The Technology Circle

Plus: Exporting Work to Flash, Low-Cost 3D Solutions, Ren and Stimpy in Review, Pjotr Sapegin and more...

Table of Contents

MARCH 2001

Table of Contents

MARCH 2001

Cover: Richard Taylor's *The Visitors* shows alien "mother ships" revisiting the earth to uncover their eggs, which have been nesting under the cover of desert mountains. © Richard Taylor.

Editor's Notebook

by Heather Kenyon

What good is technology?

As we can read about in John Edgar Park's "Low-Cost Solutions, High-End Results," the advances in tehnology are astounding and offering new opportunities to the masses, as we can see by Mark Winstanley's "Making It To The Web." However, Richard Taylor is dead on when he says, "Special effects are no value in themselves or by themselves." Sure, animation geeks like us will go to movies just for the effects and ogle at them with glee, but we know when the package they are wrapped in is terrible. And so does the general movie going public. Technology is great, and technology will get us those eye-popping effects better, faster and stronger, but they are of no use unless properly utilized to tell a story or impart the desired emotion.

Effects studios need a staff that knows every plug-in and every version of the available tools. They are the unsung heroes who provide the correct tools to the artists. The artists in turn must use these tools to make us feel the story. This is another tremendous task: getting the timing just so…making the character perform what becomes a classic gesture. It is amazing to me the melding of left-brain and right-brain people that go into each and every project. Somewhere in the middle ground lies a wonderful turf, where the "tech heads" have empowered the artists by providing them with the correct tools that will enhance, and not encumber, their work. As effects tools (software and hardware) become more and more complex, varied and specific, the more important are those in the know. Bruce Manning clearly states in "The Technology Circle" that all tools are in possible need on a project…not just the latest and the best. While every software version might not be selling across the board anymore, effects studios need to know about the tools that are available in order to stay on top in a wildly competitive arena.

Then there are those that do it all. Those that are not only artists but also highly, highly knowledgeable of what tools are at their disposal and how to get the most out of them. This is a new breed, a new multi-media breed, that is going to become more, and more, apparent – and not only in the commercial realm. Chris Lanier and Andy Murdock are two such artists with this approach. Chris' description of Andy's latest work, which he saw at Sundance, is amazing!

Across this issue from article to article evolved this idea of using many tools to create one final product. In Jacquie Kubin's discussion of the recent Toy Fair, she states that properties with many approaches to the consumer are the winners. In this new digital world, the same models can be used for the video game, television series, packaging and then put onto the Web through clever interfaces and applications.

In this new world, we must all, especially the artist, be savvy. Case in point, Jean Detheux, an artist who had to switch quite suddenly due to an allergy from using organic materials to the computer. Rather than being afraid of this medium, intimidated, he has grasped it wholeheartedly as a new opportunity to speak in his unique voice. In fact, in "Standing at the Crossroads," he asks many pertinent questions not just to the inhabitants of la Réunion, but to all of us. Regardless of which tools, what technology, comes our way, we must always strive to master it, in order to use it to speak, not only to the project, but about ourselves.

Until Next Time,
Heather

editor@awn.com

Colombia Is Animating

Thanks for *Animation World Magazine*. It is wonderful! In my country it is very difficult to learn about the animation world and you permit that. Thanks again and long may it continue (maybe in Spanish?).

Edwing Solorzano
Independent Animator
Medellin, Colombia

More Kudos for the Web Guide

I just wanted to thank you for the kind words about my cartoon and let you know that it was an honor to have *Bill and Ted #6* chosen as one of Rick's Picks. The first Rick's Pick of 2001! I check in on *AWN's* Web Animation Guide often and was pretty shocked and excited to see *Bill and Ted* up there. I'll probably "cross the line to crudity" again but I'm really glad you liked #6. I'll try to have more "moments of clarity!" Keep up the good work.

Mixing fart jokes with social commentary since 2000,
Josh Faure-Brac
Bill and Ted cartoon maker guy.

Anime?

If you had told me that I'd be renting and buying anime videos a few months ago, I would have thought you were crazy but thanks to Fred Patten's informative "New from Japan: Anime Film Reviews" (Patten, 5.11), I'm sold. Thanks for opening my eyes!

Kitty Hughes

Sold!

I met Heather Kenyon on Saturday, February 17, 2001 at the Women In Animation annual meeting...she gave me some information about where to find cels and also told me about www.awn.com. Well, I just checked out the site and it is GREAT. What a resource! I'm so glad to know about it. Thanks for pointing me to it Heather. I wish I'd discovered it long ago.

Best regards,
Carolyn Miller

The Technology Circle

by Bruce Manning
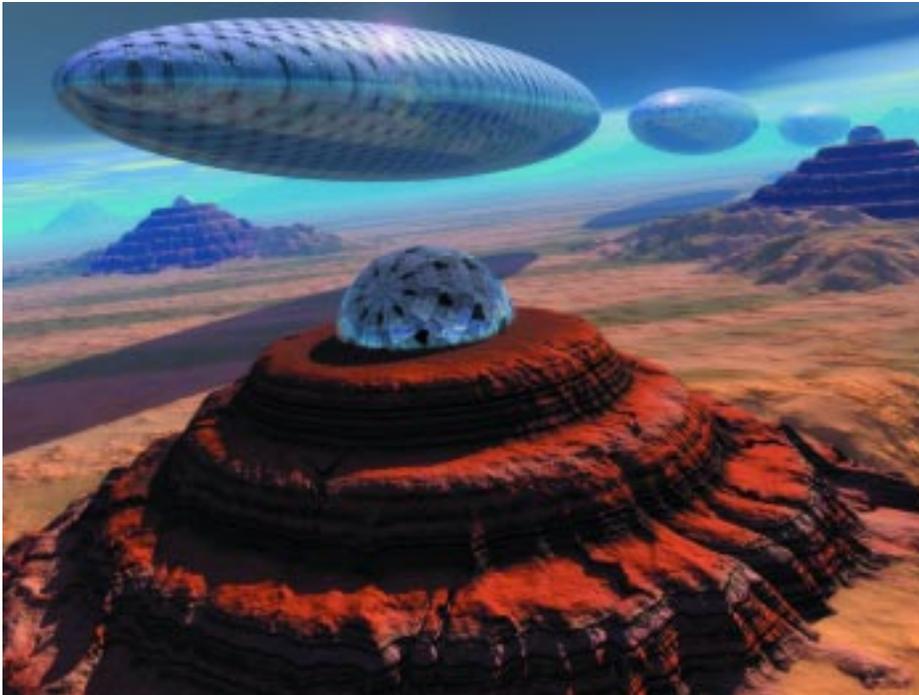
Richard Taylor's *The Visitors*. Courtesy of Richard Taylor.

I first started in the visual effects business at a prominent Hollywood effects company by the name of Robert Abel's. Shooting visual effects as a cameraman, I never dreamt I would see the changes in technology that have taken place in the industry. Back then Robert Abel's was the top of the line. He got his name by doing high-end commercials, spending every last dime of the budget to make it just right. He worked with a lot of innovative people, who are now very successful. Among some of the equipment we used were optical printers, Oxberry down shooters, computer-controlled tracking cameras and Evans and Sutherland's, one of the first digital composite computer systems. My favorite camera was known as "camera two." It was a dark place. There you could shoot 35 mm rear screen projections, you could flop cel animation, and it was a computer-controlled tracking camera all in one. Little did I know, like every camera in the building, this camera would become a giant boat anchor when digital technology came along.

During the past five years the changes in special effects technology for film and television have been monumental. What used to require days of work and heavy equipment can now be accomplished with the click of a mouse or push of a button. However, as simple as this sounds, the proliferation of special effects software has brought with it a host of new issues.

As things continue to change quickly, there is a great deal of speculation about the future of software and hardware companies. The marketplace is flooded with software designed to produce special effects and the companies developing this software just keep publishing new versions. Some special effects professionals are of the opinion that all these new versions aren't really necessary and are being produced just to keep an acceptable profit margin for the stockholder. But how long will this mode of business work for the software/hardware companies? Do we really need all of these new versions? Not every release is as dramatic an upgrade as we are seeing right now with the latest release of 3D Studio Max. Is the demand becoming less? Large studios frequently have proprietary software at their disposal and when do the small boutique effects companies upgrade? How do they contend with re-training while on tight budgets and even tighter deadlines?
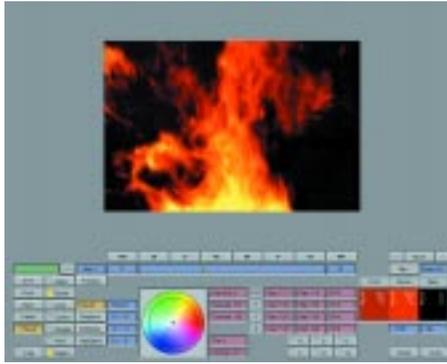
Screenshot of the color correction module included in Discreet Logic's flame* package. © Discreet.

Push and Shove

Of course to stay in business, software companies have to stay competitive. Let's say a software company comes out with a software package like Shake by Nothing Real for $600 and it rivals Discreet Logic's flame*, which is a software package that costs about $10,000. What's flame* going to do? They have to make their software very special to justify the $10,000 price ticket. So, they will continue to add features. When it comes to flame*, and inferno*, some feel it's too much software for TV production. flame* now has particle generators and other such fancy features. A lesser software package might work just fine for a number of jobs.

It seems obvious that new versions are being produced solely to make more money and to have a new release to publicize. However, some of the features that software writers produce aren't the ones that the effects artists really need. Developers come up with features that aren't necessarily useful, but are announced with trumpeting importance. Therefore, while new versions are being released the necessity of owning these new versions is being diminished.

Proprietary Needs

Another blow to the sellers is that major companies have their own versions of certain software packages. For example, the effect of animal fur is a "must have" look that digital artists have been trying to perfect for years. Many studios have written their own software versions for animal fur and muscle systems. If they're not happy with an off the shelf version, they have the means to create their own.

A screen capture of Shake 2.3's "Hope" imagery. © and courtesy of Precipice Pictures and Nothing Real.

In fact, there are some large houses where almost all of the software is proprietary and there are some major advantages in this. Proprietary software can save money and time for large effects companies. They've been working so long with their own product that they've built infrastructures such as file formats, geometry formats and image formats around it. For better or worse, they're married to their own proprietary software and it's difficult for them to break away and use a non-proprietary system. Another nice thing about proprietary software is that one can just walk into the office next door and ask a programmer to write something up really quick — a cool plug-in or some other nice application. There's no waiting, or required detailed explanation necessary. Plus, if you are at ILM or another powerhouse, you probably have some of the brightest minds at your disposal.

Rachel Dunn, one of Digital Domain's top 2D composite artists with credits such as *Dante's Peak*, *Fifth Element*, *Red Planet*, *Titanic*, *The Grinch* and *Super Nova*, explains: "If a studio can afford to write custom software they will because writing their own proprietary software gives them the exact features they need in order to do their job. Most store bought software is written for a broad consumer market. Software companies are trying to make everyone happy. The larger studios don't need that. They custom tailor their proprietary software for their own in house artists."

Rachel Dunn, one of Digital Domain's top 2D composite artists.

"Our proprietary software Nuke is very powerful. We have about 10 or 12 guys writing software for Digital Domain. A lot of the software we write is translation. We take store bought software and write links to it so it will work with Nuke. So we can get Alias|Wavefront's Maya to work with Houdini, to work with Softimage, to work with Ultimatte and so on and so forth. We can take a blue screen model and read it through five different software packages to get what we need."

There's a whole lot stuff out there you can waste your money on.

"We at DD find ourselves bouncing back and forth between quite a few different software packages when we're doing compositing because some packages do better than others on certain things. We will bring an image through a whole chain of software packages just to massage it into the shape we want. The artists and managers at Digital Domain really evaluate the software carefully because there's a whole lot stuff out there you can waste your money on."

Enter the Boutique

Another factor that is changing the face of the way effects are done today is the shear amount of shots that need to get done for certain projects. Some feature films have up to a thousand effects shots. Producers often don't want to send a thousand effects shots to one house. For that matter there are very few effects studios that can even handle a thousand shots! Sending projects to multiple companies is one way of cutting costs and saving time. Some of these companies are small, highly specialized boutiques. One possible drawback about smaller boutiques is that they don't have stages and cameras, while the bigger studios do have access to motion control cameras, big stages and all the bells and whistles. They can also shoot blue screens themselves. There are a couple ways to view this development. Some think this is a healthy development and creates a competitive atmosphere, others think differently as small studios are burned to the ground trying to meet deadlines and make profits in a cut-throat world.

Richard Taylor.

Been There, Done That

Richard Taylor of Tropix Films, a Santa Monica-based production company, was one of my favorite directors at Robert Abel. He is also a well-versed industry veteran. Starting at Robert Abel's in 1973, he did all the miniatures on the first *Star Trek the Motion Picture*. He was one of *Tron's* visual effects directors and did the original 7-Up bubbles un-cola commercials. Along with the Duracell battery campaign featuring CGI toys and an arm-length list of other credits, his *Cowardly Baskets* for Reebok won three Clio's with Rhythm & Hues. His talents have enabled him to maneuver forward through analog and jump to digital. I recently sat down with him and we reminisced about the past and speculated about the future.
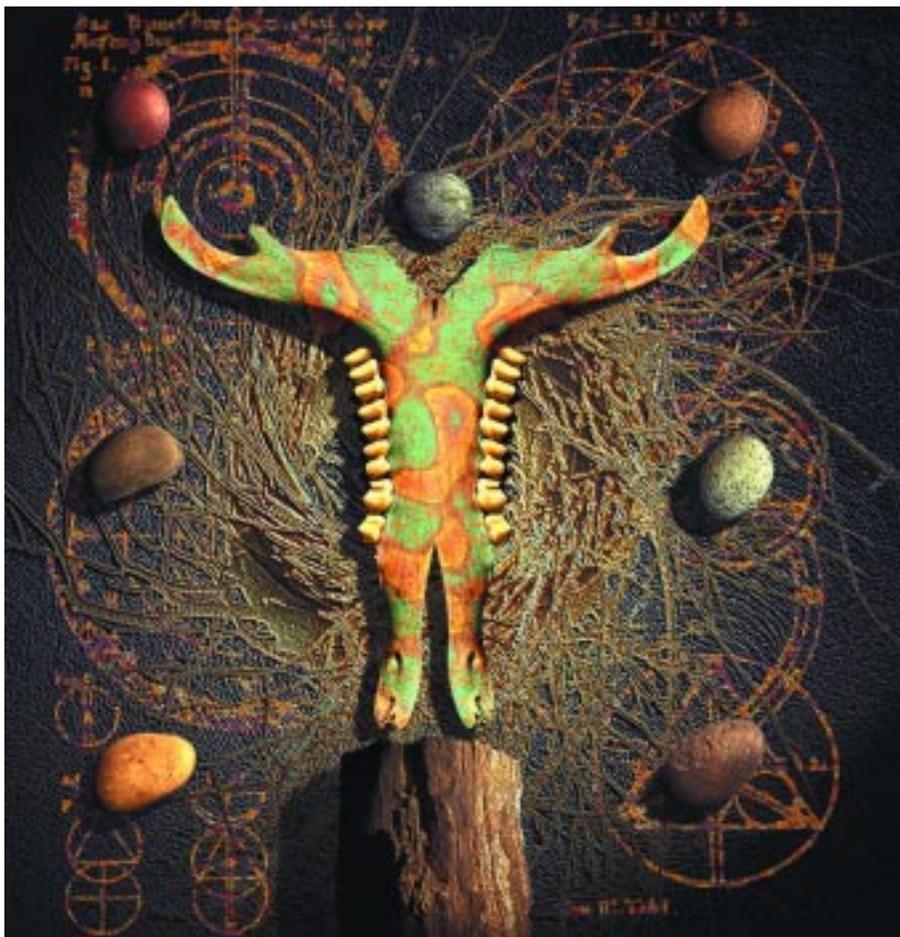
Richard Taylor's *Seven Stones Man*. **Courtesy of Richard Taylor.**

Bruce Manning: What's the future for software/hardware companies?

Richard Taylor: I think that it's pretty infinite depending on how you look at it. If you're talking about the visual arts it gets faster, better, more accessible to everybody and easier to use. I use all the latest stuff. I happen to be an effects director so I do a combination of media — effects animation and live-action all put together. Digital matte painting, total character animation, 2D animation — you name it. They all get blended together through the software whether you're using Photoshop or After Effects, Maya or Lightwave. Different companies have different tools, but you need to speak those languages. All the software companies are making things easier to do for more people.

I look at my dailies with the special effects companies that I work with over the Internet. I get QuickTime movies played down to me over the Internet at very high-res. I talk to them by phone and we work through media. I shoot film and do my own matte paintings. I send it to them, and they send me back a composite. Or I make a composite. The walls are burning down.

BM: Have the glory days passed for hardware?

There are ways to make slower machines do clever things.

RT: The revitalization of Apple with Steven Jobs jump started that hardware company. Sony PlayStation 2 is a renovation. There are companies that are plugging together Sony PlayStation 2's that will do incredibly complex animation. Rather than going out and buying big mainframe computers, you can plug 10 of them together and you've got an incredible rendering machine for graphics and visuals.

BM: What's your favorite store bought software?
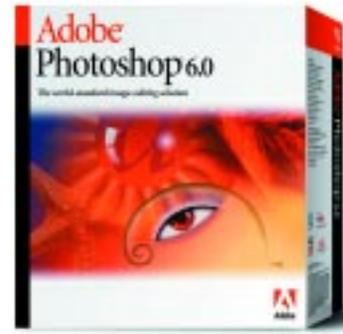
RT: Photoshop. The new Photoshop 6 has the ability to send sound and can do all kinds of other things. It's not just graphics anymore. That's for sure. When I do a high-res print presentation, I use Bryce by Corel, which is an incredibly simple program to operate. That program is so easy for a novice to use it's unreal.

BM: Do visual effects studios need all these new software packages?

RT: Some of them have their own software, and/or some combination. Certain companies like Rhythm & Hues have their own proprietary software like Voodoo. It's very cumbersome, but very versatile.

How many people know Maya vs. Lightwave vs. whatever? Do people need to know all three? Everyone kind of learns Photoshop. When it gets into 3D programs or into animation programs, do you need to know Flash? The question is, can all these different programs be homogenized? The closer they come to each other the better.

BM: Lately smaller boutiques are doing special effects on big films using out of the box software. How is that affecting larger studios?

Richard Taylor's *XLR8*. **Courtesy of Richard Taylor.**

RT: If the product is television, which is low-res, you can get a G4 and glue together some stuff in a Winnebago and have the most powerful visual effects studio on wheels, if you wanted too! It depends on how much work and how many scenes that particular boutique can do. Digital Domain, Rhythm and Hues, or Sony, those places get most of the big work. These large firms are sub-contracting a lot of their work to these smaller boutiques and you don't even know it. Many of the smaller boutiques will get a job, or a scene, or a movie, and that's it. They'll do a movie, one project. To keep the momentum of a place going you need a sales force, the right representation in the meetings at the right time, bidding on multiple movies. You can get one movie and the major studios aren't afraid to burn some little effects studio down to do their movie. Smaller companies will buy the job and the large studios will say, 'We need that scene,' again and again. It's not right. The smaller companies will do whatever it takes to keep the door open. The big studio doesn't care if they're successful after the movie or not. All they want is their effects the best they can get, for the best price.

BM: Can the price of new technology put companies out of business?

RT: People are still using hand drawn animation. Nothing kind of goes away. Maybe you work a little slower than somebody, but if you do quality work, it doesn't matter. When do I get rid of my VHS and when do I buy DVD? It's a constant problem. When do I get rid of my DSL and put in a T1 line? It's a continual battle. All it
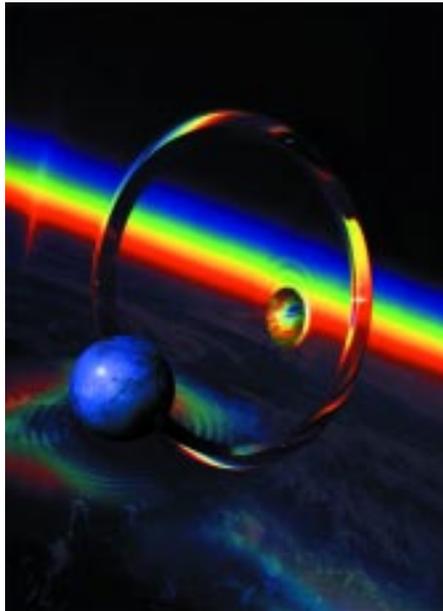
Richard Taylor's The Prismix. Courtesy of Richard Taylor.

really relates to is speed and versatility in the end. There are ways to make slower machines do clever things. It's an economic battle, just like anything else. The new technology always makes you better, but sometimes it's not worth the high investment. You have to decide that for yourself.

The new technology always makes you better, but sometimes it's not worth the high investment.

BM: Are movies better now with the technology boom in software? Look at movies like *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters* and *Aliens*, mostly done with optical printers.

RT: Yes, technically they are better. They're more seamless. You can do things more perfectly now. You can do things now, you never

You can do things now, you never would have considered ten years ago.

would have considered ten years ago. To compare opticals to the digital world, that's like comparing the space shuttle to a stagecoach. Once things became digital, it became another reality. In the digital world, we see movies like *Independence Day* and *X-Files*. The visuals are so complex today, compared to what they used to be. Being able to do particle glow and organic creatures and things. There's no comparison with the things that were done with optical printers. Digital is better by far. Whether they're better stories, or better movies, that's another question.

BM: Are moviegoers more sophisticated now?

RT: I don't know if they are more sophisticated or more worn out by the incredible barrage of visual stuff they see. There's so much stuff that's so complex, and so well done. But a special effect in a movie for a young kid doesn't mean anything anymore; it's just another gun barrel flash to him. People expect an incredible amount of complexity. The amount of visual information in today's society is barraging people so much that they just kind of expect more. It's not intellectual. It's kind of reactionistic, visceral. People watching television don't watch the whole content of the movie, they just kind of skip around, to see what catches their

eye. You have to make something that cuts through. Either a great idea, or something visually stunning. When they come together, that's the best. That doesn't happen much. You have movies that have phenomenal special effects in them, which people don't give a shit about. If your heart's not into it, they're not good stories. Special effects are no value in themselves or by themselves.

BM: Did you see that new John Travolta movie?

RT: Oh yeah, *Battlefield Earth*. Rhythm & Hues worked on that. That's a great example of phenomenal visual effects and lots of things going on, but you can't stand the movie.

BM: Do you like old movies?

RT: Yes, I do. I like John Ford pictures like *The Searchers*, *2001*, of course, and *Seventh Samurai*. That's just a variety of older films I thitography and direction. All the things that make a movie work. You can't make the same thing twice. Timing has a lot to do with things. Watch television now. If people watched *Friends* back in the '60s you wouldn't know what the hell they were talking about.

BM: When you see an old movie do you think, "Oh man we can do that better now."

RT: Well, yeah look at *Tron*. I look at that and say, "Boy could we do better than that now!" I could do more on my G4. The programs that I have in my Mac G4 would blow *Tron* away. I know what we could do now. We now have Ferraris instead of bicycles.

As I left Tropix Films and Richard Taylor, I walked down toward the Third Street Promenade. He got me thinking… Would I wake up tonight in a cold sweat next to my Mac G4, screaming at it, "Where's all this technology going?!" No probably not, because I realized that, today it's a mixed media. There will always be new software, faster boxes and better tools.

The programs that I have in my Mac G4 would blow *Tron* away.

Historically there have been examples of companies being put out of business because of technology. Richard Edland, Boss Film and Robert Abel are good examples of pioneering companies, which spent very large amounts of money on expensive technology and hardware equipment. The next year the technology cost was cut in half and their newly sprung competitors had much lower bills.

As a visual effects director on Disney's *Tron*, Richard Taylor has witnessed amazing growth in visual effects technology since the film's release in 1982. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

Then these pioneering giants spent years trying to pay off their bills for technology and hardware equipment that had already become obsolete. Do we have to spend more money? Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. It depends on the application. We will buy that particular plug-in for that particular job and in most cases, the old tools, the old software, will always be around just in case.

Visit us online to see enlarged images and additional information on Richard's work.

Bruce Manning, a writer and filmmaker, shoots with a Mitchell 35mm film camera. In the past 10 years he has stock piled an impressive, eye-popping array of images. He edits with a Mac G4 and all the Adobe software he can jam into it. You can find Bruce on his Website at http://www.footage-now.com/

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

Low-Cost Solutions,
High-End Results

by John Edgar Park

Strata 3D is a good entree into 3D animation. It boasts a full feature set, an excellent renderer and is available for free from www.strata3d.com. © Strata.

Now is a great time to purchase a 3D animation solution. The line separating low-cost and high-cost software is blurring. You no longer have to invest tens of thousands of dollars in a Unix workstation running high-end software in order to create stunning animation, but what solutions provide the best bang for your buck? The good news is: there are a lot of choices out there. Now here's the bad news: there are a *lot* of choices out there!

Software

Today's 3D software packages are all-in-one marvels that range in price from a few hundred dollars to many thousands. They all contain modeling, texturing, animation and rendering tools. Many also include inverse kinematics, particle systems, dynamics, ray-tracing and scripting systems. What usually sets the pricier packages apart from the others is the depth, not breadth, of their options. The bottom line is: all of these packages are being used to create wonderful animation.

Waving the flag high for inexpensive, high-quality 3D character animation software is Hash, Inc.'s Animation: Master (www.hash.com). Running under Windows 98/NT/2000 and Mac OS and costing only $299, this package boasts a tremendous price-to-performance ratio. The inverse kinematics (IK) and skinning functions found in Animation: Master rival those found in high-end rivals Maya and
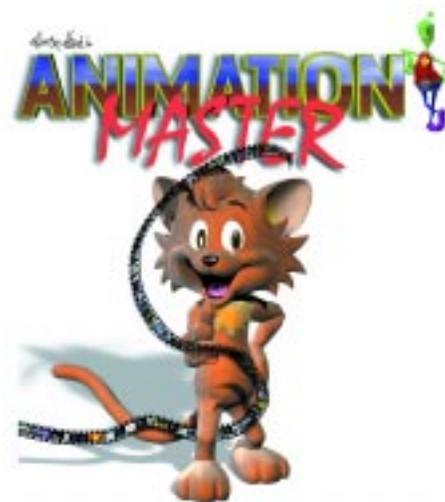
The Hash logo adorned by KeeKat created by ReelFX and Blit Wizbok created by Victor Navone. © Hash, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Softimage. The modeling system excels at organic shape creation. In addition to traditional Phong and raytracing, it has a very nice cartoon shaded renderer.

***Monkey*, created by Raf Anzovin at Anzovin Studios with Hash Animation:Master. © Hash, Inc. All Rights Reserved.**

For a nice example of work done in Animation: Master, visit www.navone.org and look for Victor Navone's *Alien Song* movie. This terrific piece led to Navone landing a job with Pixar Animation Studios to work on the upcoming feature *Monsters, Inc.*

The mid-level price point software includes Maxon Cinema 4D ($1700; www.maxoncomputer.com), ElectricImage ($2000; www.electricimage.com), NewTek *LightWave* ($2500; www.newtek.com) and Discreet 3D Studio Max ($3500; www.discreet.com). These applications have been used to create award-winning animations and effects for broadcast and film. It is perhaps this encroachment of moderately priced software upon the territory of high-end software that has spurred price reductions from *Alias|Wavefront* and Softimage. 3D Studio Max, in particular, has a great number of plug-ins available to fill the gaps between it and Maya or Softimage.

