

# Rising Stars of Animation and VFX Class of 2007

Talent and perseverance may be two of the common traits that unite our 12 rising stars this year. However, what's more fascinating are the eclectic and divergent career paths each one of these individuals took to get to where they are today. We know we'll be following the colorful work of this bright dozen for many years to come. For now, consider these brief profiles as a tasty appetizer of the satisfying meals ahead.

## AMY WINFREY CREATOR, *MAKING FIENDS*, NICKELODEON

"My show's got a little bit of a darker feel than Dr. Seuss, but it's got that same sort of absurdity," says Amy Winfrey, the creator of *Making Fiends*, the upcoming new animated series which premieres on Nickelodeon in 2008. Based on the web series of the same name, Winfrey's show centers on two elementary school girls—Charlotte and Vendetta—one of whom makes friends with her natural sweetness, while the other creates twisted monster "fiends."



"I started making cartoons for the Internet," she explains. "Nickelodeon had a shorts program at the time, and they had been looking for some people who had done shorts in the past. It ended up just going from pitch bible to TV show. At the time there were only seven shorts on Makingfiends.com, and by the time we were done there were 20. But I had time to develop the characters fully and add more to that world, so it became easy for the network to see what they were getting when they were bringing it to TV."

Winfrey graduated UCLA in 1997 with a BA in English, then studied animation in the school's graduate degree program. At the same time, she worked on both the *South Park* series and theatrical release. Her 2000 thesis project, *Muffin Films* and her subsequent project *Big Bunny* were immensely popular with online fans, leading her to make a "decent living" just by selling T-shirts, DVDs and art prints over the Internet. For her Nick show, Winfrey is sticking with the same voice cast, story structure and overall visual design as the web cartoons that made her popular. Additionally, as per the web cartoons, she's composing all the original songs herself. "I like to write. This has been very satisfying for me because I still write a lot of songs, which are similar to my background in poetry. So it's a good fit."

—Jake Friedman



## ROB BOUTILIER CREATOR, STUDIO B'S *LOOK WHAT MY SISTER DRAGGED IN*



A strange-looking hairless cat is the real-life inspiration behind Rob Boutilier's new series *Look What My Sister Dragged In*, which started its life as a Studio B short and now is in development with Canada's YTV cable. The show centers on an evil hairless cat who torments a young boy named Coop, whose sister is completely unaware of the feline's nefarious motives. "I created the characters in 2003," says Boutilier. "After eight years of marriage, my wife and I bought a hairless cat, and I was always amazed by people's reaction to it—these cats are very alien-like. I had the idea that if this cat was truly evil he'd probably try to do me in at some point, and that's what the cat is doing to the boy in the short."



Boutilier's first dream was to create a daily comic strip, but he got sidelined to animation. After studying at Vancouver Film School, he started storyboarding for AKA Cartoon, working on BBC's *Aaagh! It's the Mr. Hell Show* and Cartoon Network's famous *Ed, Edd n Eddy* series. He joined Studio B in 2001, where he's been a storyboard artist or storyboard supervisor on many of the shop's popular toons. First conceived for Studio B's in-house development program B-Hive, *Look What My Sister Dragged In* has traveled to festivals around the world and was one of the top 15 projects at last year's MIPCOM Jr. pilots.

"It's loony in the classic style of old chase cartoons, but it's becoming much more than that," says Boutilier. "It's storyboard-driven, not script-driven, and the artists are encouraged to go crazy with their art." He adds, "I prefer the real simple stories of chaos spinning off something really simple and really silly. That, I think, is good storytelling."

—Jake Friedman

## CHRIS SIEMASKO ANIMATOR, *MY ADVENTURES WITH CLOE*

A nerdy kid called Timmy befriends a 900-year-old chain-smoking, cranky sea monster in New York-based Chris Siemasko's hilarious animated pilot, *My Adventures with Buddy*. Co-produced by Canada's Fatkat studios and New York's Big Hug Productions for Teletoon, the short has become one of those offbeat gems one comes across on the Web these days. "Together Cloe and Timmy meet



other magical creatures like Bigfoot, Chupacabras or an enchanted hobo," elaborates Siemasko. "But they also tackle everyday challenges like Timmy being bullied or Cloe's dating and drug problems."

The idea originally came from the mind of New York comedian Buddy Bolton, who befriended Siemasko and began their collaboration. "When Buddy was in college, he wrote it and performed it as a stage play," says Siemasko. "Then he stored it in a vault for about a decade; we met, and I loved his ideas right away."

Siemasko, who graduated from the Art Institute of Philadelphia in 1999, had already worked on projects like Showtime's *Queer Duck* and Noggin's *Pinky Dinky Doo* for Noggin before designing and keying the pilot for *Cloe*. Canada's Fatkat studio then came on board to finish the short and helped the duo pitch it to Teletoon. The creators stayed in close contact with studio head and director Gene

Fowler and documented the whole production process on a blog. "The process was transparent to anyone who wanted to look at it, from voice recordings to animatics," says Siemasko. "We were able to get a lot of feedback from people over at Fatkat, as well as friends, comedians and total strangers."

Since then, they have partnered with *Just for Laughs* to showcase the pilot around the world for possible international distribution. Siemasko adds, "I think people relate to the characters' sincere friendship, as well as their nauseating personalities and horrific dysfunctions!"

—Jake Friedman

