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SYNOPSIS

From acclaimed cartoonist Dash Shaw (*New School*) comes an audacious debut that is equal parts disaster cinema, high school comedy and blockbuster satire, told through a dream-like mixed media animation style that incorporates drawings, paintings and collage. Dash (Jason Schwartzman) and his best friend Assaf (Reggie Watts) are preparing for another year at Tides High School muckraking on behalf of their widely-distributed but little-read school newspaper, edited by their friend Verti (Maya Rudolph). But just when a blossoming relationship between Assaf and Verti threatens to destroy the boys' friendship, Dash learns of the administration's cover-up that puts all the students in danger. As disaster erupts and the friends race to escape through the roof of the school, they are joined by a popular know-it-all (Lena Dunham) and a lunch lady (Susan Sarandon) who is much more than meets the eye. But even as the film piles on brilliant details like a post-apocalyptic cult formed by jocks, video game homages, and an infectious synth soundtrack, it never loses sight of the characters at the heart of the story. Hailed as "the most original animated film of the year" and "John Hughes for the Adult Swim generation" (*Indiewire*), the film's everyday concerns of friendships, cliques and young love remind us how the high school experience continues to shape who we become, even in the most unusual of circumstances.

"THE MOST ORIGINAL ANIMATED FILM OF THE YEAR!"

- INDIEWIRE

"A GREAT DISASTER COMEDY!"

- NERDIST

**"WILDLY BIZARRE
AND IMAGINATIVELY ALLURING!"**

- THE PLAYLIST

MY ENTIRE HIGH SCHOOL **SINKING**

A FILM BY DASH SHAW



**"A QUICK AND DAZZLING
BURST OF PLEASURE!
IT'S SOMETHING QUITE SPECIAL!"**

- THE GUARDIAN

**"THE WHOLE THING BUZZES
WITH HAND-DRAWN
CREATIVITY!"**

- SLANT

OPENS APRIL 14, 2017





MY ENTIRE HIGH SCHOOL SINKING • INTO THE SEA •

A FILM BY DASH SHAW

CREDITS

Written and Directed by Dash Shaw

An Electric Chinoland Production
in association with Low Spark Films
and Washington Square Films

Executive Producers: Matthew Johnson,
Tyler Davidson, Kevin Flanigan, and Joshua Blum

Produced by: Kyle Martin, Craig Zobel,
and Dash Shaw

Lead Animator: Jane Samborski

Music: Rani Sharone

Editors: Lance Edmands & Alex Abrahams

Additional Editing: Michael Taylor

Assistant Editor: Ross Laing

Post Production Assistant: Cyrus Cohen

Main Exterior Background Paintings:
Frank Santoro

Additional Background Paintings: Andrew Lorenzi

Title Lettering: Mickey Duzyj

Liquid Light Effects: Curtis Godino

Blueprints: Jeff Samborski

Cell Shading: Will Jones

Boy Scout Flashback Sequence: Andrew Lorenzi

First Underwater Sploosh Sequence: Lily Benson

Verti's Flashback Sequence: Andrew Lorenzi

Principal Grimm Flashback Sequence:
Laura Knetzger

Dash's Dream Sequence: Bjorn Miner

Sound Design: Ryan M. Price, MPSE

Supervising Sound Editor & Re-recording Mixer:
Ryan M. Price, MPSE

Voice Over Recording: Ryan M. Price, MPSE

Voice Over Recording: Andrew Orkin

Dialogue Editor: Sebastian Henshaw

Foley Artist: Leslie Bloome

Foley Mixer: Ryan Collison

Sound Post Facility: Fall On Your Sword

Sound Post Facility Producer: George Dellinger

Sound Post Production Producer: Lucy Alper

Additional Voice Recording: Anarchy Post

Voice Recordist for Anarchy Post: Kyle Lane

Post Production Services: Final Frame

CAST

Dash: Jason Schwartzman

Mary: Lena Dunham

Assaf: Reggie Watts

Verti: Maya Rudolph

Lunch Lady Lorraine: Susan Sarandon

Principal Grimm: Thomas Jay Ryan

Drake: Alex Karpovsky

Gretchen: Louisa Krause

Brent Daniels: John Cameron Mitchell

Running Time: 77 minutes
Format: DCP 5.1 sound
Rated PG-13 for some images of peril,
sexual references and drug material.

