

Dino Dan

Dino Dan was produced by Sinking Ship Entertainment Inc. for TVOkids based in Canada. Dan Henderson dreams of being a paleontologist just like his Dad and he has a funny way of seeing dinosaurs in every situation. The way Dan tells it, there is a Compsognathus living under his bed. It is a Dromaeosaurus that stole his pal’s snack, and it’s not the Big Bad Wolf, it’s the Big Bad Spinosaurus. Some may say that Dan has an active imagination but they do not know what Dan knows ... Dinosaurs are EVERYWHERE. And, in Dan’s world, they really are: dinos lurk around every corner, fuel every adventure, and even help answer Dan’s questions. *Dino Dan* is an educational adventures series for 4-7 year olds that can help inform while it entertains.

In this episode, “Trouble Clef”, the kids are learning to play the French Horn in Mrs. Nicholl’s music class. Dan is particularly excited because the French Horn makes a sound like the Corythosaurus. After Mrs. Nicholls teaches Dan to play, he uses his French Horn playing abilities to communicate with a couple of Corythosauruses in the schoolyard.

Dino Dan was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 finalists in the “up to 6 fiction” category.

International experts’ opinions

Despite the fictitious topic, many international experts found the program close to reality. “This looks so real. That was the first thing that I wondered about. I thought that it was done very well. I thought it was beautiful; I enjoyed it” (female expert, USA). They marvelled at the technique used in the program: “I thought that the technique was just fantastic – and seeing those dinosaurs in the real world. It was looking really fantastic. I just had the feeling that the attention on the story was not as strong as the attention on the technique. But maybe that is also always the problem if you see an episode out of a longer story” (female expert, Germany).

There was some disagreement about the age of the target audience for this program. For example, while one argued that it should be “just a little bit, not a lot – for the young preschoolers” (male expert, USA). Another one thought the opposite: “I thought it was older. It says here four to seven, but I think it was for more Six and Up” (female expert, Australia).

They also discussed the various emotions that the children have when they watch dinosaurs. “I think once they do like them, they absolutely loved them! I know so many little boys, five-year-old little boys, who are crazy about dinosaurs. They like to learn things about them as well” (female expert, UK). Many experts pointed to a



Figure 1: Dan’s dog Doug warns him that there is a dinosaur outside the house.



Figure 2: In the music class, Dan and other classmates are learning how to play the French Horn.



Figure 3: Dan thinks that the sound of French Horn and Dinosaur shouting were similar.

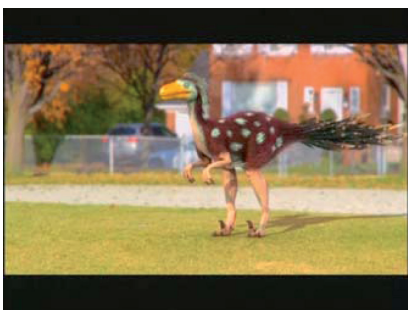


Figure 4: Dan sees a Dromaeosaurus approaching and preying on a Corythosaurus.

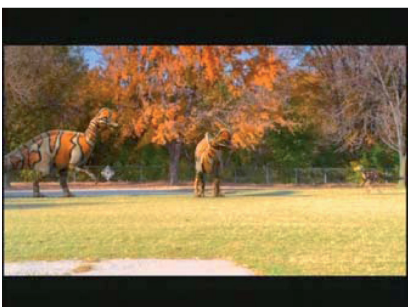


Figure 5: Another Corythosaurus comes and warns his peer to run.

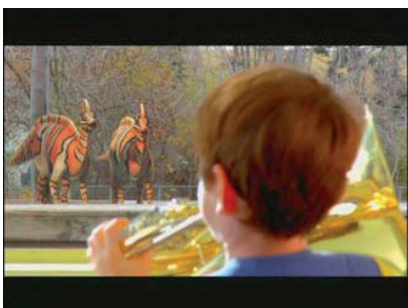


Figure 6: Dan uses the French Horn to communicate with the Corythosauruses

positive relationship between dinosaurs and children. “What I found is that when kids decide that they really love dinosaurs because of the big teeth and the big claws, it is after they have realised that dinosaurs are extinct. That empowers them. They can very easily like them, because they are not real; they cannot be harmed by dinosaurs. That was just my first reaction” (female expert, USA).