Walt Kubiak, founder of The Krislin Company (www.krislin-company.com), has built his 3D animation studio around Discreet's 3D Studio Max 4. The upcoming *Baloonatiks* series was created entirely in the alpha, beta and final release versions of Max 4. Says Kubiak of the decision to go with mid-level software instead of one of the higher-end packages, "Technology has come along so

The Krislin Company has built a 3D animation studio around Discreet's 3D Studio Max 4, as seen with the *Baloonatiks* series. ©2001 AEGI.

You no longer have to invest tens of thousands of dollars… in order to create stunning animation.

far since a few releases back that we're doing better work for the same amount of money. To be honest, Max has become, for lack of a better word, more 'Maya-like.' From pre-production to post, we created thirteen and a half hours of animation in 16 weeks."

The 60 animators working in Krislin's Toronto office, Krislin & Elliot, have used a few tricks to get the best look possible within the confines of a tight budget. Under the supervision of George Elliot, president of Krislin-Elliot Digital, they are working in 24fps with a 3:2 pull-down. This allows the traditional 2D animators to stick with a familiar frame rate and allows them to render fewer frames than a rate of 29.97fps would dictate.

In another cost-saving measure, they made the decision to use the built-in bones and skinning tools within Max. They have been more than happy with the results, and have saved considerable money by not adding Character Studio (Discreet's character animation add-on for Max) to their tool set.

More examples of Krislin's *Baloonatiks* series done with Discreet's 3D Studio Max 4. ©2001 AEGI.

The final animation frames for the *Baloonatiks* series were rendered on the 60 animators' Windows NT workstations. Rather than set up a separate renderfarm, Krislin & Elliot uses Max 4's built-in network render license during off-hours. With an allowance of up to 1000 render nodes per seat of Max, most studios will run out of available machines before they're required to buy a network render license.

> ### Over the past few years, 3D graphics workstations have increased in power while decreasing in cost.

Hardware

Over the past few years, 3D graphics workstations have increased in power while decreasing in cost. This is partly a result of Moore's Law (which states that the CPU speed doubles every two years) and partly a result of the demands of 3D gamers being met by the graphic card vendors. It is now possible to run most 3D packages adequately on a basic consumer-level PC. But what should you look for when selecting your own graphics workstation?

Processor: Speed is king. Go for one notch under the fastest and you'll save big bucks, for little noticeable speed difference. Here's a list of the ones to watch for: Pentium III 1GHz, Pentium 4 1.3GHz, AMD Athlon 1.1GHz, and PowerPC G4 667MHz. If you are willing to spend twice as much to increase rendering speeds, and your software/OS will support it, consider getting a dual CPU setup.

Memory: A minimum of

John Monos' student film was rendered with BMRT. © John Monos.

256MB of RAM is recommended. The price of RAM fluctuates a lot, but is currently cheap, so splurge and get 512MB – 1GB.

Hard Drives: Here you will want to spend a bit more for higher performance. Ideally, get a separate drive each for your operating system, applications and rendering. The system needs to access all three simultaneously during rendering; and with three drives you won't run into bottlenecks. ATA66 and ATA100 IDE drives running at 7,200 RPM are good, Ultra160 SCSI drives are better. SCSI costs more and requires an add-on controller card, but still reigns as performance king. 10–20GB per drive is good, with a larger drive for storage/rendering. Look at drives from Seagate, Quantum and Fujitsu. A good place to check for reviews is www.storagereview.com.

Graphics Card: The 3D graphics cards out there today can really push polygons around. nVidia (www.nvidia.com) offers consumer-level chipsets, like the GeForce 2 and professional ones like the Quadro 2. These chipsets

are found on cards from Elsa, Creative Labs and Hercules, or built into workstations from Dell, HP, Fujitsu and Compaq. ATI Radeon and Matrox G400 cards also turn in excellent performances at a low price.

Recommendations

Different users have different needs. Are you just making the switch from 2D to 3D? Get your feet wet with something like Animation: Master – it's not a huge investment and may satisfy all of your character animation needs.

A free software package to consider is Not A Number's Blender (www.blender.nl). It is a fully featured 3D program that runs under the Linux OS. While its interface doesn't conform to the familiar look of Mac and Windows 3D programs, it is very powerful and could be an excellent choice for the animator who is technically minded.

Another freebie worth looking into is Exluna's Blue Moon Rendering Tools (BMRT; www.exluna.com). A RenderMan-compliant renderer with movie credits such

Another image from John Monos' student film rendered with BMRT. © John Monos.

as *The Cell* and *Hollow Man*, this powerhouse was written by Larry Gritz, formerly of Pixar. While Exluna has plans to commercialize the technologies in BMRT, it is currently available as a free download.

> ## In the right hands, almost any software will yield wonderful results.

A mid-level 3D package may be the last 3D app you ever buy. They are capable of doing work on a production level of the highest quality. If you are ready to make the plunge and buy one, it's a good idea to try them all out first. After all, you'll be spending lots of time with your 3D software, so be sure it's a good fit! Demo versions are available from many manufacturers; for others it may be necessary to contact a sales representative to take a test drive.

So, what are the advantages of paying for a top-shelf package? A compelling one is that of production integration. They can save you money by providing an efficient production pipeline. Is the workflow of a low-end app a good fit with the other tools in your studio? Could you easily integrate your animation with live-action background plates? What other plug-ins or additions will you purchase to round out your animation tools? For example, Alias|Wavefront's Maya Unlimited includes very solid camera-matching in the form of Maya Live, cloth simulation, paint effects, a fur plug-in, a compositor and more. Purchasing these things alongside your core 3D program can push the price up pretty quickly, making Maya's $16,000 price tag seem a bit more reasonable.

Another consideration is long-term planning. You won't want to switch programs every year. These are complex applications; mastery can take years to achieve. You may find yourself saying, "I'd like to start in this one, but then move to Maya when I'm ready." Bad idea. In truth, many animators stick with one main program; leaving it becomes increasingly unpleasant due to their depth of knowledge in that one program. You are unlikely to outgrow a high-end app, with its depth of features and extensibility.

Ultimately, these are just tools to aid the animator. In the right hands, almost any software will yield wonderful results. The line between low- and high-end software has blurred, which means you can now go forth and create wonderful 3D animation — affordably.

John Edgar Park received his B.A. in Drama from the University of Virginia. He is a 3D artist with NovaLogic, Inc., a Los Angeles-based video game developer.

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

Making It To The Web

by Mark Winstanley

Animation has been a prominent force on the Internet since its inception. Even when the image files were tiny animated gifs, they were still...well, animated. Long before streaming video became an Internet buzzword (and sore disappointment), Web graphics with the look and feel of animation became the norm when viewing web pages on just about any site. Eventually the technology progressed and we've arrived in 2001 where programs like Macromedia's Flash enable fill blown animation delivery across the Internet, without the wait and choppy playback of streaming video.

Flash Is Still King

The biggest factor in getting your animated pieces onto the Internet and viewable by thousands of net surfers is the size of the pipeline over which they're delivered. Even though DSL connections and cable modems have proliferated, most of the world still subsists on 56K dial-up modems whose narrow bandwidth prohibits the delivery of smooth consistent streaming video. This is where Flash comes in. Flash was developed to deliver high impact graphics and sound over a small amount of bandwidth. Flash performs this feat by delivering only the instructions to recreate the images on the user's computer, and not the images themselves. It's like the difference between someone sending you the recipe for a cake versus the cake itself. That big chocolate cake isn't easy to squeeze through the mail slot on your front door, while an index card with the recipe slips right through, and you can recreate the cake on your side of the door.

Now don't get me wrong, you can scan animation sequences and import them into Flash all day, but your files can end up being huge and unable to be seen by anyone except those with

A screenshot of Macromedia Flash 5's action script panel. © Macromedia.
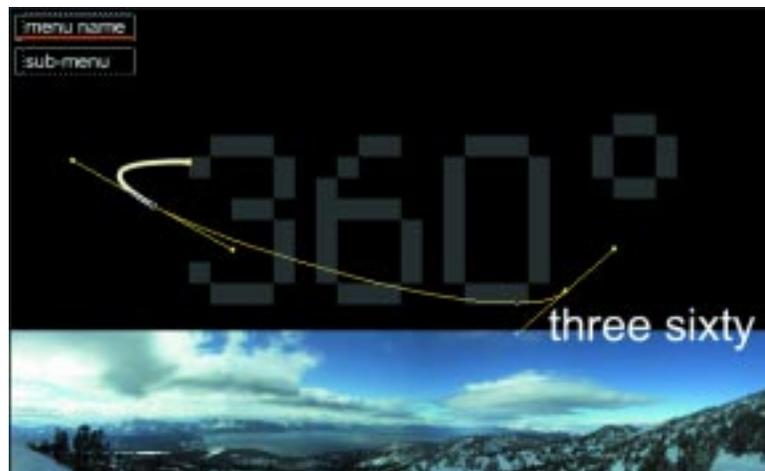
Another screenshot of Flash 5 showing how bezier handles come in handy in. © Macromedia.

the fastest of net connections. One solution to the problem is to draw the image sequences in Flash itself, although if you're used to more traditional tools to create your animations, this may be cumbersome and produce less than satisfactory work. Another solution is to use one of the many after market plug-ins or stand alone products that promise to take animations created in an environment other than Flash and transform them into Flash compliant, bandwidth friendly deliverables. Flash is such a hot delivery platform that every company seems to want to add "Flash-export capability" to the list of their product's merits. The problem lately is that although many companies are promising this miracle of content morphing, not all are able to deliver. We'll take a look at some of the most popular here, and the pros and cons of each.

For More Traditional Folks

First up are the products used to transform scanned images and animation cels into Flash compliant vector image outlines. The most popular for a long time has been Adobe's Streamline (www.adobe.com). Streamline takes scanned images and converts them to line art that is then ready to be imported into Flash or Adobe Illustrator. Streamline works quite well although it suffers from the over generalization of many Adobe products. They don't exactly come out and say anywhere, "Streamline was designed for animators and perfect to integrate with Macromedia Flash." On the other hand Adobe's products have a consistent look and feel and most releases are fairly stable, with Streamline already in its 4.0 revision. It works fairly well for anima-

tion except it seems to lose details that you have to go back and put in again by hand once you've imported your images into Flash. Streamline has often been likened to have a rotoscoping effect. Adobe's compositing software After Effects 5.0 will begin shipping in the second quarter of 2001 and is reported to be boasting a number of new Web enhancements as well.

> **Flash is such a hot delivery platform that every company seems to want to add "Flash-export capability" to the list of their product's merits.**

A newer product to hit the market dealing with scanned images is NetGuru/AXA Software's AXA Web 1.0 whose tagline is "To the Vector Go the Spoils" referencing the vector image format that lets Flash deliver high quality animation in a small package. AXA Web is a product that is targeted directly at the traditional animator offering the ability to take scanned cel animation and "vectorize" it for use in Flash. It can detect more detail than Streamline and deliver an output that requires less touch up when finally brought into Flash. Originally launched late last year, it is scheduled for a relaunch this spring after some refinement update's by AXA to improve the software overall. A beta copy I tested seemed to be fairly free of bugs

although it contains some interesting departures from standard usability, like using Alt+Backspace to execute an undo instead of the almost universal Ctrl-Z key combo. I'd like to see some serious demos on their Website of pieces converted using AXA Web, although I can say this about any of the other products discussed here as well.

MediaPEGS, a leader in 2D animation production systems, will soon release i-Pegs, a "lighter" version of their award-winning Pegs software currently used by hundreds of studios around the globe. i-Pegs is designed solely for Internet use and is described as a user-friendly solution to taking previously created animation with sophisticated movement and backgrounds to the Net using incredibly small bandwidth. While not yet released this product will be interesting to see once it is available and of course, will be a natural fit for those already using the Pegs software system.

Taking the Web 3D

The 3D world has really taken off on the Internet lately. I think it's everyone's goal at this point to start producing bandwidth friendly 3D animations and games without having to go learn a whole new set of tools. One of the more standard tools in 3D creation is 3D Studio Max, now shipping in its hottest revision - 3ds Max 4 (www.discreet.com). With an enhanced character studio and purported support for exporting to Web friendly formats such as Flash, it seems to be the hot ticket for getting 3D onto the Web, although their Website lacks any real demonstration of direct export capability.

Fear not, others have come up with plug-ins for 3D Studio Max

Discreet's 3D Studio Max 4. © Discreet.
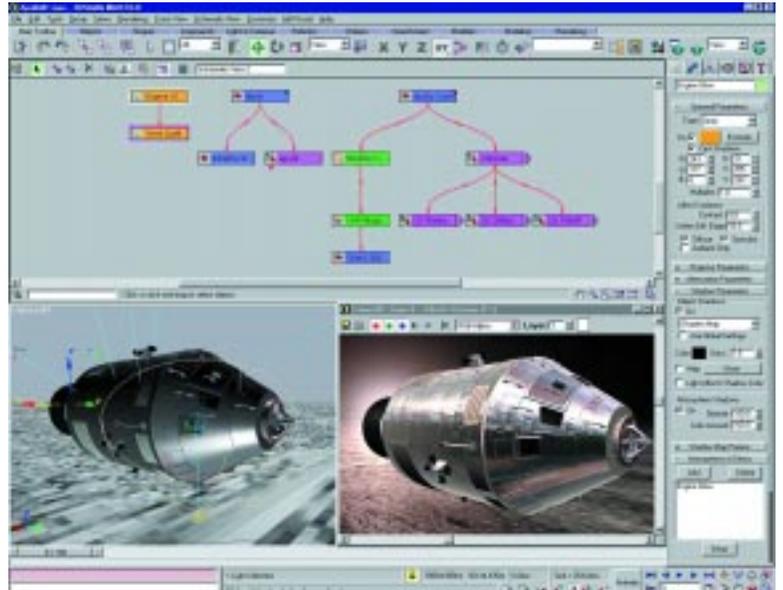
3D Studio Max 4 includes an enhanced character studio and support for exporting to Web friendly formats such as Flash. © Discreet.

that allow you to take 3D content and bring it right into Flash. Vecta 3D (www.vecta3d.com) was the first to allow direct 3D export into Flash. Available as both a standalone application and a plugin for 3D Max it delivers very good 3D vectorized graphics with a small file size. The look is often angular and not very fluid, but you can't beat the small file sizes, or the price of the plug-in! Thankfully there are some good examples on their Website. Another plug-in for 3D Max was just announced by Electric Rain (www.electricrain.com), the makers of Swift 3D. The Swift 3D standalone application has been a great way to create 3 dimensional graphics and easily export them into Flash. Building on the success of Swift 3D, Electric Rain has developed their RAViX II™ rendering technology to take content directly from 3D Studio Max into Flash. With a release date of Spring 2001, it's sure to be a big hit this year.

A completely different company with a similar sounding name has developed a product that is a standalone creation tool

> **Fear not, others have come up with plug-ins for 3D Studio Max that allow you to take 3D content and bring it right into Flash.**

capable of some pretty fluid and smooth 3D export for Flash. Electric Image (electricimg.com) recently released their newest version of Amorphium, titled Amorphium PRO. Good examples on their Website prominently illustrate and advertise Amorphium's ability to produce 3D animated content specifically for the Web through Flash. The visual quality is very good although some of the file sizes seemed a bit large for the number of frames and content of the animations. This product is impressive and definitely worth checking out.

Maya has long been a stan-

dard for high-end visual and special effects development. In November, Cambridge Animation Systems announced a plug-in for Maya to output to Flash directly. A check of their Website reveals no direct information or demonstration of this product or its capabilities. Not surprising, since converting Maya content into a compact vectorized image format for Flash is certainly no easy task. I'm intrigued to see if and when this product is released in a workable form.

Another Option

Last but not least in our list of cool ways to deliver animation on the Internet is proof that Flash isn't the only game in town for delivering cool interactive content in a Web-friendly package. Pulse 3D (www.pulse3D.com) has developed their own proprietary technology and Web browser plug-in to deliver incredibly cool streaming 3D animation and interactive content! It's not as popular as the Flash format but Pulse's penetration increases every day. With some big names signed on to use

the format, Pulse is generating quite a buzz. What's somewhat of a buzz-kill though, is the fact that you must buy a license to put Pulse content on your Website. The tools to create the content are free however and integrate directly with 3D Studio Max, whose newest release may prove to be the fuel Pulse needs to compete head to head with Flash for the title of 'Coolest Content Delivery Format;' although the inclusion of the Flash plug-in with every new computer sold today gives Macromedia the competitive edge.

Hopefully we've covered enough ground here to give you a broad view of the options available to take content you've created in one format and transform it into another that is more accessi-

ble via the Web than would be using traditional streaming video. Take a look at the tools you use most often and the applications and plug-ins here that integrate with those tools to find a conversion pathway that best suits your needs. If some of the options seem pricey, try and get a demo version, or insist on being able to view demos online of the output achievable with the product. This is always a good idea since it seems many of the claims presented by some of the companies outpace the impact of their online examples.

Good luck and happy animating!

Make sure to check our Technology News in Animation World's Headline News for the lat-

est releases and announcements.

Mark Winstanley is a high-end Internet developer and consultant to Hollywood studios and entertainment creators, both online and offline. A Flash programmer, he is the editor and author of four books on Flash and co-founder of FlashCore.com, the Global New Media Creative and Technical Community. His email is: mark@flashcore.com

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

Steam utilizes Discreet's 3D Studio Max for an "Innerlevel" theatrical commercial for KCRW Radio's publicity campaign. Image courtesy of Steam/Discreet.

There Once Was A Man Called
Pjotr Sapegin

by Chris Robinson

Pjotr Sapegin. All images courtesy of and © Norsk filminstitutt.

Art, the eternal expression of the soul, key to life's mysteries.
The dark chaos beneath the shimmering sheath of banausic sobriety.
That's what generations of poets, painters, writers and charlatans would have you believe. Humans all of them and all of them lie, equivocate and spin.
Security, stability and comfort sheltered behind
the facade of currency,
the roots of these gestures of the grandeur.

Once upon a time there was a man named Pjotr Sapegin. He came from the far away Eastern or Western, depending on your point of view, country of Russia before moving to the Nordic regions where he became an internationally successful maker of animation films (*Mons the Cat, One Day a Man Bought a*

House, The Saltmill). He evolved out of generations of circus acrobats, poets, painters and writers. As a child, he lived in a big court of brick buildings, which belonged to the art union. The courtyard provided a world of discovery for young Pjotr. The enormous backyard contained hips, heads and noses of revolutionary heroes, which lay scattered beside moulds for marble statues. The landscape continually changed as the severed limbs of marble were transformed one by one into gigantic odes to Lenin.

> **"My parents did not participate in the production of Lenin's head, so they were as poor as rats."**

Childhood Among Body Parts

Pjotr was born in Moscow. Moscow was dirty. Sure it was green, there were trees and parks and even grass, but it was dirty and ugly. But for Pjotr, the ugliness smelled good. The aroma of dust, snow, marble was the stuff of dreams. "The landscape is one of the strongest memories from my childhood. My parents did not participate in the production of Lenin's head, so they were as poor as rats." Pjotr's parents were painters, but this was no Bohemian Mecca.

"Art was work and it was nothing much to talk about; just do it." While they may not have spoken of art, Sapegin and his young mates did indeed talk. "We definitely were talking too much. We all were in the conspiracy against the stupidity of the state, and that was deliciously dangerous." During long vodka sessions at the kitchen table, politics, flying saucers, urban legends, adventures in the dark and the mysterious mountains of Tibet were all topics of conversation. "I knew at least five people who personally saw the abominable snowman. One lady was even carrying his child."

Sapegin enjoyed his years as a young man in the Soviet Union and what life of youth is complete without physical yearnings. While never the most athletically gifted of beings, he did embrace the sports passion of the 1970s: slalom skiing. Of course there were no hills in Moscow, but there were deep valleys. "It was absolutely breathtaking and just imagine most of our equipment was self-made, and often self-constructed." Karate replaced slalom in the '80s. "It was like in Japan in 1800, we had rival schools and secret societies." Oh and of course there was that other youthful pleasure: sex. Erotic games were the bane of Sapegin and his friends' existence; flirting, looking for adventures in odd circum-

stances and generally dreaming of conquering the milky bosom of any girl acknowledging them.

Time passed. Scents, secrets and desires lay scattered among the cluttered compartments of conspicuous memories. Privileged Pjotr grew and grew and not surprisingly he became an artist. First, he studied with a painter and then he attended a school of theatre. Five years passed and one day Pjotr awoke a state theatre designer. "I got my first artistic job as a theatre designer at the age of 18. It was great to build a world, which is different and live there separated from the rest of life by the parameter of the stage." A beautiful island paradise nestled within the walls of a dirty, hostile sea.

"I knew at least five people who personally saw the abominable snowman. One lady was even carrying his child."

Changing Venue

He found success over the years and produced work for many performances. As Pjotr matured and came to understand his soul, he sought change. The strange power of desire carried him to the shores of Norway and her alluring landscape. At first, the harsh Nordic climate greeted the Russian with indifference. He began by cleansing the chewed remains left scattered on cheap china by the palettes of the people. Eventually Pjotr climbed the sweet thighs of fame and was permitted to feed, care and wipe the

A scene from _Edvard_, Sapegin's first film, utilizing live-action and clay animation.

asses of Norwegian children before leading them to their lands of dreams, groans and smiles. As a tender of the youth of tomorrow, he did not come cheap, but soon the call of the soul grew louder than the cries of the children and Pjotr found himself immersed in the manual creating of art for magazines, theatre and whatever would enable his family to eat. On this new road Pjotr met the celluloid poets of the soul and turned toward the chemicals of sound and light to learn new means of finding life's cure. Realizing that the Norwegians, aside from Ivo Caprino, had relatively little experience making animation films, Pjotr, the virtuous, honest and pious, who had never animated in his life, spun that tangled web and next found himself standing with a stop-motion camera among the new voices of Norwegian moving images.

Sapegin had a new home, a new career, but no money. Fortunately for Sapegin the Olympics were in town. Realizing that there was now a pot of gold in the Norwegian cultural pro-

gramme, the hungry Sapegin and a friend licked their lips and began dreaming of an animation series made with the fat bucks of the Olympics. The idea was to have a parallel Olympics with different creatures coming from all kinds of countries. Inspired by the ocean side aroma of a nearby seafood restaurant, the famished duo based their character on a "pink, shapeless, flexible, fresh, tasty" shrimp. Then they dumped the idea as it was too close to the paralympics (for special people) and took their delicious shrimp and turned him into Edvard. Edvard took his name from the composer Edvard Grieg, who while lacking the qualities of a genius, could compose some scintillating film scores. The wide range of emotions expressed in his work was perfectly suited to Sapegin's animation with its melodramatic reflections of Chaplin, Keaton and the other silent shadows from cinema's birth.

The premise of _Edvard_ is simple. A Chaplinesque 'shrimp' wanders around the Nordic seascape adapting to the strange

environment around him. Sapegin made five *Edvard* films and they all combine live-action and clay animation. Even in the first film, *Edvard* (1992), Sapegin's talents are apparent. Edvard meets a young woman and subsequently turns into everything he is feeling (heart, flowers, sculpture) for her. In the rather strange, *The Naked Truth* (1993), Edvard is introduced to the bare essentials of humanity as he encounters a group of nudists on the beach. During his adventure Edvard assumes the form of all the body parts he sees and also that of a hot dog... *Unbearable Lightness of Longing* is the most technically accomplished of the five films and foreshadows later films with Sapegin's detailed, multi-textured backgrounds. The backgrounds were created by painting on a mirror and leaving parts of the surface open to reflect other backgrounds. Edvard sees a beautiful woman fall asleep on the beach. Lonely, horny Edvard falls immediately in love and imagines ways to wow his sleeping beauty. Finally he builds a boat for the woman. She awakens, smiles and waves, but alas it is not Edvard she acknowledges but a beau in a boat. Once again Edvard is left alone.

Seemingly taken from Sapegin's Russian backyard, *Stand In* (1995) has Edvard jumping into action as he reads about a statue of a baby being stolen. With echoes of Starewicz's *The Mascot*, Edvard takes to the streets and tries to replace the statue. He assumes various forms until he hears the roar of the audience. But we soon see the applause is for the return of the statue, which subsequently leaves Edvard crushed...literally. In the final film, *The Cruise Ship*, Edvard dreams

> ## "If you see a cat eating a mouse, that's when the cat is at his best, he's nice, he's smiling, he looks very, very cute."

that he is on a passing ocean liner and chasing the dame of his dreams. Unfortunately the lass is too busy fleeing the perverted come-ons of a hapless old timer to notice Edvard. Seeing that his dream is bothered by the half-soused tourist, he sabotages the man's libidinous plans and sends him fleeing. Just as Edvard seeks to comfort the woman, a handsome stranger comes to take his dream away. From here the director inflicts the utmost cruelty on the shrimp by attaching him to the drunk's ass where he is slammed against walls before being flushed down the toilet. Fortunately it is all a dream.

Silent comedy serves as a major influence in the construc-

tion of the *Edvard* series, although at times Edvard's randiness seems more attuned to the primal antics of English comedian Benny Hill. Like Chaplin and Keaton's characters, Edvard is a perceived unsung hero or loser. Of course, Edvard is additionally handicapped by the reality that he is a clay sea creature who is about the size of my middle finger. Like the great silent comics, Edvard wants desperately to fit in to the surrounding society. He wants nothing more than to be loved and accepted for what and who he is. Unfortunately no one can even see him. Sharing more with Chaplin's tramp, Edvard is even willing, unlike Keaton's character, to shed his identity to gain acceptance.

One can't help but think back to Sapegin's rocky landscapes and the discombobulated stones of his youth. Just as the yard was continually transforming with body parts appearing and reappearing, Edvard is a constantly shifting figure in search of a stable centre of being. As in Keaton's films, landscapes are ever present in the *Edvard* series and play a piv-

Ippolita the Little Amazon uses a combination of cut-outs and clay to present a dynamic stage design.
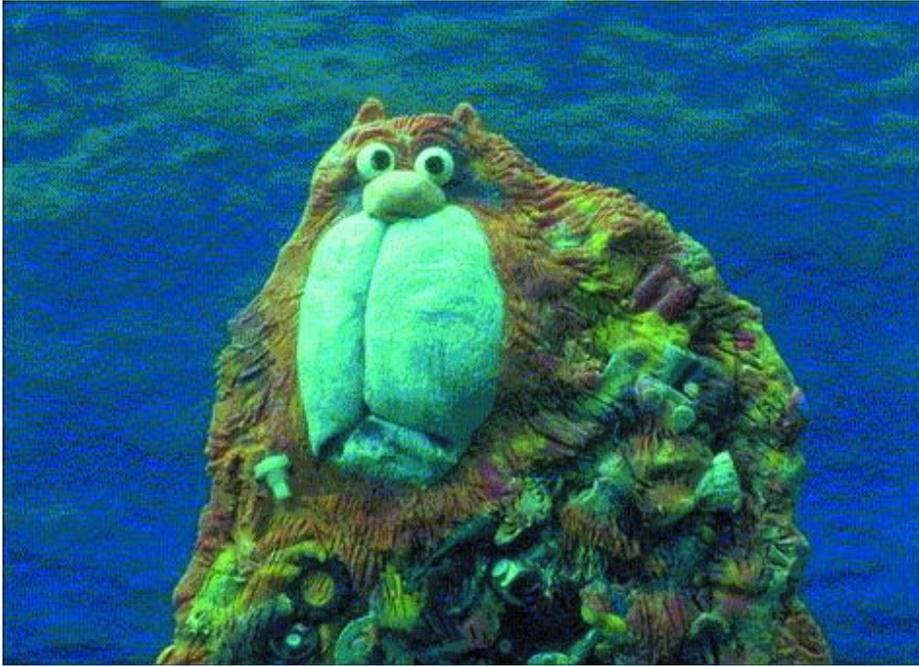
With the release of *Mons the Cat* in 1995, Sapegin made his mark in the animation industry by telling a Norwegian folk tale.

otal secondary character dictating the direction of Edvard. At the same time, Edvard shares many characteristics with his creator, notably the fact that both were new to their environment and learning to adapt to and understand the surrounding culture. Edvard's story is very much Pjotr's; although to my knowledge Pjotr was never flushed or crushed... well not literally anyway.