GKIDS

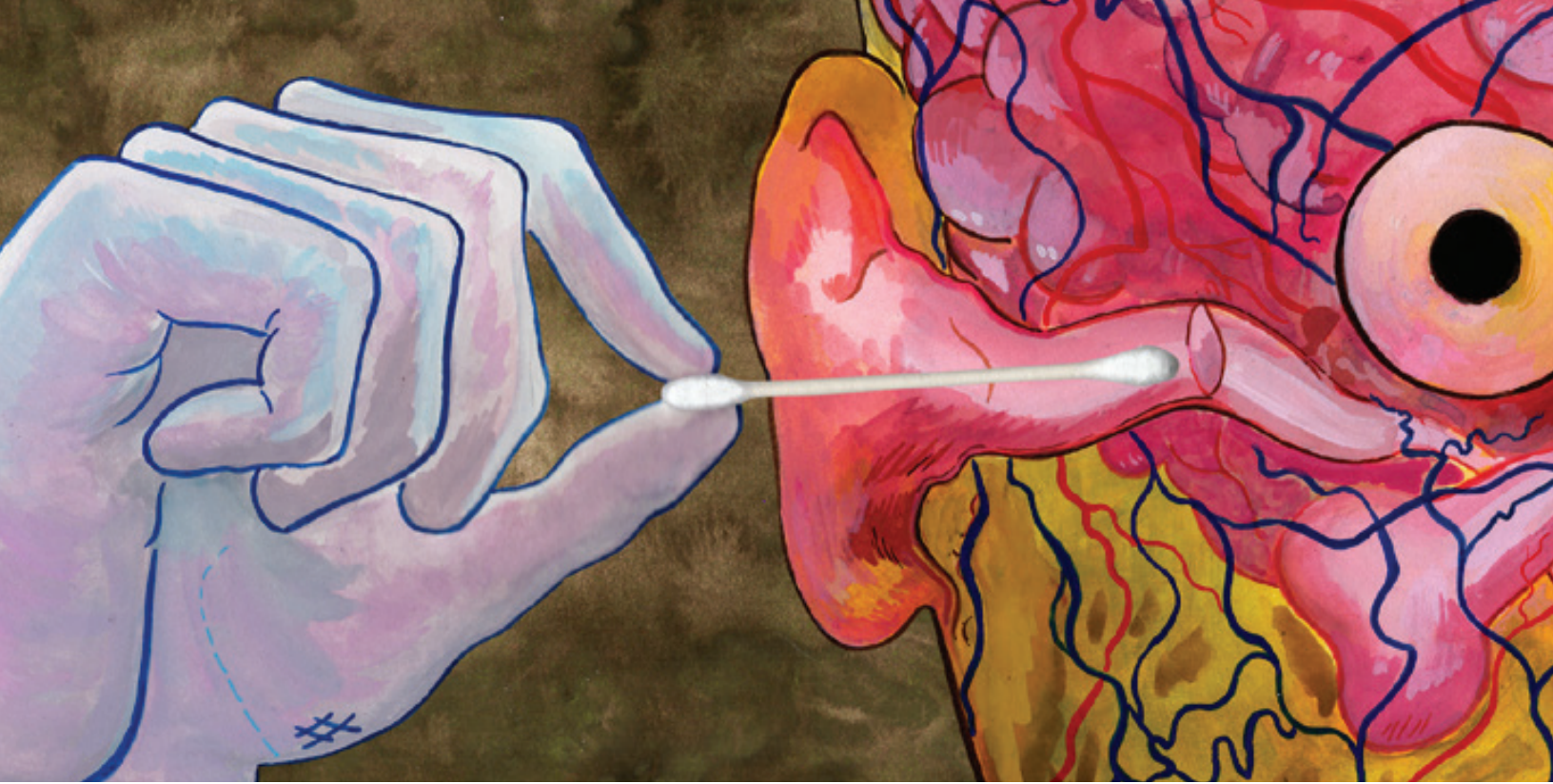


A CONVERSATION WITH **DASH SHAW, JANE SAMBORSKI & KYLE MARTIN**

Q: How did the idea for the film first develop?

DS: I'd drawn a comic short story titled *My Entire High School Sinking into the Sea* in early 2009. When I was a high school student, in the nineties, there were two main schools of comic books: autobio comics on one end and adventure comics on the other. The idea behind the story was to combine these two opposing schools; so I had a character named Dash, and it was based on real feelings and experiences, working at a school newspaper with other students and wanting to be a cartoonist, but it was thrown into a boy's adventure-style action comic. Also, the James Cameron movie *Titanic* came out when I was a teenager. I thought it was a funny story idea, a funny title, and I liked how that particular short story was colored in a very extreme, almost abstract way. I kept thinking about it and I wanted to expand it into something larger. When I started making more animations, my mind went back to that piece. And gradually more ideas came into view, like the school being four floors and each floor being designated to a grade—a video game-like structure. I realized I could write the script and have it be a disaster movie, but keep everything based on actual high school scenarios. So, for instance, the cafeteria scene in my movie reflects the dynamics of high school cafeterias in real life, where the students divide themselves, and it's in the center of the movie, just like lunches are the center of a school day, there's an altercation in a restroom—all classic high school stuff, but heightened or dramatized in this comic book-y way.

