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SPARK

ANNECY SPECIAL

MAGAZINE

An Initiative by Animation Xpress.com JUNE 2026



MANOJ MISHRA

CEO & MD
POWERKIDS ENTERTAINMENT



SS RAJAMOULI
PRESENTS

ARAA
METAWORKS



bahabali
THE
ETERNAL WAR

A FILM BY ISHAN SHULKA

SHOBU YARLAGADDA PRASAD DEVINENI M M KEERAVANI SCOTT MOSIER
SOWMYA SHARMA DEVA KATTA MADAN KARKY VINAY VARANASI



From the editor-in-chief

As the country heads to Annecy, the noise is no longer just outsourced.

For decades, India's animation industry was the world's diligent back-office: cheap, capable, and largely invisible. Foreign studios sent over their frames, Indian artists polished them, and the credits when they appeared at all, were buried somewhere after the caterers. That arrangement is fraying, and not a moment too soon.

Begin with the multiplex. Animated films with Indian DNA are no longer novelties tucked into children's matinees; they're proper theatrical events, jostling for screens against live-action blockbusters. The most eye-catching example is the animated spin

on Baahubali, a bold bet that Indian IP, done with ambition, can travel beyond the festival circuit. Meanwhile, veterans such as Vaibhav Kumaresh continue ploughing away at distinctly Indian original content that doesn't need to borrow a foreign accent to find an audience. Slowly, "made in India" is starting to mean something other than "made cheaply for someone else."

Then there's Anime India, which has, in just three editions, gone from a slightly improbable bet to a genuine cultural moment. Cosplayers queuing round the block, voice actors mobbed like pop stars, brands falling over themselves to sponsor booths, it turns out India's appetite for anime was never the question; the absence of a proper stage was.

Outsourcing, the industry's old bread and butter, tells a more ambivalent story. Indian studios remain attractive on cost, but the easy boom years of "just send it to India" have cooled somewhat, as global production budgets tighten and some work drifts to other low-cost hubs. The smarter studios have read this correctly: rather than mourn the slowdown, they're using spare capacity to build their own IP. Outsourcing got India's animators world-class skills; now those skills are being turned, gratifyingly, on India's own stories.

Government policy, for once, appears to have noticed. Maharashtra has approved an AVGC-XR policy with an outlay of 3,268 crore rupees and a roadmap stretching to 2050. Karnataka got there first with its own framework, Kerala has a draft policy targeting tens of thousands of jobs, and Telangana has long positioned Hyderabad as an outsourcing base with the infrastructure to match. The result is a slightly chaotic patchwork of state ambitions, all racing towards the same vague horizon of becoming "India's AVGC-XR capital" a title that, on current form, several states may simultaneously claim and none will quite earn.

What's missing, as ever, is coordination. A national task force exists, projecting millions of jobs and hefty GDP contributions, but stitching state schemes into something coherent remains a work in progress. Compute power, too, is becoming the new bottleneck: AI-driven pipelines are hungry for GPUs that India's general infrastructure wasn't built to feed.

None of which should dampen the mood heading into Annecy. India arrives with theatrical ambition, festival-ready original work, a thriving fan economy, and policy momentum that, even if uneven, is real money rather than rhetoric. The outsourcing desk hasn't shut down, it's just no longer the only desk in the room. For an industry once content to work in the wings, that's progress worth applauding, loudly, from the front row. ^{AX}

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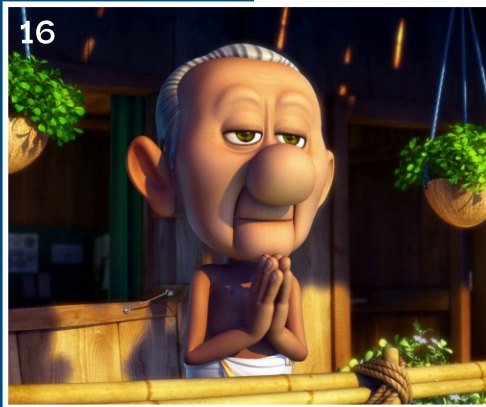
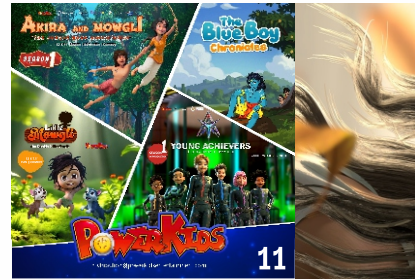
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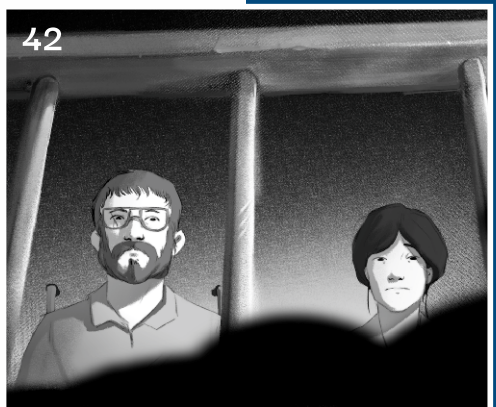
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A Spanish filmmaker brings psychological dread to Anney's midnight short lineup, in black and white, and with the volume turned up



Toonz Media Group: Shaping the Next Era of Animation

For more than 25 years, Toonz Media Group has been a trusted name in global animation. Today, the company is entering a new chapter driven by ambition, innovation, and a commitment to quality.

Under the leadership of CEO Viswanath Rao, Toonz is embracing a bold vision for the future. The message is clear: Toonz is entering a new phase of growth and transformation. The company is actively shaping its future by investing in technology, building stronger audience connections, and creating premium content that resonates with viewers across the world.



TOONZ MEDIA GROUP

POSSIBILITIES UNLIMITED. STORIES UNLEASHED.



Technology as a Creative Enabler

Technology sits at the heart of Toonz's future, empowering artists and storytellers through AI-assisted workflows, real-time production, and next-generation animation pipelines.

AI supports areas such as motion capture, modelling, texturing, storyboarding, animatics, and expression enhancement, while storytelling, emotion, and artistic vision remain firmly human-led. The goal is to streamline production, improve efficiency, and allow creative teams to focus on crafting exceptional stories and

viewing experiences.

Quality Over Quantity

One of the most significant shifts in Toonz's strategy is its focus on quality over volume.

The company's focus is shifting from scale to significance, with an emphasis on developing distinctive content that delivers lasting value to audiences and partners worldwide.

Instead, every project is evaluated through a single lens: does it deliver meaningful value to audiences?

Toonz Animation arrives at Annecy and MIFA 2026 with a robust feature film slate, reinforcing the studio's growing role as a producer and distributor of long-form animation. The four titles, spanning family theatrical, adult horror, hybrid documentary, and premium family entertainment, bring together established creators, artists and producers from around the world, reflecting Toonz's commitment to partnering with world-class collaborators on high-quality content with international appeal.

Pierre the Pigeon-Hawk

Toonz's tentpole feature is Pierre the Pigeon-Hawk, a CGI musical produced by Exodus Film Group, Toonz Media Group / Telegael, and Anthony Davis' JAKM3N Productions, slated for end of 2026. The voice cast includes will.i.am as Pierre, alongside Jennifer Coolidge, Jennifer Hudson, and Snoop Dogg.

A Banquet for Hungry Ghosts

Based on the acclaimed book by Ying Chang Compestine, this horror anthology unites Toonz Media Group, Robot Playground Media (Singapore), Xanthus Animation (Taiwan), and Kucing Hitam (Indonesia) in a pan-Asian collaboration.

Tulipop: Magical Seasons

From Iceland's Tulipop Studios, this preschool family feature weaves together two Tulipop adventures, Pumpkin Pip and A Midwinter Tale, with new seasonal interstitials for cinema.

The Taste of Water

Co-produced with Supersub LLC and producer Ryo Nakajima, this animated feature documentary uses AI-assisted rotoscoping and 3D Gaussian Splatting to transform live-action footage into anime-inspired visuals.

Together, these projects mark Toonz's shift toward storytelling that inspires, entertains, and challenges convention, positioning the studio at the forefront of international animation production and distribution.

The World's Best Talent, One Project at a Time

As Viswanath Rao puts it, "Great studios are built by great people." For Toonz, quality begins with talent. Toonz is increasingly focused on assembling world-class

creative teams tailored to the needs of each project. Writers, directors, animators, designers, world-builders, and feature filmmakers are brought together based on creative fit rather than production convenience. For every project, the emphasis remains the same: bring together the right people, provide them with the best tools, and create an environment where creativity can thrive. As Rao has repeatedly emphasised, quality begins with talent.

Building Brands and Connecting with Audiences

Technology and quality storytelling form the foundation of Toonz's future, but ensuring those stories reach audiences wherever they are is equally important. The company is pursuing a 360-degree audience engagement strategy designed to strengthen brand visibility, expand audience reach, and build lasting connections with viewers across platforms.

At the heart of this strategy is Toonz's rapidly growing digital ecosystem. Across its YouTube network, the company generates approximately 5 million daily views and reaches a combined subscriber base of more than 30 million worldwide. These platforms help Toonz build communities around its content and strengthen direct relationships with viewers across global markets.

Building on this momentum, Toonz recently launched MyToonz, its FAST (Free Ad-Supported Streaming Television) channel on LG smart TVs in India. The channel currently attracts around half a million daily views and is projected to reach between **1.5 million** and **3 million** daily views by the end of August. Together with its VOD and telecom partnerships, Toonz content already reaches nearly 5 million viewers every day.

Looking ahead, Toonz plans to expand MyToonz across Southeast Asia, followed by North America, Europe, and the Middle East. By combining a strong digital presence with direct-to-consumer platforms, the company is building a global entertainment ecosystem that keeps its brands connected to audiences worldwide.

As the animation industry evolves, Toonz is positioning itself not merely to adapt but to lead. The company that earned its reputation through reliability and scale is now pursuing something even more ambitious: becoming a global creative powerhouse defined by excellence.

