



**Tom Baker**  
...Freelance character animator and illustrator Tom Baker did a science degree before earning a

Postgraduate Certificate in Character Animation at Central Saint Martins. He has produced animated work for *Modern Toss*, the game *Heavenly Sword* and the Paramount Comedy Channel. He's currently working on the third season of the BAFTA-nominated Cartoon Network series *Skatoony*. See [www.bakeranimator.com](http://www.bakeranimator.com).

**Paul Wyatt** speaks to the up-and-coming animator Tom Baker about his work for TV, games promos and his own *Combat Wombat*

# Tom Baker

**01** Baker worked on a series of animated shorts promoting the videogame *Heavenly Sword*. They were directed by Ben Hibon

**02** The BAFTA-nominated series *Skatoony* airs on Cartoon Network. Created by James Fox, the game-show format pitches real-life children against cartoon characters

**03** You can see the Mick Jagger influence in *Straight From the Horse's Mouth*, a project Baker is currently developing

**"Trying to get inside a director's head can be the hardest and most frustrating part of this job," declares Tom Baker, character animator for Cartoon Network and Modern Toss.** "Directors, as their title would suggest, are very good at describing what they're after but sometimes they'll change their minds when they eventually see it moving. This happens a lot in creative industries."

And Baker should know, with a solid track record in productions for the internet and television. Last year he also worked on a series of promotional shorts for the PlayStation 3 game *Heavenly Sword*. "We were supposed to get through an episode every three weeks. That's about two minutes of full-motion, naturalistic animation," he says.

The shorts are much more stylised than the game itself. "The director Ben Hibon created an atmospheric, 2D manga-style graphic-art animation piece. There's constant movement throughout, which was a headache and one of the biggest challenges we faced," Baker explains. "Our animations were mixed with After Effects to create a style that would rival the film *300* – only they were much less homoerotic!"

Baker and other animators on the production took turns filming themselves acting out fight scenes. "It wasn't for rotoscoping," he reveals. "The style Hibon required was so naturalistic that we had to film ourselves so we could study our movements and expressions to breathe life into these characters."

Straight after this experience, Baker moved onto his third series of Cartoon Network's BAFTA-nominated animated game show *Skatoony*. "That's a real departure from *Heavenly Sword*. We produce 30 seconds a day of slick, brilliantly scripted animation. It's a different way of animating and you learn to adapt your skills to these projects."

Unfortunately this frantic activity leaves little time for self-initiated work. "I wish I had more time. It's important that I experiment and try out techniques I've learned from animation greats such as *The Jungle Book's* Milt Kahl and *Iron Giant* animator Brad Bird. These help you develop your own style."

Is there no way to try these techniques in his professional work? "You have to understand that an animator spends a lot of time aping someone else's animation style," he emphasises. "Illustrators and directors can become protective of their illustration style, and sometimes you'll animate a character in a way they wouldn't have drawn them. The upside is that you end up learning some great techniques. The downside is that you aren't pushing your own individual style."

Despite the success of Baker's 2004 short starring his own *Combat Wombat*, the animator has yet to return to his signature character. Why the delay?

"You can't work for free," says Baker. "Even though there's various funds available, they're very competitive and lean towards more arty ideas. I need to decide where to take the *Combat Wombat* character. I could pitch him to Cartoon Network or Jetix, which would mean coming up with script ideas, character designs and storyboards. However, I don't want to lose the rights. I have great ideas for him that I want to develop as soon as I find the funding to do them justice."

04 The popular **E Stings** competition for E4 saw this collaboration from Baker and the mysterious director and compositor Mr Navid



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05 The original version of **Combat Wombat** in all his comic-strip glory, created and produced by Baker

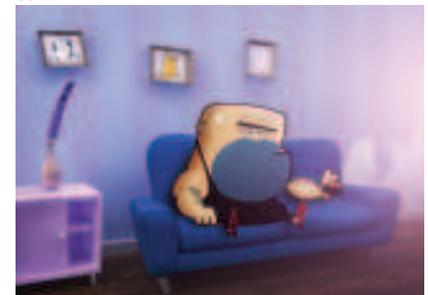
06 Baker directed and designed these **Paramount Comedy Channel** idents, created by 12foot6



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