Despite Edvard's modest popularity in Norway, it is rapidly apparent by the second or third film that he is a one-dimensional character. Edvard's chameleon transformations and Benny Hill hard-ons could only carry the films so far. On the way out, tired of being mocked and tortured by his creator, the shrimp flashed a final explicit pantomime to his creator. And so Edvard now rests, we hope, in peace.

Edvard served Sapegin well. He worked on the series from 1992-1996 and the films afforded Sapegin the opportunity to develop and hone his animation skills.

More importantly the sacrifices of poor Edvard temporarily fed and clothed the Sapegin family.

"Then I said, 'Ah, hah,' that's where a lot of things are hidden in animation..."

A New Myth

Given Sapegin's inexperience, it is no surprise that his work environment was rather primitive. Working on 16mm for his first film, Sapegin constructed his own glass table. "I had window frames, you know winter window frames, so I just piled up twelve layers and it was great. It was the only time I didn't get any reflections on those window frames. It was so easy and actually fast. So I thought, 'Yep, that's probably my thing to do.'" Sapegin first began experimenting with the glass table for his film, *Ippolita the Little Amazon*.

Ippolita emerged out of a

failed Hercules project. With a stream of rejections and a 'God knows how I needed money then" reality, Sapegin divided the Greek hero into a girl (Ippolita) and a goat (Esmeralda). What is instantly striking about *Ippolita* is the influence of Sapegin's stage design. Using a combination of cut-outs and clay, the wild, roaring backgrounds explode within the frame lending an expressive theatrical element to the film. Having been abandoned by their tribe (which is visually represented through a jolting fusion of blacks and reds), Ippolita and Esmeralda journey through ancient Greece. Along the way they encounter a variety of Herculean-like labours. A chameleon-like bull, that despite being killed by calm Esmeralda's arrow, pursues the duo in different forms. They are saved by the mighty hand of Appolon, the god of light and music. After being forced from Hesperide's garden, they encounter Atlas who offers to get them golden apples if they will hold the world up. After ditching the worm-infested pommes, they repay Appolon's favour by saving him from a beast. The duo then carry on what Appolon calls, the beginning of their journey. Their journey ends as it begins.

Sapegin's work is casual and sober. We wonder whether we wander through a life in progress. Ippolita and Esmeralda walk through life unaware. Heroism arrives serenely. A serendipitous greeting unrecognized.

Ippolita is a keen inversion and parody of a masculine, virile world. Sapegin re-constructs the masculine world of Greek myths through the unassuming, assured eyes of a woman giving her a silent strength. Ippolita remains an

important film for Sapegin because it was his first experience with a female character: "It was the first time I tried to work with a female main character and I absolutely loved it." Not really knowing women by definition, Sapegin found himself less in control of his character than usual. Sapegin found this manner of working exciting and liberating in the ways that it led him toward new ideas and storylines.

Enter Mons

Nestled beside his window frames with eyes scanning for greener pastures, Sapegin's inner bulb lit: he would become rich by making commercials. Using some left over film, he made the hilarious *Fishballs*. The film was shot in 1 1/2 days on 35mm and was to be part of Sapegin's new commercial portfolio. *Fishballs* is a dramatic departure in style from *Edvard* and clearly foreshadows the crisp clay animation and stylish, colourful flowing backgrounds of *Mons the Cat*. In *Fishballs*, a young Mons the Cat (making his first
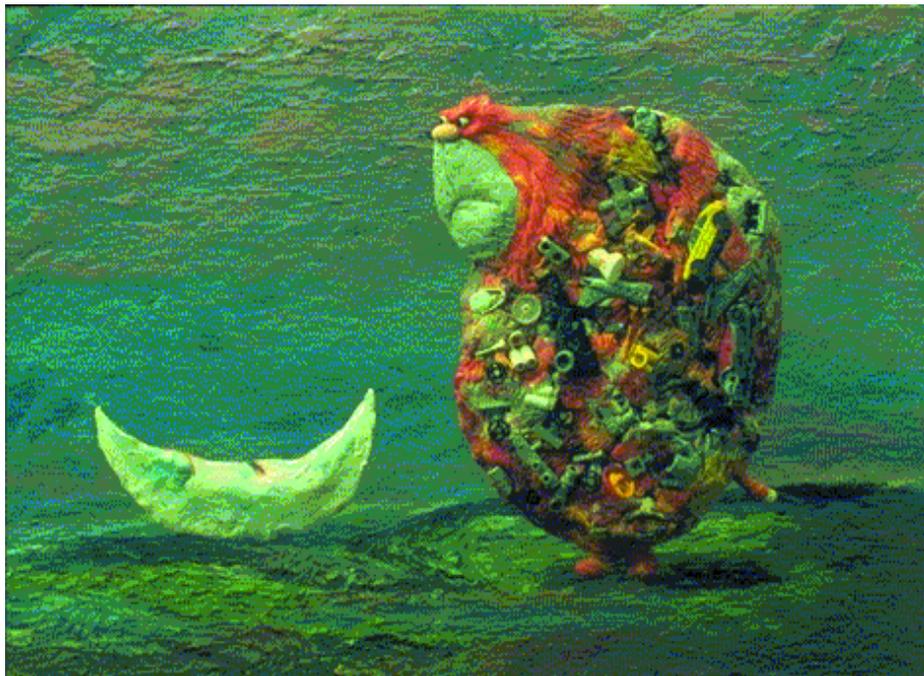
Another still from Sapegin's successful *Mons the Cat*.

appearance) sits by the water eagerly seeking out food. He rejects a female fish and then a male fish appears, but rather than take the whole fish, the cat grabs at his pearly white genitals. Sapegin received no commercial offers. While Sapegin expresses surprise that he did not get jobs, there is no doubt that the sly transplanted Russian was well aware

(Sapegin's voice is heard at the end asking, "How was it?") that he was making an anti-commercial. Sapegin simply could not go gently without first biting the 'hand' that feeds.

Distribution and funding, those tired, repetitive refrains, remain a problem for Sapegin. Funding comes primarily from the Norwegian Film Institute, which also distributes his films. There is a competition for project funding a couple of times a year. Short Animation and Documentary proposals are lumped into one bin and if the idea is worthy enough to be among the top ten, one gets financing. Films are shown in theatres but no money is paid to the filmmakers. TV channels buy films, sometimes even show them, but there is very little money for a short film. So for independent animators like Sapegin, he must rely primarily on international festivals to find an audience and a buyer.

The animation 'boom' has found its way to Norway, however the problem remains the same: most of the money is going to "big

***Fishballs*, a film Sapegin shot in 1 1/2 days on 35 mm leftover film.**

companies who just found out where the money is in our humanistic bad conscience towards children's time."

In Sapegin's eyes the Norwegian animation community is quite different from other countries because of the gap between generations of animators. Most of the people in the industry are quite young and have never had any role models. While this can be an overwhelming situation, it removes many pressures and allows the animators to be more liberal and adventurous. Of course with freedom and a staunch refusal to work for the 'bad guys,' most of the animators are opening and closing studios and fighting to find funding. With age comes fatigue and with fatigue comes compromise. "Young people don't really know all those things which we know already because we have families and sick parents. We have to pay bills, the house and the car and God knows what. And they must have Sundays and they must have holidays off, and they don't hear anything." Despite the uncertainty, Sapegin likens this younger generation to the early days of the National Film Board of Canada and believes that many of today's artists "will become the masters for a new generation."

Following *Fishballs*, Sapegin made *Mons the Cat*, his first international 'hit.' *Mons the Cat* is based on a Norwegian folk tale. After refusing to eat his catfish, Mons in turn chews up the entire village community until he explodes á là Monty Python and everything returns to normal...a dream. Mons now enjoys his catfish without complaints.

A haunting nightmarish tale of a hyper consumer living on overdrive within a wild, free flow-ing capitalist marketplace? Maybe, but Sapegin was more interested in the cat. "The cat as an animal is the perfect anti-hero because it is basically a nasty character. He kills, he steals, he isn't really faithful, he never serves, but at the same time he's so loveable. If you see a cat eating a mouse, that's when the cat is at his best, he's nice, he's smiling, he looks very, very cute." Just like a tycoon as he is taking down another country.

"The story came out of an accident when I had to kill a rat, and I tried to persuade her with a sausage…"

Mons was shot in only four weeks, but Sapegin spent about two months just trying to figure out how to end the story: "In *Mons the Cat* I used the actual media of animation as an expressive tool, as a storytelling tool. And then I said, 'Ah, hah,' that's where a lot of things are hidden in animation, so you have to see why you are making this film not in live-action but in animation, what possibilities it gives you, how you can play with an environment with the reality of animation."

With *Mons*, we see Sapegin's most concerted use of mobile, multi-coloured backgrounds that sweep in and out of each scene. Originally, Sapegin had intended to make the backgrounds entirely in clay, but his "rotten clay" was too soft and would not hold a solid form. So Sapegin heated the clay with a lighter and used it as crayons on a glass surface. He would use this technique again in *The Saltmill*.

As might be expected, Sapegin works with very few people. "The ideal set is that I have one more person working with me, and this person is some kind of orchestra leader." At the moment, Sapegin's team consists of Janne Hansen, a Volda College graduate. Sapegin also works with Lisa Fearnley, who shot *One Day a Man Bought a House*. "She is a an exceptional, exceptional photographer."

What is perhaps most remarkable about *Mons the Cat* is the quality of the clay animation. It seems incredible that an artist with no previous animation experience could master the medium so quickly. But as always there is a little secret. A former colleague in Moscow used to work with clay and while Sapegin never saw her work, he did see her puppets at home. "We'd been making some toys for kids and I sort of stole a lot of her aesthetic in a way. But I also thought that if I worked with animation ever I would try to make it as close to live-action as possible. When you look at real people out in the street they are made out of different material, which by definition is different from the environment they live in, so I thought I will probably try to find an environment which is contradictory to the physical substance of the characters. That's why I went for clay, because also of my theatre modeling experience. That's where my backgrounds actually came from, from theatre models."

A Loving Rat

One Day a Man Bought a House is a twisted tale about a man who moves into a house only to discover another occupant: a rat. Unwilling to share his new home, the man embarks on a

In 1997, Sapegin finished *One Day a Man Bought a House*, a love story told in an unconventional and comedic manner.

series of methods to exterminate the rat. However, each murderous gesture (including the use of the infamous Malaysian pitbull cat) is mistaken as a sign of affection. The rat, a woman, soon believes that the man loves her. She dolls herself up, approaches the man and they marry and live happily ever after.

Sapegin wrote the original story and his wife re-wrote it for the film. The story was actually made in 1995 and was in production for almost three years. This perverse bestial fairy tale is actually based on a true story...well, sort of. "The story came out of an accident when I had to kill a rat, and I tried to persuade her with a sausage and she ate the sausage then I couldn't kill her because I thought she now thinks that I'm a nice guy."

Adapting his stage experience, Sapegin creates some stunning noirish chiaroscuro lit backgrounds that seem taken from a Hitchcock or Orson Welles film. Combined with Randall Myers noir tinged score, the backgrounds add a playful and ironic atmosphere of tension and uncertainty.

Perversity aside, *One Day a Man Bought a House* is a tale of misunderstanding. Sapegin slams conventions and expectations turning the inappropriate or unnatural into new possibilities. Not that I suggest that we all run out and start humping animals, but instead we should look beneath the surface and embrace the film as a light tale that questions our perceptions. Things we take for granted should not be taken for granted.

"My backgrounds actually came from...theatre models."

Sapegin worked on *One Day* and *The Saltmill* concurrently. Once again, bills were outstanding. "It was such a bad day and I said, 'Fuck a duck, we have to do once more like we did on *Mons*,' four weeks later everybody got paid, and we just kept rolling. So that's how it started, as usual." Once again, Sapegin returned to a folk tale for his story source. The script was written by Studio Magica colleague, Lars Tommerbakke, but both he and

Sapegin worked on the story together. On one level, *The Saltmill* is a tale about how the sea became salted, but deeper still it is about the accidental discovery of independence and identity. In a small town, all the salt is owned by a greedy old man. The Sea has no salt. The town has no salt. A young man digs for salt everyday. He is a 'yes' man who works only for a sandwich...unsalted of course. While digging the man discovers a cave and within it a salt troll. The man trades his sandwich to the troll for control of the salt. The man hastens immediately to the local tavern and offers the patrons salt for their fish and chips. Still being the 'yes' man, the idiot savant gives the rich man all of the salt and tells him the secret to owning the mill. The greedy man sets sail in a boat, says the magic words and drowns in the sea as the salt pours into his boat.

Sapegin finds folk tales a challenge to work with because they are constructed on different moral issues, so they must be twisted around. "If you really look at folk tales, they are completely pre-Christian, they came from pre-moral time, and to tell the story which will communicate with our society, you cannot just tell the folk tale because people will get absolutely confused with what you are actually saying." By altering the ending of the film, *The Saltmill*, like *One Day*, became a tale based on misunderstanding. The young man in *Saltmill* finds his independence completely by accident and despite his utter stupidity. In Sapegin's surreal fairy tale world, there are no grand gestures, no mythical heroes, no profound logic, only everymen who, like Beckett characters inadvertently bump into solutions.

The Saltmill **is a tale based on a misunderstanding, which leads a young man to discover his independence.**

Another New Beginning

Sapegin recently left Studio Magica, a studio he co-founded upon arriving in Norway, with to form Zoofilm. "It became a little boring and I felt we were moving towards different cities. We had a big studio. It became a bit heavy and I also want to work with experimental things and they want me to do television series." Zoofilm was formed in May 1999 with two other partners who, sur-prisingly, are not animation people. "I have to prove to them that this genre can exist next to live-action. I have to prove that I'm capable of doing things and it's basically great."

The first Zoofilm project, *In the Corner of the World*, is a short Shakespeare "pick-up" film. *In the Corner* returns to the style of *Edvard* using clay characters on a manipulated live-action back-ground. The concept behind *In the Corner* was to give back the original meaning to Shakespeare's poetry which for all its high brow reception, was basically written to score with chicks. "*In the Corner of the World* was an extreme experi-ment. It came from an idea after I saw *Shakespeare In Love,* which I liked very much and everybody else hated it absolutely, my part-ners hated it, my son hated it also, because it was wimpy. I thought it was great."

Currently Sapegin is work-ing on a variety of projects includ-ing an interpretation of *Hamlet* and *Bernard Bityourtongue*. "It's a book which was written by a very famous crime novelist and me. It's a crime story with two murders, for children. So this book is going to be an animation film, and it's half live-action. It's a story which happens in a puppet theatre and the marionettes have a life of their own and one of them is a killer, basically." Sapegin has also approached Canada's National Film Board about co-producing a top secret project involving Puccini.

Despite a prosperous 1997,

In the Corner of the World — **Sapegin's animated film based on Shakespeare's sonata number 18.**

Winner of a top prize at the Montreal Children's Film Festival, *Snails.*

"I absolutely refuse to accept the definition of art on these two sections, figurative and non-figurative..."

where Sapegin made four commercials for the National Lottery and four for a radio station, recent financial frustrations forced him to re-consider his artistic direction. "I thought, 'Okay, let's just give up and make a straightforward animation silly for children.'" But poor Pjotr still couldn't get it right. "We made the film and sent it to some Danish consultants and they said, 'What kind of film is this? It's no action and the main character is a well behaved girl.'" Nevertheless, *Snails,* recently won a top prize at the Montreal Children's Film Festival.

Given Sapegin's highly stylized backgrounds, it would seem natural that he look the other way and perhaps try more abstract non-narrative animations.

However, Pjotr has a very good theory on this. "I absolutely refuse to accept the definition of art on these two sections, figurative and non-figurative, because abstract art is one of the components in figurative art. It's a part of figurative art and by working in abstract media you are cheating yourself in a way because you will end up with a story which is maybe not on the screen but you hear it in back of your head. So, if you develop abstract things up to a certain point, it will start to become figurative. That is what I am doing, always using abstract things in a composition in storytelling. It's kind of hidden inside in the paintings, in the figurative paintings."

For now this life in progress carries on beyond these pages and our slanted tale of one life must come to an end. Young Pjotr is now older Pjotr. He has grown far from the acrobats, karate experts, snowmen and marble landscapes of his youth. His new Nordic life is one of rats, cats, salt and seas. Financial insecurities aside, Pjotr is happy, busy and

Norwegian. "I am a Norwegian filmmaker, and I am planted absolutely, thoroughly. I just don't wanna go back to Russia; it's a really hectic place."

Chris Robinson is the artistic director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival and founder and director of SAFO, the Ottawa International Student Animation Festival. He is a board member of ASIFA International and editor of the ASIFA magazine, ASIFA News. *Robinson has curated film programs and served on festival juries throughout the world. He writes a monthly column ("The Animation Pimp") for Animation World Network and has written numerous articles on animation. His iconoclastic tendencies have led him to be called the "John Woo of diplomacy" and most recently, "the enfant terrible of animation" by* Take One *magazine. He is currently working on a documentary with Otto Alder on Estonian animation; a biography of writer, Richard Meltzer; and a book on animation entitled,* Unsung Heroes of Animation. *Apparently he's a Canadian.*

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

THE CHALLENGES OF THE BIG SCREEN CARTOON

by Gerard Raiti

South Park's **Kenny, Stan and Kyle before their dramatic transition to the big screen! © Comedy Partners, Inc. All rights reserved.**

South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut **hit theatres in 1999 successfully riding the wave from television to feature film. © Comedy Partners, Inc. All rights reserved.**

"**B**igger, Longer and Uncut." These are the adjectives that subtitled the *South Park* feature film of 1999. These same adjectives brashly typify the mission statement, the ethos, upheld by animation studios when cartoons transition to the big screen. Then again, you should hope that after paying $5 to $10 for a movie ticket, the film represents something more than what is broadcast every Saturday morning. The innate pitfalls, and opportunities, in bringing a television show to the theaters successfully however are many. With millions in profits going to those who achieve the magic combo, and straight-to-video relegation for those who fail, it is a tight rope more studios are trying to rush across.

A Chance to Shine

When a cartoon like Disney's *Recess* makes it to the silver screen, it is a global testament to the endearment these characters have garnered in a relatively short period of time. A movie version of a cartoon justifies a show's popularity. On the other hand, it also indicates that the cartoon is edging that much closer to that big movie vault in the sky. Does anyone even watch *South Park* anymore? Exactly.

Nevertheless, big screen cartoons are genuinely about the fans. True, this tribute to fandom often yields millions in profit dollars for studios if done well, but this is just an unfortunate side effect on which companies have to bite the bullet in chagrin! Think of the cartoon movies you dragged your parents to when you were younger, and then think about, in turn, how many of these movies you have had to sit through with your children or grandchildren. Now, think about how happy they were (and back to how happy you were) to attend the movie. The big screen is an experience, and for children especially, it becomes that much more of an experience

Rugrats in Paris, **the latest feature to come forth from Nickelodeon's hit TV series** *Rugrats.* **TM & © 2000 Paramount Pictures and Viacom International Inc. All rights reserved.**

when the movie features the world of characters they have spent their Saturday mornings and after-school hours watching. This creates the urgency of why big screen cartoons must be "bigger, longer and uncut" when compared with their small screen counterparts; studios are rewarding fans for devotion.

There are also some tremendous benefits when bringing cartoons to movie-form. While a typical television show is half an hour in length, cinematic versions average around eighty minutes. This added time allows for grander adventures with more complicated plot twists and character development. In the case of Tommy, Chuckie and the other Rugrats, their movie and its sequel allowed them to "boldly go where no baby has gone before!" Coupled with higher budgets that allow for better animation, sound and "celebrity" voice talent, big screen cartoons align all the intrinsic variables to maximize the potential of sending characters on their greatest adventure ever. Above all, the cinematic experience is a draw card in itself. This is why George Lucas chose to re-release the *Star Wars Trilogy* in 1997 — not only to make a substantial amount of money but also to give an entirely new generation of *Star Wars* fans the opportunity to experience the movies on the big screen, the way they were intended to be seen. The hype around big screen versions draws a new crowd and re-invigorates fans that perhaps have strayed.

Staying True to Character

There are, however, risks when transitioning cartoons to the big screen. How do you balance this call for high adventure with a property designed for an 11 or 22 minute venue? Disney's *Recess: School's Out* creators and writers Paul Germain and Joe Ansolabehere discussed with *Animation World* some of their first fears regarding the excursion. "When we were asked to [make a *Recess* movie,] our gut reaction was, 'No, let's not do it.' When we started playing with the idea, we were told it had to be big — bigger than anything we've ever done before. It couldn't be a big TV show."

IN THESE TOUGH FINANCIAL DAYS, STUDIOS WILL BE WEARIER IN HOW THEY PRODUCE THESE GRAND, CINEMATIC CARTOONS.

While they attribute the move of many small screen wonders to the big screen as a sign of studio commercialism — "Genuinely we think it's kind of a commercial move on the part of studios…It has to do more with economics and business than art." — they are advocates that big screen cartoons should maintain the integrity of the original series while taking it to the next level. "[*Recess*] has always been talking about the world within the microcosm of a playground — taking small things and treating them as big… School is about more than just cramming information down kids' throats. Recess is where kids learn to interact socially. It's invaluable. We couldn't abandon that for the movie." This is in contrast to *The Rugrats Movie*, which Paul

Germain feels "betrayed the idea of the series." He can justifiably make this comment being one of the co-creators of *Rugrats* in 1989 for Nickelodeon. "The success of *The Rugrats Movie* had to do with the success of the series. It betrayed the concept in terms of both animation and story." The televised *Rugrats* revolves around the "small" events of toddlers' first experiencing the world. Many felt that the first movie strayed too far by putting the children in such frightful situations as being alone in a forest. An adventure to the back of a closet is one thing…an overnight stay in a scary wood while being stalked by a wolf is quite another. This made many parents uneasy.

Ansolabehere continues, "We didn't want [*Recess: School's Out*] to be a 3-part TV episode. It doesn't have to be the greatest adventure *ever*, but it's got to be bigger. Our shows are about the small things in life that aren't dealt with these days. If you're in film, it has to be high concept and big, but you have to make something
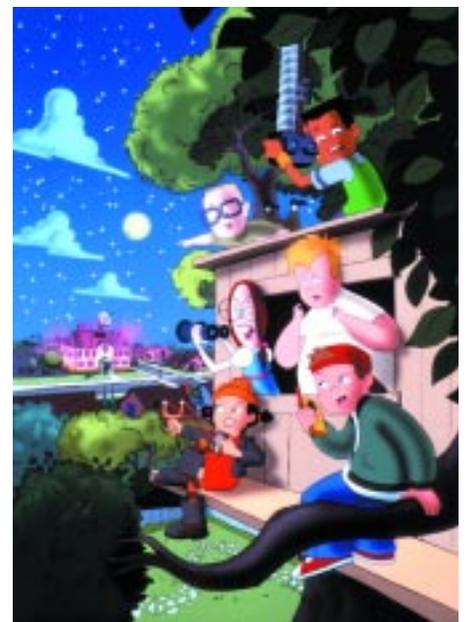
Recess: School's Out is currently a big hit at the U.S. box office. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.
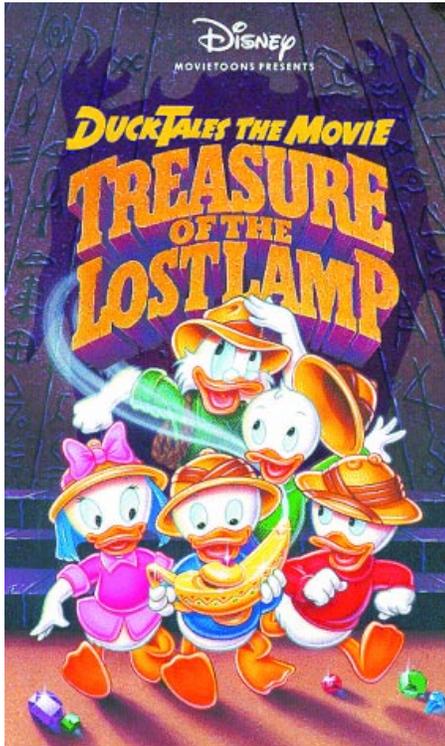
DuckTales: The Movie follows Scrooge McDuck as he takes his nephews to Egypt on a 74-minute chase to find a pyramid that contains a magic lamp. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

good within the parameters." Germain and Ansolabehere are continuing their beliefs in creating *Disney's Lloyd in Space* for ABC. It is refreshing to know that they are maintaining the Disney tradition by making good shows, by just doing what they believe in.

Against the Very Nature?

Renewed popularity in *The Jetsons* and *Tom & Jerry* in the early '90s led to the production of their respective feature-length films. Both are examples of how not to transfer half-hour icons into ninety-minute farces. However, are the adapters to blame or the general nature of these particular cartoons? Both are historically funny cartoons because the humor of their characters is sustainable within a twenty-minute storyline. But sometimes, when characters are removed from their natural habi-

tat, there is no way they can function optimally. Nevertheless, as pitiful as *Tom and Jerry: The Movie* was, there is no way Film Roman could have produced ninety minutes of a cat chasing a mouse because there is no way to sustain that humor while staying innately true to the original core of the show.

> "IF YOU'RE IN FILM, IT HAS TO BE HIGH CONCEPT AND BIG, BUT YOU HAVE TO MAKE SOMETHING GOOD WITHIN THE PARAMETERS."
> — JOE ANSOLABEHERE

Catching the Wave

While finding the delicate balance between the show's original emotional center and the demands of the theater is tough, writer/producer Alan Burnett summarizes his foray into big screen toonage very succinctly: "Making movies takes a lot longer." As a writer for Disney's *DuckTales: The Movie* and Warner Bros.' *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*, much pressure was put on him to produce a great story in a limited amount of time because the movies had to be released no later than a year and a half from the conception date. Studios tend to rush the production of big screen cartoons in order to capitalize on a show's popularity before it wanes. "In the case of *Batman: MOTP* I had my group of story editors, Paul Dini, Martin Pascoe and Michael Reaves, and what I did was write a very detailed treatment so that I could split it up amongst the four

of us and get the script out faster…which is unusual."

When producing *DuckTales: The Movie*, the Disney crew was given such a limited time to create the film that it was not possible to incorporate any songs. "So we had to make a lot more plot than we would have liked. It turned out kind of frenetic. I think it worked better on TV because of the commercials. They broke up the plot so it wasn't one long chase, which is really what the movie was."
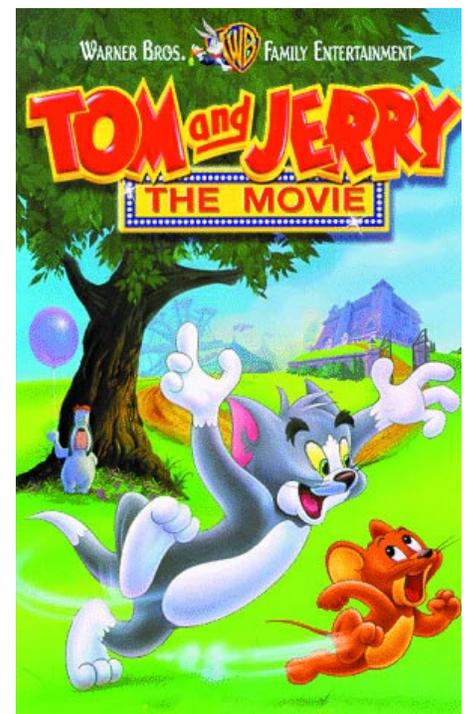
Tom and Jerry: The Movie has the popular cartoon cat and mouse assisting an orphan in her trials with a corrupt guardian. © Warner Bros.

