Exploring the Land of Ooo

An Unofficial Overview and Production History of Cartoon Network’s Adventure Time

Paul Thomas

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# Table of Contents

*Acknowledgments*  
v
*A Note on Season Divisions*  
vii

Introduction: “C’mon, Grab Your Friends”  
1

11  
1. Two Rad Bros: Finn the Human & Jake the Dog  
12  
2. Sugar & Spice:  
   Princess Bubblegum & Marceline the Vampire Queen  
28  
   The Ensemble Characters  
46  
4. The “C-Listers”: Other Characters of Note  
71

**Part 2: Behind the Easel: The Production of *Adventure Time***  
94  
5. “Video Makers”: How an Episode Was Made  
95  
6. “Come Along with Me”:  
   The Production History of *Adventure Time*  
104  
7. Good Jubies: The Guest-Animated Episodes  
158  
8. The Institute of So Und: The Music of *Adventure Time*  
178
**Part 3: “Storytelling”: How *Adventure Time* Told its Tales**

9. Monomythic Time: Finn and the Hero’s Journey 209
10. The Creative Use of Retconning 227
11. The Three Levels of *Adventure Time* 234

**Part 4: Pure Finndemonium!**

12. The Ins and Outs of the *Adventure Time* Fandom 243

Conclusion: “The Fun Will Never End” 269

*Appendix A: Episode List* 271
*Appendix B: Original Production Schedules for Seasons 7+* 299

*Bibliography* 301
*Index* 315
*Image Permissions* 321
*About the Author* 323
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The division of the show’s first six seasons are uncontroversial. However, much digital ink has been spilled about the correct division of seasons seven and beyond. Throughout this book, I will use Cartoon Network’s “official” season divisions (for a total of 10 seasons), as they are the ones used on the Adventure Time DVD and Blu-ray box sets. For those curious, a comparison of the production vs. post facto ordering of the show’s final few seasons is presented in Appendix B.
When I was a child growing up in the 90s, I watched a lot of cartoons. I had a soft spot for Nickelodeon shows like *Hey, Arnold!*, *Doug*, and *Rugrats*, and the CBS program *Garfield and Friends*, but the truth is that I would watch pretty much anything animated if given the chance. I liked media that had silly set pieces, wacky dialogue, and zany action. Most cartoons scratched that itch.

Unfortunately, as I grew older and “matured” (read: began to internalize many of my interests so as to not appear too “weird” to my judgmental peers), my love of cartoons fell to the wayside. I instead began preoccupying myself with other hobbies, like reading fantasy literature, playing computer games, and performing music. By the time I graduated from high school and entered into the “adult world,” my interest in cartoons was a thing of the past.

Or so I thought...

Things started to change when I went to university in 2011. I roomed in a hall with 50 other young men, several of whom were art majors with eclectic tastes in popular culture. This meant I often found myself engrossed in conversations about the merits or defects of contemporary animation. During one discussion in particular, a friend of mine suggested that I watch a silly cartoon called *Adventure Time* about a boy named Finn and a magic dog named Jake. At the time, I had only seen a few snippets of the show, which, to be honest, it had not impressed me that much; this disinterest was largely due to my ignorance, as I erroneously assumed that *Adventure Time*
was some sort of hyperactive nonsense factory, grounded solely on “random” humor and gross-out comedy. (Oh, how naive I was...)

My limited understanding of the show persisted until the start of the fall 2012 semester. During the afternoon on a day in late August, I was chatting with my hall-mates in our communal TV room when I noticed the friend who had earlier recommend *Adventure Time* sitting in the corner of the room. He was looking at something on his computer and laughing. Always in the mood for something funny, I meandered over and saw that he was watching one of the newest episodes of *Adventure Time* (specifically season four’s “Sons of Mars,” in which the main characters journey to Mars and meet Abraham Lincoln). What I saw on that computer screen was captivating. The show was overflowing with the lushest of colors, it had a magnificent handle on made-up language, and its humor was so versatile.

Perhaps it is corny to say, but I felt something deep within me. It was a sort of pure, unmediated joy—the kind I remembered feeling as a child when I would wake up early to watch Saturday morning cartoons. That night, I queued up the first episode of *Adventure Time* and took the deep dive into the Land of Ooo; I binged the rest of the series soon thereafter, and by Christmas of that year, I was officially hooked.

When 2013 rolled around, I was purchasing merchandise and joining online fan communities made up of people who were just as passionate about the show as I was. Then, in the summer of 2014, I took my interest to the next level by starting a Tumblr blog titled GunterFan1992, on which I posted my thoughts about individual episodes. I also used this site as a way to reblog production updates and share artwork made by the show’s crew members. Hardly anyone paid me attention when I made my first few posts, but in time, more and more people were dropping by. Within a few months, I had somehow amassed over several thousand followers.

As my readership continued to grow, I decided to mix things up a bit, and so, in July of 2015, I reached out to some of the folks who had worked on the show, hoping to conduct “mini-interviews” about the show’s production via email. I firmly believed that only one or two artists would bother to respond, so consider my surprise when almost every single person whom I message agreed to my request. Within no time, I was chatting with the writers and producers of one of my favorite television programs, learning the behind-the-scenes details about which fans are so often eager to hear. After posting transcripts of these interviews on my Tumblr, I gained even more followers, and at one point, Adam Muto (the *Adventure Time* showrunner during seasons 5-10) was even following my blog!

In September 2018, just after the *Adventure Time* finale aired, I decided to write a few paragraphs about what made the show special as a sort of mourning exercise: I wrote about Marceline and Bubblegum, I began expli-
cating the show’s complex mythology, and I delved into the Ice King’s tragic backstory. In only a handful of days, a few paragraphs had grown into a few pages, which in turn grew into a few dozen essays. Several weeks later, I reached out to the writers and storyboard artists with whom I had previously corresponded, inquiring if they were interested in discussing their work on the show again. These informal email chats soon evolved into bona fide online interviews, and in time I had a nice little trove of production secrets about the show’s creation. During the latter part of 2018, I started collating my personal musings with the information provided to me by my contacts, and soon I had an embryonic manuscript focused on all things *Adventure Time*.

I initially hoped to publish the manuscript through McFarland and Company, an independent, academic publisher known for releasing quality works that take serious the often-neglected world of pop culture (such as Brian C. Baer’s *How He-Man Mastered the Universe* [2017], Sherilyn Connelly’s *Ponyville Confidential* [2017], and Darren Mooney’s *Opening the X-Files* [2017], to name just a few). The editors at McFarland were amenable to the idea, but alas, a shot across the bow from Cartoon Network’s lawyers in early 2020 prevented the project from coming to fruition. Just when all hope seemed lost, Dean Kevin L. Smith of the University of Kansas Libraries swooped in to the rescue, agreeing to offer my manuscript for download via the university’s ScholarWorks portal. I was, needless to say, delighted; not only did this arrangement mean that my book had a scholarly home, but it also ensured that people the world over could freely and easily access it.

Now, after almost two years of thinking, interviewing, writing, editing, rewriting, and re-editing, here we are. This book is the culmination of my interest in *Adventure Time*, and it functions as both an overview of and a love letter to a series I care deeply about.

⁂

This book is a critical overview and history of *Adventure Time*, the exuberant cartoon series that was created by visionary artist Pendleton Ward and which aired from 2010–18 on Cartoon Network. Like most cartoons, *Adventure Time* was written primarily for children, but unlike many others, it managed to also amass a fan-following of teenagers and young adults, almost all of whom were drawn to the series because of its distinct sense of humor, bold aesthetic choices, and memorable characters. The show was also a critical darling, and during its original run, it netted three Annie awards, eight Emmys, and a coveted Peabody—all the while earning accolades from what you might call “traditional” publications like *The New Yorker* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Although the series finished its original run in 2018, the
program still has legions of fans and is credited by many in the animation world as the catalyst which ushered in a new golden age of animation.

In the mid-2010s, it seemed like *Adventure Time* was everywhere—from t-shirts sold in malls to Macy’s Day Parade balloons. But while it is undeniable that *Adventure Time* grew into something of a pop culture phenomenon, only a few books and journal articles have looked at the show through a scholarly lens. What is more, most of the research about the show was published roughly half a decade ago, during the middle of the show’s run. This book, which I began to write in September 2018 following the *Adventure Time* series finale “Come Along with Me,” is my attempt to present an overview of the show that is both holistic and up-to-date.

Chances are that the person reading this book has a basic understanding of *Adventure Time*, but just to be safe, let me recap the premise of the series: set in the magical Land of Ooo, *Adventure Time* follows the escapades of two brothers: Finn the Human and Jake the Dog. While Finn is just a normal human teenager, Jake is a talking canine with the power to shapeshift—a power he and his brother often use (and occasionally abuse) to solve life’s problems. The two live in a rustic tree fort with their good friend, the sentient video game console BMO.

When they are not kicking back or off exploring, Finn and Jake serve as the *de facto* knights of the Candy Kingdom, a city-state ruled by the benevolent but uber-utilitarian Princess Bubblegum, who, as her name suggests, is a monarch made out of chewing gum. Finn and Jake also spend time with their myriad friends, including Marceline the Vampire Queen (a vampiric rocker chick whose apathetic exterior hides a tortured soul), Lumpy Space Princess (a spoiled and obnoxious drama queen who hails from a dimension known as “Lumpy Space”), and Flame Princess (the sweet but short-tempered princess of the Fire Kingdom). At other times, Finn and Jake find themselves trying to foil the plans of the misguided Ice King (a socially-awkward wizard whose insanity is matched only by his crippling loneliness) or their arch-nemesis, the Lich (a primordial entity whose driving purpose is to extinguish all life in the multiverse).

Finn and Jake’s Ooo is a dreamlike realm, inhabited by unusual characters and whimsical creatures, but this cheerful exterior belies a darkness, for Ooo is actually the shattered remnants of Earth—our Earth—one thousand years in the future, following a calamitous thermonuclear conflict known as the “Mushroom War.” This war is never discussed directly in the series, but clues scattered across various episodes suggest that it occurred sometime during the early 21st century, killing billions and leaving the planet in shambles; so thorough was this destruction that for most of the series, Finn believes that he is the only human left in existence. But while this nuclear holocaust was undeniably horrific, it did have one positive effect: It rein-
introduced into the world magic—a fundamental aspect of creation that had for the most part been dormant on Earth for millions of years. This means that the Ooo inhabited by Finn and Jake is something of a contradiction, being both a radioactive wasteland full of monsters as well as an enchanted paradise abounding in effervescent magic.

“What the Cabbage!?”: Explaining the Popularity

People who watch the series for the first time—especially after hearing people gush on and on about how good it is—can sometimes be off-put by its tone. This is understandable, as the earliest seasons are defined by a certain, shall we say, juvenility (for frame of reference, one of the first lines of dialogue uses the phrase “explosive diarrhea” quite gleefully). But as with many great works of pop culture, Adventure Time matured as it went along, meaning that while early episodes are often predicated on standard cartoon hijinks and “childish” humor, latter-series episodes often weave together topics as heavy as sexuality, depression, existentialism, and even the inevitability of death.

Much of this evolution was the result of the series’ interest in character growth, which is perhaps most obvious when considering the show’s main character, Finn. At the beginning of the series, he is a wide-eyed child of 12, but by the time of Adventure Time’s tenth-season finale, he is 17 and on the cusp of manhood. In the intervening episodes, we the audience journey with Finn as he discovers the joys of life (e.g., video games, ice cream waffles) and its pitfalls (e.g., heart break, abandonment). But it is not just Finn who grows; in fact, many of the show’s more outwardly flamboyant characters—like Princess Bubblegum, Marceline the Vampire Queen, and even the villainous Ice King—start off as one-dimensional archetypes before metamorphosing into multifaceted individuals with rich inner lives. It is this sort of character development that led James Poniewozik of The New York Times to conclude that “material of great drama ... lies ... under [the show’s] confectionery surface,” and that, ultimately, the show is a “wonderland of broken, misfit toys learning to fix one another.”

All of this talk about Adventure Time “maturing” may give a reader the impression that over its ten-season run the show became “serious” and lost its goofy sense of humor. This is incorrect, and even at its most pensive, Adventure Time was able to find laughter in almost any situation—be it the mundane or the absurd. What is more, Adventure Time’s sense of humor was always a bit different in that it was fundamentally kind. Characters are not usually jerkasses to one another, and if they are, it is in service to a larger point; it is never just for cheap laughs. This is in stark contrast to the many shows out there that encourage viewers to laugh at the main characters,
rather than with them. And contrary to the popular understanding of the show’s humor as “random” or “just for stoners,” most of the jokes are clever, working on different levels. This is not to say that “you have to have a very high IQ to understand” Adventure Time—simply that the series is versatile and can be enjoyed by diverse audiences, including everyone from pre-literate school children to graduate students.

This last point has generated much discussion: It is understandable why a cartoon might gain popularity with children, but why did a show like Adventure Time become so popular with young adults? In its earliest years, Adventure Time’s popularity among the teen and college sets baffled critics. In an attempt to explain this enigma, many commentators invoke what I call the “nostalgia theory.” A textbook example of this can be found in a 2012 video essay published by the PBS Idea Channel, in which host Mike Rugnetta argues that watching “Adventure Time is like remembering your childhood ... [and] ach[ing] for a time passed that you can’t recreate.” A year later, Jennifer Luxton would write something similar when she snarked: “In a time when nostalgia reigns supreme ... it’s understandable why adults may want to revisit their childhood through a cartoon for grown-ups. ... Adventure Time jumps in with infantile innocence and the right amount of twisted humor to lure in even the most discretionary man-child.”

While critical theorist Grzegorz Czemiel concedes that Adventure Time has nostalgic aspects—in that it “offer[s] a trip down memory lane to the world of 8-bit consoles, classic role-playing games, bouts of gorging on candy, and agonizing over how to speak to girls”—he attributes the show’s popularity not simply to a yearning for the “good old days,” but rather to its fundamentally “cute” aesthetic. Citing the writings of critical theorist Sianne Ngai, Czemiel contends that cuteness as an aesthetic category is deeply ambiguous, being “the site of a surprisingly complex power struggle” that functions as both “a form of resistance and a capitalist pacification.” Czemiel argues that Adventure Time explicitly reflects this ambiguity in its cuteness by “moving freely between the childish and the mature,” thereby subverting expectations of “proper” adulthood.

For late Millennials and early Zoomers—two demographic cohorts slated to inherit a world demarcated by late capitalism's many failings (e.g., global warming, debt crises, housing problems)—this “cute” aesthetic is appealing; given that it was the so-called “proper adults” who caused many of the problems that plague the world now, why would Millennials or Zoomers want to emulate their predecessors’ “proper adult” behavior? Czemiel thus concludes that young adults are drawn to Adventure Time because its cuteness offers a way to make “new subjectivities ... [and] ontologies” that will allow humans to overcome future obstacles.
A useful combination of the nostalgia theory and Czemiel’s thesis can be found in a 2016 article on the *kawaii* culture of Japan by design theorist Hui-Ying Kerr, who writes:

> Looking at the adult landscape, with its pressures of debt, competition and responsibility, it is no wonder that people want to escape into the infinite time, space and promise of childhood. Cute becomes a way of resisting the adult world. It’s not just a means of escape and denial, but also a way to fight back against the curtailment of possibility. ... In the West, cute becomes a foil for millennials against the diminishing of privileges that mark the end of the late-20th century as a Golden Age. ... Childhood means the luxury of not growing up, but also denial of adulthood and the refusal of responsibility. But while *kawaii* may seem like a closing of one door, held in its small furled fist is a key that opens another. To be simultaneously adult and child means to straddle both worlds, a symbol of resistance and boundless possibility.\(^\text{12}\)

On one hand, Kerr’s assertion recalls the nostalgia theory’s focus on the yearning to “escape” into the idyllic past that is childhood. On the other hand, it recalls Czemiel’s argument that cuteness—and thus, by extension, the cuteness of *Adventure Time*—is an aesthetic category that, while commercially exploited, can be used to push back against a cold, cruel capitalist world. Applying Kerr’s full argument to *Adventure Time*, I think it is reasonable to conclude that the show has developed such a sizable adult following because it is both nostalgic and cute, thereby reminding viewers of their childhood while simultaneously offering them a new approach to adulthood. (Also, the show has fart jokes!)

**Theoretical Fightonomics: Book Outline**

The purpose of this manuscript is to document the rich production history of *Adventure Time* and also demonstrate that the show is a multivalent cultural object, with myriad themes ripe for analysis. To achieve this goal, I have organized the book into four thematic sections. The first, entitled “Who’s Who in the Land of Ooo,” details the show’s many characters. In addition to discussing behind-the-scenes information about their creation, this section also analyzes the nuances of Ooo’s inhabitants, discussing how their identities developed over the course of the show’s run and how the characters themselves were received by fans and critics.
From here, the book segues into part two, “Behind the Easel,” which documents the writing and development of the show. In the first chapter, “Video Makers,” I explicate the process by which an *Adventure Time* episode was written, storyboarded, and animated. In the second chapter, “Come Along with Me,” I outline the show’s complex production history, and the following chapter, “Good Jubies” serves as a guide to the show’s guest-directed episodes. The final chapter in this part, “The Institute of So Und,” is focused on the show’s music. This chapter opens with a discussion of the show’s composers, Casey James Basichis and Tim Kiefer, placing particular emphasis on the styles of music that inspired them and how they created the show’s distinct soundtrack. Part two comes to a close with an outline of the most important songs featured across the show’s 283 episode run.

Part three, entitled “Storytelling: How *Adventure Time* Told Its Tales,” comprises three chapters, each of which focuses on storytelling models and techniques that the writers used when blocking out the series. In the first chapter, “*Adventure Time* and the Hero’s Journey,” I propose that *Adventure Time*’s main story—that is, Finn’s growth from naive boy into enlightened hero—is best understood as three separate but highly intertwined narrative arcs (what I call “ordeals”), each of which can be mapped using concepts formalized by Joseph Campbell in his writings on the monomyth. I follow this up with the chapter “The Creative Use of Retcons,” in which I argue that the show’s use of “retcons” (a contraction of “retroactive continuities”) helped to create and maintain an intricate sense of continuity. In the subsequent essay, “The Three Levels of *Adventure Time*,” I employ a delineation conceived of by the critical theorist Douglas Kellner that allows me to outline the show’s realist, mythological, and allegorical dimensions.

The book’s final section, “Pure Finndemonium,” is focused on the show’s fandom. In this part of the book, I first explore the many behaviors endemic to the show’s fandom, namely fanfic, fanart, cosplay, and fan criticism. This is followed by a detailed consideration of several key websites (namely, the *Adventure Time* Wiki, Twitter, Formspring, Reddit, Tumblr, 4chan, and the Land of Ooo forums) that served as bastions for the *Adventure Time* fandom during the show’s run. Of note, much of the “Pure Finndemonium” section is based on interviews that I conducted with fans from across the world, all of whom shared with me their unique fandom experiences.

This book comes to a close with a short reflection on the series, followed by two appendices: The first lists production facts about all the episodes of *Adventure Time* released as of early 2020. The second is a chart contrasting the original production understanding of the show’s final few seasons with the “official” divisions as understood by Cartoon Network.

In terms of methodology, this work pulls from a variety of academic traditions, reflecting my own interest in multi- and interdisciplinary scholar-
ship. That said, much of the book is rooted in the historical tradition, as it has been my main goal to explicate the origins of *Adventure Time* and produce an accurate history of its production. This necessitated that I scour through hundreds of books, journal articles, blog posts, Tweets, Formspring/Ask.fm answers, Wikia articles, and Archive.org pages to reconstruct past events. To supplement these findings, I also interviewed dozens upon dozens of the artists who worked on *Adventure Time*, asking them about their unique experiences as part of the show’s crew. My being situated in the middle of the United States meant that these interviews were conducted through online channels (e.g., email, Facebook, Reddit, Twitter) or over the phone. The historical sections of this work are thus complex amalgamations of oral history and primary source analysis.

So c’mon, grab your friends—and maybe a few bacon pancakes while you are at it. We’re going to very distant lands...
Endnotes

1. That said, parts of my original manuscript are currently being reworked into a new McFarland project. Stay tuned...

2. Ironically, *Adventure Time’s* emphasis on growth and maturation stands in stark contrast with what the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin called “adventure-time”: a static, almost cartoon-like temporality found in ancient Greek novels in which “nothing changes: the world remains exactly as it was, the biographical life of the heroes does not change, their feelings also remain unchanged—people do not even age.” Mikhail Bakhtin, “Form of Time of the Chronotope,” 91. For a more in-depth take on this comparison, see: Aaron Kerner and Julian Hoxter, *Theorizing Stupid Media*, 120-25.

3. James Poniewozik, “The 20 Best TV Dramas since the *Sopranos.*”

4. There is a popular belief that fans of *Adventure Time* are all habitual drug users. This is a gross assumption. Taking drugs is by no means a prerequisite for one to “get” the show.

5. Cf. Poniewozik, “The 20 Best TV Dramas since the *Sopranos.*”

6. Mike Rugnetta, “Is Nostalgia the Reason for *Adventure Time’s* Amazing Awesomeness?”


8. Czemiel.


11. Czemiel.

Part 1:
Who's Who in the Land of Ooo?
Character Profiles
1. Two Rad Bros: Finn the Human & Jake the Dog

_Adventure Time_ is many things, but at the end of the day, it is ultimately the story of two brothers: Finn the Human and Jake the Dog. In this chapter, I will take a close look at both characters, discussing how they were developed, who voiced them, and how their characterizations matured as the series progressed.

**Finn the Human**

Finn the Human (full name: Finn Mertens) is the main protagonist of _Adventure Time_. As his epithet makes clear, Finn is a human boy who, for much of the show, is believed to be the last scion of humanity left in the post-apocalyptic Land of Ooo. A textbook paladin with an iron resolve, Finn spends most of his time adventuring with his dog-brother Jake, and together, the two fight monsters, rescue kidnapped princesses, and save the day. Finn is known for his eccentric weapons (like a cursed grass saber or a blade made out of an alternate-universe version of himself), his boundless energy, and his quirky vernacular (e.g., “Shmowzow!,” “Mathematical!”).

At the onset of the series, Finn is an excitable 12-year old who serves Princess Bubblegum as one of her knights. In the earliest episodes, Finn sees the world in strict terms of “good” and “evil,” meaning that he often fails to recognize moral nuance. This, in turn, leads him to sometimes rush
head-long into problems. By the time the series ends, however, Finn’s varied life experiences have molded him into a mature young adult, one whose adventuring skills are surpassed perhaps only by his newfound awareness of life’s many complexities. This maturation is best seen when a viewer considers how Finn approaches conflict: in the first few seasons, he operates on a “punch first, ask questions later,” but by series’ end, he is more willing to diffuse problems with discourse before resorting to physical violence.

Finn is very close with his older adoptive brother, Jake the Dog, and the two live together with their little robot friend BMO in a great tree fort located in the middle of the grasslands. Finn and Jake’s close relationship is mutualistic: Jake often functions as a mentor figure, giving Finn sage advice or helping him work through his emotional struggles. Finn, in turn, counteracts his brother’s lazier tendencies and often serves as Jake’s moral compass. Together, the two form the perfect team, protecting the peoples of Ooo from myriad threats. (While many television critics have noted the superficial similarities between the heroes of Adventure Time and the titular characters in the 1975 film A Boy and His Dog, Ward has claimed that he was not aware of the movie until after he had developed his characters.)

Obsessed with behaving honorably and “willing to sacrifice his own needs on behalf of others” regardless of the task at hand, Finn is a clear manifestation of the hero archetype—specifically its “lawful good” variant (to invoke the alignment schema of Dungeons and Dragons). And while it is almost certain that Finn’s heroic characterization was inspired by figures from classical myths (e.g., Aeneas, Fionn mac Cumhaill, Gilgamesh, Hercules) and the sword and sorcery stories of the early 20th century, Ward revealed that much of Finn’s portrayal was based on Jean-Luc Picard, the intelligent and ethical captain of the USS Enterprise in the popular science fiction series Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987–94), played by Patrick Stewart. In an interview included on the DVD set for Adventure Time’s third season, Ward explained, “Even when he is not fully confident, [Picard] still makes a decision. He still moves forward on something. He doesn’t waiver, [and] he’s always on the ball.” The very same is true of Finn.

The exact story of how Ward came up with Finn is somewhat unclear, although it is probable that the character’s look was inspired by an earlier Ward creation known as “Bueno the Bear.” This idiosyncratic critter—a white bear with noodle limbs, small bumps for ears, and no visible nose—was dreamt up by Ward when he was a student at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), and the character starred in several of Ward’s student films and web comics. While Ward has never confirmed a connection between Bueno and Finn, it seems unlikely that the similarity between the characters is simply a coincidence.
The earliest incarnation of Finn proper can be traced back to 2005, when Ward drew a doodle of a kid wearing a white hat, whom he dubbed “Pen the Human.” This character was initially just a rough sketch but Ward decided to work him into a minute-long video short that he pitched to Nickelodeon Studios. While Nickelodeon passed on the concept, Ward successfully pitched it to the executives of the production company Frederator sometime later, leading him to write and storyboard his first professional animated project, the seven-minute film entitled “Adventure Time.” In this short, Pen (voiced at the time by Zack Shada) is introduced as an energetic kid wearing a distinctive “awesome” hat who teams up with his dog Jake to rescue Princess Bubblegum from the evil Ice King.

The “Adventure Time” short first aired on the Nicktoons Network in early 2007, and against all odds, became a viral success. Recognizing that they might have a hit on their hands, Frederator and Ward began working to convert Adventure Time into a full-fledged television series. It was during this period of reworking that Ward made a few tweaks to Pen’s character—most notably, renaming him “Finn.” As to why he made this name change, Ward told the audience of a 2009 Comic-Con panel: “Pen is my name and I didn’t want to see my name on the back of sweatpants, products, [or] other bad things. ... So I changed it to Finn.”

After Cartoon Network agreed to produce a full Adventure Time series, Ward also decided to recast the character’s voice actor. One of the dozens of children who auditioned for the part was Jeremy Shada, the younger brother of Zack. In an interview with Brendon Connelly of Bleeding Cool, Jeremy Shada relayed the following:

We got a breakdown [of the Adventure Time series] from my agent ... and they had the characters and the lines all in there. And then, Zack was like, “I just did that pilot like three years
Jeremy has emphasized on numerous occasions that despite his “taking” the job from his brother, there is no animosity between the two and that Zack was quite happy that they were “keeping [the role] in the family.”

Unlike many animated characters, Finn actually ages throughout the show’s run. This was in large part necessitated by Shada’s real-life development, specifically the voice changes that accompanied puberty, with the actor noting in an interview with Skwigly: “Luckily for me they’ve aged the character throughout the show ... if you go back and listen to [the voice of] season one Finn and season eight Finn, it’s definitely different.”

In retrospect, this decision to age Finn in real time was a masterstroke, as it foregrounded the character’s journey through adolescence to adulthood. This, in turn, encouraged the show’s producers to explore real-life issues that many teenagers face as they grow up, such as youthful romances and bouts of depression. These topics are explored casually in early episodes, many of which feature Finn's fruitless pining for Princess Bubblegum. Alas, after almost constant rejection, Finn finally realizes in the third-season finale “Incendium” that he and Bubblegum will never be together, leading him to experience his first real depressive spell. But much to Adventure Time’s credit, the show has Finn get over his obsession with Bubblegum in a healthy way that allows the two to remain close friends (a seemingly rare occurrence in modern media).

In season four, Finn begins dating the heir to the Fire Kingdom: Flame Princess. The romance between Finn and his new beau is more “real” than anything he experienced with Bubblegum, and as a result, the romance-focused episodes become increasingly more mature over the course of seasons four and five. Perhaps the best example of this shift can be found in the fifth-season episode “Frost and Fire.” In this installment, after watching his girlfriend beat up the Ice King, Finn has a pleasurable dream in which Flame Princess shoots fire at his groin. The visuals in this dream can be understood as alluding to nocturnal emissions and, more broadly, sexual dreams—experiences that many adolescents will have without any explanation from the adults in their lives. Unfortunately, Finn manipulates Flame Princess so that he might experience more of these dreams, precipitating the couple’s inevitable breakup.
During season six, Finn’s sadness about his romantic failings is compounded when he is reunited and then promptly abandoned by his biological father, resulting in our hero falling into a deep, season-long depression. It is only by embracing the good and the bad of this material life, making amends with those whom he has wronged, and growing as a person that Finn is able to overcome his funk.

There was a small contingent of fans who reacted negatively to the show’s portrayal of Finn in seasons five and six, arguing that his romantic misadventures and his overall depressive attitude ruined much of his character. At best, these criticisms are misguided. By portraying Finn—the hero of the show—as someone who struggles with issues related to romance, sexuality, and depression, Adventure Time stresses the humanity of the character, emphasizing that even heroes can struggle on the journey of life. This is an important message to send to viewers—especially adolescent viewers!—who might feel as if their particular struggles are insurmountable in the moment.

Like all good monomythic heroes, Finn has an elaborate backstory, but in the show’s earliest episodes, this story is a glaring mystery. During the first season, for instance, the only snippet of Finn’s genesis that is privy to the audience is that when he was an infant, he was discovered crying in the woods by the sentient dogs Joshua and Margaret, who adopted Finn as one of their own children. Finn was thenceforth raised alongside their sons Jake and Jermaine.

The mystery of Finn’s parentage is finally tackled head-on in the fifth-season finale “Billy’s Bucket List,” in which Finn learns that his human father is still alive and is trapped somewhere known as “The Citadel.” In the season-six premiere, “Wake Up”/“Escape from the Citadel,” Finn and Jake journey to this mysterious location and come face-to-face with the former’s biological dad, Martin Mertens (voiced by Stephen Root). Finn—expecting his father to be some intergalactic hero of renown—is crushed to learn that Martin is nothing more than a smooth-talking conman. Martin, wanting nothing to do with his son, attempts to flee the scene, and in the ensuing chaos, Finn loses his arm. During the remainder of the sixth season, Finn attempts to bond with his father and understand his behavior, all to no avail. By the time that the season finale “The Comet” rolls around, Finn has come to terms with the fact that “there ain’t no changing” his dad.

But Finn’s father is only one side of the biological coin; what about Finn’s mother? The mystery of her identity is not resolved until the eighth-season miniseries Islands. At the onset of this event series, Finn discovers information suggesting that a colony of humans is extant on a small islet known as “Founders Island,” and so he—with the help of Jake, Susan Strong, and a stowaway BMO—journeys out to sea, along the way learning the truth about his genesis.
Years prior, Martin was a simple conman living on Founders Island. After breaking his leg attempting to scam a group of “Hiders” (that is, humans seeking to leave the safety of Founders Island), Martin was sent to the hospital where he met a lovely “helper” (that is, a medical doctor) named Minerva Campbell (voiced by Sharon Horgan). Soon thereafter, the two fell in love, and in time, Minerva gave birth to a son, whom she and Martin name Finn.

While Martin abandoned his life of petty crime to take care of his new family, his past misdeeds would soon catch up to him; one night, while he and Finn were alone at home, Martin was ambushed by the Hiders whom Martin had previously attempted to scam. Martin and Finn escaped the surprise attack by jumping onto a raft, but they were separated at sea, with Finn eventually being marooned in the Land of Ooo. This separation would leave Finn with a subconscious fear of the ocean; as for Martin, it is implied that the emotional toll of losing both his son and partner caused him to have a devastating mental breakdown, thereby explaining his borderline sociopathic tendencies in the show’s sixth season.

Minerva, too, was grief-stricken by the loss of her entire family, but instead of collapsing inward, she became fixated on helping the inhabitants of Founders Island. In time, a horrible plague ravaged the island, and to maximize her effectiveness as a helper, Minerva uploaded her consciousness into a computer program, which allowed her to aid those around her without fear of dying from their deadly illnesses. (Unfortunately, this also meant that she forever severed most of her ties with the physical world.)

At the conclusion of Islands, Finn and Minerva are reunited, and unlike Martin, the latter is overjoyed to see the former alive and all grown up. While Minerva initially tries to force her son to stay on Founders Island, Finn decides to return to his home and follow in his mother’s footsteps by continuing to help those in need. Just before Finn sets sail for the Land of Ooo, he and his mother share a touching goodbye with the help of virtual reality equipment. It is a somber moment, as both characters seem to recognize the unlikeliness that they will ever again meet. Luckily, both are proven wrong in the series finale, “Come Along with Me,” when Minerva and the many inhabitants of Founders Island journey to Ooo.

Despite what some viewers might think, this elaborate backstory was far from planned when the show first entered into production; in fact, the earliest draft of Finn’s origin story, hammered out during the production of season two by creative director Patrick McHale, differed substantially from what would eventually be considered canon. According to McHale:

Our decision to make Finn afraid of water in the first season episode “Ocean of Fear” was sort of arbitrary, so to make sense of it, my idea was that Finn and Susan Strong were [siblings] sep-
Part I—Who’s Who in the Land of Ooo?

arated from their parents at sea. Finn and Susan washed ashore in Ooo in different places. Susan was discovered by mutated hyoomans and was raised by them … Meanwhile, Finn tossed and turned on the ocean, separated from his family (thereby explaining his fear of the ocean, but not of water in general) until he ended up in Ooo and was discovered by Jake’s family.17

Although McHale undoubtedly put immense energy into connecting all these dots, this version of Finn’s backstory never made it beyond the writers’ room.

The question of Finn’s origin was subsequently ignored for several years until early 2012, when the show’s writers and storyboard artists were working on the fourth-season finale “The Lich.” In the episode’s original storyboard, artist Skyler Page blocked out a scene in which Finn learns that his father is a great hero who has been locked away in a dimension known as the “Citadel.” But because Ward felt that this scene “threw everyone” and “didn’t reveal as much as you wanted it to,” he cut it from the episode.18

The idea that Finn’s father was trapped in some space-prison was then revived in 2013, when the writers started outlining the fifth-season finale “Billy’s Bucket List.” However, when breaking the story, the writers soon found themselves faced with a decision. “We knew [Martin] was trapped in a kind of space prison,” Jack Pendarvis told me in an interview, “so the question [became], ‘Is he being held unfairly, or did he do something bad?’ The second option is more dramatic [and] a flawed character is always more interesting to explore.”19 Ultimately, it was the second option that prevailed, as the writers chose to portray Martin not as a champion of righteousness, but rather as a sleazy “bozo” (to quote Tom Herpich).20 This decision in turn inspired the writers years later to depict Minerva as something of Martin’s opposite, with Pendarvis telling me, “Certainly it’s interesting to see a character like Martin in love with a character who is not like Martin, and vice versa.”21

In addition to Finn’s biological backstory, there is also the question of his spiritual origin (after all, in the Oooniverse, souls are real and persist after death). The first episode to arguably look into this topic is the third-season spookfest “The Creeps,” in which Finn finds himself haunted by the eerie specter of a smiling woman. After cameoing in season four’s “King Worm” and season five’s “Sky Witch,” the specter gained substantial attention from the fandom, and many began to speculate that this ghost was that of Finn’s mother, who had yet to be introduced. However, this hypothesis was later quashed in the fifth-season episode “The Vault,” wherein it is revealed that this mysterious spirit is actually that of Shoko, one of Finn’s many past lives. Hundreds of years prior to the start of the series, Shoko was a one-armed bandit who roamed the land of Ooo with a tiger friend, taking odd
Two Rad Bros

jobs for various crime bosses. One day, Shoko was tasked with stealing a powerful amulet owned by Princess Bubblegum, who at the time had just begun constructing the central fortress of the future Candy Kingdom citadel. Shoko infiltrated the kingdom, but she and Bubblegum developed a friendship, with Bubblegum even constructing for Shoko a prosthetic arm. Shoko was conflicted about her assignment, given the princess's kindness, but in the end, she stole the amulet from Bubblegum anyway. Unfortunately, while fleeing from the kingdom, Shoko fell into a pool of radioactive sludge, dying over the tree that would one day grow into Finn and Jake's beloved tree fort.

While the logistics of Finn haunting himself are never quite explained, the reincarnation storyline added a dark, spiritual depth to the series that would be further explored to great effect in the sixth-season finale “The Comet.” At the end of this episode, Finn learns in a discussion with the titular entity that he has been repeatedly reborn, and that in his earliest incarnation, he happened to be a catalyst comet that hit Earth and brought along with it a new cycle of change and renewal.

This revelation engendered much discussion—and considerable confusion—amongst fans, many of whom erroneously believed that the episode was trying to paint Finn as some sort of Jesus-like demigod who had been delivered unto Ooo by means of the comet to “save” it from evil. Storyboard artist Jesse Moynihan, who played a large role in developing the episodes detailing Finn’s past lives, later rebutted this interpretation with a 2015 Reddit post:

I’ve noticed a recurring misunderstanding of Finn-as-cosmic-god variation. I guess I blame myself for not being clearer, at the same time the focus of my writing in [season six] was to not be clear all the time. If it helps at all, as a personal footnote—Finn is not a cosmic god or whatever. He’s just a normal human. His soul was delivered to Earth by a comet, but it should be understood that Earth is as cosmic as the comet. We all derive from the same source material.23

Later the following year, on his personal website, Moynihan expounded on this final point:

Finn’s soul arrived on Earth by way of a mysterious living comet. But all of our souls arrived on Earth by way of a creative explosion that sent us hurtling through the void. Earth itself is a living, cosmic being, and the souls that inhabit it derived from the same material that formed stars and planets billions of light years away. The theme of reincarnation was used to imply
the specialness/non-specialness of Finn as his soul migrates through time in different identities and meets other incarnations of other souls. Finn is “special” not because in another life he was [some supernatural or powerful entity] ... but because he decided to be great in this moment.24

In other words, Finn is not extraordinary because he was some sort of cosmic “god-baby”25; instead, “[He] is special because we’re all special.”26

**Jake the Dog**

Jake the Dog is a talking canine and Finn’s older, adoptive brother. Affirming the aphorism that heroes come in all shapes and sizes, Jake possesses the fantastic ability to morph his body into almost any form. While his superpowers make him a intimidating foe in battle, Jake is more often than not a creature of comfort who yields to his lazier impulses—sometimes to Finn’s chagrin.

Finn and Jake usually function as a comedic double-act, and while both characters can play the “funny man” role, Jake is more often than not the source of explicit comedy, thanks in large part to his magical powers (that allow him to morph into countless humorous shapes) and his carefree attitude (which often leads him to be blunt about what he is thinking). But as with all brothers, the two can also occasionally turn on one another, with each serving as the other’s foil. In the fourth-season episode “Who Would Win,” for instance, Finn and Jake get into a violent fight, with each trying to best the other in direct combat. A lighter (albeit still violent) example of this sort of brotherly contention comes to us in the fifth-season episode “Jake Suit,” in which the brothers make a bet as to who can tolerate pain the most pain. This leads to Jake taking over Finn’s body and subjecting him to “all kinds of pain”27—ranging from physical to emotional punishment. But regardless of squabbles like these, at the end of the day, Finn and Jake almost always find a way to overcome their differences and reaffirm their close relationship.

Jake is usually portrayed as a champion of Ooo, but unlike Finn he is not as obsessed with following the letter of the law to the t, and in an early part of his life, he was even the leader of an infamous gang that committed numerous robberies—a “seedy past”28 of which he is not proud but which is alluded to nonetheless across a number of episodes. And while by show’s end Finn comes to see violence as an option of last resort, throughout the series Jake is more than willing to use violence as a means to an end. Given that Jake’s moral alignment can vacillate between the twin poles of “lawful” and “chaotic,” Ward has argued that Jake is best understood in *Dungeons and*
Terms as a “neutral good” character.  

In terms of design, Jake is a pudgy bulldog, with orange-amber fur, prominent eyes, and large drooping jowls. Series creator Pendleton Ward whipped up the initial design that would evolve into Jake sometime around 2005, when he doodled “a kid with a bear hat and his bulldog riding on a boat.” Ward found the drawing “fun-looking and cool,” and in time, it became the basis for the original “Adventure Time” short (2007), which necessitated the development of Jake the Dog’s unique personality.

Ward based much of Jake on Bill Murray’s character Tripper Harrison from the 1979 comedy classic *Meatballs*. In the film, Tripper is a counselor at a summer camp made up of misfits. While he is fond of mischief and lewd jokes, Tripper is also well-meaning and capable of providing solid advice when the need arises. This connection between Jake and Tripper is made most explicit in the series’ pitch bible:

> [Jake's] relationship with Finn is similar to Bill Murray’s character relating to [the child camper] Rudy in the movie *Meatballs*. Like Murray, Jake is very jokey, everything can be poked fun at until it gets serious. And when it’s serious, like when Finn is feeling low or sad, Jake is good at listening and knowing the most thoughtful things to say.

Jake is thus an amalgamation of several archetypes, most notably the “wise old man” who uses his life experience to train the hero, as well as the “comic mentor” who is often found giving—sometimes ridiculous, but often correct—advice about life, growth, and love.

Jake was voiced by veteran voice actor John DiMaggio, who prior to working on *Adventure Time* was perhaps best known for playing the crude robot Bender on the Fox/Comedy Central animated comedy *Futurama* (1999–2003, 2008–13). DiMaggio secured the role of Jake during production of the pilot and was the only original voice actor retained when the series was picked up by Cartoon Network. During the recording of the first few seasons, DiMaggio struggled with understanding the new show’s appeal, as he found its dialogue confusing and sometimes nonsensical. While speaking with io9 in 2013, DiMaggio explained:

> I was trying to figure out from the beginning what the big deal was. I was like, “I’m not sure I understand what’s going on here.” ... You just had these lines that said whatever, and it was like, “I don’t get it.” I said to Tom Kenny once, I was
The specific voice that DiMaggio uses when playing Jake, while a bit gruff, still manages to reflect the warm nature of the character, and in a 2015 episode of the *Conversation Parade* podcast, DiMaggio contended that Jake’s voice is really just “[his] natural voice with a little bit of a hug on it.”

As mentioned at the start of this section, Jake is perhaps most notable for his “stretchy powers”—that is, his fantastic ability to morph, alter, or twist his body into practically any shape. Jake claims in the first-season episode “The Witch’s Garden” that he received his powers after rolling around in a magical mud puddle as a pup. This whimsical origin story, however, is later retconned in the sixth-season episode “Joshua and Margaret Investigations,” wherein the audience learns that the character is actually the graftling of a shapeshifting alien creature named “Warren Ampersand” (voiced by Dave Foley), who at one point implanted a parasitic “egg” into Joshua the Dog’s head. Jake—like some sort of extraterrestrial Athena—was subsequently born from Joshua’s head wound, making him half-dog and half-shapeshifter.

Joshua and Margaret decided to adopt Jake (despite his being the scion of a parasite) and raise him alongside their biological son, Jermaine, and their other adopted son, Finn. Many years later, in the tenth-season episode “Jake the Starchild,” Ampersand would return to Ooo and abduct Jake in the hopes of stealing his son’s powers, thereby extending his own life. Jake, however, is not one who is easily outsmarted, and by episode’s end, Jake tricks his “rube” of a father and pitches him into a black hole.

By making Jake’s bio-dad an alien from some mysterious world, the *Adventure Time* writers were able to explicitly dabble in the tropes of science fiction, despite the show ostensibly being predicated on the trappings of fantasy. Sometimes, this sci-fi experimentation was successful (e.g., season six’s “Joshua & Margaret Investigations,” which easily merges sci-fi horror with the intrigue of the mystery genre); other times, it was not (e.g., season ten’s “Jake the Starchild,” which resolves the mystery of Jake’s parentage in a rather abbreviated and underwhelming 11 minutes). Regardless, when viewed as a whole, the episodes focusing on Jake’s sci-fi genesis do a nice job painting the character as a truly enigmatic “other”—and in a land full of talking candies and vampire bassists, this is saying something.

Despite the complicated relationship with his immediate family (both biological and adoptive), Jake has a much more straightforward relationship...
with his long-term romantic partner, Lady Rainicorn, and in the fifth-season episode “Jake the Dad,” the two welcome five “pups” to the world, all of whom have various superpowers like their parents. The pups include:

**Charlie**, who is able to lower the density of her being, thereby allowing her to grow to a huge size while retaining a consistent body mass. Charlie lives in a crumbling Egyptian pyramid and is a skilled occultist quite adept at reading tarot cards. Charlie was designed by Steve Wolfhard and named by Tom Herpich. The character was voiced by Alia Shawkat, perhaps best known for her starring role as Maeby Fünke in the Fox cult comedy *Arrested Development*.

**Jake Jr.**, who can shapeshift using her hair in a way similar to her father. Living up to her namesake, Jake Jr. reunites her father’s old gang in season five’s “One Last Job” and steals the Baker’s Shard—an action which earns her a strong talking-to from Jake. Jake Jr. was designed by Herpich and Wolfhard (the former of whom proposed that the character not have a standard face), and named by Wolfhard. Jake Jr. was voiced by Kristen Schaal, whose distinctive voice can also be heard in several other animated shows, like *Gravity Falls* (Disney) and *Bob’s Burgers* (Fox).
Kim Kil Whan, who possesses the ability to teleport and colorize objects. Kim Kil Whan is a no-nonsense realtor who is often exasperated by his father’s childlike antics. (The character also has a rebellious daughter named Bronwyn, voice by Rae Gray, who bonds with her grandfather over their mutual love of skateboarding.) Kim Kil Whan was designed by Wolfhard and named after the founder of SAEROM animation studio, Kim Gilhwan. The character was voiced by comedian and improv actor Marc Evan Jackson.

TV, who is capable of teleportation and colorizing objects. A stereotypical “basement dweller,” TV often gets lost in elaborate daydreams, and by series’ end, he sets up a detective agency. TV was designed and named by Wolfhard, and voiced by Dan Mintz, who co-stars alongside Schaal in Bob’s Burgers.

Viola, who possesses the powers of teleportation. One of the more mature pups, Viola has dreams of becoming a famous stage actress, which leads her to take part in Lumpy Space Princess’s play Summer Showers. Viola was designed and named by Wolfhard, and voiced by Paget Brewster, perhaps best known for her role as Special Agent Emily Prentiss in the CBS series Criminal Minds. (After mingling with and marrying other magical creatures, the offspring of Lady and Jake’s children will develop into a separate species called “pups,” and one thousand years after the time of Finn and Jake, the “Pup Kingdom” will be a hegemonic city-state, ruled by President Gibbon, the nigh-immortal son of Charlie.)

It was first revealed to the audience that Jake and Lady would have children in the fourth-season episode “Lady & Peebles,” and when this announcement was made, many fans were excited, as they assumed the introduction of Jakelettes would force Jake into a newer, more mature role. Alas, these hopes were dashed when it is revealed that Rainicorn-Dog hybrids grow at an accelerated rate; in fact, by the time “Jake the Dad” ends, Jake’s children are all grown up and no longer require Jake’s constant attention. This decision to “age up” the characters was met with a mixed response from fans and critics, with some applauding the clever way Adventure Time returned to the original status quo, and others lambasting the show for introducing a major development and then dumping it at the last minute to “play it safe.”

Perhaps in response to some fans’ disdain for the “overnight age-up” of the pups, the show’s writers and producers began exploring Jake’s rather distant relationship with his grown-up children in the later part of the show’s run. In some episodes, such as the season six installment “Ocarina,” Jake is clearly shown goofing off, much to the chagrin (and occasional detriment) of his children. In others, such as season seven’s “Summer Showers,” he is more
self-aware, bemoaning the fact that he was only able to be a “good dad” to his pups for just a few days. All of these episodes, when taken together, create a nuanced depiction of Jake as a father who loves his children, but who is not that great of a caretaker. This is diametrically opposed to the stereotypical “bad” parent often seen in popular media, who is portrayed as cruel or evil. Jake is far from evil; he is just a dingus.

“A Boy and his Dog”: Final Thoughts

Two brothers who might not always see eye-to-eye but who nevertheless care deeply for one another, Finn and Jake are the heart and soul of *Adventure Time*, and over the course of the series 283 episodes, the audience is given the opportunity to see them grow as characters and strengthen their brotherly bond. In the world of animation, Finn and Jake are thus special, set apart from other famed cartoon characters like SpongeBob SquarePants, Bart Simpson, or Bugs Bunny, who while funny, have remained static for years if not decades. In a word, Finn and Jake are dynamic, and—ironically—it is that dynamism that makes them timeless.
Endnotes

2. Finn’s fixation on doing “the right thing” in every situation may have been inspired by Ward’s childhood anxiety about always being a good person. Neil Strauss, “Adventure Time;” Whitney Matheson, “A Chat With ... Adventure Time Creator Pendleton Ward.”
5. Maria Cassano, “15 Things You Didn’t Know”
13. See: William G. Boissonnault, Primary Care for the Physical Therapist, 266. In many ways this criticism presaged the Internet-wide discussion about Luke Skywalker’s characterization in the Star Wars film The Last Jedi (2017). Both cases illustrate that fans are often deeply uncomfortable when their fictional heroes stumble like real people.
15. As a dedicated doctor, Minerva Campbell’s first name is fitting. In ancient Rome, Minerva was a protector goddess, who among other things was the patron of doctors. In fact, a special cult even sprung up that worshiped Minerva Medica (lit. “Minerva the Healer”), which was predicated on the goddess’s supposed ability to cure the ill. Walter Friedlander, The Golden Wand of Medicine, 94-95; Estée Dvorjetski, Leisure, Pleasure and Healing, 100.
21. With this neologism being a portmanteau of “Ooo” and “universe.” I will use it throughout this book as a shorthand for “the fictional universe in which Adventure Time takes place.”
23. To quote Jake’s words from “Dark Purple” (Season 6, Episode 29).
25. “May I Come In?”
27. Tabor and Ward.
30. Tom Surette, “Q&A with Adventure Time’s Pendleton Ward.”
35. Vogler.
36. John Moe, Open Mike Eagle, and John DiMaggio, “Finn, Jake, and the Necessity of Manuals.”
38. Moe, Eagle, and DiMaggio, “Finn, Jake, and the Necessity of Manuals.”
39. Named after series storyline writer Julia Pott’s “imaginary high school boyfriend.”
41. Wolfhard.
42. Wolfhard.
43. Wolfhard.
44. Wolfhard.
45. Steve Wolfhard, “‘Come Along with Me’ Main Title – Network Pitch Storyboard.”
47. See: https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/OvernightAgeUp.
2. Sugar & Spice: Princess Bubblegum & Marceline the Vampire Queen

Finn and Jake are the stars of Adventure Time, but they are far from the only characters that matter. Two other players of immense importance are the show’s leading ladies: Princess Bubblegum of the Candy Kingdom, and Marceline the Vampire Queen. This present chapter focuses on the two, exploring the inspirations for the characters, their evolution over the series’ run, and the complex relationship that they share.

Princess Bubblegum

Princess Bubblegum (full name: Bonnibel Bubblegum; often called “PB” and occasionally “Bonnie”) is the supreme ruler of the “Candy Kingdom,” a polity which looms as one of Ooo’s few true superpowers. In the show’s first few seasons, Finn and the audience are led to believe that Bubblegum is only 18 years old, but in time it is revealed that she is a biologically immortal creature that has lived for well over 8 centuries. Bubblegum is also the current incarnation of the Candy Elemental, making her the sentient manifestation of one of the four primordial elements that constitute the known Ooniverse (the others being ice, fire, and slime, naturally).

Princess Bubblegum was one of the first Adventure Time characters that Pendleton Ward created, and she appeared in the 2005 short that preceded the production of the show’s pilot, which Ward had mocked up when trying
to pitch the series to Nickelodeon.\(^1\) Ward had initially named the character “Bettie,” likely after his mother, but when *Adventure Time* went into production a few years later, he reconsidered this decision, instead choosing to christen the monarch “Bonnibel.”\(^2\)

In terms of her aesthetic, Bubblegum is a “pretty pink princess,” in the mold of other fictitious royals like Peach or Zelda. The earliest designs for Bubblegum are simplistic, with the character resembling an elongated, pink gumdrop. Animator Robertryan Cory, who worked for a few months as the show’s first *de facto* lead character designers, tweaked the character’s look by giving her a “more hourglass figure” and by adding the “upside down heart” design onto her dress sleeves.\(^3\) Bubblegum’s look was then finalized by character designer Phil Rynda during production of the show’s first season.

Bubblegum was initially voiced by actress Paige Moss in the pilot,\(^4\) but when the show was picked up by Cartoon Network, the producers chose to re-cast the role.\(^5\) One of the many individuals who auditioned to play the character was veteran voice actress Hynden Walch (who at that time was perhaps best known as the voice of the heroic alien Starfire from the Cartoon Network series *Teen Titans*). In a 2015 interview with *Metro*, Walch explained:

I absolutely knew that [*Adventure Time*] was going to be galactically huge. I’d been a fan of the Frederator short. ... That was such an amazingly brilliant little piece of animation that I knew it would be huge. ... I was so excited when I got called in for Bubblegum. ... [I said to myself] “This is the one I want. Let’s get this one. Please let’s get this one.” And it worked. I was delighted to work on that show from the beginning.\(^6\)

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1. Hynden Walch—the voice actress of Princess Bubblegum—reportedly felt that *Adventure Time* would be a “huge” success before she even landed a role on the show. (Photo courtesy of Isabella Vosmikova)
Walch does not inflect her voice too much when voicing the character—an inspired decision, given that the natural pleasantness of Walch’s voice compliments Bubblegum’s confectionary nature, while also contrasting nicely with the character’s darker tendencies.

Much like Ice King and Marceline the Vampire Queen, Bubblegum has a complicated backstory and it is only after seasons of build-up and teasing that the audience learns the truth: Centuries prior to the start of the series, Bubblegum was “birthed” from a sentient mass of radioactive chewing gum known as the “Mothergum.” Because Bubblegum had no other family members except for her socially anxious brother Neddy (voiced by Andres Salaff), she decided to create her own family: an uncle named Gumbald, an aunt named Lolly, and a cousin named Chicle.

Gumbald, however, grew jealous of Bubblegum’s controlling tendencies and, with the help of Lolly and Chicle, attempted to overthrow his niece. While their coup d’état failed (and Gumbald and his familial stooges were accidentally turned into simple-minded candy people in the process), Bubblegum was nevertheless shaken, and so when she began building up her kingdom, she decided to create candy subjects who were relative simpletons, thereby ensuring that they would not rise up against her like her family had. After several centuries, her kingdom became a hegemonic city-state, and in time she befriended Finn the Human and his brother Jake the Dog, enlisting the two to serve as her knights.

For the show’s first three or so seasons, Bubblegum serves as both a mentor to young Finn, as well as the object of his affection; in fact, many early episodes focus on his often hair-brained quests to woo the princess. Unfortunately for young Finn, Bubblegum rejects him at almost every turn. Part of her disinterest is due to the age gap separating the two: at the start of the show, Finn is 12 years old, whereas Bubblegum is over 800. But another reason Bubblegum scorns Finn’s advances is that throughout the series, it is implied (and eventually confirmed) that Bubblegum is in love with her oldest friend, Marceline. After several episodes in which the two behave prickly around one another, Bubblegum and Marceline reaffirm their friendship, (re)admit their feelings for one another, and become an official couple in the series finale “Come Along with Me.”

Princess Bubblegum begins the series as a stereotypical “pretty pink princess,” but from the get-go her character also bucks stereotypes by also being portrayed as a scientific wunderkind, who has pushed genetics to its limit in a quest to create candy life. Bubblegum’s experiments are initially portrayed in a positive light, but as the show goes on, Bubblegum’s fixation on amoral science starts to hint at a dark Shadow hiding deep within her unconscious. This is made most manifest in episodes like “You Made Me!” and
“Goliad,” in which she is presented as an almost archetypical mad scientist, whose “intellectual ambitions scorn traditional morality and challenge the prerogatives of God himself”9 While this macabre change in Bubblegum’s characterization certainly made her more interesting from a story standpoint, it also led to some fans online growing disgusted with her antics (with some even choosing to compare her to Axis medical doctors like Josef Mengele).

Bubblegum’s adoration of science also leads her to espouse a very controversial view: that the fantastical magic which permeates the Land of Ooo is nothing more than complex natural phenomena that can be explained in reasonable terms using the scientific method. This radical scientism puts her in direct conflict with those who view magic as a fundamental facet of reality. This science vs. magic debate reaches a fever pitch in the fifth-season episode, “Wizards Only, Fools,” in which the princess offends a group of wizards by refusing to concede that magic is a superior worldview to science. By the end of the episode, Bubblegum realizes that different people hold different worldviews, and that forcing hers—regardless if it is “right” or not—onto others is not only abrasive, but also intolerant. (It seems likely that Bubblegum’s radically scientistic beliefs were written to serve as a parody of the views held by “New Atheist” zealots like the of evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, the cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett, the neuroscientist Sam Harris, and the late writer Christopher Hitchens.)

Bubblegum does her best to appear outwardly “sweet,” but countless episodes suggest that she is an iron-fisted ruler with a fixation on control—controlling her citizens, controlling her allies, and even controlling her friends—all in the name of “protecting” them. This is first made apparent in the fourth-season episode “Goliad,” in which Bubblegum reveals that her near-death experience in the season two finale “Mortal Folly”/“Mortal Recoil” triggered an existential crisis about who might lead her kingdom were she to die. She consequently creates a candy sphinx (the titular Goliad) from her own DNA, who becomes focused on negating the free will of her candy subjects—offering the audience an ominous peek into Bubblegum’s oft-guarded psyche.

Over the next few seasons, Bubblegum’s controlling nature leads her down the road of radical utilitarianism, and she begins to do whatever it takes to keep her kingdom “safe.” This results in her establishing what is effectively a surveillance state: she hides cameras everywhere (“You Made Me,” “The Cooler,” “Nemesis”), routinely spies on her political enemies (“Nemesis”), and even installs GPS devices in her citizens’ teeth (“Graybles 1000+”)! This unscrupulousness reaches an explosive apex when the princess attempts to disarm the Fire Kingdom via blatant sabotage in the season six episode “The Cooler.” It is only after an intense fight with Flame Princess that Bubblegum realizes her desire for control in the name of safety has turned her into a
dangerous fascist. Bubblegum immediately thereafter begins to dismantle her extensive surveillance state in the name of being a better person.

But despite this development, Bubblegum’s past sins eventually catch up to her. In “Hot Diggity Doom” (the first part of the sixth-season finale), the King of Ooo orchestrates a Candy Kingdom election in which he dupes the citizenry into selecting him as their new princess. The outcome is such a wake-up call for Bubblegum that she abandons the throne in shock and anger. She soon thereafter journeys to her uncle’s derelict cabin in the middle of nowhere, establishing a realm in exile. While Bubblegum initially tries to make the best of this turn of events, she finally breaks down in the seventh-season episode “Varmins,” admitting to Marceline through tears of sadness that instead of protecting those close to her, her desire for control only pushed them away. By episode’s end, Bubblegum admits that she is tired of micro-managing everything—an admission that opens the door for radical character growth.

Following the Stakes miniseries, Bubblegum’s former citizens recognize the error of their ways and re-install Bubblegum as their “One True Princess.” Thereafter, Bubblegum is noticeably more down to earth, and it seems her time in exile caused her to develop a greater sense of empathy not only for her close circle of friends, but also her subjects. This is best showcased in the series finale, “Come Along with Me.” Following the materialization of the malevolent deity GOLB, Bubblegum recognizes the potential disaster that the monster has in store. She consequently climbs to the top of a large boulder and begins addressing her citizens. Given the circumstances at hand and the monarchical register that the princess uses at the start of her address (beginning with the sobering order “Banana guards! Obey my command!”), it is heavily implied that Bubblegum is about to ask her loyal servants to sacrifice themselves for the Greater Good. However, these expectations are immediately subverted when the princess demands that her citizens abandon her, and “flee for their lives,” lest they be killed by GOLB.¹⁰

Bubblegum’s character arc can be read several ways. First, it can be seen as a meditation on ideal governance, with the show suggesting that the best form of rule is a benevolent monarch, guided by justice, truth, equality, and above all else virtue. (This distinctly Aristotelian view—emphasizing the perils of bad monarchies, as well as the dangers of direct democracy—is one that we see echoed time and time again throughout Adventure Time episodes.) Second, it can be seen as an allegorical condemnation of the systems of mass surveillance that emerged in the United States following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, specifically those programs engendered by the passing of the PATRIOT Act in 2001. The parallels here are striking, with perhaps the most obvious being that both Bubblegum and the United States began encroaching upon civil liberties not neces-
sarily out of a baseless yearning to usurp power, but rather out of a desire to “protect” and promote “safety.” Alas, in both cases, the need to protect eventually spiraled into something much more sinister.

The good news is that while Princess Bubblegum’s character arc is one marked by nadirs of absolute darkness, it is ultimately a story of redemption, and by series’ end, Bubblegum has managed to abandon many of her questionable ways, conquer the Shadow within her soul, and become a truly virtuous leader.

**Marceline the Vampire Queen**

Marceline the Vampire Queen (full name: Marceline “Marcy” Abadeer) is an immortal cambion and the monarch of vampires—of which she is the only one left. She is also the heir apparent to the devilish dimension of utter bedlam known as the Nightosphere, which is ruled by her demonic father, Hunson Abadeer. Despite vampires being among the most feared creatures in Ooo—after all, the usually indomitable Finn and Jake are reduced to hysterics when Marceline first drops by their house in her debut episode “Evicted!”—Marceline subverts expectations by donning the appearance of a cool punk rocker who feasts not on the blood of her hapless victims but rather on red pigment itself.

Marceline is an immensely powerful being who can shapeshift into almost any form and effortlessly heal herself when injured. But far from being an unrelenting monster, Marceline is, for the most part, a laid-back loner who enjoys hanging out with friends and focusing on her greatest hobby: music. An accomplished bassist, her preferred instrument is a guitar that she retrofitted out of a large, double-bitted battle axe that had previously belonged to her father. Marceline is also a gifted vocalist who expresses her complex emotions through catchy tunes.

Ward came up with Marceline when he was putting together the series’ pitch bible, intending for the character both to serve “as a sort of antithesis to Bubblegum,” as well as “to make [the show] a little more scary when [the writers] needed it.” Given that he envisioned the vampire queen as having a somewhat emo-goth aesthetic, Ward decided to appropriate the character’s unique appellation from the middle name of his childhood friend, Marie, who had a fondness for dark clothing and classic horror movies, such as Alfred Hitchcock’s 1960 film *Psycho*.

The casting process for Marceline was exacting, as Ward was determined to find someone who could effortlessly convey her “darker” nature. One day, he caught an episode of the Disney cartoon *Phineas and Ferb* featuring the character Vanessa Doofenshmirtz. Ward had no idea who played the character,
Part I—Who’s Who in the Land of Ooo?

but the actress’s “angsty teenager thing” was exactly what he was looking for. Ward subsequently reached out to his friend and colleague Martin Olson—a writer, musician, and comedian who served as the lead storyline writer for the first season of *Phineas and Ferb*—and asked him if he knew the actress in question. To Ward’s great surprise, Martin told Ward that the actress was none other than his 17-year old daughter, Olivia.17

Ward was delighted by the coincidence and brought Olivia in for an audition, at which she tried out for both Princess Bubblegum and Marceline. While Ward and the casting directors felt that Olson’s style of delivery and vocal timbre were not a good match for the saccharine monarch, they agreed that she was a natural fit for the more cynical Marceline, and soon thereafter she was cast in that role. Fortuitously for the show, Olson was also a gifted vocalist (who first gained recognition in 2003, when at the age of 13 she performed a spectacular rendition of Mariah Carey’s hit song “All I Want for Christmas is You” for the cult classic *Love Actually*), and the show made good use of her talents during its run by giving her character several songs. Several years after Olson’s casting, Ward emphatically declared that “her voice is incredible!” and mused that “having Olivia in episodes is inspiration enough to write a song for her to sing.”19

It is interesting to note, given the major role she would play in later seasons, that when Marceline is introduced in the first-season episode “Evicted,” she serves as the antagonist, playing a generic vampire villain who steals our heroic duo’s beloved Tree Fort. Marceline is therefore similar to other season one baddies in that she tests Finn and Jake’s patience before engaging them in direct combat, but Marceline is set apart from other foes in how Finn and Jake defeat her—namely, that they do not. Indeed, during the episode’s climactic fight sequence, Marceline almost effortlessly gains the upper hand:

Marceline the Vampire Queen was voiced by Olivia Olson, a talented actress and singer, who first gained notice for singing “All I Want for Christmas Is You” in the holiday classic *Love Actually* (2003). (Photo courtesy of Joel Feria)
She neutralizes Jake by biting him, and after turning into a giant bat, nearly kills Finn. It is only after Finn successfully lands a punch that she lets Finn and Jake win. She even gives them back the Tree Fort as a “gift.”

Marceline lets our heroes go simply because she thinks they are fun. This is the first hint that there is something more to her character than her just being an “evil vampire”—a hint that is ultimately confirmed in the follow-up first-season episode “Henchman,” in which Finn learns that Marceline’s evil exterior is an elaborate facade, and that she is, as Finn puts it, “a radical dame who likes to play games.” This exclamation has led most fans and critics to discuss Marceline in regard to the trickster archetype. However, Marceline is a multifaceted character who is not so easily defined. In her initial appearances, for instance, she also displays elements of the “shapeshifter” archetype, who “change[s] appearance or mood, and [is] difficult for the hero and the audience to pin down. [She] may mislead the hero or keep [him] guessing, and [her] loyalty or sincerity is often in question.” Both Marceline’s ability to change physical form and her penchant for pranking Finn clearly index her shapeshifter qualities. Marceline can also be viewed as an archetypical “wild woman” who is playful in general but fierce when provoked; free to do as she likes but loyal to her friends; and well-meaning but sadly “hounded, harassed, and falsely imputed to be devouring and devious.”

Although the pitch bible implies that Marceline was intended as a romantic interest for Finn, refreshing this never comes to pass. Instead, Marceline comes to function more like Finn and Jake’s affable (if at times mercurial) older sister, often coming to their aid when they need it the most. Considering that Marceline was introduced as a simplistic bully, this is quite the character development! Much of this development can arguably be attributed to the influence of storyboard artist Rebecca Sugar, who related deeply to the character. Sugar used this connection to flesh out the more emotional elements of Marceline’s story, which in turn led naturally to Marceline becoming one of the show’s more complex characters.

Despite technically playing second fiddle to Finn and Jake, Marceline is one of the show’s most popular characters (if the legions of bass-wielding cosplayers often spotted at fan conventions mean anything), and she is easily one of the show’s breakout stars. Marceline’s popularity dates all the way back to early 2010. Prior to the debut of the first season, promotional shots of Marceline engendered an embryonic following for the character on Internet forums like ToonZone—a following which exploded into a bona fide fan base after the previewing of “Evicted!” on March 18, 2010. With every new season, fans were demanding more and more Marceline episodes, and consequently when the producers began working on their first miniseries, they decided to focus it entirely around her. Even today, in online rankings of the
show’s best characters, Marceline almost always takes first place, and she is beloved by the creators of both fanart and fanfiction alike.

Part of Marceline’s allure is probably due to her undeniably “cool” characterization: She is a powerful she-demon, who also happens to be a stylish bassist that enjoys having a good time with her friends. This combination of the “cool older sister” and the “good bad girl” tropes is appealing to many. Another factor that has helped Marceline become so popular was her enigmatic backstory, which was slowly teased out over the show’s ten seasons, and which many viewers found intriguing.

While a few clues as to Marceline’s backstory were sprinkled into the show’s first season, it is not until the second season premiere, “It Came from the Nightosphere” that her personal story starts coming to the fore. In this episode, the audience is introduced to Marceline’s demonic father, Hunson Abadeer (voiced by Olivia Olson’s actual father, Martin), whom we learn is not that great of a dad. The next piece of the puzzle comes in the third-season episode “Memory of a Memory,” in which we learn that Marceline was a child during the Great Mushroom War, which presumably claimed her mother’s life.

Marceline’s backstory is then blown wide-open in the penultimate episode of season four “I Remember You,” and the follow-up fifth-season episode “Simon and Marcy.” Over the course of these two episodes, we learn that immediately after the Mushroom War, Marceline was discovered by a still-sane Simon Petrikov, who had managed to survive the mutagenic horrors of the conflict thanks to the power of his ice crown. Simon took little Marceline—whom he affectionately called “Marcy”—under his wing and began raising her like his own daughter. Unfortunately, while Simon was able to resist the marred magic of the crown for a while, it eventually consumed his mind, causing him to forget both himself and poor Marceline. Simon eventually abandoned Marceline when she was a preteen so as to spare her from his increasingly dangerous psychosis.

The audience finally learns the last key pieces of Marceline’s backstory over the course of the eight-episode miniseries *Stakes*, which aired in late 2015 during the show’s seventh season. This event series reveals that when a then-mortal Marceline was about 20 years of age, she came into conflict with gangs of murderous vampires, who had recently awakened after centuries of hibernation deep within the Earth. Marceline quickly grew tired of these blood-sucking foes, and so she devoted herself to eradicating the vampiric threat; to aid in her task, she began using her demonic powers to absorb the souls—and consequently, the abilities—of those vampires that she slew. As she eliminated the alpha vampires, she grew ever stronger in the process. From a vampire named the Fool, she took the power of flight; from another named the Empress, the power of invisibility; from the Hierophant, the power to shape-shift; and from the Moon, the power to self-heal. Marceline eventually
confronted and killed the Vampire King himself. Alas, it was something of a Pyrrhic victory, for in that climactic fight, Marceline herself was bitten, ironically turning into the very abomination that she so deeply despised.

The flashback sequences seen in *Stakes* serve as a meditation on the horror of physical/sexual abuse and the emotional weight of trauma, which is best exemplified in one of the show’s darkest sequences: Marceline’s turning. In this scene, Marceline is shown pinned to the ground by the hulking, masculine Vampire King. As she struggles in vain to free herself from his grasp, he penetrates her neck with his fangs. As his teeth pierce her skin and distribute the vampiric curse through her veins, Marceline lets out a terror-filled scream. It does not take a Freudian to see the obvious visual and aural parallels in the scene: The Vampire King’s actions are the equivalent of rape.

So distressing was the fight with the Vampire King and its resultant fallout that roughly a millennium later, Marceline tells Princess Bubblegum, “When I became a vampire, I was just a messed-up kid. Now it’s 1,000 years later, and I’m still messed up!” It is only during *Stakes*—when Marceline literally confronts her harrowing past, “mourn[s] the old self that trauma destroyed,” and cathartically “sheds her victim identity”—that she is able to come to terms with her turning and go on with her life.

These occasional flashbacks clearly paint Marceline as a strong-willed survivor of extreme emotional and physical abuse: a victim of war, who was pulled from her mother, abandoned by her biological father, effectively “lost” by her adoptive father, and then graphically assaulted. To say that Marceline’s backstory is heartbreaking is an understatement. But Marceline’s strength in the face of so much adversity is also admirable, and many fans who have been dealt a bad hand empathize with the character, finding solace in her triumphs.

Marceline is far from a perfect character, but over the course of the show’s ten seasons, she nevertheless shows a willingness to learn from her flaws and make peace with her troubled past. In this way, she is arguably one of the show’s most human characters (which is ironic, given that she is an immortal vampire demon).

**The Tale of “Bubbline”**

As was briefly discussed earlier in this chapter, throughout the series, it is heavily suggested—and eventually confirmed—that Bubblegum and Marceline have feelings for one another. While this pairing of the show’s leading ladies may be one of the more famous queer relationships in the history of Western animated television, only a few published sources have considered the topic in-depth. What follows is thus an attempt to fill this
hole by providing a detailed history of “Bubbline” (the shipping portman-
teau of “Bubblegum” and “Marceline”).

Despite what some people believe, the romantic relationship between
the two characters was never planned from the start.\textsuperscript{36} In fact, the series pitch
bible describes Marceline and Bubblegum as being “friendly rivals,” with the
implication that both were to be love interests for Finn.\textsuperscript{37} In a 2012 interview
io9, Pendleton Ward explained that this early approach to Bubblegum and
Marceline was inspired largely by the \textit{Archie Comics}, specifically the char-
acters Betty Cooper and Veronica Lodge; in the long-running comic series,
 Betty and Veronica are best friends who nevertheless compete against one
another for the attention of title character Archie Andrew. According to
Ward: “That was the cliché that I was interested in, and I liked that there
were these two girls that liked messing with Finn’s head, and he’s totally true
of heart. ... I liked that relationship.”\textsuperscript{38}

This Betty-and-Veronica approach to Bubblegum and Marceline is
perhaps best illustrated in the second-season episode “Go with Me.” In this
installment, Finn hopes to get Bubblegum to go with him to the movies on
couples’ night, so he and Marceline flirt in an attempt to make the princess
jealous. When Bubblegum first acknowledges Marceline, the former is notice-
ably irritated by the latter’s presence, almost as if the vampire queen has long
annoyed her with her careless antics. Marceline, on the other hand, seems
delighted to both be bothering the princess as well as messing with Finn.

