

The Adventures of Teddy Ruxpin

Nestled among a cluster of houses on a quiet, Ottawa side street, Atkinson Film-Arts produces animation programs that have won international acclaim. Inside the large brick building the air is bristling with activity as some 170 animators, artists and editors are now at work breathing life into Teddy Ruxpin, star of the most ambitious animation television series ever produced in Canada, *The Adventures of Teddy Ruxpin*.

Alchemy II, a California toy company, are the creators of Teddy, the best-selling, audio cassette-equipped, stuffed illiop. Atkinson was given a tall order when Alchemy II asked them to produce a cartoon version of the bearlike creature. The toy company wanted no less than 65 half-hour episodes to be completed in 18 months. At the most, having made only 17 half-hours in that length of time, Bill Stevens, Jr., chief executive officer of the company says, "We reacted by sort of falling on our collective can."

To get an idea of the scope of what a production of that size really means, Stevens explains, "There are not enough animators in all of Canada to do that. If every Canadian animator in the world came back to Canada, we might be able to do it in about two years—maybe. Even so, it's a real long shot. You're talking about somehow rounding up about 500 people. And when it comes down to it, they just don't exist."

The solution, therefore, as suggested by Alchemy II, was to co-venture with the American arm of the French animation company, DIC. At first this posed a dilemma for Atkinson, having been one of the companies that lobbied against DIC's attempts to invade the Canadian market, with little regard for Canadian content, two years ago.



• Newton Gimmick, Teddy Ruxpin, Grubby and (below) the fobs

In order for a deal to be struck, Stevens insisted that Canadian content be made a priority in producing the *Teddy* series. As no official regulations governing Canadian content in animation productions exists, Stevens had to come up with suitable guidelines, in view of his company's position two years ago.

"They (DIC) wanted us to send them something in writing. I didn't quite know what to do so I took the memorandum from the CRTC on co-productions, co-ventures, and so forth—Canadian content from its perspective—and virtually took the thing as it was, transferred it chapter and verse onto another piece of paper with a signature at the bottom and sent it down to them. They signed it and a deal was made," says Stevens.

Working with DIC has proved fruitful for Atkinson's. While Stevens' company has complete creative control, subject to approval by Alchemy II, they've gained access to DIC's Japanese and Korean facilities. It's this latter arrangement that made meeting the 18-month deadline possible. The manual labour—constructing many of the drawings, and duplicating and colouring them—was all

done in the Orient.

The animation process, slow and expensive because of the vast amount of manual work involved, has not really changed much since Walt Disney made cartoons, nor is there much deviation in methodology from country to country.

"It's still based on the concept that if you put a drawing in front of your eyes and then replace it with another one, and do that about 12 times a second, and move them with practiced graduations of movement, you're left with the impression of action," explains Stevens.

For the last two years, Atkinson's and its sister company, Crawley's Research and Development, have been developing new technology to reduce time (and therefore costs) significantly in the animation process. When completed, in another two years, computers will take over much of what Stevens calls "the grunt work."

"What we've done is applied the computer to the animation studio the same way as word-processing is applied to the office pool. It's artist-driven and multi-terminal. It depends on the same struc-

ture as exists in the present animation studio, except it's automated," explains Stevens.

To date, no one else in the world has such a system, says Stevens. But once it's operational, he hopes to reduce costs enough to compete with the Orient, an area of the world recognized for the high quality and relatively low cost of its animation.

Stevens sees a bright future for Canadian animators. "On the quality spectrum, we're as good as anybody in the world. We're as good as the Americans. We're as good as the British. And there's no one that does better animation than either of those two in terms of Western acceptability," he maintains.

Although he describes Canadian animation as still being "a cottage industry," government funding, especially through the National Film Board, is changing this situation. Presently, only two major animation studios exist in Canada, Atkinson's and Nelvana of Toronto, but Stevens acknowledges the industry's expansion with the arrival of new players in the market.

"There are lots of middle-ground animation studios starting up all across the country. All they need is an opportunity to prove themselves. As long as they concentrate on the quality and have the business acumen to pull the financing together, they'll get out there in the world markets and people will be waiting for them because of the work that has been done by Atkinson, Film-Arts, and Nelvana," he says.

In business since 1974, Atkinson's first 10 years were "a real struggle." According to Stevens, it's largely due to the advent of new programmes like Telefilm's Broadcast Fund that Atkinson's has been able to finally stand on solid ground.

Since that time, Atkinson's has gone on to build an impressive list of credits which include: *The Racoons* series, aired on CBC, *The Bestest Present*, a Christmas special based on the popular cartoon, "For Better or For Worse", (CTV), and *The Nightingale*, the first-ever Canada-People's Republic of China co-production to be aired this fall on CTV. *Teddy*, the new addition to the list, can be seen this fall on Global.

Lorena Bekar

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"Both financially and in participation, the eighth Banff Television Festival was a spectacular success . . ."

