

HOPE: THROUGH WORDS AND ACTION IN THE ANIMATED SHORT ‘PIGASUS’

By Asis Sethi — August 4, 2026 ⌚ 8 Mins Read



‘Pigasus’, the award-winning animated short film produced by Burnaby, B.C.’s Arcana Studio and directed by Sean Patrick O’Reilly (*Go Fish, Locked*), has secured a remarkable 200 festival screenings. The film, which is now available to watch for free around the world via YouTube, has travelled the globe and won more than 65 awards. Based on the beloved book ‘Pigasus: The Lost Paradise Elysium – Battle for Evermore’ by Don McDowell, the film has already struck a chord with audiences around the world, receiving praise for its heartwarming blend of adventure, fantasy, and powerful life lessons. Since its release, the film has screened at prestigious festivals, gaining recognition for its artistic excellence and universal themes.

At the heart of ‘Pigasus’ is the coming-of-age adventure of a special little pig who is on a journey to fulfil his destiny. The film follows Pigasus as he struggles with his own faults and fears. Directed by Sean Patrick O’Reilly, written by Don McDowell, and produced by BC-based Arcana Studio, ‘Pigasus’ brings McDowell’s book to life with stunning visuals and an emotionally resonant narrative.

Audiences around the world have embraced the themes of the film, which speak to timeless human values and offer a sense of hope and connection in times of uncertainty. Here’s our conversation with director Sean Patrick O’Reilly and writer Don McDowell about the words and how the words came about on screen.

While many Canadian studios work primarily as service providers, Arcana has focused on creating and owning original IP. Why was that an important choice?

Sean: Service work keeps the lights on, but owning your intellectual property is how you build a lasting legacy and real equity. From day one, I wanted Arcana to be a home for original storytelling. When you own the IP, you own the vision. Building worlds from the ground up, controlling the narrative, and retaining the long-term value of what you create. It's definitely the harder path, but it's infinitely more rewarding.

Sean, what immediately stood out to you in terms of wanting to do an adaptation of the book?

Sean: 'Pegasus' has a fable-like quality that practically begs for animation. Beyond the fantasy of a flying pig, the core emotional arc, learning to embrace what makes you different, feels universal. I could visually see the main beats of the film, and I knew we could turn it into something visually striking and emotionally impactful.



Don, what inspired you to write the original book?

Don: I had the privilege of growing up in Shasta Valley, and Mt Shasta has always been a source of inspiration. When I was 19, I was out on a small hill to view the Full Summer Moon rise that literally looks like it rolls up the side and settles right above the West Peak & East Crater of Mt Shasta. That evening, a single thunder & lightning storm slowly drifted towards and drifted atop Shasta. The only storm in the summer sky! At that point I had what I can only call a "Vision" of the entire story. Then the

storm drifted off to the east, leaving a beautiful full moon and a starlit sky above Shasta Valley & Mt. Shasta. It has been a life's passion since that night to create the story and share what I believe is a "Gift" with the world.

There is a fine balance between fantasy and deeply personal themes. How challenging is it to achieve that in a short film?

Sean: In a short film, you don't have the luxury of time, so every single frame has to pull double duty. Fantasy provides the spectacle and the canvas, but the emotional core has to ground it immediately. The challenge is stripping away unnecessary backstory and letting the visual storytelling carry the emotional weight. If the audience doesn't care about the character's internal struggle within the first two minutes, the fantasy elements won't save it.

***Pigatus* talks about finding light within ourselves. Why do you think audiences around the world continue to respond to stories centered on hope?**

Sean: Because hope is a universal language, especially in uncertain times. No matter where you live or what culture you come from, everyone understands what it feels like to face darkness or self-doubt. Stories centered on hope remind us that our vulnerabilities can become our greatest strengths. When a story touches that raw human element, it transcends geographic and cultural boundaries.

