My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic developer & creative director Exclusive Season 1 retrospective interview / Q&A for Equestria Daily Interviewer / coordinator: Tekaramity (Tekaramity@equestriadaily.com) Special assistance, contributions, and support by: Phoe (Phoe@equestriadaily.com) Additional contributions by: Cereal Velocity (Cerealvelocity@equestriadaily.com) Equestria Daily administrator: Sethisto (Sethisto@gmail.com) My Little Pony and all related characters and indicia are ©1982-2011 Hasbro.

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1. Hello, Lauren. Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview and for taking the time

to talk with Equestria Daily. Let's begin then. First, let's discuss the steps that led to the

the My Little Pony franchise? When I was 6, I saw the first large and brown "My Pretty Pony" toy in the store. I was a typical horse-obsessed little girl already, but I liked tall, graceful thoroughbreds and Arabians, so the

pudgy pony wasn't quite as interesting to me. But when they came out with the multi-colored ones, I couldn't help but reconsider. They were too darn cute and I just I had to have the Pretty Parlor with

Peachy, my first little pony. Then, when Hasbro came out with the unicorns and pegasi, there was no going back. Horses and fantasy? I kissed Strawberry Shortcake and Barbie goodbye, and soon, 2. Did Hasbro contact you regarding a leading role in their new Friendship is Magic reboot of

I was spending every penny I was given or earned on collecting every pony thing that came out. My Little Pony, or did you approach them? What did they present in their case to you? I had approached Hasbro to pitch a micro-series pop opera for my Milky Way and the Galaxy Girls project, and it prompted Lisa Licht from Hasbro to ask me if I'd be interested in My Little Pony. She handed me one of the recent DVDs (Princess Promenade) and asked me to watch it to see if there

was "anything you could do with it." They wanted a reboot, and she was really pushing to match the right talent with the right project. Hasbro was just coming off the success of the Michael Bay's first Transformers movie and Lisa was interested in finding similar "creative stewards" - talent that would re-invent and lend their unique voice to their other properties. The possibility of this sort of creative trust and freedom and Lisa's belief in this approach really piqued my interest. 3. Following up on that, why did you decide to spearhead the show? What factors secured

your interest and confidence in the high quality and wider appeal of Friendship is Magic? and I literally referenced the characterizations and stories I made up for myself when I was little.

The characters you see in the show were based entirely on the personalities I gave certain toys. that my own inner eight-year-old was my personal focus group. they said "yes!" Developing animation for TV is often (though not always) a grueling and directed their own pilots while no longer knowing what they were trying to say or who their

disappointing process, and you can end up miles away from your vision. I've known people who've characters were after having it developed to death. I didn't want to be in that position. I was also so passionate about making quality entertainment for girls, and I didn't want to be responsible for adding to the pile of entertainment garbage that's so often targeted toward them. I was always waiting for things on MLP to take this sort of bad turn during the development process, but they

never, ever did. Hasbro was kind of awesome that way. 4. So, you signed on as developer and creative director of MLP:FiM - but even you couldn't

The development of this show and the greenlight to pre-production were just about exactly one whole year apart. While developing the concept for the show, I personally produced a 40+ page "pitch bible." I was hired to do this on my own, so I was free to hire the help I wanted with the budget I was given. I hired two artists to help me with this early phase. Martin Ansolobehere, with whom I had worked on Powerpuff Girls and Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends, did some adorable initial background concepts for this bible. And my friend Paul Rudish, a key creative for shows like Dexter's Laboratory, Powerpuff Girls, Samurai Jack, the first Clone Wars and Symbionic Titan, assisted me with conceptualization and art development. In particular, I remember an amazing sketch he did of pegasi romping across clouds to make it rain. This inspired me to come up with the concept of the ponies controlling the weather and otherwise being stewards of their

world. He also came up with the initial version of Nightmare Moon. Paul is a creative powerhouse, and I felt very fortunate to work with him. This version of the bible consisted of art by Martin, Paul and myself, and I did all the writing. A little after the bible was first presented, I was asked to do some more visual development, and I hired Dave Dunnet and Lynne Naylor. Dave's first background designs (colored by Martin) all made it into the show and became the defining reference point for the art direction. Lynne designed the final Nightmare Moon and Luna. And of course, my husband Craig McCracken listens to me gripe, pontificate and bounce around ideas about whatever I'm working on, so his influence is spread throughout.

