

# FRAME BY FRAME



## “To infinity, and beyond!”

### Celebrating 20 Years of

# TOY STORY

by Glen Ryan Tadych

As we celebrate Thanksgiving and prepare for the holiday season, some of cinema's most anticipated films prepare to hit theaters, most notably *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. This past Wednesday, Disney and Pixar's latest computer-animated adventure, *The Good Dinosaur*, released nationwide to generally positive reception, but this week also marked another significant event in Pixar history: the 20th anniversary of *Toy Story*'s original theatrical release.

I'm find it difficult to accept 20 years have passed since Pixar released its classic story of two lost toys fighting desperately to escape the clutches of a destructive kid and make it back to their owner before he moves away. While the toys, a hand-me-down cowboy doll and space ranger action figure named Woody and Buzz Lightyear, initially despise one another, their journey teaches them the true value of friendship and what it means to be a toy.



Glen Ryan Tadych

As someone who grew up with not only *Toy Story* but the emergence of Pixar fandom itself, there's no doubt the 20th birthday of Pixar's first feature makes me feel much older than I really am. I was 5 years old the first time I saw *Toy Story*, and like everyone else who saw it in 1995, the first experience was all I needed to fall in love with the film.

Watching it as an adult though is a different experience sure enough, as I'm able to understand how the adult themes are actually what make the film so moving.

Today, I see *Toy Story* as the *Star Wars* (1977) of my generation, and not just because it was a "first" for the film industry or a huge critical and commercial success. Like *Star Wars*, audiences of all ages worldwide enjoyed and cherished *Toy Story* because of its relatable characters and genuine combination of humor and drama. The story was classic yet simple, inspired by the spirit of "buddy pictures" moviegoers have come to love for decades. But even more so, *Toy Story* became a technological benchmark in not just the art of animation, but the film industry itself. The film set the standard for what audiences expect from animation, as well as how far animation can really go in storytelling.

Of course, computer animation is now leaps and bounds ahead of *Toy Story*, but this isn't a negative truth by any means. The primitive look and feel of *Toy Story*'s animation compared to that of computer animation today is what makes *Toy Story* so distinctive. Prior to 1995, audiences' exposure to computer animation extended only to individual elements in various features from *Tron* (1982) to *Jurassic Park* (1993), and Pixar's computer-animated shorts. A feature film comprised entirely of computer animation had yet to be seen.

Like Jack Skellington discovering Christmas in Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, the sudden exposure to a visually-gripping computer-animated world like that of *Toy Story* made audi-

ences go, "What is this?!" And while this factor is what made *Toy Story* memorable to most audiences upon leaving the theater, the heart of the film still lies beneath the animation, the impact of which is what makes *Toy Story* a classic.

*Toy Story*'s legacy really begins with Pixar's beginnings in the 1980s. Pixar's story begins long before the days of Sheriff Woody and Buzz Lightyear, and believe it or not, the individual truly responsible for Pixar's existence is George Lucas.

Lucas' ambitions and vision of "a galaxy far, far away" led to the formation of Lucasfilm Limited, LLC, Lucas' production company, and its visual effects division, Industrial Light & Magic. Pixar's inception was Lucas' recruiting Ed Catmull in 1979 to head Lucasfilm's Computer Division, and the founding of The Graphics Group within the division. TGG's primary purpose was to explore and develop computer graphics for film.

An aspiring animator, John Lasseter came to work for TGG in 1983 where he assisted in animating the short film *The Adventures of André & Wally B.*

