The Sysadminotaur Cartoon Is Coming Soon + Interview with Animator Patrick Désilets

Devolutions

THE ANIMATED SHORT, WHICH IS CALLED VAULT, WILL BE RELEASED ON OCTOBER 31

I have some BIG NEWS for all the Sysadminotaur fans around the world who can't wait to see what strange and hilarious things Maurice, Max, Mel, Kali, Phil, Bob and the Boss are up to: **the much-anticipated Sysadminotaur cartoon is almost here**!

The animated short, which is called Vault, will be released on October 31 to coincide with the end of Cyber Security Awareness Month. It was inspired by one of the most popular Sysadminotaur comics of all time.

I recently interviewed Patrick Désilets, the super talented artist who draws all of the Sysadminotaur comics (along with the related artwork and illustrations), to learn more about the story behind Vault. Below is a look at our conversation (my questions are in bold, followed by Patrick's responses):

How long did it take you to create Vault?

Vault is a traditional 2D animation, and even though it's only about one minute long, it turned out to be pretty ambitious for a one-person project. The production was spread over roughly two years. I was working on this among other projects at Devolutions — such as comics, illustrations, and so on — so it wasn't an intensive two years. There were long stretches of not touching it at all, but it still amounts to several months' worth of time.

Did things develop as you expected, or were there some surprises along the way?

Pre-production had some fun challenges, as it involved adapting the style of the comics into something that would be interesting in video form. Originally, the comics were very low-key and intentionally minimalistic, and sometimes even a little crude. They were slowly evolving with each strip, but for the animated short we needed something more fleshed-out and constructed.

Also, I still wanted to keep some of the expressive hand-drawn essence and texture of the comics, so it was a balancing act of trial and error to figure out the art direction. Backgrounds had been especially neglected in the comics, and this one story happened to rely very heavily on them, with all of its emphasis on security stuff and the crowded city. The characters also weren't originally designed for animation. They had these design cheats that don't animate all that well, so they had to be adapted somewhat. The general visual style of Sysadminotaur gained quite a lot of definition throughout this process, and that has been increasingly reflected in the comics.

What are some of the adjustments you had to make in telling your story through animation rather than the comic format?

In the original comic strip for *Vault*, the punchline works fine as a single comic panel. But in a video format, reading the dialogue out loud takes time, and I thought that this might be anti-climactic. So, I figured we'd keep it interesting by overly-exaggerating everything: making the city super crowded and making the characters ridiculously loud. I animated the screaming faces as much as I could, and a bunch of little crowd reactions.

Can you tell us something about the other talented people who worked on Vault?

I was lucky enough to find some very talented and expressive voice actors to match the distorted screaming faces. John Mondelli as Bob and Scott Moat as Phil were incredibly generous with their performances, and I hope their vocal cords have since recovered. Sound design also contributed a lot to this sense of exaggeration and contrast, thanks to the wonderful work of Jared Arnold, who provided the solemn military suspense music, as well as the various sound spaces and effects.

What was the hardest part of the project?

I was originally expecting the animation to be relatively simple: Bob is walking a bit rigidly for a while, opens a few boxes, and then screams out the window. So I thought I could add a little extra complexity by adding all these layers of highlights and shadows and textures. This turned out to be more than a little extra complexity!

In traditional animation, you have to hand-draw up to 24 frames per second to animate a character, multiplied by the amount of characters, multiplied by the number of layers of highlights and shadows for each character — in this case, up to 4. That's a lot of pencil mileage. And that's okay, I knew to expect that. It was the rest of the whole process, however, all those extra effects, that made things a bit daunting. Managing the textures, the lighting, the camera stuff, keeping everything homogenous throughout all those drawings and layers, render times, and so on. Even things as mundane as dealing with the sheer volume of files this all generates added to the workload.

Overall, it was super interesting to work on and, I think it looks pretty unique. Some things could have been kept simpler for the sake of efficiency, but those are lessons learned for the future.

How has this experience changed your approach to the Sysadminotaur comics?

I think overall Sysadminotaur greatly benefited from this entire process. The comics are looking sharper, and the illustrative style is now refined enough to be making its way into other areas of Devolutions' website, as well as Devolutions Force, and on a bunch of cool merch.

Do you have anything to say to your fans out there?

Just that I'm glad people are enjoying the comics — I always love when a new strip generates discussion, and I truly appreciate the feedback I receive! We have a good crowd.