

SPRING 2021

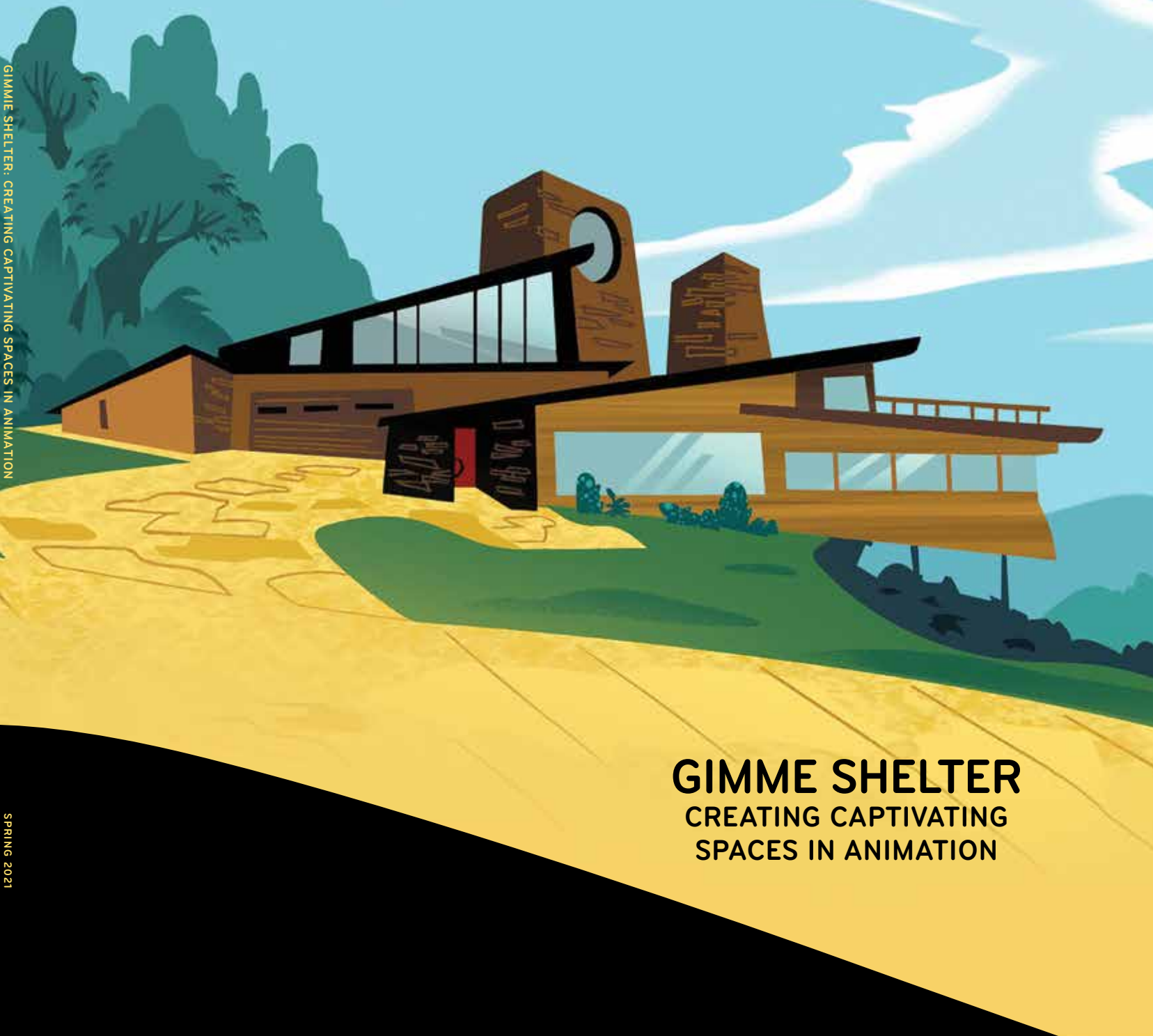
ISSUE NO. 13

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# KEYFRAME

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THE ANIMATION GUILD QUARTERLY



**GIMME SHELTER**  
CREATING CAPTIVATING  
SPACES IN ANIMATION

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

# BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

GLEN KEANE, GENNIE RIM, p.g.a., PEILIN CHOU, p.g.a.

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*EMPIRE*



FROM OSCAR®-WINNING FILMMAKER AND ANIMATOR **GLEN KEANE**



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After a year of sheltering at home, we're all eager to spend time elsewhere. Why not use your imagination to escape into an animation home? From *Kim Possible's* midcentury ambience to *Kung Fu Panda's* regal mood, these abodes show that some of animation's finest are also talented architects and interior designers too.

- 30 **RAYA OF LIGHT**  
As production on *Raya and the Last Dragon* evolved, so did the movie's themes of trust and distrust. Cinematic techniques to develop these themes included a focus on lighting and the creation of an atmospheric library that gave lighting artists an adaptable tool for enhancing the tone of each scene.

- 38 **COSMIC CARTOONING**  
The first season of Craig McCracken's latest cartoon, *Kid Cosmic*, takes place over 10 serialized episodes. But an ongoing storyline isn't all that's realistic about this show. The sketchy linework of the true-to-life settings is intended to remind us that Kid and his gang of local superheroes are drawn by real human beings.



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# AWARDS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19



**A LOT OF PEOPLE SAY THAT LOS ANGELES DOESN'T HAVE SEASONS, AND WHILE IT'S TRUE THAT OUR TEMPERATURES RARELY GO BELOW FREEZING OR ABOVE 100°F, WE HAVE OUR OWN DEFINITION OF SEASONS. I COUNT OUR RAINY SEASON AND FIRE SEASON AS SPECIFIC TIMES OF THE YEAR THAT ARE FAIRLY PREDICTABLE. PILOT SEASON IS ANOTHER, BUT THAT IS STARTING TO CHANGE WITH THE NEW STREAMING PLATFORMS THAT DON'T ADHERE TO THE TRADITIONAL BROADCAST TIMELINES.**

The season that I'm missing, all due to this pandemic, is awards season. Although the hosts of such award shows are doing a great job transitioning to the virtual space, I am sorely missing the camaraderie of attending in person, made more painful by the isolation necessary for everyone's safety.

As artists, we usually keep our noses to our Cintiqs with long hours of focusing on our piece of the larger project—working hard to hit our deadlines with the artistry and professionalism expected of us. Getting recognized for our work is a way for us to leave our offices and celebrate with our peers. Even if you aren't getting recognized, it's an opportunity to acknowledge the labor, talent, and creativity of your fellow colleagues.

For the last decade or more, The Animation Guild has been one of the sponsors of ASIFA-Hollywood's Annie Awards, and many of us have attended the evening's festivities year after year. Every time a union production or a TAG member wins an award, our block of seats celebrates with loud claps and, yes, an occasional whistle or holler. You can feel the excitement and energy in the air, something that just can't be translated online.

I know that in the grand scheme of things award shows may seem frivolous compared with the losses that COVID has carried into our communities, but sometimes that's what you need to get through the dark times—a spotlight at the end of the tunnel, and a little statuette that keeps us hopeful for the future.

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

## ON THE COVER

House design by Justin Thompson with color direction by Alan Bodner and Key Art by Nadia Vurbenova-Mouri. Image courtesy of Disney Television Animation.



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animation  
guild

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writers and technicians since 1952.

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# SPINNING PLATES



**WHEN I CREATED KEYFRAME MAGAZINE THREE YEARS AGO, MY ENTIRE FOCUS WAS ON THE PUBLICATION. A LOT HAS CHANGED SINCE THEN.**

After a year at the Guild, I was asked (and accepted) to lead a robust communications initiative, handle media relations, oversee the website and social media, support events, liaise with community organizations, and much more. I juggled all these various responsibilities as best as possible, but often I felt like I was spinning plates terrified of dropping one. It was clear I needed more help.

So with great pleasure I want to introduce you to our new Managing Editor Kim Fay. You may recognize her byline from previous issues of *Keyframe*—she's been a contributing writer for several years. Her experience as both a writer (she's published two books with a new one coming out soon!) and editor is a tremendous asset to our publication. She's already imbuing its pages with fun and fresh ideas, such as the article *Gimme Shelter* (p. 22) that allows readers to imagine relocating to different cartoon homes.

This issue is packed with many great stories highlighting more than 70 Animation Guild members, and *Keyframe* is the only place where you will see so many of our union kin celebrated. For example, you'll learn about why our TAG committees are so important (p. 18), get insight into Elizabeth Ito's career journey (p. 14), and immerse yourself in the breathtaking lighting of *Raya and the Dragon* (p. 30).

On a separate note, I wanted to share that *Keyframe* won three ILCA awards this year: Best Cover for the "*How to Train Your Dragon: Hidden World*" cover; Best Feature Article for a piece about writer Taneka Stotts' career journey; and General Excellence for our website, [KeyframeMagazine.org](http://KeyframeMagazine.org). We are proud of these accolades, but we are even more thrilled that our talented Animation Guild members are getting recognized.

Let's look forward to a wonderful year—the last one was a doozy!

*Alexandra*

Alexandra Drosu  
editor@tag839.org

## CONTRIBUTORS



**SONAIYA KELLEY** ("The Power of Persistence") 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.



Freelance writer and author **KAREN BRINER** ("Against the Odds") grew up in Cape Town, South Africa where her garden was home to

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**WHITNEY FRIEDLANDER** ("Gimme Shelter") is an entertainment journalist who lives in Los Angeles with her husband, son 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.

An Apple Original Film

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2020

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WINNER  
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DUBLIN FILM CRITICS CIRCLE  
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WINNER  
GREATER BAY FILM CRITICS ASSOCIATION  
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2020

WINNER  
SAN DIEGO FILM CRITICS SOCIETY  
BEST ANIMATED FILM  
2020



**GOLDEN GLOBE® NOMINEE**  
**BEST ANIMATED FEATURE**

fyc | 



ARTIST: Grace “Grey” Chen  
 TITLE: *Sunset on Flower Street*  
 MEDIUM: Digital  
 SIZE: 12” x 5.5”



# PAINTING WITH LIGHT



Creating original art while juggling a full-time job and schoolwork is challenging, so it's no surprise that Color Designer Grace “Grey” Chen

fell into a temporary creative burnout when she first started in the animation industry. She put what remaining energy she had into peaceful experiences outside of work and art. But slowly, she says, “I found myself wanting to illustrate those little moments in my life that I found joy in—quiet moments with my cat, watching the sun set against

the L.A. mountains, sitting in coffee shops. I take a lot of pictures of things that inspire me, and I try to depict the energy that I felt in that moment.”

Capturing these vignettes of her everyday life led her to create *Sunset on Flower Street*, a familiar view to some animation professionals who have spent time at the DreamWorks’ campus. “As I was heading back to my car after work, I was really captivated by the way the light was hitting everything; there was a pinkish-purple hue [that] made everything feel dreamy and magical—a strange way to describe a parking lot, I know! But that’s what I really enjoy

about painting, being able to take a familiar sight and transform it to make the viewer feel something different.”

Chen is often drawn to capturing scenes during the golden hour because, she says, “you forget about the troubles in your life for a brief moment.” In the case of *Sunset on Flower Street*, she also played around with bokeh and chromatic aberration in the foreground of the image to create nostalgic pops of color. She adds, “I really discovered my love of color and lighting and how its use can affect the mood and storytelling of a piece.”

— Alexandra Drosu



“A Rich Standout”  
Filmmaker Magazine

“Poetry in Motion”  
AnimationXpress

For Your Consideration | Best Animated Short

# Kapaemahu

Directed by **Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson**  
Animation - **Daniel Sousa** Chant - **Kaumakaiwa Kanakaole**

A Hawaiian story of healing and aloha  
that has been hidden from history  
- until now



Kapaemahu.com

# WHITTLE WHILE YOU WORK

**THIS STORY ARTIST HAS DEVELOPED HIS OWN UNIQUE STYLE THAT'S EXPRESSED IN HIS WOODCARVING.**

When he's not working at Walt Disney Animation Studios on films such as *Zootopia* or the upcoming *Encanto*, or helping to take care of his four children, Jeremy Spears finds time to steal away into his Whittle Workshop where he creates objects out of wood. The Annie Award-winning story artist then has high-quality resin replicas made of his carvings, packaging and selling them to people around the world.

"I've always loved the idea of carving in wood," Spears says, "and I'd done bits of it here and there." Then, ten years ago, he was up in Big Bear. "I was outside in the snow, bundled up and just whittling away on this little piece of basswood, and I was at peace and harmony with world. I created this bear that was finished," and unlike work he'd done before with clay, "it wasn't going to break or fall apart."

Spears' side interest escalated beyond a hobby when he received his first commission. Early in his efforts with woodworking, he had displayed some of his smaller carvings in a micro gallery that he and two colleagues had created in a hallway cubby space. This led to him connecting with Brandon Kleyla at Walt Disney Imagineering, who hired him to

THIS PAGE: Whittle Bear "Frontier Edition"  
(FOLLOWING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) Jeremy Spears sketching designs; Drinki Tiki Coasters; Whittle Hippos



Photo by The Matthew Smith



create the signature wall mask for Trader Sam's Enchanted Tiki Bar at Disneyland, and a side business was born.

Because of time constraints, Spears finds he has to work quickly in spurts, taking advantage of nap times when his kids are asleep. One of his favorite creations, a bear that he named after his son Emmet, took over three years to complete. And when his newborn daughter turned out to be a sound sleeper, he found time to do some tiki carvings. He created his Drinki Tiki coasters with uniquely carved faces. Starting small, he figured he could sell a run of 25 sets, and then kept building from there as demand increased. His business model evolved over time, and he determined that having flash sales work best for him.

"The reason I do each one of these projects," Spears says, "is because there's something about it that scratches an itch that I've had for a while." Woodcarving is his labor of love, and he might spend six months to a year just thinking about a specific creation, doing plenty of drawings first. Sometimes he'll glue pieces of wood together and place the rough assembly of a character up on a shelf so that he'll catch a glimpse of it

whenever he walks by. Once he's ready to finish it, he does the actual carving over a month or two, working on it a couple of nights a week and some weekends, always striving to have a surprising twist in the pose to imbue it with extra character.

