



Milking The Pro's - Part 2

A series of interviews by Jake Friedman

If you're reading this newsletter, you love toons as much as I do. We made it our interests, our hobbies and/or our professions. But what exactly is out there for people who love toons? I had the opportunity to ask nearly a dozen people all over the animation spectrum the four main questions that are the crux of any good brain-tapping. In this second installment in a multi-part article, professionals in and around cartoons talk about their gigs and offer input to the rest of us.

Dave Bossert is currently an animation director at **Disneytoon Studios**. Dave has worked such Disney films as the Oscar-nominated **Beauty and the Beast**, **Lion King**, **Fantasia 2000**, and the two Oscar-nominated shorts "Destino" and, just this year, "Lorenzo." Dave has been with the Walt Disney Studios for more than 21 years.



JF: What's the hardest thing about being an animation director at Disneytoon Studios?

DB: I think the hardest thing when you are directing is balancing the creative process with that of the business side. You have to be able to get your vision on screen while still being respectful of the schedule and budget. That can be hard sometimes as you always would like more time!

JF: What's the biggest perk?

DB: The biggest perk is being able to work some of the most talented people in the business.

JF: Why did you choose to do what you're doing?

DB: I was always interested in art and really got excited when I first made some of my art move. It is incredibly gratifying to be able to work with a team of artists to create an animated film that will touch and entertain so many people.

JF: How do I get to be where you are now?

DB: It takes a lot of hard work and dedication to the animation art form. I have always told students to never rest on your laurels but to always keep learning new things, always ask questions and keep stretching the boundaries of your mind. Also, you need to be persistent in chasing your dreams. Never, never, never give up!

Bill Plympton is an Oscar-nominated independent animator who has consistently produced popular animated films for the last 20 years. His short film, "Guard Dog," was nominated for an Academy Award this year.

Visit him at www.plymptoons.com.



JF: What's the hardest thing about being an independent animator?

BP: Doing the money deals – the contracts, negotiations, marketing, distribution – and getting the money from buyers – whether they're distribution or theaters.

JF: What's the biggest perk?

BP: Going to festivals.

JF: Why did you choose to do what you're doing?

BP: I loved the magic of cartoons and I especially love hearing the audience laugh, it's almost better than sex. In fact, the perfect event would be to have sex in the cinema while people are laughing at my film.

JF: How do I get to be where you are now?

BP: Keep your films short, cheap and funny.

Craig Yoe is the head of one of the world's leading entertainment design studios, whose plethora of clients include **Disney, Cartoon Network** and **Nickelodeon**. Visit him at www.yoe.com, and check out his new book at www.arfrovers.com.



JF: What's the hardest thing about running a design studio for the entertainment industry?

CY: Shrinking budgets. And many companies now have their own large in-house art departments, not so when we started.

JF: What's the biggest perk?

CY: It's a lot more fun working with cartoon characters, movies, etc than doing a brochure for a bank. At least "I" think it is. We once hired a freelancer work that HATED the kind of work we do and thought it was beneath him. He longed to do annual reports. What-EVER! (We kicked out his sorry ass).

JF: Why did you choose to do what you're doing?

CY: It probably chose me. I've been interested in professionally doing things like comic books, toys, kid books and the like for as long as I can remember.

JF: How do I get to be where you are now?

CY: The best route is to sleep your way to the top--that's how I did it! If you want to try an alternative route I might suggest that number one, don't ever let yourself get discouraged, then compulsively study hard the work of the past, collect tons of that work, draw constantly (especially from life), eat healthy, don't think about the money, go for the experience especially when you are young, pray to God and praise God for the gift of life, try and get to meet as many of your heroes as you can and pick their brain (not their nose), especially try and meet old farts, believe in yourself, I mean really cultivate a very strong self-esteem, spend some of your time doing volunteer work to help less fortunate people, draw more, read books on positive thinking, work really, really hard! Or, again, sleep your way to the top!

