



Eric Schwartz is still with us.
Hip hip! Hoorah!

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Interview with Sabrina Online's creator, Eric Schwartz

One of the popular destinations on Jumpgate is the daily comics page featuring the complete collection of Sabrina Online, presented as a daily comic strip.

Eric Schwartz is a well-known cartoonist from his creations in illustration and animation of Amy the squirrel, Sabrina, the Aerotoons animations, and many others. His animations (many in Moviesetter format) are used to this day to demonstrate the power of the classic Amiga OS and hardware.

We thought it would be interesting to interview Eric and see what he had to say; below is a transcript of an email interview conducted from September 25, and Oct 29th, 2001.

Jumpgate : When did you get into cartooning, and what got you interested in drawing anthropomorphic characters?

Eric W. Schwartz : I've been drawing for as long as I can remember, and my greatest influences have been cartoons, such as animated films and comic strips. My early attempts at drawing were usually copying or emulating comic characters, such as Garfield the cat, and later animated cartoon characters from Disney or Warner Brothers. Animal characters are common in cartoons, and I just carried on with the traditions when I started creating my own characters. I didn't think of them as anthropomorphic or 'furry' characters at the time. To me they were "cartoon animals". It wasn't until I was contacted by a few fans that I became aware of the fandoms for anthropomorphic animal characters and the like.

Jumpgate : What got you interested in the Amiga, and how has it helped your work?

Eric W. Schwartz : I had an interest in the Amiga ever since it first appeared, knowing that it was a very powerful computer for graphics, especially in the late eighties. I got an Amiga 500 around the end of 1988, and I've been hooked ever since, especially with its capacity for creating quick animations. I've had the opportunity to use a variety of computers and software, and I generally prefer the Amiga as an environment. I doubt I would be in quite the same place I am now, if I didn't have the Amiga, and made use of its graphics and animation abilities.

Jumpgate : Speaking of Amigas, where did you get the idea for Amy the Squirrel, and how does it feel to have created a symbol that just about every Amiga user identifies with the platform?

Eric W. Schwartz : Not too surprisingly, I never had the idea of a symbol or mascot in mind when I first drew the character. When I was much younger, I often drew well-known cartoon characters, such as Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse, and several others, in part from my enjoyment of the characters and also to hone my skills as a cartoonist. After some time I came to a simple revelation - that I would be unlikely to make a name for myself without creating characters of my own.

Amy the Squirrel was one of the first results of my attempts to create my own

character following the inspiration of the classic studio cartoons. The name came from the Amiga, which didn't hurt Amy's unofficial mascot status. As my style changed over time, the look and nature of Amy's character has changed somewhat, but she always stands out as my first reasonably well-known character, since her first appearance in 1989.

Jumpgate : So where did the idea for Sabrina come from?

Eric W. Schwartz : Basically just a desire to create different characters. Amy was my first popular character, and my only one in the eyes of some. When many of my old animations were reviewed in Amiga magazines, reviewers commonly mistook other female characters for Amy, such as Clarisse Cat from the Flip the Frog cartoons, or even the Femme lemming that appeared at the end of the Anti-Lemming demo. Many female animal characters I had at the time were similar to Amy visually, So I tried to put more effort into having characters that were more distinctive from each other visually. When I first started sketching the skunk character that would later become Sabrina, my intent was to create a total departure from the Amy-type. Where Amy was confident and built like a supermodel, Sabrina was thicker thru the hips, wore glasses and was shy and insecure. When I had the opportunity to try my hand at a comic strip for my college, I chose Sabrina as a lead character, as I thought she represented a student-type better than Amy did. With some artwork and reprints of the college comic strip, Sabrina gained popularity quickly, surpassing Amy's popularity in many ways. It greatly influenced me when I reworked the comic strip to become "Sabrina Online" on the internet in 1996. My original idea was for the strip was to center around Amy.

Jumpgate : So Sabrina got her start when you were in college; what college did you attend and what did you study?

Eric W. Schwartz : I went to the Columbus College of Art and Design in Columbus, Ohio. My major was illustration.

Jumpgate : So what do you do for a living now - do you work for some company, are you a freelance illustrator/cartoonist, or do you work for some part of a covert government agency?

Eric W. Schwartz : Basically, I do freelance work in illustration, cartooning, and animation. I don't get a lot of work, but I have done illustration for comic books, graphics for video games and websites, and animation for video games and local television commercials. I mix that with sales of my own artwork and related material, and trying to find new venues for my comic strip.

Jumpgate : How much of Sabrina Online is drawn from your own life, past or present?

Eric W. Schwartz : When I did "Sabrina at See-CAD", the college comic strip, I drew heavily from my own experiences as a college student. That happens much less now with Sabrina Online, though aspects of Sabrina's and other characters' personalities and interests come from myself, or from people I know. Most of the rest is made up.

Jumpgate : Of all your characters, which is your favorite, and which is most like yourself?

Eric W. Schwartz : I wouldn't say I have a favorite, as each of my characters are different, though I've done the most work with Sabrina recently, with the comic strip and related work. Sabrina is probably the most like me as well, since we both have personality traits and interests in common.

Jumpgate : You've released three Sabrina comic books (Sabrina Year One, Year Two and Year Three). When is the next installment going to be available? How are sales going?

Eric W. Schwartz : Actually, there have been four so far - Sabrina at See-CAD (which was a home-made collection book of the college comic strips), and Sabrina Online Year One, Two, and Three (all published with the aid of United Publications in Great Britain). I am unsure exactly how well they have done financially, but Sales have been brisk and interest appears to be high. A 'Year Four' collection is scheduled to appear in January or February 2002. It will be larger and contain more comics and other material than the previous three books.

Jumpgate : So where do you see Sabrina Online heading? Any teasers to what you have planned for her?

Eric W. Schwartz : If I'm lucky, I would like to bring Sabrina Online to a greater audience, possibly branching into animation or other media. If you mean story-wise, there's not a lot I can tell you, in part because I don't like to divulge stories ahead of time, and also because often I don't know exactly what will happen next in the strip until I actually begin working on the next installment.

Jumpgate : Thanks for taking the time to talk with us.

Eric W. Schwartz : Thanks.

Sabrina Online comic books, t-shirts and other materials are available through mail order directly from the **ES Productions** website (there are online catalogs available). The comic books are also available from the **United Publications** website - just do a search for **Sabrina Online**.

Sabrina* Online.com
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