

ANIMATION WORLD

Vol. 6 No. 9

MAGAZINE

December 2001

Animated Feature's **Expanding** Horizons

Beauty, The Beast
& **IMAX**

JIMMY NEUTRON's Franchise

A Master Returns:
Spirited Away

Plus, I Castelli Animati's Art Exhibits, Cinanima's 25 Years And More

Table of Contents

DECEMBER 2001

VOL. 6 No. 9

DECEMBER 2001

NINE AND A HALF QUESTIONS...

4 Nine And A Half Questions with Mavis Paisley

Will Ryan asks the infamous voice actress and performer Mavis Paisley a question or two -- or nine and a half.

FEATURE FILMS

6 Beauty and the Beast: Disney's Big Hit Gets Bigger

For its 10th anniversary Disney is re-releasing Beauty and the Beast in large format theatres. But, as Rick DeMott reveals, it isn't so much a re-release as it is a re-do!

9 The Rise of Jimmy Neutron

Rick DeMott maps Jimmy Neutron's amazing rise from DNA Productions in Texas to theatres and television sets around the world as Nickelodeon's next big thing.

14 Kamikakushi -- Anime Master Miyazaki's New Ambition

Kumi Kaoru discusses Anime master Hayao Miyazaki's all time Japanese highest grossing film Spirited Away-- from its background to its meaning and whether or not Miyazaki succeeds at creating another masterpiece.

18 Jimmy Murakami's Five Decades of Animation

Jimmy Murakami speaks with Andrew Osmond about his five decades in animation: from California's WWII internment camps to UPA, to TVC, to independent film director/producer to directing the new A Christmas Carol feature.

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

25 Licensing And Merchandising Trends And Their Impact On The Sale Of Animated Programming

Alliance Atlantis' Ken Faier discusses how today's marketplace is being impacted by L & M trends and what one can do to get ahead.

28 Shades of Gray

Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman takes a moment to ponder going back to a black, white and gray world. Could modern animation benefit from looking back at the aesthetics of yesterday?

32 The Animation Pimp: Ho Ho Ho

'Tis the season for xmas cheer and thank goodness the Pimp is here. The Animation Pimp reviews the true meaning behind a few of our favorite Christmas animated specials.

36 Hobbit-alized: The First Attempt At Animating The Hobbit

Gene Deitch relates his ill-fated experience of trying to bring The Hobbit to life.

STUDENT CORNER

40 Sketching on Location: Three Dimensional Figures

Renowned drawing instructor Glenn Vilppu continues with his tenth "sketching on location" teaching installment. This month we delve into creating three dimensional forms with the use of light.

45 The Career Coach: Producing Animation

Are you wondering what to give someone, who works in animation or aspires to this holiday season? Well, wonder no more. The Career Coach has the answer.

Table of Contents

DECEMBER 2001

VOL. 6 No. 9

DECEMBER 2001

EVENTS

46 I Castelli Animati and Oscar Grillo's Exhibitions

Ron Diamond attended Italy's I Castelli Animati and took in two of Oscar Grillo's art exhibitions — one featuring Betty Boop and the other featuring our favorite faces and personalities in animation at crucial moments.

48 Cinanima Celebrates 25 Years

Cinanima, the Espinho International Animation Festival, celebrated its 25th anniversary this year. Abi Feijó relates the festival's beginnings and what it means to the Portuguese animation community.

FILMS/VIDEOS

50 Fresh from the Festivals: December 2001's Film Reviews

Jon Hofferma reviews five short films fresh from the festival circuit: f8 by Jason Wen, Os Irmãos Willians (The Willians Brothers) by Ricardo Dantas, Aaron James Erimez's Ornaments, The Shark and the Piano by Gabriele Pennacchioli and Alessandro Carloni, and Still I Rise by Umesh Shukla.

53 New from Japan: Anime Film Reviews

Fred Patten reviews the latest anime releases including Black Magic M-66, Night on the Galactic Railroad, Battle of the Planets, Yamamoto Yohko, Starship Girl and Saint Tail.

BOOKS

59 Marvel: The Characters And Their Universe

Danny Fingeroth spins through the new book by Michael Mallory that covers everything Marvel in big, bold and glossy pages.

61 Masters of Animation

John Grant's new book offers profiles of some of animation's greatest animation artists. While a nice collection, Jerry Beck has a few reservations...

Nine And A Half Questions...

Mavis Paisley

by Will Ryan

Mavis Paisley was married to more cartoon characters than any other human being. Despite this shocking achievement, she has managed to keep a low profile in the animation business — until now.

I caught up with Mrs. Paisley at Hollywood Central Studios on Las Palmas in the heart of Hollywood on the evening of October 15, 2001. In honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the first *I Love Lucy* television broadcast, Viacom's TVLand Network was throwing a party for 150 notables on the original *I Love Lucy* soundstage. The table to our right was occupied by, among others, Alan Young (principal voice of Scrooge McDuck) and a now-fully-grown Baby Rose Marie, and the table to our left was occupied by, among others, Desi Arnaz Jr.



Will Ryan: Would I be correct in assuming you've got a lot of friends in this room?

Mavis Paisley: Oh, sure. Hey, there's Alan Young — Yoo hoo! Howdy, Angus! — I worked with him on radio. There's Madeline Pugh and Bob Carrol Jr. They wrote most of the *Lucys*, you know. And on the way in I was yackin' with John Stephenson. He did a lot of work for them Hanna-Barbera boys.



The marvelous, glamorous Mavis!

WR: When they ran the first episode of *Lucy* earlier tonight, John got the biggest laughs in the show as the on-camera spokesman for Philip Morris cigarettes.

MP: Ya can't beat their 1951 slogan, "Do you inhale? If so, you should smoke Phillip Morris!" And he did it with a straight face, too! Now that's real actin'!

WR: Gee, I'm surprised I haven't seen Janet Waldo and Richard Crenna here. They were in one of those classic *Lucy* episodes.

MP: What — ? Corlis Archer and Walter Denton? They don't let kids into these shindigs!

WR: Tell me, Mavis. Were you ever married to a rabbit?

MP: 'Course. Bugs Bunny.

WR: Were you ever married to a duck?

MP: Yup. In fact I was a guest of honor at the Graumann's Chinese Theater for the unveiling of the new Daffy Duck stamp a couple years ago. The Honorary Mayor of Hollywood, Johnny Grant, introduced me to the crowd. Had to sign autographs . . . Lucky thing I can spell m' own name.

WR: Indeed.

MP: I was married to a human at Warner's too, ya know. Yosemite Sam. Least, I *think* he was human.

WR: Were you ever married to a big buck-toothed goof?

MP: I can think of at least two of 'em! Goofy was one.

WR: Who was the other?

MP: You should know, you numbskull! You're not only wearing a pin with his picture on it, but you're the one who set it up!

WR: Oh, I guess I did. You're playing Mrs. Elmo Aardvark in an upcoming cartoon.

MP: That's right. And this time I get screen credit!

WR: I know you're sensitive about credit. You so rarely received it. Why was that?

MP: Well, for years it didn't seem important to me. Most people in cartoons weren't getting credit then anyways.

WR: Your voice has been compared to Marjorie Main's. You ever work with her?

MP: Nope. But I worked with Lucy. Played her puppy on one of the TV episodes. Don't look at me that way – it was voice only.

WR: Oh, well, of course! Now, Mavis, the first time you received credit, you went by your married name. Why was that?

MP: I didn't want people to think I only married cartoon characters! There are a lotta weird people in this town, you know. In fact, you don't look all that normal yourself.

WR: Thank you . . . I think.

MP: No, you don't. If you did think you wouldn't be taking that as a compliment. Besides, I wasn't *really* married to all them cartoon characters. I was just play-acting. That's what they pay me for.

WR: Your old hit for Capitol Records "Them Durn-Fool Things" has been making the rounds again. How did that come about?

MP: Well, it was re-released on an anthology of Red Ingle tunes put out by some German company. A fan sent me a few. I gave a copy to the singer Bea Wayne –

WR: From the *Lucky Strike Hit Parade* radio show?

MP: Of course! Anyway, she loved it, and I gave one to my agent Don Pitts. He told me he used to

play it all the time when he was a disc jockey. Now all kinds o' people are playing it all over again.

WR: We're celebrating a fiftieth anniversary here tonight, and 1998 was the fiftieth anniversary of your first recording. Did you do anything to acknowledge that milestone?

MP: I shore did! In 1998 I recorded my second hit single "The Canebreak Stomp." It'll be released sometime next year, I'm told. M' new record label don't believe in rushin' things.

WR: Evidently.

MP: I'm surprised you didn't ask me about my historic influence on the world of pop music.

WR: Uh . . . I wasn't sure there was a question there.

MP: Why, you big galoot! Don't you realize the cultural revolution I set into motion?

WR: Ummm . . .

MP: Don't you understand the influence my rural interpretation of classic Tin Pan Alley garbage had on the generation that followed?

WR: I'm not sure what you're drivin' at, Mavis.

MP: A lotta people thought I was black, you know.

WR: Well, perhaps they did, Mavis, but I still don't –

MP: Ever hear of "Blue Moon of Kentucky"? Ever hear of "That's All Right, Mama"? Ever hear of Sam Phillips? Ever hear of Sun Records?

WR: Of course I have. But I don't quite see what you're –

MP: Why, the boy's gol-durn name even sounded like mine!

WR: Wait a minute! You don't mean to tell me that – ?

MP: That's right! The Singin' Sensation of 1948: Mavis Paisley! The Singin' Sensation of 1955: Elvis Presley!

WR: Whoa.

MP: Like m' clodhoppers? Blue suede.



Mavis Paisley can be heard in countless animated films. As "Mrs. James F. X. Paisley," she recorded for Capitol Records and currently records for Audible Records. Mavis did not receive screen credit throughout much of her career and now usually performs under another name ("June Foray").

Will Ryan never worked with Marjorie Main or Lucille Ball. He does, however, work with a stellar cast, including "June Foray," on the Annie Award-winning series Elmo Aardvark: Outer Space Detective! He is also president of Snappytoons Amusement Company, a production and design firm specializing in the creation of animated films, theme parks and creative consumer environments.

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Beauty and the Beast:

Disney's Big Hit Gets Bigger

by Rick DeMott



The groundbreaking ballroom scene is back with Disney's re-release of *Beauty and the Beast*. All images © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

In 1991, *Beauty and the Beast* hit theaters, spurring the late film critic Gene Siskel to comment, "The musical has been basically dead for the last 20 years in American film; this one brings it back alive." The picture, the first to go through a completely digital pipeline, was the follow-up to *The Little Mermaid*, which had given Disney's animated features a resurgence. But the landmark *Beauty* would give the legendary studio a critical success in addition to a monetary one. The next year, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences honored the \$351 million worldwide blockbuster with a best picture Oscar nomination; the first given to an animated film. Now, in celebration of its 10th anniversary, Disney has decided to re-release the film, with

a new musical number, in the giant 65mm format.

Changing A Classic?

The first question is: why add something to a film that's already considered a classic? When asked this question, producer Don Hahn explains, "The ['Human Again'] song was also meant to be in the film. We just couldn't figure out how to make it work and not take away from the central story of Belle." During the original production, the 11-minute sequence was storyboarded and songwriters Howard Ashman and Alan Menken had recorded a demo version of the music. Even though a favorite of the filmmakers and songwriters, the song was finally replaced by the shorter "Something There." However, in

1994 when Alan Menken took *Beauty and the Beast* to Broadway, he discovered a way to work the show-stopping tune into the stage musical.

Hahn recalls, "About four years ago, [directors] Kirk [Wise] and Gary [Trousdale] and I were sitting around talking about the *Star Wars Special Edition* that had just come out and Kirk jokingly suggested, 'Wouldn't it be fun to do a special edition of *Beauty* with 'Human Again' or new material in it?' When the head of Feature Animation said he thought it was a great idea, we stopped joking and began thinking about how





we could actually do it. We had storyboarded the sequence for the original production, but completely reworked it for this special edition of the film. We discovered that there was a perfect place for the song following 'Something There' and it added a greater emotional depth to the story. A new scene with Cogsworth instructing the staff to create the most romantic atmosphere known to man or beast sets up the song beautifully."

To create the additional sequence, the filmmakers reassem-

bled the original voice cast and most of the original animators and artists. Nik Ranieri, the supervising animator for Lumiere, recalls, "I was really excited to be working on this character again and 'Human Again' had a good role in it for Lumiere. My first thought was, 'Can I handle this character? It's been ten years and I don't know if I can still draw him.' I got out the old model sheet and started drawing and it just started to come back. It was like visiting an old friend. I really enjoyed getting



to work with him again."

Some fans have complained that the new sequence features pop culture references, like one to the "American Gothic" painting, of which the original film was free. However, Hahn differs in opinion: "It never bothers me. The film has a teapot hopping around and singing in it. It's a fairy tale and fairy tales have references to all sorts of cultural things." He feels the most important thing is that the sequence is entertaining.

New Format = Lots of Tweaks

The second important question about the re-release is: what did it take to transform the film into the Imax format? Hahn admitted that due to the fact that *Beauty and the Beast* was completely digital the transfer to the 10-times larger format was not that difficult. From the digital source material, Disney's camera department used special camera heads and film recorders to create new large format prints. Unlike the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" sequence in *Fantasia/2000*, *Beauty* was not just blown up to a larger size, but was reformatted frame-by-frame.

Artistic director Dave Bossert and Joe Juliano, director of the camera department, actually printed the film in three different large formats — IMAX (15 perfs wide), dome projection and 8 perf. Two special 65mm camera heads were placed on top of film recorders to create the final output. It took 2-1/2 minutes to shoot each frame, which required a 24-hour filming schedule to meet the demands of production. To increase image clarity, the resolution was doubled from 2000 to 4000 pixels per frame.

However, the larger image did present detailing issues for the

filmmakers. For instance, in the wide shots during the snow ball fight, Belle's face had no detail, which on the now seven-story-high image clearly showed. Almost 200 scenes required some additional animation, effects, background painting or other details. Art director Ed Ghertner and background supervisor Lisa Keene spearheaded all the adjustments.



Keene comments, "Technology has changed and improved so we were able to do things that we couldn't do before. Dust on the original images looked like tennis balls on the screen. At the time, we weren't able to do a digital touch-up and remove all the imperfections. For this release, we looked at the entire film and decided what was charming and what really needed to be fixed. Today it's a very simple matter to correct these things digitally. Those small little adjustments really helped."

Hahn explains that the most difficult part of the re-release was smoothly integrating the new material. During the new "Human Again" number, various castle residents feverishly clean the castle, hoping to ignite a romantic mood. This new sequence then presented continuity errors in the scenes that followed. Eighty to eighty-five shots of the messy castle had to be literally "cleaned-up."

In regard to sound, sound re-recording engineer Terry Porter

says, "Large format theaters are spectacular. As mixers, we can take a film to a little more extreme as far as dynamic range and balance. The sound amplification and speaker systems are huge so we were able to do things a little more dramatically than we could for a regular theatrical mix. In a traditional movie theater, a lot of sound comes from behind the screen through the center speaker. In large format houses, the audience will feel like they're sitting in the middle of the movie and become more involved. We used the surround and top speakers to full advantage to create this effect."

A New Tradition?

The re-release of the film in IMAX and other large format theaters also reaffirms Disney's com-

the same and possible do more. There's a huge wave of possibility. The film is near and dear to our hearts and the hearts of fans. It also brings the beloved film back to theaters for kids who were too young to see it the first time. That in itself is an event, but releasing it on the large format makes it even more of a special event."

Disney is currently working on bringing other animated features to the large format including the biggest animated film of all-time, *The Lion King*. Whether this will become a standard for re-releasing their animated features is yet to be seen and could hinge on the success of *Beauty*. If *Beauty and the Beast* succeeds like Disney feels it will, this benchmark film could again become a benchmark but in a totally different way.



mitment to the giant screen format. Disney's first venture into large format, *Fantasia/2000* smashed previous records, finally grossing \$89.4 million worldwide. *Beauty and the Beast* will be the first narrative film to have a major push in the large format. When asked how *Beauty* will do compared to *Fantasia/2000*, Hahn predicts, "It has a great chance to do

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The Rise of

JIMMY NEUTRON

by Rick DeMott



Jimmy and his dog, Goddard. All images

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Where did Nickelodeon's *Jimmy Neutron* come from? It seems like overnight kids have become enamored with Jimmy, a boy genius with big hair. It didn't start with a TV show like *The Rugrats* nor a feature like *Toy Story*. Since February of 2001, Nick has been airing *Neutron* interstitials, but that's not really the beginning either. If one really wants to dis-

cover the origins of Jimmy and his robot dog Goddard, one needs to take a time machine back to 1995 when Texas-based DNA Productions got their first out-of-the-box 3D software package and started to fiddle around with a elementary-school-aged rocket aficionado named Johnny Quasar.

Humble Hopes...

Jimmy-creator and founder

of DNA Productions, John A. Davis, had been tooling around with an idea ever since the early 1980s about a boy genius, who runs away from home in a home-made rocket-ship. When his company got their first copy of *Lightwave*, he unearthed an old script and storyboard and started to work on a 40-second short entitled *Runaway Rocket Boy*. Once completed, the lab coat wearing Johnny Quasar flew his rocket from Earth into space, introduced himself by waving to the camera, dodged some asteroids and zoomed off into the outer reaches of the universe. Davis and his partner, Keith Alcorn, liked the short so much they decided to create a show bible in an attempt to pitch the project as a TV series. In the meantime, the short was entered in a *Lightwave* demo competition at SIGGRAPH, the world's largest 3D software and animation convention. Subsequently, *Runaway Rocket Boy* took home two "Wavey" awards for Best Character Animation and Best in Show.

After seeing the show bible, Oedekerk was hooked...

Upon the successful run at SIGGRAPH, the short garnered a lot of press in trade magazines. That's how *Ace Ventura* writer and director Steve Oedekerk was introduced into the mix. "I saw a photo of an early incarnation of Jimmy and Goddard in an off-the-beaten-path CGI magazine. Basically, I thought they looked fun," remembers Oedekerk. "I'm a huge fan of computer-generated animation, and at that time, one of the few



Little did this crew know the ride that Johnny Quasar would take them on: (back) John A. Davis, (middle) Albie Hecht and (wing) Steve Oedeker.



