



diversions

Internet Provides Filmmakers With New Frontier, Audience

By BRIAN BEDSWORTH
Assistant Arts & Entertainment Editor

The mournful, melodramatic background music lets you know this is serious stuff.

On the screen, the image switches back and forth between stark battle scenes, with men falling left and right, and a woman reading a letter, presumably about the soldier she loves.

The voice of the letter's writer reads: "Your husband was a fine soldier and a very courageous man. He fought with both valor and honor. No doubt by now, you have received full information about the untimely loss of his cock and balls, which are currently missing in action." And so begins "Saving Ryan's Privates."

Director Craig Moss' eight-minute epic about a WWII special mission for the rescue of Private Ryan's genitalia is at the forefront of a growing Internet trend: online movies.

"Ryan's Privates" is the top-viewed movie at AtomFilms (www.atomfilms.com), one of the most popular sites catering to the growing demand for short bursts of online entertainment.

The site, along with others like The Sync (www.thesync.com) and Urban Entertainment (www.urbanentertainment.com), provides a mix of animated, experimental, comedy, drama and student films. Most are less than 15 minutes, the perfect length to accommodate short online attention spans.

Another favorite among Atom users is "Capitol Hill," an interactive, hip-hop animation piece featuring collage images of Al Gore and George W. Bush rapping. Users can scratch turntables and play snippets of presidential soundbytes while the two candidates tear up the mic.

On these sites, "You can find creative material that's not on network television, not in the multiplex," said Anne Bergman, a Los Angeles writer who has written extensively about digital filmmaking for Variety and the Los Angeles Times.

The new, adventurous nature of the Internet lends itself to creative experimentation she said. New technology, like the 360 degree camera, is constantly expanding creative possibility of Internet films.

And even better, most of these sites are free. "The e-movie sites are) pretty much the same concept as Napster," Bergman said. "The online community in general, we just really like sharing."

With a fast connection the films are easy to download, and most sites have a "send this to a friend" feature.

Now in addition to all the MP3s, chain letters and stupid jokes people send to their friends, movies may be cluttering your inbox.

Though sites like these might be a fun way to procrastinate or kill a few hours, it is filmmakers, much more than audiences, who are excited about the new film frontier.

Bergman said most filmmakers showing their work on these sites are students or people working on a tight budget. Until recently, the best they could hope for were featured spots in a few good independent film festivals.

"But now, you have the opportunity to show your work to thousands of people," she said.

And short films are generally much cheaper and easier to make than full-length features.

"We're talking, you're asking your friends to hold the camera and lights in place," Bergman said.

It is this ease of production and the exponen-



tially increased distribution possibility that is luring thousands of filmmakers to the Web.

Since its 1998 launch, AtomFilms has received more than 40,000 submissions of short films and animation, said a representative for the site.

"Basically, (the films) are sort of calling cards for people who want to make it in the film industry," Bergman said. "The goal is that someone in the Hollywood film industry will notice."

And several people in Hollywood have.

IFILM's "405" humorously depicts an airliner crash-landing on Interstate 405, the busiest freeway in Los Angeles. Creators Bruce Branit and Jeremy Hunt produced the short on their home computers in about three months. The film won them widespread acclaim, even from L.A. Mayor Richard Riordan.

And Barbara Schock's "My Mother Dreams the Satan's Disciples in New York," featured on Atomfilms, won the 2000 Oscar for Best Live Action Short.

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Just Like Going to Cannes

For online film fun from documentary to animation, head to these sites.

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|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| ■ IFILM.COM | ■ DEN.NET | ■ PLANETOUT.COM/PNO/ |
| ■ ATOMFILMS.COM | ■ BULLSEYEART.COM | ■ PSEUDO.COM |
| ■ ZOOMCULTURE.COM | ■ AIRWORLD.NET | ■ ANTEYE.COM |
| ■ PITCHTV.COM | ■ OTHERCINEMA.COM | ■ BROADCAST.COM |
| ■ RESFEST.COM | ■ FILMFILM.COM | ■ EVEE.COM |
| ■ SIGHTSOUND.COM | ■ ON2.COM | ■ CULTUREJAM.COM |
| ■ NEWVENUE.COM | ■ ALWAYS!.COM | ■ ODDCAST.COM |
| ■ SLAMDANCE.COM | ■ REELSHORT.COM | ■ CRUSHEDPLANET.COM |
| ■ SHORTBUZZ.COM | ■ IFILM.COM | ■ GEOCITIES.COM/VIDEO- |
| ■ MEDIATRIIP.COM | ■ HEAVY.COM | CLIPS_2000 |



