

Disney Stories

Krystina Madej • Newton Lee

Disney Stories

Getting to Digital

2nd ed. 2020

“An affectionate portrait of how ‘the mouse’
learned to use the mouse.”

–Dr. Alan Kay

 Springer

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*Dedicated to all the children and adults in
the world who enjoy “the happiest place on
earth” physically and digitally.*

Newton Lee

*Dedicated to Nicola, Michael, and Daniel
Budd, my enthusiastic companions in many
Disney story moments.*

Krystina Madej

About the Book

As I continued to use *Disney Stories* to bring Disney's history of storytelling across media to university students, it became increasingly important to write a second edition. The original book had been intended as a brief introduction that showed how story and technology evolved hand-in-hand to make for audience-engaging entertainment. I'd written about Disney animations through the 1920s and 1930s until the first feature, *Snow White*, before moving on to the Disney Master Narrative, and then video games and online sites. The book leaped expediently from *Snow White* to *Mickey's Game and Watch*; the class discussions, however, included films from the 1940s to the 1990s, the new approaches used for live action hybrid animation, and CGI and CAPS. I was intimately familiar with most of the Disney repertoire from that time as I had been a steadfast viewer of the Sunday night television program *Walt Disney Presents* in the 1960s and was also a collector of classic Disney films, a hobby that was facilitated by the studio's policy of releasing their classics every seven years, and encouraged by my three children's devotion to watching every film at least a dozen times. The Eagle Marahute's dramatic dive towards the river in *Rescuer's Down Under* is still etched in my memory. It was not difficult then to add three new chapters which discussed how these films reflected the evolution of story and technology in Disney's movie history.

Since the research completed for the first edition ten years ago, the web has exploded with blogs, you tube videos, and discussion forums on Disney's extensive world. These are a boon to a researcher prepared to winnow to find the nuggets. In one lucky foray into YouTube searching for the film *Looker*, I came across a comment from Richard Taylor, the film's creative supervisor. He had not seen the film in years: finding it online brought back a forgotten experience and allowed him to see its place in the history of computer graphics.

The primary purpose of this edition is to provide key moments in the development of animated films as they evolved to embrace digital technology. It is, however, still about stories-across-media. One of the most exciting recent events has been Disney's acquisition of the well-loved story property *Star Wars* when it purchased Lusasfilm in 2012, and bringing that story to real life. Our story concludes with *Galaxy's Edge*, the latest in Disney's theme park lands, and the engagement

audiences enjoy with the animatronic character Hondo Ohnaka on their way to see the Millennium Falcon in an across-media digital experience.

Newton Lee teaches Disney in his game design courses and I want to thank him for his suggestion to include *Star Wars* and for the review of *Kingdom Hearts* he provided for this edition, it is an exciting game that warrants a place in Disney game history.

Dr. Krystina Madej

December 2019

From the first edition:

Disney stories are, more than ever, present across all media. This book provides readers with a brief and accessible look at how Disney has used technological innovation to create characters and stories that engage audiences in many different media, from early film to today's video games and online environments.

Drawing on Disney films from the 1920s until they became digital, and on the extensive collection of writings both in print and on the Web by Disney historians of all ilks, the book presents how innovation in film and animation techniques worked to evolve ideas about character and content to produce stories that very successfully engaged audiences. The evolution of the genre took animation from gags to full-length animated films in theatres, then across media into people's homes through merchandising, television, and into a virtual world through theme parks, all the while creating a Disney Master Narrative. This historical sketch provides the back-story for considering Disney stories move into the virtual *digital* world in the 1990s and the online communities of the 2000s. When Disney reached out to its audience with *The Lion King Animated Storybook* in 1994, it was following a well-established tradition of using leading-edge technology to remediate its stories and engage its audience in new ways, in this case, through the interactivity potential of digital environments. With the subsequent move into online MMORPGs such as *Toontown Online*, the community that had developed around Disney stories could now communicate and share the experience, one to one, across continents.

Dr. Alan Kay, president of Viewpoints Research Institute and former Disney Fellow, describes the book as “an affectionate portrait of how ‘the mouse’ learned to use the mouse.”

Newton Lee
Krystina Madej

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the authors of the many books which tell the story of the Walt Disney Company and that have been an invaluable resource in writing this edition. Some had access to Walt himself, a few to colleagues and employees who they were able to interview, and others to the extensive material in the Disney archives. They include Michael Barrier, Andreas Deja, Christopher Finch, Neal Gabler, Christian Morran, David Price, Jason Surrell, Bob Thomas, Jay Telotte, and Steven Watts, among others. I am an armchair researcher, who now has at hand the formidable resources of the World Wide Web. If I think about it, I must thank Tim Berners Lee for inventing the WWW, ensuring it was free, and promoting it for general interest. The result is an expanse of information that would probably not have been available to me otherwise. The interest in Disney, in Pixar, and in CGI by researchers and Disney fans has created a motherlode of docushorts, interviews, articles, original films, and original documents from past eras. Thank you to Disney for sharing so many of its resources online, to Pixar for the extensive number of videos they have made available on the process behind the films (to Disney for this as well), to newspapers and periodicals across the country whose archives have been made freely available, and to those who had original materials and shared them. During one search into Pixar, the original proposal written at Graphics Group for the Disney CAPS project showed up; it was a treasure of information about the development process the Pixar team had planned for the project. Particularly helpful for clarifying the many company moves CGI researchers made was Mike Seymour's interview with Alvy Ray Smith, for insight into CAPS was Barbara Robertson's article for *Computer Graphics World* (the first reveal about the system), and for their explanation of the work on the early CGI test short *Where the Wild Things Are* was John Lasseter and Glen Keane's discussion in *Disney Newsreel*. I had seen the test previously and Amid Amidi's posting of the Disney newsletter helped fill out the story. Thank you too for all the docushorts posted on the development of *Toy Story*. Listening to Ed Catmull, John Lasseter, and others who worked on the film discuss the process brought forward their perspective on a complex story. This documentation follows in Walt's footsteps; the studio archived all its meeting from its beginning—even early gag notes are available to researchers. Searching for history,

however, only goes so far. Then the work to filter it begins: but that is the joy of research, finding the kernels. In this I am inspired and encouraged by Dr. Jay Telotte, a Disney scholar, and my teaching colleague at Georgia Tech, Richard Utz, who freed me from many academic responsibilities so I had time to work on writing, and to Jan Stasienko at the University of Lower Silesia in Wroclaw, Poland, who has trusted his Erasmus students to my Disney enthusiasms. I want to say thank you in particular to my children, Nicola, Michael, and Daniel, who were always prepared to watch one more Disney film with me, one more time; they are now grown and will soon be inculcating a new generation of Disney fans, and to my spouse, Jim Budd, for his ongoing support.

Krystina Madej

We would like to posthumously thank Mark Mandelbaum, our agent for the original edition of *Disney Stories*. Mark was a digital publishing enthusiast and Director of Publications at ACM for 30 years. He had a very positive approach to helping people and promoting new ideas.

Krystina Madej
Newton Lee

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