

# ANIMATION

# WORLD

Vol. 5 No. 8

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• November 2000

## The Mysteries of Television



*Belphegor*

PLUS:

DISNEY'S NEW GROOVE  
DREAMWORKS' JOSEPH  
OTTAWA SCRAPBOOK  
AND GAMING

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**Cover:** *Belphégor*, the story that has fascinated the entire country of France since the '60s, comes alive again with a new animated series. © France 2 and 3.

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# Editor's Notebook

by Heather Kenyon

A new, healthy beginning...

This year I consider that primetime animation has been kinda like a rock star or movie star that has hit super stardom and then doesn't quite know how to handle it, resulting in a fiery crash to rock bottom. Animation became red hot, and in all the craziness that ensued...we went down in a fiery crash. (How else can you explain cancellations almost before the shows even aired?) Now, like the big bang theory the explosion is coming back down, and I think this will lead to a more stable industry, if it doesn't completely implode! Rather than having two or three high profile shows on the major networks, I'd rather see the industry have four or five shows on smaller networks continuing at a steady pace, building a following and audience for the networks. If animation can help build a market for burgeoning networks as Gerard Raiti suggests in his article "Primetime Animation Fills Growing Niche TV," then that will only help animated programming expand and in turn provide jobs.

Animation producers are always complaining about "suits" that don't understand animation and make their lives hell by poking their noses into the shows they are producing. Well, I think after this past television year, a lot of network suits have definitely learned their lesson. Animation is its own special breed and to capture and use it like Cartoon Network and

Fox...well, it takes focus and commitment. Unfortunately, now many have been burned and won't be coming back to animation anytime soon. Moreover, as Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman explains in "Boom and Doom," it takes more than a dog and pony show to produce animation. Experience is vital and several of this past season's shows have proven that you are asking for trouble when you have an animated show that isn't backed by industry veterans. Hopefully, if networks have learned anything this past year, it is to look before they leap. There is still more animation being produced for primetime than ever before and with shows like *The PJs* and *Home Movies* finding new network homes after being cancelled proves that it isn't "our" animation that failed, it was the placing and approach.

When I was in college two events influenced me to go into animation. The first was a "Writing for Animation" course I took with Ernie Pintoff. For a bunch of kids raised on Saturday morning cartoons, Ernie's selection of art films with favorites from UPA and the NFB blew us away. We were wowed. And I was impressed. The second event was my experience over the course of one summer regarding two separate internships. The first one was at a very high profile ultra-cool live-action feature company run by a very talented writer/director/producer team. They were very nice to me. I really can't complain. Other class-

mates had terrible internships where all they learned was exactly how certain executives liked their tuna sandwiches (think *Swimming with Sharks*), and one poor soul even had to bail out a convertible that had been left open in a rain-storm! No one ever yelled at me because I forgot mustard. In fact, they even bought me some trail mix because I wouldn't take lunch and they felt sorry for me. In Hollywood, that's true concern. I did coverage, filed, entered info into the database and was encouraged to ask a lot of questions. The other internship was at Turner Feature Animation (TFA) and the project that was in production was *Cats Don't Dance*. After completing my coverage, I would get to look at artwork, sit in on story meetings, and on really great days, I'd go over to the main TFA building and follow around the key players, one of whom was Mark Dindal. I had no idea how lucky I was at the time. If I had some questions about character design, the next week they'd organize a chat with character designer and CalArts' instructor Robert Lence. The next week I had questions about acting and animating, so in I'd go to Lennie Graves who was Sawyer's lead animator. 'How do you put the whole thing together though?' I pondered. Well, what I didn't glean while being a fly on the wall of the conference room from Mark and the Turner executives, I could get by asking a few questions of art director Brian McEntee. What a summer! It was then I decided that I wanted to go into animation because the folks were so friendly and interesting. Forget a snooty commissary and assigned parking depending on your rank and file...lets walk across the street



together to the Crest market and get a sandwich. I'd tag along listening and absorbing and loving it! I can really say that the people of Turner Feature turned me onto one of animation's greatest facets — its people.

Finally, we all had a great time up at the Ottawa International Animation Festival from September 19 - 24, 2000. Four AWN staff members traveled up north, which was a delicious preview of fall weather and had us all bundled up. My only regret is that I didn't realize there were marshmallows to roast at the picnic until it was almost too late...and everyone knows one roasted marshmallow is far too few. Gary Schwartz was also in attendance and snapping

away photos with wild abandon. But not just any photos mind you — 3D photos! I do hope you can see the stereoscopic effect and take full advantage of "The Ottawa 2000 Scrapbook: Featuring the 3D Photographs of Gary Schwartz." Enjoy!

Until Next Time,  
Heather

P.S. Oh, and in addition to a blender, DreamWorks' new straight-to-video production *Joseph: King of Dreams* is on my holiday wish list. Check out co-director Robert Ramirez' article "Out of Character: The Making of Joseph," because in my opinion this production is quite special.

**editor@awn.com**

### Something's Fishy Here...

I quote from your article "Shockwave.Com: Fun and Games on a High-Flying Hub" (Dannacher, 5.01): "To date, the Flash software player has been successfully downloaded by over 200 million users around the world. This means that veritably 90% of the people on the Net now have Flash."

The reason this seems preposterous is because 200 million downloads have been recorded — not 200 million individual Web users as your article claims. Most of them are people downloading a newer version or trying to get it again after a Net failure.

It's great that you are promoting Web animation and I develop my Web animation in Flash and Director, *but* ridiculous claims make the industry and your magazine look like nothing more

than hype. We don't need that any more.

Skepticism of a company's claims is healthy. For a journalist it's essential.

Sincerely,  
Rob

### Hooray for Harry

We enjoyed your interview, "10 Questions with Harry Shearer, Springfield's Finest," (Singer, 5.01) with Harry Shearer. Your Website is outstanding. We just discovered it and will come back frequently.

Keep up the great work!

Best,  
Rich Davis and John Sprengelmeyer  
Captain RibMan Comics  
<http://www.supercomics.com>



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# Belphegor

## The Renewed Legend

by Annick Teninge

The story of Belphegor has fascinated the entire country of France since the '60s, with the introduction of a live-action television series that now belongs to France's cultural inheritance. Based on a novel written by Arthur Bernède in the '20s, the author took a mythological character from the recesses of antiquity and assigned him an identity that captured the imagination of the country when brought to television.

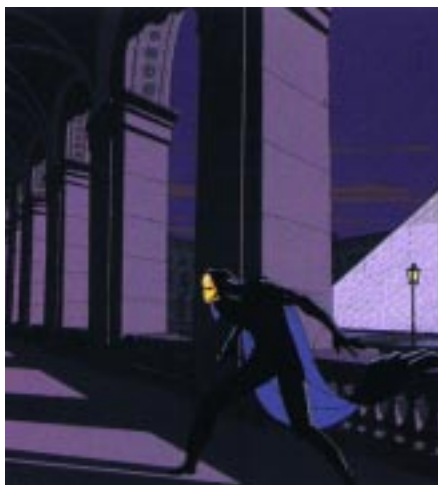
Today *Belphegor* is a 26 x 26-minute animated series co-produced by France Television (France 2 and France 3), Les Armateurs (France), Toocan (Canada) and Price RG (Korea). The story is of a mysterious phantom, Belphegor, that haunts Paris, from the Louvre museum to the Opera House to the city's catacombs, while being pursued by the Paris police chief and two valiant journalists, Jacques and Sarah, who try to confound his evil plans...Gérald Dupeyrot, who is also the script director, created the series. Jean-Christophe Roger directs it and Frédéric Beziau is the artistic director. The first episodes will broadcast on France 2 at the end of this year, while France Television Distribution has just released the first video of two episodes "Le Fantôme du templier" and "La preuve par 24."

The animated version is a modern, expressionistic adaptation of the live-action *Belphegor*



© Les Armateurs/ France 2/  
France 3/ Tooncan.

series, with a strong graphic style. It successfully recreates an eerie universe, where even the city of lights becomes a haunting character. The series is also characterized by very ambitious scripts — multi-



Belphegor, the phantom that haunts  
Paris. © Les Armateurs/ France 2/  
France 3/ Tooncan.

layered stories that drag you along, losing you in the complexity of the characters and the excitement of the story and mysteries.

A public television network, France Television is the leading financier of animation programs in France. They are currently co-producing fourteen animation series, representing 116 hours of programming. France 2 targets 12-18 year olds, while France 3 targets the 4-10 age group. France Television centers its children's programming around two artistic lines: impertinent humor with series such as *Baskerville: une famille d'enfer*, *Momie au pair* and *Norman Normal*; and action and adventure, colored with French and European cultural inheritance, illustrated by *Belphegor*, *Corto Maltese* and *Lucky Luke*, among others. Les Armateurs, *Belphegor*'s executive producer, is a French production company founded in 1994 by Didier Brunner. Among others, Les Armateurs co-produced Michel Ocelot's famed *Kirikou And The Sorceress*. They are currently working on Michel Ocelot's *Princes & Princesses*, as well as Sylvain Chomet's *Les Triplettes de Belleville*, an animated feature based on characters from Chomet's award-winning short *The Old Lady and the Pigeons*.

Creator Gérald Dupeyrot agreed to share his thoughts on his work:

**Annick Teninge:** How did you get the idea to bring back this mythic television series? Were you worried it would not be equal to your memories, and the viewers' memories, even if this concern was irrelevant for today's generation?

**Gérald Dupeyrot:** To begin with,



Jacques and Sarah, two journalists following the mysterious Belphegor.  
© Les Armateurs/ France 2/France 3/Tooncan.

it was purely commercial. The production company was looking for an idea for a TV series. First, they considered *Fantomas* but the rights were not available. Then, *Belphegor* became an option. I pitched the idea to Pathé, the rights holders, and Arthur Bernède's heirs. They accepted it. However, for moral reasons, it was out of the question that Belphegor would kill, or even be a thief. We were told that no distributor would go for that. Even a project with "Robin Hood" in the title had discouraged investors, not to mention a thief! Plus, the C.S.A. (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel) [French Audiovisual Council, a regulation authority] had recently frowned on several projects with bad heroes and we needed to be very careful with the story line. And it was out of the question to follow the book, because it ends with Belphegor's death. The rights holders also imposed other constraints, such as never revealing Belphegor's identi-

ty. We had to be daring, but in a different way. This is why I made *Belphegor* what it is.

Once Pathé was convinced, we worked on a pilot, which was presented at the Cartoon Forum in Connemara [Ireland, 1996]. The day after the presentation, France 2 and France 3 announced they were willing to join the venture. Yet, the pilot was quite awful! I would like to say that our partners at France 2/3 have been fantastic, especially considering the particular nature of this series.

**AT:** From an artistic standpoint, did you feel that an animated version would bring some limitations — to translate the mysterious aspect, among others — or allow more creativity? And how did you choose the artistic director, who is extremely talented from my point of view?

**GD:** I have always felt that animation doesn't bring any constraints.

On the opposite, it allows one to render a different vision of reality, to give more meaning to life by refining it and only keeping what is essential, and by playing with the time, etc. Of course, this is assuming one knows how to use it and has enough resources to reach the effect required. Films such as *Jin Rô* convinced me that animation has started to explore new roads that will become fabulous means of expression.

**AT:** Can you explain this?

**GD:** *Jin Rô* is Japanese director Hiroyuki Okiura's first feature. It is set in an imaginary post-war Japan, where a conspiracy threatens both police combat troopers and anti-government activists. Although, the technique is traditional, the style is very innovative in the way it uses a sharp, realistic graphic style to translate the atmosphere.

But, back to *Belphegor*: I was getting nowhere with the graphic design. We were only receiving proposals with very classical character design. They all looked like *Titan A.E.* or characters from semi-realistic-type movies. How could we transform these characters into a consistent universe? Which backgrounds would fit in? This is when I suggested bringing in Frédéric Bézian, a comic book artist I really liked and considered one of the most bewitching artists, although he did not have many fans at the time. His style, and the atmosphere in his comic books seemed to match perfectly my idea of *Belphegor*. Luckily, Frédéric accepted my proposal and became the artistic director of the series. He has been fantastic. Not only did he successfully adapt his





The city takes on an eerie character of its own in the stylish new animated series.  
© Les Armateurs/ France 2/France 3/Tooncan.

relatively complex drawing style to the simplification needed in animation, but he also appeared to be extremely painstaking in his work, and thoughtful of other people's work. He is an incredibly talented professional.

**AT:** Belphegor, the title character, who has supernatural powers, is the bad guy. That's unusual compared to superheroes like Superman. Was the objective to show that children shouldn't idolize superheroes just because they possess supernatural powers?

**GD:** Belphegor doesn't have supernatural powers. His ring transfixes and temporarily neutralizes people. But this already exists in military lab and is not very sophisticated. It was mostly added to emphasize the spectacular aspect, to make him more frightening. Belphegor's real weapons are his strength and his cleverness, which — I'll grant you that — is totally unusual in superhero stories. Indeed, he is a "bad" hero, but his elusiveness makes him

quite threatening. This, plus the fact he is facing two positive and very endearing people (Sarah, one of the two journalists, most specifically), should prevent children from identifying with him and make them identify with his pursuers instead. It was interesting for us to see how Sarah stood out as we were working on the character development. She is the most impulsive and the most daring of the duo, and I believe children, especially girls, will strongly identify with her.

**AT:** How close did you stay to the book and the original TV series? In your script, the connection between the "old" Belphegor and today's is made through his reappearance, 30 years later. Did you play with that aspect — the time lag — in the script?

**GD:** Our Belphegor is quite different from the book character or the previous TV series. Plus, the story takes place in this day and age. I think that if we are true to something, it is to the atmosphere, to a character that is elusive — physically and in his motivations — unsettling, unpredictable. We devoted a lot of time to the writing. As opposed to the book — where Belphegor's sole goal is to run off with a Merovingian treasure hidden in the Louvre museum — our goal was to tell not one but twenty-six stories! And for each of them, to find a motivation which was not based on greed or the need for power, and did not portray him as capricious or pusillanimous. The writers, Marc Larmigny, together with Sébastien Viaud and Séverine Vuillaume, were able to invent stories which didn't look like we'd seen it all before, while integrating all the existing constraints.



© Les Armateurs/  
France 2/France  
3/Tooncan.

From one episode to another, one will notice that Belphegor challenges people and situations all the time; one will conclude that he is a player, or a manipulator; or maybe that he behaves like an entomologist. He fits in with the history, with who Belphegor is, way before the book. He is a diabolical character who is also an enlightener of people's personalities. By provoking them, he makes them experience things that help them to grow, like in real life!

One episode, "La Vengeance de l'Etoile Bleue," [The Revenge of the Blue Star]





Belphegor's mark, the tanit sign is seen in the design of the floor.

© Les Armateurs/ France 2/France 3/Tooncan.

gives away another essential trait of his personality. It was not possible to explain it literally, because the viewing audience is mostly children. However, we understand that Belphegor has suffered a bereavement that took away his reason for living. And instead of overcoming his mourning, or becoming insane, or an alcoholic, he steps aside and settles on the edge between life and death. He is constantly provoking life, as if he is waiting for a sign from her that might provoke an emotion within himself. Naturally, we could not translate these complex feelings in the film. So, we merely acknowledge the effects of the distance he puts between himself and rest of the world.

**AT:** Is it true that, in the antiquity, Belphegor was pictured in two quite different fashions: "as a beautiful naked woman and as a monstrous, bearded demon with an open mouth, horns, and sharply pointed nails. Belphegor was Hell's ambassador to France?"

**GD:** I don't know where this citation comes from. What's for sure is that, from the antiquity, the name, Belphegor [Baal-peor] refers to one of the avatars of the God Baal. And quite a few authors, including Machiavel, have portrayed him. At the beginning, Belphegor was a demon from an ancient civilization in the Middle East, and his name means "Demon of the mountain." Then, we track him to Carthage, hence the Tanit sign, which is Belphegor's mark. This is not clarified in the series, however the Tanit sign can be compared to that of Belphegor's imploring doll, with her arms up in the air, and to his music box. If both of them are superposed, their shape matches the Tanit sign. This doll is part of Belphegor's mystery. Obviously, it is a relic from the time when his frosty desperation arose.

**AT:** There are quite a few veiled references: Jacques Drouin, Gerard Magax.

**GD:** That's true. In one episode,

people have the ability to go through the paintings at the Louvre museum — it is the only time where the transgression of physical laws leads to this level of fantasy — and I got the idea while thinking of one of Jacques Drouin's films *Le Paysagiste* (*The Landscape Architect*). Thus, I figured it was just fair to pay tribute to the author by naming the "magic painter" after him. But, apart from a few animation groupies like you and me, had we not mentioned it, who would have noticed? Same thing with Gerard Magix, a transparent allusion to Gerard Magax, a fearsome destroyer of telekinesis in the '70s. And there are many of them. But, in most cases, they are veiled messages to nobody. It's just that, at some point, you need to come up with a name. For instance, I named the main female character Sarah, and her surname is Kozminsky. Who knows why?

Visit AWN online to see Belphegor clips at:

<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.08/5.08pages/teningebelphegor.php3>.

*Interview with Gérald Dupeyrot conducted in French and translated by Annick Teninge.*

*Annick Teninge is the general manager of Animation World Network. A French native, Annick began her animation career as Assistant Director at the Annecy International Animation Festival, a post she held for six years.*

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# No Boundaries:

## An Interview With Eric Radomski

by Amid Amidi

**D**ark, intense and brooding are not words often used to describe an afternoon animated TV series, but the Caped Crusader's adventures proved to be just that when *Batman: The Animated Series* premiered in fall of 1992. The show radically redefined the medium of television animation eschewing the tradition of mediocrity while proclaiming that an afternoon cartoon show could be atmospheric, moody, mature and entertaining to both kids and adults. This triumph of TV animation was a team effort, and one of the crew leaders was Eric Radomski, who along with Bruce Timm and Alan Burnett, served as the show's executive producers. His invaluable contributions to the show ranged across the board from the artfully designed title cards that introduced each episode to the series' minimalistic art direction that suggested and hinted at details rather than spelling it all out for the audience.

However, Eric Radomski's career did not begin nor end with



From comic book to television screen, Todd McFarlane's *Spawn*.  
© 1996 Home Box Office.

*Batman*. Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, a decidedly non-animation town, Radomski entered the business in the early '80s as a cel painter and office boy at a hole-in-the-wall Cleveland commercial studio run by Rick Reinert. As most animation artists eventually do, he found his way to Los Angeles working at various outfits on the feeble cartoon output of the '80s before ending up at Warner Bros. with his chance-of-a-lifetime opportunity on *Batman*.

Following his illustrious tenure with the Dark Knight, Radomski became the supervising director of HBO Animation in 1996. There he was responsible for two high-profile series: Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* and Ralph Bakshi's *Spicy*. Sadly the studio folded before it had reached its full potential, and Radomski has since redirected his focus toward Film Roman where he is currently executive creative director. Not knowing what to expect before our first meeting, I soon discovered Eric to be a genial and genuine creator,

somebody who loves the classic Warner Bros. shorts and Disney features, speaks his mind freely, and most importantly, isn't afraid to push the animated envelope and explore the vast possibilities of this art form.

**Amid Amidi:** You were painting backgrounds on *Tiny Toons* when they started developing the animated *Batman* at Warner Bros. I understand that you weren't a particularly avid reader of the *Batman* comics like Bruce Timm was, so what was it that initially attracted you to the project?

**Eric Radomski:** I think I've always favored more of the dramatic in terms of storytelling. As a kid from the lower east side of Cleveland, inner city kid, I saw the *Godfather* when I was like 11, and I was into mob and war films, and enjoyed that sort of drama. The previous incarnations of *Batman* I'd seen growing up, the Filmation animated version, that series they did



Director, producer Eric Radomski.  
Photo courtesy of Film Roman.



Radomski hard at work.  
Photo courtesy of Amid Amidi.



with Adam West, they were all just a bunch of goofs. They were dopey versions of a character that could be really strong and dramatic, and when I saw Tim Burton's movie, I thought that was a good way of looking at this character.

**AA:** To get on the project, you made some preliminary studies using colored pencil on black paper...

**ER:** That's a painting technique that I had done previously in my own personal paintings where I was trying to work with limited lighting and examining how lighting actually works at nighttime with the effects of the moon and such. Literally the first piece that I did was lights of a city reflected on a wet pavement, and that was also inspired by the drama of Burton's movie. But I never thought that they would go that far in a cartoon. They attached to this look immediately, and that was exciting for me. I thought, Well, at the very best I'm going to get to paint or set the style for the show," but it also opened the door for me to exercise skills that most everyone didn't know about. I knew how to organize projects because out of necessity, I had been so hands-on in the previous studios that I'd worked at so when they asked us to produce a couple minutes of animation, that was like a walk in the park for me. Bruce and I basically organized this two-minute presentation piece in a month and a half. Bruce boarded it, and he and I did layouts from the boards, and I did all the original backgrounds. I had a friend up in Canada, Greg Duffell, who had a commercial studio, and his crew animated the whole thing. Based on the strength of that piece, we



Following the popularity of *Batman: The Animated Series*, The WB presented the New *Batman/Superman Adventures* program hour. © Warner Bros.

were offered to produce it. Here, Bruce and I are looking at sixty-five episodes, neither one of us ever having been in that position of responsibility, and we just never thought about it. Just took it one episode at a time.

## **I think the ability to bring together the writers and the artists, and the crew in general, was one of the biggest accomplishments with Batman.**

**AA:** Speaking to your role as an executive producer on *Batman*, you came from an artistic background, whereas many TV animation producers today are not as versatile in basic cartoon fundamentals. Do you think it's an

advantage to have a producer assume an artistic and creative role in the creation of an animated series?

**ER:** Having a very involved and comprehensive knowledge of the process was completely beneficial to me. It allowed me to talk to anyone from prop designers to the directors. I could explain and request things very specifically as to the way a sequence should be directed or what needed to be indicated in the storyboard so that there wasn't confusion when they sent it overseas. I was also able to relate those same concerns and thoughts to the writers on the show, and the writer/producer Alan Burnett, and later Paul Dini. To be able to troubleshoot an episode in script form, we were able to resolve issues and not compromise the content of the scripts.

The problem comes when folks are given a producer title and it's not warranted. As we see in a lot of the primetime shows, anyone who writes is a producer, and that's fine to have that title or credit, but it doesn't relate to the responsibility of that producer. At the end of the day, it's a visual medium, and while writing is very important to it, in order to make the best possible piece of entertainment, you have to be able to look at the big picture and know how you're going to get to the end of the line. Not just have a cool idea and go, "Oh yeah, we'll have these wacky animators come up with some gags or funny drawings, or direct it with great timing so that the comedy comes off." That's fine but that's a lot of assumption. If you don't know how to get there or convey that, you're asking for big trouble. Subsequently, you see some of

these primetime shows that just cost oodles of money and the product is really pretty weak. Its a system out of balance. Primetime television sort of adopted animation and to them its just a technique. A good portion of the animated primetime shows could just as well be done live-action. I mean there are a couple exceptions but for the most part, its not what cartoons were originally meant to be. Cartoons aren't meant to lip sync dialogue thats written by stand-up comics, which is what seems to dominate the primetime market. For me, unless you do that extremely well, its always going to be less than interesting to watch.

**AA:** With shows like *Batman* and *Ren & Stimpy*, it seems that when the producer is an artist, it can avoid a lot of problems down the line...

**ER:** Its unfortunate but exactly as you've said, really heavy duty producers from the live-action world are trusted more by executives so they're put in a position of power. But they really don't understand the process and the animators are left a lot of times fixing things that are broken rather than concentrating on making them better. So you end up with an end product thats half of what it could have been, had it been trusted in the hands of the animation folks.

**AA:** *Batman* has proven to be one of the seminal TV shows in animation history. What are you most proud of about your association with that show?

**ER:** The live-action movie had done very well and *Batman* was very much in the limelight, so I guess the biggest effort we made



HBO's *Spawn* — animation capable of giving viewers a story in a single frame.  
© 1996 Home Box Office.

was to stand on our own. We didn't want to just rely on the success of the movie; we wanted to distinguish ourselves not only as [a representation of] the character Batman himself, but as an animated project. It was an opportunity to say we're going to do this differently. Speaks directly to what we just spoke about, artists/producers being involved in a project. I think the biggest accomplishment, whether we set out to do it or not, was that we proved that if artists/producers were allowed to handle a huge franchise show, we could deliver both visually and storywise.

**AA:** How involved would you be in the actual writing of the show?

**ER:** We didn't sit down and write them, but Bruce and I were very involved with a lot of the scripts. We not only pointed out the pitfalls, but also had a strong, secure writer in Alan Burnett to invite us into the process, and invite our opinions in, so that when we had an idea for a sequence in a show, or changes to story, it wasn't about fighting over it, or egos. It was about making it better. I think

the ability to bring together the writers and the artists, and the crew in general, was one of the biggest accomplishments with *Batman*. We eventually created 85 half-hours in the first incarnation of the series, and subsequently they've done *Superman* and *Batman Beyond*, and they've held consistent. Really strong narrative and absolutely terrific graphics. Its a wonderful testament to a team working together, which is a rarity in animation.

**AA:** From a viewers perspective, theres not really a whole lot to complain about, but from your perspective, if you could go back, what would you improve about the show?

**ER:** Without stooping to the levels of using foul language or showing nudity, I think we could have pushed a lot of the elements to a greater degree more adult, and I use that term very loosely because I don't think it has to be blood and guts but I think it has to be real for the audience to buy it. There were a couple episodes that probably spoke truest to the goal that we would have set for ourselves in

terms of overall quality. We were fortunate enough to win an Emmy for part one of *Robin's Reckoning*. It was the back story of the death of Robins parents, a touching story about a kid losing his parents. That took animated storytelling to a new height because it wasn't about selling toys anymore, and it wasn't about being wacky cooky, and it wasn't about Batman always winning; this was a story about the birth of a superhero, of Robin really making decisions in his life, and it was quite dramatic.

**AA:** It would seem then that the move you made to HBO was a real freeing transition in terms of the content that you were allowed to do?

**ER:** Absolutely, knowing that HBO was definitely interested in pushing their shows to an R-rating was music to my ears.

**AA:** What specifically took you there?

**ER:** *Spawn* was their first project they had optioned, and HBO had brought in Catherine Winder with the project. They originally sub-contracted work out to an off-site studio and had gotten about three or four months into development and pre-production, but Todd McFarlane, who created *Spawn*, and the studio, which shall remain unnamed, had a real difficult time getting along because the material being generated wasn't up to Todd's standards. So Catherine made a suggestion to HBO, to bring the work in-house. She and I met somehow, and it was perfect timing for me because I was then directing *Freakazoid* and very anxious to get out of Warner Bros.

She gave me the *Spawn* comics and when I read them, I found Todd's writing in the books to be kind of sophomoric. Very young for the opportunity that he had. It's not all about ripping guys heads off. You're talking about the Devil and there's nothing juicier than that. We wanted to get to the romance story; it's a guy who lost his life, wants to get back to his wife and he's got a kid. Can't ask for better drama than that. It was continually an education process to say, "Look, *Spawn* doesn't get mad and put his fist through the wall, he takes a moment here and there." That was really important to convey to Todd.

**We specifically went for material that was going to be more adult, but that doesn't mean adult in a bottom of the barrel sense which 95% of the stuff on the Internet currently is.**

Most of the material that had been created by the other studio didn't work for my plan. I wanted to go for something much more dynamic, much more graphic. The material I had was very illustrated and not very animatable. It was even beyond manga, it was just so complicated. I had to convince Todd that I wanted to simplify, but to keep in mind the big picture of what I wanted the

art direction to look like on the piece. As with *Batman*, I was fortunate enough to generate some material to be able to convince Todd and HBO that this is the way I think the show should look. Production moved along fine, and as we were tailing out on *Spawn*, Bakshi's *Spicy* came by and that was another juicy bit.



Ralph Bakshi's *Spicy City*.  
© 1997 Home Box Office.

**AA:** HBO seems to be the ideal outlet for adult animation, and you had two pretty successful shows in *Spawn* and *Spicy*, so why is it that HBO Animation didn't survive?

**ER:** We hit a huge bump in the road when Catherine and I made a request to have a story editor come in on *Spawn* because no one was too happy with the scripts that were coming out, and what we inherited was some executive producer that came in from live-action, speaking back to our earlier conversation, and just proceeded to really dismantle everything we had built. And unfortunately, he had one HBO executive believe that he had a better way of doing things even though the show was already successful. Slowly things started to decline





**Spawn battles the forces of evil on Earth — and in himself. © 1996 Home Box Office.**

internally at HBO for our little unit, and by the end of it, I took my name off of the third season of six episodes because I refused to be associated with them and what was going on.