they wanted Jayson Thiessen to be the supervising director, I felt very confident that they could do what I was looking for. Together, Jayson, Wootie (James Wooton) and I made a two-minute short to demonstrate what the show could look and feel like - and sometime later, Hasbro secured Studio B to produce the series. Once the show was greenlit, I was able to hand-pick my writing team (with Hasbro and Hub's approval), most of whom I'd worked with on Powerpuff or Foster's. The rest of the artistic team was put together by Studio B and Jayson. Jayson endorsed Ridd Sorenson as art director, and I approved him. Voice actors and composers were all auditioned, Jayson and I endorsed our picks and Hasbro and the Hub made the final calls. There were only a couple picks we disagreed on, but obviously, it all worked out great. 5. In the pre-production planning process, who brought about most of the decisions

regarding the format and layout of the show (2D Flash animation in 22-minute episodes)? During this critical stage, how much of the show's conception was due to the team at DHX Media, and what specific requests did Hasbro issue regarding their franchise and content?

I pushed for Flash and Hasbro trusted me. I wanted 22 minute episodes, but briefly the plan was for 11s. Ticket Master was actually the very first script and was written before the show was greenlit, and it was originally 11 minutes. Hasbro changed its mind eventually - I can't remember why. I was

glad. I prefer 22s. By the time pre-production began, I had the concepts for the show already nailed down in my finalized bible. I had finished development, which included the characters, their personalities and designs, main locations, tone, several premises and three scripts - I had them all ready to go. Once we were greenlit, the Studio B team was brought on and it was less about developing and more about MAKING the episodes. I went up to Vancouver to meet with the team and give out initial direction. Ridd and his designers then started expanding on the art direction and Jayson and Wootie started building the astounding Flash builds for the main characters while starting storyboards. While they were doing that, Rob Renzetti and I started the script process with our

used to. I felt so fortunate to have Jayson and Ridd in Vancouver. It would have surely been a huge mess without their expertise to guide the team to achieve what I was looking for. All the work, when done, was sent to me via the Internet for notes, revisions, and final approval. There were times I would have liked to have just walked down the hall and talk to an artist about revisions, but I had to do it all via email, which took longer and lacked the luxury of back-and-forth. There was a lot of trial and error to work through in the beginning, and I ended up doing a lot of designing and storyboarding myself because I couldn't just tell people what I wanted to see. Another challenge was meeting the perceived needs of our young target demographic. We had to

figure out how to make the more adventure-y shows compelling and exciting without being scary. It

took some extra thought and a combination of careful storytelling, lots of jokes, and appropriate, appealing designs. Tone adjustments helped as well - like lightening a scary situation with humor and whimsical design, or making an otherwise non-threatening scene more tense with art direction,

Similarly, there was also worry about seeming mean - and I don't mean cruel or dastardly, I mean slightly rude or mildly insulting. We had EI (Educational and Informational) standards to adhere to, and character behavior that was considered OK in shows I'd worked on previously was suddenly

music, and proper timing.

The Hub for any further adjustments.

and Rob?

production?

and get more refined.

come out of nowhere.

obvious results?

did?

FiM?

unique in that it is still extremely appealing, pleasant, and devoid of cooties, if you know what I mean.;) 7. Tell us about some of the major contributors at this point and throughout the show's run. Jayson Thiessen was the supervising director for Season 1 and has succeeded you as showrunner for Season 2. As supervising director, what was his primary responsibility, and how did the chain of production run from Hasbro through you to Jayson and the other leaders?

