

Independent 3D Computer Animation: New Initiatives

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1. Growth of Independent 3D CG Feature Animation

Reasons Behind Growth

- Better education for young animators
- Lower costs of hardware/software
- More experienced 3D computer animators
- Easier to produce animated 3D short films
- Audience interest

Potential for Growth

- Short-term: Continue to gain ground
- Medium-term: Produce features as good as Studio productions
- Long-term: Transform the industry, similar to what happened in live action since the 1940s

2. Independent Productions and Hollywood Studio Productions

Independent vs. Hollywood Studio

- Model differences: financing, creative, production, and distribution.

Yesterday Independent, Today...

- Many of today's Studios animation successes started as (and some still are) independents: Brad Bird, Tim Burton, John Davis, John Lasseter, Hayao Miyazaki, Nick Park, Mamoru Oshi, Chris Wedge, etc.

Modes of collaboration between independents and Studios

- Studio distributes independent production (Ghost in the Shell 2, Triplets of Belleville)
- Studio co-produces independent production (Toy Story 2)
- Studio funds independent production (Valiant, Vanguard/Disney; Barnyard, Ovation/Paramount)
- Studio commissions an "independent" production (The Wild, Disney/CORE; Flushed Away, DreamWorks/Aardman)

3. Shorts as Successful Independent Production Models

Eternal Gaze...

- Directed by Sam Chen, produced on his laptop
- Completed 15 min. of CG animation in 3 years (900 sec. X 30 fr.= 27,000 fr.)
- <http://www.eternalgaze.com>

Birthday Boy

- Directed by Park Se-jong, Korea/Australia
- A graduate of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School
- 2004: SIGGRAPH Best Animated Short, nominated for Oscar
- (Other student shorts premiered at SIGGRAPH have received development consideration from Hollywood Studios)

Ryan

- Directed by Chris Landreth
- 14 min. pseudo-documentary on the life of Ryan Larkin
- 2004: Oscar Academy Award, Annecy Jury's Special Award, SIGGRAPH Jury Honors
- Animated by students at Seneca College, co-produced with Office National Du Film Du Canada
- <http://www.nfb.ca/ryan>

Ideally Independents Like to Have

- Creative control; balance between production, budget and schedule; good producers; motivated and engaged team

4. North and South American Independent Productions

Overview

- A lot more activity than last year
- Many independent projects sold to Studios before production starts, or in early production
- Budgets range from ±US\$20 to \$65 million
- Multiple production models

Delgo

- Fathom Studios in Atlanta, Science-Fiction
- Self-financing from private individuals, in-house staff
- Posted digital dailies to their public website during production
- ☞ <http://www.delgo.com>

Foodfight!

- Threshold Entertainment, L.A., directed by Larry Kasanoff
- Production budget: ±US \$65 million, distribution by Lion's Gate
- Started production before securing funding
- Using off-site IBM rendering service
- ☞ <http://www.threshold-digital.com>

The Ant Bully

- DNA Productions, Irving, TX, directed by John Davis (Jimmy Neutron)
- Distribution: Warner Bros. and Playtone
- ☞ <http://www.dnahelix.com>

The Barnyard

- Ovation Studios, San Clemente, CA, directed by Steve Oedekerker
- Funded by Paramount, scheduled release: January 2006
- ☞ <http://www.thebarnyard.htm>

Hoodwinked: The True Story of Red Riding Hood

- Co-production between Kanbar Entertainment and Blue Yonder Films
- Budget: US \$20 million, produced in The Philippines

Vinton Studios

- Acquired rights to Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, Henry Selick scheduled to direct
- Staffing for production
- (Involved in production of *The Corpse Bride* for a Halloween 2005 release)
- ☞ <http://www.vinton.com>

Piratas en el Callao

- Alpamayo Entertainment, Peruvian production
- Scheduled to open in South America during 1st half of 2005
- ☞ <http://www.piratasenelcallao.alpamayoentertainment.com/>

Sin City

- Innovative low-budget VFX techniques that may be applied to 3D computer animation
- Troublemaker Studios, Austin, TX, directed by Robert Rodriguez (*Spy Kids*), shot in HD
- ☞ <http://www.loshooligans.com>

Animation Cooperative

- Based in Los Angeles, over 600 members in 11 states
- To foster activity, exchange of information, and to provide a place for open pitches
- Three feature ideas pitched recently
- ☞ <http://www.animationcoop.org>

