

FALL 2022

ISSUE NO. 19

KEYFRAME

THE ANIMATION GUILD
QUARTERLY



Shavonne
Cherry



James Baxter



Jennifer
Yuh Nelson

THE
LONG
GAME
SECRETS TO A
FULFILLING
CAREER

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BALANCING ACT



THERE IS A MYTH THAT GREAT ART COMES FROM GREAT SUFFERING. THAT SOMEHOW LIFE'S CHALLENGES, VICES, OR FAILED PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE MUSES OF MOVING WORK.

While art can be a great medium for working through issues, that approach can take a great toll on a person. I've known artists who have delayed or denied themselves the mental health therapy they

needed because they worried that their art would suffer—but instead they were the ones who suffered. Denying personal care and what you need for an enriching life is a great sacrifice and completely unsustainable. The life of an artist who works their fingers to death, ignoring every other aspect of who they are, is difficult. There are too many tragic stories: overdoses, self-destruction, and even the death of many talented musicians, actors, and artists.

The truth about art is that although it can be emotionally and spiritually satisfying to create, you need to have a balanced life to have a long career. It's a non-romantic view that a career in art is a job choice just like any other. And that career should be just one part of a well-rounded life. Everyone should be able to enjoy the human right of time spent with family and friends or hobbies. To have domain over your time—everyone, not just artists, needs this to feel inspired or to just relax and be in the moment.

This is why The Animation Guild exists. We are here to protect workers' ability to live a long and balanced life in the animation industry.

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

ON THE COVER

Tim Sullens photographed Shavonne Cherry, James Baxter, and Jennifer Yuh Nelson for this issue's cover story about career longevity in animation.



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WHO NEEDS LUCK?



WHEN MY HUSBAND ERIC USED TO TELL PEOPLE HE WORKED ON ANIMATED FILMS, THE REACTION WAS ALWAYS ENTHUSIASTIC. PEOPLE WOULD PEPPER HIM WITH QUESTIONS AND CONGRATULATE HIM ON HIS

"LUCK" LANDING SUCH A FUN AND COOL JOB. "YOU ARE SO LUCKY!" THEY WOULD SAY.

Yes, he was grateful that he worked in an industry that champions creativity and allows him to be artistic, but it's not just about luck as any of our Animation Guild members know. It requires hard work, dedication, and developing your natural talents.

As the new film *Luck* (p.34) explains, luck is random. But the artists and storytellers who worked on the film know that crafting this tale required research, commitment, and skill. You can't control your luck, but you can control how you approach your work and your colleagues. And, indeed, flexibility and a good attitude are among the qualities that ensure a long career in the animation industry. Just ask James Baxter, Shavonne Cherry, and Jennifer Yuh Nelson. These three animation veterans share the secrets of their success in *The Long Game* (p.20). And, luck played no role in it!

As summer ends and fall begins, we celebrate the work of Animation Guild members in time for the Emmy Awards. Contenders for this year's Primetime Outstanding Animated Program talk about what makes their shows unique in *Behind the Screen* (p.26). We also look at how Miranda Tacchia explored her creative freedom through Post-it notes (p.10), the way Kitty Tomblin's art fuses religion and The Who (p.9), and more.

Now, don't get me wrong, appreciating your opportunities whether in your career or life is important. Because at the end of the day it's up to you to take advantage of the chances you are given and make the most of them. That being said, let's all wish for a healthy dose of good luck in our lives!

Alexandra

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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** ("Emmy Lookback") 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*.



SONAIYA KELLEY ("Color Her Unimpressed") is a film reporter at the *Los Angeles Times*. The Bronx, N.Y., native previously served as a digital producer at *Essence*

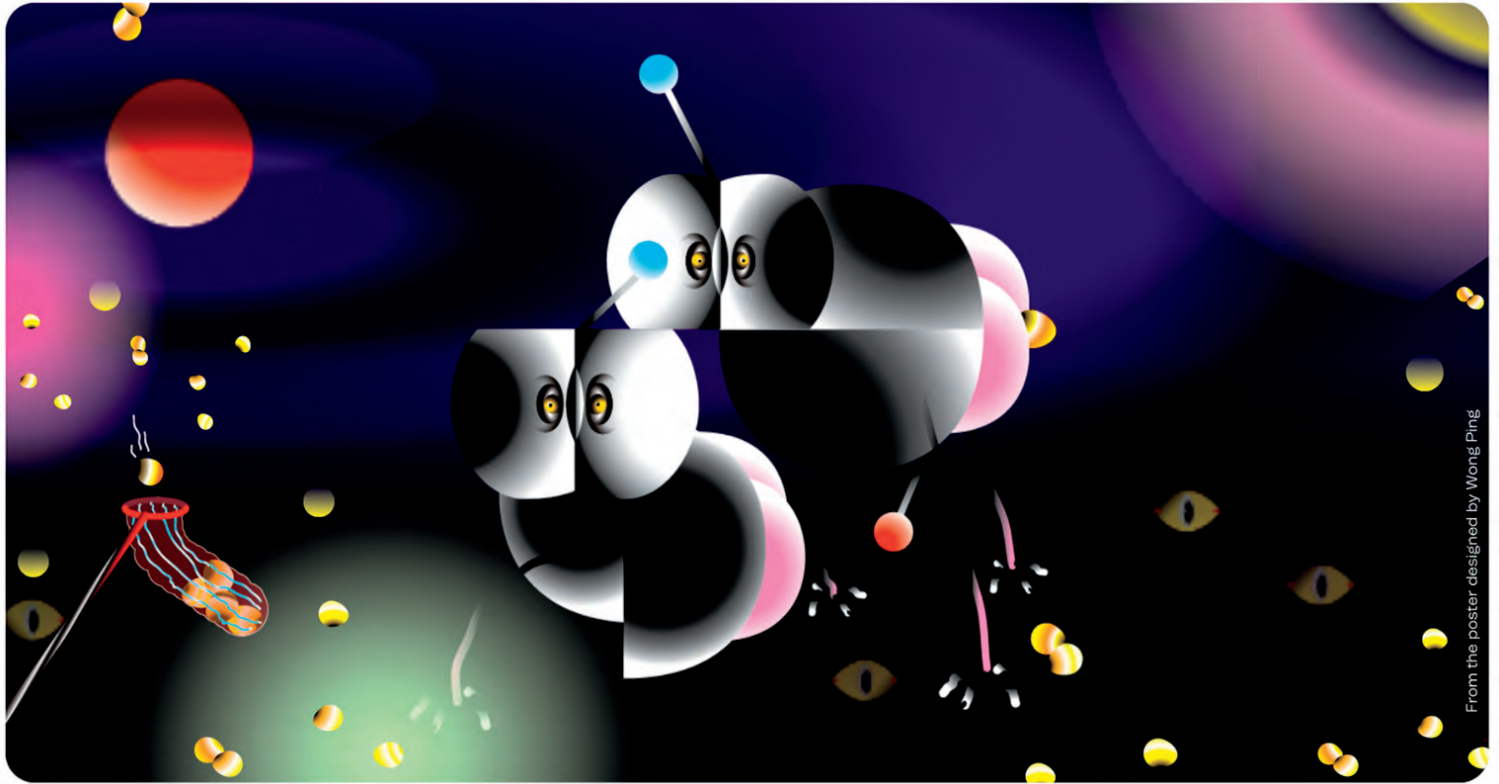
and *Allure* magazines and has contributed bylines to *Complex*, *Mashable* and *Patch.com*. An alumna of Stony Brook University's School of Journalism and the Bronx High School of Science, you can find her on Twitter @sonaiyak and on Instagram @sonaiya_k.



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 Long Game."

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DRAWING THE DIVINE



When Kitty Tomblin was growing up, classic rock always played in her house, and she was drawn to The Who for “their incredible music and the unique

character of each member,” she says. A spiritual experience listening to the band’s rock opera *Tommy* while animating late one night at The Savannah College of Art and Design inspired her “St. Who” series.

An animator on *Solar Opposites* and *Rick and Morty*, Tomblin says that the style for this series came from her experiences growing up Catholic. “I’ve seen many different stained-glass windows at the churches we attended Mass in,” she says. “The most gorgeous was at the Cathedral Basilica of St. John the Baptist in Savannah.” She was visiting for an architectural history class, and she found herself explaining the various Biblical scenes depicted in the windows to those she was with.

“I realized that a lot could be told through the symbolism of these scenes and portraits, from the hand gestures to the items they were holding. These are usually visual shorthand for what the depicted figure is known for,” she says. “I’ve always enjoyed the godlike presence [lead singer] Roger Daltrey commands on stage, with his golden curls and powerful voice. He is known for [that], and for playing the titular character in the film adaptation of *Tommy*. The film has famous visuals I’m drawn to, like the scenes for ‘The Acid Queen’ (the crown of poppies), and ‘Pinball Wizard’ (the pinball playfield). I’ve always joked to my friends that music—especially The Who’s music—is my religion of sorts.” Once she figured out that the poppy crown and the pinball playfield had spiritual parallels, she was inspired to create ‘St. Roger the Golden.’



Tomblin made the image digitally using Procreate on an iPad, adding: “I especially love that I can travel with it—drawing rockstars and listening to their albums while flying is unparalleled. It’s my happy place.”

ARTIST: Kitty Tomblin
TITLE: *St. Roger the Golden*
MEDIUM: Digital
SIZE: 12.636" x 18.091"

COLOR HER UNIMPRESSED

Easy access to Post-it notes and a search for creative freedom resulted in Miranda Tacchia's impressive first book, *Unimpressed*.



