

ANIMATION

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DreamWorks'
Spirit



Plus: *Spider-Man* The Movie In Depth

Inside the Ottawa Animation Scene • Up and Coming Comic Strips

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Crafting A Career In A Time Of Change

by Gregory Singer



Frank Gladstone.

As the head of artistic recruitment and development at DreamWorks SKG Animation, Frank Gladstone, along with the Animation Training Department, has had his hands full these past months helping DreamWorks' talented artists in Glendale, California become even more versatile, by introducing and making them fluent with

digital tools. A figurehead in the industry, Frank is consulted time and time again by artists for advice, perspective and wisdom on the state of animation ... and its possible futures.

Gregory Singer: Rumor has it that the animation biz is in a slump, a downturn — what should folks be doing to

survive these lean and mean economic times?

Frank Gladstone: It's funny. At the same time that we're having a slow-down in hiring and lay-offs at some studios, with other studios closing, we also have two of the most successful pictures of the last year; *Shrek* and *Monsters, Inc.* did exceedingly well. Even the smaller budgeted, outside-of-Hollywood production, *Jimmy Neutron* was a solid hit. So while we are seeing a downturn in studio hiring, we are also seeing good success at the box office — and the first year that the Motion Picture Academy has established an Award for [animated] features. So, there's a bit of a dichotomy in the business right now...

Be that as it may, the question is how do people survive? That can be a difficult question to answer in any specific way. I think the first thing is that people who want to stay in the animation business need to increase their skill sets, so that they do more than just one thing. Or, if they do one thing, they do it more than just one way — that may be a better way of saying it. In other words, a traditional animator will want to get some CG under his or her belt, so that when jobs come about that require CG, they can take them. And vice versa: CG animators who have been doing effects and props may want to get some traditional training, so that they can better handle character work. People who have been doing CG with motion-capture, not animating using the primary principles of animation, may want to get some classes in that — because a lack of flexibility and fundamental understanding may

be what separates them from the better jobs down the road.

People should be prepared with their portfolios and reels. They should know how to submit their work in a professional manner. When we get reels and portfolios [at DreamWorks], I am constantly surprised at how unprofessional some of them are; and the most flagrant are often from people who have been in the business for many years. Of course, it may be that they've had a job at one place for a long time, and now that they're looking again, never having to have put together a portfolio, they end up sending in this kind of mish-mash of stuff.

People ought to know what they want to do when they are applying for a job, and know something about the studio that they are approaching. Try to be specific about the kinds of things for which they could be valuable at that studio. Realize that, in bigger studios they are likely to have a very specific job, but in smaller studios they may do more than one thing, have a wider range of duties. So, I think one should approach the bigger studios for a particular job, and the smaller studios as more of a 'generalist,' as they like to say nowadays.

Another thing to realize in the job survival game is that one may have to accept a job that may not be as high on the totem pole as the last job they worked. People need to be flexible about the kinds of jobs they're willing to accept. Somebody who was a supervisor on one project may not be a supervisor on the next project — and to wait for the job title they may have held before may keep them from getting the

job that they really need to survive. It is important to be open to taking different status level jobs from one show to the next.

And finally, we should come to grips with the fact that this has, for the most part, become a market of working show to show, or project to project, and not, for most people, a situation where you have a job forever. Most contracts, most arrangements, most agreements, for most people, are going to be on a per-project basis, perhaps with an option for additional projects. Once you come to terms with this, I think you can survive.

One other bit of [practical, failsafe] advice is to save your money!

GS: Given today's economy and evolving technology, where would you suggest are people's best bets for finding work?

FG: It depends on how much experience they have. Even if there seems to be a downturn in the business, there are more opportunities now. Looking back, anybody from my generation can remember times when there were less opportunities, fewer venues than there are now. Today, if you want to, you can cast your net much wider, and you can look everywhere, whether it be visual effects houses, animation or gaming studios, Web interests, television, even project-built companies: small places that are doing a single project. I think in this day and age you have to be open to all opportunities, and not say, "I'm only going to work for the big studios." I don't think it is particularly wise to limit your opportunities. You should be able

to say, "I can take any of these jobs seriously and apply my craft as best I can," and then throw your net wide to stay in the business.

GS: How would you advise artists — just graduated and seasoned professional — to train for the likely opportunities of future employment?

FG: I think they have to get a broad education, actually. I am always saying a college degree is important. To a lot of folks I know that might sound odd, but I think a college degree helps people to survive, and be flexible enough to make career adjustments. Further, the challenge of getting a degree really makes a person foster and develop the communication skills that are about 50% of the skill needed to do any kind of job nowadays.

Within that degree, if they are actually studying animation, I'd make sure to get a taste of all the disciplines, and then focus on what really turns them on. And then learn how to do it more than one way... in other words, the traditional approach first, then augmented with solid computer skills. Those people who have both skill sets are much more marketable than people who don't. So, I would say that people who are preparing to get into the business should define what they're best at, and then study that discipline from every angle that they possibly can.

For instance, if I wanted to be a background painter, I would be able to paint and illustrate traditionally as good as anybody ... I would also learn how to use Photoshop and other computer tools to do some of those things. If I was an animator,

I would learn to animate the traditional way and I would also learn how to use some of the new animation software, so that I could animate in CG as comfortably as animating with a pencil.

Most people, no matter what they do, can't expect to stay in one place, either geographically or job-wise for their whole career. They're going to need to be adaptable, which is why a degree is helpful — though not absolutely necessary. I don't think people get hired into artistic positions because they have a degree. Initially, people get hired because they have a good portfolio and/or reel. As their experience grows they get hired, at least in part, because of their expertise and reputation. Nevertheless, there is the argument that they may survive in the long view because of the skills that a post-secondary course of study prepares them for. Whatever the degree (or non-degree), it's important to make sure that one's art training, animation training and education in general is really well rounded.

GS: In terms of where folks might find work, or helping them to train for other opportunities, do you think Flash is something useful for traditional artists to learn? Is that something to take seriously?

FG: Absolutely. There are a lot of traditional animation artists experimenting with Flash now. There are some jobs to be had, especially as the program gets better and more versatile. People are actually able to do some pretty decent animation with it now. The Internet will eventually figure out how people might actually be able to make a living working with it,

and then Flash will become an increasingly attractive alternative. It's also a nice way to do your own personal work.

GS: Having been in the industry for so many years (said affectionately), do you feel that the 'gloom and doom' of today's marketplace is part of its natural episodic ups and downs, or do you anticipate a brave new world of animation on the horizon?

FG: Both. 'Gloom and doom' — I've seen a helluva lot worse in the business, though I do think people have a real reason to feel at 'sixes and sevens' right now, not only in light of lay-offs and so forth, but just the general timbre of the country. With all of the things that have gone on in the last few months that have made people feel, just in general, very vulnerable ... added to the possibility of being laid off, or down-sized, things can seem pretty daunting. We are probably going through one of our cycles. For many years we've had a continuing and profitable run of films — escalating employment and escalating salaries — and right now we're looking at what the stock market might call a correction. That is probably as it has to be; nothing just goes up forever. Some people are prepared for it, some people aren't. Those people who have been in the business awhile have seen it before. Those who are animation historians can point to other high spots, plateaus and dips. So, though we may be in one of those valleys now, as we regain direction it'll move back up again.

At the same time, there is probably going to be somewhat of a — well, I don't think I would

call it a 'brave new world,' where we're suddenly all automatons, or space invaders or Captain Kirks trying to follow the prime directive — but I think that the way the animation business will look ten or fifteen or twenty years from now will be somewhat different than what we have today. We'll probably produce somewhat differently; there'll be more hybrid films — meaning, combinations of 2D and 3D, or 3D and live-action, and various other amalgamations. I suspect that one of the brighter spots is that we'll see more independent films in animation, because technology will allow small groups of people to do amazingly finished work. Actually, the day that we see a high quality animated feature produced by a very small group of people is not too far off. In fact, I believe people are working toward this now. I am expecting the results any time.

GS: As a corollary to that, perhaps given the Internet and different models for distributing or receiving films — for example, *Waking Life* was produced in Austin, Texas — do you see these centers outside of Hollywood, outside of New York, becoming more of a presence in animation?

FG: Absolutely. Somebody smarter than I once wrote that Hollywood is a walled community that does things and then throws them over the wall for the rest of the population to look at. If that was once true, it is not the case anymore. We can no longer be isolated. Animation is produced everywhere. You know, the reality is that people do animation because they love it. They have a drive to be part of it in some way — whether they're writing it,

making it, or managing it. And loving animation, wanting to make animation, is not exclusive to Los Angeles or San Francisco or New York. It's a human desire, and people can make it anywhere. The tools are readily available in many, many countries now, and there are populations that can learn and use those tools as well as anybody can. It's international. We have to be aware of that. I say, more power to it. There's no way to say, "No, only we do animation. The rest of the world are pretenders." The animation genie is way out of the bottle and available to people everywhere.

GS: Because off-the-shelf hardware and software are so powerful and accessible now...

FG: And there's always paper and pencils. They are also readily accessible. That the world draws, and can do it as well as we can if given the opportunity, should not be a surprise to anybody here. And there's no way that we can, or should, protect ourselves, or isolate ourselves, from that.

GS: What is the likelihood and financial viability of working from home, freelancing, on a project-by-project basis, on teams whose members are as far flung as Texas, Brazil, China and Australia?

FG: It's been done and it works okay, up to a point. Somebody working by themselves, say working on a commercial, where the animator's in New Mexico and you're doing a thirty-second spot for a client in Miami, has been happening for years. But when it comes to feature films, I think you have a problem, because feature films are much more like a

philharmonic rather than a solo act. It is a group effort. And while you might be able to have animators scattered all over, at some point everybody's really got to be in the same room to hear the vision and to understand what's going on contextually, and to get a feel for how the other animators are performing. Technically, producing a feature long distance is becoming increasingly easy, but from what I have seen of long distance producing, it is even easier to lose the feeling of context and performance. Maybe with increasingly better telecommunications this will become more plausible, but I think for features you're still going to get a hodgepodge that has the real possibility of being flat or perfunctory. Commercials, short films, independent films, those kinds of things, can be done much easier long distance.

GS: Any last words of wisdom or advice to offer?

FG: Animation to me is a big, interesting story. And what we're in now is just another chapter in the book. To force the allegory a little, I feel that we are still in the first few chapters of that book, and while we've been reading for some time now, the story has quite some longer time to go. The next chapters are all about change, and then everything is going to look different. Twenty years from now, forty years from now, the young whippersnappers in today's technology are going to find themselves thinking, "What happened? What're they doing now?" ... just as when the young whippersnappers of my generation who were drawing

on paper suddenly wondered, "What is this MAYA thing?"

And that's the way it should be. That's evolution, and that's one of the best things about this story...this most spectacular art.

Frank Gladstone has been working as a professional animator, producer, director, writer and teacher for more than twenty-five years. From 1973 to 1989, he managed his own Emmy award-winning studio, Persistence of Vision, Inc., producing commercials and educational films, and has since worked for the feature animation divisions at Disney, Warner Bros. and DreamWorks. In addition to his studio credentials, Frank has spoken on animation at schools and institutions around the country, in the Caribbean, Europe and Asia, and has taught various animation and cinematography courses and workshops for the University of Miami, VIFX, Cinesite, UNICEF, Gnomon Digital, Nickelodeon, UCLA, San Jose State, Stanford and USC. Frank has also designed courses and helped train literally hundreds of people who work in the animation industry. Additionally, Frank serves on several school advisory boards, philanthropic and educational organizations, produces public service television commercials and is a member of the City of Glendale Arts and Culture Commission.

Gregory Singer is a freelance writer, residing in Los Angeles.

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HOW TO DRAW ANIMATION: Pushing an Expression

by Christopher Hart

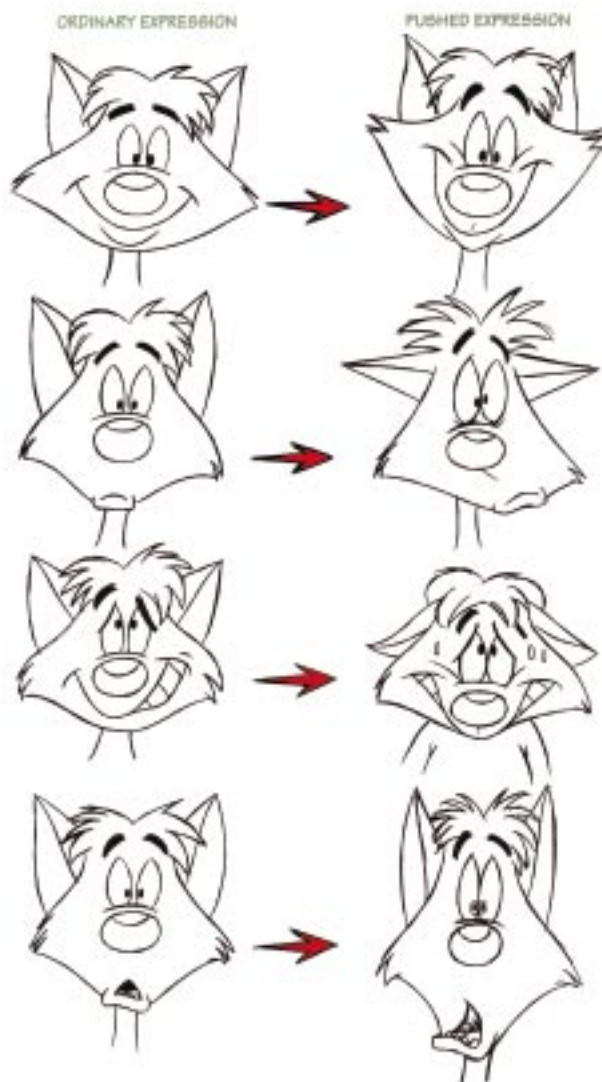
motion based on fundamentals and more advanced techniques, then give these pages a look. Although the examples given are of 2D animation, the same principles may carry over to 3D.



Don't settle for the ordinary. By "tweaking," or *pushing*, a character's facial expression, you get that extra energy and vitality that can make a memorable moment.

How to Draw Animation by Christopher Hart. New York, New York: Watson-Guption Publications, a division of VNU Business Media, Inc., 1997. 144 pages. ISBN: 0-8230-2365-6 (US\$19.95)

Christopher Hart has written and illustrated many successful "how to" cartoon and animation books for Watson-Guption, in addition to writing for many studios and networks like NBC, Showtime, 20th Century Fox, MGM and others. He is also the author and on-screen host of a popular art instruction CD-ROM series. Hart has worked in animation, comic strips (Blondie), and magazines, including contributing regularly to Mad Magazine.



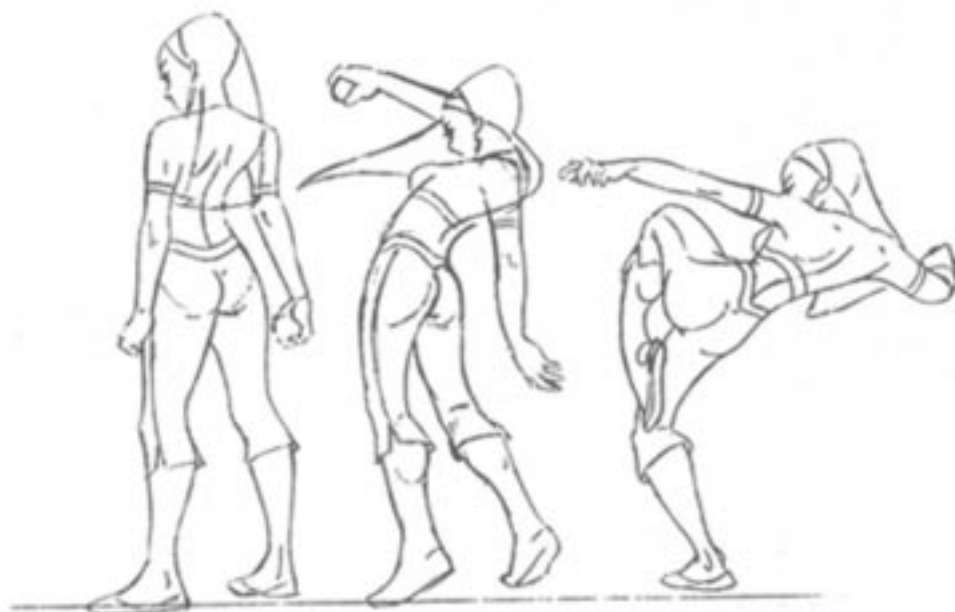
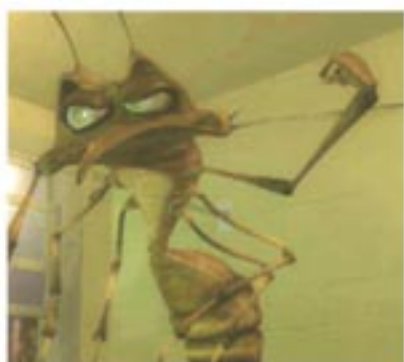
© Christopher Hart; drawn by Christopher Hart.

My book, *How to Draw Animation*, has found its way into many animation classrooms. So I was delighted when the people at Animation World, a Website I frequent, asked me if they could reproduce some of the art from the book. My aim in creating the book was to marry art instruction with appealing charac-

ters. Appealing characters lie at the heart of animation; and it always struck me that unless you create great characters, it's pointless to put so much energy into making them move. If you are interested in learning more about character design (both cartoony and semi-realistic types), as well as in creating fluid, convincing

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You have probably heard that joke about the definition of a camel. It is a horse that has been designed by committee. Since film is a collaborative art, most movies are put together by committee. This is even truer in feature animation, where you not only have a director but usually co-directors and a team of artists to design and animate each character. So, given the squabbling that goes on in a committee and the intrinsic problems with animating horses, one might have expected DreamWorks' *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* to turn out looking like a double-humped dromedary, but far from it. Magnificent in scope, this DreamWorks offering for the hectic Memorial Day weekend (May 25 - 27 in the U.S.) is an animated version of an epic Western that features nearly photo-realistic horses set amid panoramic vistas of the Old West.

Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron is the adventurous tale of a wild mustang stallion and his journey through the untamed American wilderness of the 1800s, where he encounters the unrelenting drive of westward expansion. As far as animated features are concerned, *Spirit* is a genuine thoroughbred, not at all the turkey that some might expect given its broad scope and problematic nature. How come? The answer in two words: Jeffrey Katzenberg.

A Horse? Of Course!

Katzenberg was the guiding light behind the committee of DreamWorks artists who created and produced this traditionally animated feature. From the very start, Katzenberg understood two important points: first, the challenge that he and his team at DreamWorks faced and, sec-

SPIRIT:

A Longshot Or A Sure Bet?

by J. Paul Peszko



Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron is proof that design by committee can result in a thoroughbred — not a camel. All *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* images are ™ & © 2002 Dream Works LLC.



Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron features stunning panoramic vistas of the Old West.

ond, his audience. Nearly every young person loves horses, especially a stallion with a spirit that cannot be broken despite action-packed travails with the U.S. Cavalry and the builders of the intercontinental railroad.

"Horses are among the most beloved and beautiful creatures on the planet," Katzenberg stated in an interview, "and I think there is a connection that we as human

beings have had with horses, going back thousands of years. For all of those reasons, I loved the idea of an animated movie about horses."

Katzenberg loved the idea so much that he postponed an anticipated Fall, 2001 release, opting for this Memorial Day weekend when *Spirit* will square off against the likes of *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* and *Spider-Man*. A more cautious



Left to right: directors Kelly Asbury and Lorna Cook, singer/songwriter Bryan Adams, producers Jeffrey Katzenberg and Mireille Soria flank Donner, the real-life mustang which served as the artists' model for Spirit. All photos courtesy of DreamWorks Pictures.



James Baxter, the senior supervising animator, tackled the many challenges of animating a horse.

studio executive would cringe at the thought. But to hear Katzenberg tell it, he has a sure bet. "It has been made literally for every audience, every age group," Katzenberg said of *Spirit*. "Every human will be able to see it after they've seen *Spider-Man* and *Star Wars*."

But will they? Katzenberg's certainly banking that they will. From the start, he knew what he wanted: "The story of the American West told from the point of view of the horse." At the same time, he realized that he was

throwing down the gauntlet to his animation team. "I know that there is no animal more difficult to animate," he says.

The Most Difficult of Creatures

The challenge according to Dr. Stuart Sumida, a paleontologist who specializes in vertebrate anatomy, is that horses have long, inflexible spines, a defined musculature seen in their every movement, and a wide range of gaits. Their faces pose another kind of challenge, characterized by an elongated muzzle, with the

eyes set high and wide, and the mouth set low.

Understanding the challenge ahead of him, Katzenberg knew he needed a great jockey, not just a good one, to ride *Spirit* home. So, he selected James Baxter, whose animations include Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, Rafiki in *The Lion King*, Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Tulio in *The Road to El Dorado* and Moses in *The Prince of Egypt*.

"It was the hardest thing I've ever undertaken on a picture," Baxter admits. "I literally spent the first few weeks with my door shut, telling everyone, 'Go away; I've got to concentrate.' It was quite daunting because when I first started to draw horses, I suddenly realized how little I knew."

In order to educate his animators, Katzenberg arranged for Sumida and Dr. Deb Bennett, another renowned horse expert, to serve as the film's consultants. Then DreamWorks purchased a Kiger mustang stallion named "Donner" to serve as the model for the horse, Spirit. Kiger mustangs are noteworthy because they are a wild breed with genetic traits that can be traced back to the breeds brought over by the Spaniards centuries ago.

This began an intensive crash course in equine anatomy, movement, locomotion and behavior at the Los Angeles Equestrian Center, a short drive from DreamWorks' animation campus. Here, the animators spent a great deal of time sketching and videotaping horses, particularly Donner.

