

AWW

ANIMATION WORLD MAGAZINE

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INTERNET + WIRELESS
UPDATE



N-GAGE
NOKIA

Sinbad
Legend Of The Seven Seas™

**Plus: Blitz Digital,
Stan Lee, Fred Seibert,
Olivier Cotte, MIFA,
Animated Encounters,
More Fupduck Ideas
and others...**

Independent Animation

Small Screen, Big Possibilities 05

Christopher Harz charts the phenomenal growth of wireless animation and reveals the most unpublicized growing need for 2D animation to keep up with the demand.

BY CHRISTOPHER HARZ

Blitz Digital Studios: Doing What Works 11

If you think the Internet is dead space then read Chris Harz' profile of Blitz Digital Studios and find out how this company is still making money working on the Net.

BY CHRISTOPHER HARZ

Live and Learn: The Secret to Success on the Internet 15

Rick DeMott talks with the remaining lead players in the Internet animation field to discover their secret to success.

BY RICK DEMOTT

Others

Being an Independent Creator and Other Fupduck Ideas — Part 2 21

Read about the second leg of creator Dave Warren's fear and loathing journey from struggling independent to working with Carmen Electra.

BY DAVE WARREN

The Fred Seibert Interview — Part 1 26

In the first of a two-part interview, Joe Strike reveals how Fred Seibert came to revive television animation in the 1990s, helping Hanna-Barbera and Nickelodeon give birth to a slew of original hits.

BY JOE STRIKE

Sinbad Sets Sail on a New Journey into Water Surfaces 36

VFXWorld's Bill Desowitz journeys into *Sinbad*, which represents a culmination of DreamWorks' fascination with water, building on techniques used in most of its previous animated features.

BY BILL DESOWITZ

POW! Stan Lee Reloaded 40

Rick DeMott talks to the invincible Stan Lee as he bounds out of the ashes of his old company to take on new cinematic adventures with his new studio.

BY RICK DEMOTT

This Guy Really Knows How to Manage His Time: An Interview with Olivier Cotte 43

Chris J. Robinson chats with French animation writer, teacher and director Olivier Cotte to figure out how he gets so much done in the same 24-hour day that we all live in.

BY CHRIS J. ROBINSON

Columns

The Animation Pimp: Attack of the Clones 48

Class is in, and the Pimp is teaching Animation 101 to students and schools that churn out cloned work.

BY CHRIS J. ROBINSON

¡Viva La Revolución! 51

Dr. Toon investigates revolutions that help change the art of animation, which are addressed in Allan Neuwirth's new book, *Makin' Toons*.

BY MARTIN "DR. TOON" GOODMAN



An ANIMATION WORLD NETWORK Publication



05



11



26



36



84



88

Columns (cont'd)

Don't Give Your Right Name! — Part 1

56

Fats Waller once said that, and another blues man sang, *It Must Be Jelly, 'Cause Jam Don't Shake Like That!* There really was a man named Jam — Jam Handy — and he ran a 500-person studio in the then gloomy city of Detroit. It was an amazing adventure working there, in that most amazing, little-known but heavyweight studio. I directed my first film there, nearly had my tender career nipped, and discovered John Lee Hooker. 1949-51.

BY GENE DEITCH

Concept to Creation: Directing Dialogue

59

Mark Simon continues his series of 12 excerpts from his new book, *Producing Independent 2D Character Animation: Making and Selling a Short Film*.

BY MARK SIMON

Student Corner

Career Coach: SIGGRAPH 2003

62

This month the Career Coach Pamela Kleibrink Thompson suggests what you need to get the most out of SIGGRAPH 2003, what to take and what attitudes to leave home.

BY PAMELA KLEIBRINK THOMPSON

Reviews-Events

Annecy: Professionals' Opinions

64

AWN managing editor Rick DeMott talks with artists, execs, teachers, historians and other festival directors about their experiences with Annecy, both artistically and professionally.

BY RICK DEMOTT

MIFA: Is It Still Important to Attend?

68

Rick DeMott surveyed a wide array of international professionals and asked them their opinions on why they attend MIFA.

BY RICK DEMOTT

ASIFA East Awards Through An Artist's Sketchbook

72

Don Duga reports on the ASIFA East Awards with his sketchbook art, not with words.

BY DON DUGA

The Tough Eye International Turku Animated Film Festival

84

Kelly Neall finds the Tough Eye Animation Festival in Turku, Finland excels at bringing old and new animation together in a great setting and well worth a visit.

BY KELLY NEALL

Animated Encounters 2003

88

Andrew Osmond struggles from the crowds to report on Bristol's fourth Animated Encounters festival, with guest appearances from Ray Harryhausen and Bob Godfrey.

BY ANDREW OSMOND

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Andrew Osmond
Fred Patten
Chris J. Robinson
Peter Saunders
Mark Simon
Joe Strike
Dave Warren



Reviews-Events (cont'd)

Italy's TV Animation Festival — Cartoons on the Bay 92

There is no doubt that dragging oneself inside, away from the beautiful Amalfi Coast is hard to do... but international visitors at Cartoons on the Bay can find great rewards and fun at its conferences.

BY HEATHER KENYON

Production I.G.'s Visit to the Cartoons on the Bay Festival 96

Travel along with Production I.G.'s Justin Leach to get his personal impression of Cartoons on the Bay's artistic and geographical beauty.

BY JUSTIN LEACH

The Cartoon Movie Report 100

Iain Harvey reports on Europe's 2003 Cartoon Movie, covering the hot properties and how the event has progressed in five years to support European animated film producers.

BY IAIN HARVEY

Reviews-Films/Videos

New From Japan: Anime Film Reviews 103

Anime expert Fred Patten reviews the latest anime releases including *Brigadoon*, *Devil Lady*, *Gate Keepers*, *Read Or Die*, *Voices of a Distant Star* and he takes a second look at *Cowboy Bebop: The Movie*.

BY FRED PATTEN

Fresh from the Festivals: July 2003's Film Reviews 109

Jon Hofferaman reviews five short films fresh from the festival circuit: *Plugs McGinniss*, *Seeing Eye Dog* by Aaron Augenblick, *Requiem* by Roger Oda, *Ski Jumping Pairs* by Riichiro Mashima, *The Toll Collector* by Rachel Johnson and *Tunanooda* by David Zackin. [Includes QuickTime movie clips!](#)

BY JON HOFFERMAN

Reviews-Books

Stop-Motion Armature Machining 112

Peter Saunders reviews what he calls a long overdue book on how to make stop-motion armatures.

BY PETER SAUNDERS



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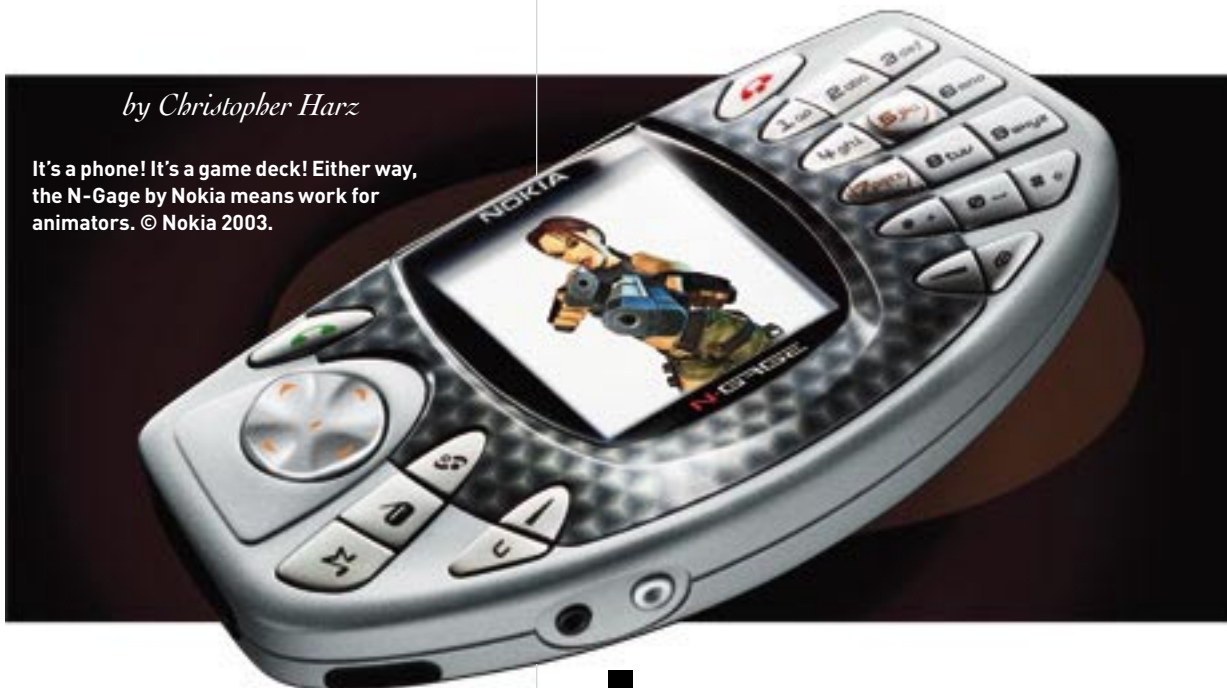
GAME GEAR

Small Screen, Big Possibilities

WIRELESS: HOTTEST GROWING GAME FOR 2D ANIMATION

by Christopher Harz

It's a phone! It's a game deck! Either way, the N-Gage by Nokia means work for animators. © Nokia 2003.



WHAT OTHER ANIMATION BUSINESS
CAN YOU THINK OF THAT IS MORE THAN
DOUBLING IN SIZE EVERY HALF YEAR?

IN A TIME OF REPEATED REPORTS ABOUT LAYOFFS AND downsizing, it's refreshing to hear that there's an area of animation that's growing like wildfire, with a worldwide demand that's expected to double every six months, requiring the services of thousands of animation specialists. It's animation for the small screen.

"Huh?" you may ask. "Isn't TV animation work stagnant right now, with the consolidation of studios and increasing overseas outsourcing?" But we're not talking about TV. We're talking about the *really* small screen — the screens in wireless devices such as telephones and PDAs.

The growth in this field in just the past year has been robust, but that pales compared to what is expected in the next few years. Global wireless gaming revenues are expected to climb from near-zero before the year 2000 to \$1.5 billion this year, to \$41 billion in 2007, by which time there should be more than 300 million wireless game players (The Research Room, 2003). What other [animation business](#) can you think of that is more than doubling in size every half year? In the U.S., the number of gamers is expected to rise from seven

A FEW DOZEN DEVELOPERS TOOK THE PLUNGE AT THE ROLLOUT; THEY WERE JOINED BY HUNDREDS OF OTHERS BY THE SECOND YEAR, AND NOW NUMBER IN THE MANY THOUSANDS.

million last year to 71 million by 2007 (IDC Report). One U.S. distributor/publisher, Handango, has been reporting growth of 30% every three months (!) since 2000, and now has more than three million customers.

HISTORY: IN THE BEGINNING...

Now that I have your attention, some history may be in order. Wireless gaming, like *Genesis* (the book, not the band), started with a snake. In 1997, Nokia sold a phone that supported a simple game called *Snake*. Like *Pong*, it caught on. It became *de rigeur* among London cabbies and other groups who all had cell phones and a lot of time on their hands.

Enter NTT DoCoMo, the Japanese telephone giant. In 1999 DoCoMo introduced the i-mode, a mobile phone that allowed customers to send and receive data and pictures over a wireless network. The i-mode became an instant hit among Japanese teenagers, who suddenly could not imagine life without one. Unlike U.S. dial-up phones at the time, the i-mode was always on, using a type of packet technology based on a modified form of HTML (called cHTML).

DoCoMo did two very smart things that totally eluded America for years. First, it set a strict standard and kept tight quality control on the content, to make sure users were happy. Second, instead of jumping into the business of content creation, the company stood back and invited independent developers in. DoCoMo acted as the bill collector for these developers, giving them 91% of the revenues from sales or monthly subscriptions of the games and other content, and keeping only 9% (plus connection fees) for itself. A few dozen developers took the plunge at the rollout; they were joined by hundreds of others by the second year, and now number in the many thousands. The developers were happy, and so were the customers — they were not charged for connection time, and the cost of each application was modest, typically the equivalent of one or two dollars a month.

Western wireless customers were not nearly as happy as their Japanese brethren. Games generated for WAP or other standards ran at painfully slow speeds, and were charged for on a per-minute basis. Consum-



Motorola has teamed with Sega to make animation for the really small screen. Motorola offers T7201 (left) and the v60x.

ers asked that deadliest of questions, "Why bother?"

In 2001, just to rub it in, the Japanese took another leap forward with the i-appli, an upgrade to the i-mode that let games be downloaded and run locally in the phone's memory. Videogame makers like Namco and Sega started to get into the market, and it became possible to play advanced games like *SimCity*.

Around this time the major western telcos woke up to the fact that, 1) they were hemorrhaging red ink after throwing away tens of billions of dollars on government licenses for bandwidth; and, 2) DoCoMo's major problem seemed to be keeping up with all the demand for its services — it now has more than 30 million subscribers, and is the world's largest wireless ISP.

The western telcos decided to jump on the bandwagon. The giants of the wireless gaming world started a mating dance. Microsoft joined up with Qualcomm in a joint venture, Wireless Knowledge, to pump out applications. Motorola teamed with Sega, DoCoMo teamed with AT&T, and Ericsson with Sony (as witness the Sony/Ericsson phones in the stores). Phone companies and publishers planned to provide open platforms for independent content developers, as DoCoMo had done.



The Simpsons is joining the wireless game world.™ & © 1997 20th Century Fox Film Corp. All rights reserved.

They were not as successful in agreeing to one standard platform — there are several now, prominent among them Sun's Java (in a sized-down format called J2ME, for Java 2 Micro Edition), Qualcomm's BREW, as well as SMS (Short Messaging Service). Wireless PDAs generally run on one of two operating systems, either the Palm OS or Microsoft's PocketPC. There are of course many different handsets, each with its own peculiarities as to screen size, buttons, memory and reception capabilities. The net result is that there is a lot of opportunity for game developers, but they have to write for multiple platforms, much like videogame developers are resigned to writing for Sony PS2, Microsoft Xbox, Nintendo GameCube and PCs.

THE DISTRIBUTION SUPERMARKETS

Several very large wireless content distributors have sprung up in recent years. In America, Jamdat (www.jamdat.com) and Handango (www.handango.com) are among the very biggest and best. They vary somewhat in function, but they basically serve as a clearing house for the thousands of games that are being produced — they accept content from pre-qualified development partners, test the content (if necessary), post it on Websites for sale and support the download to customer wireless devices — with the permission of and coordination with numerous telco operators. Jamdat also has a technology division that helps develop tools for generating and publishing games, and is also a developer.

Both companies are setting up offices in Europe and Asia to enter into those markets, which are at least a year ahead of the U.S. in both growth and the quality of the devices (new Japanese phones have around 200 lines of

resolution in bright color, whereas many Americans make do with under 100 lines and black and white).

ON THE FRONT LINES

How does a typical small wireless content studio work? For the answer, we went to Flarb (www.flarb.com), a relatively old ("old" in this business in America is two years, "ancient" might be three or four) studio in Valencia, California. Ralph Barbagallo, the founder, has a core staff of animators and programmers, and adds team members with character design, music and other skills to projects as needed, often via the Internet in a virtual studio setting. Barbagallo has an extensive gaming background, having worked for Ion, Neversoft and other major videogame firms.

A typical wireless game takes about three months to create, and although studios keep their costs secret, it appears that production costs may be in the \$10,000-\$30,000 range. This is where videogames were at in the early days. "It's actually good if someone has early videogame experience," says Barbagallo, "because for wireless games they need many of the same skills — how to tell a compelling story with few pixels and small amounts of memory." Familiarity with high-end animation packages is not necessarily a plus in this world. "I have applicants coming out of school that tell me how well they can work in Maya," Barbagallo says, "And I tell them, that's great, but do you know how to draw? It's a real challenge to deal with the present limitations of mobile devices, where you have to be able to create a character with 18 or 19 pixels instead of thousands of polygons."

A good first step in creating a game, or in starting a wireless gaming company, is to become a partner of one or more of the major publishing/distribution companies. Joining the Handango Software Partner Program (directions on how to do this are on its site) enables a developer to list his game on the Handango site, have access to international distribution channels such as Lycos Germany or Sony International, access software resellers such as Software Spectrum, and get technical and marketing help.

The next step is to decide which platforms to write it for. The customer often decides this. If the game is for Qualcomm partners, for instance, it would most likely be written in BREW (Binary Runtime Environment for Wireless), Qualcomm's proprietary platform. If the game is for a larger market, it will have to be cross-platform, which increases the time for both coding and testing. "Testing is a critical phase of developing these games," notes Barbagallo. "It's not just testing the game to make sure it plays well and is bug-free. You also need to assure it displays properly on different models of phones with different screen sizes, process-

THESE ARE HALCYON DAYS FOR CHIPMAKERS LIKE INTEL, SINCE PHONES KEEP GETTING MORE AND MORE FEATURES, AND CONSUMERS ARE TYPICALLY TOSSING THEM OUT EVERY 18 MONTHS OR SO.

ing power and other peculiarities — every new model of phone has at least one major bug in it.”

This can get involved. Unlike creating videogames, where developers may only need to “stay tight” with the publisher, wireless games often demand that the creator also be close to the telco, the creator of the OS and/or software environment, and the manufacturer(s) of the handhelds. For instance, a particular telco may let the developer know that it will not support violent or sexy games on its network. Knowing the gatekeepers of software environments, such as Sun for Java, will alert the developer to new software evolutions, such as the new Java applications for 3D wireless games.

Following the handheld market will let the developer know how much real estate he has to work with, whether it is the tiny 96x50-line screens of some of the older sets, the 128x112 screens of some newer models, or the new Japanese handhelds with over 200x100 resolution capacity. Keeping on top of each new handheld is not easy, since new models are coming out every month. A good site that has pictures and reviews of new phones is that of *Wireless Gaming Review* (<http://wgamer.com/devicedir/>), which also lists which software platform(s) each phone supports. These are halcyon days for chipmakers like Intel, since phones keep getting more and more features, and consumers are typically tossing them out every 18 months or so. One example of a new type of phone is the Sharp J-Phone released this month in Japan — it is the first phone to have a megapixel camera (J-Phone is a branch of European giant Vodafone; some 67% of J-Phone’s 14 million customers use its picture-messaging service).

Finally, Nokia’s new N-Gage “game deck” features multiplayer gaming capability over Bluetooth and GPRS (higher-speed GSM), an MP3 player, an extensive keyboard, and a stereo FM radio (press releases mention almost as an afterthought that it can also work as a mobile phone). The N-Gage is being rolled out in Europe with a 50-city Challenge Tour to decide the European champion; gamers can follow tour progress at www.n-gage.com.

THE ART OF THE DEAL

After deciding on game and platform type, the developer needs to strike a deal with the publisher/distributor. These can vary widely. The first issue is whether there is



“Veteran” wireless content studio Flarb has produced the games *Cali Surf* (bottom left) and *Puzzle Poker* (bottom right). All images and content are copyright FLARB development. FLARB is a trademark of FLARB Development.

an up-front payment (against royalties), or whether payment is for royalties only. The type of royalties can also vary. In the U.S., it is normal for the developer to get 70-80% of the price of the game when it is purchased by the player. If the game is being sold in Europe or Asia, there are often more middlemen involved, meaning other parties eat up some of the royalties.

If extensive localization is involved, including translating into a different language or changing some of the content for a different culture, this incurs costs as well. Whereas in the U.S. the developer usually only gets a cut of the sales price (which ranges from \$2 at the low end to around \$10 at the high end, though some new titles are coming out at \$20 and above), this may vary in other countries. In South Korea, for instance, it is possible that a customer can pay for a game and then pay a monthly fee to play it; part of that fee may go to the developer.

Finally, a payment schedule has to be delineated — some distributors pay monthly, others quarterly. It is also possible that a developer can do “work for hire,” where he develops a game that then belongs totally to the publisher, who pays him only for the work performed. This is not generally the case, as publishers, distributors and telcos prefer that developers absorb most of the risk.

A smart developer will seek to get additional revenues from a successful game, by generating new versions or levels, or perhaps adding new features such as power-ups, armor or characters that the player can adopt.

TEST, LIST, DOWNLOAD

Once the game is complete, it is time to thoroughly test it (although, as mentioned earlier, testing should be done throughout development). The final testing can be done in-house, by the publisher, or by an independent testing agency. The game is then listed on a distributor site, and can then be bought by a customer in one of a number of ways. One method is for the buyer to go to a Website, enter his phone number, and have the game downloaded to it. Smartphones and PDAs can "store and forward," that is, the game can be downloaded to a desktop and then transferred to the handheld through a sync cradle or via a removable memory storage device such as a Compact Flash Chip.

The Nokia N-Gage phone is breaking new ground in that it will also offer pre-loaded memory chips with games at various stores, for prices in the \$20-\$30 range. Most distributors choose to avoid having to deal with actual hardware inventory and prefer to deal only with electrons, essentially selling "zero gravity" virtual packages to customers for real money.

POSSIBLE TYPES OF WIRELESS GAMES

Early games were limited to slow, turn-based simple games and puzzles (which remain popular), but more powerful handhelds and faster connection speeds are enabling faster and richer game play for RPGs, multiplayer and action games. "Until recently, Americans were lucky to get 5- or 6-frames-per-second on their handhelds, which is way too slow for dodging bullets" comments Barbagallo, "But now we can get 15 fps, allowing both action games and detailed role playing game environments."

Recent releases of multiplayer games from sprint include *Alien Fight Club* (from Mforma), *Bejeweled Multiplayer* (JAMDAT Mobile), and *Jumble* (Mobliss). Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) are coming online, with releases of *Wizardry Proving Grounds Of The Mad Overlord*, by German publisher Mobile Scope, as well as wireless versions of existing popular MMOGs such as *Ultima Online* (from Dwango) and Sony Online's *Everquest*. Telcos like MMOGs because they can charge both for the initial game and for monthly gameplay, much as publishers such as Sony are presently doing with *Everquest*. What is not clear is how MMOGs will adapt for mobile play, where gamers usually do not have the long playing times available that they do at home on their desktops.

An interesting new form of mobile game is developing in Europe, where viewers were invited to vote for TV contestants with SMS messages from the phones. Some shows also allowed playing simple games sent via the SMS-based input. This has now mutated into a

new form of MMOG, where huge groups of players duke it out in action games that are shown as normal TV broadcasts. This type of "cross-media" mobile game has generated so many millions of euros that on some TV shows it has replaced traditional content altogether, forming a new kind of "reality show" with roots in the cyberworld.



Monsters, Inc. and Atlantis: The Lost Empire jumped into the wireless fray when Disney and Sprint announced a game partnership. *Monsters, Inc.*: © Disney/Pixar. *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*: © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

MAJOR PLAYERS JUMP IN

The opportunities afforded by wireless gaming are of course not limited to the thousands of small independent developers springing up all over the globe, but also extend to the majors, which have been busily re-purposing their major franchises and brands for the tiny screen. For instance, Twentieth Century Fox and THQ Wireless (a new division of THQ, Inc.) recently announce distribution of *The Simpsons* wireless games. JAMDAT has licensed many branded characters, and teamed with Electronic Arts, THQ, Hasbro and other major publishers to offer mobile versions of their games, such as *EA Sports PGA Tour Tiger Woods Golf*, and *World Cup Soccer*.

Walt Disney Internet Group (WDIG) announced a partnership with Sprint to provide games such as Disney/Pixar's *Monsters, Inc.*, Disney's *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* and ESPN's *2-Minute Drill* on Sprint's PCS Wireless Web.

FUTURE TRENDS

Several bleeding-edge trends will provide both challenges and opportunities to the booming mobile gaming community. One is the rapid improvements in both handsets (larger screens, better color, more powerful chips with integrated processing, graphics and communications, as well as built-in hi-res cameras and GPS location systems) and transmission (from the slow 10Kbit range of the past to consistent 50Kbps speeds in many American and other global locations to more than 300Kbps from 3G systems in Japan, Singapore and elsewhere).

Another development is Location-Based Gaming (LBG), which allows gamers to play scenarios based specifically on their geographic locale in the real world (Sweden's *Botfighters* is a popular application of this).

As phones get more built-in memory, expect more games to be played in the phone itself, not within the phone network, leading telcos to support multiplayer gaming and other applications that generate connection charges or monthly club membership fees.

Expect gamers to take advantage of meshing, the process of extending a WI-FI (802.11 b/g Internet access) hot spot by hooking multiple connected mobiles together in peer-to-peer local networks.

Finally, the new Internet format (known as Internet Protocol version 6), which starts to phase out the "old"

Internet this year in Asia, Europe and American communities such as the Department of Defense, will have many as-yet-unknown effects on wireless gaming. The new Internet protocol provides for thousands of IP addresses per player (permitting individual game elements such as avatars, armor/capabilities and locations to be individually addressed), as well as built-in security and worldwide wireless roaming support.

SUMMARY

There's a saying that some people complain about the noise when they hear opportunity knocking. Generating animated content for very small screens may have many challenges, but offers opportunities for growth right now that is geometric, not linear. ■

CHRISTOPHER HARZ is a program and business development executive for new media enterprises, working with digital animation companies around the world. He writes extensively for trade magazines on topics including the New Internet, visual effects for films and television, online video games and wireless media. Harz was previously vp of marketing and production at Hollyworlds, producing 3D Websites and video games for films such as *Spawn*, *The 5th Element*, *Titanic* and *Lost in Space*, and for TV shows such as *Xena*, *Warrior Princess*. At Perceptronics, as svp of marketing and program development, Harz helped build the first massive-scale online animated game worlds, including production of the \$240 million 3D animation virtual world, SIMNET. He also worked on combat robots and war gaming at the Rand Corporation, the American military think tank.

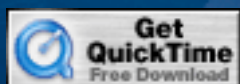
Online Highlights

Every online (HTML) issue of *Animation World Magazine* contains additional features not found in the download or print Acrobat version, such as QuickTime movies. Don't miss the following highlights that are showcased exclusively in this month's *Animation World Magazine* HTML version:

FRESH FROM THE FESTIVALS: JULY 2003'S FILM REVIEWS

Jon Hofferma reviews five short films fresh from the festival circuit: *Plugs McGinnis*, *Seeing Eye Dog* by Aaron Augenblick, *Requiem* by Roger Oda, *Ski Jumping Pairs* directed by Riichiro Mashima, *The Toll Collector* by Rachel Johnson and *Tunanooda* directed by David Zackin.

View the QuickTime clips online!



GRAPHIC IMPACT

Blitz Digital Studios: Doing What Works

BLITZ BRANDS ANIMATION FOR THE INTERNET

by Christopher Harz

In this era of downward advertising revenue, Blitz has found success by brand promoting. Here they created the look for Atari's *Apex*. All images courtesy of Blitz Digital Studios.



SO WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN IT'S GETTING HARDER AND harder to produce independent animation for television programming? Or you're trying to make a living from animated [entertainment on the Internet](#), but ad rates have dropped through the floor? You can either keep hoping — or you can read the handwriting on the wall and look for more profitable opportunities. That is what the folks at Blitz Digital Studios have done, with animated content for advertising, Internet games and professional presentations. They're successful and they have tons of work. What's their secret?

First, let's get clear on what they're *not* doing. They're not creating advertising-supported stories for the Internet. They're not creating [games](#) with the hope of duking it out for shelf space at the local Wal-Mart. And they're not trying to create TV shows in the hope that the FCC changes its mind and mandates that



The bedrock of Blitz Digital (from left to right) Gregg Apirian, Ivan Todorov, Ken Martin and Mark Cohn, have earned the trust of corporate culture.

broadcasters outsource more programming. What they *are* doing is creating brand-promoting content (online marketing campaigns and TV commercials), games (advergimes, viral branded games, and downloadable games) and Website and presentation content.

Blitz clearly has a lot of creativity on its staff, and enough rounded talent to produce almost anything in-house, including any and all phases of modeling, animation, gaming and music production — they even have their own recording studio. Other companies may claim to have the same capabilities, but there is one area where Blitz is clearly outstanding, and that is in its deep understanding of branding and brand development for major corporations. Whereas many other content creators generate content just for entertainment purposes, Blitz is deeply dedicated to the bottom line — its customers tend to be Fortune 1,000 companies that pay for content up front, but need to be convinced that this content fits into the overall marketing strategy and results in a return on investment.

You notice this dedication the minute you step into the company's North Hollywood, California headquarters — the talk in the halls is not so much about what 3D or 2D tools are being used (animators are given wide leeway for what they prefer individually) on a new scene, but on how it fits in with the wishes of a customer or their ad company, and how it can best be pitched. You are never quite sure whether you're in Hollywood or Madison Avenue. Gregg Apirian, the vp of business development, notes, "We used to be known, like many other houses, as an animation studio, but if you're going to hit these big clients and big budgets, you can't do it as an animation studio — you have to do it as an agency."

The understanding of corporate culture (both by Apirian and by founders Ken Martin, Mark Cohn and Ivan Todorov) has paid off handsomely. Blitz customers include household names such as General Electric,

Warner Bros., Showtime, Cisco, Atari, Best Buy and Kellogg, which have trusted the studio with their precious (and highly protected) brand images.

Whereas a lot of animation companies don't even know how to pitch ad agencies, Blitz has developed strategic relationships with several, including giant agency J. Walter Thompson (for which it is sole vendor of online and animated development), and the Leo Burnett agency, for which it developed three highly trafficked Webisodes. Whether to pitch a company directly or go through its ad agency can differ from situation to situation.

"Sometimes we go directly to the company, sometimes through the agency, depending on what's appropriate. It's about hitting that magic person that can appreciate our pitch," says Apirian.

Blitz has put in considerable research on the best process for pitching a company for interactive content such as an advergame. "For instance, we know that advergames work well for car companies, says Apirian. "We have worked with Chrysler, and are now looking at other car companies as well. First off, our goal is to be their agency for web design. The process of selling them on an advergame is to put together a concept, a proposal and build a little internal demo."

"We take a car they most likely want to use — let's say, an off-road vehicle — and then we model and texture it. We then throw it into a game engine that we have. We don't do anything too extensive at this stage, and we make sure the demo is something we can re-use for something else later on — for instance, a demo for an off-road car can be turned into an off-road racing game that we can use for ourselves."

Blitz then presents this short demo to the client, either in person or online. If the feedback is positive, the demo becomes a full proposal.

Not all products are suitable for promotion by an advergame. "We try to put ourselves in a gamer's mind

... A LOT OF ANIMATION COMPANIES DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO PITCH AD AGENCIES...



Blitz created these images for Atari games *Godzilla Destroy All Monsters* and *Mission: Impossible Operation Surma*.

and ask, 'What would you want to play in this scenario?' and then we go to the programmers and ask them 'Can this be done?' Apirian notes. "We pitch it to the client as, 'It makes sense, it's a good ROI (return on investment) and an extension of your brand.' If it doesn't make sense, for instance for a product like a computer printer, I would not pitch a game, I would pitch a good Website."

Sensitivity to client needs means knowing how far you can go with your concepts. "Some clients such as whiskey companies may be conservative and stick closely to their style guides, while others tell us to go for it. General Electric, for instance, wanted something really creative for re-branding its image." To assure that the Blitz and the client are on the right track, the company provides several comps (compositions, or rough mock-ups) in Photoshop or Flash for the customer to choose from as an indication of the direction he wants to go in.

It is of course important that the company Website (www.blitzds.com) be ultra-cool but informative, since every client will spend time perusing it. "We get hundreds of calls from people who have seen our Website

and want something similar," Apirian notes. "It then becomes my job to find out what they really need, and what kind of return they're looking for."

In addition to advergames for clients, Blitz is now creating its own games, such as *Puzazz*, for sale over the Internet. The business model is to create a free sample version of the game that is downloadable online, and then hook the player into the game so that he/she buys it, for amounts ranging from \$3-\$5 for a short game or upgrade to \$20 for a full-up game. Players can pass the trial versions on to their friends, providing a form of viral marketing that results in thousands of trials per week for a desirable game.

Conversion rates of 2-4% (from trial to buying) are considered good for the industry. An additional revenue generator can be from game tournaments, where players pay fees of around \$10 to play for prize money and recognition. Apirian notes that, "Many of the players of our games are women, especially for puzzle-style games. For all of our games, we try to push the boundaries, to make the experience similar to that of a console-type game." For gaming, Blitz uses Macromedia Flash for 2D, Shockwave for 3D and the DIVX codec for video. The company has experimented with Java, but has found it too limiting up to now.

What kind of animators does Blitz hire? "We judge applicants by their portfolio and timing. We pay beyond what's fair, but they have to be able to perform on schedule," says Apirian. "They must be able to multi-task. Knowledge of both 2D and 3D is good, as is a knowledge of physics for gaming interactions. Reliability is really important, so we need references. Finally, a really major requirement — something that's difficult to find — is that the person is able to communicate. Many artists can't do this. Our need is to be able to talk directly to a client, even if management is not around, and we have to be able to trust them to do that."

When asked what mistakes some companies make in building online advergames, Apirian responded, "Some people build these games with such large file sizes that only broadband viewers can see them — they don't bother to optimize each page for slower Internet speeds. We take care, even under insanely short schedules, to optimize each page."

Another challenge is dealing with tight schedules and last-minute changes. "Animators here also know programming, and our programmers know art, so if a schedule is tight, we can all help each other. On the outside, programmers often wait until all the art is finished to get started, and you miss deadlines that way," Apirian remarks.



