

FALL 2023

ISSUE NO. 23

# KEYFRAME

THE ANIMATION GUILD QUARTERLY



THE  
HORROR  
ISSUE





**"A GORGEOUS  
AND PASSIONATE  
CREATION."**  
GUILLERMO DEL TORO

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BETWEEN  
'WHEN HARRY  
MET SALLY' AND  
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# FACING FEAR



**A WARM SENSE OF NOSTALGIA WASHES OVER ME WHEN I THINK ABOUT MY EARLY INFLUENCES FROM HORROR MOVIES AND BOOKS. I WAS ONE OF THOSE KIDS WHO HAD AN INSATIABLE LOVE FOR ALL THINGS HORROR.**

Whether it was spine-chilling comics, eerie books, or scary movies and TV shows, I devoured them all with gusto. Those memories of reading *Creepy* and *Eerie*, the horror anthologies my teenage cousins had lying around, are etched vividly in my mind.

My passion for horror only grew with time, especially when I discovered the gothic tales of Edgar Allan Poe during my middle school days. *The Twilight Zone* and *Twin Peaks* became staples of my TV viewing, along with Saturday afternoon reruns of Universal Pictures monster movies. With every scare and thrill, my fascination with horror deepened, and I realized that the genre offered a safe way to explore intense emotions and frightening situations from the comfort of my couch.

Horror, much like a rollercoaster ride, allows us to willingly immerse ourselves in fear and excitement. It's the kind of thrill-seeking that I've cherished throughout my life—a way to experience the adrenaline rush without any real danger.

Today, I find myself excited about the rise of adult themes in American animation, coupled with a newfound appreciation for diverse art styles. While there have been animated horror movies and shows in the past, they mostly catered to children. Now, with the freedom to explore more mature themes and the acceptance of various artistic expressions, animation can finally merge with my beloved horror genre in a whole new way.

Yet, amidst this artistic progress, we face challenges that demand our attention. The world of entertainment has shifted drastically with the rise of streaming media, allowing for experimentation and creativity, which I do find thrilling. But there's also a darker side to this evolution—a complex interplay of changing consumer habits, corporate greed, and consolidation. As costs are cut in the name of profitability, it's often the artists and creatives who suffer—layoffs, understaffing, and stagnant wages are all too common.

In the midst of these struggles, I find hope in the ongoing WGA/SAG-AFTRA double strikes. These events serve as a reminder that we must prioritize the people who pour their hearts and souls into creating the shows and movies we cherish. Their well-being should be at the forefront of our concerns, for they are the lifeblood of this beloved industry.

It's crucial that we come together, industry professionals and fans alike. We must ensure that the future of animation and the entertainment industry, in general, isn't veering toward a dystopian nightmare. By supporting artists and acknowledging their value, we can pave the way for a brighter and more creative future.

I'm hopeful that our shared love for animation and horror will inspire us to protect and nurture the industry we hold dear. Together, we can shape a future that is as thrilling and captivating as the scariest horror story—minus the nightmares.

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

## ON THE COVER

Visual development art for DreamWorks' *Fright Krewe* depicts terrified tween Soleil who accidentally awakens a demonic being.







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# CREATING SPACE



**THIS SUMMER HAS BEEN TOUGH. OUR FELLOW WGA AND SAG-AFTRA KIN ARE WALKING THE PICKET LINES IN BLAZING HEAT, AN INDUSTRY DOWNTURN LEFT MEMBERS WITH FEWER JOBS, AND AI TRIGGERED FEARS, JUST TO NAME A FEW CHALLENGES WE'RE RECENTLY FACING.**

Sometimes it's hard to stay positive, but we can draw strength from the collective power generated when we come together to support one another. We can also find comfort in the craft of animation and art, and in the joy of creating, not just for studios but for ourselves and our families.

Take a look at Pete Oswald, for example. His new picture book is a very personal project (p.10), inspired by his three sons and a need to explore stereotypes surrounding male emotions. "Art and Craft" artist Teri Hendrich C. shares the importance of taking time for herself to paint and reflect on her own personal artwork (p.9), and retired Disney veteran John Musker returned to his artistic roots to create an ode to hand-drawn animation and free-form jazz (p.14). His love for the animation community is evident in the dozens of caricatures he drew and included in his short film *I'm Hip*.

Celebrating the work and contributions of so many talented artists is something *Keyframe* strives to do in every issue. This fall, we look at anthropomorphism and the creativity, research, and technical skill employed by artists and writers to create animal characters that audiences can connect with on an emotional level (p.18). In a darker realm, we explore the evolution of horror in animation and the vision behind this trending genre (p.24). Once again, Animation Guild members continue to push the boundaries, imagining new ways to thrill and scare kids and adults alike.

I suppose this is a lesson we can all apply to daily life, too. As we navigate the uncertainty and fear around us and this industry, we can push our own boundaries, lean on one another, and keep on creating for ourselves for the love of what we do.

*Alexandra*

Alexandra Drosu  
editor@tag839.org

## CONTRIBUTORS



**EVAN HENERSON** ("Emotion in Motion") 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.



**WHITNEY FRIEDLANDER** ("Big Breaks") 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** ("Animal Magic") 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*.



**AMANDA DE LANY** ("Manifesting Destiny") is from the San Francisco Bay Area, where she learned a love for all things Film & TV. She now lives in Los Angeles with her cat, and she works as an Administrative Assistant for The Animation Guild. She debuted her first short film, *Because I Love you*, in 2016.



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# MANIFESTING DESTINY



Graduating from ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena with a major in Illustration and minor in Fine Arts, Teri Hendrich C. landed her first animation job on *The Life @ Times of Tim* in 2007. Now, a Color Supervisor at Bento Box and Vice President of The Animation Guild, Hendrich strives to find the time to work on her personal art too.

Hendrich created *Manifesting* because she wanted to break out of her comfort zone while staying true to her own artistic style. The piece, made on a bloodwood panel, depicts a seated figure made of gold embossing powder that was activated with a heat gun. Hendrich was inspired to conceive a more realistic piece, while incorporating representative imagery with abstract elements, and the outstretched hand manifests vibrant strokes of color that have been intuitively placed with acrylic paints. Creating *Manifesting* reaffirmed her identity as an artist and inspired an excitement to make more of her own pieces.

After having her firstborn, Hendrich had made a conscious effort to temporarily let go of focusing on her personal art. Her job and kids made it difficult to find the time, but in 2021 she reprioritized her personal creativity. "Sunday evenings are for time in the paint studio," she says. "Whatever I can get done in those few hours while I'm in there, then I'm one step closer to getting the piece [finished]." She is honored and excited to continue stepping out of her comfort zone by sharing more of her work with the world, and she's looking forward to her exhibition at TAG's Gallery 839 in February 2024. Until then, you can view her work on her website: [www.terihc.art](http://www.terihc.art).

— Amanda De Lany

**ARTIST:** Teri Hendrich C.

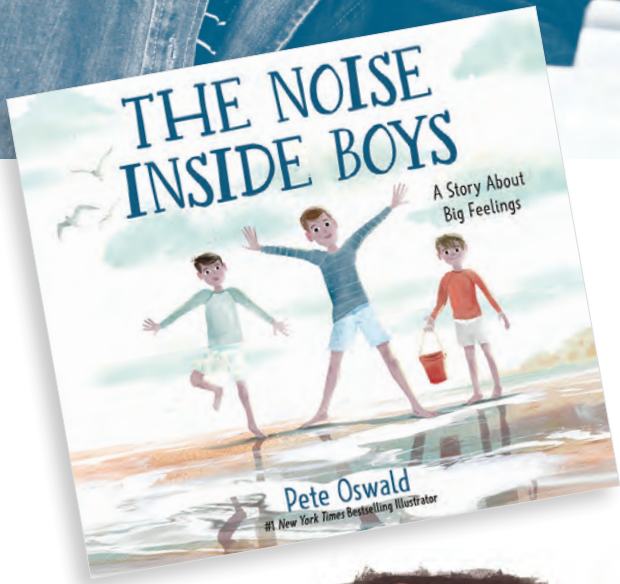
**TITLE:** *Manifesting*

**MEDIUM:** Acrylic paint and gold embossing on wood panel

**SIZE:** 9" x 12"







Dear Boys,  
I'm not here to tell you what to feel, how to  
feel, or when to feel. Just feel.

Love,  
Dad

The Noise Inside Boys courtesy of Penguin  
Random House; copyright Pete Oswald.



TOP: An incident with Oswald's sons inspired *The Noise Inside Boys*. BOTTOM: Oswald worked with different color palettes to convey specific emotions.



