

SPRING 2022

ISSUE NO. 17

KEYFRAME

THE ANIMATION GUILD
QUARTERLY



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ANIMATION

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Inspired by a popular video game, *The Cuphead Show!* TV series is a throwback to rubber hose animation among other classic influences. As for its plots, character is key, with the sophistication expected from modern-day viewers.

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MENTEE TO MENTOR



WHEN I WAS FIRST STARTING MY CAREER AS A PROFESSIONAL ARTIST I ASSUMED THAT HAVING A MENTOR WAS A FORMAL RELATIONSHIP AGREED UPON BY BOTH PARTIES—THAT THE MENTOR AND MENTEE WOULD HAVE REGULAR CHECK-INS. THIS MADE ME NERVOUS ABOUT ACTIVELY SEEKING OUT A MENTOR.

What if I was rejected or told my talent wasn't at the level to deserve their valuable time? So I just asked as many questions as I could to anyone who would listen.

Looking back over my long career, I can see all the people who helped me in a less official way. Many probably don't realize that they were even doing it. From my co-workers being generous enough to show me how they were approaching the work and inspiring me with their novel takes to my supervisors who took the time to talk me through my scenes or boards, making me a little better every day.

When you ask for advice or criticism or help, I learned that it is your responsibility to roll with whatever is thrown at you. Take it in. Allow yourself time to process it. Try not to take it personally even if sometimes it can sting. It can only make you stronger.

Now that I'm a veteran, I try my best to pay it forward. I meet with as many students as I can and give portfolio reviews and career advice on how to survive this crazy industry. As a supervisor, I try to make time for every member of my team and see how they are doing and give guidance along the way.

This week I'll be meeting with a group of 8th graders from Long Island to talk about The Animation Guild and the benefits of unionism in art. I am really looking forward to speaking to these girls and setting them on their way.

As I shifted from learner to teacher, the one thing I hadn't anticipated was how rewarding being a mentor is. My younger self thought that only the mentee benefitted from the relationship, but it is such a thrill to see people grow as artists and know that I've played a small part in that.

In Solidarity,
Jeanette Moreno King | President
The Animation Guild, IATSE Local 839

ON THE COVER

Page meets screen as *The Bad Guys* books become a feature film.



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Editorial Director Alexandra Drosu

Managing Editor Kim Fay

Art Director Jenn Logan/Studio Fuse, Inc.

Photographers Martin Cohen, Tim Sullens

Contributing Writers David Brain, Karen Briner, Jay A. Fernandez, Whitney Friedlander, Evan Henerson, Sonaiya Kelley, Paula Spence

Publishing Committee Steve Kaplan, Jeanette Moreno King, Carrie Liao, Jason MacLeod, Jason Mayer, Paula Spence

Executive Board Jeanette Moreno King (**PRESIDENT**), Jack Thomas (**VICE-PRESIDENT**), Steve Kaplan (**BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE**), Paula Spence (**RECORDING SECRETARY**), Robert St. Pierre (**SERGEANT-AT-ARMS**), Jack Cusumano, Danny Ducker, Laura Hohman, Brandon Jarratt, K.C. Johnson (**TRUSTEE**), Crystal Kan, Carrie Liao (**TRUSTEE**), Mike Milo, Elisa Phillips, Stephen Silver (**TRUSTEE**), Emily Walus

Advertising AFM/Ken Rose & Elizabeth Ferris
(818) 312-6880 (cell & text)
(866) 563-6193 (fax)
krose@afmla.com

Editorial Offices 1105 N. Hollywood Way
Burbank, CA 91505
(818) 845-7500



We welcome editorial submissions; please contact us at editor@tag839.org or kim.fay@tag839.org.

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Representing animation artists,
writers and technicians since 1952.



THE WONDER OF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS



AS MY OTHER DUTIES HAVE GROWN AT THE ANIMATION GUILD, I HAVE SPENT LESS TIME WRITING FOR THE MAGAZINE, AND GUESS WHAT? I MISS IT! ONE OF THE BEST PARTS OF MY JOB IS GETTING TO KNOW OUR TALENTED ANIMATION GUILD MEMBERS, HEARING THEIR STORIES, AND LEARNING ABOUT THEIR CREATIVE ENDEAVORS.

So, I made a point of writing one of the features this month, “Game Changers” (p.36), about the journey of transforming the popular *Cuphead* game into a TV series.

One thing was obvious from my interviews, the support and collaborative atmosphere of the *Cuphead* production played a key role in the artistic success of this project. Learning how to collaborate and fostering a supportive environment is critical to all working relationships, which is why mentorship can be so valuable. In our feature, “Wise Counsel” (p.30), we explore three mentor-mentee pairs and discover how these treasured relationships foster mutual respect and understanding.

When a working relationship clicks it can open doors once closed. That’s what writing partners Jeannette Lara and Michael J. Beall discovered when they joined forces. In “Relentlessly Intentional” (p.15), they discuss how their shared Latinx experiences propelled them to seek lasting change in the animation industry. Working tirelessly to make change happen and support all Animation Guild members is something The Animation Guild’s Tactical Action Group, also known as TAG-TAG, strives to do. You can read more about why these dedicated TAG members are working to mobilize the membership into action in “Tactical Activism” (p.18).

Since I started working at the Guild almost five years ago, I have watched as the members of The Animation Guild have come together in solidarity and camaraderie. I like to think that *Keyframe* has played a small part in this transformation by not only celebrating the craft of animation but those who make the magic happen.

Alexandra

Alexandra Drosu
editor@tag839.org

CONTRIBUTORS



EVAN HENERSON

(“Turning the Page”) is a lifestyle and entertainment writer based in Los Angeles. His work has appeared in *L.A. Parent*, *TV Guide*,

Orange Coast Magazine, and the *Los Angeles Daily News* where he was a features writer and critic for nine years.



L.A.-based photographer

TIM SULLENS has one wife, two daughters, and six cameras. Over the years, he has captured images of musicians and

performers, political rallies and weddings. In this issue, he snapped the mentors and mentees in “Wise Counsel.”



WHITNEY FRIEDLANDER

(“Drawing with Feeling”) is an entertainment journalist who lives in Los Angeles with her husband, son, daughter, and infamously ornery cat.

A former staff writer at *Los Angeles Times* and *Variety*, she has also written for *Esquire*, *Marie Claire*, and *The Washington Post*, and currently contributes to CNN.



Freelance writer and author

KAREN BRINER (“A Passion for Picture Books”) grew up in Cape Town, South Africa where her garden was home to wild chameleons. Her

most recent novel is *Snowize @ Snitch: Highly Effective Defective Detectives*.

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9 ANNIE NOMINATIONS
INCLUDING
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

2 CRITICS CHOICE AWARD
NOMINATIONS INCLUDING
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

BAFTA
BEST ANIMATED FILM
NOMINATION



"'Dos Oruguitas' is the first song that [Lin-Manuel] Miranda has written in Spanish and is absolutely gorgeous and hugely impactful."

THE PLAYLIST

*"A triumph in every category:
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THE NEW YORK TIMES

*"Germaine Franco's score
is outstanding."*

WASHINGTON POST

Even in our darkest moments, there's light where you least expect it.

Disney
ENCANTO



ARTIST: Colleen McAllister

TITLE: *Blue*

MEDIUM: Digital

SIZE: Customized to order

ETHEREAL POWER



When Colleen McAllister's grandfather passed away, she received an unusual inheritance: glass slides that he had used to identify and verify cultures when he was a microbiologist in New York from the 1950s to the 1970s. Taking the slides to an old print shop, she had them scanned and digitized. Then she took her fascination a step further and manipulated them in Photoshop to create distinct, abstract cellular designs.

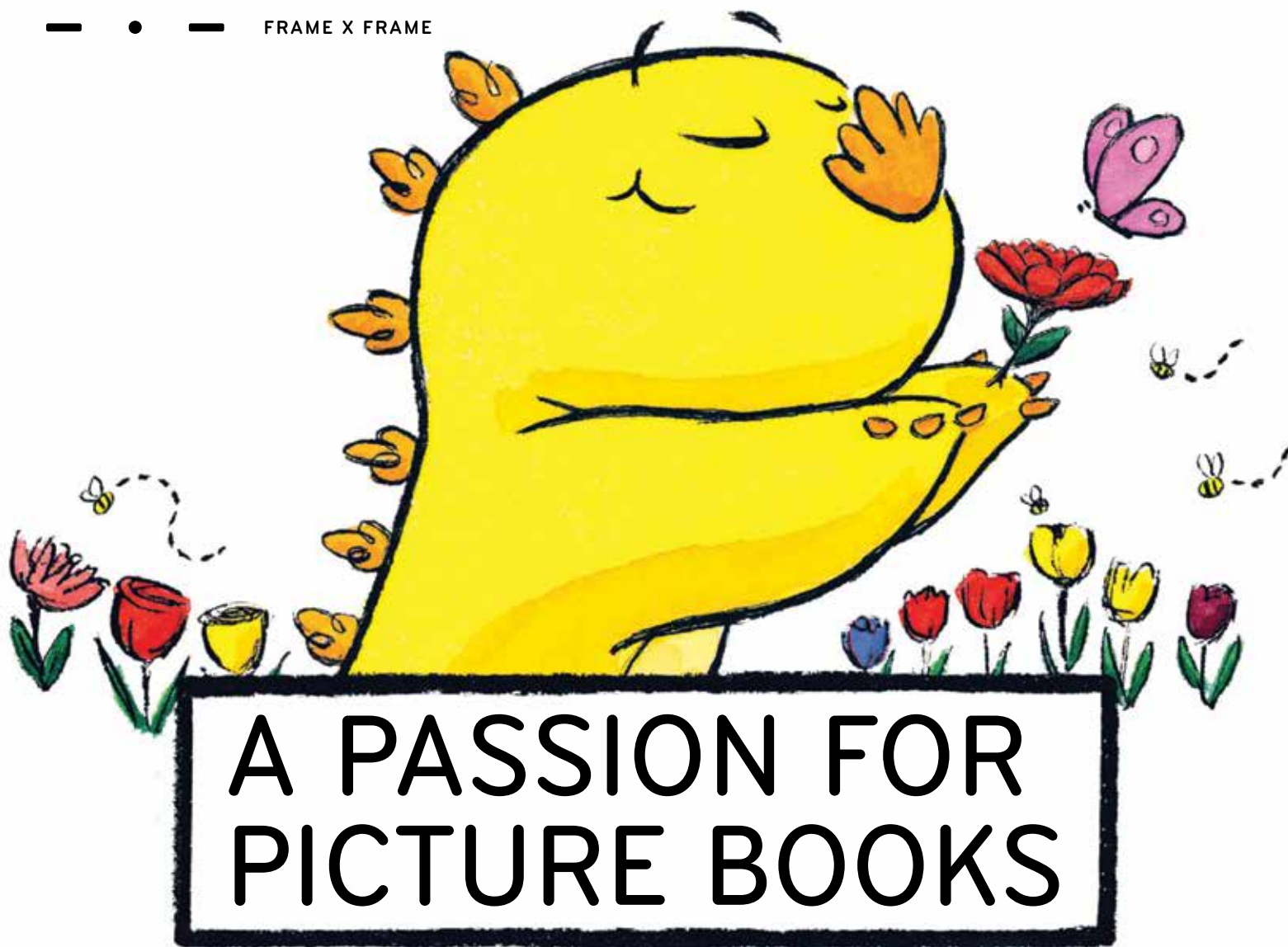
A former film and TV executive and animation veteran who is now a Story

Editor and Head Writer on Nickelodeon's *Zokie Sparkleby*, McAllister takes great pleasure in sharing what she calls her "wacky-science-art." Not only does it give her the opportunity to stretch her creativity, but it also allows her grandfather's work to live on in a new medium: digital prints on premium, high-resolution, semi-glossy paper. Among the pieces she has created, *Blue* is one of her favorites. Taking this microscopic view of one common form of human nocardial disease—pneumonia—she digitally colored it and manipulated the contrasts and highlights so that it appears lit from

behind. "To me, it looks like the face of a moon from a far distant galaxy," she says.