General Electric asked Blitz to create a new corporate look.

Apparently, becoming successful sometimes means just saying no. "If a company has a budget totally out of line with the requirements, it's better to just pass. It's better to produce successfully for a company with an appropriate budget, and get referrals from them later on — those referrals then usually start out knowing what a budget has to be — and what they will get as an ROI," says Apirian. "If they just want a cool look for a few thousand dollars, we'll pass on it. Someone that wants serious value out of their Website is someone we can work with. It's a good source of business — it's a given that everybody needs a better Website!"

Blitz's customers speak well of the company. Derrick Morton, the vp of marketing for GameHouse, for instance, noted that, "Blitz has an intimate knowledge of Flash. While many agencies understand the animation techniques and are competent with Flash, no one we've found understands ActionScript at their level and can also design impactful graphics." He also com-



Blitz is setting its own brand by creating games for the Internet. Games like *Puzzaz* especially appeal to women.

mented, "They understand how to take the basic brand design and incorporate it into everything from interface to layout. They get it!"

Future plans for Blitz include more games for major clients such as Electronic Arts, creating cinematics, generating interactive game-like content for presentations and kiosks at trade shows, and exploring the needs of new types of companies such as aerospace and new applications such as wireless game delivery.

The company has won accolades for its Webisodes of *Gary the Rat*, starring Kelsey Grammer, and for its original Web series, *Regurge*. Its success with online content is all the more remarkable when you consider how hesitant many risk-averse advertising agencies were in investing significantly in web-based promotional campaigns. The breakthrough success of Blitz Digital Studios appears to be good not only for the company, but for the animation industry at large. ■

CHRISTOPHER HARZ is a program and business development executive for new media enterprises.

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

INTERNET ADVENTURES

Live and Learn: The Secret to Success on the Internet

UP AND RUNNING IN INTERNET ANIMATION

by Rick DeMott



Wallace & Gromit fans were willing to pay for Internet original content. © Aardman Animation. Courtesy of AtomShockwave.

IT SEEMS SO LONG AGO WHEN THERE WAS AN announcement every day about an Internet company starting up. It even seems long ago when there was an announcement every day about an Internet company folding. Today professionals in the entertainment industry, especially those who dived head first into the Web and failed, swear up and down that there isn't any money to be made on the Internet. But don't tell that to the major players who are still around and thriving.

Entertainment on the Web has grown a cult following, with independents and corporate conglomerates creating quality content. Newcomer Homestarrunner.com has slowly developed an avid fan base, including the likes of *Buffy* creator Joss Whedon. WB Online is taking submissions from aspiring artists in its Cartoon Monsoon section. David Gilcrest, director of communications, WB Online, said Warner Bros. is using "the Internet as a research tool" acquiring new projects to



Warner Bros. isn't shying away from exploiting its properties on the Net. © Warner Bros.

develop further for the Website with the possibility of crossing over to network and/or cable. Luxury car-maker BMW is driving loads of traffic to its BMWFilms site, which airs shorts featuring big stars helmed by big directors. The series is so popular that BMW has released a DVD compilation.

Sounds promising doesn't it? Oh, what could have been, if POP didn't burst. Or Icebox didn't thaw. We can only speculate. However, we can learn from the old school players who are still around how they have found the key to success on the Internet. I talked with execs at AtomShockwave, Urban Entertainment and Mondo Media about business plans and making money. Folks that isn't a typo, people are making money on the Internet.

I talked with Scott Roesche, vp of marketing at AtomShockwave, in 2001 when cutbacks and layoffs were still fresh in people's minds. Back then the company's business plan was moving toward integrated sponsored content, where shorts and games would feature product placement. At that time, they had recently launched a series of games containing Ford's Focus. They are working on three or four more partnerships with the automaker. Today, the vet Net firm has a deal with Radio Shack, placing products in the game *ZipZap Street Rally*. Powered by music from the feature film, *2 Fast 2 Furious*, the game allows players to race remote controlled Radio Shack cars. The game gets more than 100,000 plays per day.

In addition to sponsor-supported programs, AtomShockwave is finding success in areas where others have not – ads and subscriptions. A major part of the blame for the downfall of Internet business in 2000 was the pull out of the advertising industry. Currently, AtomShockwave boasts it is 100% sold out of spots for pre-play commercials. Where other online sites are getting \$10 per impression for a banner ad, AtomFilms nets \$25 for its TV-like ads that run before each short.

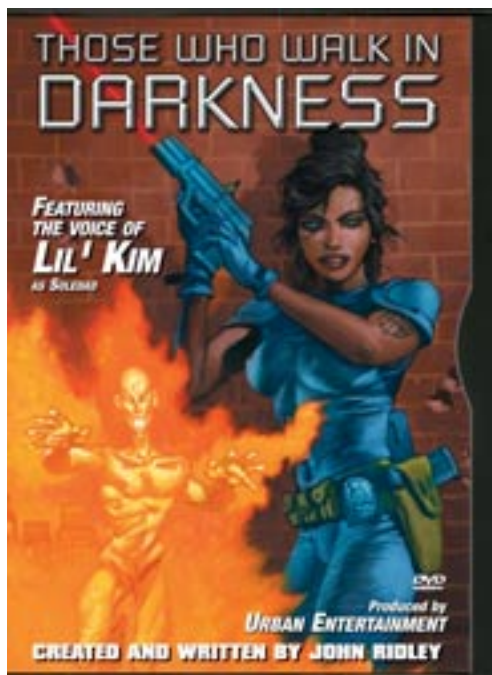
With subscriptions, Roesche says AtomFilms has racked in solid numbers for the Internet-only *Wallace & Gromit's Cracking Contraptions*. The firm found that viewers were willing to pay for original Internet content that was previously branded in another medium and they couldn't get anywhere else. The Shockwave side of the company has also discovered that gamers are more willing to pay for games than people looking for shorts. The Shockwave model is based on e-commerce. The site contains free versions of most of its games with a premium version with more levels and options to purchase.

Spec game *Hurtle Turtle* got creator Sticky 3D more work.
© AtomShockwave.



Roesche says it was tough for a while, but the company weathered the storm by being "innovative in key areas and focused on key parts of the business." Their current success strongly hinges on maintaining high traffic numbers. The combined sites have more than six million unique visitors a month. That's impressive. In addition, AtomFilms continues to receive hundreds of submissions weekly from artists around the globe. Roesche says the company's internal production remains minimal, nowhere close to where it was in 2000. Internally, the main production focus is on game development with the physical production outsourced. For instance, Sticky 3D submitted their game *Hurtle Turtle*,

Uncover Brother made Urban a legitimate film production company. © Universal Pictures.



Those Who Walk in Darkness may be Urban's next title to hit theaters. © Urban Entertainment.

which gained a lot of popularity. Later Shockwave gave the job of creating the Radio Shack games to Sticky 3D. On the acquisition front, the company travels the world attending festivals to seek out new content.

With all Internet companies, some focus is placed in taking content to other mediums. In 2000, AtomFilms released a collection of shorts on DVD and, upon a recent check of Amazon.com, it was out of stock. Roesche says they also syndicate their content on other sites with heavy traffic like Microsoft and file-sharing sites like Kaaza and Altnet. Moreover, AtomFilms, with partner Global Media Holdings, is still trying to develop AtomTelevision, a digital network containing films from its library. Roesche also sees AtomFilms as a beach-head location as technology develops, melding the worlds of Internet and cable. Still, Roesche says, the most promising thing about Internet entertainment is "the Web allows new people to enter the entertainment market."

When it comes to taking Internet properties to other mediums, no one can claim more high-profile success than [Urban Entertainment](#). Formed in 1999 by former Fox vp of feature film production Michael Jenkinson, the company is mainly using the Net as an incubus for talented individuals to develop content for future exploitation in other mediums. The firm has developed over time from looking at the Internet as a source of revenue to focusing its business on feature film development and production, animation production for a black family audience, direct-to-video animation for an adult audience and television licensing for features, shorts and animation.

Besides assuming that its content is of a superior quality, how else has Urban survived the shift from an Internet-focused business model to a development model when others have failed in doing this same thing? Nichelle Protho, vp of production and programming, said that their key to maneuvering around the burning debris of other dot.com disasters was a "multi-faceted attack of multimedia opportunities including feature films, television and video and DVD. Also, a scalable operation with many functions outsourced for flexibility."

So you may be asking why include them? Though their revenue is mainly derived from taking what they start on the Net to films, DVDs and TV, the key is that the content starts on the Web. Protho said, "New artists have been approached with the opportunity to create their very own cartoon — a real treat to artists. They were given the freedom to write whatever they want." It's this concept of allowing artists the freedom to create unique content outside of the corporate Hollywood structure that attracts the likes of novelist and screenwriter John Ridley, Naughty by Nature star Treach,

House Party director Reginald Hudlin, *Big Hit* writer Ben Ramsey and *Why Do Fools Fall In Love* screenwriter Tina Andrews.

The Flash shorts start as free content on the Internet. Urban's audience of 100,000 unique individuals a month builds a following for the content, which makes them more attractive to other mediums. John Ridley's *Undercover Brother* became the first Internet property to make the jump to film. Starring Eddie Griffin and Densie Richards, the film grossed more than \$38 million, and has become a cult hit on video. DVD is another land of great opportunity for Urban, with animated collections of Ridley's *Those Who Walk In Darkness*, Andrews' *Sistas 'N the City* and Ramsey's and Kantz's *The Contract* making jumps from the Net. Screen Gems released the live-action version of *The Contract*, entitled *Love and a Bullet*, in September 2002.

Urban Entertainment has three other animated shows in development at various studios. Ridley's *Those Who Walk In Darkness* will get a live-action rendition via Warner Bros. and Silver Pictures, based on the Web series. Originally the Web series was based on an unpublished novel, which has now been published by Warner Books. The series follows an elite group of police officers that battle crazed mutants. *Pookie Poo*, which follows the life of a hopeless player, will head to theaters as *Ralph* from Imagine Entertainment and Universal Pictures. *There Goes the Nation*, which chronicles the rise to the White House of a black reality show contestant, is in development at Alcon Entertainment and Warner Bros.

These kinds of deals are unmatched. And who can blame them for wanting to take their shows to the big screen. It's no different than Marvel expanding its reach by exploiting [Spider-Man](#) and the [X-Men](#) in other mediums. Most of Marvel's revenue isn't made in comics, but made through licensing and developing its properties in film and television. However, people generally don't think of Marvel as anything other than a comic book company. Likewise, Urban Entertainment is still an Internet company at heart.

Protho sees the future of the Net going in a BMW and AtomShockwave direction. In addition, she feels Web toons will be used as marketing tools for feature films and TV programs. Though Urban is mainly using the Net as a launching pad to take shows to other mediums, Protho said, with broadband initiatives from companies like AOL, only time will tell what the future will bring for Internet entertainment. However, she said, "In the meantime, we entertain our audience."

Finally, we come to [Mondo Media](#) who has found a way to make money off its content without exploiting it



Mondo Media's *Happy Tree Friends* found a home last year on MTV's *Downloaded*. The production also served as a basis for Mondo Media's first foray into DVDs and merchandising. © 2000 Mondo Media.

in other mediums first. Not so long ago, Mondo's main focus was on syndication of its content to high traffic sites. Now, it has shifted its business model from advertising-based to merchandising. John Evershed, co-founder and ceo, said their audience has grown dramatically and he equates the fan base to revenue.

With 30% of all connected households are on broadband, and that number is expected to grow to 50% by the end of the year, Evershed said, "the Internet can really launch a property globally. It is the most efficient word of mouth tool." Mondo leverages its content as effectively as it can by making it increasingly easy for fans to direct friends and family to Mondo's site. Once they get the new viewers, they push marketing toward the additional eyeballs.

The first title Mondo has merchandised on a major scale is *Happy Tree Friends*. The DVD, which sells at Tower Records and Best Buys, has already sold more than 10,000 units, very impressive for a property that has no other medium tie-ins other than the Net. Mondo is prepping clothing and other products based on the *Happy Tree Friends* character to sell globally. This property, Evershed said, proves that the Net can serve as "a pathway introducing hip content [and to] grow entertainment properties."

For the production of its content, Mondo has a combination of in-house and outsourced content creation. Evershed said the key is that Mondo owns the rights to the properties; it has total freedom to create merchandise from the franchises. Mondo is airing three shorts

– *Zombie College*, *Hard Drinkin' Lincoln* and *Poker Night* — from the defunct Icebox.com. Two years ago, Mondo bought a minority stake in Icebox, allowing it to syndicate its library of shows. In addition, Mondo developed a relationship with the heads of Icebox, which includes *King of the Hill* producer John Collier, *Angel* and *Buffy* producer Howard Gordon and *Simpsons* producer Rob LeZebnik, in hopes to have them create content for the company in the future.

Evershed insists there is money to be made on the Internet. He says in two to five years, with broadband expanding, especially in foreign markets, Internet entertainment will be able to sustain itself on a merchandising basis. Nonetheless, he says the properties need to be good to warrant merchandise. He points to TV animated series that don't have merchandising possibilities that then lack longevity. Evershed emphasized that Mondo has no delusions of taking over TV, but he feels his company will be in an opportune position when Internet users are swapping TV programs and films with the ease they swap music today. Mondo will have the savvy experience to know how to

adapt and give its audience what it wants, which ultimately turns into dollars.

Rightfully so, many people are still scared of funding Internet ventures after losing their shirts only a matter of years ago. However, we're not that far away from content available to download off the Internet onto hard drives, which can be played on TiVo-like TV-based devices. AtomShockwave, Urban Entertainment and Mondo Media are finding radically different ways of building revenue. However, at the core of it all, they have content that people want to see and ultimately are willing to pay for in some way, shape or form. It's exactly what Roesche said in 2001, "Bare with the industry. The opportunities for talented artists too will be there." ■

RICK DEMOTT is managing editor of Animation World Network. Previously, he served as the production coordinator for sound production house BadaBing BadaBoom Productions and animation firm Perky Pickle Studios. Prior to that position, he served as the associate editor of AWN.

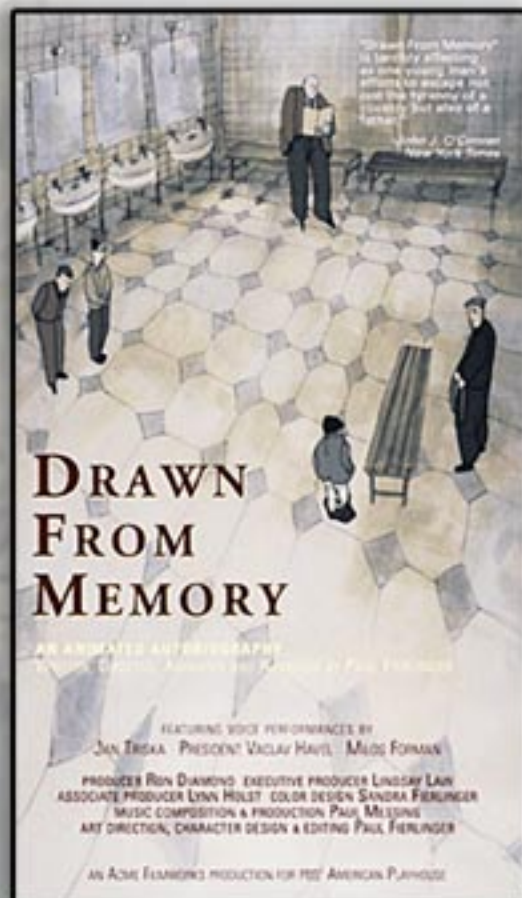
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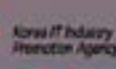
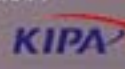
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STRANGE JOURNEY

Being an Independent Creator and Other Fupduck Ideas — Part 2

by Dave Warren

Dave had concerns about presenting his short of *SoSophie* at MIP-TV. This is an early sketch of Sophie.



I WAS SURE I HAD ALL THE TOOLS NECESSARY TO GO OUT AND TAKE THE ANIMATION WORLD BY STORM. THE REALITY WAS I WAS NAÏVE AND HAD NO IDEA HOW COMPLICATED AND DIFFICULT THE PROCESS IS.



As an indie producer Dave Warren realized he needed more than one project to sell. Photo credit: Frank Longford, Studio2 Productions, Santa Ana, California.

BEING A RELATIVE UNKNOWN AND SELLING A SHOW IS a bit like the Tour de France. It's a tough, long journey with a lot of hills to climb. As you struggle to survive, you learn a lot about yourself and your goals along the way.

When I ventured beyond my cubicle and entered the world of the Creator, I was sure I had all the tools necessary to go out and take the animation world by storm. The reality was I was naïve and had no idea how complicated and difficult the process is. I did possess some very important skills like passion and persistence, but other than that, I had little or no idea of what else was involved. My thinking at the time was I've got a great show and I know it. It's just a matter of getting out there, pitching it and the rest will be history. Well, a couple of years have passed, and I'm still writing that history, waiting for that triumphant final chapter.

There are subtle things involved with this process that most of us don't see coming and have to learn by experiencing. After the "Pitch-Me" competition and the amazing ride I had at [NATPE](#), I was on an emotional high. I never

I WAS ON AN EMOTIONAL HIGH. I NEVER STOPPED TO THINK ABOUT HOW IT FELT WHEN THAT RIDE CAME TO AN END.

All of Dave's hopes and dreams were tied up with his project *SoSophie*.
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stopped to think about how it felt when that ride came to an end. Coming back to my studio, I felt lonely and slightly depressed. Everything that happened was great, yet I didn't come back with a sale. That meant getting right back in the saddle, promoting the show and working on getting a deal. This is a cycle that continues to repeat itself over and over again with each new market, interested buyer or potential sale. It's something I've learned to live with, but definitely not something I ever anticipated. Life is like a roller coaster; full of ups and downs and so is selling a show.

Shortly after NATPE, a distributor in Canada named Michelle Stratford who was interested in representing *SoSophie* contacted me. Honestly, at that time I didn't even know what a distributor did. I was just so thrilled someone was interested enough in what I had to offer that I quickly signed a deal with her.

Mentors many times come from places you least expect them. This was the case with Michelle. She introduced me to the **MIP-TV** market in France, buyers from all over the world, and, to this day, continues to pursue every opportunity that is available with efficiency and grace that is unmatched. From her I learned the

importance of developing relationships, following up, what a co-production is and how shows are actually bought and sold. I was overwhelmed at my first MIP market to see buyer after buyer and how they interacted with Michelle. They had a genuine love and respect for her that transcended just doing business. I felt so very lucky, and still do, to have her by my side.

The MIP market is an amazing spectacle. Networks, buyers, sellers and distributors from all over the world gather to get down to the business of television. It can be a bit intimidating and overwhelming at first, but I quickly adapted to this strange new world and found opportunity at every corner. I've met countless buyers from all over the world who provide instant feedback on your idea. I've developed relationships with many of these people. I got an opportunity to see the competition up close and learn the business side of things. Those four days in France provided me with a priceless education and set the foundation for my future in this business. For that, I will always be grateful to Michelle and France, and will always hold both very dear to my heart.

When I first started pitching *SoSophie*, I had nothing but positive reaction from buyers, yet they unanimously scratched their collective heads as to what to do with it. At the time nobody was buying animation with mature subject matter. How things have changed in just a few short years. The lesson being is that if you have a good show but your timing is out of sync with what the market is looking for, then put it on a shelf for a period of time until the market is ready for it. Then again, if your idea isn't so good, be honest with yourself and move on.

Buyers don't want to see you again and again with the same show they rejected the year before. Take note, this is why developing relationships with these people is so important. Just because they didn't buy *SoSophie* didn't mean they wouldn't buy my next idea or maybe the one after that. It just meant that it wasn't right for them at the time. By developing and maintaining healthy relationships with other people in the industry you will greatly increase your chance of success.

I was starting to realize that *SoSophie* was going to be a tougher sell than I thought. If I was going to make a career out of this, I needed to have more product to sell than just the one show. I had a series of shorts I did inspired by my daughter's drawings and the tragic events of September 11th called *teenytiny*

movies. The premise was simple. Take stories written and drawn by children and animate them. In addition, I thought this was a good follow up to *SoSophie* because I wanted to show my creativity had depth and that I wasn't just an "adult" animator.

I quickly set about to package them up and get them out to the marketplace. Just as quickly I learned the flaws in the idea. The main rejection to the idea was that it lacked reoccurring characters, which therefore made it difficult to merchandise. This is a business after all. I decided to put *teenytiny movies* on hold until I get an idea on how to reformat it to better suit the marketplace.

Before I had a chance to begin development on my next idea, Rita Street and Jean Thoren, two amazing women who have championed *SoSophie* from day one, offered me an opportunity to have a centerfold in *Animation Magazine* if I was willing to hire a model to portray Sophie and autograph copies of the magazine at the upcoming Comic-Con. Robert Evans said, "Stay in the picture," and I'm a firm believer in that philosophy, so I jumped at the opportunity.

It was a ton of work, getting the art done and hiring a model and getting a costume made, but in the end it was well worth it. The Sophie model signed hundreds of autographs and introduced just as many to *SoSophie*. Even Gene Simmons of Kiss stopped by the booth to see what all the commotion was about. I was amazed that an unknown entity could attract a large crowd.

Shortly after Comic-Con, John Davidson of SMEC Animation in China contacted me. They were impressed by the show, the attention it was getting and offered to produce a short. It's funny how one opportunity begets another, but that's how it works. It never fails to amaze me how simply taking action in the direction you want to go can set an entire chain of events in motion. The trick is to recognize opportunities when they present themselves and take advantage of them. Don't forget to be grateful and give thanks or those opportunities will go away as quickly as they come.

Suddenly I was in a pinch. I desperately wanted to make a short but needed help. Ralph Sosa has always and continues to have my back. He's an incredible artist, a tireless worker and the best friend you could ever ask for, but Ralph and I couldn't do it alone. We needed writers, prop artists, timers, etc. Not only that but I had markets coming up in the fall and at the beginning of the new year.

I needed something fresh to show besides *SoSophie*. Suddenly I was very busy and spending money I didn't have. I reached out to some very talented old friends. Peter Gaffney came on board to help with the script and [Rob Davies](#) and [Atomic Cartoons](#) joined



teenytiny movies was a flawed concept from the beginning.
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That's what friends are for: Trevor Bently (left) and Rob Davies provided moral and production support for Dave at MIP-TV.

forces with us to get the pre-production done. Tim Borquez and Hacienda Post rounded out the crew, agreeing to help with the post-production.

SMEC did an incredible job as did everyone else involved. Being my first experience working with a studio overseas, they held my hand and made the entire experience a pleasant one. Not to say it was easy. I spent countless nights on the phone with Dennis Deegan, the director overseas going over scenes at 4:00 am in the morning. This was after working all day and all night. By the end I was completely spent.

The short was finished hours before I boarded a plane for France. But it had problems, problems that fell squarely on my shoulders. The script Peter wrote was long enough for a half-hour pilot, but SMEC had only agreed to produce three minutes. Almost everyone involved donated their time to the cause or was working at a severely reduced fee. We were under an incredible time constraint trying to get the short done in time for the next MIP market, so we did our best to condense 22 minutes of material down to three. The end result was a story that left the viewer confused and me embarrassed.

Having no choice I took it to MIP. On the flight there I started to think it might be better not to show it. On our first night in France I took Rob Davies and Trevor Bently from Atomic back to our apartment and showed it to them. They thought I was being hard on it and it wasn't



Dave developed *The Fupduck Show* (left) with Ralph Sosa, which they pitched at NATPE. © 2003 channelzero entertainment, LLC. All rights reserved. Fate brought Carmen Electra to the *SoSophie* project. Photo credit: Rita Street.

as bad as I had led them to believe. Till this day I think they were just being nice and saw it for the mess it was. That's what friends are for. Rob made one suggestion, why not re-cut it as a montage and set it to music using the theme song that everyone loved.

The next day I had meetings back to back to back with buyers anxious to see the short. They weren't as kind as the boys from Atomic. I quickly learned that it was a better idea not to show the short and avoid doing any more damage.

Upon my return to the states, I swallowed my pride and accepted the fact that all this hard work that everyone had done had to be either abandoned or adapted to make it presentable. It was a hard choice, but, nonetheless, had to be made. With help from Hacienda Post we transformed it into a music video and got it ready in time for the next market, NATPE.

While this was going on, Ralph and I started developing a bible and pitch pack for my latest idea, *The Fupduck Show*. I love underdogs. Sophie is an underdog because she's a woman competing in a man's environment. Fup is no different. Nothing ever goes right for this poor sucker and life has slammed him pretty hard. Despite all of that, his character always maintains hope of a better day. I'm big on well-developed, relatable characters that somehow remind us of ourselves; yet on the surface appear to be polar opposites.

It's that common thread of humanity that runs through all of us that binds us together. It's what makes Tony Soprano so interesting. He's a murderous, cheating, lying criminal, yet we somehow manage to feel sorry for him. To me that's brilliance, and that's the bar I go for when I'm coming up with ideas.

Another Christmas holiday comes and goes with Ralph and I working through it. Our present was that we got the *SoSophie* music video and *The Fupduck Show* pitch pack ready in time for NATPE. I have to mention here that during the development of *Fupduck*, I was fortunate to come across two of the most brilliant comedy writers I have ever had the pleasure of working with — Tom Mason and Dan Danko of Mad Brain. These guys are the bomb, and I'll work with them as long as they continue to put up with me.

January 2003 comes and it's off to NATPE in New Orleans. Attendance was way down, and that was all everyone was talking about. Everyone, that is, except me. I saw it as an opportunity to meet buyers and other interested parties who normally wouldn't have time for me. It was the most productive market I've had to date. *The Fupduck Show* was extremely well received. Just goes to show you, it's all in how you look at it. Is your cup half empty or half full?

The icing on the cake came when I walked out of a conference there called "Producer's Boot Camp." As I left, there was a long line just outside the door. This was the biggest group of people I had seen at the market, next to the lines at the free happy hour every night. It was too early for happy hour so I decided to walk to the front and see what all the activity was about. Much to my surprise it was Carmen Electra signing autographs. She was there to promote a new show she was hosting called *Living Large*.

Immediately a light went on over my head and I thought, "Man, she would be a great Sophie!" It's amazing to me that I'm standing there next to one of the most beautiful women in the world and my first thought is of

this damned show. In that moment I knew there was something wrong with me. Regardless, I decided to take action. I joined the line and patiently waited my turn for an autograph.

Half an hour later it was my turn. Being a good Boy Scout, I was prepared and already had my pitch pack in hand, just in case the stars shined on me and she was interested. I informed her that I wasn't after an autograph, but instead wanted to know if she would be interested in voicing the lead character in this show I have called *SoSophie*. Much to my surprise, she said yes, and asked me to sit down next to her and explain the idea in more detail. So there I was, pitching Carmen Electra in New Orleans while she signed autographs and had her picture taken by every horny Joe within a 200-yard circumference. After several minutes, she said she would love to do it, and had her assistant give me her agent's name and number. Thank you Carmen, I will forever be grateful for those 10 minutes of your time.

Early on in this article, I referred to life as a roller coaster. At this moment I was on top of the hill. I was convinced adding Carmen Electra to the mix would make the show irresistible. As is often the case, I was

wrong. First of all, most buyers at the networks aren't horny little Joes, so it's not as big of a deal to them as I thought it would be. Secondly, I had now thrust myself into competition against other celebrity-backed shows like Pamela Anderson and *Stripperella* or Kelsey Grammer and *Gary the Rat*.

The reality is that's okay with me. As a matter of fact, I think it's fantastic. I love the challenge. I'm incredibly flattered to be in that company. I've got a great show and I know it. Some lucky network is going to be very, very happy when they take the chance on *SoSophie*. ■

DAVE WARREN is a two-time Emmy award-winning animation artist of the television series Steven Spielberg presents *Pinky and the Brain*. Other animation credits include Steven Spielberg presents *Animaniacs* and the *Animaniacs* feature film *The Wishing Star*, *Ralph Bakshi's Spicy City*, *Scott Adam's Dilbert*, *Jamie Kellner's Camp Whatever* and *Angus Oblong's Baby Farm*. To learn more about Dave and his company, please visit www.channelzero.org.



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Huckleberry Hound
© Hanna-Barbera.



Fred Seibert: The right man at the right time in animation.

ANIMATION ODDPARENT

The Fred Seibert Interview — Part I

by Joe Strike

IF ONE MAN CAN BE CREDITED WITH RESUSCITATING American commercial animation from its near-death experience in the '80s and '90s, the credit would have to go to Fred Seibert.

After putting the then-new **MTV** on the map with a series of unforgettable, no-two-alike animated ID spots, he took over the creatively exhausted **Hanna-Barbera** studio and engineered a turnaround that brought some of the country's most innovative young animators to its doors. Their creations helped make another newborn cable network more than a place where old cartoons went to die. Moving onto an association with Nickelodeon, Fred proved his success was no fluke by midwifing a second batch of groundbreaking, creator-driven cartoons that helped cement Nick's dominance of the children's television market.

Fred will often praise an associate or collaborator as being "an awesome judge of talent" — a description he more than deserves himself. With an eye toward the main chance that others have overlooked, and an instinctive understanding of both the creative and commercial potential of animated cartoons, Fred has a knack for making himself the right man at the right time. In late March and early April 2003, I had the pleasure of sitting down with Fred Seibert in his Fifth Avenue office in New York City where he heads Frederator, the animation company he started in 1997. I discovered that he is not shy about taking — or sharing — credit for his successes, or accepting blame for his failures; I also learned why he prefers "cartoons" over "animation."



Huckleberry Hound (previous page), *The Flintstones* and *Bugs Bunny* are among Fred's favorite all-time animated characters. *The Flintstones*; TM & © 2001 Cartoon Network. An AOL Time Warner Company. All Rights Reserved; *Bugs Bunny*; © AOL Time Warner.



Joe Strike: *I've read a lot about you already, but can you give me the 10-cent recap how it all began?*

Fred Seibert: Sure. I started in the media business in college radio at Columbia University. I went from there to becoming an independent record producer, making primarily jazz and blues records.

That got into me into commercial radio, into WHN here in New York, which was then a country music station. I did advertising and promotion; that was my introduction to that part of the world.

I was introduced to [MTV founder] Bob Pittman by my mentor, Dale Pon, who had been working with Bob in radio. One day I got a phone call, "Hi, I'm Bob Pittman, program director of [New York pop music radio station] WNBC, and we're going to make you rich." By the way, Dale came up with the 'I Want my MTV' slogan for me when I hired him after I didn't work for him anymore.

I basically developed a career as "the branding guy" in cable television, primarily at MTV networks. My then-partner, Alan Goodman, and I introduced the whole notion of branding to cable television through our company Fred/Alan. We helped clients like Nickelodeon develop unique personalities that people could connect with emotionally. Nowadays it's a given, but back then branding was a new idea in TV promotion.

I don't do branding anymore; once other people started talking about branding I was onto something else. We actually introduced the word 'branding' into the television lexicon. We did that until 1992, when we both decided we had had enough already of being in the service business.

Then I went and became the president of Hanna-Barbera when we closed Fred/Alan. That started me in animation.

JS: How did you come by that job?

FS: While I had Fred/Alan, the then marketing head of Hanna-Barbera approached us about doing some work for some new primetime series they were developing. I had no interest in talking with him about his new series. I had learned that doing advertising for television shows was a lousy business, so I really had no interest in that.

However, two of my three favorite cartoon characters of all time were Hanna-Barbera characters: *Huckleberry Hound* and *The Flintstones*.

JS: *Who's number three?*

FS: **Bugs Bunny.** Anyway, I spent the whole meeting quizzing him about the business behind the classic Hanna-Barbera characters — which then was a complete mess. The company was owned at the time by Great American Television and it was a total gang-bang: one person controlled distribution rights, another controlled the characters and the studio had nothing to do with the library — and the guy who ran the studio clearly hated the library.

I walked away with this little blueprint in my head, and I marched right into my clients at Nickelodeon. I told them 'there is an opportunity we can drive a train through.' I sketched out a little scenario where I believed Nickelodeon could get Hanna-Barbera library properties for zero money instead of millions of dollars — and participate in a merchandising upside if we did things right. The Nickelodeon people told me 'we can't do that.'

I said, "No, no really," and I showed them how to do it. Reluctantly or skeptically they went to negotiate. They said 'we'll never get it for nothing' and I said,



2 Stupid Dogs, the first show Seibert greenlit at Hanna-Barbera was unsuccessful. TM & © 2001 Cartoon Network. An AOL Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

'well you go in asking for nothing, you'll get it for half of nothing.' So they went in using my script and they got seven properties — *The Jetsons*, *Yogi*, a bunch of things — for half, and they saved \$7 million.

One night I was having dinner with this guy from Turner Broadcasting and he said "What's that watch?" We were in *The Four Seasons* where everyone is dressed fancy, and I'm wearing a Hanna-Barbera wristwatch with Fred Flintstone and Scooby and Yogi and Huckleberry Hound on the dial. I told him about the deal I had helped Nickelodeon put together. He said "I didn't know you knew how to do that," and I said, "Well, now you know."

Fast-forward 18 months later: Turner buys Hanna-Barbera and puts the guy I had dinner with — Scott Sassa — in charge of the studio. Up to that point Scott had had only one conversation with any human being about Hanna-Barbera, and that was with me. He called me one morning and said, "Hey why don't you come out to L.A. and run Hanna-Barbera for us?" I looked at my watch — I was wearing the Hanna-Barbera watch again. It was 10:30 and I said "Sure, how about three months from now?" So Alan and I closed our company and that was that.