"Horses are notoriously difficult to draw, and a lot of people know how they look and move, so it's obvious if you make a mistake," says Baxter. "There were times

when someone would animate something that was a little too much like a dog. They would do a bit of action and it would look like a dog playing with something, not a horse."

The other nagging problem was giving the animated horse the power to perform the actions called for in the script such as leaping across a high canyon. "Trying to create some of the actions in the movie and give them enough power was tricky," Baxter states. So, the challenge became how to make the horse look realistic and at the same time animate it. "I tended to simplify and boil down his anatomy into component parts, which would be easily followed by a large group of people and make it so that everyone could draw him satisfactorily and move him around. It's not like we put every single muscle in there, but we had to understand the basics of where they all were."

Much easier said than done. In some cases there are only two or three lines delineating one body part from another. "True," Baxter says, "but you have to know what's there in order to put that line in the right place."

No Mr. Ed Here

Beyond the challenge of drawing horses accurately, the animators had to create a horse who could communicate with the audience through expressions and body language, since none of the animals in the film speak.

This is a point of contention if not controversy. The question is: did Katzenberg intend the horses to be silent from the outset as he claims, or did his team of animators only later realize that Katzenberg's epic Western was in



Production designer Kathy Altieri (far right) and art directors Luc Desmarchelier (left) and Ron Lukas sketch the unique rock formations of Monument Valley, which served as the site of the cavalry fort in the movie.



Spirit features a lot of action and dramatic events.

danger of becoming a real joke?

For his part, Katzenberg insists that he never intended for the horses to speak. "We wanted to tell a story that was an emotional journey, as opposed to an irreverent comedy," Katzenberg explains. "The moment that decision was made that we wanted to tell that kind of a story, as soon as you see a horse talk, it's Mr. Ed, and it didn't work. We never even tried it because in our mind it just suddenly made the movie undramatic."

According to screenwriter, John Fusco, however, he was two years into a script, which had all the animals talking before he was asked to write voice-over narration instead. "We started out with all dialogue, and then having

Jeffrey [Katzenberg] say, 'How about no dialogue?'"

Frustrating? "It's been four and a half years and started off with talking horses and no talking humans," Fusco says. "We followed that direction for two years or so until we had storyboards and sketches to put up and animated sketches with the dialogue working. It was kind of a group feeling that once the horses start talking, it breaks the spell, and we're exploring some more realistic themes of the Old West."

Was it a committee decision in the end or had Katzenberg conceived the project from "day one," as he says with no talking horses?

James Baxter, who was specifically responsible for animating *Spirit*, the lead character, tries



Eyebrows and large, visible eyes were key to making Spirit's emotions clear to the viewer.



Kelly Asbury (left) and Lorna Cook.

to give some insight as to why there may have been a discrepancy between what Katzenberg claims and what screenwriter Fusco first wrote. "It's very difficult to write a screenplay where nobody talks. It's like writing a short story. For a screenwriter that is incredibly difficult to do. So, I think even at that early stage, they [the co-producers and co-directors] knew that wasn't right [animal dialogue], but they had to go through that process to get the storyboard together."

Kelly Asbury, who co-directed *Spirit* along with 25-year veteran animator, Lorna Cook, adds, "The process of animation is a little hard to explain. We use a script, and the script is very important to the structure of the story and the contents of the scenes.

When we storyboard these films, we use the dialogue to help us in the storyboard phase to know what the scene is about. As we slowly develop it, that dialogue comes and goes. The dialogue in his [Fusco's] script was the jump-off point. I guess that's how to put it. We even had a lot more narration at one point, but it started going away, too. We wanted to be visual about it."

"Jeffrey [Katzenberg] asked me to overwrite narration on every scene, to really have Spirit tell his story and deliver his perspective on everything. We would use that to inform songs," says Fusco. "That's something Jeffrey always wanted to do — to have a musical narrative going on — and cut back just to the essence of the narration. But it evolves.

These artists are working in one direction for two years, and then guess what? No talking animals. We're going this way."

Asbury's co-director, Lorna Cook, adds, "I think we were looking to do something that had some sophistication. To give a creature like a horse the kind of dignity that it needed to have, [no animal dialogue] was a very natural decision."

Fusco, whose credits include *Young Guns*, *Young Guns II*, *The Babe* and *Thunderheart*, all live-action features, says that he began with a few pages of notes from Katzenberg, which pointed him in an *Animal Farm* direction. "I think that's how Jeffrey saw it up front and then we sort of went through the discovery process together. I wrote a short novel. It started as a treatment and then it went off and off. Then Jeffrey said, 'Go wild! Do what you want.' I wrote some songs. I don't know if he ever appreciated that. I turned it in and he was really excited. He said, 'Now you've got my mind working.'"

In what way, was Fusco's original script like Orwell's *Animal Farm*? "The horses were very representative of different cultures and ideas in the West. The buffalo had their story, the cavalry horses had theirs. It was darker — a lot of darker shades, and everyone was really excited about that."

Getting Spirit Onto The Screen

After two years of storyboarding talking animals, Katzenberg's no talking animals dictum had little effect on the animators. "Pantomime characters have always been a part of animation," James Baxter states. "For example, *Dumbo* doesn't talk.

So, it's nothing new in those terms. It's the same as any actor having to do a mute character. You use your body language and the rest of it. All we did this time was to do that through a horse's body."

"I think that's really something we tried to discover in the boarding process," explains Lorna Cook of capturing human pathos and drama through the horses' bodies. "That's where we could create the movie first. And create a kind of visual blue print for the film before we actually started animating it. So a lot of the business, a lot of the way Spirit or the other characters acted or behaved was found by boarding out the sequences and having them very specific. That served as a guide for the animators, and then the animators were able to take it way, way beyond. But we talked about his personality a great deal, and we watched the horse [Donner] that was the model for this film and tried to pick up nuances and little behavioral things that would make the character more rich."

"There are a lot of human emotions coming through a horse's body," James Baxter adds. "It's not as if we're doing a realistic

interpretation of a horse. Otherwise, we'd just shoot it live-action. So, that was the challenge to find a way to portray more human emotions along with more equine ones."

Animators have usually avoided horse characters because the distance between their eyes and mouths makes their expressions hard to read. In order to help Spirit emote, certain changes had to be made. "It was a real challenge to give Spirit a face that could display readable emotions," Baxter says. "We did some design tricks, shifting his eyes a little further forward on the head, so you can see both eyes more readily, which makes his expressions easier to read. And we gave him nice big eyebrows — which horses don't have."

The "Voices" of Spirit

Last year it was rumored that Bryan Adams, who wrote the lyrics for *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, was being brought in to narrate Spirit as well. Later, DreamWorks officially announced that Matt Damon would do the narration. Today, DreamWorks contends that Damon was their top choice. Then how come a teaser trailer was released in Canada, which

actually had Bryan Adams doing voice-overs for Spirit?

"It was temporary scratch dialogue that we used but it was never the permanent one," co-director Asbury insists. "Matt Damon was the final narrator we decided on period. Once we heard it that was it."



While no longer the narrator, singer/songwriter Bryan Adams is definitely the voice of Spirit through the soundtrack.

"We are usually given a list of names, of possibilities of whom might work with that particular role," Cook discloses. "And we just go ahead and listen one by one to each one of those voices to see who can best facilitate that character."

Asbury agrees, "Really, it's a matter of holding that character design up and listening to what voice should be coming out of that character. It takes a lot of trial and error and a lot of listening to takes from other characters in other films to finally reach that point."

While Robert Redford was mentioned at one point as being



The baby colt Spirit is protected by his mother.

in line for narration, the team chose Damon because, "When we met him and talked to him he is Spirit," Cook says. "He's got so much vitality and youthful quality to his voice. It was that voice quality we were going for."

"We spent four years trying to find the perfect voice that could capture a spirited, heroic character," said Katzenberg. "Matt had everything we hoped for, a genuine enthusiasm for life that comes through melodically in his voice."

But don't feel sorry for Bryan Adams. He was chosen to write the lyrics and perform the soundtrack album over names like Bruce Springsteen and Paul Simon. He is teamed with veteran scorer Hans Zimmer, who did the score for *The Lion King* and *The Prince of Egypt* among a host of other features. It is very possible that the album may draw an even older audience to the feature and enhance subsequent video sales, not to mention grabbing some gold or platinum on its own.

A Different Point of View

The other point of contention is the political correctness of the story, where Native Americans are nearly deified while the cavalry, railroads and westward expansion in general are vilified. But in the early versions of the story, the differences were not so pronounced.

According to Fusco, "This colonel is really Custer and was called Custer in my early drafts, and we portrayed the Washington River massacre. So, I wasn't trying to portray the Seventh Cavalry as good guys. Let's portray Custer and the Seventh as they were, and the Native American stuff I

portrayed not so lily white. I spent a lot of time in the Lakota world. I speak the language and was adopted into a family there. So, I showed other characters [Native American] who were more brutal with the horses because that existed too. It was a real survival world, and I wanted to get all that stuff. There were more gray areas in the original. But as it found its way, it became what it wanted to be, and I'm not going to argue animation with Jeffrey [Katzenberg]. It's ultimately going to reach young people, and maybe light a fuse for them and get them interested in the West."

Sweeping Seemless Scope

On the technical side, this was the first animated feature for DreamWorks in Cinemascope. Making the most of the larger aspect ratio, the artists quickly adapted and took full advantage of the format.

"You know, very quickly into it, we realized it's all about picture making," Kelly Asbury notes, "and we have such a team of artists that we knew we wanted to take advantage of the big horizontal scope and thrust of it. Horses are natural for that, trains are natural for that, and the vast vistas are natural for that. So, what we thought to be a challenge in the beginning actually turned out to be an asset."

Another technical note, the animators used Maya software with a Linux platform. Why Linux and not Microsoft? "To dramatically reduce costs was one of the big motivating factors in moving animators to Linux," says head of technology Ed Leonard. "But, it is our animators' productivity that really counts. Telling the story well, not the underlying technology,

is what matters to us. Microsoft software continues to play a key role in our overall business, but Linux is particularly well suited to animation production pipelines."

Again DreamWorks' has pooled together the right formula. Just try to identify the points where 2D transitions into 3D and vice versa. You may be hard pressed, the blending is that good.

So, now all of the challenges have been met except one. Will *Spirit's* run to the box office make it all worthwhile? While the risks seem great, Jeffrey Katzenberg has proved time and time again that what counts is the story and emotional tie that the audience feels with the characters. After all the revisions and creative wrangling, the filmmakers have definitely brought *Spirit* to life.

J. Paul Peszko is a freelance writer and screenwriter living in Los Angeles. He writes feature articles, interviews and reviews for regional publications. He currently has two scripts under option and is working on a feature comedy, in addition to just completing his first novel. When he isn't writing, he teaches communications courses.

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The New Gold Standard: Spider-Man the Movie

by Danny Fingeroth



Spider-Man and the other early 1960s Marvel Comics were the first to be set in real cities like New York rather than a pseudonymous "Metropolis" or "Gotham City."

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In the early 1960s, Marvel Comics' Stan Lee and his artistic collaborators, most prominently Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, came up with a unique hybrid of kid-friendly adventure and grown-up character development that revolutionized comics and, to a large degree, all popular media. It's a hybrid that's in successful use to this day.

Strangely, movies such as *Star Wars* and TV shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* long ago realized that if you combine soap opera, science-fiction and the right kind of humor, you'd have the essence of a Marvel-style story. But when it came to adapting the template to films based on the



Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire) improves upon his first attempt at costume-making.

comics themselves, movie studios always got gun shy, and decided that no sizable audience could possibly take a comic book-based superhero story seriously. This kind of thinking led to self-parodying movies that lost the underlying thematic truths that sparked the characters.

The *Spider-Man*, *Batman*, *Batman Beyond* and *Justice League* cartoons got it, and get it, right. And the first *Superman* and *Batman* movies had great moments of drama, humor and action. But feature filmmakers always seemed embarrassed about taking the material seriously. For whatever the reasons, though *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Buffy*, *Dark Angel* and many other movies and TV shows *not* based on specific comics characters had the Lee/Kirby/Ditko Marvel spirit, feature films based on superhero properties that are completely true to the properties' spirit have just started to be made. The *X-Men* movie and the two *Blade* movies come to mind. But it turns out that they were just warm-ups for *Spider-Man*.

Finally... They Got It Right

Yes, after decades of trying to figure out how to make popular comics franchises acceptable to mainstream movie audiences as

well as to dedicated fans, Hollywood has finally figured it out. Don't change the material. Don't dilute it. Don't satirize it. Don't condescend to it. Keep it true to itself.

Apparently, based on the first weekend box office — over 114 million smackeroos in gross receipts — a lot of people feel that way.

Tobey Maguire is perfect as harried, soulful, misunderstood nerd, Peter Parker. Kirstin Dunst embodies Mary Jane, switching from her serious persona when she's (sincerely) emoting with Peter, to carefree party girl when her friends show up to grab her for a night on the town.

The movie's plot, which is essentially the origin of Spider-Man and the Green Goblin and their first battles, is a classic coming of age story. A "regular-guy" teen is given enormous power. What does he do with it? Does he cash in, show off, fight crime — or is he tempted to become a criminal? What does it say about this person that he makes the choices he does? Would we do the same thing in his place? And how does he deal with other powerful people who make drastically different choices about how to use their power?

It Could Be Us

The comics' and movie's origin of Spider-Man is part of our national pop culture collective memory. Not as familiar, perhaps, as the Superman or Batman origins, it nonetheless hits us where we live. You don't have to be a strange visitor from another planet to be Spider-Man. You don't have to inherit billions of dollars and train to the peak of human physical and mental



Spider-Man (Tobey Maguire) and Mary Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst) become this generation's Romeo and Juliet.



For every super-hero, there must simultaneously arise a super-villain of equal might: Norman Osborn, The Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe).

perfection. All you have to do is get bitten by a radioactive (or, in the movie, genetically modified) spider.

It could happen.

In a way, it *does* happen. To all of us. Well, not the spider-bite. But in everyone's life, something opens our eyes to the fact that the world has possibilities — both good and bad — we never imagined. That the object of our passions may be as shy about expressing them as we are. That everyone thinks they're weird. And we discover that when people realize these

things, they sometimes get arrogant and reckless and self-involved. That's what becoming an adult is all about. That's the real hook of Spider-Man.

Peter Parker does "something wrong. Once." (To quote Burt Lancaster in *The Killers*.) And that one selfish act, committed by an otherwise open-hearted and generous person, results in a loss that will haunt him forever. That is the fear we all live with: that no matter how careful we are, we will make one mistake that will ruin everything. That is where we identify most with Peter. We've all



Spidey must be hoping that his new super-powers include flameproofing.



Good makeup? Good casting? Uncle Ben (Cliff Robertson) and Aunt May (Rosemary Harris) look exactly like Steve Ditko's original comic book art portraits.

made critical mistakes, usually — but not always — reparable. In most cases, no one dies because of them. But we all come close to that edge. Peter falls off of it.

For him, his newfound spider-powers are the key to redeeming himself in his own eyes for a “sin” no one else but he thinks he committed, but for which he can never forgive himself.

The most enduring heroic narratives, from the Bible to the Greek Myths to the archetypal comics heroes — Superman, Batman, Spider-Man — deal with loss of family, discovery of power, the journey from helplessness to mastery, and learning how to best use that mastery. “With great power comes great responsibility,” is what Peter’s Uncle Ben tells the young man shortly after he gets his spider-powers. That’s a lesson Peter learns the hard way, as do we all. Learning it is what makes him a hero. The Green Goblin, played by Willem Dafoe, also has great power. But his sense of responsibility is only to himself. His supposed family loyalty is just an excuse to abuse power. In a role that

echoes, both in dialogue and in gesture, Brando, Pacino and DeNiro in the *Godfather* films, with a little Darth Vader thrown in, Dafoe ably fills the role of Norman Osborn, madman industrialist. As Osborn’s alter ego, the Green Goblin...well, to me, that’s the movie’s weakest point. The costume does all the acting — or non-acting — when Dafoe (or whatever stuntman) is in it.

Action, Action, Action

That’s the weirdest thing about the movie. Much of the

time, the film’s two antagonists’ faces are fully covered. When their faces are uncovered, though, especially in Maguire’s case, they make it count.

Their climactic, final slugfest is just what you want to see in a super hero-super villain battle. Which of the two is technically stronger? Who’s tougher? They’re actually pretty evenly matched. But the strength of the script, performances and message of Spider-Man, in whatever incarnation, is that quality of character trumps hate and power. And, for



The Green Goblin raining on his own company’s parade.



Industrialist Norman Osborn is not the first super-character to gain fantastic powers from an experimental formula, and he will not be the last.



The Green Goblin menacingly emerges from just one of the destructive blasts his high-tech weapons cause.

the two hours we're in the theater, or the twenty minutes we're reading a well-crafted comic, we believe it to be true. We don't think, "Gee, what cool effects," or "How does he go to the bathroom in that suit?" We think, "I wish I was as good of heart as Spider-Man, seriously flawed though he may be."

Don't get me wrong. This isn't a Merchant-Ivory movie. While there's lots of human interest and philosophical reflections on life, there's also lots of (very originally staged) action. There are also many authentic New York sets. (*Spider-Man* is as much a love poem to New York as any Woody Allen film.) There are loads of jokes and quips, both for Spidey-geeks and for those who wouldn't know Spider-Man from the Roto-Rooter Man. There are also many touching moments that transcend genre.

And of course, there's much punching and hitting in, to coin a phrase, the Mighty Marvel Manner.

Just Plain Fun

Significantly, and always

the message of the comics as well as the movie, is that, at the end of the day, after all the grief and battling and angst, it's still *fun* to be Spider-Man. Face it — we've all got our own problems. But only Peter Parker gets to deal with his by swinging though the concrete canyons of New York on silken strands of webbing.

Could I nit-pick things about the movie? Sure. The Goblin suit. The carjacking. (I know they happen in New York, too, but it feels to me like a California thing.) Not getting the power/responsibility line exactly right. "With great power there MUST ALSO come great responsibility," is how it goes. The much-debated "organic" web-shooters. (While they worked better in the movie than I ever dared hope, I still would rather have had them be mechanical.) Peter not using his scientific know-how to solve any major problems. But, like I said, they're nit-picks. You'll no doubt have your own. You get that right when you pay your nine bucks.

Bottom line: *Spider-Man* is

tons of fun. It's the best super hero movie ever made.

Danny Fingeroth was group editor of Marvel Comics' Spider-Man editorial line when Jim Cameron's "scriptment" for a Spider-Man movie arrived on his desk. He's been waiting ten years for the movie to get made. After Marvel, Danny was a creative executive at Virtual Comics and Visionary Media (home of WhirlGirl).

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The Producers of Spider-Man Speak

by Danny Fingeroth

As you can imagine, Laura Ziskin and Avi Arad are two of the busiest people in Hollywood this week. Danny Fingeroth managed to snag each of them at key times in the progress of the *Spider-Man* movie phenomenon.

Laura Ziskin, Executive Producer of Spider-Man

(Ziskin's previous credits as executive producer include *Pretty Woman*, *To Die For* and *As Good As It Gets*.)

I spoke with Laura Ziskin by phone on Friday morning (Spider-Man's premiere day), after the phenomenal East Coast box office returns had started to roll in. Needless to say, she was in very good spirits.

Danny Fingeroth: *How are you doing?*

Laura Ziskin: We're havin' fun.

DF: *Did you read a lot of Spider-Man comics to prepare for this film?*

LZ: I did. I hadn't read any comics until I came onto the project, but Avi Arad says I'm now a geek.

DF: *Congratulations. (Laughs) Many comics fans wonder why*



Figuring out how to deal with the characters' masks was one of the bigger challenges for producer Laura Ziskin (seen here with actor Tobey Maguire on the set of *Spider-Man*). Photo credit: Zade Rosenthal. © 2002 Columbia Pictures.

the Green Goblin's costume is so different from the Goblin in the comics. What was the reason for the drastic change?

LZ: One of the toughest things we had to deal with was the Goblin. I didn't feel that the comic book character, visually, was something we could just translate directly to the screen. It was a struggle. We wanted to give the audience some understanding of why he put that green suit on, where it came from. We wanted it to be related to what he did. That's why we put him in armor that

would be connected to his glider. The mask was trickier. Originally, we tried a latex mask, which we had high hopes for, but it was frightening in not the right way. We made it so that he was a warrior who made weapons of war and collected warrior masks, and when he flips out, he puts a warrior mask on his noggin.

DF: *For much of the movie, you have two characters wearing masks that cover their entire face, yet having to convey emotion. That must have been difficult to deal with.*

LZ: It was truly one of the huge challenges we dealt with, having two characters in masks. With the Goblin, we figured, "Let's see his eyes, that will help." But we couldn't do that with Spider-Man and be true to his costume. That was when Sam [Raimi] came up with the notion of having his mask ripped at the end of the movie, so you could have an ending where you see the actor react.

DF: *You really kept things true to the flavor of the comics. I was very impressed by that.*

LZ: Thanks. That was our goal, to honor the original's spirit. That's been the most gratifying thing — the positive reaction of the fans. We felt we had to make a movie for them.

**When I came
into it I
thought that
Spider-Man
was just a
boy thing.
– Laura Ziskin**

DF: *Of course, there was great controversy over the organic web-shooters Spider-Man has in the movie, as opposed to the mechanical ones he uses in the comics.*

LZ: Some people made a big deal of it, though we didn't think it was that big a thing. We thought it was a really good decision that, actually, Jim Cameron had made in his original "scriptment." [Something

between a treatment and a script.] Everybody's kind of gone with it. We thought that would happen.

DF: *What, if anything, does the success of Spider-Man say about our times?*

LZ: That we're always wrestling with questions of good and evil and how to deal with great power? That's a resonant idea, though not unique to this time. It's always a theme worth exploring.

DF: *In many movies about adolescents, the high school graduation would come at the end. In Spider-Man, he makes that transition in the middle of the movie. Any reason it was structured that way?*

LZ: Peter had a lot more learning and living to do. Graduation is the moment he decides to take on the mantle of Spider-Man.