# EMOTION IN MOTION

## ANIMATION INDUSTRY VETERAN PETE OSWALD EXPLORES STEREOTYPES ABOUT BOYS AND THEIR EMOTIONS IN HIS NEW PICTURE BOOK.

To create his latest picture book, Pete Oswald faced down—and ultimately conquered—the ocean.

*The Noise Inside Boys: A Story About Big Feelings* is largely set at the beach. Which means that Oswald, a veteran Character Designer, Visual Development Artist, and Production Designer, needed to figure out how to depict water. As he was doing his sketches in black and white, he says, “In the back of my head I was going, oh my goodness, how am I going to pull this off? How am I going to make this water feel special?”

Spoiler alert: he found a way to do it.

Oswald studied animation and graphic design at Loyola Marymount University. Although he pursued a career in film and TV, he’s had a longstanding affection for picture books which he says influenced his career in animation.

“Although I’m always thinking about picture books, I never thought I would actually do them,” he says. It was a fun and enlightening moment when he realized how great it could be to work on both.

In *The Noise Inside Boys*, water represents more than just something you swim in. It tackles the oceans of emotions that boys are often conditioned not to feel or express.

“Be strong.” “Don’t cry.” “Let it go.” “Be a man.”

Sound familiar? It does to Oswald who has authored or illustrated several previous books. But this latest effort, which is dedicated to his three sons, had an especially personal element.

“I think there’s a problematic history of males not feeling comfortable with their emotional intelligence, and I just wanted this book to play a small role in changing that,” says Oswald whose credits include *The Angry Birds* movies, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, and *ParaNorman*. “It started out as a poem I wrote for my sons, wanting to give them the space and permission to feel. I talked with my editor and my agent, and they agreed this could make a really timely and important picture book.”

In the story, during a day at the beach, the youngest boy is teased by his brother after a soccer ball destroys his sand castle. The incident mirrors something that actually happened to Oswald’s sons Vincent (11), William (10), and Anderson (4), who he says are a constant inspiration. Oswald works from his L.A. home, and his office is between the boys’ rooms, so they frequently peek in on what dad is up to. As Oswald notes, kids can be pretty honest in their assessments.

And while the book is based on a personal experience, Oswald hopes it has broad appeal. “It’s not just for boys. It’s for any human who has emotions,” he says.

For the illustrations, he worked in watercolors, scanning the images and painting digitally over the top. Since one never knows what the pigments are going to do, he says that the medium of watercolor can be a little unpredictable, but it worked for this project.

“You don’t how the water’s going to flow, and there’s this kind of happy accident which I love about watercolor because two brush strokes can never be exactly the same,” Oswald says. “I thought that was a really great relationship to the theme of the book, talking about emotions and how they flow in and out of us as humans.”

Oswald has played around in watercolors before, but not so much within his picture books. Getting to work on *The Noise Inside Boys*, he initially proceeded with caution, afraid to make a mistake because, as he noted, “There’s no undo button.” The more he progressed, the greater his confidence as he got into the work and saw how it was coming together.

For sections where the father talks about emotions, Oswald wanted the images to be monochromatic. But for the depictions of emotions, he had to give a lot of thought to color choices as they related to a given feeling, such as blue for sadness, green for envy, and red for anger.

Then there was the water itself. Oswald got a bunch of blank illustration boards and started throwing down loose watercolor washes. Once they were scanned, “I’d have little bits and pieces, and I could combine them digitally on multiple layers,” he says. He describes the title page, for example, where there was a swirl with a marble-esque aspect that also had a reflecting quality with an organic, tactile feel to it. “I was especially excited when I landed this stylized look of the water so I could carry it through the book.”

Growing up with an older brother and a younger half-brother, Oswald knew something about male emotions even before he had his own children. “Having that past and becoming a father myself and having sons, a lot of this book was the culmination of all those experiences,” he says.

His wife Allison, on the other hand, grew up in a household full of girls. “[She] has a lot to do with how I perceive myself and perceive males in general,” Oswald says, noting that this influenced different aspects of being open to talking about his emotions and dealing with his own mental wellness.

“I would say that 20 years ago, I didn’t know that mental wellness was an actual thing,” Oswald says. “Now the fact that we can have our four-year-old talk about different emotions and understand them—I think that’s one step closer to supporting children who are more resilient, better communicators, and hopefully better humans overall.”

Learn more about Oswald’s work at [www.peteoswald.com](http://www.peteoswald.com).

– Evan Henerson



# BIG BREAKS

WHEN IT COMES TO STAYING CREATIVE, TIME SPENT NOT DRAWING PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE FOR CHARACTER DESIGNER LUIS GADEA.

**THIS PAGE:** Gadea studied caricature when he was young—an ideal artform for expressing his passion for the uniqueness of human beings.



Luis Gadea has always had an innate interest in what he calls “moments in life.”

Born in Canada and raised in Costa Rica, Gadea says that, as a kid, he’d watch

how his extended family interacted at loud get-togethers, analyzing their body language or the way they moved. These real-life moments of observation led to more creative pursuits.

He’d use paper to imagine playful fictional worlds and characters, like Martians who

were members of a rock band, or riffs on historical stories, like someone meeting the 16th-century pirate Redbeard. His parents enrolled him in drawing classes where he learned artistry like manga and caricature.

In Costa Rica, the culture helped Gadea push beyond traditional textures, colors, and shapes.

“It’s a very colorful country,” he says. “Even with skin tone and body shape, that was something very early on that I started pushing to get away from the ‘normal’ way of drawing [peoples’ bodies].”

Gadea would eventually study classical animation at Vancouver Film School.





He stayed in the city after graduation to work as a teaching assistant at the university and in 2D animation for Atomic Cartoons, where his credits included *Rocket Monkeys* and *Avengers Assemble*. In 2014 he shifted into character design, doing studio jobs before freelancing for DreamWorks, Illumination, and Netflix. He continued this path when he returned to Costa Rica in 2020. Then Warner Bros. Animation, for whom he worked on the TV series *Bugs Bunny Builders*, hired him full time and relocated him to Los Angeles.

Now in the City of Angels, Gadea still likes to look at how people express themselves, and he says his people-watching has gravitated toward street fashion. His website and Instagram are full of illustrations that reflect the individuality of all skin tones and body shapes walking and moving in colorful clothing combinations.

Gadea laughs at the irony in this because his professional career has largely gravitated toward projects about animals, not people. In addition to *Bugs Bunny Builders*, his credits include *The Angry Birds Movie* and the upcoming *Garfield* film. He says he takes a similar approach to animals as he does to humans, though, since “even animals have personalities,” and you can infuse animated animals with human characteristics.

With *Angry Birds*, for example, this meant playing with the shapes and sizes of the characters’ beaks. And when he is updating a classic animation, such as Chuck Jones and others’ work for *Looney Tunes*, he says he simplifies some shapes and makes them less complicated so he can create more complicated designs with the clothing.

“If you ask every single artist, they’re trying to look for a style [of drawing], and that thing haunts us every single day,” he says. “For me, I’ve got to question how I accomplish a drawing.” This is because he doesn’t like to find himself in the comfort zone of a repetitive style.

**THIS PAGE:** Gadea often works on animal animation, but he prefers drawing humans. When it comes to people, he finds it important to capture bodies of all shapes, sizes, and colors.

A need to challenge himself also extends to the tools Gadea prefers. He will switch between markers and ink if he finds he’s becoming reliant on one of them. A texture enthusiast, he likes the way paints can dampen thinner paper “because then the paper has wrinkles.” And he prefers what he calls “preschool art supplies” like crayons and watercolors because they’re not exact. When a tool is messy, “then it’s not controlling you and you somehow control it,” he says.

It’s not surprising that Gadea prefers hand drawing to computer screens. “I completely feel more comfortable with pencil and paper,” he says, even if this means he might be a bit slower because he has to erase or redraw his work. This effort to pace himself helps Gadea curb a mentality to hurry up and get it done now.

Of the art he does on his off hours, he says: “If you asked me a few years ago, I would be that artist with a sketchbook all the time with me. These days ... I’m doing my own investigation mentally of analyzing things, and I’m not stopping every single place to then draw.” This trains his brain to “create a mental library” and helps with creative burnout.

“I cannot expect to be 365 days a year, super creative,” Gadea says. He and his wife Maria del Mar like to take road trips with their dogs Paco and Lola. He uses that time to “take my mind out of [my art] and be present.”

During these breaks, he’s still fascinated by human interaction and if he sees a moment between people he mentally captures it to draw it eventually. He just doesn’t need to do it immediately. His method is to take breaks and get more inspiration. “It helps me with my personal art, which I believe at the end will benefit my professional life,” he says. “Everything is connected.”