It would not be until the third-season episode “What Was Missing” that
the two would once again interact, but this time the nature of their relationship
is deepened substantially. In this episode, Finn, Jake, Marceline, Bubblegum,
and BMO chase down a “doorlord” who has stolen a prized possession from
each of them. The doorlord soon locks himself behind a magical entryway
that will only open to “music from a genuine band.” Marceline, being a natural
musician, grabs her axe bass and kicks things off with an emotive song enti-
tled “I’m Just Your Problem,” the lyrics of which are not-so-subtly directed at
Princess Bubblegum. The song suggests that in the past Bubblegum pushed
Marceline away, seemingly for not being “serious” enough. The lyrics also
express Marceline’s frustration that, despite feeling as if she has done nothing
wrong, she wants to make up with the princess regardless.

Based on many of the plot points in “What Was Missing”—namely,
the suspiciously specific lyrics in “I’m Just Your Problem,” and the fact that
Bubblegum’s prized possession is a shirt given to her by Marceline—it is
abundantly clear that Marceline and Bubblegum share a complicated past.
But what exactly was the nature of that past? According to storyboard arti-
est Rebecca Sugar, after receiving the outline for “What Was Missing,” she
pitched to Adam Muto (her storyboard partner at the time) the idea that
Marceline and Bubblegum had been in a romantic relationship that had
gone south, thereby explaining the characters’ prickly demeanor toward one another. Muto and the Adventure Time crew were receptive to this idea, but due to the prejudices of the time, Sugar and Muto had to be strategic in how they worked this romantic angle into their storyboard. The two eventually decided to make the characters’ relationship a bit more subtextual than it perhaps would have been had they been given free rein by the network.39

Despite this roadblock, Sugar and Muto were confident that the show’s fans would get what they were going for, and indeed, when “What Was Missing” aired on September 26, 2011, a sizable portion of the fanbase immediately recognized the queer subtext in the episode for what it was meant to be. However, there were those fans who protested any romantic interpretation of the episode, arguing that Marceline and Bubblegum were your standard “frenemies” who had simply had a falling out. Soon, a full-on debate had erupted within the fandom.

It was around this time that the Frederator-sanctioned recap series “Mathematical!” accidentally added further fuel to the fire by referencing the topic in one of their video summations, wherein a voice-over speculates that Marceline “might like Princess Bubblegum a little more than she’d like to admit. Maybe a little more than Finn.”40 The producers of the recap series also chose to complement this voice-over with select drawings (some by charac-
ter designer Natasha Allegri), which depicted Marceline and Bubblegum in loving embrace.

Because the “Mathematical!” series was produced by Frederator, many accepted the video as explicit confirmation that Marceline and Bubblegum had in fact been a couple. This, in turn, engendered push-back from the shipping naysayers, who were worried that the show was trying to “force a narrative” on them. The growing controversy resulted in Frederator axing the “Mathematical!” series altogether. The topic got so heated that Fred Seibert himself even issued the following apology:

Well, I completely screwed up.

There’s been chatter on the internet recently about our latest Adventure Time “Mathematical!” video recap that we created, posted, and removed here at Frederator. I figure it’s time to clear up the matter.

In trying to get the show’s audience involved we got wrapped up by both fan conjecture and spicy fanart and went a little too far. ... I let us goof in a staggering way and I’m deeply sorry it’s become such a distraction for so many people.\(^4\)

The apology did little to calm the waters. In fact, many in the fandom were livid, with this anger perhaps best expressed by Kjerstin Johnson of Bitch magazine, “It’s hard not to see Seibert’s language as pretty coded: By ‘spicy’ fan art, I think he was referring to the depictions of Bubblegum and Marceline being more than just friends (though the images in the video are, at most, PG-13).”\(^4\) Was queerness in a kid’s show really that much of a taboo?

Most members of Adventure Time’s production crew (who were not particularly eager to be dragged into a volatile Internet flame war) immediately tried to distance themselves from the controversy: Pendleton Ward called it “a big hullabaloo” and decided not to take a stand one way or the other because “there were so many extreme positions taken on it all over the Internet.”\(^4\) Adam Muto likewise argued that the exact nature of Marceline and Bubblegum’s relationship was best left up to the viewer’s interpretation.\(^4\)

While these “impartial” comments were meant to prevent any further controversy, they only served to further foment strong feelings in the fanbase. In this way, what had started out as a seemingly fringe pairing had become one of the fandom’s most famous “ships.” Bubbline had officially set sail.

It seems that the controversy generated by “What Was Missing” was so volatile that for years the show held off on the production of episodes that co-starred Marceline and Bubblegum. This dearth of episodes, sometimes sardonically called the “Great Bubbline Drought” by fans, finally ended on July 29, 2013 with the airing of the fifth-season episode “Sky Witch,” which
features Marceline and Bubblegum teaming up to take down the eponymous villain, Maja. With the debut of “Sky Witch,” many in the fandom wondered if the show’s writers and producers were finally ready to embrace rather than avoid the elephant in the room.

The answer, unfortunately, was “not yet.”

“Sky Witch” came and went. Soon months had passed since the last Marceline/Bubblegum interaction. By mid-2014, hope for Bubbline seemed lost, but then on August 7, 2014 at a Q&A panel with fans, Olivia Olson dropped the following bombshell:

I was at the recording studio [the other day] and Pen was actually there because he was recording for Lumpy Space Princess. And I ... wanted to pick Pen’s brain a little bit [about Marceline and Bubblegum’s relationship]. And he said, “Oh, you know they dated, right?” ... I said, “Are they going to [date] on the show at all? Or can we say anything about it in the [The Enchiridion & Marcy’s Super Secret Scrapbook]?” And he’s like, “I don’t know about the book, but in some countries where the show airs [queer relationships are] illegal.” So that’s why they’re not putting it in the show.45

Olson’s revelation was met with jubilant hoots and hollers from the audience, but part of this joy was later undercut when Olson surreptitiously tweeted that she “like[s] to make things up at panels” and that fans “take [her] stories way too seriously.” While Olson never addressed which “stories” were made-up, many fans assumed she was talking about the Bubbline reveal.

But why, some fans asked, would Olson have dropped such an explosive fib at a filmed panel attended by dozens of people? Surely she knew that whatever answer she gave would race like wildfire across numerous online fora? This suspicion led many fans to suspect that the tweet was not so much a recantation as it was Olson’s attempt to back-peddle—possibly on behest of an unhappy network that had been publicly shamed for its practices.

Luckily for Bubbline shippers, good news was right around the corner, for around this time, the show’s writers and storyboard artists began working on the show’s seventh season. Realizing that they had not placed as much attention on Marceline and Bubblegum in the past, the producers decided it was time to once again shine the spotlight on their leading ladies. This refocusing is immediately noticeable in the second episode of the season, “Varmints,” which aired on November 3, 2015. In this episode, Marceline and Bubblegum team up to hunt the titular monsters, and in the process, begin to discuss their past. In a scene about midway through the episode, Bubblegum, in a rare moment of vulnerability, breaks down into tears, apologizing to Marceline for the way she
pushed her away. In an equally rare display of tenderness, Marceline comforts Bubblegum and assures her that she has nothing to apologize for. The two then finish off the varmints and call it a night. The episode ends with Bubblegum falling asleep on Marceline’s shoulder while the two, for lack of a better word, snuggle on Bubblegum’s porch.

Things are then kicked up a few more notches in the miniseries *Stakes*, in which five fearsome vampires return from the dead, forcing Bubblegum and a de-vampirized Marceline (along with Finn, Jake, and Peppermint Butler) to stop them. For many who had up to this point remained Bubbline skeptics, *Stakes* is what caused their dam of doubt to break. Indeed, to call *Stakes* queer is an understatement. Across the miniseries’ eight episodes, Marceline and Bubblegum engage in a whole slew of quasi-romantic behavior, such as: cradling one another lovingly, talking about living with one another, and fantasizing about growing old together. In one of the more direct scenes, Marceline, while training with Bubblegum one-on-one, even mistakes a newfound feeling (in this case, hunger) for “love.”

It seems that *Stakes* was some sort of catalyst for the Bubbline movement, for after the miniseries’ debut, episodes featuring Marceline and Bubblegum became much more frequent, which each of these episodes adding more and more subtext than the last: soon, the two were “meeting the parents” (“Broke His Crown,” “Marcy & Hunson”), going on “dates” (“Broke His Crown,” “Wheels”), and holding hands in public (“Seventeen”). By the time *Adventure Time*’s final season rolled around, the idea that Bubbline was just a “fan theory” seemed ludicrous to many, given the voluminous subtext that had accumulated over the years. That said, the show had yet to explicitly foreground the romantic element of Marceline and Bubblegum’s close relationship, instead choosing to veil it slightly or to hide it in the background.

This all changed in the series finale, “Come Along with Me”; in the episode, Bubblegum is battling a chaos beast when she is nearly killed. For a moment, Marceline believes that Bubblegum has died and flies into a blind rage, unleashing her full vampiric power, which allows her to effortlessly defeat the creature that (apparently) felled her friend. Once Marceline realizes that Bubblegum is alive, she flies into the princess’s arms and, through tears of happiness and regret, tells her: “Even when we weren’t talking, I was so afraid something bad would happen to you and I wouldn’t be there to protect you ... I don’t want to lose you again.” After Bubblegum assures Marceline that she will not be going anywhere, the two lovingly embrace, and then, to the delight of shippers the world over, they kiss.

The scene was met with near-universal acclaim from critics and fans alike, but what many might not know is that it nearly did not make it into the final episode. According to Muto:
[The kiss] actually wasn’t in the outline when it was submitted. It didn’t say that they kiss. It just said they “have a moment.” ... It was really up to Hanna K. [Nyström], the storyboard artist who got that scene, to decide what her take on it was going to be. ... When Hanna boarded that, there was a little note in the margin that said “Come on!” with a big exclamation point. That was the only note. I can’t argue with that.50

Much of the hesitation on the part of Muto and the producers was due to the fear that too heavy a focus on Bubblegum and Marceline’s romance could be misinterpreted as a carnival-esque showcasing of “novel” sexuality, rather than a casual depiction of natural, queer behavior that has been unfairly marginalized for centuries.51 On the other hand, were the show to have not addressed the romance at all, or down-played the subtext, the show would have likely been accused of queerbaiting its audience.52 It certainly was a tightrope act, but in the end, the show stuck the landing.

Finally, after years of subtextual maneuvering and ardent fan campaigning, Marceline and Bubblegum were able to get a happily (for)ever after.

**Complex Leading Ladies: Final Thoughts on Bubblegum and Marceline**

While in this chapter I have attempted to eschew preferentialism in favor of impartiality, I normally make no secret that Princess Bubblegum and Marceline are my favorite Adventure Time characters. There are numerous factors that I could cite to defend this position (e.g., both Bubblegum and Marceline manage to be badass without rejecting femininity wholesale, both have intriguing backstories that give many of their episodes an additional level of mystique, and both are, simply put, cool, but I think the most important factor is the characters’ complexity.

It is true that Marceline is a vampire—a rather “traditional” fantasy monster—but she is also a sensitive soul, a loyal friend, and a talented musician whose emo tunes are veritable earworms. Likewise, while Bubblegum might be a magical princess, she is also a scientific wunderkind whose governing philosophy makes Machiavelli look like Abe Lincoln. Bubblegum and Marceline are thus more than just friendly neighborhood monster girls; they are characters with depth, which allows them to transcend easy understandings of what it means to be a “vampire” or a “princess.” Marceline and Bubblegum are fundamentally interesting, and if that is not the sign of a great character, then I do not know what is.
Endnotes
1. Lloyd, “Series Broke Barriers.”
8. Or, rather, Glob.
10. “Come Along with Me” (Season 10, Episode 13–16 [originally Season 9, Episodes 13–16]).
11. Marceline is never addressed by this full name in the series, but it has been used in the official Boom! comics, the Epic Tales series of books, and by many in the fandom. Additionally, storyboard artist Jesse Moynihan noted on his Formspring that “Marceline Abadeer” was what he understood the character’s full name to be. “Marceline Abadeer,” Formspring, 2012, archived at http://archive.is/DmYe.
16. John Moe, Open Mike Eagle, and Olivia Olson, “Fionna and Cake, Marceline, and Addiction”; Florida Supercon, “Adventure Time Panel on Friday at Magic City Comic Con 2015.”
18. Lloyd; Olson.
19. René A Guzman, “Fiona and Cake.”
20. “Henchman” (Season 1, Episode 22).
25. McKenzie Atwood et al., “‘Rebecca Sugar’ with Adam Muto, Ian Jones-Quartey, and Ben Levin & Matt Burnett (Vol. 3/Ep. 9).”
28. See: https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/CoolBigSis.
29. See: https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/GoodBadGirl.
30. “Marceline the Vampire Queen” (Season 7, Episode 6).
31. Judith L. Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 176-87.
32. Herman, 196.
33. Herman, 203.
34. In describing all relationships and orientations that are not considered heteronor-
mative, I have chosen to use the umbrella term “queer” because it is a) inclusive, b) easily integrated into prose, and c) commonly invoked in scholarly texts. For more on the term and its usage, see: Morgan Lev Edward Holleb, “Queer,” 208-10.

35. The major exception being Simon Bacon’s insightful essay “The Love that is Named: Lesbianism in Children’s ‘Horror’ Television and the Queer World of Marceline Vampire Queen.”


39. Sugar.

40. Frederator and Dan Rickmers, “What Was Missing’ Recap.”


42. Kjerstin Johnson, “Adventure Time Gay Subtext: ‘Spicy’ or Adorbz?!”

43. Smith, “Pen Ward Talks.”

44. Adam Muto, “I don’t mind...” Formspring, 2011, archived at http://www.webcitation.org/6FGgPUQLY.

45. Connie Wu, “Fans Rejoice!”


47. For more on the queerness of Stakes, see: Bacon’s insightful essay “The Love that is Named”; Bridget Blodgett and Anastasia Salter, “What Was Missing: Children’s Queerbaiting and Homoromantic Exclusion in Adventure Time and Steven Universe.”

48. “Come Along with Me” (Season 10, Episode 13–16 [originally Season 9, Episodes 13–16]).

49. A video of this scene was uploaded to YouTube the day the finale aired, and within a week’s time, it had amassed over 4 million views.


52. For more on queerbaiting with regard to Bubbline, see: Blodgett and Salter, “What Was Missing.”

Every good hero needs sidekicks, and every good hero needs a villain; as the undisputed champions of Ooo, Finn and Jake have both in spades. In this chapter I will explore a few of our heroes’ more important allies, as well as a few of their more formidable foes.

BMO

BMO (in some sources stylized as “B-MO” or spelled out phonetically as “Beemo”) is a small robot who lives with Finn and Jake in their grassland tree fort. Gregarious and relatively carefree, BMO treats Finn and Jake at times like its parents and at other times like its peers.

According to Patrick McHale, BMO was inspired by a robotic character named Raye that he had mocked up in the late 2000s for his own personal pilot project: “a quirky cosmic opera with deeper philosophical themes” entitled Space Planet.1 After Adventure Time entered into production and McHale was hired on as a creative director, he and Ward retooled Raye into a new character that they christened “BMO.”2

In terms of an aesthetic design, the character is best described as a cross between a Nintendo Gameboy and an old Macintosh Classic II.3 But under the mundane facade of late 20th century technology, BMO is a technologically advanced multi-tool, capable of performing a bevy of futuristic tasks
(e.g., projecting complex holograms, downloading human consciousness into its “main game brain frame”) alongside more humdrum functions (e.g., playing video games, printing readouts on continuous stationery, playing old VHS tapes, functioning as a flashbulb camera). These many abilities mean that when Finn and Jake are in plot-related pinch, they are often quick to turn to BMO for some much-needed assistance.

BMO is voiced by Niki Yang, a writer and animator from South Korea who worked on the first season of *Adventure Time* as a storyboard artist and who also provided the voice of Lady Rainicorn. Yang, who speaks English with a Korean accent, got the part of BMO almost accidentally, as she revealed in an interview with online entertainment website Sweety High:

[The producers] were ... having a hard time finding BMO’s voice. At first they tried really low, tough voices, but at the end of the day, Pen asked me if I wanted to give it a try, so I did. I’m not an actor, so to me my BMO voice sounds really immature and I think with my [Korean] accent it sounds childish, but that’s what they liked about it, and I got the role.4

Later, in a 2020 email exchange with the author, Yang joked: “Who would know having an accent opens a door of golden opportunity!”5

At the start of the show, BMO appeared mostly in the background, and usually only had a handful of lines every few episodes. But as the show’s fan-base grew, and many began highlighting the robot as their favorite character,
BMO began finding itself in the spotlight more and more. This eventually led to the fourth-season episode “BMO Noire,” which stars BMO as a hard-boiled detective attempting to solve a case. “BMO Noire” marked the first time that Yang had to carry an episode almost entirely by herself, and when it came time to do the voice recording for the episode, she worried that she would not be able to do the storyboard justice. Despite her uncertainty, Yang did an excellent job, and “BMO Noire” is often cited by fans as a stand-out episode of the show’s fourth season. The success of this episode arguably led to the writers penning a number of BMO-heavy episodes thereafter, and as a result BMO readily became part of the show’s group of main characters.

For the first half of the series, BMO’s origin is ignored, and the characters remain oblivious to its almost certainly fantastic genesis. This all changes in the fifth-season episode “Be More,” in which Finn, Jake, and the audience learn that BMO was constructed by an eccentric trans-human inventor named Moseph “Moe” Mastro Giovanni. Moe initially wanted BMO to take care of and play with his future biological son, so he made the robot playful so as to “be more” than the average android. However, Moe never had any biological children, and so he released BMO unto Ooo to find a family of its own. Later, in the two-part season-seven episode “The More You Moe, The Moe You Know,” the audience learns that while BMO was designed to give love, its older “sibling” AMO was designed to receive love; alas, this turned AMO into a needy monster who grew jealous of the attention given to BMO. At the end of the episode, AMO and BMO confront one another, and in the fray, AMO is accidentally killed by falling off a cliff.

The genesis of both “Be More” and “The More You Moe, the Moe You Know” (both of which were storyboarded by Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard) can be traced back to the show’s third season, when storyboard artists Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar were slated to work on an episode focused on BMO’s origin. The initial idea for this episode was that Finn, Jake, and BMO would “trek out to find the giant AMO, which [was] ... buried under the ground.” For unclear reasons, the concept was pushed back, and by the time the episode finally entered into production during season five, Sugar had long left the series; in a 2014 Reddit "Ask Me Anything" (AMA) post, she noted, “[The plot changed] a lot! But a lot of ideas float around like that and change over time ... Sometimes these seeds just take a while to grow!” In a 2020 email exchange discussing BMO’s origin story, Sugar was also enthusiastic in her belief that Herpich and Wolfhard’s version was the best possible approach to the story.

In the epilogue of the series’ finale, it is revealed that BMO not only has an important connection to Ooo’s past, but will also play a major role in its future: One thousand years after the time of Finn and Jake, BMO is still “alive,” living in a small house atop Mount Cragdor (the same mountain
that had housed the *Enchiridion* prior to Finn’s acquisition of the book). Believed by some to be nothing more than a colorful folkloric character, BMO is known at this time simply as the “King of Ooo”—having presumably usurped at some point the title from the character of the same name. It is “King” BMO who narrates the story of the Great Gum War to Shermy and Beth, and it is BMO who inspires the two to find the Finn-Sword embedded in the trunk of the Fern-Tree. In this way, BMO is something of a constant in a universe of change, uniting the past, present, and future of Ooo all as one.

Whether intentional on the part of the show’s writers or not, BMO’s characterization subverts many of the tropes and clichés associated with sentient robots in pop culture. For instance, while many robots—like the Terminator in the movies series of the same, or the Machines from *The Matrix* franchise—are depicted as conscienceless killers who think only in terms of mass slaughter, BMO is depicted as childlike, yearning not for destruction, but rather play.

BMO also manages to eschew the “uncreative robot” trope often found in pop culture by being arguably the most imaginative member of *Adventure Time*’s main cast. In fact, so creative is BMO that the robot regularly engages in elaborate role-plays, or pretends to be a “living boy” or a “real baby girl.” This side of BMO is best showcased in episodes like season four’s “Five Short Graybles,” wherein the character talks to itself in the bathroom mirror, believing that its reflection is really a doppelganger named “Football” who lives in a parallel mirror-world; in several subsequent episodes, BMO and Football discuss their separate lives, express their affection for one another, and even switch places for a day!

Another fascinating aspect of BMO’s characterization is that the robot has no clearly assigned gender, instead “appear[ing] inherently fluid,” as theorists Christopher Olson and CarrieLynn Reinhard put it. Because of this fluidity, BMO can, at a moment’s notice, “adopt any identity or inhabit any gender it wishes.” The fourth-season standout “BMO Noire” provides a fascinating case study to consider this fluidity. In this episode—which overtly lampoons black and white noir films from the early half of the 20th century—BMO dons the role of a hard-boiled detective, attempting to solve the case of Finn’s missing sock. Throughout the episode, BMO interacts with a variety of “suspects,” all of whom are given a uniquely inflected voice by the robot; included in this motley group of suspects is the episode’s *poule fatale*, Lorraine the chicken. When playing the detective role in “BMO Noire,” BMO copies the behavior of stereotypical masculine private eyes (like Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe) by talking in a gruff voice, threatening violence to get answers, and making cynical observations about the world. Conversely, when giving voice to Lorraine, BMO mimics another aspect of the show’s fluidity: BMO has no clearly assigned gender, instead “appear[ing] inherently fluid,” as theorists Christopher Olson and CarrieLynn Reinhard put it. Because of this fluidity, BMO can, at a moment’s notice, “adopt any identity or inhabit any gender it wishes.” The fourth-season standout “BMO Noire” provides a fascinating case study to consider this fluidity. In this episode—which overtly lampoons black and white noir films from the early half of the 20th century—BMO dons the role of a hard-boiled detective, attempting to solve the case of Finn’s missing sock. Throughout the episode, BMO interacts with a variety of “suspects,” all of whom are given a uniquely inflected voice by the robot; included in this motley group of suspects is the episode’s *poule fatale*, Lorraine the chicken. When playing the detective role in “BMO Noire,” BMO copies the behavior of stereotypical masculine private eyes (like Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe) by talking in a gruff voice, threatening violence to get answers, and making cynical observations about the world. Conversely, when giving voice to Lorraine, BMO mimics the world. Conversely, when giving voice to Lorraine, BMO mimics
the stereotypical behavior of femme fatales, such as using flirtatious dialog in an attempt to manipulate the detective.

In this episode, BMO is on one level consciously choosing to role-play as both a male detective and a femme fatale; on another level, however, the specific behaviors that BMO chooses to imitate are predicated on “sociocultural codes that categorize individuals as man [or] woman”—codes which BMO passively assumes are “correct.” In other words, BMO’s gendered behavior can be both intentional and unintentional—sometimes in interlocking ways. “BMO Noire” is thus an excellent example of both Erving Goffman’s understanding of gender as a “performance” (i.e., that gender is actively and consciously enacted by subjects to convey information to others), as well as Judith Butler’s understanding of “gender performativity” (i.e., that gender is unconsciously enacted, cited, and replicated by subjects). For Olson and Reinhard, Adventure Time thus uses BMO as a clear example that gender is “fluid and subject to change at either a conscious or unconscious level.”

Given BMO’s penchant for shifting genders depending on the situations at hand, characters routinely address the robot with whatever titles or pronouns seem most appropriate. What is more, in the show, there is never any obsession with this fluidity, and characters do not express anxiety about getting BMO’s gender “correct.” The same cannot be said about fans of the show online; in fact, a simple Google search for “BMO’s gender” will return hundreds of forum posts in which fans debate whether BMO is a “he,” “she,” “it,” “they” or some other gender. In all fairness, some confusion may stem from the fact that BMO is voiced by a female actress, while being depicted partaking in stereotypically “boy” activities (e.g., skateboarding, playing video games). At the same time, the show’s producers have time and time again declared that BMO is genderfluid, given that the character is basically a sentient Gameboy.

Due to its idiosyncratic behavior and humorous, often stilted lines of dialog, BMO is beloved by many fans of the show, and is often heralded as one of its greatest characters. When I asked Yang if she thought her voice acting played a part in this popularity, she responded with modesty:

I know BMO is very popular, but I’m not sure if my voice has anything to do with that. BMO is a great character with an irresistible personality created by great writers, storyboard artists, designers, and of course the creator. I did my best to bring all the charms and love that they poured into [the character]. I’m only the transmitter of those creative minds behind it. I’m deeply grateful for being the [voice of the] tiny robot who carries their vision.
“Best Friends [and Foes] in the World”

Lumpy Space Princess

Lumpy Space Princess (often referred to simply as “LSP”) is the self-absorbed princess made up of “irradiated stardust” from a dimension known as “Lumpy Space.” Functioning more or less as an extreme caricature of a contemporary female teenager, Lumpy Space Princess is vain, self-centered, dramatic, boy-crazy, and obsessed with being fashionable. She is also frequently depicted rebelling against her parents, which generally takes the form of her running away from home; in fact, for much of the series, she lives as a veritable hobo in the woods of Ooo. But despite this litany of negatives, the character is nevertheless a close friend to Finn and Jake.

As one of Ooo’s more unusual inhabitants, it is only appropriate that Lumpy Space Princess should have an equally unusual production backstory. According to Patrick McHale:

[During the production of season one] I remember ... Pen and myself staying up really late working on the storyboards for “Prisoners of Love.” I went in to Pen’s office to see how he was doing on his section, and he was passed out at his desk, and he was still holding his pencil, which was still touching the paper. He was basically storyboarding in his sleep. I picked up the paper and looked at it, and it was really just a bunch of scribbles and blobs with faces, along with some impossible-to-read dialog that Pen wrote in some half-dream state. I woke him up and he pitched the board in sleepy mumbles, explaining that it was Lumpy Space Princess ... That’s how I remember it.

Lumpy Space Princess speaks with an exaggerated Valley Girl accent, making heavy use of the quotative “like,” vocal fry, and hip “swears” (e.g., “Lump off!,” “What the stuff?,” “Oh my Glob!”). In contemporary Western culture, it has long been (erroneously) assumed that the Valley Girl accent indexes a sort of vapid stupidity. By giving Lumpy Space Princess this accent, it seems that the show is attempting to code her as shallow, unintelligent, and vain.

Lumpy Space Princess is voiced by none other than Pendleton Ward, who lends the character’s vocal tone a shrill, somewhat nasally quality. At the 2011 Toronto Comic Arts Festival, Ward revealed that the voice evolved out of his attempts to playfully mock the Valley Girl accent while swearing: “I have to get into [the accent] by cursing. That’s how it started. ... I’d drop the last letter of the curse word, so it’s like ‘Oh shi...’ or ‘Oh fu...’ For whatever reason, Ward decided to use this goofy impression as the basis for Lumpy Space Princess’s voice, and the rest, as they say, is history.
In addition to bragging about her intelligence and charm, Lumpy Space Princess often boasts about her luscious “lumps.” For most of the series, it is heavily implied that these “lumps” are a euphemism for aspects of the feminine physique. However, in the ninth-season miniseries *Elements*, the audience learns that lumps are more than just physical attributes: they are “the subspace molecular lattice that binds together the scientific and magical forces of Ooo. More powerful than any one element, [lumps are] the force that orders reality into its true shape.”23 The reveal means that Lumpy Space Princess’s lumps are actually a powerful anti-elemental energy, capable of combating the combined power of candy, ice, fire, and slime. At the climax of *Elements*, Lumpy Space Princess and Finn use the power of lumps to reset Ooo, unleashing a “world-healing wave”24 that restores the elements-ravaged land.

When she is not saving the world with her anti-elemental body (which is to say, most of the time), Lumpy Space Princess is usually shown mouthing off sassy one-liners or delivering catty insults, making her an excellence source of comedic relief. Sometimes, however, the character’s selfish nature grows to such levels that it collapses in on itself, resulting not in straight comedy, but rather a Stygian sort of gallows humor. Consider, for instance, the fifth-season episode “Apple Wedding,” which implies that the character dug up the grave of Princess Diana (yes, *that* Princess Diana) and stole her dress, all so she can crash Tree Trunks’s wedding.25 Things get even darker a few episodes later in “Bad Timing,” in which Lumpy Space Princess begins a romantic relationship with a lumpy person named Johnnie, before inadvertently trapping him forever in a bizarre, parallel universe.

Lumpy Space Princess is one of the show’s more popular characters,26 and is often cited as its funniest by fans and critics. Much of this love has to do with Ward’s hilarious voice-acting, as well as the character’s self-absorbed and vivacious dialogue. Gaayathri Nair of Bitch Flicks has further applauded the producers for making the character—despite her many foibles—a main heroine, writing, “To have an unlikeable female character who is not immediately cast as a villain is so rare.”27 But Lumpy Space Princess’s comical unlikableness is also a double-edged sword, as her permanent immaturity means that she rarely learns from her mistakes or grows as a character. In fact, by series’ end, Lumpy Space Princess is just as obnoxious as she was in her debut episode. At least she is consistent.

**Flame Princess**

Flame Princess28 (birth name: Phoebe) is, upon her introduction in the third season, the heir to the Fire Kingdom’s throne and a prisoner kept in a glass
Flame Princess was voiced by Jessica DiCicco, a fairly prolific voice actress. (Photo courtesy of Steve Cranston)

lamp by her evil father, the Flame King (voiced by Keith David). Freed inadvertently by Jake in an attempt to find Finn a new love interest, Flame Princess falls for Finn, and the two begin to date; sadly, their relationship falls apart during the middle of the fifth season. Flame Princess subsequently overthrows her father and usurps his throne, establishing a realm based on honesty.

Flame Princess is introduced in the third-season finale “Incendium” as a potential love interest for Finn. The character was devised near the end of the production for season three after the writers began to worry that penning episode after episode in which Bubblegum rebuffs Finn’s romantic advances was getting old. To keep the show fresh, they decided to have Finn get over Bubblegum and instead pine after someone else. The problem was that the show did not yet feature a character who could serve as a suitable love interest. The writers thus thought it best to think outside the box by drafting up a new resident of Ooo. It was eventually decided that the character would be the temperamental princess of the Fire Kingdom. Adam Muto and character designer Natasha Allegri each drafted up preliminary sketches for the character, but the character’s final look was designed by Rebecca Sugar, who based her design mostly on Allegri’s rough drawings.

With regard to characterization, the writers wanted to make Flame Princess more on Finn’s level, both in terms of her age as well as her emotional intelligence. When roughing out the character’s personality, the writers were inspired by the alluring but dangerous nature of fire itself, with voice actress Jessica DiCicco revealing in a 2015 interview: “I spoke to Pen, because I wanted to get his insight into the character, and he said that [the writers and producers] wanted [her to be] like fire personified—what would fire be like if fire was a person?” During the commentary for the fourth-season premiere “Hot to the Touch,” Rebecca Sugar built on this line of thinking, arguing that Flame Princess’s fiery nature is best under-
stood as a metaphor for the unpredictable nature of love itself: “She’s sort of the embodiment of ... love as a ... uncontrollable destructive force that you naturally have but you can’t control—you don’t really know what it is and you’re kinda [sic] feeling it out ... you realize it’s going to hurt people, but you didn’t know that at first.”

Flame Princess is voiced by Jessica DiCicco, an Emmy-nominated actress, who has long voiced characters for animated television series and video games. Prior to her landing the role, DiCicco was only peripherally aware of *Adventure Time* and as such was not familiar with its complex characters and plot. This changed once she got an email asking if she was interested in auditioning for a new character. According to DiCicco:

> Usually they give [you] a character design, you see the character, you get the blurb about her [or] the show and you get a bunch of lines. This [audition request] just came ... in the body of the email. I didn’t have much to go off of, but I YouTubed [the series] like crazy, and I watched as much *Adventure Time* as I could, and so I started to understand the [show’s] tone.

DiCicco was struck by what she saw, telling media analyst Mike Gencarelli in 2013: “Immediately [after watching those clips] I knew this was a show I wanted to be on.” DiCicco promptly prepared an audition tape, submitted it for consideration, and was delighted when she scored the role. In the aforementioned interview, DiCicco told Gencarelli: “I was very happy ... From the very first script that came in, I thought the show was just so amazing and well-written. I knew that I was in for something great.”

Much like Marceline (with whom she shares much in common), Flame Princess can readily be categorized as a manifestation of the “wild woman” archetype, and her characterization deconstructs what it means exactly to be “evil.” In her first few episodes, such as “Incendium” and “Hot to the Touch,” it is suggested by characters like Flame King that Flame Princess is a depraved, wicked woman who craves wanton destruction. But by mid-season four, it is readily apparent that Flame Princess is not malicious—she is simply following her nature as a fire elemental, and as she puts it, “Fire’s purpose is to burn.” As she and Finn spend more time together, she begins to realize how her flames impact non-fire persons, and—despite her father’s (humorous) warning that “if she acted out of alignment ... there’d be penalties to her experience”—she works on becoming a person who helps rather than hurts others.

While Flame Princess functions more or less as a generic love interest during seasons three and four, her character begins to evolve rapidly during the show’s fifth. After Finn betrays her trust by lying to her in the explosive
episode “Frost & Fire,” she terminates their relationship and begins an intense period of soul-searching. Sometime after, she overthrows her evil father in a bloodless coup and installs herself as the Queen of the Fire Kingdom. Although it takes a few seasons, Finn comes to realize how much he wronged his ex-girlfriend, and after a heartfelt apology in the eighth-season episode “Bun Bun,” the two repair their friendship. Around this time, Flame Princess also begins to dabble in music, and by series’ end, the character is not only a successful monarch, but also a talented rapper.

During the latter part of the show, Flame Princess is also revealed to be the flame elemental (that is, the personification of fire, which is one of the four elements comprising the Oooniverse), making her one of the more powerful characters in the show. While this is officially confirmed in the eighth-season episode “Elemental,” it was hinted at earlier in the fifth-season episode “Earth and Water,” in which a flashback reveals that the Flame King feared his daughter because she has “greater powers than [he will] ever dream of,” and in the sixth-season episode “The Cooler,” when Flame Princess reveals to Princess Bubblegum that her real name is “Phoebe.” This appellation is derived from the ancient Greek term phoibos, meaning “bright, pure one,” and in a slightly different form (i.e., “Phoebus”) was used as an epithet for the Greco-Roman deity Apollo, who was popularly believed to be the god of the sun. It would make sense that the flame elemental would have a name associated with the brightest, hottest bit of fire in the Solar System.

While reflecting on Flame Princess’s growth and the increasing complexity of her character’s story in a 2015 episode of the podcast Conversation Parade, DiCicco mused: “That’s what I love about all the female characters in this show: they are dynamic and they are real. They have layers.”

The Ice King

The Ice King (original name: Simon Petrikov) is the magical sovereign of the Ice Kingdom, who has a penchant for kidnapping princesses and trying to force them into marriage. While on the surface homicidal and insane, the Ice King is really lonelier than anything else, and in many episodes, he openly wishes for someone to love him. Unfortunately, the only creatures that can stand to be around him for extended periods of time are wild penguins and other (usually dim-witted) snow creatures like ice centipedes or snow golems. Despite being an antagonist who fights the heroes, the Ice King nevertheless refers to Finn and Jake as his “best friends,” and Princess Bubblegum as his “on-again-off-again girlfriend.” (Finn, Jake, and Bubblegum, however, would likely beg to differ.)
Series creator Pendleton Ward dreamed up the Ice King while developing a short film at CalArts that featured early versions of “Finn and Jake saving Princess Bubblegum from an Ice King using rocket boots.” Later, when Ward retooled the short and turned it into what would later be considered the Adventure Time pilot, he once again featured the Ice King as the villain. This incarnation of the character was voiced by John Kassir, a comedian and actor known for playing, among other roles, the corpse-like Crypt-Keeper from HBO’s horror anthology series Tales from the Crypt (1989–96). When Adventure Time was picked up for series by Cartoon Network, the producers decided to hire a new voice actor, eventually settling on Tom Kenny (perhaps best known as the voice of SpongeBob SquarePants, the main character in the eponymous Nickelodeon series).

To develop Ice King’s unique vocal pitch, timbre, and rhythm, Kenny considered the character’s warped psyche, telling MTV:

My approach to the Ice King is that he’s a very real psychopath. He’s the kind of guy that they would do a 48 Hours Investigates about, where none of his neighbors know that much about him but they realize there’s that weird smell coming from his house and they dig up a bunch of weird stuff in the basement. That’s definitely the Ice King. And then when they capture the psychotic killer, he can’t realize why everybody’s mad at him.
... He’s one of those guys who’s so pathological that he doesn’t realize why anyone would be angry at him.⁴⁸

Kenny also mentioned in this interview that he “tried not to do was go back and look at the original short” so that his performance would not “be infected by any kind of subconscious earwigs.”⁴⁹

Ice King aesthetically resembles a cross between the Winter Warlock from *Santa Claus Is Coming to Town* (1970) and the King from *The Point* (1971). This look was largely finalized during the production of the pilot, and when *Adventure Time* went to series, the design was tweaked only slightly by character designer Robertryan Cory, who made the jewels on the ice crown resemble Rupees from the *Legend of Zelda* video game series.⁵⁰

In regard to characterization, however, the Ice King is perhaps the character that changes the most from pilot to finale. At the series’ onset, the Ice King is the primary antagonist, and the plots to many an episode are set in motion by Ice King doing something villainous. However, as the show progresses and Finn and Jake learn more about the Ice King, his character is steadily rehabilitated until he is seen by most in Ooo as a lonely but not particularly dangerous schmuck. Perhaps writer Eric Thurm said it best when he described the Ice King as evolving into a “grotesque sitcom neighbor, always showing up when he isn’t wanted while coming through exactly when he’s needed.”⁵¹ And indeed, by the time “Come Along with Me” rolls around, Ice King is shown fighting alongside Finn, Jake, and their many “good” allies.

How is it that the series’ first main antagonist—who at the start of the show was frequently written-off as a hateful psychopath—became a “good guy”? The answer has to do with the character’s in-universe backstory, which was explored steadily over the course of the series: Ice King is actually a victim of the cursed magical crown that gives him his icy powers. This revelation is made in the third-season Christmas special, “Holly Jolly Secrets,” in which Finn and Jake, while watching some of the Ice King’s old video diaries, learn that 1000 years prior to the show’s present, their nemesis was actually a respected antiquarian named Simon Petrikov.⁵²

One day, Petrikov purchased a jewel-encrusted crown from an individual in Scandinavia. Unbeknownst to Petrikov, the ice crown was a magically-infused artifact created 66 million years ago by a powerful ice elemental named Urgence Evergreen. This mage had created the crown out of wish magic in the hopes of preventing a catalyst comet from plowing into the Earth and causing a mass extinction event. Unfortunately, when the time came to use the crown, Evergreen was disabled in a fight. The task of wishing away the comet consequently fell to his young apprentice Gunter, a dinosaur who thought highly of Evergreen, despite the fact that his master treated him poorly. When Gunter placed the crown upon his head, however, he wished...
not for the comet’s destruction but rather to become like his master. From that moment on, the crown’s magic was marred, and anyone who dared wear it was turned into a twisted parody of Urgence Evergreen.

Because Gunter failed to wish away the comet, it smashed into earth, causing the extinction of the dinosaurs, as well as the temporary disappearance of magic. The ice crown, however, survived the impact and slept for millions of years, until it was rediscovered sometime during the Anthropocene, eventually making its way into the hands of Simon. Knowing nothing of the crown’s curse, Simon thought nothing of putting it on his head, but with this one small act, all Hell broke loose, and Simon was infused with maddening ice power, courtesy of the vexatious crown. Simon tried to fight the maddening power, but it was no use, and the resultant chaos was so great that Simon’s beloved fiancée, Betty, fled from him, leaving Petrikov distraught.

Around this time, the mutagenic Mushroom War broke out. Thanks to the powerful magic of the ice crown, Simon was able to survive this nuclear holocaust, and in the aftermath of the war, he adopted a small half-human, half-demon girl named Marceline, whom he found crying in the wreckage of the world. As the two struggled for survival, Petrikov continued to fight the effects of the ice crown, but he allowed himself to give into its power every once in awhile, all in the name of protecting Marceline from the dangers lurking in the post-apocalyptic landscape. These occasional dabblings eventually led to the crown swallowing Petrikov whole, turning him into the sociopathic Ice King, who neither recognized Marceline nor remembered anything of his previous life as a mild-mannered researcher.

When *Adventure Time* first began, this heart-breaking backstory was never part of the plan. Rather, the seeds of this story were laid during the production of season two, when then-creative director Patrick McHale realized that both Marceline and Ice King were roughly the same age but had yet to interact with one another in an episode. This inspired him to mock up an elaborate backstory about how the two characters, centuries prior to the time of Finn and Jake, had attempted to save humanity from menacing vampires.

In an interview, McHale explained to me: “My initial idea was that [Ice King] was essentially humanity’s last hope—like an unlikely superhero using the power of the crown in an attempt to save humankind [from vampires], but falling further and further into insanity.” When McHale initially pitched this grand backstory, none of the writers were interested in it, but then, a few months later during the writing of the third-season holiday special “Holly Jolly Secrets,” McHale partially resurrected his idea by proposing that the VHS tapes Finn and Jake find actually contain the thousand-year old video diaries of Simon Petrikov, documenting his crown-induced descent into madness.

“Holly Jolly Secrets” also features a short scene in which the Ice King sings Marceline’s “Fry Song” (which had first been heard in the second-sea-
son premiere “It Came from the Nightosphere”). This gag once again brought attention to the fact that Ice King and Marceline had yet to co-star in an episode. According to McHale:

[It was around the time that we were working on “Holly Jolly Secrets” that storyboard artist] Rebecca Sugar realized completely independently of me that Marceline and Ice King [had] never actually ... interact[ed] with each other ... And she came up with a more personal, beautiful backstory [for them] and came into the writers’ room super excited, pitching her thoughts about it. It re-ignited the conversation and we were all immediately convinced that [her idea] was the truth of their backstory. Sugar’s ideas eventually came to form the backbone for the fourth-season installment “I Remember You” (in which the audience first learns of Marceline and Ice King’s shared history) and the fifth-season episode “Simon & Marcy” (which functions as a flashback, allowing the audience to actually see what their relationship was like those hundreds of years ago).

The final piece of the Simon-Ice King puzzle came during the production of the show’s sixth season, when storyboard artist Tom Herpich developed an intriguing backstory for Ice King’s cursed crown, which later evolved into the episode “Evergreen.”

Many have drawn comparisons between Ice King’s insanity and those suffering from debilitating neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer’s, which impair cognitive function and destroy memory. Diseases like these are completely out of our control, so when a loved one begins to succumb to their effects and act in a manner inconsistent with their previous self, it makes no sense to fault them for anything bad they might do. The same is true for the Ice King, and after learning about his condition, Finn, Jake, and the show’s many characters realize that Ice King is not malicious, but rather a sick, sad old man who needs the love of friends.

Of the many who have noted the parallels between Ice King and those suffering from Alzheimer’s, perhaps it was Lev Grossman (the lauded author of The Magicians, among other works), who, in a 2013 interview with National Public Radio (NPR), said it best when he lamented:

[Ice King] doesn’t remember who he used to be, but other people [like Marceline] do ... It’s very affecting. My dad has been going through having Alzheimer’s, and he’s forgotten so much about who he used to be. And I look at him and think this cartoon is about my father dying.
Sugar was touched to hear comments like this, and in a short 2014 interview included on the fourth season DVD set, she confessed that “it meant the most to [her]” when people who have lost loved ones to neurodegenerative diseases appreciate what she was trying to say with episodes like “I Remember You.”

All in all, Ice King is one of the show’s most complex characters, able to vacillate between being a heartless antagonist and an awkward weirdo—sometimes within the span of a single episode. It truly is a testament to the show’s writers that such a bizarre, sympathetic character can exist. Perhaps part of the character’s charm is due to the fact that, underneath the veneer of villainy, the character in many ways mirrors our own insecurities and foibles. In a conversation with the show’s writers documented by journalist Maria Bustillos, Pendleton Ward admitted: “I identify with [Ice King] more than any other character. ... [Not in regard to] literally kidnapping women... Just like, living alone and having to talk to your pet.” This is a sentiment to which I—and likely many others out there—can relate.

The Earl of Lemongrab

The Earl of Lemongrab—usually referred to by the simple metonym “Lemongrab”—is one of Princess Bubblegum’s many candy creations. Ruling a fiefdom comprising Castle Lemongrab, the character nominally answers to the sovereign of the Candy Kingdom but in effect governs himself. Awkward and cantankerous, Lemongrab has problems getting along with other people, and often overreacts when the slightest of things go awry. Lemongrab is one of the more popular characters in the Adventure Time fandom, and is perhaps best known for his catchphrase: a shrill scream that things are “Unacceptable!”

Lemongrab is introduced as the antagonist of the third season episode, “Too Young,” in which he usurps the Candy Kingdom throne after learning that Princess Bubblegum has regressed to a 13 year old. However, his tenure as the kingdom’s leader is mercifully short, for at the end of the episode, Bubblegum re-ages and reclaims the throne.

According to storyboard artist and head writer Kent Osborne, the seeds of what would evolve into Lemongrab can be traced back to his watching an episode of the HBO series Game of Thrones that featured regency as a plot point. This inspired Osborne to pitch the idea that sometime during the first half of season three, Bubblegum’s uncle would show up and rule in her stead until she once again reached the age of 18.

Osborne’s proposal about a Candy Kingdom proxy ruler was well-received and soon found its way into an outline for what would eventually become “Too Young.” However, the episode’s storyboard artists, Jesse
Moynihan and Tom Herpich, were put off by the regent’s aggressive and rather belligerent demeanor (on his personal website, Moynihan wrote that the character in the original outline “was just a huge asshole”), and so they retooled his characterization: Dubbing him “Lemongrab,” Moynihan and Herpich ditched the idea that he was Bubblegum’s uncle and instead proposed that he was her first candy creation, who struggled with empathy. “[I] tried to play him as weirdly sympathetic,” Moynihan explained online. “He does a lot of things wrong, but you can see that he’s trying to do what makes sense to him. ... I wanted the viewer to feel sympathy for him, or at least conflicted about his motivations.”

After “Too Young” aired, the character became popular with the fanbase, leading the show’s writers to pen additional episodes in which he stars. The first of these sequels, “You Made Me,” aired during the show’s fourth season, and once again Herpich and Moynihan were tasked with storyboarding the adventure. While working on this episode, both artists were anxious about trying to capture lightning in a bottle, with Moynihan admitting:

I felt a lot of pressure as a writer to re-capture what clicked with Lemongrab in “Too Young,” while introducing fresh ideas about him. Sometimes I wonder if audiences want to re-live the moments that made a character popular. If you bring someone like [Lemongrab] back, do they just want to hear the same lines he spouted off in his first appearance? Is that why the Hangover 2 made so much money?

In the DVD commentary for “You Made Me,” Herpich also discussed this anxiety, claiming that he overcame the issue by consciously avoiding predictable dialogue or “catch phrases,” thereby keeping the character fresh and interesting.

Lemongrab is voiced by Justin Roiland, perhaps better known as the co-creator of the Adult Swim series Rick and Morty (2013–present). When the writers and producers of Adventure Time were looking for an actor to bring the character to life, Roiland was the host of “The Grandma’s Virginity Podcast”—a program of which Pendleton Ward was a fan. After trying and failing to contact a different voice actor for the role, Ward reached out to Roiland and asked if he was interested in voicing Lemongrab; Roiland eagerly accepted, as he happened to be a fan of Adventure Time. Because Roiland was personally solicited by Ward, he never formally auditioned for the part, meaning that he did not know what the character was supposed to sound like. Roiland was thus forced to develop the character’s unique voice at the studio while recording. “I literally just showed up and took a crack
at [the voice],” Roiland explained in an interview with Benjamin Van Den Broeck. “Pen was pleased and we got to work.”70

Lemongrab has one of Adventure Time’s odder storyarcs. In his debut episode, “Too Young,” he serves mostly as an overbearing foil for Finn and Princess Bubblegum. However, in his second episode, “You Made Me,” he is played less as a villain and more as a victim, who is lonely and uncomfortable with existence. This leads to Princess Bubblegum creating for him a brother. For a time, the original character is known as Lemongrab 1 (or “Black Lemongrab”), and his brother is called Lemongrab 2 (or “White Lemongrab”). After learning how to create candy life, the two Lemongrabs build up a citizenry and rule their Earldom in peace. Unfortunately, in the fifth-season episode “Another Five More Short Graybles,” Lemongrab 1 soon grows tired of and eats Lemongrab 2. The sole surviving Lemongrab then becomes a veritable despot, who is ultimately deposed and blown apart by the hero Lemonhope in the two-part episode of the same name. Princess Bubblegum soon thereafter creates a new composite being from the remnants of Lemongrabs 1 and 2, who is dubbed Lemongrab 3 (or “Grey Lemongrab”).

It is important to note that Lemongrab’s first three episodes (all co-storyboarded by Jesse Moynihan) focused on his awkwardness and his anxiety. But then, during season five, the Lemongrab storyline was helmed almost exclusively by Tom Herpich and his storyboard partner Steve Wolfhard, both of whom steered the character in a much more horrific direction. While not opposing this change, Moynihan personally felt that this approach diverged from his own interpretation of the character, telling the rapper Open Mike Eagle in a podcast interview:

So after I worked on ... “You Made Me” ... Tom and Steve ... basically took over Lemongrab for several episodes, and they took him on this [dictator] arc with his brother ... It turned into, like a horror movie. That aspect of his personality was definitely there in the beginning, but they ramped it up—this one aspect of him—to a really high level ... I really enjoyed watching those episodes, and I was always shocked by what they came up with, but I think if I had been working on [those episodes], I [would have approached them differently] ... I think my tone for Lemongrab is slightly different from Steve’s especially, because Steve really enjoys the horror! ... [So] I wouldn’t say [I] “disagree with” [Herpich and Wolfhard’s interpretation of Lemongrab] but it wasn’t a direction that I would have taken the character.71
After season five, Jesse Moynihan once again took the reins of Lemongrab's story, co-writing the heady sixth-season episode “The Mountain” with Sam Alden. “The Mountain” was something of a return to form, focusing more on Lemongrab's personal anxiety, and less on his dictatorial tendencies—or his taste for lemon flesh.

Lemongrab's development over the course of the show comes across as a complex amalgamation of several different stories. On one hand, his arc can be seen as a somewhat more light-hearted take on Mary Shelley's famous Gothic novel *Frankenstein* (1818). In this work, the titular Dr. Frankenstein manages to create a creature out of reanimated body parts. Because he is of artificial origin, the monster begins to question his very nature. Finding himself feared by others, the monster shuts himself off from society and devolves into a dangerous monster.

The parallels between *Adventure Time* and *Frankenstein* in regard to Lemongrab are fairly obvious: Princess Bubblegum is the analog to Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein, and Lemongrab is the monster, resentful of being brought into a world that does not understand his “lemon styles.” However, unlike in *Frankenstein*—in which Dr. Frankenstein dies from exposure in the blistering Arctic and the monster presumably dies at sea—Bubblegum and Lemongrab's story has a relatively happy ending: in the series finale “Come Along with Me,” Lemongrab prepares to fight for Bubblegum during the Gum War, and he remains by her side even after the arrival of the demonic GOLB.

Lemongrab's story can also be read as a dark parody of the Creation of Man, as recounted in the biblical Book of Genesis. In this creation story, God creates a being “in his own image” named Adam, to whom he gives dominion over the earth. But Adam soon grows lonely, and so God creates the first woman, Eve, from Adam's rib. The two live in the paradisaical Garden of Eden before they betray God's trust by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. According to Christian theology, it is only through the intervention of God via his son Jesus Christ that Adam and his descendants find themselves redeemed in the eyes of God.

Once again, the parallels are obvious: Lemongrab was created by Princess Bubblegum (whom he even calls his “glob”) in her own image, and so that he would not be lonely, Bubblegum also uses some of Lemongrab's genetic material to make for him a brother, Lemongrab II. The two beings live in relative peace until they discover the joy of creating candy creatures (analogous to eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and thus learning about lustful procreation, à la John Milton's Adam and Eve), after which they devolve into a sort of cartoon representation of “total depravity.” It is only through the actions of Lemonhope—a veritable messiah under the guidance of Princess Bubblegum—that the Lemongrabs find themselves redeemed and (literally) united together as one.
These differing approaches to the character mean that Lemongrab has a tendency to vacillate between two extremes: Sometimes, he comes across as a confused child, yearning to bond with his mother. At other times, he comes across as something of a misotheist, resenting the “glob” who made him only to watch him suffer.

Some fans and critics have proposed that Lemongrab be seen as an artistic depiction of someone with Asperger Syndrome. Moynihan, however, eschews this strict interpretation, arguing that the character should be seen more as a generic “fish out of water.” On his website, for instance, he wrote, “Lemongrab doesn’t have Asperger’s. I don’t know what exactly is going on with him.” It seems that Moynihan’s comment was not made to deny possible neurodiversity in Western animation, but rather to avoid pathologizing Lemongrab and trying to figure out what is “wrong” with him. To quote Princess Bubblegum, he is “just like this.”

The Lich

The Lich is arguably the principal villain in Adventure Time. A powerful necromancer, the Lich has but one goal throughout the series: extinguish all sentient life from the multiverse by whatever means necessary.

During the late-19th and early-20th centuries, the term “Lich”—derived from the Old English term lic—had been used in works of science fiction and fantasy as a fancy (if pretentious) word for a dead body. The term entered into slightly more mainstream usage with the popularization of the role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons (1974), specifically its expansion rulebook Greyhawk (1975), which defines a lich as being a “skeletal [monster] ... of magical origin [with] each Lich formerly being a powerful Magic-User or ... Cleric in life.” Given Pendleton Ward’s love for this role-playing game, it makes sense that a D&D enemy would help shape one of Adventure Time’s Big Bads.

Ward and his creative team laid the initial groundwork for the Lich in the series’ pitch bible, in which he is described as “not funny” and “absolutely evil.” In the series proper, the character has a brief cameo in the first-season episode “His Hero” before being properly introduced in the second-season episode “Mortal Folly.” Originally, lead character designer Phil Rynda drafted up a model for the Lich that resembled a stereotypical “skeleton magician,” complete with a black, tattered clock and a sinister, blackened crown on the top of his head. Rynda, however, felt that the design was not “quite unique or scary enough,” noting on his Formspring account in 2010: “He’s an important character and even though we only catch a glimpse of him [in ‘His Hero’], it was important to me that we establish something that we [could] work with down the line.” Rynda consequently redrew the
Ron Perlman voiced the Lich. As an actor, Perlman is known for his sonorous voice, which he used to masterful effect when playing Adventure Time’s Big Bad. (Photo courtesy of Gage Skidmore)

Lich to more closely resemble a rough of the character that creative director Patrick McHale had made for the series’ pitch bible. This sketch depicted the Lich as a partially decomposed corpse, with torn skin around his mouth, and giant, black eyes with pinpricks of yellowish light for pupils. With this aesthetic tweak, the character went from menacing to down-right horrifying.

The Lich was voiced by Ron Perlman, a stalwart of Hollywood perhaps best known for playing the titular character in Guillermo del Toro’s Hellboy adaptations. Because Perlman’s managers secured him the part, when he went to Cartoon Network Studios to record, he had not looked at any of his lines and thus did not know what to expect. Upon reading his dialogue in the studio, Perlman was thus struck by the quality of the script. At the 2013 Chicago Comic & Entertainment Expo, Perlman confessed: “I was pleasantly surprised how much fun I had on [Adventure Time] playing [The Lich]. There was a huge amount of enthusiasm in the [studio] for the making of that show, which is always helpful.”

The Lich’s origins are never directly explained, but based on clues scattered across numerous episodes, we can make a solid guess as to his backstory: According to the Lich’s monologue in the sixth-season episode “Gold Stars,” his essence originated from a period before time itself, when existence was nothing but a writhing mass of hideous, primordial demons. (It is possible that in this plane of existence, the Lich became a follower of the chaos deity GOLB.) In time, the multiverse came into being, and after billions
of years of celestial expansion, the essence of the Lich became infused in a
catalyst comet, which careened towards Earth 66 million years prior to the
start of the series, “ach[ing] for ... extinction.” Despite the attempts of the
ice elemental Urgence Evergreen to avert its course, the comet nevertheless
impacted the planet, embedding the Lich’s essence deep underground. This
impact also led to the Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event, which caused
magic to all but disappear from Earth.

Eons later (c. 2000 AD), when the Mushroom War was at a cataclysmic
fever-pitch, human scientists dug up the essence of the Lich in the crust of
the Earth and used it to build a doomsday device: the mutagenic Mushroom
Bomb. The bomb was eventually dropped on top of a civilian subway station,
possibly somewhere on the East or West Coast of the United States, and when
it detonated, it released the Lich’s essence, which took over the body of a hap-
less victim, giving birth to the Lich proper. Presumably, the Lich unleashed
a reign of terror that was only stopped when the majestic hero Billy sealed the
undead being away in a great block of amber, which was then stored away in
the highest branches of the Candy Kingdom’s great tree for safe keeping.

In the second-season episode “Mortal Folly,” the Lich is freed from his
prison and resumes his mission to end all life in the multiverse. After pos-
sessing a number of beings (including Princess Bubblegum and the waving
snail who appears in each episode) and leaving a trail of dead bodies in his
wake (including Billy the Hero and the wish-master Prismo), the Lich finds
himself trapped in an inter-dimensional prison called the “Crystal Citadel.”
Despite being guarded by powerful crystalline characters known as the
Citadel Guardians, the Citadel proves no match for the Lich’s nefariousness;
as soon as he is incarcerated, he manages to wreak havoc by freeing the other
inmates and killing the guards.

Although Finn tries to confront the primordial demon, he finds the
Lich’s power is far too strong. The only thing that Finn can do is brush some
of the blood from a recently felled Citadel Guardian onto the Lich’s hand.
Amazingly, this is all that is needed to stop the being, and in a scene recalling
the “Valley of Dry Bones” vision from the biblical Book of Ezekiel, the
Lich’s skeletal form begins to grow organs and flesh. This revivification turns
the Lich into an innocuous baby named Sweet P, who is adopted by Tree
Trunks and Mr. Pig.

During the latter part of the show’s run, the Lich is (for the most part)
safely contained within the body of Sweet P, and while the former occasion-
ally overpowers the latter, Sweet P is usually able to fight back and reclaim
his body. But while the Lich within Sweet P is for the most part kept at bay,
an alternate-universe Lich (taking the form of a hand) eventually drops into
Ooo near the end of the series’ run. This alt-ghoul tries talking Sweet P into
joining with him, but the child proves resilient to the Farmworld Lich’s false promises, slaying the hand before it can cause any harm.

Unfortunately, while the Farmworld Lich may have been vanquished, it must be remembered that Finn and Jake’s antics in the seventh-season episode “Crossover” mean that every other dimension in the multiverse now has its own version of the Lich. In an uncomfortable bit of fridge horror, the show implies that the Lich is everywhere—existing in all possible timelines. (Talk about bleak.)

Near the midpoint of the sixth-season episode “Escape from the Citadel,” the Lich breaks out of the titular prison while delivering one of the most chilling soliloquies in children’s animation, which manages to shed considerable light on the Lich’s purpose: “There is only darkness for you [Finn], and only death for your people. ... I will command a great and terrible army, and we will sail to a billion worlds. We will sail until every light has been extinguished. ... I am the end.”

As a being whose existence is predicated solely on deterioration, destruction, and decay, the Lich in many ways can be seen as a poetic depiction of entropy—or, the general disorder in a system. According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, entropy in an isolated system will always increase over time, eventually leading to a dead universe of unchanging randomness (this end result is the so-called “Heat Death of the universe,” often referred to colloquially as the “Big Chill”). This is why the Lich is so scary. The character does not just cause death; he very literally is death—“the destroyer of worlds.”

All of this means that Finn’s attempt to battle the Lich are futile, as death comes for everyone in the end. While this on the surface might come across as decidedly nihilistic, I would argue that Finn and his friends’ willingness to fight the unstoppable is exemplary of the show’s existential outlook: It does not matter if darkness one day will win—all that matters is that you fight it when you can. This resolve to do what is right in the face of hopelessness is something that the Lich himself will never be able to truly comprehend.
Endnotes

1. Sean Edgar and Patrick McHale, *The Art of over the Garden Wall*, 13-14; Patrick McHale, “@whoiam989 i had a robot named Raye for a pilot i was working on for CN, but when AT got picked up we changed him around & he became B-MO,” Twitter, September 7, 2011, archived at http://archive.is/9KRJz.


3. At the 2011 Comic-Con panel, Ward claimed that BMO was inspired by the “Apple II,” although it is likely that he meant the Macintosh Classic II, which more closely resembles BMO’s design. AlizeHEd [pseud.], “Adventure Time Panel-SDCC 2011-Part 4,” YouTube, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Udep0vVzB3o.

4. Amanda Pillon and Niki Yang, “The Voice of Adventure Time’s BMO and Lady Rainicorn Told Us How She Feels About the Show Ending.”


6. Pillon and Yang, “Niki Yang Interview.”


12. Olson and Reinhard, 183.

13. Olson and Reinhard, 188.

14. Olson and Reinhard, 179.

15. For a longer discussion on this, see: Olson and Reinhard, 179–80.


17. See also: Emma A. Jane, “‘Gunter’s a Woman?!”


23. “Skyhooks II” (Season 9, Episode 9 [originally Season 8, Episode 23]).


25. See: Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard, “‘Apple Wedding’ Final Storyboard.”

26. TV Tropes names her one of the show’s “Ensemble Darkhorses.”


28. Characters continue to refer to the character as “Flame Princess,” even after she ascends the Fire Kingdom throne.


32. “Incendium,” commentary by Adam Muto.
33. John Moe, Open Mike Eagle, and Jessica DiCicco, “Finn’s Swords and Flame Princess.”
34. “Hot to the Touch,” commentary by Rebecca Sugar.
35. Moe, Eagle, and DiCicco, “Finn’s Swords and Flame Princess.”
36. Mike Gencarelli and Jessica DiCicco, “Voicing Flame Princess.”
38. “Hot to the Touch” (Season 4, Episode 1).
39. “Ignition Point” (Season 4, Episode 22).
40. “Earth & Water” (Season 5, Episode 32).
43. Moe, Eagle, and DiCicco, “Finn’s Swords and Flame Princess.”
44. “Princess Potluck” (Season 5, Episode 18).
45. Lloyd, “Series Broke Barriers.”
47. Culturess editors, “Tom Kenny Reflects on 20 Years of *Spongebob* at C2E2.”
49. Kenny.
50. Cory, “Old AT Preliminary Design 1.”
51. Eric Thurm, “Best Character.”
52. The name “Simon Petrikov” may be an allusion to Stanislav Petrov, a Soviet lieutenant colonel who almost single-handedly averted a nuclear war in 1983.
54. Matt Fowler, “Adventure Time Creator: It’s Awesome If We Give People Nightmares.”
56. “Holly Jolly Secrets,” commentary by Pendleton Ward; commentary by Adam Muto.
57. According to Herpich: “‘Evergreen’ was nice just for the chance to work in a more traditional swords & sorcery mode for a little bit—to draw and write some cool powerful wizards, who were a shade less silly than the average *Adventure Time* wizard. ... [The story for the episode] came about really slowly in little bits and pieces. The initial seed came from reading Joe Daly’s *Dungeon Quest Book Three*, which has a bunch of cool stuff in it about Atlantean alchemists. I started out with a sort of Sorcerer’s Apprentice story set in ancient Atlantis about the creation of the crown, which eventually morphed into the current story about elemental deities at the time of the dinosaurs’ extinction. Early on I envisioned it as a two-parter, or even a movie. I pictured it having two parallel interwoven stories, the Evergreen story that became the actual episode, and a present day story too, with the Ice King seemingly going really crazy, reliving more stuff from the past, and [Princess Bubblegum] driving a gigantic pink tank across Ooo to shoot down the new comet. Then eventually I trimmed that stuff out and pitched it to the writers pretty much the way it is now. One thing ... that changed in the writers’ room was Steve [Wolfhard] coming up with the really good idea of having Candy and Slime elementals instead of just the standard fire, ice, earth and air, which I think was a super, super good idea.” Thomas, “Tom Herpich Interview.”
58. See also: MHA contributor, “*Adventure Time* ‘I Remember You.’”
61. Maria Bustillos, “How Adventure Time Came to Be.”
64. According to Jesse Moynihan, the character’s name was originally “Lemonsnatch,” a likely play on the term “sourpuss,” as both “snatch” and “puss” are slang terms for a vulva. Cartoon Network censors made the writers change the name. “Originally...” Formspring, 2013, archived at http://archive.is/AZ0gd.
65. Moynihan.
66. Moynihan.
70. Van Den Broeck and Roiland.
71. John Moe, Open Mike Eagle, and Jesse Moynihan, “The Best of C-Listers and Lemongrab Evolution.”
72. See: Paradise Lost, 9.1034–48
73. Moynihan, “You Made Me.”
74. “All Your Fault” (Season 5, Episode 9).
76. Gary Gygax and Robert Kuntz, Dungeons and Dragons: Supplement I, 35.
77. A “Big Bad” is a main enemy in a series (see: https://fanlore.org/wiki/Big-Bad). The term was first used by the writers and fans of Buffy the Vampire Slayer to describe the villains of each season. Only a few enemies in Adventure Time can be considered bona fide Big Bads, namely: The Lich, Uncle Gumbald, and GOLB.
81. “Mortal Folly,” commentary by Rebecca Sugar.
82. Edgar and McHale, The Art of over the Garden Wall, 14; “Mortal Folly,” commentary by Rebecca Sugar.
84. “Evergreen” (Season 6, Episode 24).
85. None of this is stated in the show per se, although most fans accept it as implied canon.
87. Implied by the events in “Finn the Human”/“Jake the Dog” (Season 5, Episodes 1-2).
88. Specifically Ezekiel 37:7-10.
4. The “C-Listers”: Other Characters of Note

The *Adventure Time* universe is teeming with literally hundreds of secondary and background characters—far too many to name let alone outline. As such, this present chapter briefly surveys those characters who might not be considered among the show’s “major” players, but who nevertheless impact the overall plot in significant ways.

**Betty Grof**

Betty Grof is the magic-infused, time-hopping fiancée of Simon Petrikov. The character is introduced in the third-season episode “Holly Jolly Secrets,” which reveals that she was engaged to Simon Petrikov before he wore the ice crown and became the Ice King. Later episodes reveal that she was a graduate student who studied ancient petroglyphs and co-authored a book with Simon on mystical rituals.

Upon the first mention of Betty, it is suggested that she was killed during the Mushroom War, but this implication is supplanted by the revelation in “Betty” that she actually traveled through time to save Simon from the curse of the ice crown. In the sixth-season episode “You Forgot Your Floaties,” Betty, while studying magic under the tutelage of Magic Man, accidentally absorbs his magical abilities—along with his insanity. For the remainder of the series, Betty exists in a half-crazed state, attempting numerous times to
rewrite history or reverse-engineer the magic of the crown to save Simon, all
to no avail. It is only in the series finale, after she and Ice King are consumed
by the chaos deity GOLB, that the two revert to their original forms. Betty
then uses the reset crown to merge with GOLB, thereby keeping Simon sane
and safe. GOLBetty then leaves Ooo behind, and it is implied that Simon
and Betty are never again reunited.

Betty was the source of much fan speculation when her name was first
mentioned in “Holly Jolly Secrets.” This speculation was further fueled by a
comment made by Rebecca Sugar at an Adventure Comic-Con panel in 2012
that an episode centering on Betty was in the works. For two years, fans de-
veloped headcanon after headcanon in anticipation of the foretold episode,
which finally aired in the spring of 2014. Titled “Betty” and storyboarded
by Jesse Moynihan and Ako Castuera, the episode not only introduced the
titular heroine, but also brought her into the thick of things by having her
embark on a mission to save Simon from the clutches of Death. “Betty” was
somewhat controversial upon its debut, with many in the fandom critiquing
it for being rushed and underdeveloped (perhaps this was only to be expect-
ed, given the hype that surrounded its airing). Luckily, subsequent episodes
that expanded on Betty’s backstory and motivation seem to have ameliorated
much of this fannish frustration.

In a think piece for the website Film School Rejects, Liz Baessler con-
tends that Betty is a flawed heroine, who is guilty of being hopelessly stuck
in the past. In the real world, Baessler argues, it is impossible to fully restore
a previous version of someone, as intervening experiences will always affect
who that person is. This means that Betty and the Simon-she-knew will
never truly be reunited; Ice King has simply gone through too much to be
“reverted.” Unfortunately, Betty cannot realize this lesson, and while her
intentions to “restore” Simon are noble, they lead her to insanity. The impos-
sibility of Betty and Simon living like their old selves is further emphasized
in the series finale, wherein Betty “cures” Ice King, but in doing so effectively
sacrifices her individual essence by merging with GOLB. Baessler concludes
that Betty’s storyarc emphasizes that “your most essential self might not
necessarily be your simplest or your earliest iteration. ... Change can be a
vital part of becoming who you are.”

In her first couple of appearances, Betty was voiced by the writer and
director Lena Dunham, perhaps best known as the creator of the HBO
series Girls. Dunham agreed to be on the show both because one of her
younger relatives was a fan, and because she was friendly with head writer
Kent Osborne. During the ninth-season miniseries Elements, nerd superstar
Felicia Day stepped in as the character’s new voice actress, remaining on
until the series’ conclusion. As to why Day replaced Dunham, the answer
is not clear: Some fans have speculated that it was because Dunham was
simply too busy to reprise her role; others, however, have hypothesized that
the show was wanting to quietly distance themselves from the increasingly
controversial antics of Dunham. Either way, it seems fair to say that Day—an
actress who has been in everything from Buffy the Vampire Slayer to the CW
series Supernatural (2005–20)—was a stellar casting choice.

Billy the Hero

Billy is a famed hero whom Finn and Jake look up to. Before Finn and
Jake became Ooo’s greatest champions, it was Billy who protected the land
from all manner of evil doers, including the dreaded Lich. In his heyday,
Billy was often accompanied by his then-girlfriend, Canyon (voiced by
storyboard artist Ako Castuera), and together the two were a heroic “power
couple.”

In his old age, Billy became a pacifist, arguing that violence only engen-
ders more violence. However, after the events of the first-season episode “His
Hero”—in which Finn and Jake use (albeit rudimentary) consequentialist
philosophy to show Billy that adherence to a strict code of nonviolence only
enables evil to go unchecked—Billy returns to his heroic ways. Alas, in the
fourth-season finale “The Lich,” the titular villain kills Billy and possesses his
corpse. It is in this way that the Lich tricks Finn and Jake into helping him
open a portal to the center of the multiverse. Billy’s spirit is finally allowed to
rest after his bucket list is completed by Finn in the fifth-season finale, aptly
titled “Billy’s Bucket List.”

While Billy is a complex amalgamation of heroes from disparate pieces
of literature, the character’s most obvious inspirations are the many heroes
from 20th-century sword and sorcery literature. Like Billy, the protagonists
of these works were usually swashbuckling heroes, who battled all sorts of
fantastical foes. Billy’s characterization also pulls from the heroes of Greco-
Roman mythology, like Jason, Achilles, Hercules, and Aeneas, who were
celebrated for their strength, fearlessness, and their competence in battle—
traits which can be readily applied to Billy. After his death, Billy is even im-
 mortalized in a way befitting a Greco-Roman hero: his soul is enshrined as a
constellation among the stars, thereby recalling the sort of starry apotheosis
of heroes often discussed in classical literature.

Billy was voiced by Lou Ferrigno, an actor and former bodybuilder
perhaps best known for playing the eponymous character in The Incredible
Fern and the Grass Curse

Fern (voiced by Hayden Izzy) is a grass-golem doppelganger of Finn who plays a prominent role in the show’s later seasons. The character has a confusing genesis, and for one to understand it, it is necessary to go back to the earliest seasons of the show. Throughout many of these episodes, there are copious hints that Finn will lose his right arm. These references later prove to be prophetic, as in the fifth-season episode “Blade of Grass,” Finn contracts an eternal grass curse which manifests itself as a grass sword permanently attached to his right wrist. Eventually, this curse takes over the entirety of his right arm, and while it is seemingly ripped from Finn's body at the end of the sixth-season premiere “Wake Up”/“Escape from the Citadel,” it grows back as a plant-based limb indistinguishable from Finn's own flesh and bone.

