

A Modern Fairy Tale

It took years of development and tinkering, but Disney's new CG-animated *Tinker Bell* finally earns her wings this month. *by Jake Friedman*

Disney's new direct-to-DVD movie, *Tinker Bell*, was a long time coming. After all, Peter Pan's feisty companion is almost as much of a Disney icon as the Mouse himself. To synchronize the push of the new fairy franchise, the creative folks over at Disney had the daunting task of taking the emblematic pixie and turning her into a movie star. The end result may make the most creative minds at Disney not only filled with happy thoughts, but also downright proud of their work.

"It's such a great project," says *Tinker Bell* director Brad Raymond (*Pocahontas II*, *The Lion King 1 1/2*), who has become an expert in delivering DVD sequels to the studio's animated releases. "It's about Tinker Bell's origins in Never Land, what makes Tinker Bell who she is and finding her place in her world."

and having him over your shoulder helping you with that was an incredible process."

Raymond and screenwriter Jeff Howard worked together to create an engaging story that would win Lasseter's approval. "Jeff and I thought, 'What would be the best way to set up that world with a story that would be entertaining?' It just felt natural to tell Tinker Bell's origin story, to take a character we know and love and follow her through her world." J. M. Barrie's original Peter Pan story was used canonically for fairy lore (a fairy is born from a baby's first laugh). "We pitched the story to John a number of times, and at each pitch he added to it and made it better," offers Raymond.

A few of Lasseter's tricks of the trade found their way into the *Tinker Bell* movie. "He really understands the importance of relate-ability

"He really knows Disney magic, and he's the most artist-friendly boss I've ever worked for," says Raymond. "John loved the final film—he's seen it every step of the way."



Bradley Raymond

Another Disney luminary, Andreas Deja, gave further artistic support to Raymond's design team. "Redesigning the character in CG wasn't easy. We wanted her silhouette to look and feel like Tinker Bell, so we had Andreas look at it," says Raymond. "He gave us a very detailed chalk talk on some key elements in her design. He had talked with Marc Davis numerous times about his design of Tinker Bell, so it was almost like having Marc there showing us how to draw her."

To give Tink's home a fairy feel, art director Fred Warter was relied upon to create something unique. "The different settings are part of the magic of relating to these characters," says Raymond. "When we start off in London, it's a little more realistic. Pixie Hollow, though, is in the mountains of Never Land. We wanted to keep that same style, and the mountains in the distance are the rounded mountains from Never Land, but we wanted it to stand on its own. We used art nouveau styles to give it a slightly more stylistic world. There are a lot of curves and straights in the lines, echoing Mary Blair's concept sketches of Peter Pan." Warter also created a color script for the film, which gives visual cues that follow Tinker Bell's journey.

The film was written and designed at the DisneyToon Studios in Burbank and animated by India's Prana Studios, using a Maya platform. The production team took a few trips overseas, but mostly relied on video conferencing to compromise with the thirteen-hour time difference. Raymond estimates around 500 people in total worked together to meet their 20-month production schedule.

"It was a little daunting to tackle the film," concludes Raymond, "but with John Lasseter and a great crew throughout the process, it was a chance of a lifetime. It was an incredible honor to see her origin story, and it makes it a bit easier when you have a great character to start with." ■

Tinker Bell will be released on DVD (\$29.99) and Blu-ray (\$34.99) October 28 by Walt Disney Home Entertainment.



One Pixie's Beginning: Mae Whitman voices the titular fairy in Disney's new CG-animated movie, *Tinker Bell*. The all-star cast includes Anjelica Huston, Kristen Chenoweth, America Ferrera, Raven-Symoné, Lucy Liu, Jesse McCartney and Rob Paulsen.

Not surprisingly, Disney's chief creative officer, John Lasseter, has played a big role in guiding the project along and mentoring Raymond throughout the production process. "The first thing John said when he came in is that he loves seeing worlds created," says Raymond, "and of course he's done that time and time again in the Pixar movies. It was his idea to jump in using the book *In the Realm of the Never Fairies* [Disney Press] as inspiration and build the world from there. It was a lot of fun creating such a rich world,

and how the audience's world connects to the world you're showing," says Raymond. "There's the magic of nature like snowflakes and the leaves changing, and it was John who said, 'What if fairies are the ones that bring that to our world?' He also helps us understand that everything—the story, the costumes, the props—all has to connect with that world." Raymond points out that may be something as simple as a fairy vehicle: A miniature wooden cart was redesigned out of a hollow gourd, with acorns for wheels.