McAllister notes how living through a pandemic has caused each of us to exist with disease front-and-center in our daily lives. "While it's invisible, we know we're in its presence," she says. "The wisest among us respect its power." She considers her art a way to show her respect as well as capture the contradictory nature of disease, which she calls "powerful yet ethereal, real yet intangible."

More of McAllister's microbiology inspired artwork can be found at her Etsy shop, The Abstract Biologist.



A PASSION FOR PICTURE BOOKS



ABOVE: Finding beauty in small things sets Anzu apart in *Anzu the Great Kaiju*. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The covers of Shum's most recent books display his varied style, and **(BOTTOM)** an interior page shows the influence of his animation skills on his illustrations.

BENSON SHUM'S LOVE OF DRAWING LED HIM TO PURSUE TWO CREATIVE CAREERS AS BOTH AN ANIMATOR AND CHILDREN'S BOOK ILLUSTRATOR.

As a kid Benson Shum loved drawing so much that his enthusiasm sometimes spilled off the paper and onto the walls of his childhood home in Vancouver, BC, much to his parents' dismay. He grew up watching plenty of cartoons, and after seeing a behind-the-scenes show about animation, it dawned on him that people were actually responsible for making them. It became his dream to be one of those creators.

After high school, he applied to Capilano University's 2D animation program but didn't get

in. Undeterred, he spent a year working odd jobs while he focused on his drawing skills and improving his portfolio. His second attempt was successful, and he bonded with fellow students who'd experienced similar rejection. As a result, "I think we really pushed ourselves a lot harder," says Shum.

He worked locally for a couple years after graduating and then attended Sheridan College in Ontario to learn 3D animation. He alternated between working in 2D and 3D, and when he attended CTN animation

eXpo, he was encouraged to apply to Disney. Within a few months a visa was organized, and he was heading to the U.S. That was 2012. He's been at Disney ever since, working as an animator on numerous films from *Frozen* to *Encanto*.

Back when he shifted to 3D animation, "I just kind of stopped drawing for myself," Shum reflects. But at work in the Disney studios, he took notice of the drawings on the walls. He loved the art of Mary Blair in particular and was inspired to experiment with gouache and watercolor painting. When he heard about a program at Disney giving employees the opportunity to submit work to be considered for publication, Shum, who'd always loved kids' books, leaped at the chance. He submitted *Holly's Day at the Pool*, a picture book about a hippo who is afraid of water. It took several years and revisions before his project was finally selected, and then a further two years before it was published as part of the Walt Disney Animation Studios Artist Showcase book series.

Shum set about learning all he could about writing and publishing kids' books. He signed with a literary agent who helped him find work illustrating other people's books. Soon, though, he had a side career writing and illustrating his own stories after work. He loves having a creative outlet that gives him an opportunity to work with his hands on physical paper rather than "just clicking a mouse or moving something on the Wacom tablet," he says.

While creating picture books and animating are fulfilling in different ways, he still finds it thrilling to add movement to characters and see them come to life. But as an animator, he's creating the character for the director's vision. With his books, he has more

creative freedom because he can tell his own stories.

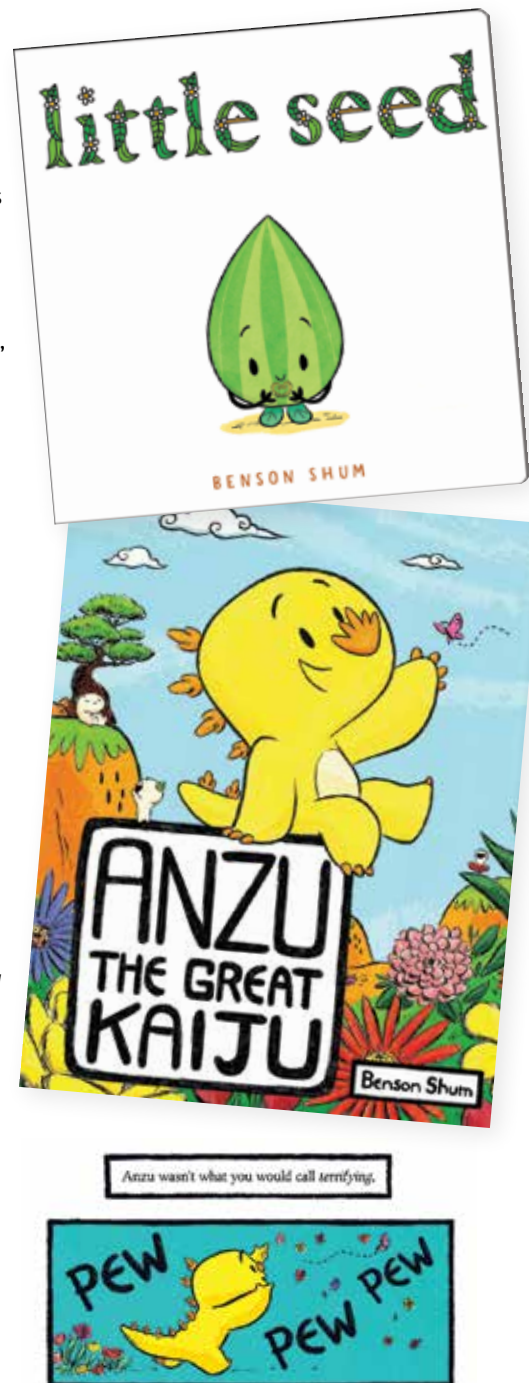
The slow pace of publishing is something Shum has had to get used to. He explains that in animation, feedback on a revision comes back almost immediately, whereas in publishing waiting for weeks or months is not uncommon. As for his creative process, a picture book can take up to a year to develop, and sometimes longer. Once he has the rough story, he sends it to his critique group, and after that he'll start to illustrate and then edit and revise.

Each book evolves in its own unique way. "Sometimes the words come first," he says. "And sometimes I might do an illustration for fun, and then a story comes out of that." Finding just the right words for a line in a book can be challenging because the word count is so limited, but he enjoys it. He might have no idea how he'll illustrate what he's writing, "but I'll write it anyways. Then I'll figure out how to creatively solve that problem," he says. The experience Shum has gained from working in animation has influenced his picture books. "We're all about trying to get movement and emotions in our animation. I use a lot of that knowledge in my illustrations to make sure the characters always feel alive."

Shum's most recent books include *Anzu the Great Kaiju* (Roaring Brook Press/Macmillan), about a monster who wants to make his family proud but doesn't want to follow in their scary footsteps. "The book addresses how to be true to yourself despite others' expectations," Shum says. *Little Seed* (Little Simon/Simon & Schuster) is a board book about Little Seed, who wants to hug all the world's creatures and must come up with innovative ways of showing affection.

To see more of Shum's work, visit his website at www.bensonshum.com. Signed books are available at Once Upon a Time bookstore in Montrose.

— Karin Briner



DRAWING WITH FEELING



NOT ONLY HAS A CAREER IN ANIMATION PROPELLED ALONSO RAMIREZ RAMOS TO THE ROLE OF EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, IT HAS ALSO HELPED HIM OPEN UP AND GROW AS A PERSON.

By his own admission, Alonso Ramirez Ramos doesn't have the best memory. Names, dates, and life events must be fact-checked online or with friends and family.

But his experience with movies? Those he remembers down to the last detail.

with friends, everyone would be excited to see the newest release. But after it was over, he was the one who wanted to "stand up and clap and just be really appreciative of the artform," he says.

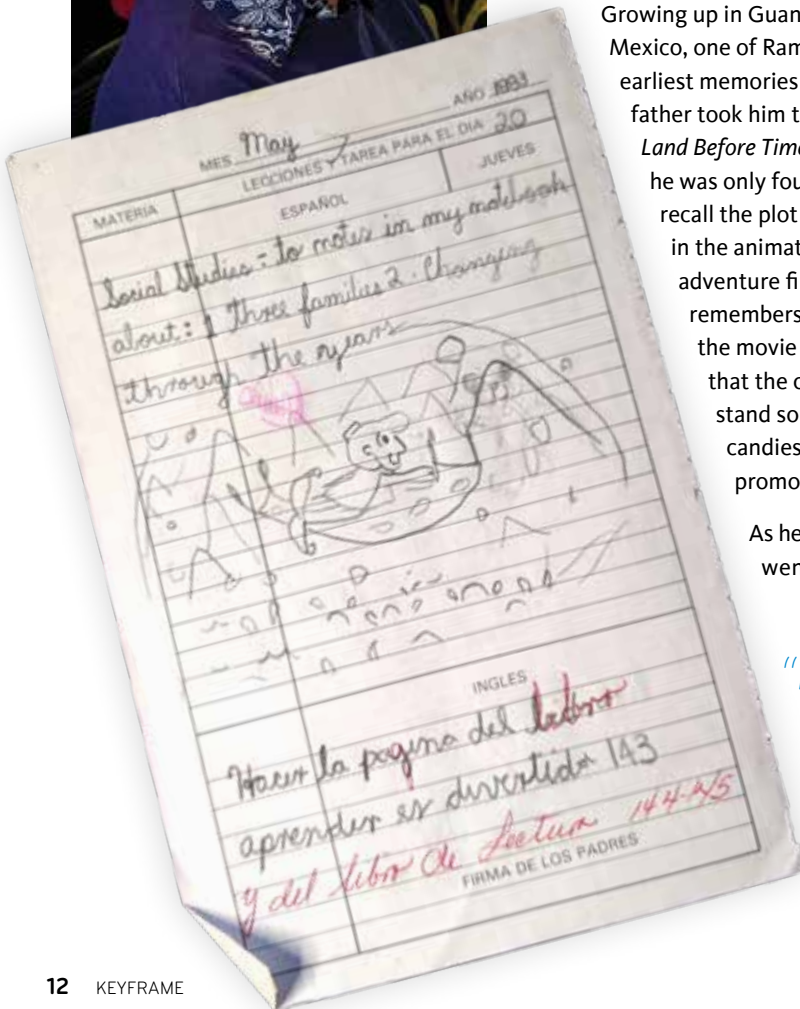
His passion overlapped with school, as well. His homework was riddled with doodles of Disney characters, and some of his favorite assignments were math questions that asked you to draw out the answer. One of his first directing jobs was school murals. Teachers would give him time off from class to sketch elaborate drawings to celebrate various holidays, and he'd employ his friends to help color them.

Ramirez Ramos' free time was equally creative, spent with toys like My First Sony Electronic Sketch Pad, a drawing tablet that could connect to the TV. And he was enamored with a VHS recording of *Ziggy's Gift*, watching it over and over, studying animator Richard Williams' work.

Growing up in Guanajuato, Mexico, one of Ramirez Ramos' earliest memories is when his father took him to see *The Land Before Time*. Although he was only four, he can still recall the plot and drawings in the animated dinosaur adventure film. He also remembers the look of the movie house and that the concession stand sold cherry candies that were a promotional tie-in.

As he got older and went to movies

"I put a lot of my thoughts and heart into it, and I really enjoy seeing the passion of everyone around it..."





TOP LEFT: Ramirez Ramos (CENTER) with Joe Johnston and Matthew Braly. **RIGHT:** Ramirez Ramos with his family. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** An *Aladdin* doodle on Ramirez Ramos' homework.

Growing up in an artistic family with a plastic surgeon and art collector for a father, a floral designer for a mother, and a writer for an older brother, Ramirez Ramos says he wasn't met with any pressure when he decided to continue his education in the United States instead of staying in Mexico. He studied illustration for a year at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. However, when he got accepted to CalArts in 2007, "that's where I really found my community," he says. He likens it to a monastery where he was immersed in learning every day.