A few episodes later, in “Is That You?,” Finn converts an alternate-reality version of himself into a new blade that the characters refer to as the “Finnsword.” Finn uses this weapon for much of the show’s sixth, seventh, and eighth seasons, until it is stolen by Bandit Princess in “I Am a Sword.” Near the end of this episode, Finn tracks down the thief and the two engage in a duel. The fight causes Finn’s grass-arm to partially reform into the grass sword, with which Finn accidentally impales the Finnsword. This results in Finn’s grass curse infecting the alternate-universe version of Finn within the Finnsword, producing a new, composite being: Fern.

Fern is properly introduced in the following episode “Two Swords” as a brutish but well-intentioned lookalike of Finn. Throughout the eighth and ninth seasons, Finn attempts to teach Fern how to be an effective hero, but Fern often finds himself outperformed by his human counterpart. Fern soon grows tired of playing second banana to Finn, and this resentment causes him to go rogue. After trying to usurp the role of Ooo’s resident hero, Fern is accidentally blown apart by Finn and then resurrected by Uncle Gumbald as the “Green Knight” (who is voiced by Brad Neely). For much of the show’s final season, Fern serves as Gumbald’s evil paladin—darkly mirroring Finn’s chivalric relationship with Princess Bubblegum.

According to storyline writer Jack Pendarvis, the idea for Fern cropped up organically as the writers worked out the show’s increasingly elaborate mythology:

[The Fern plot] just grew naturally ... out of the story. Something was going to happen with the grass arm, and we had this [alternate-universe] version of Finn that needed to be acknowledged in some way. I can’t remember exactly why or how we ended up merging the two [but] certainly it was an
interesting way of getting the curse off of “our” Finn without cheating in a storytelling sense.¹²

Indeed, Fern ultimately serves as a tidy way for the show to conclude the grass curse saga: In the series finale, Fern makes up with Finn, and together, the two kill the grass sword demon that has caused them both so much trouble. Unfortunately, this eleventh hour redemption comes at a steep cost, and by destroying the demonic power that gives his body form, Fern disintegrates into nothing more than a seed. After Finn plants this remnant on the ruins of the tree fort, it grows into a mighty tree that lives for thousands of years. This means that while Fern has a sad ending, an aspect of the character manages to live on well after Finn’s natural demise.

Gunter

While the Ice King is often shown surrounded by hordes of penguins whom he all calls “Gunter”¹³ (the name being an unconscious reference to Urgence Evergreen’s dinosaur apprentice of the same name), there is one particular penguin at whom this address is usually directed. This Gunter is an intelligent and mischievous creature, who communicates through duck-like vocalization (often rendered phonetically as “wenk!”). Many of Gunter’s behaviors recall the stereotypical antics of house cats, such as pushing things off flat surfaces, demanding to be brushed, and interfering with Ice King’s use of his laptop. While Gunter’s gender is never formally established, the second-season episode “Chamber of Frozen Blades” reveals that the character can lay eggs, and in the sixth-season episode “Hoots,” Gunter’s dream-form is voiced by actress Kay Lenz. These clues have led to some fans using female pronouns when referring to the naughty little critter.

During the show’s first five and a half seasons, Gunter is portrayed as a mischievous but nonetheless normal penguin. However, near the end of the show’s sixth season, it is revealed that Gunter is actually a primordial space demon from before the dawn of time named Orgalorg, who long ago was banished to Earth by the power of the celestial being Grob Gob Glob Grod on behest of the King of Mars. The fall to Earth gave Orgalorg amnesia, and the gravity of the planet crushed her into the shape of a penguin. After her great fall, Orgalorg wandered the Earth for some time until she was taken in by the crazed Ice King, who mistook her for an average, ordinary penguin. It is only in the episode “Orgalorg” that, after a traumatic brain injury, Orgalorg’s latent personality reawakens.

While one could arguably trace the origin of Orgalorg back to the second-season premiere “It Came from the Nightosphere” (in which Hunson
Abadeer refers to Gunter as the “most evil” creature in all of existence), the explicit formulation of Gunter as a space demon occurred during production of the show’s fifth season. Around this time, the writers were hammering out the storyline for a television movie, and it was decided that the Big Bad should be none other than Gunter, who would turn into Orgalorg at the movie’s climax. While the television movie was, for a variety of reasons, scrapped during its production, the ideas about Orgalorg were soon salvaged for use during the writing of the show’s sixth season.14

A scaly being with a trunk-like body, two contorting arms, spiny growths on the shoulders, and a head with five or so eyes, Orgalorg seems to be a broad pastiche of numerous space-demons from across the popular culture spectrum, with some fans arguing that the character functions first and foremost as a parody of the horror and science fiction writer H. P. Lovecraft’s famed “Eldritch abominations” like the demoniac alien-deity Cthulhu (a dreaded cosmic entity of immense power and size) or the monstrous “Elder Things” (primordial extraterrestrials who colonized Earth millions of years prior to the evolution of humankind). When asked about this connection, Andy Ristaino (the artist responsible for hammering out Orgalorg’s final look), told me: “As far as the designs went for [the episode “Orgalorg,”] it was unintentional. They just asked me to come up with some crazy looking alien designs. ... [That said] I would say it’s hard for there not to be a Lovecraft influence when talking about otherworldly beings beyond our comprehension.”15

In the series finale, after Betty severs the connection between the ice crown and Simon, it is Gunter who next places the crown upon her head. While Jake fears that this will lead to the reemergence of Orgalorg, it merely turns the demon-penguin into a new Ice King-esque character named “Ice Thing.” By the time of Shermy and Beth, this Ice Thing has devolved into little more than a crazed, flying mass of hair. It seems safe to say that, in this state, Orgalorg will not be escaping any time soon.

**Huntress Wizard**

Huntress Wizard is a powerful mage who, like the Greek goddess Artemis, is in tune with the natural world. Designed by storyboard artist Jesse Moynihan and debuting in the third-season episode “Wizard Battle,” Huntress Wizard was originally intended to be nothing more than a background character. However, after “Wizard Battle” aired, she quickly gained a cult following online, and many fans were eager for her to play a more prominent role in future episodes. Moynihan attempted to showcase her in
The “C-Listers”

several of his episodes, although almost all of these scenes were excised for being extraneous or unnecessary to the main plot.

For a time, it seemed as if Huntress Wizard was doomed to stay in the background. But then, during the production of season seven, Moynihan had a deeply personal encounter with an individual that caused him to meditate on relationships, falling in love, and sacrificing desire. This, in turn, inspired him to outline a story starring Huntress Wizard, in which she and Finn begin to fall for one another, but eschew a traditional relationship “in service of [their] higher calling.” While the ending to “Flute Spell” implies that Huntress Wizard and Finn can never be together, Huntress Wizard eventually returns in the tenth-season premiere “The Wild Hunt,” and in this episode, she and Finn reaffirm their feelings for one another. Throughout the rest of season ten, it is suggested that the two have entered into a sort of non-traditional romantic relationship.

Initially Huntress Wizard was voiced by Maria Bamford before Jenny Slate was cast in her stead for the seventh-season episode “Flute Spell.” Slate likely landed the role due to her talent as an actress, but it certainly did not hurt that several years prior to her casting, she had praised Adventure Time on her personal Twitter as “one of the best, most beautiful and special” television programs ever made.

King of Ooo

The “One True” King of Ooo is a con artist who travels the land with his associate, Toronto the Dog, looking for rubes to scam. Despite the commanding sound of his honorific, it is a hollow vanity title, which has earned him many political enemies (such as Princess Bubblegum) who all see him as a crook. Despite his illegitimacy, he is nevertheless incredibly crafty, and he even arranges a Candy Kingdom election which leads to the ousting of Princess Bubblegum. After this electoral coup, he assumes the full regnal name “Princess King of Ooo”—only to be almost effortlessly deposed by Bubblegum during the Stakes miniseries.

The King of Ooo was designed by storyboard artist Steve Wolfhard and voiced by comedian, actor, and podcaster Andy Daly, perhaps best known for his role as Forrest MacNeil on the Comedy Central mockumentary series Review (2014–17). On Twitter, series storyline writer Jack Pendarvis wrote that the show was “lucky ... to get him,” and indeed, Daly’s casting was inspired. Daly brings to the character a sort of jovial smarm, making the King of Ooo the sort of villain who is actually quite funny.
Lady Rainicorn

Lady Rainicorn is Jake the Dog’s long-term girlfriend and Princess Bubblegum’s royal steed. A defining feature of Lady’s character is that she speaks exclusively in non-subtitled Korean. According to Bert Youn (a Korean-American storyboard artist who wrote for the show during its first few seasons): “[Ward] told me that he wanted [the character to speak] something he could not understand. So I suggested we use Korean. Originally, my wife was going to voice the character.” However, the producers eventually decided to cast Niki Yang, an artist who storyboarded during season one and who also voiced the sentient robot BMO. Yang explained in an interview, “[Ward] was looking for a voice actress for Lady Rainicorn and he wanted somebody who could speak Korean. That was me. I got that role.” Whereas BMO’s voice is processed to give the character a robotic feel, Lady Rainicorn’s voice is not, with Yang clarifying, “Rainicorn is pretty much my voice and how I speak—no filter.”

Often, the character’s inability to speak English is played up for laughs, simply because of its incongruous nature with the rest of the show: for instance, an extended scene in the fourth-season episode “Lady & Peebles” features Princess Bubblegum listening intently to a lengthy, highly emotional Korean monologue courtesy of Lady Rainicorn, only for Bubblegum to respond, “Hm. I suppose that’s true,” and then immediately change the subject. (The joke being that unless the person watching the show knows Korean, Bubblegum’s vague response makes the entire exchange impossible to decipher.) At other times, the show used Rainicorn’s Korean dialogue as a way to add slightly risqué jokes into the show. Some commentators and fans argued that this was an example of sneaking content “past the censors,” but Yang revealed in an interview: “We have a lot of freedom [with what I can say in Korean]. However, [the network executives] always triple make sure that I don’t say anything bad in Korean when I read Rainicorn’s lines (that I translated).”

Magic Man

Magic Man (voiced by Tom Kenny) is a crazed Martian wizard who spends much of the series harassing the citizens of Ooo. In his debut episode, “Freak City,” Magic Man functions as little more than a one-dimensional villain, who causes Finn plenty of headaches by turning him into a giant foot. It is only in the fourth-season episode “Sons of Mars” and the sixth-season episode “You Forgot Your Floaties” that his backstory is fully revealed.
Two hundred or so years before the start of the series, Magic Man was a respected Martian scientist-wizard, the brother of Grob Gob Glob Grod, and a direct underling of the King of Mars himself. After the malevolent entity known only as GOLB erased from existence his wife Margles (voiced by Gillian Jacobs), Magic Man created an AI defense system to defend Mars, M.A.R.G.L.E.S. (short for the “Magical Automated Resistance-Generating Laser Energy Supplier), which both looked like and acted like Magic Man’s fallen wife. However, because his actual wife had been erased from existence, Magic Man was forced to construct M.A.R.G.L.E.S. from the wisps of memories contained only in his darkest nightmares. This meant that when M.A.R.G.L.E.S. was installed, she went haywire, accidentally attacking Magic Man and turning him into a lunatic. Following a crime spree on Mars, he was banished to Ooo by the planet’s king and told to only return once he learned to care for people again. After a series of magical adventures cataloged in the episodes “You Forgot Your Floaties” and “Normal Man,” Magic Man is reverted back to his “normie” self, allowing him to ascend the Martian throne, whereupon he dons the regnal name “King Man.”

Much of Magic Man’s storyarc was developed by storyboard artist Jesse Moynihan, who often cited the character as his personal favorite to write for. Moynihan first began tinkering with Magic Man’s backstory during the production of season three. The original idea he developed connected the character with the mythology of the show’s Dead Worlds and would have seen Magic Man as some sort of trickster psychopomp. When Moynihan presented his concept to the writers, it was substantially revised and divided into two outlines that became the third-season episode “Ghost Princess” and the fourth-season episode “Sons of Mars.” (In the comments section of his personal website, Moynihan later explained that the original outline “painted Magic Man in a light that isn’t congruent with the world of Ooo after ‘Sons of Mars,'” and as such had little bearing on the future direction of the character.)

When it came time to tackle the outline for “Sons of Mars,” Moynihan took the mantra about “writing what you know” to heart by crafting for Magic Man a new backstory that was directly inspired by a fairly “traumatic” breakup Moynihan had had with a former girlfriend. Moynihan was hoping that by writing Magic Man in this way, he would be able to anchor the character’s story in real emotions while also confronting his own personal issues.

Magic Man’s story was further fleshed out in the sixth-season episode “You Forgot Your Floaties” (storyboarded solely by Moynihan), in which the audience learns the full truth about Margles, GOLB, and how Magic Man went insane. Soon after the episode’s airing in the spring of 2015, Moynihan wrote on his personal website:
I remember saying somewhere that I would never explain what happened to Magic Man [and Margles], and that maybe Ako [Castuera] and I had already explained too much in “Sons of Mars.” Tom Herpich and I talked about it on several occasions. That was definitely his feeling at the time, and after watching “Sons of Mars,” I agreed with him. Unfortunately, one of my personality traits seems to be that the more I say I’ll never do something, the more I think about how I could do it. ... So me saying, “I’ll never go into Magic Man’s backstory,” was really me saying, “I will definitely figure out a way to tell Magic Man’s backstory!” The process of coming up with it had a lot to do with waiting and seeing how all the other episodes and character arcs were playing out, and how Magic Man’s story could fit in there.30

Thanks largely to Moynihan’s effort, Magic Man morphed over the course of the show’s run from an anarchic cipher into a sympathetic (albeit dangerous) screwball. In this way, the character followed the trajectory of other Adventure Time foes—like the Ice King or Lemongrab—who evolved from one-note villains into complex characters.

**N.E.P.T.R.**

N.E.P.T.R. (short for “Never ending pie-throwing robot”; also written as “Neptr”) is a neglected robot that lives with Finn, Jake, and BMO in their tree fort. Created by both Finn and the Ice King in the first-season episode “What Is Life?,” N.E.P.T.R. resembles a bumbling parody of Frankenstein’s monster, who is not so much actively rejected by his creators as he is simply forgotten about. Despite this (accidental) emotional abuse, N.E.P.T.R. still shows up from time to time and attempts to help in any way he can.

N.E.P.T.R. was voiced by comedian, actor, and rapper Andy Milonakis, who was personally asked by Pendleton Ward via Twitter to appear on the show. In a 2013 Reddit AMA, Milonakis wrote, “It was such a G [sic] way to ask someone to be on a real show. I saw his pilot and said yes immediately.”31

**Peppermint Butler**

Peppermint Butler (voiced by a pitch-shifted Steve Little) is a candy butler who serves as Princess Bubblegum’s devoted aide-de-camp. One of the show’s longest recurring jokes is that this otherwise innocuous character
is a powerful occultist, who has over the course of the series, mastered dark magicks, befriended Death, played golf with Hunson Abadeer, summoned numerous demons, and even demanded Finn and Jake’s flesh as payment for services rendered. Despite this, he is often seen aiding the show’s “good” characters, most of whom either overlook or are oblivious to his dark ways.

Much of Peppermint Butler’s characterization seems to have been based on the infamous English occultist and Thelemic priest Aleister Crowley. The first overt connection between the two occurs in the fifth-season episode “The Suitor”: At the beginning of this episode, Peppermint Butler is seen performing some sort of demonic summoning ritual surrounded by a lion, a bull, a “guardian angel,” and an eagle. The scene is rife with Thelemic imagery, with perhaps the most obvious parallel being that the four creatures which surround Peppermint Butler are clear stand-ins for the four “Kerubic beasts” (viz lion, bull, angel, and eagle) which appear often in Crowley’s work.32

In the show’s penultimate episode, “Gumbaldia,” Peppermint Butler is accidentally turned into a candy infant by the nefarious Uncle Gumbald, a form which he is still stuck in by the series finale, “Come Along with Me.” With that said, the character’s final scene depicts him reading a book entitled “Dark Magic 101,” suggesting that while his body may have regressed, his interest in occultic magick certainly has not.

Shermy and Beth

Shermy and Beth (voiced by singer Willow Smith and actor Sean Giambrone, respectively) are gregarious outlaws living in the Land of Ooo one thousand years after the time of Finn and Jake. Appearing only in the series finale “Come Along with Me,” Shermy and Beth might not seem notable enough for inclusion in this section. However, their one appearance is of great importance to the show’s overall mythology, as the two emphasize Adventure Time’s driving theme that all things are circular, and that even though Finn and Jake might one day die, their heroic legacy will still be carried on by others well into the future.

Much of what we know about Shermy and Beth comes to us from the (possibly extra-canonical) drawings of storyboard artist Steve Wolfhard, which he shared on his personal Tumblr account after the airing of the finale.33 According to these doodles, Beth—whose full name and title is “Her Highness Betony [sic] Burrito Jakson [sic] IV”—is the exiled princess of the Pup Kingdom (a realm ruled by Jake’s grandson Gibbon), who possesses the power to teleport objects through her belly button. Given that the pups are the descendants of Jake and Lady Rainicorn, Beth can trace her heritage all the way back to Jake himself. Shermy, on the other hand, is an adventurous
Part I—Who’s Who in the Land of Ooo?

cat who bears a striking resemblance to Finn. This—along with the closing shot of the series finale, which features Shermy holding up the Finn sword atop the Fern-Tree à la the show’s title card—implies that Shermy is likely one of the many reincarnations of Finn’s soul.

Susan Strong

Susan Strong is a mysterious, muscular woman who lives underground with a primitive tribe of mutated humans called “hyoomans.” Susan is introduced in the eponymous second-season episode, in which Finn and Jake discover her existence and befriend her.

At first, it is unclear whether Susan is a mutated human like her subterranean compatriots, but later episodes reveal that she is actually a cybernetic human. Her full backstory is explicated in the Islands miniseries, wherein it is revealed that she was originally a cyborg from Founders Island named XJ-77 and known as Kara to her closest friends. Kara had been programmed by Dr. Gross to be a “seeker”—that is, a technological enhanced spec-op tasked with retrieving runaway humans. In her youth, one of Kara’s closest friends was a scientist named Frieda, who dreamed of leaving the Islands and exploring the world. Unfortunately, their relationship was strained after Kara accidentally prevented Frieda from escaping.

Years after the incident between Kara and Frieda, Martin and baby Finn disappeared at sea, and Kara was the seeker dispatched to find them. Somehow this mission went awry, and Kara crash-landed on the shores of Ooo, developing amnesia in the process. She soon found herself in the company of the hyoomans, of whom she quickly became the de facto leader.

Upon her return to Founders Island many years later, she began to regain her memories, eventually leading her and Frieda to reconnect.

The origin of Susan can be traced back to a free massively multiplayer online (MMO) game named Blade Mistress that Pendleton Ward and Patrick McHale discovered in the mid-oughts during their time at CalArts. According to the former, the game featured “really buff women in torn clothing with enormous swords.” Eager to play, Ward created a character that he named “Susan Strong,” but he never really got the hang of the game. Flash forward to the year 2010. Storyboard partners Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar were starting to work on an Adventure Time episode that would eventually evolve into “Susan Strong” when they hit a creative snag. The episode’s original outline called for Finn to discover a group of mutated humans living underground, whom Finn would then take on a grand tour of Ooo. Sugar and Muto worried that it would be hard for viewers to keep track of all these new characters, so they decided to merge them into one individual. But who
The “C-Listers”

would this one character be? It was then that Ward regaled his colleagues with the aforementioned story about “Susan Strong,” which inspired Muto and Sugar to write her into the episode as the eponymous character.36

(Around the time that “Susan Strong” was being storyboarded, then-creative director Patrick McHale began to block out an elaborate backstory for Susan, envisioning her as Finn’s lost sister who had been separated from him at sea. When Susan and Finn’s backstories began to diverge in later seasons, these plans were scrapped.37)

All of Susan’s initial lines were written out in coherent English before they were deliberately corrupted into a crude pidgin by the storyboard artists. Other aspects of Susan’s speech were inspired by a “made-up patois”38 that storyboard artist Somvilay Xayaphone occasionally spoke around the production offices; the other storyboard artists found this bizarre constructed language so amusing that they decided to work elements of it into “Susan Strong” and its sequels.39 Susan Strong was voiced by Jackie Buscarino, who—like many other individuals affiliated with Adventure Time—had previously worked on The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack. (Buscarino would later go on to produce Adventure Time alumna Rebecca Sugar’s hit series Steven Universe.)40

Tree Trunks

Tree Trunks is a small pygmy elephant who lives in the forest and is known for her delicious apple pies. She is also married to Mr. Pig (voiced by comedian Ron Lynch) and is the adoptive mother of Sweet P. Tree Trunks is voiced by Polly Lou Livingston, an eccentric Texan who had just turned 80 in 2009 when Ward asked her to play the part. As to how she of all people landed the role, Livingston explained in a 2013 interview with podcaster Dennis Tardan:

When [Pendleton Ward] was about 12 years old, I knew his mother, Bettie Ward ... She had a house [near where I lived] and I used to go see her. And there was Pen drawing, all the time. ... I was fascinated because I’ve always liked cartoons and I love to draw. So we became friends—he was a very quiet, sweet person ... After years and years and years ... He called me from Los Angeles and asked if I [would play Tree Trunks]. I was so flattered! I cannot tell you.41

Tree Trunks speaks with a distinctive Southern drawl, which the San Antonio Current colorfully described as a cross between “a hinge in quest
of lubricant and Blanche Dubois as channeled by Olive Oyl." What many people do not realize is that when Livingston plays Tree Trunks, the actress is not inflecting her voice; in fact, it was Livingston’s natural voice that made Ward want to cast her in the first place. Livingston was delighted to hear this, for in the past she had been criticized for her accent, telling Tardan in his podcast: “Almost every teacher I’ve ever had almost kicked me out of their class because they thought my voice was so terrible.”

Unlike the other actors and actresses who recorded their lines together in Los Angeles, Livingston recorded her lines in Texas, explaining in a 2013 Reddit AMA:

> I do it from San Antonio, Texas and they’re in Hollywood, but we work together through technology. I talk to a machine and it goes to Hollywood and they direct me from Hollywood ... through earphones. ... I can’t hear what everyone else is saying, I only say my part from the script and they put it together with pictures.

Because Livingston is using her normal voice, her performance is often very “natural,” requiring only a few takes.

Much of Tree Trunks’s dialog is riddled with double entendres, innuendos, or subtle sex jokes that go over the heads of children. Because of these more mature gags, many fans find Tree Trunks to be hilarious; others find the character decidedly off-putting. As for Livingston, she feels that the dialog is “fabulous.”

### Uncle Gumbald

Uncle Gumbald (voiced by Fred Melamed) is the primary villain during the show’s final season, and the series finale is focused at least partially on the “Great Gum War” between his forces and those loyal to Princess Bubblegum. While nominally Bubblegum’s uncle, Gumbald is actually one of her many candy creations; this has led to a sort of reverse-Oedipus complex, in which Gumbald desperately wants to overpower his mother-niece and usurp her throne.

Much of Gumbald’s backstory is revealed in the tenth-season episode “Bonnibel Bubblegum,” which reveals that Gumbald was created by Bubblegum—along with an Aunt Lolly and a Cousin Chicle—so that the lonely monarch might have a family. Throughout the episode, Gumbald is painted as a savvy businessman eager to make a profit; for instance, he fells a number of trees that Bubblegum had planted to found a new city predicated on property management. He also creates kitschy merchandise to sell to the citizens living in his new town, and becomes irate when Bubblegum builds
The “C-Listers”

a butterscotch lake on the site of his planned gift shop. His greed for and fixation on material goods leads to him conspiring with his family to oust Bubblegum as princess. Unfortunately for Gumbald, his plan backfires, and he, Lolly, and Chicle are accidentally turned into simple-minded candy folk in the process. It is only after the events of the ninth-season miniseries *Elements* that the three are restored to their original state, upon which they once again concoct a plan to take over the Candy Kingdom.

Gumbald’s devolution from kind uncle to industrialist goon is arguably best read as a critique of capitalism, illustrating what the Candy Kingdom could have become had rampant materialism taken the wheel. Contrasting the money-hungry Gumbald with the well-meaning but micro-managing Bubblegum is important because it continues the trend of reforming Bubblegum’s image—a trend that began around mid-season six when Bubblegum vowed to turn off her extensive surveillance system in the episode “The Cooler.” The introduction of Gumbald thus serves as a way to underline that for all the inadvertent harm her actions caused, Bubblegum’s intentions were always good; Gumbald, on the other hand, only ever cared about capital, regardless of the pain it might cause others.

The Many Deities of the Oooniverse

In the *Adventure Time* universe, it is not a question as to whether gods and goddesses exist, as Finn and Jake have time and time again partied with deities, fought demons in space, and been snatched away by angels. Perhaps one of the most powerful of these beings is the two-dimensional “wish master” Prismo, who lives at the heart of the multiverse in the extra-temporal “Time Room.” Prismo is in charge of wish magic, but while he is almost omnipotent, his wishes all come with what he calls a “‘monkey’s paw’ kind of” catch. Initially aloof and impartial, Prismo quickly forms a close friendship with Jake. Prismo is voiced by Kumail Nanjiani, an actor whose laid-back vocal performance contrasts with his character’s tremendous power.

Another deity that becomes more fleshed out as the show progresses is the Cosmic Owl, voiced by M. Emmet Walsh. Tasked with maintaining the dreamscapes of all those who inhabit the multiverse, the Cosmic Owl is also compelled to appear in dreams destined to become true. In religious and folkloric traditions all over the world, owls are often seen as ominous creatures, often serving as harbingers of death. Other cultures believe that the bird has some sort of spooky connection to the underworld, afterlife, or the spirit realm. These related traditions could explain why the writers decided to make the Cosmic Owl a prophetic dream-messenger from the “great beyond.” (On a less folkloric note, the character’s unique beak design
was based on a distinctive refraction of light produced by a urinal at Cartoon Network Studios.)

The god of the “50 Deadworlds” (i.e., the collective name for the afterlife in *Adventure Time*) is, unsurprisingly, Death (voiced by Miguel Ferrer), who lives in a “castle made of light” and enjoys playing death metal music. In terms of appearance, the character is a humanoid with a cow skull for a head, a design drafted up by storyboard artist Jesse Moynihan in response to his feeling “intimidated trying to come up with a design for such an iconic character.” Moynihan hoped that the final design—reminiscent of the Aztec god Mictlantecuhtli by way of an Alexandro Jodorowsky film—would be evocative of death-as-a-concept while nevertheless remaining unique.

Given that in “Death in Bloom” (his debut episode), Death is challenged by Finn to a musical showdown to win back the soul of a plant, the film and television critic Lindsay Ellis has argued that *Adventure Time*’s take on the deity serves as a way for the series to humorously invert the “Chess with Death” trope. In subsequent episodes, however, Death is played less as a simple subversion and more as a legitimate person, with his own idiosyncrasies, interests, and relationships: at various points, we see him casually partying with Jake, jamming with Marceline, and even trying to record a mixtape for his girlfriend, Life. This characterization serves to reinforce the idea that almost all the deities in the *Adventure Time* universe—despite their awesome powers—are regular Joes and Josephines, too.

Another oft-mentioned celestial being is a four-headed Martian by the name of Grob Gob Glob Grod, whose third name is commonly invoked by Ooo’s citizens as a mild swear (e.g., “Oh my Glob!”). While Grob Gob Glob Grod is viewed by some as a deity, this tetramorphic being resembles an angel more so than a god, with its four distinct faces recalling the four-fold visage of the cherubim, who according to the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel “had the likeness of a man [but with] four faces.” Grob Gob Glob Grod also wields a flaming sword, like the cherub whom God tasked with guarding the Biblical Garden of Eden. And like the Guardian of Eden, Grob Gob Glob Grod’s sworn duty seems to have been guarding select territory (i.e., Mars) from any outside threats. In this way, Grob Gob Glob Grod can also be compared to the Oyéresu from C. S. Lewis’s *Space Trilogy*, who are Judeo-Christian archangels—by way of the “planetary Intelligences” popular with medieval occultists—tasked with defending each of the planets in the solar system from any possible galactic malevolence.

Although Grob Gob Glob Grod is a wielder of awesome power, the four-faced being is nothing compared to an entity of even greater ability: the wise King of Mars, who in the *Adventure Time* universe is none other than Abraham Lincoln himself. In the series proper, the King of Mars is introduced in the fourth-season episode “Sons of Mars” as an “all-powerful be-
The “C-Listers”

ing” capable of “travel[ing] through time and different dimensions.” While Lincoln’s appearance in this episode is an obvious call-back to the show’s pilot, “Sons of Mars” also manages to work the character into the show’s complex mythology: After Jake is mistaken for Magic Man and accidentally executed, the King of Mars negotiates with Death himself, trading Jake’s soul for his own immortality. This means that in many ways, the King of Mars is a Christ-like figure, who gives up his life so that an innocent could live. Many have argued that he is thus the closest thing Ooo has to Jesus.

But how exactly is Lincoln a godlike being? And why is he ruling over the red planet? These questions are never explicitly answered, but it is worth noting that Doug TenNapel, a cartoonist who freelanced for the show during season one, explained in an online (and admittedly extra-canonical) interview with Dick Masterson that:

[During season one] I [storyboarded] this giant epic story where Finn and Jake... one of them dies, [but] they are the ones that the Earth needs to survive... in the future. And Abe Lincoln is an interdimensional traveler [who] shows up and says that he will insert himself back into Earth’s history as [a U.S.] president in order to die in place of one of those two guys who died and [thereby] save the universe. ... The network canned the episode and said “We can’t do any of this.” ... In [the] fourth season, they brought back some of my work and did ‘Sons of Mars’ and gave me writing credit.

Obviously, this storyline changed dramatically when it was converted into “Sons of Mars,” but TenNapel’s insight suggests that in the Oooniverse, Abraham Lincoln was the King of Mars since time immemorial, and it was only the activities of “Sons of Mars” that retroactively made him the sixteenth President of the United States. (This also explains why Pendleton Ward, during the writing of “Sons of Mars,” was adamant that the character be referred to exclusively in the storyboard as the “King of Mars,” rather than Abraham Lincoln.)

Although many of the deities and beings of power in the Oooniverse are friendly or at the very least ambivalent towards mortal beings, this cannot be said for all of them. Chief among the more dangerous deities is the entity GOLB, a Lovecraftian abomination who embodies chaos itself. While GOLB is teased throughout the series, starting with the fifth-season episode “Puhoy,” he is only introduced as a major baddie in the series finale, “Come Along with Me,” when he is unleashed unto Ooo thanks to the magical antics of King Man and Betty. In this episode, the audience learns that GOLB is capable of corrupting life into almost unstoppable eldritch horrors that wreak
havoc wherever they go. GOLB’s deadliest power, however, is his capability to wipe people (and possibly whole universes)\textsuperscript{60} from existence. While it is likely that GOLB cannot be killed in the traditional sense, harmony (such as that found in music) seems to weaken him. GOLB is ultimately defeated by Betty with the ice crown, although her victory is Pyrrhic, as in the end she is forced to merge with the being and leave Ooo—and Simon—behind.

A handful of times throughout the series, the Oooniverse's pantheon members make cryptic references to their “Boss.” This boss is never shown, although in “Hoots,” it is revealed that this entity put many of the gods in power, recalling the way Zeus is said to have divided up the universe among his siblings. Given this hint, it can be reasonably inferred that the Oooniverse’s boss is a deity concerned with the division of metaphysical labor, and is thus by extension interested in maintaining order in the universe.

If Prismo et al.’s boss is indeed the supreme god of order, with GOLB as their opposite, then the multiverse of *Adventure Time* comes to resemble in many ways the fundamentally dualistic cosmology of Gnosticism.\textsuperscript{61} This was especially true for the Manicheans, who believed that a “Father of Greatness” (whose name differed radically depending on the language being spoken) held dominion over the spiritual aspects of creation. This great being was in turn locked in a cosmic war with a malevolent deity known as the “King of Darkness” (the “anti-God” of the universe, as it were), who held dominion over material existence.\textsuperscript{62} This Manichean cosmology also claimed that the Father of Greatness was by his very nature fundamentally inaccessible and unknowable to earthly beings.\textsuperscript{63} Additionally, Manichean/Gnostic cosmology posited a “trickle down” of lesser and lesser deities, emanating both from the Light and the Dark.\textsuperscript{64} Looking at the Oooniverse through a Manichean lens helps explain several things, such as why Finn and Jake never bump into *Adventure Time’s* equivalent of said God and why there is an apparent hierarchy of good (e.g., Prismo et al.) and bad deities (e.g., the “Scholars of GOLB,” such as the Lich) trolling all around reality.

## The Fionna and Cake Universe

Fionna (a feisty girl-warrior voiced by Madeleine Martin) and Cake (a magical cat voiced by Roz Ryan) are the gender-swapped versions of Finn and Jake. The two are introduced in season three’s “Fionna and Cake,” wherein it is revealed that they are actually characters in a series of fanfics, written by the Ice King. Other major characters in the “Fionna and Cake” universe include:

**Prince Gumball:** The gender-swapped version of Princess Bubblegum, voiced initially by Neil Patrick Harris (in “Fionna and
Cake” and “Bad Little Boy”), and later by Keith Ferguson (in “Five Short Tables”). In his first appearance, he serves as Fionna’s main love interest.

Ice Queen: The gender-swapped version of Ice King, voiced by Grey DeLisle. The character serves as the main antagonist in “Fionna and Cake.” Much like her male counterpart, the Ice Queen dabbles freely in fanfiction, writing stories about “Flynn the Human,” “Jacques the Raccoon,” and the “Ice President.”

Marshall Lee: The gender-swapped version of Marceline, voiced by Donald Glover. The character, who stars in the episode “Bad Little Boy,” shares with his female counterpart a love of pranks and playing music; regarding the latter, he is both a skilled bassist and rapper.


Lord Monochromicorn: The gender-swapped version of Lady Rainicorn. While Lady Rainicorn is best described as a rainbow crossed with a horse, Lord Monochromicorn more closely resembles a stallion crossed with a black licorice wheel. The character communicates with others through Morse code.

Fionna and Cake have an interesting origin story. In fanfic and fanart circles, there has always been an interest in swapping the genders and/or sexes of main characters. This practice is known by various names, including “genderbending,” “genderswapping,” and the crass “genderfucking”; other fans use the catch-all designator “Rule 63” (an allusion to the infamous “Rules of the Internet”). Regardless of the nomenclature used to describe the practice, gender-swapped characters are usually made by fans for fans, and rarely do they make their way back into the original media object off of which they were based. It is in this last regard that Fionna and Cake are special.

The characters started life as fun doodles that storyboard revisionist and character designer Natasha Allegri had mocked up in her free time. In 2011, Allegri explained to Bitch magazine:

The [genderbent] stuff I did at first wasn’t for work ... I just wanted to draw the [characters that] I wanted, and how I wanted. And I wanted to draw a cute, chubby girl in a bunny hat,
and a super sexy ice queen, because why not? I wasn’t getting paid to do it, so I did whatever I felt like doing at the time.  

Allegri eventually posted her drawings of “Fionna the Human” and “Cake the Cat” to Tumblr, where they were blogged and reblogged by many of the show’s ardent fans. When Ward saw these drawings, he felt that they had creative potential, and so he greenlit an official Fionna and Cake episode, with Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar tapped as storyboard artists. Sugar, in particular, was excited to work on the episode because in the past she had dabbled both in fanfiction as well as genderswapped fanart. After several extensive rewrites, Muto and Sugar turned in a finalized storyboard featuring Fionna and Cake fighting off the evil Ice Queen while trying to woo Prince Gumball.

Ward thought that fans would enjoy the Fionna and Cake concept, but in many regards, he misjudged just how popular the episode would become. Upon its airing “Fionna and Cake” became the show’s most-watched installment at the time, with over 3.3 million viewers tuning in to see what a gender-swapped version of Adventure Time would look like. In a subsequent interview with the San Antonio Express-News, Ward noted: “Fionna and Cake, in my mind, was a cool one-off experiment that was fun for us to dabble around in, so I didn’t consider making another Fionna and Cake until [the first one] aired nine months from when we started ... The vocal fan feedback was bangin.” The success of “Fionna and Cake” led to countless pieces of creative fanart and numerous cosplays, and it set the stage for four other gender-swapped episodes of Adventure Time, which would air during the show’s fifth, sixth, eighth, and ninth seasons, respectively.

For most of the series, Fionna and Cake are best understood as figments of Ice King’s deluded imagination; however, this view is problematized by the final scene in the ninth-season episode “Fionna and Cake and Fionna,” in which we learn that the Ice King actually receives the Fionna and Cake stories from a ray of red light that beams ideas into his mind while he sleeps. Although the show’s cancellation prevented the truth about this beam from ever being revealed, many fans believe that the scene is a reference to the writings of sci-fi writer Philip K. Dick. In one of Dick’s final novels, VALIS, the protagonist, Horselover Fat, is struck by a mysterious beam of pink light that embeds in his mind “things he had never known.” Given that Horselover Fat’s beam-based “delusions” turn out to be genuine visions from an alternate reality, it is likely that had the Adventure Time writers been given a chance to write a final Fionna and Cake episode, they would have revealed that the characters, too, were in some sense “real.”
The “C-Listers”

Endnotes

2. Bill Graham, “Comic-Con.”
5. Billy was originally named “Hogarth.” Niki Yang, Kent Osborne, and Adam Muto, “Finn Meets His Hero’ Storyboard.”
6. “Billy’s Bucket List” (Season 5, Episode 52).
7. E.g., Manilius, Astronomica, 1.718ff; Ovid, Metamorphoses, 15.745ff.
10. Pun intended.
11. Ditto.
13. This name is pronounced differently across the series. Variations include “Gunther,” “Goonter,” and “Gunter.” The last of these has been used throughout this book for consistency.
19. The exception to this is the eighth-season episode “Lady Rainicorn of the Crystal Dimension.” Because the dialogue in the episode is almost entirely in Korean, the production crew added subtitles so that non-Korean speaking viewers can follow the story.
21. Pillon and Yang, “The Voice of Adventure Time’s Bmo and Lady Rainicorn Told Us How She Feels About the Show Ending.”
22. Niki Yang, “Interview with Adventure Time’s Niki Yang.”
24. Yang, “Interview with Adventure Time’s Niki Yang.”
27. Moynihan, “Adventure Time Update.”
32. Lon Milo DuQuette, Understanding Aleister Crowley’s Thoth Tarot, 110.
34. Wolfhard was inspired to make Shermy a cat because of Finn’s assertion in “Mortal Recoil” that he “is an agile cat.” Wolfhard, “Adventure Time 1000+.”
35. “Susan Strong,” commentary by Pendleton Ward.
36. “Susan Strong,” commentary by Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar.
38. “Susan Strong,” commentary by Muto.
41. Dennis Tardan, “S04-10 a Conversation with Polly Lou Livingston.”
42. William J. Sibley, “Polly Lou Livingston.”
43. Tardan, “S04-10 a Conversation with Polly Lou Livingston.”
45. Livingston.
46. Livingston.
47. “Jake the Dog” (Season 5, Episode 2). This is a direct reference to the 1902 short story “The Monkey’s Paw,” by British author W. W. Jacobs.
51. Moynihan, “Adventure Time #3.”
52. See: https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ChessWithDeath.
53. Lindsay Ellis, “Loose Cannon: Death.”
56. Seth Wright, “Planetary Architectonics,” 95.
57. “Sons of Mars,” commentary by Pendleton Ward.
59. “Sons of Mars,” commentary by Pendleton Ward.
60. As suggested in “Puhoy” (Season 5, Episode 16). GOLB first appears in this episode after Finn “dies” but before he returns back to Ooo, ignorant of the pillow universe. The implication is that GOLB may have erased the pillow universe from existence, explaining Finn’s amnesia.
62. John Coyle, Manichaeism and Its Legacy, 66; Michel Tardeu, Manichaeism, 76.
63. Ehrman, Lost Christianities, 119, 23.
64. Ehrman, 120, 23.
65. Who in turn writes fanfiction about “Janet the Fox” and “Lynn the Person.” Talk about turtles all the way down.
The “C-Listers”

69. Guzman, “Fiona and Cake”; “Fionna and Cake,” commentary by Pendleton Ward.
70. “Fionna and Cake;” commentary by Rebecca Sugar.
71. Guzman, “Fiona and Cake”; Chris Sims, “Adventure Time’s Gender-Swapped Episode and the Art of Natasha Allegri.”
73. Guzman, “Fiona and Cake.”
74. E.g., https://www.reddit.com/comments/8bl4fp/.
76. This theory is alluded to in the Beginning of the End comic miniseries (2018), which briefly features a satellite labelled “FELIS.” On his personal blog, the comic writer, Ted Anderson, wrote: “FELIS ... is the source of the Fionna and Cake stories—in [his personal] version of the universe.” “Annotations for Adventure Time Beginning of the End Issue 3,” Tumblr, 2018, https://tedlyanderson.tumblr.com/post/180638139224/annotations-for-adventure-time-beginning-of-the.
Part 2: Behind the Easel: The Production of Adventure Time
5. “Video Makers”: How an Episode Was Made

In popular discourse, *Adventure Time* is often seen as the product of a single auteur—Pendleton Ward. In reality, the show was a team effort that required dozens of skilled artists carefully coordinating for months at a time to produce the final 11-minute product. In this present chapter, I will delineate the often enigmatic process by which an episode of *Adventure Time* was produced (a process which Ward himself once likened to a sort of magic), covering everything from initial conception to final broadcast.

Developing an Outline

Before a new season would enter into production, the show’s writers and producers would convene and make note of any characters who needed to be fleshed-out or lingering storylines that needed to be addressed. After drafting up a rough outline of the season, the writers then began to work out the details of individual episodes.¹

All *Adventure Time* episodes originated as general outlines developed in the series’ writers’ room. These were relatively short story sketches—usually a page or two at most—that focused on the main “acts” of an episode (viz. beginning and rising action, climax, and resolution). Outlines were normally written by a dedicated storyline crew—directed in the show’s later years by Kent Osborne—and it was common for stories to be based on the everyday
experiences of the writers. Other storylines were developed by the show’s storyboard artists; Jesse Moynihan and Tom Herpich in particular were known for helping prepare outlines, producing some of the show’s strongest episodes in the process, like Moynihan’s “Sons of Mars” (Season 4, Episode 15), or Herpich’s “Evergreen” (Season 6, Episode 24).

Still other outlines evolved from ideas that the show’s artists developed while playing writing games, of which “exquisite corpse” was arguably the most popular. This game would start with a writer drawing a goofy picture (e.g., Marceline laughing at a transmogrified Princess Bubblegum, who has been turned into a horse) at the top of an otherwise blank sheet of paper. The sheet would then be passed to a new writer, who would look at the image and then develop the first part of a story to explain what was going on in the picture. The sheet would be passed down the line, with each writer adding more and more until a coherent story coalesced. While Ward once admitted in an interview that these outlines were often “terrible” because they “usually devolve into boner jokes,” he noted that the game would produce the occasional storyline gem. Notable episodes that emerged from games of exquisite corpse include “Puhoy” (Season 5, Episode 16) “Rattleballs” (Season 5, Episode 46) and “Jake the Brick” (Season 6, Episode 20).

The Storyboarding Process

Once episode outlines were finalized, they were passed off to the show’s storyboard artists (often referred to colloquially as “board artists” or “boarders”). Initially, Ward wanted his show to be script-driven, so that he would have total creative control over dialogue. But as he explained in a 2012 interview with the Nerdist:

I sat down to write my first script ... and I wrote “Finn and Jake make funny faces at each other.” I thought, “This sucks. This is not funny. I need to draw what those faces are and I need to time it out so that it feels funny.” ... I scrapped the whole idea [of having the show based around scripts] and just went [the] storyboard driven [route].

As a result of this decision, it was the storyboard artists, and not the storyline writers, who had most of the creative control over pacing, action, and—most importantly—dialogue. While discussing the show in a 2013 interview with the Daily Beast, Osborne equated the storyboard artists to directors, saying, “They’re writing all the jokes, editing the outline, picking all the camera shots ... [and figuring out] what the episode is going to look like.” Structuring the
show in this way allowed the artistic personalities of the various storyboard artists to shine through in finished episodes, as storyboard artist Polly Guo explained in an interview: “Each artist had their own specific voice that contributed to the show and made it the hodgepodge of art and writing that the show ended up being.”

Both Ward and Adam Muto (the showrunner during seasons 5–10) were interested in storyboard artists who were willing to push the boundaries of the art world, with Guo emphasizing that the storyboard artists were actively encouraged “to get weird.” As a result of this interest in “weird” art, Ward and Muto often recruited storyboard artists from the experimental world of independent comic books. Notable Adventure Time storyboard artists who got their start in the indie comic scene include Derek Ballard, Michael DeForge, Brandon Graham, Tom Herpich, Sloane Leong, Jesse Moynihan, Luke Pearson, and Jillian Tamaki.

Storyboard artists almost always worked in teams of two, and how these artists approached the storyboarding process depended entirely on their sensibilities: Sometimes, the pairs would actively work with one another, coordinating their efforts so that their portions of an episode would fit together seamlessly. Other partners preferred to work in isolation, consulting each other only when necessary. For most of the show’s run, it was common for there to be four pairs of “regular” storyboard artists working concurrently on their own episodes. In addition to being efficient, this division of labor also seemed to have engendered a sort of friendly competition that in turn stimulated creative growth, with Herpich telling me that when he was storyboarding, he aimed “to be as funny as Jesse [Moynihan] and as dramatic as Rebecca [Sugar].”

The storyboarding process usually took about five weeks. On the first week, storyboard pairs would be assigned an outline, which they would divide among themselves. Again, the method for division depended on the preferences of the artists. For instance, some preferred to divide the outline cleanly down the middle, with one artist working on the front half, and the other working on the back half. Other times, one artist would take the first and fourth quarters of an outline, and the other would work on the middle half. And still at other times, the artists would jump around and work on shorter sections about which they felt most confident.

Once a division was finally settled upon, the artists began to mock up a rough storyboard. According to Andy Ristaino (a storyboard artist during seasons five and six), during the first week of storyboarding, most of the emphasis was placed on dialogue, and the storyboard artists did not worry too much about perfecting their drawings; freelancer Laura Knetzger echoed this in an interview when she told me that by the end of the first week, “drawings could be really sketchy and didn’t need to have every single pose
These rough storyboards were often doodled on post-it notes or on plain pieces of paper.

Following the conclusion of the first week, the storyboard artists would pitch their thumbnails to the showrunner (either Pendleton Ward during seasons 1–5 or Adam Muto during seasons 5–10), the various directors, and studio executives, all of whom would make comments, provide constructive criticism, and take detailed notes. During the second and third weeks, the storyboard artists integrated the suggestions they received, which inevitably resulted in dialogue being tinkered with, new jokes being added, and substandard gags being excised or tweaked until deemed satisfactory. The partners then began working on a “more polished pass” of their storyboard. According to Knetzger, during this phase of production, “drawings could still be sketchy, but [they] needed to be legible and poses needed to be completed.”

At the end of week three, the artists would then pitch their storyboard once again, after which they would receive a final round of notes. The fourth and fifth week were devoted to clean-up, which Ristaino described as the phase “when you’re posing everything out and you’re supposed to draw everything nice and put backgrounds in where needed ... so [the production crew] can figure out all the camera angles.”

There was no “one way” that artists approached the storyboarding process, as Tom Herpich explained:

Different boarders do it different ways. For me it’s very granular. It’s always: how many pages I need to draw divided by how many days I have in which to do it, then hit those quotas as best I can. I’ve had partners who do one big quick take on the whole thing, and then do pass after pass refining things, but I need my schedule more concrete—it feels like less variables to worry about.

Kris Mukai, a storyboard artist who freelanced for the show during seasons seven and eight, revealed to me that one of the best ways to make the job easier:

... was learning to use sticky notes. Sticky notes are kind of translucent, so if you’re drawing multiple poses you can stick a post-it over one frame to trace, and then transfer it over to the next panel. Also because sticky notes are so disposable, it makes you feel a lot less precious with the drawings.

Storyboarding could often be emotionally and mentally exhausting. Ristaino, for instance, disclosed in a podcast interview: “I was working 12-14 hours a day every day of the week. ... And I’d be working weekends. ...
really wanted to do a good job on my boards. ... [Some artists’ storyboards] are super rough and quick and it’s all, like, short hand, and that’s a skill.”21 Knetzger echoed Ristaino’s feelings when she confessed: “I struggled with the workload each time, drawing 200+ panels 2 or 3 times in 5 weeks is a lot, even when it’s your full time job.”22 Likewise, Mukai told me, “It was so nerve wrecking ... It’s hard to figure out a good workflow for something that’s so large. You have to produce just a ton of drawings for storyboards and it can be really daunting at first.”23

The Recording and Design Phases

Following network approval of an episode storyboard, production moved into the recording phase.24 Assistants compiled the dialogue from a completed storyboard down into a script, which was given to the voice actors. Soon thereafter, the actors would convene in one room and record their lines together. (This method, which differed substantially from the piecemeal recording practices employed for other cartoons, resulted in dialogue that sounded more conversational and genuine.) These vocal sessions took about 3 hours, and were usually held every week.25 During much of the show’s run, Kent Osborne served as voice director, which required that he coach the actors, provide context for scenes, and call for re-takes.

When the vocal takes were completed, an editor used video editing software to assemble an animatic by timing out the lines of dialogue and placing them over polished storyboard panels. This resulted in a rough cut of the episode that was of the correct length, thereby allowing the animation studios to have a solid understanding of the episode’s timing and pace.26 Production then entered into the design phase,27 which required extensive coordination, as Derek Kirk Kim, the lead character and prop designer for seasons 6–8, told me in an interview:

> Once a week, I would meet with the other department heads to break down a completed storyboard and see what needed to be designed for that particular episode. Then the rest of the week was the actual task of designing and drawing.28

*Adventure Time* has a very specific “look,” with the characters’ noodly limbs and minimalistic faces recalling the “rubber hose” animation popularized by Max Fleischer in the early 20th century. While the groundwork for this throwback style was laid by Ward early on, it was formalized largely by character designers Phil Rynda, Tom Herpich, and Natasha Allegri during the production of season one. For the many seasons that followed, it was
thus the job of character and prop designers to make sure that this distinct aesthetic was consistently infused throughout all the show’s many designs. (With that said, Ward often encouraged the artists to go “off-model” if it made a scene funnier or helped sell a certain emotion.)

Once character and prop designs were finalized, they were sent to a clean-up artist, such as Alex Campos, whose job was to take roughly 30 model sheets a week and polish them up in Adobe Illustrator. These drawings would serve as key visual aids, providing the animation studios with a clear understanding of how the characters or props were to look in a finished episode. For certain unique shots (usually those that employed off-model designs), the production team would also draw out and clean-up key frames so that the animation studios would know what the producers were envisioning.

Concurrent with the finalization of character and prop designs, the series’ background artists met with the show’s art and supervising directors to determine which background pieces needed to be designed for an episode. According to Derek Hunter, who worked as a background designer during seasons 4–8:

At the beginning [of my time on the show], my art director [Nick Jennings] picked all the [backgrounds] I did, but he left before season 7, and [during that season] I was put into a supervisor role, where I would go to a 2-3 hour meeting with all the department heads and episode directors to go through the storyboard page by page and identify which designs needed to be done. Then I would decide which of my background designers would do which scenes, [I would also give] them direction, reference, and inspiration photos/art to get them going [in] the right direction.

Usually, the designers produced between 30 to 40 background pieces a week.

Animation Time

At this point, everything was sent to South Korea for animation. To speed up production, different episodes were animated simultaneously by both SAEROM and Rough Draft Studios. Each production house employed roughly a dozen lead animators, who focused most of their attention on key poses. These artists were in turn aided by numerous assistant animators and in-betweeners, who drew the frames that transitioned into the key poses. To the untrained eye, episodes produced by the two studios look stylistically identical, but according to Tom Herpich, Rough Draft was “usually slicker
and smoother ... but, on the other hand, they also smooth[ed] away some [of the] interesting idiosyncrasies” of the individual storyboard artists. Conversely, SAEROM “studiously preserv[ed] all those idiosyncrasies,” 36 which sometimes resulted in a slightly rougher looking episode.

Unlike many modern cartoons, the animators of Adventure Time eschewed the heavy use of programs like Adobe Flash, instead animating episodes by hand on paper. This animation was then scanned onto a computer, and dedicated teams of artists used programs like Toon Boom Harmony 37 to digitally ink, color, and composite the frames. 38 The animation process was overseen by SAEROM director Dongkun Won (an industry veteran who had served as animation director for programs like Camp Lazlo, Lilo & Stitch: The Series, and Kim Possible) and Rough Draft director Bonghui Han (another animation veteran who in the past had worked on episodes of The Ren & Stimpy Show and The Simpsons). 39 The entire animation process for a single episode could take anywhere from three to four months, on average. 40

When animation was finished, it was sent back to the United States, where the series’ showrunner inspected it to make sure that it was quality. If the showrunner noticed any errors, SAEROM or Rough Draft were notified, and the necessary corrections were made. According to Sandra Lee, who served as the show’s art director during seasons 6–10, there were two common types of mistakes caught at this stage: “technicals” and “creatives.” The former included simple animation blunders or errors made by the animation studio; the latter included instances in which the producers decided to make an aesthetic change to the final cut. While major retakes were handled by the animation studios, the show’s art director or showrunner would sometimes work on minor fixes from their offices in California as a cost-saving mechanism. 41

Once the producers approved an episode’s animation, it was time to whip up the episode’s soundtrack. First, necessary sound effects were added into the episode. Following this, the series composers Tim Kiefer or Casey James Basichis worked on crafting the show’s chirpy score. After the soundtrack, effects, and dialogue tracks were mixed, the episode was ready to air.

From start to finish, the writing, recording, and animating of a single episode usually took about nine months to complete—an astonishing amount of time for 11 minutes of animation.
Endnotes

3. On a related note, Herpich told me in an interview: “To create everything from scratch makes the whole thing that much more engaging to work on. It’s sort of an irony of this job—for me anyways—that I usually want everything to be really difficult, because then it’s interesting, and therefore feels easier, whereas easy simple stuff is boring so it feels like hard work.” Thomas, “Tom Herpich Interview.”
5. Graham, “Comic-Con.”
14. During the show’s earliest seasons, storyboard artists were given four weeks exactly to turn in their storyboards, but as the show grew more popular, Cartoon Network agreed to give the artists an additional week. Jesse Moynihan and Dominick Rabrun, “Jesse Moynihan (Forming, *Adventure Time*) | DSC Interview.”
15. Laura Knetzger, (storyboard artist), interview with author, September 13, 2018.
16. “Showrunner” is a unique term denoting an “executive producer ... whose vision reigns supreme ... The showrunner is responsible for all creative aspects of the show as well as its day-to-day management.” Eve Light Honthaner, *The Complete Film Production Handbook*, 395.
17. Knetzger.
23. Thomas, “Kris Mukai Interview.”
25. Shada, “Interview with Jeremy Shada.”
29. “On-model” drawings adhere closely to established character models, whereas
off-model drawings “violate” these models by adjusting or exaggerating things like character height, limb proportions, facial features, and level of detail.

32. Hunter.
33. Hunter.
35. Tony White, Animation, 199.
41. Lee.
While the last chapter emphasized that *Adventure Time* was the creative offspring of many artists, it cannot be denied that the show has its origin in one man: Pendleton Ward. Born in 1982 and raised in sunny San Antonio, Texas, Ward was an introverted child who at a young age discovered the joys of art. Ward’s mother, Bettie, being an artist herself, was delighted by her son’s interests and encouraged him to explore his creative impulses at every possible opportunity. Ward soon developed an intense fixation with animation—in interviews, he often mentions how much joy he derived from making ad hoc flip books or watching his favorite television program, *The Simpsons*—and in time, he began dreaming of the day that he could develop his own cartoon.

During his teenage years, Ward’s life was permanently changed when he learned about the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D). Initially released in 1974 and modeled on the miniature war-games of the 20th century, D&D allows players to create their own fantasy characters and go on elaborate “campaigns” that effectively serve as storyarcs for the participating players. All games are organized by a “Dungeon Master” (often simply called a “DM”), who enforces rules and keeps detailed track of game play. Known for its complex logic, its Tolkien-esque monsters, and its use of polyhedral dice, D&D became increasingly popular in the 1980s, and by the time Ward started dabbling with the d20s, the game had become a fixture of the nerdosphere. As a game predicated on creativity and imagination, D&D would greatly impact Ward’s artistic development, and years later, when...
“Come Along with Me”

When a teenage Ward was not fighting fantasy creatures with his friends, he was beginning to hone his drawing abilities at San Antonio’s respected North East School of the Arts (NESA)—a magnet school that boasted an arts-heavy curriculum. Ward made quite an impression on several of his teachers at NESA, including Visual Art Director Jennifer Janak, who in 2010 told the San Antonio Express-News that she “remember[ed] Ward as an excellent artist and creative freethinker.”

Ward’s creative growth continued when in both 1999 and 2000 he attended the California State Summer School for the Arts, a summer program aimed at artistically promising high school students; the following year, he was accepted to CalArts, a private university located in Valencia, California. CalArts is often seen as the Harvard of art schools, and for good reason: counted among its many alumni are animation luminaries like Tim Burton, John Lasseter, and Craig McCracken.

It was at CalArts, while studying for a bachelor’s degree in character animation, that the shy Ward made a number of good friends, many of whom would help him develop Adventure Time only a few years later, including most notably Patrick McHale and Adam Muto. According to the former, whom I contacted via Twitter: 

Adventures Time was the brainchild of Pendleton Ward, who studied character animation at the CalArts during the early 2000s. (Photo courtesy of Edward Liu)
Pen and Adam were both a grade above me [at CalArts]. I learned about Pen because some people told me that my drawings looked like Pen's drawings, except his stuff was funnier than mine. ... I forget how we actually became friends, but we used to doodle and draw comics ... I think we were just like-minded guys who had a similar sense of humor and stuff. [For instance] one thing we bonded over was that we tried to create a real-world role-playing game called LifeQuest in which players walk around parking lots to fight monsters by flipping pennies.6

McHale also recalls:

Adam was infamous at CalArts for being this incredible animator who would animate all day and night, but would never complete a film. Once I got to know him I realized he was just less interested in finishing a film than he was [in] exploring the possibilities of animation. ... He was almost like an animation scientist, just pushing the boundaries and testing hypotheses. Not for any purpose other than the pursuit of truth in animation. Adam animated some of Pen's wall doodles one time, which was incredible to see; at the time I hadn't really seen simple cute drawings being animated in that way. In Adam's final year I think he felt a little hopeless about handing in an actual film, so I joined in helping him sort through his stacks of animation and edit it into a watchable film. ... We became friends during that process and we've been friends since.7

The importance of McHale and Muto cannot be overstated. When production for Adventure Time began in 2008, it was these two artists whom Pen called upon for help: McHale served as the series' creative director for its first two seasons and remained on as a freelance storyline writer well into its fifth, and Muto began as a writer and storyboard artist before eventually succeeding Ward as the program's showrunner during the production of its fifth season. Due to the hundreds of hours they put in working alongside Ward to craft Adventure Time, it is inarguable that the final tone of the show is heavily indebted to both McHale and Muto's creative sensibilities.

**The Fun Begins: The Pilot and Season 1**

Ward's student work at CalArts was, as he himself admits, rough around the edges, but what he lacked in technical mastery, he made up for
with creative verve and a one-of-a-kind sense of humor; in a 2014 interview with *Rolling Stone*, Muto noted, “Even back then, [Ward’s] films were the funniest ones being made.” One of these films (created c. 2005) was a minute-long short that featured two heroes—a boy and his dog—rescuing “Princess Bubblegum” from the clutches of a wicked “Ice King.” Ward later told the *Los Angeles Times* in 2018 that it “was just a sketch I kicked out into a minute-long short ... Nickelodeon was taking pitches from CalArts students. And they didn’t like it.”

But while Nickelodeon was indifferent to his work, others were starting to take notice, including Eric Homan, the development executive at the production company Frederator, at the time perhaps best known for their series *The Fairly OddParents*. In the spring of 2005, Homan attended a CalArts student showcase at which one of Ward’s films was screened, and he was struck by the uniqueness of Ward’s work, as well as the passion of his budding “fandom.” In a later interview, Homan recalled that Ward’s “work was clearly a favorite among his classmates.”

Homan soon contacted Ward and encouraged him to propose an idea for Frederator’s cartoon anthology series *Random! Cartoons*. Ward was delighted by the offer and dutifully showed up at the production company’s offices with the idea that Nickelodeon had previously rejected. At the pitch, Ward lugged in an acoustic guitar and sang a catchy theme song for his proposed short, which he called “Adventure Time.” Initially, some at Frederator—including the company’s founder and eventual *Adventure Time* evangelist, Fred Seibert—were apprehensive about working with Ward as they feared that his aesthetic was far too unpolished; in a 2013 interview with Dom’s Sketch Cast, Seibert explained: “I saw the pitch, [I] loved it, and then said we weren’t going to do the cartoon ... At the time ... I’d been making cartoons for, like, 15 years, and like every other idiot executive, I thought I knew what made a good cartoon. And this did not fit it on the surface.” After continuous urging from Homan and Frederator’s vice-president Kevin Kolde, Seibert finally came around and agreed to let Ward write and storyboard a seven-minute short.

Ward’s previous experience in animation had mostly been confined to working on student films at CalArts. When reflecting on the opportunity in 2009, Ward noted, “It was exciting jumping into it not knowing whether I would sink or swim.” Despite the exhilarating nature of the opportunity, the task was nonetheless daunting, and to make it easier, Ward enlisted the help of several CalArts alumni, including the ever dependable Adam Muto, who became the short’s prop designer. Ward himself focused on designing the characters, writing the basic story beats, and then visually plotting out a storyboard, with the latter task taking roughly two weeks to accomplish.
After months of work, “Adventure Time” was completed in late 2006 and aired on the Nicktoons Network in early 2007. In this silly short, a young boy named Pen (voiced by Zack Shada) and his talking English bulldog Jake (voiced by John DiMaggio) learn that the dreaded Ice King (voiced by John Kassir)—an evil wizard with frosty powers—has captured Princess Bubblegum (voiced by Paige Moss) and is holding her prisoner in his dreaded mountain fortress. Pen and Jake arrive on the scene to free the monarch, but Pen is frozen by the Ice King’s nefarious magic. After being “transported back in time and to Mars,” Pen receives a pep talk from a deified Abraham Lincoln (voiced by Ward), who tells him to “believe in [him]self.” This provides Pen with the power needed to break out of the ice, rescue the princess, and save the day.

Although it clocks in at only seven minutes, the “Adventure Time” short is memorable due to its absurd but sweet aesthetic. Almost immediately upon its release, it began garnering praise from those in the animation industry, and in 2007 it was even nominated for a prestigious Annie Award. Frederator took notice of this attention and inquired as to whether Nickelodeon was interested in developing the short into a bona fide program. Nickelodeon, however, declined the offer, fearing that the success of the short was just a fluke. But despite their lack of faith in Ward’s project, the network did give Frederator the go-ahead to post the short on the Internet. It was in this way that “Adventure Time” made its way to the masses, for soon
after its uploading, it became a viral hit. Frederator once again approached Nickelodeon about developing a full series, and once again the network said that they were not interested. All hope seemed lost.

**Cartoon Network Saves the Day**

While “Adventure Time” was making its way across the Internet, Ward got a “real job”: a position as a storyboard artist on Thurop van Orman’s Cartoon Network series *The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack*, an experience he later called “a crash course on how to [professionally] storyboard.”

Concurrent with Ward refining his abilities and learning more and more about the world of professional animation, the higher-ups at Cartoon Network reached out to the executives at Frederator and informed the production company that they had enjoyed the “Adventure Time” short and were interested in developing it into a full-fledged series under one key condition: that “Pen could prove the seven-minute short made for Nick wasn’t a one-hit wonder.” Of course, capturing lightning in a bottle is easier said than done. Nevertheless, Ward was up for the challenge, and so he enlisted the help of his CalArts pals Adam Muto and Patrick McHale, and the trio began brainstorming potential story ideas. Soon, they had roughed out a storyboard that focused not on Pen and Jake, but rather on Princess Bubblegum and the newly re-named “Finn.” This new idea differed substantially from the original short, in that it focused on the characters’ romantic chemistry and not on a wacky adventure.

According to Eric Homan: “Cartoon Network wasn’t having any of [that initial storyboard]. Besides their thinking the romantic aspect would alienate young boys, the network was asking—not specifically, but generally—for those things they felt made the short so special, like the crazy opening dance, the ‘Abe Lincoln moment,’ funny catchwords, and the awkward princess/kiss moment at the end.” Ward and his friends internalized these comments, literally retreated back to the drawing board, and subsequently produced an unwrought storyboard that would one day, in a more refined form, become the first-season classic “The Enchiridion!” Much wackier and more action-heavy than the previous attempt, this storyboard was what the studio was looking for, and they ordered 26 episodes to go into immediate production. This was a highly unusual move, as most television shows go through a pre-production period, in which the writers and producers get a chance to “figure out, among other things, the look and tone of the series.” Cartoon Network, however, was in no mood to waste time soul-searching. According to McHale:

>At the time, Cartoon Network had canceled [almost] all of their animated shows ... [They] were [also] on the path of rebranding
the network “CN” instead of “Cartoon Network” and filling it with live-action shows instead of cartoons. *Adventure Time* was kind of the only new animated show they were making. So there was a lot of pressure for it to be the animated show [and] the network second guessed every decision Pen would make. ... There was too much riding on it, so it’s understandable ... why [the network was] so stressed out about it, and why they couldn’t give us the benefit of the doubt ... It was just unfortunate for all that it had to be so difficult in those early days.  

To say that the stakes were high is a bit of an understatement. Cartoon Network needed a hit, and they needed it as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the rush to get *Adventure Time* written, animated, and broadcast caused a number of behind-the-scenes problems. In fact, during the first few months that *Adventure Time* was in production, the show was “constantly on the verge of falling apart,” and people were being hired and fired almost on a weekly basis. A large part of this problem was that, aside from Ward, Muto, and McHale’s still nebulous vision, the show lacked a “solid direction.” This was further exacerbated by the fact that many of the people who were initially hired to work on the series did not understand Ward’s approach to animation or his deceptively simple aesthetic. “There weren’t that many people who could draw or write in [Ward’s] style,” McHale told me. “It seems very simple, and nowadays there are tons of shows that have a similar feel, but back then it was just hard to find the right crew.”

In other words, no one seemed to get it.

Noticing that the *Adventure Time* crew was struggling, Cartoon Network halted production, but instead of pulling the plug on the entire project, they decided to counterbalance the crew’s relative inexperience by hiring people with seasoned animation acumen. Chief among these individuals were Merriwether Williams and Derek Drymon, both of whom had previously worked on the hit Nickelodeon series *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Williams was stationed in the *Adventure Time* writers’ room and helped Ward and his nascent production crew successfully break episode scripts. Drymon, meanwhile was hired on as an executive producers and eventually became something of a creative intermediary, “tell[ing] the network what they needed to hear,” while also communicating to the production crew “what [Cartoon Network] was trying to say.” Thanks in large part to Drymon’s mediation, Ward and the writers recognized that Cartoon Network was effectively wanting a goofy sitcom when all this time they had been “trying to write a weird action/comedy.” Now that the goal was much clearer, production for *Adventure Time* started to stabilize.
This stabilization continued once artists were brought on who actively understood what Ward, Muto, and McHale were looking for. One of these artists was Dan “Ghostshrimp” Bandit, an alumnus of Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute who became the show’s lead background designer. Hailing from New England, Ghostshrimp had previously freelanced long-distance as a storyboard artist on Flapjack before moving to the greater Los Angeles area in 2008 to work in-studio for Cartoon Network. However, six months later, he was let go from Flapjack when a creative conflict arose between him and his then-storyboarding partner Mike Roth. The day after his termination, Ward and McHale met with Ghostshrimp and asked him if he was interested in becoming the lead background designer for their fledgling show; Ghostshrimp was touched, later declaring in a 2018 podcast: “I’ll never forget that moment where Pen told me, ‘I want Adventure Time to take place in a Ghostshrimp world.’” Once Ghostshrimp accepted the job, Ward and his team gave him relative free rein to design the Adventure Time universe as he saw fit.

Evocative of both the offbeat architecture of Dr. Seuss and the patterned complexity of M. C. Escher, Ghostshrimp’s backgrounds are off-kilter in a delightfully kooky way. Always looking to hide a joke or a piece of lore in even the simplest of backgrounds, Ghostshrimp often added strange bits of detritus—such as busted cars, oddly-placed skeletons, wrecked spaceships, and deteriorating fantasy ruins—into his pieces, which heavily suggested that there was more to the land of Ooo than meets the eye; these hidden artifacts quickly became a defining feature of the show, and helped shift the setting from “generic fantasy land” to “post-apocalyptic ruinscape.” While Ghostshrimp eventually left the show as a full-time member of the production team during its fourth season, he inarguably left his mark on Adventure Time, and all subsequent background designers worked hard to evoke his unique style—a turn of events that Ghostshrimp later called “just crazy.”

Another artist who was crucial in getting Adventure Time off the ground was Phil Rynda. A graduate of the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in Manhattan, Rynda is a gifted character designer who can jump from art style to art style without missing a beat. Rynda had initially applied to be a storyboard artist on Adventure Time, but failed the test, largely due to his self-admitted inexperience. He then applied for a job as a character designer, but due to a misunderstanding about what Ward and the producers were looking for, he failed that test, too. However, the show’s director, Larry Leichliter, knew of Rynda’s artistic prowess and was determined to find him a position on the show.

Leichliter eventually decided to conduct what was effectively a surprise design test by approaching Rynda with two drawings: one that Adam Muto had designed which was very “precise,” and one that Ward had made that “looked like he drew it with a crayon.” Leichliter then asked Rynda to draft-
up turn-around models\textsuperscript{43} for both drawings. Rynda initially thought about synthesizing the disparate art styles into one that combined the key aesthetics of both drawings, but instead he decided to do the turn-arounds each in their original style. Leichliter then took these turn-arounds and showed them to Ward, who was flabbergasted at how flexible Rynda was in terms of matching drawing styles, changed course and hired Rynda as the show’s lead character designer.\textsuperscript{44}

Rynda’s impact on the look of the show was immense, as it was he who fused the aesthetic of Ward with what he described as a “modern take on what the [Max] Fleischer studios were doing in the 30’s,” resulting in many of the show’s iconic character designs.\textsuperscript{35}

Other crew members who were hired around this time had been students at CalArts when Ward was going there, such as Casey James Basichis and Tim Kiefer (BFAs ’05), who were brought on as series composers; Niki Yang (BFA ’03), who was hired as a storyboard artist and voice actress; and Somvilay Xayaphone (BFA ’05), who became a revisionist—the latter of whom had previously worked alongside Ward on The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack. Other Flapjack alumni who eventually joined Ward’s new crew included Thuroup van Orman (who served as an advisor to Ward during the first few seasons of Adventure Time), Kent Osborne, and Cole Sanchez.

Prior to working at Cartoon Network, Osborne had made a name for himself by serving as a writer and storyboard director on SpongeBob SquarePants during the latter part of its golden age (c. 2002–05)—a job which garnered him two Emmy Award nominations.\textsuperscript{46} In 2008, when Adventure Time entered into production, Osborne was working as a story editor on Flapjack—a job that he enjoyed but was also growing weary with. After seeing the sort of stories and art that Ward et al. were producing, Osborne began yearning to join the Adventure Time crew. This yearning created quite the predicament, for while Osborne wanted to join Ward and his crew, he also did not want to slight van Orman by leaving Flapjack; while discussing this quandary in a podcast interview recorded for this book, Osborne recalled: “I remember, I went down to Pen’s office [and said], ‘I really want to work on Adventure Time, but I’m on Flapjack! I feel like I’m dating a girl, but I want to date another girl!’” Osborne ultimately decided that his best course of action was to be upfront and “respectful,” and so, during the production of Flapjack’s second season that, he told van Orman that, were the show to be renewed for a third season, he would not be returning as story editor. Soon thereafter, Derek Drymon asked Osborne if he was interested in job as a storyboard artist for Adventure Time—an offer which Osborne accepted.\textsuperscript{48}

Sanchez, on the other hand, was a bit newer to the world of animation; having graduated from CalArts in 2009, he had cut his teeth storyboarding for Flapjack.\textsuperscript{49} At a Comic-Con Paris 2016 presentation, Sanchez explained
the rather nonchalant way he landed a job on the *Adventure Time* crew: “*Adventure Time* was just on the floor below Flapjack [at Cartoon Network studios, and once the latter show ended production] I walked downstairs and I knocked on Pen’s door and I was like, ‘Pen, can I come work on your show?’ and so he said, ‘Yeah, come on over!’” Sanchez was subsequently hired on as a storyboard artist, a position he held until season six. Over the course of their many seasons working on the show, Osborne and Sanchez would earn reputations as among the show’s funniest writers, and coincidentally, by the latter part of the show’s production, both artists would also find themselves in lead and directorial roles. (Osborne was promoted to both head of story as well as lead voice director after a few seasons, and Sanchez worked concurrently as a storyboard artist and creative director during seasons two and three before being hired on as a supervising director during the show’s eighth season.)

