

SIP looks to reel in some co-pro partners on extreme fishing toon *Astaquana*



What's developing in kids production

by jocelyn christie

As Europe's leading animation players get ready to give buyers a first look at what's cooking in their pipelines at Cartoon Forum month, *KidScreen* offers up this sneak-peek at some of the more promising projects poised to make a pitch for regional funding.

SIP hopes to land a big one with extreme-fishing pitch *Astaquana*

As more and more parents embrace outdoor activities as part of a cultural shift towards leading a healthier and greener lifestyle, French studio SIP Animation is looking to reinvent the sport of no-kill fishing for modern kids. Its latest project is a high-octane series for seven- to 12-year-olds that centers around a legendary extreme fishing tournament. Every five years, the world's hottest young "waders" gather on a mystical uncharted island called *Astaquana* to show off their skills in hopes of impressing a highly revered fraternity of veteran fisherman.

So in tune with nature that they can commune with animals and control the weather, these Master Waders send the youngsters out after Legend Fish, a race of evolved and magical sea creatures that ratchet up the thrill of the chase and teach the waders to have respect for the awesome force of nature.

Although action-adventure is the main thrust of the series, there's a lot of comedy in its scripts too, much of which sparks from community life on the island. Like surfers or skateboarders, the waders have strong personalities that often clash, which is compounded by their rampant puberty.

SIP drew a lot of its inspiration for *Astaquana* from Maori culture, which features many strong oceanic legends and places

high value on living in balance with the environment. The 26 x 22-minute toon is designed to be a fluid high-def hybrid, so the fish and some backgrounds will be rendered in CGI, while the human cast is done in 2-D animation. *A.T.O.M.* director Olivier Jongerlynck is attached, and the goal is to shore up co-production financing at Forum, get production (budgeted at US\$10.7 million) off the ground by June 2008, and deliver at the end of 2009.

Neptuno apes daycare life with design-led *Megaminimals*

If relatability is the key to connecting with TV-watching toddlers, then this stylish Spanish series should be a hit with preschool buyers in Girona. *Megaminimals* is based on a colorful collection of cubic animal characters that Spanish artist Teo Tarras created to fuel a specialty merchandise line. The property took off in its home market and has since spawned a wide range of gift and stationery products.

To expand the concept into a 104 x seven-minute series, Neptuno has been busy collecting input from nursery and kindergarten teachers to feed into a daycare backdrop and simple stories that mirror the experiences young preschoolers have when they leave home for the day. Each episode will focus

on a common daycare activity—such as mixing primary colors to make new ones, or caring for a potted flower—that takes an unexpected turn when the little animals get involved. In the flower story, they suggest lots of ways to look after the plant that Miss Meadow has brought in, but everything they do makes it wilt even more. Eric the Elephant steps in and tries to “iron it out” by sitting on it, turning the bloom into a lovely bookmark instead.

Neptuno has almost locked in a Spanish broadcaster for *Megaminimals*, and will concentrate on securing additional presales for the US\$5.8-million series at Cartoon Forum and MIPCOM. The production schedule is still being hammered out, and could be tightened for a 2008 delivery if broadcast interest is strong enough.



Neptuno's *Megaminimals* keeps it real with input from daycare and kindergarten experts

Magma doubles up on screen exposure for Ark-based tale

Sticking with the tandem production model it pilot-tested with *The Ugly Duckling and Me*, which debuted as a feature film earlier this year and was developed simultaneously as a 23 x half-hour TV series, Ireland's Magma Films is working on another TV-plus-film project that follows up on the biblical tale of Noah's Ark. Targeting kids eight to 12, *Oops—Noah is Gone!* is about a bunch of creatures who missed the boat and find themselves stranded on the world's last island (which is actually the top of a mountain) after the flood.

The 26 x half-hour series will be structured like a sitcom, focusing on the trials and tribulations of carving out a new multi-species community. The plan is for the TV show to debut in fall 2009 and seed the market for the holiday '09 movie, which sports a more

Magma Films plans to keep costs down on *Oops—Noah is Gone!* by sharing assets with a feature film also in the works



epic storyline in which the animals must overcome their fear of water and swim away from the island in order to survive.

Scripts for both projects are being written by *Ugly Duckling* scribe Mark Hodgkinson and Marteinn Thorisson, and the team at Magma's Pictoria studio in Hamburg, Germany is hard at work on character design and a trailer. There's a ton of scope because the characters are animals we've never seen before, and Magma is getting a lot of ideas from BBC doc *Deep Blue*, which is about the mysterious creatures living in the deepest depths of the ocean. All the animation will be done in CGI, and the goal is to do the movie entirely in Europe, and then outsource some of the toon work on the series to Asia.

Magma is looking for distributors in France, Germany and Scandinavia, as well as broadcasters interested in buying the two projects as a package. The company is also on the lookout for a European film distributor who can coordinate one release date across the region's major countries. The production budget for the project is trim because assets and resources will be shared between the two parts, and it breaks down into US\$9.6 million for the movie and US\$11 million for the series.

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Psi-Five pushes the style envelope at Calon

Gothic chic and a rare composited photo technique work together to lend Calon's Forum entry *Psi-Five* a distinctive visual edge, and Welsh pubcaster S4C liked the spooky series concept enough to commission a pilot episode for its Halloween schedule. The premise of this original pitch rests on four teens with a sixth sense who travel the cosmos in their house-cum-spaceship, the SS Karloff (reminiscent of Norman Bates' house in *Psycho*), searching for ghosts trapped on the astral plane.