Rob Renzetti was a big contributor, and, of course, Ridd, Jayson and Wootie. Rob and I handled all of the story development and scripts down in Los Angeles. Once they were done and approved by Hasbro and The Hub, we'd get them recorded, and hand them off to Jayson and Wootie to begin

the production work. Jayson would supervise his team in Vancouver and send me the work at each phase (design, color, storyboard, animatic, animation rough cut) for direction and/or revisions and then make sure my revisions were put in place. Each of these phases would then go to Hasbro and

8. Rob Renzetti has contributed to many cartoons over the past two decades - including 2 Stupid Dogs, Dexter's Laboratory, and his own My Life as a Teenage Robot. How did you

between top decision-makers (such as you and the folks at The Hub) and the actual writers

I was so thrilled when we got Rob on the show! He's extremely talented, and having run his own show in the past, very experienced and knowledgeable. Rob and I came up with and wrote all of the story premises. Once approved, Rob and I decided who to assign each script to and spent a whole day with the writer, just the three of us, planning the story of each episode together. The writers started writing, Rob and I gave notes and sometimes did revisions at each phase (outline, first draft, second draft). Then the outlines and scripts went to Hasbro and The Hub for notes, further

collaborate with him in his role as story editor, and how did that writing process flow

revisions and final approval. If the notes from Hasbro and The Hub were light, usually Rob handled the revisions himself. Once approved, the recorded scripts were sent to Studio B for the next phase of production. 9. Sarah Wall is the producer of Friendship and Magic and other DHX Media productions. What roles did she and the other DHX leaders play in the creation of Friendship is Magic? Similarly, what aspects of the show's first season drew chiefly from crew suggestions? Sarah manages the day to day production, budget, and schedules; and she and the production staff made sure the artists got the material they needed when they needed it. I'm amazed at the work producers do; it's so much to juggle.

Whether or not a story warranted a song was decided in the story meeting. In the writers' room, Rob, the writer, and I would plan what information needed to be communicated in each song and discuss what sort of tone the number should be. Then it was up to the individual writers to compose their own lyrics for the songs in their scripts. Once the lyrics were approved (usually along with the whole script), Daniel came in. I would give him some brief direction at the start - then he'd come back with an initial recording (usually with a temp singer). He would sometimes make small adjustments to lyrics to suit the music better. I don't recall giving him many notes that were beyond tweaks, except for when we had to ask him to make the Cutie Mark Crusader theme song WORSE - poor Daniel! But it was an essential story point that their performance was legitimately

bad. Once all was approved, he produced the final records.

world. As with any show, it was a very collaborative effort.

greenlit, we'd even be working on as many as 32 at once.

testament to Hasbro that they put their faith in us as they did.

humor to Rarity that was unexpected and wonderful.

worked on a schedule so fast.

estimated?

be worth mentioning.

imperfect?

13 needs to be ready for design right away, which means the script needs to be done, and script 14 needs to be ready just one week later. It's very much run like an assembly line. A new episode had to begin every single week to keep the process running, so everyone on the team had work. It's especially trying on those of us who are supervising all aspects of the show. On any given week I was coming up with a premise, calling notes on an outline, calling notes on a first draft, revising a final draft, revising designs, recording and episode, revising a storyboard, calling notes on an animatic, spotting music, reviewing and calling notes on music, and finally delivering the final episode. And each of these steps was for a completely different episode. On most productions, this is actually a 2 week process, but we had to make it work as a 1 week process. I've never

14. What were some of the greatest triumphs you experienced during those precious first stages of actual production? Likewise, what were some of the most difficult obstacles to

overcome? Which elements turned out unexpectedly better or worse than initially

Sparkle's journey to Ponyville and her triumph over Nightmare Moon with the help of her newfound friends and the virtues represented in the Elements of Harmony. Afterward, the season continued to hold a certain level of continuity but meandered from story to story as a episodic romp. Why'd the approach change, and how did this impact production and creative input? What do you believe emerged as the strongest component of the new direction; alternately, what do you believe you could have accomplished had the show stayed on its first course? This is a good opportunity to clear up a bit of a rumor. Something I said on my dA page turned into an interesting Internet game of telephone; consequently, a lot of fans now seem to think that I had a grand scheme for a big, dramatic, serialized magical-girl style of a show. Actually, it was always my intention to have the show partially "adventure stories" and partially "relationship stories," as I called them in my initial pitch bible. I had thought that maybe a third of the episodes could be more like