Because it doesn't involve looking at a screen, woodcarving offers a form of escape for Spears. He likes the feeling of drawing on something other than a computer, although a career spent in animation has inevitably influenced his style. Among the artists he admires are classic Disney animators such as Bill Peet, Mary Blair and Marc Davis. Of the latter's technique, he says, "There's a quality to the pen and ink work and the watercolor that you kind of miss when [you] get into the newer digital artwork."

After a lot of trial and error, Spears feels that he's developed a woodcarving language of his own that he can apply to any character and design. As well, he's discovered that his process is surprisingly similar to what he does every day with storyboarding. "As with story," he explains, "we start out with the block of wood and cut little pieces away, trying things out until we start to see the form emerge." He admits that

he almost always gets to a point with his woodcarving where something about it is not quite right and he has to take a big risk, like boldly cutting something off and gluing it back on. Doing that shakes things up and helps get him unstuck. It helps to keep him inspired on all levels.

Woodworking has also enhanced Spears' work in animation. If he's struggling to figure out a storyboard scene, he'll come home and start whittling. Shifting focus enables him to return to work with a fresh perspective.

Spears delights in every stage of his side business, from creating the final product to marketing and fun packaging ideas. He pays attention to every detail, often adding accessories for his carvings. These might include a screen-print bandana for Emmet the bear or a small bird that can be affixed to the back of Francis the hippo—not only is every creation named, it's given its own story. With this love of whimsy and passion for craft, it's no wonder that Spears calls his woodshop his "happy place."

— Karen Briner

**More of Spears' Whittle Woodshop creations can be found at [WhittleWoodshop.com](http://WhittleWoodshop.com).**

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HEARTBREAKING AND  
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**“★★★★  
BEAUTIFUL.”**

READY STEADY CUT

**“EASILY ONE OF THE  
MOST POWERFUL SHORT  
FILMS OF THE YEAR.”**

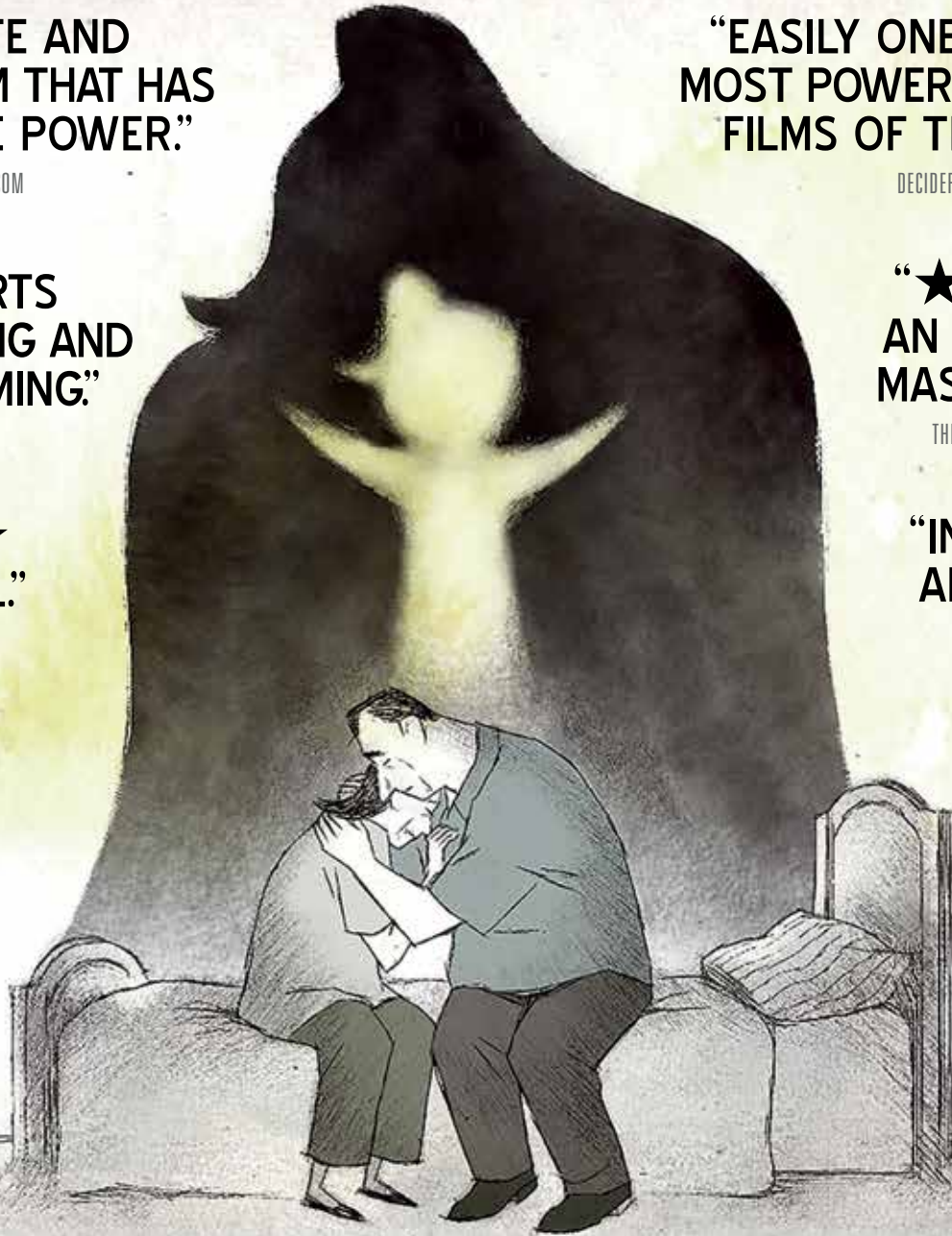
DECIDER

**“★★★★  
AN ANIMATED  
MASTERPIECE.”**

THE INDEPENDENT CRITIC

**“INSTANTLY  
AFFECTING.”**

MASHABLE



**If anything happens I love you**

# THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE

**STORYBOARD ARTIST, WRITER, AND DIRECTOR ELIZABETH ITO SHARES HOW HER PERSONAL JOURNEY HAS SHAPED HER CAREER AND THE TYPE OF SHOWS SHE WANTS TO CREATE.**

Like many people who end up in the animation industry, Elizabeth Ito used drawing as an outlet for her feelings growing up. “When I was really little, I drew a lot of mice in little clothes living in little houses,” she says with a laugh.

Ito grew up in L.A.’s Crenshaw District to third-generation Japanese American parents. Between her junior and senior years in high school, she attended the California State Summer School for the Arts. “I loved art,” she recalls, “but I didn’t know what I wanted to do with it. Going [to this program] made me realize, [animation] is an art form that combines all of the things that I have a really deep interest in like music and film and drawing.”

She decided to study animation at California Institute of the Arts “because I knew it was the best place to learn the technique of it.” After graduating in 2004, she was hired as a trainee at DreamWorks Animation. She wasn’t sure yet what job she wanted to do in the industry. “I just knew I wanted to do something where I could still draw.”

As a woman of color, Ito had to overcome certain challenges to be taken seriously. After pitching ideas, she would sometimes receive responses that made her realize those reading the ideas were seeing them

through a lens that was uniquely white. “It’s a lot of coming up against other people’s insecurities,” she reflects. “Like you might pitch an idea and occasionally it feels like that’s threatening to some people for some reason.” Instead of being discouraged, Ito took a patient if not persistent approach, taking the time to educate and explain how her life experience was different. “It’s just more difficult in that regard, sort of having to convince people, ‘No, this is a valid point of view. It’s literally how we feel.’”

These obstacles didn’t stop Ito’s steady rise, though. Over 15 years in the industry, she has worked as a storyboard artist on feature films like *Hotel Transylvania*, *Astro Boy* and *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge Out of Water*, as well as Cartoon Network’s hit TV series *Adventure Time*, first as a storyboard artist and later as a supervising director. In 2017 she took home an Emmy for directing the “Islands Part 4: Imaginary Resources” episode of the show.

“The Emmy was wild because that episode had been such a collaboration that I wasn’t even sure if I was named [as director],” she says. “But it was really exciting. It’s sweet to have an Emmy in my house, and it’s a weird thing. I like to put it in the background of my Zoom calls and see how long it takes the person on the call to see it or if they notice it at all.”



Image courtesy of Netflix.



**TOP:** Image from *City of Ghosts*.  
**ABOVE:** Elizabeth as a toddler at daycare.  
**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Elizabeth in front of a mural she painted on the original Q-Pop location.

While working on *Adventure Time*, Ito created a short film called *Welcome to My Life*, based on a student film she'd made her senior year at CalArts. It generated buzz, and not long after she left Cartoon Network she was hired by Netflix to develop her own show.

Originally, she hoped the appointment would involve developing *Welcome to My Life* into a series. Instead, she created a different show, "but with the same kind of feeling and storytelling." A hybrid documentary/animation series about a group of kids who learn about their city's past through its diverse ghost population, *City of Ghosts* is inspired by Ito's experience growing up and "hearing people describe L.A. in this way that wasn't recognizing the culture here, and wanting to be like, 'No, it's awesome! You just have to dig in a little bit.'"

*City of Ghosts* also touches on the city's rapid changes. "I wanted to document what's behind [gentrification] and what existed in these places [that has] people riled up about them changing into these slightly homogenized neighborhoods." She also hoped to show "how different neighborhoods, specifically Boyle Heights, have dealt with gentrification, and what it's like when a community pushes back."

As a mother of two young children, Ito created the show with a specific audience in mind. "I wanted something for my kids because they are kind of sensitive when it comes to movies and TV, especially my son," she explains. "I felt like there wasn't really a ton of gentle, sensitive storytelling for somebody like him. That's how I was too as a kid. I was easily scared over random things."

In this way, Ito's career has brought her full circle, but now, instead of drawing mice in little houses as a way to express her own feelings, she draws the environment she grew up in, helping children like the one she used to be feel more comfortable in the world around them.

— Sonaiya Kelley





# BEAR NECESSITY

CAREER ANIMATOR BOB SCOTT PURSUES CREATIVE FREEDOM WITH HIS SYNDICATED ONLINE COMIC STRIP

Whether it's a rooster ghost gag that ends in "poultrygeist" or a batter-butter joke with an "irritable vowel syndrome" punch line, Bob Scott loves a good pun. But that isn't all that drives him as the creator of the web comic strip *Bear with Me*.

As a successful animator for 35 years on feature films such as *The Road to El Dorado*, *The Prince of Egypt*, and more recently as a storyboard artist on *Ralph Breaks the Internet*, Scott enjoys the collaborative aspect of his job. But a craving for artistic freedom moved him to pursue a second lifelong passion a decade ago.

"I fell in love with animation as soon as I could be propped up in front of the TV," he explains, "and comic strips hooked me once I learned to read."

Originally titled *Molly and the Bear*, *Bear with Me* is about 800-pound Bear who flees the woods for the suburbs. There, he meets tween Molly, and she takes him home. Naturally, having a bear for a pet causes complications, and it doesn't help that Bear is the Felix Unger of wildlife—he's even allergic to his own fur.

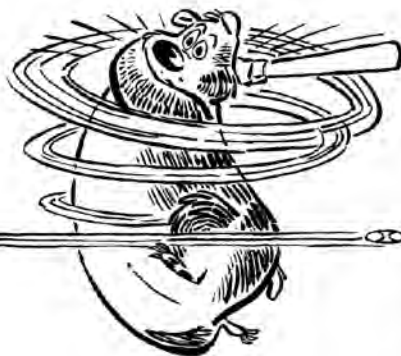
"He doesn't mean to be frustrating," Scott says. "It's just that he misunderstands almost everything ... and he's a scaredy bear on top of that. As a kid I was worried and afraid of a lot. It's easy for me to tap into those fears and exaggerate them with Bear. People can relate to fear. We all have it."

Scott began his education in the world of comic strips upon graduation from the California Institute of the Arts. Back in the 1980s, he and his friend Brett Koth, creator of *Diamond Lil*, were hired to pencil the *U.S. Acres* comic strip by Jim Davis of *Garfield* fame.

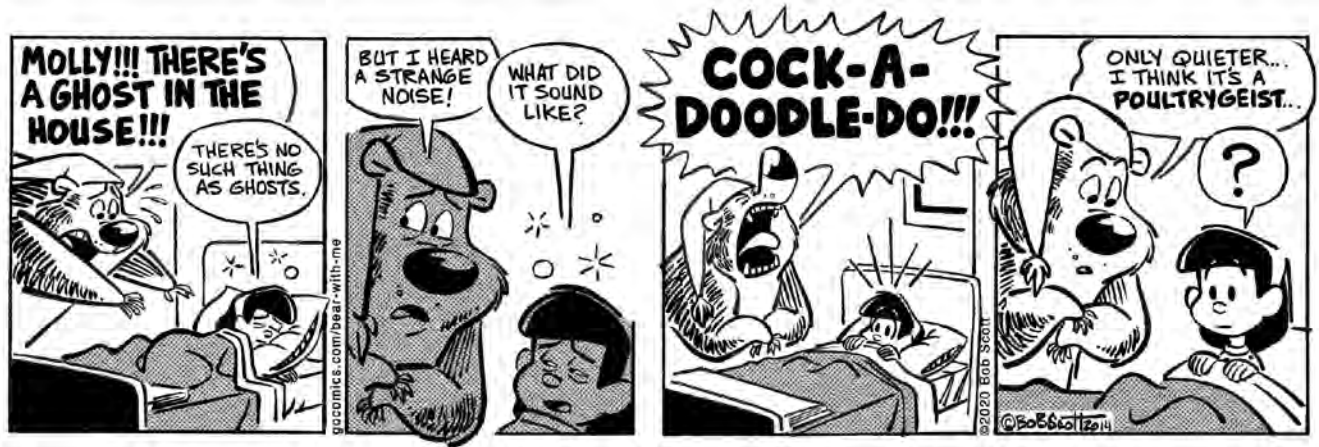
"I learned an amazing amount from both of them," Scott says. "I had been

submitting strips to syndicates pretty regularly, but working for Jim on a strip that had real deadlines was eye-opening. Intellectually I had known that 365 strips needed to be drawn a year, but when handed that responsibility—Wow! It gets real very quickly."