A sneak peek at what will become *Jimmy Neutron's* superior television sets.

that thought a CGI television series was even possible." Oedeker gave DNA Productions a call and requested a tape of the short, after which he requested to see anything else the small Texas studio had on the character. After seeing the show bible, Oedeker was hooked; he wanted to help DNA pitch the project to various studios.

With Oedeker's O Entertainment involved, Oedeker, Davis and Alcorn created a refined look for the Johnny character. The lab coat was dropped and a more iconic hair-do was formed. As Davis says, the character aged-up, but became more of a kid in the process. Now entitled *The Adventures of Johnny Quasar*, DNA Productions created an expanded short based on the original demo. Then in the fall of 1995, their studio pitching tour began – and ended after the first stop!

Nickelodeon understood the technical advantage of doing the feature prior to the TV series...

This Kid IS on a Rocket Ride

"It really just blew us away," says Albie Hecht, Nickelodeon's president of film and TV entertainment, and later executive producer on the feature. "The animation was so sparkling, and it has that future-retro style." Upon this reaction, Nick ordered a 13-minute pilot episode to be created. After a long period of further develop-

ment, the pilot started production at the end of 1997. As part of the initial pitch, Oedekerker boasted how with 3D technology, assets created for a TV series could also be used for a feature and visa versa. And Nickelodeon bought that 100 percent. So when the execs went to Dallas to meet the filmmakers and check out the studio, they asked about a feature.

"That's when my jaw dropped to the floor," says Davis. "That's the holy grail of what I would want to do." From a production standpoint, Davis then suggested doing the feature first. This way Jimmy's world could be created at theatrical quality then those assets could be used on the TV series. Nickelodeon understood the technical advantage of doing the feature prior to the TV series, but was worried about not being able to build an audience for the feature without the series coming first. That's when Nick came up with the idea of creating and airing short interstitials leading up to the feature's release.

So in the fall of 1999, Nickelodeon gave the green-light to start production on the feature script. This is where the world and characters really started to take shape. What Nickelodeon liked so much about the now-called Jimmy Neutron character was that he was a genius, but still liked kid-type things. This concept mirrored Nick's programming philosophy of "making kids' dreams come true."

Clever Inspirations

Davis and Oedekerker dived back into their own childhoods and looked for things that captured their imaginations back then. Oedekerker says, "We thought about what a kid would create if he had the ability to create any



As if having your own show on Nickelodeon and in theatres isn't cool enough, John A. Davis now gets to work with superstars like Martin Short and Patrick Stewart.

This concept mirrored Nick's programming philosophy of "making kids' dreams come true."

kind of gadget." With that in mind, Davis expanded on the character's love of rockets, which spurred the creation of the amusement park rocket scene in the film. "It's just a great kid fantasy," explains Davis. Many of Davis' own influences, like Ray Harryhausen and *The Thunderbirds*, made their way into the film. The giant chicken monster, Poultra, is an homage to Mothra of *Godzilla* fame. The shows and films he loved as a kid had neat gadgets, secret passageways and cool creatures, all of which worked their way into the world of *Jimmy Neutron*. Oedekerker stresses that the project was a very collaborative process,

taking ideas from various people including his 6-year-old daughter, Zoe. She came up with the burping soda invention and even gets a special thanks in the credits for her contribution.

After three months of pounding out a script, in the beginning of 2000, Nickelodeon gave the go-ahead to start production on the feature. Now, DNA Productions, which had been 20 employees, needed to expand to 120 employees for the very tight production schedule of 24 months. Using Lightwave and Messiah, DNA Productions started creating the *Jimmy Neutron* feature, in addition to several interstitials. The production marked the first time that a 3D animated feature was being completely produced with out-of-the-box software. Regarding the influence that this may have on the industry, Davis says, "It really concentrates the power on the artist as opposed to teams of code writers." Davis gave an example of Pixar's Renderman software, which requires so much code that artists



Martin and Patrick in their animated form! On the left is Martin's Ooblar and on the right is King Goobot, voiced by Patrick.

have to work through code writers to create their art. Using consumer software allowed DNA's artists to have more hands on control. The easy-to-use software also enabled Davis to hire less experienced artists, who had been working out of their basements, but showed innate talent through their work. Those talented rookies combined with more experienced 3D artists added to the creative environment.

The Power of Nick

In November 2000, the world was introduced to Jimmy in a trailer, featuring clips from the interstitials, which played before *Rugrats in Paris*. Then on February 5, 2001, the first interstitial, "New Dog, Old Tricks" aired on Nickelodeon. To build the buzz even more, the interstitials lead viewers to jimmyneutron.com, for Shockwave games, and *Nickelodeon Magazine*, for an ongoing comic strip. Kids responded so well that streams of the *Jimmy Neutron* trailer ranked #2 on nick.com. The announcement

Jimmy Neutron ranked in the top 25 cartoon shows among kids 6-11 on the Q-Scores report...

of the *Jimmy Neutron* feature rolled out during the 14th Annual Kid's Choice Awards, where Jimmy served as a presenter. This appearance introduced the character to 4.3 million kids 2-11, 1.9 million teens 12-17 and 4.4 million adults.

The trailer for the feature debuted in front of *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* on June 15, 2001. Then starting in July of 2001, Jimmy became a spokesman in Trident gum commercials. To top off Jimmy's success, Nickelodeon signed a deal with Jive Records to release the film's soundtrack under the new Nick Records label. Adding to the attraction, the soundtrack features such popular singers as Britney Spears, *NSync,

The Backstreet Boys, Lil' Romeo and Aaron Carter. Needless to say, by now, Jimmy Neutron ranks in the top 25 cartoon shows among kids 6-11 on the Q-Scores report, which tracks viewers' impressions of various characters and shows. And Nick was worried no one would know who this character was?

When asked if he ever thought his Johnny Quasar character would go as far as it has, Davis plainly replies no. But he does say he always had faith in the character and gives much praise to Nickelodeon for putting faith in him as a first-time writer/director and DNA Productions as a first-time feature studio. The future of Jimmy Neutron is even more impressive. He'll be presented as a balloon in the Macy's New Year's Day Parade and will have an expanded line of merchandise coming in 2002. This all leads up to the debut of the TV series, *The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius*, in April 2002 following the 15th Annual Kid's Choice Awards. When asked how he feels the series will influence the TV industry, Davis says, "It will definitely raise the bar." And in this writer's opinion, if the TV show looks half as good as the feature, there will be no truer a statement.

Rick DeMott is a freelance writer, working in Los Angeles.

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Kamikakushi — Anime Master Miyazaki's New Ambition

by Kumi Kaoru

Editor's Note: At present Hayao Miyazaki's film, Spirited Away or Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi, does not have a U.S. distributor and the Japanese rights holders would not give AWN permission to run images and clips with this story. For images and clips you can visit the official Studio Ghibli site at <http://www.ntv.co.jp/ghibli/> and the film's official site at <http://www.toho.co.jp/sento-chihiro/welcome-j.html>. Another excellent, but unofficial site, is Nausicaa.Net, which is in English and located at <http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/sen/>

It is hard to put the Japanese word 'Kamikakushi' into English. When I referred to a Japanese-English dictionary, I found it was translated as 'spirited away.' Yet I think it does not convey the exact meaning because the phrase 'Kamikakushi' has a more spiritual meaning.

So let me explain what 'Kamikakushi' truly means using the famous Anime feature *Tonari no Totoro* (My Neighbor Totoro) as an example. Recall the sequence where the little girl Mei was lost and everything got very confused in the village? While men were searching for her body in the pond, an old woman, who loves little Mei as if she were her

true granddaughter, prays desperately for her safety sitting on her heels on the footpath by the pond.

If you were there and asked her in Japanese: "Obarchan, ittai nani ga attan desu ka." (What's happened, Ma'am?), she would reply to you harshly: "Mei-chan ga KAMIKAKUSHI ni attan dayo!" (My little Mei has got involved in Kamikakushi!) If you take the word as 'missing' or 'lost,' you will miss her true feeling. She means that some spirits have carried off Mei.

Japan has many legends and tales about children who strayed into the spirits' world, although in *Totoro*, spirits help, not kidnap, Mei. Her older sister Satsuki finds missing Mei on a path outside of the village before sunset, assisted by the giant and kind spirit Totoro, living in the forest by her house, and his friend, the Cheshire Cat-like spirit Neko Basu ("Cat Bus"). The story ends with a happy scene where the old woman holds Mei with wild joy.

The *Totoro* story is set around 1955, ten years after Japan was defeated in World War II. Now it is 2001. With Japan's miracle economic growth since the '60s, many forests have been chopped down in order to make living quarters. Villages like the one in *Totoro* have disappeared in

much of Japan. I believe forest spirits like Totoro would hate such places now because they must have loved the old, natural forests. To make a Kamikakushi tale in this age was the new ambition of Hayao Miyazaki, Anime master and best known as the creator of *Totoro* and Studio Ghibli (pronounced "Jibuli"). A ten-year old girl of today strays into the world of spirits, goes through many experiences there and finally returns to the human world. This is the story of his latest film *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* (its official English title is *Spirited Away*), which is his first movie in four years since *Princess Mononoke* and broke box office records when it opened on July 20, 2001 in Japan.

Chihiro in Wonderland

If you saw *Totoro*, you will feel some déjà vu while watching the prologue of *Kamikakushi*. The movie starts with 3 family members riding in a car. They seem to be moving house like Satsuki, Mei and their father in *Totoro*, although, while Mei's family brought all their belongings on their light truck, there is much less being carried in the smart Toyota four-wheel vehicle. It appears that housemovers will be bringing Chihiro's family's remain-

ing belongings.

There is another difference between protagonists. While Satsuki and Mei in *Totoro* were watching the sights curiously with their bodies thrust forward out of the truck, Chihiro, the protagonist in *Kamikakushi*, seems to have no interest and does nothing but lie on the backseat spiritlessly. The place where they are living looks like newly developed housing on a hill.

Their car strays onto a mountain path and encounters a strange big gate. When they get out of the car and pass through the gate, they find they are in a large hill plain. They wonder if it is the debris of a theme park's construction, now suspended. In the middle of a street right out of a Western ghost town, they find an open public restaurant. There are no other patrons and no employees in sight. Chihiro's parents find plates of fried chicken available on the counter and begin eating without hesitation.

After that, the story proceeds as you saw in the trailer available on the Net. As the sun sets, the town grows lit and ghosts appear on the streets. In a state of shock, Chihiro shouts to her parents, still hungry for food: "I want to go home!" They turn their faces toward her and, my God, she discovers they have been turned into pigs!

This is the amusement town where spirits elsewhere in Japan visit in order to heal themselves. An old witch called Yubarba ("The Hot Water Hag") rules the big public bath in the town, which doubles as the banquet hall. Yubarba is very greedy. If you saw *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky*, you will be reminded of Dora, the greedy female captain

of the flying pirate ship in the adventure movie.

Chihiro is accepted into the world on the condition that she works at Yubarba's public bath center as an employee. But Yubarba dislikes her name Chihiro ("A Depth of A Thousand Fathoms of Water"), and gives her a new name, Sen ("A Thousand"). Now her trials begin. Can Sen, no, Chihiro restore her parents to human form and return to the human world like *Alice in Wonderland*?

A Film For Ten Year-Old Girls

In 1997, a few months before the release of *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki surprised his fans with a sudden retirement declaration, only to withdraw it officially in February 1998. Apparently, it is because Yoshifumi Kondo, who directed the youth movie *Whisper of the Heart* in 1995, died after the *Mononoke* release. He was expected to be the successor to Miyazaki. In addition, *My Neighbors the Yamadas*, released two years after *Mononoke*, made only 820 million yen in distributor's revenue while the production cost was 2.4 billion yen. Studio Ghibli and its parent company Tokuma Publishing, whose fiscal situation had grown worse in these years, needed Miyazaki once more.

Then, what made Miyazaki decide to make a fantasy adventure whose protagonist is a ten year-old girl? He explains in an interview published in the theater program: "Studio manager Suzuki and I have friends and I'm familiar with their little daughters. For a few days every summer since the girls were 4 or 5 years old, they have come to visit me at my

mountain cottage. [...] When they turned ten years old, I realized I had not made a movie for them. *Kiki's Delivery Service* was aimed at adolescent girls. [...] I started thinking [about] what kind of movie I should make, if I am making it."

Miyazaki says he decided to make a movie in which a typical ten year-old girl of today steps into a strange world, goes through many experiences and awakens to what's truly important in life. Through the experience, "her hidden adaptability and patience will appear. She will realize for the first time she has the power of life for good judgement and acting."

Our heroine Chihiro is the most unappealing girl among female protagonists created by Miyazaki (except Mei in *Totoro*). But Miyazaki designed such a girl intentionally. "Today, children are growing up spoiled, guarded and overly protected in Japan. They just live with less realization of life, and fatten their unhealthy ego. See Chihiro's slender arms and legs, and her distorted and lifeless face. They symbolize the children of today."

Miyazaki emphasizes: "*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* has no fighting scene or ESP battle, but I think it is an adventure movie. 'Good versus evil' is not the theme. This is the story about a girl who stepped into another real world where both good and evil exist. She will go through many experiences, learn how important friendship and dedication are, and return to the human world with her wisdom."

The Real Girl of Today?

One cannot overemphasize that Miyazaki is now much more popular and respected in Japan than the legendary filmmaker

Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998), let alone the Anime Godfather Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989). This film's release was a major social event in the land of the rising sun.

So you need not be surprised that *Kamikakushi* broke the Japanese box office record for best opening day held by *Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace*. If you went to the theater on the morning of the opening day, July the 20th, you would have found people already standing in a queue around (not just in front of!) the theater. Adults with their kids, school girls, junior high school boys, and so forth... They enter the theater, and chat happily in their seats waiting for the screening to start...

The film starts. Action scenes, humorous scenes, horrible scenes and so forth continue, and the audience's happy laughing and murmurs fill the hall. The running time is 2 hours 5 minutes. The movie ends and the hall is illuminated. You stand up and move toward the doors congested with people. If you are fluent in Japanese, and listen carefully to what is being said, you would find boys are saying, "Omoshirokatta kedo, naa..." (I admit it's very entertaining, but...), or girls saying to their parents, "Kore de oshimai?" (Did I miss something?)

Yes, I missed something. *Kamikakushi* is full of exciting events and adventures, but I felt it failed to give us something more important. Seeing reviews written just after the release, I found the reviewers were divided on *Kamikakushi*; some say it is a very entertaining movie, and the others (including me) say Miyazaki failed to have his intention thoroughly reflected throughout the film.

Why do you leave with such an unsatisfied feeling? I think it is partly because Chihiro is not really portrayed as an ordinary girl.

Miyazaki says Chihiro is a typical modern Japanese ten year-old girl, but she appears to me to be his typical innocent and courageous heroine. I wish that he had depicted Chihiro as bullied by her colleagues at Yubaba's public bath center, felt vexed by her own incompetence, and thus grew mean-spirited due to her failings. She would then more accurately portray a typical girl of today. I think he was successful with this in *Kiki's Delivery Service*.

There is another unsatisfying point for me; various spirits, ghosts and gods call at the public bath center, but what on earth are they? I guess they are designed as symbols for the strains and shadows of modern Japan. For instance, in one case, Chihiro and her older colleague Rin bathe a Jabba the Hut-like spirit desperately trying to remove his sludge pollutants. He turns out to be a polluted river god. I think Miyazaki tried to depict that Chihiro comes to learn how her country is going, as well as how important labor is, while working for the spirits. I, however, don't think he was entirely successful. They are all interesting and fascinating, especially Kao-nashi ("Faceless") and Boh ("Baby"), but to me they were not more than goblins like Hampty Dampty.

Miyazaki and the 'Family'

Above all, I felt uneasy about the relationship between Chihiro and her parents, especially her mother, who is portrayed as a bit too distant. It is a formula in juvenile novels, such as Ende's *The Never Ending Story*, that the pro-

tagonist steps into another world, adventures and returns to the real world to re-confirm his/her tie with his/her parent(s). Yet, if you expect such a conclusion in *Kamikakushi*, you will feel betrayed.

As Miyazaki discusses in the film's press kit, the protagonist returns to the human world with her father and mother, but that's all; there is nothing more than the fact that they return to the world. I understand, or believe I understand, that Miyazaki tried to make a story about a child who awakes to the 'power to live,' not a story about the family. However, I could not help feeling the conclusion is something unnatural.

It is sometimes pointed out by critics that the family relationship, especially the stable relationship between parents and children, is rarely portrayed in Miyazaki's works. Even in his most heartwarming movie *Totoro*, Satsuki and Mei are not living with their mother. Meanwhile, to work together is always admired as a very good thing in his films. He seems to love to describe solidarity through labor, rather than blood or territorial relations. He loves para-familial communities based on labor. For example, the fortress village in *Mononoke* and how lively the employees are in Yubaba's public bath!

I think this is related to the main reason why I was unsatisfied with *Kamikakushi*. Frankly speaking, I went so far as to think that Chihiro would have been happier if she stayed in the spirit world rather than returning to the human world with her rather selfish parents. On the surface it looks as if this movie deals with a dull girl's awakening and return to the real world, but I suspect Miyazaki made (maybe unconsciously) a

story about the denial of the real world and the escape to his own fantasy world.

In other words, Miyazaki sailed under false colors. The superb animation technique (*Kamikakushi* is full of crowd scenes!), realistic background artwork, Joe Hisaishi's excellent tunes, lively voice acting by talented actors and actresses like Bunta Sugawara and Mari Natsuki, Yumi Kimura's impressive song and so forth made *Kamikakushi* the most sophisticated and exciting Anime film, but *Kamikakushi*, I must conclude, is nothing more than the attractions in Tokyo Disneyland. On November the 13th, the film's distributor Toho announced that *Kamikakushi* broke the all time

Japanese box office record, formerly held by *Titanic* with 26 billion yen, but I wonder if it might have reached only one-fourth of this box office figure without the spell cast with 'directed by Hayao Miyazaki.'

Credits

Director: Hayao Miyazaki
Animation Supervisor: Masashi Ando, Kitaro Kosaka and Ai Kagawa
Background Art Supervisor: Yoji Takeshige
Color Design: Michiyo Yasuda
Sound Effect Supervisor: Kazuhiro Hayashi
Music: Joe Hisaishi
The theme song composed and sung by Yumi Kimura, words by

Wakako Kaku
Executive Producer: (the late) Yasuyoshi Tokuma
Running Time: 2 hours 5 minutes
Color / Vistasize
DTS-ES (6.1ch)

Kumi Kaoru is an Anime scholar residing in Japan, and now is engaged in the translation of Helen McCarthy and Jonathan Clements' The Erotic Anime Movie Guide. The Japanese edition will be published with the translator's commentary chapter in 2002.

