

AWW

ANIMATION WORLD MAGAZINE

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The issue of Business



WHO SCREWED ROGER RABBIT?

**Plus: The Future of Network TV,
Anime Influence & The Art of Nemo**

**FINDING
NEMO**



AW

ANIMATION WORLD MAGAZINE

An ANIMATION WORLD NETWORK Publication

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AWN, Inc.

6525 Sunset Blvd.
Garden Suite 10
Los Angeles, CA 90028
United States
[T] 323 606-4200
[F] 323 466-6619

info@awn.com

www.awn.com

PUBLISHING

PRESIDENT

Ron Diamond

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Dan Sarto

OPERATIONS

GENERAL MANAGER

Joan Kim

EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Heather Kenyon

MANAGING EDITOR

Darlene Chan

NEWS EDITOR

Sarah Baisley

CONTRIBUTION

AUTHORS

Jerry Beck

Leslie Bishko

Karl F. Cohen

Gene Deitch

Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman

Rich Gorey

Jon Hofferaman

Pamela Kleibrink Thompson

Fred Patten

Sandrine Pechels de Saint Sardos

Gerard Raiti

Chris J. Robinson

Mark Simon

WEB DEV/ART

WEB MASTER/DEVELOPER

Mike Dunlop

ART DIRECTOR

Deron Yamada

ADVERTISING

SALES

Dan Sarto - dan@awn.com

Jay Hudson - jay@awn.com

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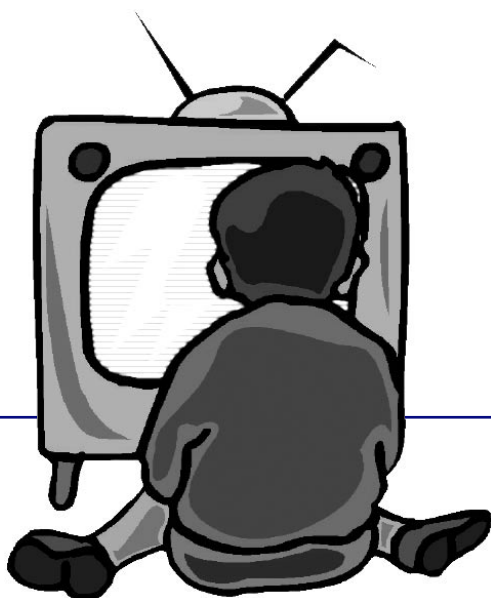
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A once seemingly inseparable partnership between children and Saturday morning cartoons is now a thing of the past.

The LOST WEEKEND Disappearance of Saturday Morning

by Gerard Raiti

FOR ANYONE WHO REMEMBERS THE PARAMOUNT OF SATURDAY MORNING CARTOONS, THEY CAN KEEP THOSE MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD DEAR IN THEIR HEARTS ALONG WITH OTHER GREAT RELICS FROM THE '80S...

IN A TIME NOT SO LONG AGO, SATURDAY MORNINGS were indicative of one and only one pastime for children — watching cartoons. Throughout the '70s and '80s, the broadcast networks ABC, CBS and NBC dominated the Saturday morning airwaves by inundating children with cartoons. Cartoons on these networks used to earn ratings of more than 20 million viewers. Today, network Saturday morning cartoons only exist on ABC Kids, FOX Kids and Kids' WB!, the latter two networks either did not exist or did not air cartoons two decades ago. Current successful cartoons on FOX Kids or Kids' WB! can garner a mere two million viewers. That statistic does not even take into consideration that the population of children in the U.S. has increased by approximately ten percent over the last 20 years. Due to this precipice in viewers, network cartoons are left struggling to make money while advertisers remain befuddled without a mainstream channel to promote new toys and products to children. Why have children stopped tuning in on Saturday mornings to network cartoons and what are the ramifications of this change?

Six key factors have led to children watching less Saturday morning cartoons: more recreational sports, the introduction of cable and satellite TV, the

Internet and video games, a poorer quality of animation, and a greater emphasis on family time. These factors are rather self-explanatory with the exception of the latter: the divorce rate of Americans now stands at 49 percent, and time on the weekends has become more precious for children as many commute between parents' houses. For parents who only have limited access to their children due to either divorce or career advancement, plopping them down in front of the television for five hours on a Saturday morning is no longer a viable option. Among most parents, divorced or not, there is a new emphasis on "quality" time. Consequently, taking one's children to the theater, mall, museum, event, zoo or beach on the weekend is deemed more appropriate to being a "good" parent, then letting kids sit and watch cartoons. To this effect, American society has changed substantially enough over the last two decades to the point where Saturday morning cartoons are less important to our culture.

THE BIGGEST CHANGE OF ALL

Today, cartoons are no longer on the major three networks that dominated the preceding decades. Although ABC technically still airs Saturday morning cartoons, its relationship with Disney distinguishes it from ABC's past programming during the '70s and '80s. When NBC and CBS began reducing their children's programming on Saturdays in 1988-1990, FOX jumped aboard the bandwagon and laid the cornerstone for its FOX Kids Network. NBC chose to delve into live-action teen entertainment, hallmarked by *Saved by the Bell*. Presently, NBC is in partnership with Discovery Kids; a Saturday edition of *Today* either precedes or follows Discovery Kids. CBS initially chose to replace its cartoons with news from local affiliates and now airs a national morning show, which is either preceded or followed by children's content from Nick Jr. Disney acquired ABC, so their relationship has stayed relatively constant over the decades and still continues to air its One Saturday Morning, recently renamed ABC Kids. Linda Simensky, vice president of original programming at Cartoon Network, feels that, "Children's television was never the strength of broadcasters to begin with. There were some good shows in there, but kids' TV was the department where executives at the network would start their nephews out in. [Kids' TV] was never the primary goal of a network." Children's entertainment on Saturday mornings is currently such a liability that local affiliates in markets such as Baltimore choose to air local news in lieu of Discovery Kids, Nick Jr., and ABC Kids.



According to Linda Simensky of Cartoon Network, Saturday morning animation has always been the backwater of programming for network broadcasters. Courtesy of Cartoon Network.

Cable and satellite TV have replaced these dated network juggernauts as the home of cartoons. The Disney Channel, Viacom-owned Nickelodeon, and Turner-owned, now AOL Time Warner's Cartoon Network form the new triumvirate of cartoon supremacy. Oddly enough though, the ratings for these three cable channels hardly exceed one million viewers per station on Saturday mornings — a far cry from the zenith of Saturday morning ratings in the '80s. Why are these channels less successful than their network counterparts were years ago since cable TV is now in the majority of American households?

The success of Nickelodeon and the other cablers during the week has led to their own shortcomings on Saturday mornings. That is to say, Nickelodeon and the others are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; there is no draw card for children to watch at any specific time or on any specific day. It is always there! A child who never knew the phenomenon of Saturday morning cartoons sees no reason to watch cartoons on Saturday mornings rather than on Wednesday nights or Sunday afternoons. Nevertheless, according to some studies, when a child sees the color orange, the first word the child associates with that color is "Nickelodeon." Today's children are being raised as brand loyal to Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network's signature checkerboard. These brand loyalties form as early as two years of age.¹ Needless to say, this brand loyalty demonstrates that despite Nickelodeon's not earning comparable ratings to broadcast networks in the '80s on Saturday mornings, Nickelodeon and the others are doing something right.

WHY BROADCAST NETWORKS AIRED CARTOONS IN THE '80S

Before cable TV, allocating time for children's programming on broadcast networks was at a premium. In



The cable troika of Cartoon Network, Disney Channel and Nickelodeon rewrote the position of children's animation in the annals of television history. Courtesy of Cartoon Network; © Disney; Courtesy of Nickelodeon.

TODAY, 'SATURDAY MORNING CARTOONS' IS A PHRASE THAT EMOTIONALLY MEANS NOTHING TO ANYONE UNDER THE AGE OF TWENTY-FIVE. — LEE GAITHER

the '70s and '80s, there were essentially five networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX and PBS. Consequently, these five networks had to cater to the tastes of all people. As a rule of thumb, networks aired children's programming in times when adults did not want to watch TV. For this reason, cartoons were syndicated during weekday afternoons in the hours after children arrived from school and before adults arrived from work. Cartoons also appeared on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Sunday morning cartoons were always less successful than Saturday morning ones because they were in syndication on local channels rather than on broadcast networks, and they conflicted with many Americans' church schedule. The most notable '80s Sunday morning cartoon block was *The Funtastic World of Hanna-Barbara*, featuring shows like *Fantastic Max!* and *Don Coyote*. In the end, Saturday mornings provided the longest number of consecutive hours on which to air cartoons and proved to be the most successful. This precept held true until the growth of Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network and the other cable TV children's programmers.

FOX KIDS PAVED THE ROAD FOR NICKELODEON'S SUCCESS

According to Lee Gaither, vice president of Saturday morning programs at NBC, "If you go back and look at the growth of Nickelodeon, it owes much to FOX. Most FOX affiliates did not have local news, so FOX Kids was able to go to a six-day-a-week schedule. For the first time, you had a set of kids who had Saturday morning fare six days a week. FOX started to feed an appetite...but it was only two hours a day."



Lee Gaither of NBC credits FOX Kids with breaking the boundary of Saturday morning animation. FOX Kids created a need in kids for more programming aimed directly at them.

Before the FOX Kids weekday lineup in 1991, weekday cartoons existed in the realm of syndication. The difficulty with syndicating any show is that local affiliates determine a show's timeslot. There is no continuity across the country and no way to promote the proceeding show. "FOX Kids' weekday lineup created a single promotional machine," adds Gaither. "FOX Kids came on at the same time across the country and promoted to the next day [and Saturday]."

Problems for cartoons on broadcast networks stemmed from what began as "promoting to the next show" on FOX. Promoting to the next show transformed into a churning desire in children to see more programming. As Gaither explains, "Kids would watch *Power Rangers*, then they would flip all over the dial trying to find more content just for them. Nickelodeon benefited because they had *Double Dare* and other live-action shows. They had a branding

voice: 'This is yours. It doesn't belong to your parents.' Consequently, kids found cable in a huge, huge way. Today, 'Saturday morning cartoons' is a phrase that emotionally means nothing to anyone under the age of twenty-five."

THERE IS A PRICE FOR THE PROLIFERATION OF TELEVISION GENRES.

Brian O'Neal, former manager and vice president of children's programming at CBS, concurs with NBC's Gaither: "The competition from Cartoon Network and Nick changed the programming paradigm for the broadcast networks. It eroded our audience base. Kids discovered that they did not have to settle for programming one day a week. There were shows for them seven days a week." O'Neal also elaborated how even the most successful children's programming could never compete with programming for adults: "*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, at the height of its success, was never even comparable to the average primetime show. One hour of primetime generated the same profit as the entire Saturday morning lineup. As a network, where are you going to put more of your resources to drive your ratings? You're not even going to allocate [children's programming] in your budget." Since cable TV can program to specific verticals every hour every day, there is no longer any financial reason to keep cartoons and children's programming on broadcast networks.

IT'S THE CHILDREN THAT CHANGED - NOT THE CARTOONS

"As cable TV started to rise, the 'tween psychology became real," comments Gaither. "Kids over the age of eight started splitting off into very different groups. Some boys were into animation and others were not. Girls have always been sketchy over the age of six with animation. Live-action became more popular. You are always better off as a network if you have a mixture of both live-action and cartoons. I know Discovery Kids' plan: they wanted a mixture of animation, reality series and live-action to reflect the breadth and complexity of kids today. It's hard to find



Brian O'Neal, formerly of CBS, watched as kids turned to cable for shows anytime during the week.

a kid who likes just animation anymore. Kids have evolved. You don't have many boys watching cartoons when they're thirteen. That's not happening anymore. They are evolving emotionally faster. *Lizzie McGuire* is

Shows like *Lizzie McGuire* appeal to the new niche of 'tweeners. Courtesy of Disney.



a live-action *Ally McBeal* for kids on The Disney Channel and it's a huge hit with girls, and boys oddly enough."

Primetime family programming is also an endangered species due to the same proliferation of cable TV. Successful family shows like *Full House* and *Family Matters* no longer have a place on broadcast networks because of channels like Nickelodeon and ABC Family. The absence of primetime family programming also hinders Saturday morning cartoons on broadcast networks because there is no way to promote programming on Friday night for Saturday morning. Right now, only ABC's *Wonderful World of Disney* on Sunday evenings promotes programming on Saturday mornings, and as O'Neal points out, "There is no way you can expect a child to remember to watch a show all the way from Sunday night until Saturday morning. No child will remember that."

THE FISCAL FUTURE OF SATURDAY MORNING CARTOONS

The final problem with Saturday morning cartoons is their incipient decrease in quality over the last decade, attributable in part to a decrease in advertisement revenue. While individuals at FOX Kids and Walt Disney TV Animation do not agree that there has been a decrease in quality, O'Neal confirms that there is no question that production costs have increased while revenue from advertisements has decreased. This relationship has placed animation stu-

CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF TWELVE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR \$500 BILLION IN PURCHASES.



Kids WB! is one of the stops for a property on its way up the revenue stream for the vertically integrated Warner Bros. TiVo promises to change audience's consumption patterns to on-demand viewing. © 2002 TiVo, Inc.

dios in a catch 22. Everyone in the industry will insist that good stories denote high quality shows, yet can shows hire experienced, quality writers when low budgets are such a commodity?

There is a price for the proliferation of television genres. As the number of cable channels continues to increase, the average number of viewers per channel will decrease. What this means for the viewing audience is that networks cannot expect advertisers to pay the same proportional rates they paid decades ago when there were, at most, five channels. "The animation business has always been driven by ancillary, meaning toys and games," says Gaither. *Transformers*, *He-Man*, *My Little Pony* and *G. I. Joe* are prime examples of this. Gaither adds: "Frankly, prior to the '90s, when there were no FCC rules, it was very easy to launch an animated product based on a toy and you could very clearly see where the revenue stream would lie. After the FCC rules, you could no longer do that so directly. Unless you were vertically integrated like Warner Bros. Studios, which in putting a show like *Animaniacs* on FOX Kids then Kids' WB!, then merchandising it through your studio and on videos around the world, there's no way to stop that." According to Cartoon Network's Simensky, if a show does not have the potential to be successful in the toy and game industries, the likelihood of a network picking it up is much slimmer.

The greatest benefit to Saturday morning cartoons was their ability to create one venue for advertisers where they could reach 20 million viewers. If a toy company wanted to promote a novel product in the '80s, advertising on Saturday mornings was logical. On the other hand, an advantage to the proliferation

of children's programming on cable TV is that advertisers can more directly target their products to their core audience. Since children exist in such smaller niches, an advertiser can better pinpoint a germane time to advertise, thus reducing the cost for the advertiser.

The other sizeable change in the last two decades is the increase in children's buying power and larger family assets due to dual family incomes.ⁱⁱ Children under the age of twelve are responsible for \$500 billion in purchases per year.ⁱⁱⁱ As professors at Middle Tennessee State University noted in a conglomeration of studies, the annual amount children spend has been increasing by 20% each year for at least the last decade.^{iv} Ancillary becomes that much more important because kids are being allowed to spend more of their parents' money. The toys and games associated with a children's program can be more important than the program itself.

Now the future of television is TiVo and other DVRs (digital video recorders). TiVo will cause the next great generational shift in the way children consume programming. Where cable TV facilitated viewers in watching a certain genre of programming anytime of day, DVRs will bring viewers one step closer to television on demand — watching a specific show at any given time. "Once TiVo takes off, it will force networks to come up with a new way of getting advertisers," observes Simensky. Since viewers will then have the ability to skip watching commercials, how will networks function without ad dollars as the primary source of revenue? O'Neal realizes that, "There will be a change. The beauty of the medium is that it evolves. The business models evolve. As the advertis-

ers and the broadcasters and the techno-wizards who come up with these devices get together, they will discover a way for everyone to make their money. There will be some kind of sponsorship associated with shows. For example, at the bottom of the TV screen, it might say, 'Sony,' with a banner running across outlining new Sony products." Television may return to having specific products sponsor a show: for example, in a decade one may watch *Kellogg's Cornflakes Proudly Presents The Simpsons*. The bottom line is that the way 30 year-olds remember Saturday morning cartoons, the current generation of children may remember Nickelodeon once DVRs and digital television arrive in the mainstream.

The final question remains: will cartoons ever return to Saturday mornings to the same degree that they existed during the '70s and '80s? The answer is no. The reason for this is the same reason why people no longer watch silent movies or black and white TVs or primetime sitcoms where married couples sleep in separate beds: once things evolve, they seldom return to their simpler forms. Saturday morning cartoons were a phenomenon that now resides in the history books. It is an anomaly in the history of children's broadcasting, the likes of which will never be seen again. For anyone who remembers the paramount of Saturday morning cartoons, they can keep those memories of childhood dear in their hearts along with other great relics from the '80s including parachute

pants, Pogo balls and saying "Have a nice day!" because Saturday morning cartoons are gone for good on broadcast networks. ■

i William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992): 477-502.

ii Bruce Horovitz, "Cashing in on kids: Retailers in search of customers for life," *USA Today* (1997, December 18), Page 1A.

iii Ibid.

iv "Attention All Shoppers: Consumerism and Kids," *Youth Markets Alert*, June 1994: 6(6).

GERARD RAITI is a senior at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee where he is majoring in English, Music and Computer Science. He grew up in Baltimore, Maryland. Recently, he interned as a Business Intelligence Research Analyst for ClientLogic. He has been writing about animation for various publications since 1997 because he loves animation and all things Disney. He aspires to work one day at a network in children's programming and development.

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

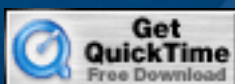
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FRESH FROM THE FESTIVALS: APRIL 2003'S FILM REVIEWS

Jon Hofferma reviews five short films fresh from the festival circuit: [Autofoto](#) by Avi Offer, [The ErlKing](#) by Ben Zerkowicz, Stefan Grube's [Leashlessness](#), [Shh.](#) by Adam Robb and [Skin](#) by Bobby de Groot.

View the QuickTime clips online!





RISING INFLUENCE

The *Impact* of *Anime*: Creek & River Expands

by Rich Gorey

The Japanese-influence on *Samurai Jack* is undeniable.
Courtesy of Cartoon Network.

THAT "JAPANESE SENSIBILITY" IS IN EVIDENCE NEARLY EVERYWHERE ONE LOOKS IN RECENT ANIMATED PRODUCT.

ANIMATION WORLD READERS PROBABLY DON'T NEED TO be told the animation industry is enduring a period of transition and metamorphosis. High-profile features like *Treasure Planet* haven't performed nearly as well as hoped, and even when the Disney people get behind the distribution of a seeming "sure thing" like [Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*](#), the results are not guaranteed success. Even that lovingly crafted masterwork has gone largely ignored (at least in America) despite the grassroots efforts of fans like film critic Jack Matthews to put the movie before a more receptive public.

It's hard to know just where the industry stands, when formerly impervious venues like the Cartoon Network have come under fire for some conspicuous failures like the heavily hyped [Sheep in the Big City](#). For audiences, the schizophrenic climate has created confusion, but few breakout hits. For professionals in the field, the current state of affairs



Charlie Schroder (left), vice president of Creek & River America, and CEO Christopher Bristow have seen the job market grow for animators in gaming. Photo credit: Igor Perchuk.



The poor showings of big budgeted *Treasure Planet* (above) and critically acclaimed *Spirited Away* beg the question, "Where is this market going?" *Treasure Planet* © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved; *Spirited Away* © 2002 Nibariki. TGNDTDM. All rights reserved.

seems bleak. Is traditional animation dead? Where have all the jobs gone? And how does one connect with work in the current depressed environment? For some animators, negotiating the uncertain terrain of the field can be frustrating and debilitating.