As Toonz enters this new era, one thing is becoming increasingly clear. "We are not here to create more content. We are here to create better content and," says Viswanath Rao. The next chapter of the company's story will not be defined by how much it creates, but by the quality, innovation, and impact of the stories it chooses to tell. **AX**

Faith, Fire and Frames

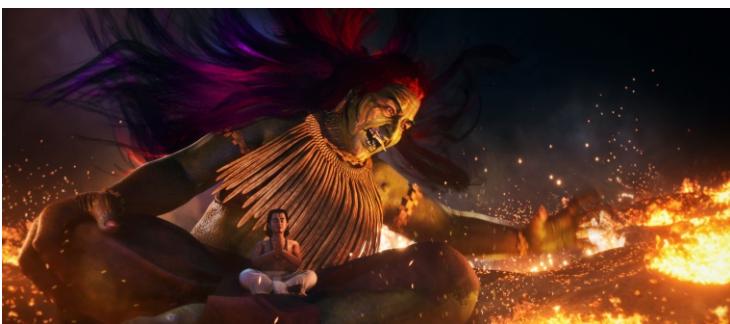
Charuvi Design Lab's animated short made in 45 days *Narasimha Awakens* roared onto the global stage

By Binita Das

When the winners of the 47th edition of the Telly Awards were announced, one Indian animated short quietly stood out among nearly 14,000 entries from across the globe. Tucked within the general-animation- short form category was a bronze-winning film that carried with it mythology, devotion, experimentation, and an unmistakably Indian artistic soul.

Charuvi Design Labs, known as CDL, earned the honour for its ambitious animated short *Narasimha Awakens: The Legend of Prahlad*, a 3D animated art film that reimagines one of India's most enduring mythological narratives through a strikingly unconventional lens.

At a time when Indian animation is seeking globally resonant yet culturally rooted stories, the film's recognition is particularly significant. Rather than retelling the myth through divine heroism, CDL explores the psychology of fear and power within Hiranyakashipu's court. The result is a haunting interpretation of the Prahalad legend that focuses on those seeking to crush a child's unwavering faith.



For CDL founder and creative director Charuvi Agrawal, the win carries emotional and creative significance beyond the trophy itself.

“To receive a bronze at the 47th Annual Telly Awards for *Narasimha Awakens: The Legend of Prahlad* is deeply meaningful to me as a filmmaker,” Agrawal shares with AnimationXpress. “Created in just 45 days, the film was a labour of design, devotion, and relentless detail.”

What makes the achievement even more compelling is the scale and speed of the production. Built within an intense 45-day timeline, the film leaned heavily into India-centric art styles while embracing



cinematic 3D storytelling techniques. Every element, from poetry developed internally to the tactile visual world was crafted in-house by the CDL team.

Agrawal describes the project as one shaped with “faith and intent”. In an award that saw participation from across 55 countries, the recognition served as a reminder that rooted storytelling still holds universal power.

“Deeply rooted Indian stories, when told with sincerity and conviction, can travel far beyond borders,” she notes.

Long before the Telly Awards recognition, *Narasimha Awakens: The Legend of Prahlad* had already begun building momentum on the festival circuit. The film premiered through a private screening in Brussels and has since continued its festival journey ahead of any platform release.

The short is a layered, psychologically charged retelling of the Prahalad myth. While the familiar tale culminates in Vishnu's Narasimha avatar defeating Hiranyakashipu, CDL's interpretation adopts a darker, more introspective lens, lingering within the corridors of authoritarian fear.

The court becomes a suffocating space where paranoia grows with every failed attempt to break Prahalad's spirit. The machinery of control intensifies, but so does the fear consuming those who wield power. Through tactile environments and mythic symbolism, the film blurs the line between ancient legend and contemporary emotional reality.

CDL's bronze win reflects the industry's growing confidence in presenting culturally rooted stories that reinterpret mythology with artistic ambition and emotional depth. [AX](#)

India's animation ambitions go global

An Indian studio wants to turn Mowgli and Krishna into worldwide franchises. It might just pull it off

By Binita Das



Bollywood long hogged India's cultural export story. Now a quieter revolution is under way, one drawn in pixels, not celluloid. PowerKids Entertainment, one of India's most prolific children's animation outfits, is betting that the country's mythological treasures and literary borrowings can be spun into durable global franchises. Think less outsourced cartoon factory, more homegrown Disney-in-waiting.

Manoj Mishra, PowerKids' chief executive and managing director, is a fixture at Anney. For him, events like Anney and its industry market, MIFA, are where strategy gets tested against reality: broadcasters, distributors, licensing partners and co-production financiers from dozens of countries, all under one roof. "These platforms are catalysts for collaboration, innovation, and long-term relationship building," he says. Translation: deals get done here, and PowerKids intends to be at the table.

The studio's most ambitious bet is Adventures of Akira and Mowgli, a reimagining of the Jungle Book universe that introduces Akira, a young heroine, alongside the iconic feral boy. The move is well-timed. Nostalgia for Kipling's world runs deep across generations,

while a contemporary female protagonist broadens the audience. A companion preschool series, Little Mowgli, extends the franchise to younger viewers, a deliberate strategy to engage audiences early and retain them longer.

Equally telling is Young Achievers Academy, a sci-fi action series in which young cadets battle rogue artificial intelligence. The premise is almost algorithmically calibrated for the anxious 2020s: teamwork, courage, innovation and a villain ripped straight from today's headlines.

Yet the project that best reflects PowerKids' ambitions is The Blue Boy Chronicles, a co-production with Cayenne Pepper Productions that reimagines Krishna as a relatable young adventurer navigating friendship, identity and leadership. Rather than exporting mythology as spectacle, the studio aims to tell universally resonant stories. As Mishra puts it, "We believe culture should serve as a bridge rather than a boundary." The challenge lies in creating narratives strong enough to connect with audiences from Varanasi to Vancouver and PowerKids is confident it can.

India's animation industry, once valued primarily as a low-cost service hub for Western studios, now boasts original IP creators with genuine creative confidence, backed by world-class technical talent. What has lagged is the infrastructure for international expansion- co-production financing, global distribution, licensing ecosystems. That is precisely what the Anney circuit helps to supply.

PowerKids' long-term vision extends well beyond television screens: publishing, consumer products, gaming, digital experiences. The logic is familiar to anyone who has watched how Marvel or Pokémon built empires, the screen is only the beginning.

Mishra is clear-eyed about what the next generation of viewers demands. "They don't simply consume content," he says. "They seek deeper connections with the worlds and characters they love." In an era of infinite scroll and shrinking attention spans, building worlds that outlast a single series is not just good creative philosophy, it is the only viable business model. India, long a storyteller to the world, is now trying to own the stories it tells. The credits, for once, will roll in its favour. **AX**

Digitoonz heads to Annecy with a pack of 'Tiny Terrors'

Indian studio bets on toy box charm and a ten-IP pipeline as it muscled onto the global animation stage

By Pankti Vora



Forget cuddly mascots. India's Digitoonz is marching into Annecy 2026 with a gang of small, mischievous creatures and big ambitions to match. The animation studio is parking itself at MIFA (stand E.04), pitching to broadcasters, producers and anyone else who fancies a slice of its growing portfolio, and by the sound of it, there is plenty to go around.

Top of the showbag is Tiny Terrors, billed as India's first toy-based original IP and yes, the toys come first, with animation, gaming, merchandise and publishing all built around them. It is less a cartoon with a toy line bolted on, and more a franchise engineered from the ground up to colonise shelves, screens and lunchboxes alike. The 360-degree ambition is unmistakable: this is a universe, not a one-off show, and Digitoonz is keen that audiences everywhere, not just in India feel they have a stake in it.

The studio describes the project as combining high-energy slapstick comedy with slick 3D animation, wrapped around a world built for children, minus the lecture-hall tone often associated with "meaningful" content. Environmental themes sneak in too, but the studio insists they arrive without anyone reaching for a sermon. The pitch, essentially, is chaos with a conscience: terrors that are tiny, troublesome, and quietly trying to save the planet between pratfalls.

Tiny Terrors has already had a test run at Anime India Delhi, where Digitoonz says the response from fans was enthusiastic enough to validate the bet. Talking to audiences directly, the team says, sharpened its sense of what viewers actually want, rather than what executives in a boardroom assume they want. It is the kind of grassroots reality check that big franchises often skip, and Digitoonz seems rather pleased with

itself for not skipping it.

Anney, for DigiToonz, is not just a stand and a stack of business cards. The studio credits the festival with shaping its approach to storytelling and co-production over the years, treating it as an annual masterclass disguised as a networking jamboree. Every edition, the team says, has fed back into how it picks projects and partners, proof, perhaps, that even animation studios need the occasional reality check from a French ski town.

The bigger picture is even more ambitious: DigiToonz wants ten original IPs in development by the end of the year, spanning three feature films, four franchise-driven properties built for multi-format expansion across animation, games, toys and merchandise, and three further projects exploring new visual styles and storytelling approaches. *Tiny Terrors* leads the pack, but it is clearly meant to be the first of many a flagship, not a one-hit wonder.



The studio frames its international push Anney, IFA, Mipcom and beyond as part of a wider moment for Indian animation, with co-productions and global partnerships increasingly on the table. Cross-cultural collaboration, DigiToonz argues, is what turns a good story into one that travels, swapping out parochial quirks for the kind of universal appeal that plays equally well in Mumbai, Manchester or Minnesota.

Whether *Tiny Terrors* becomes the next plush toy fighting for space on a child's bed remains to be seen. But DigiToonz is betting that small, terrifying and Indian-made could be a winning combination on the global stage and if the toy aisle gets a little more crowded by next Christmas, do not say nobody warned you.^{AX}

Prayan Animation Studio Turns 14: Reflecting on Our Journey of Growth, Creativity, & Innovation

By *Vinayan V and Remesh, Co-Founders, Prayan Animation Studio*

Fourteen years ago, when we sat down to name our studio, we chose a simple Malayalam word: Prayan.

