

Tony Fucile talks about his picture book *Let's Do Nothing!*



Tony Fucile



Q. How and when did you become interested in art and animation?

A. I was lucky to have been exposed to some of the greatest animation at a very early age. We had a local TV cartoon host who showed early 1940s Looney Tunes, which were on the air every day after school. Those Bob Clampett Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck cartoons in particular just mesmerized me. Then came my first viewing of *Pinocchio*. Of all the movies I've seen in my lifetime, none compares to that one screening in terms of dramatic impact. I just couldn't wrap my head around it. I knew its characters weren't "real," but to me they were more alive than anything. Later came Ray Harryhausen's wonderful stop-motion monsters, the *Peanuts* holiday specials, Chuck Jones, and Tex Avery. All of this is what inspired me to learn how to draw.

Q. How did you make the leap from films to books?

A. I spent most of my career in animation making hand-drawn animated features, as both an animator and a character designer. Pixar brought Brad Bird up to develop *The Incredibles*, and I came along to join the team, helping to create and build the characters and supervise animation. I was intrigued by the computer. It was an amazing experience, but I did miss drawing, and acting with drawings. In the meantime, the hand-drawn form of animating movies was slowly being phased out at all the studios, including Disney. A very sad development.

I had always wanted to make picture books, but thought it was something that would be very tough to break into. I had collected many little tidbits over the years that I thought would make fun books. I began developing an idea about a kid who climbs his huge grandfather like a mountain. But my wife spotted a review of *The Daddy Mountain* in the newspaper, and that was the end of that. It actually energized me. I thought to myself, Wow, the great Jules Feiffer thought this idea was worth making a book out of. Maybe I have a chance here!

Q. How is creating a book different from or similar to working on animation?

A. The biggest difference for me is the writing. In animation, I never wrote or worked in story. I was an animator. My responsibilities were similar to what an actor gives a director in a live-action film. I was

addicted to it, the notion of breathing life into characters with a pencil and paper. Making this book was kind of like animating, but without the in-betweens. In an animation shot, we call it the "storytelling pose"—the single visual idea that must be conveyed to the audience, to connect them with what you're trying to communicate. When you animate, you usually begin with that dominant pose or poses in mind. *Let's Do Nothing!* is really a series of key animation storytelling poses. It scratches that animator itch in me that I'm afraid will never go away.

Also, with a book you are a one-man show — you lay it out, draw locations, research, and color the thing all by yourself. I used to live in a black-and-white world as an animator. That may have been the toughest challenge for me with this book: color. I hope that I stink at it a teeny bit less than I did before painting the book.

Q. Why did you want to write a book about doing nothing? How did you get the idea?

A. I vividly remember those childhood moments of excruciating boredom. We tend to remember the interesting and exciting parts of youth, but what about those times when you feel like you are stuck in a vat of molasses? A kid experiences that with such conviction. It was horrible! That said, I think those moments can be hugely catalytic. Great ideas come out of a bored mind. Or quiet mind. The concept of nothing wasn't the impetus for the book; it was a product of the characters and situation. I visualized these two bored boys — one kind of like me, and the other kind of like my childhood friend Steve. Then I had them interact. The idea of doing nothing really sprang from these characters yapping at each other.



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Q. Describe the process of illustrating *Let's Do Nothing!*

A. Most artists who use computer paint programs use them to do their final art. I went the opposite way with this project. I used computers for roughing it all out and real materials for final art. I used a Cintiq monitor, which allows you to draw right on the screen. I completed all versions of the dummy on the Cintiq using the program Painter. I find the program great for playing around with layouts and placing text. It has all sorts of cool brushes, and experimenting with color is very fast.

Being slightly detached from the work is strangely liberating for me as well. It keeps me loose. When it came to doing the final art, I went with traditional materials: acrylics, ink, and pencil. You still can't beat real art supplies for tight control (and happy accidents). It was fun! And I like getting dirty.

Q. What artists, writers, and/or experiences have most influenced your work?

A. I'll always be somewhat a product of my experience as an animator. My drawing style is very much influenced by some of my favorite animators. Many of my heroes from the golden age of the art form made the transition to picture books: Bill Peet, Mary Blair, J.P. Miller, the Provensens. I love Marc Simont, Dr. Seuss, Maurice Sendak, William Steig, Roger Duvoisin, Robert McCloskey, Richard Scarry, Jules Feiffer, Charles Schulz, N.C. Wyeth, Ronald Searle, Hank Ketchum. I can go on and on. Many current artists and writers inspire me as well. I should mention one book that cast a spell over me: *Dmitri the Astronaut* by Jon Agee. Like *Where the Wild Things Are*, this is a book that I can endlessly chew on, like a dog with a bone. I love the appearance of something that at first glance feels breezy and spontaneous but at further inspection reveals tremendous complexity. I love it. I think that books as much as anything inspired me to try to create one myself. ○

