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frames per second magazine

DIY Animation

If you want your cartoons done right...

In Progress

Nina Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues*

Also:

Antimation toys: flipbooks and zoetropes

Two new Aardman DVDs

Stand Alone Complex 2nd Gig





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in progress

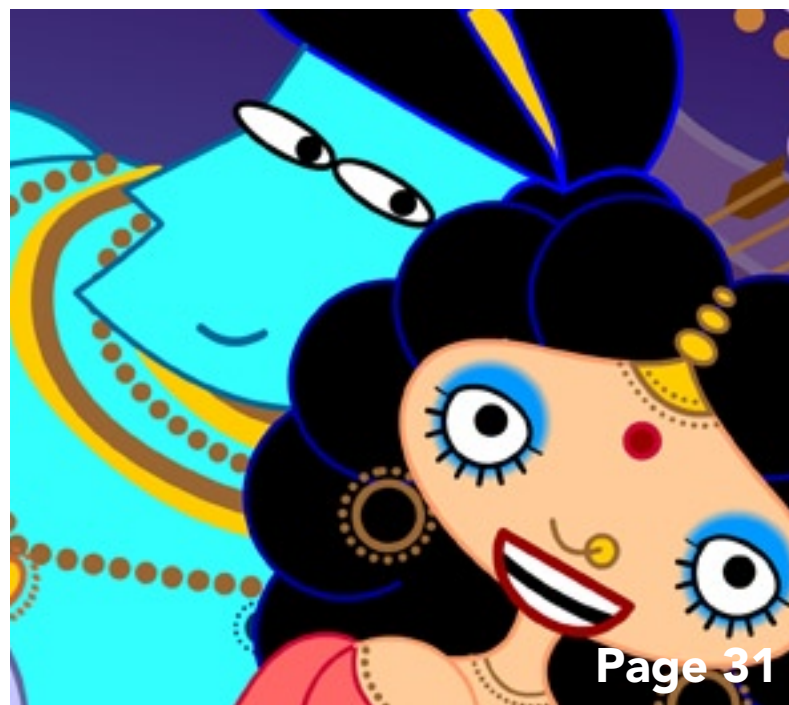
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Animation Punks

What Johnny Rotten and Walt Disney have in common

DIY—Do It Yourself—has been referred to as the punk ethic, but it's really the foundation of every creative endeavour. More often than not, DIY comes into play when someone feels that something needs to be expressed, so they either express it themselves, or create a space for others to do so.

That includes animation magazines, by the way. The mid-1980s magazines *Anime-Zine* and *Animag* were an attempt at broadening awareness of anime, as no other magazines were at the time. *fps* started when I couldn't find publications that looked at animation with the same pluralistic eye that I did. I wouldn't be surprised if *Animato*, *Funnyworld*, *Animator* and *Escape*, to name but a few of the noteworthy magazines that have since disappeared, started the same way.

You can find the same passionate motivations throughout animation's history. For over a century, pioneers have looked at new or evolving facets of animation and, deciding that something was missing, tried their hand at filling in the blanks. Winsor McCay, Lotte Reiniger, Osamu Tezuka, [Ralph Bakshi](#) and Hayao Miyazaki are just a few of animation's legendary DIY practitioners.

All that said, it's important not to become too romantic about DIY; it sometimes leads to unintended consequences. Just look at Disney.

Walt Disney famously said, "it all started with a mouse," but it could as easily be said that it started with a rabbit. Walt's studio had created Oswald the Lucky Rabbit for Universal Studios, but after a dispute with Universal's Charles Mintz, Walt found himself without a character and without a job. His solution: DIY. Mickey Mouse was created, Disney made sure to control the rights to his characters, and an empire was born.

Walt never abandoned the principles of DIY. It was a rare thing for his studio to imitate other studios' work, and he constantly pushed forward, looking for new styles, new stories, and new media. Even Disney World was partly a DIY reaction to the generally ratty state of most amusement parks.

The problem came when Walt died, sending everyone into years of second-guessing what he would have done in a given situation. The studio was built so much on Walt's DIY spirit that when he was gone, no one quite knew how to do it themselves. One could argue that the studio has never recovered; while it

enjoyed commercial success after the release of *The Little Mermaid*, Disney's feature animation never captured that same sense of constant exploration.

But that's just one possible manifestation of the DIY ethic, and one possible outcome. In this issue, we'll be looking at several different ways that others have struck out on their own—and we're hoping that maybe you'll be inspired to do the same.

This issue, we're pleased to bring back a feature from the days when *fps* was a print magazine. In Progress provided a sneak preview of films in production, which incidentally allowed me to indulge my love of pre-production artwork.

