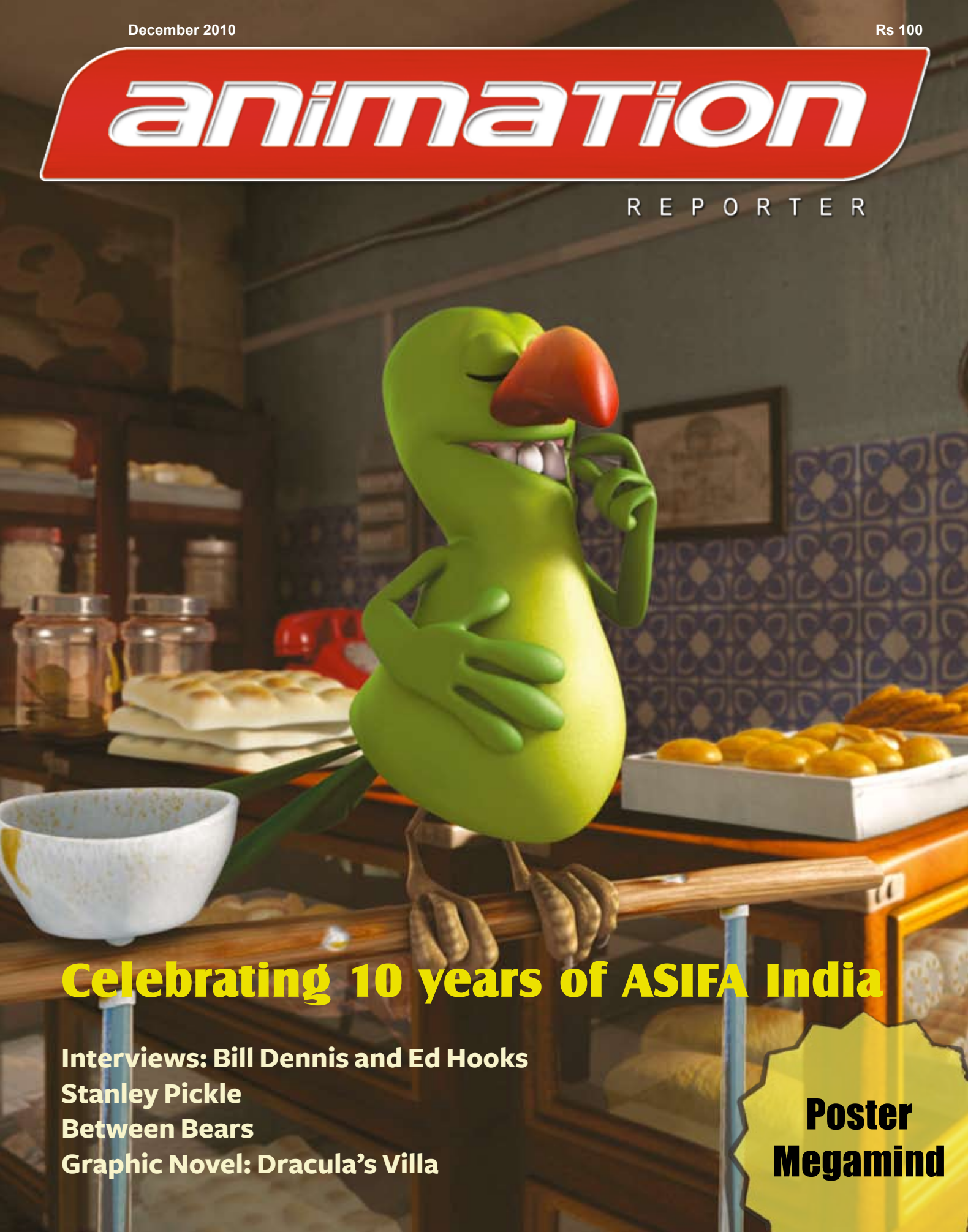


animation

R E P O R T E R



Celebrating 10 years of ASIFA India

Interviews: Bill Dennis and Ed Hooks
Stanley Pickle
Between Bears
Graphic Novel: Dracula's Villa

Poster
Megamind

Bill Dennis



Regarded as one of the most influential people in Asian animation today, Bill Dennis, President Emeritus ASIFA and partner of the International Animation Consulting Group, foresees a bright animation future for the Indian Animation Industry.