After graduation, Ramirez Ramos briefly worked in graphic design for Disney Consumer Products before landing a job as a storyboard artist on *Gravity Falls*—something he says was so hands-on, he equates it to still being in school. As he gained more experience, he considered himself lucky to find talented people who allowed him to insert his own

creativity. He went on to win an Emmy in Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animation for his work on the show.

He's since worked on classic projects like *Mickey Mouse* shorts. "When I was drawing it, it didn't feel like an icon," he says. "It really felt like it was all about the story and about what the character was feeling."

Ramirez Ramos says that working on these and other known properties like *Steven Universe Future*, the Cartoon Network series where he served as Writer, Director, and Co-executive Producer, feels very personal even though they are branded television. "I put a lot of my thoughts and heart into it, and I really enjoy seeing the passion of everyone around it," he explains. He's also developed other series with friends, where he thrives because he's a support system to others' visions—something he finds satisfying.

His current home at Disney Television Animation as Executive Producer,

Development, has also influenced his growth as a person because he interacts more with people. "It's not only drawing, but presenting my ideas, speaking up in meetings. I went from being more shy to being more open and receptive," he says. "Finding that support really helped me open up. [Because] at the same time, I was coming to terms with my identity as a queer man."

Ramirez Ramos adds that he doesn't want his art to be limited to animation. "I have interest in puppets, and I have interest in just getting back to sketching for myself," he says, though he still loves where he's going with his journey in animation. He's excited about the new people it will introduce him to and the new projects it will bring to the screen.

One thing he's certain of—he won't forget a minute of it.

— Whitney Friedlander

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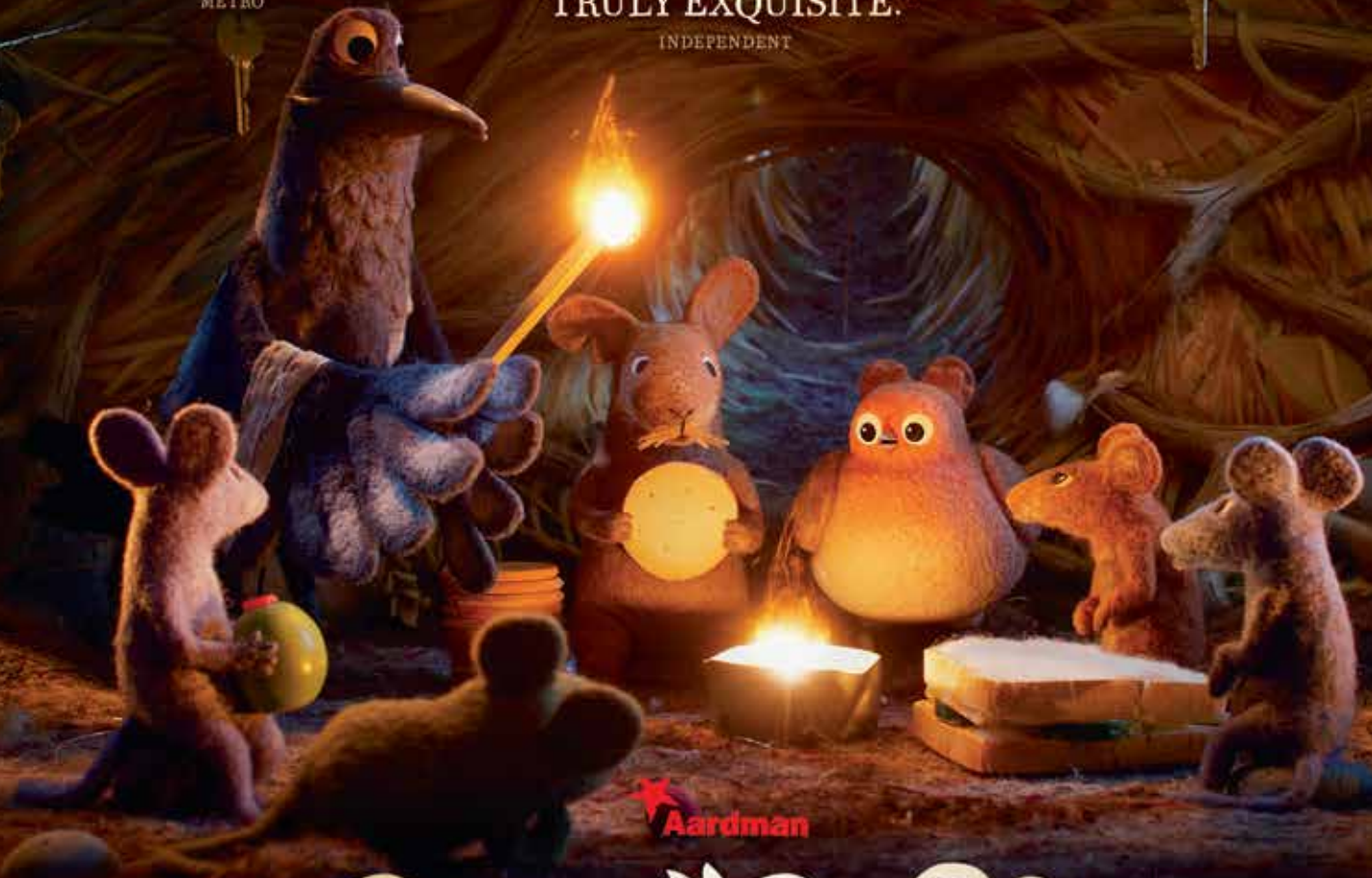


"DETAILS THAT ARE
TRULY EXQUISITE."

INDEPENDENT



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RELENTLESSLY INTENTIONAL

TAG MEMBERS AND WRITING PARTNERS JEANNETTE LARA AND MICHAEL J. BEALL DISCUSS GROWING THEIR “COMMUNITY OF TWO” AND HOW TO CREATE LASTING CHANGE IN THE ANIMATION INDUSTRY.

When we met in 2014, we were both striving to become professional writers and wanting to tell self-discovery and coming-of-age stories. Most importantly, we wanted to see ourselves represented on-screen. These goals helped us decide to become writing partners. We get it, writing partners are pretty rare in the industry because collaboration isn't always easy. But we've found it to be the secret ingredient to our success. We became a community of two, and we knew if we were going to accomplish our goals, we would need to expand on that.

Back then we were just a pair of unknown Latinx writers, standing in front of the entertainment industry, asking it to give us a shot—but the gates were bolted shut. We were aware that for many of us, our identity has always been the source of our struggles of fitting into an industry that didn't look like us. Despite that, we were determined to make our identities the source of our successes. The trails blazed for us, by generations past, were narrower and harder to find. But what we did find in our search for success was a group of like-minded individuals. >



A TIME FOR LASTING CHANGE

As an animation community, if we want to see change overall then we need to be relentlessly intentional. For the BIPOC community, continue to be vocal and bring people up the ladder with you as you succeed because we can't wait for the industry to magically change. We are the change. Continue acting like it. To our allies, thank you for believing in us and not just seeing our pigmentation, but also our determination, talent, and passion for storytelling.

Everyone has jumped on the diversity train, but not everyone has paid for their ticket. For those looking to be part of the change, start by changing your hiring practices. Showrunners, the “one diverse hire” in the room doesn't round out the representation equation. Stop. This is an antiquated process. The rooms that we work in should be as diverse as the world that we live in. Fight for your room to be well-rounded in both life experience and background, then challenge others to do the same. Also, actively read people who aren't like you. Listen to their voices. Not only will it make you a greater storyteller, but it will also make your show immensely better.

Studios, we're encouraged by the continuing efforts you're making with the diversity programs and/or fellowships you currently are offering. But you can and should do more. Instead of more initiatives, we need mandates. There's no reason why you can't mandate that every show company-wide is made up of half or more diverse professionals. We don't need more surveys or studies to prove that the industry is behind in the diversity dilemma. There are diversity and inclusion departments at every studio for this very reason. It's a great start, but it's not enough. So many diversity organizations exist because the system is broken and can't be trusted to bring the true change needed for authentic representation. If you're still unsure of what to do, please reach out to any of the organizations mentioned in this article and they'll be more than happy to help you.

Ultimately, every single one of us plays a part in the larger community of the industry. Let's come together and communicate. In an industry full of competitors, dare to be collaborators, because collaboration breeds camaraderie, which in turn encourages community. And only from the community can true, lasting change occur.

"We were aware that for many of us, our identity has always been the source of our struggles of fitting into an industry that didn't look like us. Despite that, we were determined to make our identities the source of our successes."

➤ When we became LatinX in Animation (LXiA) charter members in 2018, it was clear that everyone involved wanted the same thing we did: to see authentic stories about us, told by us, and made by us. Like us, LXiA knew that to be successful it would have to work together and pool resources with a coalition of organizations with diversity initiatives. LXiA needed allies whose personal mission championed drastic change through action, such as the Latino Film Institute (LFI), Black N' Animated, Women in Animation (WIA), Asians in Animation (AIA), Rise Up Animation (RUA), and The Animation Guild (TAG), which has forged a genuine partnership in advocacy and helped our cause by spotlighting LXiA members, promoting the Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival (LALIFF), and magnifying our voice through its social media and publications.

So we now had this resource, but we still needed to figure out how we were going

to become professional writers. Personal experience proved the odds were not in our favor. We didn't have a *tío* or *tía* to call in a favor. We were lucky to even be considered for an unpaid internship!

Other than doing the hard work of writing nonstop until we had 15 finished scripts, we made our own opportunities. How? By getting involved with helping LXiA run events and forging connections with studio executives we would later work with. We stayed late after panels with industry leaders to connect on a personal level and talked with every person we could at networking events. Because we have benefited personally from having mentors throughout the years like Davah Avena, Rob Edwards, Makiko Wakita, Maria Escobedo, and Elise Allen, we worked together with LXiA founders Magdiela Hermida Duhamel and Bryan Dimas to establish the Creator's Collective, a community of creatives at all levels and disciplines

who would volunteer their time and be a resource to one another.

Eventually, we landed our first writing gig, which led us to securing legal and managerial representation. Armed now with a few writing credits and representation to help guide us, our career trajectory was once again changed for the better. Fast forward to today. We've written on multiple shows (*Action Pack*, *Santiago of the Seas*, *Alma's Way*, *ARPO Robot Babysitter*) and are currently developing series for studios. Every chance we get, we're infusing our stories with characters who look like us, act like us, and come from the same places as us. When we look back, we are amazed by how much we've accomplished in our writing journey together, but there is still a ways to go. For true change to happen, decision-makers need to stop doubting our community's abilities to "run the show" and give us the reins to guide our own narratives.



MICHAEL on Jeannette

What I learned about Jeannette is that she has a very cosmopolitan view of the world when it comes to stories and characters. Being Puerto Rican, she came

from the melting pot that is the Caribbean, and although she is proud of her Spanish, African, and Taíno heritage, she also has a deep appreciation for other cultures. Having lived in Japan on a military base as a kid and being well-traveled, she was influenced by art, anime, manga/comics, international films, and most importantly, Shonda Rhimes! These were some of the influences that shaped her opinion that television and film needed more fun, funny, and fantastical stories from around the globe. She wants to tell stories that reflect hers and others' experiences equally.



JEANNETTE on Michael

What I learned about Michael is that he is a lover of tacos and a teller of punny puns (he would want me to say that). His biggest influences span genre, space, and

time! He loves the silliness of *Adventure Time*, the wit of Bugs Bunny, and the visual style of J.J. Abrams. Like his mixed influences, Michael is bicultural, having a Mexican American father and European American mother, meaning he's inherited the wealth of multiple cultures' worth of heartfelt and hilarious stories. Growing up, Michael learned quickly that his blended identity wasn't celebrated culturally. He felt he was underrepresented, underappreciated, and underestimated in cinema, literature, and life. So, he set out to change all of that in the only way he knew how, through writing.

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"THE MOST MOVING PIECE
OF CINEMA I SAW THIS YEAR."

BONG JOON HO (PARASITE)

"HARNESSES THE ANIMATED
MEDIUM IN STUNNING FORM."

