

“Kim Possible. She can do anything”

A conversation with Robert Schooley and Mark McCorkle*

Kim Possible – is she a female superhero?

What Kim Possible does is pretty amazing and kind of implausible, but she still has real problems and teen issues she goes through. So we were careful not to make her impervious or anything like superheroes are, because we wanted Kim and Ron to be characters that kids can relate to. What makes Kim effective in the action world is gymnastics, cheerleading, physical activity, something that any kid, any girl, in the world could do. The other thing about Kim that was part of what made it really exciting when we first developed it, is the idea that she would have a website, she would have the communicator with a video screen. When we started in the year 2000 there were only cell phones, and not every kid had a website – but now kids do, and this is one of those things that makes the world smaller. It reflects that a little symbolically in the series, where Kim can effortlessly hop around the world and get back in time for dinner. Which is pretty unrealistic, but it's what kids can do on the internet now. They can talk to somebody anywhere, so it's one of those things that, at the time, we thought was kind of novel – and it is actually just now part of kids' everyday lives.

What role does humour play in this series?

It's primarily a comedy series and it's definitely parodying a lot of the conventions of the *James Bond* movies and things like that. We found that boys tend to really like action shows,

just action, but girls want to see characters and a little more relationships. And the one thing we found that unites boys and girls is, everybody likes to laugh, so we felt that if we could do a show that had some adventure, some relationships and humour throughout, then we would appeal to a wider audience and more kids would like it. And so far we're good!

Another thing that we consciously put into Kim, and it really helped to form her character and it is part of why kids and adults respond positively to her, was this simple idea that her goal is just to help people. If someone needs help, no matter how big or how small, she'll do it, but then when she needs a ride to Hong Kong, she gets a ride from somebody and we always play that gag: “Thank you for the ride” – “No, thank *you*, for saving us ...”. So it became a humour thing, but also a nice thing that for her it was never about money or medals or working for some organisation. If someone goes to her website and says “I need help”, she helps.

How did you create the character Kim Possible?

We got the request that the people at Disney Channel were looking for a show that showed ordinary kids in extraordinary circumstances. Bob and I were on our way back from lunch and I just turned to him and said: “Kim Possible. She can do anything.” And then Bob said: “Ron Stoppable, he can't”. And then we came up with almost the entire show. A show with those kinds of names

already tells you that this is going to be an arched show that is a little bit over the top, but also that the girl is going to be the action lead and the guy is going to be funny.

There was this fun challenge for us: in TV animation there's a sort of ancient truism that girls will watch a show with a boy star, but boys will not watch a show where a girl is the star, for whatever reason. So we were thrilled when the show premiered and it was getting a pretty healthy sampling of boy fans.

And also because we're both fathers with daughters and when we were growing up we had heroes – James Bond or Captain Kirk or the like. We had these guys who were larger-than-life characters, and when you were playing, you were pretending you were them.

So we thought, why shouldn't our

daughters have the same thing, a character that they can pretend to be?

Working out the whole Kim Possible universe was really collaborative. The people at Disney Channel have input all the way and the actors help develop, if they bring something to it. The designers of the characters for the visual look of it certainly help set it apart, the various writers who work with us, everybody who can bring a little spark, that all adds up. And it does develop, too. When you do that many seasons the character gets to grow and you usually discover new things. We were lucky enough to be able to oversee the whole series and keep it consistent.

Which considerations played into the graphic realisation of the characters? How much did you, as the writers, take part in the decision-making of Kim's appearance?

We took a part in it a lot, but the credit really has to go to the 1st season director Chris Bailey, and to our brilliant art director, Alan Bodner. He and Stephen Silver, the character designer, put their heads together. We had an input considering we've had a fair amount of experience in doing movie spin-offs. We knew what worked in TV animation and what didn't. And we knew, Kim had to be an appealing character and Ron had to be a goofy-appealing character.

We tried a lot of things for Kim's look. There were about 3 months of various developments. She started out as a pretty standard-looking athletic blonde. It evolved; we just tried to make her more unique. I think one of the things that design-wise they pushed for was Lara Croft. But together with Disney Channel we came to realise that this is an interesting character and a fun character, but not a very real character. That's where we really pushed the designers into the direction of "let's make her look like a real 14-year-old girl" that she's not some 'bombshell', she's just this pretty girl who's athletic. She has a nice,

very appealing design, but we just wanted to keep it out of that realm of video game heroine.

We did a representative study on favourite television characters of 6- to 12-year-olds in Germany and Kim Possible ranked # 1 in 2007 for the girls. What makes her so especially attractive to girls?

It's everything! When you create an animated character, the visual design is a huge part of it and she's a very appealing design, but also very relatable. The voice actress Christy Carlson Romano for us here in America did a great job. I've actually heard some of the German translations and they match the voice pretty well. So, the voice actor is a huge part of the appeal. And then the character as we created it, the fact that she's a confident, competent, positive character is really appealing.

In our survey in 2007, Kim Possible was the only girl character ranking among the top ten of the boys in Germany. Why is that so?

Whenever there's an action complement to a show, boys get excited, and when Kim does her martial arts and when she's doing one of these incredible stunts, boys love to watch it. They think she's so good at it that they have fun watching her do it! And one of the things that we've always found is that boys of any age, going right up to the late teen years, love humour and characters that are a little goofy, sort of silly and weird. When we tested it, the kids were like: "Oh, Ron's stupid funny" and that became sort of a buzz phrase.

And we tried to highlight from time to time in the show that even though Ron is not a great action hero the way Kim is an action heroine, he goes along and puts himself in this danger, so he's still very courageous. In season 4 he does get his chance to shine even more than previously. Over the course of the seasons, the one feedback that we consistently got from

boys was they did want to see Ron succeed a little more, so heading into season 4 we let him develop and become more confident so he wasn't always messing up.

How did you develop Shego, the female villain?

Well, in a lot of ways it evolved. The Drakken/Shego-dynamic is sort of this weird mirror of the Kim/Ron-dynamic. For some reason the girl is very competent and the boy is a fumbler. We had worked with Nicole Sullivan, the voice of Shego, on the *Buzz Lightyear* series, and we created this character for her. In the very first session with John DiMaggio, who plays Drakken, they got this chemistry of her being smarter than him and being sarcastic – being the hallmark of those characters that really did come from the actors and what they could make funniest. Initially, Shego was supposed to be just a standard sidekick to him, but as soon as we cast Nicole and played with it, it became clear that the funny dynamic there was for her to just barely put up with him.

Would Kim have been your dream girl in High School?

Oh, absolutely! She would have been way out of our class though. ■

*A short version of a conversation of Elke Schlote (IZI) with Robert Schooley and Mark McCorkle, creators of Kim Possible. The two US-Americans have been working as writers and producers in children's animation for more than 15 years.