Scott found his groove at Davis's studio. He also learned that he's devoted to the traditional structure. "I find a lot of freedom creatively when the limitations are so defined. For example, trying to simplify a joke into three or four panels is always a fun exercise for me. It's like a puzzle." He's also a fan of classic methods. "I draw







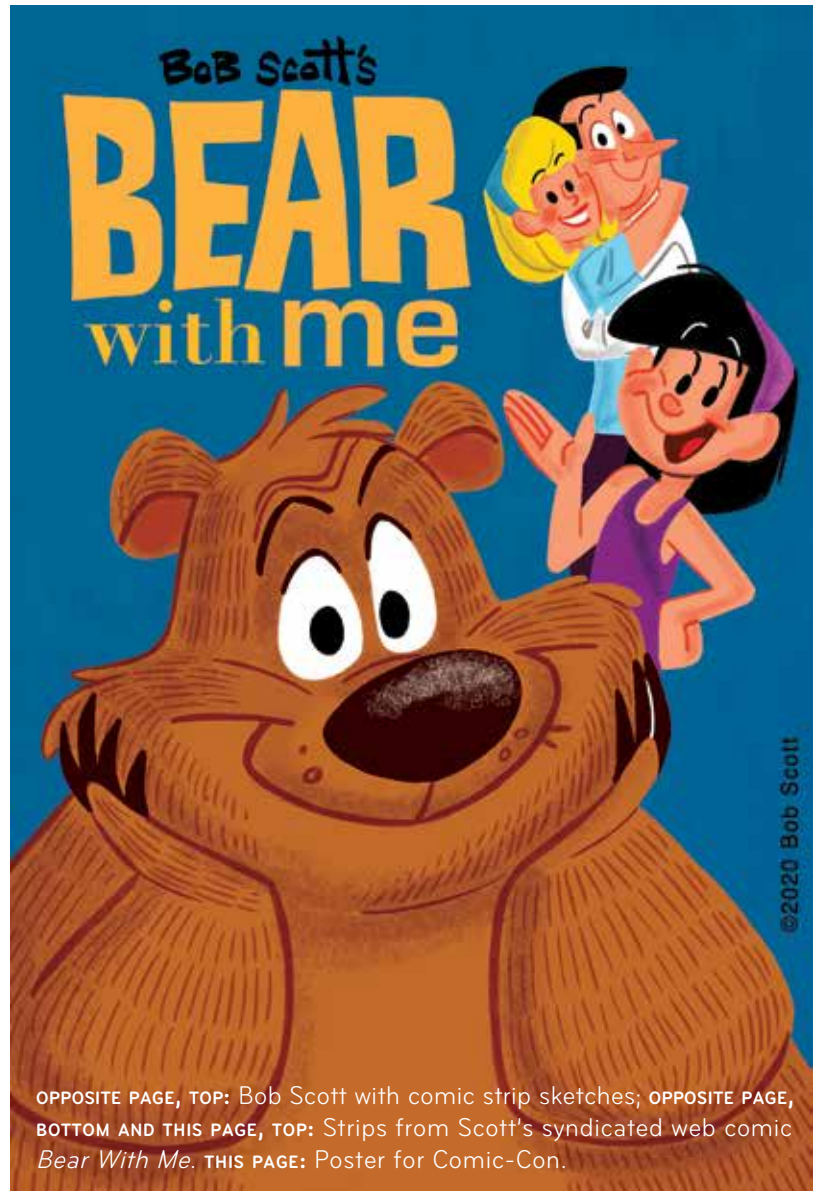
Bear with Me the old-fashioned way, penciled on Bristol board and inked with a Winsor & Newton brush. Over the years my day job has become more and more computer-based, so I really love putting pencil to paper for my strip.”

While Scott derives different satisfactions from each of his careers, they aren't completely separate for him. “I would say my comic strip art and animation career have overlapped whenever I work in story. Both require writing, staging, and clarity to tell a joke.”

As for the jokes, they are at the heart of keeping *Bear with Me* fresh, and he's always on the lookout for new material. “When something strikes me as funny, or I draw a funny sketch or I hear a funny story, I write all that down. That is a good habit to get into.” But keeping things fresh also requires another tactic: growing with his characters. “Over the years ... as I know them better, I know how they will react to situations. Put Molly and Bear in a kitchen with a bag of flour, and the strip writes itself because the characters are so real to me. They don't get stale; they expand.”

He adds that creating the strip is something he needs to do. “An itch that needs to be scratched. It's also like spending time with old friends, so there is a pleasant quality to it. Plus, I have the constant challenge to improve, to get better, to make the perfect strip.”

**A curated collection of Scott's comic strips, *Bear with Me (It's Been a Rough Day)*, will be published by Hermes Press and feature an introduction by Jim Davis. It is available at [hermes-press.myshopify.com/products/bear-with-me-pre-order](http://hermes-press.myshopify.com/products/bear-with-me-pre-order).**



OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Bob Scott with comic strip sketches; OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM AND THIS PAGE, TOP: Strips from Scott's syndicated web comic *Bear With Me*. THIS PAGE: Poster for Comic-Con.

# COMMON GROUND

**TAG'S "BETTER TOGETHER" ETHOS IS ENRICHED BY ITS MANY VOLUNTEER-RUN COMMITTEES.**

A union's strength is in its members, and one of the great strengths of The Animation Guild is its member-run committees. Reinvigorated in 2017, this all-volunteer system now boasts more than 18 groups and committees. Each focuses on particular needs within the union's larger oversight of a variety of complex jobs.

On a fundamental level, the benefit of such specialized committees is that "members are the ones who are on the ground, working within the studios," says Teri Hendrich Cusumano, Co-Chair of the Color Designers Committee. "Members are positioned to be their own best advocates."

But the committees also offer so much more. They are safe spaces for difficult discussions, as Writers Committee Co-Chair Patrick Rieger notes, "It's nice to know that if I have an issue ... I'll be explaining it to a group of working writers with an in-depth knowledge of my craft." And the committees provide a variety of personal and career support. The Family and Membership (FAM) Committee has a caregiver support group, for example, and there are programs like the Storyboard

Committee's Supervising School, which the committee's Co-Chair Jake Hollander says is designed "to bridge the gap between supervisor and board artists and revisionists."

As for the volunteer aspect, Co-Chair of the Queer TAG Committee, Andy Garner-Flexner says, "It can be difficult to volunteer your time and energy into free labor, but it's vital that members are running these committees to give appropriate voice to our cause and mission statement."

While it can be daunting to consider heading up a committee, it's important to remember that the committee chairs aren't necessarily experienced leaders. "For a long time, I held myself back from volunteering with 839 because I thought someone more qualified should/would do it," says Mairghread Scott, Chair of the Writers Committee. "[But] I kept hearing from writers that they didn't know how to make their concerns known and wanted more of a voice in the Guild. [What I discovered is that] I didn't have to be the perfect writer or leader. Together, we're the perfect leader. That's what unions are all about."

Committees come about in a variety of ways, and in the case of the Queer TAG Committee, more than one person initiated it when they saw a need to be met. Nora Meek, who now Co-Chairs the Young Workers Committee, says, "A lot of it was seeing firsthand as a queer animator that the animation industry *has* a queer community, but ... it was difficult for us to connect." Meek expressed her desire to head up a pride committee and discovered that two other TAG members, Garner-Flexner and Derek LaMastus, had done the same. "We made contact and gathered anyone and everyone who might be interested in heading up such a group, met for lunch, and Queer TAG was born!"

For the FAM Committee, Co-Chair Kristin Donner says, "We first became aware of this need through our involvement with the Negotiations Committee ... As we crafted a proposal for paid leave, we asked Guild members to share their experiences with family leave, sick days, and bereavement. We discovered that some working parents and caregivers felt excluded, unprotected, or even discriminated against."



Pre-pandemic Animators Committee (LEFT) and FAM Committee (RIGHT).

Existing committees also inspire the development of new committees. Regarding the origins of the People of Color Committee (POCC), Co-Chair Roger Oda explains, “Issues involving racial minorities is a part of my life that I am passionate about but have always kept apart from the Guild. Honestly, it was only in the last few years and after seeing activity from our amazing Queer TAG, FAM, and Color Designers committees that I considered it. It would at first seem that equal rights and representation is a natural partner to organized labor, but that is not always the history of our industry. I wanted to be a part of making future generations feel like they have a place here.”

Each committee works hard on its own goals, such as making sure writers get paid for pitching on pre-existing IP (Writers Committee) and building representation and addressing bathroom situations at studios (Queer TAG). They also get results. Members of the FAM Committee drafted successful resolutions for the last two IATSE District 2 Conventions. And through its 2018 #ColorIsDesign campaign, the Color Designers Committee negotiated the same above-scale rate for color designers as their background paint colleagues on Season 5 of *Rick and Morty*.

With the pandemic, committees have become even more valuable, adapting their methods of support and resources, from the FAM Committee’s virtual parent hangouts to Queer TAG’s Discord group. While each committee might seem as though it’s an entity unto itself, together they meet a greater collective need. As Oda says, “There are complicated discussions to be had if we want to really work through differences and have true solidarity. There are different forces in business and politics, but much of the work is amongst ourselves.”

*All TAG members are encouraged to join committees or start new ones. Learn more about TAG committees and how to start a committee at [animationguild.org/committees](http://animationguild.org/committees).*

# COMMITTEES AT A GLANCE

## CRAFT COMMITTEES

**Animators Committee:** Fosters community, collects data, defines job classifications, and educates to promote the growth of in-house animator job.

**CG Committee:** Identifies and addresses issues affecting CG artists, expands skill sets through training, and builds up a network to provide resources and support to CG artists.

**Color Designers Committee:** Brings recognition and visibility to the craft while also highlighting and addressing issues of pay equity.

**Designers Committee:** Informs, educates, and tracks industry standards while connecting the design community and providing a space for sharing workplace issues and experiences.

**Storyboard Committee:** Facilitates a community of events, resources, and channels of communication to best represent the storyboarding craft in negotiations.

**Writers Committee:** Connects and represents writers while offering online networking, job resources, and advocacy for the enforcement of rules for writers’ pay.

## COMMUNITY COMMITTEES

**Experienced Workers Committee:** Provides support, networking opportunities, and the exploration of best practices for experienced workers for seeking and maintaining employment.

**Family and Membership Committee (FAM):** Fosters community, outreach, advocacy, and member activism while also providing resources for member and family wellness.

**Memorial Committee:** Organizes and hosts the annual Afternoon of Remembrance, honoring individuals in the animation industry who passed away the previous year.

## People of Color Committee (POCC):

Supports ethnic minority TAG members and addresses systems of race and class through outreach, activism, and initiatives.

**Queer TAG Committee (QT):** Fosters community, spreads visibility, and addresses LGBTQIA+ issues to promote security.

**Young Workers Committee:** Fosters a positive relationship and stimulates engagement with newer members through social events.

## ADVOCACY COMMITTEES

**Political Action League:** Supports the IATSE PAC fund and educates members regarding political activities and legislation that affect TAG, members, benefits, and compensation.

**Testing Committee:** Addresses the issue of excessive and unpaid skills evaluations commonly known as “testing” with the intention of dismantling this industry norm.

**Workplace Equality Committee:** Supports fair and equal treatment, and works to combat discrimination, harassment, and hostility in the workplace.

## ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITTEES

**Communications Committee:** Facilitates and works to improve communication, within TAG and with the broader public, with the purpose of supporting the goals, objectives, and initiatives of TAG and its members.

**Constitution Committee:** Examines TAG’s Constitution and by-laws to ensure TAG’s governing documents are inclusive and uphold and support TAG’s mission.

**Worker Action Readiness Planning (WARP):** Supports the Negotiations Committee by researching and planning timelines and toolkits for potential action, and by building solidarity and engagement within TAG membership.

# LOOKING BACK ON THE ANNIE AWARDS

NO AWARDS CEREMONY IS WITHOUT ITS STORIES, AND FRANK GLADSTONE—EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ASIFA-HOLLYWOOD, THE ORIGINATOR AND ORGANIZATION BEHIND THE ANNIE AWARDS—HAS PLENTY. THERE HAVE BEEN AT LEAST TWO STATUE DROPS, A BACKSTAGE FIRE STOMPED OUT BY AN AWARD WINNER, AND LOTS OF TEARS. HERE HE SHARES A FEW MEMORABLE ANECDOTES.

## OVERALLS AND UH OH

Gladstone's first recollection is his own, from before he was even an ASIFA member. He'd just arrived in California in the mid-1990s to do work with Warner Bros. "I was underneath the sink fixing something," he says, "and my wife said, 'Don't you have that Annie's thing?' 'Oh yeah,' I said, 'I gotta go.' I had grease on my shirt and I was wearing overalls. I quickly changed my t-shirt.

"[The ceremony] was at the Pasadena Civic, which has something like 3,000

seats, but the Annies themselves back then were very small. Maybe 400 people in the corner of the auditorium. The rest of the place was empty. I was late because I'd forgotten about it. So I get there in my overalls and go in. I didn't have to have a ticket or anything. And I look down and see this group rows and rows in front of me. They're wearing tuxedos and fancy clothes. I think, uh oh, and sit in the back where nobody can see me. When the ceremony was over and everybody was getting up, I just scrambled out of there."



Frank Gladstone

Photo credit: Joel Hindman.

Photo courtesy of ASIFA-Hollywood.



## CELEBRATING THE FORGOTTEN

From this inauspicious beginning, Gladstone went on to join the board, and he has been executive producing the ceremony since he became Executive Director in 2012. He says he's an easy crier, and there's usually a part in every ceremony where he thinks, I hope I don't have to speak now.

