

ANIMATION

WORLD

Vol. 5 No. 5

• MAGAZINE

• August 2000

**Animation's
Surprise:**

**The
Internet**



**SIGGRAPH, Mainframe Entertainment,
U.K. Festivals, Canada's Scene and more!**

Table of Contents

AUGUST 2000

VOL. 5 No. 5

AUGUST 2000

5 Editor's Notebook
Go Web Young (Wo)Man, Go Web

7 Letters: editor@awn.com

Internet Animation

8 Your Move...
Jacquie Kubin looks at how and why packaged gaming companies are adding on-line elements to their business plans.

12 Alter-Net-ive Worlds
How would the world of animation be different if instead of being a new tool the Web was an old one? Get ready for some pretty wild "classics." Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman takes us theorizing...

16 The Aesthetics of Internet Animation
Think Web tools are restrictive creatively? Think again! Chris Lanier, creator of Wildbrain's *Romanov*, explains why, in the vein of comics, they are actually a source of freedom.

20 Is There Life Beyond Flash?
Flash is the leading tool for Internet animation, but there are a few other options for production and augmentation. Here industry leaders reveal their secrets from high tech 3D software to good, old-fashioned talent.

23 Getting Started On-Line
So you want to get into this Internet game? Two of AtomStudios' animators, Kwesi Ako Kennedy and James Dalby, not only tell you how, but offer tips for success.

Computer Animation

25 Vancouver's Mainframe Entertainment
Since their first 3D CGI television show, the groundbreaking *Reboot*, Mainframe Entertainment has been producing quality children's television. Don Perro goes for a tour and finds they are working on more than television now.

29 Writing for CGI: A Talk With Ian Boothby
Ian Boothby, co-writer of *Casper's Haunted Christmas*, gives us some insight on the pitfalls and joys of writing for CGI.

SIGGRAPH Special

34 WAM!NET at SIGGRAPH 2000
Working on a production that is taking place on three different continents? Need to see that footage today? Need more rendering horsepower to boot? Then you need to meet WAM!NET, a real production service solution. Stephanie Argy explains.

Table of Contents

AUGUST 2000

VOL. 5 No. 5

AUGUST 2000

37 Recruiting at SIGGRAPH 2000

Juniko Moody speaks with the major studios' recruiters and relates what they had to say about their current hiring philosophies and needs.

42 Focus on SIGGRAPH: Eyetronics

This year's SIGGRAPH keynote address was given by scientist, inventor and visionary Ray Kurzweil, who discussed "The Human-Machine Merger: Why We Will Spend Most of Our Time in Virtual Reality in the 21st Century." Sound farfetched? Then take a look at Eyetronics' ShapeSnatcher demonstration.

Focus On...

45 Scandals, Smokescreens and a Golden Age?: Canadian Animation in the 21st Century

Recently Canada has been at the center of controversy and mixed reports of success, scandals and damage control. Chris Robinson offers us an updated look at the animation scene.

Other

53 Beyond Vital: British Festivals In 2000

With the demise of Cardiff ancient history, the U.K.'s animation crowd is springing back to life with a number of lively new events. Andrew Osmond takes a closer look at this year's activity.

58 A Letter To A Master

Giannalberto Bendazzi writes Giorgio "Max" Massimino-Garniér, who was not only a personal source of inspiration and learning, but one of the greatest figures in Italian, as well as international animation in the last 50 years. Available in English and Italian.

The Student Corner

66 Let's Sketch on Location: The Thumbnail Sketch

Just in time for summer trips, renowned drawing instructor Glenn Vilppu continues with his second installment discussing techniques for sketching on location.

INTERNET COMPANY PROFILE

73 Adventurous Action Abounds on Stanlee.net

Pow! Take that. There's a new superhero powered player in town! Lee Dannacher finds that there is more behind Stan Lee Media than the man himself.

EVENTS

80 Ray Harryhausen, A Celebration

When Ray Harryhausen turned eighty Creative Planet was there for this star studded tribute to a true industry inspiration. Joe Fordham reports.

Table of Contents

AUGUST 2000

Vol. 5 No. 5

AUGUST 2000

Films

84 Fresh From the Festivals

Maureen Furniss once again offers a wonderful selection of films, complete with excellent commentary: *Oil and Vinegar*, *Brahm's Lullaby*, *Sheep in the Big City* "Chapter 2: *Sheep on the Lam*," *Hello, Dolly!* and *Atlas Gets a Drink*.

News

87 Cartoon d'Ors Five Finalists, Fox Animation Phoenix Burns Out, Dr. Katz Co-Creator Inks Icebox Deal, Aardman's Angry Kid Sets Net Record, Baby Blues Animates WB Friday Nights, Fox Kids Europe Invades More Turkish Homes, Voyager Producer Signs Deal To Create Next Trek Series and, of course, much, much more....

89 Next Issue's Highlights

6 This Month's Contributors

Cover: *Romanov*, a new series on Wildbrain.com. © Wildbrain.com

Editor's Notebook

by Heather Kenyon



Go Web Young (Wo)Man, Go Web

When I left the comforts of Hanna-Barbera Cartoons in May of 1997 (has it been that long?) for the wild, wild Web world of Animation World Network, people thought I was crazy. They spoke to me in hushed tones of warning...and then started asking questions: "What is it? A magazine on the Internet? How does it work? So just any ol' computer can get it? You dial 'up'? It's free? That can't work..." I reminded them that television was also free and had seemed to catch on. They looked puzzled and wandered off, later telling other mutual friends and acquaintances that they feared I had made a serious miscalculation with my career.

Well, here we are a few years later and many of those same people are working on Webisodes instead of episodes. The Internet is an incredible phenomenon that has caught on unbelievably fast. Moreover, we

are lucky enough to be living at the right time and place to experience it. When I was at USC in 1993 there were a few computers in the library with this strange "Internet" thing hooked up to them, but I never actually saw them. They were very special. Now, every student worldwide goes to school and automatically gets an email account. I can't pay my bills, plan a trip or make a large purchase without it. Moreover the Internet as we know it is just the beginning of how connected we will be. Soon the Internet will be on our cell phones and watches all of the time – in some places it already is.

The Web is here to stay and we'd better start figuring out how to best use it. I have found that people are coming to the Web from many different areas and are bringing with them their native terminology and business models. Therefore, the industry is becoming a melting pot of ideas and approaches, making for some exciting companies. One of the most prevalent trends that I've noticed is that the most innovative Web-based entertainment companies are headed by pioneers from other arenas – not the traditional media outlets. People with backgrounds in gaming, CD-Roms, technology, research, even military applications of technology, are coming to the Internet and creating off the page and out of the box thinking companies.

One of the largest puzzles

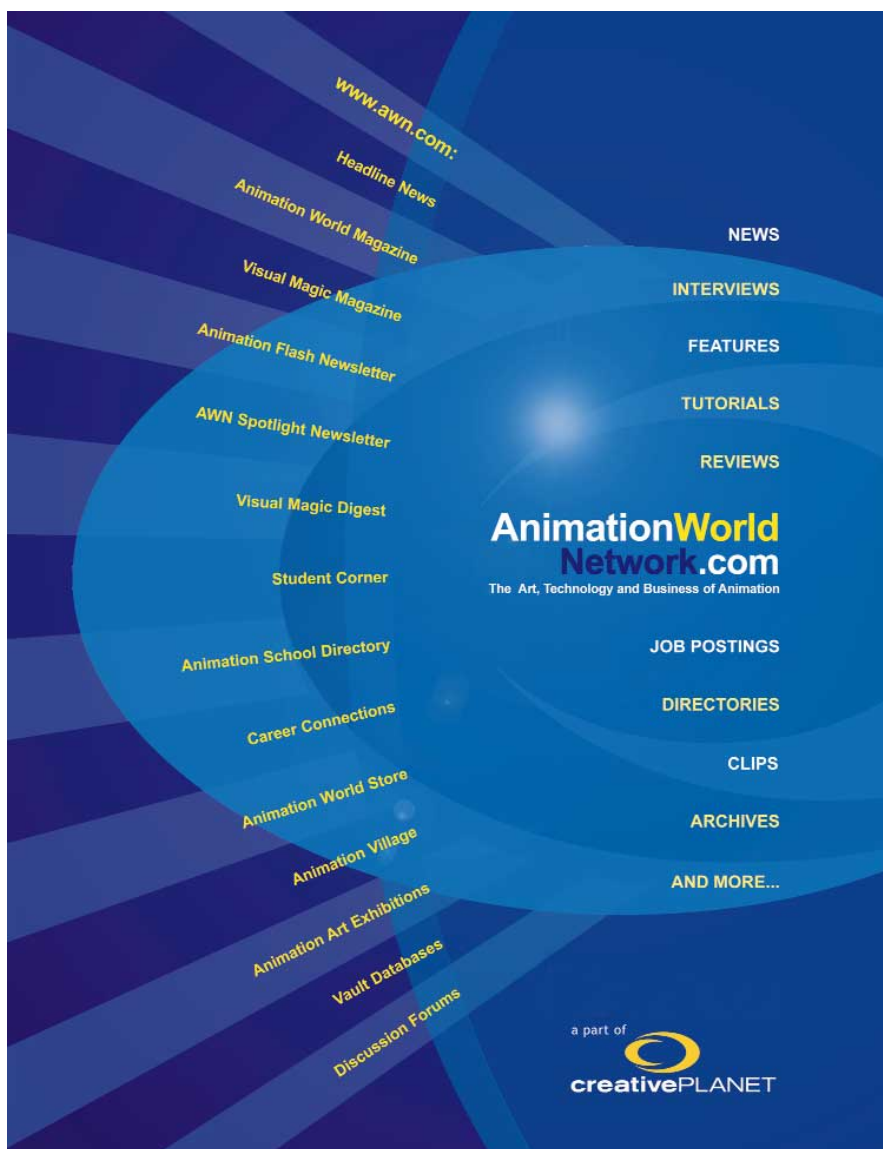
right now is how to make it all produce money. Is the Internet a guaranteed cash cow? Definitely not. Is it easy to run through tons of venture capital and never earn a dime? For some, yes. But what is not true is the statement that I have heard quite often from Web naysayers: "These companies don't have solid business models." The truth is: there isn't a set business model. We have become very comfortable with the standard business models when it comes to feature film and television. While companies target different markets and niches, the basic principles of where like companies make their money is the same. This is not the case with the Internet yet and companies that are bringing animated series to the Net are all approaching it from different directions. As the market matures a pattern might emerge but for now it is indeed the wild, wild frontier with people making predictions, doing great work, praying and bending the rules as the industry changes and flexes at warp speed. These are exciting times and call for true creative thinking.

Speaking of creative thinking, I have just returned from SIGGRAPH – a conference I love for this very reason. I find SIGGRAPH tremendously stimulating because one can hear a lecture about how SGI hardware was used on *Mission to Mars* and within fifteen minutes hear highly theoretical predictions on the impact artificial intelligence implants will have on human cul-

ture. SIGGRAPH is where you realize science-fiction is pretty tame compared to what the academicians are cooking up in laboratories all over the world. How exciting! I think SIGGRAPH was charged with a special energy this year because of these very discussions. After a week at SIGGRAPH I want the future to be here now — to see how it all turns out and to be able to play with the gadgets about which I have just heard. Indeed high technology will play a larger role in our lives, converging

with the Internet and other similar systems. Like the Industrial Revolution, the Technological Revolution will bring with it many, many changes of culture, lifestyle and being, some predicted and planned for, perhaps some radical and unexpected. The Internet as we know it is just the tip of the iceberg — get ready for the next incredible developmental rush.

Until Next Time,
Heather



ANIMATION WORLD NETWORK

5700 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 600
Los Angeles, CA 90036
Phone : 323.634.3400
Fax : 323.634.3350
Email : info@awn.com

ANIMATION WORLD

• MAGAZINE •

editor@awn.com

PUBLISHERS

Ron Diamond, President
Dan Sarto, Chief Operating Officer

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Heather Kenyon

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Rick DeMott

EDITORIAL ADMINISTRATOR

Gregory Singer

CONTRIBUTORS

Stephanie Argy
Giannalberto Bendazzi
James Dalby
Lee Dannacher
Rick DeMott
Joe Fordham
Maureen Furniss, Ph.D.
Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman
Kwesi Ako Kennedy
Heather Kenyon
Jacquie Kubin
Chris Lanier
Juniko Moody
Andrew Osmond
Don Perro
Chris Robinson
Glenn Vilppu

OPERATIONS

Annick Teninge, General Manager

DESIGN/LAYOUT

Alex Binotapa

WEBMASTERS

Jeremy Keller
Alex Binotapa

ADVERTISING SALES

Jay Stokes

Edward Gorey

I share Derek Lamb's sentiments on the artistry of the late Edward Gorey (Lamb, 5.4). Although I never had the opportunity to work on his projects, my wife Pat and I were always passionate collectors of his work. When we were dating Gorey was one of the first things we shared in common. Growing up an art student in New York whenever you went to a first night at ABT or the Metropolitan Opera you could always see Gorey in his full-length fur coat and hi-top tennis sneakers, his beard groomed in the manner of a well-manicured Edwardian aristocrat. For years after we moved on, whenever we were in New York a holy obligation was always a stop into the Gotham Book Mart on 47th to see if there were any new Gorey publications. I mourn a great artist and brilliant wit. Bravo Derek for your article.

Sincerely,
Tom Sito

Turning to Japan

I really liked the article "Growing Pains" by Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman (Goodman, 5.4). I think that you hit the money on the button why "adult" themes in animation cannot make it in the U.S. Many people associate cartoons with only children here. I think anime, i.e. Japanese animation, has handled adult themes the best, and that perhaps American filmmakers could learn a thing or two from them.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Walford

Toon In Feedback

Editor's Note: To accompany this issue, AWN recently launched Toon In, a weekly guide to Web animation. The response has been tremendous so here is a sampling of the good, and the bad, regarding our new feature.

I received the AWN Flash, read it, learned a lot of important information and was psyched to see that you mentioned the Rumpus/Eggels piece. Thanks so much. We're still reeling from Lee Dannacher's "A Rumpus On The Net" (Dannacher, 5.4) about us. It was that good! You people at AWN rock!

Have fun!
Stephanie @ rumpus.com

If this is Rick who recommended the *Exit 109* episode in AWN's Toon In of July 25, 2000:

Please refrain from applying your opinions to any cartoons in the future.

This short was hardly edgy or smart. For instance, the entire opening of the dog being in the car was wasteful. It had no bearing on the story as a whole, and could have been done many other ways in about 3 seconds. The rest of the short involved watching a dog in a walk cycle and babbling on about being

Jewish. After a few witty shots of his butt crack (always gets a laugh right?) we are subjected to a one line finish which hardly comes across as the shot of the dog's penis practically goes unnoticed.

Overall from me it gets one star. I appreciate you reading this.

Jason

Your Move...

by Jacquie Kubin

A Look At How And Why Packaged Gaming Companies Are Adding On-line Elements To Their Business Plans

In 1998, "think tankers" Forrester Research, Inc. reported that leisure table games, card, board and television game show games are becoming more popular to on-line players than "hard core gamer" games such as *Quake* or *Doom*. This is not to say that all those adolescent to young adult males who enjoy their first person shooters suddenly took an interest in on-line bridge tournaments. It means that today's on-line game players are not just made up of teen age boys between the ages of 18-32.

The card and board game audiences are potentially huge with more than 100 million active members. Numbers at on-line sites such as Pogo.com and Uproar.com exceed three and four million registered users.

A key reason for game site popularity increases is that visitors to on-line game sites spend long periods of time not just playing, but also chatting with other gamers in community chat rooms and message boards. Gamesville.com reports that the average visitor spends more than four hours per visit.

As impressive as having millions of loyal registered users is, that number represents only a percentage of the more than 40 million U.S. households that are on-line. At the turn of the millennium,

the Internet has become a large part of every day life. It continually changes consumer habits. It is a communication, e-commerce and entertainment destination.

With these large numbers of targeted users identified, it is no wonder that the gaming companies are seeking to increase the loyalty of console game playing households while reading over to the Internet family demographic as a new revenue resource.

Numbers at on-line sites such as Pogo.com and Uproar.com exceed three and four million registered users.

Sega Goes On-Line

First to market Sega of Japan, Inc. is baiting more than 28 million gaming customers with the lure of a free Dreamcast console when they sign-up for SegaNet (www.sega.com), a fee-based Internet service provider and gaming destination rolled into one that gives users a gateway to the World Wide Web through their PC



Leisure on-line games are proving to be tough competition for the hard core games that traditionally dominated the arena. © Electronic Arts.

and/or Sega.

"Giving away the console is a small price to pay to be able to own the multiplayer games on-line," says Charles Bellfield, director of communications, Sega of America from his San Francisco office. "Deploying SegaNet will allow us to build a community of gamers that we will engage not through the PC or desktop, but through the living space. This battle for the consumer will take place on the living room sofa."

The Dreamcast, Sega's latest enhancement to console gaming, was released to market this last spring and came equipped with a 57K modem and a keyboard peripheral port, though early adopters of the console had no need for either. Installing those unseen extras was a bit of forecasting on the part of the hardware manufacturer who will be deploying SegaNet this fall.

For those who have already purchased a Dreamcast or for those getting ready to make the purchase, when making a two year commitment (\$21.95 per



© Access Communications.



Screen shot from *Star Trek Conquest On-line*. © Activision.

month) to the SegaNet ISP, they will receive a rebate check (up to \$199) for the cost of the Sega Dreamcast gaming console.

With the cost to acquire a new e-commerce customer ranging as high as \$600 each for financial sites such as E-Trade and averaging more in the \$200 range for other sites, giving away the \$249 console, at retail, might be an inexpensive way to forge brand loyalty within a hotly competitive market.

"You will not need to be a part of the SegaNet ISP to play the SegaNet games, but you will want to be as it will be a faster network that consistently delivers packets without latency," Bellfield explains. "The person who wants performance for enhanced interactive game play will want the edge that SegaNet technology will deliver."

Joining the on-line gaming revolution does not remove the requirement to buy the packaged game but it does allow Johnny in New Jersey to battle Kyle in Texas, moving the often solo activity of electronic game playing into a

more social arena.

**"I find on-line gaming very interesting and not unlike entering a brave new world."
— Jeff Holzhauer**

Another Final Frontier

Activision's *Star Trek Conquest On-line* (www.conqueston-line.com) has successfully meshed on-line gaming into a community environment with their *Star Trek* franchise inspired game.

"I find on-line gaming very interesting and not unlike entering a brave new world," says Jeff Holzhauer, producer *Star Trek Conquest On-line*. "The jury is still out on its wide acceptance, but I am excited about being a part of this emerging genre of game play."

In order to achieve maxi-

imum game and community environment benefits, *Star Trek Conquest On-line* players will either purchase a boxed version of the game (\$30) or download the game from the Internet Web site (\$20). The advantage to the retail boxed version is that when registering to play, the \$10 registration fee is waved, downloading is easier, the player receives additional collectible characters and it comes packaged with a hard copy of the player's manual. Once registered to play, additional booster packs of fifteen playing pieces can be purchased for \$3 each on-line only.

"*Star Trek Conquest On-line* provides an interesting experiment in bringing the collectible paradigm to on-line gaming," says Holzhauer. "Players are able to purchase additional collectible playing pieces, win them from other players or by competing in daily tournaments to fine tune their playing experience."

Fee players are given a starter group of 51 playing pieces from within five different segments: People, Items, Ships,



Klingons are ready for battle!
© Activision.

Events and one Q. The player is in the role of a "Q" — a race of superior intelligence beings that use mortals as pawns in a race against other Q for control of the universe — manipulating playing pieces against other Internet players.

The human "pawns," or playing pieces, are characters recognizable to *Star Trek: The Next Generation* fans. Upon registering for the on-line game, fee players can choose key characters such as Captain Jean-Luc Picard, Ambassador Sarek, a Borg Queen, Counselor Deanna Troi and Lieutenant Worf.

For Activision, the creation of an immersive, interactive gaming experience means that people are communicating with other people on-line creating their own *Star Trek Conquest On-line* experience. "Players will be able to add depth to the game based on their own experience and community interactions with other players when they get together in the chat room outside of the game," says Holhauzer. "We are looking forward to some heated, 'My Captain Picard can beat your Number One any day,' battles."

Activision claims 9,000 registered *Star Trek Conquest* players, though they do not, at this time, have sell through numbers for the retail packaged game that launched in June of this year.

Star Trek Conquest is only



Partnering with AOL, Electronic Arts is becoming a strong presence in the on-line gaming community.
© Electronic Arts.



Commercials will be diving into the gaming scene soon! © Electronic Arts

the first step for the gaming company that plans to add more on-line gaming to their roster.

The company plans on developing an on-line network, committing in excess of \$200 million toward cyber space.

Giants EA and AOL

Electronic Arts has partnered with America On-line (AOL) in hopes of creating a family gaming destination. By becoming a member of the AOL family the group has ready access to their twenty-three million subscriptions, which they feel represents 50 million on-line persons.

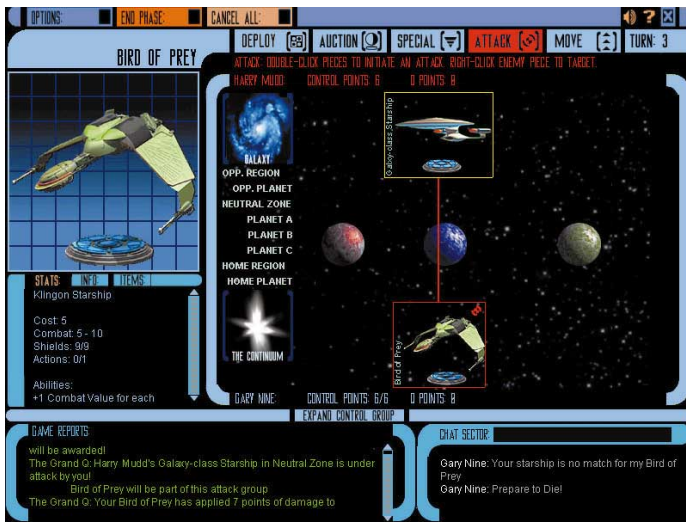
The gaming company has experienced certain success with its game *Ultima* (www.uo.com), claiming 180,000 players who are

paying a monthly \$9.95 fee in order to spend, on average, twenty hours a week within a medieval fantasy realm with other cyber gamers.

The company, which enjoys a large European presence, plans on developing an on-line network that would provide gaming experiences for everyone, committing in excess of \$200 million toward cyber space.

"Our on-line rallying cry is to create games that are as easy to play as television is to watch," said Jeff Brown, Senior Director of Corporate Communications. "This means that while we will create challenging games, there will also be games for everyone. There are going to be deep game experiences for the more experienced gamers, but also games that are easier to play for new and intermediate gamers."

The site, an enhanced version of which will only be available to AOL subscribers, will be a subscription-based model with fees forecasted to be under \$10 per



More screen shots from *Star Trek Conquest On-line*. © Activision.

month. Non-AOL users will not have access to free games and the interface will be slightly different.

The gaming company, which still plans to treat packaged goods as their number one source of revenue, predicts that on-line gaming will provide a good, sustainable business model for future growth with revenue streams, in addition to subscription fees, being realized from the sale of on-screen or banner advertising, e-commerce and, in the future, interspatial advertising.

"Commercials within gaming are going to be a reality," says Brown. "The only question is whether it will look like American television with commercials interspersed or British television with commercials grouped at the end of the broadcast hour."

Rounding out the list of hard core gaming groups looking to profit from soft gamers is PlayStation2. The PlayStation2 gaming console has been designed to merge movies, music and games heralding what the company claims is a "new world of computer entertainment."

Don't Rule Out...

For gamers, PlayStation2

will be delivering enhanced digital graphics but for family use the system is being designed to serve as a network platform that will allow users to merge electronic media. Game players will be able to enjoy the look, feel, sound and cinema type experiences.

The system will support audio CD and DVD video formats offering consumer's music and video entertainment options while retaining the ability to play games created for the original PlayStation systems.

With a phone connection, PlayStation2 will allow Internet-based electronic distribution of digital content when used with an Ethernet connection to broadband networks (i.e., digital cable). Users will be able to download data-intensive computer entertainment content to an accessory hard-disc drive through their PlayStation2. Additional connection ports on the PlayStation2 include a wide range of digital and s-video outputs for televisions, monitors and speaker systems. Gamers will be able to attach two computer type joysticks and game play accessories.

Players will be able to hear more about the gaming giants

broadband strategy after the game ships on October 26, however industry reports state that sometime next year the company will have an expansion unit that will ship with the hard drive allowing for a future network interface and on-line gaming element.

Jacque 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.

Alter-Net-ive Worlds

by Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman

(Note: The following is a fiction based on true events in animation history...)

Time: 21 August 2000 @ 1330 / Content: Lesson Plan 4B/Estimated Run Time (incl. variable factor questions.answers) 61 min 40 sec. Image enhancement and vocoder: default settings. Initialize sequence 3YA 76C "Pixelle" bandwidth 6768Hz/system is activated —

"Good afternoon, class. Today we continue with the early history of Internet animation and its impact on the societal and global perception of the animated medium. Please open your textbooks to page 17 and have yesterday's notes at hand. Simon Banetta, can you tell me where we left off?"

"Yes I can, Professor Pixelle. We were discussing the effects of World War I on computer development."

"Quite correct. In 1912, it will be recalled, the United States government discovered, and procured the services of, 12 year-old boy genius John V. Atanasoff. This prodigy, along with a talented staff, worked on an all-electronic computer for two years. With the outbreak of World War I the project was given special impetus under Secretary of War Baker during the Wilson Administration. Who can tell me the importance of this undertaking? Elena Diaz?"



Fantasia...the greatest movie ever made? © Disney.

"Well, if you're talking about the early development of computers, that's the period in which the first breakthroughs in magnetic-core memory and transistors replaced the first models that Atanasoff and Von Neumann designed. If you're talking about the Internet, that was the period in which Remington Rand started working on integrated communication networks for the military."

"Correct on both counts. Wilson, anticipating entry into WWI, gave the project top priority. Unfortunately, the modern computer and the Internet could not be developed in time to help the Allied war effort or 'make the world safe for democracy.' We were able to get no further than the concept of a stored program and the progenitors of languages such as FORTRAN and COBOL by the end of 1918. Still, this 24-hour a day, intensive research effort involving the most brilliant minds

and prodigies from across America was one of the most impressive technological feats ever accomplished. The stage was set for the silicon disk in 1920, the semiconductor in 1923, and the first modern operating systems with ultra-large scale integration by 1926. By the time Mussolini controlled Italy and Communism was well-established in Russia, microprocessor technology allowed nearly every American to own a personal computer. This fueled one of the biggest economic booms in our history. Adam Curtis, perhaps you can tell what happened next."

"I can. The Department of Defense had ARPANET running by 1928, realizing Wilson's dream. Within two years, thanks to the discovery of TCP/IP by Vint Cerf I, we had the Internet by 1929. Of course, the first animation software had been used by then. I think it was, uh, Real-Izer, developed at the Fleischer studio in 1927."

"Everyone has done the assignment, I see! Right again. The combination of Internet-ready systems and animation software by 1930 turned a cel-based medium into one that could be downloaded worldwide through computer plug-in devices. Now, you mentioned the Fleischer studio; good starting point. Having long been fascinated by technical advancements, Max Fleischer was one of the first pioneers to take advantage of early CGI software. The Real-Izer was a decent start, but had many problems generating 3D effects. When Max hired Ub Iwerks away from the Disney studios in 1931, this gifted technician was able to refine the software until Real-Izer 4.5 overcame the technical problems involved in 3D rendering. Who can discuss the next great advancement in Web-based animation? Chad Wright?"

"In my opinion, professor, the next advancement wasn't technical at all. It had to do with the creators rights battles of the 1930s."

"An interesting assessment, Mr. Wright. Say more."



Aah, how Casper might have been...
© Harvey Entertainment.

"Sure. After the Net developed into the World Wide Web, animators began independently developing cartoons in their own small studios. The movie moguls and film producers wanted their stuff, but were forced to deal with

them on a contract basis. The first challenge to the system happened in 1932 when two independents, Joe Oriolo and Seymour Reit, were hired in at Paul Terry studios. While working there, they hit it big with a Web-based toon of their own called *Casper the Jive-Jumpin' Ghost*. Terry tried to claim that since Oriolo and Reit worked for him, Terry Studios automatically owned the rights. It took a court less than a month to decide in favor of the creators, and Oriolo and Reit wound up millionaires. After that, creators dealt with studios on their terms, and the suits were lucky to get 15% of any merchandising rights. That's got to be a major step, Professor Pixelle."

"True enough, and your point is well taken. Perhaps Lin Zhao can take the story from there."

"Gladly, prof. The first 3D Web cartoon was *Ko-Ko's Diner*, 1930. Fleischer and Walt Disney Studios were pretty much neck and neck through the early '30s, but it was the Fleischers that took advantage of the fact that the Web was not subject to regulation, and that literally any content could be broadcast without the threat of censorship. Max and Dave began to produce two sets of cartoons, one for public consumption in movie theaters, and another for the Fleischer Web site. Those that enjoyed more risqué, surreal, and in some cases graphic content could download the erotic adventures of Betty Boop. Disney chose not to go that route, believing that what Americans really wanted was clean, wholesome entertainment. His brother Roy urged Walt to go a more modern, adult-oriented route but Walt wouldn't play ball.

"By 1935, it was clear who

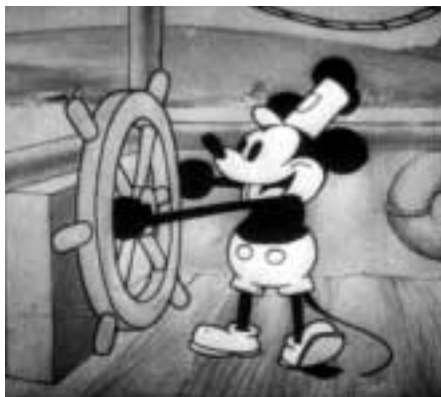


Betty, the biggest star of all. © King Features Syndicate/Fleischer Studios.

had won that battle: the Fleischer Web site, with millions of hits and subscriptions, financed more advances in software and resulted in better theater-based cartoons for their studio as well. Disney tried to counter by unveiling Mortimer Mouse in 1933, but by the end of the decade this rather tame character was all but defunct. Disney's last gasp came in 1937 when he attempted the first feature-length animated feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, but by then most of his key animators such as Norm Ferguson, Bill Tytla and Grim Natwick had already signed with Fleischer or were freelancing at MGM, Warners or Van Beuren. The film flopped, and the biggest hit of the year turned out to be the Web short *Betty's Birthday Bash* in which caricatures of the biggest male stars in Hollywood paid...um...tribute to Betty on her fourth anniversary as a star."

