



The joy luck club

One thing separates Hollywood's clunkers from winners: a string of lucky breaks.
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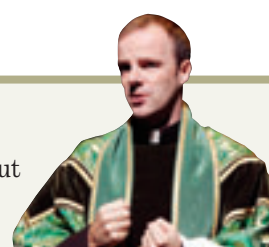
Breaking the rules

How has Spyglass prospered when most film co-financing deals are foundering?
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Tony blare

The Tony noms offer some surprising conclusions about the state of Broadway.
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V Life June/July Issue Enclosed

VARIETY



VARIETY.COM ■ THE INTERNATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY ■ MAY 16-22, 2005

H'WOOD HEARING VOICES

Star voiceovers up the stakes in lucrative toons, vidgames

By **CLAUDE BRODESSER** and **BEN FRITZ**

Suddenly, Hollywood voices are getting louder.

Just a few years ago, voice work for toons or video-games was something that stars did for scale, happy in the knowledge that it would amuse their kids.

But it's a new world for thespians and creative types as they write a fresh set of rules for the increasingly competitive animated-feature biz and the \$7 billion videogame business. Jeffrey Katzenberg set a new bar by paying \$10 million each to Mike Myers, Cameron Diaz and Eddie Murphy for "Shrek 2." Vin Diesel reportedly pocketed over \$1 million from his turn in the "Chronicles of Riddick" vidgame.

It sounds prosperous, but both industries are at a critical point. The gold rush might not last.

The hefty toon salaries are alluring to actors and their agents, with no downside: If a toon tanks, the star never takes the blame. But as studios rev up their animated output, they're having to worry for the first time about talent budgets. And one animation exec pre-

dicts that Hollywood could run out of big names who have the very specialized talent for toon voiceovers, since studios don't want to use Robin Williams or Murphy in a new movie every year.

Other than Diesel, a few stars — Clint Eastwood, Sean Connery, etc. — have made lucrative deals for vidgame vocals (see chart). But if game publishers can't resolve their standoff with the Screen Actors Guild, that could spell an end to stars' vidgame work — which in turn could hamper movie studios' efforts to exploit new and old films as vidgames.

DreamWorks' CGI "Madagascar," which opens May 27, is based on a formula Katzenberg patented: Star voices for all the key roles, ranging from leads (including

Ben Stiller and Chris Rock) to supporting players (Andy Richter and Cedric the Entertainer).

"Voiceovers had always been looked at as things people did for fun," says one top talent agent. "Jeffrey Katzenberg changed the model for everyone. ... It's all new ground for agents and actors."

Katzenberg says he didn't set out to drive up voiceover talent costs, but sought to use the right stars for the right roles — and the best doesn't come cheaply.

"Having recognizable names in your movies is always helpful to marketing, and we have been lucky enough to attract a lot of truly amazing talent to our films," he insists. "But what is most important is having a great character come to life."

For nearly 60 years, Disney monopolized feature animation and followed strict guidelines on casting the voices: Good actors, no names, no big paychecks. Now, as Pixar, DreamWorks and upstarts like Fox's Blue Sky take center stage, toon-town has become star-struck.

"Some people are great at voiceover talent, but the real



Chris Rock, Ben Stiller, Jada Pinkett Smith and David Schwimmer are behind the toons in "Madagascar."

value of the names comes with added publicity and press attention," says "Shrek" producer John Williams, who now heads indie animation company, Vanguard.

But that money is not just for showing up in your sweat pants to do two weeks' work in a sound booth. One agent estimates his client's commitment involved three months of PR, covering 27 countries (stars even do junkets in countries where their voice may be dubbed on some prints).

Rival studio chiefs and agents agree that stars offer an added marketing kick that can be crucial when studios are faced with an ultra-competitive box-office calendar — especially overseas. Moreover, now that DreamWorks has established a precedent by rewarding talent in success and with ever-richer sequel deals, competitors need to follow suit.

Still, mega-salaries are more exception than the rule. A more typical payday for a well-known actor would be \$10,000 to \$50,000 in daily session fees for what's typically a week or two of work. Up to a million more in bonuses can be triggered if the

pic is a success.

