

ANIMATION

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July 2002

Reign of Fire's Dragons

Was **Walt Disney** Evil?

TV Shows to Features

Annecy's Svankmajer Exhibit and more...

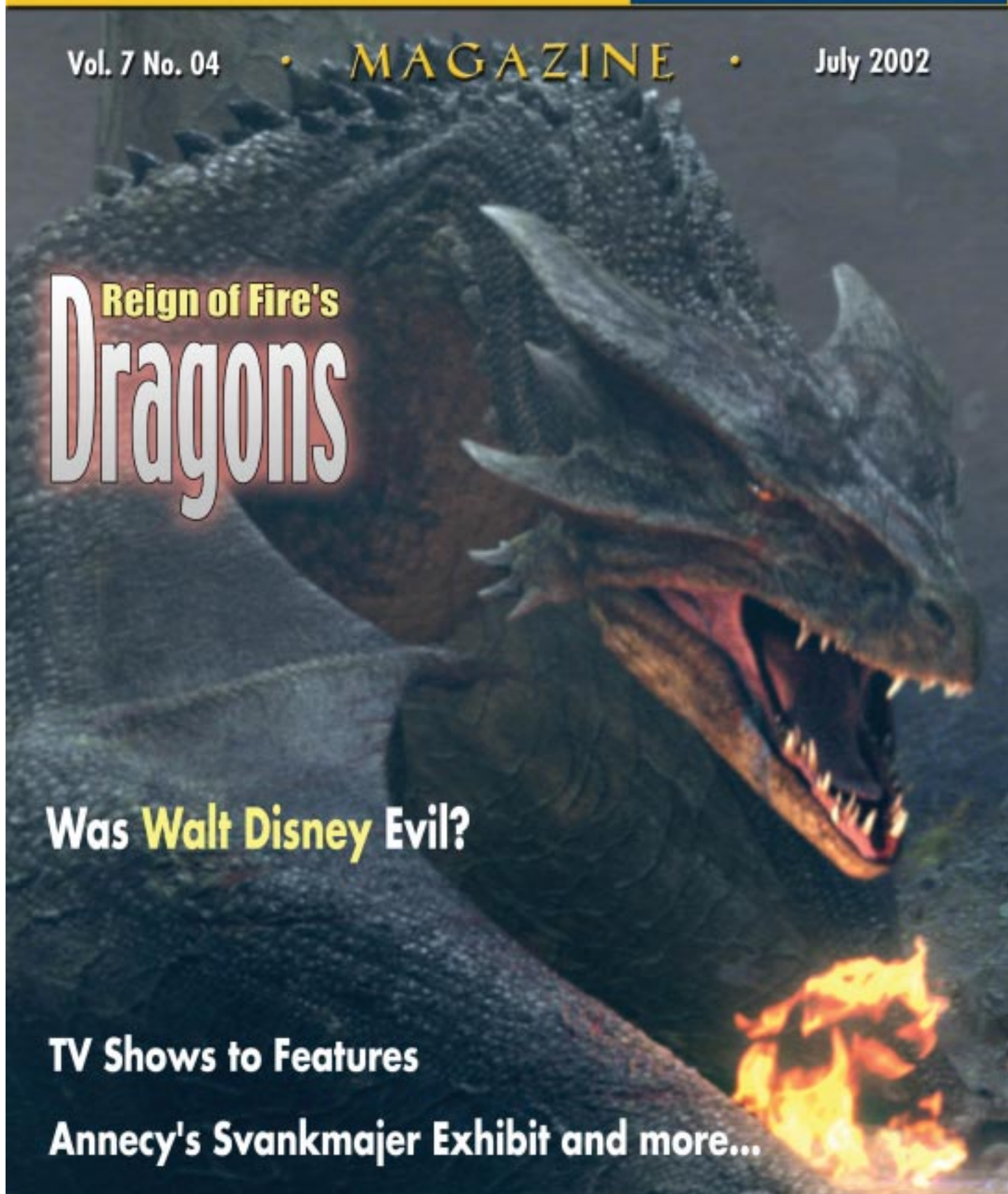


Table of Contents

JULY 2002

VOL. 7 No. 4

JULY 2002

FEATURES

- 4 Reign of Fire: Breathing Life Into Dragons**
Pamela Kleibrink Thompson sits down with co-visual effects supervisor Dan DeLeeuw to talk about one of The Secret Lab's last effects projects, Reign of Fire, and creating the film's horrible winged creatures.
- 10 Powerpuff Girls: From Small Screen to Big Screen**
The Powerpuff Girls -- everyone's favorite pint size crime fighters -- are coming to the big screen. J. Paul Peszko speaks with creator Craig McCracken about bringing the TV heroes to the big time.
- 14 Was Walt Disney A Saint, An Evil Sinner Or The Devil Incarnate? The Truth About Some Of Those Nasty Disney Stories!**
Some rumors regarding Walt Disney have lived on far too long. Was he a Nazi? A super-secret FBI agent? Is he frozen somewhere in a vault? And why does the Christian right hate his company so much? Karl F. Cohen takes on all these myths and more to set the record straight.
- 23 Aardman's Steve Box Talks**
While everyone knows Aardman's super-stars like Nick Park and Peter Lord... what about Steve Box? The maker of Stage Fright, discusses his first jobs, his work ethic and growing role at the successful studio.

COLUMNS

- 28 Screen Test**
There are a lot of television toons coming to the big screen these days. Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman takes a look at this growing phenomenon and all its good and bad points.
- 32 The Animation Pimp: ανθρωπος μορφη**
Talking animals...why are we so attached to the talking animals? The Pimp, of course, has some ideas.
- 35 Red-Hot Jazz = Red Menace?!**
In these post-9/11 days when the U.S. government is assuming greater surveillance powers for national safety, it may be instructive to look back at how fear of foreign threats affected the animation industry fifty years ago...
- 38 Notes from the Underground Part 3 -- Drawing, Without Knowing (Or, The Art in the Doodle)**
While many of us believe drawing is knowledge based, Jean Detheux explores how venturing beyond this "given" opens up an entire new realm of paradoxes, dilemmas and ultimately success.

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STUDENT CORNER

44 The Television Animation Outline

Jean Ann Wright continues her series of articles on writing for television animation. This month she focuses on writing an outline for an episode of an animation series.

46 Career Coach: Declaration of Independence

You don't need to be American to celebrate Independence Day. In the new job market, Pamela Kleibrink Thompson explains why we should all declare our independence.

49 How To Draw Animation: Simplifying Characters for Animation

Christopher Hart continues his series of six tips on how to bring animated characters to life. This month we learn about simplifying character designs so that animation is easier.

TECHNOLOGY

50 Combustion 2 in Action

Scott Jenkins reviews Combustion 2 and checks in with a production in progress to see how Combustion stacks up against key competitor After Effects.

EVENTS

54 Annecy 2002 Through An Artist's Sketchbook

Don Duga returns to Annecy with his trusty sketchbook in hand.

58 Svankmajer E & J: Mouth to Mouth

Clare Kitson describes, and explains, a continuing exhibition of Jan and Eva Svankmajer's surrealist work at the Annecy Castle Gallery.

FILM/VIDEO

63 New from Japan: Anime Film Reviews

Anime expert Fred Patten reviews the latest anime releases including Excel Saga, GTO, Project A-ko, Spriggan and Armitage: Dual-Matrix.

68 Fresh from the Festivals: July 2002's Film Reviews

Maureen Furniss reviews five short films fresh from the festival circuit: Airship by Sam Yousefian, King Tangun by Jun Eun Lee, Nina Paley's The Stork, Drunk by Aaron Augenblick and Billy Greene's Thought Bubble.

BOOKS

72 Inside the Yellow Submarine: The Making of the Beatles' Animated Classic

Brett Rogers reviews Dr. Robert R. Hieronimus' book on the history of the Yellow Submarine and uncovers a clever and accurate account of the film's chaotic history.



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ANIMATION WORLD NETWORK

6525 Sunset Blvd., Garden Suite 10
Los Angeles, CA 90028

Tel. 323.606.4200 • **Fax** 323.466.6619

Email info@awn.com

PUBLISHERS

Ron Diamond - President
Dan Sarto - Chief Operating Officer

EDITORIAL

Heather Kenyon - Editor-in-Chief
Leigh Godfrey - Content Manager

CONTRIBUTORS

Karl Cohen
Gene Deitch
Jean Detheux
Don Duga
Maureen Furniss
Martin "Dr.Toon" Goodman
Christopher Hart
Scott Jenkins
Clare Kitson
Fred Patten
J. Paul Peszko
Chris Robinson
Brett Rogers
Pamela Kleibrink Thompson
Roger Whiter
Ruth Whiter
Jean Ann Wright

OPERATIONS

Joan Kim - General Manager
Darlene Chan - Office Manager

WEB/DESIGN TEAM

Mike Dunlop - Webmaster
Alex Binotapa - Webmaster

ADVERTISING SALES

Dan Sarto - dan@awn.com
Greg Singer - greg@awn.com

Bill Buck - Bill@Afmla.com
Cheryl Rosenthal - Cheryl@Afmla.com

Reign of Fire:

Breathing Life Into Dragons

by Pamela Kleibrink Thompson

The Secret Lab studied flying dinosaurs before creating this dragon with a 300-foot wingspan and its offspring. Here, they fly high over the ruins of London, having burnt Big Ben and Parliament to ash.

All images © Spyglass Entertainment Group, LP. All rights reserved.

R*aign of Fire* director Rob Bowman wanted to make his dragons as vicious, as organic, and as scary as possible. The job of creating living, breathing dragons and a post-apocalyptic world was given to The Secret Lab. Co-visual effects supervisor Dan DeLeeuw reveals how they borrowed elements from nature to create a supreme predator who could destroy the world.

A 10-year veteran of visual effects, DeLeeuw's connections helped him find his first job. The brother of a college friend attended Moorpark College in California, where he saw a poster advertising an internship at a visual effects company called Dream Quest Images and told DeLeeuw about it. DeLeeuw applied, hoping his degree in computer science from UC Irvine, and experience doing stop-motion in his garage and occasionally torching his back yard with home-made pyrotechnics would land him a job doing visual effects.

Now a veteran of effects-heavy films such as *102 Dalmatians*, *Bicentennial Man*, *The Rock*, *Mighty Joe Young* and

Crimson Tide, DeLeeuw notes that *Reign of Fire* was the most difficult film he's worked on in his career. Inspired by *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, he realized early on that the power of the image to tell a story is the real magic behind filmmaking and visual effects. When you can elicit emotion from audience members — that is when you hit gold. The powerful, visceral images in *Reign of Fire* were achieved through the creativity of DeLeeuw and help from a crew of effects artists and

some computers. Pamela Kleibrink Thompson interviewed Dan DeLeeuw, co-visual effects supervisor on *Reign of Fire*, to find out how the challenges were met on the hardest film on which DeLeeuw has ever worked.

Pamela Thompson: What was the biggest challenge you faced while working on *Reign of Fire*?

Dan DeLeeuw: This was the hardest film I've ever worked on. On *Mighty Joe Young* we dealt



The Secret Lab animation team faced a huge challenge in making the dragons look like real animals that could exist on Earth. Co-visual effects supervisor Dan DeLeeuw is sitting far right.



The wireframe and render of the dragon. Before getting to this stage, Secret Lab had sketched the character on paper and sculpted it in clay.

“Reign of Fire encompassed both character animation and environmental effects.”

with character animation and *Armageddon* was full of environmental effects but *Reign of Fire* encompassed both character animation and environmental effects. The character animation was central because the dragons are the antagonists, the bad guys. The dragon is as much a character in the film as Matthew McConaughey's Van Zan or Christian Bale's Quinn. Working with the dragon was a challenge for the actors and the director. They had to have an understanding of the character and what it could do.

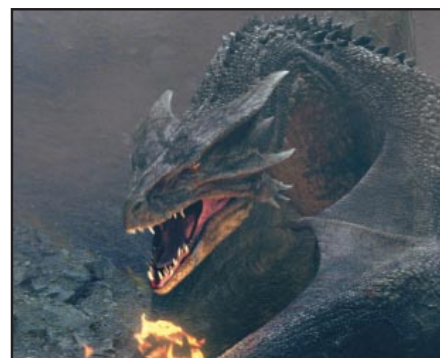
The director wanted to make the dragons like real animals that could exist on earth. When most people think of dragons the images are based on mythology. When we did research on dragons, most of the images showed

ornamentation on the heads, spikes on the backs. We wanted to make the dragon look like it really existed.

We attacked the design on three fronts. We sketched the character on paper, sculpted it in clay and built it in the computer. In the computer we built a basic model with a simple IK rig which was handed off to an animator. We found that some of the designs might look great as a silhouette, but once the animator attempted to move the model, it didn't work. The front legs are part of the wings and if we made the wings too big, the dragon couldn't walk. The wing size and legs had to be worked out so that the dragon did not walk like a gorilla.

Character design is not only how a character looks but also how it moves. We wanted to

make an animal whose wings could support its weight. To make something that could really fly we studied flying dinosaurs. We took classic ideas and combined elements of various animals to create the dragon. The dragon is part snake, leopard, lion, eagle and hawk, vulture and crocodile. Another challenge was the dragons' skin. We had done leathery skin on Shep in *George of the Jungle*, but the dragons didn't have just leathery skin. The dragons were armored beasts with scales. Normally we would paint the scales on. But when the skin moved, the scales were displaced and we didn't want them to stretch. The scales had to be hard enough to deflect a bullet. We wanted the scales on the dragon to overlap like they do on snakes. We made the scales bigger over the chest of the dragon to protect the heart and vital organs. But it looked like fantasy art and didn't seem real.



The Secret Lab combined elements of the snake, leopard, lion, eagle, hawk, vulture and crocodile to create the dragons.

To create the scales with the control we wanted, we changed the hair program we used on *102 Dalmatians*. This was a procedural modeling system, which generated scales for the models at each frame. We took an animated puppy and replaced the fur with scales.



An early version of the dragon with no scales. The animation team had to revise a hair program to create the kind of realistic scales needed.



The dragon is seen here with its scales. The revised hair program allowed the animation team to change the color of each scale so that movement wouldn't distort the skin surface.

The program allowed us to control the size of the scales. The scales are smaller on the arms to allow for movement. The scales ride on the surface of the dragon's skin. As the skin moves, the scales pull apart, the gaps separate, and the scales don't deform or stretch. Using the revised hair program, it was easier for us to change the color of individual scales.

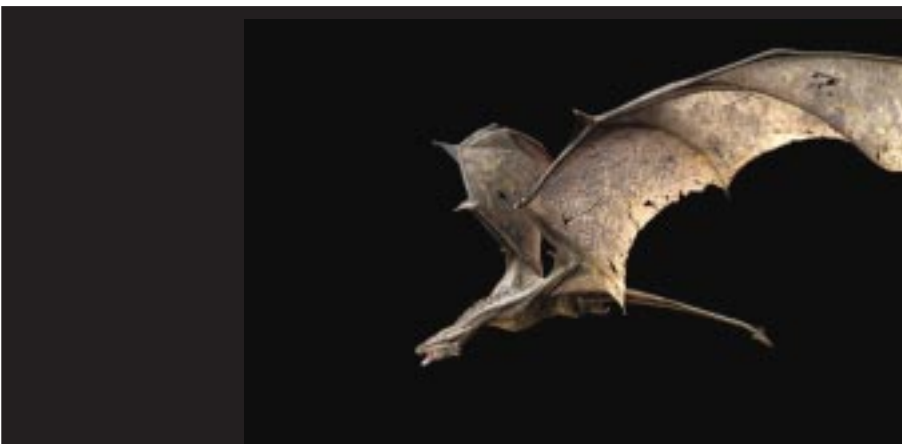
We visited the reptile house at the L.A. Zoo to see how the scales worked on snakes. We also got to touch a crocodile skin that they had for kids. The scales are based on snake scales. On

the ventral side of a snake the scales slide over each other without exposing skin. After our visit to the zoo, the scales on the dragon were laid out and textured like the scales on a crocodile.

Animation wise, dealing with the dragon was a mind-boggling challenge. On *102 Dalmatians* we dealt with a CG dog, which was four legged animal. But the dragons were four legged animals that could also fly and land. The front legs have giant wings attached to them, with long arms and extremely long fingers. The wing

acted like a giant cape on these kingly dragons. The wing span on one dragon was 320 feet — it was as big as a 747 and there was 160 feet of wing behind the dragon when he folded them back. We recorded the measurements of the set and placed the dragons in a virtual set but it was a challenge because it was so big. There was 100 feet of tail with a mace at the end so it was difficult to fit the dragon into the set. We did a lot of animation tests. The dragon also could also bite.

There is layer upon layer of complexity in the film. The dragons are destroying the world and there is a huge amount of smoke and fire. Environmental effects were a big part of the film. We had spot fires and digital smoke. To make it look convincing the environment had to interact with the dragon. The dragon interacted with the smoke. After destroying the castle, the dragon returns to finish off the job and he lands on the castle. The flap of its wings causes the smoke to blow away. The animator had to be careful



This flap cycle was created to show what the dragon could do. The Secret Lab created a movement bible for the dragon from animatics like this one.



The inverse kinematics driven animation rig combined skeletal characteristics from leopards, bats and birds. The skeleton provides attachment points for the skin and muscle system.

about the speed of the wing flap for the particles to work.

Dealing with fire was another challenge. Fire is part of the dragon's repertoire. We had a flame thrower that could shoot fire 110 feet which worked great when the dragon was on the ground. But when the dragon was moving through the air we had to create CG fire. We used basic computational fluid dynamics to make the particles move in a way that fire would actually move. We needed the fire to have volume so we used a volume renderer.

PKT: What was the interaction between the director Rob Bowman and the Secret Lab like?

DD: To help with the process, the director had an office within the building of the Secret Lab and he was very involved from early on. All the creative groups of the Secret Lab were in one building, so he could view the sculptures, the concept work and the final designs by Mike Meeker. We sent the director QuickTime movies when he was on location in Ireland.

While the script was still being changed we would

create animatics, small animations of what the dragon could do. We did flap cycles, diving, animation tests of the tail being used as a mace, we explored how the dragon breathes fire, how he holds his body and throws his neck forward. We created a lot of different pieces — and ended up with a kind of bible for the dragon characters.

The director had a clear vision of what he wanted. It was nice to have such a collaborative relationship. The shots improved because we had so much back and forth, which is unusual on many films. But it was important on *Reign of Fire* because the dragons were part of the cast.

What's nice about a film like this is the dragon is not just the monster. The dragon is the antagonist. It's an ever present threat, a hurdle for the heroes to overcome. Everything we did was designed to give the dragon a malevolence, and a fierceness. The story is dependent on the character.

PKT: With rising expectations from the audience, what do you have to do to really wow them now?

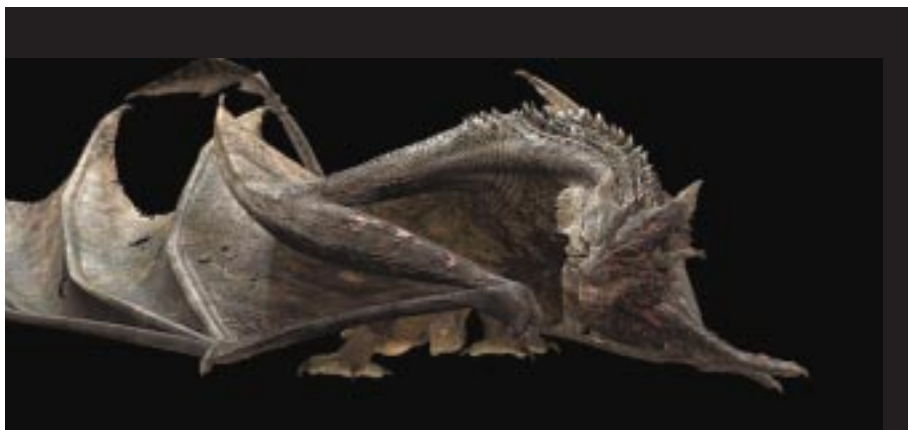
DD: It's great that people are

interested in visual effects and are becoming more knowledgeable about them, but it is difficult as well, because it is like a magician giving away his tricks. Even critics comment on visual effects now. So we have to up the ante. We try to make it as realistic and believable as possible.

The main stumbling block is not technology. We have the tools to do stuff that is realistic. The tools and talent of the people allow us to do more shots and tell better stories.

Now to wow the audience we have to work on character design. We've gotten to the point that the tools are accessible to more people and now we have to work to make the audience be awed by how cool the character is. In the case of a dragon, how menacing it is, and how it flies.

We started out with a typical dragon, a lumbering dinosaur like T-Rex. But the director wanted to focus on the grace and fierceness of the animal. We started studying videotapes of animals hunting and stalking prey. Then we saw a tape of a leopard stalking through high grass. To stay below the grass he brought his legs very low to the ground and his shoulders were raised. This image of stalking was what we wanted. The dragon moves with a creepy, menacing walk but is graceful like a big cat. We did a lot of walk cycles for the director. We gave the dragon's long neck a vulture pose where we draped it down low and he hangs his head. The dragon flaps his wings like an eagle or hawk. We wanted the audience to feel that they had seen this animal before and they have — in snakes, leopards, lions, hawks, eagles and crocodiles.



At the render stage, the dragon is shown here after the muscle system has deformed the skin and the scales have been applied.

We can make creatures more easily but ultimately we make it harder. We don't want to do what we've done before. The tools have gotten better but we want to push the possibilities and try something new. With each movie we like to raise the bar on the look, technology and performance. It's like jumping out of an airplane without a parachute and we have to make one on our way down. But that's what makes it fun.

PKT: What is the biggest change in visual effects since you started?

DD: When I started there were big

effects houses. They had specialty items that no one else had. You had to have a large company because it was a big investment in equipment. There were not a lot of boutiques.

Computers have made effects more accessible. There are more artists who are trained in schools. The students are better trained and know the tools. There are more people that can do it well. This is an exciting time for animation and effects. Setting up a company is much easier and that will allow more stories to be told.

The tools don't get in the way of the process now. You can do more iterations of a shot. The

“We can make creatures more easily but ultimately we make it harder.”



The final render is composited into the location photography. Smoke and round contact elements were created to integrate the dragon into the shot.

machine can do more than just two years ago. The technology is getting easier.

When we did *Crimson Tide*, creating the wake was difficult. But now that job would be simple. Rendering times are faster and we can create a very realistic look.

PKT: What advice would you give someone who wanted to have a career in digital effects?

DD: It's good to understand all the different aspects of visual effects, especially if you want to become a supervisor. In a smaller house you can be a Jack (or Jill) of all trades, doing a lot of different things. But in a larger shop you need a specialized talent.

It's the nature of business that those who are the most successful figure out what they are good at. Really think about what you want to do, whether it's animation, lighting, technical direction or something else. Find out what you are best at and go for that. Concentrate and focus on your strengths.

I recommend computer courses too.

It worked out well for me. I got lucky. I've done scanning, color timing, compositing. Expand your skill set. People who really want to do it will practice at night at what they want to do after their job is finished. They'll stay late and practice. Start somewhere and show the supervisor you can do something else. It's much more assembly line now. You have more of a chance to do something else. Not as many people in the past were involved in effects. Show the supervisor what you can do.

PKT: What was the biggest thing you learned while working on *Reign of Fire*?

DD: I learned a lot. I have built an eclectic knowledge from all the films I've worked on. I learned about submarines from *Crimson Tide*, F-18s from *The Rock* and gorillas from *Mighty Joe Young*. I like to get as much background as I can when I work on a film so on *Reign of Fire* I learned about mythology and the anatomy of large flying creatures.

After the long hours and weeks of work, one day you go into the screening room and watch the film and find that you have a creature that comes alive. That's the rewarding part of the process. Between the science and the silhouettes, to see the film projected in a theatre and realize,

"Wow, we made a dragon."

PKT: What about the future?

DD: Disney purchased Dream Quest Images a few years ago and folded it under the feature animation umbrella and formed the Secret Lab. Now Disney is going to subcontract all effects so the Secret Lab is being disbanded. The big players now are ILM, Sony Pictures Imageworks, Digital Domain, Rhythm and Hues, Cinesite and Centropolis. I'm grateful for all the opportunities I've had at Disney and am looking forward to all possibilities that are out there.

The next challenge for visual effects supervisor Dan DeLeeuw will be to find an opportunity that will put his many skills to good use.

