FLASH FREAK SHOW

BY DAVE ALEXANDER

Horror feeds on many forms, and Flash animation is no exception. Since the user-friendly animation tool debuted a decade ago, it has grown as a new computer-based art form combining the aesthetic of comic books with the dynamics of motion pictures. Online communities like newgrounds.com host and catalogue thousands of shorts, series and interactive games created with the multimedia authoring program and, not surprisingly, horror is a strong presence. Free to view, here's a sampling of some of the best genre-themed Flash Animation on the 'net, and a look at the artists who found a new forum for fear.

XOMBIE
by James Farr
(www.xombified.com)

A computer tech by day, animator in his spare time, and zombie fan 24/7, Tulsa, Oklahoma's James Farr is also one of the most successful Flash freaks out there. His ongoing undead saga *Xombie* was picked up earlier this year by Canadian company Wetsand Animation, and is currently being turned into a 70-minute animated movie, slated for release in 2006.

"I started *Xombie* originally because it was something I'd never seen before, and a story that had never been told," he explains. "It's a fresh angle on the zombie genre, which I felt was getting pretty boring back in 2000, when I started."

The plot follows a young girl named Zoe, who wakes up in a shadowy undead-infested wasteland with amnesia. An intelligent, muscle-bound, shovel-wielding zombie named Dirge protects her against a legion of flesh-eaters, vicious reanimated animals and various other monsters, as they search for more survivors and try to unlock both of their pasts.

"I'd call it a hybrid somewhere between an anime and a classic Tim Burton film – dark, moody, lots of dry humour," says Farr of the series' style. "Zombies, monsters, mummies and dinosaurs beating the crap out of each other: basically it's my dream come true."

The six segments posted thus far on the *Xombie* website average around five minutes in length, and took Farr about five months to complete in his off-hours. As far as crafting a rich, dark atmosphere on a budget, Farr believes the forum is unbeatable.

"It's a pretty economical way to put your ideas in motion, and get them out in front of people," he says. "With Flash, the result is based more on your skills and effort than the amount of money you have to burn."

DR. SHROUD
by Rob Feldman
(www.drshroud.com)

Flash animation may be a product of the Digital Age, but Rob Feldman uses it to create an original series grounded in the monster movie serials of yesteryear. A few years ago the Milford, New Jersey man created *Dr. Shroud*, an online serial about a "reformed" vampire searching for his daughter. Disguised as a plastic surgeon, the throwback hero battles an assortment of supernatural baddies using an array of campy inventions, including a "vamp-o-meter."

"In terms of horror, I love the Hammer films, Bava, *anything* with Vincent Price, George Romero and any B-movie, preferably with vampires," says Feldman, adding legendary comic book illustrators like Jack Kirby and John Byrne, as well as younger artists like *Hellboy* creator Mike Mignola, to his list of artistic influences.

Each two to three minute episode ends with a cliffhanger, and viewers choose the outcome by voting online. He says the series isn't simply reviving an old style in a new form, though.

"While I am strongly influenced by cheesy horror movies, I do try to draw from research of actual events and horror literature for each plot," he reveals. "That combination reveals some degree of substance beneath the surface of the B-movie atmosphere."

Feldman recently released a compilation of the stories on DVD, which is for sale on the *Dr. Shroud* homepage.