Discover more of Gadea’s illustrations at [www.luisgadea.com](http://www.luisgadea.com).

— Whitney Friedlander





# HIP CAT

AN OFFICIAL SELECTION AT THIS YEAR'S ANNECY FESTIVAL, JOHN MUSKER'S SHORT FILM *I'M HIP* IS A LOVE SONG TO CLASSIC HAND-DRAWN ANIMATION AND FREE-FORM JAZZ.



By the time John Musker retired, it had been decades since he'd worked as an animator. A 40-year veteran of Walt Disney Animation Studio, he wrote and directed numerous films—including *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, and *Moana*—with his partner Ron Clements. But when he decided to make the short film *I'm Hip*, he returned to his roots. "I wanted to celebrate the magic trick that still thrilled me: drawings coming to life," he says.

*I'm Hip* is a music video of sorts, a groovy, free-wheeling collage animated to the song of the same name composed by Dave Frishberg and Bob Dorough. "I loved the wittiness," Musker says. "When I heard it years ago, I got pictures in my head as to how I might visualize it. Dave's lyrics, his deadpan delivery, and his sardonic jazz 'fills' on the piano all helped shape the narrative."

Musker describes this narrative as a "first-person comic 'brag' that skewers self-absorbed people who are desperate to always be on the cutting edge. The lyrics catalogue the singer's many examples of hipness, which I wanted to illustrate, so the 'story' is a loose soliloquy of sorts."

The singer in *I'm Hip* is a soul patch-sporting, fedora-wearing cat who flits from scene to scene, with each scene being its own tongue-in-cheek tableau of perceived hipness, from an arty French flick to a Beatnik café to running with the bulls. While it feels like an abstract ride, Musker notes the song's structure with a clear introduction, verse and choruses, and recitative bridge where the bass and drum rhythm section drop out—it then returns to an up-tempo pace that leads to a comic coda Musker says "felt very funny to me and a satisfying way to truly bring the song to a rousing finish."

Musker worked meticulously with the song's structure, using it as a framework for the cool cat's actions and to emphasize humor. "For example, when [Frishberg] did that low register 'I'm hip ... oh, I'm hip ... yes, I'm hip,' I thought it sounded like he was underwater," Musker says. "So I concocted a way to get the cat thrown off the rooftop jazz club and plunge into the river. Then the following glissando seemed like I could use it as a fishing line, yanking him up and out of the water into a fisherman's arms. I wanted all the animation to support and amplify the track."

For the look, Musker reflected on the classic Hollywood animation he grew up with, not only from Disney movies, but also from Warner Bros. and MGM shorts he saw on TV. "I was also influenced by the jazz record album art of the '50s and '60s, particularly the work of David Stone Martin, one of the premier illustrators of that period," he says. "He used a scratchy pen line and spotted areas to drop in solid black shapes. And he utilized washes of flat colors which didn't conform to the ink drawing. The result was a very 'jazzy' improvisational look."

To achieve this style, Musker drew all of the animation with a stylus on his Cintiq and used TVPaint to animate. "I wanted the final look to have that scratchy pen and ink line, which would have been difficult to achieve on paper, but TVPaint had brushes that could do that," he says.

Because Musker knew absolutely nothing about TVPaint, he took the advice he says he would give to young animators thinking about doing an independent short film: "See if you can enlist collaborators who are expert at their jobs." He's quick to give credit where credit is due, from "Jennifer Yuan's cool

layouts [to] Ken Slevin's beautiful backgrounds." Talin Tanielian is credited on the film as Editor, Composer, Shot Supervisor, and Production Manager, and he says, "If I didn't have her, I would still be trying to finish the short."

But Musker isn't just grateful for the people who helped him make the film. He appreciates everyone he's encountered on his animation journey. This makes the film more than just a fun romp. "I am addicted to drawing caricatures," he says. "Ever since I saw Mort Drucker in *Mad*, I have been compelled to do my own."

This compulsion led to more than 120 caricatures in the four-minute film. Along with the people who worked on it and his family, he says, "I couldn't resist also adding some of my CalArts classmates and their wives and significant others. And people like [animation legends] Glen Keane, Eric Goldberg, and Bill and Sue Kroyer." He also caricatured two of the hippest guys he says he's ever worked with—Taika Waititi and Lin-Manuel Miranda: "I couldn't do a movie about hipness without getting them in there, however briefly."

With so much personal investment, it would seem impossible for him to choose a favorite moment in the film, but he does have one. He notes the animation he did in a scene of the cat in a jazz club "bounding across the floor, plopping onto the stage to soak in the licks coming from a sax player." Of course, the musician is a friend, [Story Artist] and jazz saxophonist Jeff Snow. But that's not all that makes this stand out for Musker. Throughout the project he had a specific vision of the timing, phrasing, and looseness he wanted. It is in this scene where he sees the manifestation of the magic trick he sought—drawings come to joyous, playful, bah-bah-doo-bebop life.

– Kim Fay





ABOVE: In the audience for an art house film, Musker included publicists, long-time animation colleagues, friends, and family. Also in the crowd are Storyboard Artist and Character Designer Harry Sabin (Musker's CalArts roommate) and *I'm Hip* Layout Artist Jennifer Yuan and her husband Mark Kalesniko.

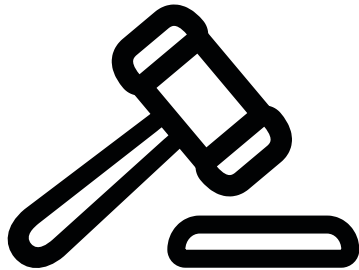


TOP LEFT: Musker caricatured his friend Marlon West, a jazz drummer and Head of Effects on *Moana*, which the two worked on together. TOP RIGHT: Along with legendary jazz pianist Judy Carmichael, Musker populated this jazz club scene with Effects Animator Eric Daniels on bass, as well as real-life Carmichael fans, including (FROM LEFT) Margie Daniels, who did clean-up on *I'm Hip*, animation veterans Eric and Susan Goldberg, Film Critic Leonard Maltin and his wife Alice Tlusty, and *The Lion King* Director Roger Allers. BOTTOM LEFT: While Musker and his wife stroll through the midground, Taika Waititi and Lin-Manuel Miranda enjoy a conversation in the lower right, and animation artists Juliet and Ken Duncan take a cab driven by Story Artist Kaan Kalyon. Dietz Ichishita, who did clean-up on *I'm Hip*, serves as the bouncer.



# LABOR SCHOOL

EVER BEEN TO A MEETING WHERE THINGS GOT OUT OF CONTROL? **ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER** WAS CREATED TO REMEDY THAT.



## WHAT IS IT?

*Robert's Rules of Order* is a manual that has been adopted by nonprofit associations, professional societies, trade unions, and other organizations to govern their meetings.

## WHEN DID IT ORIGINATE?

In the mid-1800s an Army officer named Henry Martyn Robert was asked to preside over a public meeting. He had no experience doing this. Needless to say, the meeting did not go well. This, combined with other unruly meetings he'd attended, caused him to research and write a manual outlining parliamentary procedure, which is a formal way to conduct meetings with fairness and decorum. In 1876, the first edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* was published. The manual has been revised over the decades to meet the needs of the times and is now in its 12th edition.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER TO YOU?

When you attend a General Membership or other Guild meeting, you might wonder why things are done in such a specific way. By using *Robert's Rules of Order*, all members are guaranteed the same right to speak following an "order of business," which structures a meeting to ensure all matters are addressed in an orderly manner. It also provides a process for effective and fair decision-making. For example, it requires a quorum, which is the number of voting members that must be present at a meeting in order to legally conduct business. This prevents a minority from controlling what happens during a meeting.

Learn more about *Robert's Rules of Order* at [robertsrules.com](http://robertsrules.com).



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# FREELANCING 101

TAKING A “FREELANCE” ANIMATION JOB DOESN’T MEAN YOU FOREGO YOUR UNION BENEFITS.



If you’re working for a signatory studio or production company that has a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with TAG, your job abides by the same contract agreements as full-time work based on the type of work being done:

- Weekly employee with a guaranteed 40 hours a week.
- Daily employee with a guaranteed daily rate.
- Unit rate employee with a specific guaranteed rate for a specific amount of work.

What does this mean? For one thing, every single hour worked with a signatory studio under a TAG CBA counts toward your Motion Picture Industry Pension & Health Plans (MPI) hours. And while your TAG membership isn’t official until you’ve paid the necessary initiation fees, your MPI contributions begin the very first hour you work for a signatory studio or production company. Keep in mind, though, that you need 600 hours for your benefits to kick in.