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Jimmy Murakami's Five Decades of Animation

by Andrew Osmond



Jimmy, in front of the Ernest Pintoff Studio in New York while working with UPA, 1957.
All personal photos from Jimmy T. Murakami's private collection.



Family photo taken in San Jose, California in the 1930s. (l-r; back row:) Jimmy's parents, Testujiru and Shizue Murakami; (middle row) Teru (Jimmy), Jun and Sumiko (with dog); (front row) Yuriko.

The Murakami family during incarceration at Tule Lake Camp, California during WWII in the 1940s. (l-r, front row:) Jun, Yuriko and Teru (Jimmy); (middle row:) Shizue and Sumiko, who died 2 days after this photograph was taken, and Testujiro; (back row:) Mitsuo Murakami, Jimmy's uncle.



In Giannalberto Bendazzi's book *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation*, he aptly describes Jimmy Teru Murakami as a 'globe trotter of animation.' Over the last five decades, he's worked in California, New York, Japan, France, Italy, the Netherlands, England and Ireland. His colleagues include Ernest Pintoff, George Dunning, Richard Williams and James Cameron. Murakami's short films have been acclaimed round the world, while he made his feature directing debut with *When the Wind Blows* (1985). At present, he has just recently finished a new feature version of *A Christmas Carol*. Andrew Osmond caught up with Murakami at London's Illuminated Films — the venue for the *Carol* feature — to talk about animation past and present.

Andrew Osmond: During World War II, when you were only seven, you and your family were among the thousands of Japanese people interned at Tule Lake in North California. [Tule Lake is a dry lake near the Oregon border.] Obviously, this must have had a profound impact on you. How did it affect your outlook?

Jimmy Murakami: Mainly, I was very, very bitter, to be an American citizen treated this way. My older sister died in the camp and the rest

of us came out pretty bad. We had planned to go to Japan, but my mother (a second generation Japanese-American) and my father (first generation) decided to stay after Japan's defeat. My father heard from his sister that the Japanese house had been bombed and people were living outdoors... But we didn't want to go back to San Jose, we had lost our farm, so my father contacted a friend in Los Angeles who had come out of another camp. He invited us over. My mother cancelled our boat trip, went to the War Office and begged them to get us on the train to L.A. It wasn't an easy journey but we got there in the end.

AO: You went to Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, which later merged with the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music to become CalArts.

JM: Chouinard was an incredible place. It was a 'fine arts' school and I was training to be a fine artist. I was on a so-called working scholarship. Mrs. Chouinard, a grand lady, had followed my career from high school when I had 'Saturday scholarships' and she said, "You must become an artist." I told her I wanted to become a doctor, a brain-surgeon, and went to college for six months. But then I thought more about being an artist. I left college and called Mrs. Chouinard and she gave me a scholarship for three and a half years.

Within the fine arts course, they had everything. They wanted you to have all the background for not only life drawing, but also painting, designing and animation. Animation was then taught by people like Marc Davis, Ward

Kimball (two of Disney's Nine Old Men) and Don Graham, who taught Disney animators from the 1930s. Graham was a wonderful guy, God rest his soul, and everything I learned about composition was from him.



Jimmy as a student at the Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles 1952.

There were also night classes in drawing, which I took. Chuck Jones was a fellow student, though of course he was already working at Warner Bros. Chuck was an incredible draughtsman; he did wonderful charcoal life-drawings. A truly fine artist. Even to this day, when I see him I say he should have worked in fine art, not with bunnies and road runners! His wife says she's told him that all his life! But each to his own. I was doing commercial illustrations and canvas painting and making pots and pans... I became an all-round artist.

After Chouinard I went to UPA, where I stayed a year. They first hired me as a publicity artist.

But I hardly did anything; just a few ads for *Mr. Magoo* and CBS' *Gerald McBoing Boing* series [a.k.a. *The UPA Cartoon Show*], making 'set-ups' from cel drawings. Eventually, UPA set up a unit for their *McBoing Boing* show, and Bobe Cannon, a director at that time, asked me to move there and be more my own boss, even though it meant a pay-cut. There was Fred Crippen, Ernest Pintoff and myself. I became a designer and storyboard artist for *McBoing Boing*, one of the first half-hour weekly animation shows on television, each programme made up of different stories. I also worked on packages of theatrical shorts for Columbia.

AO: After UPA, you moved to New York in 1958 and worked with Ernest Pintoff on films such as *The Violinist*. Would you like to say anything about that?

JM: I went to visit Pintoff in New York while I was still working for UPA. At that time, he had decided to break away and start his own studio. So I went back, quit UPA and started working for Ernie. Up to that time, I had never really animated, and started by directing and animating commercials. Ernest gave me a commercial to do, with a long schedule, and I must have re-animated it ten times over until I finally got it right, but I learned a lot.

I only stayed there for a year though. Things started closing in on me as a young adult and I didn't want to stay in New York. It's a lonely, miserable city when you're on your own and I was only in my twenties.

AO: What experiences were affecting you at this time?



Jimmy in Japan while working at Toei Animation in 1959, during a group photography trip.

Jimmy with George Dunning and others at the TVC Studio in 1961.



JM: I was basically cracking up, to be honest. I was drinking too much, my health was suffering with late nights in New York. I thought I was going insane. I wanted to find my roots as a Japanese. I was brought up Japanese, speaking Japanese at home as a kid. So I thought, I better go to Japan. No-one was guiding me... I didn't tell my parents anything, I didn't want them to worry. So I took a boat to Japan, not knowing if I would stay there the rest of my life or what; just made a decision to leave America.

I worked in Toei Animation for a time as a consultant, and all they did was give me grief because they wanted me to do everything their way, including using paper-clips for registration instead of pegs, so the picture would be 'jittery.' (Registration is where two papers are put together for tracing and ink-and-painting.) I had disagreements and left. Then I painted watercolors, made woodcuts and taught conversational English to university students and prostitutes and bar-girls. I sold some paintings, but for neg-

ligible money.

Eventually I returned to California with the intention of making enough money to go back to Japan, because I had a fiancée waiting for me. I returned to UPA and worked on their Magoo feature, *1001 Arabian Nights*, as a layout artist. [*1001 Arabian Nights* was released in 1959.]

At that time, I got a letter with tons of stamps on it, which had followed me from London to Tokyo to Los Angeles. It was a letter from George Dunning, who wanted me to come to London to direct for him on a one-year contract. He had gone to London to run the UPA studio there, and when that closed [1958] he started TVC. When I joined, Richard Williams was there too, only a kid, and I wasn't much older myself. My first job was directing from a Williams storyboard. This was a documentary for Ford Trans-mission, called *Power Train* I think.

For the rest of that year, I was doing mostly commercials. There was a lot of work for the Coal Board, Ford, bits and pieces

of things. I did more commercials in Italy, and returned to Dunning's studio after that. I made a brief return to the States with my wife, and then Dunning asked me back for another year, because they had a lot of work on. It was at that time I made *Insects*, which won me a British Academy Award.

AO: Can you say something about *Insects*, and the other 'personal' films that followed?

JM: I made *Insects* at home, writing, animating, tracing, painting, I did the whole thing. I made it with a lamp under the table as a bottom-light. I couldn't afford to shoot it, so I went to Dunning and told him about this film, all painted and ready, and asked him if he could shoot it for a co-producer credit. He said yeah, he loved the story. So the film went through TVC and they added a great soundtrack, and it ended up winning the British Academy Award.

After *Insects*, I worked around Italy again for awhile, and in 1965 I opened a studio in



Jimmy (left) at the British Academy Award ceremony where he won for *Insects* with George Dunning (in shirtsleeves).



With Fred Wolf at the studios of Murakami Wolf, 1965.

California with Fred Wolf [called Murakami Wolf]. I did quite a few personal films then, working at home on weekends and mornings, because we had enough spare time and money. The films included *The Top* and *Breath* [made in 1965 and 1967 respectively]. *Breath* was one of my favourites, along with *Good Friends* [1969].

Friends came out of a couple of films I did for the U.S. Information Agency. One was about government, made for the Third World. The other was about the Space Project, and why all these billions of dollars were being

spent, the spin-offs from the project and so on. On this film, I was working with George Stephens Jr. [then director of the Motion Picture and TV service of the U.S. Information Agency], who went on to start the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. He asked if I had an animation project in hand, and I got a grant for *Good Friends*.

Films like *Breath* and *Good Friends* express statements that were in my mind. *Breath* is about how people breathe in other people's oxygen and influence each other's lives. *Good Friends* is more cynical, about how 'friends' abuse

and use people, eventually destroying them. [Bendazzi describes the film as 'a man literally giving himself to another man — eyes, mouth and so on — until the latter leaves with the donor's woman.'] That came out of my life, my anger.

Meanwhile at Murakami Wolf, we carried on making bread-and-butter commercials. We got through an enormous volume of work; one of the biggest commercial animation studios in America. We were forced to open up an office and studio in New York, but that ended in disaster. We couldn't keep control, and lost a lot of money. But we were still big, so big that Bing Crosby's company wanted to take us over at one point. It never happened, though. It was one of these things when they worked out how they could do it, looked at the books and said, 'Well, it's not quite what we wanted.'

Eventually, I got fed up with doing commercials, and also with personal problems. I wanted to come back to Europe; I missed the mentality, the creativity, the culture. I was bored with California.

AO: Was this around the time you worked with Roger Corman?

JM: Yes, I came over to Ireland to work on *The Red Baron* [1971], as a second-unit aerial director, though when you direct with Roger you do everything. I was also executive producer on *Battle Beyond the Stars* [1980]. Corman taught me a lot; how to think on your feet, how to not waste money, how to schedule, how to be tough at the right time. He taught a lot of people. James Cameron [director] and James

Horner [composer] were on *Battle*. I remember Cameron as very young and ambitious: he knew he was going somewhere!

AO: What about your animation at this time?

JM: Well, I moved into Ireland at the time of *Red Baron*, got married (again), settled down and opened a commercial studio. It was called Quateru Film, and I made lots of commercials for Germany and France, also California. I was also still making animated shorts. There was *Death of a Bullet* [about suicide] in 1979, and *Passing* [1980]. *Passing* used white-on-white images, so the audience had to concentrate to see anything, and everyone saw something different. I made both films for festivals — Annecy and Zagreb — but missed my deadline both times!

AO: Then came *The Snowman* and *When the Wind Blows*...

JM: Channel 4 initially asked me to direct *Snowman*. It wasn't my cup of tea so I became supervising director. That was successful, I didn't realise how successful it would be. Then I was sent the manuscript for *When the Wind Blows* and said, 'This is my kind of film!' It was a much more serious, adult subject. [Both *The Snowman* and *When the Wind Blows* are based on picture-books by Raymond Briggs. *When the Wind Blows* is about two pensioners trying to do 'the right thing' in the face of nuclear war.]

I'll be frank, I'm not one for kid's films. It's not because I don't want to make films for kids, but I think kids would see anything that looks good and well-made; the

only difference is less sex and violence, which I would never condone. Anything intelligent, the kids could love it... there's no need for dogs or bunnies. *Chicken Run* is a really well-made animated comedy, but Disney's *Mulan* puts me to sleep. Then again, one of the successful movies for me is *South Park*, which kids could never go to!

I directed *When the Wind Blows*, did the whole storyboard. It came from a big book in terms of

scenes and dialogue. I simplified it to make it work as a film, and Briggs came in and said it was dead-on, didn't change anything at all. I put in some fantasy scenes to keep it moving, give it some edge.

AO: How did you go about translating *When the Wind Blows* to screen? In the film, there's a contrast between the naive, 'flat'-looking pensioners and the three-dimensional backgrounds.



With David Bowie, who sang the title song for *When the Wind Blows*.



Jimmy in Japan promoting *When the Wind Blows* with dolls of the main characters, Hilda and Jim.



Gabriel and Ellen are the two mice who lead us into the world of *A Christmas Carol*.
© Illuminated Films (*Christmas Carol*) LTD/MBP 2001.

JM: We built the pensioners' house like a set and moved the camera inside to create a sense of three-dimensional depth. I had wanted to make the film live-action, but the budget wasn't there. So we built a set and painted, textured it exactly as it appeared in the book. Then we shot it and devised a system of shooting the registration off the background. In the film, it looks like a camera moving through live-action backgrounds because of the registration. It could have been done better now, with a 'solid' set built on video, using modern techniques to combine characters with backgrounds. That might have been more 'stunning,' in a way. But I think the naive look works, ties the film together. We captured the innocence of the pensioners, the way they build this ridiculously outmoded bomb-shelter against nuclear attack.

The film could have done better in the cinema. But it was distributed poorly. It failed in America, though it was the top-grossing film of the year in Japan. It also did well in Germany and

fairly well in England. It certainly made its money back. (I didn't make any money out of it, unfortunately, because I didn't control the books!)

AO: Also in the 1980s, you helped on the BBC serialisation of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, which involved animated creatures and effects.

JM: Yes, I worked on the animated segments. Unfortunately, there weren't a lot of feature opportunities at the time, because no-one was putting money in. It's only now that it's happening because of Disney's success, and DreamWorks. Into the '90s, I was making commercials at my Dublin studio, Murakami Films. (Quateru eventually closed down.) I was also starting to get projects for television series, which seemed to be the way to go when Cartoon Media came into being.

I set up another company with an Irish partner, a studio called Alegro (only one 'l,' a long story). We tried to develop projects for the television market, but with

no success. We managed to raise money for pilots, but these didn't get off the ground. I did direct a series in Ireland called *The Storykeepers*, about the early Christians [shown on Hallmark and EWTN in the U.S., plus two other specials based on the series aired on Fox Kids, Latin America]. There were two feature-length specials edited from that, for Easter and Christmas, also shown on television.

AO: Finally, what do you want to say about your current project, *A Christmas Carol*?

JM: Iain Harvey, the producer, tapped me when another director fell through. [Harvey and Murakami had previously collaborated on *The Snowman* and *When the Wind Blows*.] I disliked the initial script: I didn't feel it was anything different or new. So I told Iain, I would direct if I could do the film I wanted to make. He agreed and we took it from there. I feel that it will be OK. It's a hell of a lot better than the script we started with, and could be quite successful. It has weaknesses, but then all films have weak points.

AO: What was wrong with the original concept?

JM: Like most animated features, there was no sense of telling the story properly: no characterisation, just standard well-known characters, and it was too like Disney in terms of cuteness. Overall, it was uninteresting. So we had a couple of rewrites, and I boarded the whole thing in terms of how the drama would play. We developed the role of the mice... [In the film, much of the story is told through the eyes of two mice, effectively



Epiphany: Scrooge and the carol singers on Christmas morning in *A Christmas Carol*.
© Illuminated Films (Chrismas Carol) LTD/MBP 2001.

'alter-egos' of Scrooge and his fiancée.]

The film is a children's film in that it includes things I think will fascinate children. I don't think they'll be bored. I'm pleased with how the ghosts express them-

selves in their three segments. [The saddened Christmas Past is voiced by Jane Horrocks, who was 'Bunty' in Aardman's *Chicken Run*. The more joyous Christmas Present is voiced by Michael Gambon, while Murakami promises some-

thing 'very different' for Christmas Future; 'almost black-and-white.']

I also like the relations between the characters: Scrooge and the ghosts, Scrooge and Belle, his fiancée, how they interplay with each other... Scrooge and Belle's relationship was never properly exploited in other versions. In terms of animation, I think the highlights are the acting between Scrooge and Belle. The voice-track helped us a lot. [Scrooge is voiced by Simon Callow, Belle by Kate Winslet.] It helped give us those 'special moments' to move the audience.

Andrew Osmond is a freelance writer specializing in fantasy media and animation.

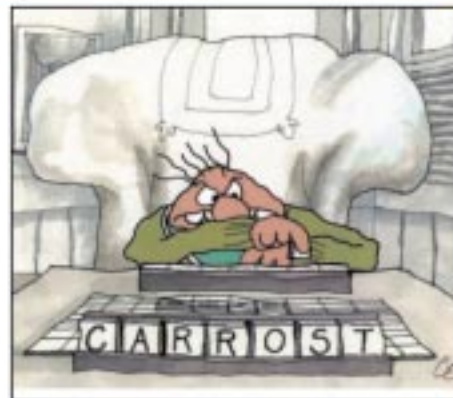
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Licensing And Merchandising Trends And Their Impact On The Sale Of Animated Programming

by Ken Faier

When asked to write this article on the trends in licensing and how they are affecting the sales and viability of animated programming, it allowed me the opportunity to step back for a moment and take stock of why we are in this business.

Clearly, there are many companies that are attracted to this business for that potential home run property. That is still a possibility in these competitive and financially challenging times, however, there has to be more than that. There has to be passion.

As most players in the animation business know, there has been much turmoil over the last few years that have brought significant changes to the demand and viability of animated programming. Gone are the days when you could fully finance a show on the U.S. sale alone, or sell it to one or two territories and then rely on the licensing and merchandising revenues.

Licensees And Retailers Are Becoming Even More Risk Averse

What has become clear over the past couple of years, and what was apparent at the International Licensing Show in New York back in June, is that the market for entertainment licensing is not as buoyant as it once was. As of late, licensees and retailers



Ken Faier.

Licensees and retailers are looking at the whole picture and the picture has to look pretty convincing.

are increasingly becoming risk averse; with fewer wanting to invest in entertainment driven properties.

In addition, in the U.S. market, specialist retailers such as Noodle Kidoodle/Zainy Brainy and Store of Knowledge are finding

themselves in financial difficulty. This makes it harder for smaller properties (usually pre-school) to build smaller scale successes that can grow into bigger ones. There is tremendous pressure from licensees and retailers for immediate success at the mass level. This is, of course, very difficult considering that shelf-space is shrinking and there are simply so many properties competing for the space. Even retailers are competing for their own shelf space, as companies like Toys R Us develop their own private labels and try to get exclusivity on various products so that they can differentiate themselves from their competitors.

Movie Driven Properties Have Become Risky Business

The big animated theatrical releases are not bearing the same kind of fruit as in previous years, as these properties often have a very short shelf life. Animated films take 2 – 3 years to produce and the toy and licensed merchandise often mirrors that development time. The risk of trying to pick a movie that will be a box office smash, as well as a merchandising success, has forced licensees to become very selective. Licensees are looking for the longer-term plan so that they may limit their risk and amortize their costs over a longer period. They want to see the support that the studio will be providing such as movie sequels, televi-

sion series, direct to video releases, book publishing plans and interactive plans, both online and off. Licensees and retailers are looking at the whole picture and the picture has to look pretty convincing.