THE WRAP

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

FREE

A FILM BY JONAS POHER RASMUSSEN



NEON



TACTICAL ACTIVISM

Last fall, when members of the IATSE live-action locals voted to authorize a strike, TAG's Executive Board initiated a mobilization campaign in response. The result: the birth of the TAG Tactical Action Group, otherwise known as TAG-TAG. This engaged, committed group includes more than 250 trained volunteer mobilizers committed to growing member engagement through Local 839's negotiations and beyond.



JESSICA VAILLANT
MODEL DESIGNER,
HAILEY'S ON IT!
DISNEY TV

WHY DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN TAG-TAG?

Like a lot of us, I've been interested in our Union's issues for years but only got involved around the time that the IATSE live-action local's issues were prominent in the media. I wanted a way to show my solidarity with those folks, and I stuck around because I realized it's just as important to work on the issues affecting our own animation community.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

We're reaching out to members and reminding them that they are the Union, and ultimately our successes and failures depend largely on their involvement. I know what it's like to be apathetic about the state of the industry, and it's a terrible feeling. I'd love it if we could help one another discuss our power in different ways.

TAG-TAG also does the very important job of listening to what members' biggest beefs are with the way they work and their contracts. We're trying to have direct conversations with as many people as we can so we know what issues we should be fighting for!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM BECOMING INVOLVED?

When I first got involved, I was so worried that I wouldn't know enough about the many concerns people have to be able to discuss them intelligently. The nice thing about having 1-on-1 talks with members is that I get to hear about a vast range of experiences. Because of these convos, I know so much more about what challenges workers face in other positions, or at other studios. It feels great to be more plugged in.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO SEE TAG-TAG GO IN THE FUTURE?

My biggest wish for the short term is just to get more people involved. We've grown a lot, but we also need as many hands on deck as possible!



ALEX ANDERSON-KENNEY
ANIMATION ARTIST
DREAMWORKS TV
HUB TEAM

WHY DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN TAG-TAG?

I got involved in TAG-TAG after about a year of gradually increasing my involvement in the Guild. I participated in few groups, regularly attended meetings, and joined the negotiations committee. When the Basic Agreement negotiations devolved this fall, it became clear we needed a rapid response. Out of the collective efforts of everyone who worked to prepare and rally The Animation Guild to support live action, TAG-TAG was formed.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

We're dedicated to strengthening the Guild and animation industry workers as a whole, and we're doing that by building a stronger, more organized community. There is a lot of work to be done to improve the animation industry, but so much of it is feasible when you work as a group.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM BECOMING INVOLVED?

TAG-TAG has taught me how to take more risks. It has forced me to step out of my comfort zone to do things that need to get done. It has also made me realize just how important it is to have people you can count on to do the big stuff—for the times when you can't do it alone, you have a team of people who can support you.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO SEE TAG-TAG GO IN THE FUTURE?

I want to continue building solidarity within our Union via TAG-TAG through ongoing communication and community events. I would love it if one day volunteering with TAG-TAG was seen as a quick way to make new friends in the Guild. We have a dedicated group of core members, but there's always room for more, and we'd love to have you!



JUSTIN WEBER
ANIMATOR, *ENCANTO*
WALT DISNEY
ANIMATION STUDIOS

WHY DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN TAG-TAG?

I initially joined the group to help mobilize our membership around the IATSE Basic negotiations. After those negotiations concluded, I stayed on as the group shifted attention toward TAG negotiations. A few of us also formed a studio-specific mobilization group for our own workplace, the Walt Disney Animation Studios Tactical Action Committee, or WDAS-TAC.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Unions should be member-driven, where the members consider themselves the Union itself—not an external entity that negotiates on their behalf. This is at the heart of what it means to be a union. As workers, we are the skilled artisans who spend our days creating amazing art through our work. We breathe life into characters that audiences around the world connect to and love to watch. We drive the profits of our employers who make billions off our work. We all deserve to lead dignified, joyful, healthy lives, and in order to achieve that, animation workers everywhere need to mobilize to build collective power.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM BECOMING INVOLVED?

I learned that 1-on-1 outreach is the most effective tool in our tool belt. One-way, indirect, informational updates, such as large meetings, newsletters, and social media posts can be useful but have declining returns on investment. It is only through having members talk directly with one another about their working conditions and working together to develop and implement strategies around mobilization, that we can build the power we need to achieve our goals.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO SEE TAG-TAG GO IN THE FUTURE?

As remote work becomes more common in animation, we will have to be creative about how to keep workers connected to each other. I hope we can continue to become more comfortable and effective with different forms of long-distance communication so we can push back against the atomization that may come from us working physically apart from each other.



SAMMY SAVOS
STORYBOARD ARTIST,
LITTLE DEMON
SHADOWMACHINE

WHY DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN TAG-TAG?

I got involved in TAG-TAG when it was created during the IATSE live-action negotiations. I was learning about the awful conditions under which many people were forced to work, and how a possible strike might affect TAG, and wanted to help. There are a lot of ways I feel our life at work could be improved [in] a healthier and more humane way. For me, TAG-TAG has felt like the best way to act on those feelings and make a direct impact in trying to change the things I think could be better.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

It's crucial for members to know what's going on and know how much their voice and their actions make a difference. Our power in bargaining is directly tied to how involved and united our membership is, so TAG-TAG doing direct outreach to members, getting their thoughts and opinions and encouraging them to take action and get involved is necessary and important. For example, if those we bargain with see a massive amount of TAG members wearing our Union t-shirts over Zoom, see us posting about our support for a fair deal on social media, see us organizing together in various visible ways, they will understand that our negotiations team has the backing of the membership behind them.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM BECOMING INVOLVED?

When I first joined TAG, I didn't know much about unions and didn't realize that in order for unions to function at their best, they need maximum member involvement. Originally, I was very detached, thinking that the relationship between a member and their union was transactional—i.e. you pay dues, and in return you receive benefits. But that couldn't be further from the truth. Being part of a union is a constant fight to maintain the things members before you have fought to win and to improve upon them.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO SEE TAG-TAG GO IN THE FUTURE?

Ultimately, I want our entire membership to become as informed and active as possible. I want us to have the power to make the changes we so badly need. Being active will look different for everyone! There are many ways to get involved, all with varying amounts of time commitment and expertise.

If you're a TAG member and want to get involved, email mobilize@tag839.org.

THE FUN AND FINESSE OF TRANSFORMING THE WRITTEN WORD INTO ANIMATION

Turning THE PAGE

By Evan Henerson

First of all, the characters now have to talk and move in three dimensions.

Yeah, this seems like a pretty basic function that anyone turning a book into a movie or TV show must perform. After all, in a favorite fairy tale, chapter book, or graphic novel, the author and/or illustrator lay all of the groundwork. But once you transplant that child, deer, ogre, mad scientist, or robot onto the screen, the character is going to have to move and speak within a world that you will have to create. On top of that, the whole package—characters and world—must be convincing or diverting enough so that your audience isn't sitting there for 12 to 90 minutes thinking, "But the book was so much better."

If this sounds like a daunting proposition, the artists and writers who work in animation will remind you that it's a regular part of the job. As exciting as it is to bring a *Raya and the Last Dragon* or *The Mitchells vs. The Machines* into the canon, there are many more animated titles that began life in a different form.

"I think Hollywood loves to stake claim to the general population's mental real

estate, and the real estate you have in your mind contains a lot of different things you've read over time or stories you know," says Dean Wellins, a Character Animator and Story Artist on multiple Disney films and Lead Animator and Story Artist on *The Iron Giant*. "If they can do a new version of something so that they don't have to reintroduce brand new characters to people, they will. It's much riskier to try to get everybody on board with characters they've never heard of before."

Filmmakers have been mining works of literature to turn into animation since the genre was invented. With contemporary adaptations, sometimes the author of the book is present to work on the project, offer creative advice, or just give their blessing. In other cases, they may have died decades or even centuries ago, allowing filmmakers liberty to rework the story as they see fit. Are there actually any Hans Christian Andersen purists out there who are angrily lamenting the transformation of Andersen's *The Snow Queen* into Disney's *Frozen*?

THIS PAGE: Manipulating realistic rendering with painterly effects in a blend of 2D and CG gives The Bad Guys a look that suggests illustration.



Floriane Marchix, Art Director on the new DreamWorks film *The Bad Guys*, has worked on adaptations where adherence to the book was not a strict requirement and other projects where the author controlled the reins more tightly—most notably her experience bringing kid lit favorite *Captain Underpants* into theaters for *Captain Underpants: The First Epic Movie*. She says the approach to each movie was entirely different. Unlike with *Captain Underpants*, where the team had to follow the drawings “a lot more strictly” while adapting the books, there was room in *The Bad Guys* for more creative license.

THE LEEWAY FREEWAY

In scripting *The Bad Guys*, Screenwriter Etan Cohen knew he had plenty of creative leeway, but he also wanted to include material to please the books' fan base.

“Even though there is a macro arc to the books, they're meant more to be told in episodes,” says Cohen. “You've got to transfer that into a shape that works well as a movie. So, you look at the whole menu of books and try to figure out the bits that make one good story. The way I tried to do that was looking at big themes that we could pull out of the books.”

Cohen had his pick of themes, such as everyone has the potential to change. *The Bad Guys* series recounts the adventures of a group of scary animals who, tired of being demonized, decide to make over their image while also plotting a heist. “Going

good” is no easy lift, and the partnership between Mr. Wolf, Mr. Shark, Mr. Piranha, Mr. Snake, and Ms. Tarantula hits more than a few speedbumps.

The book series' fan base may miss favorite plot lines or wonder about certain changes. The character of Mr. Tarantula, for example, became Ms. Tarantula to add a female presence. In addition, the world created by the books' author, Aaron Blabey, contains only animals, where the universe of DreamWorks' *The Bad Guys* includes

kind of sun-bleached L.A. and the whole Tarantino and Soderbergh universe. [But] as we went on, there was never a single point in the visual sense where I went, ‘I'm not sure that's right.’”

The books are illustrated, but the aesthetics of *The Bad Guys*' cinematic universe is positively eye-popping, a blend of CG and 2D that artists say breaks new ground for DreamWorks animation. “In recent years, [DreamWorks] has upgraded its rendering system to give you very

“...you look at the whole menu of books and try to figure out the bits that make one good story.” — ETAN COHEN

human beings, as well.

To make the books cinematic, Cohen, Director Pierre Perifel, and the team turned to some cultural reference points from movies that people of different ages might recognize. Those cool black suits and shades worn by our quintet evoke the crooks of *Reservoir Dogs* and the alien chasers of *Men in Black*. The movie also pays homage to George Clooney and the heist-minded hipsters of Steven Soderbergh's *Ocean's Eleven*.