As for those hours you’re working, if you’re full-time on one show, can you take additional work on another? Yes. But it’s important to note that working on

two shows might not mean working for two different studios. For example, ShadowMachine produces different shows under different production companies. If you are working for different shows under the same parent studio, that could require the studio to pay you overtime rather than for two separate sets of hours worked.

Want to know more about “freelancing,” like terms of payment, working outside your usual job category, best practices for keeping track of hours, what to bill for, and more? Go to [animationguild.org/lunch-learn-recap-freelance-101](https://animationguild.org/lunch-learn-recap-freelance-101).

## WHAT ARE YOUR JOB DUTIES?

My primary role is to prepare, send, receive, review, and organize TAG contracts and associated documents with new and existing studios. In working directly with members, I review all O-1 and O-2 Visa submissions to determine whether the applicant meets the criteria established by the USCIS,

and create, prepare, and distribute the corresponding advisory-opinion letters to the petitioners and the IATSE. I also respond to members’ emails and phone calls regarding required safety training and job-related skills training, and I create surveys including the Wage Survey and respond to member questions and issues. For those members requiring assistance updating their online portfolios, I provide technical support.

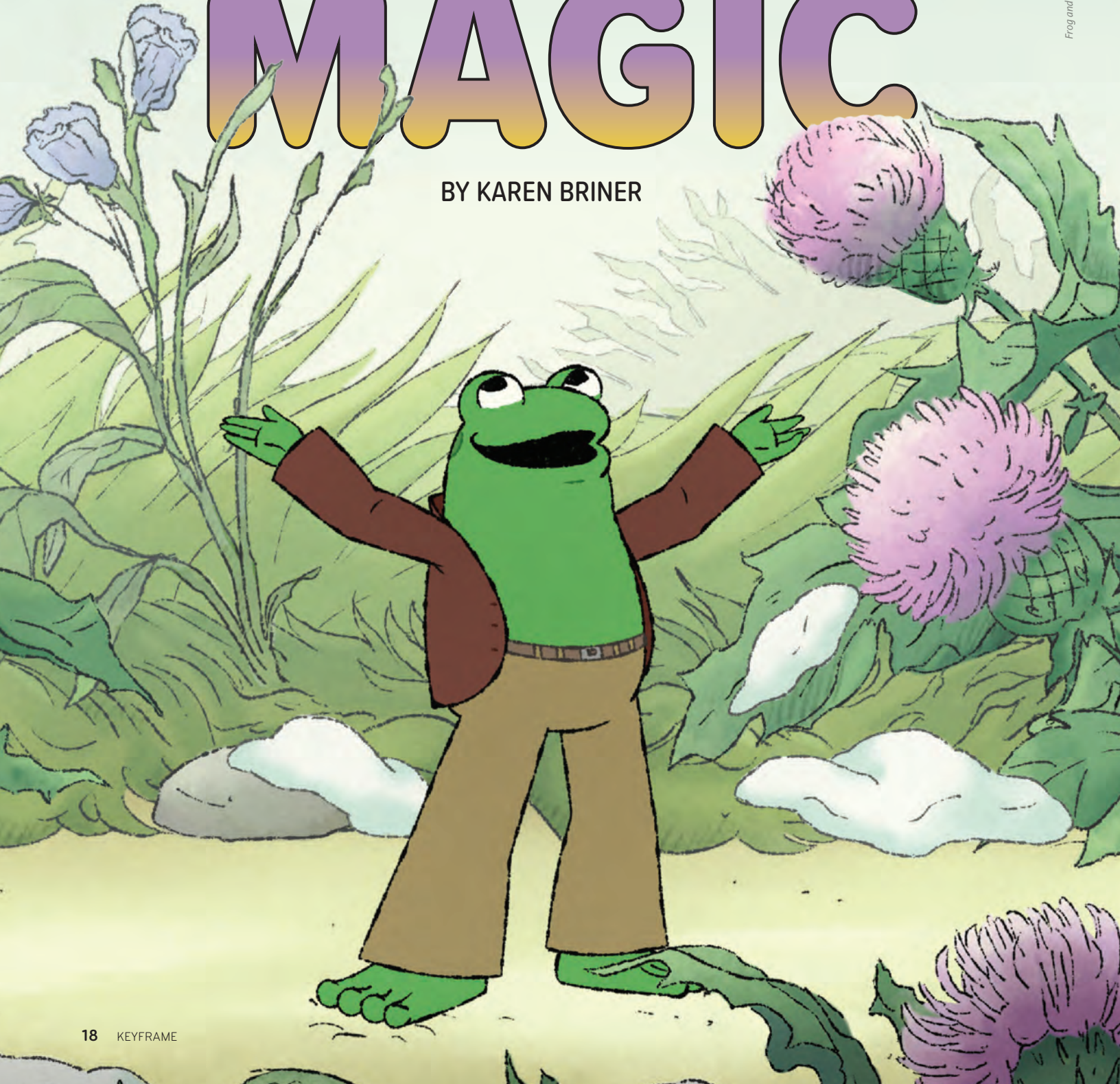
## WHAT’S YOUR FAVORITE PART OF YOUR JOB?

I enjoy talking with our members on the phone and providing any help they need. This can include showing them around our website, helping them set up a profile on the MPIPHP site and showing them what’s available there, helping them access free skills training, and assisting them when searching for work.

**WHAT’S A FUN FACT ABOUT YOU?** I spent two years traveling the U.S. playing drums in a circus.

# ANIMAL MAGIC

BY KAREN BRINER



Frog and Toad images courtesy of Apple TV+ and Titmouse.



## WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING ANIMALS RELATABLE, ARTISTS AND ANIMATORS USE A CLEVER COMBO OF REAL-LIFE REFERENCES AND VISUAL TRICKS.

Whether it's frog and toad best friends, a monkey with supernatural powers, or a family of loveable sharks, "creating anthropomorphic animal characters is something that humans have been doing for a long time," says Cheryl Johnson, Art Director on Nickelodeon's *Baby Shark's Big Show!* "We love to see ourselves in animals."

Whitney Ralls, Executive Producer and Head Writer on *Baby Shark's Big Show!* and Script Writer for *Baby Shark's Big Movie*, agrees. She says that this has its roots in ancient mythology, the way we tend to take things that are "very animalistic, but looking at them through a human lens."

As for how to accomplish that in animation, it's about finding the happy medium. With details like the ears, nose, whiskers, and feet, the more animal-like, the better. But the more expressive the face, mouth, and eyebrows can be, "the easier it's going to be to relate to those characters," Johnson says.

Take a shark, for example. "It can be tricky, because you don't want to have too many big pointy, scary teeth," says Johnson. So her team made the sharks' teeth a bit chunkier and gave each shark its own uniquely-shaped teeth to differentiate it. These tweaks made for friendlier creatures.

For the Titmouse/Apple TV+ series *Frog and Toad*, based on author and illustrator Arnold Lobel's much-loved books about a friendship between two amphibians, Executive Producer and Head Writer Rob Hoegge notes that all of the characters in the show are animals and their names reflect exactly what they are. "Frog is a frog, Robin is a robin, so they're inherently animal," says Hoegge. "That being said, they talk. They wear clothes. They cook breakfast. Most of them live in houses." As well, *Frog and Toad* is largely about feelings and

emotions. To convey this and humanize them, the animals do things that you don't see animals doing in the real world, such as smiling, laughing, and crying.

In the book series, while Frog and Toad are already more like humans, the other animals "really felt just like critters," says Supervising Director Sarah Johnson. A conscious decision was made to humanize Frog and Toad even more, while keeping the other animals somewhat humanized and leaning more into their animal qual-

ities. It was a fine balance because they didn't want to lose the idea that this is Frog and Toad's world. "While we would have Mouse run in and out on all four legs and do little mousy actions, I never wanted to see Frog and Toad hopping along the ground like animals, because that would feel inherently weird," says Johnson. That said, they did want to convey some of their more nuanced animal aspects, such as the tongue flicks added to Toad by Storyboard Artist Amy Mai.



Mouth shapes are crucial to making animal characters feel relatable. For Frog (**OPPOSITE**) it was important to make sure the black space of his mouth didn't overwhelm his face, and for Baby Shark (**ABOVE**), reducing the number of his teeth and rounding his mouth gave him a friendlier look.



**TOP:** An upright posture played an important role in humanizing the Monkey King.  
**BOTTOM:** An eye with a lot of white around the pupil makes it less animal-like.

## DRAWING INSPIRATION

References are always an essential part of creating any animated character. Inspired by a centuries-old Chinese tale, the Netflix action-comedy film *The Monkey King* follows a monkey and his magical fighting stick on an epic quest to fight gods, dragons, and his own ego. Director Anthony Stacchi says that from descriptions in the original text, the monkey is roughly based on a macaque that is common in southern China. That served as a research starting point, but they wanted him to feel more special than the other monkey characters. They gave him a deeper red color and a long, pompadour-like hairdo, as well as specific markings on his face and hands that were inspired by the make-up in Peking opera.

