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Animated Shorts: League Leaders - The Super Evil Creators



By Steve Fritz
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Asaph "Ace" Fipke is a name animation fans should be more aware of. In barely a decade, he's been on the creative side of such shows as *Reboot*, *Transformers: Beast Wars/Machines*, *Dragon Booster* and *Storm Hawks*; all incredibly innovative shows both for their story arcs and groundbreaking animation.

"In the *Reboot* days, it was just that we were working on 3-D as a tool for the first time. That gave us ideas in their own right. That was just luck," Fipke says modestly. "Then, as I started to do more and more development. After working on *Beast Machines*, we started looking more at what classic cartoons brought to the table.

"Towards my later days in creative and development at Mainframe, I was trying to find new looks and reinvent what people thought of as cartoons. That really started to happen when I started Nerd Corp. Starting with *Dragon Booster*, then doing *Storm Hawks*, our object each time was to have a really distinctive art look. That was it. The other thing is I've been lucky enough to run into certain properties that I can really sink my teeth into."

In this case, Fipke says his luck came in the form of three recent college graduates named Philippe Ivanusic-Vallee, Davila LeBlanc and Peter Ricq. They pitched Fipke an idea for a group of super villains. The only thing is this **League of Super-Evil** (aka L.O.S.E.) isn't much able to dominate the cul-de-sac they live in, much less the world.

They are lead by the ultra diminutive Voltar (Scott McNeil), whose miniscule size is compensated by a criminally oversized ego. The "muscle" is named Red Menace (Colin Mudock), who may be as strong as a Kodiak bear, but when brains were being passed out he wasn't out having a beer, he was playing patty cake with Rainbow Brite. The "brains" of the operation is Doctor Frogg (Lee Tockar), a cross between Peter Lorre and Larry Fine. Rounding this crew out is Doomegeddon, a "pan-dimensional" hellhound whose stomach, much like Dr. Who's TARDIS, defies all the rules of space and time.

Probably the closest TV to resemble these hapless hooligans are the legendary Ralph Bakshi's *Mighty Heroes*, and that show aired over 40 years ago.

"I had no idea what the *The Mighty Heroes* was," says Fipke. "Actually, I'm now kind of super pissed off, because I see where Phil got his ideas from."

"I thought no one would have caught on!" Ivanusic-Vallee laughs in his defense, knowing full well he wasn't even a gleam in his parent's eyes when the show aired. "I didn't think people would have caught on I was ripping off an old series."

"It's one of those things, I imagine, is that the three creators—Phil, Dave & Peter—weren't born when these shows aired," Fipke admits. "They are literally just out of college and range in age between 23 and 25. We just stole them from Ottawa. I'm just 37. All I can say is we all didn't get the opportunity to see much Ralph Bakshi. Now that we know about it, it will be interesting to see how Bakshi did superheroes.

"Also, I think doing parodies of superheroes and supervillains have always been there. I just remember when the guys first brought the idea to me, at first I hemmed and hawed a lot. I had other parodies pitched at me kind of like it. Theirs just felt more contemporary."

Comic books did play into the League's creation, of course.

"We read everything that Davila would get," said Ivanusic-Vallee. "We call Davila our comic book encyclopedia. He knows the works of everything and everyone. He can cite you everything from *The Watchmen* to *Transformers*.

"Actually, what got us all was watching superhero cartoons. We grew up on *He-Man*, *G.I. Joe*, *Transformers* and all that stuff. One thing that really bound us together though was all the bad guys. We all realized they were all pretty dumb. I remember one episode of *Joe* where Cobra Commander tried to shoot something at the Space Shuttle in order to steal it. Put him up there with Skeletor and can you really find anybody more pathetic?"

"That's such a great thing about the world of superheroes and villains," says Fipke.

"There is such a rich mine of material to draw from. I mean especially in the last decade, who'd have thought there would be such hit movies and TV shows based on what's being published these days? I mean 30 years ago, no one would ever have dreamed of doing



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blockbuster movies based on what was being published by Marvel or DC. It seems the big thing is since Hollywood has moved in, the heroes have gotten so moody and serious, that it's now too weird to be true. I mean you have grown ups running around in these outlandish costumes! Can you imagine how funny some of them looked if you saw them on the street?"