The male expert from Canada who was also the producer of the program shared his experiences during the making of the program. He discussed the initial stages when they were planning to start the production. “Before we actually went into production, I went into a bunch of preschool classes and actually interviewed the kids about dinosaurs and what they liked about dinosaurs (four to five-year-olds). One of the things that got me the most: 90% of them said that they love dinosaurs because they were scary. So when we got into that, they loved the big claws, the reality, and the craziness of it. That is why we specifically wanted to treat them as real – not making them talk, or any of these things”

He continued and shared what he has learnt about children’s knowledge of dinosaurs from these interviews. “How knowledgeable those young kids were. Originally, we were going to have a few, kind of, introduction episodes, but we realised that they already knew most of the names. They already knew the key facts. We wanted to go one step further.” He used a lot of colors on dinosaurs. He explained the reasoning behind this move. “We had a museum in Alberta, which is the Tyrrell Museum – the only North American Museum dedicated to dinosaurs who vetted everything in the show. So, everything is completely accurate. But with colours: they have no idea if there were colours or not, so we decided obviously to make something that was a little bit more approachable, but could have been real. I just wanted them to stand out from the backgrounds. It was just a creative call to make them a little more interesting.”

Since the producer of the program was present, a lot of questions were pointed towards him. A male expert from Sweden wanted to know, “Have you ever thought to put a girl in Dan’s world – what would happen here. Have you ever done that?” The male expert from Canada answered, “In the series, there is a girl that is his equal in dinosaur knowledge, even though she doesn’t necessarily see the dinosaurs. He does have a group of friends in the school that move through the episodes with him and help him out in kind of setting up his experiments and stuff. But they always kind of just miss out on the dinosaurs.” He clarified that though the main character of the program was a boy, “a lot of the responses that we get are from girls that fanned out from parents talking about how their daughters like the show and stuff like that. I don’t necessarily

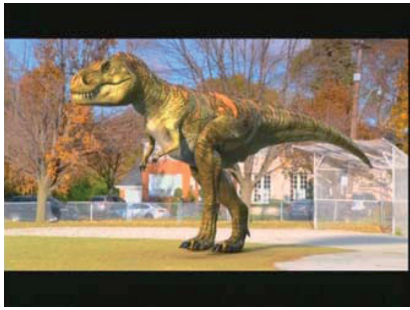


Figure 7: Dan sees a Tyrannosaurus Rex preying on the two Corythosaurus.



Figure 8: Dan uses the French Horn to warn the two Corythosaurus and finally they escape the predator.

Screenshots from *Dino Dan* © Sinking Ship Entertainment Inc.

think that dinosaurs is only a boy topic.” There were also questions raised about the use of music in the program. “I just wasn’t so convinced that dinosaurs and musical education go together that perfectly somehow” (male expert, Germany). The produce replied, “Yeah, in the sense of explaining – I guess it was just trying to find ways to go. If a dinosaur could talk, how can we find interesting ways for him to communicate back to them. That was the attempt.”

Most of the international experts praised the characters in the program. “I like the cast a lot in *Dino Dan*. I just think that the kids have a lot of personality. They have those real quirks that real kids have, as opposed to the sort of smooth edges that most professional kids have. I think it is a real strong show” (male expert, USA). Some also admired the character of the girl in the program (female expert, UK). They also admired the respect the classmates had for each other. “There is something about the way that the classmates treat each other: when you have got this one kid who sees something that nobody else sees, that is so into his own life, but they treat him with such respect, and they are in on the story – all but seeing the dinosaurs. I think that is wonderful” (male expert, USA). Other characters in the program were also discussed. “I think it is a relief to see a boy as the main character. Then I actually like that the mother was a policewoman with a belt and a gun and everything. I am looking forward to seeing the other programs, because the mother must be having a big role as a policewoman” (female expert, Denmark).

There were few suggestions for the improvement of the program. “I would like to have the text in English, although it is in English, and I understand English, it would be so nice for me if it was texted, because then I could read it – at the same time, because sometimes the dialect – You need subtitles on it” (female expert, Denmark). There was some confusion also. “I was a little confused whether he is the only one who could see the dinosaurs. It should have been a bit clearer up front. Everyone who was watching it: we were all a bit confused whether he was the only one who could see them or not” (female expert, Australia). Some gave suggestions for a better opening. “Also, one of my thoughts about the program was that the opening took forever and gave away all the fun of the show. It was just like one dinosaur after another dinosaur, after another dinosaur, for no particular reason. There could be a much better use of the opening” (male expert, USA).

Target Audience 6,4	Idea 6,6	Script 5,6	Realization 6,8
Average Score per Category by experts' voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010			