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THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

December
2009
January
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ANIMATION MAGAZINE™

**The Princess
and the Frog:
The Beautiful
Rebirth of
Disney's 2D
Animation**

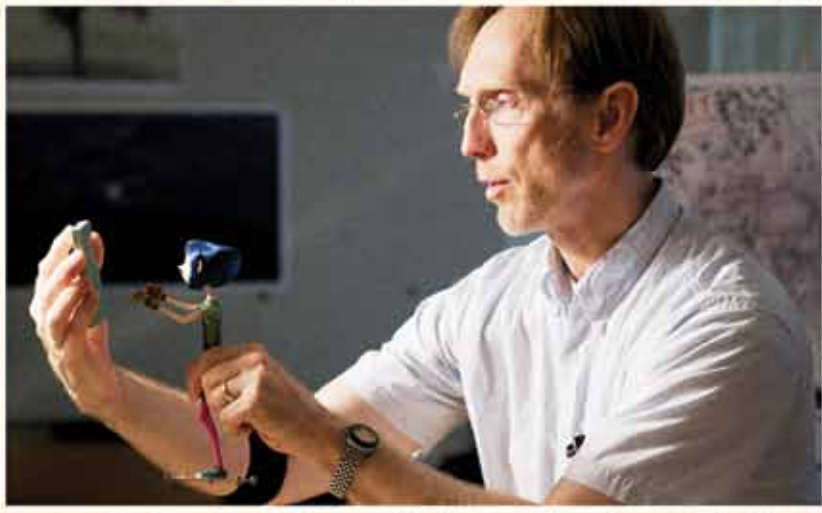
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2 versions of each set had to be created for *Coraline*: 1 for the regular world and 1 for the other world.



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For a behind-the-scenes look at the craft of 'Coraline' and up-to-the-minute screening information, go to: FocusAwards2009.com



F O R Y O U R C O N S I D E R A T I O N

DREAMWORKS
**MONSTERS
VS
ALIENS**

BEST ANIMATED FEATURE



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ANIMATION



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Cover: Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* marks the studio's triumphant return to 2D feature filmmaking.



Click With Animag Online Every Day!

Visit Animag's popular website (www.animationmagazine.net) this month to enter our special year-end giveaway, copies of the hot new DVD, *Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures: The Complete Series*, (courtesy of Paramount Home Ent.). The DVD comes out on Jan. 5, 2010.





As we approach the final day of 2009, there is plenty of news about animation and the ever-expanding community of people who work in the field. As awards season kicks into full gear, there is no shortage of articles handicapping the chances of *Up*, *Coraline*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *The Princess and the Frog*, *The Secret of Kells* or the other top contenders in the field. We're certainly thrilled to have featured many stories about these wonderful movies here in the pages of Animation Magazine.

For this year-end issue, we chose to highlight the return of Disney Animation to its 2D roots with the acclaimed *Princess and the Frog*. The film's directors Ron Clements and John Musker were kind enough to share some of their insights and behind-the-scenes stories with us for our cover story. In addition, we just had to include two articles about two of this year's great underdog movies in the Oscar race—*The Secret of Kells* and *A Town Called Panic*. Although we'd written about both of these movies in our magazine before, the fact that they were both gaining more momentum and will be getting a wider release in theaters in 2010 gave us another excuse to highlight their achievements.

Speaking of toon achievements, I'd like to take this time to congratulate the amazing Tina Price for putting together a fantastic event dedicated to the art and business of animation in Burbank, Calif. last month. The first CTN Expo attracted hundreds of toon fans and professionals and provided a wonderful opportunity for everyone to meet and greet some of the top animation artists in the industry up close. We were all very excited to be part of this great celebration and can't wait to participate again in 2010.

As we all know, there are plenty of animation-related events and markets held all over the world each year, but geographically it just makes sense to have a big event in Burbank, as the city is home to so many animation studios, vfx houses and outlets.

On a final note, on behalf of all of us here at the magazine, I would like to wish all of our readers and supporters a wonderful holiday season. We are planning lots of fun and informative animation-related panels and activities for the next few months, so don't forget to visit our website (www.animationmagazine.net) for up-to-the-minute news and events information. Thanks again for letting us put the world of animation at your fingertips. You are the reason we stay animated all year long.



Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor-in-Chief
rzahed@animationmagazine.net

Quote of the Month

"Excellent! Fictional cartoon millionaire Charles Montgomery Burns scored the most write-in votes for mayor of New York, collecting 25, according to Board of Elections data."

—MSNBC



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The New York Times

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EXUBERANCE IS A UNIVERSAL TONIC.**

The voice performances are sparkling; the plot is realized with a scenographic splendor that's as understated as it is dazzling and it's also invested with a surprising moral weight?"

The New Yorker

RICHARD BRODY



www.foxsearchlight.com/awards



The Animation Planner December



1 Slim pickin's at the DVD counter today. You can go for *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse: Choo-Choo Express*, *Ben 10: Alien Swarm* or *Tom and Jerry: Paws for a Holiday/A Nutcracker Tale*. Just make sure your kids don't fall for the Good Times rip-off DVD of *The Frog Prince*, which looks suspiciously similar to that Disney movie everyone is buzzing about this month!



2-4 Get your mingle on at the **Asia Television Forum** content market in Singapore for some prime wheeling and dealing (www.asiatvforum.com).



4-17 Check out the animated shorts and features "worth freezing for" at the wintry entertainment wonderland known as the **Anchorage Int'l Film Festival** in Alaska (www.anchoragefilmfestival.org). Also kicking off today is the annual **Les Nuits Magiques** celebration of animation in Bègles, France, which runs until Dec. 13 (www.lesnuitsmagiques.fr).



7-13 Should your holiday travels find you in beautiful Ljubljana, Slovenia, take some time off from grabbing last minute stocking stuffers and pop in to the **Animateka Int'l Animated Film Festival** that kicks off today, playing toon treats in English and Slovenian (www.animateka.si).



8 You only have a few more days of holiday shopping left, so why not consider the newly released DVDs of *SpongeBob SquarePants: Season Six, Vol. 1, Monster: Box Set 1* or *Naruto: Shippuden, Vol. 4*. For that special someone, we recommend the awesome two-disc *Coraline Gift Set*, which will set you back around \$60.



11 Ron Clements and John Musker bring 2D back to the Mouse House with their much-anticipated feature *The Princess and the Frog*. Peter Jackson displays some of his visual magic in the haunting *The Lovely Bones*, based on the best-selling novel by Alice Sebold.



15 It's a good day to go anime hunting: *Samurai Champloo: The Complete Series Blu-ray* and *One Piece: Season Two, Fourth Voyage* DVD are both out for you to enjoy. On the non-anime, hipster front, we've got the spanking-new *Robot Chicken: Season Four* DVD awaiting us.



16-19 Convene with leading experts on computer graphics technology for this year's **SIGGRAPH Asia** conference and exhibit in Yokohama, Japan this week (www.siggraph.org/asia2009).



SIGGRAPHASIA2009

18 Fanboys rejoice: James Cameron's super-hot 3-D fantasy *Avatar* finally hits theaters today. Cast includes Sigourney Weaver, Sam Worthington and Michelle Rodriguez.



22 Look for Seth MacFarlane's *The Empire Strikes Back* parody *Family Guy Presents Something, Something, Something Dark Side* in DVD stores and amazon.com today!



23 Those singing high-pitched critters face their female counterparts in *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel*, directed by Betty Thomas.



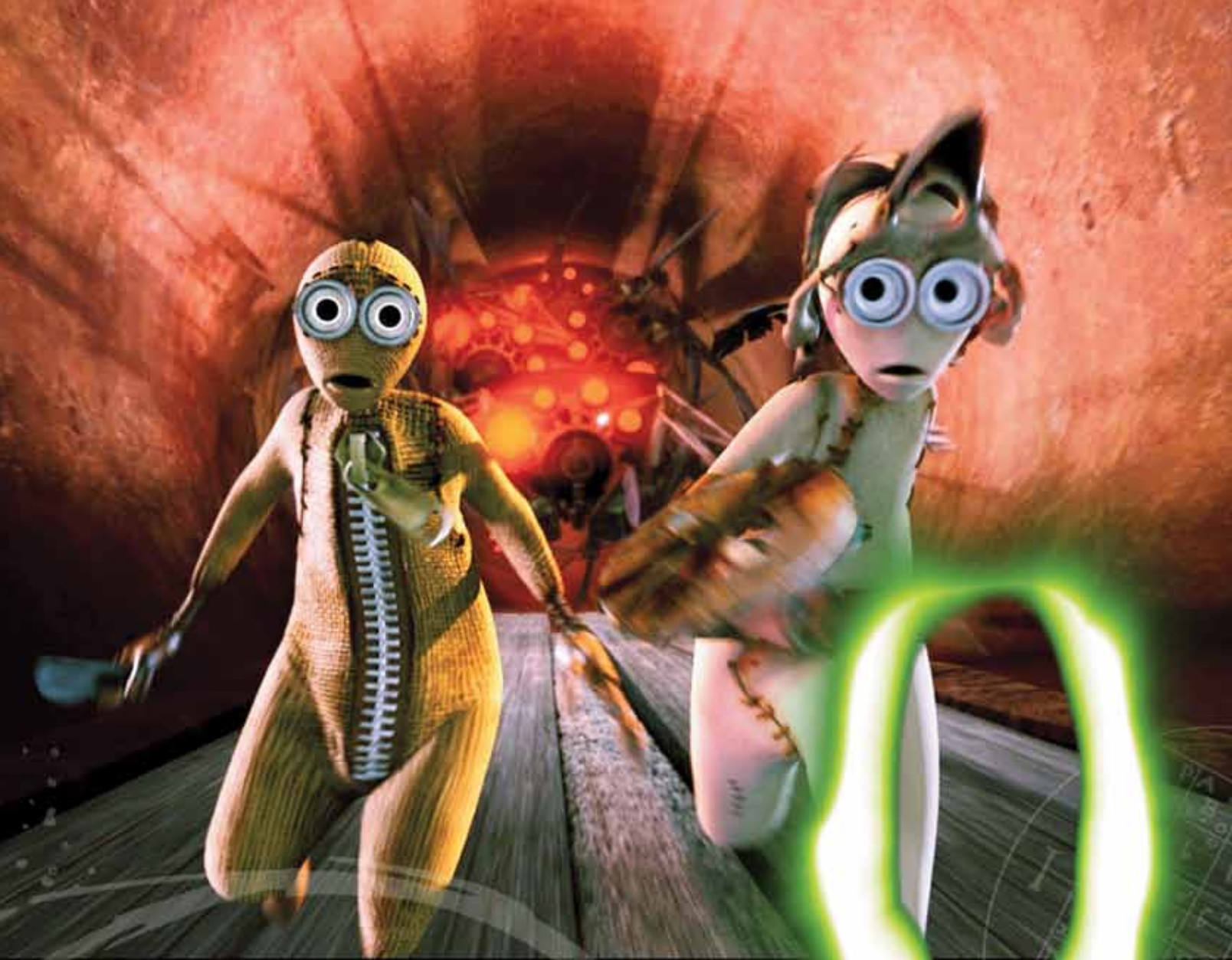
25 Terry Gilliam's high-concept *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* features *beaucoup* visual candy and the final screen appearance of the late Heath Ledger. Jude Law, Johnny Depp and Colin Farrell took over the role after his death.

29 Yes, the holidays are almost over. You've suffered through stifling family gatherings and overlong visits from out-of-town guests. Sadly, the only new DVD arrival today is *Case Closed: Captured in Her Eyes*. Well, you might as well wait a couple of days and see if Syfy will have another *Twilight Zone* marathon this year. (Yeah, we're also hoping they'll change their name back to Sci Fi Channel in 2010!)



31 **Happy New Year**, toon fans! We'll see you in 2010, keeping up with the latest and greatest in the animation universe (and nursing our hangovers!)





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BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

DIRECTED BY SHANE ACKER

“Breathtakingly Original.
Director Shane Acker Has Brought
Us Someplace Daring And New.

The animation is wondrous in its detail.
Acker has a vision all his own.”

- Christy Lemire, AP

For up-to-the-minute screening information and a
behind-the-scenes look at the creation of “9,” go to:
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FROM PRODUCERS TIM BURTON,
TIMUR BEKMAMBETOV AND JIM LEMLEY

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NOMINATED SHORT

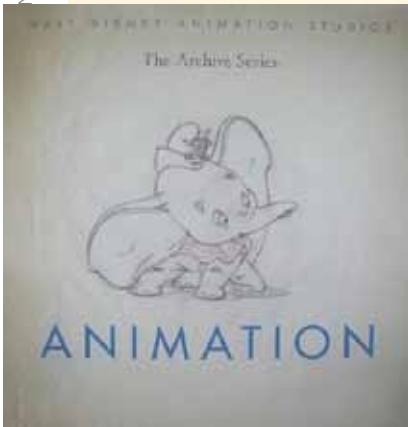
Books We Love



Animation: Walt Disney Animation Studios Archive Series

[Disney Editions, \$50]

One of the sweetest rewards of the season is the abundance of shiny new toon-related books hitting stores to tempt holiday shoppers. Landing way on top of our must-have list is this beautiful 272-page hardcover showcasing to-die-for art from the Disney archives. If you recall the first volume of the series that was published around the same time last year, you know that these books are like catnip to animation art lovers. This one features a nice intro by John Lasseter and includes pencil sketches by beloved classic Disney artists such as Hamilton Luske, Frank Thomas, Ollie Johnston, Milt Kahl, Marc Davis, Ward Kimball, Eric Larson, Wolfgang Reitherman, Clyde Geronimi and more recent treasures by the likes of Glen Keane, Andreas Deja, Eric Goldberg, Mark Henn and Tony



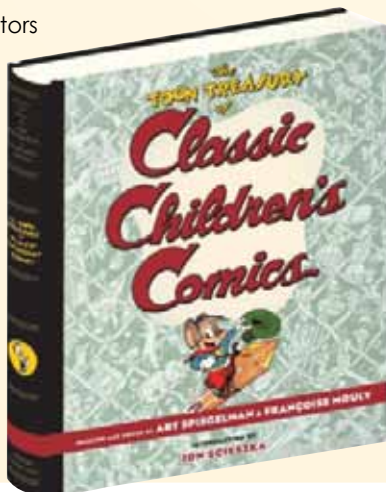
Bancroft. Many of these pieces have never been published before, so you can simply pretend you're a kid in a candy shop—or more accurately, a toon geek set free in the Walt Disney Animation Research Library. Frankly, if you see this book and don't start salivating and/or hyperventilating immediately, we'll be seriously worried about your mental health.

The TOON Treasury of Classic Children's Comics

Edited by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly

[Abrams ComicArts, \$40]

Graphic novel creators Art Spiegelman (*Maus*, *In the Shadow of No Towers*) and Françoise Mouly (*The New Yorker*, *RAW*) have given all of us a big holiday gift this year by putting together a gem of a comic-book anthology from the 1940s and early 1950s. Those were the days when comics



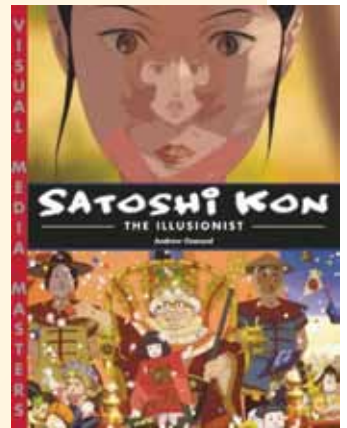
brought in million dollars in sales each year—and they only cost a dime back then! This handsome collection features some of the amazing work done by Carl Barks (*Disney's Uncle Scrooge*), John Stanley (*Little Lulu*), Sheldon Mayer (*Sugar and Spike*), Walt Kelly (*Pogo*) and Frank Tashlin (*The Fox and the Crow*) and Basil Wolverton (*Mad Magazine*), to name a few. Spiegelman and Mouly both have a natural affinity for the subject matter and have done a nice job of organizing the brilliant work into five different categories: Hey, Kids; Funny Animals; Fantasyland; Story Time!; and Wacky & Weird. Each section comes with an informative essay and biographies of the artists. A minor gripe is that none of Harvey Comics' classic characters such as Casper or Richie Rich make the cut—but that's OK, because they've been in the spotlight many times before. We'd get all teary-eyed and nostalgic about the timelessness and creativity displayed on each one of the book's 350 (11.5" x 9.5") pages, but the fact that publishing houses are still taking chances on a venture like this makes us whistle a happy tune.

Satoshi Kon: The Illusionist

By Andrew Osmond

[Stone Bridge Press, \$18.95]

Those of us who have fallen in love with the imaginative, surreal and mind-expanding world of Japanese anime director Satoshi Kon will never forget his unique visions and complex storylines. As British author Andrew Osmond writes in his new book, "Kon slides between genres just as smoothly, taking conventional film categories—horror, comedy, romance, science fiction—and scrambling them, even as he blithely breaks new genre ground in animation." The author has put together a wonderful primer on Kon's career, covering the movies *Perfect Blue*, *Millennium Actress*, *Tokyo Godfathers* and *Paprika*, and the acclaimed TV series, *Paranoia Agent*, using a wealth of interviews, observations and nicely reproduced color images. The author doesn't spare any details about the making of these instant classics, providing fans with a full synopsis, points to note, key scenes, a handy reference section, filmography and full cast and crew info. Although this paperback is only 128 pages long, it truly does Kon and his stunning world justice.



—Ramin Zahed



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CHANCE OF MEATBALLS’
IS CLASSIC WITH A
CHANCE OF MASTERPIECE.”

Frank Lovece, FILM JOURNAL

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Directed by PHIL LORD & CHRISTOPHER MILLER

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Postcard from Finland

A report on some of the major animation houses in Helsinki and their eclectic projects slated for 2010 and beyond. *by Jean Thoren*



A few months ago, a trip to Cartoon Forum in Norway afforded me the chance to make a side-visit to the beautiful city of Helsinki in Finland. I was fortunate enough to have Petteri Pasanen, CEO of Anima Vitae, and his lovely wife Liisa Vähäkylä of Finnimation as my gracious hosts. In just one day, I was able to get a good feel for the talented people and diverse productions going on in that vibrant modern city.

