



Up Up and Away!

This week's story is coming to you from 30,000 feet over California. In recent years, typical visits to my family have involved flights from Tokyo to Vancouver then directly back to Tokyo, but this one is a bit different. It's a 'triangle' flight, and I'm making a stop in Los Angeles before heading back home across the Pacific.

This will be a business trip, although not quite the type of business that I would have expected to be involved in up 'till a few months ago. The event I am attending is the CTN Animation Expo, a gathering of people and businesses in the world of animation production. I understand that it's quite a major event in that world, and everybody who is anybody in the field will be there.

You might be wondering just what a woodblock printmaker would be doing at such an event, but if you are familiar with the 'Ukiyoe Heroes' project that I have been working on since early this past summer, you may be able to guess. Illustrator Jed Henry and I put that project together to combine our two talents - Jed as the artist, and myself (and my crew) as the makers - in the production of a series of woodblock prints in a traditional style, but based on modern characters taken from video games.

Now there is nothing 'animated' about our work; we are not coming to the convention to make a pitch to Disney about a movie! We are here to make a presentation to the attendees, many of who are going to be extremely interested to hear what we have to say.

It's all because of the Kickstarter campaign that we ran. For those of you who aren't familiar with Kickstarter, it is an internet site/community where one can present proposals and request funding from the 'crowd'. If it turns out that enough people are willing to support your idea and invest in it, you then collect money from them all and move forward with production. This is how Jed and I financed the start-up costs of making a number of new woodblock prints.

As it turned out, we did a very good job of planning and executing our campaign, so much so that we now find ourselves somewhat 'famous' in that field. The presentation we will give tomorrow is on the theme "How to Run a Successful Kickstarter Campaign," and the audience will be people who are themselves considering Kickstarter campaigns for their own projects (animated films, presumably).

Flying across the Pacific to give speeches on effective ways to sell one's work isn't exactly in my self-image, as I consider myself pretty much a quiet and private craftsman, but we live in a new era now, where 'consumers' expect a high degree of interactivity and communication with the 'producers', and it looks as though I am going to have to get used to this sort of thing. My new partner Jed is already lining up events in Brazil and Boston, with more on the way, and I'm beginning to get a bit nervous about how I am going to balance all these public events with the inflexible requirement to stick to my bench and actually *make* the prints that all these people are interested in.

In theory, the younger printer trainees who are coming to my workroom a few days each week will at some point be productive enough to shoulder much (most?) of the production responsibilities, but that is still quite some way down the road. I get back to Tokyo late Tuesday evening, and I'll be at the bench first thing the next morning. Jed and I seem to have created a monster, and I tell you, it is one very hungry beast indeed!

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