



fps

frames per second magazine » www.fpsmagazine.com » july 2005 » animated and loving it

My Beautiful Girl, Mari

The blossoming of Korean animation

Also:

Marcy Page

Film fest jury secrets revealed

Mind Game



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A Need to Know

Emru Townsend could learn a thing or two

One of the things I enjoy the most about this job is the sheer amount of *stuff* I learn. Sometimes it's a little bit of trivia (the full name of the antagonist in *Rock & Rule*, referred to throughout the movie as simply Mok, is Mok Swagger, in a nod to one of his inspirations); sometimes it's something more profound (the new facets of the anime industry I learned while speaking with fellow SIGGRAPH Computer Animation Festival juror Shuzo John Shiota).

Then there's the pleasure of watching other people learn, of seeing their eyes light up as new possibilities come to them. I've been seeing that a lot lately, thanks to the recent release of *Howl's Moving Castle*. When I tell people about Miyazaki's other films, there's invariably one movie that connects with them, just based on its description.

From the moment we're born, we're learning. And no matter what the field, whether you're a beginner or an expert, there's always more to learn, and more

opportunities to expand your horizons. That's why I'm pleased to announce some additions to the website and the magazine.

First, the website: we've added a new glossary of terms, accessible by clicking linked words from within articles. Clicking a word highlighted in green pops open a window that explains the term. (The glossary will also be available in the magazine in some form or another starting with the next issue.)

The glossary has been in the works for some time, and in fact was a fixture in the print edition of *fps* since 1993. The reasoning for it was, and is, simple: many people come to animation from different backgrounds. A fan of independent animation might not be aware of anime-related terminology like OAV, manga, or otaku. On the flip side, an anime fan (or for that matter, any young animation fan) might not understand film terminology like optical printing, rushes, or slit-scanning. When these terms came up in our *Rock & Rule* interview, more than one reader

commented on the nostalgia they felt upon reading those old terms.

Old (but still good) stuff brings me to the second addition. There's now a new subsection among the reviews, called Flashback. This is where we'll be reviewing books, movies or DVDs that are at least ten years old but still available—though likely hard to get hold of. Here, too, the reasoning is simple: new fans are born (or made) every day, and some books or movies that might be considered essential may simply have been released too early for newer fans to notice. For them, Flashback is a chance to learn about what came before. Even longtime aficionados can benefit. Flashback provides a chance to read to read about something they missed the first time around.

If you have any comments on the glossary or on Flashback, or if you have suggestions for new terms or items to review, don't hesitate to [drop me a line](#). In the meantime, enjoy the issue. ■

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frames per second
the magazine of animation

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Compiled
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Big Screen

Over the last five years, DreamWorks has partnered with studios from abroad to bring animation to the American continent. First England (*Chicken Run* and the forthcoming film, *Wallace and Gromit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit*), then Japan (*Millennium Actress* and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*), and now Korea. The studio is now in talks with its Korean partner and major shareholder CJ Entertainment about working on a Korean animation project. Given that the burgeoning [Korean animation industry](#) has been putting out a variety of interesting animation projects over the past few years but mainstream audiences are less familiar with it, this is a nice opportunity for DreamWorks to be ahead of the curve.

Remember the 1950s? Okay, neither do I, but that was when television's popularity started chipping away at the movie industry, which responded by coming up with all kinds of technological innovations: Cinemascope, Cinerama and of course 3D. The idea, of course, was to create an experience that couldn't be replicated in the living room. Now, with HDTV, digital television, DVD, and a variety of surround sound options available and movie

theatre ticket prices climbing, the cycle is repeating itself. Disney will be debuting Disney Digital 3D, a new digital 3D technology that uses the original 3D CGI scene data, in about 100 cinemas when *Chicken Little* is released in November. Completing the '50s analogy, Reel Source president and box office analyst Robert Bucksbaum is quoted as saying, "People are going to be looking for more and more in theaters, and whatever technology will lure people out of their homes will be a big advantage."

While I'm all for interesting new eye-popping cinematic experiences, I'd like to remind Disney that, back in the 1950s, movies studios (including, ahem, Disney) also backed up their technological innovations with plain old good movies.

New features in the works: Twentieth Century Fox has bought rights to Rob Reger's tween goth **Emily the Strange**, with plans to make a live-action/animation movie based on her adventures. Hopefully the hybrid will mirror *Monkeybone* more than *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*... Vanguard, the studio that produced the movie *Valiant* (already released in the UK, with the North American release coming this August), will be producing **Phreex**, about a group of rejected lab animals... On the flip side, it looks as if the live-action **Underdog** feature is a go, using a

real dog as its star. Inexplicably, he will still be called Shoeshine Boy in his mild-mannered secret identity, and presumably will still talk.

Small Screen

Mainframe Entertainment, who gave us the alphanumeric adventures of *ReBoot* and the CGI *Spider-Man* television series, has acquired the rights to create a direct-to-video feature based on the *Arthur* children's book series. If you have young children, then I don't need to tell you that Cookie Jar Entertainment produces the animated *Arthur* television series that has aired on PBS for years.

Really Small Screen

Anchor Bay Entertainment is the latest company to announce that it will release animation on the Universal Media Disc (UMD) format used by Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP). August will see the release of *Ghost in the Shell*, *Blood: The Last Vampire* and *Ninja Scroll*, all from corporate sibling Manga Entertainment.

Obituaries

Joe Grant, quite possibly the only person to have worked on both *Fantasia* and *Fantasia 2000*, worked at the Disney studio from 1933 to

1949, then from 1989 until he died May 6, just shy of his 97th birthday, from a heart attack. Fittingly enough, he passed away at his drawing board... **Frank Gorshin** is probably best known as the Riddler from the campy *Batman* television series, but he worked constantly in film and television until his death May 17, after a long bout with lung cancer, emphysema and pneumonia. He was 72. Of the many animation voices he provided over the years, the most recent was, appropriately, for a villain in the new *Batman* cartoon; the aptly-named psychiatrist Hugo Strange... Montreal-born **Henry Corden**, the voice of Fred Flintstone since original yabba-dabba-dooer Alan Reed's death in 1977, died of emphysema May 19, at the age of 85... **Thurl Ravenscroft** provided animation voices for over 50 years and sang "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch" in Chuck Jones's 1966 television special, but his longest-running role was as Frosted Flakes spoketiger Tony, who first declared "They're grrrrrrreat!" in 1952. Ravenscroft was 91 when he died of prostate cancer on May 22... **Robie Lester**, the singing voice of Eva Gabor in *The Aristocats* and *The Rescuers*, died June 14 of lung cancer. She was 75... Winnie the Pooh lost two of his pals when **Paul Winchell**, the voice of Tigger, died June 24 and **John Fielder**, voice of Piglet, died a day later. They were 82 and 80, respectively.



