

Take My Parents, Please!

It's hard to resist the charms of Disney Channel's *The Replacements*—a clever new show with a killer premise, hip character designs and madcap situations!

Children's author and illustrator Dan Santat had a great idea one day as he was cleaning up his art studio and came across some old comic books. He saw one of those ads where you could order whoopee cushions and x-ray goggles and thought what would happen if kids could actually order a cooler set of parents from an agency. "I thought about this kid who's fed up with his parents making him follow their rules, and one day he actually gets to order cooler parents—like a wrestler dad and a cowgirl mom," recalls Santat. "Of course, in the end, he learns a lesson that your parents may be hard on you, but they wish the best for you even though they might not be what you perceive as cool."

Flashforward several years later, and Santat found himself pitching a show around town based on that very idea. Although the premise evolved through the development process, his idea inspired one of the season's more original new comic toons—*The Replacements*, which premiered last month on Disney Channel. Exec produced by Jack Thomas (*The Fairly OddParents*) and directed by Heather Martinez (*SpongeBob SquarePants*), the 2D animated show follows the adventures of orphan siblings Riley and Todd who end up with a British spy mom called

Agent K, a daredevil dad and a smart-alecky talking spy car called C.A.R.T.E.R. The kids also discover that they can switch any grown-up in their world by

calling Conrad Fleem, owner of a mysterious company named Fleemco. The show's A-list voice cast includes Nancy Cartwright (Todd), Grey Delisle (Riley), Kath Soucie (Agent K), Daran Norris (Dick Darling) David McCallum (C.A.R.) and Lauren Tom (Tasumi).

"The funny thing is you see the storyboard animatics and you think, 'Wow that's



cool," says Santat. "Then they add the music, the voices and the sounds, and you think that you can't possibly get any more excited. You get this surreal feeling when they put up the website and you think to yourself, 'Wow—am I really seeing this?'"

Santat believes that there's a lot in store for the adults who watch the show as well. "I can't recall another show like this that offers the kids the opportunity to push the adults around. Usually, in similar situations, there's a kid with a superstar. He can play with the big boys. Ben 10, for example, has the wristband with powers—he can fight the evil super

forces, but he's still a kid!"

Thomas, a former stand-up comic who cut his teeth in animation on Butch Hartman's *The Fairly OddParents*, says he thinks the

show has all the ingredients of a great comedy. "I'm really pleased with all the comic elements, the storylines, the great characters," says Thomas. "We really like to come up with material that will appeal to kids and their parents—just like a lot of the shows I grew up with."

Both Thomas and Santat also believe that the cartoony traditionally animated style of the show is a throwback to some of the classic toons of the past 30 years. "The bulk of the animation is done at Toon City in Taiwan," says Santat. "At one point, we were contemplating doing the show in Flash, but the producers really wanted to stay true to the hand-painted style of my illustrations."

Besides seeing his first TV idea become a hot toon property this fall, Santat is continuing to illustrate Rhea Perlman's *Otto Undercover* kids' adventure series for Harper Collins. As if all that doesn't keep him busy enough, he is still holding on to his day job at Santa Monica-based videogame company Treyarch.

So what words of wisdom does he have for all those bushy-tailed art school and animation students? "I got the best advice from one of my Art Center's advertising teachers, Roy Young. He told us, 'You either want to suck the worst or be the best and different from all the others. Nobody remembers the person who did the thing in the middle.' When I was in art school, everybody wanted to draw the best-looking car or the best-looking characters. Nobody talked about the characters' histories. The image was first and the story was secondary. What I believe now, is that story should always come first. Remember that form should always follow function." Now discuss that as you order yourselves a new set of parents. ■

The Replacements airs Saturdays at 8 p.m. on The Disney Channel.

