

Arclight at Cannes: caught up in Bubblegum
Crisis, as sharks surge through the
supermarket
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It seems improbable - a five country co-production deal driven by a Singapore company with no Significant Track Record, armed with the live action rights to an elderly Japanese anime film. Ruby Boukabou deploys her sharp elbows and enquiring mind.

Yes, *Bubblegum Crisis* is an Australian, Chinese, Canadian Co-Production deal. I caught up with Singaporean brothers Ben and Stanley Toh (Axxis Group) and Garry Hamilton and Yin Ye (Arclight/Eastern light) in the zoo of the Cannes film market, and it took a dizzying 45 minutes to get past the bubble to the Australian involvement in the Japanese anime film, most likely to be shot in 2010.

Ben and Stanley Toh are young and bubbly and this is by far their largest project to date. Have they slept in the last months? "Barely", they laugh across the table loaded with soft drinks and chocolate.

The English language production of the cult Japanese futuristic cyber punk anime, will be filming in Australia (the percentage being penned right now by the Canadian writer). Hamilton later confirms that there will be an Australian director and Australian and international cast and crew. Post production is in Canada with the animation director of *Spiderman II*.

Finance is coming from China, UK, Singapore, Canada and a 'substantial' amount from Australia, says Stanley Toh. Government production treaties include Singapore-Australia, Australia-Canada, Canada-Singapore, China-Australia and China-Canada.

So why Arclight? Axxis were looking for project partners that would make "a perfect fit to add value to the production," says Ben Toh. "Arclight, other than being producers, we also think are a good international sales agent and will really fit the pieces together very well."

The Tohs have known Garry Hamilton through the industry for "many years" and liaised with Ying Ye and have high respect for the quality of their productions and company/ies.

Having secured the rights to the popular anime has put Axxis in a good position to pull off a large production, Ying Ye says later. For Axxis, they feel that their last projects were "trial and error on the quality output for animation" and that they are now ready for this. They also insist on having done a large marketing analysis and thorough strategising.

The Tohs believe that the main challenge for them in this project is "striking a balance" between allowing the film to be large and Hollywood-esque and remaining as "close to the original as not to antagonise any fans."

"It's the first time that a Japanese anime has ever been made into a 3D film," says Garry Hamilton a minutes of weaving upstairs later, at the Arclight offices.

"I'm very excited about it," ads Ying Ye (Easternlight being party owned by Arclight and handling films with an Asian element).

The biggest hurdle for the production is the script, says Hamilton. "It may be set in America, it may be set in a nondescript place, I don't know yet.

"The idea is share some filming in Australia and maybe China."

Besides the government funding treaties, they are definitely intending to talk to Screen Australia.

"I think (Axxis) are a young, aggressive (said in positive tone) company out of Singapore with a lot of support behind them," says Hamilton.

Is there risk? Not foreseen. "It's a very clear finance plan," says Hamilton, "with money out of Canada, Australia and China, equity in UK and potential big sale in Japan and the government treaties, I think the movie's fully financed. There may be a small portion we may need to bring in from the bank but we have a good relationship so that's not a problem."

So what else is happening for Arclight in Cannes? Besides the bubblegum gang downstairs, the company has been doing a lot more serious business, with very established names. "We've announced another big project - *Bait* with Russell Mulcahy directing and co-writing. This is his first film in Australia in years, he's just had a big hit grossing over I think 40 million world wide. We did a lot of fine tuning before taking it to the market and have had a tremendous reaction. A lot of people are very interested in the film."

Garry will be spending Christmas on the Gold Coast, the film to be shot in Warner Studios November- December 2009. *Bait* is a catastrophe film about a tsunami that hits the Gold Coast (some may consider that less catastrophic than others). Set in an underground supermarket car park with huge amounts of water and tiger sharks. Shot in 3D. It's the first Australian 3D dramatic feature film. 15 million dollar budget. "The plan is to have a totally Australian production with us putting up a minimum guarantee and do it with the Screen Australia rebate and Film Queensland. Our partners in the project are Grant Bradley, Dale Bradley and Richard Stewart (Limelight).

Several other film projects are in development including lower budget productions in Australia to capitalise on the Screen Australia rebate.

Also, Arclight are getting into the television business. "We have a head of television out of the US looking to do co-productions with Australia."

In terms of the response for them here in Cannes, they say they are having busiest market in a year. Hamilton: "The first day of market was busier than the whole of Berlin but we haven't finalised all the projects just yet."

Ye confirms that they have not been suffering from La Crise.

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