JS: What was Hanna-Barbera like at the time?

FS: A disaster. At the time I got there, in 1992, they no longer blanketed Saturday morning, and they hadn't had a hit since *The Smurfs* in 1983.

JS: And the quality of what they were producing —

FS: The quality issues I always find interesting and debatable. My first interview experience at Hanna-Barbera was very enlightening. *Film Threat* had started a cartoon magazine. A 25-year old kid comes in and I'm scared to death; I don't know anything about the cartoon business at that point — nothing. I had a great interest psychically in cartoons but I hadn't watched them seriously since I was 12.

The kid comes in and his first question is 'Why don't they make cartoons the way they used to?' I do have a rap for that and I talked about *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons* and *Huckleberry Hound*, bababa... He looks at me finally and says 'I mean the stuff they made in the '80s — why don't they make good stuff like that any more.' I realized the issue of cartoon quality is really all in the eye of the beholder. In general, especially for a 25-year old kid, whatever you grew up with was the best stuff.

A lot of people dismiss *The Smurfs* as a complete piece of junk. I can't dismiss *The Smurfs* — people love it. For my age, the beginning of hating cartoons was *Scooby-Doo*. I couldn't stand *Scooby-Doo*, but what I can't dismiss is its ability to communicate with people as of even today. I have two young kids, five and seven, and they're totally in love with *Scooby-Doo*, they think it's the greatest.

It wasn't the quality per se of what had happened at Hanna-Barbera, it was the fact that they clearly had lost touch with communicating with human beings and making things that people fell in love with. They didn't make hits. They had no idea what people wanted anymore.

JS: Who was hot at that point?

FS: Nickelodeon was new kid on block at that point; they had *Rugrats*, *Doug* and *Ren & Stimpy*.

JS: All three of which had very distinctive looks to them.

FS: Look aside, they were all popular. On Saturday morning FOX was really the winner at that moment. Actually, a Hanna-Barbera show, *Tom and Jerry Kids*, was one of their hits. We had just come out of the Pee-wee Herman phase, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* was big, so there was a lot of stuff out there.



Seibert learned a lot from John Kricfalusi. Courtesy of Spumco.

BUT I'M INTERESTED IN PEOPLE YOU THINK ARE FANTASTIC. AND IN THIS CASE I'M VERY INTERESTED SPECIFICALLY IN ANIMATORS YOU THINK ARE FANTASTIC WITH IDEAS, NOT WRITERS

JS: *But Hanna-Barbera wasn't involved anymore?*

FS: Not at all. They had stuff on the air, but in general, it was a sad state of affairs. They were in piss-poor shape, and Ted [Turner] was always a minute away from closing the place; he bought it for the library.

JS: *And you came in swinging the ax?*

FS: I guess according to some people. I didn't really, over the first year or two, let go of lot of people. It was really a painful time for me. In my television career, I had never been where there were any people before me. I had always been the first guy in the room building organizations, so I never had to turn one around before. The idea that I had to come into this place of 300, 400 people and reduce the overhead significantly to the point where the place could breathe was really hard. At that point, many of those people had been there for years and were of a certain age. That was unbelievable pain, it was really hard; but it was one of the things it had to be done.

JS: *2 Stupid Dogs came along at this point. [Note: as did SWAT Kats, a show we did not get to explore.]*

FS: Actually what happened was I did what I always do. I told people around me, 'I'm not really good at being a cog in the machine. If the way this place is going to be a machine, a widget producer, they put the wrong guy in the job.'

I told the development people 'there are two things I'm really interested in seeing personally while you're doing whatever work you do — because I have no idea what a development department does. But I'm interested in people you think are fantastic. And in this case I'm very interested specifically in animators you think are fantastic with ideas, not writers' — I had a very specific lack of interest in writers — 'and I'm obviously interested in properties you're really thrilled about that you don't necessarily feel fits the system, whatever the system is.'

One of the first things in was a guy named Donovan Cook with a thing called *2 Stupid Dogs*. Depending on how you look at it — either very intelligently or unbelievably stupidly — I greenlit the series on half a storyboard and Donovan's presence in the room.

It was an unbelievably unsuccessful show.

JS: *I enjoyed it; it had a sly sense of humor and was a real change of pace from most of what was on at the time.*

FS: You're one of the few.

JS: *What about the back-up feature, Super Secret Secret Squirrel? I thought that was a brilliant revival.*

FS: I told Donovan we'll make 26 *Stupid Dog* shorts, but I'd really like to stick to the old Hanna-Barbera formula of a half-hour with three shorts, and I'd like the middle to be something else. 'Why don't we see if there's a great classic character we can do something with,' and he came in with the squirrel.

For my future, a very interesting thing happened. I had assigned one of the older veterans at the studio to help Donovan because I knew it was a snakepit, and I didn't know enough to re-invent the system at that point. Donovan needed a guide to the system. Beyond that, he was not at all capable of handling a series. An animated series is a complex machine. From the outside it doesn't look complex; then you add on the complications of the Hanna-Barbera machine — and the kid was doomed.

So I gave him an older guy, someone who was 45 and had been in the business since he was 20. He was actually someone else's recommendation, but I had the sense he could work with young folk without depressing them. We assigned this guy, Larry Huber, to be his supervisor, his handler.

It quickly became obvious Donovan was not going to let Larry in on *2 Stupid Dogs* too well, and Donovan was going to be too busy to do anything other than set up *Super Secret Secret Squirrel*. Once Donovan set the stage — he had his people redesign the characters and they made a couple of key creative decisions — after that Larry took it and ran it. Larry showed himself to be something other than what I thought he was at the time, which was a capable line producer. I found out that one, he was an awesome spotter of talent. Two, he was willing to give that talent room to be what they had not been before; he was able to see an artist or director and say 'maybe they'd be good at story.' And third, I found out he was a magical film story guy, which is not what those line producer types were known as — he was an unbelievable story guy.

Donovan turned out to be significantly less interesting to me than I thought he was at the time, but he also



Seibert talked to Bill Hanna (left) and Joe Barbera, not about business, but about cartoons.

was fantastic at a couple of things. He was an awesome spotter of talent as well. He brought in a new level of young talent into the system. Because I allowed him something the studio had never allowed before

— letting young people be in charge of their own destiny — the crew that he bought in turned out to be incredibly important to my future. When Donovan was no longer with studio, at least a couple of dozen key people from the crew turned out to be the nucleus of the new world order for us.

JS: *That led to What A Cartoon!?*

FS: Not directly. I was able to populate some of What A Cartoon! from some of *2 Stupid Dogs*' crew.

JS: *Where is Donovan now?*

FS: Donovan fell eventually into the bowels of the Disney system. He did one show at Disney that fit the Donovan thing, *Nightmare Ned*, and then went onto to do a lot of TV movie work for them; he directed that *Peter Pan* sequel *Return to Neverland*.

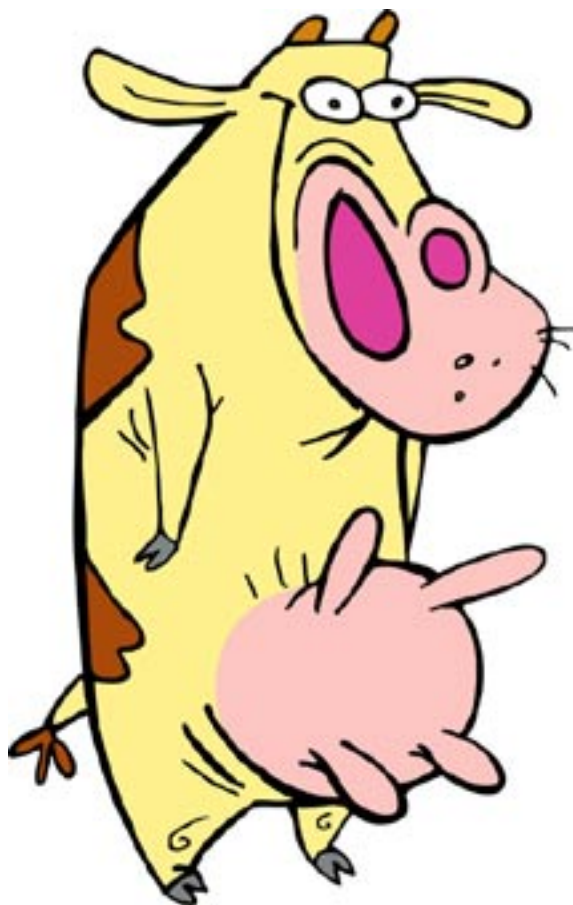
JS: *So you're at Hanna-Barbera now, you've turned this awesome...*

FS: I hadn't done anything at that point. Not near. Ever hear the phrase 'turning a battleship around in a bathtub'? Well I was in the bathtub with the battleship and we were still moving forward. *2 Stupid Dogs* as far as all those people were concerned was a complete aberration.

JS: *The old-timers?*

FS: Even the new-timers, everyone. I hadn't even made a dent into the system at that point. It was just like 'oh, here's another new guy in charge of wasting our money.' That was really all that had happened there.

The next big step was *What A Cartoon!* A lot of business stuff was going on in the meantime. We had to carve through lot of very complicated things to get Hanna-Barbera on a footing that would allow us to do anything.



Cow & Chicken was a success for the newly named Cartoon Network. Courtesy of Cartoon Network.

JS: *Like getting the library back?*

FS: That was the least of it. How they paid for things, how they accounted for things, what employees were necessary and what weren't, characters that had been licensed out in perpetuity to sweetheart companies, we had union issues... there was an amazing amount of complexity to issues that had nothing to do with cartoons. It was a nightmare.

I said to friends at the time 'it's like boulders from here to the horizon, and if you lift every boulder there's a snake underneath.'

JS: *And all the boulders needed to be moved.*

FS: [in a whisper]: Oh God, yeah.

JS: *It must've been painful to focus energy your energy on that as opposed to the creative.*

FS: It was, but luckily I had a number-two man, Jed Simmons, who spent an enormous amount of selfless hours fixing it, so it worked out really nicely.

So, the next big thing was *What A Cartoon!* I had been a consultant to Nickelodeon for many years before going to Hanna-Barbera. In 1989, the Nickelodeon programming and business team came to me and said 'we really need to get into the [original production] cartoon business — how do we do it?'

I had never really done anything in cartoons. I was really just a neophyte, an interested media person, but I knew about the way Looney Tunes, theatrical cartoons had been made. I said, 'it seems to me that what they did was make a six-minute cartoon, run it before a movie and, if people liked it, they made another one [featuring the same character]. If they didn't like it they stopped making it.'

'Why don't we do a system like that, where we make these little containable things? Everything I know about the [TV] cartoon business is they go right to 13 episodes on everything, and they don't believe they can pilot.'

I suggested a system that I thought made some kind of sense, but I had no idea how to execute it, because I knew nothing about cartoons. As usual when you're a consultant, they took pieces of my idea and threw out the rest. The piece that they took, that turned out to be valuable for a couple of years at Nickelodeon, was that they made pilots, which was radically different from the way that Hollywood made cartoons for kids. And that's when you got *Ren & Stimpy*.

So when I got to Hanna-Barbera, I knew they hadn't done the system the way I wanted to do it because I didn't think pilots were the thing. To me, pilots are things that you'll never show anybody and they're messy, they're all over the place, they're not disciplined. Every one Nickelodeon did was a different length.

I thought why don't you make things with some discipline, and then you can actually show it and make a dollar from it? Why make something you're just going to throw into the soup? Because they made a lot of pilots at Nickelodeon back then, and you've never heard of the other ones because they were unairable.

My model for everything I've done successfully in the media business, no matter what medium I've been in, whether I was a record producer or in radio was Berry Gordy's Motown. I loved the idea that they were all in a house and the recording studio was here, and the writing studios were here and the promotion department was here, and quality control — Berry Gordy's office — was up here, and when they needed an extra singer they went to the receptionist and said, 'do you sing?' — I love that.

When I started doing promotion for MTV, I'd never done television promotion, so I built a system like Motown. On Monday you wrote, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays you did audio, on Thursdays and Fridays you did



Oh Yeah! Cartoons! was a collection of brand new shows created for Nickelodeon by Seibert. Courtesy of Nickelodeon.

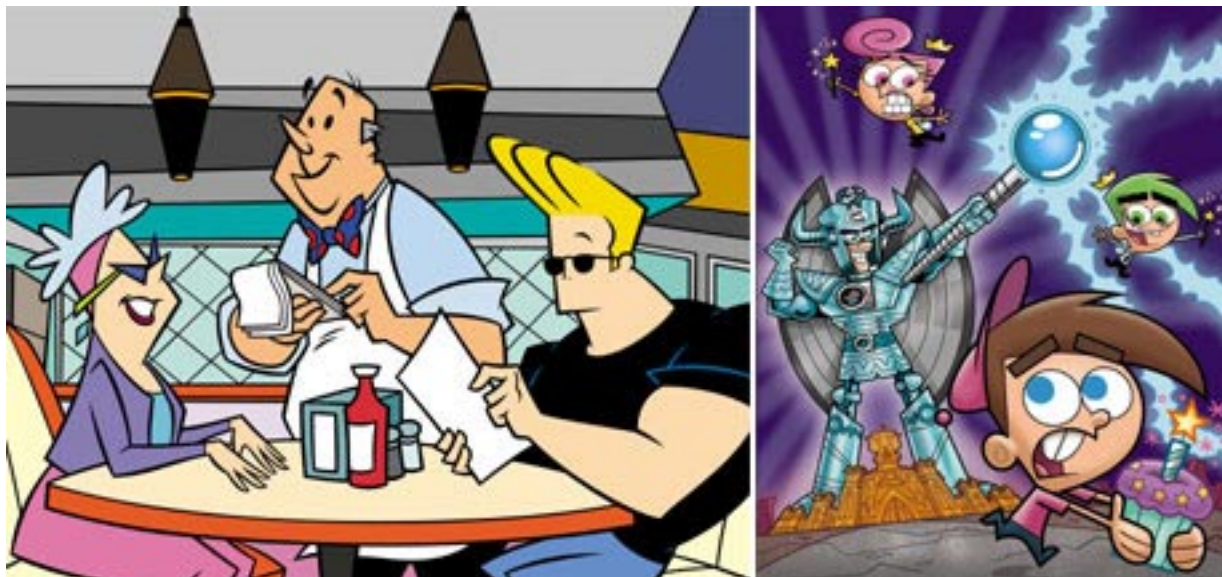
video, and then next week you started again. That's how we got spots out.

I always loved the idea of a factory system where the goal of the factory was unique creative work; where you could discipline the execution process so that it didn't get out of control. I always thought you could get more good, interesting work out of that kind of creative system. My love of going to Hanna-Barbera was I always had the sense they had that system in the old days — and they had lost sight of it.

So I arrive, knowing I want to make these short cartoons like Looney Tunes used to be done. I want to try lots and lots of talent even before I walked through the door because I knew Hanna-Barbera was not a place that talented people felt they belonged. Hanna-Barbera was a place for three kinds of people: people getting their first job, people on their last job or filling in between jobs, and people who really had a tough time getting jobs elsewhere.

In the mid '80s before I went to Hanna-Barbera, both Disney and Warner Bros. got into the television animation business by raiding the company — and they raided the cream. All the people left at Hanna-Barbera thought they were the cream, but that wasn't the case. They were talented people, but the top people went elsewhere and they made the *Tiny Toons*, the Disney Afternoon shows and so forth.

So here I am, I know that no first-level creative person would ever come to Hanna-Barbera, and I knew I needed system to attract them, and where I could try out as many people as possible — and figure out who had the goods and who didn't.



Butch Hartman created both *Johnny Bravo* and *Fairly OddParents*. On the right *Fairly OddParents*' new full-length movie, *Abra-Catastrophe*. *Bravo* courtesy of Cartoon Network. *OddParents* courtesy of Nickelodeon.

I had this idea I'd given Nickelodeon that they didn't execute the way I thought they should've. I'd met [John Kricfalusi](#) in the meantime, who was very skeptical of Hanna-Barbera, but very envious simultaneously. We became very good friends. He told me lots of stuff — and I listened very carefully, I was a great student.

Then I had a sister company that was starting a cartoon network. Corporate politics being what they are, they didn't want to do anything with Hanna-Barbera — other than use the library. But they found out they had to, which no one likes. They came to me and they said 'I suppose we have to do original series with you.'

So being a dope, or acting like a dope I go, 'what do you need original programming for, you have this great library?' They said what I knew they would say, but I wanted to know. 'We're a new network, and advertisers and cable operators respect original programming, they don't respect library. If we're going to get distributors and advertisers we've got to do new stuff.'

I actually don't have many talents, but I'm a good analyst, and I never do anything unless I know why I'm doing it. If I fail, it's because I didn't know why I was doing it to begin with. I said, 'why do you want to do original series?' Now I knew where I was going with this, but they didn't. They said 'because that's what you do on television.'

I said 'let's look at it. If it's about publicity, when are we going to get publicity on an original series? The day we announce we're doing one; the week we launch we'll get some; maybe if we're on air for years and we're a phenomenon, we'll get some more.'

I had just made two series — *2 Stupid Dogs* and

SWAT Kats — for 10 million bucks, and they failed within a week. So we're going to do all this stuff to get these two publicity hits, spend all this money and fail, because in showbiz that's the odds.

I said 'I have an idea how we can get publicity for 48 weeks — every single week for almost two years.' They said 'really?' I said 'yeah — Let's make a new show every week — but I can do it for \$10 million. 'How do you do that?' 'Let's make it like Looney Tunes.'

I had had my tutorial from John, I had spent a long time talking to Bill and Joe, not about Hanna-Barbera, but about [Tom and Jerry](#) and how they produced cartoons. I talked to [Friz Freleng](#) and a bunch of other people — and they taught me how they made those shorts.

So I said 'we'll make a short cartoon every week. It'll be a new character every week, and you'll run it at your most popular time: primetime Sunday evenings just before a cartoon movie. We'll do it just like the old days, we'll run the cartoon just before the movie, and every other week for two years you'll be able to get some publicity out of it. All of a sudden people will think 'every other week? They must be doing a lot of stuff!'

Lo and behold, Cartoon Network bought it. So I called John and asked him 'who should I know?' John gave me my first list.

JS: Who was on it?

FS: David Feiss, Eddie Fitzgerald, a guy named Tom Minton and four or five other guys whose names are escaping me. The only ones I wound up making deals

with were Dave and Eddie, and Dave went the distance with *Cow and Chicken*, which was fantastic.

So I basically started with John, but there were 400 employees at Hanna-Barbera and I started there as well. A lot of the key talent that has gone far with me were people who were already at Hanna-Barbera when I got there.

I hired Larry Huber to be my supervising producer on *What A Cartoon!* He had supervised Donovan Cook on *2 Stupid Dogs*; I said 'okay, you did such a great job with Donovan — now you've got 48 of them to supervise.' He felt like, 'is this a promotion?'

I told the Hanna-Barbera staff 'I know the business you've been in has been one where you do management and network bidding. They tell you what to do and you do it. I know you got into this business because you feel like you're talented and you have something to say. I'm here to make what you want to make.'

At that point in the industry, the business was such that the cartoonists believed that if they did have an idea the studio or network would take it from them and they would get nothing.

JS: *Work for hire.*

A couple of guys that I actually went after who had expressed interest before said 'what will you pay me to make a storyboard?' 'Well, I'm not going to pay, this is your thing and I'll be interested in seeing what you have.' 'But I'm a professional — I get paid to make a storyboard.' I said, 'yeah when you're doing *my* work you do that, but when you're doing your work...' They completely missed the mark.

After beating the bushes for weeks, one of the kids shows up at the door. At the time he was probably about 25. Larry Huber calls them 'the fists.' They were doing props or storyboards or character designs and they do what they're told — they're a fist.

One of the fists turns up at the door and said 'I have an idea, can I pitch you my board with one of my other partners here?' He pitched it to me — and it wasn't that good. But because he showed up first, he got a short. It turned out to be the worst short. But before it was even done, he came back again with another one, and it was a lot less worse — in terms of the pitch. He was enthusiastic and he had really learned things from the first, and I said let's do it — and it turned out to be the second worst short. He ended up doing I think five *What a Cartoon!* shorts.



Powerpuff Girls, Dexter's Laboratory and Courage the Cowardly Dog have all been successful and long-running shows for Cartoon Network. TM & © 2001 Cartoon Network. An AOL Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

FS: Right. I made a deal with them saying 'if we do your thing you will get something.' They had all been complaining to me the first couple of years I'd been there about this stuff.

I prepared for a stampede at the door. No one showed up.

JS: *Was everyone there caught in a rut?*

FS: I think there was a combination of cynicism, pessimism, disinterest and purely the fact that most people want to do what they're told and complain about it rather than take the bull by the horns and do something for themselves.

JS: *You must've had faith in this guy.*

FS: Well, every time out of the box he improved. Most people when they come back to you the second time they're exactly the same or they go down. But this guy learned something every time out. By the time he was done his last short was probably in the top 25 — but still not the top.

In my first season doing *Oh Yeah! Cartoons* [for Nickelodeon] I had one last slot to fill. He had been working on *Johnny Bravo* at the time and his contract was up. He called and said 'I'm available, I have another project to show you.' We looked at it and greenlit it, and that was *The Fairly OddParents* from Butch Hartman.

THE NAME HANNA-BARBERA IS BASICALLY RELEGATED TO EXPLOITATION OF THE CLASSIC CHARACTERS — WHICH IS A SHAME, BUT THAT'S LIFE.

So the first place I went into was Hanna-Barbera and then I really started scanning the world. We just started putting our tentacles out, we called [Ralph Bakshi](#) out of nowhere and said 'Ralph, do you want to get back to your roots?' and he did. He's a character, but he was a very great character for us, he's larger than life.

JS: *Why shouldn't people who make cartoon characters —*

FS: — be characters, exactly?

At the time, if you think about, there were only a couple of well-known animation people and he was one of them. That was a great feather in our cap that looked to people like it was all beginners, to have a couple of well known veterans like Ralph in the mix.

JS: *Didn't Bill [Hanna] or Joe [Barbera] do one as well?*

FS: They each did one for just that reason. In fact, Bill's was wonderful.

JS: *They must've enjoyed just getting hands-on and making a short again.*

FS: Absolutely. Joe, on the other hand, wanted to know why he couldn't do all 48.

What A Cartoon! gave us *Dexter's Laboratory*, [The Powerpuff Girls](#), *Cow and Chicken*, *Johnny Bravo*, [Courage the Cowardly Dog](#) — which by the way gave Hanna-Barbera its first Oscar nomination in the studio's history — the *Cow and Chicken* spin-off *I.M. Weasel*, and we had a compilation of the shorts themselves, the *'What A Cartoon! Show*. So we had seven series, any one of which earned enough money for the company to pay for the whole program.

JS: *Basically a research and development program.*

FS: Then on top of it I reinvigorated the 'who comes in the studio' equation. Now talented people *wanted* to show up. Some 5,000 people pitched us cartoons from all over the world. We got into business with Ralph Bakshi, with Bruno Bozzetto; we got into business with a broad range of people who never would've given Hanna-Barbera a passing chance. We worked with people who were 70 years old, who were 20 years old. We turned on its head the perception the people in the community had of us. And by the way, we made almost a

billion dollars worth of value for the company.

JS: *Does Hanna-Barbera still make cartoons?*

FS: No. It morphed into what is now the Cartoon Network Studios. Some of the original Hanna-Barbera team continues to exist at Warner Bros. doing classic character things, primarily *Scooby-Doo* movies. What I'll call the new classic team — the post-*Dexter*, *Cow and Chicken*, and all those things are at the Cartoon Network Studios, but with a lot of veterans there.

One of the key directors on all the Cartoon Network stuff is a guy who had already been there 20 years when I got there, a guy named Robert Alvarez, a fantastic director. So it isn't all like a new crew, but primarily a new crew. The name Hanna-Barbera is basically relegated to exploitation of the classic characters — which is a shame, but that's life.

JS: *That was basically the whole first period of post-theatrical animation.*

FS: There could've been more, but that was Hanna's and Barbera's fault, which we can get into as a side issue.

JS: *Which really set back the development of American animation.*

FS: You could also make the argument it saved American animation. I get the whole thing. A lot of people think that the entire output of the Hanna-Barbera studio was shit. What happened was that the dialog on cartoons was not controlled by Hanna-Barbera. It was controlled by theatrical people: the Disneys, the Warner Bros. What people said was the Hanna-Barbera stuff was simple, limited animation — you saw characters running past the same tree over and over — it was garbage.

My point is that Hanna and Barbera were not entrepreneurs — they were animation people. They started the studio out of desperation to work, unlike Walt Disney who wanted to start a business. At MGM, when somebody said lousy things about *Tom and Jerry*, the studio publicity person answered it. They didn't control the dialog — they didn't speak up themselves. And over the years at Hanna-Barbera, when people said shitty things, they just seethed on their own, but they let people say shitty things.

JS: *Do you think there was a bit of a guilt complex going on there?*

THE REALITY FOR ME IS THAT THE WORLD WAS IN A MOOD TO LISTEN TO WHAT I HAD TO SAY. I SAID THE EXACT SAME THING TO NICKELODEON A FEW YEARS EARLIER, BUT THEY DIDN'T PAY MUCH ATTENTION.

FS: No — not at all. They weren't guilty at all. Zero. You ask Bill Hanna the day he died. At one point he made a bargain-basement pilot for NBC where you could see the animator's hands visibly moving the drawings.

JS: *Was that a 'fuck you' to NBC?*

FS: No. Bill Hanna's mission in life was how to make it cheaper — that was it. Remember, they started the studio when they were 48 years old. Their mission in life was to make a living. They have no guilt at all — and by the way, I don't think they have any reason to have any guilt.

The fact that they did a lot of stupid things was because they weren't business guys. They weren't driven to build a business on a legacy like Walt Disney was — they just wanted to work. They were working guys who happened to run a place — who by the way happened between the two of them to be brilliantly talented — and it worked. They were unbelievably competitive guys.

JS: *Between each other or versus the industry?*

FS: Everything. With each other, with everyone — they just wanted to get across the finish line. So you could say that they started the decline.

JS: *Well it was when they started to self-plagiarize —*

FS: They were plagiarists from the beginning. *The Flintstones* was *The Honeymooners* in stone-age drag. But when they started Hanna-Barbera, they and every one of their friends in '56 was out of work. So how can you say they were the beginning of the decline? They were the saviors. They figured out how to do it and keep it going. The fact that American animation had hit a peak in the late '40s early '50s — all that meant was eventually it was going to come down.

JS: *Then if anybody's responsible for bringing it up from that nadir, you would have to take credit —*

FS: I would be very thrilled and flattered to take a piece of that.

JS: *You're entitled to a large piece.*

FS: Thank you very much. But there were a lot of other

things going on at the same time — the time was right. The reality for me is that the world was in a mood to listen to what I had to say. I said the exact same thing to Nickelodeon a few years earlier, but they didn't pay much attention. They went their own way and figured out a way to make it great. I was in the right place at the right time.

JS: *But you knew what to do there.*

FS: I knew how to guess there. I guessed, like Berry Gordy guessed.

JS: *Your guesses were right more often than not.*

FS: I had a couple of really big wrong ones.

JS: *2 Stupid Dogs and SWAT Kats?*

FS: No, those were *minor*.

JS: *Tell me the worst.*

FS: *The New Jonny Quest* — a disaster. If any human being could have made more bad judgements than me on *Jonny Quest*, I don't know who could've. That thing almost scuttled the Turner merger with Time-Warner, it was so bad.

One after the other, after the other, I made bad judgements. I can't tell you — I won't tell you — how big a financial disaster that thing was. Leave out the fact that the show was just mediocre. I'm telling you, behind the scenes it was a much larger mess than you could ever imagine — frankly, than I ever could imagine. I was getting an hour of sleep a night for like a year. Suffice it to say it was a disaster, and I'm willing to claim full responsibility for the disaster. ■

JOE STRIKE is a New York City television writer/producer with a lifelong interest in animation, and who remembers watching *Astro Boy* when it first aired in the U.S. His work includes numerous promotional campaigns and special events programming for cable outlets including Bravo and the SCI FI Channel. He interviewed Disney animation director [Mark Dindal](#) in the November 2000 Animation World Magazine.

Sinbad Sets Sail on a New Journey into Water H2O VFX Surfaces

DREAMWORKS EXPANDS 2D & 3D WATER IN SIGNIFICANT WAYS

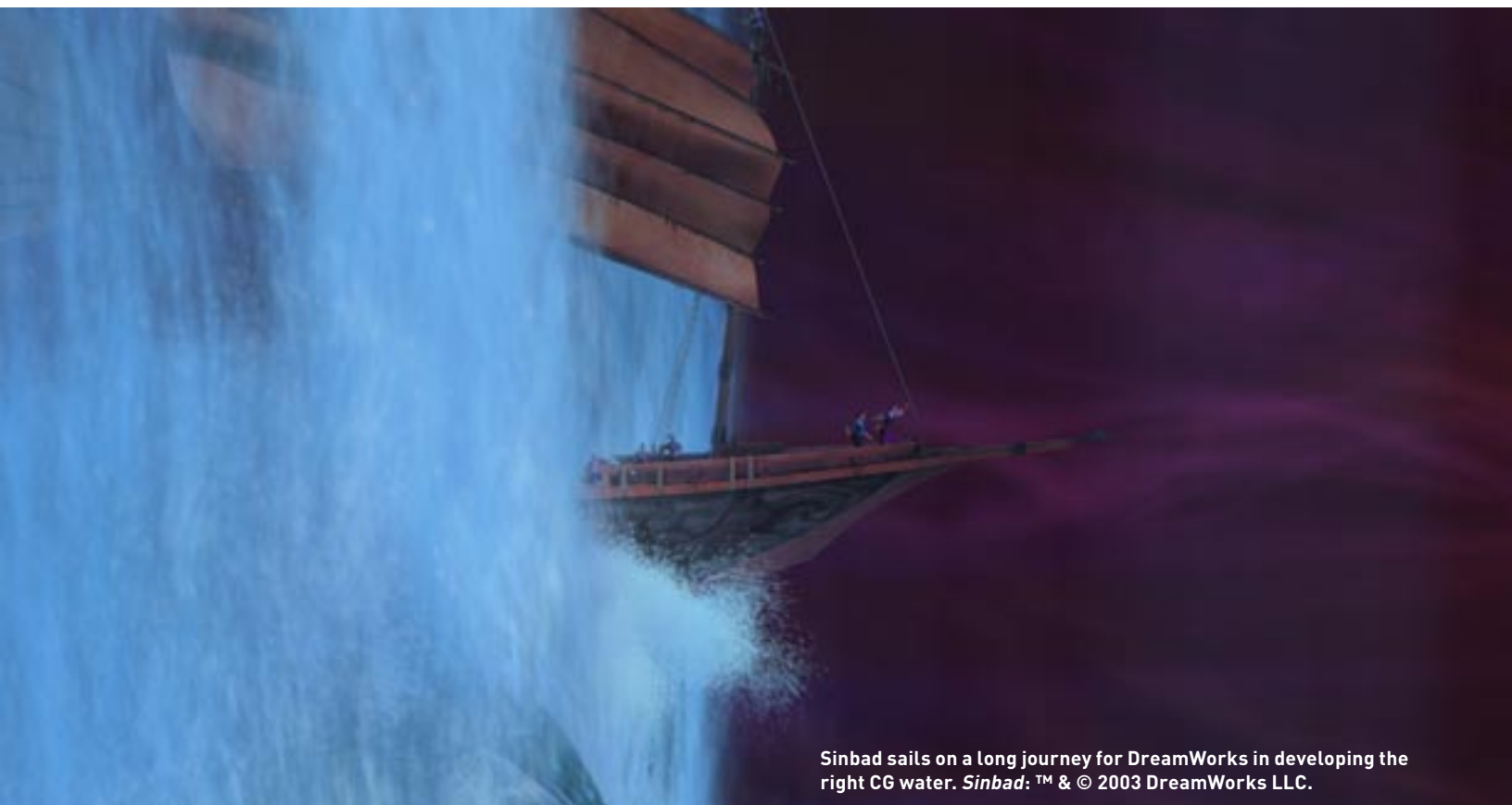
by Bill Desowitz



Craig Ring, digital supervisor on *Sinbad*. Craig Ring headshot courtesy of DreamWorks.

Prince of Egypt, *Antz*, *The Road to El Dorado*, *Shrek*, *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* and now *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas* are all heavy into **water**. In fact, DreamWorks co-founder and animation guru Jeffrey Katzenberg readily admits it: the studio definitely have water on the brain. And wait till next year's *Sharkslayer*, DreamWorks' gangster-inspired answer to *Finding Nemo* — it's their ultimate in waterworks.

According to Craig Ring, digital supervisor on *Sinbad* and lighting supervisor on *Antz*, water is all over the place in *Sinbad* and is represented by four approaches utilized on other films. "The simplest thing we've done — and it's surprisingly effective — is to take a painting of water and then do a compositing ripple distortion over that painting," Ring offers. "It looks astoundingly good but only works for very calm water like the surface of a pond." In *Sinbad*, this occurs, for instance, when the protagonist talks to Marina on the ship at night.



Sinbad sails on a long journey for DreamWorks in developing the right CG water. *Sinbad*: TM & © 2003 DreamWorks LLC.