I started my day in a refurbished factory building that is the headquarters for Talvi Digital. CEO Pekka Korpela and Jonas Bergring showed me their impressive reel of vfx commercials and projects. Talvi was the first Nordic 4K digital cinema post-production company with in-house concept design, 3D animation, vfx, sound and IT departments with streaming video servers. This company will obviously be able to ride the current economic tide with the creativity of their management style and the diversity of their capabilities. (www.talvi.com)

My next stop was to see animation veteran Tom Carpelan, who has worked in distribution since 1981, but founded Filmkompaniet Alpha Ab in 2003. While the core company consists of five staff people, it relies on freelance talent and a network of co-pro partners such as YLE and MTV to accomplish its Herculean goals and projects. One of these recent tasks has been working with the Finnish ministry of foreign affairs to brand Finland through the internationally popular Moomin characters. Created by hugely popular Finnish novelist, philosopher, illustrator and comic-book artist Tove Jansson (1914-2001), the Moomins are a family of white trolls that resemble hippos and have numerous adventures in the Finnish forests. Jansson's characters have inspired numerous animated TV shows and features.

Carpelan and company are now working on a new 3-D stereoscopic animated feature titled *Moomins and the Comet Chase* (slated for the summer of 2010) as well as a 78-part HD TV series based on the popular trolls for 2011. The wildly talented recording artist, Björk, who loves the Moomins, has already recorded the theme song for the upcoming movie. I was fortunate enough to hear an early tape

of this wonderfully quirky song and can see this one leaping off the international charts with the Moomins conquering new media platforms along with the big screen. These characters, which are hugely popular in Japan and throughout Scandinavia and some areas of Europe, will have the chance to win new fans in the U.S. and Canada with this new multi-media launch. (www.filmkompaniet.fi)

Over at Anima Vitae, I was introduced to the creative team of Anima Boutique. Founded by Joonas Uhti, Anttu Harlin and Eliza Maria Jäppinen, this young, creative team is surrounded by toys and sets that they have built for their very inspiring children's

Finnish TV. This satiric series uses a combination of CG-animated caricatures of Finnish politicians and vocal imitation to comment on the latest political and pop cultural newsmakers. Anima is currently working with up-and-coming talented independent producers such as Nick Dorra (*What's Up, Cramps and Strains*) on various TV projects that will hopefully be presented at future editions of Cartoon Forum. You can check out some of the creative efforts of the studio at www.anima.fi/en.

Finally, as an end to a perfect day, we met my longtime friend Mikael Wahlfors. This dedicated promoter of the Finnish animation community heads up Epidem ZOT, a thriving company that develops films, products and services based on original concepts. Wahlfors, who has produced successful animated projects such as *Little Giraffe*, *Hydronauts* and *Spirello* in recent years, is working on a multi-faceted 2D animated series titled *Red Caps* (26 x 24 minutes), which follows the adventures of a special squad of Santa's assistants who are dedicated to helping children all around the world. The concept has also inspired a new CG-animated feature called *The Magic Crystal*, which is penned by Thomas Wipf, Bob Swain and Dan Wicksman and directed by Antti Haikala and co-produced by Italy's Cartoon One and Canada's CinéGroupe. The budget for this 2010 Christmas film is estimated to be 4.6 million euros.

"Our film is closer to science fiction than classic Nordic mythology," says Wahlfors. "It's a film about a magic crystal which makes it possible for Santa Claus to multiply his efforts to bring more Christmas presents for children around the world."

Epidem ZOT's other new project is a 52 x 5 minute co-venture with Steve Walsh Productions titled *Nosku*. Based on books by Mikko Kunnas, this preschool show uses new 3D technologies rendered into 2D animation to teach social skills and early life lessons to young children. (www.epidemzot.com)

As evidenced by my whirlwind tour of Helsinki's toon houses, the Land of the Midnight Sun has become quite a creative hot spot for animation. We hope to explore more of these exciting ventures in our upcoming issues in 2010. ■



The Autocrats (Itse Valtiaat)



Red Caps



Love & Anarchy



Moomins

crafts show, *Girls Know How*, *Boys Do Stuff*, the Tropical Cider ads they created with delightfully colorful birds, and the innovative films and commercials that can be seen on their show reel on their site. They recently completed *Love & Anarchy*, which was the opening trailer for the Finnish Film Festival. (www.animaboutique.fi)

The parent company of this group is the oldest 3D animation studio in Helsinki. I first met the studio's dynamic CEO Petteri Pasanen, dressed in clogs and lederhosen at the 2005 edition of Cartoon Forum where he was presenting *Leningrad Cowboys*. He has since gone on to co-produce the very successful E.U. movie, *Niko & the Way to the Stars* and Anima's latest effort *The Autocrats*, which was a huge hit on

F O R Y O U R C O N S I D E R A T I O N



ASTRO BOY

BEST ANIMATED FEATURE FILM



"A SUPERHERO ICON MAKES A SPECTACULAR BIG SCREEN DEBUT."
- RICK FLORINO, ARTISTDIRECT.COM

"DIRECTOR DAVID BOWERS, AN AARDMAN ANIMATIONS VET WHO CO-WROTE THE MOVIE WITH TIMOTHY HYDE HARRIS, NICELY BLENDS EASTERN AND WESTERN ANIMATION STYLES FOR THIS CG OUTING, GIVING THE MOVIE A ZIPPY, RETRO STYLE THAT'S NICELY IN TUNE WITH ITS SPACE AGE ORIGINS."
- GLENN WHIPP, LOS ANGELES TIMES



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A Happily Ever After for Disney's 2D Animation



The directors of the highly anticipated *The Princess and the Frog* discuss the studio's risky return to traditional animation and singing heroines. by Ramin Zahed

That happy noise coming from Burbank this month may be the sound of a collective sigh of relief from the team at Disney Animation. After four-plus years of waiting for the arrival of *The Princess and the Frog*, fans of 2D traditional animation are closely watching the fate of this unique labor of love, written and directed by the Oscar-winning team of Ron Clements and John Musker.

Of course, the animation landscape has changed drastically since the spring of 2004, when the studio's last 2D-animated movie *Home on the Range* landed with a big thud. Under the leadership of Disney/Pixar's chief creative officer John Lasseter and Disney Animation president Ed Catmull, the studio made a sweet U-turn back to the classic form that became its trademark during the Golden Age of Animation and its first renaissance in the 1980s. So the big question is, will audiences embrace the Mouse's return to 2D and musical fairy tales?

"Stakes are particularly high for this movie for many reasons,"

notes Musker, whose impressive directing and writing career at Disney has included critical and box-office hits such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin* and *Hercules*. "As you know, for a while, we thought that hand-drawn animation at Disney was going to go away and not return." Clements, Musker's co-directing and writing partner on all those movies, adds, "Without John Lasseter's clout and passion, another 2D film wouldn't have happened. He was really committed to it, so we really worked hard to make it as strong a movie as we could possibly make—and this includes all the various aspects of it—from story and character design to art direction, lighting, music, editing, everything."

Both directors are quick to point out that going back to the Mouse House's original way of doing movies created a high morale within the animation team. "One of the movie's great songs is called 'Dig a Little Deeper,' which is sung by Mama Odie [Jennifer Lewis] to Tiana [Anika Noni Rose], and in way, everyone working on the movie was also asked to dig a little deeper if they

could, and the results are incredible to see," notes Musker.

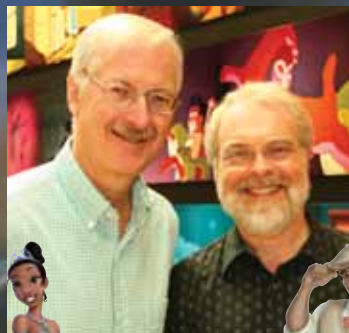
A New Setting for an Old Tale

One of the many interesting twists and turns surrounding the movie is how a classic fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm evolved into a musical about an African American princess set in Jazz-era New Orleans. According to Clements, Disney had been wanting to do something with *The Frog Prince* story going back to the days of *Beauty and the Beast*. In 2003, the studio bought the rights to a children's book called *The Frog Princess*, which offered the story with a twist—the princess turns into a frog instead. "Parallel to that, Pixar had been exploring *The Frog Princess* as a possible CG film, and John [Lasseter] suggested the setting to be New Orleans, because it's his favorite city," says Musker. "When we got involved, we had been gone from Disney for about six months—then when John and Ed Catmull became in charge of Disney Animation, they invited us





John Lasseter



Ron Clements and John Musker



Let the Good Times Roll: From the beginning, the creative team knew that the sights and sounds of New Orleans would play a big role in *The Princess and the Frog*. However, the choice of N.O. native Randy Newman as the movie's music man cinched the deal.

back," recalls Clements.

By the time the movie was greenlit, however, it had been two years since 2D animation had left the studio. "To some degree, we had to build the traditional studio from scratch," says Clements. "They actually got rid of all the animation desks, but there was a secret batch of them stashed away—just like that secret room in *Sleeping Beauty*."

The directors point out that they explored going paperless, but many of the animators actually wanted to have the sensation of drawing and doing clean-up on paper. In addition, the various studios helping with the animation around the world (Yowza Animation in Canada, Premise Entertainment in Florida and HGN Productions in Brazil) also employed Wacom's Cintiq tablets and Toon Boom's Harmony package for ink and paint. Musker says Harmony allowed the animators to paint characters in somewhat neutral colors and then play with the colors to adjust with the background in realtime.

"You can see what characters look like in that environment

and play the scene as you'd see it on the screen and are able to do a lot of things interactively with gradients. If they decide they don't like the colors, with this new system, you don't have to repaint the whole scene—you just push a button. In the old system, you'd have to take out every cel or in the computer every drawing and physically repaint each one and go to the next one."

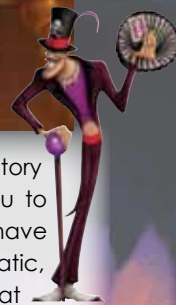
Another big selling point of the feature is the fact that the film's lush visual style also harkens back to the dimensionally drawn, round and appealing sort of animation that is in direct contrast with the stylized, graphic look of toons we find on TV these days. Clements says they decided to look at the visual style of films such as *Bambi* and *Lady and the Tramp* for inspiration. "Disney's feature animation hit a crossroad in 1959, after *Lady and the Tramp*, the studio experimented with more stylized, design-driven material," he adds. "It's the most sophisticated dimensional version of classic Disney animation."

Musker also credits art director Ian Gooding for designing the rich, saturat-

ed palette of the movie. "Our story ranges from areas in the bayou to areas in New Orleans—and we have both comedic and quite dramatic, scary moments in the film, so that gave the color palette a fairly broad area to work in," adds Musker. "In general, you have more romantic lighting—and the objects in the distance are treated with a more impressionistic touch."

Handle with Care

Considering the fact that Disney has been making animated movies about princesses since 1937, many critics believed that the studio should have been able to come up with a toon showcasing an African American heroine earlier. That's why the *Princess and the Frog* directors note that they were very aware of the social responsibility they faced when it came to depicting Tiana, a smart young woman whose dream is to own a restaurant and bring her father in to work with her. Clements says part of that storyline was based on a real character named Lee Chase,



who was a waitress in New Orleans and ended up opening a successful restaurant with her husband, Dooky Chase.

"We've always tried to be very sensitive in the message and the depiction of our characters in our movies," says Musker. "We knew there was a huge response in the African American community about this film, and we felt very confident about the story and knew that our heroine was a strong character. Our goal was to be sensitive without compromising—and we were very fortunate because the actress who portrays Tiana—Anika Noni Rose—brought so much richness to that role. The beauty of it is that girls of all races can see a huge role model in her."

In addition, Musker and Clements asked several leaders in the African American community to take a look at the scenes and make sure that they were capturing the right tone and cultural timber. Clements also notes that having screenwriter Rob Edwards on board, who also worked with them on *Treasure Planet*, was a huge help in reflecting the true African American experience on the animated screen.

Among the other challenges faced by the creative team was finding talented artists who were comfortable working in 2D. "Disney's hand-drawn animation has always been done in such a unique way, going all the way back to the days of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*," says Musker. "These skills are quite difficult to learn, and it's always difficult to find really good artists who are also great actors and draftsmen who have a great sense of how to create entertaining animation."

Clements also points out that Lasseter's involvement with the project has raised the quality of the film to a much higher level. "He really demonstrated his love for 2D animation and his notes were enormously valuable," he says. "John suggested that we should have dailies in which all the animators would review the production. We used to just have one-on-one reviews with the supervisors in the past—in this way, everyone could see everything that was animated every day—people could provide suggestions—and this really raised the level of anima-

tion because you are letting a group of highly talented people give you their feedback."

This month, the helmers and their talented team of animators will finally be able to reap the rewards of more than four years of hard work. As Musker says, "When the story is settled and you see the movie come to life before your eyes—that's the best part of the job. The most fun for me is to see these characters take on lives of their own, and I can't even remember them before they were animated."

Clements says it's been wonderful to see young people in their twenties gravitating to hand-drawn animation instead of CG work. "We were a little surprised to see so many talented people wanting to do 2D animation—we've had this amazing crew of veteran artists such as Eric Goldberg, Andreas Deja, Mark Henn, Bruce Smith and Anthony de Rosa who work alongside younger people like Hyun Min, who was a student right out of CalArts. It's been very gratifying to see animators go back to doing what they loved to do, which is to return to the hand-drawn world."

For now, everyone is crossing their fingers, hoping that Musker and Clements can usher in a second renaissance of 2D at Mickey's House. As Lasseter has been saying to the press repeatedly in recent months, "I've never understood why the studios were saying people don't want to see hand-drawn animation. What people don't want to watch is a bad movie!" ■

Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* will open in theaters nationwide on December 8.



Poetry in Motion: According to Disney/Pixar's chief creative officer John Lasseter, the film's rich painted backdrops were inspired by classics from Disney's Golden Age such as *Lady and the Tramp* and *Bambi*.



THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG

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Princess Tiana Toys Rule Holiday Wish Lists

Disney's newest princess is getting ready to give Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Jasmine and Mulan a run for their money this holiday season. Mickey's huge merchandising empire has put a lot of muscle and marketing dollars behind its spunky African American princess and the efforts are paying off.

Stores nationwide are reporting that *Princess and the Frog* items have been flying off the shelves even before the movie opens wide in December. "We are selling out of individual items, particularly the dolls and the role-playing items," says Mary Beech, VP of Walt Disney franchising. "It is typical with any major Disney film to see movie-inspired product available as early as six weeks prior to the film's release, and the same is true for *The Princess and the Frog*. However, the historic nature of the release of *The Princess and the Frog* film has generated tremendous consumer excitement well in advance of the film—and sales thus far have been very strong, something that is remarkable for characters with which fans are not yet completely familiar."

Since its launch in October, retailers report that the merchandise has already begun out-selling other Disney Princess items by double digit percentages. More than 45,000 dolls have sold in less than a month, and at Disney Store locations nationwide and DisneyStore.com, the Princess Tiana role-play dresses are selling above all other Disney Princess characters.



Among the wide variety of Princess Tiana knick-knacks, toys and collectibles fans can expect to spend their holiday dollars on are:

- ✿ A **hand-crafted jewelry box, bookends** and a **snow globe** featuring Tiana and her prince in a wedding scene, role play costumes, plush dolls and exclusive dolls—all available only at Disney Store and www.Disneystore.com.

- ✿ The new toyline comes in vibrant hues of purple, green, gold and blue and is accented with decorative elements reminiscent of New Orleans and the bayou. Available at major retailers nationwide, these new playthings include the **Just One Kiss**

Disney Princess Tiana Doll dressed in her blue ball gown that lights up, a Princess Tiana Doll outfitted in her bayou dress, a variety of Princess Tiana role play costumes, play sets and various plush dolls including the **Kissing Frog plush**.

- ✿ Believe it or not, Disney has even come up with a **Princess Tiana-inspired bridal gown**, which will be added to the Kirstie Kelly for Disney Fairy Tale Weddings collection in spring.

- ✿ Many lives wouldn't really be complete without a few Tiana collectible items such as the limited-edition porcelain Princess Tiana **Wishing on the Evening Star figurine statue** by Enesco. There's also a new **Thomas Kinkadee oil painting** which depicts Princess Tiana and Prince Naveen in a memorable scene from the film.



- ✿ According to the marketers at Disney, "a princess is beautiful inside and out," so we think that's why they've also come up with Tiana **hair care** and **bubble bath products** (via Carol's Daughter) as well as especially designed Johnson & Johnson Band-Aid products! Oh yes, there's also Tummy Ticker juices and Kellogg's fruit-flavored snacks, which we are hoping won't taste like bayou critters.



- ✿ As with any other popular Disney toons, kids can look forward to *Princess and the Frog* **stationery assortment** including craft and activity sets, journals, sticker packets, paper party sets, cake décor, calendars and holiday wrapping paper.

- ✿ Our personal favorite on the list is **The Art of The Princess and the Frog** hardcover (\$40), written by the amazing Jeff Kurtti and published by Chronicle Books. We're talking 160 glorious pages of magnificent concept art, sketches, character designs, lighting studies and storyboards as well as interviews with directors Ron Clements and John Musker and the rest of the talented team that made this return to classical 2D animation a true cause for celebration. ✿



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When the Chipmunks Met the Chipettes

Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel promises more high-pitched singing and lots of elaborate CG-animated/live-action sequences. **by Ramin Zahed**

Although they turned 51 this year, the squeaky-voiced musical trio known as The Chipmunks are likely to give the Jonas Brothers a run for their money this holiday season. Yes, the beloved singing critters are back in the CG/live-action hybrid feature, *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel*.

Since their first official live-action movie grossed over \$361 million worldwide, it's not surprising that Fox has wrangled the team back together for another adventure, which finds them enrolled in high school and competing with the seductive Chipettes—voiced by Amy Poehler, Anna Farris and Christina Applegate. The family pic, which is directed by Betty Thomas, also features the voices of Justin Long (Alvin), Jesse McCartney (Theodore) and Matthew Gray Gubler (Simon) as well as live-action support from Jason Lee (Dave Seville), Zach Levi (Seville's nephew Toby) and David Cross (villain Ian Hawke).