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Chris Giarrusso is the creator and artist behind the toony “Mini Marvels” for **Marvel Comics**, and the popular “G-man” comic for **Image**. Visit him at www.ChrisGComics.com.



- JF:** What’s the hardest thing about being a comic book artist?
- CG:** Making money.
- JF:** What’s the biggest perk?
- CG:** Occasional discounts at comic stores
- JF:** Why did you choose to be a comic book artist?
- CG:** I love comics.
- JF:** How do I get to be where you are now?
- CG:** Be in the right place at the right time via dumb luck and keep drawing.

Mo Willems is an Emmy Award winning animator-writer-show-creator-turned Caldecott Honor winning children’s-book author. His work can be viewed at www.mowillems.com.



- JF:** What’s the hardest thing about being an author of children’s books?
- MW:** Selling your books.
- JF:** What’s the biggest perk?
- MW:** See answer to question #1.
- JF:** Why did you choose children’s books and stepping away from animation?
- MW:** It’s both an evolution and devolution: An evolution in the sense that after knocking out TV scripts for “Sheep in the Big City” and “Kids Next Door” week after week after week, I wanted to try a different type of story-telling with a more liberal schedule. In this, I’m following a tradition of animators like Ted Geisel, P.D. Eastman, Virgil “VIP” Parch, and Mordicai Gerstein by moving from animation to Picture Books. After years of formats (square aspect ratio, 11 minute stories, etc.), it’s liberating to control the size of a page its content in ways that are seldom possible in TV (and even festival) animation.

It’s a devolution in the sense that my career began by making cartoon shorts for “Sesame Street” where I could do everything (write, design, animate, ink and paint) in my home studio. There was a pleasurable solitude involved in crafting these weird little films on my own. As my career shifted to longer TV projects and I needed larger and larger crews to produce them, I found myself managing more than drawing. So, book making is kind of a return to an individual, independent period where I can draw funny pictures again.

None of this is to say I’ve somehow abandoned TV or animation. There are several projects I hope to pursue in the future. For now books are a pleasurable sabbatical.

- JF:** How do I get to be a children’s book author?
- MW:** Be patient, work hard, learn the medium. Many things about kid’s book illustration

and animation are the same; the need for strong poses, good silhouettes, engaging character design. But books involve understanding the page turn and an appreciation of who will be reading your work and to whom they will read it.

Unfortunately, everyone (from celebrities to moms) seems to want to do kids' books. "They look so easy, they're for kids; anyone can do it!" Be warned; it's a bunny-eat-bunny world out there, and crafting a decent book is long, hard work.

I came to the hunt with the distinct advantage of several Emmys and a few TV series under my belt and it took me well over 2 years to find a publisher. From finding an agent to my first book on the shelf: 5 years. To be more discouraging, the vast majority of published books do not earn enough for the artist to live on (as an animator, you can relate) and if you're teamed with a writer your earnings are half of not enough to live on.

Now, for some encouragement: once you break in (and your work is good) editors tend to take you under their wing. Unlike TV, they're interested in artists' whole careers, not just one project. That give you time to grow and experiment, you don't have to pretend to be a hit-making 25 year-old all the time. And since there's nowhere near as much money at stake in books (as opposed to a cartoon series), publishers can be more willing to take risks. As an animator, you'll have the distinct advantage of knowing how to work on schedule and on budget (unlike some illustrators), and your posing should be better. I've also found that established authors and illustrators (with one exception) are great guys who are happy to welcome new talent. A good resource for getting your bearings as you start out is the Children's Book Council (www.cbcbooks.org), an advocacy group comprised of publishers and their ilk.

Beyond all that practical stuff, it is essential that you like children; they are your audience, you work for them, you need to understand their world. If you're doing books for yourself, you will not succeed.

Next issue: Animation author/historian John Culhane and TV cartoon composer Jared Faber.

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