In 2010, I participated in the Sundance Institute Writer and Director's labs for a feature film project *The Ruined Cast*. Coincidentally, Lance Edmands who edited *My Entire High School*



Sinking into the Sea and Kyle Martin and Craig Zobel who produced it, were also Sundance fellows at that time with their own projects. That's how we all met.

The Labs immensely helped me improve my social and interpersonal communication skills, which were woefully lacking due to a lifetime drawing comic books. I never went to film school, so the Labs and the experience working on *The Ruined Cast* really taught me everything I know about film. John Cameron Mitchell and Howard Gertler were producing *The Ruined Cast*, and they were trying to make it in a bigger way. We spent a great deal of time trying to get a cast to sign on in order to trigger financing, but as time dragged on that process became frustrating... I kept thinking “why can’t I just go home and start drawing the movie?” And so I basically did. I went home and started making *High School Sinking* with Jane Samborski.

Q: You're well-known for your work as a cartoonist, so a feature film marks a kind of new chapter for you. How do you think your work in comics shaped this new project?

DS: It completely informed this project, and probably everything I'll ever do. I love comic books, graphic novels, zines, mini-comics; that world is my first love. The animations I'm interested in come from this place too, such as the early *Astro Boy* cartoons by Osamu Tezuka. He was a cartoonist and then he applied his storytelling and drawing and composition skills to make beautiful, traditional animations. Most of the Japanese animations I admire are based on comic books, and drawn by comic book artists. I thought there should be something like this for my own work, in U.S. alternative comics. I wanted to do it in a limited, DIY way, like zine-making, and translate it into this different film medium, and I knew something interesting would happen. The way I color, for instance, would be considered “off-model” for most animations, but since animation is time-based, and the images are flying past you, you can follow the story and characters even as the colors change or are unaligned like how they are in my comics. Cartooning also provided a community of collaborators. This movie was drawn mostly in my kitchen in Brooklyn, by myself



and my partner Jane Samborski, along with a few people I know from alternative comics like Frank Santoro. I knew I could make it based on my discipline from drawing graphic novels that are hundreds of pages long, though there were new skills I was excited to develop through the process of filmmaking, like working with sound and music and actors.

Q: Jane, when did you and Dash first collaborate?

JS: I feel like it's impossible for two creative people to be in a relationship and not collaborate. The first formal collaboration was probably a series of cut paper illustrations for one of Dash's books. They looked a lot like the cut-paper snowflakes seen in *High School Sinking*. Before that we did all sorts of informal projects, drawing games, and just making things... Even when we weren't working directly together, he would unwittingly provide the seed of a piece, and was an invaluable source of feedback.

Our first animation together was *The Unclothed Man* IFC web series. I'd animate some characters and he'd animate others, switching back and forth between our different styles of drawing. Since then, we've really discovered that it's better if I do a lot of the underdrawing, while Dash inks and paints. It allows us both to play to our strengths. Dash brings bold energy and I bring precision.

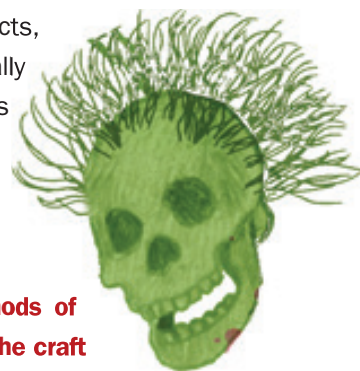
Q: I'm curious to know more about how Dash worked with the actors, both how this particular cast came together and what the voiceover process was like. The image of the filmmaker on set directing an actor is such a familiar one, but obviously animation demands a different kind of collaboration.

DS: I was able to get this cast from my work in comic books. Jason Schwartzman in particular I'd known for years through my comics. I'd met Lena Dunham at the Sundance Labs, and she knew my comics and animations. Of course, I was incredibly lucky to have them. I love all of them; they're the soul of the cartoon. All drawings are abstract—you're reducing people into lines, and the story and visuals are rather surreal, so the voices are really the human element



that's shooting through all this strange abstraction. The drawings are their masks. The voiceover recording sessions were staggered, with some of the cast working alongside each other and others not, then the takes were collaged together into scenes. Often I'd be reading the character opposite them, and in a recording studio without visual reference. That recording style helped the deadpan humor of the movie I think, in that the characters are in this extreme situation but they continue talking about high school and writing and their feelings. A big part of the joke of the movie is the dissonance between their reactions and what's happening around them.