The reintroduction of In Progress dovetails nicely with this issue's theme; it feature's Nina Paley's first feature, *Sita Sings the Blues*, which she is creating on her own. As a longtime fan—I started reading her comics more than a decade ago, and have enjoyed her [later animated shorts](#)—it's been a pleasure to put this together. I hope you enjoy her work as much as I have. ■ *Emru Townsend*

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frames per second
the magazine of animation

EDITORIAL

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Thanks to Ray Harryhausen, stop-motion animation has an established link to the tales of ancient Greece. So it's entirely fitting that renowned digital-video artist and impresario Jason Wishnow turned to the sandy kingdom of Thebes for his first stop-motion outing, a retelling of the

Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex*.

True to his background, Wishnow elected to produce *Oedipus the Movie* by shooting it entirely with digital still cameras at a resolution high enough to accommodate 35mm film and high-definition video. True to his impish nature,

he also shot *Oedipus* with the entire cast of characters played by produce—

Oedipus, of course, is a potato.

In an e-mail interview, Wishnow discussed his production methods, after first answering one very important question.

A Veggie's Tale

Interview by Emru Townsend

Emru Townsend: Why produce?

Jason Wishnow: It seemed like an obvious gap in the three-thousand-year stage history of this Greek tragedy. Why shouldn't *Oedipus* be performed by fresh produce? That, and I think most people miss out on the humour inherent in the story.

Let's see, there's accidental patricide, accidental incest, and of course self-mutilation. What did you see that I don't?

Quantity.

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Who Needs Film?

Ruth Hayes

The main focus of animation is the apparatus that communicates change. It's not just the illusion of movement, because in many animation forms, the illusion is acknowledged. The obviousness of that acknowledgement varies from device to device. Of course, animation can be presented seamlessly, as in cinema, so that the illusion isn't as much in the foreground. But a wonderful tension arises from the simultaneous perception of movement or change and the knowledge of how the illusion that brings it to life is constructed. That tension is strongest in animation toys such as the zoetrope or flipbook. From an animator's point of view, different devices present different challenges to consider when making sequences. They impose different structural forms on the content.

Among the quickest and easiest ways to make your own animation is through flipbooks or optical toys like zoetropes, where creating new work requires little more than pencil and paper. But even such simple devices have their own quirks and demands, in terms of construction or production—and exploring these can lead to some interesting results.

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Improving Your Animation in Five Easy Lessons

William Joel

You've just finished your animation. All the rendering, editing and special effects have been taken care of. The soundtrack has been laid down and you're ready to sit back and watch your masterpiece. Only, when you watch it reminds you of the story where the surgeon walks out of the operating room, turns to a nurse and says, "Have you seen my watch?"

Something is amiss. Something in your animation just doesn't feel right. Your watch is missing, and you don't know where to start looking for it.

What follows are five common mistakes that animators often make. I'm not implying that these animators are lacking in their craft. Rather, because of issues of time or other resources, they have temporarily overlooked one or more tenets of good animation.

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One of the perils of learning animation on your own is that you end up discovering some of the most important lessons the hard way. Here are a few small pointers that can make a big difference in your final work.

Sifting Through Layers of Illusion

Armen Boudjikian

Compared to “3D animation,” the term “2D animation” is abstract. When we speak of the former, we are referring to one of these three clearly different ways of frame-by-frame filmmaking: traditional model or puppet animation (often referred to as stop-motion), pixillation (animation of objects and people) and, more commonly, CGI (computer generated imagery). On the other hand, talking about 2D animation—even on a technical level—can be tricky.

Whether creator or viewer, it's hard to be unaffected by the current lines being drawn

between 2D and 3D animation. But “2D

animation” is a retroactive moniker—no one

called it that until computer animation came into

vogue. So what, really, is 2D animation? And how

does this debate affect the many other kinds of

animation that exist?



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Last Exile Takes Flight

Cynthia Ward

Last Exile

Directed by Kouichi Chigira
Studio Gonzo/Geneon Entertainment, 2003
26 episodes

Recently, a fellow science fiction writer asked if I was going to the movie *Serenity*, sequel to the TV series *Firefly*, when it opened in theatres. I'd only seen the pilot, I answered, "I never really got into the show." How could I not like *Firefly*, asked the popular and multi-award-winning SF author, when it was the best SF show on TV? I answered her with a truth that I hadn't even realized until I spoke it: "I get my fix of good media SF from anime."

Plenty of cartoons feature spaceships, aliens and all kinds of techno-gadgetry and call themselves science fiction. But *Last Exile* earns its place in the pantheon by trying—and succeeding—to engage our sense of wonder.

