



*Mona the Vampire*

## Cinar's Quality Animation

By Cheryl Binning

Classic tales that transcend today's fads, stories long familiar to generations of children and endearing characters transportable around the world—these are the signposts of Cinar Corp.'s slate of animated kids' series.

The Montreal-based production company has brought the well-worn pages of numerous children's books to animated life—*The Adventures of Paddington Bear*, *The Little Lulu Show* and *The Busy World of Richard Scarry* to name just a few. Cinar's longest-running animated series is the Emmy award-winning *Arthur*, based on a set of kids books by Marc Brown, which is now entering its fifth season. "The magic of *Arthur* is that he is real to little kids. They see themselves in everything he does," says Cassandra Sehafhausen, vice president of animation production and development at Cinar. "Arthur goes through all the problems kids go through. He gets embarrassed and afraid and finds himself in trouble. The show is not dumbed down nor is it so hip that kids can't relate."

With over 11 animated projects that span the preschool to teenage market currently in production, Cinar has definitely found a formula in capturing young audiences. The latest projects all contain similar main ingredients: lovable and

believable characters from time-tested literary properties and a splash of action/adventure added to spice up the mix. *Mona the Vampire* is a new series based on the books by U.K. author Sonia Holleyman which relay the tales of a precocious 10-year-old with a vampire as her alter-ego and an imagination twice her size. "Mona is full of wit and ingenuity," says Sehafhausen of the 26-part, half-hour series targeting six-to-11-year-olds. The project is a coproduction with the French company Alphanim and will debut this fall on YTV and overseas on France 3 and Canal J. As with all its literary-based properties, the animation style and design of the series (all 2-D) will enhance the uniqueness of the artwork and illustrations found in the original books. When dealing with well-loved characters, sticking with the tried and true is the safest bet. "The books are generally so successful that we want to stick to a familiar concept," explains Sehafhausen.

Cinar is delving deep into the literature of the ancient past for another new kids series, *Journey to the West: Legends of the Monkey Kings*. Based on classic Chinese stories written over 400 years ago and inspired by a pilgrimage to India taken by a Chinese Buddhist monk, *Legends of the Monkey Kings* is a partnership between Cinar and China Central Television, the national broadcaster in the People's Republic of China. As yet, the series has not been picked up for air in Canada but Sehafhausen says that although North American children have not been exposed to these Eastern tales, the stories themselves are universal and accessible. "Children have grown up with Arthurian legends and Greek mythology, so it will be interesting to see their reaction to the legends that come out of China." The 52-part, half-hour series follows Monkey and his friends Pigsy and Sandy on a quest. "It is action/adventure but with a twist. The characters are different, the milieu and landscapes are different. But the content—the fight between good and evil—runs through all classic mythology. China Central Television is developing an animation style that brings the ancient legends into a 1990s design frame while keeping the classical elements.

Cinar has been developing strong ties with the Chinese animation industry of late, having recently signed the first Canada/China official coproduction for animation involving Shanghai Animation Film Studio, a subsidiary of Shanghai Television. The two companies will produce *Rumble & Growl* based on a Chinese comic strip in which two young friends uncover unusual scientific wonders during their endless search for food. Cinar is also developing the well-known *Ripley's Believe It Or Not!* franchise into a combined 2-D and 3-D animation action/adventure series. Taking off from adventurer Robert Ripley's search across the globe for the bizarre and unexplained, the show's concept adds a nephew, Michael "Rip" Ripley, and his gang of friends. The 26-part, half-hour animated series will follow the youthful adventurers around the world as they uncover outrageous, unusual stories and odd artifacts. Cinar and Alphanim of France are partnering on the *Ripley's Believe it or Not!* project which will air on Family Channel in Canada and Fox Family in the United States. To complement the exotic aspects of the series, stylized 3-D animated backgrounds have been created, utilizing dark shadows, contrasts of black and red, and black and orange, to formulate interesting perspectives. Aimed at the eight-to-12-year-old set, the show points out the old adage that truth is often stranger than fiction. "The things they find and the myths encountered are all based on fact," says Sehafhausen. "So although the show is designed foremost to be fun, it also expands the potential for kids to want to explore and learn more about people and places, history and myths." ●