When it came time to fill out the rest of his crew, Ward reached out to young artists, experimental comic book writers, or underground illustrators whose art he found entertaining. As colorist and art director Sandra Lee put it, “[Pen] was looking for *artists* [who were] not bound by the rules of animation.” While this approach led to the hiring of many individuals who had limited experience in the world of professional animation, a number of them—like Rebecca Sugar, Tom Herpich, and Natasha Allegri—nevertheless shared Ward’s wide-eyed excitement for the medium of animation.

Soon, everything was coming together: a unified creative direction—inspired heavily by dungeon-crawling video games and *Dungeons and Dragons*—was decided upon, a consistent art style had been nailed down, storyboards were being approved, and a voice cast had been assembled. By the spring of 2010, the first episodes had been animated and were ready for airing.

**Adventure Time** **Hits the Small Screen**

*Adventure Time* was unique in that during the production of the first season—prior to the airing of any episode—a proto-fan base (composed mostly of those animation enthusiasts who had so eagerly embraced the pilot) began to form; these fans began to excitedly chat about the upcoming series on a number of Internet fora, which in turn spread news about the show. Interest in *Adventure Time* was also piqued by Frederator’s ingenious choice to upload production art like character designs and backgrounds onto its website so readers could get a “sneak peek” of what was to come. This small fan base began to grow more rapidly after Cartoon Network “previewed” the episodes “Business Time” and “Evicted!” on March 11 and 18.

*Adventure Time* officially debuted on April 5, 2010 with the back-to-back episodes “Slumber Party Panic” and “Trouble in Lumpy Space.” In the former, Finn and Princess Bubblegum accidentally unleash a group of candy
Part II—Behind the Easel

zombies onto Ooo; in the latter, the audience is introduced to a character destined to be a fan-favorite, Lumpy Space Princess, after she accidentally infects Jake with a disease known as “The Lumps.” Most television critics wrote positively of these episodes, such as the eminent *Los Angeles Times* writer Robert Lloyd, who applauded the show’s “fantastical” setting, its “strange, somewhat disturbing characters,” and its screwball dialogue—the latter of which he described as “at once so childish, so pulpy, so polite.”

But while the show had been a critical darling, had it also been a ratings success? By the morning of April 6, the nervous executives at Cartoon Network had received their answer: *Adventure Time* was a certified hit. Seen by 2.5 million viewers, both episodes helped propel the network into the number one place for the night and also saw a drastic increase in viewers for the channel across the board when compared to the same day the previous year. Delighted by the success, the network’s executives did not think twice about officially renewing the series for a second season.

*Adventure Time*’s first season ran from April 5 to September 27 of 2010. Initially, new episodes were aired in pairs (as was traditionally the case for 11-minute cartoons), but about a third of the way through the season, Cartoon Network decided to air only a single episode each week. This not only reduced the gap between seasons, but it also put less pressure on the production crew to crank out new episodes.

The show’s first season is for many quite enjoyable, and the season’s best episodes—like the jam-packed “The Enchiridion!,” the zany “Dungeon,” and the surprisingly touching “My Two Favorite People”—radiate with a youthful *joie de vivre*. At the same time, the season is not fully indicative of what the show would eventually mature into. For one thing, many of the episodes follow predictable story beats. This problem is compounded by the thin characterization of the show’s supporting characters, like Princess Bubblegum, Ice King, or Marceline, who initially function as little more than one-dimensional plot generators. This is not to say that these characters are poorly written, just that their strongest episodes are not to be found in the first season. With all this said, the season is perhaps the show’s funniest, and its style of humor clearly reflects the writers’ playful approach to life.

**New Faces: Season 2**

As Ward and his crew began production of season two in late 2009, it was a time of change. For one thing, a fresh slate of storyline writers (including Steve Little, Mark Banker, and Thurop van Orman) entered the writers’ room and began to collaborate directly with Pen Ward to produce episode scripts. New artists, too, such as Andy Ristaino were joining the show’s
“Come Along with Me”

design crew and helping to refine the look of Ooo. And while some folks were joining, others were leaving: Derek Drymon, for instance, left the show following the completion of its first season, and in a move that presaged his eventual departure from the series, Patrick McHale began sharing his workload as creative director with storyboard artist Cole Sanchez.

**An Influx of Talent**

Only a few storyboard artists from the first season were retained—namely Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Cole Sanchez—and the vast majority either left the show, were let go, or in the unique case of Bert Youn, were conscripted into the South Korean military. This exodus of storyboard artists necessitated that Ward search for their replacements—a search that resulted in the hiring of five new artists whose creative voices would in many ways come to shape the very nature of *Adventure Time* itself: Rebecca Sugar, Tom Herpich, Ako Castuera, Jesse Moynihan, and Somvilay Xayaphone.

In the animation world, Rebecca Sugar, has become something of a household name. The lauded creator of the smash hit Cartoon Network series *Steven Universe*, Sugar got her start working as a storyboard artist on *Adventure Time*. However, long before she had fully dreamed up the Crystal Gems, she was making independent comics and directing her own independent films at SVA. According to *Animation* magazine:

> [Sugar’s] first big break came when SVA alum and *Adventure Time* designer Phil Rynda came to the school for a panel on finding work in the industry. [According to Sugar] “I came up to give him some of my comics after his panel, and he was like, ‘Oh, we have to get a picture!’ I was like, what? And I keep standing next to him for this picture ... Then I realized he meant a picture of the panel, and I was standing in front of them! I kind of just dropped all my stuff and ran out, it was mortifying.”

While the experience may have embarrassed Sugar, it did not seem to faze Rynda, and soon thereafter, he recommended that the *Adventure Time* producers hire her. Sugar was subsequently given an art test, which she “aced,” and then brought on as a revisionist during the first season of *Adventure Time*, tasked with cleaning up storyboard panels. Sugar was only in this position for a scant month before Pen Ward promoted her to a full storyboard artist, partnering her up with his good friend, Adam Muto. The Sugar-Muto storyboard partnership was perhaps one of the show’s most fruitful pairings, and during the two seasons that they worked together, the duo produced a number of enjoyable episodes, ranging from the plain
silly ("Power Animal," "The Chamber of Frozen Blades") to the emotionally- or thematically-complex ("Mortal Folly," "Fionna and Cake," "What Was Missing"). Indicative of their natural fit as storyboarding partners is the fact that the first episode that they co-storyboarded, “It Came from the Nightosphere,” was later nominated for an Emmy for “Outstanding Short-Format Animated Program.”

While Sugar is a gifted storyboard artist—capable of striking a deft balance between emotional honesty and the silliest of humor—she also has talent as a songwriter. When she was a young adult, Sugar enjoyed writing music, but she only felt comfortable sharing creations with her closest friends. When she landed her job on Adventure Time, Pendleton Ward encouraged her musical dabblings, which eventually led to her composing the “Fry Song” sung by Marceline the Vampire Queen in the second-season premiere “It Came from the Nightosphere.” After the episode aired, fans and critics alike praised the song for its emotional honesty; this surprise success encouraged Sugar to pen a number of songs during her tenure as a storyboard artist, including “I’m Just Your Problem” (a song from the episode “What was Missing” that first hinted at Marceline and Bubblegum’s romantic feelings for one another), “Remember You” (a duet sung by Marceline and Ice King from the episode “I Remember You,” in which the audience first learns of their tragic history) and “Bacon Pancakes” (a goofy, twelve-second ditty from “Burning Low” that has been hailed as something of a *chef-d’œuvre* by many Adventure Time fans). It was likely Sugar’s music-writing abilities combined with her inarguable storyboarding prowess that led Forbes magazine to highlight her in their annual “30 under 30” piece in 2012, which praised her as the writer of “many of the best episodes” of Adventure Time.

Much like Sugar, Tom Herpich too was an SVA graduate and indie comic-maker before coming to work on the show during its first season on the behest of Phil Rynda. However, unlike other storyboard artists, Herpich got his start not as a revisionist but rather as a character and prop designer, who had been tasked with designing everything from lightning bolts to sample character outfits. Looking back at this time, Herpich noted, “I had so many ideas and so much energy, the design position couldn’t contain it all. (I’m sure I was really annoying at the time—I had opinions about every aspect of the show and stuck my nose into everyone’s business—I didn’t have much experience with working on a team.)” Pendleton Ward, however, recognized Herpich’s boundless vigor, and when the show began production on its second season, he asked Herpich if he would be interested in a job as a storyboard artist. “Pen suggested storyboarding might be a good fit for me,” Herpich told me via email, “and Pen was right: storyboarding turned out to be a really great, really fulfilling fit.”
If Rebecca Sugar’s strength lay in her expert use of music and emotion, then Tom Herpich’s strength lay in his masterful use of dialogue. Indeed, many of Herpich’s episodes come across as A Clockwork Orange-lite in their imaginative use of fictional, idiomatic language: for instance, it was Herpich who developed the memorably nonsensical line “This stink-ups mega bam-bam to the J-stop” (translation: “This stinks!”), as well as the slang adjective “bloobalooby” (equivalent to “awesome”), among many others. Herpich relished any chance he got to create new slang terms (in fact, he once noted in an interview, “I have the most fun when I get to play around with language, and write weird abstract poetry stuff”), and his unique use of language eventually led to many of his crewmates calling him the undisputed master of Adventure Time’s wacky vernacular. Herpich also gained a reputation for storyboards that dabbled in what one might call “pensive philosophy.” These often took the form of “allegorical escape stor[ies]” with the epitome being season seven’s masterpiece “The Hall of Egress,” which sees Finn having to escape from the titular dungeon by trusting in his mind rather than his physical senses. Herpich would go on to be one of the show’s most-lauded storyboard artists, and by the time the series finale aired in late 2018, his work on Adventure Time had earned him two Emmy awards (among a total of seven nominations).

During season two and parts of season three, Herpich was paired up with Ako Castuera, who hailed from the Golden State and was a graduate of the California College of the Arts (CCA). Castuera came to work on the show quite fortuitously, explaining to me in a 2016 interview: “I made a comic and [the animation producer and voice actress Jackie Buscarino] passed it along to Pen, who subsequently asked me to submit a storyboard test. I was hired as a revisionist at the beginning of season one, and was promoted to writer/storyboard artist at the end of that season.” Castuera’s episodes often emphasized, to quote her long-serving storyboard partner Jesse Moynihan, the “physical and tactile. She likes to do a lot more visual jokes—especially with Jake—and she likes to manipulate/mutate environments.” This fascination with physical action or states of materiality was likely due to her interest in sculpting; indeed, aside from her work on Adventure Time, Castuera is perhaps best known for her quasi-abstract clay sculptures depicting fantastical animals and humanoid figures.

During her time working with Tom Herpich, Castuera co-storyboarded several memorable episodes, such as “The Other Tarts,” “Guardians of the Sunshine,” “Go with Me,” and “Memory of a Memory.” Ironically, while the two artists were and remain close friends, and the episodes that they made were often strong, their “dynamic as partners wasn’t ideal,” to quote Castuera herself. In an interview with the background designer Ghostshrimp, she elaborated further by saying: “Tom and I … we just are on opposite ends
of everything”; Castuera specifically cited their divergent approaches to the creative process and their differing work ethic as being the main reasons why they struggled to gel as a pair. Consequently, in the middle of season three, Herpich began to storyboard with Bert Youn, and Castuera began working with Jesse Moynihan—a partnership that would go on to be quite fruitful.

Moynihan (unlike Sugar, Castuera, or Herpich) was completely new to the series when he joined the production crew at the beginning of season two. And unlike the aforementioned artists, Moynihan did not have a professional art degree, having studied at the Pratt Institute for a year before transferring to and earning a film degree from Philadelphia’s Temple University. Moynihan, however, was well-known in indie comic circles for his unique sensibilities, and he had initially came onto Ward’s radar after the two met at a comic convention. Ward was drawn to Moynihan’s aesthetic, and subsequently hired him on as a storyboard revisionist for the show’s second season. On the strength of his work, Moynihan was soon promoted to full storyboard artist and partnered with season one veteran and then-co-art director Cole Sanchez (whom Moynihan credits with “show[ing] [him] the ropes” during this time). While Moynihan’s first episode, “Crystals Have Power,” received a mixed reaction among fans and critics due to its heavy use of off-model design, Moynihan would soon work on several season two classics, such as the Orphean “Death in Bloom” and the down-right terrifying “Mortal Recoil.”

Prior to his joining the Adventure Time crew, Moynihan had long been interested in religion and spiritualism (as perhaps best evidenced by his webcomic Forming, which attempts to present a syncretic account of many of the world’s disparate religious traditions). Consequently, he brought these interests along with him when he was promoted to storyboard artist, liberally sprinkling esoterica and “symbols ... that have deep ancient meaning” throughout many of his greatest episodes. This fixation with the mystical led Moynihan to help develop elements of Ooo’s afterlife and the mythology of the catalyst comets, among other topics. While a group of detractors online sometimes maligned his work for being “2deep4u,” a vast majority of the fandom praised Moynihan as one of the show’s strongest artistic voices. Television critics, too, often found his episodes to have a certain depth and philosophical richness that made unpacking and analyzing them a treat.

The final storyboard artist hired during this period is something of an enigma: Somvilay “Somvi” Xayaphone. A CalArts classmate of Pen Ward and Patrick McHale (both of whom cite him as a direct influence), Xayaphone initially served as a storyboard revisionist during the show’s first season before he was partnered with Kent Osborne for seasons two and three. More so than perhaps anyone else on the show, his style is eccentric and hard to define; avant-garde may be the best descriptor. Xayaphone finds humor in
what one might call “awkwardness”: his storyboards often feature purposely stilted poses, strange pacing, and bizarre facial expressions. Xayaphone also has a deep fascination with sound, and many of his episodes dabble in this interest to some degree, whether it be noise music (“Dream of Love”), sound effects (“James Baxter the Horse”) or beatnik poetry (“The Empress Eyes”). Due to these peculiarities, he often polarized audiences, some of whom loved his decidedly offbeat style, whereas others lambasted him for being weird for weirdness’s sake.

It is important to note that of the five storyboard artists just discussed, only Xayaphone and Herpich remained storyboard artists until the show’s end, meaning that in many ways their personal styles and distinct artistic voices became thoroughly infused into the very DNA of the show—more so than perhaps any other artists aside from Ward, McHale, and Muto.

Season two of *Adventure Time* debuted on October 11, 2010 with “It Came from the Nightosphere.” The season wrapped up a little over half a year later on May 9, 2011 with “Heat Signature.”

*Adventure Time*’s second season, while similar to the show’s first in regard to humor and pacing, shows evidence of subtle stylistic evolution. Many episodes still focus on wacky plots and emphasize adventurous action sequences (such as “Death in Bloom,” in which Finn and Jake travel to the spooky “Land of the Dead”; or “The Eyes,” in which our heroic duo tries to stop a creepy horse from staring at them), but there is often a greater focus on the characters themselves rather than the unique situations in which they wind up.

This slight but important change in direction is perhaps best illustrated by “It Came from the Nightosphere,” an absolute gem of an episode storyboarded by Rebecca Sugar and Adam Muto. While much of this episode focuses on Finn and Marceline’s humorous escapades as they try to stop the latter’s demon dad from terrorizing Ooo, the real heart of the story is founded upon the complicated relationship between Marceline and her absentee father. The end result is a deeply emotional episode, with touches of both juvenile humor and Lovecraft-meets-Cronenberg-style horror for good measure.

This stylistic evolution continued with the season’s two-part finale *de jure*, “Mortal Folly”/“Mortal Recoil,” which introduced one of the show’s main villains, the Lich, and by extension the concept of continuity. Prior to the finale, most *Adventure Time* episodes had effectively existed in their own self-contained universes. This tendency to “reset” at the start of each episode also fit with the “wacky” style of the early show. But soon, the writers started to flesh-out the in-universe histories of the show’s main characters—a move which coincided with their increasing desire to tell stories that could
not be fit into a pithy 11 minutes. These two factors soon led to backstory episodes and multi-episode storyarcs that by their very nature necessitated a consistent sense of continuity. Arguably, it was this key development that would eventually usher in the show’s “Golden Age” and transmute it from a fun kid’s show into one of the great television programs of the twenty-first century.

**Continued Evolution: Season 3**

In late 2010 (roughly around the time that season two debuted on televisions across the country), Cartoon Network renewed *Adventure Time* for a third season. In a press release sent out a few months later, the network boasted that the show consistently “ranked #1 in its timeslots on all of television—broadcast and cable—among kids and boys [aged] 2-11, 6-11, and 9-14.” While the network was waxing poetic about their pet program, the writers and producers of *Adventure Time* were hard at work ensuring that the show’s third season would build off the success of what had come before it.

If season two of *Adventure Time* was the first to really hint at a larger, more consistent world in which the characters lived, then season three was the first that began to actively construct the history of that world. The show’s writers and storyboard artists accomplished this by focusing on the often-mysterious backstories of the show’s various characters. The first to receive this treatment was Marceline; in the season’s three episode, “Memory of a Memory,” the audience learns that sometime when she was a little child, Marceline had lived through the Mushroom War—a mysterious nuclear cataclysm that had ravaged modern society, unleashed magic back upon the world, and drove humanity to the brink of extinction. Additional season-three episodes like “What Was Missing” and “Marceline’s Closet” would continue to provide bits and pieces about Marceline’s past, specifically regarding her relationships with other characters, like Princess Bubblegum.

The next major character whose backstory the show began to tease out was Ice King, with much of this development occurring over the course of the two-part Christmas special “Holly Jolly Secrets.” At the start of the episode, Finn and Jake discover old VHS tapes long ago disposed of by the Ice King, which they soon learn contain the personal home movies of their oddball foe. As Finn and Jake watch tape after tape, they come to slowly piece together the Ice King’s backstory: their nemesis was once an ordinary human antiquarian named Simon Petrikov who was cursed one thousand years prior to the start of the series after placing the ice crown upon his head. The decision to give the Ice King a tragic backstory was a masterstroke, as it not only provided depth to
a formerly one-note villain but it quickly expanded upon the show’s budding mythology in a way that felt organic, instead of forced.

The third season of Adventure Time premiered on July 11, 2011 with “Conquest of Cuteness,” and concluded later the following year on February 13, 2012 with “Incendium” (the latter of which introduced a new main character: Flame Princess, the irascible heir-apparent to the Fire Kingdom, voiced by Jessica DiCicco).

Adventure Time’s third season is often seen as something of a turning point—the moment the show began to actively eschew the over-the-top wackiness of its first two seasons in favor of a “deeper” approach to its storytelling. Much of this shift can arguably be attributed to the trials which had plagued previous seasons giving way, resulting in the network taking a less hands-on approach to the show. This, in turn, led the storyboard artists to both individually and collectively “find their grooves,” so to speak. In a podcast interview recorded for this book, storyboard artist Kent Osborne noted:

[During] season three, I remember, we had a meeting; it was [Kelly Crews, Pendleton Ward, Patrick McHale] and me, and we were talking about the writer’s room. And they were like ... “The execs ... are just now starting to leave us alone.” ... There was a sense that we were on the air, [Adventure Time] was doing well, [and the network executives] were kind of like, “OK you guys are off and running.” We had one executive who was keeping an eye on us, but there wasn’t the sort of close-up chaperoning that was going on in seasons one and two ... That’s when ... we were hitting our stride. ... Everyone was trying to outdo each other.95

Suffice it to say, this sort of friendly competition yielded several standouts, such as “Thank You” (a sweet, eccentric episode about overcoming differences, storyboarded by Tom Herpich), “Fionna and Cake” (Rebecca Sugar and Adam Muto’s delightful ode to and lampooning of fanfiction), “What Was Missing” (another Sugar-Muto episode, which introduced the world to the “Bubbline” ship), and “Holly Jolly Secrets” (perhaps one of the show’s most important mythology episodes, storyboarded by Kent Osborne and Somvilay Xayaphone).

Another strength of the season is its creative and tonal equipoise. Perhaps it was Tom Herpich who, on the DVD commentary for the season opener “Conquest of Cuteness,” expressed this sentiment most clearly when he argued: “[Season three] is actually ... the most balanced season, where ... there
was a novelty and an ambition still, but we were sort of figuring out ... how
to say what we want[ed] to say and make it work. So, there’s a nice mix ... of
youthful energy and professional chops.” The sort of balance about which
Herpich speaks is readily apparent upon rewatch: With season three, episodes
no longer drastically vary from one another in terms of tone, as most do a solid
job balancing goofy set pieces with increasingly nuanced storylines. The end
result is a season that, as an aggregate, is more consistent than its predecessors.

**Fighting the “Fourth Season Blues”: Season 4**

In April 2011, *Adventure Time* began production of its fourth season in
early 2011, which, being set to comprise 26 episodes, would include the 100th
installment of Finn and Jake’s adventures.

100 episodes is quite the achievement for any show, and the show’s pro-
ducers were rightfully proud of their creation. But around this time, a worry
began to sneak into the back of their minds: what if the show succumbed to “seasonal rot”—that is, the general decline in quality of a long-running
television series. A main reason for this worry was the fact that some of
the story ideas that the writers were whipping up were too reminiscent of past episodes. In an oft-quoted interview with io9, Ward admitted that
this realization forced him and his writing staff to “dig a little deeper [when
writing stories for season four] ... Not to say that anything’s unoriginal—
everything’s still coming out super weird and interesting—but it just gets
a little harder.” Ward and his writers referred to this trial as surmounting
the “season four blues.” Years later on his personal website, storyboard
artist Jesse Moynihan would poetically address this problem, using language
reminiscent of Ward’s: “All the ideas I had in the beginning [of my time on
*Adventure Time*] were right there on the surface of the well water. It was
pretty easy to scoop up. Once that material was gone though, I felt obliged
to dip further down, essentially holding my breath for longer and longer
stretches of time.”

One way that the writers managed to “dip further down” was by creating
and fleshing-out new characters. Epitomic of this was the show’s interest
in exploring the recently-introduced Flame Princess. While upon her debut
in the third-season finale “Incendium” the character was a relative cipher,
during season four the writers quickly developed a unique personality for
her. Over the course of several episodes—including the season-four premiere
“Hot to the Touch,” as well as “Burning Low,” and “Incendium”—Flame
Princess went from just being Finn’s love interest to a vibrant character with
her own unique skills, challenges, and worries.
In addition to working with new characters, the show’s writers also took a note from *The Simpsons* by writing stories that starred not just Finn or Jake, but also some of the minor denizens of Ooo, many of whom had become fan favorites, like Lemongrab or Magic Man. As with the decision to explore the backstories of main characters in season three, this decision to flesh out the show’s background characters allowed the writers to better create a richly-layered world that in many ways felt real and “lived in.”

The writers also fought seasonal rot by “experimenting with more types of storytelling.” Season four, for instance, saw the debut of the “Graybles” episodes, which are made up of four to five seemingly disparate vignettes that are all united by a common theme.) Other writers overcame stagnation by reconsidering the very way they told stories. According to Moynihan, it was during this season that “the idea that we had to explain everything a character was going through started to become less emphasized in the pitch meetings,” which resulted in the show’s storyboard artists moving away from the “narrative handholding that embodies not only kid’s television, but almost all television.” At first, this movement away from simple, safe storytelling was subtle, with some scenes, for instance, dialing back expository dialogue or trying to show more than tell. Other episodes bucked tradition wildly, such as “BMO Noire,” “King Worm,” and “The Lich,” which each feature heady dream sequences and premonitory “visions” that are not that easily grasped by adults, let alone children.

Season four saw not only a shift in focus and style, but also a few production crew shuffles. Perhaps most notably, Adam Muto left his position as a regular storyboard artist and became one of the show’s creative directors, serving alongside former storyboard supervisor Nate Cash; this double-promotion allowed Pendleton Ward to scale back his involvement in the day-to-day operations of the show and instead focus mostly on “put[ting] notes on things [and] chop[ping] down episodes.” Meanwhile, Muto’s old storyboard partner Rebecca Sugar was teamed up with comedy-master Cole Sanchez, who returned to storyboarding after spending the last few seasons as a creative director. Likewise, Bert Youn was partnered up with Somvilay Xayaphone, and Tom Herpich was paired with Skyler Page, who had just earned his degree from CalArts and would eventually go on to create the Cartoon Network series *Clarence*.

It seems likely that this substantial reconfiguration of the production hierarchy and storyboard pairings shook things up and contributed to the season having a strong and distinct “feel” to it.
Adventure Time’s fourth season debuted on April 2, 2012 with “Hot to the Touch,” and concluded a little over six months later on October 22 of that year with “The Lich.”

Upon its initial run, season four was warmly received by the fandom, and today, in discussions of the show’s best season, many fans still consider the fourth one of the show’s strongest. The reasons for this praise are varied, but surely one factor is that with this season, the show began to focus on its many secondary characters. In the black-and-white, hardboiled parody “BMO Noire,” for instance, the titular robot—who usually plays second banana to Finn and Jake—takes center stage and shines; likewise, in “You Made Me!” Lemongrab (last season in season three’s “Too Young”) returns and is at least somewhat rehabilitated, transforming from shrill villain to misunderstood weirdo. Even one-off characters as inconsequential as NEPTR (the robotic sad-sack last seen in season one’s “What Is Life?”), and Ricardio (Ice King’s sentient heart, who served as the main antagonist in the eponymous first-season episode) are brought back and given something productive to do in the episodes “Hot to the Touch” and “Lady & Peebles,” respectively.

Season four also continues the show’s interest in world-building, demonstrating that there is much more to Ooo than meets the eye. Consider, for instance, “Sons of Mars,” in which Finn and Jake get roped up into one of Magic Man’s nefarious schemes, which results in their being teleported to Mars of all places. This may sound like your standard cartoon goofiness, but “Sons of Mars” is actually one of the show’s most ambitious episodes when it comes to world-building: Not only does it give Magic Man a backstory that fits nicely into the overarching mythos of the show itself, but it also introduces several characters of cosmological importance, such as the oft-mentioned—but-never-before-seen Glob, as well as the all-powerful King of Mars himself (who is none other than Abraham Lincoln). Another fine example of this sort of world-building comes to us in the season finale, “The Lich,” which brings back the titular villain and gives him an explicit purpose: to steal the Enchiridion and travel to the center of the multi-dimensional Oooniverse. While much of this episode takes on the form of a “gotta catch ‘em all”-style MacGuffin hunt, it ends on one monster of a cliff-hanger that sees the main characters zapped to a different reality, in a way fulfilling the show’s promise that “we’re going to very distant lands.”

But more than anything else, this season’s secret weapon is its masterful use of emotion to add depth and complexity to the show’s characters. This is readily apparent in episodes like “Hot to the Touch” and “Burning Low” (which detail Finn experiences with the strange and sometimes painful feelings that teenage romance often gives rise to), or “Princess Cookie” (in which Jake is moved to action by the plight of a candy kingdom criminal, whose only desire in life is to become a princess), but is perhaps most ap-
parent in the season’s penultimate “I Remember You.” In this heart-tugger of an episode, it is revealed that one thousand years prior to the events of the series, in the direct aftermath of the cataclysmic Mushroom War, the Ice King served as a surrogate father to a young Marceline until his magical crown drove him completely crazy. When the episode debuted, most Adventure Time fans (the author included) were completely blindsided by the episode’s devastating sadness, and because of its effective use of pathos, many critics argue that it is not only one of the best episodes of the show, but of modern cartoons in general.

### Peak Popularity: Season 5

In late-winter and early-spring of 2012, the producers, writers, and storyboard artists for Adventure Time began working on the show’s fifth season. At first, those behind the easel were under the impression that Cartoon Network was interested in 26 new episodes—the same number of episodes that had comprised each of the show’s four previous seasons. However, according to lead writer Kent Osborne, “A few weeks into the [production of] season [five, Cartoon Network] let us know that [they] were extending the fifth season to make it twice as long.” The end result was a behemoth of a season comprising 52 episodes.

Once again charged with the arduous task of writing new episodes, the writers first attempted to build off that which had been successful in the past in a way that still felt innovative and original. This resulted in the writing and storyboard of a second Fionna and Cake episode entitled “Bad Little Boy” (which focuses on Marceline’s male counterpart, Marshall Lee), two new Graybles episodes, and a follow-up to the season-four classic “I Remember You” entitled “Simon & Marcy” (which builds upon the familial link between Marceline and the Ice King while also expounding upon the show’s intriguing post-apocalyptic mythology). But to keep things fresh, the show also began to experiment by shaking up the show’s status quo. Jake and Lady Rainicorn, for instance, were given children near the start of the season, and Finn’s understanding of teen romance was fleshed out in episodes like “All the Little People” and “Vault of Bones.” On the production side of things, guest artists like James Baxter, Graham Falk, and David OReilly were brought in to put their own unique spin on select episodes, inaugurating a tradition that would last until the show’s end.

### Hello Wolfhard, Farewell Sugar

It was during the early part of season five that the show also began to feature the regularstoryboarding of artist Steve Wolfhard. Born and raised
in Canada, Wolfhard had learned the art of animation while attending Sheridan College’s prestigious animation program. When he started working on *Adventure Time* during its third season, he originally served as a storyboard revisionist, and because this job mostly involved cleaning-up panels, he worked remotely from Canada. Then, near the end of 2011, series creator Pendleton Ward offered Wolfhard a job as a permanent storyboard artist, an offer which Wolfhard initially rejected before reconsidering. He and his wife Leslie (who would later write several songs for the series) subsequently moved to Los Angeles near the middle of 2012, where he was partnered with Tom Herpich. While Wolfhard and his wife eventually moved back to Ontario during the production of season six, he would remain on as a storyboard artist, working remotely with Herpich until the show’s end.

A talented Cintiq artist, Steve Wolfhard is known for his distinctive digital illustrations that usually combine uniform cel shading with thick, sometimes patchy line work. Wolfhard is also fond of designing cute, chubby characters that in many ways evoke the key features of Pendleton Ward’s original design aesthetic. But Wolfhard’s fondness for endearing characters often belies a fascination with the darkness that lies dormant in people’s psyches, and many of Wolfhard’s storyboards include some of the show’s bleaker jokes. During his tenure as an *Adventure Time* storyboard artist, Wolfhard worked almost exclusively with Tom Herpich, and together the two produced a number of highly lauded installments, including the Emmy-nominated episodes “Be More” and “Ring of Fire.”

In 2012, as the show’s producers and writers were welcoming Wolfhard to the rank of storyboard artist, they were also preparing to say goodbye to one of their own: Rebecca Sugar. About a year earlier, in 2011, Cartoon Network had solicited potential pilot ideas from several of their employees. Sugar was one of the artists approached, and she quickly began working on a cartoon proposal—inspired equally by her beloved brother Steven and her fondness for video games, musicals, and anime—about a young boy with special abilities who lives with a group of superpowered alien women. Sugar called her pet project *Steven Universe*. The executives at Cartoon Network were intrigued by Sugar’s creativity and eventually ordered a *Steven Universe* pilot before greenlighting it for full-series production. Within no time, Sugar had become the first woman to create a show on Cartoon Network.

But because she cared so much for Finn, Jake, and the many residents of Ooo, Sugar attempted to work as a storyboard artist for *Adventure Time* while also developing *Steven Universe*. Unfortunately, this arrangement was not viable in the long-term, and by the time Sugar was working on the second Fionna and Cake episode, “Bad Little Boy,” she realized that if she wanted to see *Steven Universe* achieve its full potential, she was going to have to step down from *Adventure Time*. The final *Adventure Time* episode that Sugar
worked on was the aforementioned “Simon and Marcy,” which received near-universal acclaim from television critics upon its airing. While many in the fandom lamented Sugar’s departure, most agree that she could not have chosen a better episode with which to end her tenure as an Adventure Time storyboard artist.

**The Abandoned Television Movie**

Near the middle of the production for season five, the writers and producers of Adventure Time decided to try something new: producing a 45 minute television movie—a decision which arguably presaged the show’s dabbling with the miniseries format several seasons later. At the time of its production, the movie was arguably the largest, most convoluted project that the Adventure Time writers and producers had yet undertaken, and it consequently required intense coordination and contributions from all the show’s regular storyboard artists.

The Adventure Time production crew sunk untold hours into this television movie, but unfortunately, the project was never actually finished. The collapse of the movie was largely due to its aforementioned scale and the trouble the various artists had in settling on a consistent tone; in a 2014 online post, the storyboard artist Jesse Moynihan confessed that the movie, when considered as a whole, “was a mess and needed so much work to get in shape. All the individual parts were really cool, but they weren’t hanging together right, and the end seemed impossible to figure out.”

Because the movie was canceled, not much is known about its exact plot structure, but thanks to comments made by a few of the show’s writers and producers (namely, Tom Herpich, Adam Muto, and Jesse Moynihan), we can nevertheless work out a rough outline: The movie was slated to begin with “Finn’s finger getting blown off in a battle, leading to him having a spiritual crisis and setting out alone to find the meaning of life.” During this spiritual journey, Finn “abandon[s] his bear hat [and] ends up beheading a Snake King ... [He then uses the snake’s head] as a hat for a while.” (After noticing that Finn had gone missing, Jake would “[set] out to find [his brother] by turning into a bus, and he and Tree Trunks and a bunch of candy people have a sort of road trip adventure.”) The movie would have ended with Finn “question[ing] everything about what it means to be a hero while climbing a mountain into space and having a confrontation with Orgalorg inside a weird cube portal to the many Dead Worlds.”

When the movie started to fall apart, the decision was made to push it back, with the hopes that Ward would be able to “put his magic on it ... and make it make sense.” Alas, this last-minute salvage effort was not enough to save the project. When production of season five wrapped and it became clear that the movie was not going to be made, elements of the four-parter
were subsequently repurposed for use during the show’s sixth season: Finn losing a body part featured heavily in the climax to “Escape from the Citadel,” Finn experiencing an existential crisis became a season-long storyarc, and Orgalorg emerging and becoming a major antagonist was repurposed for the season finale. Additionally, a sizable chunk of the movie’s first ten or so minutes was cannibalized to serve as the backbone for the episode “Something Big,” and the portion in which Jake and several others go on a road trip served as loose inspiration for the episode “Thanks for the Crabapples, Giuseppe!” Herpich also mentioned in the aforementioned email exchange that he had planned to recycle parts of his section—in which “Finn be[came] a servant to a crew of crash-landed aliens pretending to be Greek gods”—but unfortunately he “never found the time.”

By the time production for season six was over, almost all the good ideas had been strip-mined from the dead movie’s carcass, leaving the rest to be mothballed away deep in the archives of Cartoon Network.

**The Dawning of the Adam Muto Era**

In 2012, sometime midway through the production of season five, Pendleton Ward stepped down as series showrunner. In an interview with the music and pop culture magazine *Rolling Stone*, the auteur explained:

> Dealing with people every day wears on you ... To spend that extra energy and time you don’t have, to make something that’s worth making, to make it awesome, wears you out ... It’s a beast of a show. And the more popular it gets, the more the ancillary things—like the merchandise and games and everything—keep getting bigger. ... For me, having quality of life outweighed the need to control this project and make it great all the time.

While Ward never truly left the series (he remained on as a regular storyline writer until season seven, continued to occasionally storyboard for the show into its eighth, and retained informal “veto powers” until production wrapped in 2018), he completely relinquished his role as lead decision-maker. Such a high-profile departure might have kicked off a messy succession struggle in a lesser production, but thankfully the *Adventure Time* crew was spared a civil war when Ward’s position was quickly filled by the only man for the job: Adam Muto. Muto had been working on the show since the pilot episode, and at the time of Ward’s resignation, was a supervising director tasked with overseeing the day-to-day of episode production. Pensive, talented, and dedicated to his craft, Muto was considered by most to be Ward’s natural successor, and according to Kent Osborne, “Pen ... felt fine leaving because he knew Adam was taking [the show] over.”
Despite being friends and long-time creative associates, Muto and Ward favor divergent approaches to showrunning. In a podcast interview recorded for this book, Ghostshrimp expounded on these differences, telling me:

Pen was really good at putting the right people in place and then just letting them go wild. ... With Adam, he has much more of a very specific thing he is looking for, and he is going to ask you to make changes to that and he is going to try to get that out of you. ... In my opinion, [both Pendleton Ward and Adam Muto are] absolute creative heavyweights: [Ward] appreciate[s] what other people are bringing to the table, and [Muto] has a laser focus of what the end vision of something is. [Ward] allow[s] people to do their thing, and [Muto] demand[s] excellence from a group of people. Both things are equally captivating and motivating and I think both guys are equal in creative genius stature.

Osborne echoed these ideas later in the same interview when he told me that Ward usually made key decisions “in the moment,” whereas “there was a technical side to Adam.”

Given Ward’s more laissez faire approach to showrunning, a reader would be forgiven for assuming that the Adventure Time production crew had a hard time adjusting to their new boss. Instead, quite the opposite was true: Muto’s transition into his new role was relatively “smooth,” to quote Osborne, with the day-to-day operation of the show continued much as it had under Ward’s direction. But while Muto’s taking up the metaphorical scepter did not affect the show’s production, it almost certainly affected its tone, and during the latter part of season five, the show began to grow darker, with episodes focusing on heavy topics like loss (e.g., “James,” “Bad Timing”), the pains of teen romance...
(e.g., “Frost & Fire,” “Earth and Water,” “The Red Throne”), and the meaning of sacrifice (e.g., “Sky Witch,” “Betty”); other installments dabble freely in horror (“Red Starved,” “James”) or heady philosophy (“Lemonhope”).

It was roughly around the time of this tonal shift that two new artists rose to the rank of storyboard artist: Andy Ristaino and Seo Kim. Ristaino—an alumnus of Rhode Island School of Design who in the late oughts had made a name for himself in the indie comic scene—had gotten his start on the show during season two, when he was hired on as a character designer. Ristaino excelled in this position—it was his character designs, after all, that garnered the series its first Emmy award win in 2013—but he had long wanted to try his hand at storyboarding episodes. Needless to say, when a storyboarding slot opened up midway through season five, he jumped at the chance. Ristaino brought his talent to the storyboarding table, and during production of seasons five and six, he worked on several of the show’s most important mythology episodes alongside his partner, Cole Sanchez.

Ristaino would ultimately step down from being a storyboard artist at the end of season six, citing the grueling hours and the emotional exhaustion that came with the position. Ristaino nevertheless remained a part of the show’s production crew, working as both a background designer and storyboard revisionist. By the time the show’s final season aired, Ristaino had become the resident jack-of-all-trades.

Kim, on the other hand, was brand new to the show when she worked on her first episode. A native of Toronto, Canada, and an alumna of Sheridan College’s animation program, Kim had gotten her start as a caricaturist and Internet artist, Kim’s online work—noted for its loose, somewhat sketchy look recalling the aesthetic of colored pencils—impressed Adam Muto, who eventually asked her to contribute to the fifth-season episode “Earth & Water.” Kim was subsequently brought on as a permanent storyboard artist, working almost exclusively with Somvilay Xayaphone until the show’s end. While some of Kim and Xayaphone’s early episodes are hit-or-miss, by the time the show entered into the production of its last three or so seasons, they were one of the more consistently funny storyboarding partners.

Just prior to Ristaino and Kim joining the storyboard ranks, Patrick McHale departed as a storyline contributor, leaving the writers’ room one member short. To fill this void, Kent Osborne reached out to Jack Pendarvis, an instructor at the University of Mississippi who also happened to be one of Osborne’s favorite authors. In an interview, Pendarvis explained:

Kent asked me if I could help out in the writers’ room for a couple of weeks ... I didn’t realize that it was sort of an audition for a permanent position, so that was a nice surprise. They told me I was hired in such a laid-back manner that I didn’t realize
I had a job at first. The following Monday I got a lot of phone calls from Kent: “Where are you? You’re not in the meeting!” And it finally dawned on me that I had been hired.¹³⁶

Unlike many who landed a role in the Adventure Time production crew, Pendarvis was not an illustrator. He was, however, an accomplished writer, a well-read individual, and a die-hard fan of 20th century cinema—especially the work of comedian Jerry Lewis. Pendarvis would go on to contribute to the scripts for almost half of the show’s episodes, diffusing his distinct sensibilities far and wide.

Season five debuted on November 12, 2012 with the two-parter “Finn the Human”/ “Jake the Dog,” which was seen by a whopping 3.4 million viewers.¹³⁷ The season concluded on March 17, 2014 with “Billy’s Bucket List,” which drops the bombshell that Finn's biological father is still alive, trapped somewhere in the infinite cosmos.

Looking back, season five is something of a chimera, given that it is essentially two seasons fused into one. The season's first half (produced when Pendleton Ward was still showrunner and often called “season 5.1” by the fandom) is a mostly lighthearted romp that spends considerable time building off many of the gimmicks introduced in previous seasons, resulting in a second Fionna and Cake episode, and two new Grayble episodes. These “sequels” were mostly applauded by fans when season 5.1 debuted, but when considered in retrospect, they do give the impression that the season was playing it safe by retreading familiar ground.

On the topic of playing it safe, another weakness of season 5.1 that should be mentioned is its disinterest in overturning the show’s status; this is especially frustrating when considering episodes like the two-part premiere “Finn the Human”/“Jake the Dog” or the highly anticipated “Jake the Dad”—all of which promise big changes only for everything to go back to normal in the end.

It is important that a reader does not mistake these critiques for a condemnation; in fact, season 5.1 contains some of the show’s best episodes, such as the heart-wrenching “Simon & Marcy” and the buck wild “James Baxter the Horse” (featuring the eponymous guest animator). To be pithy, I suppose you could say that when season 5.1 is good, it is very good, but unfortunately, it often struggles to reach its full potential.

Conversely, the back half of the season (produced under the leadership of Adam Muto and often called “season 5.2”) does a much better job at telling multi-episode story arcs, spending considerable time on threads such as the fall of Lemongrab, Finn gaining a new grass sword, and—perhaps most im-
Part II—Behind the Easel

Importantly—the story of Finn and Flame Princess’s break up. But while many viewers applauded the show’s increasing interest in serialization and its accelerated interest in world-building (best exemplified in episodes like “The Vault,” “Betty,” and “Billy’s Bucket List”), others were unhappy that this shift coincided with the show adopting a more pessimistic attitude. Finn’s break up arc, in particular, generated fierce criticism from some in the fandom, who felt that it portrayed Finn not as a hero, but rather as a creepy jerk. (One could argue that these fan grumblings were portents of the coming civil war that season six would bring.)

But regardless of any shortcomings, it cannot be denied that season five was, overall, quite popular with most viewers, and it was in the span of the season’s sixteen-month run that the show blossomed from a cult classic to a legitimate cultural phenomenon. By early 2014, when time the season was nearing its end, episodes were regularly being watched by anywhere from 2–3 million viewers, publications like The A. V. Club and IndieWire were writing thoughtful odes to the show, attendees of comic conventions could be commonly spotted cosplaying as the show’s characters, and a balloon of Finn and Jake had even been added to the Macy’s Day Parade in the fall of 2013! Given this bevy of interest, most Adventure Time fans (myself included) now look back at this time with a sense of wistful nostalgia. Season five may not be a perfect season of television, but it did mark the apex of Adventure Time’s popularity.

The Age of Enlightenment: Season 6

In July 2013, production for the show’s sixth season began. When it came time to work on this new batch of episodes, the show’s producers and writers decided to try something completely new: a season long, multi-episode storyarc. This plot thread is established in the double-length sixth-season opener “Wake Up”/“Escape from the Citadel,” in which Finn meets his long-lost father, Martin. Initially, during the production of the fourth-season finale “The Lich,” there were plans to introduce Finn’s father as a majestic hero who had been unjustly trapped in a celestial prison. The idea had been excised from the storyboard at the last minute, but it soon found new life when it was repurposed for use in the sixth-season premiere. This time, however, the premise was turned on its head: Finn’s father would not be some great hero who had been unfairly locked away for a crime he did not commit, but rather an indifferent space criminal who likely deserved celestial punishment for whatever he might have done.

Although Finn learns that Martin is not the father that he had hoped for, in “Escape from the Citadel” he tries to bond with his dad nonetheless.
Alas, Martin wants nothing to do with his son, and quickly runs away. The emotional trauma of this turn of events is compounded when Finn dramatically loses his grass-cursed right arm in the closing minutes of the episode. Finn’s (re)abandonment and the loss of his arm would prove to be a major turning point for the show, and the fallout would reverberate throughout the season, drastically affecting its tone and sense of humor. This meant that while many episodes were still focused on the hijinks of Finn and Jake, others episodes eschewed overt humor in favor of quiet contemplation and sometimes outright seriousness. Epitomized of this shift are episodes like “The Tower” and “Breezy,” which explore heavy topics such as the insidious nature of depression and the pain of loss in an earnest way.

**Boundless Creativity**

With season six, *Adventure Time* arguably reached the apex of its aesthetic experimentation: Not only did the show begin to work on developing long-term story arcs, but it also began to freely toy around with different art styles (e.g., “Food Chain,” “Ocarina,” “Nemesis,” “Water Park Prank”), make use of unique plot devices (e.g., “Sad Face,” “Graybles 1000+”), and focus more attention on background characters (e.g., “Little Brother,” “The Diary”). This experimentation was amplified by the producers’ choice to hire on several guest storyboard artists like Derek Ballard, Masaaki Yuasa, Madeleine Flores, Jillian Tamaki, Sam Alden, Sloane Leong, Brandon Graham, and David Ferguson. These artists’ impact on the season was immense (a final tally of production credits will reveal that these guest storyboard artists worked on almost one-fourth of the season’s 43 episodes), and is clearly evident upon rewatch.

It was also during this season that a handful of regular storyboard artists like Tom Herpich, Kent Osborne, Steve Wolfhard, and Jesse Moynihan decided to temporarily forgo working with a partner, instead choosing to work by themselves on several episodes. Previously, solo episodes had been something of a rarity, with usually only a handful appearing in a season, but season six bucked tradition by featuring a whopping eleven. And while most of the sixth-season solo episodes are notable in their own right (for instance, Osborne’s “Jake the Brick” and Herpich’s “Walnuts & Rain” netted the show a few Emmy awards, and Wolfhard’s “Graybles 1000+” deepened the show’s already complex mythology by flashing-forward one thousand years into the future), it is Moynihan’s solo episodes that are truly mind-bending. Captivated by the darker tone of the season and the cosmic scale of its overarching plot, Moynihan worked hard to make each of his solo episode (viz. “Something Big,” “Is That You?,” and “You Forgot Your Floaties”) weirder and more abstract than the last. In fact, so distinctive
are Moynihan’s episodes that many within the fandom view him as the unofficial voice of the show’s sixth season.

**A Fandom Divided**

*Adventure Time*’s sixth season debuted on April 21, 2014 and aired its finale on June 5, 2015. While the season was lauded almost uniformly by television critics and garnered a whole litany of awards (including several Emmys and a coveted Peabody), it has become something of a divisive topic in the fandom. In one camp you have those fans who believe that the producers’ willingness to explore gloomier, more experimental stories highlighted the creativity lurking beneath the show’s charming exterior. Conversely, you have those fans who bemoan the show’s darker turn and argue that the season’s headier episodes are at best pretentious and at worst masturbatory.

There were many sixth-season episodes that attracted criticism from fans (“Chips and Ice Cream,” for instance, was decried as boring, despite a promising guest spot by musical comedy duo Garfunkel and Oates, and “Water Park Prank” was lambasted for its simplistic writing and its somewhat-disquieting animation style), but perhaps no other sixth-season episode divided the fandom more than “Breezy.” While many viewers appreciated the episode’s meditation on using sex (allegorized as kissing) as a “self-medicine” for depression, others found the premise off-putting. There were also fans who were disturbed by the scene featuring Lumpy Space Princess and Finn “taking [things] to the deep end,” which some interpreted as the former sexually assaulting the latter. But for some fans, the show’s unforgivable sin was the decision to have Finn regain his arm only four episodes after having lost it, which was seen as a lazy regression to the status quo. The divide in opinion was most evident online, where both those who enjoyed and hated the episode clashed on sites like 4chan and Reddit. When the digital dust began to settle near the end of the season’s airing, a number of disgruntled viewers left the fandom, never to return.

The polarizing nature of the season was compounded by Cartoon Network’s poor handling of the episodes’ airing schedule. This all started early in the season when the network moved *Adventure Time* from its long-held Monday timeslot to Thursday nights, catching some viewers off guard. Then Cartoon Network aired only a single new episode between August 14 and November 24, 2014, throwing off the momentum of the season; the airing of the season was further disrupted in November 2014 and June 2015, when the network decided to burn off handfuls of episodes by releasing them in “bombs” (that is, short clusters of episodes that are aired back-to-back, sometimes during a single week, and sometimes on a single day), rather than airing new episodes once per week.
“Come Along with Me”

Further exacerbating this disordered airing schedule was Cartoon Network’s tonally flawed promotional strategy. *Adventure Time’s* sixth season was, after all, darker and more serious than any of its previous seasons, but the network refused to showcase this tone shift in their advertisements. Many years later, on his personal blog, Jesse Moynihan would lament this turn of events:

In the later seasons [*Adventure Time* was] winning Emmys, getting Peabody awards, being called one of the best shows on TV by the *New Yorker*, etc... and the [public relations (PR)] department of CN did not adjust their marketing strategy to take advantage of the critical praise. [*Adventure Time*] was a cult hit with a rabid fanbase that could have completely exploded but CN PR didn’t [use anything outside] their previous success models. Online articles were comparing us to shows like *Louie*, but our advertisements were promoting us like we were *Phineas and Ferb*. ... PR could have tried to make adjustments as the show evolved but maybe that was asking too much. I think it meant way more to us, since we were ripping our guts out trying to make the best thing we could.144

Moynihan’s comments about Cartoon Network’s promotional (non)strategy echo the thoughts of an anonymous *Adventure Time* staffer who in early 2017 told Eric Kohn of IndieWire: “[*Adventure Time*] never really fit into a category, so Cartoon Network didn’t really have a model in which to manage its ever-growing popularity.”145

All of this confusion about airdates and the lack of a strong promotional strategy on the part of Cartoon Network resulted in some fans missing out when new episodes debuted, which in turn caused them to lose interest in the program and drift from the fandom.

**A Season Re-evaluated**

In 2014–15, when all of the season six drama was happening, it was relatively easy for fans to jump to hasty (and often half-baked) conclusions about the show’s direction. Now that almost half a decade has passed since the season first aired, it is far easier to be more objective when considering its quality—especially when it is viewed in the context of the series as a whole.

Of the aforementioned criticisms lobbed at season six, a few were, in hindsight, overblown, such as the frustration that many had about Finn growing a new grass-arm in “Breezy”; to be frank, the uproar caused by the episode was completely premature, given that the grass curse storyarc was seasons away from being finished. Other critiques, however, are more valid.
Consider, for instance, that while many of season six’s more experimental episodes succeed in showcasing the show’s background characters, this was often at the expense of fan favorites like Ice King, Marceline, Flame Princess, and BMO—all of whom received hardly any screen time. What is more, while this experimentation led to some philosophical and artistic masterpieces (e.g., “The Mountain,” “Astral Plane”), it also diffused a sort of existential gloominess throughout the entire season, resulting in some episodes that play as straight dramas. For fans who just want to watch the humorous adventures of a boy and his dog, the rather seriousness of the season can sometimes make it a chore to watch.

But perhaps the most deserved critique was in regard to how the show handled its seasonal arc; indeed, Adventure Time’s sixth season often struggled at points to tell a cohesive story. Part of this was the clunky way the show integrated Martin into the story, providing only the barest of hints as to his backstory (luckily, this was ameliorated when the Islands miniseries aired only a few seasons later and filled in the rest of the details). The show also had the tendency to air game-changing episodes, only to follow them up with non-consequential installments (e.g., the excruciatingly mediocre “James II” directly following on the heels of the game-changing “Escape from the Citadel”) or purposeful anti-climaxes (e.g., the season finale “The Comet”). It is also possible that the show’s struggle with its storyarc pacing was exacerbated by the near-constant revolving door of guest storyboard artists, whose presence resulted in a unique but sometimes disorienting melange of aesthetic voices.

With all of this said, it must be remembered that, at this point in its run, the show was not known for its strict plot-building. Sure, past seasons had their own storyarcs, but most of these arcs had been relegated to two or three episodes at the maximum. What is more, the show’s mythology had previously evolved at a snail’s pace. (For perspective, it took the show almost two full seasons before it returned to the paradigm-shifting Lich plot introduced at the end of season two!) Season six thus marked Adventure Time’s first foray into the art of season-long plot development. It therefore seems only fair to view the season as a trial run, and for a first attempt at this sort of storytelling approach, it is certainly an admirable one.

In a run-down of Adventure Time’s best seasons, its sixth sharply divides the fandom, and you will either find fans out there who love it or downright hate it. At the end of the day, I believe it is best to see the season as an imperfect but respectable piece of art—a sort of messy, melancholic coming of age story whose parts were often greater than the sum total, but which nevertheless illustrates Adventure Time’s willingness to explore the trials of adolescence in creative and unexpected ways.
The Renaissance: Seasons 7–8

During the summer of 2014, it was officially announced by Cartoon Network that Adventure Time would return for a seventh season. Whether it was the split reaction of the fandom to early sixth-season episodes like “Breezy,” or simply a desire to try something different, the writers decided that with the show’s seventh season, they would move away from the dark and sometimes serious tone that many associate with the show’s sixth. When directly asked as to whether this was a conscious shift on his part, Jesse Moynihan noted on his website, “I can say that on my end, while going into [season 7] I decided to steer my boat away from philosophical notions and focus a bit more on jokes and adventurous scenarios. This is because I feel like the end of Season 6 gives Finn a reason to embrace the temporary, material life.” Moynihan’s comments were later echoed by Tom Herpich, who explained in an interview that his writing for the season was “more grounded” than that of the show’s sixth. Adam Muto too expressed a similar sentiment when at a panel in 2015, he noted that with season seven, the writers consciously decided to eschew “really heady and philosophical” storylines.

Raising the Stakes

In November 2014, around the time that the season’s first batch of episodes were being storyboarded, former Adventure Time production crew member Patrick McHale’s event series Over the Garden Wall aired to both critical acclaim and solid viewership numbers. Executives at Cartoon Network immediately thereafter began contacting the showrunners of their biggest shows, inquiring if they were interested in working on stories that could be delivered in a “longer, more serialized format”: the miniseries. One of the shows that the network approached was Adventure Time. According to Adam Muto, the writers were equally as interested in the idea as the network, as it would allow them to “dig into one idea and really explore it.” As they began mulling over story ideas that the program could explore, they eventually remembered a long-hibernating story about Marceline the Vampire Queen’s origin.

At the onset of the series’ production, Marceline’s honorific “the Vampire Queen” was seen by the writers simply as a title that rhymed with her name and provided her with spooky superpowers. In a show chalk-full of weird beasties and even weirder characters, it needed no elaborate explanation. After all, what was so special about a plain old vampire? But as production wore on, Marceline and her vampirism became a larger and larger question mark. Finally, during the production of season two in 2010, then-creative
director McHale decided it was time to hash out how exactly Marceline had gained her bite marks. In a 2019 interview, he explained:

I realized ... that we’d never actually had Marceline and Ice King interact with each other in the same episode, and we’d also established that they were both 1000 years old. I thought that was meaningful, and so I started coming up with this whole elaborate backstory [explaining that] Marceline was the daughter of a demon and a human ... [and that roughly one thousand years prior to the start of the show] Marceline and Ice King were working together to save humanity [from vampires]. But Ice King was losing himself [to the ice crown], and it all landed on Marceline to fight off the vampires as the humans were escaping on an ark, set for some unknown shore. ...

So in the final struggle, as a mutated horde of monsters and vampires come to kill the last remaining humans ... [Marceline] goes and fights the vampires with her demon powers so that the boat can leave. The humans make it, but Marceline is turned into a vampire. So she’s stuck looking [like a teenager] forever, and Ice King is stuck being crazy ... and it’s too heartbreaking for [Marceline] to ever even go near him, so she avoids him and lives in a cave ... Anyway, I pitched this whole huge elaborate thing to the writers room and they were like, “That’s cool, Pat.” But it was too much plot. Nobody was very excited about it.  

McHale’s ideas quickly fell by the wayside and were archived away in some file cabinet, where they languished for years in a state of undead limbo. Fast forward to 2014: while trying to think up a storyline for a possible miniseries, the writers suddenly remembered McHale’s earlier attempt to delineate Marceline’s origin story. Adam Muto and the show’s writers decided that the time was right to “[roll] with that [original idea] and [expand] that into eight episodes.” The end result was the first Adventure Time miniseries, Stakes (originally titled Return of the Vampire King), which began production at the tail-end of 2014. For fans of Marceline, this could have come at no better time, for during the show’s fifth and sixth seasons, the character—despite being a fan favorite—had started to slowly be sidelined by the writers, appearing in only a handful of scattered episodes. While some might argue that this was because the show was wanting to focus most of the action on Finn, there is evidence that Marceline’s absence might have been because the show’s writers did not exactly know what to do with her character anymore. Stakes thus gave Marceline a raison d’être.
The cast and crew of *Adventure Time*—when told of their new project—were immediately energized by the creative challenge (Tom Herpich perhaps best summed up the collective excitement when he told me: “I was really excited about the Marceline miniseries and couldn’t shut up about it around the office for the longest time. I really drew my heart out on that one”). The miniseries also functioned as something of a homecoming for a few artists: former storyboard artist Rebecca Sugar contributed a new song for the miniseries, Ghostshrimp (whose backgrounds in season one had arguably set the stage for the series’ post-apocalyptic nature) designed a few background pieces, and former storyboard artist Ako Castuera returned to work once again with Jesse Moynihan, producing three of her all-time best episodes. The miniseries also saw storyboarding contributions from long-serving revisionist Lyle Partridge, frequent guest storyboard artist Luke Pearson, and newcomer Hanna K. Nyström.

The miniseries was initially slated to air during the Halloween season of 2015, but for whatever reason, it was pushed back a month. *Stakes* finally aired during the week of November 16 (with new episodes debuting every day in pairs) and follows the adventure of Marceline, Princess Bubblegum, Finn, and Jake as they attempt to eliminate five recently-resurrected vampires whom Marceline had killed long ago. Along the way, Marceline loses, regains, and then comes to terms with her vampirism, growing over the course of the eight episodes from a “messed up kid” to an adult.

For the most part, the miniseries received positive reviews from television critics, many of whom lauded its storyline and its focus on one of the show’s most beloved characters. Others outlets—including some that normally did not review television, like *Pitchfork*—penned gushing prose about Rebecca Sugar’s new song. That said, more than a few critics and fans were disappointed that the miniseries did not fully elucidate “the ghosts of Marceline’s past” (as was promised in the miniseries’ official press release). Much of this disappointment can arguably be chalked up to the way Cartoon Network (mis-)advertised the miniseries as a movie-length flashback, rather than an interconnected but nevertheless episodic monster hunt.

In hindsight, *Stakes* is a delightful long-form adventure story that combines the humorous dialogue and exciting action sequences of the show’s earlier seasons with the character development and philosophical musings seen in the show’s fifth and sixth. It is by no means perfect (compared to later miniseries, for instance, *Stakes* does at times feel a bit disjointed, and at other times too flippant in its storytelling), but it illustrates the continuing evolution of the series even in its later years.
ARTISTS COME, ARTISTS GO

As has been noted by many online commenters, most of the episodes that immediately follow Stakes are something of a Hegelian synthesis, mixing in the pensiveness of the show’s sixth season with the lightness of its fourth. This blend resulted in one of Adventure Time’s more consistent strings of episodes. Some of these installments, such as “Flute Spell,” “The Thin Yellow Line,” and “Bun Bun,” dig deep into the characters themselves, exploring their strengths and their foibles in a way that is not only sincere but also incredibly funny. Others, like the two-part Christmas special “The More You Moe, the Moe You Know” and Tom Herpich’s solo masterpiece “Hall of Egress” tackle heady, often existential themes while still bringing plenty of laughs to the table. And while almost all of these episodes take place in fantastical new lands or are filled to the brim with nutty action sequences (e.g., “Crossover,” “Broke His Crown,” “I Am a Sword,” “Normal Man,” and “Lady Rainicorn of the Crystal Dimension”), they nevertheless remember that the most successful episodes are those driven by the characters and not necessarily the wacky situations in which they find themselves.

One reason that seasons seven and the start of eight are so strong is because they mark the first regular contributions from four talented artists whose aesthetic sensibilities noticeably impacted the tone of Adventure Time’s final few seasons: Hanna K. Nyström, Sam Alden, Aleks Sennwald, and Ashly Burch. The first of these artists, Hanna K. Nyström, was largely a self-taught illustrator who joined the production crew as a guest storyboard artist in 2014 during the production of Stakes. Because Nyström lived over 5,000 miles away from Burbank, she made heavy use of technology to collaborate with the other Adventure Time writers and storyboard artists both synchronously and asynchronously. While the remote storyboarding experience could be “a bit lonely [and that] the time difference could be kinda [sic] rough too,” Nyström surmounted these hurdles and in time became one of the show’s strongest latter-day storyboard artists.

Also joining the show around this time as a permanent storyboard artist was Sam Alden. An alumnus of Washington state’s Whitman College, Alden had cut his teeth producing independent comics and drawing illustrations for publications and periodicals like The Seattle Times and Slate. Alden first got involved with the production of Adventure Time in early 2014, when he emailed Adam Muto and inquired if he could take a storyboard test for the show. Alden passed and was subsequently hired on as a freelance storyboard artist, working with Jesse Moynihan on one of the sixth season’s trippiest episodes, “The Mountain.” Alden was again asked by the Adventure Time producers to freelance a few months later, this time working with Kent Osborne on the seventh-season episode “President Porpoise Is Missing!”
Largely on the strength of his freelance work, Alden was soon offered a permanent storyboarding position.\textsuperscript{166}

The third new storyboard artist to join the show was Aleks Sennwald, whose first episodes for the series were the fourth Fionna and Cake installment “Five Short Tables” and the mythologically significant “Preboot.” Like Alden before her, Sennwald had gained critical exposure by landing illustrations in prestigious publications like \textit{The New York Times}, \textit{The Washington Post}, and \textit{GQ Germany}. Sennwald also had experience in the video game industry, having been one of the prop designers for the highly lauded video game \textit{Gone Home} (of which Pendleton Ward was a major fan),\textsuperscript{167} and this interest in video games can clearly be seen when one looks at the promotional art pieces that she designed for her episodes of \textit{Adventure Time}, most of which employed rudimentary CGI animation made with modeling programs like Blender. Sennwald was partnered Hanna K. Nyström during the show’s final few seasons, and together the two produced several stand-out episodes including “Hide and Seek,” “Bonnibel Bubblegum,” and “The First Investigation.”

Season seven also saw the debut of Ashly Burch as one of the show’s storyline writers. Prior to her hiring, Burch was a voice actress well-known in the video game world for having provided the voice of Tiny Tina in the first person shooter \textit{Borderlands 2}, and Chloe Price in the time-travel adventure game \textit{Life is Strange}.\textsuperscript{168} Burch’s journey in becoming an \textit{Adventure Time} writer was relatively serendipitous: During the show’s sixth season, she provided a number of voices, with her most notable role arguably being that of Breezy the bee from the eponymous episode. During the recording session for that episode, Burch and lead writer Kent Osborne got to know each other and soon became friends. Awhile later, during the middle of season seven’s production, when Pendleton Ward scaled back his commitment to the show even more by no longer regularly working in the writers’ room, Osborne reached out to Burch and asked if she was interested in working as a storyline writer—a job which she eagerly accepted.\textsuperscript{169} Burch would ultimately serve as a writer for most of season eight, as well as a few episodes in seasons nine and ten, including the series’ four-part finale.

While prior to her tenure on the show, \textit{Adventure Time} had been a fairly progressive show, Burch’s hiring in many ways injected into it a new streak of feminism; in an interview with John Moe, she explained, “I just love the female characters on the show. It is important to me that female characters [like Princess Bubblegum and Marceline] are highlighted on any show.”\textsuperscript{170} This belief is perhaps best seen in episodes like “The Thin Yellow Line,” “Broke His Crown,” “Bun Bun,” and “Ketchup,” which portray the show’s lead female characters as competent, strong, and understanding, while still managing to showcase their complex emotional dimensions.
But as in season’s past, the addition of talented voices like Alden, Nyström, Sennwald, or Burch preceded the departure of more experienced crew members. This time, the individual leaving would be Jesse Moynihan, who had been storyboarding for the series since season two, and who had developed a reputation online as a veritable auteur for his unique brand of spiritual episodes. Moynihan revealed on his personal website that he began to seriously consider quitting during the production of season six, when he “tried to test the limits of what [he] could get away with on a kids television show” with a string of increasingly esoteric episodes like “Is That You?” and “You Forgot Your Floaties.” Unfortunately, this extreme sort of experimentation led to a mental breakdown, and after this emotional disaster, Moynihan made up his mind to remain on as a storyboard artist for a final season, treating that year like his victory lap by “scaling back a lot of experimental aspects and just pushing for jokes and excitement.” He explained, “I felt like if I could pull that off, it would be a nice end cap to my time on [Adventure Time], and then I could feel good about leaving.”

Moynihan’s seventh- and eighth-season contributions are notably lighter than his sixth-season episodes, with a heavier emphasis placed on silly dialog and comedic set pieces. Some might argue that during this time, Moynihan artistically regressed and “phoned it in,” but I would argue the opposite—that his final few episodes show evidence of substantial creative growth and flexibility. After all, episodes like “Crossover,” “Flute Spell,” “I Am a Sword,” and his final storyboarding contribution, “Normal Man” all manage to tell stories that are neither pretentious (as some of Moynihan’s sixth-season contributions were wont to be) nor frivolous. They thus serve as a creative syntheses of his past work, merging the hilarity of Moynihan’s earliest episodes with the profundity of his fifth- and sixth-season creations.

**The Season Seven Shuffle**

*Adventure Time*’s seventh season debuted on November 2, 2015 with the episode “Bonnie & Neddy.” Initially, 39 episodes had been ordered by Cartoon Network, and the season was slated to conclude with the two-part finale “Preboot”/“Reboot” (which would eventually air on November 19, 2016). However, in the summer of 2017, the network completely reorganized how the official seasons were divided, retroactively making the twenty-sixth episode of the season, “The Thin Yellow Line,” the “official” season seven finale. The network then re-categorized the final 13 episodes of season seven as belonging to season eight, which retroactively turned the “Preboot”/“Reboot” two-parter into the mid-season finale for the show’s eighth season.

While this divisional snafu may have given *Adventure Time* fans something to argue about online, it did not detract from the quality of the episodes effected. In fact, the storytelling experiments and influx of fresh artists...
resulted in season seven and the beginning of season eight heralding a new golden age for the show—a Renaissance, if you will. And unlike previous seasons, there were no major missteps, with every episode being enjoyable in its own way.

**The Denouement: Seasons 8–9**

When “Preboot”/“Reboot” aired on November 19, 2016, it blew the mythology of the series wide open, revealing that there were indeed other humans out there somewhere in the farthest reaches of Ooo, and that Susan Strong had at one time had been affiliated with the mysterious—and villainous—Dr. Gross. With these reveals, it can rightfully be said that “Preboot”/“Reboot” marked the transition from the show’s Renaissance to the beginning of its denouement. On his personal Tumblr, Herpich wrote something similar, noting that after the production of these episodes “everything start[ed] rolling into one big snowball that roll[ed] and roll[ed] all the way to the end” of the show. The following two episodes “Two Swords”/“Do No Harm,” which were storyboarded in early 2016 and aired in January of 2017 (and were originally envisioned as collectively making up the show’s eighth season premiere), continued this snowball-like effect by introducing the audience to Fern, a grass-based doppelganger of Finn voiced by Hayden Ezzy.

**A Trip to the Islands**

While working on the batch of episodes that followed “Two Swords”/“Do No Harm,” the producers decided that the time was right to explore one of the show’s biggest mysteries: Finn the Human’s origin story. In an interview with IndieWire, Muto explained: “For a long time, Finn’s origin story didn’t seem like one of those threads [that needed to be resolved] ... [But] the more seasons we got, the more glaring that mystery became.” It just so happens that the writers and producers began thinking about this plot thread after *Stakes* aired in late 2015. The miniseries was a ratings success, which made Cartoon Network eager to greenlight more long-form projects.

And so, during the winter of 2015–16, the *Adventure Time* writers’ room convened to start working on a second miniseries. It was during these brainstorming sessions that the writers once again reached into their file cabinet of ideas and dusted off a rough backstory for Finn that had been tentatively outlined during the production of the show’s second season. Although plot developments in subsequent seasons had rendered unusable almost all of this initial backstory, there remained one key idea that had yet to be contradicted: that a colony of humans had managed to survive the cataclysmic...
fallout of the Mushroom War by hiding on a mysterious island.\textsuperscript{178} Muto, in particular, seized upon this kernel of an idea and combined it with a meditation on trans-humanism (a topic which had caught his eye after he read about it in a magazine article). The end result was a new 8-part epic focusing on Finn’s genesis, which was eventually dubbed \textit{Islands}.\textsuperscript{179}

Unlike with \textit{Stakes} (which Cartoon Network had announced almost a year prior to its airing and had eagerly promoted throughout 2015), the network barely did anything to promote \textit{Islands}. In fact, the first official reference to the miniseries came via an obscure Comixology post from November 2016 that was passed around fansites, which was followed up by an official press release a month later.\textsuperscript{180} (This lethargy on the part of the network is likely due to the announcement in late 2016 that \textit{Adventure Time} had been canceled; this will be discussed in the next section.) \textit{Islands} eventually aired the week of January 30, 2017, with new episodes debuting every day in pairs.

\textit{Islands} follows the sea voyage of Finn, Jake, Susan Strong, and BMO, as they travel to the quasi-mythical “Founders Island” to learn more about Finn’s human family—and also meet his long-lost mother. Similar in structure to Vergil’s Latin poem the \textit{Aeneid}, the miniseries takes the form of a sprawling epic, whose first half sees our heroes meandering across the sea in search of their “destiny,” and whose second half focuses on the heroes coming face to face with that which they seek. Replete with meditations on the impact of technology and what it means to keep someone you love safe from harm, \textit{Islands} is a touching batch of episodes that not only explores the mythology of the series, but also provides Finn with some emotional closure regarding his family. In a 2017 interview with IndieWire, showrunner Adam Muto mused:

\begin{quote}
I’m glad we were able to tell this story … In a way, it sort of frees [Finn] to have a completely unexpected ending. He’s not a chosen one with a grand destiny or the last anything. He’s the son of a doctor and a con man trying to figure stuff out in a colorful magical land.\textsuperscript{181}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Braving the Elements}

A few weeks after \textit{Islands} debuted, the \textit{Adventure Time} fandom was caught off guard by wonderful news: another miniseries, entitled \textit{Elements}, would be airing mid-2017, and it would continue almost right where \textit{Islands} ended (with the two miniseries separated by what became the post-facto season nine premiere, “Orb”). As to how this third miniseries came about, head writer Kent Osborne explained in a podcast interview: “\textit{Elements} [was largely] my idea. I was like, ‘Well, what’s going on in Ooo while [Finn and
Jake are off] doing Islands? Likewise, in a 2019 interview, storyline writer Jack Pendarvis, told me:

*Elements ... came up organically, and if I recall correctly, we surprised ourselves with the realization that we were basically writing another miniseries on the heels of Islands. ... [Elements] came from talking about what was going on in Ooo while Finn and Jake were gone. I believe it was Ashly Burch’s idea that [Patience St. Pim’s] scheme should come to some sort of fruition... and that’s how that sort of foreshadowing episode (“Jelly Beans Have Power”) came about. Ashly worked on “Orb,” too, in which we have the big reveal (at the very end) which leads into *Elements*.¹⁸²

Osborne also noted in the aforementioned interview that he initially wanted the miniseries to be an “epic” showdown in which all the characters “are all battling ... everyone is fighting each other, and you get to see the extent of everyone’s powers.”¹⁸³ The final version of *Elements* is likely more subdued than what Osborne had originally intended, but nevertheless the miniseries still features its fair share of action—especially in bombastic episodes like “Happy Warrior” and “Hero Heart.”

