

STAYING ON TOP OF THINGS

Jørgen Lerdam and Anders Sørensen of A. Film are co-directing a new animated feature based on Sven Nordquist's popular picture books about old man Pettson and his cat Findus. As an aid, they developed *The Nordquist Design Bible*.

■ BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

Looking for a director for a new animated feature about Pettson & Findus, the Swedish production company Happy Life turned to A. Film. Happy Life had already produced two films based on the Swedish children's book author Sven Nordquist's clever and very popular picture books about the eccentric bachelor farmer Festus and his inventive cat Mercury. The last

director was a Belgian and the producers wanted a director who was more Scandinavian." A. Film's Jørgen Lerdam says. He and Anders Sørensen eventually took on the assignment.

The film is based on *The Tomte Machine*, Nordquist's novel about Pettson & Findus compiled from an advent calendar series that ran on Swedish television. "Accordingly, the



Pettson & Findus

book is a bit segmented. It almost had to be," Lerdam says. "The trick for us was to put together a film with a beginning, middle and end. I think Torbjörn Jansson, the screenwriter, did a great job of pulling that off."

Nordquist originally did not want to be part of a third film. But Happy Life talked him into it and he ended up being much more involved than he had been in either of the first two films. "We made what we call *The Nordquist Design Bible* of all the illustrations from his books that we would be using for locations in the film," Lerdam says. "Then, we only had to tell the screenwriter to turn to page four in the 'Bible' and he could see that what he wanted to take place, couldn't. Sure, Sven's drawings have various minor inconsistencies, but he takes pride in his objects being functional. He used to work as an architect and he's actually built many of the strange machines he's drawn - and they work."

"Also, we could show the 'Bible' to the location designer and the background painters and say: 'Here's the drawing style we want you to stick to - only make it a bit more cinematic now and then.' Sven Nordquist conceives his

compositions in book form, everything is simultaneous, while we see them like a movie, extending in time." Moreover, when the film called for objects and places that Nordquist hadn't drawn before, Lerdam contacted him with his ideas.

"We always had Nordquist to refer to, for instance when we couldn't figure out how *The Tomte Machine* should look. He had some sketches for it lying around and he also made a drawing of his neighbour's farm, which we never see in the picture books."

A WEEK BEHIND SCHEDULE

Happy Life and TV-Loonland of Germany are executive producers of *The Tomte Machine* with A. Film co-producing. The Danish Film Institute is also subsidising the film. The whole production, from character designs to storyboards, backgrounds and animation, was handled in Hungary, Britain and Denmark.

The first two films about Pettson & Findus were both put together from episodes of a TV series. This time, it's the other way around. The feature A. Film is now making will later be cut into six episodes for a TV series. Moreover, they

are making seven episodes of another TV series. The film and the TV series have a total budget of roughly 6.7 million euros, half of it for the film. Which isn't much for an animated feature.

"Initially, we said, There's no way we can do this," says Lerdam, who needs to have the finished film ready in a few months. "Then we devised a plan which would pan out if no one got sick and nothing went wrong. But of course, people do get sick and things do go wrong, so we're currently about a week behind schedule."

Fortunately, A. Film has years of experience in animation production to fall back on. "We've learned how to analyze a production down to the smallest detail. In an industrial sense, we know what to do. The different phases of an animation production can either be handled well or poorly. What's important is always getting the best people for the job. If you use people who are not so good or new in the business, you run over schedule and things don't turn out quite the way you wanted them to. The director always has to stay on top of things."

The Tomte Machine will receive its world premiere late November, Denmark.



Pettson & Findus