**AA:** What do you think of your time at HBO?

**ER:** I was absolutely under the impression that HBO Animation had arrived, and this was the place to be. We had even gotten to the point of development, and we had probably eight or ten titles that we had optioned from various sources — underground comics, independent creators, etc. and there was a nice mix of material that we were going for which was very much adult. It took me a long time to get over that because I was so absolutely excited to be working in R-rated mode and being trusted to do things the way that I wanted to do them.

I'm speaking to you from Film Roman, but if I had an opportunity to work on another HBO show, I'd do it in a minute. I think they're a fantastic group to work

with. Not only do they allow and trust you to do what you do, but they're really smart. They know good entertainment and it's so refreshing because a large part of the industry simply doesn't. That's why we have so much crap on television. You'd sit in a notes meeting with them, and actually come away with useful ideas. Typically you're looking at notes and going, "What the hell are they talking about?" It was a great experience, and inspiring if nothing else, because now I continue to work towards getting back to producing at the level that I had at HBO.

**AA:** You had a unique situation at HBO because you're working with Todd McFarlane, a creator inexperienced with animation, and Ralph Bakshi who probably knows too much about animation. As a producer, who did you find easier to work with?

**ER:** I would probably lean on the Todd side because it's a strong idea and he was absolutely supportive of pushing the envelope. He bought the art

direction, he bought the drama. He had a commitment to making something that was different. He didn't want to do a typical show in any form. Out of lack of a better term, because of his ignorance, he was open to the process and able to allow us to produce something special.

Now conversely, with Ralph, he had absolute respect and trust for the talent involved. He basically handed it over and said, "This is your project, I'll tell you what I want, you guys go do it." That was great, but on the downside, HBO was very demanding about the content so scripts that came in early on from Ralph, not known for being a great storyteller, needed changes. And Ralph is not a guy that likes to compromise. If this is the way it's written, and you point out that it's not working, hope you get him on a good day because if you don't, you're going to hear about it. I think that's to be admired that the guy has survived in the industry for so long and done his films his way. But it's less likely that you're going to be allowed to make decisions the way you need to because it's somebody who's been through it and has a specific way of thinking about how animation should be produced.

**AA:** And what would be the downside to working with Todd?

**ER:** The fact that Todd didn't understand animation, had no experience with it, was a lot of work on my part as a producer to help him understand how things are produced and how to trust without seeing, because basically he wouldn't know anything until he saw it come back on film. He would have to trust me that the

pause and slow moment there and the shot in black with just a little bit of light was going to speak volumes.

**AA:** As a comic artist he's used to drawing the final product himself and seeing it immediately on the page in front of him . . .

**ER:** Exactly, and a lot of the comic art is in the artist's head. The audience is invited in and if you get it, fine, and if you don't, you're gone. We're speaking to a much broader audience, a pretty good chunk of them who've never seen the book and who don't care about the book. They're watching a piece of late night animation and it better tell them a story. They don't care about the cool drawings in the book. They don't care about drawings at all as long as when they come away from it, they're hopefully affected in some way emotionally or just entertained in general.

**AA:** Both with *Batman* and the HBO shows, the cartoons had more of a cinematic live-action feel to them than traditional fare. Was this something you were consciously aiming for, or did this style evolve out of necessity for the type of stories that you were telling?

**ER:** *Spawn* was a natural extension or evolution from *Batman*, to take it not only cinematic but also get into a real stylistic approach. *Batman* had the traditional three-act setup, but with *Spawn*, having only six episodes in each season, it was an ongoing and everchanging storyline, with the core being this guy who has a mission which is to find his wife and see if there's any possible way he's going to be able to get back what he lost. It



Radomski introduces a 2D, 3D, live-action combination technique in *Mindless Bob*. © and ™ Film Roman.

was wonderful, the closest that I've come to really doing my own piece. I could not wait to get to the editing room and try a million different things. I can't tell you how many times I begged and pleaded with Catherine to give me more time in the edit room because I had absolute visions of how some of this stuff was going to play before I even saw it, and it just took a lot of time.

Literally, there would be times where within a twenty-two-minute episode, I'd have a thousand cuts because a lot of it was half frames, re-uses, flips and flops, effects, and the like. It was all done after the fact. Typically with animation, you send stuff over and what you send you get back. Here I was doing almost special effects in the Avid, because there was no way I could convey those thoughts in my exposure sheets. I had to do it in the edit room so it was very much a live-action mentality of having a cutting room floor except it was all digital.

**AA:** Following along these same lines, when I see some live-action films, I see a level of depth in the characterization and storytelling

that I don't see in animation. Do you think an adult animated drama has a place in animation?

**ER:** I think there's definitely a place for an animated adult action-drama. Everything doesn't have to revolve around fairy tales and fantasies. Animation has always, at least for as many years as I've seen, been relegated to marketing and merchandising. I think *Blade Runner* could exist as an animated film, or a *Blade Runner*-esque type of film. It's futuristic, they've got vehicles and they've got action characters. If you want to make your merchandising, that's great. It just hasn't been given the opportunity. No one is trusted enough; it always has to be justified with how much money the film will make merchandising-wise. There's no reason that you couldn't do an absolute all-out animated action-drama, and let it compete against any other live-action film.

**AA:** What sort of a role do you see the Internet playing in the future of animation?

**ER:** A lot of the material that's on the Internet now is place holders



as far as I'm concerned. Its derivative of television. Right now the best use for the Internet is to sort of incubate ideas. To put up a short, and get a real good sense of whether your ideas working and whether the audience likes it. Beyond that, delivering on-going content on the Internet is limited so you have to surrender yourself to that, and do something that's pretty much verbal graphics. But embrace the fact that it is a reality and it's not going away. The technology is coming, and artists creating material for the Internet should be prepared to throw away all of the limitations that television places on animation, and just get back to making good product.

The Internet will allow audiences to pick the material they like. People that know the material will pass around the word and eventually creators/producers/directors like myself will be trusted to make stuff that can exist on the Internet, and can be directly marketed to its audience. I believe that will play a big role in moving entertainment, especially animation, forward.

**AA:** How involved have you been with Film Roman's entertainment



**Doomsday is hopefully soon to be underway. © Film Roman.**

site Level13.com?

**ER:** I was responsible for the direction and attitude of the entire Level13 project. With Level13, we specifically went for material that was going to be more adult, but that doesn't mean adult in a bottom of the barrel sense which 95% of the stuff on the Internet currently is. Not just a bunch of jokes about excrement, nudity, foul language and racist jokes. A little bit of that is fine for people to exercise their point of view but it's not going to hold up over the

long term.

*Mindless Bob* was a short film that I directed for Level13. We had a relationship with Mark Mothersbaugh and he had an idea and basically told me what he wanted to do. I came up with a new technique that's a 2D, 3D, live-action combination. It's real strange, esoteric, weird, but we never had the opportunity to develop the character further into the sort of Marx Bros./Three Stooges personality we had planned. The set-up was that wherever *Mindless Bob* went, chaos followed. He literally caused the destruction of the Earth in the first piece by setting off a nuclear warhead through his ignorance.

**AA:** You've also been associated with Film Roman's Howard Stern project.

**ER:** We sold *Doomsday* about a year ago to UPN. The show is created by Tracy Torme and Howard is attached to it as an executive producer. I helped Tracy develop a bit of the animation style, and also helped put together about a 10-minute animatic that basically tells the story and introduces all the



3D animated science fiction spoof *Trippin' the Rift* and Doug Lawrence's *Hair Balls* are both in development. ™ and © Film Roman.



main characters. However, what we pitched was a 2-minute trailer that we cut movie fashion. UPN was never satisfied with the pilot script, and they pushed us in ten different directions about how they wanted the family treated. So we decided to take a break with it, and since then UPN went through some changes with the merger so who knows what's going to happen with them as a network. Either way, a new writer/producer was brought on recently to start the production up again. Tracy will still be an executive producer and Howard is still very much involved. We're hoping to get back under way writing the pilot script and developing it in the next month. There is a series that will be made.

**AA:** And what are some other projects you're currently developing at Film Roman?

**ER:** We're working with Norman Lear to develop *Till The Fat Lady Sings*, which will be taken out this year to pitch as a series. It's about folks that live in a senior citizens home and it's quite funny. There's *Trippin' The Rift*, a 3D animated science fiction spoof currently in development as a series for cable. I didn't have much to do with that other than making sure the attitude and the content was appropriate for what we were doing. Doug Lawrence's *Hairballs* is being developed for the Internet, and possibly a cable series. This show was rescued out of the batches of

optioned content that we had. It was originally part of another show that had this as an insert. A cartoon within a cartoon.

Go online and see a QuickTime clip of *Spawn* at:

<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.08/5.08pages/amidiradomski.php3>.

*Amid Amidi is the publisher and editor of Animation Blast Magazine. He is currently lobbying The Walt Disney Company to produce more Humphrey the Bear merchandising in honor of the character's fiftieth birthday.*

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

## Bonus HTML Features

Every on-line (HTML) issue of *Animation World Magazine* contains additional features not found in the download or print Acrobat version, such as QuickTime movies, links to Animation World Network sites, extended articles and special sections. Don't miss the following highlights that are showcased exclusively in this month's *Animation World Magazine* HTML version:

- **No Boundaries: An Interview With Eric Radomski**

From *Batman: The Animated Series* to *Spawn* and *Spicy*, Eric Radomski has always been testing the limits of animated TV, while being very vocal about what makes and breaks a show. Amid Amidi passes on the insight. See a QuickTime Clip at:  
<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.08/5.08pages/amidiradomski.php3>.

- **The Ottawa 2000 Scrapbook: Featuring the 3D Photographs of Gary Schwartz**

Did you miss Ottawa this year? Thinking about attending next year? View this year's selection of over 60 photos and find out why you have to make it a must stop in 2002! Includes special 3D shots by Gary Schwartz at:  
<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.08/5.08pages/ottawascrapbook.php3>

- **Belphégor, The Renewed Legend**

The legend of Belphégor has entranced France for years. Now France 2 and 3 bring the mysterious dark figure back to television, only this time, it's animated. Annick Tenenge reports. Check out the QuickTime clips at:  
<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.08/5.08pages/tenengebelphegor.php3>.

# Primetime Animation Fills Growing Niche TV

by Gerard Raiti

**G**od, the Devil, and Bob cancelled after NBC aired four episodes. *Sammy and Clerks* cancelled after two episodes. I refuse to mention *Stressed Eric*! Does anyone else see a trend out there? If so, then cross off "Television Executive" from your list of would-be professions.



*Stressed Eric stressed NBC executives!*  
© NBC, Inc. All rights reserved.

My fellow Americans, the state of primetime animation is not good. The four aforementioned shows represent the best primetime animation that ABC and NBC have produced since 1998. This is a tragedy disenchanting to fans of animation, none of whom like to see animation repeatedly sullied across the broadcast world.

Nevertheless, the last few years have seen a formidable renaissance in primetime animation heralding back to the glory days of the 1960s with *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons*. In 1989 as *The Cosby Show* was winding down, Matt Groening and FOX ushered in a brilliant, new epoch of comedy with *The Simpsons*. Currently, it is the longest running sitcom on

U.S. television and has been a defining phenomenon in the world of entertainment. Since this once poorly animated sitcom on Thursday nights has impacted the world in such a profound way as "D'Oh!" many have tried relentlessly to duplicate its success.

Consequently, there is currently more primetime animation than ever before, which is both extremely exciting and dangerous based on how the networks treat it. Between *Futurama*, *The Powerpuff Girls*, *King of the Hill*, *Daria* and *Dilbert* to name just a

few, there is a plethora of different animated styles designed to satisfy everyone. Nevertheless, not all animated series perform like *The Simpsons*, just as all live-action series do not perform like *Seinfeld*. Many shows are simply bad. But while primetime animation has failed on ABC and NBC, FOX, The WB and Cartoon Network have had repeated success. (CBS has wisely chosen not to partake in the primetime animation melee and focus instead on the highly lucrative reality TV market.) In addition, Cartoon Network astonishingly



*The Powerpuff Girls is just one of Cartoon Network's well performing shows.*  
© Cartoon Network.

posted the highest primetime ratings of any cable network during its most recent quarter. Therefore, primetime animation can be successful on non-major networks. This is the trend that can be successfully mimicked and is proven.



*Daria* continues a steady performance for MTV. © MTV Networks.

## A Discrepancy Between Majors and Minors

Regardless whether a television show is animated or not, its success is dependent upon two variables: the show's quality, and the timeslot and level of promotion the show receives. Network executives are responsible for both since they select which shows are picked up and how the network will promote them.

According to Linda Simensky, Vice President of Original Animation at Cartoon Network: "Networks are not taking into account that animated shows are different than live-action ones... [Primetime] animation needs to be developed and produced differently. The networks are not seeing that."

Brad Turrell, Executive Vice President of Network Communications at The WB, shares Simensky's views and acknowledges other causes for inconsistencies in primetime animation: "Primetime animation is very difficult to do these days. Its

always been difficult to do. *The Simpsons* is an anomaly.... It will go down as one of the greatest shows in the history of television. Some people have it even higher than that on the list. It raises the bar to a very high level. All the shows that have followed have been judged against *The Simpsons*. I think primetime animation is hindered because *The Simpsons* is so clever and well defined. Nothing can quite live up to it. That's not to say that prime-time [animation] will not work."



UPN gave *Dilbert* several tries to draw a crowd. © UPN. All rights reserved.

## Devout Cancellation

So what went wrong with primetime animation on ABC and NBC? A spokesman for NBC states that *God, the Devil, and Bob*, *Sammy* and *Stressed Eric* were cancelled because "ratings were not at a satisfactory level to contin-

ue to air them." Fair enough — that is an obvious reason to cancel any show. To demonstrate how poorly they performed: in late-March, *God, the Devil, and Bob* received the lowest ratings in NBC history for an 8:30 Tuesday night timeslot. Ouch! Nearly 50% of viewers of *The Drew Carey Show* chose not to watch *Clerks* — an abysmal percentage! Meanwhile *Sammy* had a household rating of 3 during its second episode...

However, this hat trick of fiascos could have been avoided because these shows should never have been aired in the first place...

*God, the Devil, and Bob* premiered superbly in March 2000, miraculously garnering 14.42 million viewers, sandwiched between "Must-See" powerhouses *Friends* and *Frasier*. More impressively, those ratings came despite nine NBC-affiliates refusing to air the cartoon due to religious concerns. Now, if nine network affiliates refuse to air a show before it premieres, is that not a clear indicator that the show is destined for failure and should not be broadcast? Isn't it surprising that no one at NBC realized religious humor would be deemed offensive by many Americans? Especially in light of recent events where media draws political correctness accusations at the drop of a hat. *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* received complaints from nearly every religious and ethnic group on the planet it seems. Moreover, the most wholesome of the wholesome, Disney, can't escape as lyrics were even changed before the release of *Aladdin*. On top of that however, Caryn James of *The New York Times* wrote in March 2000: "Beneath [*God, the Devil, and*



*Bobs*] supposedly risky premise, the series is just one more benign and stale family sitcom."

Now, let's take a look at *Sammy*. Family dysfunction is never fun. Whether it is live-action or animated, a father deserting a family and returning only upon a child's fame and fortune a hilarious comedy it does not make. Didn't anyone think that this wouldn't ring true to the traditionally sappy U.S. primetime audience? In their ways, both Homer Simpson and Hank Hill are sincere family men just trying to get along, be happy and capture a little part of the American dream for their families.

The NBC spokesman tried to explain: "If a show is funny or compelling, we look at it, regardless of whether it is animated or not. We picked up those particular shows because we thought they were different and had a chance." But were they really different? These shows were different because they were animated but not really "different" in television form. They are still a type of sitcom — a common form of television programming with which the traditional networks are very comfortable. However the sitcom may not be the best forum for animation. Cartoon Network's Simensky explains: "There's something about the cartoon format that does not format well as sitcoms. Cartoon characters throughout history are complex. Animation works when it's character driven.... Sitcoms are often about one-dimensional characters. So-and-so lost his keys and is locked out. How many times has that been done! Character is most important — much more than the situation.... Networks are trying to make animated sitcoms, and they're not working."

Despite poor ratings, can-



*The PJs* are now on the WB. © 2000 The WB Television Network.

celing a show after two episodes is practically unheard of in live-action. (That is not to say that it never happens as the case was last season with FOX's *P.L.A.Y.*) Generally, it takes at least a month for many viewers even to discover new shows, especially if the replacements come mid-season. In June 2000, *Clerks* creator Kevin Smith voiced his disdain with ABC's premature cancellation of his show: "What more can I say about the wonder boys in charge of ABC that I haven't already?... I know the ratings weren't great, but there were only four more [episodes] to go. It was about the only bone they could've thrown us." With Smith's cult following viewership might have increased if his fans had been given time to find the show and turn their friends onto it. *The Simpsons* was not a hit the first time it aired. It was several seasons into its now astounding run before it became a worldwide icon. This is something executives tend to forget. There was a time that insiders speculated *The Simpsons* might die due to a change in the day that it aired. It takes time to build an institution.

Not to justify ABC and NBC's respective decisions, but many of their executives were unaware of the lead-time that goes with animation. When a network picks up an animated show, the network orders six to thirteen episodes roughly six months prior to the premiere of the show. This is a partial cause for the cancellation of primetime animation because if an element in the cartoon is deemed unacceptable, a network of ABC or NBC's caliber cannot afford to lose six months of ratings on the gambit that an alteration will work. The NBC spokesman confirms that, "[Lead-time] presents problems. In a live-action show, if you see that certain scenes are not working, you can re-shoot if you have to. That is just something that can't be done with animation."

### A Growing Niche

FOX was a young, punk network when they gambled on *The Simpsons* and it worked. Today the pattern is repeating itself. Due to the proliferation of channels, television is generally becoming increasingly specialized.

The non-major networks are succeeding because animation is helping to define the specific niche audience they are trying to capture and they can afford to take the risks. Imagine medias evolution from Hunter-Gatherers to Division of Labor: each network is now assigned a specific group-targeted genre — the premise on which cable television was founded. NBC, for example, targets, "Adults 18-49. NBC has a somewhat more upscale profile than other networks. We're looking for shows about young urbans like *Will and Grace* or *Friends*, or more sophisticated comedies like *Frasier*," whereas The WB targets 12-34 year olds. According to Turrell, "85% of our revenue is derived from that... We're more specifically targeted."

This specialization of television and animation is paying off for Cartoon Network. Simensky explains that Cartoon Network's ratings proliferate during the summer since children are not at school. Moreover, this most recent summer proved interesting as adults comprised a third of Cartoon Network's primetime ratings. Simensky attributes this to Cartoon Network's variety and superior quality of original entertainment. "Everything we do here is about the couple new shows [we add] each year. So we go above and beyond the call of duty... Adults tune in [over the summer] when repeats are on networks. They get an evening of original shows mixed in with classics like *Bugs Bunny* and *Tom and Jerry*, and early signs show that those viewers are staying."

The primetime animation that is surviving on network television is not performing stupendously, i.e., ranking in the top ten;

however, performance is a relative thing. For example, *The PJs* lost its home at FOX after last season, but The WB wisely gambled and picked it up. "We thought it was funny," said Turrell. "We thought it was innovative [and] had a lot of life left in it. It had only been on the air for a season and a half. Its now our highest rated show on Sunday." However, *The PJs'* ratings on The WB are actually lower than its ratings last season on FOX. Part of the reason for this dip, could be the fact that a lot of fans are still trying to find the show and are unaware that it has started again on The WB. "Its successful from [The WBs] point of view. Thats how we have to look at it." Hopefully, as the network keeps the show on, word of mouth will spread and it will build a loyal following. (Another point that is worth re-pointing out here is that while this show is set in the projects, the show still focuses on very real human relationships and the protagonist, Thurgood, while at times bumbling, has a heart of gold. Underneath the neighborhood drug addict, this is a sweet

show — unlike *Sammy*. And unlike *Bob, God and the Devil*, these characters are shown attending church and holding Bible study.)

### Feeling a Little Blue?

The newest kid on the block is The WB's *Baby Blues*, based on the comic strip from Rick Kirkman and Jerry Scott, and developed and executive produced by Jeff Martin (*The Simpsons*) and Pete Ocko (*Weird Science*, *Dinosaurs*). In September, The WB announced its pickup of a second season of *Baby Blues*. So far it has been one of the highest rated comedies in the history of The WB. Part of *Baby Blues'* success is attributable to The WB's acquisition of *Sabrina: The Teenage Witch* from ABC. Together, they are establishing The WB as a contender on Friday nights. Turrell explains that *Baby Blues* was actually picked up more than a year before it premiered, but "[The WB] didn't have a good time slot for it. We needed shows that were compatible, but we didn't have anything on the network that fitted. We have a night with



Cartoon Network's anticipated new hit, *Sheep in the Big City*. © Cartoon Network.





Coming soon to the WB, Film Roman's animated comedy, *The Oblongs*. © 2000 The WB Television Network.

lots of drama; then an Urban Comedy night; and then some more drama.... [*Baby Blues*] has done well warming up for the teenage-girl market which *Sabrina* has brought us. Maybe around midseason we'll move it after *Sabrina*."

For the time being, ABC, NBC and CBS are staying away from animation. It took ABC eight years from the failure of *Capitol Critters* to venture with *Clerks*, and prior to *Sammy*, primetime animation had not been made exclusively for NBC since 1964's *Mr. Magoo*. Fox will be airing *Gary and Mike* and The WB has picked up Film Roman's much anticipated, politically incorrect *Oblongs*. Cartoon Network is anticipating a hit from the forthcoming *Sheep in the Big City* by Mo Willems, and have picked up UPN's cancelled *Home Movies*, which will be resur-

rected in the spring of 2001. It would be nice if someone re-picked up *Mission Hill*. Despite winning many awards, including Italy's Cartoons on the Bay, the show has still fallen by the wayside.

The WB's Turrell says, "We like the fact that the other networks shot their shows, so the landscape is not filled with a lot of primetime animation. *The Simpsons* and one or two [animated] shows on The WB can work [successfully]." However, the sum total of this equation is an abundance of primetime animation — just in different locations and at a softer volume. As the smaller networks try to build a strong specific audience they are using animated shows in the mix to attract and grow their demographic. Luckily for the shows, these networks can also keep them around for more than a few episodes to try to build

a loyal following. Has the year really been so much of a disaster? No, it's been more of a learning experience — one that if it had been intelligently studied months ago would not have even been necessary. The fad of primetime animation is over. It has come back to an intelligent center, a much better place for animation to prove itself as a viable primetime form of entertainment.

*Gerard Raiti, a resident of Baltimore, has reported on animation, Broadway musicals and comic books for various publications including AnotherUniverse.com and Newsweek.*

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



# The Good, The Bad, The BUTT-UGLY Martians

by Paul YOUNGHUSBAND



2-T, B-Bop and Do-Wah do the Butt-Ugly Martian salute. © Mike Young Productions.

**T**he year is 2053. I'm grey and old (or possibly bald...but definitely old) and enjoying my retirement. But my afternoons spent reminiscing of the "olden days" when 3D animation was all done by people (and not killer robots) are about to be interrupted. That's right — the Martians are coming!

The Evil Emperor Bog has decided to invade earth, and he has sent teenage aliens B. Bop-A-Luna, 2-T Fru-T, Doo-Wah-Diddy and their robot canine, Dog, to take over our humble little planet. Unfortunately, there's a slight problem. The youthful Martians have no real intentions of enslaving the human race — they have a far stronger desire to experience Earth's pop culture...things like root beer floats and Britney Spears CDs. And when they discover that Earth is even better than they thought, they decide to stay and protect our planet from the evil scum of the universe.

As you've probably guessed by now this isn't a premonition of the future — it's a description of Just Entertainment, Mike Young Productions and DCDC Studios latest action/adventure/comedy 3D animated television show *Butt-Ugly Martians*. The first 26 episode series is a U.K./U.S. co-production, and it will air in the U.K. on CITV in January 2001. But as I discovered, the Butt-Ugly Martians aren't just invading our television screens (oh yeah, and our planet), but they're also taking over the World Wide Web too.

## A New Twist

Most TV shows have promotional Websites — they can play an integral role in attracting viewers and providing information about the show — but the producers of *Butt-Ugly Martians* took a different approach. "From the beginning of the creative process, we developed the television series with a strong Internet component

in mind," says Wilf Shorrocks, CEO and founder of Just Group. "Kids are far too savvy today to be satisfied with a traditional promotional Website. It's easy to get their attention but producers must push the boundaries and explore new territory to ensure that we keep their attention — and that's exactly what we promise to do with *Butt-Ugly Martians*, both literally and figuratively speaking!"

So the producers of *Butt-Ugly Martians* developed their Website side-by-side with the television show. This means that the online presence is not just a promotion of the TV show, it's an extension of it. And as Bill Schultz, producer of *Butt-Ugly Martians* explains: "Today's kids' familiarity, if not fascination, with the Web makes the reference points in the show that much more relatable. In addition, the series is very high-tech in look and feel, with numerous space-age characters, gadgets and vehicles — all very consistent with the high-tech aspect of the Internet."

But how did the creators create a Web presence that raises the bar and truly is an extension of the TV show? We're constantly being told that everything starts with the story, and in this case, that couldn't be truer. "We write each show to integrate some kind of unique Web-related storyline into each episode," states Bill Schultz. "And we're constantly traveling between outer space and cyber space in our minds in order to provide maximum entertainment value to both the viewing audience and the Web visitor," adds Wilf Shorrocks. This means that Web visitors will have a reason to watch the TV show, and TV viewers will have a reason to visit the Website. It isn't TV show and

Website integration, but more a mutually beneficial coexistence — they work together in a fun and entertaining way.

### Co-Habitation In Action

Take the television show, for example. When the Butt-Ugly Martians decide to stay on Earth they turn Zapz, an abandoned Laser tag emporium, into their home base on Earth. And in cyberspace, you'll find that Zapz also represents the Web environment for the *Butt-Ugly Martians* Website. Web surfers can play a variety of arcade games similar to those on the TV show and in doing so can score "Martian points."

*Butt-Ugly Martians'* very own technical officer, T-2 Fru-T acts as Webmaster for the site, and also as a tour guide. T-2 gives commentary and advice as Web browsers plough through the site unscrambling words and definitions in the Gibberish Decoding System, playing cool games and solving puzzles.

When the Butt-Ugly Martians team stay on Earth they befriend three human teenagers — Mike, Angela and Cedric. In their adventures they defend their human friends from more evil invaders, not eliminate them as promised to Bog. So they end up making phony videotapes of themselves destroying Earth and taking human children as prisoners, which they send back to Emperor Bog as progress reports. On the Website, one of the teens, Cedric, hosts a section of the site



Protectors of Earth: the Butt-Ugly Martians!  
© Mike Young Productions.

where visitors can trade in their Martian points for movies, images, audio, wallpaper, screensavers and merchandise.

And as if that isn't an exciting enough crusade, the Butt-Ugly Martians also have to steer clear of Stoa Muldoon, a zealot who hunts aliens and has his own cult cable show, *Stoa Muldoon, Alien Hunter*, where each week he investigates sightings of suspicious extraterrestrials. Stoa is a crazy adventure-driven character. This show within the show also has its own real Website to accompany it. Web surfers can learn more about Stoa's mission, access secret files about the Butt-Ugly Martians and other aliens, read transcripts of online chats with Stoa and see previews of his upcoming TV shows.

The *Butt-Ugly Martians* Web presence is innovative, cre-

ative and entertaining. Later in the year, original Webisodes of *Butt-Ugly Martians* will be a regular feature on the site, and if the TV show is as superb as it looks and sounds, they should be a huge hit. The 3D animated series features some top voice talent: Emmy Award-winning Rob Paulsen (*The Mask*), TV star Charlie Schlatter (*Diagnosis Murder*) and Jess Harnell (*Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*) play the aliens, with *Rugrats'* Kath Soucie, Disney Channel on-air host Ogie Banks and Emmy-Award winner Robert Stack (*The Untouchables*, *Unsolved Mysteries*) portraying the earthling youngsters.

Wilf Shorrock admits that, "This might all seem alien at first, but I suggest everyone get their butts in gear *now* before it really gets ugly this fall!"

Check out Butt-Ugly Martians' Website at [www.butt-uglymartians.com](http://www.butt-uglymartians.com) and Stoa Muldoon's site at [www.stoatuldoon.com](http://www.stoatuldoon.com). Butt-Ugly Martians will air on CITV in the UK in January 2001.

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# Boom and Doom

by Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman



Mike Judge's *King of the Hill*, one of Fox's sustained successes. <sup>TM</sup> & © 1997 20th Century Fox Film Corp.: All rights reserved.

**T**his past summer we bore witness to one of the great turning points in the history of television entertainment. What a concept! Take nearly a dozen distinct entities, place them in a cutthroat environment in competition with one another, and watch as one by one they disappear. Some are ejected almost immediately, others after slow deliberation. The tension builds as we wait to see who remains, and who is vetoed into obscurity. Finally, the audience is asked to become the final arbiter, and the winner receives riches, recognition and licensing opportunities for...oh, at least a year or so before the next *Celebrity-Of-The-Nanosecond* comes along. Whats that you say? *Survivor*? No, no, not at all; the above is a near-perfect description of the past year in primetime animation and next to it island beetle larvae taste like *escargots à la chablisienne*.

