

TAKE ONE

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EDITORIAL

By Marc Glassman



This is the golden age of animation. That's what the media, from *Entertainment Tonight* to *Maclean's* magazine, proclaims to us with awesome regularity. The evidence is all around us. Cartoon stations are broadcasting, indeed competing with each other, in the United States. Canada is due to have its own station, Teletoon, by next fall. Kids are lining up at the doorsteps of educational institutions, most notably Sheridan College, looking for degrees in animation. Nearly everyone, it seems, wants to be a computer nerd creating new Sega-style games or animating the latest sexy superhero thriller on television. And the same multitude, no doubt, is hearing the siren call of Hollywood beseeching all of our best and brightest hackers and rasters to create bigger and wilder special effects for upcoming multimillion-dollar-budgeted blockbusters.

One of the current buzz phrases among media-makers is "the global market." Canadians are praised for participating in it, especially in the cultural and entertainment sectors. But a chilling aspect of all of this globalism is the movement of so many talented Canadians from here to warmer and richer climes down south. Hockey players like Mario Lemieux, writers like Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise, and film stars like Jim Carrey have all headed southward to the Land of Opportunity. The animation community has been particularly stung by these types of defections. Steve "Spaz" Williams, the awesome special-effects computer animation wizard behind *Jurassic Park's* memorable T-Rex is merely the most visible of the hundreds of Canadian artists who are now populating the production units at Industrial Light and Magic, Pixar, and Rhythm and Hues. Two of the three major computer software firms located in Canada, Alias/Wavefront and Softimage, have been purchased by conglomerates based in the United States. Is there anything Canadian left in an animation field populated by Canadians?

And what do we mean by Canadian? Is it, ironically, something we heard in a Walt Disney movie? Something that Jiminy Cricket once told us is "the still, calm voice" that we call our conscience? There was a time when animation and Canadian had very specific meanings. Canada was a country that embraced a peculiarly depoliticized version of socialism, and animation fit right in. It was something, like documentary filmmaking, that Canucks did exceptionally well. For a long time, animation also meant Norman McLaren and the National Film Board and odd, little experimental films that, supposedly by accident, said things about the environment and education and the prospects for global peace. Sometimes McLaren and his spiritual children said nothing about those things—but they produced their poetic pieces with style and charm.

Lately, we are told through the media that there is no need to claim cultural turf for Canada. Perhaps, at one time, artists from around the world came here because this was a great country to live in and produce fine work. Perhaps some of those artists were animators. What will that buy us? A lot. Everything but sovereignty. In a global age, should we care? In my opinion, we should—and do—care about these issues. Which is why I'd like to answer the question: Are we having fun yet? We are, but we're feeling guilty about it. All won't be right with the world during animation's new golden age unless efforts are made to keep independent animators alive and functioning in Canada. With the decline of the NFB, we need our "still, small voices." Animation can provide some of them, if properly nurtured, even while that hot new techno-thriller is being shot in northern New Jersey.

This special issue of *Take One* focuses on animation in Canada. Thanks to all of the contributors for making this issue possible. I would also like to dedicate this issue to Tom Knott and Ellen Besen, two friends of animation who have inspired me to create this version of *Take One*. Tom and Ellen—thanks a lot! ■