It means journey.

At the time, we did not know exactly where that journey would take us. We had spent years working in the animation industry, learning from different studios, artists, productions, successes, and mistakes. What we did know was that we wanted to build something of our own, a studio rooted in quality, trust, and a genuine love for animation.

Looking back today, the name feels more meaningful than ever.

Because Prayan was never about reaching a destination. It was about moving forward, learning continuously, adapting to change, and growing alongside an industry that never stands still.

When we started in 2012, the animation landscape was very different. Television was still the dominant platform. Streaming had not yet transformed viewing habits. Creator-led content was in its infancy. Artificial intelligence was not part of everyday industry conversations. Most importantly, many studios like ours were still trying to prove that we could be more than production vendors.

Over the last fourteen years, we have witnessed one of the most fascinating periods in animation history.

We have seen audiences change. We have seen technology reshape workflows. We have seen new platforms emerge and completely redefine how stories are discovered and consumed. We have watched talented artists evolve into leaders and young studios grow into global creative partners.



Remesh



Vinayan V



In many ways, our own journey mirrors the industry's transformation.

One lesson that has stayed with us throughout these years is that animation is ultimately a people business.

Technology matters. Pipelines matter. Tools matter.

However, behind every successful production are people who care deeply about the work they create.

Some of our strongest memories are not tied to completed projects or business milestones. They are moments spent solving impossible deadlines with a dedicated team. Late-night creative discussions. The excitement of seeing an idea come to life on screen. Conversations with clients who eventually became long-term collaborators and friends.

Those experiences remind us that trust remains one of the most valuable assets any studio can build.

As the industry evolved, client expectations evolved

Years ago, many conversations focused on production capacity and cost efficiency. Today, clients are looking for something much deeper. They want partners who understand storytelling, can contribute creatively, communicate transparently, and scale reliably when projects grow in complexity.



That shift has been one of the most encouraging developments for studios worldwide, especially within the Indian animation ecosystem.

For a long time, India was recognised primarily for its production talent. Today, Indian studios are increasingly participating in creative decision-making, original content development, and global collaborations. The conversation is gradually shifting from execution to contribution.

That is an important evolution, not just for studios, but for the entire Indian animation ecosystem. Today, Prayan Animation Studio is recognised as one of the top animation studios in India, trusted by clients around the world for quality and creative excellence

Vinayan often reflects on how much the industry has changed while certain fundamentals remain the same.

“The tools we use today are very different from the tools we used fourteen years ago. The platforms are different. The workflows are different. But quality, consistency, and trust still matter just as much as they did when we started.”

At the same time, new technologies continue to open new possibilities.

Artificial intelligence is currently one of the biggest topics in animation. Like many industry professionals, we are watching its development with curiosity and optimism. Every major technological shift creates questions, but animation has always evolved through innovation.

As Remesh Ram often says:

“Technology can make us faster and more efficient, but creativity remains deeply human. The emotion behind a character, the heart of a story, and the imagination of an artist cannot be automated.”

Perhaps that is why we remain optimistic about the future.

The animation industry will continue to change. New tools will emerge. New platforms will rise. Audience behaviour will keep evolving. Yet the desire to tell meaningful stories will remain constant.

As we mark fourteen years of Prayan, we do so with gratitude, for our artists, clients, collaborators, and everyone who has been part of this journey.

Fourteen years may sound like a milestone, but for us, it represents another chapter in our ongoing animation studio growth journey.

The journey continues.

And perhaps that is the true spirit of Prayan, not simply celebrating how far we have come, but remaining excited about where the road ahead may lead. **AX**

India's animators finally get their roar

Vaibhav Studios' 'Return Of The Jungle' shows homegrown stories can pack cinemas - if anyone lets them try

By Pooja Raj Thakkar



India has stories to spare. They have travelled by word of mouth for millennia, through the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Panchatantra, shaping cultures and entertaining audiences long before streaming algorithms existed. Yet for all this narrative wealth, India's animation industry has rarely managed to put homegrown tales on the big screen. Vaibhav Studios, the country's only Emmy-nominated animation house, decided to fix that with Return Of The Jungle.

Directed by Vaibhav Kumaresh, the film reimagines the Panchatantra for modern audiences. It is also something rarer: an independent animated feature that took on India's theatrical machine and refused to blink.

Kumaresh calls it the ultimate ambassador of Aatmanirbhar Bharat. "It is strongly vocal for local and gives a strong push to India's rich indigenous stories. We want to create engaging animated content for local audiences first, especially at a time when India faces a huge onslaught of foreign animated content," he says.

The film was never meant to be a one-off. Fifteen years in the making, it was conceived as a sprawling cultural IP; two more features are already in development, alongside spin-off series, comics, merchandise, games and an animation-education arm.

Getting it to cinemas, though, was its own ordeal. Ranjit Tony Singh, chief creative producer, says the fight



Return Of The Jungle : an independent animated feature that took on India's theatrical machine and refused to blink.

began long before the first ticket sold. After the film was completed, the studio spent nearly two years chasing funds for marketing and release. Doors shut, repeatedly. Eventually, the Kumaresh family stepped in with its own money to keep the project alive.

Even then, the studio had to build a marketing, distribution and PR network from scratch, partners who believed in the film rather than merely tolerated it. And the cinema hall, the place every filmmaker dreams of reaching, turned out to be the toughest hurdle of all. In an industry ruled by big studios and star power, independent films are typically handed the scraps: odd time slots, limited screens, and a release calendar stacked against them.

Then the audience did something studios hadn't bargained for: they showed up, and kept showing up. Word of mouth spread between families. Children demanded sequels. Parents called it among the best outings they'd had with their kids. Some pushed for school screenings.

That groundswell did what marketing budgets couldn't: cinemas handed over more screens and better timings. Three weeks after its release on 29 May 2026,

the film is still holding firm against bigger competition, with strong occupancy reported across Mumbai, Delhi-NCR, Pune, Kochi, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Bhopal, Indore, Patna, Ahmedabad and Mohali, driven almost entirely by recommendation and group bookings.

For Singh, the bigger story is structural. India's animation studios, he argues, need real support, merit-based promotional funding, tax incentives, better exhibition access, to get locally made films across the finish line. The talent exists. The stories exist. The audience, evidently, exists too. What's missing is a system willing to back the final stretch, from edit suite to box office.

Return Of The Jungle was a bet that Indian audiences would choose Indian stories if given half a chance. Three weeks in, the odds look rather good. ^{AX}



Mahishmati Marches To Annecy

S.S. Rajamouli's ambitious animated feature Baahubali: The Eternal War – Part 1 has secured a coveted spot in the Work in Progress section of the prestigious Annecy International Animation Film Festival 2026

By Binita Das



From the thunderous battlefields of Mahishmati to the grand stages of global animation, the Baahubali franchise is embarking on its most ambitious journey yet. What began as a record-breaking live-action phenomenon under visionary filmmaker S.S. Rajamouli is now evolving into an animated epic with global aspirations. Baahubali: The Eternal War – Part 1, the franchise's first full-length animated feature, has earned a coveted place in the Work in Progress (WIP) section of the Annecy International Animation Film Festival 2026, widely regarded as the world's most prestigious stage for animation.

In an exclusive interaction with Animation Xpress, creator Rajamouli, show's producer Arka Mediaworks

CEO and co-founder Shobu Yarlagadda, animation filmmaker Ishan Shukla shares their insights into building the magnum opus universe. Leaders of global animation studios also joined in to talk about their experiences of working in this spectacular project.

The Next Evolution of a Cinematic Legacy

When Baahubali: The Beginning released in 2015, it transformed the landscape of Indian cinema. The franchise not only shattered box-office records but also established a deeply engaged fan community that continues to resonate with the world of Mahishmati.

Reminiscing about his immensely popular creation Rajamouli says, "Baahubali world is very dear to me,

and bringing it into animation feels like a very natural evolution of that vision.” He believes, this universe always had stories that extended far beyond the scope of the live-action films and animation offers a canvas with no boundaries.

“Animation gives us the freedom to explore those worlds with a scale and imagination that is truly limitless. With *Baahubali: The Eternal War*, we are pushing the universe into new creative territory while still staying rooted in the emotion, mythology, and spectacle that audiences associate with *Baahubali*,” he adds.

According to Yarlagadda, the audience’s connection and fan engagements with *Baahubali* have always been very strong. “With *Baahubali: The Eternal War - Part 1*, we are expanding the universe through animation while keeping the franchise’s core elements intact- emotion,