Was it only July of 1999 when I did a column for this magazine lauding the advent of prime-

time animation? Was it so long ago when every network press kit, animation magazine and newspaper was touting the Primetime Toon Boom? Pick up your local *TV Guide* or hit your remote channel menu today and you will find nary a sign of this plethora in pen-and-ink. In the beginning there was *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*, and so it is again. Armageddon has befallen the Great Toon Boom. Immediately only *Futurama* has emerged alive (and with some promotion) as from a blasted shelter, a dazed survivor blinking painfully in the cathode-ray light (I'll believe *The PJs* are back when I actually see it – What? It *is* back? Where was *that* promoted?). In every direction, failed series litter the ruined landscape, never to be seen again. There was a time when the mere mention of *Capitol Critters* or *Fish Police* was good for a sarcastic howl among animation insiders; well, most of the prime-time animated series that pre-



Fox's undisputed leader in primetime animated series, *The Simpsons*. <sup>TM</sup> & © 1997 20th Century Fox Film Corp.: All rights reserved.

miered during the past year strove mightily — and *failed* — to match the average market share of those two bellyflops. Several of them could have finished fourth or fifth in the Saturday morning ratings, and one — poor *Mission Hill* — would have struggled to beat out *Lady Lovelylocks* and *the Pixietails*, were that wretched show still in existence. Clearly, no one is laughing now.

**These unfortunate shows will be recalled by most network execs in the way that Chernobyl is remembered by Greenpeace.**

## How Did This Happen?

There is nothing sadder than a post-mortem, yet in this case the situation begs one. How could so many hopeful projects meet such utter destruction in so short a time? Many analyses have been offered already, all worth considering. In a *Los Angeles Times* article dated April 22, several insiders offered insights into the slaughterhouse that was once a boom. An unnamed NBC exec stated that, "I really don't get the feeling that viewers wanted to see cartoons on network television." Mike Lazzo, Cartoon Network's senior VP of programming, mused that hits such as *The Simpsons* tended to spawn imitators quickly, many of which were destined to "fall by the wayside" since "...it's not good to mindlessly rush into anything." Warner Bros. Television



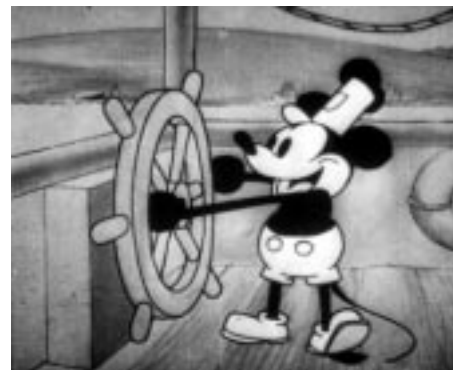
president Peter Roth offered a similar insight: "Whenever there is a success, everyone wants to clone it...Everyone thinks there is a magic formula. But it's never about the form, it's about the content."

Tom Turpin, CEO at Will Vinton Studios, opined that the very novelty of animation had worn off due to stylistic similarities between the various series. AP Television writer Frazier Moore, in a nationally syndicated article, seemed to simply consider the entire toon bust as the death of a fad, saying, "...primetime's cartoon craze was its own undoing, as crazes usually are. On TV, there's never enough of anything new and different until it's all old and all the same." In short, quite a few qualified network insiders and media analysts had their say on the meltdown of primetime toons, and these unfortunate shows (several of which died after less than three episodes) will be recalled by most network execs in the way that Chernobyl is remembered by Greenpeace. All of the viewpoints

given above are valid, but it seems that something important was left out of these perceptive and cogent analyses: the fact that these series were produced for primetime TV. Is that important? More than anyone might realize.

### Taking Risks...With Experience

In the days of Termite Terrace and Hyperion Ave., cartoons were produced in a totally different context. At Warners, for example, the short films that are so beloved today were produced under a system that allowed a great deal of creative freedom. While it was true that certain structural parameters in the form of animation units had to be utilized in order to ensure organization and production, Leon Schlesinger generally stayed out of the directors' way and let the animators be. As a result, the Warner cartoons under his reign tended to reflect the highly personal styles of those directors and their units. Chuck Jones was free to exercise whatever artistic pretension caught his



Walt Disney's classic Mickey Mouse.  
© Disney. All rights reserved.

fancy, or to abandon them all in the name of character development. Bob Clampett was allowed to slather rapid-fire pacing, metamorphic distortion and bombastic gags over any plot he wished. Friz Freleng tinkered with the intricacies of musical timing, while Frank Tashlin developed a cinematic touch.

Walt Disney spent much of his career taking risks. Whether it was making a synchronized sound cartoon, absorbing the extra cost of color, gambling on a feature-length film, or abandoning a successful formula in order to produce an unprecedented merger of animation and classical music, Walt's vision always came first. Disney wagered that if the story and animation were uniformly excellent, the public would always prove him right. History emphatically records who won that wager. Then there is the case of Tex Avery, whose reality-defying shorts earned nothing but enmity from MGM producer Fred Quimby. This mattered little to Tex, who continued to perfect his high-speed assaults on logic and narrative. In countless interviews, histories and biographies one unifying theme can be noted about this diverse group of artists: they made their cartoons in order to please themselves. Whether they were given the freedom to do so or took risks



Walt Disney setting precedents back in 1938 with the production of *Bambi*, the first animated film for which he brought in live animals for the animators to study.  
© Disney. All rights reserved.



Bill Hanna and Joseph Barbera's original creation, *Scooby-Doo*, is still drawing new audiences on Cartoon Network. © Cartoon Network. All rights reserved.

in the name of their art, each man mentioned above was his own most reliable test audience...and harshest critic.

**Experience is a bigger factor than the ability to be hip, cool, self-referential or cognizant of the latest trends and buzzwords.**

#### **When Fools Rush In**

The world of primetime TV, however, is another story. In this realm of test audiences, market share, ratings, networks that sell eyeballs to sponsors and programming execs who don't understand animation in the least, a cartoon series has the same chance to flourish as a dead geranium planted in battery acid and watered with iodine. When one adds the effects of TV station censorship, creative control exercised by spon-

sors and advertisers, pressure by networks to come up with immediate hits, and demands for a show with licensing and merchandising potential it becomes almost impossible for anyone who isn't a seasoned veteran to succeed. In far too many cases, however, an idea or concept was sold by people whose experience consisted of some storyboard work, a couple of episodes in a director's chair and a nose for the latest fad. In some of the worst cases, ideas were pitched by self-promoters who had virtually no experience in the field, impresarios who would swear that Scooby Doo was hand-drawn by Walt Disney.

If that sounds too far-fetched, I refer my readers to the latest issue of *TOON Magazine*. There you will find a biting editorial written by editor-in-chief Michael Swanigan, an animation professional who actually witnessed one of these misbegotten projects firsthand. Swanigan applies Willy Wonka's admonition to a misbehaving child ("Oh, I wouldn't do that. I really wouldn't...Stop, don't.") to studios that blithely finance animated series

without any comprehension of what they are getting into. When stand-up comics, sitcom writers, would-be film auteurs and semi-experienced trend-riders sign contracts to produce animated projects for primetime the result is an embarrassment for all concerned. Mike Judge was correct when he told the *Times*: "The ones I've seen lack a heart and soul. They look like they've been made by a committee."

**When stand-up comics, sitcom writers, would-be film auteurs and semi-experienced trend-riders sign contracts to produce animated projects for primetime the result is an embarrassment...**

Experience is a bigger factor than the ability to be hip, cool, self-referential or cognizant of the latest trends and buzzwords. Mike Judge, quoted above, actually does have a successful primetime animated series. However, he also spent years as an independent before creating *Beavis and Butthead*, a learning experience that was not without travails and controversy. Only after gaining that experience did Judge give us *King of the Hill*. Consider the case of *The Flintstones*, TV's first animated primetime hit: Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera first broke into the

business in the 1930s, paid innumerable dues before teaming up at MGM and winning seven Oscars before they ever pitched an idea to a network. By the time they did, their cumulative experience in the animation business totaled sixty years, and they already had one certifiable prime-time success to their credit with *Huckleberry Hound*.

## **If one fact is evident concerning the Crash of 2000, it's that the song remains the same since Culhane sat down with Paramount.**

### **Stop, Look and Listen**

The Primetime Crash of 2000 was due to many factors, but one of the most important may have been overweening eagerness on the part of the networks and big studios. While they cannot be blamed for wishing to ride a hot trend, it seems that in most cases they did so while seemingly lacking an insiders view of the animation industry. Therefore, questionable choices were made about which series to sink their dough into. One-shot wonders can and do happen, but most good series are carefully developed and have answers for the most important questions of all before they make the grade. Net execs should have asked: Is this a unique vision and a labor of love by the creator(s), or a hit-it-big hopeful? Did the creator(s) study animation and its history, work

extensively in the field and understand what makes an animated show successful, or are they simply people who believe they can write funny stuff? Did the creator(s) believe that animation has a unique style and sense of timing that has evolved over decades, or do they believe that all they need to do is draw funny-looking characters and give them a live-action script? These are good questions for the networks to ponder come the next "boom."



**Television's first primetime animation success, Hanna-Barbera's *The Flintstones*. © Cartoon Network. All rights reserved.**

One of my favorite animation anecdotes concerns the legendary animator Shamus Culhane. After Culhane was hired by Paramount in 1965 to rejuvenate their failing cartoon studio, he met with the sales department and presented some of his newest ideas. The Paramount execs shoved them aside and ordered Culhane to create the next Bugs Bunny. Culhane, who had been in the business all his life, attempted to explain that such a phenome-

non did not simply happen on demand. The executives scoffed, writing him off as lazy and unimaginative. If one fact is evident concerning the Crash of 2000, it's that the song remains the same since Culhane sat down with Paramount. The difference is, Culhane knew better due to his vast experience in the business. Today, dozens of power-lunch, media-wise hipsters would have besieged Paramount with some stand-up, postmodern version of Bugs who riffs like a sexually depraved Tarentino hood. Paramount would have bought the whole idea and then watched in horror as the show was switched off by one local station after another before choking after three episodes. *In pace requiescat*, say the jittery sponsors, and better luck to us next time.

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

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# Tom Snyder Productions Goes Scriptless

by Sharon Schatz

**"B**y the end of this scene you guys need to be kissing in an elevator," Tom Snyder instructs his voice-over actors, "but that's all you need to do." How they'll wind up smooching to Muzak is anyone's guess. Snyder, founder and creative director of Tom Snyder Productions (TSP), uses this improvisational "writing" method to create witty, offbeat and downright hilarious animated comedies. It was during the production of his quirky hit series *Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist* that Snyder discovered that by "retroscripting," creating an outline and relying on the casts ad-libbing abilities, he'd hit upon something incredible.



Jonathan Katz with Laura, the intimidating secretary, and slacker son Ben. *Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist*. © Tom Snyder Productions.

## Getting Started

In 1980, Snyder, a former science and social studies teacher, founded TSP, which began as an educational software firm. Most of Snyder's products targeted the kids' market and involved the use of animation. As the Boston-based company flourished, Snyder wanted to expand his work outside the education arena.

In 1992, on a whim, Snyder asked one of his artists, Annette LeBlanc Cate, to help him create a five-minute animated short. Little did he know, this rough demo called *Shrink Rap* would evolve into the highly acclaimed *Dr. Katz* series. "I said, 'Hey Annette, you want to come in this weekend? I want to record a crazy scenario and have you animate it,'" Snyder recalls, "So, we did a show about a shrink and a kid. I changed my voice digitally so I could sound like a couple of different people. I sent it off to my friend in L.A. He sent it off to another guy and then to a production company who sent it to Comedy Central. I think six months from then we had an Emmy!"

## Dr. Katz in Session

The road to *Dr. Katz* was a learning experience for Snyder. When Comedy Central first responded after viewing Snyder's demo, their industry lingo threw him for a loop. "They said, 'What you really need is *talent*.' I was so hurt!" Snyder laughs. When he learned that the network meant that he needed professional actors, Snyder recruited veteran comic Jonathan Katz, and comedians Jon Benjamin and Laura Silverman. Some of the show's famous guest stars include Whoopi Goldberg, Steven Wright and Janeane Garofalo, among others. *Dr. Katz* soon had a cult following and won several prestigious awards.

## A Different Kind of Writing

While making *Dr. Katz*, Snyder developed his trademark "retroscripting" technique, which entails writing a story outline for each episode, but relying on improv to fill in the gaps. Snyder quickly realized the value of going scriptless: "With that freedom we could achieve a really live and natural conversational comedy that you don't get when you've got a script pumping in the background." Melissa Galsky, an associate producer for *Dr. Katz* remembers, "We were using standup comics and people who improvised a lot. There was just so much funny stuff, we figured, 'Why write a script?'" Improv is used to some degree in just about all of Snyder's properties. For a single episode, actors might spend up to four hours in the studio improvising scenes.



At the heart of *Squigglevision* is *Science Court*, a courtroom drama illustrating scientific principles. © Tom Snyder Productions.

Sometimes a script is necessary, depending on the network's requirements and the nature of the show. *Dr. Katz*, which ran for six seasons ('95-'99), was created

almost entirely from outlines and actor improv, as was *The Dick & Paula Celebrity Special* which ran on F/X in 1999. *Dick & Paula* was an animated series about a husband and wife talk show team who interview deceased and fictionalized celebrities. TSP produced a childrens series about science called *Squigglevision* (formerly *Science Court*) for ABC which just completed its three-year run in September. Galsky, who was the shows associate producer, compares it to the other TSP properties: "*Squigglevision* stuck to the script the most because we had the educational aspect. When you're talking about science, there isn't much improv you can do without confusing children!"



Brendon Small, the third grader with an obsession for movie making.  
© Tom Snyder Productions.

## Current Projects

TSP currently has two TV series in production. The first is *Home Movies*, which appeared briefly on UPN in 1999. The series has since been picked up by Cartoon Network and is slated to air in April. *Home Movies* features an awkward third-grader named

Brendon Small (played by actor/comedian Brendon Small) who deals with his problems through the lens of his video camera. Paula Poundstone plays Brendon's single mother. UPN canceled the show because it wasn't bringing in enough male viewers. Snyder claims that when the network initially picked up the show, they were trying to attract female viewers. He comments, "UPN was changing before our very eyes into a pro wrestling, young male audience."



The domestic world of Brendon, Paula and baby Josie in *Home Movies*.  
© Tom Snyder Productions.

Cartoon Network bought the original five episodes and ordered eight more to complete the season. Recently, the network ordered an additional season of 13 episodes. According to Linda Simensky, Cartoon Networks VP of Original Animation, "We had a bunch of episodes to screen for Mike [Lazzo, Senior VP of Cartoon Networks Programming] and by only the second episode, he yelled, 'Buy it!'"

The biggest change in the new episodes is that they are going to be scripted. However, the improvisational element will still be preserved. Galsky, one of the shows producers explains the new regimen, "What we do now is we go in and we [record] the script. Once we have that take, we'll go in and improvise a little bit. Then, the audio editors paste together

the best of both worlds."

Also in production is *Hey Monie*, the first network animated series about an African-American woman, which will air on the Oxygen network. This retrospectively-edited show was originally a five-minute short on Oxygen's *X-Chromosome* series. *Hey Monie* was picked up to become part of a new Oxygen show. The new episodes will be 11 minutes in length. So far, the network has ordered ten 11-minute episodes.

## The Story of Squigglevision

TSP is also known for *Squigglevision* animation. Snyder created the process himself. "I'm not an artist," he says, "but I used to be a programmer. I'd stay up late at night drawing little stick figures and seeing what I could have a computer do to speed up the insanely long production time in animation. One night, I just drew this little figure... I kept on drawing the same figure on top of itself and then had the computer memorize each of these [drawings] and then flip through them. What it created was a very human-like energy that made the character pop out because it was continually covering and uncovering bits of the background."



More than just good friends, Melissa and Jason comprise Brendon's cast and crew. *Home Movies*. © Tom Snyder Productions.

In addition to creating a unique look, *Squigglevision* saves time and money. Snyder explains,

"[It's] a nice cheat because it implies a lot of motion that's actually not there. Therefore, there are fewer redraws and fewer pixel changes than you have in a lot of conventional animation." Snyder's company has perfected the style over the years. He comments, "The newer looks that we have that still use a squiggling theme are a lot easier to watch. It's become a lot more painterly and more interesting." The company has also created several non-Squigglevision TV pilots and Web toons.

### Looking Ahead

Snyder is thrilled to have expanded his work into the online



One of Squigglevision's attorneys, Doug Savage, lounging by the pool with movie star J.C. Cramwood.  
© Tom Snyder Productions.

arena. He recently won an award at the First World Internet Animation Competition, for *World Internet News*, a two-minute parody of the BBC News. The company has already created several shorts and series for Shockwave.com and Cartoon-

Network.com. Snyder plans to retain the company's television focus, but will continue to dabble in the Web world. With a unique approach, a flair for quirkiness, and a knack for finding actors who can wing it, TSP is sure to ad-lib their way into continued success.

*Sharon Schatz is a writer/editor at a major kids' television network Web site. She is also a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.*

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# The Purpose of That X-Chromosome

by Heather Kenyon



Hey Monie introduces the first network animated series based on an African-American woman and her friends. © Oxygen Media. All rights reserved.

In 1998 when Geraldine Laybourne, the creative spark behind children's powerhouse Nickelodeon, decided to start her own cable network dedicated to the needs and views of women, the buzz was incredible. A true media company for the new century, Oxygen Media began with a collection of Websites focusing on issues ranging from parenting and health to money and home repairs as they pertain to women. The Oxygen cable network launched on February 2, 2000 (Get it? 02/02/00) through a U.S. cable operator, MediaOne, to over 1 million subscribers, and offers a variety of diverse programming, all focused toward meeting women's unique needs and presenting their point of view. Backed by a promotional partnership with America Online, and partnered with Marcy

Carsey, Tom Werner, Caryn Mandabach and Oprah Winfrey, Oxygen quickly proved that it was anything but kids stuff, and everyone in the industry kept an ear out for the latest developments.

## New Voices

Kit Laybourne, Oxygen's Head of Animation and Special Projects, in keeping with the company's overall vision, vowed to create animated programming predominately by women, for women. *Our Stories* hit the Website in late June 1999 with the tag line, "Your Stories + Our Technology" and brought short minuets of real women telling stories and experiences recreated using different mixed media. They are short, funny, insightful, brilliant little bits. They are also addicting. (I dare you to go to [oxygen.com](http://oxygen.com)

today and watch just one.) In early June the cable channels first primetime animated series for women and about women, *X-Chromosome* had been announced and a few early pilots went into production. Based on the quality of *Our Stories*, anticipation was running high. "Our goal is to create the first animated television series for women, exploring issues from a female point of view. We also wanted to build an outlet specifically for female animators, whose distinctive voices will help us develop a unique Oxygen animation style and outlook," said Geraldine Laybourne at the announcement.

Now this sounds like one of those promises that never comes true. However, in this lucky case, *X-Chromosome* has come true, and has flourished under Kit Laybourne and executive producer Machi Tantillo, who came to the upstart company after six years at MTV Networks. She left as the Director of MTV Animation, co-supervising the production of MTV's animated series, features, specials and shorts. *X-Chromosome* combines a mix of 3 to 7 minute segments into a variety type show. "It was conceived as a place to incubate new ideas and new talent," explains Kit Laybourne. "We think it is important because animation has been an area of programming that has allowed a number of different cable companies to break out — things like *Beavis and Butthead*, Nickelodeon with all the Nick Toons and Comedy Central with *South Park* has proven this."

Produced in a number of different styles the stories all have one thread in common — they are sincere stories that come straight from the heart. "The biggest part

of it is, when we pick a pitch we believe it is expressing what Oxygen wants to express to women through animation," explains Tantillo. "Is this character relatable? Is this what the creator is looking to do and does it reflect Oxygen's vision? What comes first in our mind is the story, the voice and the point of view of the lead character. The style of the animation? We just want to make sure it is doing a service to the story."

In the same vein as *Our Stories*, *X-Chromosome* segments feel as though they have been done by one woman in her living room, using a style that she has just kind of "made up." Now that isn't saying that the shows look unprofessional, rather they just aren't what one would expect from a slick media company that is on a schedule. These aren't your typical cartoons and they aren't your usual subject matter. Before sitting down to *X-Chromosome* be prepared to laugh, cringe, be embarrassed and cry. "The Oxygen team is small and so is the show's creative team, usually just a writer and director, so it is very intimate and direct. We aren't weaving through notes from 20 million different filters," says Tantillo. The results are shows that are lively, fresh and pertinent to today's viewing audience. Tantillo laughs, "I've watched shows with people and they are actually talking to the television. They jump up and yell, 'What are you doing that for?' which is a really good sign!"

### New Style

But *X-Chromosome* does more than give a voice to the female experience. It is subtly introducing an array of animation styles to the U.S. viewing audience. Let's look at the production



**A fresh form of portraiture, the *Drawn from Life* series communicates that the ordinary can be extraordinary. © Oxygen Media. All rights reserved.**

process for just a few of the segments. *The Ruth Truth* started as an animated on-line series and made its TV debut on *X-Chromosome* on Saturday, July 15, 2000. The show chronicles the adventures of Ruth Decker, an actress/comedian who lands a job working undercover for a detective agency that specializes in busting vendors who traffic in counterfeit designer goods, and is based

on the life of the writer and lead actress Sheila Head. The series won Shockwave.com's World Internet Animation Competitions awards for Grand Prize, best in all categories and the best "Mixed-Media" produced for the Web. The show uses Jen Taylor and Randy Lowenstein's new technique to morph one still image into another to tell the story. The duo developed a system that combines pho-



***Bitchy Bits*, another successful series featured on Oxygen based on the award-winning comic-book series *Naughty Bits* by cartoonist Roberta Gregory. © Oxygen Media. All rights reserved.**





**Avenue Amy, like the character, is intelligent, self-aware, analytical and a big hit on *X-Chromosome*. © Oxygen Media. All rights reserved.**

tos and vectors to create a new form of animation in which the outlines of photo-painted elements are morphed into each other. This technique is now a patent pending system called Liquid Lines.

*Avenue Amy* is produced by Curious Pictures and directed by Curious Pictures' Joan Raspo and written by Amy Sohn, based off of her New York Press column. The satirical show brings to life the daily trials and tribulations of a woman's life in the Big Apple in a unique way. It sets brightly colored, rotoscoped actors against live-action photo collage backgrounds. You have to see it to believe it. Of course another star of *X-Chromosome* is *Hey Monie*, which uses Tom Snyder Productions unique Squigglevision technique and "retroscripting" process. (It is also the first network animated series based on an African-American woman and her friends.) *Closet Case*, a pilot by Theresa Duncan, was done in a water color technique, enhanced by After Effects, while another pilot *Female Trouble*, by Amy Sohn and John Raspo of Curious Pictures,

combined 2D animation with live-action and After Effects-enhanced visual effects.

Bringing all these unique styles to *X-Chromosome* in a variety type format is teaching viewers that animation doesn't have to just look like "cartoons." Tantillo agrees, "What we have heard from our focus groups and our own guts is, 'Use styles that are innovative and present styles that are not the same old thing. We are in the midst of a digital revolution and while I am a big fan of traditional animation and I love pencils and papers, it doesn't ever hurt to employ what is out there. All those people that have been innovating new techniques and styles and mixed up mediums can only make it more interesting and people are looking for new styles and innovations.'" While the show's bumpers and IDs have been carefully created to showcase the individual segments and create a cohesive whole, the fact that the segments are so different is exciting, leaving the viewer wondering what is about to come next. "People like to choose. They like to have the option. It is a psychological thing -

maybe I'm making this up - but it seems to ring true that it is nice to watch a show and say, 'I liked that one. This one didn't work for this reason. I loved this one.' It is like a buffet and I think people like that," says Tantillo. With shows sometimes coming in from outside production companies directly to the editing bay creating the flow of each episode is a challenge that also keeps the show fresh and varied.

## New Season

Some of *X-Chromosome*'s "stars" have been split out and will appear as longer segments in the upcoming season. "We have a bunch of contenders! We backed some wonderful talent, much of it very experienced talent, women who have been working a long time and just waiting for an opportunity to be allowed to do what is really close to their heart and by offering them a platform to do that, and getting out of their way, we've been able to benefit from their wonderful creativity," enthuses Kit. However that doesn't mean that they are no longer looking for great ideas.

"We have, what we hope is an innovative way of shaking out the trees. We call it the RFP, the request for proposal, and that is a document that introduces the animation community and beyond to Oxygen and *X-Chromosome*. It establishes what we are, and then breaks down our deal picks right out front. We have three deal offers and everyone in the whole wide world gets the same three deal picks. It also explains what we are looking for. We don't like to narrow it down too much, but we try to describe the type of content we are looking for," explains Tantillo.

Kit Laybourne continues,

"We are just beginning to figure out what new kinds of programming have the most potential. I think we have done some cool things, but I also think we can go a lot further. And that's what keeps us all jumping out of bed to come in every day to see where we can go further. It is energizing to have this freedom. You realize what a rare opportunity it is to be in a place where you can innovate and where innovation is normative. If it isn't innovative people here would look down on you!"

Going into the New Year, Laybourne explains how *X-Chromosome*, and in turn animation at Oxygen, will be changing: "We will be growing it in three ways. We will be taking some of the work we did before and putting a little more Miracle Grow on it. And then we have some new seedlings that we don't want to announce yet because we are still piloting. But they are clearly some new voices, or new plants, that we will start watering and giving sunshine to. Another thing that we are interested in doing, that we didn't do too much of the first time around, is to cull the world around us for interesting things that would be appropriate for *X-Chromosome*. One of the things that's happened in the year and a half since we started this process is that the Web has become a wonderful dynamic source of innovation. We are trying to concoct a number of different ways that we can tap into the power of this emerging creative group."

### Using the New In New Media

The folks at Oxygen are also making it clear that they aren't forgetting why they are unique, offering both Websites and a cable channel. While they have been



**Hey Monie's central character Simone, explores the life and longings of a single, African-American professional woman in the big city. © Oxygen Media. All rights reserved.**

very progressive at crossing programming over from one platform to another, the case of *The Ruth Truth* is one such example, they are working toward further integration and using this unique advantage to offer their audience more. "We are trying really hard to figure out how to use the Web to promote television and storytelling and creativity in general among women. And it is really, really promising but what it requires is a deep level of tools and we are still building that infrastructure. It takes a long time to build these things, because to really be able to offer people a chance to create, you need to give them some wonderful tools. We are aware of that and we are working on it. The online world is showing us some really important things about connecting to our audience and about how to work really fast. It is also pushing us toward these wonderful new digital tool sets that are really deeply interesting. There is a pot of technology that gets stirred up just because we are working on the Web that guys who are in a TV studio don't get exposed to. It really helps us in profound ways,

and that is often missed by people." These digital tool sets are also offering the *X-Chromosome* creators an advantage, as Laybourne explains, "It is very empowering for the creators because they can try something and, the next day, change it, and try something completely new. The cycle of self-learning is so much faster."

Tantillo finishes by saying, "We hope we can get the word out and let people know this is the place to come." I think the content is telling them just that already.

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# The Music, The Pageantry, The Fourth Grade...

by Joan Kim



Spot in his school guise, sports a sassy pair of red trousers and comfortable shoes.

© Disney. All rights reserved.

Arriving on Disney's *One Saturday Morning* lineup this past fall, *Teacher's Pet* delivers the rich and playful animation of Gary Baseman and the experienced storytelling of Bill & Cheri Steinkellner. The series introduces viewers to its endearing cast with the flare of a Broadway musical. Central to the story are the desires of a boy, Leonard, and his best friend, his dog Spot, but Spot isn't an ordinary dog. Spot, in fact, doesn't even want to be a dog. He

wants to be a boy. Leonard is trying to be just a regular fourth grader — normal in the blandest way possible — but between the antics of Spot and the fact that his mother teaches his class and periodically humiliates him by calling him "doodlebug," he's having a tough time. His difficulties multiply when, much to his horror, he realizes that the new boy in school, Scott Leadready II, is Spot! His goal of being "normal" is further confounded when he becomes the

sole human emissary to the world of fuzzy (and feathery) critters. Yes, he can talk to the animals. His attempts to avoid being the teachers pet are abruptly, and ironically, alleviated by the exemplary academic performance of the new kid — his dog — who ends up becoming the teachers pet. While of course comedic situations arise, the stories always end in lessons being learned and intelligent realizations made to mediate all the canine madness.