We, the Jury

Emru Townsend provides an inside look at the making of a film festival program

One of the perverse pleasures of film festivals is trying to get into the heads of the selection committee. There's always at least one short that makes you scratch your head and wonder, "What were they thinking when they let *that* in?" Or sometimes you find yourself wondering why that amazing short you saw at that other film festival last month didn't make it into this one.

I've been asking myself those questions for years, and just a few months ago, I had the opportunity to find out for myself.

In mid-March, I went to Emeryville, California, to be part of the Computer Animation Festival

(CAF) jury for this year's [SIGGRAPH conference](#). These things don't happen by accident, of course; in late 2004 I'd made a volunteer application, for the third time in as many years. It just so happened that this year's CAF jury chair decided I'd made the cut.

The result: three and a half long days in dark rooms as one of seven jurors, along with six other CAF 2005 committee members, intently watching short (and occasionally not so short) films, hoping to arrive at a consensus in deciding what could be considered the best computer-animated films of the year. It was fun, it was exhausting, and it was highly

educational. While I'm sure no two film juries are alike, I hope this glimpse into this year's CAF selection process will make future festivals a bit less befuddling for you.

Assembling the Troops

When I was a kid, getting up early on a Saturday to watch cartoons was a weekly ritual. But as an older night owl, the idea of getting up early enough on a Saturday to meet at 7:00 a.m. is enough to make me run away screaming. I compensated by not adjusting to local time—so the rendezvous time felt like 10:00 a.m. It was almost like I was sleeping in.

After breakfast, we piled into

SIGGRAPH's Computer Animation Festival

SIGGRAPH's Computer Animation Festival can be considered a roundup of the year's best films that make extensive use of CGI. These films include self-contained narratives, abstract animation, music videos, scientific visualization, commercials, visual effects and more. All told, it's about four and a half hours of animation, divided between the Electronic Theater and the Animation Theater.

The Electronic Theater contains the cream of the crop, and has a running time of about 90 minutes. It's also more of an event: there are only five showings, in a fair-sized cinema, and you need a ticket to get in.

The Animation Theater—the best of the rest, as it were—is made up of several programs that run repeatedly throughout most of the conference in smaller rooms. Any registered attendee can walk into an Animation Theater screening at any time.

Left to Right:
Catching a glimpse of sunlight as we start our day at the Pixar studio; Shane Acker's 9 won Best of Show; finally calling it a night.

festival watch»

several cars and drove to where we'd be spending most of the next few days: Pixar Animation Studios. If you've seen the extras on Pixar DVDs, you'd be inclined to think that the company is just about the coolest place to work in the world. You wouldn't be far off; from the atrium, it's easy to see that paintings, drawings, sculptures and assorted knickknacks are everywhere. Even the security guard's walkie-talkie had a clip in the shape of *The Incredibles'* Dash.

There was a practical side to the location as well. Pixar had several top-notch (and, importantly, comfortable) screening rooms, which we'd be using for the next few days. And CAF committee chair Samuel Lord Black is a former Pixar employee (he worked as a software engineer on their last five features, and provided voices for *Monsters, Inc.* and some of the *Incredibles* DVD extras), so he knew the people and the buildings.

The selection process was broken down into several rounds, where we progressively whittled down the number of films. Each juror would grade a film as ET (Electronic Theater), AT (Animation Theater) or NT (No Theater)—or, as I like to put

it, great, good, or gone. When we started there were 560 entries, so Sam divided us into four groups of two for the first round (committee member Leo Hourvitz acted as an additional juror), with each pair working in a different screening room.

As you might expect, SIGGRAPH's jury meetings are fairly high-tech. Each film's running time, as well as any information provided by the creators, is entered into a database, which is also used to keep track of votes and comments throughout the jurying process. Leo kept a copy of the database on his laptop to help us manage information while we were working, and those of us with laptops were given a compacted version to use as a reference.

Sam would also use the database as a means of determining the dividing line between what stayed and what got cut at the end of any given round. For instance, based on the amount of films that would get eliminated, he might decide that films with four or more NT votes would get cut. In the first round, any film that got two NT votes was removed from the list.

We completed the first round (bringing the list down to about 230)

The CAF 2005 Loot Bag

On the first day, CAF 2005 producer Betsy Johnsmiller handed out what I called loot bags, but were more like survival kits—canvas bags with supplies we would need for the weekend:

- A **notepad** for keeping track of our thoughts during the proceedings. The notepads were a key indicator of our different methods of working. I always had mine out, but wrote only a few words the entire time. Others wrote pages of notes, and were able to refer back to earlier discussion points when we got bogged down. Still others never took the notepads out of their bags.
- A **combination pen and flashlight** that could be used to illuminate our notepads while writing. Every professional movie critic should have one.
- A **laser pointer**, for registering our votes on the screen and gesturing for a film to be fast-forwarded.
- A packet of **tissue paper** which, along with small packets of **ibuprofen**, were probably a boon to juror Donna Cox, who started to sniffle Saturday evening and by Tuesday had most of us eyeing her warily whenever she sneezed. I'd bet that some were even surreptitiously using the **antibacterial moist wipes**, but of course I wouldn't know anything about that.
- A small bottle of **eye drops**, which came in handy halfway through Monday.
- **Mint Tic Tacs and Trident gum**—vital, we were assured, for heatedly conferring in close quarters.
- A **toothbrush and toothpaste** since we would be spending most of our waking hours away from our hotel rooms.
- **Hand lotion** because smooth skin is always important.
- Four **Hershey's Kisses** to give us a little boost during long stretches. We learned early on that committee chair Sam Black is a chocolate connoisseur, and assured me that with such a right-thinking person at the helm, the committee was in good hands.

Each juror would grade a film as ET (Electronic Theater), AT (Animation Theater) or NT (No Theater)—or, as I like to put it, great, good, or gone.



Five Minutes With Brian Blau

Longtime SIGGRAPH volunteer Brian Blau was an unofficial part of the CAF 2005 jury, helping out wherever he could. However, my curiosity was piqued when he was introduced to us as the person responsible for making CAF prize winners eligible for Academy Award nomination. During a lull in the proceedings, we talked about the workings of the CAF jury and his role in “the Academy Awards thing.”

