

Space Vets: “The creative vision remains rooted in human ingenuity”

A CONVERSATION WITH ISABEL GALFE*

What does Storybook Studios do?

Galfe: Storybook Studios produces moving image content, such as series and films using AI. Our portfolio ranges from animated children’s series to productions that resemble live-action films. For example, we have recently released the short film *The Barrier*, which falls within the science fiction and dystopian genres.

How did you come up with the AI-produced children’s animation series *Space Vets*?

Galfe: *Space Vets* (Ill. 1) was developed in-house at Storybook Studios. Our creative director Albert Bozesan came up with the idea because he is a *Star Trek* fan and was inspired by veterinarians in his family. He thought combining the 2 themes would be fascinating. Albert pitched the initial concept to our team, and we loved it. The first concept was handed to our author Anna Ludwig, who further developed it and wrote the script for our first episode.

Where was AI used in *Space Vets*?

Galfe: AI was involved in almost every aspect of production – except, and I want to emphasize this, for the script. The script and story were developed and written in the traditional way by our author. From that point forward, AI played a significant role in all areas of production – particularly in visual and character design and environment creation. It also supported animation, voice performance transfer, and lip-syncing. It was a very big help. Roughly speaking about 80% of all production steps involved AI.

What role did AI play in character creation?

Galfe: It all begins with the director’s vision how the character should look like. The creative decisions are made by humans. Then, we use AI as a tool to bring that vision to life. We start by giving AI a prompt that describes the character – its color, size, and overall look. AI generates dozens of 2D image suggestions. From our favorite 2D concept, we create a 3D model with AI in seconds. AI also helps to add further texture details to finalize the character design. The final model is then also rigged intelligently.

How does AI assist with creating settings?

Galfe: We used a similar approach for the settings. With the spaceship, for example (Ill. 2 and 3), a colleague created a rough 3D model using the

software *Blender*, specifying the color palette and a kind of floor plan. He then asked the AI to add all the textures – buttons, levers, screens, screws and so on. This process allowed us to achieve a highly detailed and visually appealing 3D spaceship in a matter of hours. We could then position our characters within that space, wherever we wanted them. The time-consuming step of having to create every single button on the console manually was no longer necessary.

How were the planets and the planetary environments created?

Galfe: The first episode is about Barkeroni, a desert planet. Each episode introduces a new planet with new unique features. Unlike the spaceship, the planet environments are simpler to create. Due to being outdoors most of the time, 2.5D backdrops can be



Ill. 1: *Space Vets*: The children’s animation series about veterinarians and scientists in space was largely produced with AI

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used. These can simply be prompted, without any 3D work being necessary.

All this was done with AI?

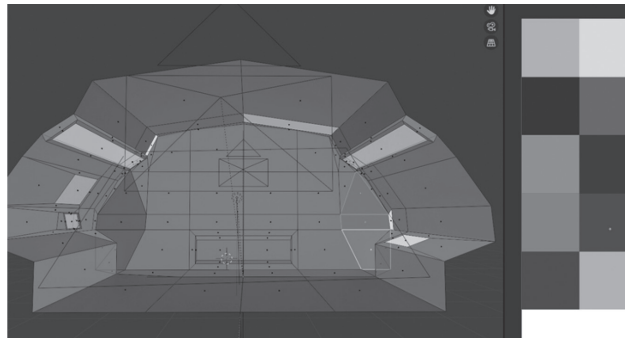
Galfe: Yes. And again, it all started with a creative vision about how the planets should look like and what makes each of them special. We passed this vision on to the AI to visualize the worlds. Of course, the AI came up with lots of suggestions, which we then had to choose from and refine until we were satisfied with the final product and it looked exactly the way we wanted it to.

What are the benefits of using AI in terms of time and cost?

Galfe: Producing the pilot episode took us just 60 days – around four times faster than traditional methods. This automatically reduces costs. More important, it allows a production company like ours to pursue projects we are passionate about. With AI, we are able to realize projects like *Space Vets* that we believe in, which gives us a lot more creative freedom and flexibility.

How do you ensure the quality of the stories and incorporate values such as pro-social behavior in the narrative?

Galfe: For *Space Vets* specifically, but also for our other projects, we work with experienced authors who are familiar with the target group and understand the importance of conveying positive messages. They are also always open to feedback and advice, e.g. from the IZI. In general, and with children's series in particular, we prioritize adventure and fun while incorporating educational values like teamwork, environmental awareness, and animal welfare. We try to make



Ill. 2 and 3: For the spaceship, a rough 3D model was first created, which was colored and filled with details using AI

sure that there is always a small message in the episode.

We also tested a *Space Vets* episode with the target group, gathering feedback on what worked, what didn't work, what the children understood and whether the messages we wanted to convey came across. It's always very helpful to get direct feedback from the audience.

Our author Anna Ludwig, who is a primary school teacher, is very close to the target group and brings invaluable pedagogical expertise. She knows what children understand and how to convey content so that it is exciting rather than boring. This helps us a lot.

What do you want children to take away from episode 1?

Galfe: Episode 1 emphasizes teamwork – that you can work together as a team, that everyone has their strengths and weaknesses, how supporting each other as a team leads to success.

We would also like to instill an awareness of environment and climate protection. We would like the children to develop a certain basic awareness of how to deal with plants and maybe inspire them to nurture one of their own, in the sense of "I have my own plant, I need to water it". That would be great.

What lessons did you learn from the 60-days production process? What would you do differently?

Galfe: We gained valuable insights in terms of workflows and episode structure. Yet the main learnings were more in the technical area. In terms of narrative, we realized we could highlight the characters' strengths and weaknesses more effectively and create greater tension

to make the stories more engaging and more fun for the children. We also want to extend and deepen the problems and challenges in future episodes to make them even more exciting.

What's next for Space Vets?

Galfe: We are planning 4 seasons of 26 episodes each. We released our second episode, a Christmas special, just before the 2024 holidays. Hopefully, we'll have lots of space adventures with this diverse crew that we can all enjoy and learn from! ■

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