DF: *How is Spider-Man different from other super hero movies?*

LZ: Really, it comes from Sam's point-of-view, and his love for the comic and his relationship with the characters. He wanted the film to have a sunny feeling and be buoyant and filled with bright colors. And that, again, is what he felt was in keeping with the books, not to try to make it falsely hip. I always say about Sam, "Sam is so unhip, he's hip." He's hip in his own way, but not in some sort of copycat, follow-a-trend way. He's authentic.

DF: *Any thoughts on the wide*

appeal the movie seems to be having?

LZ: It has something more than just the action. The movie is about a character that you care about and that, to me, is its biggest triumph. And also that it's a movie that works for girls. When I came into it I thought that *Spider-Man* was just a boy thing. But when I read the script, I said, "That's not so. We can make a movie that works for everybody."

Avi Arad, Marvel Enterprises' Chief Creative Officer and Executive Producer of Spider-Man

(Arad's credits have included serving as executive producer on *Blade I & II*, creating the *Mutant X* series, and just about every current Marvel movie and TV initiative.)

I spoke with Avi Arad by phone (in between his many meetings) on the Monday morning after the weekend in which Spider-Man had broken all previous records for gross receipts for any movie ever, and had also garnered nearly unanimous rave reviews.

Danny Fingeroth: *What do you do Monday morning after a weekend like this?*

Avi Arad: You go on and carefully make the other movies and hope they all turn out winners.

DF: *Spider-Man took a long time to do.*

AA: I know. You know. You were there when it began, years ago.

DF: *Was it worth the wait?*



Executive producer Avi Arad of Marvel Comics (left) talks to Stan Lee, creator of Spider-Man on the movie set. Photo credit: Zade Rosenthal. © 2002 Columbia Pictures.

AA: Absolutely. Every bit of it. It came out great. Sometimes waiting is good.

DF: *Was there much in the script from James Cameron's original version?*

AA: The movie has a different villain. But the Peter and MJ story, yes, there was a lot from Cameron. And he and we used the source comics material. There are shots in the movie that are based on panels in the comics. It was like a mix-and-match, a little from this source, a little from that. I think the tone that [screenwriter] David Koepp established worked well for all of us.

DF: *You were amazingly faithful to the comics, but there were some changes. Any you want to talk about? The organic web-shooters, for example?*

AA: On the Internet, the web-shooters were controversial. Now they love it, they understand it, they get it. The changes we made

were good changes. Mary Jane was a better heroine in the long term than Gwen Stacey [another Spider-Man romantic interest in the comics] would have been. I thought, all in all, the choices were very good, and people seem to be quite satisfied with them.

DF: *As executive producer, what was your role in making the movie?*

AA: Everything, from picking a director, to casting — which, of course, is very important — to working on the story with Koepp, including deciding what pieces of Cameron's treatment we would keep. The MJ story versus a Gwen story. Initially we tried both. I never felt Gwen would work. I did what producers do: get involved in the creative mix. The costumes, the sets, interviewing potential directors, and so on.

DF: *How does Stan Lee feel about the movie?*

AA: Stan created a wonderful

legacy and a great story, and we had to make sure that we didn't veer from what he did, because it's worked so well, and there's no reason to make any changes. We showed him the movie, and he was very happy.

DF: *In the scenes where Peter is sketching ideas for his Spider-Man costume, who actually did the drawings?*

AA: It was an artist named Phil Jimenez [an artist on *Wonder Woman* comics].

DF: *Marvel seems to be on a roll in terms of its movies these days. The X-Men, the Blade movies, now Spider-Man. Any thoughts about why things are taking off so hugely now?*

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AA: Now, you've got me doing it full time. (Laughs.) The major thing is that our previous owners were not focused on entertainment, but on publishing and licensing. I don't think they understood how valuable these characters are. Or maybe they did understand, but were afraid to find out that maybe they weren't. Once we took over the company — and since we love

this material and we know what we have — we could act on our commitment to it. And so far, so good. Four for four. Pretty good numbers. There are also other factors. One is the fact that yesterday's kids are today's movie executives, directors, cinematographers, video game designers, things like that. And obviously, the great escalation in technology makes our movies more doable and makes them better.

DF: Can you tell us about the upcoming Spider-Man animated series that will be on MTV?

AA: It's an interesting combination of traditional and CG animation. Sony is producing the show. It has a more contemporary look, and it deals with Peter's college days, not his high school days, though it's not necessarily picking up where the movie ends. The movie gets Peter to college and

that's probably the main similarity. College is the starting point. [Ultimate Spider-Man writer] Brian Bendis is heavily involved. He's a story editor and is writing many of the scripts.

DF: How would you compare it to the mid-1990's Spider-Man animated series?

AA: The '90s show was based more on the classic Spider-Man. We picked up great stories from the comics and we adapted them. Hence, we had a great show. This one is a little more mature...

With that, Avi was called into yet another meeting, leaving us to ponder what a "more mature" Spider-Man animated series will be like. I'm betting it'll be excellent.

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Waking Life

and Liquid Caricature

by Chris Lanier



Waking Life takes the viewer on a journey of dreams. All *Waking Life* images
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Waking Life, directed by Richard Linklater, takes the viewer on a dreamer's journey — the main character, unnamed but played by Wiley Wiggins, wanders through a series of dreams from which he cannot wake. Trapped in this oneiric net, he encounters a procession of characters who offer him their ideas on the nature of reality, identity, human communication and destiny (among a hodgepodge of other topics). Some of this is scripted, and some of the monologues are actually the pet theories and personal enthusiasms of non-actors brought before the camera. The original footage was

shot on digital video, and then a team of artists were hired to animate over it, using software developed by Bob Sabiston. Through the animation, the characters are given a slippery dream-presence, sometimes to humorous effect, and sometimes to a more purely expressionistic effect.

Waking Life is a wildly digressive film, delighting in sidelines and the occasional enticing dead-end; along the margins of its journey it also manages to suggest several novel things about the nature of caricature, and the purely occult applications of that much-maligned animation technique, rotoscoping.

The use of caricature in *Waking Life* is very particular. Caricature is certainly nothing new to animation. One of the early staples of animation was the old "Hollywood party" cartoon, which only existed to parade a series of recognizable exaggerations: Groucho's oily moustache, Clark Gable's granite outcropping of forehead, Mae West's prehensile eyelashes, WC Field's swollen punchbag nose. Today we watch these famed ideographs rubbing elbows with lesser-knowns and second-stringers, who we're meant to recognize, but don't: placed beyond the ability to remind us of their origins, their physical exaggerations simply come off as rubbery deformities. Likewise, if they utter a once-beloved catchphrase, cut off from its original context, it just registers as a kind of cultural tourette. (The spectacle of Hollywood strivers reduced, after death, to anonymous inked grotesques is enough, if dwelled upon, to give a case of the night-sweats.

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Disney has increasingly carried celebrity caricature into their feature-length animation; though as one of the "extras" on the new *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* DVD reveals, it lies hidden at the very genesis. Staff artists sometimes turned toward celebrities to help them envision the qualities of the characters they

were hoping to bring to life, and an early character design of Snow White was modeled on Zasu Pitts. [Although the artist didn't have Pitts' work with Erich Von Stroheim in mind. The drawing suggests an alternate universe where Snow White lies rolling on the Dwarves' beds, madly clutching a blanket of coins. While Pitts was abandoned as a "source" for Snow White, she did eventually make it into cartoons: her flustered comedic persona, with its fluttering hands and nervous voice, became the template for the animated version of Olive Oyl.]



The art of the caricature first appeared in Agostino Carracci's "Sheet of Caricatures" (detail), 1594.

The use of caricature in *Waking Life* is very particular.

More recently, Disney has moved from considering caricature as a source of inspiration to a mandate, modeling the character designs directly on their "name" voice actors. There's wit on display here, in the Hirshfeld-like desire to whittle the essence of a face down to its sparest lines. Though, unsurprisingly, this is wit inextricably entangled with the logic of marketing: if you pay the money for name voices, you want to make



Caricature as it appears in *Waking Life*.

sure you can sell their celebrity. Celebrity is a kind of currency, and while a caricature is an expression of personality, it can also be "branding" — the sublimated face as corporate logo.

We're such a celebrity-inundated culture that it may seem strange to speak of caricature outside the realm of fame and notoriety. Caricature has a number of modes outside of fame, however — the caricature of definite, individual personalities was actually a late development, preceded by the caricature of "types," whether they be social, moral or racial.

And when the caricature of the individual did appear — under the pen of the Italian Annibale Carracci, in the 1600s — it first played on intimate physiognomies, not public ones. As the art historian E. H. Gombrich writes: "...the Italian caricature of the seventeenth century was a pastime for leisure hours only. The victims of such caricatures were not public heroes but friends of the studio, dilettanti and noblemen, enlightened enough to be flattered by these fruits of passing whim and gentle mockery."

While I have no way of knowing how many *dilettanti* and

noblemen are on the roster of *Waking Life*, there are certainly many "friends of the studio," people from the Austin film scene where Linklater made his name. In fact, the handful of performers in *Waking Life* who might be considered famous — Ethan Hawke, Julie Delpy, Steven Soderbergh — are animated without being caricatured. The is no desire to use caricatures to play off the recognition of a wide audience, but simply to amplify and distill the subject's individualized personal traits; and in this narrow regard, at least, *Waking Life* is a new-tech throw-back to personal caricature's infant studio days.

Also, when caricature is used in *Waking Life*, it's very different from the usual fixed stylization of caricatural animation: an effect as though the subject's facial features had been extended and abstracted into an articulated mask. Rather, the caricatures exist as flickering, shimmering indeterminacies. This is an effect achieved through a novel usage of rotoscope, which is also employed by the animators to caricature something more intangible than physio-

gnomy: at times, *Waking Life* moves into a personalized caricature of *motion*.

Rotoscoping at its most basic is the tracing of a photographic image, projected onto animation paper or an animation cel, in order to create a series of animated frames. Bob Sabiston's process doesn't exactly use those analog configurations, but it still deals with the tracing of figures over a recorded image, and he himself has referred to it as a rotoscoping process.

While rotoscoping's initial use was met with praise — critics found rotoscoped animation amazingly fluid and “realistic” — it has since then been generally looked down upon. The most obvious reason for this is that it appears less “artistic;” the hand isn't creating something out of thin air, rather it's following the lead of a mechanical apparatus.

But there are artistic possibilities hidden in the act of tracing and rotoscoping has never been a purely mechanical process; it produces its own

peculiar artifacts. *Waking Life* is the first animated feature to embrace those artifacts and actually compound them until they make up a coherent artistic vision.

Perhaps it's natural that some of the few instances of interesting rotoscoping come from the technique's inventors, the Fleischer Brothers. They first used the technique for their character Koko the Clown, a creepy smooth-faced Pierrot — and a habitual fugitive from an artist's ink bottle. Koko would start each episode either by unscrewing the bottle's cap from the inside, or by congealing himself out of a puddle of tipped jet India. The jittery liquid quality of the rotoscoped sequences is reminiscent of the shimmery wobble of spilled ink, as if Koko, once spilled, can't stop spilling.

Disney soon employed rotoscoping techniques for *Snow White*, to more distracting effect. The rotoscoped human characters in *Snow White* look like they come from a different universe than the Dwarves and

animals — and what's worse, a far less interesting universe. It's a perfect visual distillation of the problem that dogs most fairy-tales, where the main protagonists are usually far duller than the intriguing side-characters who fill out the world's corners. Even when the human characters in *Snow White* strain for expressiveness, they seem reigned in: the rotoscoping smooths away some of the particularities that might have otherwise been gleaned from the faces and bodies of the actors. Everything that has been subtracted from the actors is present, in heightened form, in the plastic (and wholly animated) features of the Dwarves.

Max Fleischer considered suing Disney for patent violation, but soon found out that another company had actually created something similar to the rotoscope, prior to the Fleischer patent. Fleischer still might have been able to sue, as that company had never filed a patent itself. But perhaps he'd developed some karmic appreciation for buried antecedents and their claims on legality; the Fleischer studio had already dodged a suit brought against them by the singer Helen Kane, who claimed Betty Boop was a “wrongful appropriation” of her identity. In fact, Boop *had* been designed after Kane (making Boop a sort of caricature manqué), but Kane lost the case when it was discovered Kane's trademark “Boop-oop-a-doop” hadn't been coined by Kane at all; in fact, she'd apparently lifted it from a black singer, named Baby Esther.

The byways of transformation, appropriation and outright theft, knotted along the miscegenating lines of entertainment and race — the sputtering black



A rotoscoped Snow White appears less interesting visually than her dwarf friends.
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soul hidden under the gloss of a painted cel or a turn of phrase — leads us back to another memorable Fleischer rotoscope: Cab Calloway's first immigration into the Boop universe. In "Minnie the Moocher," when Boop visits a ghostly underworld, Calloway appears in the guise of a ghost walrus, singing "Minnie" through his ectoplasmic ivory tusks. At first this might seem like a bit of early ethnic smuggling (like the contraband phraseology "kick the gong," stashed in an entertainment for bright-eyes kids, most of whom, we have to assume, had yet to be acquainted with an opium-pipe). Up to the present day, there's a tendency to "clothe" ethnicity under unsewn animal skins: *The Little Mermaid* couldn't have a real Jamaican in it, so the faux-patois had to issue from a hermit crab. Likewise, Eddie Murphy has now ventriloquized both a dragon and a donkey.

But "Minnie the Moocher" isn't an attempt to "mask" the race of the performer since the cartoon actually begins with live footage of Calloway and his orchestra. The hilarious, slithery, ineffably cool dance moves that Calloway exhibits here are the same steps copied for the bump and shuffle of the ghost (Calloway, for the record, reportedly fell off his chair laughing when he first saw his Walrusification).

Calloway's transmigration to animal form may've been an active mercy, considering the caricatural imperatives of the time. Louis Armstrong wasn't so lucky; in the Boop cartoon "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead You Rascal You," Louis appears as an African "native." As the title song begins, a spear-wielding African's



Does this minstrel mask give us clues to understanding the person underneath the image?

head balloons, 'til it engulfs his body and floats into the air: the song is mouthed by a thick-lipped top-knotted cannibal-dirigible. This eventually melts away to superimposed footage of Armstrong's actual head, mugging and rolling his eyes in echo of the cartoon.

If Calloway had appeared as a cartoon black man, with saucer eyes and innertube lips, he would've seemed less human (and less himself) than as a spirit-Walrus. The caricature of race was so smothering at that point that the caricatural "type" was bound to overwhelm a caricature of individual personality. The cartoon African version of Armstrong's face (not rotoscoped, but animated outright) can't immediately, from its facial characteristics, be identified as Armstrong: it's just another assembly-line jigaboo rictus.

A sequence in *Waking Life* at first seems to skirt some of the bad old days of racial caricature. One of the monologists, Aklilu Gebrewald, is a black man, and the animator chooses to exaggerate the size of his eyes and the bright white sheen of

his teeth. These are such keystones of the minstrel mask, at first it's as though the gates of race have closed over his face. But after a short while they seem like real expressions of personality; there is a warmth and openness to Gebrewald that the eyes and blinding smile seem to invite in. As you listen to him speak, in the few minutes he occupies the screen, his cartoon figure seems, paradoxically, a more genuine human presence than real-life footage of 7-Up shill and professional eye-bugger Orlando Jones.

Besides which, it's clear pretty early into *Waking Life* that eyes are key, both as a visual and philosophical touchstone. The way the animators use the roto-scoping software, they often isolate each facial feature from the others, setting them gliding on different planes and oscillations. In this facial ripple (as if each face were a puddle that a stone has been dropped into, sending eyes, nose and mouth drifting on separate concentric rings), the eyes most often take precedence. Sometimes they break the frame of the face, giving the jarring sense of an intelli-



The eyes are key to character development in *Waking Life*.

gence or spirit that's sprinted one step ahead of its body.

More often, the eyes loom larger than scale, expanding outward; perhaps this Americanized dilation can finally lay to rest the notion that the *Sailor Moon*-eyes in Japanese anime are some swoony admission of Occident-envy. It's merely an attempt to widen the portals to the soul.

It's a graphic simulation of the sensation that occurs when you're involved in an intense conversation with someone and the person's eyes take over their face. Across that bridge of sight, the eyes may not seem to grow physically larger — but they do appear to drift closer (it's the feeling of proximity that gives the linguistic formulation of eye "contact"), while the rest of the face blurs into generalities.

One of the grounding vignettes in *Waking Life* takes place between independent filmmaker/performer Caveh Zahedi and a friend. Zahedi excitedly talks about the "holiness" of every moment, a "holiness" to which we're ordinarily oblivious (he speaks of this in connection with Bazin, who felt that in an attentive recording of the

unscrolling moment, cinema could potentially have truck with the divine). After some windy gusts of theory, Zahedi finally has had enough of it and turns to praxis: he suggests he and his friend have a "holy moment" right here, right now. He stops speaking, and for several seconds, they simply look into each other's eyes. It's a wonderfully awkward, charged scene. The camera zooms in on Zahedi's looming, fixed pupils.

Isn't caricature, when all is said and done, about essence?

The filmmakers, the animators, the actors — they all turn toward the eyes when they're hunting for spirit, for essence.

And isn't caricature, when all is said and done, about essence?

Carracci, according to Gombrich, offered an early defense of caricature, on grounds that its impulses were the same as those of the more refined, more "profound" arts:

"Is not the caricaturist's task exactly the same as the classical artist's? Both see the lasting truth beneath the surface of mere outward appearance. Both try to help nature accomplish its plan. The one may strive to visualize the perfect form and to realize it in his work, the other to grasp the perfect deformity, and thus reveal the very essence of a personality. A good caricature, like every work of art, is more true to life than reality itself."

It's interesting that here, the defense is still couched in purely negative terms: the "perfect deformity." It's certainly true that caricature is often employed to make the subject less human. But the apparent contradiction caricature is based on — namely, that distortion can make something *more itself* — is more fundamental than its application toward deformity. Hirshfeld, for instance, elevates his subjects as much as he kids them, making their iconic presence concrete, indelible. Hirshfeld, though, the great chronicler and mythologist of the stage and screen, is essentially capturing a performative mask. His caricatures rarely have that intimate sense that accrues to the characters in *Waking Life*, where the caricatures seem exploratory and provisional.

The simplified self can be a more intimate self, a more familiar self. The memories we have of people tend not to be photographic — when we think of a close friend, we don't think of every pore and pimple, we can't enumerate every eyelash — we have more of an essence, a refined caricature. This is the effect that is rendered on all the characters in *Waking Life*, even the ones that aren't exaggerated, the ones



Our memories of people are refined caricatures, not photographic facts.

who are “captured” without the extravagances of caricature. We’re given the memory of their form without the intercession of time — as if memories could take place in present tense.

Like dream and like memory, the characters and the world they inhabit in *Waking Life* are constantly in flux. There is a jittery wobble that seems to arise from the rotoscope process: the accumulated imperfections between the eye, the hand and the rendering surface. It’s a sense of inconstancy that worked well for Koko the clown, but which was ordinarily the bane of the rotoscoper’s existence during the photochemical era of the technique. In *Waking Life* it’s wholly embraced, and almost set on a pedestal of aesthetic principle. The caricature becomes a liquid caricature, with the physiognomic exaggerations erupting and then subsiding, almost as though these physical particularities were merely adjuncts to a deeper animating force.

A bravura sequence of animation in *Waking Life* is the monologue of Eamonn Healy, a professor and chemist who believes humanity is reaching a

new stage of evolution, at the threshold of becoming the “neo-human.” He talks excitedly, skipping from one thought to another, too rapidly to keep up with; his hands lunge out in explosive swipes at the air. The animator treats Healy’s head and face like a restless blob of mercury, or a caffeinated amoeba, threatening to make some quantum evolutionary leap. His limbs swerve and snake beyond the limits of anatomy, stretching like rubber.

Any isolated frame of this sequence, if frozen, would make Healy look like a grotesque. But in motion, he actually appears intensely vibrant and alive. This moving caricature gets at Healy’s living self, as both a body and an intellect: the restless wiggle of his figure, which seems always on the edge of mitosis, visually puns off Healy’s idea that the next level of human evolution will be driven by the mind, rather than by purely physical processes. The animation allows him to become a figurative fulfillment of his own prophecy.

The expressive flow of gesture that rotoscoping is here used to capture, for the sake of

artistic exaggeration, is very unlike the rehearsed gestures of *Snow White*. There, the gestures were coached beforehand, in order to match the plan of the animation: gesture was used to give form to a theatrical idea. The gestures express, but they don’t reveal. The body and movements of Marjorie Belcher, the dancer and actress used as filmic reference for *Snow White*, were used as intermediaries — placeholders between idea and execution.

The physical acting behind the rotoscope of *Snow White* stands at an interesting pivot-point.

Film captures gesture in a way no other medium can; the motion picture camera is the technology that has brought all the subtle nuances of gesture into the fold of artistic contemplation. The way the camera “notices” incremental movements and expressions has transformed the physicality of acting, moving it from melodrama that could be “read” from the back seats of the theater, to a more subdued naturalism (the most visible contemporary trace of the earlier, theatrical mode of acting is of course the cartoon, where the use of the emphatic still seems “natural”).

The physical acting behind the rotoscope of *Snow White* stands at an interesting pivot-point. While that telegraphed, pantomime style was already well receding from the screen by 1937 — brought about by a

technology of vision that essentially magnifies small gestures, collapsing the space between the physicality of the performer and the eye of the audience — Belcher was being coached to push her style in the opposite direction, back toward the emphatic, so that it wouldn't clash too much with its cartoon environment. So the camera-eye is both destroying a mode of acting, and being used to project that mode of acting into a reinvigorated art. Rushing forward and backward at once, old styles are meeting with new forms, turning on the fulcrum of the rotoscope.