Of course, as was the case with the first outing, one of the reasons audiences will flock to the movie is to see the CG-animated chipmunks cause all kinds of trouble in real-world settings. As the pic's animation supervisor Chris Bailey sees it, fans can find parts of their own personalities reflected in each one of the little guys' qualities. "You can see Simon is the dad figure—he's the responsible one, Alvin is the wild card and Theo is the baby," says Bailey, whose numerous credits include *Fat Albert*, *Eragon*, the 2007 *Chipmunks* movie and the two recent live-action/CG *Garfield* features. "I enjoy watching Theo the most, but I want to be more like Simon, but I think I have more in common with Alvin, who can be very undisciplined!"

Bailey, who has worked on the film's elaborate CG animation with the team at Rhythm & Hues and Oscar-winning vfx supervisor Doug Smith (*Independence Day*, *Garfield: A Tale of Two Kitties*) for over a year, says he is too young to remember the first TV show and too old for the '80s adaptations, but he has great memories of the infectious songs, penned and sung by

the man behind the original toon, the late Ross Bagdasarian, Sr. (a.k.a. David Seville). He says he worked closely with *Chipmunks* producers and voice artists Ross Bagdasarian [Jr.] and Janice Karman to flesh out the characters.

"They were enormously helpful by filling in all the blanks and pointing to the key aspects of the characters that they liked and how they had all evolved through these movies," he notes.



"Ross saw the first movie as an origins movie and wanted to go in a completely different direction with the sequel. It has the sarcastic attitude that is typical of high school—but the fact that the Chipettes are in it puts a new coat of paint on the movie!"

Since Thomas has a strong background in improv, she insisted on fine-tuning the scenes and adding elements even after the live-action footage was finalized. "Initially, we started boarding the sequences while the script was still in development, and the process was an amalgam of feature animation and live-action movies, where we had the benefits of storyboarding and editing—really the best of both worlds," says Bailey. "Betty was always pushing to make it better. For example, she came up with a great way to make the final chase scene more dramatic. The whole idea was added in post—R&H was replacing the skies—and now we have a really cool dramatic chase through Chinatown—all done in post!"

Although Bailey didn't reveal exact numbers for the vfx budget, he says it's definitely more than the first movie. "We have six main characters instead of three—and they also have a lot of real-world props," he explains. "Also, the Chipettes have a lot of wardrobe changes—all of which are CG—and then there's a scene in which Alvin is riding a motorcycle and is being chased by a remote-control helicopter."

When asked to compare *Squeakquel* to the first movie, Bailey responds, "Although I think I'm too close to the project to be able to make an objective statement, people tell me that they like the characters and the performances—they say that the characters act and certainly move better than the first film. One big difference is that the characters run around a little less on all fours—they're a few more years out of the forest. After all, they're in high school now!"

So is Bailey surprised by the lasting popularity of a franchise that's more than half a century old? Not anymore. "I had a feeling the original movie was going to do well when we were in Hollywood shooting footage—and a bunch of street kids came up to us and asked us what movie we were working on, and when we told them, they said, 'Oh, yeah, Alvin and the Chipmunks...that's cool!' That's when I knew we had street cred!" ■



Betty Thomas



Chris Bailey

Fox's *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel* will begin its theatrical run on December 23.



Tomm Moore

"It's the first Irish animated feature film based on Irish history and legends, and we looked to the European tradition in animation as inspiration to find our style."

The glimmer of Oscar gold has tempted plenty of indie producers this year, especially with the rare opportunity of five nomination slots. While *Kells* has received a glowing response around the world, the filmmakers were at first tentative to join this race. But the pieces quickly fell into place: "It was just about timing," Moore explains, "We signed with GKIDS just days before the deadline and we quickly decided that even if it's an amazing year with lots of great movies qualifying, it was better to go for it when the chance of five nominations was possible. Also, we felt it was a great way to launch the film to fans before its [U.S.] release next year."

GKIDS, the distribution company branching off the New York International Children's Film Festival, held screenings of *Kells* in New York this summer and is currently handling the Oscar qualifying run in Los Angeles. American audiences can expect a wide release in the spring of 2010, for those not lucky enough to have caught this gem yet.

Moore is duly proud of the film, and proud of what it would bring to the Oscar contest. "I think we bring something unique to the race. It's very different looking, but also the story is not a typical blockbuster type scenario. We tried for something a little different since we were free to do so by being independent," The director notes. "Of course a nomination would mean a huge amount to the whole team, but it's exciting just to be in the race and to be mentioned alongside so many gorgeous films."

And what if *Kells* were to come out on top and snag the top prize? "I hope the whole team would be even more proud of their achievement," Moore muses, "It was a labor of love for many years for a great deal of people, we are all very proud of any recognition it receives. We began developing this film in college, almost 10 years ago, so the fact that in its release year it has been awarded so many prizes and been seen all over the world is very satisfying."

Almost as satisfying as catching a glimpse of this delightful indie treat from the Emerald Isle. ■

Visit www.gkids.tv and www.theseecretofkells.com for more information.

Cartoon Saloon's Secret is Out

Director Tomm Moore shares his thoughts on the studio's breakout feature, *The Secret of Kells*, and its bid for the animated Oscar race. by Mercedes Milligan

With just inches to spare, another charming European underdog has squeezed into the Best Animated Feature Oscar nominations race: Irish toon house Cartoon Saloon's *The Secret of Kells*. Directed by Tomm Moore and Nora Twomey, the film has wracked up its share of awards and nods since its February debut at the Berlin International Film Festival, the latest being its nomination for the top feature honor at the Annies. In this year's eclectic slate of contenders, *Kells* is a stand out, but can it stand up to the much-hyped American giants?

"I am not sure if we are competition," Moore remarks on the increasing presence of European animation in the U.S. "I do hope European animation can find a place alongside American mainstream animation, however. I feel the English speaking countries like Ireland and England have less of a tradition of animation and comics than our European partners ... Certainly in France and Belgium comics and animation are seen more as an art form."

Kells centers on an adolescent named Brendan being brought up in an Irish monestary which is in the grip of fear of an approaching Viking invasion. When a new Brother, a master illustrator, shares the magic of his craft and entrusts Brendan with a mystical quest to complete the Book of Kells, the boy embarks on a perilous journey rife with mythical creatures.

The much-celebrated 2D animation which brings this incredible story to life draws on the rich colors and designs of Celtic art and medieval manuscripts, as well as avant-garde character design. The combination of stark drama and endearing whimsy as Brendan explores the fantastical world outside the monestary reminds audiences that for all the advances in 3D, 2D animation still very much has its place and can make as big an impact as any stereoscopic spectacle!

Contrasting his film against the artsy sensibilities of animation on the Continent, Moore says that his team strove to find a midpoint between American and European aesthetics, while maintaining the film's "Irishness." (*Kells'* Irish identity is further brought home by star Brendan Gleeson and his countrymen co-stars, as well as an enchanting original score performed by folk band Kila, composed by Bruno Coulais.)

"I hope we have been able to find a style of animation that's uniquely Irish," he says,





Vincent Patar and Stéphane Aubier set up a shot for *A Town Called Panic*.

Belgian *Panic* Hits U.S.

Stéphane Aubier and Vincent Patar's stop-motion labor of love, *A Town Called Panic*, arrives stateside for its Oscar-qualifying run this month.
by Mercedes Milligan

This month, audiences in Los Angeles and New York receive a rare treat in the form of a Belgian animated film starring the improbable adventures of little Cowboy, Indian and Horse. Zeitgeist Films is distributing this tale of an Earth-spanning journey which ensues when Cowboy and Indian plan to surprise Horse with a homemade barbeque, only to find they've ordered 50 million bricks. In between trekking the tundra and exploring a strange underwater world, Horse is merely desperate to get some alone time with his be-hoofed paramour in the manic papier-mâché world of *A Town Called Panic*.

If you're thinking that a stop-frame toon about the madcap adventures of a small plastic Indian, cowboy and horse seems strangely familiar, don't worry, you're not having an acid flashback: *Panic* (or *Panique au Village*) began as short films and a cult TV series in Europe in 2003 (and later on Nicktoons in the U.S.) distributed by claymation godfather, Aardman Animations. Part innocent romp à la Gumby, part carnival of the absurd per Monty Python, Stéphane Aubier and Vincent Patar's strange little universe (crafted by their Pic Pic André studio for La Partii) proved popular across the pond, and this year launched onto the big screen.

Panic is a fully hand-animated, stop-motion feature—the first of its kind to be part of the Cannes Film Festival's Official Selection—the

frantic action in which was entirely created by Patar and Aubier in under a year. The longtime collaborators used 1,500 plastic figures to create the film's toy-land vibe, and each of the main characters alone required up to 200 "clone" figures. Their painstaking process lends the protagonists' humorous antics the effortless feel of children playing with their toys.

"One of the biggest challenges for us was to try and keep the spontaneity and hand-made/DIY spirit of the TV series alive whilst working hard to improve the animation techniques and the details of the set design," note directors Aubier and Patar. "Our main concern was to keep the film fresh and simple ... Another big task for us was to transform all the poor little plastic figurines we had bought at flea markets into proper 'A-list' actors!"

Despite its somewhat unorthodox indie production and story, the film's reception has been enthusiastic across the globe. The helmers point out, "We have been very happy to find out that the North American audiences seem to react very positively to our film. It was very warmly received by the audiences at the Toronto Film Festival ... more so even then over here in Europe!" Additionally, *Panic* received the Audience Prize at the Austin Fantastic Fest, and its screening at the Los Angeles AFI Film Festival completely sold out.

"The great reception [the film] has had so far has actually taken us a little by surprise," the

humble team admits, "Although the TV series had proven to be quite successful, we weren't sure that the feature would be as popular. We're really pleased!"

Animation fans in America are always excited to see a piece of off-the-wall craftsmanship hit our shores, and this year's Oscar race is certainly bringing many out of the woodwork. When asked about the film's left-field appeal, the directors cite "...the originality of the animation technique, the spontaneous spirit and the general story line, which basically revolves around three unlikely characters placed in the most incongruous of settings," (to say the least!). They add, "Perhaps another distinctive feature is the fact that our film has a home-made and slightly chaotic feel to it, which sets it apart from most other productions, which are so clean, tidy and perfect."

Hopefully the pre-Oscar run will garner more attention for this less than tidy project. Plans are already in motion for a DVD release which will include some deleted sequences (raising the question of when they found time to create extra material in their mile-a-minute production schedule). The indie animation community is certainly giving a well-deserved hats off to the intrepid filmmaking team who have managed to conquer the toon scene with a toy chest full of plastic doodads and an unyielding creative drive.

While Aubier and Patar are ecstatic over the film's success thus far, for them the real triumph was in completing the feature length *Panic* in the first place.

"For us, some of the most exciting events in fact consist of the small achievements concretized during the shoot," they insist. "For instance, we were very pleased when we first managed to create an in-camera water effect using silicone, or when we did the first Cowboy and Indian animation tests with a camera movement. Managing to practically realize an idea we had in our minds is always a majorly satisfying moment." ■

A Town Called Panic will run at the Claremont 5 in Los Angeles December 11-17 and at the Film Forum in New York Dec. 16-29. For further dates and info, visit www.zeitgeistfilms.com.

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"THE MISSING LYNX"
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The Padded Cel

by Robby London



The Best Awards Money Can Buy!

Our astute columnist muses on the madness that is Oscar season in Hollywood

Welcome to the official opening of Oscar Season. (Music cue: Fanfare!) Those lip-smacking sounds you hear reverberating through Hollywood? That's the limo-drivers, party-planners, freelance publicists, talk-show talent bookers, trade magazine ad departments and giff-bag product placement specialists all licking their chops. Talk about a cottage industry!

And, yes, we can legitimately talk about the Oscars here—since, starting in 2001, a new category was created for Best Animated Feature. Of course some of the more paranoid conspiracy theorists (read: anyone who works in animation) insist that the Academy's hidden agenda in establishing this category was to dissuade its members from nominating animated movies to the higher-profile Best Picture category. Once an orphan stepchild, always an orphan stepchild! (And by the way, don't think I won't get letters from the Orphan Stepchild Lobby. You can always spot them because the envelopes are stained with gruel.)

Nonetheless, speaking on behalf of the animation industry, we (and by "we," I mean Pixar) are thrilled to be guaranteed inclusion in the Oscars each and every year. And we (and by "we," I mean Pixar) would pre-emptively like to thank the members of the Academy, our kindergarten teacher and the curmudgeonly old creep down the street who put laxatives in our kids' Halloween candy—and gave us the inspiration for the lead character in *Up*. And I (and by "I," I mean myself) would like to say to Pixar: "You're welcome."

There's no question that the Academy Awards is the granddaddy of entertainment industry awards. But apparently ol' Oscar does not honor the act of creating—

so much as he does the act of PROcreating. In fact, when you take stock of the ludicrous number of industry awards—and awards shows—spawned by Oscar, you'd think he had an interminable series of flings with octomoms. I mean ... the Emmys, the Annnies, the Humanitas Prize, the VES Awards, the Environmental Media Awards. Okay, okay, they're all legitimate and worthy. But, really ... displayed shamelessly on my ego wall (next to the full-length mirror) is the plaque celebrating my recognition by ... the Houston International Film Awards? I have another plaque, and I'm not kidding about this one either—a big expensive

lot." A rough translation of this phrase from "Weasel-ese" into English would be "This series was broadcast." Because, *all* broadcast series appear on the initial Emmy ballot! It made me wonder about the other shows on his credit list, which apparently did *not* "Appear on Emmy Ballot." I'm thinking YouTube.

And of course all the campaigning, politicking, studio money and behind-the-scenes shenanigans which we have come to associate with the likes of Oscars and Emmys can seem a little distasteful. There are those who insist this corrupt system completely devalues and tarnishes the awards, making them little more than shiny shells—up for sale to the all-powerful marketing machine. At least that's what they say right up until the day they are finally nominated!

Here at *The Padded Cel*, we have no such double standard. In fact, we don't even have a single standard. When we think "Oscar," we're thinking Oscar-Meyer. So if there was an award for Most Offensive and Sophomoric Column, we'd be out there campaigning hard! But even we would draw the line at product placement! Still, *naturally* we'd want to include in our acceptance speech thank yous to "my McDonalds barista, my Men's Wearhouse fashionista and my Terminex exterminista."

But at the speech's conclusion, my tears would be genuine—as I thanked the special people who have provided meaning, fulfillment and inspiration: my parents, my wife, my mistress, my other mistress—and her friend, Bubbles, who used to work for Letterman and appeared on the Emmy ballot. ■

Robby London is an animation industry veteran, who would like to thank the Academy for keeping his ego in check.



wood and engraved gold affair for something called The Genesis Award—and I have no clue what it is! But at least I beat Pixar...

Legitimate awards are a great way to be recognized and validated by your peers for worthy achievements. But they are also a form of self-promotion ripe for abuse. I once had a job applicant whose resume contained the following citation regarding one of his credits: "Appeared on Emmy Bal-



Sing a Happy Song: In 2008, Kevin Lima's *Enchanted* received three Oscar nominations for Best Song for Stephen Schwartz and Alan Menken's "Happy Working Song," "So Close" and "That's How You Know."

Fewer Points for Originality

What has happened to the once fruitful relationship between animated films and Oscar-friendly original songs? by Michael Mallory

For the past two decades animation has dominated the Academy Awards' Best Song category, racking up eight wins out of 26 nominations since 1989. At the height of the feature "toon boom," a song score by an A-list songwriter was considered as vital an element for the creation of an animated feature as having a villain. But these days, original songs are in short supply. Filmmakers instead tend to rely on familiar songs to under-

score or comment on the action.

This phenomenon is not endemic to animation. "I'm surprised when I come across a movie soundtrack album that's actually music composed for the film and not a greatest hits collection," says animation and music scholar Will Friedwald.

"There has been a big push to do a lot of licensing of songs," concurs Bruce Broughton, chair of the Academy's music branch, and a past Oscar nominee (*Sil-*

verado) and multiple Emmy winner. "That's an annoyance to the songwriters and composers, but what the film companies get out of it is what they hope is the benefit of a sure thing, because the songs are often well-known. The downside is that perhaps they are well known for associations other than those in the film."

For two-time Oscar-winning songwriter and composer Richard M. Sherman, who with his brother Robert has been nominated for a total of nine Academy Awards, there is a definite creative line between a song that comes from the POV of the character on screen, and one that merely comments on the action. "Maybe [the filmmakers] intend not to have the character in the story being the one who's doing the number, but have some outside personality telling you what the person is thinking," Sherman says, "but to me, that's doing it backwards."

So, how does the song situation in 2009 stack up? There are some high-profile songs coming out of this year's slate of toon features, but in number they cannot compare to the animated films of the 1990s. For its part, Sony Pictures is so proud of Miranda Cosgrove's (today's Annette Funicello) recording of Mark Mothersbaugh's "Raining Sunshine," from *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, that it has hyped the song in ads for the film. Hayao Miyazaki's *Ponyo* also has a notable theme song, albeit one that inspired a teapot controversy. In the original Japanese version, the song is winsome and sitcomish, and sung by a child and an adult. Disney's American translation features a driving, techno-rap cover by Noah Cyrus



Bruce Broughton



Randy Newman



Robert Sherman



Richard Sherman



Noah Cyrus

Frankie Jonas

Ponyo

and Frankie Jonas that has some Japanese maniacs up in arms.

Former Pulp frontman Jarvis Cocker contributed a tune called "Petey's Song" to *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, from 20th Century (wait for it...) Fox, and he also voices Petey, but the bulk of the soundtrack is filled by the likes of The Rolling Stones, The Beach Boys and Burl Ives. For Focus Features' *Coraline*, the pop rock band They Might Be Giants might have been giant contributors to the film as well, had not all but one of the songs they wrote been cut from the release version. Only a sprightly piano-backed ditty called "The Other Father Song" remains within the orchestral score by Bruno Coulais.

Disney/Pixar's *Up*, which is expected to do very well in some of the big Oscar categories this year, showcases a remarkable score by Michael Giacchino but doesn't offer any original songs. And for Chipmunk fans (you know who you are) Fox's *Alvin and the Chipmunks: the Squeak-*



People Eater," as does New Line's *Planet 51*, which puts its nickel in the jukebox and presses "Mr. Sandman," "Be Bop a Lula" and "Unchained Melody." Fox's *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakuel* features not only Ross Bagdasarian standards, but has the singing Chipettes covering Beyoncé's "Single Ladies (Put A Ring on It)." The fact that it's not eligible, having come in

couldn't tell the story."