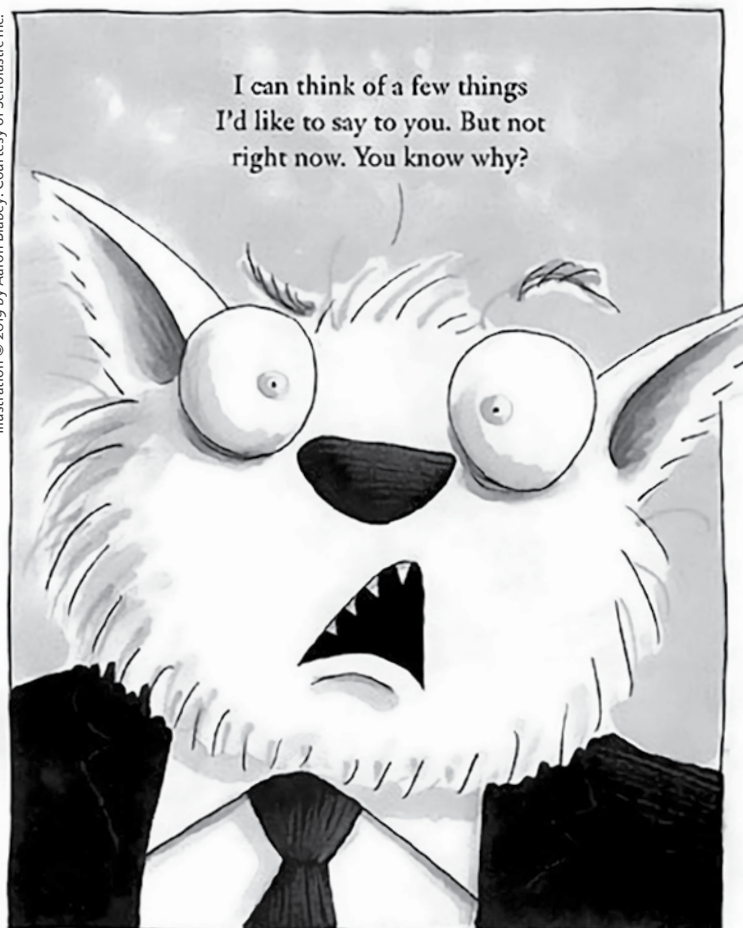
“The movie has been informed by a love of the same things that have driven me to create the book series,” says a delighted Blabey. “I think that is because we've completely shared that common language which is very cinematic. When I was making the books, I never pictured that

accurate physical lighting,” says Perifel. “I came in and said, ‘No, I don't want that.’ I wanted something more painterly and illustrative that had more line effects.”

Applying this technique to animals proved to be a somewhat “hairy” proposition, especially in the case of characters like Mr. Wolf and Governor Diane Foxington. “I didn't want the rendering to get in the way of the characters,” says Luc Desmarchelier, the film's Production Designer. He explains that CG tools have a tendency to render every detail, and as an artist, that wasn't how he saw the world. “If I paint hair, I'm not painting every single hair. You want to give the impression of hair. That's what we were trying to do in general with the look of the movie.”



The Bad Guys images courtesy of DreamWorks Animation LLC



THIS PAGE: Drawings in *The Bad Guys'* books (TOP LEFT) provided a rough sketch for the movie's artists, who used pop culture references and cinematic techniques to bring the animated characters to life. Creative freedom was also in play, as evidenced in vis-dev art (BOTTOM) by Visual Development Artist Rémi Salmon.



CREATIVE BALANCING ACTS

Justin K. Thompson reported similar difficulties in 2009 when he worked as the Production Designer on *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. While looking to create a hand-drawn, graphic aesthetic, Thompson said, filmmakers had to essentially trick a computer that was trying to actualize everything. Thus, new software was needed for *Cloudy* and its sequel, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2*.

Thompson notes the ginormous Jell-O mold in the original *Cloudy* that Flint Lockwood and Sam Sparks—characters invented for the movie—penetrate and bounce around. “That was the hardest thing to render in the whole movie,” he says. “Instead of building it as component parts, we built it as one continuous piece of double-sided geometry that included all the set, the statues, and all of the furniture. So all of the reflections in it are real. All of the ripples when they bounce on it are real.”

Devotees of *Cloudy* the book, written by Judi Barrett and illustrated by her husband Ron, won’t find many similarities between the book and its adaptation. That was deliberate. The filmmakers studied children’s books for inspiration, but not so much the original source material, according to Thompson.

In creating Flint, Sam, and the residents of Swallow Falls, the aim was characters with a distinctly cartoony look with big heads and gangly bodies. Plot-wise, Writers-Directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller also upped the wackiness/mayhem quotient. Lovers of the Barrett story still got to witness an enormous pancake draped over the school and a spaghetti tornado, but Lord and Miller steered away from the cautionary tale spun by the Barretts.



THIS PAGE: Character Designer Carey Yost created poses for Flint Lockwood (ABOVE), just one of the characters created from scratch for the movie version of *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. (BELOW) Production Designer Justin K. Thompson also conceived entirely new images for locations.

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs images courtesy of Sony Pictures Animation

"In the book, the main character is an old man telling a story to his grandchildren about something that happened," says Thompson. "With Phil and Chris's interpretation, they wanted to make it more contemporary and give it a more youthful feel. And we wanted to feel a silliness. [After all], it's a movie about giant food falling from the sky and crashing into buildings."

The makers of the Netflix TV show *Ada Twist, Scientist*, on the other hand, confronted a different sort of balancing act. In making a show for preschoolers that emphasizes the value and endless possibilities of science, Executive Producer Chris Nee and Showrunner Kerri Grant looked to deliver an experience that was entertaining but also rooted in scientific principles and methods. The show takes not only the adventures of the title character, but also Ada's best friends Rosie and Iggy,

the heroes of author Andrea Beaty's other books, *Rosie Revere, Engineer* and *Iggy Peck, Architect*.

"The three books had different rules on what was science-based and what was whimsically-based," says Nee. "We're combining them into one world, so we had to figure out what are the edges of

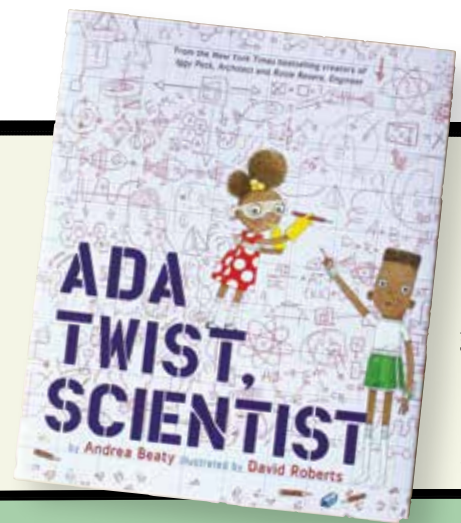


Image courtesy of Abrams Books for Young Readers.

"We're combining [the three books] into one world, so we had to figure out what are the edges of the world?" — CHRIS NEE

the world? How far does fantasy go? We landed on the middle ground. We really liked the idea that we had a science show and a character who was super into unicorns and dragons and sci-fi."

THIS PAGE: The picture book *Ada Twist, Scientist* (ABOVE) is visually similar to the preschool TV series of the same name.



Ada Twist, Scientist image courtesy of Netflix



THIS PAGE: Stop-motion animation influenced the transformation of Big Nate from its book and comic strip (CENTER RIGHT) origins to the screen. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Original Winnie the Pooh illustration by E. H. Shepard.

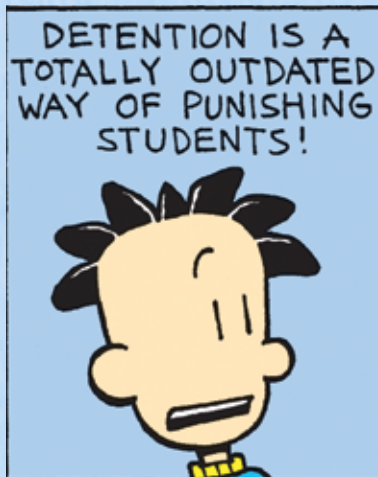


THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

Robert Brown brandishes the collection of Lincoln Peirce's *Big Nate* comic strips as though he is holding the book that has all the answers.

"This," says Brown, a Character Designer on the new Nickelodeon series, "is our bible. We're always going back to the strips because there's so much material there. We had an episode that required a squirrel, so we went back to see whether Lincoln had ever drawn a squirrel. We're trying to maintain his design language as much as we can."

Nate Wright, the central character of Peirce's strips and books, is a trouble-prone sixth grader who is also an aspiring cartoonist. His antics resonated with Art Director David Skelly who also had dreams of being a comic book artist. Skelly's career includes Muppet-building at The Jim Henson Company, and his eclectic resume—particularly his puppeteering expertise—are part of what made Executive Producer and



© Lincoln Peirce. Distributed by Andrews McMeel Syndication for UFS.

Showrunner Mitch Watson tap him to help guide *Big Nate* from the comics into his TV series.

The overall design concept centered around giving the characters a hand-made, hand-painted look, much like what you might see in stop-motion animation. "Having been a puppet fabricator for stop-motion, it was easy for me to make that leap," says Skelly. "The idea was to make the show a little like the Rankin/Bass holiday specials of the 1960s and 1970s, to capitalize on the perfect imperfections of hand-made objects."

Among the people Skelly enlisted were some with specialized backgrounds in comic art: Vicki Scott, who had worked on *Peanuts* comics, and Sang Jun Lee, Lead Character Designer on *The Peanuts Movie*.

Skelly and Brown both cite the challenges of turning a comic book figure like Nate and his friends into three-dimensional animated characters. Take Nate's hair, for example—six fronds on his head that always look the same from the front or side. "How can we take that and make sure we're hitting >



"We're always going back to the strips because there's so much material there."

— ROBERT BROWN



Winnie the Pooh by A. A. Milne with illustrations by Ernest H. Shepard, Colored by Hilda Scott

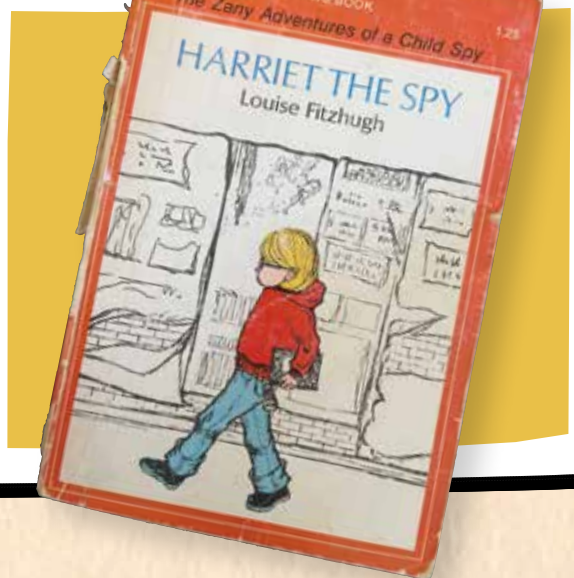
THE ADAPTABLE WORLD OF DISNEY

To say that the folks at Walt Disney Animation Studios churn out classics "by the book" would be an understatement. Given the staying power of movies like *Bambi*, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, *The Jungle Book*, and more, the company has practically rewritten the book on adaptations. Generations of viewers now know the tales of *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and the *Little Mermaid* not because they fell asleep listening to the stories of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, but because they have watched the Disney films.

"If you want to transfer a book or even a long short story directly into a film, the key is how do you take the most pertinent or most entertaining or most emotional elements of a story, yet maintain the spirit

of that original story," says Fox Carney, Manager of Research at Disney Animation Research. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the studio's first full-length animated feature, expanded on the Grimm tale, making it less dark and giving those titular dwarfs personalities. *Bambi* synthesized Felix Salten's book down to a more cohesive "circle of life" story, eliminating many of the novel's subplots. Dodie Smith, author of *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*, was reportedly so enchanted with the 1961 film adaptation of her book that in her regular correspondence with Walt Disney, she proposed writing another story specifically for Disney to adapt.

And let's not forget a certain "silly old bear" with an insatiable



OPPOSITE PAGE: The new on-screen rendition of Harriet the Spy keeps the storybook quality of the original illustrations (BOTTOM RIGHT) by the book's author, Louise Fitzhugh.

› the silhouette and making it work from different angles?" says Brown. "We eventually got to a point where we felt pretty good with the marriage of CG and two-dimensional line texture vibe."

For the Apple TV+ series *Harriet the Spy*, the team at Titmouse faced its biggest hurdle less with the kids, and instead with the creation of Ole Golly, Harriet's gruff nanny. The 1964 middle grade classic was written and illustrated by Louise Fitzhugh. Background and Character Designer Yves Menshikova conducted extensive research into the look of the period. In their first pass, they drafted Ole Golly as a Mary Poppins figure. But their initial renderings were sent back with instructions to make the character frumpier and more utilitarian. Make her look more like Anjelica Huston.