Kids are simply busier and more fickle than ever.

Kids Have Other Alternatives

While the licensing business for entertainment properties is levelling off, licensees and retailers are moving toward other categories of properties, including consumer brands, sports, fashion, music and video games. Kids are simply busier and more fickle than ever. While statistics show that they are still watching a lot of television, they are not only watching kids television. Shows such as *Friends* and *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* are actually some of the higher rated shows for kids 2-14. Even when you have a hit show, this still doesn't necessarily translate into licensing success. All of the planets have to be aligned.

State Of The Broadcast Market In The U.S. And Abroad

For an independent producer/distributor, the U.S. market is presently a very difficult puzzle to figure out. The market is in a state of transition, experiencing further consolidation while at the same time erosion in ratings. Disney has acquired Fox Family, one of the few players who dealt with the independent community fairly regularly. It remains to be seen what the Disney empire of ABC, ABC Family, Disney Channel, Toon Disney and soon Playhouse Disney will mean to the independ-

ent producer. Long term support from 20th Century Fox for the Fox Kids Network, one of the true platforms for building a boys action property, is in question at the moment. The Cartoon Network has reduced its time slot for the "Toonami block," the one part of their schedule that allows for acquired programming from independent producers. Kids WB! and Nickelodeon are clearly great platforms, however, they too do not acquire that much programming from independents. PBS is quite full at the moment with pre-school programming, and most of the other players are not really licensing platforms.

Internationally, the effect of all of the new kids channels that have launched over the last few years is taking effect. The market is fragmenting further, driving broadcast license fees down and ultimately making it more difficult to build awareness for your properties.

The effect of all of the new kids channels that have launched over the last few years is taking effect.

So What Do You Do?

The trends and challenges that are facing us are a reality, however, I do take a more positive spin from it all. At the end of the day, what still remains true is that great content, great stories, great characters and consistently delivering on your promise, will always

lead to good things. Most of the breakout successes over the last 25 years have been from independent companies who focus on quality and unique ideas. Children have an innate love of animated properties that touch them on an emotional level. They love new things, a sense of fun, adventure and they are curious. There will always be room for a hit property.

Broadcast license fees have dropped, and there are more properties than ever.

While broadcast license fees have dropped, and there are more properties than ever, I do believe that the best do make financial sense. You know when you have a great property — it is what I call a slam-dunk!

A great example of a recent success is *Bob the Builder*, a stop-motion animation series, from Hit Entertainment, that has strong entertainment value, a unique style and a great play pattern. The producers decided to build the property in the U.K. first and concentrate on developing the brand through the release of quality products such as music, toys, games, etc. Once a proven success, it made the trek across the pond to the U.S., a much easier task with a track record, and which allowed Hit to retain the merchandising rights while landing on a great broadcast platform in Nick Jr. Now it is their job to build and maintain this brand into an evergreen property. Watching my two-year-old play with Scoop

and Muck, characters from the show, I think they are well on their way.

As for AAC Kids™, although we are a relative newcomer to the kids entertainment area, we are quite proud of our properties to date. We have focused on establishing a solid foundation of global, creative and financial partnerships in order to build a stable of high-quality, innovative properties that we can build into global brands. At MIPCOM, we launched several animated properties that span the age spectrum. Included were *Connie the Cow*, a pre-school cel animated series, *Henry's World*, a stop-motion animated series for the 4-8 year old set, and *Old Tom*, a humorous series for 6-11 year olds about a filthy, flea ridden and smelly alley cat (what's not to love!).

Moving ahead, we have

decided to focus our property development into three categories. First, we are definitely interested in developing and partnering on pre-school properties that have great story and characters and a strong emotional connection. Second, we are focusing on finding a great action oriented property that is non-violent, but that has a strong play pattern and third, we are focusing on the tween market with primarily strong live-action drama.

With a focused approach, and an unflinching passion for great properties, one can find success in this business!

As vice president, television distribution, AAC Kids™, Ken Faier, oversees all distribution of the AAC KIDS products both in the U.S. and international markets, including all properties

under the agreement between TV-Loonland and Alliance Atlantis. Over his 11-year career at Brunico Communications Inc., Faier's responsibilities spanned publishing, events, Internet development, marketing and general management. A founding publisher of KidScreen, Faier helped to build Brunico's foray into international markets and the conference and events business. Specifically, he was the co-founder of the Golden Marble Awards, the only award show that celebrates excellence in children's advertising and promotions.

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Glenn Vilppu's drawing techniques manual and video tapes, used worldwide as course material for animation students.



Shades of Gray

by Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman

If I were to ask you, my esteemed readership, to generate a mental picture of an animated cartoon and then describe what you had imagined, I could probably expect a diverse set of responses. Some of you may instantly recall a beloved character, or perhaps several of them frozen in some immortal scene from a great film or short. Others may conjure up abstract images from experimental, independent works. The images could conceivably include anything: Donald Duck shaking his feathered fist at Chip and Dale; the forlorn cat in *Allegro non Troppo* mourning her master's fate in the aftermath of war; the swirling, hypnotic rhythms of Oskar Fischinger; or the incredulous face of Samurai Jack as he surveys a world out of time. The only response I could safely predict would be that any and all of the images you envision are suffused with vibrant colors.

Animation and color have been synonymous for so long that it's difficult to imagine one without the other. To be sure, all of you have seen the early manifest of Mickey Mouse cartoons, enjoyed the original run of Fleischer's Popeye and Betty Boop, or recalled such black-and-white gems as *Porky in Wackyland* from the Warner studio. How many black-and-white cartoons, however, have been made during your

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Cats Don't Dance sans color would recall the great '30s musical.
© Turner Feature Animation.

Animation and color have been synonymous for so long that it's difficult to imagine one without the other.

respective lifetimes? Yes, the Warner studios did make a few episodes starring the *Tiny Toons* and *Animaniacs* in Ye Olde Style, but this was often done to parody old films of the black-and-white era and did not represent a stylistic reach by any means.

A quick look tells us that history is on the side of black-and-white cartoons. If you were to peruse the list of the "50 Greatest Cartoons" chosen by over 1,000 animation professionals in 1994, you may be amazed to discover that one out of every five is a black-and-white short. Among this august list we find titles such as

Fleischer's *Snow White* and *Minnie the Moocher*; Disney's *Steamboat Willie* and *The Skeleton Dance*; Warner's *You Ought to Be in Pictures*; and even an independent entry, *Bambi Meets Godzilla*. Well, *Godzilla* may have had his unique way of dealing with disputes, but it's awfully hard for the rest of us to argue with success; some of the best films in the history of animation were not made in color.

At any rate, ever since Walt Disney struck his legendary deal with Nathalie Kalmus for the two-year exclusive rights to Technicolor, cartoons have never

A quick look tells us that history is on the side of black-and-white cartoons.

looked back. The last theatrical holdout was, predictably enough, the Paul Terry studio, which did not convert to color shorts until 1938. (Somehow it's difficult to envision Paul Terry himself in anything but black-and-white.) Nope, they don't make 'em like that anymore. Should they? Before you dismiss that question as mere devil's advocacy (or perhaps lunacy) from the keyboard of this site's resident pedant, consider a few viewpoints on black-and-white films culled from a recent edition of the *Chicago Tribune* (11/4/01). After discussing some of the ideas contained therein and applying them to animated films, I will present my nomination for at least one recent animated feature that may have actually been better had color been dispensed with entirely.

In discussing the pending release of Joel and Ethan Coen's latest film *The Man Who Wasn't There*, *Tribune* movie critic Michael Wilmington notes that: "For many

movie aficionados, black-and-white cinematography, far from being a limitation, offers more opportunities for true artistry than color." Wilmington then goes on to list some of the greatest black-and-white movies ever made; the compendium is an impressive one. Films such as *Citizen Kane*, *Seven Samurai*, *On the Waterfront*, *Breathless*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Raging Bull* and *Schindler's List* make the cut, and most of these films were produced at a time when color stock was readily available. Film buffs among you may argue that Mr. Wilmington is talking about cinematography, but if there is one thing we have learned during the past decade, it's that modern CGI can duplicate virtually every nuance of texture and lighting imaginable in live-action film. If classics such as those listed above can be considered among the greatest films made, why couldn't an animated film follow suit?



A black-and-white *Mulan* would harken back to the bygone Asian cinema of the '40s and '50s. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.



Anastasia could have been made in black-and-white without losing its effectiveness. © Twentieth Century Fox.

A related article by Steve Knopper includes input from film experts and cinematographers (including Tom Denove, Michael Chapman, Robby Mueller and the Coens' cinematographer Roger Deakins), who "came up with a list of reasons why black-and-white movies are so distinctive, different and just plain cool." To no one's surprise, their input is as applicable to animated films as they are to their live-action counterparts:

1. Grays, dark tones and shadows set a different mood.

This was recognized by the Fleischer studio as far back as the Thirties. No American animation studio was more inventive with the black-and-white medium; by some accounts, the Fleischers actually animated their backgrounds using muted watercolors and then filmed them using black-and-white stock, the better to obtain a wider range of gray and off-white shadings. This technique was worked to great advantage in the *Popeye* series by helping to style the distinctly urban setting

that many of the cartoons played against. Long before Disney began experimenting with matching a scene's color to a character's mood, Max and Dave Fleischer knew how to color the mood of an entire short using only black, white and gray. With precisely controlled digital coloring now available, today's directors could easily do the same. Perhaps the closest and most cogent use of this technique in modern times can be seen in segments of *Batman: The Animated Series*.

2. Black and white evokes a bygone era. Which could be

very effective if the animated film recalls the heyday of the *noir*, semi-documentary, or B-grade films that flourished during the late '40s and early '50s. *Anastasia*, *All Dogs Go To Heaven*, *An American Tail*, *Fievel Goes West*, or *Atlantis* for that matter, could have been candidates for black-and-white production. (Later in this column when I discuss my own choice I will mention several others that might have qualified.)

3. Color is too real. This is rarely a problem with animated films; in fact, the more vivid and imaginative the use of color, the

more we are reminded that animated films exist in a fantasy world. *Yellow Submarine* is an excellent example of this. At times, however, it may be prudent to tone color down when scenes call for ultra-realism. In discussing the film *Raging Bull*, UCLA American film history professor Jonathan Kuntz noted that, had director Martin Scorsese filmed his fight scenes complete with bright red blood, "the audience would have cringed." One of the reservations many critics had about Martin Rosen's animated adaptation of *Watership Down* was its use of graphic and bloody violence. Cartoon rabbits, their flesh torn in combat, bleed in all too realistic gouts of crimson. This is one instance in which color was indeed too real; these scenes might have fared better if filmed in black-and-white.

4. Black and white can be cheaper. This is the most debatable point. It is difficult to see how a completely digital film in black-and-white might be cheaper than one in color, as it would simply be a matter of programming, monitoring and adjusting the software for the desired result. In the case of a traditionally animated feature, cost would depend on whether the animated picture is being filmed on black-and-white stock (probably cheaper) or done with black-and-white digital coloration (no difference). Of course, someone would have to come up with the idea in the first place...

5. Just because. ...and that brings us to the final point. Since no one has ever done a wide-release animated film in black-and-white, some brave *auteur* ought to give it a try. A good period piece, digitally colored in the rich black-and-white style of the time,



The vivid colors of *Yellow Submarine* make its fantasy world surreal.
Distributed by and © MGM Home Entertainment Inc.

might be enough of a novelty to attract a more sophisticated animation audience. What might there be to lose? Could it make any less money than *Monkey-bone*? There may be no better time than now, with the popularity of animated films at an all-time high and with new recognition of animated films by the Motion Picture Academy. As I have always argued, animation is a flexible enough medium to encompass all forms of presentation, so why can't some director take a risk... just because...

My nomination for a recent animated film that might have been even better in black-and-white? This was a tougher decision than it seemed at first. Disney's *Mulan* may have been a very good candidate since the film had a strong story and the visual style would have hearkened back to some of the great black-and-white Asian cinema of the 1940s and '50s. Another good pick? Warners' *Cats Don't Dance* — What better way to revive a boy-gets-girl Thirties musical than to do it in lush black-and-white? While these films were viable choices, my final pick was none other than Warner's 1999 sci-fi fantasy *The Iron Giant*. To begin with, the story took place during the early Cold War era and black-and-white animation could only have heightened the ambiance. To have the fashions, cars and settings cinematically portrayed as in a sci-fi movie made during the 1950s would have lent *The Iron Giant* the distinctive feel of that era. Neither Hogarth nor Annie Hughes would have suffered by being animated in black-and-white, and the characters most congruent with the period (namely bohemian Dean McCoppin and

paranoid government agent Kent Mansley) may even have been enhanced.

The titular character was



The Iron Giant in black-and-white would have become a period sci-fi classic. Courtesy and © 1999 Warner Bros.

My nomination for a recent animated film that might have been even better in black-and-white?

for the most part *already* animated in black-and-white and this was for the good; in many scenes his black-and-gray computer-generated image was all the more robotic due to the sharp lineation of his mechanical form. The penultimate battle between the Giant and the military would have nostalgically recalled the great black-and-white sci-fi films where all conventional armed might is helpless against the powers of alien invaders or titanic monsters. Finally, the film would have been an engaging and singular throwback, one that looked unlike any other animated feature being released today; for this reason alone *The Iron Giant* would have been one of the most unique animated films ever produced by an American studio. But after sixty-odd years of color features, no one — even a talent such as Brad Bird — thinks that way anymore.

This column is by no means a plea to return animation to the

days before three-strip color, nor is it a rant against the many fine color shorts and features produced since the technology became available. I merely mean to challenge the current conventions that modern animation seems to operate by. In a medium capable of anything (and more so by the day), perhaps there is still room to stretch back to the future and have some director try his or her hand at the rich possibilities that black-and-white animation still might offer today's audiences. There are undoubtedly many great animated films to come that will be made in color, but it will take a truly colorful director to make one in black-and-white.

Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman is a longtime student and fan of animation. He lives in Anderson, Indiana.

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.

Monthly provocative, drunken, idiotic ramblings from the North...



Illustration by Andreas Hykade.
Courtesy of Chris Robinson.

Ho, Ho, Ho

by Chris Robinson

"Christmas...the season when with shining fable Heaven and Nature, in accord for once, edict and postulate us all husbands and fathers under our skins, when before an altar in the shape of a gold-plated cattle-trough man may with impunity prostrate himself in an orgy of unbridled sentimental obeisance to the fairy tale which conquered the Western world, when for seven days the rich get richer and the poor get poorer in amnesty: the whitewashing of a stipulated week leaving the page blank and pristine again for the chronicling of the fresh." — "The Wild Palms," William Faulkner

"Is there ANYONE who knows what Christmas is all about?" — Charlie Brown

"Kyle's mom is a stupid bitch." — Cartman

Tis THAT time again: the moment when we imagine we are as close to good and genuine toward those we share this bizarre world with. Me? I'm not one for xmas. Like Charlie Brown, I go through the rituals but I just don't get it. Until my son was born, Christmas

was a depressant. Even now I doubt the validity of my contentedness. Is it because my son is moderately thrilled over the unveiling of new toys? If so, that's a pretty flimsy notion of bliss. The idea of pre-planning gifts for a loved one baffles me. Gifts and gestures should be spontaneous not programmed for the sake of some fat, boozy guy in a red coat (itself a guise for THE company).

Taint all bad. I am a sucker for the snow, the lights, the music and the xmas cartoons. There's something almost spiritual in that feeling of pleasure and comfort I get during a soft snow fall with a little Dean Martin "Baby It's Cold Outside" crooning in the background as the red, green, blue and yellow lights flicker on the window. Then again, maybe it's the double shot of rum in my eggnog...

There is something fundamentally (heh heh) good about Christmas.

There is something fundamentally (heh heh) good about Christmas. It evokes a spirit of Christian humanism I can dig.

Forgiveness. Peace. Understanding. I like everyone during the xmas season. When I'm driving I make full stops. I let the pedestrians cross before turning. I slow down to let a car change lanes. I honk out of joy not anger. Come January 2nd though, I return to a system that cannot afford such 'weakness' and within days I devolve into the tired, pissed off, frustrated person I was before December.

No, this isn't one of those calls (cause of...you know...the 'war') for the need to think about this xmas more than any other. I should be forgiving and kind to people EVERY FUGGING DAY of my existence. That's the rub. Xmas is like a vacation. I take a few snapshots, indulge more than usual, see the sites, talk to strangers and then take the first flight on Air Imagination back to the 'real' world. I emerge not wiser, just sort of umm...re-formatted. Christ, even during this hibernation/chamber session I'm rarely in possession of the spirit. Most of the time I'm half drunk, roaming around shopping malls desperately trying to spend my credit limit on 'gifts' (a.k.a. temporary excretions of guilt). It's a token payback for the hours I dumped my kids in front of the TV, ignored them all together, and for those 'late' nights at the office leaving the spouse to care for the home when in reality I was drinking with the boys or tongue dancing with the girl in the office.

Christmas, hell, life, should be about tolerance, forgiveness and sharing, but I've turned it into some bizarre almost robotic week where I wipe the guilt clean for the year so I can fuggit all up again the next year.

When Plato, through

Socrates, said, "Wisdom begins at home," he wasn't suggesting that we sit round the television. But like the book, radio, theatre, cinema and vaudeville show before it, people like to be elsewhere (in a brain sense) and as such television has become the fountain of what we call wisdom today. Television is a guide. It gives us dreams. It gives us breath. Television is our blue pattern for life. Television gives us stereotypes and clichés. Television gives us parts of a whole. Television simplifies. We apply sitcom principles to reality. Our mistake is not filtering the residue from those images before stepping outside.

**No, this isn't one
of those calls
(cause of...you
know...the 'war')
for the need to
think about this
xmas more than
any other.**

But hey there's hope; there's always hope until there isn't. Ponder that while you're sitting on the sofa half corked on rum and eggnog with the kids watching the annual xmas specials, cause you ain't gonna find much value in these tinsel toons.