"Yes, and that brings us to today's lecture. Class, please turn to page 41. With the Fleischers established as the premier animation studio in America, a position they still hold today, a new trend began to take place. Fleischer and other studios such as Terry, MGM

and Mesmer began to offer benefits packages and signing bonuses to independents in order to procure and keep their services. It was a difficult path for the studios; many of these highly eccentric, restlessly creative mavericks either chafed at being under a production system or would attempt to strike it big with an independently produced character they hoped would be their ticket to fame and riches. At times this worked: witness Jack Kinneys independent revival of a then-forgotten character named Goofy following the failure of the first Disney studio in 1940. At other times it failed, as with Isadore Kleins attempt to launch his *Super Mouse* — later known as *Mighty Mouse* — series after his departure from Terry Studios in 1941.



Could this plucky mouse have compared to the one we know today? © Disney.

“The battles over creators rights and studio properties never truly ended, however. One of the few mistakes Max Fleischer made was relinquishing the rights to a minor property. Dave Tendlar and Myron Waldman independently produced a Web-based cartoon named *Popeye The Sailor* that Fleischer had let go as part of a contract incentive for Waldman. The old sea dogs markedly violent and steamy adventures were soon the hit of the Web, and Max

attempted to void the contract. His powerful legal department succeeded in shutting down Waldman and Tendlars Web site until the decision was overturned in Appeals Court. At times the creators themselves were at odds, as happened after Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera created the highly successful *Tom and Jerry* series in 1940. Each claimed exclusive credit, and the situation was not helped when producer Fred Quimby, for reasons unknown, paid an exceedingly large bonus to Bill Hanna. The legal battle, highlighted by the infamous ‘missing floppy disks’ controversy, ended with Hanna and Barbera never again working with one another. However, no case was more convoluted than that of Bugs Bunny at the Warner Bros. studio.

“Independent producer Leon Schlesinger was, along with the Fleishers, the main beneficiary of the collapse of the first Disney Studio. Walts refusal to market a wilder, more adult product for the World Wide Web sent former Disney animators such as Isadore “Friz” Freleng, Chuck Jones, Fred Moore and Milt Kahl over to Schlesingers stable, and the crafty producer also signed such independents as Robert Clampett, Tex Avery, Frank Tashlin and Dick Huemer. After contracting with Warner Bros. for a distribution deal, Schlesinger turned the team



These frightened little pigs look a bit risqué themselves! © Disney.

loose for the first time in 1938. Clampett and Tashlin turned out to be natural partners, creating a risqué couple named Porky and Petunia Pig. The first cartoon in the series, *Porky's Hot-Cha Honey*, established the studio as a comer. Fred Moores sensual 3D rendering contrasted brilliantly with Tashlins rapidly paced direction and quick cuts, not to mention Clampetts twisted gags.”

“What about the Jones-Avery-Kahl dispute, Professor?”

“Getting to it, Ms. Zhao. Friz Freleng, Chuck Jones and Milt Kahl came up with a rabbit named Bugs Bunny who at first appeared only in theater-based productions. It remained for Tex Avery to add the warped humor and tight pacing that made the hare the new darling of the studios Web cartoons. Unfortunately, this led to a dispute over the actual ownership of the character, who existed in two distinct mediums. Jones claimed exclusive credit for the characters creation, a story disputed by Kahl, who claimed that he and Huemer developed a similar rabbit named Max at Disney. Jones’ story was supported by Clampett, who stated that he was present at the early storyboard and wireframe design sessions before he and Tashlin left to work on Web cartoons featuring the very popular (and now discontinued) sexpot Coal Black. Avery, for his part, claimed that Bugs Bunny was his first effort at motion-capture and that he had the program to prove it. The debate between Avery and Jones developed rancorous overtones, and the two sadly remained at odds throughout their respectively brilliant careers. Avery eventually left studio work altogether and remained an independent until his death

despite tempting offers from Walter Lantz and Otto Mesmer. We'll meet him again later in this course."

"Professor Pixelle, not to change the subject, but some things got me confused. Our e-lesson plan cites *Fantasia* as 'the greatest animated film that was never made.' I don't get it."

"Actually, Eric, that fits in with our next topic. Roy Disney was determined to stay in business despite his brother's abandonment of the field for a career in urban planning. Roy resurrected a discarded idea for a film called *Fantasia* that existed only as a series of notes from Walt. The film was intended to be an exercise in the higher arts; Roy believed that a market existed for adult cartoons that were sexy, yet more refined than the raucous, edgy and often violent products that were finding their way to America's PCs and laptops. In 1942 Roy Disney established the second Disney Studio and put the production of *Fantasia* in the hands of two loyalists left over from Walt's regime, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston. It was hoped that this lightly erotic film, set to classical music, would recapture audiences and that the characters would spin off to the subscription Web site.

"Under Thomas and Johnston the artistic renaissance known as 'Disney's New Wave' flourished, featuring artists and writers such as John Hubley, Dave Hilberman, Bill Hurtz and Steve Bosustow. They were soon joined by Chuck Jones who, tiring of rowdy cartoons and personality clashes, yearned for a more intellectual approach to animated shorts. This crew began to experiment with *Fantasia*, replacing classical music with jazz and finally



Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston are superstars, regardless of the times.
Photo by Karen Quincy Loberg. Courtesy of and © 1995 the Walt Disney Company.
All Rights Reserved.

breaking the segments up into convenient downloads. The most famous segment was, of course, 'Rooty Toot Toot.' Though Roy Disney's *Fantasia* was ultimately never made, the 'New Wave' ended up redesigning the entire look of Web cartoons by minimizing 3D sequences, eschewing special effects and abandoning attempts at motion-capture. These simple but stylish cartoons created a stir among the artistic community and had the added advantage of a fast download time."

"Thanks, prof! I got it!"

"This will be our stopping point for today. Next week we will examine how World War II affected the World Wide Web and how the Internet became a powerful tool for animated propaganda on both sides. The effect of the 'Tokio Jokio' virus as a weapon will be examined, and we will also see how government blackouts, firewalls, and discontinuation of local servers in the name of national security affected the history of animation. Your assignment is to read pages 65-98, including the section 'Hitler's Hackers.' Class is dismissed, and have a pleasant afternoon."

*Time: 21 August 2000 @1431/
Initiating shutdown sequence 3YB*

for hologram "Pixelle." Save image enhancement pathways and vocoder defaults. Deactivation table 4.009 in progress 5..4..3..2..1..end program.

This column marks my first full year with Animation World Magazine! I would like to thank my very first editor, Michelle Klein-Hass of the late, lamented Animation Nerd's Paradise Web site for helping me to find a home here, and also Dan Sarto and Heather Kenyon of AWN for hosting me and allowing me to lend my voice to the animation community. Lastly, thanks to my readers, whose support, comments and cogent emails have been a joy to me over the past year. Thanks, one and all!

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

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

The Aesthetics of Internet Animation

by Chris Lanier



Wildbrain.com features the hit Web cartoon *Romanov*. © Wild Brain, Inc.

The creation of art at the limits of technical innovation is bound to produce a fair share of both epiphanies and headaches. You know you're in deep when you start having difficulties telling the two apart.

I've just completed a three-month run of a cartoon made for the Internet. The weekly 2-3 minute animations were made in Flash; because Flash allows for modem-friendly transmission of graphics, it's moved to become the vanguard of Web animation software. Despite its graphical efficiency, however, there are a number of constraints the Flash animator faces: issues of bandwidth, frame rates and processor speeds. I've tried to treat these obstacles as opportunities, as a spur to creativity.

Every limitation implies its own peculiar liberation. There is a point at which the effects of Shakespeare's sonnets are achieved as a result of, and not despite, the form. Robert Frost famously said that writing free verse was like playing tennis without a net. There's a huge difference between self-imposed aesthetic constraints and technical constraints, but it's an attractive operative metaphor. At times, making Web 'toons has been like playing tennis with a net five stories tall, while using teaspoons for rackets. It makes for invigorating and absurd sport.

Limitations Equal Freedom

The most profound "liberation" effected by the limitations of Web animation is the removal of

the burden of spectacle. In the middle of blockbuster season it's impossible to avoid the conclusion that cinematic technology is in a headlong rush to overwhelm the senses. The unspoken assumption is that any movie could be improved if, instead of merely hearing and seeing it, we could also feel, smell and taste it. Whether, during a dinner scene, we should be tasting what's on the hero's plate, what's on the love interest's plate, or some combination of the two (problematic if the hero's tucking into his chocolate mousse while the love interest is still dallying with the Salmon fillet), is something best left to the aestheticians of the future's sensoriums. As an audience member, it's hard not to feel like a lab rat with an electrical wire inserted into your brain's pleasure center. Culture has become a pornography of the senses.

The burden of intense sensory engagement is lifted simply because, for now, on the Web, it's technically unattainable. It's a strange "cutting edge" that looks like a throwback to other, older technologies where "cutting edge" animation looks like sub-par Jay Ward-era *Rocky and Bullwinkle* (or reaching even further back, *Colonel Bleep*). For now, it is novelty enough to find movement in your Web browser, it needn't be particularly smooth or robust. This has the immediate effect of lowering the budget for animations; they can be done quickly and cheaply, because they can be done crudely. This removes the layers of bureaucracy that traditional animation has had to contend with, allowing for wider freedom of imagination. It also foregrounds the importance of good writing. And it provides opportuni-

ties for subtle effects of imaginative transference.

The Comic Comparison

In this regard it's helpful to think of comics, a communications medium that's thrillingly low-tech. (I actually moved into animation through an interest in comics.) Comics are often considered an orphan form — the hapless urchin begging at the darkened peripheries of the movie palace. This is to misunderstand profoundly its genius. Few reflect on its efficiency as a visual language: draw 200 pictures in comics and you have a book. In animation, you only have 8 seconds.

There has been much press about comics migration to the Web (some have even touted the Web as the savior of comics), but much of it seems misguided. Yes, the Internet has provided a fertile arena for iconographic and "cartoony" art, as navigation and design elements, but these are artifacts of style, not coherent effects of a medium. In fact, as the display of these cartoonish drawings tends to be temporal, and not spatial, they're no longer comics: they've been cannibalized for animation. The driving notion behind this is the same one that drives cinematic spectacle: the comic would improve if sensory information were added to it, namely motion and sound. It's considered an improvement that we actually hear a gun going off, rather than reading the word "bang," and that all of these fantastic characters can speak in their own voices. But to date, this alchemy has not produced any better comics, just stilted animation.

A comic emits no sound, but it is not truly silent: when you read it, you hear the voices and

sound effects, and see the action paced to your own rhythms. The story takes place inside your head and is more "real" because of it. For example, you don't have to worry about bad voice acting throwing a scene off as the characters aren't actors, but projections of your own psyche. Animation takes place on a screen, entirely outside of you; comics starts on the page, but it ultimately "occurs" half outside you, on the page, and half inside, in your mind.

In short, the technical "additions" to comics are actually subtractions of imaginative involvement. Comics are a profoundly collaborative medium. It draws you into an imagined world through the efficacy of "closure." It presents you with a series of discreet images or "moments," and you must piece them together in a narrative flow.

A Different Interactivity

Take a crude example: first, we see a panel of an angry mouse, his arm cocked back, a brick clutched in his hand. In the next panel, we see a cat, lying prone on her back, a welt raised on her forehead and a cracked brick lying in halves at her feet. The brick has certainly met up with the feline cranium (Heisenbergian metaphysics left temporarily aside), but where has this meeting taken place? The quick answer is in the "gutter," the white space between panels one and two. However, the truer answer is: within the reader's head.

The "gutter" is spatial, but, applied temporally, it becomes an edit. Both the gutter and an edit mark out the boundaries between self-contained semantic units, the panel for comics and the shot for cinema. Some degree of "closure"

is necessary to piece things into a narrative in both cases, and both the "gutter" and edit can be used to either extend or minimize the amount of closure. In a comic, staying with my above example, you could insert another panel between the first and the second, showing the brick fused to the cat's forehead, in a moment of perpetual contact, throwing off a handful of frozen stars. In a film, you could have a 3D POV shot of the brick leaving the mouse's hand, tumbling through the air and striking the cat. You could have an x-ray shot of the cat's skull fracturing. The Dolby sound system could wallop your eardrums. You could even employ a friend to whack you over the head with a two-by-four at the moment of impact for complete authenticity. However, to have a shot of the mouse cocking his arm back, followed by a shot of the cat lying supine, a welt on her forehead, etc., is far more suggestive. Instead of providing a sensory stimulus, you've presented a puzzle for the audience to solve.

Abstracted Storytelling

Of course, this brick-and-cranium example is crudely mechanical. The extension of closure becomes far more exciting when, instead of being applied to mechanical causalities, it is applied to ideas. Taking the notion of closure from comics, where it is explicit, and applying it to cinema, where it is less obvious, we can push animation into the territory of a lucid, complex picture-language. In this manner, animation can deliver us into a world where the differences between words and shapes are blurred: a world of motile (and perhaps even emotive) hieroglyphics.

In this regard, I pay more attention to the progression of images than I do to fluidity of movement. I try to articulate sequences of imagistic comparisons and contrasts, to render abstract ideas into concrete forms, and to nudge concrete forms into the realm of abstraction. I utilize text not to explain, but to suggest — to begin a thought that the audience must finish.

So finally, I've come to accept (or rationalize) the technical limitations of Web animation as a departure point for greater imaginative investment. Through juxta-

positions, comparisons and transformations, meaning is made. The aesthetic spark is not one of spectacle, but of making connections; drawing information and images together into constellations of meaning. Of course, this causes me to view the advent of broadband with a degree of trepidation, hoping that the pipeline won't simply be a lab-rat wire, aimed directly at my helpless ganglia. In the meantime, I'm happy to cultivate an aesthetic approach that draws viewers into a created world by appealing to their curiosity and to create puzzles that find

their solutions in poetry.

Go on-line to see *Romanov* for yourself at:
<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.05/5.05clips/romanov.mov>

Chris Lanier is the creator of the Web cartoon Romanov, running on www.wildbrain.com.

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



Featured in the Animation World Store:
 Richard Condie, Sally Cruikshank, Bill Plympton, Raoul Servais,
 Best Of Festival tapes, Classic Limited Editions, and more...

www.awn.com/awnstore

**CARTOON
NETWORK**



THE INTRUDER IS COMING.

TOONAMI, Cartoon Network's action adventure block, is being invaded. Watch the story unfold in a week-long interactive event. You can affect the outcome and change the face of TOONAMI forever.

SEPTEMBER 18th from 4-7 on TOONAMI and Toonami.com.

sponsored by



TOONAMITM

Is There Life Beyond Flash?

by Heather Kenyon

There is no doubt about it! Macromedia Flash is *the* industry standard for Internet animation, utilized by over half a million Web authors worldwide to create animated vector-based Web sites. But are there new tools out there that are being incorporated into today's cutting-edge Web animations? Flash is king when it comes to delivering action and adventure on a low-bandwidth, but are audiences already demanding more? Are artists already beginning to push these freshly assigned limits? We asked several leading companies what they use on this quickly paced and evolving frontier.



© JibJab.

Gregg Spiridellis CEO, JibJab Media Inc.

JibJab uses Flash exclusively for all of its on-line animation production. We are hyper-focused on creating content that is accessible to the largest possible audience and Flash is the only technology that both works well in a low-bandwidth world and has a massive installed base for the plug-in. To add variety to our productions, we are hiring great artists that are pushing the technology to its limit, moving beyond straight vector animation and producing exciting

new collage and mixed media animations in Flash.



Yo, everything's up at JibJab. © JibJab.

Darrell Van Citters Director, Renegade Animation

We find Flash to be an excellent piece of software, fulfilling virtually all of our Web animation needs. We do, however, employ a few useful plug-ins. One enables your average, fumble-fingered artist to produce drawings of startling beauty. It's called TALENT. We use another utility, WIT, to inject moments of mirth into otherwise lifeless scripts. In addition, we find that a finely-honed, wood-encased graphite stick is an indispensable aid in pre-visualization. It's also handy for filling out surveys.

Bruce Forman Co-Founder, ROMP.com

We are meat and potatoes, heavy users of the Flash plug-in and have yet to develop animation on another platform. Why? It is about as ubiquitous as any plug-

in on the Web — thereby lessening the technical burden on our viewers — and remains a very inexpensive platform for content development. It is difficult enough ensuring that our audience has Flash 4 to enjoy our programming, let alone forcing them to download a foreign plug-in to view it. We will evaluate up-and-coming animation tools, such as Pulse, once they reach a critical mass and approach the development costs that Flash offers.

David B. Williams Chairman & CEO, Visionary Media LLC

For the kind of high-end, multiple episode animation projects that are Visionary Media's hallmark, 3D tools are playing a growing role in our Flash production process. The creation of 3D models benefits us in two main ways:

1) For props and/or backgrounds (and even characters) that will play a large role over the course of several episodes, 3D models have a "create once and use often" advantage. Once a 3D model is created, multiple views and sequences can be imported into Flash, saving our art staff valuable drawing time, and enhancing the aesthetic continuity from view to view.

2) A sequence generated with the aid of 3D tools can help us to throttle up its overall "Wow!" factor. In our example, the stages of a rocket entering orbit drop away toward Earth, but as they



The rocket launches! © Visionary Media LLC.

fall, their orientations shift, subtly enhancing the realism of the shot.

To achieve these effects, we utilize a variety of tools, including 3D Studio Max for modeling, and Vecta and Swifty 3D for exporting 3D models to vector files ready for Flash. Adobe Illustrator also plays an important role in the layout of various screens.

Sound production plays a central role, especially since Visionary produces all original music for its programming. Sound tools can also help to optimise dialog tracks, keeping file sizes to a minimum while retaining clarity. We employ a wide array of software, including: Digital Performer with Waves Shell for sequencing, Sound Edit 16 and Deck for splicing and batch processing, Unity DS1 for midi sample playback, Steinberg's B.Box for groove creation, Sound Foundries Acid for music loop production and QBase.

Kevin Bermeister
President, Brilliant Digital Entertainment

Brilliant Digital Entertainment has created an introductory b3d toolset for creating interactive 3D animation content that may be streamed over the Internet. Tools include a b3d Exporter plug-in for 3D Studio Max, Maya and Lightwave, two versions of an authoring tool

called b3d Studio and a Digital Projector for real-time 3D playback. b3d Studio allows animators to import a variety of media types into a timeline and then "build" an interactive animation that may be streamed in real-time. Brilliant Digital's *Superman* and *KISS Immortals* series on portals such as Entertaindom and Yahoo are referred to as "Multipath Movies," a term used to describe interactive movies that include user-selected subplots. Movies can be played in a pop-up Digital Projector that also plays Flash, AVI, MPEG and HTML. Although Multipath Movies are Brilliant Digital's most visible projects on the Web, the b3d platform is actually a pervasive 3D format that can be used to deliver a wide variety of interactive content. The compression and delivery engine built into the b3d platform is very versatile and may be used to create virtual shopping malls, educational programming, walkthroughs and other content. Without advanced programming or even scripting, content developers and artists who use 3D Studio Max, Maya and Lightwave will be able to export their animations for assembly in b3d Studio.

Richard Fenton
CEO, Spot Box Inc.

One of the things that we're doing here at Spot Box is trying to anticipate where animation

and entertainment are going on the Internet. This means forecasting what technologies will become prevalent. In addition to Flash, we use LiveStage Pro to create QuickTime Wired Sprites. This technology allows us the flexibility to do some things that we cannot do as well in Flash, such as the ability to handle multiple media types, and the ability to build 2D sprite games that have special effects like fire, or clouds. In addition to QuickTime Wired Sprites, we are also using Pulse 3D to create interactive 3D content. For us, the key advantage of Pulse 3D over other 3D technologies designed for the Internet is its character animation features. We



Ninjas spotted at Spot Box.
 © Spot Box, Inc.



Stellar new technology at Spot Box.
 © Spot Box, Inc.

are also investigating software that allows us to take these experiences outside of the Internet browser. One such development tool that has caught our attention is iShell. With iShell, we can create immersive custom environments that exist outside of the standard Internet browser. We can also use iShell to do some things that would otherwise be difficult. In iShell, we can create our content in any of several formats (Flash, QuickTime, Pulse3D, etc.), and those media types can then communicate with each other. For instance, we can have a Pulse 3D animated object communicate with and control a QuickTime movie or vice versa.

Note: To see QuickTime previews of Spot Box's games, visit the online version of this article at <http://www.awn.com/mag/issue.5.05/5.05pages/kenyonsurvey2.php3>.

Trevor Bentley **Director, Atomic Cartoons**

For animation content Atomic Cartoons has mostly relied on the traditional approach. We do all the design with pencil and paper and do the animation the old fashioned way, but we try to cheat where we can in Flash. Obviously Adobe Photoshop 5.0 is a big help and has made out-putting to the Web easier. We often use Photoshop for color styling and show treatment, but Flash 4 is so easy to use that we have stuck with it for the majority of color. In fact I like coloring in Flash so much I have started only using Flash to color show treatments, which are then exported to Photoshop and Quark. I think once we exhaust the look we are

currently using we will try to import gifs from Photoshop and Illustrator. As for effects, we are sticking to traditional 2D animation so they are mostly done with drybrush, zips, etc.



© Funny Garbage.

Veronique Brossier **Flash Programmer and Animator, Funny Garbage**

Funny Garbage uses state-of-the-art technology to create its award-winning animation work. Other than Sound Edit 16 for sound design, Flash has become our exclusive piece of software for animated content in an effort to streamline the creation and animation process. The key piece of hardware that enables us to create such high quality animation is the Wacom tablet, which allows us to trace hand-drawn art or draw directly inside the Flash application. New Funny Garbage animators, often familiar with graphic programs such as Illustrator, are trained to draw directly into Flash. The learning process is usually very fast and quite successful.

On occasion, we experiment with 3D software to create



Cats in outer space! ©Funny Garbage.

models. Those models are then imported into Flash, through third-party software which converts 3D models into vector art. We'll be doing more exploration of this kind in the future to further our experimenting with unusual looks and feels.

Joel Kuwahara **Vice President of Production,** **Icebox Inc.**

At Icebox, in addition to Flash we also use Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere and Streamline. However, graphic software has always supplemented the artists' tools in preparing design and artwork for animation. And a majority of the software mentioned above has been used by artists for a number of years, except Streamline. The major change in the process that is significantly different from traditional animation is the implementation of Flash software. Flash allows for economical, efficient animation to be done in-house. Other animation software does exist on the market but I feel that Flash is the strongest. Not only do 90% of Internet users already have the Flash browser, but its tool set is easy to use and applicable to 90% of what we need to do. Occasionally we will take our graphics and "treat" them in Illustrator or Photoshop before we bring them in to Flash, but a majority of the effects we create are done directly in Flash.

Heather Kenyon is editor in chief of Animation World Magazine.

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

Getting Started **On-Line**

by Kwesi Ako Kennedy & James Dalby



Kwesi Ako Kennedy.

Traditional animators rejoice! The Web industry is hot and hungry for on-line content, and Flash makes it possible for anyone with an idea to produce an animated skit out of their own home successfully. I've seen some great content come out of a studio the size of a closet. If you have a mid-range PII PC or PowerPC Mac, scanner and modem, then you're prepared to mark your name onto the Internet walk of fame.

Independent animation doesn't necessarily need to end up at a festival to be viewed by the public. If you have a Web site, your audience will have instant access to your work 24 hours a day worldwide. Millions of users are logging on and exploring the Net every second. With a few carefully placed links on other sites sending users to your content, hits to your Web site could reach thousands in days. If you feel you're ready to take a step above the rest, submit it to a content distribution site such as Atomfilms.com. Afterward you can think about how many thousands of Netizens

watch your content while you sleep.

The price of a workstation capable of Flash design has plummeted in the last year. With the convenience of a monthly payment option, a decent machine can be purchased for as little as US\$50 per month. As far as Internet access is concerned, a DSL or cable modem connection is recommended, but not required. If you're comfortable with drawing on a tablet, Flash offers specific settings that register pen pressure for calligraphic painting.



Aardman Animations' *Angry Kid* shows that mixing media on the Web creates some funny effects. © and TM Aardman Animations Ltd. 2000.

Flash 4 runs about \$250.00 and is quite easy to learn. You won't lose any hours at work because you can accomplish all that you need on your own free time. Flash can also import a slew of picture file formats, such as Adobe Illustrator, Quicktime video, GIF, JPEG and more. Therefore, using other programs to create your artwork is always an option. Audio software for voice and foley can be downloaded for free at any shareware distribution site (i.e. www.download.com).



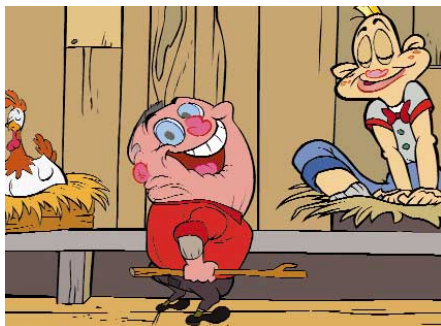
James Dalby.

Geocities.com offers a free 15 Mb. Web site, and free custom e-mail addresses come at about a dime a dozen.

The Tough Step

The "how to" of making your own animation shop out of the home does not end at providing yourself with the proper equipment and materials. Once you have surrounded yourself with everything you need to create animation for the Internet, you should also take the time to familiarize yourself with all of the different things being done for the Internet as well. This should help you to determine the limits of the medium as well as how far you're capable of going with your own material.

For example, take time to see how different Flash animated productions run on different speed machines. Does a tweened pan of a gradient filled background work well or are the results you see in other people's work telling you that this is a bad idea? Take what you find and use it to your advantage by either cor-



George Liquor was one of the first Flash toons to hit the Net. © Spumco.

recting the mistakes made by others and improving on what you have seen in your viewings. This should help you to determine what tricks and techniques will work the best with what you have planned.

One of the biggest problems we have on dialog heavy productions is figuring out an efficient way to lip sync the character's mouths. We noticed in rival productions, while art and animation value was very high, lip sync was either very poor or avoided. This was due to limitations of the software or the problems encountered with streaming a tight series of images over the Internet.

To avoid such curses as dropped frames or pauses in the animation, our general rule of thumb was to animate the graphic on the stage, frame by frame. This proved to be effective but very tedious in situations where the character made a lot of head movements or when simple changes needed to be made. Sure we were getting a highly accurate lip sync, but it was a pain to implement and edit.

By playing around with making the mouth shapes into a separate movie clip, we found we were able to do the sync in a separate file away from the animated character. Instead of having to manipulate different shapes on the timeline, the correct sequence of

shapes is saved as a graphic element that is simply placed on the character's head. This freed up our ability to edit the character on the fly without worrying about the effect it would have on the already completed lip sync.

Some Help

Having trouble getting the hang of certain techniques? There are a good number of sites available to you that have step by step tutorials as well as downloadable Flash files for you to dissect. Utilizing as many different sources of instruction and inspiration is the best way to build your skills and stay ahead of all the competition out there. A few include:

For tutorials and sample files:

<http://www.Flashzone.com/>
<http://www.shockfusion.com/>
<http://www.Flashkit.com/>

A couple of personal sites I like to visit for ideas include:

The Secret Garden of Mutabor
<http://www.yenz.com/menue/garden/intro.html>

A designer's personal site that makes use of clever interfaces and a unique story that relies on searching for clues in order to reach the end.

Sarbakan
<http://www.sarbakan.com/>

An on-line entertainment company whose strong visuals and music make for addictive and involving on-line interactivity. The on-line demos of Arcane, a gothic mystery, and Snoozeleberg are both very well made Flash applications that require complete user input to move not just the actions of the characters but the stories that unfold around them.

Chman On-line
<http://www.chman.com/>
A European Flash site for animation and entertainment. It appears they intend to use the site to not only promote their own abilities but to use their projects to promote musical artist and games. A good variety of material.

Mono*crafts
<http://www.yugop.com/>
A Japanese design site dedicated to "exploring new forms of expression in Networked situations." Fascinating, off beat, interface designs.

Kwesi Ako Kennedy works with animation and character design for AtomFilms out of AtomStudio.

Prior to working at Atom, he worked as a freelance digital artist for Pixelwave Corporation.

Kwesi attended Howard University and graduated with a degree in Fine Arts. Immediately after Howard University, Kwesi attended the University of North Carolina where he joined the Industrial Design program.

Before becoming a senior animator at AtomFilms, James Dalby spent a year-and-a-half as the graphics manager for the Highlander, a student newspaper at the University of California, Riverside. He attended two years of study at UCR, but gave it up to focus his attention on work. Soon after, James spent most of his time as a freelance Flash animator for various Web sites, as well as a full-time animator at Pixelwave Corporation.

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

Vancouver's Mainframe Entertainment



Mainframers zap the animation industry with their pioneering spirit.
© Mainframe Entertainment.

If you had to name some animation studios that were truly pioneers of the medium, which ones would you consider? Okay, besides Disney. There would be perhaps, companies such as the Fleischer Studio which brought an adult-oriented, urban atmosphere to its films; Warner Bros. which through the amazing genius of its directors — Avery, Clampett and Jones (among others) — perfected animation timing; and of course, United Productions of America, which is still a major influence on animation design, fifty years later.

But there are also contemporary pioneers, companies made up of people who strive to take animation to new heights; who

see their role in the animation industry as one of learning and growth. Mainframe Entertainment, although their name may not be well known yet, can certainly be described as a pioneer in the field of computer animation. Unlike the more popular theatrical CG producers, Mainframe's territory has been 3D character animation for television and until recently, they

were practically the only studio working in the field. They now have over three hundred employees working in their Canadian studio.

by Don Perro

A Short History

Mainframe Entertainment's origins began in the mid-1980s in England when Ian Pearson and Gavin Blair animated the Dire Straits' video, "Money for Nothing." Although the animation was slow and robot-like and the characters were constructed of rudimentary shapes, this was cutting-edge stuff and gave many viewers their first look at 3D com-



Mainframe's key players. © Mainframe Entertainment.

puter animation of characters.

Pearson and Blair, along with animator Phil Mitchell, began to dream of creating the world's first, fully computer animated television series. They looked around for a location where they could build their studio and decided that Vancouver, Canada, already a film and animation hub and close enough to L.A., would be ideal. In 1994, the first season of *Reboot* appeared on television screens in Canada and the U.S. and immediately captured the interest of a generation of young viewers. The first all-CGI television series preceded the first all-CGI feature-length film (Pixar's *Toy Story*) by a year.

Reboot was a show, not only animated with computers, but which actually took place inside a computer. This was a solution based on the earlier restrictions of the medium, since complex details, shadows and lighting required rendering time which the schedules just didn't have. But there was plenty of action, strong, appealing characters and good stories. *Reboot* was a hit and, as the first completely computer generated television series, resulted in the induction of Mainframe Entertainment into the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

Mainframe then went on to produce *Beast Wars* (renamed *Beasties* due to the Canadian aversion to the the word "war" in children's programming). The characters, with names such as Optimal Optimus and Megatron, are organic/mechanical Transformers (based on the Hasbro action toys of the same name) battling for the victory of either good or evil, according to which side they belong. This series has seen much success and continues this season

on YTV in Canada and FoxKids in the U.S. as *Beast Machines*.

