

Adventures in the Toon Trade

Blue's Clues animation director David B. Levy's new book offers tasty tips on making it in the business.

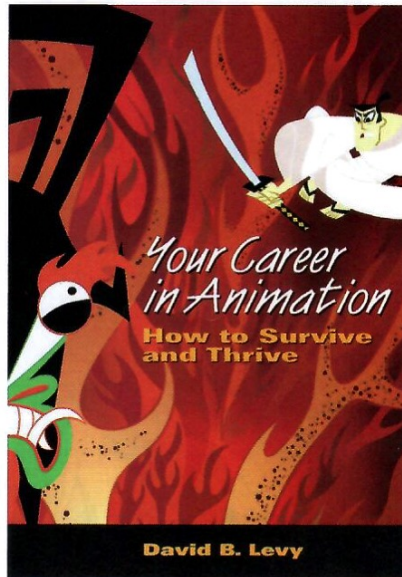
by Jake Friedman

We have all read animation books that require a few highlighted paragraphs. Now comes a book that deserves to be printed on highlighted pages. Stuffed to the gills with information like the other publications from Allworth Press, David Levy's *Your Career in Animation: How to Survive and Thrive* is the most straightforward book on the subject of the biz ever printed.

"So much of the stuff we go through in our careers we may not experience until we're a few years in," says Levy. "I wanted to write a guide for those trying to get the most out of their career so that they may navigate difficult and challenging situations as successfully as possible."

For this guide, Levy, an animation director, college instructor and president of ASIFA-East, interviewed 100 professionals all across the animation spectrum. The book contains a wide assortment of advice and experience from character animators to producers to designers, from recent graduates to established directors. There are tips from Oscar-darlings like John Canemaker, independent studio heads like Michael Sporn and hit network TV-show creators like *Codename: Kids Next Door's* Tom Warburton. Reading the book gives you a window into the industry in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Canada and, most significantly New York, Levy's home base.

Levy got the idea for the book when he started teaching a course at New York's School of Visual Arts on the very subject of succeeding in the animation business. "As I started making the syllabus, it felt like a chapter listing to me. It was a 'eureka' moment. I immediately started to come up with a



book pitch; I felt that I had enough experience where my story could be a good focal point for a book like this. I've had enough success already, and I've made enough mistakes that I could pass along to the reader for instructional purposes."

The anecdotal blunders that Levy describes in his book are the really tasty bits. In reading these stories, the reader feels like he's sitting with the author and contributors listening to the secrets of the industry. In its candidness, the book harkens back to Shamus Culhane's *Talking Animals and Other People* but treats itself more as a guidebook than a memoir. With chapters like "Making On-the-Job Criticism Your Friend," "Surviving Unemployment" and "Networking: People Who Need People," the author goes through the do's and don'ts by example, showing how regular folks do the job right or wrong.

Levy's tips on networking are per-



David B. Levy

haps one of the pillars of the book. He encourages people to get personal in their networking attempts. "Everything in the book goes back to the fact

that it's a people business, it's about relationships at the end of the day. As animation artists, there are so few of us who will have a job at a studio that's going to last more than a few years in a row. When you look back at a 30-, 40-year career, the relationships you've made are probably going to matter more than any one particular project you worked on."

For instance, Levy reveals what he considers a top trade secret about interviewing. "The thing that I'm encouraging people to do most is the informational interview, a strategy which is really most important to people just breaking into the industry, and I'm suggesting not to hide behind sending out e-mails, resumes and reels, or going to websites that are listing job postings. What I'm suggesting is starting with relationships first. Getting out there to meet and connect with real people to show off yourself and your work."

While the book does give advice for rookies who need to meet people, the book gives equal attention to established professionals with its chapters on pursuing independent animation, starting a studio business and pitching a pilot. It's the kind of book that one will continue taking off the shelf and re-reading countless times during different career stages. While the business of animation may be ever-changing, the book is a navigation tool through the different relationships that pop up in the industry. That quality gives the book a timeless relevancy.

Adds Levy, "For me, the bulk of the book is really about what happens year five, ten, twenty and thirty of your career and how we can constantly ensure that we have the best chance for success, no matter where we set our goals. That, to me, is the key to this book." ■