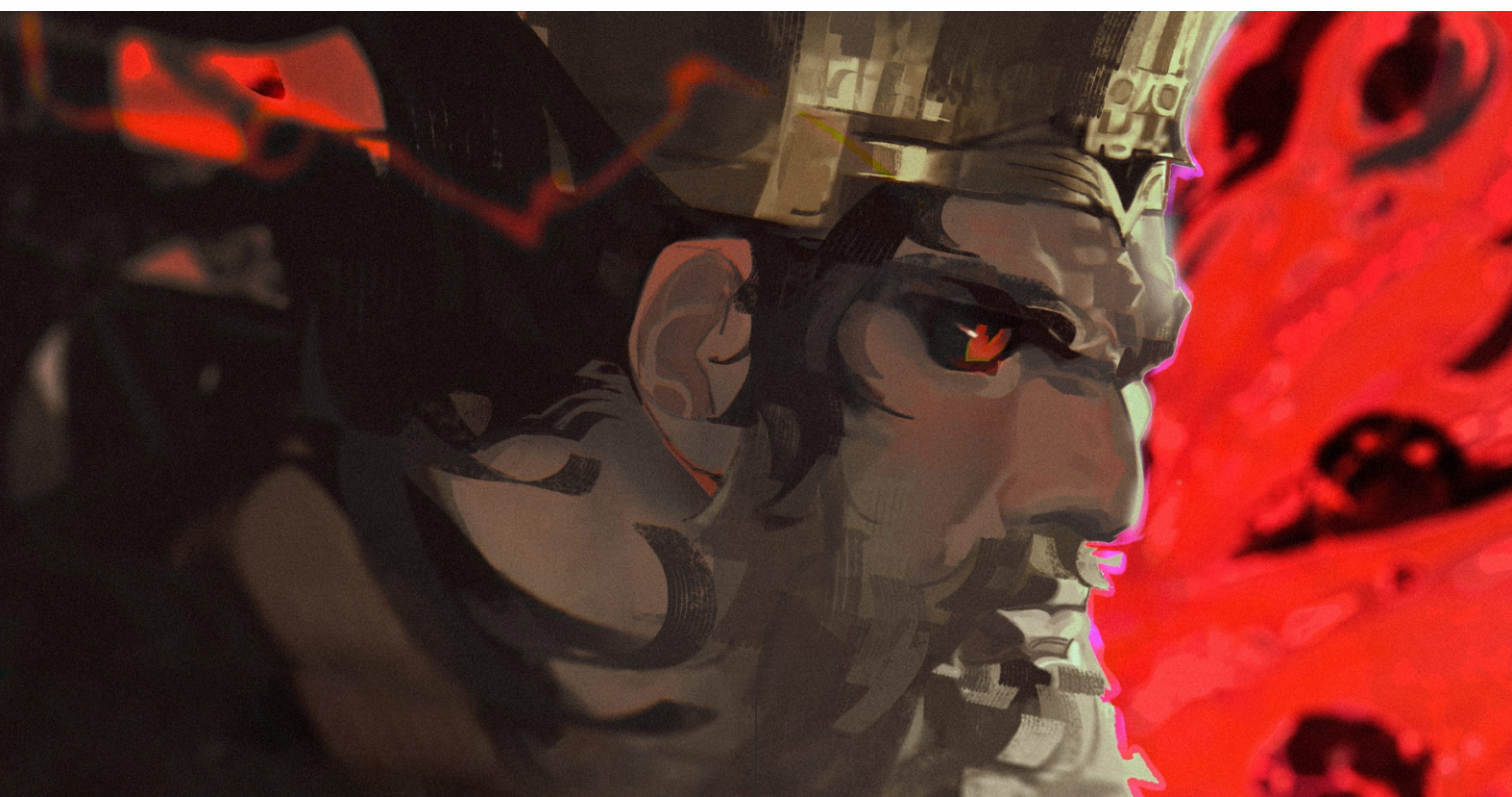
animated format.” Then, rest is history.

Shukla’s first reaction was: disbelief.

“*Baahubali* is one of the rare films that rewired what Indian audiences expect from scale and emotion, so being trusted with it is not a small thing. Once that settled, what I felt was recognition,” Shukla reveals.

After nearly a decade in independent animation, Shukla viewed the opportunity as a rewarding recognition of his work and a testament to the trust placed in him by Yarlagadda and Rajamouli.

He describes *The Eternal War* as “a story that wants to leave the physical world,” following *Baahubali*’s soul through *Swarga* (heaven) and *Patala* (hell). For him, animation was “the perfect medium” to realise a story



action, drama, and world-building. Audiences today are also far more open to animation as a storytelling medium than they were some time back.”

How Schirkoa’s Creator wrote *Baahubali*’s Next Chapter

At the helm of this ambitious project is filmmaker Shukla, whose acclaimed animated feature *Schirkoa: In Lies We Trust* caught the attention of Yarlagadda. He then offered the young director to develop “an animation concept within the *Baahubali* universe that could feel fresh, exciting, and well-suited for a stylised

of such scale. The film explores realms “that would otherwise be unfilmable,” making it “exactly the kind of film, animation medium was made for.”

For Shukla, expanding a beloved franchise comes with pressure, but he feels that the popularity of *Baahubali* also provides a strong foundation. “We are not retelling the film,” he explains. Instead, the animated feature explores “the cosmic and mythological dimension of the saga” following *Baahubali*’s death, giving the team the freedom to take the hero’s journey into entirely new realms through animation.

Uniting Global Talent Under One Vision

Yarlagadda, highlights how Mihira Visual Labs has played a very important role in shaping Baahubali: The Eternal War beyond just production execution. They have been deeply involved across creative planning, visual development, production management, and coordinating collaboration between multiple studios and partners working on the film.

Maintaining a unified creative vision, Mihira has played a key role in building that alignment while working closely with studios such as 88 Pictures, Zaratan, Alcyde, Les Androids Associés, and other global collaborators.

For the feature, Scott Mosier introduced Yarlagadda to Aniventure's Adam Nagle to support the animation production process. After the first meeting it was clear how bold, exciting and pioneering the project was even in that early concept phase. Aniventure brought in their recently formed partner company Zaratan, founded by ex-Axis Studios producers Andrew Pearce and Paula Bird, who specialise in young adult animation, which the project fitted squarely into.

"Our extensive production experience delivering projects of varying styles, complexities and genres for older audiences meant that this was something we were very familiar with. Shobu, Ishan and the Indian unit brought incredible ambition and vision for the movie, along with a wealth of mythology knowledge, cinema sensibility, dance and martial arts culture that enriched the storytelling potential," Zaratan team shares.

The Alcyde and Les Androids Associés teams were able that to an incredible level visually and narratively. This production is a true melting pot of talents, styles and culture. Their team understood how epic the story was, but initially they didn't realise how epic the fan base was as well.

"Indian mythology and culture is so rich in creativity, to have the opportunity to then bring such an incredible story to life in animation where we are limited only by our imaginations and the skills of our crew is a real honour," Zaratan team mentions.

For the Alcyde team, the idea was to pay homage to the original films and recapture the essence of Baahubali through the unbridled spectacle and the characters' emotions. "We therefore developed the visuals based on these key principles: spectacle, emotion and values. Ishan introduced us to Indian culture and mythology, and we pushed the superheroic aspect he was looking for."

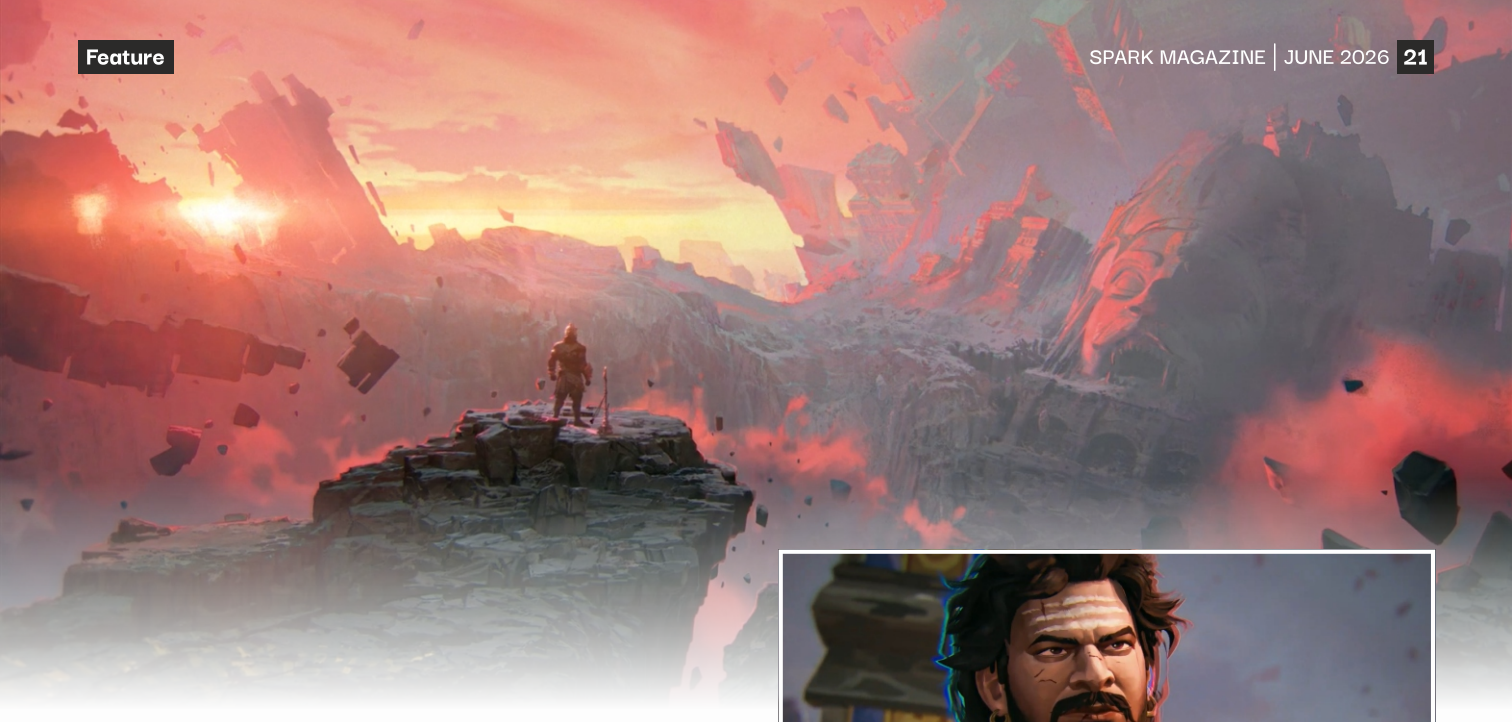
The Alcyde team describes the film as a "supercharged" version of Baahubali, with the hero facing forces as powerful as the gods. To achieve this scale, the studio adopted a 2.5D visual style that enables dynamic camera movements, enhanced effects and a distinct visual identity. Early efforts focused on storyboards and character designs, particularly capturing actor Prabhas's iconic presence in animated form. Their goal was to retain the essence of the original films while bringing "something new to the table through the medium of animation."