In 1998, Mainframe introduced a new series, with more human-like characters called *War Planets* (again, to protect the innocent, the title in Canada was changed to *Shadow Raiders*). The story focuses on one man's quest to unite four hostile planets in order to defend themselves from the Beast Planet: a force intent on the annihilation of every lifeform it encounters.

Mainframe Entertainment's origins began in the mid-1980's in England...

The series, *Weird-Ohs*, which aired last fall, was an attempt to introduce the squash and stretch of a Tex Avery cartoon into the world of 3D animation. The show introduced a group of suburban skateboarding kids, trying to belong with the cool crowd. "People said (the squash and stretch style) couldn't be done in 3D, so we had to prove them wrong," explains Director of Communications Mairi Welman.

Action Man is Mainframe's latest venture into the sci-fi world of good versus evil. An extreme sports superstar, Alex Mann discovers he has unique powers, but is pursued by a renegade scientist who is out to capture him to use Action Man's powers to take over the world. It is the first Mainframe show to involve motion-capture technology in a big way, and is currently showing on Fox Kids in the U.S. and on YTV in Canada.



Ghosts and goblins fill the screen in *Casper's Haunted Christmas*.
© Harvey Entertainment

Going Long Form

But with seven years of production experience behind them, Mainframe is now ready to "transform" themselves into a feature length production studio. They have three feature films in the works, to be produced for IMAX screens, and this fall, audiences will get to see *Casper's Haunted Christmas*, the latest in the series of classic Casper movies. Of course, with Mainframe involved, it won't be a mere copy of the ghosts of Casper's past; this version is the first Casper movie to be created exclusively with computer animation.

I spoke with Mairi Welman, Director of Communications, and Owen Hurley, the director of *Casper's Haunted Christmas* to find out more about this direct-to-video release.

Casper's Haunted Christmas is Mainframe's first "direct-to-video" production and their first collaboration with Harvey Entertainment, the company that brings us the classic characters Richie Rich, Wendy the Witch and Baby Huey. *Haunted Christmas* is also the first ever all CGI direct-to-video film based on the Casper The Friendly Ghost franchise. There have been several other shows on television and in theatres, the most memorable being *Casper*, which was produced by Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment in 1995. Mainframe's *Casper* continues

along these lines, with the biggest difference being that there is no live-action; all the characters and locations were created digitally.

Owen Hurley describes the plot: "Casper and his friends get banished to the town of Chris, Massachusetts, 'the most Christmassy town in the world,' where they have until Christmas day to get Casper to scare somebody. If he doesn't do it, the group will be banished to the Dark. They bring in Casper's cousin Spooky, dress him up as Casper and try to get him to get the job done, with hilarious results." The show will be released on video and DVD this fall. The DVD version will have a wide-screen format option and a special, behind the scenes documentary.



Casper's charming presence makes the challenge of creating him worth it. © Harvey Entertainment.

Casper was a challenge for Mainframe, which had to have a much more complex look than your average TV show. The company went all out to make the show look as good as it could, since this is a new direction for them. The crew consisted of twenty-six animators working under Hurley. Each animator produced about twenty seconds of animation per week and for Hurley, it was "a labour of love" which required him to practically live at the studio during the production.

Although *Casper's Haunted*



The crew at Mainframe look like a fun and lively bunch. © Mainframe Entertainment

Christmas was a "service job," funded by Harvey Entertainment, Mainframe had a lot of creative control over the project. "The whole relationship with Harvey was very good," says Welman.

Hurley agrees, "On the creative side, there have never been any disagreements about anything." However, the biggest challenge in working with Harvey, was building the main characters, because, "Harvey knows their ghosts and they've owned them for a long time," states Hurley. "We had the maquettes, the statues that Industrial Light & Magic had made for the 1995 *Casper* and we modeled off them. They were rejected immediately as being off character, so we then did a lot of tweaking around with them. But overall, in terms of the storyboards and artwork, Harvey was very accepting and it was a great relationship with a lot of mutual trust."

As for audience appeal, Mairi Welman advises that *Casper* is a film that, "You could take your grandma to see."

Hurley agrees that the project was aimed at a wide audience: "We tried to put enough stuff in there at various levels so that parents aren't going to get bored with it. Its kind of like *Reboot* in that it works on a lot of levels. There are references to things that kids may not quite understand, but parents will get a kick out of, including a '*Psycho*-shower scene."

The Artists

For Owen Hurley, this was an important "next step" in a computer animation career spanning 10 years. He began his career in Holland, working as a composer and special effects supervisor on commercials and music videos. Owen came to work for Mainframe at the request of one of its founding members, Ian Pearson. Having directed various shows at Mainframe including *Reboot*, *Weird Oh's* and *War Planets*, Owen had the right stuff for this project. He was also tired of working on television commercials, which he left back in



Another shot of Mainframe artists, here, testing their gadgets.
© Mainframe Entertainment.

London: "You can sleep a lot more easily at night when you make a living by entertaining children rather than selling them toxic garbage," he quips. "It's a completely different form of directing. Directing commercials is compiling pretty pictures for 30 seconds as opposed to telling stories."

Another interesting thing for Hurley, was working with two talented storyboard artists, Eddie Fitzgerald and Rich Arons, whose "boards were almost like flip-books." Rich Arons was a Warner Bros. director who worked on *Freakazoid* and *Animaniacs*. Eddy Fitzgerald is one of the stars of Spumco who worked on the early *Ren & Stimpy* shows with John Kricfalusi.

Designing the human beings was one of the most fun parts of the production for Hurley. The artists were given pretty much free reign to design them because the studio was breaking new ground: in all the previous Casper projects, the humans were either

2D or live-action. Mainframe avoided the temptation for photo-realistic humans and went for a real but stylized look. "I find it really unpleasant and creepy when (photo-realistic) 3D humans are animated," says Hurley. "At best, they end up looking like dead people. Stunt doubles and crowd scenes are a great use for realistic characters, but I just don't buy into this whole 'cyber-actor' thing. I wanted the show to stay cartoony."

Pushing the envelope is always Mainframe's objective and *Casper's Haunted Christmas* represents the transition to a new chapter for them: feature films. As mentioned, *Gulliver's Travels* is scheduled to be released on Imax screens later this year. In the pioneering spirit, which continues at Mainframe, this will be "an all CGI stereoscopic 3D motion picture in the 15/70 format using Mainframe's cutting-edge 3D computer animation technology." Mainframe will also reach back to

their roots to reintroduce their 1994 "cyber-stars," Bob, Dot and Enzo of *Reboot*. These well-known characters will return to the small screen in two, two-hour made-for-TV movies next year. And considering that the studio has no plans to give up their successful leadership role in computer animated series work (they have recently announced a deal with Sony Pictures to produce up to 40 episodes of its new CG animated half-hour TV series *Heavy Gear*) the future looks great for one of the earliest pioneers of CGI.

Don Perro is a veteran animator and educator. He founded the Animation Department at Capilano College in North Vancouver and co-ordinates their two year, Commercial Animation Program. He is currently spending his summer vacation as an animation director for Studio B Productions in Vancouver, developing a new character-driven series for the Internet.

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

Writing for CGI:

A Talk With Ian Boothby

by Heather Kenyon

Starting as a stand-up comedian, Ian Boothby writes for television, radio and theater, as well as comic books. For the past two years he has written for Bongo Entertainments *Simpsons Comics*. He was also a contributing writer on *Homer Simpson's Guide to Being A Man* (Harper Collins). For television, Ian has written for *Canvas Cat and Bongo Bat*, *Zero Avenue*, *Street Cents*, *Popular Mechanics for Kids* and *Skinnamarink TV*, among many others. He has also created two television shows, *Channel 92* and *The 11th Hour*. For his efforts he has won many awards, including the Gemini Award for Best Childrens TV Program (1987) for *Switchback*, a show he both wrote and performed in. His relationship with Mainframe Entertainment started when he began writing for *Weird-Ohs*. Recently, he and his partner Roger Fredericks, another *Weird-Ohs'* alum, co-wrote the screenplay for the CGI feature, *Casper's Haunted Christmas*.

Here Ian talks about working with Mainframe, writing for CGI, balancing a freelance lifestyle and collaborating with a production team...

Heather Kenyon: You write for television, radio, theater...you do everything. Is this what it takes to make a living as a freelance writer?

Ian Boothby: Well I might be a little different in that my prime goal is to work on my own projects. I



Ian Boothby. Photo courtesy of Ian Boothby.

like working on other projects that I enjoy in the meantime to sort of finance my own personal work. Everything for me comes back to, 'How can I learn something that I can put into my own films or television programs?'

HK: So you're creating your own films, your own television shows, and then taking television series work and other things to pay the bills?

IB: Yes, but not taking just any work. I only take work where I either feel I can learn something or I really enjoy the company that I'm working with. With Mainframe that was the case. I was a big fan of *Reboot* and always wanted to work with them on that show, but then, of course, it's off the air. Then *Weird-Ohs* came along and I got the opportunity to work on that

show and from that I got *Casper*.

HK: All things flow into one another.

IB: I've got a pretty strong rule, which is I won't do anything that isn't funny, or doesn't have the potential to be funny. Sometimes you drop the ball later, but it's got to at least have a good chance. To me, the *Casper* movie was very funny and so that was like, 'Yeah, all right, I'd like to play with these characters. I'd like to take these toys out to the back yard and see what we can do.'

HK: How do you change your sensibilities for these different mediums? What factors do you take into consideration?

IB: It's interesting 'cause the line is really blurred now. It used to be if you were doing live-action you were very limited to the amount of sets you could have and your budget. Any time you had anything slightly special effects-y — see if that gets past your spell check — special effects-y, your budget would go through the roof. But then in the world of cartoons, you could have people falling off mountains and flying to the moon, but you couldn't do realism. You couldn't do faces well. You couldn't have small little gestures. At present you have to be much more slapstick-y when you do animation. You have to be much more visual when you do

animation. But the line is blurring and there will be a lot of crossover. There's a lot of live-action movies where the special effects are all computer generated. What's the difference between that and CG animation? It's all mixing into one really interesting world where there are no limitations. As a writer that's both scary and very fun.

HK: Sometimes I see stories that are animated but there doesn't seem to be any reason to use this special medium. What elements do you see are necessary for a successful animated story versus a live-action story?

IB: That's an interesting one. Something like *King of the Hill* you could almost see as being a live-action sitcom, whereas something like *The Simpsons*, there's absolutely no way. One, you'd never be able to do the timing correctly on the jokes. With animation, you can do all these quick little jokes and little behind the scenes things; you can have multi-layered jokes. Whereas in a sitcom, you really have to do, set up, punch line, set up, punch line. If there's anything in the background, it'll probably be out of focus or take away from the live studio audience laughing. The benefits of animation or what makes a difference from, say, *Something About Mary*, are the background elements and multi-level jokes.

HK: What about the general elements of the story? It seems like a lot of the great animated films contain elements of magic, fantasy or of looking at the world from a different point of view.

IB: You got a couple things you can do with animation that, at

least at present, you can only do in animation, and that is, it can take you to another world. What you really need is for the audience to be able to project themselves into that environment. I saw *Dinosaur* recently. You couldn't do that any other way than computer animation. That's something animation can do — take you to a completely different world that has its own rules. But what has been done traditionally, I think, is since you've got animation you feel weird doing a small intimate story about just people and so you go, 'We better take them to the moon.' You're spending all this time drawing something. 'I better do something you can't do in live-action.' So you get a whole bunch of big action, big slapstick or eyes popping out, things like that, but otherwise you feel like, 'Why don't I just do this live-action?' like you were saying earlier.

HK: With *Casper*, did you run into any specific challenges?

IB: Yeah, in that we had a very limited cast. Say I was doing a live-action movie. I go, 'Okay, I want the street to be full of extras.' It's a little pricey, but you can still get it done. But if I say that to the people at Mainframe they go, 'We've got to generate each character individually,' and that takes a whole heck of a lot of time. So to overcome this, what we did was we went, 'All right. We want a whole bunch of people — since it's winter — in snow suits.' So all the snow suits are the same, but a different color. That gives the illusion that we've got a whole bunch of different people. That's the only one real limitation is you can't have a guest character come in or add more characters in later. In a

live-action film — not a problem. In an animated film — yeah, it is a problem. You've got to cast a new voice and especially with computer, you've got to generate it. And it's so much work to do that. I can't believe the amount of work they do on each of these characters. There's so much depth and precision and so many little details. We were also a little bit limited in that once you built a set, say the house, you really have to use the house as much as possible because it took so much work to make. You're limited by location when you're dealing with CGI specifically.

HK: What was it like working with such a classic character?

IB: That was fun in that you get to put your own spin on him. Both Roger and myself are big fans of animation. So, it's been a kick in the last two years to actually do it. It's been a real thrill. In this, there's a lot of homages to things like *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, *Frosty the Snowman*, things like that. We tried to say, 'Okay, Casper's a classic character. Let's see what all these characters would be like if we put them in a *Grinch Who Stole Christmas* environment.' That's something that Roger and I are known for, merging two genres together, two styles together, and seeing what comes out of the mix. But *Casper* was definitely fun. We got to play with a couple of things that we always thought were interesting in that Spooky looks a lot like *Casper* but no one's ever done something where Spooky impersonates *Casper*. Plus, Spooky and Poyle have a real Burns and Allen vibe to them. We had a lot of fun with that, writing

in the old Burns and Allen style for them, and a Three Stooges slapstick-y style for the trio. Then we had a nice, not quite romance, but we had a nice story between Casper and Holly. You can always tug at the heartstrings with Casper. That gives the film just that little extra. To me, what makes a Christmas film good, is you can have all the jokes in the world, but then you have to have that little moment where you really care about the characters. That's what we played with Casper and Holly. And Casper's kind of a sad character at heart in that he really wants friends and he doesn't have friends. He scares everybody, you know? So when Casper actually finally gets a friend, it's a big deal and it's nice.

HK: You started as a stand-up comic. How do you think this helped your writing?

IB: I started off also doing improvisation. Both Roger and I do improv. I think that's more what we use in our writing than stand up, per se, because improv is more communal. What you do is you make an offer on stage and the other person responds and builds on that offer. That's exactly what we do with Mainframe. We go to Mainframe and go, 'All right, we want Casper to be on top of the Empire State Building.' Then they show us what they can do with the animation, what their limitations are and what they can do that really looks cool. We then build on that and go, 'If you can do that and that looks really cool, well, heck, we're going to write a scene on that.' Then they build on that, and we go back and forth. It's really a nice collaborative process. What are your strengths? What are

our strengths? Okay, let's put them together and see what we can do. I think in this Casper film, we really both pushed our limitations. There were a lot of times when they sent stuff to us and we went, 'Oh man, that's tricky. I don't know how we can write that.' But then we did. And we'd go to them and say, 'We really want this scene.' And they'd respond, 'Oh, I don't know how we're going to animate that.' But then when we'd see it done, it was gorgeous.

We're at the start of a new medium with CGI, in that in 2D animation, a lot of stuff has been done. It's tough to beat Disney and Warner Bros. and all the classic stuff that's been done. You look at shows now and you say, 'I like it, but you're kind of repeating the old Chuck Jones, you know, Clampett, gags.' But CGI, that's new. What are the visual jokes that you can do in a 3D environment? You could just repeat — translate 2D jokes to 3D. That's possible. But there's so much more that you could do. That's what we're on the ground floor of, and it sure is fun. I think that's a mistake sometimes people make when they go into 3D. They say, 'I just want to do basically an old Chuck Jones or Bob Clampett cartoon, but 3D it up.' It's like, no! That was their medium. 'What's yours? What can you do?'

HK: How did you get your start in writing?

IB: I got my start in writing because I was also an actor and the best way to get a part for yourself is to write a part that's exactly right for you. I've written for a couple of TV shows. I've done a sitcom called *Channel 92*. Roger and I did a sketch comedy show,

which we're actually still doing, called *The 11th Hour*. And in both of those, I wrote parts that were exactly right for me. Then at times when the acting work isn't coming in, the writing work covers it. And times when the writing work isn't coming in, then the acting work covers it. I also still do improv. In Canada, you pretty much have to do at least five jobs to make a living in the arts. Luckily, I can do about five things okay.

HK: That leads perfectly into my next question. How do you handle the precarious nature of being a freelancer?

IB: I think the way you handle it is, you don't put all your eggs in one basket. Do a whole bunch of different things. It's weird, because the main rule about writing is they say, 'Write what you know.' But then you go, 'I'm writing for *Road Runner*. They've got explosives and a coyote chasing around.' This is a world of fantasy, but you know what you like. So write from what you know in the real world for live-action, but write from what you like when it comes to animation. If I was writing for a genre that I didn't enjoy it would become very obvious very fast. I think that's why you get a lot of really mediocre animation. People are just going for any job: 'I've got to take any work that comes along because anything is good. Anything will help me along.' No, I don't think so. I think you've got to take only work that you enjoy. Then you'll bring that joy and interest to the project. That'll make a much better television program or film. That's sort of how I go about things. I do multiple things. I do improv. I do my own stuff. I work freelance for good compa-

nies. Not a lot of people do that but that's a real rule of mine. In doing that, you sort of dodge a lot of the freelance bullets.

HK: You're lucky that you can do that, that you're not starving, so you can pick and choose.

IB: Oh, I starved! I've had a few years of that, but you make your choices and you stick with it. But I've had the hungry years as well. Definitely.

HK: Now, it seems like *Casper* wasn't a case where you and Roger just wrote a script and handed it to Harvey and then left. It sounds like you were really involved in the production with Mainframe. Is that the case?

IB: Yes it was. What had happened was we had been writing on *Weird-Ohs* already, so about once every two weeks we'd go sit with all the animators in a big room and jam on ideas. In that way we got to know them and they again told us what the limitations were, and even more importantly, we were asking them, 'Well, what do you guys want to animate? What's fun for you to animate?' We'd get a good vibe from the room. If you have an animator animating something that they like, they're going to do a better job. So we kept that relationship. We had meetings every once in a while but then when they're doing their thing we'd leave them alone and let them work their magic, and then they'd leave us alone and let us write our thing. Harvey was very hands-on, and Mainframe was very hands-on. Both Roger and I live just a couple of blocks away from the Mainframe animation offices so we

would be able to pop over. Plus, I knew a couple of the animators on this because I also write for comic books and I knew a couple of them from the comic scene in town as well. So we already had a little bit of a pre-existing relationship. They're just all great guys and girls to hang around with.

HK: That's good. I think when you have the writers and the artists interacting that lends itself to a much more cohesive story and project at the end of the day.

IB: I've been in so many projects where you write a script, get a check, which is lovely, but then Bobs your uncle, you're off. Then you watch the show months later and go, 'That was my name at the beginning? But a giraffe was the police officer? What the...?' I've sat down with friends to watch a show and I say, 'That was my joke,' about once every two minutes.

HK: It was a luxury then that you got to work with Mainframe so closely.

IB: It was a luxury. It was also a luxury working with a company — it sounds like I'm kissing ass — but that does such great work. We'd write a scene and then a couple of months later, we'd go in and we'd see the scene and take our jaws off the floor, and go, 'You guys are great! Oh my gosh!' And that would so pump you up to write more stuff because you're going, 'Did you see what they did? Okay, now we really have to write this.' It would be so exciting. Of course, that's encouraging to the animators, too, 'cause they're working in a big vacuum there. Who knows if the jokes funny anymore after you've been working on it for a

month? It's nice to have someone come in and say, 'That's good.' We're going to see that, come Christmas. The footage I've seen so far, I was really, really pleased with.

HK: In animation, there's a real struggle, because there's some studios that are letting the 'board artists almost write the whole entire thing. Then there's other studios where the writers are writing everything and then like you said, just getting a paycheck. It seems like somewhere there has to be a middle ground, but it's really hard for animation studios to find that ground.

IB: You've got the John Kricfalusi way, which is where the animators themselves do the writing, and then there's also *The Simpsons* style, which is the writers write it all and then the animators take over. There's almost like animators first or writers first. Those are two very distinctive styles, and there's some really hilarious *Ren and Stimpy* cartoons and there's very hilarious *Simpsons* cartoons. Then there's some studios that just want to turn around and make a buck and so they buy a property and say, 'We got our animation studio that's going to do it, great.' And then, 'Who are the writers?' 'Well, these are some writers who have written animation with boards.' 'Good! Them. Okay.' And you're there in the business of selling the toy or whatever it is. They're making a buck. And fair enough. But something like *Ren and Stimpy* or *The Simpsons* both work, because they've got a lot of heart to them. *Ren and Stimpy* were Kricfalusi's creations and he really cared. And Matt Groening was very hands-on with *The Simpsons* because he

really cared. You've got to have someone who gives a damn. I think 80% of the projects out there, people don't give a damn and you can tell. But with *Casper*, luckily, it was obvious they really did care. And that was swell.

Its really important to make comedies as funny as possible. A lot of times something is called comedy and it just — it is not funny. I think we've got something here that hopefully is funny and

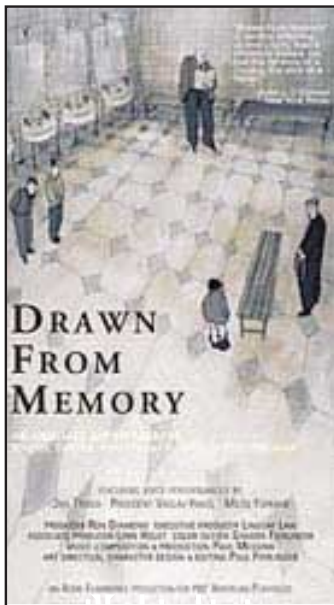
that we'll be proud to show all our friends. Heres the other thing that is really cool for both Roger and I. A Christmas special airs forever — just airs forever. Its so nice to have something that ten years from now, they'll probably be showing. So much of your work is disposable. Its on for however long the TV season is and then its done, unless Nick at Nite picks it up in thirty years, but a Christmas special lives on for a long time. And to

make it with Mainframe, was really a great experience.

Heather Kenyon is editor in chief of Animation World Magazine.

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

PAUL FIERLINGER'S DRAWN FROM MEMORY NOW AVAILABLE ON VIDEO !



“Drawn From Memory is an extraordinary reminiscence about an improbable but true life, rendered in pen-and-ink images as whimsical as those of James Thurber and words as piercing as those of Milan Kundera. The work, which could be called *The Movie of Laughter and Forgiveness*, uses the lighthearted medium of animation to heartbreaking effect.”

--Carrie Rickey
The Philadelphia Inquirer



<http://www.awn.com/awnstore/acme/drawn.html>

WAM!NET AT SIGGRAPH 2000

by Stephanie Argy

As visitors to SIGGRAPH 1999 may have learned, WAM!NET offers a way for companies that create digital content to store, share, transmit and render their projects. "We try and remove a lot of the headaches of putting together a computing system," said Anne Wagner, the company's manager of marketing programs. "WAM!NET takes on the burden of putting together the infrastructure."

Founded in 1995, WAM!NET began as a network enabling media-related businesses to collaborate online. Today, the company has approximately 6,800 users who connect to the service via the Internet — usually T1 or ISDN lines — and another 1,900 direct users who connect via "purple boxes" provided by the company. The purple-box service provides a server, a router and a communications box that connects the company directly to the WAM!NET network.

WAM!NET has clients ranging from newspaper publishers to pre-press firms to 12 of the 20 largest retailers in the United States, but the company is also building a strong presence in the entertainment industry, especially in the visual effects and post-production communities.

Among the company's early entertainment industry clients were the Mill and Mill Film in London. "About two years ago, we were approached by someone we knew in a previous life who had just started working at WAM!NET," recalled Roy Trosh, head of technology at the Mill.



Now networking... © WAM!NET

The Mill and Mill Film were offered a chance to beta-test a direct WAM!NET connection. "I guess it was quite successful, because we didn't give it back," Trosh said.

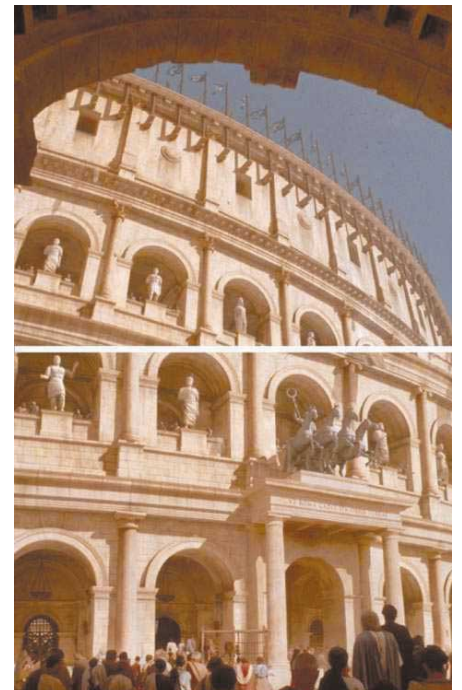
Trosh explained that the service is used extensively by both the Mill, which does post-production work on commercials, and its sister company, Mill Film, which specializes in effects for feature films. "About 20% of the work we do at the Mill is for U.S. agencies," Trosh said. "We use it for that, for our commercials."

On the feature side, he said, the arrival of the WAM!NET connection coincided with a number of projects on which the directors wanted to stay in close contact with the facility as they worked.

On the movie *Gladiator*, for example, director Ridley Scott shot at locations ranging from Malta to Morocco, then went to Los Angeles to edit the movie. By using WAM!NET, he was able to stay in touch with the London-based visual effects team throughout the process. "It just stops directors having to fly around the world to see viewings," Trosh said. "Everybody's used to double-clicking on their PCs and seeing a

Quicktime movie." He said that working via a network also accelerates the post-production process, eliminating the need to strike a tape, mail it to a director on the other side of the world, then wait for the reaction. With WAM!NET, feedback is almost instantaneous — or, as Trosh said, "It eliminates that five-day turnaround."

Trosh emphasized that one of the biggest changes in WAM!NET since its early days has been the improvement of a client's ability to follow the progress of a transmission. "WAM!NET enables a user to send a data file, go to the Web site and see where that package is," Trosh said. "Since the information is accessed through WAM!NET's Web site, the customer can track the package from any



WAM!NET worked with Mill Film on *Gladiator*.
TM & © 2000 DreamWorks LLC.

computer, logging on from home to see if the file has actually been delivered."

While WAM!NET continues to promote all of its various services, at SIGGRAPH 2000 its emphasis was on ROD! and ROD! Lite, the company's render-on-demand services.

According to WAM!NET estimates, a 100-frame sequence that would take about 16 and a half days to render on a single desktop computer could be done in about four hours using the ROD! service. The render-on-demand services thus make it possible for both large companies and boutiques to take on larger and more complicated projects.

At SIGGRAPH 2000, the company unveiled ROD! Lite, an Internet-based rendering service expected to be available by the end of this year. Providing access to the company's 350-computer render farm, ROD! Lite initially will support Windows NT, with support for additional platforms scheduled for 2001.

Several companies that encountered WAM!NET at SIGGRAPH 1999 have since taken advantage of ROD! Norm Stangl, CEO of Spin Productions, said that at last year's gathering, his company had just agreed to generate about 11 minutes of 3D work in *Cyberworld*, an animation showcase for IMAX theaters. "We were looking for render solutions," Stangl said.

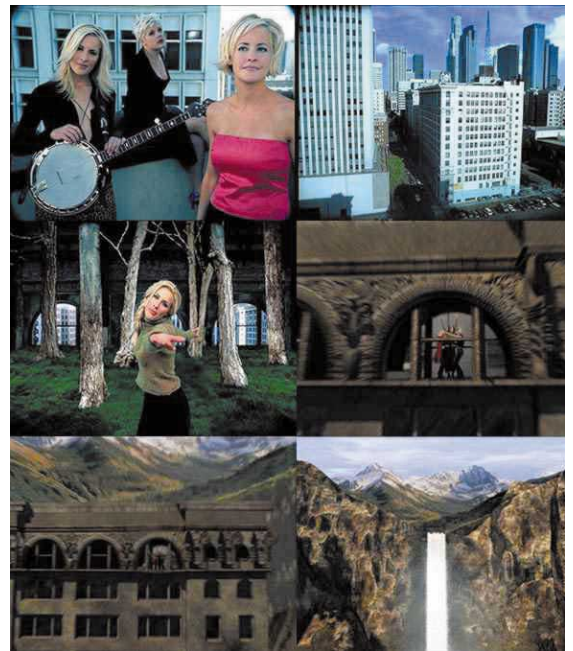
Each computer-generated *Cyberworld* frame had between 100 and 150 layers and required an average of four hours to render. Furthermore, because this was a 3D project, each frame was doubled — one frame for the right eye, one frame for the left. As a result, the project comprised

approximately 30,000 frames, which required about 58,000 hours of rendering time. "Rendering the whole film on one processor would certainly have been a daunting task," Stangl said.

After examining the various options available, Spin decided to use WAM!NET. "The deciding factor was whether WAM!NET had enough processors on-site to manage our job," Stangl said. "They had the horsepower. They also had the bandwidth to make it practical for us to send them images to render (which) they could send back, rather than sending them back and forth on tapes."

The rendering process nevertheless required a degree of faith. "It was quite a render task all around, and to be doing it remotely was quite daunting," Stangl said. "We were also beta-siting WAM!NET, so we were in a very risky position. We entered into this knowing that in beta mode, you have to work through issues." WAM!NET technicians did their best to resolve any problems. "They responded well to our challenges," Stangl said. "It was a good working process to get this up and running."

Spin's first renders went to WAM!NET in February, and Stangl estimated that at one point during the process, there were 500 to 600 machines working on the project. When Spin sent its shots to WAM!NET for rendering, he added, they were sent in multiple layers. "The file sizes were so huge, it was the most practical



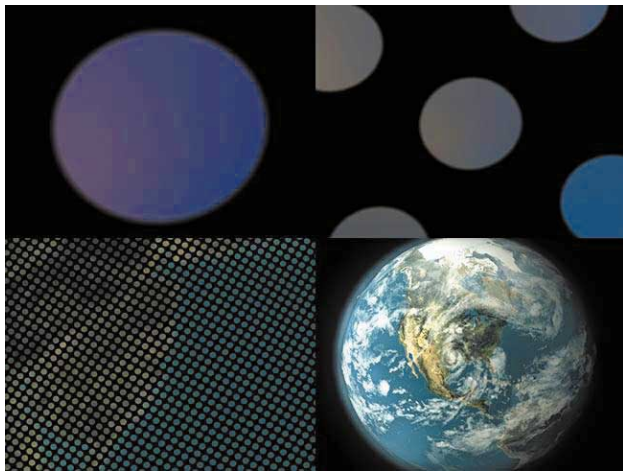
GOAT's Dixie tricks. © Goat.com.

approach," Stangl explained.