KM: When Dash emailed me around August 2014 about a new project he was making, I was ecstatic. He said he had about 80% of the film drawn and animated, and he was at a point where he needed to start recording the character voices so that he could draw the mouths and finish the film. I didn't hesitate to get involved. Craig Zobel, Dash, and I kicked around some names for parts, and Jason and Lena were at the top of the list, they were the first two people we approached. We were all friends with both of them from previous projects, but more importantly, they were both huge fans of Dash's work. That felt really important to us – they knew Dash's sense of humor and his tone, which was going to be crucial in bringing Dash's voice from the printed page to the big screen. There was a short hand in place for understanding and performing those characters.

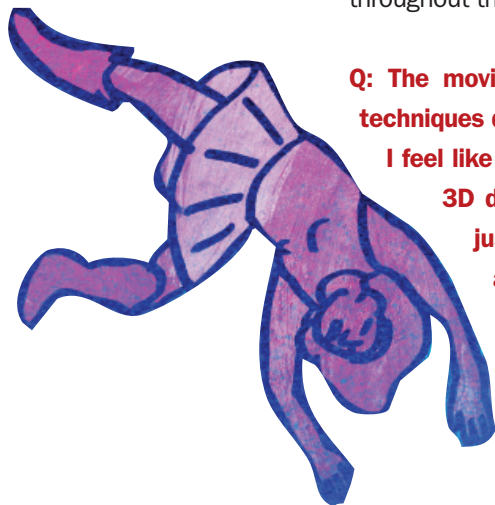


Q: Speaking of animation, how would you describe the technical methods of making the film's visuals? I feel like it's a genre where the particulars of the craft are often somewhat obscure to a viewer.

DS: It's all drawn on paper, and the paint is acrylic on bristol board, which is then scanned into a computer. Essentially we use After Effects the way Disney used the multiplane camera, so all of the elements are hand-made, we just arrange and slide things using AE. I love traditional animations, especially when drawings "flicker" for a moment. Like, when the shadow hatching on someone's arm is slightly different from frame to frame. None of the lines were drawn with a Wacom. Occasionally we collage in real fire, water, and liquid light show effects, which is something that cartoons from the 60s and 70s would do a lot. Even though these are "old" methods,



I honestly don't think it has a nostalgic element. I wanted it to feel fresh. As for the drawings, Jane is trained as an animator and she's a master at complicated body movements. She would animate the more intricate gestures in pencil and I would go over it in ink so it'd all look consistent. Other sequences were done by specific people, and I'd "cast" the artists for sequences that I thought would make sense for them. Jane did all of the silhouettes for the elevator sequence, for instance. Curtis Godino is an artist who'd worked in Joshua White's famous liquid light show, and the cartoonist Frank Santoro is a great landscape painter so I thought it'd be incredible for him to paint waves crashing. We were able to use his wave animation quite a bit throughout the movie.



Q: The movie certainly doesn't seem nostalgic, even if its style was achieved through techniques developed in another era, because the perspective guiding it is so contemporary. I feel like it points to the ways that, even in a moment of, say, increasingly sophisticated 3D digital modelling, there's still tremendous potential in the ways of working you just described. For me this all seems in keeping with the rest of your comics and animations, in that multiple visual idioms and genres—manga and Sigmar Polke paintings, coming-of-age pictures and disaster movies—are commingled in the service of producing something entirely new. What's the allure for you of this strategy, this almost alchemical coming together of quite disparate aesthetic elements?

DS: It feels natural because I love all of those disparate tones or modes. I have to trust my sensibility that it'll come together. But I'm also aiming for the pronounced juxtapositions too. Ideally what's happening is something in between these elements that is exciting and rings true, but in a way that's not too literal.

Q: Jane, what do you think have been your main influences as an animator?

JS: I'm personally responsible for destroying two public library copies of *Watership Down* through repeated viewing. It was my first experience with animation that told an adult story. I would watch the opening fable of *El-Ahrirha* over and over. It is intensely beautiful.

When I discovered Lotte Reiniger it was a super empowering moment. I was already doing a lot



of cut paper work, so her silhouette films really resonated with me. It was awesome to learn the first animated feature was created by a woman in her attic! The elevator sequence of *High School Sinking* is an homage to her.

Q: Dash, did your ideas about the film change or evolve in any significant or surprising ways over the course of production? I'm always fascinated by the trajectory from an initial concept to a finished work, since filmmakers often end up taking routes they didn't anticipate!