Therefore, anyone handicapping the Best Song race has to hold the door open for Disney's *The Princess and the Frog*, which among animated films this year single-handedly holds up tradition on all fronts, including music. Oscar-winner Randy Newman has written seven original songs, though because of another rule change this year that restricts eligibility to two songs from the same film, only two could see a nomination. Even so, *Princess* appears to be the only major Hollywood release out there that potentially qualifies for the rarely-presented Best Original Musical award, the last recipient of which was 1996's *Pocahontas*.

Ironically, changes in this year's Academy rules governing the music categories have actually brought them closer in line with the animation categories on a procedural basis. The award for Best Animated Feature is given only if its committee feels there are enough worthy films, and Broughton says the song committee now has the same option. "Unless a song comes up to 8.5 [out of a possible 10 rating], it will not be considered," he explains. "This year, if no song reaches up to an 8.5, there will be no song category at all, but it would frankly surprise me if we got to that."

Randy Newman and Mark Mothersbaugh would likely be surprised as well. ■

Michael Mallory is an award-winning journalist and author whose recent books include *Universal Studio Monsters*, *Iwao Takamoto: My Life with a Thousand Characters* and *Marvel: The Expanding Universe Wall Chart*.



uel features not only Ross Bagdasarian standards, but has the singing Chipettes covering Beyoncé's "Single Ladies (Put A Ring on It)." The fact that it's not eligible, having come in pre-existing form, means Kanye West can skip attending the Oscars this year.

Ice Age Dawn of the Dinosaurs, also from Fox, appears to be out of the running in terms of Best Song, since those that break through John Powell's score are a couple of chestnuts that escaped even Skrat's attention: Lou Rawls' "You'll Never Find Another Love Like Mine" and a tweaked version of Gilbert O'Sullivan's "Alone Again (Naturally)." DreamWorks' *Monsters vs. Aliens* similarly relies on oldies such as "Wooly Bully" and "Purple

pre-existing form, means Kanye West can skip attending the Oscars this year.

Broughton admits that the music branch has parried a lot of complaints over past rules and selections, as do most such competitions, but there is method to the apple-and-orange salad. One key criterion for judging songs is how well the song advances the story and reflects the characters, something to which Dick Sherman can attest. "Walt Disney used to say, 'Personality, personality, get to that personality,' and that's what we learned to do," he says. "You'd go into the colloquialism of that person, whether that person was an animated snake or whatever. You had to have the song in there or you

A Popular Brew

Fabrice Joubert, the director of the prize-winning short *French Roast*, talks about his career, inspirations and his love for Paris.

Fabrice O. Joubert's charming CG-animated short *French Roast* has been receiving numerous festival awards and critical attention this year. Not only did it take home the Best of Show prize at the annual SIGGRAPH confab in New Orleans, it was also one of the 10 titles that landed on the Oscar short list for Best Animated Short. We recently caught up with the in-demand French animator to find out a little more about his background and career:

Animag: Please tell us a little bit about your background. How did you get involved in animation, etc.?

Fabrice Joubert: As far as I can remember, I've always been drawing and for a long time I wanted to become a cartoonist. Growing up, I became more interested in cinema and my desire to become a film director took over. So I started to study cinema at the Univer-

sity of Paris, Sorbonne, and after four years of watching films (which is what you mainly do when you study cinema at University), I graduated, and later found out about an animation school in Paris called Les Gobelins. I then realized at 22 years old that I could combine my passions of drawing and filmmaking into one medium. I was immediately seduced by the idea and went to Les Gobelins.

How did you end up at the Pumpkin Factory/Bibo Films?

To make a long story short, I finished school and got recruited by DreamWorks to work as a traditional 2D animator on *The Prince of Egypt*. Seven years later I was still working at DreamWorks but as a CG supervising animator. I then went back to Europe, to Bristol, England to work as a stop-motion animator on *Wallace & Gromit: Curse of the*

Were-Rabbit at Aardman. At that stage, I had spent nine years learning my skills as an animator and it was time for me to go back to my first ambition, which was to direct my own films.



Fabrice Joubert

That's when I decided to move back to Paris to make *French Roast*.

The production didn't actually start at Pumpkin Factory/Bibo Films. I was still searching for a studio to finance it when I was able to start the film with a group of students from an animation school called Ecole Georges Méliès. The students worked with me during the Summer of 2007 and that's when Pumpkin Factory/Bibo Films came in. I had worked with Eric "Bibo" Bergeron at DreamWorks and he was himself back in France to direct *A Monster in Paris* (co-produced by his company). We met again and very quickly he and his partners (Louis Viau and Pascal Chev ) agreed to produce my film.

What was the inspiration for *French Roast*?

My inspiration came from a certain nostalgia for Paris. I grew up there...



and having to live so far away for such a long time most likely nurtured an idealized Paris in my mind. I naturally used that feeling as a starting point for the story of *French Roast*. Then, because I am an animator and because I love characters, I wanted to tell a story through pantomime and characterization, thus avoiding the use of dialogue. I also wanted to do a comedy. From that point of view, my main inspiration was Jacques Tati's work. I was also very inspired by Ronald Searle's drawings.

What kind of software did you use to produce the animation and how long did you work on it?

Character and set modeling were done using Maya during the first stage of production at the Méliès School. Then, we mainly used Softimage | XSI for rigging, animation, texturing, effects and lighting. We also used Maya for cloth simulation. Compositing was executed on Nuke.

We first spent a couple of months in development which consisted of me writing and storyboarding, and Nicolas Marlet creating the designs of the characters. Then it took a full year to make the film, with a team of 65 artists and technicians in total.



What was the toughest aspect of the job and which aspect of the short are you happiest with?

From a pure visual aspect, the first big challenge was to translate the graphic look of the original drawings done by Nico into CG, and to create an environment that would integrate the best with those characters. Modeling, texturing and rendering were all crucial in this process. The work done by the texturing department has been essential in getting the painterly look that I wanted for the characters, as much as Julien Geogel's matte paintings did for the backgrounds.

Creating the tramp's curly hair and beard was a pretty tough one, as they were the most intricate elements to translate into CG... We decided to use hair simulation to achieve both the graphic style and the natural behavior that I wanted, and it was eventually quite successful.

The other big challenge was to stick with the idea of a camera shooting a single shot in one axis only. That's how I got the idea of placing a big mirror behind the characters to create the equivalent of a reverse shot without cutting or panning the camera.

The final look of *French Roast* is a real achievement and I'm proud of it. I'm also very happy with the quality of the animation, and that's a big deal since the narration relies primarily on it.

Did you watch a lot of cartoons when you were growing up?

As a kid I saw the Disney features with my parents. I believe the first animated film that really had an impact on me was *Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas* and then the *Wallace & Gromit* shorts. I had a lot of catching up to do when I started studying animation!

What do you think of the big animation renaissance in Europe right now?

I think we're living in an amazing time because animation is in full expansion today. We have this wonderful medium in our hands, which allows us to create pretty much anything we can imagine. The most important thing is that the audience enjoys animation now more than

ever! It's also interesting to notice that the audience is getting wider in terms of age. Animation is not only for children anymore. The mentalities are evolving and there's now more space for variety in subjects and graphic styles. I believe that things are moving in the right direction in Europe, even though it's still trickier than in the U.S. on the financial level... simply because we don't benefit from the studio system who can afford the \$100 million (or more) that a feature costs today. The best you can get for a film in France is around \$30 million...not the same scale.

On the other hand, this constraint forces the filmmakers to spend more time on the story, to prepare well so they don't have to change things all the time as they go. We can't afford the "organic" process here, and in my view, this leads to better storytelling.

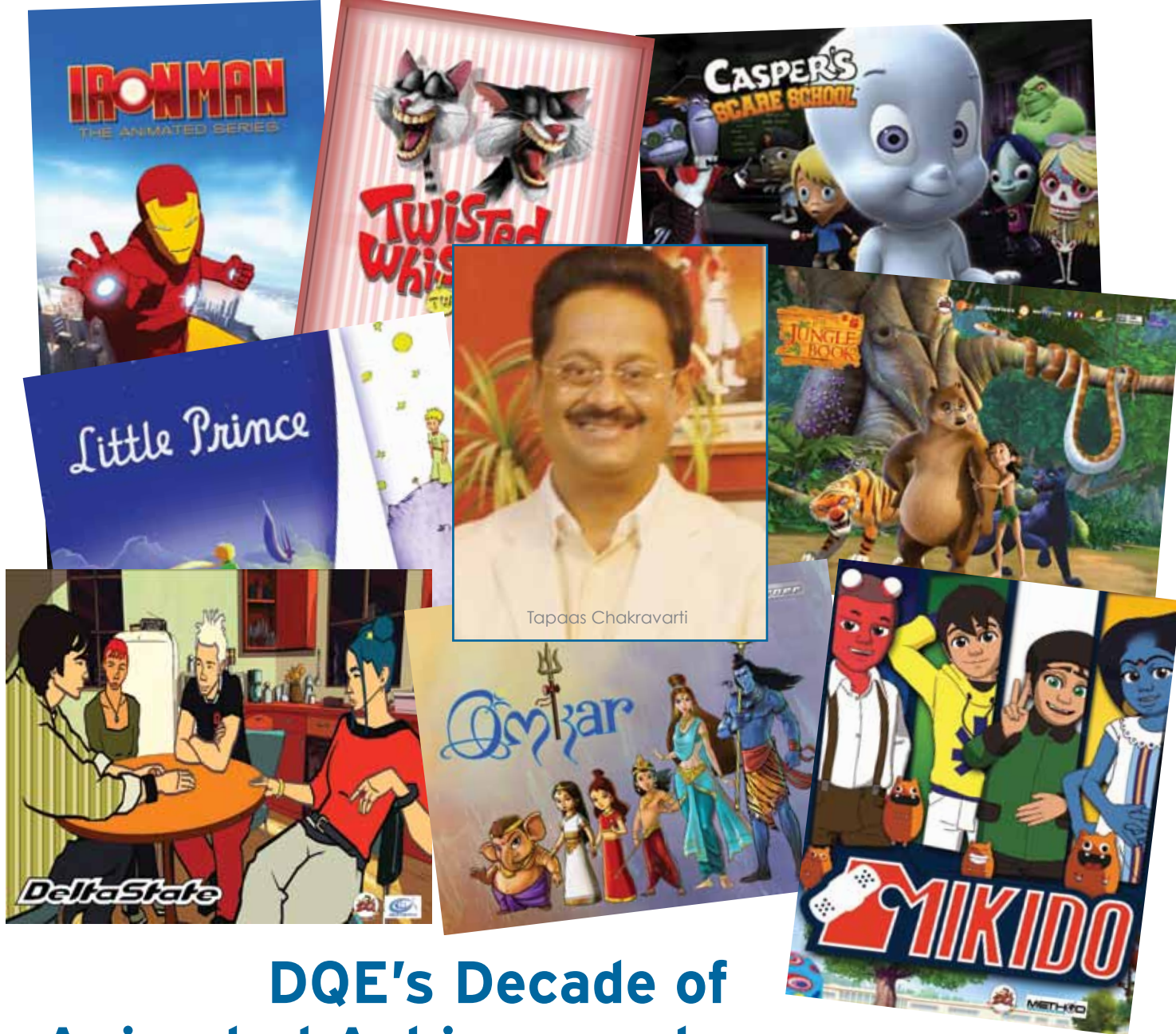
What kind of advice would you give young students who want to do what you've done?

You know, I still consider myself a student. This is my debut film as a director and I feel like I still have a lot to learn. I would encourage aspiring animators to be curious (your inspiration will come from everything you can observe around you...you have to work from life to avoid clichés), to be patient (animation is all about patience, perseverance and focus), and to always see yourself as storytellers (you're not only making things move, you are breathing life into your characters for the audience to believe in them and therefore in the story they're being told).

What are you working on next? Your plans for the next five years?

I am currently the animation director on *A Monster in Paris* directed by Eric "Bibo" Bergeron and made here...in Paris (of course!). This a great project and I am very proud to be part of this adventure. Making *French Roast* definitely reinforced my desire to direct ... I am therefore writing a new story for my next film and will be looking for financing very soon! ■

You can learn more about Fabrice and his projects at www.frenchroast.fr.



Tapaas Chakravarti

DQE's Decade of Animated Achievements

In recent months, we have written several pieces on DQ Entertainment's amazing growth trajectory and the numerous animated projects in the Indian studio's busy pipeline. However, our anniversary issue wouldn't be complete without a small tribute to this thriving toon powerhouse, which has become one of the crown jewels of India's booming animation scene. With 3,500 employees and over 300 freelancers, the Hyderabad-based studio has made significant co-production deals over a very short period of time and has moved from a service production studio to a full-fledged owner of IP rights and producer of top-notch toons with partners such as Mooncoop, ZDF, Classic Media, Marvel Entertainment, American Greet-

ings, Disney Australia, NBC Universal, BBC Kids and Discovery. We had a chance to interview the company's charming chairman and CEO, Tapaas Chakravarti, on the occasion of DQ's 10th Anniversary:

Q: Congratulations on DQ Entertainment's 10th anniversary milestone. The company has certainly come a long way since it launched in 2000. What are some of your thoughts in regards to the studio's phenomenal growth?

Tapaas Chakravarti: DQ Entertainment is now a leading global entertainment group in the business of animation, gaming and live action—production, licensing and distribution. We have produced or co-produced and distributed almost 60 TV

series, direct-to-home videos and feature films; created real-time game movies and animation for online, mobile and next-gen consoles and also diversified into production and distribution of live-action television and feature films. The DQE group has evolved its integrated business model from pure service to being a global entertainment entity for children with co-ownership and co-production of international iconic brands with high profile partners across the globe including producers, funding agencies, broadcasters, distributors and licensing groups. We are now increasingly investing in our own intellectual properties to fulfill our vision to be a "global entertainment group" by enhancing our capabilities for worldwide licensing and distribution

for all platforms of entertainment with offices in India, Paris, Tokyo, LA, London and Ireland.

How was DQ able to carve such a strong niche for itself in the global animation community?

Chakravarti: Our work over the years has spoken for itself. One good reason that has fueled our great run is the passion and persistence of DQites for quality and timely production, which naturally resulted in an increasing list of clients and partners including global majors from U.S.A., Europe and Canada. The company's vision of producing iconic brands and superior quality entertainment has been the business advantage of DQE in a content-driven world. The multiple international awards won by DQ are an affirmation of the quality of work being produced, which has been recognized at various national and international forums. DQ has been recognized as an organization that fosters excellence and encourages quality and creativity. DQ also has emerged as a corporate capable of end-to-end solutions for entertainment and an investing partner with world-wide producers.

What do you see as your company's biggest challenges in the year ahead?

Chakravarti: An economic downturn is like a mild Ice Age, during which the fittest will survive. We are confident that we'll this Ice Age or Meltdown—which ever way you look at it! Even so, it has meant some belt tightening, and putting more focus on efficiency and new technologies and reinventing iconic brands and properties for the 21st century kids.

What are some of DQE's big projects and priorities in 2010?

Chakravarti: Our focus in 2010 will be on DQE's home productions of iconic brands such as *The Jungle Book*, *The Little Prince* and *Lassie*, and [live-action TV series], as well as Indian-mythology-inspired productions such as *Omkar*, *Surya Putra*, *Ravan & Balkand* and *Feluda*, which is an animated detective series adapted from the legendary Satyajit Ray's novels. We are also making our foray into live action with the TV series

Toomai, the story of an elephant boy, which is produced wholly by DQE. We aim to grow our licensing and distribution business for 360-degree monetization of our IPs with great success for *The Jungle Book* and several others.

They say that winners compare their achievements with their goals and our goal is to remain focused on quality and an all-around excellence in operating as a leading global entity and making entertaining children our business and hobby.

Our strong relationships with the leaders of the industry has enabled us to partner with internationally acclaimed production houses across the globe. We hope to capitalize on our strong reputation and also foray into live-action content creation with major worldwide broadcasters on board. This will come to life worldwide in the year 2011.

What kind of advice would you offer new animation start-ups that would like to follow in your footsteps?

Chakravarti: Things to keep in mind are investing in cutting-edge technology, higher standards in quality and content levels with the smallest or biggest partners providing equal importance and no compromise on ethics and honor of standing by the promises made. This is often a slow and difficult process for a start-up but the rewards are immense as the industry leaders are extremely humane and ready to give opportunity if convinced on the above simple attitudes.

What keeps you going and makes you happy about the work that you do?

Chakravarti: I think my biggest satisfaction comes from seeing smiles on the faces and happiness in the eyes of thousands of employees of the DQE group. Three little words, "Well done, Tapaas," from my friends at Disney, Nickelodeon, Turner or others in Europe, such as the BBC, ZDF, M6, France TV, TFI—that's what recharges my energy levels and encourages me to do more and do better! ■

To learn more about DQ Entertainment and its slate of upcoming projects, visit www.dqentertainment.com.

DQE: Mega-Deals & Milestones

- 2000: The company launches its 2D animation division and establishes a training facility (DQ School of Visual Arts) to train fresh talent from leading fine arts colleges and improve the in-house skill sets of artists. *Hoze Houndz*, *Benjamin Bear* and *Potatoes and Dragons* are some of the international projects on the studio's slate.
- 2003: DQ helps co-produce *Delta State* with Alphanim and Nelvana, a 2D digital production which combines rotoscope and Flash technologies.
- 2004: The studio launches its 3D animation division and introduced proprietary ERP-based production tracking system.
- 2004: DQE is recognized as one of Asia's top 100 companies driving technological growth in the country by *Red Herring* magazine.



- 2004: The studio begins work on Walt Disney TV Animation's CG-animated series, *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*.
- 2007: It's another big year for DQE's 3D animation division as it lands a Daytime Emmy for *Tutenstein*, a co-production with Porchlight Entertainment for Discovery Kids.
- 2008: DQ Entertainment PLC is listed on the AIMS market, London Stock Exchange.

- 2008: Among the studio's many top-notch co-production deals of the year are *Little Nick*, *The Large Family*, *Pinky & Perky*, *Twisted Whiskers*, *Mikido & Skyland*.



