

new disney animation "best since Cinderella,"



Something 'fishy' is going on at Disney Studios.
Mermaid hits the screen just in time for Christmas.

by Howard Kaman

Remember the first time you saw *Fantasia*? *Snow White*? *Cinderella*?

The folks at Walt Disney Pictures hope to recapture that feeling all over again this Christmas, when they release their 28th, full-length animated feature, *The Little Mermaid*, in Canada.

Their hopes are so high that last week Buena Vista Pictures, the company that distributes Disney's movies in Canada, brought one of its representatives to York last week to plug the film.

The presentation, hosted by Kim Corby, consisted of a slide show followed by a videotape. Disney, being the media-friendly company that it is, put on a very

professional show for a class of York's would-be-film-makers.

Indeed, the only glitches seemed to be in the equipment; the slides of the beautiful mermaid Ariel were consistently out of focus on York's out-of-date slide projector.

As for the film, it looks promising. Based on a classic Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale, it tells the story of Ariel, the mermaid who falls in love with a prince and yearns for a pair of legs with which to pursue him. Ariel is tempted by the evil seawitch Ursula into signing a contract that gives her legs, but takes away her voice; the very quality that the prince fell in love with in the first place.

Like several other Disney classics, such as *Snow White* and the

Seven Dwarfs, *Little Mermaid* has a beautiful heroine, and a cruel witch of a villain. It has all of the elements that are cliché in children's film.

However, Disney manages to rise above the conventional. In its promise to create one new animated feature every year, the company has committed itself to continue a long tradition of quality family entertainment. Unlike live action films, animated films take considerably longer to make. The average live action picture can take 12 months to produce, the average animated feature takes three to four years, from story development to final product.

Disney has not wasted its efforts. With last year's *Oliver and Company*, and the upcoming *Little Mermaid*,

Disney seems to be keeping true to its promise. Its secret is reliance on time-tested stories with old fashioned heroes and villains. Animator Leon Joosen described *Little Mermaid*, as "the best [Disney] movie since *Cinderella*." In an exclusive *Excalibur* interview, he emphasized that it's the first animated Disney film in 30 years to be based on a classic fairy tale.

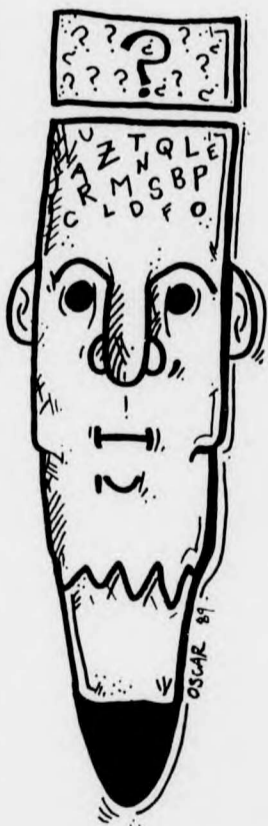
Joosen was born in Calgary, but attended university at the California Institute for the Arts. He was hired by Disney in May 1987 to work on *Oliver and Company*, and followed this up with *The Little Mermaid*. For his next project, *The Rescuers Go Down Under* (to be released December 1990), Joosen will be second unit director. This

will be followed by work on *The Prince and the Pauper*, and a new Mickey and Minnie featurette.

Joosen enjoys the process of seeing an animated film come together. While it may seem tedious to draw the same pictures over and over, Joosen emphasized that, "They all relate." He said an animator must keep in mind the overall theme, and that "the more you get into a theme, the more you are achieving an effect."

Each Disney picture, from *Snow White* to *Fantasia* to *Little Mermaid* and beyond, has developed the art of animation to a higher level. Explains Joosen, "Each style has its own merit and each picture started developing a style of its own."

the writers block



Ira Nayman is a York student with vast experience as a writer. Ira has written numerous newspaper columns as well as dabbling with CBC television and radio.

by Ira Nayman

"Ira Nayman? Hi. I'm Keith Duncan—CBC Radio? I just read *A Job For Amateurs* . . . it was pretty good . . ."

"Really? Thank you. What did you think of *We Interrupt This Programme*?"

Pause. "*We Interrupt This Programme*?"

"That's right. Ten half-hour scripts . . . sketch comedy . . . it came with a cassette of one of the episodes?"

"Un hunh. Hold on a second . . ." Long pause. "Uhh, okay, Ira, I think I found it. It was in a filing cabinet. I'm sorry, but I'm new to this position, and I didn't know it was there. You'll have to give me some time to read it . . ."

Un hunh.

I had this idea that it would be easier for a new writer to break into radio than television. I expected the competition not to be as great, for one thing, and I figured radio would be a good medium in which to hone my dialogue writing skills. Once I had a few radio writing credits, it would be that much easier for me to get television writing work. I still get ideas like that,

but now I take a valium and wait for them to go away.

After a couple of conversations, it became clear that Mr. Duncan couldn't use anything I had submitted. *A Job For Amateurs*, 12 half-hours with a single continuing story (a satire of the Iran/contras affair) was too ambitious for CBC Radio. They had all the sketch comedy programmes they needed, and weren't looking for new writers for them. *Greetings From La La Land*, the other project I had submitted, was out because CBC radio didn't do shows that were two hours long.

Despite this, Mr. Duncan (a former radio producer who, to be fair, warned me in our first conversation that he wasn't sure he liked being the liaison between writers and producers and that he may not stay in the position for very long) was very supportive. He liked my writing, and we discussed ways I could start working there. He even went so far as to take my Social Insurance Number which, in my naive way, I assumed was an indication of how serious he was about finding me work.

Mr. Duncan suggested I write some sketches for a show called *Prime Time* while I waited for something more longterm. I wrote seven

sketches for the show; in our next conversation, he told me that three or four could be what the producers were looking for. Elated, I wrote ten more sketches. This, obviously, was too much for the CBC: I haven't hear from Keith Duncan since.

Two months later, I finally tracked down the person who had replaced Mr. Duncan (who, for purposes of this article, shall be known as The Bureaucrat From Hell). According to her, Mr. Duncan had been fired, and all my material had been relegated to the dreaded filing cabinet, where they would probably still be if I hadn't said anything.

THFH's first words to me were, "Hello. Christine has dumped all this stuff on my desk and, frankly, I don't intend to read any of it. Is it okay if I send it back to you?" Other words included, "Have you written for radio before?" and, the one it took me the longest to be able to laugh about, "Do you know how to use sound effects?" (Had she been prepared to read any of the hundreds of pages of material before her, she could have judged for herself!) THFH's last words were, "I'm producing my own hour long comedy special, but, if you have any ideas for

sketches, feel free to call me in a month."

I admit, I lost it. I had pretty much gotten used to rejection by this time, but this was something more; some cruel game where the hope of writing work was held out to me, only to be snatched away by some ladder climbing bureaucrat at the last moment. When I was able to think rationally about it, I gained a valuable lesson: ability is no guarantee of success.

But, at that moment, I calmly walked out of the office in which I worked, down the hall to the bathroom and started punching out a toilet stall. The stall was ahead on points when the referee called the bout on account of businessmen, two of whom entered the bathroom. As I walked out, embarrassment now added to my anger and frustration, one of the businessmen awkwardly said, "It's not worth hurting yourself."

Later, much later, I complained, "Don't they realize they're dealing with a satirist? Apparently, the power to reduce those positions of power to figures of derision (well, more so than they usually make themselves) meant nothing to people at the CBC."

I haven't written anything else for radio since.