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'Hexed' Directors On Reinventing Disney Magic, 'Chainsaw Man' Influences, And Vertical Video Trailer Criticism: 'It Was Bizarre And Not True'

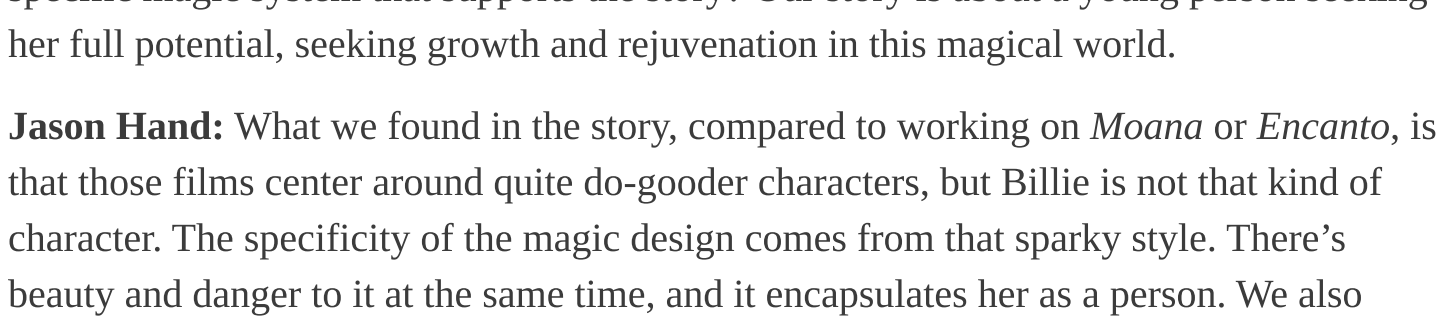
By **RYAN GAUR** | 06/28/2026 11:26 am | 9

Magic has always been part of Disney Animation's DNA, from *Fantasia* and *The Sword in the Stone* to *Frozen* and *Encanto*. But with this year's original feature *Hexed*, directors Fawn Veerasunthorn and Jason Hand wanted to find a fresh spellbook.

The film follows Billie, a prickly teenager who discovers she has magical powers and is swept into a strange new world alongside her mother. At Annecy, the filmmakers broke down the movie's distinctive visual language before sitting down with *Cartoon Brew* to discuss reinventing Disney magic, building a more imperfect heroine, and why the internet got the film's first trailer completely wrong.

Cartoon Brew: In the presentation, you talked about Disney's long history of depicting magic. Is it a challenge to have something new to say with that story mechanic?

PARTNER MESSAGE



Fawn Veerasunthorn: It's a fun challenge. Our effects department has done it all, so what could be something new that we could all be excited about while rooting us in a specific magic system that supports the story? Our story is about a young person seeking her full potential, seeking growth and rejuvenation in this magical world.

Jason Hand: What we found in the story, compared to working on *Moana* or *Encanto*, is that those films center around quite do-gooder characters, but Billie is not that kind of character. The specificity of the magic design comes from that sparky style. There's beauty and danger to it at the same time, and it encapsulates her as a person. We also found that her personality means she's attracted to the weirder parts of this world, and that gives us a take that I don't think we've seen before.

Veerasunthorn: It's a little sharper and a little weirder. We got to know Billie so well this year. I really fell in love with that character. I wish I'd had her bravery at her age.

Is it difficult to calibrate the likability of a character like that? Making sure she's endearing to the audience while being a bit more abrasive?

Veerasunthorn: We go by the rule of, "If you were Billie, you would have made that choice too." It's about understanding the mischief she's gotten herself into. We all have that side to us. That's why characters like Garfield are so popular. We all want to be a little spiky and get away with it. But for Billie, her heart has to be in the right place. Her actions may not be the most mature way of doing things, but we love her for it because we've all been there.

Hand: We do talk a lot about likability, but it's more about being rootable. You're rooting for her. You wish you were as brave as she is. A driven character is really fun to watch in a film. A character who does too much is more interesting than a character who doesn't do enough.

Veerasunthorn: If you put her at a crossroads where the dilemma is interesting enough, even if she makes the wrong choice, you understand it. It also creates the intrigue of, "How is she going to get out of this?"

Hand: The other great thing about a character who is so headstrong is that when you see a moment of vulnerability, it's super effective. Hailee [Steinfeld] is so good at bringing those small moments to her line readings.

Mother-daughter stories are also a little underexplored in animation. How important was that aspect of *Hexed*?

Veerasunthorn: When I became a mother, my whole worldview about my own mother shifted. I think I'm pretty normal and cool, but my daughter isn't going to see me that way, just like I didn't see my mum that way. It's a fun mystery, figuring out who your parents used to be.

Hand: I also think that this being a story about a witch ties in really well with the mother-daughter relationship. Billie is this character who is growing and changing, and we have a lot of moon iconography in the movie to reinforce ideas of change and cycles.

