



der  
**SQUONK**



KEY FACTS



Title	Der Squonk
Logline	A beautiful kingdom. An eerie howling in the woods. The hunter Frederick is sent to catch the mysterious Squonk once and for all...
Genre	Fantasy/Fairy Tale
Length	18:10 Minutes
Principal Photography	2012-2013
Post-Production	2013-2022
Capture Format	ARRI Alexa (ARRI RAW)
Master	DCP (Cinemascope)
Director	Mike Bothe
Producer	Janns Funk
Screenplay	Jannis Funk & Mike Bothe
Director of Photography	Timon Schäppi
Production Design	Svantje Woltersdorf
Production Companies	We Are Buddies, bittersuess pictures

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FILMUNIVERSITÄT  
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## SYNOPSIS



**L**ittle Caspar is afraid of a moth in the dark. Then his grandfather tells him the fairy tale of the Squonk:

Every spring, an ugly beast appears in the forests of the kingdom. With its eerie howling in the woods, the Squonk robs people of their sleep. The brave trapper Frederick sets out to catch the creature. But even his most skillful traps come to naught. Instead of the monster, Frederick catches only spring flowers. The proud hunter despairs more and more.

But then he secretly observes how the other animals of the forest fearfully flee into the undergrowth when the Squonk approaches. Lonely the Squonk sits at a pond and cries. Absorbed in grief, he does not notice that from his tears grow beautiful flowers. Instead, he only has eyes for his disfigured reflection in the water.

Frederick senses his chance: he forms a puppet in the image of the Squonk and lures his prey into the trap.

The Squonk cautiously approaches the supposed companion - and suddenly finds himself in a net, floundering two feet above the ground!

But no sooner has the hunter marveled at his howling catch than the Squonk disappears, dissolving into tears. All that remains is a salty lake on the ground, from which soon grows the most beautiful and largest flower of the forest...



## PRODUCTION TECHNIQUE



While we could simply set up and shoot the nursery in the studio, the fairytale forest initially only existed in our heads. But we also never wanted to simply go into the forest and shoot the images “on location”, but rather design each individual tree ourselves and create the perfect illusion of an eerily fantastic forest. To do this, we resort to a mix of studio builds, miniature models, and digital set extensions.

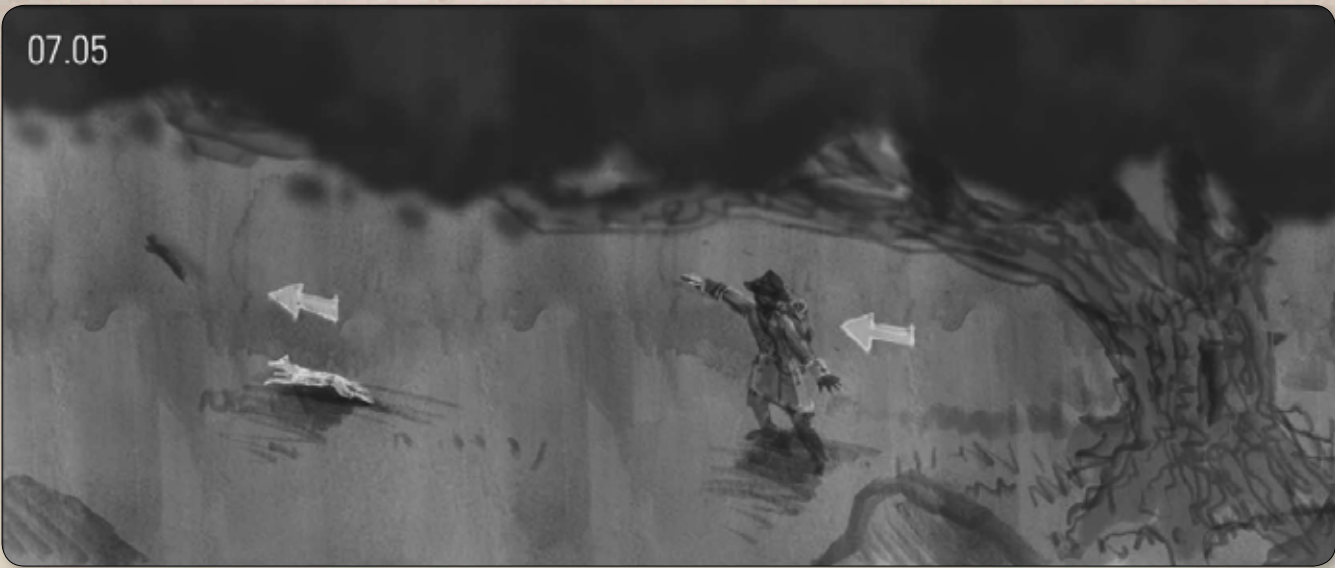
In the studio, we created a forest floor on a pedestal set against a blue-screen background that the actors could interact with directly. The scenes with the actors were then edited together so that the miniature backgrounds could be cut to fit each shot exactly.