Calling it a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," the 88 Pictures founder & CEO Milind D. Shinde says they were "thrilled beyond words" to help bring the ambitious vision to life. As one of India's leading animation studios, his studio spent years collaborating on internationally acclaimed productions while steadily building world-class creative capabilities at home. The studio views the project as a chance to fulfil a long-held dream: bringing an Indian story to global audiences and creating what they hope will be "the finest animated film to emerge from India."

Shinde believes the project was "meant to happen." He credits Yarlagadda's vision for bringing together the right talent and expressed gratitude for his trust in the studio. Praising Shukla's bold storytelling and distinctive visual style, he noted that the director's ambitious vision pushed everyone to think beyond conventional boundaries. Working closely with Mihira Visual Labs has been an "exhilarating" collaborative experience.

The artists at 88 Pictures working on this film represent a unique blend of some of India's finest creative minds, artists who have mastered both the craft and the technology needed to bring these visuals to life. "As for the secret sauce behind how we're making it all happen, we'll keep that under wraps for now. Some things are best experienced on the big screen, and we can't wait for audiences to discover them when they watch the film," teases Shinde.

Voice and music play a vital role in animation, and Baahubali: The Eternal War – Part 1 is placing strong emphasis on both. Shukla reveals that M.M. Keeravani, who shaped the emotional identity of the original films, is composing the score, describing his music as capturing "memory, grief and grandeur all at once." The voice cast combines trained voice actors and live-action stars performing in Telugu, which remains under wraps.



Annapurna Studios chief technology officer C.V. Rao shares that while working on key sequences, Shukla utilised the A&M Motion Capture Facility, one of the largest motion capture studios established by Annapurna Studios and Mihira Visual Labs in Hyderabad, India. According to the director, bringing real actors onto the mocap stage and capturing their performances, the team was able to shape scenes organically and ground them in authentic character movement and emotion. “The captured performances gave pre-vis artists a strong creative foundation while helping align the broader production around Shukla’s vision for the film,” Rao shares.

From Anney to the World Stage

Yarlagadda sees the film’s selection in Anney’s WIP section as a strong validation of the team’s vision. From the beginning, *Baahubali: The Eternal War – Part 1* was conceived as an animated feature rooted in Indian mythology yet designed to resonate with global audiences. The recognition, he says, reinforces the team’s confidence and motivation.

He also views the festival and Mifa market as an important platform to introduce the film to the global animation community. Beyond showcasing the project’s vision, Yarlagadda hopes to engage with creators and industry leaders worldwide, build meaningful partnerships, and demonstrate that large-scale animated storytelling from India can stand confidently on the world stage.

Rajamouli points out that *Baahubali* has long evolved beyond cinema, becoming one of India’s first franchises to expand into VR experiences, mobile games, television shows, merchandising and other storytelling formats.



“We have always looked at ways to grow the universe meaningfully and give audiences and fans new ways to engage with it,” he remarks.

For him, Anney offers the perfect platform to continue that journey. Calling it an opportunity to connect with the world’s leading creators and studios, Rajamouli says, “It is a great opportunity for us to share what we are creating, get inspired by new ideas and innovation in animation, and learn from the global creative community.”

Terming the Anney selection a proud moment, Shukla notes that “an Indian animated feature at this scale” being showcased in the WIP section reflects the industry’s growing ambitions. He is particularly looking forward to the panel, where the team can “share the vision and the craft with the world” and showcase how far the project has come.

As *Baahubali: The Eternal War – Part 1* heads to Anney, it carries more than the legacy of a blockbuster franchise, it embodies the growing ambition of Indian animation. Rooted in Indian mythology yet crafted for global audiences, the film showcases how homegrown stories can be reimagined on an international scale. Whether it becomes a defining moment for the industry remains to be seen, but its journey from Mahishmati to the world’s premier animation stage already signals a bold new chapter for Indian storytelling.^{ax}



Anime mania conquers India, one convention at a time

From Mumbai to Kolkata to Delhi, Anime India has turned a niche fandom into the country's biggest pop-culture juggernaut

Cosplay armies, gaming arenas and tens of thousands of fans screaming for Japanese voice actors, Anime India has gone from upstart event to full-blown cultural phenomenon in under a year, and it shows no sign of slowing down. What started as a gamble has become the country's premier celebration of anime, manga, gaming and Japanese pop culture, pulling in fans, cosplayers, voice actors, creators and global brands under one roof. Animation Xpress's flagship convention series has rapidly become the rallying point for India's anime faithful, and the numbers tell their own story.

It began with Anime India Mumbai 2025, held from 22 to 24 August at the Nesco Bombay Exhibition Centre. As India's first large-scale anime convention, it drew

more than 29,000 attendees over three days, a watershed moment for the country's anime scene. The guest list set the tone: Attack on Titan and Death Note director Tetsuro Araki, The Pokémon Company's Susumu Fukunaga, comedian and anime devotee Rohan Joshi, and voice actors Sanket Mhatre and Lohit Sharma. Screenings, workshops, gaming tournaments and cosplay battles followed proof, if any were needed, that Indian anime fandom was no longer a fringe interest.

Then came Kolkata. Anime India Kolkata 2026 marked the festival's first step into nationwide expansion, drawing over 33,000 visitors across two days. Haikyuu!! director Susumu Mitsunaka was the headline draw, his panels packed to capacity. The event closed in style,



with a grand cosplay royale, live sets from Yura Akari and Misaki, and the AVGC 40 Under 40 awards rounding off proceedings. But Delhi blew the roof off. Anime India Delhi 2026, the biggest edition yet, welcomed over 43,000 attendees at the Yashobhoomi Convention Centre, turning the venue into a two-day playground for anime, gaming, manga and cosplay. The star turn came from legendary Japanese voice actor Kazuhiko Inoue, the voice behind Kakashi Hatake in *Naruto* and Yoriichi Tsugikuni in *Demon Slayer*, while anime singer Yurika performed live tracks from *Little Witch Academia*, *Beastars* and *Land of the Lustrous*.

The Delhi edition went big on spectacle: a shoutengai street replicating Japanese shopping districts, a dedicated Japan pavilion, the “fandom realm”, and one of the largest gaming zones any Indian anime convention has seen. Brand tie-ups added further muscle, Toyota built an immersive *Attack on Titan*-themed attraction, Takara Tomy brought its *Beyblade* experience to Indian shores, and fans got a first look at promotional material from the *Baahubali* franchise. Artists’ alleys, esports tournaments, model-building showcases and webtoon panels filled out the rest.

ANIME INDIA

アニメ・インディア

With three sold-out editions across Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi, Anime India has cemented itself as the country’s anime epicentre, connecting Indian fans with global creators and cementing India’s place among the the world’s fastest-growing anime markets.

The franchise returns to Mumbai from 28th to 30th August 2026, this time alongside Animation Xpress’s Animation & More Summit, pairing the fan-facing extravaganza with serious B2B networking across the AVGC-XR ecosystem. If the trajectory so far is any guide, expect bigger crowds, bigger names, and an even bigger party. [AX](#)

Animation nation: AM Summit 2026 gears up for its biggest edition yet

Animators, anime fans, studio bosses and AI evangelists descend on Mumbai this August for two days of deals, ideas and dress-up

Mark the calendar, sharpen the pitch decks and dust off the cosplay: the animation world's annual jamboree is back. From 28-29 August 2026, the Animation & More (AM) Summit returns for its eighth edition, once again rubbing shoulders with Anime India, the country's biggest celebration of anime, manga, gaming and Japanese pop culture, running a day longer from 28-30 August.

Organised by AnimationXpress, the summit has grown from a niche industry meet into something closer to a bazaar of ambition, where studio executives, technologists, broadcasters, students and assorted dreamers collide over coffee and occasionally walk away with a deal. This year's theme is still being thrashed out, but the broader brief is clear: how artificial intelligence, real-time production pipelines and new forms of digital entertainment are rewriting the rules of how stories get made, sold and watched.

But regulars will say the real magic happens off-stage, in the corridor chats and chance introductions that quietly turn into partnerships months later.

Two heavyweight international partners are joining the fray this year. The Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Japan's trade and investment promotion body, and the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), which drives Malaysia's digital economy and creative-tech push, will bring cross-border collaboration opportunities to the table. The summit also has backing from the government of Maharashtra's industries department and MAITRI (Maharashtra Industry, Trade and Investment Facilitation Cell), underscoring the state's ambitions as a creative-industries hub.

Students hunting their first break, creators after inspiration, studios scouting partners or businesses sniffing out the next big thing in entertainment, all get a front-row seat. And once the talking's done, the summit wraps with the ANN Awards, the industry's night to celebrate its sharpest talent and boldest ideas.



The programme promises keynotes, workshops, fireside chats and panels stacked with voices from India and abroad, covering everything from production innovation and talent pipelines to co-productions and the business models keeping studios afloat.

The future of animation won't be sketched out in boardrooms alone; it'll be doodled, debated and deal-made on the show floor. This August, AM Summit 2026 throws open its doors. The only question is who you'll bump into. **AX**

Curtain up: ANN Awards 2026 opens its doors to animation's brightest sparks

Entries are now open across dozens of categories, from preschool telly to the metaverse



What separates a character that's merely watched from one that's adored? A pipeline that ticks boxes from one that breaks new ground? A story that fades from one that follows audiences home? The ANN Awards 2026 is once again on the hunt for the answers, and the doors are now open.

Studios, broadcasters, indie creators, students and industry stalwarts across the region are invited to throw their best work into the ring, competing on a platform widely regarded as one of animation's most respected stages. The sprawl of categories this year covers nearly every corner of the industry: programming (preschool shows, features, 2D and 3D series), social media (reels, platform presence, viral animated content), and the booming digital-OTT space, with slots for everything from acquired movies to localised shows.

Then there's the craft itself. Technical individual-achievement awards single out the people behind the magic, character designers, animators, directors, concept artists, storyboard and layout artists, composers, lighting wizards and more, alongside broader technical honours for editing, title tracks and metaverse projects. The technology categories nod to where the industry is heading,

Ann AWARDS

with awards for innovation, software, hardware and, inevitably, best use of AI.