Photo credit: Stanley Wong

Miranda Tacchia remembers her father reading *Casper the Friendly Ghost* comics aloud to her as a kid. "He would do these voices for the characters, and I always thought that was really funny," she says.

This was her first introduction to the art form, and she grew up loving cartoons and drawing. "I was always looking for ways to incorporate it into school projects that didn't require it," she says. "One time I did a science project in fourth grade on botulism and made drawings of the bacteria as characters arguing with each other."

After graduating from CalArts' Character Animation department in 2012, Tacchia says, "Right out of school, I had trouble finding

[jobs], so I tried to make work that I thought would get me hired by studios, which isn't necessarily true to my own sensibilities."

For a decade, she has worked at studios including Disney, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, Warner Bros., and Titmouse, but she says that for a time she was all over the place in how she wanted her work to look.

"Even though this is a creative field, you still don't get a whole lot of creative freedom," she says. "I'm designing from a storyboard that clearly dictates where the characters are and what it has to look like. It's a skill that you learn over time, [but] you're kind of on autopilot while you do it."

PREVIOUS PAGE: Tacchia's own facial expression influences her art. THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: An example of how body image is addressed in Tacchia's work; Tacchia's office with Post-its on the wall; the cover of *Unimpressed*; Tacchia uses her art to explore both romantic and platonic relationships.



She wanted to focus on her own visual style, and a few years into her animation career, she began making cartoons during her off-hours. "I started doing these little Post-it comics, and it became kind of a regular thing," she says.

The comics were inspired by what she calls "everyday life, observational things" like heartbreak, as well as a "continually evolving mindset and period of questioning about relationships. None of the cartoons were literal, but I did pull ideas from personal experience, and that influenced how I approached them," she says.

Each cartoon was illustrated using only markers, a brush pen, Post-its, and tape. Over the course of several years, she built up a body of work that she decided to make into a book. She pitched *Unimpressed* to Fantagraphics in the fall of 2019 and got a deal. "Shortly after that, we went into quarantine," she says.

With the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic, she took her time putting the book together, taking a brief pause before resuming at the tail end of 2020 "scanning artwork, sorting it, [and] trying to make sure the right caption was with the right image."

"I would spend about an hour or two every evening just scanning," she recalls. "Scanning was the longest, most tedious process." Editing down her cache of content was almost as daunting. "I tried to be as true to myself as I could. I didn't want to take out too much. Even though I thought some of [the cartoons] were a little embarrassing or I had outgrown them, I wanted [the book] to reflect this stretch in my life [between 2016 and 2020] when I was doing them."

Tacchia says that making this book is the high point of her career so far. Published in

October, 2021, *Unimpressed* features more than 200 comics about women dealing with relatable issues like relationships (romantic and platonic), social media/technology, and self-image.

"Body [image] was a big theme in my work as I was coming to terms with my insecurities and learning how to accept things that I couldn't really change," Tacchia explains. "In general, I usually try to use somewhat generic-looking characters, but I always go back to my own likeness when I'm doing reference just because I'm there; I can go to the mirror and see how it looks when I raise my arm up this way or if I make a face. I see myself in the mirror every day so it's hard for that not to percolate into how [I] draw."

It also percolated into her book's title. "When I was a kid, people remarked over and over, like a broken record, on how little I smiled," she says. "I was told I looked angry, sad, or 'unimpressed' when I actually felt inwardly happy. I started realizing as I got older that even when I felt I was being physically expressive, I still just looked like Daria, or any other half-lidded, deadpan character you can name." For a long time it confused and annoyed Tacchia that her joy wasn't coming across to other people, and by drawing the characters in *Unimpressed*, she feels she was finally able to embrace her straight-faced exterior.

— Sonaiya Kelley





A PASSION TO PAINT

THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER JOEL PAROD HAS HAD ONE GOAL—TO MAKE ART, ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING, FROM ANIMATION COLOR KEYS TO PLEIN AIR LANDSCAPES TO HIS OWN ALBUM COVERS.

ABOVE: *Looking Down on Arroyo Burro Beach Park*; OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP CLOCKWISE: *Toni 053111#1* - a 25 min. figure study in oil on canvas; *Network Support*; *Boats on the Beach*; Parod with his daughter Scarlet, a huge animation fan and Chuck Jones expert who hopes to have a career involving the care and conservation of animals; Parod at work for Warner Bros. Feature Animation in 1996.

Born in Northern California and raised in the Sacramento suburbs, Joel Parod always knew he had an affinity for art. Before targeted Instagram ads made pet portraits a booming industry, his mom's friends would hire him to make pointillism ink drawings of their four-legged friends. He illustrated his book reports, and in sixth grade, when he met now-caricature artist James Malia, the two would draw comic strips together. In high school, he designed the cross country and track teams' logos and T-shirts.

Parod says that graduating from San Jose State University in Illustration and Graphic Design in 1994—just before the

era of blockbusters like *The Lion King* or *Toy Story*—meant that “animation was never even discussed as a career.” He took a job at an educational software company, while also doing freelance work like book cover illustration for St. Martin's Press. Although the company did give him projects to work on when he asked for more responsibility, it was ultimately unfulfilling.

“One day, I shoved away from my desk, and I was like, ‘I just want to paint for a living,’” Parod recalls.

Sometimes, throwing a desire out into the universe yields results. About a month later, a former professor called to tell Parod that three animation studios

were coming to the campus to do portfolio reviews. He submitted, and Warner Bros. liked his work, but he needed more life drawing skills. After taking a class, he formally applied for an internship. The result: a life-changing answering machine message. He had two weeks to pack his bags and get to Los Angeles.

"The intern program was like another level of college because we were learning a lot about animation and the history of animation," Parod says. "It was a crash course. They taught us the basics of how to animate walk cycles and effects animation. They told me I was better with a brush than a pencil, so they trained me as background painter. All 12 of us interns graduated the program and were hired to work on the production of *Quest for Camelot*. I felt lucky to be there!"

Another of Parod's first jobs for Warner Bros. included background painter on *The Iron Giant*, where Art Director Alan Bodner liked one of his concept paintings so much that he was assigned to paint the opening scene of the giant hurtling through space and crashing into Earth through the eye of a hurricane. "I was so excited about that," Parod says. "The background of space and stars was almost as long as I am tall."

Being at Warner Bros. turned out to be fortuitous for his personal life, as well. Parod's wife, Claire Armstrong Parod, is a skilled animator who is known for, among other things, helping to design the Lola Bunny character for the first *Space Jam* movie. The two met at a studio art show when Parod was standing beneath a painting of himself—as a vampire—done by a fellow intern. In the mid-2000s, the couple worked together on animated commercials for brands like Charmin and United Airlines.

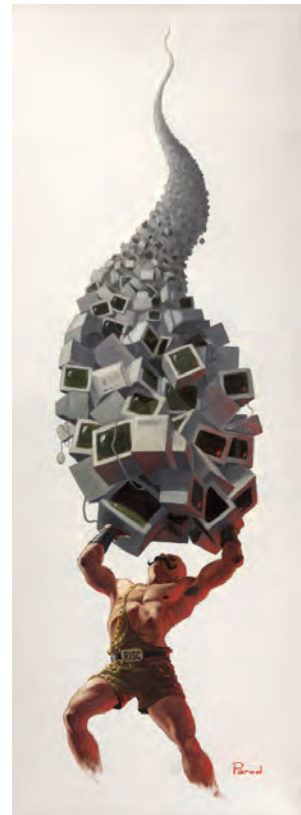
Being at a small company gave Parod experience as a designer, art director, co-director, animator, editor, and painter. As well, his ad experience led to work as the character painter on the first *Tinker Bell* movie because the art director loved a painting he had done of an animated flower character dancing with a product logo in an otherwise live-action commercial. He continued working on this franchise and its promotional shorts (designing props, art directing, and more), and he's also worked as a Visual Development Artist on *Scoob!* and *Space Jam: A New Legacy*. Recently he did almost all the character painting (including some new monsters) for the upcoming prequel film, *Scoob!: Holiday Haunt*.

On the latter project, he also painted color keys, "which I really enjoy, to inform the lighting department how the color and lighting affect the characters and the environments in each sequence. It's like illustrating the movie," he says.

Simply put, Parod loves to paint—any way he can and as much as possible. He loves plein air painting because "it's amazing how much things change even in half-hour or hour increments," he says. He's also a photographer in his off hours, an artform that he describes as "painting through a different lens." He's worked with sculpture and figure drawing, as well, and he's a musician who, naturally, designs his own album covers.

"For me it's about being an artist and creating art whether it's for the movies or just for myself," Parod says. "I think all of that experience has made painting characters come more naturally to me. I plan to keep painting long after I retire."

— Whitney Friedlander



LIVING COLOR

COLOR DESIGNERS HAVE EXPERIENCED SUBSTANTIAL VICTORIES IN RECENT YEARS, FROM MOVING OUT OF INK AND PAINT TO TRADING THEIR OLD JOB TITLE OF “COLOR STYLIST” FOR ONE THAT RECOGNIZES THEIR ROLE IN THE PIPELINE. HERE, THREE TAG MEMBERS EXPLAIN THE COMPLEXITIES OF THEIR CRAFT AND WHY THEY LOVE WHAT THEY DO.