One such moment came in 2019 when Frank Braxton received the Winsor McKay award for his career contributions to the art of animation. Having passed away 50 years earlier, "He had been forgotten by most of the [animation] community, but he was, for all intents and purposes, our Jackie Robinson," Gladstone says. Braxton worked on classics like *The Bullwinkle Show* as a director and *Mister Magoo* as an animator, as well as on successful commercial campaigns including Cap'n Crunch. In 1960 he became president of the Screen Cartoonists Guild. "He'd had a color bar to get through, but the community in general welcomed him then, and his family told us how much they appreciated it." Braxton's wife and children accepted his posthumous award, and his son spoke of "the humanity we came to know during his career." That, Gladstone says, "was particularly poignant."

The family of Frank Braxton receiving his posthumous award



Photo credit: Meg Oliphant

## WE'RE ALL HUMAN

Each ceremony inevitably has its elements of surprise, whether it's an award recipient ignoring the timeclock, a presenter announcing the wrong name, or a legendary winner with a potty mouth. "We gave a Winsor McKay to a very famous guy named Walt Peregoy," Gladstone says. "He was too ill to come, so we went out to film him." Peregoy was known for being a curmudgeon and was famous for cussing

people out. Gladstone and his team weren't sure what to expect, and when they turned on the camera, they got a surprisingly generous speech. Teary, Peregoy declared, "Everybody has talent ... and their accomplishments are as great as anybody else's." Then he added, in classic Peregoy fashion, "I have to say that because we're what make up this world. A\*\*holes. Hey, we all have one." Laughing, Frank says, "That was his reputation. We left it in."

*The 48th Annual Annie Awards will be held virtually on Friday, April 16, 2021.*

# WE, THE JURY

**The Annies started in 1972 as a dinner at the Sportsmen's Lodge in Studio City. The organizers, including June Foray, who conceived of the idea, were nervous. Would anyone show up? More than 400 people did, and a tradition was born.**

In the beginning, the Annies gave an Annie Award and then added the Winsor McCay Award for Lifetime Achievement. Now, there are three more juried awards

and 31 awards for production and achievement. Today, the Winsor McKay is the Annies' anchor, and as the 2021 winners show, it carries on a tradition of celebrating nothing short of excellence.

**WILLIE ITO** is an animation industry legend, having started his career at Walt Disney Studios working on the famous spaghetti scene in *Lady and the Tramp*. Following a stint with Chuck Jones at Warner Bros., he arrived at Hanna-Barbera, where he worked on *The Flintstones* and *The*

*Yogi Bear Show*, as well as designing title characters for other popular programs.

**SUE NICHOLS** was considered pivotal in the 1990's revival of Disney Animation, beginning with *Beauty and the Beast*. She contributed to the early development of such hits as the *The Lion King*, *Aladdin*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Hercules*, and *Mulan*. She passed away on September 1, 2020.

**BRUCE W. SMITH** got his start on films such as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and countless TV cartoons. But he's best-known for his heavy hitting work, co-directing the much-adored animated short *Hair Love* and creating Disney TV's groundbreaking animated series *The Proud Family*.

# GIMME SHELTER

Architecture and design possess personalities as distinct as the characters that inhabit these noteworthy animation homes. **By Whitney Friedlander**

A year into shelter-in-place living, we've discovered that being stuck at home for the long haul can trigger voyeurism. Tired of our own dwellings, we rubberneck at others' Zoom environs and binge HGTV shows.

But for pure escapism, there's arguably nothing better than a cartoon home. They can combine reality with flights of fancy, and in these gerbil wheel days, they offer plenty of opportunity for pandemic pondering, like whose house would you rather sip a quarantini in—the Flintstones or the Jetsons?

With few constraints when it comes to building budgets and physics, animation art directors, production designers, and background designers can become architects and interior designers of the highest order, stretching the imagination to create captivating and often fantastical living spaces.

Not only have we assembled a unique collection of homes from TV cartoons and feature films here—we talked to the talented people who created these visual backdrops.

So close your eyes and imagine jumping into any of these memorable abodes with the ease of *Mary Poppins* leaping into one of Bert's charming sidewalk chalk drawings.





**ABOVE:** Poison Ivy's living room.  
**BELOW:** Exterior of Poison Ivy's apartment.

## HARLEY QUINN

WARNER BROS. TV

ART DIRECTION: BILL WRAY

Supervillains' lairs tend to be dark and scary, the kinds of places regular humans avoid. But the airy bachelorette pad that Poison Ivy lets her partner-in-crime Harley Quinn crash at has surprising appeal.

The dreamscape mixes crisp lines and contemporary furnishings with an abundance of greenery. According to Rodel Gravo, one of Harley Quinn's background key designers, "Ivy is a botanist, so I imagined her lair to be full of space [with lots of] green and light to emphasize a clear mind."

Gravo wanted the living room to feel habitable, and he worked with Supervising Producer Jennifer Coyle and Art Director Bill Wray to decide on how many plants were overly excessive, and how they would fit into the overall look. Ultimately, the room ended up with so much vegetation that it literally colored the atmosphere, with Wray painting green shadows on the white furniture.

The plants themselves were designed to match Poison Ivy's hip, stylish, and very green anti-heroine appearance. As for the architecture, Gravo wanted a mix of old and new. He blended arched doors and windows with a peaked roof to create an "aesthetically pleasing, stylish, and striking greenhouse/lair."

### Shelter-at-home verdict:

The perfect abode for those seeking a luxe lockdown with opportunities for indoor gardening on the side.

**THIS PAGE:** *Kim Possible* house exterior and living room. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** *She-Ra* bedroom still and bedroom concept art.

## KIM POSSIBLE

DISNEY TELEVISION ANIMATION  
ART DIRECTION: ALAN BODNER

As design began on the sleek family home for *Kim Possible*, Art Director Alan Bodner says, “We knew what she was going to do and who [Kim] was, and it was like, how can we make this be cool?” He and his team gravitated naturally toward a midcentury aesthetic, not only because it felt like the best answer to the question, but because of the genre’s strong shape language.

“In *Kim Possible* all the characters themselves were very shape oriented,” says Bodner. “The amount of information was really minimized, and that’s what

married them to those backgrounds.”

“We were trying to keep the details to a minimum and then being very specific about where we put the texture,” adds Nick Filippi, a storyboard artist supervisor. He also notes the importance of using color and value in a way that allowed the removal of lines.

Doing this, Bodner explains, directs the eye to specific spaces within a room. An Eames-esque chair, for example, or an overhanging lamp that creates “a neat flow of design. I was always thinking, how much can I not put in and still have it be dimensional. That was kind of the game.”

Among his favorite influences were Disneyland’s attraction posters from

the 1950s. “They had a great streamlined look, but they also had strong shapes and foreground, middle ground, background. [The background is] split into three levels, and it’s very distinctive.”

Director Chris Bailey was a fan of this graphic approach, but only “as long as [the shapes were] grounded in reality and perspective,” Bodner says. “I think that’s what makes it work for me. If you look at the backgrounds, it’s all the right perspective, [so] you buy it. You don’t think, oh my God, I need to see more ... That’s what really makes it exciting.”

### Shelter-at-home verdict:

A spacious and groovy pad for socially distanced chill-out sessions.

Images courtesy of Disney Television Animation.







**SHE-RA AND THE PRINCESSES OF POWER**  
 DREAMWORKS ANIMATION  
 ART DIRECTION: LAMB CHAMBERLIN AND ELIZABETH KRESIN

In *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, fan-favorite Glimmer always wakes up to a perfect setting for a Zoom chat with her Best Friends Squad. Elizabeth Kresin, the show's Art Director since 2018, says that Glimmer's home—the kingdom of Bright Moon on the planet Etheria—is a fancy place, inspiring the bedroom's look. "We didn't want anything to feel flat or matte, and everything is high gloss."

Kresin credits Background Painter and Color Stylist Amanda Winterstein for the opalescent look, while Elle Michalka, a visual development artist who worked on the series early on, came up with the idea of the magical floating bed, because "what kid wouldn't want bunk beds? So we took that and we made it as extreme

as possible." As for the space itself, "a round tower bedroom is just the ultimate princess fantasy."

Bright Moon is the antithesis to the evil world of the show's protagonists, The Horde, where the designs are jagged and haphazard. To emphasize this, Kresin says, Glimmer's bedroom is spherical, her bed is a golden ball, and there's lots of yonic imagery. "We wanted to keep everything as soft arches [and] really round towers ... every detail is meticulously considered for its beauty."

Glimmer's bedroom is also the only place in her Crystal Castle where she's guaranteed some alone time. Since she's the only one who can teleport, Kresin says putting the bed high up ensures she can get "as far away from everything else as possible."

**Shelter-at-home verdict:**

A transcendent escape whose soothing mood (and Zoomtastic ambience) makes isolation less lonely.





*"The fact that it's a jade floor created this really beautiful reflectivity [bouncing] light back into the space."*

— TANG KHENG HENG



# REALITY TV

For most, house envy never goes beyond the daydreaming stage. For a rare few, the lines between fantasy and reality blur. Case in point: Two of cartoons' most iconic homes, belonging to the Jetson and Flintstone families, can actually be found in the real world.

On a Malibu bluff in SoCal, a prehistoric-style house was conceived with an ulterior motive. Word is that Dick Clark, of *American Bandstand* fame, wanted to build in the Santa Monica Mountains, but the area's conservancy resisted. Clark figured a structure that looked like rocks would blend in and make his project more palatable—he was right, and the result was a one-bedroom, Yabba Dabba Doo-worthy dwelling with views of the sea. Not that this explains the equally Stone Age interior, with its rough-textured walls and cave-like ceilings. While there's no pelican mailbox or crab lawn mower, we still think the Bedrock HOA would approve.

Images courtesy of DreamWorks Animation.

## KUNG FU PANDA DREAMWORKS ANIMATION ART DIRECTION: TANG KHENG HENG

This intricately designed mountaintop haven, overlooking a soaring valley, offers the perfect setup for enforcing the six-foot rule—not to mention an atmosphere conducive to contemplation.

Tang Kheng Heng, Art Director on the first two *Kung Fu Panda* movies, explains that the Jade Palace was inspired by the Temple of Confucius in Qufu in China's Shangdong Province. Its design unites references to classic Chinese architecture and the yin-yang theory, to reflect elements being in harmony with each other.

Color plays a key role in the palace's design. It was given its name because in the realm of *Kung Fu Panda*, green symbolizes wisdom. There is also a yellow roof

to symbolize good and blue water patterns in the floor to express a sense of government or order.

The enormity of the spaces—like the Hall of Warriors, filled with artifacts of past kung fu masters—could feel daunting and impersonal, but Heng says that he and his team created intimacy by always lighting the Jade Palace from ground level. "The fact that it's a jade floor created this really beautiful reflectivity [bouncing] light back into the space." He compares the jade to an infinity pool or mirror that shines up around the characters with each step they take. "At the same time," he points out, "it makes the space feel even bigger and more grand."

### Shelter-at-home verdict:

Tops for quarantine getaways with bonus activities like color therapy and lessons in ancient Chinese philosophy.

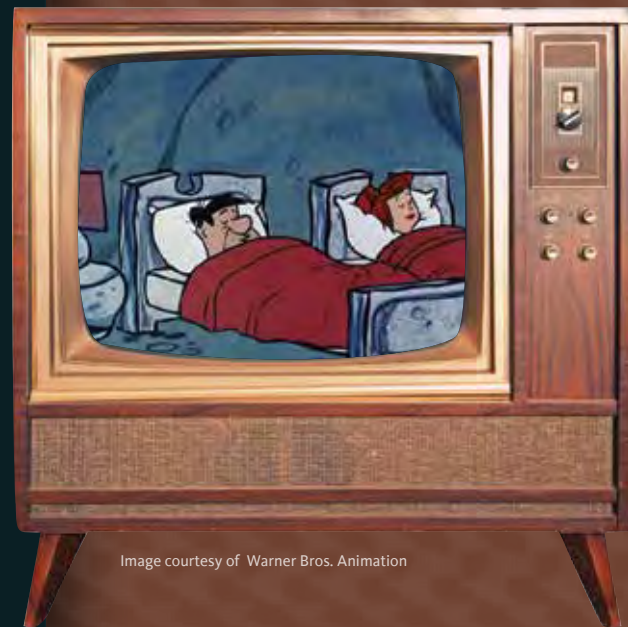


Image courtesy of Warner Bros. Animation

OPPOSITE PAGE AND ABOVE: The Jade Palace.

REALITY TV *Continued from page 33*

On the other end of the timeline, the Jetsons' house is a bit of Escher's famous *Drawing Hands*, with art drawing from life while life draws from art. The sky-high apartment was influenced by more than one L.A. architectural landmark, most notably the Theme Building at the Los Angeles International Airport and the Chemosphere home in the Hollywood Hills—both of which look like spaceships landed on earth.



In the years since the early 1960s when the show was on the air, its look has been mirrored, from the rotating Round House in Connecticut to the 3D-printed Curve Appeal prototype house in Tennessee. The interesting thing about the Jetsons' home (ABOVE) is that it took the design of the day and made it feel like the design of the future. It brought new recognition of midcentury style, introducing it to the masses through network TV. Of course, it also predicted (inspired?) smart homes that arrived long before the show's setting of 2062. Unlike with Fred and Wilma, whose animal-powered gadgets never made it to reality, we can easily live in George and Jane's world, complete with robot vacuums and video calls.

Image courtesy of Warner Bros. Animation



Images courtesy of Walt Disney Animation Studios.

**SLEEPING BEAUTY**  
**WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS**  
**ART DIRECTION: EYVIND EARLE**

In most fairy tales, woods are dark and foreboding. Maybe it's their bad reputation that allowed *Sleeping Beauty's* Princess Aurora (AKA: Briar Rose) to hide undiscovered in this otherwise tranquil one for nearly 16 years—a proponent of the Tiny House Movement long before *Tiny House Nation* premiered on the small screen.

Her petite, triangular cottage features a thatched roof, built-in tree, and just enough extra space for a few opinionated fairies. Fox Carney, Manager of Research at the Disney Animation Research Library, says the directive from Disney during the film's production was that this 1959 animated musical should look like "a moving illustration" because it was going to be shown in Technirama. This would mean a larger frame with a lot of space to fill.