COURTESY OF ATOMFILMS.COM

Zoom Culture Brings E-movie Craze Home

By JEREMY HURTZ
Assistant Arts & Entertainment Editor

Among the many approaches to creating and marketing e-movies, one company stands out with an innovative approach geared entirely toward the college-age audience. The name is Zoom Culture, and their national headquarters are located in Chapel Hill.

"We're creating a global media company — really a global media experience — for the college student and young

adult," said Alex Paulson, business development manager.

The local company provides students with the means to create their own online content — something that separates Zoom Culture from other e-movie distributors.

This content includes a bevy of genres, including short documentaries, coverage of events both local and of national interest, concerts, sporting events and skit comedy.

"Some of our students even produce,

direct and create their own programs that have a specific theme, whether it's documenting the life of a college student or focused on a specific topic such as politics," said Keith Henstree, regional director of content acquisition for the eastern United States.

Paulson said Forrester Research estimated 92 percent of Internet households will produce their own rich or streaming media within the next five years. Streaming media is the format Zoom Culture uses to deliver content to users. "From where we are now to 92% ... this is a huge, emerging industry," he said.

Henstree said, "Because Chapel Hill is our headquarters, we want to get as many UNC students involved in this program as possible."

The content is posted on the company's site, www.zoomculture.com, and is syndicated to other Web sites.

Currently, the finished Web site is not online. Henstree said the company hopes to have their finished Web site available by the end of September.

Until then, the Web address contains a preview site. Visitors can watch short films on first-look pages with labels such as "Outdoors," "Music" and "Disc Golf."

Henstree explained Zoom Culture's program for allowing students to create content.

"We have a nationwide network of what we call Zoom Directors," he said. "They're college students on different campuses around the country who create the video programming that's on our site and may potentially be syndicated to hundreds of other sites, and potentially cable."

Zoom Culture currently recruits on 50 campuses across the United States, including UNC, Duke University and the University of Michigan.

The company plans to eventually hold video production workshops on UNC's campus.

Interested contributors to the site must apply to the Zoom Director program. Anyone can apply, Paulson said, and most applicants receive an initial interview, where they pitch five ideas for pieces they'd like to shoot. These can be anything from a single film to a series.

"It's really their opportunity to showcase their creative side," Paulson said.

Once selected, zoom director hopefuls must complete an exam at Z-school, the company's online media production school.

They then receive a digital camera and other filming equipment and begin filming their visions.

Edwin Godwin, a UNC senior from Greenville, used Zoom Culture equipment to film a road trip he took from North Carolina to New Hampshire this summer.

Kayaking and hiking footage from his adventure is available online on Zoom Culture's outdoors page, which Godwin also edits.

"I'm proud of the intro to the page," Godwin said. "It's a bunch of random stuff that I filmed and me playing guitar."

Because the company uses a streaming video format, which doesn't allow movie clips to be downloaded, most clips must finish around three minutes, Godwin said.

"The nature of streaming video on the Internet dictates that the clips have to be short," he said. "It's a big-time factor as far as developing theme."

That's not deterring him from ambitious projects, though. "I'm going on the Appalachian Trail next year, and I'm planning on making a documentary about that."

Students interested in the Zoom Directors program should contact Henstree at keith@zoomculture.com.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.



COURTESY OF ATOMFILMS.COM

British claymation character "Angry Kid" (top) acts snotty. Al Gore shows off his mad rhyming skills in the animated short "Capitol Hill." Both films can be found at www.atomfilms.com, a site that figures largely in the e-movie revolution. Atom Films, and other companies like it, provide an outlet for short and independent films to be seen online by larger audiences.