Don: My Hope is that our audience will experience through our story how important Faith, Hope, Love, and Family are to every aspect of our lives and our relationships with family, friends, and God. That good does defeat evil, that hope is the hero in all of us, and that Love is truly the greatest gift to be both given and received. That Faith is believing, especially when all seems lost, and that by the Grace of God, together with Faith, Hope, Love, Family, Forgiveness and Laughter, Life will always lead to a "Happily Ever After".

"With the Faith to Believe in Love – Life becomes Magic"



Two hundred festival selections is an extraordinary achievement. The film has won more than 65 awards. Did you ever imagine the film would travel this far?

Sean: You always hope a film resonates, but a response like this is humbling. When you're in the thick of production, tweaking frames and working through edits, you're just focused on making the best story possible. Seeing *Pigasus* connect with audiences and juries across 200 festivals globally proved to us that heartfelt, creator-driven stories still stand out in a crowded market.

Sean, how do you decide what to change and what to keep when adapting a book? What important conversations did the two of you have during the creative process?

Sean: Adapting a book means translating internal thoughts into visual action. You have to keep the emotional soul and core themes of the book intact, but be ruthless about adapting the narrative structure so it moves naturally on screen. Don and I had great conversations early on about what was non-negotiable emotionally versus what we could reframe visually to maximize the medium of animation. It was always about honoring the spirit of his original story while giving it a dynamic cinematic life.

Don, the core of the book remains intact in the film, doesn't it?

Don: "The Adventures of Pigasus" is a classic, but unique story of good versus evil, which draws strong analogies between every character and their "real life" counterparts, continually emphasizing that what is good is good and what is bad need not be. Always striving for the highest of moral values. Most of all, "The Adventures of Pigasus" is a story about believing. Believing in faith, hope, love, and

family. Believing in all that is good and having the conviction and perseverance to believe even when faced with the “Blackness of the Darkness”. Believing that Good does conquer Evil and knowing that having the Faith to Believe in Love, Life does become Magic.



Independent animation often competes against major studios with enormous budgets. Where do smaller and mid-sized studios have an advantage?

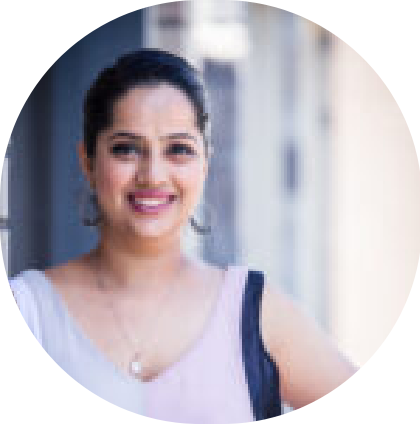
Sean: Agility and creative freedom. Major studios have massive resources, but they also have massive overhead and layers of corporate approval that can dilute a unique vision. Independent and mid-sized studios like Arcana can move fast, take creative risks, and tell distinct, personal stories that big studios might find too niche or risky. We can put the passion directly on screen without it getting sanitized along the way.

What opportunities do you see for Canada’s animation industry over the next decade? What advice would you give emerging Canadian creators who dream of building their own IP?

Sean: Canada has world-class talent, and the global appetite for original animated content across platforms is higher than ever. The opportunity over the next decade is for Canadian creators to step out from behind the service curtain and claim ownership of their narratives globally. My advice to emerging creators is simple: don’t wait for permission. Protect your ownership, build a strong proof-of-concept, and learn the business side of the industry as thoroughly as you learn the creative side.

What's next for *Pigasus*? Do you see it being expanded into a feature or a series?

Sean: The incredible reception from the short has shown us there's a real demand for more of this world. We are actively exploring options to expand 'Pigasus' into a broader format as the universe Don built has plenty of depth for a feature film or an episodic series, and we're looking at the best partners to take that next step with us.



Asis Sethi is a magazine publisher and filmmaker with 17+ years in publishing and over a decade in journalism. She creates impactful, culturally driven content across print, digital, and film.