SHIFTS IN THE MARKET

Recently, I spoke with Charlie Schroder, vice president of Creek & River America, a Tokyo-based talent management firm, to get her feelings on the current artist market. Ms. Schroder and CEO Christopher Bristow are in a unique position within the entertainment industry. Creek & River, Co., Ltd. currently represents over twenty thousand creative professionals — including directors, screenwriters, animators and illustrators. The agency has been instrumental in connecting these artists and writers with the kind of projects they might not discover independently. Ms. Schroder has the advantage of some first-hand experience in animation: during her tenure at [Protozoa/Dot Comix](#), the company became the first to license an animated Internet character for television broadcast — Sister Randy (a spoof of BBC's Sister Wendy). Though Creek & River is primarily dedicated to forging relationships between artists and producers in all aspects of entertainment media, Ms. Schroder and Mr. Bristow have seen the need for animators rise in recent months — in unexpected arenas. Though the television and feature fields are staying static at best, the demand for sophisticated graphics in animated games has risen exponentially.

"Though a large percentage of our clients are in television and Websites, our talent has been an integral part of the production of over 100 game titles, including *Tekken 4*, *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Final Fantasy X*," Schroder says. Creek & River's function is not to produce the animation themselves, but as managing agents, to assemble the right teams for the right jobs. "We can streamline the production process by connecting multiple resources outside of [a company's] personal network."

These days, with the idea of a "Global Network" more than just a fantasy, it's more possible than ever to unite talents from different locales and cultures to create entertainment graphics unlike those seen before. We've all been aware of the fact that most television animation screened in America is drawn in Korea, but the new market, Schroder believes, will expand on this (essentially cost-saving) strategy and replace it with a symbiosis more driven by creativity than economy. Schroder and Bristow believe that with the accessibility of nearly limitless talent, "producers can afford to be choosy, now. They have their pick of very highly-skilled technicians who are extensively trained, who have high-end education."

A few years back, there was the feeling that anyone with the proper software and marginal talent could design a serviceable Website. Today, there's so much product — and such an avalanche of content available — that in order to stand out a site must dazzle technically — and do so immediately, or browsers will move on.

"Our wide talent base means we have very few limitations," Schroder says. "These days a commercial spot might have a combination 2 and 3D approach. We can provide the resources to do both. A film may in tone and theme lean toward an American character, but graphically, have a Japanese visual sensibility."

MS. SCHRODER AND MR. BRISTOW HAVE SEEN THE NEED FOR ANIMATORS RISE IN RECENT MONTHS — IN UNEXPECTED ARENAS.

That "Japanese sensibility" is in evidence nearly everywhere one looks in recent animated product. The Cartoon Network's *Samurai Jack*, for instance, is highly distinctive not only for its Asian look, but its pacing and storytelling, which sets it quite apart from the cheerful energy of *The Powerpuff Girls*, for instance. (However, even the *Powerpuff* backgrounds have a little anime feel when the girls fly into action.) At the Cartoon Network, for the first time, focus groups are responding more to the Japanese animated product than to classic American shorts like *Bugs Bunny* — long a staple for cartoon audiences. It's more than a trend: teachers in New York's School of Visual Arts, like [Howard Beckerman](#), will testify that over 60% of their students are creating work that strongly reflects the anime influence. And the use of the heavily anime-influenced [Animatrix](#) as part of the marketing blitz for *The Matrix Reloaded* feature film just proves that anime is reaching the mainstream and considered hip.

MELDING OF MINDS

But are audiences and future animators responding to the visual style of these intricate films, or the stories? No one is quite sure, just yet. For now, the astounding success of shows like [Pokémon](#) and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* seems to indicate audiences (mainly children) are ready for something new and different from Bugs, Scooby and their ilk. Still, the conspicuous failure of *Spirited Away* would indicate in America, at least, audiences aren't quite sure what to make of the deliberate pacing, complex character motivation, and sometimes Byzantine plotting of Japanese filmmakers. The

With the success of *Yu-Gi-Oh!* (top) and *Pokémon* (bottom) it seems like audiences are ready for something different. *Yu-Gi-Oh!* and *Pokémon* © 2003 The WB Television Network. All rights reserved.



WITH THE IDEA OF A "GLOBAL NETWORK" MORE THAN JUST A FANTASY, IT'S MORE POSSIBLE THAN EVER TO UNITE TALENTS FROM DIFFERENT LOCALES AND CULTURES...

future success of these movies (and games) may depend on a meeting of the minds and cultures that has not yet occurred.

"That's where we come in," Schroder says. "We're middle men (and women). We're a knowledge network, with access to so many types of talent."

And what advice does Ms. Schroder have for that talent? "Work with people you like," she says. "Sometimes, it's not the project itself that drives the creativity. Ideas grow into what they need to be down the line. Often the time between an original idea and the finished product — be it a feature or a television show — can be as much as two years. Right now, the anime look is hot, but the rules haven't changed. At places like Pixar, they've succeeded because of their dedication to the story. Engaging characters, an engaging story line: you've got to have the basics in place."

Sometimes, especially in animation, these "basics" are forgotten when audiences are dazzled by something new and exciting. *Jurassic Park* was a technically breathtaking film, but I wonder if a hundred years from now, people will still be watching it, the way they'll be watching *King Kong*. In the '70s, viewers couldn't get enough of the glitzy titling and effects work of R/Greenberg Associates, in their jewel-like 7-Up commercials and station identification trailers. But in time, the novelty wore off, and the public had become too familiar with the style to find it arresting anymore. As computer animation gets more and more lifelike, and moviegoers lose their awe of the seemingly magical images presented on a daily basis, the need for a solid story and involving characters will once again become paramount. *Ice Age*, for instance, made a connection with audiences because of its endearing characters and sharp humor, despite its sophisticated surface gloss. In many ways, the appeal of a film like *Ice Age* is rooted in the same elements of the popular Disney Classics of long ago — motherless children, the strength of unlikely friendships, and the adventure inherent in a quest.

As computer animation becomes more and more prevalent — and user friendly — we'll be seeing more and more of it. "It's a great time to be doing what we do," Schroder says. "There are tremendous opportunities to assist and develop intriguing projects. How much fun do we get to have?" she asks, laughing. But the road ahead, for animators and the folks at Creek & River, will always be winding. Is a place like Creek & River a good fit for all those animators out there won-



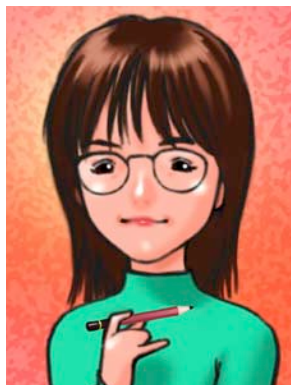
Ice Age struck a chord in audiences with its traditional themes. TM and © 2002 Twentieth Century Fox. All rights reserved.

dering where the work is? The agency's policy of non-exclusivity should be a plus to those who've always favored working on their own terms, and the prospect of co-creating with another artist across the globe might be an enviable idea to those of us who may find ourselves stuck in an artistic and cultural rut.

COLLABORATING TALENT

"Our talent is always on the lookout for more work," Schroder says. We're not feature specific, though we do sometimes work in the feature arena. While we don't necessarily build entire careers, we'd like to think we've been instrumental in nurturing the careers of some very worthwhile people."

One such artist is Takada Akemi, the Japanese designer and illustrator, whose characters now are being used in a series of ads for mobile phones. In Tokyo, where Creek & River is based, often times projects are driven by business demands, just as they are here in the United States. Other times, an idea is pitched (for a series, for instance) and the talent is involved from the beginning. Naturally, this is the preferable scenario for animators and writers eager to have their work reflect their own sensibilities. Many animators I know would rather work this way, and remain private entities. Is ownership of your product a driving factor in your creative life? Ambitions to have a series like *The Simpsons* or *SpongeBob SquarePants* are common — but the kind of breakout talent and business-savvy required for such success are unfortunately harder to come by. For most animators and writers currently working, their art is a collaborative effort, and it's this spirit of collaboration that has been the primary force behind the expan-



Creek & River is nurturing the career of talented designer and illustrator Takada Akemi, as seen here in a self-portrait. Courtesy of Takada Akemi.

sion of Creek & River. Their New York office, which opened last October, is the company's first North American branch. In January, Creek & River aligned with Abandon Entertainment, whose Mythic Entertainment created the successful online game *Dark Age of Camelot*. There are now plans for a television series based on the game — and possible features as well.

"We're always looking for new evolutionary styles, a melding of storytelling traditions and graphic sensibilities compelling enough to stand out," Charlie Schroder says. "That moment when you can say, 'This is a great story! Let's tell it this way. I love what I do.'"

Lately, with the uncertainties facing the animation industry, I wonder how many of my fellow artists can

say the same. It's always an inspiration to hear someone get excited about their field, and to share that excitement with others. For those interested in Creek & River, Co., Ltd., the company has a Website, of course, at www.cr-america.com. Though Creek & River does not accept unsolicited demo reels, they do have a submissions page on their Web address, and would welcome any serious queries. ■

RICHARD GOREY graduated with a degree in animation from the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. He has written film comment for the ASIFA newsletter (east coast) and is the author of the book *The Great Rabbit Rip-off*, as well as several screenplays. During Gorey's career at Young & Rubicam, he was a creative director and animator for such clients as Johnson & Johnson, Citibank, Hallmark and Philip Morris.

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The recent downturn in the German economy, specifically the stock market, has contributed to the KirchMedia bankruptcy and other shake-ups in the media. Photo courtesy of KirchMedia GmbH & Co KGaA.

CRASH TV

Behind the Kirch Collapse

by Sandrine Pechels de Saint Sardos

THE COLLAPSE OF THE KIRCHMEDIA EMPIRE HAS HAD TREMENDOUS CONSEQUENCES...

GERMANY, WHICH IS ONE OF THE DRIVING MARKETS IN THE European Union, is currently fighting economic turmoil and high unemployment (9.7%). Most recently, Germany's issues were aggravated by long term problems resulting from the absorption of former East Germany into its economy and an overall stock market drop, characterized by the strong 2001 downturn of its heavily high-tech exchange, the Neuer Market.

In the entertainment industry, Germany has a highly competitive TV market where two strong public-TV networks, ARD and ZDF, battle groups of commercial networks owned by Bertelsmann and KirchMedia. But this past year, these economic woes, the bankruptcy of KirchMedia, management changes at Bertelsmann and troubles in the cable industry have further unsettled the market.

TV PLATFORM TURMOIL

The KirchMedia case is particularly interesting as over this past year European markets experienced the blackest clouds on the cable and satellite horizon, mostly because of the consolidation and insolvency of some of its pay TV platforms. A combination of tough competition, poorly thought out technology, paying too much for sports rights and just plain bad management have attacked and dried out the pay TV platform business, creating the bankruptcy of KirchMedia...and the story repeats itself in France with Vivendi Universal, in Spain with Via Digital and Canal Satellite waiting to merge, and in Italy with Tele+.



Bertelsmann went through management changes, but still is a mainstay in the German TV market. Photo courtesy of Bertelsmann Media Worldwide.

In fact 2002 was the year of TV platform turmoil, which has produced a tidal wave and impacted the market so negatively that operators are shrinking costs, selling assets, merging and pushing themselves to find solutions...but the clock is ticking and there will be few survivors.

It all started when the KirchMedia pay TV operation, Premiere World, lost about \$4 billion in four years of business despite reaching 2.4 million subscribers. Through a series of complex deals, Premiere World had bought its sports and movie rights through another unit of KirchMedia, which exaggerated the pay TV operator's costs. One of the sports that pulled the trigger was Formula One, which is extremely popular in Germany. However, Premiere World has had limited acceptance as the German market has a low appetite for pay TV because of the high number of free channels.

AN EMPIRE

KirchMedia is one of Europe's largest media conglomerates, which owns the TV rights to not only Formula One, but also the 2002 and 2006 World Cup football (soccer) and controls the German language rights for a huge library of Hollywood films. Its debt burden, however, is estimated by some to amount to as much as US\$13 billion. The company is now beleaguered on all fronts and the empire built by owner Leo Kirsh has fallen apart.

KirchMedia's rapid expansion during the 1990s



Leo Kirch built up KirchMedia's assets by buying German TV rights to U.S. movies from the '60s and '70s. Although Formula One racing is popular in Germany, the viewers have been slow to subscribe to Premiere, KirchMedia's pay channel, which owned the exclusive TV rights to the event. Photo of Leo Kirch courtesy of KirchMedia GmbH & Co KGaA.



and acquisition of bigtime sports rights have brought the company depth but relatively poor revenues. Leo Kirsh made his fortune by buying up the German language TV rights of many Hollywood movies during the 1960s and 1970s. After deregulation of the broadcaster sector, he expanded into TV, setting up his own free to air television station and the Premiere pay TV channel. To attract customers he bought expensive sports rights just at the height of the Internet and media boom. His critics say that he was over paying and playing well over the odds. German TV viewers are accustomed to receiving between 10 to 30 free TV channels through cable, so they have been slow to sign up for pay TV channels.

In February 2002, ProSieben Sat 1 decided to postpone a planned merger deal to give KirchMedia time to establish a more solid financial profile. The merger was designed to give KirchMedia access to fresh capital because ProSieben Sat 1 is already listed on the Frankfurt stock exchange. Privately held KirchMedia already holds a 52.5% state in ProSieben Sat 1 but only half the voting rights. When the news of the delay broke, the TV group's share price surged 20%. Half the voting rights in the broadcaster are held by the Axel Springer publishing group, which recently shocked KirchMedia by invoking a so-called put option which forces KirchMedia to buy back into ProSieben Sat 1 for \$775m. This triggered a cash crisis at

KIRCHMEDIA WAS ON THE VERGE OF SECURING ITS LONG-TERM FUTURE AFTER AN ALL-GERMAN CONSORTIUM ENTERED EXCLUSIVE TALKS TO BUY THE BANKRUPT GROUP.

KirchMedia. KirchMedia owns 40% of Axel Springer but cannot sell this stake as it is the security for a loan from Deutsche bank.



KirchMedia's financial headaches were made worse when Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. pulled out of helping the Premiere pay TV channel, and then wanted to be bought out of its share for more than the channel is worth.

TROUBLE UPON TROUBLE

Meanwhile, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation added to KirchMedia's woes by writing off its stake in Premiere. Mr. Murdoch has ruled out any further investment in KirchMedia and invoked yet another put option, which will force KirchMedia to buy back Mr. Murdoch's stake in Premiere — at the set price of \$1.72 billion, well above the channel's market value. Plus, adding insult to injury, several banks that provide loans to KirchMedia have already gone on record saying they will not continue to support the firm any longer.

In October 2002, KirchMedia was on the verge of securing its long-term future after an all-German consortium entered exclusive talks to buy the bankrupt group. In March though after KirchMedia, its parent company, collapsed under a \$6.28 billion burden, the jewel in the crown of the now defunct empire was put up for sale. German publisher Bauer Verlag and Hypo Vereinsbank (HVB), the country's second largest commercial bank, were expected to tie up a \$1.96 billion deal by mid-December. Plus, Sony's Columbia Tristar was expected to join the consortium.

Bauer publishes big-selling titles such as a TV

programming guide and a German version of Hello! magazine. The family owned group also controls 20% of RTL2, one of the top four stations in the highly aggressive German TV market.

The RTL Group, owner of Channel 5 and a 36% shareholder in RTL2, has not objected to the KirchMedia deal, but it's concerned that a take over of Prosieben Sat1 could clash with RTL2's interests.

Moreover, Bauer and HVB will have to mount a full takeover of Prosieben Sat 1 if their bid for KirchMedia is successful, as German law requires bidders acquiring more than 30% of a company to make an offer for 100% of the shares. This would add around \$475 million to the cost of the bid.

Other bidders for the company included a link-up between French broadcaster TF1 and Haim Saban, and a group of KirchMedia shareholders, including the Lehman Brothers investment bank and Saudi investor Prince Ali-Waleed.

A SYMPTOM

KirchMedia's creditors, comprising U.S. film studios and German banks, have already sold KirchSport Group, owner of the rights to the 2006 World Cup. But Premiere was not included in this KirchMedia rescue deal.

However, all of this changed the week of March 17th, just before MIPTV, as Mr. Saban is on the verge of taking control of the coveted assets lost by Mr. Kirch, making him the first non-German to break into Germany's media market in a big way with a deal that is worth more than \$2 billion. TF1 is also in partnership in the bidding with Mr. Saban. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Mr. Saban explained why he was so hungry: "It's as if a big U.S. network like ABC or NBC were up for sale, such chances are rare."

German channels are all suffering from this pay TV platform turmoil. As rival platforms have battled it out to attract subscribers, some channels have been able to squeeze better terms, but if a platform fails, this leaves the channels with fewer options and less leverage in future carriage fee negotiations. In this environment, those channels with long-term contracts in place should have sufficient breathing space to find alternative revenue streams against what will almost certainly be tougher negotiations and lower fees for their channels the next time they have to deal with a platform.

The collapse of the KirchMedia empire has had tremendous consequences on every sector of the Ger-



Among KirchMedia's holdings were the World Cups in 2002 and 2006.

man media, including the co-production business. The German market was saturated with library product, which eventually lowered overall pricing. There was a huge surplus of content but the demand was not there.

What's happened in Germany with KirchMedia, or in France with Vivendi Universal, clearly changed the whole media market. TV stations are anxious and more conservative partly as a result of falling advertising and subscription revenues. It is also not just the story of an individual business failure but a symptom of an unstable international media market. ■

SANDRINE PECHELS DE SAINT SARDOS is currently freelancing in distribution and programming, working for clients such as Hallmark/Crown Media and Classic Media. She previously worked for Sunbow Entertainment where she handled distribution and business development in North America, Europe and Asia. Born in Paris, France and living in New York for the past 7 years, she is also pursuing co-financing and co-production. She has been a panelist for KIPA in Korea and a juror for the International Emmys.

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SPIN DOCTORED

Animated Propaganda

During the Cold War: Part Two

by Karl F. Cohen



Frances Stonor Saunders discusses the CIA's Militant Liberty policy in her book *The Cultural Cold War*.

Part Two — Cartoon Shorts; A Preliminary Report on Militant Liberty Films

IN FRANCES SAUNDERS' BOOK *THE CULTURAL COLD WAR: THE CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (Who Paid the Piper? in England), she mentions a policy developed in the 1950s called Militant Liberty. The phrase was the name of a top-secret campaign by the CIA, Pentagon and other agencies that encouraged studios to insert the theme of freedom into our movies in the mid-'50s. It also can be used to describe an informal trend or movement to include pro-American content into films. In the 1940s it is seen in a series of anti-Nazi and then anti-Communist films.

Saunders covers some of the Militant Liberty themes Carleton Alsup wrote about in memos to the CIA when he was working undercover at Paramount. In *Arrowhead* (1953), he saw serious potential problems that "the Commies could use to their advantage." The film about the Apaches was tinkered with so scenes of the Indian tribe being shipped against their wishes to a reservation in Florida were removed or "their impact (was) significantly diluted." After the film ended its run in the U.S., dialogue was re-dubbed so that the international release could be presented on "a commercial and patriotic basis."

Images showing heavy drinking in our films were eliminated when they were not essential to the script. Showing Tobacco Road poverty (especially in our black population), corporate knavery, being irreverent toward organized religion and showing outrageous crimes were other themes to avoid if possible. Alsup wanted Hollywood to avoid showing negative stereotypes and to include "characterizations which represented a healthy America."