While there is a distinctive look to traditional Chinese dragons, Stacchi says they tried something different with the Monkey King's adversary, the Dragon King. Even though it's a mythical creature, Animation Supervisor

Rune Bennicke says that they did research on real reptiles. They looked at the "Jesus Christ Lizard" as a reference. This lizard runs on water and has a slightly awkward way of running. Bennicke says that was an important attribute to work into the Dragon King, since he is uncomfortable on dry land and travels around in a tub when he's out of the water.

Similarly, when approaching the underwater sea creatures on *Baby Shark's Big Show!*, Cheryl Johnson advised her artists to look at the real animal first and to identify those key animal features. For sharks, that would be the fins. You have to make sure they're in the right place and that you give the sharks a streamlined body as well. "Sharks have a very distinct

silhouette, and each species of shark has a slightly different silhouette," she says. "So if you can include those details, while making them a little bit rounder, a little bit more friendly, it will make it feel like a good blend of an animal [and human]."

For Frog and Toad, characters who are already very humanized, Sarah Johnson, who is a self-proclaimed herpetology nerd, says she "wanted to lean in to the inherent differences of Frog and Toad." Not just through their personalities as portrayed in the books, but she also wanted to "lean into Frog being more 'froggy' and Toad being more 'toady'" and finding ways to show the differences between these two creatures. This meant that "Frog could do bigger jumps and bigger leaps. He was springier," she says. "And Toad is very much more flat on his feet."





## GET A MOVE ON

Tasked with figuring out how to move the Monkey King, Bennicke says they learned that monkeys are quadrupeds, so they don't walk on their knuckles like chimpanzees, but instead walk with their palms down. Monkeys also walk upright with a slight bend to the back, with the elbows a little bit out, and with a bend in the knee.

In the beginning of the movie, just after he's born, the Monkey King is surrounded by real monkeys who all move like monkeys, and he uses his arms to run. But as he becomes more godlike and powerful, he stands up straight and starts moving more like a human. That said, they focused on the Monkey King's posture "so that he's never standing up completely straight, because that would always tend to look [too] human," Bennicke says. And occasionally he'll still go down on all fours to run faster.

The Monkey King's movement is a combination of "real" monkey movement, from when he is seen as a baby monkey, combined with Peking Opera-influenced and martial art-inspired posing when he is an adult. Bennicke says that despite having expert help with fight choreography, one of their biggest challenges was animating the action scenes. With martial

arts, he explains, it's all about the tensing and relaxing of muscles and movements. "One of the hardest things to do in animation is to get ... a sense of power into something," he says. He adds that the Monkey King is a lot more athletic than any actual martial artist, because apart from being a monkey, he has supernatural qualities. "We can jump him more, we can spin him more, he has a tail that he can use when he's fighting."

For movement in *Frog and Toad*, Hoegge says his team really wanted to tap into the nostalgia of the books and make it look as if the illustrations had come to life. To honor Lobel's art, they mimicked scenes and poses whenever possible. But this meant they had to figure out how the animals moved and how they were articulated based on still illustrations.

Another issue was wardrobe for the supporting animal cast. "As far as clothes go, if it looks weird, no clothes," Hoegge says. This was the case when they tried to dress a snake character, so Snake didn't get clothes. "And clothing for Robin would interfere with how wings work and how she flies," he says. They compromised by giving Robin a little hat. Mouse didn't get clothes either because he sometimes runs on all fours and the clothes would



**"As far as clothes go, if it looks weird, no clothes."**

— Rob Hoegge

interfere with his movement. Sarah Johnson explains that there were also instances when they had to use cartoon logic to get around certain situations. For instance, Snail delivers mail. The character is limited because she doesn't have arms or hands, so they let her use her mouth to move things.

Ralls had a similar experience with the undersea creatures on *Baby Shark's Big Movie*. The characters don't have hands so how do they pick things up? And they don't have thumbs so they can't give each other a thumbs up. Because of this, she encouraged the writers to think about how feasible it is for a character to do certain actions to pre-empt issues down the pipeline.

**TOP RIGHT:** The complexities of animating movement were taken into consideration when clothing, or not clothing, characters in *Frog and Toad*. **BOTTOM:** Arnold Lobel's original illustrations (LEFT) provided a template for developing the characters in *Frog and Toad*.





Peking opera provided inspiration for the theatrical look of *The Monkey King*.

## SIZE MATTERS

Animals come in a vast range of sizes, creating unique complications when figuring out how they should interact. Rob Hoegee points out that in *Frog and Toad*, the sense of scale was hugely important. The show has characters as big as a raccoon and as small as a ladybug, and when seen next to each other they needed to be in proper scale. For example, when Frog and Toad are talking to Raccoon, Raccoon towers over them. They also wanted to show a natural scale in terms of animals living in a human world. So when Frog and Toad are walking down a path, he explains, they really are at frog and toad level, and what looks like a tree might just be a flower.

While seeing scale as a problem to be solved, Crystal Stromer also finds it fun to play with. On *Baby Shark's Big Show!*, she says they often end up having to adapt certain props and have different scales of props. A cup for a fish might be a different size than the one for a whale. "Either we'll scale it up, so it's appropriate to the size of that character, or depending on the gag, sometimes we'll leave it very small or very large, just for a funny visual contrast," she says. But it can be tough to figure out scale when two characters are vastly different in size and interacting with the same prop. In those situations, they try to split the difference.

*The Monkey King* complicates matters of scale because there are three versions of Monkey: baby, adult, and giant. Adult Monkey is in the same size range as humans. But there are times, like in a climactic fight scene with the Dragon King, when they both become giants.

Conveying weight and force in the actions of giant characters is a particular challenge. "You have to spend the time getting the movement started and you have to spend the time finishing the move," Rune Bennicke says, explaining how the Head of Character Animation addressed this issue. "His approach to it was that you spent a few shots setting up the scale and maybe exaggerating the weight of the giant characters. Once the audience has accepted the size and the scale, then you don't worry as much about it—you can go into something that feels a bit more real."



**ABOVE:** Numerous mouth charts were developed for the variety of characters in *Baby Shark*.

## HEY, BIG MOUTH

Mouth movements on speaking animals can present their own difficulties. Cheryl Johnson says that for *Baby Shark's Big Show!* they have a system in place for building mouth charts for most characters to accommodate all the phonemes they need to say. Where possible, they will try to stick existing mouth charts on new characters if it works with their design, but whenever they add a character that has a unique mouth shape, they have to build a new chart that usually includes a front-facing view, a three-quarter front, and a side view. It's a lot of tedious work, she says, but it's absolutely essential.

With human characters, she explains, you can build a theme that you can reuse across different faces, but that's not possible with animals ranging from dolphins to crabs because their faces are all so different. In the show they've had to make the mouths more human because it's easier and works better with their character designs to make them more appealing.

Frog and Toad's mouths were also problematic, according to Sarah Johnson. "Early on, we were trying to avoid them looking



straight on at the camera and speaking at all, because we were worried that it would just be a sea of black. It would be too dark because we're emulating the book where the mouth-fill is all black scribbles."

Mouse's mouth was a challenge, as well—it's so small that they didn't give him an open mouth shape at all. "When he talks, it's just his muzzle moving," says Sarah Johnson. She believes this led to some really great body animation on Mouse because it forced the animators not to rely on the mouth shapes to get his expressions out.

With the Monkey King's mouth, canines were a consideration, and the team debated how much to show because "immediately when you open somebody's mouth and show canines then there is an aggressive feel to it," says Bennicke. "But it was extremely helpful for the shots when the monkey is angry."

Stacchi points out that it was especially complicated to animate the Dragon King with his long crocodile-like mouth. "The corner of the mouth has to travel so far for different mouth shapes—stretching the surface and the textures," he says. They had to determine how far back and forward the corner could go "without [the mouth] chattering around so much that it looks distracting."

## WINDOWS TO THE SOUL

Cheryl Johnson pays close attention to an animal's eyes. The more closely the eyes of the sharks resemble human eyes, the more relatable they are. In practical terms, "you usually want to have eyes with a lot of white around them, like ours, and a really clear pupil," she says. "The minute you give an animal character a solid, dark eye, or a black dot eye, it's going to instantly feel more animal-like and be a little bit harder to relate to."

*Baby Shark's Big Show!* Animation Director Crystal Stromer also emphasizes conveying emotion through eye movement. "A well-timed blink can just really hit home," she says. If a character is sad or surprised, changing up the timing of a blink alone will say so much about how

a character is feeling. "That's what really telegraphs that these characters are alive."

