

# San Diego Comic-Con 2011

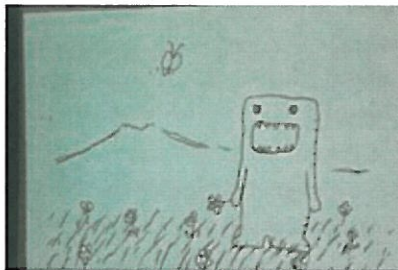
## Spotlight on Tsuneo Goda

by Gia Manry, Jul 23rd 2011

*Domo-kun* creator Tsuneo Goda drew a large crowd for his spotlight panel on Saturday, which was opened by a Dark Horse representative, who spoke briefly about the *Domo-kun* character's history in stop-motion animation and his arrival in the United States. Comic-Con's David Glanzer took over the microphone next to thank Goda for coming to the event. Glanzer then awarded Goda Comic-Con's annual Inkpot Award, which is given to outstanding contributors to comics and comic arts.



Goda opened by apologizing for speaking Japanese; Dark Horse's director of Asian licensing, [Michael Gombos](#), handled the panel's translation. Goda joked that having received the Inkpot Award he felt that he really had to try his best during the panel. Next the audience watched a video presentation on Goda's [works](#), including *Domo-kun* and many other stop-motion animations. As with the [video](#), which featured a lot of *Domo-kun*, Goda stated that he would mostly focus on *Domo-kun* for the duration of the panel.



Twelve or thirteen years ago, *Domo-kun* was born. At the time he was a director who had never created a character, but he heard that Japan's [NHK television network](#) was seeking a new mascot character and he decided to try it out. He worked on the character up until mere hours before the submission was due, and he decided to simply draw circles and squares until he came up with something on his paper. He turned it into the *NHK* as an amalgam of sketches and graffiti, and was shocked when the *NHK* called him and hired him. Goda showed the audience some of his earliest drawings of *Domo-kun*, and claimed that the biggest mystery of his life was why anyone would hire him after seeing it.

During the discussions with *NHK* on how to present the character, Goda made a clay model of the character to share his vision of what the character was supposed to be like. (He joked that the other staff in his studio told him to take the day off after he started hammering on a piece of clay.) But as a result, they decided to create the mascot character's shorts as stop-motion animation.

Domo-kun's earliest features were shorts shown between episodes and commercials, no longer than 30 seconds. His first appearance on television was December 22, 1998— widely recognized by Japanese fans as the character's birthday. Goda played the first short for the audience, which features the character being born from an egg in the underground home of a rabbit. A few more of these early shorts graced the screen, and the audience laughed and applauded throughout all of them. In the last twelve or thirteen years, more than forty 30-second *Domo-kun* "episodes" have been made as the character's popularity grew gradually.

Nowadays, Goda said that he comes up with the characters and stories and hands them to the staff to make the actual animation. A slideshow of the studio, including sets with multiple Domo-kuns, was then shown so that Goda could outline some of how *Domo-kun* works are made. There are about fifty employees in the studio, and every [episode](#) requires a lot of work, including lighting and camera crews. Goda noted that he feels blessed that throughout the years, most of the staff has stayed the same, and the rest of the staff have come to love Domo-kun as much as or more than he does. (Sometimes they even argue with him about what Domo-kun would do in the scenarios he writes.) Domo-kun has many parents who love him and raise him in Tokyo along with Goda, he said.

The audience was treated to several concept sketches and storyboards for *Domo-kun* adventures, including Halloween and other seasonal events. The average shooting day goes from about 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. and on a good day, that will result in five seconds of animation. It takes about a week to make a full thirty-second spot.

Goda revealed that the Domo-kun character in front of him is the original, used in the stop-motion films. As for the stories, Goda said that he comes up with most of them from his own memories. For example, one *Domo-kun* short features the character unable to discern the difference between a *Godzilla*-esque [film](#) and reality, which Goda remembers happening to him as a child. He offered an example: as a child he went to see the filming of a *Power Rangers*-esque show and it turned out that a female character's stunts were being performed by a man, who took off his hood and took a leisurely smoke between takes. But this didn't stop him from being able to enjoy the show later, even though it seemed odd at the time, which he wanted to capture in the *Domo-kun* short.



In short, each *Domo-kun* adventure is a little piece of Goda, and he's sure that even the experience of this panel will become fodder for another story someday. A few years ago a friend suggested that Goda perform a Google search for the character, and Goda couldn't believe how many results the search came up with. The international interest has surprised him, but he wants to help do more to let the world know about Domo-kun. He is also very thankful for fans' interest in his creation.

After a brief interruption, presumably a time warning, Goda showed a new work that he has created for Nissan which will be available on the company's website starting August 1. The video shown was claymation, featuring a creature with electrical prongs on his head who goes on

a journey and meets a girl with a tail that ends in an electric prong, as well as a group of giraffe-like beings with heads like wind turbines and other colorful beings.

The panel is just about out of time but Goda wanted to add a message about the earthquake and nuclear power plant problems currently plaguing Japan. He thanked America and other countries for all of their support of Japan in its troubled times, especially since the Japanese government hasn't been very reliable. The key is really for people to come together, and because of that support, anime and manga and other works are still being created. He expressed hope that Domo-kun was part of the Japanese culture that interests people here at Comic-Con.

Goda closed the panel with one last video, which was shot even as Tokyo was shaking and which hasn't been seen in Japan yet.