

ANIMATION

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CREATING WORLDS UNKNOWN

Weta, Ltd. and **The Lord of the Rings**
Blue Sky's Ice Age

Maya Training
Solutions
**Build Your Own
Workstation**

plus: NATPE 2002, Chinese Master Te Wei

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Cover: *The Lord of the Rings* © 2001 New Line Cinema Productions.

MARCH 2002

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Eric Goldberg is one of the top animators and animation directors in the world. He was lured from London to Disney's Southern California studio a decade or so ago, and became a major contributor to their animated feature division. Having recently eluded Disney's grasp, he is currently situated at Universal.

I caught up with Eric in the rumpus room of a former Eastern European embassy in the palmy hills of Glendale.

Will Ryan: When *Fantasia/2000* was released, how many interviews did you give?

Eric Goldberg: I lost count.

WR: Dozens and dozens?

EG: Yes.

WR: More than a hundred?

EG: Possibly.

WR: And would you say you gave an equal number for *Pocahontas* and *Aladdin*?

EG: Yes. A bunch for *Hercules*, too. What actually gets printed depends on how the movie does. Everybody's perceptions, and things like that.

WR: Since you've done tons of these interviews, I hope you don't mind if we discuss terrain not too well trodden.

EG: Shoot.

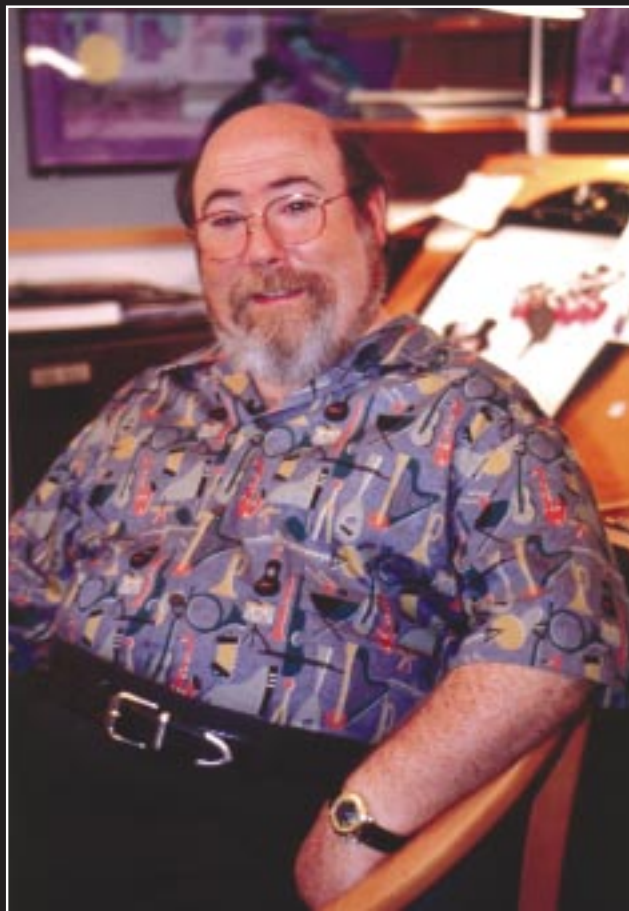
WR: Was that an expletive or an imperative verb?

EG: It might have been an imperative sentence, actually.

Nine And A Half Questions...

Eric Goldberg

by Will Ryan



Eric Goldberg. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

WR: I shall take it as such, with an understood 'you' on the side.

EG: Which will make for an amiable interview.

WR: Amiable and brief, like a good cartoon.

EG: Definitely brief, we've only

got 6 1/2 questions left.

WR: Really?

EG: Actually, 5 1/2 now. But who's counting?

WR: The editor.

EG: Oh.

WR: So, Eric, tell me: What are some of your major non-influences?

EG: My major non-influences? Oh gosh, there are so many.

WR: Let's limit it to animation. Is there some primitive animation you saw as a kid that just chased you away? Was there some insipid drivel that leapt out and yelled, 'This is not what you want to be doing with your life'? An example might be *Pow Wow the Indian Boy*...

EG: ...or *Bucky and Pepito*.

WR: Right!

EG: Funny enough, I actually had a voracious appetite for all of that kind of stuff ... including those shows. But I would say, in terms of later career choices, *Courageous Cat* wasn't high on the list.

WR: Ah-hah.

EG: And there's *Winky Dink and You*. I don't really reference that a lot.

WR: Although the interactive nature of that particular series blazed the trail for many of today's video games.

EG: True.

WR: How about *Clutch Cargo*?

EG: That and *Space Angel* broke me up when I was a kid. You'd look at the stuff and think: I know these are guys, but I swear they're all wearing lipstick. What must the recording sessions of this have looked like?

WR: Moving from the unsublime to the unridiculous, what are your thoughts on Winsor McCay?

EG: He's the real father of animation. As much as Disney had to do with animation, McCay was there first. There's such a sophistication to even his earliest work. I consider him really *the* pioneer. Disney took up the baton and made it – how should I say it? –

WR: A viable...?

EG: I don't want to say just 'a viable business' because Disney made it much more than that. I would say that he –

WR: – is the Henry Ford...?

EG: I don't want to say that either. I don't think it's the assembly line method that will ultimately give Disney his lasting place.

WR: Agreed. But how would you put into words what Walt Disney, animation pioneer, succeeded in doing?

EG: I think he made animation accessible as an entertainment to the mainstream to a certain extent, which is a huge, huge thing. First in the realm of shorts, and then in the realm of features. If you say that Winsor McCay made these great experiments... 'Okay, let's see if I can convince everybody that Gertie is actually on stage with me'... Or, 'Let's see if I can make Little Nemo and his friends move...'

WR: '— in color!'

EG: Yeah, '— in hand-painted color!' Well, the stuff that he did

was just groundbreaking, absolutely groundbreaking. But for the most part it wasn't narrative.

WR: And so Disney...?

EG: Disney took it and made it narrative so that everybody really could understand story and character. That's where he made his biggest contribution.

WR: Hum.

EG: And we've used up our allotted 9 1/2 questions.

WR: Shoot.

EG: Shot.

WR: Cut.

EG: Wrap.

WR: Thirty.



Eric Goldberg is currently in the early stages of developing Where the Wild Things Are for Vivendi/Universal. Expect to see at least 100 interviews on that project [at the appropriate time].

Will Ryan writes, produces, draws cartoons and plays the ukulele. He also provided the voice of the comic strip character Ziggy for the television pilot Ziggy's Take 30, an early directing job for Eric Goldberg. To date, Eric has given a total of "Let me think ... um ... zero" interviews on this project.

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

FORCE OF HOBBIT

Mythmaking at Weta

by Greg Singer

Mythmaking, moviemaking. These days, it's all the same. By now, you may have heard of a trilogy of movies called *The Lord of the Rings*. But perhaps, by some omission or oversight of conversation, you may not have heard of the studio behind the movie – the Ring Leader, as it were, for the brilliant digital and practical effects that have helped to adapt J.R.R. Tolkien's literary masterpiece into a visual one.

We speak, of course, of none other than Weta, Ltd.

Situated unassumingly in a quiet, nondescript suburb of New Zealand's capital, right next door to an old weathered ice cream factory, Weta is a state-of-the-art facility producing some of the world's most fantastic visual effects. Even as we speak, an entire world populated by elves, dwarfs, hobbits, trolls, orcs, ents, wraiths and balrogs is patiently coming to life. (And you thought you had a busy workload.)

For the first film of the trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, something on the order of 570 special effects shots were produced – with some of the more complex shots having over 300 input layers of various types, and thousands of operations in the final compositing script. Now, with

hushed devotion and tight security, work is already well under way for the second of the films, *The Two Towers*, due in theaters this coming December 2002. And the final film, *The Return of the King* (2003), will have effects work equivalent to the first two films combined.



Peter Jackson, director/writer/producer of *The Lord of the Rings*. All images © 2001 New Line Cinema Productions.

For *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the number of artists and technicians at the Kiwi studio doubled in the year leading up to the film's wrap date, from 90 to nearly 170 artists at its peak. It is expected the staff will need to grow to 250 persons to complete the work on *The Two Towers*, slated for

delivery in October of this year. While the practical filming for the trilogy is done, other than pickups, the artists will be soldiering on for the next 18 months or so, to finish the two remaining films.

Director Peter Jackson and the Weta team have had to achieve, visually, in five years what Tolkien labored for 12 years and 1200 pages to create in words.

Fellowship: A Brief History of Weta

Fourteen and a half years ago, Richard Taylor and his partner Tania Rodger decided they wanted to start an effects business in Wellington, New Zealand. There was no such industry within the country at the time. Therefore, starting a workshop that specialized in models, puppets and physical effects was quite an unusual undertaking – perhaps even more so given the rural upbringings of Taylor and Rodger. Taylor explains, "We don't come from a long history of loving effects films, and suchlike. We didn't have access to the movie culture that others may have grown up with." But Taylor and Rodger saw it as a great way to utilize the skills they had, and devote themselves to their love of making things. The operation began in the back room of their flat as RT Effects, Ltd.



Richard Taylor, head of Weta Workshop, supervising special makeup, armor, weapons, creatures and miniatures.

Taylor and Rodger worked for two years, before meeting Peter Jackson. They struck up an instant friendship. Jackson employed them in their first collaboration on *Meet the Feebles* (which, for those who have yet to see it, is often described as “the Muppets on acid”). Following the strength of that project, Taylor and Rodger went on to supervise the creature, gore and model effects, as well as to do a small amount of stop-motion animation, for *Braindead* (a.k.a. *Dead Alive*). Jackson, Taylor and Rodger continued in their work together on *Heavenly Creatures*, based on a famous murder case in New Zealand from the 1950s. It was during the making of this latter film that they leased one computer to do the small amount of digital morphing and animation required of the story. As the production drew to a close, Taylor and Rodger realized that if they let this one computer return to its leaseholder in the United States, it would be a big loss for the visual effects possibilities within their country. So, in 1994, pooling their resources, Peter Jackson, Richard Taylor, Tania Rodger and Jamie Selkirk formed a company called Weta, Ltd., which allowed

them to continue leasing the computer. Thus were Weta's humble beginnings.

“Weta” is derived from the name of a native New Zealand insect, from the cricket family, which has been around since before the dinosaurs. The weta is the size of the palm of one's hand, able to survive extreme conditions, even being frozen in ice, and it has the distinction of being the heaviest insect in the world. Although the name means nothing outside of New Zealand, Taylor acknowledges, it is a colloquial favorite. Taylor says, “It's the ugliest little monster on the planet, while still being the most beautiful insect. It was a great little creature to aspire to.”

Within a year, the fledgling Weta team had set up both the physical and digital arms of their company. During the last six years, they have worked on numerous New Zealand films and foreign productions shot locally, including: *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*; some shots for Robert Zemeckis'

Contact; a *King Kong* remake with Peter Jackson, which has since been shelved; and, also with Jackson, *The Frighteners* and an hour-long mockumentary called *Forgotten Silver*.

Amongst all of this, Jackson came to Weta and said, “Hey, everyone, we're making *Lord of the Rings*,” whereupon, according to Taylor, they promptly fell over. Picking themselves back up again, and brushing the dust from their sleeves, they delved into the making of the trilogy.

At this stage, Weta, Ltd. formed two companies, because each had grown in their own right. Weta Digital handles the visual effects work for the films, and Weta Workshop oversees the construction of physical sets, props and other practical effects. Richard Taylor is the supervisor looking after the Workshop, and Tania Rodger serves as the Workshop's manager. In all, Weta comprises 68,000 square feet, with five departments gathered under one roof, which is, in itself, quite unique within the world of special effects.



A multi-level composite shot, combining miniatures, matte painting, sky replacement and CG effects, while the foreground comes from a practical element filmed on a New Zealand landscape.

As Taylor explains, "We primarily chose to look after so many departments, so we could create a very cohesive vision for the picture. The written word of the author is coming from a singular vision, and we realized that if we dissipated the work around the world, the vision would also dissipate. The great relationship and benefit of Weta Workshop and Weta Digital in being under the same roof, within the same complex, is that it creates a very easy flow of information and vision to the overall project."

Weta Workshop manages special makeup effects and prosthetics, armor, weapons, creatures and miniatures.



A motion control camera careens around and up the 1/166 scale, hyper-detailed miniature of the Barad-dûr tower. In the film, Sauron's minions construct the looming tower by the light of a thousand torches.

On *The Lord of the Rings*, the Workshop accumulated and built over 48,000 separate pieces for the film — including 2,000 weapons, 68 miniatures, 10,000 facial appliances, 10,000 arrows, 1,800 body and prosthetic suits, 1,000 suits of armor, as well as numerable other interactive crea-



These Troll images show how detail obtained from the original clay maquette with the 3D laser scanner is applied to the finished rendered creature as an extracted displacement map.

ture effects, scannable maquettes, and the like.

The Weta team began work creating miniatures two and a half years before the start of production. "Peter utilized miniatures as huge animatic shooting models, and through them designed the shots and action that would be required on the full-sized sets," Taylor explains. "We coined the phrase 'biggatures' in the Workshop, as some of our miniature constructions rivaled in size some of New Zealand's largest live-action set constructions to date."

The "small part," as Taylor says, that the Weta Workshop played in the animation for the films was their development of the creatures. Beginning with the absolute philosophy that Tolkien's fantastical world of Middle-earth was based completely in a reality both possible and believable — a kind of modern English folklore drawing from a huge reference of historical documentation — Weta pursued, to every length, this same sense of realism. They built

their own blacksmithing shop, literally beating the armor suits out of plates of steel, and hand grinding the weapons. Every prosthetic foot and ear was individually crafted, shaped and sized to fit the needs of the characters. The physiology of the creatures had been exactly designed. Taylor notes, "We imagined and delivered to [the Weta Digital team] creatures that could have existed in our own world, with the same physical structure, dynamics and mechanics of muscle that a creature would have in our own time."

To model the creatures, maquettes were sculpted in the Workshop at a very large scale, four or five feet tall, in the highest detail. Then, using a hand-held laser scanner originally developed for scanning carcasses for the New Zealand Meat Board, the models could be captured in real-time at an incredible resolution for the digital effects facility. This provided a very detailed and strict guideline for the form of the creatures, which the digital artists could then

use in building up the characters for their animated performance.

Two Powers: More Than One Cook in the Kitchen

Randall Cook became interested in the movie business when he was seven years old, with the release of *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*, and in seeing the other films of Ray Harryhausen. "That scarred me for life," he reminisces, fondly. Now, forty odd years later, Cook is the director of animation at Weta Digital.

Cook's background is one of traditional animation and training, having started out doing stop-motion work, and having studied acting and directing through the University of California, Los Angeles. In the 1970s, during the transition period from its earlier classics to its later revitalization, Cook worked as a storyboard artist and "gag man" for Walt Disney Studio. It was during this time that circumstances allowed him to be taken under the wing and tutored by one of the original Nine Old Men, Eric Larson. "I was fortunate enough to come into contact with some very clever, smart, talented old fellas," Cook says, "who knew a trick or two, and who were willing to teach me something." Cook worked alongside a group of young hopefuls, at the time, like Glen Keane, Randy Cartwright, Ron Clements, Ron Husband, Ed Gombert, Brad Bird and John Lasseter — "people who have all gone on to something other than obscurity, as you may well know."

Cook met Peter Jackson after a career of doing animation on independent pictures, creating and staging special effects and action sequences, and producing "tussles with monsters," as he says, in films like *The Gate* and *I*,

Madman, and "other films of even more meager budgets." Cook claims he was lucky that when he was making low budget films in his twenties, Jackson and Taylor were seeing those films when they were in their teens. As a result, when Jackson was old enough to start hiring people, he contacted Cook when he visited Los Angeles in 1992, to do the stop-motion animation for a film called *Blubberhead*.



Randall Cook, Weta Digital's director of animation.

"Mind you, I thought Peter was extremely bright and personable," Cook recalls, "but I wasn't prepared to move lock, stock and surface gauge to New Zealand to work on a film called *Blubberhead* — or anything else."

Or so he thought.

When *The Lord of the Rings* came up, Lorna Cook, co-director of DreamWorks' *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, and Randall's spouse, encouraged him to call. In their earlier conversations, Jackson had made it very clear that he understood and appreciated the attention, effort and sacrifice that Cook put into his work, having surmounted and excelled within a low budget milieu. So, Cook called. Jackson offered him a job doing pre-vis for six months, not specifically anima-

tion. And that, of course, was three and a half years ago. Cook is still there.

In pulling together an animation department for Weta, Cook feels that his greatest contribution is being able to draw upon his acquaintanceship and friendship with Ray Harryhausen, Eric Larson and Tex Avery; in being able to pass along to the next generation of animators what his earlier mentors had taught him. For Cook, it has become a kind of "holy quest to make sure the right kind of animation gets into *The Lord of the Rings*."

Jackson is also a huge fan of *King Kong* and Ray Harryhausen. Cook explains, "It's natural for me to empathize with what Peter is talking about, because he and I have many of the same childhood touchstones to which we refer when discussing creature sequences." As such, there was a stylistic compatibility and passion to bring into the world of computer animation the same values of staging and feeling from the classic creature films of Willis O'Brien and Ray Harryhausen.

It turns out that Mr. Harryhausen was able to join *The Lord of the Rings* filmmakers, in December of last year, for the London premiere. It was a great treat and honor for Cook, Taylor and Jackson to have their boyhood idol enjoy and endorse their work.

Return: Weta's Creature Comfort

Perhaps one of the great successes of the movie is that the animation, and the special effects in general, was so well integrated into the story's telling, as opposed to being its *raison d'être*.



For the water horses sequence, several images had to be combined to create the final plate in such a way that the live-action and visual effects would work as one – including an original shot of the canyon, Ringwraiths on horseback in front of a blue screen, and CG water horses.

Richard Taylor remarks, “We believe that we have created a world that is not so much fantasy as mythological reality. So often in fantasy filmmaking the actor is required to wink at the audience, to ask them to buy into the film, because even the actors aren’t taking it seriously. Well, here is a piece of filmmaking that supposedly should fit into that genre, where the actors are putting in A-grade performances in an A-grade environment. It’s so imperative that the technology is used to create a seamless tapestry that is subtly woven together to put the backdrop into this incredible play; that at no time can the effects, the animation, the creatures grandstand themselves over and above the story that’s being told through the performance.”

Cook adds, “We were always trying to sublimate ourselves to the film. In creating these characters, the idea is always in being grand and theatrical enough to exist in Middle-earth, but with an eye towards being a part of the journey, rather than standing out from the needs of

the story. A balance of naturalism and theatricality had to be maintained at all times to allow the characters to move effortlessly through Tolkien’s world.”

Much of the praise heaped upon the first film celebrates the technology that helped to create its expansive, epic scope. Weta’s proprietary crowd behavioral simulation software, dubbed Massive, helps to build the huge battle scenes of which the prologue in *The Fellowship of the Ring* is but a taste. Every individual character in the crowd moves in response to the stimulus of its environment, such as terrain and obstacles, and the actions of other characters. (This differs from typical crowd, battle or spectacle scenes, wherein a small number of actors are filmed and then multiplied.) *The Return of the King* will see hundreds of thousands of these autonomous, intelligent agents in frame at the same time, making for a truly new cinematic experience.

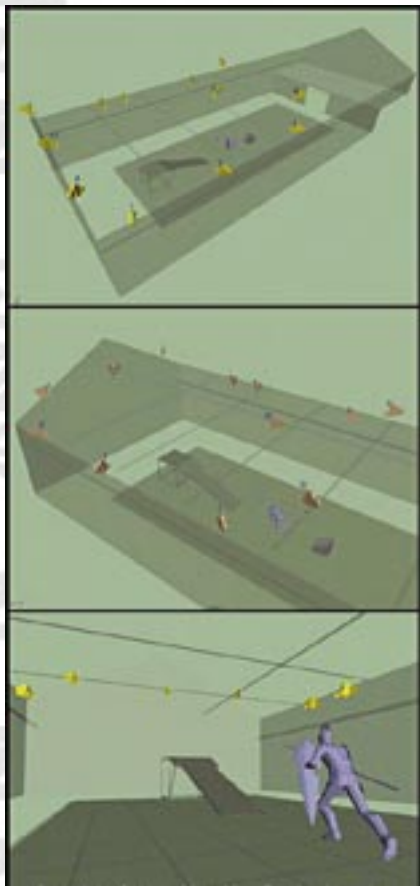
While the special effects are as much an accomplishment of the software programmers, who

are oftentimes writing code late into the night, the state-of-the-art technology is only a starting point. Cook points out, “Massive, as an



The Massive technique is used to create the onslaught of Uruk-hai marching into battle.

artificial intelligence program, is nevertheless only as good as the movement put into it, some of which is done by animation, yet much of which is done by motion-capture.”



Multiple cameras are used in the motion-capture process to record the action of an Elf “massive agent” running up a ramp.

While the staff at Weta grew to almost 200 people during the production's first crunch time, the entire animation team numbered no more than twelve. The animators mixed, matched and switched off on the various scenes, with everyone contributing to everything.

The Cave Troll, Balrog and Watcher in the Water were animated through keyframing, and involved some of the biggest and most intense scenes. The Troll, in particular, required the time and

talent of the whole team. Cook put on the motion-capture suit only to help in blocking out the sequence's camera work for Jackson's quick approval. But then the animators built up the scene one frame at a time, out of their raw imagination. The Troll sequence was animated by, in no particular order: Adam Valdez, Matt Logue, Andrew Calder, Carlos Rosas, Mary Victoria, Heather Knight, Doug Sheppeck, Melanie Cordan, Steven Hornby, Mike Stevens and Stephen Buckley. Their work is what we see on screen.

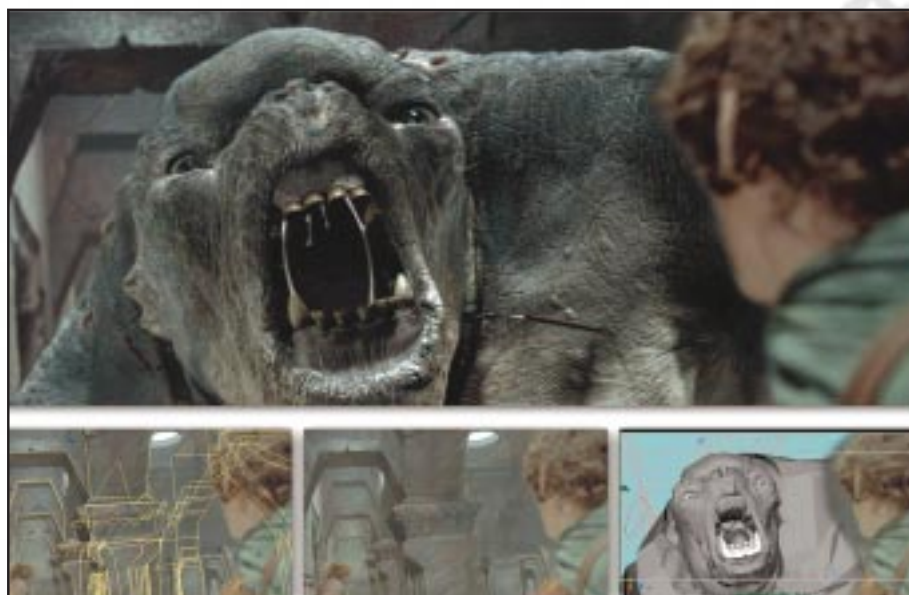
Creating the animation for Gollum, however, was another matter. Gollum is based on the voice, pantomime and motion-capture performance of actor Andy Serkis, who does a wonderful job in helping to distill the emotional complexity of the character.

Jackson comments, “Weta developed vast amounts of code to create Gollum ... He is amazingly life-like, and we were able to give him a range of expressions,

from the evil of Gollum to the sympathy of Smeagol.”