Along with more human eyes, they gave the sharks eyebrows to help with expressions, but in *Frog and Toad*, the characters don't have eyebrows at all. To add emotion, Sarah Johnson says they had to lean on the animation team to push what they

**"The minute you give an animal character a solid, dark eye ... it's going to instantly feel more animal-like and be a little bit harder to relate to." — Cheryl Johnson**

did have. The team made use of the under eyelids coming up and upper eyelids coming down to get more expression.

Sometimes, though, the element used to express emotion can take a surprising form. When writing for animal characters, Ralls says she likes to focus on something that's unique to that animal. In *Baby Shark's Big Movie*, for instance, they introduced a lantern shark named Lannie. Ralls explains that lantern sharks glow different colors. This led to the idea of the colors representing different human emotions.

In a sense, Ralls says, they were anthropomorphizing the colors to represent the human emotions that make Lannie a lovable, relatable character who is a bit all over the place because what she's feeling is obvious to everyone. It also helps with the comedy because Lannie is always putting her foot in her mouth (proverbially) by revealing her true feelings in her glowing colors.

Another unconventional example is a sea urchin in *Baby Shark's Big Show!* He was particularly challenging because he's basically "a circle with some quills sticking out and like one eyeball," says Stromer. "If he gets excited, we'll shake his quills a little bit ... or droop them to show that he's sad."

Be it a raised eyebrow, a well-timed blink, or quivering quills, there are myriad techniques that can bring animal characters to life to make sure audiences forge an emotional connection. 🌀

*Faced with unusual facial features, including a lack of eyebrows, the artists on Frog and Toad used the lower and upper eyelids to help convey emotion.*






# BEHIND THE SCREAM

By  
Kim  
Fay

WHAT MAKES HORROR ANIMATION WORK?





Images courtesy of DreamWorks Animation

When it comes to scaring up believable horror, suspension of disbelief can be more of a challenge for animators than it is for their live-action counterparts. Rather than shying away, they're rising to meet that challenge. Horror animation is finally coming into its own in the U.S. for audiences of nearly all ages.

On the younger end of the spectrum, DreamWorks is leaping into the horror pool with its new tween series *Fright Krewe*. One of the show's creators and Executive Producers is live-action horror master Eli Roth, whose first film work—it turns out—was animation. When he was around nine, he started shooting stop-frame animation with a Super 8 movie camera, and before he made his first live-action feature, *Cabin Fever*, he directed a series of animated shorts called *Chowdaheads*.

"I could get lost in animation," he says, so it's no surprise that when his friend, Executive Producer James Frey, approached him to do a scary animated show like a new *Scooby-Doo*, Roth jumped at the chance. But *Fright Krewe* isn't a bunch of meddling kids with another mystery on their hands. Rather, it's an example of how the industry is redefining the boundaries of how much is too much when it comes to scare tactics.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Visual development drawings of *Fright Krewe*'s Maybe (LEFT), horror buff Soleil, and Pat explore levels of fear in facial expressions; **THIS PAGE:** Character Designer Jose Garibaldi helped develop the character of mean girl Missy who transforms into a Rougarou, New Orleans' version of a werewolf.



## FEAR FACTORS

“We wanted the show to be spooky and scary but not so terrifying it’s traumatic,” Roth says. Finding that balance was a major goal for Joanna Lewis and Kristine Songco, *Fright Krewe’s* Executive Producers and Showrunners. As self-proclaimed scaredy-cats, they had no choice but to dive deep into horror research, a genre with a surprisingly large number of subgenres: slasher, creature, psychological, and comedic, to name just a

few. Because of the age group, Broadcast Standards and Practices limits blood and guts, “so we avoided the classic gory horror tropes,” says Lewis. “[Instead, we allowed] our characters to have really dark moments and cry and yell and react in a visceral way that I think a lot of Western children’s media doesn’t often delve into.”

The *Fright Krewe* story centers on five kids in New Orleans who are unwillingly brought together doing graveyard cleanup for detention. When one of them, horror

buff Soleil, accidentally undoes a spell cast by her ancestor, she awakens a demonic being and his henchmen. The being—no spoiler here—wants to destroy the world. This in turn awakens the Lwa, spirits in the voodoo tradition that serve as intermediaries between humans and the divine.

Each kid has their own Lwa. Not only does this Lwa help them fight the demons, but it also serves as their core strength and contributes to their character growth. “The relationship our kids develop with their respective Lwa opens up this culture that a lot of people aren’t familiar with,” says Leah Artwick, who served as a Director and then Supervising Director for the series.

A respectful approach to voodoo turns the tables on the typical Hollywood portrayal of the religion as something for villains to use in nefarious ways. It also reflects one of the show’s themes: “The perception of something versus what it really is,” says Songco. “Good or evil, what does that actually mean? Everything’s not as black and white as you think it is.”

The kids grapple with complex concepts, and “being able to draw and direct



**THIS PAGE (TOP):** Each main character in *Fright Krewe* has their own Lwa, a spirit emissary between the human and the divine; **(BOTTOM):** Based on Cajun legend, the Rougarou is said to haunt the swamps of greater New Orleans.







**THIS PAGE:** "Our design teams did a really lovely job using New Orleans as an inspiration piece," says Joanna Lewis, referring to the city's graveyards **(TOP)** and evocative interiors **(BOTTOM)**.

characters that had really raw emotions felt liberating," says Artwick. "I think it helped all of us fall in love with these characters and identify with them and see them as these fully formed people."

This kind of emotional investment can be crucial to making the tension in horror work, especially when gore is off the table. But where animation has an advantage over live action is that "we don't have the constraints of real cameras or real sets," says Artwick. In addition, Roth adds, when it comes to budgets, having a 20-foot-tall character with 200 eyes in animation costs far less than in live action.

This kind of freedom resulted in complex, shiver-inducing creatures. The team also leaned into the naturally haunted feeling of the New Orleans setting, using environments like graveyards to make the characters feel trapped, or "framing elements to block the audiences view from something that

may be lurking behind a building or closed doors," says Artwick. Using Harmony software, artists employed effects like rim light to make night scenes creepy. Classic jump scares were also employed, and sound effects were a key component. In one of the first episodes, "one of our characters is kind of dragging a metal pipe against the ground," Artwick says. "Visually you can see it, it works, but once that echoey, creepy, metal scraping [is added], it really brings it to the next level of—oh, I feel like I'm here now."

"There are different ways to be scared," says Songco. "You can fear for someone's life. Those moments where you're yelling at the screen—don't do it! Those were the things that we were trying to do. Sometimes creepy whispers, or the right sound effects, will make something as simple as going into a dark room feel scary. We had a lot of discussions with our writers about what are the things that give you nightmares?"







## DO NOT ENTER!

Many of the techniques used in *Fright Krewe* can be found in action, adventure, and mystery animation. So what makes this series specifically horror? “Scary is part of the DNA of the show, as opposed to an element that pops in,” says Lewis.

Using this criterion, it’s easy to see how skimpy horror animation offerings have been over the decades. Many credit Disney’s 1929 Silly Symphony shorts *The Skeleton Dance* and *Hell’s Bells* as being the first. While *The Skeleton Dance* can feel a little silly, *Hell’s Bells* manages to disturb with its twisted imagery in the flaming depths of hell. *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, released in 1949, also pulls off an eerie vibe with its depiction of the Headless Horseman, but otherwise, a lot of past animation that calls itself horror has been more playful than terrifying.

Recently, TV series have dipped into

realistic horror in hybrid ways. Among them are *Gravity Falls*, *Harley Quinn*, and *Love, Death @ Robots*. Then there are shows like *The Simpsons Treehouse of Horror* specials, annual shorts that parody and reference classic horror films. And of course, for more than half a century, there has been *Scooby-Doo*.

The ultimate in horror lite—more campy than creepy—Scooby-Doo was a reliable, safe cartoon staple when Mitch Watson was approached to do a reboot. This was around 2008. He’d been interested in horror for a while, he says, but no one would touch the kind of horror he wanted to do with a ten-foot pole. “And it’s tricky when you mess with IP. People love what they love. [But] Sam Register had just taken over WB at that time and was looking to take a challenge, take a risk. ... Sam was like, if you did do it, what would you do?” Watson was obsessed with the

*Battlestar Galactica* reboot, and if the studio would let him do something similar, turning a goofy old show into “something amazing,” then he was in.