The second level up the surface water chain in *Sinbad*, Ring says, has to do with a fluid simulation. "It provides more control over water to make it believable and stylized. It allows you to change the wave shapes. It's great for creating an ocean surface. You just get this nice, complex ocean with big and small waves, and everything in between. But it's a single surface; there are no splashing or breaking waves. We had waves that were 30-feet high on *Sinbad*. We used it most prominently during the sea monster attack." However, the full-blown ocean simulation utilized on *Antz* and *Shrek*, which was inspired by Areté Entertainment's Advanced Fluid Simulator, was not applied to *Sinbad* because it didn't call for photorealistic splashes.

The third use of water, which DreamWorks previously used in *El Dorado* and *Spirit*, occurs during the rushing river sequence involving the Sirens, the mythological women that sing songs, entrance sailors and cause them to crash on rocks and drown. "It doesn't look like an ocean and it's not calm," Ring suggests. "It is a rapid slashing technique used to create a surface and then send ripples through the surface. You can think of it as a bed sheet when you flip it and you feel a wave moving through the bed sheet even though it isn't moving. You combine that with animated

textures that look like a swirl of color and foam. The illusion looks like waters flowing down this river. It was first really pushed on *Spirit*, when Rain falls into the river and Spirit saves her."

As for the Sirens themselves, they were essentially female creatures that look like living fountains. The technique was similar to the one involving the aquatic aliens in *The Abyss*. When the Sirens rise out of the water, they splash up like a wave, float in the air and then fragment into a million drops of water as they try to sweep the sailors off the ship.

Ring says they were very careful not to show anything risque on the Sirens. "We pushed the speed and scale a lot during the Sirens sequence. There was this huge wall of rock that everything rushes into. We wanted to integrate 3D with stylized, traditional splashes hitting rock, so we had 2D animators draw splashes, which we texture-mapped onto little cards and emitted these cards like a particle simulation coming off the rocks. Instead of being photoreal, it allowed us to get bigger, more complex splashes than you could affordably draw because we were multiplying that same slow animation hundreds or thousands of times in the shot. But it still has a feel that integrates well with the drawn characters."



A lot of work went into combining the 2D and 3D worlds of *Sinbad*.
Sinbad: ™ & © 2003 DreamWorks LLC.

A LOOK BACK AT THE BUILDING BLOCKS

For Doug Cooper, who was a sfx technical director on *Prince of Egypt* and is the lead cgi supervisor on *Sharkslayer*, each film built on the work of previous films for specific and unique needs. "The most obvious challenge of *Egypt* was the parting of the Red Sea sequence. How do we credibly create a massive sense of scale in the water? The intent was to come up with something that looked like a moving painting. We used a lot of painted reference from the art department as well as other pieces of art. We had paintings of stormy oceans that were key. We used very few photoreal or photographic references. We were starting from nothing so had to come up with a whole process from scratch. Other water sequences such as the Nile were done using Alias primarily as an effects package. But the Red Sea sequence was produced entirely in [Houdini](#) 1.0 and 1.2 because of its procedural animation capabilities. Most of the masses of water for the Red Sea were animated using surfaces. For those calmer seas, a lot of that was a combination of noise fields and typical fake water for the surfaces. Something we did to enhance the look of it, though, was the development of a shader by Moon Seun, where we took simulation data of calmer, flat oceans that we got out of Areté, and turned those into [texture] maps, which we could then use to displace some of the large scale ocean shots."

Cooper adds that this technique allowed them to control and animate surfaces in a very atypical way compared to other packages at the time. But they used no fluid flow or particle simulation for the Red Sea. "We wanted very art-directed motion. When you part the sea, there is no simulation that can do that because it is not part of nature. The animation directors were very specific. 'We want the wave to move this way; splash to occur here.'"

The water walls and parting of the Red Sea were animated with Houdini and rendered with RenderMan. The look of the parting was developed by David Allen, an effects animator now working on *Shrek II* at PDI. "I worked on the drowning of Egyptian soldiers," Cooper explains. "I used procedural animation and Houdini. I layered in a lot of 2D effects so 3D water wouldn't stand out." As with *Sinbad*, they plotted out frames of the CG animation onto pegged animation paper, which they turned over to the 2D animators to make traditionally-drawn splashes.

Toward the end of *Prince*, they developed a rendering technique applied more forcefully on subsequent films where they mapped hand-drawn splash particles

onto particle systems with sprites to create big splashes that looked hand-drawn. This allowed for a lot more splash rendered in the computer. Doug Ikeler packaged that into Spryticle, which was an in-house tool used on *El Dorado*, *Spirit* and *Sinbad*.

Instead of a procedural animation approach using Houdini, in *El Dorado* they used Maya to take a very hand-sculpted approach. The animators modeled keys poses of the water in Maya and then used them as blend-shape targets with the help of an interpolation plug-in written in-house. The advantage to this approach was it was more conducive to the style of the art direction, which required very specific shapes and timing of the waves, somewhat akin to digital stop-motion.

Overall, *Prince* had an almost brush-stroke style. It challenged the animators in what they did with the shaders and textures on the surfaces. On *El Dorado*, the look was much more graphic, so they had to tune the surface shaders to come up with a different look for that water. And they required different shapes. It was more about blocking of the masses. That's why it made sense to use the sculpted approach. On *Spirit*, they returned to a more painterly style that was much richer. *Sinbad* was a return to very graphic style.

LOOKING AHEAD TO SHARKSLAYER

On *Sharkslayer*, most of the previous techniques are not really applicable because they aren't dealing with water surfaces – they are dealing with a whole underwater environment. "So we add particulate matter, depth queuing and atmospheric haze," Cooper says. "We are working on light fall off and how it changes color underwater. Bubbles and ripples so that when fish swims by quickly they will leave a trail of bubbles and often the water will distort the scenery behind it. *Sharkslayer* is a CG-rendered look. And we are pushing it more than in previous films, using subsurface scattering and global illumination on a massive scale. This is not photorealistic but believable. It is richer than previous films. We pay close attention to detail in effects too. There is a Whale Wash sequence [a hip-hop parody of *Car Wash*] with lots of soap suds and bubbles. We cheat on the physics but use the fluid simulation technology developed on *Antz* and *Shrek*." ■

BILL DESOWITZ is the editor of VFXWorld.

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POW! Stan Lee Reloaded

UNCANNY RETURN

by Rick DeMott

AS A FOG DESCENDS ON THE CITY, OUR SILVER-haired hero walks the cold, dark, merciless streets. Villains — first thought of as allies — have betrayed him. Where does he seek refuge in this onyx-colored midnight? He turns the corner and there it is — the neon glow of the sign cuts through the mist like a lighthouse beacon. Our champion heads straight into... a strip club?

If you haven't guessed yet, our hero is the venerable comic book legend, Stan Lee. Stan the Man has risen above the mire of [Stan Lee Media](#) and has moved on. He started POW! Entertainment in November 2002, and he has a new animated series, [Stripperella](#), on Spike TV.

Back in February 2000, Stan Lee and his new Stan Lee Media launched the much hyped stanlee.net, which was a front-runner in the online animation boom. At that time, the company had market capital exceeding \$300 million. That was about \$100 million more than [Marvel Comics](#), the home where Lee created such characters as Spider-Man and The X-Men.

In November 2000, like many hopeful dot.coms, Stan Lee Media signed a bridge financing deal that secured the company's future. However, a clause in the deal voided the funding if Stan Lee Media's stock price dropped below \$1. In only a matter of weeks, the stock plunged from \$8 to well under \$1, forcing NASDAQ to eventually delist the stock from the exchange. At this point, Stan Lee Media was forced to lay off nearly all of its 140 employees, and, only a year after its triumphant birth, Stan Lee Media filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

However, the worst was yet to come. President/ceo Ken Williams and co-founder Peter F. Paul got into a bloody battle of words over who was to blame for the company's downfall. False allegations of all sorts, including fleeing the country and embezzlement, were thrown around like The Hulk tosses tanks. Finally, in June of 2001, the courts entered the fray, indicting Paul,

SLM evp Stephen Gordon; Jeffrey Pittsburg, a Long Island, New York-based analyst and securities broker who wrote reports boasting about SLM shares; and Charles Kusche, a Darien, Connecticut-based stock advertiser. The four were charged with conspiracy to manipulate the company's stock price through improper transactions. The legal wranglings are still working their way through the judicial system.



Stan Lee's Secret SuperSix will be POW!'s first project with DIC. © DIC Entertainment.

Lee doesn't like to talk about what happened. When I asked him about Stan Lee Media and how it affected the formation of POW! Entertainment, he said, "As you may know, some people [at Stan Lee Media] did some things that were less than legal. With POW!, it's much smaller and the people I'm working with I trust implicitly."

So who are these trusted partners? Gill Champion (is that a secret identity name or what?) is serving as coo. The veteran producer is a long-time friend of Lee. Rounding out the top trio is Arthur Lieberman, a New York attorney, who serves as chief of business affairs. Set up at MGM Studios in Santa Monica, California, POW! has already inked more than a dozen feature and television production deals. Lieberman negotiated a first look deal in April 2002 with MGM and Cheyenne Enterprises, the production house of actor Bruce Willis and producer Arnold Rifkin.

The three films in preproduction are *The Femizons*, with writers Cary Solomon and Chuck Konzelman (TV movie *Earth vs. the Spider*), *The Double Man*, being developed by *Training Day* director Antoine Fuqua and *Nightbird*. In addition, POW! has signed a deal with Idiom

Films to produce *Forever Man*, another superhero film featuring a unique twist on the avenging hero character. In July 2003, POW! signed a television production deal with DIC to produce TV series — the first being *Stan Lee's Secret Super Six*. The show will follow a group of super-powered alien teens who come to Earth and meet Stan Lee, who teaches them what it is to be human. Moreover, Stan Lee announced at Comic-Con 2003 that he has signed on to create an animated superhero series with *Playboy*, turning Hugh Hefner into a superpowered leader of a group of crime-fighting playmates. *Hef's Superbunnies* is currently in the development stage.

However, POW!'s most high-profile project to date has to be *Stripperella*. The tough-in-cheek superhero adventure spoof is one of three original animated series in Spike TV's "The Strip." Along with new episodes of *Ren & Stimpy* and *Gary the Rat*, Spike TV is using the popularity of animation with young adult males to lure those viewers to the newly revamped men's network (formerly known as TNN and The New TNN).

So why did the king of comics want to deal with strippers? Lee said he wanted to do something different that was funny and exotic. He had worked on female heroines in his past like Minnie the Model, Nelly the Nurse and Heady of Hollywood. He thought the concept of a woman who strips by night and fights crime by later night was a humorous idea, and always imagined the character's look to be similar to Pamela Anderson. Not just the creator, but also the business man, Lee knew that if he got Anderson involved, her large fan base would easily attract buyers.

When he approached Anderson, she loved the idea. She had recently stepped down from her *V.I.P.* series and wanted to start a more low-profile life, so she could raise her kids and recover from her hepatitis treatment. Anderson participates in the creative process as well. Besides voicing the lead character, she serves as creative consultant, adding such devices as diamond-studded glass-cutting nipples to the character's repertoire.

The show's animation has a Warner Bros. *Batman/Superman* style, courtesy of the artists at Nickelodeon animation, but the writing is satire all the way. The series skewers all the silly comic book conventions from



Pamela Anderson — now that can attract an audience. © Spike TV.



Stripperella isn't your daddy's innocent supergirl here. © Spike TV.

the criminals who leave the hero behind in some elaborate death device, ultimately allowing the hero to escape via secret gadgets that just happen to be available

when needed. The voice cast is excellent with the likes of Maurice LaMarche (*Pinky and The Brain*) and Tom Kenny (*SpongeBob SquarePants*). Even Lee lends his voice to a clueless old inventor named Jerry, who, in one episode, thinks that his 10-pound cell phone will revolutionize the modern world.

Lee says that POW! has no plans of venturing into the Internet. But he said that if there is a way to make money there, he has no problems trying it again. With the huge big screen success of Lee's creations like *Spi-der-Man*, *The Hulk*, *Daredevil* and *The X-Men*, the mess of Stan Lee Media has in no way tarnished the legend of Stan the Man. In its early stages, POW! seems to be making steady strides forward. *Stripperella* is the company's first venture and its first hit. The debut installment on June 26, 2003 brought in two million viewers, more than both of its lead-in "Strip" counterparts. It looks like Lee won't let any type of evil villains ruin his reign at the top the superhero empire. ■

RICK DEMOTT is the managing editor of AWN.

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CHRIS J. ROBINSON CHATS WITH FRENCH ANIMATION WRITER, TEACHER AND DIRECTOR OLIVIER COTTE TO FIGURE OUT HOW HE GETS SO MUCH DONE IN THE SAME 24-HOUR DAY THAT WE ALL LIVE IN.

L'ANIMATION FRANÇAISE

This Guy Really Knows How to Manage His Time: An Interview with Olivier Cotte

by Chris J. Robinson

FRENCH ANIMATION WRITER, TEACHER and director, Olivier Cotte is a busy guy these days. He's written an encyclopedia of animation (sorry folks, it's only in French at the moment), a monograph on U.S. independent animator, David Ehrlich, and is at work on a few books, including one about the Swiss animator, Georges Schwizgebel. Chris J. Robinson caught up, via e-mail, with Olivier to find out where he finds the time to do all this stuff.



Il était une fois le dessin animé is Olivier Cotte's latest work on animation.



Fantasia was an early influence on Cotte.
© Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

Chris Robinson: *Tell me a bit about your book *Il était une fois le dessin animé*, which is an encyclopedia of animation.*

Olivier Cotte: This encyclopedia was an old dream I had. I fell in love with animation when I was about 10, after seeing *Fantasia* and the work of Norman McLaren. Two very different ways of making animation! After that, I saw as many animation films as I could for years, and I continue today. About 12 years ago, I had the idea of an encyclopedia and proposed it to several publishers, without success. During this time, I worked as a computer artist for features, shorts and commercials. And I had the possibility to work for a magazine dedicated to animation, *Animation Reporter*. One day, I proposed the old idea of the encyclopedia to Thierry Steff, the publisher of the magazine who also had a publishing company. He said yes. So I spent three years writing the book.

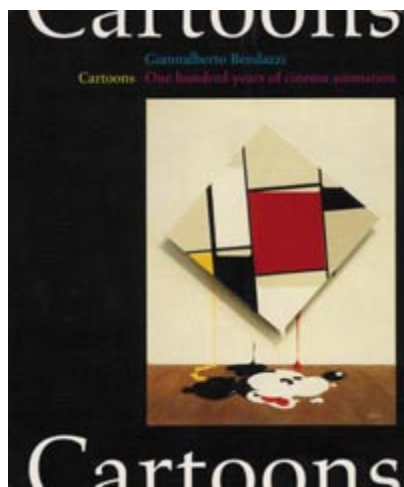
CR: *How does the book compare, for example, to Bendazzi's encyclopedia? Did you use Bendazzi as an example of what to do and what to avoid?*

OC: Bendazzi's work is very impressive and I'm full of admiration for it. As the history of animation is the same for everybody (we will not change the historical facts!), I've tried all the time not to go in the same direction, but with another point of view. It was a difficult thing to manage, but there are two important things to keep in mind.

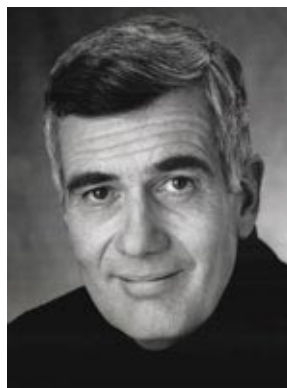
First, I wanted this encyclopedia to be for a general audience. That's why I've included a technical chapter at the beginning, to inform people how we make animated movies, and to give them a better understanding of all the techniques that are used.

Second, I wanted this book to have a more subjective look, compared to Bendazzi's. Of course, I've tried to talk about all the important directors, even those who don't fit my personal tastes. But at the same time, as I consider that an artist can't make a masterpiece every time, I tried to help people to have a kind of guide to the artist's best works. It means that I wrote about the best works and also about the ones, which are not so impressive. It's very subjective, I know, and very dangerous, but as I'm open-minded (I like cartoon and experimental films, for instance), I think it was an opportunity to give more information and to have a better understanding of an artist's career. That point convinced me to also give a (very) subjective list of the 50 best-animated films of all the time.

CR: *I was impressed (and yes, I say this with a smidgen of self-interest) that you also included a list of the winners from all of the most important animation festivals. This is very useful and long overdue. Now, during the writing of this book, you met many animators including American [David Ehrlich](#). Last year you wrote an interesting book on Ehrlich's life and career. How did the idea come about? How hard was it to find a pub-*



Cotte tries to present a different historical point of view from Bendazzi's influential *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation*.



Cotte would like to write indepth about animators working today like George Griffin (left). He also admires historian [John Canemaker's](#) (right) writing.

lisher? Ehrlich's an experimental animator, so I can imagine that must have taken a pretty ballsy publisher to take this on.

OC: During the three years I worked on the encyclopedia, I had many contacts with directors, including David Ehrlich. He's a very positive and charming person and he answered my questions honestly. After a while, I wondered if a book about him wouldn't be a good idea. The encyclopedia wasn't finished yet, so the creation of the two books overlapped. The publisher was the same. Of course, I had to more intensively sell this monograph because David is not such a 'commercial subject' as an encyclopedia. But, because Thierry loves animation, and because David helped us a lot, the project was launched. And of course, it was a possibility for me to write a bilingual book. This book was the opposite of the first — not planned, a kind of 'accident', a little bit like a lovely meeting and I still like the way it came out.

CR: *It's disappointing in a way — although certainly not unusual — that it took a foreigner to write about an overlooked American animator.*

OC: Well, some Americans have written about French artists. I particularly think of Donald Crafton's Emile Cohl biography. I don't think very much in terms of countries. I feel very much international; I belong to ASIFA and have many friends all around the world in the field of animation. I felt close to David and to his work, and that's why I have chosen to write about him. I react more in terms of sensibilities.

CR: *What I mean is that there are some really great American historians and academics and yet they seem to devote almost all their time and energy toward covering every possible detail of American 'cartoons,' specifi-*

cally this Golden Age period. It's great that these folks can find all these theoretical and historical angles, but couldn't they do the same with other countries, other animators like [George Griffin](#), Priit Pärn, Igor Kovalyov, Caroline Leaf (to name a handful)?

OC: The cartoon, which, by the way, is a bad and inappropriate word for these films, is an important style of animation. And it's a popular one, so writers can be surer that they will find a publisher and readers, which is not the case for some other directors. Maybe it's a pity to continue to dig this way: It leaves a lot of other artists unknown. I like Canemaker's books very much because he revealed some new periods, and did a real historian's work. His sensibility goes to classical animation and he gives a tribute to it. I think it's very honest. And he's a good director too. I would like to write about Griffin, Pärn and Kovalyov, or Leaf. Maybe one day.

CR: *And you actually are writing about one of those unsung figures right now....*

OC: I have several books in preparation including a bilingual monograph about Georges Schwizgebel for next year.

CR: *Who will publish the Schwizgebel monograph? Why do you find his work so fascinating?*

OC: I suppose it will be the same publisher. I find Schwizgebel's work fascinating for many reasons. First, there is the question of sensibility, I like painting (I've studied painting myself) and Georges' work is deeply involved in it. And I like his relationship to cutting and music.

CR: *And what else are you working on?*

OC: Well, I've just finished the French translation of the Richard Williams' [*Animator Survival Kit*](#). I can tell you that I am preparing another encyclopedia, a new one, more complete on animation. This time there will be French and English editions. I also write articles for different magazines. I'm working on my next personal animated film. And I write scripts for comics and animated TV series, but that's another story...

CR: *Normally... an interviewer would now ask, "But Olivier, where do you find the time," but now that I've written two books in a year, along with organizing a festival, and writing articles... I know it's a pointless question... we just manage to find time. I think, sometimes, we actually have more time than we imagine.*

OC: Yes, we have to manage to have some free time, and that's not always easy. I try, as everybody else, to schedule everything. If I do nothing, I'm bored. If I have many things to do, I can jump from one to the other and I feel comfortable because I'm never hindered by any problem. And, even if I'm not at my desk, I continue to think about all the work in progress all the time; it's like a 'background application.'

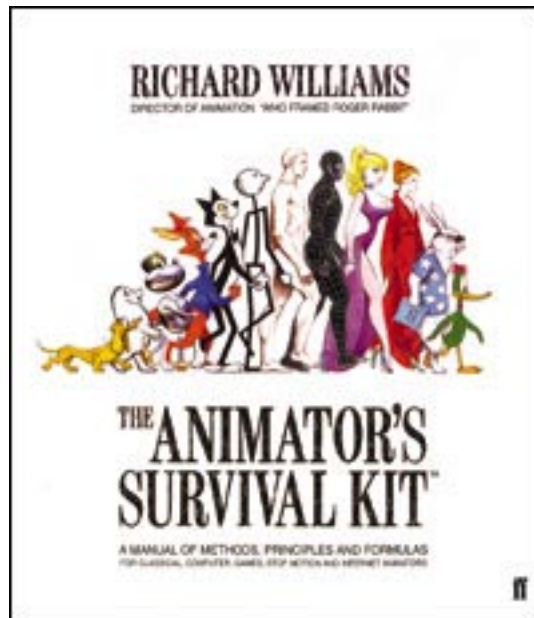
CR: And you don't just write, you also teach. Where, and what, are you teaching?

OC: For the moment, I work at the Gobelins School, famous for the shorts that were shown every day at the 2003 Annecy Festival (and I spent a lot of time on these films).

I teach two different subjects. The first, as you can guess, is a history and aesthetic of animated film. I do a lot of screenings, a melting pot of different styles, and we discuss the film with the students. The main idea is to improve the way they watch films, to give them a desire to open their minds to other kinds of film they don't know.

CR: *What kinds of films?*

OC: The range of these films goes, during the same session, from the early silent movie to the latest computer graphic work. The other kind of teaching I do is about digital post-production. As I was a computer artist for 13 years, I have worked for 15 features by Polanski, Costa-Gavras etc... and on a lot of different kind of films, I have learned and practiced many different ways of manipulating and blending images, and I link all this work to painting. When I began video was analogical, and, when I stopped, it was a digital film resolution media. And, of course, I've worked a lot in animation and digital. All that background gives me the ability to teach students how to manage digital tools for technical and artistic expression.



Cotte's latest project is translating Richard Willams' book to French.

CR: *With the onslaught of digital technology, do you see animation eventually just merging with live action into some new digital medium? So many Hollywood features, for example, heavily rely upon animation effects these days ([Attack of Clones](#), [Spider-Man](#), [Hulk](#), [X-Men](#)). Will animation be absorbed? Where do you see what we call traditional or drawn animation in the next 10-20 years?*

OC: Ouch! I don't know, and, sometimes, when I think about that, I feel uncomfortable. Of course, FX that use animation, particularly via computer, are much more important than before. But keep in mind that it's only an extra. It didn't kill the rest. It's a bonus. But I worry more about the culture. Now I see less experimental films than before. All the independent (especially from schools) films seem very 'equal.' It often gives me the feeling that the director wanted his film to 'fit in a mainstream style.' I suppose we will produce traditional drawn films in 10-20 years, probably less, but maybe better films. The real question is who will do that? And, who will be interested to see them?

CR: *And that's really an important question: Who will be interested to see them? Will there even be a place for short films? Annecy has more focus on feature animation, and we've just been told in Ottawa that's its in our best interest (financially) if the Ottawa Festival starts focussing more on commercially viable feature animation. Are we now entering a new era that might lead to the demise of the short animation film?*

OC: That's a real problem. We wanted to see animation become better known and distributed. We complained about the lack of features films (except Disney's films)? OK! Here we are! A feature is part of a business, it's very expensive and so it means money. A large part of the audience is interested in this kind of production. Today art is much more linked to entertainment (some people don't even make the difference). All these considerations lead to a possibility: the one that a short could only turn to be a 'passport' or a showreel, when you leave the school, destined to work only in the business sector.

CR: How is the animation scene in France?

OC: The situation in France is quite different from other countries. The government can help production, and, every year, about 450 shorts (animation and live-action) are produced. There is Folimage, of course, and there are many other little companies that produce independent films. And when we add student films, it's quite a lot. And yes, commercial production, especially feature, is important. Only last month, there were three new French animated fea-

tures on screen. That's the first time that happened.

CR: Thanks for your time.

OC: A pleasure. ■

CHRIS J. ROBINSON is the artistic director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival and the Ottawa International Student Animation Festival. He is also the editor of the semi-annual ASIFA Magazine. Robinson has curated film programs and served on festival juries throughout the world. He writes a monthly column (*The Animation Pimp*) for Animation World Network and has written for *Salon.com*, *Cinemascope*, *Take One*, *12gauge*, *City Pages* and others. Robinson contributed a chapter on English-Canadian animation to the book, *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*. His book *Between Genius and Utter Illiteracy: A Story of Estonian Animation* was published in May. He is working on a strange book about childhood, alcoholism and an ex-hockey player tentatively called, *The Boy Who Never Grew Up*.

FUTURA

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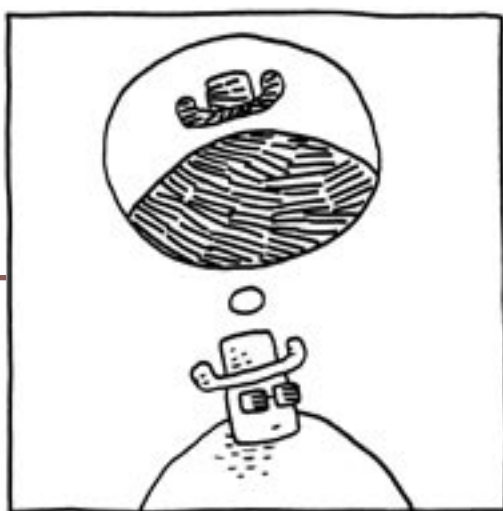


Illustration by [Andreas Hykade](#).
Courtesy of Chris J. Robinson.

ANIMATION PIMP

Attack of the Clones

WHY SETTLE FOR BEING A ONE-DIMENSIONAL SCHMUCK?

by *Chris J. Robinson*

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

Couple months back I was visiting an animation school in the U.S. For the most part, the animation department was no better or worse than most animation schools I've encountered: 3D animation, as usual, was pretty much short on concept — oh and hey, all you fuckers who throw the word CONCEPT or CONCEPTUAL around like they've found the lost ark can KISS MY ASS. Concept means you have an IDEA. What the fuck is non-conceptual anyway? Even the worst piece o' poo poo that has crossed my eyes had a CLUE, IDEA, GOAL, CONFUGGINCEPT. OK? Can we move on now? Any questions?

Long on lip-synch (as in theft, borrowing, recycling, stealing, lifting, pilfering, taking) down the hall in the traditional department we find the latest Preston Blair/Disney wanna-be impressions; and, maybe worst of all, is the use of music. There's nothing more annoying than watching really crappy visualizations (that means PICTURES) of really crappy Tori Amos songs... or even better... using the same piece of music from a recent animation. I'm breathing examples of one school... but I'm by no means picking on them. The above criticisms can be applied to 90-95% of the so-called animation programs in existence.

ESPECIALLY A PROBLEM AT COLLEGES, STUDENTS OFTEN GET HALF-ASSED 'LIBERAL ARTS' COURSES TAUGHT BY MY MOM OR THE MOST FLEXIBLE CUSTODIAN.

Lesson #1: Throw ALL DISNEY/Warner/Preston Blair materials into an incinerator. No offense Charlie but these should NOT be taught as if they're standard texts. I mean first off... this phony attempt at realism is just that... people aren't soft, round figures with big wide round eyes, they come in all shapes and forms. You'd notice that if you took the time to close the book, turn off [Bambi](#) and Linkin Park and SEE the world and people around you. It's sad really because I see some stuff that's not bad, snippets of a personality... but it's all shot to shit when those cozy little teddy bear drawings appear. It's amazing to me that no one questions the validity of a Disney or Blair (are they the same?) drawing. It's simply taken for granted that these sources are truth; the natural essence of drawn animation. What a bunch of suckers.

Lesson #2: It's a tough call. Maybe computers and software should be junked. Clearly, people are way too fascinated with these toys to create anything interesting... and most students seem to rely too much on the inherent assets of the computer... so again... their voice is lost to that of the limitations or controls of the software. But then I think of the interesting films like [Bingo](#) and [Flying Nansen](#) and I feel forgiving. OK... how about we say that no one can animate with a computer until they're at least 30 and have made drawn, cutout, direct, collage films. Of course... then you're all out of jobs, and maybe that ain't such a bad thing.

Lesson #3: BAN THE USE OF NON-ORIGINAL MUSIC. I don't care if they make silent films or pull out their mom's Casio, ANYTHING to get them more focussed on the image. YOU'RE MAKING A MOVIE children... a medium dominated, apparently, by an image. You wanna play Moby, make me a mixed tape.

Lesson #4: HISTORY/PHILOSOPHY/ART/LITERATURE Especially a problem at colleges, students often get half-assed 'liberal arts' courses taught by my mom or the most flexible custodian. I don't mean that they need a better animation history, something that includes more than a token appearance by the parts of the world that aren't USA, but at least an introduction to the philosophy and history of parts of the world that aren't USA. In one classroom I visited they had a map... of the USA. Don't give me any shit about snobbery but man... European students, for the most part, make us look like

slobbering monkeys. They get a fairly well rounded education in the history and culture of the world. You can see it in many of the student films. Even the worst or unsuccessful films are often somewhat original.

This leads me to my biggest beef. During this particular visit I heard more than one (i.e., a few) student say in a real disturbing desperate-for-anything — "If I say it, it'll come true" manner that they were just going to be a character animator or a modeller/renderer. There was NO passion in their voices. It was like they'd resigned themselves to being a civil servant or an information systems technician. In each case, they begged off worrying about any other aspect of their work. They didn't think the other stuff mattered. Sad, sad, sad.

OK — I know that the priority of a college is to prepare a student for a career, to get them a job. It's about training first and foremost. But isn't even that approach a bit sloppy? Why settle for being a one-dimensional schmuck? It's like hockey. No one I know ever dreamed of being a fourth liner. I had no visions of killing penalties or clogging up zones or becoming a low scoring defensive defense man. I doubt anyone ever did. We all wanted to be the superstars; the guys who scored the goals, who led the team, who could do ANYTHING asked of them whether it was man the powerplay, take an important draw, start fights or kill penalties. You wanted to be THE guy who could do whatever the coach called upon him to do. Not a single third or fourth line "role" player ever DREAMED of having that role.

So, I cannot understand these kids who apathetically dream of a life rendering. I can't even imagine that in the ol' days anyone dreamed of being an ink-and-painter. Heck... should ANYONE under the age of 30 just pin the tale and say, 'That's it, that's me for the next 50 years?'

It's a weird time and there are always strange circumstances. Some schools don't give a damn as long as the check cashes. That means that they accept virtually anyone who applies (and that's not a bad thing either). Finding qualified/experienced teachers is another problem especially in areas where salaries are low. Sometimes you don't get the most inspired teachers. They come to school, do their job, and leave. But hey... sometimes you might have the greatest teacher right under your nose, but you're in such a seemingly apocalyptic phase that you're too angry, stupid, or drunk to recognize it. Maybe post-secondary studies should only start at 25 or 30. Spend that period traveling, living, fucking (men and women)... just doin' STUFF (and no I

don't mean knock up a gal and get married).

What do all these grades and reviews mean anyway? These kids I met were so stressed out over these, in truth, rather well-intended but random/limited judgements. It's like I've said before about festivals. Just because one festival rejects (and even then, maybe in another year that festival would have accepted your work) yours doesn't mean another will. School can be pretty meaningless in the long run. I remember how important it was for me initially when I could state that I had a B.A. on my CV, now I don't really care.

HOWEVER... that being said... even in the darkest, most decadent and seemingly pointless Pimp rants, I can still VERY CLEARLY see university's influence on me. It just sort of snuck up on me... like... what lame analogy can I use: a seed blossomed into a flower? A grape into a wine? Ugh. Umm... OK... how about... school's kinda like a hard-on; it can take time, but when it comes, it's well worth that wait.

Let's not end so negatively. You didn't ask, but here are my picks for, not the best (what does that mean?), the most routinely interesting, provocative and original animation schools around. No particular order:

[Royal College of Art](#) (U.K.)

[La Cambre](#) (Belgium)

[KASK](#) (Belgium)

[Turku Arts Academy](#) (Finland)

[Rhode Island School of Design](#) (USA)

[National Film and Television School](#) (U.K.)

[California Institute of the Arts](#) (USA)

[Supinfocom](#) (France)

(Why is it that with two strong schools, Belgium really doesn't seem to have much of an animation community?)

On the horizon?

[La Poudriere, Ecole du Film d'Animation](#) (France)

Honorable Mention:

[Emily Carr School of Art and Design](#) (Canada) ■

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>

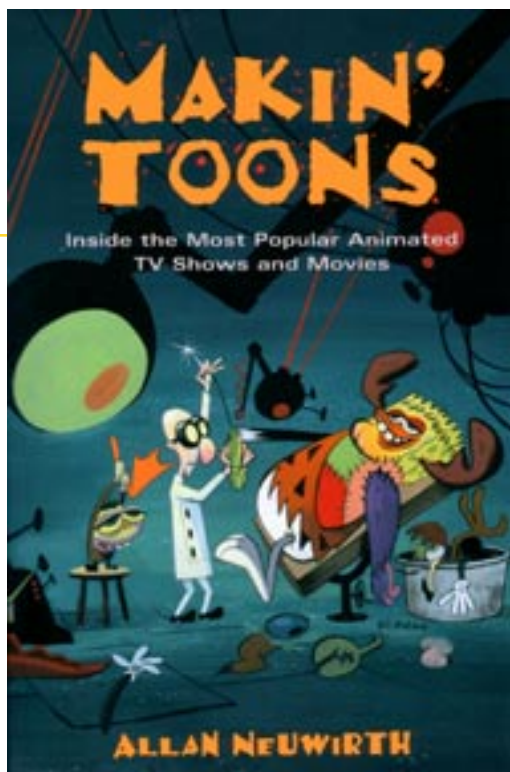


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Makin' Toons by Allan Neuwirth traces the popular rise of animation in features.

