



## Apocalypse Soon

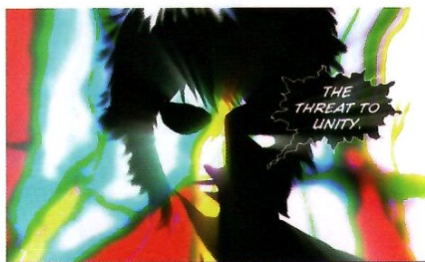
Creator Brooke Burgess discusses *Broken Saints*, a new DVD release that offers a cool and economical method of bringing comic books to digital life. by Jake Friedman

Look out, fans of independent animation. There's a new method of storytelling and it's available for your inspection and enjoyment on a new DVD release called *Broken Saints*. Described as "a graphic novel brought to life," this 24-episode web-comic, which uses Flash animation for simple movements and impressive camera tricks, has garnered a following of tens of thousands, not to mention numerous awards.

"I was trying to think of a way I could reconcile my Western living tech side, my love of computer and what have you, with my growing spiritual side," says creator, writer and director Brooke Burgess. With the help of art director Andrew West and technical director Ian Kirby, Burgess produced 24 installments of the eerie, ambiance-rich storyline between early 2001 and mid 2003.

It's fitting that the piece makes direct references to dark graphic novel creators like Neil Gaiman and Alan Moore, admittedly two of Burgess's influences. The work explores the troubled lives of four people across the globe who are linked together by their visions of an upcoming apocalypse. Paced like a mini-series, characters and secrets are revealed in each installment of this episodic saga.

"Modern storytelling, especially in the West, is looking for something fast-paced with action,



and that's great, but a lot of people are getting bored with movies and TV shows because it's the same old stuff. But the powerful stuff that sits with you and helps shape you when you're younger, those are the heavier stories: things that deal with issues of emotion, politics, conspiracy, religion and human responsibility. I know there are people out there who feel the same way," adds Burgess.

Burgess got the idea for this project after leaving his job as a producer for a top video game company in the late '90s. "I kind of got tired of cranking out the same old stuff," he says. "I wanted to start telling stories that reminded me of the great anime that I had seen and the incredible comic books that I was a huge fan of." After coming back from a trip to the South Pacific, Burgess wanted to tell a story that could reconcile his tech-heavy Western lifestyle and his growing spiritual side.

Burgess teamed up with West and Kirby,



Brooke Burgess

as well as score composer Tobias Tinker, realizing that a Flash web-comic would be the best way to showcase his story. "I thought, 'We could make a graphic novel with a sense of movement, with a beautiful soundscape, and we wouldn't have to be under a studio's thumb.'"

A definite asset to *Saints* is the anime-inspired art, which is complex and more detailed than an ordinary comic (found on the web or in print). Drawn by West and digitally enhanced by Kirby, the illustrations are a feast for the eyes of the analytical artist in us all. Just as Burgess describes himself as a self-taught director, he boasts that his whole team taught themselves their respective craft.

"We're the first to say we know we're not great bastions of animation skill. We're three guys who are self-taught, who use sliding frames in Flash to create an illusion of a moving comic book. We are not animation pioneers; what we are is storytellers who took the technology that was there and used it to service a story that we thought could touch a lot of people."

In August, Fox Home Entertainment, with a grant from the government agency Telefilm Canada, will distribute a four-disc collection of the 24 episodes, completely remastered in 5.1 audio and with lots of behind-the-scenes features. In addition, much of the art has been redone and there is dialogue throughout, a distinct difference from the online version. Besides assigning the shot list and arranging the storyboard and visual transitions of the piece, Burgess also directed the voice actors for the DVD.

Burgess believes that the project's special message helped the team of actors, artists and financial backers come together. "The basic theme is that, as in *Lord of the Rings*, there is power in the very small and that one person can make a difference. But more important, like our characters, no matter what you're going through or where you are, we are all connected. We're part of something bigger than ourselves, and we have a responsibility to give of ourselves to sacrifice for the greater good." ■

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