The real money comes in sequels, where studios depend on big-name talent to return. "Without a doubt, what Jeffrey did on 'Shrek 2' has had a ripple effect on all animated sequels," observes one studio animation exec.

Few thespians want to pass up the chance at what might become a lucrative, repeat gig with plenty of ancillary opportunities. The industry standard is a 5% royalty on all merchandise that uses an actor's voice. So with the sale of each \$10 "Shrek" Donkey doll (for example, one that proclaims aloud a love of parfaits when squeezed), Murphy is making 50¢.

As one Big Five agent who specializes in voiceover talent explains, "Basically, pretty much every actor that we represent wants to be in an animated movie."

However, not all studios have stars in their eyes. When it comes to toon voice casting,

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VIDGAME VOCALS

Stars have reaped big bucks by lending their voices and likenesses to vidgame adaptations of their film roles.



Game (publisher)	Talent involved
Batman Begins (EA)	Christian Bale, Liam Neeson, Michael Caine, Morgan Freeman, Katie Holmes
Dirty Harry (WB)	Clint Eastwood
Fantastic Four (Activision)	Michael Chiklis, Jessica Alba, Julian McMahon, Chris Evans, Ioan Gruffudd
From Russia With Love (EA)	Sean Connery
The Godfather (EA)	Marlon Brando, James Caan, Robert Duvall

'The Godfather' game

Spotlight
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H'WOOD VOCAL HEROES

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there are three schools of thought: 1) Get superstars; 2) get recognizable names; 3) get an unknown.

In the past decade, studios have declined to use option No. 3. Pixar tends to go for No. 2: Ellen DeGeneres and Albert Brooks in "Finding Nemo"; Craig T. Nelson and Holly Hunter in "The Incredibles." The only time Pixar went with big names was its first movie, "Toy Story," with Tom Hanks and Tim Allen, but insiders say that's because Disney was calling the shots on that movie's casting. Once Pixar began to flex its muscles, it stuck with a

mass appeal.

"Ten to 15 years ago, animated movies like 'Beauty and the Beast' were rooted in Broadway, and the voice talent reflected those origins," says Katzenberg.

But now, says the DreamWorks Animation topper, toons are in a new phase.

"The origins of CG animated comedies are more mainstream comedy, and the talent involved reflects this trend."

In other words, rather than wow 'em with a big production number like "Be Our Guest," you can reel 'em in with Will Smith and Renee Zellweger, as DreamWorks did in "Shark Tale."

Tonight Show" or "Good Morning America."

All this is a far cry from Disney's decades-long policy, begun with the 1937 bow of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," of using actors who were not household names, such as Adriana Caselotti (Snow White), Cliff Edwards (Jiminy Cricket) and Ilene Woods (Cinderella).

Utility players

In smaller roles, Disney used a rep company of voice talent, such as Verna Felton, Sterling Holloway, J. Pat O'Malley and Eleanor Audley. Most of these actors, used to working under the studio system, did not question the discrepancy between their modest paydays and the huge profits the studio was making.

This old-school studio attitude is mirrored by today's videogame publishers, who hire most of their creative talent — the developers who design games — as inhouse employees. Actors, by contrast, are the only talent needed who come in on a freelance basis and have a union backing them up. Which could spell trouble.

SAG's interactive contract is on its third extension and is fast running out, and videogame publishers look ready to stand firm against demands for better pay and residuals from SAG and AFTRA. That means the publishers could face a strike and no more Hollywood talent.

This may not worry some publishers, who are aware that "Harry Potter" has become one of the bestselling movie videogames without the participation of any of the original film's cast.

But other studios are fretting. Warner Bros. enjoyed a huge windfall from "The Matrix" videogames, which were only enhanced by the cooperation of stars Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne and Carrie-Anne Moss. And as the vidgame world expands, studios are mining their libraries for material, adapting everything from "Dirty Harry" and "Taxi Driver" to "The Godfather" and "Scarface."

As guilds see the healthy profits that EA, Activision and others are racking up, actors want a slice of the pie. Publishers are balking at the demands of Hollywood talent, particularly for residuals.

"Residuals are a non-starter," says one insider familiar with the talks. "They're never going to happen."

