

Regina Welker & Nina Wels about LATTE AND THE MAGIC WATERSTONE

“Eating worms and bugs is part of a hedgehog’s life”

Now the animals are suffering from a water shortage, young reckless hedgehog girl Latte clumsily spills the last drops of water. When all the animals gather in an emergency meeting, the raven tells them about Bantur, the Bear King, who stole the magic waterstone. Latte has no other option than believing the story and courageously embarks on a quest. On her journey through the forest, she is joined by her best friend Tjum. But being friends with a stubborn girl like Latte is not always easy.

We meet both directors of the ambitious looking animated feature right after the film’s world premiere at the Schlingel Festival.

On their quest, Latte and Tjum meet all sorts of animals, each one of them with a different style and characterisation in its body movement. Are these movements animal-based or character-based?

Regina Welker: Character-based. Not all characters could be on four legs. A

hedgehog walking on four legs would have its head bowed to the ground all the time, you would never be able to see its facial expression. Rabbits and wolves can sit with their heads upwards to the camera, like they do in reality. But we can’t have them standing on two feet, like a squirrel. For Bantur the Bear King, it looks totally natural to stand upright. Finally we aimed for the optimal combination of all those human and natural elements.

In general you try to stick as close as possible to the animals’ natural behaviour.

Nina Wels: Animals don’t live in houses, they live in nests and caves. We didn’t add any human elements to the scenery. Eating worms and bugs is part of a hedgehog’s life, so that’s what Latte does. We thought kids might find the idea rather gross, but in the premiere they simply loved it.

Welker: Only in one scene this approach caused us difficulties. When Tjum is returning home, sounds were needed suggesting that inside the



nest dinner was prepared. Instead of the usual pots, pans and dishes, the sound coming from the nest is the cracking of nut shells.

How to put an expression on a hedgehog’s face?

Welker: Since a hedgehog’s nose is so long, Latte’s mouth would always remain hidden. We cheated a bit with proportions to give her an expressive mouth in a lovable face. Hedgehogs are not afraid to noisily stumble into

all sorts of situations, as they carry their natural protection with them. With this armour of spikes, Latte is always ready for a confrontation. When she has something on her mind, she won’t let go until she gets what she wants. She is cute, but tough.

Wels: Her facial expressions are clear and simple so that everybody can easily read them.

Being such a brave girl, still Latte calls herself ‘a princess’. Why do



girls always have to be princesses?

Welker: Because there is something special about her, something royal. Which puts her on an equal level with the Bear King. Although he seems so scary, Latte easily connects with him. In the original book by Sebastian Lybeck, Latte was a boy. Now the gender has changed, but Latte's spirit remains the same: a strong – so called – boyish attitude. But with all these boyish assets, she can still be a princess, she can totally decide herself what she wants to be.

Wels: She is the outsider, different from all the others, proving that she is worth her royal status.

Five years ago, everyone was in awe watching your first trailer at Sola Media. Ever since the animation design has changed drastically.

Welker: That funding trailer was a hard nut to crack: starting from scratch, with no budget and only two weeks to deliver. Holding on to that style would have been impossible. All those painted backgrounds were not compatible for 3D. For a feature animation, efficiency is needed.

Wels: Especially since the production grew so big. We had a crew of 500 people working on this film in Germany, Belgium and India.

And two directors, probably both adding different dynamics to the project.

Wels: As directors we should be truthful and authentic, carrying the audience into our vision. If they don't believe in what we're doing, we'll lose them. We need to put everything we have into our characters. Since all emotions are transmitted onto the screen through the animators, a deep understanding of the characters is needed.

Welker: *"You can only make the film that you can make,"* as is often said.

The music is impressive, symphonic and therefore very ambitious.

Welker: Animation directors in general are obsessed with details, like one fingertip moving, or one twinkle in a squirrel's eye. This focus we recognised in the work of composer Andreas Hoge. He noticed every detail - a wolf waving its paw, a bear nodding at the king – and implemented them in the score. It all adds to the magic. Recording the soundtrack with the Leipziger Symphonic Orchestra was a fantastic experience.

What was the most complicated scene, in terms of animation?

Welker: The chase scene with the lynx, with two four legged characters hop-



ping through a huge set.

Wels: All had to be done within the limitations of our set. There were about 20 trees standing around a clearing, and there was a choreography, with animals running up and down in different directions. In terms of perspectives you could say there is some cheating involved that nobody notices.

It paid off rather well.

Welker: It was lovely to see how much fun the kids had with that scene. It contains so much tension that afterwards they felt a need to be relieved. Did you hear them laughing when finally a tree falls upon the lynx's head? Wels: A filmmaker need to find that balance. You don't want to scare your young audience to death, and neither do you want them to run out of the cinema crying.

LATTE AND THE MAGIC WATERSTONE premieres in German theatres on 25th December.

During the ECFA Seminar at the Schlingel Festival, producer Lilian Klages (Dreamin' Dolphin Film) gave a lecture on her production work for LATTE AND THE MAGIC WATERSTONE. *"Since it takes at least five years to finish a film, I only want to get involved in a project if there's something in the story that attracts me personally, something that I really care for. This book is about 'life, love and the miracle of living together on this planet', in a charming story about taking care of nature's resources."*

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