NANCY ULENE COLOR DESIGNER, *BUGS BUNNY BUILDERS* AND *MERRY LITTLE BATMAN*

When Nancy Ulene got her start in animation in the 1980s, she worked various jobs with traditional tools doing inking, painting, airbrushing, rotoscoping, and inbetweening. In 1991, she joined Disney TVA as what was then called a Color Stylist. Along with the rest of the industry, she transitioned from hybrid techniques to all digital. She was thankful for the opportunity to train on the job, and she then trained others. Although leaving Disney TVA full-time (but still freelancing) in late 2014, she has

continued to work as a Color Designer/ Art Director at many studios including Netflix TVA, Warner Bros. TVA, Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, DreamWorks, and Splash Entertainment. She also teaches and mentors regularly.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR JOB?

I add color to the black-and-white line art of any characters, props, or effects that animate in the show. It sounds so simple, but it is a puzzle of color. Depending on the style of the show, it can be flat local color with black lines or flat local color with added highlights, shadows, and self-color ink lines. The latter takes a great deal of time and thought to make the model look like it lives in the colored environment painted for the scene.

WHAT DOES YOUR WORK DAY LOOK LIKE?

I get my assignments on a new show and gather the elements needed for the episode so I can color models. Using the Background Color Keys, I add them behind the line art of my scanned models in Photoshop, and then I create a palette from scratch that works in the environment that was painted. Many versions may be necessary to get to the

final approved model, but that is part of the process. This is repeated for all characters, props, and effects until each of the models is complete. It is very tedious work and takes a great deal of time to make sure all the pieces work together in a color setup.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST WORK CHALLENGE YOU'VE FACED?

My biggest challenge has been finding work as the jobs now are on shorter terms, and technology is constantly changing. Contacts are the main way I find work. My experience has helped as I can adapt to many styles and know the pipeline well. Although I used Toon Boom OPUS and Harmony for years at Disney, staying on Photoshop and getting more efficient and knowledgeable has really helped me stay employed.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF YOUR JOB?

My favorite parts are the crew and creating a finished product. It is rewarding to work in a pipeline that is so talented and diverse. I am always learning new things and meeting new people. To stay in this business for so long has been something I will never take for granted. Every time I start a new job, it always feels like my first day in the animation business.



ERIC OMEGA

VISUAL DEVELOPMENT ARTIST INCLUDING COLOR DESIGN, GOOD TIMES

After being mentored by Lead Background Designer Derek Hunter, Eric Omega's first job in animation was doing freelance Background Design for *Adventure Time* and *Regular Show*. Shortly after, he landed his first full-time job at *Rick and Morty* with the title of Color Key.

Since then, he's worked in Color Design for Marvel Animation, Disney TVA, DreamWorks TV, Nickelodeon, and Netflix.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR JOB?

My job is to use color and light to establish color palettes for characters, props, and effects. It's important that it fits the show's mood, and that it is cohesive, distinct, and readable against other assets and the painted background.

WHAT DOES YOUR WORK DAY LOOK LIKE?

I start by watching the animatic and referencing the route sheets while keeping in mind which assets appear and in what type of lighting. When needed, I apply special lighting using blending modes, then add shines, texture, or anything that can plus the design. Depending on the show, I'll indicate opacity or what blending mode is used for anything transparent like windows or water. All the while, I composite them with any other colored assets they interact

with, as if it were the completed scene. That way, in review, we can see how everything would look against each other.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST WORK CHALLENGE YOU'VE FACED?

The biggest work challenge I've faced was color designing in Harmony and having to ship all my assets to the overseas studios. As a result of taking on multiple, time-consuming, non-art responsibilities, I started to lose my identity as an artist. Having tight schedules and being among the least-paid crafts also made for a rough experience. However, I can say I learned a lot!

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF YOUR JOB?

It is seeing all the skillful work from the entire design and story team, and utilizing it to directly influence my color choices. Color Designers often work closely with the Art Director to make sure everything looks good and makes sense. So, seeing our hard work come together is essential to doing my job, and I'm grateful I get to experience that every day.



AMBER SPILLMAN

COLOR DESIGNER, BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD

Working in production, Amber Spillman discovered the job of Color Designer and fell in love with its role in the animation pipeline. In 2020, after expressing interest, she was given a test and offered her first Color Design job at *Bless the Harts*. Since then, she has worked mainly for Titmouse while also freelancing for Nickelodeon and Disney.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR JOB?

[It's] my dream job! As stressful as it can be at times, I love the fact that Color Design is one of the last steps in the design process. I love being able to really give life to amazing linework via color. Strong color theory is definitely a must in this job, and I always find myself seeking inspiration for work by consuming as much media as I can.

WHAT DOES YOUR WORK DAY LOOK LIKE?

I'll check my emails for any new assignments and check FileMaker to see what hasn't been approved yet. After any meetings I will usually receive notes a bit later in the day and make any changes to files as requested. If I'm starting work on a new episode, I'll watch the animatic to familiarize myself and make note of any specifics. Once I have a new list of assets to color, I'll grab completed backgrounds to place the asset against, as well as grab references if needed. When that's all done, then I start the actual process of coloring.

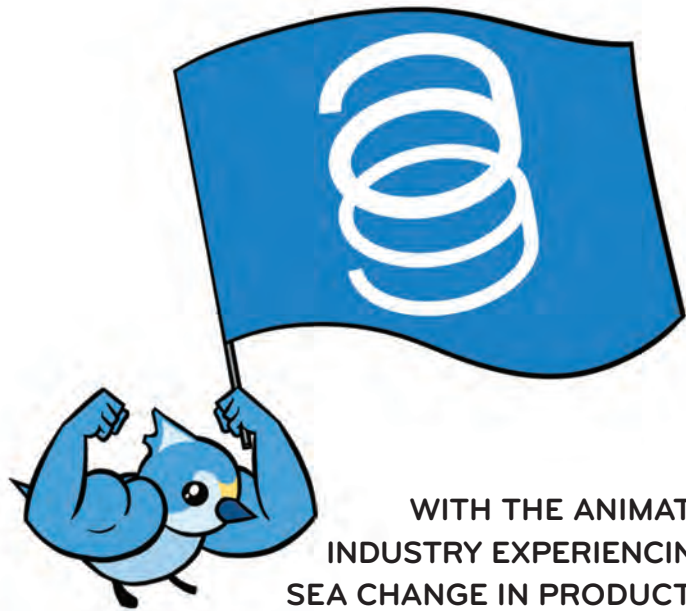
WHAT IS THE BIGGEST WORK CHALLENGE YOU'VE FACED?

I first transitioned from being a Production Coordinator to a Color Designer right when COVID hit and our entire team was sent home. I had no prior experience at the time as a Color Designer, so trying to figure out a workflow on my own was a bit daunting. I would mainly get notes via email or chat, and it felt a bit isolating starting out. I've worked on other shows since then, and I've grown to appreciate and even thrive while working from home.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF YOUR JOB?

As much as I enjoy the actual process of choosing colors and applying them to models, I think my favorite part might be seeing everything come alive in the end! It's so satisfying and still surreal, even after three years, seeing what I've colored move on a screen. I love that animation is such a collaborative effort. I'm very proud to be a Color Designer and can't imagine myself doing anything else!

GETTING ORGANIZED



WITH THE ANIMATION INDUSTRY EXPERIENCING A SEA CHANGE IN PRODUCTION ORGANIZING, FIVE SOON-TO-BE TAG MEMBERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES ON THE ORGANIZING TRAIL.



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: TAG Recording Secretary Paula Spence united Titmouse NY Organizing Committee and TAG logos; Glaser has worked in production on *The Simpsons* for more than half a decade. FOLLOWING PAGE, FROM TOP: Jack Cusumano designed a Production Strong graphic based on the Epic Handshake meme; Cel La Flaca speaks at the #NewDeal4Animation Rally.

Kathryn Wheaton was on her first day as a Production Assistant on *Rick and Morty* when the person training her told her the show was unionizing: “We’re coming out publicly. Are you okay being a part of this?”

Wheaton’s response: “Hell, yeah.”

Why? “You get the protections,” she says.

Historically, animation production in Los Angeles County has been non-union in a mostly unionized industry, resulting in multiple inequities. It’s a sector that includes assistants, managers, and other “boots on the ground” workers, and there has been a long-held stigma that production doesn’t require the same level of expertise as the art and craft side of the business. “But we’re the connective tissue of all of the departments in animation,” says Katerina Agretelis, a Production Coordinator for ShadowMachine. “When people ask me what my job is, I always like to say, I’m one of the people who makes sure the show actually gets made.”

“Production people have to have creative solutions to creative problems, even if it’s not necessarily in the way people think of creativity in this industry,” says Cel La Flaca, a Production Coordinator at Titmouse L.A.

Lack of union representation had been simmering on the back burner for decades. When TAG held a Town Hall for animation production workers in October 2021, the

pot began to boil. Led by TAG’s new Organizer Ben Speight, it was open to production workers at all studios.

Kallan Zimmerman, a Production Manager on *Solar Opposites*, was at that meeting. “There were over a hundred people there, which was really exciting,” she says.

While talk about unionizing at various studios and productions had been gaining traction before the pandemic, Covid derailed some of these efforts. Now, the Town Hall jump-started serious conversation.

At ShadowMachine, “there were a couple people who had a pretty robust spreadsheet of who was working at [the studio],” Agretelis says. “It felt a lot more concrete this time. The real deal, rather than murmurs.”

La Flaca welcomed this change. “For quite some time, I’ve had the sentiment that production should be part of The Animation Guild,” he says, but because people weren’t talking openly about the issue, “I felt I was a lone wolf.”

Such conversations can feel uncomfortable, but Wheaton strongly encourages workers to discuss wages. “Having pay transparency is so essential because then you know who’s getting underpaid,” she says. Zimmerman emphasizes that it’s important to “keep in mind, it’s business, not personal. This is about [your] livelihood.”