Pamela Kleibrink Thompson writes regularly for Animation World Network and Animation Magazine. You can find more of her writing every month in the Career Coach section of AWN. She is a career coach, recruiter and management consultant. Her many clients have included Disney Feature Animation, Dream Quest Images and Digital Domain.

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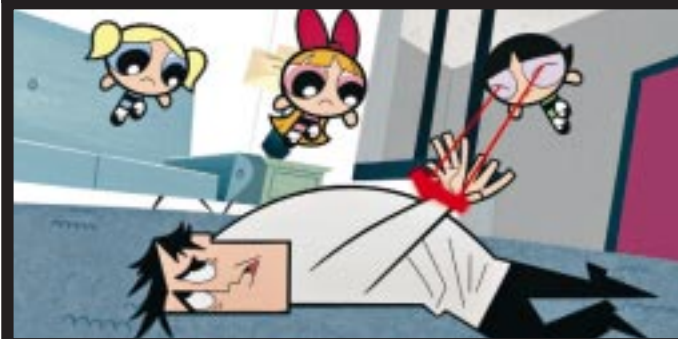
Never before
available!!
Original Production cels
from the Oscar
nominated film *The Big
Snit* by director Richard
Condie





From Small Screen to Big Screen

by J. Paul Peszko



The Powerpuff Girls are a unique combo of tough and cute. All images © AOL Time Warner.

Dedicated fans of Cartoon Network's top animated show *The Powerpuff Girls* don't have to be told how the three little waifs got their unusual powers. All *Powerpuff* fans know that, when Professor Utonium first cooked up the girls in his Townsville laboratory, he wasn't trying to give them superpowers. The good professor only wanted to create the perfect little girl. You know, sugar and spice and everything nice. But along came the professor's mischievous monkey lab assistant, Jojo, who knocked a dose of Chemical X into the mix and puff! The *Powerpuff Girls* were born! All of this is compactly depicted in the opening title sequence of the new *Powerpuff Girls* feature-length movie. So, if you're not a diehard fan, fear not. The opening titles will bring you up to speed in about two minutes.

There's More to This Story

But, what fans and general audiences alike do not know is what made *The Powerpuff Girls* — Bubbles, Blossom and Buttercup

— become superheroes, the loyal protectors of Townsville. That is the point of *The Powerpuff Girls, Movie*. Well, actually, that's the point of the story. The point of the movie, of course, is to make money for AOL Time Warner by leap-frogging off the TV series and inducing young fans and old ones alike to bring mom and dad and whoever with them to the theater.

But back to the story. After Professor Utonium created the girls, he discovered that they had incredible powers such as laser beam eyes, superhuman strength and the ability to fly at the speed of light, but they weren't superheroes — yet. They were just cute little girls with incredible powers. Did I say cute? I'd better add the word tough and even more appropriate, bizarre. Then something happened in their lives to change them just like it changed most of us — Kindergarten. And, as you'll find out in the feature, the girls were never the same after that.

Creator and director Craig McCracken explains how the story

evolved, "I realize there are a lot of people out there that only know *Powerpuff* from the shorts they've seen. So, I wanted to introduce the concept to new audiences, as well as give our fans something that they can get out of it. So, we came up with the idea to tell the story about what happened in the girls' lives to make them decide to become heroes as opposed to just another adventure. The girls were born with their powers, but they weren't superheroes then. They were just kids with powers. The story is about the events that happened to make them decide to save the day."

"There's only so much of a story you can tell in eleven to twenty-two minutes," McCracken adds. "I've always wanted to explore the possibilities of a feature-length format, where you can really sink your teeth into a good story and tell it the way you really want to tell it. We'd been cutting our teeth on the television show and learned a lot of tricks, and we were eager to branch out onto the big screen."

History Lesson Time

The Powerpuff Girls made its debut as a short on Cartoon Network in 1995 as part of the World Premiere Toons project and quickly became an audience favorite. But the actual creation of *The Powerpuff Girls* occurred a couple of years before when McCracken made a student film entitled, *The Whoopass Girls*. "It was my second year of film at Cal Arts," McCracken explains. "I knew I wanted to do the hero genre, but I didn't really have a character cast yet as a hero. And I just drew these little girls one afternoon. And I went, 'That's great! They're going to make better heroes than any guy in a cape or whatever.' When I finished my student film, Spike and Mike paid to have it colored, and then they aired it in the Festival of Animation (1994). So I had a real nice demo reel. And I took that to Hanna-Barbera and said I wanted to make this into a show."

Hanna-Barbera told McCracken that they were starting the World Premiere Toons pro-

gram — a series of shorts that would hopefully spawn new stars for the then fledgling Cartoon Network — and they thought that his film would fit into the format perfectly. So, they gave him a seven-minute short to do, which they titled *The Powerpuff Girls*. After that, Hanna-Barbera asked McCracken to make another short. "Then, over the years, they decided that they were getting so much response from the shorts," McCracken says, "that they wanted to make it into a series."

"I've always wanted to explore the possibilities of a feature-length format, where you can really sink your teeth into a good story and tell it the way you really want to tell it..."

The series launched on November 18, 1998, and remains one of the network's highest rated programs. The show made its broadcast television debut on Kids' WB! on May 25th, airing all-new episodes six days a week. It won an Emmy award for art direction in 2000 and has been nominated three times for Outstanding Animated Series.

The Cast

"The core concept of the *Powerpuff Girls* is cute and tough.



That's what it is at heart," McCracken explains about the characters. "The girls are just a balance of that where Buttercup is tougher than she is cuter, Bubbles is cuter than she is tougher, and Blossom is right in the middle. So there's a balance of what makes up each of the girls and the dynamic is great between all three of them."

Actress Tara Strong enjoys playing the sweetest of the bunch. "My character, Bubbles, is definitely the cutest of the three," says Strong. "She's into her little stuffed octopus 'Octi' and talking to squirrels, being one with nature and peacefully solving problems, but she does get into fights with her sisters in order to prove her toughness. She wants to save the day, but she also has to be cute and be nice to everyone. She's very fun."



Craig McCracken with his characters in typical form.

Surly Buttercup, voiced by actress E.G. Daily, is Bubbles' polar opposite. "Buttercup is the feistiest of the girls," says Daily. "She's definitely the toughest, because she's very passionate, fights big and loves big. She has the worst temper, but she's really a good girl. She's very strong in how she feels about things — when Buttercup gets mad, she gets really, really mad. Her outbursts push my voice to the furthest place it can go."

These two disparate personalities are kept on an even keel thanks to the leadership of the most levelheaded of the kindergarten heroes, Blossom. She is the glue that holds *The Powerpuff Girls* together, according to Catherine Cavadini, who voices Blossom. "She's the leader and she's the voice of reason for everybody. She definitely likes to take charge and tell everybody what to do. She's got a good side, though, because she's the one that I think is the most intelligent — she speaks conversational Chinese, she's concerned about the environment and she really does want to save the world. She's the practical one."



Of course, in every toon, there has to be a bad guy. In *The Powerpuff Girls Movie*, the bad guy is a monkey — Professor Utonium's former lab assistant,

Mojo Jojo. Unlike many toon villains, Mojo is far from one dimensional, according to McCracken. "His evil plot actually has some merit to it in the movie. I like blurring the lines a bit, where being evil and being good is just kind of a choice. You can see both sides of it. It's not so black and white."

Of course, in every toon, there has to be a bad guy.

For the most part, Roger L. Jackson, who voices the wicked chimp, agrees with McCracken. "You could say that Mojo Jojo is the Powerpuffs' shadow since they were both created in the same situation and they're both intimately associated with Professor Utonium. Basically, he's jealous and mean and selfish and rotten. He's a contradiction of a character, because physically he is an ape. He is primitive, but mentally he is vastly superior to humanity, and that really, really angers him."

Most animated shows record voice-overs individually, and the actors are isolated while performing their parts. On *The Powerpuff Girls*, all of the actors work together while recording, and are able to play off of each other, adding an even greater dynamic to the quality of the show. "One of the things I like about *The Powerpuff Girls* is that it's done like an old radio show," says Jackson, "where we're all in the booth together. On a lot of shows, it's 'wild line,' which means that you go in alone and do your stuff. You don't see

anybody except the director and then they edit it all together. But there's so much more to it when you're playing the scene with other actors."

The Production

The popularity of the TV series continues to soar, drawing a diverse audience that ranges from young children to adult fans who can appreciate the subtle humor and pop culture references sprinkled throughout the episodes. "It's a lot of different people," says McCracken of the *Powerpuff* fan base. "Big animation fans are into it. Older women are into it just because they like the empowerment of these strong girl characters. College kids are watching it. Parents are watching it with their kids as well. So, it's getting a lot of different views from a lot of different places."



McCracken has been involved in every step of *The Powerpuff Girls Movie*. He wrote and storyboarded it along with four other artists, Charlie Bean, Lauren Faust, Paul Rudish and Don Shank. He directed the

actors, worked with the computer graphics artists and art director, Mike Moon, on the visual aspects of the film as well as scoring and editing — everything it took to put the picture together. “I have my hands in every single aspect of this production,” he notes. “This is my baby and I care about it. I’ve had it for ten years and it’s got to be just right — I’ve got this vision and I want to see it come true.”

“There’s a lot more work put into this movie,” McCracken explains. “For the TV show, we do a blueprint — we do a storyboard, all the designs, and the timing for the episode and then it’s sent overseas (Korea), where the whole thing is animated. It’s then sent back on film, and that’s that. But with the movie, my crew and myself have really been able to get into almost every single drawing and fix it so it looks perfect. And then all of that animation that’s done overseas is sent back to L.A., where we meticulously put every single shot together digitally in the computer. This way, we’re able to manipulate every frame and get everything perfect.”

As McCracken noted, he and his crew were able to employ digital filmmaking techniques to give them more control over the shots and a greater possible range of motion. But blending 2D with 3D involves an incredible amount of details. McCracken has art director Mike Moon to thank for coordinating all the artists and their departments, which resulted in a relatively seamless design scheme.

“We have a full-time vehicle designer,” Moon explains, “and I work with him on all of the various vehicles that are going to populate Townsville. We have an effects designer that I work with to create



Every facet of the production has to be designed to fit into the Powerpuff universe.

a look to all of the different effects. We have several color stylists, several background painters, several layout artists, and we try and keep all those elements in sync and everyone focused and working in the same universe. We have to make sure that there’s a similar design thread that’s running through the whole show and that the entire movie has a design continuity that accentuates the story and creates a great piece of cinema.”

McCracken feels that it wasn’t a difficult transition from TV to film because *The Powerpuff Girls* television series already has a lot of cinematic elements in it. “When we make the TV show, we look at them as mini films. The show is really condensed, it always keeps moving and it’s got an energy level to it because of the time limitation, so my first concern was, are we going to lose that pacing going into a long form? But as it turned out, the movie still moves at the same pace that the show does. It still has that distinctive feeling to it.”

McCracken is happy to have been able to make the movie that he had envisioned,

without having to make compromises in the process that would lessen the artistry of the film. “At heart, this isn’t an animation film that’s made by a studio, per se, or made by executive interference. It’s made by a group of artists who really, really, really love animation and have wanted to do this their whole lives. We finally got an opportunity to do what we’ve done on television, but on a much bigger, grander scale, and really push ourselves creatively. We’ve dedicated ourselves to creating the best work that we possibly can.”

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.

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

Was Walt Disney A Saint, An Evil Sinner Or The Devil Incarnate?

The Truth About Some Of Those Nasty Disney Stories!

by Karl F. Cohen

Walt Disney and his corporation are either one of the most evil companies in the world or they have become the subject of countless false rumors, lies and hoaxes. Conservative preachers have warned their followers not to pollute their minds with the company's products and to boycott their theme parks. The *National Enquirer* has run numerous exposés including one article that began, "Walt Disney was one of America's most admired geniuses. But behind the scenes, he was a hard-drinking drug user whose behavior was so weird his brother Roy feared he was crazy!" Books and magazine articles claiming to reveal the truth have labeled the man an illegitimate child, an FBI spy, a Nazi sympathizer and many other shocking things.

To understand why so many people are fascinated with spurious facts about the man and his company, one should look at their history. In the early 1930s Mickey Mouse went from being a troublemaker to become a virtuous member of society who could do no wrong. By the mid-30s the company's films were always wholesome family entertainment. In the '50s the company's TV shows further perpetuated their wholesome image by creating the myth that the first theme park was "the happiest place on earth."



Walt Disney (right), with brother Roy in the early 1940s, has been the object of speculation and false accusations through the years. © Disney Enterprises, Inc.

Walt's TV image was that of the perfect father or uncle. The public seems to have forgotten that the studio produced hard-hitting war propaganda that taught us to hate our enemies during WWII and that there was a nasty strike at the cartoon factory in 1941.

No other Hollywood studio has the carefully manicured reputation that Disney spent years cultivating. As a result when other companies create controversial product, nobody seems to care. When Disney does something slightly irreverent, conservative family oriented pressure groups can and will protest. The problem is Disney has carefully created an image that is hard to live up to all

the time. It is known to employees of the company as "The Franchise" and it stands for quality, wholesome entertainment.

When Disney doesn't live up to its image and the press becomes aware there is a problem, it is news. When a few people protested the release of *Song of the South* as a racist film in 1946, it was reported in many papers, but not on page one. By the time Hippies held an uninvited "be-in" at Disneyland in the late '60s, the park's overreaction to the "Hippie invasion" was front page news across our nation. When wildlife was killed by gardeners using and/or disposing of pesticides incorrectly in Florida, the



Song of the South (left) and Disneyland's "It's a Small World" made the company an omnipresent image in the public's mind. © Disney. All rights reserved.

company was labeled an enemy of the ecology movement and for several months the press seemed to take delight in revealing every human error that they became aware of at Disney parks.

I maintain that certain members of the clergy, press and other groups and individuals have, over the years, exploited the public's fascination with the company to further their own self-interests. In some cases they have deliberately created false rumors. While some stories were probably started as harmless forms of humor, others appear to have been fabricated and/or spread by religious leaders to strengthen their point of view. What is even worse are elaborate hoaxes published in books and articles that report fascinating facts that scholars find impossible to confirm, but in some cases are easy to disprove. The sad thing is that a gullible public rarely learns they have been fed a lot of misinformation, so false myths become "well known facts." For instance, my wife has a 95 year-old aunt who once told me that she is sure Elvis is alive.

Disney And Conservative Religious Groups

When I was researching my book *Forbidden Animation*, I was shown a copy of *The End Times* from North Carolina. According to

Joseph Chambers of the Paw Creek Ministries, *The Lion King* and toys relating to the film are part of a conspiracy to brainwash the youth of America into believing in VOODOOISM! The feature is described as "a picture of a pagan society...acted out in the panorama of idolatry and pagan bondages. The struggle between good and bad is a classic occult picture of black and white magic. Even the relationship of the king and his evil brother draws attention to the pagan suggestion that Jesus and Satan were brothers..." The writer says the appearance of a baboon shaman who used methods used by witch-doctors and the references to the worship of a sun god are further proof for his thesis. He warned that "almost every toy, television series, comic books or items targeted for the young generation is steeped in occult practices and psychic phenomenon." For people wanting more information the publication offered a booklet called *Rebuilding The Foundation of Your Home*. It "exposes the dangers of *The Lion King*, *Barney*, *Cabbage Patch Dolls*, *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*."

The American Family Association (AFA) is a much larger group warning America about the dangers of Disney. When I first read their journal in the late

1990s, it was carrying stories about their protests against *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas* and other Disney films. They were upset about images hidden in Disney animated films including a tower on the video tape box of *The Little Mermaid* (1989) that resembles a phallus. Other phallic looking spires are on the *Aladdin* video package cover. Let's face the facts, towers are usually considered phallic. They reported that *The Lion King* (1994) is supposed to have the word "sex" written in the sands of the desert somewhere in the film. They say the word is a subliminal image, so it may not really be there, but they think it is. They also noted that *The Little Mermaid* has a scene that depicts a priest becoming noticeably aroused while presiding over a wedding.

While I've never seen these shocking images, a Website snopes.com has devoted countless hours searching for them. They have a large Disney section



In the eye of the beholder: One group felt *The Lion King* represented voodooism and paganism; another group saw sex in the sands. © The Walt Disney Company.



The AFA determined that there were hidden sexual images in *The Little Mermaid* (left) and *Pocahontas*. © Disney.

and have issued reports on which legends are true and which are false. Their report called "The Aroused Minister" concludes the bulge in *The Little Mermaid* is the preacher's knee. If you are not convinced here is what Tom Sito, the animator who drew the scene, says: "I animated the bishop in *The Little Mermaid* scenes and they are his knees. He's standing on a box that his long robes cover."

The essay on the aroused minister then attacks rumors about subliminal sex messages. They mention that a court case in Arkansas was brought against the studio for including images unsuitable for young children, but it was eventually dropped. Elsewhere on the site they say that the spelling of the word "sex" in a cloud of dust is "ambiguous." The only really naughty images they have found were in *Roger Rabbit*, which wasn't released as a Disney film (it was a Touchstone release rated PG) and 2 frames of a barely visible topless woman in a moving background shot in *The Rescuers*. This is a great site and it reports on dozens of myths about Disney not covered in this article.

The AFA's research into naughty things hidden in Disney animated films resulted in a major find that was announced to the

world, January 12, 1996, in a press release that read: "DISNEY BLASTED FOR USING THE 'F' WORD IN DONALD DUCK CARTOON." Anybody who can understand what Donald Duck says is an amazing linguist, but the Reverend Donald Wildmon, president of the AFA, says the word is in *Clock Cleaners*. He didn't believe the story until he listened to the duck's dialogue in the short. Wildmon claims Donald says, "Fuck you" to the clock when it comes to life and begins to taunt him. Wildmon calls this discovery "the latest in a growing list of anti-family incidents by the company that has long been a stalwart of family entertainment." The press release did not bother to say the cartoon was made in 1937 and didn't bother to note that for almost 60 years nobody seemed to have noticed the word in the film. Why? Does anybody really care now except people out to get Disney?

The anti-Disney literature has uncovered a few interesting facts about the animated films, but mixed in with these amusing little stories is the real reason for the boycott — homophobia. The Christian right is upset that Disney established a company policy extending insurance benefits to the live-in partners of homosexual

employees, but not to unmarried partners of heterosexual employees. Disney also allows "homosexual celebrations" in the theme parks which means they allow gay groups to exercise their civil rights to organize and hold events just as they allow other social, religious and civic groups to hold organized events. To ban homosexuals from the park is against the law.

The list of complaints against Disney also includes charges that the publishing company they own, Hyperion Press, has published books about gay culture, that "Michael Eisner is quoted saying he thinks 40% of Disney's 63,000 employees are homosexual, that Disney hired a convicted child molester to direct the movie *Powder*, and that Disney ended a 17-year-old traditional Christian Christmas display and replaced it with a secular 'Tropical Santa' display." They are upset that Disney has taken out ads in homosexual publications and that a couple of animals in *The Lion King* are supposed to be gay.

The list of complaints also covers objectionable shows on Disney owned ABC-TV, Disney hiring Martin Scorsese to direct films (he directed *The Last*

Temptation of Christ, a film several religious groups boycotted) and a Disney owned company made *Priest*, an “anti-Catholic” movie. The AFA called *Kids*, a film a Disney owned company distributes, “nihilistic pornography.”

An acquaintance that works in the public relations department at Disney says, “People lay in wait for us.” The employee suggests that there are too many people who have nothing better to do with their lives than to study Disney films with the hopes of finding something that they can use to embarrass the company.

The AFA has built a strong organization and their followers apparently are quite active doing what is asked of them, writing letters of complaint to TV advertisers. They have threatened boycotts of sponsors that advertise on TV shows they find objectionable. The shows are reviewed in the *AFA Journal* and the names and addresses of sponsors are on the pages that feature the reviews. The AFA has won some of their battles and lost others according to carefully researched articles. The articles also report the membership gives generously.

In the 1990s the AFA began an on-going Disney boycott. A recent article from them begins with, “Profits from family entertainment products and theme parks are subsidizing Disney’s promotion of the homosexual agenda. A boycott — including even their good products — is the only way to impact the company.” To remind people of the dangers of watching Disney owned TV channels, their January, 2002 online newsletter had a headline that

reported somebody said the F word on the “mouse channel!”

While the AFA milks almost every naughty story they can find about the company, the Southern Baptists Convention in New Orleans expressed their displeasure of the Disney stance on gay rights by simply voting to boycott the company in 1996. In 1995 the Florida Southern Baptist Convention voted in favor of a similar boycott.

The Toy Story Hoax

In February 1996 a student of mine said that there was an organized boycott of *Toy Story* (1995) by the AFA because Woody, the name of one of the film’s stars, is a slang term for the penis, and Buzz, the name of the co-star, was a drug term. The story came from a local weekly newspaper. Although the student believed that there was a real boycott of *Toy Story*, a quick call to Pixar revealed the story was a hoax and that somebody had started it with a letter published on the Internet. Pixar sent me a copy of the letter along with a memo from the American Family Association

that denied they wrote the letter or that they had ever called for a boycott of the film. A few months later the *AFA Journal* praised the film as it “brought a broad audience of moral Americans back to local theaters.”

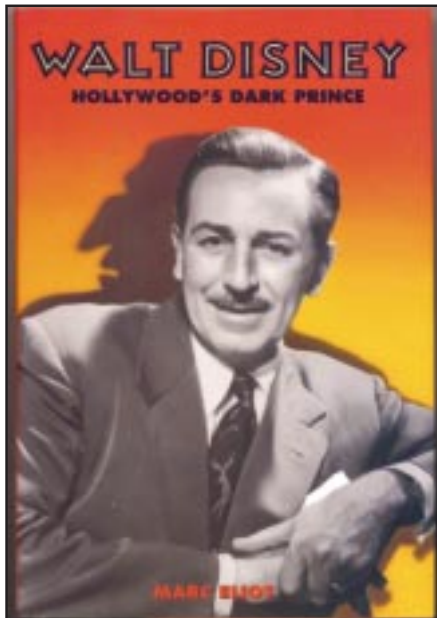
The hoax letter, dated December 5, 1995, claims to be from Donald Wildmon of the AFA. It called the first computer animated feature “obscene pornography disguised as ‘family entertainment’...” The letter mentioned that the names of the film’s stars were a sexual and a drug reference and that the film included “a sex-obsessed talking potato, a sex-obsessed Bo Peep doll who cannot keep her hands (or lips) off ‘Woody,’ and an Etch-a-Sketch whose ‘knobs’ must be ‘adjusted’ to produce results.” It asked people to boycott the film. It also gave the wrong Website address for the AFA and said they had published an article about *Toy Story* in the December issue of the *AFA Journal*. There was no December issue and the November/December combined issue did not discuss *Toy Story*.



Toy Story was the object of a boycott hoax and false allegations of sexual and drug references. © Disney Enterprises, Inc.

Profiting By Creating Hoaxes

A very profitable hoax that has no doubt damaged the reputation of the late Walt Disney is Marc Eliot's book *Walt Disney, Hollywood's Dark Prince*. Millions of people now believe Disney was an FBI spy, etc. thanks to this book. The fabrications in it will probably be passed on for many generations, just as many people have insisted for the last 35 years that Disney's body was frozen at the time of his death. If you believe it was frozen and will be brought back to life someday, you will be happy to know that Elvis was seen on February 30, 2002 in the Haunted House at Disneyland.



he book that put the idea of Walt Disney as an FBI operative into the public's mind: *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince* by Marc Eliot.

Eliot's end-notes on the sources of his information are detailed at times, but he doesn't reveal how he discovered some of his most important "facts." Eliot's scholarship has been called into question by several people. Diane Disney Miller, Walt's daughter, says, "There are more than 150 glaring factual errors." David Hilberman,

who was interviewed for the book has been quite adamant about his being misquoted by the author. I've also asked dozens of former Disney employees if any of Eliot's claims that Disney was sexist, racist, Fascist, anti-Semitic, heavy drinker, etc. were true. Some think some of the rumors might be true, but nobody ever saw him expressing negative feelings toward any race, religion or creed. The worst things I found out is that he swore from time to time and was addicted to tobacco. If he had a bias against a group of people he was smart enough not to express those opinions in public.