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Gollum is brought to life using a combination of techniques. When the character is being tortured, for example, the keyframes for that scene were roto-matched to Serkis' performance; whereas the shots of Gollum in the Mines of Moria, as he peers at the Fellowship through bars, is straightforward keyframing.

Other brief sequences from the first movie that impressed audiences were the stampede of water horses and the dragon fireworks. Cook remembers, “The dragon fireworks is very interesting, because we had to get the animators to animate in a way they weren't used to. It was very easy for the dragon to look like a wonderful flying dragon, whereas they had to make it look kind of mechanical. So, Doug Sheppeck, Mary Victoria and Stephen Buckley animated those scenes, and they had to work like hell to animate much more crudely than was their



Animation of the Cave Troll was keyframed to the post match-moved plate of the hand-held camera work, and digital ceilings were tracked and seamed into the practical set. Like all the L.O.T.R. creatures, the Troll was constructed with a physiological sensibility, with working layers of muscles, fat and skin applied over an accurate skeleton.



Hordes of Orcs descend upon the Fellowship in the Mines of Moria.



The Fellowship negotiates the treacherous stairs of Khazad-dum.

usual method."

Cook emphasizes the importance of animators honing their acting skills. "It should always be clear what the characters are thinking, that their intentions are readable," he says. The animators use dialogue tracks to work with the characters, sometimes written by themselves or by Jackson, so that they understand precisely what the characters are thinking or going through. In matching this internal dialogue with the eyes or other features of the character, though not the actual lips, a kind of "thought sync" emerges.

Cook explains, "It is vital that we have creatures that not only seem to be real, or naturalistic, but which also are charismatic, compelling, and that perform in a fashion that is dramatically valid."

For the several characters in the second and third films, some with digital fur, the animation will become more complex and involved. A few of the key characters include Gollum, the giant spideress Shelob and Treebeard (a walking, talking tree).

Cook says, "To anyone who has read the books, they know what a wonderful star turn Treebeard has the potential for giving, and I don't think they'll be disappointed. I'm very fond of him as a character. He's going to be unusual, entertaining and touching. Unlike our poor old Troll friend [in the first film], Treebeard has a lot to say for himself. He has a much greater range of emotions than the Troll, who spent much of the time angry and bewildered, and more than a little bit in pain."

The Show Goes On

A year ago, Weta had one rack of 32 processors. But it soon became clear that would not be enough to handle the backlogging queue of workstations needing to render their scenes. By the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, they had ramped up to almost 800 processors, and for the increasingly intensive and elaborate visual effects work for *The Two Towers*, it is expected they will be using about 1200 processors. Already, adjustments have been made to network switches and data distribution systems to ensure the technology will scale up again for the studio's growth peaks during the next several months, with the working storage



The animation team for *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*.



The Balrog, a creature of shadow and fire, was realized by shooting practical licks of fire and smoke and then attaching these to a particle system. This gave the fully digital Balrog his mane of fire and cloak of black smoke. The hall of Balrog was created with the use of 1/14 scale miniatures.



Frodo (Elijah Wood) takes in the beauty of Rivendell.

space for the facility probably reaching about 30 terabytes for the second and third films.

Though about 90 percent of the company's systems are from SGI, there is a major development and research effort under way at the moment into running more Linux-based workstations. According to Weta's chief technology officer, Jon Labrie, they are looking to at least double the facility's number of installed Linux systems for the second film. The Linux machines are dual 1GHz Pentium III boxes running Red Hat 7.0.

Modeling and animation was done principally in Maya, using in-house proprietary muscle and skinning plug-ins. The team also used Mirai for some advanced facial animation setup and modeling, with Renderman handling the CG renders. Among the other tools was Shake handling the compositing, as well as Inferno, a Flame, and three Cineon seats.

So far, between \$20-30 million has been spent on Weta's IT infrastructure.

In terms of recruiting artists and talent to New Zealand, it is less difficult now that the first movie is out. The challenge is to find people who believe passionately in the validity of the films as

potential classics. Cook recalls, somewhat wryly, "When I learned that the guy who had made *Heavenly Creatures* ... and *Braindead* ... and who had written *Blubberhead* ... was going to do *The Lord of the Rings*, I thought, at the time, it had great potential for being a classic."

Cook and Adam Valdez, while recruiting, looked for people who had unusual abilities, and who had an approach to their work that was sympathetic with what *The Lord of the Rings* filmmakers were trying to do. "Quirky, offbeat ... but work that was honest, and that didn't take the easy way out; that didn't take the knee-jerk, clichéd way out of a scene, but that had a greater breadth of invention than the norm," Cook explains. Gathering together artists from New Zealand, Europe and the United States, there are some high quality, high profile people coming on board. Presently, for the second film, the animation staff numbers at 15, though they are looking to bring on a few more people, because there is so much to do.

After the long haul of *The Lord of the Rings*, it is difficult to anticipate the future. Weta will likely continue to do service work

for Peter Jackson and other top class directors, and there is always the possibility of creating intellectual properties of their own. Given the artists and technology they have assembled, there is ample opportunity to do high end effects, coupled with fantasy. While Weta hopes to continue to work on film projects they are proud of, their large facility and diverse range of people lend themselves equally well to servicing the creative industry as a whole – whether that be educational children's television, interactive media, theme parks, museums, or any form of external display work.

For those financiers and producers who come to New Zealand, they realize, as Taylor observes, "That it's not just a clean, green beautiful shooting location, but there are highly enthusiastic and motivated crews, with the sophistication of any in the world." He adds, "There's still almost a youthful innocence to the industry that allows people to operate at a level of passion and enthusiasm that can run freely, because you're not caught up in the fashion of following preset rules."

In the world of film and entertainment, there are other forces at work than we may realize. And that indeed, dear Frodo, is encouraging news.

Greg Singer is an animation welfare advocate, eating in Los Angeles.

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

Build Your Own Animation Workstation

by John Edgar Park

So you've decided to take the plunge and build an animation workstation. Here's my advice: Don't do it! Run for your life!! Save yourself while you still can!!! Go on without me . . .

Are they gone now? Good.

Okay, now that the sensible people have left, it's just us lunatics. While they're off buying boring, old pre-built computers — what with all their warranties and tech support — you and I are gonna throw caution into the wind and make ours from scratch. We'll buy a bunch of shiny computer parts, throw 'em into a box, shake it around a little and *blam!*, we'll have home-brewed a monster animation rig.

Let's clarify some things first. There aren't too many folks building their own Macs and SGIs. So what I'm talking about here is a Windows or Linux box. Now, Linux is fun to say, but I honestly know next to nothing about it, what I'm *really* talking about is an Intel or AMD based Windows box.

Second clarification. What's an animation workstation? Well, garden-variety PCs are general purpose computers. When you put high-end parts in them that are geared toward a specific task, those PCs get the much cooler-sounding moniker: "workstation." In our case, that specific task set is animation — 3D, 2D, compositing and a little video editing.

Building the animation workstation is a multi-phase process:

1. Select components
2. Assemble them
3. Install an operating system
4. Install software.

Selecting Components

Animation workstations generally have state-of-the-art components compared to the basic family PC. (Although a PC built for 3D gaming will share many traits of a good workstation.) Few tasks tax a machine quite like hardcore 3D graphics and video editing do. All of the subsystems, such as storage, data transfer, CPU, RAM and graphics, work very, very hard to keep the beautiful pictures looking good and moving fast on-screen.

Here is a roundup of the parts you'll need to select. I'll even throw in some highly subjective opinions on specific parts. This is sure to spawn many angry emails, and be out-dated within minutes of press time, but what the heck.

Case

The enclosure is what you'll put all this other stuff into, so you might as well make it a good one. If you're like me, you'll end up upgrading your workstation, instead of buying a whole new computer every few years. The case is the one part you may never need to replace, because it's just the guts that will change.

Get a mid- to full-sized ATX tower. You want lots of room to root around in, and you may need the extra drive bays someday.



Both the InWin Q500 (l) and the CoolerMaster's ATC-210 cases will house your wares efficiently and with style.



Size matters with the Sony GDM FW900.

Spend the extra money for a quality case, too. The cheap ones don't have rolled edges on their internal, stamped metal parts. This can make for some awful lacerations. I learned that the hard way. Bleeding all over a \$250 CPU is a bad thing.

Most cases come with a power supply, but you want to make sure that it's rated high enough to provide power to all of your internal components. A 350 to 450 watt, P4 ready or Athlon rated power supply is a necessary investment. Underpowering your system can be harmful. I use the Silencer 400 ATX from PC Power & Cooling. Other good brands are Enermax and Antec.

While we're on the subject of fans, know this: All your workstation components are adversely affected by heat. Too much of it

and things will start to become unstable or even sustain damage. At a minimum, you should put a good 80mm fan in the fan cage at the bottom front of your case to draw in cool air, and another 80mm fan in the upper rear of the case to blow hot air out. This can get noisy, so I again recommend a high-quality, quiet fan like the Silencer 80mm from PC Power & Cooling.

Case recommendations: InWin Q500, Antec SX1240, Lian Li PC70, Cooler Master ATC-210.

Monitor

There are a few issues to consider when choosing your monitor: CRT vs. LCD, size and quality. Oh, and of course, price.

CRT technology is the TV-style, picture tube monitor we are most familiar with. LCD tech-

nology is the active-matrix, laptop screen broken out onto the desktop. In general, CRTs are still the best bet for animation. They are capable of higher contrast and have more resolution choices than LCD panels. LCDs are not yet up to the visual standards of CRTs, although their low power consumption, small footprint and overall sex appeal make them quite tempting.

You can never have too much screen real estate. A 19" CRT is pretty good, 20"-21" is better. Sony makes a wide aspect-ratio, 24" CRT that is beautiful. Remember, the larger the screen, the bigger and heavier the monitor. Most large CRTs need a pretty deep desk to sit on. One note about LCDs: A 17" LCD is the equivalent of a 19" CRT.

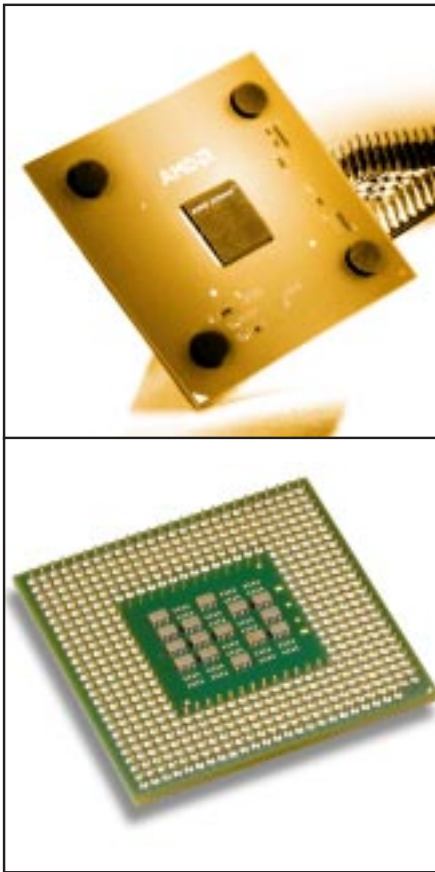
The quality of the monitor is a very important consideration. Most manufacturers have a "graphics professional" or "CAD" line of monitors that is worth checking out. Look for a perfectly flat screen, a dot pitch of .22mm to .25mm (this is how densely packed the pixels are), and a good overall picture. It is important either to see monitors in person or read lots of reviews from trusted sources.

Monitor recommendations: IBM P260, ViewSonic PF815, Sony GDM FW900, iiyama Vision Master Pro 512.

CPU

Since the CPU is the "brain" of your workstation, it is one of the key selections you will have to make before choosing other components. Your motherboard and RAM choices will depend largely on which CPU you get.

The choice here is between Intel's Pentium 4 and AMD's Athlon



AMD Athlon XP 1800+ (Socket A) vs. The Intel Pentium 4A: Both are fast.

lineups. They are pretty comparable; people have great success with both of them. Some days the Athlons are quoted as being the speed kings, on others it's the P4.

Any P4 or Athlon in the 1.7 - 2.2Ghz range will do for your workstation — the faster the better. Fast CPUs generate lots of heat, so you'll need to keep them cool with a large heatsink/fan combo. Most P4s are bundled with the proper heatsink, for Athlon XPs you should get an AMD recommended model, like the Thermaltake Volcano 6.

CPU recommendations: Intel P4A 2.2Ghz (Socket 423), AMD Athlon XP 1800+ (Socket A), Intel P4 2.0Ghz (Socket 478).

Motherboard

Based on your choice of CPU, you will now need to pick a

compatible motherboard (also called the mainboard). This is determined by the motherboard's chipset and socket configuration. You can't put a P4 CPU into a motherboard built for an Athlon XP, and vice versa.

Other features to pay attention to: You'll want a fast front-side bus speed (this is the speed at which data shuttles around) like 100Mhz, many open RAM slots, a bunch of PCI slots (5-6 is good) for different upgrade cards, and a heavy-duty AGP Pro slot for your graphics card.

Motherboard recommendations: Asus P4T-E, AOpen AK 73 Pro, Soyo SY-K7V Dragon.

RAM

System memory (RAM) is yet another part of the CPU/motherboard choice equation. Once you've made those decisions, the RAM will pretty much pick itself for you. For an animation workstation you will want a minimum of 512MB of RAM. 1-2GB is even better. The motherboard will specify whether it takes DDR SDRAM, Rambus RDRAM or normal SDRAM. (RDRAM must be inserted in matched pairs, so buy accordingly.)

Memory recommendations: Crucial, Rambus, Corsair, Kingston.

Storage

The amount and speed of your hard drives will play a large role in the overall animation pipeline. When texture maps are pulled into RAM, rendered frames are stored, or video streams during playback, it is your hard drive that is working overtime. The bandwidth available for such data transfer is dependent on the interface between drive and motherboard,

while the speed of the drive platters themselves is measured in revolutions per minute (RPMs).

The Ultra160 SCSI interface is just right for the job. It is capable of very fast, sustained data transfer, and is fun to say! IDE drives that use the ATA/100 or ATA/133 interface are plenty fast as well. Make sure that your motherboard can support the interface standard you want to use, or buy an adapter card like the Adaptec Ultra160 29160.

Drives that spin at 7200, 10,000 or 15,000 RPMs are your best choice. Anything slower will create a data bottleneck. The size of the drives can have an impact on speed as well. A couple of 18GB drives is a better choice than one 36GB drive. In order to work most efficiently, it is a good idea to have one hard drive for your operating system (9GB), one for your applications (18GB-36GB) and a larger, cheaper one for storage (40GB-80GB).

Hard drive recommendations:

SCSI: Seagate Cheetah 36XL, IBM: Ultrastar 36LZX.

IDE: Maxtor DM60, Western Digital WD1200.

Graphics Card

If you are planning to run any 3D animation software effectively on your workstation, you'll want to invest in a professional-level OpenGL graphics card. These are the AGP Pro slot sittin', giant heatsink wearin', 128MB of onboard RAM bearin' monsters. The faster the graphics card, the easier it is to do your work. The cards to look for are the Wildcats, FireGLs, Quadros and Oxygens. While you can spend less on a gaming card like the GeForce3 and GeForce4, you will need to jump through some hoops and

workarounds to get the most out of your 3D package.

If you plan on using dual monitors, be sure to check that your graphics card can support that. It is much easier to get one card that'll drive twin displays than it is to install two graphics cards in one system.

Graphics card recommendations: 3Dlabs Wildcat II 5110, ATI FireGL 4, Elsa QuadroDCC, 3Dlabs Oxygen GVX1. (Note: AWN plans to review the new Wildcat III line in a future article.)

Video Capture

I said we'd throw a little bit of video editing into the mix. In order to capture digital and analog video, edit it, and output back to digital or analog videotape, you'll need a video capture card. This card will accelerate your video editing software, as well as allow you to work with an NTSC monitor or television. With the proliferation of Firewire cards and miniDV camcorders, you may be able to skip this component. It depends on how much editing you plan to do.

Video capture recommendations: Pinnacle DV500plus, Matrox RT2500.

Other

There are some other, less exciting components that you still need to consider when building the workstation from the ground up. Some of these you may be able to cannibalize from an old PC. You'll need a three button mouse (get an optical one that uses the USB port), keyboard (USB), CD-RW burner (Plextor is everyone's favorite brand), CD-ROM, floppy drive, sound card (Creative Labs Audigy is great), ethernet card (if you plan on networking or connecting to the Internet with a



Pros use powerful graphic cards like this Wildcat II 5110.

broadband connection), and a UPS/surge strip to protect everything from electrical spikes and blackouts.

One other piece of advice: Make sure all of your components are compatible with each other. It can take a good bit of research, but finding out about conflicts before you buy is worth it. Try the Usenet newsgroups or the support page of a specific manufacturer for more information.

Putting It All Together

Well, now that you have all these expensive parts laying around, it's time to plug them all together! I'll cover the basic process in broad strokes here, but if this is your first time poking around inside a PC, you should seek a more detailed guide. Something like *Upgrading and Repairing PCs* from Que Publishing, or the videotape *How To Build Your Own PC* from www.informit.com will help.

Be sure to read all of the manuals that come with your components. Really. No one wants to, but it pays off in the end. Plan your attack before you start opening up the anti-static bags.

Here are your major steps:

1. Install the fans and power supply into your case. Be

sure to check that the lower fan is going to pull air in, while the upper fan will blow out. There are usually arrows on the fan housing that indicate airflow direction.

2. Using brass standoffs and screws, attach the motherboard to the case. This is easier if the case has a slide-out motherboard tray.

3. Install the CPU and heatsink/fan combo onto the motherboard. This is a delicate operation, so check for proper pin alignment. Socket-based CPUs require "zero insertion force," which means it will drop right into place. If you are pushing on it at all, then you've got a misalignment. Whatever you do, please don't forget to attach the CPU fan lead to its connector on the motherboard.

4. Add RAM. Read the motherboard manual to be sure that you've inserted RAM pairs into the correct channels. Rambus-based boards will require you to leave dummy CRIMM modules in any unoccupied slots.

5. Set motherboard jumpers. Again, the manual will have a chart that tells you which (if any) jumper settings you must set for your particular CPU clock rate.

6. Set SCSI ID numbers and IDE jumpers, then mount all of the hard drives, optical drives and flop-

py drive into their respective bays.

7. Connect the case switch/LED/speaker leads to their place on the motherboard.

8. Attach the case fan leads to the motherboard.

9. Plug the power supply leads into the motherboard.

10. Connect the power and data cables for all of your drives. This is a good time to use some trial and error in order to find the optimal path for cables. The idea is to keep things neat and out of the way, in order to encourage airflow.

11. Insert the graphics card in the AGP slot. If you have an AGP Pro card, it will be necessary to first remove the AGP Pro sticker and plastic spacer from the slot.

12. Insert and connect the other peripheral cards, like sound, ethernet, video capture and SCSI.

13. Close the case and then plug in the monitor, power cord, keyboard and mouse.

14. Fire it up. If everything has been properly installed you should hear a single, happy beep and be on your way to setting the BIOS. Follow the second half of your motherboard manual for this one.

15. Install the operating system. I recommend Windows 2000 for the animation workstation.

16. Install your software.

I know, I know, that's a lot of work! While it's easier to buy a pre-made system, off-the-shelf workstations don't have the same degree of customization you've just achieved. And the best part about building your own rig is that you know it inside and out,

literally. When it comes time for upgrades or other system modifications, you can do all the work yourself. You may never need to buy a full-on computer again.

So good luck, and have fun with your new animation workstation!

John Edgar Park is a 3D animator, instructor and writer based in Los Angeles. He received his B.A. in Drama from the University of Virginia.

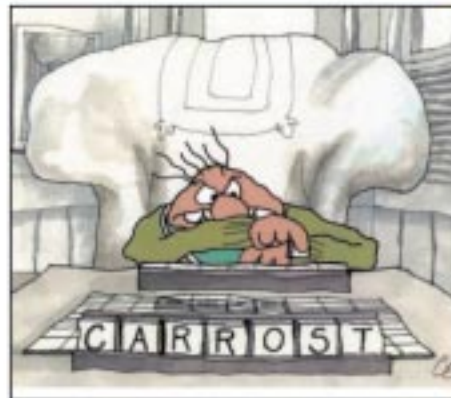
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Original Production cels
from the Oscar
nominated film *The Big
Snit* by director Richard
Condie



Maya Training Solutions

by John Edgar Park

You did it. You got in. You somehow managed to get onto the Alias|Wavefront Website and download the free Maya Personal Learning Edition! Congratulations, because I'm sure it wasn't easy.

Truth be told, Maya is wildly popular software, and the Alias|Wavefront servers didn't have a prayer of dealing with the zillions of animators clicking away at the 138MB download. Apparently, there were over 13,000 downloads in less than two weeks.

But forget about the unfortunate ones who still haven't got Maya — let's talk about you! You downloaded it. You installed it. You read through the documentation. You played around a little bit. Now what? Are you serious about learning Maya at home?

This is complex software. It can be difficult to learn, especially if you don't work in a studio with savvy colleagues to pester or live near a school that offers Maya training. One great solution for the stay-at-home Maya student is training videos.

Are you serious about learning Maya at home?

Learn Visually

Videotapes can be an excellent training aid for people who learn visually and aurally. Videos straddle the fence between books and directed instruction.

They aren't as random-access as books are — it's nice to flip to any page and take as much time as you need. Nor are they as interactive as directed instruction — politely raising your hand won't normally compel your VCR to call on you and answer a question.

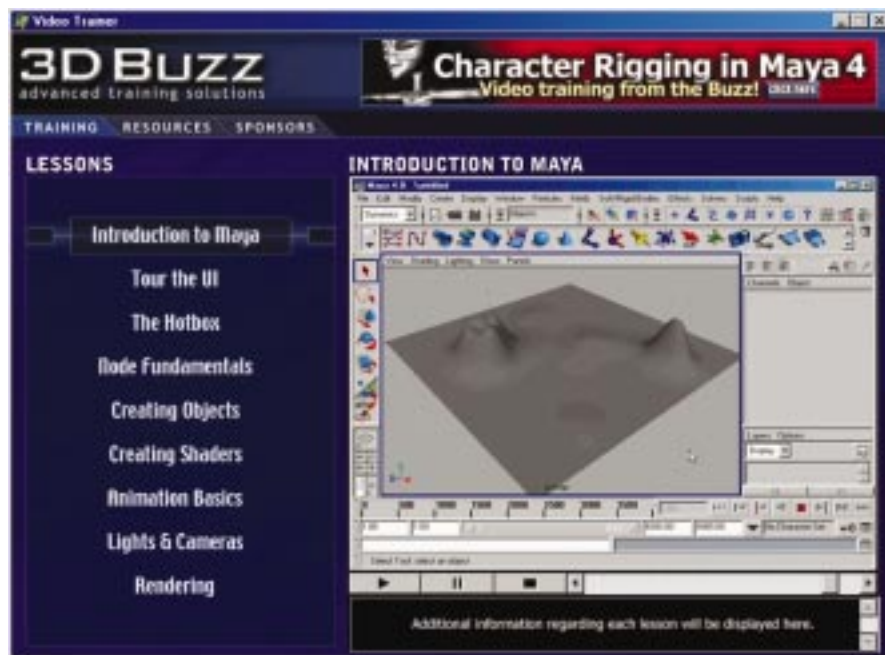
The major benefit of training tapes is that they allow you to watch active demonstrations of concepts and techniques at your own pace. In reviewing these tapes I learned all sorts of great tips. It's like having personal demonstrations presented to you by a group of Maya masters.

Depending on your needs, you can get training materials for many different topics within Maya. (Most of these tapes apply to any version: Maya PLE, Maya Builder, Maya Complete or Maya Unlimited.) As you progress in your understanding of a given topic, you may also want to learn more advanced techniques. Thankfully, there are videotapes available for a wide range of skill levels.