FALLING DOMINOS

In February 2022, Titmouse L.A. demanded and won voluntary recognition to unionize. If ever there was proof of the domino effect, this was it. *Rick and Morty* and *Solar Opposites* went next, and by June production crews preparing to join TAG also included ShadowMachine and the trio of *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, and *American Dad!* at 20th TVA.

According to Margaret Glaser, an Assistant Production Manager on *The Simpsons*, organizing had been under discussion for a while, but “[we] went full-speed ahead because basically, *Solar Opposites* and *Rick and Morty* went. They inspired us to realize, you didn’t have to be in person to do it.”

In an interesting twist, a major restriction of the pandemic made organizing easier. *The Simpsons* had been trying to connect their efforts with *American Dad!* and *Family Guy*, but it was hard to get everyone in the same room. “On Zoom you can join from your phone, wherever you are. It made a major difference,” Glaser says.

Using video and phone calls, organizing efforts in all cases included information meetings and reaching out one-on-one to co-workers to find out if they were in favor of organizing and willing to help. Organizers also sought to identify the most important issues. The top-line items were pay equity, healthcare, and pensions.

“Hearing from people about how wages have not been updated for a decade, maybe two decades, that definitely lit a fire in my heart,” says Agretelis, noting that the average Production Manager makes about the same as an entry-level Animation Designer.

Now an Office Coordinator, Wheaton feels that a lack of equitable wages can create barriers to a diverse workforce. “It’s creating an unintentional gatekeeping. People who aren’t born into privilege, they can’t take these opportunities because they’re like, I can’t afford to work here. A lot of [productions] are missing out on great talent because they’re not offering enough.”

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Because *Rick and Morty* and *Solar Opposites* were both small shows, Zimmerman says, “It felt like a pretty achievable mountain to climb.” But challenges arose. The studios agreed to recognize all job categories except Production Managers. The dispute went before the National Labor Review Board, “where we had to prove that we weren’t supervisors under the law,” Zimmerman says. “That was pretty demoralizing.”

Shortly after that, the production workers began discussing the possibility of a strike. In preparation, their TAG Shop Stewards polled the artists to gauge their level of support in the event production voted to authorize a strike. Word got out, and the studios conceded quickly—the same day, in fact, that production workers officially voted to authorize a strike to happen the following week. “It couldn’t have been done without the support of the artists,” Zimmerman says.

“People are hesitant when the word strike is put out there,” says Wheaton, because they’re worried about not being paid and about retaliation. And when it comes to some younger workers, according to La Flaca, “They genuinely don’t see themselves as valuable. They say, oh, I haven’t been here long enough. I haven’t earned a voice. You don’t need to earn one! You have one!” It’s definitely a cultural shift.”

Another difficulty comes from the fact that anyone working on an organizing effort already has a full-time job and is overworked—that’s why they’re organizing. “It’s easy to get people in a quick conversation to agree to helping out, but it filters out pretty quickly,” says Agretelis. “You need to get that core group of people that will stick around week after week and come to organizing meetings and meet up with people.”

As for who should be in that core group, diversity is essential. “Everyone has a unique vantage point and has something



to bring to the table,” La Flaca says. On his negotiations committee, he knew that as a tri-racial Trans man, there were some people he would be able to connect with, and others he wouldn’t. “We all had to pitch in—it was a group effort as a committee in order to reach everybody.”

Essentially, the ultimate goal of organizing is industry change. “If we are able to get a critical mass of production workers with representation, then the non-union studios have to step up their game to compete,” says Agretelis.

Then there are the more personal rewards. For La Flaca, organizing renewed his faith in people. Watching workers come together and be part of a collective effort to make their lives better, “it made me feel whole again,” he says. “It gave me new life.”

PEER POWER

WITHIN THE TELEVISION ACADEMY, THE ANIMATION PEER GROUP EMPOWERS ANIMATION INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS.

Twelve years after the first Emmy for Outstanding Animated Program was awarded in 1979, the Television Academy added an award for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animation. This new award was just one of the ways that animation's representation has evolved at the Academy over the decades, according to Brian Sheesley, a former Animation Peer Group Governor and the Co-Executive Producer for *Exploding Kittens*.

Sheesley recalls that in the 1980s, then-Governor Phil Roman addressed the fact that only above-the-line producers were recognized for the Outstanding Animated Program award. His push was instrumental in the addition of directors and writers. And when Sheesley became Governor in 1999, his mission was to change the face of the Animation Peer Group Executive Committee.

The Television Academy has 31 peer groups representing various sectors of the industry. When an individual joins the Academy, they also join a specific peer group based on their areas of expertise and credits. Active members in the animation peer group can vote for Emmy animation and program categories, be selected for the Animation Peer Group Executive Committee, and run for Animation Governor. They are also invited to participate in all general Academy member activities and enjoy

exclusive benefits like mixers, seminars, FYC screenings, and more.

The returning Governor and the newly elected Governor appoint the Executive Committee between December and January for the upcoming year, and when Sheesley arrived for his term, he felt that the animation committee did not represent the industry's diversity of jobs. He set about to change that, bringing in people from a variety of disciplines (background designers, storyboard artists, etc.), as well tackling gender equality and studio diversity.

He also spearheaded a membership drive, and "animation became more visible overall at the Academy," says Lindsey Pollard, a member of the Animation Peer Group Executive Board and a Director on *Bugs Bunny Builders*. "It was Brian who really said, 'Listen up, look at animation, pay attention. We're here and we're really important!'"

The committee works collaboratively with the Academy to update guidelines and address questions, as well as facilitate the Individual Achievement Awards. Unlike the other awards for animated programs, this is a juried award.

If they meet the eligibility, anyone can submit their artwork for the Individual Achievement Award, but there is a submission fee, and Television Academy members automatically get two free submissions. "It is your right as a member of the Academy to say, 'I want my work to be put out there and considered,'" says Pollard.

"We really promote the individual to have power for themselves," adds Sheesley.

Judging takes place during a single day, and this year, on July 30th, it was both virtual and in-person. National active members of the peer group were able to sign up to serve as a judge in the sub-category most suited to their skills and experience: character design, character animation, storyboard, background design, color, or production design.

Judges use guidelines established by the Academy and the animation peer group. "We have the rules and regulations of what outstanding means," says Sheesley. "What the Emmy means."

Throughout the day each group of jurors whittles the selections down. "It becomes a discussion. It's very public," says Pollard. She also notes the bottom line for the selection of a winner or winners: "Is the artwork elevating the visual to a level that is Emmy worthy? Is it doing its job?"



Danny Moloshok/Invision/AP

One of the many roles of the current Emmy Animation Governor, Kaz Aizawa, a Background Paint Lead and Color Script Artist at Disney Television Animation, is to work with his Co-Governor Joel Fajnor, an Art Director at DreamWorks Animation Television Studios, to appoint the Animation Peer Group Executive Committee for the Television Academy. The Animation Governors also represent the Television Academy's animation industry members on the Academy's Board of Governors.

GET ON BOARD

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For most people in the animation industry, their work is their passion, but as these three TAG members share, it takes more than simply loving what you do to forge a long, successful career.

THE LONG GAME

By Kim Fay



PERSONAL JOURNEY

Jennifer Yuh Nelson

During her last semester at Cal State Long Beach, driving her mom's Hyundai Excel to a part-time Production Assistant gig at Jetlag Productions in Woodland Hills, Jennifer Yuh Nelson wasn't thinking about a career in animation. She was an illustration major who wanted to be a live-action storyboard artist. But when she was offered the job through her sister, she was eager to learn how an office worked.

It wasn't glamorous. She made copies and helped clean model packs. In her small copy area, she also doodled on Post-its. Passing by, the producer saw them, leading to Nelson drawing animals and monsters for a direct-to-video children's series. When the producer moved to Hanna-Barbera, she followed, taking a job as a character design clean-up artist. Then came a storyboard opening, and that, she says, "is how I started doing storyboards for animation."

Fast-forward and Nelson is directing 2011's *Kung Fu Panda 2*—the first female to solely direct a full-length animation feature film for a major studio. The path that took her there has been one of overcoming challenges and leaning into strengths.

"I'm not the kind of person that blows a bugle for my own self all the time," Nelson says. "I had to learn how to physically advocate for myself or at least tell people, this is what I want to do." At Hanna-Barbera, she told the producer she wanted to do storyboards, and "that's why they knew to give me a test of a storyboard sequence."

Nelson also emphasizes the importance of adapting in the face of a constantly changing industry. She loves working on the computer with digital tools, but "a lot of the artists I was with, some of them couldn't make the transition to full digital art so they [aren't] around anymore. It's also a matter of globalization. How do you remain relevant when basically you're competing with everyone on our planet?"

Nelson says she addresses these challenges by always being open to learning because "the jobs change, the job categories change, audience tastes change, so you [can't just say], okay, I'm good enough at my skill and I can keep doing it for the rest of my career. You have to constantly reinvent things that make you excited about the job and your part in it."

One way Nelson does this is by taking jobs she finds interesting. Taking a job that she doesn't connect with wouldn't be fair, she says. "It would make me look bad, it would make the employer unhappy. There are just some jobs I'm not cut out for."

Outside of work, Nelson spends time and effort seeking better ways of doing things and pushing her own storytelling, and she says that most of the jobs she has gotten have been because of her personal projects. "It's really hard to learn on the job for many reasons," she says. "To learn you have to be able to fail, you have to experiment, you have to do things that

haven't been done before. [You can't just walk into work and say] today I'm going to fail. But with your own projects, the only client you're trying to satisfy is your personal journey. You don't have to show it to anybody. You don't have to please anybody. At work you're chasing a style, a sensibility, or demands of your employer whose tastes have been formed well before yours. There are literally no parameters to your own personal project."