The CIA called the Militant Liberty image of a sanitized America the "Hollywood Formula." While Saunders doesn't discuss how it affected short films and cartoons there are differences in the content of cartoons from the 1950s from those that were made before WWII. There is a reduction of racist stereotypes, drunken scenes, showing people living in poverty, etc. Which elements if any were reduced or cut consciously by Militant Liberty advisors is impossible to know at this point. For example while black stereotypes were eliminated in War-

ner Bros. cartoons by 1950, there are several Bugs Bunny cartoons from the '50s showing hillbillies and criminals living in shacks. At Paramount's Famous Studios shacks were omitted from their 1950s productions, but Casper the Friendly Ghost lived in a rundown ruined house and the last black stereotype appears in a cartoon from Famous in 1958. (Alsop worked for Paramount in Hollywood and Famous was in New York so it appears his influence wasn't as strong there.)

While the influence of patriotic watchdogs to remove negative images in cartoons is impossible to prove, their influence is obvious in several cartoons that promote freedom and the American way of life. The films to be discussed from Warner Bros., Sutherland, Disney and other studios are clearly propaganda and none would have been made if it were not for outside money and advice. Most clearly state in the opening or end credits who sponsored the film, but what isn't said is whom the sponsors really were and why they felt there was a need to present these messages to the public. We might also wonder from where their money came. In 1967 the *New York Times* revealed that the CIA was using private and corporate philanthropic foundations as conduits to fund some seemingly innocent educational projects. It isn't known if government funding was used to make any of these films, but Disney's *Our Friend the Atom*, 1957, was made with the assistance of the Navy and *Duck and Cover*, 1951, was sponsored by the U.S. Federal Civil Defense Administration.

THE SLOAN FOUNDATION, HARDING COLLEGE AND JOHN SUTHERLAND PRODUCTIONS

Alfred P. Sloan (1875-1966) was the CEO of General Motors from 1923 to 1946. He is considered the father of the modern corporation. Today his foundation is a major supporter of PBS radio and TV, medical research projects and other impressive projects. The foundation has ties with many major corporations and institutions. They were not mentioned in the 1967 scandal over the CIA using foundations as conduits.

A story that sounds too simplistic to be accurate is Sloan heard George Stewart Benson, president of Harding College in Searcy, Arkansas, deliver a "fundamentalist anti-labor diatribe" and was so moved that he decided "that day" to underwrite Harding College's plans to produce educational anti-Communist, pro-free enterprise system films. In any case the Sloan Foundation did give Harding a lot of money to produce propaganda



George Stewart Benson, president of Harding University, was tapped by entrepreneur Alfred P. Sloan to make propaganda films. Benson's deal with Sloan benefited Harding University financially. Photos courtesy of Harding University.



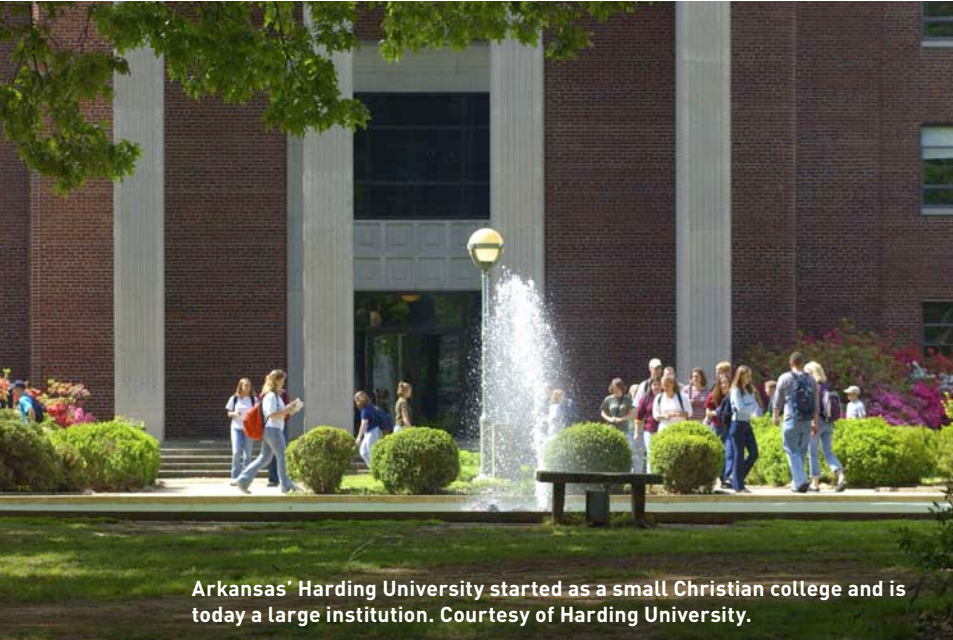
films (reports vary from \$300,000 to \$597,870). There were nine animated films made for Harding using money donated by Sloan according to Rick Prelinger. He runs Ephemeral Film, a film library that had an enormous collection of unusual films paid for by corporations, educational institutions and our government. The collection was purchased by the Library of Congress in 2002.

RESEARCHING THIS PAPER WAS AN EXCITING CHALLENGE AS MOST OF THE MATERIAL DISCUSSED WAS NEW TO ME AND IT HAS NOT BEEN DISCUSSED IN PRINT BEFORE.

I find it hard to believe that the just-retired head of General Motors would fund an expensive propaganda film in Technicolor and let a school in Arkansas with no track record as a film producer handle the project unless there was an unstated ulterior motive. Sloan isn't mentioned in the film credits, which is odd as most sponsors want some recognition. Did he want the school to be his front? Something about the project doesn't make sense.

Since the first of the Harding films dates from 1948 and the CIA was created in July 1947 it is possible, but unlikely that one of the CIA's first activities was to fund propaganda cartoons. It is possible the films were made at the request of another federal agency, but most likely the money used was Sloan's. He probably felt there was a need for strong anti-Communist propaganda films

WHILE THE INFLUENCE OF PATRIOTIC WATCHDOGS TO REMOVE NEGATIVE IMAGES IN CARTOONS IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PROVE, THEIR INFLUENCE IS OBVIOUS IN SEVERAL CARTOONS...



Arkansas' Harding University started as a small Christian college and is today a large institution. Courtesy of Harding University.

and using Harding would keep his name from being identified with the cause. It is common for foundations to give restrictive gifts that are designed for the money to be used for specific purposes.

Mike Barrier, author of the remarkably well-researched [Hollywood Cartoons](#), interviewed John Sutherland in February 1990. Sutherland owned the Hollywood studio that produced the animated series for Harding. His interview confirms the above scenario and adds additional information. Sutherland told Barrier that Sloan "sent a representative to Walt" to approach him about making cartoons on economic themes and that Walt sent the representative to Sutherland. Sutherland told Barrier that Sloan gave a grant to Harding so they could commission him to make the films. Harding owns the rights to the films so any income from them went to the college. The school also owns the negatives to the films. Barrier was also told, "So I got a million dollar contract."

Sutherland probably inflated the amount of the contract in his conversation. A typical Warner Bros. cartoon cost about \$23,000 to make in the mid-'50s and George Pal Puppets were costing under \$50,000 at Paramount after WWII. Prelinger's \$597,870 is probably the most likely amount for the grant.

Eventually other conservative corporations contributed to Harding including General Electric, U.S. Steel and Olin Mathieson Chemical. By 1961 Harding's endowment from corporations was said to be \$6 million.

Harding, founded in 1924, began as a small religious college, run by the Church of Christ. It is named after James Harding, a minister who was co-founder of the Nashville Bible School. The school was integrated in 1962, becoming the first college in the state to integrate. Today Harding University is a much larger institution offering a wide range of degree programs.

Benson's biography includes his being born in a log cabin in Oklahoma in 1898, going to a one-room school and eventually graduating from Harding in 1925 with a B.A. He and his bride spent the next 11 years as Church of Christ missionaries in China. In 1936, "Harding College urged Benson to take over the presidency and for the next 29 years of his presidency Benson raised a great deal of money for the college. In 1936, he formed the National Education Program dedicated to teaching Americans the importance of faith

in God, constitutional government and free enterprise" (from Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans). Benson retired in 1965. He was also chancellor of Oklahoma Christian University and presented a radio program *Behind the News* for many years. The Arkansas Archive of Public Communication has 543 tapes of his radio broadcasts on file (1975-85). He died in 1991.

On the Internet, there are references to the John Birch society and other conservative groups showing films produced by Harding College. There are also references to people who question Benson's beliefs. A review of *Arkansas Mischief* by Jim McDonald in the *Denver Post*, 1998, describes the purpose of Harding's National Education Program as "to spread warnings of Communist peril lurking in the civil rights movement and among the ranks of peace demonstrators." An unidentified writer for [www.spiritone.com](#) says the organization's "sole purpose was to produce propaganda films supporting his fascist views" and the Church of Christ "opposes most modern doctrines including Darwin's theory of evolution." While the information on the site includes oversimplifications and basic factual errors, it does indicate the controversy that exists about Benson.

Harding hired John Sutherland Productions in Los Angeles to produce their animated films. Sutherland (1910-2001) worked for Disney for several years (chiefly as a writer) before opening his own studio in 1945. His first productions included the animated *Daffy Dillies*

series for United Artists and a series of animated one-minute theatrical ads for Chiquita Bananas. He experimented using puppets in at least one of his early *Daffy Dillies*, but he became known for his high-end cel animation. It appears that his first propaganda films were for Harding College. They were distributed to theaters and to schools, civic groups and corporations by Loew's, a division of MGM. He received an Oscar nomination in 1968 for the documentary short *A Way Out of the Wilderness*. His biography published in trade annuals says he was the creator of Thumper in *Bambi*. He was given screen credit in that film for being one of two actors doing the voice of Bambi.

BILL SCOTT ON WORKING AT SUTHERLAND

In the mid-1950s Sutherland hired Bill Scott as a writer. Scott told Paul Etchevery in an unpublished interview taped November 2, 1981 that working at the studio, "was pretty fascinating, as a matter of fact. I had never worked on that kind of picture before. They were propaganda and informational pictures in large part, which meant that you took a problem of communication that somebody wanted to handle. They would give you points a, b, c, d and e that they wanted the picture to be about or convey. Then the writer would come up with the entire concept of how to do it and what kind of characters and how best to use animation, and develop the entire picture from its concept to its final production. It was a very useful training ground for me although the material wasn't what I would normally have picked to work on."

Scott found the work great training for the tight deadlines he had later on as co-producer and head writer at Jay Ward's studio (*Rocky and Bullwinkle*). He said, "I learned a great deal..." but, "I was not particularly happy at Sutherland studio. The material I was doing was not anything I really believed in, but there was always a great set of challenges. It was always a satisfaction to be able to solve problems, which is largely what writing is. It is like doing puzzles." He also says he was well paid and, "We traveled first cabin all the way." He described the quality of the studio's work as "really good stuff," but left after four years: "I couldn't stand it anymore."

THE SUTHERLAND PRODUCTIONS

The following are examples of the kinds of animated propaganda shorts produced by Sutherland for Harding and other clients in the late 1940s and '50s. The films for Harding began with a card that reads, "This is one of a series of films produced by the Extension Department of Harding College to create a deeper understanding of what made America the finest place in the world to live." After screening several of the studio's propaganda films, Chris Robinson, artistic director of

the [Ottawa International Animation Film Festival](#), wrote, "The major theme of the series is the reconciliation of labor and management, along with the need to reinvest profits into research and development...the conclusions of each film delivers the same message: as consumption is both a means and an end in defining American freedom." (Essay titled "Selling America: Post-War Propaganda Cartoons," in the 1999 *Ottawa International Student Animation Festival Reader*.)

Giving the viewer lots of facts is part of each film. They stress the freedoms given to us by our Constitution and Bill of Rights from religious freedom and free speech to the right to own your own business. We learn the USA occupies only 7% of the planet, but we own 70% of the cars, 92% of the earth's bathtubs and 50% of the radios. A film sponsored by the New York Stock Exchange explains each step a corporation has to take before they will list that stock. After showing us how great the system is, they issue a warning that occasionally they list a lemon, so read carefully before you invest.

All the Sutherland films were released in Technicolor. Most are eight to ten minutes long. Some of the films have dates in the title sequences, but others do not. It was common to leave out dates in industrial films (a.k.a. sponsored films) so people wouldn't know how old the film was. These were films shown in schools and to other groups year after year. Since older animation doesn't always look dated, hopefully these films could stay in distribution for many years. It is difficult to date some of them accurately. Many of them can be seen at no cost on the Internet at Ephemeral Films' Websites.

A DESCRIPTION OF SEVERAL SUTHERLAND PRODUCTIONS

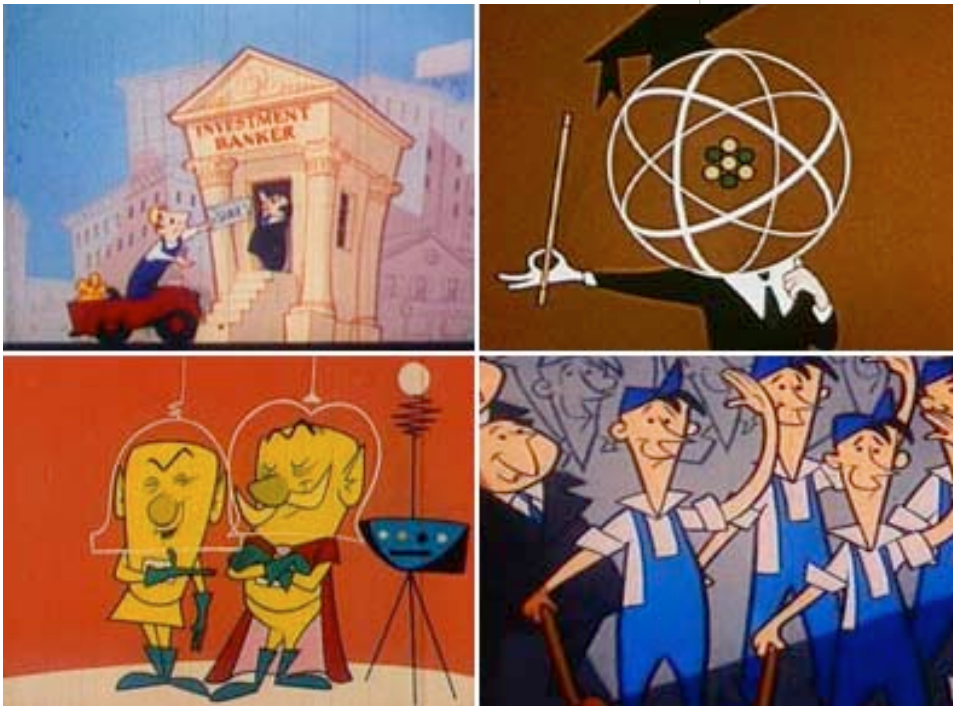
- In *Make Mine Freedom* for Harding College (Sloan Foundation), 1948: Dr. Utopia is selling bottles of "ISM." The substance is said to work miracles, but it is really an evil system that could lead the American worker down the road to slavery. Dr. Utopia will take away our constitutional rights. Before people swallow the salesman's hogwash, John Q. Public butts in and reminds the crowd about what made this country great — capitalism. Then we see what life would be like under Dr. Utopia's dictatorship (Communism at its worse).
- *Going Places* for Harding College (Sloan Foundation), 1948, is a Cold War cartoon defending the profit motive against anti-capitalist critics. The film stars a young soap maker whose business grows into a large business thanks to a good product, loans and his selling stock in the company.



Shots from Sutherland Productions' films (clockwise from top left): *Make Mine Freedom*, *Going Places*, *Why Play Leap Frog?* and *Meet King Joe*.

IN ANY CASE THE SLOAN FOUNDATION DID GIVE HARDING A LOT OF MONEY TO PRODUCE PROPAGANDA FILMS...

- *Why Play Leap Frog?*, for Harding College (Sloan Foundation), 1949, is about the correlation between rising labor cost and higher prices. Labor can beat inflation with more efficient tools and factories that produce more and better things in less time. The worker in the film works at the Dilly Doll factory.
- *Meet King Joe*, for Harding College (Sloan Foundation), 1950, is a Cold War cartoon aimed at American workers with the objective of convincing them of their good fortune. We are told the American way of life means we can consume more new items because our bosses are reinvesting some of their profits in new tools which somehow means a worker can produce more in less time so his wages can go up while the item can sell for less. And that is why we are the industrial capitol of the world.
- *Albert in Blunderland*, 1950, shows us a planned economy run by ants. There are no labor unions or freedom of expression. The film's hero, a car mechanic, wakes from his nightmare just as he is about to be shot for expressing his dislike of the ant colony system.
- *The Littlest Giant*, date unknown, sponsored by the National Consumer Finance Association, is a lesson about all the things you can do with bank loans. Go into debt so we can maintain America's supremacy as the world's most powerful consumer nation.
- *Inside Cackle Corners*, 1951, is a film that takes place in a town run by chickens dressed like humans. There is competition between an old fashion store and a modern one that can sell a better item for the same price. The conservative storeowner gets smart and goes to a bank for a loan so he can expand his business. Of course he gives his employees raises too, just like bosses in the real world. It ends showing us the automatic kitchen of the future with robotic appliances making life easy for us. Credits for art direction go to Gerald Nevis and Edger Starr, music by Darrell Calker and animation by Arnold Gillespie, Phil Monroe, Armin Shaffer and Bob Bemiller.
- *In What Makes Us Tick*, 1952, John Q. Public lives in a modern home with his typical American family. He learns how the stock market works including the steps taken to get a stock listed. Made for the New York Stock Exchange, the associate producer was George Gordon, Carl Urbano was the animation director and the art directors were Gerald Nevis and Edger Starr. The music was by Eugene Poddany and the animation was by Arnold Gillespie, Emery Hawkins and Bill Higgins.
- *A is for Atom*, 1953, sponsored by the General Electric Co., explains how the atom works and what makes uranium so special (it can be used for the good of mankind). There are great images of a giant with arms folded representing atomic power, but the long explanations of the mysteries of U-235 and U-238 are somewhat dull.



Shots from Sutherland Productions' films (clockwise from top left): *Make Mine Freedom*, *Going Places*, *Why Play Leap Frog?* and *Meet King Joe*.

- *Destination Earth*, 1956, is a thinly disguised anti-Communist film about life in a poorly run dictatorship on Mars. The great leader Ogg sends Colonel Cosmic to earth to find out if there is a better way to run his limo. Cosmic learns about how Americans use oil to power cars and to lubricate things to prevent friction. He steals a book from a public library about business competition and capitalism. By introducing the American way of life on Mars, we are led to believe Ogg's days are numbered. Directed by Carl Urbano. Animated by George Cannata, Ken O'Brien, Bill Higgins and Tom Von Neida. Written by Bill Scott, Michael Amestoy and George Gordon. Production design by Tom Orb and Vic Habough. Sponsored by the American Petroleum Institute.
- *It's Everybody's Business*, not dated, but probably about 1956, tells about the building blocks of freedom and it warns us about the destructive forces of war. The lessons learned from WWII (rationing, frozen wages, fixed prices, shortages, etc.) should help us to avoid evil forces in the future. In the film a hat maker learns about free enterprise. Maurice Noble, art director, created the film's modern look. George Gordon was the associate producer, Carl Urbano was the animation director and the script was by Bill Scott and George Gordon. The animators were [Bill Melendez](#), Emery Hawkins and Abe Levitow. The narration was

by Macdonald Carey and the music was by Lex Baxter and Eugene Poddany.