We'll look at some training tapes (and related materials) from three vendors: 3D Buzz, The Gnomon Workshop and Alias|Wavefront.

The 3D Buzz

Character Rigging 1 with Maya 4 is the first in a three part series from 3D Buzz. Frankly, I can't wait to see the next two, because this one is terrific. It covers the step-by-step creation of a bipedal skeleton in a clear, easy-to-follow manner.



A shot from a training video by 3D Buzz. All 3D Buzz images © 3D Buzz.



A sample of 3D Buzz's homepage.

As an intermediate-level tape, you won't want to dive into it without learning your Maya basics first. However, once you're ready to try your hand at character setup, this tape is a must-have. You'll learn about joints, inverse kinematics, the connection editor, grouping, set driven keys, two different foot setups, custom attributes and expressions. The end result is a well-designed, easy-to-control rig.

One feature that extends the tape beyond your VCR is the 3D Buzz Website (www.3dbuzz.com). Once you purchase the video, you will be granted access to an online classroom forum, personal Web space to host a gallery, a download area to get the character model that is used on the tape, and more. (One note: the character model down-

load is only available as a Maya Binary file. This will not open into Maya PLE.) While the classroom area isn't bustling with activity, any questions you have about the video will be answered by the knowledgeable lead instructor, Jason Busby.

Available on VHS for \$49.95, and running about 2 hours, this one is a real bargain.

The Gnomon Workshop

It's difficult to think of a Maya topic that hasn't been addressed in a tape from the Gnomon Workshop. These guys have been busy! They have training videos covering the topics of Workflow, Modeling, Texturing, Lighting/Rendering, Animation, Character, and Effects. In most cases they offer a few levels of detail in a topic (i.e., *Kinematics I -*

IV, Polygon Modeling I - II, Dynamics I - VII) for a total of 24 different tapes.

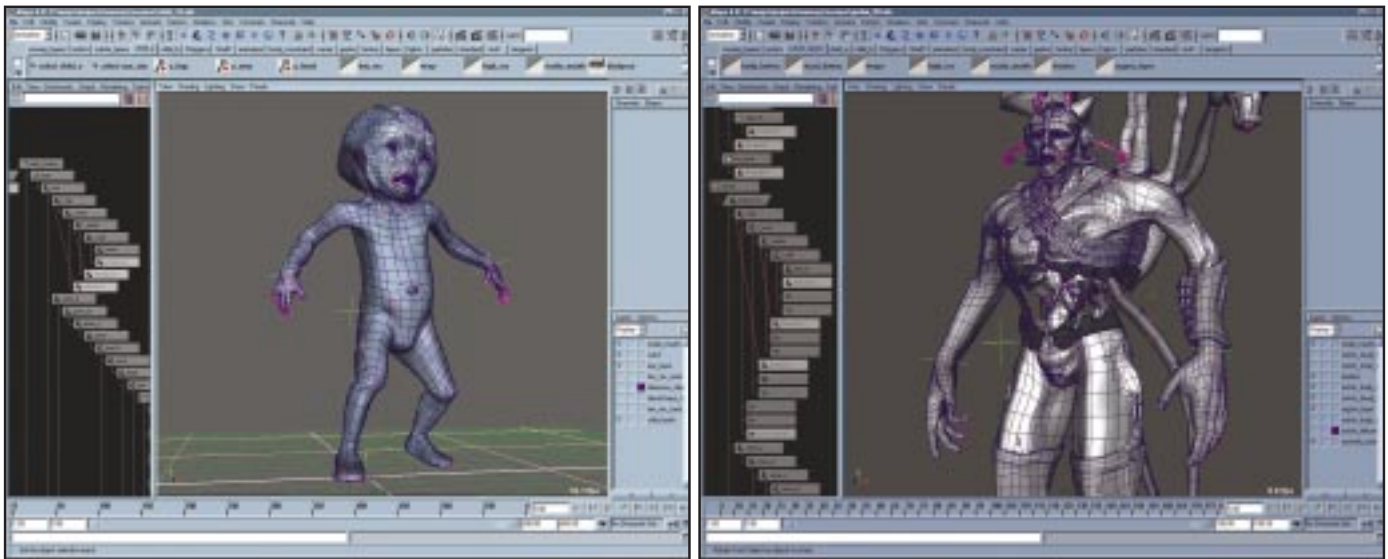
The *Introduction to Maya* tape is a good starting point for the new Maya user. The material is presented concisely, and touches on all the major interface and workflow concepts. If you are brand new to 3D animation, you may need a more basic primer. This tape (much like the introductory tape from Alias|Wavefront) doesn't contain any introductions to 3D space, the Cartesian coordinate system, or "What is animation?" discussions. It instead focuses on teaching the software.

The other level-one tapes from Gnomon Workshop are equally informative and helpful. In many ways, there is no substitute for watching someone else go through the workflow you are trying to learn.



The Gnomon Training Video Collection.
All Gnomon images © The Gnomon Workshop, Inc.

The *NURBS Modeling I* tape covers all of the basics of organic surface modeling. Drawing curves, revolving surfaces, creating image plane templates and manipulating surface components are all presented clearly. Even though it is a level-one tape, it goes into some more complex operations like trims and detach surfaces.



Kinematics I from The Gnomon Workshop gives the viewer a thorough exploration of FK skeletons.

The Texture Mapping I tape does a terrific job of unraveling the mysteries of shader networks — if you follow along closely, you'll be able to create and render some very impressive looking images.

The Rendering I tape is a real stand-out. After a good primer on controlling one-, two-, and three-node cameras, the camera itself is fully dissected and explored. The interactive demonstration of focal length, film gate, resolution and film back is worth the price of admission alone. These can be very difficult concepts to grasp. The *Rendering* tape does a fantastic job of demystifying camera settings.

Kinematics I is a very in-depth exploration of creating FK skeletons. It covers all of the joint tool settings and related joint orientation issues you will face when building character skeletons. This tape will get you well on your way to building and posing FK characters, although it may take some rewinding to catch all of the information.

There are some moments on a few of the tapes where things get a bit confusing, or don't turn out correctly the first time. It

would have been preferable if these had been edited for clarity, instead of being recorded in one continuous take.

Like everything technology-based, there is an inevitable obsolescence to contend with in producing training videos. As new versions of Maya are released, some of the techniques on the

videos become outdated. Since the Website (www.the-gnomon-workshop.com) does not indicate when a tape was produced, it can be hard to know which version of Maya it refers to. While this isn't a major problem, perhaps these issues could be addressed through an addendum page on the Website.

If you are interested in a specific topic (I've only reviewed a small sampling here), and want lots of detail on it, you can't go wrong picking up a few of the tapes offered by the Gnomon Workshop. The presenters are experts in their fields, the examples are excellent (a picture is worth a thousand words), and the range of topics covered is tremendous.

Available on VHS, most tapes are \$69.00 and run a little under 2 hours.

Alias|Wavefront

The materials available from Alias|Wavefront are the most varied of any vendor. It's a bit overwhelming to choose from the many tapes available on the Website (<https://secure.aliaswavefrontstore.com/Main.asp>). If you are looking for a one-stop

**This is
complex
software.
It can be
difficult to
learn...**



Rendering techniques are *de rigueur* for animators. All Alias|Wavefront images
© Alias|Wavefront, a division of Silicon
Graphics Limited.



This book offers advanced techniques in shading.

shopping trip, check out the Maya 4.0 Ultimate Bundle. It is an impressive resource for learning the program.

\$1,449.95 will buy you:

1. *Introduction to Maya* — Video
2. *Maya Rendering Techniques: Exploring Advanced Shading Networks* — CD-ROM
3. *Particles for Visual Effects* — DVD
4. *Maya Paint Effects Techniques 4.0* — Video
5. *Maya Modeling Techniques: Working with Subdivision Surfaces in Maya 4.0* — Video
6. *Motion Tracking in Maya Live* — Video
7. *Rigging for Facial Animation* — Video
8. *The Art of Maya* — Book + CD-ROM
9. *Learning Maya 4.0* — Book + CD-ROM
10. *MEL Fundamentals Courseware*
11. *Maya Rendering Courseware*
12. *Maya Cloth Courseware*

(That's no small amount of cash, but keep in mind, this is about the same cost as enrolling in a Maya class at a private institution.)

The *Introduction to Maya* video is very similar to the Gnomon Workshop tape by the same name. In it, the interface and workflow are presented well, but it's the explanation of Maya's node-based architecture that really shines. This is accomplished both through digging into a shader network in the hypershade and by revealing the input nodes of a model in the hypergraph. This is a key concept to learn early on in your Maya training, and it is great to see it addressed effectively in the *Introduction* tape.

For intermediate to advanced shading, the *Rendering Techniques* CD-ROM is a must have. It contains step-by-step tutorials and analyses of 20 different shaders as well as their related data files. When learning about materials, there's nothing better than pulling apart someone else's shader networks.

The most technically advanced of all these training materials is the *Particles for Visual*

Effects DVD. This one may enlighten you on some aspects of the particle workflow, but without some serious scripting chops, you'll find it hard to keep up. The DVD format is great to look at on screen (especially compared to VHS), and there is a companion CD-ROM that contains project data files.

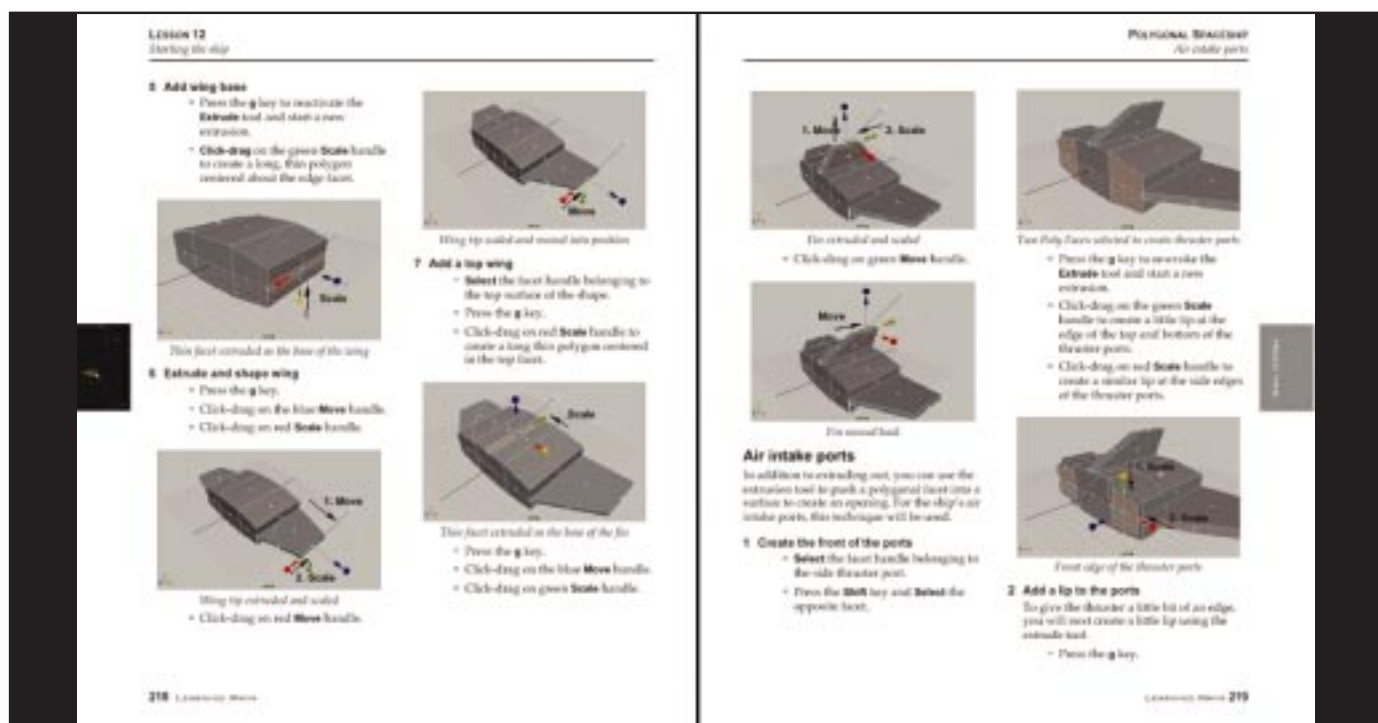
The *Maya Paint Effects Techniques 4.0* video was presented as a seminar at SIGGRAPH 2001. The video varies in quality from some unfocused moments to some brilliant insights. It is not meant to teach Paint Effects from the ground up, but rather to share advanced brush creation techniques. The sections on lighting and hair dynamics are particularly good.



A frame from Alias|Wavefront's DVD on Particles for Visual Effects.

The other three tapes in the bundle are more traditional training tapes. *Working With Subdivision Surfaces*, *Rigging For Facial Animation* and *Motion Tracking in Maya Live* all cover their topics in great detail, and shed light on advanced workflows. The *Rigging For Facial Animation* tape, in particular, unveils many great tips and tricks that will invariably improve your work.

The *Art of Maya* and *Learning Maya* books act as the backbone of the Ultimate Bundle, so read these first. *The Art of Maya* is a coffee-table style book with



Step by step directions are featured in *Learning Maya 4.0*.

clear explanations of underlying Maya concepts. (This is the full version of the online documentation that came with your copy of Maya PLE.) *Learning Maya* contains a series of tutorials that teach different tools and techniques. While the tutorials don't always teach you how one element of the workflow relates to another, doing these tutorials will certainly help in your quest for Maya mastery.

The last set of materials is the *MEL Courseware*, *Rendering Courseware* and *Cloth Courseware*. These are the curricula for the Alias|Wavefront certified classes by the same name. Essentially high-density textbooks for high-intensity classes, they are very informative, to say the least. The *Rendering Courseware*, for example, is an education unto itself on lighting, shadows, cameras, materials, textures and optical effects. It goes into fine detail on specific problems and solutions in the rendering workflow.

Now, \$1,449.95 is a lot of money, regardless of the quality and quantity of the materials. What if you just can't invest that kind of money? Well, all of these videos and materials are available individually, as well. Prices range from \$39.95 for most videos, to \$395.95 for the *Rendering Courseware*.

**You may find
that the right
combination
of hard work
and video
assistance
sends you on
your way...**

Everyone has their own learning style and pace. If you like to learn by watching, I hope that

you check out some of these training materials. You may find that the right combination of hard work and video assistance sends you on your way to becoming an expert Maya user.

John Edgar Park is a 3D animator, instructor and writer based in Los Angeles. He received his B.A. in Drama from the University of Virginia.

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

COMING OUT OF THE *Ice Age*

by John C. Donkin



Sid, Manfred and Diego are the results of years of planning, talent and passion. All images ™ and © 2002 Twentieth Century Fox. All rights reserved.

How does a small boutique studio such as Blue Sky Studios turn itself into a major player in the feature animation world over the course of two and half years *and* make a successful animated feature on time and budget? On top of all that, do it in New York? The simple answers come in the following key words: *planning, talent and passion.* These three tenets go hand in hand. A shortcoming in one may be able to be overcome by strengths in the other two. On *Ice Age* we were fortunate to have strengths in all three.

Planning

Even before the script for *Ice Age* crossed the threshold of Blue Sky's doors, we were already

working on the pipeline and infrastructure, which would allow us to take on a project of this magnitude. The effort that goes into small projects such as commercials or contract work for features is a far cry from the amount of work that it takes to produce a full-length feature. For some perspective *Ice Age* has over 25 characters, approximately 35 sequences



Director Chris Wedge studies the storyboard for *Ice Age* during production. Photo: Barbara Nitke.

and 1400 shots. The actual length of production (the point at which we started doing animation which ended up in the film) ran about 65 weeks. The film is about 80 minutes in length — that's a little bit over a minute per week of actual production.

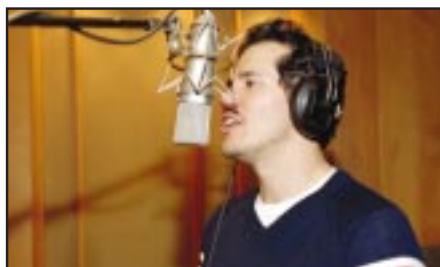
The math alone gets to be overwhelming. A major challenge is to figure out how to be able to produce this much work in such a short amount of time. It became clear early on that we had to convert our way of working to accommodate the scale of the project and crew. On smaller productions, it's a relatively simple matter to keep everyone busy and productive. As the scale of the project increases in scope this becomes a major challenge. It is required that each artist has all of the tools and materials necessary to work through the material quickly. In order to accomplish this, we had to structure the production pipeline to be more of an assembly line. Each department needed to function independently of one other and have a constant supply of work to do (inventory).

On small projects it's possible for different departments to work nearly simultaneously. This is not possible on a large-scale project and requires a different discipline both technically and creatively.

In order to accomplish this assembly line approach we had to break apart the procedures that are normally done within a small group and redefine them so that they could be reformed into discreet production steps. Each step is sorted into departmental groups. A production manager who is responsive to a single master schedule produces the inventory of each department. This master

schedule is designed to allow work to flow from one end of the production pipeline to the other.

During the course of production on *Ice Age*, it was necessary to modify both the structure of the pipeline and the subsequent schedule to accommodate things that we learned along the way. Managing the pipeline and schedule was a very active process as the production progressed. We needed to be able to be flexible to allow creative changes or to accommodate technical issues. The primary goal is to forecast bottlenecks and to make adjustments in the workflow to avoid them. Without allowing this flexibility, we would have fallen into holes from which we could not have escaped.



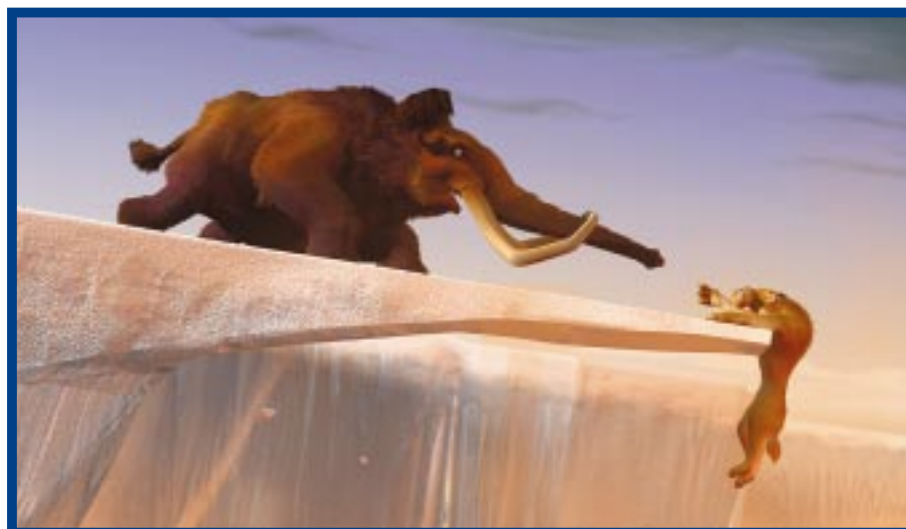
John Leguizamo provides the voice of Sid the Sloth. Photo: Barbara Nitke.

Talent

When Blue Sky began production on *Ice Age*, the studio consisted of approximately 65 people. At the height of production we grew to more than 170. There was an incredible ramp-up that occurred during a relatively short amount of time. Our recruitment strategy was twofold: to look at raw talent even above experience and to find people who would be great to work with. In the end our crew consisted of a healthy mixture of new people with little or no production experience, along with people who had a wealth of experience.

In animation, lighting and modeling we brought on a group of fresh young talented people who just had "it." They were able to animate or pose a character with strength and emotion. They were able to light a scene with sensitivity and beauty. They were able to capture the shape and form of a character or a background and realize it in three dimensions. We hired the best talent we could get our hands on and enticed them into our culture. Many of our entry level people grew into new positions as the production moved forward.

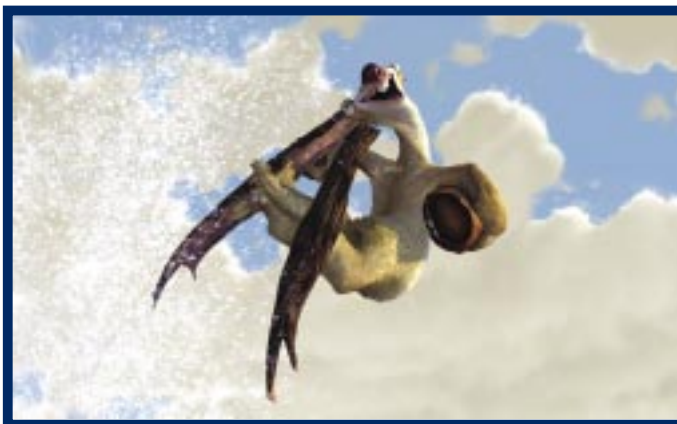
Because this was Blue Sky's first feature, we had to build up or create new departments. These included Story, Layout, Art and Editorial. For these departments we were fortunate to bring on some experienced talent whose previous work included such films as *Tarzan*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, *A Bug's Life* and *The Iron Giant*, among others. These people provided leadership that went beyond the screen. They understood the rigors of a long production, and understood that times would be easy and other times would be so very difficult.



Manfred races to save Diego.



Creating a furry, four-legged creature like Scrat proved to be an animator's challenge.



Too late for Salt Lake City? Sid the Sloth tries freestyle skating.



Ice Age features spectacular set pieces like this ice and lava laden landscape.

Part of the challenge of any collaborative work, particularly an artistic one, is to find ways of managing and delegating critical creative decision making. On *Ice Age*, Chris Wedge was the pivotal creative voice, but there was a reliance upon others who tried to capture or ignite his vision. This wasn't always a breezy experience, as we were all learning together, yet somehow the elements came together to create a unique look at a foreign world.

Passion

Chris Wedge is a demanding director in that he is always pressing to have the best work on the screen, and no detail is too small to scrutinize. The culture at Blue Sky Studios is very much one of attention to detail. This attention comes out of the fact that everyone who worked on *Ice Age* carried with them a passion: a passion to do the absolute best job possible, as well as a passion for the film to succeed. The importance of success in the collective at Blue Sky led to extremely strong team building within and beyond individual departments.

I believe that part of the strength of the crew, and the reason the team worked so well together, is Blue Sky's New York

location. Artists relocated from the West coast, or chose New York over the West coast, because they were drawn to the project and the culture that has been created at Blue Sky. People were here



Ray Romano's voice helps to make Manfred the Woolly Mammoth lovable.
Photo: Barbara Nitke.



Diego and his saber-teeth show us why it's called the Ice Age.

because they wanted to be here.

When *Ice Age* was first read at Blue Sky, we were thinking, "This is the worst possible film we could try to produce as our first feature: it's a travel film, all of the characters are furry, four-legged animals...Oh! Except for the humans...Humans! And it takes place in the great outdoors."

Computer generated films to date (at that time) did not include furry four-legged talking animals standing next to raging waterfalls. How could we possibly do this movie?

After some careful reflection, some creative thinking, clever design, ingenious technical achievements, and a lot of sweat, we turned these apparent negatives into positives and *Ice Age* now stands on the screen, a proud achievement for all of us here at Blue Sky.

John C. Donkin is an associate producer at Blue Sky Studios and was in charge of the production of Ice Age; Blue Sky Studios' first CG-animated feature.

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

Te Wei and Chinese Animation: Inseparable, Incomparable

by John A. Lent and Xu Ying

When he began his cartooning in 1935, Te Wei asked permission of an older nephew whom he admired for his progressive ideas, to use his name to sign his works. After that, China's premier animator did not borrow much else in a fascinating career full of new principles and techniques that revolutionized animation.

Animation had its birth in China in 1926 through the diligent efforts of the four Wan brothers, who, with others, continued to produce shorts (and the first feature in 1941) until World War II. A few works also appeared in the late 1940s, but the real beginnings of modern animation occurred in 1949, when Te Wei and the painter Jin Xi were asked by the Ministry of Culture to go to the northeast and establish an animation group at the Changchun Film Studio.