TOON PSYCHOLOGY

¡Viva La Revolución!

DR. TOON INVESTIGATES REVOLUTIONS THAT HELP CHANGE THE ART OF ANIMATION, WHICH ARE ADDRESSED IN ALLAN NEUWIRTH'S NEW BOOK, *MAKIN' TOONS*.

by Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman

ANIMATION, OWING TO ITS NATURE AS AN ART FORM, is fated to transmute into an ever-changing array of presentations. It is the method by which this is accomplished that draws the attention of critics, analysts and historians; each exploring different facets of change and how they alter previous expressions in the state of the art. No one, for example, could argue that animated cartoons went from Paul Terry's *Farmer Al Falfa* to Genndy Tartakovsky's *Samurai Jack* overnight.

Even if we allow for the span of almost 80 years that separates their respective debuts, it is evident that something happened besides the passage of time that accounts for the disparate appearances and content of the two creations. The identification of that "something" is not always simple, even after the actual revisions have occurred and we are held in thrall by the shock of the new. This month's column is a humble attempt at defining the methods by which animation has evolved over the years. The biggest surprise may be that animation has never really evolved at all: Revolution, and not evolution seems to have been the true agent of progression.

As I began writing this month's column, Allan Neuwirth's new book *Makin' Toons* hit the stands. This perceptive and entertaining work correctly identifies several events which marked the beginning of the "Toon Boom" that began in 1988 and continues (despite more than a few bumps in the road) to the present. Neuwirth



A key touchstone in animation was *The Little Mermaid* due to its Broadway roots. © The Walt Disney Company.

is accurate in his assertion that the 1988 film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* got the Boom bouncing in the first place. Equally astute are his observations that several key developments followed the release of that film in short order: The Broadway stylings of *The Little Mermaid*; the advent of *The Simpsons*; the premiere of [John Kricfalusi's](#) *The Ren & Stimpy Show*. These four events profoundly shaped the appearance and narrative structure of animated films and television productions. It should also be noted that all four events took place within three short years.

In 1995, the appearance of the Disney/Pixar collaboration *Toy Story* established a stunning precedent for future CGI presentations; the rest of the Toon Boom notables listed by Neuwirth (*The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Dexter's Laboratory*, [The Powerpuff Girls](#), *The Lion King*, *South Park*, [Shrek](#), *King of the Hill* and [Ice Age](#)) were all influenced by the five unique productions first mentioned. Since 1988-1995 is a span of only seven years; given that the history of American animation spans roughly 110 years, this spasm of creation truly represents a revolutionary period.

That these events happened is indisputable, and Neuwirth does an excellent job in detailing them. However, *how* these events happened (and why at this particular point in time) is a separate story, one that deals with the nature of how animation has progressed since silent ink-and-rice-paper toons held sway. The most fertile periods in animation history have been marked by sudden, rapid change rather than slow, painstaking evolution. To discover the reasons for this, it is necessary to examine the process of revolution itself. Revolutions in animation are rarely political but they do tend to follow four other paths: economic, ideological, stylistic,

and technological. Each path is capable of producing a radical change in a short period of time. Let us explore these concepts, and how they have directly wielded their influences on the art and business of animation.

Economic revolutions in animation are global in their manifestation, and are thus easy to observe. There have been several of these cataclysmic events during the history of American animation, and the following are just a few examples. During the [1950s](#) the rising cost of theatrical animation coincided with diminishing returns from theatrical outlets. This led the major studios to dismantle long-standing animation departments and discontinue the production of theatrical shorts. While it is true that economic pressure had been building towards the death of the theatrical short, the studio closings took place in a very brief amount of time. Between 1957 and 1964 virtually all of them journeyed to extinction, seven years that reversed the previous 30. This threw hundreds of animation professionals out of work and marked the curtain call for the beloved cartoon that once opened for the main attraction.

Another economic revolution affecting animation took place as a result of the one mentioned above. Television became the major consumer of animated product. Overwhelming production schedules combined with minuscule budgets, necessitating the use of limited animation. The Hanna-Barbera studio is the one most associated with this practice, and its story illustrates the speed at which revolution can occur. [Hanna and Barbera](#) established a studio geared for producing limited animation TV series within five months of being let go by MGM. Every production company had to adapt to the standard merely to survive, and, thus, the look of animation permanently changed due to financial pressures.

Sometimes economic revolutions are a result of factors seemingly unrelated to animation such as federal deregulation. When Mark Fowler, a champion of deregulation, took over the Federal Communication Commission in 1981, cartoons were allowed to become half-hour advertisements for toys, action figures, the nascent videogame market and whatever else merchandisers wished to palm off on children under the guise of entertainment. So, within a surprisingly short time a revolution took place. By the mid-1980s much of televised animation consisted of series directly created to move playthings off the shelves of stores and into the hands of kids.

Ideological revolutions are most evident in the content, rather than the artistry of animation. A couple of examples will suffice here, the first being the proscription against cartoon violence. Cartoons were scrutinized to the point where any conceivable action suggesting hostility or unsafe behavior in a cartoon led to

THE MOST FERTILE PERIODS IN ANIMATION HISTORY HAVE BEEN MARKED BY SUDDEN, RAPID CHANGE RATHER THAN SLOW, PAINSTAKING EVOLUTION.

terrified self-censorship by networks. This was necessary lest the watchdogs of the FCC, outside groups such as Action for Children's Television, and other concerned parents and educators raised their voices in protest. Animation historian Hal Erickson dates the emasculation of the classic Warner Bros. shorts for television as beginning in the mid-1970s, but more interesting is his assessment that the heyday of network Standards and Practices lasted from 1975-1983. From there it was a short hop to having cartoons contain educational and safety tips welded into their structure; the Children's Television Act of 1990 sealed this deal.

Another ideological revolution took place in the early 1990s with the premiere of *The Simpsons*. Neuwirth's analysis of this series is quite sharp and serves to underscore the nature of swift, radical change — in this case, because the concept behind *The Simpsons* succeeded: an adult demographic could be entertained by a cartoon aired during primetime hours. Every animated series that comprised the "Primetime Toon Boom" in the late 1990s owed a debt to *The Simpsons*. The fact that virtually all of them failed miserably does not erase the fact that a revolution happened.

Some revolutions are stylistic, and these can be startling to observe. Again, a few examples. When Walt Disney came to the decision that his animators should create the illusion of life in full, Disney hired the noted art instructor Don Graham in 1932. By 1934, the staff was attempting its first realistic animation of the human figure in *The Goddess of Spring*. By 1937 — only three years later — the studio produced *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. In the space of just one year (1933-34), the Disney studio also released two films that established the concept of fusing a character's personalities and inner thoughts with expressive animation: *Three Little Pigs*, animated by Fred Moore, and *Playful Pluto*, ably drawn by Norm Ferguson.

The "graphic revolution" pioneered by United Productions of America (UPA) radically changed the look of animation. [John Hubley](#), Zach Schwartz, Bob Cannon, Bill Hurtz and Dave Hilberman broke away from the naturalistic style typified by Disney. [UPA's](#) cartoons were signified by flat, stylized design and novel uses of color; the influence of that style was soon felt worldwide. How soon? Six years after UPA's foundation with the premiere of *Gerald McBoing Boing* in 1951.

Stylistic revolutions can be retrogressive as well, and the effects can be just as rapid. With just six episodes of *The Ren & Stimpy Show* in 1991, John Kricfalusi



The Simpsons' blend of animation and adult humor made it an important milestone says Neuwirth. © & ™ 2000 20th Century Fox Film Corp. All rights reserved.



Ren & Stimpy had a profound impact on future animation projects. © Viacom International, Inc. All rights reserved.

influenced the look of cartoons over the next decade. He did so by channeling animation styles of the late 1950s and merged them with startling emotional and anatomical distortions. Anime has also been the impetus for stylistic changes in American animation. Offerings such as *Batman: The Animated Series*, [Batman Beyond](#), *The Powerpuff Girls*, *Teen Titans*, and *Samurai Jack* owe their distinctive look to Japanese influences. Time-



Revolution on cartoons: *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (top left), *South Park* (bottom left) and *King of the Hill* (right). *Nightmare* © Touchstone Pictures. All rights reserved; *South Park* © Comedy Central and *King of the Hill* courtesy of Fox.

frame: roughly 1990-1993, with the revolution continuing in full force at this time.

Finally, but by no means least, are technological revolutions. These may well be the most rapid of all. The story of animation has, to large degree, been concurrent with advances in film technology. Applications tend to be immediate and produce a considerable impact both on studios, artisans and audiences. Historian Donald Crafton, in his book *Before Mickey*, notes that: "In a very short timespan, from 1913 through 1915, an entire technology developed, flourished and became standard." Crafton astutely recognizes that the nature of change in animation tends to be rapid and revolutionary. The technologies referred to include the adoption of acetate cels and the scientific management of animation's production process in concordance with the assembly-line vision of Frederick W. Taylor.

Other revolutionary advances? Actual cartoon/sound synchronization, developed in 1928: standard in cartoons by 1933. True Technicolor was first used in 1932 in Disney's *Flowers and Trees*. When Disney's exclusive three-year contract for Technicolor ended, every animation studio in Hollywood was making brilliantly colored films, including relative lightweights like the Van Buren studio.

The multiplane camera, which could simulate 3D effects, made its debut in Disney's *The Old Mill* (1937). That same year the Disney techs were comfortably using it in *Snow White*. By the time the studio's second feature, *Pinnocchio*, arrived in 1940 the multiplane was used in that film for some of the most amazing animation shots ever done. It is impossible to forget that once PCs and digital software caught up with animator's dreams, there was a veritable explosion of feature-length films animated wholly by the arrangement of pixels in a software program, a cathode-ray cavalcade beginning with *Toy Story* in — was it only 1995?

With the mention of *Toy Story* we come full circle to Neuwirth's list of achievements: That film was the result of a technological revolution. *Ren & Stimpy* represented a stylistic revolution, as did *The Little Mermaid*. *The Simpsons* was the child of an ideological revolution in its subversive blending of animation and adult sitcom sensibility. And the father of the Toon Boom, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, actually blended elements found in technical, stylistic and ideological upheavals. Taking the above into consideration, there are at least two things we can expect of animation in the future. One, it will continue to change along the four lines discussed above. Two, these changes will be fast, spread rapidly and reflect more of a revolutionary than evolutionary bent.



Batman Beyond is an example of work influenced by anime. © Warner Bros. All rights reserved.

While I do not deny that some changes within animation are slower and do suggest a process of evolution — such as the refinement of a given character's appearance over time as animators grow increasingly comfortable working with it — a global analysis of the art does suggest that when things happen, they are likely to happen fast. As animation is now more diverse, plentiful and popular than ever perhaps we can agree with Thomas Jefferson, who once said: "God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion!" ¡Viva La Revolución! ■

Makin' Toons: Inside the Most Popular Animated TV Shows and Movies by Allan Neuwirth. New York, NY: Allworth Press, 272 pages. ISBN: 1-58115-269-8 (\$21.95)

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

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BOOK EXCERPT

Don't Give Your Right Name! — Part 1

by Gene Deitch

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

JHO WAS A LARGE OUTFIT, MORE THAN 500 Christian Scientist souls, virtually an adjunct to mighty General Motors Corp, doing all of that behemoth's sales training films. It was a company joke that there was a secret tunnel between The Jam Handy Organization on East Grand Boulevard, and the General Motors Building. But JHO also did motivational movies for the U.S. military, stop-motion and animated TV commercials, and every sort of worthy, establishment propaganda film.

In this rich atmosphere, I was ushered into a meeting room, seated in the center, and ringed with all of the top executives and creative department heads.

"Gene, we've heard you are one of the hottest young animators in Hollywood!"

I actually felt somewhat offended. I couldn't let them think I was a lesser light than I actually was!

"*But I'm not an animator!*" I said, proudly proclaiming the truth. Talk about dead silence! Talk about

SO THAT'S THE SECRET! NEVER ADMIT YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING!

ice-formation! I didn't have to be clairvoyant to be able to read the mind of everyone in that room. "What? We just paid this boy's train trip across the country, and he's not an animator???"

An instant too late, I suddenly awoke to the fact that I had committed the cardinal crime of any job applicant: *Never, ever, admit that you can't do anything!*

So then followed my panic back-peddling: "Um, er, well, I must explain that in our work, the generic term "animator" is applied to anyone in the profession. I am specifically a *production designer*, but of course I can animate."

Were they going to buy that? I tell you now that I had at that time never animated a scene in my life. I had scribbled animated stick figures in the margins of my junior high school mathematics books, idly flipping them as I failed math. But I *had* carefully watched the master animators work at [UPA](#). I had spent my lunch hours and after-work hours sitting at the studio Moviola machine, running their brilliant animation backwards and forwards. I *knew* the principles, and I could draw. I had come to Detroit assuming and hoping that I would immediately dazzle them with my advanced design concepts, and would craft stunning movies for them. So what was my first assignment? To *animate* a TV commercial!

Back to luck. My luck was that the animation standard at Jam Handy was antediluvian rubber hose stuff that was 30 years out of date, even in 1949. Remember what I told you about building a house? Or doing any job? Step-by-step. With basic talent or skill and observation, any intelligent person can figure out how to do any job. I knew the principles. I could draw. I could act.

So I got my dialog reading from the film editor, and I squashed, and I stretched. I plotted my arcs. I anticipated. I followed through. I lip-synched. They thought it was the best animation they'd ever seen. It was better than any animation I had ever done before. (None!) I kept the job. They moved my family. I soon directed my first film there, and within a year I was the head of the JHO animation department.

So that's the secret! Never admit you can't do anything! Brazen it out! Analyze the problem, and you can figure out how to do it!

As The Jam Handy Organization was one of the more obscure corners of movie making and animation production, and there may be no one left around to tell you about it, I will. It was a truly amazing place, run by this crusty old devout Christian Scientist, with the top

echelon mainly made up of the followers of "Organization" was the proper name for the place. It was the classic paternalistic and slogan-saturated work place. Above every "member's" desk was a framed list, titled, for example: "Gene Deitch, duties and responsibilities: 1. Reports to Grant Harris, studio producer. 2. Creates and organizes animation projects. 3. Acts as director and scenarist of animated films 4. Co-ordinates the work of the animation department. 4. Consults with the leaders of other branches for projects combining live-action sequences. 5. Co-works with story department where required. 6. Consults with musicians, actors, and technicians for the completion of his projects... etc.

It didn't include helping to clean the men's johns, or organizing studio softball teams, but it might have. I got a kick out of these framed duty lists, and I imagined that should a worker come in drunk or zonked from lack of sleep, and wonder what in the name of heaven he was doing there, all he had to do was swivel his chair and read the sign!

In fact, the place was loaded with helpful signs, mottos and exhortations. One I remember showed a large block of ice, held up by iceman's tongs. (They still had iceboxes then.) Large letters informed us that "IDEAS ARE LIKE A BLOCK OF ICE. THEY MELT IN TRANSIT!" Do keep that in mind. It was claimed that the famous motto, "*The difficult we do right away — the impossible takes longer,*" was coined at Jam Handy. I wouldn't dispute that.

You old time animators will be interested to know that the nominal head of the Jam Handy Organization's animation department during part of the '40s and '50s was old Max Fleischer himself! Jam had him on retainer, assuming Fleischer's name would add class to the joint. Max actually showed up once during my two-and-a-half year stay at JHO, presumably called in to look at my first film, *Building Friends For Business*. We had a pleasant chat, and I never saw him again.

The studio's greatest claim to animation fame up to that time was the original animated version of *Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer*. It was so early, in fact, that it didn't even incorporate the hit Christmas song of that name, which was apparently written later.

One of the great features of JHO life was the annual 4th of July picnic. The staff numbered about 500, so real big-time picnics were staged in a country setting. Jam himself went all-out for these picnics. It was all part of his grand paternal plan. There was plenty of food and root beer from barrels, greased pig chases, kissing booths, volleyball, fireworks and, of course,

pep talks. Jam himself displayed his great condition and commonality, playing volleyball with the underlings, er, "associates." Great stuff.

The head animator, when I came on board, was a chap named Ted Vosk. I didn't know from Slavic in those days, but I soon learned that there was a large Polish city named Hamtramk, plopped like a huge wad of poppy seeds right smack in the middle of the Detroit coffeecake. Many of the JHO staff were of Polish extraction. Ted Vosk was a refugee from the old Fleischer studio, still passionately devoted to early '20s "rubber-hose" animation. His name hasn't appeared in any list of Fleischer greats that I have seen, but he was the star animator at Handy's. He is the very one, who after seeing some of the outrageous UPA-influenced design I was importing into JHO animation, and sizing me up as a post-pubertic upstart, who advised me, "Gene, when you've been in animation as long as I've been, (10 years at the time), you'd know

you can't get away with that sort of stuff!" However, I did get away with it. ■

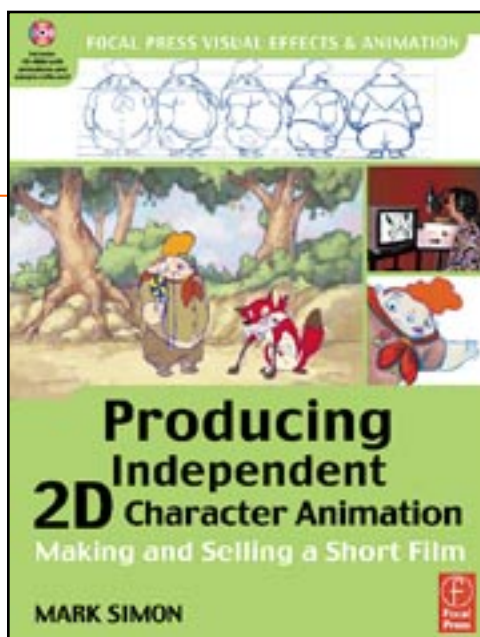
To [read](#) more about the production of these classics visit Gene's online book now.

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 40+ years with the Prague animation studio, "Bratři v Triku."



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.



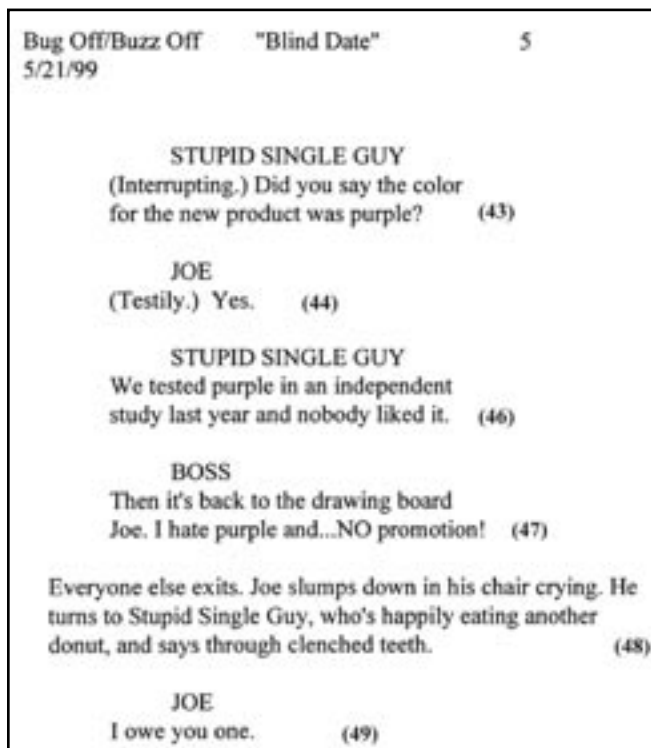
All images are from *Producing Independent 2D Character Animation: Making and Selling a Short Film* by Mark Simon. Reprinted with permission.

BOOK EXCERPT

Concept to Creation: *Audio Recording and Editing*

by Mark Simon

This is the fifth 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 more than 600 full-color images, interviews and a CD-ROM containing sample animation, animatics and sample software described in the text.



Sample script page with lines of dialogue marked for reference.
Script by Jeanne Pappas Simon.

Now the real fun begins. You've done all of your pre-production and you're ready to start production on your animation. If you have any dialogue, you will need to record it before you start animating.

The lines of dialogue need to be numbered for reference during recording and editing. Many scripts have each line of dialogue numbered for exact referencing during production. This may be overkill on small projects, but it is a tremendous help on big shows.

Audio is always recorded before animation starts. This allows you to determine how long the scenes need to be and to plot, frame by frame, where the phonemes are so that you can sync your characters to their audio. Not all animations have dialogue, but they may still have special sounds the animation needs to be related to, or you may want to have your characters move to the beat of music. In all these instances, the audio needs to come first.



When you are working with a project that has been funded, you can hire actors, rent an audio studio, record their voices and have technicians edit the audio together for you. When you have no funding, you need to be inventive in how to produce your project with favors and cheap solutions. Let's start with the assumption that you will have to make do without funding for your project.

WORKING WITHOUT FUNDING

Finding actors willing to do voice overs for free is fairly easy. Voice overs don't take as long as acting in front of a camera. Actors don't have to memorize their lines since they can read from a script. And as long as you're flexible, you can work around their schedules. If you don't know any actors, ask around or go to the drama department of a local school. You can also try local theaters and comedy troupes. For short, independent projects, you can often get voice over actors to work for free, with the agreement that you will provide them with a tape that they can use to get future work.

Whether you have funding or not, record multiple takes of each line of dialogue. It always costs less to record more in the first place than to have another recording session. You often need to use portions of different takes. You may hear something in their acting while editing that you didn't hear while recording.



Sound-dampening in the corner of an office (left) that is being used for recording. Notice that the actors will be facing the hanging blankets. DAT recorder (above) for digital audio recording on tape. It will accept both analog and digital inputs, and the recording quality is as good as you can get.

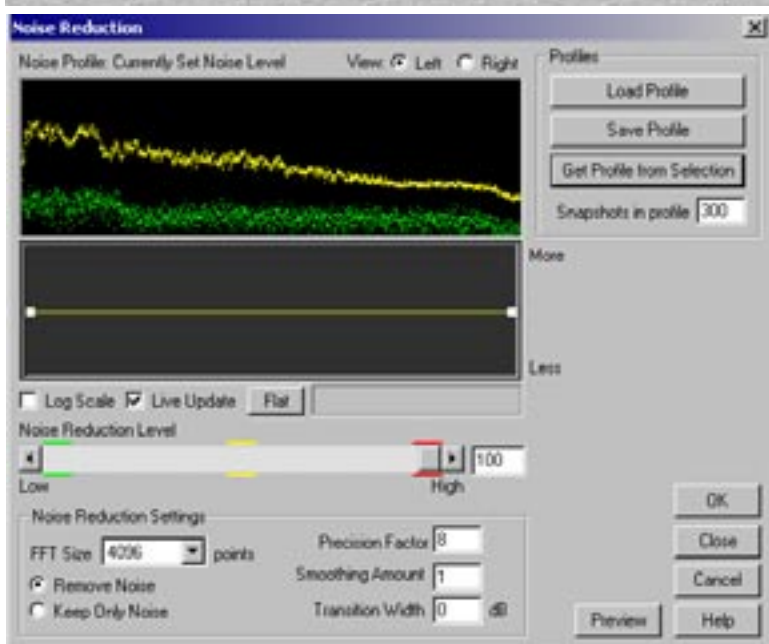
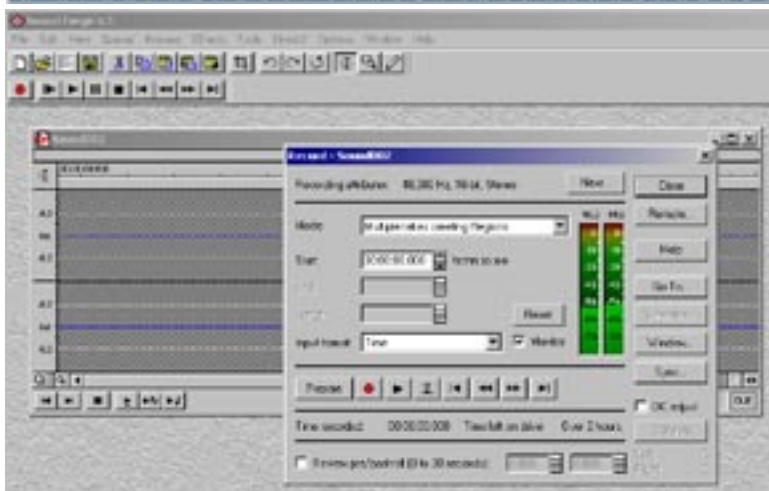
A number of smaller production studios set up their own little recording booths — or even recording corners — in their office. Find a quiet corner or small room and hang some sound-dampening materials in it to keep the recording from sounding tinny. You can use sound blankets, comforters, foam sheets or anything else that is soft and will absorb sound. Place the microphone so that the actors are facing toward the sound-dampeners. Be sure to have a stand for the actors to read their script from — you don't want the noisy shuffling of papers on your recording. Use a stand for the actors to read their script from — you don't want that noisy shuffling of papers on your recording. Use a windscreen in front of the mic to keep down the sound of breath hitting the mic. If you don't have a windscreen, have the actors speak off to the side of the mic instead of directly at it.

Once your studio is prepped for recording, you can record to any device that will accept audio. The best results will be either recording to a DAT (digital audiotape) or directly onto your computer. Once the audio is recorded and you've chosen the best takes, you should clean the audio by removing any background noise that may have been recorded. We use Sound Forge for recording and Cool Edit Pro for removing unwanted noise. Years ago, we used to record room tone, or the general sounds in the recording area that had a slight hum. We then edited that tone over any gaps in the dialogue, so that the quality of the sound wouldn't change. Now, with digital audio recording, we ordinarily remove all background noises, so room tone is seldom necessary.

Different software programs work differently to remove background noise. In Cool Edit Pro, for example, you select a portion of the audio with no dialogue and sample it then load this sample as your



The area highlighted in white (left of top image) is the noise in a silent portion of the recording. Selecting this sample allows you to eliminate that noise in the entire audio file. The background noise profile shown on the left is used here (middle) to remove noise from the audio. Sound Forge recording screen (bottom).



background noise profile. Then you select the entire audio file and have the software remove all elements that match the background noise profile.

In addition to Sound Forge, another popular audio program is ProTools. ProTools also offers a free version of its program that may be downloaded from the Web at www.digidesign.com/ptfree/. This is a fully functioning version, but it only works on a few operating systems. Since software changes so quickly, there may be other freeware or shareware audio programs than these available at any time. It is always a good idea to search the Internet for free or affordable programs to use.

The remaining chapter describes the recording process with funding, audio formats, editing, timing, animatics, file naming and more. To learn about other topics, check out *Producing Independent 2D Character Animation*, published by Focal Press. It can be purchased 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 to more than 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. Winning more than 30 animation awards, 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 and the author.

CAREER COACH
SIGGRAPH
2003



by Pamela Kliebrink Thompson

**BLOW OFF APPOINTMENTS WITH
COMPANIES — THEY'LL NEVER MISS
YOU IN THE CROWD.**

SIGGRAPH, ONE OF THE BIGGEST CONFERENCES FOR COMPUTER GRAPHICS takes place July 27 – 31, 2003 at the San Diego Convention Center in San Diego, California.

I'm sure you're familiar with the scene where a devil and an angel hover over the head of a character, offering conflicting advice. Here are some tips from the guy with the pitchfork and horns.

"Don't bring any business cards with you. If they can't remember your name and number, who needs them?"

"A convention is a great place to break in a new pair of shoes. Try the spike heels so you'll be able to see over the crowd."

"Party all night. You can sleep during the day."

"Don't bother with a plan or floor map. All the exhibits look the same anyway."

"You only need one copy of your résumé to post in the Career Center. Let interested companies take notes from there."

"Make sure your résumé doesn't have any contact information on it. You don't want employers you don't know getting your number."

"Skip the seminars and workshops, but collect the free t-shirts."

"Don't bother researching the companies before you go. You can find out everything you need to know by hanging out in their booth for two or three hours. Better yet — hang out in their hospitality suite. Find the company with the best free food and drinks. That's my kind of research."

"Blow off appointments with companies — they'll never miss you in the crowd."

"Bring only one demo tape (your original) and tell the company you'll wait while they watch it."

"Buy lots of heavy books and lug them around all day. Then if a stranger sits next to you at lunch or waiting for a class to begin, you can read instead of talk."

"Go with people from the office and stick to that group — your contact manager program is too full already."

"Lose your inhibitions at the hospitality suites. Companies are looking for people who know how to enjoy a martini."

"Why bother following up with anyone you meet? What can a person at a different company with a different job do for you anyway?"

"Take time off from the show for sightseeing. After all, when is the next time you'll get to San Diego?"

"Remember you're out of town at a convention. This is your chance to paint the town red. You'll probably never see these people again."

Remember these tips and you're sure to have a devil of a time. ■

PAMELA KLIEBRINK THOMPSON is a career coach, recruiter and hiring strategist. She frequently speaks at colleges, universities and conferences. Her advice: prepare yourself well, wear comfortable shoes and clothes, bring more business cards and résumés than you think you'll need, meet lots of new people, and if you want to see the San Diego Zoo, do it after the conference is over.

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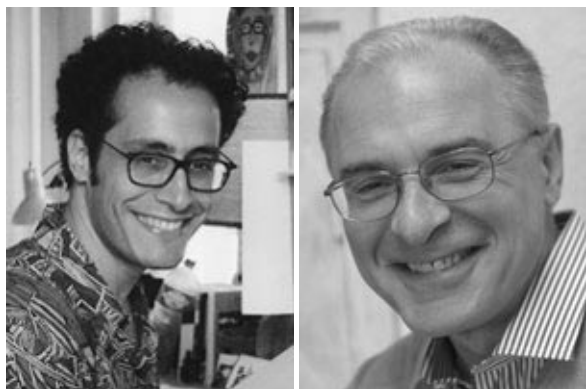
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ANIMÉ RÉNDEZVOUS

Annecy: Professionals' Opinions

by Rick DeMott

EACH YEAR THOUSANDS OF ANIMATION PROFESSIONALS FROM ALL OVER THE GLOBE FLY TO ANNECY, FRANCE TO attend the [Annecy International Animation Festival](#). Over the years, the festival has developed the reputation of being the premiere animation festival in the world. This year's event, which ran from June 2-7, 2003, was no exception. We wanted to find out why others enjoy the festival and find it an important event to attend each year. Our pool of responses came from filmmakers, historians, festival directors, educators and execs. Here is what they had to say.



John Dilworth (left) and Giannalberto Bendazzi (right). Dilworth photo courtesy of Stretch Films. Bendazzi photo courtesy of G. Bendazzi.

JOHN DILWORTH, DIRECTOR AND DESIGNER, STRETCH FILMS

Academy Award-nominated director John R. Dilworth is the founder of New York-based Stretch Films and the creator of Cartoon Network's [Courage the Cowardly Dog](#). The pilot for that series, *The Chicken from Outer Space*, was nominated for an Academy Award, an Annie Award and a CableACE Award. Dilworth has also directed such short films as *The Dirty Birdy*, *Noodles & Nedd*, *Catch of the Day* and *The Mousochist*.

My most positive Annecy moment was the restoration of hope that hand drawn animation will survive, with intensive care, with the feature film, *Les Triplettes de Belleville*. Also discovering new souls. It is important to me to attend the festival for the continuity of community, inspiration and contagious enthusiasm. The networking I do at the festival is all human, which includes, naturally, business interests and creative. I am mostly interested in how well people live and love within the context of their art and commerce. For me, to network is to insert myself in this net that works like the weave of a blanket. I cannot discriminate against the quality of the films. I was satisfied with my colleagues' difficult selection choices seeking the best of the best. I resist judgment.

GIANNALBERTO BENDAZZI, ANIMATION HISTORIAN

Italian born Bendazzi is a film critic and historian who has been studying animation since age 19. His most recent work is a book in English and French called [Alexei-eff – Itinerary of a Master](#), devoted to a master of auteur and experimental short film. His best known work is *Cartoons, One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation* (Indiana University Press, 1994, 1995, 1999), a world history of the medium that has been in the making since 1970.

My most positive Annecy experience was realizing that my colleagues on the jury were the best group of civilized, cultivated and expert people I could hope for. They were Bill Plympton (USA), Gabor Csupo (USA), Mikhail Aldashin (Russia) and Susie Campbell (Australia). The quality of the films to award were above average, and this was my second most positive experience.

I'm a historian, and at a festival like Annecy, I can watch a good selection of every year's best animated films of the world. I attend the retrospectives. I can also meet the filmmakers. If I were a filmmaker, a distributor, a professional of any kind, I'd do the same and I'd feel enriched anyway.