Emru Townsend: *This is your fourth CAF jury?*

Brian Blau: Yes. This is my fourth CAF jury. The first one, I was sort of on the jury, but it was the year before I was officially the CAF chair. When you're CAF chair, it takes you two years. And part of the training is to go to the one the year before. So that was 1998.

You sort of have to shadow the CAF chair for that year to learn how to do it. If you don't already know how to do it, you have to see what they do, see how they do it, take a lot of notes, formulate your ideas and your process before you're officially kind of on-line to do it.

How much leeway do you have to make things your way?

With the CAF there is both a lot of leeway, but because the Electronic Theater has been around for more than 30 years there's also a lot of tradition and a lot of things that are expected to happen as well. So I think there is some freedom, but also because it's such a unique event, you want to make sure that tradition is upheld as well.

So you want to put enough of a personal stamp, but not too much.

Exactly. And also there some logistical challenges, practical matters that you have to take into account.

Tell me about the Academy Awards thing.

As it stands right now, the SIGGRAPH Computer Animation Festival is listed on the [Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences'] short film festival list. To be nominated for a short film Oscar, there's one of two ways of doing it. One way is to have your short film screened in a Los Angeles movie theatre, and there's rules associated around that. The other way to potentially get nominated for an Oscar is to have your piece win an award at a sanctioned film festival. There's probably forty of those. Forty, or

maybe even fifty. I don't know the exact number.

Before 1999, SIGGRAPH was not listed on that list. Nor did SIGGRAPH have any awards at the Animation Festival for the Electronic Theater. In the research that I did, there were a number of films that either debuted or were shown at the Electronic Theater that went on to get nominated and even win an Academy Award. I believe before 1999, there were six pieces that got nominated that came from the Electronic Theater, and there were two that went on to win Oscars.

So what I did was I went to both the motion picture academy and asked for them to put the SIGGRAPH film festival on the short-film festival list—to the board of governors, there's a specific one that deals with the shorts, it's different from the full-length features. And they accepted it, as long as we would establish awards for the Electronic Theater. So then I had to go back to the SIGGRAPH executive council and ask them for permission to give out awards. It was fairly contentious, but in the end they voted to let the awards happen for the Electronic Theater.

and compared notes, finishing our first day at around 9:00 pm—making Saturday our shortest full working day.

The Long Haul

All day Sunday and Monday, the entire group gathered together to finesse the list over a few more rounds. As time wore on, the emphasis slowly shifted from deciding what films weren't going to make it to which ones were definitely staying in. Unlike the first round, where it was often easy to vote without seeing the entire film, we were now watching each one, sometimes multiple times, all the while asking questions, referring to notes, defending films we personally liked, and debating choices among ourselves. As the criteria became more severe and the stakes got higher, we would find ourselves spending more time discussing a film than we had spent watching it, or re-watching it several times.

In some ways, repeat viewings could make or break a film. As the pool got smaller, a film that was championed earlier on might not look as good compared to the company it was keeping. Or a film might gradually move up the list as its strengths became more apparent over time. These were both long, gruelling days, each ending at around 11:00 p.m.



Light at the End of the Tunnel

Tuesday was our last day, for which I was grateful; the late nights were nudging my body toward adapting to Pacific Time, and waking up for our 7:00 a.m. rendezvous was getting harder. It also meant we were nearing the end. We spent Tuesday morning focusing on only two decisions: how films would be divided between the Electronic Theater and the Animation Theater, bearing in mind the time limits for both; and which films would win prizes. Sam reminded us that the film that won Best of Show would qualify for an Academy Award nomination for Best Animated Short, which added some pressure to the decision. If the film we selected won an Oscar, would we really be able to

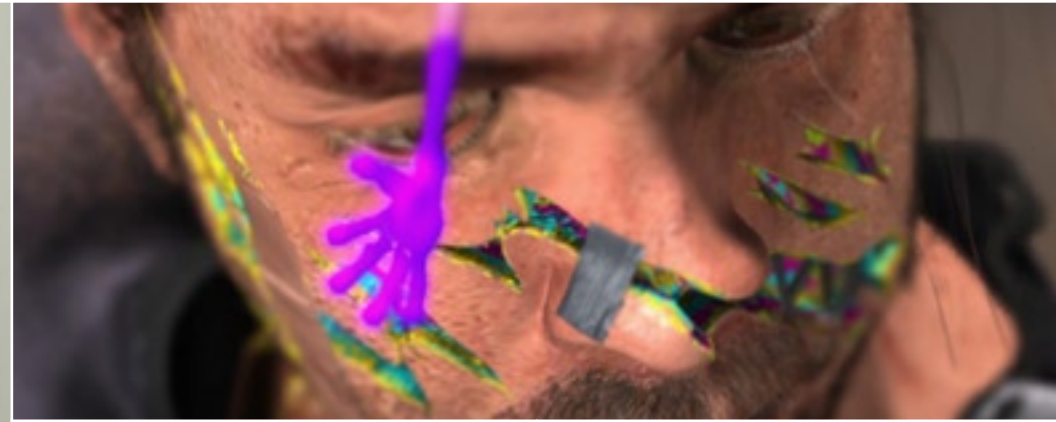
say it was better than the others in the Electronic Theater? (As someone who [regularly questions Oscar nominations](#), it was like asking if I was going to be part of the problem or part of the solution.)

Our final decisions (Shane Acker's *9* took Best of Show; Tomek Baginski's *Fallen Art* and Eric Castaing, Alexandre Heboyan and Fafah Togora's *La Migration Bigoudenn* won Jury Honors) were agreed upon surprisingly quickly, but looking at the seventy or so films that made it in, I can't say I disagree. In fact, looking at our final list, I'd say SIGGRAPH has a winner of a Computer Animation Festival this year.

Of course, when the time comes, you may wonder just what we were thinking. But I'm ready for that. ■

If the film we selected won an Oscar, would we really be able to say it was better than the others in the Electronic Theater? It was like asking if I was going to be part of the problem or part of the solution.

Left to right: Getting ready to resume after lunch; *Fallen Art* and *La Migration Bigoudenn* won Jury Honors.



Marcy Page in Paradise

Janeann Dill follows the *Ryan* co-producer's journey from San Francisco to the NFB

Clockwise from top right: Chris Landreth's Oscar-winning *Ryan*, Torill Kove's *My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts* and Sheldon Cohen's *I Want a Dog* were produced on Page's watch.