His Animation Beginnings

Te Wei remembers that he had a stomach ailment at the time and welcomed a more pleasant environment. However, he was not very keen on doing animation. "I like animation," he explained, "but I didn't like to do production. I liked doing cartoons, not all those monotonous frames. But, it was an order and I had to do this job." His other reservation was that he knew absolutely nothing about animation production.



Te Wei at home (seated right), next to author Dr. John A. Lent, with co-author Xu Ying (standing left) and critic Chen Jian Yao, last year in Shanghai, China. Photo courtesy of Dr. John A. Lent.

Why then was he chosen to head this pioneering unit? And why was it put in the northeast? At the time, the Changchun Film Studio was headed by a woman (Chen Bo'er), who liked animation and had created and directed puppet works, including *The Dream of an Empire*. Wanting to widen the scope of the studio's films with animation, she called on Te Wei because she knew of his cartoons for the print media.

If Te Wei had not carved out a niche in the annals of animation, he still would be remembered for his pre-1949 print cartoons.

Born Sheng Song (in 1915) to a family of limited economic means, Te Wei finished only two years of middle schooling before working in a Shanghai advertising company. He began drawing cartoons in 1933, an opportune time as Shanghai teemed with humor magazines in the 1930s, and launched his professional career two years later. He drew primarily internationally-oriented cartoons for newspapers and magazines.

When Japan invaded China in 1937, Te Wei became part of an anti-Japanese cartoonists propaganda brigade, an august body of distinguished car-

toonists (Liao Bingxiong, Ye Qianyu, Zhang Leping, Zhang Ding, Liang Baibo, Hu Kao), which he soon led. The group traveled from city to city (Shanghai, Nanking, Wuhan, Hankow, Changsha, Shangrao, Guilin, Chongqing, Hong Kong, etc.), boosting Chinese morale and spirit of resistance and warning the people about the Japanese invaders. Te Wei described the group's activities: "We had exhibitions in and out of doors, printed our cartoon works as posters put on walls, and published journals against the Japanese. We did everything ourselves, and though economic conditions were very difficult, we found ways to survive." One way was through funds from the Kuomintang Military Committee. When these dried up in 1941, Te Wei went to Hong Kong where he published two collections of his cartoons — *Te Wei Satire Cartoons* and *Wind and Clouds Collection*.

Te Wei's life took different twists in the 1940s. Like others, he left Hong Kong in 1942 when the Pacific War widened and settled in Chongqing. Because the Kuomintang controlled culture "loosely," he pursued painting instead, going into mines, factories and military bases for subject material. The large water and ink sketches that resulted were for exhibition, mainly "to reflect the poor people's problems." At the end of the war, he went to Yunnan Province, back to Hong Kong in 1947 and Beijing in 1949, where he attended the first Chinese Literature and Arts Conference.

Te Wei said that though he did not know animation, he could function when called to Changchun because "cartooning



The Conceited General (1968) draws its style from the traditional Chinese arts, including the Peking Opera. Photo: Shanghai Animation Film Studio.

had similarities to animation, except for its lack of movement." The animation unit stayed at Changchun only a year. In 1950, Te Wei and staff felt Shanghai had "better conditions" and with the sanction of the Ministry of Culture, joined the Shanghai Film Studio. Te Wei retained his position as head of the art department.

Building A National Studio

In the 1950s, Te Wei and his growing staff learned animation through "study and exploration," mainly of Soviet concepts and techniques. "Every aspect of everything was learned from the Soviets at the time," Te Wei said, "because Soviet animation had high level skills and very healthy contents." His enthusiasm for the Soviet model was dampened when the Shanghai Film Studio's *Why Crows Are Black* won an award at the 1955 Venice Animation Festival, but was regarded by the judges as a Soviet work. At that point, Te Wei decid-

ed it was time to make Chinese animation reflective of Chinese customs, tales and techniques.

In 1956, while directing *The Conceited General*, Te Wei hung a slogan on the studio wall that implored animators to explore a national way. *The Conceited General* was the first experiment in Chinese-style animation with its Peking opera-like movements. Te Wei said, "We had a clear idea to draw useful things from the traditional arts — local opera, drama, Peking opera. From the models to the movements, we followed these operas. Most importantly, we invited opera teachers to the film studio to show us how to move."

As *The Conceited General* and other animated films with prominent Chinese styles became popular in art circles and society at large, the experimentation accelerated, not only with content and techniques, but also basic raw material. Te Wei explained, "We made paper cut and puppet as

these were plentiful materials from Chinese culture. We have a long tradition of paper cut and shadow puppetry, and we made paper cut animation very successfully." Wan Guchan, one of the brothers who started Chinese animation, and Hu Jinqing worked for a year to make the first paper cut-out film, the award-winning *Piggy (Zhu Bajie) Eats the Watermelon* (1958). It was followed by others such as *The Little Fisherman* (1959), *The Spirit of Ginseng* (1961), *Wait for Tomorrow* (1962), *More or Less* and *Red Army Brigade* (both 1964).



Feelings from Mountain and Water (1988), used a brush-painting, water and ink technique. Photo: Shanghai Animation Film Studio.

Te Wei then proceeded to take as a challenge a hope expressed by Chinese Vice President Chen Yi, that one day, water and ink painting mastered by painter Qi Baishi would be animated. According to Te Wei, "This type of painting was very famous and had a long history, so I thought we should do animation this way. Qi Baishi painted a lot of tadpoles and shrimp; we thought we'd make them move. We tried many ways before they moved. We made samples and showed them to the art association and got a strong positive reaction." The film, *Where Is Mama?* (1960), won five awards, including ones at Annecy, Cannes and Locarno. Flushed with the joy of depicting

movement so flawlessly, Te Wei wrote the script and directed a second water and ink film in 1963, *Buffalo Boy and the Flute*, and later served as general director of *Feelings from Mountain and Water* (1988). There was only one other water and ink animated film, *Deer Bell* (1985).

The golden era inaugurated by Te Wei in the 1950s continued until 1964, spewing forth other unique Chinese techniques and stories that made the animation world take notice. Yu Zhenguang adapted the ancient Chinese folk craft of paper folding to animation in *A Clever Duckling* (1960); Wan Laiming (another of the four founding brothers) used the Peking opera military style of performance in creating *Havoc in Heaven* (first part, 1961; second part, 1964), termed by David Ehrlich as "surely the most ambitious and ultimately the most well loved work" produced at the Shanghai Film Studio.

The Dreaded Cultural Revolution

What Te Wei and his highly-talented crew put together in the first 14 years of the studio (1950-64) was shelved or destroyed in the next 14. Many of the studio's works (*Buffalo Boy and the Flute*, *Havoc in Heaven*, *Red Army Brigade* among them) could not be shown in China again until the late 1970s or 1980s. Two years before the dreaded Cultural Revolution, Te Wei's work was already criticized by party leaders (as not reflecting the class struggle), who demanded that he write self criticism; when he could not comply, they sent him to a factory to work.

When the Cultural Revolution started, he was isolated for one year in a small room

under very close surveillance. Te Wei talked about that experience: "In my tiny room, I had a table with a pane of glass on it. I drew many paintings on it. When I heard sounds — the guards coming — I erased the paintings with a wet cloth. I drew everything by imagination; I drew like I'd been there and saw it. This capability was from having drawn cartoons and animation. Later when my job was feeding pigs (along with fellow animator A Da), I saw a lovely baby pig that I thought I would animate when I got out, but I didn't. One fat pig we named Wu Fa Xian, after one of the Gang of Four. A Da and I amused ourselves with humor at times."



A Da, at 49 years of age in Vermont in 1983. Te Wei and A Da were confined to the countryside together during the Cultural Revolution. Photo: David Ehrlich.

While confined to the room, on one occasion Te Wei was deprived of sleep for three days while being interrogated and at other times was tortured. When he was sent to the countryside, he carried garbage and manure, helped dig a river, and as he said above, raised pigs with A Da.

A Return to Art

As the animators gradually returned to the studio in 1973, where they made mostly propa-

ganda films, Te Wei at first was made head of the library, and then in 1975, directed a film about Tibet. After the perpetrators of the Cultural Revolution, the Gang of Four, fell in 1976, he regained his position as head of the animation studio, and for the next eight years or so, was responsible for yet a second important period of Chinese animation. Veterans and newcomers alike — animators such as A Da, Lin Wenxiao, Qu Jianfang, Zhou Keqin, Hu Xionghua, Hu Jinqing, Jin Xi, Qian Jajun, Yan Dingxian, Wang Shuchen, Chang Guangxi, Zhong Quan and Wang Gang — made many puppet, paper cut and cel works that were shown (and captured awards) at international festivals.

After finishing his administration as head of the studio in 1984, Te Wei directed the 1985 feature *Monkey Conquers the Demon* and *Feelings from Mountain and Water* (1988). The latter was awarded five prizes, including grand prizes from the Montreal and Shanghai International Film Festivals. In 1995, ASIFA gave Te Wei a lifetime accomplishment award, which hangs proudly over his bed. "The award means I can draw a dot to my career," he said, but adding, "I think I can do more to make animation unique." At 86, he said he is waiting for a good script to direct, implying it might be a water and ink production, because he thinks this technique is unique and should be preserved.

Speaking with Te Wei

In our 4 1/2 to 5 hour meeting with Te Wei, June 16, 2001, first in his Shanghai apartment and then at lunch in a nearby restaurant, he recalled (though

sometimes in roundabout ways) how and why animation was done in the manner it was during his tenure as studio head and discussed (though a bit hesitantly) problems of the profession today.



Te Wei, at 80, holds his ASIFA prize for lifetime achievement, which was awarded at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival in 1995. On the right is Swiss animator and friend Georges Schwizgebel. Photo: David Ehrlich.

Question: Of all the Chinese arts, why were water and ink, paper cut, folding paper, and puppet adapted to animation?

Te Wei: In the 1950s, we thought we should have Chinese art films. The first animation was puppet. They were not called cartoons, but art films. When we closed the door to the U.S., you seldom heard of cartoons, only art or animation films. The staff at the time seldom said we should learn from Disney, but most of them liked Disney skills in movement, styles, etc. When the Kuomintang left (1949), they left behind some Disney work, including *Fantasia*,

which Chinese animators had seen. The word animation can include all aspects, paper cut, paper fold, puppet, etc. We didn't waste time over what to call it; we just did things to make a national identity type animation. We also learned from the high skills of foreign countries. A problem now is that seldom do animators carry out deep research on foreign animation.

Q: What in your life are you most proud of?

TW: When I was young, working as a cartoonist. I not only drew many cartoons, but I also organized and attended many activities in the 1930s. I was a famous cartoonist then. Most of my life has been connected with animation, and in those decades, I did one important thing; I explored national styles and ways for animation. I not only said what had to be done; I not only put a slogan on the wall, but I did something — made outstanding water and ink films.

But seldom can I feel satisfied; I always felt that there were defects in my works. It's a common phenomenon for directors to have regrets when they finish a film. At that time, film companies gave us money to do water and ink animation, and we were very happy to have that strong government support. Now, no one gives money to do water and ink animation.

Another accomplishment was I organized talented people. From several people, gradually we developed many people talented in animation.

Feeling Te Wei was too modest about his accomplishments,

animation critic and scriptwriter Chen Jian Yao, who was present, added:

Te Wei's accomplishment as animator and artist is that he made several masterpieces — *Where Is Mama?*, *The Conceited General*, *Buffalo Boy and the Flute* and *Feelings from Mountain and Water*. These works can go down from generation to generation. In 1999, the government chose the 100 outstanding films of China; only 20 animation works were represented and Te Wei's four were among them. Also, as a leader of the animation industry, Te Wei's had three accomplishments: 1. He founded a Chinese national style of animation; 2. He established a highly talented group; under his leadership, the Shanghai Animation Film Studio developed from several to hundreds of staff, uniting seniors like the Wan brothers and cultivating the younger generation of animators; 3. He led both of China's golden eras of animation and most of the famous Chinese animation was made when he was the leader. In 1989, when the Chinese government chose four filmmakers as most outstanding of more than 50,000 people who had worked in the industry, Te Wei was one of them.

Q: What would you have changed if you had had the chance?

TW: I'm very strict with my own works. When I made films, I did not pay attention to social reflection [audience reaction]. What I didn't do is what I regretted. Next time, I would do better.

Q: What have been the biggest changes in the past 50 years of Chinese animation?

TW: There were two ups and downs. 1960-64 was the first golden time with outstanding films. After that, with the political movements until the end of the Cultural Revolution, everything stopped. The 1980s was also a golden period. The second era was much more intense than the first because all the artists had been oppressed during the Cultural Revolution and collected much energy as a result, and they wanted to do something. The level of work was much higher because all of them wanted to make their best works and they worked hard during that time. After the Cultural Revolution, animation films were revived and it was the best period.

Q: What is the biggest artistic change in animation of the past 50 years?

TW: It is hard to say what the big artistic changes were. Artistic skills keep being promoted, and animation production keeps going smoothly; there are no ups and downs artistically.

Q: What are the characteristics that distinguish Chinese animation from that of other countries?

TW: From 1956, I said Chinese animation should find its own nationality and this was so until I retired in 1988 [after directing *Feelings*]. This way is still going smoothly. It is still different from foreign animation. After 1980, Chinese animators attended international animation festivals, and China had its own; during these times, Chinese animators had a chance to open their eyes and found they lacked certain skills.

Through international animation festivals, foreign animators know more about Chinese animation; on the other hand, Chinese animators learn from the outside. Because of these observations of foreign work, Chinese animators are not satisfied just doing traditional animation. They know they have to learn other skills and when they learn good things from foreigners, some bad things come in also.

Q: What has been learned from foreigners?

TW: When I was working, I put more attention on creation. Now, retired, I feel some animators pay more attention to working for foreign companies; it's not their work, not Chinese animation. This is a bad impact. This situation has been around for years, not just recently. Chinese animators have tried to do something about the [drain of talent to] foreign work. Shanghai Animation Film Studio recently made *Lotus Lantern* which had market success. You can see Disney in it, but at least they tried. Seldom is there a film here like that these days; it is not common to make efforts at high quality animation like *Lotus Lantern*. The artistic exploration and atmosphere are not strong.

Artistically and commercially, *Lotus Lantern* made contributions. We should not expect too much of these films, because seldom can the animators do exploration they need. Nowadays, the animation competition worldwide is stronger and stronger. Chinese animators should take bigger steps like *Lotus Lantern*. After its success, others have made efforts to do features. Disney has its own ways and methods; Chinese animation

must have its ways and methods to compete. But Disney and DreamWorks are too powerful and it is not easy to catch up with them.

Q: Why don't the animators pay more attention to artistic exploration now; why are they going to work for foreign companies?

TW: Working for the foreign companies means more pay, but it also means there is no time to do Chinese animation exploration.

Q: Does the senior generation of animators worry about this?

TW: I feel helpless; I can't change — or know when or how to solve — this problem.

Q: How much control from government did animators face in the past?

TW: Seldom was there government control of the animation industry. Some believe there was so little government control so that the industry could develop smoothly. And some senior government leaders have been artists, literary and cultural workers, like Xia Yan, Chen Huang Mei, Premier Zhou Enlai. Even Zhou gave his attention to animation and spiritual support and suggestions. I saw Zhou many times and he often talked about animation films. On one occasion, when he visited Southeast Asian countries, Zhou took Chinese animation with him to show. When he met Japanese delegates, he told

them Chinese art films could find their own ways.

John A. Lent is professor of communication at Temple University, chair of Asian Cinema Studies Society and editor of both the International Journal of Comic Art and Asian Cinema.

Xu Ying is senior research associate at China Film Archive, Beijing, and author of more than 100 articles on film, including some on animation.

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Defining a New Vocabulary for Voice Characterization

by Jacques Barreau

I have spent the last five years travelling all over the world for Warner Bros. As a creative executive responsible for the casting of all of our animated product worldwide, I have the great privilege and opportunity to work with a wide variety of actors of all nationalities.



The studio crew in Procen, Japan, recording *The Magic Sword*, better known to U.S. audiences as *Quest For Camelot*. Jacques is on the far right.

Of course, this has not always been an easy ride and I've had a few surprises. I remember one amazing mix session for *Space Jam* in Beijing, where I learned that the concepts of time and space are quite different in the West and the Far East — it was the fastest mix for the world's biggest audience. Then there was the recording session in Bangkok, where I had to change the voice director because he couldn't ask the actors to redo a line. He was younger and owed respect to the older actors!

Besides the humorous stories, I realized very soon that I needed to bring some sense of organization and common references to the dubbing world, if I wanted to succeed in my quest to protect the integrity of Warner Bros.' animated celebrities by maintaining the consistency among the many international language voices of these animated icons. The first observation I made during my travels was that all the artists were taking different approaches in trying to reach this goal. One would think that most actors use more or less the same techniques to work with their voices. This, in fact, is not the case; the actors' different approaches results in inconsistencies in character.

In this article, we will talk about the voice characterization (the art of creating a non-human voice) used in animation. What do actors from different countries do to re-create classic animated voices in their language and how can we help them to do this? Our role is to explain voice placement techniques to actors who do not have this training. To do so, we need a common vocabulary to describe these techniques. As I mentioned earlier, up until this point, there haven't been common references, but this new vocabulary will guarantee the same approaches to characterization worldwide, and consequently, the consistency of animated character voices.

A Void to Fill

First, we need to define the two essential parameters of voice characterization. They are the voice placement and the voice effect that can be created by working with the mouth, throat, etc.

1. Voice placement indicates in which area the actor places his voice. Later, I'll discuss the different areas where the voice can be placed and all the sounds we obtain from those areas.

2. The voice effect defines the way of working with the throat, nose and mouth, which will help in creating a great variety of sounds.



Jacques playing guitar to demonstrate his point.

Let's consider for a second the voice as a musical instrument. Like with all musical instruments,

you can play the same note (pitch) with different colors. If I hit the strings of my guitar softly or hard or if I place my right hand close to the bridge or far away, the same note will have different sounds, or different colors. It will be the sound of a guitar (the basic voice of an actor), but with different colors (same voice placed differently). Like any serious musician knows how to change the sound of his instrument, any serious actor should be able to work with his voice the same way. The main difference is that the voice placement techniques are still much more mysterious than the instrument techniques, which is probably because there is no vocabulary to define these techniques.

Voice characterization, unlike music, is a new art. Musicians and singers all over the world know how to do a vibrato and use more or less the same techniques to play a common repertoire. This makes sense. What doesn't make sense is that all the actors have the same repertoire but don't share or sometimes don't know the techniques to place their voice correctly, which is the basis of voice characterization.

The first thing to do for an actor is to place his voice in order to get as close as possible to the voice of the character he is dubbing. When the voice is in place, he will then be able to concentrate on the character's attitude. The VD's (voice director) work is to make sure the actor gets the right attitude and keeps his voice consistent during his performance. This is a very common problem with animated dubbing in almost every country. The actor's concentration goes back and forth between the right attitude and the right voice. It is very difficult,



Nagare Hagiware, the speaking and singing voice of Ruber, performing in studio.

especially at the beginning of a series, to remember and control both at the same time. It is the responsibility of the VD to make sure the actor doesn't lose the desired voice. The VD must communicate the voice placement information to the actor. Another problem: the VD, most of the time, concentrates on the attitude or on

the acting side and does not help the actors in the voice characterization. One can argue that this voice characterization is so personal an approach to the actor, that only he can understand what he does. Here is where I do not agree. We need to be able to describe the voices and to explain the placement techniques. The same way a musician or a singer is able to describe a sound of a flute or a sound of a trombone and an effect like the vibrato, we should be able to describe the voice placement of any animated voice. Only then, we will be able to guide the actors and more importantly, guide them all the same way, using the same descriptions and vocabulary. How can we describe Marvin's voice? How is it different from the Tasmanian Devil's voice, for example?

Now that we know about the voice placement concept and the necessity of a vocabulary, let's try to create this vocabulary. This will be of course my proposition and like all propositions, they may not be perfect but have at least the merit of starting the process.

Voice Placement Positions

I divided arbitrarily, and based on my experience, the head in six regions or areas, organized around two lines or axes, vertical and horizontal, with the throat as the center. The vertical axis will define the high throat and the low throat and by extension, the top of the head and the very low head or chest. The horizontal axis will define the rear throat and the front of the throat. From the center (normal voice of most of the actors) throat, we can move our voice into the six areas. These six areas will give the basics of all the different characterizations.

1. The high throat (Bugs, Daffy, Tweety, etc.)

Although Bugs' and Daffy's voices are different, they are placed in the same area: the high throat. The difference comes from the effect: a nasal quality for Bugs and a lisp for Daffy. I will refer from now on to "mask" instead of nasal, which can be often misinterpreted and creates a voice of a person who has a cold (stuffed nose). We obviously want to avoid having Bugs sound like he has a cold! We'll explain later these voice effects.

2. The low throat (Taz, Sam, etc.)

Another example of two voices placed identically with different effects. This placement is used in general for big and thick voices such as Taz and Sam. Taz is full and big in the low throat and Sam is compressed in the same area creating a thick gravel effect.

3. The low head or chest (Hector, etc.)

This placement gives a pure sound compared to the placement in the low throat. Because you cannot compress your chest, this sound is big, low pitched and pure. This is used mainly for big animals or characters like dogs, monsters, etc. The actor has to feel his chest vibrating like a resonance box on a guitar. Only then is the voice placed properly. If the voice doesn't go low enough in the chest, it will still be in the low throat and give a different sound.

4. The top head (Granny, etc.)

This placement is also what singers call falsetto. The voice is pure and high pitched. Due to this extreme placement, very few effects will be possible. The falsetto gives an interesting sound, but

can also be a danger for the actors who have to do high-pitched voices. Voices like Tweety are actually placed in the high throat. I had some problems with an actress who had a tendency to go falsetto instead of raising her pitch in the throat. She was then changing her voice timber and missing Tweety's color. I had to ask her to imagine that she had a book on her head, which was helping her to keep her voice in the high throat. The "book" was setting a limit on her head that she couldn't move, thus keeping her head steady for the correct placement.

Like any serious musician knows how to change the sound of his instrument, any serious actor should be able to work with his voice the same way.

5. The front of the throat (Ed, Courage, etc.)

This placement seems to be used for the more recent characterizations. The actor has to move his voice in front of his mouth and raise his head a bit to be able to do this kind of voice. Once I had to ask an actor to take his script in his hand and place it high in front of him. His head was looking up and his mouth extended in front a bit, so he was naturally in the correct posture to position his voice. These voices are modern sounding, more from the '90s than the classic Looney Tunes, which help in defining the concept of charac-

terization. Kids like them because they sound "hip" and closer to their own natural way of speaking.

6. The back of the throat (Marvin, etc.)

This placement is not easy to do. The actor has to "feel" his voice in the rear area of his throat. To help, I ask the actor to do the same thing as when the doctor wants to see your throat and places a spoon on your tongue. The actor has to position his head slightly behind the body axis, which will help place the tongue in the right position. This placement is necessary for the unique voice placement of this character.

Effects

We are now going to review the effects that can be combined with the different placements.

1. Pitch, higher or lower voice

The variation of the natural pitch is the oldest and most basic effect an actor can do. Everyone has tried at least once to talk or sing with a higher or lower voice. This is very easy to do (within a reasonable range) and any actor should be capable of moving his pitch up or down to match the voice pitch of a character. The pitch is very important to distinguish different characters. Granny and Tweety are a good example of the importance of the pitch. Most people make this mistake and think that Tweety has a very high-pitched voice compared to Granny. This is incorrect and comparing these two voices shows us that Granny is in fact the highest in pitch. Tweety's voice has a higher throat placement with some mask effect. Granny has a higher

voice placed almost in the top head with thin gravel. If this pitch relation is not respected, the two characters will not be easily recognizable and the dubbing will lose its credibility. Of course, the attitude of these two characters (babyish for Tweety and sweet for Granny) will help to differentiate them.