How The Grinch Stole Christmas

On the surface it looks great. A miserable prick is so jealous of his happy neighbours that he decides to rob and loot them. Turns out that they don't care. They have each other. They have songs. They don't need gifts. In turn they forgive the remorseful

Grinch and invite him to dinner. Now that's a good lesson: forgive thy neighbour. Hmm...kinda reminds me of...umm...well...never mind. But hey, let's face it, the film does not feel complete until the presents are returned and the food is gorged. They tease you with this spiritual stuff, but then walk away from it in the end. Christmas is not complete. Forgiveness and understanding is nothing without a big table of food and a whole lot of toys! Amen.

A Christmas Carol

Okay, better still is Ebenezer Scrooge. Dante loathed avarice and Scrooge is the textbook example. He is the seven sins in one. His life is defined by money: how to make more and spend less. But the old sod doesn't even enjoy his money. He's just a lonely, repressed, bitter s.o.b. And yet despite ruining everyone's lives he is forgiven overnight! How exactly did he purge his sins to earn this path from hell to heaven? A visit by four ghosts. That's it. The guy had a bad night's sleep, awakens scared to the core, and is eager to change. Gee...s'like when you wake up with a raging hangover determined never to drink again. By nightfall, you're guzzling a beer and another and another... Anyway...is Scrooge really forgiven? Bob Cratchett is not exactly a man of principles. He's a boot licker. Scrooge enslaved him and he enjoyed it...so when Scrooge shows up at the door with a bag of gifts and some turkey, do you really expect Bob to say, "Umm...sorry you old coot, but piss off, you're not welcome here?" Of course not, Scrooge still pays the bills. Cratchett has no choice but to

welcome Scrooge in, and hey, even if it is a momentary transformation, at least they got some good grub. Our idea of villainy is as screwed up as our idea of heroism.

Dickens was a twerp.

Olive the Other Reindeer/ Robbie the Reindeer

I really wanted to like these two 'hip' pieces. Both are stylish, modern and filled with a wealth of nudge-wink references. Robbie is the work of Rex the Runt guru Richard Golezowski. Robbie shows up at Santa's domain to replace his retired dad, Rudolph. Within he meets a villainous Blitzen (still boiling over Rudolph's stardom); the Louise Brooks tinged tramp, Vixen, and a wealth of other cookie cutter characters. Beyond that it's the usual good vs. evil, good Robbie gets good, but dull, chick (my blood boiled when I realized that a COUPLING was on the way) and xmas is saved... I guess.

**You ain't gonna
find much value in
these tinsel toons.**

Meanwhile Olive is umm... not even crap...it's fake crap. A dog (Olive) mistakenly believes that she is needed to save Christmas. Olive. All of. Get it. Heh heh. She is accompanied by a greaseball 'ethnic' penguin and chased by an evil mailman who wants to stop xmas from happening. The message? When you get through the clutter of politically correct pop culture hipness (e.g. Drew Barrymore as Olive, Michael Stipe as a reindeer! Wow...way to go!), there ain't much to this except the usual, "I can be what-

ever I want to be," philosophy. Ain't a bad philosophy, but when you're a dog and your desire is to be a reindeer, the words psychotic and delusional come to mind. But hey, both films LOOK great. So if you're looking for a one-night stand with a big busted, peroxide haired bimbo lacking conversational skills then by all means check out these two, babes.

South Park: Mr. Hankey

Ok...now this *South Park* xmas episode is funny. The idea of a kid believing that a talking piece of shit comes up the toilet bowl every year to bring gifts to fiber fueled kids is a fine ode to the ribald tradition. And the quartet of foul mouthed, self-absorbed greedy children is damn close to the true nature of children at xmas. As with most of their episodes, the creators ridicule fundamentalist and politically correct tendencies of religious and social groups by being as politically incorrect as possible (e.g. Kyle's self-hating Jew song, Cartman's glorious rendition of "Kyle's Mom's a Bitch"). S'like a kid yanking his dick out of his buddies' car window so he can take a leak. It's initially shocking, and then it makes you chuckle until his endless waving and shouting just becomes embarrassing.

The great characters of Shakespeare's plays were the fools. They were loutish and obnoxious...but also the wisest and most perceptive characters in the plays. Parker and Stone are no fools.

A Charlie Brown Christmas

Charlie Brown finds that he does not understand Christmas. The rituals of decorating and gift buying do not give him any pleasure. To help him, Lucy suggests

that he direct the xmas play. He agrees but then finds he cannot control his smug, ignorant classmates. After picking up a dying little green tree (instead of a big aluminum one) to improve the spirit, Charlie Brown is heckled and insulted by his classmates. In frustration he demands to know what xmas is about. As always, philosopher Linus is there to save the day. With the lights dimmed, Linus recounts the nativity scene. Gifts were brought to the Christ child who was sent here to save us. Now being a heathen I find that story a bit loosey goosey but hey, it's the fact. Christmas is a Christian celebration. A poorly interpreted fairy tale of a fairy tale. But hey, Chuck is right; how did we go from gifts of an aroma, a tree and a yellowish metal from rock deposits to Playstation, Pokemon and roller blades? Good grief.

The PJs: How The Super Stole Christmas

A man catches a kid shoplifting, bounds and gags him and locks him in a trunk while he tells the story of a superintendent who almost 'jacked' Christmas. The super (voiced by Eddie Murphy) is pressured to get his wife a computer...but failing to receive any tip\$ from the apartment tenants he can't afford it. While xmas shopping at the local pawnshop he makes a desperate deal with the 'shriner' capped owner to become a repo man in exchange for the computer. The super accepts and begins sneaking around the neighbourhood repossessing items from his friends. Turns out that the reason folks couldn't make their payments was because they pooled their money to buy the super a new

sofa chair.

This is, and yeah I'm speaking from suburban middle class whitey perspective, one of the most realistic, down to earth xmas pieces I've seen. The humour is biting: a tree is decorated with asbestos droppings; a man's xmas bonus is whatever he can get pawning; the pawn dealer tries to sell back the super the watch he bought his wife last xmas; silent night is sung between spurts of gun fire and police radio calls. Best of all the sugarcoated sentimentality we're usually force-fed is DOA. And hey...any show that portrays Jesus as a poorly decorated baked potato and uses "beeatch" not once, but two times, is damn fine in the Pimp's books. There is something close to conventional narrative resolution: the super sells his chair to get money to buy back the items he repossessed from his friends. The confused 'shrine' capped guy asks the super why he is doing this. The super says he's doing it for one reason: "There is no 'I' in friendship."

In the final shot, the neighbours discover that the super was the repo man and beat the crap out of him. The truth ain't pretty but, like a bowel movement, it's necessary. It's life.

Epilogue

It seems to me that if we want to extend the spiritual element of joy to our lives, it's a simple matter of respect. Respect the values, concerns and beliefs of those we SHARE the world with. And hey, I've got a long way to go, so it's not like I'm speaking from Mount Olympus. But it seems increasingly clear to me that in order to find the tools to improve yourself and those around you, you're gonna need to live. You

don't practice for ice hockey by playing a video hockey game. You don't practice for life through a television screen. You learn by doing. As a friend told me recently, "You got to take life in your hands and fuck it up."

If all that fails, there are always narcotics and liquor. Here's my recipe for a potent old-fashioned that will make every xmas joyous.

Get a nice bourbon glass (NO ICE and NO WATER):

1. 1 teaspoon of sugar
2. 3 dashes of angostura bitters
3. Mix the two until the sugar

is brown

4. Add a half slice of lime, lemon and orange

5. Throw in as much Canadian Club as you need (1-3 ounces)

6. Take a drink stick and mash up the fruit. Take occasional sips and keep mashing the fruit until the taste meets your satisfaction (after 2 of these satisfaction will come quicker)

7. Add a cherry for show

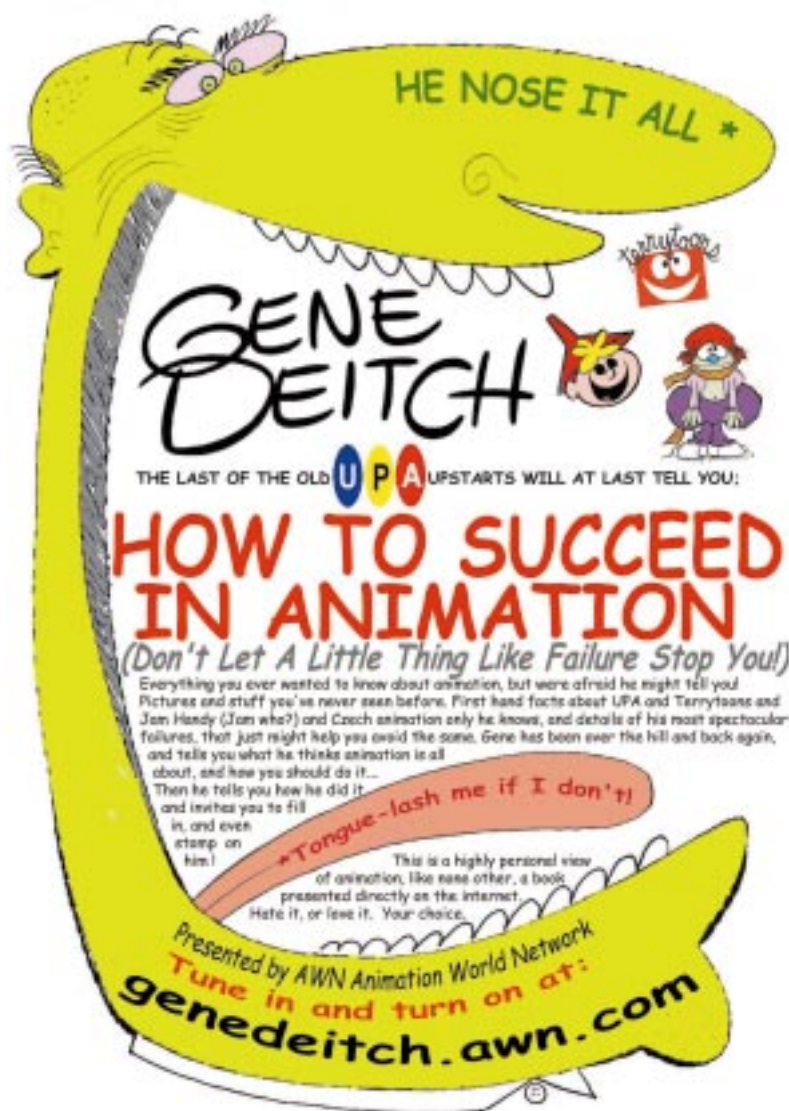
8. Drink, savour and watch the xmas blues fade away as family and friends become loveable and huggable with each swur...oops...I mean...slur-inducing gulp.

Hottie Animator of the Month

Kunyi Chen (*Subida*). Because she is and because I said so.

Chris Robinson is a writer, festival director, programmer, junky and has been called the John Woo of diplomacy. His hobbies include horseback riding, pudpulling, canoeing and goat thumping.

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.



Hobbit-alized:

The First Attempt At Animating The Hobbit

by Gene Deitch

An excerpt from Gene Deitch's book, How To Succeed In Animation (Don't Let A Little Thing Like Failure Stop You!).

Bill Snyder, my producer, did come up with some amazing things. In 1964, before anyone but a few obscure Brit kids ever heard of it, Bill handed me a faded little 1937 children's book named, *The Hobbit*. He recognized it was a great story, and he obtained the film rights to it and the other works by a fusty old English philologist, named John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. Snyder's rights extended to June 30, 1966. Just enough time. He set me to the task of making *The Hobbit* into a feature-length animated movie.

He set me to the task of making *The Hobbit* into a feature-length animated movie.

After reading the book, I caught the fever, and intensively began working up a screenplay. My dear old friend Bill Bernal, the same man who led me to UPA, and who later came to The Jam Handy Organization with me, flew to Prague to collaborate. The great sweep of the adventure, the



fabled landscapes, and the treasury of fantasy characters, made the story a natural for animation. Although the first book of the later trilogy, *The Lord of The Rings*, was published in 1954, we did not yet know of it. The Tolkien craze was still a few years in the future. Snyder had happened onto something of major value, and he had gotten the rights for peanuts!

We were well into *The Hobbit* screenplay when *The Lord of The Rings* came out in paperback editions. Having assumed there was only *The Hobbit* to contend with, and following Snyder's wish, we had taken some liberties with the story that a few years later would be grounds for burning at the stake. For example, I had introduced a series of songs, changed some of the characters' names, played loosely with the plot, and even created a girl character, a Princess no less, to go along on the quest, and to eventually overcome Bilbo Baggins' bachelorhood! I could Hollywoodize as well as the next man...

When I did manage to get and read *The Lord*, I realized I was dealing with something far more magnificent than what appeared in *The Hobbit* alone, and I then back-spaced elements from *The Lord of The Rings* into my script so as to logically allow for a sequel. First Bill Bernal, and then I, worked on the script for most of a year.

In January 1966, Snyder asked Zdenka and me to come to America to do a presentation to 20th Century-Fox. It would be Zdenka's first trip to America, and I wanted her to get the feel of the distance, so I decided we should go by ship. The six-day crossing would also give me time to do the



last-minute rewrites. There were only typewriters in those days, but I did achieve a sort of high-tech breakthrough: The rocking of the ship gave me automatic carriage returns on almost every line!

**Before the
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Before the time of CGI, I had proposed an impressive visual effect, combining cel-animated figures over elaborate 3D model

backgrounds. I know that Max Fleisher had once tried something like it, but I intended to take the idea to greater heights and atmosphere. I even attached a special name to the technique: "ImagiMation!" I was thinking big!

By the time we arrived in New York, however, Snyder had already blown the deal by asking 20th for too much money. Tolkien's name hadn't yet reached them either. I had a fat script, but no other film companies were then interested. It was crushing. Even today, when I flip through my screenplay, and can almost see the fabulous scenes I had imagined, I feel a heavy regret.

But the worst was yet to come. Months later, when I was back in Prague working on some other filler projects, Snyder managed to get a phone call through to Zdenka's office. (Phoning to Prague in those days was like trying to contact Uranus.) He had a preposterous order for me: Make a one-reel version of *The Hobbit*, and bring it to New York

within 30 days! I thought he had been smoking something wilder than his contraband Cuban cigars. Not possible!

What had happened was that in the meantime, the Tolkien craze had exploded, and the value of the film rights reached outer space. Suddenly Bill had the possibility of getting a huge profit without having to finance and produce a feature film at all. Why invest money, plus a year-and-a-half of work, when you can make money without all that sweat? Not only had the Tolkien estate lawyers given Snyder the rights for peanuts, but in their ignorance of film terminology, they had left a hundred-thousand-dollar loop-hole in the contract: It merely stated that in order to hold his option for *The Lord of The Rings*, Snyder had to "produce a full-color motion picture version" of *The Hobbit* by June 30, 1966. Please note: It did not say it had to be an *animated* movie, and it did not say how *long* the film had to be!

**I thought he
had been smoking something
wilder than his
contraband
Cuban cigars.**

The Tolkien estate had now been offered a fabulous sum for the rights, and Snyder's rights would expire in one month. They were already rubbing their hands together. But Snyder played his ace: to fulfill just the letter of the contract — to deliver a "full-color film" of *The Hobbit* by June 30th.



All he had to do was to order me to destroy my own screenplay — all my previous year's work — hoke up a super-condensed scenario on the order of a movie preview (but still tell the entire basic story from beginning to end), and all within 12 minutes running time — one 35mm reel of film. Cheap. I had to get the artwork done, record voice and music, shoot it, edit it, and get it to a New York projection room on or before June 30, 1966!

I should have told him to shove it, but I was basically his slave at the time...and it suddenly became a sort of insane challenge.

I knew my screen story line by heart, so I just had to put it through a mind-shredder, and write a sort of synopsis, with a few key lines of dialog scattered throughout. I called on close friend, brilliant Czech illustrator,

Adolf Born, well known even then, and now the premier book illustrator of the Czech Republic. We managed to work out a simple storyboard. Adolf came up with a paper cutout scheme, and I worked out some multiple-exposure visual effects and scene continuity. We worked directly under the camera to shoot it. I got an American friend here, Herb Lass, who worked as a broadcaster for the Czechoslovak Radio's foreign cultural transmissions, to come up to our apartment and record the narration on my own recording machine.

I borrowed a tape of dramatic movie music from a composer friend, Václav Lidl, which I quickly extracted and cut together, also at home. It was no problem with music rights, as I could assure him that the film would never actually be distributed, but would be — sadly — a mere decoy.

**I had to get the
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record voice and
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to a New York
projection room
on or before
June 30, 1966!**

I love to see my name as director on the screen credits of my films, but I modestly refrained this time. I did not want my name on such a chopped down version of my script, even though, thanks to Born, the film looked amazingly good. We actually managed to



get it shot and out of the lab in time (without bribes, but with Zdenka's usual brand of irresistible-object techniques), and I arranged for my New York air ticket. I arrived with the rough answer print on June 29th. Snyder had already booked a small projection room in midtown Manhattan. After a quick test screening — and Snyder was duly impressed — I ran downstairs and stopped people on the sidewalk, asking them if they would like to see a preview of a new animated film, for only 10¢ admission. I handed each willing customer a dime, which they handed back. After the screening, the few, puzzled audience members were asked to sign a paper stating that on this day of June 31, 1966, they had paid admission to see the full-color animated film, *The Hobbit*.

Thus Snyder's film rights to the entire J.R.R. Tolkien library were legally extended, and he was immediately able to sell them back for nearly \$100,000. (Remember, this was 1966.) My

share of this weazled boodle was — you guessed it — zip.

The final blow came some years later, when an animated feature version of *The Hobbit* appeared, starring the timid voice of Orson Bean. That film to my mind in no way approached the magnificence I had originally envisioned. I had obtained the greatest Czech artist of the time, illustrator, painter, sculptor, and director of the most famous Czech puppet films of all time, Jiří Trnka, to be the designer of my projected version. Sadly, we never got beyond his model sketches. They have never before been published, and I present them to you here, brilliant souvenirs of one of my more magnificent failures!

Want to hear more about Gene's foray into the feature film world? In How To Succeed In Animation (Don't Let A Little Thing Like Failure Stop You!), he also discusses Charlotte's Web...another fabulous disaster. Exclusively on AWN at

<http://genedeitch.awn.com>.

Gene Deitch is one of the last surviving members of the original Hollywood UPA studio of 1946, the instigator of the CBS-Terrytoon "renaissance" of 1956-1958, Animation Department Chief of the Detroit Jam Handy Organization, 1949-1951, Creative Chief of UPA-New York, 1951-1954, Director at John Hubley's Storyboard, Inc. New York, 1955, Creative Director of CBS-Terrytoons, 1956-1958, President of Gene Deitch Associates, Inc. New York, 1958-1960, Creative Director for Rembrandt Films, 1960-1968, star director for Weston Woods Studios, Inc., Weston, Connecticut, 1968-1993, and has worked for over 40 years with the Prague animation studio, "Bratři v Triku."