In fact, Disney was in such a rush to release a *DuckTales* movie that the original plan was to take one of the multi-part episodes (i.e., the origins of Bubba Duck or Gizmo Duck) and release it theatrically. "[Disney staff] were going through the episodes seeing what could be a movie," Burnett explains. "When they tried blowing some of them up on a bigger screen the quality of the animation
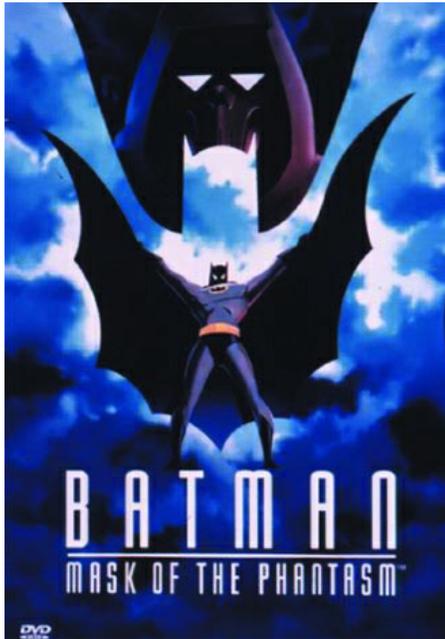
Warner Bros.' *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* feature has Batman set to solve another mystery, but fails to prepare him for the big screen. © Warner Bros. All rights reserved.

was too poor." This resulted in *DuckTales: The Movie* as we know it. The big and small screens are very different and those studios that try to create a half-hearted mishmash often fail. So while it is advantageous for studios to rush cartoon features, the result can often lead to sub-par stories and animation.

It Isn't All Gravy

Batman: MOTP experienced an extremely short theatrical run in late 1993. The movie was released less than sixteen months after *Batman: The Animated Series* premiered on Fox Kids in 1992. Burnett explains how Warner Bros. had little hope for *Batman: MOTP* in theatres, for example, in Los Angeles, it was only screened as a matinee, which is extremely atypical in such a large market: "I think part of the problem was the animation. What we were getting back from overseas was not up to par with what we wanted. The movie originally

began as a home video, and one of the executives saw some computer animation that was being applied to the movie and decided that it should go into the theatres. It turns out the computer animation was a small part of the animation we were doing. Fortunately, the animation at the climax was good which helped a great deal."

Although *Batman: MOTP* was not a disaster, it was a signpost to Warner Bros. regarding their philosophy of animated superhero movies. The subsequent *Batman* animated movie, *Batman & Mr. Freeze: Subzero* was a direct-to-video release, as was *Batman/Superman Movie* (a.k.a. *World's Finest* from the TV series), and *Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker*. Any of these movies, especially *World's Finest*, could have made it to the big screen, but Warner Bros. chose the more innocuous route by releasing them to video. "I do think there is a market for superhero or action-adventure animation out there," commented Burnett. "It just takes someone who is willing to spend the money to produce something that is really fun and good looking."

"THE PRIMARY GOAL IS TO CASH IN." – ALAN BURNETT

Nudging Along TV

There is also the case of when cartoon movies advance the storylines of their TV shows in an exponential fashion. This can serve as a boost to a show which is becoming stale, or to a writing staff in need of new plots. Case examples of this are *The Transformers: The Movie* and *G. I.*
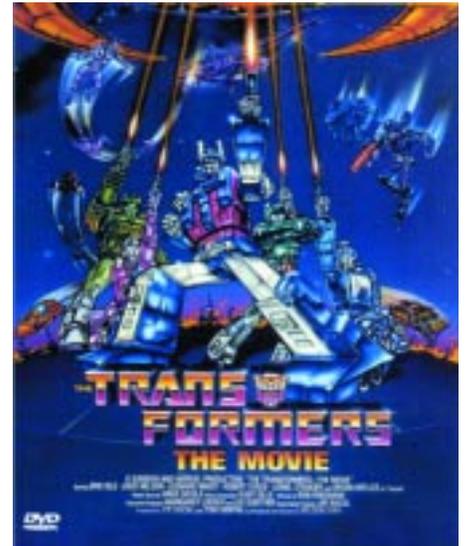
As the tagline goes, "Beyond good. Beyond evil. Beyond your wildest imagination." *The Transformers: The Movie* succeeds in furthering the series' development. © DEG.

Joe: The Movie. Within twenty minutes of *The Transformers: The Movie*, the two "stars" of the movie, Optimus Prime and Megatron, kill each other in battle. The result of their deaths and the onslaught of new villain Unicron led to a new breed of Autobots and Decepticons, led by Rodimus Prime and Galvatron respectively. This radically altered *The Transformers* TV series for the remainder of its tenure.

In these tough financial days, studios will be wearier in how they produce these grand, cinematic cartoons. But the *Rugrats* features, along with the *Pokemon* movies, *Beavis and Butthead Do America*, *Digimon: The Movie*, *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* and now *Recess: School's Out* have all been at least respectable at the box office if not smash hits, which means, of course, that there will be more! The brightest beacon on the horizon looks to be *The Powerpuff Girls* movie. It will be the first movie produced at Cartoon Network's new studio and

is slated for Summer 2002. Once again under the crush of high quality demands and little time, Cartoon Network is taking a gamble that the *Girls* will still be hot in 2002. If it were released this summer, at what may be the peak of the show's popularity, it would be a guaranteed success…however, what results it yields in 2002, will be determined by the fickle demands of the pre-teen set.

In the meantime, fans can enjoy their favorite shows on television and hope that one day they will be able to experience "the greatest adventure ever!" for that show. As Alan Burnett reminds us, "The primary goal is to cash in. It's a fine goal as far as I'm concerned. The problem is that [studios] want something as quickly as possible. You always want more time to make these films right." Whether animated or from the faster-paced live-action production realm, as Burnett is demonstrating through his involvement in the forthcoming *Batman Beyond* movie, fans will be waiting, and hoping, that their favorite show is next on the big screen gravy train.

Gerard Raiti, a native of Baltimore currently residing in Nashville, has reported on animation, Broadway musicals and comic books for various publications including Fandomshop.com and Newsweek. *He also holds the Diploma of the Royal Schools of Music, U.K. in classical piano and music.*

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

Monthly provocative, drunken, idiotic ramblings from the North...

Blame the USA

by Chris Robinson

"...[A]nimators wanted to keep cartoons in Hollywood."

One look at this quote from Rick DeMott's article, "Picketing In Front Of PBS! Just Blame It On Canada?" (DeMott, 5.02) in January 2000's *Animation World Magazine* and one would figure that citizens of the United States of America invented the process and development of animation (a.k.a. cartoons). Sorry, but I think it was a Frenchman, and given that Canada is French and English, we have more right to claim 'cartoons' than Hollywood. And heck, given the amount of Canadians working down there including Kricfalusi, Steve Williams, Nik whatever his name is who creates those nasty Disney villains, Canadians be the ones keeping this machine a float. Now Hollywood does deserve some credit. Ya all certainly kidified animation. No denying that. Thank you. Bravo.

Read recently that Americans were pissed off that Canadians were taking jobs away. Seems last January PBS said they were gonna go with Toronto-based Nelvana as creators of their animation schedule. Rightly, American animators were freaked to the point of protest. However, the source of these targets is all wrong. If you wanna find a source of blame take a look at free trade. This has been the bane of the existence for both our countries. Nelvana can compete because they receive tax credits from the provincial government. These tax credits allow them to lower their costs and provide a better offer. You wanna talk about wasted tax dollars, just take a look at Canada where tax credits are being provided with the supposed intent of encouraging Canadian productions. Unfortunately, none of this stuff is really benefiting Canadian 'culture' (and I ain't talking Margaret Atwood books. She stinks. It could be SCTV or *Kids in The Hall*...just something with definable Canadian roots) as such. Sure it's creating a few jobs, but it's just service work for American shows...and in the end that means one less Canadian show on the air thanks to PBS and our provincial government. I also wonder why Canada suddenly bears the brunt of the blame when Mexico, Vietnam, Korea and other countries have been taking jobs away for years. Course I guess it's easier to blame a fellow cracker for your troubles. Then again, ain't many crackers left to blame.

From a Canadian perspective, what I find funny, is this belief that Canadians have a special animated gift. Shit, ya think studios are coming up here for our unique talent? Disney came to Canada because of tax breaks. Studios hire Canadians because we are essentially cheap labour. No, it's not near being a sweatshop but it's really the same idea.

But what's the anger for? The jobs you're all losing are cog in the wheel jobs. Christ...you can use as much brainpower driving a cab (a dream of mine while we're on the topic). Additionally, for decades Canada has watched many of its finest (ummm...let's take Mario Lemieux or Ted Lindsay) and shittiest people (Kricfalusi?, Celine Dion, Shania Twain) lured to the U.S. by that damn dollar.

I've always felt that a minority of Americans are akin to the special ed. class of the world. Always a little behind...never quite getting it. Well, folks, as much as I sympathise with some of ya, you're getting it now. Welcome to a world that's been eaten up by your 'owners' for decades. Sure you're worried about feeding your kids, keeping your house etc., but what you gotta realise is that your material abundance (couple o' cars, all sorts of crap) has come at the expense of other people 'round this here world. Shit, they can't feed their kids...can't find homes...can't even imagine cars, computers and swimming pools. Some of these very people live in America! Yeah, sure we've all heard the soaps before and sheeeet I'm as material as the rest of you, but please, please, please keep your whining to yourselves. Do you have ANY idea how fortunate you are?

Every damn corner of the

world I visit bears an icon of America at its worst, notably McDonalds and Disney. See you've got your damn jobs at the cost of someone else, somewhere else. When I was in Vietnam and other countries I saw less and less inclination toward encouraging original material that speaks for the cultural voices and an increasing reliance on, for example, Disney films. Ya know what that means…that means governments et al don't want to encourage original productions (see Nelvana/PBS deal). Instead they fork out for distribution rights to Hollywood junk. It's cheaper to buy American product than to sweat trying to make something a little different.

This cultural colonisation is of course especially bad in Canada. Everywhere I turn, I see a Home Depot, Wal-Mart, Denny's, Starbucks and Disney store. Even the fabled Montreal Canadiens, once a symbol of cultural and linguistic diversity, are now owned by an American! Big deal you say? Well, considering they've put many Canadian businesses and families out of work, it is a BIG DEAL.

Now I'm sure many of you are fine people who maybe even voted for Nader (gee, that turned out well), but it's time you opened up your perpetually narrow geographic eyes to see that the rest of the world has long suffered at the hands of corporate America. Welcome to the club.

Is there a bright side? Shit ya…you now got a brain dead duffus as your leader and he's damn eager to start a killin' folks. If there's a good thing about killing folks, it means job openings.

And while we're talking about jobs, give us back our hockey teams!

Love,
Your kindly neighbour of the North

Hottie Animator o' da Month
Sonia Bridge. The most determined animator I ever met…and she's hot…and she's Canadian.

The Animation Pimp is sponsored by Canadian squirrels. Thanks to Dickie Meltzer for loathing the fuggin' States before I was born.

Chris Robinson is a writer, festival director, programmer, junky and has been called the John Woo of diplomacy. His hobbies include horseback riding, pudpulling, canoeing and goat thumping.

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

Cartoons Aren't Real!
Ren And Stimpy in Review

by Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman

The idolatry, accolades and endearments are long over; so, for the most part, are the recriminations, accusations and bitter parting shots. Animation insiders who aligned their sympathies with either camp, as well as the fans who chose sides, have moved on to different interests. *The Ren and Stimpy Show*, animation's version of the Dreyfus affair, ceased production in 1995, and today it lies buried under strata of imported anime, several incarnations of the Cartoon Network and the recent small-screen triumphs of Nickelodeon and Disney TV. For those who followed this unique, creator-driven series from its premiere in August of 1991 through the controversial and contentious firing of head man John Kricfalusi in September of 1992, all that remains are memories, regrets and whatever episodes were handily captured on videotape.

No Dead Ringers

Still, the past cannot be erased or forgotten; there *was* a Ren and Stimpy, not to mention a George Liquor, a Mr. Horse and a Muddy Mudskipper. The visual style of American animation was coated with Spumco for more than a decade, and the cultural mainstream of the country was tweaked as well. Two clones were spawned almost immediately (allowing for the vagaries of production schedules), Donovan Cook's *Two Stupid Dogs* and Disney's *Shnookums and Meat*. Even *The Simpsons*, Matt Groening's primetime hit, found occasion to cameo the pathological pets; *ad captandum vulgus*. The commentaries, magazine covers, campus viewing parties and merchandising were omnipresent, and the "Log" song vied with "Happy, Happy, Joy, Joy" as a cultural signifier of cool. With one brief star turn, a scrawny, dyspeptic Chihuahua and an obese, brain-damaged cat demolished the previous forty years of commercial animation. We saw Superman's fists crash through walls of concrete, and we winced as the chips flew by at hyperspeed; as we turned to peer through the hazy dust of that destruction, Superman shouted: "YOU EEDIOT!" and vomited up a hairball at our feet.

There have been many

Donovan Cook's *Two Stupid Dogs* chronicled the irreverent adventures of a big dog and a little dog. TM & © 2001 Cartoon Network. An AOL Time Warner Company. All Rights Reserved.

attempts to explain the appeal and popularity of this show, but in keeping with postmodern culture and our abbreviated attention spans, all of them were either done at the time of Ren and Stimpy's ascendancy or shortly after the exile of Good King John — a revisionist view is in order! The show has been described by analysts and pundits as "Tex Avery on drugs," a maniacal evolutionary offshoot of the classic Looney Tunes, a postmodern take on Hanna-Barbera kidvid, or some posthumous stepchild of Bob Clampett's rule-shattering mayhem. These are not unwarranted comparisons if one considers the wild takes and casual violence of the Avery cartoons or the emotional *sturm und drang* that boiled through Clampett's creations until the force of that maelstrom distorted their bodies.

Still, the differences between John K.'s cartoons and those that influenced them are considerable. For one thing, Avery's attitude toward his characters was far too impersonal, and the damage done to them left little impact on the viewer. Clampett's characters had an emotional life, but tended

to behave like amphetamine-drenched buzz saws when angered, frightened or bent on aggression; this played into Clampett's tendency to direct cartoons at an almost preternatural pace. In truth, while elements of these can be seen — animation does tend to build on its precedents, and Clampett was Kricfalusi's spiritual mentor — *The Ren and Stimpy Show* was built on a much deeper foundation where superficial comparison to animated precedents does not apply. Although Ren once assured his fatuous feline friend that cartoons weren't real, John Kricfalusi brought to them an uncomfortable touch of reality that had no forerunner in modern animation.

Pain…Real Pain…

What had never been explored before (at least not to this depth) was the concept that cartoons and their characters could harbor a deep, resonant pathology that infected both body and

spirit. This is not the same, nor is it as simplistic, as stating that John K. showed us "the dark side of cartoons." Ren and Stimpy could be bright and funny, and many of their adventures were more endearing than disturbing. However, the dog and cat were organic to a degree that separated them from any other animated creations to date. This allowed Kricfalusi and the Spumco crew to inflict grotesqueries upon the pair and their supporting cast that rivaled — and surpassed — those dreamed up by animators such as Jan Svankmajer. Nickelodeon's frantic interference and censorship prevented viewers from seeing tongues torn out and eaten (*Sven Hoek*), disembowelment (*Rubber Nipple Salesmen*), exsanguination by a giant leech (*Nurse Stimpy*) and the quaffing of water from a dirty toilet (*Big House Blues*). As it was, the show's fans got to enjoy mucus, farts, parasites, nasal hair and sundry other effluvium in abundance. This was only the

Disney's *The Shnookums and Meat Funny Cartoon Show* first aired in 1993 featuring original music by Drew Neumann and Nathan Wang. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

beginning.

The Ren and Stimpy Show featured filth, illness, disease and mutilation to an unprecedented degree, making these horrors an integral part of the show. Close-ups and held shots of parasites, blood-rilled eyes and hairy, inflamed skin often resembled plates from pathology textbooks, highlighting the fragility of our flesh and the insidious diseases and injuries that threaten it daily. In *Ren's Toothache*, exposed nerve endings writhe in the dog's pestilent gum sockets. Consumed by sickness in *Nurse Stimpy*, a glazed Ren sweats feverishly from his pores, as mucus sputters in his nostrils. Mr. Horse's fall in *Fire Dogs* violates the rule of cartoon invulnerability; he shatters his spine. As with those textbooks, it is hard to stop turning the pages to see the next sickening insult to our mortality; we retain our morbid fascination with the overturned car, the autopsy table, the visceral thrill of the gory crime scene.

Nor was illness confined to the body; Ren Hoek was violently psychotic, and Kricfalusi complained of how Nick executives wheedled him to give the Chihuahua a softer side. Ren may have been easily frazzled, bad-tempered and abusive by nature, but in episodes where he actually lost his mind, it was the result of a slow, cumulative process that took most of the episode to develop. In *Space Madness,* Ren goes slowly mad over the course of a galactic journey. When the boys enlist *In The Army*, the rigors of military life drive Ren insane late in the cartoon. Witness Ren's stunning descent into menacing lunacy at the conclusion of *Sven Hoek.* Only after his fragile sanity was overwhelmed would Ren detonate

into a screaming klaxon, neon-pink eyes dilating into twin novae inches above his jagged, monolithic teeth. Contrast these examples with Bob Clampett's *The Great Piggy Bank Robbery* (a favorite, incidentally, of Kricfalusi's): Daffy Duck begins the cartoon in a manic state, engages the action by knocking himself out, and never slows down until the finale; we are always laughing. It is Ren, and not Daffy, who illustrates the true process by which rationality is gradually replaced by raging disorganization, and the effect on us is vastly different. Stimpy underwent a similar meltdown in *Nurse Stimpy*, but the full range of the slobbering cat's repressed sadism was best displayed in *Stimpy's Inventions*, a parable of mind control that must rank as one of the most chilling cartoons ever animated.

The Ren and Stimpy Show featured filth, illness, disease and mutilation to an unprecedented degree...

The series boasts countless examples of bodily wastes and fluids lumped and puddled about in flippant denial of the paranoid AIDS nation we had become by the 1990s. Sven Hoek slaps a used, bloody bandage on Stimpy's delighted nose, and soon the two are both waist — or is it waste — deep in Stimpy's litter box, sharing "a private moment." Stimpy, in another notorious episode, gives "birth" to an animated fart, perhaps the symbolic love child of

Stimpy and his canine housemate (Kricfalusi "outed" the couple, as if that was necessary, in an interview with *The San Francisco Examiner* on January 28, 1997). It matters little if Ren and Stimpy were gay; it matters considerably that Ren and Stimpy were often diseased or exposed to copious bodily fluids. How did all of this contribute to the overwhelming popularity of the *Ren and Stimpy Show*? After all, illness and insanity are typically unpleasant subjects let alone a template for what were allegedly children's cartoons. The answer lies not in comparison to other cartoons, but in comparison to another medium, that of folk and fairy tales.

A Modern (and Gross) Fairy Tale

Over the past seventy years or so, psychologists (primarily of the psychoanalytic school) reinterpreted many of the world's most popular fairy tales, finding in them a common thread: they were believed to be abstract representations of fears, needs and anxieties common to both children and adults. It was through these symbolic tales that powerlessness could be confronted, anxieties (including sexual ones) safely expressed and dealt with, and wishes fulfilled. Chief among the proponents of this theory were

An unlikely friendship between two strange and unique characters helped make John Kricfalusi's *Ren and Stimpy* popular viewing for many folks. ©Viacom International, Inc. All rights reserved.

Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and more recently, Bruno Bettleheim (who saw these tales as a way to negotiate growth through developmental stages). In this way, for example, George Liquor can be viewed as a grinning, evil gingerbread witch to Ren and Stimpy's Hansel and Gretel, or perhaps the devouring Oedipal figure (Liquor "owned" the pair in at least two episodes) of psychoanalytic lore.

The world of the early 1990s was an anxious and uncertain place. The aforementioned AIDS epidemic spread across the globe like some malignant viral stealth fighter; by the time of Kricfalusi's ouster in 1992 the disease had claimed 200,000 American lives. Frightening new viruses such as Ebola were sifting out of the rainforests. The fall of Communism brought instability and conflict to a suddenly fragmented Eastern Europe; genocide in that area and Africa permeated the headlines. America led an

international force into the explosive Middle East where suspicions of chemical, biological and nuclear "weapons of mass destruction" ran rampant. The term "New World Order" was bandied about in the media and the White House but few could define what this actually meant or what it held for the future. While we waited to see what came next, terrorist activity increased around the globe. If American society was ever prepared to accept revisionist fairy tales, this final decade of the millennium — portentous for this fact alone — was the ideal time.

Kricfalusi's *Ren and Stimpy* shorts thus struck several resonant chords among both children and adults. On a surface level, they were funny, subversive cartoons with an offbeat retro look, but a deeper examination revealed them to be an encapsulation of some of our darkest fears, ones in which the soul and body are powerless against a world out of bal-

ance. Perhaps the most striking example of this was the episode *Black Hole,* which finds the duo stranded on a bizarre, hostile planet; they begin to mutate into progressively hideous versions of themselves before imploding at the end of the cartoon. John Kricfalusi became a folk teller for the 1990s, however unwitting or subconscious the process might have been. Kricfalusi's genius was twofold: not only did he tap into the collective unconscious of a nation and retrieve its *angst,* he then circumvented the prevailing studio system and prosocial miasma that hung over television animation in order to mirror these fears back to us. Nickelodeon, which was probably expecting something more in the spirit of *The Angry Beavers* or *CatDog,* was little prepared for cartoons that carried such elemental, archetypal force; their response was to censor and protect. Yet, there was no other way to tell these stories; fairy tales, which have been with us since the 1500s, are cruel, frightening and capricious by their very nature. In the history of American animation, only Kricfalusi and Walt Disney fully recognized this fact. *The Ren and Stimpy Show* was a landmark in animation history, but few contemporary critics seem to have noted how deeply its roots were buried in history — and in ourselves.

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.

Ahoy! An Intelligent Children's Show At Last!

by Chris Robinson

All images © BBC Worldwide Ltd.

The *Yoho Ahoy* cast of characters aboard the pirate ship Rubber Duck.

Now most of you know that I'm not exactly a mainstream animation fan, however now that I've got a youngster I certainly watch a lot more kid's animation then I did. Frankly, before I became a parent the idea of a TV show made for babies and toddlers kind of sickened me. But now I understand that it's impossible to hang with the kid all day. TV becomes tempting. Of course we're careful. We guide what the boy watches. As such, I've become fully exposed to this new world of kid's TV. Honestly, most of it has been fairly unimpressive. *Teletubbies* was good for a lark, however, I want to strangle most of the sickeningly sweet characters that parade across the screen.

Thankfully, this past fall in my post-festival leisure time, I discovered this bizarre little show that takes place on a pirate ship. This puppet animation show features a gang of little pirates who say nothing more than "Yoho" and "Ahoy." The first thing that struck me about

the show was the obvious Buster Keaton influence on the antics and dead pan glares of the cast. At the same time, each five-minute episode finds the characters, very much like Keaton, using their material environment to solve a problem.

Ah, What Gentlemen

Every episode focuses on one of the ship's crew who have outlandish, nautical inspired names: Bilge, the bitter, peg-legged captain; Booty, the snotty princess type; Grog, the handless cook; Cutlass, the butch pirate; Poop, the always yawning deckhand; the innovative Jones; Swab; Plunder; Plank; Flamingo; a cat and some rats.

Yoho Ahoy is the brainchild

of U.K company, Consortium of Gentlemen (COG), specifically Mole Hill, Mark Slater and producer Julian Roberts. Mole Hill might be known to some in the animation world through his work on *The Plague*. Prior to *Yoho,* Hill and Slater worked on the children's series, *PB Bear*. While the trio have worked together for years, COG was established specifically for *Yoho Ahoy*. While the company has a number of ideas in development, *Yoho* is their only series under the COG banner to date.

The primary creator of the show is Mole Hill who came up with the concept and design. *Yoho Ahoy* was inspired by the birth of his daughter, a love of pirates, sleep deprivation and the awareness of "how cute babies

Captain Bilge spies Cat on deck as he vies for a fishbone.

Grog the cook with shipmate Jones awaits the approach of some rats.

On board the ship, Booty the princess serves tea to Plank while Flamingo looks on.

can be." Says Hill, "I've always liked pirates and wanted to do a series combining pirates, babies and French rococo painting." Hill also acknowledges the silent comedy influence: "I wanted it to be like a Buster Keaton film."

Slater and Hill then worked out the world of characters and defined the universe that they lived in. According to producer, Julian Roberts, "The primary aim of the show is to entertain and amuse its audience. What children should take away from the show is the understanding that although rubbing along with your peer group can be difficult, it can also be fun."

The Two Word Production

When *Yoho Ahoy* is in full production there are about 15 people working. There are set builders, three animators, an editor, a musician and a small pool of writers who work with Mark Slater. Both Slater and Hill serve as directors. It takes about two months to make each episode: three weeks to shoot, two weeks to edit and about a week to do sound.

While COG is well aware

of the parameters of the BBC (i.e. no violence), Roberts notes that they have a great deal of freedom. "All scripts and storyboards have to be submitted to BBC before shooting but it's rare for comments to be made other than, 'Okay.' This is not due to any slackness at BBC, it's just that we are on the same wavelength."

A cynic might say that the lack of dialogue is an easy way to sell to an international market. Of course, that's true, but the little pirates also communicate a wide array of emotions through the tone of their voice in speaking those two words, and also through very expressive body language. One can't help but feel the COG group have slightly higher ambitions. Says Roberts: "There is no art,' someone said, 'Without the resistance of the medium.' Mole and Mark don't like to make things easy for themselves. Maybe if you up the resistance of the medium you up the quality of the art?"

To hear such words come from the mouths and minds of television animators, brings warmth to my small, blackened heart. If

only more TV folks could follow the lead of this innovative, intelligent crew. So watch *Yoho Ahoy* and pray that this merry trio of troublemakers makes more great television for me and the boy.

And by the way, Grog lost his hands in a fondue accident before the series began.

A QuickTime movie clip available for download online at: http://www.awn.com/mag/issue 5.12/5.12pages/robinsonyohoahoy.php3.

Chris Robinson is the artistic director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival.

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

Fresh from the Festivals:
February 2001's Film Reviews

by Jon Hofferman

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.

This Month:
La Danse des Asperges Sarrasines (The Dance of the Saracen Asparagus) (1999), 4.5 min., directed by Christophe Le Borgne, France. Info: Cartooneurs Associes, 162 rue du Chateau, 75014 Paris, France. Tel: 33-1-45422356. Fax: 33-1-43206470.
Fur & Feathers (2000), 5.5 min., directed by Maria Vasilkovsky, USA. Info: Maria Vasilkovsky, P.O. Box 31035, Los Angeles, CA 90031, USA. Tel: 323-221-3797. E-mail: mvasilkovsky@yahoo.com.
Og møllen Drejer (Run of the Mill) (2000), 8 min., directed by Børge Ring, Denmark/Netherlands. Info: A.Film, Aase Moresco, Tagensvej

85 F, DK 2200 Copenhagen, Denmark. Tel: 45-35-82-70-60. Fax: 45-35-82-70-61. Email: mail@afilm.dk. URL: http://www.afilm.suite.dk.
Ring of Fire (2000), 15 min., directed by Andreas Hykade, Germany. Info: GAMBIT, Alexander Funk, Konigsale 43, D-71638 Ludwigsburg, Germany. Tel: 49-7141 125-179. Fax: 49-7141-125-175. E-mail: a.funk@gambit-film.de. URL: http://www.gambit-ringoffire.de/.
Still Life with Animated Dogs (2001), 27 min., directed by Paul Fierlinger, USA. Info: Susan Senk PR, Susan Senk, 18 East 16th Street, New York, NY, USA. Tel: 212-206-8974. Fax: 212-229-0266. Email: SusanSenkPR@msn.com.