WARNER BROS.

In the mid-1950s the Sloan Foundation funded three theatrical cartoons made by Warner Bros. that have heavy-handed economic messages within them. *Heir Conditioned* (Freleng, 1955) has Elmer Fudd trying to convince Sylvester to invest his inheritance rather than spend it. In *By Word of Mouse* (Freleng), we are taught the benefits of mass production and consumption, and *Yankee Dood It* (Freleng, 1956) presents capitalist theory on how to run a

profitable factory. It is somewhat amusing to see Elmer Fudd waxing poetically about "mass pwoduction" and "pwofits."

Jerry Beck, co-author of *Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies*, 1989, says the Sloan Foundation paid the studio \$25,000 to produce each cartoon and each was produced with a \$23,000 budget resulting in a profit before the films were even shown to the public. The films are still shown on TV by the Cartoon Network. Fans rarely say anything nice about them and all three made it onto an Internet list of "politically incorrect stereotypes that seem to offend just about everyone." They are listed under a special category, "capitalist propaganda (Sloan Foundation cartoons)," at www.nc.rr.com/tuco/looney.lists/politically.

While there is no proof any animated short was produced under our government's Militant Liberty program, the three from Warner Bros. are possible candidates. They were made at the right time, their content was the type of material the Militant Liberty people wanted and cartoons from Warner Bros. were seen in many countries. In an e-mail from Frances Saunders, she said, "The Sloan Foundation was, as I'm sure you know, full of cold warriors (including Lucius Clay) and, if memory serves, it was used as a conduit by the CIA. But I don't think I have anything in my files to help you." It would be a mistake to jump to conclusions about the circumstances under which these films were made.

WHILE THE INFLUENCE OF PATRIOTIC WATCHDOGS TO REMOVE NEGATIVE IMAGES IN CARTOONS IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PROVE, THEIR INFLUENCE IS OBVIOUS IN SEVERAL CARTOONS...

ANIMATION FROM DISNEY AND OTHER PRODUCERS

- *Duck and Cover*, 1951, Archer Productions, nine minutes, a how to survive an atomic blast, a film for kids starring Bert the Turtle, an animated star in a live-action film. Sponsored by the U.S. Federal Civil Defense Administration. Clips from the title song that show Bert demonstrating how to save your life when the bomb explodes were a highlight of *Atomic Café*, a feature length documentary.
- *Our Friend The Atom*, released January 23, 1957, Disney, Technicolor, was made to help promote the government's Atoms for Peace program, and was made with the help of the U.S. Navy and General Dynamics.

LIVE-ACTION PROPAGANDA FILMS MADE FOR HARDING COLLEGE

- *The War We Are In: Communism vs. Capitalism*, 1962, a lecture by Dr. Benson, President of Harding College.
- *A Look at Capitalism*, 1955, with Professor Clifton L. Ganus of Harding College, 13 minutes, produced by Foxovox, Inc., an anti-Communism film about the Cold War and economics, and features an economics lecture on the merits and workings of capitalism.
- *America's Distribution of Wealth*, 1955, with Professor Clifton L. Ganus of Harding College, demonstrates the value of widespread ownership of wealth and the equitable distribution of national income.

Other talks presented by Ganus in this film series from 1955 include *Secret of American Production* and *Why Kill the Goose: The Profit System*.

WAS THERE A NEED FOR THESE FILMS?

If you are still wondering why these films were made and are still feeling a bit skeptical about culture being used as a Cold War weapon, let me leave you with a few facts from the CIA's Freedom of Information Website. One document stamped, "CIA historical review program, released in full, 1999" says, "Since the mid-Fifties, expenditures by Communist countries for cultural and propaganda programs directed toward less developed countries have expanded rapidly and now exceed \$430 million annually...USIA funds for programs in less developed countries are currently about \$90 million." Next it outlines, "Instruments employed in the



Archer Productions introduced Bert the Turtle to teach children how to survive an atomic blast in *Duck and Cover*.

Communist cultural offensive." They include books, films and exhibits in one of the seven categories listed (www.foia.cia.gov). The undated document, probably from the mid-'60s, shows the agency felt using culture, as a weapon for the Cold War, was important. An independent Website says, "By the mid-Reagan era, the USIA would spend nearly a billion dollars per annum to export propaganda..."

The CIA was not the only one to believe we needed propaganda films. We know from Mark Langer's excellent Animation World Network article "[Disney's Atomic Fleet](#)" from April 1998, that *Our Friend the Atom* was a tool to counter opposition to the military use of atomic weapons by showing peaceful uses of atomic energy and by explaining it can be a harmless friend that can benefit mankind. Disney's staff met with government officials while the work was being developed. The article goes on to show how Disney took his propaganda efforts further by building a fleet of "atomic" submarines at Disneyland. Vice-president Nixon, Walt Disney and a Navy admiral were on the maiden voyage of the ride before millions of viewers on ABC television, June 14, 1959. This is a fine example of Militant Liberty.

The films discussed were made at a time when many Americans were really scared of the red menace and the evil empire. The right wing fringe saw Commies everywhere. We had the House Un-American Activities Committee and Joe McCarthy in the Senate holding hearings (a common mistake is to say McCarthy was

THE CIA WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE TO BELIEVE WE NEEDED PROPAGANDA FILMS.

involved with the House group). I can imagine conservative businessmen on corporation boards suggested to their friends on other boards that all corporations should do something positive to fight the influence of Russia at home and abroad. It makes perfect sense for defense contractors to do their part by making small contributions toward the production of propaganda tools (films, etc.). Since the films were shown in classrooms, to civic groups and in company lunchrooms, it was good public relations to say, "This important message was brought to you by..." at the end of each film.

It appears that by the late '50s the emphasis of the conservative pro-American/anti-Communist film had shifted away from using animation and the themes in the works discussed. There were new dangers at home and abroad to worry about that were better dealt with through live-action footage. Harding produced *Brink of Disaster* (1972) that tells us how the 1960's activism "threatens" American moral, religious and ethical principles. CBS photographed Harry Reasoner "without any flowers in my hair" taking a tour of the Haight-Ashbury in *The Hippie Temptation* (1967), an anti-LSD propaganda classic with contempt for those who reject our country's mainstream values during a time of war. Operation Abolition (1960) was made to show the horrors of anti-American protesters "rioting" in San Francisco's City Hall. The ACLU was so outraged by the distortions of truth in the film that they produced *Operation Correction* (1961), a film that explains what actually happened. It was a peaceful sit-in protesting the House Un-American Committee's hearings in May 1960 in San Francisco. It ended with protesters being doused with fire hoses and dragged out to paddy wagons. The conservative film claimed those who opposed the committee were either Communists or Communist dupes. The "riot" footage showed a peaceful sit-in being disrupted by angry police.

Animated anti-Communist propaganda didn't die out completely. Tom Sito, an animator/director, told me: "In 1984 during Ronald Reagan's 'Evil Empire' buildup, Hanna-Barbara had a show called *Challenge of the GoBots*, a toy based show similar to the *Transformers*. The main GoBot Leader-1 could turn from a robot man into a F-14 fighter plane. In one episode his enemy was a robot called Red Menace, who brainwashed other GoBots so that they didn't know they could turn into trucks, planes, SUVs and the like. Red Menace would turn from a man into a Soviet style MIG-21." Dr. Norman S. Cohen, an uncle who once headed Occidental University's history department (retired), wrote me, "Messing with the heads of kids is a great propaganda technique."

Researching this paper was an exciting challenge as most of the material discussed was new to me and it has not been discussed in print before. I feel I've made important discoveries and have begun to understand what happened during the Cold War. I suspect a great deal more is to be learned about animation used as propaganda. There may even be some surprises to discover in well known animated films that we now assume were made solely for entertainment. This study also raises important moral and ethical questions. I'm personally uncomfortable with the knowledge that our government and corporate interests have used a great art form for covert purposes. I'm saddened at animation's loss of innocence.

The author would like to thank the individuals who provided material for this report. Frances Stonor Saunders' research has opened a new chapter in animation history. Vivien Halas has been kind enough to check this text for errors and has provided a wealth of information. Chris Robinson provided his notes on Sutherland Productions and other material. Over two-dozen other people made important contributions. Among them were Michael Barrier, Jerry Beck, Howard Beckerman, Paul Etcheverry, Mark Kausler, Mark Langer and Tom Sito. I'd also like to thank the 19 people who sent e-mails to awn.com regarding my controversial article [**Was Walt Disney a Saint, An Evil Sinner Or The Devil Incarnate? The Truth About Some Of Those Nasty Disney Stories!**](#) Some of their comments inspired me to search the Internet for other questionable Disney stories. I found more, plus my first reference to Saunders' book. Without their letters this study into Cold War propaganda might not exist. Finally, I'd like to thank Ron Diamond and Heather Kenyon for making awn.com an exciting Website. ■

The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters by Frances Stonor Saunders. New York, New York: The New Press, 2000. 528 pages with eight pages photographs. ISBN: 1-56584-664-8. (US\$18.95)

Nine of John Sutherland's films can be viewed and downloaded from www.archive.org/movies/prelinger.php

KARL F. COHEN is a frequent contributor to Animation World Magazine and is the author of *Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators (1997, McFarland)*. He teaches animation history at San Francisco State University and is president of ASIFA-SF.

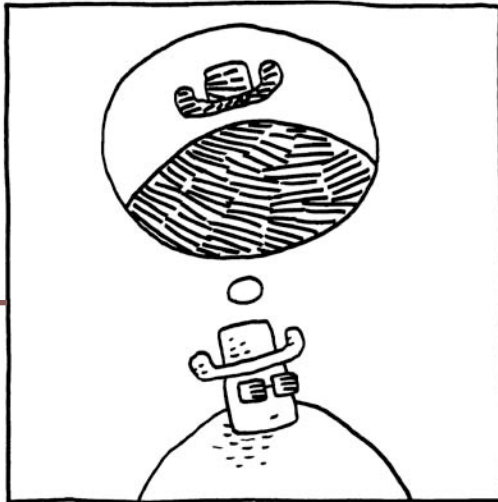


Illustration by [Andreas Hykade](#).
Courtesy of Chris J. Robinson.

ANIMATION PIMP Elbows and Cakeholes

IN MARCH, DISTANCE WAS OBLITERATED WHEN I LEARNED THAT AN ANIMATOR/FRIEND OF MINE MIGHT HAVE COMMITTED A PRETTY VIOLENT ASSAULT.

by Chris J. Robinson

Insignificant and occasionally interesting contributions to the cognition of reality...

"Errors are not in the art but in the artificers."

— Isaac Newton

EVERYTHING I'VE WRITTEN NON-PIMP WISE HAS IN some ways always sought to uncover the character or the essence of the subject. The subjects are often just main characters in a larger story. Last year I started writing a book about a relatively famous hockey player (Doug Harvey). He was a great player, but my interest was in his character. He was a fascinating figure who suffered from alcoholism and manic depression and beyond that was a bit of a unique figure who shunned the so-called normal routes in life. I didn't really have problems talking about his off-ice life with former players, but I did get the sense that the prevailing belief was that Harvey should be judged only for what he did on the ice, not off. I faced a similar issue a few months later when I wrote a piece about the actor Sterling Hayden. Again, I didn't care much about his films (hell...neither did he!), I was curious about his iconoclastic behaviour (yes...he was a boozier too). Most recently, there was the Pete Townshend/child porn incident. Townshend was, I dunno, the guru of my teens. His words and music about the struggles of identity and the anger and frustration of the music definitely provided me with an outlet for my own fuckedupness. Closer to home, most of us now know

WE NEVER REALLY KNOW ANYONE. THAT'S OBVIOUS.

that Norman McLaren had some issues with drugs and booze and it's been said that Eve Lambart often covered up many of McLaren's timing screw ups. Yuri Norstein is a misogynist twit. But hey...as much as I try to find empathy with my subjects, I still speak from a nice safe distance...at least until recently. In March, distance was obliterated when I learned that an animator/friend of mine might have committed a pretty violent assault.

The Full Picture

Yes...okay. There's a big difference between committing a crime, having an illness and just being a basic prick. You can very likely fully enjoy *Tale of Tales* still knowing that Norstein thinks that women are subservient to men and that his wife remains an unacknowledged contributor to his work. Same with McLaren. How much of his success was due to Eve Lambart? Why wasn't it fully acknowledged? I don't think it takes much away from McLaren's achievements. I guess my beef with guys like Norstein and McLaren, and even assorted troubled hockey players I know about, is not that I, for one, want to exploit and destroy them...but rather to just acknowledge the completeness of who they are. Doug Harvey was a fantastic hockey player, so I find it even more incredible that he achieved this while battling manic depression and eventually alcoholism. Harvey's illnesses were a part of who he was...no different from Norstein and McLaren. But they should be known. Generally we read these superficial hagiographies that exist only to celebrate the subject. So ya know we get the charitable deeds, the setbacks that they had to overcome (generally financial or academic)...but umm...WHY is it okay for us to know how great some figure was with charities or kids or old farting ladies but NOT that he was alcoholic, depressive or had violent tendencies toward small animals? Artists, no matter what they might say, do not exist on islands. Everything they create is tied up with the society that surrounds them. You simply cannot escape that. As I've noted before...what happens when we get these sanitized visions is that invariably we get the opposite extreme: the gossipy, scandal ridden piece that seeks only to dish the dirt on the subject. These too are gen-

erally crap because they just dish the dirt without any deep contextualization. Take [Cartoon Capers](#), a book about Canadian animation history. The author talks about both McLaren's and [Ryan Larkin's](#) addiction problems (and Arthur Lipsett's battles with depression) but doesn't even attempt to explore it. As a kid, I was stupid (more so) and I figured every celebrity/hero/artist, whatever, was perfect. They were angels. It made my imperfections that much worse. From the get go I just figured I was a fuck up destined to hell (I was right of course)...but what I'm saying is how many kids are getting fucked up by trying to emulate the illusory perfection of their heroes? I mean shit...I sure as hell would have loved to have known that from the start that these hockey players I worshipped were dysfunctional screw ups like you and me. Wouldn't it be more comforting to know your heroes are like you? Ironically...teenagers seemed to get it. I was drawn to Pete Townshend's music because it evoked anger, frustration, tension while his words articulated a variety of conflicts within each of us. Kurt Cobain is of course another example.

TOO MUCH INFORMATION

But okay...these are slightly different issues. What does one do when someone they respect and admire has committed a serious crime? If this animator has committed a violent crime, how do I deal with that, not just as a friend, but as a programmer? It's one thing to program the films of an alcoholic or a downright prick, but do you programme the films of someone who might be a murderer, rapist or wife-beater?

Certainly I will look at their films differently, with their act in the back of my mind. But then again, in this case, it was likely a rare moment where the person lost control of themselves. Do we punish a person for life because of a single moment?

If I refuse to show this person's films again am I not saying not only that the person is bad, but that they are pure unadulterated bad, that there is no in-between, that they were good solely because they made films but now that doesn't matter because they committed a crime? Does committing a crime mean you're a bad person? What if tomorrow that person commits a good deed? Is it a moot point? What about all the

CERTAINLY I WILL LOOK AT THEIR FILMS DIFFERENTLY, WITH THEIR ACT IN THE BACK OF MY MIND.

unknown crimes? Those that were never discovered or only thought? Should this even be a consideration for a programmer? When I choose retrospectives or films I sure as hell don't analyse the character of the filmmaker. So why should I now reject films because of character? And what about my character? I've certainly had my share of violent, drunken, misanthropic moments. Who am I to judge the morality of another? Hell...there are people in animation who don't like me yet still attend the [Ottawa festival](#) so who am I to refuse people because of their character or their supposed immorality?

We never really know anyone. That's obvious. We always think we do. We think we know some people inside and out, only to discover that we know very little. I guess most of what we project to people is an il-

lusion or a dreamworld to begin with. We all wear masks, even those who think they are open and honest. We, generally, choose what we want others to see. Conversely, we also define those around us. The person we see is in a lot of ways a projection of ourselves. We create the other person.

As for my friend, the artist remains, but the friend, or at least the image of the friend, is gone. And that really sucks. ■

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



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TOON PSYCHOLOGY

Who *Screwed* Roger Rabbit?

by Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman



Why is it that a sequel to this \$154 million moneymaker has never been produced? All *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* images: © Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. All rights reserved.

IN 1988 THE DISNEY AND SPIELBERG EMPIRES JOINED FORCES TO PRODUCE A BIZARRE AND WONDERFUL PIECE OF WORK CALLED *WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT*.

IN THIS ERA OF SEQUELS VIRTUALLY EVERY FILM TO hit the \$100 million mark is lined up for a II, and in some cases a III...but not always. One of the most popular, profitable and revolutionary animated films ever produced sits forlornly on the sidelines awaiting its progeny. In 1988 the Disney and Spielberg empires joined forces to produce a bizarre and wonderful piece of work called *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. This well-known film brought its producers four Academy Awards, \$154 million and the satisfaction of triggering a nationwide revival of interest in animation. Part animated feature, part live-action *film noir*, all entertainment, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* made animated stars out of a sputtering rabbit named Roger and his mammiferous mate Jessica as they led live-action detective Eddie Valiant through sunny Los Angeles and the insane asylum known as Toontown in a desperate chase. The goal: clearing the

rabbit of a spurious murder charge. Critics were wowed, both Disney and Spielberg's Amblin Productions were enriched, and audiences were left p-p-p-pleading for more. Yet, to this day they continue to plead in vain, innocent victims of corporate politics, personal pettiness and doom-laden decision-making. As far as yours truly has been able to piece the sorry tale together, it goes something like this:

THE BIRTH OF A STAR

Disney CEO Michael Eisner, you see, had become enamored of an old project once pushed by former exec Ron Miller; the adaptation of Gary Wolf's novel *Who Censored Roger Rabbit*. Eisner was looking to put his stamp on a major animation project and believed that the novel would translate into a blockbuster film. Before coming to Disney, Michael Eisner had been head of production at Paramount. While there he had once helped out Steven Spielberg and George Lucas on a little project of theirs back in 1982, a faux 40s swashbuckler called *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. This film helped cement Spielberg's position as one of the most popular directors in America. Since *Raiders* also turned a buck or two, Spielberg was happy to return the favor a few years later after Eisner had gone on to the House of Mouse and realized he needed help to make *Roger Rabbit* a reality.

Spielberg was by now one of Hollywood's major players and he contributed more than mere moolah; he was instrumental in having other studios agree to lend their animated characters to the effort. Lucas, for his part, lent Disney the might of his SFX arsenal (Industrial Light & Magic). With the backscratching now complete, the inevitable army of lawyers convened to work out agreements regarding the profit-sharing. When the last briefcase clicked shut, Disney and Amblin held 50/50 rights to box-office take, licensing, merchandise, theme-park attractions and everything on down to Roger's fleas. The Big Deal included the making of any sequel, although no one foresaw how contentious this would become.

As production continued on the film now known as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, director Robert Zemeckis and animation supervisor Richard Williams

emerged as a secondary tier of stars flourishing within the vision of Eisner and Spielberg. Roger, Jessica, Baby Herman and the venerable denizens of ToonTown were the third wave, the one that engulfed the nation and made toons cool again. People clamored to know how the SFX were achieved, and more importantly, started learning about the classic characters whose cameos made *Roger Rabbit* such a treat. People who did not know Tex Avery from Tex Ritter began to watch Avery's films after articles described the late, great director's influence on the movie's original characters. It is probably no exaggeration to say that this film was the seminal trigger for the Disney revival and the emergence of entities like the Cartoon Network, to cite two examples. Oh, lest we forget, the movie finished second in box-office take that year only to the Tom Cruise/Dustin Hoffman vehicle *Rain Man*.



