

screen

# Silly networks, toons are for kids

A new breed of animation pushes the envelope with adult themes and risqué jokes



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Futuristic bounty hunter Faye Valentine and her smokin' partner keep the galaxies of 2071 safe and sound in Cartoon Network's anime show *Cowboy Bebop*.

**Put the kids to bed, and flip on the tube.** What's on late-night TV? Cartoons, of course. Adult toons on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim and FOX's Sunday lineup are more popular than ever. Without sets or actors to work with, cartoonists have the freedom to push more boundaries than usual. MU social psychology professor Ken Sheldon says this is why animation has gained such popularity.

"They're breaking taboo, and it ticks off conservatives," he says.

### Explicitly animated

The most notable of the bunch is *Family Guy*, which attracts 5.6 million 18- to 49-year-olds, according to a study by Nielsen Media Research. Debuting in '99, *Family Guy* aired for three seasons before FOX cancelled it. The show was

brought back this summer. Despite the title, this is not a cartoon for the whole family, which is evident from FOX's TV-14 advisory. The Federal Communications Commission required FOX to air it after 8 p.m. because of its explicit content. In one episode, the network chose to blur an image of Stewie's bare bum, and the show has a disclaimer before each episode.

*Family Guy* is just one of the 24 shows featured on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim that is geared toward older viewers. Shows such as *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, *Futurama*, *Cowboy Bebop* and *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* air from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. Saturday through Thursday.

### Anime invasion

Anime, an animation style typically based on Japanese comic books, or manga, has become much more mainstream. The anime trend began with "college nerds, misfits, introverts... whatever you want to call them," says Patrick Broz, a Suncoast Motion Picture employee. Now the large-eyed characters of anime are popular with middle school and high school students. He says anime is more of a fad with this age group and questions how long it will last. Andrew Cope, president of the MU Anime Club, disagrees and says anime will maintain its popularity because there has been an increase of imported Japanese animation.

"Anime stands apart from other types of shows because of its originality," Cope says. "It combines different genres into every type of anime." One of Cope's favorites, *Fooly Cooly*, incorporates action, comedy, fantasy and science fiction. The Adult Swim show centers on Nandaba Naota, a school-

age boy who struggles with his new housekeeper and his brother's girlfriend.

### Controversial cable

The adult-oriented plots of these popular shows often bring controversy. In one episode of *The Simpsons*, Marge discovers her sister is a lesbian who wants to get married. *The New York Times* reported that L. Brent Bozell III, president of the Parents Television Council, a Los Angeles media watchdog, led opposition to the episode even though he never watched it. "At a time when the public mood is overwhelmingly against gay marriage, any show that promotes gay marriage is deliberately bucking the public mood," he said.

Similarly, in a *Family Guy* episode, Peter sings the song "You got the AIDS" as a member of a barbershop quartet. AIDS groups such as Philadelphia's ActionAIDS and the AIDS Foundation of Chicago found the episode offensive. FOX officials defended their decision to air the episode by saying that *Family Guy* wasn't targeting AIDS patients. The show thrives on inappropriate comedy, and as a result, it has insulted almost every ethnic, religious and social group, said FOX spokesman Steven Melnick in *The Advocate*.

Despite the controversy these shows raise, much of the public continues to watch. Hank Ottinger, a film professor at Westminster College, says, "*The Simpsons* is probably one of the most clever animations and most salient social commentaries." He says it's a show that even "old farts" such as he and his wife can enjoy.

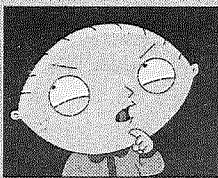
— NISA KORTE

## SKETCHY CHARACTERS

These characters might be animated, but don't count on them being kid-friendly. Sarcastic, cynical and crass, these cartoon crazies can't be found on Saturday mornings.

### Stewie Griffin, *Family Guy*

This acid-tongued baby with a sinister British accent is constantly on a quest for world domination. Forget rattles and stuffed animals, this wicked wee one is always causing trouble. From creating devices to help in his quest to rule the world to scheming to kill his mother, Lois, Stewie is never done trying to dominate the world while still in diapers.



COURTESY OF FOX

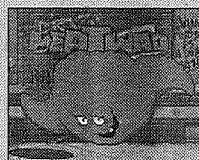
### Meatwad, *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*

Meatwad is the shape-shifting glob of meat who is part of

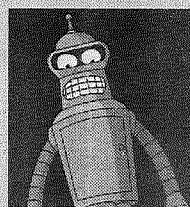
the Aqua Teen Hunger Force, three human-sized fast-food crime solvers who live in New Jersey. Meatwad is happy-go-lucky despite Master Shake's frequent insults, and the lovable and clueless blob is always ready to dance.

### Bender, *Futurama*

Constantly imploring others to bite his shiny metal booty, Bender is a robot with the worst qualities of an angry drunk, which makes sense because he needs alcohol for fuel. He chain-smokes, curses and argues but has a bit of a softer side. He often expresses aspirations to be a folk singer and has a fondness for penguins. But his penchant for snatching wallets and overinflated ego make him a metal menace.



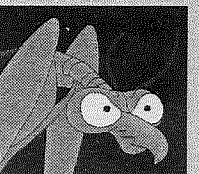
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### Zorak, *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*

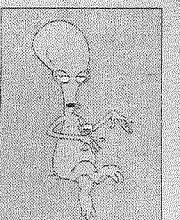
The cynical band leader on superhero Space Ghost's talk show, Zorak isn't afraid to zing his pompous co-worker or celebrity guests. Proclaiming himself the lone mantis of the apocalypse, Zorak frequently launches into absurd rants and gets into childish arguments with Space Ghost.



COURTESY OF CARTOON NETWORK

### Roger, *American Dad!*

Rescued from Area 51, Roger is the resident angry E.T. in the Smith family. From dressing up as a Rastafarian to posing as a date for an ugly girl to accidentally lactating into potato salad, Roger always comes close to blowing his cover as a subversive space invader.



COURTESY OF FOX

— SHANNON BURKE

Things we love about movies

The healing power of Windex in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*