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Animal House

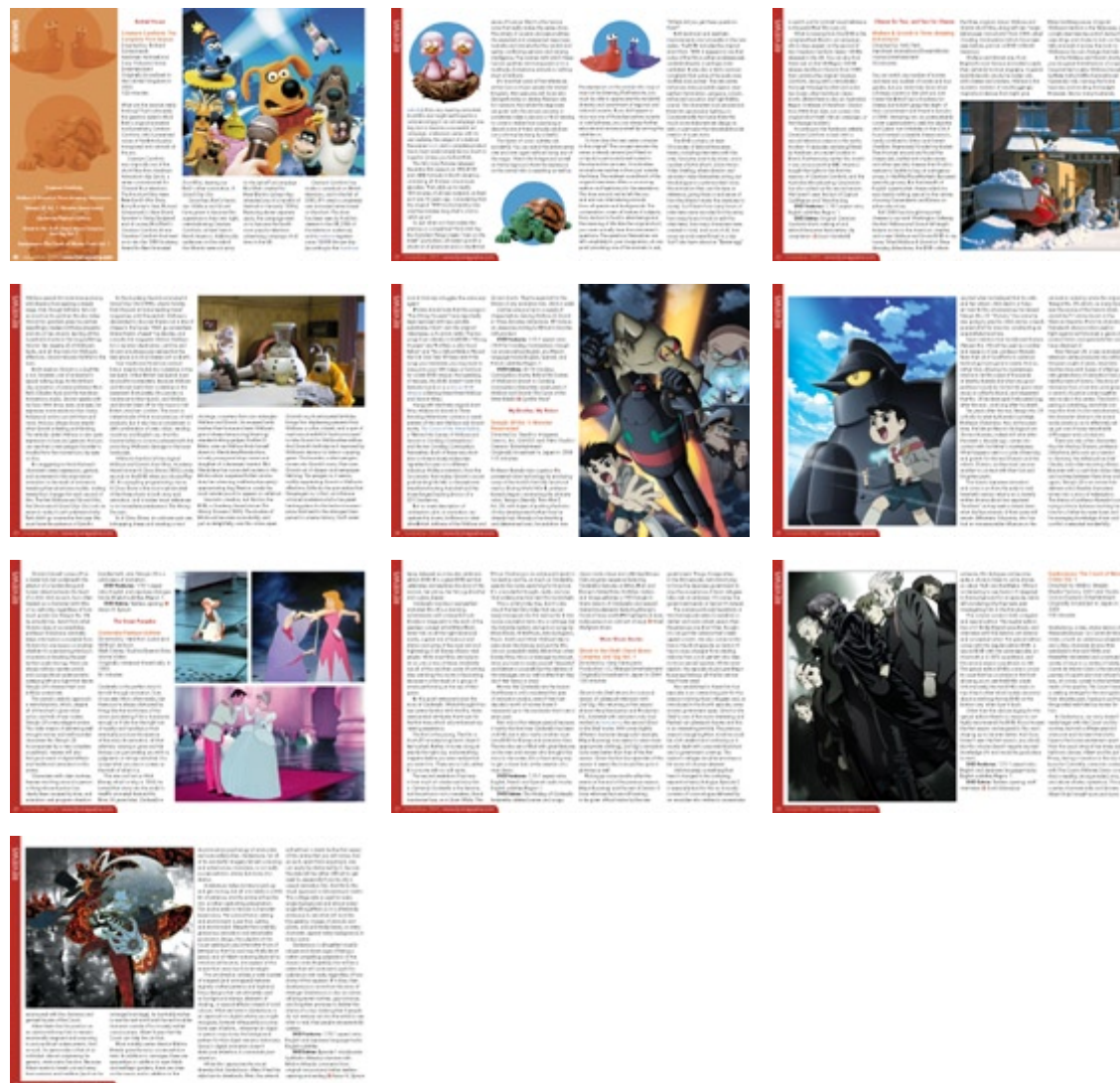
Creature Comforts: The Complete First Season

Directed by Richard Goleszowski
 Aardman Animations/
 Sony Pictures Home
 Entertainment
 Originally broadcast in
 the United Kingdom in
 2003
 133 minutes

What *are* the animals really thinking? That's ultimately the question asked in Nick Park's original animated mockumentary, *Creature Comforts*, which presented voices of the British public transposed onto animals at the zoo.

Creature Comforts was originally one of five short films from Aardman Animation's Lip Synch, a series commissioned for Channel Four television. The five short films were Peter Lord's *War Story*, Barry Purves's *Next*, Richard Goleszowski's *Ident*, David Sproxton's *Going Equipped*, and of course, Nick Park's *Creature Comforts*.