## If the Dog Could Only Talk

Co-creator and co-executive producer Gary Baseman is known for his creative genius. One can see his works in esteemed periodicals like *Time*, *Rolling Stone* and *The New York Times*, and he has done commercial artwork for clients such as Nike and Microsoft. He's an accomplished and talented artist but stroking aside, here's the really amazing part — there was a particular moment when he looked down at his cocker spaniel, Hubcaps, and the seed of a simple story was planted. Baseman has maintained that the tag line for his work is, "Where the line between genius and stupidity has been smudged beyond recognition." He also offers that, "I've always strove for a balance between a very adult, sophisticated sense of esthetic mixed with images that are stupid and absurd." In the April 2000 issue of *Communication Arts* he goes on to assert that, "The most important thing I've learned in communication, in making messages, is to be able to push buttons. Understand who your audience is, whether it's you who I'm talking to right now, or to a million people or even a TV show — what's going to make them happy,





Bunkmates in the Helperman household, Leonard and Spot share more than a room ever since Spot started to talk. © Disney. All rights reserved.

whats going to make them miserable, where their touchy subjects are and not to do it maliciously, not to hurt somebody. I love getting a rise out of people. I love making them think. And hopefully maybe they learn from it."

His unique visual style and attitude is not lost in the cartoon. Timothy Bjorklund who directs the series vividly translates Baseman's artistic vision. "Tim has really sought to ensure every frame of the show — and that's 12 drawings per second — looks like a Baseman painting," says Baseman.

In addition to show's unique visual style, the Steinkellners' writing expertise marries together a particular blend of craziness and credibility. In the first episode, "Muttamorphosis," as the title suggests, we encounter Spot deliberating over whether to

continue eating doggy treats or to grab a backpack and go to school. Decidedly, Spot undergoes an inspiring transformation when he jumps into Leonard's trousers, dons a cap and in Clark Kent fashion puts on a pair of glasses. The pearls to his outfit? The bunny backpack selected by Mrs. Helperman, predictably rejected



Gripping a bowl of grub and watching some television Leonard, Spot, Mr. Jolly and Pretty Boy actually have a lot in common. © Disney. All rights reserved.

by Leonard, of course. As writers, the Steinkellners find a perfect vehicle for exciting learning in the natural characteristics associated with the lovable canine. Cheri Steinkellner states, "We love a character who'll drive a story and really push it forward with energy and enthusiasm. These are very dog-like qualities. All the tail-wagging and jumping up and down and slobbering. What fun to take all that puppy hyper-joy and make it about something not traditionally viewed as a joyful experience — like the fourth grade."

### Truth is Stranger Than Fiction

In their role as co-creators and co-executive producers, the Emmy Award-winning writing team, Bill and Cheri Steinkellner (*Cheers*) revel in the ability to place into the mouths of the characters words that are derived directly from their own experience as parents. Cheri comments, "Things will come out of their mouth and go right into our scripts. We get story ideas just from hearing about their day. Something dumb happens at school, we talk it through, try to work it out, then say, 'Hey, what if that happened to Leonard or Scott?' It helps put the dumb stuff in perspective, and dumb stuff usually makes for great stories."

Working together with Baseman, their combined skills produce a show that avoids being flat or heavy educational fare with burdensome lessons presented in textbook manner. Rather, the Steinkellners produce characters that build stories which are engaging for adults and children alike. In the episode "Being Mrs. Leadready," Spot finds himself playing the role of dog, mother and son. The over-achieving dog isn't able to keep up the farce, but

from the beginning we get a clear sense that his time is not wasted. It's a pleasure to see Spots attempts to pull off his deception and the simple lessons that come forth when he realizes and considers the impact of his actions. Spots determination and intensity is always counterbalanced and tempered by a genuine caring for his master, Leonard, and his ability to recognize his own dynamics within a group. Spots horrible tummy ache resulting from eating too many liver wraps and the sincere regret he exhibits for overextending his ruse is sufficient enough to teach us all a good lesson.



Spot showing us that we can be who we want to be. © Disney. All rights reserved.

### If the Cat Could Only Talk...Uh, and the Canary Too

So, what else can you add to an already exceptional educational and informational program created and produced by the likes of Baseman and the Steinkellners? How about the voice talents of Tony Award-winner Nathane Lane as the rambunctious four-legged scholar; Shaun Fleming (*Once Upon A Christmas*) as Leonard; Debra Jo Rupp (*That '70's Show*) as Leonard's mother and fourth grade teacher Mrs. Helperman;

Jerry Stiller (*Seinfeld*) as the voice of the napoleonic family bird, Pretty Boy; David Ogden Stiers (*M.A.S.H.*) as the Helperman's plump, neurotic cat, Mr. Jolly; Rob Paulsen (*Pinky and the Brain*) who supplies the voice of know-it-all classmate Ian Wazselewski; and Wallace Shawn (*Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2*) portraying the cat-loving, overlord Principal Strickler? Together, the characters that populate the show create a diverse group of dynamic personalities. Mr. Jolly, the cat, and Pretty Boy, the canary, along with the rest of the pack, make a spirited addition to the central story line. Often cranky and overly opinionated, Pretty Boys call-it-like-I-see-it mentality consistently clashes with Mr. Jolly's far more gentle and careful sensibilities.

"Pet Project," yet another clever installment of the *Teacher's Pet* series, has Leonard and Spot vying to win a writing competition. Each needs to decide which pet will serve as their muse in forming pages of flowing prose. The competition is brought to an unexpected turn when the pets are invited to the classroom to serve as visual accompaniment to the written works. The press will be there, prizes are to be awarded and the pressure is on. Pretty Boy and Mr. Jolly after all their squawking back and forth prove that they are equally good at being friends as they are at being rivals. Pretty Boy steps up to protect Mr. Jolly when Ian Wazselewski's snake tries to intimidate him. The snake's simple rebuttle is to chomp Pretty Boy up in one gulp. Mr. Jolly is quick to recover and rises faithfully to the occasion, jumping onto the surly serpent causing him to belch up Pretty Boy. In the end, the two friends decide that they belong at

home, and not at school. Unlike their friend Spot, the two find their hoots and hollers in the safety of the Helperman home. In addition to the trials of Spot and Leonard, the other members of the household learn equally valuable lessons about themselves along the way.



The model pupil, Scott outshines the other students in the classroom. © Disney. All rights reserved.

### One More Thing

As difficult as it is for me to admit — I catch myself singing the theme song for this show a lot — borderline annoying, but catchy nonetheless. *Teacher's Pet* airs on ABC Saturday mornings. Times are available at: [www.disney.com/teacherspet](http://www.disney.com/teacherspet).

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# Last Exit on St. Laurent Street: The Wonderfully Fucked Up World of Ryan Larkin

by Chris Robinson

"Being an artist doesn't take much, just everything you've got."

— Hubert Selby Jr.

**O**kay, to avoid any potential construction of pathos, let's cut to the chase. In the 1960s, Ryan Larkin was a 19-year-old protégé of Norman McLaren. With McLaren's support, Larkin was given a rare carte blanche at the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and made one of the most influential animation films of all time, *Walking* (1968). By 1999, Larkin was living on welfare in a mission house and panhandling for spending money. How the hell did this happen? Who knows? NFB types say one thing, Ryan says another. The reality is likely, as usual, a combination of the two stories. I'm not out to turn Larkin into a victim or a martyr. He made choices...well, actually it was his inability to choose that caused the problem. He is living with his indecision.

Cliché #1: "Must have come from a broken home." Not so. Larkin's family lived in a classic 1950s suburb of Montreal, Dorval. His father was an airplane mechanic and his mom worked as a secretary. Right from the beginning Larkin (the middle of two brothers) proved to be a special child. By the age of about 10, he was already doing oil paintings,



Ryan Larkin. Photo courtesy of and  
© National Film Board of Canada.  
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and at 13 was accepted into the prestigious Montreal School of Fine Arts. The school was already very familiar to Larkin. As a child, his father used to drive him there every Saturday for classes. One of his early artistic influences was his teacher, Arthur Lismer, who was also a well-known Group of Seven painter. At the school, Larkin received an extensive education in classic forms: life drawing, sculpting, oil painting. Larkin excelled at the school and within a few years he was being considered for a job at the National Film Board of Canada.

Cliché #2: "He ruined his life with drugs and booze." Not

quite. Yes, as we shall see, Larkin was a cokehead and drinker (but not a drunk), but there is a much deeper and more traumatic episode behind all of these escapes. Larkin was very close with his older brother. "I had a rock and roll teenage hood. I played drums, was in rock bands. My older brother was very popular in the area. He drove a convertible and always had girls around him. I looked like a greaser punk and was the typical younger brother, always hanging out with him." During the summer of 1958, Larkin, his brother and friends are playing on a boat in the lake. Something goes wrong and Larkin's brother is dead. "It was a terrible boating accident. I was unable to save him. We were very close. It hit me very hard. I was on the boat and was physically unable to save his life. It was a major block for me. I felt terrible and missed him greatly." This, more than snorts and chugs, caused his eventual spiral.

## A Bright Start

With the help of his father, Larkin got an interview at the NFB and surprisingly, given that he had no animation experience, got a job at the age of 19. He initially worked as an animator on educational films for the army and navy including the spine tingling epics *Ball Resolver in Antic* (1964) and





Syrinx. © National Film Board of Canada. All rights reserved.

## There is a much deeper and more traumatic episode behind all of these escapes.

*The Canadian Forces Hydrofoil Ship: Concept and Design* (1967). The work was generally mindless crap requiring Larkin to follow storyboards and do tracing and painting for other animators.

During his 2nd or 3rd year at the NFB, Larkin became a friend of Norman McLaren and his "gang" including Guy Clover and Grant Munro. McLaren had recently begun holding an after-hours session in a small room at the Board. The relationship with McLaren opened Larkin up to a completely new world. "They were sophisticated. They had

huge libraries and invited me home and showed me their libraries. It was fascinating. I was just working class. In my house we had pictures of airplanes." Larkin absorbed books, paintings and classical music. "I was young and really impressed with all this new information."

Within the after-hours sessions, McLaren set up a project for the eager young artists (including Pierre Hebert, Co Hoedeman and Ralph Abrams). "He'd give us 16mm cameras and teach us the fine aspects like calibration and how to use our senses. He had a

test that involved taking a cut-out of a round ball and shooting it single and double frame." Each artist was given a roll of film to shoot whatever they wanted. Animation came as naturally to Larkin as drawing. "Norman said I had natural control over timing and pacing over any given object." At the same time, Larkin developed a unique technique involving stop-frame action with charcoal that was easy to erase. Using a strong sheet of paper, Larkin was able to draw deeply into the paper and still erase it. Utilizing this new technique, Larkin made a one-minute



*Syrinx*. © National Film Board of Canada. All rights reserved.

test film called *Cityscape*. This dark, nightmarish view of the city is filled with animation and a melange of strange characters coming and going. Finally, the main character finds solace in a country landscape, alone. It is hesitant and sloppy at times, but it is also a shocking, raw and almost paranoid portrait of the cement garden.

Larkin shot *Cityscape* single frame and "the whole thing went whizzing by in 30 seconds." So to enhance the film, Larkin took it to an optical imager, reprinted the frames and cross mixed them while developing short cross dissolves to give the film a natural looking emotion. People at the Board noticed *Cityscape* and were

taken by its originality. McLaren approached Board producers and asked that Larkin be given carte blanche to make any film using the charcoal technique. "They said, 'Here's a budget. You've got three months to make any film.' I spent a week wondering what I was going to do. One of Normans friends presented me with a solo flute piece called *Syrinx* by Claude Debussy. A French flutist recorded it and that was my starting point." Using the flute piece, Larkin then turned to the Greek story about Pan. In this tale of stalking, Pan is constantly hasslin' the hotty Syrinx for a little love. Tired of his come-ons, Syrinx asks Gaea for help. Gaea then turns Syrinx into a clump of reeds. Pan then takes the

reeds and turns them into an instrument.

Larkin faced a number of problems before completing the film. The music was a key ingredient and had to be carefully time and paced. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough money in the budget to buy the music so they were forced to find a member of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra to record it for less. Meanwhile, Larkin discovered he had to re-shoot the film. "First time I got off track and the images weren't coming off as beautiful as I wanted. I was getting nervous but Wolf [Koenig] and Bob [Verrall] said, 'Go back and re-shoot the whole thing.'" Ah, the fortune of a court artist! Larkin re-shot the film, this

time concentrating more on the images and the body of *Syrinx*. The final product received excellent reviews and *Syrinx* won awards all over the world including the Grand Prize at a children's festival in Iran.

### Becoming Established

Larkin was now living a princely life in downtown Montreal continuing to paint and sculpt and surrounded by many friends. "I was always good at sculpting and doing three dimensional sculptures. I began to see animation as a form of sculpting." Larkin had a few small exhibitions and many people at the NFB purchased his drawings and paintings. Larkin gleaned his inspiration in cafes and bars watching and absorbing the way people walked and talked and moved. He loved to watch people and would make sketches of people walking or get friends to pose. Larkin's friends were also doing more than posing, doing what kids were supposedly supposed to do: drugs. Ironically, Larkin wasn't into drugs at the time and instead was a Virgil to his LSD induced mates. "They would experiment and I wouldn't. I made sure they didn't fly out windows." Things would soon change. Despite the wealth of friends and success, Larkin remained lonely. The death of his brother had quietly fractured the family. "Because I was on the boat nobody knew what happened, but somehow I failed to save my brother." Something changed. "I was always the goofy little guy and they figured I goofed up again." Nothing was ever said to Larkin but he nevertheless felt eyes scorching him. Larkin, a man who could bring images to life, could not save a life dearest to him.

After *Syrinx*, the producers told Larkin that he had to go back to applying his talents to industrial films. He made a variety of educational films for St. John's Ambulance, an elaborate colour pastel clip on preventing forest fires, and a contribution to the NFB's exhibition at the Montreal Expo. "The Board had its own pavilion, called Labyrinth, and they had multi screens. I was asked by Roman Kroiter and Colin Low, to put in a Labyrinth, the old Greek idea, using the same style as *Syrinx*."



*Walking*. © National Film Board of Canada. All rights reserved.

Following the Expo exhibit, Larkin put in a proposal to do a film based on sketches he had drawn of people walking around. The proposal was accepted and Larkin was given a year to do the project. However, dreading the thought of repeating himself, the film took two years as Larkin took time to perfect new techniques. "I was developing my Oriental brush

work with water colours, and the human figures and the way that anatomy works, expressions of human behaviour, how funny they look sometimes when they're trying to impress each other with certain movements. I wasn't doing any rotoscoping, I was doing a lot of self-study. I had mirrors in my little office, and I would go through certain motions with my own body and was just going with pencil, ink and paper." In concentrating on motion and the details of the figures, Larkin abandoned background movement instead choosing a blank white screen.

The result of this two-year project was *Walking*, one of the most celebrated films made at the NFB and one that remains a major influence on animators to this day. Using a combination of line drawing and colour wash, Larkin observes the movements of a variety of urban characters. Larkin weaves colours and sounds with an extraordinarily detailed visualization of faces, bodies, gestures and postures. A vivid imagining of the city and those within it.

*Walking* received an Oscar nomination and Larkin travelled to Hollywood with his girlfriend, Felicity. The Oscars provided Larkin with a chance to put his beatnik persona and wild wardrobe to practice. Larkin had hair that was about three feet long and made his own clothes. "I would sew together my own pair of pants in special colours. It was coming out earlier I think, I was always performing, trying to look outrageous by whatever standards were established, just being a punk." For the Oscars, Larkin selected a flashy silk, wide sleeve shirt and tight fitting pants with bright colours.

*Walking* didn't win. Disney, who had died a year earlier, won





*Walking.* © National Film Board of Canada. All rights reserved.

for Ward Kimball's *It's Tough to be a Bird*. But Larkin had a great time and a rather strange experience. While in a hotel lobby, a man approached Larkin and said, "Hey, I know you. I've seen your helicopter up on the roof. I want to introduce you to the senator of New Mexico." The man then led Larkin over to a crowd of people including the Senator. The man introduced Larkin to the Senator: "Well, you've seen him on the Ed Sullivan Show playing his little ukulele." Larkin of course was mistaken for another flowery figure: Tiny Tim.

Following *Walking*, Larkin once again returned to NFB industrial films before being loaned out to a Vancouver art school (maybe Emily Carr, but he can't remember). For eight months, Larkin ran an animation workshop. Each student worked in their own studio and Larkin would travel around visiting them, hanging out and directing them. Larkin encouraged

the students to find their own voice no matter how wild their experiments turned out. Among these young voices, Larkin met a group of street musicians. "I decided that they would make a great focal point for my abstract images. There was a whole little gang of them with their own children and stuff, hippies I guess, really good musicians." Larkin's encounter led to his next film, *Street Musique*.

Very much a film in search of itself, *Street Musique* opens with live-action footage of two street musicians, before changing into an awesomely animated stream of conscious piece. A variety of creatures and figures float through the screen and undergo a continual metamorphosis. *Street Musique* is loosely divided into about five or six segments all determined by the pace of the music. One of the most dazzling scenes comes in segment two with a series of extraordinary landscape impressionist paintings. As with most of

Larkin's work though you can feel the hesitancy. The film ends rather awkwardly with the last image stopping to wait for the music. "What happened was, I ran out of ideas and I didn't know how to end the film, so I just ended it on a strange little character, wiggling away in his little dance, in a way suggesting that, 'This is to be continued.'" Structural critiques aside, *Street Musique* is a toe tappin', knee slappin', barn burner of a film solidifying Larkin's talent as an artist and animator.

*Street Musique* did the festival circuit and won a Grand Prize at an Australian film festival. Larkin is particularly fond of this award because it was a live-action festival. "It was a ten minute film up against all kinds of complicated feature films." Larkin received \$3000 with the prize, and because he had a regular salary he often supported other young artists with his prize money. "I had a nine room flat in Montreal that I was renting for \$100 a month, if you can believe it, and I'd give money to certain young people to experiment with their art and their music. I'd give them free room and board to hang around. In a sense I had my own school." Sadly, Larkin's generosity with people would come back to haunt him.

## A Turn

Following *Street Musique*, Larkin was assigned to a feature film that the Board was working on called *Running Time*. Larkin was asked along with Co Hoedeman to do three short animation sequences combining the actors with animation images. However, *Running Time* soon turned into a nightmare for Larkin: "I was trapped into it for four years because the executive producers



**Street Musique.** © National Film Board of Canada. All rights reserved.

kept putting it on the shelf, then there were endless committee meetings. I was getting pissed off because I was on hold. I had no other budgets or work to do. Frustrated, Larkin began working at home on his next project, *Ding Bat Rap*. This decision has led to one of the myths surrounding Larkin.

In the book *Cartoon Capers*, author Karen Mazurkewich claims that drugs and depression got so bad that Larkin exiled himself to his home. For two years, the NFB sent him cheques by taxi. He was then fired. According to Larkin, things didn't quite happen this way. "Well, what happened was, I was seeing this feature film just flying away and in the meantime, I was developing my own idea, and I had my own setup in my apartment. I had two apartments, one that I lived in and one that I used as a studio. I was developing my own new film but I couldn't get a budget to work on it, and the executive producers of this feature film were saying, 'Well, wait a couple of weeks and just stand by because we haven't got the

approval from upstairs.'" Rather than sit around the Board offices doing nothing, Larkin worked at home on his next film, a project he anticipated would be approved by the NFB. The situation was ideal for Larkin because if he woke at 2 am he could simply work on his film. This was something he couldn't do at the office. Larkin also notes that the producers knew that he was doing research and development for *Ding Bat Rap* at home while the feature was on hold. "That seemed to be okay with them since I was not able to work on the project."

About a year later, Larkin finally received a budget for *Ding Bat Rap*, but he continued to work at home. "I told my producers to trust me, I was working on the project, so they sent me my cheques." Larkin paid for the cab. *Ding Bat Rap* was to be Larkin's first 'talkie.' The film was to be set in a bar with a bunch of regulars sitting around talking nonsense with great earnest. "A lot of people talk and talk without saying anything. They make gestures with their hands, give meaningful looks back and forth towards each

other." Larkin had experimental voice actors to re-create the 'babble.' He had originally hoped to record actual dialogue, but noticed that people froze up so he dropped that idea. He also selected swing music for the soundtrack: "There was a beautifully organized music library at the Board, made to provide filmmakers with soundtracks for any subject. I selected that material and edited it myself. So I had edited my soundtrack but I didn't have enough animation drawing. I had drawn my characters, about five. It was a very abstract, poetic thing. I had a storyboard and filmed still images, but there was no actual animation movement."

By this time, Larkin was a coke addict. Coke was a big attraction to Larkin. It was a magical, almost spiritual experience. "The cocaine was giving me incredible insights into human behavior and very acute sensitivities towards what constituted human behavior." But, contrary to Heraclitus' thoughts, the way up was not nearly the same as the way down. With the high, came the low. The neurological stimulation gave way to backlash. A flood of ideas drown the mind. Larkin discovered a confidence he never knew, but the pace of the magic locked Larkin into a fantasy world. A magician trapped within the allure of his illusions, Larkin was no longer able to work.

Meanwhile, the program committee was none too thrilled with Larkin's project. What Larkin saw as a satire on ethnic groups and nationalism was viewed with disdain as a reactionary, almost racist vision. "I was making sound and visual jokes against all people that were too full of pride. There was an anti-Muslim thing, and



Ryan Larkin with some of his works behind him.

Photo courtesy of and © National Film Board of Canada. All rights reserved.

anti-Christian thing. I was trying to put down the nationalistic attitude that was happening at the time." Even McLaren backed out of Larkin's corner. "Norman was also sort of shocked by my heavy punk material." In Larkin's mind, he was making unsafe work for a conservative institution. But he also acknowledges that he was burning out. "I was losing my edge because I'd been there for too long. I was having a creative block that was probably the result of the coke." In a sense, Larkin was unable to grow up or at least fit the model of maturity prescribed by the society around him. He was pushing forty, but living like a punk. He was playing in rock bands. He was still hanging out with younger people, financing their bands, writing lyrics. He was a godfather to the punks. Nevertheless, it was clear that Larkin and the Board were no longer good for each other. For

Larkin, the NFB became increasingly restrictive. A coked up, confused, talented Larkin wanted his freedom back; whatever the hell that was.

### A Different Path

Never one to forget the encore, in 1975 Larkin was invited to create a mural for the NFB. What he drew was likely not what they had envisioned: an adolescent with an erection who may or may not have been ejaculating. The mural was 20 x 15 feet. "It was meant to be a satirical commentary on masculinity because at the time there was a year long festival going on about women's rights. It was supposed to be a comical relief from all their terrible, self-conscious seriousness." Ryan Larkin's tenure at the NFB ended. No one really seems to know what happened, but whether fired, resigned, whatever, Larkin was free. So he thought.

Larkin's girlfriend at the time convinced him that he should work in the private industry on feature projects. (Odd advice given Larkin's experience with *Running Time*.) Nevertheless, Larkin headed to Toronto where he worked for a short time as a storyboard artist at Nelvana. Larkin worked for two months storyboarding the final sequence for the feature film, *Rock and Rule*. Unfortunately, Larkin wasn't around to see if his work made the credits (it didn't). One night Larkin was working late, probably snorting some lines and sippin' on some beers, when something fell on his head and knocked him out. He ended up in the hospital for stitches. The next day, Nelvana quietly and quickly put Larkin on a train bound for Montreal.

It's not really clear what happened, but Larkin admits that his girlfriend would come around at night, he was still doing coke, and he was rarely without a drink in his hand. Turns out, in addition to coke, Larkin was also an alcoholic. Unlike coke, Larkin accepts his drinking condition with the greatest of ease, in fact he claims it makes him healthier. "I've been doing it ever since I was a child. When I was ten the doctor told my mother that I should drink 1-2 beers a day to put on weight." Larkin continues this ritual to this day and rightly claims, "I'm an alcoholic, not a drunkard."

Well anyway, after a brief period working on a variety of odd jobs including *Heavy Metal*, Larkin realized that his finances were out of whack. The gal he was shaggin' with was controlling his money and apparently ripping him off. "In the early '80s, I was getting angry with her, accusing her of stealing from me. I realized



she was a thief. I tried to get rid of her, which resulted in some kitchen violence. Being a woman with a child by another man, she was able to get the upper hand with the authorities and the police. I was thrown out for being a violent man, but I wasn't."

At the same time, Larkin, admittedly without many options, gave up on the film industry: "I realized that even though I had made some good films, I was not a good filmmaker. I couldn't meet deadlines. Other people were pouring out bullshit. I was becoming disheartened with the whole process of films, I was getting paid a salary for junk films." So Larkin returned to his first love, being an artist.

### Today...

For a short time, things were okay. Larkin fell in love with a man who put him up in a studio. "I did a lot of good paintings in the '80s. I moved all of my work down to this beautiful home. This lasted for about 8 years, but he finally wanted to get rid of me. I'm very attractive, but evidently, I'm undesirable after awhile." The 1990s found Larkin, now coke free, starting over again on his own. His generosity with people resulted in a variety of folks taking advantage of his home. Paintings, drawings and sculptures were stolen by friends in need of a fix. Eventually penniless and alone, Larkin was tossed out of his home. He lived on the streets of Montreal briefly before moving into the Old Brewery Mission where he currently resides. Virtually all of his art is gone now, pawned for dope, tricks or whatever help the strangers needed to survive. He now carries only what he can: a few clothes, some books, and his

little pop bottle for his daily beers. Many people have tried to help him over the years, but Larkin is either unwilling or unable to accept.

**"I realized  
that even  
though  
I had made  
some good  
films, I was  
not a good  
filmmaker."**

Has Ryan Larkin's life taken a downward spiral? It's really hard to say. When you watch his films, especially *Walking* and *Street Musique*, they seem to foreshadow his flaneur existence. The lack of structure, the random, carefree nature of his films seems to mirror his own refusal of order in life. Today he seems to have found some sense of freedom. He controls his time and actions. His days now consist of a regular shift outside a Montreal restaurant where he performs mime, dances and draws for change. He continues to play in rock bands as a drummer. Would life for Ryan Larkin be any better if he had remained a court artist at the NFB working away for a nice salary on crappy projects? Our conventional, constructed beliefs would be that his life has hit rock bottom, but I don't buy it. Everyday we see miserable souls drifting sleeplessly through life from meaningless job to lonely home. Unhappy travellers caught in a web of material constructions. Larkin may not have a home, he may not have a job, but he

remains an artist. This is not to say that Larkin is content with his life. He isn't and still suffers from bouts of depression. Whatever may happen down the road (currently the Ottawa International Animation Festival and Quickdraw Animation Society are working toward getting Larkin back on the filmmaking track), Larkin has left the world with a quartet of passionate, delicate visual poems. Beyond that, he makes life better, if only for a second, for those walking, weary souls on St. Laurent Street. What more is there?

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*Robinson has curated film programs (Los Angeles, Norway, Korea, Holland, Estonia, Singapore, Vietnam and several other places), served on juries (AnimExpo, World Animation Celebration), and written articles on animation for Animation World, FPS, Plateau, Animation Journal and Take One. He prefers writing over cartoons. He also irks a lot of people with his often-inflammatory opinions about many things.*

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

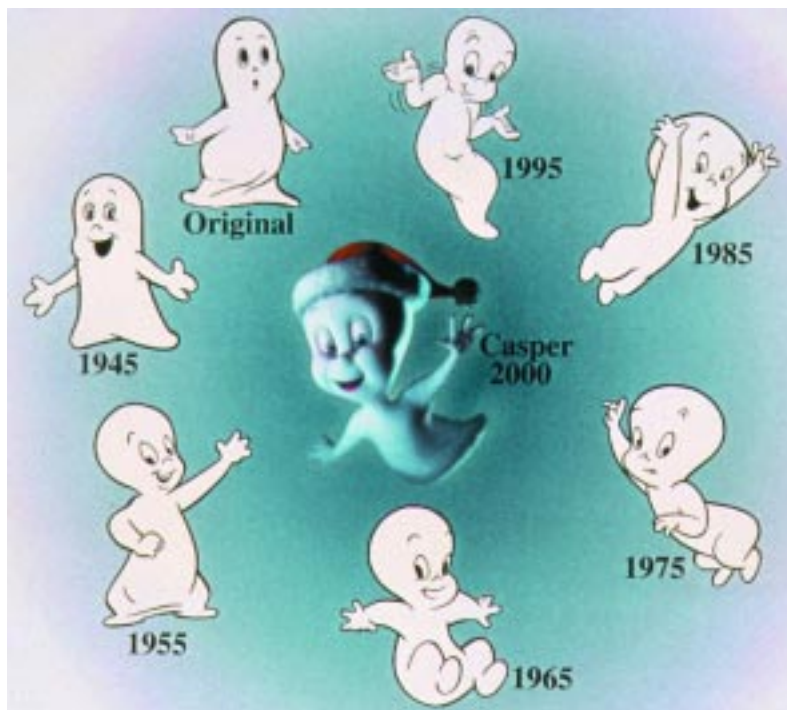
Since the success of Harvey's made for video release *Casper: A Spirited Beginning* and the made for TV movie *Casper Meets Wendy*, the company that started as a comic book company in New York, has re-emerged and is aiming to become a staple in children's video collections. In 1999 a new management team headed by Roger A. Burlage (Chairman and CEO) and Rick Mischel (President and COO) redirected Harvey's trajectory and continues to re-position Harvey in today's market hoping to take advantage of new media channels. Maximizing the already established family branding associated with the Harvey classic characters, their marketing plan attempts to match itself to the new media age and secure its share of shelf space when Harvey's all CGI production *Casper's Haunted Christmas* comes to stores this fall. David Bowers, Harvey's senior VP marketing, shares some insight into the marketing and distribution of Harvey's classic character. First, however, let's get to know a little about David Bowers...