The quality of the films has changed a lot during the years, and this is an extremely exciting and inspiring thing. I don't mean the *level* of the quality, I mean its *morphology*. During the seventies animators were presenting novelties: new techniques, new design approaches and new sound inventions. During the eighties the basic theme was issues (the emblem film of the eighties was nature-loving *The Man Who Planted Trees* by [Frédéric Back](#), Canada). Then came electronic development. But you see, when I first arrived in Annecy, in 1971, I happened to hear this comment: "This year's selection is quite weak... Do you remember how great it was the one before?". Now, 32 years later, you can hear the same thing told by almost everybody in the festival hall. And this means that, in fact, the *level* of the quality, despite its *morphology*, has always been perfectly high.



Steve Whitehouse. Caricature courtesy of Steve Whitehouse.

STEVE WHITEHOUSE, ANIMATOR

Born in Toronto, Whitehouse began his career in traditional animation in 1985. He has worked on many diverse projects, mainly for TV, including: *Babar*, *Beetlejuice*, *Duckman* and *Sam & Max*. In 1999, he started the [Flash](#) animated series *Mr. Man*, for which he has created more than 140 shorts to date, including *Interactive* which garnered the Grand Prix Vivendi at the FIFI2000 (Festival International du Film de l'Internet). He is developing other properties with the collective "The Petrie Lounge." Its first film, *Kunstbar*, has won numerous international awards.

The most positive thing [about Annecy] is just being involved/immersed in the creative atmosphere, seeing old friends that I have not seen in years and meeting new ones! And Annecy is such a lovely town. It is important to attend the festival for meeting like-minded people, seeing what they are up to and seeing that you're not alone in the struggle to create.

There's not so much business networking at the moment, I was occasionally meeting with people interested in *Mr. Man*. Unfortunately, nothing has materialized at the moment, but I am in no particular rush. [My networking is] more on an artistic/personal level, meeting the filmmakers whose work I admire, etc...

It's always interesting to see what gets accepted. I find the student films to be more enjoyable as they seem less self-conscious and more daring in their approach. Generally somewhat less pretentious — more art/story driven than the big "I wanna impress'em" approach that a lot of "professionals" seem to get caught up in, which tends to drag and becomes more interested in style than substance.

TSVIKA OREN, DIRECTOR OF THE ANIMATION CENTER TEL AVIV

Oren served as the animation curator for the 17th and 18th Haifa International Film Festival. He is a senior lecturer at the Bezalel Academy of Art & Design in Jerusalem, Tel Hai College Film School in N. Galilee and Minhal College's Electronic Media department in Tel Aviv. He also works as a journalist, film critic and is a member of editorial board of the bi-monthly cinema magazine *Cinematheque*. He contributes a column in *Otot*, a communication and advertising monthly, as well as *ASIFA Int'l Quarterly*, *ASIFA IL Newsletter*, *YNet magazine*, *Animation World Magazine*, *ASIFA S.F. Monthly* and *Credit Magazine*.

My most positive Annecy experience was verbal communication with selected people. In addition, the exciting new 'three dimensional drawing' technology (*Falling in Love Again*, NFB/IMAX). [Zagreb Fest](#) and Holland Animation had wonderful casual receptions with lots of exciting people. Solweig von Kleist's excellent exhibition was very cleverly arranged at the Castle space. I enjoyed Sylvain Chomet's superb feature *Les Triplettes de Belleville* as well as the "Work in progress" presentation of Folimage's wonderful feature, *Raining Cats and Frogs*.

If one has access to a similar variety, plus the same quality of animated people and films, Annecy (as well as the other five top festivals) would have no importance. Since I don't have the above mentioned available, attending at least one of these festivals a year is a *must* to further develop insight; get some idea of current creative achievements and tendencies; exchange knowledge, concepts and opinions; diminish ignorance; view rare important films of the past; get a fresh supply, in abundance, of creative and thought-provoking stimuli.

Annecy offers all qualities of films. There are 265 selected new films. All 1,400 sent for selection are available for viewing on video. With several hundreds of films in retrospectives and special screenings, plus many more available at the market, there is plenty to choose from to suit an individual's needs and interests.



Sophie Trainor (left) and Bob Balser (right). Trainor photo courtesy of London Effects and Animation Festival. Balser photo courtesy of Bob Balser

SOPHIE TRAINOR, FESTIVAL MANAGER, LONDON EFFECTS AND ANIMATION FESTIVAL (LEAF)

*Trainor has held the post of **LEAF** festival manager for the last four years, following roles producing conference and events relating to telecommunications and online issues. She has a keen interest in film, cinematography and, of course, visual effects following studies in French cinema and media. Similarly, she has written industry related articles for European publications.*

My most positive Annecy experience was meeting up with Bill Plympton and other U.S.-based guys that I only see rarely. I believe that Annecy is the best event for networking with the 2D animation community. In my role as manager of a festival in London, this is my prime reason for attending. In the past, the event has been more beneficial to me, as my focus is more CG and 3D projects, and there was very little relevant content of this nature this year. In the past, the question has been, why wouldn't you attend Annecy, more than why would you. Similarly, I believe that it is noticed if you are not there.

The networking that I do is almost completely business-related to the festival, looking for speakers and awards entries and also profile-raising for the festival in general. It is a great place to meet a really international audience and also high profile animation gurus who would be very hard to get in touch with otherwise.

I have attended now for three or four years and, each year, I notice that there is some amazing work. However, there is also some less interesting stuff and it means that you need to go to a lot of screenings in order to search out the really cool stuff. Also, I have noticed that some work is repeated each year, which isn't necessarily a bad thing as there must be some crossover of attendees. But for those of us who go each year, it does lessen what we look at. (Also for 2003, the conference programs were almost absent, which was a great shame).

BOB BALSER, ANIMATION DIRECTOR

*Balser is best known for being an animation director on the Beatles' cult classic **Yellow Submarine**. After Yellow Submarine, Balser opened his own production company in Barcelona, Spain, where he produced TV series like The Jackson 5, The Lion The Witch and The Wardrobe, Peanuts for CBS, Barney for BBC and many more. His recent credits include The Triplets and Bay Dogs. Today, he spends most of his time as a consultant and teaches students around the world.*

As always Annecy is a combination of positive experiences: seeing the latest films, seeing friends, networking, seeing the various exhibitions of animation historical importance, and, of course, enjoying the beauty of the Haute Savoie and eating that wonderful food. Added to this, for the past few years, (since the inauguration of MIFA) the computer programmers present their new developments, which is also interesting. This year impressed me especially because of the advances that allow a creative filmmaker to use a relatively inexpensive computer to make a broadcast quality film — at home.

For anyone interested in animation, the Annecy Festival probably has the fullest range of exposure to the best commercial film market products, such as films for sales, educational and scientific use; TV series, as well as personal films, using every conceivable technique. There are also student films, which allow us to see where the new animators are going. For those whose interest enters the business area, there is the chance to see — and buy — many new products before they are presented in the large film markets.

At this point in my career, I'm mainly interested in consulting and teaching. Annecy gives me the opportunity to make contact with various schools, and extend my contacts with acquaintances in a very constructive and valuable way.

There are so many programs at Annecy that anyone's taste can be satisfied. Annecy has grown so large and important that four categories have been established: Short & Feature, Student & Graduation, TV & Commissioned and Internet. The four pre-selection juries had to look at more than 1,000 films, and select what they considered the best in each category to be placed in competition. It is a very difficult job, because, of course, the viewer will be dependent on the taste and concerns of the jury members. This year, I was very pleased to see that the quality was generally very high, and most people we talked to were very impressed with a larger percentage of films than in recent years.



Cartoon Saloon co-founder Tomm Moore, animator Fabrice Ziolkowski and Paul Young (pictured left to right). Photo courtesy of Cartoon Saloon.

PAUL YOUNG, CO-FOUNDER AND JOINT MANAGING DIRECTOR, CARTOON SALOON

Young serves as producer on the Saloon's in-house projects and those in development. As an artist, he has scripted and storyboarded six episodes of a series in development, Ruairí. He designed and drew a 40-page comic book An Toraíocht, as well as numerous illustration and cartooning projects for commercial clients. While he was still in school, he created the Television sketch series Barstool that was broadcast in October/November 1998 as part of @ LAST TV on RTE. Paul worked as a character designer and layout artist with Brown Bag films on the production. Before setting up The Cartoon Saloon with Tomm Moore in Ireland, he completed numerous illustration and cartooning jobs as a freelancer including contributing to a young person's guide to the Amsterdam treaty, funded by the EU and published by The National Youth Agency in Britain.

It's hard to pinpoint the most positive experience I've had in Annecy, because every time I come back I feel better for it in general, I get to meet some very interesting people and show them what we do... that, and the weather was great and we got to go swimming. This year I would say meeting two very talented animators, Diane Le Feyer and Laurence Peguy, who had just finished college in France was one of the highlights. Their work was just fantastic, and they wanted to come to Ireland and work with us, so it was good news for Cartoon Saloon. They'll arrive next week to start work on a project! I know the highlight for Nora Twomey was seeing *Belleville Rendez-vous*. She was the only one of our group to manage to get a ticket in to see Sylvain Chomet's film at the time. I got to see it at a previous screening in Cannes. It's definitely my animation highlight of the year.

Obviously, Annecy is a good place to go and talk about your projects and to meet with the people who

can help you make your feature film or TV series. But while Ross Murray and myself scrubbed ourselves up a bit and did the producer thing at [MIFA](#), the others from the studio were just relaxing and taking in some animation, comics, sun and swimming. So it was a great week out for a studio overall.

In contrast to MIPCOM or MIP-TV, MIFA is a great way to meet both the business and the artistic side of the animation industry. Two Cartoon Saloon directors were there, Nora Twomey and Tomm Moore, to meet with students and look at portfolios. I found out which broadcasters and producers I would like to meet a few weeks before the market and arranged some appointments over the first two days, leaving a day or so to arranged more when I'm there. The size of the market is intimate enough that you can arrange to meet someone if you really want to. Even had a few hours to work on our feature film script for *Brendan and the Secret of Kells* while supping back some wine by the lake. Pure class.

Unfortunately, this year I only saw a couple of screening sessions as I was very busy in the market, but we had a film called [From Darkness](#) in competition and the shorts that were in the same session were wonderful. It's amazing to see so much animation at one time and realize there are still a lot of people making short films. It's harder and harder to see shorts on television anymore, so Annecy is one of the best places to see what other people are doing. It also helps in the "we're not alone" type of feeling you get when you're in the middle of a production, you know, there are other fruitcakes out there too. Of course, everyone has to see *Belleville Rendez-vous*, and I'm not just saying that because we're co-producing our feature with [Les Armateurs](#).

At the end of the day, Annecy is a great way to meet interesting people from all over the world... and have a drink... I hate to be living up to the Irishman stereotype, but let's face it — free booze is always good thing...■

RICK DEMOTT is the managing editor of Animation World Network.

ANOTHER RÉNDEZVOUS

MIFA:

Is It Still Important to Attend?

by Rick DeMott

m

IFA, THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET FOR ANIMATED FILM HELD IN conjunction with Annecy, took place this year from June 2-6, 2003. AWN wanted to know what professionals' feelings were on the expo? We asked why they attend, what business they do at the market and what advantages MIFA gives them over other events. We got responses from professionals across the globe, working in different areas of the animation industry, and here is what they had to say.



Naomi English, global sales manager, Cambridge Animation Systems. Photo courtesy of Naomi English.

NAOMI ENGLISH, GLOBAL SALES MANAGER, CAMBRIDGE ANIMATION SYSTEMS

English has worked at Cambridge Animation Systems for the past three years as global sales manager. Prior to Cambridge, she was involved with a hardware solutions company in Australia for five years.

MIFA is one of the few festivals where the business and the animation art are catered for. It brings the artists, the producers, the distributors, the buyers and the tools of the trade together under one festival. It is a wonderful place to network with the animation community and to see what is going on with the new and established filmmakers, production companies, service studios and animation manufacturers.

As we exhibit at MIFA each year, not only can we demonstrate our new products and releases, we have the ideal opportunity to meet with our reseller partners, to build on existing customer relationships and to develop new customer relationships. MIFA's role in the animation community is no longer "just" centered on the European markets. As we have seen each year, an emerging number of international studios and representatives are coming to MIFA, which gives the festival a wonderful global flavor.

MIFA is the biggest animation trade show closest to England and is tightly focused on our target market. The setting of Annecy is also a lovely advantage.



THE GENESIS FOR A LOT OF OUR PARTNERSHIPS IS MIFA...

— CHRISTOPHER PANZNER, TEVA

Christopher Panzner (left), writer/producer, TEVA and Seth Piezas (right), president of Fluid. Panzner photo courtesy of TEVA. Pieza photo courtesy of Fluid.

CHRISTOPHER PANZNER, WRITER/PRODUCER, TEVA

Panzner started his career as the technical director for the inventor of interactive television shopping, the Home Shopping Network. In 1988, Panzner moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in "multimedia" as assistant art director for the inventor of the colorization process, Color Systems Technology. He set up a subsidiary of CST, CST Interactive, in Paris, in 1991, to colorize black and white French films and was hired away later that year as a software consultant by Pixibox, then Europe's biggest producer of television animation and the inventor of the first industrial cartoon production software, now called PEGS. In 1993, he became the managing director of the Luxembourg-based studio, Luxanima. Panzner joined TEVA in 2001, and has been instrumental in the financing and/or the making of five features there in 2002-2003, including Belleville Rendez-vous.

It's an occasion to catch up with virtually everyone in European animation (and the North American "regulars"), formally and informally. The atmosphere is much more relaxed, people make more time for you in general and the "appreciation level" is higher since it's exclusively animation. Annecy's such a beautiful place, too.

This past MIFA was incredibly fun and productive for us. The genesis for a lot of our partnerships is MIFA since there are many more creative people (who shy away from MIP-TV or MIPCOM). Normally, most producers are preparing a pilot for Forum Cartoon or MIPCOM Junior and just starting to show their projects around, looking for partners and asking for creative input on projects that are fairly far along in development, but whose financing phase may have only just started. There are also a lot of independent artists and/or new companies looking to get their projects off the ground and MIFA is a good place to start generating interest. We are a high-quality studio/co-

producer, so we make a good fit (with the financing available to French studios).

Cartoon Movie, MIP-TV and the Cannes Film Festival precede MIFA, which is the last festival before summer vacations start. So, normally, we conclude a lot of deals in Annecy and prepare for the double whammy of Forum Cartoon and MIPCOM.

SETH PIEZAS, PRESIDENT, FLUID

Starting his career, Piezas worked in broadcast commercials, feature visual effects and interactive games for such companies as LucasArts Entertainment and Tippett Studio. While at Pixar, he served as a member of PING, an internal group devoted to production process improvement and strategic developments. Among his Pixar production credits are [Toy Story 2](#) and [Monsters, Inc.](#) He left Pixar in September 2002 to found Fluid as a production management operation catering to the growing computer animated feature market.

Our business model relies entirely on fully animated features. We felt MIFA's animation focus would create an ideal atmosphere to meet quality production and distribution partners from all over the world. Specifically, we are interested in meeting companies that are designing themselves as remote production centers. Traditional animation is mature in this way. We expect it to be a significant part of CG animation's future. However, it may take a long time to mature.

Everything in this business comes down to relationships. MIFA, combined with Annecy, created a perfect environment to meet professionals in an atmosphere where everyone was enjoying and celebrating animation. It was simple. MIFA has a specific focus on animation with an emphasis on the international scene. We are completely immersed in the North American market, and MIFA provides the opportunity to catch things that we might otherwise miss.

IN SUCH A FOCUSED ENVIRONMENT IT HELPS CREATE AND FOSTER THOSE RELATIONSHIPS.

— ROSS MURRAY, CARTOON SALOON



Attending MIFA helped Cartoon Saloon's *Skunk* project immeasurably. Tapaas Chakravarti (center), DQ Entertainment. Joan Vogelesang (right), president/ceo, Toon Boom Technologies. *Skunk* © Cartoon Saloon. Chakravarti photo courtesy of DQ Entertainment. Vogelesang photo courtesy of Toon Boom Technologies.

ROSS MURRAY, ADMINISTRATOR, CARTOON SALOON

After graduating with double honors in Economics and Sociology from NUI Maynooth, Murphy decided he wanted to make his filmmaking hobby a career and promptly joined Cartoon Saloon. Since then, he has worked to help the Saloon develop its range of services and its own projects.

MIFA is important because it is focused — only animation — so you get to talk about the solutions and problems from all angles. There are students, writers, designers, animators, script editors, producers, directors, colorists, etc., so if you look, you will find.

Partnership is the best thing for a studio like ourselves. And I think, that in such a focused environment, it helps create and foster those relationships. You can test the water much better — at other events like MIPCOM and MIP-TV sales are the main target of the people attending, so they are often under intense pressure to reach targets. At MIFA, you can bring a project, throw it out there and get a response. For us that was invaluable this MIFA with our project *Skunk*, which we are presenting at Forum this autumn.

TAPAAS CHAKRAVARTI, MANAGING DIRECTOR/CEO, DQ ENTERTAINMENT

Chakravarti is the head of the Hyderabad, India-based cel animation company, which produces programming for television, feature films, the Internet and CD-ROMs. The company was formerly known as Dataquest Management & Communications Ltd.

MIFA is immediately after MIP-TV in a serene, relaxed atmosphere for follow-up on MIP discussions. Very serious people come here for one-to-one relaxed and detailed meetings in a holiday atmosphere. This

ensures serious business deals. You can take a weekend off after MIFA in one of the most beautiful and hospitable places. You meet many youngsters, aspiring animation people with original ideas, great relaxed parties and it's less expensive. MIFA is more European business-oriented and you meet serious buyers and sellers from France, Spain, the U.K. and Germany.

JOAN VOGESANG, PRESIDENT/CEO TOON BOOM TECHNOLOGIES

Prior to joining the Toon Boom, Vogelesang was coo of Qsound Labs, Inc., an audio technology firm. Before then, she was vp of business operations at Hitachi Data Systems, Inc. Vogelesang also worked for Philips Electronics Ltd. for 10 years where she held the position of vp, product line management. As the first female vp, she supervised 380,000 employees. She came to Toon Boom in 1998 as coo and, in 2003, was appointed president and ceo.

MIFA is recognized as the European Animation Festival and Market. Therefore, it attracts all the players, big and small, of the animation industry, that are mostly based in Europe, creating an ideal environment for business opportunities. It is critical for [Toon Boom](#) to attend as our presence in Europe is expanding, and MIFA gives us the opportunity to meet with existing and potential customers. We have pulled out from all the other events as exhibitor — the other shows didn't turn out as productive as MIFA. MIFA's advantages are: the event is focused, it is well-established and well-organized, creating a favorable environment for business and the combination of the festival with the market draws a lot of talent and expertise, making the whole event worthwhile and stimulating.



Andrew Fitzpatrick, chairman, Monster! Distributes. Photo courtesy of Monster! Distributes.



Jiang Toon Animation is an emerging animation firm in China. © Jiang Toon Animation.

ANDREW FITZPATRICK, CHAIRMAN, MONSTER! DISTRIBUTES

In addition, to being chairman of TV brand firm Monster! Distributes, Fitzpatrick is a director at several other companies, including Planet Rock Ltd., which produces the successful music series, Planet Rock Profiles. Prior to Monster!, he ran the [Don Bluth](#) companies, which included Europe's largest animation studio, employing more than 420 people, for 10+ years, holding various positions, including that of chairman, prior to the company's take-over by Newscorp.

MIFA is the only industry event attended by such an interesting mixture of broadcasters (though not enough these days!), distributors, producers and first-time filmmakers. Its combination with the festival enables distributors to meet with emerging creative talent and it enables these talented individuals to spend time with buyers in a way which wouldn't be possible at a major market.

It provides an opportunity to acquire great new programs for distribution, as well as opportunities to meet with buyers. We've already made two sales resulting from meetings at this year's MIFA, and are close to a third. MIFA is pretty unique in being a market attached to a festival.

ALEXANDRE ROUSSEAU, VP, INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/SUPERVISOR, OVERSEAS PROJECTS, JIANG TOON ANIMATION

Rousseau represents Jiang Toon Animation in China. The five-year-old company specializes in the pre-production, production and post-production of animated features, episodics and Webisodics. It has facilities in Shanghai, Wuhan and Chengdu, China, with its business development unit located in Montreal, Canada.

There aren't enough shows exclusively dedicated to the business of animation for us to ever consider not attending MIFA. Furthermore, current conditions force us to inspect every nook and cranny for opportunities, although I cringe a little at the comparison. Annecy is neither a nook nor a cranny, and its festival, setting and ambience lend it a certain dignity — an augustness if you will — unsurpassed by comparable events. If only they'd improve their damned cooling system. ■

RICK DEMOTT *is the managing editor of Animation World Network.*

SKETCH BOOK

ASIFA East Awards Through An Artist's Sketchbook

by Don Duga

DON DUGA ATTENDED THE 34TH Annual ASIFA East Awards on May 4, 2003 at the Tishman Auditorium, in Manhattan, New York. As always, Don had his sketchbook in hand and reports back to *AWN* with pictures not words. Page through and enjoy Don's visual rendering of the ceremony. See if you can identify who's who.





THE BOARD MEETING... ASIFA EAST



PLAN THE SCREENING OF THE 34th
ASIFA-EAST FESTIVAL.

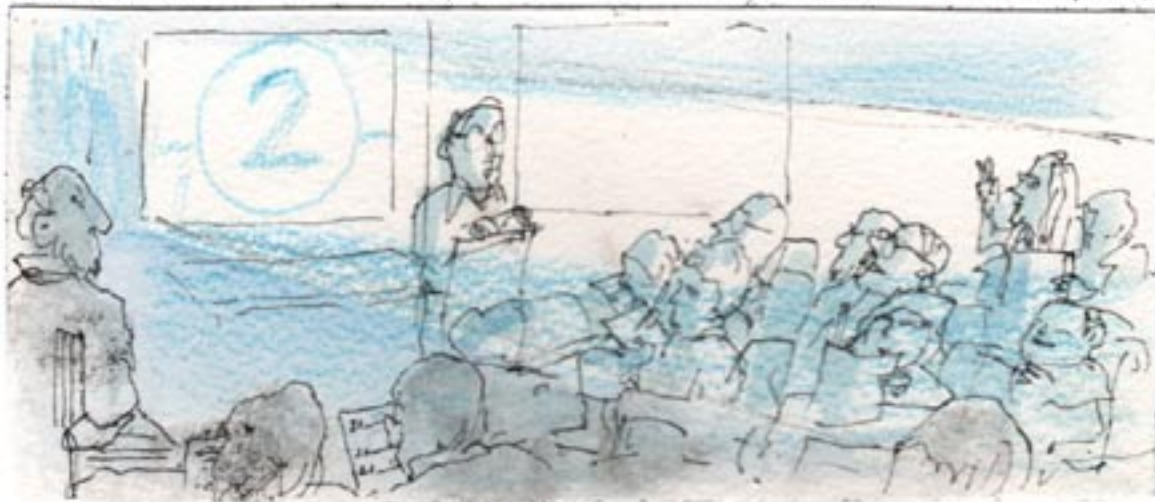


♫ ♪
BOTTLE OF RED, BOTTLE OF WHITE ♪ ♫

ON TO SVA (SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS)
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AND INDEPENDENT FILMS...ALL PAYING MEMBERS
OF ASIFA EAST CAN VOTE.



PRESIDENT DAVID LEVY TELLS THE MEMBERS HOW TO FILL OUT VOTE FORM



AFTER 3 DAYS OF WATCHING









AND THE PARTY AFTER



HERE'S A COMPLETE LIST OF ALL THE WINNERS.

1ST HONORABLE MENTION — STUDENT

Rabbit 17 Becomes Restless by Mike L. Mayfield

3RD PLACE — STUDENT

Ark City by Christi Bertelsen

2ND PLACE — STUDENT

Little Moon Monster by Cynthea Mazur

1ST PLACE — STUDENT

Dreamscapes by Sean McBride

COMMERCIALS — EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN

Samurai Jack by Curious Pictures

Bigmouth Us Unwired: Woman by [Acme Filmworks](#)

COMMERCIALS — EXCELLENCE IN ANIMATION & HUMOR

Pioneer Car Stereo Headbangers by Mike Overbeck (BBDO West)

3RD PLACE — COMMERCIALS

Charmin: Comfy Bed by [Joanna Quinn](#) - Director (Acme Filmworks)

2ND PLACE — COMMERCIALS

Please Baby Please by Jennifer Oxley

1ST PLACE — COMMERCIALS

Charmin: Blindfold by Joanna Quinn - Director (Acme Filmworks)

SPONSORED FILMS — EXCELLENCE IN WRITING/HUMOR

Religietables by Wachtenheim/Marianetti Animation, in assoc. w/ Hornet Inc.

Midterm Elections by Eric Drysdale & David Javebaum - Writers, JJ Sedelmaier - Director (JJ Sedelmaier Productions)

SPONSORED FILMS — EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN

Condom Skills Building by Jeremiah Dickey & Emily Hubley - Designers (GMK Animation)

SPONSORED FILMS — EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Blue's Clues: 100th Episode Celebration by Nickelodeon/Blue's Clues

3RD PLACE — SPONSORED FILMS

Linny the Guinea Pig: Ocean Space by Jennifer Oxley (Little Airplane Productions)

2ND PLACE — SPONSORED FILMS

Turn, Turn by Maciek Albrecht (Magik Studios)

1ST PLACE — SPONSORED FILMS

X Presidents: Search by David Wachtenheim & Robert Marianetti (Wachtenheim/Marianetti Animation)

INDEPENDENT FILMS — EXCELLENCE IN WRITING/HUMOR

The Box Factory by Fran Krause

INDEPENDENT FILMS — EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN

The Man With The Smallest Penis In Existence by Aaron Augenblick - Designer (Augenblick Studios/Transfatty Inc.)

INDEPENDENT FILMS — EXCELLENCE IN SOUNDTRACK

The Stone of Folly by David Buchbinder - Composer, Jesse Rosensweet, (National Film Board of Canada)

INDEPENDENT FILMS — EXCELLENCE IN ANIMATION

Stiltwalkers by Sjaak Meilink (National Film Board of Canada)

INDEPENDENT FILMS — EXCELLENCE IN EXPERIMENTAL TECHNIQUES

Current Events by David Ehrlich

3RD PLACE — INDEPENDENT FILMS

Delivery by Patrick Smith (Blend Films)

2ND PLACE — INDEPENDENT FILMS

Roof Sex by PES

1ST PLACE — INDEPENDENT FILMS

Sieviete (Woman) by Signe Baumanė (Rija Films)

SAMU AWARD HONORABLE MENTION

Imagine by Maciek Albrecht (Magik Studios)

SAMU AWARD HONORABLE MENTION

Stiltwalkers by Sjaak Meilink (National Film Board of Canada)

SAMU AWARD

Flashbacks From My Past: Starry Night by Irra Verbitsky

PRESIDENT'S AWARD

International Film Seminars (The Flaherty)

2002 BEST IN SHOW

Bathtime In Clerkenwell by Alex Budovsky

2002 BEST IN SHOW

Tongues and Taxis by Michael Overbeck

View Don Duga's [sketchbook](#) from Annecy 2002. ■

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

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FINNISH FEST

The Tough Eye International Turku Animated Film Festival

by Kelly Neall



Tough Eye Animation Festival. Unless otherwise noted, all images courtesy of Tough Eye Animation Festival.

A HEATED DISCUSSION BROKE OUT DURING A PRESS conference held at the [Tough Eye Animation Festival](#) in Turku, Finland. Gerrit and Celia Van Dijk (*I Move, So I Am, Quod Libet*), festival programmer [Otto Alder](#) and others bemoaned the lack of quality venues for independent animation. One of the most rich and innovative forms of art today remains obscure primarily because it is not easily made into a commodity. Animation festivals, really the only place to see much of this work, have tried to incorporate high art animation into the commercial realm. Without this connection, most of the festivals themselves could not exist. They work to sell themselves as “trade shows” and sometimes force their programmers to play it safe in order to attract their corporate supporters and the general public.

Visiting Tough Eye was a revelation, because here is a festival that has set out to respect these animations as important, individual artistic works. What a great pleasure to simply see art as art. Of course, the organizers are lucky because without strong government support, this would just not be possible.

Turku, Finland is a bit off the beaten track, at least for North Americans, but it turns out to be a great place to visit. Calm, organized, great food and a surprisingly high number of people speak English. The festival itself is amazingly well organized thanks to a dedicated staff.

In the very long hallways of an old rope factory lies a crucial contributing factor to success of Tough Eye — the Turku Arts Academy Polytechnic. It's one of the top animation schools in the world and a hive of creative activity. The head instructor of the program is the legendary animator Priit Pärn who, along with the program's administrator, Eija Saarinen, are two of



Turku Arts Academy Polytechnic, one of the top animation schools in the world, contributes to Tough Eye's success as a festival (top row-left). Courtesy of Kelly Neall. Jury Prize winner Ülo Pikkov (second row-left). Jury members Andreas Hykade (second row-center), Koji Yamamura (top right), Heikki Jokinen (third row-left) and Sayoko Kinoshita (third row-center). Dellers (third row-right) plays trumpet. Photo by Dino Azinuro. Antonia Ringbom (bottom right), creator of *Yellow Giraffe* at work. Courtesy of Kelly Neall.



the main forces behind Tough Eye. This year at the festival, Ülo Pikkov's film *Bermuda* — a film completed at the Turku school in 1998 was awarded a jury prize. (More about why a film from 1998 won a prize later.) The next wave of Turku grads have also produced some accomplished films. *Many Complained of My Form* (Moni Moitti Muotesni) is a collaboration between animator, Leena Jääskeläinen, and Finnish songwriter, Sanna Kurku-Suonio, that brings to life a haunting poem about solitude. Some students, Christer Lindström, Aino Ovaskainen and Aiju Salminen are finding success with their cutesy film *Treevil*, which was shown at Annecy this year.

This festival, which ran May14-18, 2003, was actually the second edition — the first was held in 2001 and, since it is biennial, the next will be held in May 2005. The thing that makes Tough Eye stand out from other festivals are its many gutsy curatorial decisions. Otto Alder, who is a veteran festival programmer, explained the philosophy behind them.

1. Tough Eye allows any independent animation to be entered regardless how old the film is.

How does the perception of a film change over time? A film that once won many awards might not have any relevance today, or a film that was ignored 10 years ago may find a voice in a current climate. The festival employs a team of students to do the selection process. This unusual move theoretically ensures that fresh eyes will view all the films entered as equals.

This year's Grand Prix winner was the 1991 film *Swamp* (Gil Alkabetz) which expresses the danger of the weighty armor that mankind inflicts upon itself. The film's profundity is made all the more powerful given the political climate of 2003. Jury members Heikki Jokinen (Finland), Ruth Lingford (U.K.), Janno Põldma (Estonia), [Andreas Hykade](#) (Germany) and [Koji Yamamura](#) (Japan) picked award winners that expressed both depth and sincerity. In addition to *Bermuda*, other special jury prizes went to *Andrei Svislotski* (Igor Kovalyov, 1991), *Camouflage* (Jonathan Hodgson, 2001) and *Flux* (Chris Hinton, 2002).

2. Tough Eye has single presentation screenings, which feature only one short film.

Short films are made to be viewed and considered on their own. To combine them together in a viewer friendly 90-minute package is to change how they are perceived. In a bold step to remedy this — or at least make people aware of the problems of the compila-

tion screening — the festival presented the films *Little Lilly* (Mati Kütt, 1994), *Rigoletto* ([Barry Purves](#), 1993), *Bravo Papa 2040* (Susanne Horizon-Fränzel, 1989) and *Tango* (Zbigniew Rybczynski, 1980). Each film is given its own essay in the program book, and the screening is followed by a discussion.

Showing the newest animation is one way for festivals to market themselves, but the consequence is that, aside from retrospectives, many films get buried and are never seen again. Bringing older films up for examination benefits those who may have never seen them before and allows older festival attendees to view them with a new perspective.

3. What's with the weird festival name?

The idea was to have a festival that would challenge attendees by forcing them to really look at animation art, and, in doing so, to examine their own opinions and beliefs. The festival curators would also seek innovation and diversity in their programming. The idea is to take a tough look at things. OK, it is still kinda a weird name, but we can attribute that to the surreal humor of Priit Pärn.

So, apart from all the high-minded innovation going on at this festival, there were also many outstanding special programs and retrospectives.

Alder presented a number of programs filled with new animation that he had selected himself. Some highlights included *Faces* (Vuk Jeremovic, 2002), [Home Road Movies](#) (Robert Bradbrook, 2001), *The Red Gates of Rashomon* (Alexander Tatarsky, 2002) and the unnerving puppet animation *Having Soul* (Riho Unt, 2002).

The multi-talented artist Kilian Dellers did handstands during the opening of his retrospective. His non-narrative works are full of change, movement and a sense of joy in expression. Dellers was everywhere at the festival — his artworks were displayed at the festival's headquarters, and he played his trumpet at a jazz presentation.

Gunnar Strøm of Norway's Volda University College screened a series of amazing but obscure animated Norwegian commercials for a packed house. These artful pieces for mostly cigarette companies were directed by animation legends such as Oskar Fischinger. One of the few examples of commercial work in the festival, it appropriately demonstrated an ideal collaboration between animation artists and corporate clients.

The festival delved into the world of Japanese animation. Retrospectives showcased the work of puppet master, Kihachiro Kawamoto, Renzo Kinoshi-



Turku Arts Academy Polytechnic, one of the top animation schools in the world, contributes to Tough Eye's success as a festival. Priit Pärn (inset) came up with the unorthodox name for the film festival. Photos courtesy of Kelly Neall.

ta, Yoji Kuri and Osamu Tezuka. Jury member Koji Yamamura was also showcased in two sold-out retrospectives.