Like the *Fright Krewe* team, Showrunner and Head Writer Watson and Supervising Producer and Lead Monster Designer Tony Cervone focused on character as they began developing the 11th incarnation of the beloved franchise: *Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated*. “The moment we cracked the characters, and all the different permutations that were going on with them psychologically—that allowed the horror to really take on a different

**THIS PAGE:** *The Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated* team used classic horror film techniques like low camera angles to create a creepy mood.



kind of shape,” Watson says. “If you cared about the characters, and you didn’t want to see them harmed, the horror becomes that much greater.”

Giving Scoob and the gang emotional resonance was just the beginning. The look was also a significant departure from the original. Art Director Dan Krall’s artwork was jagged and angular, and “we very specifically [wanted] to shoot this like a horror movie,” Watson says. This meant techniques like low camera angles and things happening off camera to build a sense of dread. Stylistically, the team was inspired by the films of John Carpenter and David Cronenberg, and the bright, prismatic color palette of Dario Argento’s Italian horror films.

Still, it was *Scooby-Doo*. There was only so far they could go. At one point they shot an episode with zombies. “We did it in such a way—we’re not going to play this as a joke,” Watson says. “It’s all going to be straight. We scored it with a really frightening piece of music. When it went to Cartoon Network, they kicked it back. Too scary.”

That was the early 2010s. What a difference a decade makes. Artwick notes



**“If you cared about the characters, and you didn’t want to see them harmed, the horror becomes much greater.” –Mitch Watson**

the popularity of dark, grim video games and serious, sinister anime among younger audiences, and Songco says, “It does feel like kids are watching scarier things at a younger age. There are some eight-year-

olds who are watching *Stranger Things*.”

“Now, if you’re competing with that, you’ve got to raise the bar animation-wise,” Watson says. “What used to be scary is no longer going to be as scary.”



**THIS PAGE: (TOP)** Angular character design was a huge departure for Scoob and the gang in *Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated*; **(BELOW)** Saturated colors were inspired by Italian horror films.









## HUMAN REMAINS

Naturally, adult shows don't have the same restrictions as shows for kids. So it would seem that there would be more offerings in this area. But unlike Japan's long history of horror anime, adult horror animation in the U.S. is still in its infancy. Watson recalls *Spawn*, HBO's 1997-1999 TV series. Bloody and graphic, it was an outlier. It wasn't until 20 years later that *Castlevania* came along, kicking open doors for the genre. When he first watched it, Watson

**"Horror has always been a kind of allegory for other things going on. Good horror is rooted in the human experience." —Jeanette Moreno King**

says, "I remember saying to someone—okay, finally."

The story of Dracula taking revenge after his wife is burned at the stake, *Castlevania* was made for a mature adult audience. Adam Deats calls the opportunity to do a show like this serendipity.

Deats worked on the series as a Compositing Director, Editor, Key Lighting, Assistant Director, and more, while Sam Deats matched his brother in the multiple roles department as Director, Production Designer, Storyboard Artist, Animator, Prop Designer, Character Designer, and more. According to Sam Deats: "It certainly was a combination of the right property [and] the right creative vision, in conjunction with the timing of its release—and the platform it got released on." That platform being Netflix, which was having great success with original programming.

Long before the show got off the ground, though, Adam and Sam Deats had been huge fans of the *Castlevania* video game, and they recall talk in the mid-2000s of a direct-to-DVD series. But direct-to-DVD was dying out, and the project went into hibernation. They kept an eye on it. Fast-forward 10 years. They were working for Powerhouse Animation (recently unionized under The Animation

Guild), a studio that did mostly trailers and promotional and educational work. Sam Deats saw an article indicating the project was getting some attention again. He brought it up to Powerhouse CEO Brad Graeber: "Hey, we should work on that." Later, in a meeting, when Graeber mentioned that *Castlevania* was being discussed as a series the studio might take on, Adam Deats says he gasped "very, very loudly."

Not only did the brothers love the video game, they admired the artwork and had

wanted to do anime for a long time. They also noted a hunger among *Castlevania* fans, and animation fans in general, for a more adult style of content. Because Powerhouse had never done series work before, "we wanted to do it right," Adam Deats says.

This meant tackling issues of believability. While Artwick believes there can be a strong resonance between the audience and animated characters, and "that's why we cry when [*The Lion King's*] Mufasa dies," she says, the trick gets harder as viewers rise in age.

TAG President Jeanette Moreno King, who was the Supervising Director on *Little Demon* and is now working on an unannounced comedy-horror pilot, says: "As an animation fan already, when you know and understand that animation language, you're more willing to [believe]. If you're a person who only watches live-action horror, and you're trying animation, that might be a hard thing."

Adam Deats thinks that it's "really, really hard for animation to be viscerally horrifying. It might have to do with the level of immersion that animation has versus live-action. Live action can get you to a place where you might fully believe that you're there for a second. Your body feels it."

To overcome this challenge, he says,

"I think that good character and theme that goes to darker places will start to have the audience buy into things that will get them feeling a certain way. And if the onscreen imagery matches that in some capacity thematically, you'll get there."

He explains it's helpful that horror viewers are used to seeing types of imagery in ways that makes them feel scared. "Things like a well-timed rack focus between points of interest, concealing parts of an image with vignetting, lens blurs, flaring, or even clever use of strobe lights can all be useful. Above all else, good monster, color, and location design are obviously huge, and do a lot of the work for you!"

*Castlevania* also used iconography well-known in horror, along with a willingness to dive into very violent adult subject matter. In fact, *Castlevania* had no limits on what it could do as far as violence was concerned. But the brothers point out that in most cases violence was used for thematic reasons.

As an example, Sam Deats notes the show's first episode, which sets up Dracula's meeting and love story with Lisa, who would become his wife. Lisa wants to be a doctor, but her interest in science is mistaken for witchcraft, which results in her death. "There were question marks about—do we want to show the burnt corpse of Lisa after she had been burned at the stake?" says Sam Deats. They decided they did. "It had to be a stark contrast. That gut sinking [feeling] of seeing him lose himself needed to be visceral and needed to have weight to it. I think that going hard on the very unsettling imagery, things that maybe we don't want to look at but we have to for the story—it was important in those cases ... even though it made some folks uncomfortable."

**OPPOSITE PAGE: "We were fine with dipping stuff way, way down darkness-wise," says Adam Deats of the dark effects used in *Castlevania*. The series also did not shy away from graphic imagery like a character burning at the stake (MIDDLE RIGHT) to create emotional resonance.**





**“Good or evil, what does that actually mean? Everything’s not as black and white as you think it is.” -Kristine Songco**

**THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE:** *Giving characters relatable, ordinary storylines helps create tension in Little Demon, where the plot revolves around a girl who is the daughter of a human mother and Satan.*

Little Demon images courtesy of FX.



## THE STAKES

Ultimately, whether for kids or adults, horror is “always talking about something else,” Adam Deats says. “It’s never just about horror.” Moreno King agrees: “Horror has always been a kind of allegory for other things going on. Good horror is rooted in the human experience.”

“The best horror movies are morality tales, going back to Grimm’s fairy tales where children are eaten by wolves and baked in ovens,” Roth says. “There’s a reason those stories have lasted hundreds of years. Children use the stories as a mechanism for discussing their fears.”

Adults do, too. While the horror anchor in *Little Demon* is a daughter who happens to be the Antichrist, it’s also about a broken family as the father tries to connect with her, and the parents fight in their efforts to win her over—the kind of story you might find in any “regular” drama-driven show. But with those kinds of shows, “it’s pretty forgiving if the animation isn’t pushed or the sound design isn’t perfect,” says Moreno King. “For horror, in order for it to sell, all of that stuff has to work. Whoever’s doing it, they have to have a strong vision. [They] have to be able to create that world and stick to the rules of that world.”

Debuting in 2022, *Little Demon* was yet another animated horror show that broke ground “by even just existing,” says Moreno King. Now, less than a year later, horror projects are flourishing, from an animated version of *Stranger Things* in the works to *Castlevania: Nocturne* in production. This is spurred in part by a new generation of creatives, audiences, and people with the power to greenlight shows that grew up on sophisticated animation and terrifying anime.

It’s also the result of something more intrinsic. “There’s always been a hunger for it,” says Artwick. “It’s the same idea as why [people] are attracted to roller coasters. ... You get that big rush of adrenaline and then you’re safe. I think it’s hard-wired into us. Horror is a really exciting space ... where you can be on the edge of your seat and feel that danger and feel your heart rate go up, but at the end, you get to sit back and relax and be in your safe space.” ☺





# TV TAKEOVER

**TAG MEMBERS HIT A HIGH NOTE WITH ALL FIVE PRIMETIME EMMY NOMINEES FOR OUTSTANDING ANIMATED PROGRAM FROM TAG SIGNATORY STUDIOS.**

TAG members are no strangers to the Emmys, and with all of this year's Outstanding Animated Program nominees done under Guild contracts, they show their collective strength. As *Bob's Burgers'* Supervising Director Simon Chong points out, because this award is for a program rather than a person, "it's truly the whole crew's nomination from top to bottom."