In the pilot episode, this quest leads the gang to a bird sanctuary planet called Avian X, where an overzealous conservationist has stuffed all the birds in order to preserve them forever. The poor critters' spirits are planet-bound because their little feet are nailed to tree branches.

Needless to say, given its slightly macabre trappings, *Psi-Five* is aiming for an older fanbase, zeroing in on 10-year-olds as its prime target. Calon is looking to come away from Forum with leads on presales and a co-producer from a country with the kind of architectural features that suit the show's Victorian Gothic sensibility. It's been a bit tricky to nail down a budget for the 52 x 11-minute project because it's a new animation style for the Cardiff-based studio, and it takes a while to build up a big enough library of photographic assets to create all the backgrounds. But MD Robin Lyons puts the per-minute pricetag at somewhere close to US\$11,000.



Welsh pubcaster S4C has greenlit a pilot ep of *Psi-Five* for Halloween

Illuminated sticks to cel-action to keep *Buddy and Elvis* production at home

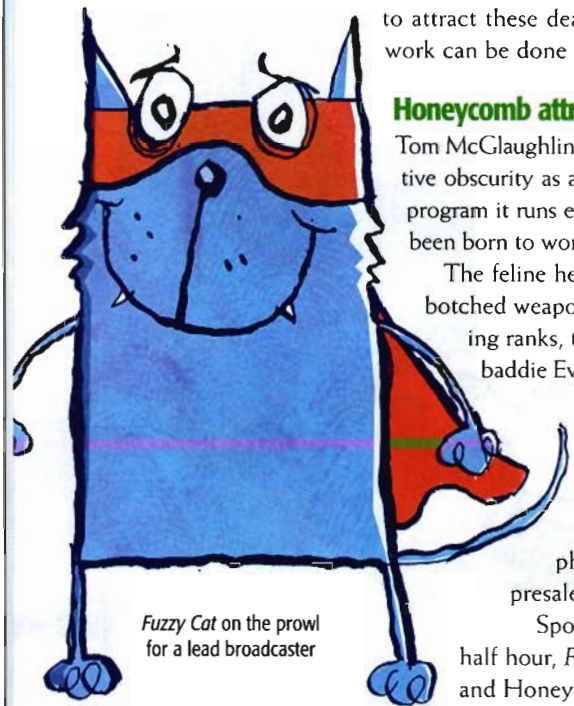


Illuminated goes for preschool giggles with *Buddy and Elvis*

As its 2004 Forum pitch *Little Princess* picks up steam on international airwaves and rolls out product on retail shelves, The Illuminated Film Company is hoping for a repeat performance with *Buddy and Elvis*. This 30 x 10-minute comedy toon for four- to six-year-olds is based on a book series from author/illustrator duo Andrew Murray and Nicola Slater (who also worked with Meg Cabot on *The Princess Diaries*) that has spawned three titles to date.

Staying true to the franchise's original aesthetic and overarching story, Illuminated's series treatment stars a cat and dog owned by the same eight-year-old girl; they disagree constantly, but have got each other's backs when push comes to shove. In one episode, for example, Lucy decides to enter Buddy in a dog show, which he is winning hands-down until a jealous Elvis replaces Buddy's dog treats with his own kipper yummys. Buddy is so revolted by the fishy flavor that he can't go on, so Elvis competes in a dog costume and runs away with the top prize. But as he's savoring the victory in front of adoring fans and cameras, Elvis' disguise suffers a wardrobe malfunction, and he soon finds himself in the middle of a gang of angry canine competitors. As irritated as he is with Elvis for sabotaging his performance, Buddy steps in and saves him from the mob.

Presales in territories such as Western Europe, Australasia and North America are what it will take to send *Buddy and Elvis* into production, and Illuminated is working on a full pilot to show at Cartoon Forum in order



Fuzzy Cat on the prowl for a lead broadcaster


to attract these deals. The series is budgeted at US\$3.4 million and will be rendered in cel-action so all the work can be done in-house at the London, England-based shop.

Honeycomb attracts *Fuzzy Cat* creator with toon bursary

Tom McGlaughlin, the creator behind Honeycomb Animation's latest series concept, spent 10 years toiling in relative obscurity as a newspaper cartoonist before the Devon-based studio discovered him through a local bursary program it runs each year. But judging from his design work on *The 99 Lives of Fuzzy Cat*, McGlaughlin may have been born to work in animation.

The feline hero of this 99 x 11-minute series for the six to 10 set came into his superpowers by way of a botched weapons experiment involving a laser-beam and his rear end. Now that he's joined the crime-fighting ranks, though, he's eager to keep the good folk of Capital City safe from the nefarious plots of chief baddie Evil Dr. Woof—as long as it doesn't cut into his side gigs as a singer/songwriter and connoisseur of fine sausage and mash.

A completed pilot script sets up the backstory, intros the cast and sees Fuzzy rescue his Q-like inventor colleague Professor Strange from a kidnapping attempt, and additional scripts and story outlines are in development. Honeycomb is looking for a lead broadcaster to move the Flash-animated project into the next phase, with the plan being to round out its financing with presales or co-production once that cog is in place.

Sporting a typical animation budget of around US\$300,000 per half hour, *Fuzzy Cat* is projected to head into production next spring, and Honeycomb is aiming for a fall 2009 delivery. 

LINKS

Calon	www.calon.tv
Honeycomb Animation	www.honeycombanimation.com
The Illuminated Film Company	www.illuminatedfilms.com
Magma Films	www.magmaworld.com
Neptuno Films	www.neptunofilm.com
SIP Animation	www.sipanimation.com