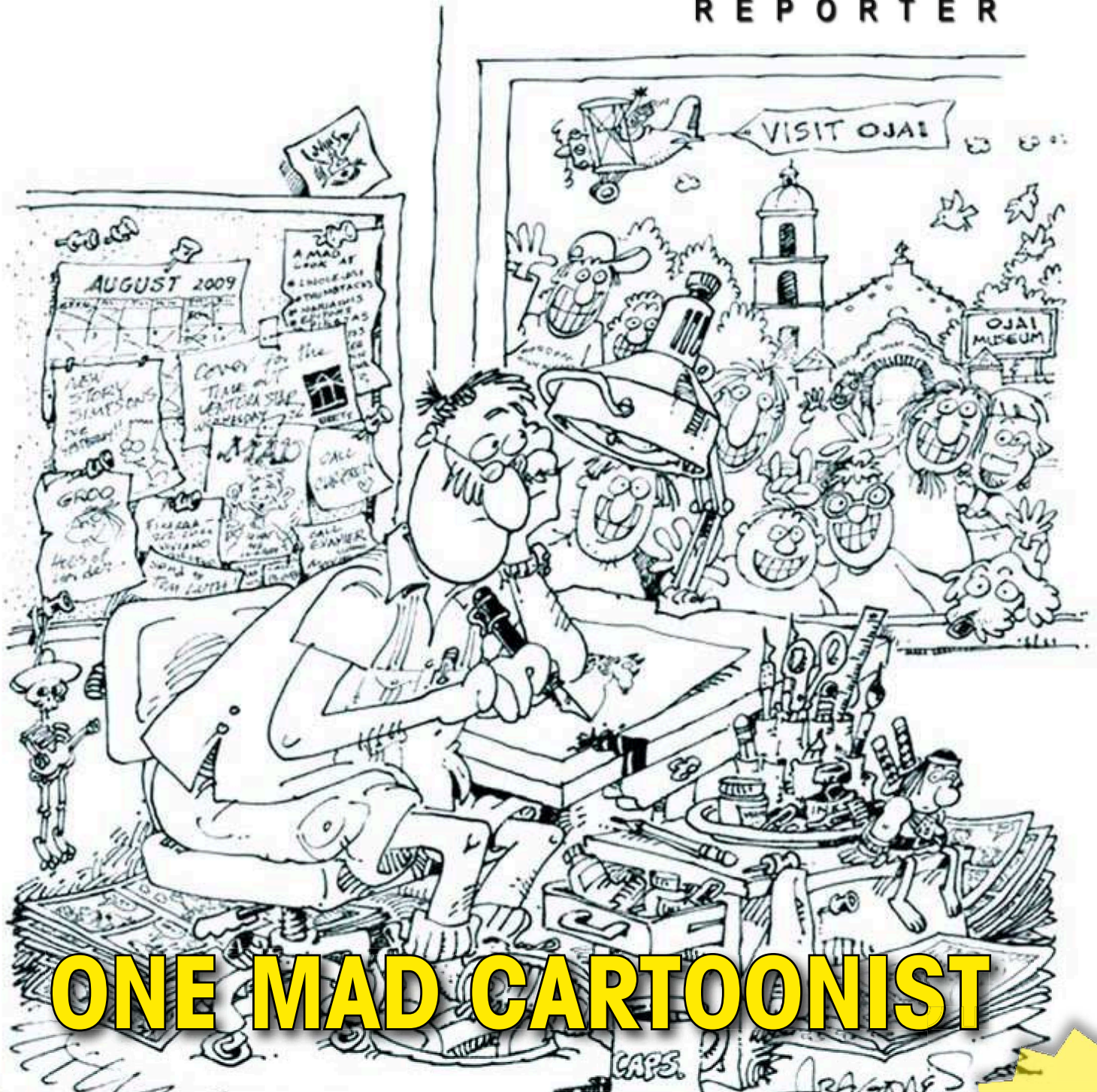


animation

REPORTER



ONE MAD CARTOONIST

- CG Tricks for Diwali flicks ● Anifest Films
- A Dog's Tale ● Canary Wharf Winners

Poster
AstroBoy



First Shot

It's good to be number one. But it's even better to be the first to go somewhere where no one has gone before. Ken Mora does it with *Magnum Farce: A Shot in the Park*, a 12 minute animated short that has been adapted from Mora's feature-length script 'Magnum Farce'. The short is a spoof of the "Dirty Harry" films starring Clint Eastwood. Wanting to make an explicitly unique contribution to the entertainment arena of animation, Mora hit upon the idea of producing a mature-audience film. His are among the first steps into such a realm and he himself is surprised by the footprints left behind by his bold steps into this territory. "I'm amazed at the resistance to it among major studios who would rather make mediocre kid-marketed fare instead of pioneering new ground in animation," says Mora.

