

Tom Van Gestel & Geert Torfs about SIR MOUSE

“What is funny for a child at what age?”

Several episodes of the animation series SIR MOUSE were presented as a compilation film to the youngest audience by Belgian distributor JEF. Besides its beautiful design, the series stands out for the frivolous way in which gender patterns are broken.

In a world without war, brave knight Sir Mouse often feels bored. Until the king sends her on a mission, along with her best friend Dragon. We meet with director Tom Van Gestel and producer Geert Torfs (Fabrique Fantastique) at the premiere in the JEF festival, where the audience's reactions make it clear how important 'humour' is as an ingredient to the series and the film.

Tom Van Gestel: We invested in good jokes. Slapstick always works, but sometimes a good joke requires some extra efforts. I find children's sense of humour difficult to estimate. What is funny for a child at what age? I've watched loads of crazy YouTube videos of people stumbling and falling, which my kids seem to find incredibly funny. We always search for our own

inner child.

How high did you aim?

Van Gestel: We never underestimate the intelligence of children. In one episode, the king has lost his voice. He speaks through a substitute voice, someone standing next to him saying his words out loud, in a particularly boring tone and often completely incorrect. Although the context is complex, kids find this absurd reference to amateurish lip sync totally hilarious.

Geert Torfs: In terms of humour we came across many cultural differences. SIR MOUSE is a co-production with Germany and Ireland, who both gave very contradictory feedback on the scripts. Jokes that one partner found particularly funny, the other one even didn't understand. The series is broadcast on TV in many countries, it would be interesting to compare the cultural differences that arise.

SIR MOUSE has a remarkable approach towards gender elements.

Torfs: Our statement is: knights can

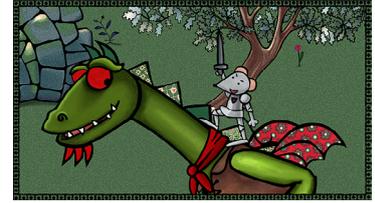
be girls too. I have a daughter who plays soccer. People often say she's "like a real boy". But she isn't, she's just a girl playing soccer.

Van Gestel: No one will ever tell Sir Mouse she is not capable of doing something because she is a girl. In a survey about advertising, young girls were asked to "walk like a girl". They just walked boldly across the stage. When they asked the same to women in their 30s, they acted like walking the red carpet. Children can simply choose who they are. Recognition does not have to be gender-based.

Will the younger generation deal with this more freely?

Van Gestel: When my son was in kindergarten, they worked with this theme of contradictions. One day the boys were supposed to come to school dressed as girls and vice versa. Hardly any boys showed up, because parents seemingly had difficulties with it.

The animation stays very close to the original books by the author



Dirk Nielandt.

Van Gestel: The books are graphically interesting, they look medieval and are inspired by stained glass windows. We liked that style a lot.

You have more plans for SIR MOUSE?

Torfs: Plenty! We are working on an action & adventure game. It is also a logical step to bring these stories to the (puppet) theatre. With a series you miss the immediate reaction of the audience, which you can experience in a theatre setting.

—
Fien Poppe