An important phenomenon to check is the variation of pitch with the projection. Most of the actors' voice pitch goes lower when they are tired or when they project less. The opposite is also true and most of us will unconsciously raise our pitch by projecting more. This is a natural thing and the VD should be aware of it and correct the actor if necessary.

2. Compression, gravel

The compression of the throat (high or low areas) is one of the most common effects in animated voices. The compression creates what we'll call GRAVEL, like a granulation to the voice. The best example is Sam, who has thick gravel. But the gravel can also be thinner. Granny has thin gravel in her voice. Her voice is high but not pure. As we can see from these two examples, the compression and the pitch are independent and do not interact with each other. The compression or the act of pinching the voice can also be done gradually to create gravel from thin to thick. The more you force, or compress the voice in the throat, the thicker the gravel will be. Actors dubbing such characters as Taz or Sam with thick gravel have to rest frequently so as to not damage their voice.

3. Air in the voice

This effect is also used frequently to make actors sound

older than their real age. The same way we whisper, we can mix this flow of air with our voice to sound like an older person. The more air you mix with your voice, the older you will sound. We also have to be careful as some actors naturally put air in their voice, especially when they are tired. Our role is then to recognize the problem and ask them to project their voice more to reduce the airflow.

We just introduced another important parameter, the projection.

We need to be able to describe the voices and to explain the placement techniques.

4. Projection

This is very often confused with volume. In fact projection and volume are two different parameters of the sound of a voice. The projection can be compared to the acceleration of a car and the volume would be its speed. As we can see, the two things are very close but not quite the same. The projection will be the force with which the actor is sending his voice out of his mouth, at a low or high volume. To project more will give a voice a more dynamic and energetic attitude. At the opposite end of the spectrum, we'll ask an actor to project less to give a calmer or quieter attitude. The projection has a big influence on the attitude, as we can see.

5. Nasal quality, nose, mask area

This effect can only be used when the voice is placed in the

high throat. The nose and the mask are placed on the same horizontal axis as the high throat. We'll make a distinction between nose and mask, which will help to dissipate a very common misunderstanding. We'll define the mask as the area where the sinuses are. The nose will be the extremity of the area. These two areas create different effects. The mask is known worldwide because of Bugs, but a lot of actors who cannot separate the two areas, place their voice completely in the nose, which makes them sound like they have a cold and stuffed nose. This also makes the voice muffled and missing clarity. From now on, we'll refer to "mask" for most characterization, unless "nose" is specified.

6. Lisp

Sylvester and Daffy made this effect famous. The lisp, like compression, can be thin or thick (subtle or more pronounced). I recommend the actor put the top of their tongue on the left side of their mouth between the lips. Maybe the fact that we are generally right sided makes this side easier for everybody. (The effect created with the tongue at the center of the lips is different.) Then they have to speak and direct their voice along the tongue. The projection and the amount of air will create different lisps. More projection and more air will create a thick lisp and less projection with a little bit of air will create a thin lisp. If we listen carefully, we'll notice that Sylvester's lisp is thicker than Daffy's.

7. Recording techniques

I like to consider recording techniques and the microphone as part of the effects. The microphone works like the human ear

and everyone can discern the difference in the tone of voice between someone talking at a normal distance or very close to the ear. The voice sounds bigger, with more bass and is of course more present. The actor's position in front of the microphone can help in changing the voice. Placed close to the microphone, the voice will sound bigger, fuller and present. Further from the microphone, the voice will sound thinner but in some cases will get some ambiance of the recording room. This is an extreme example and the engineer has to be careful to not get room ambiance when it's not needed. A present voice can always be put in perspective with equalization and reverberation at the mix but the opposite is not true. The right position in front of the microphone will help the actor to get closer to his character.

Help to Perform

The voice placement technique can help us save some good actors from being rejected during casting. This was the case of Dick, a play actor in Copenhagen. At the beginning of the test, this actor was sure he couldn't do the character and was ready to leave. He didn't know how to place his voice and was very far from the voice of Eustice in *Courage*. His big voice made him think that the fragile older voice of Eustice was impossible to reach. I saw that he was very flexible and after making him compress his voice and raise his pitch, we were already much closer. At this point, and this is a classic example, he had a tendency to go too high in pitch, almost to falsetto, which made him lose his gravel. I had to tell him to keep his compressed voice placed in the high throat. He understood where



Ran Ran Suzuki, the speaking and singing voice of Kayley, steps through her vocal paces.

his voice had to be placed and did a very good Eustice. It would have been a shame to lose such a good actor, only because he was not shown how to place his voice.

As we can imagine, all these placements and effects can be mixed to create an endless number of characterizations. The little variations in placement and the amount of effect will differentiate for example Sylvester and Daffy. The voice is placed in the

same area but a bit lower in the throat with a bit of chest for Sylvester. The slightly different lisp is enough to make Sylvester and Daffy sound different and very recognizable. It is important to understand that these placements don't have clear borders. The voice can move from one area to the other with an infinite number of positions. The same way the different effects can be applied with in an infinite number of graduations. The combination of all the placements and all the effects makes characterization an art virtually without limits.

Jacques is currently Sr. Creative Executive in the Dubbing Group at Warner Bros. He is in charge of worldwide casting of all animated Warner Bros. product and oversees the dubbing group's activities. Jacques was awarded the gold medal in electro-acoustic music from the National Conservatory of Music in France, before becoming assistant professor in the Department of Music Sciences at the University of Provence. As researcher at the Music & Computer Science Laboratory of Marseilles, he continued composing electro-acoustic music. His compositions have been played in festivals in France and Spain. His former work as a researcher and his previous articles published in France on the synthesis of Jazz harmony by computer constitute the foundation of ongoing dubbing challenges at Warner Bros.

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

Atomic Betty:

Defending the Universe and Trying to Find a Home on TV

by Martin “Dr. Toon” Goodman

(Author's note: At the time of this writing, Atomic Betty was still in the initial stages of production, and negotiations for the series were in progress. The author would like to thank producer Samantha Daley and the Atomic Studio team for providing an advance look at the show. Now, here's hoping we see it on our television screens soon...)

“Intergalactic Rocket Jockey” and “Legendary Defender of the Universe” might not seem like titles one would pin on a small, red-haired moppet from Maple Street, but this sweet little girl is not what she seems. She may spend her time lost in daydreams or the pages of a sci-fi novel, but whenever galactic peace is threatened she answers the call as — *Atomic Betty!* Rocketing through the uni-

verse in her star cruiser “Blinky,” Betty, along with her companions Sparky the Martian and her faithful Robot X-5, fight for justice. Commander-in-Chief Admiral Degill of the Galactic Council must depend on Betty and crew to defend 4556.33 worlds against evil menaces such as Supreme Emperor I-Q of Lynxia — well, at least until Betty's curfew kicks in...

An Atomic Mission

If young Betty is a dreamer, she follows in the footsteps of her creators. Mauro Casalese, Olaf Miller, Trevor Bentley and Emmy Award-winner Rob Davies spent their formative years working their way through various jobs at Warner, Disney, Nelvana and DIC. Among other projects, the four-

some worked up the online series *Space Cadets* for Studio B Productions. In February of 1999, Casalese, Miller, Bentley and Davies founded Atomic Cartoons in Vancouver, British Columbia, and by mid-2000, Atomic was one of Canada's busiest animation studios, providing services to such prestigious clients as Film Roman, Cartoon Network, Warner Bros. and Sunbow Entertainment. In less than a year the young studio turned out pre-production on over 100 hours of TV animation including work on *Milo's Great Adventure*, *Edd, Ed, 'n' Eddy*, and *Courage the Cowardly Dog*. The Atomic team also launched a popular series of Web Cartoons, *Dog in a Box with Two Wheels* (which initially premiered on the Honkworm entertainment Web-site). Co-founder Olaf Miller informed *Playback* magazine (4/5/99) that, “The goal of the shop is to move into the proprietary production arena, developing shows for other studios and developing its own concepts.” Here were new worlds — and galaxies — to conquer.

The conquest began soon after Atomic Cartoons was established. “The first drawings of Betty were done in mid-2000,” recalls co-creator Trevor Bentley. “We



A superhero for our times: Betty as dreamy student by day; Defender of Justice against all evil until bedtime.

All images © Atomic Cartoons 2001.

were still at our old space when Rob (Davies) and Mauro (Casalese) first came up with the concept to do a show about a little bundle of energy. The concepts for the overall idea behind the show developed quickly. As I remember it, Rob coined the name — it was a reference to a surfer/mountain-biker term for a girl who tears it up. All four of us worked in a developmental capacity on Betty. After the initial style of character was set, Mauro and Rob did the bulk of the character design. Mauro initially sketched out a few designs and Rob threw a few in there as well. Eventually we decided on the basic character we now have.”

According to Bentley, “At Atomic we try and develop our shows in an open, ‘everybody throw out some ideas’ kind of environment. We all brainstormed the specific details and the final colors. One of our goals is to stay true to the ‘classic’ style of animation while combining it with today’s sensibilities. We love the old UPA shows of the 1950s. We really wanted to use the Chuck Jones timing and we wanted to get a touch of anime, at least as far as the pacing during the action sequences.” Casalese agreed: “I was heavily influenced by Chuck Jones. So many aspects of the designs that I did drew upon his stylings.”

Betty in many ways captures the spirit of Chuck Jones’ famous daydreamer Ralph Phillips, who starred in the 1954 Academy Award-nominated short *From A to Z-Z-Z-Z*. In this cartoon, Ralph transforms his classroom into an imaginary arena of action and adventure, driving his teacher to distraction in the process. Bentley also recalled another feature of the



Betty with her crew, Robot X-5 and Sparky the Martian, blast through the universe in their star cruiser Blinky.

character’s design: “With Betty we combined two opposite personalities; one being a shy, reserved Earth girl, and the other her space alter ego, strong and confident.” Casalese confided that: “Betty is based on a real person, but her identity will remain a secret.”

The idea, however, was too good to keep secret for long.



Trevor Bentley (top left), Rob Davies (top right), Mauro Casalese (bottom left) and Olaf Miller: The Atomic Betty brain trust.

Finding Strong Partners

In a way, Phil Roman had much in common with Atomic Cartoons. He had also founded a new production company in 1999

(Phil Roman Entertainment) with an eye on developing new animated properties. Atomic’s executive producer Samantha Daley remembers: “During one of our trips to Los Angeles we met with Phil Roman and showed him some artwork containing Betty. He was very intrigued and wanted more. We solidified a presentation pack and sent it off to him. We had a solid working relationship with Phil Roman prior to pitching the idea to him, having provided pre-production on several projects for Phil Roman Entertainment. Not only did he really like the work we provided, but he realized the quality of work Atomic Cartoons will always provide. After seeing the artwork and hearing the storyline he voiced his interest further, suggesting that we all work together on it. And thus we worked out a contract attaching Phil Roman as the executive producer on the show.”

Roman’s credentials are impeccable. In 1985 he founded Film Roman, one of the world’s foremost producers of TV anima-

tion. During his fourteen years with the company, Phil served as executive producer of *The Simpsons*, *King of the Hill*, and many of the popular *Garfield* specials; he was uniquely qualified to help prepare *Atomic Betty* for stardom.



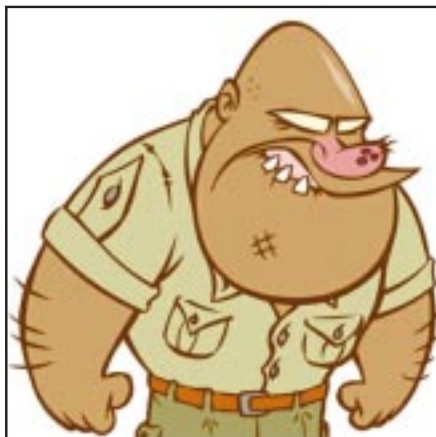
Producer Samantha Daley helped to finalize the deal with Film Roman.

The partnership was announced in June 2001. Samantha Daley told the press: "We are extremely excited to be working with Phil Roman on *Atomic Betty*. Phil is an animation guru and his experience will surely make an already great property much better." Phil Roman was equally enthusiastic: "All of us at Phil Roman Entertainment are excited about our new association with the young, energetic and talented team at Atomic Cartoons. We are delighted to be working on *Atomic Betty*, a project that is both unique and distinctive." The final handshakes were negotiated by Rick Ramirez for PRE and Cheryl Nelson for Atomic Cartoons. Betty was now ready to conquer the universe.

Going to Market

With an eye on wider exposure, the Atomic team prepared Betty's "pitch pack" for MIPCOM 2001 in Cannes, France. (MIPCOM is an international film and program market where hope-

ful producers of TV, video, film and satellite properties meet potential buyers.) Animation director Mauro Casalese worked with Atomic animators Chaz McKenna, Ridd Sorensen, Jeffrey Agala and Benson Shum to produce the three dynamic minutes of footage seen at MIPCOM Jr., where properties aimed at the children and youth markets are typically screened. As Casalese related: "I came up with the idea and storyboard. I animated along with Chaz, Jeffrey, Ridd and Benson. They also did the bulk of the compositing and assisting." The final demo, which went through several stages of development, was the result of considerable work by Casalese and his team.



Writers Dennis Heton (l) and Jono Howard fleshed out the story.

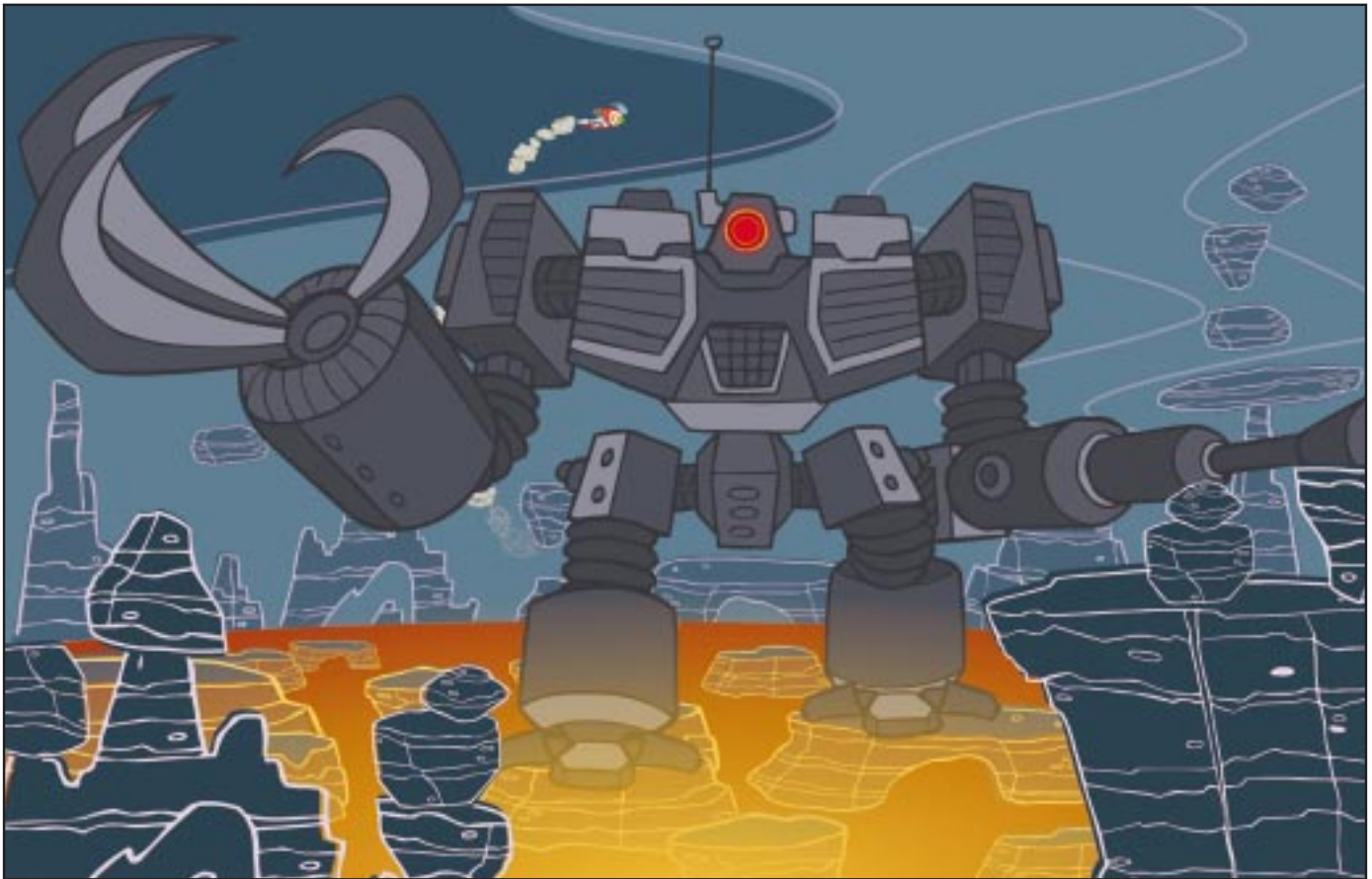
Several other Atomic artists, including background artist Warren Flanagan and designer Victor

Marchetti (who styled some of the initial character poses), helped with the early development. "Warren and Victor did some initial work on the pitch pack," says Casalese, "but I decided to go in a different direction for the background styling once the demo got underway and unfortunately some of those designs were not used." Jono Howard and Dennis Heaton came on board later as developmental writers. They really enhanced the story ideas and helped solidify the pitch pack." Trevor Bentley recalls: "We were working on a service job at the time so any development was done on the side. Sort of like reading comic books in math class at school."

The result of their efforts was an evocative demo that would give prospective buyers and investors a taste of the product to come. Betty and crew proved tasty indeed; Trevor Bentley recalls the excitement of their triumph at Cannes: "The big kick was the feedback we received at MIP Jr. and MIPCOM; Betty was the first most-viewed North American property at MIP Jr. I'd say that all the positive response has been the most enjoyable thing to date." Atomic Cartoon's showing was particularly impressive: of the 758 properties presented at MIP Jr., *Atomic Betty* was not only the North American champ, it was the third most-screened item in the entire program.

Fruits For Their Labor?

The cartoon has a winning retro look, and a quick glance reveals that the Atomic team stayed true to their inspirations. The UPA influence is strongly evident in the scene where Betty's ship weaves in and out of traffic, and some of the scenes set in I-Q's



One of the killing machines under Supreme Emperor I-Q's command.

robot factory also reflect UPA's modernist style. The transformation scenes and titles are clearly inspired by modern anime; so are the flowing combat sequences, where Betty twirls and spins from one unlucky robot to the next without missing a beat. The character designs are uniformly excellent; Betty sports a flaming red ponytail and large green eyes that suggest anime design while keeping the look of a young, all-American girl. Whether girding for battle or daydreaming in class, the character is expressive, appealing and fun to watch. Sparky the Martian is (of course) a little green man, who benefits from sharp, well-defined poses. Robot X-5 resembles a tin toy straight out of the 1950s, and thus fits in perfectly with the demo's "throw-back" style. Samantha Daley believes that Betty's appeal will be,

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well, universal: "Even though *Atomic Betty* is based on a girl, we feel the show will reach both genders because it follows one little girl's way of dealing with the unfamiliar and sometimes difficult world of childhood."

The Atomic Cartoons team is confident about facing the challenges of producing the new series. When asked how their experiences at other studios prepared them for *Atomic Betty*, Trevor Bentley replied: "All the work we have done for the big studios has led us to where we are today, so it's hard to pick out all the specific lessons we've learned. Some of the key things have been the chance to work with and learn from some really talented and experienced veterans, as well as working on critically acclaimed, award-winning shows. As far as *Betty* goes, we know all the pitfalls

of pre-production so you can bet we won't cut any corners on the model packs, boards and layouts. The timing will be taken care of here as well, so we will maintain the crisp, quick, snappy action and subtle acting that sometimes gets lost in the animation stage. I think the important thing to us was to make a show that we would want to work on and watch."

Let's hope a network executive is thinking the same thing and signing on the dotted line right now...ensuring *Atomic Betty* will reach our television screens.

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.



Illustration by Andreas Hykade.
Courtesy of Chris Robinson.

In Search Of STUFF Part 1: (F)art

by Chris Robinson

"The Word proves those first hearing it as numb to understanding as the ones who have not heard. Yet all things follow from the word."

— Heraclitus

"I am a scientist — I seek to understand me"

— "I Am A Scientist" Robert Pollard (Guided by Voices)

Okay bear with me. I'm a little behind with this whole Art thing. Everyone seems to know what art is; I hear the words thrown about with ease. I mean I always figured that there was a difference between *For The Birds* and *Breakfast on the Grass*. Seemed damn simple enough: one evokes emotions, the other challenges the mind. For me, art challenges the mind. Sensory perception is fine and dandy but it doesn't explain WHY. As Homer once said, "Why me laugh?"

Art for me is like a good dump. The natural release/reaction to what your system has experienced during the day. I like creative works that leave a stink, the natural breath of the creator. To smell is to be. Even if they stink, they're human (e.g. Ed Wood)

and that makes them better than that other stuff we call Hollywood (which I use quite sweepingly here), which ain't nothin' but a manufactured piece of plastic poop. Can't smell nuttin' (hence no SENSE/CAUSE). Taint art. Pretty easy. Done. Finito. Ka.....PUT. And hey...to put the nail home, there's the client/self split. How can anything client driven be art? How can anything personal NOT be art?

I decided there and then — while watching Jessica Fletcher — that I would try to find out just what ART is.

So all's going along well in my head until I'm reading Homer's *Iliad* and discover that it's pretty much just a Hollywood action movie. A MASSIVE war starts because of a fight over a gal and then we encounter passage after passage of gruesome violence. So what's the difference between Homer and Homer? But back to me...why can I embrace the highfalutinESS of Faulkner and

George Griffin and just as quickly run out and rent *Booty Call* or *Big Daddy* and then laugh my ass off at the stupid jokes?

Maybe I should just relax and let it go. Who cares WHY things are, they just ARE...right? Just go wherever my senses lead me... Sorry...it's not enough to know that Bubblicious tastes good, I need to know WHY it tastes good (childhood flashbacks? Specific flavour that is NOT in Hubba Bubba? Present chewing location?).

Last week while watching *Murder, She Wrote* — the early seasons are great because Lansbury was willing to let her annoying character have the piss taken out of her by other characters — oh yeah...so been reading a lot of Greek philosophy and turns out that Plato and Aristotle were saying some things about art and one of my sortofpals recommended Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. I decided there and then — while watching Jessica Fletcher — that I would try to find out just what ART is.

Plato's Take

Okay I'm back. It's a day later. While I was gone I finished the rest of Plato's *Republic* and

wouldn't ya know he's got a few not so mild things to say about art. Plato was quite a moral fellow and believed in a divine order to the universe. The pursuit of wisdom and knowledge was for him the ULTIMATE goal. So he pretty much shunned art because it is imitative and the only works to be permitted in his ideal state would be those that honoured the gods or famous guys. Why? Well because imitative art produces merely a semblance of reality. As such it is false — see NATURE was itself a semblance of the DIVINE reality (or for us non-believers...we could say that NATURE is the reality and HUMAN nature a COPY and then Art a copy of that copy) — so if I paint a picture of a man — it is 2 notches below reality/truth — whereas if you paint a nice fine picture of the big man you're I guess a notch from truth and that's better for everyone.

But no cold chump he, Plato breaks down and admits that he'd still allow imitative art in his ideal state because of its charm and sensual pleasure — now hold on — doesn't this upset the WHOLE damn book since Plato is constructing an ideal state and if you start letting a few bozos in — sorry that's for another time.