WAM!NET also enables artists to collaborate with others from around the world, even if they don't have a single central headquarters. Another early customer for the ROD! service was GOAT (Gurus of Abstract Techniques), a design collective of people working in different professions. "Everybody does something of a creative nature," said Jake Morrison, one of the founders of GOAT in London.

Morrison has since moved to San Francisco, while other members of the group live in places ranging from Sweden to Hawaii. Although they continue to work together on projects such as a recent music video for the Dixie Chicks, "Cowboy, Take Me Away," they lack some of the resources of a brick-and-mortar facility. "Because we don't have an office per se, we don't have a base of machines," Morrison said.

At SIGGRAPH 1999, Morrison spoke with officials from WAM!NET and arranged for GOAT to do some beta-testing. In addi-



Sunspot by GOAT. © Goat.com.

tion to the Dixie Chicks video, GOAT used WAM!NET for two corporate presentations — one for Sun Microsystems and the other for sap.com. Morrison has seen WAM!NET evolve over the course of GOAT's productions. "On our first job, we were literally telnetting into their machines," Morrison said. Soon, though, WAM!NET established an Internet gateway. "These were simpler FTP sites," he continued. "They now have this whole Web-based system, which is pretty slick, I think.

"The most important thing for us was that WAM!NET were extremely responsive to our needs," Morrison continued. "If we had a big render coming up, they would render a file frame and send it back to me so I could quality-check the scene before we started the full render. The only delay for us was in downloading rendered imagery at GOAT via our DSL connection. The people at WAM!NET were actually rendering faster than we could download."

WAM!NET's rendering options vary, depending on clients' needs. "Rendering is a flexible science," WAM!NET's Wagner said. "Sometimes you want it completed in a certain period of time, other times you want to try out dif-

ferent approaches." Accordingly, the price of WAM!NET service also fluctuates. "Cost varies based on a number of variables," Wagner said. "The type of connection and whether the client wants to do tests or an entire film both influence the cost. We also sometimes have special

offers to coincide with trade shows and events."

The underlying pay structure can even differ between companies. GOAT, for example, hires WAM!NET on a project-by-project basis and is charged per hour of rendering. On *Cyberworld*, Spin paid for rendering by the frame. "We knew roughly how many frames we would have to produce," Stangl said, "so early on we negotiated a rate with WAM!NET that was sensible and workable to our budget. Obviously, a good deal has to be a good deal for everyone."

Although the Mill has not yet made use of WAM!NET's rendering capabilities, Trosh is confident ROD! may prove itself a useful tool in the near future. "We foresee a large demand for rendering in our upcoming projects at the Mill," Trosh said. "We're going through the numbers, so it's a purely financial consideration for us now."

Trosh noted that one important financial question when it comes to rendering is the issue of additional license fees. While some software manufacturers offer use of their render engines for free, others charge a hefty fee per render license. As a result, even if

an effects facility wants to bring in an extra server for a heavy render job, the expense of license fees may lift the cost out of the viable range. WAM!NET, though, has already paid the relevant fees, so its users can render images using programs from a range of companies, including Alias|Wavefront, Softimage and Pixar.

According to Wagner, WAM!NET's mission is to free artists and other creative people from having to spend too much time thinking about their equipment. "All the creative people need to worry about is hiring WAM!NET," she said. "We provide an end-to-end rendering solution." Ironically, the company offers so many options that the biggest problem customers have, according to Wagner, is choosing from among them. "The most interesting issue that I have found is that there are various opinions about the best way to go," Wagner said. "Ten people will want to take this resource 10 different ways. Building a consensus is often the most difficult thing. It's not a technology barrier."

Republished from VFXPro, a fellow Creative Planet community Web site, and on-line news resource for the visual effects community affiliated with the Visual Effects Society.

Stephanie Argy is a regular contributor to VFXPro.com.

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

Recruiting at

SIGGRAPH 2000

by Juniko Moody



© SIGGRAPH

From the West Coast to the East Coast, the trend this year is "back to basics," with most studios looking for well-rounded, experienced generalists who have strengths in both technology and art. Most facilities agree that while SIGGRAPH is a great information-exchange forum and meeting place, few candidates are actually hired immediately after SIGGRAPH. With the industry's everyday recruiting strategy utilizing referrals and Web sites, there is little dependence upon a concerted once-a-year recruiting effort. However, recruiting continues because SIGGRAPH is so conducive to building relationships and allowing both prospective employers and employees to learn more about one another.

Among the following medium-to-large companies, the forecast includes more CGI animation, more feature films and more digital effects, but this growth doesn't necessarily translate into volume hiring. Most agree that it is quality, not quantity, that is desired. Since most studios have already staffed their main team of employees, they now can concentrate on

amassing a supply of possible per-project candidates for upcoming projects.

There are more schools dedicated to developing entertainment artists and technologists than ever before, and thus more candidates, but the common lament remains that quality people are hard to find. Most studios enlist their recruiters to advise universities and other training institutions on the education and set of skills necessary for potential employees, in the hopes of affecting curricula and creating an ideal employee pool. Educational institutions change slowly, so the immediate solution still is to rely on screening numerous candidates worldwide. All studios have Web sites and internship programs, which makes recruiting easier.



© Pacific Data Images

Now that digital effects have been widely used for so many years, there is a larger number of experienced practitioners available. Evidence of digital effects longevity is Pacific Data Images, now celebrating its 20th anniversary. This year's SIGGRAPH was recruiting director Marilyn Friedman's seventh with PDI. "We

have a short-term and long-term approach," she said. "The short-term objective is to fill immediate positions, while the long-term goal is to build relationships which may be fruitful in the future."

With *Shrek* in full production, only a couple of lighting and effects positions remain unfilled at PDI. The company recently wrapped Robert Redford's feature *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, to be released in November. Looking forward to its third animated feature, *Tusker*, with the Imax version of *Shrek* in the works, the longest-lived digital effects studio is enjoying an infusion of new business from current major stockholder DreamWorks. Friedman said, "Our planning has been enhanced by knowing that there are several feature films in the future, due to DreamWorks."

There are a variety of openings to be filled over an extended period of time. PDI generally looks for people with two to five years of production experience and focuses on skills and education. Its digital artists must know UNIX and shell scripting. Friedman refrains from using opposing titles such as "artists" and "technicians"; she prefers to describe PDI employees as "people who create imagery and people who enable the creation of imagery." Artists and technical directors are both essential to the process.

PDI seldom hires recent graduates, but currently it has sev-

eral entry-level positions open. PDI does not offer internships or scholarships. Its Web site posts announcements and job opportunities regularly.

Digital Domain (DD) also is enjoying a successful period while completing *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. "Our goal has been to become our own production company, and we are moving toward our goal in significant ways," said Laurence Plotkin, director of human resources and recruitment at DD.

Employees from each department staffed the DD booth: 2D, 3D, character animation, TD and software. They handed out postcards with software, job and contact information, while showcasing past work. They did not collect reels or resumes but instead presented an opportunity to meet and talk. Reels and resumes can be sent directly to Digital Domain. The company recruits for two purposes: to add to its core team of artists and to identify people with specific sets of skills who can be called upon quickly when a new project begins. "The number of people we are looking for is actually a result of who we meet," Plotkin said.

Asked to describe the Digital Domain culture, Plotkin responded, "We have a unique environment compared to other studios. Because many of our staff have been at Digital Domain since the beginning, we have a casual, young, energetic yet relaxed atmosphere that is fraternal and low-key. Our location also contributes to our culture. Many of our most successful artists were groomed internally and gained experience in a peer system that takes time to teach and learn. Our artists are intense, self-managed

adults capable of working both independently and as a team."

Finding someone whos a good fit means meeting well-rounded people, Plotkin said. "We can add to the core team that will complement our ability to handle complex projects." Plotkin credited two main factors for the broad-based search strategies used by Digital Domain and other studios: difficulty in predicting candidate success on the job and competition among facilities. These factors cause each studio to seek out the top two or three candidates and to be ever on the lookout for fresh new talent and potential.

"There are a huge number of schools and graduates," Plotkin said. "Experienced production people and the cumulative years of experience are growing significantly, but the reason we recruit internationally is because talent exists everywhere, and it is my job to look everywhere. We hire internationally because certain schools may consistently produce excellent graduates due to their training, curriculum and access to technology or admission process that attracts ambitious and talented people. Also, many areas of the world focus on artistic development and place a value on artistic growth not always found in the U.S."

Judging candidates by their potential means evaluating their base skill display, because they do not yet have production experience. The criteria for evaluating experienced artists are different from those for newcomers. "There is a direct correlation between the longevity of certain software or techniques and the experience level of collective seasoned candidates," Plotkin said. "Some technology is 8 years old,

so we have a broader base of experienced people to choose from, and these people will bring their experience to us."

Plotkin defined DD's core team as consisting primarily of "brilliant-thinking problem solvers with traditional talents in painting, drawing or photography." He also said DD hoped to meet people who want to work with them and to help students and professionals make good career decisions.

Brad Reinke, senior recruiter for Cinesite, concurred with Plotkin. Cinesite also is involved in "specialized recruiting," selecting only the best TD candidates, those with three to five years of production experience. He too keeps a lookout for "rising stars" or fresh new talent through exhibitions like Electronic Theatre.

"In the past there was a need for senior-level personnel," Reinke said. "Then, as software and pipelines improved, it was easier to bring in junior-level artists, train them and put them in a solely artistic role. This resulted in having less technical skill development. Now we've come back around full circle and need experienced people with both skills."

Reinke believes the greatest damage has been done by the numerous short trade programs that teach only software. The longer two-year programs produce students with superior talents, blending art, technology and software. He serves on advisory boards but finds most learning institutions and training facilities reluctant to lose the income generated by the demand for brief, concentrated software courses.

"I often get students who say to me, 'I know Maya inside and out,'" Reinke said, "but we only use 50% of Maya because

25% will not work in our pipeline and 25% was rewritten to work in our pipeline. That means that 50% of the students time was wasted learning software instead of improving artistic skills. We've always looked for generalists with strong, artistic style." Reinke serves as adviser on the board of Gnomon School of Visual Effects. "Gnomon is a good example of a fine upcoming school," he said. "They integrate skills in the way they train, retrain and cross-train."

Reinke described the Cinesite culture as being relaxed and easy to work in without walls or cubicles, large enough to accommodate several big-budget, high-profile projects yet small enough to retain a "family" atmosphere with free-flowing communication. "Our environment tries to create and nurture personalities who want to be involved in everything," he said. For Reinke, one of the most important advantages to working at Cinesite is "the ability to see the whole production process, no matter what role you play."

On the heels of *Stuart Little*, the upcoming *Hollow Man* and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Don Levy of Sony Pictures Imageworks welcomed keen interest from the SIGGRAPH community. "There are fewer than half a dozen enormous projects in the marketplace today. Imageworks is lined up to work on three," Levy said. "One of our priorities we're interested in is meeting shader writers. A lot of the kind of work we're doing looks as good as it does because we develop proprietary shaders that enable us to give our images the very special kinds of look that we're able to achieve. We're also looking for technical directors and character animators. One of the things

Imageworks has become respected for is our work in creating digital characters and integrating those characters into live-action environments. A large measure of our success in creating those performances falls upon the shoulders of our digital animation team." Levy also emphasized that "talent knows no borders," inviting applicants from the international community.

Sony's alliance with Sony Pictures Digital Entertainment, a new operating unit of Sony Pictures Entertainment, has broadened the horizons this year for Levy. "All of our broadband initiatives, our online activities at Sony and our gaming unit, Sony Online Entertainment — which includes *EverQuest* and the whole Verant Organization, which we have now acquired — is represented in our booth," Levy said. "We will now be able to engage talent from a broader cross section of talent as broadband comes into play. The computer graphics opportunities are only going to grow, so we now have more opportunities."

Jeff Fino, co-founder and executive producer of Wildbrain, said, "SIGGRAPH is not the best way to find people, but it is a great way to meet people." He said he likes to impact careers by imparting advice, adding, "Information exchange is the most important aspect of SIGGRAPH."



© Wildbrain

Wildbrain is looking for generalists who like to work on a

wide variety of projects, including commercials and film. "Our employees might work on a commercial one week, then a short film or television series development the next week," Fino said. "We work on various types of projects." Top on Wildbrain's list was Internet animation. "We started modestly with 2D cartoons," Fino said, "but we are aggressively pursuing more 2D and 3D animation."

Fino said he has tended to find more artists than producers and production managers at SIGGRAPH, and noted its sometimes difficult to attract people to the Bay Area due to its high cost of living. Like other studios, Wildbrain recruits internationally, a task made easier by the Internet, which has yielded a diverse workplace. The company is selectively searching to fill two to five positions. "We have a free-flowing environment with lots of creativity," Fino said. "We are a corporation with deadlines and clients, but a creative environment needs a little exemption from the norm." Offering challenging work, Wildbrain also rewards creativity. "Animation is a merit-based system," Fino said.



© Pixar Animation Studios

Another Bay Area company, Pixar Animation Studios, also is looking for the right blend of artists and technologists. Pixar reps describe the ideal TD as having knowledge of UNIX programming/scripting and extensive 3D graphics experience in modeling,

lighting and shading using Alias|Wavefront and Softimage. Also useful is an education in computer science, mathematics or engineering with an art background and a thorough understanding of physical motion, weight, balance, texture and form. Pixar also is looking for graphics software engineers, animators and layout artists.

In New York, the approach is the same. Chuck Richardson of Blue Sky Studios said, "We are finishing a major recruiting effort that started at last year's SIGGRAPH to staff up for feature production. We increased our crew by about 150%. We still have approximately 10-15 TD and character-animator positions open."



© Blue Sky Studios

As to requirements, Richardson said, "Our antennae are always out for bright, talented, skilled, dedicated, spirited, determined, obsessive, imaginative individuals. Having strong softball skills is a plus." In addition to SIGGRAPH recruiting — which for Blue Sky usually results in an ocean of applications, resumes and reels — the studio also makes use of its Web site, paid advertisements and an in-house recruiter, and offers bonuses for successful recruiting.

Blue Sky recently transformed itself from a commercial and high-end film and TV computer-animation production facility into a feature film studio specializing in computer animation. The change meant the company

tripled in size, so it is moving to a new location. Already hired are feature film editors, layout, visual development and storyboard staff, managers, planners and programmers. They have written fresh animation tools, proprietary rendering software and production management and tracking tools.



© Rhythm & Hues

Rhythm & Hues also had a booth at SIGGRAPH where would-be employees could drop off resumes and demo reels. "We are always looking for highly qualified and experienced personnel in all disciplines," said David Weinberg, director of 3D production. "We may add to our core group of employees if we meet appropriate candidates. Recently we have seen the talent pool mature. People with years of experience can now be found at SIGGRAPH. In the past, we often found people without much professional production experience applying for positions at SIGGRAPH." He said Rhythm & Hues has found it rarely needs to hire internationally now, as it did in the past. When the studio merged with VIFX a year and a half ago, the result was a larger and better company. "We have hired many more free-lance people in the past year than before," Weinberg said.

Working on commercial and feature films, current Rhythm & Hues projects include *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *The Sixth Day* and *Little Nicky*. Several bids are out for 2001.

The Walt Disney Co. was represented at SIGGRAPH by Walt Disney Feature Animation (WDF), the Secret Lab (TSL), Go.com and Walt Disney Imagineering (WDI), which presented their current and upcoming projects. WDF debuted artwork from *The Emperor's New Groove*, *Atlantis*, *Treasure Planet*, *Sweating Bullets*, *Lilo & Stitch* and *John Henry*. TSL showcased *Dinosaur* and previewed work for *102 Dalmatians*. Go.com highlighted its Web attractions, and WDI presented its work for the new DisneyQuest virtual ride "Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for Buccaneer Gold."

TSL also made presentations of its work on *Dinosaur*, *Mission to Mars* and *Gone in 60 Seconds* at the Alias|Wavefront, SGI, Nothing Real and Steamboat Software booths. All divisions were recruiting for a wide variety of job opportunities and were accepting reels and resumes. Job opportunities are posted on the VFXPro.com job listings.

Andrew Millstein of the Secret Lab hoped to hire approximately 30 new people, for both permanent and project positions, primarily for feature animation technology. Secret Labs goals for SIGGRAPH were threefold: present a high-end presence, communicate to candidates about upcoming projects and allow artists and technologists to demonstrate their work. In general, it seeks those with backgrounds in computer science, visual arts, film business and Internet.

Industrial Light & Magic had a major presence at SIGGRAPH and is looking for talented people to join its CG, digital technology and art departments. There is a lot of cutting-edge work expected on features such as

Jurassic Park 3, The Mummy Returns, Pearl Harbor and Star Wars: Episode II. ILM also will be working on the highly anticipated *A.I.*, a project begun by Stanley Kubrick and currently in production at Warner Bros./DreamWorks, directed by Steven Spielberg. A June 29 release is planned and

ILM is accepting reels and resumes.

Republished from VFXPro, a fellow Creative Planet community Web site, and on-line news resource for the visual effects community affiliated with the Visual Effects Society.

Juniko Moody is a regular contributor for VFXPro.com.

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

Frederic BACK



FOLIMAGE



Bill PLYMPTON

AWN:

Home to your
Animation
Favorites

Featured in the AWN Gallery are renowned International animation directors

Nag Ansoorge, Frédéric Back, Walerian Borowczyk, Richard Condie, Sally Cruickshank, Raimund Krumme, Caroline Leaf, Phil Mulloy, Priit Pärn, Bill Plympton, Georges Schwizgebel, Raoul Servais, Folimage Studio and more.

www.awn.com/gallery

Focus on SIGGRAPH: Eyetronics

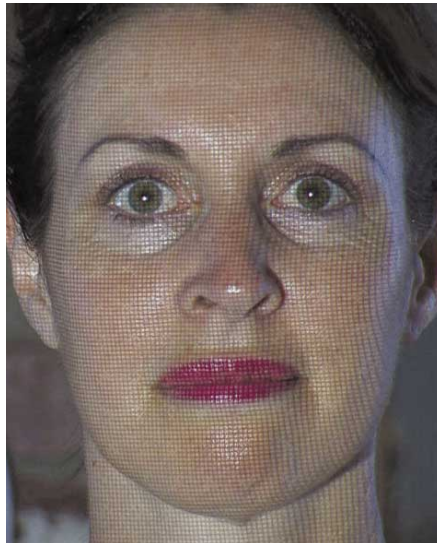
by Juniko Moody

This year's SIGGRAPH keynote address, "The Human-Machine Merger: Why We Will Spend Most of Our Time in Virtual Reality in the 21st Century" will be given by scientist, inventor and visionary Ray Kurzweil. According to Kurzweil, by the 2020s virtual reality will no longer be the crude depiction that we see today. Instead, it will be so realistic that it will be difficult to distinguish from our material world experience.

Indeed, already neural or other implants have been used to counteract impairments caused by Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, deafness, blindness and paralysis. The leap from life-assisting to life-enhancing and recreational applications no longer seems so far. Evidence for Kurzweil's reasoning can be found in Eyetronics' ShapeSnatcher demonstration. The ability to render real-life objects or people as virtual 3D objects in one hour or less surely is an essential part of Kurzweil's highly evolved machine-system scenario.

The speed, economy and simplicity with which Eyetronics representative Nick Tesi captured the likeness of volunteer Lynn was truly amazing. Using only a slide projector, a consumer video camera with a 3.5-inch floppy output (Tesi used the SONY DCR-TRV900 three-CCD digital video camcorder), the ShapeSnatcher calibration box and ShapeSnatcher/Matcher software running on a PC, Tesi was able to render 640x480 resolution images of virtual Lynn in very little time.

Because the projector and camera were already set up, it only took 15 minutes for the photography. The software processing took 45 minutes, longer than usual, because Tesi took time to explain each step.



Lynn. © Eyetronics.

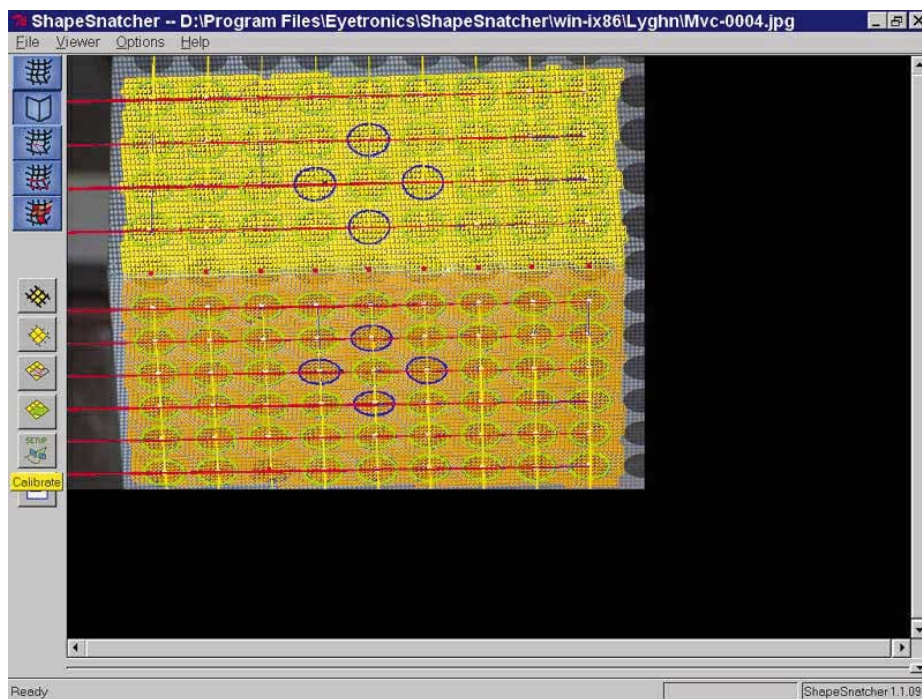
The fact that all of these components are available to consumers and that the software is priced like any consumer electronics equipment demonstrates that high-end graphics can be achieved by anyone. Users don't need any special skills or training to produce adequate results. This technology is a vast improvement over the days when artists chose digital models by browsing through a supplier's catalog of available objects. Those objects were generic and might not be exactly what the artist needed, so modifications had to be made. With ShapeSnatcher, if the object exists, you can capture it.

The process appeared to be quite simple. Tesi positioned Lynn before the projector and

"snapped" her picture with the video camera, deliberating slightly over the focus of the special ShapeSnatcher grid slide projected onto her face. After he was certain she was in focus and in full view, the rest of the process proceeded quickly. He took three pictures of Lynn — frontal, left profile and right profile — then a shot of the calibration box, which she held in front of her face. There were not even any special lighting requirements, since illumination came from the slide projector.

After that, it was a short walk to the computer to download the 640x480 images from the floppy disk. The first step was to create 3D spatial coordinates by using the image of the calibration box and ShapeSnatcher. The calibration box works on given references, such as the planes being at a 90-degree angle to each other and the distances between the circles printed on the box. This information is used to calculate parameters such as camera-to-object distance and focal length. Once these parameters are established, object surface information can be deduced from the deformation of the grid projected on the object's surface.

Having established spatial references, the next step was to transform Lynn's frontal portrait into a mesh map. After some anticipatory cleanup, Tesi was ready to perform the same treatment to the left and right profiles. Hair requires a special strategy, so if the artist is not prepared for that, it is best to remove data up to the hairline. Jagged edges also should be



Calibration. © Eyetronics.

removed, because that makes merging different mesh surfaces cleaner and easier.

Object capture is limited to the viewing angle of the camera lens, so getting a 180-degree view of a head necessitates three viewpoints. Tesi could have used a wider lens but, as any portrait photographer knows, the result is less than flattering and is not an accurate representation of the subject.

Blending the three wireframe meshes with ShapeMatcher was surprisingly easy. In a few minutes, Tesi had the completed facial mesh map. Even the areas of overlap were seamless. The entire map was displayed as a conforming, rectangular grid, even in the highly detailed areas such as the mouth, nose and eyes.

Once the texture map was applied to the geometry, the illusion was complete. The projected grid lines disappeared. Both mesh map and texture map were created from the same image, yet when rendered, there were no

grid lines on the virtual face. Since the mesh map and the texture map are one image, it is easy to filter out the grid pattern on the surface and smooth the texture. (It is also possible to turn off the grid projection and take pictures of separate textures. This technique might give interesting animated effects.) The original reason for recording the geometry and texture map within the same image was to guarantee that there would be no "slippage" between the two.

Model data then could be output in several formats: OBJ (Alias|Wavefront), 3DS (3D Studio Max), DXF (AutoCAD), HRC (Softimage 3.7), IV (Open Inventor 2.1), LWO (LightWave 3D Object), WRL (VRML 2.0) and, of course, SS3D (ShapeSnatcher 1.0).

The main objective accomplished, Tesi was free to experiment with various mesh map resolutions using ShapeReducer. Even at low resolutions, the images maintained detail in the critical mouth, nose and eye areas. In

other 3D packages, this kind of overall model reduction would have meant the loss of significant detail in convoluted areas. However, this mesh remained "adaptive:" there were more subdivisions in convoluted areas, but no more than needed. The ratio of subdivisions between areas of greater and lesser detail remained proportional.

Often there are greater extremes in mesh subdivision between more and less detailed areas, sometimes so much so that the mesh has to be "balanced" in a painstaking manual process. If the object were to be animated or morphed, this kind of subdivision disparity — extremely tiny grid size and extremely large grid size on the same surface — would result in holes or wrinkles. This software is endowed with an intelligent system for decreasing geometric resolution.

This would be a great application to use in creating virtual objects for games, multimedia, Internet entertainment, e-commerce or information systems. Fast-loading, low-resolution models that retain their character are achievable.

The implications are widespread. Archiving would take less digital storage space. Museum artifacts, industrial or manufacturing prototypes or versions and architectural elements could be stored compactly. The camera is the only limitation. The better the camera, and hence the image quality, the better the model will be. So high-quality, high-resolution models for movies, science and medicine also are possible.

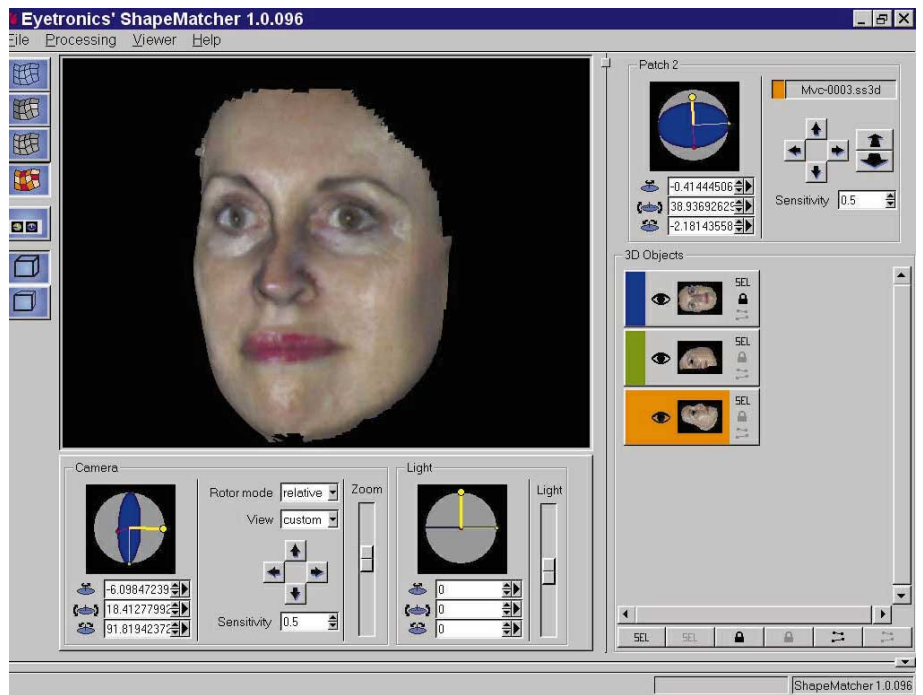
Eyetronics recently expanded into the United States, opening an American office represented by Nick Tesi. For more information on

Eyetrionics products and services, visit the companys Web site, or contact Tesi by phone at (800) 205-9808, or by e-mail at nick.tesi@eyetrionics.com. If outside the U.S., call +32-16-29-83-43, or e-mail info@eyetrionics.com.

Republished from *VFXPro*, a fellow Creative Planet community Web site, and on-line news resource for the visual effects community affiliated with the Visual Effects Society.

Juniko Moody is a regular contributor to VFXPro.com.

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



Render. © Eyetrionics.

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:

- **The Aesthetics of Internet Animation**

Chris Lanier, creator of Wildbrain.com's *Romanov*, explains the liberation of animating for the Internet. View a QuickTime clip of *Romanov* at:
<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.05/5.05pages/lanieraesthetics.php3>

- **Ray Harryhausen, A Celebration**

Join in the fun of a star-studded celebration in honor of Ray Harryhausen's 80th birthday, with a QuickTime movie of one of the evening's tributes, from Phil Tippett Studios.
<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.05/5.05pages/fordhamharryhausen.php3>

- **Fresh from the Festivals: August 2000's Film Reviews**

Maureen Furniss offers a glimpse into a selection of five wonderful films: *Oil and Vinegar*, *Brahm's Lullaby*, *Sheep in the Big City "Chapter 2: Sheep on the Lam,"* *Hello, Dolly!* and *Atlas Gets a Drink*. Now see the QuickTime clips at:
<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.05/5.05pages/5.05festival.php3>

- **Is there Life Beyond Flash?**

Gain insight into the alternative tools and software being used to create animated content for the Internet. Includes QuickTime previews of two of Spot Box's online games.
<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.05/5.05pages/kenyonsurvey.php3>

Scandals, Smokescreens and a Golden Age?:

Canadian Animation in the 21st Century

by Chris Robinson

Helen: Hey Pop, do you know where you are right now?

Pop: Uh-uh.

Helen: Tell me where you are.

P: Any...anywhere.

H: Anywhere?

P: Uh huh.

— From Helen Hills film *Mouseholes* (1999)

This union of letters, words, sentences and pages is a sequel to an article I wrote a couple of years ago entitled, "Whose Golden Age? The State of Canadian Animation." I had first encountered this dreadful phrase in an editorial of the animation issue of the Canadian magazine, *Take One*, and subsequently read about it in a variety of newspapers. I was surprised because from my wide exposure to Canadian animation, I saw state cuts to all branches of cultural funding including festivals, filmmakers and studios like the National Film Board of Canada. At the same time, the quality of Canadian films was in serious decline; hindered by low budgets, naivete, political correctness and an overall lack of fresh, innovative ideas. At the close of the 20th century, Canadian animation, despite what traditionalists like Hiroshima and Ancey would have you believe, seemed far removed from the innovative years of Norman McLaren, Rene Jodoin, Ryan Larkin and Caroline Leaf and unlikely to rise again. So with this in mind, where was this Golden Age any-



Caroline Leaf's use of light and color in her paintings is fuel for the imagination.
© Caroline Leaf.

way? Well apparently it was in the slick corporate kiosks of Nelvana, Cinar, Funbag, Walt Disney Canada, Sheridan College, Vancouver Film School and anywhere else where animation is viewed merely as a means to exploit the nostalgic sentimentalities of a generation fed on *Sesame Street*, MTV, and other immortal, cute, big-eyed animals who sing the songs of the muses without ever taking a shit.

