

Peter Ramsey: The 'Rise of the Guardians' Interview

**Kam Williams
Special To**

Rise of the Guardians is Peter Ramsey's first feature film after directing the hit DreamWorks Animation Halloween special, "Monsters vs. Aliens: Mutant Pumpkins from Outer Space." This project followed the feature film, "Monsters vs. Aliens" on which Ramsey served as Head of Story. While at DreamWorks Animation, Ramsey also served as a story artist on "Shrek the Third," and as a storyboard artist on "Shrek the Third."

Before joining DreamWorks Animation in 2004, Ramsey's talent as a storyboard artist was on display while working on a notable number of live action feature films, including "Adaptation," "Minority Report," "A.I. Artificial Intelligence," "Cast Away," "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," "Fight Club," "Godzilla," "Men in Black," "Independence Day," "Batman Forever," "Far and Away," "Backdraft," and "Predator 2" amongst others.

Ramsey's directing skills were also honed early, as he served as Second Unit Director on live

action feature films including "Godzilla," "Tank Girl," "Higher Learning," and "Poetic Justice." A lifelong resident of Los Angeles, California, Peter grew-up in Crenshaw, and graduated from Palisades High School before attending UCLA.

Here, he talks about his life and career, and about being the first African-American to direct a full-length, animated feature.

Kam Williams: Hi Peter, thanks for the interview. I'm honored to have this opportunity to speak with you.

Peter Ramsey: Oh, the pleasure's all mine, Kam. The pleasure's all mine.

KW: I really enjoyed Rise of the Guardians. Let me start by asking you what it meant to make history as the first African-American hired by a big studio to direct a full-length, animated feature?

PR: I thought about it a little bit when I first got the job, but then rapidly got lost in the work. It wasn't until later, when my mom and dad read that fact about me in the newspaper, and I saw how it affected them, that it came back to me. Since I talk to a lot of groups at schools, one good thing is that kids can look at me and have

direct knowledge of someone who's doing something they might be dreaming of doing themselves.

KW: How did you get the gig? Judging from your bio, it seems like you've been a storyboard artist most of your career until now.

PR: Right. I got into film as a storyboard artist, but my dream was always to be a director. The way I was able to get into the industry was through drawing. As a storyboard artist, you basically pre-visualize the whole film through drawing. So, I spent a lot of my career doing that with many different directors. That was really film school for me, my training ground, because I got to work with so many great people.

KW: So, what was your academic background? Did you study art?

PR: I'm pretty much self-taught. I took a couple of art classes in high school, and I entered college with the intention of majoring in art. But I was a little too young when I started at UCLA at 17, and I wasn't ready for the concept of art that was being taught there. I was intimidated by Art History, and didn't get it. All I was inter-



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ested in was drawing. I wish I had been able to hang tough, but I dropped out after a couple years. Of course, I did learn a bunch of that stuff later on.

KW: Editor/Legist Patricia Turnier was wondering whether the film is faithful to the book series it's based upon.

PR: An interesting thing about the movie and the books is that they were both being developed at the same time. The books' author, Bill Joyce, in his talks with the studio, said, "It would be really cool, if I could do a series of books

about the origins of these characters, how they came to be and their back stories while you guys were simultaneously developing a movie about the first time they all came together." So, they're all the same characters and they share the same mythology, but the movie and the books are pretty different.

KW: Patricia also asks: What message do you want children to take away from your movie?

PR: The main message of the film is that you have the power to create magic through your imagination and to bring it into the world, whether that's in the form of the Guardian characters who represent a lot of things we need, or whether it's just anybody creating something. That is the best way to fight fear. That's probably the central idea of the movie.

KW: Why did you tweak these familiar characters, like giving Santa a Russian accent and making him look a little different from what we've come to expect?

PR: The basic idea behind the books was to suggest that you grew up with a made-up version of all these characters, as if there's a

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