I know a woman Eliot consulted when he began his research. She says she told him that there was a lot of dirt on Disney somewhere, but she didn't know what most of it was. She also could not confirm that any of it was true, but she was sure that if he searched hard enough he would find a wealth of information. I believe he didn't find much, but since he had invested a lot of time in the project and wanted to write a best seller exposing Disney's past, he invented it. As for the woman, she was motivated to tell him what little she knew because she hated Disney. She had never met or worked for him. Her hatred was based on her late husband's feelings about the studio. He had been laid off after going on strike in 1941. Disney held a grudge against most or all of the strikers and she never forgave Walt for what he did. It didn't matter that she didn't begin going out with the man she married until ten or twelve years after the strike. Some of the questionable things she told him are presented in the book as true facts.

Disney's handling of the strike at his studio in 1941 suggest he lacked the complex skills needed to successfully negotiate a timely resolution of a major labor conflict. It appears his anger and hatred of those who opposed him probably prevented him from reaching an acceptable compromise. Resolution came after others stepped in and he left the country.

The closest I came to confirming some of Eliot's material was when I interviewed a man who said he had worked on *Snow White*, *Fantasia* and other features as an animator. His yarns were so amazing that I checked with the studio and found out their records showed he had only worked there for about 6 months in the camera department. I later found an old *Motion Picture Annual* that included him in their Who's Who section. His biography said he was only at Disney in 1937.

For Eliot and others who insist Disney became an ultra-conservative after the strike and that he hated Jews — explain why he hired and worked closely with writer Maurice Rapf from 1944-'46? Disney knew Rapf was Jewish, had a left-wing background and possibly that he had traveled to Russia in the 1930s. I've interviewed Rapf several times while writing *Forbidden Animation* and when I've asked him about Eliot's claims he could not confirm any of them.

When Eliot's book came out I was researching the contents of Disney's FBI file. In his book Eliot falsely reported the contents of FBI documents to weave his yarn about Disney and the FBI. For example a newspaper article in the file dated November 10, 1940 said that Disney was in Washington, D.C. for a two-day

visit to see the sights over a week-end. He had been in the South doing research for a film that eventually was titled *Song of the South*. Eliot saw the article and claims that, "On November 10, 1940, Disney apparently struck the following deal with the Bureau. It appears that in exchange for its continuing assistance in his personal search to find out the truth of his parentage, Walt agreed to assist Hoover's crusade against the spread of communism in Hollywood by becoming an official informant of the FBI. His initial contact was..." Nothing in the FBI file suggests that any of this information is true and there are no blacked out memos from this period of time. So where did Eliot get his information?

Eliot claims that the two tasks he knows Disney undertook as a spy were to fly to New York City in 1943 and 1944 to attend left-wing cultural events. Eliot says Disney then returned to Los Angeles each time and wrote reports on the events for the FBI. While Disney or his studio donated money to the events and was listed as a sponsor (today we use the word "sponsor" when we give friends money for taking part in a walk-a-thon for a good cause), nowhere in the file, which includes news clippings, advertisements and two FBI reports about the events, does it say Disney was going to attend or that he attended either event. Eliot ignored the note that said the FBI reports were filed in New York (Eliot said they were filed by Disney in Los Angeles). The agent's name is blacked out on each report so we do not know who filed them, but why would the FBI ask Disney to attend the events? He wouldn't recognize who was in the audi-

ence, and the FBI had more than enough people available in New York to spy on the crowds.

Another distortion of the truth is Eliot saying Disney traveled to Reno and gave an "impassioned" speech. The FBI file says Mary Pickford read a telegram sent by Disney to the Reno event. Eliot quotes what he claims to be part of the speech, but actually he quotes the entire telegram! He knew full well Disney didn't travel to Reno.

**Mickey Mouse
went from being
a troublemaker
to become a
virtuous member
of society who
could do no wrong.**

Disney was made a Special Agent in Charge - Contact (SAC-Contact) by the FBI on January 12, 1955, which means he was recognized as an unpaid reference person that they could trust and call upon for information. Eliot calls the position a promotion for Disney and claims (but offers no proof or examples) that other spies reported to Disney once he became an SAC-Contact. As a friend of the FBI he did meet with them on a few occasions. He made a four-part newsreel about them for the Mickey Mouse Club and he once discussed making a film with their help about child molesters. He probably provided them information from his company's employment records, probably

answered general questions about subjects that he was an expert on and possibly suggested where they might go to find information about questions he couldn't answer. According to news stories that came out after Eliot's book was published, Walt Disney never knew he was called an SAC-Contact by the FBI. It was simply an in-house specification that they used to designate trusted friends.

If you still feel there is something more sinister in the FBI calling Disney an SAC-Contact, you may recall that President Nixon met with Elvis and made him a drug officer. Photographs of the occasion have been published in recent years in history books and as postcards. They show Elvis and Nixon shaking hands. Does the meeting between Elvis and the President mean Elvis busted drug rings and turned in doctors who gave drug prescriptions to people with pill habits?

Eliot was really sloppy in developing his yarn. At one point he writes Disney filed his last FBI report in 1956 and that after 1957 "he seized every opportunity to ridicule the Bureau's personnel and tactics in his films." If Eliot is correct and Disney was not of service to the FBI after 1956, why does a memo dated October 11, 1960, from the head of the L.A. office to J. Edgar Hoover ask that he send SAC-Contact Walt Disney an autographed copy of his book *Masters of Deceit*? In the memo and in others up until the time of his death in December 1966, Disney was called "a valued contact of this office."

As for Disney trying to ridicule the Bureau, the only possible suggestion of this is the studio making two live-action slapstick comedies. In *Moon Pilot*, 1962,

the script called for an FBI agent, but the character's title was changed to security officer at the request of the FBI before the film was made. The memos in the FBI file make it clear that Hoover disliked the idea of an agent in a comedy, but they also state that film critics and the public did not see the film as an attack on the Bureau.

When Disney purchased the rights to *That Darned Cat* he called the FBI office in L.A. (7/8/63) to tell them he was going to do the film. A memo about the call says, "He stated that this is a comedy, and that the FBI will be depicted in a very respectful manner. He stated he would never do anything which would depict the FBI in any other light."

When the FBI sends you a copy of Walt Disney's file they say there are pages missing and they don't explain what they might contain. Eliot decided they were sinister things, but most likely they concern more mundane problems. Several people testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee that they had been members of the Communist Party at the time they worked for Disney (1930s). Papers regarding those people would have been in Disney's file if they stated where the person worked. They are not in the records released to the public. Other pages might have been about the studio doing secret work for defense contractors during the Cold War (several had exhibits at Disneyland).

The list of errors and fabrications can go on and on. Besides there being more problems with his facts based on the FBI file, it appears he has almost no knowledge or interest in animation history. He makes serious errors

that anyone who has carefully read Leonard Maltin's *Of Mice and Magic* would notice. I also wonder how he managed to quote so many conversations that took place decades ago between people that had been dead for many years.

Other Unauthorized Histories of Disney

The first unauthorized biography appeared in 1968, two years after his death. Richard Schickel's *The Disney Version* outraged Disney fans as he claimed Walt couldn't and didn't draw Mickey Mouse (true) and he couldn't sign his name in the fancy script that is the company logo (true). The next unauthorized biography, Bob Thomas' *Walt Disney, An American Original*, stuck close to an authorized biography written in 1957. In 1985 Leonard Mosley's *Disney's World* revealed a dubious story that Walt was born out of wedlock in Spain to different parents. Mosley's research is so poor that he gives a detailed description of Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur*, 1914, but his description describes

a different film.

On November 30, 2001, the *Guardian* in England published "The Spanish Connection," an extremely long article by their staff writer Giles Tremiott. He reports that Marc Eliot and Christopher Jones, son of a Disney press agent, are working independently to prove Walt was born in Spain. While the tale may make great reading for some, there is one bit of evidence the authors don't bother to explain. Walt looks too much like his brother Roy to be the bastard son of a Spanish nobleman and a washerwoman. Even if this were true, does anybody really care who his parents were? It is the man's outstanding contributions to 20th Century popular culture that is important.

So What Sort Of Person Was Walt Disney?

One of his former employees told me, "Walt was a genius, Walt was a friend, Walt was generous and Walt was a tough son-of-a-bitch. He was all that at once." He has also been described as an arrogant businessman, a self-made tycoon and a person with a large



Walt (left) and Ub Iwerks, circa 1932. © Disney Enterprises, Inc.

ego. He was raised in the early years of the 20th Century on small town, Mid-West values (he has been called a WASP). Roy and Walt were good businessmen, but they made several costly mistakes including going bankrupt in the 1920s and signing away the rights to Oswald, their silent screen star in 1928. Their early mistakes helped shape the way they did business once the company was on the road to success with Mickey Mouse as their star. Walt was said to be justifiably proud of his rise from shoestring productions to being the head of a major Hollywood studio.

Walt Disney misled the public into believing he was the artist responsible for all those wonderful short films. His legend is so erroneous at times that an art gallery in Florida once sent out a flyer claiming they were selling valuable Disney limited edition cels by the man who invented animation. He didn't invent the medium nor did he design or animate the first Mickey Mouse (I assume you know about Ub Iwerks' importance — if not see Leslie Iwerks' terrific book and video, *The Hand Behind the Mouse*, about her grandfather). Disney scholars say he was a good animator, but by the mid-20s he was more valuable to the company as a producer. Ub Iwerks was a business partner and head animator until he left Disney in 1930.

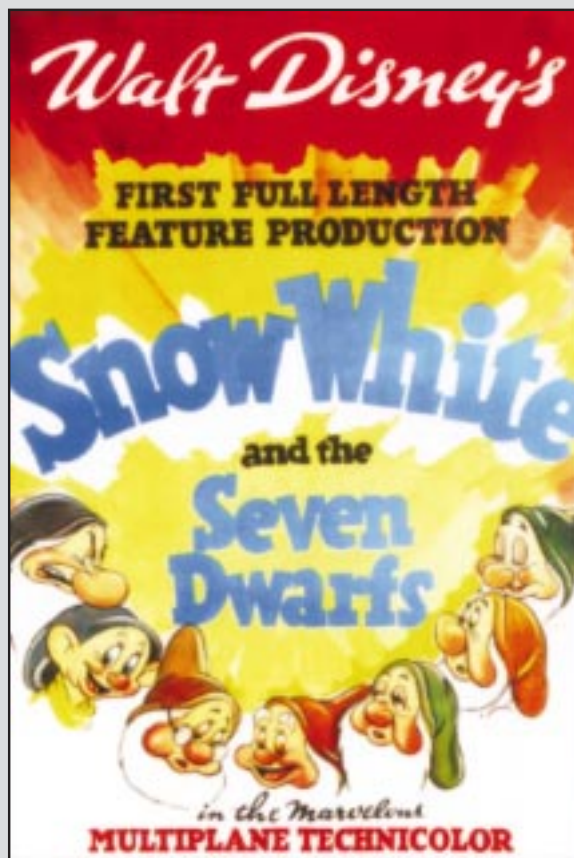
Walt was a brilliant producer who understood the value of making the best possible product. Major studios in Hollywood are said to be happy if 1 out of 8 or 10 films turns an impressive profit. Disney's track record was much better than that (at or close to a 100% success rate). He understood the value of having a care-

fully crafted script. He knew how to motivate his production team to create the best possible characters, sets, costumes, props, etc. He was also the visionary who put together the team that created Disneyland and Walt Disney World in Florida. He was a genius who produced exceptional family entertainment for most of his life.

I suspect that Walt was naive politically. It appears he didn't understand how others felt about being underpaid and not getting the expected bonuses after the initial success of *Snow White* at the box office. He certainly didn't agree with these ideas and other labor issues that were raised before the strike.

The company's conservative attitude about women employees in the 1930s was to

mainly hire them for low paid jobs in the ink and paint departments. Disney did on rare occasions hire women as artists or designers. The list of women who were better paid artists included Mary Blair, Sylvia Moberly-Holland, LaVerne Harding, Retta Scott and several others. Although one would call the attitude sexist today, it was the norm in industry at that time and I wouldn't call Walt or the company racist or sexist for their employment practices before WWII unless you clarify the statement and say the vast majority of American companies had similar attitudes about hiring women. Also, the animation industry grew out of the male-dominated newspaper business so many people probably assumed animators were guys like the cigar smoking



While touring to promote *Snow White* in Germany, Roy and Walt might have tried to recover lost money or to lobby Germany to lift its ban on U.S. films.
© Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

newspaper men in *The Front Page* (1931).

Maurice Rapf tells an awful story that he says Walt told him about why he became a Democrat. In his youth a few sons of local Republicans beat him up and poured hot tar on him because his father didn't vote Republican.

As for Walt's feelings about Fascist Germany, Eliot says he regularly attended meetings and social events of the American Nazi party. The statement is probably a gross exaggeration of the truth, but he did in fact meet with Fascists including Germany's most celebrated filmmaker, Leni Reifenstahl, when she visited Hollywood in 1938. Her L.A. visit was protested by people with strong anti-Nazi feelings and several studio heads decided not to meet with her. Walt's main motivation to meet her may have been to find a way to recover money owed his firm by his German film distributor. A book recently published in Germany written by Carsten Laqua and published by Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag says Roy and Walt went to Germany in 1937 to try and retrieve over 135,000 Reichmarks owed them (they were on a tour of Europe promoting *Snow White*). They may also have lobbied to get Germany to lift its ban on importing films from the U.S. Their visit to Germany was unsuccessful. Since the brothers were capitalists, I suspect any positive feelings they might have had about Hitler were replaced by hatred for the SOB that was robbing them of their share of their films' income in Germany. Their anti-German sentiment is quite obvious in their WWII propaganda films.

The questionable theory

that Errol Flynn was a Nazi spy comes from Charles Higham's book *Errol Flynn, The Untold Story*. Perhaps Eliot decided that if Higham could have his Nazi, he could have one too.

As for Walt the anti-Communist, he and other studio heads were called to testify before Congress in 1947 about Communist infiltration in the film industry. Walt's statements were sincere but somewhat naive. I doubt that he read a great deal about politics. A knowledgeable person might not have said, "I believe he is a Communist... I looked into his record and I found that No. 1, that he had no religion and No. 2, that he had spent considerable time at the Moscow Arts Theater studying art direction or something." He was then asked, "Any others Mr. Disney?" and he replied, "Well, I think Sorrell is sure tied up with them. If he isn't a Communist, he sure should be one." A few minutes later he said, "In my opinion they are Communists. No one has any way of proving those things." I do not believe his reasons for calling people Communists would hold up in a court of law, yet his public testimony did damage the careers of several people. His testimony was quoted in a successful campaign by conservatives to put Tempo, an animation studio in New York run by two of the four people Walt identified as Communists, out of business in the early 1950s.

Disney In The Coming Years

Considering Disney has become our nation's second largest media conglomerate, it is logical that the number of pot shots taken at this corporation will increase. Disney may eventually be the subject of exposés about

giant corporations trying to control the media and the way we think, just as William Randolph Hearst has been the subject of several books and the feature *Citizen Kane*. I'm sure some ministers will continue to find fault with the corporation and tabloids will have lots more nasty stories to share with us in the coming years. That sort of journalism is stupid, however millions of people buy into that part of our culture so, unfortunately it will continue.

Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince by Marc Eliot. New York, NY: Birch Lane Press and Carol Publishing Group, 1993. 295 pages. ISBN 1-55972-174-X (US\$21.95)

Karl Cohen teaches animation history at San Francisco State and is the author of Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America, McFarland, 1997.

Portions of this article are from his book and from his review of Eliot's book published in the Society for Animation Studies Newsletter, May, 1993. For more information about Disney myths see his book (available from Amazon.com) and visit snopes.com. Disney's FBI file can be seen online at apbonline.com/media/gfiles/disney.

You may also want to visit Websites of the American Family Association and Paw Creek Ministries. Cohen wants to know if people who prevent kids from enjoying Mickey Mouse and Snow White are being un-American?

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

Aardman's Steve Box Talks

by Roger and Ruth Whiter

When Nick Park made his Oscar winning film *The Wrong Trousers*, he used only one other animator. The animator's name was Steve Box, and he brought to life Feathers McGraw, the jewel-thief penguin who silently usurps Gromit's place beside Wallace. Steve also animated on *A Close Shave* and *Chicken Run* and will

co-direct the forthcoming Wallace and Gromit feature film. He's made his own film, *Stage Fright*, also at Aardman Animations. I've seen very little written about Steve Box at all, and I thought it might be interesting to interview him at this stage in his career.

He was more than happy to fill me in. We met for lunch at the Clifton Wine Bar in Bristol, just around the corner from Aardman Animations' original studio building, where he is currently working on the feature film's story with Nick Park. Steve said he wasn't hungry, ordered half a pint of Guinness, and then talked more or less non-stop for the next hour and a half. What follows is a condensation of our conversation.

Inspirational Morph

Steve was born and bred in Bristol, where Peter Lord and David Sproxton started Aardman Animations in the 1970s, with their little brown plasticine character 'Morph.' But Steve points out that he is actually from Kingswood, which to a local lad is quite a different place. "I mean," he explains, "you're talking about five miles away, but for some reason, because I lived up that side of town, and worked there, I didn't find that I was venturing into town much." It would be a long time before Steve ventured into the Aardman studio, but he does remember seeing Sproxton

and Lord on TV: "They were on an English kids TV programme called *Blue Peter*, talking about it, and they had a Morph puppet there, just made of brown plasticine, and they must have talked about the animation process."

Morph used to appear on a children's art programme, popping out of a little wooden box on the presenter's desk and turning himself into any shape he found useful. "I remember loving it, being fascinated by it," says Steve, "and getting all my coloured strips of plasticine and just mashing them together until they went brown, and making my own Morph. I even had my own little box to keep mine in. But it was never satisfying because it didn't move. I think that was why I started to get interested in it."

Falling Into A Trapdoor

Steve reckons that he got his first job in animation "by pure fluke." When he was still at school, and drawing all the time, his dad saw an incongruous ad in the local paper saying 'Cartoonists Wanted.'



Box's first job was on *The Trapdoor*.
© CMTB Animation.

"I phoned it up," says Steve, "and it just happened to be two roads away from where I lived." This was CMTB Animation, a two man company, who at the time were making low budget cut-out films illustrating ways to start a business. Steve met one of them, Terry Brain, and although he did-



Steve Box made a job for himself at CMTB, which launched his career as an animator. © 2001 Aardman Animations Ltd. (left) and © Aardman/W & G Ltd. and BBC Worldwide Ltd. 1993 (right).

n't get the drawing job, he noticed that they had a plasticine model sitting in the studio. He found out that they were hoping to make a stop-motion kids' series, and began to pester them. When they finally started work on a pilot episode, they were keen to let him be involved, but had no money for an extra animator. Steve managed to create a Government Youth Training Scheme placement for himself, which paid him £20 (about US\$30) per week. He began animating on the first of what would be forty-five episodes of *Trapdoor*, a roughly made but original series remembered fondly by many British animators, which involved various plasticine monsters that escaped from a trap door each week.

"I was thrown in at the deep end, totally. They'd done animation at home as kids, and I'd never had that benefit because I'd never had a camera. So I learned by doing it, really. And that was blind animation, you know, not like what happens now."

I asked Steve whether he thinks it's better to learn to animate blind, before working with a video picture that one can see:

"Yes, without a doubt I do. I know it isn't easy now, because people tend to get jobs as animators on higher profile projects, and they have to use video assist, and they learn that way now. But I think the emphasis, even though you want it to be on performance, it's turned into a job of technical slickness. OK, [blind animation] is more ropey, it jumps about, if you kick the camera or knock the model over, you've got to start again or put up with it. *Trapdoor* is full of lumps and bumps, but what got better and better as we did it was the performance. And even



The Wrong Trousers was the first Nick Park project Steve Box worked on.
© Aardman/W & G Ltd. 1993.

though it's dead simple, characters started to come to life. Because the only way you can animate blind is by acting it in your head. Then I began to realise that just where you put that model, how many frames you hold something, how long he looks in a certain direction, how quickly he turns his head, gives him a unique character. There were three main characters — they had different ways of behaving — it wasn't analysed, it was just, they performed it, and we acted it. That's how I learned and that's what I value. I think animators should be made to learn that way, then they will understand the value of what they are doing. It's nothing to do with slickness. Slickness isn't important.

Along Came Aardman

"When Aardman started to develop, which for me was really when Nick came along, when *Creature Comforts* popped up — they were slicker, funnier, the stories were better — they were a kind of black hole for work. We made a couple of commercials at CMTB, but after that, if anyone

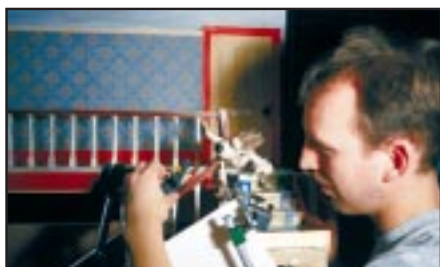
wanted a commercial, they went to Aardman, and our work just dried up. It wasn't anybody's fault, but I was kind of laid off."

Steve still didn't go straight to Aardman, but spent six or seven months doing 2D animation. Then, he thinks it was in 1990, he had a call from Aardman director Richard Golezowski, offering him a job as assistant animator on a Kellogg's commercial.

"I was quite petrified, really. It was a big company — I mean, not big in scale — there were about ten people there, and five of them were director-animators. You see, half the staff actually made films then, wrote, directed and animated them."

Steve worked on a couple of commercials — the second was "a film for the Red Cross, which was to educate seamen about AIDS." He has also directed a pop video at Aardman, for the Spice Girls' "Viva Forever," a number one hit in the U.K. The film, which he describes as surreal, and involves tin-toy Spice Girls popping out of strange eggs found by two boys in a field, was entirely his idea. "I

listened to the song, and it was obviously a holiday romance, which I thought was a dead boring topic. Then I started to think of it not as a loss of romance, but as a loss of childhood, and it fits perfectly."



Box prefers the hands on experience of stop-motion animation. © Aardman/W & G Ltd. and BBC Worldwide Ltd. 1993.

Working With Nick

By that time, however, he had already collaborated with Nick Park on *The Wrong Trousers* and *A Close Shave*. His first encounter with Wallace and Gromit came much earlier though. "When I was working at CMTB, the guy who was editing *The Trapdoor* for us, Rob Copeland, was also editing *A Grand Day Out*, and he would sometimes use our Steenbeck. I remember Terry and I having a sneaky look, and not thinking much of it at all! We thought, 'That's never going to be very successful, just a man and his dog!' It actually seemed so old fashioned, in the rough cut, with no sound and bits missing. Somehow, when it was finished, the humour and style came out."

Steve got to know Nick Park when he was working on an Aardman commercial, and Nick was animating Morph on the next set. When Nick, who had animated *A Grand Day Out* single-handedly, began work on *The Wrong Trousers*, his producer Chris Moll suggested that he would need a second unit this time.

I pointed out to Steve that

when Nick Park shows *The Wrong Trousers* to an audience, he likes to draw attention to scenes that Steve animated. I asked him what he thinks differentiates his style from Nick's:

"That's easy, actually. Yes, I'm in the shadow of Nick, everyone at Aardman is. That doesn't bother me, he's a genius. I had comments made about *Stage Fright*, that it looks like Nick's work, and yes, it's got a bit of a feeling of that style. I could apologise for it, but I'm not going to. I'd worked with Nick, it had rubbed off on me, but there is a difference.

"Nick is a great storyteller, he's a great comedian, his timing is second to none, and I'm not just talking about the timing of animation, I'm talking about the timing of sequences, and the way jokes build and pay off. I think what I brought to *The Wrong Trousers* was a very filmic — I wouldn't say a darker edge, I don't think it's quite that, but I think I brought a weight to it that isn't in *Grand Day Out*. *The Wrong Trousers* had a great script, but I had a hand in the way things were shot, and obviously I had a hand in the way the penguin evolved, led by Nick. What's great about model animation, what I love about it, is when you start animating, you are in control, and the same shot can be done so differently, it can make you feel a different thing. I think that's somehow what I brought to Nick's work. I think what people saw when *The Wrong Trousers* was finished was a very coherent, powerful film. Whether that was anything to do with me, I don't know. When we worked on *A Close Shave*, stuff that I handled seemed to have a similar intensity and — you know, it's hard to talk about your own work — but

even now, when I watch *A Close Shave*, when there's a sequence comes up that I've done, I'm suddenly transported, I'm suddenly fixed. All I can say is that I'm incredibly passionate about what I do, and I treat it with such gravity and such seriousness, even if it's ridiculous, and Nick likes that. Maybe that's the difference. But there's a great similarity as well. Stuff that I did before I ever came to Aardman has got such similarities to Nick's work."