To speak with Marcy Page about her role as producer at the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada is to hear a voice full of exuberance and enthusiasm on its behalf. The story goes that in 1987, Page was completing her film *Paradisio* in San Francisco when she fell in love. Careful not to leave her heart behind, Page set out to pursue

another kind of paradise in Canada with her new love.

Life, in its mystifying twists and turns, had plans for Page that she had not imagined while waiting in Canada for her landed-immigrant status to arrive in the mail. When a producing position became available at the NFB, veteran animator John Weldon strongly urged her to apply.

Obviously she did, and here she is, eighteen years later, in a paradise that joins the globe of her former life in California to her present life in Montreal by receiving an Academy Award for the NFB as a producer for *Ryan*, alongside her colleagues Chris Landreth, Steve Hoban and Mark Smith. While she is still glowing from the continuing success of this film,

do not be deceived into thinking that Page is resting comfortably on her laurels. Here is a woman whose vision for animation production at the NFB is widely diversified in style, subject matter, and programming.

Imagine, if you will, that alongside the unending demands on Page's agenda for the day, the production schedule has been cleared enough

Below: Janet Perlman's *Bully Dance*, part of the ShowPeace series, conveys its message without dialogue.

so that the moment has arrived to select a new project to produce. A variety of ways exist for a project to come to her attention and its selection is a complex process. A project proposal may come to her from an individual director; she might have a proposal from another production team to co-produce a project; or a need for programming might arise within the NFB and films are produced to fulfill it. Her particular favourite is to think about ways to create opportunities for directors to be able to make auteur animated short films. While

committed to producing a wide diversity of styles, Page resonates with projects that—in her “former incarnation as a director”—she would have liked to make. She seems excited by a project that interests her in such a way to participate “a bit vicariously” in the creative process and to serve to clarify the director’s vision along the road toward completion of a film. Page is interested in art and animation history, but that alone is not enough to convince her to take on a project. It’s likely that Page’s prior directing experience and her propensity

toward teaching have led her to produce projects that might push the idea of animation history or push the language of film into new areas—those projects which might be experimental or are more about conversations in the history of what she calls “dialogues in cinema.”

As mentioned, that kind of project can come to her directly from the director. Alternatively, it can come from an international director or production team who is interested in co-producing a project related to the national interest. More often than not, the latter is in the realm of children’s production around a theme demanding a different approach from that of the auteur film. With the auteur film, Page looks to the passion and commitment of the director to be centrally implicated in the project so that the film is really the director’s vision. Her job, then, is to effect that vision to get the film made. Sometimes, with emerging filmmakers who may have less experience in certain facets of production—such as post-production or sound—she sees her job as filling in the production gaps of their experience or education to balance out their other strengths of idea or vision.

The NFB is mandated to devote a share of its production budget to children’s programming, so different strategies are applied to

that aspect of selection. Page tries to select directors who can work with thematically related subject matter but who can also impart that auteur stamp on the project by grabbing hold of the production and making it their own. For example, the ShowPeace series of films for children are on the subject of conflict resolution. The directors took hold of that theme and came up with their own unique approach using some basic guidelines for the entire series. For instance, the characters are non-verbal, to appeal to an audience of varied ages, and the characters cannot be stereotyped as members of a particular culture, in order to support a larger freedom of identification with the characters. The ShowPeace series appeals to a multi-generational adult audience as well, because there are no specific clues, such as language, to interfere with an overall response. On her part, Page emphasizes that while the children’s programs differ from the auteur films she produces, she strives to apply the same kind of criteria for both, toward what the experience of the director is going to be, as much as is possible.

In addition to working with directors from the past and working with new directors who approach the NFB, Page and her colleagues are continuously scouting film festivals, student animation festivals, and student end-of-year screenings to look for new talent. The NFB



offers apprenticeships to student animators to work on other people's projects as well, so that they come to know and have a relationship with the NFB in that capacity. The apprentice can, in turn, propose projects. The studio has a program called Hothouse that has held two iterations thus far, developed by Page's fellow NFB producer, Michael Fukushima. Emerging directors come into the NFB to work on short projects of thirty seconds to a minute and a half. The apprentice, then, is given an opportunity to work on a film within a professional climate and with the professional support of the NFB as an agency. Page speaks proudly of the resulting short films and directorial relationships that have developed out of Fukushima's Hothouse program. She readily describes this program as indicative of an organizational commitment to a creative culture that is unique to the NFB in that it remains creatively active as a whole to keep Canada a fertile environment for the creation of animation.

When posed the question of how her style of producing now might be related to her style of teaching at San Francisco State University years ago, Page draws a parallel. Careful to distinguish producing for the National Film Board from producing for a commercial production house, Page believes there is a striking resemblance to producing at the

NFB and how she might teach a "post-post-graduate course" for a doctoral project. The similarity for her is in discussing with a director how best to achieve the idea of a project in order to realize the director's vision. As a producer at the NFB, Page experiences a sense of closure on many more films than she feels she would have the opportunity to experience as an independent producer or director who is "heroically" seeking funds for production. Her style of producing (as was her style in teaching) allows her the freedom of a central and vicarious role to play in the realm of ideas and to envision them happening as an artist does. Admitting that a part of her does hunger at times for the drawing board and the taste of magic at creating motion, she quickly adds that producing the projects she does is not so far away from accomplishing the same magic she found at the drawing table.

Focusing on a nurturing part of her personality as "hard-wired" into producing as a trait, Page has some observations on women as producers, generally speaking, and encouraging women in that role. Arriving at the NFB when she did, Studio D was still in existence as a separate studio for women, but has since been abolished as it was deemed no longer necessary. Page portrays the NFB as an institutional

beacon for the realm of professional women in film but understands that due diligence in relationship to her directors is an ongoing essential. Wondering aloud about the disparity of women in the (global) CG area of production, Page is alert to a need for a male/female balance and creates that balance whenever an opportunity is available for her to do so. Women can make excellent producers, she observes, because the role somewhat suits the "hard-wiring" she sees as specific to being a woman herself. Page's observations are that women are very practical problem solvers, are experts in conflict resolution, and have sound administrative styles that are less about self-aggrandizement and more about letting others shine.

