Culture



In Seth Worley's "Sketch," a father, son and daughter are reeling from the death of the children's mother. When the girl's sketchbook falls into a mysterious pond and her grief monster drawings come to life, the family must work together to vanquish the creatures that have been unleashed. (Angel Studios)



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August 23, 2025

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After watching director Seth Worley's "Sketch," the phrase "word became flesh" may take on a new meaning.

The film introduces us to Taylor (Tony Hale), the father of Amber (Bianca Belle) and Jack (Kue Lawrence). We learn that the children's mother recently died, and the three are grieving in their own respective, siloed ways; Amber's happens to involve drawing terrifying monsters, often even depicting scenes of annoying classmates being harmed or eaten by them. But when her sketchbook falls into a mysterious pond, her drawings begin to come to life. Amber and Jack, along with Taylor and his sister Liz (D'Arcy Carden), must work through their family trauma to vanquish the bellicose creatures that have been unleashed.

NCR spoke with Worley over Zoom about the film's journey from short film to full-length feature, the balance of horror and humor and the weighty responsibility of creating for kids.

This conversation has been edited and condensed for length and clarity.

***NCR*: This project has been in development for over eight years and has expanded upon your short film, "Darker Colors." Can you speak to how the story has evolved?**

Worley: The feature script existed before the short. I had this belief that you're either going to make a really great short and then a disappointing feature, or you're going to make a disappointing short and maybe never get a feature made. I wouldn't say the short that I ended up making was disappointing; "Darker Colors" consisted of a couple of scenes from the feature script. The only problem was that it lacked all the emotional context for the story, which, if you've seen our movie, you'll see is really important. The exploration of interiority for the characters is integral to the success of the story.

I learned the things that I didn't want to do. For instance, the kids in the short are amazing, but they're a lot younger, and for the feature I knew I wanted to age up the kids. I wanted the movie to be more of a fun thrill ride less of the moodiness of the short.

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You weren't afraid to go horrific in this film. The final monster is terrifying, and other scenes are also frightening. How did you find a way to lace the horror and humor together?

What's funny is that up until the release, I didn't know if the movie was scary or not. When I was designing the monsters, I wanted to make them equally threatening and goofy-looking at the same time. We were trying to strike this balancing act where the film could be both scary and funny.

The team and I strove to make this a hard PG but never a PG-13. So that helped guide our creative choices around how to balance those two ends. We wanted as many people as possible, of as many ages as possible, to see it.

Also, I distinctly remember seeing specific movies that had scenes that were terrifying to me as a kid. Those became my favorite movies in the world. Those scary moments allowed me to be both fascinated and to confront terrifying things. I'm not saying we try to scar children on purpose, but we give them a chance to survive formidable things, and just maybe be inspired to create themselves.



Worley says he was motivated to make a film that empowered parents to support their children's use of art and creative self-expression in channeling complex emotions. (Angel Studios)

How do you consider stewardship when you're telling these private stories for consumption by a wider audience?

By making a movie, you're hoping to have eyes and ears on it. You are always, to some degree, educating people on something, especially if your audience contains kids. Every movie I saw growing up taught me something about humanity, comedy, relationships, etc. Especially when kids are in the theater, you have a responsibility to keep in mind what the journey is going to be like for them, what you want them to walk away with.

Tony and I were adamant that we wanted to make a movie for everybody, but we wanted kids and adults both to walk out of the movie feeling empowered and inspired to use art and creative self-expression to channel their more complex emotions. Even more importantly, we wanted to empower parents to create a safe space for their kids to be able to do that.

"*Sketch*" *is now in theaters everywhere.*