- After working on Nickelodeon's *Tak & the Power of Juju*, DQE signs up to for the studio's *Fan Boy* and *Chum Chum* and *The Penguins of Madagascar*.
- 2009: DQE announces the production of the CG-animated *The Jungle Book*, developed by DQE and pre-sold for television and home video, worldwide. The studio also signs co-pro deals for new CG-animated series centered on *The Little Prince*, *Casper the Friendly Ghost* and *Lassie*. ■



ZDF enterprises



UNIVERSAL TFI



THE JUNGLE BOOK

52 X 11'
1 X 60'
3D HD
5 to 9 Yrs
Adventure
Drama
Comedy



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View Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5pDCplIPp4>

Lassie



26 x 22'
3D HD

ClassicalMedia ABC Television

26 x 22'
Live Action

Tomaj
The Elephant Boy

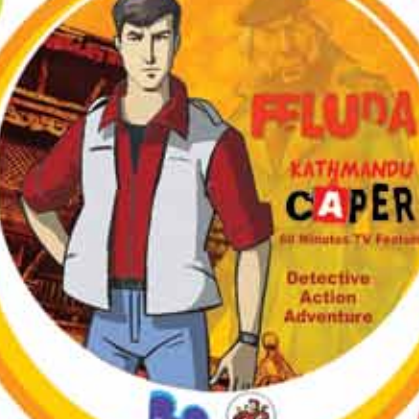


Action Adventure Drama

The Story of an Elephant Boy

ABC Television

FELUDA



KATHMANDU
CAPER

60 Minutes TV Feature

Detective Action Adventure

Little Prince



52 x 26'
3D HD

LLPTV

france 5 METHOO

Galactic Football



26 x 22'
High Definition

ABC Television

Little Nick



52 x 13'
3D HD

METHOO

TARA DUNCAN



26 x 22'
High Definition

METHOO

IRON MAN



26 x 22'
3D HD

MARVEL METHOO

52 x 11'

CASPER'S SCARE SCHOOL



TFI



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Marathon, C'est Magnifique!

The smart and sassy French animation studio celebrates 10 years of blending anime style and American toon conventions to create globally popular franchises.

It's always fascinating to see how other countries re-interpret pop cultural artifacts from other regions and create entirely new artistic and commercial ventures. Take, for example, the impressive achievements of Paris-based animation studio Marathon, which is celebrating a decade of spunky, energetic and uniquely branded TV series in 2010. Before Marathon began its brave attack on the global front, there were very few French studios that were able to break into the seemingly impenetrable fortress of American children's broadcasters and cable outfits. With huge internationally popular hits such as *Totally Spies!*, *Monster Buster Club*, *Martin Mystery*, *Team Galaxy* and the 2009 addition, *Gormiti: The Lords of Nature Return*, the studio has proven once again that it is possible for an indie entity outside the U.S. to make an impact in the market by producing great-looking, original series.

As David Michel, the company's general manager and producer, sees it, this was all in the original plan hatched by Marathon Media's president Vincent Chalvon Demersay. "Both Vincent and I have a strong North American bias. This past decade, we've produced only eight series, but they've all been on the air at some point in the U.S. and Canada, and that's exactly what we endeavored to do from the start."

Michel points out that when Marathon started out, few if any European companies could get American broadcasters to air their toons. "There were really no acquisition departments in the U.S. and mostly they had an in-house development division that would deal with independent U.S. producers," he says.

"What helped us a lot was that our first show made for the U.S. market—*Totally Spies!*—struck a chord with audiences, and it actually aired on two different channels, ABC Family and Cartoon network."

Inspired both by anime and by pop-culture-drenched American shows, *Totally Spies!* had an irresistible appeal: three shopaholic Beverly Hills teenagers



named Sam, Clover and Alex fight criminals and international spies for a secret organization known as the World Organization of Human Protection (WOOHP), when they're not at school or buying outfits on Rodeo Drive!

"In France, Japanese shows were all the rage when I was a kid," explains Michel. "But I also loved American shows like *Parker Lewis Can't Lose*. So you can see both sensibilities reflected in our cartoons. What we liked about anime wasn't just the design—it was the way the characters had these extreme reaction shots. They had this over-the-top craziness that you can only find in Japanese shows, and we tried to recapture that feeling for our series."

Totally Spies! paved the way for Marathon's other projects, which were also well received overseas. The series also inspired a full-length animated feature—



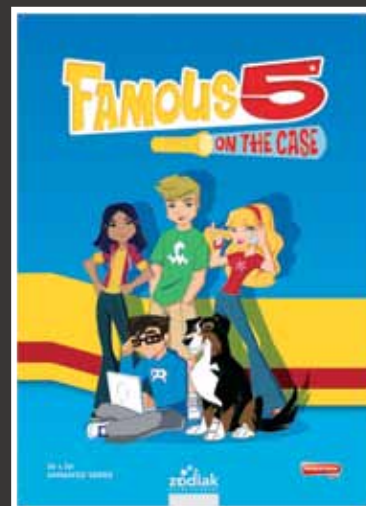
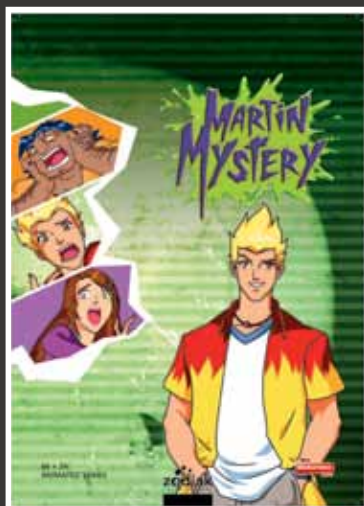
Marathon's Vincent Chalvon Demersay and David Michel

focusing on how the girls came to work for their agency—which had a successful run in France this past summer.

Regardless of their success, Marathon is sometimes criticized by French cultural purists, who don't like to see their countrymen creating animated projects that are influenced by American pop culture. "The criticism always comes from French writers, and our response to them is that there are close to 300 companies that create French-style animation, while there are only a couple of studios that do what we do," says Michel. "It's a similar trend in the world of music, there are some bands that create music for French audiences alone and then there are those who offer music for the international fans."

Of course, like many animation companies around the world, Marathon has also had to fight the huge appetite for live-action fare on TV. According to Michel, live-action shows are getting some traction in France, but not as much as they do in the U.S. That means his job is a little more complicated as outlets such as Cartoon Network and Disney Channel aim for an older target demo which is more likely to watch *High School Musical* than *Totally Spies!*. "We now need to finance our own shows in Europe and have to digest all these different parameters for an animated show," says Michel. "Then we have to come up with a concept that's fun and works for everyone and shape it in the 11-minute comedy format."

For the next few months, Marathon has several new exciting projects in the pipeline. One of its most recent properties, *Gormiti: The Lords of Nature Return*, which is based on a hugely popular Ital-



ian toy line, began its run on Cartoon Network in the U.S. in October. Another big project is *Rekkit Rabbit*, a new show that is a pure comedy—as opposed to the studio's previous toons which have been adventure comedies. Michel says they've put a writing team together made up of former writers for *The Simpsons* and various Nickelodeon hits. He says Marathon is also working on a deal with Spinmasters for a hot new series they're developing together. But it's all hush-hush at this point, so he won't reveal any more details!

For now, Michel says he's just happy to work in a place that allows you to really let good ideas turn into successful animated shows. "Ten years ago, we were the new guys on the block, now for the next decade, the challenge is to team up with fresh talent that can bring new energy and unforeseen angles to what we're doing. I just consider myself very lucky to work at the kind of place that if you have a good idea that you're passionate about, nobody prevents you

from bringing it to fruition. That's all very liberating." ■

To learn more about this dynamic studio, visit www.marathon.fr.

Next Up: Laughing with a Giant Rabbit

Marathon Animation will be taking a page out of the classic 1950 movie *Harvey*, in which Jimmy Stewart got into all kinds of trouble after he befriended an invisible, talking six-foot-tall rabbit. In Marathon's upcoming toon, *Rekkit Rabbit*, a young boy named Jay Shmuffon finds out what it's like to have a 10-foot-tall magical rabbit as a friend. Bored with his job as a magician's assistant in Magicland, Rekkit Rabbit runs away and lands smack in the middle of Jay's life.

According to exec producer David Michel, the rabbit's eccentric ways create all kinds of havoc, while the odd couple's friendship is the heart of the show. "It's the first pure-comedy show that we are working on, and it's exciting to work with a seasoned comedy-writing team that has worked on such amazing shows such as *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *The Simpsons* and *Catscratch*." With that kind of a pedigree, nobody would mind falling into Rekkit's magical rabbit hole. ■



Companies, Characters and Creativity Benchmarks

A look at a few of the big animation and vfx studios, companies and properties celebrating anniversaries & milestones in 2010.

25 Years

Looking Fantastique!

Surviving a quarter century in this fickle business is nothing to sneeze at. Just ask the innovative team at French children's cable outfit, **Canal J**. The programming selection is a mad mix of anime shows like *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, Euro toons such as *The Owl*, *Code Lyoko* and *Martin Mystery* and American fare such as *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Sabrina*. Founded by the Hachette Group, the company is also widely recognized as the studio behind the animated French show *Titeuf*, which is based on the popular comic-book character created by Swiss artist Zep. The studio has several new animated shows in the pipeline, including *Samson and Neon*, *Leon* and *The Little Cosmonaut*. "We may be 25 years old, but we're



Contraptus

still children," says the cabler's press liaison Aline Bray. "We care about children and our success comes from the unique relationship we have built with them through the years." We're sure you

can find out more about the secrets of their success if you corner program manager Caroline Mestik at one of the big European TV markets.

For more info, visit www.canalj.fr.

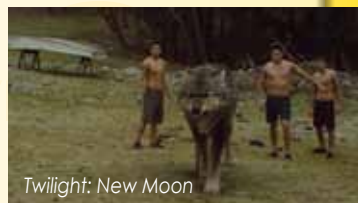
Tippett in Top Form

Visual effects master Phil Tippett was only 33 when he left ILM to set up a studio in his garage to create an experimental short called *Preshistoric Beast*. Next came the Emmy-winning visual effects he created for the CBS animated documentary *Dinosaur!*, followed by the jaw-droppingly cool visuals he came up for the 1986 movie *Robocop*. Always willing to embrace new forms, Tippett made a smooth transition to digital effects, and the work he and Craig Hayes did on *Jurassic Park* led to the development of the Digital Input Device.

You can never think of Paul Verhoeven's 1995 sci-fi epic *Starship Troopers* without immediately recalling **Tippett Studio's** beautifully visualized giant arachnid battle sequences. In the years that followed, moviegoers were treated to more masterful vfx work in a wide variety of pics, including *Hollow Man*, *Cats & Dogs*, *The Haunting*, *The Matrix Revolutions*, *Hellboy* and *The Adventures of Sharkboy and Lavagirl 3-D*.

The Berkeley-area-based studio hasn't been showing any signs of creative fatigue in recent years. After delivering a mighty fine Templeton in *Charlotte's Web*, the Tippett boffins created the digital rats in *Enchanted*, and perfected the art of digital wolves for *The Golden Compass* and *Twilight: New Moon*. Not surprisingly, they tell us their in-house slogan is "Creativity or death!" and the reason they stay in business is their "Love of pain, love of film, love of crew." Now those are words we can keep close to our hearts for another 25 years of hairy monsters and super creeps.

Check out Tippett's latest creations at www.tippett.com.



Twilight: New Moon

20 Years

J.J. A-O-K After 20 Years

To those with more than a passing knowledge of toon history, **J.J. Sedelmaier Productions** is a name that can't help but bring a knowing smirk to their face. After launching the studio in 1990, J.J. and Patrice Sedelmaier went on to work on some of the more notorious series in toondom, like the TV *Fun House* cartoons for *Saturday Night Live*, the anti-politically-correct super hero spoof *The Ambiguously Gay Duo* and the launch season of Mike Judge's notorious *Beavis and Butt-Head*, which J.J. notes is probably the most ridiculous thing his studio has been involved in!

In writing to us to share in the celebration of this anniversary, Sedelmaier states that the best decision the studio has made in the business has been to stay as small as possible. Perhaps that's why the house's cartoons have been able to avoid any of the watered-down, nannying effects of larger studios! Sedelmaier lists Richard Williams and Winsor McCay as his animation heroes, but even given that love of the classics you might be surprised that the man who brought you such irreverent shows honed his skills on *Strawberry Shortcake* and *Berenstain Bears* specials back in the '80s!

Some of the Sedelmaiers' studio's more recent projects include the pilot for [adult swim] cult hit *Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law*, the celebrated (and hilarious) "Tek Jansen" cartoons for *The Colbert Report*, featuring Stephen Colbert's somewhat pumped up fantasy of himself, and animated interstitials for USA's faux-psychic-detective series, *Psych*. The studio is currently developing projects for IFC and Al Roker, and knowing Sedelmaier Prods., there is no way to predict exactly what these will end up like! So let us say to the Sedelmaiers, thank you for all the laughs, and here's to another 20 years of 'em, at least!

Learn more about the studio's latest and greatest at www.jjsedelmaier.com.



Skunk



Toon Boom: Animators' Best Friends

Sometimes it feels like it's a Toon Boom world—we just live in it. The dynamic team at the Montreal based animation software company let us know that it's been 10 year since they introduced **Toon Boom Harmony** and **Toon Boom Studio** to the market. Thanks to the hard work and excellent leadership of company CEO and president Joan Vogelesang, the outfit's award-winning software has won legions of fans worldwide. When we asked them about the secrets of their success, Toon Boom spokesperson Karina Bessoudo notes, "Toon Boom is deeply connected to the animation community directly in the field and across all continents. We also listen to our customers and deliver animation technology that caters to their needs!"

Another important aspect of the company is that it stays at the forefront of introducing animation to the developing world. Vogelesang is constantly on the road, flying to many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to spread the word on the company's growing line of products. Karina says they will introduce more fun products for animation lovers of all ages in the near future—but it looks like we'll have to wait a bit until she'll reveal more details. In the meantime, when you catch Disney's latest movie *The Princess and the Frog*, keep in mind that the animators used Toon Boom Harmony to animate this beautiful 2D fairy tale!

More info, products and downloads at www.toonboom.com.

A Decade of Being Out of Our Minds

You've got to give the hard-working team at North Carolina's **Out of Our Minds Animation Studios** lots of credit. Not only did they finish a full-length CG-animated movie (*The Magistical*) in three years with a full-time staff of 12, they also have one of the best names in Toon Town! Run by Lori and John Cernak, the Winston-Salem, N.C.-based shop is celebrating 10 years in the animation business (although it was founded as an art studio in 1985).

What put the shop on the map was their wonderful 2003 short *Dear Sweet Emma*, which won over 150 awards in 2003 and was nominated for a BAFTA. Then came *Flyaway* and *Joyride*, which also received much acclaim. "Considering they were all done in our spare time, on a budget of zero dollars by about eight people, we think they've done alright for themselves," says Lori Cernack. The team is now

collaborating with New Orleans Café Baby artist Mark Bercier on their next animated short.

Of course, we had to ask them about their reasons for staying in the biz: "A great designer once said, 'You can get things done well, cheap or fast. And maybe, once in a while, you'll be lucky enough to get two of the three.' We do our best to provide all three on every single project we take on! We treat all our clients' projects as if they are our own—because they are!"

However, it's their list of silly in-house antics that is the most impressive! "We've had more than our fair share of mannequins on the roof, emergency room visits, giant dragon heads—we sing everyday conversations as a bad musical ... brought Santa to a bowling alley, covered our bathroom with over 3,000 post-it notes, turned our bathtubs into planters, put statues wearing gas masks behind doors, throw real darts at each other, create a holiday all about screaming about fruit—and that's just before coffee!" Try topping that, Seth MacFarlane!

See more at www.outofourmindsstudios.com.



A Dazzling Decade for DAZ

If you work in CG animation or like to create 3D art, chances are you are already a fan of the impressive software packages released by **DAZ 3D**. The Draper, U.T.-based company was founded by current president and CEO Dan Farr and Christopher Creek in Dec. 2000. Among its many popular releases is the DAZ Studio 3D art and animation package, Victoria, "the most widely supported female 3D figure on the planet," and her male counterpart, Michael.

Farr and Creek tell us that they're working to create a more powerful, easier-to-use version of DAZ Studio, which will incorporate a new system of full-body IK for easy animation. "Additionally, research is under way for a next-generation Unimesh human which will be easy to customize and animate," says Farr.

One of the reasons they love working in this field is because they want to inspire creativity in all artists. "We find that we tend to absorb even more inspiration than we provide," notes Creek. "The drive and creativity of each of DAZ 3D's 1.5 million community members continues to push our limits to provide the highest quality content and software applications at the most affordable prices possible."

By the way, they tell us that their official slogan is "Unleash the Artist Within!" But we like their in-house mantra even better. It's a cross between "Make sure it doesn't suck too much!" and "Take it to the community to see what they suggest."

To see more of DAZ 3D's offering, visit www.daz3d.com.



3D Models from the Deep

Turning around an animated project, commercial or game on a tight deadline? Don't have to time to grant your creations pixellated perfection? You may want to let your fingers do the walking over to **TurboSquid**, a veritable mega swapmeet where users create, buy and sell stock 3D models for just such emergencies! TurboSquid has been in business since launching at SIGGRAPH in 2000 and has since become the largest online marketplace for these much-needed models. Company founders Matt and Andy Wisdom made a splash from the start as they handed out squishy squid-shaped fishing lures to attendees at their SIGGRAPH booth, and say they still get fan mail from people keeping the mushy freebies on their desks.



The small company of roughly a dozen employees handles a mini empire of thousands of models, textures and assets from their home base in New Orleans. Though Katrina made them look at leaving their hometown, TurboSquid decided instead to stay and be part of the rebuilding efforts. Current CEO Matt Wisdom sits on several rebuilding committees and the whole crew often gets out to participate in projects with organizations like Habitat for Humanity. Wisdom's roots in the city run deep, and they say Mardi Gras doesn't hurt, either! In the team's words, "We love this business. We work hard (sometimes in our pajamas), then play hard (sometimes in our pajamas)."