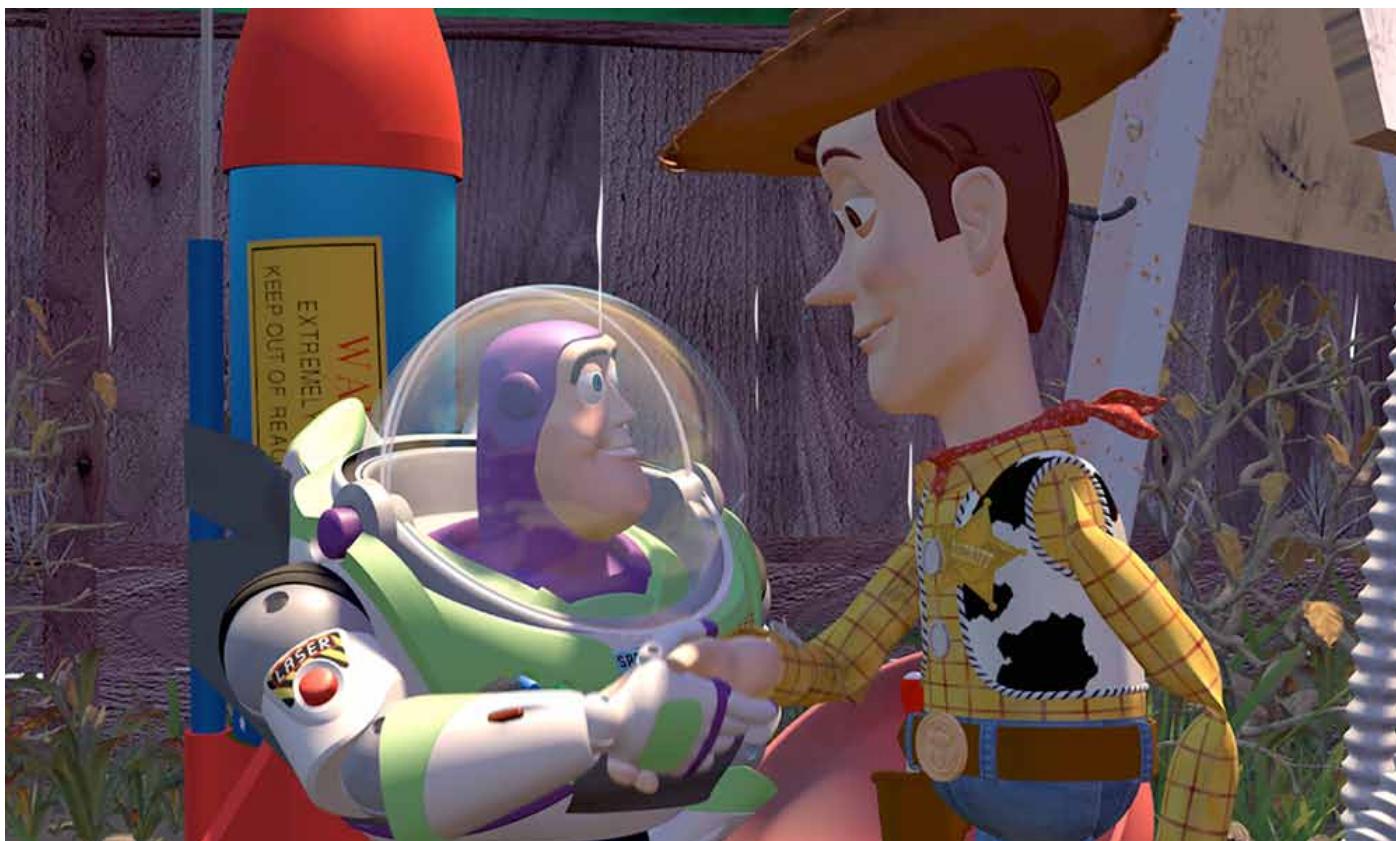
While only two minutes long and incomplete, *The Adventures of André & Wally B.* demonstrated the potential for computer animation when TGG presented it at SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group on GRAPHics and Interactive Technologies), an annual computer graphics conference, on July 25, 1984. According to Pixar's website, the short film's highlights were the use of complex visible characters, hand-painted textures and motion blur, ground-breaking technology at the time.

Lasseter's work on the short film and other TGG projects landed him a full-time position as an interface designer that year. However, everything changed for TGG in 1986.

Despite TGG's success in harnessing computer graphics, and putting them to use in sequences such as the stained-glass knight in *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985), Lucasfilm was suffering financially. Lucas' 1983 divorce and declining *Star Wars* license revenues after *Return of the Jedi*'s (1983) release were contributing factors to this financial crisis. As a result, TGG split from Lucasfilm, where it became a lone corporation called Pixar, named after the Pixar Image Computer used by TGG in its time with Lucasfilm. Catmull stayed with Pixar, becoming the company's president.

Months after his May 1985 departure from Apple, Inc., Steve Jobs saw this split as an investment opportunity. He proceeded to purchase Pixar's technology rights from Lucasfilm for \$5 million. All purchase and stock pricing agreements between the two companies officially closed Feb. 3, 1986.

Following Jobs' investment, Pixar was primarily a computer hardware company. The primary product was its namesake, the Pixar computer, and one of the buyers of Pixar computers just happened to be Walt Disney Studios. Disney used the computer as a part of its CAPS project (Computer Animation Production System) to digitally paint the cells of 2-D animated films. The studio's first film to utilize this process was *The Rescuers Down Under* (1990).



While marketing and selling Pixar computers, Lasseter and the other Pixar animators were continuing to advance computer animation techniques. From 1986 to 1989 Pixar created four computer-animated short films, two of which made history for Pixar: *Luxo Jr.* (1986), *Red's Dream* (1987), *Tin Toy* (1988) and *Knick Knack* (1989).