Brands get their moment too, with the MAM (media, advertising and marketing) categories rewarding the smartest animated campaigns, brand collaborations and experiential stunts. Live-action kids' programming, partner and services work, national and international animated features, and student short films round out an already hefty list. Licensing and merchandising categories celebrate characters that have leapt off screen and onto shelves, while the Arnab Chaudhuri awards, one by nomination only, honour standout individual contributions.

And then come the special awards: young animator of the year, studio of the year, India's most loved animated character, popular character (global), best indie studio and animation personality of the year, among others, the categories that tend to get the loudest cheers in the room.

The stage is set, the categories are stacked, and the entries are open. Now it's over to the animation community to prove just what it's made of. **AX**

The tree that would not let go

A childhood afternoon under a Kerala tree has become an animated short film asking whether humanity deserves nature's forgiveness

By Pooja Raj Thakkar

Hopeful Blu, smiling and admiring the beauty of nature



REDGOD
STUDIOS

blu's
ANIMATED SHORT FILM

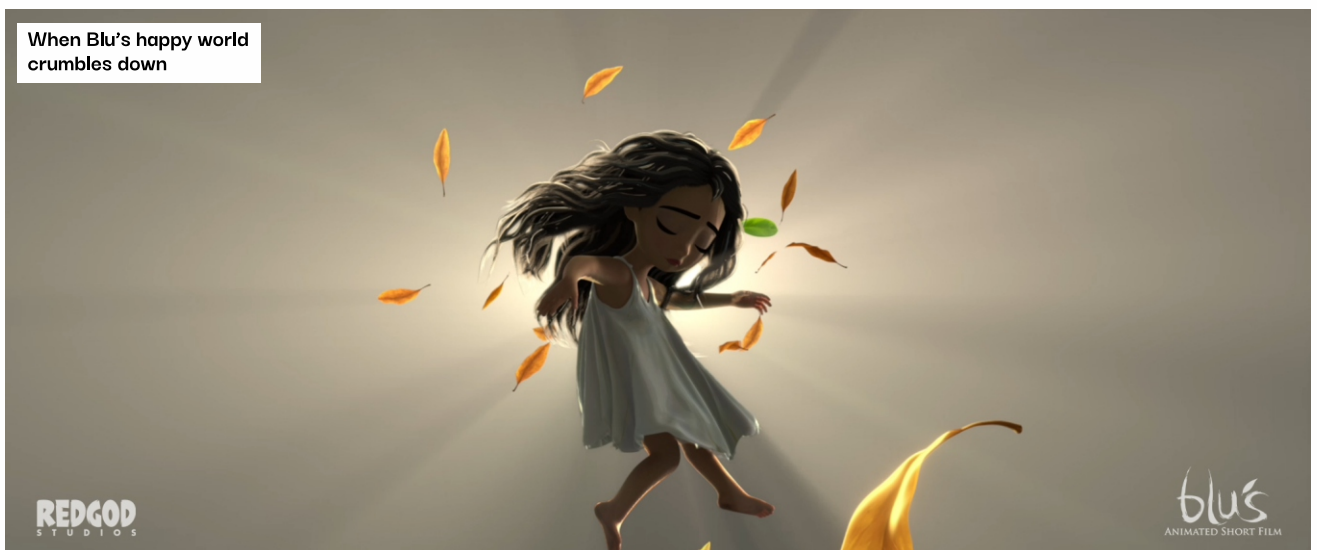
The tree is gone. In its place: a building, a road, something useful. Nobody held a funeral. Nobody thought to. And it's a scenario being replicated almost all over the world. Even more so in fast-developing nations like India.

That particular grief, wordless, unheroic, easy to dismiss, has haunted Rajesh PK since boyhood. Now it has a film. Blu's, an animated short from Rajesh's Kerala-based RedGod Studios, has been winning prizes on the international circuit and asking, with disarming

quietness, whether humanity has forfeited its right to nature's patience.

The origin is almost absurdly simple. As a boy in his village in Kerala, Rajesh lay under a tree one afternoon and let himself imagine it gone. The feeling that arrived, sudden, hollow, disproportionate, never quite left. It sharpened considerably when he moved to Bangalore around 2008. Whitefield was still mud and open land. Within four years, he watched it vanish under concrete. "The green receded like a tide going out," he says. He knew then that the feeling needed a form.

When Blu's happy world crumbles down



REDGOD
STUDIOS

blu's
ANIMATED SHORT FILM



What he settled on was a child. Not a scientist, not an activist, not an adult burdened with rhetoric. A little girl, Blu, at the age when butterflies still feel like discoveries and the world retains its magic. She carries no manifesto. She simply holds out a leaf and waits for you to look at it. Really look.

The film has no dialogue. Rajesh, who wanted “someone who understood silence more than noise”, built the entire emotional architecture out of imagery, music, and restraint. A child looking at a dying tree, he argues, does not need to explain herself. Either the audience feels it alongside her, or they do not.

Production was, by his own admission, an act of controlled stubbornness. Short films do not attract investors; Rajesh is clear-eyed about that, and an ambitious, painterly, dialogue-free animated short from a first-time director in Kerala was never going to find a backer. So he built the infrastructure himself. RedGod Studios was not born from a business plan; it was born from a film that refused to die. There were moments of self-doubt, stretches of fear. Quality, he says, was the one thing he would not negotiate on. Not once.

The film was completed on 4 April 2025, at 5 pm. “It felt like a birth,” he says.

The world Rajesh was documenting kept making his argument for him during production. He lived through wildfires near Los Angeles. He watched the Amazon burn in dispatches and glaciers retreat in photographs. The image that hit hardest was closer to home: a pregnant elephant in Palakkad, fed firecrackers hidden in fruit, dying silently in a river. Nature, the film quietly insists, is not the aggressor in this story.



RAJESH PK
DIRECTOR OF BLU'S

Blu's has since collected the best animation short film prize at Indie Short Fest LA 2025, recognition at the Minsk International Film Festival Listapad 2025 in Belarus, and a selection at the Mumbai International Film Festival. Rajesh is taking it around the global awards circuit, with a full release planned for late this year or early 2027. Beyond that, he is tight-lipped about what comes next, except to say it is a story that could only come from India, a country with thousands of years of storytelling threaded through its culture that the world has barely begun to reckon with.

But it is Blu who lingers. Not angry, not despairing. Hopeful, improbably, stubbornly hopeful, standing in the wreckage of a world that has been cutting down its trees and holding out a single green leaf. The question she poses is not complicated. It is just very hard to answer honestly: when nature still has faith in us, have we done anything to earn it? **AX**

Inside ZEE5's KidZ Playbook

ZEE5 recently launched KidZ, a one stop safe and purposeful entertainment destination for kids of all ages, designed to serve the evolving needs of young audiences and families. The launch aims to build a long-term kids ecosystem rooted in trusted viewing environments, original intellectual property and franchise led storytelling. At a time when children are increasingly shifting from traditional television to digital first viewing experiences, ZEE5 sees an opportunity to tell stories that are deeply rooted in Indian culture, mythology and values, while being produced with world-class animation standards.

Animation sits at the heart of this strategy, travelling seamlessly across generations, languages and markets while driving deep character affinity and long-term engagement. It is also one of the few formats that naturally brings families together, creating moments of co-viewing where parents can revisit stories and emotions from their own childhood alongside their children.

As children increasingly move to digital platforms, parental concerns around safety remain important. Through its 'Safe Bhi Fun Bhi' approach, KidZ combines dedicated child profiles, parental controls, PIN protected access and age-appropriate content curation to create a trusted environment that balances entertainment with positive values and learning.

Today, KidZ offers a growing catalogue of more than 140 titles across multiple languages, bringing together globally recognised franchises, international partnerships and homegrown stories. This approach will soon come to life through Shivlok Ke Kundakka Mandakka (SKM), a new animated series set to

premiere on KidZ in July. Blending mythology, humour, action and adventure, the series follows two mischievous Asura twins whose journey transforms them from pranksters into unlikely heroes.

Looking ahead, the platform sees significant opportunity in creating a broader ecosystem around kids entertainment through collaborations with creators, writers, animation studios and consumer facing partners. The long-term ambition is to nurture characters and worlds that can extend across formats and experiences while strengthening India's position as a creator of globally relevant kids IP.

Commenting on the vision, Chandan Khandelwal, Business Head, KidZ, said, "The kids' entertainment landscape is evolving rapidly, with audiences seeking stories that are culturally relevant and capable of extending beyond the screen. At KidZ, our focus is on building a trusted destination for purposeful entertainment through compelling storytelling, value-led experiences and original IP. With titles such as Chote Tara Ka Bada Gadar, FAB 5 and Shivlok Ke Kundakka Mandakka, we aim to create homegrown stories that encourage co-viewing and bring families together, creating shared experiences across generations. We believe India is uniquely positioned to make a meaningful contribution to the global kids' content ecosystem, and we are committed to building stories that can travel far beyond borders."

As viewing habits continue to evolve, ZEE5's bet on KidZ is rooted in a simple belief: the future of children's entertainment will be shaped not just by content volume, but by trusted environments, original IP and stories that can inspire audiences far beyond the screen.^{AX}

YE HAI SAFE AUR FUN BHI!

KidZ ON Z5



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Participating Studios



Karnataka Showcases AVGC-XR Excellence at Annecy & MIFA 2026

Karnataka is set to participate in Annecy International Animation Film Festival and MIFA 2026, the world's leading platform for the animation and AVGC-XR industry. The Karnataka Delegation will represent the state's dynamic AVGC-XR ecosystem, comprising industry leaders, studios, startups, academic institutions and government representatives.

The Karnataka Pavilion aims to showcase the state's capabilities in Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics and Extended Reality (AVGC-XR) to the global market.

Participation will provide an opportunity to position Karnataka as a preferred destination for content creation, co-production, outsourcing and investment. The pavilion is expected to facilitate B2B meetings, networking sessions and strategic partnerships with international studios, broadcasters, distributors and technology companies. The delegation will actively promote Karnataka's progressive AVGC-XR policies, robust talent pool and thriving innovation ecosystem.

