

THE BATTALION

ATLANTIS

Disney filmmakers spend four years recreating the culture of Atlantis

Matt McCormick
The Battalion

Atlantis is one of Disney's most ambitious animated features to date, financially speaking. There was no doubt that the creative team of Kirk Wise, Gary Trousdale and Don Hahn would be in charge of trying to ensure that it does not fail. Wise and Trousdale serve as co-directors on this movie and have also co-directed both *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Hahn, who serves as producer on this film, has collaborated with Wise and Trousdale on their two previous films and has also produced Disney hits like *Tarzan* and *The Lion King*.

The movie itself is almost better suited for a live-action

style than animation, but Wise believes that animation is not just about cartoons.

"I love animation," Wise said. "There is something very special about it, and I am very proud to be one of those people who helps keep that tradition alive. I think animation is a great medium for telling all different kinds of stories. I think people mistakenly think of animation as a genre unto itself, and it is really not. Not anymore than a painting is a genre. I think it is great that animation can handle so many different varieties of storytelling."

"God forbid you try to make this movie as a live-action because it would have cost three times as much," Hahn said.

"Our actors always hit their marks. It never rained unless we

wanted it to. When you have complete control of all aspects of a movie, it really is a cost-effective way to make a movie. If it is successful, we can actually make money on this movie."

Animated movies are extremely time-consuming for those who create them. In fact, many live-action directors will have made at least two pictures in the amount of time it has taken Wise to complete this one.

"I worked on the movie for four-and-a-half years," Wise said. "From that original lunch meeting where we dreamed-up the idea of doing a wide-screen adventure movie in animation to the finished film was about four-and-a-half years."

Working on a project for that long presents its own unique difficulties for all involved.

"The hardest part is just keeping your level of enthusiasm up for that amount of time," Wise said. "It is really a sport for long-distance runners in that way. The great thing about animation is even though the process is so long, it renews itself along the way. Just when you think you cannot look at another storyboard,

then suddenly the rough animation begins to come together — characters start to live and breathe and that really helps you get to the next milestone," Wise said.

The project also had its share of technical difficulties.

"This one was the granddaddy of all the films I have worked on I think," Wise said.

"It had more digital effects than any other movie we have made, probably something in every scene," Hahn said. "Shooting it in widescreen was a challenge because we had thirty percent more screen area to fill up. But the studio did not write me a check for thirty percent more money. So we had to be really clever about how we did that. So I looked for experience when I assembled the team."

The animation process was complex and even experienced filmmakers like Hahn and Wise found themselves encountering problems they had not anticipated.

"All you know at the beginning is that you are going to have a new problem every day," Hahn said. "It's a business of capitalizing on opportunity or happy accidents, and so you just have to take each day as it comes," Hahn said.

In creating a movie that dealt effectively with the folklore surrounding *Atlantis*, the

filmmakers had to create an entire culture.

"We had to create an entire civilization from scratch," Wise said. "What sort of language would they speak; how would their buildings look; how would they dress. We had to answer all of those questions and create a whole culture much like you would have to do if you were making a movie about another world," Wise said.

Was the created *Atlantis* culture an accurate one?

"It was kind of a little bit history and a whole lot imagination," Wise said. "In the research stage we found some very valid scientific approaches to *Atlantis* to just wild speculation, and we knew that somewhere in the middle was where we would be."

This movie is a departure from the normal Disney feature because there are no talking animals or any song and dance routines. Hahn believes that is a good thing.

"I think that not having the song and dance routine is a plus actually," Hahn said. "We had done that before, and we felt that we personally needed to stretch and that our audience was ready for us to stretch. For this story, I feel that is very refreshing to tell an adventure

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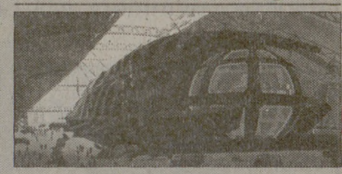
Atlantis
Starring the voices of
Michael J. Fox and
James Garner
Directed by
Kirk Wise and
Gary Trousdale

Atlantis is a disappointing movie on every level. Too simple to offer much for adults but too mature to interest the kids, *Atlantis* is destined to go the way of its subject, become a huge loss for Disney and destroy the stranglehold they have held on animated features for the past 60 years.

Combining the talent of A-list directors, Kirk Wise and Gary Trousdale, who were responsible for *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, with voice talents that include Michael J. Fox and James Garner in an epic, animated adventure must have seemed like a dream come true for the executives at Disney. So why did everything go wrong and result in a movie that is not entertaining?

The answer lies in the approach taken by the creative team who sought to make a big-looking animated adventure in the tradition of

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