(If this seems a too coldly technical eye to put on the use of motion in film, consider that the rise of caricature as an art form was facilitated partly by technical means: it was the rise of etching that allowed the reproduction of the fine, light linework that best abetted caricatural wit. The line engraving that preceded etching

was too stiff and formal to support such tossed-off fancy.)

Both the animated gestures of *Snow White* and Eamonn Healy can be understood as caricatures of motion. The first is analogous to the caricature of "types;" the distortion of gesture doesn't reveal anything of the essence of the individual performer, rather it amplifies emotional states. It is meant to evoke qualities, not personality. The latter example is *nothing but* personality.

The kind of gestures *Waking Life* pays such heightened attention to are usually noticed, in ordinary film, at the margins of performance. But in *Waking Life*, the revelatory qualities of gesture are nearly the whole film itself. It is a movie that repeatedly asks: What is identity? What is self? It offers no final answer except the evanescent, living dance of forms, expressions and gestures — quivering over the surface of a dream, like

a skin of colors stretched across the spherul screen of a bubble.

Perhaps this is part of the eerie magnetism of the spectral Walrus. Calloway himself has gone to the boneyard. By capturing Calloway's idiosyncratic dance (not only has no Walrus ever danced that way — no other human being has), that roto-scoped trace — emanating yet also isolated from his body — captures some mirror ricochet of his soul.

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

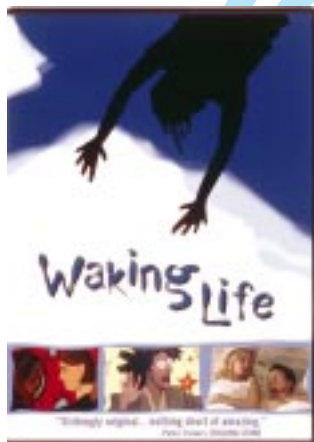
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Animation World Magazine



DVD Review:

Waking Life



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by Chris Lanier

than the characters featured onscreen. (This is surely the only feature-length animation production that has hired an artist based on his work on an X-rated coloring book.) A few point out the little subliminal filigrees they worked into the background, too fast to catch at normal projection speed, but now able to be seen in DVD freeze-frame (a detail-intensive rack of candy bars with "Hercules" substituted for "Hershey's," "Junior Pants" for "Junior Mints," and so on, is particularly chuckle-worthy and testament to the human mind's need to turn drudgery into a game).

These sorts of flash-frame subliminal details have historically been an industry safety valve; bursts of passive-aggressive animation that safely tick past faster than the human eye. Here, though, they seem less the result of frustration than play. The common thread through the animators' commentary is the pleasure they took in the creative environment Linklater and Sabiston established. Sabiston emerges as a genuinely impressive creative force behind the film, not only encouraging a collaborative atmosphere that inspired excellent work, but also drawing long sequences of animation himself, and periodically getting under the hood of his own software, adding new functionalities to the program as new needs arose.

The DVD also includes

some alternate scenes (many involving incidental bits of business the animators have added to the footage, which were ultimately deemed distracting from the flow of the film), a few scenes of the original DV footage the animators rotoscoped over (which shows just how much the animators reinvented the feel of the scenes not merely tracing them), and Bob Sabiston giving a demonstration of how the artists used the software.

There are more odds and ends, but the most satisfying extra is Sabiston's short film *Snack and Drink*, which features earlier (and more free-form) use of his animation software. The short follows an autistic teenager, Ryan Power, on a walk to the corner store for soda and candy, while Sabiston tags along, asking questions. (Power would later act in one of the segments of *Waking Life*, as a human who turns into an alien over the course of his monologue.) I worked at a group home for autistic kids for over a year, and found the universe Sabiston created for Power, where everyday objects are prone to shift and transform, almost overpowering in their strange "thingness," to be a persuasive visual metaphor for the autistic experience — at least as it might be imagined from the outside.

It's a point at which *Snack and Drink* meets back up with *Waking Life*. We really do live in a world patched together with strange, perplexing things; it's only habit, a kind of sleepwalking, that dulls it down to normalcy.

Chris Lanier is an animator, writer and cartoonist living in San Francisco.

The newly-released DVD of *Waking Life* is full of extras that will be of interest to anyone who enjoyed the film.

There are two audio tracks; the first features Linklater, Wiggins, Sabiston and Tommy Pollatta, the film's producer. Linklater is refreshingly candid about what the actors and the animators added to the film. He seems to have created a process more than a script. Many of the most striking visual moments — the sparkling rivets that punctuate and support the discursive narrative flow (for example, a pair of people at a table turning into cloud-forms, or a dream that plays out in silhouettes projected onto a wall) — were conceived entirely by the animators.

The second commentary track, featuring over 25 animators who worked on the film, is even more engaging. The animators, several of them artists who were animating for the first time, come across as a group of people only slightly less eccentric

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Strip Tease

by Martin “Dr. Toon” Goodman



Jeremy Duncan is the central character of *Zits*, which chronicles the complexities of modern family life. © 2002 Zits Partnership. Published online by permission of King Features Syndicate.

The printed comic strip and animated cartoons have shared a long mutual history; in many cases, the former has given birth to the latter. Newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst even established his own studio for the purpose of having his newspaper strips animated, the better to boost circulation. So it was in the halcyon days of rice paper and India ink when Mutt and Jeff, Krazy Kat, and *The Katzenjammer Kids*

displayed their stiff and jerky charms beneath crude word balloons. In some cases, things got better as time went on, as demonstrated by Fleischer studio's *Popeye The Sailor* series. Bill Melendez also did a terrific job of bringing Charles Schultz' *Peanuts* strip to life, putting Charlie Brown and crew into some of the niftiest cartoon specials of the 1960s and '70s.

In some cases, the formula failed: Columbia's mangling of

Al Capp's *Li'l Abner* strip in 1944 is a prime example. A sad end also came to Filmation's *Fabulous Funnies* in 1979 when audiences failed to respond to animated versions of Broomhilda, Alley Oop and other luminaries of the comic strip trade. The tradition continued on into the 1980s with some success, most notably in adaptations of Jim Davis' *Garfield*, George Gately's *Heathcliff* and Pierre Culliford's *Les Schtroumpfs* (that's *The Smurfs* to the Saturday Morning crowd). A more recent example of strip-to-screen would be that scarred survivor of the Great Millennial Prime-Time Slaughter, Jerry Scott's *Baby Blues*. In many cases a feedback loop occurred between the comics and animation so that Felix the Cat and Mickey Mouse, among others, made the transition to a daily strip.

This rich and productive cross-pollination between print and animation mediums is one of the forces that keeps animation vital, and hopefully it will continue on into the future. Actually, I predict that we will see more of these transitions from strip to screen on a regular basis, since one of the great trends of the past decade is the conglomeration and merger of media companies. Comic strips, being a presold commodity, can gain a second round of profits in animated form. This represents an economic windfall that will become increasingly irresistible to entertainment moguls, cartoonists and animation studios alike. Presold commodities are also more likely to find funding than original products; buyers and distributors may feel safer laying their ducats on animating a comic strip that runs in 900



A top Goodman pick for transition to the screen is *The Boondocks* by Aaron McGruder. © Aaron McGruder. Reprinted with permission of uclick. All rights reserved.

newspapers and reaches a readership of millions than an original idea by a gang of recent graduates from Animation U. Not to mind whose idea may be better; that, dear readers, just isn't the point.

So...what's out there these days that might carry on the grand old tradition? Which recent comic strips might take their place in the hallowed pantheon of media jumpers? Allow me, if you will, to tease you with some contenders. These are not capricious selections by any means; these first two were chosen with an eye to the question that endlessly nags American animation to this day: "When are we going to see some animation for *adults*?" Well, suppose the answer to this question isn't to be found in American animation as it exists today? What if a cross-influence from another medium is needed in order for this process to make a quantum leap? What if I quit hypothesizing and simply get to my picks?

The Boondocks

My initial offering is all the more exciting because it may actually happen (one of these days). The strip is *The Boondocks*, and the cartoonist is Aaron McGruder. For a strip that has only existed since 1997, *Boondocks*

has managed to become one of the most controversial comics of its day. The strip explores the lives of several young African-American children who have relocated from the ghetto to the mostly white suburb of Woodcrest, U.S.A. The main protagonist is Huey Freeman. Despite his years he is somewhat of a scholar, constantly reading and questioning the world around him. Consumed with a preternatural rage, this unsmiling youth serves as McGruder's voice as he examines the hypocrisies inherent in both white — and black — society. His younger brother Riley refuses to relinquish the gangsta culture of the old 'hood and wields a clutch of dangerous-looking squirt guns. The pair are befriended by Michael Cesar, hip-hoppin' MC and budding lyricist, and Hiro Otomo, the self-proclaimed master of "turntable bushido." Rounding out the main cast are Granddad, caretaker to Huey and Riley, ? and sweet-natured Jazmine DuBois. The latter is a bewildered biracial young girl who serves as a foil to Huey's sulkiness. Jazmine also functions as a living exploration of the similarities and contradictions between the races.

Not all readers respond

positively to the strip; this is mainly because Mr. McGruder speaks his mind openly and unsparingly, swayed neither by the trap of political correctness nor any perceived obligation to ignore the contradictions in his own culture. McGruder is equally impatient with readers of either race when they miss the satire in *Boondocks* or assume that he is speaking for every character. Shortly after appearing on several programs airing on Black Entertainment Television, McGruder blasted the network in several strips for trivializing blacks and perpetuating repugnant stereotypes while purporting to be black America's entertainment network. BET claimed that McGruder was embittered by his failure to sell an animated *Boondocks* project to the network, a charge McGruder denies. At last report (or rumor), McGruder was making a deal with an unnamed cable network and had hired Reginald Hudlin to direct. We shall see.

This strip has everything it needs to be a great animated series with adult sensibilities. McGruder's pull-no-punches style and blunt willingness to confront the thorniest issues facing blacks and whites in this era mixes nicely with his dictum that we have left our children these questions; they will have to wrestle with them using their own sensibilities. McGruder's artistic style is moody, with muted colors predominant. His characters tend to be low-slung, angular and sharply edged; they should animate quite well. Since McGruder mostly works with children, animators had best be prepared

to work 2 1/2 heads high. Due to the nature of the dialogue, it might be better to cast adults as voice actors and have them intone "younger" voices; *Boondocks* would not work with cutie-pie warbling. If the rumors are true, we may possibly see the animated version in late 2002. If not, somebody... please...make a deal with Aaron McGruder. This show belongs on television.

Dykes To Watch Out For

Even those who are not members of the gay community can find plenty to laugh about in Alison Bechdel's raucous comic strip *Dykes To Watch Out For*. This well-kept secret would make a terrific coup for some progressive cable network willing to foot the bill. *Dykes* has been running since 1983 and can be found in nearly seventy magazines, not all of them gay publications; readers of the *Funny Times* are no doubt familiar with this comic (also available on

the Web). In that nineteen-year span, Bechdel has built up a community of endearing characters who are sharp, thoughtful, politically aware and never stop coming to grips with life. Mo is an active feminist and resident socialist whose rants and diatribes often fall on uncomprehending ears. Lois is a self-confident, flip mistress of sarcasm. Clarice, a prominent attorney, lives on an ever-changing diet of anti-depressants while her lifemate Toni tries to keep up with their son (yup, that's right), Raffi. Sydney and Ginger are fixtures at the local university, where the former is forever fighting for tenure while the latter has spent half her life trying to graduate from a Doctoral program. Matronly Jezanna runs the chaotic "Madwimmen Bookstore" where we often find dreamy Sparrow, a New Age astrology freak.

This strip contains as much adult humor and political satire as *Doonesbury*, and not all of it involves lesbianism (though the

humor takes place inside that general context). The strip has a quirky feel; the same newspaper might change its headlines from one panel to the next, or a TV playing in the background might play counterpoint to the dialogue. As one might have guessed by now, the strip's politics are quite liberal, but at times Bechdel will pull an ideological surprise in order to enhance the satire or make a mordant point or two. *Dykes* is deceptively sophisticated but this is best discovered by reading a series of episodes rather than taking any one strip at random, and that fact alone makes it good material for an animated series.

Still, *Dykes*' greatest strength is its sizable cast of funny, expressive characters and the relationships that lie at the heart of the story. Given time to develop, this could be every bit as interesting as *King of the Hill*, with the difference that the humor is decidedly more adult. Bechdel has identified Robert Crumb as a major artistic influence; this is obvious in the strip, especially in the drawing of facial expressions. Bechdel's line, however, is cleaner, her proportions better and her poses less exaggerated than Crumb's. Animating this show would call for good reproduction of the human figure. Backgrounds may have to be simplified as Bechdel sometimes crowds her panels; this might not work on television, where her animated characters would have to register more strongly on the screen. Who wants to take a chance on this one? MTV? HBO? How about TNN putting this one into their new "adult" animation slot? *Dykes To Watch Out For* is one comic strip we should watch out for on TV. Perhaps some day we will.



Sophisticated and sharp, Alison Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For* is another contender to go from paper to television. © Alison Bechdel.



Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman, the creators of *Zits*, capture youth's exuberance and surliness. © 2002 Zits Partnership. Published online by permission of King Features Syndicate.

OK, those are my two main proposals. Here are a couple of more mainstream possibilities that would at least make for a decent Christmas special (What? *Another* one?). These strips adhere less to meeting criteria for "adult" animation, but we can't expect the industry to change overnight. As mentioned earlier, Jerry Scott made it to TV with an adaptation of *Baby Blues*, but in fact he is also the co-author of a much better strip. *Zits* was conceived by Scott and Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist Jim Borgman in 1997; today the strip is carried by nearly 900 newspapers. The main protagonist appears to be 15 year-old Jeremy Duncan, but the strip is actually the chronicle of a generation gap, new millennium style. Jeremy's confounded parents are Walt and Connie Duncan, and the strip is often portrayed from their point of view. Because *Zits* takes this approach, there tends to be an emotional range and complexity that reflects true family life. In one strip, Jeremy may be start-

lingly insensitive while ridiculing his father; in the next, they may share high-fives after mischievously teaming up on Mom.

The strip is a good candidate for animation because the narrative is generally episodic, with storylines running for a week or longer. Scott and Borgman have generated enough characters (mostly Jeremy's teenage cohorts) to carry a series. Borgman is especially good at capturing adolescent surliness, postures and emotional angst. Scott is an observant writer whose teenagers ring remarkably true; one would guess that the dialogue was provided by high school students — *zits* and all — while Scott transcribed their words. Borgman's style in this strip runs to caricature rather than realism; his line is easy and relaxed with few cluttering details. Sometimes one can find surrealism and morphing in the panels, an added plus for animation. This strip would pose no particular problem for most anima-

tors, and its shifting perspective between teens and adults would appeal to a broad range of the market. *Zits* would make for a more sophisticated series than comparable "tween" shows such as *Pepper Ann* or *Doug*, and thus I place it in my "second tier."

And now just for fun: Why not take things full circle to the days of animation's seminal stars? Patrick McDonnell started his strip *Mutts* in 1994 and since then has won several international awards. The cartoonist has also been nominated four times for the prestigious Reuben Award and took it home in 1998. Of particular interest: McDonnell is the author of *Krazy Kat: The Art of George Herriman*. McDonnell has virtually recreated that renowned cartoonist's élan in *Mutts*, a funny animal strip that counted the late Charles Schultz among its biggest fans. Mooch the cat and Earl the dog are the four-pawed philo-sophers of this strip, switching from this profession to more typical animal behavior within a panel or two.

The word "charming" best describes *Mutts*, which is executed in the drawing style of Herriman. McDonnell's characters do have a slightly wider range of expression and display more active poses than Herriman's, whose animals were more similar to Delsarte actors. Another variant of Herriman's humor is Mooch's vocal peculiarity: "S" is pronounced as "sh" (Yesh, thish *ish* funny). Because there are no continuing storylines and a relatively small cast of characters, *Mutts* may make a better one-shot special than series. Animators are strongly

advised to study Herriman, but should have little difficulty with McDonnell's loosely-drawn characters.

There may be better choices than the ones presented here and I am certain that many of you have your own candidates, but that is exactly the point: the comics will forever be a spawning ground for great animation, and not always at Yuletide. Be they hip-hoppers, dykes, teens, mutts, or whoever is gracing the strips these days, bring 'em on; ink and paint in one medium can be just as entertaining in another.

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.

MUTTS



In *Mutts*, Patrick McDonnell tips his hat to the style of George Herriman. © 2002 Patrick McDonnell. Published online by permission of King Features Syndicate.

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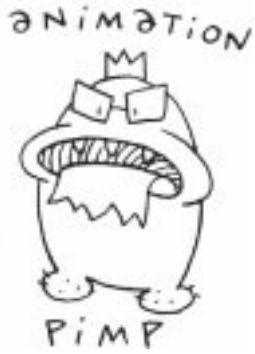


Illustration by Andreas Hykade.
Courtesy of Chris Robinson.

In Search Of STUFF

Part 3: Fear of a Non-Narrative Planet

by Chris Robinson

In one of phil mulloys films see a man running back and forth on a train track between 2 brick walls when he comes to the end he bangs his head against the wall at one pt he trips and stumbles off the tracks as he gets up he sees a forest of trees startled he rushes back on the tracks and runs back and forth again unknown inability to articulate fears thoughts into language miscommunication misunderstanding fear anger violence socrates laughed at those who feared death not an ounce of understanding or knowledge yet we avoid fear loathe it narrative films provide patterns stabilitydisruptionresolution nonnarrative follows no route no center noTHING to grab endless always being freefloating some say wanky selfindulgent shit is that the case or fear of unknown being wrong fear that presumes a right non-narratives personal unique challenge assumptions we are so in tune that apparent lack of melody is alien life 9 5 day night open close time constrains us being set according to pre-defined clocks controlling time cannot be tamed look at the days as cycles not single entities days weeks weekends history divides by

decades 50s 60s as if actions of time can be neatly summarized within those tens despite that we don't control time our life is not a narrative escape escape from what escape from time is escape from death snot possible beginning is end is beginning is end is beginning is end is end over means over end being in not for moment like sex orgasm intense moment process is richer reward life snot summarized in one moment neither should art the pleasure of nonNARRATIVE is sensual cognitive maybe confused but a feeling moved disgusted don't run see it again and again until its system becomes familiar acceptable understood education alphabet addition once other now familiar narrative taught everywhere commercials newsprint radio television internet always wasn't western industrial phenomenon homer greeks asians scattered multilayered narrative jumps time space people assume one is rightwrong disneydick-williamschuckjones always right but sjust 1 language articulation possibility among many too many take 1 to be truth slike english language we me expect other to learnaccommodateunderstand mean we right they wrong

tribalism close to home what you know know yourself doesn't mean stop stagnate end no more knowing living process always experiencing flexibility respect of other views like like like with boxing started in sept quickly discovered I couldn't skip worth shit hated doing it looked like a fool within a few weeks found myself getting it now I can rotate my feet doublejumpcrossovers coming basic skipping is familiar fear is gone worked at understanding led to confidence new perspective but to just do basic skipping becomes tedious mind/body needs challenge swwhy I cant understand those who keep laughing same jokes hollywoods fine once in a while nice to have some certainty resolution emptiness but after time same ol character music story dialogue tiresome like paint by numbers cant eat big macs everyday die unhealthy fat no taste me thinks this rejectionfear of alternative forms of narrative might reflect some culturalreligiouspolitical-race xenophobia rejection of japaneseestonianpolishrussian-chinese film a refusal of other possibilities interpretations realities everything we experience is subjective everything we inhale

intake is but a possibility tough though mediaeducation prioritizes tribe rarely get other eye voice too much work easier to stay near tribe but as mick said ya gotta move yet same time get miffed by those non-narrative pure art fugs who reject shakeheadlowerbrows at my your right to enjoy ripping friends samurai jack south park as valid as man who planted trees tale of tales both tribal need empathy not sympathy sure taste of necessity is real but taste of liberty is possible dont mean u need to book a flight to Tallinn cause I got the solution to this fear of nonnarrativeabstractexperimentalotherdifferencethem see was watching American pie 2 and this guy was learning tantra so he could get real deep and spiritual with stiffler's mom seems to me you we could do worse than to give tantric shaggin a try taint goal orientated tis in the moment and teaches ya to step into the other shoes and all the

while raises your consciousness of the inner outer world within around you so next time you bitching griping about some lame-ass artfukkkfilm with dotscirclesquaresorsquigglylinesabsurd-plotssymbolicoddshapedprimitivelydrawn characters head to the bedroom with someonething you love or could and let the tantric meat dance begin might not clarify your bewilderment over the latest priitparnigorkovalyovquay-brothers film but ya just might have the best sex of your life bottom line kids just cause your house has four walls don't mean u need to

Conclusion

Ok...well that concludes my STUFF trilogy. Here's the STUFF I learned:

- 1 — everything produced by humans is art, even me
- 2 — a.) judgement is a mediator in our mind between our understanding and reason

b.) taste is a bullshit distinction that reinforces social differences
3 — Industry and Indies need to come together for some goalless tantric sex

4 — my appreciation of *Booty Call*, *Murder, She Wrote* AND Jorge Luis Borges is normal, balanced and healthy

5 — that doesn't explain the goats

Next Month: Hollow Gestures

Have animation films really become more racially tolerant?