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.



Sketching on Location: Three Dimensional Figures

by Glenn Vilppu

This is the tenth in a new series of bi-monthly articles about sketching on location. The articles are based on my *Sketching on Location Manual*. The manual was developed as a series of lessons that I use on my guided sketching tours of Europe and as material in my regular drawing classes. As such the lessons can be part of a regular course or used by individual students as a practical learning guide. If you have not seen the previous lessons starting in the June 2000 issue of *Animation World Magazine*, it is recommended that you do. The lessons are progressive and expand on basic ideas. It is suggested that you start from the beginning for a better understanding of my approach. If you really want to start at the beginning open with the lessons based on the *Vilppu Drawing Manual*.

In the last lesson we discussed "The Silhouette — Positive and Negative Shape." The main purpose was the use of two-dimensional elements in a picture; contours being a useful tool in expression and as a strong picture-making tool.

Let's Get Started

In the chapter on quick sketch, we discussed creating volume by drawing over and around the form seeing how lines are able to create a feeling of three dimensions. In the real world we live in,

we see volume described not only by the surfaces of the forms which go around, but also by the light and the shadow that distinguish the sides of figures, or the planes, as we call them, artistically speaking. To create this same intense feeling of reality in our drawings, we need to be able to see our subjects as having tops, fronts, sides and bottoms. The simplicity of the box is the starting point for visualizing these planes. The use of the box for simplification is a traditional approach with a long history going back into the Renaissance and beyond. Luca Camiaso and Albert Durer are good examples

of artists that used it to great advantage.

Look at the examples on the following pages to see the progression from the box to the developed sketch. Our next step will be to define these planes with values of tone that give the illusion of light falling on them. When we are working in the field, the direction of light is usually established for us. As we discovered in earlier chapters, we do not necessarily need to take the light that is given to us, but have the option of making it come from wherever we need to have it come from for our purposes. Although we aren't



All drawings in this article are by and © Glenn Vilppu.

stuck with the direction of light given, we should try to be consistent in our light source.

When working in the field, I find using a simple watercolor wash the quickest and easiest way to create a sense of light

that describes form. The tone can also be applied when you get home or at a later time. As you notice in the examples, pencil works equally well.

In the next chapter I will discuss using the wash more thor-

oughly. Compare the drawings above to see how the wash helped to show the volume of the figures.

Continue on to see more examples.







Glenn Vilppu first wrote for *Animation World Magazine* in the June 1997 issue, "Never Underestimate the Power of Life Drawing." His drawing manuals and video tapes may be purchased in the Animation World Store, <http://www.awn.com/awnstore>.

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.

Glenn Vilppu teaches figure drawing at the American Animation Institute, the Masters program of the UCLA Animation Dept., Walt Disney Feature Animation and Warner Bros. Feature Animation, and has been sent to teach artists at Disney TV studios in Japan, Canada and the Philippines. Vilppu has also worked in the animation industry for 18 years as a layout, storyboard and presentation artist. His drawing manual and video tapes are being used worldwide as course materials for animation students.



Producing Animation

Pamela Kleibrink Thompson

Traditionally, this is a time of gift giving. If you are wondering what to give someone, who works in animation or aspires to do so, the book *Producing Animation* by Catherine Winder and Zahra Dowlatabadi may be your answer. *Producing Animation* gives a fabulous producer's overview of the animation process, but it is not just for producers. Anyone who works in or aspires to work in animation would benefit from this book. The writers are both experienced production people and remind us how important attitude is and why it's essential to establish a sense of mutual respect for everyone involved on a project. The way people treat each other matters.

An early chapter is devoted to descriptions of the producer's role by a wide variety of industry veterans. From director Brad Bird to supervising animator Andreas Deja, each person gives a different but similar perspective on the important attributes of a producer.

The writers describe the roles and required skills of the crew. Terms are defined as they are used and the reader becomes familiar with the entire process of animation production, whether for 2D or 3D, features, television or direct to video.

Producing Animation provides a comprehensive overview, which is exactly what a producer needs. One of the best parts is the Producers Thinking Map — a visu-



Pamela Kleibrink Thompson

al guide for the main steps involved in any animated project. The writers give practical ideas on how to put together a production plan from script to post-production, give tips on selecting a production team, and describe what is required of each person on the crew of an animated project.

Producing Animation provides examples of budgets, schedules and ways to track the progress of a project. Anyone who wants to set up and run an animation studio should study this book so they can optimize the talents of their crew and staff, and minimize wasted efforts. The writers guide the reader through the complex and often frustrating process of producing animation. Those who already run animation studios or independent animators may find it useful for planning, creating and distributing their work.

I wish this book had been

around when I was a production manager on *The Simpsons*. It would have helped me a lot. *Producing Animation* is an invaluable resource for students, executives, artists and live-action producers who may dream about producing an animated project. It will help anyone who is entering the business understand how and why decisions are made and give insight into the entire process. It describes how production problems develop and how to avoid those situations or come up with practical solutions. From preparing a pitch through final release print, everything one needs to know about producing animation is discussed.

For more information visit www.producinganimation.com or www.focalpress.com. Plus, watch for selected excerpts from *Producing Animation*, which are being published exclusively on AWN. You can already read several by visiting our magazine archives online.

Pamela Thompson is a career coach and recruiter, who had nothing to do with writing Producing Animation, though she wishes she had.

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i Castelli ANIMATI®

and Oscar Grillo's Exhibitions

by Ron Diamond

members honored a marvelous selection of international short films.



At the invitation of the gracious and visionary festival director Luca Raffaelli, Oscar Grillo created and presented a humorous exhibition of original drawings and paintings. The title of each piece began with "The day when..." and draws from his own experiences, encyclopedic knowledge of animation and unbridled imagination. In this collection of 29, Oscar pokes fun at many of the greatest animation artists. From John Lasseter to Lotte Reiniger, no one was safe from his hysterical caricatures and outrageous scenarios. Remarkably done in less than 2 weeks, this exhibition was presented as an I Castelli Animati exclusive and brought a warm and personal touch to an already wonderful festival.

If you have the opportunity to see these pictures in all their glory, I encourage you to do so. Incidentally, in Genzano Oscar also presented the stunning Betty Boop send up "The Boop Sisters," an exhibition that he created for this year's Annecy International Animation Festival. Both exhibitions are shown online at AWN.com through the courtesy of Mr. Oscar Grillo. Should you be



Catalogue cover for I Castelli Animati 2001 festival

There is no question that the major international animation festivals offer enthusiasts an unparalleled opportunity to see great films. The pleasure of watching brilliant animators' work is substantially increased by the chance that one will enjoy the films in the creators' company and be able to speak with them following the screening. Many animators are humble and easy going and rarely reflect the often-wild side of their id that comes out in their films. And sometimes the

animators are just as bold as their films. And this brings us to the subject of Oscar Grillo...

It has been my pleasure to attend the marvelously hospitable and well programmed I Castelli Animati Animation Festival in Genzano, Italy. This year, as it was last year, I enjoyed the honor of sharing the experience of attending I Castelli Animati with the venerated and legendary master of animation, Oscar Grillo. Oscar served this year as the president of the jury and with his fellow jury

fortunate enough to attend a festival that Oscar is also attending, do what you can to hear all he has to say. And don't forget to put I Castelli Animati on your festival list for submissions and attendance.

Go online and see Oscar's two collections that he created specifically for I Castelli Animati, "The day when..." and "The Boop Sisters:"

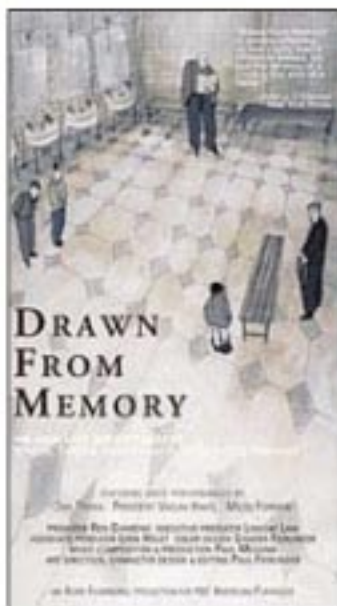
http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=search&sval=grillo&article_no=873



Note: Readers may contact any Animation World Magazine contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.

Ron Diamond is the co-founder and co-publisher of Animation World Network. He also serves as executive producer and founder of Los Angeles-based Acme Filmworks, an animation commercial production company.

PAUL FIERLINGER'S DRAWN FROM MEMORY NOW AVAILABLE ON VIDEO !



"Drawn From Memory is an extraordinary reminiscence about an improbable but true life, rendered in pen-and-ink images as whimsical as those of James Thurber and words as piercing as those of Milan Kundera. The work, which could be called The Movie of Laughter and Forgiveness, uses the lighthearted medium of animation to heartbreaking effect."

--Carrie Rickey
The Philadelphia Inquirer



<http://www.awn.com/awnstore/acme/drawn.html>

Cinanima Celebrates **25** Years

by Abi Feijó

Cinanima actually began as an exhibition of comics and the screening of some animated films in 1976. The results and the response was so encouraging that it led the first organizing group to aim higher and the next year the first edition of the International Festival took place. The organizing committee was composed of people from different backgrounds, but they were all cinema lovers who wanted to develop the activities of the local CineClub. In only four years they were able to set the foundation and reputation of Cinanima, creating a very friendly festival with good programs. Plus, special attention was paid to create public awareness of and involvement in animation through the organization of parallel activities such as animation workshops.

At that time, only a few years after the Portuguese "Carnation Revolution," which brought freedom back to Portugal, there were only a few Portuguese animators; most of them doing commercials. Only one studio was



Cinanima's dynamic home.
All images courtesy of and © Cinanima.

There were many years without a single Portuguese film being shown at Cinanima.

trying to survive doing TV series for children. There was also some governmental support to finance a few animated films, but, unfortunately it stopped quite soon. For about 15 years there wasn't any money for short films and very

little for other kinds of animation. As a consequence, an entire generation of Portuguese animators were suffocated and it was very hard for Cinanima to carry out its task of developing an animation film festival in a country where almost no animation films were being produced. There were many years without a single Portuguese film being shown at Cinanima.

But this perseverance, together with all the workshops held at Cinanima, brought to fruition a new generation of Portuguese animators that started to appear in the early '90s when the Portuguese government decided, pushed by the European community, to start supporting animation. From that moment on this support has continued to grow and Portuguese animation is accepting the challenge and is beginning to receive international recognition.

Today at Cinanima we can attest to an important national competition, what was impossible just ten years ago. Cinanima has



Festival Director Antonio Gaio, who is also the author of a book on Portuguese animation cinema.



Author António Costa Valente signing his new book *Cinema without Actors*.



Cinanima's enthusiastic crowd and beautiful weather.

played a very important role in this development. This year there were 10 Portuguese films in the international competition and more than thirty in the national one. But it is not only at a national level that Cinanima is an important festival. Twenty-five editions in 25 years makes Cinanima one of the most important animation festivals in the world. It has been recognized by the European Community as one of the festivals qualifying for the highest European award — The Cartoon D'Or — and also by Hollywood's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Films awarded in Espinho qualify for the Oscars. In recent years Cinanima has also improved their cash prizes in each category, which now total 29,000 Euro. This has meant an entry increase from an average of 250 films per year to more than 500 this past year.

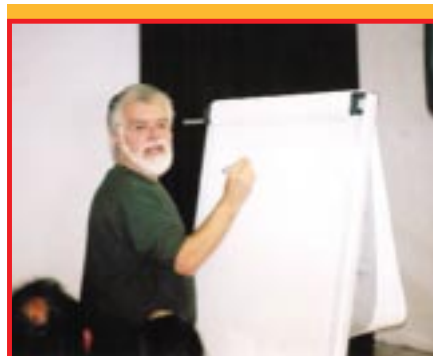
Cinanima also cares about the festival's quality and tries hard to fulfill the ASIFA guidelines for an outstanding animation festival. To that end, they have improved their selection jury, which now has two international members and is able to stand at the same level of every other major international animation festival.

But the most important thing is the way guests are welcomed at Cinanima. They enjoy the warmth of the people, the respect they have earned. There

are not too many screenings to attend and it is always possible to find time to recover from late night parties and meet other guests. And, if they are lucky, they can enjoy the nice weather even in early November. However, even the best festival director cannot guarantee that!

This perseverance, together with all the workshops held at Cinanima, brought to fruition a new generation of Portuguese animators...

A list of winners for Cinanima 2001 was included in AWN's Headline News at <http://news.awn.com/index.php3>



Dave Master teaches one of Cinanima's workshops.

?ltype=search&search=Cinanima&newsitem_no=6090.

AWN also published a Gallery of photos from Cinanima's 25 years!

You can see these photos at http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=search&sval=Cinanima&article_no=939.

Abi Feijó was born in Braga, Portugal in 1956 and graduated from the Oporto School of Fine Arts. In 1984 he went to the National Film Board of Canada for an animation internship, which resulted in the short film Oh que Calma. Soon after, he founded Filmógrafo, an animation studio based on the NFB model of handcrafted auteur animation, where he serves as producer and artistic director.

He was elected president of ASIFA, the International Animated Film Association, in 2000 and is currently involved in establishing a cultural center devoted to the art of animation in Oporto. He also gives training workshops around the world. His films have won roughly 40 international prizes and honorable mentions.

His most recent film was Clandestino (Stowaway), in 2000.

Note: Readers may contact any Animation World Magazine contributor by sending an e-mail to editor@awn.com.

Fresh from the Festivals:

December 2001's Film Reviews

by Jon Hofferma

Within the world of animation, most experimentation occurs within short format productions, whether they be high budgeted commercials, low budgeted independent shorts, or something in between. The growing number of short film festivals around the world attest to the vitality of these works, but there are few other venues for exhibition of them or even written reviews. As a result, distribution tends to be difficult and irregular. On a regular basis, *Animation World Magazine* will highlight some of the most interesting with short descriptive overviews.

This Month:

f8 (2001), 13 min., directed by Jason Wen, USA. Info: Jason Wen. Fax: 972-240-0087. Email: jason_wen@hotmail.com

Os Irmãos Willians (The Willians Brothers) (2000), 12 min., directed by Ricardo Dantas, Brazil. Info: Zoo Filmes Ltda, Rua Armando Pinto, 142, São Paulo, SP, Brazil. Tel/Fax: 55-11-91127286. Email: zoo@originet.com.br.

Ornaments (2001), 5.5 min., directed by Aaron James Erimez, USA. Info: Aaron James Erimez. Email: ajerimez@aol.com.

The Shark and the Piano (2001), 6 min., directed by Gabriele Pennacchioli, co-directed by Alessandro Carloni, Germany. Info: Alessandro Carloni. Email: alecarloni@aol.com. Or Gabriele Pennacchioli. Email: gpennacchioli@iol.it. URL: www.munich-animation.com and www.night-flight.it

Still I Rise (2001), 6 min., directed by Umesh Shukla, USA. Info: Umesh Shukla, 5809 Abernathy Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045. Tel: 310-216-5724. Email: info@umeshshukla.com.



f8. © Jason Wen.

f8

Jason Wen's science-fiction short is both compulsively watchable and inherently frustrating. A tour-de-force of computer-animation technique, *f8* is also largely indecipherable at a narrative level, and — with its episodic structure composed of short segments punctuated by dissolves, fades and blackouts — often feels more like a trailer or a non-interactive video game than a cohesive work. While it's clear that the film has something to do with the individual versus the omnipotent techno-

state, the story doesn't resolve any further. The imaginative visuals and attention to detail are awesome and Wen demonstrates substantial mastery of the computer-animation idiom. However, as digital tools become more available and sophisticated, and computer-created milieus more widespread and familiar, the need for a meaningful and engaging narrative becomes even more important if one is to move beyond the generic.

Jason Wen is a graduate of the Ringling School of Art & Design. *f8*, which he began while a student, is his second film. (His senior thesis, *Whirligig*, screened at SIGGRAPH in 1999.) *f8* was completed over the course of 3 1/2 years, using Lightwave 3D with the Project: Messiah plug-in. The film was composited in After Effects and edited in Adobe Premiere.

f8 screened at the 2001 SIGGRAPH, where it won a Jury Award, as well as the Hollywood Film Festival, Prix Arts Electronica (Austria) and many other festivals. It received a Gold Award at the 2001 Japanese Digital Animation Festival.

The Willians Brothers

A mock documentary that immediately brings to mind the work of Nick Park (who is cited by the director as an influence), this Brazilian claymation piece relates the meteoric rise and fall of a group of musical siblings, filtered through the sensationalist sensibility of the popular media. *The Willians Brothers* is the second film and the first claymation effort of director Ricardo Dantas, whose cynical and wry perspective gives a nice edge to the samba-infused proceedings. (The songs — includ-

ing the immortal “Neighbor’s Doorbell” by Rodolpho Grani, Jr. — are great.) The animation, in which the mouths do most of the work, is primitive at best, but the minimalist style generally suits the subject. At times the film’s humor seems labored and the purposely clichéd characters overdrawn; yet I also had the feeling that some of the perceived flatness may have been due to less-than-inspired English translations of the Portuguese, and a cultural and/or historical specificity that made it hard for an outsider to appreciate all of the references.



Os Irmãos Willians (The Willians Brothers).
© Zoo Filmes Ltda.

Ricardo Dantas is a graduate of the School of Arts of the University of Mackenzie in Brazil. He has worked as an Art Director for Storm Advertising in Portugal and as an animator on the Brazilian TV show, *Ra Tim Bum*. *The Willians Brothers*, which was produced with grants from the Culture Ministry of Brazil, has been shown at Anima Mundi, CINANIMA, the Brazilian Film Festival of Miami and many other festivals in South America.

Ornaments

Taking a page out of Pixar’s book, Aaron James Erimez has created a whimsical and often quite funny film about the death-defying efforts of a Santa Claus tree ornament in his pursuit of an elusive plate of cookies. Though very similar in appearance and tone to the early works of John Lasseter &

Co. (*Knickknack* in particular comes to mind), the familiarity does little to diminish the pleasure of sharing the misadventures of an ill-fated, but determined protagonist in his uphill battle against adversity (a paradigm epitomized not only by the immortal Wile E. Coyote — Erimez cites Chuck Jones, as well as Pixar, as an influence — but also by the work of many of the early silent movie comedians). Featuring a soundtrack comprising a few of classical music’s greatest hits, *Ornaments* is a remarkably accomplished first film in which the narrative payoff transcends the film’s derivative origins.