Variety, June 11, 1987

"I have travelled extensively and attended such functions in many countries, but never have I felt myself in a situation both thoroughly professional and yet so relaxed and friendly. One of the great successes of the Banff Television Festival is the way it puts creative people and business people together in such a pragmatic way."

Daniele J. Suissa
Television Director, Montreal

"The 8th Banff Television Festival was relaxed and purposeful, conducive to business without being overtly commercial. With no official market encircling the festival in an atmosphere of high pressure sales, it is the television programme makers who dominate the proceedings. Writers, producers, directors, broadcasters and archivists are in workshop sessions and there are continual screenings of the best current international television programmes with a supplementary 'on demand' service, offering up to 400 programmes from 32 countries to fulfill every individual request."

Screen International, June 27, 1987

"Banff is now recognized as one of the quality international festivals and one of the most pleasant events to attend. I also very much enjoyed the various seminars I attended, which were of a very high standard."

Masami Takagishi
Production Manager, International Relations,
NTV Network, Japan

"What happens in Banff is important to television and to television makers . . . I feel enriched by being part of this extraordinary week."

Larry Bloustein
V.P. Public Relations, MTM Enterprises Inc.

"Now in its eighth year the Banff Television Festival has clearly established itself as one of the important dates on the calendars of television people around the world. Quite apart from the fact that the TV awards themselves are among the most prestigious anywhere, the week-long festival has become — to the community of film and TV — significant both from a social and business point of view. And, as this year's delegate list will attest, it is considered so by the full spectrum of that society: government and private broadcasters, writers, students, guild representatives and the international media . . . The whole world of television comes to Banff for a week of shirt-sleeve informality."

Playback, Editorial comment, June 15, 1987

"Lovely place, lovely people, and an excellent festival."

Alan Hart
Controller, International Relations, BBC

"In business terms this was probably the most important Banff Festival for me yet. Many of the people I'm now working with on co-productions and co-development deals all happened to be in the same place at the same time, including several I did not know were going to be at Banff when I organized my trip. Banff is obviously the place to be!"

Paul D. Barron
Managing Director, Barron Films, Australia

"Excellent festival! The calibre, quality, scope and interest of participants gets better and better!"

Lorne W. MacPherson
President, Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation

"Banff has become synonymous with a celebration of excellence — and beautiful scenery . . . For many delegates it has become a kind of annual home-coming, an event that rates with Christmas and Hanukkah as a red-circled "must" on the calendar . . . The Banff Festival provides a rare forum, rooted in that Canadian-style pragmatism which mixes business, education, politics, and social concern."

TV World, August, 1987

"Let me state categorically that I have not enjoyed any festival more than I enjoyed Banff . . . splendid setting, admirably relaxed and committed atmosphere and — mysteriously — one of the few countries that blends a flavour of its own nation into the mix . . . A huge mark in my diary for next year."

Patrick Dromgoole
Managing Director, HTV, U.K.

" . . . splendid organization and an interesting event. Banff has become one of the most interesting and vivid festivals in the world. We shall come back next year."

Dr. Hans Kimmel
ZDF, Federal Republic of Germany

"Certainly from an industry standpoint the list of participants is impressive. In addition to the hundreds of producers and would-be producers, writers and directors hoping to 'make a deal', almost every major player in the Canadian industry is present."

The Globe and Mail, Toronto, June 10, 1987

"There is an atmosphere at the Banff festival that is very much of the Eighties . . . It's fresh, it's new, and I think it's also representative of the new independent producer. They move around very easily here, and they talk to each other."

Bill Cotton
Managing Director of Television, BBC

"Writers are hustling producers who are hustling networks who are hustling foreign networks. It's non-stop huddling as the groundwork is laid for elaborate deals often involving half a dozen disparate funding sources."

The Banff Television Festival is a strange brew — an unlikely mix of high art and high finance in a teeny tourist town in the Canadian Rockies . . . It is one of the few places where the innovators and the deal brokers mingle, where there is annual reassurance that artistry and popularity can co-exist."

The Citizen, Ottawa, June 12 & 15, 1987

"A great success — it gets better every year, if that's possible!"

W. D. Marsden
Director, Film Industry Section,
Alberta Economic Development and Trade

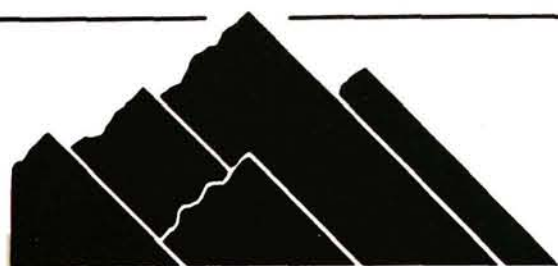
"I was exposed to some of the BEST TV that I've seen in years. Banff opened my eyes to what Canada, the U.K., Australia, and Europe are doing. The U.S. might dominate the international TV market now — but at Banff I saw the future."

Mel Frohman
Television Writer, Los Angeles

June 5-11, 1988

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