Having just returned to Montreal from the Annecy International Animated Film Festival, where *Ryan* continued to receive accolades, Page was particularly articulate in stating that this film was "a runaway train" in the most positive sense of the phrase. Already intrigued by hybrid forms of filmmaking, she noted the precedent by the NFB to co-produce Chris Landreth's film with Steve Hoban, Mark Smith and the Seneca College graduate program. Documentary film, animation and education are three of the NFB's mandates and in *Ryan* we see all three fulfilled.

Producing the film was a risk in many ways. Initially, there was a discussion that the subject matter could produce a depressing film. It is also as a documentary hybrid—a "documentation," as it were. The production team for *Ryan* was a complex set of partners. The project was expansive enough to include a separate documentary film on the relationship between Chris Landreth and Ryan Larkin, *Alter Egos*, directed by Laurence Green.

The live-action documentary contains the animated documentary within it. This kind of subjective/objective filmmaking required a kind of mantra for Marcy Page and her colleagues, around which they coalesced whenever repeated during their production of *Ryan*: "We see things not as they are but as we are."

In this author's opinion, the mantra served them well, albeit requiring more clarity about whom "they" are.

Page's *Paradisio* may be simply a film, or a state of consciousness or a place. However, she proves that paradise is of one's own making and arrives at differing moments in time, recognized or not. At its Latin root, animation is defined as "giving life to." As a woman in the world of producing animation at the National Film Board of Canada, Marcy Page, indeed, seems to epitomize a belief in all of the above. ■



My Beautiful Girl, Mari

Directed by Seong-kang Lee
 ADV Films, 2005
 Originally released in 2002
 80 minutes

I don't know what's in the water in South Korea, but I hope someone makes it available in a pill. I've been both astonished and delighted to discover, in recent years, that [Korea's animation renaissance](#)—from service provider to production hub—has been marked by a willingness to experiment with techniques, styles and themes. In 2003, both [Mangchi the Hammerboy](#) and [Sky Blue](#) were released, one a Miyazaki-esque adventure story and the other a harder-edged, dystopian science-fiction movie. *Mangchi* used traditional cel techniques, while *Sky Blue* used an interesting blend of cel, stop-motion, live-action, and CGI.

But before them both was *My Beautiful Girl, Mari* (*Mari Iyagi*), recently released on DVD. *My Beautiful Girl, Mari's* look is not only different from the other two, it's different from just about anything else you've ever seen on the big screen. Though the movie is clearly a CGI feature, the aesthetic is a blend between hand-drawn and CGI that, curiously, results in a very warm and inviting film. People, animals and most objects are rendered in a cel-shaded style, but with no hard

edges—objects are either borderless or have barely discernable, coloured edges. Most of the colour is flat, but sometimes there are colour gradations, usually to play up lighting or texture. Wrinkles, for example, are flat-coloured, while finer furs are shaded. The result is that organic and inorganic objects meet somewhere in the middle, which allows everything to blend together more naturally.

Mari also takes a different path storywise, avoiding the quest/chase mechanism used to propel most animated films and electing instead to give us a quiet, wistful look at that time when childhood begins to give way to adolescence, and the only constant is change.

When the film starts, the two friends, Nam-woo and Jun-ho, are adults, office workers who keep in touch but rarely have the chance to see each other. Jun-ho is about to accept a job transfer that will take him out of town, so the two meet for dinner. While the two talk about their present and future, Jun-ho gives Nam-woo a gift from their past—something he came across while packing, a memento of their last summer together.

Most of the film takes place during a few significant days in their childhood. Nam-woo and Jun-ho are 11 or 12, and everything else around Nam-woo has been changing; his widowed mother is tentatively starting a new relationship, his

My Girl

Emru Townsend points to *My Beautiful Girl, Mari* as a good sign for Korean feature animation

grandmother is ailing, girls are becoming a curious new factor in life. Jun-ho is Nam-woo's constant; but soon, Jun-ho will be moving away to go to a boarding school in Seoul. The two try to enjoy their last days together, while Nam-woo responds to the other changes in his life with passive-aggressive behaviour and detachment.

There is a light fantasy touch to *My Beautiful Girl, Mari*. Early in the film, Nam-woo discovers a glowing marble, which he later discovers is capable of sending him to a strange other world, where he encounters a humanoid creature he calls Mari. Where the movie deviates from type is that this other world isn't the focus of the story, nor do the boys devote much screen time to figuring out how to get there. But this other world is important. It's the only place where Nam-woo seems truly happy and at peace, and there's a sense that, paradoxically, this other world is the one thing that's keeping him from becoming completely adrift in the real world.

In a certain sense, *My Beautiful Girl, Mari* reminded me of *Magical Shopping Arcade Abenobashi*. *Abenobashi* also centred on two kids of around the same

age, one of whom is moving away, finding a fantasy world during their last days together. There are even some of the same touchstones, like the beginnings of adolescence and dealing with change and mortality. But *Abenobashi's* fantasy worlds are riotous, chaotic places, where the issues of growing up are largely avoided. (In fact, Sasshi, who will be losing his friend Arumi, finds ways to deliberately keep them from returning home specifically to avoid dealing with them.) In the already placid *My Beautiful Girl, Mari*, the other world seems to be one where Nam-woo can centre himself and find the inner peace to cope.

I say "seems to be" because *My Beautiful Girl, Mari* leaves a lot unsaid, which leaves a number of questions unanswered—including the question of whether these otherworldly jaunts actually happen. Maybe, *Calvin & Hobbes*-like, these are nothing but vivid, escapist dreams.

That uncertainty is the hinge that determines whether or not you'll like this film. If your movies absolutely must come with a side order of clarification, resolution and closure, you'll come away unsatisfied.

But if you're willing to play with that uncertainty, it opens up a number of possible interpretations for the film. This is the real delight of *My Beautiful Girl, Mari*. Its foundation is realistic life experience—there are many scenes that will trigger your own memories of summers past, for good or ill—but it's open enough that different meanings can be gleaned with repeat viewings.

Given all the thought that went into this movie, it's astonishing that there are no extras on the DVD. The Korean release features a making-of documentary, an image gallery, and early Flash animation, which would have been a nice look into the creation of a film with a unique look for an animation feature. It would have been nice if ADV Films had gone the extra mile and added the original extras, as well. In the meantime, we'll have to content ourselves with the movie alone—and that's not a bad consolation prize at all.

