



This Neil Gaiman Story Almost Got Adapted by Pixar



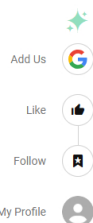
By Rachel Sandell Published Jun 11, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT

Rachel Sandell is an experienced editor and proofreader with a love for language and storytelling. A graduate of the creative writing MFA program, The Rainier Writing Workshop, she is the author of five short stories and analyzes the different facets of fiction her spare time. She's also a huge...



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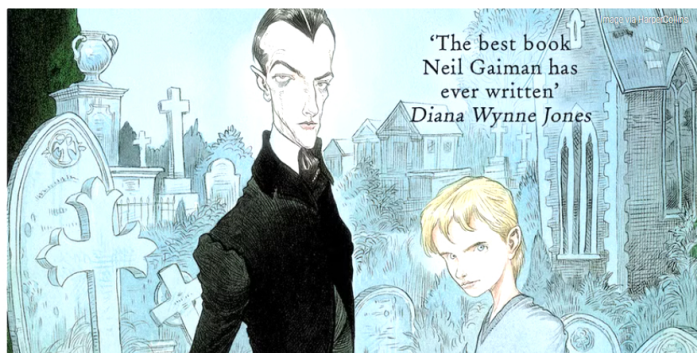
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Pixar's films have gone down in history as tear-jerkers, stellar examples of emotional storytelling, and top-notch animated media. They've spearheaded many innovative projects over the years, not the least of which is the very first computer-animated full-length feature film in 1995 with *Toy Story*. However, in 2012, an opportunity arose to go further with creative storytelling, taking Pixar to places it's never been before.

Neil Gaiman's 2008 novel, *The Graveyard Book*, was an award-winning addition to his impressive collection of fiction, and for a while, it seemed as though Pixar would bring the story to the big screen. But in an unfortunate turn of events, the project was scrapped, leaving *The Graveyard Book* unadapted and leaving would-be audiences disappointed.

What Is 'The Graveyard Book' About?



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Loosely inspired by *The Jungle Book*, *The Graveyard Book* tells the story of Nobody "Bod" Owens, who lives as normal a life as you can when you live in a literal graveyard. Following the murder of his entire family, Bod is adopted and raised by a variety of ghosts, including his guardian and father figure, Silas.

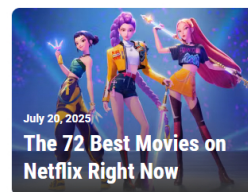
Bod, his ghost family, and a colorful array of ghoulish characters (including werewolves, vampires, and actual ghouls) go on several spooky adventures, from a city of ghouls to encounters with the creature known as the Sleer to the deadly Jacks of All Trades. Throughout it all, Bod grows up, makes friends, and comes faces to face with the one responsible for killing his family. Darkly funny, adventurous, and imaginative, *The Graveyard Book* is a coming-of-age story that feels both timeless and unique.

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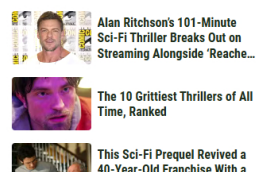
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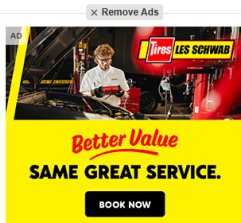




Neil Gaiman has written a plethora of amazing reads, including well-known stories like *American Gods*, *Stardust*, *Norse Mythology*, *The Sandman*, *Good Omens*, and, perhaps the most relevant to this particular conversation, *Coraline*. It isn't uncommon for his work to be adapted to film and TV, as his unique author voice (pairing humor well with dark and mysterious tones) matches well with visual media. In fact, *The Graveyard Book* itself includes a number of beautiful illustrations by **Dave McKean**, which fit incredibly well with the text.

In the same spooky realm as stories like *Coraline*, *The Graveyard Book* places the reader in Bod's shoes as he exists in a surreal place between life and death. Since its publication in 2008, the book has won plenty of awards, including the John Newbery Medal, the Carnegie Medal for Writing, and the Hugo Award for Best Novel.

'The Graveyard Book' in Pixar's Hands



The film rights to *The Graveyard Book* were acquired by Disney originally, with director **Henry Selick** hired for the project. Selick had already proven his ability to tell darkly charming stories by directing *The Nightmare Before Christmas* in 1993 and *Coraline* in 2009. His directorial style would have been the perfect match for the tone of *The Graveyard Book*.

The film would have been Pixar's very first book-to-film adaptation. Around the same time, Selick was working on an unknown and untitled stop-motion animated project for Disney, **which was cancelled in 2012**. Though confirmation is hard to find, rumors later circulated that this unknown animated film and *The Graveyard Book* might have been one and the same, as *The Graveyard Book* was put on hold not long after, and the rights went right back to Disney. That point, however, is speculation that's over ten years old.

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With the success of *Coraline* in 2009, a follow-up film like *The Graveyard Book*, with a similar dark tone but unique characters and plot lines, was all but a guaranteed success as well. It would be **the first adapted film for Pixar** and was intended to be stop-motion like *Coraline*, according to Gaiman. In the hands of Pixar, who had already proved its mettle with films like the first three movies in the *Toy Story* trilogy, *The Incredibles*, *Up*, *Ratatouille*, and *Finding Nemo* in the years prior, could have handled the emotional bits of *The Graveyard Book* nicely. The film would have been somewhat of a departure from their established tone, but there's no doubt the studio could have handled **the darker tones of a Neil Gaiman story**, especially with Henry Selick at the helm.

Unfortunately, the game of hot potato from Disney to Pixar and back to Disney didn't bode well for a finished film. The project was put on hold, and Selick started working on other projects, leaving poor Bod and his ghostly family and friends lingering in the graveyard. Several attempts were made by Disney to resurrect the project over the years, but nothing came to fruition. That is, until 2022.

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'The Graveyard Book's Adaptation Could Be on the Horizon



There have been plenty of false starts plaguing the development of this project, but in 2022, news broke that *The Graveyard Book* was once again **in development**, this time **for a release on Disney+**. Unfortunately, Henry Selick is no longer involved, but Disney has procured a replacement in **Marc Forster**, who worked on *World War Z* and *Finding Neverland*, among others. Before Forster, there was even [talk of Ron Howard directing the film](#).

Because Forster has mainly worked on live-action projects, **this version of *The Graveyard Book*** will be live-action as well, instead of the animated project that was in development at Pixar. Neil Gaiman is listed as a writer on the project, which is a good sign that the film will be true to the book. Forster's previous work could also be a good sign for the future of *The Graveyard Book* film adaptation. With him directing the project, the film has less of a chance of being toned down for Disney, like many other fairy tale adaptations that have come from Disney's animation studio.

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However, it's still a shame that *The Graveyard Book* is now out of Pixar's hands when seeing the story play out in animation would have added an extra dose of charm. For a story that is already well-loved and written by a popular author that has brought so many creative stories and characters to life, *The Graveyard Book* would have benefited from Selick's direction and the animators at Pixar. While it's exciting to see that Bod might actually make it through the development process for Disney+, it's still a shame that we'll never know what might have become of a different version.

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