

Living the DREAM

Alumnus Dave Hardin pursues passion for animation as a senior character animator at Dreamworks in California

By Melina Glusac
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It took a few insects and some artistic talent.

“We had taken a field trip to go see the movie *A Bug's Life*, the Pixar movie. I saw that in 10th grade. Our animation class went on a field trip and saw it. After that, I was like, ‘I wanna go and do that stuff. I wanna do 3-D film,’” alumnus Dave Hardin said.

Hardin is a senior character animator for DreamWorks Studios, the production company behind star-studded hits like *Kung Fu Panda*.

In his job, Hardin is still pursuing a talent that manifested early in his life.

“Well, I think I used to draw when I was really young,” Hardin said. “I would do little drawings of video games that I liked from Nintendo.”

His mother, North classroom assistant Wendy Spreder, remembers her son's budding aptitude for the arts.

“He drew ever since he was a little child, and he always used to draw like war figures and people getting hurt and injured,” Spreder said. “And he also was really creative in his bedroom – he would set booby traps. You'd open up his door of his bedroom, and this fan would spin around, and army guys would fly off what would be connected to a string, which would pull another cord, and you'd get hit in the head with something, and then something would get thrown at you. You know, he always had a really creative mind.”

North allowed Hardin the freedom to hone his creative energy with the help of influential staff members.

“Mr. (Ray) Marchesi, he was my photography teacher. I learned a lot from him. Mr. (Rob) Thies was my art

teacher; he was great... I really liked taking those classes. And Mr. (Brian) Stackpoole taught me a lot about video, as well,” Hardin said. “He taught me a lot about stuff that I still use today, about stuff like film composition and stuff like that.”

The variety of art classes offered at North also enlightened Hardin to up-and-coming software.

“I took animation basics, like 2-D and 3-D courses, at North. And there was actually one student named Mike Parker that actually came in and told me about this program called Brice 3-D. It was a 3-D landscape generator. And I remember we were all doing these 2-D assignments, and he had brought in this assignment that he had done in 3-D, and it blew my mind.”

This passion eventually led him to the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, the birthplace of his love affair with making art come to life.

“I actually wanted to get into visual effects, like for film. When I went to college, I actually had no interest in animation at that time because I didn't really know much about it,” Hardin said. “So yeah, I went to col-

lege for visual effects, doing explosions and stuff like that, particle effects – stuff that's more technical than animation is. But then my sophomore year of college, I took an animation class because it was a requirement for the visual effects field, and that's kind of when I fell in love with animation.”

After college, Hardin was immediately hired by Sony. His career has helped spawn an array of more-than-noteworthy films like *Open Season*, *Surf's Up*, *Cloudy With A Chance of Meatballs* and *Kung Fu Panda 2*.

“My favorite animated movie, one that I could watch over and over again, would probably be the first *Kung Fu Panda*. *Kung Fu Panda 1* was my favorite film,” Hardin said. “Actually, that's the reason why I quit Sony and came to DreamWorks, was because of that film. And I actually came [to DreamWorks] and worked on the sequel to *Kung Fu Panda*, *Kung Fu Panda 2*. Yeah, I really wanted to be a part of that franchise because I loved the first one.”

Since then, Hardin has most enjoyed creating the drama-free *Cloudy With A Chance of Meatballs*.

“I really liked that film a lot. The end result was really fun; people really responded to it really well,” Hardin said. “And just working on it was great. The directors were really young guys, and they were really laid back. It was their first feature film themselves, so they didn't have like a hidden agenda, they didn't have an ego. They were just like super excited to be a part of the filmmaking process, so it made it really fun for the crew as well.”

Even after all his glamorous success, which includes being nominated for an Annie Award for his animation in Sony's *Surf's Up* and a Golden Globe for *Rise of the Guardians*, Hardin still aspires to improve.

“I kind of want to probably get into directing animation as well. Hopefully that will be before 10 years time. But I think it would be really nice to actually be a director, as well, but I know that you kind of have to go the story route to become a director for a feature film. So I would have to get into story-boarding and stuff,” Hardin said. “But right now I'm just kind of set with animation. I kind of like doing what I'm doing.”



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