This year's nominees display the breadth of TV animation, from twists on old favorites (Bart Simpson in anime) to a new contender—*Entergalactic*. It's an animated Black rom-com, and because it's driven by the album of the same name by Kid Cudi, "it's also a new way to release music," says Director and Executive Producer Fletcher Moules. Moules' goal was to make the show look like a moving painting, and the creative direction included not only animation artists but also fashion designers, graphic designers, street artists, and comic book artists.

Despite a legacy of excellence, the established shows faced challenges as they pushed fresh visions. In *Rick and Morty's* "Night Family," the family uses a device called a



“Act 2 is *The Simpsons* in full-fledged authentic anime!!! People couldn’t get enough of seeing what we did with the “Death Tome” story. *Death Note* is such a favorite in the anime world, and after we created the storyboards, we knew it was going to be a huge hit. The camera work, the shots, the characters, the COMEDY ... everything was perfection! Some fans have called it one of the best episodes of all time. I’m a fan, too—and I tend to agree.”



**ROB OLIVER**

DIRECTOR

*The Simpsons*

“Treehouse of Horror XXXIII”

20th Television Animation



“Firstly, and most universally, this a love story and we can all relate to that. It’s emotionally vulnerable, in the music, the artwork, the animation style, and the writing. It aims to speak to a specific culture, who thankfully, seem to love the show! With this nomination I hope we can broaden that audience, because in the end, love will find us ALL.”



**FLETCHER MOULES**

DIRECTOR/  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

*Entergalactic*

Netflix

Entergalactic courtesy of Netflix







“This episode deals with strong themes of turning up for and supporting family in the most meaningful of ways. Be it running through the dark cold of night for your child or really turning up for your siblings, viewers resonated with the strong family bond the Belchers have and what the family means to each other. It’s a huge, warm hug of an episode that leaves you feeling hopeful and full of emotion.”



**SIMON CHONG**  
**SUPERVISING DIRECTOR**  
*Bob’s Burgers*  
 “The Plight Before Christmas”  
 20th Television Animation

*Bob’s Burgers* courtesy of 20th Television Animation

“This episode was not only the reunion between Spear and Fang, but also a love triangle between two dinosaurs and a human. From the birth of the idea, we knew it had the potential to be something special.”



**GENNDY TARTAKOVSKY**  
**DIRECTOR/EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**  
*Gennady Tartakovsky’s Primal*  
 “Shadow of Fate”  
 Cartoon Network Studios

*Gennady Tartakovsky’s Primal* courtesy of Cartoon Network Studios







“I think everyone in the world has had an argument at some point about the proper way to do the dishes—possibly even with themselves. I also think that everyone struggles to balance their nighttime and daytime routine. The simple sci-fi element at the episode’s core to address these very relatable issues makes it the perfect *Rick and Morty* ‘Twilight Zone’ episode.”



## JACOB HAIR

SUPERVISING DIRECTOR

*Rick and Morty*

“Night Family”

Rick and Morty LLC and  
Williams Street Productions

Rick and Morty courtesy of Rick and Morty LLC and Williams Street Productions

Somnambulator to make their bodies do chores while asleep. Supervising Director Jacob Hair had done live-action horror before, but he’d never had to time a jump scare for animation. He agonized over one for the cold open and didn’t quite get it right on his first pass, but he says, “having the safety net of our insanely talented team to review it and workshop it with me helped get it to where it needed to be.”

For *The Simpsons* “Treehouse of Horror XXXIII,” which was divided into three parts, Act 3 is set at the Simpsons World amusement park where android replicas of the family reenact scenes from the past. This required the creatives to go back in time to recreate a classic monorail moment from season four. “We traced the old footage verbatim, nudged a couple things here or there, and drew out to the edges of the newer, wider format,” says Director Rob Oliver. Then they added various filters to make it look like the original.

Parents trying to attend all three kids’ holiday performances formed the plot for *Bob’s Burgers*’ “The Plight Before Christmas,” and because the show usually relies on quick wit and snappy editing, things got complicated in a purely musical section that needed to be emotional without feeling rushed. “Finding the right music was key to tying the whole scene together,” says Chong. Once they landed on the closing score from Philip Glass’ *Mishima* soundtrack, “the picture fell into place, and our most difficult part of the show became the most beautiful.” In the reverse, Moules says “I think the biggest creative challenge [of *Entergalactic*] was being true to the music and creating a show that was just as emotionally engaging.”

To connect with viewers on a deeper level, emotional engagement begins during production before a show even hits the screen. Of the buried leadup to Tina showing up for her little sister in *Bob’s Burgers*, Chong says, “The reveal of that moment made me cry from script through to final.” And of *Primal*’s “Shadow of Fate,” where main characters Spear and Fang are separated in a strange land, Director and Executive Producer Genndy Tartakovsky says, “drawing and watching the story develop and reveal itself visually and emotionally—[that was] one of the most challenging and rewarding things we did.” 🥰

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*The 75th Emmy Awards have been postponed due to the WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes. At press time a new ceremony date had not been announced. The dates for final-round voting remain the same, from August 17th to 28th (10 PM).*





# nick names

## AS NICKELODEON ANIMATION STUDIO CELEBRATES ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY, TAG MEMBERS REFLECT ON WORKING ON BELOVED "NICK" SHOWS.

Twenty-five years ago, Nickelodeon Animation Studio opened in Burbank. Within a year it released *SpongeBob SquarePants*, now one of the longest-running animation series in the U.S. So what turned a show about a kid with a sponge for a head into a fan favorite?

Marc Ceccarelli, who started as a Writer and Storyboard Director and is now an Executive Producer on *SpongeBob SquarePants* as well as its spinoffs, *Kamp Koral: SpongeBob's Under Years* and *The Patrick Star Show*, says, "There weren't many cartoons that were made for children and their parents to enjoy together until ... Nickelodeon started its original animation block. I think [it's] a great market they helped engineer that's valuable to bring families together."

Michael Rubiner, who has worked on and off for Nickelodeon since its previous incarnation in the early 1990s, credits this kind of broader appeal to the success of *The Loud House*, where his work as Story Editor and Head Writer led to his current role of Executive Producer. This show about a big family with 11 kids has been going strong since 2016. He says, "It's basically a family sitcom, which is both timeless and universally relatable."

But "Nick" has connected with viewers in other ways, as well. With 14 years at the studio over the last two decades, Bryan Konietzko is the Co-Creator and Art Director of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The Legend of Korra*. He says *Avatar* hit its mark because it's "a hero's journey being told in a continuous storyline with relatable characters who mature along the way." He also credits deep world-building, another element that contributes to *SpongeBob SquarePants*' success.

Konietzko looks back fondly on his early years at Nickelodeon, especially the storyboard review meetings. "It was fun in the old days to see the physical storyboards pinned up around an entire conference room to really get the feel for an episode," he says. "We had a lot of laughs with the crews doing ridiculous drawings with Sharpies on Post-it notes—one of my favorite mediums."

For Ceccarelli satisfaction comes from longevity. "I've been working with the same core group of writers for a while now, and it's great to bounce weird, crazy ideas around and watch them form into an episode," he says.

Rubiner feels the same about being on a show over time. "We've been doing this for seven seasons, so things run pretty smoothly, making it a fun and easy-going environment to work in," he says. "As one of our crew members once said, 'There are no cartoon emergencies.'"

Asked about Nickelodeon's influence on the animation industry, Konietzko says, "I think it's largely been an artist-friendly studio that puts the focus on making good shows from specific perspectives rather than just trying to sell toys or follow trends." This can be seen in many of Nickelodeon's creator-driven programs, from *My Life as a Teenage Robot* (Rob Renzetti) to *El Tigre: The Adventures of Manny Rivera* (Sandra Equihua and Jorge R. Gutiérrez). Konietzko says he feels fortunate to have been able to work with his partner Michael DiMartino to "create a show out of things we loved and were personally passionate about."

On the subject of Nick's legacy, Rubiner adds, "It's always been about putting kids first, trying to create shows that really speak to them, make them laugh, and promote a positive message. Or in the shorthand version we sometimes use at Nick: smart-heart-fart."

A quarter century of Nickelodeon Animation Studio has produced a legacy of fan favorites including (FROM TOP) *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *The Legend of Korra*, and *The Loud House*.





Yvette Nicole Brown, Actor,  
NextGen Board Member, and  
Toni Vaz, Actor, NAACP Image  
Awards Creator, MPTF Resident



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