Hey...speaking of the senses, I'm being overwhelmed by Jerry Lee Lewis: *Mercury Years, Volume Two 1969-72*, some scorching country/gospel/rock tunes that are imitative of no one but the devil himself. Check it out.

— so yeah...Plato's view of art is limited but he clearly allows that there are two aims of art: emotional and intellectual. So that's good news for you Hollywood fans.

Aristotle Has Some Ideas...

Okay. Next. Aristotle.

Another day has passed. I finished Aristotle's *Poetics* and an overview of the man in Copleston's *History of Philosophy Vol. 1* (you should be reading THIS nine volume series instead of that damn hotel drawer fairy tale). Aristotle's got a bit more to say about art than Plato, but again I guess it's important to remember that these are less theories of art then reflections on the art of the time, as such the *Poetics* is MOSTLY just a "How To Make Poetry/Drama/Comedy" (the comedy part was lost) book. Outside of a few bits on the origin of poetry and the idea of universality, *Poetics* don't help me much at this stage of the game 'cause I'm trying to figure out what ART is and why we do it.

Plato's view of art is limited but he clearly allows that there are two aims of art: emotional and intellectual.

Aristotle touches on some good stuff in *Poetics* about the origins of mimesis (imitation) and expands that in *Metaphysics*. Buddy boy says that we long to KNOW. As children we learn (via our senses) through imitation. This is indicated through the reaction of our senses. The eyes (especially) produce recognition and recognition helps us to differentiate between things (e.g. trees from water). Through repetition we become familiar with the world. Familiarity brings pleasure 'cause we ain't so out to lunch no more.

The key to this is memory. We learn from memory. From memory comes experience. Experience CAN produce knowledge and skill. Skill comes from many experiences. A general assumption is formed. For example, I have a headache. Experience tells me that by taking an aspirin I will relieve myself of the headache. However I do not possess the skill to explain WHY the aspirin achieves this effect. Skill involves knowing WHY. In short...experience knows THAT but not the BECAUSE. Skill or *tekhnê* (Greek for craft or art) grasps the BECAUSE.

SO...art is a sort of expansion of what we experience and is produced for necessity (a bed, plate, cup), pleasure (a picture, toy) and knowledge (mathematics, philosophy).

Nietzsche's Two Thoughts...

Let's skip ahead in time to Mr. Nietzsche. In *Birth of Tragedy*, the little pastor says that we can divide art into two streams: Apollinian and Dionysian. The former is a subjective individual approach that seeks beauty and a higher form (i.e. how the world SHOULD BE), while Dionysian is a more objective form that shows "the incompletely intelligible everyday world" (which...umm...is still a subjective viewpoint). So certainly we can see how the Hollywood system strives for the Apollinian form of harmony and order (EVERY Hollywood product is based on a classical narrative system that gives stability-disruption-resolution-closure or what is the Aristotelian notion of completeness), whereas some like Phil Mulloy and Ryan Larkin are slightly more Dionysian in that there is no sense of completeness, harmony, but more a concern with

showing the world as it IS. The audience is left ALONE to figure out the “incompletely intelligible.”

Yet this system doesn't quite work because animation is by very definition limited to the boundaries of its technological infrastructure (material of film/video/digital, camera — and the speed, aperture, framing — and projector — and projection-ist). As such no animators are truly chaotic and wild. Certainly cameraless animators are (to use the Plato ratio) a step or two closer to the reality/disorder but they still rely on film. Of course, with that hardcore logic...painting, literature and music have SOME whisper of a structure. The only truly free arts would be speaking, singing and dancing. Cha Cha Cha!

Mercenary Art is a disagreeable occupation that attracts someone mostly because of the pay cheque.

It gets more confusing when you see that Nietzsche says that individualism is commonly Apollinian whereas the loss of self into oneness is Dionysian (like when you're stoned) BUT clearly the Hollywood system in fact diverts the individual into the illusion of a form of oneness through its production of films that it thinks will reach a UNIVERSAL audience (as opposed to the particular — although it relies on the illusion of the particular/unique experience to sell merchandise) and through its use of tragic/comic models seeks to EVOKE a general emo-

tional reaction from the audience. Whereas the Dionysian reps like, say Ryan Larkin or David Ehrlich, make films from an individual perspective for the pleasure of the ACT itself (i.e. little care for audience). Furthermore in showing the world as it IS, the Dionysian artist is seeking an understanding of this state while leaving the audience to do the same individually. Some would say this is self-absorbed but clearly Hollywood does not REALLY give a shit about the audience (as individuals) whereas MANY (not all) of these apparent Dionysian folks DO actually care about individual perspectives.

Sooooooooo the way I see it...Apollinian offers universal types to present the world as the Artist thinks it *should be* using examples of BETTER or WORSE, which then evoke emotions from the audience and give them a feeling of oneness. Whereas the Dionysian shows the world as the Artist thinks it *is*, warts and all and leaves the audience to sort it out for themselves.

A-ha! Kant Has A Point

Let's see what that pissant Kant has to say. In the *Critique of Judgement*, he talks briefly about what Art is. First, he separates it from nature (art is work, nature is effect) and ESSENTIALLY says that art is work by man (which means that ALL humans are works of art — except that grade 9 French teacher who wanted to touch me in odd places). He then distinguishes Art from craft and science. Science knows. Art can know. (What about science films like *Haemorrhoids*, a 20-minute film depicting the removal of IT from someone's hairy red ass? Is this science or art?) Art is Free Art. Craft

is Mercenary Art. (Ah...hold up...now we're getting somewhere!) Mercenary Art is a disagreeable occupation that attracts someone mostly because of the pay cheque. So could we not say that MOST kids who go to school to LEARN how to be a big studio artist are in fact NOT artists (but craftsmen) because they have a specific purpose to make money (check out those discussions groups where some youngin' asks, “How much should an entry level animator make?”) and gain recognition (e.g. being ACCEPTED in a school and then a studio)? In Free Arts, the artist creates for the sake of creating. Fame and fortune are secondary. The primary pleasure comes from the act of creation (oops...sorry...production). THEN again...the free artist seeks grants, subsidies and has screenings, readings, openings...so is that not tinged with fame and fortune as well? And anyway...from what I've seen, the kids at Pixar (for example) are MIGHTY content whereas I've encountered a lot of 'free' artists working in miserable/disagreeable conditions.

In Free Arts, the artist creates for the sake of creating.

Immanuel breaks it down further. He says that within Free Art, there is mechanical art (making an object actual like say a bicycle or car) and aesthetic art (seeks to arouse a feeling of pleasure). Within aesthetic art Kant locates fine and agreeable art. Fine art “further the culture of our mental powers to (facilitate) social communication.” The pleasure of fine

art stems from reflection rather than "mere sensation." Agreeable art seeks to provide merely enjoyment in the moment...and does not serve as material for future meditation or quotation.

Okay...everything's art...but this doesn't explain why we love and loathe.

Now initially I thought I'd found a home for Hollywood... but clearly this category doesn't fit either because one thing Hollywood does not want is momentary un-meditative enjoyment. They want the audience to remember through quotations, merchandising, repeat screenings, etc... It's a system that feeds off our tendency toward unreflective sense prioritizing: "It made me laugh (or cry). I want to laugh again." It's still very much in keeping with Kant's claim that agreeable art only provides "agreeable noise" that keeps minds in a cheerful mood (sort of like Prozac). But hey...whatever the make-up of agreeable art, it's quite clear (sort of) that superficial or otherwise, it is art and ANYWAY a boatload of make-work academics have reflected on Keanu Reeves; so much for the moment.

Let's stop there. We've pretty much got a sense now of WHY we make art (imitation/improvement) and WHAT art is (virtually anything made by humans including you, me and your Grandma). Despite my assumptions, *Monsters Inc.*, Hot Wheels, bobbleheads, Britney Spears and Ikea furniture are ALL Art. Hollywood may be a robotic assembly line, not to mention a

technological based medium, but these systems were designed (and accepted) by/for people, so THEY be Art too. You are what you eat, so I guess we get the system we deserve. Hey...s'good enough for me cause not only is *Murder, She Wrote* art (which makes me feel far less guilty), but so am I.



Okay...everything's art...but this doesn't explain why we love and loathe. I guess judgement helps us differentiate between Plympton, Pixar and Pollock (alliteration...heh heh. Is that art? Guess so). But what is judgement (and taste) and how is it formed? Well...as they used to say on Hammy Hamster (is that one notch below truth in so far as it uses ACTUAL animals — if so does that mean that all real animal and nature films are in fact the highest forms of art?)..."That's another story."

Next Month: Part 2: Yummy and Yucky

Squirrel Facts

Squirrels are common rodents that have hairy tails and strong hind legs. There are over 200 different species of squirrels that live in a variety of habitats.

Chris Robinson is but a man. His hobbies include squirrel taunting, meat dancing and elderly peeping. You can find the results at <http://asifa.net/robinson>

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DEITCH ON PINTOFF

by Gene Deitch

When Gene Deitch joined Terrytoons in 1956 he brought into the studio a number of new faces. Ernie Pintoff was one...

Flebus was created by Ernie Pintoff, another new talent I had recruited. He came in from UPA Hollywood. He originally called the character "Willy," but I didn't think that name funny enough. On my way to work one day I heard a talk on my car radio about the disease, Phlebitis. Never having suffered from the pain of that ailment, I thought the word was funny, and suggested the name Flebus as a funny and original non-sequiter name. Ernie suddenly left the studio while the film was still in the early pencil test stage, so I had to take over and finish it according to the color models Ernie had left. Jim Tyer did some of the funniest animation in the film, and of course it was a totally new image for Terrytoons. Weiss hated it.

Ernie was a "Rara Avis" in the Terrytoons studio. He had little to talk about with the majority of the old guard, and pretty much kept to himself in his little director's cubicle.

He always had his trumpet with him at work and would play the blues while waiting for inspiration. Of course I didn't care how crazy or other-worldly he seemed to the older animators. What was important to me was the new breath of creativity he brought to the place. One animator with whom he bonded, and who



Flebus by Ernie Pintoff. Artwork courtesy of ASIFA-Hollywood.

caught the challenge Ernie presented, was Jim Tyer. As I said, Jim did the key animation on *Flebus*.

I was saddened when Ernie suddenly decided to leave. I took over the *Flebus* project, and even over Bill Weiss's dead body, I was determined to see it brought to completion just as Ernie had laid it out. I still feel it was one of our landmark productions at CBS-Terrytoons (1957).

You can read more about Gene's time at Terrytoons by reading *How To Succeed In Animation (Don't Let A Little Thing Like Failure Stop You!)*. An AWN exclusive.

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

Gene Deitch is one of the last surviving members of the original Hollywood UPA studio of 1946 and the instigator of the CBS-Terrytoon "renaissance" of 1956-1958. He was also: 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, President of Gene Deitch Associates, Inc. New York, 1958-1960, Creative Director for Rembrandt Films, 1960-1968, and star director for Weston Woods Studios, Inc., Weston, Connecticut, 1968-1993. He has worked for over 40 years with the Prague animation studio, "Bratri v Triku."



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Taxed to the Max

Pamela Kleibrink Thompson

“ In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.”

Most people know that quote from Benjamin Franklin. We may feel robbed when paying taxes to the government, but we tax ourselves much worse with some insidious habits.

The Laziness Tax

Franklin noted, “Idleness taxes us much more,” than the government. You only have so many hours in a day. How much time do you spend watching television, playing video games and Internet surfing? These distractions can consume a lot of time. If you are putting off tweaking an animation by playing your favorite computer game, you have to examine your priorities. Why tax yourself?

Work on your dreams every day. Franklin states, “Time is money.” Use it to do what you want and to get what you want. If you dream of being an animator, work on drawing, on your demo reel, or a new animation. If you dream of being a writer, work at it. Write every day. Californian author Carolyn See’s working motto is: “A thousand words a day and one charming note.”



Pamela Kleibrink Thompson

The Attitude Tax

Energy is another precious resource that can be taxed heavily by discouraging people. Your enthusiasm can soon be sapped by negativity, so hang out with encouraging people — people who support your goals. Do your friends think it’s cool that you want to be a voice over actor or do they think you are being silly? Your time is precious, spend it with people who are supportive. People who discourage you erode your resolve. Why do you think they are described as “taxing?”

The Consumption Tax

Your earnings are often taxed much more by consumer

debt than by the government. Franklin wrote, “Buy what thou hast no need of, and ere long thou shalt sell thy necessities.” Spending foolishly is a tax on your income and your future. The next time you see something you want, make sure you can afford it. Ask yourself, will it help you reach your goals? Do you really need it?

The first line in chairman and CEO of Viacom Sumner Redstone’s autobiography *A Passion to Win* is: “I don’t splurge much in my life.” Mr. Redstone is one of the wealthiest men in the world.

The Short Term Gains Tax

Franklin pointed out, “Think what you do when you run in Debt, you give to another power over your liberty.” Buying anything you don’t need is a tax on your earnings and your future.

We may feel robbed when paying taxes to the government, but we tax ourselves much worse with some insidious habits.

If you are working just for money and think you can’t afford to pursue your dream job, think about the price you are paying. Financial freedom, or liberty as Franklin puts it, is vital to pursuing your dreams. Free yourself of those golden handcuffs.

Sumner Redstone took a big pay cut when he resigned from his partnership at a law firm

to help his father in his business, the Northeast Theater Corporation. In 1954, his earnings dropped from over \$100,000 a year to only \$5,000. But his decision to learn about the entertainment business had a huge impact in his life and his wallet in both the short term (fewer gains) and long term (incredible wealth). Would you be willing to take that kind of risk?

When filling out your tax returns this year, realize that government taxes may impact your wallet, but your habits can impact your life and be much more

taxing, whether through laziness or doubt, consumer debt, or short term thinking. Don't put your life on hold waiting for a better break or the right time to pursue what you want to do. Take a tip from Redstone, "Life begins whenever you want it to begin." Begin it now.

Resources:

Autobiography and Other Writings by Benjamin Franklin, edited by Russel B. Nye.

A Passion to Win by Sumner Redstone with Peter Knobler.

Pamela Kleibrink Thompson is a recruiter, career coach, curriculum consultant and columnist. She helps clients define goals and devise strategies to attain them. She speaks regularly at schools and national conferences on career and work related issues.

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

ANIMATION WORLD

• MAGAZINE •

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:

Maya Training Solutions

Don't work in a studio or live next to a school but want to learn Maya? John Edgar Park offers a solution and reviews the best Maya training videotapes around. The online version of this article includes a movie clip of one of the training videos:

http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=pageone&article_no=1349

Atomic Betty: Defending the Universe and Trying to Find a Home on TV

So you think selling a show is easy? Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman goes behind the scenes of Atomic Cartoons to see how much work and time goes into getting a show off the ground. Watch a trailer for Atomic Betty from the online version of this article:

http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=all&sort=date&article_no=1346

Fresh from the Festivals: March 2002's Film Reviews

Jon Hofferaman reviews five short films fresh from the festival circuit: *Aria* by Pjotr Sapegin, *Hubert's Brain* directed by Wild Brain's Phil Robinson, Oscar Grillo's *Shadow Cycle*, *The Snowman*, directed by Lane Nakamura of Duck Soup Studios, and Dave Unwin's *War Game*, produced by The Illuminated Film Company. Includes QuickTime movie clips! The online version includes QuickTime movie clips at:

http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=all&sort=date&article_no=1337

Tips on Becoming an Animation Producer

by Gerard Raiti

The animation industry, like much of the entertainment business, is hard to break into. Despite the various credentials one might have tagged across a résumé, there are few written qualifications that can easily land one a job in the animation industry, especially in production. The situation is even bleaker for younger individuals who do not have experience in the field. Even with an undergraduate degree, MBA or Animation MFA, there are no academic programs in the country that provide an education for would-be producers of animation. The closest academic options are undergraduate and graduate programs in animation; however, those are tailored mostly for artists. Some West coast universities offer graduate programs in producing, like the University of Southern

California's Peter Stark Producing Program, but none are geared specifically toward animation. So alas, it is quite an academic conundrum to become an animation producer.

"It is easier for the cream to rise to the top in a small studio than to go through all the levels in a large company."

– Jeff Fino

Start Small

In order to discern the best way to get a job producing animation, *Animation World Magazine* has interviewed the executives most responsible for hiring at several smaller animation studios, namely: Duck Soup Studios, Renegade Animation and Wild Brain. While many ambitious students may yearn to produce shorts and animated features at the likes of Disney, DreamWorks and Pixar, beginning one's producing career at a smaller studio is arguably better due to their faster production schedules of shorter projects like commercials. Jeff Fino, co-founder and executive producer of Wild Brain, advocates the advantages of smaller studios: "Producing commercials is much faster than producing cartoons or

features. It is swift and it is crazy and it is rewarding, but it is eight to twelve weeks. The best sports analogy is the sprint versus the marathon. You have to be well conditioned to do both. Commercials are great because they teach you a variety of styles. On any given day, you could be doing radically different stuff... Not to mention that it is easier for the cream to rise to the top in a small studio than to go through all the levels in a large company."

Of course, if one had the



Jeff Fino of Wild Brain advises job seekers to start out at a small company in an entry position and then work through the ranks. Photo credit: Julia Tortolani, Wild Brain, Inc.



A frame from a Rice Krispies spot entitled *Billboard* from Renegade Animation. © Kellogg. Ad agency: Leo Burnett, Chicago, IL.

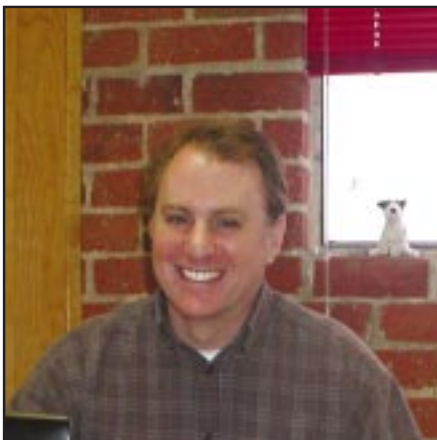


Duck Soup at work. Photo courtesy of Duck Soup Studios.



Ashley Postlewaite of Renegade warns newcomers to brace themselves for a bumpy ride. Photo courtesy of Renegade Animation.

ideal academic credentials (even though an MFA in Animation Production does not yet exist), the most important qualification for both large and small studios is experience. Another facet to the conundrum of becoming an animation producer is the adage associated with getting experience: No matter for what job you are searching, you cannot get a job without experience and you cannot get experience without getting a job. Again, it is the chicken and the egg problem. (I still question why Chuck Jones never made a Looney Tunes short on that subject.) Nevertheless, when you set off in search of experience,



Mark Medernach of Duck Soup suggests that job hunters polish their people skills. Photo courtesy of Duck Soup Studios.



A scene from *Naptime*, a series in development at Wild Brain. Image courtesy of Wild Brain, Inc.

namely your first job or internship at an animation studio, there are three abstracts that will help distinguish you from the herd of other applicants: an organized and diligent work ethic, connections and luck.

Timing Is Everything

The easiest of the three to explain is luck. The animation industry is a business based on the economic consumerism of supply and demand. So for small studios in particular, the amount of animation jobs is dependent on the studio's workload. At any given time, a small studio could go from a maximum capacity of work to near stagnation. According to Mark Medernach, executive producer at Duck Soup: "There is not as much work out there as there was three years ago, but that does not mean there are not jobs out there. Hard work and persistence is going to get you the work. The economy is weaker right now, so people are less inclined to spend money on animation."

Consequently, depending on the national economic scene when you submit your résumé or make an inquiry at a studio could determine whether you get a job. Ashley Postlewaite, executive producer at Renegade, concurs saying: "Everything is cyclical. The whole economy is nuts right now. It only makes sense that the animation industry is part of that. It always goes up and down, so you have to be prepared to weather the downtime."

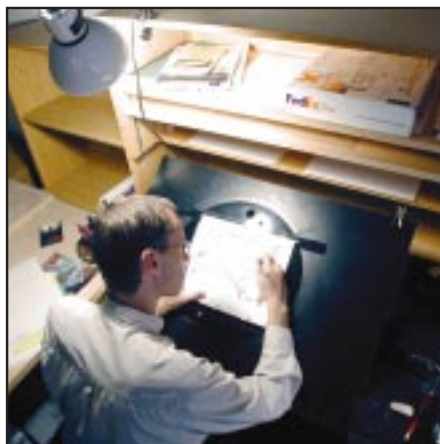
Even if one is lucky and finds some job openings at studios, according to Jeff Fino: "Getting the proverbial first foot in the door is sometimes the hardest part of getting into the business." All three studios recommend taking any job available at a studio and trying to work your way up. Mark Medernach adds: "If you want to produce and you are stuck with clerical work, make sure everyone knows that producing is what you want to do eventually."

If you are at a good company, the staff will help you out."

Jeff Fino advocates similar ideas for starting at the bottom and working your way up: "Do not expect to start at a level that is too high. Animation more than many businesses requires you to do a bit of an apprenticeship to learn the process. It does not matter if you are an artist or a producer. You have to prove yourself. If you are an artist, show that you have the talent. If you are a producer, show you have the wherewithal to make a highly collaborative process work. You in essence become one link in that chain, and you have to prove that you are strong with the other links. The good side to that is that your talents are recognized quickly and your value is judged pretty fast. Good people can rise up through the ranks in relatively short order."



SpongeBob SquarePants appears in the New Home spot for Target by Renegade Animation. © Target. Ad agency: The Martin Agency, Richmond, VA.



Wild Brain's Dan McHale at work. Photo credit: Julia Tortolani, Wild Brain, Inc.

It's Not What You Know...

Connections can really help getting that first job or internship. Of course, being connected does not mean that your father is John Lasseter, though that probably would help. One can build connections simply from meeting recruiters at job fairs or establishing a professional rapport by phone with individuals at a studio when inquiring about work. "If you call a small studio and there is no work available there, mark your calendar and in six months time call again," suggests Ashley Postlewaite. "Don't give up. My current assistant called for months before we had a position available for her. At that stage, she was the first person to come to mind because she had been so interested and thorough in following up with us. You should not stalk people, but there is an appropriate every-couple-of-months check in time. Find somewhere that will hire you at any level. Keep your eyes and ears open and work your way up. I would encourage people not to give up."

"The more people skills you have, the better off you will be."

— Mark Medernach

One of the problems of getting a job as an animation producer is that the job itself is rather vague in its responsibilities. Unlike the live-action film industry, animation producers are essentially the middlemen; they are the captains of their respective projects, and their responsibility is to be the glue that holds together every aspect of production. Consequently, one's

organizational and people skills are the bedrock of being a good animation producer. For Mark Medernach: "The best thing is someone who is well organized and has a good phone manner. Those are the two key elements. If someone has a strong animation background, that is a real plus, but organization is the biggest thing. I cannot stress that enough. It is a people business. The more people skills you have, the better off you will be."

A Can-Do Attitude

Irrespective of my earlier harangue on the necessity of experience, Jeff Fino is not in full agreement: "Experience is not at the top of my list. It is relevant for sure, but I think intelligence, organization and enthusiasm are all great qualities that a producer should have. Animation is a bit more specialized. It helps to have some experience, but if you find

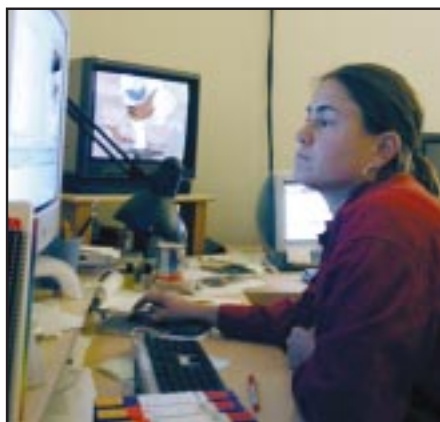


Vanilla Pudding is another project being developed by Wild Brain. Image courtesy of Wild Brain, Inc.