When talking about her projects, Nelson emphasizes the distinction between those created in the hope of being sold and those created just for learning's sake. With the former, "you're still trying to please somebody else," she says. But when it's

"To learn you have to be able to fail, you have to experiment, you have to do things that haven't been done before."

just for you, you can do "something that you're scared to death of doing or that you think you're really bad at. It's very present oriented, because you may not get better at it for a long time, but you'll discover something in the process."

When asked if she's ever wanted to throw in the towel, Nelson says: "Anyone who has directed a feature animated film understands wanting to give up. You're looking at years and years of the tense stress of pressure, ups and downs, crews getting demoralized and happy and then demoralized again. You have to [use] all the coping mechanisms you have in your reservoir for surviving a feature animated process."

So, how does she push through? "[A project] is not a reflection of me. It's something I'm given guardianship over," she says. "You are responsible for it. It's not like you can give up and say, I've got this kid and I'm tired and I'm not going to take care of it anymore. You have to see it through. Suck it up. If you give up, you're hurting the project. You're limiting its ability to be seen out in the world. To have other people enjoy it."

This speaks to Nelson's generous attitude about her place in the world of animation—a place she feels has been empowered by the community she works in. "There's so much kindness," she says. "There's so much understanding of I was there, I know how hard it is, I was given a leg up by somebody—so everyone's paying it forward. I think that's unique to our group and something to be really cherished."

PRICELESS EDUCATION

Shavonne Cherry

As a child, Shavonne Cherry loved animals and Saturday morning cartoons. “I started to draw my own versions—invent my own stories, invent my own characters, and invent their worlds,” she says. “That got me interested in the process of animation and considering it as a career.” But when she graduated from art college in the mid-1980s, she was a woman of color entering a white, male-dominated profession. Fortunately, she had a strategy. She would start as a cel painter, a job traditionally held by females. “I knew that was going to be the easiest way to get my foot in the door,” she says.

By 1986, Cherry had made enough connections to get a job doing assistant model designs and model clean-up on the first season of *Flintstone Kids*. She worked at various boutique studios doing mainly commercial work, but her game plan paid off as she moved up into animation positions, eventually landing in character layout and then storyboards.

You name a big show from the past 30 years, and Cherry has probably worked on it. *Tiny Toon Adventures*. *The Looney Tunes Show*. *Family Guy*. *The Proud Family*. *The Simpsons*. It’s a list that goes on—and one whose eclecticism taught her a valuable lesson.

“I had to think differently about every artistic task I was given,” she says. “I had no choice. Every show is different, so I had to adjust what I did per show.”

Having gotten her start in Disney, Hanna-Barbera, and Warner Bros. styles, Cherry recalls how difficult it could be at times to switch gears. “You couldn’t bring a Disney thought process into *The Simpsons*,” she says. “There is a way of drawing that you have to lend yourself to. There’s something underneath that gives those characters their personalities and makes them come across the screen the way they do. It’s really hard to unlearn certain things that you can do as an artist. [That’s why] I think flexibility is very important.”

Equally important to Cherry is self-care. She remembers what it was like to be a new artist who wants to give 150% “just to get the project done and let people know that you’re a hard worker and dedicated. But it came with a price—forgetting what it was like to have a life.” She wants those coming up after her to know that “it’s okay to shut down and go outside and get some sunshine and walk around.”

She also advocates for being kind to one’s self during the down times. For her this meant moments when she wasn’t working, asking herself: “Do I suck that badly? Is it because I won’t push myself to meet impossible deadlines?” Over time she learned to “take a deep breath and take the advice of good friends and family who kept me from falling into that dark abyss [where] we’ve all teetered around the rim.”

Because that abyss can exist even while a person is working, Cherry advises “not taking criticism personally. Listen to your bosses, regardless of if you think they’re wrong. [Don’t] be afraid

to suggest alternatives before you just do what you think is right, [something] you’ll eventually regret later. Be a team player.”

For Cherry one of the joys of being on a team is embracing the opportunities to learn from those who came before her. She savors her experience working on *Tiny Toon* for that very reason. “The atmosphere!” she says. “I was among the most talented people in the business on a very popular show that everybody was talking about at that time. We were free to be ourselves. Nobody put constraints on what we were doing. There was nothing like it.”

First doing freelance as a storyboard clean-up artist and then joining the staff as a character/model clean-up artist, Cherry took full advantage of the veterans she worked with: “We had their undivided attention. We wanted to learn. Holy cow! We listened and they told us amazing stories of working with people that had either passed on or already retired. And now [they] were teaching us how to be better at our crafts.”

Cherry longed to animate in some capacity, and when one of the veteran animators suggested that she do character layout, she admitted she didn’t know how. This opened the door to an invaluable education as he showed her the fundamentals. “Just being able to have somebody look over your shoulder and say, don’t do it like this, do it like that,” she says. “[And then] oh, you’ve got it, you don’t need my help. It’s priceless, what I have as an education.”


While Cherry has kept up with the times and mastered all the technology necessary to keep a career going, she occasionally cel paints old favorite cartoons for fun and relaxation. She also enjoys working on her own characters she’s created. And as can happen with labors of love, this led to an idea she believed would make a good show.

Combining the concept of talk and cooking shows, Cherry, her husband, and two food professionals made an animatic. Having formerly worked for the Executive Producer of Cartoon Network’s Cartoon Cartoons shorts program, she had the opportunity to reach out to him. “Fortunately, [he] was generous enough to hear my idea and saw merit in it,” she says. He encouraged her to submit, and her project was chosen to be turned into a pilot.

Cherry’s takeaway is that “it doesn’t matter how old you are. How long you’ve been in the business. It’s all about the idea. It shouldn’t matter if you’re considered a veteran or newbie. It should be, can you make people tune in?”

When asked if she still loves her work, Cherry replies: “Very much so. Especially how long it’s taken me to get to where I’m at right now. I can see myself going until I can’t do it anymore.”

As for how she’ll do that, she plans to follow her own advice: “Get out there and just be brave and try to let people know who you are. The only way to do it is to do it.”

A woman with short, wavy brown hair is smiling broadly, looking off to the side. She has her arms crossed and is wearing a bright yellow short-sleeved top, a brown leather belt, and white pants. She is also wearing a gold watch on her left wrist and a multi-strand necklace. The background is a dark, textured blue.

**"... it doesn't matter
how old you are. How
long you've been in
the business. It's all
about the idea."**

"Whether it's painting or designing or animating or writing or storyboarding, get as good at your craft as you possibly can get. That's going to carry you."



TEACH THYSELF

James Baxter

In the U.K. in the 1980s, James Baxter assumed he would have an animation career in London. Hollywood hadn't established British outposts yet, and he figured he'd most likely work on commercials. Then *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* came to town. Baxter quit art school for the opportunity to work on the movie.

The *Roger Rabbit* crew included several Disney animators from California. One of them, Andreas Deja, recommended that Baxter head to L.A. and try to get a job. By age 21, Baxter's animation career was off and running as he started work in the U.S. as a character animator on *The Little Mermaid*.

For Baxter the excitement of coming to America paled compared to the chance to “really go to the source,” he says. “I think more than anything, it was about the opportunity to be able to learn the craft at a place where the knowledge was available. I went to Disney so I could get to the animation research library. So I could get those drawings out of the morgue and flip through them and try and understand how they were done.”

Baxter knows that his approach to learning isn't a conventional one: “I'm a little weird in that I didn't seek out my elders that much. I don't think it's bad advice. It's great advice, actually. But I'm pretty autodidactic. I tend to learn by osmosis rather than by sitting down and going, how do you do this? I do it by just analyzing the work.”

This doesn't mean he's a lone wolf, though. One of things he advises for those farther along in their careers is connecting with younger people in the industry. “When I started reaching out to younger creators whose work I admired, creators 10 and even 20 years my junior, it opened up whole new avenues for me,” he says. “[You can't] keep yourself insular and say, oh, all I've done is this and that's all I'm going to continue to do.”

Another way he avoids resting on his laurels is finding the lesson in each project. Leading a crew of animators at the age of 23 on the main character in *Beauty and the Beast*, he learned confidence. Doing CG on *How to Train Your Dragon* taught him to appreciate working on a film with a really good story.

Then there are the lessons Baxter proactively sought. “I went into *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* intentionally with this idea of trying to learn something. Because I knew I didn't know all I should know about quadrupeds,” he says. He was guided by something he'd learned about the making of *Bambi* in 1940: “[That crew] was the one that led the studio for the rest of their careers. It was the animators and artists that went through that boot camp of how to do that kind of animation, that level of study, that set them up for success in *Lady and the Tramp*, *101 Dalmatians*—anything that had an animal in it from [then] on, they were

masters. I looked at *Spirit* as my opportunity to do that deep dive.”

As his career continues skyward, there are times when things can feel stale, and Baxter says it's important to “get back to that core passion and that core inspiration that got me into [animation] in the first place.” He does this in a few ways, including seeking out people he wants to work with. “For me it's as much about the other artists I want to be around and learn from and collaborate with as it is the movies themselves,” he says. When he moved from Disney to DreamWorks for example, it was because he wanted to work with the French animators at that studio. And while leaping from studio to studio isn't always easily done, he has a more achievable suggestion. Reenergize yourself by simply going back and watching the shows that inspired you to get into the industry in the first place. His go-to? *Bambi*.