Michael Eisner incurred Steven Spielberg's wrath when the Disney chairman placed short *Roller Coaster Rabbit* at the head of *Dick Tracy*. Photo by David James; courtesy DreamWorks LLC.



A prequel, *Who Discovered Roger Rabbit*, came close to getting the greenlight, but the budget torpedoed the production.

MONEY TO BE MADE

Never ones to waste an opportunity, Eisner and Spielberg hopped on their manic bunny's newfound stardom. In what would become their last full act of cooperation, Disney/Amblin turned out a 1989 theatrical short called *Tummy Trouble* featuring Roger, Jessica, Baby Herman, and (in what would become a running gag in future shorts) Tex Avery's Droopy. Eisner presented this hyperkinetic short as the opening act for *Honey, I Shrunk The Kids*, and when both movie and short drew enthusiastic reviews it couldn't be denied that profits were boosted by Roger's return to the big screen. A second short was announced and it appeared that fans would have their fill of Roger and his toonmates for years — if not decades — to come.

NEVER ONES TO WASTE AN OPPORTUNITY, EISNER AND SPIELBERG HOPPED ON THEIR MANIC BUNNY'S NEWFOUND STARDOM.

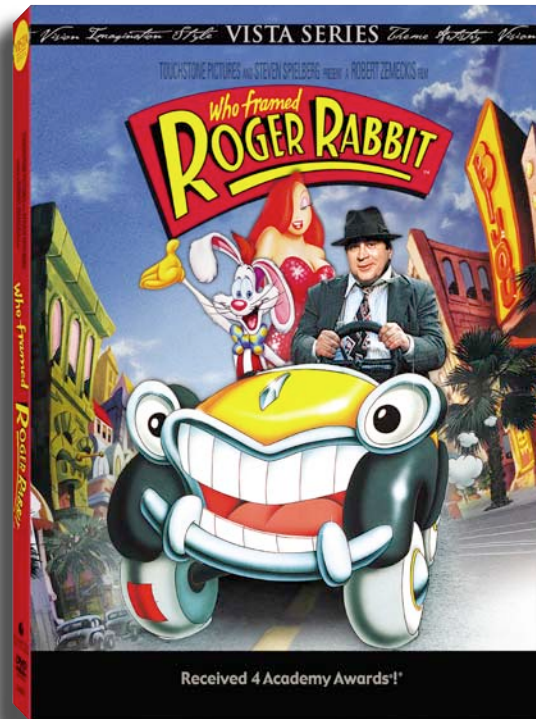
They were to be disappointed. It was, in fact, that next short that apparently began the ruin of Roger Rabbit.

Eisner and Spielberg's Amblin outfit were both busy in Disney's behalf in 1990; Disney's *Dick Tracy* was being touted as one of the year's blockbusters, and Spielberg was producing a creepy farce called *Arachnophobia* for Disney's Hollywood Pictures. Roger Rabbit was busy too, starring in *Roller Coaster Rabbit*, the aforementioned second short. He was soon pulled into a raucous tug-of-war that Avery himself would have been thrilled to animate: Eisner and Spielberg each wanted the short to open for (and hopefully boost) their respective films. Since both films were under the Disney aegis, Eisner won the battle. *Dick Tracy* and *Arachnophobia* lost the war in any case. These unmemorable movies faded from sight but Eisner and Spielberg would never entirely repair the breach caused by their dispute. Still, the legal agreements concerning Roger held in place.

It seemed that angering Steven Spielberg was a losing proposition; the once-and-future *wunderkind* allowed Disney to practically complete a third (and as-yet-unseen) Roger Rabbit short called *Hare In My Soup* before objecting vehemently to the cartoon and issuing a veto. Spielberg also proved contemptuous in regard to the script for the long-proposed sequel — or, more accurately — prequel. Scriptwriter Nat Mauldin had fashioned a screenplay called *Toon Platoon*, later renamed *Who Discovered Roger Rabbit*. This work-in-progress featured Roger's search for his mother, Jessica's unwitting employment by Nazi spies, and Roger's entry into show biz. Spielberg was not impressed and vetoed the script but did send out a peace feeler; Disney was allowed to script and complete a third Roger Rabbit short entitled *Trail Mix-Up* in 1993.

A SECOND CHANCE?

Eisner may possibly have responded by authorizing a rewrite of the script in 1997 by two writers who had a history of working on Spielberg-backed animation productions. Sherri Stoner and Deanna Oliver had been on the team that produced *Tiny Toons* and *Animaniacs* (they later collaborated on an animated *Casper the Ghost* revival). Stoner and Oliver jettisoned the Third Reichian subplot in the original script and turned it into the story of Roger's inadvertent rise to stardom on Broadway and the silver screen. The sub-



The recent release of the deluxe DVD version of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* may be as close as it gets for those awaiting a sequel. Director Robert Zemeckis carried out Eisner and Spielberg's vision for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.



Who Framed Roger Rabbit is cited as the film that began animation's latest renaissance.

plot about the search for Roger's mother was retained. The script was a big hit in the corridors of Disney; Alan Menken wrote five songs for the film and offered his services as executive producer. Hot animator Eric Goldberg was the front-runner for animation supervisor and in accordance, he redesigned Roger as an eager young rabbit headed for stardom.

Eisner sweetened the pot by offering two of Spielberg's old Amblin associates, Frank Marshall and Kathleen Kennedy, a chance to co-produce the prequel. Spielberg was by now one-third of the Spielberg-Katzenberg-Geffen triumvirate that represented Disney's most dangerous threat to animated hegemony, but the dean of DreamWorks finally relented and gave the go-ahead. (Although colleague Jeffrey Katzenberg had been fired by Eisner and held no great love for his ex-employer at the Mouse, the Roger Rabbit agreements did not include Katzenberg and were thus beyond his influence.) Test footage for *Who Discovered Roger Rabbit* was shot sometime during 1998 at the Disney animation unit in Florida; the results were an unwieldy mix of CGI, traditional animation and live-action that pleased no one. A second test run had the toons wholly converted to CGI; everything clicked and it appeared that nothing could stand in Roger's way — except the budget.

THE LAST SUNSET

The Mouse's bean counters, receiving the news that perhaps 80% of the film would require CGI, put the projected budget for the film well over \$100 million. Eisner's feet grew colder than Chilly Willy's at

this prospect and he may have been wondering whether a prequel twelve years after the fact was worth it. Eisner did not ponder this for very long; the money earmarked for Roger's *redux* was apparently channeled into the production of a film that became *Pearl Harbor*. Interestingly enough, the budget for this film was reportedly \$135-\$140 million. This was in no way Disney's last production with a budget that could have put the Roger Rabbit sequel across. Disney directors Ron Clements and John Musker had long wanted to make a sci-fi

update of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*; after a decade of frustration the duo appealed to Roy Disney himself, and *Treasure Planet* was given a green light. Despite an eventual cost of close to \$180 million the space-faring saga sailed into a black hole of public indifference; *Barren Asteroid* might have been a more fitting title given the \$38 million that straggled back to Disney.

And Roger Rabbit? At last traceable report the prequel has been taken off the production schedule and is nowhere to be seen on the radar. At the time of this writing, a special anniversary two-disc DVD set with a plethora of extras is about to go on sale, and this appears to be as good as it will get. There was a time when Roger Rabbit and his cohorts were a hop away from toon immortality, poised at that indefinably magical moment when the audiences of America and the world clamor for more and in doing so transform an animated character from an ink-and-paint whimsy to a beloved icon. Roger's tragedy is analogous to the radiant child stricken with leukemia, or the frisky young moppet who skips out into the street unmindful of the drunk driver careening around the corner; an unfair death just as life was beginning to reveal its promise. One of the premises underlying *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* was that toons entertained the populace but were second-class life forms subject to discrimination at the hands of the very humans who enjoyed them. Given the fate of Roger Rabbit, in this case perhaps fiction is closer to truth.

So, who indeed screwed Roger Rabbit? Was it Michael Eisner, monopolizing the "star" during the early

days of the agreement with Spielberg and later pulling the financial plug on the project amidst fears that a sequel at such a late date would not fly? Was it Steven Spielberg, picking up his rabbit and going home after his flap with Eisner, relenting only when it may have been far too late? Was it the legal agreement, which may have been well-intentioned but turned out to be far too detailed and rigid in a realm where *The Art of The Deal* is everything? Was it the corporate decision-making structure at Disney, which turned out films that made modest (or no) profits at a budget that might have floated a *Roger Rabbit* sequel? A combination of the above? No matter, the bottom line remains the same; *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* may well be one of the only films to gross \$328 million (in 1988 dollars) worldwide and still be denied a sequel.

Perhaps someday Disney may muster their second and third-string personnel to toss out a direct-to-video quickie, but to many fans the sequel actually exists. In this version, which Mauldin, Stoner and Oliver had nothing to do with, there are two Judge Dooms; between

them they have washed all of ToonTown in a deadly rain of dip. Jessica has abandoned showbiz for the life of a high-priced courtesan catering to multimillionaire executives, and Baby Herman has grown up to be an embittered Hollywood accountant forever pulling the plug on projects that threaten to go above cost — except when overruled by higher powers. Roger? Living proof that no man (or rabbit) can serve two masters, he took the last red trolley car out of L.A. To this day he has not returned. Cut. Fade to black. ■

Who Framed Roger Rabbit is now available in a feature-packed, deluxe 2-disc DVD set and also a VHS bonus edition from Walt Disney Video; running time approximately 104 minutes. DVD US\$29.99; VHS US\$19.99. UPC 786936073386.

MARTIN "DR. TOON" GOODMAN is a longtime student and fan of animation. He lives in Anderson, Indiana.



How To Succeed in Animation (Don't Let a Little Thing Like Failure Stop You!)

GENE DEITCH, A SUCCESSFUL AMERICAN ANIMATION DIRECTOR, USES EXAMPLES OF HIS OWN FAILURES TO MAKE POINTS AS TO HOW YOUNG ANIMATORS CAN AVOID SOME PITFALLS ON THE WAY TO SUCCESS, AND STIRS THE POT WITH MUSINGS ON THE MEANING AND WONDER OF ANIMATION. A GREAT READ FOR ANYONE INTERESTED IN THE WORLD OF ANIMATION.

BOOK EXCERPT

We Hereby Agree...

by Gene Deitch

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



Crabby Appleton is "rotten to the core!" From the CBS-Terrytoons series *Tom Terrific*.

HERE ARE A VAST ARRAY OF WAYS AN ANIMATOR OR independent filmmaker can get screwed. If you get involved with a real expert, there may be no escape. But a well drawn written agreement can save you in most cases. Decide for yourself if you need a lawyer, but legal eagles generally fly high, and need plenty of enriched dollars to keep them aloft. I may be lucky, but I've done better on contracts I've drafted myself. A lawyer has enough boilerplate to make a contract that is thicker than your film script — often many times thicker — and you probably won't understand most of it. From my vast experience with vampire producers, I have boiled down the essential armor plate to just a few pages — often just a single page — with the essentials all there. However, every project is different in one way or another, but these are the essential points:

1. Clarity. Simple, but precise language.
2. Use of the word "shall" in preference to "will." There is a mighty difference!
3. Fairness to all parties. A tricked up, one-sided contract leads to intense pain, and is non-workable in practice.

AS CASEY STENGEL ONCE SAID, "VERBAL AGREEMENTS ARE NOT WORTH THE PAPER THEY ARE WRITTEN ON!"

In animation work there are generally three types of contracts or agreements.

1. Employment.
2. Freelance, where your own creation is involved.
3. Freelance, where you are contracted to produce their project.

I'm not guaranteeing you that you can actually get all of the rights and compensations you want. They are what you should strive for. What you will actually get depends on what you've got to sell and how much the client/producer wants you and/or your creation. That is, as they say, "Show Business!"

No contract is foolproof, and any can collapse for various extreme reasons. The most important point is to know with whom you are dealing. Trust and mutual benefit are the only true guarantees of fulfillment. It is vital that all understandings be in writing, carefully worded to eliminate ambiguities, and that they be

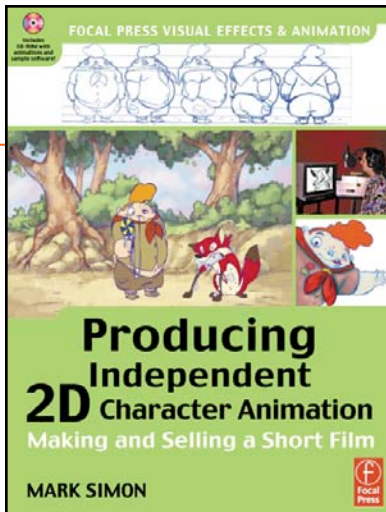
carefully read and understood.

As Casey Stengel once said, "Verbal agreements are not worth the paper they are written on!"

Read examples of each of the three types of contracts, complete with Gene Deitch's explanations of the good and bad points, now. ■

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."





All images are from *Producing Independent 2D Character Animation: Making and Selling a Short Film* by Mark Simon. Reprinted with permission.

BOOK EXCERPT

Concept to Creation: Story and Storyboards

by Mark Simon

*This is the second in a series of 12 excerpts from Mark Simon's book, *Producing Independent 2D Character Animation: Making and Selling a Short Film*. This book is a full-color concept-to-pitch guide that teaches animators, students and small studios the art and business of producing short, cel animation films. Animation producer Mark Simon has detailed the process in an accessible how-to manner using his award-winning series, *Timmy's Lessons In Nature*, as a guide. This 432-page book contains over 600 full-color images, interviews and a CD-Rom containing sample animation, animatics and sample softwares described in the text.*

BACK IN THE GOLDEN ERA OF CARTOON ANIMATION, there were no scripts, just directors storyboarding their ideas. They would come up with a basic story in a bull session and then storyboard the action. Good physical gags can't be written, only drawn. Gags are made funny by the expressions of the characters and the actions they go through, not necessarily by written descriptions. Dramatic scenes and situational humor, on the other hand, are best when scripted first.

SCRIPT VS. BOARD

It is up to you to determine what best suits the needs of your project — writing a full script and then storyboarding, or doing the storyboards straight from a concept. If you are working for a client, always start with a script.

If you script your story ideas, make sure that you write your scripts in the proper script format. Even if no one but you sees the script, it will be good practice for when you need to show a client or potential employer that you know what you're doing. There are plenty of great books that explain script formatting.

When you storyboard an animated project, make sure you board out all key motions and the beginning

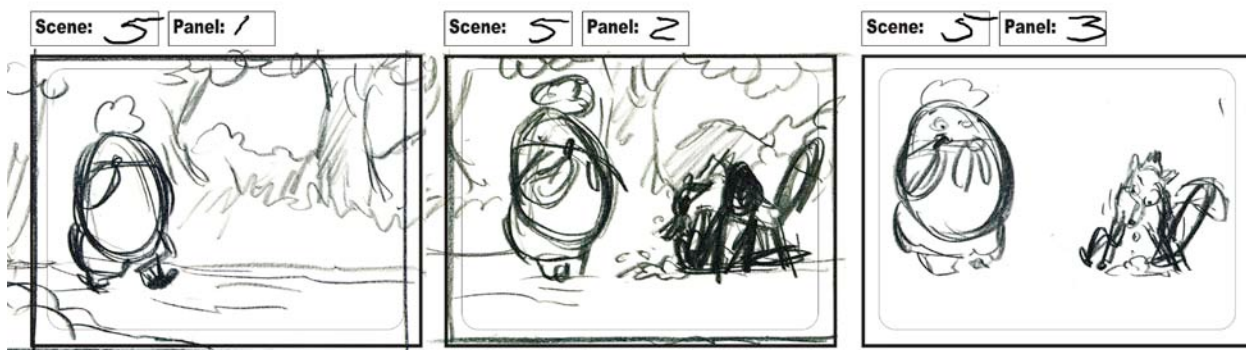


We used multiple panels to show Timmy walking up to and past the camera. One drawing would not have accurately shown the action.

and ending of each action, not just one drawing per scene. These storyboards will function as a reference for all your key animation. Notice in the following samples, in which Timmy walks up to and past the camera, bobbing his head side to side, that we use a number of frames to show how he moves. This is also true for when Timmy throws the candy at the fox. There are hundreds of ways a character could throw something, but we needed Timmy to look like he was just tossing his candy without any malicious intent. To save time and money, it was important for us to work out the proper action in storyboards rather than in animation.

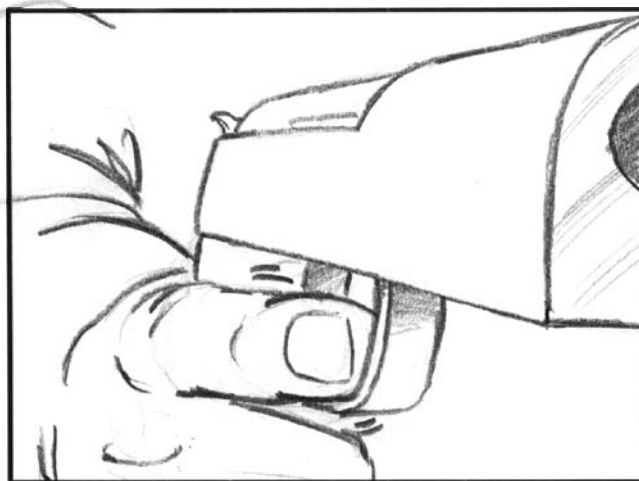
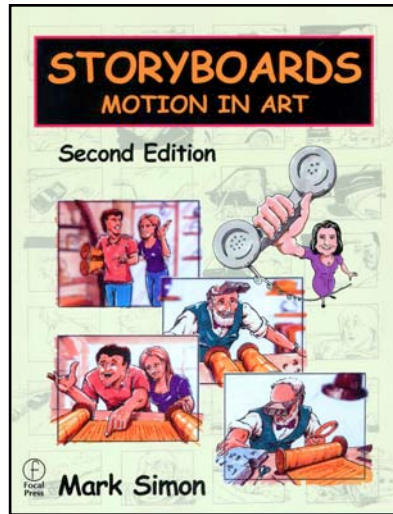
A page of storyboards with the layout taped on the bottom for reference.

Project: Timmy's Lessons In Nature, Lesson 3



Timing Dialogue Action	PAN WITH TIMMY. FOX IS FORMING AND LOOKS AT TIMMY. FOX LOOKS BACK TOWARDS CAMERA	
	Background layout	

Storyboards: Motion in Art,
2nd Edition (published by
Focal Press).



Close-up (middle) of character: normally head and shoulders or a bit tighter. An extreme close-up (bottom): the shaking finger of the character tells the audience he's not sure about what he's doing.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Storyboards should never be drawn on the art supply store pads that have black around the panels or that have rounded corners. The black keeps you from drawing outside the image or from making notes. Rounded corners are generally frowned upon because rectangular boards are much easier to crop. The art supply store pads are also not the right size paper.

Storyboard sheets should be letter or legal size (8 1/2" x 11" or 8 1/2" x 14") for ease of copying and storing. Storyboards are often translated into layouts that provide the background design and position of the characters. Very tight storyboards, clean and well-rendered, are sometimes blown up and used as the layouts for a scene. At other times, layouts are provided for the storyboard artists. When layouts are provided, they will often be pasted below the storyboard panels as a reference for both the storyboard artist and production.