"I was thinking a lot about the '60s and New York," Menshikova says, explaining that they looked at *New Yorker* covers and specific illustrative styles that felt like pen and ink on paper.

Ole Golly was toned down into a less elegant and more dependable figure, "very no-nonsense," says Menshikova. "She took quite a few passes to get right, and eventually [Character Designer] Jacob Ospa nailed her final look."

Ospa, also a Storyboard Supervisor, Animation Retakes Director, and designated "Ole Golly cracker," had his own adapting challenges on *Harriet*.

"I gravitate toward more exaggerated, cartoonier character designs, whereas the look we were going for was more innocent and naïve, like what you would find in an actual childhood book," he says. "I remember I had to design some dogs, and at times my dogs had too much anatomy in them."

However an adaptation from book to screen is approached, from replicating the original to expressing full creative freedom, the artists involved tend to have one common goal: When the story hits the screen, is should capture "the spirit of the book." ☺

Winnie the Pooh image courtesy of Walt Disney Animation Studios



ABOVE: Color keys by Lorelay Bové depart from the books' story lines while maintaining their spirit.

craving for honey who leapt effortlessly from the pages of A.A. Milne into an animated franchise. Milne's books were charmingly illustrated by E.H. Shepard, but when they got to work on *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh* (1977), the team of animators forever transformed the look of Pooh Bear, Piglet, Tigger, and all the friends of the Hundred Acre Wood. *The Many Adventures* creators even added a new character, the whistly-voiced Gopher who introduced himself with the oh-so-meta line, "I'm not in the book, you know."

Long-time Disney animator Burny Mattinson worked on both the 1974 short, *Winnie the Pooh and Tigger Too*, and on *The Many Adventures*. Known as "the Pooh guru," he came back to the world of Pooh for the 2011 feature *Winnie the Pooh*. Among other contributions, Mattinson, who is credited as a Story Supervisor, developed the plot of the menacing The Backson which Pooh and friends believe has captured Christopher Robin.

"The two directors came to me and said, 'Will you look at Milne's books and come up with some ideas for a feature,'" says Mattinson. "I just looked at what Milne had done, and I illustrated what I saw."

For other additions, the *Winnie the Pooh* team brought Lorelay Bové into the "Poohniverse" to work on a particularly sweet sequence that did not originate from any of the Milne books, but one that has become part of Pooh lore. Having worked most recently as an Associate Production Designer on *Encanto*, she helped create the oceans of honey in which Pooh frolics during the "Everything Is Honey" musical dream sequence.

"They wanted to push the characters, but also make sure that they were in line with the other movies that were done back in the day," says Bové. The sequence worked because it developed the character, "showing the fantasy of indulgence and how hard it is for Pooh to say no."



WISE COUNSEL

BY KIM FAY

Mentoring isn't just a destination. As these TAG members share, the mentor-mentee relationship is a journey of career discoveries and mutual respect.

JILL STIRDIVANT & DAVID RODRIGUEZ

When David Rodriguez started at Disney Television Animation as a clerk in 1994, he was told that if he stuck with the office job for a year, "they would consider what I could do as an artist." During those 12 months he became aware of color styling (now called color design). He told management he was interested. They sent him to Color Stylist Jill Stirdivant.

"It never really occurred to me to teach someone what I knew until the idea was brought up to me," Stirdivant says. "We just hit it off instantly. And I knew at that moment when I first met David that I was going to do this. It was my way to pay it forward. To take my knowledge and my skills and hand it off to him."

Now retired, Stirdivant started at Disney features in the 1980s as a painter on *The Fox and the Hound*, learning from "the very best women in Ink and Paint," she says. "There was a process to produce these high-quality productions. It translated a little differently at TV ... but there were still the key components."

"It was at the tail end of Ink and Paint, so she taught me using cels and paint," Rodriguez says. "I was like a kid in a candy store."

Stirdivant also taught Rodriguez to use the computer painting program and a Wacom tablet and pen, which were just coming into use in the mid-1990s, and he points out that she did all of this on her own time, without pay, for about six months.

Then, along with Director/Producer Karl Geurs, she pushed to get him hired as a color stylist on *Pooh's Grand Adventure*. "I was the first guy color stylist at Walt Disney TV Animation," he says.

One of the reasons they both feel their mentor-mentee relationship worked was because Rodriguez wanted to put in the effort. He values what he's learned from her so much that "I want to pass it on to somebody who wants to learn—not just wants a higher paycheck. I want to pass on how to do it correctly. You have to know the story. You have to talk to your director. You don't just start throwing color down."

Over the years they have worked together on numerous projects, and Rodriguez—who is currently Lead Color Designer on *Alice's Wonderland Bakery*—makes it clear that he credits Stirdivant for his career. "I don't think you can learn having a color sense, but I think I had a color sense that she brought out of me," he says. "She was honest and fair and knowledgeable. She's the one person I still trust in my career when I need help or advice."

Stirdivant, in turn, says Rodriguez taught her to always keep her sense of humor. "I wasn't engaging enough in that prior to my relationship starting with David. He also gave me an appreciation of what I knew. Realizing the valuable lessons I was taught came from mentoring David."



JOE PURDY & ARIEL LADENSOHN

Back in 2015, Ariel Ladensohn learned that her playwriting teacher's former student, Joe Purdy, was story editing on *Ready Jet Go* in the building where she worked. She asked if it would be all right to pop in and introduce herself. Getting the okay, she knocked on Purdy's office door and walked right into the middle of a meeting. Rather than dismiss her, Purdy joined her for coffee later. Their mutual connection was enough to start a conversation. It kept flowing because "we hit it off," Ladensohn says. "Joe is absolutely the nicest guy."

"ARIEL IS A TRUE SCHOLAR. SHE'S A QUICK STUDY AND ALSO FUN, BUT SHE DOES A DEEP DIVE ON SUBJECTS."

But later, giving Ladensohn her break writing on *Llama Llama* where Purdy was Co-Executive Producing, wasn't just about being nice. Yes, he says, it was a fast friendship, but it was also "an immediate creative respect. I read Ariel's stuff and I thought, my God, this is so fun, funny, interesting."

As for mentorship, it came naturally. "Joe very much leads by example," says Ladensohn, who is now a writer on the *Futurama* reboot. "He's not someone who gives you unsolicited advice constantly."

It was also a bonus to Ladensohn that she grew up addicted to '90s series like *Hey Arnold!*—shows where Purdy had played a seminal role. Mindful of the influences that propelled this career that Ladensohn admired, Purdy feels: "We're in the trenches, we're doing this together, so we're partners. Guide by experience, and always be nimble and learning on every project."

Purdy does more than this, though, according to Ladensohn. He also, *always*, picks up her calls. "He'd been there before and understood what it was like in the positions I was in," she says. "He would help me deal with whatever I was going through."

"JOE VERY MUCH LEADS BY EXAMPLE. HE'S NOT SOMEONE WHO GIVES YOU UNSOLICITED ADVICE CONSTANTLY."

After giving Ladensohn her first shot, Purdy helped her get other jobs, and they developed a project they eventually sold to Freeform. Starting out as kids' show, it evolved into what they laughingly call animated adult horror comedy. Purdy was still supervising Ladensohn, but now they were also partners, and she says, "It was the most fun experience I've had thus far doing anything."

"Joe knows what it's like to build an animated show from the ground up. What do you need in character design? Making sure the script is going to work when it hits the screen," she says. "He's [also] super professional but can have fun with it. I think it's really easy to take things too seriously, and with Joe there's a good balance."

The two have become so close that their families are friends, and now that they're on equal footing in many ways, it would seem that the mentorship would fade away. Not so. "We've been getting coffee through every iteration of my career," says Ladensohn. "Joe's been a sounding board, helping me stay the course in tougher times, as well. He is still the person I turn to for advice."

Though his is the teaching role, Purdy is fast to point out what he has gained. "Ariel is a true scholar. She's a quick study and also fun, but she does a deep dive on subjects," he says. "I always respect that there is this wide and deep conversation about things. She's ridiculously loyal and a hard worker and really is appreciative of what she learns."

Now freelancing and in development on a few shows, Purdy credits the organic nature of their relationship for its multi-layered success: "It wasn't set up. It wasn't forced." It felt natural for him to guide her the way colleagues and friends had helped him along the way. "The creative kitchen was always open," he says. "I think it's fun to just keep inviting more people in."





ANGELA ENTZMINGER & JACQUELEEN MUÑOZ

Some people are born to be leaders. Angela Entzminger is one of them.

She was working at Nickelodeon in 2020 when she learned about Rise Up Animation and its mentorship program. She remembered how hard it was to get her first full-time job. "My friends and I [were] grasping in the dark trying to figure out how to do anything. I didn't want anyone else to have to deal with this," she says. So she set out to demystify the process.

Rise Up paired Entzminger, who is currently a writer on Warner Bros.' *My Adventures with Superman*, with Jacqueline Muñoz, and Entzminger says: "Right away I was super impressed with her artwork. Her boards are really great."

This enthusiasm was exactly what Muñoz needed. She had graduated from ArtCenter College of Design into the pandemic lockdown. "There was nothing," she says. "No internships, no trainee programs. [Rise Up] was a port in a storm. To have someone in the industry in my corner. Not just helping me with my work, but also helping me keep my chin up."

Entzminger takes a strategic approach to mentoring, first sending out a questionnaire. She asks who her mentee's favorite artists are, what age group they want to work with, if they want to work in TV or film, and other specific questions. "Not only does that help me know where they're coming from," she says, it helps them start to think about what they want to do.

By the time she meets her mentee, Entzminger can say, "Okay, based on what you want to do and your skill set, here are my recommendations to get you to this point." She focuses on everything from craft to cover letters because "I'm trying to get them focused on the long haul."

While Muñoz values the industry insider expertise Entzminger brings to the table, "with what I should be doing to get a specific job with a specific show and that kind of thing," she says, "I think what meant the most to me was that, right off the bat, it was a lot of warmth and support in a time where I really didn't feel like there was much going for me."

A more formal program also means resources. In Rise Up, for example, there is a Slack channel for the mentors where people can ask questions, post resources, and talk about best practices. For mentees there's a Discord channel to connect and share experiences, which is helpful because there is an art to being a good mentee.

"Start thinking about, what really compels you?" Muñoz advises. "What made you want to get into animation?" Having answers to these questions makes it easier for your mentor to guide you in a direction you want to go.

Despite the more formal nature of the Rise Up program, both Entzminger and Muñoz have benefited in personal ways.

"ANGELA TAUGHT ME THAT I'M NOT BY MYSELF IN SOME VOID JUST BEGGING TO GET TO THE OTHER SIDE. THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO HELP BRING ME OVER THE GAP."

"Jacqueline has definitely rekindled my love for animation," Entzminger says. "It's not that the love went away, but there are days that are hard, a lot of work. Talking with her, she reminded me, this is a very joyful thing, the art of creation."

Muñoz, who credits her current (and first) industry job as a Storyboard Revisionist on *The Loud House* to Entzminger, says: "Angela taught me that I'm not by myself in some void just begging to get to the other side. There are people who want to help bring me over the gap. Having this absolute angel of a woman show me again and again that's she's there for me meant everything." 🌟



Impulsive Cuphead and cautious Mugman are partners in comedy. OPPOSITE: The iconic villain the Devil proved to be one of the more complex characters in the TV series.

GAME CHANGERS

TRANSFORMING THE *CUPHEAD* VIDEO GAME INTO A TV SERIES PROVED BOTH CHALLENGING AND FUN AS THE PRODUCTION TEAM TOOK A DEEP DIVE INTO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, OLD-TIME JAZZ, AND VINTAGE ANIMATION.

BY ALEXANDRA DROSU

When *Cuphead* came out in 2017, it wasn't your typical run-and-gun video game. The style was inspired by rubber hose animation and surrealist storylines from the Golden Age of Walt Disney and Fleischer Studios cartoons. The effect created by Chad and Jared Moldenhauer looked so authentic to the time period that when they initially showed footage of the game, people asked where they licensed the characters from. So it didn't come as a complete surprise when Netflix commissioned an animated TV series based on the award-winning game called *The Cuphead Show!*, which premiered last month.