“Be good at what you do. There's innate talent, but there's also the passion to do the work.”

While Baxter acknowledges that everyone has their own approach to learning and working, there are two qualities he believes every single artist in the animation industry needs. Number one: “Be good at what you do. There's innate talent, but there's also the passion to do the work,” he says. “Whether it's painting or designing or animating or writing or storyboarding, get as good at your craft as you possibly can get. That's going to carry you.”

While he admits that it sounds overly simple, his second piece of advice is to “be nice to work with. Animation is a team sport. It has to be collaborative. Be a good colleague, be generous artistically, just [don't be] a pain. It's actually really important. I learned that more over time. I was a little bit grumpy at the beginning because I was very idealistic, and things would upset me. I learned to deal with that better as I got older and still stand up for what I believed in.”

As a result, Baxter feels fortunate to have what he calls “a consistent career” in a field that continues to hold him in its sway after nearly a quarter of a century. “I enjoy the magic trick of it,” he says with the passion of someone just starting out. “I like the medium too much to want to do anything else.” ☺



BEHIND THE SCREEN

TAG members contributed on all levels to this year's Emmy nominees for Outstanding Animated Program. Here, a few of them share their inspirations and favorite moments, as well as why they think their shows are unique and what they believe their shows' legacies will be.



CHRIS CLEMENTS

DIRECTOR

The Simpsons

“Pixelated and Afraid”

20th Television Animation

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES *THE SIMPSONS* UNIQUE?

Our amazingly long run would obviously be my first answer! I think one of the things that really makes us unique is the way that the show has evolved over the decades. From the original shorts to the series to the feature, it has continually grown and changed. However, if you look at it, its core has stayed constant. It's about a family of five who love each other, living in a town of generally well-meaning, good-natured, goofy people. Our characters often do things that are wrong, but it's never from a mean-spirited place. We're a show with a really big heart, which I think makes *The Simpsons* unique.

We're also one of the few shows that still does not only [do] storyboards but key animation and backgrounds, as well, for all of the scenes in every episode. This allows us to get a depth of performance from our characters, while also letting us do some elaborate physical comedy not typically found in television animation. From my standpoint as a director/animator, that really sets us apart. We're still doing the show the way we did it back in 1989! (Well, with the addition of a lot more technology these days.)



WHAT WAS THE BEST PART ABOUT WORKING ON THE NOMINATED EPISODE, AND WHY DO YOU THINK IT RESONATED WITH VIEWERS?

I think it's an episode that really resonates with people because it shows us a different side of the Marge and Homer we know. They are this amazing team together, beyond just being the “mom and dad” we're used to seeing. We set them up initially in a ridiculously lazy rut, parked on the couch, binging TV and eating junk food (which I think a lot of couples can relate to these

past few years). Shortly after that, we drop them straight into this crazy life and death survival adventure, lost deep in the woods. It's full of great comedy moments as they try to survive, particularly when they lose all of their clothing in a fire thanks to Homer (which was a hilarious challenge to animate in a way that worked for television). But then there are also wonderful dramatic moments between them that feel really authentic: breaking down missing the kids, trying to protect each other from the wolverine attack, walking out of the woods together and encountering beautiful vistas in nature. One of my favorite parts of the episode are the closing scenes. There's a point early on when we see Marge and Homer on the couch and he's feeding her chips as she cuts his hair while they both stare lazily at a reality TV show. The episode ends with a great callback to that, Marge again sitting with Homer as he feeds her chips, this time smiling and silently watching their new “favorite show,” which is the sun setting after everything they've endured. It really ties up the story with a nice little bow.

WHAT ANIMATED SHOWS INSPIRED YOUR CAREER?

The classic Warner Bros.' *Looney Tunes* would have to be up there as one of my biggest inspirations. The incredible timing and animation are second to none. Everything from the designs to the animation to the backgrounds is just amazing. You can take almost any still from them, and they'd look great framed on your wall. Whenever we get to animate broad physical comedy on *The Simpsons* (generally involving Homer), I think about those classic shorts. It's some of the best comedy ever produced. When in doubt, what would Chuck Jones or Tex Avery do?

WHAT DO YOU THINK *THE SIMPSONS'* LEGACY WILL BE?

When it started, primetime television animation was almost unheard of. The show paved the way for so many other great series that came after it. It changed the way a lot of people looked at animation. It also has launched a lot of amazing careers. If you look around the animation industry, so many people who got their start on *The Simpsons* have gone on to work in key positions all over the business. Aside from being a great show in and of itself, it's been a training ground for many talented people in animation, and it continues to be that to this day. We have crew starting up all the time who literally weren't even born when *The Simpsons* premiered, and they are so excited to join the team and be a part of creating Springfield.



SCOTT MARDER

SHOWRUNNER,
WRITER, &
PRODUCER

Rick and Morty
“Mort Dinner
Rick Andre”
Adult Swim

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES *RICK AND MORTY* UNIQUE?

I'd easily have to say Dan Harmon's Story Circle. [Harmon is the show's Co-creator.] Every single episode of the show is broken on [this narrative structure], providing for the richest, most dynamic possible stories. As a self-admitted story nerd, it's been an absolute pleasure to learn from the man himself.

WHAT WAS THE BEST PART ABOUT WORKING ON THE NOMINATED EPISODE, AND WHY DO YOU THINK IT RESONATED WITH VIEWERS?

Mr. Nimbus—hands down! I think it resonated because Nimbus is a really funny, larger than life character, and it was relatable to see even Rick have a nemesis who's got his number. The story combo of their intense sit-down and Morty needing to fetch wine from a time-dilated world where he's made his own enemy really married together for a *Rick and Morty* I'm super proud of.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE MOMENT FROM *RICK AND MORTY*?

Probably all of “Total Rickall.” The concept of Smith

family flashbacks spawning an infestation of hilarious one-off characters totally blew my mind as a fan and set the high bar that we aspire towards each and every episode.

WHAT ANIMATED SHOWS INSPIRED YOUR CAREER?

I've got two favorite shows as a kid that I can 100% credit for making me want to be a comedy writer, and that's the Golden Age of *The Simpsons* (seasons 1-9) and *The Ren & Stimpy Show*. The former hit the hat trick of top-notch story, characters, and jokes, while the latter delivered a manic tone and general insanity that I still can't get enough of.

WHAT DO YOU THINK *RICK AND MORTY*'S LEGACY WILL BE?

I think we'll be remembered for our ambition—trying to make the absolute biggest show possible within 22 minutes every week. Our crew works tirelessly to give us what feels like four movies in one each week, and I couldn't be prouder of the work they do knocking it out of the park on a daily basis.



KRISTINA VARDAZARYAN

ART DIRECTOR

What If ...?

“What If... Doctor Strange Lost His Heart Instead of His Hands?”

Marvel Studios

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES *WHAT IF ...?* UNIQUE?

I'm excited that it is geared towards a more adult audience. It is edgy, cool, and gritty. What excited me about *What If ...?* initially was that we could finally make bold-looking concept art and not be afraid for it to be too scary or too dark. Everything was about the story, and whatever the story needed. Our design team really pushed the look on what it could be. Coming from a feature animation background that was primarily for a younger audience—there were limits on what you can design and how dark you can take it, which is understandable! It was just a nice break for me to finally be able to do a show at this level and for an older audience.

WHAT WAS THE BEST PART ABOUT WORKING ON THE NOMINATED EPISODE, AND WHY DO YOU THINK IT RESONATED WITH VIEWERS?

What I loved about the Doctor Strange episode was that it felt real. If you had the power to bring back your loved ones from the dead, you would probably do it. Also, my favorite part of that episode was that they left Doctor Strange's storyline to be a tragedy. What people are used to seeing in Marvel movies are characters being redeemed at some point in the story. I think to a lot of people it was shocking, that they just left it there

with him destroying the world. And that is the part that I think makes this episode special.

WHAT ANIMATED SHOWS INSPIRED YOUR CAREER?

I definitely was inspired by old Disney animation. I watched *Pinocchio* and *The Lion King* a million times, because those were the only VHS tapes we owned in Ukraine. There are too many more to name because I think all of the animation movies that I have watched so far have contributed in some way. However, I don't think I was just inspired by animation. I love live-action movies, as well, and love the cinematic look and feel. Things started shifting for me when I saw *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* for the first time. I was like: “You can make animation like this?!” I think that was the turning point for me when I realized that I wanted to do more, and therefore I am thrilled to be working at Marvel.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE LEGACY OF *WHAT IF ...?* WILL BE?

I am hoping it will inspire other studios to create more adult animated shows and also give more opportunities for artists like me to be able to work on a variety of animation styles.



**PHIL
HAYES**
ART DIRECTOR



**KAREN
HYDENDAHL**
ASSISTANT
DIRECTOR

Bob's Burgers

"Some Like it Bot
Part 1: (Eighth
Grade Runner"

20th Television
Animation

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES *BOB'S BURGERS* UNIQUE?

Hayes: Early on we aimed to create a look that fit into the Fox line-up between *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, but that also had its own visual identity. Our character designs are simple and expressive. We spent a bit of time looking at Muppets. Our compositions are flat and squared off. For the backgrounds, we love to draw observational details: conduits, wires, and mismatched sidewalk panels, and yet we draw it in a simple style that leaves out extraneous detail like the busyness of rendering beveled edges. We draw inspiration from real places. The buildings on Ocean Avenue are the wooden Victorians of San Francisco, and the town and the Wonder Wharf are a collage of small cities on the northeast coast. Our color palette is vibrant like other Fox animated shows but shifts away from magentas and teals, and is grounded in energetic primary and secondary colors like green, yellow, and red.

