Help an Aspiring Animator

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My nephew is 16 or 17 and wants to become an animation/game programmer. He's been working using a product called **blender**. It seems to be pretty polished for an open source project. I was impressed with the movie galleries on the site and especially with the "Big Buck the Bunny" and "Elephants Dream" - pretty awesome cgi stuff. Most of you who read my blog know that I am *not* qualified to do (or judge) anything artistic. My wife won't even let me choose which soap to put in the shower. So I thought I would be a good uncle and ask my readers if they have a take on Blender. Is it "up to snuff" for an IDE? Is there something more powerful or better he should be using (and why)?

He gave me an animation which I have converted to FLV. You can check it out at this **link**. Take a look and see what you think. I think he has talent. It needs audio, but it's pretty smooth and he's thought of a number of things - backlighting, reflections and shadows etc. What I *don't* know is if it's "out of the box" thinking or the result of working his way through tutorials. I would appreciate any comments you can muster, but please be helpful and not too critical (remember when you were just starting out :). If you have a comment you want to send without posting it "live" feel free to use the ask-a-muse box in the upper right or email me directly at mkruger at cfwebtools.com.