Cartoon Network once again took a cagey approach when it came time to advertise the miniseries, publicizing the string of episodes via a press release that preceded the miniseries’ airdate by only a month. *Elements* eventually ran during the week of April 24, 2017 with two episodes debuting each day. In this event series, Finn and Jake return to the Land of Ooo to discover that it has been transformed into a nightmare realm, with each quarter of the land being overtaken by a different universal element (viz. candy, ice, slime, and fire). Finn and Jake subsequently team up with Ice King, Magic Betty, and a begrudging Lumpy Space Princess to restore the land that they call home. Unlike *Islands* or *Stakes*, *Elements* is less significant to the series’ overarching story, and more or less plays as a standard adventure story stretched out to fill eight episodes. While this means there is a certain superfluousness to it, *Elements* nevertheless recalls the absurd wackiness of the show’s earlier seasons, making it enjoyable in its own way.

Just before the writers started to outline *Elements*, Burch left the series and a new artist (who would soon go on to become a Cartoon Network series creator herself) was hired to take her place: Julia Pott. A half-American, half-British animator, Pott hailed from London and had studied animation at both Kingston University and the Royal College of Art.¹⁸⁴ After making a number of short films, Pott was contacted by Cartoon Network and eventually hired to create a pilot, which would serve as the springboard for her
soon-to-be picked up series *Summer Camp Island*. It was during this time that she was also tapped to be a writer for *Adventure Time*.\(^{185}\) Because the show was at that point was over half a decade old, Pott told the *Los Angeles Times* that upon her arrival, she “felt very new, like [she] was walking into a high school in the last year.”\(^{186}\) Pott was nevertheless ecstatic about the opportunity, as she was a self-professed “huge fan of *Adventure Time*,”\(^{187}\) having first seen the pilot while an undergraduate student in London years prior.\(^{188}\) Fellow storyline writer Jack Pendarvis wrote on his personal blog that Pott “showed incredible spirit and ingeniousness” after joining the writing crew, providing them with a jolt of energy that helped them fully block out the *Elements* miniseries (as well as the remaining 22 episodes of the series).\(^{189}\)

The storyboarding for what was eventually dubbed *Adventure Time’s* ninth season ended in mid-2016, with the two-part season finale “Whispers” /“Three Buckets” (both of which would air about a year later, on July 21, 2017). These episodes provided a workable ending to some of the show’s bigger plot points involving characters like Sweet P and the Lich, while also creating additional storylines with which the series could toy around in its next season. And indeed, as the summer of 2016 turned into the fall, story ideas for a tenth season were already coalescing in the minds of the writers. Unfortunately, bad news for the show was just around the corner.

### The End of All Good Things: Season 10

On July 21, 2016, Kent Osborne tweeted a quick doodle of Tree Trunks (dressed like then-presidential candidate Donald Trump, saying, “This apple pie is gonnna be yuuuuge!”), along with a hashtag indicating that *Adventure Time* had been renewed for a tenth season.\(^{190}\) Compared to previous renewal announcements, this one was met with a relatively muted reaction—probably due to the low-key way in which the news was delivered—but the show’s most devoted fans reacted with excitement. The writers soon thereafter began crafting up new episodes, many of which focused on Princess Bubblegum’s recently-restored Uncle Gumbald and his plan to conquer the Candy Kingdom.

#### The End is Nigh

The show’s writers, producers, and cast members were under no delusion that *Adventure Time* would go on forever. With the epic reveals in *Stakes, Islands*, and *Elements*, many of the show’s biggest mysteries were being answered, resulting in an increased discussion about wrapping the show up. As Olivia Olson (paraphrasing Adam Muto) put it: “The ending of the show was getting stretched and stretched and stretched out because of how softly they let us know. There were definitely talks for a long time of
In fact, as work on season ten started, the writers and producers truly believed that the end was near: Cartoon Network had only ordered 16 episodes, a drastic departure from previous years, in which as many as 52 episodes had been ordered.

Nevertheless, the series cancellation in September of 2016 caught the show’s crew members off-guard. According to Kent Osborne, the writers and producers were under the assumption that after the production of the truncated tenth season, Cartoon Network would order one final 26 episodes season to wrap everything up. The writers had a number of story ideas they were interested in pursuing—some of which involved Sweet P, Susan Strong, Finn’s mother, and presumably, Fionna and Cake—and so as to segue into what they believed would be the show’s swansong season, the writers tasked Tom Herpich with plotting out a four-part story that wove elements of the Uncle Gumbald storyline with new plot points that he had for a long while wanted to work into an *Adventure Time* story. Alas, the “timing was no good,” to quote Herpich, and these plans were disrupted by Cartoon Network’s decision to axe the program with only four episodes left to be written.

The *Adventure Time* writers were suddenly left with the almost Herculean task of wrapping up the show’s myriad plot threads in less than a half dozen episodes. As Adam Muto told *The Los Angeles Times*, “I freaked out a little because endings are so hard on TV shows. So it was like ‘What is the perfect ending?’” The first thing that they did was completely retool Herpich’s epic season finale premise, keeping some of his ideas, but sadly jettisoning most of the more novel ones. Thankfully, the impossible task of crafting the “perfect finale” was made easier by Cartoon Network, who gave the show’s writers several additional months to hammer out the finale’s plot points by pushing back the air date of the *Islands* miniseries.

The series’ writers eventually worked out a four-part finale entitled “Come Along with Me” (after the show’s ending theme) that focused on Princess Bubblegum and her Uncle Gumbald preparing for battle, only to be interrupted by the arrival of the malevolent entity GOLB. When it came time to actually storyboard this behemoth of an episode, all hands were called on deck: Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard were tasked with setting up the Great Gum War plot as well as introducing viewers to the far future of Ooo; Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone focused most of their attention on an extended nightmare sequence; Hanna K. Nyström and Aleks Sennwald storyboarded the arrival of GOLB and the reactions of the various characters (including a long-waited “Bubbline” smooch); and Sam Alden and Graham Falk brought it all home by not only writing a satisfying ending to the episode, but also working on an elaborate montage showing what becomes of many of the show’s many characters.
**The Last Adventure(?)**

*Adventure Time’s* tenth and final season debuted with four new episodes on September 17, 2017, the first of which was “The Wild Hunt.” For the remainder of the season, Cartoon Network continued to make use of this one-day “bomb” method, releasing additional quartets of episodes on both December 17, 2017 and March 18, 2018, respectively. It is not exactly clear why the network eschewed the tried and true method of debuting new episodes once every week. Regardless, this peculiar treatment of the series led many fans to speculate that the network was trying to burn off the few episodes that remained of its former flagship series.

Season 10 is, for many fans, something of a disappointment after the creative heights of seasons 7–9. This is largely due to its abbreviated nature, which precluded the sort of closure a final season comprising 26 episodes may have offered. This issue is perhaps most noticeable with regard to the development of the season’s antagonists—Uncle Gumbald and the Green Knight—neither of whom receive the screen time needed to feel like proper “big bads.” A oversized chunk of the already-truncated season was also wasted on several middling “bad dad” episodes (viz., “Son of Rap Bear,” “Marcy & Hunson,” “Jake the Starchild”), which did little more than retread ideas that had been better explored in previous episodes. But “disappointing” should not be confused for “terrible,” and season ten does contain its fair share of good episodes, such as: “Bonnibel Bubblegum” (a flashback episode that expands upon Bubblegum’s origin), “The First Investigation” (in which Finn and Jake investigate the “haunted” offices of their parents), and “Blenanas” (the show’s final one-off, in which Finn and Ice King join forces to revive the comedy magazine *Ble*, despite their both being terrible at writing jokes). When the episodes are taken together, season ten works, but it is nevertheless frustrating—a string of decent-to-good episodes retroactively blemished by the thoughts of what could have been.

In late August 2018—just days before the premiere of the series finale—dozens of laudatory pieces celebrating the series as a whole were run in high-profile publications like *The Los Angeles Times*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *The New York Times*. Online, fans were understandably bittersweet in their postings to social media: many were delighted that their beloved show was getting a proper conclusion, while at the same time bemoaning that *Adventure Time* would soon pass into the annals of television history. For others, the finale represented a sort of homecoming. As was discussed earlier, during the height of the show’s experimentation (c. season 6), many fans had jumped off the *Adventure Time* bandwagon as their tastes and the
show’s tone began to diverge. Some of these former fans, curious as to what would become of Finn and Jake, resolved to return one final time to watch the epic conclusion to the series. All of this interest meant that Adventure Time message boards—many of which had seen a decrease in traffic ever since the show began to wane in popularity c. 2015—lit up with activity as fans began to excitedly speculate. For the briefest of moments, it was like the glory days of 2013, when Adventure Time was the talk of the Internet.

On September 3, 2018, Adventure Time’s four-part finale, “Come Along with Me” was broadcast to almost a million domestic fans, many of whom were watching with bated breath. Detailing the resolution of the great “Gum War” between Princess Bubblegum and her Uncle Gumbald before morhping into a battle against the cosmic chaos deity GOLB, “Come Along with Me” is a tour de force of storytelling, replete with touching character moments, wacky dialog, and inspired design choices. Television critics for the most part gushed about the finale, and the majority of fans were happy with how things turned out for our heroes.

Now it must be admitted that “Come Along with Me” is far from a perfect episode of television—the anticlimactic resolution to the Gum War is just a tad disappointing, for instance—but Adventure Time never pretended to be a perfect show. Instead, as Eric Kohn argues, it often “embraced [a] messy aesthetic” so as to convey “the complicated nature of the human experience,” and this attitude is clearly on display in “Come Along with Me.” The finale is a heartfelt mix of (sometimes contradictory!) emotions, which are presented in a way that, while not flawless, is definitely sincere. All things considered, “Come Along with Me” is a fitting end to Adventure Time’s run.

Or, at least, its initial run...

The Return: The Distant Lands Specials

After the airing of the finale, members of the Adventure Time fandom mourned their loss for several months before eventually carrying on with their lives. Such is the natural order of things after a television series ends its original run. But in our age of reboots, revivals, and reinterpretations, many suspected that Adventure Time was unlikely to remain forever in its television grave; perhaps this sentiment was expressed most famously by Tom Kenny, who sometime after the final episode was recorded, told Kent Osborne: “Just this week, I’m doing voice work on Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Powerpuff Girls and Samurai Jack”—all of which were shows that had been canceled and then brought back—“This isn’t the end of anything.”

Kenny’s words proved prescient when on July 24, 2019, the animation industry insider Steve Hulett let slip on his personal website that Cartoon
Network Studios was working on a special—codenamed “Rumble Jaw”—that was supposedly “based on the characters from Adventure Time.” It was not exactly clear what this meant (Was this special a spin-off of the original series? Or was it more of a reinterpretation, à la the 2014 CGI Powerpuff Girls sequel?), which led to fan speculation.

In the following months, fans began scraping together more and more clues about this mysterious “Rumble Jaw” special, eventually deducing that the project was likely a one-hour special. On October 23, 2019, Cartoon Network revealed that fan speculations had been off a bit: “Rumble Jaw” was the codename for not one but rather four hour-long Adventure Time specials—collectively referred to as Distant Lands—that would debut in 2020 exclusively on the HBO Max streaming service. Of course, many fans who had anticipated a one-off special were floored by the news.

As of May 2020 (when this chapter was finalized), information regarding the Distant Lands specials has been somewhat limited, but what has leaked has been cause for great rejoicing. For the last several months, Adventure Time fans have taken to various online fora, speculating wildly as to how the specials will unfold. While predicting the future is always something of a fool’s errand, one thing seems certain: The adventure is far from over...
Endnotes

5. See: https://www.csssa.org/alumni/.
12. Fred Seibert and Dominick Rabrun, “Fred Seibert Discusses the First Time He Met Pendleton Ward (Creator of Adventure Time).”
15. Andrew Farago, “Random Thoughts from Frederator Cartoonists.”
16. Farago.
19. Zahed; Eric Homan, “‘the Enchiridion’ Storyboards.”
21. Homan, “‘The Enchiridion’ Storyboards.”
22. This storyboard detailed “a spaghetti-supper date between Finn and an oblivious Princess Bubblegum.” Homan; this plot point would be recycled in the eventual episode “To Cut a Woman’s Hair” (Season 2, Episode 10).
23. Homan.
24. Homan.
31. Many of the show’s earliest storyboards were rejected by Cartoon Network, with “Brothers in Insomnia” being the premiere example. According to lead character designer Phil Rynda, “[The pitch] was the first pitch that Pen did to the network with lots of people ... it was a pretty full room ... and [the storyboard was] amazing. There was a song in it. ... It was just a crazy pitch. ... I got up a couple hours later and was like, ‘I gotta go talk to them about it. I really think it was one of the best things I had ever see.’ And I went in and ... Pen and Pat and Adam were all together [and they told me,] ‘They’re throwing out the episode.’” Homan, “‘the Enchiridion’ Storyboards.” Other first season episodes that were storyboarded and later discarded include “The Glorriors” by Joe Horne and Doug TenNapel and “Diamond Jim” by Joe Horne and Armen Mirzaiian.
34. McHale.
37. Ghostshrimp, “Episode 050: *Adventure Time Redux.*”
38. Ghostshrimp; Ghostshrimp, “Episode 010: I Am a Total Fuck Up.”
39. Ghostshrimp later drew freelance backgrounds for the *Stakes* miniseries (Season 7, Episode 6–13); the one-off episodes “Abstract” (Season 9, Episode 10 [originally Season 8, Episode 24]), “Fionna and Cake and Fionna” (Season 9, Episode 12 [originally Season 8, Episode 26]), “Whispers” (Season 9, Episode 13 [originally Season 8, Episode 27]), and “Gumbaldia” (Season 10, Episode 12 [originally Season 9, Episode 12]); and the series finale “Come Along with Me” (Season 10, Episode 13–16 [originally 9, Episodes 13–16]).
40. Ghostshrimp, “Episode 050: *Adventure Time Redux.*”
41. Ghostshrimp and Phil Rynda, “Episode 051: *Adventure Time Memories Continued with Phil Rynda.*”
42. Ghostshrimp and Rynda.
43. In the animation industry, “turn-arounds” are designs showing what a character looks like from different angles.
44. Ghostshrimp and Rynda, “Episode 051: *Adventure Time Memories Continued with Phil Rynda.*”
47. Ghostshrimp and Osborne, “Episode 080: *Adventure Time Interview Part One: Kent Osborne.*”
49. Paul Fraser, “Calarts Alumni, Faculty Nominated for 40th Annual Annie Awards.”
51. Midou.
52. Gero, Ward, and Osborne, “#65: Pendleton Ward, Martin Gero, and Kent Osborne.”
56. Robert Seidman, “Monday Cable.”
57. It should be noted that the show’s crewmembers were already working on a second season before the first debuted (e.g., Jesse Moynihan, “Forming Hiatus,” JesseMoynihan.com, 2010, http://jessemoynihan.com/?p=796). It seems that it was only when the show was a ratings success that the network felt comfortable in publicly announcing this information.
58. Of note, this model would become the norm for most of the show’s initial 10-season run, although it was later supplanted by the “bomb” model of episode delivery, as described later on in this chapter.
59. Although McHale would step down as creative director at the end of season two, he would remain on as a storyline writer until midway through the show’s fifth season.
60. He would return to storyboard during the show’s third, fourth, and sixth seasons.
61. See, for instance: Mihaela Mihailova, “Drawn (to) Independence: Female Showrunners in Contemporary American TV Animation.”
63. *Animation* staff.
“Come Along with Me”

68. Cameron Esposito and Rebecca Sugar, “Rebecca Sugar.”
69. Rynda, “Phil Rynda Responses.”
71. Ghostshrimp and Rynda, “Episode 051: Adventure Time Memories Continued with Phil Rynda.”
72. Tom Herpich (storyboard artist), interview with author, September 16, 2018.
73. Herpich.
74. “Heat Signature” (Season 2, Episode 26).
75. “Too Young” (Season 3, Episode 5).
76. Thomas, “Tom Herpich Interview.”
77. E.g. Thomas, “Alex Campos Interview.”
78. Thomas, “Tom Herpich Interview.”
81. Thomas, “Ako Castuera Interview.”
82. Ghostshrimp and Castuera, “Episode 053: More Adventure Time Homies with Ako Castuera.”
86. Duncan Trussell and Jesse Moynihan, “Episode 220: Jesse Moynihan.”
87. Jesse Moynihan (inspired by his understanding of Kabbalah and encouraged by creative director Patrick McHale) expended considerable effort in fleshing out the mythology of the Dead Worlds. Alas, Moynihan never managed to write an episode fully exploring the afterlife in the Oooniverse; in an interview with the rapper Open Mike Eagle, he revealed: “I tried ... [to explain] the cosmology [of] the Dead World stuff and how that works with ideas of reincarnation as well ... It was too big. It was tied into Magic Man and the Cosmic Owl and all that stuff. We ended up parsing out some of those ideas into other episodes, but we totally avoided explaining the Dead Worlds.” Moe, Eagle, and Moynihan, “The Best of C-Listers and Lemongrab Evolution.”
88. This being a leetspeak abbreviation for the phrase “too deep for you,” implying that Moynihan’s spiritual and philosophical musings were superficially complex or pretentious.
91. Castuera remained on as a regular storyboard artist until the conclusion of the show’s fifth season. Afterwards, she contributed to a few freelance storyboards (including, three episodes of the Stakes miniseries), before working as a storyboard revisionist during the show’s final few seasons.
92. “Mortal Folly”/“Mortal Recoil” was intended to cap off the season, but due to
95. Ghostshrimp and Osborne, “Episode 080: Adventure Time Interview Part One: Kent Osborne.”
97. See: https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/SeasonalRot.
98. Graham, “Comic-Con.”
100. Anders.
101. Moynihan, “U Forgot Ur Floaties.”
103. Anders.
105. Tim Surette, “Inside the Brain of Adventure Time Creator Pendleton Ward.”
107. Goldstein, “This Is How an Episode of Cartoon Network’s Adventure Time Is Made.”
108. It is not quite clear why the network extended the fifth season instead of just ordering a sixth.
109. Tim Foley refers to this as a “unique sense of gentle fatalism”—a turn of phrase that I believe perfectly describes Wolfhard’s writing style. “Very Distant Lands,” (unpublished manuscript, 2018), PDF file, 104.
110. Season 5, Episode 28.
111. Season 10, Episode 6. Originally Season 9, Episode 6 before the division shuffle.
See: “A Note on Season Divisions” and “Appendix B.”
112. As well as the first non-binary person.
114. Kohn, “Adventure Time Writer Rebecca Sugar.”
115. It seems likely that the scheduled movie was originally slated to serve as the fifth-season’s four-part finale, given its production codes. However, the eventual collapse of the movie necessitated that four new episodes be written to fill the production void; this was the start of what the storyboard artists called “season 5.2,” which began with the production of “The Suitor.” In time, Cartoon Network also ordered an additional 26, bringing the total for the entire season up to 52. Jesse Moynihan (@jmoyns), “Time to climb this mental mountain again #season5.2,” Instagram, 2012, https://www.instagram.com/p/PNPkQrTcie/
121. Moe, Eagle, and Moynihan, “The Best of C-Listers.”
122. Moe, et al.; Moynihan, “‘Something Big’ Promo.”
“Come Along with Me”

123. Moynihan.
125. Tom Herpich (storyboard artist), interview with author, January 23, 2019.
128. Bustillos, “How Adventure Time Came to Be.”
129. Ghostshrimp and Osborne, “Episode 080: Adventure Time Interview Part One:
Kent Osborne.”
130. Ghostshrimp and Osborne.
131. Ghostshrimp and Osborne.
132. Ghostshrimp and Osborne.
133. Andy Ristaino, ”Andy Ristaino.”; Ghostshrimp and Andy Ristaino, “Episode 024:
Guns, Money, and Drugs with Andy Ristaino.”
storyboard.tumblr.com/post/37259672615/seo-kim-cats-comics-burbank-she-said-it-
with#seo-kim-cats-comics-burbank; Seo Kim, Cat Person, author bio.
135. Payton Teffner, “Return of Pendarvis.”
137. TV by the Numbers, "Monday Cable Ratings: 'Monday Night Football' Wins Night,
'WWE Raw', 'Teen Moms Ii', 'Pawn Stars', 'Catfish', 'Real Housewives' & More.”
138. E.g. Emily Guendelsberger, “Just Past 150 Episodes.”
Groundbreaking Than You May Realize.”
141. Jesse Moynihan, “Wizards Only, Fools! – Comment 11,” JesseMoynihan.com,
com/?p=2013.
142. Tom Herpich and Skyler Page, “The Lich’ Storyboard.”
143. Alden would later be hired on as a permanent storyboard artist starting in season seven.
jessemoynihan.com/?p=4053 (comments).
145. Eric Kohn, “Going Off the Air.”
146. For the record, season six had only two Ice King episodes, one major Marceline
episode, one major Flame Princess episode, and no BMO-centric episodes.
com/?p=2452&cpage=1#comments.
148. Thomas, “Tom Herpich Interview”
149. Allegra, “New Season of Adventure Time.”
150. Jeremy Dickson, “From the Mag.”
151. Todd DuBois, “NYCC 2015:”
154. Allegra.
155. As revealed by the miniseries’ storyboards.
156. At a Q&A session that preceding an early screening of the show’s finale, Olivia
Olson is reported to have said: “Marceline kinda [sic] disappeared after Flame Princess
was introduced.” Regardless of whether Flame Princess’s introduction was the reason for
Marceline’s apparent marginalization, it should be noted that during seasons five and six,
Marceline starred in only seven episodes (out of a total of 95): “Five More Short Graybles.”

157. Storyboard artist Jesse Moynihan, considered by many in the fandom to be one of the main creative voices of the show’s sixth season (a season in which Marceline starred in only one episode, “Princess Day”), once admitted that he found Marceline to be among the hardest characters for which to write. Paul Thomas, “Jesse Moynihan Interview,” Tumblr, 2015, https://gunterfan1992.tumblr.com/post/125847184210/jesse-moynihan-interview. Moynihan’s long-serving storyboard partner Ako Castuera likewise noted in an interview that she was not “a big vampire person.” John Moe, Open Mike Eagle, and Ako Castuera, “Stakes, Eating, Patterns, and Eurydice.” It consequently seems odd that both Moynihan and Castuera, with tasked with writing the majority of Marceline episodes that aired during season five, following Rebecca Sugar’s departure.

158. Tom Herpich (storyboard artist), interview with author, July 2, 2019.
159. Eric Thurm, “Bes Music on TV.”
160. “Upfront Slate.”
161. The first Cartoon Network promo, for instance, prominently featured scenes from “Everything Stays” (the only episode in the miniseries made up mostly of flashbacks) and promised that viewers would “discover Marceline’s vampire-hunting past.”
162. “Seasons seven and the start of eight”: That is, the 39 episodes that originally comprised the show’s seventh season.
163. She studied art and classical animation briefly at the Fellingsbro Folkhögskola (“Folk high school”), but “it wasn’t a very good year because they were shutting down or whatever.” Hanna K. Nyström, “FAQ,” Tumblr, http://hannakdraws.tumblr.com/post/105725895692/faq.
164. According to Nyström: “We had a Slack channel up where we (mostly the boarders [plus] Pen and Adam) could all talk, and the storyboards got posted on there too, so I got to read them at least. Then there were lots of emails and sometimes video calls. I didn’t feel like the work got impacted by me living far away … [And] everyone on that team was so sweet. I went to visit them twice and I just love them all so much.” Paul Thomas, “Hanna K. Nyström Interview,” Tumblr, 2017, https://gunterfan1992.tumblr.com/post/158352078174/hannak.
165. Thomas, “Hanna K. Nyström Interview.”
166. Sam Alden (storyboard artist), interview with author, August 22, 2019.
167. Bustillos, “How Adventure Time Came to Be.”
172. Moynihan.
173. Moynihan.
174. As to why the network rearranged the final few seasons, no one is quite sure. Some initially speculated that it would allow the network to release an additional season DVD, thereby increasing revenue, but given that the last three seasons were released domestically on a single DVD set, this is unlikely. Others speculate that the reorganization was an attempt to “even out” the seasons so that the seventh season did not disproportionately overshadow the others while they were being released to streaming sites.
177. Kohn, “Going Off the Air.”
178. In an interview, McHale noted that the “island wasn’t necessarily [his] idea, but that he was the one who was working to “[connect] all the dots” and “[make all the loose pieces fit together.” Interview with author, June 8, 2020.
180. Part of this promotional (non-)strategy may have been due to Cartoon Network’s recent decision to cancel the program.
181. Kohn, “Going Off the Air.”
188. Eric Thurm, “Talent Incubator.”
189. Pendarvis, “Waaaaahhhhhhhhhhh!”
190. Kent Osborne (@kentisawesome), “#AdventureTimeSeason9,” Twitter, July 21, 2016, 10:45 a.m., https://twitter.com/kentisawesome/status/756183428920283136. Note, at the time of this announcement, Cartoon Network had not rearranged the season divisions, meaning that the writers were under the impression they were working on a ninth, rather than tenth season.
192. Andy Swift, “‘Satisfying’ Series Finale.”
199. Kent Osborne, “Head Writer Kent Osborne.”; Kohn, “Going Off the Air.”
200. According to Falk: “I boarded the final scenes of the final episode, which felt weird to me, I felt like I was destroying the show... but it was just by chance that I worked on those scenes. Most of my section was simply a montage of what happened to a lot of the characters over the years. It took me three or four days to find reference material for all the characters and settings. My board partner was Sam Alden, and he showed me what some of the characters and props looked like, just from memory. I was surprised that he could do that!” Interview with author, March 25, 2019.
7. GOOD JUBIES:  
THE GUEST-ANIMATED  
EPISODES

*Adventure Time* always showed a readiness to experiment with the animation medium. This was perhaps best illustrated by the show’s willingness to hand over the reins of episode production to select guest animators, who put their own creative spin on the Land of Ooo. In an interview with HappyCool, showrunner Adam Muto explained: “I think [the use of guest directors] kind of grew out of the way we approach the show ... the storyboard artists define a lot of what an episode is going to be, so it’s already like we have guest directors ... so we just kind of expanded that to have [actual] guest directors.” In this chapter, I will catalog and discuss the various guest-animated episodes that aired over the course of the series’ run.

**“Guardians of Sunshine” (Season 2, Episode 16)**

*Adventure Time’s* first foray into the realm of guest animation occurred during production of the season two episode “Guardians of Sunshine.” In this episode, Finn and Jake are teleported inside BMO so that they can play the titular video game. Given this plot and its unique setting, the show’s producers were hoping to animate portions of the episode in a way that emulated the 8-bit, low-resolution graphics of old-school Atari video games like *Adventure* (1980), *Pac-Man* (1982), and *Pitfall!* (1982). But despite their
best efforts, the show’s production crew and animation houses were having trouble getting the CGI aesthetic right.²

Jacky Ke Jiang learned of this struggle while auditing a class at CalArts taught by Adventure Time’s lead character designer Phil Rynda. An animator who had previously served as a lead modeler for the PlayStation 3 video game Journey, Jiang was interested in working on the series, and so he mocked up a few short clips that illustrated his technical capabilities. Jiang subsequently showed the reel to the show’s producers, and they were impressed enough with his ability to hire him on as a freelance artist. Jiang was initially slated to serve as a “style supervisor,” who would merely oversee the animation process and provide input when necessary, but the producers soon decided that it would be far easier for him to animate the scenes himself.³

Jiang was given about a month to build digital models of the characters in the 3D modeling program Autodesk Maya, and then render whole portions of the episode in the desired style. While Jiang followed Herpich and Castuera’s storyboard closely in regard to the action, he was given substantial creative control over the character designs and the aesthetic look of the CGI elements. This led to him “add[ing] lots of animation ... easter eggs in each scene.”⁴

Jiang eschewed the use of a production manager or animation assistants, instead choosing to do all the work himself. He also worked from the first scene to the last scene instead of jumping around so that “each character’s emotional arcs [would play out] in a nice orderly fashion, like actors performing ... a live stage play.”⁵

It took Jiang five weeks to animate his portion of the episode, with a few extras days budgeted for implementing feedback provided by the show’s writers and producers. In the end, Jiang’s scenes comprise 5 minutes and 45 seconds of screen time—almost half the length of the full episode.⁶

“A Glitch Is a Glitch” (Season 5, Episode 15)

The second time Adventure Time dabbled in guest animation occurred during the writing of the show’s fifth season, when the episode “A Glitch Is a Glitch” was storyboarded and animated by the experimental Irish filmmaker David OReilly. Prior to the production of this episode, OReilly was known for his avant garde animated films, which, in addition to their slick 3D aesthetic, are infamous for juxtaposing cute, charming characters with dark or taboo topics like sex, murder, suicide, drug use, or spousal abuse. Pendleton Ward had been a fan of OReilly’s work for some time, and around 2010 (roughly during production of Adventure Time’s second season), he had actually reached out to OReilly to see if he was interested in contributing 3D animation to an episode. OReilly—who was a fan of Ward and several of the
artists working on the show—was indeed interested, but his responsibilities at the time (namely, his work on the film *The External World*) precluded a collaboration from happening. A few years later, OReilly emigrated from Europe to Los Angeles, where he ran into Ward. Ward once again extended to OReilly an invitation to work on an episode, and this time OReilly accepted.⁷

Inspired by his past experiences with glitch art, and “want[ing] a narrative idea to justify [his episode] being in 3D,”⁸ OReilly developed a story in which Finn and Jake attempt to stop a computer virus that has been programmed by Ice King to delete everyone—sans himself and Princess Bubblegum—from existence. To simulate the virus taking its toll on reality, the animation in “A Glitch Is a Glitch” starts off smooth and on-model, before devolving into bursts of random pixels, streaks of misaligned animation, compression artifacts, and heavy sound distortion. To simulate the near-complete breakdown of reality, OReilly also made liberal use of a technique known as “datamoshing,” which is the “distortion of [an] image, audio, or video, generated by an application of data compression that causes a diminishing of quality.”⁹ In an interview with Rhizome, OReilly admitted: “In general, doing stylistic glitch is easy compared to doing good character animation. Mixing the two gets very tricky though.”¹⁰

Some of OReilly’s initial jokes were too risqué (or, as Ward put it, “too funny”), forcing him to excise or rewrite certain sequences. Preserving his unique artist voice while also avoiding content to which the network might object was often a stressful balancing act. This was a particular challenge when it came time to craft a scene in which Finn and Jake receive a disturbing video via email that makes them feel physically ill. In an interview with game designer and academic Colleen Macklin, OReilly later said, “You got to [think like] a fucking lawyer. What ... can you show a kid [on television that] still make[s] them throw up?”¹¹ Using obscene shock sites goatse.cx,
LemonParty.com, and TubGirl as inspiration, OReilly eventually animated a short video of a young woman eating her hair (an act which while gross, was nowhere near as offensive as the contents of the aforementioned sites).\(^{12}\)

A different scene, featuring Princess Bubblegum kissing her hand, caused an issue with the censors at Cartoon Network for a reason OReilly did not understand. In his interview with Macklin, the artist explained:

> There was a scene ... where Bubblegum was kissing her hand ... [Cartoon Network] said she is not allowed to moan when she kisses; she can only make [light] kiss sounds but she's not allowed to [make passionate kiss sounds] ... so I had to go into a waveform editor and cut out moans for that version. I was like, “What do you think? Do you think hearing a moan is going to make some kid get up and fucking shoot up a school or something?” There was no logic there.\(^{13}\)

Later in 2020, OReilly expressed his irritation at this sort of network-mandated censorship, telling me: “Some things [in the episode] were cut back, or edited out without my input. ... It was extremely frustrating. When you reach the edges like that you realize you’re actually working in a very conservative environment pretending to not be.”\(^{14}\) OReilly’s (mis)treatment at the hands of the network left a decidely sour taste in his mouth, and in an email, he told me that “the experience was so awful that [he] will never work with them again.”\(^{14}\)

When it came time to score the episode, OReilly reached out to Bram Meindersma, a sound editor and composer who had contributed the music to *The External World*. OReilly had also wanted to craft a new intro for the show and have his friend Steven Ellison, better known by his stage name Flying Lotus, provide the music, but due to budgetary and time constraints, this did not come to pass; instead, Flying Lotus contributed the song “About that Time,” which plays over the episode’s ending credits.\(^{15}\) A hyperbolic chiptune track—replete with sporadic, glitchy chirps and a fuzzy synth bass—“About that Time” is a perfect finish to a truly madcap episode.

“A Glitch Is a Glitch” took most of 2012\(^ {16}\) to produce and was (appropriately) released on April 1, 2013. Upon its debut, the episode immediately garnered praise from those in both the animation and game design industries. Fans of *Adventure Time*, were a bit more divided, with some fans being put off by the episode’s writing and its distinct animation style. (This later led OReilly to joke in an interview with Macklin that his episode is “probably one of the most hated ... by the most hardcore fans” of *Adventure Time.*\(^ {17}\)) Other fans celebrated the show’s inventiveness and OReilly’s unique take on the universe.
“James Baxter the Horse” (Season 5, Episode 19) and “Horse and Ball” (Season 8, Episode 18)

Around the time that OReilly was working on “A Glitch Is a Glitch,” the show was busy collaborating with another guest animator: James Baxter. While his name might not be a household one to the average Joe or Josephine out there, in the world of animation, Baxter’s name is legendary, and for good reason. Baxter is a gifted character animator and an industry veteran who has worked on dozens of features such as The Little Mermaid (1989), Beauty and the Beast (1991), The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1996), and Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron (2002). And what Adventure Time episode was Baxter asked to work on? Why a jaunty installment entitled “James Baxter the Horse” of course! What is more, the producers also hired Baxter to voice the eponymous character, who, as his epithet suggests, is a horse that brays its own name in a comically posh accent while rolling around on a beach ball.

Often cited by fans as one of the show’s funniest episodes, “James Baxter the Horse” has its origins in something relatively mundane: a university lecture. In the early-to-mid oughts, when Ward was still a student at CalArts, one of the school’s professors invited Baxter to deliver a guest talk, in which he explained his unique take on the fundamentals of character animation. Hoping to demonstrate by doing rather than simply by saying, Baxter reached out to the audience and asked for a concept that he could animate before their very eyes. It was at that point that someone in the audience suggested that he animate a horse balancing on a beach ball. No doubt the audience laughed—it was a funny idea, after all—but Baxter decided that the concept was a bit too ambitious for the time allotted to him, and so he chose to work on something else.18

It just so happened that Ward was a student in that class, and the idea of a large, awkward horse trying to delicately balance on a beach ball of all things “stuck with [him].”19 Years later, when he was busy working on Adventure Time, Ward received a call from none other than James Baxter himself. The esteemed animator told Ward that he was a big fan of the series; he also mentioned that if Ward needed any freelance animation that he would be more than interested in helping out. This led Ward to think back on the memory of Baxter’s CalArts guest lecture, and soon, an episode idea began to percolate. According to Baxter:

Pen [later] called me up and said, “Hey, I’ve got this crazy idea I want to run by you.” And he sent me this picture [of a horse braying the name “James Baxter” while balancing on a beach ball]. He said, “I’m kind of writing you into an episode, and I
want to see if you would be interested in [animating parts of
the episode].” ... It was like the most flattering thing that you
could do."20

Most of “James Baxter the Horse” was animated in South Korea, but the
scenes featuring Baxter’s character were penciled by the animator himself
at his home studio in California.21 Baxter’s personal animation was then
composited with the animation produced overseas, forming a final, cohesive
whole (that said, the scenes that Baxter animated are readily apparent, due
to their distinctive dynamism).

“James Baxter the Horse” debuted on May 6, 2013 and became almost
an instant fan-favorite, thanks largely to its eccentric comedy and its fluid
animation. In fact, so popular was the episode that James Baxter (the anima-
tor) would later contribute animation to a sequel, the eighth-season episode
“Horse and Ball,” which aired on January 26, 2017.22 This follow-up not only
sees the return of Baxter’s equine character, but it also provides him with
a surprisingly touching backstory while commenting on the importance of
creative self-satisfaction. As with the earlier “James Baxter the Horse,” “Horse
and Ball” is a stand-out episode due to its distinctive animation, courtesy of
an industry veteran.

“Food Chain” (Season 6, Episode 7)

When news broke in early 2014 that Adventure Time would begin
airing its sixth season in the spring, information also leaked that the new
season would include another guest directed episode. The fandom reacted
largely with delight and immediately began to speculate as to whom the
guest director was, and what unique style the episode would be in.

It turned out that the episode in question was named “Food Chain,”
and it was directed by Japanese animation whiz Masaaki Yuasa.

According to TV Tropes, Yuasa is “one of the most prominent figures of
alternative anime” because “his visual style is immediately recognizable as
it significantly differs from standard anime iconography.”23 Indeed, Yuasa is
set apart from other anime directors due to his fondness for vibrantly wild
animation, a fluid approach to character designs, and a willingness to make
use of new styles in service of a story. This approach to animation gives all
of Yuasa’s productions a distinctive flair, and standouts of Yuasa’s oeuvre
include the feature film Mind Game (2004) and the television series Ping
Pong (2014).

Yuasa’s collaboration with the Adventure Time producers happened
accidentally. According to Adventure Time character designer Michelle
Xin, sometime in 2013, Yuasa hosted a Google Hangout session to talk directly to his fans about his film *Kick-Heart*, which had recently been funded via a ground-breaking Kickstarter campaign. Xin was one of the fans taking part in this Hangout, and during the session, she mentioned that she was a character designer on *Adventure Time*. Much to her amazement, Yuasa mentioned that he was a fan of the program, having long been captivated by the show’s unique character designs and its overall “adventurous feeling.” Soon after this chance online encounter, Yuasa and his longtime associate Eunyoung Choi contacted Cartoon Network, inquiring about a possible collaboration. According to Choi, “We reach[ed] out and asked ... ‘What if Yuasa worked [on] one episode? And ...’ [the producers of *Adventure Time*] talked and said, ‘Yeah, why not!’”

Cartoon Network itself was understandably a bit leery about green-lighting the project, given that it was not yet attached to an established animation studio, and so, to ameliorate these concerns, Yuasa and Choi co-founded Science SARU studio. Yuasa focused his attention on “director things” like storyboarding, whereas Choi took on a “producer-like” role by handling most of the day-to-day operations of the studio as well as serving as the episode’s creative director.

After brainstorming for a bit, Yuasa visited the Cartoon Network offices in 2013 to show the producers his preliminary ideas, most of which were focused on exploring the food chain. Yuasa also brought with him large watercolor illustrations that he had mocked up to better showcase his budding ideas. The show’s producers, delighted to be working with an artist of Yuasa’s caliber, were receptive to his ideas, and while they helped him refine the story to a certain degree, Yuasa was given almost total creative control over the direction of the episode’s plot and its final look. (According to Choi,
the only major change that Cartoon Network asked of Yuasa was to alter
the color of brown candy in one scene so that it looked less like feces.)

When it came time for the voice actors to record their lines for the
episode, Yuasa, with the help of a personal translator, coached the actors
himself. According to voice actress Minty Lewis (perhaps better known for
her role as a storyboard artist on the Cartoon Network series Regular Show):

The recording session was pretty bananas, too. There were
multiple steps of communication between Masaaki Yuasa, his
translator, the director, and the actors, so it was kind of like
playing [a game of] telephone so I had no idea if what I was
delivering was what was desired.

After the voice sessions were finished, Cartoon Network gave Science SARU
all the recorded takes so that the studio could choose the ones that captured
the right “mood.” When it came time to work on the episode’s soundtrack,
Yuasa solicited the help of Soichi Terada, a chiptune composer known in the
video game community for his scores to the Ape Escape series.

While most episodes of Adventure Time were animated on paper
and then scanned into a computer, Yuasa’s studio animated the entirety
of “Food Chain” using the now-deprecated Adobe Flash software. In the
2000s and 2010s, it was fairly common to hear Flash disparaged in some
artistic circles as a poor animation platform, but when one looks at Yuasa’s
work, it becomes apparent that under the right direction, Flash can be used
to create breathtaking pieces of media. Cartoon Brew writer Amid Amidi
expressed such a sentiment in a 2015 analysis of Yuasa and Science SARU’s
animation setup, writing “The studio appears to have a flexible production
pipeline that allows them to come up with inventive solutions for each
shot. Some of their scenes are puppeted, while others use full animation
techniques. All of it looks good.”

“Food Chain” aired on June 12, 2014, and in no time became a critical
darling among media critics, with Oliver Sava of The A.V. Club calling the
work “an engaging sensory experience” and “an unforgettable installment of this series.” In early 2015, the episode was nominated for a coveted
Annie Award, and later that summer the parade of accolades continued
when the episode was screened at the prestigious Annecy International
Animated Film Festival in Annecy, France.

“Food Chain” would not be the last time the Adventure Time producers worked with Science SARU, as the studio would also animate the
unique title sequences for the Stakes (2015), Islands (2017), and Elements
(2017) miniseries, as well as the show’s series finale, “Come Along with Me” (2018). Unlike with “Food Chain,” each of these intros was done in
the show’s established aesthetic, and the ease with which they blend into *Adventure Time*’s regular style is further testament to Yuasa and Science SARU’s animation prowess.

**“Water Park Prank” (Season 6, Episode 37)**

Near the end of season six, production on another guest directed installment began. This episode, which would eventually be named “Water Park Prank” was written and directed by David Ferguson, who prior to working on the show had been one of Pendleton Ward’s favorite experimental animators. Ferguson was based out of Glasgow, Scotland and known mostly for what animation reporter Amid Amidi called “fun ... naive animation [that is often paired with a] borderline incomprehensible Scottish accent.”

Interestingly, “Water Park Prank” was not originally slated to be a full episode. Back in 2014, Ferguson had been contacted by *Adventure Time*’s production company, Frederator, and asked if he was interested in animating their online short *Spacebear*—a job which he accepted. Soon after work on *Spacebear* wrapped, Ferguson received an email “out of the blue” from Cartoon Network, inquiring if he would be interested in working on an *Adventure Time* project. The network explained that they were wanting a five-minute “mini-episode” that would be released exclusively online; according to Ferguson, the intention was for this short to come across as a “bootleg version of *Adventure Time*,” with Ferguson himself voicing all the characters. Ferguson agreed to the project and worked diligently to mock up a storyboard—featuring Finn and Jake going to a water park and running into the Ice King—which was approved by the show’s producers and the network.

Cartoon Network eventually decided that it was no longer interested in producing web shorts, and when the news reached Ferguson, he was understandably worried that all his hard work was about to go up in a puff of smoke. Luckily, Adam Muto intervened, petitioning the network to salvage Ferguson’s creation. Ferguson had to endure “two or three nervous weeks” before he learned the fate of the project: his five-minute short had been upgraded to an eleven-minute episode that would air on Cartoon Network proper.

There were, however, additional challenges. Because Ferguson’s storyboard had been intended for a five-minute short, the upgrade forced him to “build [more scenes] around [his initial story] rather than try to redo the whole lot,” as the latter option would have not only forced him to bin what he had already created, but would have also eaten up far too much time. In an interview with podcaster Terry Anderson, Ferguson explained:
Even though I’m working in a simple style, I’m still usually on a tight deadline, and that’s why [producers or networks] might pick me to do something, because you can get away with something in that style... this looked like it was going to be something that I could actually spend quality time [on] and maybe put a bit more animation in, but then it became twice as long, and ... it wasn’t twice as long for the deadline. So I thought, “Right, I’m going to have to work even harder than I’ve ever worked before for something that is a huge thing.”

Despite the extreme time crunch, Ferguson managed to expand his episode by drafting up a b-story about “Princess B’Onangutan” and Finn being infected by parasitic “Daddy Sad Heads.”

Ferguson animated the entire episode in Glasgow, never actually journeying to California while the episode was in production. He did, however, listen in on the voice recordings that took place in Burbank via phone—an opportunity that he called “a surreal experience.”

“Water Park Prank” aired on May 21, 2015, near the tail-end of season six. At the time, the fan reaction to the episode was largely negative, with Ferguson telling Anderson in late 2015, “If you go looking for it, [the reception] is not great. [Many fans called it] the worst episode of Adventure Time ever, but some of the actual artists ... seem to like it, so I think that’s the main thing—as long as you haven’t ruined it for the people who work on it.”

“In early 2014—when production of Adventure Time’s seventh season began—the show’s producers let slip that they were interested in working with a stop-motion animator for their next guest directed episode. Soon thereafter, Kirsten Lepore—an experimental artist who had developed a distinct style while studying at both the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and CalArts—came onto the show’s radar after releasing her breathtaking stop-motion short Move Mountain. The film, which details the story of a young girl who climbs a volatile mountain to locate an herbal balsam, is a work of pure creativity, whose lamination of whimsy and emotion recalls the established aesthetic of Adventure Time; the show’s producers seemed to have thought the same thing, for soon after Lepore released her short film, Adam Muto contacted the animator and asked if she would be interested in working on a special stop-motion episode of the show. Lepore responded with a resounding “Yes!” In an interview, she explained:
[After receiving the offer] I was very giddy with excitement—both because it was an opportunity to work on a phenomenal show and also because it felt like a huge stepping stone in my career. At the time, I had actually only seen a few scattered episodes of *Adventure Time* (my husband was actually a big fan and had shown me a few over the years) so I was also pondering all the TV I would have to watch to catch up on the entire series and educate myself on the [*Adventure Time*] world!

Initially I pretty much had free rein to explore whatever concepts I wanted for the episode. Adam Muto even encouraged me to consider an episode without any of the traditional characters, as well. I brainstormed for a bit and came up with around 8 or 10 potential loose concepts that I pitched to the writers in a meeting and they gave their input. I feel like that was the only point at which I learned which things I should probably steer away from. For example, one of my main ideas was to have the characters transition from 2D to 3D (stop-motion) and be aware that their physicality had changed and comment on it. Pen Ward had big reservations about that one since he felt that we should treat the characters like they were real, rather than cartoons, which was understandable. ... [In terms of characters] I knew we had to have a limited cast due to the budget ... so I picked my favorites that I thought would play off each other well for the story. For a while I really wanted to include Marceline, because I love her, but [I] couldn’t find the right spot for her in this particular story ... In the end I wound up coming up with an entirely new idea ... that was then approved by Kent Osborne.47

The story that Osborne and the producers approved—detailing Finn, Jake, BMO, and Lumpy Space Princess’s attempt to build a bunker and avoid the destruction wrought by a tempestuous storm (played by veteran voice actor Kevin Michael Richardson)—took Lepore roughly “five or six months” to draft up, block out, and storyboard.48 This task was quite difficult, with Lepore confessing, “Storyboarding is exhausting and super hard ... you basically have to do the job of the writer, cinematographer, editor, designer, and fine draftsman all in one.”49

After several revisions, Lepore’s storyboard was accepted, but just as she began to shift from writing to directing, a crisis of sorts occurred: Cartoon Network trimmed the episode’s initial budget down substantially. As can be guessed, this put a major strain on Lepore and the show’s producers, forcing them to find a stop-motion production house that would agree to work
with a smaller-than-usual budget. Eventually, Bix Pix Entertainment stepped up to the plate, promising to work with the show and problem-solve any budgetary issues that might arise.\textsuperscript{50} (Lepore later called Kelly Bixler, the production house’s owner, as a “saint,” as she was kind enough to “gift” Lepore an additional week to work on miscellaneous aspects of production.)\textsuperscript{51}

The stop-motion animating finally began in November of 2014: five weeks were dedicated to creating a set and the necessary puppets, and another five weeks were dedicated to the actual animation. To help develop the set pieces, backdrops, and props, Lepore reached out to the talented Jason Kolowski, who among other things, rigged up a stop-motion stream and designed a replica of Finn and Jake’s tree fort.\textsuperscript{52}

Stop-motion animation itself is extremely time-consuming, with sometimes only a few seconds of workable footage being produced in a single day. To make the daunting task of animating 11 minutes of footage more manageable, the animation was divided amongst four stages, which were each managed by a lead animator.\textsuperscript{53} While this sped up filming by a factor of four, it did necessitate the creation of four puppets of each of the main characters.\textsuperscript{54}

After the bulk of the animation was finished, Lepore spent February–April 2015 working from her house on the “finishing touches,” such as special effects and post-production cleanup. Lepore also took this time to work on a stop-motion intro for the episode, which she animated entirely by herself.

When it came time to hire a composer for the episode, Lepore sought out the talents of Richard Vreeland, an experimental electronic musician known professionally as “Disasterpeace.” While Vreeland arguably gained prominence after scoring the indie horror film \textit{It Follows} (2014), it was ac-
tually his score to the 2012 video game *Fez* that prompted Lepore to contact him. She explained:

Towards the end of the animation process I was obsessively listening to the *Fez* soundtrack, and it dawned on me one day that Rich would probably be the perfect person to score the episode. It felt like a total pipe dream, and I never expected him to say yes, but I just reached out to him by email and he agreed ... I love the score he created so much and was incredibly happy to have him on the project.55

In an interview, Disasterpeace told me that the feeling was mutual, and he was “ecstatic to be involved” with the episode.56 Disasterpeace later told me via email:

The score took a few months [to compose]. It was a bit of an on-and-off again process, in part due to the creation schedule for the episode. ... I worked entirely remotely, and Kirsten was my only point of contact. It can be quite nice to hash out music for something like this with just a single person. Sometimes when there are a lot of voices involved it can make the process more difficult. ... Kirsten gave me lots of freedom to explore different ideas and as she has a musical background herself, we got to collaborate a bit on some different sections of the episode, specifically Jake’s nature rapping segment. ... I wanted to try sourcing sample material from friends for the score, and so what you hear in the end result is a collection of sources, various people playing instruments, answering machines, Gameboys, and other eclectic sounds which helped to create the sound of the episode.57

“Bad Jubies” aired on January 4, 2016 (many months after it was completed), and like the guest episodes of the past, was immediately lauded by fans and critics alike. In fact, so positive was the reaction that the episode later netted both an Emmy Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animation, and an Annie Award for Best Animated TV/Broadcast Production for a Children’s Audience. It is not hard to see why the episode was showered with these accolades: “Bad Jubies” is a sprightly excursion that successfully transposes the show’s *je ne sais quoi* into a three-dimensional environment.
“Beyond the Grotto” (Season 8, Episode 3) and “Ketchup” (Season 9, Episode 11)

During the middle of 2015, the Adventure Time writers developed an episode entitled “Beyond the Grotto,” in which Finn, Jake, and their pet “sealward” get trapped in an odd parallel dimension. Storyboarded by Adventure Time veterans Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone, the middle portion of this episode features Finn and Jake interacting with bizzaro versions of Ooo’s denizens and becoming increasingly disoriented as their minds are manipulated by hallucinatory “purple stuff.” Given that “Beyond the Grotto” was ripe for trippy visuals, the show’s producers thought it best to bring in a guest animator to make the episode stand out. It was in this way that the show came to work with Lindsay and Alex Small-Butera.

A husband and wife art duo, the Small-Buteras had met one another when they were students of animation at Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) in the late oughts. After graduation, they made a name for themselves online with their whimsical web series Baman Piderman. Around 2014, Cartoon Network contacted the duo, inquiring if they were interested in animating parts of the Clarence episode “Tuckered Boys,” in which the main characters stay up all night and, in a sleep-deprived state, begin to wildly hallucinate. The Small-Buteras were fans of the show and naturally agreed to take part.

One thing led to another, and soon the two were approached by Adventure Time showrunner Adam Muto, who asked if they were also interested in contributing animation to “Beyond the Grotto.” Muto had long been an admirer of the Small-Buteras’ work (in the past, he had even donated money to a Baman Piderman Kickstarter campaign), and so he was eager to

Alex (left) and Lindsay (right) Small-Butera at the 2018 Primetime Emmy Awards ceremony. For her work on “Ketchup,” Lindsay won an Emmy for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animation. (Photo courtesy of Lindsay Small-Butera)
work with them. The Small-Buteras were likewise excited by the opportunity and eagerly signed on.

According to Lindsay, Cartoon Network and the show’s producers “trusted [them] to take care of the seven minutes of full animation” and gave them “incredible” creative control over the finished look of the episode. “The only thing we couldn’t alter,” Lindsay explained to me via email, “was the dialogue, since it had already been recorded. ... We received sketchy [story]boards and ended up redoing most of them, while using [the originals] for inspiration.”

The Small-Buteras animated the episode in Flash, but strived to make the animation feel both “other worldly” and as “‘un-Flash’ as possible.” In regard to the latter point, the two decided to use a line thickness recalling the distinctive look of graphite. When it came to coloring in the individual cels, Lindsay explained online:

I had [an] idea to do an offset printing style of color starting after Finn and Jake consume the purple stuff and start forgetting themselves. Before that point, they’re colored how they normally would be in a traditional [Adventure Time] episode, but as they descend into an [out of body] experience, I thought it would be neat if the colors were literally out of body and slowly became more purple as the episode progressed.

Lindsay and Alex worked on “Beyond the Grotto” for about three months. The resulting episode, complete with wiggly lines and strong cel shading, is reminiscent of the “Squigglevision” programs developed in the 1990s and early 2000s by animation pioneer Tom Snyder, such as *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist* and *Home Movies*. And of course, it also echoes the off-beat quirkiness that made so many fall in love with *Baman Piderman* in the first place.

Around mid-to-late-2016, the producers of *Adventure Time* once again reached out to the Small-Buteras, inquiring if they were interested in providing animation for the episode “Ketchup,” in which Marceline and BMO entertain one another by taking turns telling allegorical stories. On their personal Tumblr, the Small-Buteras wrote that it was “extremely flattering” that the *Adventure Time* producers enjoyed their work enough to ask for their return. Unlike “Beyond the Grotto”—in which Lindsay and Alex worked in only one style—“Ketchup” vacillates between four dissimilar aesthetics: the show’s regular look, a “tropical” but slightly “unsettling” look for BMO’s first story, a “cinematic” look for Marceline’s puppet show, and a “theater” look for BMO’s tale of the “Moonlady.”

Lindsay worked closely with Matt Cummings (a painter who had designed backgrounds for “Beyond the Grotto”) to develop these individual...
styles, striving to make each distinct but not jarring. In an email, Lindsay explained to me:

I wanted each story to have its own unique feeling [and to] emotionally resonate in very specific ways. BMO’s initial story is child-like and humorous, and clearly quite off from what had really “happened” during Islands. I wanted to have a kind of curious broken line style and bright color palette that sort of described a tutti fruitti child’s brain ... For this we also did everything on 1’s, which means there’s a full 24 frames drawn per second rather than a more traditional 12. It gives it a strange, dream-like effect, although [it] adds a lot of time and difficulty.

Marceline’s story is still a fairy tale, but I wanted to go a [cleaner], traditional route because she’s a bit more mature than BMO, even though she’s trying to explain a complicated situation to him through the lens of “puppets.” Here we relied more heavily on slowly changing color[s] to describe a turn of events.

For Moonlady, [we] wanted it to feel like a stage play, and contain a lot of theatrical flourish and decoration. It feels more like it’s happening on a set, rather than in a real space, since BMO’s story feels sort of like a legend or a fable. I had a lot of fun with the design of this one, particularly Moonlady herself.

As with “Beyond the Grotto,” the Small-Buteras worked tirelessly on “Ketchup,” with production lasting for roughly five months. The end result was a poignant peek into Marceline’s psyche, which later earned Lindsay an Emmy Award for Outstanding Short Form Animated Program in 2018.

“Diamonds and Lemons” (Bonus Episode)

While it was not strictly guest directed, the bonus episode “Diamonds and Lemons”—produced after the finale of Adventure Time was written and storyboarded—is distinctive in terms of style. It thus seems appropriate to discuss the episode’s creation in a section focused on aesthetically unique installments of Adventure Time.

The idea for “Diamonds and Lemons” developed organically. In early 2017, Mojang, the Swedish video game development hub that had created the popular sandbox game Minecraft, started working with Cartoon Network to develop a “Mash-Up Pack” for Minecraft players, which took characters from the series and placed them in a Minecraft context. This partnership was fruitful, and by the fall of 2017 (roughly a year after Cartoon Network
announced that the show would be ending) there was talk of producing a special Minecraft-themed episode of Adventure Time, which would be partially funded by Mojang. Adam Muto quickly jumped at this chance, explaining in an interview with Minecraft.net: “My own reasons [for working on the episode] were pretty selfish. Production was wrapping on the final [Adventure Time] season and I wanted an excuse to work with the crew one more time. And we were able to get quite a few of the crew to work on it.”

Regarding the aesthetic look for the episode, Mojang told the producers that while they wanted the episode to celebrate all things Minecraft, the final episode “shouldn’t look exactly like the game.” This necessitated the producers soliciting different styles from a bevy of artists. One of those approached was Joe Sparrow, a UK-based freelancer with whom Adam Muto had long wanted to collaborate. On his personal Tumblr, Sparrow wrote: “The idea was to get a look that felt recognisably Minecraft-y whilst also fitting in with the aesthetic of the show, which was a fun challenge.” Sparrow’s style was eventually the one selected, and Sparrow himself was later hired on as a character designer for the episode.

To generate the basic story, Muto and the other writers consulted with former art director Patrick McHale, storyboard artist/supervising director Cole Sanchez, and series creator Pendleton Ward—all of whom had passionately played Minecraft in the past. The episode was storyboarded and written by Adventure Time veteran Hanna K. Nyström in partnership with the tenth-season storyboard revisionist Anna Syvertssson. The final story—featuring Finn, Jake, Bubblegum, Marceline, Ice King, Lumpy Space Princess, and Lemongrab all interacting with one another in a Minecraft-version of Ooo—contains a sweet lesson about the nature of beauty and meaning.

As the creative cherry on top, “Diamonds and Lemons” also features a special 8-bit style intro, animated by Ivan Dixon and Paul Robertson. In 2015, the two had produced a memorable pixel-version of The Simpsons intro which went viral and was later aired as part of the twenty-sixth-season episode “My Fare Lady.” The two later inquired as to whether the show’s producers were interested in an intro of this sort, but according to Muto, the project “didn’t feel quite appropriate” until production of “Diamonds and Lemons” began. As a celebration of all things 8-bit, Dixon and Robertson’s intro nicely compliments the episode’s video game theme.

Postscript: The Don Hertzfeldt Episode that Could Have Been

At the 2018 San Diego Comic Con, writers for the website Comics Beat asked showrunner Adam Muto if there were any guest animators with whom
the writers and producers had been hoping to collaborate. Muto answered: “I really wanted to do a Don Hertzfeldt directed episode. We were even talking to him during the last season but it got canceled. So that was the one director I wanted to get in before the show ended.”

Hertzfeldt is perhaps best known for his cult classic short film *Rejected* (2000), which satirizes television culture by taking the form of “rejected” wraparound segments and commercial shorts for the (fictitious) Family Learning Channel. Replete with absurd comedy, over-the-top cartoon violence, and meta-humor about the medium of animation, the film has developed a fan following on video streaming sites such as YouTube. Given the absurdity of Hertzfeldt’s shorts, it is not hard to imagine how madcap his episode could have been.
Endnotes

5. Jiang.
8. OReilly.
10. Rourke, “Datamoshing the Land of Ooo.”
12. OReilly seems to take a certain pleasure in knowing that this disturbing scene was funded by Cartoon Network Studios. IndieCade.
13. IndieCade.
19. Muto.
22. Originally Season 8, Episode 5 before the division shuffle. See: “A Note on Season Divisions” and “Appendix B.”
27. In Japanese, サイエンスSARU.
29. Yuasa and Choi, “Yuasa and Choi Interview”.
30. Anime! Anime! staff.
31. Kent Osborne and Jessica DiCicco, “Head of Story.”
34. Smith.
37. For an example, see the comments on Amid Amidi, “Yuasa Used Flash.”
38. Amidi.
Good Jubies

40. Amid Amidi, “David Ferguson’s Animated Shorts.”
41. Terry Anderson and David Ferguson, “David ‘Swatpaz’ Ferguson”.
42. Anderson and Ferguson.
43. Anderson and Ferguson.
44. Anderson and Ferguson.
45. Anderson and Ferguson.
46. Oliver Sava, “Joys and Pains.”
47. Kirsten Lepore, (guest director), interview with author, October 10, 2018.
49. Lepore, interview with author, October 10, 2018.
50. Lepore.
51. Lepore.
52. Good Jubies, Interview with Kirsten Lepore, et al.
54. Good Jubies, Interview with Kirsten Lepore, et al.
57. Disasterpeace.
58. Originally Season 7, Episode 29 before the division shuffle. See: “A Note on Season Divisions” and “Appendix B.”
59. MassArt Alumni, “Alex and Lindsay: Best Fwends.”
60. Lauren Morse et al., “‘Baman Piderman’ Creators, Alex & Lindsay Small-Butera (Part 2)”.
61. Morse et al.
63. Small-Butera.
65. Small-Butera, “Hello!”
66. Morse et al., “‘Baman Piderman’ Creators, Alex & Lindsay Small-Butera (Part 2)”.
67. Originally Season 8, Episode 25 before the division shuffle. See: “A Note on Season Divisions” and “Appendix B.”
68. Lindsay Small-Butera (@SmallBuStudio), “Being excited over the Annies has had me looking back over our 2017 work fondly” [thread], Twitter, 2018, https://twitter.com/SmallBuStudio/status/960211313527083009.
70. Small-Butera, “Being excited over the Annies…”
72. Small-Butera, “Being excited over the Annies…”
73. Tom Stone and Adam Muto, “Adventure Time Minecraft Episode.”
74. Stone and Muto.
75. Stone and Muto.
77. Stone and Muto, “Adventure Time Minecraft Episode.”
78. Laura Polson and Paul Kalina, “The Simpsons Opening Sequence Created by Australians Ivan Dixon and Paul Robertson.”
79. Stone and Muto, “Adventure Time Minecraft Episode.”
Any consideration of *Adventure Time*'s production would not be complete without a discussion of the show’s music—an aesthetic element many would agree helped accent the show’s zany energy. The first part of this present chapter discusses the importance of the composers who crafted *Adventure Time*'s chiptune score: Casey James Basichis and Tim Kiefer. The chapter comes to a close with an outline of the major musical numbers featured in the series, complete with production information and critical commentary.

**The Composers of *Adventure Time***

The soundtrack to *Adventure Time* was the product of two electro-wizards named Casey James Basichis and Tim Kiefer. Like Ward, both Basichis and Kiefer had attended CalArts in the early 2000s; due largely to their shared interest in experimental music, the two became friends and often collaborated on idiosyncratic school projects. Meanwhile, Basichis and Ward got to know one another thanks to a web comic and fortuitous living circumstances: “Pen and I haunted the same [CalArts] dormitory hall,” Basichis explained via email. “I was stalking his web comic ‘Bueno the Bear’ and eventually, awkwardly approached him to tell him I adored it.” This moment of sincere admiration led to collaborations between the two, which eventually grew to include Kiefer, too.
When the *Adventure Time* short was being written, Ward asked Basichis to compose the background music; when Cartoon Network picked up the full series, Basichis was naturally hired as series composer. During the early production of season one, Basichis worked on musical compositions by himself—a task he later described as “over the top [and] unnecessarily monastic”—and so, to make the process less taxing, Basichis began reaching out to Kiefer for assistance. “I ... help[ed Basichis] out every now and then,” Kiefer explained, “like recording weird vocal sounds for his ‘Jiggler’ score, or making video game music for a BMO game in ‘My Two Favorite People.’ Pretty soon I was arranging some of Casey’s musical sketches (‘The Witch’s Garden,’ ‘Wizard’).” Roughly around the midpoint of season one, the producers decided to bring Kiefer on board as an additional composer, with his first episode being “When Wedding Bells Thaw.” This was a wise choice, for as Kiefer noted, it ensured that “each episode got the musical TLC it deserved, despite the crazy TV deadlines.”

The soundtrack to *Adventure Time* can broadly be categorized as electronic dance music (EDM), but arguably this label collapses down the numerous dimensions that make Basichis and Kiefer’s music so charming. According to Kiefer, during season one, he and Basichis worked together to figure out “the sound” of the show, and while Pendleton Ward often had specific notes about the music he was envisioning in the final cut, he was also interested in letting the composers work their own magic; “We would be given a decent amount of direction,” Kiefer clarified at a 2018 WonderCon Q&A session, “but ... we were free to interpret ... the simple direction from Pen [Ward].” Basichis seconded this point, telling me: “Generally we were given an unreasonable amount of freedom and patience—Pen, Adam and the rest are inscrutable angelic beings.” As one might imagine, this flexibility quickly led Basichis and Kiefer to experiment with other genres of music, and by the time the first half of the series was finished, Kiefer noted, “every single episode [sounded] completely different.”

Despite both being electronic producers, Basichis and Kiefer approached composing from slightly different angles. For Basichis, the process involved both “intellectual” and “performative” phases. In a featurette included with the first season DVD, Basichis explained the “intellectual” phase as follows: “I usually start[ed] by looking at the characters and the things that [were] specific to an episode, and [I tried] to find the real attitude of it, and how I could represent it musically.” When he entered into the “performative” phase of recording, Basichis was wont to employ the wonders of technology, either by creating computer programs that helped him dream up new melodies, or by assembling a “component orchestra” of mechanized instruments that “play[ed] differently than the way you expect them.” Basichis’s experimentation later led him to describe his “more WTF soundtrack efforts” as
being “littered with prototypes on the way to a new musical mathematics and cognition.”

Of the many songs in his Adventure Time oeuvre, perhaps Basichis’s more famous background tracks are those that he composed for the show during its first season, such as the hyperactive party song that opens “The Enchiridion!,” the operatic tracks featured in “Ricardio the Heart Guy,” and the playfully autotuned score of “The Jiggler.” Basichis also produced the music for many of the songs sung by character, including the positively infectious “House Hunting Song” from the first-season episode “Evicted!” and Marceline’s famous “Fry Song,” first heard in the second-season premiere “It Came from the Nightosphere.”

Kiefer too was enthralled with electronic music, but he also had a special affinity for more traditional instruments. In fact, many of the characters’ iconic instruments (e.g., Finn’s flute, Jake’s viola, Marceline’s bass) were played by Kiefer. In terms of distinct genres, Kiefer cites Chicago juke, footwork, and skweee as his main influences. Some of Kiefer’s best-known background tracks include “Manlorette Party” (the smooth dance track that plays over a montage in the first-season episode “When Wedding Bells Thaw”), “Chip Dip Triple Flips Are Hip” (the chiptune magnum opus that opens season two’s “Power Animal” with an 8-bit bang), and the high-spirited rave music heard in the second-season episode “Belly of the Beast.” Kiefer also produced the instrumentals for the Rebecca Sugar classics “Time Adventure” and “Everything Stays” (the latter of which has, as of September 2019, almost a third of a million streams on Kiefer’s personal Soundcloud).

When Basichis and Kiefer first started to work on the series, the network provided them with about two weeks per episode; this gave them plenty of time to think of fun background tunes. But as the show got more and more popular, the network began to tighten their deadlines, and by the time the show reached the apex of popularity during its fifth season, the composers only had about four to five days to work on an episode. The drastic reduction in turnaround time caused both musicians stress, but interestingly, Kiefer did note that it sometimes led him to experience a “weird Nirvana”: “I think the crazy intensity of the network TV deadlines ... helped ... [I would say to myself] ‘Stop thinking. ... You can’t overthink this. There isn’t enough time. Just go with your instinct. Just kind of be reflexive about it.’” In a 2019 retrospective about the series, Kiefer once again alluded to this state of mind, arguing that while stressful, the crunch nevertheless allowed him to tap into the “creative sublime.”

Throughout the show’s run, Basichis and Kiefer split composing duties between themselves, each working on their own set of episodes. This division of labor was not because Basichis and Kiefer disliked collaborating with one another—in fact, the latter noted that “collaborations are a sweet ...
thing”—but rather due to simple logistics: For the first five or so years of the show’s production, Basichis was based out of Los Angeles, whereas Kiefer lived in San Francisco. Due to this distance, working one-on-one together was a difficult endeavor to coordinate. And even after he moved to Los Angeles during the show’s later seasons, Kiefer told me that collaborations were still hard to coordinate because of the show’s “prohibitive production schedule.” When a fortuitous collaboration did come to pass, it “look[ed] something like sending recordings and parts back and forth, infusing them with [the composer’s] zany styles each session.”

For years, *Adventure Time* fans clamored for a full soundtrack, containing the electronic bleeps and bloops that gave each episode so much atmosphere. While Spacelab9 released a number of limited-run vinyl records over the years (including a Marceline mini-album in 2015, followed by a partial soundtrack in 2016), these releases compiled only the songs sung by the show’s characters, and excluded Basichis and Kiefer’s distinctive score. What is more, these releases used audio ripped directly from the episodes, meaning that the sound quality was shoddy. For a time, it seemed that fans would never get what they wanted, but then, in November of 2018, Cartoon Network finally acquiesced to the audiophiles by releasing a double-LP soundtrack of the *Adventure Time* finale “Come Along with Me”; this was followed up by the release of *The Complete Series Soundtrack Box Set* in July of the following year. According to Kiefer (who also co-produced the set):

Working on the [project] the past year and change was pretty surreal. For one, Casey and I were the last holdouts of the [*Adventure Time*] staff, digging through nine years of memories by ourselves! A weird experience while the rest of the world was moving on from the series ending. Olivia Olson [also] joined in the fun to resurrect “Everything Stays”—we made an extended version exclusive to the Complete Series soundtrack. Breathing new life into a dozen or so old tracks—“A Blip and A Bubble,” “Party with the Chief,” “Thinking of Butts,” [etc.]—was my fondest memory of the process.

Spread across four LPs, a 10” vinyl record, a CD, and a cassette tape, *The Complete Soundtrack* is truly a mammoth set that assembles over 200 of the songs featured in the series, including not only the ones sung by characters but also selections from Basichis and Kiefer’s eclectic body of work.
A Rundown of Major Songs

In addition to Basichis and Kiefer’s score, *Adventure Time* is replete with catchy songs sung by main, supporting, and background characters alike. Often times, these tunes tie directly into the show’s main plot, either by propelling the action forward, keying the audience in to characters’ emotions, or a combination of both. In this section, I explore many of these songs in greater detail. However, before we dive in, I must note that I will not be documenting *every* song featured in the show, as this would take up far too much space (for reference, the *Adventure Time* Wikia lists well over a hundred songs that have appeared across the show’s 283 episodes, many of which are only a few seconds long). Instead, I will focus on those that have substantial emotional heft for the characters, or those about which much has been said by the show’s writers, storyboard artists, producers, voice actors, or fans.

The Theme Song (Also Known as “Adventure Time”)

Before Pendleton Ward had even storyboarded the initial “Adventure Time” pilot, he had already written a potential theme song. In fact, during the initial pitch to Frederator, Ward even brought in a guitar and played the tune to Fred Seibert and the other big-wigs at the production studio. Seibert was completely caught off guard by this ad hoc concert (“In ten thousand pitches that we’ve gotten, no body’s been in there [with a] guitar,” Seibert remarked in a 2013 interview), but Ward’s idiosyncratic song-and-pitch tactic was almost certainly one of the reasons why Frederator took such a chance on Ward.

When it came time to record the track for the pilot, Ward asked a friend of his to play the guitar. During a 2014 interview, Ward revealed that just before recording the guitar part, his friend “farted really loud.” Ward caught this errant sound effect during the mixing process, but instead of excising it from the final mix, he actually *increased* the volume because he thought it was a funny. (It could be argued that this creative decision somewhat portended the comedic direction the show would eventually take.)

A few years later, when Ward was working on the official series opening, he recorded a temporary version of the theme “on a bad microphone in the animatics bay” so that he could turn in a rough demo of the introduction animation for network approval. This version of the theme song—performed by Ward on a ukulele—is noticeably lo-fi, as Ward intended to go back and record a slicker version once the opening was OK’ed. However, when Ward tried redoing the song, he found himself drawn to the almost anti-folk nature of the original. After Casey James Basichis added a few additional effects, the temp track then became the final version.
“Baby” (from “The Jiggler,” Season 1, Episode 6)
While not the first song composed for the series (that honor belongs to “House Hunting Song,” which is discussed next), “Baby” was the first that aired. A spasmodic melange of auto-tuned vocals and blippy samples, the track is in many ways epitomical of the show’s wild and wacky first season.

In an email chat, Basichis explained to me that the song’s soundscape was the result of extreme musical experimentation: “‘Baby’ and [the score to] ‘The Jiggler’ were the most counter intuitive compositions on the show. I made a giant sample library of vocal fry, breakup and other raspy artifacty effects, and [then I] autotuned them into modem speak. They were then mapped to a keyboard, controlled by dynamic—so what sample was triggered depended on hitting the key at an exact hardness. Why? Reply hazy, try again.”

