Fatal flaws: I'd love to licence this film but ...

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BIOGRAPHIES
Dr Jenny Shipway has been involved with planetaria since 2003, including managing the 17m Winchester Science Centre planetarium for its first ten years. She sits on the IPS Education Committee, is a trustee of the Spacelink Learning Foundation and a former president of the British Association of Planetaria.

Kaoru Kimura has been involved with planetaria since 1987. She works for E/PO of Astronomy Education and program coordination. She engages in work to relate formal education, non-formal education to a research organization. She sits on the IPS Education Committee, and has been helping with the LIPS workshop for several years.

ABSTRACT
Fulldome films are expensive to produce, but there are a limited number of planetariums seeking to licence shows. This demands that films are licenced internationally, bringing complex challenges related to different cultural expectations and requirements. We have all seen shows that are fantastic except for that one fatal flaw that makes them unplayable in our dome.

In this session, participants share the common issues which have prevented them from choosing shows that would otherwise have been of interest to their audiences. The resulting knowledge will be made available to producers and the planetarium community; please contact Jenny Shipway for a copy of the report.

EXAMPLES FROM THE UK
Some examples of such issues as encountered by Jenny Shipway, who spent 10 years licencing shows for UK audiences:

For children under 8yr, it is necessary for us to portray a rather idealized world. This means avoiding any cruelty and to clearly show that ‘bad’ actions directly result in poor outcomes. Characters who do ‘bad’ things must learn why this was wrong by the end of the show. The thought is that the children will copy behavior they see on-screen. A child climbing out of their bedroom window without immediate harm would be bad, while climbing out of a spaceship is fine because it cannot be copied.

Physical stereotypes based on unchosen traits should be avoided. Things like the clever child wearing glasses, the girl being scared, the evil person having a disability/disfigurement, the scientist having wild hair, the hero being taller, the stupid character being fat, the good person being blonde. Challenging these stereotypes (ie having character/physical combinations that are less often seen in media) makes a show very attractive.

Gender balance is important. Research has shown that there is positive impact for girls to see female STEM role models, while there was no measurable difference for boys. If you have two characters, then one must be female. Female narrators are preferred. Where both genders are present, it is important that the female character is not seen as less able.

In the UK, we have the advantage that almost all shows can be provided in our own language. However, the quality of translation and narration varies wildly. As the time-cost of re-scripting/recording is significant vs a single licence fee, those shows which would require this treatment are much less attractive than those which are ready to play. There are examples where translations have significant and distracting grammatical errors, but also where the sense of the science communication is lost (eg where a word may be considered difficult/jargon in one language but not the other).