Hydendahl: *Bob's Burgers* has that special infusion of wacky characters paired with relatable life issues. That duality makes shaping the stories challenging and fun—never a day without an LOL moment. I'm proud and humbled to work among some of the best writers and artists in the business.

WHAT WAS THE BEST PART ABOUT WORKING ON THE NOMINATED EPISODE, AND WHY DO YOU THINK IT RESONATED WITH VIEWERS?

Hayes: Placing the charming Victorians of *Bob's* neighborhood into the dystopian world of *Blade Runner* was taking my two all-time favorite flavors and mixing them together. We grew these buildings vertically and added layers of accumulation: ducts, cables, video screens, and other retro-future technology throughout. I think it resonated because Tina's struggle to fit in at middle school, as expressed in the "bots" search for identity in a world overrun by technology, is something most of us can relate to. The lighthearted optimism of

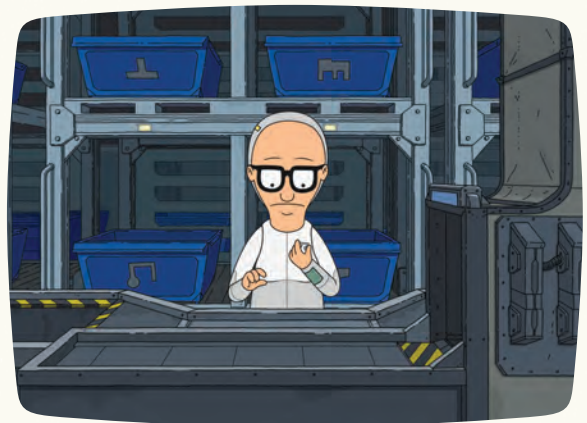
Bob's makes these darker tones of *Blade Runner* more digestible, as the family pulls together to help Tina find her way.

Hydendahl: I enjoy that this episode dives right into Tina's friend fiction over the love of her brand new shirt. She is brimming with self-confidence! But Tammy and Jocelyn have to ruin it by calling Tina weird on their "Wow or Weird" news segment. Tina's friend fiction takes a dark turn, which leads us into her *Blade Runner*-inspired story. Tina regularly experiences peer alienation but doesn't acknowledge it as such because she wants to see the good in people. In this episode, she really does grapple with these emotions. The song "What If They're Right" is heartfelt, and we realize Bob is processing the same feelings. Wanting to be loved and accepted is universal. We love you Tina and Bob!

WHAT DO YOU THINK *BOB'S BURGERS'* LEGACY WILL BE?

Hayes: I hope that the characters and the look of the show will stand out in people's minds, but it's our process that's truly unique. Creator Loren Bouchard brought together actors who had specific and dynamic chemistry and constructed a family to fit their characters. The writers and artists are on the same floor of the building, always accessible to each other. The actors read their lines, react to each other, and improvise. Loren is the conductor, instructing and inspiring, picking and choosing the best pieces of all of this and assembling them together. I don't remember seeing or hearing of any primetime animated show that's ever done this before.

Hydendahl: *Bob's'* footprint is a feel-good legacy. The bundles of love and warmth infused into these silly characters make us invested in their day-to-day lives. If we could all be more *Bob's*, the world would be a sweeter place!



EMMY LOOKBACK: PHINEAS AND FERB, 2007–2015



Art Director Jill Daniels won two Primetime Emmys for Outstanding Individual Achievement for her work on *Phineas and Ferb*. Here she looks back fondly on her time with the show.

BY KARIN BRINER

Attached to *Phineas and Ferb* from the start, Jill Daniels already knew the show's creators. She had worked with Dan Povenmire on developing two pilots at Disney and with Jeff "Swampy" Marsh on *King of the Hill*.

Daniels explains that the look of the show's signature characters came from Povenmire's drawing style. "Dan really, really loved where I took all the different shapes that he created for the characters, like triangles or circles, and infused them into the backgrounds," she says. Both creators resonated with the shape-based look that she gave them in her development pass, and from there they moved forward as a team.

Custom brushes were created in Photoshop, providing a base from which "you could launch into all the fantasy worlds that we created for *Phineas and Ferb*," says Daniels. It was a thrill for her whenever the show left the characters' hometown of Danville. She recalls that one episode was made to look "like they were on Chinese rice paper in ancient China," and in another, "they go to the moon and make ice cream." There was never a dull moment on what she calls "an amazingly creative journey."

One of Daniels' highlights was getting to write an episode. She was having lunch with some storyboard friends who were struggling to get Perry the Platypus down to his lair one more time—a recurring gag of the show. Inspired by her love of the movie *Memento*, "I went to Dan and Swampy and pitched the idea of having an episode that went backwards," Daniels says. They liked the concept and let her go for it.

As with every production, there were also challenges. Daniels says that board-driven shows, which historically had not done well at Disney, are hard to do "because they involve constant reboarding and rewriting. I'm so grateful we had such a super talented crew." The fact that every show had a song in it also presented its own set of obstacles to overcome, and Daniels had to do a lot of improvising on how to convey all of the show's information to the four overseas studios that worked on it at any given time. She says that "a continual stream of Art Direction sheets and creating motion graphics in Photoshop were helpful assets to give to the various overseas teams set up all around the world."





When asked how *Phineas and Ferb* stands out from other animation series, Daniels notes the sparkling vitality of the show: “I think it just had this amazing heart about it, and a relatability. Everybody who was a part of the show, we all were just really giving a hundred percent on it ... It was a labor of love.”

Daniels believes the show’s legacy goes beyond animation. “I think it actually contributes to society,” she says, recalling how people who embraced the show found it to be a source of joy. The production received lots of fan art, emails, and letters from people who were excited and delighted with the way that the show portrayed creativity as something to be valued. Parents wrote to share that the show had revolutionized their child’s life and inspired them to be imaginative.

Of winning two Emmys for Individual Achievement, Daniels says, “It was such a huge blessing and gift” to be given that recognition by her peers. “My heart exploded with gratitude for that.” Afterwards, she became involved with the Television Academy, serving as the organization’s Governor for animation. She is still on the Peer Group Executive Committee. “It means

“I’d say the unexpected cool thing about winning an Emmy is that it has a huge amount of joy attached to it, whether receiving it or giving it.”

so much to be able to help boost animation within the whole entertainment community,” she says.

Another fun aspect of being a governor was that she got to call people and let them know they’d won an Emmy. In one instance, when she announced the news to a recipient, all she heard was a thump. She wasn’t sure if he had fainted or dropped the phone. “I’d say the unexpected cool thing about winning an Emmy is that it has a huge amount of joy attached to it, whether receiving it or giving it,” she says. “I really, really love the work that I’ve been able to do with the Academy, being that conduit of joy and helping to raise up my peer group.” ☺





LUCK OF THE DRAW

By Alexandra Drosu

When it comes to defining luck, a new movie explores both sides of the coin.

When Director Peggy Holmes was first approached about the project *Luck*, there were two concepts in place. The first was focusing on the universal idea of luck, and the second was developing a story around a lead character that grew up in the foster system.

"We looked into this idea of good luck and bad luck. It's something we all experience every day in our life," she says. "I immediately started to do research. I read a lot of journals and papers...what I came to realize was that luck

is random. You have no control over it. You couldn't have a character, for instance, that was creating a piece of good luck and sending it to a specific person."

The visual creation of the Land of Luck helped inspire the story further, and in a way illustrated the randomness of it. Holmes reached out to Production Designer Fred Warter to help make a visual map. "The first piece of art that Fred did for the movie was he created two worlds on the opposite sides of

a coin, good luck on top and bad luck on the bottom,” says Holmes. This idea of a “lucky penny” captured the indiscriminate nature of luck—anyone who has flipped a coin can attest to that fact.

To create a world never seen before, Warter combined “the industrial nature of steampunk with the clean lines of mid-century modern. And then we also stumbled upon this thing called Voronoi diagrams, which are these mathematical constructs or patterns,” says Holmes.

The Land of Luck also needed to be populated with characters, based on lucky (and unlucky icons) from around the world. “My first assignment for the artists was to take all of that research and just go crazy for two days creating characters that would represent luck, good or bad,” she says.

The team came up with some obvious choices like leprechauns and rabbits, but also explored lesser-known symbols like unicorns, dragons, or pigs. Imbuing personality and movement into the characters required both real-life inspiration as well as creative and technical execution. Most of the animal characters exhibit humanistic traits in the Land of Luck.

The six-legged dragon named Babe was a particularly interesting challenge for the animation team. Voiced by Jane Fonda, Babe’s caring personality and graceful and elegant demeanor informed her movements. “We started from the character, her personality and her attitude,” says Director of Animation Yuriko Senoo. But with six legs the team needed to determine how Babe used all of her appendages.