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

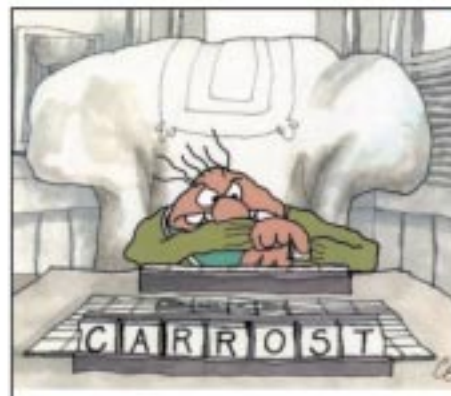
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Never before available!!
Original Production cels from the Oscar nominated film *The Big Snit* by director Richard Condie



Animatin' in Adawe

by Chris J. Robinson

The hottest animation area in Canada is not Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver, but Ottawa. Over the past 5-6 years, a flurry of activity has taken place including the appearance of original and service production studios (notably, *Funbag Animation* and *Dynomight Cartoons*), a developing independent scene, two major animation festivals (the *Ottawa International Animation Festival* and *SAFO*), schools (Algonquin College), a gaming studio, an already well-known hi-tech industry (Corel, Nortel etc.), and perhaps the biggest news (from a media standpoint) was the recent return of Ottawa native,

John Kricfalusi, who is producing his series, *The Ripping Friends* in the Eastern suburbs of town.

Ottawa, you ask? Where? What? How?

Where?

Ottawa is located in Eastern Ontario between Montreal (2 hour drive) and Toronto (4 hour drive).

What?

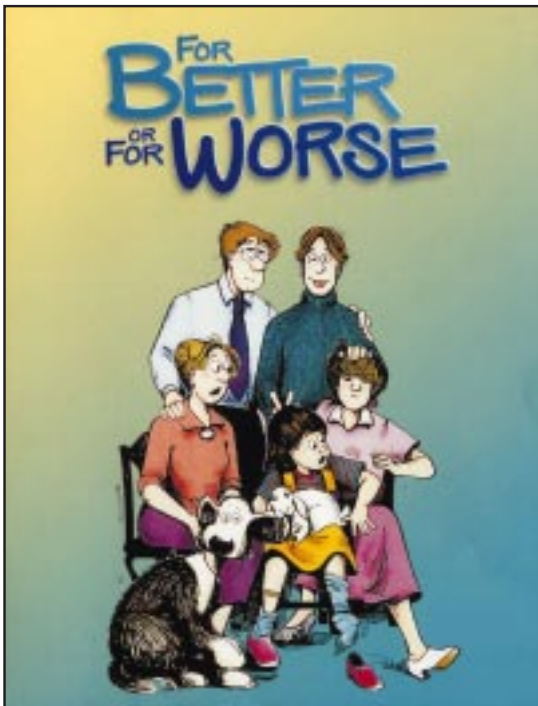
The capital city of Canada is Ottawa. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. That's right. Not Ottawa, Kansas; Ottawa, Illinois; or even Ontario, California; and definitely NOT Toronto. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

The word, 'Ottawa,' came from the Algonquin Indian word, Adawe, meaning: 'trader' or 'to buy and sell.'

How?

The first known people to occupy the area were the Algonquin Indians. According to early French visitors, the Algonquins were a particularly cruel and barbaric tribe (although this was later debated by subsequent visitors). Of course, what-ever the truth, we know the French and English genocide cut the Indians stay short in North America.

In the 1700s, after the Brits defeated the French, a lot of Brits



Funbag, the most successful Ottawa studio, has worked on many shows, including *The Simpsons*, *Beavis and Butthead* and *For Better or Worse* (above). © Funbag FBFW (Series I) Production Company, Inc.



Ocnus produces the dark and funny *Kevin Spencer*. © Kevin Spencer, Inc.



Norman McLaren headed up a group of talented animators for the NFB. The award-winning *Neighbours* typified the artistic excellence coming from the early days of animation in Ottawa. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.

and Americans started settling in the area. After the War of 1812 between Canada and the U.S., the Rideau Canal was built to protect the St. Lawrence River, a major shipping route, from any more American attacks. The bloke in charge of this was an engineer named, Colonel John By. In 1827, the area, not a major lumber town, became known as Bytown (after Col. By), although to be fair there were about four or five

self-contained communities (and naturally they were all greedy buggers who were never able to agree on anything). Then, as now, the area was a land of division: French/English (Hull, Quebec is connected by a short bridge to Ottawa), Catholic/Protestant, working class/upper class.

In 1857, ol' fatty Queen Victoria, pissed a few people off when she choose Ottawa as the capital of what was then called Upper and Lower Canada. When Canada became a country in 1867, Ottawa was kept as the capital and that civil servant 'joie de vivre' has been in Ottawa ever since.

The First Animators: NFB and Crawley

Given Canada's history, let alone Ottawa's, animation seems to be the last thing a bunch of rail men, farmers, lumbermen and bureaucrats would embrace. And not surprisingly, aside from a few sputters by Bryant Fryer near Toronto and Charles Thorson in Winnipeg, it took a foreigner (a strange term given the roots of the country where everyone was a damn foreigner!) to kick start animation. The first major animation producer in Ottawa (and Canada) was, naturally, the

government created National Film Board of Canada (NFB). The first director of the NFB was an angry Scotsman named John Grierson. He hired another Scotsman, not as angry, but certainly troubled, named Norman McLaren, to join him. McLaren was put in charge of the animation division in 1943 and he hired bright young student artists from around the country: Rene Jodoin, Jean-Pierre Ladouceur, George Dunning, Grant Munro, Jim McKay and Eve Lambart (who was already in the photo department of the NFB). For the next two decades, the group made a number of inspiring and award-winning films (e.g. *Neighbours*) on Victoria Island in Ottawa. When the NFB relocated to Montreal in 1955 (to appease French-Canadians), animation in Ottawa effectively died.

The NFB was not the only film production studio in Ottawa; Budge Crawley founded Crawley Films in 1939 and made some attempts at animation, mostly small bits in the educational and industrial films. Their first entirely animated film was an industrial piece called *Coal Gas* (1946). After the NFB left, Crawley was the only major studio left and they scored a major animation deal in the mid-1960s when they animated



The Prodigal Son Returneth:
John Kricfalusi comes back with *The Ripping Friends*. © 2001 Fox Kids.
All rights reserved.

over 100 episodes of the not so fine series, *The Wizard of Oz*.

In the 1970s, the most innovative work being produced in Ottawa was from the scientific division of the Federal government, the National Research Council. Two scientists, Nestor Burtnyk and Marceli Wein, became pioneers of computer animation development when they collaborated with the National Film Board and notably French studio producer, Rene Jodoin, in producing the acclaimed computer films *Metadata* (1971) and *Hunger* (1973).

Beyond that, there was little activity in Ottawa. In 1974, animator Vic Atkinson left Crawley to form Atkinson Film-Arts with Bill Stevens. The studio produced a number of TV specials including *The Little Brown Burro* (1978). Oddly enough, during this rather low production era, the Canadian Film Institute (which was created in 1935 in Ottawa) created the first Canadian International Animation Festival, which took place in Ottawa in 1976.

Animation activity continued to evolve in Ottawa in the 1980s. After Atkinson left Film Arts, Stevens bought Crawley Films and merged the two studios. Throughout the 1980s, Crawley's animation produced a number of children's specials including *The Raccoons*, *Babar* and *Father Christmas*, and two television series including *Dennis the Menace*. Other notable companies to emerge included Hinton Animation Studios (which took over *The Raccoons*) and KLA Visual Productions, a small operation run by the Atkinson family.

By the end of the 1980s,

the picture was not so rosy in Ottawa. While the animation festival (now called the Ottawa International Animation Festival) had returned after a turn in Hamilton and Toronto, the Hinton and Crawley studios ran into enormous debts and folded. However the late-1990s expansion finds its roots in Lacewood Animation Studios, which was formed in 1987 by Sheldon Wiseman, the former head of Hinton. Lacewood's focus was primarily children's television shows (e.g. *Katie and Orbie*). In their ten years of existence, Lacewood produced over 200 animation TV programs.

Lacewood went under in 1997 after an arranged partnership with Toronto's Paragon Entertainment fell through. The idea was that the two would create a new joint venture called Lacewood Animation Productions, Inc. It failed. Lacewood closed its doors.

Ironically, the expansion that has taken place in the last few years owes a lot to Lacewood. New studios like Boomstone Animation, PIP Animation, Dynomight and Funbag all have former Lacewood employees in executive positions.

The Big Players

The most successful studio locally is without doubt, Funbag Animation. In less than ten years, the studio (which was founded by Gord Coulthart, Don Spencer and Rick Morrison in 1993) has become a highly successful service studio, doing design, layout and storyboards for an impressive list of shows including: *The Simpsons*, *Beavis and Butthead*, *The Critic*, *Ren and Stimpy*, *Real Monsters*. In 1998,

Universal Studios became a minority partner and in the last few years, the studio has moved into original productions (*Toad Patrol*) and expanded their service empire to Halifax, Nova Scotia where they are the principle owners of Helix Animation. Ongoing projects include *For Better or For Worse* (based on the comic strip) and *Freaky Stories*.

Dynomight Cartoons was founded in 1994 by Dan and Diane Craig. While Diane Craig had no animation experience, brother-in-law Dan had plenty, working for Crawley Films, Atkinson Film Art and Lacewood. Over a short period, Dynomight Cartoons grew into a respected service studio working for Nickelodeon, Disney, Nelvana and others. In 2001, they made the jump to original productions with Graham Falk's Mr. Bean-tinged, *The Untalkative Bunny*. In each episode, the Bunny goes through a variety of seemingly normal experiences. But unlike *Mr. Bean*, the show is really aimed at children who are also experiencing the world for the first time. The show was picked up by Canada's animation channel Teletoon and is one of their more popular shows, and arguably the best original production out of Ottawa.

Despite its current success, *The Untalkative Bunny* created a lot of financial problems at Dynomight, and thereby generated a lot of bad word of mouth locally. The \$4.2 million (CAN) series was made with virtually no cash flow at the studio, forcing many of the animators (and a number of creditors) to go months without pay. "We thought, innocently," Diane told *The Ottawa Citizen*, "that right from the beginning we could turn around and

do our own stuff. Well, of course it's not such an easy thing in animation. First, we had to grow the company so that we could bring in the animation and the talent."

While Dynamight has left some bitter tastes in a few mouths, it seems the company has overcome its fiscal troubles, paying back animators and creditors alike, rather than jumping on the convenient bankruptcy train. The studio is currently moving full steam ahead on a slate that includes the second season of *The Untalkative Bunny*, BBC's *Noddy*, and two more original shows that are in development: *Dead Dog Café* and *Mushira* — *Not Very Scary Lizard Friend*.

"I knew in Sheridan that I wanted to run my own shop," says Lee Williams, president of Boomstone Animation. "It was always my dream." After graduating from Sheridan College, Williams began his animation career as an animator at Crawley Films before working at Hinton Animation and Lacewood. Williams initially set up Boomstone, along with Debra Wynter, to co-produce properties with Lacewood. When Lacewood went bankrupt, Williams was left with Boomstone. "The fact that Lacewood went out of business forced my hand to do something." Williams pulled out his rolodex and made some cold calls to various colleagues and contacts that he'd developed over the years and let them know that he'd started a new animation studio.

Boomstone is currently providing direction and animation services to Amberwood's *Katie and Orbie* series and is also working with Nelvana. Boomstone has yet



Dynamight, which produces *Untalkative Bunny*, survived financial troubles to become a major player on the Ottawa animation scene. © Dynamight Cartoons 2001.



Amberwood Productions concentrates on children's programming with shows like *Hoze Houndz* for The Family Channel. © Amberwood Productions, Inc.

to produce any original productions ("We're still young," notes Williams), but there are a number of live-action and animation projects in various stages of development.

The digital animation provider, PIP Animation opened their doors in 1998. "We started with three employees," says Dulcie Clark, "which quickly grew to

twenty by year two, thirty in year three, and 110 in year four (due to five major series going through at the same time)." Currently they've got about 40 people. PIP does "basically anything that touches colour, effects and camera," including scanning, ink and paint, compositing, digital backgrounds, colour design, etc. PIP has worked for Funbag,

Dynomight, Nelvana, Cine-Groupe, Spumco and Rich Animation on nine major animation series along with a variety of specials and videos.



Greg Lawrence, founder of Ocnus.
Photo courtesy of Ocnus.

In May 1997, within months of the closing of Lacewood Animation, Sheldon Wiseman opened up a 'replacement' studio called Amberwood Animation. Amberwood has continued the mandate of Lacewood focussing primarily on children's productions (e.g. *Hoze Houndz*). In 2000, Wiseman, with the help of Canadian actor Leslie Nielson (*Naked Gun*), bought back the assets of Lacewood's library.

One of the more interesting studios is Ocnus Productions, which was formed by Greg Lawrence in 1998. The company does both live-action and animation, and has gained attention for its provocative series, *Kevin Spencer*. While *Spencer* looks like it was animated by the kids in special ed, it is occasionally a very dark and funny parody of the dysfunctional family. Kevin is an alcoholic teenage sociopath who lives with a variety of bizarre and psychotic family members. *South Park*, naturally, comes to mind because of the raunchiness and poor technical quality, but *Spencer* is something different,

especially for us 'nice' Canadians. *Spencer* has been a modest international success. NBC bought the first episodes to include on Saturday Night Live (it's not clear whether they ever aired) and *Spencer* was recently sold to Australia and Spain.

Miles from *Kevin Spencer* is Ocnus' next production, *Leonard the Monkey*. With a whisper of J. Otto Siebel's design style, the series follows the viewpoint of a six-year old monkey.

The latest, and most uniquely named, studio to hit town is NOITAMINANIMATION, founded by Jason Belec in 2001. The name, as you might have noticed, is animation spelled forwards and backwards. "The

essence of what we offer, better animation capability."

NOITAMINANIMATION is a computer animation house that does rendering, modelling, complete projects (TV, film, commercials, corporate, etc.), full sound production, post editing, effects, and, well...you get the picture. Their creative director is former Disney animator, Peter Beilicki. The company has also done a number of original productions including the TV shows, *The Dragon and The Phoenix* and *Gay Dinosaurs* (yes...that's correct), along with some shorts called *Digital Prisoners* and *Dandelion*.

Hi-Tech and Beyond

Ottawa is often referred to



Ocnus runs the gamut with the dysfunctional *Kevin Spencer* to the innocent six-year-old *Leonard the Monkey*. © Kevin Spencer, Inc.;
© and title held by Leonard the Monkey, Inc.

as Silicon Valley North because of its hi-tech community, which has its roots in those early National Research Council projects. In many ways, this technological boom stimulated the animation community's growth and led to a more diversified field. There are improved production and post-production facilities in Ottawa. In the past, producers had to leave town to get work completed. And there are also a couple of gaming companies Sir-Tech (formed in 1994) and the old man of the scene, Artech Studios, which was formed way back in 1982. One man who has been involved with both studios is the ubiquitous young animator, Cyrus Hogg.



Jason Belac, Senior VP & Chief Technology Officer of NOITAMIN-ANIMATION, feels that the lack of long term goals harms the animation industry. Photo courtesy of NOITAMINANIMATION.

"I started in animation thanks to James Cameron," says Hogg, "who I called back in '92 when I was still in high school and trying to figure out how to incorporate animation with computers." Hogg attended Algonquin College and studied there for a year before getting

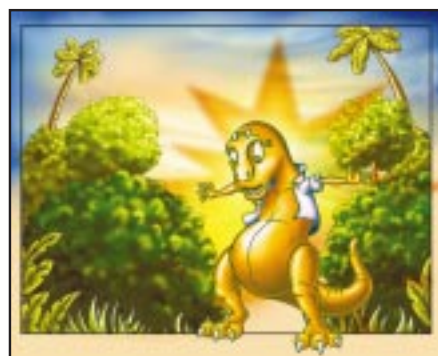
hired by Sir-Tech. Within six months, he was the lead animator/artist. After two years, he joined Artech Studios, where he helped acquire and complete Hasbro-Lucas products such as *Star Wars Monopoly* and the *Star Wars Playset*. After a brief stint in Toronto, he returned to Ottawa, where he produced and directed two live-action/animation music videos, *Mr. President* and *Smile Like an Angel*, for local reggae artist, Bingie Barker. Hogg has also been doing contract work with, among others, Stephane Faulkner (another important figure in the local animation scene) and his company, Digital Glass. Last month, Hogg was invited to Nova Scotia to help set up motion-capture hardware and software for a local college. Last Christmas, Hogg started a small production company called Cy's Matters.

Schools

Ottawa's Algonquin College first offered an animation program in 1989. The program was founded by former Sheridan College animation graduate, Gerry Paquette (who also worked as an animator on many Canadian television productions in the 1980s). "It was the second professional animation training program in Canada and the first to incorporate computers into its curriculum. We were also the first to include drama as one of the courses." The two-year program has grown from one class of twenty-five students to three classes and a third year will be added in early 2003. "The emphasis of the program," says Paquette, "is drawing with feature quality in mind. Traditional animation techniques are taught

as well as life drawing, character design and layouts. Computer training includes Photoshop, Premiere, After Effects and TOONZ."

In 1998, Paul West took over as coordinator of the program so that Paquette could focus on the development of a five-month digital animation fast-track program. "I continue to coordinate the Computer Animation Fast-Track program, which is the first of its kind to target the new trends in animation. The focus is on animation produced for the Internet, multimedia and games. Both 2D and 3D techniques are covered along with several support courses."



The palindromic NOITAMIN-ANIMATION, which produces Gay Dinosaurs, offers full-service animation production facilities in Ottawa. © NOITAMINANIMATION.

Aside from an animation history course at Carleton University (taught by renowned animation scholar and curator, Mark Langer), the only other educational possibility for the youngins is the Ottawa School of Art. Jan Beath started the animation program in 1999. The aim of the school says current instructor, Gerard Belac, is "to prepare students for further studies in animation, build a better portfolio or seek a career." More specifically, the program was tailored toward students who were hoping to

pursue animation at a college or university level. The program covers basic animation, life drawing of human and animal figures for animation, character design, painting (Photoshop and watercolor), layout and storyboard, concept and history of animation, drawing for animation (perspective and still life) and sculpture for animation (model making, stop-motion, 3D design). This hefty course load, which has about 15 new students every year, does not allow for any time to make individual films, although a few have done stop-motion pieces.



IFCO member Calvin Climie at work on *Hyperhelion*. © 2002 Calvin Climie, hyperhelion animation. Photo: Owen Oulton.

Independents

While the bubbling productivity of the studios is economically good, it is the sudden emergence of a modest independent animation scene in Ottawa that is most encouraging and refreshing in a town that has often been labelled a "hick" town. A major contributor to the development of an indie scene is the Independent Film Cooperative of Ottawa (IFCO). The Co-op, formed

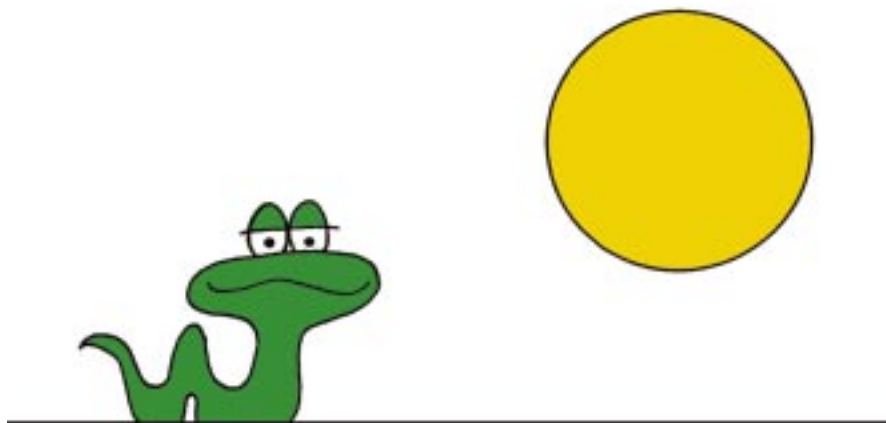


The lead character from *Hyperhelion*, IFCO's full-length animated feature by Calvin Climie. © 2002 Calvin Climie, hyperhelion animation. Photo: Calvin Climie.

in 1992, provides a more economical and casual alternative to the hefty fees that film schools extract from young, starry-eyed youths. IFCO production has mostly been in live-action film, but a handful of filmmakers have tried their hand at animation. Bridget Farr made a sombre scratch/live-action piece about alienation in the city called, *Nobody's Nothing* (1999) and most recently, Calvin Climie made what is possibly the first independent animation feature produced in Ottawa called,

Hyperhelion (2001). But the two most successful IFCO members are Dan Sokolowski and Brian McPhail.

Sokolowski is perhaps the most important individual in the local Ottawa film community. Aside from his own experimental films, he has given an amazing amount of time and energy to many young filmmakers serving as both technical and creative support. Sokolowski is pretty much unknown to the animation scene primarily because his work combines live-action and



Dan Sokolowski discovered the Ottawa animation community's willingness to share knowledge when he made *Seraphim*, his first animated work. © Dan Sokolowski.

animation, which is apparently horrifying to the puritan animation festivals.

Sokolowski's first four films were entirely animated. While still a student at the University of Ottawa, he made his first film, *Seraphim* (1980), a simply drawn short about a snake chasing the sun. "I made it in Super 8 and then blindly applied for a grant to re-shoot it in 16mm and the Ontario Arts Council gave me a grant. When I went to Crawley's to get it shot, I found out the actual costs! They were incredibly nice to me, the animation cameraman [Ron Haines] gave me a great rate and the production guru [Paul Harris] sat me down and taught me all about post-production. It was that freedom of information that really made me like the film industry. I found people were always willing to share knowledge."

Following *Seraphim*, Sokolowski made *Revolution* and *Picture Frame* (both made in 1984). Both films are reminiscent of animator Rene Jodoin in their examination of the movement and perception of geometric shapes. After completing his fourth animation film, *Photosynthesis* (1984), Sokolowski grew tired of animation. "I think I got really tired of the process, hours and hours of planning and drawing for minutes of satisfaction."

During this period, Sokolowski travelled across Canada and became interested in the country's varied and striking landscapes. "I was amazed at the variety of images that we have in Canada, so I became a little more interested in photography and cinematography. I drifted away from animation a little but I think I always used the same

process for creating the films; once I had footage I would draw each shot and then order them for a paper edit, so I was in effect, taking those photos and animating them in a way." Aside from *Still Life* (1992), Sokolowski has continued to mix animation and live-action in his explorations of the Canadian landscape.