Don't forget to visit us online at: http://www.awn.com/mag to view a QuickTime movie clip from each film.

The Dance of the Saracen Asparagus

In this humorous first work, director Christophe Le Borgne goes inside the brain of a psychotherapy patient as he confronts the vegetative demons from his childhood. Pictured as a downtrodden figure in a prison suit alone in a barren black and white landscape, the protagonist — guided by the clinical, soothing voice of the therapist — must deal with the incursions of an increas-

ingly hostile environment. Eruptions and sinkholes gradually give way to the eponymous hordes of asparagus, which wreak their vengeance in a variety of multi-hued forms. Yet the little man survives the assault and, shaken but triumphant, prepares for the next step toward his liberation.

Le Borgne's film, made with pencil and aquavel on paper, again demonstrates the ability of simple drawings to create a very particular world and to serve as a powerful tool in dealing with sometimes recondite subject matter (and threatening vegetables). *The Dance* is helped immeasurably by a carefully synchronized score composed by Agnès Alouges and performed by a small chamber group of winds, strings and percussion and the voice of Catherine Mouchet.

The Dance of the Saracen Asparagus, directed by Christophe Le Borgne. © Christophe Le Borgne.

The director studied engineering at the Ecole Centrale de Lyon and, since 1996, has been a member of Cartooneurs Associés, where he has worked on several series for French TV. He also publishes his cartoons in magazines. *The Dance of the Saracen Asparagus* was screened at Annecy 2000 and a number of other festivals.

Fur & Feathers

Using the low-tech medium of paint on glass, Maria

Fur & Feathers, **directed by Maria Vasilkovsky. ©
Maria Vasilkovsky.**

Run of the Mill, **directed by Borge Ring. © A.Film A/S.**

Vasilkovsky has created an accomplished and evocative, if somewhat disjointed, romantic fable in which a man and a woman — and their animal alter-egos — go through a series of physical and emotional transformations on their way to a soaringly happy ending. While the particulars of this dysfunctional love story remain a bit murky, the often striking visuals display the kinds of pleasing metamorphoses, altered perspectives and shifting relations between figure and ground that distinguish this especially fluid method of animating. Rendered in shades of blue that give the whole an appropriately nocturnal feel, the film features a tango-like score by John and Kassandra Woodring Hawk that is an apt accompaniment to the animalistic mating dance.

Maria Vasilkovsky was born and raised in Moscow and, after emigrating to the U.S., attended the Rhode Island School of Design and Cal Arts, from which she received an MFA in 1998. *Fur & Feathers* is her thesis project. Her influences include Alexander Petrov (*The Cow*), Mark Shagal and Caroline Leaf, to whom she gives credit for her technique. Vasilkovsky is based in Los Angeles, where she works as a freelance animator.

Run of the Mill

An earnest and at times somewhat heavy-handed and overly literal anti-drug film, *Run of the Mill* employs traditional cel animation, supplemented by Toons and Photoshop, to look at the effects of drug addiction on a typical nuclear family. The main character is a young boy who succumbs to the seductive powers of chemical stimulation, growing up inside a bubble that allows him to float above the prosaic events going on around him. This symbol also effectively helps to portray in stark terms the family dynamics of the situation, as the ever-growing bubble becomes the center of everyone's life — an insular world that the boy's increasingly desperate parents are unable to penetrate.

Veteran Danish director Borge Ring uses a pallette of greens, browns and yellows and simple line drawings to tell his story of unrealized potential and frustrated love. In his notes for the film, Ring refers to an autobiographical element, and it's possible that both the film's power and its weaknesses derive from his own experiences as a parent and his closeness to the subject.

Originally trained as a jazz musician, the director — who also composed the music for *Run of the Milll* — has worked on a large number of shorts, commercials and features, including *Heavy Metal* (1981) and *Valhalla* (1986). In 1984 he won an Academy Award for *Anna and Bella.* He cites Norm Ferguson, Art Babbitt, Ward Kimball and Eric Goldberg as favorite directors and John Hubley's *Moonbird* and *Crac,* by Frédéric Back, as two favorite films.

Ring of Fire

Ring of Fire is an impressive exercise in personal iconography, a kind of cubist Western that deals obliquely with male bonding, sex, masculinity and loss of innocence. Director Andreas Hykade employs an exaggerated black-and-white drawing style more commonly found in comics to excellent effect, creating a strange and ominous landscape in which two "cowboys" engage in a series of ritualized encounters. Traditional Western icons take on unexpected Expressionist forms, while an intermittent first-person voiceover explains little but suggests much. ("We never fell. We never even stumbled. We just waited for the spirits to rise from out of the ground.")

The film was made in

widescreen format (!) using a combination of ink on cels and 3D animation over a period of about two years. The terrific score, which incorporates traditional Western themes and is a perfect blend of the heroic and the ironic, was written and performed by Steppan Kahles. *Ring of Fire* has screened at major festivals around the world and has won a clutch of awards, including the Grand Prize at Ottawa and Special Jury Prizes in Hamburg and Rome.

Andreas Hykade studied animation at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg. *Ring of Fire*, his first professional film, was produced by GAMBIT-Michael Jungfleisch, with which he's had an association since 1994. The film was funded by MFG Film Fund Baden-Württemberg and the German Federal Film Board and Ministry of the Interior.

Still Life with Animated Dogs

Paul Fierlinger's autobiographical *Still Life with Animated Dogs* is a funny, bittersweet memoir that uses the dogs he has owned throughout his life as an organizing principle to explore his

Still Life with Animated Dogs, directed by Paul Fierlinger. © ITVS.

***Ring of Fire*, directed by Andreas Hykade. © Gambit Films.**

personal universe. Fierlinger's story (which was previously explored in his *Drawn from Memory*) extends from Czechoslovakia during the darkest days of the Communist regime through his current existence with his wife and collaborator, Sandra, in the eastern U. S. Moving between present and past, the film touches on such topics as the nature of love, political oppression and artistic freedom, as well as the animator's relationships with a variety of quadrapeds and bipeds.

Still Life features the same whimsical cel animation — marked by loosely drawn characters and blocks and splashes of color — that distinguishes *Drawn from Memory* and Fierlinger's other films like *Drawn from Life* for the upstart Oxygen network. It's the perfect complement to the animator's wry and frequently rueful voiceover, which has the eloquence and complexity of a written essay. Sandra Fierlinger served as painter, assistant animator and production manager, while the sound effects and music were provided by John Avarese, who has worked with the Fierlingers on at least a dozen films.

Paul Fierlinger has been a professional independent animator since 1958, when he made his first TV commercial in Prague.

Since then he has produced roughly 1000 films of varying lengths, including the *Teeny Little Super Guy* series for *Sesame Street*. He received an Oscar nomination in 1979 for his short, *It's So Nice to Have a Wolf Around the House*. *Still Life with Animated Dogs* was funded by ITVS and had its premiere on PBS on March 29, at 10:30 pm.

Jon Hofferman is an independent filmmaker, writer and graphic designer, as well as the creator of the Classical Composers Poster (www.carissimi.com). He has a B.A. in Philosophy & Religion and an M.F.A. from UCLA's School of Film & Television. Appropriately enough, he is currently working on a documentary about the nature of religious experience.

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

New from Japan:
Anime Film Reviews
by Fred Patten

Outlaw Star was directed by Mitsuru Hongo. © Bandai Entertainment.

Around 1995, Japanese animation (anime) began pouring into North America, Europe and across the globe in video form. Most of these titles were unknown outside of Japan and never covered by animation journals. Whether a title is highly popular or very obscure, a high-quality theatrical feature or a cheap and unimaginative direct-to-video release, they all look the same on a store shelf. Therefore, *Animation World Magazine* will regularly review several new releases (including re-releases not previously covered) that have some merit and about which our readers should know.

Outlaw Star.
TV series, 1998. Director: Mitsuru Hongo. V.1 - V.13, video, 2 episodes/50 minutes each. $24.98 subtitled/$19.98 dubbed. V.1 - V.3, DVD (bilingual), V.1 & V.2, 9 episodes/225 minutes each; V.3, 8 episodes/200 minutes. $44.98. Distributor: Bandai Entertainment.

TV animation has been trying for over twenty years to come up with a good counterpart to the original *Star Wars*. The 26-episode

Outlaw Star, developed by director Mitsuru Hongo and writers Hajime Yadate, Takehito Ito and Katsuhiro Chiba, based on Ito's 1994-95 comic book, arguably comes closest in spirit, including the Lucas-authorized 1985 *Droids* and *The Ewoks*. The setting is our distant future in which the whole galaxy has been colonized, although the dominant culture is Chinese with "science" that includes Tao mysticism and feng shui. Gene Starwind and Jim Hawking are two orphaned buddies running a cheap repair service on a frontier planet. Gene, 20, is the cocky brawn of the team, while Jim, a precocious 11-year-old genius (a combination of *Treasure Island*'s Jim Hawkins and scientist Stephen Hawking), is the brains. They get caught up in the outlaw Hilda's search for a fabled galactic treasure. An "outlaw" is anyone strong and free enough to live outside the authority of either the officious Stellar Police or the rapacious space crime guilds. Gene, Jim and Melfina (an android girl) have just been taken by Hilda to a hidden experimental spaceship which includes clues to the treasure, when she is killed before

she can explain any more. The inexperienced trio find themselves on the run in the *Outlaw Star* from Hilda's old enemies including both the law and the pirates, as they take on interplanetary salvage jobs, enter a spaceship race, and generally just survive long enough to acquire new companions (including an obligatory furry alien pal, the cat-girl Aisha) to augment their crew, while they gradually decipher the clues that will lead to the treasure of the Galactic Leyline. The plot allows for padding in the middle, which is well used to flesh out personalities and allow some character growth while exploring exotic planets. The dialogue is constantly witty and there is plenty of excellently-direct-

Outlaw Star is TV animation's answer to Star Wars. © Bandai Entertainment.

Cardcaptors is the U.S. version of Cardcaptor Sakura. © Pioneer Entertainment.

ed suspenseful action, whether escaping from a space pirate ambush or a giant sun's gravity well. The story includes frequent surprises (nobody expected Hilda to die so early, if at all) and the jazz-themed mood music by Kou Ohtani is *tres* cool (I am listening to the soundtrack CD as I write this review). If you haven't already guessed, well, *Outlaw Star* is one of my favorites in over twenty years of watching anime. The series was shown on Japanese TV from January 8 - June 26, 1998, and has just been added to The Cartoon Network's Toonami block starting this January 15th. What took them so long? (Production by Sunrise.)

[While the DVD collections are untitled (merely called *DVD Collection 1, 2* and *3*), the 13 video titles are as follows: V.1, Outlaw Star. V.2, Into Burning Space. V.3, Beast Girl, Ready to Pounce. V.4, Creeping Evil. V.5, A Journey of Adventure...Huh? V.6, Adrift in Subspace. V.7, Advance Guard from an Alien World. V.8, The Seven Emerge. V.9, Between Life and Machine. V.10, Law and Lawlessness. V.11, The Dragon's

Tombstone. V.12, Hot Springs Planet Tenrei. V.13, Labyrinth of Despair.]

Cardcaptors. V.1, Tests of Courage. V.2, Power Match. V.3, Misdirections. V.4, New Lessons. (More to come.) (The edited American version.) TV series, 1998-2000. Supervising Director: Morio Asaka. 60 minutes. Price & format: $14.98 dubbed VHS/$24.98 dubbed DVD. Distributor: Pioneer Entertainment.

Cardcaptor Sakura is clearly designed for young girls. When it was acquired for American TV to ride the *Pokemon* bandwagon, the decision was made to re-edit it to appeal to both boys and girls. It was renamed *Cardcaptors*, and it began with what was episode #8 in Japan, "Sakura's Rival," introducing Li. Other changes include Americanizing many names (Sakura is Sakura Avalon; Tomoyo is Madison Taylor), and turning Li's sister into a jealous girl-friend. Only 17 *Cardcaptors* episodes were re-produced for the first season (shown on KidsWB! from June 17 to December 2, 2000; now in reruns), in a completely different order. The two versions are so different that it was not possible to combine them in the same video release with just different English and Japanese audio tracks. Instead Pioneer and Nelvana have agreed on two separate DVD releases. *Cardcaptor Sakura*, uncut with four episodes per video, is available only in Japanese with English subtitles. *Cardcaptors* is only in the English dub, three episodes per video.

Watch Cardcaptor Sakura is see how Cardcaptors was edited for the U.S. TV market. © Pioneer Entertainment.

Cardcaptor Sakura. V.1, The Clow. V.2, Everlasting Memories. V.3, Friends Forever. V.4, Sakura, Fight!

(Later volumes to come.) (The unedited Japanese version.) TV series, 1998-2000. Supervising Director: Morio Asaka. 100 minutes. Price & format: $24.98 subtitled VHS/$29.98 subtitled DVD. Distributor: Pioneer Entertainment.

This DVD release is bannered as "The Original Japanese Uncut Version." That is an important distinction. Pioneer is also releasing "The American Cut Version" (produced by Nelvana for KidsWB!) which is titled *Cardcaptors*. The two are quite different.

Cardcaptor Sakura is the latest big hit in the Japanese "magical little girl" genre that began with *Sally the Little Witch* in 1966. (*Sailor Moon* is a well-known 1990s example.) This is also another winner from the mega-popular CLAMP team of 4 woman cartoonists who have created several of the most popular comic book series of the 1990s, which have been turned into even more popular anime series; *Rayearth* and *X*, to name two. The *Cardcaptor Sakura* comic-book serial by CLAMP began in a girls' monthly magazine in June 1996. It became a 70-episode weekly anime TV series from April 7, 1998 through March 21, 2000; there were also two theatrical features in the summer of 1999 and 2000.

Sakura Kinomoto is a 10-year-old fourth-grader whose father is a college archaeology professor. She opens an ancient book in his study, which is a case for a mystic set of Clow Cards (a Tarot-like deck), which come to life and escape. The deck's supernatural guardian, Kero-chan (a winged lion cub, very obviously designed for plush-toy potential), who had been asleep on the job, gives Sakura a magic baton so she can recapture the cards, each the personification of a different elemental (Wind, Rain, Fire, Wood, Shadow, etc.) before they use their arcane powers to cause havoc in the world. At first the only person who knows Sakura's secret is her best friend, Tomoyo Daidouji, a rich girl with the hobby of designing clothes. Tomoyo insists on referring to Sakura in super-hero terms ("upholder of justice") and creating a new "battle costume" dress for each of her adventures (while Kero-chan provides fashion-show commentary for the audience). Tomoyo also tags along to videotape the adventures on her camcorder. The lighthearted plot gradually grows dramatic as Sakura starts encountering more powerful and darkly ominous cards; and a new cardcaptor, the boy Li Shao Lang from Hong Kong, tries to push her aside and take over the "man's job." As the series progresses, the background of the special cards and Clow, their wizard creator, becomes important as Sakura and Li learn to work together.

Twenty years ago, most magical little girls anime TV series let the six-to-twelve set fantasize themselves with the power to try out grown-up roles instantly: a nurse in one episode, or a businesswoman, a TV news anchorwoman, etc. A decade ago the fashion was to transform them into teen pop singing idols with a horde of handsome boy admirers. *Sakura* goes for the late '90s trends: Tarot cards and the trappings of New Age mysticism, an unlimited wardrobe and your personal paparazzi. (Animation production by Madhouse.)

Appealing to older teen girls, *The Vision of Escaflowne* is a TV series directed by Kazuki Akane. © Bandai Entertainment

The Vision of Escaflowne. V.1, Dragons and Destiny. V.2, Betrayal and Trust. V.3, Angels and Demons. V.4, Past and Present. V.5, Paradise and Pain. V.6, Fate and Fortune. V.7, Light and Shadow. V.8, Forever and Ever.

TV series, 1996. Director: Kazuki Akane. V.1 & V.2, 4 episodes/100

minutes each. V.3 – V.8, 3 episodes/75 minutes each. Price & format: $19.98 dubbed VHS/$29.98 bilingual DVD. Distributor: Bandai Entertainment.

Escaflowne, plotted and story-edited by Shoji Kawamori with character design by Nobuteru Yuuki, has some similarities with *Cardcaptor Sakura;* both are primarily for girls, use Tarot cards for a motif and were edited for American kids' TV. Otherwise they are very different. *Escaflowne* is a fantasy-drama-romance for older girls. Hitomi Kanzaki, a high school girl who tells her friends' fortunes with Tarot cards, is caught up in a dimensional portal and brought to Gaea, a world combining elements of high fantasy, Medieval warfare and technological sci-fi. It is the eve of warfare between the conquering Zaibach Empire and several smaller kingdoms trying to remain free. Hitomi initially just wants to return to Japan, her family and friends. But ties are gradually formed with the new people she meets, human and otherwise, notably young King Van of Fanelia (wearer of the holy Escaflowne battle armor), handsome knight Allen of Asturia and the cat-girl Merle. Hitomi's skills with Tarot divination give her an important role in the resistance, and a reason for Hitomi's mystic affinity to the world is provided. The political history, warfare and ecology of Gaea are given sufficient depth to appeal to male viewers. By the time an opportunity comes to return to Earth, Hitomi must decide which world is her true home. *The Vision of Escaflowne* was a smash success with teens in 26 episodes on Japanese TV (April 2 — September 24, 1996), with music by fan-favorite anime com-

poser Yoko Kanno. It was one of the first anime titles released when Bandai entered the American anime video market in September 1998. Continued popularity in Japan resulted in a June 2000 theatrical feature, *Escaflowne: A Girl in Gaea*, which Bandai intends for an American theatrical release this summer. With all this popularity, *Escaflowne* was picked up for the Fox Kids network, debuting on August 19, 2000. But it was so heavily edited (not surprisingly, since one of the main villains, Dilandau, is arguably the most psychotically sadistic killer in any anime) that those familiar with the original series complained that the result was hopelessly confusing. Ratings were poor, and Fox dropped it after only nine episodes. The uncut *Escaflowne* has been available in America on video for two years now, but the current DVD release has special features such as music videos and cast interviews. (Animation production by Sunrise.)

Cowboy Bebop.
TV series/OAV, 1998. Director: Shinichiro Watanabe. V.1 - V.13, video, 2 episodes/50 minutes each. $24.98 subtitled/$19.98 dubbed. V.1 - V.6, DVD (bilingual), V.1 & V.2, 5 episodes/125 minutes each; V.3 - V.6, 4 episodes/100 minutes each. $29.98. Distributor: Bandai Entertainment.

Cowboy Bebop is arguably the most imaginative anime creation of the past decade. First, it is designed for adults and older teens. Its characters drink and get hangovers; they smoke, lighting up cigarettes under No Smoking signs. Second, it is an improbably successful blend of every TV genre from interplanetary sci-fi to

Westerns to cop and private eye dramas, including spoofs of both popular movies like *Alien* and news events like the Unibomber in America. Third, it is one of the best mixes of traditional animation and CGI outside of theatrical quality animation. Fourth, its jazz score by Yoko Kanno has won awards and made it a top-selling sound track CD in Japan. (Episodes have music-themed titles like "Asteroid Blues," "Stray Dog Strut," "Waltz for Venus," "Heavy Metal Queen" and "Ganymede Elegy.") Fifth, its mood shifts leave viewers guessing whether the next episode will be drama, comedy, suspense, romance, fast-paced action or an intellectual puzzle. When *Cowboy Bebop* first appeared in primetime

Directed by Shinichiro Watanabe, *Cowboy Bebop* is one of the most imaginative anime TV series. © Bandai Entertainment.

from April 13 to June 26, 1998, only 13 of the 26 episodes were considered suitable for TV broadcast due to such adult themes as drug addiction; the others had to be bought as direct-to-video releases. (The whole series was later broadcast in an adult 1:00 am timeslot from October 23, 1998 through April 23, 1999.) Set in 2071 A.D. after space travel leads to the colonization of the Solar System, Spike Spiegel and Jet Black are two bounty hunters bringing freelance justice to the sprawling frontier society that has grown up among the bubble-domed cities on asteroids and satellites from Venus to Saturn. Despite their genuine good-buddy relationship, each clearly has a past that he is keeping extremely private. They pick up an unlikely assortment of hangers-on (a sultry femme fatale, a juvenile computer hacker of dubious gender and sanity, a Welsh corgi who may be smarter than they are) that becomes a surprisingly charismatic and endearing regular cast. There are in-group jokes (don't miss the "next episode" previews after the closing credits, which may be straight or may give a new meaning to the episode just seen), visual references (an unidentified car in one episode is a Tucker Torpedo, for those who can recognize it), and cryptic plot elements (why is Earth in ruins and being bombarded by meteorites?) that are only slowly clarified, as are the casts personal secrets. A theatrical feature is in production for a summer 2001 release in Japan. (Animation production by Sunrise.)

[The six DVD volumes are titled only 1st Session through 6th Session, but they contain the thirteen individual video titles of: V.1, Asteroid Blues. V.2, Honky Tonk Women. V.3, Ballad of Fallen Angels. V.4, Heavy Metal Queen. V.5, Jamming With Edward. V.6, Toys in the Attic. V.7, Jupiter Jazz. V.8, My Funny Valentine. V.9, Mushroom Samba. V.10, Wild Horses. V.11, Boogie Woogie Feng-Shui. V.12, Brain Scratch. V.13, The Real Folk Blues.]

Generator Gawl is an unlikely teen comedy TV series directed by Seiji Mizushima. © A. D. Vision Films.

Generator Gawl. V.1, Human Heart, Metal Soul. V.2, Future Memory. V.3, Secrets and Lies. V.4, Out of Time.
TV series, 1998. Director: Seiji Mizushima. 3 episodes/75 minutes each. $19.98 dubbed VHS/$29.98 bilingual DVD. Distributor: A. D. Vision Films.

This is a good example of how the anime industry can turn *any*thing into a teen comedy; in this case, *The Terminator* plot crossed with the insectile/arachnoid monsters from the John Carpenter version of *The Thing*. The first episode introduces three mysterious teen boys, Koji, Ryo and Gawl, who materialize in a university town in the near future (2007) while battling what looks like a giant mechanical bug. Gawl "generates" into a similar beetle/scorpion creature to defeat it. Cryptic dialogue establishes that they have come from a future in which humanity is oppressed by these tyrannical Generators, to find and stop the scientist who is about to discover the cytogenetic secret that will enable humans to transform into these super-powerful monsters. They get themselves enrolled into the university as students to search for the elusive Prof. Nekasa. Their search is comically hindered by Masami, an impulsive fellow student (and the daughter of their landlady) who gets a crush on handsome but aloof team leader Koji, but mistakes the spying Gawl for a pervert trying to ogle the girls. They are also dramatically hindered by enemy Generators; obviously the ruling tyranny in the future has its own agents at the university to make sure the Prof.'s research is not inter-

rupted. The formula for the first half-dozen episodes is that Gawl and Masami humorously bedevil each other, partly deliberately by Gawl to distract her from Koji so he can conduct his spying; then another of the enemy's Generators attacks in giant bug form, and Gawl must battle it without any of the other students noticing. Ryo is crippled with guilt for having turned Gawl into a Generator, even though he agreed to it for their own defense. Gawl's carefree foolhardiness is partly a mask for his own despair at no longer being entirely human. Some plot depth, notably revealing who the villains really are and giving them a bit of motivation to make them more than just generic "bad guys," is saved for the unexpectedly serious climax. This is fortunately not too long in coming, since *Generator Gawl* was only a 12-episode TV serial (October 6 to December 23, 1998). Production studio Tatsunoko (*Speed Racer* and *Battle of the Planets/G Force*) pioneered the sci-fi sub-genre of teens who are reluctantly or involuntarily transformed into superhuman monsters to protect mankind with *Casshan: Robot Hunter* in 1973, and is still milking it today (although the most popular example in America remains Takaya Productions/MOVIC's 1987 *Bio-Booster Guyver*).

Fred Patten has written on anime for fan and professional magazines since the late 1970s.

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

Bonus HTML Features

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

• **The Technology Circle**
Over the past five years the changes in special effects technology for film and television have been monumental, causing large shifts and new issues for production companies and the software/hardware companies that service them. Bruce Manning outlines the issues and then sits down with Richard Taylor to discuss. Visit us online to see enlarged images and additional information on Richard's work.
http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.12/5.12pages/manningtechnology.php3.

• **Low-Cost Solutions, High-End Results**
With today's new software packages becoming more and more efficient for less and less money, one can definitely do more with less. John Edgar Park discusses the different software and hardware combos that can get you on the fast track to great looking CGI work. View detailed specs on Strata 3D and Hash Animation:Master online at:
http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.12/5.12pages/parkblurring.php3.

• **Ahoy! An Intelligent Children's Show At Last!**
Tired of *Teletubbies* and need another bizarre pre-school fix? Well check out Consortium of Gentlemen's *Yoho Ahoy* on the BBC. Soon you'll know every word…Go online to see a QuickTime movie clip!
http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.12/5.12pages/robinsonyohoahoy.php3.

• **Fresh from the Festivals: February 2001's Film Reviews**
Jon Hofferman joins us to review short films: *The Dance of the Saracen Asparagus* by Christophe Le Borgne, Maria Vasilkovsky's *Fur & Feathers*, *Run of the Mill* by Borge Ring, Andreas Hykade's *Ring of Fire* and Paul Fierlinger's long-awaited *Still Life with Animated Dogs*. As always, visit us online to download and view a QuickTime movie clip from each movie!
http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.12/5.12pages/5.12festival.php3.

Supplemental Disney DVDs Surpass the Competition

by Gerald Raiti
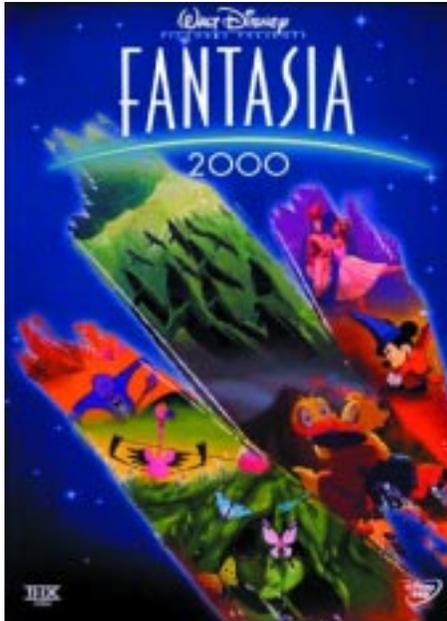
Disney's *Fantasia/2000* DVD. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

DVDs are the panacea for videophiles. Since their introduction in 1997, they have offered consumers dazzling displays of digital imaging and sound, arguably the closest a consumer may ever get to re-creating a cinematic experience in the home. Despite all their advantages over VHS, such as portability and random-access searching, their greatest feature is their ability to create interactivity with the viewer. Bonus or supplemental footage provides the means to achieve this.

In today's growing age of commercial voyeurism as evidenced by *Survivor*, *Temptation Island*, *Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire* and *Big Brother*, consumers want…no, no…they demand behind-the-scenes information. No aspect of a movie should remain hidden from the public. The private life of celebrities is public news — go right ahead and ask *Entertainment Tonight*. Aren't we all a little touched by the breakup of Tom and Nicole? Now the once slow-selling DVD format of 1997 caters to both techno-savvy aficionados and lavish information-bereft consumers. Moreover, DVDs are currently a greater cash crop to the entertainment industry than most pundits foresaw.