TurboSquid's most popular product is "Masha," a realistic, rigged female character who tends to star in weight loss commercials, where you can see her perfect polygons stretch out and miraculously bounce back into shape (if only we could all be so lucky). Masha is constantly evolving with new techniques and is turning into quite the star.

The team of hard-line 3D nerds, who say they idolize Bill Gates as a PC-based house in a world full of Mac studios, have no problem taking their work home with them. You'll often catch conversations at TurboSquid revolving around NURBS-based modeling or the pros and cons of 3ds Max vs. Maya—of course, there's always enough time to recap on the latest Saints game. Right now they're hard at work on a massive site redesign in the midst of selling their wares to major film, game and TV projects (but TurboSquid would never kiss and tell). So the next time you're in a tight spot, you'll know where to turn. Ten years at the top can't be wrong!

To learn more or do some (browser) window shopping, head to www.turbosquid.com.

Chinese Toon Pioneers

Those of us who have been following the indie CG-animation feature scene can recall an interesting family movie titled *Through the Moebius Strip* that was released in 2005. Directed by vfx veteran Glenn Chaika, the film centered on a boy's voyage to an alien world to find his lost father. That bold venture was the first feature produced by Hong Kong-based digital distribution and production studio **Global Digital Creations Holding**, which marks its 10th year in the business in 2010.



The company's talented and dynamic senior VP Catherine Xu wrote to remind us of this big milestone for GDC. She notes the best thing her studio did was

to switch from original content creation to service-for-hire business. Some of these projects include the *Dive! Oily! Dive! Movie (Little Happy Submarines)* for Mike Young Productions and *The Strawberry Shortcake Movie: Sky's the Limit* for American Greetings.

On top of its 16 production stages, a fully integrated production pipeline and quality control systems in Shenzhen and Shanghai, GDC has also established a professional CG training school in partnership with Shenzhen University.

According to Xu, "GDC strives to provide a Four Seasons-level quality of CG service at a Holiday Inn price! Our biggest role models are Pixar and DreamWorks. We want high-quality entertainment products to be 'Made in China' as well!"

So what was the silliest thing they did? "We made over 120 minutes of full animated footage on an 85-minute film for our first movie!"

You can find out all about GDC at www.gdc-world.com



FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION
BEST ANIMATED SHORT



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presents

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Foothill's Foothold in Kids' TV



It's hard to believe it's been just 10 years since Gregory Payne and his wife Jo Kavanagh-Payne started their Santa Barbara, Calif.-based children's television outfit known as **Foothill Entertainment**. In the years since, Foothill has helped produce beloved children's toons and its current distribution catalogues boasts *Barney*, *Biker Mice from Mars* and the BAFTA award winning *Animal Stories*, among others.

Foothill's products are full of the same gentle, humorous and adventurous attitude that the Paynes bring to running their operation. As Jo puts it, "We love what we do and love being able to do it together!" From their home base in their beloved Santa Barbara, Foothill's fearless leaders jet set to top markets around the world looking for new series and new opportunities. And while they claim to have "good travel karma," a few flight mishaps and stories about hotel fires might make you question that!

Working under a positive mantra—"Work with people we like on projects that we enjoy"—Foothill is striving hard to deliver their next hit. Their latest project is a CGI series called *Raz & Benny* about two mouse buddies who bring a little bit of Tom & Jerry style comedy action back to the small screen, which is as the Paynes say "Just what we need in this gloomy global environment." And we couldn't agree more. The dialogue-free series focuses on high-end animation and highspeed hijinks as Raz and Benny, whose dreams are a bit bigger than their brains, get into all kinds of shenanigans posing as spies, racecar drivers or even jungle explorers.



If you're lucky enough to meet Greg and Jo at one of the international markets this year, be sure to give your congratulations, invite them for a round of golf, and remind them to keep open flames out of the hotel room!

For more on Foothill's properties, visit www.foothillentertainment.com.

Getting in on the Action

Next year will mark a decade of one of the leading digital 2D animation software providers getting their product into the hands of eager artists and studios as London-based **CelAction** celebrates their 10th anniversary. Of course, the creation of their namesake product, CelAction2D, goes back a little further than that. The software was created and refined when the creators of BBC series *The Big Knights* reached out to the young company looking for a way to keep animation cost-efficient without outsourcing. While working with the animators, company founders Andy Blazdell and Simon Lipowicz fine tuned their own in-house tools into the focused, user-friendly application it is today, though they continually work to improve it with each new version.



CelAction2D was also used in ratings hit *2DTV*, the Oscar-nominated short *The Mysterious Geographic Explorations Of Jasper Morello* and most recently for *Tinga Tinga Tales*. Blazdell and Lipowicz matched their technological ingenuity (can you believe they claim to enjoy taking tech support calls?) with an easy sense of humor when they wrote to tell us of their upcoming milestone. According to them, the best thing they ever did was to keep their product name the same as the company name—"It's so much easier to remember that way!" Their one regret? "Using all our funniest lines for our fifth anniversary."

Whether their hard at work tweaking their software for the version 3.5 release coming soon, using their top secret strategy ("We have the most complex animation technology in the world, now let's hide it from our users and make it look simple.") or imitating their shared hero, British super spy extraordinaire James Bond, we have to agree with them when they tell us their slogan is, "We're the good guys. We're nice people and we're bloody good at what we do." Cheers to that, boys!

More information available at www.celaction.com.

Starlight, Star bright



A major buzzword in the entertainment industry in the last few years has been "transmedia," and no company has grasped that idea better than **Starlight Runner Entertainment**. The New York-based outfit has been hard at work developing cross-platform properties, producing animated and live-action films, and even dealing in books, comics and videogames to help big wigs like Disney, Hasbro and Coca-Cola expand their brands, and doing the same for major entertainment properties. You'd think after 10 years, they'd be exhausted. Luckily, they operate under an inspiring slogan: Never Surrender!

Founded in May of 2000 by Chrysoula Artemis, Mark Pensavalle and current CEO Jeff Gomez, Starlight Runner is one of those studios which touches on so many projects in so many areas of the industry it seems dizzying. In a snap, Gomez rattles off such diverse upcoming projects as work for Coca-Cola's "Happiness Factory" campaign and vfx-laden blockbusters-in-the-making *Tron Legacy*, *Prince of Persia* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*. In addition to these major deals, Starlight is hard at work creating its first in-house transmedia property, *GORIZER*.

Judging by the whirlwind of activity, we're happy that Gomez was able to find time to share a couple cool facts about the company. He says the funniest job they've ever had was a treatment where silent movie monsters team up to take over the world, and that one thing noone can guess about Starlight is that they do secret projects for the government! Hey, as long as they don't leak any secret missile codes, Starlight should be able to continue that for a long while!

For more on Starlight's full slate, visit www.starlightrunner.com.



Platige Image and Tomek Bagiński present a new motion picture

the **KINEMATOGRAPH**

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Animasia's Malaysian Invasion

Edmond Chan, the talented co-founder and managing director of Malaysia's hot toon studio **Animasia** wrote to tell us that his company was going to be five years old in 2010. Offering innovative, top-notch shows such as *ABC Monsters*, *Bola Kampung* and *Supa Strikas*, Animasia has been able to stay ahead of the competition by offering a variety of services and producing original content for local and international consumption.



Chan says he loves working in the animation sector. "The great creative people we meet in this industry are the main reason we stay in this business," he notes. "There are always new surprises and challenges when we embark on new projects. It's never boring!"

One of the company's upcoming projects is a 2010 co-production with Cartoon Network, a movie titled *Balla Bowl*, which is centered on the game of cricket. Chan says most of the work will be done in Malaysia, where Animasia will be responsible for pre- to postproduction. When it comes to idols in the business, Chan says he thinks of Agogo president, Steven Ching as a role model. "I admire his hard work, high spirit and energy in continuously bridging European animation projects with Asian studios. Since he was one of the few Asians who ventured into this business 15 years ago, I truly salute his successful journey."

Chan is also refreshingly candid about learning from past experiences. "The silliest thing we ever did was going to our first MIPCOM market full of hope. We printed and brought 2,000 brochures and managed to only distribute a hundred. Imagine, we had to pack and carry all the remaining stock back home!"

You can find out more by visiting www.animasia-studio.com.

Winx Club Earns Its Wings

If you have a young girl in your family, you are probably already aware of **Winx Club** and its appealing cast of trendy pixies. In case you're totally out of the loop, all you need to know is that the animated series was created by the multi-talented Iginio Straffi five years ago and produced and animated by Italian toon powerhouse **Rainbow S.p.A.** The show, which airs on CW4Kids in the U.S. has inspired several DVD collections, toys, clothings and two



CG-animated features.

Incidentally, Rainbow is also celebrating its 15th anniversary in 2010. *Huntik* and *Monster Allergy* are among the Italian studio's other hot properties of recent years. Next up for the company is *Maya Fox*, a toon about a 17-year-old gossip and fashion blogger who uses her psychic powers to elude a serial killer, and *Rome vs. Rome*, the studio's first 3-D stereoscopic movie. And yes, the Winx girls are also getting a second CG-animated movie in 2010. With all these exciting activities happening in the house of Straffi, we have to agree with their in-house slogan: "No detail is left to chance." Felice anniversario, Sig. Straffi! **Celebrate with the pixies at www.winxclub.com or learn more at www.rbw.it.**

Flying Fairy's Secret Helpers

Abby's Flying Fairy School



Indie boutique studio **Speakeasy FX** wrote in to tell us that they'll be marking their fifth year in the business in 2010. The Westfield, New Jersey shop currently has a staff of 30 and is busy animating the new CG-animated *Abby's Flying Fairy School* series for *Sesame Street*. Headed by company founder Scott Steward, Speakeasy says nobody can guess that the shop is just a front. "We really are a speakeasy," says Jan Carlee. They also let us know that the best thing they did was "rent out a bar at 8:30 a.m. to watch *Sesame Street*!" Heck, nobody can argue with that folks. Keep up the great work and grab a drink for us next time!

Learn more at www.speakeasyfx.com.



That TeamTO Spirit

TeamTO

It seems like it was only yesterday when French husband-and-wife team Guillaume Hellouin and Corinne Kouper decided to form their own animation company along with Caroline Souris and Christophe Archambault. According to Hellouin, who worked on the Emmy-winning CG-animated series *Rolie Polie Olie* before forming the company, the name of the company comes from two words, "Team is obvious, but TO is short for Tobiuo which means flying fish in Japanese—that's not so obvious!"

Guillaume and company have a very busy period ahead of them. They are in production on their new series, *Hareport* and *Angelo Rules*, which was the most viewed children's program at MIPCOM Junior in October. They are working on *The New Adventures of Babar*, *Ooohhhasis* and *Plankton Invasion*, and a CG-animated 52 x 13 *Felix the Cat* show. TeamTO is also cooking up a visually arresting stereoscopic 3-D feature called *Occho Kochoi*, about an unprepared bird that has to lead his flock on a dangerous migratory flight to Africa.

When asked the elusive question about why they embarked on animation as a career, Hellouin responds, "Because we're silly, and we like it...let's just make it happen!" Here's to many more years of top-flight, quirky animation from one of our favorite French studios.

Find out more about these projects at www.teamto.com.

Angelo Rules



Fifi: Still Fresh as a Daisy

We would be amiss if we didn't mention that Chapman Ent.'s delightful preschool show **Fifi and the Flowertots** will be celebrating its fifth anniversary next year. The British stop-motion series has aired on Nick Jr. and PBS KIDS Sprout in the U.S. and on Five in the U.K. Created by the brilliant Keith Chapman, who also gave us the globally popular *Bob the Builder* show, the series had a shaky first season. "People don't realize that the show almost didn't happen," writes the show's ace publicist, Cassandra Sananes. "After we had our first series co-commission from Milkshake! and Nick Jr., our studio partner walked away from the relationship due to its own financial pressure. Through pure perseverance we landed new investment and the company took off!" Up next for Chapman are two very promising preschool shows, *Rah Rah the Noisy Lion* and *Little Charley Bear*, which will both air on CBeebies in 2010. Yes, Fifi's legacy lives on and you can still pick up the soothing Fifi Lullaby Plush doll on amazon.com for about \$40!

Visit www.chapmanentertainment.co.uk for more info. ■



Fifi and the Flowertots



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Stocking Stuffers for All Ages

This month's DVD releases will help tick geeks, overgrown kids, actual kids and otaku pals off your shopping list. *by Mercedes Milligan*

Family Guy Presents: Something, Something, Something Dark Side [Fox, \$22.98]

The *Family Guy* entourage are zipping back to a galaxy far, far away for this second *Star Wars* spoof. This sequel makes a farce of *The Empire Strikes Back*, recreating the Hoth battle and the burgeoning romance between Han and Leia (Peter and Lois). The rest of the gang reprise their rolls as Luke (Chris), Obi-Wan (Herbert), Yoda (Carl), C3PO (Quagmire), R2 (Cleveland) and Chewie (Brian), with Mort stepping in as Lando Calrissian and Joe as the Empire's probe droid!

The DVD includes audio commentary from series creator Seth MacFarlane as well as producers Mark Hentemann and David Goodman, writer Kirker Butler, director Dominic Polcino and star Seth Green. Further bonuses are deleted scenes, *The Dark Side of Poster Art* featurette, animatics and

pop-up video. The Blu-ray (\$29.99) also includes a digital copy, and a limited edition release will include collectors' cards and a T-shirt. May the giggity be with you.

[Release date: Dec. 22]

Robot Chicken Season 4 [Warner, \$29.98]

More mad stop-motion mayhem from the minds of Seth Green and Matthew Senreich. The fourth season of short-attention-span gratifying skits includes toon spoofing looks at a war between the Smurfs and the Snorks, Strawberry Shortcake as a detective and Annie Warbucks' Super Sweet Sixteen!

Collected on two discs, the season's 20 episodes are accompanied by



video commentary, gag reel, episode commentator feature, video blogs, deleted and extended scenes and animatics from the season's production. Crack open some champagne and celebrate this irreverent massacre of your childhood.

[Release date: Dec. 15]

SpongeBob Season 6, Vol. 1 [Nickelodeon, \$26.98]

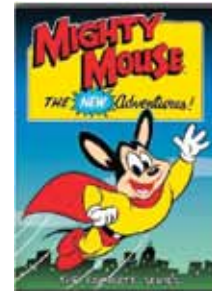
Words can't express the forlornness of a month without a *SpongeBob* release. Thankfully, the animation gods have taken pity upon us lately, and a new dose of underwater mania has hit shelves just in time for the holidays! The multiple award-winning series from the mind of Steve Hillenburg is once again bringing plenty of laughs and catchy tunes in its sixth season, and boasts guest star Alton Brown ("House Fancy") and the Annie-nominated "Penny Foolish" episode. Not to mention the "SpongeBob vs. The Big One" special, guest starring seafaring dreamboat Johnny Depp and Davy Jones.

Volume 1 hosts the first 12 two-parter episodes on two discs. The set is rounded out with special features The *SpongeBob* History Song and three bonus shorts: "Balloons," "Juiceman," "The Outfit" and "Traffic." The perfect way to wind down after a day of jellyfishing.

[Release date: Dec. 8]

Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures The Complete Series [Paramount, \$45.98]

Here he comes to save the day! This witty superhero send-up series, produced by Bakshi-Hyde Ventures



(founded by the notorious Ralph Bakshi and producer John Hyde), brought the 1940s character into the '80s for two seasons (CBS, 1987-88), spoofing popular heroes like Batman and nearly

forgotten retro characters alike. Sometimes cited as the first of the modern creator-driven toons, the series helped launch the careers of animation icons John Kricfalusi, Lynne Naylor, Bruce Timm, Tom Minton, John Reardon, Rich Moore and even Pixar luminary Andrew Stanton. The set includes three discs and throws in three bonus *Mighty Mouse* cartoons and featurette. An '80s cartoon that wasn't a 22-minute toy commercial? Now *that* is a collector's item. [Release date: Jan. 5, 2010]

Monster: Box Set 1 [VIZ, \$59.98]

This anime adaptation of Naoki Urasawa's popular '90s manga, masterfully directed

by Masayuki Kojima (*Piano no Mori*) is launching on disc in the U.S. in the wake of its premiere on Syfy in October. The plot centers on a German brain surgeon who loses his standing after saving a mysterious young boy's life, only to discover later

that his patient has grown into a murderous psychopath. As he chases his monster from Germany to Prague, he tries to unravel the mystery of the murderer's corruption, knowing he is the only one that will remain unharmed by the abomination he had saved from death. This release contains the first 15 episodes on three discs, but you may want to wait to watch it until Set 2 is announced because the suspense might literally kill you.

[Release date: Dec. 8] ■





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Animation Lovers' Holiday Gift Guide

What do you get the toon fan on your list that seems to own every behind-the-scenes book written about animated movies, has a full library of Disney DVDs and Blu-rays (including *Home on the Range!*) and has a closet packed with character-themed t-shirts and underwear? We have a few suggestions that might make holiday shopping easier for you—or you may just decide to keep the items for yourself and save money by sending friends and family e-cards instead. The choice is all yours!

Games Without Frontiers!

A recent survey by video game retailer Game Crazy revealed that Activision's *Guitar Hero World Tour* tops the most-wanted list of most eight- to 17-year-old boys and girls. That's pretty understandable, but if your heart beats for more animation-related titles, there are plenty of other games to choose from this month. You can explore South American jungles with Carl and Russell (and their delightful talking canine companion Dug and the prehistoric bird known as Kevin) in the *Up* Nintendo Wii game. Priced around \$30, the game has 11 gameplay levels across six different environments.

If you like playing with your food, then you might get a big kick out of Ubisoft's fun tie-in games for *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. You can play as Flint, the inventor/hero of the Sony animated feature, and use wild gizmos to interact with giant hamburgers, ice-cream cones and meatballs in 20 levels and seven different environments. You can also invite your friend to join in the fun and play as Flint's clever monkey pal.

High on the list of Animag favorites this year is the new Wii *Toy Story Mania!* game, which puts you smack in the middle of a cool carnival staged by Woody, Buzz and the rest of the team from the Pixar family favorite. The thematically connected game offers 10 shooting galleries, 30 mini-games, bonus levels in 3-D, hidden Easter eggs, and a lot more to keep you and three other players busy until the next installment of the franchise hits theaters in May!