In addition to playing a key role at Harvey Entertainment, David founded The Bowers Group in 1998 providing full-service entertainment marketing and publicity for clients who include Artisan Entertainment, PM Entertainment, The Leslie Greif Company and Trimark Pictures.

Prior to joining Harvey, Bowers served as executive vice president of marketing services and publicity at Artisan Entertainment (formerly LIVE Entertainment) specializing in the development, implementation and supervision of their theatrical marketing and publicity campaigns. There he supervised and

# David Bowers: Creating Shelf Space for Casper

by Joan Kim



Casper Timeline. © Harvey Entertainment.

created all publicity and promotion campaigns for theatrical, home video, international and corporate divisions.

Bowers spent the mid to late '80s as the senior vice president at J2 Communications /National Lampoon responsible for all marketing and publicity of their home video product and was integral in the purchase of *National Lampoon Magazine* and its subsequent update and launch. The early '80s were spent at Quinn, Brein, Inc. as vice president of the Family Entertainment Division where he created and implemented publicity and marketing campaigns for major toy companies introducing product

line-ups. Some of the companies include Mattel, Hallmark Properties, Coleco and Hasbro.

**Joan Kim:** How long have you been with Harvey Entertainment working on marketing and distribution?

**David Bowers:** I've been with Harvey for the last year.

**JK:** What are some of the challenges you've encountered this past year in marketing a classic character that has already been branded and recognized by the public?

**DB:** Well, there are a couple of

challenges. The first one is that the marketplace is extremely glutted with product this Christmas season. You have everything from major theatrical releases like *Chicken Run* to home video releases like *Aladdin 2* or *Little Mermaid 2* or *Land Before Time 7*. There is so much sell through product coming out that the shelf space is very limited for a lot of the titles. One of the biggest challenges we have is making sure that the retailers and ultimately the public are excited enough about this title that they want to clear off space for us.



**JK:** There is an assortment of hot, new properties that have come out this year that are doing well. Are there any specific challenges you have in trying to update Casper to compete in today's market?

**DB:** That has not been a problem, because all of our research has indicated that children absolutely love this character. We have something that a lot of other products don't have, which is that the parents grew up watching it, so they are really familiar with the product. What we have done is completely updated the character and how it looks. This film was all computer-animated, a la *Antz* or *Toy Story*. So, it's a whole different look. It's a

very good look. It's an excellent quality film. Having said that, the retailers have jumped on this, because there is so much product out there that perhaps doesn't have quite the quality. Retailers are looking at something that they perceive as a great value.



Casper calls a meeting in *Casper's Haunted Christmas*.  
© Harvey Entertainment.

At the same time, Casper is turning 60 this year. A large premier on the 20th of October celebrating his 60th birthday at the Television Academy of Arts and Sciences is planned followed by the kickoff of the video, which comes out on October 31st. To help celebrate Casper's birthday, Harvey and Sight for Students, a non-profit charity, have teamed up to distribute over 60,000 pairs of eyeglasses to kids across the country who are neither covered by insurance, or do not qualify for government assistance such as Medi-Care. Each participating child receives a free eye exam through a local ophthalmologist, free eyeglasses, free eye cases and free follow up exams. We're tying in with them and the slogan is, "Everyone deserves to see Casper." Under that umbrella, we'll be launching a huge marketing campaign starting in October.

The 60th birthday will seg-way straight into the home video release. We will also be putting

Randy Travis on television shows. He sings the soundtrack for *Casper* and he'll be appearing on shows like Rosie O'Donnell targeting our moms. And then we have a pretty good Internet campaign set up. During the last two weeks of October and the first two weeks of November kids will be able to visit their favorite Web site and see behind-the-scenes footage of *Casper's Haunted Christmas*. We're also producing a Flash-based Internet game with Sarbakan Entertainment. The game will feature characters from the movie and will be freely distributed online.



© Harvey Entertainment.

**JK:** Are you guys going with any fast food chains or anything like that?

**DB:** We're not selling the video there, but we do have two major tie-ins. One is at Orange-Julius/Dairy Queen. They're giving away Casper product in all their kid's value meals. We also have a major tie-in with Baskin-Robbins nationwide. They're putting a coupon in the video for free ice cream sundaes. In all their stores they have counter cards promoting the video and they named a new ice cream flavor for three months called "Chiller Thriller" to promote Casper.

**JK:** "Chiller Thriller" going along with the Halloween theme.



**DB:** Right and it comes out the 31st. So Halloween will give us a great opportunity to promote the ghost. At the same time, the video comes out just shortly after that for Christmas and will be on the shelves for the next 2 and half months.



© Harvey Entertainment.

**JK:** With the direct to video and various promotions you've been focusing on, what are some of the promotions we'll see on television?

**DB:** We're spending about 2.5 million advertising dollars to advertise the video during the holiday season. In addition to that, as I've mentioned, we're tying in with all the local TV stations, one in each major market — I think the top 50

markets — where they'll be giving away Casper grand prizes to the Saturday morning childrens viewing public. We're also going to be working with the Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon. So, we're doing a lot on TV.

**JK:** Will any of the Casper films, like *Casper's Spirited Beginning*, be airing this holiday season?

**DB:** No, but we will be airing the new video release *Casper's Haunted Christmas* on the USA Network, so that'll be a big boost for the video sales. We've created a lot of account specific promotions. For instance, with Wal-Mart if you buy the video there, you can get the soundtrack. One song from the soundtrack, "Deck the Halls" sung by Randy Travis, will be attached to the video. So we're doing a lot of account specific promotions as well.


**JK:** Is there anything else, you'd like to add about Casper?


**DB:** Well, we did a "Making of Casper" that will be on the DVD

which is a 15 minute special that we're using a lot on the Internet. We also have a gentleman over here by the name of Sid Jacobsen who was the original editor and edited all the Casper comic books through the years and he also created the character Richie Rich. So he's been with Harvey forever and he's going to be doing interviews with the printed press and on the Internet to talk with people about the history here at Harvey and his experience with it. We're really excited and we're expecting well over a million units initially shipped for this holiday season.

*Joan Kim received her B.A. in English Literature from UCLA and currently is the editorial administrator for Animation World Network. Previously as a graphics consultant she produced several company reports and manuals and continues to pursue an education in computer graphics.*


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# Mark Dindal's Place in the Sun

by Joe Strike

**T**he hotheaded young test pilot won't give in. He won't return the experimental rocket backpack that has fallen into his possession, even though a Nazi spy ring will kill to get their hands on it. Finally, its inventor — aviation pioneer Howard Hughes — shows the pilot a movie he hopes will change his mind. The room grows dark and a cartoon appears onscreen...

*Art deco chiseled, rocket-pack-equipped soldiers fly across the screen in multiplane formation...a swastika spreads tentacle-like arrows of domination that arc across the Atlantic and stab into the U.S...battalions of flying stormtroopers fill the sky as the U.S. Capitol building goes up in black and white flames...and an unfurling Nazi flag gives way to a*

*chilling full-screen legend, "Heute Europa, Morgen Die Welt" ["Today Europe — Tomorrow The World"].*

"It cost a man's life to get this film out of Germany," notes Hughes.

## Who Is This Man?

Well, not really. The eye-catching 47-second animated sequence in the midst of Disney's 1991 live-action adventure film *The Rocketeer* was actually the work of Mark Dindal, a creative and ambitious young staffer at the Disney feature animation studio. Animation buff that I am, I made a mental note of his name as the film's closing credits rolled by... and then promptly forgot all about him.

A few years later, in a trade magazine article on computer-based ink and paint systems, I saw



**Director Mark Dindal.**  
Photo courtesy of Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

a still for a yet-to-be released animated feature: a female cartoon cat posing wistfully by a street light against a stylized urban setting. Her defiantly non-Disney appearance (a bold-featured, oversized head with solid coloring and strong outlines), the subtle color scheme and the strength with which the picture conveyed its emotional content piqued my interest. I made another mental note to see the film, something called *Cats Don't Dance*, upon its release; this time I didn't forget.

The 1997 film, a funny and heartfelt valentine to the golden



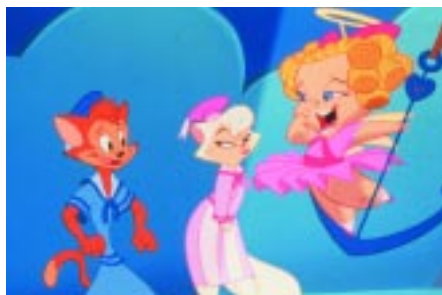
Disney's latest, *The Emperor's New Groove*. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.





Dindal's work in Disney's *Rocketeer* powered his career in animation.  
© The Walt Disney Company. All rights reserved.

age of movie musicals, lived up to the promise of that one photograph. It followed the travails and ultimate triumph of Danny, a somewhat naïve "song-and-dance-cat" just off the bus from Kokomo and out to conquer 1939 Hollywood. By the end of the film Danny has bested evil child star Darla Dimple, put an end to the second class status endured by animal actors and won the heart of the beautiful Sawyer, the wistful cat in the above-mentioned publicity still.



Darla Dimple, child star, laughs at Danny and Sawyer's dreams of stardom.  
© Turner Feature Animation.

Did I mention *Cats Don't Dance* was directed by Mark Dindal?

For sheer entertainment value and as a beautifully animated film, *Cats Don't Dance* holds its own with any of Disney's contemporary releases. Unfortunately,

Warner Bros. somehow decided the film wasn't worth its time of day, and after a cursory theatrical run and video release it dropped off the radar screen of public awareness. (It can still be found in the video stores, usually with me nearby trying to convince total strangers to rent or buy it.)

### Let's Get Talking

About a year ago I learned that the next feature in the Disney pipeline was to be called *Kingdom of the Sun*, and would be co-directed by the self-same Mr. Dindal, together with *The Lion Kings* Roger Allers. 'That's it,' I said to myself, 'I've got to talk to this guy.' Thanks to *Animation World* and Walt Disney Studios' publicity department, I was able to do just that on September 12, 2000. In the interim *Kingdom of the Sun* had become *Kingdom in the Sun*, and ultimately *The Emperor's New Groove*, but I was to learn far more had changed than just its title. First however I wanted to trace the steps and choices that had brought Mark Dindal to arguably the peak of the animation profession: directing a full-length Disney feature:

**Joe Strike:** So how did you get into this line of work?

**Mark Dindal:** As far back as I can remember, this was just something I wanted to do. Through grade school, high school, I just drew. I collected all the Disney books and any sort of animation books I could, which weren't very many at that time. I remember the one with Mickey on the cover holding a paintbrush. [Christopher Finch's *The Art of Walt Disney*.]

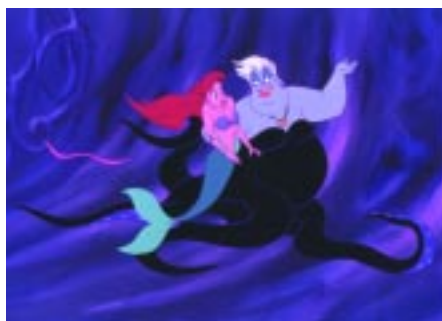
Then I was lucky that my guidance counselor's secretary had a nephew who went to CalArts. She just happened to overhear a conversation and recommended it, so I came out with my dad to visit the school and ended up going. That was just a dream come true, because there was still Ken O'Connor, the layout man, Elmer Plummer, all these Disney veterans who were teaching at the time, so I got a chance to be exposed to them before they retired.



From CalArts to the effects department working on *The Fox and the Hound* Dindal made it to Disney. © Walt Disney Pictures. All rights reserved.

After a couple years there at the school I got offered a job as an effects animator on *The Fox and The Hound* in 1980. Ken





Mark was the effects supervisor on *The Little Mermaid*. © Walt Disney Pictures. All rights reserved.

O'Connor helped me out a lot; even though his specialty was layouts, he knew a lot about the effects world as well and really was my mentor through that.

That's how I got into Disney. The effects department wasn't very big at that time — about 5 people total. I stayed with that for quite a while, working my way up through the ranks until I was the effects supervisor on *The Little Mermaid* and ran the department.

**JS:** I'm trying to find the point where you made the leap from effects animation — which could be a possible career dead end if you get too good at it — to working with character and story development which is a whole different area.

**MD:** What I think was good about being in effects was in that capacity you were involved in all the phases of production quite a bit. Maybe not so much storyboard, although we could sit in on storyboard pitches to anticipate the work that was coming. You got the chance to see the production in both directions: the production part as well as post-production.

So it gave me quite an awareness of what everybody does, which I think is important as

a director, to have some knowledge. I couldn't tell you everything that they do, but at least I know the main gist of what they have to do, so it was a good path by which I ended up here.

**JS:** Was there some point where you had to show somebody, 'I can animate a character, I can get an emotion across?'

**MD:** It was after *Little Mermaid*. That was such a pinnacle of effects animation. There were so many things in there; it just ran the gamut. I felt at the end of that movie that I had done everything I wanted to do in that category. But the experience of being in a leadership position was something I wanted to pursue further and be more involved with the story aspects of a film.

I talked to Peter Schneider [head of feature animation at Disney] about it and he was very supportive, but how old was I at the time, 27 or 29? Of course you want to go from effects supervisor to director right away. There's not a whole lot of patience and I probably had less than the usual person.

Peter was aware you can't make that kind of jump all at once, but you had to move slowly over. So he helped and got me to the next step, which was really the way to go.

**JS:** What was that?

**MD:** I went to Mickey's other featurette, not *Christmas Carol*, *The Prince and The Pauper*. I worked on that in kind of a dual layout/workbook phase and did some storyboarding as well. I got exposed to that side of it, which was a whole new angle.

**JS:** Workbook?

**MD:** After the storyboards are done but before they prepare for the actual, full-sized layouts, they go back in and do thumbnail-sized layouts for an entire sequence. It helps you see the flow and continuity or if there are any problems in the cutting. I actually found some in the morgue that Ken O'Connor did on *Peter Pan*, so it's something they did quite a while back.

**JS:** Did this give you the experience to say, 'I can do this — I'm good at this?'

**MD:** It was more a matter of drawing, thinking in a way I hadn't done to that point. I remember early on thinking, as all artists do when you're starting something new, 'Boy, I really shoulda stayed where I was, because I can't draw this sort of thing.' It was more a case of moving into a new area and trying to gain confidence. I was just trying to feel comfortable doing that job.

**JS:** Sort of jumping into the deep end?

**MD:** Yeah, it really felt that way because everybody I worked with had a lot of experience. I was working with Don Gibbons — he could draw the classic characters and was a real fan of Carl Barks. His drawings were so dynamic. He could handle the classic characters just fantastically.

I was sharing the room there with Don and I already felt like, 'Boy, this is a new thing for me,' and then to come in and work side by side with someone like that — it was even more intimidating. But he was very support-



Another scene from the live-action feature that fueled Dindal's career.  
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ive and very helpful.

So little by little I moved along. I started doing some storyboard work, and then got a little piece of animation in *The Rocketeer*.

**JS:** How did that come about?

**MD:** I had spent a lot of time talking with Tim Engel, who is one of the senior finance officers at the studio now. I had just finished *Prince and the Pauper* and I think I said to him in passing that I was dying to try something a little different, a little unusual. I might have even said, 'I wish I could do something in black and white' off the top of my head; a couple of days later he said, 'Well, there's this thing over in the live-action division...'

I don't think the whole thing took more than 3 months or so. The piece wasn't very long, but it was exciting to be a part of a live-action film. It was fun and a very unusual type of thing.

**JS:** The first time I saw it, it reminded me of the Fleischer Superman shorts, but more recently the spreading arrows made me think

of [Disney's World War II-era short] *Victory Through Air Power*.

**MD:** Both of those influenced the sequence. I had all the Max Fleischer Superman shorts on tape. We also saw a little bit of [director Frank] Capra's *Why We Fight* series — they have the same sort of arrows in there as well.

**JS:** Where did you go from there?

**MD:** From there I went over to development and tried to develop feature ideas. We were all in a brick building off the lot. There wasn't anything definite that I worked on. I just remember I was probably even more impatient than I was before, wanting this opportunity. I was probably 30 or so. I remember feeling, 'It just isn't going to happen here as fast as I would like it to.' I felt like I wanted to go on somewhere else and pursue this — I didn't have the patience to wait there.

**JS:** Were they shooting down ideas, or was it just a slow process to move anything ahead?

**MD:** At that time they weren't making the number of movies

they are now. That was when Jeffrey Katzenberg was at Disney, and his taste was for things that were much more 'real' and literal. We pitched a couple of things, and had the 'gong shows' as they called them. We tried to pitch an adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Matilda*. There was something with dragons that was on a more serious note, and then there was a comic version of that as well.

All of the ideas I was working on had more of a cartoon sensibility than where he wanted to go at the time. So it didn't seem like I was a match and I ended up leaving and trying to make something happen — elsewhere. This was in '92. It was one of those things where it wasn't under the best circumstances that I left. When I look back, I think, 'Why did you go about it that way?' I would know how to handle it a lot better now than I did at that time.

I needed to go, I felt I had to go, and I sort of wrestled my way out and ended up at Turner on *Cats Don't Dance*. I wish it hadn't happened that way, but the lessons I learned by having gone out and now coming back to Disney, I don't know that I would've had this perspective that I have any other way; at the end it was valuable for me.

**JS:** Lessons in company politics, or relationships...

**MD:** In just sort of everything. The way to make a movie, the way to understand what the artists need, what the management is trying to deal with — just having more of a global awareness of the whole animation industry. So you're not wrapped up in the one little thing that you're doing and throwing a fit and not realizing why things

are. Even when you find out why things are it can be frustrating, but that's just sort of life on Planet Earth. In the end it ended up being a good thing. I wouldn't want to go through it again, but I think I'm smarter for having done it that way.

**JS:** Was *Cats Don't Dance* a Turner property or did you come to them with it?

**MD:** No, they had it. They were developing it at the time. It was a much different story and had 5 other songs; Randy Newman was not involved.

**JS:** What was the original concept?

**MD:** It was more of a Broadway show and not the sort of *Singin' in the Rain* movie that it ended up being. The songs they had were written by Richard Maltby Jr. and David Shier, who had worked on the stage musicals *Big* and *Baby*.

There are stray cats that live among the sets and studio backlots and the film was originally a story about the lives of those cats. So the original story had actual cats on 4 legs that could speak; it was more along the lines of *Lady and The Tramp*.

I remember we did this big sort of analysis while we were pitching the idea of all the different ways that animals can appear in a movie. You had everything from an animal that doesn't speak, but behaves in an intelligent, 'Benji' sort of manner, all the way up to a Bugs Bunny universe where the animals coexist with humans, and no one says, 'I can't believe I'm talking to a rabbit.' You're accepted as another individual.



Woolie, the musically gifted elephant, confides his dreams to his friends Danny the cat and Pudge the penguin in *Cats Don't Dance*. © Turner Feature Animation.

**JS:** But a lower class kind of individual.

**MD:** Right. So we were all excited about taking it to the furthest extreme and have it be in the world of people. It just was more fun and it made it quite a bit different: it went to the notion of being typecast simply by what you appear to be on the outside.



Pudge and Danny share a cup of tea in *Cats Don't Dance*. © Turner Feature Animation.

**JS:** It started taking off at that point?

**MD:** Yeah, quite a bit. It was one

of those things that all the people working on it could feed ideas into. That's when you know you've got something that has potential; you'd say, 'Oh, I know, this could happen,' and you start drawing pictures and generating images....

**JS:** The characters don't look 'Disney' at all, which is usually the look other studios aspire to; was it hard to convince Turner to go in a different direction?

**MD:** Oh no, I don't remember that being an issue at all. When we worked on character design it was about giving them appeal. Whichever way you arrive at that, be it classic Disney or classic Warner Bros., or anything, it was just trying to go for an appeal that had the potential...

**JS:** Did a sort of WB look work its way into the film?

**MD:** When I grew up I was influenced first by the Disney movies. I think my grandmother took me to *Sword in the Stone* when I was 3, which might've been one of the first influences to set me down that path. Then I was exposed to



the Warner Bros. cartoons on Saturday morning TV at the time. So I think those were the two biggest influences for me. Probably *Cats Don't Dance* reflects kind of a blending of what I liked about both of those styles.

**JS:** The snappiness of the action, the quick cutting and posing reminded me of [WB animation director Bob] Clampett.

**MD:** Yeah, we looked at those — I liked the heightened reality that they achieved in those cartoons. One thing we're always trying to do is increase the productivity of the animators without making it obvious to the audience that you had to cut corners. Something that Chuck Jones was very clever with was putting a lot of attitude and a lot of entertainment on the screen. When you actually studied those cartoons you'd see how long he would actually hold things. The style in which the characters would move would still be very entertaining, but they were far more economically animated than in a feature production.

**JS:** Was it smooth sailing once you took the story in this direction?

**MD:** The person that was in charge of the Turner animation division changed several times. There may have been at least five different people over the course of the production, and with each person came a new take on how we should do the story... That tended to slow the process down.

**JS:** Was this during pre-production?

**MD:** Oh no, we were right in the middle of it.

**JS:** It looks pretty seamless.

**MD:** It was rocky going. There were some drastic suggestions, like changing it from the '40s era to 1950s rock & roll, pretty much in the middle of the movie. It's pretty hard to try and keep what you have finished so far, and then suddenly transition into a different period of time or introduce a different character or have a completely different ending that doesn't seem to fit the beginning you have.

**JS:** Were the end posters showing the film's characters starring in modern-day films a result of last minute tinkering from on high?

**MD:** We had all the characters done up in classic movies — to us they were so much more fun. They were films like *Casablanca*, that everyone knew. I think *Singin' in the Rain* was the only one that made it into the film. It was funnier to see these guys having taken those roles, as opposed to *Grumpy Old Men* or *Twister*, but that was one of those 'how to survive' decisions. The films we ended up using were all Warner Bros. or Turner titles. If we used others, we would've had to pay fees for the rights to use them. At that point there was just enough money left to finish it in color.

**JS:** Well, you said you wanted to work in black and white... Was providing [Darla's evil, gargantuan butler] Max's voice yourself a director's perk?

**MD:** I recorded a temporary scratch track for Max, which we intended to replace with a professional actor later on. When we ran out of money at the end of pro-

duction, my voice wound up staying in the film.

**JS:** Gene Kelly is credited with the film's choreography. Did he have an active role in its production?

**MD:** We probably saw him three or four times. I think we first met him a little more than a year before he died. It wasn't like he would demonstrate steps or anything — we talked more about the philosophy of approaching musicals and what they were originally thinking back when musicals were being made all the time.

It was interesting, because he said, 'Now we're in a very analytical age, because there's so many books to read and films to watch.' I got a similar response from Ward Kimball when I asked him the same question. But at that time there wasn't the history we have now, so they were just trying things. They basically said, 'We would try stuff, and if it worked we kept it and if it didn't we would try something else.'

**JS:** Was there anything that just didn't work in *Cats Don't Dance*?

**MD:** Oh, yeah, but I can't remember anything in particular...and on *New Groove* too. Again, that's part of the process that you have to go through en route to the final product. It made the people without the experience at Turner nervous, because obviously money's going out the door and you're not seeing any results. At Disney they realize there's gonna be a certain amount of that. They're not stupid, they're not just gonna let things go out the door endlessly, but they realize that's part of it.

**JS:** An investment, sure.



Introducing Kuzco, an emperor transformed into a llama, voiced by David Spade, and Pacha, a good-hearted peasant, voiced by John Goodman, in *The Emperor's New Groove*.  
© Walt Disney Pictures. All rights reserved.

**MD:** And that it will pay off. If you've never done it before, you think, 'Oh my gosh, the meters running and this guys not driving at all.'

**JS:** Do you think it was Turner's lack of experience in animation, or the Turner merger into Time Warner that deprived *Cats Don't Dance* of a bigger opening?

**MD:** Well, when we were at Turner I certainly got the feeling that it was going to be a major launch, that it was a bigger fish for them. I was much more encouraged with what they were talking about doing, how they were going to position it.

At the time they had successfully launched quite a few things with effective ad campaigns. But when the film went to Warner Bros. everybody felt it was going to become a smaller fish and it would get lost; I was trying to remain optimistic that it wouldn't happen.

I think very objectively they looked at it and decided there wouldn't be a market for it. It wasn't something they responded to, they didn't think people would eat it up.

All the good reviews we

got came too late to have a positive effect. The first responses from test screenings were very rough because the film was still very rough — a lot of sequences were still only pencil tests. I don't know if most audiences can look at this black and white coloring book they see on the screen and imagine what it's going to look like when it's finished.

So the test screenings didn't go very well. All of it just pointed to not throwing too much money at the film. But after it was released there were quite a few reviews that were very favorable. It would've helped had they come out earlier.

**JS:** Was *Cats Don't Dance* a labor of love?

**MD:** It had to be because it went through so much 'changing of the guard.' We had so many problems in making it, and this went on for a little over five years. That was a long time to be hanging with that, and so — it was a labor of love. All of us really liked it. We wanted to make a movie that wasn't just an 'edgy cartoon' and they kept pushing that. It was a family movie, and not Beavis & Butthead. I don't have the taste, I don't have the

desire, to do that — this is what I'd like to do.

You remember *The Ed Sullivan Show* where they had the plate spinner? I remember as a kid thinking one of the most exciting things on TV was watching that guy. At times during *Cats Don't Dance* I felt just like him; we would have several 'plates' going and then they would all start wobbling at the same time.

In the end we got it all to come together. And again, I think it was a valuable experience — it contributed to the great appreciation I have now for the way the process works at Disney.

**JS:** They're more supportive here?

**MD:** Yeah, they're aware of the process and they trust the process. They know what to expect it to look like, what'll work and not work, because they've been through it.

**JS:** What happened after *Cats Don't Dance*? Did Time Warner close down the Turner animation unit?

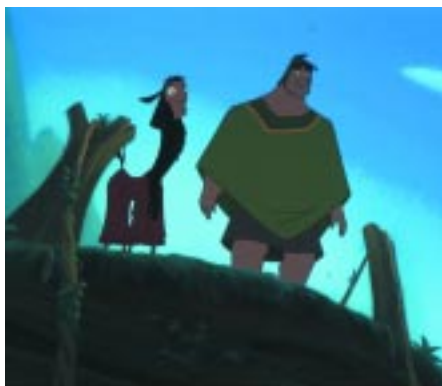
**MD:** They didn't close it down, but it just seemed to all of us there that the future was really uncertain. I had had enough of trying to push a movie through under those circumstances. Then I got a call from a friend at Disney, Randy Fullmer. We had known each other for quite a while, 10 years or so since we worked together on *Little Mermaid*. He was going to produce *Groove* and he gave me a call to come back over to Disney.

I felt I had gotten all of the 'roaming' out of my system, and had really learned a lot of valuable things, and I was really ready at that time to come back to a place

that had a history and understood the process of animation.

**JS:** When was this call?

**MD:** That was the beginning of '97, when we were finishing *CDD*. I finished and then two months later I started at Disney. I didn't take much time off — *Groove* was something they were already working on. I just got on — I felt like it was an opportunity I didn't want to pass up.



Kuzco and Pacha sizing up the situation. © Walt Disney Pictures. All rights reserved.

**JS:** They basically said, 'Would you like to direct this for us?'

**MD:** Well, I started as a co-director with Roger Allers from *Lion King*. He had been working on this idea for at least a year or a couple of years. I was to come on and be a co-director, which was kind of an apprentice to a director type of role, plus it was an opportunity to get back into the Disney studio.

**JS:** I understand it started out as a more serious story.

**MD:** It was originally much more epic. Sting was writing songs for it, but it was still more of a serious movie.

**JS:** It still had the prince turning into a llama?

**MD:** The prince did turn into a llama — that was one of the few things that remains, but once he turned into the llama he was mute, so he didn't speak through the rest of the movie. The prince was not really the main character; it was Pacha the peasant. In *New Groove* he's played by John Goodman, but originally it was supposed to be Owen Wilson, who was a kid at the time, so it was just a different movie altogether.

**JS:** The kid became the llamas protector?

**MD:** No it was more like *The Prisoner of Zenda* or *The Prince and The Pauper* where the kid substitutes for the prince; it was a completely different story altogether.