A key focus will be to create avenues for global collaborations, market access and knowledge exchange for Karnataka-based companies and creative professionals. The initiative seeks to highlight the potential of Karnataka's homegrown intellectual properties (IPs), emerging startups and established studios on an international stage.

Participation at Annecy & MIFA is aligned with the state's vision of strengthening Karnataka's position as the AVGC-XR Capital of India and a globally competitive creative hub. Insights gained from the event will contribute towards enhancing industry-academia linkages, fostering innovation and supporting the long-term growth of the sector in Karnataka.

Expected Outcomes:

- International business leads and partnerships.
- Enhanced global visibility for Karnataka's AVGC-XR ecosystem.
- Opportunities for co-production and content distribution.
- Increased investor interest in Karnataka's creative economy.
- Stronger global networks for industry and academia.



Biren Ghose
Founder & CEO -Astra Studios,
President - ABAI

For 25 years, my Annecy experience has provided me with insights that this festival and market is renowned for. This event is all about relationships, new ideas and imagination and a market and screenings which becomes the annual melting pot of what's groundbreaking from new talent and technologies that make the animation genre increasingly the most coveted and enduring IP in entertainment content.

The Government of Karnataka and ABAI are hosting an India Pavilion as a springboard for studios and professionals and its homegrown startups to present their services to realize the next level of success for Indian Animation at MIFA 2026.



Dr. N. Manjula, IAS
Secretary to Government
Department of Electronics, Information Technology,
Biotechnology, and Science & Technology,
Government of Karnataka

“Karnataka’s Delegation at Anney MIFA 2026 is showcasing the depth of talent, technological capabilities, and entrepreneurial spirit that define our AVGC-XR ecosystem. Through strategic collaborations between government, industry, and academia, we aim to create global opportunities for Karnataka’s creative enterprises and strengthen the state’s position as a preferred destination for innovation and investment in the AVGC sector.”



Honourable Shri Priyank Kharge
Cabinet Minister Home, Information Technology &
Biotechnology, E-Governance,
Government of Karnataka

“Karnataka has been at the forefront of the AVGC-XR industry for nearly two decades, and our AVGC-XR Policy 3.0 reflects our continued commitment to creating an ecosystem where creativity, technology, and entrepreneurship can thrive.

At Anney 2026, we are showcasing the best of India—from promising startups and emerging IP creators to globally recognized industry leaders. Together, they represent the depth of talent and innovation that is positioning India as a major force in the global creative economy. We look forward to forging new partnerships and unlocking new opportunities that will accelerate the next chapter of growth for both Karnataka and India.”

Original IP Showcase – Karnataka’s Creative Storytelling Ecosystem

Aesuloid Media - Lacher

Unveiled at GAFX 2026, a sustainable kids’ lifestyle brand celebrating play, learning, and Indian craftsmanship. Backed by Karnataka’s Elevate PoC Grant, it will also showcase its original IP at MIFA Anney 2026.

Staunch Studios

Staunch Studios’ Ollie and the Bubble Heads is a 3D animated series following four mantle-dwelling humanoids and a young girl on a humorous adventure, created for global family audiences.

Broadvision

A leader in international co-productions since 2008, has backed acclaimed projects including Mia & Me and 100% Wolf. Its 2027 slate features Esther, Arvil - Poles Apart, and a new Kids & Family strategy.

DEMEG

Fira is a 3D animated short film by Demeg Studios, written and directed by Harsha Damerla. Set against a harsh winter backdrop, it explores a mother’s unconditional love, sacrifice, courage, and resilience.

Neo Entertainment Studios

Garuda: The Wings of the Divine is a mythological animated feature exploring Garuda’s destiny, while Sacred Legacy is an action-adventure game inspired by India’s ancient legends.

Plangle Studio

Unveiled at GAFX 2026, Nayanar showcases Plangle Studio’s vision of culturally rooted storytelling. Supported by ABAI and Karnataka’s creative ecosystem, it advances to Anney 2026 with Zygneic.

Sanskriti

Developing original educational & mythology-based content through GuruCool & Devikatha, The Legend of the Goddess, blending history, culture, adventure, and immersive storytelling for modern audiences.

Zebu Animation

Developing original Indian IPs including Wingstar, featuring Mizoram’s first female superhero, and The Wonderful Adventures of Suppandi, a 3D animated adaptation of the beloved Tinkle character.

Shining Cloud

Interactive Presentation Platform enhances sales & communication through AR/VR, interactive 3D content, immersive visualization, & digital storytelling, helping businesses deliver engaging, experience-driven customer presentations.

Arena Animation - Arena Originals

Empowers students to create and own original animation IPs through industry mentorship in storytelling, design, world-building, production, and pitching, fostering Indian creators and globally relevant content.

Studio Jatayu

Founded in 2022, Studio Jatayu creates original Indian-inspired IPs, including Academy of Gods and NIKO, developing globally appealing stories across animation, comics, publishing, licensing, and merchandise.

Studio56

Animation is producing Esther: Queen of Courage alongside projects including The Last Dinosaur, The Black Diamond Race, and Flora Buxton & Bear. The studio earned multiple 2026 Telly Awards, reinforcing its reputation for animation excellence.

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DISCOVER OUR WORK

India's animators storm Annecy with ghosts, grit and a great deal of guts

From a haunted Bengaluru market to a feathered rebel taking on a tyrant king, five new projects show why the world is finally watching Indian animation

By Binita Das

Forget snake charmers and Bollywood clichés. As India takes the stage as official partner country at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival 2026, it is sending five films that are stranger, sadder and considerably more interesting than the usual postcard version of the country. Ghosts haunt crumbling markets, ageing mothers wrestle with sarees, sparrows defy kings and a tree-planting ban triggers an uprising. Welcome to Mifa, Indian style.

Shaitaan, by Spruha Das



A 2D digital short set in the fading lanes of Russell Market, *Shaitaan* follows Aditya and his friend Mumtaaz as they investigate the demon of local legend that has supposedly stalked the market for generations. The film grew out of Das's childhood memories of weekly trips to the bazaar with her grandmother, and her dismay at watching the real Russell Market struggle through the pandemic and the relentless march of redevelopment. At its heart, she says, the film is about how human connection keeps such places alive, even as everything around them crumbles.

Funding niche, homegrown animation, Das notes drily, is no small feat; India could do with more labs and platforms to help first-timers like her find their feet. AniMela gets the credit for getting her to Annecy, and Das, by her own admission, is “absolutely stoked”.

The Myth of Data, by Dhruva Rao



This 2D hand-drawn series follows Ravi, a thirty something clinging to a cool-guy reputation built entirely on lies about a vanished friend named Data. As the persona unravels, Ravi is left facing the gap between the legend and the rather more ordinary man underneath.

Rao calls it a portrait of “a very specific time in the lives of a generation of Indians”, and part of a broader push for grown-up Indian animation where the characters actually look and talk like real people, rather than cartoon approximations of them. The trouble, as ever, is money and believers: an idea can only go so far without

backers willing to bet on adult animation. As for the Annecy jitters, Rao admits he has not had time to feel anything yet. “At some point, I’m going to answer ‘excited,’” he jokes.

Getting Ready, by Somnath Pal

A hand-drawn, paperless short about an elderly woman preparing for a festival ritual, even as her own body refuses to cooperate with her sari and her stubbornness. Inspired by Pal's ageing mother and aunts, the film turns a quiet, everyday struggle into something close to a meditation on dignity and ageing, all while tipping its hat to animation greats Richard Williams and Milt Kahl.

When silence speaks louder than words

A French animated film about a family of emotional misfits has made it to Anecy. Its creators say the story almost wrote itself.

By Pankti Vora

Blaise does not ask for much. He simply wants to avoid upsetting anyone. In doing so, he ends up a revolutionary, which is, when you think about it, a rather precise portrait of how ideological movements get their foot soldiers.

That quiet irony sits at the heart of Blaise, a French animated feature directed by Jean-Paul Guigue and Dimitri Planchon, selected for the Anecy International Animation Film Festival 2026, both under its prestigious Contrechamp category and the ACID section for independent cinema. For a film that began life as a gag strip in the magazine *Fluide Glacial*, it has travelled a considerable distance.

The story follows Blaise, a diffident 16-year-old navigating the wreckage of the Sauvage family. His father Jacques is consumed by how others perceive him. His mother Carole seethes with resentment. And Blaise, drawn into activism by a girl named Joséphine, drifts from anxious bystander to accidental firebrand, not out of conviction, but out of his pathological inability to say no. The film opens and closes on his nervous gaze, which tells you everything about where the emotional logic lands.

Planchon, who originated the comic strip nearly 20 years ago, did not set out to make something so emotionally loaded. The strip was a deadpan domestic comedy. When producer Alexandre Gavras approached him in 2015 to develop it into an animated series, Planchon brought in Guigue, and the two began pulling at threads they had not expected to find. Anxiety. Miscommunication. The quiet violence of belonging to a family that cannot hear itself think.



The Sauvage family

“The humour was still there,” Planchon has said, “but something heavier had grown underneath it.” The feature film became the only form capacious enough to hold all of it.

Neither director came to animation through the conventional route. Planchon, a graphic artist who worked in photomontage and comic strips, used paper cutouts to shift characters across panels, close enough to animation it turned out, that the transition felt less like a leap than a recognition. Guigue stumbled into it three decades ago after a chance encounter with a Paris studio while working in computer graphics. He never quite left. What keeps him there, he says,



is animation's particular freedom: entire worlds built by small teams, unconstrained by the logistics of live action.

The budget was a constraint of a different sort. With limited resources, both directors and their collaborators

ended up wearing multiple hats. Early production methods stalled and were scrapped. The team eventually stripped things back to the television technique they knew from the series, and found, in that discipline, a cleaner path to the film's vision.