Veerasunthorn: Then there's the idea of a coven, which is this group of people supporting each other. For a teenager who feels stuck and alone, the idea of finding your people is huge. Sometimes your people turn out to be your mum.

One of the clips you showed depicted a battle between Billie and another witch. How do you go about crafting action that hits hard but still feels palatable enough for a Disney audience?

Hand: In a Marvel movie, you have punching and shooting, and we don't do that in our films, which I really like. Instead, we create incredible obstacles and compelling antagonists to push the main character. We don't want it to feel like any less for an adult who can go and do a Marvel movie. We want it to feel just as action-packed. We just use different tools to do that. The other part is infusing comedy into the scene or the character because action for action's sake is just boring.

What's something in marketing that people haven't noticed yet?

Hand: Like I said, we have a lot of moon iconography, so if you look at Billie's eyes, the highlight in each eye is the shape of a crescent moon.

Veerasunthorn: We saw it on the big screen today and were like, "You can definitely see it." Did you?

I didn't catch it at all.

Hand: I love that level of detail. It's something our team brought to us during the lighting phase.

Veerasunthorn: When you look at Billie, we wanted to evoke the feeling that this girl has the potential to be a witch, but we didn't want to be too on the nose about it, so we put little clues everywhere.

Hand: I have a 15-year-old son, and we were watching *Chainsaw Man*. They do all kinds of crazy things with the eyes that I felt like we could totally do, but in a much subtler way.

Veerasunthorn: Because this is an original film, we took it as an opportunity to think differently and get cartoonier.

Hand: Being cartoonier was a big thing we've been pushing across the board. The color in the production design is really insane, and so are the proportions of our characters.

How much did you relish the opportunity to animate inanimate objects?

Veerasunthorn: Jason lives for this stuff. Go for it.

Hand: Myself and our head of animation, Michael Franceschi, love the little sugar pot in *The Sword in the Stone*. We're taking that idea and going crazy with it. Bucket the cauldron is something I've been drawing throughout production. You saw that 2D test from Tyler Pacana today, and when I saw that I was like, "Oh my God, it works." There are no cheats in that either. There's barely any stretching. This stuff just makes the world feel more alive. We've got some unhinged things that I look forward to people finding. I think it's what animation does best.

Veerasunthorn: We can push the sense of caricature in animation much more freely.

When the trailer came out, there was a lot of discourse about the movie being framed around vertical content, and the footage shown today puts that to rest. How frustrating is it to put out a trailer and have that become the dominant response?

Hand: I wasn't expecting that one, obviously.

Veerasunthorn: That one caught me off guard.

Hand: We've seen the incredible cinematography our team is doing, and I feel like this one is going to go away naturally. It was bizarre and not true.

Veerasunthorn: We put so much intention into every frame when it comes to where the characters stand and what surrounds them. We're asking, "Does she feel free at this moment? Is she restricted?" There's a lot of thought put into that.

Hand: We're also doing so many interesting things with how the world feels to our character from an aspect ratio perspective, so I think this will pass.

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Matt 2 days ago
Why not try some new character designs for a start?

3 1 Reply

Daryl-Rhys Taylor 2 days ago → Matt
They have, it's called not anime looking crap. Why do you get some sense of design first.

1 1 Reply

Nana 2 days ago
What a load of prepared corporate pseudo art speak for damage control. Disney definitely doesn't have a mandate for vertical content hidden somewhere with colorful language just like James Gunn said no script would pass unless it was absolutely perfect and that the supergirl script was the best he'd read. these people are all liars. Good luck with your Ai aesthetic movie

1 5 Reply

Jake Z 2 days ago edited → Nana
Have you considered that maybe, just maybe, the trailer editors chose to focus on vertically framed shots so that the movie could be advertised on platforms like tiktok and YouTube shorts. That doesn't mean the film was in any way crafted with that intent. It simply means that someone in the advertising side was able to find enough material in the film to create a trailer that would work even on vertical orientation advertising platforms.

in other words, I don't think Disney has a mandate that films focus on vertical content. But the corporate team responsible for creating promotional material so that people will go and watch the movie does have a massive impetus to craft the trailers to be compatible with tiktok and YouTube shorts, because of how many people those platforms reach. So, they may cherry pick scenes to achieve that.

2 1 Reply

HappyFuzzy 2 days ago → Nana
So sad. Do you feel better now?

2 1 Reply

Daryl-Rhys Taylor 2 days ago → Nana
You think this is AI. you have no business watching animation. Get out.

1 1 Reply

Michael 15 hours ago
Her bracelet comes off and she can do magic, I wonder why she had a magic suppressing bracelet in the first place?

0 0 Reply

zactyl a day ago
"We do talk a lot about likability, but it's more about being rootable." This means something very very different in Australia...

0 0 Reply

Eevee 2 days ago
It reminded me WAY to much of The Owl House. And I'm still kinda mad they cancelled it.

0 0 Reply

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