“House Hunting Song” (from “Evicted!” Season 1, Episode 12)
“House Hunting Song” was the first song written after Adventure Time entered into production. In the original storyboard for the episode “Evicted!,” the notes specify that the scenes of Finn and Jake looking for new homes were to be accompanied by simple “montage music.” At some point during the episode’s development, Pendleton Ward decided to replace the generic music with an actual, sung song, and so he whipped up some lyrics that describe Finn and Jake’s plight, all the while lambasting Marceline the Vampire Queen for being “mean” to the heroes. Ward recorded an a capella version of this tune before handing it over to then-creative director Patrick McHale, who trussed it up by composing a guitar part.

McHale then recorded a simple demo of his arrangement, accompanying himself on the acoustic guitar. According to McHale, this version of the song was intended to sound “lame,” like a “singer songwriter guy who’s into Dave Matthews but isn’t nearly as talented.” Ward enjoyed McHale’s take and petitioned for his version to be used in the episode, but McHale vetoed this decision. Ward subsequently recorded two versions: The first was a soft, restrained interpretation of the song, which Ward described as sounding “nice [and] normal.” The second version (which Ward sardonically referred to as the “fake energy guy” version, and which Basichis called “stentorian”) was loud and punchier, having been directly inspired by the sound of the pop punk band blink-182. Ward favored the former, but on behest of executive producer Derek Drymon, the latter was selected.

The song then passed to Basichis, who spruced up the instrumentation by adding mellow, pulsing drums and warm strings. According to the composer, the final version was produced in a hurry: “I think this was also one of the first nightmare crunches where I was still composing the song while [the
producers were] mixing the episode wondering where the music was. The first of many falling skies.”

After the recording of the “House Hunting Song,” Ward attempted to scale back the show’s use of music, arguing that Adventure Time should live up to its name by “go[ing] in a more straight adventure way.” Luckily, the writers and storyboard artists politely opposed this direction, leading to musical numbers becoming an integral part of the series’ DNA.

“Fry Song” (from “It Came from the Nightosphere” Season 2, Episode 1)

Out of all of Adventure Time’s many songwriters, perhaps none is more respected than Rebecca Sugar, who first gained attention for her songwriting abilities after storyboarding the second-season premiere, “It Came from the Nightosphere.” In this episode, Marceline the Vampire Queen sings the “Fry Song” about the strained relationship with her father.

Sugar’s initial draft of the song featured lyrics that focused overtly on Marceline’s father being a neglectful parent. Ward was concerned that this version would be a bit too serious for the show, and so he worked closely with Sugar to make the track a bit funnier. The two latched onto a lyric in Sugar’s original version—in which Marceline bemoans how her father does not “take [her] to get a burger and shake-γ [sic]”—and rewrote the entire song to be about a past incident in which Marceline’s father ravenously ate some of her French fries without asking. While these lyrics are superficially silly, deep down they explicate the sort of relationship that Marceline and her father share: he is a deadbeat dad who is worried only about himself, and Marceline feels that while he might say he loves her, his (in)actions speak louder than words.

At the storyboard pitch for “It Came from the Nightosphere,” Sugar nervously performed the song on ukulele in front of fellow crew members and higher-ups at Cartoon Network; Ward assisted by beat-boxing. Despite Sugar’s anxiety, the pitch was well-received, and Eric Homan of Frederator later “apologized” on the company’s official blog for not filming the pitch because he had found it so enjoyable.

“Fry Song” was then handed off to Casey James Basichis, who whipped up a bass-heavy instrumental; when I asked him in early 2020 for his thoughts about the song via email, Basichis quite poetically described the finished product as “daddy issues in an atmosphere of delicious golden crisp.” In the same exchange, he also lauded Olivia Olson’s “unbelievably good” vocal performance.

After “It Came from the Nightosphere” debuted on October 11, 2010, “Fry Song” become a massive hit with the fanbase—as evidenced by the dozens upon dozens of amateur covers uploaded onto video streaming sites like
During Adventure Time’s heyday, the song was one of the show’s most popular, and even today, when asked what song has stuck with them all these years, many fans will cite Rebecca Sugar’s “Fry Song” as the one ditty that had the most impact.

“Susan Strong”  
(from “Susan Strong” Season 2, Episode 18)  
The melody of this song derives from an earlier tune that a young Pendleton Ward had composed when he was a student at CalArts. This song had been written when Ward and his friends were enthralled with an online game called Blade Mistress, with the tune itself being an ode to Ward’s character, Susan Strong. Years later, when Ward and the Adventure Time crew were working on the “Susan Strong” episode, Ward decided to recycle his old ditty for the episode. But because Ward’s original was “not at all safe for television,” storyboard artist Rebecca Sugar was tasked with rewriting the lyrics. The end result is therefore a complex amalgamation of both Ward and Sugar’s playful creativity.

“Friends Don’t Fight”  
(from “Video Makers” Season 2, Episode 23)  
“Video Makers” is a somewhat overlooked second-season episode that focuses on Finn and Jake’s attempt to film a home movie. Alas, because the brothers cannot decide on a unified approach, they end up in a bitter feud. Poor BMO, caught in the middle of this fight, decides to whip up “Friends Don’t Fight,” an electro-ditty about the importance of friendship and forgiveness. Written by storyboard revisionist David C. Smith, the song was a last minute addition to the episode, replacing a red carpet reveal party that storyboard artist Kent Osborne felt was too unrealistic (even for Ooo). Recording “Friends Don’t Fight” was a new experience for Niki Yang (the voice of BMO), who told me via email:

Singing at karaoke is my only public singing experience. ... The friendship song was my very first song ever recorded in my life. Of course, I was deadly nervous and [it] took a while to finish recording the song. But Pen wasn’t happy about the result. [So he] called me later that day, and we went to the composer’s house and had to re-record.

Production issues aside, the end result is a pleasant juxtaposition of acoustic guitar and robotic autotune, which manages to tug at the listener’s heart strings while also worming its way into their ear.
“Buff Baby”  
(from “Memory of a Memory” Season 3, Episode 3)  
After being swept into Finn’s mind in the third-season episode “Memory of a Memory,” Marceline witnesses a baby version of Finn singing a ridiculous song entitled “Puncha Yo Buns” to himself in a mirror. This tune was not originally in the episode’s storyboard, and in its stead, writer and artist Tom Herpich had drafted up a quick scene featuring Finn talking to himself in the mirror “like a cool guy,” à la Robert De Niro in the film *Taxi Driver* (1976). During the revision phase, Herpich replaced this scene with a slightly more absurd sequence in which Joshua the Dog consoles Finn after the latter threw up a love letter meant for his elementary school teacher. When the storyboard got to Ward, he “vetoed” these ideas, replacing the scene with the “Puncha Yo Buns” song. To ramp up the scene’s humor, character designer and storyboard revisionist Natasha Allegri then posed out Finn’s distinctive dance.

As with other quick and inane *Adventure Time* ditties, “Puncha Yo Buns” has endeared itself to members of the *Adventure Time* fanbase, and when attending fan conventions, voice actor Jeremy Shada is often begged by fans to perform the song. The song has also permeated the larger pop culture landscape, and in 2018 the Chicago-based rapper Tobi Lou recorded a song entitled “Buff Baby” that prominently samples the lyrics to “Puncha Yo Buns.” The music video for this track also features a re-creation of the “Puncha Yo Buns” scene from “Memory of a Memory,” with Tobi Lou standing in for Finn.

“Oh, Fionna”  
(from “Fionna and Cake” Season 3, Episode 9)  
“Oh Fionna”—written by storyboard artist Rebecca Sugar—was intended to serve as an “homage” to classic “cartoon musical” moments, drawing specific inspiration from Alan Menken and Tim Rice’s classic “A Whole New World” (a song written for an iconic scene in the 1992 animated Disney film *Aladdin*, in which the title character and his love interest, Princess Jasmine, ride the world over on a magic carpet). “Oh Fionna” was sung by Neil Patrick Harris (the voice of Prince Gumball) and Madeleine Martin (the voice of Fionna), the former of whom Sugar lauded on her personal Tumblr, writing that he “sang the song beautifully.”

**Songs from “What Was Missing” (Season 3, Episode 10)**  
“What Was Missing” focused on Finn, Jake, Princess Bubblegum, BMO, and Marceline’s collective attempt to track down a thieving “door lord” who has stolen some of their beloved possessions. Unfortunately, this being seals himself behind an imposing door that will only open to the sound of a “genuine band.” Marceline, a natural musician, decides to take a stab at
the challenge, and so she launches into a bass-heavy song entitled “I’m Just Your Problem.” In the series, Marceline rarely opens up to others, but “I’m Just Your Problem” is deeply personal, suggesting that at some unspecified point in the past, Princess Bubblegum and Marceline may have been in a romantic relationship—a relationship that evidently turned sour. Due to its explosively truthful lyrics, the song not only shocks Marceline’s friends, but it also nearly opens up the doorlord’s hidey-hole.

“I’m Just Your Problem” was written by storyboard artist Rebecca Sugar, who based the song on a strangely emotional experience she had had with a former roommate sometime after graduating from SVA: Sugar and this acquaintance did not get along very well, but despite the increasing acrimony between the two, Sugar desperately wanted to make up and become friends. In the DVD commentary for “What Was Missing,” Sugar explained: “I found myself just trying and trying to make it up to her, while at the same time being angrier and angrier that I was stuck with this person who was just making me crazy.” It was while attempting to empathize with Marceline that Sugar remembered these paradoxical feelings, eventually channeling them into the final song.

The sort of honesty featured in “I’m Just Your Problem” is later reprised in Finn’s song, “Best Friends in the World.” At this point in the episode, Marceline, Bubblegum, and Jake have gotten mad at one another and are storming off. Finn does not want to see his three best friends leave, and so he begins to air his worries via song; he admits that while he cares deeply about them, he worries that they do not reciprocate this feeling. When Finn starts singing, Marceline, Bubblegum, and Jake are all taken aback by Finn’s earnestness, but then one by one they join in on the song, implicitly conveying that they consider Finn their friend, too. The veracity of this sentiment is confirmed when the door—which, it must be remembered, only responds to genuineness—opens with a spectacular flash of light.

The song is quite sweet on its own, but its affective nature is amplified when one realizes that Rebecca Sugar wrote the song to channel emotions and doubts that she herself felt towards the Adventure Time crew:

This song is really about how I felt working on the show. This was ... my first job and I just loved everyone I was working with so much—especially ... [my storyboarding partner] Adam [Muto]—and it was really strange for me because everyone was a cartoonist and [it] meant so much to be friends with all these amazing cartoonists. But it was work, too. So I just couldn’t tell where work ended and friendship began. I felt like Finn is in a similar position.
Fans and critics are wont to consider “I’m Just Your Problem” and “Best Friends in the World” as being among the show’s strongest songs, and it seems almost certain that this love is in part due to their raw, emotional honesty.

“Journal Song”  
(from “Marceline’s Closet” Season 3, Episode 21)

“Marceline’s Closet” features a scene in which Finn and Jake accidentally eavesdrop on Marceline while she records a private song about her “life and stuff.” Entitled “Journal Song,” this nonconventional ditty was written by storyboard artist Jesse Moynihan, who drew inspiration from the eccentricity of 20th-century classical music. On his website, Moynihan expounded:

The demo I submitted to Tim [Kiefer] and Casey [James Basichis] was loosely inspired by the composer Louis Andreissen’s piece “De Staat,” except dumbed down. Basically I tried to write the kind of thing that I’ve never heard on TV before. I kept a consistent beat throughout, but didn’t let the melody repeat in any way. It’s sort of a wandering, linear phrase with all the instruments reinforcing Olivia Olson’s vocals in unison.

Soon after he sent his demo recording to the show’s composers, Moynihan grew nervous that his song was too weird for television, and so as an emergency contingency plan, he drafted up a version that he defined as “straight pop.” However, Ward vetoed this reinterpretation, as he was fond of Moynihan’s original. (Moynihan’s band Make a Rising later used elements of the pop version in some of their subsequent songs.)

When it came time to record dialog for the episode, Moynihan attended the session so that he could provide musical direction to Olivia Olson, given his song’s peculiar nature. During a Twitch livestream celebrating the 10th anniversary of the show in April 2020, Olson was asked her thoughts about the song; she responded that it was “really, really tough to” record because the timing was “all over the place,” and she kept “want[ing] to do it so straight and melodic.” Nevertheless, she called it an “interesting challenge” and has cited it as one of the songs that “sticks the most in [her] mind.”

“Dream of Love”  
(from “Dream of Love” Season 4, Episode 4)

“Dream of Love”—the fourth season episode based almost entirely on Tree Trunks and Mr. Pig’s obnoxious public displays of affection—is something of a divisive topic within the fandom, with many viewers being put off by the episode’s excessive on-screen smooching. That said, the episode’s
The Institute of Sound

The eponymous song, in which Tree Trunks and Mr. Pig express their love for one another, is well-regarded for its catchy hook and its affecting energy.

The song was written by storyline writer Patrick McHale because “nobody else wanted to write” it. McHale initially intended the song to sound like a heartbreaking duet between country music legend Dolly Parton and rock singer Meat Loaf—a sort of “I Will Always Love You” by way of “I’d Do Anything for Love (But I Won’t Do That).” In a 2014 interview, however, McHale admitted: “In my head, when it is Dolly Parton and Meat Loaf singing, [I think], ‘[My demo is] gonna sound really good!’ [But then I realize] ‘Ah ... I don’t sound as good as Dolly Parton and Meat Loaf.”

While McHale’s reservations about his singing ability might technically be true (I mean, how many of us can say we sound just like Dolly Parton?), the catchiness of “Dream of Love” proves that he does at the very least have solid songwriting chops.

“Political Rap” (from “Daddy’s Little Monster” Season 4, Episode 6)

In the fourth-season episode “Daddy’s Little Monster,” Finn and Jake find themselves faced with one of their greatest challenges yet: waiting in a Kafkaesque line to talk to the leader of the Nightosphere. To disrupt Hell’s agonizing bureaucracy, Finn and Jake decide to free-style a rap, thereby instigating a demon uprising.

The soundscape of “Political Rap” is relatively sparse, featuring Jeremy Shada shouting random socio-political buzzwords (e.g., “Ride bikes!,” “Science!”) over John DiMaggio’s beat-boxing, with the joke being that despite the song’s randomness, it nevertheless inspires a “woke” demon insurrection. The track was written by Jesse Moynihan, who on his website explained that: “It was [inspired by] a running joke my friends and I had for a while, where we’d try to freestyle terrible political raps at each other.”

While a product of Moynihan, the track actually appears in an episode storyboarded and written by Rebecca Sugar and Cole Sanchez. This is because the track was intended to appear in the preceding episode “Return to the Nightosphere” but was cut for time. Sugar, however, liked the rap so much that she petitioned for it to be included in her episode.

“Let Me Show You Something Special” (from “Princess Monster Wife” Season 4, Episode 9)

“Let Me Show You Something Special” was written by former creative director and then-storyline writer Patrick McHale for use in the episode “Princess Monster Wife.” Because the song is featured in an extended sequence in which Ice King and his bride survey the entirety of the Ice Kingdom, McHale—like Rebecca Sugar when she worked on “Oh Fionna”—
drew inspiration from Alan Menken and Tim Rice’s song “A Whole New World” from Aladdin. Originally, it was planned for the song to be a duet between Ice King and Princess Monster Wife (voiced in tandem by Steve Little, Hynden Walch, Pendleton Ward), but according to McHale:

I recorded [my demo track] with Ice King’s voice and then a [placeholder] falsetto voice for the female part. I think [the producers] just thought it was funny [to] instead have the Ice King pull out a tape recorder and play his own voice in falsetto, ’cuz it feels crazier for the Ice King to be, like, “I already created this whole song. We don’t have to sing it together! I can do it!”

The end result is flamboyant ballad that is one parts romantic and two parts disquieting (which, for Ice King, is par for the course).

“Bacon Pancakes”  
(from “Burning Low” Season 4, Episode 16)  

Written by Rebecca Sugar, “Bacon Pancakes” is a relatively short ditty,clocking in at only twelve seconds, and it was written to bring a little bit of levity to an otherwise serious episode.

When pitching the song to the show’s producers, Sugar was self-conscious that the fandom would be repulsed by its “hacky” nature. Much to Sugar’s surprise, however, the song became immensely popular with Adventure Time fans, and for a time, it seemed as if no comic convention at which Sugar appeared was complete without a performance of the song. (“Bacon Pancakes” even became an online meme in 2012 when a clever Youtuber remixed the track with Jay-Z and Alicia Keyes’s 2009 hit single “Empire State of Mind.”) Given that today, “Bacon Pancakes” is one of the most well-known and beloved songs from Adventure Time, it is ironic that Sugar was initially so worried about its initial reception.

Songs from “I Remember You” (Season 4, Episode 25)  
“I Remember You”—the Rebecca Sugar and Cole Sanchez-penned masterpiece that broke millions of hearts—is a veritable musical, featuring a grand total of four songs, including a cover/parody of the “Fry Song” (first heard in the second-season premiere “It Came from the Nightosphere”), a song called “Oh, Bubblegum” about the titular princess, a ditty called “Nuts” which details Marceline’s mixed feelings about the Ice King, and “Remember You,” a climactic song which starts to unpack the complicated past shared by Ice King and Marceline. In regard to the latter’s lyrics, Rebecca Sugar explained:
It’s a note that Ice King as Simon was writing to Marceline but she never got it. ... We’d always wanted to do a Marceline/Ice King musical [episode], and Pen really took it to that emotional place. He was the one who came up with the idea of them having this shared history, and then we really took it from there. ... Somehow music can transcend memory loss and so can your feelings about people. Like it’s just there—he’s really jamming on the drums and he’s really proud of this thing that they’re making even though he doesn’t really know what it is. And that she gets to have all the catharsis of knowing that he really cares about her in the form of this song. And seeing him happy is simultaneously the best and the worst part.75

With the exception of the “Fry Song” parody, all the songs in the episode prominently feature Sugar’s very own omnichord, which is a synthesized autoharp that can play major, minor, or seventh chords with the push of a button. Unfortunately, the instrument that Sugar owned was old and a bit unreliable, and when she was pitching the episode’s songs to the show’s producers, the device began to lose power near the ending of “Remember You,” eerily warbling in and out of tune. But what started as an embarrassing technical error soon turned into a blessing in disguise, for the producers noted that the sound of the struggling instrument complimented the episode’s themes of sorrow and loss. This “accident” was eventually replicated and then worked into the score of the episode.76

**Songs from “Bad Little Boy” (Season 5, Episode 11)**

A sequel to season three’s “Fionna and Cake” “Bad Little Boy” is a fun fanfic excursion that features two catchy songs, both written by storyboard artist Rebecca Sugar. The first, entitled “Good Little Girl,” is a relaxed doo-wop track, complete with a slick ’50s chord progression and prominent backup vocals. On her Tumblr account, Sugar explained that she and fellow storyboard artist Cole Sanchez were wanting “to do a gritty ’50s bad boy story with Marshall Lee (a little Dirty Dancing, a little Cry-Baby) as opposed to [another] fairytale prince whirlwind adventure.”77

The second song in the episode, the titular “Bad Little Boy” is a rap, delivered courtesy of Marshall Lee, Marceline’s male counterpart who is voiced by Donald Glover. In addition to his work as a stand-up comedian, actor, and writer, Glover also records hip hop and R&B music under the moniker “Childish Gambino.” In a 2013 interview with the San Antonio Express-News, Pendleton Ward expressed his excitement at getting the chance to work with Glover, saying: “Donald [has] ... got awesome funny chops and singing chops and we spotlight all his chops in the episode. I was super stoked when he
came in, and he’s told me he’s super stoked to have worked on [the episode], which makes me extra stoked.”

“Good Little Girl” and “Bad Little Boy” would be the last songs Sugar contributed to the show’s fifth season, for following the production of the episode “Simon and Marcy,” she departed from the Adventure Time crew to begin working on her own series, Steven Universe. While legions of Adventure Time fans cheered on Sugar’s well-earned success, many also bemoaned the loss of a gifted songwriter. While it is simplistic and a bit essentializing to say that Sugar had a musical je ne sais quoi not possessed by any other artist, this line of thinking nevertheless became a popular one among some groups of fans—especially those who posted to online message boards like 4chan or Reddit. A cursory browsing of these sites will turn up thread after thread in which fans bemoaned the “decline” of the show’s music following Sugar’s departure. While the premise of this cataclysmic opinion is questionable (given that it ignores the existence of post-Sugar classics like “Get over You” and “Food Chain”), it cannot be denied that the loss of Sugar was a definite blow to the series.

**“Where Everybody Knows Your Name”**
*from “Simon and Marcy” Season 5, Episode 14*

Season five’s heartbreaking masterpiece “Simon and Marcy” concludes with Simon Petrikov singing “Where Everybody Knows Your Name” in a desperate—and ultimately futile—attempt to retain his sanity and remember who he is. The use of this song—which had been written by Judy Hart Angelo and Gary Portnoy to serve as the theme song for the NBC sitcom Cheers (1982–93)—is notable, as it marks one of the few instances in which Adventure Time directly alludes to the world of pop culture.

How did an ‘80s theme song make its way into the final episode? In a 2020 podcast interview with background designer Ghostshrimp, the show’s writer and vocal director Kent Osborne claimed that he had originally pitched the idea that Simon would sing the Cheers theme song as a joke, but Ward latched onto the idea, insisting that it be used. This contrasts with an earlier explanation, provided by Rebecca Sugar’s father, Rob, on his YouTube channel, that “Where Everybody Knows Your Name” was originally used as a placeholder for a song that Rebecca Sugar would have written. Regardless of which explanation is “correct,” Adam Muto clarified that the song was used largely because “it fit ... and had the right emotional punch.”

For a time, another song that was “in the running” for use in “Simon and Marcy” was “According to Our New Arrival” (also co-written by Angelo and Portnoy, along with Leon Redbone), which is perhaps best known as the theme song to the ABC sitcom Mr. Belvedere (1985–90). This track would later be used in a scene from the Stakes episode “Everything Stays,” wherein
Marceline befriends a tribe of humans by performing the song on her bass. In early February 2020, I reached out to Gary Portnoy and asked for his opinion on the use of his songs in the series, to which he responded:

I had never heard of *Adventure Time* when they used “Where Everybody Knows Your Name.” I watched [“Simon and Marcy”] and even though I had no understanding of the plot or the back story, I definitely connected with the nostalgic and poignant aspects of it. I read at the time that it was the first time they had used a “real world” song on the show. [Later, when] they used [“According to Our New Arrival” in *Stakes*], I was ... flabbergasted. Why did they do it? There is no shortage of TV themes in the world. Why two of mine? Coincidence? I have no idea.83

**“Get over You”**  
*(from “Love Games” Season 5, Episode 35)*

“Love Games” was the first episode on which Andy Ristaino worked as a storyboard artist, and to mark the occasion, he decided to write a song for the episode. Entitled “Get over You,” the track is sung by Finn during the first round of the titular Love Games. According to Ristaino:

Cole Sanchez was my storyboard partner at the time. We had storyboarded our first pass [of “Love Games”] and pitched it, but I hadn’t written the song yet, so in our first pitch [the storyboard] had a section that said “insert heartfelt song here.” After our first pitch was over, we sat in the pitch room and figured out a simple melody on a guitar that was just lying around the studio, and what the song was going to be about. I hashed out the lyrics over the evening.

The song was about Finn pouring out his feelings about still being stuck on Flame Princess. You want songs like that to feel like they’re coming from the heart, so I just pulled on past experiences of mine, being hung up on a girl that dumped me and how it felt. I ended up playing it for the writers and storyboards when we did our second pitch for the episode. I was really happy with how it turned out.84

A soft, acoustic track focused largely on young love and the pain of a break-up, “Get over You” is quite touching, making it a sort of spiritual cousin to many of the songs that Rebecca Sugar had previously written for the series.
“Hanging out Forever”  
(from “We Fixed a Truck” Season 5, Episode 39)

While blocking out season five’s “We Fixed a Truck,” storyboard artist Andy Ristaino felt that the episode could use a short song. And thus began the composing of “Hanging out Forever,” a song in which Banana Man waxes poetic about having friends. When he first sat down to write the track, Ristaino was wanting the final product to sound like “an early Beach Boys song.” However, after noodling on his guitar for a while, Ristaino scrapped this initial idea when he came up with a jangly riff to which he “was immediately able to conjure up lyrics.” These initial lyrics were serious, mixing in car- and truck-related metaphors to express how friendships are built and maintained. Ristaino’s storyboard partner, Cole Sanchez, later helped him fine-tune the lyrics, making them a bit sillier.

In the episode, the song is sung by comedy legend “Weird Al” Yankovic, who is best known for his parodies of popular songs. In an interview, Ristaino told me:

We added the song specifically because Al was the voice of Banana Man, and we wanted to have him sing in an episode. It was very fun to write [“Hanging out Forever,” which is] much more light hearted and idiosyncratic than “Get over You.” I am also a huge Weird Al fan so it was a big deal to not only write a song for Al to sing but get to watch him sing the song in person! Al was super kind, gracious, and professional. I had made a little demo as placeholder of the song for the episode’s animatic. They sent Al a copy of it so he could familiarize himself with it before he came in to record. Al ... came into the recording studio with sheet music he made of the melody! I still have it somewhere.

“Young Lemonhope”  
(from “Lemonhope” Season 5, Episodes 50–51)

This song, featured at the end of the two-parter “Lemonhope,” is sung by Princess Bubblegum over a discreet, almost inaudible synth track, and it plays while the audience is privy to scenes set one thousand years into the future of Ooo. Despite the song’s fairly happy lyrics, the track is somber, almost melancholic, thereby reminding the viewer that the future—replete with death, loss, and decay—is inevitable. According to Tom Herpich (the song’s composer), the tune was supposed to sound like a “sweet lullaby,” which he joked “was shaped ... by my lack of any kind of musical aptitude.”
“Baby’s Building a Tower into Space”  
(from “The Tower” Season 6, Episode 4)  

While constructing the titular edifice with the help of a spectral arm in the sixth-season episode “The Tower,” Finn sings this jaunty earworm to keep him focused on his mission: journey to space, find his dad, and rip his arm off. The lyrics to this track were written by the storyboard artist Steve Wolfhard and his wife Leslie; being an accomplished pianist, Leslie also composed the song’s musical structure. In Freudian terms, this song can be analyzed as a manifestation of the Oedipus complex and the associated anxiety of castration about which Freud wrote. In “Escape from the Citadel,” Finn was symbolically castrated by his father when he lost his arm. Finn has thus made it his mission to return the favor and symbolically castrate his father by violently ripping off his arm. Luckily, the situation is resolved before any blood is spilled.

“Lost in the Darkness” and “Oh So Beautiful”  
(from “Breezy” Season 6, Episode 6)  

The sixth-season episode “Breezy” is one of the show’s more controversial installments, as it painfully documents Finn’s descent into melancholy following the loss of his father and arm in the season premiere. When storyboard artist Jesse Moynihan was writing a few songs for the episode, he turned to his brother Justin for help. Justin had long been a student of piano music and ballet accompaniment, and Jesse figured that his brother’s training would prove invaluable when it came time to channel the episode’s mature emotions into song form. The end result of this collaboration was two tracks—“Lost in the Darkness” and “Oh So Beautiful”—which together serve as bookends, framing the start and culmination of Finn’s depressive spell.

The songs were written in a time crunch, with Justin and Jesse given about two days to hammer out all the details. Justin focused on developing the tracks’ melodies and piano arrangements, and the brothers worked on the lyrics together, with Justin later telling me: “Jesse had the [storyboards] written with temp lyrics. I pulled from them and created something new that expressed the same feelings.” Justin developed several drafts for each of the songs, which were then appraised by Jesse and reworked if necessary. When the compositions were finalized, Justin handed them off to Casey James Basichis and Tim Kiefer, who “definitely punched [them] up nicely.”

In terms of style, Jesse wanted “Lost in the Darkness” and “Oh So Beautiful” to be “‘romantic’ in the Old World sense,” citing as direct inspirations the French composer Claude Debussy’s orchestra piece Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune (“Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun”), as well as Erich Wolfgang Korngold’s intertextual score to the 1935 film adaptation of A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1935). In a 2014, Reddit AMA, Justin revealed...
that he was mainly inspired by the music from John Boorman’s 1981 fantasy film *Excalibur*, musing: “Something about middle ages, opera, and starry nights made that work.” In a later 2020 interview, Justin also cited the influence of the German composer Richard Wagner, perhaps best known for his operatic works like “Ritt der Walküren” (“Ride of the Valkyries”).

“Food Chain”  
(from “Food Chain” Season 6, Episode 7)

The sixth-season episode “Food Chain”—storyboarded and directed by anime legend Yuasa Masaaki—comes to a close with a show-stopping tune, also entitled “Food Chain.” In this song, Finn and Princess Bubblegum wax poetic about the wonders of this natural cycle in the style of a lively show tune. While the lyrics for this ditty were written by the staff at Science SARU (Yuasa’s production company), the music was composed by Soichi Terada. A 1988 graduate of the University of Electro-Communications in Chōfu, Japan, Terada had developed a love for New York-style house music while in school, leading him to found the record label Far East Recording after he graduated. In the 1990s, Terada began to gain a reputation as a talented electronic musician, and by the 2000s, his scores for the *Ape Escape* video game franchise were being lauded by fans and critics alike.

During the production of “Food Chain,” Science SARU, reached out to Terada, asking if he was interested in working as a composer for the guest episode. Terada excitedly took the offer and soon thereafter met with Yuasa to discuss the technicalities of the situation. In an interview, Terada noted that while he had almost total creative control over the episode’s background music, when it came time to develop the closing tune, Yuasa had a specific vision: he wanted the sequence to recall the film *A Chorus Line* (1985, based on the Broadway musical of the same name). Terada rose to the occasion, channeling this flamboyant style while also melding it with elements of gospel music. The final result is one earworm of a song, explicating the wonders of the food chain in under two minutes.

“A Kingdom from a Spark”  
(from “The Cooler” Season 6, Episode 22)

“A Kingdom from a Spark” is a song sung by Flame Princess in the sixth-season episode “The Cooler,” making it the character’s first solo song in the series. Written by storyboard artist Andy Ristaino, the earliest version of this song was penned “to sound like an ancient Dwarven war song.” Ristaino reasoned that over hundreds of years, a war song like this would have been popularized until it was more or less a Fire Kingdom folk song. This version was eventually scrapped because it did not fit the final feel of the episode, and Ristaino composed a new version that was shorter and a bit
more accessible in terms of lyrics and style.\textsuperscript{102} The finishing touches were applied by series composer Tim Kiefer, who whipped up a “medieval chant-y” instrumental to compliment the song’s supposedly archaic nature.\textsuperscript{103}

The lyrics to “A Kingdom from a Spark” are cryptic, but can be understood as the mythological cosmogony of the Fire Kingdom. According to Ristaino, “In my head I had an idea that the song would be about the origins of the Fire Kingdom. Their gods are the Sleeping Giants [which were] giant weapons from the Great Mushroom War. ... The Fire Kingdom was birthed from the use of those weapons.”\textsuperscript{104}

**“Yeah, Girl, It Stinks”**

*(from “Astral Plane” Season 6, Episode 25)*

Just before the climax in the sixth-season episode “Astral Plane,” as Finn’s spirit rises through the atmosphere of Earth, he spies Marceline floating among the clouds, singing a melancholic song entitled “Yeah, Girl, It Stinks.” The lyrics to the song are pessimistic, detailing how eternity will inevitably destroy all memory, and that the only chance for an immortal like Marceline to stay sane is by suppressing her emotions; it is not any fun (hence the titular line), but what can you do? These downer lyrics offer viewers a peek into Marceline’s worldview, suggesting that she is indifferent to the world and has resigned herself to loss.

According to storyboard artist Jesse Moynihan, the line “Dutch-boxing up the palace” was originally supposed to be “hot-boxing up the palace”—a reference to, as Moynihan put it, “filling a [closed-off] room with your fart smell.”\textsuperscript{105} However, “hot-boxing” can also refer to the act of smoking marijuana in an enclosed room. Understandably, Cartoon Network did not want a possible drug reference to slip through the cracks, so they requested the line be modified. Moynihan obliged, as he never meant to insinuate anything illicit with his original lyrics.\textsuperscript{106}

**“Everything Stays”**

*(from “Stakes – Everything Stays” Season 7, Episode 7)*

During production of *Stakes*, series showrunner Adam Muto reached out to Swedish artist Hanna K. Nyström and invited her to work with him on the miniseries’ second episode, “Everything Stays.” Soon after Nyström accepted the offer, she was given the daunting task of composing an affective lullaby for Marceline and her mom to sing together. Nyström began to worry; this was a Marceline miniseries after all, and Marceline was going to need a show-stopping tune to bring it all home, but unfortunately, Nyström did not know that much about writing music. Luckily, her worry turned out to be a boon for the show, for when she relayed her reservations to Adam Muto,
he reached out to his good friend and former storyboard partner Rebecca Sugar for assistance.\textsuperscript{107} Even after departing \textit{Adventure Time} during the production of its fifth season, Sugar had remained a fan of the series and a friend of Muto’s, and consequently she was both “excited” and touched when he asked her to pen the lullaby. The first song idea Sugar drafted up was fairly “literal,” written as if “someone [were actually] talking to their daughter.”\textsuperscript{108} However, she was unhappy with this result and abandoned it, instead opting to make the final lyrics more ambiguous and poetic.\textsuperscript{109} While pondering how exactly to do this, a memory fleeted into Sugar’s head: once, when she was a child, she had lost her favorite toy—a stuffed rabbit—somewhere in her family’s verdant garden. Months passed before Sugar finally found it, and when she picked her toy up, she was startled to see that the top had been bleached by the elements, but that the bottom was the same dark color it had always been. At that moment she realized, “It wasn’t worse and it wasn’t better. It was just different.”\textsuperscript{110} This memory appropriately dovetailed with the meditation on change and the eternal return on display in \textit{Stakes}, and so Sugar ran with it, eventually producing a haunting song dubbed “Everything Stays.” Due to the deeply personal memories into which she tapped to pen the tune, Sugar later claimed in a 2016 interview with Comic News Insider that “Everything Stays” was the “most personal” song that she had at the time written.\textsuperscript{111} The instrumental for “Everything Stays” was arranged by Tim Kiefer, who based its dark soundscape on “the musical profile [he had] developed for Marceline over the years.”\textsuperscript{112} A swirling mixture of rich bass guitar, synth pads, and reverb-heavy strings, Kiefer’s melancholic instrumental is a nice compliment to Rebecca Sugar’s pensive lyrics.

The version included in the \textit{Stakes} miniseries runs about 40 seconds and features only a single verse, but an extended version, released on \textit{The Complete Series Soundtrack Box Set} (2019), contains a second, with lyrics that mention beaches, the tide, and the moon. It is not exactly clear to what these lyrics are referring, although it is possible that they are allusions to the photographs of Marceline’s mother that are found on an old USB drive in the ninth-season episode “Ketchup.”

\textbf{Songs from “The Music Hole” (Season 8, Episode 10)}

In the eighth-season episode “The Music Hole” (storyboarded by Polly Guo and Andres Salaff), Princess Bubblegum and Jake organize a battle of the bands to cheer up a recently demoralized Finn. This leads to a whole slew of characters taking the stage and singing a variety of songs, of which the most memorable is arguably Marceline’s moody ditty, “Francis Forever.” Written by the bassist and singer-songwriter Mitski, the song had previously been
The Institute of Sound

released on the artist’s third studio album *Bury Me at Makeout Creek* (2014). As to how the song found its way into *Adventure Time*, Guo explained:

I pitched the idea to use a Mitski song for a Marceline number ... It was always Mitski and only Mitski for Marceline. I’m pretty sure Mitski fans had long been making the comparison between [the two] (both bass players). Mitski just gets so much raw emotion through her music, and Marceline is a character with immense unexpressed angst, so it was kind of a no brainer.113

According to Guo, she settled on “Francis Forever” because it is:

... a song about longing ... Marceline [has] got all this longing and unresolved regret in her relationships with both Princess Bubblegum and Simon, so “Francis Forever” seemed to fit the tone. I had a friend who regularly worked with punk musicians who had worked with Mitski previously, so she introduced us through email. [We] got informal permission through email, and then Adam Muto transferred her agent through to [Cartoon Network]’s people.114

At the end of “The Music Hole,” Finn crowns the titular being the winner of the contest, and together, the two sing “I Look Up to You,” a song by Ashley Eriksson’s band LAKE. According to Guo, it was showrunner Adam Muto’s idea to include a LAKE song in the episode,115 and in an email exchange, Guo explained:

[“The Music Hole”] was always going to be music heavy, so Adam Muto actually provided me (and [Andres] Salaff) with a couple choices for songs from Ashley Eriksson (responsible for the *Adventure Time* [end] song) and LAKE to use throughout the episode to help me in the process, just so I didn’t have to come up with or write my own songs if I didn’t want to.116

Other catchy songs featured in the episode include the Ice King’s funky cover of “Do The Boogaloo” (which was originally performed by the early 1980s disco act Quango & Sparky), Susan Strong’s power ballad entitled “Power of Myself,” a rap duet between Flame Princess and N.E.P.T.R. (written by Salaff), and Jake’s silly ditty about the miraculous universality of dumplings (written by Guo).117
“Slow Dance”  
(from “Marcy and Hunson” Season 10, Episode 7)  

Season ten’s “Marcy and Hunson” revolves around Marceline’s father crashing one of her concerts and interrupting the performance of a hauntingly beautiful ballad entitled “Slow Dance.” The lyrics to this song are somewhat cryptic, but they heavily suggest that Marceline has feelings for a likely female someone—and given the events of the series finale, this someone is almost certainly Princess Bubblegum.

Penned by country musician Evil, “Slow Dance” was actually dreamt up long before “Marcy & Hunson” was written. According to a post on the artist’s Tumblr:

I wrote “Slow Dance” about this girl I had a big crush on, and she liked me too but she had a boyfriend. The girl in question is actually the person talking in the intro of the original demo of “Slow Dance” ... She had a boyfriend and I wasn’t a boy... (to her). I identify as genderfluid, and I feel very he/him most of the time. I was so heartbroken because I knew I wasn’t a “boy” in her eyes but I thought I could be, if she let me. Hence, “I know all the other boys are tough and smooth”. It’s okay [though], she’s a very lovely girl and I wrote a really good song out of it.

Evil recorded a rough cut of the track over a sampled Santo and Johnny instrumental and then published it to their Soundcloud, where it became “a lot more popular than [they] expected.”

It was around this time that the show’s writers and storyboard artists were busy working on the ninth-season miniseries Elements. One of the artists involved, Polly Guo, was tasked with, among other things, storyboarding the introduction of “Marshmaline the Campfire Queen” (i.e., the candified version of Marceline) in the episode “Skyhooks, Pt. 1.” The script called for the character to sing a song, and, according to Guo: “I wanted her to be singing something a bit uncharacteristic of Marceline—something both sweet and eerie. My initial pick was “Green Sleeves,” but Adam [Muto] wanted something a bit more original, so I suggested we use [Evil’s music].”

It just so happened that Evil was a big fan of the series, having written in a 2016 Tumblr post that the show was “with [them] during one of the worst times of [their] life.” Integrating one of Evil’s songs into the series seemed like a perfect fit, but alas, for reasons unclear, Evil’s track never made it into the final cut. Flash forward to production of season ten’s “Marcy & Hunson.” Once again, the script called for Marceline to sing an affective song, and so Adam Muto reached out to Evil again and asked if the show could use “Slow Dance.” According to Evil, “[The producers] explained the scene to me...
beforehand so I was definitely down for them using it. ... [I] was very happy it ended up happening.”

Since the debut of “Marcy and Hunson,” “Slow Dance” has become very popular with fans of the series; Cartoon Network’s official YouTube clip of the scene featuring the track, for instance, has almost 1.5 million views as of January 2020. Evil was both shocked and moved by the response, telling me:

It was crazy, it’s def gotten the most attention of all my songs for obvious reasons. The song ended up being much bigger with the show’s fan base than I had expected, which was really sick...

It was really flattering to see people enjoy the song so much.

Due to heavy implications that the song is a love ballad directed toward Bubblegum, “Slow Dance” has also been warmly received by many in the LGBTQ+ community, with *them*. magazine perhaps epitomizing this sentiment when it argued that the song is Marceline’s “most clear and direct love song to Bonnibel ... capturing the essence of queer love and complicated relationships in a few simple lines.” When I asked Evil how they felt about “Slow Dance” being associated with one of the most famous queer relationships in modern animation, the artist responded:

I think being able to have a gay song on a prime network TV show for kids is very cool. I think it’s very cool kids get to see queer cartoon characters. ... [I]t’s the best thing ever to be and feel represented by the things that mean a lot to you.

“Time Adventure” (from “Come Along with Me” Season 10, Episodes 13–16)

In the fall of 2016, the *Adventure Time* crew learned that the show would be ending and that they had only four episodes left to turn into a series finale. The writers and storyboard artists immediately got to work, drafting up a story that would serve as a satisfying cap to the series’ near-ten year run. To make the episode as strong as it could be, Muto once again reached out to Rebecca Sugar, asking her if she would be willing to write a song for the finale. Because Sugar was still busy with her own series, Muto worried that by asking Sugar, he would be “creating more work for her.” These worries, however, were mostly misplaced, for when he asked her, she happily accepted. After mulling over ideas, Sugar eventually penned a tune titled “Time Adventure,” which—in addition to spoonerizing the show’s title—meditates on heavy topics like time, memory, and existence. Regarding the song’s inspiration, Sugar later told the *Los Angeles Times*:
I wanted to write about how even if something ends, it continues to exist in the past—nothing ever really goes away, you only feel like it does because our mind has to process information one moment at a time in order for us to function as humans. I’m so nostalgic for the time that I spent working on *Adventure Time* and I find it comforting to think that I still exist in that office with Adam [Muto], working on those stories. I would be so happy to come to work and brainstorm with him and sit down and draw on paper and pitch these stories with Post-its tacked up to the wall, just like they did in the 1930s with the stick and the song and the dance, the most traditional way of doing cartoons.¹²⁹

Sugar revealed in a 2020 interview that the emotional impact of the song was also informed by the time she and her partner, Ian Jones-Quartey, moved out of a house they had long been renting in Los Angeles’s Elysian Park. Both Sugar and Jones-Quartey loved the house, but changes in ownership necessitated their moving. For Sugar, this event was a deeply sad one, but she took solace knowing that, in the timeless fixedness of the past, she and Jones-Quartey are still living there.¹³⁰

Once Sugar finalized the song’s lyrics and the cast recorded their lines, the tune was passed off to Tim Kiefer, who produced the final track.

“Time Adventure” was emotional from the start. Even [just] working on it I was a wreck, crying in the studio. Style-wise, it was the culmination of something I had been exploring for a couple years—making beats without conventional drums. In their place I used percussive instruments, negative space, and pitch to convey rhythm. With “Time Adventure,” I took one of the trademark [*Adventure Time*] sounds—blippy, tuned 808 toms—and made them the epic centerpiece.¹³¹

In a show bursting with affective songs, “Time Adventure” is one of its most emotionally-compelling. Starting with a verse and chorus that discuss eternalistic “block time,”¹³² the song ultimately builds to a tear-jerking bridge, in which the characters express their desire for a way to capture and replay the past through thousands of “tiny frames”—a poetic meta-reference to the art of animation itself. Most fans and critics would agree that “Time Adventure” is a fitting song for the episode and one of Sugar’s greatest achievements as a series songwriter.
For many fans, the series’ closing tune, “Island Song” (known also as “Christmas Island” and “Come Along with Me”), is just as beloved as the show’s opener. The track was written by the Langley, WA-based singer-songwriter Ashley Eriksson c. 2007-08 before being re-recorded by her band LAKE for their album Let’s Build a Roof (2009). As to how the song came to serve as Adventure Time’s closing theme, Eriksson relayed via email:

I grew up across the street from [CalArts] and made friends with [the] students through a mutual interest in music. As an 18-year-old, I would go there to drink coffee and hang out with friends I had made, mostly Andrew Dorsett and Patrick McHale, who were roommates their first semester. I was writing songs and recording a lot around that time and my music started circulating in the animation department. I was told that my music was sometimes background music in figure drawing class. Once that happened, I suddenly felt like everyone knew my music. Eventually, animators started asking me for music for their student films. I should also note that students needed to find copyright-free music for their films, so this also played a part, for sure. Pen Ward, Patrick McHale, Vi Dieu Nguyen, and J. G. Quintel all used my music in their student films! It was so fun. I loved it. ... Fast forward four or five years, Pat and Pen got in touch with me about music for Adventure Time. I sent five or so songs that seemed like they could work, and they chose “Island Song” [to be the show’s ending theme].

However, the producers did request one change to the lyrics: “Pen thought some of the original lyrics didn’t quite fit, so he suggested ... that I change my lyrics about ‘a town beside the sea’ to ‘the butterflies and bees.’” This complimented the animation for the show’s ending credits, which feature an animated butterfly, a bee, and a ladybug.

The series finale turns the meaning of the track on its head when it is revealed that the track actually exists in-universe, and is the creation of the Music Hole (introduced in the eighth-season episode of the same name and voiced by Eriksson herself). “Come Along with Me” concludes with the Music Hole singing the song, and while this happens, the audience is privy to a final montage, illustrating what became of the characters in the future. It is a tear-jerking moment, as it manages to take a song that for so many epitomized the joyfulness of the show, and infuse it with an element of melancholy.
Endnotes


17. Kiefer’s love of these genres can perhaps best be heard in the episode “Shh!” which features a remix of the song “No Wonder I” by LAKE in the juke/footwork style.
18. “Skweee” is a type of Scandinavian electronica that Kiefer colorfully describes as “weird guys with a lot of synths and a good sense of humor” Bleeding Cool, “Saying Goodbye to Adventure Time at WonderCon 2018 with Tim Kiefer,” YouTube, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYDnJF7urw.

20. Bleeding Cool.
30. Dom’s Sketch Cast, “Fred Seibert.”
32. “Distant Bands.”
33. “Distant Bands.”
35. Sean Jimenez and Bert Youn, “Evicted!’ Storyboard.”
42. Tracy Brown, “The Adventure Time Songs That Make You Cry.”
43. Rebecca Sugar, “The Song from ‘Nightosphere,’” Posterous, 2010, archived

47. Basichis.
50. “Video Makers,” commentary by Kent Osborne.
52. “Memory of a Memory,” commentary by Rebecca Sugar.
53. “Memory of a Memory,” commentary by Tom Herpich.
54. “Memory of a Memory,” commentary by Pendleton Ward.
55. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CjM3NLjXnE.
56. “Fionna and Cake,” commentary by Adam Muto.
59. Sugar.
60. “Marceline’s Closet” (Season 3, Episode 21).
64. Olivia Olson, “Adventure Time 10th Anniversary Livestream,” Twitch.tv, 2020 (official stream deleted).
65. Olson.
70. “Daddy’s Little Monster,” commentary by Rebecca Sugar.
71. Patrick McHale, “@PaulThomas1992 mostly i was just trying to do something like ‘i can show you the world...’” Twitter, 2014, https://twitter.com/Patrick_McHale/status/505825107835883520.
73. “Distant Bands.”
74. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUYSGojUuAU.
76. “I Remember You,” commentary by Rebecca Sugar.
78. Guzman, “Fiona [sic] and Cake.”
80. Rob Sugar, “Well, she didn’t make a demo of that...” [comment]. YouTube, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuRvABg4V08&lc=Ugw1UCLw4yDiEUD-RsB4AaABAg.
82. Muto.
86. Ristaino.
89. Tom Herpich, (storyboard artist; character designer), interview with author, January 23, 2019.
92. Moynihan.
94. Moynihan.
98. Mike Sunda, “Soichi Terada.”
100. Ristaino, “this is a very early version...”
101. Ristaino.
106. Moynihan, “Marceline Song.”
110. Aquino, et al.
111. Aquino, et al.
114. Guo.
115. Guo.
118. Evil was recording under the moniker “Babeo Baggins” when the episode aired.
120. Evil [stage name], (guest songwriter), interview with author, February 5, 2020.
123. Evil [stage name], interview with author, February 5, 2020.
124. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjYch8-WGoM.
125. Evil [stage name], interview with author, February 5, 2020.
126. Mey Rude, “Bubline Is Canon: 7 Gayest Moments from Adventure Time's Cutest Relationship.”
128. Atwood et al., “‘Rebecca Sugar’ with Adam Muto, Ian Jones-Quartey, and Ben Levin & Matt Burnett (Vol. 3/Ep. 9)”.
129. Lloyd, “Series Broke Barriers.”
133. Who would later play in LAKE with Eriksson.
134. A story artist who has worked on a number of lauded projects, including Spider-Man: Into the Spiderverse (2018).
137. Eriksson.
138. According to Eriksson: “My character for the ‘Music Hole’ is a little bit of a mystery to me, actually. I know that it was an older idea from the show ... I like it ... I felt a little weird about acting the part because I knew it was based on me, but it had a life of its own. I actually met with an acting coach, Camille Mana, in Los Angeles, to help me find my voice with it. She said that the Music Hole sounded like a lonely 11-year-old sitting in a cafeteria and no one is talking to them. When it actually came time to reading, I felt totally weird about it. I love reading out loud, but acting is hard. I’d love to do it more to get over my fear of it.” Interview with author.
Part 3: 
“Storytelling”: How Adventure Time Told its Tales
9. Monomythic Time: Finn and the Hero’s Journey

Adventure Time is frequently described as “random,” and while this descriptor is usually meant as a way to complement the show’s limitless goofiness, it can also come across a bit dismissive, implying that the show has no “real” or stable narrative. This could not be farther from the truth, and while it is true that there was an aspect of chaotic creativity at the heart of the show that allowed it to grow organically, Adventure Time’s main story—that is, Finn’s journey of self-discovery in which he grows from innocent boy to enlightened hero—has a complex, plottable structure. To explicate the details of this structure, the present chapter will employ the thought of mythologist Joseph Campbell, perhaps best known for his seminal 1949 book The Hero with a Thousand Faces, in which he proposed the monomyth, better known as the “hero’s journey.”

I should stress that, despite the contents of this chapter, I do not consider myself a devoted structuralist; in fact, when it comes to mythology, I find structuralism to be somewhat ham-fisted, given its tendency to take complex stories and either divide them up into vague “mythemes” and then sort them into broad categories. I am not alone in this belief, and in the last half century or so many other scholars have abandoned structuralism’s more universalizing ideas in favor of a nuanced approach to mythology and folklore. Having said that, I should point out that this section is not an attempt to vindicate Campbell’s comparative approach to mythology. Instead, I simply seek to repudiate the idea that Adventure Time is “random” by illustrating
that the show’s main plot follows—albeit in a clever and refreshing way—the storytelling model that Campbell and his pupils long ago described.

**A Brief Look at the Monomyth**

Because Joseph Campbell’s formulation of the monomyth has been explicated in numerous books,¹ what follows is but a brief outline of the journey: The monomyth begins with a stage called the “departure.” In this section of the story, the hero is introduced and is called to adventure. At first, this call is refused, but soon the hero relents, crossing the threshold into a new, usually supernatural world. From here, the monomyth segues into the second stage, called the “initiation,” in which the hero experiences a variety of trials, culminating in a “meeting with the goddess” and an “atonement with the father.” The hero then undergoes an apotheosis and secures the object of their quest. This point marks the start of the monomyth’s denouement, the “return,” which usually includes some sort of magic flight in which the hero is “rescued from without.” The hero then crosses the return threshold and finds themself back in the ordinary world. It is here that the hero experiences a final transformation or a resurrection, and thereafter becomes the master of both the ordinary and special worlds, who is “free to live.”

According to English scholar Donald E. Palumbo, “The hero’s physical journey symbolizes everyone’s psychological journey of rebirth and rediscovery,”² of which the end result is “enlightenment.”³ While this term might come across as overly “spooky” in our age of science, it really means nothing more than a person becoming fully aware of their entire Self, rather than worrying about what they could be, should be, or are not; in this way, it is arguably comparable to what psychologist Carl Jung calls “individuation.” Inherent in this sort of self-understanding is the acceptance of aspects with which a person might be uncomfortable, or which they might otherwise actively repress. According to Campbell, this recognition of the Self is often depicted in mythology as the reconciling of the myriad dualities in existence (e.g., life and death, light and darkness, good and evil), which in turn is often simplified as the union of the “masculine” and “feminine.” It is for this reason that the heroes of myth tend to “atone” with the father (thereby coming to terms with their “masculine” side) and “connect” with a mother-goddess (thereby coming to terms with their “feminine” side); the merging of these two halves into one is a metaphor for the hero perceiving and accepting the many parts of their psyche that collectively form the Self.

In *Adventure Time*, Finn’s monomythic path to enlightenment is portrayed gradually across three cycles, which I have called “ordeal.” In the first, he meets his deadbeat father, who via negativa causes him to reaffirm his he-
Monomythic Time

roic spirit. Given that in Western culture, heroism is more often than not culturally-coded as a “masculine” attribute, Finn’s reaffirmation of this trait can be read as the metaphorical acceptance of his “masculine” side. Conversely, in the second ordeal, Finn connects with his mother and learns that the two share an intrinsic want to help others. A tendency to help is also culturally-coded in the West, but instead of being seen as “masculine,” it is usually understood as “feminine”; as such, Finn’s reaffirmation to help signifies the metaphorical acceptance of his “feminine” side. By the end of the second ordeal, Finn manages to reconcile the masculine and feminine into a unified whole—his “hero heart”—which he uses to save Ooo in the Elements mini-series. Finn’s enlightenment is then finalized in the third ordeal, wherein he confronts and integrates Fern, a manifestation of his Shadow. This final reconciliation signifies the merging of consciousness with unconsciousness, which allows Finn to achieve full individuation, and by extension enlightenment.

First Ordeal:
Atoning with Martin, the Ogre Father

Adventure Time’s first major storyarc focuses on Finn meeting and accepting his human father, Martin. Predicated on fatherhood and the father-son relationship, this ordeal can be understood as the process by which Finn fully recognizes and comes to terms with the aspects of his being that are culturally-understood as “masculine”—namely his heroic nature.

Separation from the Ordinary World

At the start of the series, Finn lives with his adoptive brother Jake in the Land of Ooo. While a fantastical realm for the viewer, Ooo is nevertheless an ordinary world for our characters—replete with “old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns.” For years, Finn has been at peace doing the same old things (e.g., fighting monsters) in the same old places (e.g., the Candy Kingdom), but this begins to change during the events of the second-season installment “Susan Strong.” At the start of this episode, Finn explicitly confesses to Princess Bubblegum that thinking about his origin causes him to become “all soul-searchy.” Soon thereafter, by “apparently the merest chance,” Finn stumbles upon a mysterious hatch in the ground that leads him to Susan Strong—a large, muscular women who appears, at least on the surface, to be a human. Deep down, something in Finn’s soul stirs.

For his entire life, Finn has been operating under the assumption that he is the last of his kind. It is for this reason that Finn finds Susan so interesting. Who is she, Finn wonders, and does her existence have anything to do with his origin story? Because she engenders these questions, Susan is a
herald, and her arrival can be seen as a call to adventure, beckoning Finn to leave the familiar boundaries of Ooo so as to finally solve the mystery of his humanity. But Finn—still but an innocent boy—is not yet ready to know of his origin, and so he refuses this call (ironic, given the series title). A season later, in episode “Beautopia,” Susan returns, enlisting Finn’s help in cleansing the titular city of the demonic Lub Glubs; once again, her existence calls Finn to adventure, and once again, he refuses. Finn, it seems, is still unable “to put off the infantile ego,” thereby remaining “bound in by the walls of childhood.”

**INITIATION INTO THE WORLD OF THE FATHER**

Several seasons later, in the fifth-season finale “Billy’s Bucket List,” Finn decides to complete the titular bucket list of his deceased mentor Billy so that the great warrior’s spirit can be at peace in the afterlife. For a hero like Finn, most of these tasks are easy. However, the final task is a doozy: float peacefully in the ocean. Since the first season, the audience has known that Finn’s greatest fear is the ocean. This means that even thinking about the briny deep sends a shiver down Finn’s spine. But Finn decides that Billy is worth overcoming his fear. Unfortunately, the manifestation of Finn’s dread, the Fear Feaster (voiced by Mark Hamill) appears and torments Finn, reminding him of his weaknesses. The Fear Feaster is a quintessential threshold guardian, who hinders Finn and prevents him from traversing too far into the Unknown. Normally, fear is a powerful deterrent, but this time Finn is determined to overcome his trepidation. Finn seizes a board and beats himself in the head. This knocks him unconscious, allowing him to fall into the ocean without a struggle. Through (painful) trickery, Finn has passed the first threshold and is entering into a new world.

As Finn sinks into the murky depths, he has a startling vision in which he follows a whale through a labyrinthine underwater maze composed mostly of pre-Mushroom War ruins and rusting shipwrecks. Eventually, Finn’s hat grows to an enormous size and chases after him, forcing him to swim away and breach the surface for air. The dream culminates in a striking visual: Finn, helplessly trapped on the crest of an immobile wave, as the large whale opens wide its mouth and swallows him whole. It is in this way that Finn very literally finds himself entombed in the belly of the whale. This is an important visual, for according to Joseph Campbell, “The passage of the magical threshold ... is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale.” This imagery indicates that Finn is leaving his old self behind and is, in a sense, being reborn into a special world.

Finn awakens from his reverie to find himself floating in the middle of the ocean. Once again, the Fear Feaster manifests and torments him, but this time, Finn uses his grass-sword to destroy the specter, thereby indicating his
transformation while also affirming his commitment to a greater quest. As Finn floats, no longer afraid of the ocean, the ghost of Billy manifests in the starry sky. Billy thanks Finn for completing his bucket list, thereby letting his spirit rest. Just before his soul presumably departs “into the infinite cosmos [for] an endless journey of wonder and discovery,” Billy lets Finn know that his human father is alive and imprisoned in some corner of the Oooniverse known only as the “Citadel.” This serves as the final call to adventure—one that Finn is now ready to answer.

At the start of the sixth-season premiere “Wake Up,” Finn rushes back to his tree fort to tell Jake the news, and soon thereafter the two set back out on the road of trials. Seeking supernatural aid, they turn to their ally Prismo—a laid-back, two-dimensional wish-master with almost omnipotent powers—and ask for his assistance in gaining access to the Citadel.

Prismo tells our heroes that the only way to get into the otherworldly prison is to commit a cosmic crime. Prismo then sends Finn and Jake on a final quest to locate a specific sleeping old man, who is later revealed to be the corporeal body of Prismo himself; the wish-master instructs Finn and Jake to wake up the man, which will ‘kill’ Prismo and earn Finn and Jake a one-way ticket to the Citadel. Prismo assures the two that when the old man falls back asleep, Prismo will effectively return from the dead, righting any wrong that was done.

While all of this is going on, the Lich—an avatar of death and one of Finn and Jake’s greatest enemies—has been sitting in the corner of Prismo’s time-room, waiting. Having been trapped in the room since the events of the fifth-season premiere “Finn the Human”/“Jake the Dog,” the Lich appears powerless, but this is all a deception, and the primordial being of evil is actually biding his time for the right moment to act. While the Lich is usually seen as the series’ Big Bad, it is important to note that in this first ordeal, the Lich is not the primary villain; he is but the fiercest of the many enemies guarding the path to the innermost cave. Nevertheless, his role is still of paramount importance, for once Finn and Jake “submit to [his] deception,” the Lich strikes, murdering Prismo in the blink of an eye.

Because killing a wish-master like Prismo is a cosmic crime, a giant Crystal Guardian—the wardens of the Citadel and threshold guardians of immense power—materializes and begins to transport the Lich to the Citadel. At this point, “Wake Up” ends and immediately segues into the episode “Escape from the Citadel,” which opens with Finn and Jake grabbing onto the Crystal Guardian’s hand and hitching a ride to the Citadel, thereby approaching the innermost cave—an unknown realm of trials and mystery, abounding with “its own ... [g]uardians, agendas, and tests.”

Once they arrive at the mysterious prison, Finn and Jake track down Finn’s father—whom they learn is named Martin—and set him free.
Unfortunately at this same time, the Lich manages to corrupt the entirety of the Citadel, killing the Crystal Guardians, destroying the infrastructure of the prison, and letting a number of interdimensional criminals loose in the process. During this absolute bedlam, Finn confronts his father, inquiring as to why Martin abandoned him when he was a baby. Much to Finn’s vexation, Martin provides a non-answer—the first overt hint that Finn’s father is not a hero like his son, but rather a deadbeat.

Finn is suddenly distracted by the Lich, who has emerged from the collapsing ruins of the Citadel and is delivering a monologue about the destruction he will soon unleash upon the multiverse. Martin uses the Lich’s appearance as a diversion to sneak away from the carnage, and he and several other interdimensional criminals climb onto a piece of debris connected to the imploding Citadel by only a slender cord.

Meanwhile, Finn and the Lich “join in direct combat,” and the former accidentally defeats the latter by touching him with the restorative blood of the Crystal Guardians. This fluid—resembling in function Amrita: the “nectar of deathlessness”—causes the demoniac being to grow organs and flesh, thereby negating death with life. This is an important bit of foreshadowing, as it provides a clue as to how Finn will escape the upcoming nadir of his psychological journey.

Despite this brief moment of victory, Finn realizes that his father has run away. Finn gives chase at the same time one of the interdimensional criminals attempts to cut the cord loose from its tether. When the cord snaps, Finn grabs each end, and his grass-cursed arm grows to enormous proportions as he struggles to hold on. Suddenly, Finn’s grass arm detaches completely from his body. In this way, Martin symbolically castrates his son. Not only does this humiliating abandonment leave Finn physically maimed, it also breaks Finn’s heroic spirit. In his mind, Finn had built up this idea that his father would be some great hero like himself, but it turns out that Martin and Finn could not be any more different.

Finn, now doubting everything that he had previously believed about his role in life, comes to see Martin as the ogre father who must be stopped. Embracing oedipal rage, Finn initially schemes to track down Martin and rip his arm off in the sixth-season episode “The Tower,” but this wrath quickly gives way to depression.

And thus Finn—bereft of both an arm and a dad—begins his descent into the metaphorical Abyss. The bleak suffering that Finn experiences at this time—which Carl Jung called nigredo (“the descent into darkness”) and which the Roman Catholic priest John of the Cross famously called the “dark night of the soul”—is the result of Finn’s heroic spirit being dissolved by doubt and uncertainty, leaving him to feel like an empty husk. With all of this talk about emptiness and blackness, it is no surprise that in the sixth-season
episode “Breezy,” Finn expresses his melancholy with a song entitled “Lost in the Darkness.”

Finn eventually decides to fill the void in his being by kissing as many princesses as he can. It is here that we also get another trope from the Hero’s Journey: **women as temptresses**, as personified by Breezy the bee, who encourages Finn to eschew his heroic duties in favor wooing princesses. Finn subsequently goes from princess to princess in a desperate attempt to find happiness via physical pleasure, but instead he only finds more emptiness. Finn’s coping behaviors quickly become self-destructive, and he hits rock bottom one night when he “goes to the deep end” with Lumpy Space Princess.

At the end of “Breezy,” Finn finally has a breakthrough. In an ecstatic reverie, he sees Breezy transform into Princess Bubblegum holding a sword made from his own essence. The apparition of Princess Bubblegum is a manifestation of Finn’s **anima**—that is, “the eternal image of woman ... every man carries within him[self]” In addition to representing a man’s “feminine” side, the anima also functions as an intermediary between the conscious and unconscious; this means that Anima-Bubblegum also functions as a herald from beyond Finn’s immediate awareness, bringing him a message. This message, it so happens, is actualized as a sword, the trademark weapon of a hero. Anima-Bubblegum is thus telling Finn that while he might feel defeated, his heroic inner self still exists. Raising the sword above her head, Anima-Bubblegum then commands Finn to “let love be [his] guide,” revealing that only love of what is—that is, a love of life—can overcome the darkness of what is not; it is not a coincidence that this is the same moral Finn received when he defeated the Lich a few episodes earlier.

Immediately following this beatific vision, Finn’s arm-flower glows before growing into a magnificent tree that explodes in a spectacle of bark and goo. This moment is what Jung called **albedo** (“whiteness”), denoting a sort of spiritual purification. Finn, now ready to ascend from his mental abyss, peels away the remaining integument and discovers a new arm, complete with a **brand** (in this case, a small thorn in the palm of his hand) to remind him of what he has learned. In this way, Finn metaphorically **seizes the sword** and reaffirms his heroic spirit.

**RETURN TO THE LAND OF OOO**

Finn now sets out on the metaphorical **road back**, which takes up most of the show’s sixth season and comes to a head in the season finale “The Comet.” In this episode, the space-demon Orgalorg (another enemy and avatar of death) hijacks Princess Bubblegum’s rocket and flies into space in an attempt to absorb the power of a catalyst comet. Finn and Jake, however, refuse to let Orgalorg win, and so they pursue the demon; in this way, the set piece is what screenwriter Christopher Vogler calls a **villain escape** chase,
a variation of the Campbellian **magic flight**, in which an enemy “escapes ... and becomes more dangerous than before.”

Alas, in the process of pursuing their foe, Finn and Jake are separated from one another in the void of space. Floating alone and helpless, Finn realizes that he has no escape plan, and that “the world may have to come and get him.” He then sings a song entitled “Everything’s Falling into Place,” in which he expresses his belief that he is “right where [he] should be.” Finn gives himself over to the Universe—and the Universe responds! In that instant, against all odds, Martin appears, riding a space-moth, and he **rescues Finn from without**. By this one deed, Martin has proven to Finn that, in addition to being an ogre, he can also be a **protective father**.

Finn again focuses on stopping Orgalorg, who has managed to seize the comet and is consuming its raw power. In a moment of fearlessness, Finn launches himself into the beast’s maw. This unmediated expression of pure heroism causes Finn’s grass-arm to activate once more, growing into a powerful whip-like weapon. Finn uses his arm to slice open Orgalorg’s stomach, freeing both himself and the comet from the demon’s innards. By heroically journeying into the maw of death and returning unscathed, Finn has been metaphorically **resurrected**.

The comet, now freed from Orgalorg’s clutches, addresses Finn, announcing that it has existed since time eternal and has “embodied all that is good and evil.” The comet then offers Finn the chance to ascend to a higher plane of being, but Finn decides to remain in his imperfect “meat reality” and “see it through” until his natural demise. In this way, *Adventure Time* plays with the expectations of the hero’s journey, eschewing a literal **apotheosis** for a psychological one in which Finn better understands his place in this world.

Soon thereafter, Finn turns to Martin and asks him why he feels the need to flee from people. Martin gives another non-answer, but this time, something finally clicks in Finn’s heart. Martin, Finn recognizes, is neither an evil ogre nor a perfect protector. Instead, he is just a man, and Finn cannot force him to play the hero-dad of his dreams. Letting “love be his guide,” Finn finally accepts his father for the imperfect person he is, and thus the two are **atoned**.

With the party over, Martin accepts the comet’s offer to transcend to another state of being; Finn and Jake, meanwhile, hitch a ride on Banana Man’s rocket ship and **return** to the ordinary world of Ooo to resume their role as heroes. It is here where most stories begin to trail off, culminating in a satisfying conclusion. But for Finn, only a portion of his journey is finished. He has thus entered into phase that the writer Victoria Lynn Schmidt calls the “**Eye of the Storm**,”—that is, a period of relative peace and stability, wherein he remains for the entirety of the seventh and most of the eighth seasons. During this period of intermission, Finn continues to grow as a hero.
by meditating on what he has learned, making amends with those whom he has wronged in the past (e.g., Flame Princess), and helping his friends actively fight off evil.

Second Ordeal: Connecting with Minerva, the Helping Goddess

*Adventure Time’s* second ordeal focuses on Finn meeting and connecting with his human mother, Minerva. Predicated on motherhood and the mother-son relationship, this ordeal can be understood as the process by which Finn fully recognizes the aspects of his being that are culturally-understood as “feminine”—namely his want to help others.

Separation from the Ordinary World
The blissful interlude following Finn’s first ordeal continues until the eighth-season episode “Preboot”, in which our hero meets an enigmatic cyborg scientist named Dr. Gross, whose obsession with science is matched only by her desire to “improve” the natural world. Dr. Gross is a cyborg, but her vestigial humanity once again reminds Finn that there are others out there like him. In a way, this chance meeting with Dr. Gross serves as a second call to adventure, but just as before, Finn initially refuses the call by turning back and focusing on his life in the ordinary world of Ooo.

It is only at the start of the eighth-season miniseries *Islands*—the first episode of which is aptly titled “The Invitation”—that Finn decides to act. This decision is engendered by the arrival of a mysterious herald: a robot that attacks the Candy Kingdom in pursuit of “Seeker XJ-77” (i.e., Susan Strong). After the bot is subdued, Princess Bubblegum determines that it is of human origin and was sent from a mysterious “Founders Island.” For a reason he cannot quite articulate, Finn expresses the need to journey to this mysterious island and learn about his people; Susan Strong and Jake (as well as a stowaway BMO) agree to accompany him. “The Invitation” concludes with our motley crew loading into a boat and heading out onto the open sea. The final shot of the episode depicts Finn seated at the prow of the ship, staring at the horizon as his hair blows in the wind. This is a clear visual signal that Finn has answered the call and is once again crossing the threshold of adventure.

Initiation into the World of the Mother
Finn, Jake, Susan, and BMO thus begin their own odyssey across the ocean. However, their journey is not easy, and Finn and company have to deal with a whole bevy of threshold guardians, including pirates, an annoying sea-dragon, venomous jellyfish, and a mysterious Colossus of the deep—the
latter of which wrecks their boat. Finn, Jake, Susan, and BMO are thus cast into the ocean, this time symbolically rather than literally falling into the belly of the whale. Campbell writes that during this stage of the journey, “the hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died.”

This is exactly what we find: Finn awakens to find himself alone on an unknown island littered with the still-active remnants of climate-altering technology. Isolated in an unfamiliar world of ever-changing weather, Finn is nearly killed before he is rescued by a protective figure: an elderly human named Alva. A manifestation of “the benign, protecting power of destiny” who aids the hero in a time of need, Alva is resourceful, and despite her speaking only Swedish, she nevertheless helps Finn track down Jake. Before parting ways, Alva also gives Finn a map that plots out the remaining islands in the area; In time, Finn and Jake locate BMO on an island whose inhabitants spend all of their time in virtual reality, and they find Susan on a ruined island that had once served as humanity’s Hub.

By surviving the shipwreck and their subsequent separation from the group, each hero “undergoes a metamorphosis,” bringing them fully into the special world. And for Susan, this metamorphosis is not just metaphorical. Since her first appearance, Susan has suffered from terrible amnesia, which has prevented her from remembering who she is. But after walking around the ruins of Hub Island, her mind clears. Soon, she is able to recall details about her former life: she was once a “seeker” named “Kara” who had been tasked with finding Finn after he had gone missing. With her memories restored, Susan functions as a surprise mentor, detailing to Finn the story of Founders Island, his mother and father, and how he was lost as a baby. Finn and company travel to Founders Island—which is populated by hundreds of people—and journey to the settlement’s heart in the hopes of finding Finn’s mother, thereby metaphorically approaching the innermost cave. It is here that Finn finally reconnects with Minerva, his long-lost mother, who is the de facto leader of the humans, serving them as a maternal “helper” (that is, a medical doctor, a job which is predicated on taking care of those in need). Unfortunately, Minerva no longer has a corporeal body, having uploaded her consciousness into a computer program so that she could help everyone on the island survive a terrible plague that had accidentally been unleashed by Dr. Gross years earlier.

Finn’s encounter with his mother is fundamentally different than his encounter with his father. For one thing, the two ordeals differ in terms of story structure: In the first ordeal, Finn met his father and was symbolically castrated in the sixth-season premiere “Wake Up”/“Escape from the Citadel,” fell into a nadir for much of the season, and was atoned with his father in the season finale “The Comet.” With this second ordeal, however, Finn does
not experience the season-long crisis-nadir-resurrection pattern. Instead, the tension builds to a crisis in “Helpers,” before climaxing and resolving at the end of the next episode, “The Light Cloud.” This is what Christopher Vogler refers to as a “delayed crisis,” given that the main ordeal in this story—Finn’s confrontation with his mother—occurs close to the climax of the entire journey, rather than in the middle.