Dragonshy, or the end of Feeling Pinkie Keen, or even have this creepy thread through them like Stare Master. But, ultimately, fewer than a quarter of the episodes had this adventure aspect to it. There were several reasons why. For example, restrictions on what was considered too scary for our younger demographic put limitations of the types of stories we could tell. The accelerated schedule also made it difficult - plot heavy episodes take too long to plan, and too many new

characters and locations were a heavy burden to the crew at such a fast pace. If we had tried to do more, they would have fallen short; and since we had a cast and crew that was so well versed at

comedy, it just seemed like the right decision to de-emphasize that style.

truly good stuff out there for them, but I also have kind of selfish reasons. When I think of something I want to say or an experience I want to share, my ideas are usually innately feminine because I'm female - and I refuse to believe that something being feminine by nature automatically means it isn't worthwhile. If I can put the tiniest dent in the perception that "girly" equals "lame" or "for girls" equals "crappy," I'll be very satisfied. 18. The ponies are definitely the heart of the show, yet they occupy a world that is rich with mythology and fantasy while still sporting a variety of modern technology. What was the creative strategy behind constructing the realm of FiM's Equestria? How did the team approach this balance between mythological fantasy and modern tech? I always wanted the default technology of the show to be a bit medieval in nature; but since this is a whimsical, non-serious show, I felt there was plenty of wiggle room. I think ultimately it was just my personal comfort level in each individual story. If it screwed up the story to get too technical about how primitive the technology was, it wasn't worth it. So, if we needed cameras, I just wanted those cameras to be relatively workable to a creature with no fingers. And if we absolutely positively HAD to have an electrical appliance (which we often did), I just told myself that it was enchanted by some magical unicorn mechanic at some point. However, I insisted that such an attitude was to be

considered only as a last creative resort - don't use a light switch when you could use a candle, just

umbrella because you don't feel like thinking about it a little more. Overall, though, it was definitely not a strict approach - and it's hardly consistent. Humor and ease of storytelling took precedence

19. Seems to me that a lot of foresight went into the creative planning process. Apart from the new episodic direction, how often did long-term plans change during the course of the

There was a lot of planning in development and a lot of planning for the animation process in the beginning - but really, at a certain point, once production was in full swing, we were kind of flying by

the seat of our pants and making it up as we went along. We had to rush to get stories approved

has been unquestionably worth it! What were the most rewarding aspects of creating the

For me, it was amazing to see all these ideas I'd had for years and years about how to make

21. I imagine that level of success elicited guite a large volume of feedback. Were any

20. Wow. All of that must certainly have been taxing - but I can assure you that the end result

compelling stories for girls come together. So much of what is in MLP is what I've been trying to get

on the air since I started in TV. It was amazing to see it actually work and people actually like it.

particular strengths or concerns frequently mentioned in letters and other responses you

and into production. I actually regret that there wasn't more time for planning and fine-tuning.

first season, and what were the primary reasons for any major shifting?

first season, and why were they so fulfilling?

beyond simply increased exposure to the show?

their biases no matter how great the show was.

turn of events, and I was simply riveted.

progressed?

point.

pony herd?

can struck more than once.

your ideal final episode?

the tallest order of them all.

chance.

decision. It still stings...and I suspect it always will.

because you're feeling lazy. Don't draw a hoof unnaturally and awkwardly wrapped around an

strategy we laid out to attract girls and their parents - so we didn't think there was a need to change the approach, at least as far as the show is concerned. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, right? However, even outside of bronies, I was hoping that some of the "nicey-nice" restrictions would be lifted for Season 2 or that we'd at least get more wiggle room. Not because I had a need for edginess, but because I thought we were going to start running out of ideas to explore within those restrictions. 26. Thanks for all of your answers so far, Lauren. We truly appreciate your candor and willing communication with us. As this Q&A draws to a close, could we touch upon a few lighter topics before we conclude? First of all, the four EqD blogponies - Sethisto, Cereal Velocity, Phoe, and myself - are all extremely grateful that you agreed to this interview. How closely do