Two years have passed and a great deal has changed.

Attempting to define Canada, let alone Canadian animation, is like trying to explain hockey to an American: frustrating and complicated with a tendency to simplify ("You try to get the black round thing in the net"). Just what the hell is Canadian anyway? If we are to accept Canadian

sociologist Ian Angus' definition of social identity as "the feeling of belonging to a group, and of having this feeling in common with other members of that group" or Max Weber's concept of the nation has a human group that feels itself a unity to an external organization, then Canadian animation certainly doesn't subscribe smoothly to the concept of national identity. Like the country itself, Canada's animation communities are spread out far and wide across the Canadian landscape. Canadian animation is best defined as a patchwork of differing voices struggling to be heard through the shouts from the south.

Yesterday and Today

Prior to the mid-1980s defining Canadian animation was



Citizen Harold (1971) by animator Hugh Fouldes. © National Film Board of Canada.

fairly straightforward. The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) was the calling card of Canadian animation, merging propaganda with artistic innovation to create some of the world's finest animation. In those days, there was little activity beyond the NFB. As early as the 1940s there were commercial houses like Graphic Visuals owned by former NFB animators, Jim McKay and George Dunning. In the 1960s and 1970s a variety of service studios existed in Vancouver, Ottawa and Toronto to provide work for the graduates of Canada's new animation school, Sheridan College which opened in 1967. In the late 1970s, Toronto's Nelvana Studios and Montreal's Cinar were small, but fledgling companies. In Vancouver, Al Sens

was quietly producing anti-industrial films while Marv Newland was just opening up his studio, International Rocketship. Beyond that there were few opportunities for animators. While opportunities for government funding were more plentiful in those days unless you were one of the privileged few able to find work with the NFB, there was little opportunity for animators in Canada.

This has all changed in the last 10-15 years. Animation has emerged from the margins of cultural expression into an accepted form of cultural and economic capital that has found a popular audience. In particular 'classical' American cel animation (Disney, Warner) has established itself as the norm in mainstream culture.

As such, Canadian animation has shifted from the production of government funded personal or propaganda films to a market driven industry that exists primarily to feed the global entertainment machine.

Attempting to define Canada, let alone Canadian animation, is like trying to explain hockey to an American like Nelvana and Cinar who have established themselves as leaders in the mass production of children's television productions. While there are a variety of innovative commercial studios (Cuppa Coffee Animation, Head Gear, Mainframe Entertainment), software companies (Alias|Wavefront, Softimage, Side Effects) and special effects companies (C.O.R.E Digital), the animation landscape is dominated by a plentitude of service studios like Ottawa's Funbag Animation and Dynamight Cartoons and Vancouver's Bardel Animation, Natterjack and Studio B to name a few. With the expansion of the market for animation, many service studios have turned toward original productions. Unfortunately with few exceptions (eg. *Angela Anaconda*, *Rolie Polie Olie*, *Ed*,



Adam Shahan, one of the founders of Cuppa Coffee. © Cuppa Coffee.



Chris Landreth's *The End* is an example of Canada's technological prowess.
© Alias|Wavefront.

Edd 'n' Eddy) these productions merely attempt to emulate the American norm.

On the heels of the success of Oakville's Sheridan College, the premiere classical training school in the world, various animation schools have sprung up all across the country. Vancouver Film School, Seneca College, VanArts, Capilano College, College-Interdec and Algonquin College have found success with their animation or visual arts programmes and have become major recruiting sources for the likes of Nelvana and Cinar and most of the American majors.

The emergence of animation into the global marketplace has not been as kind to the art community, but there remains a strong core of independent animation production. Educational institutions like Emily Carr School of Design (Vancouver) and Concordia University (Montreal) encourage students to produce more personal orientated work. Outside the traditional realm of education, non-profit associations like Calgary's Quickdraw Animation Society (QAS) and Halifax's Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative (AFC) provide afford-

able opportunities to those who cannot or do not want to attend costly post-secondary institutions. At the same time, QAS and AFC have produced a strong body of work that is increasingly being acknowledged by festivals around the world. Beyond institutions, a scattered array of artists like Marv Newland, Richard Reeves, Helen Hill, Stephen Arthur, Gail Noonan, and even 79 year-old NFB pioneer René Jodoin, continue to struggle along producing their own personal visions for a modest viewing audience.

The Issues

While the Canada Council has re-emerged as a strong supporter of Canadian artists, the government on the whole has shown more interest in backing industrial projects. In 1997, the Ontario government gave Sheridan College a \$12 million grant to open a New Technology Centre. This move was made to benefit the Ontario industry, but arguably most of the students will travel to the U.S. to find more lucrative work. More disturbing still is the government's tax subsidy for the creation of Walt Disney's studios in Toronto and Vancouver (both studios recently closed). A tax credit system was introduced by the Ontario provincial government, but it encourages only the production of computer animation or special effects.

The major problem for Canadian animators remains that of distribution. Despite the emergence of an animation channel (Teletoon) and new opportunities in home video and the Internet, the festival circuit remains the leading source for viewing non-mainstream animation. Since 1976, Canada has been home to North

America's largest animation festival, the Ottawa International Animation Festival which, despite heavy government cuts, has managed to remain a primary supporter of independent animation while carving out a place for the industry. In recent years, festivals have started in Vancouver, Halifax and another in Ottawa devoted to student and emerging animators.

Until recently two favourite topics of the Canadian media were the low Canadian dollar and the so-called 'Brain Drain' which has seen Canadian professionals from hockey players (Wayne Gretzky) and actors (Jim Carrey) to writers and doctors lured by increased opportunities and a higher dollar to the U.S. Animation in particular has been affected. Virtually every American studio houses Canadians. Some of the more prominent emigres include John Kricfalusi (*Ren and Stimpy*) and Steve Williams (the digital guru behind *Jurassic Park*). Aggravating the situation is the low Canadian dollar. When Walt Disney announced they were opening studios in Vancouver and Toronto in 1995, they said it was because of the legendary reputation of Canadian animators. While there is some truth in that statement, the reality is that in addition to tax subsidies, Disney was setting up shop to take advantage of the Canadian dollar. In essence, Canada was serving as a Korean-like 'sweatshop.' The Canadian dollar is a precarious situation because if the dollar rises to par with the U.S., we will likely see that despite our reputation for producing quality animators, most Canadian studios will be out of work. At the same time, as long as the dollar is low Canadian studios will continue to primarily offer

service work to American companies, but at least there is the opportunity to produce original productions.

Big Scandals

The past year in Canadian animation has been fraught with turmoil. First, Walt Disney announced that they were closing their studios in Vancouver and Toronto. Some 400 plus people were laid off. The official word came in March 2000, but insiders had known since late summer 1999. Publicly, Disney said that they no longer felt pressure to meet production deadlines. In the end, no one cared. Nelvana and other studios picked up the jobless and Disney walked away with minimal damage thanks to a tax break that eased any possible financial pains. Everyone won except the Canadian taxpayer.

On May 29, 2000, Canada's national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, published a biting portrait of Vancouver's animation industry. As if scripted from Dickens, an anonymous animator told of the long hours, mundane work and the fear of losing one's job. "Work is so desperate that people will do anything to stay on. People are working themselves to death." In typical Canadian fashion there wasn't a whole lot of reaction to this article (the hockey play-offs were on), but one animator did say: "It's possible that the industry's in a slump at the moment, but why make it look so awful and smell so bad?" Another responded that this was the first time the media had portrayed the industry in a negative light and that it was about time truths be told. And despite threatening this person with a banana tree while sipping some god awful herbal tea



Franklin. © Nelvana.

in Hollywood, I agree with him. For too long, we have heard about the wonders of the animation industry. It has become akin to the Klondike Gold Rush of the 1800s when desperate men from across the continent traveled to the far reaches of cold Northern Canada in the hopes of finding gold. Some did, most didn't. In animation, the rush is very much over, but schools continue to churn out 'factory workers;' where they go nobody knows. One thing is for certain, they are not going to animation studios. Animation schools continue to boast about their high job placement rates, but these kids are working briefly on a project before donning the blue fat guy bib and greeting prospective consumers at the doors of Wal Mart. The animation industry, at least in Canada, has become a disillusioned illusion of prosperity, diversity and opportunity.

But wait, things get worse. The biggest scandal since Canada held off the U.S. attacks of 1812 occurred when it was learned that Cinar Animation was not only fudging their credits to gain federal tax credits, but that some \$122 million was invested in a Bahamas investment fund without the

board's knowledge. The controversies resulted in Cinar stock dropping some 70% in one day, the removal of Cinar from the stock market, and the resignation of the company's blissfully married founders Micheline Charest and Ronald Weinberg.

The first scandal appeared last fall when a Canadian politician accused Cinar of falsely crediting Canadians for the work of Americans in order to receive government subsidies. We're not talking chicken feed either: over a five-year period in the mid-1990s, Cinar received over \$50 million in tax benefits. It was eventually determined that Charest's sister, Helene, was listed on over 100 episodes she didn't write. Given that there are many loud whispers that this is common practice one would think that a less obvious name could have been invented. At times, the absolute idiocy and arrogance of power and wealth is truly astonishing. Since this time, the federal funding organization, Telefilm Canada has stopped all transactions with Cinar (strangely one of the Cinar board members is from Telefilm Canada!) and Cinar is still dealing with the federal tax department to negotiate a repayment of misused funds.

The second scandal arose less than six months later when it was determined that there was improper use of company funds. Initially the stories reported that Senior Executive Vice-President, Hasanain Panju had made offshore dealings without board knowledge, but the scapegoat tune soon changed when it was discovered that Weinberg had actually signed some of the transfers. This internal scandal has evolved into an intricate web of lawsuits and accusations that has



Martin Rose's *Trawna Tuh Belvul*. © National Film Board of Canada.

seen Cinar banned from the Toronto Stock Exchange. Needless to say, private investors are thinking long and hard before investing in the animation industry. As one observer tells it: "What if the production I invest in doesn't even get their funding because they don't qualify for government subsidies? My investment will have crashed without ever having left the ground."

For our purposes, the alleged misuse of tax credits is the bigger story. The Cinar scandal erupted during another government department screw-up and opposition politicians began accusing the government of lazy tax policies. Fueling matters was not only the presence of a Telefilm Canada executive on Cinar's board but also Cinar's close relationship with the governing Liberals. The scandal re-opened the whole issue of cultural funding and tax incentives to business and brought the loud, ugly voices of the right wing to the forefront again calling for a dismantling of tax subsidies to the Canadian film and television industry. As one insider points out:

"With all the cuts to other public sectors — health, education, welfare, etc. — there is a public outcry over funding large wealthy companies. The film funding institutions are having an even harder time justifying funding film production, when there are so many more popular worthy causes demanding attention."

Right wingers were not alone in their complaints; in the U.S., members of the Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Union went out in full force this spring to complain about jobs being lost to Canadian companies because of generous tax subsidies. It's always interesting to hear complaints from people within a culture that has generally numbed and overtaken most of the world with its crass disposable culture which has thrived off cheap labour and exploitation. So a few American animators are out of work; welcome to the world the rest of us have been living in for decades.

Montreal in particular has been hit hard by the scandal. Cinar has laid off many employees and studio morale is at an all time

low. With the exception of CineGroupe, Montreal studios are not hiring. Montreal is now losing a lot of talent to competitors like Nelvana and Funbag.

Big Time Business

Despite these minor annoyances, this is probably one of the most successful periods in Canadian animation history. Cinar is expected to rise from this crisis stronger than before and it seems unlikely that the rest of the industry will suffer too much because of the actions of one company. The industrial reality remains that Nelvana, and Cinar continue to lead the pack and produce a barrage of successful international children's entertainment, while Ottawa's Funbag Animation Studios, which recently expanded their operations to Halifax, is growing by the day and will likely rival Nelvana and Cinar in the near future.

Canada remains a pioneer and leader in computer animation. Softimage, Side Effects, C.O.R.E. Digital, Alias|Wavefront, and most recently, Nelvana have all established themselves as prominent players in the digital animation and special effects industry. In Montreal, a flurry of f/x companies have started including Hybride Technologies, Tube Images, Big Bang F/X Animation, Buzz Image Group and Voodoo Arts. While most of the work is service orientated, Toronto's Alias|Wavefront, thanks in part to Chris Landreth, has turned their tools toward the production of a pair of test shorts, *The End* (1996) and *Bingo* (1998), which became award winning films. Landreth's work combines stylish computer graphics with an intelligent, absurdist point-of-view to create two

masterpieces of self-referential cinema. Landreth is one of the few computer animators to take the medium beyond technical experiments and into challenging, thoughtful critiques of human existence. In April 2000, Landreth moved on to Nelvana where he now heads up a new computer animation division.

There are also a number of companies expanding their animated possibilities with a low-end multi-media approach. The pioneer of this new trend is undoubtedly Toronto's Cuppa Coffee Animation. Founded in 1992 by Adam Shaheen and Bruce Alcock, Cuppa Coffee has set the industry standard by selling bold, experimental graphics to advertisers and broadcasters. In just eight years, Cuppa Coffee has produced some landmark work for Canada's MTV, Coca-Cola, Mazda, the Ottawa '98 Festival Trailer film, and two particularly creative children's shows *Crashbox* and *Clever Trevor*. Another Toronto-based company, Head Gear was formed in 1997 by former Cuppa Coffee directors, Julian Grey and Steve Angel. Head Gear specializes in the production of mixed media techniques and has already produced a handful of inspired spots for The Sundance Channel, Nestle, and three very funny condom ads. C.O.R.E Digital, primarily a computer effects service house, recently ventured into proprietary production by co-producing the series *Angela Anaconda*. The show is a striking stylistic departure for television animation. Using a two-dimensional collage style with scanned photos, *Angela Anaconda* is the portrait of Angela and her not so perfect life with family, friends, teachers and arch enemy, Natette Manoir.

While we constantly hear

talk that the computer age is bringing with it the freedom for anyone to create their own works of art, we rarely see these expressions of freedom and when we do they aren't particularly good. However in 1999, far from the swank, trendy office suites of Toronto animators, 79 year-old René Jodoin, who retired from the NFB in 1984, sat in his Beaconsfield, Quebec basement and made *Between Time and Place*. This short experimental film expands on Jodoin's life long fascination with all things geometrical and explores the nature of time and space between musical notes. Remarkably, *Between Time and Place* was made using an old Amiga program without any corporate or government funding.



Transfigured. © National Film Board of Canada.

Gettin' Learned...

On the educational front, there has been much debate about the direction of educational institutions. Some criticize training schools like Sheridan College, Algonquin College and Vancouver Film School among others for simply mass producing parts for the Disney empire. At the same time, the most cutting edge schools like Emily Carr and Concordia are producing work that is interesting, but not risk taking by any stretch of the imagination. Some of the most promising Emily Carr graduates include Ryan Schweitzer (*Dog, 2bit Facial*), Paula McBride

(*The People Collector, Something Extraordinary*), Sonia Bridge (*The Day Stashi Ran Out of Honey*) and Jakub Pisticky whose film *Little Milosh* recently won the Best Canadian Student Film at the 1999 Ottawa International Student Animation Festival. Ironically, *Milosh* is a beautifully designed and well-told story, but is decidedly mainstream in the gothic tradition of Tim Burton and Vincent Price. Concordia has produced a number of independent orientated films over the years, but these films are rarely shown because of the schools inability or apathy when it comes to self-promotion. Most recently, Anouck Prefontaine generated enthusiasm for her NFB inspired film, *Oh Lord*. Outside of Emily Carr, Canadian student animation is not particularly inspiring. Many new schools have started animation departments simply to cash in on the success of Sheridan and Vancouver Film School. Like a pack of starving lap dogs lunging at leftover entrails, schools are mass producing students to learn a single way of animation so they can find immediate jobs in the midst of the animation explosion. But if the industry ever collapses, these students will be without work and the proper training to evolve on their own. The government must assume the brunt of the blame. Their systematic dismantling of funding for education has forced schools to find new avenues of funding and more often than not this involves corporate sponsorship and with that an industrial make over of the institutions aims. As long as the students are finding jobs and are content to accept a variety of unimaginative positions it is doubtful that the quality of animation education will improve in

the years to come.

The Independent Plight

Another area of concern, as it is perpetually throughout the world, is the state of independent animation. With government funding in decline, the NFB absorbing two decades of cuts, and the industry booming, it has become increasingly difficult for independent animators to get their films made, let alone seen outside of a festival. Oddly enough, Canadian independent animation has arguably never been stronger. Thanks to committed associations like Quickdraw Animation Society (QAS) and Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative (AFC) among others, a modest but consistent body of independent work is being produced outside of the traditional confines of the NFB. Cooperatives throughout Canada have been a key developer of Canadian film talent. By providing equipment and training for reasonable rates, many aspiring artists are turning toward cooperatives as an alternative to the increasing costs of post-secondary education. Additionally while film schools tend to provide industrial training, co-ops afford an environment conducive to independent artists. QAS was founded in 1984 and is a non-profit, artist run centre that is committed to any type of animation. The co-op has nurtured the likes of animators Richard Reeves (*Linear Dreams*), Wayne Traudt (*Movements of the Body*), Carol Beecher (*Ask Me*), Kevin Kurytnik (*Abandon Bob Hope, All Ye Who Enter*) and Don Best (*Raw*), and has emerged as a leading producer of 'alternative' animation in Canada. In addition, QAS offers animation classes and scholarships to any and all aspiring animators.



Alexander Petrov painting one of the approximately 29,000 images to create his 22-minute animated adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. © Pascal Blais Productions, Inc.; Imagica Corp.

While Halifax's AFC is not animation specific, a small group of animators has emerged from Canada's Mecca of the East most notably Helen Hill, a former California Institute of the Arts student who now teaches courses at the AFC and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Hill has fashioned a deceptively primitive body of work that is best described as quirky and unpretentious portraits of highly personal journeys into lands foreign and exotic, yet strangely familiar. Hill's most recent film, *Mouseholes* is a moving, comic-poetic tribute to her grandfather that merges cut-out and live-action with actual interviews between Helen and her grandfather along with snippets of dialogue from the funeral.

Beyond cooperatives, a number of independent animators have furnished independent careers primarily on their own with minimal government support. Gail Noonan has been making films in British Columbia since 1989, but has found festival success with recent films *Your Name In Cellulite* and *The Menopause Song*. While *Menopause* lightly celebrates the joys of menstruation, *Your Name* is a damning comment of the mass media's per-

ception of women's beauty. Noonan's latest film, *Lost and Found*, is a tale about two children who encounter 'homeless' people. Stephen Arthur has a very diverse background that includes feature film scriptwriting and neurobiology. He has been making experimental films since 1969. In recent years he has turned more toward surrealistic exploratory works. *Transfigured* (1998) brought movement and interaction to Canadian painter Jack Shadbolt's work, while his latest film, *Vision Point* (1999) is a journey through Western Canada as if on a liberated roller coaster.

Since the NFB left in the 1960s, the Ottawa animation scene, with the exception of a few service studios and the Ottawa festival, has been relatively quiet. However, an independent scene is slowly emerging. In 1999, the Ottawa festival joined with the Ottawa Independent Filmmakers Co-operative (IFCO) to purchase an animation stand. IFCO animator Brian McPhail has produced two poorly animated, but deliriously demented films called *Stiffy* (which toured with Spike and Mike and is now being turned into a TV series) and most recently, *Down a Dark Chimney*. Calvin Climie is currently at work on a stop-motion film, and Dan Sokolowski, a noted experimental filmmaker in Ottawa, continues to merge elements of animation and live-action into his picturesque landscape films. In late 2000, former NFB animator, Ryan Larkin (director of the Oscar nominated *Walking* and a protégé of Norman McLaren) will work on his first animated film in over twenty years.

Dynomight Cartoons employees Tavis Silbernagel and Nick Cross have started their own



The Old Man and the Sea. © Pascal Blais Productions, Inc.; Imagica Corp.

studios, Joy Lab Pictures and Do It For Me Productions, respectively. Their goal is to self-finance a film per month until they have a viable show reel. The animators have had early success with their delightfully shocking odes to Terry Toons, *Fruit, Juice! Protein?* and *Der Unterseefraulein*.

South of Ottawa, in a town called Toronto, the animation scene remains primarily industry dominated, but thanks to the efforts of Patrick Jenkins, among others, there seems to be a revival in animation production through the re-formation of the Toronto Animated Image Society. Most recently, veteran animator Arnie Lipsey had his film *Almonds and Wine* screened at the World Animation Celebration.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between commercial and independent animators a few companies have turned toward the production of independent short films. Montreal's Pascal Blais Productions, a commercial studio, which has worked with the likes of Caroline Leaf and Cordell Barker (*The Cat Came Back*), co-produced the short film, *The Old Lady and The Pigeons* by Sylvain Chomet. The film was met with resounding success at festivals around the world and brought a new respect for the Blais studios. Most recently, Blais partnered up with Russian

animator Alexander Petrov to create a 22-minute IMAX animation film based on Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and The Sea*. Aside from a variety of awards including the Oscar, Petrov's adaptation has attracted thousands of spectators to see this 'independent' animation film. In Ottawa, Dynamight Cartoons recently co-produced a humorous homage to Ingmar Bergman called *Tea for Two* by newcomer Nick Cross. Whether studio sponsored short films proves to be an adequate venue for independent animators remains to be seen, but it does provide an interesting option.

"Where is here?" Canadian literary critic, Northrop Frye once noted is a question that pervades Canadian culture. It can also to be applied to Canadian animation, but unlike other facets of Canadian culture (literature, music, painting), and very much like hockey, there was once a sense of where here was: before 1972 and the historic series with the Russians, hockey was a Canadian game. Before the 1980s, Canadian animation was the National Film Board of Canada. Just as hockey is now flourishing as an international and increasingly Americanized business, so too is animation. Where there was once certainty, there were also limitations. Where there is now uncertainty and fragmentation, there are also possibilities. Like hockey which "is re-invented at the drop of every puck," Canadian animation is re-born with every drawing, print out, scan, cut out, scratch, or with whatever tools are out there. Canada, perhaps the first post-modern country, is a constantly shifting space where here is also out there, anywhere.

Research Assistant: Heidi Blohme.

Thanks to the following: Leslie Bishko, Eric Roy, Carol Beecher, Rene Jodoin, Gail Noonan, Helen Hill, James McSwain and Tom McSorley for letting me poach his hockey analogy.



Chris Robinson. Photo: Timo Viljakainen.

Chris Robinson is executive director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival and the founder and director of SAFO, the International Student Animation Festival of Ottawa. In his spare time, Robinson is vice president of ASIFA-Canada. Robinson has curated film programs (AnimExpo, Images Festival and Olympia Film Festival), served on juries (AnimExpo, World Animation Celebration), and written articles on animation for Animation World Magazine, FPS, and Take One.

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

Beyond Vital: British Festivals In 2000

by Andrew Osmond

At the start of 1999, Irene Kotlarz concluded her report "Animation Festivals: A Year of Proliferation and Change" on the world festival scene — with special attention to Vital's failure — with the comment, "It seems unlikely Britain will see another broad-based international animation festival any time soon." Her claim has borne out. Certainly, there hasn't been any British event on a comparable scale since Vital crashed and burned, to the tune of perhaps a hundred thousand pounds-worth in debts. Yet festival activity stays lively, and there's a strong sense of rebuilding. Britain may not be able to produce anything in Annecy's league for the moment, but there's plenty going on.

One recent big event was the British Animation Awards (BAA). The third edition of these biannual ceremonies, it was held in London's National Film Theatre, and like its predecessors was completely sold out. Three of the awards were in 'Public Choice' categories, voted for in nine cities at

venues including Bristol's Watershed and Cardiff's Chapter cinema. The winning films have embarked on a countrywide tour till September, and are also going abroad.



Richard Golszowski receiving one of his trio of awards for the very popular *Robbie the Reindeer: Hooves of Fire*. Photo courtesy of BAA.

Meanwhile, independent and foreign animation is playing in local cinemas. For example, the Welsh-Russian film *The Miracle Maker* had a limited theatrical outing this spring, while London's Institute of Contemporary Arts has recently run retrospectives of Osamu Tezuka and Jan Svankmajer. There are also clubs such as London's Halloween

Society and Film Arts Norwich (FAN), which specialize in screening diverse short films, including animation. FAN is preparing a festival for this October (there's more information below).

Animated Exeter

One participant in the BAA 'Public Choice' voting was Animated Exeter. This was a brand-new, five-day festival in southwest England, held between the 18th and 22nd of February. As an organiser explained, "Exeter City Council was looking to extend the calendar of arts events to raise the city's cultural profile. Cardiff's demise presented an opportunity, and we thought there might be an opportunity to build on Exeter's media activities, using the centrally located venues for screenings and production activities.



Kingston University student Kunyi Chen wins the Mari Kuttna Award for Best Student Film. Photo courtesy of BAA.

"The size of our media economy didn't warrant an industry-oriented festival, but the



© Animated Exeter.

strength of our arts and educational base suggested an animation week combining screenings, production workshops and interactive shows. We focused on children and young people, with workshops and screenings ranging from those for the very young through to the club scene and students. The event was held in the February half-term holiday."

The resulting programme consisted of the three BAA 'Public Vote' sessions, along with a collection of 'Childrens Animation Film from the South West.' This local showcase included representatives from Honeycomb Animation, a festival backer, together with A for Animation, Bumper Films, Alison DeVere Animation and King Rollo.

A sister strand, 'Prize Winning European Childrens Animation,' focused on the Belgian animator An Vrombaut (*Little Wolf, When I Grow Up I Want To Be A Tiger*). It included the first public screening of Vrombauts new film, *64 Zoo Lane*. There was also an intriguing range of feature animation, from *The Iron Giant* and the Bakshi-animated *Lord of the Rings*, through to the anime horror *Perfect Blue* and the *South Park* movie.

On the event side, workshops were aimed at carefully defined age groups. There was a 'hands-on' session for youngsters, using zoetropes, plasticine and scratch animation, while slightly older visitors attended a digital animation workshop using Mac computers, software and cameras. Meanwhile there was an 'Interactive Animation' session to show the process from storyboarding to production, and a newcomer-friendly 'Meet the Industry' panel. ('Your chance to find out how the film and television indus-



Future animators at Interact, an event of the Animated Encounters festival. Photo courtesy of Animated Encounters.

try works.') Then there were 'Interactivities' ('Workshops in Club Technology') for those wanting to play with Web animation or video, sound and digital mixing.

Early reports suggest Animated Exeter was a success, and looks certain to become an annual event. The Interactivities drew the highest numbers (about 1300) but the Childrens Workshops were also fully booked. Public Choice screenings had better attendance than Bristol, Cardiff or Cambridge, and the total number of people attending at some point was "toward three thousand." My contact notes, "We need to develop a public audience for the long-term future of such a festival. There has to be local relevance, building on the existing infrastructure and distinct talents in the region." However, she added, "I'd hope this emphasis does not exclude scope for the industry sector to develop in an equally relevant and distinctive way."

The Animated Exeter event is a fledgling cousin to another British annual, the Bradford Animation Festival (BAFI!). Operating continuously since 1994, this festival runs for five or six days a year (most recently in 1999). Organiser Bill Lawrence has similar sentiments to those above. In his view, "Festivals always face

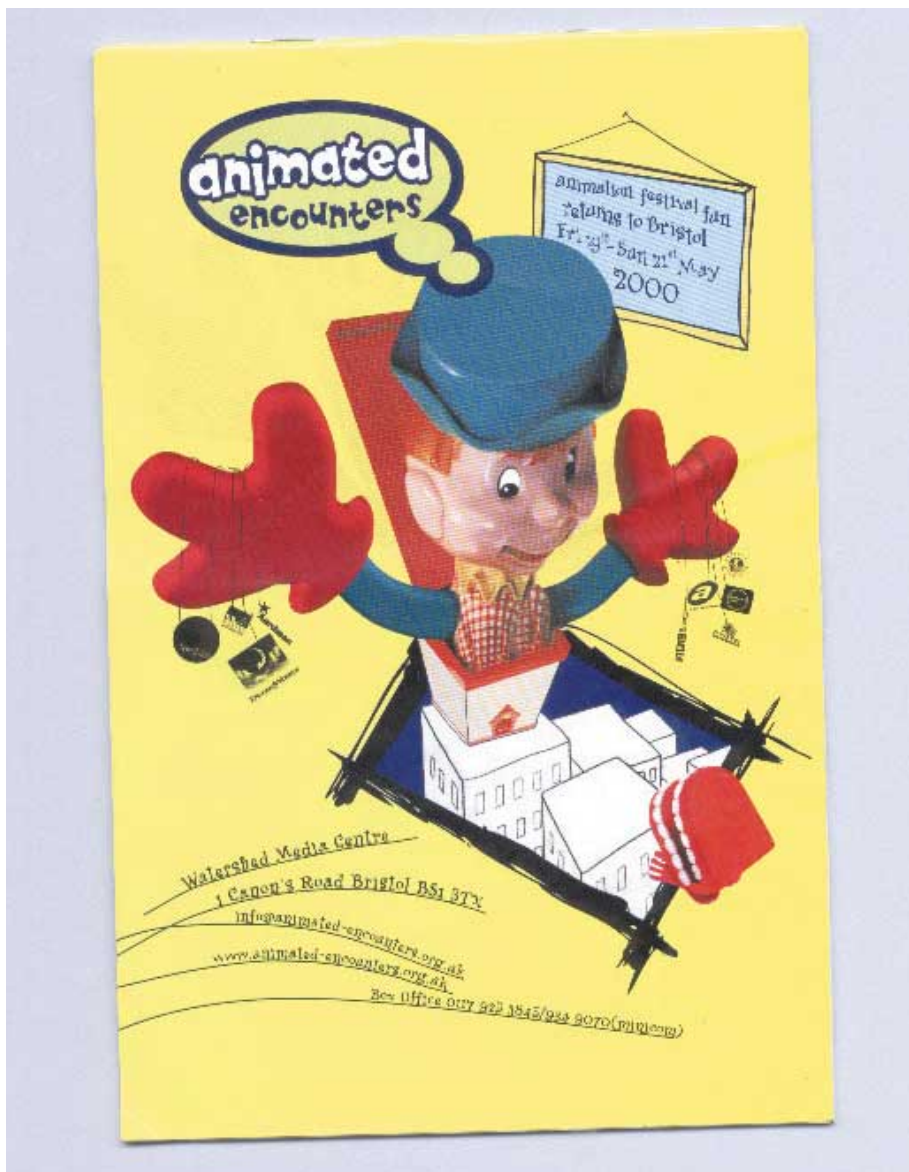
the problem of who or what leads their agenda. Inevitably, you must ground the festival in a local audience, as well as a relevance to the industry. However, without a core audience of regular festival-goers, the event is unstable. Its important to develop local audiences that will buy into the art and become regulars."