The miniature models perfectly match the forest floor of the studio landscape in terms of material and shape. They form the direct background to the location. In order to create a coherent image impression later, the shots on the set and in the model also have to be perfectly matched technically. For this purpose,

we created a 3D animation as a pre-visualization, precisely determined the shot sizes and focal lengths, and planned which elements should be realized in real size and which in the model.

The rearmost layer in the image, which was only added in post-production (compositing), is formed by matte paintings: landscapes composed from drawings and photos, which create the impression that the forest goes on forever towards the back, as carefully-crafted as in the foreground.

07.05





*Concept Art – Miniature Model – Final Compositing*



*Concept Art – Final Compositing*



Storyboard – Final Compositing



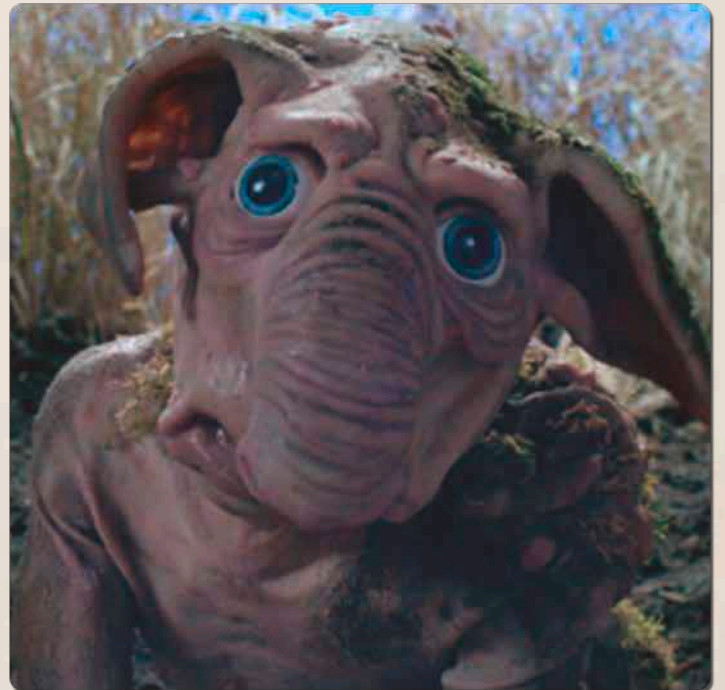


**W**e really wanted to realize the Squonk himself as a costume with a real actor and not as a 3D character.

Johannes Stubenvoll has a background in physical theater and breathes a lot of life into the Squonk through his acting. Both the expressiveness and the interaction with the environment would not have been possible with a digital character.

The costume was built over half a year by our 12-person Monster Department, led by Nadja März and Nick Krützfeldt. Nadja brought many years of experience as an SFX make-up artist and Nick the know-how for working with silicone, which he learned in the workshops of WETA Workshop for “The Hobbit” in New Zealand. The colors were applied to the costume via airbrush by Stefan von Essen (“Bernd das Brot”).

In order for the Squonk to be able to react to the environment with his eyes, we then recreated the Squonk head in 3D based on hundreds of photos and replaced the eye area in each shot individually with a digital duplicate.





## POST-PRODUCTION



The digital post-production was divided into several stages. Immediately after the end of the live-action shoot in December 2012, work began in the editing room. The finished cut was the prerequisite for many further steps, but some things - like 3D modeling and complicated tracking - were already tackled in parallel.

