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LIGHTWAVE, AND MAYA



GEORGE AVGERAKIS

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compose from glowing compliments. In less than two months, Frank was offered a job at a larger animation studio that secured a long-term animation contract with a television network.

Frank's new job was as a technical director of animation on a new Saturday morning children's series. His new duties include managing five animators and two interns, the specification of new equipment purchases, equipment maintenance, and creative direction. Although Frank had made about \$35,000 in his first year at Magic Lantern, his new salary started at \$50,000 with two weeks' paid vacation, as well as medical and retirement benefits. Eight months after Frank started his new job, he was given an 8 percent raise.

A Midsize Disney Subcontractor

Antonio "Tony" Bryant was a senior at the Pratt Institute when the school's internship placement office sent him to an interview at Cartoon Pizza in Manhattan. Cartoon Pizza creates animation for a wide variety of broadcast clients, one of them being the Disney Channel.

When asked to show his portfolio, Tony opened up a book that was divided into several useful categories of commercial art. It included typography, logo designs, charcoal life drawings to demonstrate traditional skills, a corporate stationery assignment, a web site design, and a print campaign to demonstrate his ability to take on a limited commercial task. Then there were the characters. The second half of Tony's portfolio included a menagerie of characters ranging from cartoon elves to intricate robots. They inhabited scenes ranging from jungle bogs to chiseled castles. They were shown as pencil sketches, wireframes, orthogonal diagrams, and finished renders.

It was clear to Tony's prospective employer that he was interviewing a significant talent, but that is not a rare occurrence. What was rare was that the talent was demonstrated on both the brilliant and the mundane sorts of projects, and each sparkled with enthusiasm. Tony was permitted to intern for Cartoon Pizza's standard six-week tenure, ending with the New Year holiday.

Tony's duties were to execute revisions of hand-drawn work: settings, scenes, and characters. The work involved taking scans of the original version and, using Adobe Photoshop, electronically pasting in the corrections, which were given to Tony as hand-sketched inserts. "The trick," recalls Tony, "was getting the corrections to match seamlessly with the original. It wasn't easy to do."



Notice that even when faced with a rather laborious, mundane task, the aggressive intern, interested in proving himself, made the tasks interesting and challenging. "I got quite good at the work," said Tony, "and finished early. So I went around to the senior artists' desks and asked them if they needed any help. Sometimes it was going out for a coffee and sometimes it was a challenging art assignment. One time I was asked to design a character for a Disney Channel pilot."

Tony submitted dozens of sketches for the character but didn't neglect his regular job or the artists who were still asking for a double latté with Sweet & Low. Eventually, the New Year holidays arrived and Tony packed up his gear and returned to Brooklyn to search for more work. Tony was a December graduate from Pratt and was now officially looking for a job.

Just after the holidays, Tony got an invitation to a party at Cartoon Pizza. Everyone at the party kept remarking how much he was missed around the shop. The next morning he received a call from the supervisor of his internship, offering him a regular freelance position.

As of this writing, Tony's original character design has been accepted by Disney for a new series. His name will be in the credits, and although it looks like he's solid for work, he still cleans up other people's artwork and fetches a coffee or two. At Pratt, Tony's nickname was "Ghost," because he suddenly disappeared and reappeared amongst his friends without notice. All that's changed. Tony sums it up: "Being the kind of person people enjoy having around on a reliable basis is the key to success." (See Figure 1-2.)

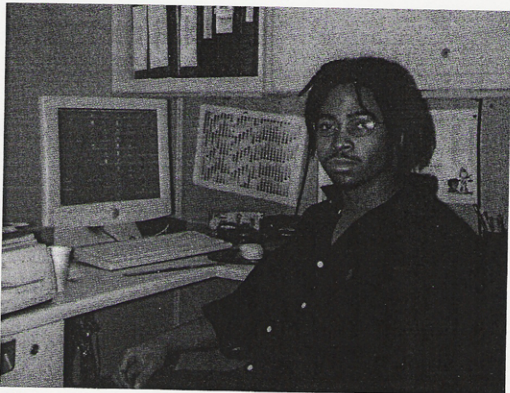
A Major-League Hollywood Studio

This story goes back a bit in time, because I want to show you what can happen a few years after you get your first job. John Gross was going nowhere as an assistant at a swimming pool company in Minnesota where he'd worked for 10 years. A friend had bought a computer and was making some money doing computer graphics, so as John puts it, "I borrowed some money from my parents, with the idea that I would give myself five years to get into computer graphics. Well, in about a year and a half I was working part-time for a company called Alphavideo in Minnesota. After another six months, they hired me full time."

John became the in-house expert on LightWave, back when NewTek was just introducing the software (ancient times in computer lore, about 1991!). But he yearned for greater horizons and eventually heard about a computer

Figure 1-2

Animator Tony Bryant at his workstation at Cartoon Pizza in New York City



animation studio called Amblin Imaging that was being set up by Steven Spielberg to handle all the computer generated imagery (CGI) for a TV series to be known as *SeaQuest*. John sent his reel to Amblin and was offered a job. Eventually, he became one of the two top animator-managers of the shop, working directly with Spielberg. In addition, John's ability to squeeze the maximum efficiency from both computers and artists created an excess capacity at Amblin. Excess capacity means that a shop has more computers and labor than it needs to be profitable. Obviously, if the capacity can be used for more work, the studio can make even more profit. So Amblin started bidding on outside work, such as the space effects for *Star Trek Voyager*.

Eventually, Spielberg decided to shut down Amblin when he formed his current partnership, DreamWorks SKG. For a while, Gross and Spielberg discussed being partners in an independent animation studio that John would helm, but eventually John went off on his own, and today runs Eden FX, one of the most successful Hollywood animation shops. On a regular basis you can see John Gross's name rolling up the credits of major films and television shows (see Figure 1-3).

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