The Snowman, Duck Soup's first fully CGI animated short film, online. This marks the company's departure from the commercial advertising world. © 2001, Duck Soup Studios.

somebody who is exceptionally smart and enthusiastic about what they are doing, with the proper amount of instruction you can make them into a great producer.”



Avid editor Ellen Schade at Wild Brain.
Photo credit: Julia Tortolani,
Wild Brain, Inc.

Careers in animation and most of the arts are eclectic. A certain amount of unbridled enthusiasm and love for the genre is mandatory and should be expressed during interviews. One cannot devote one's life to a facet of the arts without love for it. Consequently, experience in any of the arts can be beneficial to working in animation. "A love for animation helps," Ashley Postlewaite explains. "Skills in either animation or computer animation can also help a producer. I came from live theatre fourteen years ago, but I was always in the arts producing and I was able to make that transition. I hope others could make that transition as well."

Becoming an animation producer is difficult, especially these days. If you do not live in California, you are at a clear disadvantage in terms of networking at conferences and being forced to relocate in the summer if you find an internship. All of the small studios failed to mention that finding a paying internship is nearly

impossible. Consequently, moving to California for a summer while not being paid is not financially pragmatic for most students. A better alternative when looking for a paying summer position is to inquire about summer employment rather than internships. Another downside to summer internships is that in order to receive credit at most universities, you will be forced to pay the university comparable tuition for the summer hours earned. Therefore, in addition to losing money on rent and relocating, you may have the added burden of paying up to several thousand dollars in tuition.



Renegade Animation's work is seen in this spot called *He's Not a Freak*.
© Target. Ad agency: The Design Guys,
Minneapolis, MN.

Considering the difficulties in becoming an animation producer, why would anyone want to subject oneself to such an ordeal? Despite being a neophyte in this regard, it is fair to say that it is for the same reason that people yearn to be musicians, Broadway dancers, economic analysts, sports commentators, talk show hosts, and even doctors. The paths to success are not easy. Few roads are simple. If you want to become an animation producer and you work hard enough, you will find a

way to achieve that. Being hired by Disney cannot be harder than getting into Harvard Medical School. Everyone who wants to go the distance must face a challenge along the way. The animation industry is no exception to the rule.

Gerard Raiti is a junior at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee where he is majoring in English, Music and Computer Science. He grew up in Baltimore, Maryland and has spent extended periods in England and Australia. He was recently employed by the law firm of Brown, Goldstein & Levy where he assisted in the federal trial of Brenner v. Johns Hopkins University (CCB-97-313). He holds the diploma of The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, U.K. in classical piano. He has been writing about animation for various publications since 1997 because he loves animation and all things Disney.

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Not The NATPE We Remember

by Adam Snyder

"It's not what it used to be," rues Marie-Christine Dufour, senior vice president of marketing and communications at the Canadian animation company, CinéGroupe. "Where were all the celebrities, the free lunches, the giveaways?"

Dufour and more than ten thousand others who attended this year's NATPE television conference in Las Vegas last January are lamenting more than just a lack of pizzazz. "NATPE has been changing for the past few years, but this year the change was more drastic than at any other time I can remember," explains Dufour. "There were many more sellers than buyers and that's not the kind of show we're looking for. If it continues the way it's going, we'd very seriously consider whether to attend."

Breaking Point

When NATPE — the National Association of Television Programming Executives — had its first conference in 1964 it was within a totally different television landscape, dominated by three broadcast networks and hundreds of television stations making their own independent buying decisions. Syndicators and the major studios spent millions on elaborate booths, food and entertainment in order to woo individual stations and station groups in the hopes of selling them their talk show, game show, drama or comedy. But those days are long gone. With the rise of Fox, WB! and UPN,



The convention floor at NATPE 2002 just wasn't the same as in previous years.
Courtesy of NATPE.

independent stations have virtually disappeared. In their place, smaller production and distribution companies, many from Latin America, have filled the void, making for a very different NATPE.

"For years the major studios have threatened to bail on NATPE, and this year they finally made good on their promise," explains Greg Kimmelman, president of the distribution company Global Telemedia, who has been attending NATPE for more than a decade. Indeed, this year the studios abandoned the convention floor for suites at the Venetian Hotel, a long taxi cab ride away. The result was long lines at the Venetian's elevator banks, missed meetings, and feet even more tired than usual.

"In terms of getting my business done, seeing the people I needed to see, it was fine," says Mary Bredin, Director, Acquisitions and Programming, Worldwide



Mary Bredin, Director, International Acquisitions and Programming for Walt Disney Television International, was just one of the many who found the convention to be disorganized this year.

Programming Strategy, Walt Disney Television International. "But in terms of organization, what a mess. I went to my first NATPE on a broken leg and got around on a little wheeler. I could have used one this time."

Two Separate Worlds

"Having two separate NATPEs was weird," agrees Vincent Ferri, MIFA Manager of the Annecy Animation Festival, which had a small booth on the convention floor. "On the one hand, some companies that exhibited in the French pavilion were disappointed because they wanted to interact with the majors, and that was more difficult than in past years. On the other hand, of course they will continue to come to NATPE because it is now a recognized meeting place for selling programs to both the U.S. and Latin America."



Joan Borsten of Films by Jove took the Venetian route. Courtesy of Joan Borsten.

Joan Borsten, president of Films by Jove which distributes classic Russian animation, skipped

last year's NATPE after a bad experience the year before, and this year took a suite at the Venetian. "Two years ago in New Orleans the convention center was a football stadium and the animation wing was in Timbuktu," she said. "The people walking by were from local stations in Dallas and Omaha, not the international broadcasters who buy Russian animation. At the Venetian we were able to have all our meetings comfortably, and the traffic from the majors was usually the kind of people we want to meet."

Borsten also cites cost as a major reason for preferring the Venetian. Instead of paying for a booth and a place to stay, Films by Jove rented a suite for four days where they held their meetings. "It cost us \$1,200 instead of \$5,000," Borsten explains. "Multiply that by 200 and you see how much the majors saved."

For some, however, the shrinking of NATPE isn't necessarily a negative. Greg Kimmelman thought that the absence of the majors actually made it easier for him to do business. "A lot of the buyers I met with had already finished their business with the majors, so by the time they got to the convention floor they weren't distracted by the typical hoopla. They were receptive and kept their appointments on time. Sure, the show wasn't as glitzy and as fun as it used to be, but it was a very productive show for me."

Others simply think that NATPE will settle down into a more intimate show more along the lines of MIP and MIPCOM. "With a lot of the big American networks not there, it was even more like MIP, with more of a concentration on international business and co-productions," says

Richard Winkler, executive producer at the New York-based independent animation studio, Curious Pictures. "It's a little sad I suppose that NATPE is becoming less significant, but for us it is still a good place to meet with people."



For Richard Winkler of Curious Pictures, there was still something to be gained from attending NATPE. Courtesy of Curious Pictures.

Something Must Change

No one, however, particularly wants a repeat of this year's split convention/Venetian Hotel experience. In addition to the inconvenience of the two venues, total attendance fell a whopping 50% to 10,125, down from 20,348 in 2001. Beth Braen, NATPE's Senior Vice President for Marketing, tries to explain away the dramatic drop-off by pointing to the poor economy and the fact that so many new media companies disappeared from the face of the earth in 2001. "Attendance last year was an all time high," she explains. "The drop-off isn't as dramatic as it first appears."

But the numbers don't lie, and the 50% drop was noticeable at every turn. All sorts of suggestions are currently being bandied about so as not to repeat the confusion at this year's convention,



NATPE is open to suggestions on how to improve its annual meeting.
Courtesy of NATPE.

and to boost convention traffic. On the one side is complete anarchy represented by Warner Bros. president Dick Robertson, who has been quoted as questioning the need for NATPE altogether. He has suggested a smaller programming gathering in Los Angeles in November and an advertiser-related meeting in March in New York.

But few people honestly believe that NATPE will not survive as an annual event, and a NATPE organization strategic task force will soon announce its recommendations on how to bring the studios back to the convention floor. "NATPE is scheduled to be held at the convention center in New Orleans next year, and it

would be financially untenable to get out of that commitment," says Braen. "But beyond that, we are open to all suggestions."

Braen is counting on the fact that thousands of independent producers and distributors rely on NATPE as the equivalent of MIP and MIPCOM, but with some important differences. "There is less and less difference between MIP and NATPE," Disney's Bredin points out. "I can't see everyone even at three markets, and NATPE is particularly good for seeing companies from Latin America."

Adam Snyder is president of Rembrandt Films, an animation company currently working on a program on the history of animation to be aired on the Bravo cable television channel in the United States.

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THE ANIMATION FLASH

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NATPE - One Man's Opinion

by Eric Oldrin



NATPE 2002: A smaller floor than usual. Images courtesy of NATPE.

I've been to a few entertainment gatherings and for the most part, they're pretty much what you'd expect. There's this spectrum of seriousness, ranging from festival to convention and it's usually not hard to tell what an event is trying to be.

Arriving with an Intent

The week before my trip to NATPE, I had attended the Future Film Festival in Italy. Though tragically disorganized, they did manage to put together a nice collection of screenings and conversations. They delivered what they had promised. And, despite my bizarre return on Lufthansa, during which the 'head steward' demanded I surrender my precious window seat to a full-paying passenger, I landed in Las Vegas in good spirits. NATPE was sure to be rewarding. By no means some casual festival, this was a serious

market and I had come to sell my show.

I should make a disclaimer that I wasn't selling your average property. Our company focuses on interactive narrative and Flash-for-broadcast productions. I was mainly interested in the iTV market and the broadcast animation world. However, I attended the seminars and stopped into the booths, so I got a good sense of the event in general.

Now maybe it was just the economic climate but it seemed like everybody at the convention had the same intention: to sell. I'd been warned this might be the case but this was pretty pathetic. The conversations in the cafes, the presentations in the booths and the bets at the tables were all from a sea of creatives. At a festival, that's pretty cool. At a convention, built on the pretense of a market, it's no fun. To make matters worse,

if not ironic, I was surrounded by seminars boasting the secret of the perfect pitch and by gladiator-like competitions pitting desperate writers against each other in battles of elevator conversation. (Heck, if you're going to throw a party and invite a bunch of guys, don't insult us by acting like you know how to pick-up chicks.)

Luckily, I had already set up a nice handful of meetings. That's the obvious strategy for any event, but in this case it was especially necessary. Those meetings went well but I wouldn't say that NATPE was at all necessary for them to happen. It was a coincidental backdrop.

Slim Opportunities

Like I mentioned, I was focused on interactive narrative and spent a good deal of time at those sorts of seminars and in their so-called "Digital Town." Unfortunately, the seminars were mired in the same technology-focused rhetoric that seems to prevail when traditional entertainment executives begin to explore that landscape. It's almost as if they're hiding their confusion under a pile of platform politics. I was hoping to hear how they were moving ahead with new types of entertainment, revolutionary formats and millennial narratives. Alas, I learned about Tivo instead.

Digital Town was a cool idea but there were so few participants that it was hard to make any real connections. Again, the com-



A festival or a market? There was a lot of talk, but not so much action...

I had some great conversations and met some nice people but there was not much professional progress to be made.

panies that were represented were selling and mostly selling technology, not content. I had some great conversations and met some nice

people but there was not much professional progress to be made.

In general, I found the opportunities to sell very thin and the margin for learning very generic. The situation was compounded by the fact that all the major studios had decided to parcel off their participation in a separate hotel, in private rooms like an aloof aristocracy. In the end, I found the greatest successes were with the people I already knew. Festivals and conventions are always a great excuse to see old friends and Vegas is certainly a unique and fun forum.

So, next year, if you go — don't expect too much. If you're new to the industry, it's a great place to get an overview. If you're not, you're sure to connect with old colleagues. On the spectrum of seriousness, it's a festival wrapped in a patina of a conven-

tion. Unless, of course, your booth's over in that other hotel.

Eric Oldrin is president of Telepathic Transmissions, an entertainment production company dedicated to the exploration of new interactive formats and the digital perfection of traditional animation. Prior to Telepathic, he was senior producer at AtomShockwave, where he developed much of their key content, including Tim Burton's Stainboy and David Lynch's Dumbland. Eric holds a BA in Philosophy from Pomona College and lives in San Francisco.

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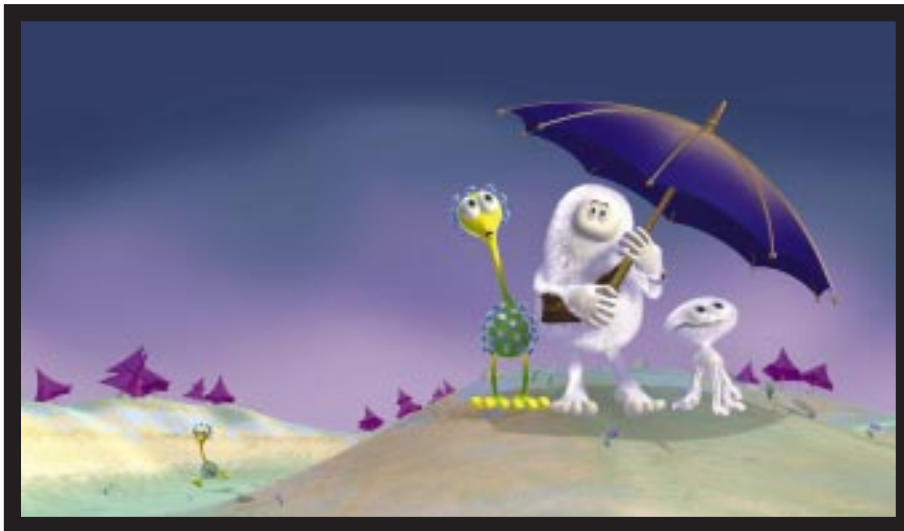
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TV Review: Tiny Planets

by Jerry Beck



Bing and Bong: The Ultimate Armchair Travelers.
All images © 2002 Sesame Workshop/Pepper's Ghost Productions.



Bing and Bong meet up with unique space creatures in their quest to help the Tiny Planet Universe.

Pre-school programming is quite wonderful these days. *Rolie Polie Olie*, *Blues Clues* and *Oswald* are but a few of the superior edu-tainment shows aimed at the younger ones, ages three through six. Now joining their ranks is the delightful *Tiny*

Planets, a co-production of the U.S.'s Sesame Workshop and the U.K.'s Pepper's Ghost Productions.

This is a series of 65 five-minute episodes designed to encourage children to be explorers. The basic premise has two space creatures, Bing and Bong,

sent on a simple mission which requires them, and the viewer, to think. And each episode has a small message which invites children to solve problems on their own, stimulates a sense of self-discovery and encourages greater self-confidence.

The episodes themselves are charming. Pepper's Ghost has the opportunity to create new creatures and different worlds for each situation. The visuals are simple, alien, yet totally familiar to a child's view of the world. Bing and Bong travel to each planet via a fluffy white couch — attached by a bungee cord to their home base.

This is a series of 65 five-minute episodes designed to encourage children to be explorers

Bing is the larger, older 'Abominable Snowman' character who puts much thought into every situation. The younger and smaller Bong, who looks like a snowball with pipe cleaner legs, is an impulsive ball of energy. Both communicate through actions, in pantomime, without dialogue.

The only voice we hear is from Halley, an all-knowing young female who is always on the lookout for ways Bing and Bong can help the inhabitants of the Tiny Planet Universe. That universe is made up of seven unique worlds, each created with great

imagination: The Planet of Nature, Planet of Technology, Planet of Self, Planet of Light & Color, Planet of Sound, Planet of Stuff and the Home Planet.

The simple educational premises give the animators plenty to work with. In "Patterns On Parade," Bing and Bong identify color patterns and shapes — which leads to a pageant of space creatures (called "Flockers" on this show), who go into a delightful Busby Berkeley musical number. In "Night Light Sleep Tight," Bing & Bong go camping on a small asteroid. Afraid of the dark, Bong uses the glowing locals as a natural night light — and encourages the kids at home to brave nighttime darkness.

The episodes are short and sweet, gently driving home a point, book-ended by a nifty bubblegum pop theme song (by Kim Goody & Alan Coates). The series is supported by a dedicated Website (www.tinyplanets.com). It's a nice little project that should be enjoyed by all your little alien creatures.

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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An alien, yet child-like look at the world.



Bing and Bong set out on their next adventure.

TV Review:

Welcome To Eltingville

by Jerry Beck



Our Town: Typical Eltingville Citizens. All Welcome to Eltingville images.
© Cartoon Network.

It didn't hit me until I watched this show — we've won! The fanboys rule the earth!

The "fanboy" is now part of the popular culture. From Kevin Smith feature films to appearances on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The Simpsons*. They're everywhere! Comics fans (along with sci-fi/fantasy & pop culture fandom) were a "type," a cliché, but are now clearly a part of regular mainstream life, if Evan Dorkin's *Welcome To Eltingville* is any indication.

I must confess, I'm a "fanboy" — I go to the comics shop at least once a week, have attended comic book conventions regularly since 1968(!) and have enough action figures to last two lifetimes.

Did I enjoy Cartoon Network's new Adult Swim entry, *Welcome To Eltingville*? Yes, I did.



The Eltingville Club first appeared in Slave Labor Graphics' *Dork* collections. *Dork*™ and © Evan Dorkin, all rights reserved. Used with permission.

Will you? I'm sure this show is going to strike people one way or another — love it or hate it. I loved it.

The character designs and animation are great — sort of *Clerks*-lite — and I mean that as a compliment. The characters and situations are REAL — I know these guys (and I'm ashamed!).

The show is built around a quartet of pimply faced comic-book-reading, role-game-playing, *Star-Trek*-watching fanboys, who meet regularly in their parents' basements to play games, watch naked celebrity videos and conspire to petition movie studios to release uncut movies. Did I say I know these people — I AM these people! (I admit it — I'm a geek!)

If *Beavis & Butthead* were an animated reflection of the MTV audience, then Josh, Pete, Jerry and Bill are indeed the Cartoon Network's (or Sci-Fi Channel's) core fanbase.



Revenge of the Fanboys.

Most of the show takes place in a local comics shop, Joe's Fantasy World, which looks like a dump situated in a seedy part of town. The guys talk in a language made up of quotes and references to real movies, TV and comic book dialogue. The climax of the first episode is a trivia battle royale over an original Kenner 12-inch Boba Fett *Star Wars* doll, mint-in-the-box. (If you don't know what that is, or why it's the "holy grail" of toy collecting, this show is NOT for

you.) The “trivia-off” sequence is a three and a half minute barrage of pop culture trivia questions, which will tickle those in the know — and baffle all others.

The characters and situations are REAL — I know these guys (and I’m ashamed!)

There are a lot of neat touches too — a cool opening and closing theme by *The Aquabats*, fantasy sequences (in the first episode involving *Star Trek* and *Dungeons & Dragons*), a main title parody of the Adam West *Batman* series and end titles spoofing *The Monkees*.

If you like the episodes of *The Simpsons* involving “The Comic Book Guy,” or if *Jay & Silent Bob Strikes Back* was on your top-ten list last year, *Welcome To Eltingville* is for you.

It was for me.

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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Fighting for the Holy Grail.



The Eltingville Cabinet Members.

TV Review:

Saddle Rash

by Jerry Beck



Saddle Rash's hero Slim is a twist on the archetype. All images © 2002 Cartoon Network.



Gummy serves as the narrator for this perverse world.



Franny (left) and Mel are two more neurotic characters who appear in Saddle Rash.

Home Movies go West? Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block is testing out some diverse pilots on-air this month — but none of them are as diverse, or perverse, as *Saddle Rash*.

Created by Loren Bouchard, co-creator of *Home Movies*, *Saddle Rash* utilizes the low-budget techniques honed on that previous show and places it in a bizarre new setting — the old West. All the standard Western clichés are here and are filtered through a contemporary comic point of view. I liked *Home Movies* and I love the old Westerns so I approached this with a wide open mind.

The story contains the traditional Western archetypes — the mysterious stranger out for revenge, the notorious outlaw, the cowgirl, the sidekicks, the showdown — each one given a dose of modern attitude and/or a strange

affliction. Our “hero” is Slim, an armless gunfighter, who likes to kick his foes in the crotch. The story is narrated by the grizzled old sidekick, named Gummy, who finds the fighting style of the mysterious hero strangely appealing. “Like a ballerina...like a very violent ballerina. Like one that will kill you.”

Slim proceeds to get even for the loss of his arms by tracking down evil Tommy Morgan and disposes of his two heavies at Crappy Joe's Saloon. He also survives an ambush by a bandit gang and has the climactic showdown in the middle of the street. And I haven't even mentioned the rootin', tootin', cowgirl Hanna Headstrong (voiced by comedian Sarah Silverman) or Inez the buffalo, a strange character I cannot explain or describe. It's a wild show.

Like *Home Movies*, this is a dialogue driven show, with comic actors improvising lines of neurotic conversation — some moments

work, others don't. The conversational style is an acquired taste and you can easily turn away from the screen and just as well enjoy the soundtrack on its own terms.

The same can't be said of the visuals — though the art direction is quite good (I particularly like the town, desert vistas and the cloud laced sky) — the show is mainly talking heads. Large talking heads.

As a one-shot *Saddle Rash* is a satisfying grown-up Western comedy. But I just can't picture it as a regular series. And, I'm not sure who the right audience is for this show. It's no *Home Movies*, nor a *Quick Draw McGraw*, but rather an acerbic take on a movie genre that rode into the sunset years ago. I like seeing the “Squigglevision” guys (or whatever they are calling themselves these days) try something different, but *Saddle Rash* is just middle of the road amusing. Worth a look, but I wouldn't want to settle there for very long.

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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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.

Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust. Theatrical feature, 2001. Director: Yoshiaki Kawajiri. 105 minutes. Price & format: English, video \$19.95/DVD \$29.95 (extras include a 20-minute "Making of Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust"). Distributor: Urban Vision Entertainment.

This second *Vampire Hunter D* movie is actually a Japanese-American co-production. The first was released in Japan in 1985 and in America in 1992. In 1997 Urban Vision Entertainment, a Los Angeles company founded by Mataichiro Yamamoto, was negotiating for the American video license to it. Yamamoto learned that the Madhouse animation studio wanted to make a sequel. He put together a deal whereby Urban Vision helped finance the

animation production in Japan, and supervised the audio production in Northern California. The sound was recorded at Skywalker Sound in Emeryville and the music was composed and conducted by Marco D'Ambrosio at his Marcoco Studios in Novato, which also handled the audio post-production. The Japanese script was recorded only in English; the movie's release in Japan (April 17, 2001) was in English with Japanese subtitles. The release in America (Urban Vision's first theatrical distribution) was on September 21, 2001, although it had already been seen at international film festivals and anime conventions since August 2000.



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Hideyuki Kikuchi/Asahi
Sonorama/Vampire Hunter D
Production Committee.
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By the mid-1990s Hideyuki Kikuchi's *Vampire Hunter D* novels were very popular, and there was demand for a new movie in better animation. The Madhouse studio made sure it met this demand. *D: Bloodlust* features gorgeously elaborate settings and bright CGI effects. Scenes of slow-paced suspense and tension alternate with dynamic fast-moving battle action. The setting is 12,090 A.D., long after nuclear and biochemical war destroyed the old civilization and a new agricultural society has developed. The vampires are explained as mutant-spawned monsters that have deliberately modeled themselves upon the supernatural beasts of legends. The action moves swiftly across a landscape that changes from lush forests to deserts littered with the ruins of the old civilization. However, not much action takes place in ruins. There is lots of blood but these vampires prefer clean and brightly-lit palaces.