No Thanks CGI

Aardman now has a department developing computer-generated animation, and I felt I should ask Steve whether he was interested in moving into that area.

"I would never want to use a computer to animate. Whether I ever direct computer animators, I can't say that would bother me. Again, this goes back to spontaneity. I get a buzz from being in a studio, on a set, with a character that exists in three dimensions, and you have to put your hands around it and make it come to life. You can't have a go and then alter it, in my mind, you've got one shot at it. I never want to do a re-shoot. I remember once getting Peter Lord to re-shoot something for me! When I do a shot, I have to get very worked up about it, it's hell to get me on set, they have to put a banana on the end of a stick and threaten me with it, because I don't like bananas! I have to go through all sorts of routines before I start animating, I have to play with the puppet for ages, to get that feel of it, and then I will go, and you cannot interrupt me, I will get into character.

"On *A Close Shave*, when I was shooting a scene with

Wendolene arguing with Preston, the floor manager, Harry Lyndon, stuck his head in and very politely asked, 'Have you finished yet?' I went mad with him, and I started shouting at him. What happened, which I didn't realise at the time, but he did, thankfully, was that I was obsessed, I was in character. Doing that for three days, holding your face in an angry pose, I think if you're doing it properly then that's how you're affected. And so I never want to go through that again. I don't know if that will ever happen with computer animation. I wouldn't like the opportunity to adjust my work, I'd rather do it and live with it."



Box became the characters he animated on *A Close Shave*. © Aardman/W & G Ltd. 1995.

What!?

Aardman is famous for its lip synch technique, and yet Steve's most famous character, the penguin Feathers McGraw, is a silent character. Steve's own film, *Stage Fright*, deals with the crossover period between music hall and silent film. I wondered if those two details were pure coincidence, or whether silent film held a particular fascination for him?

As it happened, I'd hit the nail on the head. "I adore it," he said. "I'm a huge Buster Keaton fan. And Harold Lloyd, and Charlie Chaplin. Laurel and Hardy were my first love. I know they're not strictly silent, but they've come out of that background. The connec-



Feathers McGraw is Box's best known creation. © Aardman/W & G Ltd. and BBC Worldwide Ltd. 1993.

tion is the visual humour, the visual style, making a huge impact, a huge statement. You know, just a look from Stan Laurel can speak volumes. I used to look at all these old films, and see it as this weird world, somehow removed from ours."

The desire to recreate the world of silent films in animation was behind the original idea for *Stage Fright*, in which a music hall star moves into screen acting. "Unfortunately," he adds, "it's only a small part of *Stage Fright* that's got it in, and I didn't even get to animate it in the end."

I wanted to ask Steve about that particular scene in *Stage Fright*—although it's a scene from a silent film, the two characters are actually singing as if the film is a musical. Was this perhaps another interest?

No...Really?

He suspected I'd been fed the question—"because that's my ultimate ambition, to make a model animated, feature-length musical. I wouldn't say that *James and the Giant Peach* and *Nightmare before Christmas* are musicals, they're films with songs. One of my favourite films ever is *Oliver!* It's got the feel of an old

music hall, the songs are all integral, and written so specifically, in character."

Steve actually wrote the song the *Stage Fright* characters sing himself. "I love writing songs," he says. "I'd never profess to be able to do it if I ever did a musical, but I'd like to be involved in it. When Ron Moody as Fagin sings 'Reviewing the Situation,' it's tune-ful, it's melodic, it's got great clever rhyming schemes. But it's revealing it's like a soliloquy in a Shakespeare play. You get to know something about that character. In a normal film, you never have that, they never stand and tell you what they're thinking or feeling."



Stage Fright, Box's own project for Aardman, pays tribute to the great silent movies. © Channel Four 1997.

Heathrow Bound

Finally, Steve talked about his future plans:

"Nick and I are working on a Wallace and Gromit feature film, and at the moment we're writing, along with Bob Baker [who co-wrote *The Wrong Trousers* and *Close Shave* with Nick]. So I'm a new addition to the writing team this time, but it's going really well."

I asked how he felt about the prospect of co-directing a feature film: "I had to think very hard about it. That's not to say for a moment that it wasn't so flattering and generous of Nick, and such a great opportunity, because what

it means is that I won't animate, and Nick won't animate, which has already happened to him, and that's very difficult, very hard to think about. Making a feature film is a massive process, and it's not something to be gone into lightly. But the characters are great and strong, and it's a great idea, better than any of the other films.

"I think the main challenge is working with such a vast number of people. I just think making model animated films seems to fit very well with a small crew, complete control freaks, making a world that you're totally in control of. When you end up with thirty people animating for you, and countless model makers, and so many people to organise, it's very difficult to maintain that vision. Of course not impossible, but an



Wallace and Gromit, the short, will soon become a feature, which Box will co-direct. © Aardman/W & G Ltd 1989.

entirely different type of work. That's going to be really difficult, I know it's been difficult for Nick."

And does he have plans for future films of his own?

"Well, it takes a long time to make an animated film. *Stage Fright*, an eleven-minute film, was probably four years' work. We've been working on the Wallace and Gromit film for coming up to a

year now. Depending on what happens with *Tortoise and Hare*, you're not going to see it for years. I would say you're looking at 2005. To take on something like that is incredibly daunting. Not only the amount of time and the volume of work, but any other ideas I have, and I do have other ideas, are circling over Heathrow, and there's no room for them to land until that one's out of the way."

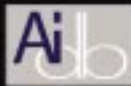
Roger Whiter makes puppets for animation, and Ruth Whiter is a puppet animator when not looking after their two young children., They live in Bristol.

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by Martin “Dr. Toon” Goodman

The Powerpuff Girls were to pose a triple threat at the box office but were mysteriously underviewed. © Cartoon Network; Distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.

As animation evolves, its economic and cultural correlates multiply; this concept gains even greater verity as the number of corporate players increase and modes of transmission by media become ever more diversified. This summer brings us two examples of how the marketing of animation has adopted a novel trend previously unseen by both the public audience and animation's more specified fandom: With the premieres of *Hey Arnold! The Movie*, *The Powerpuff Girls Movie* and the recent announcement of a *SpongeBob SquarePants* feature we are witness to the cementing of that trend. Even the pious plants of *Veggie Tales* are not to be denied. The small screen is moving to the big screen in heretofore unprecedented numbers, and this month we shall examine what this new development may mean for American animation.

Turning animated shows into theatrical releases is neither an original nor expressly American idea. This has been done in Japan for most of the past decade with rousing success until these transformations were expected by audiences as a matter of course. A popular series such as, for example, *Urutsei Yatsura* might spawn several films, all fitting more or less within the continuity of the series. It was only a matter of time until American producers and distributors wised up, as they did with the concept of direct-to-video (OAV) and followed suit. Therefore, this new trend has a strong precedent of proven economic success. Considering the general timidity of Hollywood where novel ideas are concerned, one supposes such a track record would have to be demonstrated in order for TV-based features to move to the big screen at all.

Track records apply in more than one instance here; not only

does the practice of adapting animated series to theatrical release have to be a winner, so do the cartoons. If we consider the series mentioned above, the facts are unarguable. *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Rugrats* have continually vied for the cable ratings championship over the past two years. *Hey Arnold!* can be frequently found in the top ten. Some of their star power is attributable to the fact that Nickelodeon typically broadcasts these series during prime-time hours as well as on afternoons and weekends, but the shows in question are also popular, likable offerings that feature winning scripts more often than not. In the case of *Hey Arnold!*, Craig Bartlett's spin on Hal Roach has made the grade without the ubiquitous merchandising associated with Nick's other hits. Not much needs to be said about the popularity of Cartoon Network's *The Powerpuff Girls*; the mighty

moppets have attained classic status within their time, and nearly every product that can be marketed to a child carries their goggle-eyed images. So confident is distributor Warner Bros. that the film carries a PG, rather than G rating (even though most of the violence is aimed at cartoon simians).

A New Age

The present and future animation scene is crowded with possibilities; *Samurai Jack* is headed for the big screen via live-action, *The Simpsons*, which has been a big-screen rumor since Mrs. Flanders was still alive, seems to be underway, and who's to say that John Kricfalusi (once again in control of Ren and Stimpy courtesy of Viacom), won't make the big-screen feature that fans were hoping for ten years ago? One of the most interesting questions regarding this new trend has to be: Why now? How is it that we weren't treated to a Beany and Cecil feature or a Rocky and Bullwinkle flick in the mid-sixties? The only contemporary precursors to the new boom in small-screen to feature animation were the two Hanna-Barbera films *Hey There It's Yogi Bear* (1964) and *The Man Called Flintstone* (1966). Why weren't *The Archies* or *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* on the feature docket in the 1970s? These shows were certainly popular enough, and wouldn't have needed a Dalton Trumbo or Tennessee Williams to write the screenplay. The reasons are varied and have to do with the business, and the audiences, involved with animation in the 2000s.

In the halcyon days of the 1960s and 1970s TV cartoon animation was largely confined to a



Nickelodeon's *Hey Arnold!* series hit the big screen with disappointing results... but how disappointing will it be in the long run really?
© 2001 Paramount Pictures and Viacom International.

tiny corner of Saturday morning, and networks bought any schlock that could fill a half-hour slot. No one (including many of the kids watching) constituted a fan base that would have justified any feature films derived from a given series. No producer or distributor would have taken such a risk based on such limited exposure and demographics. A 24/7/365 channel that broadcast naught but toons was an unthinkable fantasy, and any executive that suggested it would have been placed on a considerable dose of antipsychotic medication. Today such a thing does exist, and some cable stations either have or are considering adding animation "blocks" to their programming.

When a TV toon attains popularity today, the result is more media attention and possibilities for marketing over wider demographics. TV animation actually seems to be bucking the tendency of modern marketing, which breaks the population down into specialized "niches" in order to target choice groups for specific advertising strategies. The appeal

of animation is broadening to include a demographic base much wider than children, with exposure that far exceeds the old Saturday morning "cartoon ghetto." With this dynamic in place, it is little wonder that several animated TV series are making the jump to theatrical release; their world is a bigger one now.

Animation also came to be a great investment after films began breaking the \$80 million mark, but such features hardly existed (outside of Disney) until the late 1990s. The rise of successful rivals to the Mouse proved that corporate money spent on films could finally pay off. Oh, there were missteps, to be sure — *Titan A.E.* and *Trumpet of the Swan* come to mind — but overall the earning curve of animated features was clearly going up. A massive infusion of prime-time television animation may have been a failure but the time has never been better for toons making it to the movies; since 1998, the first year in which Disney faced major competition, animated features have averaged \$80,251,586 at the box

office. Twelve films have grossed over \$100 million, and half of them were by studios other than Disney.

The Larger Picture

Of course, feature films are also part of a cycle; they help to sell merchandise. Small screen animation has generated more saleable commodities over the past few years. There is more Scooby Doo product available in more stores than there ever was in 1969, and the Looney Tunesters have easily followed suit. Walt Disney found out long ago that his characters were worth a fortune in licensing, and worked closely with independent businessman Kay Kamen in order to exploit the situation to the fullest. When Kamen died in 1949, Disney eventually replaced him with O.B. Johnson and finally Vince Jefferds (an in-house company man). Few other studios outside of Disney marketed as aggressively, so many famous characters appeared only as toys or board games or in comic

books. Today, studios that feature animation have, or had, entire stores dedicated to a wide selection of animation-related product; The Warner, and of course, Disney outlets are an example, and other beloved characters are marketed in video outlets, novelty stores, or over the Internet. In truth, Warner, Disney, Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon can't lose much money on an animated feature — even should the film in question bomb — since they serve as promotional vehicles for the proliferation of licensed products — whether the movie busts the charts or not.

SpongeBob, Arnold, Doug, the Powerpuff Girls, the Recess and Rugrats gangs and the Looney Tunes do indeed seem to be harbingers of the future. If they are, they presage changes in animation and its production. Studio heads and producers may begin buying shows based on whether they can be translated into feature films in addition to a regular series; it may not be unreasonable that

part of the agreement could be: "A feature film must be produced within eighteen months of a show attaining a certain number of rating points." Creators and writers may sweeten the pot (and increase chances of a sale) by presenting a rough screenplay when they pitch a series. Why? In order to take advantage of a show's popularity with all due alacrity. A lesson is in order here: When *Pokémon* became a phenomenal hit among prepubescent TV watchers in 1997, Warners immediately bought a pre-existing film in Japan and released it the following year in the U.S.A. — just in time to catch the crest of the series' popularity. The result? \$85 million at the box office and all the secondary profits they could catch.

As we remember, the first movie starring that yellow ingenue Pikachu was followed by several sequels that went to theaters rather than OAV. A well-received film that makes a tidy profit may become a franchise. In an interview with *Toon Zone* (2/24/02), Craig McCracken revealed that he was considering ideas for a *Powerpuff* sequel. There seems no doubt that the *Powerpuff* Girls will not play (and pay) well enough to bring Professor Utonium's waifs back for an encore, but if the idea of a TV series birthing a movie franchise seems farfetched, *Rugrats* has two films in the can already. These movies are also a safe bet for studios by dint of being pre-sold and pre-marketed. How many people will go to a multiplex next year where *SpongeBob SquarePants* is playing and wonder, "Gee, I wonder what this funny-looking thing might be?" One might as well fail to recognize Tom Cruise.



Bikini Bottom is going Hollywood! Nickelodeon's *SpongeBob SquarePants* is bringing more nautical nonsense to theatres soon. © Nickelodeon.

Some Concerns

If there is a downside, it rests upon the downtrodden independents, who have a hard enough time getting their films made. Only so many movies will be released per year, and only so many of them will be animated. I pity those like Bill Plympton, who gamely soldier on though their films seem to be seen only by their appreciative fans. I pity those like Richard Rich, who may never gain a shot at redemption because studio executives decide to go with a tried-and-true TV hit over their feature production. I pity the legions of Internet animators who may have seen their dreams distanced by yet one more obstacle when it's hard enough to sell a concept already. Another concern (at least of mine) is the situation that could be created at the Academy Awards

now that animated films have their own category. Is it possible that someday the Powerpuff Girls may do battle with The Wild Thornberrys (due for a feature team-up with the Rugrats) for an Academy Award? Technically, both films would be eligible if entered, but if a television-based feature took the prize over an original film what would that mean for Oscar?

These are not questions for the future; the future is here. Within the darkened province of our movie houses the Powerpuff Girls battle Mojo Jojo, Arnold battles a greedy developer, and SpongeBob SquarePants will battle, one suspects, his uncontrollable exuberance. They are only the vanguard. Of course, there is always the possibility that the entire venture may go the way of the recent prime-time animation

bust, but shed no tears for the studios should that happen; many animated films have a great track record of outdoing their box office profit after they are released to video. In short, translating TV-based features to the big screen is likely to guarantee a profit one way or another. Keep an eye on some of your favorite toons over this year; they might just be up on the big screen next year.

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

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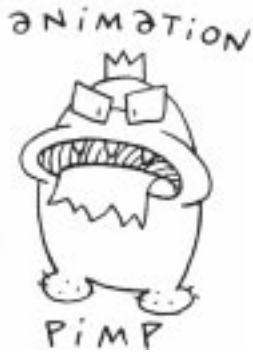


Illustration by Andreas Hykade.
Courtesy of Chris Robinson.

ανθρωπος μορφη

by Chris Robinson

Every culture has its own animal stories. When we tell stories about animals acting like humans, we are better able to see ourselves in the Circle of Life.

- Roy Disney

*Wo... man... a talkin' dog?!...
What were you guys smokin'?*

- Otto

It's amazing how much one utterly barely worthy of being deemed disposable film triggered in my cerebrum, but it was during the process of losing about 80 minutes of my life that I had one of those bizarre Dutch skunk induced seizures. Minutes that I WILL remember when I'm fighting those last conscious moments, struggling to breath my last breathes of love and wisdom to family and friends. Slowly, gently, shaking my head as it struggles unsuccessfully to remain upright, only to collapse into the stiff uncaring pillow. I see white all around me, the illimitable sky. The swans float serenely along the dawdling sky hued riverbed enveloped by an awe-inspiring transcendent harmony that we cannot speak, cannot imagine. This silent paradise is soon interrupted by the sound of human voices and musical instruments.

No...wait.... It's coming from the swans. But how is this? How can it be that they breathe my language? It turns out that my final fleeting spiritual embodiment, the final step toward wholeness and harmony is but a scene from a fucking animation film I saw decades ago. This is no path to paradise, it is the beginning of my eternal residence in hell, where for ridiculing all that the gods deemed sacred and pure, I am forced to re-live scenes from *The Trumpet of The Swan*.

You know when those few spliffs of Dutch skunk have finally clicked in the brain? It's usually when you realize that you've been obsessing over how men's shaving commercials always have women in them for what seems like hours, but it's only been seconds. When you're listening to, say, The Who, and you are able to tune out everything but Entwistle's bass. You hear his frantic rumbling thumps clearer than ever before. It was kinda like that during *Trumpet*. The concept of talking animals overwhelmed me. Animals as human stand-ins suddenly seemed like the strangest, most absurd action imaginable. Remember *The Simpsons'* bit about the sex-ed film where they used fluffy bunnies to teach chil-

dren about sex? Why on earth would you teach children/adults ideas about the human world using squirrels and ducks and horses? It's absolutely eye rolling, head quiveringly insane.

We Even Have A Word For It

We usually call this anthropomorphism. It comes from the Greek title above meaning "human form." The word though is misleading as its roots are connected with the notion of giving human characteristics and form to anything non-human. So, for e.g., Homer's inclusion of Zeus in human form is anthropomorphism. *Monsters Inc.*, *Luxo Jr.*, *Toy Story*, *MVP* (where they have this chimp dolled up in Poochie inspired threads) and on and on and on...are all anthropomorphic films.

Now visual interpretations of animals can be traced back to Ice Age cave paintings (no...not that Blue Sky film). The paintings seemed to be a mix of religious or magical (animals were often seen as mythological creatures) symbols or as diagrams for hunting (see Joseph Campbell *The Power of Myth*). The hunting paintings were almost like rehearsals for the actual kill. There were apparently even marks found on some of

these drawings suggesting that perhaps the hunters felt that what they did to the rendering would also occur in reality. The paintings were often skilful re-creations of the movement and form of the animals. Other images depicted animals doing the nasty or even human-animal characters. For Jungians the crossbreed portraits were linked to the primitive animal instinct within humans. There were accompanying ceremonies with masks, dances based on animal movements. Human identity submerged into animal during these rituals. Maybe it was felt that one could vanquish all animalistic rage from within? Maybe it was just some guilt release for killing? Maybe they just like the friggin shape of the animals? Perhaps there was some weird sex shit happening? Whatever. Either way, there was an aspect of spiritual awe and respect connected with these early paintings.

And of course if we turn to religions, we can find all sorts of animal symbols. Apu's Ganesh monument is human-elephant. Ol' perv Zeus would often take the form of an animal when he sought to vanquish some seed...and yadda yadda yadda... that Christian superstud, J.C. is connected with animals right from the get go.

In Greek literature, Aristophanes actually mocked men's desire to emulate animals in his farce, *The Birds* where two men, tired of the rigours and tyranny of Athenian society decide to bail and join with the birds. Eventually the two twits take over the bird race and turn it into the very society they fled. And *Aesop's Fables* are perhaps the most enduring, although today most of us know only the sanitized

versions courtesy of those fun-loving Ivy League-Victorian-pull over wearing Christians. *Aesop's Fables* also provided material for animation, notably Walt Disney's *Tortoise and The Hare*.

And rather than trace through the whole history of art and animals (including live-action animal films like *Benji*, bizarre cross-breeding epics like the *Shaggy D.A.*, Disney nature films, *Fairy Tales*...and my favourites, *The Master and Margarita* and *Heart of The Dog*, two fine books by Mikhail Bulgakov), let's skip ahead and focus on animation. Animation, perhaps more than any other art, has relied heavily on the use of animals to transmit perceptions of human behaviour and form. Why animals? It's likely a combination of the influence of comic strips, photographs and fairy tales. And as Linda Simensky (Cartoon Network) told me, a need/desire/pressure in 1920s animation to do the most absurd things...like making animals and objects talk. Now most of this stuff (Felix, Gertie, Bugs, Daffy) was not aimed at children, but adults. Disney was maybe the first to tailor animal (and hell, animation) toward children.

An Enduring Love

Why are kids so taken with animals? Well one schlub named Dan Acuff noted: "Research has shown that as much as 80 percent of children's dream content is of animals up to the age of about six. It appears through animal dreams children work on the resolution of a variety of issues and fears that they are dealing with in their young lives." Seems to me this is a crock; children's dreams are filled with animals likely because they are surrounded

by them via television, movies, books and toys. Naturally they're gonna dream about animals.

Children's toys are often mini-versions of objects and animals in the natural world. The stuffed wild animals like bears are easily controllable within the child's world. Animals become silent, tame, friendly and predictable. The bears don't bite, the dolls don't talk back. The trucks, trains, planes and cars go when and where the child wants. It makes the world less intimidating and allows children the opportunity to practice and articulate their social and mechanical tools. And there certainly seems to be a case for the belief that children better absorb what they're learning through their toys. They are often on their own, out of the spotlight, like a rehearsal. It's also an issue of control. Difference is harnessed.

Animation anthropomorphism takes it a step further by offering kids a chance to see their toys and dolls come to life. But how much do kids really care about what species is used? Does it matter if it's Kipper the dog, kangaroo, owl, squirrel or goat? Unlikely. Kipper has soft colours, round shapes, a friendly trusting voice and demeanour and, like virtually all characters, is predictable. Kipper, Franklin, Rupert, Arthur and Clifford ain't likely to be seen lighting one up, jerking off or firing rounds in the school yard. I can't even recall any wild, out there animal characters beyond say Spongebob or maybe the Tasmanian Devil...but even here they are controlled and pretty tame. Moving, talking animals are an extension of the child's room, and they even speak a recognizable language (remember the kid is often play acting with

his toys).

So ok...if it's not necessarily the animal, then what is the attraction beyond form/colour? It appears to be character types. Our attraction to Bugs Bunny, Spongebob, Stimpy or Droopy, etc... are rooted in the recognition of character types. We like Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck because of their resemblance to comedians like Groucho Marx, Chaplin, Costello, etc...(of course most of the characters have been Poochieized for modern kids). In recent anthro films like *Antz*, *Bug's Life*, *Shrek*, *Monsters* and *Ice Age*, is human form/behaviour even relevant? These characters are entwined with our expectations from the actors voicing them: Woody Allen, Eddie Murphy, Mike Myers, Ray Romano, etc... We approach these characters with expectations. We expect a Woody Allen/Billy Crystal voiced character to be neurotic. The 'animals' are merely extensions of the actor's personas.

Given these influences can we even call it anthropomorphism anymore? The 'animals' are just empty vessels. The core of their being is wrapped up with who is speaking and what is being said.

A Deeper Reason, Of Course

So what is being transmitted and why? Some suggest that anthropomorphism is a way of explaining things that we twits wouldn't normally comprehend, a shortcut that reduces complex formal systems to more user-friendly concepts. The problem with this theory is that shortcuts aren't limited to animals. This is a condition of virtually all of classical narrative animation. All animation is a temporal/spatial shortcut. But while some artists seek the

particulars within the universals, most classical narrative films expand particulars to universals. Here we can control the uncontrollable. Time and space are shortened, as are the characters and their relationships. What we do here is order and characterize human beings. We are given universal types. The unique, different and unpredictable are easily categorized and explained.

Because these classical narratives are such a strong part of our daily lives, the fictional starts to ooze into the realm of fact, and even becomes part of our mythology. And myth is when an idea, action, trait, **THING** becomes something natural in our imagination. Myth follows Eddie Hall's notion of Informal learning, which is often unconscious. Or hey... for you visual folks, watch Chris Landreth's film, *Bingo*, where a guy named Dave is told his name is Bingo so many times that he starts to believe himself. Informal systems become formal systems. Formal systems are rigid; they push out alternative forms of behaviour. Doubt vanishes. Fear fades. The world is **THIS** or **THAT**. Anything else is unacceptable.