The question of how to balance public and industry appeal is especially relevant in Britain, given that many people think Vital went wrong in this area. The Cardiff event seemed committed to big studio recruitment, an attitude that backfired when the majors didn't turn up. There were also allegations of anti-Cardiff feeling among Vital organisers, which in turn are said to have led to an unfriendly festival unsupported by the town.

Animated Encounters

Post mortems aside, there's a strange feeling that what was the Cardiff festival has now come home. For the first time in a decade, Bristol's Watershed Centre has hosted its own convention, Animated Encounters, a three-day event from the 19th to the 21st of May. Like the Exeter festival, it was definitely orientated to the public, with the emphasis nearly all on screenings. The only 'workshop' as such was a laid-back 'Interact' event on Sunday, where one could chat to reps from Aardman and Fictitious Egg and play with Web animation.

Animated Encounters grew out of the Watershed's Brief Encounters short film festivals, and was undoubtedly boosted by a certain poultry-themed Aardman movie. According to a local report, DreamWorks donated £10,000 to the event. Nonetheless, the chick-



Animated Encounters, a three-day convention in Bristol's Watershed Centre.
© Animated Encounters.

en presence was modest, amounting only to a whimsical opening programme of bird-brained films (*Henpecked Duck*, Norman McLaren's *La Poulette Grise*), climaxing with the first ten minutes of *that* movie. A nice bonus, though, was the presence of exec. producer Michael Rose and one of the Aardman animators, participating in a short but informative Q&A session.

Another bonus of the Bristol screenings were that plenty of the filmmakers were in the audience, so one knew who to

applaud (or not). Among the programmes were a children's section (including *The Wombles* and *The Powerpuff Girls*) and an airing of the recently announced BAA winners. Bristol, meanwhile, got a collection of its own. Most of the titles were familiar (*War Story*, *Little Dark Poe*) but one intriguing representative was *The Audition*, a 1980 cel film directed by Bill Mather using the 'real-life conversation' device more familiar in model animation.

A wider British programme featured several witty titles: Mark

Baker's Oscar-nominated *Jolly Roger*, the UK premiere of Sandra Ensbys two-timing romance *Fast Spin Fling* and Tracy Spottiswoode's very sharp *Codename: Corgi* (described as 'A tragi-comic tale of sex, spies and laverbread'). A more acquired taste was Aardman's unlvely Web-star *Angry Kid*, who popped up all through the screenings. This writer confesses a strange sympathy with the ginger-haired troll, but I couldn't help wondering why Aardman selected foul-mouthed episodes when there were kids in the audience. Though the said episodes were very funny...

Two international programmes encompassed an admirable range of styles. A pair of films from opposite ends of the spectrum were especially well-received. These were Konstantin Bronzits hilarious French *At the Ends of the Earth*, about an unstable house, and the German film *The Periwig-Maker* (director Stefan



Despite appearances, the programmes were sold out to near or full attendance.
Photo courtesy of Animated Encounters.



A comfortable and colorful future for animation festivals in Britain.
Photo courtesy of Animated Encounters.

Schaffler), a beautifully-rendered model animation set in plague-infested London. There was also a late-night airing of 'outrageous animation,' including favourites such as *Bambi Meets Godzilla* and *The Clinton Out-Takes*. This benefited from being preceded by a gross-out live cabaret, featuring the self-mutilating Incredible Blood Brothers.

All of these were near or full sell-outs, but the greatest enthusiasm was reserved for the 'Watch With Mother '70s Classics' on Saturday night. This might sound like another children's screening, but don't be fooled. The audience was packed with twenty- and thirtysomethings, starting enraptured at child icons embedded deep into their psyche; *The Clangers*, *Ivor the Engine*, *Mr. Benn...* Even for non-nostalgia freaks, the vision of these (mostly model) series can't be denied, and their charm is untarnished. Among the names on these '70s productions were Peter Lord, David Sproxton and Bob Godfrey.

To round things off, there were also two feature screenings, one quite a coup. The Watershed

is in the happy position of having an IMAX cinema located just behind it, and on Sunday morning attendees could see a special screening of *The Old Man and the Sea*, Aleksandr Petrov's Oscar-winning painting-on-glass. The other showing was *Fantasia/2000*, oddly in normal cinema-sized format rather than another IMAX special. Nonetheless, Disney's musical update still looked good.

A more unorthodox item was 'Desert Island Flicks.' where comedian Phil Jupitus selected his favourite toons in a version of the radio staple Desert Island Discs. It sounded a recipe for disaster, but Jupitus, for all his self-deprecation, plainly knew his stuff. He was soon in earnest discussion of the relative merits of Avery, Jones and Clampett, and his love for the medium was obvious. (For the record, Jupitus rated "Rabbit of Seville" well above "Whats Opera, Doc?") His British picks, meanwhile, included the BAA-winning *Big Knights* series and Aardman's *Rex the Runt*.

What Next?

There's little doubt that

Animated Encounters was another success. The screening-rooms were packed and everyone seemed to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. The organisers fully intend the event to be the first in a series. If all goes well in Exeter, there may be two new regular strands for British animation-lovers to enjoy. And more may follow. The Welsh Animation Group (WAG) is pressing for a more local-friendly Welsh event to make up for Vital. Over in Norwich, FAN plans an International Short Film & Animation Festival from October 26th to 29th. This promises to showcase animations from Britain and overseas, with competitions in both live-action and animated categories.

There are, of course, still questions about where British festivals should head, and how to avoid the over-reaching hubris of Vital. But such worries are for the future. For now, British festival animation is enjoying a new lease of life. It's a great position from which to make a new start.

Andrew Osmond is a freelance writer specializing in fantasy media and animation.

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

i Castelli ANIMATI

5TH INTERNATIONAL ANIMATED FILM FESTIVAL

THIS YEAR'S
INTERNATIONAL
GUESTS:
WENDY TILBY,
BRUNO BOZZETTO,
KONSTANTIN
BRONZIT,
PAUL DRIESSEN,
KOJI MORIMOTO,
JULIAN NOTT,
JAN PINKAVA AND
MANY MORE...

THE 4TH EDITION OF
THE
INTERNATIONAL
COMPETITION WITH
THE BEST SHORT
FILMS FROM ALL
OVER
THE WORLD!

THE NEWEST
ITALIAN ANIMATED
SHORTS
IN THE NATIONAL
COMPETITION!

THE FIRST
COMPETITION FOR
ANIMATED
WEB SITES!

PRESTIGIOUS
PREVIEWS OF
BRAND NEW
PRODUCTIONS:
FEATURES, SHORTS,
TELEVISION SERIES
AND COMMERCIALS!

SPECIAL EVENTS,
CONFERENCES, LIVE
PERFORMANCES
AND... SURPRISES!

OCTOBER 4-8 2000

GENZANO
ITALY

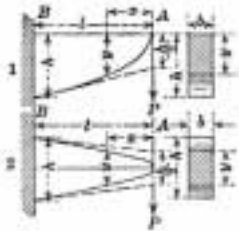
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:
I CASTELLI ANIMATI - PHONE: +39.06.93955108 FAX: +39.06.9391577
E-MAIL: CASTELLIANIMATI@CASTELLIANIMATI.IT - WWW.CASTELLIANIMATI.IT

A Letter To A Master

by Giannalberto Bendazzi

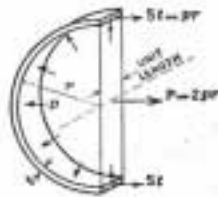
Dear Max,

I'm not writing you just because it's been almost fifteen years since you passed away, nor because of your degree in mathematical physics from one of the hardest universities in the world (the college at Pisa), though I wouldn't miss the opportunity to note that mathematics is everything except outlines and rigidity.



You were born in Turin on October 7, 1924, as Giorgio Massimino-Garniér (note the accent, which should require one to pronounce it "Garnierrrr," but everybody mistakes it for the French pronunciation "Garnyea" — and you never bothered to correct them. As for the name you were baptized with, George, you allowed it to be relegated to official documents, and turned yourself universally into Max). You devoted the best of yourself to Paul Film in Modena. You died in Rome on December 21, 1985.

Why am I writing you, then? Because you were one of the greatest figures in Italian, as well as international, animation during the last 50 years. And with the century and the millennium drawing to a close, I want the young people of your and my world (animation to be precise) to know about you and not forget



© Art Today.

you. To see how, despite everything, you were successful. But let's go in the proper order.

In 1954 you founded Paul Film in Modena, together with Paolo (Paul) Campani. He would make designs, you would write plots and scripts. You enlarged the business, and made a fortune when the government television station RAI invented the advertising formula called *Carousel*: a minute and a half of pure entertainment with a 30-second tail containing an advertising message. It was then, from 1957 on, that the little Italian animation industry was really born, because animation became the king of *Carousel*, and you from Paul Film, then Bozzetto, Gamma Film, Pagot, DeMas, Piccardo, Biassoni,

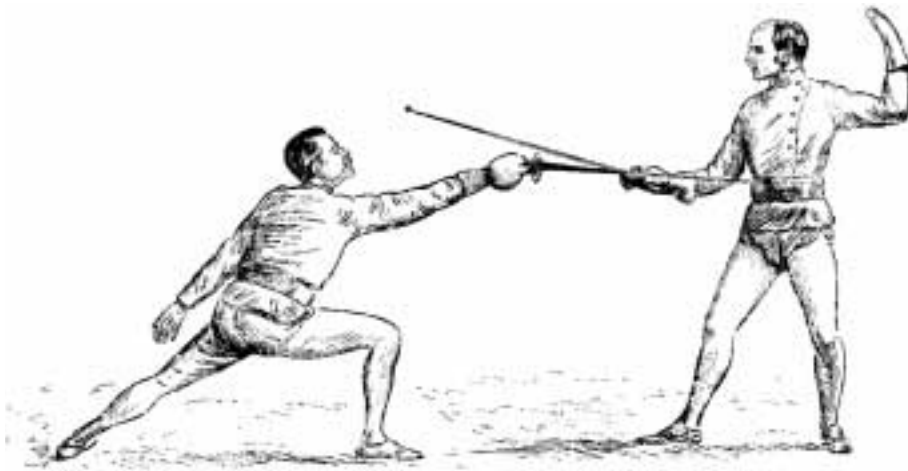


Cavandoli, and many others seized the opportunity to make that 90-seconds into so many little series with such delightful recurrent characters. You and Paul made Toto and Tata, Angelino, Pupa and Bob-Bob, Snacker and several others. For some 15 years you were among the most fertile and rich producers of Italian animation.

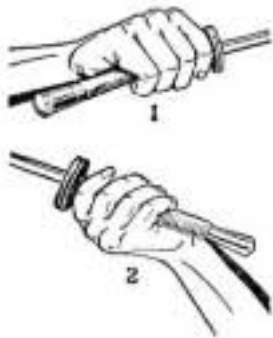
Then Paul Film dissolved, and you went to Rome to coordinate, for Corona Films, *The Tales of Europe* project: more than 40 short films, each one a traditional story for children from a European country, made by an animator from the country of origin in co-production with an Italian. In 1976 Ezio Gagliardo, the heart and soul of Corona, and your direct contact, died. You left the company but remained in Rome, founding a film company with the producer Aldo Raparelli and the painter/animator Manfredo Manfredi.

Then came the damned cancer. You would always say to me, joking (but not too much): "Sick? When someone's sick, I don't go to see them, don't telephone, don't write, move to another town..." or "Dying? It's only a probability based on the incontestable fact that in the end all humans are mortal. But what if I'm the blessed exception?"

You would joke in order to seem cowardly, or was it rather, ironically, in order to show how courageous you were? But from youth on you practiced fencing, and in 1952 you qualified for the final selection for the Olympic



team at Helsinki. You were intrinsically a fighter. Death never had a harder adversary to subdue. You never gave up going to festivals, participating in conferences, joking, and being (not just seeming!) serene. During times you spent in the hospital you would proselytize for animation even among the medical workers; each time your x-rays were developed, you would hold them up, saying, "Here's your storyboard, doctor."



You did story and script for highly prized advertising films that are lost and gone astray now. In your *European Tales* you became a kind of itinerant artistic supervisor, giving lots of guidance, but rarely getting credit as a single creator. *Metamorpheus* (1970), the short on which you collaborated with Czech animator Jiri Brdecka, and which was a powerful emotional hymn to artistic freedom, hasn't been screened for decades.

No festival has shown the 14 minute-long mini-films you made with Paul Campani, four in 1968 and 10 in 1973: aphorisms, gags, striking and sarcastic lyrics, brilliant, excellent — and forgotten.

You, Max, were a true genius. One of the most intelligent and creative people I have ever met in my whole life. You knew how to inspire, correct, stimulate, make flower, teach and encourage; you knew how to free the minds who listened to you from preconceptions that had festered in them for years. You knew how to introduce Italy to post-Disney animation, from UPA to the art of McLaren and Alexeieff. You were the charismatic mainstay of the scrawniest group that admired and promoted in our country those innovative and subversive ideas on the level of style, length and technique, so that the personal animation of the '60s and '70s developed to world-class level. You were the mainstay of the best festival of Italian animation ever organized: at Abano Terme (1970-1971), then partially moved to Lucca to combine with a comics convention. You were so cultured that any encyclopedist of any era would have envied you. There was no subject, scientific or humanistic, that you did not make

yourself familiar with so that you held an original (fresh, not banal) viewpoint.

However, please note, you weren't an author. Even though your surviving files are few, and locked away in cabinets. You were a scenarist, or rather, as you taught Brdecka to say in Czech, a *dramaturg*. You knew how to tell stories. And you told them better, much better, aloud than in writing. In conversations you had no equal in the world, and a story told by you, person to person, was a gift of the Gods. Especially when they involved anecdotes about mathematicians with superior but disorderly minds, like Albert Einstein, Evariste Galois or Blaise Pascal.



You could make people listen, too. Once you met Osvaldo Cavandoli in the square in front of the cathedral in Milan, at 10 in the morning. Osvaldo was in a hurry, a business appointment. By 3 in the afternoon, he still hadn't gotten to the subway — he was still



transfixed, hanging on your every word. Another time at a festival you started telling some paradoxical legal anecdotes at 5 in the afternoon. We ate dinner together, had coffee, sat in the lobby of the hotel. At one o'clock that night, I admitted to myself: "I'm 22 years younger than he, I can't give up before he does!" At 5 am, I interrupted you while you were explaining to me the differences between Picasso and Braque, and wrenched myself off to bed, fully clothed.

You spoke French and English (with an awful accent, it must be said). You came from a mixed marriage, half-Catholic, half-Protestant. And all that gave you a broad perspective and natural tolerance rare in your generation. For me, born after the war, it was much easier to follow in your footsteps. Animators were your family: Alexandre Alexeieff, Norman McLaren, Lotte Reiniger, John and Faith Hubley, Jiri Trnka, Jiri Brdecka, Yoji Kuri, Ion Popescu-Gopo, George Dunning, all of the artists of the Zagreb school but in particular Zeleimir Matko, Jan Lenica, Peter Földes, Ernst and Gisèle Ansorge, Paul Grimault, all the Italians. Your favorites were the American Bill Littlejohn and the British-Hungarian John Halas — your colleagues for decades on the ASIFA International administration. Halas, who would concede

to friendship only with heroes and demi-gods, esteemed you as perhaps no other.

For all these people, in greater and lesser degrees, you were a stimulus, an example, a point of reference. For me you were also a friend, a teacher — along with two other of the great departed (quite different from you), the illustrator and pin-screen animator Alexandre Alexeieff, and the professor from Chicago Robert Edmonds.

When you realized that animation had entered my blood (and it got me quite quickly), you did everything, with absolute discretion but without the least hesitation, to make sure that it never left me again. You escorted me into ASIFA. You counseled me freely and articulately about what to read (not just related to animation; you placed Umberto Eco into my hands...), and feigning to ask my opinion, you would manage to correct my inexperience. You introduced me to dozens of filmmakers so that I could interview them. And at every festival, conference, discussion group or cocktail party you would take me to one side and talk, talk, talk... Thus offering me another great lesson: You must doubt whether it is a historical truth when it comes from the anecdotal memory of a creative artist, even the best one, whether a filmmaker, or even yourself.

Subjected to scrutiny and verification, your own memories more than once proved inexact. But you, Max, were an author of fiction, and nothing in the world could have made you give up changing a story with your imagination if the change would make it more entertaining than the truth.



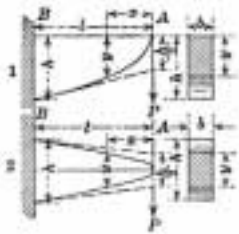
As happens with father and son, professor and student (as Freud teaches), so happened to us who were in opposition. Italian animation flourished, requiring the creation of an ASIFA Italy. You were the Italian representative to the ASIFA Board, but you deferred to the group who organized the Lucca Festival, so Bozzetto, Cavandoli, Giannini, Luzzati and Manuli didn't feel represented. I met you in Milan during one of your lightning visits, and pleaded with you to be our representative, and speak on our behalf. You considered it for a few weeks, then said that you felt it would be unfair. So at Zagreb in 1980 it was you and I (as I was the delegate for ASIFA Italy), who collaborated on the selection of an international director. There were days of dispute and bickering, luckily none between you and I. Finally both of us were elected, and the first thing that you did was to unfold a little

Lettera A Un Maestro

di Giannalberto Bendazzi

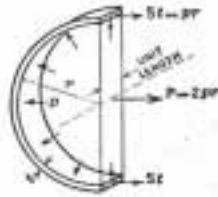
Caro Max,

Non ti scrivo approfittando dell'occasione di un tuo cinquantenario, centenario, compleanno: non l'avresti desiderato tu per primo, che eri si laureato in fisica matematica (e in una delle universite piu severe del mondo, la Normale di Pisa) ma non perdevi occasione per dire che la matematica e tutto salvo che schemi e rigidita.



Nascesti a Torino Il 7 ottobre 1924 como Giorgio Massimino-Garnier (attenzione all'accento: occorre dire Garnierrrr, ma tutti equivocavano la pronunzia francofona e dicevano Garnie; senza che tu perdessi tempo a correggerli; quanto al norme di battesimo, Giorgio fu subito relegato sui documenti ufficiali e fu diventasti universalmente Max). Desti il meglio di te a Modena, alla Paul Film. Moristi a Roma il 21 dicembre 1985.

Perche ti scrivo? Perche sei stato una delle piu grandi figure dell'animazione italiana e anche internazionale degli ultimi cinquant'anni. E mentre il secolo e il millennio stanno per finire desidero che i giovani del tuo e mio mondo (l'animazione, appunto) lo sappiano e non ti dimentichino. Come invece sta succedendo, perche...Ma andiamo con



© Art Today.

ordine.

Nel 1954 fondasti a Modena, assieme a Paolo (Paul) Campani, la Paul Film. Lui disegnava, tu scrivevi testi e trame. Vi ingrandiste e faceste fortuna quando la Televisione di Stato, la RAI, invento la formula pubblicitaria detta "Carosello": un minuto e mezzo di puro spettacolo piu 30 secondi di "coda" pubblicitaria. Fu allora, dal 1957 in poi, che veramente nacque la piccola industria dell'animazione italiana: perche il disegno animato divenne il re di "Carosello", e voi della Paul, e poi Bozzetto, la Gamma Film, la Pagot, De Mas, Piccardo, Biassoni, Cavandoli e tanti altri coglieste l'occasione di quel minuto e mezzo per fare tante piccole serie con tanti piccoli personaggi spes-

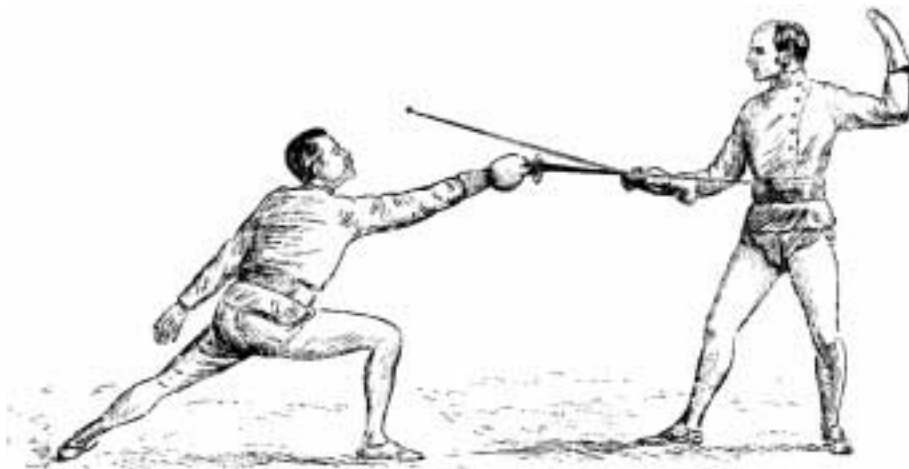
so piacevolissimi. Tu e Paul faceste Toto e Tata, Angelino, Pupa e Bob Bob, il Merendero e non so piu quanti altri. Per una quindicina d'anni foste tra i piu fertili e ricchi produttori italiani d'animazione.

Poi la Paul si sfascio e tu andasti a Roma per coordinare, per la Corona Cinematografica, il progetto delle *Favole d'Europa*: oltre 40 cortometraggi, ognuno un racconto tradizionale per bambini di un Paese d'Europa, realizzato da un cineaste del Paese stesso in co-produzione con l'Italia. Nel 1976 mori Ezio Gagliardo, capo e anima della Corona, e tuo interlocutore diretto. Tu lasciasti la societa ma rimanesti a Roma, fondando la Cineteam con il produttore Aldo Raparelli e il pittore-animatore Manfredo Manfredi.

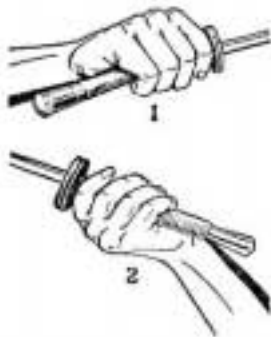
Infine arrivò il maledetto melanoma. Tu mi avevi sempre detto, scherzando ma non troppo: "Malattie? Se so che qualcuno si ammala non lo vado a trovare, non gli telefono, non gli scrivo. Cambio città!; oppure: "Morire? Esolo una probabilita, basata sul fatto, incontestabile, che finora tutti gli umani sono morti. Ma io posso benissimo essere l'eccezione."

Giocavi a fare il codardo, o piuttosto eri troppo ironico per mostrare che eri coraggioso. Ma da giovane avevi praticato la scherma, e nel 1952 eri stato a un passo dall'essere selezionato per le Olimpiadi di Helsinki. Eri, intrinsecamente, un combattente. La morte non ha mai trovato un avversario piu duro di te da piegare. Non rinunciavi a venire ai





festival, partecipavi ai convegni, scherzavi ed eri (non *sembravi*) sereno. Nei periodi in cui soggiornavi in ospedale facevi proselitismo a favore dell'animazione presso medici e infermieri, e ogni volta che la tua cartella di radiografie era pronta, te la porgevano ridendo: "Ecco il suo story-board, dottore".



Avevi scritto e sceneggiato film pubblicitari, premiatissimi ma presto introvabili e dispersi. Delle *Favole d'Europa* eri stato una sorta di supervisore artistico itinerante, dai molti consigli ma dalla scarsa impronta come creatore singolo. *Metamorphus* (1970), il cortometraggio per il quale collaborasti con il ceco Jiri Brdecka e che fu un potente, emozionante inno alla libertà dell'arte, non viene proiettato da decenni. Nessun festival proietta nemmeno i 14 minifilm di un minuto che realizzasti con Paul Campani, 4 nei 1966 e 10 nel

1973: aforismi, gag, lampi lirici o sarcastici. Brillanti, eccellenti. E dimenticati.

Tu, Max, eri un genio davvero. Una delle persone più intelligenti e creative che lo abbia incontrato in tutta la mia vita. Sapevi ispirare, correggere, stimolare, far sbocciare, istruire, incoraggiare: sapevi liberare la mente di chi ti ascoltava da preconcetti incancreniti dagli anni; sapesti portare in Italia l'animazione post-disneiana della Upa e quella d'arte di McLaren e di Alexeieff. Fosti il capo carismatico dello sparutissimo gruppo che lodò e diffuse nel nostro provinciale Paese le idee innovative ed eversive, sul piano dello stile, della durata e della tecnica, che l'animazione d'autore degli anni Sessanta-Settanta sviluppava nel resto del mondo. Fosti il perno del miglior festival italiano d'animazione mai organizzato, quello di Abano Terme (1970-1971), poi in parte trasbordato a Lucca in concomitanza con quello sui comics. Avevi una cultura che qualunque enciclopedista di qualunque epoca ti avrebbe invidiato. Non c'era materia, scientifica o umanistica, che non ti fosse familiare e su cui non avessi un punto di vista inedito e non banale.

Però-attenzione-non eri un autore. Anche per questo i tuoi film rimasti sono pochi, e chiusi nei cassette. Eri uno sceneggiatore, o piuttosto, come ti aveva insegnato a dire Brdecka in boemo, un *dramaturg*. Sapevi raccontare le storie.

E per di più le sapevi raccontare meglio, molto meglio, a voce che per iscritto. Nella conversazione non avevi uguali al mondo e una storia ascoltata da te, a tu per tu, era un regalo degno degli dèi. In particolare quando inanellavi aneddoti di matematici dalla mente superiore e sregolata, come Albert Einstein, Evariste Galois, Blaise Pascal.



Non si poteva fare a meno di ascoltarti. Una volta incontrasti Osvaldo Cavandoli in piazza Duomo, a Milano, alle 10 del mattino. Osvaldo aveva fretta, un appuntamento di lavoro. Alle 3 del pomeriggio non si era ancora spostato di un metro, era ancora lì a pendere dalle tue labbra. Un'altra volta, a un festival, cominciasti a raccontarmi episodi, giudizi



e paradossi alle 5 del pomeriggio; cenammo assieme, prendemmo il caffè, ci sedemmo nel salottino dell'albergo, all'una di notte mi sfidai: "Ho 22 anni meno di lui, non posso cedere per primo." Alle 5 del mattino ti interruppi mentre mi spiegavi la differenza tra Picasso e Braque, e andai a schiantarmi vestito sul mio letto.

Parlavi (con una pronuncia orrenda, va detto) fancese e inglese, eri nato da un matrimonio misto, protestante e cattolico: e tutto questo ti aveva dato un'ampiezza di vedute e una tolleranza naturale che erano rare nella tua generazione. Per me, nato nel dopoguerra, fu molto più facile accompagnarti su questa via. Gli animatori erano la tua famiglia. Alexandre Alexeieff, Norman McLaren, Lotte Reiniger, John e Faith Hubley, Jiri Trnka, Jiri Brdecka, Yoji Kuri, Ion Popescu-Gopo, George Dunning, tutti gli uomini della Scuola di Zagabria e in particolare il produttore Zelimir Matko, Jan Lenica, Peter Földes, Ernest e Gisèle Ansorge, Paul Grimault, tutti gli italiani. I più cari ti furono l'americano Bill Littlejohn e l'ungherese-britannico John Halas, tuoi colleghi per decenni nel direttivo dell'ASIFA Internazionale. Halas, che concedeva la propria amicizia solo a eroi e semidei, stimava te come forse nessun altro.

Per tutti costoro, in misura

maggiore o minore, fosti uno stimolo, un esempio, un punto di riferimento. Per me fosti, oltre che un amico, un maestro. Al pari di due altri grandi scomparsi, diversissimi fra loro e da te, l'acquafortista e cineasta dello "schermo di spilli" Alexandre Alexeieff e il professore chicogiano Robert Edmonds.

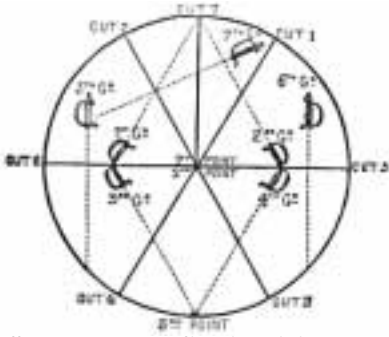
Quando capisti che l'animazione mi era entrata nel sangue (e mi entro subito) facesti di tutto, con discrezione assoluta ma senza il minimo tentennamento, perché non ne uscisse più. Mi coinvolgesti nell'ASIFA; mi consigliasti libri e articoli da leggere, non necessariamente collegati con l'animazione (Umberto Eco me lo mettesti in mano tu): facendo finta di chiedere la mia opinione correggesti in ogni modo le mie inesprienze, mi presentasti decine e decine di cineasti perché li intervistassi. E a ogni festival, convegno, dibattito, cocktail mi prendesti da parte e mi parlasti, parlasti, parlasti...offrendomi così un'altra grande lezione: dubitare, se si è uno storico vero, delle memorie personali delle persone creative, anche delle migliori, come sono appunto i cineasti e come eri tu. Passati al vaglio del controllo, i tuoi ricordi si dimostrarono più di una volta inesatti. Ma tu eri un dramaturg, e per nulla al mondo avresti rinunciato a modificare una storia con la tua fantasia, se la

modifica fosse stata più divertente e attraente della verità.

Come accade ai padri e ai figli, ai maestri e agli allievi (Freud docet) anche fra noi ci fu una contrapposizione. L'animazione italiana stava crescendo, voleva la fondazione di un'ASIFA-Italia. Tu eri il rappresentante italiano all'interno del direttivo internazionale, ma facevi riferimento al gruppo di organizzatori del festival di Lucca, da cui i Bozzetto, i Cavandoli, i Gianini & Luzzati, I Manuli non si sentivano rappresentati. Ti incontrai a Milano durante una tua visitalampo e ti pregai di passare dalla nostra parte, di essere il nostro capo. Ci pensasti su un paio di settimane poi dicesti che ti sarebbe sembrato sleale. Così a Zagabria, nel 1980, sia tu sia io (io delegato da ASIFA-Italia) concorremmo alle elezioni per il direttivo internazionale, Furono giorni di litigi e battibecchi, per fortuna mai fra te e me. E alla fine risultammo eletti entrambi, e la prima cosa che tu facesti fu di spiegarmi i piccoli trucchi delle riunioni del board. Eravamo su posizioni diverse, ma fra noi non era cambiato nulla.



L'ultima volta che ti vidi fu a Roma, nei settembre del 1985, quando venni per un lavoro che non aveva nulla a che fare con l'animazione. Tu mi accompagnasti



all'aeroporto di Fiumicino per il mio ritorno a Milano. Su Fiumicino scrosciava un temporale spaventoso, tu eri di buon umore e non mi parve che avessi un cattivo aspetto.

Due settimane dopo mi telefonasti chiedendomi di raggiungerarti, perche avevi dei libri e dei disegni da regalarmi. I lo capii

perfettamente che cosa volevi dire, ma problemi di salute (mia), di famiglia e di lavoro mi obbligarono a rinunciare. Questo lo rimpiangerò per sempre.