The result is a work that resists easy categorisation, which is precisely why Anecy's Contrechamp section, designed for films that push against the grain, feels like the right home. *Blaise* is not a children's film, nor a conventional arthouse provocation. It is something quieter and more unsettling: a portrait of people so busy managing their image that they have lost the thread of who they actually are.

Blaise himself never quite finds it. But in that failure, Guigue and Planchon have found something rather more interesting a film that understands, with rueful precision, that the most dangerous thing a person can do is nothing at all. **AX**

The minds behind *Blaise*



A fire, a prison and a story that refuses to stay quiet

Ahead of its Annecy premiere, Hoda Sobhani and Beatriz Felix turn the Evin prison fire into hand-drawn testimony

By Pankti Vora

Some stories arrive with sirens. Others arrive in a letter, smuggled out between the lines of small talk, and take years to become a film. That Night belongs firmly to the second category, and by the time it reaches the screen, it carries the weight of a fire that Iran's own prison system could not be bothered to put out in time.

The animated documentary, directed by Hoda Sobhani, is built around the testimony of activist Neda Najji, who survived the 2022 blaze at Tehran's Evin prison. It lands at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival as part of a broader reckoning: the woman, life, freedom movement that pulled Iran's treatment of women into the world's newsfeed, whether the regime liked it or not.

Sobhani's own route to the project is suitably circuitous. A theatre degree in Tehran, a cinema masters at Sooreh University, several short films about women's everyday lives, then a move to America in 2019 for a documentary course at the University of California, Santa Cruz. That Night is her first post-graduation film, and her second made on American soil, a fact that says something about how far from home this story had to travel before it could be told properly.

Its origins lie in an earlier short, built from letters exchanged between Sobhani and Najji after Najji's first stint in prison in 2020. When Najji was released a second time, mid-movement, she had a new story to tell, a far darker one. An interview was arranged within days. What Sobhani heard convinced her this could not simply be filed away. A prison fire that the authorities left unattended for hours, she says, revealed a contempt for human life on an entirely new level.

That conviction came at a cost. Working from abroad, scrolling through protest footage while editing testimony of fire and fear, Sobhani admits the process repeatedly became too much to bear, though staying close to the material, she says, also kept her tethered to home.



Filmmaker
Hoda Sobhani

Wisely, the film does not attempt to be an encyclopaedia of the Evin fire. It stays inside one woman's account of it, with names and identifying details altered to protect the people involved, a sensible precaution when your subject matter is a regime not famous for its sense of humour about dissent.

The animation itself is where the real ingenuity lies. Brazilian animator Beatriz Felix had to find a visual language for things no camera could ever have captured: memory, dread,



the particular blankness of being interrogated while blindfolded. Her solution was elegant, Najji is rendered in solid, painted form, while her interrogator exists only as loose, unfinished linework, a man who is never quite allowed to become a person. Colour does its own quiet work too: pinks and reds around Najji, blues around the guards, slowly bleeding into purple as the story's power dynamics shift and blur.

One sequence stands out. As prisoners are beaten and described as falling "like leaves," Felix turns the image literal, a fallen body dissolves into a scattering of leaves that

multiply across the screen, conveying scale without ever showing a body count. It is the kind of image live-action simply cannot do tastefully, and animation does almost too well.

Felix calls the responsibility of animating someone else's trauma the project's hardest test; every creative flourish had to serve the testimony, not decorate it. To keep things honest, the team relied on rotoscoping, with Sobhani, friends and even Najji herself acting out scenes for reference, including the film's gut-punch opener, a child dragged by her hair for not wearing a headscarf.



Two women, one unspoken understanding

Underpinning all of it is trust: Najji's trust in Sobhani to tell her story straight, and the trust between director and animator to find images equal to the words. Without it, Sobhani says simply, the film would have been impossible.

Annecy will give *That Night* its European premiere, and with it, a global audience, many of whom will be hearing about the Evin fire for the first time, and some of whom will recognise rather more than they expected to. Sobhani hopes the film does two things: opens eyes to

what is happening inside Iran, and prompts a wider rethink of what prisons do to the people locked inside them. Modest aims, perhaps, for 80-odd minutes of hand-drawn grief and defiance, but then again, so was lighting a match in a cell block, and look where that ended up. **AX**



Prince Charming Can Wait

Canadian filmmaker Catherine Lepage reflects on love, vulnerability and self-acceptance in 'Ultra Strong'

By Pooja Raj Thakkar

Every girl grows up with an idea of what her ideal man should look like. When you're young and hopeful, the search for your own version of prince charming feels almost inevitable. Canadian filmmaker and illustrator Catherine Lepage was no different. She chased love through bad haircuts, reinventions of herself, awkward experiments, and countless disappointments, always convinced that the next attempt might finally be the right one.

The filmmaker believes that self-exploration can often spark reflection in others. That curiosity is perhaps why her work repeatedly gravitates toward anxiety, self-doubt, perfectionism, and the emotional grey areas that many people prefer to avoid.

"More than anything, I'm trying to understand myself better. It's by exploring my own grey areas that I learn the most," she reveals.



But somewhere along the way, the question changed. Instead of asking how she could become lovable for someone else, she began asking what she truly wanted for herself.

That deeply personal journey forms the heart of Lepage's latest animated short *Ultra Strong*, produced by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB).

Speaking to AnimationXpress, "The character's (Lepage in this case) journey in *Ultra Strong* is based on her ill-advised choices, dictated by others instead of by her inner voice, which she tries to stifle. The whole film hinges on that. She looks outside for the things she should be seeking within herself," Lepage explains.

While *Ultra Strong* tackles themes such as identity, self-worth, and emotional growth, it does so with a surprising lightness. "Humour is a huge part of my everyday life, but it's a side of me that I haven't really put forward in my work."

While *Ultra Strong* tackles themes such as identity, self-worth, and emotional growth, it does so with a surprising lightness. "Humour is a huge part of my everyday life, but it's a side of me that I haven't really put forward in my work."

Yet beneath the playful surface lies something far more layered. "I set up a fairly light, fun story, but things get darker as it moves along, reaching a point where you



Bad Haircuts That Shaped the Character



**Catherine Lepage,
Director of 'Ultra Strong'**

realise it's really not that funny."

Lepage never wanted the film's message to be mistaken for cynicism about relationships.

"I didn't want the film to be perceived as anti-male.

The character, Catherine, is disappointed with the promises fiction has sold her, but that doesn't mean she gives up on finding a partner."

Instead, the film arrives at a quieter and perhaps more meaningful conclusion. "Once her expectations become realistic and she finds security within herself, then she's ready for a relationship."

She laughs at the wisdom she has uncovered through her filmmaking process. "I feel like I'm sounding like a self-help manual, but I think everyone needs to remind themselves of this!"

That honesty, vulnerability, and willingness to laugh at herself have now earned Lepage one of animation's most prestigious recognitions. *Ultra Strong* has been selected for the Anney International Animation Film Festival's official competition.

"I'm thrilled about it," she exclaims. "It'll be my first time at Anney. I'm glad to see that my very personal style has been welcomed and recognised by this great festival."

If you're someone still searching for your own Prince Charming, Lepage has a message for you. – "I think you can be happy in a relationship, but first you have to accept who you are."

And perhaps that's the real strength at the core of *Ultra Strong*, not finding the perfect partner, but finding yourself first.^{AX}

The horror of impossible choices

A Spanish filmmaker brings psychological dread to Annecy's midnight short lineup, in black and white, and with the volume turned up

By Pooja Raj Thakkar



Some ideas will not leave you alone. They sit in the dark and wait. Imanol Ortiz López knows the feeling. *Hunger Room*, his animated short, began as a short story by horror writer David Jasso, a psychological nightmare with roots in something uncomfortably real. Jasso had drawn from personal experience before twisting it into something surreal and brutal. That collision of autobiography and dread is what hooked Ortiz López. He filed it away and waited until he could do it justice. When he finally did, he stripped out all colour. Black and white only. For most filmmakers, colour is the primary emotional instrument. For Ortiz López, its absence became the instrument instead.

The film premieres on 24 June in Annecy's Grande Salle, Bonlieu, as part of the festival's midnight short lineup. Close to a thousand people are expected to watch it for the first time in one of animation's most storied rooms. For a filmmaker who founded his production company, Orlok Films, only in 2023,



Imanol Ortiz López
Director of 'Hunger Room'

specifically to bring his stranger visions to life, the moment carries considerable weight.

Hunger Room is, at its core, about parenthood pushed to its limits. A painful reckoning with sacrifice, love, and impossible choices, it poses a question the audience is left to sit with long after the credits: can love alone keep a family alive when survival itself is in question? The story, Ortiz López says, felt "universal and deeply human", which is, of course, what makes it so unsettling.

His cinematic reference points are unapologetically ambitious. German expressionism looms large: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, F W Murnau's *Nosferatu*, Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*. Then the modern Koreans, Park Chan-wook, Bong Joon-ho, Na Hong-jin, filmmakers who understand that dread is most effective when it is grounded in the recognisable. What connects all of them, for Ortiz López, is an understanding that horror is not decoration. It is excavation. A way of getting at wounds that ordinary storytelling politely avoids.

But it is sound, more than image, that he considers his sharpest tool. "I sometimes focus even more on sound than visuals," he says, and he means it. The theory is straightforward and correct: fear lives in what is just out of sight, the breath behind a closed door, the silence that stretches one beat too long. *Hunger Room* is built on that principle. The sound design does not illustrate the horror; it generates it, leaving the audience's imagination to finish the job. What remains unseen, Ortiz López knows, is almost always worse.

The film arrives at Annecy not as a calling card but as a statement of intent. Orlok Films already has *Mono Rojo* (Red Monkey) in development, another animated short, this time leaning harder into expressionist visuals, and Ortiz López is also preparing his first live-action feature, *#elreto* (*#thechallenge*), before the year is out.

"We have more projects than time," he says, laughing.

Given what he has already dragged out of the dark and onto the screen, that is very good news indeed. **AX**



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