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Creature Comforts

Wallace & Gromit in Three Amazing Adventures

Tetsujin 28 Vol. 1: Monster Resurrected

Cinderella Platinum Edition

**Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex:
 2nd Gig Vol. 1**

Gankutsuou: The Count of Monte Cristo Vol. 1

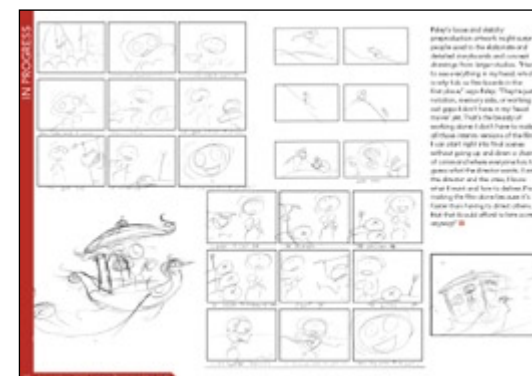
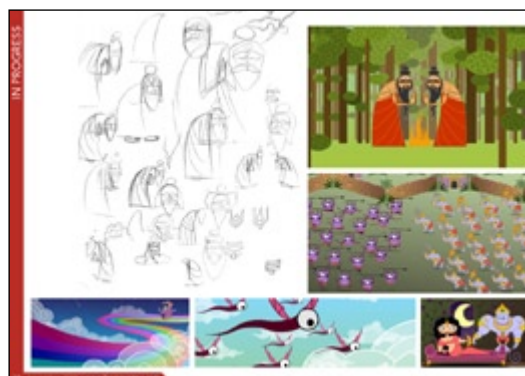
Sita Sings the Blues

Words by Emru Townsend

Nina Paley's latest project is *Sita Sings the Blues*, a feature-length, Flash-animated film that interprets the epic Indian tale *The Ramayana* from the perspective of Rama's wife Sita, set to the music of Annette Hanshaw. Begun in December 2004, Paley expects to complete the movie by 2008.



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Armen Boudjikianian is a digital and traditional animator residing in Montreal. He has a BFA in Film Animation from Concordia University. He lives his life frame-by-frame, currently in “pose-to-pose” mode. He hopes that one day, it will be “straight ahead.”

Aaron H. Bynum is a freelance writer and full-time college student in English Studies. He spends most of his time writing all sorts of literature, keeping a very close eye on both Eastern and Western animation industries, reading philosophy, sleeping in, and writing some more.

Noell Wolfgram Evans is a freelance writer living in Columbus, Ohio. Winner of the 2002 Thurber Treat Award, he enjoys a number of things, mainly laughing with his family.

Ruth Hayes produces experimental works in film, video and digital media as well as flipbooks and other pre-cinema formats. She earned her MFA in Experimental Animation at California Institute of the Arts, and currently is a member of the faculty at The Evergreen State College. For more information on her work or to order flipbooks and/or zoetropes, please visit www.randommotion.com.

Scott Schmeisser is a computer programmer in the videogame industry. In his spare time he plays guitar in a punk band and, unsurprisingly, also plays video games. He has a beautiful wife who likes anime and comic books almost as much as he does. Yeah, his life is pretty much perfect.

Emru Townsend is animation’s Renaissance man. He sees the connections between Japanese and American animation, stop-motion and CGI, the art and the industry, the fiercely independent and the relentlessly commercial. He has been preaching his Unified Animation Theory worldview since 1989, and is the founding editor of *fps*.

Jason Vanderhill is a longtime fan of stop-motion animation, and *Colargol/Jeremy the Bear* was his very first favourite television program.

Science fiction author **Cynthia Ward** lives in Seattle. Her most recent story, *When the Summons Came from Camelot*, appears in the anthology *The Ultimate Dragon*. With the author Nisi Shawl, she has co-authored the writing manual *Writing the Other: A Practical Guide*, the companion book to [Writing the Other](#) fiction workshop. Cynthia is at work on her first novel, tentatively titled *The Killing Moon*.

Where to Get It

How to find the titles mentioned in this issue

Angela Anaconda	Amazon.com
Animated Motion	NFB Store
The Animatrix	Amazon.com
Cinderella Platinum Edition	Amazon.com
Creature Comforts (North American releases)	Amazon.com
Creature Comforts (UK releases)	Amazon.co.uk
Fetch*	Amazon.com
Gankutsuou: The Count of Monte Cristo	Amazon.com
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex: 2nd Gig	Amazon.com
Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*	Amazon.com
The Illusion of Life	Amazon.com
The Incredible Adventures of Wallace & Gromit	Amazon.com
Last Exile	Amazon.com
Life of Brian	Amazon.com
The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa*	NFB Store
The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa* (UK release)	Amazon.co.uk
Mindscape*	Amazon.com
Oedipus the Movie	Oedipusthemovie.com
The Stork*	Amazon.com
Street Musique*	Amazon.com
Tetsujin 28	Amazon.com
Wallace & Gromit in Three Amazing Adventures	Amazon.com

*Part of a compilation DVD or video.