Anthropomorphism is about control. The objects around us fascinate us. Trees, animals, flowers are mysterious, beautiful and free. As Aristophanes so presciently noted, rather than just embrace what we share the world with, let what is...be. We have some desire to control everything we do not grasp, to assimilate it. Just take a look at world history and you see centuries of examples. That being said there is a distinct cultural difference between North Americans and the rest of the world. We are surrounded by land that is "large

and without mercy." No borders. Restless. Unharnessed. Charles Olson said that, "Some men ride on such space, others have to fasten themselves like a tent stake to survive." Most Americans (not all) sought to pitch tent and take over nature. Again Olson, "We are the last 'first' people. We forget that. We act big, misuse our land, ourselves. We lose our primary." This time, me: We believe we're in a race. If we don't shoot first, someone will shoot us. We seek to exist above rather than alongside. To ascribe animals and whatever else with human voices and perceived behaviours is not only bizarre, but also arrogant.

*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>*

Note: Readers may contact
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Red-Hot Jazz = Red Menace?!

by Gene Deitch



Gene's jazz cartoons for *The Record Changer* magazine in the late 1940s caught the eye of UPA and Big Brother.

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

Just at the moment I was flying highest [in 1950 as newly-hired animation department chief] at [the Jam Handy Organization industrial animation studio in Detroit], I was suddenly called into the personnel office. A lieutenant colonel of the United States Navy was standing there in full uniform, and he handed me an envelope. On it was written, "Eugene Merrill Deitch, For His Eyes Only." What the hell???

While he and the JHO personnel chief patiently waited, I carefully opened the envelope.

Inside was another envelope, and on it was also written, "Eugene Merrill Deitch, For His Eyes Only."

Inside that, a crisp letter unfolded, bearing the seal of the United States Industrial Employment Review Board, declaring that I was to be denied access to work on films the United States Navy had in production at the Jam Handy Organization, because "it has been determined" that I was a member of the Communist Party, an organization dedicated to the overthrow of the government of The United States of America by force and violence.

One moment I had been the fair-haired boy (I had gorgeous hair then) of JHO, and the next moment I appeared to be finished. There I was, with my career just taking off, and suddenly faced with a forced landing.

"This is absolutely not true!" I implored.

The officer spoke dryly: "Your case has been thoroughly investigated. We are not saying you should be fired from your job here. We are simply saying, that as a customer with security priorities, we refuse you permission to work on our films."

"We refuse you permission to work on our films."

How neat. They weren't asking JHO to throw me out, they were just making it impossible for me to be fully useful to my employer, and this was 10 years before I got to the land of Franz Kafka!

"I will appeal this decision. It is a terrible mistake!"

"You may appeal if you want to, but you will have to pay your own expenses to Washington for a hearing. However, it will be useless. These decisions are never reversed!"

"It will be useless. These decisions are never reversed!"

Right. The true McCarthyist approach to democracy! But I did manage to get through to the JHO leadership, and they graciously agreed to withhold any mention of this to other members of the staff. They found a way to have my assistant handle the "secret" stuff, and gave me a month to attempt a reversal.

I did get an address from the officer, and wrote for a hearing. "The Industrial Employment Review Board," was located in the Pentagon, in Washington, D.C.

The average animator doesn't usually get invited to the Pentagon, at least not these days. Being led through this 5-sided center of warriors is suitably cheerless. It is not just one pentagon, but several, one inside the other, something like -- you should excuse the simile -- a set of Russian dolls -- anyway a labyrinth, and my first thought was, "Will I ever find my way out of this place?" After being locked behind layers of security doors, I was led into a rather small room, filled to the

brim with high-grade military officers from all branches of the U.S. armed forces, all sitting around a long table, the same shape as, and only a tad smaller than the room itself. This was the Industrial Employment Review Board. What startled me the most was the high stack of documents on the table in front of each member. "Could all of those papers be about me?"

They were all fans of traditional jazz, but some were certainly political radicals, even Communists.

After a long string of seemingly unconnected questions about my activities in Hollywood, it finally came out what they were driving at. "Look, Mr. Deitch, we don't have to beat around the bush. We have information that you held regular Communist Party meetings in your home." What? Now it all was clear.

In our slightly above-the-poverty-line existence after the war, my first wife and I, being intense jazz fans, had evolved a very cheap weekly social event. What extra money we had went for jazz records, very hard to come by in those days. Those were our substitute for cigarettes. We had a terrific collection of ancient 78 RPM jazz records, and a suitable pre-pre-stereo record player, so we started having Friday night kaffe-katches and jazz record sessions. As I was then doing my jazz cartoons for *The Record Changer* magazine, I ran a small ad, reading, "all you CATS in the los angeles area... you're invited to marie &

gene deitch's regular Friday night record sessions." At our little Hollywood bungalow on Westbourne Drive, my wife would whomp up a large pot of beans and weenies, and we brewed a tank of coffee. Everyone who came gave 50 cents to defray expenses, and contribute to our current favorite candidate -- always a Democrat... We met a lot of new people that way. They were all fans of traditional jazz, but some were certainly political radicals, even Communists. There was some political talk, especially having to do with Negro rights, because we were all champions of Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Johnny Dodds and King Oliver.



So it was a great relief to realize what those generals and admirals had gotten a hold of. I tried to be jolly, and to patiently explain to them the essentials of the above true story. It went over like a lead balloon.

"Mr. Deitch, are you telling us that you allowed perfect strangers to come into your home?"

I could tell right away that these guys were definitely not jazz fans. How in the name of Buddy Bolden was I going to convince these men that we did exactly that; opened our house each

week to perfect strangers, just to listen to jazz records, and not to plot the overthrow of the U.S. Government by force and violence? I went over the story from every which way, trying to get them to understand a glimmer of what goes on in the heads of young jazz fanatics.

"We have information that you held regular Communist Party meetings in your home."

Even when they seemed on the verge of half-way believing me, they came on with the typical poison pill of that time: The List.

"We have a list here of those we suspect of being Communist agitators, who regularly visited your home. Will you please look over this list carefully, and tell me which of them you knew?"

That was it. I expected that I was sunk. I glanced at the list, and sure enough, there were names I knew. I did my best not to react.

"Sirs, even if I might recognize some names on this list it wouldn't mean that I thought they were subversives. Even by saying I know someone could mean I was making some sort of accusation. I traveled here from Detroit at my own expense for the purpose of defending myself. I'm willing to talk about myself, even if I think that it is wrong that I must do so in order to save my career, but I am not willing to talk about anyone else."

I wrote all of this down when I returned from Washington, so I can be sure that is what I said. I assumed I was cooked. After several more tries to get me to at least admit I knew anyone on the list, they let me go, and told me I would be informed of their decision by registered letter within one month. It was probably the longest and gloomiest month of my life. Sure enough, 30 days later a registered letter appeared in my mailbox.

"The Industrial Employment Review Board of the United States Department of Defense informs you that the decision to deny you access to film projects they have or might have in production at the Jam Handy Organization in Detroit, Michigan is hereby reversed." It seemed an agonizingly long eye-span just to get to that last lovely word!

**"Mr. Deitch,
are you telling us
that you allowed
perfect strangers
to come into
your home?"**

My only guess of the reason for this deliverance was that they must have figured that I was too young, naïve and nutty to be any real danger to the security of my country.

You can read more about Gene's career in the world of animation in *How To Succeed In Animation (Don't Let A Little Thing Like Failure Stop You!)*. An AWN exclusive at:
<http://genedeitch.awn.com>

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

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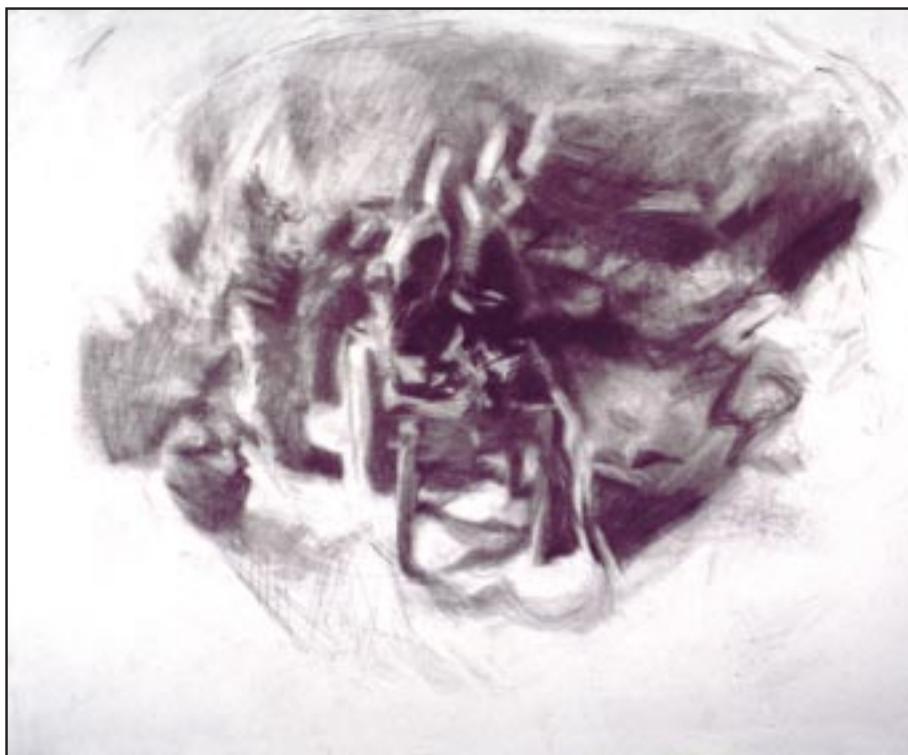
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**Animation World Network, 6525 Sunset Blvd., Garden Suite 10, Los Angeles, CA 90028
Phone (323) 606 - 4200 ■ Fax (323) 466 - 6619 ■ Email info@awn.com**

Notes from the Underground Part 2 — Drawing, Without Knowing (Or, The Art in the Doodle)

by Jean Detheux



*Table chez Nanou, 1978. Graphite on paper, 14" x 17".
All original artwork © Jean Detheux.*

It is not an exaggeration to state that drawing is basic to most forms of animation, just as drawing has traditionally been the foundation of painting (and sculpture, and so on) for a very long time.

Yet, from the point of view of drawing as an art form in its own right, drawing in animation is very weak, and above all, almost always lacks a dimension which is fundamental to art as a whole, the dimension of exploration, of discovery.

Most people “use” drawing as a means to a predetermined

end; very few view (and live) drawing as a tool of exploration and discovery, a “flying carpet.”

Sure, in the animation house, we have talented people who can rearrange the furniture in interesting ways once in a while, but basically, we are permanently stuck in the same old rooms, in the same old space (3D objects moving about in empty space).

Drawing is an activity that seems as basic as breathing and eating.

Yet, as basic as it may be, it is very seldom “natural,” it is very seldom coming from our deeper

“self,” it is most often taught (and used) as an acquired language.

Most people believe that drawing is knowledge-based, that we have to learn how to draw in order to have some success with it.

If so, what is that drawing knowledge we (may) have to learn, what is it exactly that we can learn?

And what could “drawing without knowing” be, if anything at all?

Drawing the Immediately Perceived

Most people start to draw with the hope that their drawing will “look like” something they can visualize, be it as something they “see” around them in the (so called) “external world,” or as something they imagine, “in their mind.”

Either way, their ability to perceive and give form to those “visions” is what will inform their drawing.

At a very fundamental level, there is no qualitative difference between our “seeing” inwardly and outwardly. The distinction between “inner” and “outer,” between “real” and “imagined” comes much later in the chronology of our consciousness.

The manner in which we constitute/organize those visions is what our drawing uncovers.

“Perception is constitutive,” said Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology of Perception* ought to be required reading for all art students, and *The Eye and the Mind* could be a terrific introduction to his work, and to a deeper understanding of ours).

It seems to me that most people think that “the eye works like a camera and we all see the

same thing," especially if the same people are totally indoctrinated into believing that there is an "objective" world, the same for everybody, and that the differences between our respective experiences are "merely" subjective.

In that frame of mind, drawing is a way by which we think we can (re)produce an image of reality as we believe it to look.

However, much of that "reality" isn't as "real" as most would think, it is above all based on expectations, expectations rooted in culture, shaped by language.

We can hardly see some "thing" if we do not have a name for it, a label, with which to isolate it, to differentiate it from the infinity of available stimuli, from the infinity of potential readings available in any and all situations (the "here and now" as a door to infinity, the living present as "infinite manifold," as Husserl called it).

Things Are Not As They Seem

When still a student at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts de Liège (Belgium), I tried my best to follow the methods we were taught, much of which was based on an "explanation" of the appearance of "reality," an explanation that was rooted in the belief that the world consisted of solid objects existing in empty space.

The notion that the objects retained their identity and were always easily distinguishable from their surroundings was one that made it fairly easy at first to draw, but progressively this notion started to be challenged by the evidence of my own experience ("things" were not always behav-

**The more I tried
to "capture"
the visible,
the more
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if "successful,"
the more
disappointed
I would be with
the results.**

ing as they were expected to, according to that "objective world" theory).

Most painters whom we, as students, were encouraged to study, seemed to function with a great deal of ease within the confines of that system of belief, a system with which I, like a few col-

leagues, felt more and more uncomfortable.

Yet, and this is very significant, the painters that were identified as the greatest (Rembrandt, Vélasquez, Vermeer, Chardin, Cézanne, just to name a few) were not always respecting the "norms" of that theory ("solid objects existing in empty space").

In fact, it became increasingly evident that the more "potent" the paintings, the more they seemed to not respect the "rules."

Trying to emulate those successful paintings by applying a "style" was mildly successful, but always felt "off," and was obviously not the way to go, nor seemed to be the way "they" (the painters I was studying) had gone.

No matter how much I twisted the possibilities available in the "solid object in empty space" world view, I always came out with works that were very short of what those painters had obviously made available, and that



Chair, 1974. Pencil on paper, 11" x 14".

they made available in a very consistent manner.

Either I trusted “my” perception as guided by my naive faith in this “objective world,” and always ended up with drawings and paintings that were very trite, or I manipulated those images that were made possible by my reliance on the “objective-world” model and came up with works that may have seemed more “interesting,” but which were, to me, lies, fabrications, and very much at odds with what got me to study art in the first place (call it a search for truth, for meaning, for “self,” the Holy Grail, whatever).

Surely, based on the impact of my experience of some of the better Rembrandts, and such, there had to be more to Art than that!

There had to be (an)other way(s).

Another Point of View

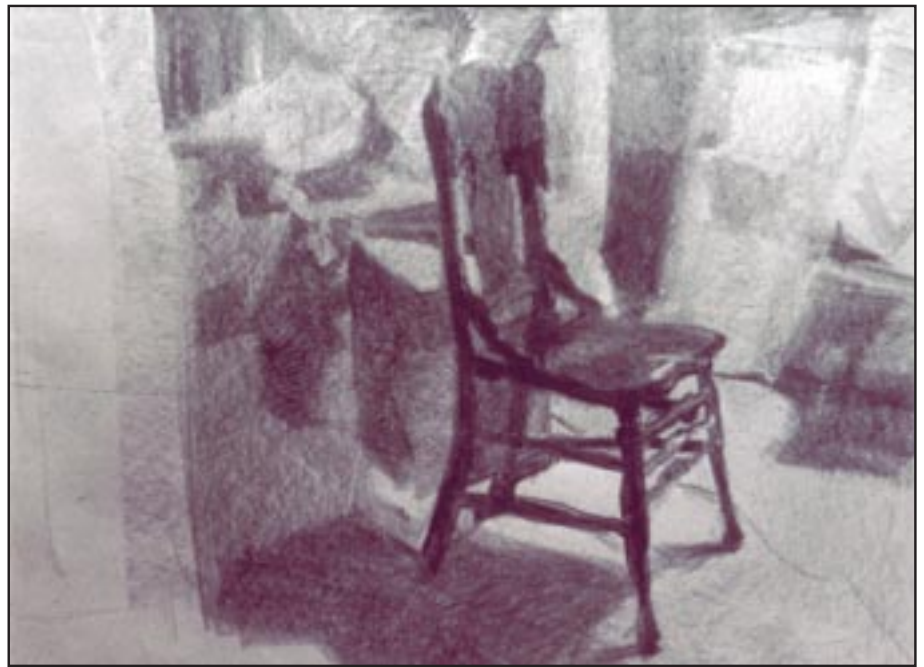
Invariably, when working “from the visible,” I would have moments during which none of what I was seeing made (habitual) sense, and during which my (traditional) way of drawing was terribly inadequate.

This seemed to happen more and more frequently, the more I tried to “capture” the visible, the more I would fail, or, if “successful,” the more disappointed I would be with the results.

I was becoming very confused, and unfortunately I did not (yet) trust that confusion.

That’s when I met a great teacher, Joseph Louis, who held one of the keys for which I was looking.

Joseph deeply believed that our perception held keys to Art, and that what we needed



Chair 2, 1974. Graphite on paper, 11" x 14".

to do was to become able to “see the visible in terms of abstraction” (“voir le visible en termes d’abstrait”).

With his competent help, I (and quite a few other students) became more able to focus on that which did not behave according to the “solid objects in empty space” model, and to follow all the openings (“passages”) I was exposed to all the time but kept on editing out because they did not conform to the societal model.

Very quickly, this approach made us realize that we had a lot more in common with the likes of Rembrandt, Vermeer and so many others than we originally suspected, and that the depth of their work was not based on a greater theoretical knowledge and skills (like “exceptional talent” or “super tricks”) but instead was rooted in a greater connection with their own particular perception.

The realization that Art was not at the end of knowledge forever changed our relation to Art and, of course, to school.

Joseph Louis introduced us

to the work of Alberto Giacometti, and that is when I realized that the kind of “failure to draw/paint what I saw” was not my problem alone; I could see in Giacometti’s works the very same experiences, though with a huge difference: unlike me, he was accepting that constant failure, and was in effect riding it the way one rides a wave.

Camus’ “the failure shall be the measure of success” came to mean something to me finally!

We also could sense that those deeper modes of perception were available to us as well, though they would require much work (and luck?) if we were to ever be connected with them in a meaningful way.

This is a point at which a choice needs to be made, where in fact a choice *is* being made, by each and every one of us, each and every time we work: “Rembrandt or South Park?”

Much of what I dislike in habitual animation is born in and from a world that remains very short of this search, it almost exclusively wallows in what is done

when this search for “truth” is kept silent, when the choice I talk about is made, but made in the same manner one sweeps dirt under the carpet.

Embracing this search is no guarantee of success, far from it, this opens doors to paradoxes and dilemmas that can be, and often are, very painful.

I recall a comment Picasso made when he put an end to the work he did with Braque. He had been painting with Braque for a couple of years, years during which he, in my opinion, painted his very best work ever. He said: “To continue to paint like that, I would have had to live like a monk.”

I don’t think he was talking about celibacy only (if at all); I think he was talking about a form of concentration he was unable to sustain, a concentration on a basic unresolved dilemma, which — if unresolved — very few people can live with permanently.

One way of putting this dilemma into words is this: Is meaning found or created?

If found, it means I am nothing (“it” independently exists outside of me).

If created, it means that I am utterly alone (alone because this “Meaning” cannot be experienced — as such — by others, as it belongs to their “external reality”).

Merleau-Ponty points to this dilemma/paradox this way: “We derive meaning from our experience while simultaneously projecting meaning into it,” (in effect pointing to the dilemma /paradox with which we seem to be living at every breath).

The tension this type of dilemma generates is precisely the wave Giacometti was riding, it



Windowsill, 1978. Graphite on paper, 14" x 17".

is precisely the type of tension I was determined to sustain, to investigate.

A Different Approach

Going back to working “from the visible” armed with this new “understanding,” I no longer tried to force the visible to conform to my habitual differentiation (as between “figure and ground”), but instead, I switched my attention from, “What is that?” to “How does ‘it’ appear?” (And it no longer mattered if that “it” remained undefined, unlabeled, in fact, the longer that undefined quality remained so, the better the work would become, though this would often be recognized long after the fact.)

Progressively, the focusing on “the appearing as it appears” yielded drawings and paintings that were very different from my previous work, and yet much closer to the work of artists with whom I was most impressed.

Imagine that: I was getting closer to my heroes and this, not by emulating or plagiarizing

their work, but by paying more attention to my most personal experience!

Indeed, the exhilarating part of this was that the similarities between their work and mine did not come from emulation, not at all, but came instead from a deeper connection with my own experience of “the real.”

It is possible to break the stronghold societal models have on our experience of the visible, but to do so requires a serious effort, an effort that is turned “inward” as it were, quite different from much of what most of us are used to doing.

For example, seeing “this” means not seeing “that.”

This means that most of our visible world — as a context — is held in place by our constant projection in the experience of the “here and now,” all that we remember having seen, and that we anticipate seeing.

In that sense, the “naive” (not pejorative) experience of the “here and now” is loaded with recollection, and anticipation.

If we did not do that “naturally,” we would not be able to read a sentence, or hear a musical phrase, or make sense of a representational drawing.

Animation itself relies on this naive recollection/expectation in order to appear as a continuous “meaningful” flow.

In fact, if we did not have this loaded “living present,” we would not be able to make habitual sense of the world in which we live.

And yet, this is reality as we constitute it, it is not reality as it appears to us prior to our being actively engaged in our sense making projects.

This projecting into what we see of the parts we do not see but assume are there is called “adumbration,” and we constantly “enrich” our experience of the visible world with that adumbration (it’s like looking at the moon and giving it substance by projecting into the experience the faith we have in the existence of the parts of the moon that we cannot see).

The problem with (naive) adumbrating is that we can only project into the experience that which we already “know!”

In other words, living and seeing that way condemns us to see the world not as it appears (as it is constantly appearing), it condemns us to see “it” strictly as we imagine it to be, our imagination being formed by our culture, by our language, by our expectations. (Other cultures, other languages, give birth to different expectations, to other habitual visible realities.)

Undoing The Done

Surely, there have got to be ways by which we can “undo” the control that our culture, our lan-

guage, have on our experience, ways by which we can, at least temporarily, put aside these controls, shelve them, “bracket” them, and see “the appearing as it appears.”

Much of what I dislike in habitual animation is born in and from a world that remains very short of this search...

We will be looking at some of those ways in greater detail in the next article(s), but here are a few things that may interest those who want to explore this a bit further: physiologically, unlike film, our vision is not based on an even field, with a capacity to receive external stimuli with the same accuracy evenly distributed on the retina.

Far from it!

Our peripheral vision is very different from our central vision.

In a nutshell, our field of vision is mostly constituted by light-sensitive rods, rods that are connected in groups to nerves that carry the signal to the brain. Only a relatively small area on our retina is equipped with cones, cones that are connected individually to nerves and able to convey a far greater amount of detail (and colour) to the brain.

There’s a lot more to this: for example, the rods do not respond to/transmit colour, while

the cones do. The rods are connected in groups to nerves and can respond to/transmit movement far more than the cones can, but they cannot provide much image “resolution;” only the cones can.

Most people are very amazed when, through very simple experiments, they come to realize how tiny our central area of vision is (the only one that provides for sharp image differentiation and colour) in the context of our whole field of vision.

I am not positing here that all there is to vision is based on physiology, but I am finding this to be a good place to start, and will try to show in the next article(s) how much the basic “center-periphery” (dynamic) structure also applies to “higher” functions.

To start paying attention to the enormous qualitative differences between our central and peripheral vision can be a great place from which to begin looking into “seeing without knowing,” a gentle beginning that is nevertheless one reliable place from which to try to see beyond /through the walls of perception (no doors yet!;-) by which we allow ourselves to be trapped so readily.

To try to implement — in one’s drawing — the qualitative differences one notices between central and peripheral vision is the beginning of a journey that could yield many frustrations, and many discoveries.

It is fair for me to remind the reader of what I said in Part 1 — Animation, Prozac or Kyosaku?: “This inherent style is the intrinsic ‘flavor’ of one’s continuous and inevitable failure to succeed at capturing reality.”

**Embracing
this search is
no guarantee
of success,
far from it,
this opens doors
to paradoxes
and dilemmas...**

What I am proposing here does not lead to greater "control," it may make it possible to connect with another mode of experience or more precisely, with a greater awareness of how our experience is taking place.

The next article will look at

this in depth, and talk about how it so often is the case that, in our better work, we draw with, for example, charcoal in hand on a paper placed before us, but almost invariably, the better (the "real?") work is born as if it had been done behind our back by a charcoal that is attached to our elbow.

How is it that, so often, our better work is done without our being aware of its genesis?

How is it that, so very often, "our" better work is done as if it had been made by an "other?"

How does "the other" come into play when I am trying to draw how "I" see?