“We figured out that she would be standing on two legs when she’s talking, [and] that when she’s running at full speed, she would use all six legs. But when she

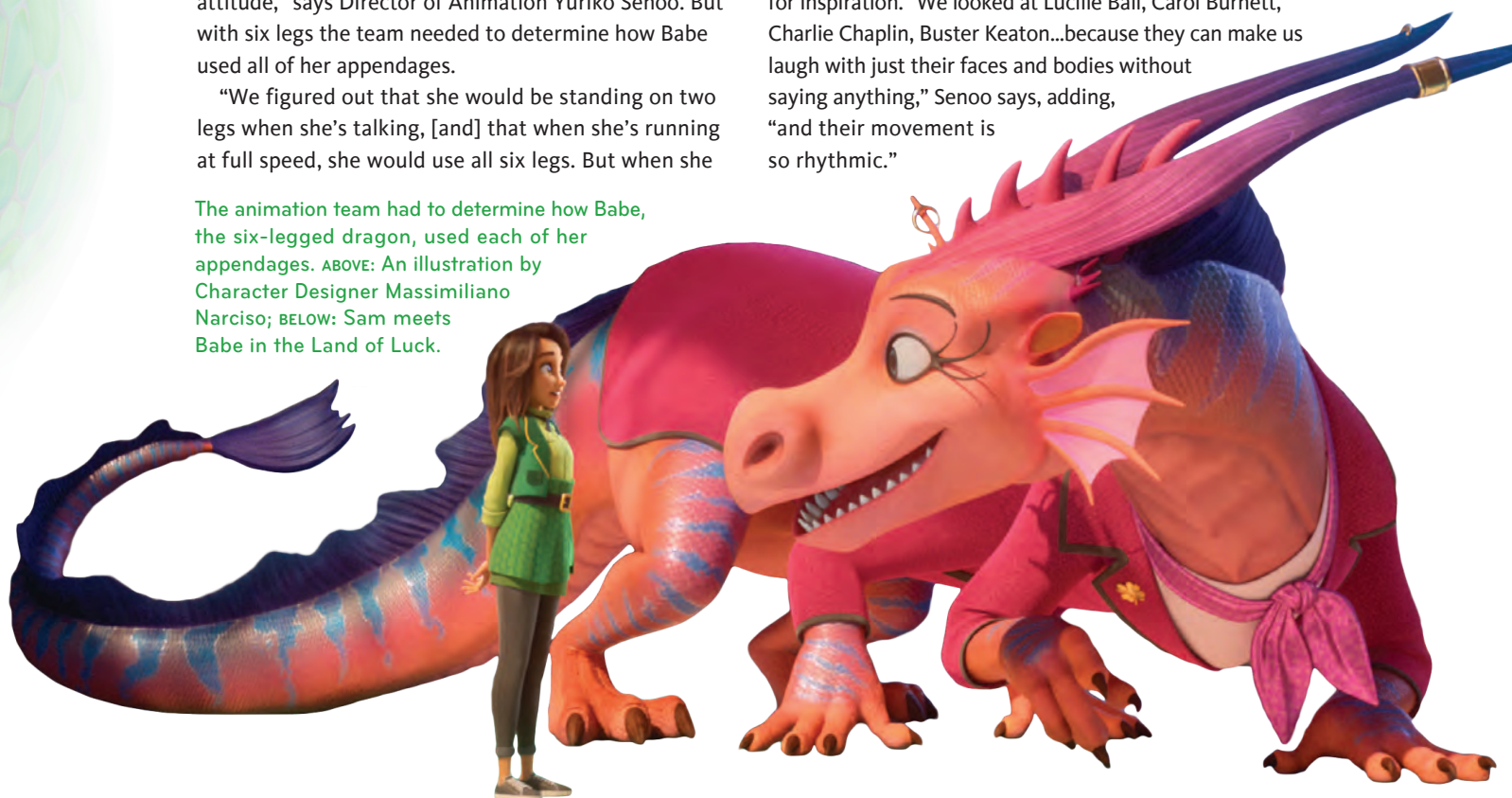
was more relaxed, she would use four. And then [the extra limbs] came in handy when she needed to get her inhaler from her pocket. She would use the middle arms to reach her pocket,” says Senoo.

In Scotland, black cats are considered lucky, and the feline charm became Bob, another one of the lead characters in the film. “Since he’s a magical cat, his animation style is more graphic and cartoony than any other characters,” says Senoo. “He defies gravity sometimes. We paid homage to Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner. In one of the scenes, he walks in the air and then falls like the coyote.”



Approaches like this aided physical comedy which played an important role in this film. The animation team studied legendary comedians to mine their performances for inspiration. “We looked at Lucille Ball, Carol Burnett, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton...because they can make us laugh with just their faces and bodies without saying anything,” Senoo says, adding, “and their movement is so rhythmic.”

The animation team had to determine how Babe, the six-legged dragon, used each of her appendages. ABOVE: An illustration by Character Designer Massimiliano Narciso; BELOW: Sam meets Babe in the Land of Luck.





Photos courtesy of Apple

AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT

A chance meeting between Bob and Sam, the unluckiest girl in the world, sets off a transformational journey. Sam has just aged out of foster care and struggles with her bad luck, an emotional feeling that luck has prevented her from finding her forever family. The story team wanted to be as authentic as possible when telling the story of this character, so they spoke with many people who had experienced the foster system. “We had the honor of interviewing these amazing young people who had grown up in a very similar situation to Sam. They grew up in foster care without families, and they were the most positive and generous people you could possibly talk to,” says Holmes.

She adds that when faced with the challenges of foster care, many young people experience a moment where they begin to feel like they did something to deserve their bad luck. “No matter how many times people told them, ‘This is not about you, you’ve had bad luck. It’s circumstance, it’s things outside of your control,’ somewhere deep inside, they believe it’s them—that there’s something

wrong with them,” says Holmes. “At some point in their lives, they are ready to hear that it’s not them in a way that they finally believe...it really was just bad luck.”

Acknowledging the randomness of these kinds of experiences allows you to gain a new, more positive perspective. And it’s this emotional journey that is at the core of the film. As the story evolves, Sam is able to look at bad luck in a different way. She doesn’t erase it, but “she’s able to evaluate certain instances of her bad luck and say, ‘You know what? That bad luck actually led me to the luckiest thing in the world, which is love,’” says Holmes.

LESS IS MORE

Focusing on the emotional core of a story can be a subtractive process. Holmes likens this journey of discovery as putting stakes in the ground and then building a story around them. Sometimes you find that you have too many stakes and it’s time to remove a few and leave only the most powerful ones in place.

“But you only discover that through the iteration of putting the reels up,” says Holmes. “You’re just constantly digesting and honing in on that

emotional story. Slowly but surely, as the story strengthens and supports those emotional stakes, you’re able to take some out. You really need to be open-minded.”

One example of this is the catalyst of Sam’s journey into the Land of Luck. Sam wants to make sure that her 5-year-old friend Hazel doesn’t end up like her without a forever family at the age of 18. Sam decides that she just needs to secure a lucky penny for Hazel, but doing so would break the rules of the Land of Luck.

“We had more check-ins in act two with Hazel where we felt like maybe Sam and Hazel needed to talk to each other on the phone,” says Holmes. “When we started taking those [scenes] out, the story became more and more emotional, because it was almost like Sam didn’t have control over what was going to happen to Hazel, and Sam had to wrestle with, ‘Can I come through for her?’”

In essence, in asking such questions, Sam wrestles with her own relationship with luck, and, whether good or bad, learning from those challenging experiences and focusing on a path forward can lead to a wonderful future. ☺



OPPOSITE PAGE: The Land of Luck, two worlds on opposite sides of a coin; THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Sam meets Bob for the first time; Lesser known lucky icon Jeff the Unicorn; Voronoi diagrams inspired the design of the world; and leading leprechaun, The Captain.



PictureLux / The Hollywood Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

INTO THE FUTURE

With just a single season, *The Jetsons* captured the imagination of generations with its creative take on life in the future.

This year *The Jetsons* celebrates its 60th anniversary. Looking back, it might seem that one of the reasons it stands out was because of how many seasons it ran. But that run was an illusion. In fact, the original show was produced for only one season, from the fall of 1962 to the spring of 1963. Just 24 episodes—but those episodes were rerun continually on Saturday mornings during the following decades, instilling a love for George, Jane, and the space-age crew across generations.

When *The Jetsons* first aired, “many people forget it was a nighttime show,” says Animation Historian Jerry Beck. The multi-Oscar-winning team of Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera had been let go by MGM in 1957, and “they decided to forge into the world of TV animation.” Until this point, TV cartoons were fillers on other children’s programs. Hanna-Barbera Productions changed that, “figuring out how to produce weekly half-hour shows with limited animation but highly stylized

artwork,” Beck says. Their first major hit was primetime’s *The Flintstones*. Not long after came *The Jetsons*.

This was the optimistic, JFK-era of the Space Race, and *The Jetsons* offered a 1960s version of a push-button future based on popular science magazines and advances of the day. For example, frozen dinners became the show’s instant meals made by machines. “We had forerunners of what they would take to the next level,” says Beck. “That’s the appeal of *The Jetsons*. We wanted to imagine what it could be like to have a robot maid and that sort of thing.” Beck points out that no matter how times changed, *The Jetsons* somehow remained ahead in the future. Yes, we now have their flat-screen TVs, but we’re still not flying to work with jet packs.

Another part of the show’s lingering appeal is its futuristic-yet-nostalgic style. “On a production level, back in that early 1960s

period, everything was hand-inked. They used that beautiful thick ink-line. And the color design on a show like *The Jetsons* is pretty cool because you might look at it now and go, oh, the color’s a little muted, pastel. But the thing is, that was intentional. They made the show in color, they produced it in color, they filmed the negatives in color,” Beck says, but even though *The Jetsons* was ABC’s first series broadcast in color, the majority of viewers had black and white TVs. “So they had to use a color palette that would read in black and white. Funny that a show about the future had to be adapted for our ancient TV sets.”

Years later, in the 1980s, two more seasons were produced, and a film came out in 1990. But it’s those original episodes that entered the cultural consciousness with their promising future that’s still ahead of us, waiting for us to catch up.

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A large, abstract graphic consisting of multiple parallel black zigzag lines of varying lengths, creating a sense of movement and depth across the middle of the page.

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