Bill Dennis in conversation with Joyce Lemos talks animation and the birth of the Asifa India chapter

ASIFA celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. How has the journey been these ten years?

The journey has been incredible. When it first started in Trivandrum, we had only ten members and we were producing just one or two small events a year. But, today, ten years later, we've moved from Trivandrum to Mumbai and as you know, Vani, Prasad and Amit are heading it up. They have done an outstanding job in raising the profile of ASIFA around India and the world.

How did the ASIFA India chapter take off?

I thought there was tremendous opportunity for animation to flourish in India. In fact, it was that belief that led me to open my own studio in Kerala eleven years ago. One thing India needed to grow its animation industry was to establish its

credibility worldwide. ASIFA is the only global non-profit animation association and they were represented in 32 countries, but not in India. I flew to Europe to talk with the people who were running ASIFA. I convinced them to allow me to establish the Indian chapter. So, on November 25, 2000 the charter for ASIFA India was given. ASIFA India remained in Kerala for four years and then we moved it to Mumbai where it is headed by Vani and her team. It's been there for the past six years. I remain involved as the President Emeritus.

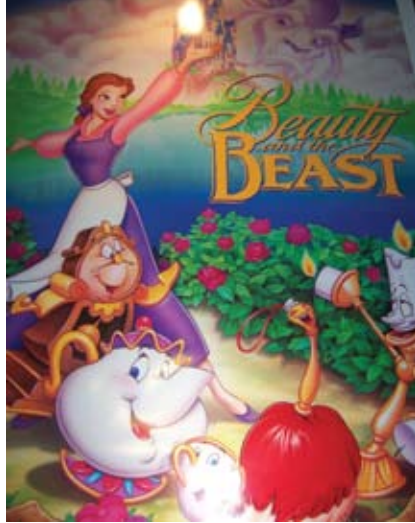
When ASIFA India first started what were your main goals and objectives? What has been the biggest achievement so far?

The primary objective was to raise the profile of animation in India.....to bring India out of the shadows and become a

part of an established international organization. Over these past ten years, the biggest accomplishment occurred this year with International Animation Day. Over 10,000 people in a dozen cities celebrated the events.

You played a key role in the production team for some of the biggest animation hits such as *The Little Mermaid*, *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast*. When you set about short listing the talent for these classic films, what criteria did you use?

The first step was to gain a complete understanding of the talent requirements. This involved in depth meetings with the story, script writers and film directors. Once I understood what it was going to take, we launched a worldwide creative talent search. In many cases that talent was already on board at our California studios. However, often we needed to send teams to Europe and Asia to search for that one special person who had the skills and sensibility to handle animating a specific character in the film.



How many studios have you helped set up around the world?

One of the first studios was in Manila, in the Philippines. That was for Hanna Barbera. I took an existing studio where we had around 2,000 employees and I converted it into a boutique studio, specializing in unique television products for studios all over the world. Along with my then partner, G.A. Menon, I also set up my own studios in India. One of these studios was based in Kerala where we produced television shows and developed our own intellectual properties. The second studio was based in Mumbai where the concentration was on ad films. I also worked with my friend, Ram Mohan, to establish a global strategy for UTV Toons in Mumbai. While with Walt Disney Animation, I helped to establish their animation studio in Florida.

Hanna Barbera has a rich and entertaining cast of cartoon characters like Johnny Quest and the Flintstones. What was it like working with the team at

Fil Cartoons to produce these famous cartoon shorts?

It was a very exciting time. Not only was I producing the classic, established characters; Hanna Barbera in conjunction with Cartoon Network was beginning to introduce new characters and cartoons. I was so fortunate to be able to produce the premiere episodes of the popular Dexter's Lab, Powerpuff Girls, Johnny Bravo and another dozen world premiere toons.

How was the student interaction this year?

The students are just marvelous. Their participation in these events is always the highlight for me. They're not timid. They're attentive. They ask intelligent questions and if they don't get satisfactory answers, they come right back until they do get the answer.

What made the ASIFA India team call upon professionals like Max Howard and Ed Hooks for the tenth anniversary celebrations?