Pacha helps Kuzco get a handle on things in *The Emperor's New Groove*. © Walt Disney Pictures. All rights reserved.

**JS:** Turning into a llama doesn't sound like the premise for a serious story.

**MD:** It wasn't a serious drama like *Prince of Egypt*. It had comic elements of which the prince's transformation was one. But it had bigger life or death stakes; the serious moments were much more serious than what we did. It did have Eartha Kitt playing the evil character [Yzma]; hers and David [Spade

as the vain Prince Kuzco]s were the two characters that survived our changes.

**JS:** I understand Allers isn't involved with the film at this point.

**MD:** No. When we shifted the film's focus it turned into something he didn't feel a connection to anymore. He moved on and he's now developing another film of his own.

**JS:** The current crop of Disney features seem to alternate between serious films with comic elements like *Lion King* or *Tarzan*, and more humor-driven efforts like *Aladdin* or *Hercules*. *The Emperor's New Groove* definitely belongs in the latter category. The studio was satisfied this was the best direction to go with the project?

**MD:** As we worked on it, there were several notes in the original version that couldn't seem to be addressed. So we just took a very bold move and went to a different direction altogether, and that became the thing that people responded to and liked. Once we did that it really took off; it was less than two years ago that the change was made.

**JS:** That's a very short time to turn around a feature.

**MD:** It really was. There was a lot of development art that had been done for the earlier version that inspired things and definitely helped, but as it changed its tone people just jumped on.

It's an amazing bunch of people at the studio. If you give them a clear idea of what to do, you just do that and step out of the way. It's not just the talent





Kuzco and Pacha working together in *The Emperor's New Groove*.  
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that's phenomenal, but there's all the support as well. If you focus on what you want, it can really happen quite fast.

**JS:** Was there a 'eureka' moment when you realized a humorous approach worked best with the story?

**MD:** For me that's the stuff where my instincts lie. So when we were given the opportunity to make that shift, or at least explore it, I felt liberated. That's just where I tend to go.

**JS:** When did it happen?

**MD:** That was September, 2 years ago ['98].

**JS:** What was the catalyst for that?

**MD:** The thing just wasn't jelling. It wasn't coming together to [Walt Disney Studios chairman] Peter [Schneider] or [Feature Animation president] Tom [Schumacher]'s satisfaction. So we needed to do something, or I think there was the option that they would just shelve it and the film simply wouldn't be made. So something needed to be done, and a couple

of us had this notion of taking it in this direction. We went with it and there was definitely nothing to lose.

**JS:** Was the title change dictated by the film's new direction?

**MD:** Definitely. It was formerly *Kingdom of the Sun*.

**JS:** Then the pronoun changed.

**MD:** Yes, to *Kingdom in the Sun*. *Kingdom of the Sun* sounded much more dramatic. In certain translations around the world it would almost take on a religious tone and that made it sound even *more* dramatic and not representative of where we were taking



Kuzco and Pacha. © Walt Disney Pictures.  
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the movie.

We had several choices that we came up with for a new title. They were presented to several small focus groups that included kids 6 to 8, all the way up to adults around 45. We got to watch behind the glass. They were told the story, shown the characters, given cards with the different titles on them, and this is the title that in 8 or 9 focus groups was chosen by the majority.

It was really interesting with the children. I heard certain adults say, 'I don't even know what that means,' and when the moderator asked the children, 'What does it mean? Do you understand it?' They went, 'Oh sure!' So it was another one of those things where kids aren't so wrapped up in all this stuff that they can't understand something. They go, 'Oh yeah, he's like changing his attitude.' I thought, 'Wasn't that nice? They just get it.' There's no fuss about it; they were pretty clear. They just looked at each other like, 'Why wouldn't we understand that?' It was really kind of fun to watch their faces as they were given the question.

**JS:** From the trailer I can see its coming from a very tongue in cheek direction.

**MD:** It's meant to be fun. It's gonna come out at Christmas — its just the perfect time for families to go and have a good time. There's a message there that's moral and valid, and it should be fun. I think that it sets you down that path.

**JS:** The characters look very angular, their design is very sharp-edged; at first glance it doesn't resemble what one might think of as the house 'Disney style.'

**MD:** Perhaps when you see more of the style of the backgrounds. *Peter Pan* was an influence in terms of the brighter colors we're using, and in what we call the 'pool of light' look. It's very theatrical — they've lit the set for the place where the character is going to perform. When you look at the backgrounds without the characters, they feel like an empty stage waiting for the actors to come on.



Dindal relates the backgrounds of *Peter Pan* to an empty stage waiting for actors to perform. © Walt Disney Pictures. All rights reserved.

Character design-wise, all the characters were designed by Joe Moshier, who was very influenced by the later years of Milt Kahl [directing animator and character designer on Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Sword in the Stone*]. There was a sense of having a straight look and not an all-round, curved kind of design. He touched all the characters, even the smallest and most insignificant walk-ons. He did them all and it looks really nice to have them have that angled look.

**JS:** I understand there aren't any songs in the body of the movie.

**MD:** Sting is still in the film — he has a ballad over the closing credits that's about the friendship, the

relationship between Pacha and Kuzco. He also wrote the song that Tom Jones sings at the beginning and at the end that bookends the movie and describes the characters' transformation.

**JS:** You're talking about his emotional transformation as opposed to his physical one. But there aren't songs or production numbers throughout the course of the film; there hasn't been a song-free Disney cartoon since *The Rescuers Down Under* in 1990.

**MD:** If you don't count the Pixar films.

**JS:** I'm talking about the traditionally animated features. Were there any qualms about that?

**MD:** They definitely were aware that they had played that hand quite a bit, and they wanted to move into different areas using music. But the music's very important. Everyone realizes the value of music, and the emotional potential of having strong music in a movie, so I don't think music will ever be completely absent. It's just too valuable. So I think you'll see different applications of music and songs in the next movies that are coming up.

**JS:** The idea of someone turning into a llama reminds me of Lampwick's donkey transformation in *Pinocchio*; was that an influence?

**MD:** We definitely looked at that. That was much more of a horror moment; this is played for the comedy. Kuzco's completely unaware that he's changing. He continues to be the arrogant insensitive person that he is. He's

just babbling on about something, completely oblivious to the fact that the other two characters are watching him and realizing something very strange is happening.

**JS:** In *Saludos Amigos* Donald Duck has a run-in with a llama...

**MD:** Yeah, we saw that too. What I really liked in that film was the way they caricatured the South American landscape. Some of our people who went down there said it's not caricatured all that much; it's a very dramatic landscape with breathtaking mountain shapes. I wanted to get that impact — not to represent anything completely photo-realistically, but to have a sense of how, in your imagination, it seems to be; to create that heightened reality that you see when you go to Disneyland or Disney World. It's the way it looks, but it's better.

**JS:** You feel good about the film.

**MD:** Yeah I do. As we finish it up we've been listening to the score that's being composed by John Debney. As I was saying earlier, it's amazing what an effect music has upon the picture. It really helps the audience know how they're supposed to feel, because music certainly gives you that cue. The pieces that we've heard either create such dramatic weight or emotional weight, or they let me know it's okay to laugh at this point, that Kuzco's being mean but you're supposed to be amused by it and not appalled by it.

It's really fun to watch because we had a terrific scratch score on the movie, but when you get somebody who's really tailormaking it for the movie itself with

a 90-piece orchestra, boy what a jump it is — it feels like a film. Movie music sounds a certain way and does a certain thing.

**JS:** What's next?

**MD:** We've already started to explore the next project Randy and I would like to work on. We want to get back into the production rotation as soon as we can. I don't want to wait too long, because for one thing I want to be busy. Also, the more you go through the process of making these, the more you learn when you go from start to finish. So I don't want the finish of the next one to be too many years away.



Mark Dindal with producer Randy Fullmer. Photo courtesy of Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

**JS:** Isn't it usually a 5-year span from conception to release?

**MD:** We may be able to cut that by maybe a year, but it's still good to keep thinking and moving on, and not take too much time off sitting back and taking a break.

**JS:** Is your next project anything you can talk about right now?

**MD:** It's still too far in the future at the moment.

**JS:** Any last words?



The Emperor with Kronk, voiced by Patrick Warburton, whose brawn is equally matched with the brains of Yzma, the Emperor's advisor, voiced by Eartha Kitt.  
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**MD:** The caliber of talent support at Disney is a big part of what made this so enjoyable for me. I was the sole director on this, instead of being part of a team. Even though it could have been overwhelming, I just can't say enough about the ability of the people here to make movies. And that made it so much fun. It never got to be something like, oh my gosh, I felt like I was drowning. It's really something to see what they can do. It's completely fascinating, really enjoyable.

**JS:** The way you describe it reminds me of the old *Disneyland* TV shows where Walt would take you behind the scenes to show animators doing sketches and working on the next film.

**MD:** It was really fun like that. I've been on things where it doesn't end up being that enjoyable, but that's the face you put on for the public. But this actually was. It could be that having experienced the other thing at Turner, I was just in a different place to be able to appreciate

things, so it ended up being a fun production. People did a lot of terrific work on it. The only thing left now is for folks to go see it.

*Joe Strike is a writer and TV producer with a lifelong interest in animation. His work has appeared on Bravo, USA Network, the Sci-Fi Channel and many other outlets. His articles on film, TV and popular culture have been published in numerous trade and general interest publications, including the New York Daily News, Starlog and the Village Voice. He lives in New York City with his wife Deena and sons Max and Ben, all of whom have caught his cartoon bug.*

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# Out of Character: The Making of Joseph

by Robert Ramirez

*Editor's Note: When I sat down to watch DreamWorks' Joseph: King of Dreams, I expected a typical direct-to-video production. In fact, perhaps I was even more skeptical due to the subject matter that could have been dry and stilted, toeing a careful line so as to not upset anyone. However, what I saw on my little screen was so much more than I expected. The story was vibrant and touching, the relationships real and the lessons learned an organic experience, not a preaching morality tale. From the imaginative dream sequences to the stylish design work, I was impressed! Luckily, co-director Robert Ramirez was willing to share his creative experience...*

It was a Tuesday afternoon in September when I heard the thud on my front porch. Before I opened the door, I knew what it was. DreamWorks' Publicity Department had messengered over a compilation of early press reviews on *Joseph: King of Dreams*, a film I had spent almost three years working on. I nonchalantly took the package, slowly went upstairs and closed my office door. The moment I sat at my desk, I cut the act. I shredded open the envelope the way the Tasmanian Devil tears through trees. What did the first non-animation industry movie critics think? Did the story work? Were the characters interesting? Whoever tells you reviews are not



Director Robert Ramirez.  
Photo © 2000 Dreamworks LLC.

important is not being realistic. Of course reviews are important. An honest movie critic with no agenda can give a filmmaker something he or she has lost a long time ago: objectivity. Because of the process, a filmmaker might sit

through a film well over a hundred times. After a while, scenes that once felt dramatic feel flat and jokes fizzle. So what did the early press reviews reveal?

The reviews for *Joseph* have generally been very good, but instead of going on about the positive press it's received, I'd rather dive into a period years ago when the film was not working very well, when the storytelling was heavy-handed, klunky and what we discovered as a crew that made it a whole lot better. But first, a brief synopsis.

*Joseph: King of Dreams* is based on the Bible story found early on in the Old Testament (not the campy Andrew Lloyd Weber musical). Joseph was a spoiled seventeen-year-old boy who was adored by his father, Jacob, and loathed by his brothers. Who could blame them? While they had to work all day in the scorching fields, Joseph learned to read and write, and pranced around in a luxurious coat his father had given him. To make matters worse, Joseph had vivid, wild dreams that foretold his rise to greatness above his family, so his brothers did what any group of sniveling siblings



Joseph gets a better look at the special coat his mother, Rachel, weaves for him.  
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Joseph, alone and alienated from his brothers. ™ and © 2000 Dreamworks LLC.

would do. They sold him into slavery, tore up his coat, doused it with sheep's blood, and told their parents that Joseph was killed by wild animals. (Very Jerry Springer.)

In Egypt, Joseph's charm and dream-reading talents allowed him to prosper and eventually rise up to be second in command over the great nation. His life seemed complete once he found a loving wife and started his own family, until a great famine struck all of Egypt (as he had predicted) and a familiar group of strangers showed up begging for food. These "strangers" turned out to be his brothers. Now it was Joseph's turn. Would he follow his initial gut instinct and enslave them? Abuse them? *Kill* them? Or would he rise above hatred and forgive them? In a nutshell, that's what the crux of the story is about: *forgiveness*.

December of 1997 was a great time on the production. While the script was being fleshed out, Paul Duncan (the head background painter) and Brian Andrews (story artist) were creating some phenomenal conceptual artwork. Francisco Avalos and Nasos Vakalis were doing storyboards based on a rough story outline. Weeks later we started

assembling a very talented story crew that included artists that had both television and feature experience. We had a script that was well-structured and followed the Bible story fairly accurately. Once the First Act was storyboarded, we filmed the panels, recorded a temp vocal track with music, and edited it all together to create the storyreel. We were excited and ready for our First Act screening for Jeffrey Katzenberg, which was set for an early weekend morning in the New Year of 1998.



Co-directors Robert Ramirez and Rob LaDuca. Photo © 2000 Dreamworks LLC.

### After the Screening...

When the lights came on in the screening room, the silence was deafening. All the execs put down their yellow legal notepads and headed down the hall to the

conference room (which for me felt miles away). When we all sat down, Jeffrey looked up and said three words: "Nothing made sense."

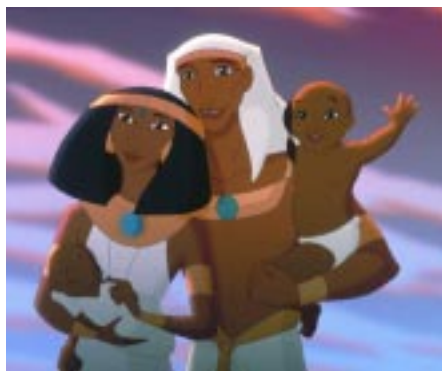
He was right. Nothing made sense. We followed the Bible story tightly. The script had structure. We storyboarded it word for word, yet it fell flat on its face. It all suddenly felt like a horrible, horrible disaster, and the worst part of it all was that I didn't know how to fix it. I was deeply confused, and our aggressive production schedule didn't allow for the story re-working that usually takes place on a theatrical feature. Share Stallings, one of our creative executives on the project, was very supportive and offered encouragement to the crew. She assured me that at least two sequences could be saved by clarifying some visuals and re-writing some dialogue. I couldn't see it at the time, although she turned out to be right. The only thing I could think about was that "nothing made sense."

The following Monday morning I was going over the notes compiled after the First Act screening, when I heard a group gathering outside my door. It was the story crew. They were dying to know how the screening went. I wasn't sure how to approach telling them the bleak news. Should I sugar coat it? Should I tell them it was a disaster? I was well aware of the fact that morale was high prior to the screening, and I didn't want to send it suddenly crashing down. (It's been my experience that unhappy crews don't make good movies.) Yet still, I had to tell them the truth.

"What do you mean, *it bombed?*" asked a board artist who two weeks prior to the

screening had pitched a successful sequence. "The sequences are based on good ideas...good concepts, but when we cut them together they don't connect," I responded. "Somethings missing."

After having some intensive story meetings with Steven Hickner and Penny Finkleman-Cox (Executive Producers), I knew we had to throw away 90% of what we had. They both brought great knowledge and experience, and proved to be the driving forces behind the project. They directed our attention toward focusing more on the characters and their relationships to each other, instead of always thinking in terms of plot and structure.



Joseph and his young family in Egypt.™  
and © 2000 Dreamworks LLC.

### Character: The Missing Piece

What is a story? To break it down to its simplest definition, a story is a character who wants for something so badly, that he or she is willing to do anything to get it. That's what stories usually come down to: satisfying a *want*.

When we started analyzing the characters in *Joseph*, we began to work from the *inside out* as opposed to just putting together a story. I learned that stories just don't *happen*. Characters make stories happen. Once we delved into the minds of these characters and dissected their

personalities, we started making some important breakthroughs. It all starts with asking the right questions.

*What does Joseph want?* To be a part of his brothers' lives and reunite with his family. *What does Judah, Joseph's older brother, want?* He wants the love and positive attention that his father Jacob reserves only for Joseph. *What does Jacob want?* Jacob wants to show the world how much he loves his favorite son, Joseph. *Why does Jacob love Joseph so much more than his other sons?* Because Joseph is the spitting image of his favorite wife. He's the first-born son of the woman he waited for all his life to marry.

Once we discovered the "wants" of the main characters, it was simple to figure out what actions they would take to satisfy them. Different characters often have opposing wants to each other, which leads to *conflict*. How the conflict is resolved is the *story*, the heart of the movie.

Another important discovery was finding the *voice* of each individual. Dialogue is action in its purest, simplest form. Think about your own voice for a moment. How do you speak? Do you generally give long, rolling answers to questions, or do you prefer to give short, curt responses? The way we speak says something specific about our nature. Do you like to use soft sounding words, or do you generally use sharp sounding consonants? When writing a character, it's not *what* a character says that tells us the most about their personality; it's *how* they say it.

Once we had a deeper understanding of our characters

and what made them tick, the scenes had a new spark of life that had been missing all along. The characters were now driving the scenes, instead of vice versa. In time, ideas that were born out of character helped blend sequences so that they flowed into each other instead of feeling disconnected.



Coming to video this holiday season,  
*Joseph: King of Dreams.*™ and © 2000  
Dreamworks LLC.

There is an unfortunate misconception that plagues many animated productions. Whenever a script isn't working, the usual plan of action is "fix it in the storyboarding process." Oftentimes, this leads to giving the board artists the burden of fixing the holes in the story. From there, the baton gets passed down to editing. "We can move things around in editing," is an overused mantra that gets dumped on the smallest department with the least amount of time. The lead editors on *Joseph* — Mike Andrews and Greg Snyder — often had only a few days to cut music and edit many sequences that were constantly being rewritten even as they dropped in the last few



sound effects for the next days screening. Although these last-minute procedures are part of the production process, a great deal of time (not to mention a film's budget) could be saved by starting out with a tighter, more thought-out script. We've all heard it before: "If it ain't on the page, it ain't on the stage."

The next time I'm on an animated film and run into the inevitable problems that come up in the story process, it's good to know where I might find some answers. In this age where the

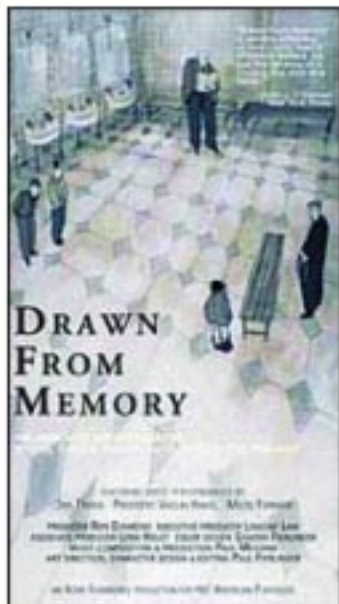
development of digital technology is growing at a mind-boggling speed, I hope that we don't lose sight of our main objective as filmmakers: creating compelling characters and telling a story in the best way possible. It may be that it'll take more production time up-front in the script development stage but, as experience has proven, it'll save a great deal more down the line.

*Joseph: King of Dreams* will be available November 7, 2000 in U.S. retail outlets, with other territories soon following.

*Robert Ramirez has directed three feature-length animated films including Joseph: King of Dreams, Brave Little Toaster to the Rescue and Brave Little Toaster Goes to Mars. He is currently developing a screenplay in the UCLA Master Sequence in Screenwriting Program.*

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--Carrie Rickey  
*The Philadelphia Inquirer*



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# The Animation Pimp

by Chris Robinson

*The Animation Pimp: rambling, provocative (see drunken and idiotic) observations of the animation scene.*

**F**ew years back was planning a piece 'bout (not boot) festival directors bein' pimps. Johns and hoes are interchangeable (e.g. Joe animator is a John looking for a hand-job from a studio and also a ho offering the studio guy/gal themselves as a whore/john, a tidy, quick piece o' meat). The whole shaaaaabang of them (whether Russian animators or California buyers) straddle the line. This was about '96 when festivals became a site of decadence.

**Few years  
back was  
planning a  
piece 'bout  
(not boot)  
festival  
directors  
bein' pimps.**

Figured festivals were/ should be galleries, museums, venues for artists to gather and share ideas, work and experiences. I hate galleries and museums. Damn stagnant receptacles for the glorification of the artist as GREAT (WO) MAN. Needless to say these artsy circle

jerks didn't attract the public who don't seem to understand the term 'animation.' Should we use Animation Film Festival anyway? Maybe Cartoon Festival is more public friendly. Yeah... International Cartoon Film Festival. The (point) being that the festivals were elitist.

Then Big Bird convinced Siebert that cartoonies could in fact sell coolness and More Tittie Visuals were born. And so began the wallpapering of animation. Festivals changed. Suits started comin'. Students came to find jobs, not ideas 'cause ideas don't buy Nikes (i.e. coolness). Studios came to show their 'human side,' headhunt, steal new styles (ya ever notice that *Rugrats*, *Duckman* and the whole Csupo look borrows a bit from a well known Estonian animator who influenced the Ukes who were lushingly lured to Hollywood?) and wank. Nuttin' wrong with that s'long as they payin'.

Same time governments turned right and figured that cartoons weren't no important 'ding to be payin' for so might as well let da' mouse cover it. Welcome booths.

Ottawa is not so bad I guess because Annecy has whored itself worse than any of us (Roy Disney! Give me a fuggin' break.). But hell, they attract a shitload of people and studios and sponsors so I guess maybe its a good thing, but I tell you each year I plan the festival's programme with no freakin' idea how

much money I will have. So maybe I'm just jealous (then again...Europe has more bodies than Canada).

The Ottawa Festival is a crapshoot. We plan the programmes, hire staff, invite programmers and guests but have no clue if we will make enough money. "Yeah," says Terry American, "but you're government supported up dere in your socialist country." A fallacy. Twenty percent of our budget is covered by the government: \$24,000 (City of Ottawa), \$90,000 (Telefilm Canada), \$15,000 (National Film Board of Canada), \$4,500 (Region of Ottawa-Carleton). Considering our size, history and importance in North America these numbers are disgusting.

**The Ottawa  
festival is a  
crapshoot.**

My demonic inner voice, while dropping the kids at the pool, yells, "IF WE WERE IN TORONTO!" Of course, the funny thing is that we work hard to avoid showing 'cartoons' and try to convince people that animation is an art form. This never works and in the end if we simply resorted to showing funny cartoonies we'd be on our way...media attention would flow in every direction. But then where are we? We've got press but its for all the big companies who are getting it already anyway...the independents and

small companies are left in the dark again.

The media doesn't care about Andreas Hykade, Paul Driessen or Raoul Servais. They are more interested in some Ottawa schmuck who is inkin' dogs for some half-butt TV production.

### Intermission

Whining aside, this is an ok job. I make my hours, travel around the world. I write.

Where am I going with this anyway? I think I was more in love with the title and trying to shock people than saying anything relevant or new. This year, Ottawa felt good. We maybe broke even.

Maybe I'm suggesting that the heart and soul of a festival remains in those dark spaces. Don't be fooled by the facades of the suits and the logos. This is just foreplay. The real down and dirty stuff lies within those silent, dark walls which come alive in a sensual play of light and sound that bring pleasure, pain, ecstasy, laughter, insight, shock, guffaws,

grunts, groans. Within the shadows these sounds bring you closer to you and those around you. The rest is just whoring. So in the end me and my fellow pimps and pimpettes offer everything for the needy starved festival-goer. If you want quick, no bullshit solo action, we've got booths and rooms for you. If you want more intimate, interactive, in-depth experiences (e.g. group sex?) we've got a nice dark 969 (not shittin' ya) seat space for you. And if you just want to talk that's ok too. But no profanity.

### Hottie Animator 'o da Month

Anita Beckman. Australian student, made a beautiful Lenica inspired short *Off Ya Trolley*.

"The Animation Pimp" is brought to you by AAA Ladies from Shanghai, meeting the sexual needs of the animation community since August 1999.

Do you want to continue this rant? Do you have an opinion

of your own to share? Then visit Chris in the Animation Café at: <http://www.creativeplanet.com/communitycenter/>

*Chris Robinson is executive director of the Ottawa International Festival and the founder and director of SAFO, the Ottawa International Student Animation Festival. He is also a board member of ASIFA International. Robinson has curated film programs (Los Angeles, Norway, Korea, Holland, Estonia, Singapore, Vietnam and several other places), served on juries (AnimExpo, World Animation Celebration), and written articles on animation for Animation World, FPS, Plateau, Animation Journal and Take One. He prefers writing over cartoons. He also irks a lot of people with his often-inflammatory opinions about many things.*

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# A Lessening Dichotomy: China

by Frank Gladstone

**O**n August first of this year, I was among about sixty people from the Hollywood film industry who traveled to China to take part in the 2000 Beijing Motion Picture and Television Conference, co-hosted by Legends of China, the China Society of Motion Picture & Television Engineers and Kodak China Ltd. The purpose of the Conference was to meet and discuss the movie industry with our contemporaries in China. Ideally, cinematographers would be able to meet cinematographers, costumers with costumers and animators with animators. The public format was to be open panel discussions, with more informal private discussions surrounding the three-day event.

Initially, I was there representing DreamWorks Animation but by circumstance and serendipity, I ended up being the only person directly representing animation, *per se*, at the Conference. Phil Feiner from Pacific Title, representing the digital services industry, moderated our panel, and our Chinese counterparts also came from the digital or traditional world.

Like many of the panels that occurred during the conference, most of the time was spent introducing each other and going over company history and purpose. This is a significant cultural aspect of presentations in China. Formal statements of past achievements and a listing of company assets are almost a requirement before any discussions can take



The Science and Technology Digital Film Studio is within this building.  
Photo courtesy of Frank Gladstone.

place. Because of the limited time we had and the need to present these formal pronouncements and the interpretation into each others language, the panel discussions very nearly always came to an end

before any real discussion could happen.

That is not to say that issues did not come up. In several of the presentations, speakers were able to intertwine pressing matters into



Workstations at the Beijing digital studio. Photo courtesy of Frank Gladstone.

their narratives. In discussing the question of intellectual property, our Chinese speaker was most forthwith about the problem of piracy, even as he traced its history and possible solutions. Some discussion about royalties, the state of Chinese art direction and storytelling did manage to come through.

More interesting discussions happened outside of the main hall, where the participants could be less preoccupied with formalities. Here, we found our counterparts to be very frank, curious and candid about the crafts they share with us.

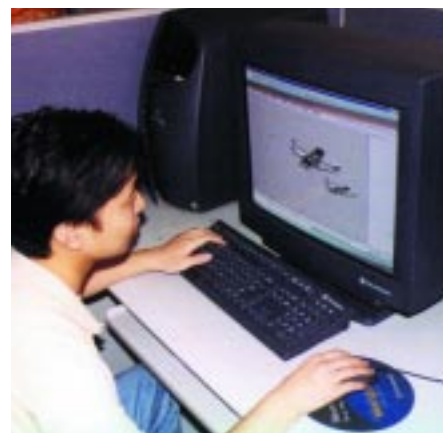
### Beyond the Conference

But, in the end, it was not the Conference where I really got a look at what China is doing with animation. Yu Lee, the indomitable woman who put the conference together and did her best to keep it on track, realized some of my frustration at not having the opportunity to have more in depth discussions with anima-

tion personnel. She quickly arranged for me to visit the digital animation facilities in Beijing and Shanghai.

Beijing is, of course, the bustling capital city of the Peoples Republic. The Science and Technology Digital Film Studio, located in a large building that houses several floors of film and film training divisions, seems to have a good deal of governmental support and perhaps a bit of bureaucratic counterpoise as well. The studio is well equipped with SGI workstations, various compositing and animation software (including Maya) and an adequate data center and film recorder. The operation is rather compact, broken into two large open plan areas with somewhere around thirty workstation cubicles in one, and a series of interconnected offices in the other. Part of the larger room is also cordoned off as a training area. Work has been pretty methodical at the studio. Their reel showed some good compositing technique, but all out animation

was not yet evident. The studio supervisor, Su Pingbao, was quick to mention that they are getting ready to expand and they are expecting much growth in facilities and capability over the next few years. I showed them some of DreamWorks product. They seemed very impressed and were almost apologetic about what they saw as their own humble efforts. They expressed a great deal of interest in learning more from us.



Using Maya at the Shanghai Film Studio. Photo courtesy of Frank Gladstone.

The following day, we traveled to Shanghai, perhaps the most cosmopolitan city in China. There, we visited the Shanghai Film Studio and were given a tour by the studio president, Zhu Yongde, and the director of operations, Eddie Lee. The Shanghai operation, while also tacitly supported by the government, has taken a very aggressive attitude toward digital production. Beginning in March of 1999, the studio prepared offices, bought and installed equipment (somewhere close to seventy workstations, a data center, film recorder and very extensive motion-capture stage) and software (Maya and Lightwave technologies), trained their crew and began producing 22 episodes of animation for tele-



A little bit of home — McDonald's are everywhere! Photo courtesy of Frank Gladstone.