Eyvind Earle, *Sleeping Beauty's* influential color stylist, researched late-medieval tapestries, Persian miniatures, and Japanese prints where "everything is sort of in focus for both your foreground and background," Carney says. Earle became "keen on the heavy use of horizontals and verticals

[to create] a lot of shape language." A notable example: The cottage's vertical beams "aren't necessarily straight up and straight across ... you see lots of slight curves in there."

When it comes to the incorporation of the tree in the architectural design, Carney says, "[It] was a deliberate choice to show that the fairies and Briar Rose were apart from ... the bricks and stones and hard edges of the castle [and were] more connected with nature."

**Shelter-at-home verdict:**

A sure pick for idyllic isolation, but this doesn't mean you can go mask-free since you never know when a prince might come wandering through the woods.



**ABOVE:** *Sleeping Beauty's* cottage. **RIGHT:** *Big Hero 6* attic still and house exterior concept art.

## BIG HERO 6

WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS  
ART DIRECTION: SCOTT WATANABE

Not only is the family home in *Big Hero 6* a reflection of the movie's fictional San Fransokyo, a portmanteau of San Francisco and Tokyo, it is also a deliberate reflection of its inhabitants. For example, when the character of Aunt Cass—guardian of teenage Hiro and his older brother Tadashi—was developed, Art Director Scott Watanabe says, “an idea formed that she could be a kind of boho/hippie, and [a] setting in the Haight-Ashbury district seemed a no-brainer. So [the house] became a mash-up of San Francisco Victorian architecture mixed with a [ground floor] café from the Meiji/Shōwa periods of Japan.”

In addition, Watanabe says, “I found that sometimes there was beauty and charm in simple mundane imperfections, such as an inconveniently placed structural beam in the café or cramped living spaces for Hiro and Tadashi. Something to keep it specific to the architecture while filling the spaces with the embodiment of the characters that lived there.” Hiro’s room, for example,



is “just a mess of tech and robots,” while Tadashi’s is “more organized and well rounded. The goal being that the viewer could tell who lived in the house without ever seeing the people.”

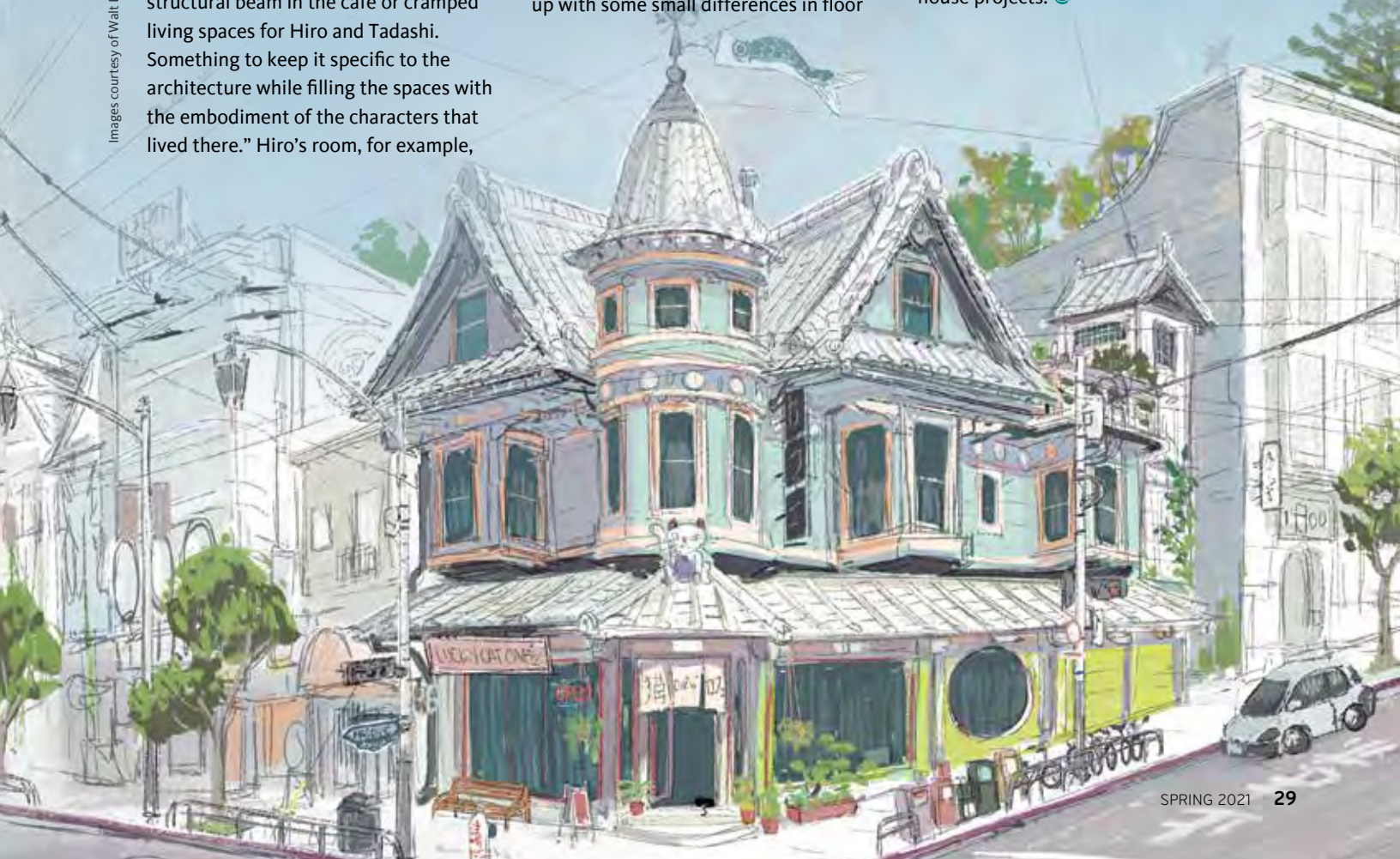
This design approach overlapped with efforts to show that the house had a past. According to Production Designer Paul Felix, “We tried to give the idea that someone, at some point, had taken out the original layout of the house and then replaced it with something else. We came up with some small differences in floor

levels that you would have to navigate, and some odd placements. While none of this really gets seen in the film, “It was nice that we all had a shared sense of what the history of the house was. I think on some level, in the story, [that makes it] feel more like a real place.”

### Shelter-at-home verdict:

A homey abode where you can immerse yourself in your passions, from coding to baking sourdough bread to tackling DIY house projects. 🏠

Images courtesy of Walt Disney Animation Studios.



A scene from the animated film 'Raya and the Last Dragon'. Raya, a young woman with long black hair, is shown from the back, wearing a red cape and a traditional conical hat. She holds a sword with a snake-shaped hilt. To her left is the back of a large, grey dragon. The background features a sunset over a landscape with mountains and a body of water.

# A RAYA OF LIGHT

*Raya and the Last Dragon* takes its production team on an epic journey of communication and collaboration. **By Kim Fay**



**IN EPIC STORIES, HEROINES NEVER TAKE A STRAIGHT PATH FROM BEGINNING TO END. RAYA AND THE LAST DRAGON IS A CLASSIC EXAMPLE. RAYA HAS A CLEAR OBJECTIVE—FIND THE WORLD'S LAST DRAGON AND SAVE HUMANITY FROM THE EVIL DRUUN. SHE ALSO HAS OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME.**

Because life has an uncanny way of imitating art, the production of *Raya and the Last Dragon* followed a parallel path. According to Director of Cinematography Lighting Adolph Lusinsky, there was a concrete goal from the start: “Latching the cinematography ideas, in particular with the lighting and camera, with the story arcs and the story thematics.”

Straightforward enough, except for this hurdle. What were those arcs and thematics? Originally, the theme circled around a broad concept. Head of Story Fawn Veerasunthorn says, “Over the course of the film, we were trying to find our

**THIS PAGE:** Raya and her sidekick Tuk Tuk.



All images courtesy of Walt Disney Animation Studios.

statement about community. We tried different ways—is it about creating hope, inspiring others, working together?”

There were false starts and detours, but with the arrival of two new directors, Don Hall and Carlos López Estrada, and an additional screenwriter, Qui Nguyen, joining screenwriter Adele Lim, the theme began to gel. “We felt like this idea of trust would give us the specificity that the movie needed,” Hall said. “In a broken world, you can’t trust anybody, versus the world is broken because you don’t trust anybody.”

Once Lusinsky and the other departments had a theme they could reflect visually, they explored cinematography techniques to convey it. They created film

LUTs inspired by the out-of-print Kodak 5289 film stock. “Trust had the most color and had less contrast,” he says, “[and] we had the grainiest, like 16mm grain, in the distrust. It’s much harder and more contrasty as well.”

“The strongest trust would [also] be the shallowest depth of field moments,” Lusinsky adds, with prominent bokeh shapes in the background. Lighting Supervisor Gregory Culp recalls how this works in a scene in which Raya is talking to her father, the one person in the world she trusts. “In order to portray that trust, we took the roof off of the kitchen, and one of the lighting artists, Steve Null, painted a dappled light setup that would hit very

specific spots of the room.” Shiny objects were set dressed into the background—cans, pots, and pans with reflective qualities. This enabled the bokeh effect Lusinsky describes, giving the space warmth and keeping the focus on the intimacy between Raya and her father.

Just as trust was tested in the movie’s story, it was also put to the test on the production side. “We had planned on having a very heavy process of delegation,” says VFX Supervisor Kyle Odermatt. “That was a direction we talked about long before 2020. But when it came time to work from home, we actually doubled down. We got initial direction from the directors and then let the supervisors and artists really run with [it].”





**THIS PAGE:** Raya and Sisu the dragon.  
**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Market scene without **(TOP)**  
and with **(BOTTOM)** atmospherics added.

## DELIBERATE AND MEANINGFUL

Early on, Lusinsky says, he, Director of Cinematography Layout Rob Dressel, and Production Designer Paul Felix visited various departments and shared the cinematic vision for the movie, “so everybody on the show was really aware of what we were trying to do. Particularly with camera and lighting.” They discussed the intent behind the color scripts and the camera effects they intended to use.

Veerasunthorn says this kind of initial collaboration was new to her. “In other productions I worked on, I feel like we were just drawing. ... Even though my department is happening so early on, and lighting is almost the last thing that happens, for us to be able to communicate back and forth, that helps.” Although her artists weren’t drawing details, she felt it was important to be conscious of the choices that were going to be made, and even the type of lenses that would be used.

Veerasunthorn recalls how learning about bokeh effects influenced her work on a scene showcasing the relationship between Raya and her father. “I was trying to be conscious about, I’m going to put the window

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*“Over the course of the film, we were trying to find our statement about community. We tried different ways—is it about creating hope, inspiring others, working together?”*

– **Fawn Veerasunthorn,**  
**Head of Story**

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behind him so they can put all the sparkle of lights. And I was drawing some props [that can] reflect light. Layout can do whatever they want with it, but at least in my end I’m going to be keeping in mind what the lighting and cinematography team is trying to do.”

As a result of this inclusive approach, after the pandemic hit and everyone started working from home, the production became “this exercise in trying to see how every shot could be deliberate and meaningful, and every creative choice we were making was really pushing on those ideas,” says López Estrada.

Many of those ideas were shaped in part by a wide range of live action movies. It became a house joke that a meeting with Hall would inevitably include a Spielbergian reference. And a heavy influence on Lusinsky was *Babel*, with its different storylines shot in different settings with different film stocks. “For example, in Tokyo it was a much finer grain film stock. And when you were in the Middle East it was a very, very grainy film stock.”

This was particularly applicable to the five lands in which *Raya* takes place: Tail, Talon, Spine, Heart and Fang, together comprising the dragon-shaped fantasy world of Kumandra. As Raya undertakes her epic journey, traversing the lands, each gets its own different application of film stock and film grain to reflect its place in the overall theme of trust and distrust. Culp says this is where a lot of work was done early on, and where the

color script played an important role to figure out how all the colors in all the worlds could be distinct but still hold together.

Felix was responsible for laying this groundwork with a time of day color script. “[This] was the first visualization of how everything sort of meshed together,” he says. “Then we got a lot more specific when each sequence went into production. I would prepare some color keys to give everyone an idea of where we were heading, trying to create ... a design language [for each land] and what their predominant color palettes would be just to keep them apart visually. ... But what ties [them] together is the way we organized the color and the lighting cinematically. Because everything is subordinate to the tonal design.”

## LIBRARY OF LIGHT

Kumandra is inspired by the countries of Southeast Asia. Along with a mission to portray the region’s traditions, cultures, art, and architecture as accurately as possible, the team also aimed to authentically create the “feel” of the region. Early research trips were taken, sparking discussions about humidity, the thickness of the air, and the way elements such as mist over water diffused light so close to the equator. They wanted to include all of these details in the movie, and to address this challenge, effects created an atmospherics library in pre-production.