Those are the questions we will spend time with in part #4.

One reminder: if drawing is basic to animation, perception is what drives drawing. . .

Jean Detheux is an artist who, after several decades of dedicated work with natural media, had to switch to digital art due to sudden severe allergies to paint fumes. He is now working on ways to create digital 2D animations that are a continuation of his natural media work. He has been teaching art in Canada and the U.S., and has works in many public and private galleries.

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Everything About Animation



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the TELEVISION ANIMATION outline

by Jean Ann Wright



Jean Ann Wright

What Is An Animation Outline?

Story editors often ease a new writer from the premise into the outline, giving notes for several rewrites, and gradually expanding the story each time. This helps to ensure that the writer can handle the assignment before the editor commits to an outline payment. Sometimes a short cartoon goes directly from premise into script or storyboard. Approvals are, not only from the story editor but also, from producers, programming executives, standards and practices people, and sometimes from toy executives. Remember that each cartoon is different. So the following information is general information. In the outline the premise is expanded so that the structure will be complete. This is a

blueprint, a plan, a narrative description of the action. Indicate scenes. Pace your story. You reveal through action, character, a little dialogue. Write in the present tense. You may suggest camera angles, minimally, working them into the sentence structure... we push in, dissolve to, see inside, etc. You may sprinkle in a little good dialogue...not too much. Emphasize action rather than description. You'll be paid for writing the outline.

The Meeting With The Story Editor

When your story editor notifies you that your idea has been approved for outline, you'll want to set up another meeting. Today most writers are freelancers, writing at home, occasionally continents away. So face-to-face meetings may be impossible. In that case business must be conducted by e-mail or snail mail or phone. Ask for a sample outline. Not all outlines look the same, so you need to know what kind of outline the story editor expects. Is this an outline with (1) numbered beats, with (2) master scenes (each beginning with a slug line as in a script), or is the outline (3) narrative prose? Ask about length. Do you understand all the notes that the story editor has given you? You'll need to follow them exactly. Ask questions. Know when your finished outline is due. Typically,

you might have a week to finish. NEVER miss a deadline!

Structure Planning

Look at your premise. What are the main points needed to tell your story? The specific personality traits of your star/hero put your story in motion. What does that star want? Who opposes him? What are their motivations? What's your hero's plan? Your star's goals should be in direct conflict with the villain's goals. The villain tries to foil the star's plans. Each turning point requires a decision by the star, who solves the story problem. There are no unseen forces, no easy solutions or clues. The star leads the action throughout the story. What's the worst thing that can happen to the star to keep him from attaining his goals? That's the crisis. The crisis is the opposite of what the star wants. What's the climax of your story, the big conflict near the end, the point that the entire story is building toward? Did your hero learn something? If so, that's the theme. Not all cartoons have a theme. You want to develop the main story points, the skeleton, first. Then you fill in the blanks. What scenes are absolutely necessary to tell your story? Are there two acts or three in your sample script? You'll want your acts to be roughly equal in length, leaving your hero in trouble before each act break. Every scene should be visual and have some action.

More To Think About

It's O.K. to restructure your plot somewhat. You may want to add more plot. You may change motivations, if you wish. Is your story true to the elements and characters of that series? Don't change the location or the villain.

The story editor is balancing locations and villains for an entire season. If adding more characters is absolutely necessary, get permission from the story editor first, as this increases the budget. Remember to stage action for the budget, using cuts, camera shakes and trucks to avoid expensive animation. Save the expense for the important story points and the important gags. Don't leave out whatever it was that sold your premise in the first place. You may surprise your story editor with a few new twists of plot. You want to include the structure, what happens, the major jokes and where they'll go (even if the minor jokes aren't there yet). You want to show your characters acting in character. Think in terms of scenes (one action in one time and one place). Are your scenes in the right order, or would it be better to rearrange them? Can you combine some scenes to fulfill several purposes in a single scene? Do you need any scenes to fill a gap?

Taking Pencil To Paper

For a comedy you may want to start with a quick gag; for an action story, you may want to establish the threat, then the villain, then the heroes. Get into the action right away, and use plenty of action throughout. The thread of the story, reflected in all gags and dialogue, should be immediately apparent and weave through to the end. Principal characters must appear early. Reveal character through action, reaction and dialogue. Let the viewer identify with universal emotions. The story editor wants to see that you know the series' characters. All action should be motivated and believable for those characters

All action should be motivated and believable for those characters and within that series.

and within that series. Later developments must have a seed planted early in the script. If the story isn't working in the middle, it's probably because it doesn't have enough conflict. New information in the middle spins the hero and/or villain off in a new direction. This information may be new to the hero or to the villain or to the audience. Build your story, your chases, your gags to a climax. What's the closing shot? Include the major gags, showing how you get in and out. Scenes usually go out on a laugh line, so set them up that way. Build your gags, top them, and pay them off. For comedy, save the best gag for the climax. Watch pacing and timing. Think broad. Be specific. Know your location, where each door is. Think like a camera sees. If the outline is too hard to write, perhaps the main situation isn't funny enough, you don't have enough props, the structure is wrong, or there's not enough conflict between characters. Have you told a good story in an original way? Is it funny? Keep

your outline light and fun to read. Make it snappy.

Rewrites

Do you need to add more action and peril, a life-threatening time factor (the ticking bomb)? Does everything move the story ahead with nothing extraneous? Is everything clear, specific, concise? Does your writing flow? Check your grammar and your spelling. Usually, you'll get two sets of notes on the outline from the broadcaster (programming, standards and practices). Your story editor will also give notes and may require a rewrite. Once...and if...the outline is approved, you'll go on to write the script. You may be paid separately for the outline, or you may receive payment for both script and outline at once after you've finished your script. Now go out and celebrate! You've got the hard part done!

Jean Ann Wright has been teaching animation writing and development since 1996 and currently teaches for Women In Animation and The Animation Academy. Recently, she started her own consulting business. She's sold her writing to DIC, Filmation and Hanna-Barbera. She enjoys serving on the Los Angeles board of Women In Animation and judging for the Emmys and the Annies.

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The Career Coach:

Declaration of Independence

Pamela Kleibrink Thompson

In July, people in the United States celebrate Independence Day. This year, declare your independence and stay that way.

A New Way of Thinking

First, think independently. You are not an employee. You are a vendor of specific skills. You are hired by a company for as long as that company requires those skills. When your skill set no longer meets the needs of that company, your employment there will end. That is the nature of the business.

**You are not
an employee.
You are a vendor
of specific skills.**

Recognize there is no such thing as job security, especially in the animation industry. One veteran animator, who has seen the ebb and flow of demand for animation, states his life is much like that of a migrant worker and that one should be ready to move on to another studio at any moment. To do this, one must have transferable skills that the studios want.

Stay up to date on what the company needs and make sure you have the skills they look for in new hires. Invest in yourself. Take whatever classes/seminars



Pamela Kleibrink Thompson

you need to make yourself more valuable to your employer and to future ones.

Once You're In

Most jobs are project based. This means you are hired as the company needs you. If you are hired for a specific project, don't think of yourself as a staff employee, even if the project lasts for many months. You may be hired to work on consecutive projects, but you are still a project hire.

Since you will have many jobs in your career, be a positive, hard-working team player people will want to work with again. Maintain a great attitude and give every job your best, no matter how brief. And remember, your current job may end, but the same employer will hire you again if your work is of high quality and your approach is professional.

Keep your marketing materials up to date (resume, portfolio, demo reel and breakdown sheet). Network all the time, even when you are employed. The best time to find your next job is when you are still in a job.

The Long Haul

When considering job opportunities, remember in the long run, what you learn is more important than what you earn. The more skills you have, the more employable and valuable you are. At a small company you may have the opportunity to learn many aspects of the business. At a large company you have an opportunity to make many more contacts. Keep in touch with those you work with when they leave the company. These former co-workers may give you a tip to your next job.

**Once you declare
your independence
and strive to
maintain it, no one
will wield undue
power or influence
over your financial
well being again.**

When you land your dream job, don't go out immediately and buy that dream car or dream house. Even if you have a staff job, you probably should view yourself as a freelancer. Maintain at least 6 months of expenses in a savings account to help you weather any layoffs, hiatuses or down time.

Once you declare your independence and strive to maintain it, no one will wield undue power or influence over your financial well being again. Don't allow someone to hold you hostage financially. If you dread going to work, it's time to network and get that next job.

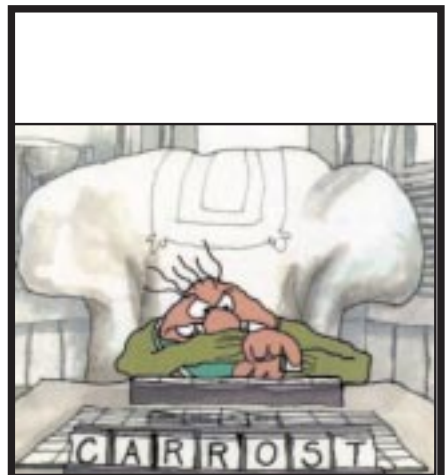
**The more skills
you have, the more
employable and
valuable you are.**

The days of an artist retiring from a long career at a single studio are gone. It's important for you to take an entrepreneurial approach to your career. Recognize that you are in business for yourself. That requires hard

work to maintain good relationships with clients and to market yourself to potential new clients. Accept independence as a way of life. Prepare for down times, enjoy the good times and welcome the freedom that this provides.

Pamela Kleibrink Thompson is uniquely qualified as a career coach, independent recruiter and management consultant. She frequently speaks about careers at colleges and universities.

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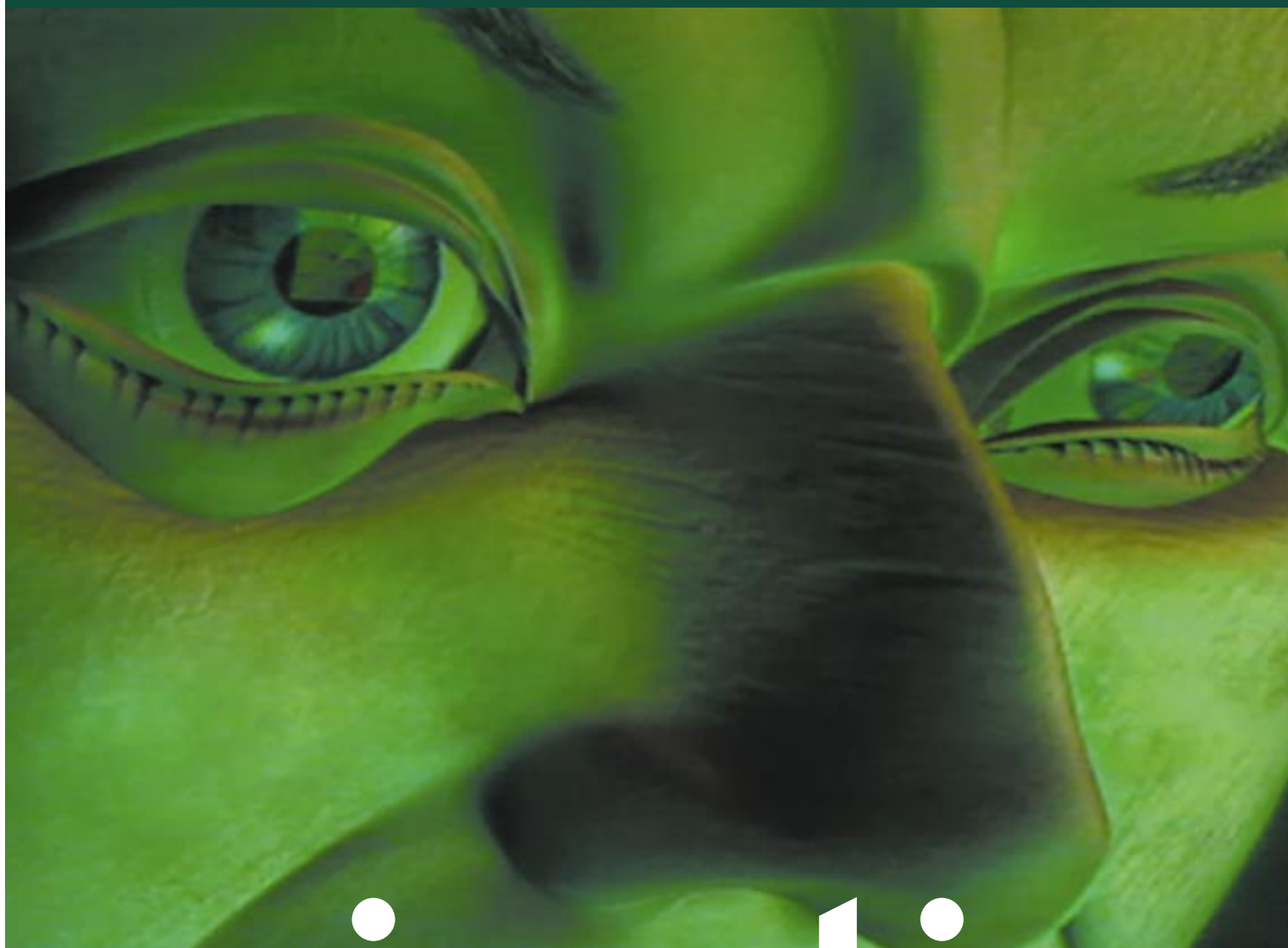
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animation

HOW TO DRAW ANIMATION: Simplifying Characters for Animation

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 characters. 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 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.

Last month we covered Facial Wrinkles, now we are going to move on and consider some design features that make sense when it comes time to start animating.

The wolf is a popular shaggy old villain. But you'd give the other animators heart attacks if you asked them to animate every ruffle of fur for hundreds, if not thousands, of drawings. And, the producers would shoot you, because the process of drawing all that extra fur would add up to many more hours of labor and, therefore, many more dollars.

While you shouldn't edit yourself when designing a character, once you've created it, see if you can simplify the character without destroying its personality.

How to Draw Animation by Christopher Hart. New York, New York: Watson-Guptill 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-Guptill, 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.

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



Both drawings are © Christopher Hart; drawn by Christopher Hart.

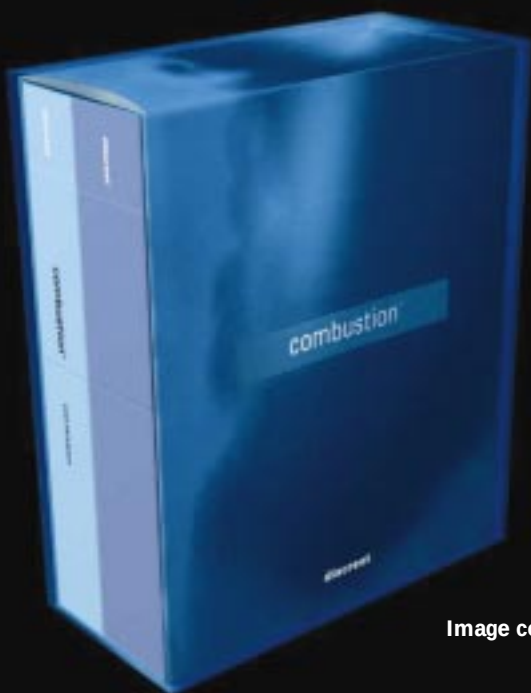


Image courtesy of discreet.

Combustion 2 *in Action*

by Scott Jenkins

Although Combustion 2's name would suggest that it is a product enjoying its first upgrade. However, it actually has survived a long history in animation and special effects. Starting its life as Denim Software's Illuminare Studio, it had two modules, Paint, an innovative and fully featured vector-based video painting program, and Effect, an equally innovative 3D compositing system. The company and the software was bought by discreet, and after an initial release, both packages were re-tooled to fit in with their ultra high-end compositing product line including, Flint, Flame and Inferno.

Much has been made of the original Combustion's integration with the high-end products. A number of effects houses use Combustion as an offline tool to do pre-composition work to later fit in with that high-end pipeline. However, looking at the core of the product shows an invaluable tool for animation work.

Combustion gives animators the ability to create, modify and enhance an animation sequence in an intuitive manner that can be a joy to use. An important part of any software package is its ability to serve the user as opposed to the user serving it. The interface shouldn't get in the way

of the job that the software is supposed to do. This is true for any software, from word processors to games to animation packages. Granted, if any software is useful or unique enough, people will take the time to learn it and deal with its foibles, but that leads to a steep learning curve. Combustion's interface is the result of years of evolution working with a very dedicated group of artists, and it shows. Pick a tool, and the interface changes so that you've got everything you need right in front of you. Choose one of a number of viewport setups and you've got your image presented to you at different stages of its creation.

So let's break it down into what Combustion can do for you.

Creating With Combustion

Combustion has a near-great vector-based painting toolset. When used with a graphics tablet there is a wealth of possibilities at your command. Since each brushstroke is a vector object, it can be animated over time. While this sounds good on paper, the question of its practicality arises: why would you want to animate each brushstroke? You may want to have a bunch of strokes forming themselves into the final picture, or you may want to group your strokes together, say for a tree or a bush, and then animate the leaves. Since the brushes aren't limited to just painting functions, you have the ability to animate the position of, say, a smear, enabling you to create waves lapping up against a shore.

As I said, you are not limited to painting functions. Combustion gives you 40 (!) different modes to work with when you are painting. You can start



A vast 3D world in Combustion illustrating multiple image planes.
Image courtesy of discreet.



Particles interface, an all access pass to creating realistic particle-based effects. Image courtesy of discreet.

with a paint layer, smear the colors together to get rid of angular, flat vector looks; dodge or burn your highlights, mid-tones and shadows; and add lighting effects to any portion of your painting that you wish. What makes the paint toolset “near-great” instead

of great is its inability to create custom brushes beyond the basic elliptical and rectangular brushes. I would appreciate the ability to create patterned or image-based brushes in this interface. Also, Combustion doesn’t yet take advantage of the angle features

in some graphics tablets. This may seem to be a minor point, but seeing as how Combustion is so geared to work with graphics tablets, you would think that they would be more on top of new innovations.

Hand-drawn animating with Combustion and a graphics tablet is also a treat. Its fast response and onion skinning tools make it possible to create high quality animations and quick pencil tests. By using different composition branches in the same timeline, you could conceivably create a single file where you could include your storyboard, pencil tests and cleaned work in a neat little package. For short pieces, commercials or individual scenes, this is a very nice feature.

If you are working with scanned images, Combustion can be used as a painting package, but it won’t give you some of the specific features of a dedicated package like Animo. However, what it does give you in the way of paint tools is great, and the compositing tools are amazing.

3D Compositing

One big plus that Combustion has is its 3D compositing tools — basically a 3D “world” for your image layers. This allows you to move your layers around in 3D space and create actual environments (of flat planes) with real perspectives.

Effects

A great addition to Combustion 2 is the 2D particle system. Much faster than 3D particles, Combustion allows you to add everything from smoke (realistic or cartoon) to sparkles, fire to water in your scene quickly. Fully customizable, the particle sys-

Works Well With Others

tic possibilities — using it in conjunction with Illustrator and Photoshop makes it amazing, using all of that and 3ds Max and you will have to be dragged from your computer for things like food and personal hygiene.

tool. The best part of this is not having to figure out the movement of the individual layers, but just setting up the “environment” and moving the camera through the scene in any direction.

Combustion also works with multi-layer Illustrator files, translating your work into editable paint objects ready for animation. The only issue is that you have to save your work from Illustrator as Illustrator 8 files.

One of Combustion's big strengths is its integration with 3ds Max. When used together — and it really helps to have a two moni-



tor system — you will have an extremely powerful animation station. Combustion can be used to paint directly onto a mesh — either a still painting or an animated one — and Max can export images in pre-comped layers to Combustion for extreme control over your final image. Through the use of the rpf file format, you can have control over many additional channels such as velocity, which enables you to control motion blur in a much faster manner than you'd get directly from Max, and normal channels, which allow you interactive lighting possibilities after you render. You can even bring Max camera data into Combustion to match movements from one package to another.

One thing I would like to see is the ability to bring Max objects directly into Combustion. This is a standard feature with their higher-end packages on the SGI platform, and you would think it would be a no-brainer to have it here.

Although many studios see Combustion as a low cost entry into the Flame and Inferno worlds, in the hands of an artist, Combustion can be an expressive tool to create amazing animations.

Combustion Under Fire

Nicholas Mermet, compositor at Acme Filmworks, has been using After Effects since it was CoSA version 2.0. He considers himself an artist who works with moving images. He learned compositing as a way to make his creative visions happen. He has worked on many different compositing systems, including Flame.

Nicholas gave Combustion a run through under fire. He'd been working on a series of com-

mercials in After Effects and tried one out in Combustion to see how it measured up. The commercials involved heavy rotoscoping and image processing to achieve a cartoony style from live video. After Effects was able to do the job, but it was taking time.

With Combustion, Nicholas was able to draw a rotospline around an object and link its individual control points to trackers. With this process, he was able to automate "80-90 percent of the work and then tweak the rest by hand." He said this process was reliable, and though some of the results were different than what he would have done by hand, the results were surprising, and a great time saver.

He loves Combustion's interface: "With the viewport management system, everything's right there in front of you. I don't have to hunt for windows, like with AE's pre-comps." He also likes the schematic view, which he says is necessary for node-based compositing. "I always work in the schematic view. I like node-based compositing, because it makes more complex projects easier to manage." It's not quite perfect, though; "As some of the cut and pasting of nodes can be a little funky. But at least it works," he says.

How does it compare to a dedicated system for 2D animation? "Animo is not as nice to work in," he says, "but the performance is a bit snappier."

Two things that he says are missing from Combustion are a mesh warper and scripting tools, which he had grown to use on this project in After Effects. "Scripting really helps for a lot of the little things," he explains. "And I really miss it."

Coming from a background where he has worked with Flame systems, Nicholas says he has faith in the discreet keyer. With some of the source footage shot on DV, this could have been an issue, but with the depth of the toolset, he said it was no problem.

The final verdict? He feels that Combustion is still a young product when compared to After Effects. After Effects is still more mature, he says, but Combustion has greater finesse of controls. On his project, he found that the After Effects preview speed was faster, but Combustion's renderer was much faster. Overall, he says, "I can't wait for version 3 of Combustion."

Scott Jenkins started off animating by hand, until he discovered the Cubicomp system way back in 1987. He is the author of the upcoming book (digital) Compositing, coming from New Riders in January of 2003.

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Annecy 2002

Through An Artist's Sketchbook

by Don Duga



All artwork © Don Duga.

2002
SKETCH BOOK CONTINUED
BY
Don Duga

Don Duga visited the Annecy International Film Festival and Market in Annecy, France from Monday, June 3 through Saturday, June 8, 2002, sketchbook in hand, of course. From parties to walks along the lake to chance meetings with people, Don recorded his experience visually. Peek inside a professional artist's sketchbook and take in glimpses of Annecy, care of Mr. Duga's experienced hand and eye as he continues on from 2001. To see the complete gallery of his images for 2002, as well as 2001 visit us online at <http://mag.awn.com>.

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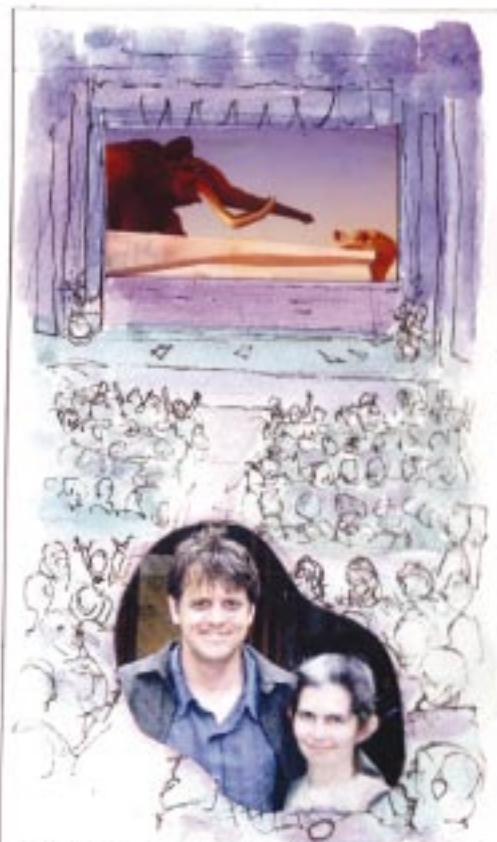
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BACK HOME

Don Duga is an animator, director and producer of animation. From UPA to Rankin/Bass to commercials to Sesame Street to feature films, he is an industry veteran. He has storyboarded such classics as Mr. Magoo, Underdog, The Last Unicorn, Frosty the Snow Man, Mad Monster Party, Wind in the Willows and more. He is also the co-founder of Polestar Films in New York, and has been an instructor of animation at The School of Visual Arts in New York City since 1962.