DVD Features: 1.85:1 aspect ratio; English and Korean language tracks; English subtitles; Region 1. ■

Mind Game

Directed by Masaaki Yuasa
Madhouse Studios, 2004
104 minutes

Mind Game, an astonishing directorial debut from acclaimed animation designer Masaaki Yuasa (and co-written by Robin Nishi, creator of the original manga) presents audiences with something refreshingly different from the standard giant mecha, beautiful teenagers and

cyber-noir SF tropes associated in the West with most otaku-anime fare. *Mind Game* even distinguishes itself from and challenges the undisputed master of the art form, Hayao Miyazaki, with its unique approach, which garnered the film a prestigious Nobuo Ofuji Award among other accolades in its home country.

Employing a deceptively rough-looking, sketchy and angular art style reminiscent of American avant-garde animator Bill Plympton, *Mind Game* unfolds in a stream-of-consciousness flow of kaleidoscopically diverse visuals using techniques that include: rotoscoped voice actors portraying their characters; collage; CGI; and traditional cel drawings that sometimes include fleeting riffs on anime clichés. The images mesmerize at a mostly frantic, MTV-style pace but they do slow down at significant moments of drama and character development. The renderings sometimes distort the figures in a clever animation trick used to emphasize emotions—an effect that makes *Mind Game's* surreal ambience and conviction in its dreamlike logic easy to believe.

Set mostly in contemporary Osaka with some scenes in Tokyo, *Mind Game* opens with 20-year-old college boy and wannabe manga artist Nishi's chance meeting with his childhood inamorata, the amply-endowed, sweet-natured Myon. Deftly dodging his clumsy efforts to amorously make up for lost time, Myon takes Nishi to the yakitori eatery she helps run with her older sister Yan. On arriving, Nishi gets acquainted with the siblings' womanizing, financially irresponsible and drunken

If your movies absolutely must come with a side order of clarification, resolution and closure, you'll come away unsatisfied. But if you're willing to play with that uncertainty, it opens up a number of possible interpretations for the film. This is the real delight of *My Beautiful Girl, Mari*.



father and with Myon's tall, robust and affable fiancée Ryo.

Despairing that he can never compete with Ryo for Myon's affections, Nishi's gloom gets even worse when a pair of yakuza gangsters arrive to collect a debt from Dad. In the ensuing altercation, their gunshots murder Nishi in a most humiliating fashion. His spirit arriving in the heavenly realms, Nishi encounters an intimidating, constantly-morphing God to whom he rails about his untimely fate. The confrontation earns Nishi the grudgingly encouraging admonition to "live for all you're worth" from the enigmatic entity. The protagonist

thus swiftly finds himself propelled back to and alive at the crucial moment.

Nishi, with uncanny luck this time, escapes with Myon and Yan in their father's car with the gangsters close behind. The high tension of fleeing causes the pursued to lose control of their vehicle, which veers off a bridge and is swallowed in mid-air by a passing whale. Inside the enormous cetacean, Nishi and the sisters meet a feisty old man with long white hair and beard who informs the trio that he has been living an improbable Jonah-like (or Pinocchio-like) life for 30 years, having fashioned the swallowed

detritus of his wrecked ship into a remarkable, oddly impressive, ramshackle yet comfortable dwelling. Facing the prospect of a lifetime in blubbery confinement, Nishi refuses to accept this existence and tries to figure out ways to escape. In the meantime, this close-quarter interim allows for some truly fascinating character interaction, while Nishi's attempt to find a way out of the whale builds tensions and leads to a strikingly satisfying conclusion.

Mind Game delivers its celebration of human folly, longing, hope and living life with childlike zest and wonder with unforgettably dazzling, ever-shifting animation imagery that is decidedly trippy in its exuberant surrealism and exhilarating energy. By turns odd, gritty, frantic, crude, lurid, funny, heartfelt and dreamlike but always enthralling, *Mind Game's* boldly experimental approach to its medium has so far marginalized it to the festival and art house circuit. This film does not deserve such obscurity. At the screening I attended, a concluding Q & A with producer Eiko Tanaka added icing to a very tasty cake. With or without such an interesting extra event, *Mind Game* ought to be widely enjoyed on a big screen as a work of singular, psychedelically exciting and brilliantly clever artistry—truly mind-blowing! ■ *Amy Harlib*

What Could've Been

Pocahontas: 10th Anniversary Edition

Directed by Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg
Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2005
Originally released theatrically in 1995
84 minutes

In 1995, after the success of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*, Walt Disney Studios were riding a cultural and creative high. They had a golden opportunity to capitalize on this momentum and make a daring and bold artistic statement with their next animated theatrical feature. Instead they gave us *Pocahontas*.

Set in the new world of America during the 16th century, *Pocahontas* tells the story of a Native American princess who falls in love with Captain John Smith, an English colonist. At the core of the film is the tale of their struggle to break the conventions of the time with their forbidden romance. It's a historically based story competently told here by talented individuals, and yet as you watch it you realize that it just doesn't work.

What's disappointing is that it should. It's a strong story idea, features an ideal heroine, has work put in by seasoned creative talents (like Joe Grant assisting on the

Above: Pocahontas looks down on the newcomer John Smith.

script, Alan Menken providing the music, and visual artists Will Finn, Glen Keane and Rick Moore). And yet all of these parts don't equal a compelling and entertaining whole. It's as if something was holding everyone back, like they were hamstrung by politics or they couldn't muster the pure conviction of heart that had been a driving force on so many previous successes.

What we have with *Pocahontas* is a stagnantly bland film. It would have been a great experience (and if nothing else a brilliantly interesting failure) to have seen the movie that Disney could have created had they upped the ante and made this film more "adult." And of course I'm not talking adult for someone like my friend Don who admits to an unhealthy crush on Ariel, but rather something that was on a more dramatic and intellectual level. I wanted *Pocahontas* to mean something. I wanted it to go against formula (such a sad word) and follow a greater realism in story and form.

For all of the Disney studio's animated genius, that is the one genre that has eluded them, and in more than one respect that's a shame. One can only wonder what would have flowed from the pens of the artists who have sat in those studios over the past 80 years if they weren't limited to this design of family films. Not that there's

anything wrong with that, as the quote goes. Those types of films certainly have their place. It's just a shame when that place supersedes any other way of telling a story.

This DVD release comes with two versions of the film, the theatrical release and an "expanded" edition. It is this expanded edition that is the real joy (and depressant) to watch. This is because of the re-insertion of the song "If I Never Knew You." This ballad, sung by John Smith, was a part of the film in its early stages, but as the film progressed developmentally, the song was jettisoned. When the song went out, so did much of the heart and truth of the third act of the film. Watching this sequence really got me thinking about my disappointment with Disney for not taking this film in what was perhaps its rightful direction. More than any other Disney animated release of the past fifteen years, *Pocahontas* had an opportunity to open the studio and its audience up into a wholly new kind of experience, one where people are forced to think and see on their own. Instead we were exposed to studio-mandated clips of history lite.