Mora who has a BFA from the University of Southern California drew his working experience from Ecommerce Development where he learned to lead teams of creative people. He has been winning screenplay competitions since 2003 when a contest win landed him agency representation. Since then, he has produced several scripts which have all won awards. Mora says, "Despite the quality of my work, however, I was not getting produced, so I decided I would produce my own work. I took my full-length parody of Dirty Harry films (which starred the iconic, Clint Eastwood) and adapted a CG animated short." It has been shown at three film festivals since August, and has won top prizes at each. The short has been the recipient of several awards. It was a winner at the 2009 20/20 International Screenplay Competition, Best Spoof Action on Film at The International Film Festival 2009, Best Animation Cinema City International Film Fest Audience Choice 2009 and Best Animated Short at the Indie Gathering Film Fest 2009.



in the Dark

Mora is fascinated by cultural icons, especially those characters that have over time proven their potency with their “staying power” in the global psyche. Mora says, “When choosing such an icon to spoof, I turned to a univer-



sally recognized icon, the rogue detective Dirty Harry, who is at once the basis for many characters to come after, and yet uniquely memorable and recognizable across multiple generations and cultures. I also wanted to produce something more timeless than parodies of contemporary entertainment. Thus was born, Detective Dick Hardon of the San Francisco Police Department.”

The short film’s budget was about US \$21,000, most of which is on deferral, thanks to those willing to work for peanuts in order to make this unique project come to screen. Mora doesn’t animate himself. He instead contracts out the CG animation owing to the extreme flexibility and capacity to impeccably interweave fantasy and seeming reality. He does the animatics himself and uses a point-to-point technique to give his creative team the delight of innovation during scenes. For the screenplay, Final Draft was used and FrameForge 3D was used for the previsualization. The animators used Maya for modeling and rigging, and Strata for lighting. A combination of premature rendering on the part of Mora’s animation house coupled with the inability to communicate some exact choreography resulted in a lot of post production work. It turned out to be a learning experience for Mora who learned many a lesson

in thorough communication such as when to allow innovation from his highly creative animators, and when to insist on his exact vision of how a scene should be choreographed.

The “Shot in the Park” scene where Detective Dick Hardon’s partner gets shot was unexpectedly tough. For some reason the anima-



tion supervisor decided another camera set up would be better and the back-and-forth involved in fixing the gag which was crucial, owing to the delicate mix of comedy and over-the-top violence.

A lot of the preproduction processes overlapped. Excluding the feature screenplay, which took about eight months, adapting the short took two months. The animatic took three months, concurrent with recording the scratch tracks and foley and working with the composer Gurdonark for the soundtrack. All that made for about six months of preproduction. With all that complete, actual animation from concept sketches to rendering took eight months, and postproduction another nine months. All in all, it adds up to almost two years. “The benefit to the feature, is that I’ve got so much preproduction done already (and I’m doing more each day) that the feature production should take less time than the short,” says Mora. The team is happy with the way the short turned out but of course there were things they wish they could have added. However there are no worries on that count as their upcoming feature will incorporate all that they wished they didn’t have to leave behind

for the short. “The good news is we’ll get a chance to make it even better in the feature-length version,” says Mora

The title ‘Magnum Farce’ is quite close to Magnum Force, the 1973 sequel to the 1971 film Dirty Harry, with Clint Eastwood as maverick cop Harry Callahan. “At the time I copyrighted the script, I was unaware of the series ‘Sledge



Hammer’ which had one show with the same title. Since then the title Magnum Farce has been applied to film reviews and is also the name of a comedy troupe, but I like it, and I think I’ll stick with it. I never really considered any other title for the story,” says Mora.

The short has received accolades and awards and Mora views it as a total vindication for the concept and proof that the audience for mature-humor animation doesn’t just exist but there’s an untapped demand for it. “The signs were all there, with the success of Robot Chicken and other adult tailored animated fare on television, and the financial success of even the most mediocre of live-action cinematic parodies these past years geared toward older teen and college audiences in addition to the successful Scary Movie franchise which did for live-action what I aim to do for animation. I still marvel that it’s taking someone from “outside” the system to put this all together, but I’m happy to be the one pioneering this Indie niche.”

— Roxanne Mehta

