

I have always been fascinated by the animation present in many films and video games. Salt Lake City happens to be an animation mecca to its respective industry, and is actually where much of the modern technology for the field was invented. Because of this, it was very easy to find and interview Jon Diesta, a man that works for Avalanche Software, one of six branches of Disney Interactive Studio's.

At Avalanche Software, Jon is just one of the many that help make Disney video games. His personal contribution is as a concept artist, with an emphasis on character design. Drawing has been a passion for him his whole life and his passion eventually shaped in to being his career. He first studied character design at California Institute of the Arts, receiving the type of education that the animation industry looks for in an employee. In 2006, shortly after he graduated, he landed a job working for Disney Interactive Studio's and has been there ever since.

Jon's job as a character designer requires a lot of hard work, intense deadlines, and exceptional skill as an artist. He said for every video game they create (their most recent one being Pixar's *Cars 2*), he, among many others, must draw numerous sketches of potential characters. They are given guidelines and then encouraged to use their own creativity to put it into life. I have seen his work and he is, no doubt, an amazing artist with a natural comprehension of form and lighting. Despite his incredible talent, he says that most of his work never ends up being used. Each artist will create dozens of sketches for each idea and a very small percentage of them end up being in the final product. "This aspect of the job can be frustrating at times," Jon claims, "You put a lot of effort into these drawings and a lot of it just gets thrown away. It can be discouraging." He has been in the industry for about six years now, however, and says that you just have to learn that it is an unavoidable aspect of the job. When a sketch gets turned down, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is a bad sketch; instead, it simply does not fit what they are looking for.

The animation industry is a tough field to get your foot in the door and there are a lot of mistakes that aspiring animators make when going in to the field. Jon elaborated on this by saying that larger, renowned companies, such as Disney, Blizzard, or Bethesda, expect their applicants to have gone to a high-level animation school and have up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the newest animation technology. "When they're hiring, if they see you went to a school that doesn't specialize in animation, they won't even consider you," Jon says. The same thing goes with the programs used to animate, such as Dreamweaver, Maya, or Macromedia: a lack of understanding for any of these programs will result in potential employers dismissing your application entirely. On top of all of that, in recent years, video game design and animation has become a very competitive field and only the best succeed. He did say, however, that there are many different areas that make up the end result of a functioning video game. Without one area, such as texturing, the entire process, or the "pipeline," could never be completed.

Overall, my interview with Jon Diesta proved to be incredibly insightful. He was able to shed light on many of the pros and cons of the animation industry and offer a realistic idea of what to expect from it. He humbly admitted that he has achieved a rewarding career doing what he loves for a well-known company, which is a great accomplishment in such a competitive field. When it all comes down to it, his success can be attributed to his hard work and determination. Jon says, that despite all that, going into the animation industry, whether that be in character design, computer programming, lighting, or texturing, above all else, the biggest requirement is an immaculate skill as an artist and a remarkable imagination.