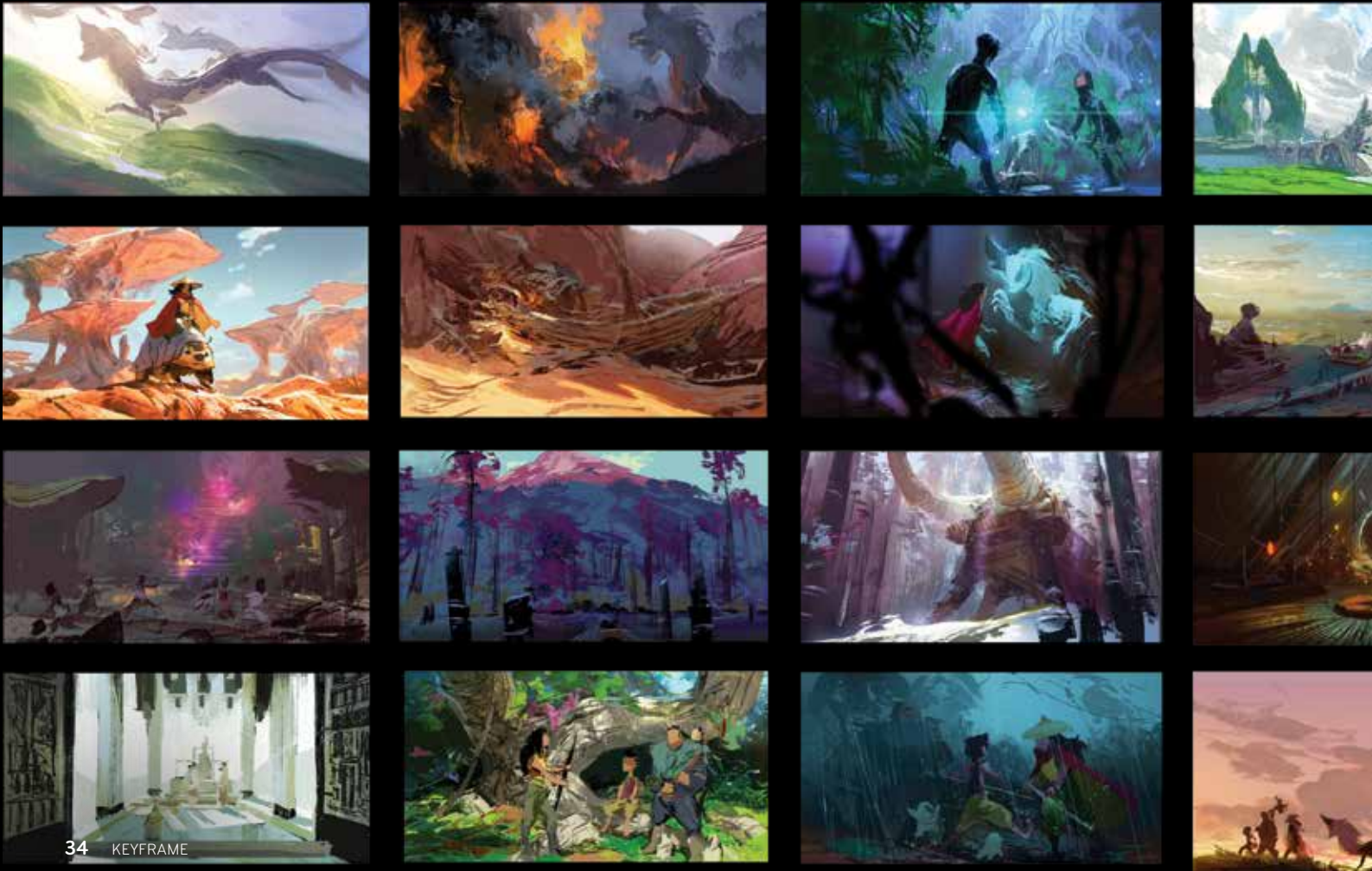
Culp says research about the different kind of volumes needed in the film led to Lighting Supervisor

Ryan DeYoung putting together “panels and images that would describe kinds of volumes ... volume that sits over the top of water, for example. And ... mist, like outside, on a rainy day, on a dry day. What it would look like for dust, coming from sand, kickups of sand? Then we talked to FX about getting some of those put into elements that we could bring from a stockroom for placing into our shots based on the different worlds.”

The result, Odermatt says: “Lighting had free reign to apply all of the atmospherics library to be able to do what they needed to do compositionally.”

“As we went into our initial sequence lighting, we’d grab those atmospherics and start dressing them into the set,” Lusinsky adds. “It’s cool

BELOW: Paul Felix's time of day color script.



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*"You're supposed to have your critical eye super sharp, but that was the hardest part to me. [Raya] looks like nothing else we've seen, and we're just so proud... It's definitely the best-looking film we've ever done."*

**– Don Hall, Director**

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because atmospherics help simplify the image, and really help you focus where you want."

One example is a scene in an open-air market with lots of food stalls. Odermatt says the lighting

team was able to add elements from the atmospherics library "to make it feel like there's billowing steam from cooking pots that may or may not be seen. It has that sort of layered feeling if you're walking down

the food aisle in any kind of busy night market situation."

"To actually have lighters who can use those tools like a cinematographer to create soft shadows, silhouettes, block out part of the image with a library of effects, it was astounding," says Felix.

In addition, Odermatt says that without these pre-made elements for lighting to use, scenes would have had to go without because the effects department was too busy working on other challenges.

Another area the atmospherics library came into play was with Felix's color scripts. Culp says, "He would give us visions, through his paintings as color scripts, of what he would expect from light dispersion and what color would do in an area at what time of day." Using Felix's art color cues





TOP TO BOTTOM: Characters Raya, Noi, Boun, and Tong.



and direction, the lighting artists would start experimenting, taking volumes from the library to see what could be achieved.

Along with the library, effects and lighting also overlapped significantly on the Druun. Like a plague or a virus, these intangible spirit beings take life from people and turn them into stone. Lusinsky says, “What’s cool about the Druun is, overall, they are these dark kind of organic things with this hot core inside of them. That tied in to the thematic really well, because it created a lot of contrast in dark and light areas.”

Effects provided locators and lights inside the effects-driven Druun, which the lighting artists would use to illuminate scenes. Because the Druun had this internal lighting component, Odermatt says, “All the collaboration between lighting and effects had to be very, very tight ... If you’re doing a dust cloud in the background, compositionally it’s important, but it’s not going to contribute to the lighting setup in a significant way. But when you’re going to put a big Druun compositional element that has a strong lighting component to it, that is critical to the outcome of the scene when it comes to the overall lighting scheme.”

“If we hadn’t had that atmospherics library, it would have been really challenging to get the Druun characters to read,” Lusinsky adds. “We developed these different atmospherics, and you can just imagine a little menu that says rolling mist, and you choose it and the atmosphere would show up in your shot and you could move it, place it wherever you need it.”

This was important, Culp says, because you can easily get distracted by the Druun when your gaze should be on action that is going on elsewhere. “So it’s all about looking at the image and trying to organize it in a way that’s perceivable to the audience member so you’re not distracted by five, ten Druun, when you’re supposed to be noticing the character in the far foreground atmospheric.”

With each obstacle tackled and overcome, the production’s epic journey neared its end, and the trust that had been tested from the top down paid off. When Hall and López Estrada finally saw the finished product, Hall says, “You’re supposed to have your critical eye super sharp, but that was the hardest part to me. [Raya] looks like nothing else we’ve seen, and we’re just so proud. ... It’s definitely the best-looking film we’ve ever done.” 🗨️



## HOME IMPROVEMENT

As many have learned first-hand during the pandemic, necessity is the mother of invention. When Lighting Artist Justine Codron started working from home on *Raya and the Last Dragon*, she quickly realized the drawbacks of the one-bedroom apartment she shares with her husband.

“I was working on multiple night or dark sequences,” Codron says, “so I needed ... to be able to see all the details and variations in the dark areas or shadows.” This included making sure colors, contrasts, values, and continuity were correct. “I needed as little light pollution as possible, [but] the only place for me and my husband to work is our very bright living room.”

To solve this problem Codron got resourceful. Like a kid building a fort out of sofa pillows, she constructed a “tent” (ABOVE) out of two photo backdrop stands and an extra-large tablecloth.

While this dealt with the technical challenges, Codron still missed working with her team. She says, “Even though video meetings have been of incredible help, it can’t compare to working together in person.” But she made the best of it and focused on the advantages of working from her tent studio: “Having my cat around and my coffee machine eight steps away from me!”

# COSMIC CARTOONING

Desert misfits turned flawed superheroes combine a sense of reality and offbeat humor in *Kid Cosmic*.

By Kim Fay



Kid Cosmic and his band of local superheroes.



**IF YOU'VE EVER ROAD-TRIPPED THROUGH THE AMERICAN WEST, YOU'LL INSTANTLY RECOGNIZE MO'S OASIS CAFÉ. IT'S ONE OF THOSE OFF-THE-BEATEN-PATH JOINTS, SET BACK FROM THE HIGHWAY, SURROUNDED BY A FADED LANDSCAPE AND FREQUENTED BY A WES ANDERSON-MEETS-BUCKAROO BANZAI CAST OF REGULARS. SEEING IT ON YOUR TV SCREEN, YOU'LL FEEL CERTAIN YOU'VE BEEN THERE BEFORE—A NOSTALGIC SENSE OF FAMILIARITY THAT GIVES *KID COSMIC* ITS APPEAL.**

With the full season premiering globally on Netflix on February 2, *Kid Cosmic* is the latest 2D TV show from Craig McCracken, following a string of successes including *The Powerpuff Girls*, *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends*, and *Wander Over Yonder*. The latter ended in 2016, and in the years following, McCracken developed a new show that is his most personal yet.

While the concept began its fermentation process in McCracken's imagination in 2009—an odd kid in love with superheroes, living in the desert and hanging out at a truck stop—its influences date back to his childhood. They are rooted in reality (the death of his father when he was seven) and escapism (his love of comics). “When I was growing up,” he says, “I was a big fan of Tintin. It was cartoony, but it felt like he was going on these real-world adventures. He was surrounded by broad, eccentric characters, but you could still see them as human beings.”

The problem in pitching his “odd kid” story back then was that McCracken could not envision *Kid Cosmic* as a typical cartoon with standalone episodes. It needed to be serialized, and networks weren't interested in

doing that, he says, so he shelved it. Jump forward a few years. McCracken saw shows like *Gravity Falls* and *Steven Universe*, and realized the time might be right for his idea. He shared it with his friend Francisco Angones, who had worked as a writer and story editor on *Wander Over Yonder*, and his wife, fellow animator Lauren Faust.

The threesome created a script and animatic. They pitched it to Netflix, and soon they were working on ten 22-minute episodes. According to Rob Renzetti, who has worked on all of McCracken's shows and serves as Co-Executive Producer on *Kid Cosmic*, “There's not one aspect of the show that has needed to be altered or compromised because of a ‘note from the network.’ Their notes are almost always on target and are never mandatory.”

The freedom that resulted can be seen in everything from the characters and the artwork to the soundtrack and the serialized storyline. McCracken explains, “[We're] telling a story about a character going through something, and turning out to be different at the end than they were at the beginning. That's something I've never been able to do in any of my shows, and it's been really exciting to be able to explore that.”

## REALITY BITES

The story follows Kid, a 9-year-old boy who lives with his grandpa in a junkyard out in the desert. He has long fantasized about being a superhero, and in the wreckage of a spaceship crash, he finds five stones that bestow superpowers on those who possess them. As aliens from around the galaxy invade earth to get these ancient cosmic artifacts, Kid is thrilled to have special powers so he can save the planet and all mankind. But his wide-eyed ideas about being a superhero smash headlong into the shatterproof wall of reality.

“There’s this certain age when you’re a kid when you have these really lofty ideas,” McCracken says. “You think you can pull [them] off, but when you get into reality, it doesn’t manifest that way. I think that’s what separates *Kid Cosmic* from other kid hero shows. The humanness of it. Kid’s allowed to be himself. ... He can make mistakes.”

Due to circumstances beyond his control, Kid isn’t the only one who winds up with a cosmic stone. There’s teenage Jo, based on McCracken’s older sister who introduced him to The Beatles and Monty Python; Rosa, a strong-willed 4-year-old with a maniacal laugh and oddly excellent comic timing; Papa G, channeling Willie Nelson’s laid-back outlaw attitude while caring for Kid in his parents’ absence; and Tuna Sandwich, a cat.

“Cats were my best friends growing up,” McCracken says. “Of course, we’re going to put a cat on the team, because that’s what a kid would do, and what use is a cat going to be?”

To Tuna Sandwich’s credit, he’s very useful—in his own way. That seems to be the point of each character, how their less than hero-worthy qualities become assets as they discover their individual superpowers. Not only are they quirky in personality, they’re unique from one another in the way they look. For this, McCracken worked closely with the show’s Character Design Supervisor, Steve Lambe.

“In past shows I’ve worked on,” Lambe says, “it was about throwing as many fancy design elements into a character as possible, to make them look interesting. One of the great things I’ve found working with Craig, is that he believes in finding that one special theme to a character, and then building the rest of the design around their story. Kid desperately wants to be a superhero. We could have made his costume look amazing, like something out of a Marvel movie. Instead it’s a mishmash of all the leftover items found in the junkyard he lives in. And none of it fits quite right. His costume is an extension of his personality.”

## SKETCHY DETAILS

The characters, which are crafted in classic cartoon style, provide a visual contrast to the settings. The show’s Lead Background Designer, Chris Tsirgiotis, explains, “Craig wanted ... a very believable place filled with the little details that one would typically see.” Tsirgiotis also worked on *Wander Over Yonder*, and says that McCracken has always given him great creative freedom, “So

keeping the setting in mind, I decided to go with a more realistic treatment rather than a very stylized or flat graphic look.”

According to Background Designer Maryam Sefati, most shows she’s worked on flatten parts of the design to push this cartoony look Tsirgiotis describes, and it was a fun challenge to figure out how to use realistic camera angles. One method that was especially helpful, she says, was the use of 3D models for spaceships, cars, and some of the main locations like Mo’s Oasis Café. Not only did these models help speed up the work, they resulted in details that were more accurate from different perspectives.

In addition, the *Kid Cosmic* team looked at a lot of classic illustrators to explore techniques to convey the feel they wanted. Lambe credits Golden Age legends such as Charles Schulz and Hank Ketcham for the “simplicity, fluidity, and economy of their lines,” while Tsirgiotis was influenced by the “sketchy and loose but well-drawn inking style” of European comic books.

“Because so much of the inspiration for the show’s style comes from comic books,” Tsirgiotis adds, “we decided early on that the line would go hand in hand with the color on the backgrounds. That’s another reason for the looser, quickly drawn line quality. I also wanted to give the backgrounds a little bit of a gritty feel that would help evoke the dusty and worn quality of locations set in the desert of the American Southwest.”