Aaron James Erimez studied computer science in college, but a growing interest in film and animation led him to teach himself the fundamentals of movie-making. *Ornaments* was created on a homemade PC using 3D Studio MAX, Photoshop, and Premiere. The film has won awards at numerous festivals, including the Marco Island Film Festival, Anima Mundi, and The Festival of Festivals.



Ornaments. © Aaron James Erimez.

The Shark and the Piano

An omnivorous shark who has trouble making friends is the main character in this likable but not particularly engaging short by Gabriele Pennacchioli and Alessandro Carloni. Created with an unusual combination of 2D and 3D techniques, the film features many beautiful underwater

effects, including an impressive realization of light streaming down from the unseen world above. However, the story is sketchy at best, and the sudden introduction of the titular *piano ex machina* that transforms the life of the woebegone fish doesn’t make a lot of sense dramatically or semantically. There’s a sweetness to the film that one can’t help but like, but it doesn’t compensate for the slack and rather desultory narrative. (It was something of a shock to discover that *The Shark and the Piano* was inspired by the Jane Campion feature, *The Piano*!), which ends with a piano being thrown into the sea. Had this idea of inter-cinematic continuity been developed, *The Shark and the Piano* would have been a very different — and potentially much more interesting — film.)



The Shark and the Piano.
© Munich Animation.

Gabriele Pennacchioli, a former comic book artist, and Alessandro Carloni, a one-time illustrator and animator for commercials, plus other members of this production’s team, met in Munich in 1996. They’ve since worked together on numerous feature films. More than 70 artists from around the world contributed to *The Shark and the Piano*, which was produced using traditional cel animation, Softimage Toonz, Eddyfree, Maya, and Photoshop, and edited on an Avid. The film has won prizes at festivals in Canada, Berlin, Italy and Russia.

Still I Rise

Umesh Shukla uses a lovely technique and an iffy organizing principle to visualize what he imagines might have been the final dream of Joseph Merrick, better known as "the Elephant Man," whose grossly deformed body made him a 19th century medical curiosity. Drawing inspiration from the fact that Merrick and Vincent Van Gogh died within three months of each other, Shukla presents his dreamscape as an Impressionist tableau, emulating the thick brush strokes associated with Van Gogh's later period and using multiple layers and dissolves to heighten the abstract quality of the film. The effect is sometimes striking and the use of Gabriel Faure's familiar *Pavane* for the soundtrack imbues the whole with a sense of poignancy. The main problem with the film is that,



Still I Rise. © Umesh Shukla.

unless one already knows something about Merrick and his tortured life, *Still I Rise* reads as a series of disconnected images that fails to communicate anything about its subject.

Umesh Shukla has been involved with the computer graphics medium for over a decade, and his work as a CG supervisor can be seen in numerous music videos, commercials and feature films, including the Academy Award-winning *Titanic*. He has worked with Walt Disney Feature Animation on several projects and is currently CG supervisor

for DreamWorks' next computer-animated feature.

The online version of this article includes QuickTime film clips.

Visit http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=pageone&article_no=900 and enjoy!

Jon Hofferma is an independent filmmaker, writer and graphic designer, as well as the creator of the Classical Composers Poster (www.carissimi.com). He has a B.A. in Philosophy & Religion and an M.F.A. from UCLA's School of Film & Television. Appropriately enough, he is currently working on a documentary about the nature of religious experience.

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New from Japan:

Anime Film Reviews

by Fred Patten

Around 1995, Japanese animation (anime) began pouring into North America, Europe and across the globe in video form. Most of these titles were unknown outside of Japan and never covered by animation journals. Whether a title is highly popular or very obscure, a high-quality theatrical feature or a cheap and unimaginative direct-to-video release, they all look the same on a store shelf. Therefore, *Animation World Magazine* will regularly review several new releases (including re-releases not previously covered) that have merit and about which our readers should know.

Black Magic M-66

OAV, 1987. Directors: Masamune Shirow, Hiroyuki Kitakubo. 48 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$24.95. Distributor: Manga Entertainment.

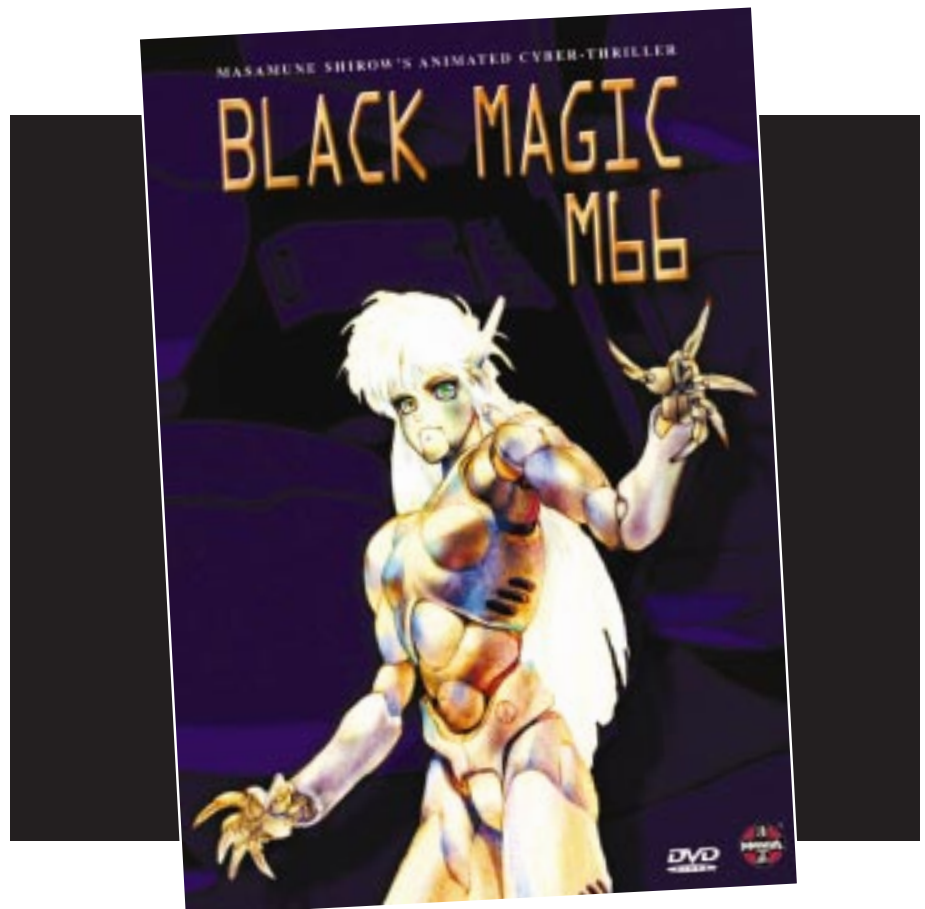
Black Magic was artist/writer Masamune Shirow's first manga novel, originally self-published while he was a 22 year-old college student in 1983. Shirow began professionally creating cartoon-art science fiction novels two years later, in parallel with starting what was to be his real career (under his actual name: Masanori Ota) as a high school teacher. The former drew him into a brief association with a group of young animators setting up companies to take advantage of the new direct-to-video market's need for cheap productions. (Namely, two animation studios, Animate Film

and A.I.C., coordinated through the Movic production company. All three have prospered as the OAV market has grown.) They picked a dramatic chapter from Shirow's *Black Magic* as one of their first projects. Shirow himself wrote the script from his story, drew the storyboards, and co-directed with Hiroyuki Kitakubo, who did story layout and character design from Shirow's art. This was Shirow's only direct foray into animation; his teaching career occupied him full-time for a while, then in the 1990s he concentrated

on his artistic sci-fi novels. The best-known of these, *Appleseed* and *Ghost in the Shell*, have also been animated but Shirow was not involved in the production.

Black Magic M-66 was released as an early OAV short feature (48 minutes) on June 28, 1987. One suspects that the animators and their backer/distributor (Bandai Visual) chose that particular chapter because of its close resemblance to *The Terminator* (1984), although almost all of Shirow's works branch off from Philip K. Dick's and A. E. van Vogt's sci-fi explorations of expanded intelligence in both humans and artificial brains.

A military helicopter carrying two "anti-personnel android" (human-looking assassin robot) prototypes toward a Top



Black Magic M-66. © Manga Entertainment.

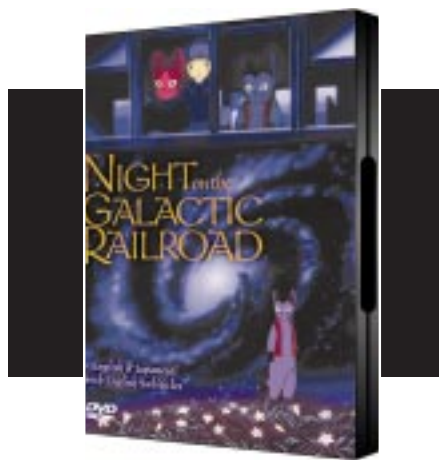
Secret test site crashes just outside a *Bladerunner*-esque futuristic city. The M-66s have not yet been programmed; their memories are still loaded with their developer's test-image — his teen granddaughter Ferris's photo. The androids activate and set out to kill their target, decimating the Special Forces commandos sent to retrieve them. Sybel, a headline-seeking journalist, is drawn to the action, but she ends up with the hysterical Ferris fleeing ahead of the remaining M-66 slashing and blasting its way toward them through the city and the remaining commandos trying to protect them.

This was one of the first productions of Anime Film and A.I.C. The animation is crude, but the direction is solid and suspenseful and the action is well choreographed. (Shirow has acknowledged studying the direction of Hayao Miyazaki's films very closely.) It shows the early promise, which has matured in the later works of all concerned. *Black Magic M-66* has been popular with American anime fans almost from its original Japanese release, first as a bootleg-copied import, then as one of the first licensed American anime videos in December 1991, and now on DVD.

Night on the Galactic Railroad.

Theatrical feature, 1985. Director: Gisaburo Sugii. 108 minutes. Price & format: DVD \$29.99 bilingual. Distributor: Central Park Media.

This art film, released in July 1985, was the first major animated adaptation of the literary classics of Kenji Miyazawa (1896-1933), one of Japan's best-known 20th century authors. Superficially



Night on the Galactic Railroad.
© 1985 Asahi Group, Herald Group, TAC.

a children's fantasy, this allegorical phantasmagoria of the unity of the earth, the heavens, life and death is for all ages. Giovanni is a young schoolboy who is ostracized by most of his classmates when he must stop playing with them to work at odd jobs to support his ailing mother. Only his best friend Campanella remains loyal. On the night of the Milky Way Festival, when the townsfolk sail lanterns down the river, Giovanni goes to a hilltop to look at the stars. An ethereal train stops so he can board, and he is delighted to find that Campanella is also a passenger. The first part of the journey is clearly a dream, with sights influenced (as in the MGM *Wizard of Oz* movie) by Giovanni's daytime memories of his school teacher's lessons and other elements; a stop at the Pliocene Coast dominated by gigantic antediluvian fossils, and stations based upon the constellations. Gradually, and obviously after a new influx of wet passengers turn out to be people who had just drowned as the *Titanic* sunk, Giovanni and the audience realize that the train is really taking newly-dead souls to Heaven. He

has a rare round-trip ticket, but what is Campanella doing on the train?

Sugii's telling of this story, beautifully animated by Group TAC, blends the original story (which was itself a blend of reality and fantasy) with well-known elements from Miyazawa's other works. Giovanni's hometown is what was then-exotic (to the Japanese) Italy, but with Japanese cultural elements such as the annual festival of floating candles down a river to honor the souls of the dead. There is no hint that the characters are anything other than human, but some of Miyazawa's other stories feature anthropomorphized cats so Sugii presents the cast here as funny animal cats. Street signs and such are in Esperanto rather than Italian, reflecting Miyazawa's passion for that artificial language. All captions and credits are in both Japanese and Esperanto. (Unfortunately, the English translation misses some references, identifying the prehistoric ancestor of the bull as "vos" instead of "bos," and apparently not realizing that some names such as swan and scorpion refer to the constellations rather than the mundane creatures.)

Giovanni and Campanella are both introspective boys who watch in quiet awe, so there are long passages without dialogue. Fortunately, the music (Haruomi Hosono) and sound mix (Atumi Tasiro) superbly carry the movie for adult viewers. However, watching *Night on the Galactic Railroad* is similar to spending an afternoon at an art museum in that children are apt to become restless.

Battle of the Planets.V.1 - V.4.

TV series, 1972-1974. Japan, Chief Director: Hisayuki Toriumi;

America, Executive Producer & Writer: Jameson Brewer. 60 minutes each. Price & Format: DVD \$19.95 bilingual. Distributor: Rhino Home Video.

Science Ninja Team Gatchaman was a landmark anime TV series in many respects. It was one of the most popular anime TV series of the 1970s, running for 105 episodes from October 1, 1972 to September 29, 1974 and spinning off two sequels, *Gatchaman II* (52 episodes, October 1, 1978 to September 23, 1979) and *Gatchaman-F* (for Fighter) (48 episodes, October 7, 1979 to August 31, 1980). It was the last major title developed by Tatsuo Yoshida, creator of Tatsunoko Production Co., before his death. It was one of the few anime series in the style of American costumed superhero comic books to win any popularity in Japan.

In October 1978 as *Battle of the Planets*, it became the first Japanese TV cartoon series in over ten years to break into American TV. Producer Sandy Frank's team (notably Jameson Brewer and Alan Dinehart) drastically edited and rewrote it to turn it into a *Star Wars* clone. The Japanese plot has the *Gatchaman* heroes traveling all around Earth to defend our world from the Galactor space invaders. The American version opts for an interstellar setting, claiming that each episode takes place on a different planet (which just happens to look like Earth). Even for the more permissive syndicated TV market, *Gatchaman* was so violent by American standards that the 105 episodes were cut to 85, and those were edited so much that new American footage by Gallerie International Films, Inc. had to be created



Battle of the Planets.
All Rights Reserved.
© 2001 Rhino Home Video.

(spaceships flying to other planets, and comedy scenes with a new C-3PO-like robot) to bring the episodes back up to 25 minutes. Even so, *Battle of the Planets* was so dramatic by American TV cartoon standards that it won a large juvenile following. American anime fandom had just started, and early anime fans won many recruits by pointing out that *BotP* was actually anime, and by showing bootleg videos of the uncut Japanese episodes. In 1986, as a result of legal entanglements, the American license reverted to Tatsunoko which resold it to Turner Program Services, which created yet another American TV version. *G-Force*, supervised by Fred Ladd, was a more faithful adaptation of the original *Gatchaman*, but it sold mostly to foreign markets and was seen by few Americans.

Rhino's DVD editions are designed for anime fans. Vol. 1 contains *Battle of the Planets*, episodes 1 and 2, plus the same two episodes of the original uncut *Gatchaman* series in Japanese with English subtitles, plus episode 1 again in the *G-Force* version with English, Spanish, and Brazilian-Portuguese dialogue

tracks. All episodes include the full credits in English. The differences between the three versions is striking! Vol. 2 presents episodes 3 and 4, plus *G-Force* episode 2. Vols. 3 and 4 are scheduled for a January 2002 release; more will follow if sales justify their production.

For the past twenty years, fans have had to settle for imports of the Japanese untranslated *Gatchaman* on video and twenty-year-old home-video recordings of *Battle of the Planets*. Now at least the first episodes of both American and Japanese versions, plus some of the *G-Force* episodes, are available in a format suitable for serious animation collectors. For those who want only the *Battle of the Planets* versions as cool space-adventure TV cartoons for the 8 to 12 set, they are available as two-episode, 60 minute VHS videos for \$9.95 each.

Yamamoto Yohko, Starship Girl: The Perfect Collection.

OAV series (6 episodes), 1996-1997. Director: Akiyuki Shinbo. 180 minutes. Price & format: DVD \$39.95 bilingual. Distributor: The Right Stuf International.

Also available in a video edition:

Yamamoto Yohko, Starship Girl. V.1, The Starship Girl. V.2, Echoes from the Past. V.3, All's Fair in Love and War.

2 episodes/60 minutes each. Price & format: video \$19.98 dubbed only.

When anime gets silly, it gets *really* silly! This is a parody of video games and the high schoolers who become obsessed gamers. It lampoons *The Last Starfighter* most obviously, but goes on to skewer sports, horror

and romance games as well. The main cast consists of rival teen girl fighter aces; wish-fulfillment role models for the girl market, cute eye-candy for the boys, and slapstick comedy for both.

A galactic civilization of the 2990s is divided between two interstellar superpowers, Terra and Ness. To avoid devastating warfare, all "tactical economic negotiation" disputes are settled by symbolic battles between teams of four starfighters. Only teenagers have reflexes fast enough to become top fighters. Terra, which has been regularly losing, decides to utilize time-travel to recruit a team from the Golden Years of the space-battle video-gaming past, a thousand years earlier. The four are reckless daredevil Yokho Yamamoto and her high-school buddies, Madoka, Momiji and Ayano. They quickly reverse Terra's losing streak and start humiliating Ness' Red Snappers team; arrogant Rouge and her sisters Lubrum, Erutron and Lote.

Just in case any viewer might mistake the exaggerated melodrama of the first episode for



Yamamoto Yohko, Starship Girl's DVD cover. © Taku Shouji-Takashi Akaishizawa-Yamamoto Yoko Seisakuinkai/Kadokawashoten.

serious action (hardly likely, since Yohko needs to drop ¥100 into her "real starfighter" to take off), the second episode is an over-the-top burlesque of sports video games. Yohko and her teammates are celebrating their victory at Funky Bubble Hot Spring, an outer-space parody of a traditional Japanese vacation spa. They run into their Red Snappers rivals, and

an instant grudge match develops. The action quickly escalates from ping-pong ("I pray to the ping-pong ball to destroy evil with this racket!") to space billiards (using their starfighters as cuesticks to carom planetoids off each other).