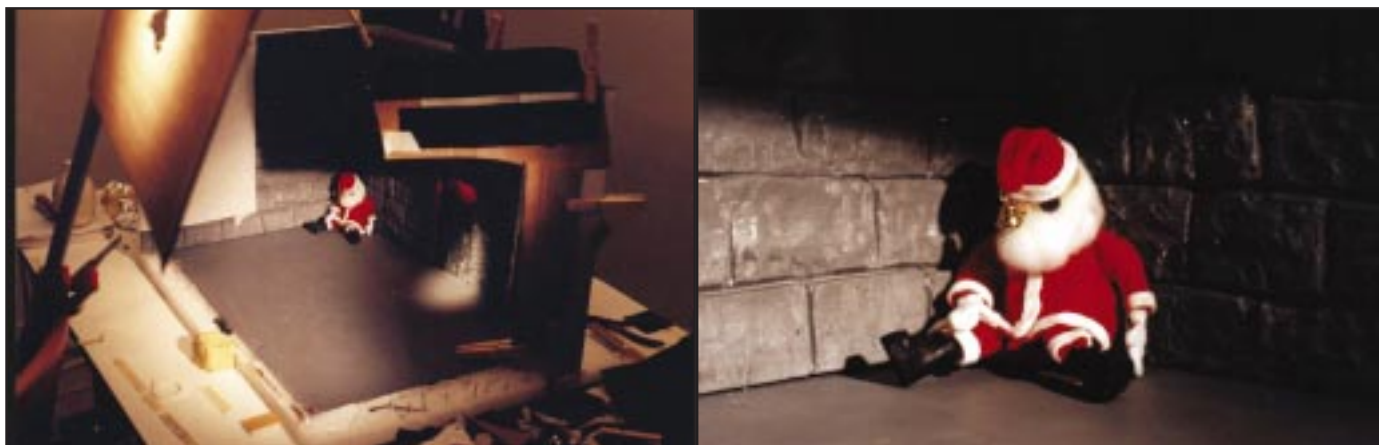
Dan Sokolowski combines an American music classic with a Canadian sensibility in *(winter)time*. © Dan Sokolowski.

The mixed method has caused reception problems for Sokolowski, especially in animation where he has been almost totally ignored by international animation festivals (even Ottawa). "The artists thought I was a filmmaker," says Sokolowski, "the filmmakers thought I was an animator and the animators just thought I was bad! People seem to need to pigeonhole things, even within filmmaking. You're either experimental or dramatic or documentary, or if you're an animator you're cel or clay or oil. If you mix things up people seem to get confused and unsettled in a way. It's too bad. I think animation festivals sometimes look too much at the craft and not enough at the ability of the medium to express. A great animation film has the same aesthetics as a great film, but it seems to get lost in discussions about technique and 'how long it took!'"

Sokolowski's most recent film, *(winter)time* (2001) is getting more attention from the animation community (including an upcoming screening at the Zagreb Animation Festival). Rooted in the abstract jazz films of Norman McLaren, Sokolowski interprets a version of George Gershwin's *Summertime* (called *winter time*) using seven styles of animation. "I had always liked the sense of freedom in McLaren's *Begone Dull Care*, but thought if I just did animation to jazz it wouldn't really be anything new. I heard the jazz piece *(winter)time* by the Peter Togni Trio and it really caught my attention; mostly as a totally different take on a tune that has been done to death. Their description of it as opening with a trudge through a slushy street in Toronto really hit upon me that they had made a truly Canadian piece out of a really southern American classic. I thought that I could do my *Begone Dull Care* to this music." Amazingly, the film took six days to shoot and three days to edit.

Brian McPhail has no formal training in animation. He learned by "messing around with super-8 stop-motion in high school a little bit." He was strongly influenced by Rankin/Bass Christmas specials: "I think that was the first time I understood that a complete functioning world could be created on a table-top." Merge Rankin/Bass with a love of Tim Burton, David Lynch and Dr. Seuss, and you find a pretty strange animator.

The international animation scene best knows McPhail for his inverse-Cat *Came Back* short, *Stiffy The Dog* (1996), which is about a boy who receives a dead dog as a birthday gift. *Stiffy*



Brian McPhail's *Down A Dark Chimney*. © 2000 Brian McPhail.

the Dog was made as part of IFCO and McPhail initially wanted to do a live-action film, but when he couldn't find "a convincing dead dog," he decided to make a stop-motion film. McPhail also consciously wanted to make a dark film. "Other IFCO films all seemed a little soft. They were either cute or politically correct or otherwise harmless. I wanted to piss people off with a very incorrect (but still funny) film."

McPhail only spent two months animating *Stiffy* and the result was a funny but poorly animated film. "It was too fast and, along with my inexperience at the time, it hurt the quality of animation. I think I was more or less satisfied with it when I was finished but in hindsight I can see how bad it really was and now I can't even watch it." Nevertheless, *Stiffy* was invited to a variety of festivals, including its debut at the '96 Ottawa Festival, and was picked up by Spike and Mike where it was toured across North America. "When it was shown people reacted to it pretty well and I realized that I managed to do what I was trying to avoid: I had made a cute film that made people happy."

One happy viewer was

Marilyn Read of Ottawa's MTR Entertainment (the company that gave the world another Ottawa product, Tom Green). Read saw a review of *Stiffy* when the Spike and Mike Festival came to Ottawa and called McPhail to discuss making a TV series of the film. "I was sceptical but she was pretty convincing so we went ahead with it. Only three episodes were made for insertion into *Buzz* [a comedy show that is produced for Canada's Comedy Network]. It didn't really fit in with *Buzz* and the last I heard was that MTR was still trying to sell it somewhere."

Following a nifty little live-action piece called *Bury Me Happy* (1996), McPhail made the dark and wildly imaginative film *Down a Dark Chimney* (1998), about Christmas during the Nazi era. In the film, the Nazis take Santa prisoner while he's delivering presents. What begins as a Christmas parody à la Corky Quakenbush, soon turns into a dark powerful film about a desperate man trying to flee from his torturers. "I was making dinner one night (beans) and as my mind wandered (as it does most of the time) I imagined Santa being beaten in prison. I thought it made an interesting image so I built up a story around it. It was

originally going to be a comedy but as I got deeper into the planning I thought it would be more effective if done straight, although most people who see it think they are watching a comedy at first."

McPhail is currently making a short "pseudo-experimental piece involving animating to music."

Outside of IFCO, there are a variety of scattered independents, most of whom have steady day jobs and simply make animation films out of a passionate need to do so.

Troy Little, a native of Prince Edward Island, studied illustration at Sheridan College and, despite having no animation experience, found work at Dynamight Cartoons. "They were looking for people who could bring something different to the studio," he explains. Currently, Little is splitting his time between the developments of his own series for Dynamight and publishing a comic book series. He also operates his one-man studio, which focuses on both animation and comic books (Little is the creator of the comic series, *Chiaroscuro*).

Nick Cross' entrance into animation was quite by chance. He graduated from Sheridan

College in the same illustration programme as Troy Little. "Troy had moved to Ottawa and gotten a job at Dynomight, which was just starting up at that time. He then recommended that they hire me; and since I was a complete failure at finding any illustration work, I blindly took the job and moved here from Mississauga. That was in 1996 and I've been here ever since." And despite working on "TV kiddie shows," Cross became hooked on animation, and wanted to try doing his own work. "I'm a bit of a workaholic and I found myself wanting to try to make something of my own. I was frustrated at seeing my fellow workers treating animation as simply 'a job.'" Cross met Graham Falk, who was also at Dynomight, and was impressed with Falk's determination. "Here was someone who had just thought up an idea [*Untalkative Bunny*] and then gone ahead and made a film out of it." Cross then went ahead and developed his first animation short, *Tea for Two*, a witty subtitled parody of Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. In the film, a farmer and dog sit comfortably in living room chairs and proceed to have a hefty conversation about death. The dialogue for the film was originally taken directly from a scene in *The Seventh Seal* where Death and the Knight discuss mortality. In the end though, Cross couldn't get the rights to Bergman's film and had to use actors speaking mock-Swedish. The use of subtitles was also an extension of Cross' drawing animation insecurities: "I realised that if I made a subtitled cartoon, everyone would be too busy reading the subtitles and wouldn't have time to scrutinize the animation."



Nick Cross and Tavis Sibernagel created the very funny *U-Girl*. © Nick Cross.

Motivated by the positive response to *Tea for Two*, Cross set up his one-man studio, Do It For Me Productions. "I knew that I was going to keep making more films and I figured it would be a good idea to give my productions a name." Cross' hope is that Do it For Me Productions can one day expand into "a viable environment where independent-minded artists can come together and create films while at the same time possibly make a living doing it."

The first film made under the Do It For Me banner was the very funny, *U-Girl* (2000), a parody of propaganda cartoons. "It was just a silly little idea that I had — a 'fake' Nazi propaganda cartoon. Tavis [Sibernagel] and I both had a passion for old cartoons from the Twenties and we started to experiment around with this style." In fact, both Cross and Sibernagel collaborated on each other's films and produced *Fruit, Juice! Protein?* (directed by Sibernagel, who has since moved to Halifax) and *U-Girl* over a three-month period.

Sharon Katz's first animation film, *Happy Birthday Hannah* (1999) was made as a birthday gift to her daughter. "I expected it to take about two weeks to complete," says Katz. "In fact, it took two years." Katz was trained as a painter but turned to animation when a friend bought her an animation workbook. "She knew my paintings well and believed that storytelling would be instinctive to me. The animation was a natural choice since I already had the drawing skills. I spent a year just working on the exercises in the book, drawing hundreds of walk cycles and head turns."

In creating *Hannah*, Katz used an old Macintosh computer and found an old software program called MotionPaint. "That was a critical point because without the use of a computer working in animation requires expensive cameras and film and all the gear that comes with that." MotionPaint is an obsolete program, but Katz found it easy and effective: "It does a fabulous job of allowing onionskins; and

the user interface is simple, direct and very intuitive. I've tried almost every animation software on the market and I keep returning to MotionPaint just because it is so simple and intuitive to use."

Most recently, Katz completed her second film, *The Angel's Foot Cake* (2001) and is starting work on a third film with the help of Belgian-Canadian artist, Jean Detheux. "Jean introduced me to the graphics synthesizer, Synthetik Studio Artist last year. While Painter tries to replicate real world media, Studio Artist lets all that go and works with digital media for its own graphic values. It also presents a paradigm shift for me. While some structure is essential to a narrative, I find working too tightly with a script and storyboard very rigid. Coming from a painterly background I've missed the im-

mediacy of following the work's lead, rather than forcing the work along an orderly path. So in this next film I'm looking forward to shifting direction a little."

Jean Detheux was born in Belgium and moved to Canada in 1971. He is trained as a painter and has taught art across Canada and the U.S., and had exhibitions of his work across the continent. He moved to the Ottawa region (he lives in Perth, Ontario, which is about an hour's drive from Ottawa) in the early 1990s and today he teaches a digital art class to Junior High students and is an advisor for the Directed Study Program at the Academy of Art College in San Francisco.

Detheux's interest in animation evolved out of a very serious illness. "About 8-9 years ago, I became very ill and this was found to be caused by sudden

severe [deadly] allergies to many things, including solvents and most of the material I used in painting for so many years. That was the brutal end of my serious involvement with natural media, extremely depressing." Detheux's wife urged him to sit down at a friend's computer and try the "painter" software. "That was a real revelation, and the opportunity to renew my marriage to image making. Very quickly, the digital tools being so very different from natural media, animation appeared not only as a possibility, but as an intense need."

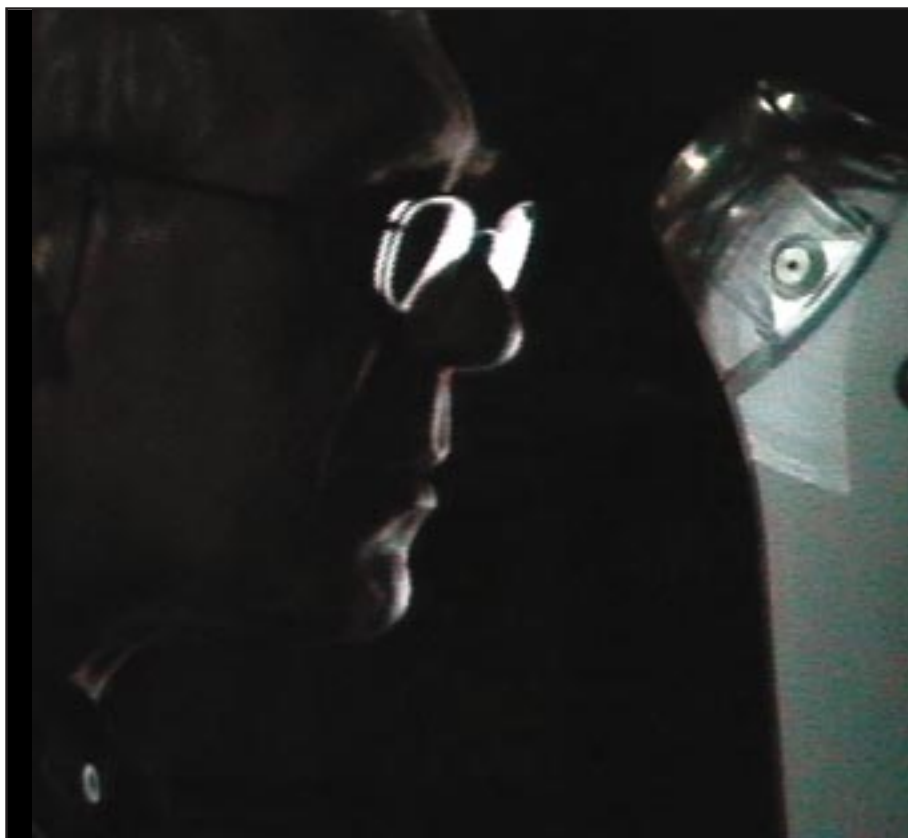
Since then Detheux has produced a variety of digital paintings and digital abstract expressionist animations, and is well known to AWN readers for his series of provocative articles about the decay of animation.

My Bread and Non-Hydrogenated Margarine

On the festival front, the Ottawa International Animation Festival (OIAF) has grown into the second largest animation festival in the world (after Annecy). It attracts a large mix of students, teachers, independents and studio executives. In 1997, the OIAF created the Ottawa International Student Animation Festival (SAFO), which focuses on student and emerging animators. SAFO was the first of its kind in animation and it has had three editions and spawned imitators in Russia and Korea.

Our Ripping Friend

Last but not least, perhaps the most impressive pat on the back for Ottawa animation came in 2001 when John Kricfalusi (*Ren and Stimpy*) returned to his hometown. Kricfalusi is



Health reasons led artist Jean Detheux to computer animation.
© Ottawa International Animation Festival.



John Kricfalusi's return to Ottawa to make *The Ripping Friends* was warmly welcomed by the local animation community. © 2001 Fox Kids. All rights reserved.

making his new series, *The Ripping Friends* (a superhero parody in a similar, subtly raunchy, vein as *Ren and Stimpy*), in a basement rec room in the Ottawa suburb of Alta Vista.

Kricfalusi returned to Ottawa for a few reasons. First, because of the lower dollar and our tax breaks, it was cheaper to produce *The Ripping Friends* in Canada. Secondly, he loathed the Hollywood bullshit. But most of all, it seems that Kricfalusi just wanted to come home. As he told *The Ottawa Citizen*: "I've been wanting to move back for a couple of years anyway, and this was a good excuse to do it." Whatever the motivation, Kricfalusi's return to Ottawa gives the city and its emerging animation community a nice boost of confidence and a bit of

visibility. "There's a really good animation pool here and Algonquin keeps turning out a whole pile more each year. There's no shortage of animators, that's for sure."

Da Future

Then as now, there are no guarantees that animation will continue to thrive in Ottawa. The hi-tech industry was hit hard in recent years, as was the animation industry. "[We've] been dealt some serious blows with poorly run studios," says Jason Belac, "and the short sightedness that is rampant in the industry that lets assets [people] leave on nearly every job."

"I have seen some really, really low times," adds Lee Williams, "and I have seen some great high points. I see all the

other studios building themselves up, and that's a great thing. I see more and more animators moving back to Ottawa from Toronto, out East, out West and that's a good thing."

While the movement away from service work toward the production of original pieces is encouraging, what is far more inspiring is that despite the on-going uncertainty facing commercial studios, the fledgling independent scene is, if not thriving, at least growing. Many of the independent animators in town have day jobs and create animation out of need and desire, not financial necessity. Not since the days of McLaren and Jodoin has there been such a community in Ottawa.

This started out as a short 1500 word piece, but because

of the amount of work and history in Ottawa, it turned into something much bigger. So...the next time one of you comes up to me and asks, "Why is the Animation Festival in Ottawa and not Montreal or Toronto?" I'll slap you in the back of the head and dance on your freshly soiled grave. Got it?

Thanks to all the animation folks who gave me their time. I'd also like to acknowledge The Ottawa Citizen, where I filled in a few gaps when people couldn't.

Chris Robinson is the artistic director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival and the Ottawa International Student Animation Festival. He is also the editor of the semi-annual ASIFA Magazine. Robinson has curated film programs and served on festival juries throughout the world. He writes a monthly column ("The Animation Pimp") for Animation World Network and has written for Salon.com, Cinemascope, Take One, 12gauge, City Pages and others. Robinson contributed a chapter on English-Canadian animation to the book, North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980. He is currently working on two books: Between Genius and Utter Illiteracy: A Story of Estonian Animation (March 2003 by Varrak Publishing) and a biography of an ex-hockey player, Doug Harvey: Like There Was No Tomorrow (Spring 2004, Boheme Press).

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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:

Animatin' in Adawe

From studios to independents to schools, Chris Robinson details the animation scene in Ottawa, from its humble, scientific beginnings to its current bubbling state. See a clip online from Dan Sokolowski's most recent independent film (*winter*)time:

http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=pageone&article_no=1409

Animated Encounters 2002

Andrew Osmond reports from Bristol on this year's Animated Encounters, starring Matt Groening, a toon Beryl Cook and *Shrek* in 3D. The online version includes QuickTime movie clips of festival favorites:

http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?ltype=search&sval=osmond&article_no=1401

Fresh from the Festivals: May 2002's Film Reviews

Jon Hoffermand reviews five short films fresh from the festival circuit: *Black Soul/Ame Noire* by Martine Chartrand, Ian Freedman's *Frank Was a Monster Who Wanted to Dance*, *A Hunting Lesson/Une Leçon de Chasse* by pinscreen master Jacques Drouin, *The Journal of Edwin Carp* by Richard Bazley and Emily Hubley's *Pigeon Within*. Includes QuickTime movie clips online at:

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May Day!

Pamela Kleibrink Thompson

Is your career in distress? Is the company you're working for foundering? Is your parachute packed or are you staying aboard hoping not to crash? Here are some survival tips for a healthy career, whether you are working for a thriving company or one that is struggling to keep aloft.

Stay Informed

Know your company's business. Who are the company's major clients and major competitors? Does your company have plenty of clients or is it relying on just a few accounts to keep going? Is your company getting its share of business, or are the jobs going to the competition?

When I worked for an educational film company our main client was the government of Saudi Arabia. When that contract dried up so did cash flow. The management was arrogant and never thought that their client would go elsewhere for their business. Too bad they didn't market their services to others while they had their large government client. Within a short time, most of the staff were laid off.

Does your company have a long range business plan? What is it doing to keep customers satisfied? Are they actively developing new clients and markets? Without income the company will not stay aloft.

Know your industry. Know



Pamela Kleibrink Thompson

Is your career in distress?

who is being awarded the jobs. What companies are busy? Who is hiring recruiters? Tip: If they hire a recruiter, they will be doing a lot of hiring in the near future.

Tips to Prevent Disaster

Prepare your parachute before you need to bail. Be prepared before disaster strikes. This is what you need in your emergency kit:

1) A financial cushion. Savings will help you weather a severe storm. Figure out how much you spend in 6 months on the necessities — rent, car, food, etc. and save enough to survive for 6 months without work.

2) Assess yourself.

Examine your skill set. Make a list of all the skills you've learned and the things you've accomplished. This list will be useful in composing your resume. If you have trouble making your list and thinking positively about yourself, get some friends to help you. Take stock of your attributes. What do you like doing at work? What do you like doing outside of work? Evaluate what you want to do. Have you always dreamed about developing your own show, building a Website, or writing a children's book "when you have the time"? When you are focussed on what you want to do you can determine what you need to know, as well as who can help you.

If you are lacking in skills, take some courses. Whether it's learning a new software, finishing a degree, working on life drawing or learning about management, the classes you take can help you expand your network. Even if you don't hear of any jobs, you will be improving your skills and that will make you more attractive and interesting to new employers.

3) Marketing Materials.

Your cover letter, resume, portfolio, demo reel and breakdown list are your marketing materials. Keep them up to date. Make sure your portfolio and demo reel contain your best and most recent work. Always put your best work up front on your reel and include your demo reel breakdown list. The breakdown list describes what is on your reel — what you did for each shot. Customize your resume and portfolio to target the job you want. You may want to customize your portfolio for each company you target. Remember to include your name, phone number and email address on everything.

4) Contacts.

Participate in online discussion groups, attend conferences, industry related meetings including software user groups and network. Keep your ears open for opportunities. Call friends you haven't seen in ages because you have been so swamped with work. Invite them to get out of the office and take them to lunch. You can check out their company and see if it's the kind of environment you would like. Ask your friends if they have any leads and be willing to share information with them as well. If you meet with anyone, be sure to send thank you notes.

5) Research.

Do some research to find the employers that offer the kind of work you want to do. Target employers that offer that kind of work. This research will help you prepare for interviews.