Vidgame publishers insist they are offering double-digit (some say as much as 25%) increases in pay, and insist they can go ahead without any name talent. They have plenty of evidence. Gamers bought more than 5 million copies of "Halo 2" for its intense graphics and gameplay, not to hear Orlando Jones and David Cross. For gamers, it's just a small step from non-stars to nonunion actors.

When it comes to movie adaptations, however, voice talent makes a big difference. Fans have come to expect the voice and likeness of Diesel in their "Chronicles of Riddick" game for it to be an authentic experience.

"This is something we're trying to monitor because it affects all of us who make movie-based games," notes one studio



exec who deals with interactive licensing.

Wider Implications

Also at risk, and closely monitoring the situation, are the talent agencies that are building businesses out of offering clients to the vidgame biz.

"If the publishers don't decide that big-name talent is worth it, I think they could be facing a strike for up to a year," says one agent. Even SAG insiders concede they're worried that while the actors' cause is just, they might be dangerously overleveraged.

In the 1950 "Sunset Blvd.," silent-screen star Norma Desmond exclaims, "We didn't need dialogue; we had faces."

Times change, Norma honey. These days, it's the face you can do without.

NON-PIC VID VEHICLES

Some performers are lending their voices to vidgames that aren't film-related.

Game (publisher)	Talent involved
50 Cent: Bulletproof (Viv U)	50 Cent, Eminem, Dr. Dre
Area 51 (Midway)	David Duchovny
Everquest II (Sony)	Heather Graham, Christopher Lee
Fear & Respect (Midway)	Snoop Dogg
Kingdom Hearts II (Square Enix)	James Woods, Ming-Na, Haley Joel Osment



mostly non-star policy, in keeping with its "Hollywood outsider" culture.

Most concede that a turning point was Williams' work in the 1992 "Aladdin." The year before that, the Mouse House had a monster hit with "Beauty and the Beast," which deployed non-marquee actors. (The title roles were taken by Paige O'Hara and Robby Benson, for those still curious.)

The Picasso effect

Williams' voicing of Aladdin's genie capitalized on the actor's well-known image, and the film wound up with a global box office take of just over half a billion dollars. Williams was vocal in his displeasure with his low paycheck, and his needling of the studio reportedly was settled with the gift of a Picasso.

Even when Disney continued to use big stars, like Mel Gibson in the 1995 "Pocahontas," the Mouse House was adamant that they not be paid big bucks. In the straight-to-video sequel, the voice of John Smith was provided by Donal Gibson, the star's brother, after Mel held out for more money than Disney would pay.

Through the end of the 1980s, animated features were rarities; the Disney brand name was the biggest selling point for such pics. As feature toons became more plentiful, socko scores, such as those by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman, helped lend these pics more

The fact that there are now multiple studios competing in animation means it's no longer possible for Disney — or any studio — to position itself as a brand in and of itself. It also means that even if you can't afford to pay Myers or Diaz their usual quote, at the least you need a Zach Braff (Disney's "Chicken Little") or a Debra Messing (Sony's "Open Season") who can appear on "The

Weight of rating hangs over vidgame confab

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vidgame equivalent of the MPAA, created the independent Entertainment Software Ratings Board to rate games with anything from an all-ages E for "everyone" to the M for intense violence, sexual content or language.

But a study by the Federal Trade Commission several years ago found nearly 70% of 13- to 16-year-olds could buy M-rated games. And whether due to parental permission or ignorance, teenagers across the country are playing "Halo" and "GTA."

State governments are worried about precisely that; about a dozen states have legislation pending to make sale of explicit games to minors a crime.

Illinois' Gov. Rod Blagojevich has made the issue a pet cause, backing a bill that

would fine store clerks \$1,001 for selling such games to kids. In California, two Assembly committees have approved a similar bill.

"The preponderance of correlational data shows these games are harmful to children," insists California Assemblyman Leland Yee, who authored the bill. "If a voluntary regimen was all that's needed, why is it a crime to sell cigarettes or alcohol to children?"

But the videogame industry insists self-regulation is the best solution.

"We believe we're just like the motion picture industry and should be given the same opportunity to prove ourselves," says

Hal Halpin, president of game retailer org Interactive Entertainment Merchants Assn. "Our ratings system is only a decade old and we have a lot of education left to do, but we're improving."

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