SU+MO!

LOST IN ANIMATION

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Specs: 12.5 minutes
Digital Animation
Available in Beta SP, Mini-DV, or DVD-R
Stereo Sound

ANIMATUS STUDIO

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

One Line Synopsis

The lap-dancing wrestler animators manage to shoot their animated film and premiere it at the Tokyo Jokio film festival.

Standard Synopsis

Su and Mo, the world's only lap-dancing wrestler animators, have finally earned enough tip money to complete their independent film. After a turbulent production period, they journey to their native Japan for a premiere screening at the Tokyo Jokio film festival. Hilarity ensues!

Long Synopsis

Dancing at Club Hippendale's has finally paid off for independent filmmakers Su and Mo. Their latest tips give them enough cash to fund their animated film.

Back at the "Su-Su-Studio," the boys attempt to draw and shoot their artwork. They can't help but run into problems, however. Su is too fat to reach the drawing table easily, so he switches to using the computer. Soon, he discovers his fingers are too fat to work the keyboard. Su finally appears to have some success using the mouse, until it's revealed that he's been spending his time ordering lunch online.

Meanwhile, Mo goes through a stack of cels, cleaning the dust off each one (with his tongue). Then, while making a minor adjustment to the Oxberry camera, he manages to get his head caught under the lens. Gears turn, the camera mashes into his face – Mo flounders like a beached whale. But no worries! Su comes to the rescue, prying his brother loose using a handy T-square.

Later on, Mo is in the darkroom with the exposed film. He reads the instructions carefully: "Warning! Change film in total darkness." That makes sense to Mo, so he closes his eyes. (It sure is dark with his eyes shut tight!) He takes the film from the magazine and it promptly begins to sizzle and smoke. Realizing his mistake, Mo quickly wraps up the film and hands it out the door to Su. Maybe it won't make any difference.

Time goes by. After a long arduous production, Su and Mo receive word that the Tokyo Jokio film festival has accepted their completed film for screening!

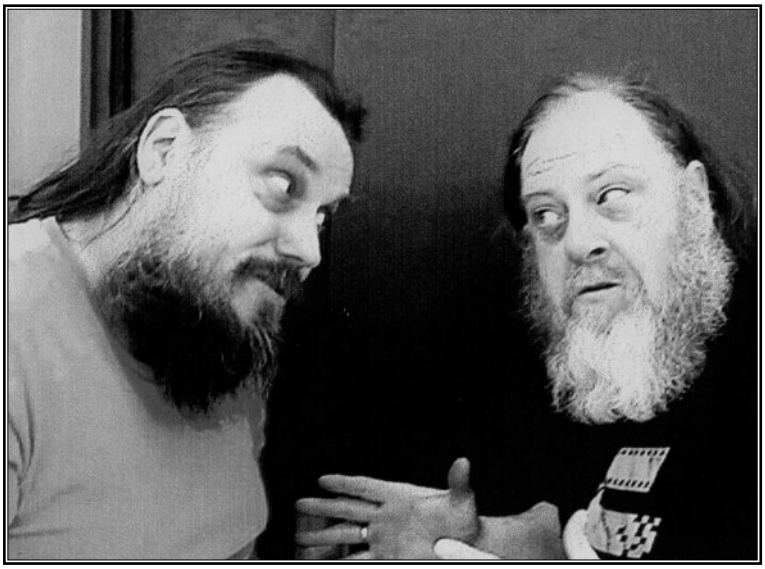
Air travel with the big boys is a nauseating experience. Their extreme weight tips the plane out of balance. Su and Mo scarf down huge portions of airline food, which is a sickening sight for other passengers. When Su makes a mad dash to the bathroom, the plane dips and sways, resulting in a less than stellar landing at the Tokyo airport.

Su and Mo are back in their element: Japan, home of their ancestors. But it isn't long before things start to go wrong... The all-access festival passes are sold out! The screening of their film is botched! How will Su and Mo overcome these obstacles? Will they emerge victorious and become darlings of the festival circuit? You'll have to watch to find out!