Of course, there's nothing wrong with going back to the classics. The new *Super Mario Bros. World* for Wii (\$49) allows players to try the propeller suit, which shoots you high into the sky and also lets Mario transform into Penguin Mario! You also have a choice to save your friends or compete with them and throw them into the jaws of danger. In addition, several visitors from the Mushroom Kingdom make guest appearances and players can ride Yoshi characters and use their tongues as weapons. Now doesn't that sound like your typical family get-together?



Inside Bender's Head

File this one under toon-related objects of beauty that can easily make us weep. Yes, the geniuses at Fox Home Entertainment have given us the Mother of all *Futurama* DVD collections—all 72 episodes of the original series along with the four movies (*Bender's Big Score*, *The Beast with a Billion Backs*, *Bender's Game*, *Into the Wild Green Yonder*). Yes, yes, we know, it's not technically the complete series, because Comedy Central is now producing 26 more episodes. But still, how can you not want a collection that is packaged in a collectible numbered Bender head?



The bells and whistles include audio commentaries by Matt Groening, David X. Cohen, Maurice LaMarche, John DiMaggio, Patric M. Verrone and the rest of the gang; the storyboard animatic for *Into the Wild Green Yonder*, *How to Draw Futurama in 10 Very Difficult Steps*, *Zapp Brannigan's Guide to Making Love at a Woman*, *Bender's Movie Theater Etiquette*, *Docudramarama: How We Make Futurama So Good, Louder, Louder!*, *A Treasury of Deleted Scenes*, *Blooperama 3* and *Zero-G, Matt and David in Space*. The suggested retail price of \$199 may make your head spin, but you can definitely find it cheaper online. Items like this definitely make us think twice about throwing our DVD players out on the scrap pile.

Red Hot Blu-Rays: Amazon Top 10



1. Up (Disney)
2. Cars (Disney)
3. Star Wars: The Clone Wars: The Complete Series (Warner)
4. Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs (Fox)
5. Pinocchio: 70th Anniv. Platinum Edition (Disney)
6. Tinker Bell and the Lost Treasure (Disney)
7. Sleeping Beauty: 2-Disc Platinum Edition (Disney)
8. The Nightmare Before Christmas (Disney)
9. Monsters vs. Aliens (Paramount)
10. Snow White and the 7 Dwarfs (Disney)

* source: www.amazon.com 11/20/09

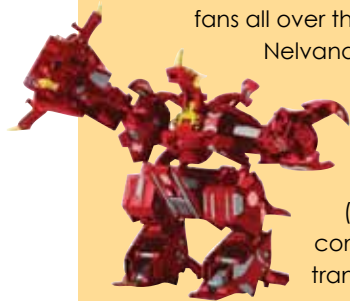
'Tis the Season to Battle Brawl

If you have a young boy in your family, we don't have to explain the strange appeal of *Bakugan* to you. Since the 2007 debut of *Bakugan Battle Brawlers* on Japan's TV Tokyo, the action-packed toon has developed an avid army of fans all over the world. Just in time for the arrival of

Nelvana's new series *Bakugan: Gundalian Invaders*, Sega Toys and Spin Master have released a fun new strategic game, based on the property. The

Bakugan 7-in-1 Maxus Dragonoid (\$39.99) is a collectible game which combines cards and three dimensional transforming playing pieces. The next evolution of the game takes the popular pieces and allows seven of them to

interconnect, creating the largest Bakugan character yet, Maxus Dragonoid. The pieces can also be used individually in the game. If you're having a hard time keeping up with the complex storylines, that means you're probably over 16!



Something for the Creative Types

While there are plenty of animation software releases out there, we always find ourselves circling back to the wonderful world of **Toon Boom**. The Montreal-based company has been offering easy-to-use and surprisingly multi-faceted software since it was founded 16 years ago. This year we saw the release of its **Studio 5** (\$250), which added stop-motion animation to its other existing capabilities. What makes this a great gift for hobbyists, students and educators alike is its ability to offer



practical ways to create animated projects—whether

you want to work in traditional digital, cut-out, rotoscoping or stop-motion animation. Studio 5 lets you speed things up with Time-Lapse Imagery, and allows you to see images



exactly as they'll appear in your work. You can change backgrounds using Chroma Key Screens and position and align elements by using Onion Skinning. You can mix and match styles and also export your animation easily to YouTube, Facebook or an iPhone. If someone you love wants to get into animation, this is the kind of gift that can really make a difference in their lives. Of course, that means you'll actually have to watch and critique their toons after they're done—Ugh!

Dora, Is That Really You?

Kids—they sure grow up fast these days. Take Dora the Explorer, for example. Last time we checked she was just a cute little preschool girl who was strangely fond of maps and backpacks. Now the Nickelodeon star heads up her own toys and merchandising empire. And she's also launched a tween line, moved to the big city and sports a new fashionable look! Seriously, we don't know whether to laugh or cry about this, but Mattel is offering new **Dora's Explorer Girls Dolls**. The Dora Links Doll costs about \$59.99 and plugs into the computer and opens up an interactive, online world. Girls can customize their dolls, solve mysteries and interact with the tween Dora in various ways. There's also the Dora Fashion Doll (\$19.99), which adds a cool, multicultural zing to the blah world of Barbie and her friends. Two things for which parents can be grateful: (1) Grown-up Dora doesn't follow the dubious example set by the Bratz bimboes and (2) She has no resemblance to that freak show known as Miley Cyrus.



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Blue Alien Fever

We've all read too many stories about how James Cameron is going to revolutionize 3-D filmmaking with his much-anticipated *Avatar* movie. Well, now that the epic adventure has finally opened in theaters, we can kick back and really examine the project with cool objectivity and keen analytical eyes. But before we do that, how about checking out



some of the strangely curious toys and collectibles that have hit the fanboy community this month. Par example, whose life wouldn't be more complete by owning their own **Leonopteryx Collectible Figure** (Mattel, \$26.99). Keep it right next to your bed at night, and you might dream about flying to the mysterious world of Pandora on the wings of its fiercest creature indeed. Perhaps you've had your eyes on the **Amp Suit** replica (\$19.99), the **RDA Gunship** (\$26.99) or the **Jake Sully**

Figure (\$8.99). It's OK. We understand because we've loved blue toys since the first 12-inch Deluxe Smurf plush hit the stores a couple of decades ago!

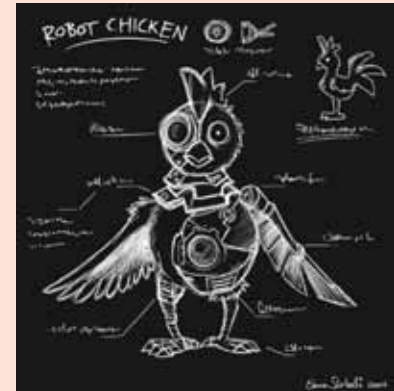
An [adult swim] Embarrassment of Riches

Remember when it was cool to make mixed tapes or CDs for the object of your affections? Well, now you have the chance to make a personalized, 110-minute-long DVD compilation of your favorite **[adult swim]** episodes. For \$20, you get to pick episodes from *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*,

The Drinky Crow Show, *Lucy the Daughter of the Devil*, *Robot Chicken*, *Sealab 2021*, *The Venture Bros.* and *Tim and Eric Awesome Show*. You even get to pick the look of the case, disc and menu from three totally cool designs offered



on the site. It's mix and match all you want until you're done with your own personal A.S. DVD. Of course, once you hit the [adult swim] website, it's really hard to resist the temptation of other goodies such as The




Meatwad Knit Cap (\$15), the Carl Nesting Dolls (\$20) and the Venture Bros. Laptop Case (\$28) and Color Change Mug (\$18). Sometimes, we secretly wish that [adult swim] would just take over all the stupid, live-action parts of Cartoon Network overnight. Wouldn't that be the best holiday gift we could ever get? (Sigh!) ■



Happy 60th Birthday, Charlie Brown!

There's something about the loveable characters created by Charles M. Schulz (1922-2000) and his gentle humor that make his *Peanuts* merchandise and comic-strip collections a natural for holiday gift-giving. However, the folks at Andrews McNeel Publishing have really upped the ante by putting out a special 60th Anniversary volume titled **Celebrating Peanuts: 60 Years**. At first, the \$75 price tag scared us a little bit, but then, when you keep in mind that you get all kinds of inspiring quotes by the legendary cartoonist and over 500 pages of classic strips and full-color Sunday editions, it really seems like a bargain! Throw in an essay penned by Pixar's ace director Pete Docter (*Monsters, Inc.*; *Up*) and an intro by Schulz's wife Jean, and you get the kind of book that will dazzle everyone in the family. Happiness is a beautiful 60-year hardcover, Charlie Brown!





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Running with the Wolves of *Twilight*

Phil Tippett spills the beans on creating the ferocious vfx for *Twilight: New Moon*. *By Ellen Wolff*

Tippett Studios, the Berkeley, Calif.-based visual effects shop founded by two-time Oscar winner Phil Tippett, has become so expert at furry animal animation that they could hang out a shingle saying "Phil's House of Fur." From *Cats & Dogs* and *Charlotte's Web* to *Enchanted* and *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*, the 25-year-old studio has tackled a menagerie of hairy beasts. So when wolves were needed for *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, Tippett was an obvious choice.

But no ordinary wolves were needed for *New Moon*, the second feature based on Stephenie Meyer's blockbuster vampire novels. Director Chris Weitz and vfx supervisor/producer Susan MacLeod, who had worked on the Oscar-winning visual extravaganza *The Golden Compass*, needed Tippett to animate realistic CG werewolves the size of small horses. These creatures had to run and fight convincingly as 1,000-pound animals—and also be werewolf personifications of several

actors in the film.

"Early on, we were asked if we could do motion capture with a trained wolf," recalls Phil Tippett, who co-supervised his studio's team alongside Matt Jacobs. "But these werewolves

had to project a certain amount of wolf behavior and also have human brains, so we had to find some place 'on the dial' between the two."

To research wolf behavior, Jacobs led a group of Tippett artists to an animal preserve where they could mingle with three-dozen wolves. Animation supervisor Tom Gibbons remembers, "It seemed like it could possibly be dangerous, because these wolves were huge—twice the mass of Great Danes. But once we were in their pens, we were really comfortable. Wolves have a very structured society, which was great, because in *New Moon* the

"I differentiate between photoreal and photographically representational. When someone says 'I want this to look absolutely real,' that's a sign they've never gone to art school ... In any kind of artistry, 'interesting' is a lot better than 'real.'"

—Vfx master Phil Tippett



werewolves are a gang."

While shooting backgrounds in Vancouver, Canada, Tippett used 8-perf cameras instead of the 3-perfs used for photographing the human actors. And he notes, "I wanted a minimum amount of camera moves—I wanted the wolves to drive the action instead of having animation 'chase' a frame where the wolves were going to be. I didn't want their performances to be chained down by guesstimating what they were supposed to do. For scenes we didn't previz, we allowed a lot of room on either side of the frame so we could do our camera moves in post and let the animation be free."

Back at the studio, Gibbons and the rest of the *New Moon* team were grappling with creating CG wolves. They experimented with rigs from *The Golden Compass*, but as Gibbons explains, "The wolves for this film were so



takes them out of the animal world. We pushed to have the different wolves' fur be the descriptor of which actor had turned into which wolf."

To create believable fur for a 1,000-pound wolf wasn't trivial, however. As Tippett notes, "The coat length of a normal timberwolf is about two-and-a-half inches. So as we scaled our guy

up two or three times, we had to scale up the fur correspondingly." Fortunately, the studio had recently updated its proprietary Furocious software, which "grows"

up light. There's a great deal of artistry in lighting CG characters to emphasize their dimensionality. For the most part, it's not realistic at all." While Tippett had gathered ambient light information with HDRIs (high dynamic range images), he cautions, "That's not a magic bullet."

Rendering is ultimately the killer challenge with furred creatures, asserts Tippett. "It's easy to say you'll make something that has 10 million hairs, but then try and render that! When we were doing the wolves we made some breakthroughs, like figuring out how to come up with a secret formula to cut rendering time in half."

Which will be crucial as Tippett Studios proceeds on the third *Twilight* movie, *Eclipse*, which has even more wolves. Gibbons notes, "We're now rendering 11 million hairs. We're figuring out ways to make these wolves look even more photographic without crashing our render farm."

The word "photographic" is key to Tippett's approach. "I differentiate between photoreal and photographically representational. When someone says 'I want this to look absolutely real,' that's a sign they've never gone to art school. What we're doing is a gigantic cheat. We're beating a bunch of 0s and 1s into submission. In any kind of artistry, 'interesting' is a lot better than 'real.'" ■

Summit Entertainment's *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* is in theaters nationwide this month.



disproportionate to what an actual wolf is that our run cycle went from approximately 71 mph down to 46 mph once we put it onto an anatomically correct wolf."

The story of *New Moon* called for these animals to have human eyes to distinguish among different people-turned-werewolves, and Gibbons says it was a challenge to make those eyes work in wolf heads. "Humans have smaller irises, and when you put those in an animal, it

hair using a series of guide splines. This tool had evolved into Furator, which gave artists more flexibility to stylize hairs and create greater variability. That was crucial to grooming distinctive-looking coats for each of the werewolves in *New Moon*.

Lighting all this fur was a major issue, Tippett recalls. "Vancouver's grey winter sky is the most unflattering light for a computer graphic character, especially one made out of fur, which sucks



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Photogenic Fiascos: No less than 16 studios worked together to blow up major cities in Roland Emmerich's holiday disaster movie, 2012.

Making Mayan Mayhem

No question about it: Audiences will get their money's worth of eye-popping, end-of-the-world vfx in Roland Emmerich's disaster movie, 2012.

by Barbara Robertson

This season's disaster-zeitgeist movie 2012 isn't only about destruction, but when a story centers on the Mayan calendar's end of the world in 2012 and the director is Roland Emmerich, you know that planet-wide destruction plays a major role. The wreckage begins with a crack in the firmament, soon ratchets way up to a big earthquake sequence in—where else?—Los Angeles and from there, all hell breaks loose.

Sixteen studios, under the overall supervision of co-producers Volker Engel and Marc Weigert, created the breakage. Engel and Weigert's own *Uncharted Territory* led the mayhem by ripping apart the landscape in Los Angeles and Las Vegas for 400 shots. Studios that contributed around 100 shots or more included Digital Domain, Double Negative, Sony Pictures Imageworks and

Scanline. Pixomondo, which previz'd the show, contributed 93 shots. Hydraulx had 60. Gradient, Evil Eye, Factory FX, UPP, The Post Office, Crazy Horse, Alex Lemke FX, Cafe FX and the Picture Mill shared the rest.

"It wasn't like we started with three studios and ended up with 16 because we didn't get the shots done," says Volker. "We planned this from the beginning. We figured out who would be our best partners."

Volker and Weigert chose Digital Do-

main, for example, to do the second half of the earthquake sequence in Los Angeles, which we see from the air. Double Negative bubbled up all the trouble in Yellowstone National Park. Imageworks and Scanline split the third act, with Imageworks creating huge arks inside a Himalayan mountain and Scanline providing the rush of water that floats the boats. Imageworks' boat-building job extended sets on a massive scale, but for the most part, the studios' work required rigid body simulation, fluid simulation and particle simulation to create fire, water, landslides, lava slides, earthquakes and general destructive chaos.

"You can't give these shots to small houses," Weigert says. "You have to give them to a sizeable house with the people, the pipeline, and the programmers who have done this before. So many mid-sized visual effects houses have closed down there's literally a shortage of houses that can handle this kind of business."

Splitting huge sequences into pieces

helped manage the global destruction, as did finding smaller sequences for smaller studios. Hydraulx, for example, cracked a supermarket in half near the beginning of the film, and later destroyed Hawaii with volcanic eruptions and lava flow. "They are typical Hydraulx shots with complicated computer graphics and particle simulations,"



Engel says.

For their part, Engel and Weigert set up shop for their production company Uncharted Territory on the Sony Pictures studio lot. As they had for earlier projects—*Independence Day* and *Coronado*—they staffed and equipped Uncharted Territory specifically for *2012*, buying machines and software and hiring over 100 people to handle the effects and manage the project. “We wanted to be close to Roland [Emmerich] in editorial,” Weigert says. And, close to the 400 terabyte server, too, that sent the digital files wherever needed during the post-production process thanks to a proprietary project management system, and then, when finally approved, moved them to editorial.

The artists working at Uncharted Territory used Autodesk’s Maya for modeling, 3ds Max for effects, and The Foundry’s Nuke for compositing. They also used Cebas’s finalRender, a hardware-accelerated ray tracer for rendering, and that company’s Thinking Particles system, a 3ds Max plug-in, for the destruction.

“We learned that they were developing a volume breaker that made it possible to destroy buildings without having to cut them apart by hand,” Engel says. “We made a deal with them to finance part of their development, which gave us exclusivity during production and a close collaboration.”

To create the Los Angeles earthquake sequence, Engel and Weigert started with three lines from the script. “[The script] read kind of like, ‘They run out of the house and as they drive in the limo, buildings crumble around them,’” Weigert says. “‘And then they arrive at the airport.’”

At first, they considered filming the route and replacing only the buildings they wanted to destroy, but they soon realized they’d need to create an entirely virtual environment except for the limousine, which they shot on a blue-screen stage in Vancouver. “In a lot of the shots, we even had to replace the road because it breaks in the shots,” Engel says.

To expand the three lines into what became a three minute sequence, the crew at Uncharted Territory created a previz using simple geometry. “It was like

a little LEGO set,” Weigert says. Once Emmerich approved the basic idea, Weigert and Engel moved the previz on to Pixomondo, which previz’d around 90 percent of the film.

“We had really good previz,” says Mohen Leo, who was visual effects supervisor at Digital Domain for *2012*. Digital Domain handled the L.A. earthquake sequence from the point at which the limousine arrives at the airport. “Pixomondo worked a long time to get the layout and camera that Roland [Emmerich] was really happy with. We did previz ourselves or made changes on a handful, but the whole flow was established. We just had to flesh it out.”

To do that, the Digital Domain crew shot reference for the parts in Los An-



“You can’t give these [big earthquake] shots to small houses. You have to give them to a sizeable house with the people, the pipeline and the programmers who have done this before. So many mid-sized visual effects houses have closed down there’s literally a shortage of houses that can handle this kind of business.”