The scenario is loosely adapted by Kawajiri from Kikuchi's third novel in the series, *Demon Deathchase* (a more apt title). The handsome vampire, Meier Link, kidnaps beautiful Charlotte Elbourne and flees with her in his lavishly rococo coach. Elbourne's father offers \$20,000,000 for her return to D, the lone vampire hunter who is half-vampire himself, and to the Markus Brothers, a team of ruthless mercenaries. They do not want to split the reward, so they try to kill D during the chase. The movie starts at a gallop and seldom slows down. D soon realizes that Charlotte was not kidnapped; she loves Meier and is eloping with him. But is his love for her genuine or is he using her for his own plans? Even if he does love her, can he protect her from

the other vampires and monsters of his world? Drama — romance — taut direction by Kawajiri — beautiful art design by Yutaka Minowa, based upon the novels' character illustrations by renowned fantasy artist Yoshitaka Amano. The fans who waited fifteen years for this second movie were not disappointed.

Sherlock Hound. Case File I - VI.

TV series (26 episodes), 1981, 1984-85. Directors: Hayao Miyazaki, Kyosuke Mikuriya. V.1 & V.2, 5 episodes/125 minutes, V.3 – V.6, 4 episodes/100 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: Pioneer Entertainment.

Sherlock Hound is famous among anime fans as the last TV animation that popular director Hayao Miyazaki worked on before devoting himself entirely to theatrical production. This children's TV cartoon series, loosely based on the Sherlock Holmes stories with all the characters as anthropomorphized dogs, was commissioned by RAI-TV in Italy from the Tokyo

Movie Shinsha studio. Miyazaki designed the characters and series outline and began directing in April 1981, but the project was interrupted after six episodes by a dispute with the Conan Doyle estate. By the time it was resolved in 1984, Miyazaki had left TMS and the remaining 20 episodes were directed by Kyosuke Mikuriya. *Meitantei Holmes* (*Great Detective Holmes*) was shown in Japan from November 6, 1984 through May 20, 1985. An English dub got a Celebrity Home Entertainment "Just for Kids" video release about a decade ago. Now Pioneer is releasing a bilingual DVD version with informative production notes.

Although *Sherlock Hound* is primarily a funny animal TV cartoon for children, it is genuinely for "all ages." Holmes and Watson are both intelligent and likeable, and Watson is less a comedic foil than in some of the live-action movie and TV versions. Holmes is gentler and more polite than Conan Doyle's often arrogant ego-tist; more like an adult version of Miyazaki's wholesome boy heroes

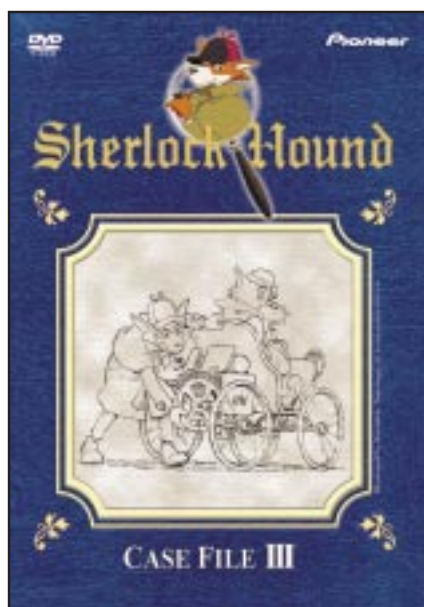
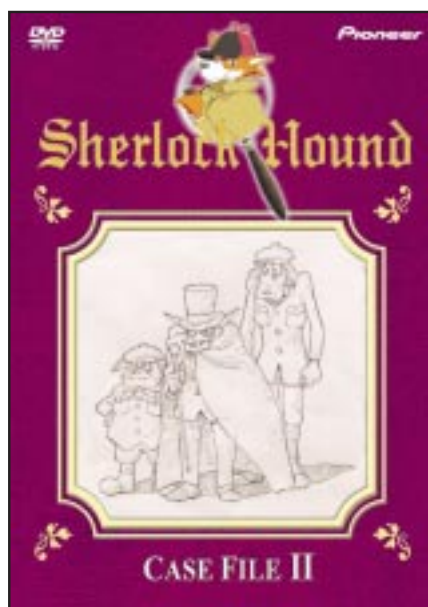
such as Pazu in *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky*. The villains in almost every episode are arrogant Professor Moriarty and his two bumbling henchmen Todd and Smiley. It is difficult to watch them without thinking of Lex Luthor (Gene Hackman) and his assistant Otis (Ned Beatty) in the 1978 *Superman* movie.

Miyazaki only directed four episodes and parts of two others, but the whole series shows his "personal touch." Many of the episodes embody elements that Miyazaki fans will recognize from his earlier or later movies. Prof. Moriarty invents an airplane that looks like a mechanical pterodactyl; Miyazaki's films are well-known for their impressive flying machines. Miyazaki favors quietly strong female characters; in two episodes Mrs. Hudson, their landlady at Baker Street, upstages Holmes and Watson. And Miyazaki has acknowledged that, while working on the series, he became such a close friend of RAI representative Marco Pagot (who created the concept of a funny animal "Holmes" TV cartoon) that he used Pagot's name, slightly modified as Pagotti, for the hero of his 1992 animated feature *Porco Rosso*. Anime fans will get a little bit more out of *Sherlock Hound*, but it is fun for the whole family.

Crest of the Stars. V.1, To the Stars. V.2, The Politics of War. V.3, Wayward Soldiers. V.4, Into the Unknown.

TV series (13 episodes), 1999. Director: Yasuchika Nagaoka. V.1, 4 episodes/100 minutes; V.2 – V.4, 3 episodes/75 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: Bandai Entertainment.

This interstellar sci-fi TV series, animated by the Sunrise studio,



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Produced by TMS Entertainment, Ltd.

is an adaptation of a popular novel by Hiroyuki Morioka; the first of three (so far). Judging from English-language reviews (the novels have not been published in English), most of the praise is going toward the in-depth background that Morioka has created for his Abh galactic empire. Both the animation and the DVD emphasize this, with many signs and captions (including the DVD menu) in the Abh alphabet. The DVD extras include a brief history of the Abh empire, a genealogy of its royal dynasty, the technology of its spaceships' faster-than-light drive, etc.



© Hiroyuki Morioka/Hayakawa Publishing, Inc. © SUNRISE. All rights reserved.

Without these, and without an American familiarity with the novel, *Crest of the Stars* seems like a pleasant but unexceptional Young Adult space opera. In the distant future the galaxy has been settled by humanity. There were originally many independent stellar nations, but these are being absorbed into five superpowers. The Hyde System republic has just been forcibly annexed by the Abh

Empire, a race of genetically improved humans (they live over 200 years) with an elf-like appearance. The Abh agree, in exchange for a peaceful surrender, to leave Hyde's President Lin as a figure-head royal governor. His teen son, Jinto, is made a minor noble and summoned to the Abh capital to learn their ways of government. Jinto, an intellectual youth, can see both merits and flaws in both Abh and normal humans. The Abh are patronizing but content to control space travel and allow the planets they rule almost complete autonomy. The humans lose their freedom, but the only power they actually surrender is the ability to wage interstellar war against each other. Abh's annexation of Hyde occurs just as the other four major human space governments decide to band together and declare war on the "inhuman monsters." The war starts with a sneak attack on the Star Forces cruiser carrying Jinto to Abh's capital. Jinto, as a civilian, is evacuated in a shuttle with Lafiel, a Princess of the Abh in training as a military cadet. The 13 episodes (January 3 through March 28, 1999) tell the adventures of Jinto and Lafiel as they try to reach the distant Abh capital in a tiny spaceship with war on all sides of them, and theoretically friendly or neutral worlds trying to capture and use them as political pawns.

It is difficult to avoid seeing this as a sci-fi replay of World War II, with the Abh as a possibly haughty but basically well-meaning blend of the Germans and Japanese; a Master Race benevolently governing a Co-Prosperity Empire. Although the translation for the American market is Mankind Empire Abh, an English-language sign in the animation art

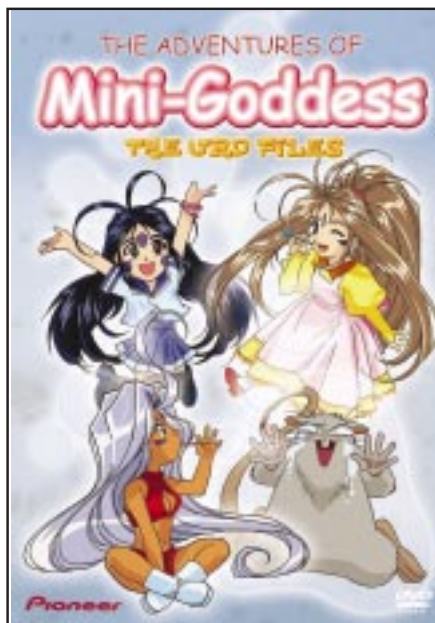
reads Mankind Reich Abh. Their joint enemies (United Mankind, the Republic of Greater Alcont, the People's Sovereign Union of Planets, etc.) show parallels to one or another of the Allies. How many of today's mostly young anime buyers are likely to catch the references? The story ends extremely abruptly. It resumed in a sequel, *Battle Flag of the Stars*, which began on TV almost exactly a year later (April 13, 2000) and will doubtlessly also get an American video release soon.

The Adventures of Mini-Goddess. V.1, The Gan-chan Files. V.2, The Belldandy Files. V.3, The Urd Files. V.4, The Skuld Files.

TV series (48 episodes), 1998-99. Director: Yasuhiro Matsumura. V.1 – V.4, 12 episodes/100 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: Pioneer Entertainment.

Although there are numerous exceptions, anime usually comes in two lengths; half-hour (TV episodes) or feature length (over an hour). Productions in the old American animated theatrical short format of six to eight minutes are almost unheard of. Here is one.

This spinoff of Kosuke Fujishima's popular *Aa! Megami-sama* (*Oh My Goddess!*) comic book series and its 1993-94 OAV adaptation began as tossed-off four-panel parodies by Fujishima himself, showing how his three young goddesses kill time at home while their college student ward Keiichi is at his classes. They shrink themselves to "super deformed" miniatures and draft the hapless rats in the building as their playmates. One rat, Gan-chan, became their "special friend," as



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Warner Bros.' *Animaniacs* would have put it. These single-page slapstick "Adventures of the Mini-Goddesses" eventually became popular enough to be animated themselves (by the OLM studio), as part of the WOWOW satellite channel's weekly (Mondays at 7:00 pm) half-hour *Anime Complex* show. 48 8-minute episodes were shown from April 6, 1998 through March 29, 1999.

Since the characters were super-small, the program title was exaggeratedly long. It was "Englished" by the Japanese themselves as *The Adventures of Mini-Goddess in the Handy 'Petite' Size!* American anime fans insisted on retaining "Mini-Goddess" (rather than "Mini-Goddesses") as a correct translation, and Pioneer has followed suit in this commercial release.

Viewers do not have to be familiar with the *Oh My Goddess!* basic plot to quickly pick up the personalities of brassy, bossy Urd, tomboyish tinkerer Skuld, housewifely Belldandy, and their sarcastic, long-suffering rat companion Gan-chan. The character interplay

and their witty dialogue are constants in a wide range of scenarios. Many episodes are variants on the theme of Urd getting bored and deciding to "help" Gan-chan get a girlfriend, go on a diet, or run for leadership of his rat community. Many more are movie and TV parodies, from Japanese classics like *Godzilla* (naturally it is Gan-chan who becomes the monster) to more recent American thrillers like *Die Hard*, *Cliffhanger* and *The X-Files*. But there are occasional surprise change of pace episodes, such as a dialogue-less quiet mood piece in which Urd simply goes strolling on a rainy day, observing the beauties of nature. The animation staff clearly had fun working in the style of American short humorous cartoons, and also used the 8-minute format for some art film projects.

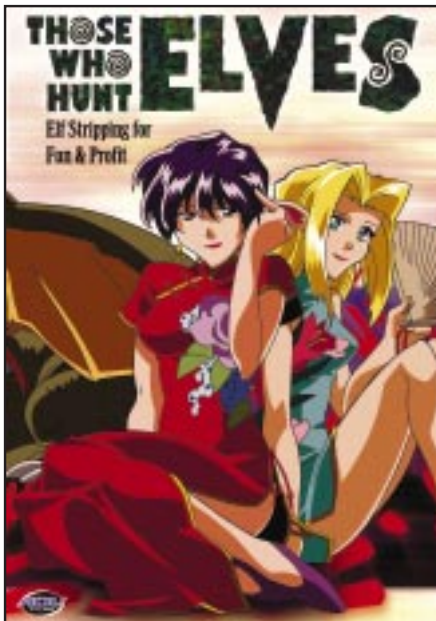
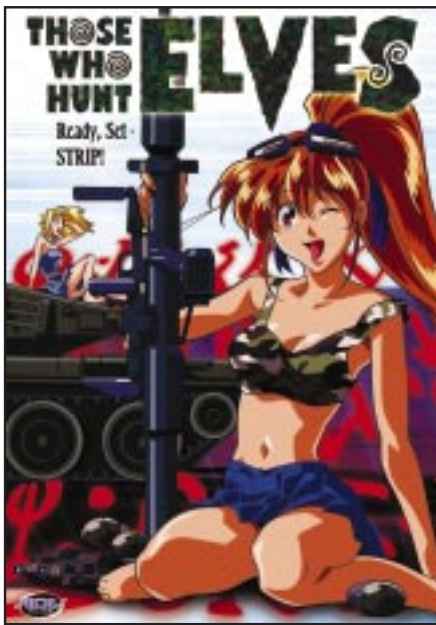
Those Who Hunt Elves. V.1, Ready Set Strip! V.2, Elf Stripping for Fun and Profit.

TV series (12 episodes), 1996. Director: Kazuyoshi Katayama. V.1 – V.2, 6 episodes/150 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98.

Distributor: A.D. Vision Films.

Was anyone nervous about turning Yu Yagami's fantasy-comedy manga *Elf o Karu Monotachi* (*Those Who Hunt Elves*) into an animated (the Group TAC studio) TV series? It was limited to twelve episodes, broadcast October 4 through December 20, 1996. It was popular enough that the conclusion was made as *Those Who Hunt Elves II*, appearing a year later (October 2 through December 24, 1997). This DVD release (and A.D.V. Films' earlier video release in 1999) is of the first series only.

"Adolescent TV anime" implies zany and mildly raunchy humor. This series drops the viewer right into the midst of it. There's this Tolkienesque fantasy world, see, inhabited by Medieval European humans and pointy-eared elf sages, and piratical fish (huh?). And there are these three strangers from our world who just want to go home to Tokyo: a muscular martial-arts champion (sure), an Oscar-winning Japanese actress (hmmm) and a teen schoolgirl with her own AK-47



© Yu Yagami/Media Works-
Amuse-Sotsu Agency.

automatic rifle and T-74 tank (wait a minute...). And the tank is haunted by the ghost of a little kitten (you *really* don't want a T-74 tank trying to cuddle up in your lap playfully). The only way to get back to our Earth is by a powerful magic spell which, inconveniently, has been divided into five parts, each of which is written on the skin of a beautiful elf maid. So to assemble the complete spell, our band of gonzo adventurers must

travel from town to town, tearing off the clothes of all the elf girls they meet to find the five who have the spell components upon them.

Can such a sexist plot be made tasteful? Surprisingly, yes. At least, the raunch factor is downplayed in favor of humorous dialogue and an emphasis on character interplay. Two of the three, the actress Airi Komiyama and school-girl Ritsuko Inou, are women themselves who are embarrassed by what they have to do to return to our Earth. Junpei Ryuzouji, the muscle-headed fighter, delivers a few stereotypical "Oh, boy! Babes!" lines, but he acts more like he has not discovered girls yet. His schtick is food; he spends most of his time searching taverns and restaurants for Earth-style beef curry. A fourth member of their party is Mistress Celcia, the elves' high priestess, who is accompanying them in the hope of finding the spell fragments and getting rid of these louts as quickly as possible. An unforeseen complication of the mixed-up magic turns Celcia into a funny-animal dog, and you can imagine the *double entendres* about the female dog in their midst. Much of the humor depends upon cultural incongruity (a Roman Catholic elf? Medieval fast-food restaurants?) and situations which give the stripping of elfmaids a socially redeeming justification. (Elf warrior maid Milliea donned a suit of enchanted armor to fight a monster. She won, but the armor will not come off her. After three years, she really wants to get out of it and take a bath!) The nudity is limited to quick flashes of bare breasts; quite mild for adolescent anime. Will this sell well enough that A.D.V. Films will release the sequel? To quote one

of the episode teasers, "Please watch us again next week, or I'll hate your guts!"

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

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

Fresh from the Festivals:

March 2002'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:

Aria (2001), 10 min., directed by Pjotr Sapegin, Norway. Info: David Reiss-Anderson. Email: david@pravdaproductions.no.

Hubert's Brain (2001), 17.5 min., directed by Phil Robinson, U.S. Info: Jeff Fino/Wild Brain, 2650 18th St., San Francisco, CA 94110, U.S. Tel: 415-553-8000. Email: jefff@wildbrain.com.

Shadow Cycle (2001), 21 min., directed by Oscar Grillo, Argentina/U.K. Info: Klacto Animations, 11 Gordon Rd., London W5 2AD, U.K. Tel: 208-991-6978. Email: klac-to@klacto.com.

The Snowman (2001), 5.5 min., directed by Lane Nakamura, U.S. Info: Mark Medernach, Duck Soup Studios, 2205 Stoner Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90064, U.S. Tel: 310-478-0771. Fax: 310-478-8773. Email: inbox@ducksoupla.com.

War Game (2001), 29 min., directed by Dave Unwin, U.K. Info: Iain Harvey, The Illuminated Film Company, 115 Gunnersbury Lane, Acton, London W3 8HQ, U.K. Tel: 208-896-1666. Fax: 208-896-1669. Email: iain@illuminated-films.com.



Aria. © National Film Board of Canada, 2001.

Aria Pjotr Sapegin's singular retelling of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* employs anatomically incorrect puppets and stop-motion photography to create a film that straddles the line between sublime and ridiculous; which it finally favors will depend very much on the sensibility of the viewer. Sapegin emphasizes the artificiality of the minimalist outdoor environment, the characters and the props, while incorporating a number of striking, surreal touches (a

fish-like fetus, the mother-child relationship conceived in terms of kite-flying, and, most dramatically, the central character's ultimate self-deconstruction). He also plays with cinematic conventions by bringing the film's music (excerpts from the opera, including the famous aria, "Un bel di vedremo") into the story, and by having Butterfly essentially leave the set to commit suicide. The work's ambiguities and the mixed feelings it evokes all seem calculated and, while the overall effect may not be fully satisfying, it's a strong and well-conceived piece.

Pjotr Sapegin was born in Russia, where he worked in theater, and moved to Norway in 1990. Currently head of the animation department for the production company Pravda, he's made about a dozen independent shorts in as many years. While shaped primarily by his theatrical experience, he also mentions Jan Svankmajer, the Quay Brothers and Nick Park as influences (although if *Aria* is reminiscent of any film in my experience, it would be Todd Haynes' extraordinary *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*). *Aria* was financed by the Norwegian Film Institute, the NFB and Pravda, and had its premiere at the Montreal Film Festival.

Hubert's Brain

Contrived wackitude is at the core of this occasionally funny story about a boy, a brain, and the unanticipated dangers of cranial transplants. Using a flashback structure, 3D digital techniques and voice talent including Peter Falk and Jonathan Harris (*Lost in Space*), director Phil Robinson demonstrates a knack for slapstick and over-the-top characterizations.

Yet, despite the surface wackiness, the storyline and situations are extremely conventional, and (unlike, say, *The Simpsons* or *South Park*, which the film sometimes resembles) the dialogue isn't clever enough to transcend the hackneyed concepts.

Phil Robinson is co-founder and vice-president of Wild Brain, Inc., where he's been instrumental in developing the company's 3D animation capabilities. His other credits include the features *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* (2000) and *Fern Gully 2* (1998), and the TV series' *Back to the Future*, *The Dreamstone* and Wild Brain's current *Mr. Baby*. *Hubert's Brain*, which is Wild Brain's first CG film, was rendered and composited using Nothing Real's Shake software and color-corrected with cineSpace.

Shadow Cycle

Some extremely beautiful and evocative animation is pretty much wasted in this rather vapid and overly self-conscious film that explores the cycle of life through the experiences of its central characters, a boy and a girl. It's a shame in a way, because the film's sophisticated visual design — which incorporates a variety of styles, as well as a pleasing use of recurrent motifs and allusions — reveals veteran director Oscar Grillo's skill and sensitivity. The film's score, which was composed by Linda McCartney, was the inspiration for Grillo and collaborator Paul McCartney, who together drew on childhood memories and other sources for the film's themes. With all due respect to the memory of the late Mrs. McCartney, the music is nondescript at best, and its central position in the film's genesis goes a long way toward

explaining the work's saccharine and essentially flat character.

Oscar Grillo was born in Buenos Aires in 1943 and has lived in Europe since 1970. An accomplished graphic artist as well as a highly regarded animator, he is a co-founder, with Ted Rockley, of Klacto Animations. His previous films include *Monsieur Pett* (1999). *Shadow Cycle* was created using traditional 2D animation techniques; the colorization and compositing were performed digitally.



Hubert's Brain. © Wild Brain, Inc., 2001.



Shadow Cycle.

© MPL Communications, 2001.



The Snowman.

© Duck Soup Studios, 2001.

The Snowman

Demonstrating again the inestimable value of a good central idea and a well-shaped narrative, *The Snowman* presents a hilarious account of what happens when some unwitting space aliens try to wrest the Earth's secrets from the wrong guy. Though *The Snowman* is basically a one-joke

film, director Lane Nakamura knows how to get the most out of the circumscribed parameters and, if he occasionally overplays his hand and stretches out the proceedings rather longer than necessary, the deadpan humor and little narrative touches raise the work to the level of good silent comedy. The 3D animation is relatively simple, composed primarily of static shots and straight-on camera angles, but the choices are appropriate for the story and if, in the end, *The Snowman* isn't quite *Knickknack* (that title character looks awfully familiar), it succeeds admirably on its own terms.

A graduate of UCLA's School of the Arts, Lane Nakamura played a pivotal role in transforming Duck Soup Studios from a traditional animation house into a full-service CG production facility. He's worked extensively in commercials, including spots for Nestlé, Wal-Mart and Whirlpool. *The Snowman*, which is Duck Soup's first 3D short, was created with Alias|Wavefront's Maya software and has screened at the World Animation Celebration, the Stockholm International Film Festival and the San Francisco Independent Film Festival, among others.

War Game

Based on the book by Michael Foreman, *War Game* is the story of three English boys, members of the same football (i.e., soccer) team, who get caught up in the national war fever and enlist together to fight in World War I. Though the book and the film are a fictionalized account, the centerpiece of the story — a remarkable spontaneous truce that occurs between the Germans and the

English on Christmas day — is based on an actual incident. It's powerful material, and the filmmakers do their best to capture not only this unique event, but also the grim realities of life in the trenches and the ultimate futility of war. Unfortunately, *War Game* suffers from an overabundance of earnestness and a kind of literalness that leads to one-dimensional characterizations and a belabored quality that prevents the film from achieving its desired effects. The watercolor visual style, which emulates the look of the original illustrations, is frequently quite beautiful and effective, but the cartoonish rendering of the characters, which might have worked on the page, is less successful on the screen.

Director Dave Unwin has been involved in animation since



War Game.
© Illuminated Films, Ltd., 2001.

1970. Among his many award-winning productions are *Willows in Winter* (1996), *Wind in the Willows* (1995), and *The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies & Mrs. Tittlemouse* (1994). Most recently, he developed and directed *Preston Pig*, a series for ITV based on books by Colin McNaughton. The poignant score for *War Game* was composed by Julian Nott, whose other credits include Nick Park's *Wallace & Gromit* films, as well as many other animated films, live-action features and TV dramas.

Note: QuickTime clips of the films may be viewed online at http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?type=pageone&article_no=1337

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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