5. Asian and Australian Independent Productions

Overview

- Long tradition of providing animation production services, efficient approach
- Desire to develop "original content" especially for Chinese market (1 of 3 most spoken languages)
- Budgets between US \$3 and 20 million
- When we think of Asian animation we often think of Japanese Anime-style animation
- Japanese Anime has influenced Asian animation outside Japan, just like Disney has influenced animation in the West
- Asian animation still in the process of integrating (or not) Anime-style with other styles
- Related issue: vibrant Asian community for massive multiplayer games

Japanese Anime

- Style that has been slow to open up and evolve, most seem keen on remaining a niche style (Examples of exceptions: Miyazaki, and narrative in Satoshi Kon's *Tokyo Godfathers*)

- Many established Anime directors do not seem too interested in 3D computer animation
- Wide range of recent activity, and new-wave Anime projects in development
- ☞ <http://www.productionig.com>
- ☞ <http://www.sonypictures.com/cthe/tokyogodfathers>
- ☞ <http://www.sonypictures.com/movies/steamboy/>

Dragonblade

- DCDC, Hong Kong, 84 min.
- Martial Arts movie, example of Chinese Anime: softer edge than Japanese
- Used 3D rotoscoping of live-action reference footage
- ☞ <http://www.dcdcorp.com>

Thru the Moebius Strip

- Hong Kong; Sci-Fi, Adventure, 87 min., directed by Glen Chaika
- Based on French illustrator Moebius' artwork
- Budget US \$20 mill., delayed production process
- ☞ <http://www.fantasticfilmsinternational.com/>

Kung Fu Gecko

- Egg Story, Singapore, directed by Nickson Fong
- Action comedy, US \$20 mill., mixed funding sources
- A gang of insects in China discovers the importance of teamwork and friendship
- ☞ <http://www.eggstorycp.com>

Happy Feet

- Animal Logic, Sydney, Australia
- Penguin-comedy, distributed by Warner Bros.
- Uses new Digital Production Incentive offered by NSW government, similar to live-action packages
- ☞ <http://www.animallogic.com>

Kung Fu Hustle

- Innovative low-budget VFX techniques that may be applied to 3D computer animation
- Centro, Hong Kong, established provider of VFX for live action (incl. Shaolin Soccer, StormRiders)
- ☞ <http://www.centro.com.hk>, kungfuhustle.com

Other Productions

- Not announced publicly yet
- Several countries, including Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong
- Many projects based on Asian traditional tales

China

- The move towards Chinese subsidiaries, due to lowest cost of labor
- Most CG production companies in Taiwan and HK have been opening subsidiaries in mainland China since early 2000s
- Obvious short-term training and quality issues, traditionally limited production values
- Obvious long-term production issues

Funding Initiatives

- Animation SuperPitch, Singapore, companies pitch animation ideas to a panel of funding bodies, co-production partners, and broadcasters
 - 2003 winner: Zip Zap Zoe, Beanstalk Global Media, Philippines
 - Other finalists from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia
 - Animation SuperPitch 2004 finalists: House of Loo, Creative License; MalaysiaArclighters, Navel Productions, Philippines; Paddy's Pages, Toonz Animation, India; My Papa is a Wrestler, Scrawl Studios, Singapore; CopyBoy, Red Rocket Animation, Indonesia; and Mustang Mama, Inspidea, Malaysia
 - Singapore's Media Development Authority (MDA) has set aside \$58 million over the next 5 years
 - Lucasfilm Animation Singapore set up shop in Singapore
 - Asia-Europe animation cooperation, series of events co-sponsored by the French Regional Audiovisual Office and the Asian Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD)
- ☞ <http://www.beanstalkmedia.com>
- ☞ <http://www.ai-interactive.com/shortlist1.htm>
- ☞ http://www.beanstalkmedia.com/industrynews_filmfinancing.html

6. Other Issues related to Independent Production

Machinima

- Using game engines to produce movies
 - Red vs. Blue, a popular series
- ☞ <http://www.machinima.com>, machinima.org, redvsblue.com

Oddworld Inhabitants

- Recent April 2005 developments at OddWorld, an award-winning game developer
- Leaving the games industry, and planning to enter movies and TV within 2.5 years
- Highly efficient production pipeline and philosophy

Technical Developments

- New software, including: Zbrush sculpting/modeling, Renderman for Maya (individual licenses), Morph-O-Matic morphing plugin for 3ds Max, real-time higher quality rendering, programmable shaders in hardware

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