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REVIEWS

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Using Web, Comic Book Sales to Attract Feature Film Funding

Having worked for Hanna-Barbara and Nelvana, Vancouver-based animator Verne Andru now wants to bring his stoner cartoon character Halbert 'Hal' Lighter to the silver screen. So how does a one-man animation studio find the money? Andru's strategy is to build Hal's fan base by publishing his adventures on the Web and in comic books, then use the generated buzz to woo investors to Andru's film project.

"I'm looking at a \$20 million to \$30 million production budget for the film," Andru tells Playback. "By establishing Hal through 'webisodes' and comic book sales, I will have already created an audience for the product. Meanwhile, since I am rendering the animation layouts in high-resolution colour, the pre-production will already be done when I am looking for funds. An audience in place and the pre-production in the can? For investors, it's a no-brainer!"

Verne Andru has already written the screenplay for '420', the name of his Hal movie. According to Andru's production website (www.okee.com), the plot is as follows: "Lebowski-esque rocker roadie Halburt 'Hal' Lighter unwittingly and unwillingly embarks on a Dr. Hoolie-kinda trip when a toke of the REALLY good stuff presto-changos him into Captain Cannabis. Busty barmaid Marion and oKee the alien round out the unlikely evil-fighting threesome imparted with the task of saving the world from imprisonment and subjugation. And they do it with the power of weed, man! Just like Woody Harrelson!"

With the screenplay done, Andru's next step was to break 420 into 13 chapters. "Working a chapter at a time, I first ink it in black-and-white, which I publish to the web," he explains. "I then colour the chapter and publish it as a comic book, which is distributed in stores in Canada and globally through Amazon.com. I'm also offering a companion 'extras' DVD, containing the collected bits that have been produced to date, including coloured webisodes."

So far Verne Andru has spent two years on this project. "The first chapter comic has been shipping since October 2006," he tells Playback. "I am now working on the second. With the process now ironed out, I expect to pick up the pace."

Ironically, if Hal does attract a large enough audience, a feature film may not be required. Rather, Andru may find himself just dubbing all 13 chapters to a single DVD, and selling copies to the public directly. Only time will tell.