The Next Dr. Seuss?

'97 takes Sleazy from The D to the big screen

BY TIERRE STARRHOF '94 - Most people take at least a little pride in playing the wise guy. Chris Miller '97 enjoys humor so much he has made it his life at Dartmouth. Next year it will be his profession.

Miller is well known on campus for his work with the student humor magazine Jack-O-Lantern, his cartoon strips in The Daily Dartmouth, and his roles in an improvisational acting group. But with the help of the studio art and film studies department, he is taking things one step further.

Funded by a $1,500 grant from the Peter E. Smith Initiative Fund this winter, Miller is creating an animation film which will air on animation film-festival circuits. To make the six-minute comedy, titled Sleazy the Wonder Squirrel Goes to France, he will create 3,000 color drawings in the Hopkins Center film studios as part of his studio art and film studies major. "It's really putting together everything I've got," he says.

The project may sound ambitious, but Miller is no amateur. According to Miller's adviser, film studies professor David Erlitch, "Chris learned animation technique faster than anyone I've ever known and integrated it with his gift for character and situation." Miller's first animation film, Sleazy the Wonder Squirrel Show, won international acclaim last year and was one of five young American films selected for Germany's Stuttgart Animation Festival.

But the recognition was not enough. "Every time I watch the film I see the things I want to do better next time," he says. "The last film was student quality. This next one is going to be more professional so it can be shown at more festivals. This one will be much more advanced animation."

And film festivals may be only the start of Miller's fame. This spring he will be presenting the film to television networks. Some have already expressed interest in buying his animation. Which ones? "Well, I don't want to say," Miller admits. "I'll jinx myself."

Miller also creates small campus uproars as an editor of The Jack-O-Lantern, the campus humor magazine which helped bring back to fame. Using his cartooning skills and his experience from a recent Mad Magazine internship, Miller expanded the size of the paper and introduced a dose of fresh humor. Miller and his staff spent so much money improving the publication, that "we got ourselves into debt," he says with a smile.

Perhaps the last time the magazine looked so good was when Theodor Geisel '25, better known as Dr. Seuss, ran the publication. Geisel first adopted the pen name Dr. Seuss during a suspension term so he could continue writing cowboy for The Jack-O-Lantern.

Miller, though, has been fortunate enough not to need a disguise at Dartmouth, except perhaps from the Dining Services administrators — his favorite department to ridicule. "You can never lose when you make fun of Dartmouth's dining services," he says, "because everyone eats there, and they eat there so often."

Miller also brings his humor to the stage. As co-founder of The Dog Day Players improvomental acting troupe, Miller and his band of dramatists perform weekly for residence halls, Greek houses or parties. "I keep myself very busy trying to be a wise guy," he says.

For a glimpse of Miller on the big screen, catch the updated version of The Empire Strikes Back hitting theaters this winter. When Miller spent the summer drawing aliens for the next Star Wars movies (these will debut in 1998) at George Lucas's movie workshop, Industrial Light and Magic, he was asked to play a storm trooper. He will be appearing alongside Darth Vader in a short section.

"I was in the office one day when they were looking for someone five feet, 11 inches," he says. "I got lucky. He'll be the one in white."