If only this film had maintained its poignancy and twist of the heart instead of, in the end, turning out another formulaic family film. Had the soul of this movie had a chance to shine and be nurtured and developed, we might have had a

What we have with *Pocahontas* is a stagnantly bland film. It would have been a great experience to have seen the movie that Disney could have created had they upped the ante and made this film more "adult."

movie worth celebrating. As it stands though, much like it is for high school, this ten-year anniversary is nothing but a chance to look back and lament what might have been.

DVD Features: 1.66:1 aspect ratio; English, French, and Spanish language tracks; Region 1.

DVD Extras: *The Making of Pocahontas* featurette; early presentation reels, storyboards, production progression; nine deleted scenes; *The Music of Pocahontas* feature documentary; images from the premiere; trailers; multi-language reel; publicity gallery; design galleries. ■ *Noell Wolfgram Evans*

Fly the Unfriendly Skies

Area 88 Vol. 1: Treacherous Skies

Directed by Isamu Imakake

ADV Films, 2005

Originally broadcast in 2004

75 minutes

Many years ago, my preferred way of exposing people to anime was surprise. I'd just play something eye-popping where people weren't

expecting it. For example, one evening I popped a bootleg tape of the mid-'80s OAV *Area 88* into the VCR just before an animation history class. It was the opening of the third part of the trilogy, in which two squadrons of fighter planes battle at dawn over the desert. It's a vicious dogfight, with planes and pilots being ripped to shreds by bullets and missiles. A classmate, sitting dumbstruck near the front row, only managed a few words about the scene's brutality:

"This is horrible."

She was partly right. The source of it all, the *Area 88* manga, thrived in the meeting point between tragedy, horror and beauty. The tragedy is that of its main character, Shin Kazama, a skilled commercial pilot betrayed by his best friend and forced to become part of a North African mercenary air force. The horror is that of war. And the beauty is in the aesthetic properties of the instruments of war, as well as the graceful but deadly ways in which they are used.

So the recent *Area 88* television series, now brought to DVD, had a lot to live up to. The original anime



was a textbook-perfect example of how to adapt a long-running manga series, a feat made all the more remarkable when you consider the three parts had a total running time of a mere three hours. And while it may seem unfair to draw comparisons between the new series and the old, the truth is that initially, the new show almost begs for it. The first ten minutes or so of the first episode is in many ways identical to the first ten minutes of the OAV.

The bad news is that the first episode doesn't withstand the comparison it invites. The immediately noticeable difference is the new version's hard, technological edge versus the original's handmade feel. One of the hallmarks of the first OAV was that the planes were drawn with a meticulous attention to detail, and brought to life through creative camera moves, dramatic staging and assured direction, as well as a carefully arranged, largely orchestral soundtrack. In a clear case of newer not necessarily

being better, all the vehicles in the television series are rendered in 3D and cel-shaded, providing technical accuracy and little else; it's particularly apparent during the dogfights, which lack the sinister grace seen in the manga and OAV series. As for the theme and battle music, far too much of it is maddeningly generic techno.

The good news is that the characters, setting and story are still compelling enough to hold our attention, and as the episodes progress the show begins to find its groove. The music gradually gains more personality, and the aerial scenes become more visually interesting. The use of more formalized jargon and procedure (no doubt thanks to the military consultant listed in the credits) provides a dose of realism, and the attention to ambient sound highlights the chaos and confusion of battle.

By the time the fourth episode ended, I felt that only one thing was

missing, but it's a crucial element—Shin's internal dialogue. A constant in the manga and the OAV, Shin's reflections provided a personal take on the tragedy, horror and beauty of *Area 88*. Shin, a gentle soul who could never have imagined living the life he now leads, is desperate to get home, but the fastest way to do that is to buy out his contract for \$1.5 million—a sum he can only achieve by killing as many enemies as he can, as quickly as possible. His thoughts reveal his own internal horror at how good he's become at killing, and his fear that he is losing his soul. At the same time, he has learned to see the tragic beauty and poetry of combat, and what it brings out in his comrades in arms. As a longtime *Area 88* fan, it's hard not to notice Shin's relative silence.

Most of the things that I liked about *Area 88* are slowly creeping into the new series. But what will make or break it is how well we get to know Shin. The planes and the dogfights are just window

dressing; if Shin's battle to hold on to his humanity comes across, then the show will deserve to be called *Area 88*.

DVD Features: 1.33:1 aspect ratio; English and Japanese language tracks; English subtitles; Region 1.

DVD Extras: Clean opening and closing animation; production sketches; interviews with Isamu Imakake and screenwriter Hiroshi Ohnogi. ■ *Emru Townsend*

Girls, Girls, Girls

Girls Bravo Vol. 1
Directed by Ei Aoki
Geneon Entertainment, 2005
Originally broadcast in 2004
100 minutes

Yukinari Sasaki is short, quite weak, noticeably shy, and has a fear of women. And while he's a rather sweet and unassuming high school kid, his humble nature is overshadowed by one small problem: whenever Yukinari comes into close contact with a

Above: *Area 88* may look like it's all about the planes, but it should be Shin Kazama's story.



woman, any woman, he breaks out in a rash. This problem however, is just the beginning for Yukinari. One day he accidentally takes a trip to another world, and ends up bringing a girl named Miharu back with him to Earth.

Girls Bravo is a romantic comedy that follows poor, unlucky Yukinari and all of the wonderful trouble that ensues when he inadvertently becomes the focus of desire of several young women. The series is a comedy through and through, outlined by adult jokes and gags, all in the hope of offering the audience something just a little bit different. *Girls Bravo* had my interest from the first episode, and I think may be that one peculiar anime release of the season that you'll never forget.

Yukinari is an introverted guy, thanks to the girls who have bullied him ever since his toddler years. Sure, he appreciates women and is attracted to them; but it would appear that as the years have passed, and as the bullying has multiplied tenfold, his tolerance of the female gender has backfired on him. Aside from stuttering, bloody noses, and flailing around like a man possessed, Yukinari also gets these little red dots all over his body when a member of the female gender approaches him. Whether it be a schoolteacher, an attractive stranger on the street, or the buxom girl-next-door Kirie Kojima, it would appear

that every woman in existence is the source of Yukinari's anguish. That is, until Yukinari comes into contact with a strange new girl, from a strangely not-so-distant world.