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Fax: 33 (0)1 41 90 45 70
tsales@reedmidem.com

USA

Reed Midem
Arthur Schweitzer
Senior Vice President
Barney Bernhard
Senior Consultant
125 Park Avenue, 24th Floor
New York, NY 10017
Tel: 1 (212) 370 7470
Fax: 1 (212) 370 7471
mipcomusa@reedmidem.com

UK/AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND

Reed Midem
Peter Rhodes: Managing Director
Walmar House, 290 Regent Street
London W1B 3AB
Tel: 44 (0)20 7528 0086
Fax: 44 (0)20 7595 0949
peter.rhodes@reedmidem.com

JAPAN

Reed Midem
Ilyo Ono: Representative
Iryo Building 2F
4-13-16, Ginza Chuo-Ku
Tokyo 104
Tel: 81 (3) 3542 3114
Fax: 81 (3) 3542 3115
ilyo.ono@reedmidem.co.jp

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Svankmajer E & J: M o u t h t o M o u t h

by Clare Kitson

When Annecy Castle was suggested to Jan and Eva Svankmajer as the venue for their exhibition, they must have been delighted. For Gothic castles, cellars and dungeons are everywhere in their work. Jan probably felt a frisson of horror as well, for he has a fear of the dark, of enclosed underground spaces, dating back to his childhood. It is an obsession with him. That is why the underground proliferates in his films.

translator for the book accompanying it, and started the research needed for this job, that I finally realised I had glimpsed no more than the tip of a giant iceberg.



Jan Svankmajer works in various media, including sculpture, seen here in *Mes chaussures préférées*, 2001.

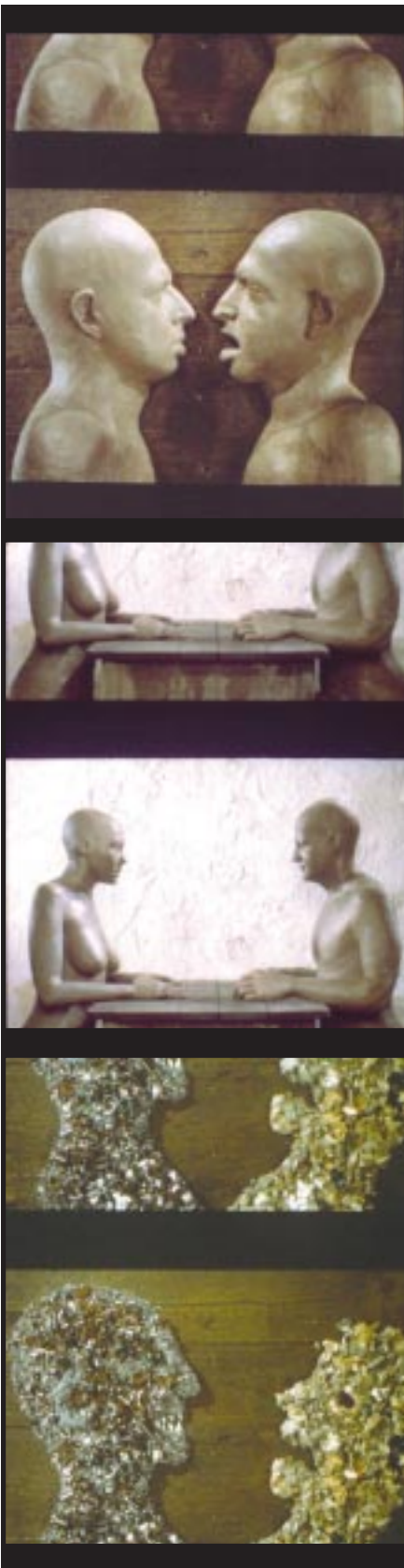


Sardonic humor, inventiveness and a sense of horror are hallmarks of Jan and Eva Svankmajer's work as demonstrated here in the film *Conspirators of Pleasure*, 1996.

Like most people, I came to this body of work via Jan Svankmajer's films. I loved them for their sardonic humour, their cruelty, their inventiveness. I even, in my role as commissioning editor for animation at Channel 4, put some money into one of them (*Food*, 1992). (My predecessor there had, likewise, invested in *Alice*, in 1987.) But it was not until I became — tenuously — involved with the current exhibition, as

Many Forms

To start with, the films may be the most visible part of his oeuvre, but this man also sculpts, paints, engraves, pots... He has even built masturbation machines. All this work links into his films. And, what is more, he is not alone. Unknown to most of us, his artist wife, well known in surrealist circles, is by his side and she also sculpts, paints, engraves, pots, writes poetry and even a novel... Both artists have individual talents and individual obsessions, but they have lived and worked together since 1960 and have affected each other's creations



Mind Games: Three different scenes from the film *Dimensions of Dialogue*, which won the Annecy Grand Prix in 1990. All images © Athanor.

massively. They also make art works together, and Eva very often participates in Jan's films, as designer, animator or puppet-maker. Her main inputs into the mix? Probably a certain playfulness; sometimes a biting, satirical humour; and a savage eroticism, often with a feminist slant. A love of folk-art also informs her work and sometimes slips, via her, into Jan's. (Notably, the wonderful animated storybook illustrations in *Otesánek*.)



Eva Svankmajer's illustration for the film *Otesánek* combines her own unique sense of eroticism, feminism, humor and folk art.

But there are other inputs too, and before looking at the exhibition itself, it is probably worth noting what these are. Mannerism is an important influence, especially on Jan, and especially in his early work, but continuing through to the present day. The Habsburg Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612) ruled his empire from Prague and assembled there a glittering team of artists and craftsmen, notably the painter Arcimboldo. Jan was aware of this heritage from his earliest youth. As well as Arcimboldo's idiosyncratic paintings (he is known for his portraits constructed of fruits and vegetables), Svankmajer was familiar with the 'curiosity cabinets' in Prague Castle, a 17th Century speciality,

in which all manner of art works and natural history exhibits were carefully assembled into display cabinets.



Influenced by the 17th Century "curiosity cabinets," Jan Svankmajer created *Natural History Cabinets* in 1973.

The surrealist movement is another major factor in both artists' work. Jan joined the Prague surrealists in the late 1960s, while Russian tanks were rolling into Prague, and this new affiliation marked a definite progression in his film style. From the earlier engravings, knick-knacks, Gothic concerns as seen in *J.S. Bach: Fantasy in G Minor* (1965) or *Historia Naturae* (1967), there is a move into a greater surface realism and a greater use of live-action, with surrealist jokes inserted into these realistic settings. There is also the surrealist concept of 'communicating vessels,' which maintains that dreaming and waking are two, equally important, sides of the same existence. His latter films manifest a greater element of dream, culminating in the quintessential surrealist dream film, *Alice*. Eva, for her part, was discovered by the international surrealists in 1970. She was surprised to learn that not only was she already a surrealist painter, but she was hailed as a 'medium' — one who has paranormal powers. (Though 'mediums' in the surrealist sense of the

word, do not claim contact with the dead.)

The final major influence was tactilism, the belief that touch is the oldest and most important of the senses and should be encouraged in us, and re-trained. This is another great passion of the surrealists and especially of Svankmajer, who was banned from making films from 1973 to 1980, and spent a great deal of this time researching and documenting tactilism as well as constructing tactile sculptures.



Jan Svankmajer sets up a shot for the film *Alice* in 1987.

Into The Castle

As you walk round the exhibition, these factors leap out at you via familiar motifs and ideas that pervade art works in all media, film sets and the screens showing film extracts.

The first section deals with the complex relationship between the two artists, and the first exhibit to catch my eye was Jan's *Tactile Portrait of ES*, made in 1977 when he was prevented from making films. Stuck over the face of a photograph of, presumably, Eva, a black fabric sleeve hangs down, and we are invited to feel inside this sleeve. This portrait of his wife includes a soft, downy section, a smooth, slippery surface with a cold, metal spike sticking out of it, numerous other elements until, finally, in the lower left-hand cor-

ner, "a ladies' stocking filled with crumpled tin foil, clothes pegs and largish pieces of pounded glass which force you to leave the tactile portrait of ES forthwith, taking with you the feeling that you have been hurt."



When he was banned from making films, Jan Svankmajer turned to creating tactile sculptures. He continued the art form in 2000 with *Éruption examthème*.

More harmonious testimony regarding their relationship is provided by a series of lithographs in the *Cadavre exquis* series. *Cadavre exquis* was a game much loved by André Breton and the French surrealists, who would each take a turn in progressing either a drawing or a sentence, but with the preceding elements folded over and therefore invisible. The name of the game comes from one of their early efforts, which produced the sentence that translates as, "The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine." Eva and Jan's products seem far more in tune. Despite their use of entirely different styles and even different media in their respective parts of the lithographs, these works

achieve an overall coherence, a humorous tone and a highly erotic punch.

Playfulness, humour and eroticism are evident in many artworks, by both artists. Eva, as a child, loved rebuses (puzzles which combine letters and pictures to express a word or sentence) and she has done a whole series of paintings in this form. Other of her paintings manifest a similar jokiness, such as the old country-style cupboard, which she has decorated, inside and out, with some extremely graphic sexual acrobatics. Many of her comic paintings have a distinctly feminist tone. *The Birth of Venus* (1968) has a bearded man rising naked from the shell in a parody of Botticelli's famous work, while *The Female Regiment on the Obstacle Course* (also 1968) has a phalanx of very large, Rubensesque naked women draped over the kind of obstacles that soldiers make such light work of.



Eva Svankmajer displays her offbeat sense of humor in *L'armoire catalogue des meubles* (2000), in which she updates an old country-style cupboard with sexual images.

One of her more sly jokes can be seen in the design of the Queen of Hearts, which Eva painted for the film *Alice* — for she has given the wicked Queen her own face.



The film *Alice* features paintings by Eva Svankmajer.

Meanwhile Jan, not to be outdone, has been scrabbling in the archives to find engravings, photographs and maps ripe for some kind of intervention on his part. Thus, chastely but pertinently, he has added a set of teeth and gums to a map of *Prussia* (1973). Far more mischievously, he has juxtaposed a set of (I think) 17th Century erotic engravings, depicting groups of naked people using ingenious props and formations in the service of sexual pleasure, with not dissimilar (at first glance) photographs of near-naked men in similarly close and unusual formations, presumably proponents of the Nazi health cult, and has entitled this *Physical Education in the Service of Eroticism and Militarism* (1976).

Streams of Influence

The couples penchant for eroticism and humour, together with Jan's studies of tactilism, came together most startlingly in the feature film *Conspirators of Pleasure* (1996), which merits a whole room in the Annecy exhibition. We see the life-size puppets of Mr. Pivonka and Mrs. Loubalová, and

the actual masturbation machine used in the film, incorporating a television screen for visual stimuli and two pairs of arms able to administer a whole range of sensations to the person sitting at the machine. But most intriguing to me (and what could that say about me?) were the wide assortment of gadgets used as stimulators in this film, things like rolling pins with different kinds of brushes and nails attached to them.



Props from the 1996 film *Conspirators of Pleasure* were featured at the Svankmajer exhibition at the Annecy Festival.

Another stream of work could be said to derive from the mannerist tradition and the curiosity cabinets. Yet, this being the Svankmajers, the art works are often at the same time shot through with varying doses of humour, eroticism and surrealism too. During the '70s, Svankmajer produced various series of art works related to natural history, on the basis that "if the environmental catastrophe we are now experiencing means that dozens of ani-

mal species die each year, there is nothing for it but for the imagination to replace them with others." Svank-meyers *Bilderlexikon* and the *Natural History* tab. group are two series of very authentic-looking, seemingly 18th Century engravings of the most extraordinary creatures, perhaps the most magnificent of which is the *Coy Longtail*, whose enormous tail transforms into a penis for the purpose of mating. Mating, incidentally, is done back-to-back, earning the creature his 'coy' epithet. The *Natural History Cabinets*, also made in the '70s, are the 3-dimensional equivalents. Perhaps the most striking representative of this genre is *Copulating Agates* (1994), which features two lumps of agate in a display case, which have been furnished with all the human limbs needed to copulate (no heads, though), and are about to give it a try.

And then there is Arcimboldo. There are various tributes to this mannerist artist, one of the most striking early examples being Jan's painting *Vertumnus and Mona Lisa* (1978). *Vertumnus* wears a suit and, being the god of fruits and vegetables, could not object to a face composed of grapes, mushrooms, etc. *Mona Lisa* comes off worse, her whole face comprising fish of various kinds. But Svankmajer's best-known Arcimboldo-inspired work is of course the wonderful film *Dimensions of Dialogue* (which took the Annecy Grand Prix in 1990). Open to various interpretations, it is obvious that these two heads are at war with each other. In the first section it is the materials making up the head that determine the winner at each stage of the battle. Thus metal objects flatten vege-

tables, vegetables manage to destroy paper elements, etc. But in the end all are levelled to a sorry mush.



In the end, head wars turn into mush in the film *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982).

Surrealism, too, is everywhere; in the grotesque humour of *Otesánek* (the strikingly realistic — in some aspects — tale of a childless woman who in desperation showers her love on a lump of wood, which duly comes to life and starts devouring the neighbours), in the dream life of *Alice*, and in the omnipresence of the ancient art of alchemy. It was a 17th Century book of alchemy that inspired Eva's strange series, the *Mutus Liber* (1997), paintings one could happily study for many hours in an attempt to solve their multiple mysteries. Alchemy is also the subject of the *pièce de résistance* of the whole exhibition, a magnificent set from Jan's feature, *Faust*, featuring life-size puppets of Faust and Mephistopheles and smaller ones of the devil and an angel, in an alchemist's kitchen.



Mother's milk works miracles for a lump of wood in the surrealistic film *Otesánek*.

The surrealists are equally enthusiastic about found objects, things taken from nature, which in the context of an art work seem to take on a life of their own. The *Copulating Agates* would fall into this category, as would many of the elements making up the bizarre specimens of wildlife found in Jan's zoological display cabinets. A further surrealist speciality is the concept of the

artist as medium and Jan and Eva have both in recent years produced 'mediumistic' drawings, in which the artist endeavours to draw as an automaton, with no conscious thought guiding his hand. The exhibition includes several such brightly-patterned drawings by Jan.



Alchemy and mystery abound in Jan Svankmajer's 1994 film *Faust*.

There is lots more of note in this wonderful exhibition, but I have exhausted my allocated wordage, and more. Of course, reading a review is no substitute for seeing the exhibition in person. Which you can still do, at the Annecy Castle Museum (Musée-Château d'Annecy) until September 30th and thereafter, from October 30th until January 5th next year at the Institut International de la Marionnette at Charleville-Mézières.

A List of Eleven

But, in finishing, for those who fail to make it to France for the exhibition, here are a few selections from the master's insights, which, in the form of Ten Commandments, are strategically displayed around the exhibition:

Across all the arts there is only one poetry. The antithesis is professional expertise.

Succumb totally to your obsessions.

Animation is not about moving inert objects but about giving them life. [Hence the kiss of life reference in the title of the exhibition.]

Keep changing dream for reality and vice versa. There are no logical bridges.

The deeper you go into a fantastic plot the more you have to be realistic in detail.

Choose themes toward which you feel ambivalent.

He adds, incidentally, as an eleventh commandment: All rules are there to be broken (!) — except this one: Never allow your art to pass into the service of anything but freedom.

Quote from Anima Animus Animation by Evasvankmajerjan. Prague: Slovart Publishers, Ltd. and Arbor Vitae - Foundation for Literature and Visual Arts, 1997. 184 pages. ISBN: 80-901964-4-6. (hardback US\$55)

Clare Kitson wandered into animation by accident very many years ago. A brief spell programming animation at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art was a signal to stop bluffing get on a steep learning curve. Which finally brought her to Channel 4 TV, where she commissioned animation for ten years until 1999. She is now a freelance animation consultant and translator.

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.

Excel Saga. V.1, The WEIRDNESS Has Begun. V.2, Missions Improbable. V.3, When Excels Strike (Out). V.4 & V.5, titles to come.

TV series (25 episodes), 1999-2000. Chief director: Shinichi Watanabe. V.1-5, 5 episodes/125 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: ADV Films.

Excel Saga (*Quack Experimental Anime*, *Excel Saga* if you add the subtitle, which comes before the main title in Japanese and plays havoc with alphabetization in English) has been a hit in a fannish subtitled bootleg video version among American anime fandom almost since its 25-episode TV run in Japan (October 7, 1999 to March 31, 2000) ended. The first pressing of ADV's



Excel Saga. © 1999 Koshi Rikdo / Shonen Gahosha * Victor Entertainment. English language and subtitled versions © Victor Entertainment.

licensed American DVD volume 1 was one of the hottest sellers at the 15,000+ attendee Anime Expo 2002 convention in July of this year.

Anime has produced some wildly bizarre adolescent comedies in the past. The goal of *Excel Saga* was to top them all. It has barely more plot than *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, and an adolescent raunch level about equal to *Beavis and Butt-head* or *Ren & Stimpy*. (ADV's age advisory is 17+.) The deliberately surrealistic plot provided many opportunities for equally crazy limited animation (by the J.C. Staff studio), such as a crowd scene in which only the main characters are fully drawn; all the background characters passing by are crude paper dolls.

There are some vaguely interlocking subplots. Excel, a hyperactive blonde so irritatingly

airheaded that she is killed three times in the first ten minutes of the first episode, has just graduated from high school and gotten her first job. She is a secret agent for ACROSS, a two-person totalitarian organization dedicated to forcibly improving the world. Her first assignment is to rid the world of all comic book artists, beginning with assassinating her own creator, cartoonist Koshi Rikdo (who appears in a barely-human self-caricature singing, "Manga artists are the scum of society, failures of life..."). Earth is invaded by disgustingly cute Martians (so cute they make everyone puke) who parody Pokemon-type plush toys. An immigrant laborer, Pedro, is trying to get home to his wife before Gomez seduces her. The unpaid Excel, who is usually starving, captures a cute little dog, Menchi, to dine on. Menchi is the only character who has any apparent intelligence, and her desperate attempts to escape Excel have made her a favorite. (Menchi barks the program's closing credits song, a blues lament asking to not be eaten.) An ultra-cool action hero, NABESHIN (director Watanabe SHINichi's exaggeratedly egotistical self-caricature, drawn like *Cowboy Bebop's* Spike Spiegel wearing *Lupin III's* distinctive suit) races around the world and into outer space saving the world. These and other regulars constantly run into each other and foul up whatever each is trying to accomplish in that episode. Each episode is also a parody of a movie/TV genre (sci-fi spectacle; jungle commando warfare bloody action; TV dating game silliness; political corruption social-commentary drama; family intelligent-pet adventures) with "guest appearance" caricatures of anime icons like Leiji Matsumoto's Maetel. Like *South Park*, *Excel*

Saga is a guilty pleasure that you can't resist!



GTO. © Tohru Fujisawa * KODANSHA * FUJI TV * SME Visual Works * ST. PIERRROT. English language version © 2002 Mixx Entertainment, Inc. TOKYOPOP is a registered trademark of Mixx Entertainment, Inc. All rights reserved.

GTO. V.1, Great Teacher Onizuka. V.2, The Bully. V.3, Outcasts. V.4, The Test. V.5, Betrayal. V.6-V.9, titles to come. TV series (43 episodes), 1999-2000. Executive (series) director: Noriyuki Abe. V.1, 4 episodes (episode 1 is 50 minutes)/125 minutes, V.2-V.9, 5 episodes/125 minutes. Price & format: video dubbed \$19.98; DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: TOKYOPOP.

GTO, a.k.a. Great Teacher Onizuka, is one of those lucky pop-culture works to become an instant media sensation. It began as an "outrageous" comedy/romance manga for older adolescents and adults by Tohru Fujisawa in 1997, serialized in Kodansha's *Weekly Shonen Magazine*. The next summer it became a weekly 12-episode live-action late-night

one-hour dramatic serial on Fuji TV (July 7 - September 22, 1998), starring heartthrob Takashi Sorimachi as the charismatic young teacher who wins over his class of teen delinquents. The final episode got a rating of 35.7%, which TOKYOPOP's publicity says "was the most watched TV program ever in Japan." A two-hour TV movie followed in August, 1999, and a theatrical movie in January, 2000. (Fujisawa's *GTO* comic-book serial has just concluded. It is collected into 25 paperback volumes in Japan, which are being published in America by TOKYOPOP.)

Meanwhile, Fuji TV was rushing a TV animated series into production for Summer 1999, co-produced by Studio Pierrot and SME Visual Works. It premiered as a one-hour TV movie on June 30, 1999, then continued for 42 more half-hour episodes until September 30, 2000. It did not receive the ratings of the live-action version, which had been gentled into a more believable soap opera (dedicated teacher Onizuka charms his troubled students by being such a Nice Guy), but it pleased the manga's fans by being more faithful to the exaggerated and raunchy action (ex-biker Onizuka charms his delinquent students by being a Badder Ass than any of them).

Ekichi Onizuka, a 22 year-old college dropout, realizes that being a biker is a dead-end proposition and he needs a real job. Becoming a school teacher with lots of hot teen chicks in his class sounds cool. But without accreditation, the only position he can get is in a private school, in a class so viciously unruly that no other teacher will take it. Onizuka shocks the uptight other teachers by

treating the students as his pals instead of constantly belittling them. He learns the secrets of their emotional problems and works behind the scenes to correct them. But his unorthodox methods, ranging from taking the guys to girly shows to beating the crap out of bullies (all wish-fulfillment fantasies for both students and teachers), keep him constantly on the verge of being fired by the PTA and similar constipated do-gooder groups.

Cartoonist Fujisawa has an ugly, warts-and-all art style, featuring lots of close-ups of exaggeratedly grimacing faces with bursting blood vessels. The animation dwells on these, and on making a virtue of such limited effects as vehicles that drive by without their wheels moving. An aspect of the exaggerated teen delinquency which Onizuka must overcome (making *GTO* rated for 16+) is that he is supposed to be teaching a junior high class. But they are drawn as 17 and 18 year-olds, and are into heavy smoking, S&M fetishism, pornography and other vices. A shy girl embarrassed by her F-cup breasts, which her classmates make fun of, is supposed to be a 14 year-old. Fujisawa/Onizuka's comedic parodies acknowledge real adolescent problems and fears that are usually not mentioned in public, showing that they are no longer laughable when someone is being emotionally or physically hurt.

Project A-ko.

Theatrical feature, 1986. Director: Katsuhiko Nishijima. 86 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.99. Distributor: U.S. Manga Corps/Central Park Media.

"This anime classic is now remastered!" The American anime



© 1986 Soeishinsha/Final-Nishijima.

industry is now old enough that early releases are being re-released. *Project A-ko* (the screen actually shows the title as *Project "A"ko*) is a genuine classic; one of the early productions actually intended for the new home video market but given a limited theatrical release first, on June 21, 1986. Director/co-author Nishijima and character designer/animation director Yuji Moriyama had been turning out humorous sci-fi soft-core pornography for the home video market. Reportedly they realized that *Project A-ko* (inspired by the Jackie Chan martial-arts comedy *Project A*) had the potential to be more than that, and persuaded their bosses to turn it into a general release movie. It put them and animation studio A.P.P.P. Co., Ltd. into the ranks of serious animation producers, and launched a mini-franchise of five direct to video sequels and a comic book. The six anime titles were among Central Park Media's first American releases, with *Project A-ko* coming out as a subtitled laser disc on July 5, 1991 and video on January 22, 1992, and a dubbed video on January 6, 1993. Image Entertainment released it on DVD on July 6,

1999, but without all the extras on CPM's newly remastered August 13, 2002 release. CPM also has a *Project A-ko DVD Collection* of all six anime titles for \$89.99.