*Luxo Jr.* became the first computer animated film to receive the nomination for Best Animated Short Film at the 59th Academy Awards in 1987. *Tin Toy* became the first computer animated film to win the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film at the 61st Academy Awards in 1989.

Despite *Tin Toy*'s achievement at the Academy Awards, *Luxo Jr.* made the bigger impact; more so

than any other short film in the company's history. If it weren't obvious enough, the short film's title character became the infamous hopping lamp we all see in the Pixar logo sequence, becoming synonymous with Pixar and vice versa. I like to think of *Luxo Jr.* as the *Steamboat Willie* (1928) of Pixar.

By 1990, sales were down for Pixar and Jobs had invested so much money at this point he practically owned the company. Pixar sold its hardware division to Vicom Systems in April 1990, and took on a larger role as a production company using its computer animation for commercials.

Everything would change in 1991 when Disney contracted Pixar to produce three computer-animated feature films. The first of these, of course, being *Toy Story* (1995).

Technologically speaking, producing an 81-minute computer-animated film was a challenging step for the Pixar team, and not just because they'd never done it, but because nobody had at this point. The story-writing process came as a bit of a struggle too.

Lasseter and his primary creative team—linked photo left to right: Joe Ranft, Pete Docter, Lasseter and Andrew Stanton—began tweaking the film's story to the recommendations of Disney executives, but the film's first executive screening proved unsatisfactory. Disney attempted to shut down production and relocate Pixar to Walt Disney Studios with the purpose of having more creative control. Lasseter, as a last resort, pleaded for a final chance to do the film Pixar's way. The executives granted Lasseter's request, after which he and his creative team initiated an entire rewrite from scratch. In just two

weeks, Pixar delivered the concept for the *Toy Story* we know today.

*Toy Story* released Nov. 22, 1995 to critical acclaim and made \$191.7 million in its initial U.S. run from 1995-1996.

"Yes, we worry about what the critics say. Yes, we worry about what the opening box office is going to be. Yes, we worry about what the final box office is going to be. But really, the whole point why we do what we do is to entertain our audiences. The greatest joy I get as a filmmaker is to slip into an audience for one of our movies anonymously, and watch people watch our film. Because people are 100 percent honest when they're watching a movie. And to see the joy on people's faces, to see people really get into our films...to me is the greatest reward I could possibly get." — John Lasseter on *Toy Story*'s impact

*Toy Story* was nominated for three Academy Awards in 1996—unfortunately not Best Picture, and the award for Best Animated Feature wasn't created until 2001. The film did receive nominations for Best Original Screenplay, Best Original Song ("You've Got a Friend in Me") and Best Original Musical or Comedy Score. Although *Toy Story* didn't win any of the three, the Academy presented John Lasseter with a Special Achievement award.

*Toy Story*'s success added Pixar to a long line of historical achievements in the film industry, and as one would suspect, the film's legacy continued to significantly impact Pixar and its association with Disney long after its theatrical debut.

Pixar underwent a major shift in 2006 when The Walt Disney Company bought the studio for \$7.4 billion. This transaction was the result of years of disputes between Jobs, Pixar's majority shareholder, and then Disney Chief Executive Officer Michael Eisner. Since the production of *Toy Story 2* in the late 1990s, disagreements regarding Pixar's contract arose, as *Toy Story 2* was originally slated for straight-to-video release. When Pixar moved the film up to a theatrical release, Disney refused to include it as a contract commitment.

With further disputes over story and sequel rights, as well as division of labor and profits, Jobs announced Pixar would seek distributors outside of Disney. Obviously, this never happened. Negotiations resumed following Eisner's September 2005 resignation as Disney's CEO. Following Robert Iger's succession as Disney's CEO, negotiations for Disney's acquisition of Pixar began, completing May 5, 2006. Many of Pixar's earliest animators and creative team members are now executives running the company, including Lasseter as Pixar's Chief Creative Officer. Catmull still retains his position as president.

The buyout officially ended Pixar's 20-year reign as an independent production company, making *Cars* (2006) its last independent feature. As a viewer, the seven true Pixar films will forever be *Toy Story*, *A Bug's Life* (1998), *Toy Story 2*, *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), *Finding Nemo* (2003), *The Incredibles* (2004) and *Cars*.