With the completion of the miniature shoot in April 2013, we then entered the hot phase of compositing, where the layers were brought together for the first time. The logistical and organizational backbone for our decentralized post-production, where sequences are distributed across artists and supporting companies nationwide, is the Shotgrid software in conjunction with OMSTUDIOS' File Server. The workflow allowed tasks to be managed and controlled with maximum efficiency.

The compositing was mainly done in Nuke, but the workflow architecture also allowed the integration

of Flame artists, for example.

The industry's willingness to help and interest in ambitious newcomer projects was great: We were supported by a number of post-production companies and over 150 individual artists, and met with a consistently positive response everywhere. Especially the combination of miniature models and modern VFX motivated many artists to offer their labor for free.









## DIRECTOR'S NOTE



When we read the old American lumberjack legend of the lonely monster for the first time in 2010, it was immediately clear to us: this is the material for a fantastic short film. We quickly developed first ideas, drew first storyboards and made first drafts. The vision of creating a fairytale forest completely out of miniature models emerged. In our somewhat naive courage, we thought the whole thing was a „weekend project“. In fact, „The Squonk“ was to accompany us for more than ten years.

From the beginning, it has been our wish to realize as many effects as possible „in camera“ and not on the computer - we would rather see thumbprints on miniature trees in the finished film than render artifacts of 3D objects. But building every single tree as a model, developing a squonk costume that could be worn by a real actor - these were all challenges that took years to overcome. Fortunately, we found committed co-producers and supporters in Bittersuess pictures and the Babelsberg Film University.

Two years passed before the technical problems for the demanding shoot were solved and the financing closed. In 2012, six weeks of shooting followed with the actors in elaborate studio setups, then two months of editing, then another four weeks of shooting to re-shoot the film shot by shot with miniature models. More than a hundred people worked on the set and in the miniature workshops, without pay, buoyed by their belief in the project. Several years of post-production followed, in the end involving over 200 VFX artists from many different countries, who also invested their free time and passion in the „Squonk“. In between, there were many moments when we doubted whether the project would ever be finished - and enough skeptics from the outside who told us before we even started shooting that what we had set out to do was „impossible“.

We are all the more proud that the film is finished today. Our co-producer Bittersuess pictures no longer exists, nor do the two main sponsors OMSTUDIOS and CHROMA Media. The university dropped out



DIRECTOR'S NOTE



of the project at some point, because every standard study period had long since been exceeded. But „The Squonk“ survived all that.

Certainly, we would do many things differently if we could restart the project today. But we are very happy with the result. It has become a short film almost without compromise and a declaration of love for analog filmmaking with costumes, studio buildings and miniatures. A handmade film.

Now we hope that with the finished fairy tale we can trigger the same feeling in small and large viewers all over the world that we had back then when first reading the lumberjack saga: The feeling that a loved one is sitting on the edge of our bed and tells us a story.

*Mike Bothe | Jannis Funk*



CAST



*Frederick*  
Hannes Wegener



*Squonk*  
Johannes Stubenvoll



*Caspar*  
Juri Winkler



*Grandfather*  
Klaus Münster



## TEAM



Mike Bothe has been working in commercial film for over 15 years. He started as a designer and VFX artist and is now at home in the dark post-production basements and grading suites of Berlin as a freelance colorist for clients from all over the world. „The Squonk“ is his first live-action short film as a director.



Jannis Funk studied film and television production at the Babelsberg Film University. During his studies, he produced two feature films and numerous short films. He then earned a doctorate in media studies. As a freelance screenwriter and producer, he has worked for radio, film and TV clients and was invited to Berlinale Talents. He is currently developing the science fiction series WHISPER TO MY PAST for UFA.



Timon Schäppi is a Director of Photography based in Berlin & Zurich. He graduated in cinematography from Film University Babelsberg with the award-winning feature LOVE STEAKS, which was nominated at the German Academy Awards as Best Film. He continued with season I of the Grimme-Prize-nominated comedy-series EICHWALD, MdB. TIGER GIRL premiered at the 67th Berlinale as the opening film of the Panorama special section.



Svantje Woltersdorf studied scenography at the Film University Babelsberg. She gained experience in major productions such as „The Girl in the Spider’s Web“ and was herself responsible as a scenographer for the short films MÄNNER, MÖPSE UND MOTOREN, PRÄSENZLÜCKE and KOSMOS MAA, among others. She also explores the intersection of film and theater in her artistic research.



## CONTACT



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