The second main difference has to do with how Finn is received by his parent. Remember, when Finn met Martin, the latter quickly abandoned him; when Finn and Minerva reconnect, however, she makes no attempt to flee, instead accepting him immediately. But this acceptance comes with a catch, as she soon becomes a maternal Calypso, demanding that her son stay with her and abandon the idea of returning to Ooo. “The Light Cloud” thus plays with two of the Hero’s Journey’s tropes at the same time—that is, the meeting the goddess and women as temptation—with Minerva serving as both the goddess who wants nothing more than to protect Finn and a temptress who wants to ensnare her son in the name of safety. Finn tries to resist Minerva’s demands, even encouraging the inhabitants of Founders Island to journey with him back to Ooo. Our hero experiences a momentary taste of victory when most of the humans agree to his proposition, but this feeling is soon squashed when Minerva decides to upload all of the humans’ minds into her “Better Reality” computer programming. By restricting her son’s agency and attempting to forcibly “juice up [his] precious essence” into the “Better Reality” computer, Minerva clearly threatens Finn with a sort of symbolic castration that would render him a puer aeternus and keep him in a permanent infantile state. Minerva thus comes to embody the bad mother, who “holds to herself the growing child trying to push away.”

Pleading with his mother to stop the madness, Finn argues that while her intentions to “save” humans via upload might be good, she is still “messing with people”; Minerva counters that she is just trying to help. Finn then uses the island’s advanced technology to beam into Minerva’s mainframe select memories illustrating what it truly means to help others. Made up of scenes from past episodes, this memory blast illustrates Finn’s ability to care for the emotional and physical wellbeing of his friends. After seeing this montage, Minerva is not only touched but also delighted to learn that her son grew up to be a “helper,” just like her. In an instant, she transmutes from the bad mother into the goddess, who resolves to do whatever she can to help her son be who he is. As a demonstration of her transformation, Minerva deactivates the mighty Colossus—the threshold guardian par excellence who protects the Islands (and who had earlier wrecked Finn’s ship)—allowing Finn and his friends to safely return to Ooo via boat.

Just before the boat is out of range of Founders Island, Finn plugs into the Better Reality computer program using VR equipment and has a final
moment with the digital specter of his mother. As mother and son embrace in a virtual hug, Minerva gives Finn a gift: pure maternal love, “the mysterious root of all growth and change.” By accepting this love, Finn fully accepts his calling to care for and help others—an aspect of his being which has long been overshadowed by his more aggressive role as a sword-wielding hero.

**RETURN to the LAND of Ooo (Again)**

Unbeknownst to Finn and Jake, in their absence, the Land of Ooo was consumed by the four primordial elements, thanks to the meddling of Patience St. Pim the ice elemental. When Finn and Jake return, they see that their “ordinary” world has gone haywire, and they recognize that failure to act will result in the total loss of their home. After a series of misadventures, all hope seems lost when errant fire magic “kills” Finn, turning him into a monster. Luckily, Lumpy Space Princess is at hand, and she manages to “resurrect” Finn with a piece of Princess Bubblegum’s hair. This blob of gum serves as a sort of candy talisman, reconnecting Finn with love, personified once again as Anima-Bubblegum; this in turn allows Finn to heed Lumpy Space Princess and “listen to the beat of [his] hero heart.” With love flowing through him once again, Finn reverts to his normal form, and he subsequently assists Lumpy Space Princess in resetting the entirety of Ooo.

The phrase “hero heart” is of key importance here, as it denotes the explicit intersection—a coniunctio oppositorum (Latin for “marriage of opposites”)—of Finn’s heroic spirit (representative of his “masculine” side, which was reaffirmed in the first ordeal) with loving want to help others (representative of his “feminine” side, which was recognized in this ordeal). Finn’s use of his “hero heart” thus signifies a reconciliation of the gendered father-mother, masculine-feminine split, which produces a new, unified aspect of his being—a sort of metaphorical elixir, into which Finn can tap to “heal [the] wounded land” that is Ooo.

**Third Ordeal: Integrating Fern, the Manifested Shadow**

By atoning with Martin and connecting with Minerva, Finn has brought himself to the very threshold of psychic balance. But there is one aspect of the Self that Finn needs to face before he can be called whole: his personal Shadow, as embodied by Fern the grass-being. Unlike the previous two ordeals, the journey to integrate Fern does not strictly follow the hero’s journey template. This is because a confrontation with the shadow is but a feature of the “road of trials” stage of the larger journey. This means that Finn and
Fern’s confrontation can perhaps best be understood as the last “test” before Finn can receive the final boon: individuation.

**What Is the Shadow?**

First conceptualized by Carl Jung, the “Shadow” is one of many “archetypes,” and can be described as a part of the unconscious human psyche in which repressed, rejected, or unrecognized aspects of the Self are contained, far from the light of conscious thought. Despite its mystical name, the Shadow is not inherently bad—in fact, it can either be positive or negative—but it does tend to seal away attributes of the Self that many associate with “immorality” (e.g., sexual feelings, violent urges). This has led to the Shadow developing the reputation as “the home of the suppressed monsters of our inner world,” in which “the energy of [our] dark side” bubbles. As mentioned earlier, the Shadow is unconscious, and thus eludes easy detection by the Ego. Regardless, its contents can often be ascertained by keeping an eye out for psychological “projection,” wherein a person denies their own foibles and instead recognizes those defects in others. It is only by recognizing the contents of one’s Shadow that an individual can become individuated, which is “the realization of the [unified] Self as a psychic reality greater than the Ego.” Individuation, in other words, is the process by which a person becomes psychologically whole.

According to Jung, it is “the realization of the [Shadow], [that] marks the first stage in the analytic process” of individuation. For Finn, this realization begins in the fifth-season episode “Blade of Grass,” in which Finn purchases a “grass sword” from an unscrupulous wizard. Unbeknownst to Finn, the sword had been constituted by evil magic and will permanently infect anyone who buys it with a grass curse. Smitten by the awe-inspiring power of the sword, Finn does not think too much before he scoops it up. Initially, the sword is a godsend, and Finn is able to wield it at an almost preternatural level of technical ability, but soon Finn begins to suspect that the weapon is too good to be true. Alarm bells start to really go off when Finn has a dream in which the sword envelops his body, turning him to grass. Soon thereafter, Finn attempts to get rid of the sword by tossing it away, but the weapon returns by stalking him in waking life. At the end of the episode, the blade has firmly attached itself to his wrist. The grass sword saga culminates in the eighth-season episodes “Reboot” and “Two Swords,” in which the curse detaches from Finn, takes over the Finn-sword, and produces a new person: Fern.

The process by which the grass sword seeps into Finn’s life until it has become a part of him can be read as his becoming aware of the existence of his personal Shadow. Of particular note in this parallel, however, is the fact that in *Adventure Time*, full recognition of the Shadow is equated with the
creation of a new being; this echoes Jung assertion that “the Shadow can be realized only through a relation to a partner.” In the “real world,” this partner is simply another human onto whom we project our repressed qualities. However, as an alternate version of Finn ensnared and wholly taken over by the grass curse, Fern is different from a run-of-the-mill relational partner. This is because the parasitic effects of the curse have led to the contents of his mind being the direct equivalent of Finn’s unconscious. Fern is thus not a mere projection; he very literally is Finn’s personal Shadow given fantastic form.

This brings up an important (and as of yet unanswered!) question: What exactly has Finn repressed? What attributes make up his personal Shadow? Fern’s behavior and literal composition provide clues to the answer. First, Fern is an aggressive character, who is wont to attack first and ask questions later. This belligerence causes Finn noticeable unease, and in numerous episodes, Finn questions if Fern’s methods are appropriate, given their severity. This suggests that part of Finn’s shadow is composed of violent compulsions that the conscious Ego suppresses. Second, Fern is a green, plant-based being. In religion and folklore, plants have long been a symbol of fertility, and the color green has long been associated with lust, sexuality and the natural instinct to procreate. By coding Fern as a virid plant-man, the writers seem to imply that the other part of Finn’s shadow is composed of sexual impulses, which Finn has pushed down into his unconscious so as to be a chaste knight. Fern thus represents Finn’s base drives, and his existence as a separate character allows Finn to recognize these drives for what they are.

**Fern Goes Rogue**

As was mentioned earlier, the Shadow is usually glossed as simply “a villain,” but as Jung’s student Marie-Louise von Franz cautions, the archetype: ...

... is not necessarily always an opponent. In fact, [the Shadow] is exactly like any human being with whom one has to get along, sometimes by giving in, sometimes by resisting, sometimes by giving love whatever the situation requires. The Shadow becomes hostile only when [it] is ignored or misunderstood.

Indeed, Fern starts out as a powerful if clumsy ally to Finn and Jake, assisting them on various adventures and even watching over Ooo during the events of the *Islands* miniseries.

Unfortunately, Fern constantly compares his failings to Finn’s numerous successes, leading to feelings of resentment. By the ninth-season finale “Three Buckets,” these feelings have festered so much that Fern turns on Finn and attacks him. This battle is a poetic depiction of neurosis, which is
a mental struggle caused by an individual’s “suspicium of being two people in opposition to each other—the Shadow and the Ego.” Unfortunately, Jung warns: “When [the Shadow] is willfully repressed, it continues in the unconscious and merely expresses itself indirectly and all the more dangerously.”

This is exactly what we find with Finn and Fern: At the end of the fight, Finn accidentally fells his grass-duplicate, cutting him into a thousand shards of grass. But Fern is not dead, and he is subsequently revived as the powerful “Green Knight,” who functions as a dangerous agent of Uncle Gumbald during the show’s final season. Fern makes his first full appearance as the Green Knight in the tenth-season episode “Seventeen,” in which he crashes Finn’s birthday party. Finn and his friends initially do not recognize Fern, and so they welcome him in, upon which he presents Finn with an axe. Finn, thinking that this is all an elaborate prank by Jake, chops the knight’s head off, but this does not kill him. Instead, the knight rises up and challenges Finn to several party games. The knight eventually defeats Finn, divulges his true identity, and reveals that he is working with Uncle Gumbald.

Fans of medieval poetry will likely recognize that this plot is a direct allusion to the 14th-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which the titular knight faces off against a mysterious verdant-colored knight. The poem has long divided scholars as to its meaning, with myriad interpretations having appeared in the literature over the years. That said, in 1964, the analytic scholar Stephen Manning analyzed the story of Sir Gawain “in archetypical terms,” coming to the conclusion that Sir Gawain is best understood as a stand-in for the Ego, whereas the Green Knight represents Sir Gawain’s Shadow. Given the obvious connection between the episode and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it seems reasonable to view Finn as the counterpart to Sir Gawain and Fern as the counterpart to the Green Knight. And if this is the case, we can therefore extend Manning’s argument, concluding that Finn should be seen as a stand-in for the Ego and Fern as a stand-in for the Shadow. Ultimately, this means that Fern’s role as the Green Knight is perhaps the closest the show comes to explicitly declaring Fern to be a manifestation of Finn’s repressed “inferiorities.”

**The Individuation of Finn Mertens**

Jung argues that the Shadow “cannot be argued out of existence or rationalized into harmlessness”; one can only come to terms with it. Throughout the tenth season, Finn and Fern fail repeatedly at besting one another. It is only in the series finale, “Come Along with Me,” that the two eschew direct confrontation. Instead, while sharing a trippy nightmare, Finn and Fern realize that they are “two sides of the same coin.” The two consequently, the two journey into their “vault”—that is, the part of Finn and Fern’s mutual psyche wherein traumatic memories, as well as the personification of the
Part III–“Storytelling”

grass curse, live locked away. Here, the two are exposed to a whole bevy of shared traumatic memories, which decide to face together. Through teamwork, the two Finns locate and “kill” the grass curse that has been infecting Fern’s mind for so long. By squishing the grass curse together, the two “tame their demons” (in both a metaphorical and literal sense) as one.

In the previous ordeals, Finn experienced a coniunctio oppositorum when he recognized his metaphorically “masculine” and “feminine” sides and distilled them down into his single, unified “hero heart.” A similar distillation occurs at the end of this ordeal when Finn and Fern work together, realizing that they “complement one another [and] form a totality, which is the Self”—a unified whole that “embraces not only the conscious but also the unconscious psyche.” This second coniunctio oppositorum is signified by Fern losing corporeal form, leaving only a single Finn the Human, who is now fully aware of his masculine, feminine, conscious, and unconscious sides. Finn has thus achieved the final boon: individuation, which has rendered him the master of both the special and normal worlds. Finally in tune with his Self, Finn is at peace with who he is (rather than who he could be, should be, or is not), and it is for that reason that Finn the Human can be called an enlightened, monomythic hero.

Conclusion

Despite the popular misunderstanding of the show as a bright, chaotic jumble with no purpose or plot, Adventure Time actually has a complex, tripartite structure that focuses on Finn the Human’s growth from an innocent, ignorant boy to an enlightened, individuated hero. And because this story can be clearly delineated using the monomythic schema long ago made famous by Joseph Campbell, it is possible that one day, Finn will find himself discussed alongside the other great heroes from popular culture (such as Neo, Harry Potter, Luke Skywalker, and Katniss Everdeen), whose stories have long been analyzed by critics via the language of the hero’s journey.
Monomythic Time

Endnotes


5. “Susan Strong” (Season 2, Episode 18).


7. Campbell, 57.

8. Campbell, 83-84.

9. Per the King of Mars. “Sons of Mars” (Season 4, Episode 15).


17. Watching with Wizard Eyes “The Nature of The Finn Pt 1.”


25. Campbell, 85.


35. Jung.


40. Stephen Manning, “A Psychological Interpretation of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.”
Often, when new viewers watch Adventure Time for the first time, they are shocked when a joke, minor character, or obscure detail from one of the earliest episodes is brought up in a later season, revealing itself to be part of a major plot point. Adventure Time is a sprawling epic comprising almost 300 episodes; how exactly did the show’s writers create such an intricate web of continuity? The answer? An attention to detail, coupled with the creative use of retcons.

What Is a Retcon?

According to the cultural theorist Andrew J. Friedenthal, “retconning”—a contraction of “retroactive continuity”—is a narrative device that “involves the revisiting of past stories, told in previous installments of a long-form narrative, and adding a new piece of information to that older story, literally rewriting the past.” Arguably, in the popular consciousness the technique is probably most associated with comic books (given the medium’s penchant for constantly supplanting or reinterpreting information established in past issues), but the method has been used in everything from classic works of literature to movie franchises.

Friedenthal argues that retcons can be one of three types: “revisions,” “reinterpretations,” and “reinscriptions.” In the first category are those
retcons that supplant previously established information by presenting and then privileging some new canonical development. Sometimes these revisions are acknowledged within the text itself, but often, these drastic changes go uncommented upon. An excellent example of this sort of retcon in *Adventure Time* is the case of the giant gumball machines who guard the Candy Kingdom. In the first-season episode “Slumber Party Panic,” these beings are quite powerful—possessing the ability to stop time itself—and are referred to by Princess Bubblegum as the “Keepers of the Royal Promise.” However, in later episodes, the beings are suddenly renamed the “Gumball Guardians” and are substantially less powerful, functioning more or less as giant alarm systems. Despite this drastic shift as to their purpose, the change is never commented upon in the series itself, and some flashback episodes—which canonically occur before “Slumber Party Panic” (e.g., “The Vault”)—extend this retcon into the past.

The second category comprises “reinterpretations,” which are those retcons that “less-than-definitively ... change how an earlier work is seen and interpreted ... allowing for some choice on the part of audience members to determine which history is still considered canonical to the narrative.” These types of retcons tend to be of relatively minor consequence all things considered, and are usually invoked by fans or creators to cover over small inconsistencies or errors. For instance, when a fan asked Pendleton Ward on his Formspring account as to why Finn and Jake were unable to perform magic after the events of the first-season episode “Wizard,” he argued that it was because the two no longer wore magical wizard cloaks, which had provided them with the abilities in the first place. This answer is never explicitly confirmed in any episode, meaning that while Ward’s answer patches a plot hole, viewers are still free to ignore it and substitute in their own solution.

The final category comprises “reinscriptions,” which are “solidified change[s] to how an earlier work is viewed, concretely and canonically changing the [original] work’s meaning going forward.” In other words, reinscriptions revisit and expand upon some past event, providing that event with a new meaning that it was not originally intended to have. It is this final type of retcon that the writers of *Adventure Time* commonly made use of, and thus it is this final category that I will explore in greater detail by discussing two major examples.

**Example 1: Gunter the Penguin Primordial Space Demon**

Perhaps the premiere example of a reinscription in *Adventure Time* occurred near the end of the show’s sixth season. In the episode “Orgalorg,” the
audience learns that the cuddly but mischievous penguin commonly referred to as Gunter is not a penguin at all, but rather a huge, fiendish space-demon named Orgalorg. Desirous of the power contained within the catalyst comets, Orgalorg had long ago attempted to capture one but was struck down by the power of Grob Gob Glob Grod. The demon then crashed on earth, and the gravity of the planet crushed her into the shape of a penguin. After wandering the earth for millennia, Orgalorg was eventually adopted by the crazed Ice King, who mistook her for a bona fide bird.

But how exactly is all of this a retcon as opposed to normal plot development? To understand this, we need to revisit the second-season premiere, “It Came from the Nightosphere.” In this episode, the Lord of Evil himself, Hunson Abadeer, refers to Gunter as the “Dark One” and “the most evil thing [he has] encountered.” Written by storyboard artist Adam Muto, this line was meant as nothing more than a joke, as the blocking of the scene clearly attests: as Abadeer speaks the aforementioned line, the character is off-screen and the camera is focused on the snowy peaks of the Ice Kingdom. This leads the audience to intuitively think Abadeer is speaking to the Ice King—the only real “villain” in the show at that point, as well as the only major character who lives in the landscape depicted. The subsequent reveal that Abadeer is actually talking to a penguin is thus quite hilarious.11 During the production of the fifth-season movie, when the writers were first dreaming up the idea that Gunter was some sort of primordial being of great evil, they remembered Muto’s joke from “It Came from the Nightosphere” and realized that they could reinscribe the line with newfound meaning. While the television movie was scrapped, the idea that Gunter was more than she seems was bounced around between the writers, and by the time the show’s writers were working on the last episodes of season six, Gunter had evolved into an evil space demon. This is a textbook example of what TV Tropes, calls a “Cerebus retcon,” in which something that was initially meant to be funny is retroactively given new meaning as the original piece of media grows darker.12 In other words, the writers took what was initially a silly gag and retconned it so that it actually had deep significance to the mythology of the series itself.

Example 2: A Farmworld Flub

Another example of reinscription was implemented to fix what originally amounted to a simple animation error. In the middle of the two-part fifth-season premiere “Finn the Human”/“Jake the Dog,” Finn is transported to an alternate dimension bereft of magic known as “Farmworld.” Here he stumbles across an aged and non-vampiric Marceline (voiced delightfully
by Cloris Leachman), who is guarding a frozen Mushroom Bomb, under which the skeletal corpse of Simon Petrikov—complete with ice crown—rests. Farmworld Marceline explains to Finn that one thousand years in the past, Simon used his ice powers to freeze the aforementioned bomb, thus preventing the extinction of humanity at the loss of his life. Finn, however, is not that interested in Farmworld Marceline’s tale, and he grabs the crown and darts off, hoping to sell it and pay off his family’s debt. After getting into an altercation with a local gang of rabble-rousers, Finn puts the crown on his head to protect himself, which fills him with ice magic but drains his sanity in the process. As Finn begins shooting bolts of ice that shake the earth, Farmworld Marceline runs in horror down to the frozen Mushroom Bomb, aghast as these tremors cause the mutagenic weapon to detonate over Simon’s bones.

What is the problem with all this? In the final scene with Marceline, as the bomb detonates, Simon’s corpse is shown clearly wearing the ice crown, even though Farmworld Finn had snatched it away in an earlier scene; in other words, there is no logical way it could have found its way back onto the top of Simon’s skull. For many of the fans watching the episode, this was a major goof—a designer had obviously dropped the ball by not editing the crown out of the background piece. I distinctly remember watching the episode for the first time with my roommates in university and having one of them point out the blunder. At the time, it irked me; of course Adventure Time is a cartoon, but it was still a distracting mistake for those of us paying close attention to the details.

Fast forward to the seventh-season episode “Crossover.” In this episode, Finn and Jake learn that the Farmworld dimension is somehow still in existence, and that the Farmworld version of the Lich is threatening to destroy the Multiverse. Our heroic duo travels to this parallel dimension and, after much effort, subdues Farmworld Lich, thereby saving the day. To prevent the Farmworld Crown from causing any more damage, the omnipotent wish-master Prismo opens what can only be described as a cosmic version of Adobe Premiere and literally queues up footage from the episode “Finn the Human.” Prismo then edits the crown into the previously-discussed scene, placing the artifact back on Simon’s corpse so that it is destroyed when the Mushroom Bomb detonates. This is a classic example of what TV Tropes calls a “cosmic retcon,” as it is the result of “forces within the story itself ... altering history.” The beauty of this storytelling decision is that it provided the show with a chance to explain away an outright error without having to either go back and “fix” the original animation or ignore that the error ever happened.
The Usefulness of Reinscription

While the intentions behind a reinscription may vary within the industry, the *Adventure Time* writers seemed to have mainly used them in two ways: to create a tighter sense of continuity post facto, and/or to make Ooo feel more “lived in.”

The first approach is most clearly on display in this chapter’s examples: In each instance, the show’s writers went back to a previous episodes, found some throw-away detail (e.g., a joke, an outright error), and then used that detail as the basis for future plot development. Perhaps the writers were most upfront about this method in the commentary track for “It Came from the Nightosphere,” wherein Jesse Moynihan mused, “I think [reinscription is] a good process ... throwing stuff out there and then using it later as if you had planned it the whole time ... [It’s like] leaving bread trails for yourself in the future”\(^\text{14}\). In the same commentary track, series showrunner Adam Muto similarly noted: “Sometimes [a reinscription-style retcon] comes organically out of a joke but later it seems like we were planning it all along.”\(^\text{15}\) As Muto alludes to, the major strength of this strategy is that it better connects episodes to one another after the fact, thereby creating a sense of continuity that appears to have been laboriously blocked out from the get-go when it was really generated ad hoc. (And, for the record, it seems that this approach was a success, judging from the dozens of online posts in which fans express amazement that the writers were able to plan such key plot developments “seasons in advance”).\(^\text{16}\)

Other times, a reinscription was used simply to connect episodes or characters to one another in a way that made the world of the show feel “real.” This approach was openly discussed by Tom Herpich when the two of us corresponded via email:

> I don’t think [reinscription is] something we [i.e., the writers and storyboard artists] ever talked about—I think it was probably an intuitive leaning that a lot of us shared. We all wanted the stories and characters to feel like they had real histories and real emotions. It might’ve been an outgrowth of that drive towards some kind of naturalism. The examples that pop to my mind are my having the Huge King [from season six’s “Walnuts & Rain”] be related to Prince Huge [from season four’s “The Hard Easy”], and having the Hall of Egress be the intended destination from “Dungeon Train.” I still like both of those [post facto reinscriptions]; they make the world feel a little smaller and realer, and aren’t too much in your face.\(^\text{17}\)
This sort of retcon helps to create the illusion that Ooo is a consistent world that *exists* even when it is off-screen, and that the characters in that world continue to live their lives and interact with one another in the inaccessible spaces between episodes.

All things considered, reinscription was a clever method of retconning that allowed the writers of *Adventure Time* to create a complex, knotty, and highly consistent world without having to painstakingly plan out storylines seasons in advance.
Endnotes

3. E.g. Friedenthal, 25-32; Proctor.
5. Friedenthal, 7.
6. This term being used broadly to denote any media object that can be analyzed by fans, be it a novel or a television episode.
8. Pendleton Ward, “All of the magic Finn gained in that episode was contained in the robes they got, which was later destroyed,” Formspring, 2010, http://www.formspring.me/buenothebear/q/867844670 (site discontinued).
10. “It Came from the Nightosphere” (Season 2, Episode 1).
11. “It Came from the Nightosphere,” commentary by Adam Muto.
15. “It Came from the Nightosphere,” commentary by Adam Muto.
In his essay “Teens and Vampires: From Buffy the Vampire Slayer to Twilight’s Vampire Lovers,” the critical theorist Douglas Kellner argues that the cult television series Buffy the Vampire Slayer (which aired on The WB/UPN from 1997–2003 and followed the adventures of the titular heroine) can be seen as having three distinct levels, the first being the realistic, the second being the mythological, and third being the allegorical. The realistic level is, as the name suggests, focused on the series’ realism, the mythological is more concerned with the overarching story of the show’s universe, and the allegorical level is focused on symbolism, metaphor, and “deeper” meanings. I agree with Kellner’s layered dissection of Buffy, but I also believe that Buffy is far from the only show that can be constructively analyzed in this way. What follows is thus a consideration of Kellner’s three levels, vis-à-vis Adventure Time.

A Slice of Life: The Realist Layer

For someone who knows of Adventure Time only from its pop culture shadow, the claim that the show has a “realistic” layer might appear, at best, suspect and, at worst, totally preposterous. After all, is not Adventure Time just a silly cartoon replete with nonsensical dialog, goofy characters, and “random” comedy? (When writing this book, I encountered this question
more times than I would like to admit.) The short answer is no; over its ten-season run, *Adventure Time* proved itself more than capable of blending its surreal brand of adventure stories with a relatable sense of normality, often resulting in episodes that many fans both on- and offline have taken to calling “slice of life” narratives.

According to Robert Barton and Annie McGregor, “slice of life” as a descriptive term was introduced by the French playwright Émile Zola in the 19th century to label “naturalistic drama.” By the 20th century, it had developed into a theatrical subgenre that attempted “to depict natural everyday life ... [by] follow[ing] a character’s life for the duration of the realistic time the actual play lasts.” By the 1980s and ‘90s, the term had come to anchor an anime subgenre of the same name, featuring episodes that “focus on school ... or on interpersonal relationships, either within family or a romance.” Now compare this last definition of “slice of life” narratives to Kellner, who in writing about “realistic shows,” contends that they present “down-to-earth and revealing relations between teenagers, and between young people and parents, teachers and mentors, and a diverse range of authority figures.” While there is not total overlap between the two definitions, there are enough similarities to logically connect the two.

Sometimes, *Adventure Time*’s “slice of life” episodes focus on the truly mundane: the Emmy-award winning episode “Jake the Brick,” for instance, opens with a minute-long sequence showing Finn wandering lackadaisically through the hills and forests of Ooo, stopping only to consult a map and eat an apple. The rest of the episode revolves around the inhabitants of Ooo tuning into and becoming absorbed with Jake’s radio broadcast, which details the story of a rabbit whose home is threatened by a summer rain storm. Were one to strip from the episode the overtly fantastical elements (e.g., a talking and shapeshifting dog), the events depicted in “Jake the Brick” could very well happen in our regular, quotidian reality.

Other episodes dealing with the mundane see Finn, Jake, and their many friends going to the library, sleeping, cooking real-world dishes (e.g., sandwiches, spaghetti, bibimbap), paying taxes, casually surfing the Internet, and chatting about the meaning of life, among many other things; pretty much every “boring” thing that modern humans do, Finn and Jake do, too. Of course, *Adventure Time*’s interest in realism is not limited to only the small happenings of the everyday, and several episodes delve into more complex topics that while perhaps more “mature” are nonetheless realistic. The fifth-season episode “Frost & Fire”, for instance, artistically depicts Finn experiencing sexual dream fantasies about his girlfriend, Flame Princess. The sixth-season episode “Breezy” deals with Finn kissing princesses to cope with depression. Finally, the entirety of the eighth-season miniseries *Islands* details Finn’s brave attempt to find his biological mother.
While it might be hard for the non-fan to accept, it seems somewhat indisputable that, alongside madcap monster battles and silly ditties about bacon pancakes, *Adventure Time* also featured its fair share of realistic plot developments.

**The Lore of Ooo: The Mythological Layer**

The second layer of *Adventure Time* is its mythological aspect. A reader will be forgiven if the word “mythology” initially conjures up mental images of Hercules fighting the Hydra or Theseus slaying the Minotaur. These are figures from *classical* mythology, and this is not what is meant when the word “mythology” is invoked by media and fandom scholars. In these fields, the term refers to a “serialized narrative plus backstory plus world building,” according to the religious studies scholar Elijah Siegler. Kellner provides a slightly more technical definition, writing that “mythology” denotes “the particular mythical universe and narrative of the series.” Regardless of which definition is preferred, the point here is that when people nowadays talk about a show’s “mythology,” they are usually referring to that program’s overarching storyline, its often supernatural elements, and the backstories of its many characters. These sorts of mythologies usually strive for internal consistency, and they usually build upon past episodes so that viewers can “connect the dots” when they watch newer installments.

This unique use of the term “mythology” (which is often shortened by both fans and scholars alike to “mythos”) was first used by the screenwriter Chris Carter in reference to the overarching story of his hugely popular television series *The X-Files*. This program first aired on the Fox network from 1993 to 2002 and followed the adventures of FBI agents Fox Mulder (played by David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) as they investigated paranormal phenomena across the United States. Episodes that focused exclusively on random mutants or cryptids were called “Monster-of-the-week” episodes, while those that focused on a broader plot about a planned alien invasion were dubbed the “mythology” episodes. In time, this use of the term “mythology” was appropriated by audiences to refer to the narrative arcs of other media franchises, such as the aforementioned *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the ABC series *Lost* (2004–10), and the WB/CW series *Supernatural* (2005–20).

When *Adventure Time* debuted, it was largely devoid of any mythological pretensions, and the show’s producers assumed that Ooo was just a generic fantasy land. This all changed by accident when the writers were hammering out the plot for the first-season episode “Business Time,” in which Finn and Jake find a group of businessmen frozen in an iceberg. When reviewing the storyline, Pendleton Ward recognized that the appearance of businessmen
as frozen relics implied that not only was the world of Adventure Time the same as our own, but also that the series took place at some point in the distant future following some apocalyptic event. According to Ward, “That [one episode] made the world post-apocalyptic,” and over the next few seasons, the artists working on the show decided to lean into that aesthetic. Flash forward to the production of the second-season episodes, “Mortal Folly”/”Mortal Recoil,” which introduce the series’ principal antagonist, the Lich. As soon as this new character entered into the Land of Ooo, the writers realized that he needed a compelling backstory, and so the decision was made to intertwine the character’s origins with the mysterious extinction event that had rendered Ooo post-apocalyptic in the first place. And thus the mythology of the “Great Mushroom War” was born.

Direct allusions to this war are few and far between, and most are subtle, sometimes appearing as blink-and-you-will-miss-them easter eggs in the background of episodes (for instance, numerous background pieces contain unexploded bombs, wrecked military equipment overgrown with plant life, or the crumbling ruins of shell-ravaged buildings). Occurring sometime around the turn of the 21st century, the Mushroom War was carried out presumably with atomic weapons, whose distinctive mushroom clouds gave the conflict its name. Who the combatants were remains a mystery, but thanks to the fifth-season episodes “Finn the Human”/”Jake the Dog,” we do know that the war ended with the dropping of a doomsday weapon known as the mutagenic “Mushroom Bomb,” which—in addition to unleashing a burst of irradiated doom—also gave corporeal form to the Lich.

When the dust finally settled, the destruction wrought by the Mushroom War was incomparable: it had vaporized whole cities, rearranged entire landmasses, and polluted large swaths of the land with radioactive sludge. The handful of humans who were lucky enough to escape this nuclear holocaust fled on ships to a string of remote islands, where they spent centuries rebuilding their society, far away from what would one day become the Land of Ooo.

As episodes of Adventure Time were written, the story of the Mushroom War soon became entwined with the backstory of several other major characters, most notably Ice King and Marceline the Vampire Queen, both of whom were revealed to be survivors of the war. These mythological connections continued to develop, and in no time, they had became an integral part of the show’s spirit.

Interestingly, despite starting out as thematic window dressing, the mythological aspects are what many fans find most compelling about the show. This can be attested by searching “Adventure Time mythology” on Google, YouTube, or Reddit, which will turn up page after page of fans trying to explicate the show’s complicated lore or make esoteric connections between episodes. Fans, it seems, love a good mythology into which they can dive.
Going Deeper: The Allegorical Layer

*Adventure Time* also has a final, allegorical layer. Allegory, according to the *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia* is a “story that serves as a disguised representation for meanings other than those indicated on the surface,”\(^1\) with the “hidden message” often being a moral, philosophical, or religious one.\(^2\) A storytelling tool that has been used for millennia, allegory is so powerful, Kellner reasons, because it allows humans to explore the unpleasant truths inherent in “reality” in a way that is safer and perhaps more socially acceptable.\(^3\)

Consider, for instance, the looming specter of death. It is an unpleasant fact of human existence that all of us will die one day, and the stark realization of this mortality is one that has impacted almost everyone the world over. But by watching episodes in which Finn, Jake, and their friend symbolically deal with loss, abandonment, and even death, a viewer might be able to contemplate and process their own mortality in a way that is not only thought-provoking, but also funny. While discussing in an interview the episode “The New Frontier” (in which Jake frankly discusses his eventual demise), *Adventure Time*’s header writer Kent Osborne touched on this same idea when he acknowledged: “Hearing Jake talk about his perception of death and dying, I remember when that was pitched, it made me feel better about my own mortality ... It prepared me for death better.”\(^4\)

Arguably, *Adventure Time*’s allegorical masterminds were Tom Herpich and Jesse Moynihan, and most of their episodes are full of material that can be mined for additional meaning. Herpich has been especially upfront about his interest in taking grand life lessons and molding them into 11 minute cartoons, noting in an interview that many of his episodes—including “Puhoy,” “Dungeon Train,” “The Hall of Egress”—are best understood as “allegorical escape stor[i]es.”\(^5\) “The Hall of Egress” is perhaps the best example. In the episode, Finn finds himself trapped in the titular dungeon, and the only way he can seemingly escape is by closing his eyes and running blindly through its labyrinthine passages. The problem is, once he returns to the outside world, he finds that he cannot open his eyes, lest he be teleported right back to the dungeon where he was previously trapped. After dozens and dozens of attempts to escape (all of which end with Finn somehow opening his eyes), Finn realizes that the only way to escape is to keep his eyes shut and wander until he somehow finds the *real* exit. He is unable to trust anyone (he is unable to trust even his own sense of sight!)—he can only trust his lonely consciousness. Eventually, after blindly wandering across Ooo for what appears to be a few seasons, he bumbles his way into another Hall of Egress, and when he passes through this dungeon, he finds that he is finally able to open his eyes and emerge out the other side.
In the episode, Finn remembers that “egress” is a fancy word that means “exit.” Usually, it is invoked as a noun, but it can also function as a verb; this means that not only describes an exit hatch, but also the action of leaving a place. It is the latter meaning of the word that the episode seems focused on, as almost all of the action is placed not on the dungeon’s exit hatch but rather the process by which Finn attempts to break out of his bizarre prison, which he is only able to do by closing his eyes, wandering off from his friends, and ultimately trusting his instincts. When taken into account, the allegorical message is made all the more clear: Life is not about who we should or could be, or what we should or could do: it is about becoming who we are in the moment and listening only to what our heart tells us is correct. “The Hall of Egress” can thus be seen as a giant allegory for the tricky process of self-discovery, all wrapped up in a deceptively simple story about dungeon-crawling.

Contra Herpich (whose episodes often centered on humanistic meditations about life), Moynihan was more interested in playing around with explicitly spiritual or mystical themes. According to Kellner, “complex ... allegories [usually have] theological and religious dimension[s] that cop[e] with life and death; sin, guilt, and redemption; the choice between good and evil; and how to understand and deal with life and an afterlife.” It should be no surprise as to why Moynihan is being discussed in this section. During his years-long tenure as an Adventure Time storyboard artist, he wrote a plethora of episodes that fit neatly into the dimensions that Kellner discusses, including episodes that deal with the nature of gods, such as Glob, Prismo, and Abraham Lincoln (“Sons of Mars,” “Is That You?”); redemption and atonement (“You Forgot Your Floaties,” “Normal Man”), the meaning of life (“Astral Plane”), and the existence and nature of the afterlife (“Death in Bloom,” “Ghost Princess”).

Among the fandom, Moynihan was one of the show’s more popular storyboard artists, and almost certainly some of this admiration was due to the way he tackled heady spiritual issues in a way that was not only fun, but also readily digestible. Take, for example, the sixth-season episode “Astral Plane,” wherein the four-headed quasi-deity Glob Grod Grob Gob willingly sacrifices themselves to protect Mars from an errant comet. There is something powerful and touching about a celestial being willing to risk death for a lesser creation that the being loves so dearly. Indeed, this idea is so powerful that it has inspired a whole litany of religious beliefs about a “dying god,” with perhaps the most well-known example being the Christian conviction that Jesus Christ was willingly crucified by the Romans to save the world that he loved from the destructive power of sin. By storyboarding his portion of the episode in this way, Moynihan draws an allegorical parallel between Glob Grod Grob Gob and Jesus (or the many Jesus-like figures appearing in
folklore the world over), illustrating the paradoxical idea that death can be the greatest act of life; what is more, he does this all within 11 minutes.

So What?

A layered dissection of Adventure Time like the one performed in this chapter is of paramount importance if we want to holistically unlock why the show has resonated with so many people. This is because such an analysis enables us to see that, at each level, the show is appealing for different reasons. On a realist level, for instance, the show’s depiction of everyday happenings in a strange fantasy world allows audience members to relate to and thereby care about the fantastical characters like we do for people in our life-world.

Conversely, on the mythological level, the series functions somewhat like a fun mental puzzle: By creating concrete (but sometimes subtle) connections between episodes, the show actively challenges its viewers to keep track of continuity so as to not only “unlock” its many mysteries but also come to a better understanding of why characters behave the way they do. Focusing on the mythological clues also allows viewers to speculate about alternate developments, or to come up with pleasurable theories about what “might have happened” if events in the series’ universe were handled differently.

Finally, on the allegorical level, the show actively considers heavy topics (e.g., death, sexuality, depression) that are generally considered “out of bounds” in everyday conversations. It is perhaps this last level that makes the series so powerful, as it provided an opportunity for viewers to ponder those heady question that keep us up at night in a way that is both serious and funny.
The Three Levels of Adventure Time

Endnotes

10. For a complete rundown, see Jagm’s excellent resource: https://atchronology.com.
15. Thomas, “Tom Herpich Interview.”
16. The name was inspired by the story of P. T. Barnum labeling the exits to his museum as “egresses.” This tricked the less educated into leaving his exhibits in hopes of seeing whatever an “egress” might be, only for them to find themselves outside. If they wanted to re-enter the museum, they would have to pay a second time. Tom Herpich, “One more scene...” Tumblr, 2016, http://herpich.tumblr.com/post/140593186304/one-more-scene-cut-from-the-hall-of-egress-this.
Part 4: Pure Finndemonium!
12. The Ins and Outs of the Adventure Time Fandom

So far in this book, I have focused specifically on Adventure Time itself. In this final section of the book, I would like to shift gears by considering not the show, but rather the fandom that it engendered.

In terms of approach, this chapter was initially inspired by absurdist musician Neil Cicierega’s humorous tweet encouraging every major fandom to “maintain a long tapestry, depicting its whole history—major events, flamewars, times of peace, prominent mods and admins.”¹ When I first read this tweet, I was struck by Cicierega’s ingenuity and quickly began mocking up a textual outline of the Adventure Time fandom’s very own Bayeux Tapestry; unfortunately, there are only so many pages of fancrufty minutia you can document before you put even the most dedicated of fans to sleep. As such, I reformulated my approach, and instead of detailing the entirety of the fandom, I decided to focus specifically on the common behavior of the fans within the fandom, as well as the websites that helped the show balloon in popularity. To enliven things even more, I also interviewed a number of passionate fans (including everyone from cosplayers to artists to fan critics), who were kind enough to share their insight into the show’s fervent fan following.
Major Fandom Behaviors

**Fanfiction**

Even to those not intimately familiar with the jargon of fandom studies, the term “fanfiction” will likely sound familiar. Defined by the fandom scholar Francesca Coppa as “creative material featuring characters that have previously appeared in works whose copyright is held by others,”1 fanfiction (sometimes called “fanfic” or simply “fic”) is a broad term referring to a vast sea of creative texts, all of which are united by the fact that they are penned by fans and based on some pre-established media object. Works of fanfiction usually revolve around a media object’s main characters, although many others focus on background characters or even new characters that the fan writer has whipped up. (For anyone who is still in the dark as to the practice, simply watch *Adventure Time’s* third-season episode “Fionna and Cake.” This episode—which focuses almost entirely on the titular characters—is itself a quantum lampooning/celebration of fanfic culture, and watching it should clear up many of the misunderstandings a reader might have.)

When it comes to the question of motivation, most of the *Adventure Time* fans to whom I spoke reasoned that fanfic serves as a way for fans to, as media scholar Henry Jenkins once put it, “fill in the gaps in the broadcast material,” either by “provid[ing] additional explanations for the character’s conduct” or by “expanding the series timeline.”2 Consider, for instance, what the fan Biggerboot told me in a Discord chat: “Since *Adventure Time* constantly left loose threads as it tied up new ones, and had this whole vast lore that was only in the background, I think it got a lot of people wanting to complete that puzzle in their head.”3 Building off this idea, others argued that fanfic functions as a sort of productive wish-fulfillment. Perhaps this understanding was best articulated by fan Instagrammer Sophie,4 who told me: “I believe [fanfic writers] like to create situations that they wish would’ve occurred in the show.”5 Despite their differences, the assertions expressed by both Biggerboot and Sophie lend credence to Jenkins’s argument that “fan writers do not so much reproduce the primary text as they rework and rewrite [that text], repairing or dismissing unsatisfying aspects, [or] developing interests not sufficiently explored.”6

In the popular consciousness, fanfiction is often associated with the practice—or, as some might argue, art—of “shipping.” Short for “relationshipshipping,” this fannish term originated with *The X-Files* fandom in the 1990s and refers to “the desire to see two particular characters in a work of fiction engage in a romantic and/or sexual relationship.”7 In the *Adventure Time* fandom, popular romantic pairings (or “ships”) include: “Bubbline” (a portmanteau of Princess Bubblegum and Marceline), “Fubblegum” (Finn and Princess Bubblegum), “Finnceline” (Finn and Marceline), “Flinn” (Finn
and Flame Princess), and “Finntriss” (Finn and Huntress Wizard). Many fans take their ships personally and some will go to extreme measures to defend them. Given shipping’s popularity in the larger fandom, it is perhaps unsurprising to learn that many of the most popular Adventure Time fanfics are what can be called “ship fics,” including Ruby Sword’s The Last Human (which at least partially centers around Finn and Marceline falling in love), \(^9\) Annalynn Roe’s Change Everlasting (a romantic drama about Marshall Lee and Fionna), \(^10\) and we4retheincrowd’s A Love Like War (a fic that focuses on Marceline and Bubblegum’s relationship). \(^11\)

A substantial number of Adventure Time fanfics—including the aforementioned A Love Like War—take place not in Ooo but rather alternate “real-world” contexts (i.e., “alternate universes,” often abbreviated as “AUs”), with the most common settings being high schools or universities. This sort of “character dislocation” \(^12\) can sometimes be hard to understand, especially for those fans who are attached to the Land of Ooo as a setting. In a Discord discussion about why AUs are popular, the fan Gale argued that “the main appeal here is basically to speculate ‘how would these people behave if they lived in a different life?’” \(^13\) Gale’s emphasis on behavior is strikingly similar to what the fanfic writer myqueenmarceline had told me a few months earlier when we were discussing the popularity of fanfic in general:

> I think [AUs are a product] of what fanfiction primarily is: character-driven fiction. The fanfictions I’ve read are usually based on characters from the piece of media in question, rather than the specific world they’re in. Fans like to mix things up because they want to imagine how their favorite characters would interact in other places. The setting always impacts the story, but when the focus is on the characters and their relationships with each other, the specific setting isn’t as important. Honestly, fanfiction is one of the best spaces I’ve found where you can really practice character exploration. I think people being creative enough to “mix it up” and examine how these characters would act in another universe is just a part of that character exploration. \(^14\)

On the topic of character exploration, while discussing what makes a “good” or “bad” fanfic, myqueenmarceline also told me that, for her, “the most important thing for good fanfiction is a strong grasp of the characters” and that “authors have to make sure they’re actually treating the characters like the complicated and multifaceted people they are, and not just as blank slates to project on whatever they want.” \(^15\) This corroborates what fan theorist Ann McClellan argues in her book Sherlock’s World (2018): “Even
though [fanfic] writers may change virtually every aspect of the setting, time periods, details, whatever, the one thing that most critics and fans agree must stay consistent is characterization.” For many readers, fics that struggle with characterization indicate that the author has a poor grasp on the characters, is not familiar with the story world, or is simply a weak writer. A major exception is usually made for fanfics about “background characters” (that is, characters upon whom the spotlight does not normally often focus); with these works, readers are often more forgiving of radical experimentation with characterization. This is because these background characters are veritable blank slates, whose characterizations are often not firmly established in canonical texts.18

Prior to the Internet, fanfic was often published in fanzines or by “apas” (short for “amateur press associations”).19 With the emergence of the online world, fans were no longer bound by material restraints and were free to distribute their creations via digital channels.20 This has certainly been the case for Adventure Time fanfic, and today most works are uploaded to websites like FanFiction.net or An Archive of Our Own (AO3). In fact, as of September 2019, the former site hosts over 7,400 Adventure Time fics21 and the latter hosts 1,708.22 Other works of Adventure Time fanfiction can be found on sites like Tumblr and Twitter.23

**Fan Documentation**

In addition to the sprawling “What if?” category that is fanfic, there is also what fan theorist Jason Mittell calls the “What is” category of paratexts that seek “to extend the fiction canonically, explaining the universe with coordinated precision and hopefully expanding viewers’ understanding and appreciation of the storyworld.”24 Often, fans who put together these sort of encyclopedic works do so to “arrive at the singular, correct account of complex narrative material,”25 or to make sense of a media object’s sometimes confusing continuity. An excellent example of a “what is” paratext in the Adventure Time fandom is the Adventure Time Wiki (discussed in detail in the latter part of this chapter), which solicits contributions from readers to construct a holistic understanding of the show’s canonical universe.

There are many Adventure Time fans out there who spend their free time cataloging the show’s complex lore, but perhaps no one else is as dedicated as a fan who posts online using the pseudonym Jagm. Once described on Reddit as the “all knowing lord of [Adventure Time] knowledge,”26 Jagm is the creator of another important “what is” paratext: the meticulously curated “AT Chronology” website,27 which catalogs every canonical happening in the Land of Ooo, from the time of primordial monsters to the death of the Solar System.
Jagm began working on the site in September 2017, after being frustrated by the lack of an exhaustive text detailing *Adventure Time*’s in-universe history. In an interview, he told me:

I’m a bit of a perfectionist, and it began to nag at me that there was no central place documenting all the show’s history. The fan wiki is an amazing resource, but it’s severely lacking in a lot of areas, especially when it comes to the later seasons and the comics. Another awesome member of the fandom named RedLionKing had made a large and very well written timeline, but it hadn’t been updated since the *Stakes* miniseries, and again included nothing from the comics and also nothing from the show’s “present day” era, and skipped a lot of events that the author didn’t consider “important.”

So over the course of 2017–18, AT Chronology evolved from a simple bulleted list of historical events I was just going to post on Reddit, into a 70,000 word monstrosity of a website that rivals a lot of novels in size. I’m very pleased with the result.28

Finally published at the start of 2018, the AT Chronology website is a remarkable achievement that can only be described as a labor of love.

Many a fan has used Jagm’s creation to better understand the history of Ooo (the author included), and so accurate is the site that it was even cited in the official Frederator YouTube video “The Complete *Adventure Time* Timeline.”29

Other works of fan documentation—including several of the chapters in the book that you are now reading—detail not the canon of the series, but rather facts about how it was created.

Once again, the *Adventure Time* Wiki is an excellent example: A cursory browsing of the site will reveal page upon page replete with storyboard PDFs, character designs, story notes, and episode backgrounds. Other pages are peppered with links to archived Twitter and Formspring posts that shed light on how the series was developed. The online encyclopedia Wikipedia is another good example of this sort of behavior, and a careful reader of *Adventure Time*-related articles will notice that almost all of them have a section dedicated to production information.

Why do fans (like myself) derive pleasure from collecting tidbits about production? And why do we assemble those tidbits into some new, comprehensible (or, at least, more navigable) whole like a Wiki article or a book?
chapter? The question of motivation, like all other behaviors discussed in this chapter, is a complicated matter. For some fans, this sort of documentation serves an almost divinatory purpose, allowing them an opportunity to predict future developments. (When the series was airing, for instance, it was not uncommon for fans to download storyboard PDFs and go through them page by page, carefully looking for clues buried in the marginalia as to where a plot might lead). There are aesthetic reasons for this sort of documentation, too: For instance, a fan might collect episode backgrounds or character designs in one place, simply because they appreciate the pieces' engaging style.

But perhaps a more general explanation for the behavior is that it allows fans to vicariously participate in the production of their favored media object. (It is this explanation about which I feel perhaps most qualified to speak, as it is the reason why I am a documenter.) When I track down a bit of production information, or glean some hitherto unknown fact from an interview, I often feel as if I have gained some sort of esoteric, insider knowledge of Adventure Time about which only those closest to the show’s production know. Likewise, by collecting those production facts in one place (such as this book), I am hoping to share that sense of insider knowledge with other fans, too.

**Fanart**

Fanart is the catch-all name for derivative artwork based on a media object’s characters, locations, or events. Delineating what is and is not fanart can be somewhat tricky—given that the term “art” denotes a variety of unique media—but in this section, I will be using Fanlore’s “colloquial” definition: “Fanart ... refers to the art for a [media object] that is drawn or painted either traditionally or digitally” by fans of said media object.30

Adventure Time fanart is almost always character-focused, with Finn, Jake, Ice King, and the show’s female characters being particularly popular models. When I asked Sophie (a fan who occasionally posts fanart on her Adventure Time-themed Instagram account) what she found so appealing about the show’s characters and why she liked to draw them, she told me:

The colours and designs of the characters are just simply so much fun. Each character is individual and there is a plethora of characters to choose from when drawing! You cannot get bored drawing them: Wanna draw an animal-like character? Gunter or Jake. Wanna draw a vampire Queen or demon? Have a go at Marceline or one of her demon forms. Wanna draw something really crazy? Think of an item of candy (or sweet as we say in England), add some arms, legs, eyes, a mouth and you have
a candy person! There’s so much scope for experimentation, because the characters are already so fabulously unusual and brilliant.

As an amateur fanartist myself, I concur with Sophie. I delight in doodling the show’s characters because they are all so unique, which provides me with ample amounts of room for creative exploration.

In terms of style, some fanart remains faithful to the show’s noodly aesthetic, whereas other pieces deviate wildly from the show’s style, embracing aspects of everything from anime to photorealism. In a discussion about this stylistic variance, Jagm (who also makes pixel art when he is not hard at work updating the AT Chronology page) opined:

Since the very beginning, simplicity has been at the core of Adventure Time’s designs. I remember old style guides made by Pendleton Ward and the crew that described Finn as being made of a set of bendy tubes. Anyone can draw a tube, and therefore anyone can draw Finn the Human. This simplicity also affords a lot of variation. Finn can be depicted in any way, from anime to pixel art to cosplay, and will always be instantly recognisable. ... So fan artists can easily impose their own personality and art style onto all the characters in the show without losing the charm of the original designs.

Another reason for this deviation may be that it provides fans with the chance to experiment with new artistic techniques, develop their own style, or even explore aspects of their own identity, all while using familiar characters from a media object that they enjoy.

Fanart is often seen as the “visual counterpart” to fanfiction, and while the practice should not be written off simply as “fanfic with pictures,” the graphic novel expert Robin Brenner does point out that “fan art often fulfills the same desires as fanfiction ... by allowing the artist to create moods, relationships, and character shifts according to what they desire from a story.” Brenner also writes that those who pen fanfiction and those who draw fanart are united because they “take the leap from speculation to creation [by] ... us[ing] their talents to fill in the gaps, to create alternative timelines, and mix universes.” According to the fan artist illeity (who gained notice in the Adventure Time fandom for his web comics that often serve as prequels or epilogues to canonical episodes), this sort of “rewriting” (to borrow Jenkins’s term) engenders further fan discussion: “The ‘what if...?’ scenarios [explored in my comics] helped people talk about the series more and the implications
created from each episode’s story beats and arcs. ... [Fanart] extend[s] the can-
on and add[s] more fuel to [the] imagination and excitement [of the fandom].”

The hub of all things fanart is arguably DeviantArt, a website founded in 2000 that self-describes itself as the “largest online art gallery and community.” As of April 2020, DeviantArt hosts roughly 96,400 pieces of Adventure Time-themed art. Gigabytes of other Adventure Time fanart can also be found across the Internet on sites like Tumblr, Pinterest, Imgur, Pixiv, and Reddit. All of the aforementioned sites are free to access and use, and as a result, most Adventure Time fanart is released for free online. With that said, some artists do upload their creations onto online marketplaces like Etsy and sell them “under the table” as t-shirt designs, stickers, prints, and more. Other fans have eagerly embraced the possibilities of programs like Redbubble’s Partner Program or Amazon’s Merch Collab, both of which allow fans to create and sell officially-licensed designs after an approval process.

**Cosplay**

Another behavior endemic to the Adventure Time fandom—and one that, in general, fan scholar Paul Booth calls “the most visible in the mainstream press”—is cosplay, or the practice of dressing up as fictional characters from popular media franchises. These sorts of costumes tend to be sewn or assembled by fans themselves, and often, fans will compete in elaborate cosplay competitions at fan conventions (“cons”).

Cosplay (a portmanteau of “costume” and “play”) has an elaborate history that the costume theorist Theresa Winge traces back to the United States at the turn of the 20th century. At this time, masquerade balls were popular, at which guests would wear fantastic masks or dress up as historical characters. In the 1930s, when science fiction conventions began to gain popularity in the United States, con-goers began following the lead of masqueraders by dressing up, but instead of wearing masks or donning the looks of real people, these fans dressed up as their favorite fictional characters. For decades this practice flourished in the fandom scene, but it went without an official name. This changed in 1984, when the Japanese writer Nobuyuki “Nov” Takahashi dubbed the practice “cosplay.” In the years that followed, cosplay flourished in Japan and was eventually repopularized in the United States. Today, the practice is so ubiquitous that it is usually considered an integral part of any fandom’s culture.

Scholars have for decades now debated the meaning of cosplay, although many are in agreement that the behavior has something to do with identity and identity formation. Booth, in his book Playing Fans (2015), writes that “cosplay is inherently about performance ... Cosplay enacts identity play for both the fan and for the character [whereby] we learn about both through the unique interaction of the two.” Nicolle Lamerichs builds off this thinking in
Many Adventure Time fans are avid cosplayers, which is the act of dressing up as characters from fictional media. As a practice, cosplay is truly diverse. (Photos, clockwise from top-left, courtesy of GabboT, Claudio Marinangeli, John Spade, and Novalee Cosplay)
her monograph *Productive Fandom* (2018) but goes further than Booth by arguing that cosplay is really a *performative* performance (à la Judith Butler) that allows the cosplayer to construct their identity through costuming, make-up application, and prop construction. Echoing the idea of Booth, Lamerichs writes, “By stating [through cosplay] that a narrative or character is related to me ... I make a statement about myself,” but she emphasizes that this connection has a real impact in affecting how the cosplayer is viewed in what we often call the “real world.” Lamerichs thus concludes that cosplay is a special behavior that provides us with the “transformative potential ... to express who we are through fiction.”

Lamerichs also argues: “Similar to fan fiction, fan movies, and fan art, cosplay motivates fans to closely interpret existing texts, perform them, and extend them with their own narratives and ideas.” However, unlike fanfic or fanart, cosplay is a behavior almost always predicated on a physical creation (i.e., a costume). This is important to note, and many of the fans to whom I spoke connected their enjoyment of cosplay to the physical construction of their costume. Sophie, for instance, mentioned that when she cosplayed as Fionna for FanExpo Canada in 2015, she did it “because it was fun to make a costume from scratch.” This is similar to what Celina, a German cosplayer who runs the Novalee Cosplay social media accounts and who cosplayed as Princess Bubblegum in 2016, told me: “Joy ... [comes from] creating something from nothing. I’m always surprised that in the end, there is a costume I can wear.”

Cosplay has long been an undeniable part of the *Adventure Time* fandom, and at the zenith of the show’s popularity, hundreds of cosplayers donned green backpacks, spray-painted ice crowns, or papier-mâché their own ax basses so that they could dress as *Adventure Time* characters at conventions. In fact, so popular was the show amongst the cosplay crowd that in 2013, Olivia Olson told The Mary Sue:

> At Comic-Con [in 2011, when the show was not yet a phenomenon] ... a lot of people still dressed up like Finn around the convention center. ... I think I saw two people dressed up as Marceline and I just thought, “This is so awesome!” Fast-forward to this year at Comic-Con ... Literally, anywhere you look, anywhere in your range, you’re going to see at least two people dressed up like Finn. It’s crazy.

Indeed, a quick Google Image search, or a perusing of Flickr will show you that in the 2010s, *Adventure Time* characters were well-represented at fan conventions, with Marceline, Bubblegum, Finn, and Fionna being among the more popular cosplay choices.
Criticism and Commentary

Henry Jenkins wrote in his seminal 1992 monograph Textual Poachers that when it comes down to it, “organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism.” The Adventure Time fandom serves as an excellent illustration of Jenkins’s point, for in addition to the myriad fans penning fanfics or drawing elaborate comics, there are also legions who express their love for Adventure Time by critically analyzing the source text and posting these thoughts for others to read. These sorts of critiques come in many styles and flavors; some, for instance, are think-pieces about characters, whereas others are critical dissections of key storyarcs. Most of these critiques are text-based, but there are others that take the form of video essays or hypermedia assemblages that blend otherwise “conventional” elements of criticism with aspects of new technologies. Often the fan writers who pen these works don the label “reviewer,” which indexes their primary mission: critically evaluating a show that is dear to them in a complex and interesting way.

On the surface, being a reviewer might sound easy, but in practice it can be a tough act. Too often do inexperienced fan critics “evaluat[e] ... individual episodes against an idealized conception of the series, according to their conformity with the hopes and expectations the [fan] has for the series’ potential development.” While a common practice, this sort of criticism (i.e., deriding an episode because it does not live up to over-hyped expectations or does not conform to one’s “headcanon”) is not exactly lauded in the Adventure Time fandom. Instead, to be well-regarded, a reviewer needs to be eloquent, interesting, and—perhaps most importantly of all—they need to possess the ability to see how something that one person might not like can nevertheless have artistic merit (and vice versa).

What is it that drives these Oooian Siskel and Eberts to critique that which they like? According to the popular reviewer UncivilizedElk (who gained prominence in the fandom by posting episode reviews and storyline analyses to his YouTube channel), critiquing and commenting on Adventure Time can serve as a metacognitive exercise, providing a reviewer with a way to understand why they engage with media, as well as (to an extent) how
your own mind works. So personally, critiquing [and] reviewing allows me to engage with media in a more robust and detailed manner than if I was to just keep my thoughts to myself.\textsuperscript{55}

UncivilizedElk also emphasized that critiquing and commenting on \textit{Adventure Time} was “one of the many ways to initiate/engage in discussion” with other fans.\textsuperscript{56} This point about active discussion was also brought up in a separate interview by Eric Stone (the critic behind the popular “\textit{Adventure Time Reviewed}” site) when he told me that with his reviews, he was hoping to “[start] a dialogue that encourages unique takes and doesn’t limit found meaning to one specific source.”\textsuperscript{57}

And when it came time to explain why fans like to read critiques, Stone speculated:

Fans like reading ... analyses because \textit{Adventure Time} is such a vague show where so much can be left to your interpretations. Part of the reason I like to read into other reviews [or] analyses is because they often offer up a point-of-view that is completely different from mine, but still really unique and interesting. ... [For instance] I’ve seen about a million different takes on season five’s “Puhoy,” and I think that’s why that episode has such a strong following. There are so many unique spins you can take with its story, and I think every last theory has its own strong points.\textsuperscript{58}

All things considered, fan criticism is appealing because it offers viewers a way to express the reasons they like (or dislike) an episode (or character, storyarc, design choice, etc.). In turn, those who consume critiques or analyses are provided with an opportunity to consider different perspectives. Fan criticism and commentary is thus fundamentally predicated on the sharing and circulation of different points of view.

\section*{Key Fandom Websites}

Previous research on \textit{Adventure Time} has often commented on the show’s strong Internet following, but hardly any of that research has considered in detail the specific sites that the fandom uses. This is disappointing to say the least, given the enormous impact the online fandom has had on the show. In this section, I will fill this hole in the scholarly literature by shining light on the importance of everything from fan-run wikis to anonymous 4chan threads.
This undertaking, however, comes with an important caveat. Comprised of thousands if not millions of users, Adventure Time’s online following is a digital hydra—a complex hyperobject that cannot easily be delineated or collapsed down. This roadblock means that any attempt to definitively write about all the websites on which fandom members digitally congregate is doomed to failure. Instead, I have structured the present section to survey only the key sites that either helped foment the series’ immense popularity in the 2010s, or served as digital strongholds for the Adventure Time fandom.

**The Adventure Time Wiki**

In an outline of key websites, it is perhaps best to start with one of the largest and most-heavily trafficked: the Adventure Time Wiki. Supported by a hosting service known as Fandom, this site uses the MediaWiki software, allowing anyone with an internet connection to modify content on the site, much like the famous encyclopedia Wikipedia. Founded in 2009, the Adventure Time Wiki was the brainchild of a web developer named Tavis Lam. In an online interview, Lam explained how the site got its start:

My inspiration ... stems from my hobby as a web developer and designer. [I was] a contributor and adopter of multiple wikis on Fandom (formerly known as Wikia), [and] most of the foundational work on those wikis was completed by 2009, as their respective TV series had finished airing. In my ambition to further expand the community with new and qualitative wikis, I set out in search of a new TV series. As a Cartoon Network fan, it wasn’t long before my research brought me to a new, upcoming series on their network known as Adventure Time with Finn and Jake, based on the 2007 viral Nicktoons short “Adventure Time.” I went straight ahead in creating the new wiki. After designing and writing pages based on what I already knew from the short, it was only a matter of waiting for the time to come when more information was released or when the new series would finally air a year later in 2010.

Indeed, soon after the first episodes aired, the wiki started to fill up with plot synopses, production artwork, and screenshots.

Most fan wikis are based on the ethos of documentation and thus oppose the posting of what is called “original content.” In other words, editors are encouraged to document a media object’s “canon,” the production that went into producing the media object, or reviews that the media object has received from reputable sources. Some wikis strictly adhere to this ethos of documentation; others—like the Lost wiki Lostpedia or the Supernatural
The Adventure Time wiki leans more towards the former category, and while fans are allowed to speculate in dedicated “Trivia” sections, most articles are focused on documentation rather than extra-canonical guesswork.

During my interviews with those in the fandom, time and time again I was reminded of the Adventure TimeWiki’s importance. Fanfic writers used the site to cross-reference character interactions, reviewers used it to quickly look up facts about characters or episodes, and fanartists used its thousands of images as inspiration for new pieces. Some fans simply enjoyed reading articles to learn more about the Land of Ooo, and still others actively contributed to the site, ensuring that it was up-to-date and relatively reliable. And the importance of the site was not just stressed by fans; Open Mike Eagle and John Moe, for instance, once mentioned on an episode of their Adventure Time-focused podcast Conversation Parade how invaluable the site was. I even made use of the site when assembling this book’s appendices! It seems that, whether people admit it or not, the Adventure Time Wiki has often been the first-stop-shop for anyone interested in learning more about the show.

As of September 2019, the site comprises 3,057 unique pages, which have been collectively created over the last decade by around five thousand Fandom editors. The wiki also serves as a repository for thousands of images, including screenshots from episodes, background art pieces, production drawings of characters and props, and rough doodles made by the show’s writers, producers, and storyboard artists. When I asked Lam why he thought the Wiki had grown to include so much material, he told me:

[It] is probably due to a few different factors. Wikia at that time was growing in popularity. It empowered the general population to publish their own writing while being part of a community they enjoy. Although Cartoon Network did well with its publicity, information about the show was scarce online. Thanks to the pre-existing state of this up-to-date wiki, it was an easy place for fans to flock to. [But] I believe the true credit goes to Pendleton Ward himself. He pioneered something new and different from any cartoon we’ve seen before. The way he placed himself and his imagination into the characters, brought fans a sense of adventure and heroism that fans of all ages can relate to.

**Twitter and Formspring**

No discussion of online fandom in the 2010s can go without discussing the role played by Twitter. Founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams, the site allows users (whose online handles are indexed by the presence of a @ sign, e.g. @AdventureTime) to send
280-character messages (called “tweets”) out to their followers. Followers in turn can “like” these tweets or “retweet” them, the latter of which being a way to broadcast an original message to a larger audience. Messages can be made up entirely of text, or contain URLs, images, videos, emoticons, or “hashtags” (which function as keywords and are denoted by the presence of a # sign, e.g. #AdventureTime). Because it enables real-time dialogue, millions of users log into Twitter every day, using it as a means to discuss everything from breaking news to idle gossip.

According to Fanlore, “The 280-character limit makes it so that most fans use Twitter for more casual conversation that they feel don’t belong on their main Tumblr or journal.” Some Adventure Time fans therefore use the site less as a vehicle for discussion with other fans and more as a way to interact directly with the show’s writers, storyboard artists, directors, and voice actors responsible for the show that they loved. In fact, when Adventure Time was in production, it was not uncommon to see fans tweeting questions or comments to the writers and producers, who in turn were often willing to discuss aspects of production with fans. Other writers were known for tweeting out promotional illustrations for episodes that were slated to air.

Like Twitter, Formspring was another social media avenue through which fans communicated with the show’s writers and producers. Formspring’s premise was rather straightforward: users could create accounts and follow others. They could then anonymously ask other users specific questions, and the receiving users could answer those inquiries at their leisure. Because it provided them with an easy way to answer questions about the show, many members of the Adventure Time crew members made use of the site, and by 2011, over a half dozen of the show’s creative minds had created accounts of their own. This turn of events delighted many fans who were interested in behind-the-scenes details, especially those who were ardent editors of the Adventure Time Wikia, and thanks to their diligence in particular, many Formspring answers became footnoted citations on the growing wiki.

In early 2013, Formspring began to have troubles with hosting and by March, the site officially announced that it would be closing down within a month. At the eleventh hour, however, new investors swooped in and saved the site, which soon thereafter was rechristened “Spring.me.” This iteration of the site continued to function for several more years until mid-2015, when it was fully absorbed (with almost no warning) by Twoo, a social media dating site. Unfortunately, this merger resulted in the loss of the former Formspring/Spring.me content, leading almost all of the Adventure Time crew to abandon the world of online question-and-answer sites. The lone
exception was Adam Muto, who continued to answer fan questions long after the show’s end via Ask.fm (a site that functioned in the same way as Formspring, although it embraced a different aesthetic).

**RediT**

Another key to the *Adventure Time* fandom’s online growth was Reddit. Founded in 2005 by two entrepreneurs named Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian, Reddit is perhaps best described as a content aggregator, ranking content based on user approval or disapproval. If users want to show appreciation for a post or a comment, they can click on a small upward-facing arrow next to the content in question. This is known as “upvoting,” and content that is heavily upvoted will eventually rise to the top of the site. Conversely, if users dislike a post or a comment, they can also click a small downward-facing arrow, which “downvotes” the content in question. Posts that are heavily downvoted sink to the bottom, and in some cases are “buried” (that is, hidden from view). According to a late 2019 press release, the site averages around 430 million users per month; altogether, these users have contributed almost 200 million unique posts, and have made just under 2 billion total comments.

Reddit itself is divided into smaller communities, called “subreddits.” These subsets of the larger Reddit universe are focused on specific topics and are denoted in text by affixing the prefix “/r/” to the topic on which the subreddit is focused; the subreddit devoted entirely to *Adventure Time* is therefore perhaps unsurprisingly called /r/adventuretime. Created on October 11, 2010, /r/adventuretime grew at an astonishing speed, and by the end of 2012, it had nearly racked up 50,000 users, catapulting it into the top 200 most-visited subreddits. In mid-2013—at the acme of *Adventure Time*’s popularity—/r/adventuretime became the 133rd most-subscribed subreddit, with just over 100,000 active users.

The *Adventure Time* subreddit allows users to submit various types of posts, such as links, images, and text-based discussion posts. Of the three, links and images are by far the most popular (likely due to their broad visual appeal), and while there are numerous text-only posts that discussed fan theories, these threads are often written for—and thus read by—a smaller, more fervent portion of the fandom. According to the *Adventure Time* fan named Mordecai626:

> Reddit ... was flooded with pictures of fans doing cosplays, tattoos, drawings, etc. It was difficult to discuss the show on there as much because there were so many other posts about other material. Though, the occasional text posts and episode discus-
sion threads did provide people with a place to argue different perspectives and takes on the show.\textsuperscript{79}

The popular YouTuber UncivilizedElk told me something similar. However, contra Mordecai626, UncivilizedElk argued that the rarity and tone of discussion posts made them easier (rather than harder) to locate:

As far as discourse goes, every now and then there would be some good conversations on Reddit about the deeper aspects of the show. ... Reddit of course had a bunch of fanart/silly/shitpost type stuff, but it was easier to notice when somebody wanted to dive deep and give super detailed thoughts.\textsuperscript{80}

For many fans, the fact that the subreddit was composed largely of “silly” content like fanart or memes was not at all an issue—this was a site dedicated to a cartoon, after all. But for others, the limited discussion was frustrating; to ameliorate this issue, some users migrated to other sites, such as the Land of Ooo forums, where active discussions about plot developments or character motivations were more the focus.

But regardless of any perceived deficiencies, /r/adventuretime was, at its prime, one of the most-subscribed subreddits focused on a television show, which almost certainly helped the show gain popularity with teenagers and young adults. Even today—several years after Adventure Time’s season-ten finale—/r/adventuretime is still active. In fact, as of February 2020 (when this section was written), /r/adventuretime was the 1094\textsuperscript{th} most popular subreddit, with almost 257,000 users, and averaging roughly 111 new comments and 31 new posts per day.\textsuperscript{81}

**TUMBLR**

Tumblr is a microblogging platform that allows users to create accounts, upload content, and share that content with other users. Founded in 2007 by tech wiz David Karp, Tumblr was in many ways a spiritual successor to blogging site LiveJournal, which had served as a fandom stronghold for much of the early 2000s.\textsuperscript{82} From the beginning, Tumblr set itself apart from other (micro)blogging platforms by not only allowing fans to post, tag, and “like” content, but also by enabling users to “reblog” (i.e., share, à la Twitter’s “retweet” option) content. In a nutshell, the “reblog” action takes someone else’s post and republishes it on another’s “dashboard” (i.e., a user’s homepage). This effectively “signal boosts” the original post, thereby giving it a wider audience.\textsuperscript{83} According to the fan scholar Louisa Ellen Stein, the reblog feature “resonated with fan practices of return, recirculation, and transfor-
mative reworking,” turning Tumblr into a new hotbed of fannish activity that “defined a great deal of the Internet’s culture” from 2008–14.\textsuperscript{85}

Given its conduciveness to fandom playfulness, Tumblr inevitably attracted legions of Adventure Time fans, many of whom settled right in by creating accounts, reblogging fanart, discussing the show’s mythology, and the finer details of shipping, among many other things. At first, the percentage of Tumblr posts dedicated to Adventure Time was tiny, but by about 2012–13, Adventure Time posts became fairly common. Unfortunately, this uptick in popularity also meant an uptick in what some fans considered subpar content (like “shitposts,” simplistic GIF reposts, commercial ads, etc.). To overcome this obstacle, some Adventure Time fans began tagging their posts with the word “atimers” (short for “Adventure Timers”). This practice allowed fans who were more interested in “serious” fandom discourse to index content and separate it from inconsequential drivel.\textsuperscript{87} (Of course, the differentiation between serious content and inconsequential drivel varied depending on whom you were talking to.)

During Adventure Time’s heyday, there were thousands of Tumblr blogs dedicated to the show, but perhaps the most important account was the “King of Ooo” blog,\textsuperscript{88} which was run not by fans, but by crew members of Adventure Time itself. Through this account, the show’s producers posted behind-the-scenes content, like background pieces, character models, storyboards, song demos, animatics, promotional images, and other assorted miscellanea. Thanks to this one site, fans were privy to the often mysterious process of how an episode of a modern animated television program is made.

Tumblr is the outlet of social media about which I have the most direct experience, as for the last six I have used the site to regularly post Adventure Time-related content under the moniker “GunterFan1992.” I created my account in early 2014, and used it mostly to post short thought-pieces about storyarcs or characters. While my first few posts received hardly any attention, my readership began to expand once I—emulating the approach of one of my favorite websites, The A. V. Club—started posting reviews of episodes. This growth increased dramatically when I began reaching out to members of the show’s production crew and arranging miniature interviews, which I subsequently published as shareable Tumblr posts (posts that, in many ways, were the seeds for this book). While I cannot speak for all of my followers, it is likely that these interviews were alluring to fans who were interested in questions like the “why” and “how” of writing and storyboarding.