Quando moristi, in dicembre, io stavo facendo uno etage a Berlino. Fu allora che cominciai a scrivere furiosamente la mia storia del cinema d'animazione, che uscì nel 1988 con il titolo di *Cartoons* e che ebbe poi le edizioni francese (1991) e angloamericana (1994), corrette e ampliate.

Dedicaì l'edizione in lingua inglese all'altro mio maestro, Robert Edmonds. Avrei voluto dedicare quella del 1988 alla tua memoria. Non lo feci. Ero ancora troppo timido e troppo confuso.

Questa lettera ha lo scopo anche di rimediare a questo.

Giannalberto Bendazzi is a Milan-based film historian and critic whose history of animation, Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation, is published in the U.S. by Indiana University Press and in the U.K. by John Libbey. His other books on animation include Topoline e poi (1978), Due volte l'oceano (1983) and Il movimento creato (1993, with Guido Michelone) .

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

PLYMPMART



**Cels, videos,
books, t-shirts,
posters and more...
Now available
in the
AWN Store!**



<http://www.awn.com/awnstore>

AWN headquarters 6525 Sunset Boulevard, Garden Suite 10, Hollywood, CA 90028, USA
tel. ++ (1) 323 468 2554 fax ++ (1) 323 464 5914 e-mail info@awn.com



Glenn Vilppu.

Let's Sketch on Location:

The Thumbnail Sketch

by Glenn Vilppu

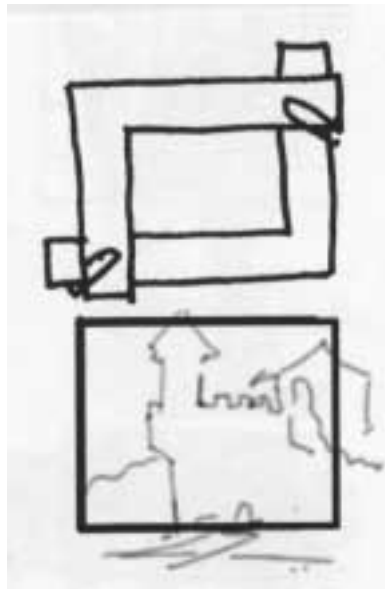
This is the second in a new series of bi-monthly articles about sketching on location. The articles are based on my *Sketching on Location Manual*. The manual was developed as a series of lessons that I use on my guided sketching tours of Europe, and that I use as material in my regular drawing classes. As such the lessons can be part of a regular course or can be used by individual students as a practical learning guide. If you have not seen the previous lesson starting in the June 2000 issue of *Animation World Magazine*, it is recommended that you do. The lessons are progressive and expand on basic ideas. It is suggested that you start from the beginning for a better understanding of my approach. If you really want to begin at the beginning start with the lessons based on the *Vilppu Drawing Manual*.

Moving On...

In the last lesson we used a point to point method of drawing. The main purpose was to reduce your subject to a series of two-dimensional observations starting from a single point. This lesson is similar; now the main thing is to be able to see your subject in simple two-dimensional shapes, only this time in the context of the total picture.

The first step is to decide the limits of your drawing; in this sense we are doing the exact

opposite of the previous lesson. Instead of starting from a part and building outward, we are starting with the total and going to the parts.



There are many ways to establish a beginning context for your drawing; in other words, to set the outside limits or framework that you are going to be working within. Two right angle paper corners with a paper clip holding them together is a simple method. A small clear plastic rectangle also works well; likewise, putting up



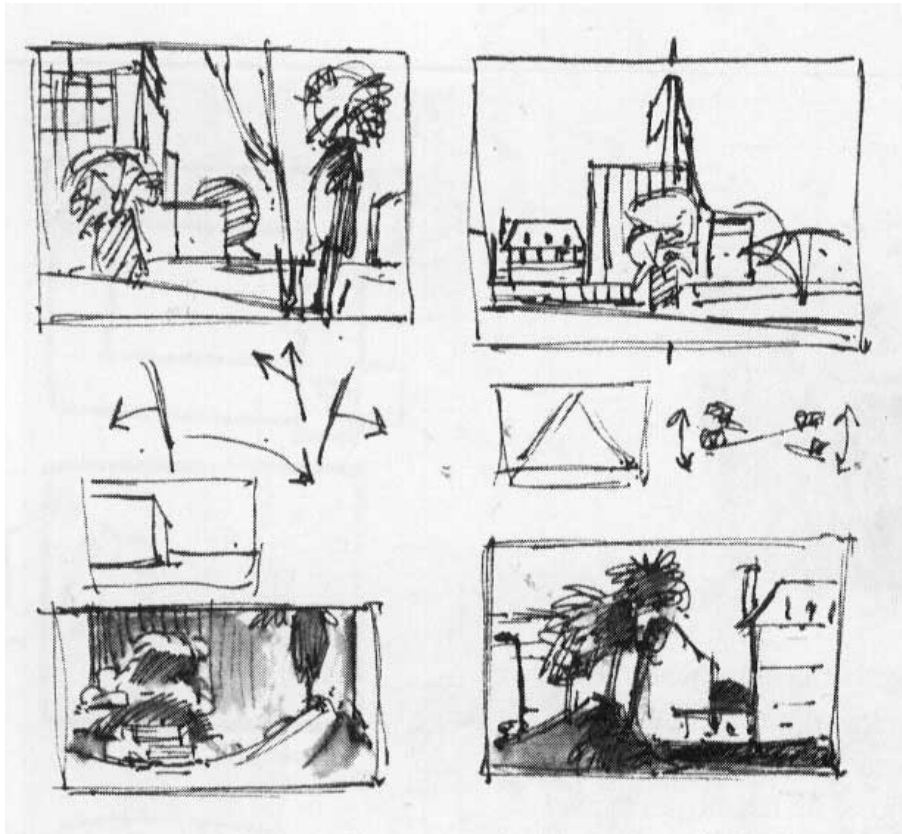
All drawings in this article are by and © Glenn Vilppu.

your hands with thumbs extended creates a frame. With practice you learn to establish your picture limits easily without any external guides.

Doing a series of simple "thumbnail sketches" to try out your ideas gives you the opportunity to see what your sketch will look like before committing a lot of effort. The thumbnail sketch also brings into play the idea of "drawing-as-thinking." You make choices and selections, not just copy an arbitrary view.

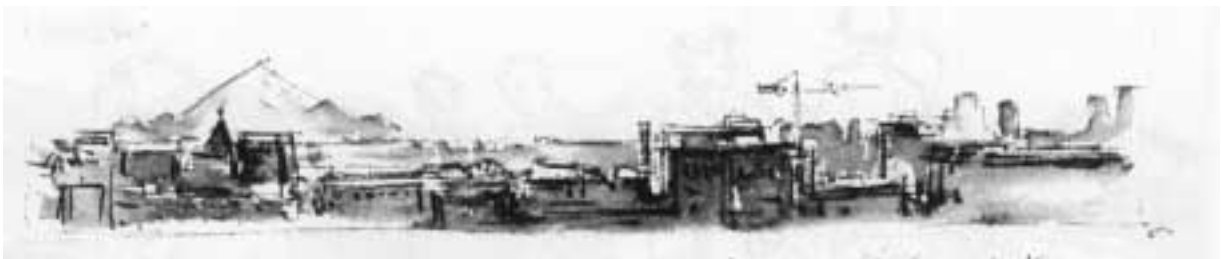
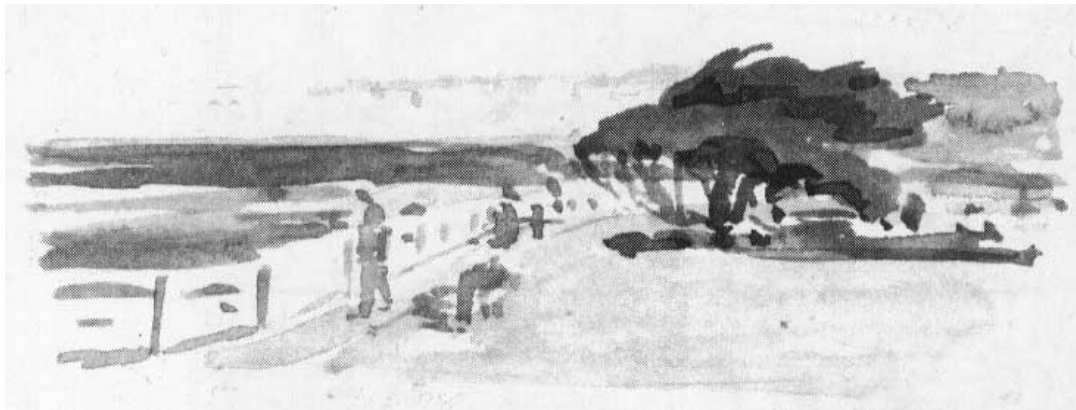
To Begin

Start by making a frame out of the borders of your paper about 1 inch deep by 2 inches long. The proportions, of course, can be any you wish to make. Now in looking at your subject, select two or three simplified major lines in your subject. Ignore any detail and, as in



Lesson One, pay particular attention to the basic angles and lengths of these elements. Look at the examples and notice that you can get a general sense of what the picture will look like, yet there is no detail. These thumbnail sketches can be done in any medium, from a carpenter's pencil to paint.

All of these drawings are reproduced actual size. In the drawings on the left you will notice simple diagrams that I did trying to think out the formal elements of the composition, primarily dealing with visual balance. The paintings on the next page are also reproduced actual size, though the originals were in color. These were done directly without any preliminary drawing, yet were done as thumbnails, drawing the simple shapes directly with watercolor.



The above drawing was done with a fountain pen; the wash was added by bleeding the ink with water. This, again, is reproduced actual size.

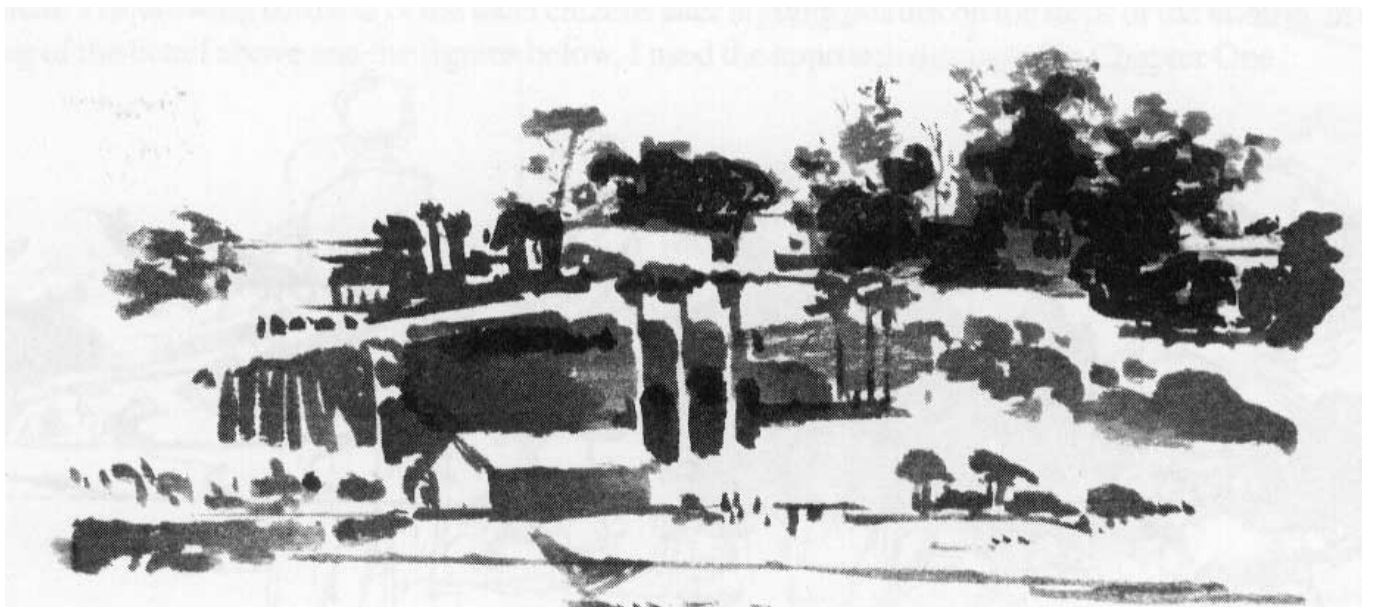


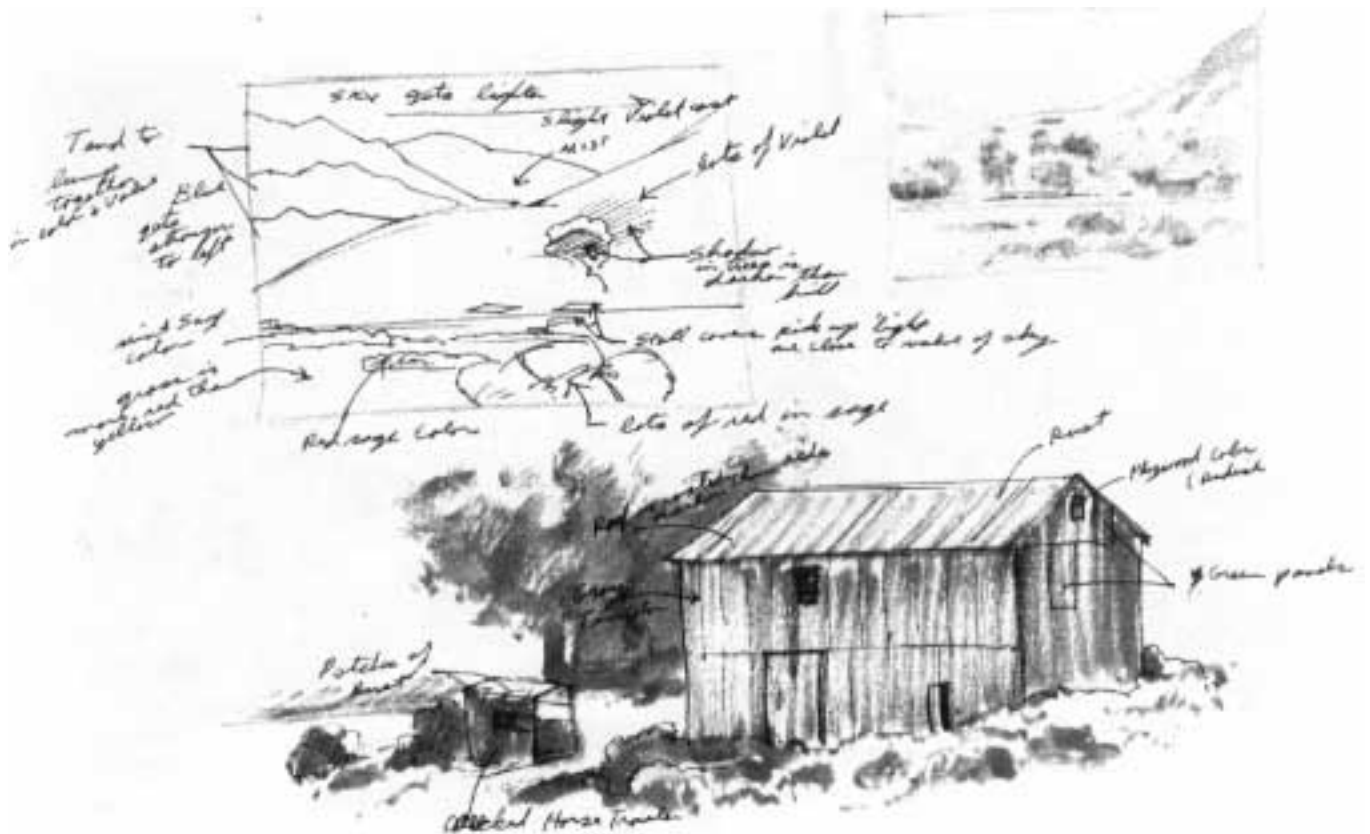
This drawing of the piazza of Orvieto with the duomo on the right combines both a thumbnail and a detail of the thumbnail. The drawing below is of the local citizens later arguing politics on the steps of the duomo. In doing the drawing of the detail above and the figures below, I used the approach discussed in Chapter One.





Now, in these thumbnail sketches, I have employed many of the elements we will be discussing in the following chapters. A strong component in the drawings is the light and dark pattern. In fact, some of these drawings were done with brush and wash where the only thing drawn was the pattern of the darks. Look at the variety of materials used: pencil, pen, as well as watercolor.





Take Note

Sometimes to aid the memory, it is useful to write information about the colors, textures and materials that you see. This page is a general visual exploration of a location which includes drawings of detail, compositional possibilities, and notations. These drawings were used while painting in the studio months later.

The camera, of course, becomes a great aid in recording detail. Yet drawing from the subject itself is still the best way to get the sense of what you are looking at.

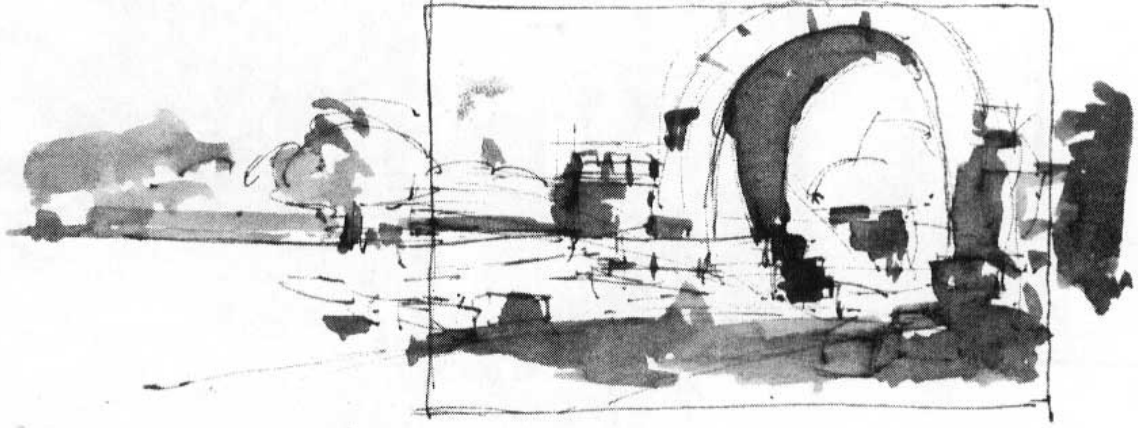
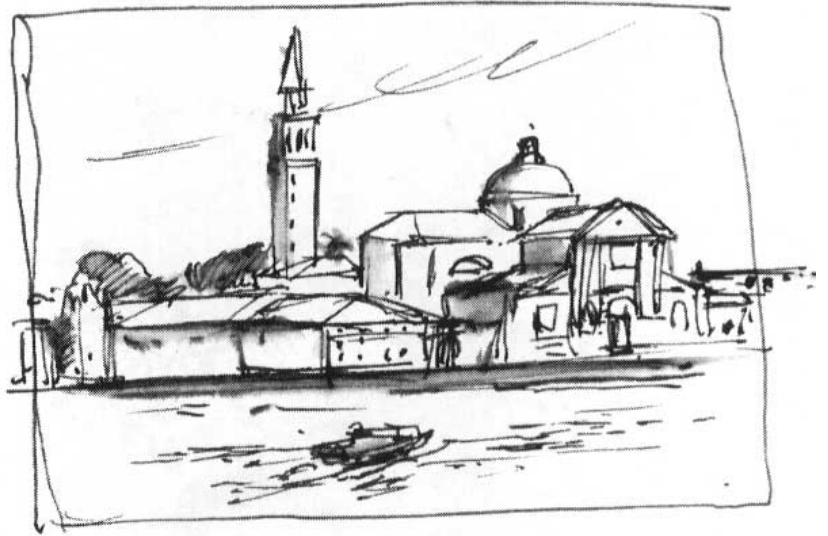
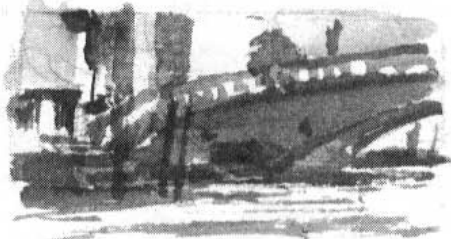
Glenn Vilppu first wrote for *Animation World Magazine* in the June 1997 issue, "Never Underestimate the Power of Life

Drawing." His drawing manuals and video tapes may be purchased in the Animation World Store. <http://www.awn.com/awnstore/>



Glenn Vilppu teaches figure drawing at the American Animation Institute, the Masters program of the UCLA Animation Dept., Walt Disney Feature Animation and Warner Bros. Feature Animation, and has been sent to teach artists at Disney TV studios in Japan, Canada and the Philippines. Vilppu has also worked in the animation industry for 18 years as a layout, storyboard and presentation artist. His drawing manual and video tapes are being used worldwide as course materials for animation students.

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





Adventurous Action Abounds on StanLee.net

by Lee Dannacher

In a new and novel on-line domain, the legendary comics creator Stan 'The Man' Lee is gleefully at work launching a commanding cache of super-hero worlds. Go quickly to stanlee.net. Be ready for a *lot* of visually compelling, action-adventure magic — timeless in appeal and timely in presentation to a whole new world of Netizens hungry for engaging episodic fare. Go for the adventures, the laughs, the games, the community...and other evolving "bits" that Lee's band of digital revolutionaries are developing into the most comprehensive, individually branded site on the Web today.

The Man

Over almost six decades with Marvel Comics, Stan Lee co-created a wealth of comic book icons including such super hits as *Spider-Man*, *X-Men*, *The Fantastic Four* and *The Incredible Hulk*...a host of classic characters who continue to roil across the 21st century's printed pages, television and feature screens. The international scope of these properties is extraordinary. More than 2 billion comic books bearing Lee's name have been published in close to 100 countries in over 25 languages. More than 27 animated series based on his work are currently in worldwide syndication while a plethora of live-action films are in development, production or release by a selection of major theatrical studios.



Stan Lee with many of his creations. © Stan Lee Media.

Time For a New Horizon

After serving as creator, editor and finally publisher of Marvel Enterprises, Stan Lee was freed from his lifetime contract when the beleaguered company was reorganizing its way out of bankruptcy in 1998. Aided by the forces of

media innovator, producer and long time friend Peter Paul, Lee was able to negotiate a far more limited role in Marvel's future, where he remains as Chairman Emeritus of Marvel Media. Freshly armed with the rights to his own name, likeness and "brand," he

and Paul then co-founded Stan Lee Media as an Internet based, multi-media company. Lee began immediately focusing the lion's share of his attention on creating his first new characters in 25 years. Paul, meanwhile, set about strategizing unique pathways across all new and traditional media for the production, marketing and licensing of Lee's recognized brand of entertainment. They've both been very busy, indeed.



Peter Paul. Courtesy of Stan Lee Media.

Let's Set The Stage

Paralleling the fast-expanding universe of their action packed programming, Stan Lee Media (SLM) made its trading debut on Wall Street in August of 1999. A medley of partnerships and alliances ensued: Warner Bros.' Acme City site began offering free 20 megabyte homepages to every Stan Lee fan worldwide; Macromedia acquired a \$5 million equity stake in the fledging company and arranged exclusive distribution for five original series to premiere on its heavily trafficked shockwave.com; IBM stepped up to sponsor SLM's Encino, California state-of-the-art studios — outfitting the burgeoning facility with its high-end Intellistations for creation of all new digital works; and Iwerks Entertainment signed on to pioneer the application of Lee's new super hero franchises to

Iwerks' ride simulations, theme park attractions and giant screen destinations. Additional alliances have been forged with Next Planet Over for on-line retailing and distribution of comic books, eCommerical for direct marketing campaigns and other outsourcing deals with WhatsHotNow.com, Cyberworld and PentaFour Software — all working in tandem as Stan Lee Media establishes itself as an international leader in today's original entertainment space.

Yeah, But Who Wants To Work With Us?

SLM now boasts over 160 top-notch industry players and creatives, all fueling its forward journey. Peter Paul explains it well, saying, "Stan has attracted the best array of talent ever assembled for the Internet because he's Stan Lee and he's had an impact on most of the people in the creative community today." Paul describes their company as "a true 'convergence studio' with people representing each disciplined media talent. So it's truly a mixture of cultures — from analog and digital to Internet, from television and films to Flash." To name but a few of their team: Ken Williams, 18 year veteran of Sony Pictures Entertainment, is now President and CEO; Stephen Brain, recognized as establishing the Fox Animation Studios, is now Exec VP of Production, charged with converging SLM's diverse media talents; George Hamilton, well-known actor and businessman, signed on as President of Global Branded Entertainment, a new division responsible for signing internationally recognized talent as well as other innovative endeavors; and Jamie Wilkinson is

onboard as Exec VP, Internet Strategy, after spending the past three years fashioning Disney Online production.



Ken Williams. Courtesy of Stan Lee Media.

And Just What Is This Super Hero Stuff?

Showcasing Lee's signature style — encompassing irresistible elements of conflict, suspense, heroism and humanity — the studio's first two Flash produced series *7th Portal* and *Accuser* launched in February and May of this year, respectively. The response has been overwhelming as both series (with new Webisodes biweekly) attract millions of devoted fans each month. And Hollywood is taking quick notice, as well. Working in "Internet time," it was mere weeks after its Net debut that *7th Portal* was marked by industry heavyweight Mark Canton for a big-budget theatrical co-production deal.

Their third original series, a dramatic techno-punk styled property *The Drifter*, is soon to make its on-line debut — and, garnering a lot of advance heat, is the company's new franchise called



The 7th Portal heroes. © Stan Lee Media.

Backstreet Project. In a team effort with music phenom the Backstreet Boys, SLM has co-created an animated Web series and elaborate comic book line starring alter-ego super heroes based on the tremendously popular teen-throb band. With a major \$15 million Burger King promotion set to roll, the premiere will be Webcast live on August 27th from the Hard Rock in Orlando, Florida. IBM will power the on-line event to a worldwide audience. Then, mixing in another music genre property, SLM also recently announced a partnership with Mary J. Blige to co-venture a Super Heroine franchise based on the "Queen of Hip-Hop Soul," herself. Preceding the Webisodes' launch (expected sometime this fall), SLM produced

a short animated video that is playing to terrific response before Blige's live concert audiences — and can be previewed now up on stanlee.net.

Other co-branded ventures currently positioned to get Stan Lee's personal treatment are a futuristic extension of the long-running TV series *Cops*, something wild with the Wu Tu Clan, a new franchise based on the recently acquired and highly successful *Conan*, *The Barbarian* character — and, in the science fiction sphere, a property based on sci-fi

master Gene Roddenberry's unpublished *Starship* material.

Clearly, plans for all SLM projects encompass strategies for spreading out from their Net 'worlds' (filled with Flash animation, puzzles, games, trivia and community) to any and all multi-platforms of traditional TV, video, features, print and merchandising. Paul is confident SLM has the chops for these mega-endeavors, stating, "We actually have the ability to create fresh properties, understand brand, and to attract other best-of-breed partners from each niche market of the global popular culture — to continue to enhance our brand and build our audience as an amalgamation of all these other audiences for different entertainment genres." With the power of creative and technical partnerships across the world, he is secure Stan Lee Media will soon be "the largest independent aggregators of globally branded entertainment content deployed on the Internet."

So, Who's Making All This Fly?

Tapped to creatively spearhead Stan Lee's Web-launched productions are three of the top animation action-genre producers of our times. A major coup for the company's roster came in January when producer, director, writer and artist Will Meugniot joined forces as Executive Vice President of Creative Production and Development. His vast credits include numerous animated series including *The X-Men*, *Exosquad* and the current *Spider-Man*



Stan Lee working with the Backstreet Boys? © Stan Lee Media.



A scene from Stan Lee Media's first Web series, *The 7th Portal*. © Stan Lee Media.

Unlimited. Meugniot garnered early acclaim as a comic book artist, best known for his own long-running co-creation *DNAgents* franchise. Long a forerunner on the animation front, he has won numerous industry awards including the 1999 Monitor for best director, a Genesis Award and double Emmy nominations for episodes of *Captain Planet* and *The Real Ghostbusters*. Having crossed paths with Stan Lee many times in the past, Meugniot's uncontrollable excitement about working with him again is infectious and he's keyed up by the overall level of expertise at his new home. "Across the board, the hiring of this company has been phenomenal." Collaborating with Peter Paul for the first time, Meugniot enthuses, "Peter's business plans and vision for the company are just amazing." In a very short time, he predicts, "This place will be an astonishing company."

Meugniot's responsibilities are similar to an editor-in-chief — supervising script development

and the production of Webisodes as well as developing innovative content for overall Web site expansion. "Our first initiative, even before I got to the company," he explains, "was to try to get on the most high-end programs that were possible. And now that we've learned how to do that, our new commitment is to find ways to make those programs more user friendly." Designing stunning, visually stimulating stories within the realities of limited bandwidth, Meugniot admits, is an ongoing challenge. "What I found when I was producing *The Drifter* episodes was that it's almost like filmmaking but not quite. It is its own medium and it requires a little different thought process to maximize the entertainment value in relation to the download time." He goes on, "I think in time, the Webisodes — the whole Flash animation thing — will develop its own aesthetic."

Meugniot has also been working eagerly with SLM's Web site team on the radical re-design of their site, scheduled to unveil

sometime later this month. "It's very streamlined," he says. "It has a consistent global navigation system at the top of every page and it's just graphically compelling. It'll be very different from what anybody else is doing at the moment." Additionally, they will be adding more features with original animation including short cartoons and character "specials," together with fresh and inventive series themed games. "We're really straining to make sure that every day you go up to stanlee.net, there's some fresh content for you to see."



It's characters like Conjure Man that drive the Webisodes at Stan Lee Media. © Stan Lee Media.

When considering some of the new aspects of creating for the Internet, Meugniot states, "I'd say the number one thing now is that, as I'm looking at our new slate of development, it is the interactivity issue. It's like: how can we get the audience involved, give them something that functions as an entertainment with a linear story but still gives them the opportunity to be involved in the story in a way that they can't in a TV show." He readily believes that focusing on story and strong characters remains the classic bottom line; but notes that with Web produc-

tion, the focal point is now enhanced with the challenge of figuring out "what are the needs of this medium and how do we make it work in our favor instead of against us."

Another big-time industry recruit, Larry Houston, has worked with Stan Lee on and off for over 20 years, beginning in the 1980s on Marvel's syndicated *Spiderman* series. His distinguished action-adventure career spans dozens of animated projects. In multiple roles as director, storyboard and artist, Houston has worked on a range of series like *The Fantastic Four*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *The X-Men*, HBO's *Spawn*, Disney's *TailSpin* and *Batman* for the Warner Bros. shop. He has also spent time in the traditional comic books field, drawing such titles as *All-Star Squadron* for DC Comics, *DNAgents* for Eclipse and his own creation, *The Vanguard*s. Before making art and animation his priority, Houston worked as a systems analyst and technician for several major computer companies. Now at SLM, the melding of his animation expertise with his "distant past in computers," he laughingly points out, "has seemed like the perfect example of professional convergence."

