

Interview: Cat Days director Jon Frickey

Animator and director Jon Frickey answers questions on his new short film

By [Emily Taylor](#), Muse Editor (2017/18)

Tuesday 26 June 2018



Image: Jon Frickey

Jon Frickey is the creator of the short film *Cat Days*. A stylish animation that follows a young Japanese boy and his father after the son's strange diagnosis at a doctor's appointment. *Nouse* was given the opportunity to ask some questions about the project.

Nouse: *What was the inspiration behind this film?*

JF: If I didn't know better, I would probably assume that the filmmaker really wanted to make a film about identity, right? And that is what it turned out to be. But my starting point was a silly joke. My girlfriend said she was feeling sickish and for no reason, I joked it may be the cat flu, adding that this would probably imply that she was a cat though... Then I realized, hey this goofy premise could have some depth.

Nouse: *What made you decide to set this story in Japanese and in a language that wasn't your own?*

JF: I had the idea when we were staying in Kyoto for 2 months, so in my head, the story unfolded and was set in Japan. Maybe, in some way, I was inspired by the country, but I can't and don't want to put my finger on it. By the way, I was also at the doctor's at one point because of a wretched flu. It was the human flu, of course.

Nouse: *With much discussion surrounding cultural appropriation nowadays, what do you think is the responsibility of the filmmaker when creating a film in the context of a culture that is not their own?*

JF: I am aware of the issue, and I was indeed hesitant to make a Japanese film. In the end, I decided, there was probably a reason to why this storyline came to me in Kyoto. Still, I was careful not to add any unnecessary elements that would be seen as specifically Japanese. So they eat pancakes with syrup, there is no shrine or torii to be seen, no salarymen, no happy mascots or pachinkos. CAT DAYS was translated by a friend of mine, Takashi Horiguchi, who is a comic artist and children's book author. He also did the voice directing. The music is from a Kyoto-based band that I met there, and, obviously, all the voice actors are Japanese. Ultimately, most people working on the film were Japanese. And it does not utilize or make fun of Japanese culture, I hope. I really hope I am not sounding too defensive now!

Nouse: *The film's art style is beautiful, is there any artists or films which inspired this style?*

JF: Thank you. So... not that I am aware of. I felt, I needed to keep it simple and to keep all characters quite realistic.

Nouse: *What was the animation process like for Cat Days and what was different with this film than your previous work?*

JF: The drawing process was quite tedious. Everything is hand-drawn, by which I mean - mostly - using a pen display and a computer. However, the frame-by-frame animation in the dream sequences and the forest scene were incredibly satisfying. I allowed myself to follow the flow and get wild, as the rest of the film is storyboarded, shot by shot. So, to answer your question: those two aspects were very new to me. Doing extended frame-by-frame tracking shots. But also working with an accurate storyboard.

Nouse: *What drew you to the field of animation and why do you think animation is an important medium for filmmaking?*

JF: Someone once said, that comic artists actually want to do animation. And animators actually want to make live-action movies. For me, only the first part is true. I started out studying illustration and realized that by adding voices and music I got way more... creative power. Is that a word? And in comparison to live-action movies you have a certain creative freedom. The audience doesn't question as much, and not just visually, also in terms of storytelling, you can really go places.

Nouse: *Many assume, perhaps wrongly, that animated films are films for children. What do you think of this statement and did you have an audience in mind when creating the film?*

JF: CAT DAYS actually received German Children's Film Funding. I was hoping to make a film that transcends age, really. It has received some children's film and non-children's film awards, so I guess that worked out. I believe things are changing, because the adults of today allow themselves to play video games and watch cartoons. Generally, Western societies are probably a little less grown-up than they used to be.

Nouse: *What is your favourite part of the filmmaking process? And what is your least favourite?*

JF: I enjoy writing, directing and editing. The animation process itself can feel like a huge waste of time.

Nouse: You both wrote and directed the film; did this allow you more creative control? Do you always prefer to work on both the story and the filming itself?

JF: First of all, thank you – creative control! That’s the word I was looking for earlier. And yeah, I really like the writing and the directing part. I also enjoy editing. The animation process – not so much. It can feel like a huge waste of time.

Nouse: *Short films are not that visible to the general public and sometimes not readily available. Do you think the film industry would benefit from a change in how we distribute and promote short films?*

JF: Oh, I really don’t know about the industry. I think the film industry benefits from franchising, and making a short film is the ultimate way to not generate any merchandise revenue. In some cases, of course, a short can also be a pilot, like with Julia Pott’s SUMMER CAMP. But if we were to screen short films as supporting films more often, I think the general public would really appreciate it.

Nouse: *As somebody who has had success with a short film, how do you view their place within the industry? Some people see them just as stepping stones to making features, but some regard them as a crucial art form in their own right; where do you stand on this issue?*

JF: From what I can tell, there is a huge difference between animated shorts and live-action shorts. In live-action it is expected for directors to do features. Or at least work for TV, I guess. But many directors of animated short films would rather not work at Pixar or Dreamworks, because they want to write and direct, not just animate. And yes, I do believe that animated short films are an art form in their own right. Just like short stories. It reflects something I said earlier: you can really go places with animation. But oftentimes 10 minutes of going there is enough.

Nouse: *Have you always been a film lover? When did you decide filmmaking was something you wanted to pursue seriously?*

JF: As a kid, I always preferred TV. And I always liked to draw. I liked to draw in front of the TV. So, it all adds up, I guess.

Nouse: *Do you have any advice for people who want to make their own films?*

JF: I have been asked before, and I always say something else. Either because I am forgetful or because I don’t know the answer. Today, I feel like saying it runs down to this: Do your thing. And then edit, edit, edit.

Nouse: *What are you planning on doing next?*

JF: Another short film, but I do not know anything about it yet. And, at some point, I want to develop a series. That really takes time though. Oh, and I want to do some fun little things. I just began animating gifs and putting them on Giphy: <https://giphy.com/jonjon2000>



Most Read Discussed

1. [Short Film Sunday: All These Creatures](#)
2. [TV Review: Endeavour – Series 3 Episode 2: ‘Arcadia’](#)
3. [TV Review: Vera Series 5 Episode 2: ‘Old Wounds’](#)
4. [Film meets fact – why is historical accuracy important?](#)
5. [TV Review: Endeavour – Series 3 Episode 4: ‘Coda’](#)
6. [TV Review: Endeavour Series 2 Episode 2](#)

Write for Nouse Film & TV

[Get in touch with the editors](#)

[Join the Facebook group](#)

More in Film & TV

[Short Film Sunday: All These Creatures](#)

[Interview: Get Ready With Me director Jonatan Etzler](#)

[Short Film Sunday: Fauve](#)

[Netflix sued by Satanic Temple](#)

[Vintage Sundays Review: The Wizard of Oz](#)

[Review: Manbiki Kazoku \(Shoplifters\)](#)

[About Nouse](#)
[Who’s Nouse](#)
[Website Credits](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Advertising](#)
[Archives](#)
[Student Discounts](#)
[Print Editions](#)
[Mini-Sites](#)
[Nouse on Twitter](#)
[Nouse on Facebook](#)
[Nouse on Google+](#)

© 1964–2018 Nouse

[Policies](#) |

