

# Head in the Clouds

The latest project of Canada's g Story Entertainment, *Skyland*, is about to make the world's imagination soar.

by Jake Friedman

Small studios come and go, as we're all well aware. However, one recent success story of the industry is g Story Entertainment. Founded four years ago by Vince Commisso and Steven Jarosz, g Story may be Canada's fastest-growing hub of new animation, with a roster meriting a raise of the eyebrow. Its Emmy-award winning *Peep and the Big Wide World*, produced with WGBH Boston, has gained international recognition and critical acclaim in children's television, and its various nominations and accolades are on the rise with programs and specials like *Best Ed* and *If the World Were a Village*. The latter, a short piece emphasizing international empathy in a global community, is one of the most inspiring and mobilizing children's pieces that has come along in quite a while.

"Our focus is on producing good programming, with well-written stories and characters young audiences will invest in," says Commisso, between phone calls from his home base in Toronto. Commisso, producer of the projects that come out of g Story Entertainment, is constantly in communication with producers and distributors all over the world. France and Canada's good international relations, for instance, have resulted in a treaty co-production between g Story in Toronto and Method Films in Paris. And with international distributors, Commisso has been able to put out various projects across Europe, Latin America, Australia and Asia.

In fact, it was with the help of India's animation house DQ Entertainment Limited that g Story's latest creative venture, *Skyland*, was able to take off. Co-produced by g Story and Method, *Skyland* is bound to impress its audience with its film-quality production standards. Using the combination of enchanting dreamscape backgrounds painted by director/

show creator Emmanuel Gorinstein and CG motion capture over special sci-fi effects, *Skyland* appears less like a regular television show and more like something that should be on the big screen. "Emmanuel created these amazing landscapes over at Method Films. When I saw these images, I knew I wanted to be part of the project."

The project itself is the epic science-fiction story that follows the adventures of two renegade children gifted with special powers. Based two hundred years in the future, the earth is broken up into millions of floating islands reminiscent of Gulliver's island of Laputa as described by Jonathan Swift. A tyrannical empire known as The Sphere oppresses the population for the sake of their most valuable commodity: water. When The Sphere discovers that teenager Mahad's little sister Lena possess incredible energy-harnessing superpowers, the kids flee their home and are forced to join a troupe of rebels bent on bringing down the rule of oppression.

"The personalities of the characters are really what drive the story," says Commisso. "For instance, the main male character, the 16-year-old, has to grow up from being a boy and has to learn how to become a hero, all in the course of the story. Above all else, we want the audience to believe in the characters, and we try to make that happen by treating them with integrity."

Commisso estimates that across India, France and Canada, *Skyland* has been employing between 500 and 600 people since the start of production. "The idea was pitched in 2002. We reached a point where we had the means to use motion



capture. If someone pitched the idea of mo-cap like this in 1998, it would have been an impossibility." *Skyland* utilizes several types of high-end software, like Photoshop, Maya, RenderMan, MotionBuilder and Shake for compositing. While g Story is well-versed in the merits of 2D animation for its other projects, Commisso stands behind the creative choice of implementing CG. "Many studios out there might use CG because it's flashy or because it might be the hot thing right now. We chose to use it because it was the best tool to tell the story we wanted to tell. There really is no better way to get this idea across." That idea has captured the interest of more than a half-dozen broadcasters around the world. What did Commisso have to say about the next big thing for g Story Entertainment and *Skyland*? "We're premiering all across the world, from Israel to Norway. We're reaching to broadcasters in Europe and the Americas. For a brand new show, it's exciting to see it reach such a wide audience." ■

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*Skyland* airs Saturdays and Sundays on Teletoon at 7:30 p.m.