When he got the call last October, Houston didn't hesitate for a millisecond to jump over to SLM's nascent studio. "You know, if Stan Lee calls, this is the guy I grew up with. It's like, 'Yes — I'm there!'" Houston describes the process they've adapted for Flash episodic production as very similar to the standard steps of 2D series formation. Each Webisode starts with the writing department (headed by well-known story editor Mark Evanier) which operates "directly with Stan to create the scripts and



Stan Lee isn't just a figurehead. He's an active member of the creative team on all of the productions. © Stan Lee Media.

work out the little nuances of what he wants in the shows." Artwork and storyboard follow. While layouts are being completed in-house, traditional actor records take place outside, with six to nine 3-minute episodes recorded per session. "Instead of now shipping overseas," Houston explains, "when you finish your pre-production, you hand it off to the digital department which is only a cube away." Scanning, computer-generated coloring and lighting take place there. "Once that's done, it's then moved on electronically to the next department which is digital animation." A major departure from usual procedure happens at this stage. "In traditional animation, we have nice exposure sheets done so that, down to the frame, you know exactly what you're doing. Producing for the Internet, it's not as precise. Not yet, at least." What Houston does, then, is shoot a rough animatic of the storyboard to give the computer animators direction on overall pacing and timing of scenes, thereby able to

communicate his well honed action-adventure sensibilities.

Once the tricky issues of "downloadability" and "playability" are tackled by Houston and the Flash animators, the Webisode is locked in to its desired length. Lush sound effects and full music tracks are produced using traditional methods of production and final sound mixes take place at the nearby studio, Image Resources. From there — marking a cool advantage to working in the digital realm — a dedicated Internet site is used for electronic transfers of the final Webisodes to SLM and shockwave, or anywhere else they may need to go.

Although the schedules remain hectic, Houston is loving every minute in his new job with mentor Stan Lee. "It's pretty much an open type of environment here where ideas are out on the table. Anybody can have input and Stan has an open-door policy for people with ideas. If you have something, come pitch it to him and he will consider it."

Tom McLaughlin is a further powerhouse addition to the Encino team, brought on in February of this year to help drive SLM's high-end goals. As a creative producer/director/designer, McLaughlin's extensive background in action adventure includes work on such successful titles as *X-Men*, *The Fantastic Four*, *Spider-Man*, *Batman*, *Gargoyles* and *Silver Surfer*. While studying at New York's School of Visual Arts, NYU and Pratt University, McLaughlin picked up day jobs in animation which eventually led to his creative involvement in dozens of award-winning commercials for clients like McDonalds and MTV. As director and designer on the acclaimed *Pee Wee's Playhouse*,



The Accuser pits a crippled lawyer against the criminals he helped put back on the streets. © Stan Lee Media.

McLaughlin treasures that early experience at Broadcast Arts because he found himself not only responsible for content and design, but as a “sometimes” animator and cameraman, as well. “It was the greatest learning experience of my life because it was soup-to-nuts, you learned everything.”

McLaughlin feels as excited about working at Stan Lee Media as he was in those heady days on the New York show. “It’s the same kind of atmosphere,” he says, “with an innovative spirit that’s just pure adrenaline!” Having “bumped into” Stan throughout his production career, McLaughlin remains super-impressed with Lee’s creative output. “Stan is still in there, a 77 year-old, ready to swing it out with anybody.” He describes the new studio as “like a bomb ready to explode with all kinds of stuff. It’s one of the most exciting places I’ve ever worked because of all the different applications we want to go into.” Last

winter, while still on a project with another studio, McLaughlin was handpicked to freelance an animated commercial to showcase SLMs gala launch party of early this year. Coming into the studio shortly thereafter, he worked on the Backstreet Project promo and just last month completed the highly praised Mary J. Blige video. He loves working on these special projects, stating, “We want to put the level up for everybody to get excited about the content that we’re doing. We want people to look at us and say, ‘What is Stan Lee doing next?’”

SLMs Webisodes have been McLaughlin’s first foray into full-out Flash Internet production. He’s been happily riding the learning curve with design and direction on *The Drifter*, *Accuser* and a new series entitled *Stoneman*. He believes making the transition from 20-minute 2D broadcast series to the short Web productions has been facilitated by his early career back East. “My com-

mercial background does tremendously help with the Flash stuff where you have to streamline your thinking,” he says. Instead of feeling frustrated by the creative limitations in this new medium (e.g. less dramatic use of special effects and heavy action sequences), McLaughlin feels, “If you’re a good producer or director, I think that’s where you show how clever you are. You give me four minutes in Flash? We’re going to roll up our sleeves and see how good we are. That’s the whole attitude.”

The Future Is Now

Peter Paul considers the biggest challenge SLM faces now is keeping up with the growth in the multiple directions they’re going. “While we’re aggregating more entertainment franchises than anybody in history, we’re also building a company dealing with all the financial issues of a public company and then doing all the partnerships around the world and coming up with technologies that advance our content.” And their expansion is occurring at super-speeds. On the international front, SLM announced in June a strategic alliance with FOX Latin America to both create original programming and localize existing Stan Lee content for cross-platform distribution throughout the Latin American region. New plans will also be announced this month regarding SLM associations with the leaders of anime and manga in Japan. These alliances, Paul states, “..will demonstrate our commitment to the global popular culture in partnering with these other regional genres to help them establish infrastructures that will be competitive on a global level with American productions.”

On the technology side,



© Stan Lee Media.

Paul is stimulated by their recent partnering with USAnimation in propelling its vector-based Toon Boom software which will permit animators to create programming that can be easily exported to Flash (also vector-based) and/or converted between all Internet, television and film mediums. He feels it will revolutionize content because, "...there will be one production that will be portable and

amortized over every media platform that its applied in." Since Stan Lee Media's intention from the starting gate has been to provide their branded, Web-based entertainment in all platforms imaginable, technology advances like these will play heavily in their future. As Tom McLaughlin says, "We're prepped and ready to fly!"

In his work positioning Stan Lee Media's velocity — out of their

50,000 square foot, "media-genic" studio — Paul is having fun. "Being in the middle of one of the most creative enterprises to be established on the Internet today and being at the helm of the company as it navigates uncharted waters in establishing a new medium of entertainment and communication...and joined with the unsurpassed storyteller to kids of all time *in* that voyage — whats better than that?"

Lee Dannacher, currently based in New York, is a Supervising Producer and Sound Track Director of over 350 half hours of television animated series, along with numerous home video and film productions.

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

“The Animation Flash is my number one contact with what's going on in the world of animation. I often quote whole passages from it in my official reports to DreamWorks.”

**-Shelley Page
European Representative for Feature Animation
DreamWorks**

**THE ANIMATION
FLASH**
Weekly Email Newsletter

Sign-up for a free trial subscription. Get the complete industry news delivered directly to your e-mail address every week.

www.awn.com/flash

Animation World Network, 5700 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 600, Los Angeles, CA 90034, USA, tel (1) 323 634 3400, fax (1) 323 634 3350, email at info@awn.com

Ray Harryhausen, A Celebration

by Joe Fordham

At 7 p.m. on July 13, cars began to line the streets outside the home of British Consul General and Mrs. Paul Dimond in Los Angeles. A band was set up in the consul general's garden, situated west of the Wilshire Country Club in the residential district of Hancock Park, along with cocktail bars, a buffet dinner and attendant security, and a large screen and video projection system which loomed over the swimming pool. Approximately an hour later, guests and band were silenced, and the guest of honor arrived. Tom Atkin, executive director of the Visual Effects Society (VES), had gathered members of the international filmmaking and visual effects community to spring a surprise on visual effects designer and stop-motion animator Ray Harryhausen, in celebration of his 80th birthday.

"I'm just so grateful that, when I was growing up and looking at motion pictures, I wasn't influenced by *Little Caesar*," Harryhausen said later in the evening. "I could have been 'The Godfather' tonight!"

Both Harryhausen's contemporaries and representatives of present practitioners of the art — including filmmakers, creature effects artists, animators and stop-motion and digital effects artists — greeted the maestro as he made his way to the center table. As twilight fell, Atkin introduced Ken



Welcome ceremony. (L to R) Ray Harryhausen, Paul Dimond, Carolyn Dimond. Photo by Adam Timrod © Lee Salem Photography Inc. Courtesy of VES.

Ralston, president of Sony Pictures Imageworks, who took the microphone and set the tone for the events to follow.



Speeches. (L to R) Ken Ralston, Ray Harryhausen, Tom Atkin. Photo by Adam Timrod © Lee Salem Photography Inc. Courtesy of VES.

When I was a boy, I went to see *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*. I got my popcorn and my JuJy Fruits, came into the theater, sat down, the lights went down, and when the movie started, I was

just knocked out. I saw the most amazing things I had ever seen — a Cyclops chasing these guys and stomping them with a tree trunk, the two-headed Roc, a fire-breathing dragon and these amazing skeletons in a sword fight — and I was never the same. It was brilliant work and brilliantly directed. I walked out of that theater and I wanted to be a visual effects guy. I didn't even know what that meant at the time, but I wanted to create that kind of magic. It was such an inspiration to me. I know your movies have done the same for so many people here who are in the business now," Ralston told Harryhausen. "We will always look up to you and try to emulate your work. We never can, of course, but we keep trying!"

Ralston listed Harryhausen's 1949 collaboration with Willis



Harryhausen and peers. (L to R) Jon Berg, Phil Tippett, Ray Harryhausen, Ken Ralston. Photo by Adam Timrod © Lee Salem Photography Inc. Courtesy of VES.

O'Brien as a point of reference. "I just saw the nightclub sequence from *Mighty Joe Young* on TV the other day, and I thought, 'Man, Ray was out of his mind!'" Ralston said. "This giant ape was tearing down the side of a nightclub and it was all stop-motion — with no digital!" Bringing laughter and more applause, Ralston nominated the rhedosaurus from Harryhausen's first solo feature, *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), as another highlight, along with the classic skeleton fight from *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) — which brought whistles and applause — and Harryhausen's 1961 adaptation of Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island*.

"That has always been one of my favorites," Ralston said of *Island*. "I love that movie. But there are so many, and it was all just amazing work, Ray, for all those years. It's hard to describe what those films mean to me and to everyone here. You created these characters, basically by yourself, which was a huge undertaking, and it was always brilliantly done. So I just wanted to thank you for all the magic you've given me over

the years and to wish you a very happy birthday."

A 30-minute video presentation, to the accompaniment of Bernard Herrmann's score from *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, followed, kicking off proceedings with a computer-generated parade of very familiar-looking skeletons by Pyros Pictures. One skeleton, with a smiley face instead of a battle insignia on his gladiator shield, stumbled into his pals and caused a pileup of bones atop a giant birthday cake.

Video greetings followed from novelist Ray Bradbury, author of "The Fog Horn," the short story upon which *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* was based. Harryhausen later recalled that he and Bradbury first met at a science fiction club in Los Angeles in 1936 and have been friends since then. Bradbury celebrated the friendship in his short story "Tyrannosaurus Rex," which described the plight of a struggling stop-motion artist and a recalcitrant producer and appeared in his 1964 collection, *The Machineries of Joy*.

Next, King Kong was seen scaling the Empire State Building, peering into windows and clutch-

ing an invitation to Harryhausen's birthday. Reaching the observation deck, Kong came across a dancing Kermit the Frog, remote-controlled by an animatronic ape from Jim Henson's Creature Shop to croak his own birthday wishes. The creature effects theme continued with an earnest plea from prosthetic and animatronic designer Rick Baker, who chastised Harryhausen, deadpan, for branding him an outcast as a child by instilling a desire to walk on tiptoe with his shoulders back and roar at everything in sight.

Filmmakers John Landis, Joe Dante, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Frank Darabont and James Cameron added their voices to the list, recalling their personal encounters and childhood reminiscences with Harryhausen's creations. Spielberg cited his childhood efforts to model his own versions of Harryhausen's creatures in clay and their encounter in 1992 when Harryhausen critiqued early wire-frame tests for the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*. Dennis Muren and Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) president Jim Morris added salutations and introduced a screening room full of their crew with a giant "Happy Birthday, Ray" banner.



Harryhausen speaks. (L to R) Nathan Juran, John Landis, Ray Harryhausen. Photo by Adam Timrod © Lee Salem Photography Inc. Courtesy of VES.



Celebrity lineup. (L to R) Marc Lougee, Jon Berg, Doug Beswick, Steve Jaworsky, Ray Harryhausen, Phil Tippett, Ken Ralston. Photo by Adam Timrod © Lee Salem Photography Inc. Courtesy of VES.

Ralston and the crew from Sony Pictures Imageworks staged a similar mass ovation. ILM also flew five of its lead animators down from the studio in San Rafael to join the celebration.

Other noted speakers included Wah Chang, Richard L. Bare and Nathan Juran, alumni from Harryhausen's days as an animator at George Pal's Puppotoons in the early 1950s; Jean Picker Firstenberg, director and CEO of the American Film Institute; and Robert Rehme, president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Aardman Animations' Nick Park and Peter Lord added a jubilant greeting, posing in front of an enormous English country manor. Matte artists Syd Dutton and Bill Taylor also sent greetings from in front of a giant Harryhausen-esque painting at Illusion Arts, while VFX artist Jon Berg added a moving reminiscence from stop-motion artist David Allen, who died recently.

A re-creation of the original *Argonauts* skeleton fight was next interrupted as animated skeletons griped about the punishment their animator was giving them, ani-

imating eight seconds a day. "Ray said if we do good, he'll put us in a Spin Bad movie," one slow-witted skeleton said, just as a background column fell flat, revealing an apple box and C-stand. Peeved, one headless performer stormed off, fumbling for its head, only to find a cube-shaped Earth instead, which signaled the animated antics were courtesy of Flat Earth Productions.

One of the most elaborate pranks came from MTV Animation's *Celebrity Death Match* team, who dropped a Jules Verne

time machine into foggy London to reveal a stop-motion Harryhausen inside. A death match ensued between Harryhausen and two mean-spirited but extremely clumsy skeletons, which both met grisly ends. Harryhausen later received his own puppet facsimile encased in Plexiglas, presented by representatives of the MTV Animation team.

Rolf Giesen and members of the Berlin Film Museum (Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek) introduced themselves to camera in front of their museum, where they have been preparing a permanent exhibition housing all of Harryhausen's work. Giesen also introduced a special guest from Harryhausen's past, Paul Christian Hubschmid, star of *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*. The actor, now in his 90s and partially disabled, gave one of the most spirited greetings of the entire assembly, saying, "From one dinosaur to another." Other personal greetings included a message from Diana Harryhausen, Ray's wife, who teased her husband that she was not going to flatter him in public; and one from a group of young women all wearing false noses



MTV Animation and friends. Photo by Adam Timrod © Lee Salem Photography Inc. Courtesy of VES.

and glasses, one of whom was Vanessa Harryhausen, Ray's daughter.

Atkin concluded the 30-minute presentation, recalling Harryhausens appearance at the VES Festival of Visual Effects 1999, where Muren introduced Harryhausen to the crowd, which rose to its feet in a standing ovation. "I asked Ray, 'Does this happen everywhere you go?'" Atkin said. "Without missing a beat and with no ego at all, he said, 'Everywhere.' Ray is definitely a standard bearer for all the people in this room and most of the people in this industry."

VFX designer Phil Tippett recited a breathless recap of Harryhausens 16 movie titles, followed by a swaggering barber-shop chorus of seven computer-animated skeletons who wailed "Happy Birthday to You" until they exploded upon hitting a high note, falling into a pile of bones that spelled out Tippett Studios' greeting.



Phil Tippett was just one of the many who created filmed tributes for the evening. © VES and Phil Tippett Studios, used with permission

Harryhausen replied, "I'm so grateful that we were able to make films that inspired people. It's a little worrying what some of the films do to young people today. I don't want to get on a soapbox about that, but I'm glad that everybody found a little more in our films than a few hours of entertainment. Thank you so much for this wonderful, wonderful celebra-



Happy Birthday, Ray! Photo by Adam Timrod © Lee Salem Photography Inc. Courtesy of VES.

tion. I'll never forget it."

Atkin finally delivered a congratulatory card from Washington, D.C., signed by President Clinton and the First Lady. Clearly moved and thrilled, Harryhausen remarked amid loud applause, "And I didn't even vote for them!"

After an official cake-cutting, festivities continued until after midnight, proving the Harryhausen legacy endures, as noted in the video tribute from the Secret Lab, Disney Feature Animation and the Walt Disney Co. Modifying an excerpt from their remake of *Mighty Joe Young* — where a modern-day rendition of Harryhausens giant ape shone a searchlight into clouds to reveal a birthday greeting — Charlize Theron's final voiceover from the film stated: "The people here are saying the sacred guardian has returned to protect the mountains. Other people say this is just a legend. Legends live forever."

To see the tribute to Ray Harryhausen from Phil Tippett's stu-

dio, visit on-line:

<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.05/5.05clips/harryhausen.mov>

Republished from VFXPro, a fellow Creative Planet community Web site, and on-line news resource for the visual effects community affiliated with the Visual Effects Society.

Joe Fordham is the editor of VFXPro.com.

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

August 2000's Film Reviews

by Maureen Furniss

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

Oil and Vinegar (1999), 3 min., directed by Mike Blum, USA. Info: Mike Blum, Pipsqueak Films, 5711 Vesper Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91411, USA. Tel: 1-818-526-3670. Fax: 1-425-944-6225. E-mail: mike@pipsqueakfilms.com. Web: <http://www.pipsqueakfilms.com>.

Brahm's Lullaby, 2 min., directed by Maciek Albrecht, USA. Info: The Ink Tank, 2 West 47th Street, New York, NY 10036, USA. Tel: 1-212-869-1630. Fax: 1-212-764-4169.

Sheep in the Big City "Chapter 2: Sheep on the Lam," 7 min., directed by Mo Willems, USA. Info: Curious Pictures, 440 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10003, USA. Tel: 1-212-674-1400. Fax: 1-212-674-0081. Web: <http://www.curious-pictures.com>.

Hello, Dolly!, 3 min., directed by Mariko Hoshi, USA. Info: mariko-

holics@yahoo.com.

Atlas Gets a Drink (1999), 3.5 min., directed by Michael Overbeck, USA. Info: Michael Overbeck, 39 Evergreen St., Providence, RI 02906, USA. Tel: 1-401-421-6529. E-mail: mikeoverbeck@hotmail.com.



Oil and Vinegar. © Mike Blum.

Oil and Vinegar

Oil & Vinegar tells a tragic tale of love between two condiments: oil and vinegar. The story itself is filled with hyperbole, as director Mike Blum parodies Hollywood clichés of romance on screen. A libretto, composed by Seve Kutay and sung in Italian, adds to the dramatic flourish of the 3-minute computer-animated film.

The project was created as an 'after hours' animated short at Walt Disney Feature Animation, where Blum currently works as Senior Development Software Engineer. Though not officially sanctioned by Disney, the project functioned as an opportunity for not only software research and development, but also employee training. Blum explains that a number of relatively inexperienced artists at the company volunteered to assist so they could learn the

software, providing some of them with opportunities for advancement. Among the applications used were Maya for layout, modeling and animation and Renderman for shading, in addition to proprietary products.

Using an all-volunteer crew, the production was completed in nine months — and only because Blum found ways of streamlining the work. For example, he reused backgrounds from his previous directorial effort, *Salad Bowl . . . A Carrot's Tale* (1998), which also took place in a kitchen. Because the volunteers tended to shift in and out of the crew, Blum was compelled to create a very tightly storyboarded project that changed little while it was in production. In order to train traditional effects animators on a computer in a short amount of time, he architected a special system, which he presented at SIGGRAPH this year in a session entitled "Timing Chart: Timing Animation via Traditional Methods."



Brahm's Lullaby. © The Ink Tank.

Brahm's Lullaby

This lovely, soothing work of animation is not only ideal for young audiences, but also beauti-

ful to behold for older viewers — it is no surprise that its director, Polish animator Maciek Albrecht, won an Emmy for its animation design. Working with mixed media, including cut-outs, clay and traditional animation, Albrecht created this film and others for the Home Box Office (HBO) cable network. He also has produced animated productions and commercials for Childrens Television Workshop, PBS, and others, and his illustrations have appeared in a variety of publications, including *The Atlantic Monthly*, *GQ* and *Rolling Stone*. Since 1983, Albrecht has worked at The Ink Tank in New York, which is directed by renowned illustrator and director R.O. Blechman.

In a way it is hard to describe what makes Albrecht's film work so well. Certainly, the singing of Aaron Neville, which is in English, adds significantly to its success. But the placid expressions of a lady bug, a little snail, a family of raccoons, and other small creatures and the continual metamorphosis from one to another also add to the total effect. I couldn't help but smile as I watched this film over and over again. It's a wonderful example of the visualization of music and altogether delightful. I hope this is the universe my children inhabit each night as they drift off to sleep.

Sheep in the Big City "Chapter 2: Sheep on the Lam"

The Cartoon Network has created a number of popular original animated series over the last several years. In November 2000, Mo Willems' *Sheep in the Big City* will join them; currently, there are 13 episodes in production at Curious Pictures, where he is a director. Willems already has an



Sheep in the Big City.
© Cartoon Network.

extensive list of productions to his credit, including more than 60 animated and live-action shorts, which have appeared on MTV, HBO, *Sesame Street* (the latter winning him two Emmy Awards for writing) and elsewhere.

Sheep in the Big City tells the story of a runaway farm animal that is being tracked by the Top Secret Military Organization. Each half-hour episode includes a series of chapters with cliffhanger endings, held together by English-language narration, satirical skits and mock advertisements in the tradition of *Rocky & Bullwinkle*. I was also reminded of the work of Ernie Pintoff as I watched this 7-minute chapter, "Sheep on the Lam." The animation style and humor is typical of a number of the original series being aired on The Cartoon Network, which often have a 'retro' look drawn from popular animation of the 1950s and 1960s, such as UPA (Columbia) animation and Jay Ward Productions. While the animation style of *Sheep in the Big City* is limited, it is stylized — more complex than most of those early examples. Its content is also updated, as Sheep takes refuge in the big city, finding work as a telemarketer and obtaining his green food from a ready teller machine (US dollars). I really liked a segment where Sheep, somehow mistaken for a lovely woman (she's wearing a dress because the cleaner didn't

have her wool ready on time), is taken out to dinner and applies lipstick at the table. It seems this series holds a lot of promise and undoubtedly will make a great addition to the list of 'winners' already produced by The Cartoon Network.



Hello, Dolly! © Mariko Hoshi.

Hello, Dolly!

Another tale of sheep with a past comes from student animator Mariko Hoshi. Ever wonder what animals think about being the subjects of scientific experimentation? This film provides a glimpse, with an ending that probably PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) would approve of.

Hoshi has created many nice effects in this film, which opens with a silhouette of a man preparing for sleep. The character becomes three-dimensional after we enter the room and see him tossing and turning in bed. Cinematic effects are used throughout the telling of the story, with a variety of angles and framing sizes used to reveal the man's work and his state of mind. Included is a great black and white dream sequence, which establishes the man as a Frankenstein-like creator who is cloning sheep. The ending shot, too, where we see the sheep's revenge, is also nicely done. Overall, it is apparent that Hoshi has a strong sense of how visuals can tell a story; no dialogue is used in this very well-structured

3-minute film.

Hello, Dolly!, which screened at SIGGRAPH this year, among other festivals, was created entirely on SGI machines. Softimage was the main software used for animation and modeling, while Composer and Pandemonium were used for editing, compositing, and some of the visual effects. Sound was processed using ProTool on a Macintosh computer.

Atlas Gets a Drink

From the Rhode Island School of Design comes another student work, *Atlas Gets a Drink*, directed by Michael Overbeck as a junior-level film. This young director is attracting attention with his work, which already has screened in several festivals and won first prize in the student category of the ASIFA-East competition this year.

Basically, the film is about the complete dissolution of rational order on earth. It all starts when



Atlas Gets a Drink. © Michael Overbeck.

two fish decide to get out of the sea and walk on earth. Chaos ensues as other animals follow suit. A shark rings a doorbell and gobbles up the inhabitant and a killer whale rings a doorbell ("Whos there?" "Killer Whale") and is true to his name. One of the most inventive portions of the film is when a cow, grazing peacefully, eyes the two fish and then eats the little bunny sitting next to him, along with a person. Ever seen the inside of a cow's stomach or wondered how regurgitation feels? Here's your chance. But this is not a sick and twisted adventure — it all makes sense in this wonderfully absurd environment. A minimal

English-language soundtrack adds to the asynchronous feel of Overbeck's new world. The 3.5-minute film was created with drawn animation, along with Flash Three and Premiere, which was used for editing.

Visit the on-line version of this article to see QuickTime movie clips of all the films discussed here.

Simply go to:

<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.05/5.05pages/5.05festival.php3>

Maureen Furniss, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor and Program Director of Film Studies at Chapman University in Orange, California. She is the founding editor of Animation Journal and the author of Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics (John Libbey, 1998).

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

Animation World Store

<http://www.awn.com/awnstore/vilppu>



Never before available!!!

Glenn Vilppu's drawing techniques manual and video tapes, used worldwide as course material for animation students.



Animation World News

Compiled and written by Rick DeMott

Get your headline news first every day on-line at
<http://www.awn.com/headlines>

Plus, have industry news delivered to your e-mail every week in
the Animation Flash, AWN's weekly industry newsletter.

Subscribe today at www.awn.com/flash/

Awards

- AtomFilms Flash.Beat Finalists Announced
 - Cartoon d'Ors Five Finalists
- ▶ <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Awards>

Business

- Animation Stock Ticker For Tuesday, July 18, 2000.
 - DIC & Korea's Ameko Ink Co-Production Deal
 - Imax Might Sell Out, Disney Style
 - Animation Stock Ticker For Tuesday, July 11, 2000
 - Fox, Compaq Deal Makes Blue Sky Top 3D Studio
 - Cartoonists' Union Rolls Out Net Contract
 - Mainframe Releases Stellar 2000 Results
 - Avid Acquires 3D Software Company Motion Factory
 - Infogrames Gains Paradigm
 - Animation Stock Ticker For Wednesday, July 5, 2000.
 - Fox Animation Phoenix Burns Out
 - Animation Stock Ticker For Tuesday, June 27, 2000
- ▶ <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Business>

Call for Entries

- TOKYOPOP.coms AnimeOnline Fest Moves To September
- ▶ <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Call%for%Entries>

Events

- Oskar Fischinger Tribute Comes To LA, Harvard and Washington D.C.
 - Crested Butte Reel Festival Honors The Short Form
 - Hiroshima Festival Works The Stings On Puppet Animation
 - Edinburgh Multimedia & Animation Festival Overflowing With Industry Eyes
 - Chicago Underground Film Fest Gets Defiant
 - Simpsons Stage Show Comes To Britain
- ▶ <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Events>

Films

- Dinosaur Walks Over The International Box Office
 - X-cellent Opening For Mutant Men
 - Harry Potter Conjures Up CGI Supervisor
 - Prince Of Egypt Director Set To Take Time Machine
 - Mrs. Doubtfire Scribe To Pen DreamWorks Toon
 - Daredevil Swings From Columbia To New Regency
 - Mission 2, Gladiator and 60 Seconds Rule Global BO
 - The U.S. Box Office Gets Scary
 - Slacker Director Starts His Rotoscope Feature
 - July 4th Holiday Perfect For Storm
 - Chicken Run Rules The U.K.
 - Gladiator Gains Japan, Mission Out Maneuvers Dinosaur
- ▶ <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Films>

Internet and Interactive

- Top Rap Artist Eminem Gets Animated On The Net
 - Heavy Metal 2000 Co-Creator Comes To Threshold
 - Cartoon Network On-line Gains Curious Web Shorts
 - R&B Superstar & Stan Lee Team Up To Create Hip-Hop Hero
 - Urban Entertainment Taps House Party-Helmer For New Series
 - Chicken Run Opening On The Net
 - Disney Creates Interactive Web Channel
 - Tom Snyder Saddles 3 New Net Toons At Cartoonnetwork.com
 - Dr. Katz Co-Creator Inks Icebox Deal
 - Aardman's Angry Kid Sets Net Record
 - Mattel To Bring Robotech To Gamers
- ▶ <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Internet%and%Interactive>

People

- ITVs Childrens Entertainment Gets New Head
 - DotComix Adds Doonesbury Creator To Exec Ranks
 - Sony Digital Pres Becomes Stan Lee Media CEO
 - Fox Family, Fox Kids Name 2 New VPs
- ▶ <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=People>

People

- ITVs Childrens Entertainment Gets New Head
- DotComix Adds Doonesbury Creator To Exec Ranks
- Sony Digital Pres Becomes Stan Lee Media CEO
- Fox Family, Fox Kids Name 2 New VPs

▶ <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=People>

Places

- Disney Family Gives Funds To Restore Laugh-O-Gram Birthplace

▶ <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Places>

Television

- Fox Kids Europe Invades More Turkish Home
- Voyager Producer Signs Deal To Create Next Trek Series
- Award-Winning Net Short, Ruth Truth, Makes TV Nod
- Dinosaurs Will Walk Again On Discovery, BBC
- Heavy.com Farms Out Net Series To USA
- Baby Blues Animates WB Friday Nights

▶ <http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Television>



Featured in the Animation World Store:

Richard Condie, Sally Cruikshank, Bill Plympton, Raoul Servais,
Best Of Festival tapes, Classic Limited Editions, and more...

www.awn.com/awnstore

Next Issue's Highlights

Feature Films & Education and Training

September 2000

Another full issue is coming to *Animation World* this September. For feature films we are going to present an interview with Mark Dindal, director of Disney's fall release, *The Emperor's New Groove*. We are also going to take a look at the aesthetics of animated properties coming to the big screen. Gerard Raiti is going to tell us why some work and others don't. Amid Amidi is profiling feature films that have been released outside of the big studios' theatrical machine. If you are about to embark on producing your own feature, read this article first. For a look into the Japanese feature film market, resident expert Fred Patten is going to outline the lay of the land of the rising sun. We are also going to look at Pink Floyd's *The Wall*.

For education and training, we are going to hear about the tools recruiters are using to find new talent. We are also going to offer a checklist to help you find animation workshops and organizations in your area. Need help selling your original concept? Want to know how to pitch, put together a series bible and obtain an agent? If so, you won't want to miss this issue.

In other articles we have a feature on Vancouver's Atomic Cartoons, a focus on Israel's animation community and a profile of Adaboy, which uses patented Targeted Message Technology (TMT) to put ads into the texture, or face, of on-line games.

Upcoming Editorial Calendar

Feature Films	September 2000
Licensing and Merchandising	October 2000
Television	November 2000
Location-based Entertainment	December 2000