

Cultural Daily

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John Lasseter's Skydance Animation Acquires Brad Bird's "Ray Gunn"

Our Friends · Thursday, March 31st, 2022

Fans of animated sci-fi rejoice – a new animated contender is coming this November.

Skydance Animation, headed by [former-Pixar animator John Lasseter](#), recently acquired [Ray Gunn](#), a Brad Bird feature-length animated film. Brad Bird is the visionary director behind animated films like *Ratatouille*, *The Incredibles* franchise, and cult classic *The Iron Giant*. For years, Bird has brought delightful storytelling to audiences young and old. Together with Skydance, the director and studio bring new tales to a new audience.

Bird stated that he wanted to blend futurism with pre-WWII aesthetics when it came to the creation of *Ray Gunn*. He mentioned this was because “the atomic bomb made the world a smaller place and the future less than rosy.”

“This is an ART DECO future where everything is streamlined within an inch of its life, where cities are gargantuan jewels that stretch into the heavens, where flying cars stream through the sky, where creatures from other planets have joined the melting pot, and holograms are only in black and white.”

“At the same time, I wanted to combine two disparate worlds from the same period: the squeaky clean look of Buck Rogers and the contemporary, gritty, been-around characters from pulp novels.”

Although specific details regarding *Ray Gunn* [have been kept relatively hush](#), Brad Bird and co-writer Matthew Robbins have said this story is one they’ve been fostering for over three decades now. Bird began writing it around the same time he was asked to do *The Iron Giant*. Both Brad Bird and Matthew Robbins are crime and retro sci-fi fans. It’s clear from movies like *The Iron Giant* and *Batteries Not Included* that this is something the director holds near and dear to him in terms of stylistic choices. Brad Bird said he was excited to “create a one-of-a-kind animated experience” with the nest egg he has been nurturing for quite some time. This will be his first animated feature film direction since 2018’s *The Incredibles 2*.

About Brad Bird

Brad Bird was born Phillip Bradley Bird in Kalispell, Montana – near Glacier National Park – in 1957. He was the youngest of four children. Later in his life, his family moved to Oregon, where he first sparked his love of film and media. At age 14, he completed his first-ever animated film

and sent it to Disney Studios. He was invited to the studios as an intern at that young age. Later, he became integral to films the studio produced, and when Pixar started releasing animated films, he was included as a director on several of them.

This isn't the first time Brad Bird worked with [Skydance's John Lasseter](#). He joined Lasseter's teams on the Incredibles franchise and Ratatouille. John Lasseter is a pioneering animator known for cultivating many successful digitally-animated films. Like Bird, he finds ways to combine traditional storytelling with new ideas. His split from Disney to Pixar work on Toy Story (the first full-length feature made with complete computer animation) was known for bringing about the success of Pixar Studios. The dream team made up of Bird and Lasseter is destined to define computer animation for the next generation of viewers. And with the inclusion of Skydance Animation, it will be interesting to see how Bird's project separates itself from the current animation monopolies.

About Skydance Media

Skydance is nonetheless at the forefront of modern animation, even as a relative newcomer to the digital animation scene. Skydance Media has been around since 2006 and has produced other non-animated films, including True Grit, Jack Reacher, Mission Impossible: Fallout, Transformers: Rise of the Beasts, and Top Gun: Maverick. It was founded in Santa Monica, California, in 2006 by David Ellison. Since then, it has focused its talents on films and television, including animated films. [Skydance Animation](#), run by John Lasseter, is the company's animation division.

Skydance Animation was launched in 2017 in Madrid as a part of a multi-year partnership with Ilion Animation Studios. The company's goal is to provide "animation the world has never seen before." Skydance seeks to use "the power of animation to create fantastic new worlds and unforgettable new characters across features, series, and shorts."

Skydance Animation & Ilion gained notoriety just a few months after its creation in August 2017 to renew a deal with Paramount to distribute their feature-length animated films. Under this deal, the animation company released two breathtaking animated pieces: *Blush* and *Luck*.

Other Released Films

Ray Gunn will not be the first feature-length animated film put out by Skydance Animation, and it certainly won't be the last. Skydance's first foray into streaming platforms like Apple Original Films came from *Blush*, a Joe Mateo short (the same mastermind behind *Prep & Landing*). Heart-wrenching, true to Pixar's influence, *Blush* follows a semi-autobiographical narrative about an astronaut horticulture expert who crashes lands on a planet and must seek the help of an alluring alien to survive. She is the one who makes the planet on which he crashes an actual paradise, but when met with tragedy, he is not sure he will be able to go on.

The story, like many other shorts of his, was a parable. This time, the parable hit close to home. He is the horticulturist, and his late wife, Mary Ann, was the alien in the story. She had struggled with breast cancer and unfortunately lost her life to it (the pink alien is a nod to the pink breast cancer ribbon). Like the astronaut in *Blush*, he struggled to survive without his wife. He had a panic attack the night of her death, and he, too, felt that he was going to die. But fortunately, he had little pieces of his wife (his kids) to move on with. He tried to portray this in *Blush* and left viewers with a sad but relatable story.

After *Blush*, Skydance paved the way to release two feature-length films – *Spellbound* and *Luck*. *Luck* is set to release on August 5th of 2022 and already is highly anticipated due to its cast, including Eva Noblezada, Simon Pegg, Flula Borg, Lil Rel Howery, Colin O'Donoghue, John Ratzenberger – and Jane Fonda, and Whoopi Goldberg rounding out the team. It follows the story of the unluckiest girl in the world who tries to change the outcome of her luck with a team of fantasy creatures.

Luck is only the first in two extensive animated features being released in 2022. The other is *Spellbound* – set to come out in November of 2022. Both are part of an AppleTV+ acquisition with a multi-year partnership and may just set SkyDance Animation up for a long partnership with the brand. The acquisition is one of several ways AppleTV+ is trying to appeal to families and children to use their product.

Like *Ray Gunn*, *Spellbound* has been kept relatively secret, though some plot details have recently been released. First, it will be a musical (featuring a score written by Alan Menken of Disney fame). It follows the story of a girl whose kingdom has been split in two by a curse. But can Elian, who is only a teenager, actually protect her town from the changes it faces from the forces of good and evil?

Many of the stories released thus far from Skydance have familiar themes and plotlines, but it's clear from shorts like *Blush* that the company has still found a way to take the comfortable and make it their own. *Ray Gunn*, however, sounds like a new and exciting chapter for the production studio.

Photo by Felix Mooneeram on Unsplash

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