Interest in my blog arguably peaked with the airing of the Adventure Time finale in September of 2018, and many of my posts during that month were liked or reblogged by hundreds upon hundreds of readers. And while I assumed that my readership would dry up and disappear in the following months, I somehow managed to hold onto a loyal contingent of readers, who
have continued to interact with me well into 2020. (In fact, many of the subjects analyzed in this section of the book were solicited at least partially from my Tumblr posts.) Given all the excitement on the site about the upcoming Distant Lands specials, it seems that Tumblr will likely remain a locus of fan activity for at least a few more years.

4CHAN

Now it is time to turn our attention to a somewhat darker corner of the Internet: 4chan. The site is an anonymous message board that has gained a certain degree of infamy due to its association with groups like the activist “organization” Anonymous, or the loosely-affiliated “alt-right” movement. A spin-off of the Japanese message board 2chan.net, 4chan allows users to create threads or make comments without having to create an account, thereby ensuring that all content is posted anonymously. To facilitate discussion, the site is divided into various “boards”—that is, themed forums dedicated to everything “from pornographic niches, to television, gaming, and cooking.” Included among the more popular boards are /pol/ (a forum for “politically incorrect” discussions), /b/ (a “random content” forum in which pretty much anything goes), and /co/ (a forum predicated on the discussion of comics, anime, manga, and cartoons).

It was on /co/ that most Adventure Time discussion took place and during the show’s first few seasons, many /co/ board members embraced the program eagerly, praising its fun characters, catchy music, and its overall whimsical spirit. During this 4chan “golden age,” it was not uncommon to find multiple Adventure Time-related threads open at once, or for episode-specific threads to reach the 1000 reply limit. Sometimes, series artists, like Jesse Moynihan or Natasha Allegri, would log onto /co/ and chat directly with the board members themselves.

As the show wore on, however, /co/’s opinion began to change. The first wave of critics emerged early in season three, when Princess Bubblegum reverted back to her older form; many on /co/ found this reversion lazy and indefensible. Further ire was raised during seasons four and five, when some episodes began to focus on the newly-introduced Flame Princess. Not coincidentally, this corresponded with the show focusing more on Finn’s passage through adolescence, leading to the exploration of heavy topics like love, loss, despair, and depression. This tonal shift bothered some /co/ members, who had originally started to watch the program for its light-hearted weirdness; some even began to bemoan that the show was drifting into pretentiousness. This growing frustration was further compounded when Rebecca Sugar left to create Steven Universe, encouraging some /co/ members to openly deride Adventure Time for “losing its soul.” Paradoxically, others argued that Sugar’s
undeniable influence in seasons three, four, and five “ruined” the program by steering it into “SJW”\textsuperscript{93} territory.

\textit{/co/}'s hyperbolic opinions about “nuAT”\textsuperscript{94} only snowballed from there: Finn and Flame Princess breaking up was a misstep. Adam Muto was a bad showrunner. “Breezy” was an atrocious episode. Bubblegum was a Nazi. The Orgalorg plot went nowhere. \textit{Stakes} ended right where it started... and on and on. But perhaps no other topic raised as much ire on 4chan as the show confirming Marceline and Bubblegum’s romantic feelings for one another in the series finale; this anger was readily apparent in the days following the finale’s airing when numerous posts on \textit{/co/} lambasted the show for this decision. While many board members argued that they were offended by the “obvious fan service,”\textsuperscript{95} much of their rage seemed engendered by the fact that Finn did not end up in a romantic relationship with Princess Bubblegum, Marceline, or Flame Princess. To make this whole situation all the more colorful, many \textit{/co/} members expressed these frustrations while liberally mixing in slurs, off-color memes, and pornographic “rule 34” content; 4chan, after all, has never been known for its tact or decorum.

Members of the \textit{Adventure Time} fandom whom I interviewed for this book were often deeply ambivalent about 4chan, with many recognizing the site’s place in the fandom while simultaneously distancing themselves from it due to its notorious nature. For instance, during a chat about fansites, one fan named “The Lich” told me:

I was aware of 4chan’s controversial history, and avoided it for a long time. I only visited it when there were whispers of [episode] leaks ... which did turn out to be true a few times, mostly during the season six era. The experience [on /co/] was intriguing, to put it in the most respectful way. It was a strange circus you could not look away from, that is for sure. I saw a large mix of fascinating analyses combined with trolling, strong dislike (especially in seasons five and six), and just flat out bizarre posts. ... Regardless of [how] you feel about the site, there’s no denying 4chan always gets attached to a piece of media and can find a way to have an impact.\textsuperscript{96}

All things considered, 4chan is something of a mercurial enigma. While it almost certainly played a part in making \textit{Adventure Time} popular with certain viewers, by the time that the show had ended, the site had also became a strange bastion for \textit{Adventure Time} hate.
The Land of Ooo Forums

For those who have long lurked online, the term “forum” will likely trigger a flood of memories and emotions. A specialized website on which fans digitally congregate to discuss some object of mutual interest, forums have long held a place in the history of fandom online. This is because they allow users to create “threads” (i.e., new pages for discussion), post messages to those threads, and message one another. While becoming less and less common in the social media era, fan forums are still an important aspect of the online fan experience, with Paul Booth (citing Henry Jenkins) arguing that “message boards and forums become knowledge communities that structure and organize the fans’ knowledge about a particular text.”

Given Adventure Time’s immense popularity in the mid-2010s, it may come as a surprise that only one fansite managed to really catch on: the Land of Ooo (LoO) forums. This site was founded in the summer of 2010 by Tom Olson, Jr. In time, it grew to a respectable size and was one of the go-to destinations for Adventure Time-related news, discussion, and idle speculation. Unlike a social media platform such as Twitter, Land of Ooo was highly organized, being divided into numerous subforums, each of which was dedicated to specific aspects of the show (e.g., there was a subforum for general Adventure Time news, one for episode-specific discussions, and another for character discussions). Additional threads were also focused on more ancillary topics, such as fanfiction, text-based role-plays, and non-Adventure Time-related television shows. To invoke a cliché, LandOfOoo.com really had something for everyone, which led to it eventually boasting around 7,000 users who collectively contributed almost a quarter million posts to the site.

For many of the forum’s members, watching an episode and then immediately logging in to chat about what they had just seen was something of a weekly ritual. Land of Ooo user Jake Suit, for instance, told me: “Back when the LoO was up and Adventure Time was still having weekly premiers was incredible. I’d watch the new episode Monday, and we’d discuss the episode and make predictions for next week’s episode. Rinse and repeat month after month.” User The Lich, echoed this thought when he told me: “Discussing episodes as they aired was another fun aspect the forum allowed for, and [it] helped bond the fandom together.” While discussing the site’s ability to facilitate conversation, the former forum member Fernando López noted that the Land of Ooo forums helped facilitate dialogue across space, as well as time and language: “Watching the show at the same time it premiered in the US and talking right on the forum was very enjoyable instead of waiting for CN LatAm’s dubbed version.”

While fairly small as far as some fansites go, the Land of Ooo was nevertheless big enough to attract the attention of the show’s production staff, and from time to time, crew members would even drop by. According to The Lich:
My favorite memory of the forums [was] both times [storyboard artist] Jesse Moynihan visited—particularly when he visited the site’s chat box one random day in April 2015. I was among several users in the chat at the time ... and getting to have a consistent one-on-one conversation with a writer of the show was an extremely rare moment. ... The fact that the forums attracted the attention of the Adventure Time crew at all is quite impressive, showing how special the forums were.101

Other members of the show’s crew who were known to “lurk” on the site include character designer/storyboard artist Andy Ristaino and showrunner Adam Muto.102

Aside from Tumblr, Land of Ooo was the Adventure Time-focused web-site that I most often frequented. Sometime in 2013, I created my account (username: “GunterFan,” about which I was often playfully teased, given that my profile picture was almost always of my true favorite character, Marceline), and within only a few days of posting, I found myself surrounded by some of the show’s most ardent fans—many of whom I am now lucky enough to call my friends. While I remained on the forum until its very end, I was most active c. 2013–14, when Adventure Time was at the peak of its popularity. Looking back on this time, I cannot begin to count the hours I spent going from thread to thread, discussing new episodes, shooting messages to my online friends, or helping others compile spoilers for upcoming seasons.

During those years that I was most active, I remembering feeling as if there was something special about the forums, but I could never quite express what that je ne sais quoi was. I realize now, upon reflection, that what I was feeling was the connective power of the site, which enabled hundreds of fans to congregate in one digital space and form a community centered on something we all loved. Former member Sophie told me something similar when she said:

[Land of Ooo] was a safe haven where you could chat with like-minded individuals with a shared interest and no judgment—unless you disagreed with a ship, ha! It was fun to talk to others who actually know what you’re talking about, as sometimes among young adults, it’s hard to find people in real-life with a shared interest in a cartoon. On the forum you would encounter people of all ages and genders, from all over the world, who loved the show for what it was. Whether you were having a heated debate, laughing about a screen grab from the latest episode, or creating and discussing crazy theories
with other [Adventure Time]-nerds, it was all a pleasure to read and be a part of.\textsuperscript{103} [emphasis added]

Sophie’s comments touch upon a deeper truth: As social animals, we humans have a natural desire to fit into a group made up of people who understand and accept us for our interests. For those of us who frequented the Land of Ooo forums, the site in many ways provided us with that sort of warm feeling of community.

Unfortunately, all good things must also come to an end.

By late 2013, the cost of hosting the Land of Ooo forums was getting prohibitively expensive, and soon there was talk of shutting the forum down. Determined to save the site that so many loved, I, along with a few other forum users, organized a fundraiser in the winter of 2014, in which we raffled off character doodles made by members of the Adventure Time production crew. This ad hoc fundraiser was a short-term success and kept the website alive until that summer, when it temporarily went offline, necessitating a total reboot a few weeks later. A similar crash occurred again in 2017. Unfortunately, each of these crashes resulted in more and more users abandoning the site, turning it into a desolate shell of its former self. LandOfOoo.com went offline for good in 2017, and without a digital home, members of the forum scattered. While a few of the more seasoned members created a Discord channel to stay in touch, others disappeared into the wild mists of the internet.

It is sad that Land of Ooo forum never was able to fully return from the dead like some sort of digital Prismo, but given the important role it played in allowing Adventure Time fans to communicate with one another online, at least it can be remembered in a book chapter.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Over the last several pages, I have attempted to draw attention to the Adventure Time fandom, which, as of this book’s publication, is an aspect of the show that has yet to be thoroughly engaged with in the scholarly literature. Having said that, I should note that this chapter is by no means a comprehensive survey, and each topic covered could likely be fleshed out into their own many-paged monographs (a book or article on Adventure Time cosplay, for instance, would be a fascinating piece of research). Instead of being some sort of complete treatment, I intend for this chapter to serve as an exploratory overview, and an opening for future researchers to further analyze the complex behaviors endemic to the community that is the Adventure Time fandom.
Endnotes

5. Instagram handle: @adventure.soph
7. Jenkins, Textual Poachers, 162.
9. See: https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/BrokenBase/WesternAnimation
10. See: https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7005076/1/The-Last-Human/.
16. myqueenmarceline.
18. For a longer (and Harry Potter-centric) discussion of this, see: Linda Green, Entering Potter's World, 119-20.
22. See: https://archiveofourown.org/tags/Adventure%20Time/works/.
23. For more on this topic, see: https://fanlore.org/wiki/Fanfiction/.
25. Mittell, 316.
27. See: http://atchronology.com/.
29. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiLdWXLXDeA.
31. Emphasis on amateur.
34. Brenner, Understanding Manga and Anime, 204.
37. See: https://www.deviantart.com/search/?order=popular-all-time&q=adventure%20time/.
38. For more on this topic, see: https://fanlore.org/wiki/Fanart/.
46. These are somewhat blanket statements. Fanart can have materiality (e.g., paint on canvas). Likewise, cosplay can also be digital (e.g., Booth, *Playing Fans*, 150-72.).
49. Olson, “Interview: Olivia Olson.”
51. For more on this topic, see: https://fanlore.org/wiki/Review/.
52. Myself included.
54. Headcanon is the fannish term for “a private and personal mini-story created by a fan for their favorite series, usually focusing on beloved characters. A key element of [headcanon] is that it ... fills in the gaps, but doesn't contradict the established storyline.” Emily Lauer and Balaka Basu, *The Harry Potter Generation: Essays on Growing up with the Series*, 114.
56. Uncivilized Elk.
58. Stone.
60. Despite similar features, Fandom and Wikipedia.org are separate organizations.
61. For more on Wikia, see: https://fanlore.org/wiki/Wikia.
63. Jason Mittell, “Wikis and Participatory Fandom,” 38, 40. The ban on original content is not universal, however; see: Mittell, 41.
64. Jason Mittell, “Sites of Participation: Wiki Fandom and the Case of Lostpedia.”
68. Lam, interview with author, June 25, 2019.
69. See: https://fanlore.org/wiki/Twitter.
70. For a related discussion, see: Annemarie Navar-Gill, “From Strategic Retweets to Group Hangs: Writers’ Room Twitter Accounts and the Productive Ecosystem of TV Social Media Fans.”
71. Promotional illustrations (often referred to as “episode promos,” or simply “promos”) were drawings mocked up, usually by storyboard artists, to promote an upcoming episode, thereby allowing them to “personally connect with fans” while also “reinforcing the sense of authorship that storyboard artists enjoy on board-drive shows” McDonnell, *The Art of Ooo*, 346. This practice was popularized by Rebecca Sugar, when she uploaded to her Posterous account a drawing promoting “It Came from the Nightosphere” on October 7, 2010.
74. Anderson, 8.
Part IV–Pure Finndemonium!

77. See: http://redditmetrics.com/r/adventuretime#disqus_thread.
78. See: https://www.reddit.com/r/adventuretime/top/?t=all.
83. Beran, It Came from Something Awful, 177-79; Melanie E. S. Kohnen, “Tumblr Pedagogies.”
85. Beran, It Came from Something Awful, 177.
86. That is, a post consisting of neo-dada-esque nonsense.
87. See: https://www.reddit.com/comments/ammrpr.
89. Cole Stryker, Epic Win for Anonymous.
90. Beran, It Came from Something Awful; Mike Wendling, Alt-Right.
91. Dillon Ludemann, ”/Pol/Emics,” 92.
93. “SJW” is short for “social justice warrior,” and is a pejorative term for activists interested in promoting equity in regard to race, sex(uality), gender, and ability.
94. A slang abbreviation for “new Adventure Time”, generally referring to episodes post-season four.
95. Despite the show having teased the ship for sometime. See: http://atchronology.com/bubbline.html.
100. Fernando López, (fan), interview with author, February 9, 2020.
At 6 pm on September 3, 2018, my wife and I huddled around the television in our living room to catch the series finale of *Adventure Time*, “Come Along with Me.” During the hour that followed, the two of us laughed, cried, and sat on the edge of our seats as we watched the ultimate adventure unfold before our very eyes.

I was quite heartbroken when the episode ended. It was not that I disliked the finale (on the contrary, I actually enjoyed it quite a bit); rather, I was upset because I realized that my favorite show—a show that had played a major role in my life—was over. There would be no more adventures for Finn, Jake, and the gang.

No more songs...
No more bacon pancakes...
This was the end...

A few hours later, in an attempt to ease my broken heart, I sat down at my computer, pulled up a blank Word document, and started to type up my scattered thoughts about why I loved the show. While I recalled my favorite episodes and the character storyarcs that I found particularly memorable, I finally began to grasp the immense importance of *Adventure Time*—not just in my life and the lives of other fans, but in regard to animation in general.

*Adventure Time* was one of the first major cartoons of the 21st century that served up real emotional gut-punches alongside inane hilarity. This is not to say that animated programs of the past were incapable of poignancy—
simply that *Adventure Time* had a tonal range that, during its run, few shows could claim to rival. (How many other programs have managed to produce something as dark as “Simon & Marcy” in the same season as something carefree like “James Baxter the Horse”? And—perhaps more importantly—how many of those shows have done so while avoiding tonal dissonance?) Early in its run, *Adventure Time* directly contradicted the prevailing wisdom of the animation industry, proving that a cartoon could still be a hit comedy with kids and adults without sacrificing a sense of affect. In this way, *Adventure Time* was a trailblazer, paving the way for other cartoons that deftly balance comedy with pathos, such as Rebecca Sugar’s *Steven Universe* (2013–20), Raphael Bob-Waksberg and Lisa Hanawalt’s *BoJack Horseman* (2014–20), and Noelle Stevenson’s *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018–20).

*Adventure Time*’s impact on the overall look of contemporary animation must also be acknowledged. Prior to the show’s debut, most cartoons embraced the “thick-line” approach to animation which had been repopularized by Hanna-Barbera cartoons in the late 1990s. But then, in 2010, *Adventure Time* burst onto the scene, and overnight its unique style—namely, its thin outlines, its liberal use of cel shading, and its penchant for “noodly” limbs that bend in seemingly impossible ways—became the “it” aesthetic. In no time, it seemed that all new cartoons were emulating the *Adventure Time* look. But unlike some people who see this widespread emulation as a sign that the 2010s were “lazy” or lacking in originality, I see it is a testament to *Adventure Time*’s radical uniqueness. The show’s style was so refreshing that it caught the attention of artists and viewers alike, very literally begetting an aesthetic realignment in the world of animation; not every cartoon changes the game so drastically.

Given its oversized impact and influence, I have no hesitancy in arguing that *Adventure Time* is not just a great work of modern animation, but of pop culture in general. And as with all pop culture masterpieces, there are innumerable aspects of the show that have yet to be teased out. There is no reason that *Adventure Time* cannot be like other works of pop culture past, such as Alfred Hitchcock’s filmography, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, or the original *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television series, all of which are media objects that, despite being released decades ago, still engender dozens of journal articles, monographs, and think pieces to this very day.

It can thus be said that this book is my attempt to breathe new life into the critical discussion of *Adventure Time*. In doing so, I hope to keep that promise that Pendleton Ward first made well over a decade ago when he, in front of an intimidating group of Frederator executives, pitched the series: “The fun will never end.”
APPENDIX A: 
EPISODE LIST

The following appendix lists the 282 regular episodes that comprise the corpus of *Adventure Time* (as of February 2020), along with production codes, air dates, and writing/storyboarding/directing credits.

**SEASON 1**

1. “Slumber Party Panic” (692-009) April 5, 2010. Elizabeth Ito and Adam Muto (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

2. “Trouble in Lumpy Space” (692-015) April 5, 2010. Elizabeth Ito and Adam Muto (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

3. “Prisoners of Love” (692-005) April 12, 2010. Adam Muto and Pendleton Ward (storyboard artists); Craig Lewis and Adam Muto (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

4. “Tree Trunks” (692-016) April 12, 2010. Sean Jimenez and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

6. “The Jiggler” (692-011) April 19, 2010. Luther McLaurin and Armen Mirzaian (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

7. “Ricardo the Heart Guy” (692-007) April 26, 2010. Sean Jimenez and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon, Adam Muto, and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

8. “Business Time” (692-014) April 26, 2010. Luther McLaurin and Armen Mirzaian (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

9. “My Two Favorite People” (692-004) May 3, 2010 Kent Osborne and Pendleton Ward (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

10. “Memories of Boom Boom Mountain” (692-010) May 3, 2010. Sean Jimenez and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

11. “Wizard” (692-020) May 10, 2010. Pete Browngardt, Adam Muto, and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

12. “Evicted!” (692-003) May 17, 2010. Sean Jimenez and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Adam Muto (storyline writer); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

13. “City of Thieves” (692-012) May 24, 2010. Sean Jimenez and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


15. “What Is Life?” (692-017) June 14, 2010. Luther McLaurin and Armen Mirzaian (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


APPENDICES

18. “Dungeon” (692-013) June 28, 2010. Elizabeth Ito and Adam Muto (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

19. “The Duke” (692-023) July 12, 2010. Elizabeth Ito and Adam Muto (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

20. “Freak City” (692-008) July 26, 2010. Tom Herpich and Pendleton Ward (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


22. “Henchman” (692-021) August 23, 2010. Luther McLaurin and Cole Sanchez (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

23. “Rainy Day Daydream” (692-002) September 6, 2010. Pendleton Ward (storyboard artist); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

24. “What Have You Done?” (692-027) September 13, 2010. Elizabeth Ito and Adam Muto (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

25. “His Hero” (692-026) September 20, 2010. Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Niki Yang (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

26. “Gut Grinder” (692-024) September 27, 2010. Ako Castuera and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Tim McKeon and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

SEASON TWO

1. “It Came from the Nightosphere” (1002-029) October 11, 2010. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Steve Little, Patrick McHale, Thurop Van Orman, Pendleton Ward, and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

3. “Loyalty to the King” (1002-027) October 25, 2010. Kent Osborne and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Steve Little, Patrick McHale, Thurop Van Orman, Pendleton Ward, and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


5. “Storytelling” (1002-030) November 8, 2010. Ako Castuera and Tom Herpich (storyboard artists); Steve Little, Patrick McHale, Thurop Van Orman, Pendleton Ward, and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


7. “Power Animal” (1002-033) November 22, 2010. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Steve Little, Patrick McHale, Thurop Van Orman, Pendleton Ward, and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


10. “To Cut a Woman’s Hair” (1002-035) January 10, 2011. Kent Osborne and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Steve Little, Patrick McHale, Thurop Van Orman, Pendleton Ward, and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


12. “Her Parents” (1002-034) January 24, 2011. Ako Castuera and Tom Herpich (storyboard artists); Steve Little, Patrick McHale, Thurop Van Orman, Pendleton Ward, and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


15. “The Real You” (1002-041) February 14, 2011. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Steve Little, Patrick McHale, Thurop Van Orman, Pendleton Ward, and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

16. “Guardians of Sunshine” (1002-042) February 21, 2011. Ako Castuera and Tom Herpich (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Steve Little, Patrick McHale, Thurop Van Orman, Kent Osborne, Pendleton Ward, and Merriwether Williams (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative directors), Nick Jennings (art director).


18. “Susan Strong” (1002-045) March 7, 2011. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


20. “Go with Me” (1002-046) March 28, 2011. Ako Castuera and Tom Herpich (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


23. “Video Makers” (1002-051) April 18, 2011. Kent Osborne and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

24. “Mortal Folly” (1002-049) May 2, 2011. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


26. “Heat Signature” (1002-050) May 9, 2011. Ako Castuera and Tom Herpich (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Patrick McHale and Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

Season 3

1. “Conquest of Cuteness” (1008-053) July 11, 2011. Ako Castuera and Tom Herpich (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

2. “Morituri Te Salutamus” (1008-054) July 18, 2011. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

3. “Memory of a Memory” (1008-057) July 25, 2011. Ako Castuera and Tom Herpich (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

4. “Hitman” (1008-055) August 1, 2011. Jesse Moynihan and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

5. “Too Young” (1008-059) August 8, 2011. Tom Herpich and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


7. “Still” (1008-060) August 22, 2011. Kent Osborne and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).
8. “Wizard Battle” (1008-061) August 29, 2011. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

9. “Fionna and Cake” (1008-058) September 5, 2011. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

10. “What Was Missing” (1008-062) September 26, 2011. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

11. “Apple Thief” (1008-067) October 3, 2011. Tom Herpich and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


13. “From Bad to Worse” (1008-064) October 24, 2011. Kent Osborne and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

14. “Beautopia” (1008-065) November 7, 2011. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

15. “No One Can Hear You” (1008-066) November 14, 2011. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

16. “Jake vs. Me-Mow” (1008-071) November 21, 2011. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

17. “Thank You” (1008-063) November 23, 2011. Tom Herpich (storyboard artist); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

18. “The New Frontier” (1008-072) November 28, 2011. Tom Herpich and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Cole Sanchez (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


23. “Another Way” (1008-076) January 23, 2012. Tom Herpich and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

24. “Ghost Princess” (1008-077) January 30, 2012. Ako Castuera & Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


26. “Incendium” (1008-074) February 13, 2012. Adam Muto and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Mark Banker, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

**SEASON 4**

1. “Hot to the Touch” (1008-082) April 2, 2012. Cole Sanchez and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

2. “Five Short Graybles” (1008-079) April 9, 2012. Tom Herpich, Skyler Page, and Cole Sanchez (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

3. “Web Weirdos” (1008-081) April 16, 2012. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Dick Grunert, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

4. “Dream of Love” (1008-080) April 23, 2012. Somvilay Xayaphone and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

5. “Return to the Nightosphere” (1008-085) April 30, 2012. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

7. “In Your Footsteps” (1008-083) May 7, 2012. Tom Herpich and Skyler Page (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

8. “Hug Wolf” (1008-084) May 14, 2012. Somvilay Xayaphone and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


10. “Goliad” (1008-087) June 4, 2012. Tom Herpich and Skyler Page (storyboard artists); Tom Herpich, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

11. “Beyond This Earthly Realm” (1008-089) June 11, 2012. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

12. “Gotha!” (1008-090) June 18, 2012. Cole Sanchez and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

13. “Princess Cookie” (1008-091) June 25, 2012. Tom Herpich and Skyler Page (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


15. “Sons of Mars” (1008-093) July 23, 2013. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Doug TenNapel, Patrick McHale, Jesse Moynihan, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


17. “BMO Noire” (1008-095) August 6, 2012. Tom Herpich and Skyler Page (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

18. “King Worm” (1008-096) August 13, 2012. Steve Wolfhard, Somvilay Xayaphone, and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

20. “You Made Me” (1008-099) August 27, 2012. Tom Herpich and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


22. “Ignition Point” (1008-101) September 17, 2012. Somvilay Xayaphone and Bert Youn (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

23. “The Hard Easy” (1008-100) October 1, 2012. Tom Herpich and Skyler Page (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

24. “Reign of Gunters” (1008-102) October 8, 2012. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


Season 5

1. “Finn the Human” (1014-105) November 12, 2012. Tom Herpich and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

2. “Jake the Dog” (1014-106) November 12, 2012. Cole Sanchez and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

3. “Five More Short Graybles” (1014-107) November 19, 2012. Tom Herpich and Steve Woffard (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

Appendices

5. “All the Little People” (1014-109) December 3, 2012. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

6. “Jake the Dad” (1014-111) January 7, 2013. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

7. “Davey” (1014-112) January 14, 2013. Skyler Page and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Skyler Page (storyline writer); Larry Leichliter (director), Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

8. “Mystery Dungeon” (1014-113) January 21, 2013. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).

9. “All Your Fault” (1014-115) January 28, 2013. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Tom Herpich, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Larry Leichliter (director), Nate Cash (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


11. “Bad Little Boy” (1014-110) February 18, 2013. Cole Sanchez and Rebecca Sugar (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, Adam Muto, Rebecca Sugar, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Adam Muto (creative director), Nick Jennings (art director).


16. “Puhoy” (1014-119) April 8, 2013. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

17. “BMO Lost” (1014-123) April 15, 2013. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).
18. **“Princess Potluck”** (1014-122) April 22, 2013. Kent Osborne and Cole Sanchez (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Adam Muto (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

19. **“James Baxter the Horse”** (1014-124) May 6, 2013. Pendleton Ward and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Adam Muto (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

20. **“Shh!”** (1014-129) May 13, 2013. Graham Falk (storyboard artist); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

21. **“The Suitor”** (1014-130) May 20, 2013. Jesse Moynihan and Thomas Wellmann (storyboard artists); Steve Little, Patrick McHale, Jesse Moynihan, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

22. **“The Party’s Over, Isla de Señorita”** (1014-131) May 27, 2013. Kent Osborne and Cole Sanchez (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Adam Muto (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

23. **“One Last Job”** (1014-121) June 10, 2013. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

24. **“Another Five More Short Graybles”** (1014-132) June 17, 2013. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Tom Herpich, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Pendleton Ward, and Steve Wolfhard (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).


26. **“Wizards Only, Fools”** (1014-134) July 1, 2013. Jesse Moynihan and Thomas Wellmann (storyboard artists); Jesse Moynihan, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

27. **“Jake Suit”** (1014-135) July 15, 2013. Kent Osborne and Cole Sanchez (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Adam Muto (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

28. **“Be More”** (1014-136) July 22, 2013. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Tom Herpich, Patrick McHale, Kent Osborne, Rebecca Sugar, Pendleton Ward, and Steve Wolfhard (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

29. **“Sky Witch”** (1014-138) July 29, 2013. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

31. “Too Old” (1014-140) August 12, 2013. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Tom Herpich, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

32. “Earth & Water” (1014-141) September 2, 2013. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director).


34. “The Vault” (1014-142) September 16, 2013. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Jesse Moynihan, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

35. “Love Games” (1014-143) September 23, 2013. Kent Osborne, Andy Ristaino, and Cole Sanchez (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

36. “Dungeon Train” (1014-144) September 30, 2013. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolhard (storyboard artists); Tom Herpich, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, Pendleton Ward, and Steve Wolhard (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

37. “Box Prince” (1014-145) October 7, 2013. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

38. “Red Starved” (1014-146) October 14, 2013. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

39. “We Fixed a Truck” (1014-147) October 21, 2013. Andy Ristaino and Cole Sanchez (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

40. “Play Date” (1014-149) November 4, 2013. Seo Kim, Kent Osborne, and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director).

41. “The Pit” (1014-150) November 18, 2013. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

42. “James” (1014-151) November 25, 2013. Andy Ristaino and Cole Sanchez (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

APPENDICES

44. “Apple Wedding” (1014-148) January 13, 2014. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolhhard (storyboard artists); Tom Herpich, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, Pendleton Ward, and Steve Wolfhard (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).


46. “Rattleballs” (1014-156) January 27, 2014. Andy Ristaino and Cole Sanchez (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).


48. “Betty” (1014-155) February 24, 2014. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Jesse Moynihan, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash and Adam Muto (supervising directors), Nick Jennings (art director).


50–51. “Lemonhope” (1014-152 and 157) March 10, 2014. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Tom Herpich, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

52. “Billy's Bucket List” (1014-159) March 17, 2014. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nate Cash and Adam Muto (supervising directors), Nick Jennings (art director).

SEASON 6

1. “Wake Up” (1025-166) April 21, 2014. Andy Ristaino and Cole Sanchez (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

2. “Escape from the Citadel” (1025-163) April 21, 2014. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolhhard (storyboard artists); Tom Herpich, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Adam Muto (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

3. “James II” (1025-164) April 28, 2014. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

5. “Sad Face” (1025-162) May 12, 2014. Graham Falk (storyboard artist); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Adam Muto (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).

6. “Breezy” (1025-165) June 5, 2014. Derek Ballard and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).


10. “Something Big” (1025-170) July 3, 2014. Derek Ballard and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Jesse Moynihan, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).


15. “Nemesis” (1025-175) August 7, 2014. Derek Ballard and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).


20. “Jake the Brick” (1025-177) November 26, 2014. Kent Osborne (storyboard artist and supervising director); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Nick Jennings (art director).


24. “Evergreen” (1025-178) January 15, 2015. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Tom Herpich (storyline writer); Andres Salaff (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).


27. “The Visitor” (1025-183) February 5, 2015. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).


31. “Walnuts & Rain”\(^{10}\) (1025-193) March 5, 2015. Tom Herpich (storyboard artist); Tom Herpich, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), Nick Jennings (art director).


34. “Chips & Ice Cream”\(^{12}\) (1025-194) April 30, 2015. Seo Kim & Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Seo Kim, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, Pendleton Ward, and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director), Sandra Lee and Nick Jennings (art directors).

35. “Graybles 1000+”\(^{13}\) (1025-195) May 7, 2015. Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artist); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, Pendleton Ward, and Steve Wolfhard (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), Sandra Lee and Nick Jennings (art directors).


38. “You Forgot Your Floaties” (1025-197) June 1, 2015. Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artist); Jesse Moynihan, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), Sandra Lee and Nick Jennings (art directors).


40. “Orgalorg” (1025-198) June 3, 2015. Graham Falk (storyboard artist); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), Sandra Lee and Nick Jennings (art directors).

41. “On the Lam” (1025-201) June 4, 2015. Seo Kim, Cole Sanchez, and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising directors), Sandra Lee and Nick Jennings (art director).

42. “Hot Diggity Doom” (1025-203) June 5, 2015. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), Sandra Lee and Nick Jennings (art directors).
Appendices


Season 7

1. “Bonnie & Neddy” (1034-209) November 2, 2015. Tom Herpich & Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

2. “Varmints” (1034-208) November 3, 2015. Kris Mukai and Adam Muto (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

3. “Cherry Cream Soda” (1034-206) November 4, 2015. Graham Falk (storyboard artist); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, Pendleton Ward, and Steve Wolfhard (storyline writers); Adam Muto (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).


6. “Marceline the Vampire Queen” [Stakes, part 1] (1034-212) November 16, 2015. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

7. “Everything Stays” [Stakes, part 2] (1034-213) November 16, 2015. Adam Muto and Hanna K. Nyström (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

8. “Vamps About” [Stakes, part 3] (1034-214) November 17, 2015. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).


11. “Take Her Back” [Stakes, part 6] (1034-217) November 18, 2015. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).
12. “Checkmate” [Stakes, part 7] (1034-222) November 19, 2015. Ako Castuera and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).


14–15. “The More You Moe, the Moe You Know” (1034-224 and 228) December 3, 2015. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Steve Walford (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

16. “Summer Showers” (1034-223) January 7, 2016. Graham Falk (storyboard artist); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

17. “Angel Face” (1034-210) January 11, 2016. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

18. “President Porpoise Is Missing!” (1034-211) January 12, 2016. Sam Alden and Kent Osborne (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

19. “Blank-Eyed Girl” (1034-220) January 13, 2016. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Seo Kim, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).


21. “King’s Ransom” (1034-221) January 15, 2016. Hanna K. Nyström and Andres Salaff (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Adam Muto (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

22. “Scamps” (1034-225) January 21, 2016. Kent Osborne and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Dylan Haggerty, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

23. “Crossover” (1034-226) January 28, 2016. Sam Alden and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

24. “The Hall of Egress” (1034-227) March 5, 2016. Tom Herpich (storyboard artist); Ashly Burch, Tom Herpich, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

25. “Flute Spell” (1034-231) March 12, 2016. Sam Alden and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Jesse Moynihan, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

SEASON 8

1. “Broke His Crown” (1034-234) March 26, 2016. Ako Castuera and Hanna K. Nyström (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

2. “Don’t Look” (1034-230) April 2, 2016. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Dylan Haggerty, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

3. “Beyond the Grotto” (1034-235) April 9, 2016. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director); Lindsay Small-Butera and Alex Small-Butera (guest animation).

4. “Lady Rainicorn of the Crystal Dimension” (1034-232) April 16, 2016. Graham Falk (storyboard artist); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Sandra Lee (art director).

5. “I Am a Sword” (1034-236) April 23, 2016. Sam Alden and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

6. “Bun Bun” (1034-240) May 5, 2016. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

7. “Normal Man” (1034-241) May 12, 2016. Sam Alden and Jesse Moynihan (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Jesse Moynihan, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Andres Salaff (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

8. “Elemental” (1034-242) May 19, 2016. Kent Osborne (storyboard artist); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Sandra Lee (art director).

9. “Five Short Tables” (1034-237) May 26, 2016. Kris Mukai and Aleks Sennwald (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).


12. “Preboot” (1034-243) November 19, 2016. Adam Muto and Aleks Sennwald (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Adam Muto (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

13. “Reboot” (1034-244) November 19, 2016. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

14. “Two Swords” (1042-248) January 23, 2017. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

15. “Do No Harm” (1042-249) January 23, 2017. Laura Knetzger and Lyle Partridge (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

16. “Wheels” (1042-245) January 24, 2017. Graham Falk and Charmaine Verhagen (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

17. “High Strangeness” (1042-246) January 25, 2017. Sam Alden and Pendleton Ward (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Jack Pendarvis, and Pendleton Ward (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

18. “Horse and Ball” (1042-247) January 26, 2017. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

19. “Jelly Beans Have Power” (1042-250) January 27, 2017. Hanna K. Nyström and Aleks Sennwald (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

20. “The Invitation” [Islands, part 1] (1042-251) January 2017. Sam Alden and Polly Guo (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

21. “Whipple the Happy Dragon” [Islands, part 2] (1042-252) January 30, 2017. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

22. “Mysterious Island” [Islands, part 3] (1042-253) January 31, 2017. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

24. “Hide and Seek” [Islands, part 5] (1042-255) February 1, 2017. Hanna K. Nyström and Aleks Sennwald (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

25. “Min & Marty” [Islands, part 6] (1042-256) February 1, 2017. Sam Alden and Kent Osborne (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

26. “Helpers” [Islands, part 7] (1042-257) February 2, 2017. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

27. “The Light Cloud” [Islands, part 8] (1042-258) February 2, 2017. Graham Falk, Adam Muto, and Aleks Sennwald (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

SEASON 9

1. “Orb” (1042-259) April 21, 2017. Adam Muto and Aleks Sennwald (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

2. “Skyhooks” [Elements, part 1] (1042-260) April 24, 2017. Polly Guo and Sam Alden (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

3. “Bespoken For” [Elements, part 2] (1042-261) April 24, 2017. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

4. “Winter Light” [Elements, part 3] (1042-262) April 25, 2017. Laura Knetzger and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artist); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

5. “Cloudy” [Elements, part 4] (1042-263) April 25, 2017. Graham Falk and Kent Osborne (storyboard artists); Patrick McHale, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

6. “Slime Central” [Elements, part 5] (1042-264) April 26, 2017. Hanna K. Nyström and Aleks Sennwald; Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Sandra Lee (art director).

7. “Happy Warrior” [Elements, part 6] (1042-265) April 26, 2017. Polly Guo and Sam Alden (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

8. “Hero Heart” [Elements, part 7] (1042-266) April 27, 2017. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).
9. “Skyhooks II” [Elements, part 8] (1042-267) April 27, 2017. Steve Wohlhard (storyboard artist); Adam Muto (supervising director); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Sandra Lee (art director).
10. “Abstract” (1042-268) July 17, 2017. Graham Falk & Laura Knetzger (storyboard artists); Jesse Moynihan, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Adam Muto (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).
11. “Ketchup” (1042-271) July 18, 2017. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Patrick McHale, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director); Lindsay Small-Butera and Alex Small-Butera (guest animation).
12. “Fionna and Cake and Fionna” (1042-269) July 19, 2017. Hanna K. Nyström and Aleks Sennwald (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, Jack Pendarvis, and Aleks Sennwald (storyline writers); Elizabeth Ito (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).
13. “Whispers” (1042-270) July 20, 2017. Polly Guo and Sam Alden (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).
14. “Three Buckets” (1042-272) July 21, 2017. Tom Herpich and Steve Wohlhard (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director); Sandra Lee (art director).

Season 10

1. “The Wild Hunt” (1054-275) September 17, 2017. Sam Alden, Erik Fountain, and Polly Guo (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).
2. “Always BMO Closing” (1054-273) September 17, 2017. Graham Falk and Kent Osborne (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Diana Lafyatis (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).
3. “Son of Rap Bear” (1054-276) September 17, 2017. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Diana Lafyatis (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).
4. “Bonnibel Bubblegum” (1054-274) September 17, 2017. Hanna K. Nyström and Aleks Sennwald (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Diana Lafyatis (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).
5. “Seventeen” (1054-281) December 17, 2017. Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).
6. “Ring of Fire” (1054-277) December 17, 2017. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Ashly Burch, Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

7. “Marcy & Hunson” (1054-278) December 17, 2017. Adam Muto and Graham Falk (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

8. “The First Investigation” (1054-279) December 17, 2017. Hanna K. Nyström and Aleks Sennwald (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Diana Lafyatis (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

9. “Blenanas” (1054-280) March 18, 2018. Sam Alden and Patrick McHale (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Diana Lafyatis (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

10. “Jake the Starchild” (1054-283) March 18, 2018. Hanna K. Nyström and Aleks Sennwald (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Cole Sanchez (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

11. “Temple of Mars” (1054-283) March 18, 2018. Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Julia Pott, Kent Osborne, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Diana Lafyatis (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

12. “Gumbaldia” (1054-284) March 18, 2018. Sam Alden and Graham Falk (storyboard artists); Adam Muto, Kent Osborne, Julia Pott, and Jack Pendarvis (storyline writers); Diana Lafyatis (supervising director), and Sandra Lee (art director).

APPENDICES

Endnotes

1. According to Tom Herpich, “I had originally pitched the idea of doing a political intrigue story in the Fire Kingdom, but that idea sorta slipped out of my hands and became ‘Ignition Point.’ I think it was some kind of scheduling thing [that] I didn’t work on it ... Anyway, I really wanted very specifically to do an [Adventure Time] version of Game of Thrones, which must’ve just finished its first season around then. But no dice.” Thomas, “Tom Herpich Interview.”

2. The episode’s title screen erroneously attributes this episode to Jesse Moynihan, rather than Xayaphone.

3. This episode is notably bleak, but was originally much bleaker. According to storyboard artist Cole Sanchez, “In older versions [of the episode’s storyboard], it used to be that [Marceline’s] illness was so severe Simon thought she would die, but [Cartoon Network] thought that would traumatize kids, so instead she is just really ill. Originally they were looking for medicine, and not chicken soup.” Formspring, 2013 (url lost; archived at https://tinyurl.com/yd6g2wvs).

4. In an interview, Falk explained, “I was asked to try drawing a storyboard on Adventure Time probably because of a previous series I had worked on (Untalkative Bunny). [When I began plotting out ‘Shh!’] I didn’t know much about how to format a storyboard—I mean, in a professional format, like at Cartoon Network. ... ‘Shh!’ was the most fun episode in some ways—maybe because it was the first episode I worked on—also because there was no dialogue, ... I think it’s really rare in TV animation to have an episode without dialogue.” Paul Thomas, “Graham Falk Interview,” Tumblr, 2016, http://gunterfan1992.tumblr.com/post/136756805399/graham-falk-interview.

5. According to Wellmann: “I met a few members of the Adventure Time crew at [Toronto Comic Arts Festival] 2012 and gave my comics to Pendleton Ward. About a week later, I received an invitation to take part in a storyboard test. Then they asked me to do a first episode for the show. ... Jesse and I used Skype and e-mail to communicate. Since I worked digitally on the board, logistics were a bit easier without scanning everything. Since the animation and cartooning industry in Germany is very small, I am used to [working remotely] on jobs. So for me it was very okay. But I also often envy a more immediate working situation. Working with Jesse was a lot of fun, especially figuring out details like clothing and hairstyles for the characters. With ‘The Suitor’, I was very anxious and overwhelmed by the opportunity alone to work on my favorite cartoon show. I had never done storyboarding before and it was my first job in animation what so ever. It pretty much determined most of my thoughts for the month I worked on it.” Thomas, “Thomas Wellmann Interview.”

6. According to Wellmann, “Working on ‘Wizards Only, Fools’ was more relaxed [than ‘The Suitor’]. It also was fun because I love Wizard City. Writing and drawing Abracadaniel and The Grand Master Wizard was amazing. And I had fun designing PB’s robot outfit. [It was] so weird that I wrote something that Steve Little then had to say out loud. ... Reading reactions [to the episode] on Tumblr was weird. A lot of controversy was going around how [Bubblegum] was acting, if I remember correctly. It was fun and scary writing dialogue [for] her, she’s one of my favorite characters on Adventure Time. Also she speaks German! I think it’s one of the biggest strengths of Adventure Time that it’s bold to explore topics like dementia, quantum physics, sexuality and science v. religion in a non-judging, open-minded way.” Thomas, “Thomas Wellmann Interview.”

7. This episode evolved from an earlier idea Moynihan had about exploring the secret wizard society briefly referenced in the fourth-season episode “Reign of Gunters.” The story eventually evolved into one about Simon reverting back to normal following a magical accident. Because the episode was so crucial to the show’s mythology, Moynihan petitioned
to have it expanded into a two-parter, but this was vetoed, forcing him and Castuera to “fit all [the story] into one bullet.” While some fans felt that the episode was rushed, Moynihan later argued that the fast-paced nature of the episode helped to emphasize the direness of Simon’s predicament. Jesse Moynihan, “Betty.”

8. According to Kent Osborne, this episode has its origin in a request from Cartoon Network: “It was the executives ... I think they were looking for creative ways to sort of market the show, and they were sort of looking for specials. They’d be like, ‘Oh ... there’s a Princess Day coming up next year. Can you do an episode?’ ... I think it was a way [for the network] to sort of navigate ... people leaving terrestrial cable, and starting to watch things [via] streaming.” Ghostshrimp and Kent Osborne, “Episode 080: Adventure Time Interview Part One: Kent Osborne”.

9. In discussing the inspiration for certain visuals in this episode, Falk told me: “An obvious movie influence [was] The Fly from 1958 ... [Remember the] scene where it’s revealed that Finn has a fly head? I’m pretty sure that shocking visual was first done in The Fly. ... And when Peppermint Butler shows up ... that scene was [an homage to] The Exorcist, where the exorcist shows up, and he’s a mysterious character seen in silhouette, carrying a big bag.” Interview with author, January 17, 2019.

10. Regarding this episode, Herpich explained in an interview: “I’d conceived and written outlines for episodes before, and done a board on my own before as well, but ‘Walnuts & Rain’ was the first time I’d done both on the same episode. As nice as it is working with a partner, there’s a level of spontaneity and immersion in the writing process that’s impossible to get if you’re sharing control over the episode. So yeah, it was exciting to be firing on a couple more cylinders than usual, juggling more balls, etc. Plus I’d had that story brewing in my head for so long before working on it that I was really confident that it would ‘work’, which is definitely not always the case going into a new board. So that took some pressure off too.” Thomas, “Tom Herpich Interview.”

11. According to Mukai, “For about a year before [Adventure Time] hired me, I was doing board tests for various shows at Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon. I didn’t know if any of those tests would lead to anything, but then Adam Muto emailed me and we ended up boarding ‘Varmints’ together. ... [The storyboarding process for ‘Varmints’] was so nerve wrecking, I was so scared! It’s hard to figure out a good workflow for something that’s so large, you have to produce just a ton of drawings for storyboards and it can be really daunting at first. ... I also was working on the boards remotely from my apartment in Brooklyn. Each week or so there’s a pitch where everyone on the show watches while you read your storyboard out loud. I would call in via video chat and my face would be on a computer screen in the LA office. What no one told me was that the screen there is huge! So just imagine a room full of cartoonists and then one giant disembodied head watching from one corner. ... [The hardest part about the job] was getting a note back saying ‘there could be a joke here’ and then freezing up and not being able to think of anything funny and then realizing that you’re a sham, etc. Easiest part is when you’re drawing a scene you really like! The part in ‘Varmints’ where Marceline [says] ‘is that why you stopped hanging out with me??’ and then the scene where PB cries were the best to draw.” Thomas, “Kris Mukai Interview.”

12. Unlike other episodes that were produced in two parts, Cartoon Network officially counts “The More You Moe, The Moe You Know” as constituting a single episode. Because it has two production codes, this book counts it as two episodes (like “Holly Jolly Secrets” and “Lemonhope” before it).

13. The premise for this episode was based on a story by Derek Kirk Kim (who at the time of the episode’s storyboarding was the show’s lead character designer). According to Kim: “‘The Music Hole’ was my writing test [for the series]! ... When [Pen Ward] was in college, he was a fan of my comics ... and he used to visit me at my table at conventions to hand me

APPENDICES
his mini-comics and VHS tapes of his student animation work. ... When Adventure Time got greenlit for a series, he asked if I wanted to write for the show. Alas, I didn’t pass the test to be a writer at the time ... ['The Music Hole'] was written [at that time] all the way back before a single episode had been produced outside of the original pilot. [When it was made into an episode] the details were updated to make it fit into the current continuity and characters, but the basic story—the battle of the bands, Finn hearing a song only he can hear, the music hole—it was all in my original story pitch. (In the original story, the Music Hole was supposed to be the origin of all music in Ooo, and the battle of bands included ‘Emogres”—Emo Ogres.) The story didn’t get me the writing job I originally tested for, but it was made into an episode nevertheless, 6 years later! It’s so crazy and unpredictable how things turn out sometimes. ... Seeing that story come to life is the highlight of my animation career so far.” Thomas, “Derek Kirk Kim Interview.”

14. According to Knetzger, “I got involved with Adventure Time by first corresponding with ... Tom Herpich. He emailed me one day to say that he read my comic series Bug Boys and really enjoyed it. A while later, in 2015, I was looking for work and figured I could try to draw backgrounds for animation. I emailed Tom about it and he said they didn’t need anyone for backgrounds but I could take a storyboard test if I wanted to try it. I did and Adam Muto contacted me a few months later asking if I would be interested in working on “Do No Harm.” ... A few weeks [later] ... I was visiting LA for a comics festival so I had a chance to visit the office. ... Tom Herpich gave me and my friend a really in-depth tour of the place. I had my first pass storyboard with me and Adam Muto looked over it with me and gave me notes. ... I really liked being part of a crew and project way bigger than myself. Coming to this from comics, where I was working alone and self-publishing my dinky little projects, it was nice to not have to do every single aspect of a project.” Interview with author, September 13, 2018.

15. According to Falk: “The first thing I worked on in Burbank was the final cleanup of ['Wheels']. I think that’s the first board that Charmaine Verhagen worked on as a board artist. I started working on that board in Quebec and I finished it in Burbank.” Interview with author, March 25, 2019.

16. According to Falk: “‘Imaginary Resources’—that’s the one I worked on with Pendleton [Ward]. ... Pen was interesting to work with! In the rough board, he took over one of my beats, the beat where BMO is revealed sitting on a throne. On that beat I just cleaned up Pen’s roughs. Pen [made heavy use of] Post-it notes, sticking them on top of each other, right up to the time of the pitch and even during the pitch! (That’s actually the only time I’ve seen someone adding Post-its to a board while they were showing the board.) I think Pen wanted to work on that episode because he is really into virtual reality stuff.” Interview with author, March 25, 2019.

17. According to Falk: “‘The Light Cloud’ was the first complete episode that I worked on in Burbank. ... [At first] I didn’t understand that Finn never really meets his mom, he just sees her on a monitor. So I drew some scenes where Finn is actually talking to his mom, and I think I had his mom give him an awkward hug, but I had to do revisions on those scenes, because Finn never actually sees his mother in real life, only on a monitor.” Interview with author, March 25, 2019.

18. According to Falk: “‘Cloudy’—that’s one I worked on with Kent Osborne. ... I found the continuity to be really difficult, even though in theory it should have been easy, because Finn and Jake spend most of the episode on top of a cloud. This was the first episode where I read out my part of the board. I had been afraid of doing [this], but as it turned out, I kind of liked it. I like reading out a board because I can try to show how I think the timing should go.” Interview with author, March 25, 2019.

19. According to McHale: “At some point CN was looking for little tiny Adventure Time shorts, and I thought it would be fun to write a couple weird little BMO stories with my son,
who was maybe about 5 years old at the time? We wrote one, but they didn’t end up making the little shorts. But Adam salvaged the storyboard my son and I had done and used it for ‘Ketchup.’” Interview with author, August 29, 2019.

20. According to Guo, “I’m particularly proud of ‘Whispers’—mostly because I put a lot of myself into the Grass Finn character. I’m a huge fan of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, which deals a lot with ideas of creation and self-loathing and existence, and I saw so much of that in Fern. Plus, I’m so happy I got to include Finn giving Fern a squoze to calm him down. I’ve needed a couple squozes in my life.” Interview with author, October 23, 2018.

21. According to McHale: “Adam [Muto] … needed somebody to help storyboard an episode, and I didn’t have anything else going on so I jumped in to board half of that episode. At the time I had no idea that the show was on its last season, otherwise I probably would have worked harder to make it really good. As it was, I just sort of had fun and kept things simple. It was cool to get to work with Sam Alden, too!” Interview with author, August 29, 2019.

22. During production of this four-part episode, the following storyboard artists worked together: Tom Herpich and Steve Wolfhard; Seo Kim and Somvilay Xayaphone; Hanna K. Nyström and Aleks Sennwald; and Sam Alden and Graham Falk.
Appendix B: Original Production Schedules for Seasons 7+

The following page features the original production schedule for Adventure Time’s last few seasons. Since this was the delineation envisioned by the crew during production, many fans consider it to be the “correct” understanding of the show’s final seasons.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Original Season 7</th>
<th>Original Season 8</th>
<th>Original Season 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bonnie &amp; Neddy</td>
<td>Two Swords</td>
<td>The Wild Hunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Varmints</td>
<td>Do No Harm</td>
<td>Always BMO Closing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cherry Cream Soda</td>
<td>Wheels</td>
<td>Son of Rap Bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mama Said</td>
<td>High Strangeness</td>
<td>Bonnibel Bubblegum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>Horse and Ball</td>
<td>Seventeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Marceline the Vampire Queen</td>
<td>Jelly Beans Have Power</td>
<td>Ring of Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Everything Stays</td>
<td>The Invitation</td>
<td>Marcy &amp; Hunson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vamps About</td>
<td>Whipple the Happy Dragon</td>
<td>The First Investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Empress Eyes</td>
<td>Mysterious Island</td>
<td>Blenanas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>May I Come In?</td>
<td>Imaginary Resources</td>
<td>Jake the Starchild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Take Her Back</td>
<td>Hide and Seek</td>
<td>Temple of Mars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Checkmate</td>
<td>Min &amp; Marty</td>
<td>Gumbaldia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The Dark Cloud</td>
<td>Helpers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The More You Moe, The Moe You Know</td>
<td>The Light Cloud</td>
<td>Come Along with Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Summer Showers</td>
<td>Skyhooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Angel Face</td>
<td>Bespoken For</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Pres. Porpoise is Missing!</td>
<td>Winter Light</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Blank-Eyed Girl</td>
<td>Cloudy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Bad Jubies</td>
<td>Slime Central</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>King’s Ransom</td>
<td>Happy Warrior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Scamps</td>
<td>Hero Heart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Crossover</td>
<td>Skyhooks II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>The Hall of Egress</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Flute Spell</td>
<td>Ketchup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>The Thin Yellow Line</td>
<td>Fionna &amp; Cake &amp; Fionna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Broke His Crown</td>
<td>Whispers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Don’t Look</td>
<td>Three Buckets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Beyond the Grotto</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Lady Rainicorn...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>I Am a Sword</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Bun Bun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Normal Man</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Elemental</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Five Short Tables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>The Music Hole</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Daddy-Daughter Card Wars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Preboot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Reboot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


AT-Come-Along-With-Me-Main-Title-network-pitch-storyboard#from_embed.


4chan, 134, 192, 254, 261–262
9/11 terrorist attacks, 32

A.V Club, The, 132, 165, 260
A03 see An Archive of Our Own
Abadeer, Hunson, 32, 36, 42, 75–76, 81, 200–201, 229
Abadeer, Marceline see Marceline the Vampire Queen
Adobe Flash, 101, 165
Adobe Premiere, 230
Adventure Time Reviewed, 254
Adventure Time Wiki, 8, 9, 182, 246, 247, 255–256, 257
Aeneas, 13, 73
Alden, Sam, 133, 140–142, 147, 155n143, 157n200, 286ff
Allegri, Natasha, 40, 53, 89–90, 99, 113, 186, 261, 267n72, 278
alt-right, 261
alternate universe see fanfiction
Alzheimer's disease, 59
amateur press association, 246
Amazon, 250
AMO, 48
An Archive of Our Own, 246
Anderson, Ted, 93n76
anima (psychology), 215, 220
Annie Award, 3, 108, 165, 170
Anonymous, 261
Apollo, 55
Archie comics, 38
Arrested Development, 23
Artemis, 76
Ask.fm, 258
AT Chronology, 246–247, 249
Autodesk Maya, 159

Bakhtin, Mikhail, 10n2
Ballard, Derek, 97, 133, 285
Baman Piderman, 171, 172
Bamford, Maria, 77
Barnum P.T., 241n16
Basichis, Casey James, 8, 101, 112, 178–181, 182, 183, 184, 188, 195
Baxter, James (the horse), 162–163; episode about, 119, 131, 270
Baxter, James (the James Baxter), 125, 131, 162–163
Bayeux Tapestry, 243
Beauty and the Beast, 162
Beth see Shermy and Beth
Betty, 58, 71–73, 76, 87, 88, 91n1, 145; episode about, 129, 132, 155n156, 295n7
Billy the Hero, 66, 73, 91n5, 212, 213
Bix Pix Entertainment, 168
Blade Mistress, 82, 185
BMO, 4, 13, 16, 38, 46–50, 49, 68, 78, 80, 123, 124, 136, 144, 155, 158, 168, 172, 173, 179, 185, 186, 217, 218, 297n16, 297n19
Bob-Waksberg, Raphel, 270
Bob's Burgers, 23, 24
BoJack Horseman, 270
bomb scheduling, 134, 148, 152n58
Booth, Paul, 250, 252, 263
Borderlands 2, 141
Boy and His Dog, A, 13
Breezy (character), 141, 215; episode about, 133, 134, 135, 137, 195, 215, 235, 262
Brewster, Paget, 24
Bronwyn, 24
Bubblegum see Princess Bubblegum
Index

Bubbline, 37–43, 45n52, 121, 147, 244
Bueno the Bear, 13, 178
Buffy the Vampire Slayer, 70n77, 73, 234, 236, 270
Bugs Bunny, 25
Burbank, 140, 167, 297n15
Burch, Ashly, 140, 141–142, 145, 289ff
Buscarino, Jackie, 83, 117
Bustillos, Maria, 60
Butler, Judith, 50, 252
Cake the Cat see Fionna and Cake universe
CalArts, 13, 56, 82, 105, 106, 109, 112, 113, 118, 123, 159, 162, 167, 178, 185, 203
California College of the Arts, 117
California Institute of the Arts see CalArts
Camp Lazlo, 101
Campbell, Joseph, 8, 209–224, 225n1
Campbell, Minerva, 17–18, 26n16, 217–220
Campos, Alex, 100
Canyon (character), 73
Carey, Mariah, 34
Carter, Chris, 236
Cash, Nate, 123, 278ff
Castuera, Ako, 72, 73, 80, 115, 117–118, 139, 153n91, 156n157, 159, 273ff
CBS, 1, 24
Charlie, 23, 24
Choi, Eunyoung, 164
Cicerega, Neil, 243
Clarence, 123, 171
Clockwork Orange, A, 117
/co/, 261–262
Comic-Con, 14, 68n3, 72, 113, 252
Conversation Parade, 22, 55, 256
Cory, Robertryan, 29, 57
Cosmic Owl, 85, 153n87
cosplay, 8, 35, 90, 132, 243, 249, 250–252, 258, 265, 267n46
Crews, Kelly, 121
Criminal Minds, 24
Cronenberg, David, 119
Crowley, Aleister, 81
Cthulhu, 76
Czechiel, Grzegorz, 6–7
Daly, Andrew, 77
David, Keith, 53
Day, Felicia, 72–73
Death (character), 72, 81, 86, 87
DeForge, Michael, 97, 281
del Toro, Guillermo, 65
DeLisle, Grey, 89
DeviantArt, 250
DiCicco, Jessica, 53–55, 121
Dick, Philip K., 90
DiMaggio, John, 21–23, 108, 189
Disasterpiece see Vreeland, Richard
Distant Lands specials, 149–150, 261
Dixon, Ivan, 174
Douglas, 1
Dr. Gross, 143, 217, 218
Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist, 172
drug use, 10n4, 159, 197
Dungeons and Dragons, 13, 64, 104–105, 113
Eagle, Open Mike, 62, 153n87, 256
Elements, 52, 72, 85, 144–146, 165, 200, 211
Ellis, Lindsay, 86
Entertainment Weekly, 148
Escher, M. C., 111
Exorcist, The, 296n9
exquisite corpse, 96
External World, The, 160, 161
Ezekiel, Book of, 66, 86
Fairly OddParents, The, 107
Falk, Graham, 125, 147, 157n200, 282ff, 295n4, 296n9, 297n15–18, 298n22
fan comics see fanart
fan documentation, 246–248
fanart, 8, 36, 40, 89, 90, 248–250, 252, 256, 259, 260
fanfiction, 8, 36, 88, 89, 90, 92n65, 121, 244–246, 249, 252, 253, 256, 263
FanFiction.net, 246
Farmworld, 67, 229–230
Ferguson, David, 133, 166–167, 287
Ferguson, Keith, 89
Fern, 49, 74–75, 82, 143, 211, 220–224, 298n20
Ferrari, Miguel, 86
Fez, 169–170
Finntress see shipping
Fionna and Cake universe, 88–90, 93n76, 125, 126, 131, 141, 147, 186, 191–192, 244
Fionna the Human see Fionna and Cake universe
Flame Princess, 4, 15, 32, 52–55, 68n28, 121, 122, 132, 136155n146, 155n156, 193, 196, 199, 217, 235, 245, 261, 262
Fleischer, Max, 99, 112

316
**Flight of the Conchords**, 23
Flinn see shipping
Flores, Madeleine, 133, 285
*Fly, The*, 296n9
Flying Lotus, 161
Football (persona) see BMO
Forbes, 116
Forming, 118
*Formspring*, 8, 9, 44n11, 64, 228, 247, 257–258
Fox (network), 21, 23, 236
*Frankenstein*, 63, 80, 298n20
Frederator, 14, 29, 39, 40, 107–109, 113, 166, 182, 184, 247, 270
Frieda see Susan Strong
Fubblegum see shipping
Futurama, 21
*Game of Thrones*, 60, 295n1
Gameboy, 46, 50, 170
Garfield and Friends, 1
Garfunkel and Oats, 134
Generation Z see Zoomers
Genesis, Book of, 63
Ghostshrimp, 111, 118, 129, 139, 152n39, 192
Gillow, 13
Gilhwan, Kim, 24
Glob, 44n8, 51, 75, 79, 86, 124, 229, 239
Glover, Donald, 89, 191–192
Gnosticism, 88
God see Glob
Goffman, Erving, 50
*GOLB*, 32, 63, 65, 70n77, 72, 79, 87–88, 92n60, 147, 149
Goliad, 31
*Gone Home*, 141
Google, 50, 164, 237, 252
*GQ Germany*, 141
Graham, Brandon, 97, 287
grass curse, 12, 74–75, 133, 136, 214, 221–222, 224
*Gravity Falls*, 23
Gray, Rae, 24
graybles, 123
Green Knight see Fern
Grob Gob Glob Grod see Glob
Grof, Stanislav, 91n1
Grossman, Lev, 59
Gunter (the dinosaur), 57–58, 75
Gunther (the penguin), 75–76, 91n13
Guo, Polly, 97, 198–199, 200, 290ff, 298
Han, Bonghui, 101
Hanawalt, Lisa, 270
Harris, Neil Patrick, 88, 186
*Harry Potter* series, 224, 266n18
*He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*, 3
*Hellboy*, 65
Hercules 73, 236
Herpich, Tom, 18, 23, 48, 59, 61, 62, 69n57, 80, 97, 98, 99, 100, 102, 113, 115, 116–117, 118, 119, 121, 122, 123, 126, 127, 128, 133, 137, 139, 143, 147, 157n198, 159, 186, 194, 231, 238, 239, 273ff, 295n1, 297n10
Hertfeldt, Don, 174–175
*Hey Arnold*, 1
Hitchcock, Alfred, 33, 270
*Home Movies*, 172
*Hunchback of Notre Dame, The*, 162
Hunter, Derek, 100
Huntress Wizard, 76–77, 245
Ice Queen see Fionna and Cake universe
Imgur, 250
in-between animation, 100
IndieWire, 132, 135, 143, 144
individuation, 240–241
*Islands*, 16, 17, 82, 136, 143–144, 145, 146, 147, 165, 173, 217, 222, 235
*It Follows*, 169
Izzy, Hayden, 74
Jackson, Marc Evan, 24
Jacobs, Gillian, 79
Jagm, 241n10, 246–247, 249
Jake Jr., 23
Jenkins, Henry, 244, 249, 253, 263
Jennings, Nick, 100, 271ff
Jermaine the Dog, 16, 22
Jesus, 19, 63, 87, 239
Jiang, Jacky Je, 159
Jodorowsky, Alexandro, 86
Joshua the Dog, 16, 22, 186
*Journey*, 159
Jung, Carl, 210, 214, 215, 221–223
Kara see Susan Strong
Kassir, John, 56
kawaii, 7
Kellner, Douglas, 234–240
Kenny, Tom, 21, 56–57, 78, 149
Kerr, Hui-Ying, 323
key poses, 100
*Kick-Heart*, 164
Kickstarter, 164, 171
Kiefer, Tim, 8, 112, 178–181, 182, 188, 195, 197, 198, 202, 204n18
Kim Kil Whan, 23–24
Index

Kim Possible, 101
Kim, Derek Kirk, 99, 290, 296n13
Kim, Seo, 129, 130, 147, 171, 283ff
Kim of Ooo blog see Tumblr
Knetzger, Laura, 97, 98, 99, 291ff, 297n14
Lady Rainicorn, 23, 47, 78, 81, 89, 91n19, 125
Lamerichs, Nicolle, 250, 252
Land of Ooo, 2, 4, 7, 11, 12, 17, 22, 31, 81, 145, 158, 211, 215, 220, 237, 245, 246, 256
Land of Ooo Forums, 8, 259, 263–265
Leichliter, Larry, 111–112, 271ff
Lemongrab, 60–64, 80, 123, 124, 132, 174
Lepore, Kirsten, 167–170, 289
Lewis, C. S., 86
Lewis, Jerry, 131
Lewis, Minty, 165
Life is Strange, 141
Lilo & Stitch: The Series, 101
Lincoln, Abraham, 2, 43, 86–87, 108, 109, 124, 239
Little Mermaid, The, 162
Little, Steve, 80, 115, 190, 272ff
Livingston, Polly Lou, 83–84
Lord Monochromicorn see Fionna and Cake universe
Lord of the Rings trilogy, 270
Los Angeles Times, The, 3, 107, 114, 146, 147, 148, 201
Louie, 135
Love Actually, 34
Lovecraft, H. P., 76, 87, 119
LSP see Lumpy Space Princess
Lumpy Space Prince see Fionna and Cake universe
Machiavelli, 43
Macintosh Classic II, 46
Macy’s Day Parade, 132
Magick, 74
Manichaeism, 88
Margaret the Dog, 16, 22
Margles, 79–80
Mars, 108, 124, 225n9, 239
Marshall Lee see Fionna and Cake universe
Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack, The, 83, 109, 111–113
Maryland Institute College of Art, 167
Massachusetts College of Art and Design, 171
“Mathematical!” series, 39–40
Matrix, The, 49, 224
McFarland Publishing, 3, 10n1
Meatballs, 21
Meland, Fred, 84
Mertens, Martin, 16–18, 82, 132–133, 136, 211–217, 219, 220
Millennials, 6
Milanakis, Andy, 80
Mind Game, 163
Minecraft, 173–174
Mintz, Dan, 24
Moe, John, 141, 256
Mojang, 173–174
Monomyth see Hero’s Journey
Moss, Paige, 29
Moynihan, Jesse, 19, 44n11, 61–64, 70n64, 72, 76–77, 79–80, 86, 96, 97, 115, 117, 118, 122, 123, 127, 133–134, 135, 137, 139, 140, 142, 153n87, 153n88, 156n157, 188, 189, 195, 197, 231, 238, 239, 261, 264, 267n72, 274ff
Moynihan, Justin, 195–196
Mukai, Kris, 98, 288ff, 296n11
Murray, Bill, 21
Mushroom War, 4, 36, 58, 66, 71, 120, 125, 144, 197, 212, 237
My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic, 3
mythology (fiction), 3, 74, 79, 81, 87, 118, 121, 125, 133, 136, 143, 144, 153n87, 229, 236–237, 260, 295n7
mythology (folklore), 73, 209–210, 236
Nanjiani, Kumail, 85
Neely, Brad, 74
NEPTR, 80, 124
New York Times, The, 141, 148
New Yorker, The, 3, 134, 135
Ngai, Siânne 6
Nickelodeon, 1, 14, 56, 107–109, 110, 296n11
Nicktoons Network, 14, 108, 255
Noir films, 49–50
North East School of the Arts, 105
Nyström, Hanna K., 43, 139, 140, 141, 142, 147, 156n164, 174, 197, 288ff
off-model animation, 100, 104n29, 118

318
Index

Olson, Martin, 34, 36
Olson, Olivia, 34, 36, 41, 146, 155n156, 181, 184, 188, 252
OReilly, David, 125, 159–161, 176n12, 281
Orgalorg, 75–76, 127, 128, 215, 216, 228–229, 262, 287
Osborne, Kent, 60, 72, 95, 96, 99, 112–113, 115, 118, 121, 125, 128, 129, 130, 133, 141, 144, 145, 146, 147, 149, 168, 183, 192, 238, 272ff
outlining, 79, 95–96, 97, 145, 296n10
Over the Garden Wall, 137
Page, Skyler, 18, 123, 278ff
Palumbo, Donald E., 210
Partridge, Lyle, 139, 285ff
PATRIOT Act, 32–33
PBS Idea Channel, 6
Peabody Award, 134–135
Pearson, Luke, 97, 139, 282ff
Peppermint Butler, 42, 80–81, 296n9
performativity, 50, 179, 252
Perlman, Ron, 65
Petrikov, Simon see Ice King
Phineas and Ferb, 34, 135
Picard, Jean-Luc, 13
Ping Pong, 163
Pinterest, 250
pitch bible, 21, 33, 35, 38, 64, 65
Pitchfork, 139
Pixiv, 250
Pott, Julia, 27n39, 145–146, 292ff
Powerpuff Girls, 149, 150
Pratt Institute, 111, 118
Prince Gumball see Fionna and Cake universe
Princess Bubblegum, 2, 4, 5, 12, 14, 15, 19, 28–33, 34, 37, 38–43, 44, 53, 55, 56, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66, 69, 74, 77, 78, 84, 85, 88, 96, 107, 108, 109, 114, 120, 139, 141, 147, 148, 149, 151, 160, 161, 174, 186, 187, 190, 194, 196, 198, 199, 200, 201, 211, 215, 217, 220, 228, 244, 252, 261, 262, 293, 295
Princess Diana, 52
Princess Peach, 29
Princess Zelda, 57
Prismo, 66, 85, 88, 213, 230, 239, 265
Psycho (film), 33
Quebec, 297n15
/re/adventuretime see Reddit
Rainicorn see Lady Rainicorn
Random! Cartoons, 107
Redbubble, 250
Reddit, 8, 9, 19, 48, 80, 84, 134, 192, 195, 237, 246, 247, 250, 258–259
reinscription see retcons
reinterpretation see retcons
Rejected, 175
Ren & Stimpy Show, The, 101
retcons, 8, 22, 227–232
retroactive continuity see retcons
Review (series), 77
revisions see retcons
Rhode Island School of Design, 129
Richardson, Kevin Michael, 168
Rick and Morty, 61
Robertson, Paul, 174
Roiand, Justin, 61–62
Rolling Stone, 107, 128
Root, Stephen, 16
Rough Draft Studios, 100, 101
Royal College of Art, 145
Rugnetta, Mike, 6
Rugrats, 1
Rule 34, 262
Rule 63, 89
Rumble Jaw see Distant Lands specials
Rykda, Phil, 29, 64, 99, 111–112, 115, 116, 151n31, 159
SAEROM, 24, 100–101
Salaff, Andres, 30, 198, 199, 284ff
Samurai Jack, 149
San Antonio Current, 83
Schaal, Kristen, 23–24
School of Visual Arts, 111, 115, 116, 187
Science SARU, 164–166, 196
scientism, 31
Sennwald, Alexis, 140–142, 147, 290ff
Serafinowicz, Peter, 89
Shada, Jeremy, 14–15, 186, 189
Shada, Zack, 14–15
shadow (psychology), 31, 33, 211, 220–224
Shawkat, Alia, 23
She-Ra and the Princesses of Power, 270
Shelley, Mary, 63, 298n20
Shermy and Beth, 49, 76, 81–82, 92n34
shipping, 37–43, 121, 244–245, 260
shock sites, 160–161
Shoko, 18–19
showrunner, 98; definition of, 102n16; transition from Ward to Muto, 128–129
Simpsons, The, 101, 104, 123, 174
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 223
SJWs see Social justice warrior
Skywalker, Luke, 26n14, 224
Slate, Jenny, 77
slice of life narratives, 234–235
Small-Butera, Lindsay and Alex, 171–173, 290ff
Snyder, Tom, 172
social justice warrior, 262, 268n93
South Korea, 47, 100–101, 115, 163
Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron, 162
SpongeBob SquarePants, 25, 56, 110, 112
Squigglevision, 172
St. Pim, Patience, 145, 220
Stakes, 32, 36, 37, 42, 45n47, 77, 137–139, 140, 143, 144, 145, 146, 152n39, 153n91,
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