Project A-ko starts with a prologue implying a serious sci-fi drama, then switches to one of anime's first wacky teen comedies. A meteor strikes the Earth, destroying a Japanese city. The opportunity is taken to rebuild it as a perfectly planned community. 16 years later, Graviton City is a lovely futuristic metropolis. Teenagers A-ko and C-ko, best friends, are transferring to a new all-girls' high school. B-ko, the rich, snobbish leader of the school's elite clique, decides that she will win C-ko's friendship for herself. This contest of schoolgirl rivalry is escalated to ridiculous heights because A-ko is an American-style super-heroine, while B-ko uses Daddy's wealth to build herself the ultimate battle-action giant robot. Part of the joke is that the audience cannot understand why either would want the whiny, empty-headed C-ko. Meanwhile, it turns out that the earlier meteor was actually an alien spaceship. The aliens come looking for it and start to conquer Graviton City. (This is a parody of *Macross*; just one of a fast-paced barrage of anime parodies — *Captain Harlock*, *Harmageddon*, *Fist of the North Star*, etc. — that have fans blind with laughter by this point.) The aliens' battle mecha and the Home Defense Force's armor are blindsided by A-ko's and B-ko's super-catfight. Beautiful Graviton City is progressively demolished as the free-for-all spreads throughout the city, each false climax being topped by a greater, to the chipper, bubblegum background score by American pop songwriters Richie

Zito and Joey Carbone. If you have not seen *Project A-ko* yet, do not miss this release.

Spriggan.

Theatrical feature, 1998. General supervisor: Katsuhiro Otomo; Director: Hirotugu Kawasaki. 90 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: ADV Films.

Although the visually impressive *Spriggan* theatrical feature (with animation by Studio 4°C; released September 5, 1998) is based upon a manga by Hiroshi Takashige & Ryoji Minagawa (being published in America under the title *Striker* by Viz Communications), it looks and feels like a work by its general supervisor Katsuhiro Otomo, the creator/director of the classic *Akira*. Major elements, notably the ruthless experimentation upon children to create mutant superman under the government's control, and the mutants being led by an adult mind in a blue-skinned child's body, are right out of *Akira*. So is the character art style and the direction, although the credits list



Spriggan. © MCMXCVIII Hiroshi Takashige-Ryoji Minagawa/Shogakukan-Bandai Visual - TBS- Toho. English language version © 2001 Toho International.

others as director and character designer.

If *Spriggan* comes across as an "Akira Lite," that is the fault of its plot which is "comic bookish" in the worst sense of that term. The simplistic sci-fi premise is that Earth was originally the home of a mighty civilization which destroyed itself through super-scientific warfare. Legends such as the sinking of Atlantis are the only remnant of this. A United Nations-like organization, ARCAM, has been suppressing any archaeological finds of this dangerous super-technology. ARCAM accomplishes this through a worldwide net of secret agents, The Spriggan, whose most accomplished operative is 17-year-old Ominae Yu who leads a cover life as an ordinary Japanese high school student. ARCAM's rival is the U.S. Pentagon, whose generals want to gain the lost technology to establish American world supremacy. The Pentagon has created the "U.S. Machine Corps," a secret army of cyborg commando saboteurs (their training graduation assignment is to be sent to slaughter an entire village in some minor country) to wipe out ARCAM's scientific research teams and steal the caches of super-technology. There is no discernable difference between these "six million dollar man" enhanced sadistic killers and Marvel Comics' mutant super-villains. They even have comic-bookish costumes and names like Fat Man and Little Boy (which were the actual U.S. code names for the two nuclear bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945).

In the *Spriggan* manga sequence used for this movie, ARCAM finds that the real Noah's Ark buried atop Mount Ararat in Turkey is a spaceship filled with

weather control technology. This is established in about the first five minutes of the movie. The rest is a non-stop battle-action film fest, switching at breakneck speed from military commando firefights to individual secret agent combat duels to sci-fi hero vs. planet-destroying-super-technology-running-amok suspense. The quality of the direction and animation is top-notch. Animation students will appreciate *Spriggan*, as will anyone who enjoys action movies with stars like Arnold or Sly or Bruce blasting their way through hordes of cannon-fodder, without worrying about plot holes.

Armitage: Dual-Matrix.

Animated feature, 2002. Director: Katsuhito Akiyama. 90 minutes.



Armitage: Dual-Matrix. © AIC/Pioneer LDC, Inc. © Pioneer Entertainment (USA) Inc.

Price & format: DVD bilingual feature only \$19.98/"Special Edition" DVD including *Assembling Armitage* "making of" featurette, 16-page booklet & other extras \$29.98/"Special Edition" plus limited edition collectable action figure, lunchbox, other bonus extras \$69.98. Distributor: Pioneer Entertainment.

Hiroyuki Ochi, the director/author/character designer of the 1994 *Armitage III* direct-to-video short serial, stated that he was a fan of Philip K. Dick's sci-fi and this was his tribute to it. Most fans agreed that it was an excellent futuristic thriller, with obvious overtones of such movies as *Blade Runner* and *Total Recall* based on Dick's novels but with enough originality to stand on its own. Ross Syllabus, a Chicago policeman in 2179 A.D., is reassigned to human-colonized Mars to help fight murders and vandalism associated with both a movement for independence from Earth, and anti-robot prejudice caused by crude mechanical laborers taking jobs away from humans. When it is discovered that there is an unsuspected improved android that is indistinguishable from people, and that Ross' new cop partner Naomi Armitage is one of these Class III's, the two must team up to learn who is infiltrating these androids into human leadership positions and why; and Armitage must prove that she has free will and is a person rather than someone's programmed puppet. *Armitage III* was of high enough story and production quality that it was edited into a theatrical feature, *Armitage III: Poly-Matrix*, which was released in America in August 1997 with Kiefer Sutherland and Elizabeth Berkley voicing the principal roles.

It was a film-festival favorite for a couple of years.

Armitage: Dual-Matrix was finished in time to be shown last October 31st at the 2001 Tokyo Fantastic Film Festival, but it was not released until June 25, 2002, when its "World Premiere" on the American pay-per-view CinemaNow.com TV channel coincided with its DVD release. *Dual-Matrix* matches the high quality of *Poly-Matrix*. The only problem is that the story follows it so closely that it is Part 2 of a two-part serial. Viewers need to see *Poly-Matrix* first to know who such supporting characters as the ghostly Julian are.

Six years after the events in *Poly-Matrix*, Ross and Armitage are living on Mars under assumed names, and have a daughter, Yoko. (How Class III androids are

able to have children by humans is a key plot element of the first movie.) News reports of anti-human violence on Earth by Martian-manufactured Seconds (the cruder, obvious robots) threaten to revive anti-robot prejudice and demands for greater Earth governmental control over the Martian colony. A crude linkage between electronic minds leads Armitage to believe that Earth's robots are the victims rather than the instigators of violence. She and Ross suspect that some power clique is using the robots as scapegoats in a plot to control public opinion. Most of the movie is excellently-choreographed high-tech urban commando action by Armitage and Ross against the would-be secret controller of Earth's military/industrial complex, with six-year-old Yoko as a hostage

who must be rescued from the villain's lair. Fans of *Armitage III: Poly-Matrix* will not be disappointed.

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

He wrote the liner notes for Rhino Entertainment's The Best of Anime music CD (1998), and he was a contributor to The World Encyclopedia of Cartoons, 2nd Edition, ed. by Maurice Horn (1999) and Animation in Asia and the Pacific, ed. by John A. Lent (2001).

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

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:

Was Walt Disney A Saint, An Evil Sinner Or The Devil Incarnate? The Truth About Some Of Those Nasty Disney Stories!

Some rumors regarding Walt Disney have lived on far too long. Was he a Nazi? A super-secret FBI agent? Is he frozen somewhere in a vault? And why does the Christian right hate his company so much? Karl F. Cohen takes on all these myths and more to set the record straight. See actual FBI reports comparing Marc Eliot's version of the events of August 22, 1944 online at:
http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?type=pageone&article_no=1439.

Fresh from the Festivals: July 2002's Film Reviews

Maureen Furniss reviews five short films fresh from the festival circuit: *Airship* by Sam Yousefian, *King Tangun* by Jun Eun Lee, Nina Paley's *The Stork*, *Drunky* by Aaron Augenblick and Billy Greene's *Thought Bubble*. To see QuickTime movie clips go to:
http://mag.awn.com/index.php3?type=search&sval=fresh&article_no=1435.

Red-Hot Jazz = Red Menace?!

In these post-9/11 days when the U.S. government is assuming greater surveillance powers for national safety, it may be instructive to look back at how fear of foreign threats affected the animation industry fifty years ago... Gene Deitch's entire book, *How To Succeed In Animation (Don't Let A Little Thing Like Failure Stop You!)* is also available online exclusively through AWN at: <http://genedeitch.awn.com>.

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:

Airship (USA, 2002). 4 min. Dir: Sam Yousefian (Iran/USA). Music: Michael Sean Colin. Produced at the University of Southern California. Contact: Sam Yousefian, tel: +1-310-777-0189.

King Tangun (USA, 2000). 6.5 min. Dir/Anim: Jun Eun Lee (Korea). Music: Michael Colin. Produced at the University of Southern California. Contact: Jung Eun Lee, email: yijungeun@hotmail.com; or Sandrine Cassidy (distributor), 850 W. 34th St. G132, Los Angeles, CA 90089, USA; tel: +1-213-740-4422; email: Cassidy@cinema.usc.edu.

The Stork (USA, 2002). 3 min. Dir: Nina Paley (USA). Music: Edvard Grieg. Produced at Parasite Pictures. Contact: Nina Paley, P.O. Box 460736, San Francisco, CA 94146, USA. URL: www.ninapaley.com/parasite.html.

Drunky (USA, 2001). 3 min. Dir: Aaron Augenblick (USA). Music: Bradford Reed (USA).

Fresh from the Festivals:

July 2002's Film Reviews

by Maureen Furniss



Airship. © Sam Yousefian, 2002.

Produced at Augenblick Studios, Inc. Contact: AugenblickStudios, 55 Washington Street #805, Brooklyn, NY 11201, USA. Tel: +1-718-855-9226. Fax: +1-718-855-9227. E-mail: info@augenblickstudios.com. URL: www.AugenblickStudios.com.

Thought Bubble (USA, 2001). 4 min. Dir: Billy Greene (USA). Photography: Jean Margaret Thomas. Produced independently at Will Vinton Studios. Contact: Jean Margaret Thomas, e-mail: girl-spark1@excite.com or Karen Davis, e-mail: magren@mymailstation.com.

Airship

In director Sam Yousefian's graduate film, *Airship*, created at

the University of Southern California, a child drifts to sleep and dreams that his bed becomes airborne, gliding him through the starry night sky. It seems that a conventional ending closes the adventure, as he wakes up to go to school. However, Yousefian adds two small plot twists in the remaining moments of the film to make the concept magical and the story more fulfilling. The result is a well-developed film that explores an experience and state of mind in some depth, without the use of words, and yet with a clear sense of story development.

Ultimately, I think it is more difficult to build a film around a theme rather than action, particularly at the student level. Yousefian has shown his ability to maintain a

thematic focus throughout the four-minute work, as well as restraint, holding back from an often powerful temptation to fill a film with a lot of movement. Aiding in the development of the film is a lovely soundtrack by Michael Sean Colin, which contributes a dreamy sensibility to the film. Yousefian's choices in designing the look of the film also add to its soft dream-like reality. *Airship* was created using 3D Studio Max for animation, Painter 6 for coloring, and After Effects for compositing. In order to create his soft images, the director did not render them in 3D, but instead made lighting and coloring decisions when he was painting over the images. Hazy effects were created with the 'chalk' tool in Painter, resulting in a look that is almost like pastels. The main character is made with a much more solid line, which sometimes makes him a bit too stiff-looking and unemotional within his environment; I don't think the character is as expressive as he might be. Still, the film has a nice look overall.

King Tangun

Also from the University of Southern California comes another contemplative work, this time by Korean director Jun Eun Lee. An accomplished artist, Lee has shown her painting work in three solo shows, in addition to over fifty group shows throughout the world. In her graduate thesis film at USC, *King Tangun*, Lee tells a story from Korean mythology about the first king in Korea. Using cutouts and drawings, she depicts a bear and a tiger who pray to Holy Hwanung to be turned into human beings. Only the bear persists in fulfilling the requirements to stay in a cave for a hundred days,

eating garlic; she is turned into a woman who later gives birth to the child who would become Korea's first king.



King Tangun. © Jung Eun Lee, 2000

The film's dialogue (in English) is limited to voiceover and it is not the strongest element of the film; by far the majority of the work is accompanied only by music, which is a good decision. The film is slow-paced and employs a limited animation technique, but these work well with the subject matter. The bear and tiger characters are stylized in such a way that they are endearing and it is a pleasure to watch them. Like *Airship*, the movement in the film is artfully restrained. Also like *Airship*, this film imparts feeling even more than content; anyone unfamiliar with the Korean myth might have trouble understanding

exactly what is going on. Nonetheless, the film is captivating, and I watched its gentle characters with pleasure. Clearly, others have as well. *King Tangun* has done well in festivals, earning a Special Prize for Children in Dong-A.LG International Festival of Animation, in Korea, and being selected for screenings in The World Animation Celebration (USA), the Ashland Film Festival (USA), the Sprockets Toronto International Film Festival for Children (Canada), the 42nd International Film Festival for Children and Youth (Czech Republic), and others.

The Stork

One might expect a similarly warm and soft film from the opening moments of *The Stork*, as we see the bird carrying its 'bundle of joy' — a baby on its way to its new home. Suddenly, though, not one but several, then hundreds of storks fill the sky, dropping their 'bombs' into the unsuspecting natural environment. The bundles explode in a 'baby boom' (as director Nina Paley describes it), resulting in row after row of identical tract homes, SUVs and



The Stork. © Nina Paley, 2002

beautiful, smiling suburban family members — mothers, fathers, and — of course — chubby, charming babies.

Paley explains that she was motivated to make the film because she is passionate about the cause of population control; indeed, the Internet's "Cruel Site of the Day" describes her as probably "the world's worst person to invite to a baby shower." But her film is effective, largely because she carefully controls the tone of the work. While Edvard Grieg's "Morning" provides a pastoral feeling to the film, Paley counters with visuals showing not only the destruction of the Disneyfied animated habitat but also more realistic-looking images of sprawling cities obtained with aerial photography.

Paley describes herself as self-taught, saying she began to animate in 1998. For this project, she employed Flash, Photoshop and Final Cut Pro. Paley intends to develop her 'animated documentary' into a longer project titled "Thank You for Not Breeding," for which she is fundraising. More information is available on the web at: www.nina-paley.com/parasite.html.

Drunky

In contrast to Paley's film, there is no soft side to *Drunky*, an aptly-named work and self-described 'dark comedy' that focuses on the alcoholic existence of a little man who has trouble remembering what he does at night. To give you an idea of the basic scenario of the film, its publicity material describes *Drunky*'s world as "a terrifying place, where the cold metropolitan landscape of seedy bars and dark alleys is populated with sexual predators who prey upon *Drunky*'s igno-



Drunky. © Augenblick Studios, 2001.

rance and naiveté." *Drunky* is subtitled, "In through the Out Door," because *Drunky* ends up in a gay bar on this particular night, finding the bartender — a 'Tuxedo Tiger' character — in his bed the next day. Augenblick hopes to develop this concept into a series (and has recently made an announcement with Film Roman), though at this point I am uncertain as to how far the concept would be modified in that context.

Visually, the film is intriguing. It is filled with strange creatures, many of whom are clearly intended to look like (even more frightening) versions of well-known animated characters. Director Aaron Augenblick explains that he was influenced by the Fleischer studio and other early animations, which he sometimes finds disturbing. He asks, "Does anyone find Betty Boop funny any more? I find her terrifying." Augenblick does a great job of translating the strangeness of some of those early works into his film. However, I think it is less a dark comedy than a commentary on what it means to be alcoholic.

I can chuckle a bit at this guy's experience within the gay bar he stumbles into, with all man-

ner of fancy, fruit-laden drinks presented to him courtesy of others in the bar. But I find a great difference between Betty Boop-like weirdness, with its unpredictable, nightmarish goings-on, and this film, which for me is quite differently disturbing. I admire its style and its authentic creepiness, but the main character bothers me. The reason, I've decided, is that the drunkenness is clearly not a one-night binge (hence the ability to potentially form a series); this character is an alcoholic who is frightened even by himself and cannot find a way out, though he appears to want to. And then he is victimized. Now, I can laugh at frog baseball, death matches between my favorite celebrities, and a lot of other pretty outlandish animated stuff, but there is something a bit too sad, a bit too realistic in this work, underneath its stylized exterior. I can already hear the protests of, 'It's just a cartoon!' coming my way, but for the record, I'm not convinced this is a comedy of any sort. As a one-shot, I'd say this is a memorable film; it's when I start thinking 'series' that I get uneasy.

Augenblick has extensive industry experience, having worked for MTV on such television

series as *Daria*, *Cartoon Sushi* and *Downtown*, and having been involved with virtually every aspect of the animation process during his career. He now has his own company, Augenblick Studios Inc., in Brooklyn, New York, and produces animation for such clients as PBS, MTV, Nickelodeon and the Cartoon Network. The writer/animator of *Drunky*, Frank Suarez, brings his own great expertise to the film, with a wide range of studio experience, including numerous credits on features, commercials and television series. Bradford Reed provides music, using an instrument of his own design called the 'pencilina,' described as "an electric ten stringed collision of the hammer dulcimer, slide guitar, koto and fretless bass with six pickups of varied types," which can be struck with sticks, plucked or bowed.

Thought Bubble

In the stop-motion film *Thought Bubble*, director Billy Greene also takes a look at a down-and-out alcoholic, though without even a hint of comedy, dark or otherwise. This film depicts a clay character who lives within a world made of paper — silhouetted characters walk around him, suggesting the world that he apparently will never rejoin. The main character's thoughts and desires formulate themselves as drawings within paper 'thought bubbles' emerging from within him. Particularly effective is a scene in which an attractive figure lures him into a thought bubble with the promise of pleasure; the only thing holding him back is the bottle he clenches in his hand, which cannot be admitted through the bubble's border. As a whole, the film provides a beauti-



Thought Bubble. © Octopus Ink/Billy Greene, 2001

ful example of mixed media animation and clay animated imagery, in particular.

Greene played in several bands, including a 40-piece Brazilian percussion group. His love of Brazilian music is clear in his choice to feature the bossa nova guitar throughout his film. Actually, another aspect of Brazilian culture had an even stronger inspiration on the film. The concept of *Thought Bubble* developed after Greene took a trip to Brazil and witnessed firsthand the poverty and homelessness there. Despite these connections to Brazil, the film is not culturally specific; for example, there is no discernable dialogue, only some non-specific grumbling heard at times. The alcoholic in this film is a fairly typical 'drunk type': a middle-aged man, in need of a shave and bath, who apparently lives an impoverished existence, on or near the street, much like the character Drunky. The same type of character is found in *Closed Mondays*, the Academy Award winning clay-animation film by Will Vinton and Bob Gardiner.

In fact, there is another link between *Thought Bubble* and *Closed Mondays*. Greene's skill as

a clay animator was developed in part at the Will Vinton Studio, where he worked as animator on *The PJs* television series. *Thought Bubble* was an independent project produced by Greene and shot at Vinton during off hours. Sadly, in 2001, after he moved from Oregon to San Francisco, Greene was killed in a still-unsolved, apparently random shooting. The film is being distributed in his memory by the film's director of photography, Jean Margaret Thomas, as well as friends and family.

You can view a clip from each film by visiting us online at: <http://www.awn.com>

Maureen Furniss, Ph.D. is founding editor of Animation Journal and author of Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics (1998). She teaches in the Department of Film and Digital Media at Savannah College of Art and Design, in Georgia, and is currently writing a book related to animation production.

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

Inside the Yellow Submarine: The Making of the Beatles' Animated Classic

by Brett Rogers

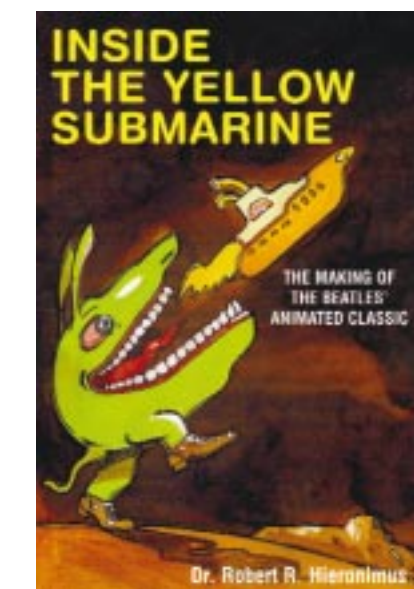
It took nearly 30 years of research, interviewing and compiling to complete, but *Inside the Yellow Submarine* has arrived to set the record straight on the conception and creation of 1968's groundbreaking *Yellow Submarine*. Dr. Robert R. Hieronimus brings to his book a genuine enthusiasm for documenting the circumstances surrounding *Yellow Submarine*'s production and dispelling commonly held misconceptions about the film, like widespread drug use among the animators, Peter Max's influence and the Beatles' contribution to the film.

As Hieronimus wrote in an e-mail to the reviewer, "Getting to the truth from the co-creators was a very long and costly process, but I stuck to it because when I learned that it wasn't The Beatles who created this enduring work of art, I realized that these underappreciated artists deserved to have their story told for posterity."

Like A Diary

The book is written in a unique, absorbing style; largely comprised of accounts from the film's creators in their own words, it reads as if Hieronimus has uncovered a diary kept jointly by all of *Yellow Submarine*'s co-creators to record their experiences.

Though the unusual style sometimes fragments the book, it would have significantly less value



if Hieronimus had fashioned the often contentious and conflicting first-hand accounts into a more conventional format. You're getting the details straight from the mouths of those who brought *Yellow Submarine* from concept to screen, complete with all the conflicting accounts and failing memories of the personality clashes, creative differences, logistical problems and countless other tribulations faced by the film's creators. Hieronimus cleverly organizes the accounts and provides just enough guidance and commentary to allow readers to reach their own conclusions of who among the film's creators were Blue Meanies and who were Pepperlanders.

As such, *Inside the Yellow Submarine* is an indispensable

companion to the movie. One cannot fully appreciate the film until learning the remarkable story behind its creation.

Those frustrated with the power struggles and art-stifling financial oversight that often plague animated productions will take solace in the experiences of TV Cartoons London in creating *Yellow Submarine*. As Hieronimus writes, the book demonstrates that "the creative process is a struggle. Some of your best ideas and work can be lost because of corporate decisions, creative stress, lack of funding and time."

Though scores of voices shout from the book's pages to trumpet their own contributions to the success of *Yellow Submarine*, the genius of designer Heinz Edlmann is undeniable. The book goes to great lengths to ensure that the Czech designer receives proper credit as the "father of *Yellow Submarine* art." Edlmann, who had never worked in animation, was recruited by TV Cartoons to ensure that *Yellow Submarine* broke from the style in which they previously animated the ABC television *Beatletoons*. Though he now views his work on the film as a stifling influence on the rest of his career, the designs Edlmann created are what give *Yellow Submarine* its distinctive style. Without his influence, the film might have ended up looking like, as Paul McCartney wanted, a Disney film.

Behind the Book!

Of course, no *Yellow Submarine* book would be complete without a bit of counter-culture. The author is a self-described "pioneer in the 'New Paradigm' movement," whose nationally syndicated radio talk

show, 21st Century Radio, tackles topics including UFOs, mysticism and the supernatural. He has painted symbolism-rich murals in several high-profile locations, including Johns Hopkins University.

Hieronimus began researching the "symbols, mythologies and related ancient legends" he perceived in *Yellow Submarine* in December 1968. Though the book's publisher, Krause Publications decided to excise the chapters in which he explored the symbolism of *Yellow Submarine*, Hieronimus remains convinced that the hectic pace at which the film's creators worked provides a window into the nature of creativity: "With any great work of art, powerful symbolic imagery can often be identified that was not consciously implied by the artist, writer or

"When I learned that it wasn't The Beatles who created this enduring work of art, I realized that these under appreciated artists deserved to have their story told for posterity."

— Dr. Robert R. Hieronimus

composer. Throughout history great artists have testified to experiencing the creative force flowing through them, and being scarcely conscious of what they were creating until it was done."

Despite the harrowing experiences of the film's creators, *Inside the Yellow Submarine* demonstrates that perseverance and dedication to vision can

result in a finished product that, 34 years later, is still remarkably entertaining.

Inside the Yellow Submarine: The Making of the Beatles' Animated Classic by Dr. Robert R. Hieronimus. Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publications, 2002. 430 pages. ISBN: 0-87349-360-5 (paperback US\$24.95)

Brett Rogers is a freelance writer based in Baltimore.

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



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