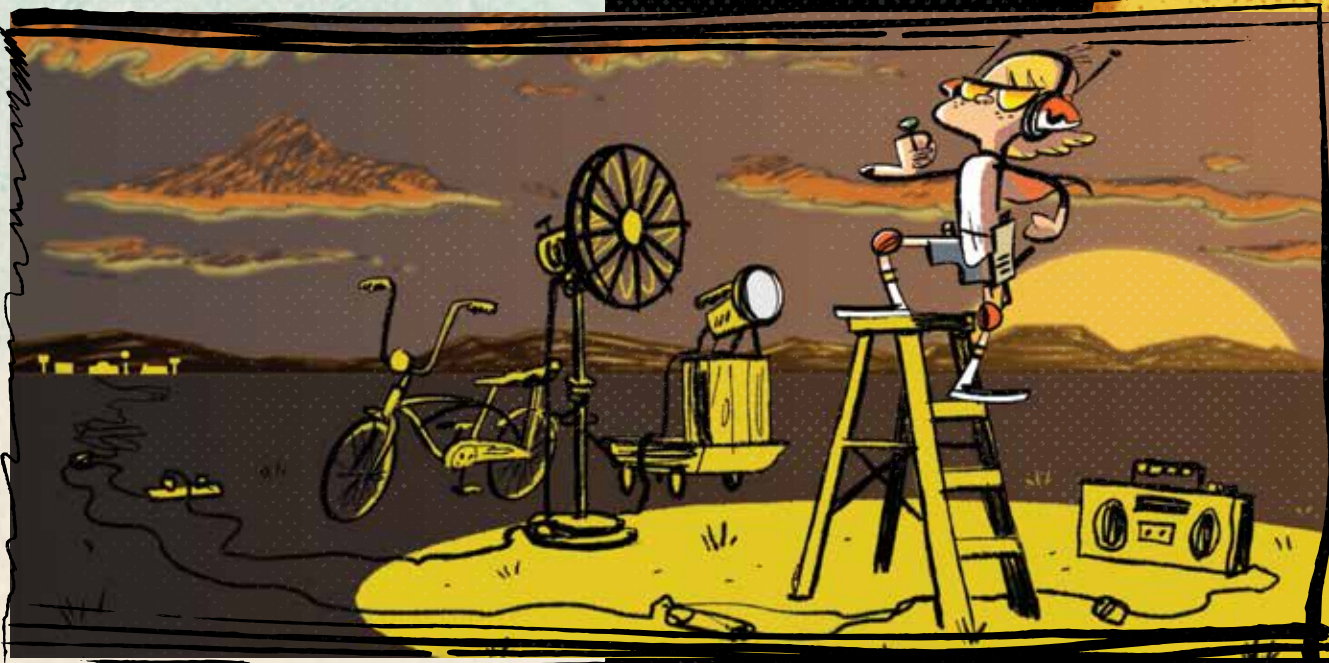
McCracken credits Background Painter Mabel Ye for the unique painting style that helped achieve this look. “When color is used subtly,” she says, “it helps linework and texture really sing. Chris’ linework is gorgeous, and I hoped to highlight that with a more understated painting style. I enjoy treating digital mediums with traditional techniques. In this case, instead of relying too heavily on texture layers or overlays, texture is created by individual ‘scratches’ during the painting process. Similarly, instead of using opacity, colors are blended by controlling the density of scratchy brushstrokes.”



**LEFT AND OPPOSITE PAGE:** Development images and episode stills from *Kid Cosmic*.







Images courtesy of Netflix.

## PUNK ROCK SUPERHEROES

The result of all these various approaches created just the effect McCracken wanted: "Rough around the edges. ...All of that is to remind you, these are drawings made by humans. We wanted to keep that homemade, handmade, kind of punk rock aesthetic. Kid and his team are essentially punk rock superheroes. Meaning, they may not have the skill or the talent, but they have the determination and conviction to do this. They have that punk rock sensibility."

It's not surprising McCracken mentions music when he talks about *Kid Cosmic*, because the soundtrack plays a crucial role. "When I'm developing any show," he says, "one of the first things I do is find a playlist or music that inspires the world I want to create, and I use that as inspiration. In 2015, when Frank, Lauren, and I were developing the show, I reached out to Andy Bean, who was our composer on *Wander*. I said, I need you to pretend to be a garage punk band from the early '70s called Dr. Fang and the Gang." Not only did McCracken use these raucous songs as inspiration, they play a major role in the show, including the theme song.

*Kid Cosmic* has a lot of sophisticated silliness—think the cantina scene in the original *Star Wars*. It also lets itself be serious, something McCracken realized he could do because of childhood movies like *E.T.* where "kids experience heavy stuff. I wanted to lean into that sort of thing. Yeah, Kid doesn't have his parents. ...He doesn't have a lot of resources. There's not any real other kids around. But he makes the best of that situation, and that's who he is as a character. Well, I'm gonna try to do the best I can in this situation I'm in. That's his real power." 🍷



### MABEL YE

*"For most of my life, I was—and still am—heavily inspired by comics. The linework in many comics, especially French, is beautifully detailed and supplemented by simple color. When I was told the style of the show is very much inspired by French comic work, it was a pleasant surprise!"*



### CHRIS TSIRGIOTIS

*"Craig's desire for a hand-drawn look is something I've always been partial to. I had gained a reputation over the years as being one of the last people in the business that draws in pencil on paper. In fact, *Kid Cosmic* is the show where I finally made the transition to work completely digitally. I knew that because the line would be in the final painted backgrounds, it would be necessary to have all the layout artists using the same digital brushes rather than have everyone work traditionally."*



### CRAIG MCCRACKEN

*"We treated *Kid Cosmic* like we were making a film, as opposed to a cartoon with a capital C. I always joke that it is an animated series. ...We did a lot of live action as far as storyboarding styles, to make it feel more grounded and real."*

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# HONORING OUR FELLOW ARTISTS

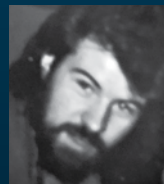
ON JANUARY 30TH, THE AFTERNOON OF REMEMBRANCE PAID TRIBUTE TO THOSE IN THE ANIMATION INDUSTRY WHO PASSED AWAY LAST YEAR. HERE, WE CELEBRATE THE LIVES OF MANY OF THOSE TALENTED INDIVIDUALS.

**ROMÁN ARÁMBULA** 03/19/2020

Born and trained in Mexico, Arámbula started his career at Gamma Productions on *Rocky and Bullwinkle* and *Fractured Fairy Tales*. He later became lead artist for the daily Mickey Mouse comic strip. He was 83.

**KELLY ASBURY** 06/26/2020

Asbury started his career at Walt Disney in 1983. He worked in storyboard, visual development, and character design, and directed or co-directed the Oscar-nominated *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron* and *Shrek 2*. He was 60.



**MANNIX BENNETT**

10/16/20

In addition to doing digital matte painting for live-action projects, Bennett also had a career as a background artist. He

worked on many animated features including *All Dogs Go to Heaven* and *Fantasia 2000*.



**DORRIS BERGSTROM**

10/24/2020

Bergstrom started her career in Ink & Paint at Warner Bros. and soon moved up to assistant animator. Her career included jobs at Walt

Disney Studios and Hanna-Barbera. Her credits include *Lady and the Tramp*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *The Little Mermaid*. She was 97.

**PATRICIA BLACKBURN** 5/26/2020

Blackburn worked as an animation checker and scene coordinator at Hanna-Barbera, Filmation, and Rich Entertainment. Her credits include *Thundarr the Barbarian*, *BraveStarr*, and numerous *Peanuts* TV episodes.

**DENISE BLAKELY FULLER** 01/05/2020

Fuller enjoyed a career in layout, matte painting, and visual development. She started at Disney, and worked at Sony Picture Imageworks, Warner Bros., and more. Her feature credits include *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Emperor's New Groove*. She was 52.

**ALFRED BUDNICK** 02/29/2020

Budnick worked as a background artist at Hanna-Barbera, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, and other studios. His credits include *The All-New Super Friends Hour*, *Scooby's All-Star Laff-A-Lympics*, *She-Ra: Princess of Power*, and *Hey Arnold!* He was 81.

**CURTIS CIM** 3/10/2020

Cim worked as a storyboard artist, character designer, and layout artist and supervisor at Hanna-Barbera, Filmation, Warner Bros., and Universal. His resume includes *King of the Hill*, *Dragon Tales*, and *Curious George*. He was 65.

**RONALD "RON" COBB** 9/21/20

Cobb started his career at Disney Studios. He also worked as an editorial cartoonist for the underground *Los Angeles Free Press* in the 1960s, designed an album cover for Jefferson Airplane, and went on to a career in production design. He was 83.

**DOUG CRANE** 12/17/2020

Crane spent much of his career in New York City at Terrytoons. He worked as an animator on *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*, *She-Ra: Princess of Power*, and *Beavis and Butt-Head Do America*. He was 85.

**MAUREEN CRANE** 12/15/2020

An inker at Terrytoons, Crane met her husband-to-be, Doug Crane, when he began working there. They were married for 64 years, and she predeceased him by 2 days.



**NICOLA "NICK" CUTI**

2/21/2020

Among Cuti's creations are the characters Moonchild, Captain Cosmos, Starflake the Cosmic Sprite, and E-Man (co-creator). His

credits as art director, background artist, and prop designer include *Dilbert*, *101 Dalmatians*, and *Starship Troopers*. He was 75.



**WILLIAM "BILL" DAVIS**

1/13/2020

Animator Bill Davis's career included work on numerous educational programs and projects, including *Sesame Street*, *Reading Rainbow*, *Braingames*, and *Free to Be ... You and Me*.

**EUGENE "GENE" DEITCH** 04/16/2020

Deitch created the early cult classic series *Tom Terrific* and *Nudnik*. He won the Oscar for best animated short in 1960 for *Munro*. He wrote and directed numerous animated TV shows and also served as a creative director at UPA and Terrytoons. He was 95.

**TONY EASTMAN** 10/31/2020

Eastman animated numerous commercial spots at The Ink Tank and J.J. Sedelmaier Productions, and worked on such shows as *Beavis and Butt-Head*, *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, and *Kablam!* He was 78.



**JAMES "JIM" FINCH**

05/31/2020

Animation checker and continuity coordinator Finch worked at Disney, Hanna-Barbera, and Filmation on TV shows such as *Darkwing Duck*, *Aladdin*, *Kim Possible*, and *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*.

**ROBERT "ROB" GIBBS** 04/24/2020

Gibbs worked for Bakshi, Disney, and Pixar, contributing to movies ranging from *Pocahontas* to *Monsters, Inc.* He wrote and directed several related *Cars* TV episodes and shorts. He was 55.

**MARK GLAMACK** 05/29/2020

Glamack worked as an animator, animation supervisor, and timing director for Walt Disney, Hanna-Barbera, and HBO. He served six terms as Governor for the animated branch of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. He was 73.

**HARRY "BUD" HESTER** 2/3/2020  
Bud Hester spent most of his career working at Walt Disney Animation alongside the studio's Nine Old Men. In the 1970s he became the Business Representative for The Animation Guild (then known as the Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Guild). He was 92.

**CULLEN BLAINE HOUGHTALING** 12/2/2020  
Timing director, supervising producer, and storyboard artist Houghtaling worked on *The New Archies*, *The Flintstone Kids*, and numerous *Scooby-Doo* iterations. He also directed an episode of *The Simpsons*. He was 85.

**JIM HOUSTON** 3/26/2020  
Engineer Houston was considered a pioneer in his field and won two Academy Awards for Scientific and Engineering Achievement. He worked for Sony and Walt Disney Animation on *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, and *Fantasia 2000*. He was 61.

**JIM JANES** 9/1/2020  
Comic book artist and storyboard artist Janes worked on numerous TV shows including *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Batman: The Animated Series*, *X-Men: The Animated Series*, and *The Incredible Hulk*.

**WILLIAM "BILL" KNOLL** 7/22/2020  
Knoll worked as an assistant animator, timing director, and director at Hanna-Barbera, Marvel, Disney TV, Warner Bros., and other studios. His TV credits include *Tom and Jerry Tales*, *The Proud Family*, *Pinky and the Brain*, *The Transformers*, *Animaniacs*, and more.

**HELEN KOMAR** 11/27/2020  
New York-based Komar worked on feature films and classic cartoons such as *Popeye*, *Casper the Friendly Ghost*, and the original *Spider-Man*. Her commercial work included Cheerios and Trix. She was 93.

**NANCY LANE TOMASELLI** 11/20/2020  
New York-based Tomaselli worked as an Ink & Paint artist, production manager, and more, with credits ranging from *Schoolhouse Rock* to *Beavis and Butt-Head*. She was married to cameraman Rudy Tomaselli who also passed away this year. She was 80.

**MAUREEN MLYNARCZYK** 2/16/2020  
Mlynarczyk worked as a timing director on numerous movies and TV shows including *Family Guy*, *American Dad!*, *Steven Universe*, and *The Simpsons Movie*. She won an Emmy for her work on *Adventure Time*. She was 47.

**FRANCISCA "FRANCES" MORALDE** 4/8/2020  
Moralde worked in cel service at Disney,

Hanna-Barbera, and other studios on films including *Oliver @ Company*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *FernGully: The Last Rainforest*.

**SUE NICHOLS MACIOROWSKI** 9/1/2020  
Nichols worked primarily in visual development at Disney, where she is credited for her contributions on films such as *Aladdin*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *The Princess and the Frog*. She was 55.



**DOMINIC ORLANDO** 5/14/2020  
Orlando worked as a Xerox processor at Hanna-Barbera and Ruby-Spears before moving on to work as a storyboard artist, supervisor, and director on TV shows such as *Rugrats*, *Dora the Explorer*, *CatDog*, and *The Fairly OddParents*.

**JOAN ORLOFF** 7/16/2020  
Orloff worked as an inker, cel painter, and Ink & Paint supervisor at studios including Disney Feature Animation and FilmFair.



**MARTIN PASKO** 5/11/2020  
Best known for writing for DC Comics for more than three decades, Pasko won a Daytime Emmy as a writer and story editor on *Batman: The Animated Series*. Along with working on other animated shows, he wrote for the sitcoms *Cheers* and *Roseanne*. He was 65.

**LISA POITEVINT** 1/15/2020  
Poitevint was as an animation checker at Disney Feature Animation. She worked on *The Little Mermaid*, *Oliver @ Company*, and *The Black Cauldron*.

