

Monkey Business

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Animated musings from
Emmy-winning screenwriter...

...Jeffrey Scott



Lessons From the Trenches of HOLLYWOOD "THE PIXAR STORY STORY"

How did they do it? How do they continue to do it? How is it possible that Pixar makes one blockbuster after another? *Toy Story*: worldwide gross \$361,996,233. *A Bug's Life*: \$363,398,565. *Toy Story 2*: \$485,752,179. *Monsters, Inc.*: \$528,970,172. *Finding Nemo*: \$866,592,978. *The Incredibles*: \$635,564,642. *Cars*: \$461,982,881. *Ratatouille*: \$624,445,654. *Wall-E*: \$532,936,655.

Nine. Count 'em! Nine blockbusters in a row!!

Pixar is the Tiger Woods of animated features.

So how did they do it? Was it their fantastic CG animation? No. Their Academy Award-winning directors? No. Their hundred million dollar budgets? No. Their Disney distribution? No.

They did it with one simple thing: great stories!

At Pixar, story is king. Nothing goes into full production until the story is as close to perfect as possible. Even if it takes years! That's discipline. But more importantly, that's what it really takes to make a blockbuster.

Are great stories easy to write? Definitely no! But you don't have to have hundreds of millions of dollars and the best directors on the planet to make hit films. What you must have is a professional writer and a creative team that is willing to put the story above all, and nurture it until it's ready, then keep nurturing it all along the production pipeline until the film is completed. If you do this then you can make a blockbuster as well. Maybe even nine in a row.

This month's excerpt from Jeffrey's highly acclaimed book

HOW TO WRITE FOR ANIMATION

Movies and TV are visual media. In most instances, their pictures are more important than their words. But nowhere are pictures more important than in animation. This is especially true for children, many of whom watch cartoons long before they even know what the words mean. Many adults who watch animation—myself included—are enamored by the beauty of moving animation art. The pictures alone can evoke great interest and emotion. I am not for a moment discounting the value of dialogue in telling an animated story, but the scales definitely tip in favor of the visual.

This is why the animation writer must wear the director's hat to some degree. Specifically, you must be able to visualize what you're writing. You have to see it in your mind—but you have to do more than just see it. To be a good writer you have to choose the words that best communicate the images you see so that the reader—especially the artists and animators—will see exactly what you see. The better you are at visualizing, and the better you are at putting your mental images into words, the better animation writer you will be. If you *can't* see the animation in your mind before you write it, chances are no one will see it when reading your script. So think visually and do your best to paint with words the pictures that you see.

You'll find the rest of this article in Chapter 8 of
How to Write Animation

Jeffrey's Latest Monkey Business

Monkeys have been in the news lately. Unfortunately, it hasn't been good news, what with tearing people's faces off and all. So I'm happy to report that my ghostwriter, Hunter N. Pecker (pictured above), has committed no felonies in the past few months. All he's guilty of is creative misdemeanors, such as writing a bible for a hot new animated series for both television and web release. I asked Hunter what it was about but he explained that his Non-Disclosure Agreement prevents him from revealing details even to me. Did I mention his attorneys are King & Kong?

On a brighter note, Hunter is working on a feature screenplay for a new animation studio. I asked him what the title was, but again he pleaded NDA. So I asked him the name of the studio. NDA. Could he tell me what it was about? NDA! But I showed Hunter. When he asked me where his paycheck was I told him I had an NDA with my bank. P.S. Does anyone know a good plastic surgeon?