**Frank Gladstone helping to illustrate the facial capture set up at the Shanghai Film Studio. Photo courtesy of Frank Gladstone.**

vision. Presently, they are in the midst of another series and are producing special effects for commercials and feature films as well. At the time we visited, they had just completed about nine minutes of digital work for a China-produced action-adventure film called *Crash Landing*. Their reel, especially for a studio so new, is impressive.

Shanghai, perhaps because of its more entrepreneurial history, its worldly, mercantile flavor, has generally a more aggressive outlook toward progress, driven, of course, by very ambitious studio leadership. What they have done in so short a time is remarkable, yet they too want to learn all they can, realizing, like their peers in Beijing, that they are really still in the midst of the training curve.

And they are quick to respond. We arrived a bit off the cuff, as the studio only learned we were coming the day before (which was actually the weekend). By the time we had toured the facility and were ushered into a room to look at the tape of DreamWorks animation I had

brought along, the entire digital studio had been brought in and were waiting for us! It was a pleasure to talk with them.

### **Developing A Voice**

So, how is animation in China? Well, I certainly cannot claim to know exactly the state of the industry there. I only saw two digital studios and did not have an opportunity to visit any other sites, either traditional or CG based. Even while the Beijing and Shanghai studios continue to grow and expand, other studios are in the works as well.

Nevertheless I did make it a



**The Shanghai skyline. Photo courtesy of Frank Gladstone.**

point to stress that while having digital technology was important, it alone was not a "magic-box" that would somehow give China an edge in animation. In fact, I took pains to say that soon technology will be available everywhere (if it is not already) and that China must not only look to its expertise in mastering machines and software, but also find other ways to make their animation stand out from the rest, either in its economy, its mastery or, most importantly, in its ability to put across a story.

China has a long and beautiful narrative tradition and it has a soulful, creative and resourceful population. With the coming of the WTO and favored nation trading status with the United States, China will have even more of an opportunity to act as a contract entity, producing product initiated in other countries. That is all well and good (and something we all must recognize as our business becomes ever more globalized), but, if China really wants to make its mark in animation, I hope they will find a way to be more than contract labor, initiating their own projects designed to bring to the world some of the inventiveness and artistic tradition that is so much a part of the Chinese culture.

China is on the brink of a great transformation. For many hundreds of years it has been, for all intents and purposes, a feudal, isolated society. Now, at speeds that can make your head swim, it is beginning to emerge as a truly modern county, connected to the rest of the world. Not everything is in place yet but everywhere I looked the dichotomy between new and old was incredibly striking. (The image of a three-wheeled rickshaw driver talking





**The real face of modern China.** Photo courtesy of Frank Gladstone.

on his cell phone comes to mind, almost as a metaphor.) There is much to do and much that will inevitably change, but the one sure thing is that the possibilities are tremendous.

About two weeks after my return to Los Angeles, Zhu Yongde and Eddie Lee from the Shanghai Film Studio visited DreamWorks. As I showed them around, peeking

into some of the traditional as well as CG areas, Zhu Yongde's eyes widened. As we parted he said, with a great deal of enthusiasm, "Now I see. This is wonderful. You are not just involved with the technology here. For you, this is also art!" When China incorporates that kind of thinking into their animation, we should see some magnificent work indeed.

*Frank Gladstone has been working as a professional animator, producer, director, writer and teacher for more than twenty-five years. For fifteen of those years, he managed his own award-winning studio and has since worked for the feature animation divisions at Disney, Warner Bros. and DreamWorks SKG. Besides his studio credentials, Frank has taught at animation schools and institutions around the country, in the Caribbean, Europe and Asia, including the University of Miami, VIFX, Cinesite, UNICEF Animation Workshops, Gnomon School of Visual Effects and UCLA. Currently, Frank is the Head of Artistic Development at DreamWorks SKG Animation.*

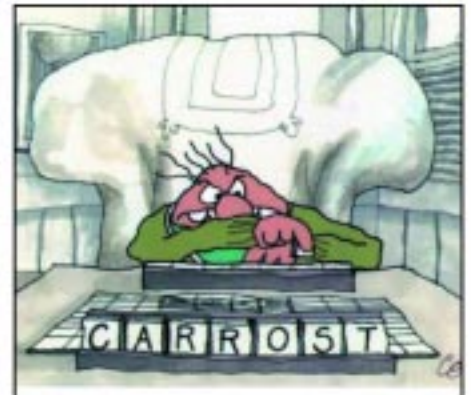
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# The Ottawa 2000

Introduction by Dan Sarto

## Scrapbook

From September 19 - 24, 2000, participants at this year's Ottawa International Animation Festival were treated to a well rounded program that mixed light and fluffy humorous work right alongside more serious and provocative pieces. Several thousand animators, industry professionals, educators, students and fans converged on the lovely Canadian capital's National Arts Center for five days of workshops, panel discussions, product demonstrations and, of course, animation screenings. Festival director Chris Robinson kept the nightly competition screening crowds entertained with his unusual selection of off the cuff remarks and anecdotes. Some of the most prominent names in animation were there, including the legendary Gene Deitch, René Jodoin, Piotr Dumala, Wendy Tilby, Marv Newland, Bill Plympton, Jerry Beck, Chris Landreth, Pritt Parn, Igor Kovalyov, Paul Fierlinger, Jan Lenica and naturally, Heather "That Blond Lady" Kenyon. Festival registration also entitled each participant to ample amounts of wild-eyed revelry that lasted way into the wee hours of each morning. Eager throngs of festival-goers imbibed oddly named spirits like "Ketel One" while rubbing elbows and swapping opinions about the most depressing Eastern European animated film ever made. Fred Armstrong from Animatus Studios kept many of us well lubricated with his nightly home-brewed



The view from the capitol building in Ottawa. Photo courtesy of Heather Kenyon.

"Derf Beer" Viking-themed receptions. The AWN sponsored closing party concluded the festival in fine form, though a few seasoned festival veterans managed to crawl back to the festival's Chez Ani lounge for a last round of cigarettes and beer (or if you were sitting with the Russians just straight vodka).



Animation superstars Gene Deitch and Zdenka Deitchova visit the AWN booth at the Ottawa Festival. Photo courtesy of Heather Kenyon.

AWN has put together a photo gallery of this year's Ottawa Animation Festival. In addition to photos shot by AWN staff, animation instructor Gary Schwartz chronicled much of the festival with his vintage 1950s 3D camera. Make sure to visit us on the web at: [www.awn.com/mag](http://www.awn.com/mag) to view our Stereoscopic Image Gallery featuring Gary's photos. Like the Viewmasters we fondly remember from our youth, these 3D pictures don't just capture a scene, they bring it to life.

*Gary Schwartz is an award-winning filmmaker, who has held faculty positions at CalArts, USC, AFI, UCLA Extension and others.*

*Through his company Single Frame Films, he has produced, designed and directed animation for Disney, Fox Television, Sesame Street, MTV and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Schwartz is based in Los Angeles and conducts animation workshops throughout the United States and beyond. He can also free view the following images in 3D from across the room and when only half trying. He's the master!*

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



# 2000 Ottawa International Animation Festival



Michael Dudok de Wit  
*Father and Daughter*



AWN Affiliate Jean Detheux with his daughter Yolande



Marv Newland



Marv Newland with AWN's Annick Teninge



New ASIFA President  
Abi Feijo



Abi Feijo with AWN's  
Heather Kenyon and Annick Teninge

# 2000 Ottawa International Animation Festival



Heather, Jay, Annick, Candy Kugel and Dan

Photo courtesy of Candy Kugel.



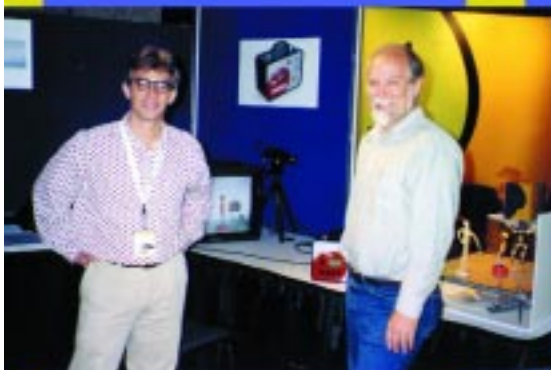
Steven Dovas, Jerry Beck and Heather



Annick and Piotr Dumala,  
director of *Crime and Punishment*



AWN's Jay Stokes (center) with Don Gyryluk (left)  
and Stephen Hagel (right) of AcmeWorks Digital Film Inc.  
Heather with Don and Stephen.



Gary Schwartz and Howard Mozeico  
at the Animation Toolworks booth.



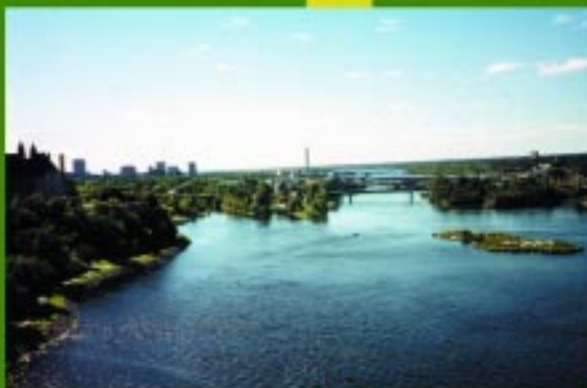
Vesna Dovnikovic (Zagreb Festival) with  
Ferenc Mikulas (Keckskemetfilm Ltd.)



# 2000 Ottawa International Animation Festival



The friendly faces behind the registration desk.



The view from the capitol buildings.

Annick's tour at the NFB Open House, the day after the festival

Photos courtesy of H  l  ne Tanguay

Animator Jacque Drouin



Vancouver NFB Exec. Producer Svend-Erik Eriksen (left) and Montreal NFB Exec. Producer David Verrall (right)



NFB Producer Marcy Page



NFB's H  l  ne Tanguay



Ottawa's beautiful Parliament buildings.



# The Daily Report:

## I CASTELLI ANIMATI, GENZANO DI ROMA

by Marv Newland



Courtesy of Marv Newland.

### Day 1: 4th of October 2000

Today international guests of I Castelli Animation Festival arrive at Fiumicino, Rome's largest airport which was built by Augustus Caesar in 72 A.D. Most guests are greeted by festival coordinator, Irene Duranti and then taken by taxi to Genzano Di Roma about 70 km south of Fiumicino. The landscape is picturesque; farms, orchards, ruins, trees, the Pope's summer cottage and many roadside pizzerias.

The first program of films begins at 3:00 pm with an early animated production of *Hallo Jeep!* by Federico Fellini. This is followed by *Pokémon 2: The Power of One* and the programs continue all day, one right after another

with introductions by festival director Luca Raffaelli. There is a Paul Driessen retrospective with a dozen of his films being screened between today and the last day of the festival (8th of October 2000).

A cell phone went off in the Cinema Modernissimo just prior to a screening of Driessen's *Cat's Cradle*. Luca Raffaelli took the phone out of the cinema and returned soon after to interview Paul.

The first Concorso Internazionale (competition films) included: *The Man with the Beautiful Eyes*, based on a story by Charles Bukowski; *Daddy and I*, a Korean film with a strong child abuse theme; and a Russian film, *Let's Play*, by Kiril Kravchenko.

Oscar Grillo was introduced prior to the screening of his beautifully produced and very sensitive art film *Monsieur Pett*. Oscar, born in Argentina, wore a home-made nametag with my name on it. I told him I would not mention this incident in my daily report.

End

Marv Newland

### Day 2: 5th of October 2000

The morning began with films like Gianni Lucches' *Opus* and a 28-minute film by Daniela Trastulli titled *Oswaldo Cavandoli. Un artigiano dell'umorismo*. Cavandoli is well-known in Italy, and in many parts of the world, for his animated films which are created out of single horizon line, usually white on a solid colour field. Minimalist humor.

Retrospectives of Koji Morimoto and Julian Nott went off today. Koji directs the extravagant science-fiction series *Eternal Family*, a non-stop bombardment of images and clips of explosions, futuristic television control rooms and one memorable sequence in which a man with his head on fire enters a bathroom, goes immediately to the shower, gets in and turns on the water. A woman then enters the same bathroom, grunting and groaning. She pulls the shower curtain closed and turns on the hot water. She lifts the toilet lid and a baby is in the toilet, head above the water. She gently removes the baby from the toilet and places him on the bathroom floor. She sits on the toilet and continues to grunt and groan. Koji cuts wide and we see the lady on the toilet, the baby on the floor and the man with the burning head jumping around in a scald-

ing hot shower. Koji also directed *Please Get the Chicken Insurance*.

Julian Nott composes music for Mark Baker and Nick Park movies. *The Hill Farm, A Close Shave, The Wrong Trousers* and a few other gems. He is a fan of Carter Burwells musical work for films such as *Raising Arizona* and *Fargo*.

In competition today among others were: *The Periwig-Maker*, by Steffen Schaeffler, and *Understanding the Law*, a film beautifully and madly designed and directed by Diane Obomsawin for the NFB in Canada. And today, Oscar Grillo remembered his name.

End

*Manu Newland*

### Day 3: 6th of October 2000

Today began with thunderstorms over Genzano. Real thunderstorms, not an animated film of thunderstorms.

Paul Driessens retrospective continues with a very shy animator from Holland being introduced into the circus atmosphere of the Cinema Modernissimo by festival director Luca Raffaelli. Paul's *Three Misses* was nominated this year for an Academy Award. Paul has never before been nominated for the Oscar despite having the strongest body of work of any living animator, certainly the strongest body of work of any independent animator. Later in this day, *The End of the World in Four Seasons* is screened. This picture has Paul's trademark split screen or separate screens within the screen approach. To Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* music, a series of interlaced dramas unfold with action from one screen influencing

action in another screen. One viewing of *Seasons* is not enough.

I Castelli Animati's programs all go off in one theatre, the Cinema Modernissimo. The screenings are continuous from 10:00 am until 11:30 pm each day. Commercials, childrens films, retrospectives, interviews with international guests and competition screenings just keep on coming interrupted only by the familiar musical theme and the fine M.C. hosting of festival director Luca Raffaelli. There are some projection glitches to be sure, some catcalls from audience members, crying children, cell phone noises and at times the theatre lights may go on during a film. There is a snack bar right outside the theatre's curtained entrance, and two or three bars and pizzerias nearby. If you do not like what is on screen just go away for an espresso and when you return there will be a whole different program underway. Understanding Italian will enhance anyone's visit to I Castelli Animati, but if you speak only English you will still have a good time.

Some highlights in today's Concorso Internazionale include: *Village of Idiots* (1999) directed by Eugene Fedorenko and Rose Newlove. This picture is beautifully made using Fedorenko's familiar illustrative styling (his work appears in *New Yorker Magazine*, including covers). It is a very funny story about Eastern European peasants. Cut-out and drawn animation are used, as well as out-of-focus effects and a very ethnically rich voice narration.

Gerry Fourniers *I'm Busy* (1999) also broke up the audience. Igor Kovalyov (currently working at Klasky Csupo in Hollywood) has *Flying Nansen* in

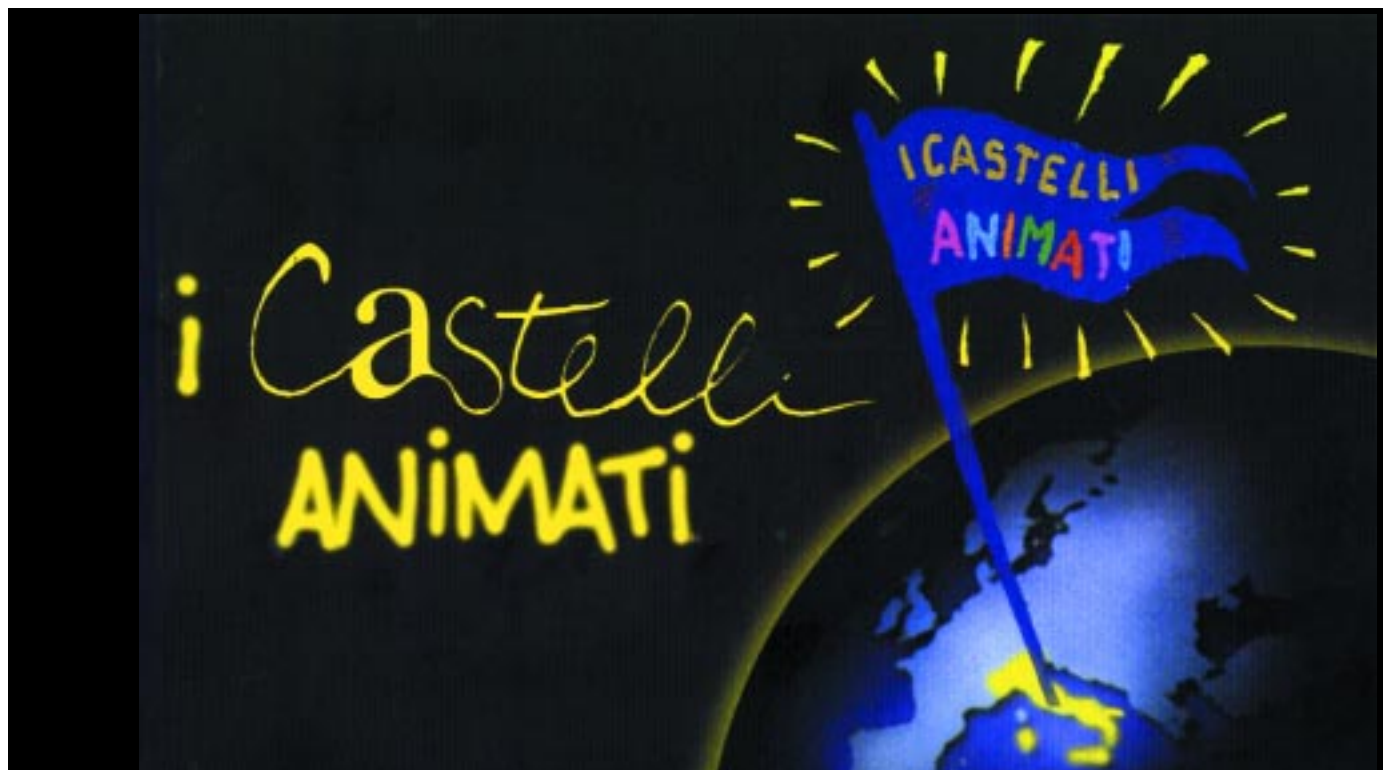
a program directly following. *Flying Nansen* is a well-animated explorer of the Arctic. Igor's film is masterful and may be based on a true story. The snow-blown epic slips into absurdity and seems not to get out before it wraps up. *Nansen* is eleven minutes of animation pleasure. Eventi Italiani: *Cuccioli* by Sergio Manfio (2000). Sergio is a well-known Italian animator and artist.

After this competition program an episode of *The Simpsons*, "Treehouse of Horror X," edizione Italiana; meaning, the Simpsons speak Italian on the soundtrack.

A later competition /Concorso Internazionale features Andreas Hykade's *Ring of Fire*, made in Germany (2000). This is a stupendous movie, in wide screen, black and white, full of cowboy bad behaviour, sexual imagery, big music, eye popping combinations of drawn and computer animation, more sexual imagery and an overall effect of grand scale animation production. *For the Birds*, by Ralph Eggleston of Pixar Studios (2000), was an audience favorite. Much laughing after this one.

*Le Chapeau* by Michèle Cournoyer (1999), made in Canada, is another strong black and white production. Sexual abuse is the theme, or is it? Beautifully made using painted line, *The Hat* (in English), depicts an exotic dancer with references to her childhood and the men in her current audience and leaves much for any viewer of this film to contemplate prior to forming an opinion.

Julian Nott, composer of music for the Nick Park *Wallace and Gromit* short films, was given another retrospective program today, by now 10:55 pm, with the



This year's I Castelli Animati International Animated Film Festival program.

screening of two Mark Baker directed films: *The Village* and *Jolly Roger*. Julian's music is just right for these films. Both pictures are great examples of Baker's humour range and both gentlemen prove themselves to be wonderful and sympathetic collaborators. *The Village* is lush and quietly funny with slow dawning messages about crime and human errors. The music never gets in the way and is simple and only helps the story told without dialogue. *Jolly Roger* is a much less complicated story, very funny, broad and noisy with fighting, action scenes and bombastic music by Julian Nott. A great pair of films.

The evening ended with more Italian coming out of the mouths of the Simpsons.

End

Mark Newland

#### Day 4: 7th of October 2000

Although there is an event

scheduled for tomorrow — Convegno: C'e in Italia, 'Un futuro molte animato' (which seems to mean, 'In Italy one future with many animators,' which seems to be the same future coming to the rest of the world) — this day is actually the final day of I Castelli Animati 2000.

Rumours fly concerning the possible appearance of Paul McCartney, a famous musician who played guitar in a band called Wings. Before he was good enough to play in Wings he cut his chops in an earlier band called, The Beatles. Paul is the executive producer of a new animated film directed by Oscar Grillo, the well-known Argentine born London, England-based animator and director. The film, *Shadow Cycle*, is based on music composed by the late Linda McCartney, who was married to Paul prior to her too early death by cancer. The film is not completed and this will be a first test screening before an audi-

ence.

*Killing of an Egg*, part of the Paul Driessen retrospective, begins the day. It is a simple idea, two and a half minutes long with voices in English, but with a very Italian accent, exactly how Paul made it in 1977. For some audience members this audio twist added spice to the screening. Later in the day, *Veliki Miting*, directed by Walter and Norbert Neugebauer in 1951, in Croatia, is shown to an audience unaffected by the propaganda in the film. An animator who worked on the picture, Milan Goldschmiedt, was interviewed by Luca Raffaelli. *Veliki Miting's* soundtrack was all in Croatian and the following interview was all in Italian.

Another foreign name appears on this day's schedule of events, Jan Pinkava. Jan is the Oscar winning director of *Geri's Game* made at Pixar Studios, and Jan, despite the middle European moniker, speaks English with an



English accent, laced with California slang picked up working around the propeller heads at Pixar. Jan is also on the competition jury at this festival. There are some sessions with Bruno Bozzetto, world famous and always funny director of many Italian animated films. Bruno has fallen in love with computer animation programs and demonstrates how he made, *Europe & Italy*, a simple and hilarious comparison between the habits of Italians and the rest of European citizens. Evidence of Bruno's accuracy in describing Italian behaviour is on constant display at I Castelli Animati. Between films and sometimes during films, lights will go on when they should be off and off when they should be on; one cell phone will ring and many people will answer their similar sounding phones; and wrong films will suddenly be projected with or without sound, and whether or not another film is already up on the screen.

The Dutch contributed to the mayhem by sending Evert de Beyer's *Characters*, instead of Paul Driessens' *Home on the Rails*. In *Home on the Rails*, Paul uses his famous trick of having a character disappear during a walk from one side of the screen to the other, and then re-appearing exactly where and when it should without having to make all of the 'getting there' drawings. In the Konstantin Bronzit retrospective *Switchcraft* is screened. Konstantin won the Annecy International Animation Festivals Grand Prix in 1995 for this film. *Switchcraft* is a kind of homage to Paul Driessen, and Konstantin uses this save the drawings technique to good effect in the film. Too bad *Home on the Rails* was not sent as the audience

would have had a better time seeing Bronzit's picture after Driessens.

Wendy Tilby, Canadian director/ animator was also on the jury at I Castelli Animati. Her films as director and *When the Day Breaks*, co-directed with Amanda Forbis, also a Grand Prix winner at Annecy (1999), were shown today. Wendy has taken leave from the National Film Board of Canada to teach at Harvard. After the Tilby, Bronzit and Driessen homages, a Web animation competition was held, and then finally the awards for this edition of I Castelli Animati were handed out.

After the awards, a speech by the mayor of Genzano di Roma, the host city of the animation festival, a screening of *Un Pesce e' un Pesce* by Giulie Gianini and Leo Lionini, and some shuffling around near the main entrance of the Cinema Modernissimo, in walked Paul McCartney. In walked a number of uniformed politizi, some big bodyguards and fewer than two dozen paparazzi, cameras flashing away, a couple of Italian television crews and four or five street urchins. By now, with the awards ceremony running longer than anticipated, even by Italian standards, everyone's stomachs were growling and the heat in the cinema was growing in intensity by the minute. At this time *Shadow Cycle* went onto the screen.

There were speeches by Oscar Grillo, Paul McCartney and Luca Raffaelli. The mayor of Genzano attempted to get up and give another speech, or to repeat the speech he gave earlier in the evening, but he was pushed back into his seat by a group of autograph hounds headed for Mr. McCartney. The festival ended on

a high note. The Italian newspapers all carried the news of *Shadow Cycle*, Paul McCartney, Paul's unofficial translator, Irene Duranti and the grand work of festival staff members such as: Emanuela Marrocco, Anna Castellani, Vincenzo Silvestri and Fiero Fortini.

I Castelli Animati is a great festival. It is small, even intimate, but full of animation spirit, live and uniformed brass bands, the M.C. talents and canny film selection of Luca Raffaelli and very appreciative audiences. All the elements required for continuing success for any animation festival.

END/KRAJ

**Marv Newland**

*Marv Newland began a career in the making of animated films and the production of illustrations in 1969 following an education in the arts at Los Angeles Art Center College of Design. He created the animated short film Bambi Meets Godzilla and designed many television commercials until late 1970 when he moved to Toronto. In 1975, he founded the animated film production company International Rocketship Limited, where he continues to produce animated short films by other directors and is also engaged in the production of animated films for the National Film Board of Canada.*

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

# MIPCOM 2000:

## A Report from the Front

compiled by Heather Kenyon

**M**IPCOM, the international content market for TV, video, cable and satellite was held in Cannes from October 2 to 6, 2000, with 11,762 people converging on the Palais to meet, discuss and conduct business. While business has seemed in recent years sluggish, this market had an energy that was based in real television and Internet business; and when speaking of the Internet it was for the first year real business and not dot.com hype. The talk was of taking characters from one medium to the next, using both as a tool to raise awareness and profitability.

There were a lot of first timers at this market with the total number of stands (494) increasing in excess of 7.15% since last year's edition (461 stands), while the number of companies registered at the show (2,924) grew by 11.90% (2,613 companies at MIPCOM 1999). The number of buyers reached an all-time record as well with 2,895 executives (up 11.75%). This included a significant increase in Asian buyers, proving that their economic crisis is over. The record number of visitors was up 11.45% from last year's 10,555, and was attributed to the addition of new media companies.

"With 22% of the companies involved in new media activities, MIPCOM 2000 has clearly demonstrated its ability to address

the way broadband and convergence are impacting the media industry," explains Xavier Roy, Chief Officer, Reed Midem Organisation. "If content is still king, the context in which it is produced, branded and delivered is now playing an essential role. With MIPCOM, and MIPTV next April, we are determined to offer industry professionals a key opportunity to take on this new challenge." Focused on television in the new economy, the various MIPNET panel discussions further enhanced the growing importance of convergence as nearly 2,000 international television executives gathered at the sessions which were spread over three days. On the floor one could hear people discussing the issues raised at MIPNET, especially the worries of ownership and copyright infringement in this digital age...

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MIPCOM 2000 was Momentum Animation Studios first market, and what an experience it was. We made the decision to attend a mere 6 weeks before it began, and by the time we arrived in France we were exhausted. What followed was five days of intense learning. We had no real idea of what to expect, and meeting with the main players in the animation game — whether it be

TV stations, heads of acquisitions, distributors or other companies interested in co-productions — was great. The feedback from the people we met with was invaluable and being able to wander around and see what other companies were producing was interesting. One of the main points highlighted was how necessary it is to go to the markets, meet people face to face, and see what the buyers are buying. We had wondered if we were throwing ourselves in the deep end, and we were, but with fabulous results. It is true the only way to learn is by doing, and we now have several parties interested in a couple of our products and a possible co-production deal. None of this would have happened if we had stayed at home. Compared to how I had envisioned it, the market was surprisingly relaxed and casual, despite the huge deals being negotiated and signed, and everyone was happy to help in any way they could.

**Lisa Zerbe, Producer**  
**Momentum Animation Studios**

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Organization is the key — we pre-booked our key appointments first, but left some space to accommodate other interested parties whilst at the market. Both MIPCOM Junior and MIPCOM

were extremely productive, mainly due to the fact that we were in the happy position of launching 6 fully-financed animated properties into the marketplace at MIP Junior. The shows were well-received resulting in 19 pages of follow up contact information, most of whom we subsequently met with during MIPCOM. A very busy and rewarding market indeed.

