



Inspiration Arises From Disaster: A Film Project Over a Decade in the Making

November 18, 2021

The ongoing pandemic has wreaked havoc on the film industry, with most theaters shut down in 2020. Even now, many blockbuster films have gone straight to streaming services.

One local filmmaker's vision began nearly a decade before the COVID pandemic. It all started with another tragic disaster, but from that disaster, a story unfolded and inspired a film project.

Foster Swift's Business Development Team sat down with one of the founders and the Director of AI OK MEDIA, LLC, based in Saint Johns, Michigan, to discuss what disaster inspired this film, where they currently stand with the project and how the attorneys at Foster Swift helped them overcome some of the hurdles along the way.

When did this film project begin?

Our production started in April of 2011 when I returned to my home town of Saint Johns, Michigan after two years of living and working abroad in Japan. After escaping the triple disaster that began on March 11, 2011, I think the creative part of my brain got a jolt from the earthquake/tsunami/nuclear holocaust-related PTSD I was experiencing. Even though my previous writing experience had primarily included only academic papers and hundreds of songs, I strangely had a flood of ideas for several screenplays while in Michigan.

What inspired you to undertake this project?

Over the course of the following few years, I taught myself how to tell a story using the modern screenplay format, and over the last decade, the screenplay that was inspired by the disaster in Fukushima slowly became the current iteration of our film's story.

What were the circumstances in getting the project started?

I had lived and worked in Los Angeles for a year, back in 2004, and even before experiencing the cataclysms in Japan, I was planning to move back to Southern California to pursue a rewarding career in the mainstream entertainment industry. In 2012, I moved back to Los Angeles to work on the script while also working as an actor, film

BLOG CONTRIBUTORS

John W. Mashni



editor, musician, restaurant waiter, and caretaker for disabled persons. I cannot begin to tell you how much easier it was to get around California with Google Maps compared to the Thomas Guide I used in 2004!

After over five years of struggling in an ultra-competitive L.A., I finally got a meeting with Stan Lee's main Japanese co-producer there (Yes, The Stan Lee of Marvel Comics). She loved the story, saw that its themes matched Lee's vision, and requested that I make a graphic novel for Lee. Soon after that meeting, I accepted a position as a professor at a Tokyo university in an attempt to be in the place where I could most likely find graphic novelists to learn from.

After a year as a professor in Tokyo, I realized that being a full-time freelancer in the art world was going to be the best way to get our production seen by audiences the most quickly. Making that transition to freelancing was not easy, but I felt so strongly about getting our story out into the world, that sacrificing stability for storytelling felt like a necessary plan of action.

After that, I lived in Tokyo for several more three-month stints to work as a freelancer with the teams who have gotten us to this point, and I am happy to report that our efforts have produced a Japanese/English script, two Japanese/English synopses, a Japanese/English graphic novel, and a one-minute animated teaser. I cannot stress enough how important Foster Swift has been for our fledgling LLC. Attorneys John Kamins and John Mashni have been so cool...

How was Foster Swift able to help you overcome some of the hurdles and keep your project rolling?

Before I left for Tokyo, my family and I created AI OK MEDIA, LLC with Foster Swift's Emmy-earner John Kamins at the Farmington Hills (now Southfield), Michigan office. John was very patient, and his talk of connections and merchandising inspired us to think bigger than ever. John also drew up the paperwork that allowed me to transfer the story's copyright to the LLC. Looking back, John Kamins' big ideas pushed us in the right direction, and now our production is a burgeoning success story for the ages!

Before John Kamins retired, he had me meet with Foster Swift's film degree-holder attorney, John Mashni, in the Lansing, Michigan office. I am happy to report that collaborating with John Mashni for the past few years has meant all the difference in our production's journey – due to John expertly wearing several hats. Our animated teaser's production contract with Tokyo's Toneplus Animation Studios was negotiated with John's help, and after he collaborated with me on our screenplay and synopses to great effect, John even labored with me to iron out our story's crucial log line which is: "In our future, a young revolutionary leads a mass slum uprising – but everything changes when a general causes a cataclysm that could trigger human extinction."

Where are you and your team currently at with the project?

And now that our production team is finally ready to submit our story to graphic novel publishers such as Penguin Books and Dark Horse Comics in America and Shueisha's JUMP! magazine in Japan, John will soon be an integral part of that process. John will also be a big part of creating our forthcoming trailer, and hopefully,



John's services will be needed as we negotiate a production/distribution deal for our feature film.

Regarding the forthcoming trailer, our LLC is currently, independently funding the creation of a silent, black and white trailer to be used in an upcoming Kickstarter crowdfunding venture. A successful \$25,000 Kickstarter campaign in 2022 will fund the finishing of the trailer - including editing, coloring, scoring, and the addition of CGI, titles and text, sound effects, and (hopefully) celebrity actors' voices. Our plan for 2022 is to create a global buzz for our film through the Kickstarter platform and attract more investors there as well. The proper two-minute theatrical trailer we expect to come from that process could set us up to be able to make a difference in the world with a poignant animated feature film in 2023 if our luck holds.

Were there any major roadblocks along the way?

There are too many to list. Stan Lee's death in November 2018 was our first big heartbreaker, but the pandemic takes the cake as far as how we are having to constantly reassess how to keep moving forward. Other roadblocks include language and cultural barriers, culture shock/reverse culture shock, and the sleep deprivation torture of constant jet lag. Even though I am now working remotely in Michigan indefinitely, I am still required to work around the schedules of collaborators who live all over the world. Being on-call around the clock for years on end has been a challenge to say the least, but the idea of shaking up the world with our epic tale keeps me motivated to keep going, no matter what.

Are there any details about this film project that you can give without giving away any spoilers?

We have found that the multi-lingual process of collaborating internationally has produced a hybrid storytelling style. Even though we follow the Campbellian formula to the letter, the unique details that hold our hero's journey together maximize emotional impact in a completely novel way. As for spoiler-free details from our story, I can only share a few without co-producers admonishing me.

For starters, our tale has a tender, interracial teenage love story at its heart. The story's climactic end-of-the-world scenario is striking beyond belief, but our message about the power of love overshadows even that. Secondly, the Bechdel Test is passed in a pivotal scene, and strong female characters are included in the diverse cast. Also, the action in the story is so varied and extreme, sub-nautical swashbuckling takes place alongside epic phantasmagoria at one point. Lastly, the ecological warning that our story includes contains clear anti-revenge sentiments and presents audiences with opportunities to learn from a wise young protagonist's example. All in all, we hope our story will be cathartic and serve as a catalyst for people who want to live in a way that makes the world a better place for everyone.

So! Get ready for the YA graphic novel and PG-13 animated feature film that are about to make a positive impact globally. Our production team has overcome adversity time and again, and the momentum that our resilience has manifested is now unstoppable. If we continue to be successful and get a chance to publicly name parties that help our story reach the masses, audiences around the world will definitely be hearing about how awesome Foster Swift is - maybe even during an Oscar ceremony! Dare to dream with us, and please stay tuned!