I will admit I still check in on EqD almost every day, and I checked Ponychan when episodes

premiered to get feedback. I consider them very valuable resources - and, frankly, fun! I also admit I've occasionally contributed to discussions, and I've even dropped a few spoilers for fun - yay for

teenaged and adult MLP:FiM fans influence executive and marketing mindsets toward these programs? At the root of it all, is the "divide" between the genders dwindling ever smaller and what will it take for males and females to be equal as humans? I love the idea of "all ages" entertainment - media that is enjoyable to male and female, young and adult. But the perception currently out there is that, if the main character is a girl, or if a significant portion of the cast is female, it is "for girls" only and exclusively. And usually, if something is planned for both genders, it means most of the characters are boys - and that maybe, if you're lucky, there arte a couple of girls who get to tag along. I long for the day that female characters are not considered novel. At the same time, it's hard to ignore the evidence that some specific content will attract mostly

creation of My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic. When and how did you first cross paths with

At first, it was just because it was fun and easy. I had played with the toys for most of my childhood, Many of the locations where expansions of the MLP playsets I played with in the '80s. I used to say And beyond that, my confidence in the project grew as the more work I turned into Hasbro, the more

do it alone! You needed a team of talented, dedicated, and creative individuals to surround you and bring this universe to life. What measure of independence did Hasbro afford you in choosing those professionals - producers, writers, artists, animators, voice actresses, composers, and so on - that would end up working with you toward the goal of creating this fantastic cartoon? Any particular people with whom you were able to reunite from previous work on Powerpuff Girls and Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends? Any particular people you were able to bring on board with whom you'd always wanted to collaborate?

Once the bible was finalized, with main and side character designs and descriptions, locations, and general world dynamics, Hasbro then started interviewing several production studios. DHX (then Studio B) was one of them. I was impressed by the animation in Martha Speaks (they made Flash look like traditional, and their animators were adept at animating four legged animals), and I was impressed with the energy, humor and overall direction in Pucca. So, when Studio B pitched that

writing team in LA. Hasbro was pretty amazing at trusting us, which was fortunate because we were going so fast. The only changes that Hasbro made at that time were visual tweaks to locations that had playset potential and changes to some of the names of locations and side characters to make them more "salable." 6. Excitement must have been building as the show's ideas finally began to coalesce! What were the primary challenges in this phase? Any particular innovations or epiphanies strike the crew as the show transitioned from planning to the first stages of execution?

For me, the primary challenges were 1) The schedule - literally twice as fast as any production I had worked on before - and 2) being separated from my crew. I was in LA working alone from my

home office, while everyone (except the writing team) was in another country. In these crucial beginning stages, ideally you want to work very, very closely with your artists from day to day to keep the vision cohesive - no one can see what's in your head, and with so many artists, you can

together...and it's really hard to do over the phone and email, and to do it twice as fast as you're

get a lot of different styles, ideas and approaches. It's up to the showrunner to pull it all

considered "inappropriate for children" in My Little Pony. Something as mild as Rainbow Dash calling Twilight an "egghead" in Fall Weather Friends was treading a very delicate line. Even the whole concept of her and Applejack cheating was worrisome to some. It was tough to find humor and create character conflict within these very constricting boundaries. The biggest innovation, I feel, is the animation. Jayson and Wootie delivered far beyond my expectations and have done things with Flash I thought was completely impossible. I used to put notes on storyboards that said "revise staging, this is impossible in Flash" and they'd write me back all "no, we can do it..." and they did. Also, I feel the art direction was an interesting innovation in that most shows aimed at girls are overly bright, garish, oversaturated and plagued with waaaaaaay too much pink. I think the colorists achieved something that is definitely feminine, but

As for crew suggestions, we occasionally held "writers' summits" in LA (though I wish we had had more) to brainstorm new premises. In the writers' room, many of the script writers came up with and defined new characters. There were also many board artists and designers in Canada that had a certain way of drawing expressions or body language or hairstyles or outfits that further defined the way the characters looked and acted. These were constantly compiled and referenced as production went on.