The main reason for storyboarding is to pre-plan and enhance the story. Don't be overly concerned with the quality of the art. Concentrate on determining the proper shots to help the story flow. There are hundreds of elements that make up a great storyboard, far too many for this book. For all the details you may refer to my book, *Storyboards: Motion in Art*.

TEN STEPS FOR A GREAT STORYBOARD

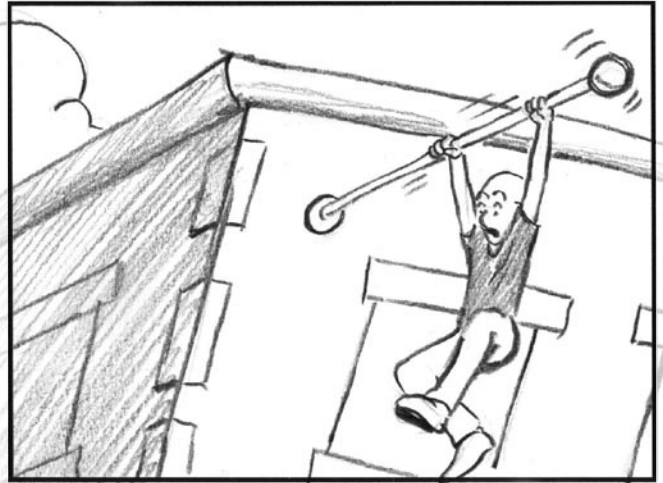
Here are ten elements that help make a great storyboard:

1. Varied shots. Make some shots wide, others close.
2. Building tension. Show the audience what the characters don't see. Cut to a bomb counting down. Show shadowy figures in the background.
3. Use Close-ups (Cus). Draw the viewer into the action.
4. Establishing shots. Give your viewers an overview of who is where to help them follow the action.
5. Cut-aways. Shots of a character's fingers twitching, or trophies on a wall, can say more about a character than lengthy dialogue.
6. Extreme Close-ups. An extremely close shot of a character's eye, mouth or finger will help enforce the urgency in what is happening.
7. Point of View shots (POV). Show the audience what your character sees from the character's view point.
8. Motivate your shots. For instance, in order to have a POV, you need to first show the character looking toward something, which motivates a cut to their POV.
9. Over the Shoulder shots (OTS). This draws the viewer into the action and makes a scene more intimate.
10. Use as many drawings as necessary to show the action.

STORYBOARDS SHOULD NEVER BE DRAWN ON THE ART SUPPLY STORE PADS THAT HAVE BLACK AROUND THE PANELS OR THAT HAVE ROUNDED CORNERS.



The shot of the character looking up motivates the next shot of his POV.



An over the shoulder shot.

The rest of the chapter contains 15 more key storyboard elements, information on digital storyboards, props for storyboard artists and examples and explanations of the entire storyboard from Timmy's Lessons In Nature, Lesson 3. To learn about other topics, check out *Producing Independent 2D Character Animation*, published by Focal Press. It can be bought at any bookstore or [online](#). ■

Producing Independent 2D Character Animation: Making and Selling a Short Film by Mark Simon. Burlington, Massachusetts: Focal Press, 2003. 432 pages. ISBN: 0-240-80513-5.



MARK SIMON founded and owns A&S Animation, Inc., an award-winning cel animation house in Florida, which develops and produces character animation for commercials, TV, training videos and the Web. He also owns Animatics & Storyboards, Inc., the largest storyboard house in the southern United States, which has provided work on over 1,200 productions. Mark's accomplishments include owning an award-winning advertising firm, being a syndicated cartoonist, production designer of film, TV and animations, and writing entertainment industry books and lecturing on both animation and storyboards. Having won over 30 animation awards for his efforts, Mark has directed Timmy's Lessons In Nature (which he sold as a TV series), My Wife Is Pregnant, numerous commercials, training videos and television series special effects. Read more about [A&S Animation](#) and the author.

CAREER COACH

The Name of the Game

by Pamela Kliebrink Thompson



WHAT'S IN A NAME? EVERYTHING!

Put your name on everything. When you apply for a job, your resume, reel, reel breakdown, outside of your portfolio, and portfolio contents should all have your name and contact information on them. Your resume may get separated from your other material so it is essential that all your materials have your name on them. If a prospective employer sees a reel he likes, make sure he knows who did it.

State your full name on your answering machine's outgoing message. Don't make the caller guess whether she's reached you or not.

Leave your name when you phone, leave messages by email, fax or other means. Identify yourself with your first and last name and leave your contact info if you want your message returned. Don't expect someone to recognize your voice, even if it is someone you have spoken with on numerous occasions. It is a courtesy to the person you called, it's professional, and mentioning your name makes the person you called think he should know who you are.

BE A NAME COLLECTOR

Networking will help you hear about opportunities, but you also have to get your name out there.

Don't keep your name a secret at meetings or events. Introduce yourself to speakers and fellow audience members. If your fellow networker does not reciprocate, ask his or her name. Use it immediately and several times in

**YOUR NAME IS THE MOST IMPORTANT
FEATURE OF YOUR BUSINESS CARD.**

PROTECT YOUR NAME. BUILD YOUR REPUTATION AS SOMEONE WHO CAN BE TRUSTED...

your conversation so you remember it.

Forget a name? Don't be embarrassed to admit it. Introduce yourself and say, "I'm sorry I forgot your name." In his book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie reminds us that, "A person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language."

When you introduce yourself, give some information about yourself as well. Provide a springboard for conversation. Prepare a brief introduction (90 seconds or less), which highlights what makes you special. This is like a log line in the *TV Guide* — why that person should get to know you. You might include what you do, what you specialize in and your special strengths and skills, your passions and what you've worked on and who you've worked with. Basically it's a personal ad of what you offer — what makes you unique.

As you meet other people at the event, introduce your new contacts to each other. People appreciate being introduced. Your friendliness will make you stand out and everyone will think you're so well connected.

At the end of the meeting, address the people you met by their names and tell them you enjoyed meeting them. Exchange contact info with them.

When you follow up with your new contacts in a few days, it will be easier for you to remember names and faces as well.

Your name is the most important feature of your business card. Hand out your business card and try to get one in return. If your company doesn't provide business cards, make them yourself. When you receive a business card, repeat the name of the person who gives it to you.

You're often on a first-name basis with colleagues, but remember to treat assistants as well as you treat their bosses. Learn their names and greet them by name in person or on the phone.

Keep track of names in your database. Stay in touch with your contacts. The more you know about them and the work they do, the more interested they will be in you and the work you do.

MAKE YOUR NAME STAND OUT

Another place to use names is on personal notes to the people you've met at an event or meeting. Very few people spend the time to do this and your name will be remembered if you do.

Protect your name. Build your reputation as someone who can be trusted, delivers work when promised and is easy to work with. At a recent SIGGRAPH meeting, Frank Gladstone, head of artistic development, DreamWorks SKG Animation, noted that your first break will come because of the work on your reel. But the jobs that follow will be because people liked working with you. Be sure when your name comes up, it is in a positive way.

Promote your name by becoming an expert. Write a bio and a short letter about the project you are working on and your role on it. Send it to trade publications, alumni newsletters or hometown newspapers, and state your availability for interviews. Throw your name in the ring whenever volunteers are sought for speaking engagements.

Follow these suggestions and you're sure to make a name for yourself. ■

RESOURCES

How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1982. 276 pages. ISBN 0-6717-2365-0 (US\$7.50)

ACM/SIGGRAPH, Association for Computing Machinery, Special Interest Group on Graphics: reachable at www.siggraph.org

PAMELA KLIEBRINK THOMPSON is a recruiter, hiring strategist and career coach. Her clients include Disney, Fox, Framestore, Macromedia and Digital Domain. You may have seen her speaking at SIGGRAPH, Women in Animation or VES (Visual Effects Society) events. If you didn't introduce yourself, shame on you.

INTERACTIVE DEVELOPMENT

The Game Developers Conference 2003 in Review

by Leslie Bisbko



This year's Game Developer's Conference showed that games are maturing. All conference photos and images courtesy of the [Game Developers Conference](#). Photographer: Robin Hood Dial II.

IN OLDER CULTURES WE EMBRACED VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION AS PARTS OF THE WHOLE BEING — BOTH GOOD AND EVIL WERE A PART OF LIFE.

THE GAME DEVELOPER'S CONFERENCE (MARCH 4-8, SAN JOSE, California, sponsored by the Gama Network) gave me a peek into the world of games from the inside out. While I'm a 3D computer animator, I'm brand new to playing games; looking at games from the point of view of a production artist was a great way to learn. I found that game developers are extolling the virtues of engaging story, vivid graphics and principles of animation as hardware and technology limitations rapidly melt away. Games are finally maturing, and developers are poised to take things to the next level.

The conference sessions are categorized into several tracks: Visual Arts, Programming, Game Design, Audio, Business and Legal, Production, and IGDA (the International Game Developers Association). There was also a two day Academic Summit to address curricular issues and industry/academia relations, and "GDC Mobile," a mini-conference focusing on the rapidly expanding mobile games industry. I attended mostly Visual Arts sessions dealing with art direction, story

WHILE I'M A 3D COMPUTER ANIMATOR, I'M BRAND NEW TO PLAYING GAMES; LOOKING AT GAMES FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF A PRODUCTION ARTIST WAS A GREAT WAY TO LEARN.

and production techniques like modeling, rigging, animation and facial animation.

The conference hosted the 3rd Annual Game Developers Choice Awards, where *Metroid Prime*, by Retro Studios, took the "Game of the Year" award through a peer voting process within the game developer community. Also featured was the Independent Games Festival, recognizing both independent and student game developers with cash prizes. This year's winner was *Wild Earth* from Super X Studios, developed in five months on a \$5,000 budget.

MUST ATTENDS

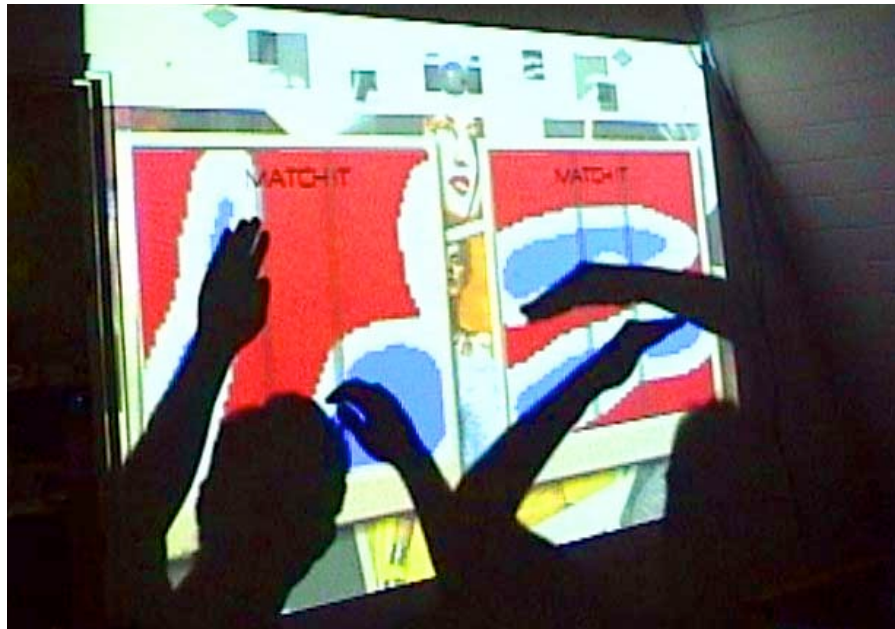
The highlight for every attendee was the keynote address, "Fleshing Out Middle-Earth: Weta Digital Creatures," presented by [Weta's](#) former CTO Jon LaBrie and Adam Valdez, animation supervisor for *The Fellowship of the Ring*, and animation department head for *The Two Towers*. We got to see how they made *Gollum*, including a bloopers of Gollum wearing a hot-pink spiky mohawk, and another shot of him playing an electric guitar on his knees. Never mind the translucent skin shader or motion-capture methods; I was awestruck by the matrix of 850 morph targets used to animate Gollum's face, and the amazing inverse kinematics foot rig that kept his feet and toes glued to the rocks. We also learned that a high level of detail was put into the Ents (which took 40 hours per frame to render), but in the final cut we lost some of the close-up shots that would have shown this off. For the scene in which the Ents destroy Isengard, Peter Jackson gave the animators free reign to improvise with knocking things over and slaughtering Orcs. He then staged the camera movements based on their animation, as if it were live-action footage.

I favored sessions on production techniques that would teach me fancy new 3D tricks. Two sessions that met my needs in this area were "Extreme Character Rigging: When Less is More" by Steve Theodore of RAD Game Tools, and "Character Rigging and Animation," by Martin Coven and Mookie Weisbrod of Inevitable Entertainment. Theodore proposes a very practical, economical approach: you rig the character on a scene by scene basis, giving it functionality according to the demands of the scene as opposed to creating an all-purpose rig. On the other hand, the rig Coven designed is the hot-rod of all-purpose character rigs, offering tools for animating characters intuitively.



The game developers community votes on who receives the Choice Awards. Keynote speakers Jon LaBrie and Adam Valdez revealed fascinating details on how Weta designed Gollum and animated the Ents destroying Isengard (middle). © 2002 New Line Productions, Inc. *Lord of the Rings* director Peter Jackson (bottom) spoke via satellite to the Choice Awards attendees.





Game Developers Choice awards went to *Wild Earth* (© 2003 Super X Studios) and *Metroid Prime* (™ & © 2002 Nintendo). Director Mike Wellins (bottom left) shared his ideas on storytelling and how to create “snappy” animation. Chris Hecker (bottom center) encouraged players to use their shadows to interact with games he presented. Here attendees play with Dean Macri’s IGJ game *Rock Scissors Paper 2000* (bottom right) and Sean Barrett’s IGJ game *Supermodel Shootout*. © Chris Hecker.

tively and efficiently. Weisbrod’s walk cycle demo using this rig was one of the best animation demos I’ve seen. A former ILM animator who worked on *Star Wars*, Weisbrod demonstrated how the tools intersect with the animation process and included pointers on timing and movement dynamics. Both sessions brought home the point that animators who get involved in the rigging process ultimately have the kind of control they need. Given the amount and value of material these presenters had to offer, their sessions could have been at least two hours if not longer.

ANIMATORS WHO GET INVOLVED IN THE RIGGING PROCESS ULTIMATELY HAVE THE KIND OF CONTROL THEY NEED.

LEARNING THE NUTS AND BOLTS

Other sessions I attended in this category were "Built to Move in Max 5" by Paul Steed of XBox and "Facial Animation for Game Characters," by Tito Pagan of Wild Tangent. Steed's full-day tutorial focused on low polygonal character modeling and weighting verticies to bones. He demonstrated that specific vertex placement at the shoulders, elbows and knees can assist the enveloping process and keep these trouble spots from collapsing when limbs are rotated. Pagan's talk was geared to real-time online animation. He emphasized that online games can now handle sophisticated facial animation created with bone rigs.

The panel session "State of the Art: Building 3D Environments and Models Review Panel" supported the "less is more" approach taken in games such as The Two Towers, Ico and Steel Battalion, where color, design and efficient use of textures are handled creatively. The panellists want to see more procedurally created environments in the future, replacing the current use of "cross-poly trees" and "sprites." They were also excited about the creative possibilities of non photo-realistic rendering techniques.

"Great Animation and Storytelling," with former Will Vinton Studios director Mike Wellins gave us a fun look at editing concepts and how to create "snappy" animation. With classical and stop-motion animation, snappy is easy and fun, smooth is hard. With computer animation, smooth is easy, but snappy is tedious. And, as we all know, there is just too much float in computer animation. Unfortunately, I dashed off to another session before I got to hear Pixar animator Andrew Gordon's talk on how he animated Mike in [Monsters, Inc.](#)

"A Review of Current and Future Animation Issues" didn't quite live up to its name, but a few important points were discussed among the panelists. The general rant was that limited game technology is to blame for bad animation. The reason there's little, if no anticipation in games is that game designers feel the player needs instantaneous response when they hit the joystick. This poses a dilemma for animators trying to make things move the way they should! As long as animators work directly with the programmers early on in production, they are able to attain their goals.

This sentiment was echoed repeatedly through several sessions on art directing. Artists need to talk to the programmers as early on in development as possible. The sooner this happens, the more the game

can evolve around the art assets. Artists were encouraged to learn scripting languages, as scripting one's own tools can empower you to get the job done faster without relying on someone else's time and availability. Making good use of visual research and pre-production were also supported emphatically, although most often production schedules don't allow enough time for this. At the "Art Directors Panel," Linda Lubken reported that several binders full of reference material were compiled for [Oddworld](#), and the walls of the studio were covered with designs. Highly detailed spec sheets were created early on in production and were of great help with workflow, client approvals and achieving high quality results.

INDY FOCUS

The dynamic "Experimental Gameplay Workshop," led by Jonathan Blow, game designer/programmer, was a series of short presentations by programmers who independently coded their own experimental games. This venue is meant to support and bring exposure to the creative possibilities of working independently. Says Blow, "If we experiment now, on a small scale, we can shape our industry."

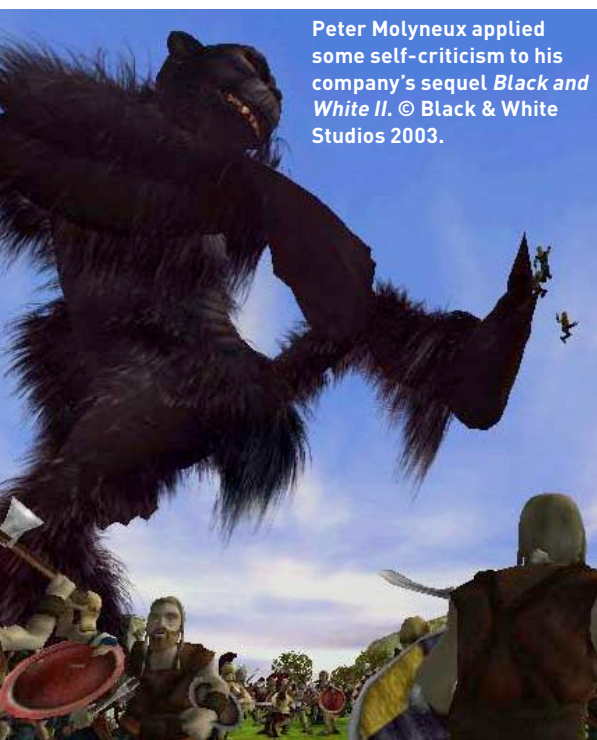
As part of this session, Chris Hecker of definition six presented the Indie Game Jam 1: 14 games that were programmed in his barn in Oakland using Zack Simpson's Shadow Garden software. Each of these games is projected on a screen and players cast their shadow to interact with the game. A camera feeds the live shadow information back into the game. The resulting full-bodied interactivity of these games ran the gamut from simple elegance to downright goofiness. Some interfaces involved hitting buttons with your hand, or using your shadow to cover as many elements on the screen as possible. Two games were based on physics simulation — the user could separate shapes connected together, or squish shapes to fit them through a maze. There was also real-time Scrabble, and Rock, Paper, Scissors. Other games in this session included a Japanese e-mail program complete with voice recognition and calligraphy, and a game that was played in a Swiss university building in which a team of players had to locate a virtual bomb.

BEYOND SHOOT 'EM UP

"Profiling the Female Gamer: A Look at How She Buys and Plays" was well attended and delivered well-researched material on both marketing and game de-



Violence and values were on people's minds during a roundtable discussion on the subject.