BEHIND THE FLESH

The (Wide) Birth of Su and Mo

The story of the world's only wrestler-stripper-animators began with a trip to a film festival. "Several things went wrong on that trip. We had trouble at customs. One of our animators had a film in the festival -- his picture in the program was printed upside down. We were subjected to an actual autopsy film at one of the screenings," relates Fred Armstrong, co-director of "Lost in Animation" and owner of Animatus Studio. It wasn't a bad festival experience, but the mishaps were odd enough to inspire Fred and the other creators, Dave Puls and Bob Lyons. On the journey home, they conjured up a pair of sumo wrestlers who stumble through production on an animated film and have unusual problems at a festival screening.



Actors Dave Puls and Fred Armstrong get into character.

Why sumo wrestlers? Well, Dave and Fred are rather large in stature, so sexy sumo caricatures seemed the way to go. "We weren't out to make fun of the Japanese -- If anything, we're an equal opportunity offender," says Mike Boas, animator and co-director. "I look at it like the classic Pepé Le Pew cartoons. They're funny not because they mock the French, but because they use clichés and the faux-French language in such an obvious way. We wanted to try for that tone, especially when the boys go to the Tokio Jokio film festival."

The resulting cartoon is part satire and part celebration of the whole film festival experience. In thinking back on festival mishaps, the Animatus staff considered many moments that could inspire Su an Mo's adventures. Fred and Dave once attended a festival without buying tickets in advance... and had to resort to forging their own passes. They've had to deal with the frustration of registering, and then not being on the "list." Fred relates his worst experience: "One sham fest took a substantial entry fee and then didn't show our shorts like they were supposed to. Well, they showed them without sound while most of the audience was still waiting outside to get in, but that doesn't count for much."

Mike sees these flubs as part of life. "You can't expect even the best festivals to run without a hitch, but you're tempting fate if you try to have an outdoor screening during the rainy season." He refers to a recent screening that came to a catastrophic end when a tent burdened with rainwater collapsed, disrupting the projection system. "The thunderstorm was bad enough, but when that waterfall happened onstage, it became one for the record books."

Audience reactions also had an influence on Su and Mo's story. Fred explains: "We've seen our share of existential films that intellectual crowds seem to love. Now some are great, but sometimes there's a sense of the emperor having no clothes. People seem to like them because they're supposed to. So what if our heroes created a film that is perceived as great because of a series of errors in production and screening?"

"Su and Mo" was initially going to be cut-out animation, shot on film. At the time of its inception, the

artists at Animatus were learning Macromedia Flash. Two prequel webisodes were produced: "A Night at Club Hippendale's" and "O Brother, Where Fart Thou?" set up the characters as popular exotic dancers, earning tip money to fund their films. The stop motion idea carried over into the Flash animation. "Our initial understanding of Flash suggested that we should construct characters in like paper dolls. So our character design mimics cut-out paper: seams between joints were clearly visible, etc. We used replacement heads, hands and other body parts rather than doing traditional sequential drawings," Mike explains.

By the time the studio was ready to proceed with "Lost in Animation," Fred had decided to do the piece digitally: "We had a great response to the first two episodes, and we had a staff that was familiar with Flash and After Effects. It made sense to keep the look consistent and utilize specific talents of our animators."

Mike agrees. "We knew this would be going to video and entry into festivals. Some of our artists were proficient in Flash, some in After Effects, so we combined forces to create something new. The final piece has camera moves, transitions, and raster images that wouldn't be possible to include in a standard Flash cartoon."

It couldn't look too perfect, however. Su and Mo had been established as crude characters who move in a crude, staccato fashion. To keep their movements "limited," most character animation was accomplished at 10 frames per second and then multiplied out to video's standard 30 fps. Stiff animation was a particular challenge in After Effects, which is always trying to smooth out motion.

The final result is quite satisfying. "Our version of 'limited animation' is a step above the standard definition," says Fred. "We may be working low budget, but we take great care in every frame."

The completion of "Lost in Animation" comes at a time when Animatus is actively seeking distribution for its library of cartoons. With Su and Mo and other shorts, Animatus has over 85 minutes worth of material, plus extras. An "Animatus Studio Collection" DVD release is expected in the next year.