Meet Miharu, the only girl who so far does not give Yukinari a rash. Yukinari accidentally makes his way to and from Miharu's home world of Seiren via his bathtub (which for some unknown reason glows an ominous blue). Miharu is a pink-haired girl that is about as adorable, simple, and air-headed as anime girls come.

I find it not a bit unusual for some unknown girl from some unknown world to be the one to relieve our leading man of his fears, nor do I find it unusual for this girl to suddenly become the envy of the rest of the female cast of the anime. But what I think makes the relationship between Miharu and Yukinari appealing is the juxtaposition of one very simple and shy guy and one simple and extroverted girl.

Girls Bravo is an anime for slightly older animation fans, considering that the majority of its humour involves both subtle innuendo and overtly ludicrous takes on sexuality. Miharu is unabashed about being naked (often trying to convince Yukinari to take a bath with her), and her character is very blasé about anything relatively practical. In one scene, Miharu has a banana for the first time, and because she

doesn't really know how to eat a banana, she ends up treating the gentle food more like a phallus than a fruit.

Outside of hentai and other anime that are clearly for adult audiences, I normally have a problem with adult humour in an anime program; the humour often treads the thin line of ridiculousness and absurdity, rather than mere funniness. Thankfully, while most character relationships in *Girls Bravo* trigger some odd pseudosexual experience, the adult humour is all done with the greater story in mind. That is, the story of just how in the heck Yukinari Sasaki is going to get along with all of the obsessed, crazy and perverted people around him.

There's a lot of fan service, but you can't help but laugh at all that goes on in this little series. Some examples include the impracticality of Kirie having what are referred to as "size F" breasts, the unreality of Miharū's home planet having a population that is 90% women, and the amusing and oddly placed bisexual tendencies of Kosame, a female bodyguard for Lisa, one of the minor characters of the series.

I did mention that *Girls Bravo* is somewhat of a romance title earlier, so it's important to note that Yukinari draws the attention of a lot of interesting characters. Kirie is Yukinari's (sometimes violent) long-time friend and girl next door who has obviously harboured feelings for him for who knows how long. Lisa Fukuyama, the younger sister of Yukinari's classmate, is a blonde girl and resident enthusiast of black magic with the delusion that this girl-

sick guy is her soul mate. And, while there are other characters yet to be introduced in the series, the only other interest thus far is of course Miharū: ignorant of Earth lifestyles (she doesn't even know what bread is), but apparently well-versed in the way of personal relationships (at least, that's what it seems like—she never hesitates to get intimate).

Yukinari, upon realizing that he has to deal with the troubles of everyday interactions with women, on top of teaching this alien girl how to live inconspicuously on Earth, finds his life getting more and more complicated.

I enjoyed *Girls Bravo*'s themes of social independence, relationship building and friendship; but they were fairly well hidden by the anime's use of miniskirts, maid outfits, elevators that take women's measurements, and nutritious yet destructive bento boxes.

In order to enjoy the anime, you have to be a fan (or at the least tolerant) of mild adult humor, because this is what keeps it going. *Girls Bravo* is your typical high school love story, but with a main character with a nasty rash, an alien girlfriend and a violent secret admirer, among other quirky aspects.

DVD Features: 1.33:1 aspect ratio; English and Japanese language tracks; English subtitles; Region 1.

DVD Extras: Clean opening; original opening; line-art gallery. ■ *Aaron H. Bynum*

Flashback

Women & Animation, a Compendium

Edited by Jayne Pilling
British Film Institute, Exhibition & Distribution Division, 1992
ISBN 0851703771
144 pages

As is true of any large group, women do not all have the same viewpoint, and any book that attempts to constrain women animators the world over to a single model would be highly inaccurate, not to mention pointless. Avoiding this trap, Jayne Pilling presents us with an exploration of women and animation rather than her thesis about women and animation demonstrated with a series of pre-selected articles that agree with it. Rather than destroying the cohesion of the book, the varied and sometimes contradictory viewpoints strengthen it.

This diversity is also present in the content of the book. Women animators are presented from the early pioneers to the then-latest up-and-comers; women are presented as working in collaboration with men, with other women, or alone; work by women from all over the world is looked at, either through national overviews, or individually. The only role a significant amount of women have had in animation that is not covered is the one in commercial studio environments (mostly as inkers and painters), which is

only mentioned as a place to get out of. Since the book concentrates mostly on creative people who made their mark as independent animators, this is not surprising. The compiled material is also varied and ranges from personal interviews to formal analyses of films. Just about every approach to looking at animation is here (including a reprint of Joanna Priestley's hilarious "How Some Independent Animated Films Are Made"). Reprints of previously published articles are limited to hard-to-find items, avoiding the endless repetition of well known texts, while material written specifically for the book enhances it even more. Brief introductions that give the reader a context for the interviews are a nice touch, as is the bibliography which is followed by a compiled list of animators entitled "International Bibliographical Dictionary" that covers not only animators mentioned in earlier texts but also many others. Containing a brief précis on each animator and a filmography, this section is a good source of raw information, though sometimes incomplete; however, this seems to be a case of unavailable material rather than poor research.

A necessary addition to any animation library; if you did not buy this book on its release, go find it and buy it now. ■ *René Walling*

closing credits»

Aaron H. Bynum is a freelance writer and full-time college student in English Studies. He spends most of his time writing all sorts of literature, keeping a very close eye on both Eastern and Western animation industries, reading philosophy, sleeping in, and writing some more.

Janeann Dill is an artist, filmmaker, scholar and author in experimental animation.

Noell Wolfgram Evans is a freelance writer living in Columbus, Ohio. Winner of the 2002 Thurber Treat Award, he enjoys a number of things, mainly laughing with his family.

Amy Harlib is a 40-something lifelong avid lover of SF&F literature, animation and graphic novels,

retired with plenty of time to indulge in her passions. She lives in New York City and welcomes intelligent feedback and discussion about the genres.

Emru Townsend is animation's Renaissance man. He sees the connections between anime and American animation, stop-motion and CGI, art and the industry, the fiercely independent and the relentlessly commercial. He has been preaching his Unified Animation Theory since 1989, and is the founding editor of *fps*.

A longtime animation fan, **René Walling** was the driving force behind *fps* for a number of years during Emru Townsend's hiatus. He is very happy to be back in the passenger seat.

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