—*2012* visual effects supervisor Marc Weigert

geles that Emmerich wanted to see destroyed in the fly-over, and then built break-apart models of buildings, fire hydrants, traffic lights and so forth to match. Proprietary technology split the geometry into pieces procedurally. To hold the objects together until they shattered, the studio developed Drop, which is custom code built around Bullet, an open source rigid body solver. Both proprietary systems worked inside Houdini, which gave artists the ability to manipulate the simulation.

For Scanline, though, the previz wasn’t as useful. “There’s a big difference between a polygon wave,” says Stephan Trojansky, visual effects supervisor, refer-

ring to the previsualization of moving water, “and a simulation that shows in detail how the water moves.” Finding the right speed to move the huge amounts of water realistically, yet within the time allotted for particular scenes, was a particular challenge because changing the speed of the simulation also changed the look. For example, water shooting off a fast moving wave vaporizes, but at a slower speed, looks like droplets.

At Double Negative, the challenges were literally groundbreaking. Using proprietary software implemented through Houdini, the studio caused a pool of lava to erupt through the Earth’s crust in Yellowstone Park and then created an ash cloud from which lava bombs and chunks of earth shoot after a fleeing RV.

“This film pushed the limits of everything,” Weigert says. “When you have to move and break the entire environment, it makes everything more than ten-fold as complex.”

When work on *2012* ended, Weigert and Engel disbanded Uncharted Territory, but will start it up again for Emmerich’s next film, which takes place in 16th century London. “When we learned we needed to create 100 percent photoreal environments, we just laughed,” Weigert says. “We said, ‘No problem. Nothing has to break.’” ■

Sony’s *2012* can be currently seen in theaters nationwide.

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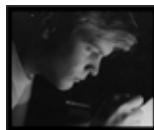
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Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry



StudioGPU's MachStudio Pro

As many have pointed out in recent months, expectations for speed in the 3D community have reached a breaking point. However, some companies are stepping up and pushing the envelope even further. One such outfit is StudioGPU and its real-time 3D compositing and render-



ing system MachStudio Pro. I have to say that I was extremely impressed with just how much you can throw at MachStudio Pro and still maintain a "real-time" output. This, of course, is dependent on how much horsepower spins around your video-card, but still, the performance was outstanding. Now, I put "real-time" in quotes because you could be talking about 10 frames per second, or 60 frames per second. Yet, the speed is substantially faster than our normal render engines. And these times include exporting out render passes for third party compositing, as well as the composite color pass.

MachStudio Pro is a raster-based render system which can incorporate shadow maps, ambient occlusion, sophisticated lighting and atmospheres as well as some successful hacks for things like depth of field. Featuring an ATI FirePro V8750 3D Workstation Graphics Accelerator, the system works well with other CG software programs such as Autodesk Maya and 3ds Max.

The results, as noted before, are quite impressive. It could very well change previz for films, as well as animation for CG features. We could be seeing a dramatic change in quality of animation for television, and probably more content, because

it can be developed faster and cheaper. I would place the real time quality output to that of maybe Nickelodeon's *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* series or the movie *Happily N'Ever After*, but the difference is that you can almost watch the film play out as you animate it.

This, however, should not be mistaken for a replacement for photorealistic renders like PRMan, mental ray, VRay, et al. What MachStudio Pro cannot do (yet) is full raytracing for effects like reflections, refractions, GI, caustics, and subsurface scattering, or full motion blur—all of which have become integral in the language of seamless visual effects in film work. And you shouldn't fault MachStudio Pro for not having it. I know that they are working on methods

for getting around these intense calculations. Until then, MachStudio Pro is completely set up for exporting scenes from the major 3D production packages natively as well as through the FBX format. I see this as an invaluable tool for delivering full CG animation production and creating previzualization in the film world.

Website: www.studiogpu.com
Price: \$4,999

Autodesk Maya 2010

Back around SIGGRAPH this year, which in CG time is a LONG time ago, Autodesk released Maya 2010 with a plethora of other Autodesk acquisitions. Within that release were some internal advances—animation constraints could be used in layers, Python was updated, and a couple of other little tidbits. A whole lot of new tutorials were thrown into the mix to bring you up to speed faster. And, notably, they expanded the number of mental ray licenses that come bundled in with the workstation license (6 per – 1 interactive, 5 batch). But really the main reason to justify a new release for the year is all the additional software packages that Autodesk injected into the Maya bundle. This doesn't include the Universal package, which also incor-

porates the 2010 versions of Mudbox and MotionBuilder. Now with Maya 2010 comes Toxik, Backburner and Matchmover.

Backburner has been around for a long time, initially being the render manager for Discreet's Flame and Inferno and other flammable namesakes. When Discreet acquired 3D Studio MAX from Kinetix, the 3D package was rolled into the mix, and Backburner became the manager of choice for smaller shops. With Discreet's absorption into Autodesk, Backburner migrated with all the other products.

Maya has finally come into the loop. And I have to say, with Rush, Backburner, Alfred and whatnot, it was Backburner that saved us in a pinch on a recent project. It may be small, but it gets the job done.

Matchmover for all intents and purposes replaces MayaLive, which honestly paled in functionality to Boujou, PTrack and SynthEyes. But Matchmover, acquired with REALVIZ, is a powerful tracker and a really nice addition to the Autodesk library.



Finally, Toxic adds a full, robust compositing system right into the mix with nice tools to utilize mental ray passes coming out of Maya, as well as 3D data. They tried this in the past with Digital Fusion (cleverly called Maya Fusion), but that lasted about eight minutes. I have high hopes and have seen it in action with good results.

I like Maya, and I like the incorporation of the new stuff. But I'd be lying if I said I wasn't disappointed by this release. It's akin to buying a new car, and hoping for a more powerful engine, but ending up

getting a new GPS, MP3 player and state-of-the-art seat heaters. The advances are noteworthy, but there just simply isn't enough groundbreaking technology to justify a full point release.

Website: www.autodesk.com

Price: \$3,495

Unity 3D's Unity iPhone

You know the iPhone app. phenom has reached its tipping point when even the Louvre Museum has jumped on the bandwagon. Meanwhile, I think the number of iPhone users has reach a gazillion now. That's right, there are more iPhone users than the population of the Earth, which means only one thing ... there is life on other planets. With all of these advances, I haven't seen a myriad of development tools for iPhone content. And perhaps it's simply because that community has not overlapped into my world of film and television. I did run across an amazing animation development tool, from my brethren in Denmark, called Unity.

There is no way that I can full touch on all the features that Unity has to offer, and frankly, I'm not sure which ones I should focus on. But I'll do my best in this small space.

Unity is a full-featured 3D package, which works hand in hand with other asset creation tools like Photoshop, Maya and Max to generate 3D animation content for iPhone apps. Animation and rigs import into Unity with little to no trouble. Graphics utilize OpenGL and DirectX features so there is a very real WYSIWYG sense from 3D to Unity. The package is multiplatform, so development can be done on either Mac or PC (although we did notice some discrepancies between Windows and OSX—in favor of OSX). It uses the PhysX physics engine for real time simulations. For those things it cannot do out of the box (veritice deformation, for example), it uses .NET based JavaScript and C# as its languages for further development.



This package blew us away so completely and thoroughly, that we decided to buy it and the companion iPhone devkit for the not insubstantial price of around \$350—which, in the world of gaming development systems, is quite cheap. Unity 3D offers a 30-day trial license for you to kick the tires. I'd recommend this for 3D artists who are looking to get their feet wet in the ever-expanding and enticing world of iPhone content development.

Website: www.unity3d.com

Price: \$350 ■

Todd Sheridan Perry is the co-owner and vfx supervisor of Max Ink Productions. You can email him at ducky@maxinkcafe.com.

OUR ALUMNI MADE AN IMPACT IN 2009.

VFS Animation & Visual Effects alumni credits in 2009 include: 9 Mike Dharney, Animator | 2012 Patil, Senior Technical Director | Christine Peterson, Digital Composer | 50 Cent: Blood on the Sand (VG) Giorgio Bertolone, Character Artist | The Squeakle Nicholas Augello, Technical Animator | Christopher Downs, Technical Animator | Amy Lu, Animator | Adam Yaniv, Animation Supervisor | Amelia Aronson, Digital Composer | Clement Yip, Animator | America's Army 3 (VG) Matthew Turner, Artist | Angels & Demons Jessica Wan, Lead Rotoscope Artist | Noel Wright, Digital Composer | Armored Riley Benard, Digital Composer | Yuta Shimizu, Visual Effects Artist | Astro Boy Andreas Hikel, Layout Artist | Kim Ooi, Animation Director | Avatar Michael Cozens, Lead Animator | Tamir Diab, Technical Director | Aaron Gilman, Character Animator | Alfredo Luzzardo, Layout Technical Director | Ben Sanders, Animator | The Beatles: Rock Band (VG) Mike Krentz, UI Artist | Brutal Legend (VG) Marke Pedersen, Senior Artist | Cirque du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant Julianna Kolakis, Character Designer | Ai Saimoto, Lighting Lead | Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs Andrew Lawson, Animator | Arun Ram-Mohan, Senior Color and Lighting Technical Director | Coraline Brian Demoskoff, Animator | A Christmas Carol Kirk Chantreine, Motion Capture Technical Director | Joel Pennington, Motion Capture Technical Director | Shraga Weiss, Character Modeler | Brent Wong, Character Modeler | District 9 Neil Blomkamp, Director/Co-Writer | Jelmer Boskma, Modeler | Robert Bourgeault, Lighting Lead | Freddy Chavez, Visual Effects Composer | Dominic Cheung, Lighting Technical Director | Paul Copeland, Visual Effects Artist | Anthony Di Nino, Animator | Brian Harder, Creature Rigger | Bernhard Huber, Effects Animator | Brett Ineson, Motion Capture Supervisor | Patrick Kaly, Animator | Bernhard Kimbacher, Visual Effects Data Coordinator | Julianna Kolakis, Creature Texture Painter | Adam Waisett, Visual Effects Artist | Nikolai Michaleski, Composer | Brendon Moritt, Digital Artist | Fernando Piazos, Animator | Derek Stevenson, Matchmove Lead | James Stewart, Creature Supervisor | Shawn Walsh, Visual Effects Executive Producer | Samson Wong, Matchmove Artist | Drag Me To Hell Thomas Schelesny, Visual Effects Supervisor | Dragon Age: Origins (VG) Bobby Bath, Character/Creature Artist | Ryan Lim, Lead Creature Character Artist | Herbert Lewis, Artist | Brian Sum, Concept Artist | Nathan Zufelt, Cinematic Animator | Fast & Furious (VG) Bobby Bath, Texture Artist | Armando Velazquez, Digital Composer | The Final Destination David Yabu, Animator | G-Force John Iskandar, Lighting and Compositing TD | Ken Kaiser, Animator | Hyun Chul Jung, Animator | Andrew Lawson, Animator | Phan Wanrakoon, Animator | Ghostbusters: The Video Game (VG) Winston Fan, Composer | Harry Liu, Junior Motion Capture Editor | Jessica Mih, Modeler | Maya Zuckerman, Visual Effects Artist | GI Joe: The Rise of Cobra Jelmer Boskma, Modeler | Patrick Conaty, Digital Composer | Ben Dishart, Texture Supervisor | Anura Inversin, Digital Composer | Julianna Kolakis, Concept Artist/Modeler | Tom Piedmont, Digital Artist | Jeremy Stewart, Senior Animator | Jeff Tetzlaff, Lead Modeler | Jessica Wan, Lead Rotoscope Artist | Grey Gardens Armando Velazquez, Digital Composer | Halo 3: ODST (VG) Bartek Kujbida, Cinematic Animator | Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince Harry Mukhopadhyay, Lead Effects Technical Director | Pietro Ponti, TD Generalist | Gia Sadhwani, Digital Effects Artist | Kieran Tether, Digital Artist | Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs Scott Lemmer, Animator | Thom Roberts, Animator | Brent Wong, Modeler | Invictus Geoffrey Hancock, Visual Effects Supervisor | Sean Lewkiw, Digital Effects Supervisor | Jason McKeeman, Lead Technical Animator | Farhad Mohasseb, Composer | Michelle Skrzyziarz, Matchmove Artist | Jose Yapoi, Animator | Killzone 2 (VG) Andrea Arghinenti, Technical Artist | King of the Hill Michael Loyia, Director | Knowing Tim Rowlandson, Rigging Technical Director | Richard Sur, Lighting Technical Director | Land of the Lost Tony Etienne, Lighting Supervisor | Law Abiding Citizen Veronica Marino, Composer | Jacob Curtis Miller, Matchmove | Jay Randall, Visual Effects Supervisor | Shawn Walsh, Visual Effects Executive Producer | The Lord of the Rings: Conquest (VG) Michelle Lum, Lead Character Artist | The Lovely Bones Michael Cozens, Previs Animator | Monsters vs. Aliens Jiyoung Lee, Texture Artist | Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian Rex Ahn, Previsualization Lead | Joshua Herrig, Lead Lighter | Zake Norton, Previsualization Supervisor | Ai Saimoto, Lighting Lead | Ben Sanders, Supervising Animator | Derek Stevenson, Previsualization Artist | Joey Wilson, Previsualization Artist | Adam Yaniv, Animation Supervisor | Paul Blart: Mall Cop Riley Benard, Digital Composer | Planet 51 Jorge Kirschner Torres, Modeler | Gianfranco Valle, Effects Animator | Prototype (VG) Harry Ahn, Lead Cinematics Animator | Bobby Bath, Lead Character Artist | Punch-Out!! (VG) Nelson Garcia, Concept Artist | Pushing Daisies Scott Dewis, Visual Effects | Red Faction: Guerrilla (VG) DiBer Mann, Project Manager | Resident Evil 5 (VG) Jacob Palmer, Animator | Sanctuary Julie Bergman, Animator | Wladimir Miholic, Visual Effects Artist | Shorts David Yabu, Animator | Stargate Universe Daphne De Jesus, Digital Composer | Daniel Osaki, Lead 3D Modeler | Anna Tomsunroj, Digital Composer | Star Trek Aruna Inversin, Digital Composer | Kieran Tether, Digital Artist | Teh-wei Yeh, Digital Artist | Surrogates Joshua Herrig, Lighting Artist/Look Dev Artist | Matthias Lowry, Digital Composer | Laurie Powers, Composer | Tales of Monkey Island (VG) Jason Findley, Character Artist | Terminator Salvation Geeta Basantani, Digital Matte Painter | Teh-wei Yeh, Lighting Technical Director | Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen Allen Holbrook, Animator | Anura Inversin, Composer | Stephen King, Animator | Henri Tan, Creature Technical Director | Kieran Tether, Digital Artist | Teh-wei Yeh, Digital Artist | The Twilight Saga: New Moon Dominic Cheung, Lighting Technical Director | Uncharted 2: Among Thieves (VG) Mike Yosh, Lead Animator | Underworld: Rise of the Lycans Pearl Hsu, 3D Artist | Lon Molnar, Visual Effects Production

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VFS student work by Thiago Martins

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This month we got a nice virtual tour of the delightfully out-there studio that brings audiences tons of timely laughs on Current TV's **SuperNews!** series. Blending animation with pop-culture jabs and a healthy disregard for politics, Josh Faure-Brac's un-newsy news show can be caught every Thursday night at 11 p.m., or visit current.com/supernews to grab a slice of current events comedy.



Creator Josh Faure-Brac enjoys his daily (hourly?) lotto habit. No luck this time, back to the grind!



Bob enjoys a fiber-rich snack for lunch.



Steve is literally knocked out by his awesome character designs.



Brian never writes a scene for the show without first consulting Jesus Malverde.



Eli keeps it real between deadlines in his cubi-fort.



Assistant director Dustin McLean and senior animator André Nguyen tone their cores.



Editor Kevin crafts Craigslist spoof segments, while browsing some Craigslist personals.



Paula demonstrates an animation industry "break."



Caution: Over-exposure to **SuperNews!** may be too much awesome to handle.



Spotting the Animation Man signal, Dustin springs into action via the animation pole.



Josh wishes all his employees were as good as Steve... he may have found an answer!



Dustin checks out at closing time. "You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here."

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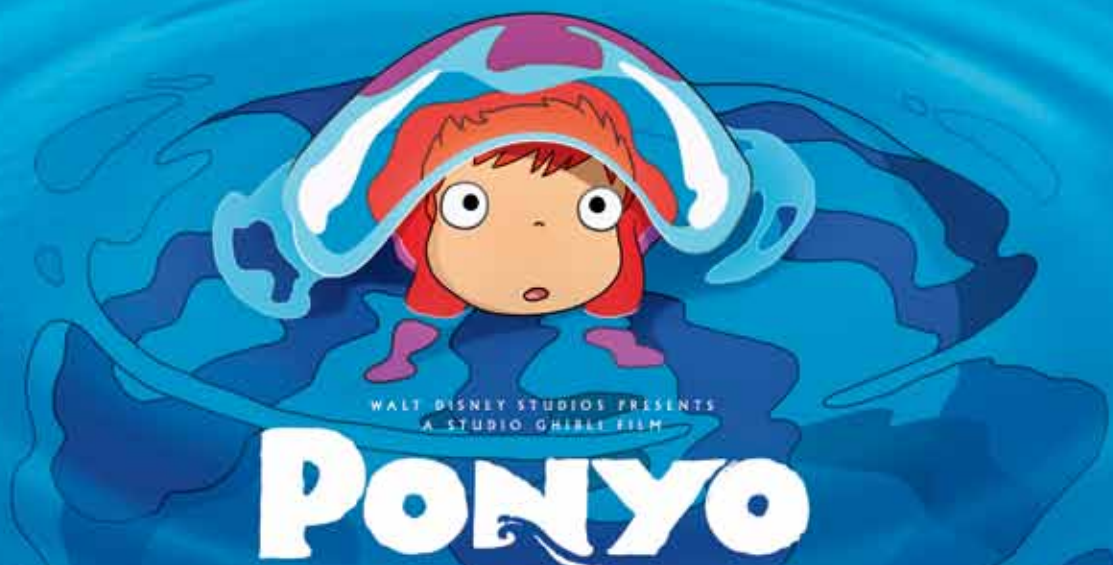
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