Visit Websites like Animation World Network (www.awn.com) regularly and read trades like *Animation Magazine*. Visit company Websites. If you don't own a computer you may gain access to the Web through local libraries and colleges. Libraries also often subscribe to many trade publications like *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter*. Most jobs aren't advertised but news articles offer clues for work. Look at announcements about new company launches, people changing jobs, or special projects.

Take Time Off

If you are laid off don't be ashamed of losing your job. Chuck Jones, Glen Keane and Steve Jobs were all out on the street once. Just regroup and take it as an opportunity to move up. Sometimes getting laid off gives

you a chance to move up or into a new area. Think about applying in a category the last company never wanted to promote you to.

Be prepared before disaster strikes.

Give yourself a chance to grieve over losing your job, if you need to. But don't let your self-esteem suffer. Being laid off or fired is not a crime. It doesn't mean you are bad or your work was bad, just that the company doesn't need your skills at this time.

You may feel cast adrift on a desert island, but you are not marooned. Attitude makes all the difference so take time to realize that you may have just landed in paradise. Your new situation may be just the break you need. Don't panic and start looking for work immediately or you may end up in a job that just pays the bills, but doesn't meet your other goals or advance your career.

You need to be refreshed to start looking for a job so take a two week vacation and get away from your normal stomping grounds. Getting away will give you a different perspective. The place you go doesn't have to be an island, exotic or expensive, just a change of scene.

Prepare your parachute before you need to bail.

During your vacation, your assignment is to daydream. Make a list of what you liked about your last job and what you didn't

like. What do you want on your next job? What kind of company do you want to work for? To be happy in life you have to like your work.

Time for Take Off

If you have your emergency kit prepared, when disaster strikes you will be ready with your marketing tools (an up to date resume, portfolio, demo reel and shot list). You know what you want to do because you have done the self-assessment and the research, so now is the time to relaunch your career. Make lots of calls. Keep conversations brief (a minute or two tops) and to the point. Find out if they are hiring in your category and who to address a package to. Spend at least two hours a day making contacts/calls and get those packages in the mail. Follow up in 3 to 6 weeks. It takes work to find work. These tips will help you get through the down times and back in the action at a job you want. Your career will take off again.

Having held every job in the entertainment industry and weathered many layoffs, Pamela Kleibrink Thompson is uniquely qualified as a career coach, independent recruiter and management consultant. She frequently speaks about careers at colleges and universities.

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

Animated Encounters 2002

by Andrew Osmond

For the third year running, Bristol's Watershed Media Centre hosted Animated Encounters, now the main U.K. animation event in the festival calendar. Encounters ran from April 25th to 28th, a Thursday to a Sunday. Thursday saw the launch reception and an "Opening Highlights" taster screening. Friday was Industry Day, with several panels oriented toward animation students, after which Matt Groening made the evening go off with a bang. There were more industry events on Saturday, but the weekend was mostly given

to the serious business of watching cartoons. Excluding the opening highlights, the Groening presentation and two children's shows, there were eleven programmes between 60 and 90 minutes each, enough for the most avid toon fiend.

The standard of the other film programmes was high, with very few duds...

Placed beside Bristol's docks, and a few minutes' walk from the town centre, the Watershed is a pleasant venue. The main indoor café is sunny and spacious, and throughout proceedings there were large groups of attendees seated round the tables talking nineteen to the dozen. Everyone seemed cheerful and enthusiastic, and impressed by the range of events and films. Most of the screenings were sold out well in advance, though standbys were sometimes available. At the start and end of an event, things got congested as people moved between cinemas and the café area, but no-one seemed to mind. The cinemas themselves were cool and comfortable, and everyone had a clear view of the screen. Print quality



The front gates of Animated Encounters 2002. All photos © Animated Encounters 2002.

varied for the vintage screenings, but the new films looked fine.

Popular Stuff

The hot ticket, unsurprisingly, was Friday's "Desert Island Flicks," over two hours of animation chosen and presented by *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening. Not only was the cinema packed, but hundreds more people crammed into the nearby IMAX to watch a live broadcast of the event. Happily, Groening was as enthusiastic as the audience. His picks included several Hollywood favourites and a lesser-known Chuck Jones film, the madcap chase *Fair and Wormer* (1946). Groening recalled Chuck's famous description of TV cartoons as "illustrated radio." Did the late maestro find anything to like in *The Simpsons*? Groening could only hope so. His two British picks both hailed from '98: *Jolly Roger*, the piratical Oscar nominee by Mark Baker, and *Baby-Cue*, a deeply strange stop-motion doll saga by Hazel Grian. By a genuine happy accident, Baker and Grian were both



Matt Groening (top) presents his "Desert Island Flicks" with interviewer/stand up comedian Phil Jupitus. The enthusiastic audience happily greeted Groening's choices.

in the audience. Groening's last choice, the Yogi spoof *Boo Boo Runs Wild* by John Kricfalusi, brought the house down.



Stubble Trouble.
© Calabash Animation, Inc. 2000.

The standard of the other film programmes was high, with very few duds (i.e. films where you're waiting for the end). On the international side, my favourites were *Pizza Passionata*, a hilarious Finnish model film by Kan Juusonen about a lonely man's fantasies; *Aria*, a model version of *Madame Butterfly* by Norway's Pjotr Sapegin, with neat self-referencing nods to the medium; *Stubble Trouble*, a screwball caveman comedy by American Joe Meredith; and *The Test*, a live-action/stop-motion Czech chiller that reminded me of Svankmajer. (Afterward, I learned it was by the master's son Vaclav.) The brilliant *Lovebirds*, a Danish film by Trylle Vilstrup, portrayed feathered blind dates with ghastly realism. Bruce Wilson's *Friday Night Idiot Box*, three quick gags about Canadian couch potatoes, was as witty as it was tasteless.

On the British front, I enjoyed the waspish *Loves Me... Loves Me Not*, a vintage '92 Aardman film by Jeff Newitt. I was also glad to see this year's BAA and BAFTA winner *Dog*, a model film by student Suzie Templeton, telling a desperately

bleak story of bereavement — so bleak, in fact, that one viewer left when it came on, saying he couldn't face seeing it again. The festival favourite was *Give Up Yer Aul Sins*, a superb Irish drawn film by Cathal Gaffney. This took the animated vox pop approach popularised by Aardman, applying it to a Bible story told by a breathless little girl. The result was funny and charming. The film scored highest in the festival's audience ballot, and will be nominated in the upcoming Cartoon D'Or in Wales.

Cinesite's Sue Rowe talked through a video deconstruction of her studio's FX work.

I couldn't get to two themed programmes, "Belgian Panorama" and the CalArts collec-

tion "California Dreaming." From all accounts, the Belgian collection was excellent but the CalArts films had dated badly, many feeling very juvenile. The honourable exception was John Lasseter's drawn short *Nitemare* (1980), featuring many ideas used in Pixar's *Monsters, Inc.* More vintage films figured in "Forbidden Animation," a collection of censored works, inspired by Karl Cohen's book of the same name. I suspect the sell-out audience expected Spike and Mike naughtiness, but the surprise was how mild most of the content was. (Or is it just that Brits see Red Hot Riding Hood on children's BBC?) For me the main pleasure was seeing Bosko and Flip the Frog for the first time, as well as Clampett's *Coal Black*, a short whose energy marginalised any racism.

It Wasn't All In The Dark

There were two high-tech presentations on Saturday. At the IMAX cinema, we had a sneak peak at DreamWorks' large-format 3D version of *Shrek*. It



Industry Day introduced professionals to animation students.

may be a work in progress, but the extract shown — Donkey and Shrek crossing the lake of lava — drew gasps of awe from the audience. In "Seeing Is Believing," Cinesite's Sue Rowe talked through a video deconstruction of her studio's FX work. The talk covered the animation of *Tomb Raider's* killer statue, Sean Connery climbing skyscrapers in *Entrapment*, and how to remove an ear-lobe in *The World Is Not Enough*. The tricks may be known to FX 'zine readers, but it was fun to see them on screen.

All speakers had time to chat to people individually after their presentations.

On the talks side, I saw Claudia Lloyd of Tiger Aspect discussing *Bosom Pals*, an animated version of the 'big woman' paintings by Beryl Cook. There were some problems with the projector, but Lloyd's stories and insights were highly entertaining, as was the impressive pilot. (*Bosom Pals* is now being made as two TV specials.) On Saturday, I caught the presentation by London and Budapest studio Varga, focusing on how youngsters could get into the industry. The same question was highlighted by a DreamWorks rep, whose talk was reportedly very good. All speakers had time to chat to people individually after their presentations.

More mixed was "The Great Animation Debate," involving a quartet of professionals discussing



Give Up Yer Aul Sins © Brown Bag Films.

the U.K. animation industry, with Tony Collingwood (Collingwood O'Hare) as chairman. The title was a misnomer. It was more a matter of each speaker (and later the audience) talking about the situation in his or her bit of the business, with little flow or focus. Many subjects and problems were raised, from the place of merchandise in the creative process, though the decline of personal shorts in the U.K., to the mixed blessing of Britain's burgeoning animation courses. However, much of the talk felt slow and meandering. The students I spoke to, though, were grateful to hear their peers discuss the industry's problems.

Overall, Encounters was a

great success. The Groening event ensured crossover appeal for the general public, and the man's presence helped interest the local media, with the Watershed proudly displaying numerous press cuttings about the event. As a student put it after the animation debate, the future for British animators may be uncertain, but the enthusiasm, the will to pursue the animation craft, is self-evident. Let's hope Blighty's animators have new triumphs to celebrate when Encounters meets again.

Note: QuickTime clips of the films may be viewed online at http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?type=pageone&article_no=1401

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



The festival goes found time for more informal encounters at the end of the day.

Between Business and Pleasure: A Preview of Annecy '02

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In 1952, John Coates found himself stranded for a week in Annecy with a hot date. The long-time producer at TVC (creators of *The Yellow Submarine* and *The Snowman*) was on 3-month tour of Europe when...

"Oh, it's a long story," chuckles Coates.

Let's just say that the town, with its picturesque lake, worked its magic and has left him to this day with "a special, funny, romantic feeling." Eight years later, the Annecy International Animated Film Festival was born beside that very same lake and Coates has been returning ever since. Along with the innumerable screenings, trade and job fairs,



The rarely seen work of Eva and Jan Svankmajer will be on view in a special exhibition entitled "Mouth to Mouth." Seen here is the striking *Les Possibilités du dialogue* (1987). © Athanor.

exhibits, conferences, parties and ceremonies taking place from June 3 - 8, the seasoned guest will be celebrating 45 years of TVC and an equally lengthy attendance record at Annecy. "Annecy is like a family reunion among film-

makers, animation buffs, producers, broadcasters and publishers," says Serge Bromberg.

**A whopping
1,424 films
were submitted
this year for
consideration...
Of these, 246
films have been
selected...**

Competition

A whopping 1,424 films were submitted this year for consideration, up by nearly 200 from last year. Of these, 246 films have been selected for competition – the largest portion from France, followed by the U.K., U.S., Germany and Canada. With nearly half of the shorts and features being first-time films and the largest portion of the competition devoted to School & Graduation Films, the festival not only provides a venue for up-and-coming filmmakers but also various opportunities for discussion and networking (such as the MIFA, the Animation and Multimedia Job Fair and the daily informal breakfast meetings with filmmakers at the Bistro Romain). The festival also provides a showcase of the latest tools of

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The nine member pre-selection jury worked eight hours a day over a three week period. It selected 246 films to compete out of 1,424 submissions.

© Odile Jacquot/NBC.

the trade: two new Internet categories have been added to the competition (Short Film and Series), as well as a democratic "Net Surfer's Award" to be judged online by the public.

This year also marks a record, of sorts, for Australian films in competition – with 6 films in the short film competition alone, putting them second only to the U.K. Of the select finalists is Anthony Lucas' *Holding Your Breath* (2001), which premieres in the Cannes official competition this week before making its way to Annecy. Lucas' latest film, part of a series aptly entitled *The Shadowlands*, features silhouetted figures set against deeply textured cityscapes and uses a series of half-tales (accompanied by frank narration) to explore the shady side of life in an industrial town. Lucas, who has been making short films for nearly 20 years, notes that independent animation is on the rise in Australia, thanks in part to support from various government programs. In fact, all of the films in this year's competition came from an initiative launched by the Australian Film Commission and the Special Broadcasting Service



Quelquechose d'Alice (1987) is another work presented in the Eve and Jan Svankmajer tribute. © Athanor.

(SBS). After a bit of an Annecy hiatus, Lucas will be attending the festival this year, pitching projects at MIFA and taking in the local festival scenery: "Went to Annecy before in 1995. Love the French thing. They have heaps of style."

Special Programmes

Alongside the competition screenings is a series of programmes that run the gamut from tributes to the masters, both living and recently departed, to the

exploration of formal and stylistic techniques, to humour and even a bit of naughty animation. A headliner this year is the "Tribute to Czech & Slovak Animation," with nearly a dozen special programmes, guests (including honorary Annecy president Bretislav Pojar), and conferences. Be sure not to miss the special exhibition, "Svankmajer E&J, Mouth to Mouth," held in the Castle-Museum – a rare chance to see engravings, collages, sculp-



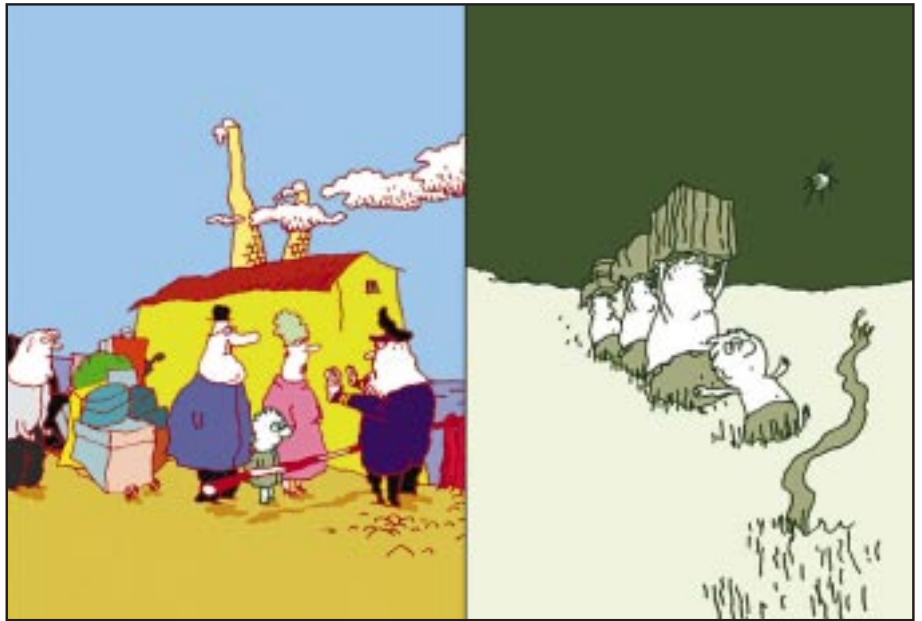
À l'affût dans la forêt (1966) by Jiri Brdeka and *Le Manteau angélique* (1948) by Eduard Hofman are included in the Tribute to Czech & Slovak Animation special program. © Kratkyfilm.

tures and paintings by the prolific duo Eva and Jan Svankmajer.

An exhibit is also planned to showcase the work of Paul Driessen, the focus of many a retrospective. The tribute, a unique co-production between the Holland Animation Film Festival (HAFF) and Annecy, includes films, a documentary and a special publication. "What I find exciting is that two festivals are working together instead of competing," says Gerben Schermer, artistic director of HAFF, and an Annecy attendee since the late '80s. What does he look forward to upon arriving? Somewhat nervously, Schermer replies: "I look forward to having the book – in my hands."

This year also marks a record, of sorts, for Australian films in competition...

Following in the footsteps of last year's popular 3D program, Annecy presents "50 Years of CinemaScope," which originally premiered at The Ottawa '94 International Animation Festival (and most recently screened at MOMA on May 17-18). Curated by noted animation historian Jerry Beck, the program focuses on the pioneering shorts of the late '50s, when the wide expanses of Scope and the 'realistic' depth of 3D were used to lure a TV-enthralled public back into theatres. A representative example



**HAFF and Annecy join forces to present Paul Driessen's work.
The retrospective will include *The Boy who Saw the Iceberg* (2000). © ONF/NFB.**

from the program is Disney's Academy Award-winning *Toot, Whistle, Plunk and Boom* (C. August Nichols & Ward Kimball, 1953), the very first animated film to experiment with CinemaScope. "A lot of the studios designed these films with the action in the middle and superfluous animation on the sides, for eventual TV viewing," explains Beck.

However, Disney opted for a 'no holds barred' approach by using every possible inch of the screen; the results were innovative and far from chaotic. Beck points out that the clever use of lighting, timing, dissolves and fades deftly leads the eye "just like at an attraction at Disneyland." This program offers a rare chance to view films like *Toot...* in their



***The Water People* (1992) by Paul Driessen will
also be showcased. © Nico Crama Films.**



One of the mischievous cows, which serves as Annecy's mascot this year. © CICA.

original format, before they were reduced in size and quality by the paltry pan & scan method used for television. "It's a great follow-up to the 3D program Serge Bromberg assembled last year. Also it may inspire animators to try some-thing beyond the limitations of traditional screen space."

MIFA

More than 900 companies and 5,600 industry professionals will gather at the Imperial Palace from June 5 – 8 for the 2002 edition of MIFA. This year the fresh mountain air carries the sweet aroma of new technologies with the presence of various Flash animators and Web content tools and service companies, as well as several conferences on the booming gaming industry, Flash animation and fascinating features

for the future.

MIFA will also welcome the Philippines to the market this year. "The Philippines are emerging as professionals on par with other Asian service companies," says Vincent Ferri, MIFA's manager. "Many of these studios are growing very fast thanks to government support. It is their first participation with a booth and I'm glad they can share their know-how with the rest of the world." The influx of Philippino companies this year is due to the efforts of the Center for International Trade Expositions & Mission (CITEM), which sponsored the booth and encouraged many of the country's smaller companies to attend. In total, 6 Philippino companies will be represented at the CITEM booth. Philippine Animation Studio, Inc.

(PASI), a full service animation facility, has had a presence at Annecy since 1996. "It is a wonderful place to network with the animation community and see what is going on with new and established filmmakers at the festival," says Frank Saperstein, PASI's executive producer and creative director. "It is very different from NATPE and MIPCOM because it is focused on animation, therefore it is much easier to run into people directly relevant to our business. The Festival also gives it a more artistic flavor and sense of community. The setting of Annecy is beautiful and more relaxed than at other trade shows or markets."

Surprises...?

An overwhelming list of festival events...and still more surprises in store: "Lots and lots of surprises to come," says Catherine Puthod, Annecy's publications editor. "The Bonlieu Forum will be invaded by a pyramid of very mischievous cows..." (??!) And you never know what to expect at the closing ceremonies. "It's all very secret at the moment, but it will be along the theme of Circuses..."

Annecy promises to be all that, plus a TVC paddle boat race lead by John Coates. 50 years later, you can still find him by the lake.

Tina Paas is the assistant director & programmer for the Ottawa International Animation Festival and co-creator of the new Canadian Animation Directory. She is also the associate editor of ASIFA International Magazine.

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

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.

Astro Boy. V.1 – V.9.

TV series (52 episodes), 1980-1981. Director: Noboru Ishiguro. V.1 - V.3, 5 episodes/125 minutes; V.4 - V.9, 6 episodes/150 minutes. Price & format: video dubbed \$19.95. Distributor: Manga Entertainment.

Two *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan Atom*; *Mighty Atom*) animated TV series were produced in Japan. The first, 193 episodes in black-&-white from 1963 to 1966 by Osamu Tezuka's Mushi Production Co., was Japan's first TV animation. This is the series that introduced *Astro Boy* to America. The second, in color by Tezuka's newer Tezuka Production Co., was only 52 episodes from October 1, 1980 to December 23, 1981. This has never been seen in the U.S., although it was released in

Australia several years ago. The new series repeated some of the more popular episodes from the first series, mixed with some brand-new stories. Tezuka went on record in 1980 as being very pleased to have the opportunity to update his most popular character to modern, full-color animation standards, and to replace his early simplistic character with a more thoughtful and richer personality.

The black-&-white version was and still is immensely popular in Japan. The color version got a polite reception and was soon forgotten. The little-boy robot has been called Japan's equivalent of Mickey Mouse, and the comparison seems apt here. The original

Disney cartoons of the late 1920s and 1930s were black-&-white and crudely produced, but the lively Mickey was loved by the public and became a major star. The final cartoons produced during the 1960s were in color with much higher-quality animation, but Mickey had become a bland corporate image and lost most of his appeal. The new *Astro Boy* is too much of a politically correct goody-goody character, sniveling, "Why do we have to fight? Why can't we be friends?" in the midst of battling villains.

Anime collectors should know that Manga's video version is edited to be "child friendly." The first two episodes have been edited into a single half-hour episode (resulting in the series being labeled as only 51 episodes), to remove the tear-jerking hospital deathbed scene of *Astro Boy*'s inventor's son; a helicopter crashing into a building with obvious fatalities, and similar "dark"



Astro Boy. © 1980 Tezuka Productions. © 2001 Manga Entertainment, Inc.

elements. Plans for a DVD version for anime collectors, which would be uncut, have been put on hold for contractual reasons until after the release of Columbia/Sony's CGI *Astro Boy* theatrical feature, which is not scheduled until sometime in 2004.

Devil Hunter Yohko: The Complete Collection. V.1 – V.2.

OAV series (6 episodes), 1991-1995. Directors: Katsuhisa Yamada (1), Hisashi Abe (2, 3), Hatou Itsuki (4), Junichi Sakata (5), Akiyuki Shinbo (6). V.1, 3 episodes/105 minutes, V.2, 3 episodes/120 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: A.D.V. Films.