Peter Molyneux applied some self-criticism to his company's sequel *Black and White II*. © Black & White Studios 2003.



sign issues. Gender differences in learning styles are a factor in getting women to play games. Women want to know how a game works before playing it, whereas men learn by doing — they are attracted to the challenge and risk of fiddling with the controls until they figure out how to play. The industry has catered to the male learning style in game design, thus alienating women and a huge percentage of the market. Game interfaces need to be “smarter,” more intelligent and intuitive to attract more female gamers.

Daniel Greenberg, creative director at Universal Interactive, led a roundtable discussion on “Video-game Violence: Rights and Responsibilities.” While this session was geared more toward informing game companies on game ratings and legal issues, participants articulated several broadly agreed upon values. Parents need to control at what age their children will watch a violent game and be active in teaching about violence and contextualizing it. It was also revealed that most gamers who become aggressive do so out of inability to control the game, rather than learned behavior from the game itself. Comic-book writer Gerard Jones discussed how violence and aggression



Game designers seemed to agree that character development and story are what attracts and keeps players.

serve a psychological and cultural function in his lecture, "The Social Significance of Games: Killing our Monsters." In older cultures we embraced violence and aggression as parts of the whole being — both good and evil were a part of life. Today's cultures are potentially subjugating our "dark side" without providing an outlet. As a result, violence and aggression are coming out as part of pop culture. Jones articulated this observation but leaves it up to us to decide whether this is a good thing.

Peter Molyneux's presentation "The Good and the Bad: A Second Chance," showed how the developers at Lionhead are tackling aggression and power in their upcoming release of *Black and White II*. With over 400 people in attendance, Molyneux described some of the flaws with the first *Black and White*, as well as changes and features in the upcoming sequel. The sequel offers you a choice between good and evil, and you can effect entire civilizations and cultures by either building a village into a city with fortress walls, or by going out and destroying other populations. It takes the premise of *Black and White* further, from just morphing individual characters to transforming entire civilizations into either good or evil. Conceptually and visually, the scope of this game is broad.

IT'S ALL ABOUT STORY NOW

I'll wind up this review with a story, as there was a good deal of attention to this topic at the conference.

The general sentiment is that the medium has matured to the point where character development and story will become the main point of engagement for most players. Lecturer and screenwriter David Freeman of Westwood Studios presented "34 Ways to Create Emotion in Games," an exhaustive presentation of "Interesting" and "Deepening" techniques that apply to characters, dialogue, relationships, scenes and plots. Freeman's Character Diamond was a particularly useful way to approach character development. The character bible method, in which one lists many personal and historical factors that go into a character, can result in a detailed profile that may be disconnected or lack an integrated whole. The Character Diamond boils this process down to 3-5 traits, which allows you to look objectively at the dynamics of how these traits create interest and depth in a character. Look for Freeman's "34 Ways" in his upcoming book, *Creating Emotion in Video Games*.

Lee Sheldon, veteran television writer/producer (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Charlie's Angels*), led "All Stories Great and Small," a full-day tutorial addressing narrative structures for a variety of game genres and types. Sheldon feels that stories in games should enhance gameplay instead of fight against it, as well as allow the player to participate in the development of content. He introduced four types of narrative structure for games: Traditional, Branching, Web and Modular, concluding that these formats all work well, but work best in combination. He also feels that game rewards should be delivered through story, as opposed to keeping score with numbers. While not all games need to have meaning, we need to have balance in the market place. His parting comment: "Imagery without meaning is empty and artless."

These are just a few samplings of what the GDC has to offer, but it's all I could fit into five days. Because the medium of games is so young, conferences like this one enable you to witness and participate in the development of the medium in a very concentrated format. GDC is still a good deal smaller than SIGGRAPH, so participants don't have to feel like just another node in a crowd simulation. I hope to go again next year! ■

LESLIE BISHKO is a computer animator and associate professor of animation at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. At GDC, she presented "Making Characters Move: Expressive Character Acting through Laban Movement Analysis" with colleague Jana Wilcoxon.

ANIME REVIEW

New from Japan: Anime Film Reviews

by Fred Patten



The personal relationships between characters make *Vandread* special. © Takeshi Mori * Gonzo/Media Factory * G.D.H.

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.

Vandread. V.1, Enemy Engaged! V.2, Nirvana. V.3, Great Expectations. V.4, Pressure.

TV series (13 episodes), 2000. Director: Takeshi Mori. V.1, 4 episodes/100 minutes; V.2-4, 3 episodes/75 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: Pioneer Entertainment.

Vandread: The Second Stage. V.1, Survival. V.2, Sacrifice. V.3, Revelations. V.4, Final Assault.

TV series (13 episodes), 2001-2002. Director: Takeshi Mori. V.1, 4 episodes/100 minutes; V.2-4, 3 episodes/75 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: Pioneer Entertainment.

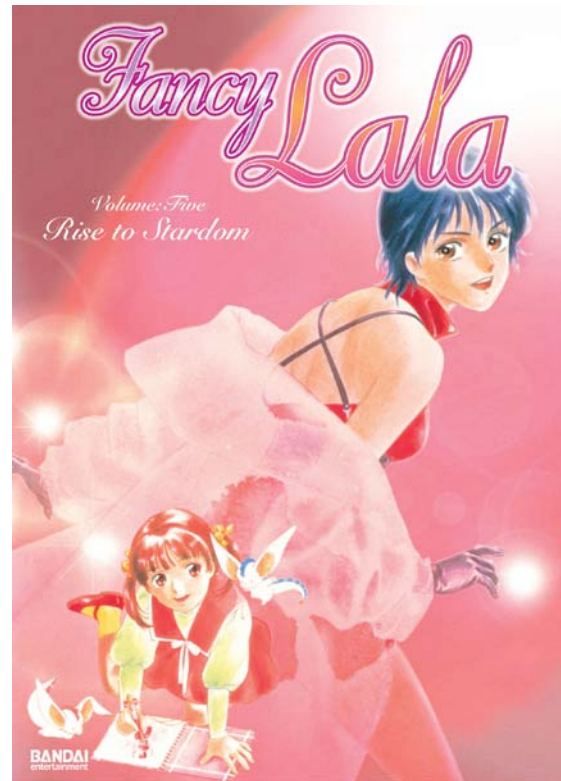
Vandread proves that a 13-episode TV series which ends with a cliffhanger can be popular enough to return for a sequel. The *Vandread* interstellar adventure serial was broadcast on the WOWOW satellite channel from October 3 through December 19, 2000, ending with our spacelost heroes racing back across the galaxy to their home planets to warn of impending doom. *Vandread: The Second Stage*, the final 13 episodes, finished the story from October 5, 2001 through January 18, 2002.

Vandread follows the basic sci-fi comedy/adventure formula of 1996's mega-popular [*Martian Successor Nadesico*](#) series. Put a mid-adolescent male protagonist who is nervous around girls (in this case, Hibiki Tokai is from an all-male planet and does not even know what women are — they are ferocious monsters in his world's folklore) in a spaceship whose crew is mostly giggling teen girls, and watch the fun — until the unknown alien menace that they set out to battle proves to be so grim and overpoweringly deadly that all humor disappears and they must learn to work together as true partners to defeat it.

The audience for *Fancy Lala* expects to see a realistic view of the entertainment industry. © Studio Pierrot • Bandai Visual • TV Osaka. Under license by Bandai Entertainment Inc. All rights reserved.

Hibiki, a lowly apprentice mechanic, is from the all-male (cloned) planet Tarak, which has been fighting a space war for generations against the all-female (artificial insemination) planet Mejale. Both planets were settled generations earlier in a wave of semi-forgotten space colonization from legendary Earth. Hibiki is aboard Tarak's new space navy dreadnaught, powered by dimly-understood ancient technology, when it is attacked by a pirate ship from Mejale. The confused action leaves Hibiki and two other teen male cadets (Duero McFile, a pretty-boy medic, and Bart Carcus, a boastful navigator), plus all the female pirates, aboard a bewildering merger of their spaceships, which has warped to the other side of the galaxy. The traditional enemies are forced to work together as they return home. There is considerable early-adolescent mildly risqué humor (rated "13+") as the boys and girls embarrassedly explore gender differences ("What are those things that men have between their legs?"), and Duero is fascinated by the medical process of natural birth. As they pass through the galaxy, they find many other planets that were colonized long ago, all of which have some serious social disorder that is slowly leading to inevitable human extinction — which they realize is also affecting their own worlds. Worse, there is an awesomely powerful alien force expanding in their direction, which is literally harvesting the human worlds for their organic components. Can the Nirvana return to Tarak and Mejale in time to persuade their peoples to put aside their differences and organize a united defense?

What makes *Vandread* so popular is not so much the plot as the emotionally-varied cast and their developing personal relationships: Hibiki, Duero, Bart, and the many women; gruff-but-motherly pirate Captain Vivan; master mechanic Gascogne Rheingau who becomes a Big Sister to Hibiki; ace fighter Meia Gisborn who wants nothing to do with men; ditzy Dita Liebley who is fascinated by Hibiki as a Roswell-UFO type "Mr. Alien" and quickly develops a crush on him; and numerous others with such "sci-fi" names as Barnette Orangello, Jura Elden and Parfet Ballblair. And also the CGI effects. *Vandread* was produced by Studio Gonzo which burst into Japan's animation industry with its CGI-intensive *Blue Submarine No. 6* in 1998. *Vandread* has even more CGI in its spectacular space clashes between the Nirvana's boys and girls in their Van and Dread giant robot battle armor and the mechanically ominous death-bots of the alien fleet.



Fancy Lala. V.1, A Star is Born! V.2, Sharing the Spotlight. V.3, Taking Center Stage. V.4, Double Duty. V.5, Rise to Stardom. V.6, A Passing Dream.

TV series (26 episodes), 1998. Director: Takahiro Omori. V.1-2, 5 episodes/125 minutes; V.3-6, 4 episodes/100 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$24.98. Distributor: Bandai Entertainment.

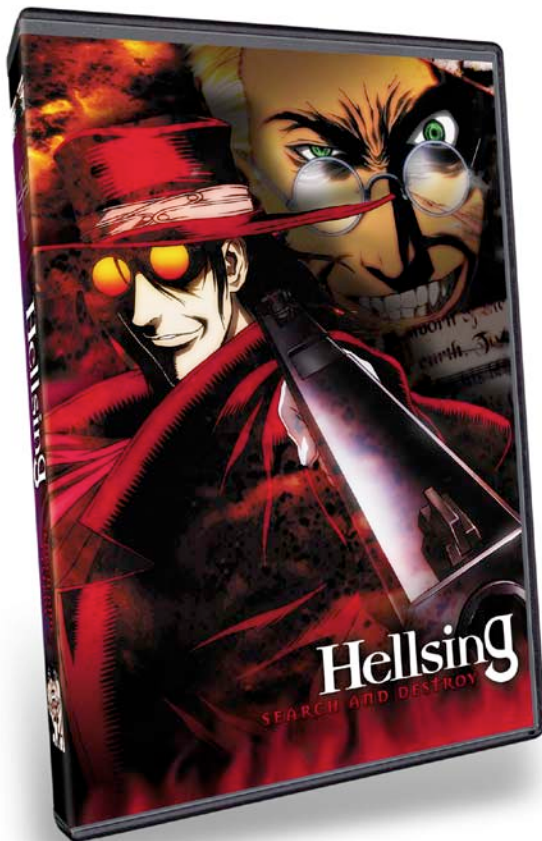
The "magical little girl" TV anime genre goes back to the 1960s, but Studio Pierrot made so many of the most popular of them in the '80s that "a typical Studio Pierrot magical girl show" has become a catchphrase. *Magical Stage Fancy Lala* was a 26-episode updated reprise for the late '90s (April 5 to September 27, 1998). As director Omori and character designer Akemi Takada explain on one of the DVD extras, today's little girls are more sophisticated than their earlier counterparts. Where a 1980s young audience would accept a third grade protagonist who can magically transform into a 15 to 18 year old immensely popular model or singing star, today's kids know that making it in the entertainment industry means hard work. Earlier magical girls appeared in one gaudy stage dress for all occasions including street wear, while today's magical girl is expected to have a varied and more realistic wardrobe.

Third grader Miho Shinohara is introduced to two sprites who look like cute plush dinosaur dolls, who give her a magical pen and sketchbook. When she

draws clothing for a teen version of herself and says a mystic chant, she turns into 15-year-old Fancy Lala. She is immediately recruited by a struggling new talent agency, Lyrical Productions, to promote as their new star ranging from an advertising model to TV actress to pop singer. But this means less glory than long days of rehearsals, jealousy of professional rivals, irresponsible or malicious fan-magazine gossip, and humorously creepy stalker-fans. Lala/Miho becomes exhausted accomplishing this plus transforming back to keep up her regular life as an elementary school student. Miho's own mother is a TV producer, and meeting her as Lala on an assignment gives Miho added insight into the emotional pressures on a mother who has a professional career.

The viewpoint is always that of a young girl, whether an episode is about Miho in Lala's body getting a backstage observation of the real entertainment industry, or

about Miho as herself with her third grade best friends cheering the elementary school's baseball team or trying to discover whether two of their school's teachers are dating each other. There is a three-episode sequence in which Miho is allowed to travel alone for the first time, on a vacation to see her grandparents in a farming village, and has the temporary fright of getting on the wrong train. This sequence is a pleasant travelogue introducing modern Japanese urban children to the rural countryside. In the "Miho" episodes such as these, Lala and the dinosaur sprites make only a token appearance. A significant difference between Fancy Lala and the earlier magical girl TV series is that the earlier ones emphasized the glitter and glamour of fantastic adventures, while in Fancy Lala the magic is a prop in allegorical domestic or vocational scenarios to show 10 year old girls what to expect or what they may realistically hope for as they enter adolescence.



A new kind of vampire terrorizes Great Britain in *Hellsing*. © Kouta Hirano * Shonen Gahosha Co., Ltd. / Hellsing K.G.

Hellsing. V.1, Impure Souls. V.2, Blood Brothers. V.3, Search and Destroy. V.4, Eternal Damnation.

TV series (13 episodes), 2001-2002. Director: Yasunori Urata. V.1-3, 3 episodes/75 minutes, V.4, 4 episodes/100 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: Pioneer Entertainment.

Hellsing (adapted from the manga by Kouta Hirano) was an adult after-midnight TV series (13 episodes, October 10, 2001 to January 16, 2002) analogous to MTV's *Spawn* in the U.S. It is a vampire horror thriller clearly designed for shock value (the DVD rating is 16+), with lots of implied off-camera gore and sadism. Some episodes involve snuff videos, homosexuality, prostitution and child molestation. However, it is well-directed and suspenseful, emphasizing intelligent, mature dialogue. The animation (by Studio Gonzo) is unexceptional, but the character designs (by Toshiharu Murata) are popular enough that *Hellsing*-character costumes are currently "in" at the anime fan conventions.

Present-day Britain is unexpectedly beset by a horrific wave of gruesome mass killings. They are actually the work of vampires, which is kept secret from the public. The first episode establishes that Britain has had a top-secret anti-vampire force for over a century, the Royal Order of Religious Knights, whispered of in the highest government circles as the Hellsing Organization because its leadership is hereditary in the Hellsing family. This is at least partly because the Hellsings personally command the service of a powerful vampire, Arucard, who kills other vampires at their orders. Arucard is a sardonic individual whose attitude and dialogue make it clear that he is serving the Hellsings for

motives of his own, not because he is under any compulsion. A vampire slaughters an entire English village, as well as an elite police force sent to investigate with the exception of young rookie policewoman Seras Victoria. Arucard is forced to kill Victoria to get the vampire; to save her life, he turns her into a vampire but leaves her with free will. (Normal vampire victims become mindless cannibalistic ghouls; one of the Hellsing Organization's duties is to completely destroy the bodies of all vampire victims.) The H.O., with considerable misgivings, accepts Victoria under Arucard's sponsorship as a new recruit to its private paramilitary army. Much of the action in subsequent episodes, plus what is revealed about the situation, is seen through Victoria's traumatized point of view as she tries to adjust to the secret human-vampire war within England while coping with her own new vampiric abilities and needs.

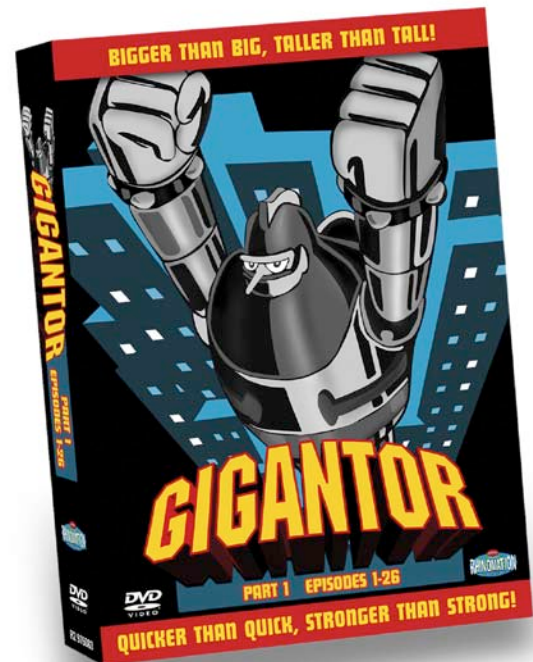
This new wave of killings is caused not by traditional "natural" vampires but by decadent thrill-seekers who have voluntarily undergone an artificial transformation, lured by promises of eternal life and pleasure. As the plot thickens, it appears that the criminal mastermind creating what Arucard calls the "trash" vampires has two goals: to undermine British society, and to expose the Hellsing Organization to the public and frame it as the culprit. An additional enemy is the Vatican's intolerant rival anti-vampire "secret bureau, Section Thirteen", a.k.a. The Iscariot Organization, which despises Hellsing for working with Arucard and Victoria ("There are *no* 'good' vampires"). Rome's top vampire slayer, Father Alexander Anderson, makes disposing of Arucard his top priority.

Hellsing raises many intriguing questions, none of which are answered as the series ends with a frustrating "cannot yet be revealed to the public" cliffhanger. Despite this, the story is unique and gripping enough to be enjoyed by all fans of serious vampire/horror movies.

Gigantor. Part 1, episodes 1-26. Part 2, episodes 27-52.

TV series (52 episodes), 1965-1966. Directors: Yonehiko Watanabe & Tadao Wakabayashi (Japan); Fred Ladd (U.S.). V.1-2, 4 discs/26 episodes/650 minutes. Price & format: DVD English \$59.95. Distributor: Rhino Home Video.

Gigantor is laughably old-fashioned by modern animation standards in America or Japan, but it is definitely of historic interest. It was the second significant TV animated series in Japan (as *Tetsujin 28-go* or *Iron Man No. 28*), and the first production of Japan's second TV animation studio, TCJ (Television Corporation of Japan). It was an adaptation of one of Japan's most popu-



Gigantor is of interest to anime fans, TV history buffs and those into nostalgia. © Rhino Home Video. 2002. All rights reserved.

lar juvenile sci-fi manga of the 1950s and '60s, by Mitsuteru Yokoyama. It ran for 83 episodes in Japan (October 20, 1963 through May 27, 1965), but only the last 52 were seen in America; and those were so revised for American broadcasting demands (reduction of violence; removal of cliffhanger endings to convert serials into stand-alone adventures) that many were subsequently shown in Japan as new episodes. The third Japanese TV cartoon series to be syndicated on American TV as just another kid's cartoon (not recognized as "anime" at the time), *Gigantor* debuted on January 5, 1966 and was popular until around the mid-'70s when all black-&-white TV cartoons were phased out.