**Organization is the key — we pre-booked our key appointments first but left some space to accommodate other interested parties whilst at the market.**  
— Lynn Chadwick

1. Less Internet trawling this time and, happily, many more seriously interested TV buyers, especially from Europe.

2. A resurgence of interest from Asia — at pains to tell us that the economic crisis is now over and its business as usual.

**Lynn Chadwick, Vice President  
Greenlight International B.V.**

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MIPCOM 2000 was a vital week for TV-Loonland. Prior to this market, the TV-Loonland name and reputation for producing and distributing high calibre, original animation for children, youth and family was building momentum but even so, many people were not making the invaluable, immediate connection between the TV-

Loonland corporate identity and its production output. The recent purchase of Sony Music Entertainment subsidiary Sony Wonder combined with the acquisition of number one European distribution specialist for Latin America Salsa Distribution and UK animation house Telemagination has really established TV-Loonland as a major player within the international marketplace. Through these strategic deals, and with the co-sponsorship of MIPCOM Junior featuring the super-successful *In a Heartbeat* and *Yvon of the Yukon*, the TV-Loonland name was buzzing around the market to no end. We're off to the races now and already gearing up for Natpe 2001.

**The TV-Loonland name was buzzing around the market to no end. We're off to the races now and already gearing up for Natpe 2001.**  
— Lisa Hryniewicz

**Lisa Hryniewicz, Head of Distribution  
TV-Loonland AG**

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Both MIPCOM-Junior and the Cartoon Forum before it were distinguished by a "professionalisation" of the presentation of new projects.

The Internet has created a fascinating openness, and a new type of input and movement is now possible, both technically and with content. The Internet itself is often the subject-matter of series. With this we can see the far-

reaching effects it has not only on society but also on the individual. The gates were open again for real creativity as everyone needs original content with its finger on the pulse.

There was a clear trend to the '70s, and many series had "flower power" elements, either graphically or as subject matter. There was also a trend toward historical series. Sure, even new media has to be a part of life-long learning! As knowledge changes quickly, it needs to be continually updated or deepened. History is an important theme. Live-action for teens with good special effects was also well-received. I noticed a lot of smart pre-school programs — target group fun-addicted adults?

A surprising market in the most positive sense!

**Marie-Line Petrequin, Managing  
Director Animation & Development  
Igel Media**

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StarToons should have done MIPCOM years ago. The contacts were fantastic. However, there's one thing that disturbed me about it — which really just shows why I'm an animator and not a suit — is the fact that in all our meetings with the wheeler-dealers, the topic of "entertainment excellence" or "quality animation production" NEVER came up. These words weren't in the running vocabulary of the people there. Instead, they talk about "co-production," "back-end," "percentages" and "trade agreements."

Yeah, money makes the world go 'round, but if the shows suck, what's the point? And there are *so many* "great deals" made for crappy, poorly executed ani-



mation material. The trend nowadays is towards the cheapest crap the market will bear. So you can imagine that as an animator with a track record, I felt somewhat out of place.

Our properties — *Tuna Sammich* and *M7* — were tremendously well received there in Cannes. To make them happen, we'll need to identify a U.S. distributor. It looks as though we can pretty well get worldwide distribution from the people we met there, but to make it financially feasible — at least for a "little guy" like StarToons — we need this to air on American TV.

**StarToons  
should have  
done MIPCOM  
years ago.  
— Jon McClenahan**

What impressed me most, while I would sit there on my bed at night flipping through French TV shows, was how much American entertainment they use. They just dub 'em over in French, but they're our shows. Why? Because entertainment is one of the things America does best! This country needs to wake up and realize that if they give away all their entertainment production to Canada and other countries, there just ain't gonna be much left for us to offer...besides corn. Being a good Chicago boy, I know all about grain, OK?

**Jon McClenahan, Animation Director  
StarToons International**

RDASTudios first to Cannes but we did have some personal experience from attending its sister show for the music industry (MIDEM) on several previous occasions. The show format is almost the same and the name of the game is still access. This year, we had great luck indeed in setting up meetings, both with people whom we wanted to see and with the people who expressed interest in meeting with us. Ironically, since we are a Canadian studio and distributor ourselves, our most productive meetings may turn out to be the ones we had with other Canadian companies and broadcasters, such as Teletoon, Funbag and Cochran Entertainment.

Since our stock in trade happens to be Flash animation, we noted the welcome presence of new media companies such as Icebox and Wildbrain. While much is still being said these days about the technical convergence of TV and the Net, for those of us actually working in new media, the content convergence is right here and right now. Websites are no longer relegated to just being "about the TV show." Rather, the Net is emerging as the pivot player in multi-platform production. At MIPCOM, we were showing a retro-future series based on Dean Motter's *Electropolis*. The print rights have already gone to Image Comics in the U.S. and our studio is producing the Internet Flash series, primarily to pre-build a fan audience, prior to print publication next May. This has further led to a TV co-production and animation broadcast deal that now gives us a "triple crown" across all three media. We are very excited about the cross-platform synergies this opens up for the property and see this as becoming the viable busi-

ness model for the near future.

Ever since we first started producing content for POP.com, people kept asking us, "How do you make money with content on the Internet?" We now believe that the answer is a hybrid media model that combines the strengths of several media into one. TV isn't going to the Internet "as is" and the Web is never going to succeed on TV, at least not in its present form. We now believe that what these two industries both are amounts to being reluctant parents of a bastard offspring, namely one labeled as "new media," itself just a child which is still trying to find its way in the economic world.

**For those of us  
actually working  
in new media, the  
content convergence  
is right here and  
right now.  
— Robert Leth**

MIPCOM 2000 taught us that we are not alone. There now exists a real economic potential to cross-pollinate TV broadcast territories with Internet globalization. In many ways, the future has arrived.

Last but not least, MIPCOM provided us with access to people who have even further access and people who enjoy connecting like minds and compatible projects. At the top of our "best citizen of show" list would have to be Marie-Line Petrequin and the crew at Igel Media. She personally went out of her way to connect us and we are forever in her debt. All that's left to do now is to enter into a deal directly with each other, and that

MIPCOM 2000 was

ball is currently in their court.

All in all, "Great show, quality attendance, will be back next year."

**Robert Leth, Vice President and General Manager  
RDASudio**

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This was my first experience at MIPCOM and I was not there just as VirtualMagic Animation, a service provider of digital ink & paint looking for work, but with a new development for children's television.

I was expecting to compare this experience with my trips to NAPTE. Each is an international marketplace where deals are struck. But MIPCOM, unlike NATPE, is very structured and focused. At MIPCOM it is mandatory to have appointments to meet with anyone. They even suggest it strongly in their registration package. Getting appointments prior to the show with most of those we wanted to was fairly easy. Everyone goes by the appointment sheet. If you do bump into someone on the floor, they're running to the next meeting.

The oddest part of the show was how quiet the floor was. I was fully prepared to be blasted at by hawking and noise and I expected to be hoarse after the first day. During the market, I never felt that I had to yell above the madding crowd, except for these few occasions at parties and on the street. And many of the booths are closed during lunch. What a civil way to attend a show and do business!

As development virgins, this makes for a great business experience. VirtualMagic is a co-

production partner with Robert Leonard and Baby Nessie Entertainment, LLC for an animated series, *Baby Nessie*. We were there looking for distribution, production and financing partners.

The nice part of having appointments was having the full attention of the individual you were pitching to. In 20 minutes you could tell your story and hear their story. After awhile, however, it all started to run together and the pitch seemed scripted, but the opportunity to get an ear and interest in the series in this manner was ideal.

*Baby Nessie*, an endearing tale of a baby Loch Ness Monster, did get a lot of interest. During the market, we were able to get meetings based on our presentation material and after the show we have received several positive follow up inquiries from distributors. We would have never been able to present this property to so many worldwide in this concentrated period of time. MIPCOM does attract the world.

I was amazed by the amount of animation that was being featured. My low estimate is 50% of the exhibitors had some form of animated entertainment available for sale. The acceptance of animation was very high.

I was not surprised to see that everyone was very accepting of a co-production deal and encouraged the assembling of the right partners for a project. In some cases, they suggested partners to pursue. In a couple of cases we could hear a note of chagrin from those who have always been able to do the whole deal, but are now resigned to the multi-tiered business plan.

In our case, everyone we

met (about 30 companies) seemed sincere in wanting to see this project succeed. I hope that they were this kind to all, but secretly wish that these good feelings were a result of our *Baby Nessie* project! Next year, I hope to be in Cannes with a distribution partner to see the show sell.

**Jan Nagel, Director of Business Development and Marketing  
VirtualMagic Animation, Inc.**

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DIC's experience at MIPCOM was incredible, especially because the company had not had a booth at the market in three years. DIC has long been known as a leading supplier of quality animated content for kids so buyers were anxious to come to our booth to find out more about our offerings. We had a tremendous response to our three new series, *Super Duper Sumos*, *Action Girls*, and *Salem*.

In general, the market was very positive for animation, and I was impressed by many of the high-quality animated properties being offered.

**Pat Ryan, Executive Vice President International Sales  
DIC Entertainment**

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At this year's MIPCOM, I was struck by the continued and growing presence of the "dot-coms," in spite of recent stock market downturns and the shuttering of several high profile entertainment Websites. For the animation community, this is good news because the digital media present outstanding opportunities for

animation.

Much of the buzz at the market had to do with the convergence of television and the new media, thanks at least in part to the MIPNET conference which focused on this subject. I was asked to participate in one of its panels, discussing digital rights management and protection. This gave me the opportunity to bring the audience up to date on the status of several closely watched legal cases in the United States. The best known of these is the Napster case, in which the lower court found that the creator of the software and a centralized Website for individuals to exchange MP3 files was liable for contributory and vicarious infringement of copyrights. This decision is currently on appeal. If upheld, this decision will confirm what most of the entertainment industry has felt for a long time — that the unauthorized copying and distribution of musical and audiovisual works over the Internet is illegal.

However, these decisions raise a more fundamental question. Has the industry won some major legal battles, but lost the war? Before the ink was dry on the Napster decision, peer-to-peer file sharing programs were already available. By avoiding the use of a central Website clearing house, infringement becomes much more diffuse and enforcement becomes more difficult and expensive. In the meantime, the legal precedents engendered by this litigation seems to be progressively limiting the application of the fair use defense and freedom of expression. If the entertainment industry succeeds in this battle for control over Internet access to audiovisual and musical works, it will end up at best limiting the creativity and

vitality of the medium. At worst, it will create a rampant underground movement that will be working with almost religious fervor in designing around whatever methods of protection the industry may devise.

Everyone seems to agree that artists need to be paid for their work, and clearly, those who finance artistic creativity (e.g., the studios) need to be compensated for their investment as well. The real question is whether the entertainment industry and the digital world will be able to come up with an economic model that will effectively "monetize" digital content, through pay-per-play, subscription, advertising, sponsorship or otherwise, and devise a technology to implement that model seamlessly and effectively.

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**Louise Nemschoff, Entertainment and Intellectual Property Attorney, MIPNET Panelist**

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Sometimes we Europeans complain like hell about the scheduling of Cartoon Forum and MIPCOM virtually back to back! This year, however, Elephant were thrilled to be able to capitalise on the good reaction to our presentations in Visby at the Cartoon Forum and we were actually able to take one major deal for *Johnny Casanova* almost through to its logical conclusion, which has really speeded things up!

My general impressions were that independent animation producers are in for a tough time, as the big international players swallow up smaller more vulnerable companies. One thing is for certain, there will be far less options open to us and the

chances of keeping hold of those hard fought for IPRs will be virtually nil!

**Sarah Muller, Managing Director  
Elephant Productions Ltd.**

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At MIPCOM, I was networking with studios that might have an interest in sending their animation productions to our studio in India or even co-production deals with us. On that level it was very successful. Every studio and producer that we met, were very impressed with our set-up. In fact, we received our next production deal with Rainbow Productions while there. Our competitive pricing and English speaking, full-time staff has been our biggest advantage. Moreover, Trivandrum is known as a holiday resort with lovely beaches and waters. What a way for our clients to relax while they work!

**K. Subramaniam, Creative Director  
Toonz Animation India**

*Heather Kenyon is editor-in-chief of Animation World Network.*

*After receiving her B.F.A. in Filmic Writing from USC's School of Cinema-Television, she went to work for Hanna-Barbera Cartoons. Currently, she is an International Board Member of Women In Animation and on the Board of Trustees for Trees for Life.*

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



# Video Games:

## Not Just For Males

## Ages 12-24 Anymore

by Jacquie Kubin



Projected to be a guaranteed success, Sony's PlayStation 2 finally goes to stores October 26, 2000.

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Sega's Dreamcast console. © Sega Enterprises, Ltd. All rights reserved.

**A**nimators who want to showcase their talents may want to stop pounding the pavement of the Hollywood movie studios. The video game industry has grown by almost unimaginable leaps and bounds with game studios all over the country.

Working within the entertainment animation genre no longer requires moving to L.A. or being able to animate blood. Today's retail video game shelf contains growing numbers of story driven games that have a traditional animation element to their development, even when completed with the help of the latest software. Plus, family gaming is growing in popularity too.

### Proof in Numbers

Recent Interactive Digital

Software Association (IDSA) released statistics reveal that 35% of Americans surveyed identify playing computer and video games as their top "most fun" entertainment activity, lagging far behind the 11% still heading out for the movies.

"If you watch the evolution of gaming over the last five years, you can see that it has broadened itself beyond the male, 14-24 demographic," says Doug Lowenstein, President of the IDSA. "There is no question that there are numerous opportunities to develop gaming products that are rich in story, animation, educational components and movie-like qualities and that are suitable for all ages."

The video game industry has expanded to include multiple consoles — computer and hand-



Douglas Lowenstein, President Interactive Digital Software Association. Photo courtesy of BSMG Worldwide.

held systems — with the sale of games totaling more than 215 million units and US\$6.1 billion.

With the release of next generation gaming consoles — the Sega Dreamcast, Sony PlayStation 2 and, in the near future, the Nintendo Dolphin and Microsoft Xbox — animators may be wondering how far and varied the gaming market is expanding. Moreover, it is comprised of many more games suitable for all ages



Microsoft's anticipated Xbox. © Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

play, than Mature, Adult Only or even Teen titles.

During the month of September, the Entertainment System Ratings Board (ESRB) rated close to two hundred new titles including those developed for the new Sega Dreamcast and PlayStation 2.

While it may seem that the teen and mature rated titles for these next generation consoles outweigh those rated for "everyone," there is a reason for that and only looking at those initial launch games provides a skewed view of the entire industry. In fact, sales of video and computer games with a mature rating fell from 2.6 million units in 1998 to 1.2 million units in 1999 (NPD Group).



**Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2**, the anticipated sequel to the original award-winning multi-platform game for PlayStation, Dreamcast, Nintendo Game Boy Color and PC/CD-Rom. © Activision, Inc.

## More Family Titles

"Hard-core gaming enthusiasts, the individuals willing to pay upwards of \$350 for the new system PlayStation 2 console, one controller and one game are primarily males, ages 12 to 24 and the games released at console launch generally reflect that," says John Ardell, senior product marketing manager for THQ, Inc. "But women and children are becoming more prolific gamers. And while PlayStation 2 will not release with a *Rugrats* title, there is room

within the industry for children and family targeted software."

Dominating 1999 sales was the hit *Pokémon* franchise with at least 18 game titles selling more than 12 million copies. The single biggest selling title, however, was *Donkey Kong 64*, for the Nintendo 64, selling more than 1.4 million copies for more than \$86 million in retail sales. The most popular M rated title for that period, *Half Life*, developed by Havas Interactive for the Sega Dreamcast, sold just under 500,000 copies. In comparison, Walt Disney's summer 1999 animated hit, *Tarzan*, realized a total adjusted gross of less than \$175 million. In response to that summer movie hit, the video game industry released seven *Tarzan* games, three for Gameboy color and two each for Nintendo 64 and PlayStation.



**Spider-Man** is a free-roaming, 3D action/adventure game bringing the superhero's trademark web-slinging skills to PlayStation consoles. © Activision, Inc.

The answer to the question of what is spawning this greater number of "family" gaming titles depends on the person answering it. Is it increased awareness of the ESRB rating system, established in 1994, or just that there are more game players from a wider demo-

graphic coming to the medium?

According to the Media Family report "Whoever Tells the Stories Defines the Culture," by Dr. David Walsh, "Ninety percent of teens say their parents never check the rating before allowing them to rent or buy video games, with only one percent stating that their parent kept them from buying or renting a game based on its ESRB rating."



**Jeanne Funk, Ph.D.**, Department of Psychology, University of Toledo.  
Photo courtesy of Motophoto.aimed at kids 6 to 8. © THQ, Inc.

"I am not sure that parents are aware of or understand the ESRB rating system or that they recognize its value," explains Jeanne Funk, Ph.D., Department of Psychology for the University of Toledo. "But it can be invaluable for parents who are not going to play games, particularly to the deeper and more difficult levels. The system makes it easier for parents to buy with confidence."

Another reality impacting the development of video games is that for every PlayStation 2 or Sega Dreamcast being sold, there is the possibility that the first generation PlayStation or Sega console is being wired to the family room television set, passed on for younger sibling and parent play.



Part of THQ's growing children's segment, Disney's *Little Mermaid II* follows the earlier success of Nickelodeon's *Rugrats* game for PlayStation consoles aimed at kids 6 to 8. © THQ, Inc.

## Kids and Gaming

Just one of many developers, THQ has grown from a toy company to a video game developer releasing children's Walt Disney titles such as *Pocahontas* and *Toy Story*, as well as the popular bass fishing games. The company has also developed titles based on the World Wrestling Federation (WWF). The Calabasas Hills California group reports that their *Rugrats* branded video game franchise has exceeded over \$100 million at retail.

"THQ's history has been about not only doing games that appeal to the core, 12 to 24 male audience but also for the gamers with unsatisfied needs," Ardell says. "In 1998, in response to the popularity of the PlayStation Platform we released *Rugrats: Search for Reptar* as one of the first video games that was specifically

designed for a young audience, ages 6 to 12." Continuing to serve this audience, THQ has recently shipped on September 25, the PlayStation title *The Little Mermaid II*, for girls ages 6 through 8, along with new Nintendo 64 *Scooby Do* and *Power Rangers* titles.

"Our titles geared for children are designed to involve parents in with the play experience," explains Ardell. "Parents may be sitting with them helping them to spot clues or solve puzzles. You must remember that parents have often gone with the children to see the movies, so they know the characters and are equally entranced with the game play."

As new consoles are being released, new road is being paved for the entertainment industry as a whole. Technology is converging to provide greater access to electronic entertainment, much of



Based on the new TV series, Disney/Pixar's *Buzz Lightyear of Star Command* is a real-time adventure game where players can be the real Buzz Lightyear. © Activision, Inc.

which — from the commercials we watch to the games we play — will be interactive.

And even with the majority of the games being released appropriate for family play and filled with rich wonderful animations, the question of violence will continue to plague the industry — both for consumers and creators.

"I think there are a lot of positive things to be said about video games, including that they introduce children to technology at a younger age," Dr. Funk says. "I also feel that children under the age of ten are much more susceptible to negative messages."

"I would be most protective of the media experience of children under ten, while recognizing that video games are a part of the child's life experience. As with any media, television, movies and music, parents need to be aware of what their children, of all ages, are playing and how much time they are spending on this one area of their life."

*Jacquie Kubin, a Washington, DC-based freelance journalist, enjoys writing about the electronic entertainment and edutainment mediums, including the Internet. She is a frequent contributor to the Washington Times and Krause Publication magazines. She has won the 1998 Certificate of Award granted by the Metropolitan Area Mass Media Committee of the American Association of University Women.*

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



# Animation World News

Compiled and written by Rick DeMott  
Technology news compiled and written by Mike Amron  
Additional reporting from the U.K. by Andrew Osmond

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## Awards

- Disney Announces the 2000 Disney Legends Recipients
  - I Castelli Animati Festival Splits Grand Prize
  - BAFTA Hands Out Its Interactive Nods
  - Saint Gely Awards Toon Prize To Adolf
  - Matita Honors Pleasures Of War With Grand Prize
  - Portuguese Short A Suspeita Wins Cartoon d'Or
  - Oscar For Animated Feature To Be Given In 2002
- <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Awards>

## Business

- Animation Stock Ticker For Tuesday, October 17, 2000
  - Z.com Laid Off Not Laughing
  - Blur Studios Expansion Adds Motion Capture Services
  - Phil Roman Entertainment Teams With C-3D TV & Internet
  - Animation Stock Ticker For Tuesday, October 10, 2000
  - Eidos Not Game On Takeover Terms
  - Cinar Explains Reasons For Delaying Financial Reports
  - Cosgrove Hall Goes Digital
  - Animation Stock Ticker For Tuesday, October 3, 2000
  - German TV Loonland Acquires Sony Wonder
  - MIPCOM Preview: The World Converges On Cannes
  - Sony Cuts Holiday PlayStation 2 Orders By Half
  - German Helkon Media Buys Dutch Rubinstein Media
  - Fox & Saban Sue Universal Over X-Men Videos
  - Cartoonists' Union Ratifies Contract
  - Foresight Marketing Forms New Animation Studio
  - ZDF Enterprises Launches New Media Subsidiary
  - Animation Stock Ticker For Tuesday, September 26, 2000
  - Canadian Writers Guild Adds Toon Scribes Under Coverage
  - Olive Jar Acquired By Red Sky
  - ASIFA International Selects New Board
- <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Business>

## Call for Entries

- Showtime Wants To Showcase Your Toons Online
  - Highlight Your Work In Front Of The World At Brussels
  - British Academy Awards Entry Deadline Nears
  - New York Childrens Film Fest Calls For Kid At Heart Flicks
  - AtomFilms Wants To Fill Their Savage Sideshow With Your Toons
- <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Call%for%Entries>

## Commercials

- Correction To Sunwoo Article
- <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Commercials>

## Corrections

- Blur Studio Enlisted For U.S. Army Reserve Spot
  - Quiet Man Uses face2face Technology On K'nex Toys Spot
  - Director Peter Nydrle Turns Cadillacs Into Olympic Swimmers
  - Black Logic Zooms With Second Lexmark Printers Ad
  - Steele VFX Strengthens New Jeep Spot
  - ViewPoint Studios Goes Wild With Animal Planet ID
  - Spontaneous Combustion Scores For NFL Properties
  - TOPIX/Mad Dog Bites Termites For Alka-Seltzer Ad
- <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Corrections>

## Education

- Nick Creates Development Program For TV & Film Writers
- <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Education>

# Animation World News

## Events

- Famed Russian Animator Yuri Norstein Comes To Georgetown University
- ASIFA-Hollywood Annie Awards Are The Toon Lands Top Honors
- Animation Magazine Is Hosting An Animation Business Marketplace
- Yuri Norstein Discussion In Russian!
- 4th Annual Collectibles Business And Gift Executive Conference
- Acting For Animators With Ed Hooks
- Yuri Norstein Will Be Screening His Work-In-Progress: The Overcoat
- DreamWorks Frank Gladstone Presents "What Makes A Great Film Great"
- Cinanima Captures The Art of Animation
- Unsold Anime Pilots: See What Never made It To U.S. TV!
- AnimExplosion Festival Brings Philippino Toons To The World
- UCLA Showcases The Art Of Anime
- TAIS Is Holding A Storyboarding For Animation Workshop
- Flashcore Presents Their Expo Of New Media & Internet Animation
- Baddeck Brings New Media To Canada!
- RESFEST 2000 Is Touring The World With The New Animated Film WAVE TWISTERS
- Take A Sneak Peek At Tomorrows Superstars At MISAF 2000!
- Celebrate The Opening of The Hands-On Animation Lab At Toon Sensation Weekend
- Catch A Sneak Peak At New Animation Work From ILM, PDI, DotComix & Wild Brain
- LEAF 2000 Features A Sneak Peak At PDI/DreamWorks' Shrek
- Holland Animation Fest Adds Indie Toon Competition This Year
- FCMM Celebrates The Cutting-Edge In A State Of The Art Theater
- London International Advertising Awards Puts The Spotlight On Spots
- Ajijic Festival de Cine Brings World Talent To Mexico
- Help Cure Ectodermal Dysplasias By Buying Animation Art!
- Learn How To Animate From Don Bluth at TOON-UP 2000!
- Jerry Becks Obscure TV Toons Is back By Popular Demand!
- iMix Brings Interactive TV To The Big Apple
- visions2000 Celebrates The Unusual World Of Animated Theatre

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## Licensing

- South Park Condoms?

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## Films

- X-Men Claim More International Victories
- WB Set To Start Live-Action Scooby-Doo Feature
- The House of the Dead Game Becomes Feature
- F/X Flicks Flicker With Lost Souls Debut In Third Tron Sequel In Works
- What Lies Around With Hollow Man Fading
- Exorcist Out Scares Digital Monsters Debut
- Mortal Kombat Helmer Takes On Resident Evil
- Disney Scraps Inappropriate Toon Feature
- Hollow Empties Pockets At The International BO
- Exorcist Repossess #2 At The US Box Office
- What Lies On Top Of The International Box Office

► <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Films>

## Internet and Interactive

- This Weeks Web Animation Guide For Friday, October 13, 2000
- This Weeks Web Animation Guide For Friday, October 6, 2000!
- Cops Producer Teams With Stan Lee On Webtoon
- Honkworm Teams With Cartoonist Leib On Jicketts Speed Shop
- This Weeks Web Animation Guide For Friday, September 29, 2000

► <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Internet%and%Interactive>

## People

- Disney's Vice-Chair Walks
- Curt Roth Joins Extratainment.com As CEO
- Honkworm Adds Von Funk To Senior Staff
- EM.TV's CFO Steps Down In Light Of Stock Plummet
- Sesame Workshop Names Chrein VP, Global Media
- Rhinoceros Adds Director/Designer Dorrington
- Eidos CFO Resigns
- Dotcomix Fills Key Positions As Co-Founder Leaves
- Brown Takes New VP Post At Sunwoo
- Cornerstone Adds Ellwood To Board & VanBorssum As COO
- Emmer Lands Film Roman Rep Post
- Solomon Pegged To Victory Board

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## Technology

- Pixar Pieces
  - Animation Toolworks Ships The LunchBox Sync
  - Will SGI Rebound?
- <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Technology>

## Television

- WB Orders More Chan Toons
  - Witchblade Now Gets A TV Series
  - Henson Set To Helm Jack & The Beanstalk Miniseries
  - British Mr. Bean To Become Cartoon
  - Dotcomix's Sister Randy Brings Habit To BBC America
  - Abdul Set To Choreograph New Cartoon
  - CBS Seeing Ratings Boom From Nick Jr Block
  - Cartoon Network Ratings Up 25%
  - Neptuno Films & Planeta 2010 To Co-Produce Puss In Boots Series
  - Cosgrove Hall Animates Fetch The Vet
  - Chorion Creates \$15M CGI Noddy Series
  - ABC Outbids CBS For Peanuts' Specials
  - Aardman Delinquent Breaks Net
- <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Television>

## Video

- Toy Story 2 Lasso's Video Release Date On Video & DVD
  - Icebox's Mr. Wong Direct-To-Video Plans Melt
  - Shamanic Princess Descends Onto Video
  - The 8th Volume Of Bubblegum Crisis: Tokyo 2040 Hits Stores
  - Maze Series Wakes Up On VHS
  - ETA For Spaceship Agga Ruter "Sweet Release" October 2000
  - Special Editions Of Nightmare Before Christmas & Giant Peach
  - Scooby Scars Up Direct-To-DVD
  - Blues Clues First Feature
  - Black Cauldron and Ichabod & Mr. Toad Come To DVD
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# Next Issue's Highlights

## Location-based Entertainment, December 2000

**D**ecember will feature articles based on the themes of location-based entertainment and anime. Karl Cohen is profiling Imax — is animation's next frontier in peril? On the anime side of things Fred Patten is going to review *Vampire Hunter D*, the latest anime hit to arrive on U.S. soil. Andrew Osmond is going to be interviewing a number of experts and scholars on the stylistic merits of Japanese animation.

In other articles Chris Robinson is back with another "Animation Pimp" — he promises this one will be a bit more "user friendly." Eric Huelsman is currently having fun playing with the new Lego Mindstorms and will fill us in on the details of these new high-tech versions of the old childhood favorites. Plus, we are going to have an in-depth conversation with voice actor, teacher, director Charlie Adler. From *Cow and Chicken* to *Rugrats* you can hear and see Charlie's work almost every time you turn on the television.

Plus we will also have a new Glenn Vilppu installment, an Internet company profile on Urban Entertainment and our monthly gaming column is going to focus on *Men In Black*. Plus, David Fine is going to review the Week of the Masters being held in Trivandrum, India. Plus, we will have reports from the London Effects and Animation Festival and Portugal's Cinanima. And, of course, there will be more.

## Upcoming Editorial Calendar

Location-based Entertainment	December 2000
The Year In Review	January 2001
Stop-Motion and Motion Capture	February 2001
Production Technology	March 2001