



## Fawning over *Bambi II*

Director Brian Pimental and animation consultant Andreas Deja discuss the making of a sequel based on one of the most popular animated features of all time.

by Jake Friedman

With the steady flow of Disney's straight-to-video sequels, some purists were initially skeptical about the company's recent release of *Bambi II*. However, the sequel to David Hand's 1942 classic has done remarkably well in DVD stores and in overseas territories where it was released theatrically. Directed by Brian Pimental, the feature has also received strong reviews from critics around the world.

The sequel picks up at precisely the moment in which Bambi looks back in the snow after the fatal gunshot before he follows his emotionally distant father, the Great Prince of the Forest, deeper into the woods. Instead of having a heavy plot line, the film focuses on the gradual growing relationship between Bambi (voiced by *Finding Nemo* ace Alexander Gould) and his father (voiced marvelously by Patrick Stewart), how each learn from the other and how they cope together over the death of a loved one.

"I just couldn't wrap my head around a story that didn't deal in some way with the loss of

his mother," says Pimental, a Disney veteran who has worked on numerous animated features in the past two decades, including *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Tarzan*. "Knowing that there must have been some connection there also from his father, the Great Prince. They were such polar opposites in their characters, it just lent itself to a good story. Bambi was so needy and so helpless, and the Great Prince was so self-sufficient and so isolated."



Producing the film in Disney's last vestige of quality traditional animation, its studio in Australia, Pimental brought aboard lead Disney animator Andreas Deja (Scar from *The Lion King*, Jafar from *Aladdin*, Gaston from *Beauty*

and *the Beast* and Lilo from *Lilo & Stitch*) as animation consultant. "I thought, maybe if we brought Andreas, he could give some talks about anatomy and animation, and also be a source of inspiration for them and be somebody they could go to with questions."

Deja's initial reaction to the concept was less than whole-hearted excitement. He admits, "I wasn't that enthusiastic about it and I basically told him, 'Who needs another *Bambi*?' But I took a look at the story reel and thought it was amazing. It was truthful to the characters, and it wasn't trying to be hip or modern."

So how did Deja tackle the remake of a classic? "It was a different challenge. I always thought that when it comes to animation, nothing could be more difficult than animating *Bambi*, because of the realism involved and the subtleties. You wonder as an artist, 'Can you do this?'"

In addition to the drawing classes of live deer and the anatomy workshops, Pimental and Deja emphasized the importance of the works of the classic Disney animators, and dissected scenes from the original feature.

"I did a lot of workshops and lectures about the old film, we looked at it frame-by-frame, I gave out handouts of do's and don'ts about the characters, going over model sheets—mostly Milt Kahl's, because he did the final models for all the deer." Above all, Deja stressed the emotion of the final product over design. "I told everybody, 'think about the acting,' and to draw loose. They're used to drawing pretty tight down there so they get the scenes through quicker and give clean-up less work. But if you draw too tight, you think about the drawing too much. You can't really internalize."

While Deja worked on cultivating the feel of the original animation, Pimental fought to maintain a steady pacing of the story, and to keep the colors from being oversaturated. "The goal was to make it as close to the original as possible. Everybody sees



Brian Pimental



Andreas Deja

what makes Bambi differently, what gives it its look. Our art director, Carol Police, really did a great job of breaking down stylistic things in the movie, how they use dark against light, or how they use Asian influences in

branches. And once we had that, it became the guide of how to make our movie."

Pimental even insisted that traditional artistic media be used to render the backgrounds, until it was realized that replicating the oil paintings was a major feat. "We tried it, and there was just so much trouble to get colors to bleed together and capture that style.

Once we went digital, there was so much more control. I was pretty adamant in the beginning about using oils, but we just weren't getting the results." And for inquiring minds, the antlers on the grown deer are indeed traced CG images.

For aesthetic purists, the film does a good job of staying true to the vision of the 1942 classic. To the emotionally heartbroken, it provides closure for those who missed Bambi's mother and

wanted to see the fawn's growth.

"I wouldn't compare it to the first one, ever," says Deja, "but for what it is, I think it came out remarkably well." Pimental agrees. "We knew we had to try to deliver something that felt, in spirit, like it wasn't detracting from the original. I was hoping to stay true to the source and not betray it." ■

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