A Medium for Animation

What does any of this have to do with animation? Well, of all media genres, animation epitomizes the need for behind-the-scenes footage. One could debate how live-action, multimillion-dollar, special effects laden films like *Titanic* or *The Perfect Storm* could offer the consumer better bonus content, but upon further examination, one should realize that the majority of today's special effects are computer animated.

Of all the companies in entertaindom, Disney is the paramount of supplemental DVD material. As director John Lasseter reminds in the *Toy Story* supplemental disc, Walt Disney always gave his employees three instructions: tell a great story, tell it with great characters and push the technology to new limits. Disney DVDs continue this tradition. As *Animation World* has reported in "Catch the DVD of Chicken Run" (Kubin, 5.10) and various Headline News items, movies like *Chicken Run* and *Iron Giant* have good supplemental footage, but neither film's history has such intrigue that it requires a full-fledged supplemental DVD. Two Disney DVD three-disc boxed sets elucidate this best: *Toy Story: The Ultimate Toy Box* and *Fantasia Anthology*. These films are technological and cinematic behemoths. If ever a scenario existed where behind-the-scenes, supplemental material is advantageous, it is for these films.

Specifically, these movies contain many firsts. For example, *Toy Story* was the first full-length computer animated motion picture; *Fantasia* was the first full-length symphonic, animated motion picture. Nevertheless, there is more to these movies than moving pictures. The DVD versions of these films allow viewers to delve into the stories behind the movies.
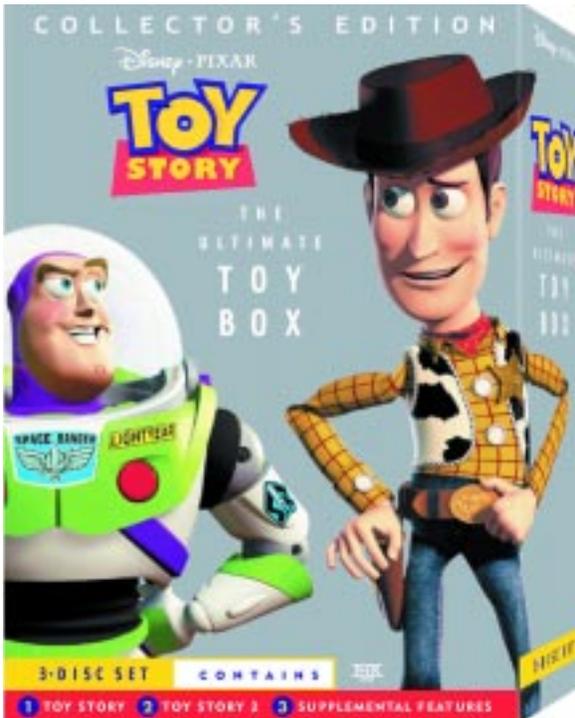
The *Toy Story: The Ultimate Toy Box* is a three CD set, which fills in the entire history of the *Toy Story* phenomena. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.
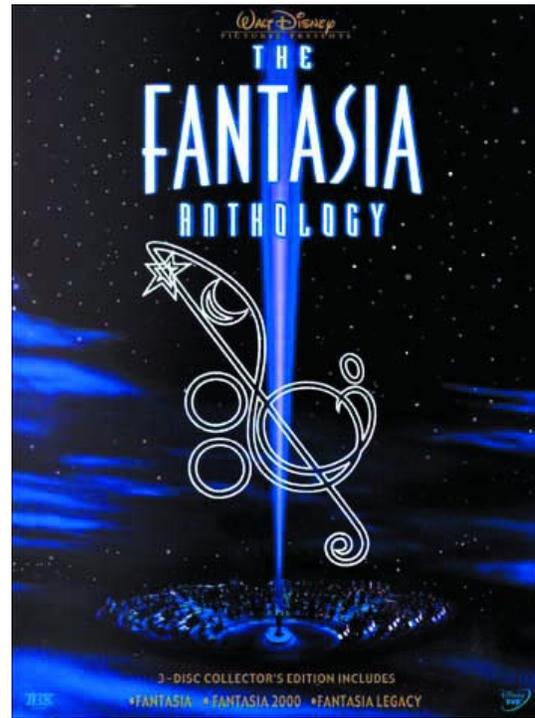
The *Fantasia* DVD in the *Fantasia Anthology* pack is the 60th anniversary edition, offering loads of bonus content. © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

Enter the Toy Box

In *Toy Story: The Ultimate Toy Box*, the supplemental DVD begins with John Lasseter casually inviting viewers to explore the world of *Toy Story* with him. Every aspect of the film and its sequel is explained through interviews with Disney and Pixar personnel. Everything is included from the original *Toy Story* pitch in 1991 to Randy Newman's "You've Got a Friend in Me" demo.

There are seven main categories to explore for both *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2* respectively: History, Design, Story, Computer Animation, Music and Sound, Deleted Animation, and Publicity. Disney DVDs excel because they have a surfeit of information. In the Design category, for example, Buzz Lightyear's evolution is mapped through 99 different designs starting with Tinny (from *Tin Toy*) then Lunar Larry and later Tempus from Morph. A similar evo-

lution exists for Woody as he transforms from a large villainous cowboy doll to a leader and buddy.

Since *Toy Story* was such a technological milestone, it is not surprising that the technical documentation in the supplemental disc is astounding. The entire CGI process is analyzed though every phase from storyboards to shading and lighting. A Pixar animator narrates each stage, which often concludes with numerous images through which to meander. The technical highlight comes through

the angle control on DVD remotes that allows viewers to toggle between storyboards, raw CGI and the cinematic version in certain scenes.

Fantastic!

The *Fantasia* DVD in the *Fantasia Anthology* is the 60th anniversary edition. It represents the original, unaltered "road show" version of *Fantasia* from 1940 when the film was only shown in twenty-five cinemas, much as *Fantasia/2000* was only (really) shown in forty IMAX theaters last year. DVD interactivity allows viewers to select audio commentary by Roy Disney, James Levine, John Canemaker and Scott MacQueen. The commentary analyzes, sometimes excessively, and details every aspect of what is occurring onscreen. From the history of animators to anecdotes about technological aspects of animation, DVD grants the option for

total immersion in the film and its history.

This is in addition to the forty-minute "Making of *Fantasia*" documentary, which narrates every aspect of the film's creation from the inception of Walt's brainchild to the "Concert Feature" to explications of the multi-plane camera. This is all in addition to the *Fantasia Legacy* DVD, which functions much as the supplemental disc does in *Toy Story: The Ultimate Toy Box*. It is replete with interviews and historic footage explaining the creation of each animated short in *Fantasia* and *Fantasia/2000*.

Moreover, the bonus content is not just historic but also humorous at times: one archived video depicts a room of Disney animators studying a female ballet dancer to learn realistic techniques in depicting the dancing hippopotami in *Fantasia*. The animators start describing the dancer as a hippopotamus, and she feels insulted until she sees the character sketches, and the mistake is rectified.

Perhaps I am biased toward Disney DVDs. Maybe other animated DVDs have outstanding bonus content. Then again, some films just leap into the culture; they push the boundaries of cinematic storytelling in such innovative ways that they magically capture the population. Many live-action movies like *The Wizard of Oz* accomplished this as well. But Disney movies tend to achieve this more often than other studios' animated movies. Consequently, Disney DVDs have more of a behind-the-scenes story worth telling. When a movie's title becomes commonplace in society, the reasons why are worth sharing. Moreover, the Disney Studio recognizes the importance of both documenting their films and the DVD ancillary market. While other studios treat their animated features as just another summer release, Disney is well aware they are adding to their heritage and they document every step of the way. That is how Disney DVDs surpass their competition. Great movies and great documentation make great DVDs possible. That is the only way it works.

Gerard Raiti, a native of Baltimore currently residing in Nashville, has reported on animation, Broadway musicals and comic books for various publications including Fandomshop.com and Newsweek. He also holds the Diploma of the Royal Schools of Music, U.K. in classical piano and music.

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

The Scarves of Sundance

by Chris Lanier

MAN WALKING DOWN MAIN STREET AT NIGHT, WITH AN OWL ON HIS ARM

All illustrations by Chris Lanier.

Chris Lanier is a San Francisco-based animator, whose animated short, Scarf Mania, was selected for the Sundance Film Festivals' inaugural online film competition. The 17 films selected for the online competition were featured on the Sundance Festival Website and displayed at the "Digital Center" in downtown Park City, Utah, where the Sundance Festival takes place. Lanier was at the festival for six days, from January 19th to January 24th; what follows is a from-the-trenches account of an animator lost in the wilds of Hollywood, Utah, reconstructed from notes he jotted down in his journal.

Day 1

By the time we step off the plane in Salt Lake City, it's already been crazy for a month. My life has been a blur of press list scanning, press kit assembly, video dubbing, postcard designing, travel arrangement juggling — it doesn't sound like it would be all that taxing, but in fact, when we hit the Utah tarmac, I'm more looking forward to getting a full night's sleep when Sundance is over, than I am looking forward to Sundance itself.

The mountains loom huge and imposing as we head toward Park City from the airport; no matter how fast the bus might be traveling, the progress goes stately-slow, because the mountains hardly seem to budge. The trees are so dwarfed by the mountains, they register as brown-gray stubble that's been erratically shaved — a few hangover swoops of the blade — to make way for the snake-line descent of pinpoint skiers. Six miles out from Park City, we hit Kimball Junction, which looks like a big joke at the expense of American civilization — there's a McDonald's, a Best Western, a Wal-Mart all huddled close together, in a wide and forbidding expanse of snowy nothingness — a corporate wagon train circled against the wilderness. Mountains ring this scene, scaling the biggest building down to shoebox size. The impassive vastness gives me deep atavistic twitchings — this landscape could kill you without the slightest expenditure of effort. You could be snuffed from exposure, or just plain dumb loneliness out here. The ludicrous, monstrous size of the homes one sees in the hills seem to be precisely about this — making futile elbowings out into the clear cold air.

Someone getting off the bus is a director of a film in com-

petition. The star of the film is also on the bus. You can feel the folks on the bus perk up at this, 'Ah! We're sharing the bus with a star!' It doesn't matter they've never heard of this star before — the fact that she has gone through the ritual, allowed her spiritual essence to be transmuted by the camera's glass eye, is enough to bestow the halo of celebrity upon her. That's the problem, being an animation director — you don't really have a star to pimp. Though an animated character, at least, is always at my beck and call — so long as there's a pen and the back of an envelope or a scrap of napkin at hand.

My wife Kristin has come out with me — she makes me look good by association – using the opportunity to live out a vicarious parallel-universe existence as a movie star. Ralph Carney, the musician for my short, has also come along. He also provided the music for a second short in the online festival, the hilarious *Great Big Cartoony Club Show*. Thank God he decided to go. His sense of humor is a real anchor for my sanity.

We check into the condo we've rented in Park City. Five days previous, I'd received a call from the folks I'd booked the room through — they told me I couldn't have it, because the water heater had blown. I had to wonder if "the water heater has blown" was Park City lingo for, "We double-booked, and the other guy can pay more than you," but with no way to verify my suspicions, I said I'd take another room at another place, further out from town. Kristin, however, got back on the phone with them, and after an hour of back-and-forth, miraculously guilted them into getting another room in the original condo com-

plex. When Kristin relayed the room number of this "other room," I had a good laugh. It was the same room number we'd been initially booted from. Very lucky for us, to've chosen a room with a spontaneously self-repairing water heater.

> **I'm more looking forward to getting a full night's sleep when Sundance is over, than I am looking forward to Sundance itself.**

We walk down to main street at night, just to get a sense of place. The commercial part of Park City is basically one street, muffled on either side by steeply rising hillsides. It has the brittle, gingerbread feel common to all towns that rely on outsiders for their livelihood, whether they be tourists, skiers or filmgoers. The architecture seems to ingratiate itself somehow. There are shop windows full of upscale ski-town kitsch — oil paintings of skiers in gilt frames, expensive rugs with mountain scenes woven in, that sort of thing. Even poor Kokopeli has been forced into service, press ganged from the petroglyphs of the southwest in order to lug snowboards across the front of innumerable sweatshirts. One ski lift springs up into the mountains directly from main street — a black net stretches over the adjacent street, to stop anyone who might slide off their seat from dropping directly into traffic.

Any available kiosks have been wrapped in layers of posters for films attached to Sundance, or

the various offshoots — Slamdance, Lapdance, Nodance, Scamdance. The surfaces are already at least three layers thick, posters and flyers drooping off other posters and flyers: publicity as an endlessly self-regenerating eczema.

The strangest thing about Park City during Sundance is something invisible — the negotiation of eye contact. There's no such thing as a casual glance here. Eye contact is one long stuttering of checking and double-checking; furtive shopliftings of recognition. The double-take is de rigeur, the quadruple-take not unheard of. Anyone walking up the street has the potential to be a star, so they have to be measured against screen-memories. A hairstyle, an expression in the eyes, can set off shockingly immediate recollections — these strangers' faces we've spent so much time with. We're all caught in a Web of helpless rubbernecking.

Day 2

Park City is far more lively this morning – main street is a constant stream of models, producers, actors, gawkers, wanna-bes, imposters, freaks, human billboards, masochists and martyrs. Over it all hangs the scent of brains marinating in cel-phone radiation.

We all show up at the Park City location of the online festival, and it's something of a disappointment. Evidently, last year, when the dot-coms were flush and sloppy with money, they raised a big stink in Park City, setting up camp along main street, raising a ruckus, bloviating through bullhorns, demanding Sundance get with the program, and take notice of the digital "revolution." I get the

RALPH UNVEILS THE REJUVENATING ELIXIR

JACK DANIELS

the online festival is located, takes up the lower floor of a mall on main street. There are a handful of monitors, tuned to the festival Website, each outfitted with a set of headphones. The headphones are a sensible way to deal with potential distractions, to help the viewer focus in on the work, but ultimately it feels anti-social. Kristin and I can't really watch the films together; one of us has to wait around while the other finishes up, which is rather boring. This is less problematic than the fact that the monitors are completely over-whelmed by the exhibits of the digital sponsors. The festival monitors seem like an afterthought between the *giant* HDTV displays, which show loops of contentless content — montages of slo-mo football passes, rodeo riders dis-aligning their spinal columns on horseback, see-sawing, circus acrobats throwing highlights off their spangles in trapezial revolutions, kids "adorably" playing on the beach in fast motion — and the arrays of high-end digital cameras. Instead of looking like a festival, the lower level of the mall looks like a trade show.

Way at the back of the sponsor exhibits, there's a small room set specially aside for the online festival. It's not very inviting, and seems hastily improvised — black curtains are drawn over all the walls, and there's one table with four monitors set up on it. It looks like some goth teenager's multimedia den, inexplicably fitted with fluorescent lights. It's very off-putting to the casual viewer — the first thing you see, on entering, are four people sitting at monitors, with their backs turned to you — while we're there, we see several people look in, then hastily beat a retreat.

sense that Sundance is of two minds about the online aspect of the festival: while they've made a sincere effort to acknowledge the world of online filmmaking, there is a sense that their hand was, to some degree, forced. Through the selection process, there was a feeling that Sundance wanted to keep the online festival at arm's length — most likely to diminish the repercussions if it ended up a bust. Understandably (and I think sensibly) they've been careful to avoid the egregious hype that swirls around the Internet as a matter of course.

However, I was disappointed that the online selections were not going to be judged by a jury — the winner will be chosen by online voting, which is prey to all

sorts of distortions (all selection systems are, but the Web magnifies them). Also, arriving at Sundance I've found the online festival has been segregated from the main festival in terms of publicity — instead of being a part of the main festival brochure, the online festival has its own, separate brochure. And the exhibition choices were a little flat-footed — for instance, on their site, all the films are shown in RealPlayer format, regardless of their original Web format. Perhaps they wanted to standardize the exhibition, and not force the viewers to juggle a number of different players, but for the films made in Flash, it makes no sense. It's like shoving steak through a meat grinder.

The digital center, where

We're supposed to be doing a Q&A, but only the other filmmakers show up — so we ask each other questions. There's Obie Scott Wade, who directed *Julius and Friends*, a great animation taking place in a planned community for cartoon characters (perfect entertainment for kids; it's smart and fun and doesn't talk down to them at all) and Jenni Olson, who directed the live-action short *Meep! Meep!*, which sets a voice-over narration about a doomed lesbian relationship against calm, fixed shots of an urban landscape (this urban landscape happens to be San Francisco — as it turns out, I've come out to Utah to meet a lot of people in my back yard; 8 of the 17 online films were produced in the Bay Area). Jenni suggests we at least get our shorts running on the monitors that are available. In a little comedic touch, I can't get into the Sundance Website. Some anti-porn software has been installed on the machine, and the Sundance site is verboten, as it doesn't have a rating.

This is all very frustrating for Angela Teran, who's been my liaison with the digital festival for the past month. It's a pleasure to meet her finally, after innumerable email exchanges and phone calls. She's extremely warm, and has been a great help through the pre-festival process. She's bent over backwards to get me set up for any opportunities the festival might offer and I certainly don't envy her, having to guide the first online festival through its initial baby steps. Any festival is a logistical nightmare — adding technological problems on top of it all must be a prime recipe for sleepless nights and daytime migraines. She takes her job very seriously; it's obvious she sincerely wants to provide the

best possible experience for the filmmakers.

Before we take off, Ralph cracks me up by taking a picture of me, and then one of the "online festival." The flash gets absorbed in the black curtains, and bounces off the four screens — we both know how spectacular the shot is going to look — like the storage room assigned to an MIS department.

That's the problem, being an animation director — you don't really have a star to pimp.

Tonight we finally catch a movie: *The American Astronaut*, a very pleasingly bizarre sci-fi musical western. It's preceded by an animated short, *Infection*, by James Cunningham. It's a 3D CGI cartoon — Cunningham explained before the screening — that was made partly in reaction to a newly-elected right-wing government in his native New Zealand, which revoked the right to free higher education, and saddled the current generation of students with sizable loans. The hero of *Infection* is a three-fingered hand that sneaks into a government data center, and deletes students' outstanding debt. He has to fight off the guardians of the data center — gruesome giant eyeballs, with hands and ears growing out of them. Some robotic hypodermic needles get mixed up in the action...and let's just say that there hasn't been a better film for connoisseurs of punctured-eyeball anxiety since *Un Chien Andalou*.

I see Cunningham in the hallway after the screening, and tell him I liked his short:

"The hand is actually my hand," he announces.

"You mean you actually traced it as the model?"

"No, I took a series of photographs of it, from different angles, that I used to map on the surfaces..." he pauses. "And the eye is from an actual eye — the textures are taken from an eyeball I borrowed from an eye bank."

"They let you have an eye?"

"Well, I returned it to them."

"So the eye..."

"Right, the cornea I used to get the texture, somebody back in New Zealand is probably walking around, looking through it, right now as we speak..."

Ralph comes back from an evening walk clutching a brown paper bag. A crinkle of brown paper, and he shows us the label — Jack Daniels. It takes Kristin and I approximately 2 seconds to dig shot glasses out of the condo cabinet. We need it bad, and it ain't cuz of the cold...

We go to the official party tonight, in honor of Julianne Moore, who's received an award today. It's sponsored by Champagne Piper-Heidsieck, but the free champagne's already run out by the time we get there. We don't know anyone and feel completely at sea in the transplanted-Hollywood vibe. In one corner of the ski lodge, people are lining up to have their photographs taken alongside a huge bottle of (presumably Piper-Heidsieck) champagne. A weird totem to build a weird little ritual around. At one point we try to head up to the second floor of the party, but are turned back, because we don't have an extra-special VIP pass. "Filmmakers aren't VIPs?" I ask, incredulous. We're about to pack it

up, when we see Elisa Greene, Wildbrain's publicist, and George Evelyn, the director of *The Great Big Cartoony Club Show*. They manage to save the party for us. It's the first time I've met George — he has a native garrulousness that seems to have, over the years, matured into a philosophy of life. The Internet has given him a second wind as an animator. He was instrumental in getting the Cartoon Network Website to buy off on the notion of producing a number of self-contained short subjects — no series potential, no merchandizing tie-ins, no re-purposing of old copyrighted characters into obnoxious contemporary "relevance." The Internet has been the greatest boon to the cartoon short since trailers booted them off the movie screens — George has taken the ball and run with it and it's obvious he's delighted.

Day 3

A night of perturbing and idiotic dreams. The waking world offers more of the same. Someone on the street is wearing a cardboard sign: "Will Work for Distribution." Someone else has a hand-puppet, a shapeless brown mass with eyes. "I'm H.R. Puke-n-shit!" it announces. The puppeteer is wearing a hat with a dotcom address — I'm glad the fellow is doing his part to perpetuate the image of the Internet as the most high-tech toilet stall in human history. Cameramen and sound guys swinging boom mics are already converging on H.R. for sound bites...

It takes forever for me to get food into my gut this morning. Big mistake — the emptiness in my stomach is getting impatient and crawling up my brain stem. I'm wondering if I've made a horrible

mistake. I've laid out a ridiculous amount of money and time in anticipation of Sundance, and I'm feeling like a sucker. Is anyone ever going to show up at the digital center? Does anyone give a crap at all?

The short Sundance selected for the festival is called *Scarf Mania* – it features a hapless everyman character, named Romanov. He travels to a city whose cultural and economic life revolves around the wearing of scarves, and Romanov just can't get the hang of it — he keeps getting tangled up, etc, and as a result he's a laughingstock. *Scarf Mania* is supposed to be a comedy of alienation, but I'm feeling it a little too intimately right now. I've joked

that it's an allegory of the wee little digital filmmaker, lost among the scarves of Sundance…and the joke's getting less and less funny by the minute.

Kristin and I go from restaurant to restaurant. They're all choked with huge lines. Someone standing in front of one restaurant propositions us: "Do you want to come inside? Right now, inside, Elvis Mitchell is interviewing Forest Whittaker." "But is there food? Can we eat?" "Yes, the buffet's open." We dash inside. Folks are pressed up against glass partitions, and against the outside windows too, completely out of earshot, but looking intently at the two men, who are just sitting and talking. That's the signal of the famous —

MAN WITH SANDWICH BOARD #5

I'VE GOT THE STORIES
TALK TO ME
FRED W. MAURNEY A.K.A. "THE PHOENIX"

and what makes them like zoo animals — people will watch them even if they're not doing anything interesting.

Unfortunately the buffet looks pretty unappetizing, and we're back on the street. Finally we find a pizza place that, for some reason, is almost entirely deserted. Like an oasis in the desert of schmooze. Soon, with a nice helping of bread and cheese in my stomach, I'm teetering toward equilibrium — bring it on, I'm ready to face the day.

I've managed to elbow my way onto a panel, "Digital Filmmaking: The Filmmakers." Mark Osborne is the first co-panelist I meet (or, instead of panelist, I should go by the title they've printed on our badges: "Digital Dialogian." The Sundance folks are insistent about it — Mark called up the offices: "Hello, I'm one of the panelists…" to be rebuffed with, "No, no, you're not a panelist — you're a dialogian"). I'm a big admirer of Mark's film, *More*, which I first saw on ifilm.com. It's a masterful claymation short, with bits of 2D animation interpolated in precise and deliberate counterpoint. In the few short minutes of its running time, Mark manages to accumulate a surprising emotional weight. I think it's a brilliant short, one of the best short films I've seen — and it's great to meet the fella behind it, and find out he's a nice guy, quite friendly and accessible.

The panel is quite well-attended, putting to rest my anxieties that people aren't interested in this stuff. The other panelists are George Evelyn, Jennifer Arnold, whose *Mullet Chronicles* (a serialized documentary dedicated to "mullet pride") are in the online festival, Ariella Ben Dov, the festival director of the Queer Short Movie Awards, Mark and myself. The moderator is John Sloss, a lawyer and producer; he opens by sheepishly admitting he was involved in the infamous Pop.com — the online entertainment venture involving Spielberg, Katzenberg and Ron Howard — which managed to burn through several millions of dollars, blazing straight into bankruptcy before actually materializing anything on the Web. Pop.com is always brought up first in the inevitable lists of failed Internet entertainment ventures, and unfortunately it comes freighted with undeserved implications — namely, if Spielberg can't make entertainment fly on the Net, then who can? Which of course is running the thing backwards. The whole Hollywood infrastructure is tuned to such different economies of scale, it's almost inevitable they'd get tripped up and bogged down.

I get the sense that Sundance is of two minds about the online aspect of the festival…

We get to run some of the directors' shorts off a laptop, through a big screen facing the audience. It's nice getting a mass reaction, hearing people laugh in the right places, etc. These are the instamatic satisfactions you don't get when you put work up on the Web and people watch it on their own time. Although when the question comes up from the audience, all the directors say they prefer the kind of audience feedback they get through the Web — less immediate but also less nerve-wracking, and usually more in-depth and heartfelt. Of course, you're also more likely to get negative comments as well; anonymity, it seems, is the handmaiden of vituperation, but the slams are usually pretty entertaining, if you're an appreciative student of grammatical novelty and unintentional typographical avant-gardism. Sometimes I fantasize all the rants delivered over the Net are written by the same person — they're all chapters in a cumulative work, and if they were to be assembled in one place, we'd be witness to one of the greatest conceptual fiats of post-modernist literature. *Finnegan's Wake*, as if written by Joyce's eighth-wit brother.

There's a lot of talk about how the Web solves problems of distribution and delivers heretofore unreachable audiences. An interesting schism on the panel arises — the Flash animators (myself and George) are in love with Webcast, but all the folks using the Web as a vehicle for video keep running against the obstacle of poor image quality — the Web hasn't caught up to video yet (when we run Mark's *More* through the pixelated blockiness of RealPlayer, it's obviously torture for him since the film was originally shot for IMAX). Because of the technical exigencies of the Web, animation (specifically Flash animation), as a tool of communication, has gained an inflated importance. Before the panel's over, I even get to trot out my pet argument that there are aesthetic strengths to be found through the current limitations of bandwidth — it forces filmmakers to use editing strategies favoring clever arrangements of juxtapositions and comparisons to build stories. Jennifer throws out *La Jetee* as a film that would be perfect for the Internet — a series of still images,

put together with consummate intelligence.

We get some good questions from the audience, and a few comments that sound like sales pitches. One person explains his project — something that's been inevitable for some time now, but which he's evidently put into practice — an online film where everything in it is for sale. You like the Ming vase on top of the armoire? A couple mouse-clicks, and Fed Ex has it on the way. A couple more clicks, and the armoire's on the same flight. The entire house the movie is set in, in fact, is for sale: "If I just sell that, I've already covered my production costs." George shoots back: "If somebody buys the house, does it disappear from the movie?" In fact, George is on to something: imagine an episode of *Friends*, where you can buy every article of clothing, and as soon as you do, said article disappears from the thespian-slash-mannequin. The only snarl in this scheme, is that you'd have all these hetero guys depleting their credit cards with bra and panty purchases. We'll have to wait for fashion to take a few more bold steps toward androgyny for this sort of thing to work out.

To the real-estate-agent-cum-auteur, I want to say, "Excuse me, but don't you find this at all horrific?" but bite my tongue. I don't suppose he'll be making many movies about poor folks, unless perhaps they work as shoe-shiners in some swanky resort.