But a game is after all a game, with a limited narrative and no clear story plots. The creative team's first challenge was to develop a solid story arc and infuse personalities into the various characters.

"We [had] to reverse engineer personalities into these characters and find meaning. How do we make their personalities funny? Where do we create friction?" says Executive Producer and Showrunner Dave Wasson, who worked together with Co-Executive Producer and Writer Cosmo Segurson. He and Segurson mined the storybook sequence at the beginning of the game for ideas and found inspiration in an image of Cuphead sitting at a craps table having the time of his life, while Mugman hangs on the edge of the table, a look of palpable fear on his face.

"We took those bread crumbs and it was like, okay, so we know Cuphead's impulsive and reckless and doesn't think about consequences. What pairs well with that? Somebody who's more

grounded, who is maybe a little more cautious," says Wasson. This dynamic relationship between Cuphead and Mugman—combined with the grouchy Elder Kettle, Ms. Chalice, the Devil, and more—created the perfect comedy engine for the story.

Given the target family audience, Wasson and Segurson wondered if featuring the Devil would be too controversial, but they pushed for the character's inclusion. "In order to have strong heroes, you've got to have a great villain. And what better villain than the Devil himself?" asks Wasson. The story team devised a premise where Cuphead is a fly in the Devil's ointment, and for the first time ever, the Devil is frustrated.

"We all felt like frustrated characters can be really fun to play with as a character trait. We pushed it even further—he's really vain and very self-aware. I think he's definitely the most complicated character in the series," says Segurson.

BYGONE ERAS & MODERN STORYTELLING

"Every morning we would have a cartoon kickoff where we'd watch at least three classic cartoons, as well as maybe some live-action shorts from the period," says Segurson. "I think everyone was ready to just fully dive into this kind of 1930s-style humor and animation and music."

Inspiration was drawn from other eras and sources including a myriad of historic references from *Popeye* to the *Silly Symphony* series, the vocal rhythms of Frank Capra films to the comedic timing of *The Three Stooges*.

Where they did veer from some of the more vintage animation influences was in the story, opting for a character-driven comedy. "Audiences [then] weren't as sophisticated as audiences are now, and so just to see a character moving in a silly cycle was enough to entertain someone. It was like seeing a magic trick. [Now] almost a hundred years later, people have

Images courtesy of Netflix





seen more sophisticated acting, more sophisticated joke telling,” notes Wasson.

Art Director Andrea Fernández remembers one of her first meetings while working on *Cuphead*. Hundreds of characters were pinned on a wall, and they started discussing which characters to make episodes out of. She was included in story conversations from the beginning, so she could start envisioning the world and, more importantly, how to accomplish it technically. She credits this collaborative process with helping to pull off the intricacies of the show, wrangling the multitude of influences and ideas into workable, budget-conscious solutions.

“The hardest part was to take everyone’s hopes and dreams, and then put guardrails around it and really make decisions about how we could actually make a show that looks like this in the timeline given and with the resources we had,” says Fernández. They had to examine every creative decision and be deliberate in their choices. The backgrounds were incredibly intricate, intentional, and detailed.

“There was just a lot of strategy,” says Wasson. “If we’re going to have one really big adventure episode where [we had] lots of new locations, then we would try to have an episode right before that mostly took place in the cottage...[and] easier for the background team.” This trade-off manifested in smaller, more

character-driven stories followed by episodes with larger scale adventures.

“This isn’t like modern shows where you can just move every layer around and it’s relatively flat, and I’m going to get you a new background in about two to three hours,” says Fernández. “Each background took up to 16 hours to paint.”

ADAPTING TO THE PAST

Aside from sometimes viewing backgrounds as a quasi-live-action set, the storyboard artists had to adapt their techniques to account for the time period, eschewing anime shortcuts and dynamic angles that didn’t exist in the 1930s. Instead, storyboard artists like Megan Boyd focused on the gags, strong staging, and hitting cinematic moments where they count. “It was a fun challenge of picking moments to really highlight the animation,” she says.

The storyboard team and directors started with denser outlines with some dialogue written, a few pre-visualization drawings for each episode, and references such as textiles or architecture from the period. Each team would then add their own jokes and ideas, encouraged to get creative and sometimes pitching wild storylines. “I think all the boarders went crazy at first,” jokes Boyd.

The other key consideration for the storyboard artists? Music! “So much of that 1930’s jazz has such great beats and

rhythms that I can listen to it with my eyes closed and just see characters moving to it,” says Wasson. They wanted to emulate this synergistic relationship between movement and sound, and enlisted the help of Ego Plum to compose the music for the series. For the more music-driven episode sequences, Wasson and Segurson collaborated on original songs, with everyone on the team immersing themselves in music from the era.

For the finale episode of Season 1, “In Charm’s Way,” Boyd choreographed a tap-dancing number for Ms. Chalice as she takes the boys on a joyride through town and dances on cars. “I spent a long time watching old-timey tap-dancing videos, trying to get the era in my mindset, so it felt authentic,” she says. “It’s just a really fun challenge making something visually flow with music.”

For these self-proclaimed animation nerds, an opportunity to share their appreciation for the 1930’s rubber-hose style was a dream come true. “It was kind of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity project,” says Fernández. Adds Segurson: “It completely embraces the magic of animation in a way that I haven’t been able to work on in another series before. And maybe we’re going to bring it back, where no matter how old you are, you can find humor and you can find the wonder of the animation itself, all in one package.” 🎵



FROM TOP LEFT, CLOCKWISE: Sketches of the Elder Kettle's cottage; Elder Kettle's fatherly figure can be a grouch at times; a night in the graveyard; surrounded by skeletons; the devious host King Dice; and Ms. Chalice's tap-dancing finale.

HONORING OUR ANIMATION FAMILY

ON FEBRUARY 5, THE AFTERNOON OF REMEMBRANCE PAID TRIBUTE TO THOSE IN THE ANIMATION INDUSTRY WHO PASSED AWAY LAST YEAR. HERE, WE CELEBRATE THE LIVES OF THESE TALENTED ANIMATION GUILD MEMBERS.

DANIEL DE LA VEGA 01/03/2021

Daniel de la Vega enjoyed a career as an Animator, Sheet Timer, and Animation Timing Director. While working for studios that included Hanna-Barbara, Filmation, and Bakshi, his credits ranged from *Yogi's Space Race* to *Dora the Explorer*. He was 72.



DAVE CREEK 01/07/2021

Dave Creek was the Lead Character Designer for *Bob's Burgers*, working on the show since its premiere. Other credits include *Central Park*, *Brickleberry*,

and *Happiness Is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown*. He taught character animation at California Institute of the Arts. He was 42.

DALE BAER 01/15/2021

Dale Baer is best known for his work at Disney Animation and his eponymous Baer Animation Company. The company served as the Los Angeles animation unit for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and also provided animation for *Beauty and the Beast*, among other films. He was 70.

RON CAMPBELL 01/22/2021

Australian-born Ron Campbell began his career in the late 1950s on cartoons such as *Popeye* and *Beetle Bailey*. He worked as an Animator, Producer, Director, and Storyboard Artist. He is best-known for directing the 1960's TV cartoon series *The Beatles*. He was 81.

MAC TORRES 02/01/2021

Longtime Disney, Hanna-Barbera, and Filmation Assistant Animator Mac Torres also did storyboards for Murakami-Wolf Films. His credits include *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, *Jetsons: The Movie*, *The Flintstones*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. He was 67.

MITCH ROCHON 02/17/2021

Mitch Rochon got his start in features on *Raggedy Ann & Andy: A Musical Adventure*. He worked on *Heidi's Song*, *Scooby Goes Hollywood*, and numerous other TV series before finding a home at DTA as an Animation Director and Timing Director. He was 72.

GISELE RECINOS 02/20/2021

Gisele Recinos was an Inbetweenner, Breakdown Artist, and Assistant Animator at DreamWorks Animation, Walt Disney Feature Animation, and Baer Animation Company. She also worked as a Cel Painter for Hanna-Barbera Productions. She was 58.

ROBERT "BOB" SCHAEFER 02/20/21

Bob Schaefer started as a Title Artist for Hanna-Barbera and moved on to become a Background Artist on *The Flintstones*. His background design and color stylist credits include *The Transformers*, *Muppet Babies*, *Scooby-Doo* videos, and numerous TV series. He was 82.

JANE BONNET 03/04/2021

Jane Bonnet worked at Walt Disney Feature Animation and DTA. She started as an Inbetweenner and worked her way up to Key Assistant Animator. She was 74.

RICHARD "RICK" BOWMAN 03/19/2021

As an Assistant Animator and Sheet Timer at Hanna-Barbera, Marvel, Disney, and other studios, Rick Bowman worked on a wide range of shows, including *The World's Greatest Super Friends*, *Muppet Babies*, and *X-Men: The Animated Series*. He was 69.

SHARON POTTER 03/29/2021

A Cel Painter credited as Sharon Thomas, Sharon Potter worked for Filmation, DePatie-Freleng, Hanna-Barbera, Don Bluth Entertainment, Warner Bros., and Disney. She was also a Digital Cel Painter on the original *Space Jam*. She was 75.

JAMES "JIM" STOCKS 03/31/2021

Jim Stocks spent his career as a Xerox Processor and Cel Service at Filmation, Disney, Hanna-Barbera, Ruby-Spears, and Don Bluth Entertainment. His work included *FernGully: The Last Rainforest*, *The Little Mermaid*, and the original *She-Ra: Princess of Power*. He was 70.

STEVE MCGRATH 04/09/2021

VFX Artist and Modeler Steve McGrath worked at studios such as DreamWorks and ILM with credits including *Madagascar* and *Kung Fu Panda*. He was 61.



EDWIN AGUILAR 4/10/2021

A Character Layout Artist for *The Simpsons* for more than 20 years, Edwin Aguilar came to the U.S. from El Salvador when he was nine. He started at Graz Entertainment, and

after stints at Hanna-Barbera and Warner Bros., he began drawing Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, and Maggie. He was 47.

MARCIA "BUNNY" MUNNS 04/19/2021

Bunny Munns worked at Hanna-Barbera, Ruby-Spears, DreamWorks and Warner Bros. She was a Color Key Artist and Color Stylist on TV series including the original *Animaniacs*, *Thundarr the Barbarian*, *Tiny Toon Adventures*, and *Batman: The Animated Series*. She was 74.

SAM CORNELL 05/01/2021

Industry veteran Sam Cornell is known for his varied work on *Twilight Zone: The Movie*, *The Rugrats Movie*, *The Wuzzles*, and *Shinbone Alley*. He also directed numerous commercials with classic characters such as Tony the Tiger and the Keebler Elves. He was 81.

MARK BARROWS 05/4/2021

As an Assistant Effects Animator, Mark Barrows worked mainly on Walt Disney movies. His career also included time at Filmation and additional credits such as the *BraveStarr* TV series and *The Simpsons Movie*. He was 60.

MICHAEL EDENS 05/07/2021

Writer and Story Editor Michael Edens began his career on shows such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *The Real Ghostbusters*. His work for DTA, Universal, Marvel, and MGM included the series *Beetlejuice*, *Exosquad*, and *Spider-Man: The Animated Series*. He was 69.

MICHAEL "MIKE" YANG 05/10/2021
Mike Yang worked as Animatic Editor, Animatic Storyboard, and Animatic Timer for Cartoon Network on television shows such as *Extreme Ghostbusters*, *Family Guy*, *American Dad!*, and *Ben 10: Omniverse*. He was 46.

PHIL YOUNG 05/12/2021
Phil Young joined Disney Feature in 1977 and worked on most of the modern Disney classics. He also worked at DreamWorks and Warner Bros. and later taught at SCAD and Rogue Community College in Oregon. He was 79.