**JOE RUBY** 8/26/2020  
Ruby was part of the legendary team behind *Scooby-Doo*, *Where Are You!* and other Hanna-Barbera classics. They supervised Saturday morning cartoon programming at ABC before starting their own studio, Ruby-Spears Productions. Ruby passed away months before his longtime animation partner Ken Spears. He was 87.

**GARY SCHUMER** 6/28/2020  
Along with a career as a visual effects animator for Walt Disney Animation Studios, Schumer taught on the faculty at Ringling College of Art + Design.

**KEN SPEARS** 11/6/2020  
Spears was part of the legendary team behind *Scooby-Doo*, *Where Are You!* and other Hanna-Barbera classics. They supervised Saturday

morning cartoon programming at ABC before starting Ruby-Spears Productions. Spears passed away few months after his longtime animation partner Joe Ruby. He was 82.

**HERBERT "HERB" STOTT** 2/8/2020  
Beginning as an assistant animator at Disney, Stott went on to co-found Spunbuggy Works, and later founded Herb Stott Films, producing live-action and animated commercials. He was 85.

**MARTIN "MARTY" STRUDLER** 10/15/2020  
A layout artist, background artist, graphic designer, and character designer for Terrytoons, Warner Bros. TV Animation, and more, Strudler worked on shows based on classic characters such as *Muppet Babies* and numerous *Pink Panther* episodes. He was 91.

**ANN SULLIVAN** 4/13/2020  
Ink & Paint artist Sullivan began her career at Disney in the 1950s, working on classic films like *Peter Pan*. She left the industry to raise a family and restarted her career at Hanna-Barbera in the early 1970s, eventually returning to Disney. She was 91.

**DANILO TOLENTINO** 7/16/2020  
Tolentino worked as a layout artist and storyboard artist. He is best known for his work on animated Marvel projects such as *Fantastic Four*, *X-Men*, *The Incredible Hulk*, and *Avengers: United They Stand*.

**WILLIAM "TUCK" TUCKER** 12/22/2020  
Tucker worked in both feature films and TV as a layout artist, writer, storyboard artist, and director on shows such as *The Little Mermaid*, *The Simpsons*, *Hey Arnold!*, and *SpongeBob SquarePants*. He was 59.

**DAVID WISE** 3/3/2020  
David Wise was a writer known for *Star Trek: The Animated Series*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and *Transformers*. He was 65.



**WILLIAM "BILL" WOLF** 3/24/2020  
Wolf worked in numerous positions including animation director at studios such as Filmation, Marvel, and Murakami-

Wolf Films. His credits include *Alvin and the Chipmunks*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Rugrats*, and *The Boondocks*.

**CATHERINE ZAR** 9/1/20  
Zar started her career as a cel painter at Hanna-Barbera before becoming an inbetweener and assistant animator. She worked at Ruby-Spears, Filmation, Disney, and other studios.

# PAYING IT BACKWARD



AFTER GRADUATING FROM EMERSON COLLEGE IN 2014 WITH A BA IN FILM PRODUCTION, TAYLOR MEACHAM STARTED HIS CAREER ON THE PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT SIDE OF ANIMATION AT DREAMWORKS. THANKS TO A NEWLY IMPLEMENTED SHORTS PROGRAM, HE WAS OFFERED AN OPPORTUNITY TO PITCH *TO: GERARD*, A STORY ABOUT A POSTAL WORKER WHO DREAMS OF BEING A MAGICIAN, AND A YOUNG GIRL, JULES, WHO INFUSES THAT DREAM WITH MAGIC. HERE, MEACHAM DISCUSSES IMAGINATIVE SPINS, WORKING WITH INDUSTRY EXPERTS, AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAGIC AND STORYTELLING.



## HOW DID YOU MAKE THE LEAP FROM PRODUCTION TO WRITING AND DIRECTING YOUR OWN SHORT FILM?

I had this idea I'd been sitting on for a short film. With all the changeups at DreamWorks, I thought, let me take some time to write this out. If I have an opportunity to pitch, I'll take it. I figured there was nothing to lose. It was something I felt really comfortable and passionate about, and I just wanted to see what would happen. There's no failing in that... There was a little opening at the end of all the pitches, and I was the last person to squeeze in there. As luck would have it, they ended up taking it. It pivoted the whole career trajectory at DreamWorks for me.

## TO: GERARD IS A LOVE LETTER TO YOUR FATHER BECAUSE HE ENCOURAGED YOU TO FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS EVEN WHEN HE WASN'T ABLE TO FOLLOW HIS OWN.

I had the pieces of this idea for a while. The magician, the post office—but I didn't know what it was about. I remember when it kind of dawned on me: Oh, no, you're circling this because of how you feel about your father's situation. I sat down and quickly wrote the outline, and I remember crying as I was writing. This little pocket of something inside of me was starting to come out.

My dad's life took a hard pivot when he had kids. He was the guy who rode motorcycles and went parasailing. He had to reassess what his role in life was, and he found this great joy in being a dad. I think I can speak for him, that his greatest gift in life is being a father...

In the same way that *To: Gerard* encourages the cyclical nature of paying it forward, it's also about paying it backward. My dad is a photographer at heart. My sister and I [pay it] backward and encourage him to go out there and take pictures. We encourage his artistic self.

## WHO INSPIRED THE ROLE OF THE LITTLE GIRL JULES?

I am the middle child of many sisters, and my little sister's name is Juliana, so that's why she's called Jules. My mom is of Hispanic descent, so we tried to put in a little bit of that too. Honestly, with everything in this short, I tried to put the people I love wherever I could. And also the love and care I have for all my siblings and for what I hope they can achieve.

Specifically for the magic—you don't see a ton of women in magic. It was important to me, if we were going to have a child that grew up and became a magician, that it was a little girl.

## THERE ARE TIMES IN THE FILM WHEN THE POST OFFICE FEELS LIKE WILLY WONKA'S CHOCOLATE FACTORY: A PLACE OF ENCHANTMENT. WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE THIS EVERYDAY PLACE FOR YOUR MAGICAL SETTING?

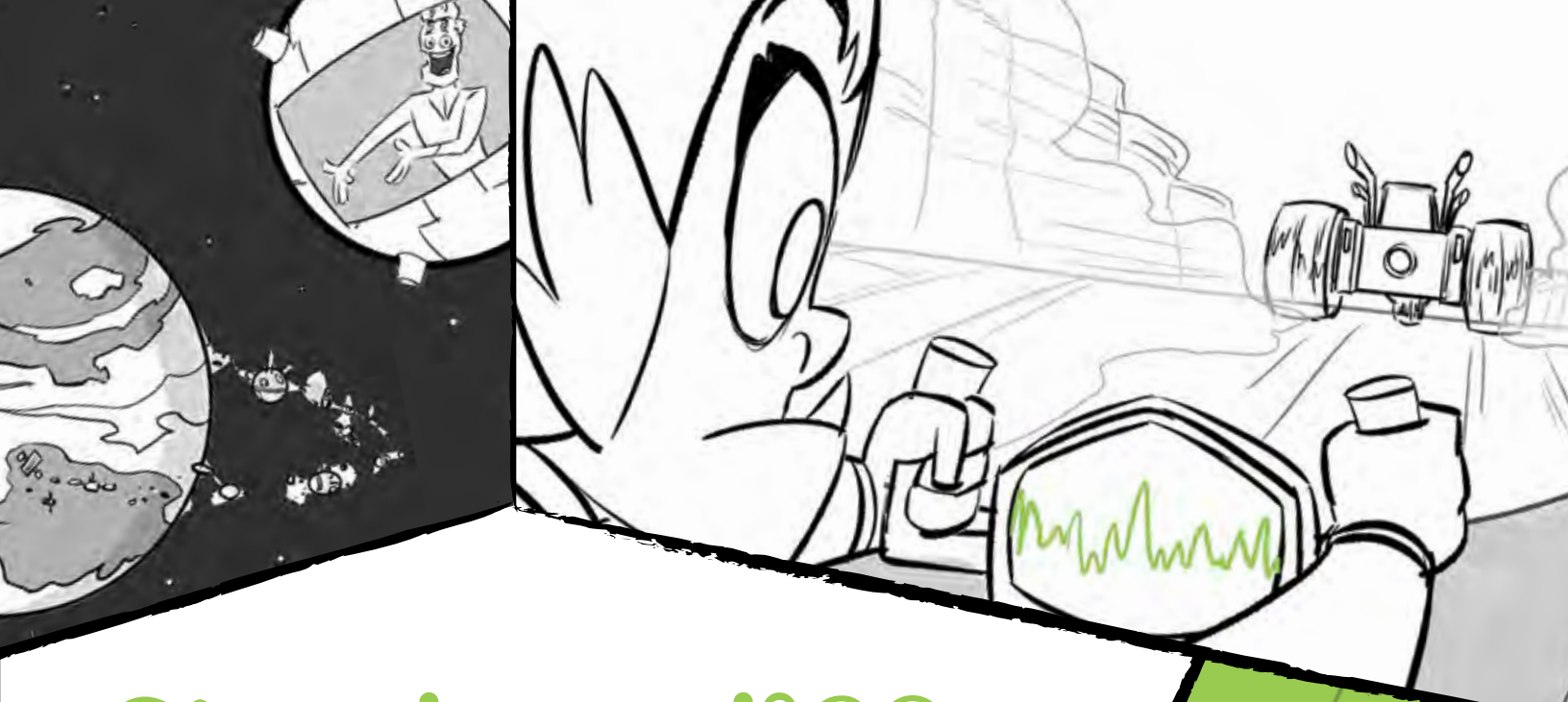
I've always found I had an attraction to stories that are 10 degrees off reality. It's

familiar, but there's been enough things that are tweaked. Chocolate factories exist, but not like Willy Wonka's. And the post office—I was fascinated, and as a kid, I would always get excited when bills would be delivered, because I'd want a letter for myself. That's part of why I held onto wanting [*To: Gerard*] to be in a post office, and then putting that slightly imaginative spin on it.

## FOR YOU, WHAT DO STORYTELLING AND MAGIC HAVE IN COMMON?

I think good magic includes good storytelling. A great illusion, a great magic trick, is fun, but if you can get someone invested in the illusion, in making the coin disappear—what is the story behind it, what does it make them feel? A lot of magicians approach their magic like that. Telling stories about themselves and their childhoods. And to tell good stories, you have to have a little bit of magic.





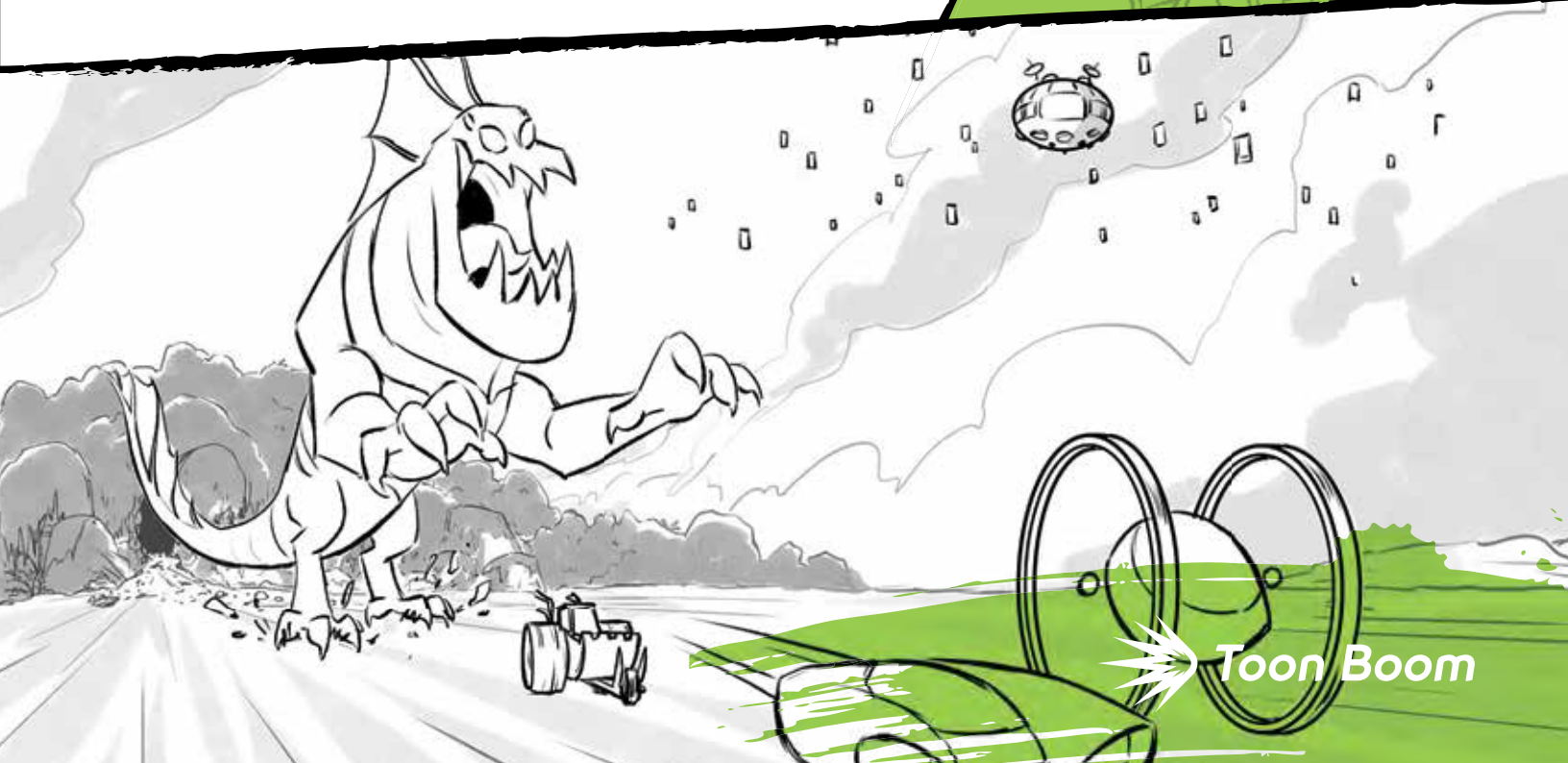
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DREAMWORKS

To:  
*Gerard*

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