After the panel's over, a few folks come up to Mark and I, who are malingering to talk up a few stray points. Someone half-jokingly ventures the theory that Spielberg et. al. created Pop.com to run it into the ground deliberately, and take down the Web with it. You gotta love the conspiracy theories. Mark says the medium is about communication, small communities, small economies of scale — things that are handmade and personal. That's the exciting potential of the Net, and that's what will always escape the Hollywood guys — they're institutionally incapable of grasping it. In retrospect, I'm disappointed that so much of the Q&A centered around economic models, with relatively little said about the cultural content of online film. The new economic models being formed are interesting, and may have wide repercussions for the development of the art form — particularly promising, to me at least, are peer-to-peer models, and the eventual advent of micropayments — but sometimes it seems the only interest people have in art, is an interest in art-as-commerce-by-other-means. It bespeaks a disappointing lack of curiosity about the human animal, about the texture and the substance of the mind.

Scarf Mania is supposed to be a comedy of alienation, but I'm feeling it a little too intimately right now.

We get back to our room, and get sucked into one of the episodes of *Jazz*, playing on TV. They're taking it up through Art Blakey, Coltrane, Clifford Brown, Ornette Coleman. Kristin keeps asking if we're going to go to the party tonight — Elisa can get us into some Hugo Boss shindig (I have no idea who or what Hugo Boss is — but I'm not about to admit this to anybody out loud).

Kristin takes a shower to freshen up, then lays down in her PJs on the couch. "So are we going to the party?" she asks, her eyelids already drooping sleepily over the top rims of her pupils. "Who're you kidding? You're gonna go in your PJs?" She shrugs, "We're at Sundance. We're supposed to be going to all the glamorous parties." I call up Elisa, because I don't want to be rude, and ask her about the party — but she and George are pretty crashed out, and are going to bail after all. When I hang up and report the news, everyone sags in relief. And my favorite stupid show, *Blind Date* is on — the best dialogue on television, improvised on the spot by lonely singles with strange exhibitionist tendencies. We yuk it up as we watch the self-professed "Hillybilly" clear the dance floor by dry-humping the air; and then yuk it up some more at the second couple, which features a self-professed "poet" with a Kenny G 'do, who actually wins over his date by talking up Norse mythology and quoting Thoreau. Sure, we're just as lame as these folks — watching bad TV from the middle of Sundance, fer crissakes — but at least our lameness isn't being televised.

Day 4

This time, in my daily trek to the "online festival," I meet Jakub Pistecky, whose short *Maly Milos* is in the lineup. He's a handsome fellow, with close-cropped black hair and compact, precisely arranged features. He's currently working at ILM, on the next *Star Wars* movie; I decide to be cool and not ask him a single damn question about it.

Jakub appears to be having a far better time in Park City than I
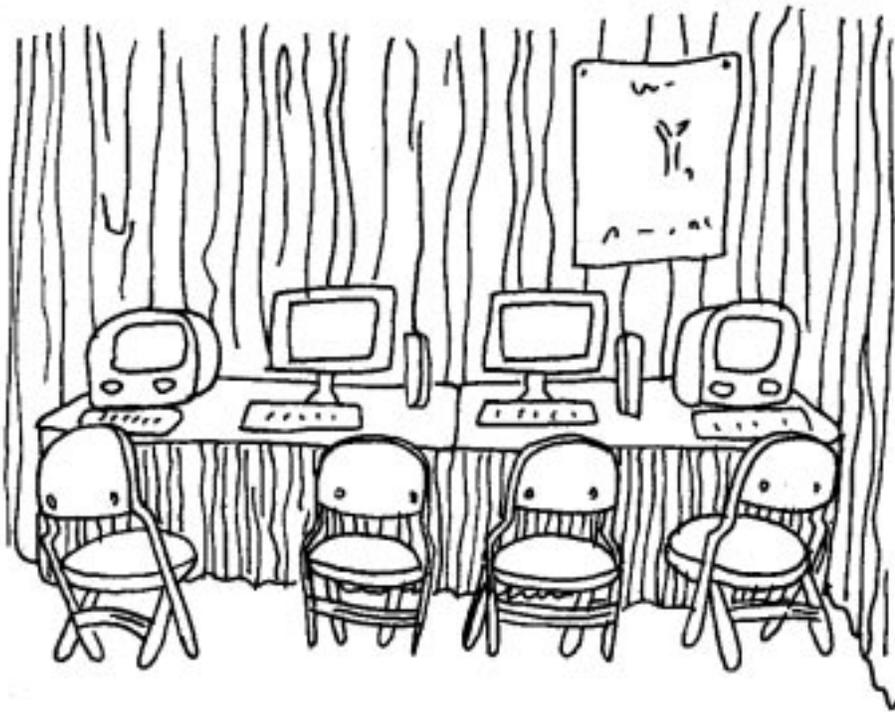
THE ONLINE FESTIVAL

am. He's not worried in the slightest about making connections or schmoozing his career up a notch — he's just here to see movies and go to parties. In all, a far more sane approach. Last night he was at an Ozzy Osbourne party, that was opened by someone named the "Reverend B. Dangerous" or somesuch, who hung a 50 lb. camera from a perforation in his tongue, and then followed up by having the heaviest guy in the audience step on the back of his head, grinding his face into a pile of broken glass. In short, Ozzy is so far past his bat-head munching days, he's taken to delegating.

I like Jakub's short quite a bit. It's a 3D computer animation, with a genuine fairytale quality (fairytales of the Grimm variety, with plenty of dirt under their peasant fingernails). A lot of CGI animation seems, to me, to be heading toward a cul-de-sac of thoughtless mimesis; the closer computer-generated imagery comes

Mark Osborne is the first co-panelist I meet (or, instead of panelist, I should go by the title they've printed on our badges: "Digital Dialogian").

to replicating "reality," the more it loses its purely expressive potential.

Jakub solves this problem by resorting to puppetry; the characters in *Milos* look like they've been carved in a woodshop. Milos has a face reminiscent of the faces of Jiri Trnka's animated puppets — almost immobile, but deeply expressive — the face has the suggestive emotional expressiveness of a mask. We have a good conversation about this. It seems we're at a point where new technolo-

gies are providing receptive forms for old, shunted-aside artforms: motion-capture provides an entry point for dance and gestural theatre; CGI provides an entry point for sculpture and puppetry.

For our last two nights, we're staying with the Quackenbushes, a couple who are friends with Kristin's dad, in Salt Lake City. It's a relief to not have to talk about movies and deals (perversely and against my will, earlier in the day I'd been drawn into an extensive conversation, with a complete stranger, about the lack of fire in Harrison Ford's latest thespian activities). Instead, we talk about books, the election, and the odd-ball physics experiments Joe Quackenbush, a science teacher, cooks up for his class. It's heaven, really. There's a world outside the screen.

Day 5

In the morning I have a live Web-streamed interview with *Streaming Media* magazine and *Res* magazine — they've set up a table at the digital center. The interview is run by Rae Zander and Scott Smith, both great folks, and the interview is actually kinda fun. Then I get to turn the tables, and conduct an interview myself, with Eric Henry and Syd Garon, the directors of *Wave Twisters*, which is running as part of Sundance's midnight screening series.

Wave Twisters is the anti-*Fantasia/2000*; both take pre-recorded music as the basis for animation, but where *Fantasia/2000* looked backwards — both in terms of the use of respectable and safe music, and in its story-telling sensibilities, which harken back to cozy '50s conventions — *Wave Twisters* is incredibly fresh, new and forward-looking. The

soundtrack that provides its aural spine is an album by DJ Qbert. The film is an insane piece of work. The "story" involves a space orthodontist spreading the gospel of turntable culture — and every scratch, beat and sample has a visual correspondence. So much information flies at you — in a combo of 2D animation, 3D animation and cheesy video effects, scrambled together in an appropriately "turntablistic" collage that the first time I saw it (a rough cut shown at RESFEST), I felt like my brain was vibrating in its skull case, overloaded past the limit of absorption.

The one place where it falls down, is in its sexual politics. It's always a disappointment when something stylistically avant-garde is politically retro and the female "character" in it is just a pin-up, given nothing interesting to do. The filmmakers feel awful about it, too. They were working off a soundtrack where the female vocal samples were all along the lines of "save me" and "help me," stuff lifted off old adventure and sci-fi records which comes off satirical on the CD, but they didn't cut against it in the visuals in a meaningful way, and the spoofing aspect of the vocals doesn't come through. In the interview, Eric says morosely: "I have no excuse. I went to Oberlin."

Because I've done the interview with Eric and Syd, I've managed to wheedle my way onto the guest list for the big party tonight, which is both for *Wave Twisters* and a documentary on turntablism called *Scratch*. The large bouncer guarding the door announces to the throng outside that: "Only those people on 'the list' will get in — this is a private party, not open to the general

KRISTIN AND ME, BOOGYING DOWN TO THE BEAT JUNKIES

I've managed to wheedle my way onto the guest list for the big party tonight…

public." We have to wait out in the cold for several minutes before "the list" arrives. People are surly, trying to cut line, throwing attitude right and left. One person leaves the line, then elbows her way back, giving Kristin an evil eye, asking her if she "has a problem." Some French lady behind me keeps saying, "Zees ees incredible. Zey said zey would have sree girls checking zee list, but zere is only one! Zees is so ineeficient. Zey said zey would have sree girls. Oh, I don't know why I am putting up weef zis!" A mystery for the ages. "I feel like I'm in New York," Kristin says. I say, "I feel like I'm in High School."

We get inside and knock back a few drinks — this being Utah, the alcohol content is lower than the norm, and despite the deoxygenating compensations of high altitude, you have to knock

back quite a few to get a decent buzz going. The Beat Junkies are up first, throwing records down one after another, the two of them swapping duties across two turntable setups. The work they're doing over the turntables is mysterious work, with perhaps a little deliberate mad-scientist mystification — they attack the vinyl as a combo of musician and performance artist. It's not sufficient, for instance, to just slide a used up record off the turntable, and tuck it back in its sleeve — the record's gotta be lifted with a quick snap, and twirled on the axis of two index fingers — the record suddenly not a disc but a brief blurred globe — the spinning longitude lines tracings of music. Both Beat Junkies bob on the stage like two pistons in a motor, synched on the same axle.

It's great fun to dance to,

because the music is "played" by being interrupted and interpolated — you have to listen closely, to keep track of where it's heading. After a while, Qbert gets up on stage to do a little scratching, before heading out to the *Wave Twisters* premiere. I have no idea what record he has up there, for scratching purposes — he warps the sound all out of shape, peeling hidden noises out of the original grooves. The record screeches up like tires in a car wreck — then dissolves into a flock of mechanical birds. The crowd whoops it up.

At the screening itself, they've got a two turntable setup for Qbert to give a scratching demonstration. On one turntable he runs the beat, on the other he's got a Barbie record — something that came with a picture book — he runs the phrase, spoken in insipid whitegirl diction: "Turn the page when you hear the sound of the chime" (and then there's the crystal ding! of the chime). He proceeds to spin the phrase fast, then slow, then backwards; then he makes up rhythms from repetitions — the audience responds to the conceptual kick of it — eloquence through stuttering. "Turn the page t-t-t-turn the page Turn Turn Turn the page." He finally launches full bore into it, running the line "when you hear the sound of the chime," then pulling out the chime into a long, complex, fluttering arpeggio — that ends with a perfectly timed and clear ding!

It's a perfect intro for the film, which unfortunately gets off to a rough start — there's no sound at first. They rewind the film and start it over again. This in itself is a great advertisement for digital projection — if *Wave Twisters* had been projected in 35mm, there would've been no way to reel it back. It's a testament to the out-there aesthetics of the film, that when it starts rewinding, running backwards and getting all pixelated, most of the audience thinks this is actually part of the movie.

Day 6

What is it about stepping into a pile of dog crap, that it always resonates with metaphysical implications? I score a direct hit, first thing in the morning, right into the winter tread of my boot. The citizens of Salt Lake City are treated to the spectacle of the defeated Sundance director, stranded at the curb for a good 15 minutes, one foot shivering in a faded black sock, beating the boot itself against the pavement again and again, like the murderous ape with the bone in *2001*. This alternates with more fine-tuned scraping with serrated bits of leaves and available scraps of gum wrapper. I examine the shit-smeared sole of my boot like a gypsy inspecting tea-leaves at the bottom of a cup. I've stepped directly into a *bad omen*, but unfortunately, crawling back into bed and pulling the covers over my head for the remainder of the day isn't an option; I've gotta persevere, forge ahead, one foot scraping against the icy blacktop in a hygienic limp.

Eric and Syd are at the digital center, both looking fairly wiped out from their big night. The perfect capper for their evening was trying to get back into their party after the screening — and not being allowed in. Their

THE DAMNABLE IGNOMINY OF DEFEAT

publicist had to come and save them from the bouncer.

A nice bonus — Andy Murdock happens to be in the digital center when I peek in to give a last goodbye to Angela (who, unfortunately, isn't there). He's tall and sandy-haired, and like all the other filmmakers I've met, very friendly. I'd seen his Sundance-selected short *Rocketpants* at RES-FEST, and told him I liked it — it's a nice slice of whacked-out dream-imagery, featuring an Elvis Presley-looking fellow with robotic nether parts, rocketing around a bizarre landscape. He shows me the cartoon he's currently working on — he's got a tape in a digital camera, pops open the side screen and plugs some headphones into the thing for me. So I sit and watch while he sits and watches me watch. It's a couple minutes of a strange, cybernetic ecosystem, with natural forms overlapping with artificial ones. It starts with a hummingbird with a sparkplug for a head, darting its beak into a flower — the stamen of the flower bends to the back of the bird's head and closes the circuit, flashing sparks across the interval. Other mechanical animals appear: a motorized millipede that erases the distinction between insect locomotion and the repetitive rhythms of an engine and a pelican that looks like it's descended from the notional helicopter that appeared in Da Vinci's sketchbooks. It starts getting deeply weird when a tree-borne fruit shrivels and disgorges, as its pit, the head and torso of a human infant...then the tape cuts out. "That was insanely beautiful," I say. "Thanks," Andy says, "I have no idea where it's going. But I like to work that way. Keeps it fresh, so I don't get bored with it."

These are the sorts of moments that make the festival worthwhile — impromptu sharings of oddball visions — the outpatients swapping their hallucinations for the sake of mutual enjoyment.

These are the sorts of moments that make the festival worthwhile — impromptu sharings of oddball visions…

Parting Thoughts and Notions

I hope Sundance continues to have an online component to their festival. It's good for online work to get notice and to be brought into greater dialogue with a wider audience. The more opportunities for people working in the online field to come together and meet each other, the greater the chances are for cross-fertilization and sideways sparks of inspiration. By facilitating this, festivals contribute to the evolution of the art form and Sundance could certainly cultivate a role as one of the midwives of this newly emerging medium.

While I understand the philosophical impulses behind Sundance's decision to keep the online festival on monitors, in its native environment so to speak, I hope they rethink this. Of course it would be possible to relegate the online festival completely to "cyberspace," without any physical, corresponding presence in Park City — but I think this would be running in the wrong direction, and wasting the cultural capital Sundance brings to the enterprise. Sundance has great value as a physical place, where filmmakers,

producers and curious bystanders can be brought together in fruitful networks. An actual screening of the online films would be nice. While the online experience tends to be an intimate one, with one or two people sitting close to their monitor, a festival experience is a necessarily communal one. Screenings concentrate peoples' attention and curiosity, and create a real dialog with the work. A screening becomes an "event" that people feel they are a part of. Interactive online films, which don't have a linear narrative, could be shown as demonstrations, with the filmmakers guiding the audience through a few variations. There's no reason why monitors couldn't be provided in addition, for the curious to work out their own variations when the screening is over. In this way, Sundance could provide a bridge to the work — acting as an educator and demystifier.

Despite all the hype and anti-hype surrounding online film, the Web is here to stay as a venue for truly independent film — films that are done on the cheap, films that evolve out of a deeply personal vision, films that push the boundaries of narrative structure. If the focus is on the work, and there's plenty of good work online, a situation that will only improve, no other excuses need be made.

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.

Standing at the Crossroads

by Jean Detheux
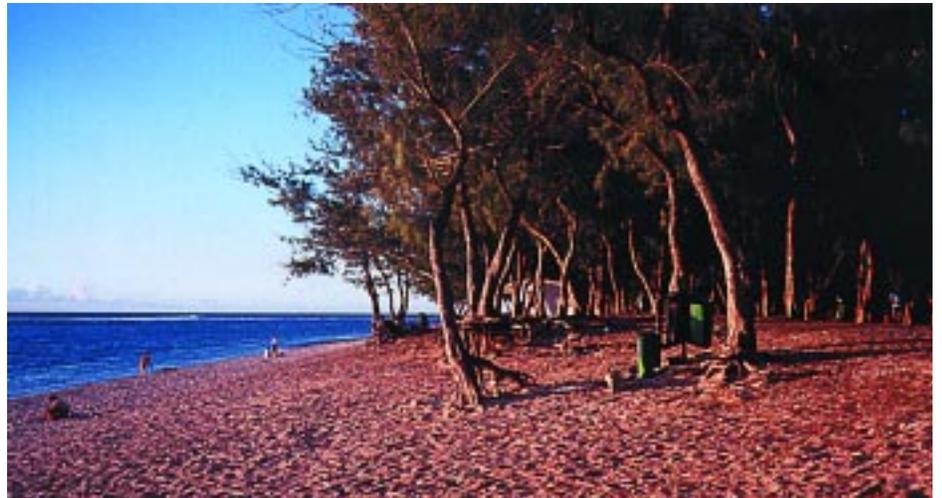
La Réunion's beach, late afternoon. All photos courtesy of Jean Detheux.

One knows the plane left Paris 11 hours ago, yet one could have landed somewhere on the outskirts of Nice!

The Fourth Crossroads of the e-mage of the Indian Ocean (4ème Carrefour de l'e-mage de l'Océan Indien) was held from January 29 to February 2, 2001, on Reunion Island. This island is situated 500 miles off the east coast of Madagascar, but is a genuine European region, part of France, in the Indian Ocean! (A "DOM" — a "département d'outre-mer" — as the French call it, an overseas district.) The population is about 730,000 inhabitants, and the island enjoys the typical infra-structures found in most European regions.

Arriving there, one is struck by a strange sense of "déjà vu;" one knows the plane left Paris 11 hours ago, yet one could have landed somewhere on the out-skirts of Nice! The cars are the same (North Americans miss a lot in not having access to all those terrific small compact Peugeot, Renault, Citroën, VW, Fiat, Lancia and other well designed, well made, attractive and efficient mod-els), the road marks are the same, even the billboards and houses seem — almost — similar. Yet, if there are strong similarities between Saint-Denis de la Réunion and a generic Southern French city, there are also striking differences: first, at this time of year (summer "down there"), the heat can be overwhelming, espe-cially if it comes with the humidity only the monsoon regions can produce. The plants are different too, and if one has a chance to step out of the car and listen, the bird sounds are unmistakably "tropical."

Yet, this is Europe, and France.

A Unique Status

Being part of France and Europe, la Réunion benefits from some formidable aid programmes; programmes that could make the difference between a remote "third world" status and a vibrant "first world" economy opened to the new technologies. The deci-sion-makers of la Réunion have decided to invest heavily in the new technologies and are extremely pro-active in trying to create the kind of infrastructure and economy that could take the island out of its present state — suffering from between 40 and 50% unemployment — and usher it into the new millennium.

In place for several years, the strategy is focused on a two pronged approach: develop the infrastructures (including lines of communication) while training the

Scenes near the beach at dusk

Views of Piton de la Fournaise, a basaltic shield volcano that forms the southeast half of Réunion Island.

The rocky cliff shore of Cap Méchant or Mean Cape.

local labour force so that they can sustain and meet the needs that the new technologies bring to the island, and find and bring home all the possible forms of help which can be used to attract potential investors. In this regard, Europe, France and la Réunion can pack quite an attractive punch designed to lure (in the good sense of the term) those looking for new places to do business in animation cinema and fiction cinema production.

The island has already shown that it can meet the demanding standards of CD-ROM production and 2D animation. It is now aiming its sites at 3D animation, Web technologies and fiction cinema, with substantial aid for partial financing of local productions now available. La Réunion has some absolutely smashing and varied landscapes (from tropical shores through strange alpine meadows all the way to moon-like volcanic craters) which ought to attract companies looking for unusual shooting locations (the light too is quite unique).

The local workforce (50% of the island's population is under 25 years old!) has access to a variety of high quality education channels in new technologies, IT and communications, including the artistic education provided by the "école supérieure des beaux-arts et des métiers artistiques de la Réunion" (superior school of fine-arts and artistic trades of la Réunion) and the Institut de l'Image de l'Océan Indien (ILOI or Image Institue of the Indian Ocean).

One potential weak link in this chain could be the connection between the island and the rest of the world, but at the time of writing, there are serious efforts being made to remedy that. ADSL is increasingly available, and the fiber optics cable "SAFE" (South Africa Far East) is being brought in from South Africa. The island itself is already extensively wired, so this major problem is being addressed by people who are only too aware of the importance of the pipes.

Rather than going through a lengthy listing of all the aid pro-grammes available to investors, I will refer the reader to the "Comité de Pilotage de l'Industrie" ("CPI," the industry steering committee) and its "chargé de mission," Mr. Paul Hibon, who can be reached via email at: cpirun@guetali.fr; phone: 02 62 922492; fax: 02 62 922488; and URL: http://www-cpi.asso.fr. Many of these pro-grammes can actually cover 50%

A lovely tent-lunch on the harbour of Le Port following a Crossroads presentation.

Alain Séraphine participating in an intense discussion.

or more of all production costs and can be applied over time to many aspects of those costs, including capital costs, taxes, labour costs and much more.

All the Island Offers

The Crossroads conference started with a presentation by representatives from the State, Region and CNC (National Cinematographic Centre) on the following theme: "La Réunion, land of production and fabrication of animation cinema." This presentation stressed the immense commonality of the efforts brought to Réunion by the different levels of government. It served as a strong reminder that the island is a part of Europe and France, and reflected the European approach of helping regions, something we North Americans may want to reflect upon. (Should we just "dump" less productive/fortunate regions, or help develop them with public moneys?)

Another question pertinent to North American projects was asked during this presentation: "Can all this financial help apply to projects that would not be realized in French?" The answer was twofold: "As of right now, the regulations are such that much of the

help applies to productions made in French. However, if such a project (non-French) ever surfaces, we can guarantee you that whatever is needed will be done to make it viable and eligible to the same financial help as are the French language based projects." I want to emphasize the strong sense of "can do" attitude exuded by those in decision-making positions, something quite unlike much of the European bureaucratic "red tape" and hurdles with which this person is only too familiar.

This was followed by a delightful lunch served buffet-style under tents along the harbour ("Le Port"). Many participants took advantage of this opportunity to meet one another. The food was remarkable; a mixture of Indian ("cari" as in curry, "Massalé" as in Massala), Créole ("boudin," sausage), French (Bordeaux and Beaujolais wines, pastries), local rum, including "rhum arrangé," a rum in which herbs and spices have been steeped, and exotic fruits. I ate the very best mango ever. "Mangue Joseph" is a small, roundish fruit, very different from the usual oval fruit that I was familiar with, and a source of unbelievably deep and long lasting flavours.

Azmina Goulamaly, the new Pipangaï director.

Gérard Cauvain of Les Gobelins, France's leading animation school.

That same evening, we were invited to a party where Pipangaï celebrated its fifth anniversary. Pipangaï, the second largest European animation studio (in production volume), can deliver up to fifteen half-hour 2D animations per month. The studio has already produced in excess of 300 half-hour animated episodes sold in over 80 countries. It specializes in colorization, background painting and compositing — basically, catering to the needs of animation studios in need of qualified yet affordable labour.

During this party, Alain Séraphine passed the torch to Azmina Goulamaly, now the new director of Pipangaï. Séraphine will focus his formidable energy and talents on the ILOI (Indian Ocean Institute of the Image), an institute that, along with the School of Fine Arts, could do much to not only develop local qualified labour, but also set the scene for the emergence of genuine local talent and vision (something that could go a long way toward lessening the dependence of la Réunion on projects from abroad).

Cyberspace, Pipangaï and Movies

The next day started with a review of e-learning, e-commerce and communications both on the Internet and Intranet as seen from a French perspective. The moderator was Gérard Cauvain of Les Gobelins (http://www.gobelins.fr/public/index.html), a well-known school of multimedia (photography, animation cinema, design, video, multimedia) in Paris. The Gobelins in general, and Gérard Cauvain in particular, have a lot to do with what is now happening on Réunion. They take part in the training being offered by ILOI and, as the Gobelins is in the forefront of "continuing education," it is a natural for responding appropriately to the unique needs of such remote areas.

> ## I wonder if "globalization" isn't having a homogenizing effect on places even as far away as Réunion.

Among the presentations, two young graduates from the Gobelins talked about Intranet communications and new technologies (Arnaud Lacaze Masmonteil, http://www.infotronique.fr) and the stakes of e-commerce (Julien Dufour). What was immediately obvious were the differences in situation between France and North America. Figures showed that the percentage of the population now wired is a lot less in France than in the U.S. and Canada, but even more significant, were the percentages of those who are wired and trust on-line transactions. I would have thought that France, with its Minitel network (see http://www.minitel.fr) had a

head start in entering the Web age, especially as far as e-commerce is concerned, but it does not yet seem to be the case. What I also noticed however was that these two young French IT specialists demonstrated not only a thorough knowledge of their field, but also a well rounded "general culture" as evidenced by their many references to things outside the narrow confines of their concentration. (I don't know too many North American "geeks" who could intelligently discuss the relative merits of L.-F. Céline's early and late works!)

Later that day we visited Pipangaï and were given a tour of the building. We saw all the usual trappings of such institutions, with many young islanders busy working on current projects. SGI computers were everywhere, and there was a focused yet relaxed atmosphere, a feel of quiet confidence.

That evening, Georges Lacroix was given "carte blanche" to create and present a screening of his choice. Georges is a formidable figure in French animation. He's been a visible player in much of French media from illustration to art direction. He was artistic director at *L'Express*, a French magazine, from 1973 to 1980 and created Fantôme, an animation studio specializing in digital 3D images. (Fantôme was later purchased by Neurones, now Neuroplanet, only to be cannibalized so it seems.) Georges had his hand in many award-winning animation movies, with *Fables Géométriques* and *Insektors* being the better known examples. His present focus seems to be mostly on organizing international conferences dealing with new technologies pertaining to the art of

animation. He's done work for the Annecy animation festival amongst others. He also teaches directing at the Angoulême Cartoons National Centre (Centre National de la Bande Dessinée d'Angoulême) and at Réunion's ILOI. The evening was an opportunity to see one man's selection of many animated pieces reflecting his experience, his tastes and giving us a glimpse of what makes him tick.

Georges put together a long programme, which included the works of Tex Avery, Tim Burton, Michaël Dudok de Wit, Yuri Norstein (that *Hedgehog in the Fog* poetic masterpiece), a collection of Pixar shorts (*Geri's Game*, *For the Birds*, etc.) and much more.

He also decided to show samples of the ILOI's recent interns' work. This was, for me, a bit of an eye opener as it showed that, technically, these kids had nothing about which to envy their North American counterparts. However, I could not help notice (and I was not the only one) that there was one big factor absent in all the pieces we saw: no trace or sense of what the French call "le terroir." It is hard to translate, but it is something like, "a taste of the local/native soil." There was no presence of the Indian Ocean in general and of Réunion in particular. This, of course, reflects yet another personal opinion, but I wonder if "globalization" isn't having a homogenizing effect on places even as far away as Réunion. These short animated films could indeed have been made anywhere!

The New Technologies

Friday was a different day all together. We were treated to a succession of intense sessions, most of which dealt with the theme "New Tools for New Concepts."

Georges Lacroix relaxes after a long day!