The basic plot similarities between *Devil Hunter Yohko* (*Mamono Hunter Yohko*) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are striking, but *Yohko* (animated by Madhouse) was released direct to video on February 8, 1991 in Japan (there was a simultaneous video game, both funded by Toho Films); and *Buffy* not until July 31, 1992 in the U.S. *Yohko* 2, 3, 5 and 6 were released roughly a year apart from 1992 through 1995. The fourth release was a half-hour music video titled *Yohko Super Music Clip* in Japan and *Yohko 4-Ever* in the U.S., and the Japanese title of *Yohko* 6 was *Yohko2* (squared) because it pits her against her demonic evil twin.

Yoko Mano is almost 16 and eager to encourage a high school boyfriend (and not hesitant about going all the way with him) when she is attacked by demons and rescued by her grandmother Madoka. Grandma reveals that the women of the Mano family are a secret line of protectors of humanity against devils, gaining their powers as supernatural warriors on their sixteenth birthday — but



Devil Hunter Yohko.
© 1990 NCS * Toho Co., Ltd.

only if they are still virgins. Yohko's hot-blooded mother could not wait that long, so Grandma is determined to make sure that Yohko remains qualified to become the 108th generation of the Mano devil hunters. But the devils are out to eliminate her before she reaches her birthday, either by killing her or encouraging her seduction by enhancing the allure of her boyfriend.

The first *Yohko* presented a then-rare blend of horror, risqué humor (A.D.V.'s age recommendation is 17+), and supernatural action-adventure for older adolescents, primarily female with its strong romance sub-plot and a dynamic, attractive heroine who has to save the handsome but weak males. Numbers 2 and 3 were tamer, more like *Sailor Moon* TV episodes with Yohko accompanied on her adventures by her two best friends, Chigako her self-appointed "manager" and Azusa who wants to become a devil hunter too. The fourth was a music video compilation of the songs from the first three, with a



Devil Hunter Yohko.
© 1992, 1993 TOHO / MADHOUSE.

minimal amount of new animation. Numbers 5 and 6 returned to the more mature drama with sadistic devils of the original story.

The first *Yohko* was also the first release of anime specialty company A.D. Vision on December 15, 1992. The others followed in both subtitled and dubbed videos between then and 1998. A.D.V. is now releasing them in a two DVD 10th Anniversary set. The first DVD contains the original *Yohko* in two versions. As A.D.V.'s founders explain in a historical commentary extra, they learned that the Japanese release had been edited at the last minute to make it shorter and more dramatic. That version became their first release, subtitled, but they then produced the complete version (never seen in Japan) for their dubbed edition in January 1996. This DVD has both; it is literally "The Complete Collection."

[The original release dates and lengths are: *Devil Hunter Yohko*, February 8, 1991 (46 minutes); *Devil Hunter Yohko* 2,

December 22, 1992 (30 minutes); *Devil Hunter Yohko 3*, April 1, 1993 (30 minutes); *Devil Hunter Yohko Super Music Clip*, December 21, 1993 (30 minutes); *Devil Hunter Yohko 5*, July 1, 1994 (45 minutes); and *Devil Hunter Yohko Squared*, July 1, 1995 (45 minutes).]

I'm Gonna Be An Angel. DVD ed.: V.1, Earth Angel. V.2, Send Me An Angel. V.3, Baby Come Back. V.4, Oh For A Muse. V.5, The Changeover. V.6, (to be determined). VHS ed.: V.1, Earth Angel. V.2, Invisible Girl.

TV series (26 episodes), 1999. Director: Hiroshi Nishikiori. DVD ed.: V.1 - V.2, 5 episodes/125 minutes; V.3 - V.6, 4 episodes/100 minutes. Price & format: bilingual, \$29.95. VHS ed.: V.1 - V.2, 3 episodes/75 minutes. Price & format: dubbed or subtitled, \$19.95. (The VHS edition may be discontinued.) Distributor: Synch-Point/Anime Gamers USA, Inc.

It is difficult to tell for what market this cute but jaw-droppingly bizarre children's TV series (rather like *Cardcaptors* as directed by David Lynch) is aimed. It is basically a mixture of the adolescent embarrassing fantasy girlfriends (*Urusei Yatsura*, *Tenchi Muyo!*) and humorous monster neighbors (*The Addams Family*, *The Munsters*) formulas. Yuusuke Kamoshita is a shy 8th-grade boy with a crush on Natsumi Suzuhara. A dimensional portal to our world opens from the Monster World and the first one through is Noelle, a blue-eyed blonde with a halo about 14 years old. She sees Yuusuke, immediately falls in love and proclaims him to be her husband. She gets her Papa to transform Yuusuke's house into a magical mansion for her whole family

to move into. Papa is modeled after Frankenstein's Monster; Mama is a normal housewife; big brother Gabriel is a vampire; big sister Sara is invisible; Granny is an old witch; and there are others. The house is not a typical creepy mansion, however, but bright pastel plastic full of soft toys. Embarrassment point #1: what adolescent boy wants to live in a house that looks like Barney's or the Teletubbies' home? Embarrassment point #2: Noelle has the giggly exuberance and innocence of a four- to five-year-old. This can be endearing, but not when she drapes herself over him in school, or he has to keep her from running around nude like a three-year-old escaping her bath. But Noelle is the target of Dispel, the decadent supernatural villain who seeks to corrupt her innocence. Yuusuke may be totally exasperated by Noelle and her wacky family, but he recognizes their innate goodness and cannot refrain from joining them in their fight against Dispel and his agents such as sexy cat-girl Miruru, even if this means letting Natsumi drift away from him.

I'm Gonna Be An Angel (*Tenshi ni Narumon!*) was a prime-time 26-episode weekly children's series on TV Tokyo (April 7 through September 29, 1999), smoothly animated by Studio Pierrot, with bouncy music by Yoshikazu Sou and a bright, soft, child-friendly art design by Hiromi Kato that is like stepping into a Toys 'R' Us store. But much of the humor is too infantile for the average teen or adult anime enthusiast, while some elements such as adolescent Noelle's total incomprehension about modesty or Yuusuke's junior high pals trying to peek into the girls' dressing room in the gym

make this an unlikely purchase for young American children. Most American anime releases have a somewhat simplified translation; this is so complete that the DVD Vol. 1's extras include eight pages(!) of translation notes explaining Japanese ethnic/cultural references, including juvenile nonsense and naughty slang.



I'm Gonna be an Angel! / Tenshi ni Narumon! © HEAVEN PROJECT / Bandai Visual - Studio Pierrot - TV Tokyo. Distributed exclusively in North America by Synch-Point, a division of Anime Gamers USA, Inc.

Love Hina. V.1, Moving In... V.2, Go West! V.3, Secret Lives. V.4, Love Hurts. V.5, Summer By The Sea. V.6, And The Winner Is...

TV series (24 episodes), 2000. Director: Yoshiaki Iwasaki. V.1 - V.6, 4 episodes/100 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: Bandai Entertainment.

Love Hina, based upon a popular manga by Ken Akamatsu, is one of the most recent good examples of the teen romantic comedy for the older end of the adolescent range. Keitaro (Kei) Urashima, age 20, has been looking forward to entering prestigious Tokyo University ever since

he was five and made a childhood pact with the girl next door. But he has just failed the entrance exam for the third time, and his parents are pressing him to give up foolish dreams and find a job. His grandmother is retiring from being manager of a small all-girls student dorm at the nearby Hinata Hot Springs resort town; that job would make him self-supporting and give him time to study. The five girls are not thrilled about having a male manager, but Kei is clearly so shy and nerdy that they can easily boss him around. The girls are all romantic comedy stereotypes: Naru Narusegawa, also trying to get into Tokyo U, furious at herself for being distracted from cramming by her developing adolescence; Mitsune (Kitsune) Konno, the get-rich-quick schemer; Motoko Aoyama, the haughty aristocrat; Shinobu Maehara, shy and with zero self-esteem who needs a kindly big brother; and Kaolla Su, would-be mechanical genius who invents wondrously goofy contraptions out of old toys. Early episodes have at least one gag scene each of Kei accidentally walking in on one of the girls in the nude and getting pummeled by all five as a pervert. (Both Kei and Naru are extremely near-sighted and constantly losing their glasses.) As the series progresses, a shaky romance blossoms between Kei and Naru, and new characters are introduced to play off that: Mutsumi Otohime, another aspiring college student who may be Kei's childhood girl-next-door; Seta Noriyasu, a handsome young Tokyo U professor and former tutor of Naru's and Kitsune's when they were in high school, on whom Naru had a crush. Each episode mixes exaggeratedly



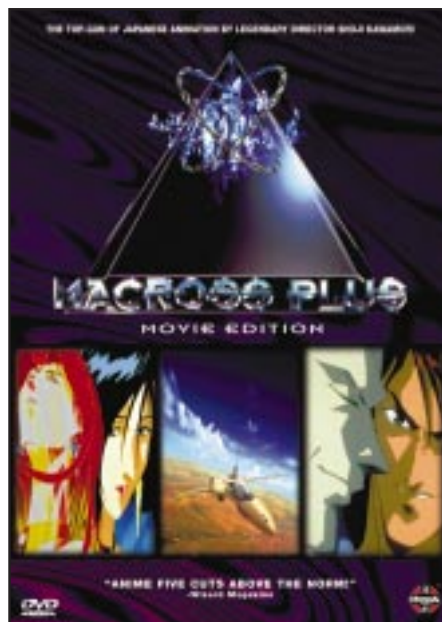
Love Hina. © Ken Akamatsu / Kodansha / Love-Hina Onsen Kumiai / TV Tokyo.

slapstick comedic situations with thoughtful moments in which Kei and each of the girls must consider that, while getting into college is an admirable ambition, it is not the final goal in life and should not become such an obsession that it blinds one to other possibilities.

There are many romantic comedies. *Love Hina* (24 weekly episodes on Tokyo TV, April 19 to September 27, 2000; produced

by TV Tokyo with animation mainly from the Xebec studio) stands out due to attractive character designs by Makoto Uno, a great opening theme song by Ritsuko Okazaki (sung by pop sensation Megumi Hayashibara) and good music by Koichi Korenaga, plus the level of "theatrical feature style" direction with lively pacing and witty dialogue which is so rare in American TV animation. *Love Hina* was so

popular that the TV series was followed up by a Christmas 2000 TV special movie, *Silent Eve*; another special in 2001; and a three-video OAV series, *Love Hina Again*, in January to March 2002.



Macross Plus Movie Edition. © 2002 Manga Entertainment, Inc.

Macross Plus Movie Edition.

Theatrical feature, 1995. Director: Shoji Kawamori. 115 minutes. Price & format: DVD subtitled \$29.95. Distributor: Manga Entertainment.

The 1982-1983 *Super-Dimensional Fortress Macross* TV series was one of the most popular "giant robot" sci-fi dramatic serials in anime, and only slightly less so in America as the opening third of the *Robotech* TV series. The public wanted more, which it finally got (not counting the disappointing *Macross II*) in the excellent *Macross Plus*. This was originally produced (with animation coordinated by the Triangle Staff studio) as four 40-minute OAVs released between August 25, 1994 and June 25, 1995. This theatrical feature, released September 30,

1995, condensed the story to 115 minutes but added several lengthy new scenes in mostly dazzling CGI. Even the fans who are unhappy about the extensive missing footage agree that the new scenes are spectacular, and that the feature is intelligently edited to result in a tight, coherent story.

Macross Plus stands so well on its own that the connection with the earlier *Macross* is quite superficial. The newly-settled colony planet of Eden looks strikingly like central California with futuristic architecture. Isamu Dyson and Guld Bowman are two Air Force test pilots at New Edwards AFB, bitter rivals despite being lifelong acquaintances. Their personalities could have been taken from Mozart and Salieri in *Amadeus*; Isamu is a brilliant flyer but irresponsibly reckless, while Guld has a fanatical but humorless obsession with perfection and despises Isamu for wasting his talent. They are assigned to test two prototype jet fighters with experimental man-machine interfaces that enable their pilots to control the aircraft with their brain waves. The action begins when Myung Fang Lone returns to Eden after seven years on Earth. Dialogue quickly establishes that the three were best friends in high school, where Myung was on the verge of a popular singing career; but some traumatic event happened around their graduation, which turned the boys into enemies and caused Myung to leave home. She is back as part of a technological entertainment project to create a holographic virtual-reality popular singing star, Sharon Apple, using the same brain interfaces that

the pilots use. Parallel subplots develop interlocked stories of Isamu's and Guld's increasingly suicidal aerial gymnastics trying to outdo each other; the two men's rivalry over Myung as they renew their relationships with her; the secret of Myung's decision to give up her own singing career to serve as the "brain" behind Sharon Apple; and the sci-fi menace that develops as the increased computer memory put into Sharon Apple gives "her" a self-aware, independent personality with all Myung's emotional problems and no moral restraints.

Macross Plus helped establish Shoji Kawamori's reputation as one of anime's best and most imaginative directors, especially with sci-fi settings featuring realistic futuristic technological hardware and, especially here, a cast of clearly distinct racial traits including Caucasians, Asians and African-Americans (plus some token Zentraedi aliens from the original *Macross* series). It also helped establish Yoko Kanno's reputation as one of anime's most popular composers, especially of rock and jazz themes (performed by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra). The two reinforce each other here to create truly awesome holographic pop-rock concerts. *Macross Plus #1* was one of Manga Entertainment's first video releases in February 1995, and the complete four OAVs have been available on a two-DVD set since September 1999. The movie version now completes the set.

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

Fresh from the Festivals:

May 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:

Black Soul/Ame Noire (2001), 9.75 min., directed by Martine Chartrand, Canada. Info: Julie Roy, National Film Board of Canada, 3155 Côte de Liesse, Ville St-Laurent, Québec, H4N 2N4, Canada. Tel: 514-283-3472. Fax: 514-283-4443. Email: jroy@nfb.ca.

Frank Was a Monster Who Wanted to Dance (2001), 4 min., directed by Ian Freedman, Canada. Info: Roula Lainas, Lost Boys Studios, 395 Railway St., 3rd floor, Vancouver, BC, V6A 1A6 Canada. Tel: 604-738-1805. Fax: 604-738-1806. Email: roula@lost-boys-studios.com.

A Hunting Lesson/Une Leçon de Chasse (2001), 13 min., directed by Jacques Drouin, Canada. Info: Julie Roy, National Film Board of Canada, 3155 Côte de Liesse, Ville St-Laurent, Québec, H4N 2N4, Canada. Tel: 514-283-3472. Fax: 514-283-4443. Email: jroy@nfb.ca.

The Journal of Edwin Carp (2001), 7 min., directed by Richard Bazley, USA/UK. Info: Richard Bazley, Bazley Films, Corsham Media Park, Spring Quarry, West Wells Road, Corsham, Wiltshire, SN13 9GB, U.K. Tel: 122-581-6210. Fax: 122-581-6211. Email: richard@bazleyfilms.com.

Pigeon Within (2000), 4.5 min., directed by Emily Hubley, USA. Info: Emily Hubley, Hubbub Inc., 11 Buckingham Gardens, Maplewood, NJ 07040. Tel: 973-763-6076. Email: hubbubinc@earthlink.net.

Black Soul

Condensing several hundred years of Black history into a brief ten minutes, *Black Soul* is an impressionistic, often beautiful, and somewhat fragmented evocation of the African-American and African-Canadian experience. Using oil paint on glass and the framing device of an elderly woman instructing her grandson, director Martine Chartrand presents a whirlwind tour that incorporates images of African ancestry, the iniquities of slavery and discrimination, and a celebration of creativity. The director exploits her fluid medium to create a pleasingly flowing tableau, but her transitions sometimes feel



Black Soul/Ame Noire. © 2001, National Film Board of Canada.



Frank Was A Monster Who Wanted To Dance. © 2001, Lost Boys Studios.

forced and the whole suffers from a diffuseness that detracts from the film's impact. There are a lot of good ideas here — visual, thematic and musical (the wonderful score includes jazz, gospel music and African rhythms) — and the effect is frequently both moving and aesthetically pleasing; at the same time, one feels that Chartrand tried to fit too much into too small a space.

Martine Chartrand worked as an illustrator and teacher before becoming involved with animation in 1986 as a layout and color artist. In 1992, she directed her first film, *Tango*, which garnered several international awards. She received a grant in 1994 to study with Alexander Petrov in Russia, where she helped develop his *The Old Man and the Sea* and made *Black Soul*. *Black Soul* has screened at more than sixty festivals, including Annecy, Toronto, Zagreb, and Cinanima, and has won numerous awards.

Frank Was a Monster Who Wanted to Dance

This visually imaginative computer animation gets a lot of mileage out of its exceedingly simple story, which is told in rhyme. Based on an illustrated children's book by Keith Graves, the film to some extent outweighs its modest source material, but it's fun to watch, thanks to careful comic timing and a wealth of amusing detail. Director Ian Freedman makes some strange choices, such as giving the monster a hillbilly accent. Plus, it would be nice if there were a little more of a narrative payoff. But for what it is, the film works well and has a lot of flair.

Since graduating from Sheridan College's Classical Animation program in 1980, director Ian Freedman has worked on over fifty animated TV series, as well as educational films, features and digital games. He opened his own company in

1987 and, in 1996, co-founded Barking Bullfrog Cartoon Company. Director of animation Ken Meyer was hired fresh out of Vancouver Film School by Lost Boys Studios, where he now serves as animation director and senior 3D artist. His other work includes commercials, digital games and special effects.

Frank was named Best Animated Short at the Northwest International Film Festival and was awarded a Silver Medal at the New York Festival of Film and Video.

A Hunting Lesson

A somewhat confused moral tale ostensibly about the evils of hunting, *A Hunting Lesson* features pinscreen animation by Jacques Drouin, an acknowledged master of this rarefied technique. It seems an odd, or in any case arbitrary, choice to use this type of animation for a straightforward narrative, since the particular



A Hunting Lesson. © 2001, National Film Board of Canada.

qualities of pinscreen animation are generally better suited to more abstract subject matter (e.g., Drouin's 1976 masterpiece, *Mindscape*). Still, while the visuals in *A Hunting Lesson* tend to be static, many of the tableaux — which are lit in various colors — are quite beautiful, and Drouin is frequently successful in transcending the inherent limitations of the form. Dramatically, however, the film is less successful. The story, based on a book by Jacques Godbout, comes across as vague and unfocused, and the intended lesson about having reverence for life isn't clearly motivated by the specifics of the events depicted.

Jacques Drouin joined the National Film Board as an apprentice in 1973 and developed a fascination for the Alexeieff-Parker pinscreen, which the NFB had acquired the previous year. In addition to *Mindscape*, his other films in this medium include *Trois exercices sur l'écran d'épingles d'Alexeieff* (1974); and, among others, the puppet/

pinscreen hybrid *Nightangel/L'Heure des anges* (1986), made in collaboration with Czech animator Bretislav Pojar; and *Ex-Child/Ex-enfant* (1994). He is currently conducting research with a view to combining pinscreen with computer animation.

A Hunting Lesson was shown at Annecy, Leipzig, Stuttgart and several other festivals and received the Jury Prize at the New York Expo of Short Film and Video.

The Journal of Edwin Carp

Set to the strains of an early Beethoven quartet, this droll shaggy dog story relates the unfortunate series of misadventures that befalls the title character when he attempts to rectify a small plumbing problem. Based on the book of the same name by Richard Haydn, with illustrations by the renowned British illustrator, Ronald Searle — whose style inspired the film's design, *The Journal of Edwin Carp* was created using Flash and After

Effects, which is somewhat remarkable considering its hand-drawn look. The loose drawing style and purposefully understated narration is punctuated by a small number of judicious camera moves and oddly shifting perspectives, all of which serves to convey the story's dry humor and whimsical outlook in a most efficacious manner.



The Journal of Edwin Carp.
© 2001, Richard Bazley.

Director Richard Bazley has worked for the past decade as a supervising animator for three of the major animation studios, Sullivan Bluth, Walt Disney and Warner Bros. Best known for his supervisory work on *The Iron Giant*, he was a lead animator on Disney's *Hercules* and has contributed to *Pocahontas*, *Osmosis Jones* and many other animated features. *The Journal of Edwin Carp*, which is Bazley's directorial debut, received some financial support from Macro-media and Wacom, but was largely self-funded. It has been shown at the Teeside Animation Festival in the U.K. and a number of other venues.

Pigeon Within

Director Emily Hubley offers another in a series of highly personal and rather recondite short films, which, though text-based and identifiably narratives, communicate more through sug-



Pigeon Within. © 2000, Hubbub, Inc.

gestion than actual exposition, and appear to serve a therapeutic function as much as an artistic one. *Pigeon Within* follows a confused and unhappy girl through the subways and streets of New York, charting her encounters with a couple of ambiguous figures and dipping into her internal monologue. Hubley's distinctive visual style, which features rudimentary hand-drawn characters combined with xeroxed photos in a rough collage, is well-suited to her oblique, dream-like narrative. (Hubley notes that the inspiration for *Pigeon Within* was in fact a dream.) It's problematic, however, whether this disjunctive world ultimately is too insular to allow much meaning to seep through.

Emily Hubley began her animation career in the studio

of her parents, John and Faith Hubley, in 1977, and has been making her own films since 1980. Among her many award-winning works are *Delivery Man* (1982), *Blake Ball* (1988), *Enough* (1993), *Her Grandmother's Gift* (1995), *The Girl w/Her Head Coming Off* (three segments, 1996), and *One Self: Fish/Girl* (1997). She also served as the animator for the feature film, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001). *Pigeon Within* received major awards at the New York Animated Film Festival and the USA Short Film Festival, and was screened at Anima Mundi, Sundance and the Museum of Modern Art, among other venues.

Note: QuickTime clips of the films may be viewed online at

http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?type=pageone&article_no=1400

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

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