MARISHA "MARY" NOROSKI 05/15/2021
Mary Noroski worked as a Cel Painter and Final Checker for Walt Disney Animation, Hanna-Barbera, Filmmation, Warner Bros., and Celine Miles Ink & Paint. Her TV credits include *BraveStarr*, while her film work includes *Space Jam* and *The Iron Giant*. She was 79.

RON ALLEN 06/06/2021
Ron Allen worked as a Cel Painter at Walt Disney Animation and as an Assistant Director at Kroyer Films on *FernGully: The Last Rainforest*. He was 55.

DONALD "DON" JURWICH 07/13/2021
Don Jurwich enjoyed a long career as a Layout Artist on shows such as *The Bullwinkle Show*, *The Flintstones*, *Hong Kong Phooey*, and more. He also worked as a Producer on *Super Friends* and *Scooby-Doo* series. He was 87.

NOREEN BEASLEY 07/22/2021
A Layout, Design, and Breakdown Artist, Noreen Beasley worked at Disney Feature, Warner Bros., and Hanna-Barbera. Her eclectic credits range from movies like *The Lion King* to TV shows including *The Completely Mental Misadventures of Ed Grimley*. She was 82.

JULIE BENENATI 07/28/2021
Julie Benenati's long career as an Animation Checker at Cartoon Network included many of the studio's iconic shows, such as *The Powerpuff Girls*, *Samurai Jack*, *Close Enough*, and *Craig of the Creek*. She was 51.

ROBERT "BOB" STANTON 08/13/2021
Animation veteran Bob Stanton worked as a Background Artist for Filmmation and Disney. Additionally, he did color scripts on films such as *The Little Mermaid*, *The Lion King*, and *Mulan*, and served as Background Supervisor on *Lilo & Stitch*. He was 60.

JAMIE KEZLARIAN BOLIO 08/29/2021
A Key Assistant Animator, Model Design Artist, and Clean-up Artist, Jamie Bolio also had an animation career that ranged from business development to talent outreach. Her credits

include Rich Animation, Chuck Jones, DreamWorks, and numerous Disney productions. She was 54.

MARION WELLS 09/09/2021
Writer Marion Wells penned scripts for Hanna-Barbera, Walt Disney, and Marvel. Among her credits are *Quack Pack*, *Goof Troop*, *Darkwing Duck*, and *A Goofy Movie*. She was 72.

MYRNA GIBBS 09/28/2021
Myrna Gibbs enjoyed a long career as an Inker and Painter. She worked at Hanna-Barbera, Warner Bros., Filmmation, and Marvel on movies and numerous iconic TV series, including *The Flintstones*, *The Pink Panther Show*, and *The Transformers*. She was 84.

KATHLEEN QUAIFE-HODGE 10/05/2021
Effects Artist and Animator Kathleen Quaife-Hodge worked at Hanna-Barbera, Walt Disney, Universal, Kurtz & Friends, and Warner Bros. Her TV and film credits include *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *The Proud Family*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *Hercules*. She was 64.



RUTHIE TOMPSON 10/10/21
Animation legend Ruthie Thompson spent nearly four decades at Walt Disney Studio. She began her career in Ink & Paint on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. Moving up to

Supervisor of the scene-planning department, she worked on *Fantasia*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Jungle Book*, and nearly every other Disney film made during her tenure. In 2000, she was named an official Disney Legend. She was 111.

LEWIS "LEW" OTT 10/16/21
Lewis Ott worked as a Layout Artist and Model Designer for studios including Hanna-Barbera, Filmmation, and Marvel. His career encompassed *Scooby-Doo*, *Flintstones*, and *Yogi Bear* specials, as well as shows such as *She-Ra: Princess of Power* and *Fantastic Four*. He was 94.

MARLENE ROBINSON-MAY 10/22/2021
Animator and Timing Director Marlene Robinson-May got her start at Disney in the 1950s. She worked at studios including Universal, Warner Bros., Filmmation, and Hanna-Barbera on classics like *The Jetsons* and *The Flintstones*, and numerous Chuck Jones' specials. She was 84.

VIRGINIA SHERWOOD 10/22/2021
A Background and Model Designer, Virginia Sherwood worked for Film Roman and Fox Animation. She was 75.

LYNN SPEES 10/27/2021
Cel Painter and Painter Lynn Spees worked for Hanna-Barbera, Don Bluth Productions,

and Aurora Entertainment. Among her credits are *The Secret of NIMH* and *FernGully: The Last Rainforest*. She was 76.

CHRIS DUNCAN 11/10/2021
Background Designer and Matte Painter Chris Duncan worked at Bento Box, Nickelodeon, Marvel, and Warner Bros. Among his TV credits are *The Great North* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*. He also worked on the *DC Super Hero Girls* series and videos. He was 58.

THOMAS SHANNON 12/04/2021
As a Storyboard, Background, and Layout Artist, Thomas Shannon worked at DTA, Filmmation, Disney Feature, and DreamWorks. His credits include *She-Ra: Princess of Power*, *BraveStarr*, and *The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!* He was 71.

VERA (LAW, NEE LANPHER) PACHECO 12/11/2021
Vera Pacheco was a Key Assistant Animator, Character Key, and Clean-Up Supervisor at Walt Disney Studios and Don Bluth Productions. Her credits include *The Secret of NIMH*, *American Tail*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, *Hercules*, and *Tarzan*. She was 65.

CATHERINE PETERSON 12/16/2021
Catherine Peterson's job as a Painter, Animation Checker, and Final Checker spanned from Hanna-Barbera to Don Bluth Productions to Disney Feature. Her work included *Shelley Duvall's Bedtime Stories*, *Fantasia 2000*, and *Lilo & Stitch*. She was 66.

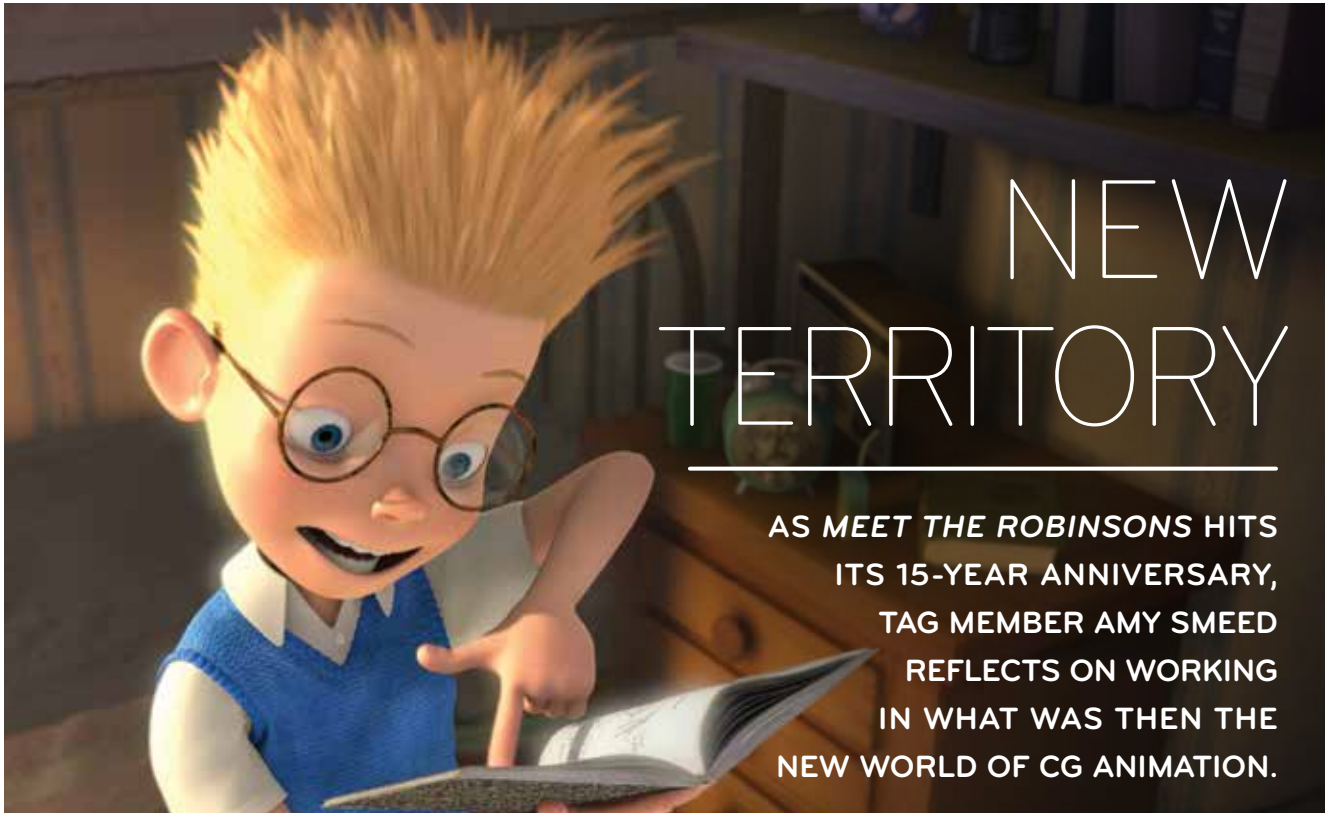
MICHAEL CAMARILLO 12/25/2021
Affectionately known as Mohawk Mike for his distinctive hair, Michael Camarillo worked as an Effects Animator, Writer, and Model and Prop Designer at studios including DreamWorks, DTA, Cartoon Network, and Bento Box. Among his credits are *The Simpsons* and *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends*. He was 57.

The following members were not included in last year's tribute.

LESTER POURIER 12/02/2020
A member of the Oglala Lakota Tribe, Lester Pourier worked as an Assistant Animator at Hanna-Barbera Productions and Ruby-Spears Productions. His credits include *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*, and *Josie and the Pussycats*. He was 89.

BRENDA BANKS 12/31/2020
Brenda Banks was an Animator for Flip Wilson and ABC Afterschool TV specials. She worked on the cult classic, *Wizards*, among other Ralph Bakshi films, and numerous TV shows. Credited as one of the first Black animators at Disney Animation, she was the recipient of a Diversity Award from Women in Animation. She was 72.

Image courtesy of Walt Disney Animation Studios.



NEW TERRITORY

AS *MEET THE ROBINSONS* HITS ITS 15-YEAR ANNIVERSARY, TAG MEMBER AMY SMEED REFLECTS ON WORKING IN WHAT WAS THEN THE NEW WORLD OF CG ANIMATION.



The story of Lewis, a 12-year-old inventor who time travels into the future with a mysterious teenager

named Wilbur Robinson, 2007's *Meet the Robinsons* was Walt Disney Animation Studios' first movie to use CG to animate human characters.

"Humans are always a challenge. We know how humans are supposed to move physically, and in animation we are always trying to caricature areas like

posing, timing, and spacing. [So] this was all new territory for us," says Amy Smeed, a current Head of Animation who worked then as an animator on the film.

The newness of CG animation entailed a big learning curve on the movie as the studio transitioned, teaching CG to some of its 2D animators. "For someone like me, that meant I was able to learn from some of the masters like Nik Ranieri, Dale Baer, and Ruben Aquino," says Smeed. "They were pushing on us to really think about silhouette value in our poses as well as the other principals of animation."

Using IK Rigs helped the animators with squash and stretch, as well as smear

frames, but technology isn't the main component that contributes to the movie's longevity. Smeed feels it has to do with the balance of entertainment and sincerity. "There are a wide variety of unique characters and personalities that add a lot of specificity and humor," she says. On top of this, she adds: "We see the feelings of a young boy wishing to be adopted and wanting to go back into his past to meet his mother ... I always get emotional when I see the scene of Lewis watching his mother drop him off at the orphanage. It's a movie where the audience can laugh throughout, but you also get the emotion and sincerity of the characters."

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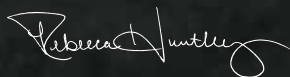
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