Eric Bessone and Pierre Maréchal of Sensable Technologies (http://www.3d-touch.com/) demonstrated FreeForm (http://www.3d-touch.com/FreeForm/index.htm), which through its touch sensitive arm/tool makes it possible to model virtual clay in real-time, while receiving tactile feedback from the work via the tool. This makes it possible to work on virtual clay through both visual and tactile senses, with almost no learning curve (if one is already familiar with clay/foam modeling). Quite a trip! One can even enter the clay piece and work on it from the inside. A selection of keyboard commands makes it a breeze to change the size of the tool tip and more. This was a hit with many people; they just had to have their hands on it.

After that, Jane White of Protozoa (http://www.proto-zoa.com/) gave us a virtual tour of the studio, including footage of their work with *Sesame Street* (as in Elmo interacting with "live furniture" through the motion-capture of foam rubber pieces being manipulated). There was quite a

bit of time spent on motion-capture and how Protozoa and DotComix, a sister company, use this procedure. The examples presented seemed to show that if motion-capture — as is — may have had its day, it may now have hit a wall of sorts. If animation is art (that could be an open question), then surely it must deal with transposition (you know, "art is what makes us see" or "it is the lie that makes reality more real"). Motion-capture seems to have fallen for the literal, bypassing/avoiding that transposition all together.

DotComix especially seems to bring to my mind questions about the differences between entertainment and art; a recurring theme for me during this and other such events. I keep running into a question that could be phrased this way: "Isn't it time to choose between *South Park* and Rembrandt?" And I don't agree with those who say that we now can have both. I believe we can have "something" when we try to have both, but both "it ain't!"

The predominantly French audience seemed to respond favorably to the offerings from DotComix. I however noticed that, for most of them, the deeper content of (for example) *Duke 2000* was totally absent. The French can often project a lot of meaning (or miss it all together) in all things "American" (need I say, "Jerry Lewis?"). I asked pointed questions to several members of the audience and very few knew of *Doonesbury*, or even less of what this comic strip represents in terms of the post-Vietnam War American psyche.

Interestingly enough, I see a common thread developing between motion-capture, virtual 3D modeling, 3D animation and

the creation of "autonomous virtual humans." They all have to accept, as a given, the a-priori existence of "the world," a world made of solid objects moving in empty space. This is rooted in what Husserlian Phenomenology would call a "naive" world view (not necessarily pejorative), and I believe we already have found many indications that this is far from being a true reflection of our experience of our reality, our "living present."

Later on, Ludovic Duchâteau introduced Virtools (http://www.next-url.com/) and demonstrated how Virtools Creation can bring behavioral 3D authoring to people who have little or no programming background. The Virtools Web Player could be an interesting plug-in for viewing 3D animation on the Web, but it is not yet available for the Mac at the time of writing.

Mendel3D (http://www.mendel3d.com) was presented as a new set of tools to create and deliver 3D content on the Web. The file sizes these things can reach are amazingly small, something that I am sure will be of interest to many a Webmaster.

On Being Human

We also had our first encounter of the day with Maurice Benayoun (http://www.z-a.net and http://www.benayoun.com/) and the creation of virtual worlds in which both "real" humans and virtual humans can interact. Some of his better known works are *The Tunnel Under the Atlantic* (Montréal and Paris, 1995), *World Skin* (Ars Electronica, 1998) and *Tunnel Paris/New Delhi* (Paris and New Delhi, 1998). This set the tone for what the day would be

mostly about, a very serious investigation of the interface between the virtual and the "real." The questions that were brought up during the day, and the way in which they were dealt, set a tone that was quite different from the rest of the event. We were no longer looking passively at presentations of a general nature. We were being challenged by ideas that looked at our very notion of what it is to be "human." The work of Stéphane Donikian (and others such as Daniel Thalman) forces a deep reflection on the nature of our being.

When the demonstration of how a virtual human is being programmed was made, we went step by step into its makeup.

When the demonstration of how a virtual human is being programmed was made, we went step by step into its makeup. I was hard pressed to find "something" that had not yet been catalogued, and was delighted (relieved?) to

come up with this one: consciousness! Our consciousness seems to work a lot by association, so that (as has been shown so well by Herman Hesse) a scent can trigger the vivid recollection of a sound and vice versa. This ability we have to experience as "real" that which is physically not "there" is what the autonomous virtual human has a long way to go to acquire. It is our very subjectivity that may save us from (total) assimilation (yes, a Borg joke).

In a more "practical" way, this type of research opens up doors for applications such as virtual interactive games and remote manipulation, as in surgery or dangerous environments. In this latter field, Jean Noël Portugal has a lot to offer (http://www.dramaera.com/). It is also worth noting that Jean Noël Portugal and Stéphane Donikian share some of their research, which has led to commercial applications such as those offered at http://www.irisa.com.

I felt that these topics, all brought up during the last day of the conference, were important enough to warrant a conference of their own, as much had to be left out due to time constraints.

The beauty of the alpine meadows.

Larger, Larger, Larger Issues

This was an event that comes back to me in two ways. As a showcase of la Réunion as a good place to do business (in animation and fiction cinema), it was a real success. All the people we dealt with demonstrated an amazing good will and much competence, insuring that their desire and commitment to see this type of industry be established deeper on the island will most likely succeed. I cannot stress enough all the financial benefits potential investors can derive from implanting some or all of their operations, and the value of the enormous amount of benevolence and competence they will for sure meet locally.

On the other hand, much of what happened led to reflections about the kind of world we are now busy creating through this rampant globalization. With that in mind, I wonder if la Réunion isn't focusing its sight on too short a vision, aiming at a short term success (as a service industry to the global animation market), but in the process, risking the longer term negative outcome of not developing its own unique content. Asia is quite capable of delivering those services at the lowest possible costs, but it may not be able to deliver truly unique content (unless it too revises its thrust).

In my examining this problem, I see how much it also exists in, for example, North America, a continent were there are many remote areas which, if we stay within the "global" models and agenda, will never be able to compete head on with urban centres. Unless, once again, the remote areas develop their unique and irreplaceable content and, like on la Réunion, they benefit from serious public aid to develop their infrastructure. The Web is exploding and the need for original material is greater than ever. That need can only continue to grow, surely this could provide the incentive to bank on one's idiosyncrasies?

Is it possible to find the universal in the particular?

As an example. Montréal was recently given the opportunity to see *Passage*, a co-production by the Théâtre Talipot (from la Réunion), the Centre Dramatique de l'Océan Indien, the Théâtre de la Ville de Paris and the Théâtre de Saint-Quentin-en-Yveslines. This show was a terrific success in Canada, from where I am writing. *Passage* is the quest of a man who searches far and wide for his identity and freedom, and who finds it when entering a cave in the very same way one enters one's self. In there, he finds that at his deepest core, he is not alone, far from it. The show was presented in a mixture of French, Créole, Zulu and more. The "idiosyncratic language" was not at all a barrier to comprehension, the "meaning" was felt more than "understood."

Is it possible to find the universal in the particular?

Is it possible for remote areas to develop this respectful relationship with their uniqueness, and in the process make a success of sharing it with the rest of the world? In a very real sense, it belongs to the rest of the world, but aren't we "the rest of the world" to each other?

A few memorable lines from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* keeps popping into my mind:
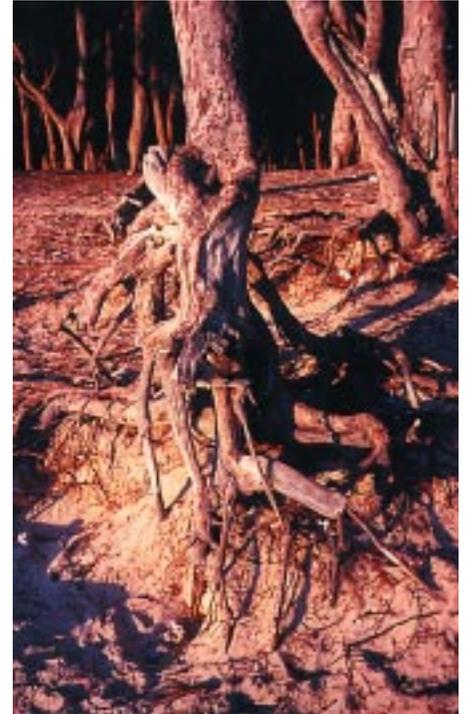
Near a beach on Réunion Island; is this perhaps a "tree of passage?"

We shall not cease from exploration And the end of all our exploring Will be to arrive where we started And know the place for the first time.
—Little Gidding V, *Four Quartets* (1943)

Jean Detheux is an artist who, after several decades of dedicated work with natural media, had to switch to digital art due to sudden severe allergies to paint fumes. He is now working on ways to create digital 2D animations that are a continuation of his natural media work. He has been teaching art in Canada and the U.S., and has works in many public and private galleries.

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

Toy Fair 2001:
The Big Hits To Come

by Jacquie Kubin

New York City...Whether the toy spins into a cartoon or the cartoon evolves into a toy, this year's 98th American International Toy Fair was the place to find out what's hot in upcoming animated properties. For those who look beyond the packaging, the annual Toy Fair allows a sneak peek into what franchises might hold possibilities for theatrical, cartoon and video game work as toys grow into multi-media franchises.

Taking Gaming to the Big Screen

Video gaming represents one of the greatest liaisons between the toy license and animated property. According to a communications industry report released by New York merchant bank Veronis Suhler last summer, interactive game sales will grow 21.7%, reaching $13.8 billion in sales by 2004 leading video

The characters of *Dragonball Z* seen out and about the city in a Humvee. All photos courtesy of Jacquie Kubin.
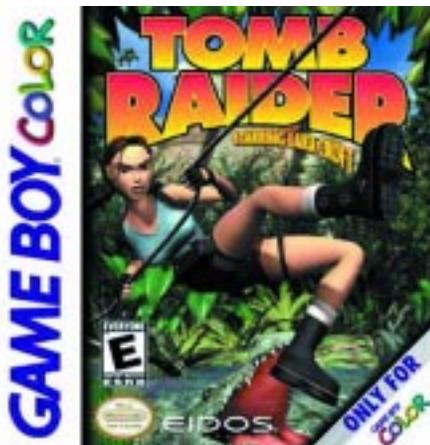
THQ's *Tomb Raider* starring Lara Croft for GameBoy Color from Eidos Interactive's enormous *Tomb Raider* franchise.

games to be one of the number one license growers.

This year's most popular video game turned licensee franchise will be the Lara Croft *Tomb Raider* universe being brought to national attention through the summer release of Paramount's live-action, theatrical release starring Angelina Jolie (June 15, 2001). The venerable Lara Croft first put video game developer Eidos Interactive on the map with the release of the Playstation game *Tomb Raider I* in 1996. That one game has led to hours of interactive animation with multiple editions for Playstation including *Tomb Raider II: Classic, Tomb Raider III: Classic* and *Tomb Raider:*

Toy Fair allows a sneak peek into what franchises might hold possibilities for theatrical, cartoon and video game work…

Chronicles. For PC play is *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation, Chronicles* and *The Lost Artifact. Tomb Raider* game play has also been developed for GameBoy Color and the Macintosh platforms.

Found ready for retailer's shelves when the movie is released this summer are *Tomb*

The second anime inspired "McFarlane's 3D Animation from Japan" figures.

Todd McFarlane's *Dark Ages Spawn: The Samurai Wars* depicting Lotus the angel warrior on the left and Dojo, Jyaaku's evil minion and host body, to the right.

London town. With partners such as Sony and Viacom, as well as the highly successful video game franchise, one would have to imagine that a *Tomb Raider* cartoon will not lag too far behind the movie.

Trying to edge their way into the collectible card game market is Seattle-based Interactive Imagination and the Magi-Nation franchise that begins with a role-playing card game, Magi-Nation Duel, that began shipping last Fall. The card game has been followed by a GameBoy Color video game and by Christmas this year, Magi-Nation will reach storybooks, comic books, action figures and toys. In addition, SEGA, Nickelodeon and Konami have all signed up to help grow the Magi-Nation animated properties.

Big Screen Hits

Taking a Darwinian approach to toy licensing, *Planet of the Apes* (July 27, 2001) represents the very first, and still one of the most popular, collectible licensing franchises. First released in 1968, *Planet of the Apes* has grown to include five original theatrical releases, a 1974 episodic television series, a television movie and 13 animated cartoon episodes that ran from September of 1975 through September of 1976. With a franchise that has never faded far from consumers, 20th Century Fox and Tim Burton will reinvent a world gone backwards when *Planet of the Apes* is released to movie theaters this summer.

With special effects by Industrial Light & Magic and make-up by the legendary Rick Baker, the movie trailers show promise as do Hasbro's 6-1/2" action figures featuring the major heroes and villains from the movie, which include Mark Wahlberg as Leo

Raider inspired apparel, collectibles, novelties, books, stationary and action figures by Playmates Toys. Though they have released *Tomb Raider* figures in the past, new releases are based on the character as portrayed by Jolie. Fans can collect three different 9" Lara dolls dressed in either a wet suit, jungle or Area 51 outfit.

Plus, they can create adventures with the 6" Lara Croft figure assortment featuring scenes from the movie, including Lara with a Bengal tiger, on her street assault motorbike, facing down a deadly white shark or battling a legendary yeti in the forests, a crocodile in the South Pacific or a Doberman on the rooftops of

Davidson the astronaut, model Estella Warren as the human Daena, Helena Bonham Carter as Ari, Michael Clark Duncan as Attar and George Clooney as the Ape General. Played by actor Tim Roth, General Thade with Battle Steed will make a fine addition to a *Planet of the Apes* collection, as will the ultra Attar, a 12" figure with electronic sounds from the movie, including Attar's ferocious roar. Fans of the original movies will want to watch the film for a cameo appearance by Charlton Heston.

New to both toys and the movie screen is *Shrek* (May 18, 2001), an animated fairy tale about the giant monster Shrek and his quest for the perfect wife. A DreamWorks/PDI CGI animated film, Mike Myers is the voice of the giant Shrek, Eddie Murphy offers comedic wit as The Donkey and Cameron Diaz is The Ugly Princess. Toy master Todd McFarlane has entered this childlike fantasy world creating action figures and plush toys with his first master toy

license. The line will include standard 6" figures, mini figures, super-sized figures, plush and beanie toys and playsets.

For fans worried that Mr. McFarlane might be going soft, also viewed at Toy Fair were more of his trademark *Spawn* figures, the second anime inspired "3D Animation from Japan" figures, "Movie Maniacs IV," a continually expanding rock n' roll series that will include Jim Morrison and Metallica, and some of the most twisted, disgusting and detailed figures ever made, The Tortured Souls. Created by Mr. McFarlane after collaborating with horrorist Clive Barker, these six figures, which include Agonistes, Lucidique, Mongroid, Scythe Meister, The Vix and Venal Anatomica, will inspire the most chilling nightmares.

Another huge push next year will be for *Monsters, Inc.* (November 2, 2001), a Disney/Pixar theatrical release featuring the voice talents of Billie Crystal, James Coburn and John


The highly anticipated Disney/Pixar theatrical release *Monsters, Inc.* seems a natural as far as plush toys are concerned.

Goodman as Monsters, the kind that hide in the closet or under the bed, who work for Monsters, Inc., a "scare factory" that collects power for their city from the screams of little children. A CGI *tour de force* in the same vein as *Toy Story* and *Bugs Life*, this film promises an extensive licensee life when wise-cracking one-eyed Mike Wzowski (Crystal) and cute, furry, blue James P. "Sully" Sullivan (Goodman) are banished to life in the human world when they accidentally let a small child, Boo (Mary Gibbs), into Monstropolis. Toys, including action figures, electronics, board games and plush, are being developed by Hasbro. Due to Disney's standing relationship, a kids meal tie-in with McDonald's is also planned.

Other Big Screen Hopefuls

Harry Potter (November 2001) seems to be an extremely wide spread toy license with Hasbro's Wizards of the Coast releasing a card game, Electronic Arts creating video games and Mattel releasing a complete line of *Harry Potter* inspired games and toys. Every fan of Harry Potter and dragons will want to have a Roarin' Snorin' Norbert pet that "comes to life" with realistic movements as he moves his tail and
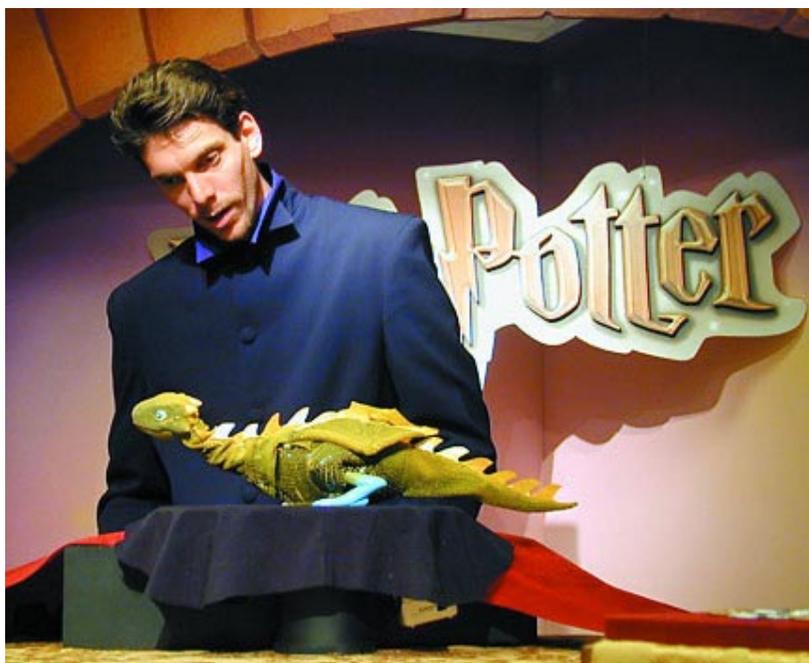
Harry Potter's release promises to proffer a diverse merchandising future that includes the Roarin' Snorin' Norbert pet which moves his tail and head, as well as flaps his wings up and down.

Nickelodeon's Jimmy Neutron, coming to the big screen, small screen, your computer screen and toy stores everywhere.

head and flaps his wings up and down.

In addition to *Harry Potter*, Warner Bros. is releasing *Osmosis Jones* (August 2001), an animated buddy-cop action-adventure comedy starring Chris Rock as the voice of the main character Osmosis Jones, a white blood cell living in the body of a construction worker Frank Detomello. In the "City of Frank," Osmosis doesn't like to play by the rules and fun ensues when he is assigned a new "cold-tablet" partner. Trendmasters is handling Mr. Jones' line of action figures and toys.

Other video/cartoon properties that continue to expand include *Digimon: The Movie* (February 2001) with the Fox/Bandai release expecting to do well in theaters before releasing to video.

Other properties to watch include *Jimmy Neutron, Boy Genius*. Mattel has the toy license for this Paramount/Nickelodeon CGI animated film due out in November releasing morphing toys just like Jimmy Neutron invents.

The hottest toys include a multi-media franchise…

Small But Powerful

From the Cartoon Network, *The Powerpuff Girls* (April 2001) are expanding their video line with the April 3 release of two new videos, "Boogie Frights" and "Twisted Sister," and a special edition DVD, "The Mane Event." These releases are being support-

ed with a Dairy Queen kids-meal tie in.

Irwin Toys, a 75 year-old toy maker, launched its most extensive animation-based toy line in history revolving predominately around anime shows acquired for Cartoon Network's popular Toonami block. Part of this new line includes *Dragonball Z* action figures, vehicles and accessories that align with the action-adventure series. Another acquired from Japan Toonami hit, *Sailor Moon* has been a favorite with girls, teens and college students. At the show, Irwin Toys featured a new packaging line including 25 dolls representing the five Sailor Scouts as well as dolls for Sailor Uranus, Sailor Pluto, Sailor Neptune, Sailor MiniMoon, Princess Serena and the Wicked Lady. Irwin Toys also grabbed the license for the ever-growing in popularity pre-school PBS sensation *Caillou*.

One of the most popular children's universes is *Dragon Tales* (March 2001) with Sony Pictures Family Entertainment and Sesame Workshop releases "Keep on Trying" and "Let's Play Together" on

The ever-popular *Powerpuff Girls* merchandise continues to showcase a plethora of must have items for every fan.

Nick Jr.'s *Bob the Builder* series created by HIT Entertainment PLC and Keith Chapman plans to expand merchandising along with the popularity of the show.

video in March.

Bob the Builder (May 2001), the popular Nick Jr. cartoon created by HIT Entertainment PLC and Keith Chapman, will be releasing two new, as yet unnamed titles this May through New Home Video. The hard working Bob promises to build out as a leading licensee for the pre-school set with Hasbro unveiling a new product line. Released in April 1999 on the

Currently airing on the U.K.'s CiTV with great success, *The Butt-Ugly Martians'* toy license expects to put these characters in front of a lot more viewers and in many more homes.

U.K.'s BBC, the *Bob the Builder* television series has become an international success currently sold in over 100 countries worldwide. The Hasbro toy line will include a broad range of products including plush, figures, play sets, board games, puzzles and electronic novelty products under their brand names Playskool, Tiger, Milton Bradely and Parker Brothers.

Another HIT Entertainment product is *Angelina Ballerina* (Fall 2001), a tiny mouse that wants to dance. Originally released by Mattel's American Girl as a book with plush toy tie-in, *Angelina Ballerina* will launch on television this fall.

Being broadcast in the U.K., *Butt-Ugly Martians* is a 30-minute CGI episodic cartoon featuring Doo-Wah-Diddy, B. Bop-A-Luna and 2-T-Fru-T who have been sent to Earth for purposes of invasion, only to befriend three Earth friends, Mikey, Angela and Cedric, and the invaders become the protectors. Hasbro has scooped up this property's master toy license and we can expect to see more of the *Butt-Ugly Martians*

on American television and, quite possibly, movie screens.

At the end of the event, one thing was very clear. The hottest toys include a multi-media franchise stretching from Saturday morning cartoons, through video games and on to the silver screen.

Looking ahead to next year, a few animated properties announced include (all dates 2002):

- *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New Line; December)
- *Eloise in Paris* (Di Novi Pictures; television and film; Summer)
- *The Country Bears* (Walt Disney Pictures with the Jim Henson Creature Workshop; animatronic puppets; date TBA)
- *Scooby-Doo* (Warner Bros.; CGI animation and live-action; date TBA)
- *The Wild Thornberrys* (Paramount/Nickelodeon/Klasky-Csupo; date TBA)

Jacquie Kubin, a Washington, DC-based freelance journalist, enjoys writing about the electronic entertainment and edutainment mediums, including the Internet. She is a frequent contributor to the Washington Times and Krause Publication magazines. She has won the 1998 Certificate of Award granted by the Metropolitan Area Mass Media Committee of the American Association of University Women.

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

Animation World News

Compiled and written by Rick DeMott
Technology news compiled and written by Paul Younghusband

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

- Oscars Do Not Reject Father & Daughter & Periwig-Maker
- BAFTA Nominates Chicken Run As Best British Film
- Maya Wins Best Of Show At Macworld
- Nick Announces Kid's Choice Noms
  ▶ **http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Awards**

Business

- New F/X Studio Mr. X Launches
- Gaming Firm Spawns F/X Studio In North Carolina
- Kaydara Gains $5M In Venture Capital
- Realviz Raises $9.39 Million
- Animation Stock Ticker For Tuesday, February 6, 2001
- iFilm Secures $10 Million
- Sega Ends Dreamcast
- DreamWorks Backs Out Of GameWorks
- Animation Stock Ticker For Tuesday, January 30, 2001
- Pukka Launches Pukka Post & Pukka Web
- Animation Stock Ticker For Tuesday, January 23, 2000
  ▶ **http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Business**

Commercials

- LocoMotion Animates Tropical Party With Vicon Motion–Capture
- iXL Parodies The Matrix Effect For Comedy Central TV Funhouse Promo
- ATTIK Launches Wrigley's Big Red Into 2001
- R!OT Pulls Off Great Escape For Ford
- Quiet Man Livens Up Regional Sport Spots For Fox
- ViewPoint Blooms 3D Venus Spot For Gillette
- PRoGRESS Speeds Up New Cisco Campaign
  ▶ **http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Commercials**

Events

- Mainframe's Fraccia Speaks At The University of Washington
- Mogra Festival Is The Online Festival Of After Effects Art
  ▶ **http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Events**

Films

- Hannibal/Tiger Slash Records At US Box Office
- Cast Away Sinks To Third
- Adam Sandler's Meatball Animation Makes Feature
- New Int BO Champ Castaways Competition
  ▶ **http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Films**

Internet and Interactive

- This Week's Web Animation Guide For Friday, February 9, 2001
- Infogrames Nails Men In Black, Peanuts' Rights
- Brilliant Digital To Release Multipath Player For Mac
- Interplay Nabs Matrix Gaming Rights
- Distant Corners Gains Creature Feature Rights
- This Week's Web Animation Guide For Friday, February 2, 2001
- Spielberg & Howard Webtoons Debut On Monday, February 5
- Australian Government Sets Out To Ban Political Web Game
  ▶ **http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Internet%and%Interactive**

People

- Warner Home Video Shuffles Staff
- Brilliant Digital Hires New CFO/COO
- Ed Catmull Named Pixar President
- Executive Producer Mandy Martin Enters ATTIK
- Harvey's Mischel Takes Pres Post At Rumpus
  ▶ **http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=People**

Technology

- Caligari Unleashes trueSpace5
- Discreet Begins Shipping frost 2.5
- Digimation Ships Phoenix 1.5
- DPS AniMate Released For dspReality & dpsVelocity
- Rainbow Studios Switches To 3DBOXX
- DigiCel Releases FlipBook PT
- eReview Producer Premieres At NAPTE
- Discreet Ships 3ds max 4
- ReelSmart Motion Blur Now Available For Shake, Avid & Discreet
- SOFTIMAGE|XSI 1.5 Now Shipping
  ▶ **http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Technology**

Television

- AtomFilms Brings Content To Pay-Per-View
- U.S. Primetime TV Ratings For The Week Of January 15-21, 2001
  ▶ **http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Television**

Video

- Mattel, Mainframe Bring Barbie To Nutcracker Feature
  ▶ **http://www2.awn.com/mag/news.php3?item=Video**

Next Issue's Highlights

Producing Animation, April 2001

In April Animation World Network will kick off Catherine Winder and Zahra Dowlatabadi's new book *Producing Animation* with a special indepth look at how animation is produced. From feature films to television from Europe to the U.S. we will detail how schedules and budgets are put together. Sylvia Edwards will compare traditional animation television show schedules and budgets to CGI TV series, a rapidly growing trend. Feature film producer Steve Walsh will take us inside putting together a European feature film, while Evan Backes will outline the recent production timelines of several large U.S. releases. Jacquie Kubin will detail the schedules and budgets of the gaming world, and James Dalby will take us into the nuts and bolts of Webisodes. Independent animation producers and directors will also discuss how they have financed their most recent works. We are also going to look at the history of television animation distribution with television animation veteran Buzz Potamkin. Plus, Sony Pictures Family Entertainment's Sander Schwartz will then outline how he thinks the distribution world will shake out in the future.

In other stories, we will have a profile of Marc Du Pontavice's Xilam and their latest projects like the ultra-cool looking *Rapido*. In regular columns, Glenn Vilppu will continue his sketching on location tips, and anime reviews and the latest from the festivals will be included as well. A full line up of events will also be featured from France's high tech Milia, to Iran's 2nd International Animation Festival Of Tehran, and then onto the long-running Brussels Cartoon and Animation Festival. We will also have a special report on Cartoon Movie 2001 which will be happening in Potsdam-Babelsberg, Germany from March 15 - 17, 2001. NATPE and MIPTV will also be profiled.

Upcoming Editorial Calendar

Producing Animation	**April 2001**
Recruiting and Jobs	**May 2001**
Independent Animation	**June 2001**