DS: The scope of the project kept expanding. When I started drawing it, I picked this story because it felt the most “do-able,” meaning it took place in a school and I knew I could paint those classroom backgrounds, and a thick-line style I knew I could execute felt appropriate to the story. I assumed I wouldn't get well-known actors, and that the level of animation would be very limited, like *Speed Racer* in terms of the number of drawings. As I kept working on it, the film became more ambitious. Now the drawings are still “limited” but it's very packed. I kept adding more elements. The actors made the whole thing much more heartfelt and that inspired altering the character performances to be more subtly drawn. Also the music was a major component I didn't have a preconceived idea about. I didn't make a temp score for our composer Rani; I just handed the film to him. When Rani Sharone scored it, he really clarified the tone of the movie. His music, to me, says: “This is carnivalesque and fun, but there's still real danger here.”

Q: Jane, Dash mentioned that much of the film was made in your kitchen—this is animation of a very intimate, human scale. What appeals to you about this set-up? What do you see as the benefits, and challenges, of this relatively artisanal mode?

JS: Dash and I work so closely together, it weaves in and out of every part of our lives. Making things together brings a camaraderie it is impossible to achieve any other way, but it also means you can't ever leave work at the office. That's extra true when you live and work in a two room apartment.

I always liked being able to look over my shoulder and get a second opinion, but I





think it was much harder for Dash. It was wonderful for me to have someone to bounce ideas off when I got stuck. I liked knowing he was in as deep as I was. Though you have to trust that the relationship will survive your aesthetic disagreements. That's harder than it sounds. Art is so personal, disagreeing about a narrative or acting choice can feel like something much bigger than it is.

It's risky to work like that. Where it pays off is in how nimble and immediate the projects are. Dash and I consistently reach solutions we both love. We have the power to change and un-change and re-change, until we've driven each other nuts! The work feels human, because it's full of struggle. You can really feel our hand in it.

Q: Dash, how is the movie related to your own memories of high school? How does autobiography figure in this film, or even more generally in your comics? Because, in a way that you sort of alluded to earlier, there's an emotional realism to be found in your work that suggests the scenarios are drawn from lived experience, yet in other respects the worlds you've made are totally fantastical.

DS: I tried to make everything as autobiographical as possible. It's a bit closer to my middle school experience, where I worked on the school newspaper with a couple of other people. I was even friends with the principal, because I did a cartoon lampooning how, when there was a fire drill, they'd line up the students around the gas station behind the school that the buses use. I was called into the office about that. Then, the middle school principal changed schools and became my high school principal, and he had a real gravity to him that's like Principal Grimm in my movie. Most of the stories in the movie are true: the Boy Scout flashback story was, the acne... Usually I have something "real" that's the basis and the story becomes fantastical because I'm trying to move the story closer to how it feels, as opposed to a literal report. I think that's what I have to offer as an artist: feelings, which are maybe more truthful than the facts!

-Interview by Thomas Beard



WRITER + DIRECTOR
DASH SHAW

Dash Shaw is a cartoonist and animator whose graphic novel, *Cosplayers*, arrived September 2016 from Fantagraphics Books. His previous book *New School* was named one of the best books of the year by NPR. His other recent books include *Doctors*, *BodyWorld* and *Bottomless Belly Button*. His animated works include *Wheel of Fortune*, *Blind Date 4*, the Sigur Rós video and Sundance selection *Seraph* (co-written with John Cameron Mitchell), and the 2009 IFC webseries *The Unclothed Man in the 35th Century AD*. He wrote and directed the forthcoming independent animated feature *My Entire High School Sinking into the Sea* starring the voice talents of Jason Schwartzman, Lena Dunham, Reggie Watts, Maya Rudolph and Susan Sarandon. He was a 2010 Sundance Labs fellow and a 2014-2015 Cullman Center fellow at the New York Public Library.



ABOUT GKIDS

GKIDS is a distributor of award-winning feature animation for both adult and family audiences. The company has scored nine Best Animated Feature Academy Award® nominations – the most for an independent distributor – with these acclaimed films:

- *The Secret of Kells* (2010)
- *A Cat in Paris* (2012)
- *Chico & Rita* (2012)
- *Ernest & Celestine* (2014)
- *The Tale of The Princess Kaguya* (2015)
- *Song of the Sea* (2015)
- *Boy and the World* (2016)
- *When Marnie Was There* (2016)
- *My Life as a Zucchini* (2017)

GKIDS also handles North American theatrical distribution for the Studio Ghibli library of films, one of the world's most coveted animation collections with titles *Spirited Away*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Grave of the Fireflies* and others.

www.gkids.com

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