The story as revised by American producer-director Fred Ladd is set in the "future year 2000." Jimmy Sparks is a barely-adolescent boy detective who has been entrusted by inventor Bob Brilliant with the controls of Gigantor, a giant robot, to help him fight crime as the assistant of Inspector Ignatz Bloop of Interpol. Inspector Bloop and Jimmy (with Gigantor) travel all over the world (often accompanied by Prof. Brilliant and sometimes by secret agent Dick Strong) to combat would-be world dictators, mad scientists and international crime gangs. Many adventures involve plot variants of the villains trying to steal Gigantor's control box to use for themselves, or trying to steal its blueprints so they could build their own Gigantor (or an army of them) for criminal purposes.

Many producers of the Americanized anime TV

series of the 1960s threw out their production elements as their licenses expired. But Fred Ladd bought the rights to *Gigantor* permanently and kept all the production materials. Rhino's DVD release is from the restored original film negatives. It is aimed equally for the nostalgia market for early American children's TV, and for the anime fan and serious TV historian. The DVD extras include half-hour video interviews with Fred Ladd and "anime historian, Fred Patten from *Animation World Magazine*," and a profile of *Gigantor* creator Mitsuteru Yokoyama. So there is much information about the Japanese origins of *Gigantor* and how Japanese TV cartoons came to be imported into America in the 1960s, and on the considerable differences between the Japanese and American versions of *Gigantor*, even if only the Americanized version is presented here.

Dragon Half.

OAV series (2 episodes), 1993. Director: Shinya Sadamitsu. 50 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$24.98. Distributor: A.D.V. Films.

"THE FUNNIEST ANIME EVER MADE"

— *Just about everyone, actually*

That is the DVD's back-cover blurb. In this case the blurb is close to the truth, at least in regard to American tastes. *Dragon Half* was originally released in America on video in August 1995. Most fans have watched it multiple times. I have seen fans at an anime convention break off conversations to go enjoy it again in the video room. And this is despite the fact that the production was never completed! *Dragon Half* was planned as a four-episode OAV series, but the first two 25-minute videos (released in Japan on March 26 and May 25, 1993) bombed and the final two were never made. Japanese and American tastes certainly differ in this case; the American fans cannot get enough of it.

This zany parody of fantasy role-playing stereotypes (based on a comedy manga serial by Ryuusuke Mita in the Japanese gaming *Monthly Dragon Magazine*) features Mink, a teenybopper human-dragon halfbreed (her dragon-slaying father eloped with the dragon he was supposed to kill), who develops a crush on Dick Saucer, the handsome blond pop-singer/dragon-slayer media idol. Mink is a cute girl whose dragon wings and tail and flame breath give her secret away. She is also plagued by the minions of the stupid king who keep interrupting her attempts to get close to Saucer to get his autograph and maybe a kiss: Rosario, an inept sorcerer ("Here, little girl, have



Dragon Half has many American fans. © 1993 Ryuusuke Mita/Kadokawa Shoten Publishing Co., Ltd./Victor Entertainment, Inc. Licensed by Victor Entertainment, Inc. All rights reserved.

an apple!" "Do you think I'm stupid? It's probably poisoned!" "Curses; my Snow White strategy has failed!"); Princess Vina, Mink's rival as President of the Dick Saucer Fan Club (she's also an evil sorceress); and Damaramu, a hulking all-brawn, "very compact" brained warrior. Learning that Saucer will give a big concert in ten days in the capital, Mink enters "The Brutal, Killer Martial Arts Tournament" hoping to win enough money to travel there and buy a concert ticket. Mink wins, but the warriors whom she defeats swear revenge and join her enemies. This is where the production ends. The music over the closing credits is a has-to-be-heard-to-be-believed bouncy bubble-gum-pop arrangement (by Kohei Tanaka) with nonsense lyrics of the main musical motifs from several of Beethoven's Symphonies. Both the dialogue and the visual gags are snappy and funny. The majority opinion of American fans is that *Dragon Half* is a must-see even if the story is incomplete. I concur.

Dragon Half is also notable as an early production of Production I.G, known today for its raw imagination and experimental advances in both plotting and animation technology with such productions as *Ghost in the Shell*, *Jin-Roh*, *Blood: The Last Vampire* and *FLCL*. ■

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), 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).

FILM REVIEWS

Fresh from the Festivals:

March 2003's Film Reviews

by Jon Hofferma

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

If you have the [QuickTime plug-in](#), you can view a clip from each film by simply clicking the image.

This Month:

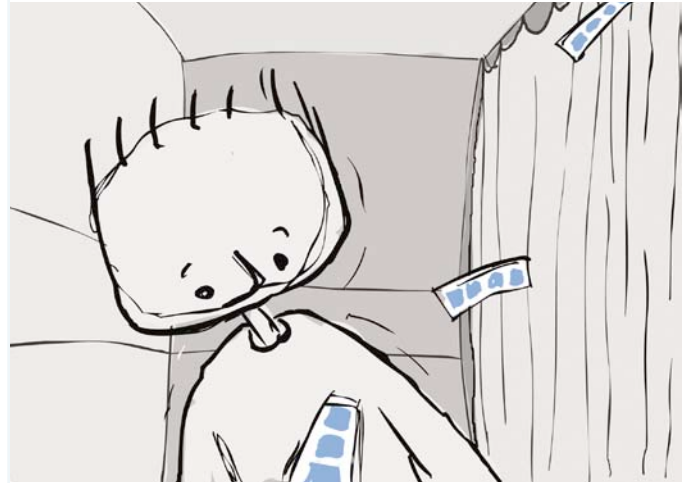
Autofoto (2001), 2.75 min., directed by Avi Ofer, Israel. Info: Avi Ofer, 168/b Ben-Gurion Rd., Givataim 53260, Israel. Email: info@daviofer.com.

The ErlKing (2002), 5.5 min., directed by Ben Zelkowitz, USA. Info: Ben Zelkowitz. Email: theerlking@hotmail.com.

Leashlessness (1998), 3.25 min., directed by Stefan Gruber, USA. Info: Stefan Gruber, 3812 S. Hudson St., #A, Seattle, WA, 98118, USA. Email: yell@stefangruber.com.

Shh. (2001), 5.25 min., directed by Adam Robb, Australia. Info: Adam Robb. Email: robb_adam@hotmail.com.

Skin (2000), 4 min., directed by Bobby de Groot, The Netherlands. Info: Bobby de Groot, Van Collenstraat, 1232 VR, Loosdrecht, The Netherlands. Tel: 31(0)622332041. Email: bobby@zombimation.nl.



A magical photo booth spits out unexpected photos in [Autofoto](#). © Avi Ofer.

AUTOFOTO

Using simple line drawings with occasional touches of color, Avi Ofer displays an appealing, loose style that works exceedingly well in this whimsical vignette about a photo booth that delivers unexpected results. It's a great idea and Ofer clearly has the skill to make it work: the setup and the first narrative surprise are well-timed and engaging, and there are a number of cute touches that enhance the humor and poignancy of the events. Even the somewhat odd choice of using a solo acoustic guitar accompaniment is reasonably effective (and certainly provides a notable contrast to the electronic soundtrack usually found in animated shorts these days). The problem, though — which is also endemic to so many of these films — is that *Autofoto* doesn't really have an ending, or much development beyond the initial idea, which makes the film more an illustrated concept than a satisfying narrative experience.

Avi Ofer studied photography and visual communications at a number of schools in Israel and has worked for the last several years in design and animation in Tel-Aviv. *Autofoto* is a personal project, which he created without a storyboard, drawing on a WACOM tablet directly into the computer. After winning an Internet short-film contest, *Autofoto* was shown on opening night of the 2001 Jerusalem Film Festival. It has also screened at Annecy, [Anima Mundi](#), [I Castelli Animati](#), and several other festivals.



Schubert, Goethe and sand on glass come together in [The ErlKing](#). © Ben Zekowicz.

THE ERLKING

In this quite beautiful and accomplished film, director Ben Zekowicz uses the medium of sand on glass to illustrate Franz Schubert's famous song based on a poem by Goethe. Except for a few segments in which he incorporates colored sand for dramatic effect, Zekowicz has chosen to work with only one hue, but this limited palette — which produces a kind of sepia effect — is very effective in capturing the nocturnal, spooky milieu of the poem and song. His decision not to include subtitles is somewhat more problematic, since for a viewer who doesn't speak German or isn't already familiar with the poem, this can be something of a detriment to fully appreciating the story's nuances and its tragic conclusion. Also, as with any work that seeks to give visual form to a pre-existing song or poem, the director runs the risk of redundancy, and of diluting the power of both the source material and his images. Yet, as Zekowicz confirms in his written notes, he was aware of these potential pitfalls and, while he doesn't completely transcend them, they're at worst minor flaws in what is otherwise a very successful effort.

Ben Zekowicz studied English and biopsychology before deciding he didn't want to be a scientist and would rather devote himself to animation. A graduate of [Cal Arts](#), for which *The ErlKing* was his thesis film, he has worked for Will Vinton studios and is currently employed by the Chiodo Brothers studio, where he animates "Clay" for the Disney channel. *The ErlKing* has been shown at Sundance, the New York Film Festival, Mill Valley, and the Leipzig Documentary/Animation Festival, among other venues.



Doggie liberation is the point in [Leashlessness](#). © Stefan Gruber.

LEASHLESSNESS

Stefan Gruber's paean to doggie liberation is stronger in its design than in its narrative structure, which is particularly problematic since *Leashlessness* is a film that's telling a specific story and is dependent on a chronology of events for its impact. Gruber has a nice, whimsical drawing style, and his use of color, "camera angles," and the space within the frame is both imaginative and thoughtful; however, there's a slackness in the pacing and the sequencing of segments that tends to undercut the film's dramatic effectiveness. More specifically, while it's clear in general what's happening, the film doesn't present information in a way that clearly conveys the director's intentions, and his implied critique of obsessive dog owners tends to fall a bit flat. Also, Jared Selter's hypnotic score, though fine in itself, feels somewhat ill-suited to the kinetic events on the screen, which might have benefited from a more lively accompaniment.

Leashlessness is Stefan Gruber's first film, which he made as a student at Cal Arts. It won first place at the Big Muddy festival, received the Princess Grace Award, and was a finalist for a Student Academy Award.



Shh. doesn't placate a crying baby. © Adam Robb.

SHH.

A somewhat uneasy cross between Chuck Jones and Jean-Luc Godard, Adam Robb's *Shh.* uses classical animation to depict the increasingly frantic efforts of a harried animator (i.e., Robb) to placate a crying baby. Robb's a terrific draftsman and it's a pretty funny idea; in particular, he uses the old and perennially appealing technique of showing the animator's hand drawing in fast motion, as he devises one potential pacifier after another for his unruly creation. Once he gets inside (both literally and figuratively) the baby's head, though, the results are rather less successful. Robb clearly has more on his mind than simple slapstick, but his attempt to present a kind of social critique through a series of word transformations with accompanying illustrations, while suggestive and admirably ambitious, is more confusing than illuminating. The problem is due at least in part to his mixing of categories and conceptual frames, which tends to obscure his analysis, and his rather odd decision to purposely misspell many of the words, which further obscures his intentions.

Adam Robb attended the VCA School of Film and TV in Australia, where he made *Shh.* as part of his post-graduate work. The film has screened at Annecy, the Melbourne International and International Animated Film Festivals, the KROK Festival, and many others. Robb's self-described goal in creating animation that combines "the political, the personal and the bizarre" is "to make audiences think."

SKIN

More an exercise than a fully realized film, this stop-motion work by Bobby de Groot is highly atmo-



The filmmaker takes on **Skin** shedding in this short. © Bobby de Groot.

spheric and well executed, but it suffers from the absence of a storyline or any sense of implied meaning beyond the depicted events. As the filmmaker summarizes the plot: "Locked in a prison, [a] prisoner is forced to shed his skin." This is pretty much what happens, with the protagonist reduced at the end to a skeletal armature. However the motivation for and consequences of this self-flaying (which, given the stylized nature of the character, isn't especially unpleasant), are not in any way apparent. De Groot cites Clive Barker, H.P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allen Poe, among others, as influences, and the filmmaker does a good job of emulating the surreal and rather insular tone of their work. However, lacking any kind of narrative development, the film is at best an indication of de Groot's potential and of perhaps better things to come.

A graduate of the School of the Arts in Utrecht, for which *Skin* was a second-year project, Bobby de Groot has worked in various capacities in the Dutch animation world for the past four years. *Skin* was shown at Annecy in 2002 as part of the student competition and was also selected for the Golden Flame Video Festival, the Cartoon Network Golden Cow Festival, and the **Holland Animation Film Festival**. ■

JON HOFFERMAN is an independent filmmaker, writer and graphic designer. He is also the creator of the *Classical Composers Poster* (a unique work of art that makes a wonderful gift for anyone interested in or learning about classical music, available at www.carissimi.com) and a shameless promoter.

BOOK REVIEW

The Art of Finding Nemo

by Jerry Beck

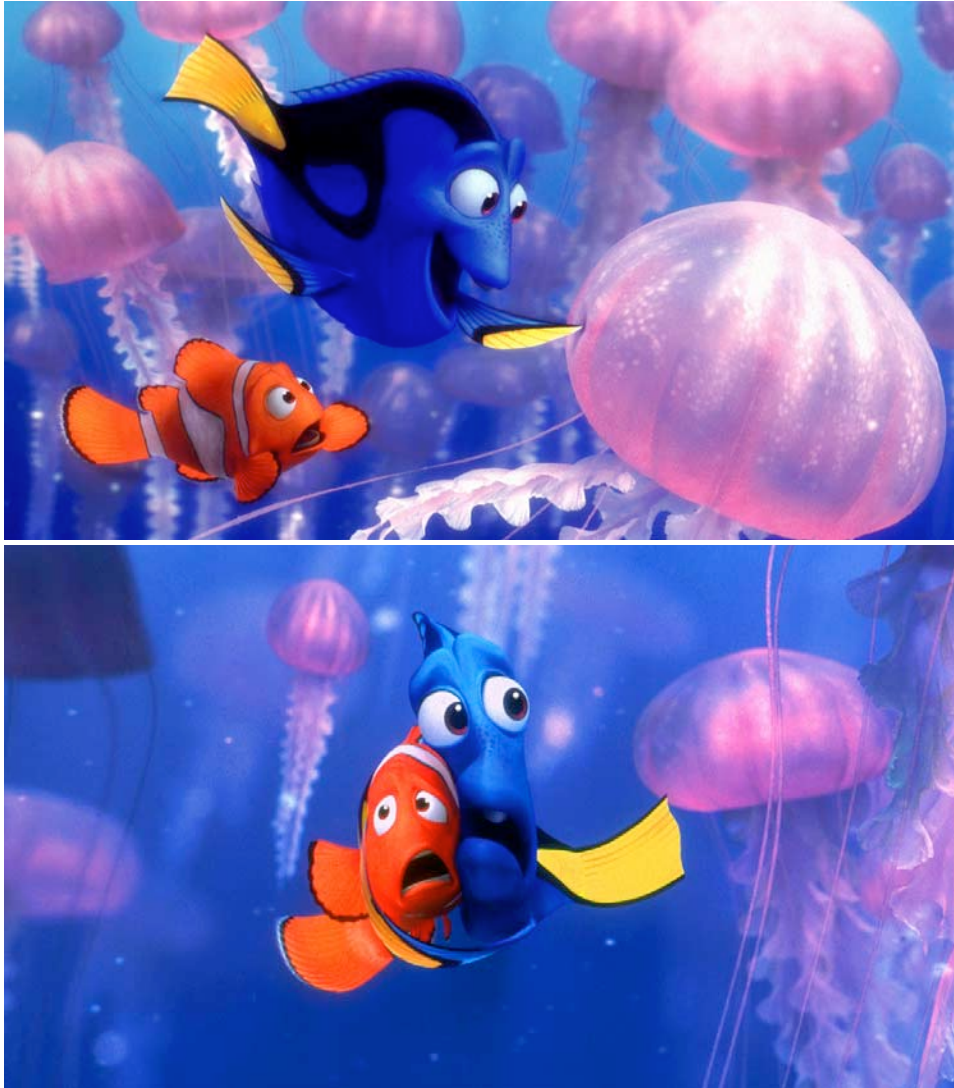


THIS NEW VOLUME PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATES WHERE TODAY'S TOP ANIMATION TALENT HAS MIGRATED.

Marlin (left), a frantic father whose son Nemo has been unexpectedly taken from his home, enlists the aid of a friendly-but-forgetful fish named Dory (right) in his rescue mission. © Disney/Pixar.

IF YOU HAVE ANY DOUBTS ABOUT PIXAR'S STATUS AS America's top animation studio, with *The Art Of Finding Nemo* author Mark Cotta Vaz has assembled a new book filled with ample evidence certainly supporting that claim. This new volume profusely illustrates where today's top animation talent has migrated. [Pixar](#) may be the leading creator of computer-generated motion pictures, and its staff of character designers, storyboard cartoonists, production painters and inspirational artists are clearly the best in the field.

And this book celebrates them all in a visually delightful package that entertains and educates its readers with a behind the scenes look at Andrew Stanton's excellent new movie. Now, not one image in this book is actually from the finished motion picture, which will be released in the U.S. on May 30, as this is about how a story visually comes to the screen. Told mainly through first person interviews with key per-



It looks like Pixar, that takes 2D's squash and stretch and applies it to 3D like no other studio, is back with another spectacular film. How can you beat expressions like this? © Disney/Pixar.

are quoted throughout the book, along with staffers Ronnie Del Carmen, Sharon Calahan, Lee Unkrich, Dan Lee, Eggleston and others, shedding insight on the artistic process.

The volume is a great way to preserve this rarely seen production art, and the book's layout lets the visuals tell the story. Anyone trying to match what Pixar accomplishes on a regular basis should study this book to understand the artistic effort, trial and error, and just plain fun, that goes into creating an animated classic. It's a huge team effort — and this studio has assembled a winning team.

Those of us who study animation's history have envied the stories we've heard and

sonnel, the book explores the visual development of the film's major sequences — with fantastic production artwork of all varieties.

If you're a fan of underwater cartoon settings and characters (as I am) — be it *SpongeBob SquarePants* or *The Incredible Mr. Limpet*, Disney's *Merbabies* or Fleischer's *Educated Fish* — you know that the amazing world under-the-sea has always stimulated animators' imaginations. Amazing acrylic paintings, pastel sketches, pencil studies and charcoal renderings fill this book, accompanied by the artists' words explaining the thought that went into the story, settings and visual tone.

Ralph Eggleston's superb color keys and Bruce Zick's amazing pencil designs take center stage, but outstanding contributions by Geefwee Boedoe, Peter Sohn, Ricky Nierva, Peter de Seve and Carter Goodrich will dazzle your eyes. Producer **John Lasseter** and writer-director Stanton contribute forewords and they

read of Disney's golden age — that period between the mid-1930s and early '40s — when it was a dream studio filled with incredible talents pushing the envelope, creating classic films that were as artistically true as they were popular and entertaining.

That studio and era live again at Pixar.

Need further proof? Pick up this book. ■

The Art Of Finding Nemo by Mark Cotta Vaz. Forewords by John Lasseter and Andrew Stanton. San Francisco, California: Chronicle Books LLC, 2003. 160 pages. ISBN: 0-8118-3975-3 (US\$40.00)

JERRY BECK is an animation producer and cartoon historian with a nifty Website at www.cartoonresearch.com and a new book, *Outlaw Animation*, due out this spring from Harry N. Abrams.