Naturally, Finnish animation was prominently showcased. The current jewel of Finnish work is *Mire Bala Kale Hin — Tales from the Endless Roads*. Directed by Katariina Lillqvist, this artful puppet series tells the story of the Romany (Gypsy) people across Europe. This is a project obviously made out of love, and the attention made to small details really shows through. The engaging stories are interesting ethnological documents that appeal to both children and adults.

Finland has an emerging commercial industry, which was present at the festival with *Yellow Giraffe*, produced by Epidem Zot and animated by Turku's brand new Aboa Animation Studio. The series, created by Jaana Wahlforss and Antonia Ringbom, has an original and appealing style.

Tough Eye also had a whole lot of art exhibits (Roland Topor, Mikko Ijäs, Christer Lindström and a collection from the Arte Assoc.) and a great nightclub where everyone came to meet and drink Finnish beer. There was an impressive array of local bands and DJs

performing, which added to a sense of collaboration between different artists, writers and venues to make this event an all-round success.

Organizers hope that a larger percentage of older films will be entered in Tough Eye 2005. Also, while there were many sold-out shows and lots of guests from Finland and surrounds, it would be great to have more international artists attending. Tough Eye is a real haven for filmmakers, and Turku is an interesting destination. With a festival this well put together and thoughtfully curated, hopefully more international visitors, with a strong interest in art rather than trade shows, will be attending the next edition. ■

KELLY NEALL does her bit to promote independent animation as the managing director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival. Before OIAF, she was the general manager of the Ottawa-Hull Film and Television Assoc., helping to produce the Ottawa Region Production Guide, The REEL Awards and many other events and publications. She is editor of the Canadian Animation Directory.

GETTING SKINNY

Animated Encounters 2003

by Andrew Osmond



The audience for Animated Anecdotes was treated to an evening with Ray Harryhausen (left) and Bob Godfrey (right). Comedian Andre 'Vinnie' Vincent hosted the event.



Professionals and students alike crowd the floor at Animated Encounters. All photos from the festival are courtesy of Animated Encounters.

EACH YEAR, THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE WATERSHED Media Centre in Bristol seems to get more congested, as animation students, professionals and plain fans queue for the next event on the festival program. At times, it can be difficult to move between the cinema and the equally crowded bar, but no one looks seriously put out. Maybe it's just the British tolerance for queuing, but there's a real sense of everyone enjoying themselves, making the odd tight squeeze worthwhile.

Squeezing seems to have been the watchword for Bristol's fourth [Animated Encounters](#), with the main events fitted into a mere two days (May 9 and 10, a Friday and Saturday). Obviously, this was good news for anyone deterred by hotel bills, but it did mean that if you wanted value for money, you'd have little breathing space between events — six or seven hours of lectures or screenings could get frazzling.

...PLASTICINE SUPREMO NICK PARK REPORTEDLY READ A MESSAGE FROM HAYAO MIYAZAKI, THE KIND OF CROSS-CULTURAL, CROSS-MEDIA EXCHANGE...



Still, at least there was plenty to see: two alternate line-ups of industry seminars, plus seven film programs and the chance to see [Bob Godfrey](#) (*Roobarb and Custard*, *Henry's Cat*) and [Ray Harryhausen](#) (c'mon, you know who he is!) swapping reminiscences. True, it was a more modest menu than previously — last year's four-day event offered 11 screenings — but it felt less like downsizing than compression, with most of the good stuff kept in.

Technically, things started on Thursday night with a screening of the Oscar-winning Japanese feature [Spirited Away](#), but this was a guest-only event for sponsors and not, the U.K. distributors were anxious to stress, any kind of official premiere. (The film will open in Britain later this year.) Pity, as plasticine supremo Nick Park reportedly read a message from Hayao Miyazaki, the kind of cross-cultural, cross-media exchange it would have been great to see.



Ray Harryhausen (left) moulds a skeleton from *Jason and the Argonauts*. Nick Park (above) reads a specially written message to the audience from Hayao Miyazaki at the opening event, a screening of *Spirited Away*.

Friday was Industry Day, or rather days, with two to choose from. Day A was aimed at students just starting out in animation, while Day B was for a more "advanced" audience. In the Day A strand, I caught the 'making-of' presentation on [Home Road Movies](#), winner of the Cartoon D'Or award last year, which was hosted by director Robert Bradbrook and producer Dick Arnall. As *Home Road Movies* was an autobiographical film, based on Bradbrook's father, there was plenty to say on both the personal and professional level.

On the practical side, Bradbrook emphasized how a "short" film schedule could extend as if by magic, and why computer models are so much easier in night scenes. More touchingly, he spoke of his qualms about how his siblings would respond to his depiction of their late father. They had no worries about an actor juxtaposed with images of their 'real' mother, but raised hell when Bradbrook suggested changing their car!

I couldn't get to the other "A" events — a master class on digital and interactive animation presented by Channel 4, and a panel with the self-explanatory title, "Inside the Head of a Development Executive." From the response of other attendees, however, it seems both went off well.

Meanwhile, a "B" panel discussed feature production in the U.K., buoyed by the number of projects on these shores (the Bolex brothers' *Magic Roundabout*, the CGI film *Valiant*, [Aardman's](#) recently confirmed *Wallace and Gromit* movie). While the subject was interesting, I couldn't help feel — as with similarly broad-based

THEY HAD NO WORRIES ABOUT AN ACTOR JUXTAPOSED WITH IMAGES OF THEIR 'REAL' MOTHER, BUT RAISED HELL WHEN BRAD-BROOK SUGGESTED CHANGING THEIR CAR!

panels I've been to — that it was too wide and diverse for a truly profitable discussion. After all, as the panelists emphasized, there are so many potential ways to make a feature, tailoring it to your budget, your target audience and, indeed, your target medium (Iain Harvey, who produced Jimmy Murikami's version of *A Christmas Carol*, was bullish about its video prospects).

The main conclusion was fairly platitudinous — that U.K. animators should learn from American majors without losing their British "quirkiness." Co-funders don't need to be American — *Magic Roundabout* is being made without U.S. money — and one has to weigh the benefits of Hollywood distribution against the prospect of most profits staying stateside.

On the anecdotal side, there were a couple of eye-openers, like the tantalizing snippet that Ozzy Osbourne (yes, that Ozzy Osbourne!) was sought after for the spaced-out rabbit Dylan in *Magic Roundabout*. It didn't happen, alas! Meanwhile, Michael Rose, who executive produced Aardman's *Chicken Run*, offered his perspective on the *Tortoise And The Hare* debacle. He explained that Aardman was anxious to get another feature under way straight after *Chicken Run* to prevent layoffs, and *Tortoise* was pushed too fast too soon. Rose added that *Tortoise* was still in development, and was confident we'd see it in the end. Of course, DreamWorks' support had given Aardman a considerable "cushion" when the (no doubt painful) decision came to put *Tortoise* on hiatus and shift gears to Park's bald inventor and dog.

The features panel was followed by one on writing for animation, featuring some *Mr. Hell* scribes and *Pond Life* creator Candy Guard. Among the topics were the agonies of unhelpful story editors ("I would not have written it like this!") and a difference of opinion over whether "too much talk" killed toon comedy (yes, *The Simpsons* was brought up).

Guard revealed her material was ripped off for a PG Tips chimp advert, while a writer for *Cosgrove Hall's Foxbusters* show noted that the "sneak it in" gag ethos of Termite Terrace was alive and well. *Foxbusters* had been up for consideration by U.S. buyers, but they were put off by certain voice over comments on the barnyard action. Example: "The goats were



Shelly Wain's *The Love Nest* was presented in the international program. *The Cathedral* represented CG animation at the festival. *The Love Nest* © COG Ltd. and Shelly Wain. *The Cathedral* © 2002 Platige Image.

dotting, the sheep were leaping, and the ducks were getting on really well." (Did you have to read it twice?)

The last "B" panel was a solid "making-of" panel on *Future is Wild*, the future evolution series aired on the Discovery Channel and animated by the British studio 422 South. (By the way, it's not connected with Framestore's *Walking with Dinosaurs*, despite the thematic parallels.) Plenty of Photoshop mock-ups and animatic works in progress, and I got a better idea of how the "meter rule" — vital for judging scale in these live-action/CG hybrids — is used. There was a hilarious demo of how an animator misinterpreted directions, leading to the campiest critter I've seen on screen.

Also on the industry side, the digital channel BBC Three launched a new animation award scheme, looking for "cutting edge characters and a storyline to

match.” The first prize is development of your own series (whoa!). More details can be found on the BBC Website, under “Talent.”

The fun stuff started on Friday evening with “Animated Anecdotes,” the chance to see Bob Godfrey and Ray Harryhausen in conversation. Caveats first: putting these two very different animators together felt like Disney’s double-billing of *Ichabod and Mr. Toad*. It must also be said that comedian-host Andre Vincent was a little more awkward in the role than Encounters regular Phil Jupitus. While Jupitus could happily debate the merits of Avery, Jones and [Clampett](#), Vincent had to ask what rotoscoping was. Jokey, enthusiastic hosts are all very well, but would it hurt to have someone who knew a little about the subject?

Then again, it didn’t really matter much. Both grand old men were in lively, cheerful form, happily talking through their careers with apposite clips. As influences, Harryhausen selected the T-Rex battle from *King Kong*, while Godfrey plumped — rather to Vincent’s surprise — for the “Bella Notte” serenade in *The Lady and the Tramp*, an exemplar of human-level emotion. Harryhausen brought out a *Jason* skeleton (reducing Vincent to a gushing fanboy) and Godfrey had plenty to say on his Oscar-winner *Great* (about Ismbard Brunel) and his much-loved TV show *Roobarb and Custard*. Shame there wasn’t time for *Karma Sutra Rides Again...*

Apart from the party, that was it until Saturday, and the marathon of short screenings from Britain, Europe and worldwide. Shorts are very much a matter of individual taste, and, given the quantity, it’d be churlish to complain. Still, there seemed slightly fewer really good films this year, though there were plenty of solid entries I was grateful to see.

Among the programs was a strand from England’s Manchester Studio, ranging from *DangerMouse* and *Bob the Builder* to [Barry Purves’](#) sublimely tragic *Screen Play*. A newer title was Mike Kirwin’s enjoyable pop promo *Another Point of View*. Its 3D cardboard world was created in seven weeks flat for DB Boulevard. Elsewhere, *Robbie and the Vikings*, the new adventure of *Robbie the Reindeer*, was premiered. Directed by Peter Peake, the half-hour film hardly knocked back the walls of the medium, but it was still fair fun.

An “International” program let us contrast the CG slickness of Oscar nominees [The Cathedral](#), *Chubb-Chubbs* and *Mike’s New Car* (the latter spun off from *Monsters, Inc.*) to the manic kids’-scrawl primitivism of Christopher Hinton’s *Flux*, which I thought held up well.

On the British side, *Love Nest* by Shelley Wain was a graceful if slightly conventional stop-motion fairy tale (one gross moment apart). Viv Jones’ *The House*, based

on drawings by mental health patients, used live-action and animation in a dynamic treatment of a potentially ‘worthy’ subject. Another hybrid, *Dad’s Dead* by Chris Shepherd, effectively conveyed the nasty world-view of angry adolescents, while Will Becher’s *Boxed In* made adroit stop-motion use of a classic situation — an old man versus a mouse — with a brilliant last gag.

More stop-motion rodents were used to good effect in Sam Fell’s *Big Cheese*, a cute-nasty film from 1991 shown in a retrospective on Channel 4’s Animator in Residence scheme. (U.K. readers may have seen the residents, scribbling away in a cubicle in London’s IMAX cinema). The program offered more familiar shorts like Ruth Lingford’s dark folktale *Death and the Mother*, and Thorsten Reinth’s alienated *Cri* (both from 1997).

It’s typical of these kind of films that I remember thinking *Cri* was absurdly portentous when I first saw it, but very effective this time round. I wasn’t too taken with Lingford’s new film, the characteristically glum *The Old Fools*, but maybe next time...

More fun were the whimsical French drawn offerings, *So Many Dogs*, by Stephane Ricard, and *Pipsqueak Prince*, by Zoya Trofiimova. Another great punchline here, which some humorous cartoons seemed to lack. The film which went down least well (at least with the people around me) was Spain’s *I’ll Water Your Petals With Tears*, directed by Juan Carlos Mari, a risibly overwrought tale of a rose and a raindrop.

The overall audience favorite (though not my own) was another French film, *Tim-Tom*, by Christel Pougeoise and Romain Segaud. This had heroes with sketchpad heads and echoes of *Duck Amuck* and Osamu Tezuka’s *Broken Down Film*. *Tim-Tom* will go forward to Cartoon D’Or.

Anything else? Oh yes, I forgot the late night “Saints and Sinners” program, Encounters’ mandatory slot for transgressive animation. The theologically-slanted titles included the well-made but hardly provocative *Promised Land* by Gili Dolev, a lament on the Israel-Palestine situation. I confess I was sick enough to laugh at the seriously warped boy-and-his-dog spoof *Davey and the Son of Goliath* by [Corky Quakenbush](#) (it was so obvious, someone had to do it).

But the shocker was the very naughty *Four Wishes*, a 1987 French film by Michel Ocelot. That Michel Ocelot? The man who made the charming [Kirikou and the Sorceress](#), doing a skit about a husband and wife endowed with rather too many genitals? Say it ain’t so... ■

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ROME TV

Italy's TV Animation Festival – Cartoons on the Bay



by Heather Kenyon

Cartoons on the Bay offers sumptuous food, the Amalfi Coast and great conferences. All photos courtesy of Cartoons on the Bay.

BEING THAT ONE IS IN ITALY, ONE DOESN'T REALLY need to discuss Cartoons on the Bay's location, food, hospitality or spirit... they are all, of course, fabulous. From the magnificent Amalfi Coast, to the seaside dining, to the staff's warmth, to the wandering, bantering presentations, stage shows and festival director Alfio Bastiancich's constant affable presence, Cartoons on the Bay is a festival unlike any other and distinctly Italian. But one area that I think is seriously overlooked at Cartoons on the Bay, is where the festival shines. Cartoons on the Bay's conferences are a great source of information and idea exchanging. Due to the high calibre of guests, the information is interesting, pertinent and definitely "from the source." While the conferences are always professional, there is a certain casualness to the setting and the intimate number of participants that leads to greater discussions and contacts.



Screenings take place in the Cartoon Village beachfront tent (top left) while conferences and panels are held in the Covo dei Saraceni hotel (bottom left).

The festival is split into two sections. One is the screenings, which take place in the animation "Village," a tent set up right on the beach. The other section is the panel discussions and presentations, which take place in the lovely hotel, Covo dei Saraceni. Both venues are in very close proximity, separated by only a short walk along a beach side boardwalk lined with restaurants where you can't go wrong with any dish you choose.

WHY YOU SHOULD ATTEND

The festival shows are not to be missed! Every evening a standing room only crowd gathers in the tent to see the evening screening... however, the real show is the



The concerts are not to be missed at Cartoons on the Bay. Musicial guests included Enzo Gragnaniello (top right) and the Nuove Tribù Zulu Band (bottom right).

festival show prior to the screening. From fashion shows, to puppet performances, to the top Italian bands, to operatic performances, one never knows what the festival will have up its sleeve. It is refreshing to attend an animation event where the evening performances are geared toward the locals. Families, couples on dates and local teenagers all crowd in next to studio heads to see what is in store.

Not only are the presentations in Italian (not to worry though, translators are on hand so if you don't speak Italian nothing will be missed), but the varied nature of them add up to a broader arts event. In a week in Positano, one can certainly brush up on what is hip and current in Italy. During the festival show it is good to sit next to a native Italian, because they will point out the famous soap star or singing legend and fill in the background. I think everyone just likes an excuse to visit Positano! The festival show is usually followed by the Italian premiere of a major feature film. While the film is

WITH SUCH A FOCUSED GROUP, IT IS EASY TO MEET THE PEOPLE AND SPEND TIME WITH THEM LEISURELY OVER A MEAL, OR ON ONE OF THE SUNNY TERRACES AFTER A PANEL.

in Italian, there is still entertainment to be had if one doesn't speak the language. Outside awaits several open-air restaurants where one can always find and join other participants — a guaranteed quality time.

Cartoons on the Bay draws together a core group of "in the production trenches" professionals every year. Most of them are the heads of European studios and networks, however, a small band of North Americans is always present. With such a focused group, it is easy to meet the people and spend time with them leisurely over a meal, or on one of the sunny terraces after a panel. This is not a **MIP** where everyone is on a schedule of 30-minute meetings. In fact, several times I have rushed to events only to find them postponed 30 minutes and everyone lounging on the terrace, talking and enjoying coffee. At all times, expect the schedule to be a little loose, and, as long as you aren't afraid to just walk up to an unknown group of visiting European professionals, you should be fine.



Cartoons on the Bay offers a wealth of conferences and panels with quality speakers.

Set in a casual (and exquisitely beautiful) setting, Cartoons on the Bay offers four days of press conferences, discussions and panels. Because the crowd is small and professional, the speakers are relaxed and often the seminars turn into discussions. Several times a year, a panel member will mention a point, which sparks audience members to speak up about their own experience, creating a real discussion, rather than a flat

Q&A. The best presentations are ones where the audience is responding to each other, and the panel members, about the issues.

For the past three years, I have been quite impressed with the panel discussions I have attended. Through AWN, I have been fortunate enough to moderate a series of presentations entitled, "Focus on the Studios." The studios have included U.S. indies like **Wild Brain** and **Pixar**, to Japan's **Production I.G.**, to Italian up-and-comers like Rainbow. Three years ago, during the Internet craze, Cartoons on the Bay gathered a world-class panel of experts to discuss this new frontier. While sitting in the audience, looking at the large panel, which included the heads of the world's leading Internet players, I marveled at how such an elite group had been gathered in such an out of the way little place, for such a select audience. It was a treat.

In 2002, the discussions brought attention to Italy's struggle to become a greater animating nation. Where else can one hear animation legend **Bruno Bozzetto**, Alfio and the rest of the Italian animation community discuss Italy's need to take greater control of their industry's stake in the international arena? "Quality originates from quantity," was Alfio's well-taken point. While RAI Trade is one of the festival's main sponsors, people remarked that more money in the broadcasters' budgets needed to be set aside to help promote the production of native animation.

However, the audience took the conversation to the next level by comparing France's success to what Italy should be working toward. The success of such government sponsored groups as Magelis-Angoulême in France, has some Italians speculating that the government should be investing more in the country's infrastructure, namely technology that will spur growth. Eve Baron, director of **France 3's** Youth Department, was also on this panel, offering unique insight and mentioning that there are now roughly 80 animation companies in France, versus, Italy's 12.

This year, 2003, was no different. A large panel discussed the future of **adult animation**, determining that niche networks like Cartoon Network will have an advantage over major, public networks to showcase such programming properly. Another specifically interesting panel was "Eurotoons: The Current State of European Co-production." What a charged topic in this current market! As always, panel members came from a wide variety of countries, so a number of points of view and experiences were exchanged. This topic can be end-



Author Heather Kenyon moderated the "Focus on Studios" panel at Cartoons on the Bay.



Festival director Alfio Bastiancich's (left) ability to assemble such guests as Paolo Ruffini (center), of RAI and legendary animator Bruno Bozzetto, makes Cartoons on the Bay a special gathering.

lessly discussed. Everyone has an opinion about how our world will change to fit smaller license fees, fewer slots and fierce competition. Another topic continued from last year was "Toward an Italian Industry: The Role of Institutions." So, one can see that the issues discussed at Cartoons on the Bay are definitely on everyone's mind. Being an American, I find it very interesting to listen to Europe's producers so candidly discuss their specific issues. It is a mindopener, and I believe in this forum. The participants are less interested in hometown politics and more interested in comparing notes with their colleagues.

ADDED BONUSES

Another great resource at Cartoons on the Bay is

the video library. All shows that were entered are available to be viewed at personal televisions in the Covo dei Saraceni. Every participant receives a book that lists, with full credits and pictures, all the shows that were entered and are available for viewing. I find this a terrific resource as, quite often, one hears about shows or sees advertisements for shows that are playing in other territories, but never gets the chance to see an actual episode. It is a great opportunity to pick up an armful of tapes, sit down and watch them. Much like MIPCOM, Jr., it offers the professional a great opportunity to catch up on the competition and see what networks worldwide are buying and airing. One can also catch pilots, shorts and all kinds of other programs. The more you know the better!

Several people attending had entered their shows but not made the competition. While they were there, they could still meet with people and encourage them to view the readily available tape. Several of these visitors received great feedback. I am sure they wouldn't have in a less easy-going atmosphere.

If you are going to attend Cartoons on the Bay, you should try to steal a few extra days from your busy schedule to explore the surrounding area. Nearby is Pompeii, the isle of Capri, Sorrento and more. You can shop for pottery (a favorite past time of mine), or visit the remains of Roman gardens and villas. Cities like Amalfi and others along the coast are just a five euro boat ride away and everyone is happy to help.

Cartoons on the Bay is a leisurely opportunity to connect with select professionals and view the international competitions in the "village." There are enough screenings so one can definitely see something new and interesting, but there isn't an overwhelming amount. Moreover, the screenings are varied. They don't just include television animation, but also short films and special presentations, like this year's great tribute to [Jules Engel](#), featuring newly restored prints. Gorgeous! Between the screenings and discussions, there is plenty to do... but not so much that it makes you crazy worrying that you are missing something. Cartoons on the Bay is a festival clearly focused on business applications but it feels more like a vacation. ■

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DIARY ITALIA

Production I.G.'s Visit to the Cartoons on the Bay Festival

by Justin Leach



The idyllic town of Positano was a welcome sight for the weary travelers of Production I.G. On the right, the Tyrrhenian Sea beckons. Unless otherwise noted, all photos courtesy of Justin Leach.



Earlier this year, my company received an invitation asking [Production I.G.](#) to make a presentation for a panel called, "Focus on the Studios" at the [Cartoons on the Bay](#) animation festival in Positano, Italy. After informing our president, [Mitsuhsa Ishikawa](#), of the invitation to the festival, he accepted. He felt it would be a good opportunity to share some information about Production I.G. with people outside Japan. In addition to myself, he asked Yoshiki Sakurai, a fluent English-speaking writer for the [Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex](#) television series, to join us. My assignment was to prepare a presentation for the festival to cover our studio history, current and future projects.

After a grueling 19 hours of travel time at various airports in Europe, we finally made it to our destina-

tion: Naples, Italy. After we made our way through the tiny airport, a staff member from the festival helped us find our shuttle to Positano. In our shuttle bus, Jacques Pettigrew, the president of CinéGroupe, a French-Canadian animation studio based in Montreal, joined us.

On the way to Positano, we passed Mt. Vesuvius, the famous volcano that decided to engulf Pompeii in 79 A.D. The volcano was quite a sight, and in many ways reminded me of Mt. Fuji, Japan's famous volcano overlooking Tokyo. After we departed Naples, we began to make our way into the mountainous coastal area closer to the festival. As we were driving, both Ishikawa and Sakurai commented on the obvious influence Italy had on Hayao Miyazaki's work, in particular, *The Castle of Cagliostro*. As our car kept on

I HAD FELT LIKE I STUMBLED INTO ANOTHER ANIMATED FILM.



The Production I.G. team immediately sensed that the Italian landscape had influenced Hayao Miyazaki visually. Left, is the hillside town of Positano and, on the right, the villa where Production I.G. stayed.



winding around the steep corners, we suddenly felt as if Lupin the super would pass us at any time. After about an hour, we wearily arrived at our hotel in Positano and checked into our rooms.

Later on that evening, we decided to head into town to take a look at the festival site. Since downtown Positano is nearly inaccessible by car, we had to walk down a long set of stairs that seemed to go on forever. Along the cliff side area of Positano, many villas are built into the cliffs, overlooking the sea, giving us an extraordinary view. Once again, I felt like I stumbled into another animated film.

After trekking down to the beachfront area, we were surprised to see that they had raised a giant tent for the festival right on the beach. After checking this out, we decided to climb back up the stairs to our hotel, which seemed much farther on the way, up than on the way down.

The next day, we were scheduled to attend two presentations at the Hotel Covo dei Saraceni overlooking the sea.

The first was a seminar on made-for-television specials that Sakurai participated on. The panel was

made up of Rick Mischel (Mainframe Entertainment) and Giulia Filippelli (RAI Trade-Italy), as well as a panel moderator, Ramin Zahed (*Animation Magazine*). The panelists went into detail on the various aspects of producing animated television specials projects, as well as other topics such as region coding DVDs.

Later that same day, I helped give a presentation with my colleagues from Production I.G. for the "Focus on the Studios" panel. Our moderator was Heather Kenyon (then editor in chief of *Animation World Magazine*, she is now director of development for Cartoon Network).

During the presentation, we outlined some of our past projects, such as *Ghost in the Shell*, *Blood: The Last Vampire* and *Jin-Roh*. In addition, we presented our titles in production such as *Innocence: Ghost in the Shell 2*, a new film directed by Mamoru Oshii; *Kill Bill*, Quentin Tarantino's next live-action film featuring 10-minutes of Japanese animation, and *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, a new television series based on the *Ghost in the Shell* manga by Shirow Masamune.

We bumped into a few technical glitches, but, in



Narrow stairways are common all over Positano.



Yoshiki Sakurai represented Production I.G. at a seminar on made-for-television specials. Also participating were Ramin Zahed (*Animation Magazine*) Giulia Filippelli (RAI Trade-Italy) and Rick Mischel (Mainframe Entertainment).



Panel discussions for the festival were held at Hotel Covo dei Saraceni.

the end, we managed to show some clips. The atmosphere at the panel was very easygoing and casual. Since it was my first time attending this festival, I wasn't quite sure of how formal the presentation would be, so I had taken extra time to prepare.

A few of the audience members asked questions regarding the differences in Japanese animation and western animation. I sort of had the impression that for many of the people there, Japanese animation was a somewhat unfamiliar topic. I was happy to see many people genuinely interested about the subject.

Shortly after we finished our presentation, one of the festival organizers invited us to an event later that evening. After returning to our hotel, we debated whether or not to go. Eventually, we decided to go, casually meandering down to beachfront area. As we entered the festival tent, the festival organizers looked somewhat relieved that we had arrived, and im-



Italian opera singer, Vincenzo La Scola (top left) and The Lollipop Girls (bottom) provided entertainment before Mitsuhsa Ishikawa (top right, holding award), president of Production I.G. received the Studio of the Year Award from festival director, Alfio Bastiancich, with Yoshiaki Sakurai standing nearby. Courtesy of Cartoons on the Bay.

mediately whisked us away to a set of reserved seats at the front of the tent. They briefly mentioned that we would be receiving an award on stage. We were pleasantly surprised since we had no idea what was in store for us.

During the variety show, an Italian pop band called the Lollipop Girls came on stage to do their number, followed by a famous Italian opera singer that moved the audience to tears. After that, Mitsuhsa Ishikawa, president of Production I.G., was called to the stage to accept one of the four Studio of the Year Awards from Alfio Bastiancich, festival director, of the Cartoons on the Bay Festival. After the ceremony finished, the audience was treated to a special screening of the Italian version of *Spirited Away*.

All in all, we really enjoyed the festival and are extremely grateful for having the chance to attend. Cartoons on the Bay was such a wonderful exchange of cultures, ideas and animation in a place as magical as an animated film itself. ■

JUSTIN LEACH'S *earliest professional credit was as a video game design consultant in 1992. Since then, he has worked on commercials, music videos and theatrical features; notably for Blue Sky Studios, from May 1997 through March 2001, where he was on the teams for Bunny and Ice Age, among other projects. Since April 2001, he has been an employee of Production I.G. in Tokyo, where he is working on Mamoru Oshii's next feature animated film, Innocence: Ghost in the Shell 2.*

EURO FINANCING

The Cartoon Movie Report

by Iain Harvey



The Cartoon Movie poster. Courtesy of Cartoon Movie 2003.

Having one good idea doesn't necessarily lead to two — not all sequels succeed!

With the success of [Cartoon Forum](#), the exclusive market for European producers and the key buyers from European broadcasting, CARTOON (the Brussels based organization charged with developing animation produced in Europe) was keen to extend the idea to animated features. The purpose is to ease the path of European producers to obtain finance for features. Unless backed by an American studio, no European animated feature is likely to find financing from one source. Some films list as many as 20 sources of finance in their contractual credits. It is considered lucky — or successful — if a producer can limit their financial partners to less than five. An inevitable result is that co-productions are a key element in financing European animated features, that is collaborations with two or more studios from different countries. Thankfully this is something animation production is well able to handle.

So, very tentatively, the first Cartoon Movie was held in 1999 at the Babelsberg studios in Potsdam near Berlin, Germany. The intention was to follow the format of the successful Forums very closely, but it was quickly realized that movies are completely different creatures, requiring an entirely different approach to their development and financing.

After five years, CARTOON believes it has just about got the format right: separate presentations for features at the concept stage (equivalent to a 'first toe in the water' pitch), the opportunity to give more detailed presentations for films already in development, as well as opportunities to present films already in production (and therefore presumably financed). Finally there are exclusive screenings of completed films.



This year, Cartoon Movie presented seven finished features and 30 development projects. Courtesy of Cartoon Movie 2003.

The figures, at least, suggest CARTOON timed its new presentation well. From the two completed animated movies (from all of Europe) screened in 1999, this has increased to six features in 2002 and seven features in March 2003.

The most recent [Cartoon Movie](#) had a definitely more business-like air to its proceedings. Whilst there were undoubtedly projects that should not have got even as far as the concept stage, most new feature ideas were well developed, with some expensive and reasonably exciting or comic trailers. More importantly, there were some serious financiers present, and the whole three-day event involved extensive rounds of consultations and meetings.

Some 30 projects were presented as concepts or in development. Of these, *Jumping Green Things* from Assorted Nuts Animation Studio, Sweden (the name says it all), *Rumbo* from Radar Film in Denmark and *The Ugly Duckling and Me* (A Film), based on a Hans Christian Andersen tale, all attracted strong interest. A Film from Denmark has highly experienced producers (credits include *Help, I'm a Fish* and the Oscar-nominated *When Life Departs*) and I understand that

this feature is now in development, with offers of full financing attached. Other impressive presentations included *Robota* from [Sparx*](#) studio in Paris (the promo for this feature won an award at Annecy), *The Midsummer Nights Dream* from Dygra Films in Spain and *Xylacom the Secret of the Wooden House* (change the title please!), also from Spain. All these films are planned as CGI, and, without a doubt, this was the main trend noticeable at this year's presentations.

Of films already in production, *Nocturna* from Filmax in Spain and *Tolo Sapore* from [Lanterna Magica](#) in Italy stood out. Both should be reaching the screens next year but will have to fight to secure U.S. theatrical releases.

Filmax's [El Cid](#) (without Charlton Heston) was previewed. Its strong graphic style and powerful story should ensure strong theatrical in its home territories and, at the least, strong video elsewhere.

Of completed films screened, *The Boy Who Wanted to be a Bear*, directed by Jannik Hastrup, and based on an Inuit tale, proved masterful at utilizing limited resources. It had already deservedly been selected for the Berlin International Film Festival, but is unlikely to be considered suitable for American children. Studio Ellipse's [Corto Maltese](#) was impressive with its dramatic range and strong visual style.

[To declare my interest, I was presenting — in development — *Greyfriars Bobby*, directed by Jimmy Murakami. This presentation, complete with trailer, attracted various levels of interest as well as potential co-production partners. We are now in pre-production.]

Lessons had been learnt — features really do demand different financial planning from low risk (for financiers, being as they are usually the broadcasters)



The presentation on the planned *Xylacom* from Spain was impressive. © Auriga Films.



Studio Ellipse showed a strong visual style in *Corto Maltese* (top). Author Iain Harvey presented *Greyfriars Bobby* (bottom), a feature now in pre-production to be directed by Jimmy Murakami. *Corto Maltese* © 2002 Home Made Movies/France 2 Cinema/RAI Fiction/Pomalux. *Greyfriars Bobby* © The Illuminated Film Company 2003.



television productions. They have to have an instant appeal — the one-line pitch that attracts — and holds — attention. Budgets have to be in line with market realities. If you do not anticipate a U.S. pre-sale then budgets above 10 to 12 million euros (or dollars) are unlikely to attract sufficient finance. There are many who would argue even this is too high.

All this has been helped by the recent success of European animated features — at least within European boundaries (with the occasional rare exception breaking out more widely). *The Little Polar Bear* (screened last year) was a commercial success in Germany and elsewhere for Warner Bros., and is likely to earn good revenues from video/DVD all over Europe. There is tremendous anticipation for Sylvain Chomet's *Belleville Rendez-Vous* (I predict it will be better known by its French title *Les Triplettes de Belleville*) a French-Bel-

gium-Canadian co-production, which premiered at the Cannes international film festival. This is likely to prove a massive popular success, not just in its home territories. Also due for release in December 2003 is Jacques-Remy Girerd's *Raining Cats and Frogs*. Two strong French titles, but both with the ability to break out into other European territories. As ever, the key question will be to what extent they succeed in breaking down barriers in North America.

Apart from these high profile titles (at least in European animation circles), Aardman from the U.K. is in pre-production on two features, including the long anticipated *Wallace & Gromit* movie. Pathe, a leading distribution and production force in Europe (we have very few outside the studio system) is backing the Anglo-French co-production of *The Magic Roundabout*.