Fipke also has some idea why these three kids succeeded where many others failed.

"I think another thing in their favor is they really had no idea what they were doing," he said. "You can see that in when they admit they didn't know Bakshi's work existed. The good thing is they brought their own voice to it. They are much more original with their parody."

And like any true superhero (or villain) story, the League has its own origin story.

"All of that really stems from when we were still at university," says Ivanusic-Vallee. "A lot of it was actually my third year thesis. It was a short called "League of Evil." Originally, the cast was Voltar, Red Menace, Doctor Frogg and a character called Armageddon. Voltar was always the short leader dude. Red Menace was a parody of certain Soviet super-villains and always going to be the big strong dumb guy. Doctor Frogg was a lot more like a mad scientist. He also had an eye patch and some other body parts missing. In fact, the only one who really stuck and stayed the same was Voltar. It took a long while for us to get the rest to where we were really pleased with them.

"In the original film, they accidentally killed their arch-nemesis Freedom Man. From there we ask what does a supervillain do when he doesn't have a hero to combat? We had them try to take over a military complex with a weather generator.

"It was definitely more of an adult show," says Ivanusic-Vallee. "I think that was to start off with the bad guys as the leads is inherently adult. In fact, I think the biggest problem we had was how to get the audience interested in them. I think what really helped was when we made their hopes and dreams really small. When we diminished their ambitions, they got really funny. The truth is they are so under-equipped they even know they can't handle the big things like taking over the world. Adding to this Voltar is fixed on the idea that his guys can roll with the big boys. That's when we fixed on the idea that they didn't want to take over the world. I think we finally got it right when we decided they just wanted to take over the neighborhood. That was the big turning point and things started to fire on all cylinders."

"I think that ultimately, when I first saw their pitch it struck me as something we couldn't sell to anyone in its current shape," Fipke adds. "I almost passed on it. What I will say is they really pushed it. Then I started to read the script and I realized that I laughed all the way through it. It was all over the place, really long, and I laughed more times than basically any other script I'd read in a long time. That's when I knew these guys had potential. So from there, we basically structured it together, and at the end of the day we came together on it. I'm really proud of it now. I'll probably work as the story editor until I feel they can do it themselves."

"What's funny is more people said no to this show than I'll ever admit," says Ivanusic-Vallee. "It was all for the best. We're happy with where it went. Those letters were from the days we were independently pitching the show. I would say it was safe to say we lacked finesse."

As for the future of the series? Fipke's Nerd Corp. has a commitment for 52 11-minute episodes, or 26 half-hours. He and his young trio of creators already have a lot lined up for the League.

"Throughout the season we will have a number of heroes to measure the League against," says Fipke. "Justice Gene has showed up early on. As the season goes on, he will keep on losing credibility as a hero with each time he takes on the League. The more he loses credibility, the lower his job gets. By the time we are done with him, he will become more or less the League's equal. Even the neighborhood kids won't respect him in the end. Even his Segue is taken away from him.

"There will also be a time where they clone themselves and the clones wind up everything the League should have been, much to their annoyance. They originally create the clones to create the messes Doomegeddon leaves on the lawn. That's the beauty of all this. They end up breaking all conventions."

You'll also find out their city has one and only one real superhero, Glory Guy. We will be doing an episode where they actually do manage to challenge him. They realize they need an arch-nemesis and decide to approach him on it. He actually buys into their brand of villainy."

Apparently so are the fans. At present, Cartoon Network is airing a new episode of the series every Monday at 7:00 p.m. eastern. The first marathon of four episodes happened last week, with more marathons and new episodes planned through the spring.

"It's a collective team of incredible nerds here," says Fipke. "I'm damn proud of the effort. It's been fun."

You get the feeling a growing league of fans are saying the same thing.

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I caught this completely by chance on the weekend. It was great! The Power Rangers parody was hilarious.

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