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Fred Armstrong (co-director, co-writer, voice of Mo) has produced a multitude of animated commercials, industrials, and over a dozen animated cartoons. One of his first jobs in animation came as the result of an almost fatal display of inebriated fire breathing. He worked for many years as an animation cameraman in New York City before founding Animatus Studio, in Rochester. He is also founder of The Animation Workshop, which teaches the fundamentals of animation to young people.

Michael Boas (co-director, co-writer, assorted voices) earned himself an art degree from SUNY Geneseo and then went on to work in some strange places, including a toy truck factory, a garbage dump, and a radio station. He came to Animatus Studio eager to learn the craft of animation and has since become head animator and webmaster. He now knows just enough to be dangerous. Michael directed "Jason: The Rebirth," the second place winner at the 2003 ManiaFest "Friday the 13th" film contest in Santa Monica, California. He has also worked as animator on all of Animatus Studio's "Derf the Viking" shorts.

Dave Puls (co-creator, voice of Su) has been the Creative Director at Animatus Studio since 1992. He wrote and directed the three "Derf the Viking" cartoons for Animatus and has produced eight independent shorts for his series of "Fresh Toones." Voicing Su provides him with a much needed emotional release.

CREDITS

PRODUCED BY
Fredrick Armstrong

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
Fredrick Armstrong and Michael Boas

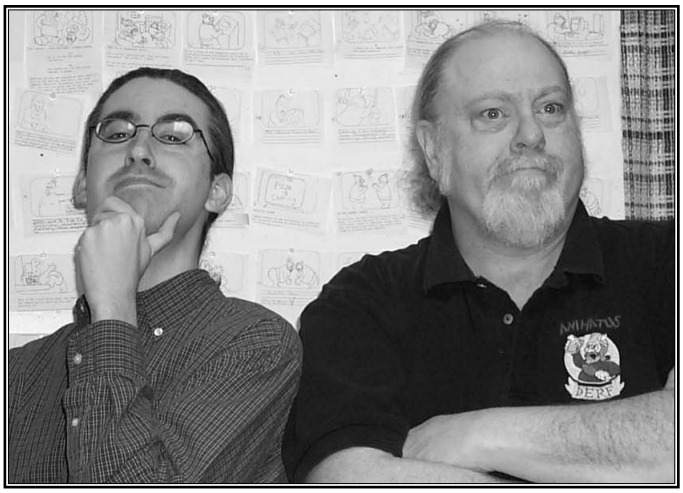
HEAD ANIMATOR
Michael Boas

ANIMATORS
Neil Brideau
Aharon Charnov
Ryan DeClerck
Audrey Fuerle
Nathaniel Hubbell
Dale Pollock
Dave Puls
Jennifer Stratton

SOUND FX AND ORIGINAL MUSIC
William Shackelton

SOUND FX LIBRARIES
Warner Bros.
Hanna-Barberra
Rocky and Bullwinkle
Animatus Studio

MUSIC LIBRARIES
Turner
Flying Hands

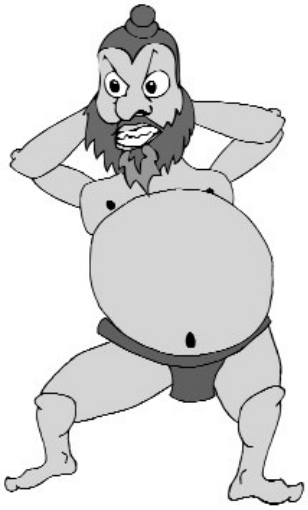


Directors Mike Boas and Fred Armstrong

VOICES
SU.....Dave Puls
MO.....Fred Armstrong
Punky Boy.....Michael Boas
Emcee (Kris Bobin-san).....James P. Harte
Lonely Estonians.....Dessislav Ivanov

ADDITIONAL VOICES
THE VOICE ACTOR WORKSHOP OF WESTERN NY
Allen Baumgardner
Kate Brennan
Deb Cole
Ginger Geoffery
Jack LoCastro
Judy McMillan
Len Toben
Sylvia Troust

COMPUTER GURU
Allie C. Peed III

SPECIAL THANKS
Robert Lyons
Paul Tracy

Produced at Animatus Studio
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