But listing all these forthcoming features — and there are many more due to hit the screens, at least in the producer's home town — also reveals one problem still facing CARTOON in its desire to develop Cartoon Movie as a one-stop financing market. None of the high-profile features mentioned, apart from *The Little Polar Bear*, went through Cartoon Forum to raise their finance. With Aardman, this is understandable as its features are fully financed by DreamWorks, but it would greatly boost CARTOON's efforts to build Cartoon Movie if more studios and distributors perceived Cartoon Movie to be a first port of call for animated features.

This is, without doubt, the biggest issue facing Cartoon Movie. If CARTOON succeeds in the way that it has with Cartoon Forum for television productions, this will prove a highly successful sequel. ■

Following a career in publishing, **IAIN HARVEY** entered the world of animation as executive producer on *The Snowman*. In 1993, he formed The Illuminated Film Company, and produced such award-winning projects as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar & Other Stories*, *T.R.A.N.S.I.T.*, *A Christmas Carol: The Movie* and *War Game*. Iain is the vp of CARTOON. The views expressed in this story are purely personal and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of CARTOON as an organization.

ANIME REVIEWS

New from Japan: Anime Film Reviews

by Fred Patten

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

Brigadoon. V.1, Marin & Melan Blue. V.2, Friends & Enemies. V.3, The Celestial World. V.4, Hope Amid Chaos. V.5, The Strongest Monomakia. V.6, The Day of Pasca.

TV series (26 episodes), 2000-2001. Director: Yoshitomo Yonetani. V.1-2, five episodes/125 minutes; v.3-6, four episodes/100 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.99. Distributor: TOKYOPOP.

Brigadoon was a 26-episode TV series (July 21, 2000 through February 9, 2001) from the Sunrise studio, with very soft, cute art design by Takahiro Kimura. Its attempt to blend extremes of silly humor and grim drama into a mix suitable for young girls is another revelation of the differences between what is considered suitable programming for children and young adolescents in Japan and America.

Marin Asagi is a lively 13-year-old girl just entering junior high school. She is a foundling, abandoned as an infant at a cheap tenement building, who has been raised to consider the humorously eccentric but caring apartment tenants as her family (including the neighborhood drunk whom Marin must drag home when he passes out in the alley). She has a happier life with them than with her schoolmates, most of whom scorn her as "poor trash."

Marin's life crumbles when a "mirage" of another world fills the skies everywhere on Earth, and robots in the form of huge childhood toys zoom to Tokyo to attack her. Marin is saved by a



Normal 13-year-old Marin is saved by giant robot Melan Blue in *Brigadoon*. ©SUNRISE • WOWOW This product is manufactured and distributed by TOKYOPOP® under the license by Sunrise, Inc. © TOKYOPOP. All rights reserved.

giant robot resembling a toy soldier, Melan Blue, who claims he is a "Monomakia" assigned to protect her (but refuses to explain what is going on). Marin's attempts to continue her normal life are frustrated as the battles between Melan Blue and other Monomakias destroy much of her neighborhood and kill neighbors. In episode 10, Marin's feisty but frail adoptive grandmother, who has been giving her moral support, dies of stress, and Marin is too crushed by guilt to enjoy the cute giant-turtle toy vehicle she gets as her personal car.

Eventually no less than the president of the U.S. comes to Japan to plead with Marin and Melan Blue to go up to Brigadoon in an Apollo spacecraft to stop the attacks upon Earth. On Brigadoon, Marin gets involved in deadly politics between Melan Blue and the other Monomakia "gun swordsmen," which leaves her nude and bleeding from many wounds, while the Brigadoon government assembly (fuzzy "monsters" obviously designed for plush toy appeal) turns out to be irresponsible squabblers who throw cream pies at each other.

There is enough seriousness in *Brigadoon* that it cannot be dismissed as just slapstick comedy. Children who are bullied at school may dream of revenge; *Brigadoon* hints at the somber reality if those fantasies were carried out. Children of 12 or 13 are reaching the age where they can expect to start losing elderly relations. Holding Marin responsible for the destruction caused by the Monomakias is a situation faced by many adolescents blamed for irresponsible actions of their companions, whether they participate or not.

Brigadoon is rated 13+, although some of the humor and situations may be considered too risqué or violent by conservative American parents. Plot setups that seem obvious (Marin's unknown parentage must mean she is a princess from Brigadoon; right?) develop unexpected and imaginative twists. The title is part of a running barrage of in-group pop-culture references (*Brigadoon* has nothing to do with Lerner & Loewe's famous musical, although its pseudo-Celtic theme song and a reference to the planet approaching Earth "every 100 years" leaves no doubt that the Japanese creators are familiar with it; there are also "tributes" to *Star Wars* and Miyazaki's *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky*) which are a gloss over of an original plot.

The Devil Lady. V.1, The Awakening. V.2, The Becoming. V.3, The Strengthening. V.4, The Gathering. V.5, The Purging. V.6, The Victorious.

TV series [26 episodes], 1998-1999. Director: Toshio Hirano. V.1 & v.6, five episodes/125 minutes. 2-5, four episodes/100 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: A.D.V. Films.



Jun meets a new monster in each episode of *The Devil Lady*
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In 1972, Go Nagai's manga *Devilman* was adapted as a limits-pushing TV anime serial that blended super-heroics with supernatural horror, similar to America's midnight-MTV animated series *Spawn* more than 20 years later. *Devilman* became a classic, inspiring numerous authorized variations and imitations. *The Devil Lady* (*Devilman Lady* in Japan, a.k.a. *Go Nagai's The Devil Lady* in the U.S.) is one of the former; a 26-episode TV series for older adolescents and adults (rated 17+), October 10, 1998 through December 29, 1999, animated by TMS Entertainment Ltd. This revision by Nagai himself, adapted for TV by Chiaki Konaka, reverses genders to make the dominant characters women, and changes the horror rationale from supernatural to biological sci-fi.

Jun Fudoh is a young fashion model who has recently begun experiencing flashes of unexplainable foreboding. When a domineering woman, Lan Asuka, orders Jun to follow her one night, Jun feels compelled to obey. Asuka takes her to a warehouse guarded by soldiers, where a chained man metamorphoses into a demonic-looking monster. Jun does also, and the two fight until the male is killed.

Asuka explains to the traumatized Jun that evolutionary forces have begun transforming people carrying a "Beast gene" into super-powerful but feral monsters, and that a secret international scientific and military Human Alliance (HA) has been formed to identify humans with this gene and eliminate them before they can transform and slaughter innocent humans. Jun was one of these latent monsters, but Asuka is confident that she can control Jun and use her as a "hound" against the Beast monsters.

On an episode-by-episode basis, *Devil Lady* is a "monster of the week" series pitting Jun against a new horrific monster each time. As the background plot evolves, Jun gradually rises above the humiliation of

becoming a devilish giant who has trouble controlling her lusts, and starts asking questions. If Jun can be trusted, why does the HA order her to automatically kill all other latent Beasts without seeing if any of them can also refrain from turning feral? When a sadistically demonic child, Satoru, tries to create a Demon Beast army to replace humanity, to what extent are his followers vicious predators that deserve to be slaughtered, and to what extent are they just defending themselves against the HA's pogrom?

Asuka's own HA aide-de-camp, Maeda, suspects that Asuka is using Jun for an agenda of her own. Maeda's efforts to help Jun escape Asuka's psychological dominance and learn the truth about the "evolution" excuse for the transformations, while Jun protects him physically, take on a reverse-*Beauty and the Beast* romantic aspect. Among the many Beasts, the females are definitely the most powerful and deadly; and a couple of the subplots are overtly lesbian. The so-so animation quality is compensated for by clever direction that makes maximum use of ominous atmospherics; notably camera angles which imply potential victims are being spied upon from above or below, lengthy slow pans of motionless "empty" halls and rooms, and creepy mood music by Toshiyuki Watanabe whose thunderous theme for Jun is reminiscent of Orff's *Carmina Burana*. *The Devil Lady* should be popular with horror-fantasy fans of series novels about "good" vampires and werewolves who use their curse to help protect humanity.

Gate Keepers. V.1, Open the Gate! V.2, New Fighters! V.3, Infiltration! V.4, The New Threat! V.5, To the Rescue! V.6, Discovery! V.7, The Shadow! V.8, For Tomorrow!

TV series (24 episodes), 2000. Director: Koichi Chigira. V.1-8, three episodes/80 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: Pioneer Entertainment.

Gate Keepers 21. V.1, Invader Hunters. V.2, The Final Gate.

OAV series (six episodes), 2002. Writer/director: Hiroshi Yamaguchi. V.1-2, three episodes/85 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.98. Distributor: Pioneer Entertainment.

After the new Studio Gonzo stunned anime fans with the spectacular CGI in its first production, the 1998 four-episode OVA serial *Blue Submarine No. 6*, fans wondered whether Gonzo could keep up the quality for a longer TV production? Yes. *Gate Keepers* was a 24-episode serial co-production by Gonzo and Digimation for the WOWOW satellite TV channel, broadcast weekly April 3 to September 18, 2000. It blended attractive 2D character designs by popular artist Keiji Goto (who was the TV series' ani-



Gate Keepers features an adolescent team with psychic powers. © AEGIS • GONZO • KADOKAWA SHOTEN/ GK21PROJECT.

mation director, as well as drawing the manga adaptation) and "super scientific" art (mechanical designs and CGI direction) by Masahiro Maeda (who was soon tapped by the Wachowski Brothers as a sequence director for *The Animatrix*-based on his CGI work for Gonzo). *Gate Keepers* did not have as much computer graphics as *Blue Submarine No. 6* had, but its CGI was more smoothly integrated with the 2D animation.

Gate Keepers is another Japanese variant of the teen mutant superhero team formula. The setting is 1969 in a parallel Earth being secretly invaded by aliens. The Invaders are taking control of Japan's booming economy by replacing industry leaders with ruthless mechanical doubles. Shun Ukiya is the leader of a team of adolescent "Gate Keepers" with psychic powers recruited by AEGIS (Alien Extermination Global Intercept System) to fight the Invaders.

The series starts off light with much humor and camaraderie (Shun is constantly embarrassing female teammate Ruriko by calling her by her childhood nickname of "Runny Nose;" as any viewer could predict, a romance gradually develops), and grows more dramatic as the Invaders become more deadly, striking at the Gate Keepers' own families and friends as well as the general public. The Invaders are able to tap into human emotions and use the economic ambition pervading Japan to turn real people into selfish, greedy sadists (a late 1990s commentary on the high-flying economy which crashed so disastrously in the 1980s?); eventually subverting a member of the Gate Keepers themselves.

Gate Keepers was so popular that the TV series was followed up quickly with a video game, *Gate Keepers 1985*, and by a six-episode direct-to-video sequel,

Gate Keepers 21, released between April and December 2002; each featuring a new wave of Invaders being met by a new generation of Gate Keepers. *Gate Keepers 21* (for the 21st century) has more CGI and higher production values than the TV series, but a darker story. Miu Manazuru is a timid innocent high school student recruited for the Gate Keepers by her classmate, Ayane Isuzu, who is much more cynical and emotionally burnt-out than the average adolescent. The new leader of AEGIS opposing the Invaders appears to be the top villain that the original Gate Keepers fought in 1969. Miu serves as the point-of-view character for new viewers unfamiliar with the TV series as she learns the history of what has gone before, and discovers the reasons for the changes between 1969, 1985 and 2001.



R.O.D. (Read Or Die) is in the *James Bond* tradition. © 2001-2002 STUDIO ORPHEE/Aniplex Inc.

R.O.D. (Read Or Die).

OAV series (three episodes), 2001. Director: Kouji Matsu-nari. 90 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$29.95. Distributor: Manga Entertainment.

Read or Die is a fast-paced, visually exciting direct-to-video three-episode serial (released May 23 and July 18, 2001 and February 2002) that works excellently as a 90-minute feature. Full of exotic backgrounds, high-quality 2D/3D animation by Studio Deen (it reportedly was the highest-budgeted 90-minute OAV production of that time), spectacular action sequences in the *James Bond* tradition, attractive character designs, famous names and the best pseudo-*James Bond* movie score you ever heard (by Taku Iwasaki), *R.O.D.* has won top praise from almost every reviewer plus such awards as Best OAV at Anime Expo 2002. A TV series is about to debut in Japan.

It makes almost no sense, but it sure does look cool!

R.O.D. is a highly tongue-in-cheek pastiche of action-based fantasy/sci-fi big-budget live-action (but heavily CGI) movies; everything from *The Terminator* to *The Matrix* to *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*. It seems that the British Library has an international division of super-powered secret agents to — well, never mind why the British Library would need secret agents with super-powers. One of these is Yomiko Readman, a cute heavy-spectacled high-school substitute teacher (this makes no sense unless you have read Hideyuki Kurata's *R.O.D.* seven novels or comic books — four volumes, art by Shutaro Yamada — which are not yet available in English; this Kurata-scripted anime adventure begins with no background information) who has an orgasm when she finds a rare book. Her code name is "The Paper," because her super-power is that she can magically manipulate paper to, for example, turn a wastebasket full of scrap paper into a jet-propelled paper airplane.

Some villain has been gathering the DNA of famous historical persons and cloning copies of them infused with superpowers, but brainwashed into becoming villains. Yomiko and the British Library get involved when a super-villain copy of Jean-Henri Fabre riding a giant grasshopper tries to steal Ludwig van Beethoven's personal copy of *Die "Unsterbliche Liebe,"* to resurrect Beethoven into an evil composer of a "Suicide Symphony" so powerful that all who hear it must kill themselves.

Yomiko, teamed up with Library super-agent "Miss Deep" (a leather-clad sexpot with bigger breasts than Lara Croft) and studly American commando Drake Anderson (depressed at being the "weak sister" of the trio because he does not have superpowers), must trail the prestigious villains (including 18th century Japanese inventor Gennai Hiraga and 19th century German aeronaut Otto Lilienthal who destroy the Library of Congress) across the world. Eventually they race to stop Beethoven and 14th century Zen Buddhist monk Ikkyu from destroying the world in a high-tech climax ripped off from the *Bond Moonraker* movie.

Read or Die is a get-out-the-popcorn-turn-off-your-brain-and-have-fun comic-book thriller. Yumiko is awfully sweet and convincingly spunky when she needs to be; Miss Deep (who turns out to be another famous historical character in disguise) is a martial artist who jiggles all over the screen as she fights; and just don't worry about where a villain would find DNA of people who died a 1,000+ years ago (maybe that secret government vault where the Lost Ark was stored at the end of the first *Indiana Jones* movie!).



Voices of a Distant Star is a virtual one-man show from Makoto Shinkai. © 2002 Makoto Shinkai / CoMix Wave Inc. All rights reserved.

Voices of a Distant Star.

OAV, 2002. Creator: Makoto Shinkai. 25 minutes. Price & format: DVD bilingual \$19.98. Distributor: A.D.V. Films.

Anime releases are practically all commercial projects. *Voices of a Distant Star* (*Hoshi no Koe*) is a rare exception; an amateur fine art film that was written, animated and edited entirely by Makoto Shinkai. It combines both cel animation and computer graphics done on a Power Macintosh 7600/120 computer. Without the background notes describing this, it would be indistinguishable in quality from any finished professional anime work.

Shinkai, born in 1973, was hired in the '90s as art director for a computer gaming design company. The experience he got with the company's software led him to create his own animated films. His first, the black-and-white short, *She and Her Cat*, won the Japan Annual Animation Contest in 2000. He quit his job to spend seven months working at home on *Voices of a Distant Star*, with himself and his fiancée performing the voices. A manga/anime publisher, MangaZoo, financed a new soundtrack with professional voices, sound effects and music.

The 25-minute short film premiered at the Future Film Festival in Bologna, Italy, January 16-20, 2002, and in Japan at the Tokyo International Anime Fair 21, February 15-17, where Shinkai won an award for Most Valuable Newcomer. MangaZoo's 10,000-copy DVD release on April 19, 2002 (including an 80-page "making of" booklet with all the storyboard art) sold out within a week. A.D.V. licensed the American rights and premiered the film at the Anime Expo 2002 convention last July in Long Beach, California, with Shinkai as a guest speaker.

Voices of a Distant Star is a languid, tragic romance amidst a high-tech setting. Mikako Nagamine and Noboru Terao are mid-teen sweethearts. It is 2047; aliens have attacked the Solar System and the U.N. builds a faster-than-light spaceship to strike back. Mikako is selected for the crew because of her superior reflexes. She and Noboru promise to stay in frequent touch, but as the spaceship travels ever further from Earth, it takes increasingly long for their electronic messages to reach each other. Noboru must mark on a calendar how many months it will take for him to get Mikako's next call.

As the U.N. spaceship reaches the star Sirius, Mikako becomes despondent knowing that it will take more than eight years at the speed of light for Noboru to get her latest call. Will he wait that long for her? Is it fair for her to expect him to spend his life waiting for her calls? There are a few brief scenes of fast-paced sci-fi battle action, but mostly the film concentrates upon Mikako's and Noboru's thoughts; their reminiscences of their brief time together, and her memories of Japan's pastoral countryside in summer and winter.

The visuals of Mikako and Noboru calling each other across interstellar space on their cell phones rather than via higher-tech communication equipment is improbable, but the physics of the limitations of light-speed communication is still valid and this romantic conceit emphasizes the emotional bond between them.

This featurette is 25-minutes. A.D.V.'s DVD does not include the Japanese 80-page booklet, but it does have an additional 75-minutes of video extras: the complete original version of *Voices* with Shinkai and his fiancée performing the voices; Shinkai's *She and Her Cat* in three versions ("digest," three-minutes, and a full five-minutes); a video interview with Shinkai; the original production animatic for *Voices*; and four separate trailers for the Japanese video release. This may be overkill, but *Voices* and *She and Her Cat* alone are worth the price.



The DVD release of *Cowboy Bebop: The Movie* will give audiences a chance to see the movie.
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Cowboy Bebop: The Movie.

Theatrical feature, 2001. Director: Shinichiro Watanabe. 116 minutes. Price & format: DVD trilingual (Japanese, English, French) \$26.95. Distributor: Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment.

This is not a review but an addendum to my [review of this movie](#) in the March AWM, at the time of its theatrical release. You probably did not see it in the theaters, since according to the statistics posted on the Box Office Mojo Website, it never played on more than 29 screens nationwide during its 12-week run between April 4 and June 22, 2003. Its grosses were only \$987,252. This is a big disappointment, as any of the many American fans of *Cowboy Bebop* can tell you. (Fans of *Spirited Away* have been similarly disappointed with the poor public response to Disney's theatrical re-release of that movie following its winning the Oscar in the Best Animated Feature Film category.)

Fortunately, *Cowboy Bebop: The Movie* is now available on DVD. In addition to the 116-minute feature (dubbed in English, or in Japanese with English or French subtitles), the special features include six "behind-the-scenes featurettes" of six- to eight-minutes each featuring Japanese director Shinichiro Watanabe, character designer and animation director Toshihiro Kawamoto, composer

Yoko Kanno, both the Japanese and American voice actors for the main cast, plus others such as American ADR director Mary E. McGlin. Two of these featurettes are on the general making of the movie and on the international appeal of the whole series. The other four focus upon each of the main cast of Spike, Faye, Jet and Ed.

Other features include "storyboard comparisons" of four key scenes of about four-minutes each (a split-screen comparison of the storyboard sketches and the finished animation); plus such now-standard anime DVD bonuses as "music videos" of the opening and closing credits background footage with their theme songs, but without the overlaid credits, and "art galleries" of 40 character sketches, 39 sketches of the aircraft, 20 of the futuristic automobiles and so forth. The total is more than an hour of bonus materials. ■

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:

July 2003's Film Reviews

by Jon Hofferman

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:

Plugs McGinniss, Seeing Eye Dog (2003), 4 min., directed by Aaron Augenblick, USA. Info: Aaron Augenblick, Augenblick Studios. Email: info@augenblickstudios.com. Web: www.augenblickstudios.com.

Requiem (2003), 3.25 min., directed by Roger Oda, USA. Info: Roger Oda. Email: roda92@yahoo.com.

Ski Jumping Pairs (2002), 5.5 min., directed by Riichiro Mashima, Japan. Info: Riichiro Mashima. Email: info@jump-pair.com. Web: www.jump-pair.com.

The Toll Collector (2002), 10 min., directed by Rachel Johnson, USA. Info: Rachel Johnson. Tel: 917-549-1979. Email: rachel@thetollcollector.com. Web: www.thetollcollector.com.

Tunanooda (2002), 10 min., directed by David Zackin, USA. Info: David Zackin, 459 3rd Ave., Apt. 3, Brooklyn, NY 11215. Email: djzackin@hotmail.com.



Plugs McGinniss gets his blind owner into trouble. All characters, stories and art © 2003 by Augenblick Studios.

PLUGS MCGINNISS, SEEING EYE DOG

Inspired in part by Budweiser's idiotic "Spuds McKenzie" campaign (and in particular the disturbing suggestion that its canine protagonist "was a heavy drinker who was apparently mating with human women"), director Aaron Augenblick has created an agreeably jaundiced sketch about a dissolute canine and his supercilious blind owner. The film, which was hand-drawn in Flash MX, is as rich in visual design and attitude as it is thin in content, although there are a few funny ideas floating around, and the hyper-literate VO sustains one's interest when the visuals flag. Augenblick's professed love of Fleischer Studios cartoons and other early animation is evident in his retro style, which is generally very effective and needs only a stronger narrative structure to support it.

Aaron Augenblick attended the School of Visual Arts in New York, where he made the award-winning shorts, *The Wire* (1995) and *The Midnight Carnival* (1997). After working for several years at MTV Animation, he founded Augenblick Studios, which has produced shows for the Cartoon Network, Comedy Central, PBS, Nickelodeon and many others. The studio's own productions include *Ramblin' Man* (2000), *Drunkly* (2001) and the upcoming series, *House Arrest*. *Plugs McGinniss* has screened at Annecy, the Annapolis Film Festival and the Filthy Animation Festival.



Requiem shows WWII from a Japanese perspective. © 1993 *Japan at War: An Oral History* by Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook. Reprinted by permission of The New Press.

REQUIEM

Roger Oda's poignant film recounts the WWII experience of a Japanese woman whose brother died piloting a *kaiten*, a "suicide submarine" that made its operator into a human torpedo. Based on one of the reminiscences in *Japan at War: An Oral History*, by Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Requiem* uses sepia tones and minimal animation to convey the special relationship between brother and sister and the personal reality of war. The film is stronger on feeling than it is on technique, but Oda demonstrates a thoughtful use of images to complement, rather than simply illustrate, the narrative, and *Requiem's* structure effectively integrates the visual and aural elements — including the well-known "Meditation" from Massenet's *Thaïs* — through which the story is told.

Roger Oda, an MFA student in UCLA's animation program, cites William Kentridge, Caroline Leaf and Isao Takahara as influences. *Requiem*, which was made as a first-year project, was first shot horizontally against a wall with a Bolex and then animated under the camera using charcoal dust and vine charcoal. It screened as part of the 2003 UCLA Prom Festival of Animation.

SKI JUMPING PAIRS

In this amusing and well-made CG animation, director Riichiro Mashima takes a tongue-in-cheek look at the latest Winter Olympics event: the new and exciting extreme sport of two-person ski jumping. Mashima does a great job of re-creating the look and feel of Olympics TV coverage, complete with color



Television coverage of the Winter Olympics is spoofed in *Ski Jumping Pairs*. © Riichiro Mashima.

commentary and instant replays, and incorporates a number of funny variations in his six teams' performances. Unfortunately, the film's impressive verisimilitude, coupled with the difficulties inherent in translation (for those of us who don't speak Japanese), sometimes makes it hard to gauge Mashima's humorous intent. However, overall the film is extremely successful in taking a clever central concept and running (or jumping) with it in a manner that's both imaginative and admirably coherent.

A graduate of Chiba University with a degree in industrial design, Riichiro Mashima worked as a businessman for three years before learning CG animation at Digital Hollywood. *Ski Jumping Pairs*, which was his graduation project, has won numerous awards, including a Special Jury Prize at AniFest and Audience Choice Awards at the Santamania Short Film Festival (Japan) and RESFEST 2002 Japan Program. It has also screened at Annecy, Melbourne, Hiroshima, Cordoba, and the Oberhausen Short Film Festival, among many other festivals.

THE TOLL COLLECTOR

Clearly a highly personal project, some of its meaning might be known only to the filmmaker, *The Toll Collector* is a beautifully designed puppet animation about a physically deformed girl who dreams of being a ballerina. Filmmaker Rachel Johnson cites Tim Burton as one of her influences and indeed the spindly central character (actually the only character) and moody milieu are reminiscent of that director's work. Yet the film has a quirky tone all its own, and the high level of execution — from the choice of shots and



The Toll Collector is an impressive directing debut. © Rachel Johnson.

deliberate pacing, to the incorporation of Patrick Kirst's haunting score — is very impressive for a first film. On the negative side, I think Johnson may not have been well-served by acting as her own narrator and, thematically, the character's epiphany at the end of the film seems imposed rather than integral to the action. If, ultimately, the many excellent parts don't quite add up to a satisfying whole, *The Toll Collector* still represents a sizable accomplishment.

Rachel Johnson graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1999 with a degree in photography and worked as a photojournalist before beginning her film career. *The Toll Collector* was shot at Trnky studio in Prague, where Johnson was mentored by producer Michil Havlik, and was completed with post-production grants from the Filmworkers Club in Chicago and Soundtrack Studio in New York. It premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival and has also screened at Annecy, Newport and Tribeca.

TUNANOODA

David Zackin's quasi-autobiographical meditation on family, aquatic life and dubious recipes (OK, it's not a meditation, more of a vaudeville routine) is both very funny and — despite its, shall we say, unpolished appearance — highly sophisticated in its manipulation of sound and image to chronicle the sort-of conversation between a boy (voiced by the filmmaker) and his grandfather.

A disciple of the *South Park* school of animation, Zackin will never win any awards for his drawing skills or his characters' nuanced movements. However, he has great insight into the way people communicate (or don't) and he's able to exploit the resources



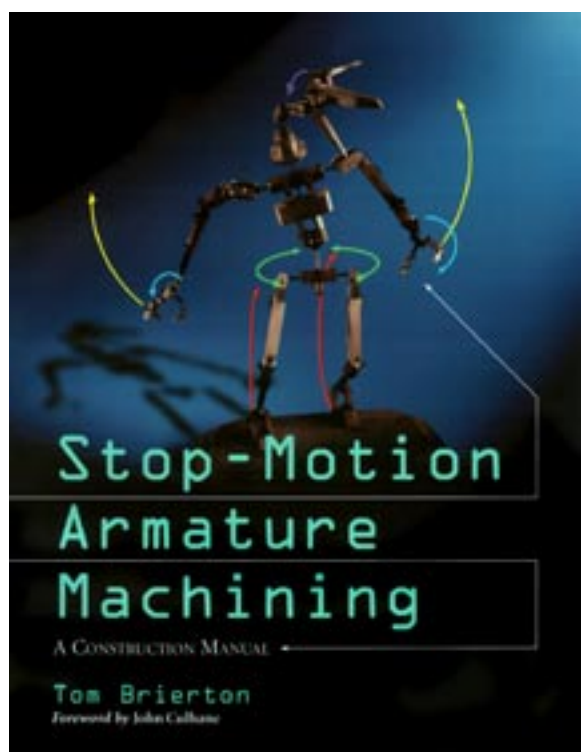
Tuna and truth are served up in ***Tunanooda***. Image courtesy of David Zackin.

of the film medium to transmit information on a number of different levels. The result here is a kind of disjointed stream of consciousness that's both highly entertaining and surprisingly truthful in its exploration of adolescence, family relationships and tuna.

Another graduate of RISD, for which *Tunanooda* was his undergraduate thesis project, David Zackin has stopped eating the dish from which his film takes its name. *Tunanooda* was shot on 16mm using a homemade four-level rig on an old Oxberry camera stand, with additional work completed in Pro Tools and Flash. Zackin cites Cezanne, *Village of Idiots* and Igor Kovalyov's *Flying Nansen* as influences, and alleges that he developed his character's voice "by imitating the disappointed scowl of the roommate of a girl [on whom he had a crush]."

Tunanooda has won numerous awards, including Best Student Film at the New England Film & Video Festival and Best Animated Film at the Big Muddy festival, and has screened at New Directors/New Films (NY) and the Philadelphia, USA, and Ann Arbor film festivals, among many others. ■

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.



THINGS THAT TOOK ME MONTHS OF TRIAL AND ERROR (MOSTLY ERROR!) TO FATHOM OUT ARE SYSTEMATICALLY EXPLAINED AND ILLUSTRATED IN TOM'S BOOK.

BOOK REVIEW

Stop-Motion Armature Machining

HELPFUL HOW-TO BOOK ON STOP-MOTION ARMATURES

by Peter Saunders

IT'S A COURAGEOUS PUBLISHER WHO PUBLISHES A book on model animation in today's CGI-dominated industry; it's an even greater act of courage when the book in question deals not with some populist, mainstream topic of model animation but one very specialized discipline within it.

Tom Brierton's *Stop-Motion Armature Machining* is one such book, and McFarland & Company is the intrepid publisher behind the enterprise. The book is, as the title plainly states, a manual on how to make stop-motion armatures and — in spite of its somewhat anachronistic timing — is long overdue. Quite what level of readership it will attain, however, I don't know. Model animation has suffered badly since the advent of computer graphics, and nowadays many would-be practitioners of the art have, out of necessity, chosen to develop their skills via computer rather than learn the craft-based skills of the puppet workshop.

Assuming that Tom Brierton was faced with no such dilemma at the outset of his animation career, one thing would have been for certain: the lack of information, text books or college courses to guide him on his chosen path. As Tom writes in his preface, "one must peck through 20 to 30 years of publications in order to find what is wanted" and even then "most of the information that is found in them does not go into any great detail on the technical processes of creating a stop-motion ar-

mature." The great inspirational animation wizards [Wil-lis O'Brien](#), [Jiri Trnka](#), [Ray Harryhausen](#), *et al*, kept their tricks of the trade a closely guarded secret like their "Magic Circle" counterparts. We all knew the principles of their wonderful illusions, but how they actually made those exquisite puppets, and what lay beneath the surface of their models, was only ever alluded to, never revealed.

In the absence of readily available information, those with sufficient curiosity, resourcefulness and enthusiasm found their own answers. Tom studied human anatomy, then replicated the human skeleton in miniature with tiny, metal, ball and socket joints. He came up with his own solutions and techniques to create his own armatures and puppets. It's the creation of the armatures that is the central topic of the book, and Tom gives a very methodical account of how to go about making them.

Thirty years ago, when I first started to be involved in model animation, but was at a complete loss on how to make my own puppets, this book would have been invaluable. Things that took me months of trial and error (mostly error!) to fathom out are systematically explained and illustrated in Tom's book.

He assumes little of the reader and carefully describes tools, techniques, processes and machinery as he guides you through the various stages of making the skeleton. At the back of the book there is a glossary, list of suppliers and bibliography which (given the very specialist nature of the work) is invaluable.

The book starts with a chapter entitled, "The Importance of Anatomy," in which Tom recommends any would-be armature maker to study anatomy and "the figures of some of the great sculptors, such as Michelangelo and Rodin." Sound advice indeed, as, in order for a character to be animated convincingly, it is essential that the puppet is articulated where you would expect it to be, i.e., an elbow joint should be located half-way down an arm, not high up close to the shoulder. (This is true virtually no matter how the puppet is styled.)

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the reader to the basic tools of the trade and two significant pieces of workshop machinery — the lathe and the milling machine. The latter two items are not cheap pieces of equipment even at the more basic end of the market. I hope that any potential reader will have given consideration to this fact, or at least sourced access to such equipment. If they haven't, they could hardly blame Tom for the impasse they would find themselves in, given the book's title!

Chapter 4 — and so to business! This chapter deals with the construction of a ball and socket joint,

the most useful and used joint in all its different guises in puppet making. If the reader gets no further than the end of this chapter, then they should still be able to make themselves a respectable and highly moveable puppet. As with the earlier chapters, no previous metal working experience is assumed of the reader.

The construction of the joint is taken right through from drawn design to finished article, with clear and comprehensive instructions and plenty of useful work-in-progress photographs. The ball and socket joint is a deceptively difficult component to make well, but I believe that the reader should achieve good results if they followed Tom's instructions to the letter.

In the ensuing chapters (5 - 8), the machining of various other types of joints is described, so by the time the reader has worked their way through to Chapter 9 they should be well able to tackle an armature of their own. A gallery of Tom's previous armature constructions is at hand at the end of the book to inspire any would-be puppet maker to action.

Stop-Motion Armature Machining is a really useful and unique book for those students/enthusiasts interested in this type of work. Ideally, I would have liked to see a little more information on how the puppet armature relates to the sculpt of the character and how the armature is locked down in its mould prior to foam latex being cast round it. The latter point usually has to be taken into consideration at the machining stage, so is relevant to the book.

I also thought the price tag of \$49.95 was a bit on the high side, given the size of the book and the fact that many of the people who might be interested in the books are likely to be students. Still, I hope it achieves the success it deserves and — who knows — it may inspire a whole new generation of puppet builders. ■

Stop-Motion Armature Machining: A Construction Manual by Tom Brierton. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002. 102 pages. ISBN: 0-7864-1244-5. \$49.95. To order, contact 800/253-2187 or visit www.mcfarlandpub.com.

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