Of course, even as Disney is credited (by common opinion) with destroying Pixar's legacy by having control over the company, Pixar still released critically and commercially successful films since the buyout. The list of films since Disney's acquisition includes *Ratatouille* (2007), *WALL•E* (2008), *Up*

## FRESH FILM PICKS THIS WEEK & NEXT WEEK



### CREED

#### Creed

**PG-13 132 min Drama | Sport**

Adonis Johnson (Michael B. Jordan) never knew his famous father, boxing champion Apollo Creed, who died before Adonis was born. However, boxing is in his blood, so he seeks out Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone) and asks the retired champ to be his trainer. Rocky sees much of Apollo in Adonis, and agrees to mentor him, even as he battles an opponent deadlier than any in the ring. With Rocky's help, Adonis soon gets a title shot, but whether he has the true heart of a fighter remains to be seen.

Director: Ryan Coogler

Stars: Sylvester Stallone, Michael B. Jordan, Tessa Thompson, Graham McTavish



### KRAMPUS

#### Krampus

**PG-13 98 min Comedy | Fantasy | Horror**

While the holiday season represents the most magical time of year, ancient European folklore warns of Krampus, a horned beast who punishes naughty children at Christmastime. When dysfunctional family squabbling causes young Max (Emjay Anthony) to lose his festive spirit, it unleashes the wrath of the fearsome demon. As Krampus lays siege to the Engel home, mom (Toni Collette), pop (Adam Scott), sister (Stefania LaVie Owen) and brother must band together to save one another from a monstrous fate.

Director: Michael Dougherty

Stars: Adam Scott, Toni Collette, David Koechner, Allison Tolman

#### NEW FILM: NOVEMBER 27, 2015

##### The Good Dinosaur

**PG Animation | Adventure | Comedy | Family | Fantasy**

What if the asteroid that forever changed life on Earth missed the planet completely and giant dinosaurs never became extinct? In this epic journey into the world of dinosaurs, an Apatosaurus named Arlo makes an unlikely human friend. While traveling through a harsh and mysterious landscape, Arlo learns the power of confronting his fears and discovers what he is truly capable of.

Director: Peter Sohn

Stars: Raymond Ochoa, Jeffrey Wright, Steve Zahn, A.J. Buckley

##### Victor Frankenstein

##### PG-13 109 min Drama | Horror | Sci-Fi

Told from Igor's perspective, we see the troubled young assistant's dark origins, his redemptive friendship with the young medical student Viktor Von Frankenstein, and become eyewitnesses to the emergence of how Frankenstein became the man - and the legend - we know today.

Director: Paul McGuigan

Stars: Daniel Radcliffe, James McAvoy, Jessica Brown Findlay, Andrew Scott

##### The Danish Girl

**R 120 min Biography | Drama**

The remarkable love story inspired by the lives of artists Lili Elbe and Gerda Wegener. Lili and Gerda's marriage and work evolve as they navigate Lili's groundbreaking journey as a transgender pioneer.

Director: Tom Hooper

Stars: Alicia Vikander, Amber Heard, Eddie Redmayne, Ben Whishaw

A modern day adaptation of the ancient Greek play *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes, set against the backdrop of gang violence in Chicago.

Director: Spike Lee

Stars: Nick Cannon, Teyonah Parris, Wesley Snipes, Angela Bassett

##### The Letters

**PG 114 min Drama**

A drama that explores the life of Mother Teresa through letters she wrote to her longtime friend and spiritual advisor, Father Celeste van Exem over a nearly 50-year period.

Director: William Riad

Stars: Juliet Stevenson, Rutger Hauer, Max von Sydow, Priya Darshini

Macbeth

#### NEW FILM: DECEMBER 4, 2015

##### Chi-Raq

**R 118 min Drama**

(2009), *Toy Story 3* (2010), *Cars 2* (2011), *Brave* (2012), *Monsters University* (2013), *Inside Out* (2015) and now *The Good Dinosaur*.

Most of Pixar's films since Disney's purchase contain heavier themes, particularly *Up*, which explores love and loss in a way audiences never expected upon their first viewing. I'm confident in saying most of Pixar's films since the buyout have matured. Although, the transition toward a mature tone really began with *Toy Story 2*, and of course, I'm referring to Jessie's recounting of enduring abandonment at the hands of her owner Emily.

As Pixar approaches its 30-year anniversary next February, one can only reflect upon the mark the company has left and continues to leave on the film industry, and to think it all started with the journey of a cowboy and a space ranger trying to get home.

From astonishing short films and an ambitious feature-length project to becoming the world's pioneer in computer animation, Pixar continues to dazzle filmgoers and animation enthusiasts. And if the company's impeccable ability to tell a story means anything, it's that no matter what happens, the legacy of Pixar will certainly be with us forever.

For me though, *Toy Story* stands as one of the most impactful films of my life, one of my top five favor-

ite films of all time and one of the greatest animated films ever made. Now 20 years later, I can't express how glad I am *Toy Story* was the first, and not just for what it means to me, but how that film impacted animation in a way it might not have had it been second or third.

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