The original *Let's Go! Starship Girl Yamamoto Yohko* OAV series, produced by J.C. Staff, consisted of three half-hour videos released between March and June 1996. It proved popular enough that three more were released as *Yamamoto Yohko II* between August and December 1997, produced jointly by J.C. Staff and Tee Up studios. These introduce Sylvie Dread, a spoiled-brat former champion starfighter who tries to pit the Terra and Ness teams against each other and ends up uniting them against her. The episode "Nightmare of Legends" opens with the girls crashlanding on a planet dominated by a haunted castle. "This is just like a horror adventure game," one points out, to Yohko's dismay since her expertise is only in the space battle games. (For no apparent



The VHS collection. © Taku Shouji-Takashi Akaishizawa-Yamamoto Yoko Seisakuinkai/Kadokawashoten.

reason, the three mad monks setting the deathtraps in the castle are named Balzac, Pushkin and Swift.) The final episode, "Cinderella of the Cherry Blossom Moonlight," puts the tomboyish Yohko into a romantic video game scenario where she seems hopelessly out of place. Crazy teen comedy with some witty repartee, in a pleasing design style by Kashihiro Akaishi & Kazuto Nakazawa, and smoothly enough directed that you have to look closely to realize how limited the animation is.

Saint Tail. V.1, Thief of Hearts. V.2, It's Show Time! V.3, Spring Love! V.4, Moonlight. V.5, Girl of Justice. V.6, Integrity. V.7-11, titles to come.

TV series, 1995-1996. Chief Director: Osamu Nabeshima. V.1, 3 episodes/75 minutes; V.2-11, 4 episodes/100 minutes. Price & format: DVD \$29.99 bilingual; video \$19.99 dubbed. Distributor: TOKYOPOP Anime.

Kaito Saint Tail (Saint Tail, the Mysterious Thief) was a 43-episode TV series; October 12, 1995 to September 12, 1996. It is a particularly bizarre variant in the "magical little girls" genre. These all (*Sailor Moon* and dozens of others) feature girls who gain temporary magic powers, usually from a benevolent fairy or space alien. This one is set in a Japanese Roman Catholic parochial school, and it is God Himself who turns young Meimi into the magically uncatchable ponytailed thief (in a costume based upon a Las Vegas magician's stage-assistant).

The students in Class 2-A at St. Paulia Catholic School include Meimi Haneoka, daughter of a stage magician; her best friend Seira Mimori, a novitiate nun; and (Daiki) Asuka, Jr., the son of one of



Saint Tail. © Megumi Tachikawa/Kodansha-TMS. All Rights Reserved. Produced by TMS Entertainment, Ltd. Under License to Mixx Entertainment, Inc.

the city's police detectives. The city has been plagued in the last few weeks by Saint Tail, a cat-burglar who the police are desperate to catch even though it always turns out her victims are criminals and she gives the loot to the innocents from whom it was stolen in the first place. The secret is that when parishioners confide their troubles to Sister Seira while asking her to pray to God to help them (do 14-year-old nuns-in-training hear Confessions?), Seira then prays to God for the answers (where a stolen necklace is hidden; how to help a girl avoid a marriage that her social-climbing parents are forcing her into). Seira gives the information to Meimi, who chants the magic prayer ("Forgive me, Lord, for the tricks up my sleeves"), which sets off the stock-footage magical transformation that turns her into Saint Tail, with the ninja-like power to leap from rooftop to rooftop (in high heels?) and steal the most closely-guarded treasures. The police's constant failure to catch her has embarrassed

Detective Asuka, and his son vows to personally succeed where Dad has failed. Since Meimi and Junior are already rivals in class, she taunts him with notices of where she will strike next, confident that she will be able to guess his traps and avoid them. The audience is of course aware that this "Girls — ugh!" "Boys — who needs 'em?" attitude is the beginning of a first romance.

The classmates are all described as 14 years old, but (as with *Cardcaptors*) look and act more like 10 or 11. That is more likely the target age of the audience; preadolescent girls just old enough for fantasy romantic adventures about young lovers. Meimi's burglary gimmicks are supposedly based upon her father's stage tricks, but like such plot devices as a schoolboy who can order uniformed police about because his father is a detective, this does not really pretend to be anything other than juvenile wish-fulfillment fantasy. The character art style based upon the *Saint Tail* comic book by Megumi Tachikawa (also being published in America by TOKYOPOP) is attractive. It is probably not a coincidence that the animation is by TMS Entertainment, the same studio that has produced the megapopular *Lupin III* animated TV and movie adult series about a good-guy master thief.

Fred Patten has written on anime for fan and professional magazines since the late 1970s.

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Bonus HTML Features

Every on-line (HTML) issue of *Animation World Magazine* contains additional features not found in the download or print Acrobat version, such as QuickTime movies, links to Animation World Network sites, extended articles and special sections. Don't miss the following highlight that is showcased exclusively in this month's *Animation World Magazine* HTML version:

Fresh from the Festivals: December 2001's Film Reviews

- Jon Hofferma reviews five short films fresh from the festival circuit: *f8* by Jason Wen, *Os Irmãos Willians* (*The Willians Brothers*) by Ricardo Dantas, Aaron James Erimez's *Ornaments*, *The Shark and the Piano* by Gabriele Pennacchioli and Alessandro Carloni, and *Still I Rise* by Umesh Shukla. Includes QuickTime movie clips online!

http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=pageone&article_no=900

Cinanima Celebrates 25 Years

- Cinanima, the Espinho International Animation Festival, celebrated its 25th anniversary this year. Abi Feijó relates the festival's beginnings and what it means to the Portuguese animation community.

- A winners list for Cinanima 2001 was included in AWN's Headline News at:

http://news.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=search&search=Cinanima&newsitem_no=6090.

- AWN also published a photo gallery from Cinanima's 25 years! Visit now:

http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=search&sval=Cinanima&article_no=939.

I Castelli Animati and Oscar Grillo's Exhibitions

- Ron Diamond attended Italy's I Castelli Animati and took in two of Oscar Grillo's art exhibitions — one featuring Betty Boop and the other featuring our favorite faces and personalities in animation at crucial moments. This online feature includes both exhibits and is not to be missed!

http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=search&sval=grillo&article_no=873

Hobbit-alized: The First Attempt At Animating The Hobbit

- Gene Deitch relates his ill-fated experience of trying to bring *The Hobbit* to life. Want to hear more about Gene's foray into the feature film world? In *How To Succeed In Animation (Don't Let A Little Thing Like Failure Stop You!)*, he also discusses *Charlotte's Web*...another fabulous disaster. Exclusively on AWN at: <http://genedeitch.awn.com>.

Career Coach: Producing Animation

- Pamela Kleibrink Thompson, the Career Coach, gives kudos to the book *Producing Animation*. For more information about the book, visit www.producinganimation.com or www.focalpress.com. Plus, search for selected excerpts from *Producing Animation*, which have been published exclusively on AWN, by searching our magazine archives at <http://mag.awn.com/>.

Marvel:

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR UNIVERSE

book review by Danny Fingeroth



The Marvel Universe is everywhere. It is part of our culture, part of our heritage, even part of our language. Catch phrases like... "Your Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man" ...have entered the lexicon. During the 1970s and '80s run of television's The Incredible Hulk, "hulking out" became the slang

term for losing control. And there is probably not a baby-boomer alive who cannot sing at least a part of the theme song from the 1967 Spider-Man animated series.

So states Michael Mallory in his new coffee table book, *Marvel: The Characters and Their Universe* (M:TCATU). This

massive volume provides an overview of the history of the company founded by Martin Goodman, and compares and contrasts the comics versions of the Marvel characters with their interpretations in other media. It's a breezy and entertaining read, for the most part accurate, if determinedly uncontroversial.

M:TCATU provides a breezy retelling of the high points of the history of the company that started life as Timely in the 1930s, reached a peak in the early 1940s (with tales of the Sub-Mariner, the Human Torch and Captain America), nearly disappeared in the 1950s and spectacularly reinvented itself in the 1960s, bringing to the world such pop culture icons as Spider-Man, the X-Men, the Hulk, the Fantastic Four and so many more. There's even a nifty Chronology section at the back that gives the high points of each year of the company's history from 1932 to 2002. (Guess the author took a trip into the future on Dr. Doom's time platform.)

What made, and continues to make, Marvel so important to its fans is brought to light by Mallory:

...the characters inhabiting the Marvel Universe have captured not only the minds of its readers, but their hearts as well. This was driven home to [legendary artist] John Romita, Sr., a number of years ago while working on a Spider-Man story at home. "My youngest son, who is now one of the best artists in the business, was looking over my shoulder...and I'm starting to draw Peter Parker [Spider-Man], and he asks why we don't give Peter an issue where everything goes right for him," Romita recalls. "And it struck me right then and there that this kid wanted Peter

Parker to have a better life. I said, 'Wow, that's the grab — this kid cares about what happens to a paper character.'"

Prominent in the book's narrative, of course, is living legend Stan Lee, the sparkplug behind the Marvel revolution. Stan, the company's editor in chief from 1939 to 1972, and currently its Publisher Emeritus, created — along with Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Bill Everett, Don Heck, Romita and others — the major Marvel characters. Mallory lets Stan explain what made Marvel an international phenomenon and gave it the ability to connect directly with its readers:

"I tried to establish a friendly relationship between the readers and ourselves, so they didn't feel like they were just readers," notes Lee. "I wanted them to feel like they're friends, and that we're all sharing a fun time together that the outside world isn't privy to."

Stan and his collaborators succeeded beyond their wildest imaginings.

Sprinkled throughout the text are various tidbits of information that will be of interest to the longtime Marvel reader. For instance, the fact that there was almost a Sub-Mariner live-action series in the 1950s, and that Richard Egan, a popular leading man of the time, was cast as the Atlantean prince. Or that Daredevil's "blindness angle was inspired by a series of murder mysteries written in the 1940s by Baynard Kendrick, featuring a blind police captain named Duncan Maclain." Or that the production budget for the 1960s Iron Man cartoon was so low that, according to actor John Vernon, who voiced the hero as well as his alter ego: "The way we switched

voices from Tony Stark to Iron Man was to put a styrofoam cup over the face!"

The book is crammed with illustrations and photographs of people, characters and products, as well as excerpts from comics stories. The book's oddest aspect is its extremely detailed descriptions of story lines from comics and especially TV and movie versions of the comics. Often, these synopses seem like more information than is really needed to give the flavor of a piece.

M:TCATU spends much time and space showcasing current and upcoming Marvel toys, games, TV, movie and Internet projects. For, indeed, the characters have become ubiquitous. Although current sales figures for Marvel in particular, as well as for the comics industry as a whole, seem to be heading into recovery mode, it's still good to know that Marvel's creations will be available in a wide array of venues. As Mallory puts it:

This explosion of Marvel-related entertainment is being staged with an eye toward creating character franchises that crossover to all media. "...we will follow a movie with an animated or live action show, and now with the Internet, there will obviously be Internet entertainment," says [Avi] Arad [Marvel Media president and chief creative officer] ...Our content feeds very well into all forms of entertainment, so as the world is going to come up with what is next... there will be Marvel characters in those venues... There is no area of business in which our characters will not be represented."

M:TCATU is an impressive package that will look good on your coffee table. If you don't have

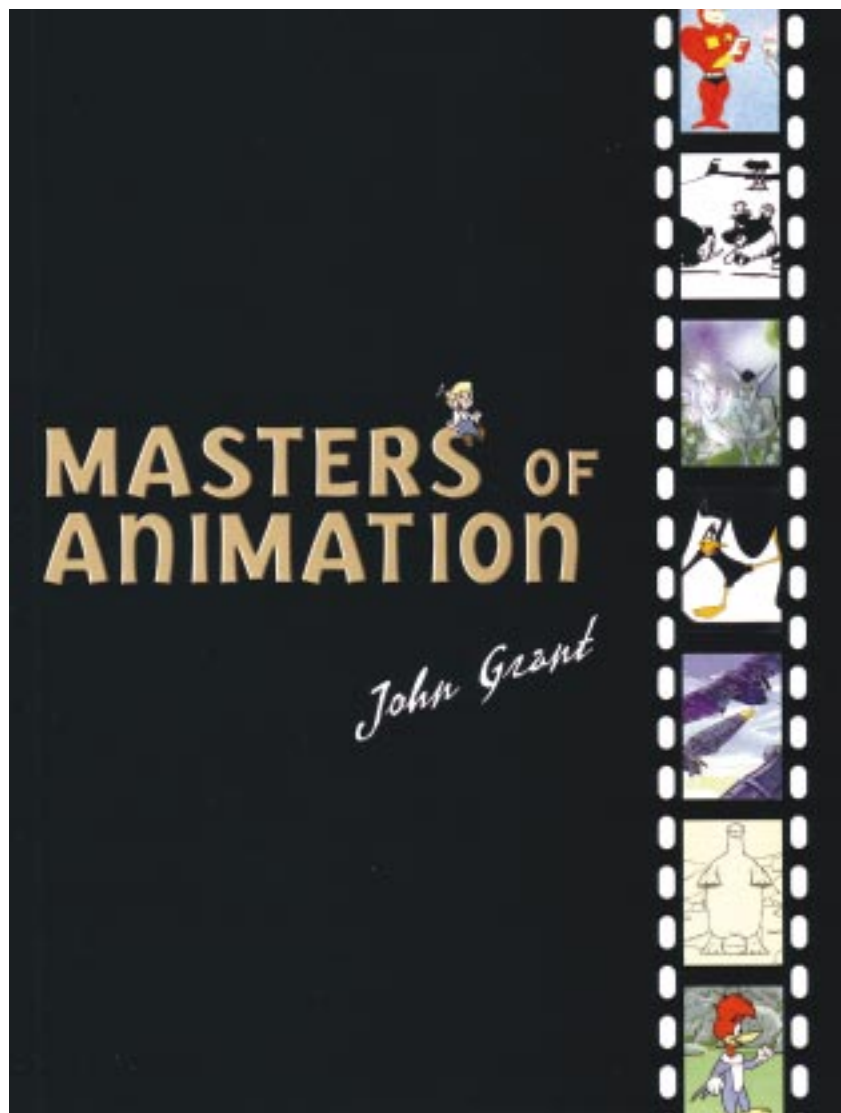
a coffee table, it's a good excuse to go get one.

Marvel: The Characters and Their Universe by Michael Mallory. Southport, Connecticut: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc., 2001. 288 pages, 300 color plates. ISBN: 0-88363-109-1 (US\$75.00)

Writer, editor and story expert Danny Fingeroth was a mainstay at Marvel Comics for many years. At Marvel, he ran the Spider-Man editorial line, consulted on the Fox Kids Network Spider-Man animated series, and wrote many adventures of Spider-Man, Darkhawk, and the immortal Dazzler. Danny has also written the Superman: Menace of Metallo Multipath Movie for DC Comics and Brilliant Digital Entertainment, which appears on warnerbros.com, as well as prose novels and short stories. He started and led Virtual Comics for Byron Press Multimedia and AOL, where he co-created the virtual line of comics. Most recently, he was Senior VP for Creative Development at Visionary Media, home of the Flash-animated sensation, WhirlGirl. Danny's name appears on pages 35 and 90 of Marvel: The Characters and Their Universe.

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Masters of Animation



book review by Jerry Beck

In 1987, John Halas wrote a book called *Masters of Animation*, which surveyed the top animation artists of the time, with a particular emphasis on international and historical talents like Osamu Tezuka, Karel Zeman

and Jiri Trinka for example.

Watson-Guption Publications has just released a new book with a similar concept and the exact same title (but it's completely unrelated). *Masters of Animation* by John Grant (author of *The*

Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters) is just out at the bookstores, and it gives in-depth profiles of 37 top animation filmmakers, past and present.

And although Tezuka, Zeman and Trinka are missing here, and Grant acknowledges his oversight of other contemporaries like John Lasseter, Brad Bird and Katsuhiro Otomo, this book offers us a nice selection of animation notables with a slant toward U.S. and British leading lights.

Each chapter gives a biography of the selected animator, an illustration or two, and highlights a few of the filmmaker's best works in a sidebar spotlight. U.S. cartoonists featured include Tex Avery, Don Bluth, Bob Clampett, Harman & Ising, The Fleischer Brothers, Chuck Jones, Walt Disney, Paul Terry, Will Vinton and Bill Plympton, to name a few. Nick Park, Terry Gilliam, Richard Williams, Hayao Miyazaki and Bruno Bozzetto are some of the international names that each get a section.

His biographies are generally pretty good, but are laced with opinions, which I find unnecessary in a book called *Masters of Animation*. For example, Grant takes swipes at Chuck Jones' input in the creation of Pepe LePew and Wile E. Coyote. Is that kind of speculation required in a book celebrating "masters?" Grant gives fellow Warner Bros. cartoonist Robert McKimson a chapter, and defends him from other authors who have (justifiably) criticized his lesser work as a director. He then spends a paragraph pointing out mistakes about Speedy Gonzales' origin in Jeff Lenberg's *Encyclopedia of Animated Cartoons*. After questioning Jones' creation of Pepe LePew, Grant

now gives full credit for Foghorn Leghorn, Speedy and the Tasmanian Devil to McKimson without further qualification.

For the most part, however, the bios are pretty standard, with no new research or information provided. Still, it's nice to have them all in one volume. Jim Henson is the one subject included that really doesn't fit. As much as I admire the puppeteer, and he does have some legitimate ties with animation, most of the others showcased in this tome are frame by frame artists.

I was pleased to see John Hubley get some attention, and George Dunning and Ralph Bakshi get their due. His chapters on Bill Tytla, Otto Messmer and Winsor McCay read like condensed versions of previous (and superior) John Canemaker books and articles. Canemaker,

himself, is rewarded with his own chapter as well.

The illustrations are colorful, but generally poor. Bad video frame grabs, or poor scans, make up much of it. The cover of an 8mm home movie version of *Ragtime Bear* to illustrate John Hubley's remarkable career? I think not! I also noted an exact frame blow-up from *Peace On Earth* and a special piece of art commissioned for *Duck Amuck*, both created for my book *The 50 Greatest Cartoons* (1994), had found their way into Grant's publication.

Masters of Animation celebrates the greats and can introduce one to many significant cartoon creators. But further reading may be required to get the full picture.

Masters of Animation by John Grant. New York, New York:

Watson-Guption Publications, 2001. 208 pages, 75 illustrations. ISBN: 0-8230-3041-5 (US\$29.95)

Each chapter gives a biography of the selected animator, an illustration or two, and highlights a few of the filmmaker's best works in a sidebar spotlight.

Jerry Beck is an animation producer and cartoon historian who is simultaneously developing a show with MTV Animation and writing a book for Harry N. Abrams Publishers. He also has a cool Website at www.cartoon-research.com.

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