Because this year's celebration was such a special event, we wanted to bring in international talent to help commemorate the occasion. And, don't forget, this was not only the tenth anniversary of ASIFA India, it was also the 50th anniversary of ASIFA International. Max is an old friend and current colleague. He had never been to India and when I approached him about the notion of presenting his seminars, he said, "I'll be there". Ed is also well known and celebrated for his acting for animation seminars and he was anxious to experience Indian audiences.



“Today, everybody thinks of India as a place to do animation. I think this is going to get bigger and bigger and the more India does its own development and creates its own shows, the bigger its going to get.”

How did the ASIFA India subchapters take shape?

Up to this year, ASIFA India in Mumbai has been able to manage everything. But over the last couple of years, ASIFA activities have gotten so big and so many additional cities around the country are now involved, it seemed appropriate that subchapters be formed to allow for more involvement. This year there are a dozen cities that are celebrating IAD along with the popular 'Meet ups' with top animation professionals from around the country and world. The four cities where attendance at ASIFA activities has been the greatest are in Pune, Indore, Hyderabad and Bengaluru. We were very fortunate that there were individuals in those cities that were desirous of heading up the subchapters. I must say, that while the enthusiasm was great in all four cities, I was most impressed with Indore. Students from the ten animation schools and academies in Indore staged a rally in the city center with 1,600 students participating in full costume and makeup. The following day 1,200 showed up for the inauguration of the subchapter. Interestingly, the subchapter does not have a president of secretary. It is run by the heads of the ten animation schools.

When do you think India will start producing its own animation feature films?

Well, it's already happening. Two films have already been released in India and at least three more feature films will be released within the coming months. All of these films are being made for Indian audiences. However, I'm told that plans are under way for feature length films intended for international audiences. I expect it will be 3-5 years before these international films will be ready. It takes a number of years and a lot of money to develop the talent and expertise required to produce this level of film. A feature film for the Indian market costs from \$2 to \$5 million US dollars. A feature film for the international market



could cost upwards of \$40 million dollars if produced in India. Still, that compares well with production costs in the US topping \$100 million per feature length animated film.

What are the key areas of improvement for Indian animators?

I think they're doing what needs to be done. They are thinking animation, they are living animation. They are very enthusiastic of this art form and as long as they can keep this enthusiasm high, they will continue to learn.

What do you see in the animation future of India?

I believe the animation industry in India is just going to continue to grow and become a greater international force. I mean, twelve years ago I don't think anyone even

thought of India as a place to do animation. Today, everybody thinks of India as a place to do animation. I think this is going to get bigger and bigger and the more India does its own development and creates its own shows, the bigger its going to get.

What led Max Howard, Frank Lunn and you to form a consulting group? How did this materialize?

The three of us happened to be in China earlier this year at the same animation conference. We had been invited by the government of one of the Chinese provinces to attend. We all had lunch one day and as we reviewed what we

had seen and heard about the challenges that were facing the government, it became clear that there was a need for the services that we could provide. I've known Max for a number of years. Max has a brilliant background as President of Warner Bros Animation, a top Executive at Disney, DreamWorks and Exodus. He also is a worldwide speaker. Frank is a noted entertainment attorney in the Los Angeles area. He's been a top executive with Sony, Saban and DreamWorks. He's also an independent producer. With my background in feature films, television animation and studio owner....when you add all of it together, you come up with 75 years of executive and creative experience with the most prestigious studios in the world.

Since that time in China, we've founded our firm, International Animation Consulting Group. We've been invited to Thailand, China, Korea and India. We've signed an agreement here in India and have deals working in Korea and China.

What can you tell me about your involvement with UNICEF and the films you've worked on?

I've been privileged to work on a couple of UNICEF projects. The first was called 'Meena'. I co-produced a series of animated short films depicting the challenges of life in developing nations with a focus on girls and the special problems they face. The films were actually shown to people in the remote areas in those developing nations. The second projects were award winning short films which I produced for Child's Rights.

What is your advice to young and upcoming animators?

My advice to young and upcoming animators is to live and breathe animation. You should be learning something new every day. Be passionate about what you do. If you're not passionate about the art form....if you're in this business to get rich, then you are NOT going to be successful. You know, this advice isn't just for young and upcoming animators. It's for all of us who lucky enough to be involved in creating films that give people an escape, a release, a moment of entertainment.