10. Ridd Sorensen is the show's art director. What elements of the show's design drew from your initial sketches, from Ridd's direction, and from Hasbro's specifications? How much

The initial BG design treatment from the show came from Dave Dunnet. We were fortunate to be able to bring him on for the two-part pilot to design many of the main locations and the ruins in the

under my supervision. I continued to do a lot of the character designs in the beginning. All in all, I don't feel the art direction really changed all that much after development, it just continued to evolve

Everfree Forest. I designed all the main and supporting ponies and Spike, and they were not changed from the bible. Beyond the pilot, Ridd and his team developed the style even further

Hasbro's input came mostly when a location had potential to be a playset. Rarity's Carousel

Boutique was revised a few times. There were also times when they were working on a toy they wanted to have featured in the show. The hot air balloon was introduced this way. Often they'd ask

for a location beforehand, like a schoolhouse, so we could design it first. They were pretty great about letting us decide how to use these locations in context of the story so it didn't just seem to

11. Daniel Ingram and Will Anderson compose the wonderful songs and music found in abundance throughout MLP:FiM. Could you describe how you and the rest of the team coordinated cues, goals, and ideas with Daniel and Will? What transpired between the

producers, writers, and Daniel to bring the ponies' songs to such vivid life? Similarly, how did you and the top decision-makers work together with Will to infuse such lush music into

did the design and style of the first season change from initial conception to final

editing, I would meet Will at his studio (he is also in LA), and Jayson or Wootie would call in through Skype. The three of us would review the episode and "spot" the episode - directing Will on what kind of cues we want to hear and when. It was a very collaborative process. 12. Friendship is Magic is a labor of love brought about by hundreds of devoted individuals, and we fans truly appreciate the efforts and handiwork of each and every person who has done any sort of work on both the show itself as well as its exemplary wellspring of promotion at The Hub. As such, we do not want to exclude anyone from our outpouring of thanks and genuine support. However, in the interest of highlighting crew teams and

processes that might otherwise go largely unnoticed, could you expound upon any facet of the show's creation and production that benefited Friendship is Magic beyond the readily

At any given time, a designer would design a side character in a direction I hadn't thought of, or a board artist or an animator would add a gag or a character trait that would help define the show

further. Also, the voice actors bring so much to the characters that you would never imagine without them. It's an ongoing, organic process - and everyone involved contributes to the evolution of the

13. Thank you very much for all of your insight thus far. If you don't mind, Lauren, I'd like to transition from discussing the show's conception and structure to exploring the timeline of

team managing at one time, and why did you and DHX stagger and juggle them the way you

aired about a month after it was delivered. There was an agonizing point in the schedule where we

episodes to make sure everyone is working. For instance, when a character designer is done with episode 12, we can't fire them and hope they're still available when episode 13 is ready. Episode

One 22 minute episode took almost a year from conception to completion. A final show usually

were literally working on all 26 episodes of season 1 at one time - and, once Season 2 was

Staggering episodes is, as always, the standard production process. You have to stagger the

the first season itself. First of all, in your estimation, how long was the time period from conception to production and from production to debut? How many episodes was your

Will and the score came later. Once the animation rough cut was done with the final timing and

There was skepticism and concern about the art direction in the opening sequence of the pilot. Some people thought that having the series begin with such a different look would turn viewers off. I love the look and feel of that sequence. I was so glad to keep it. The characterizations of Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash were a worry to some as well. It was thought that Rainbow was too boyish and our target audience wouldn't relate to her, and it was also thought that Pinkie Pie would be irritating and off-putting. There was even a lot of debate and concern over Applejack's accent. I spent a lot of time trying to reassure everyone that they would be lovable characters. In the case of Pinkie, once everyone was finally comfortable that she wasn't

annoying, we got to make her as zany as I had always envisioned her as the season went on. It's a

It's hard to point to anything coming out worse, at least not in the beginning. The first few episodes were a little wonky here and there, but that's to be expected. It always takes a few episodes for a crew to hit their stride. Any disappointments I have at that stage are only in specific details - certain character designs that I didn't love, some jokes that fell flat, etc., but nothing consistent enough to

15. The season began with a two-part introduction to Equestria, unfolding the tale of Twilight

What came out better than expected, as I mentioned before, was the animation. It turned out far better than I had ever dreamed. When the first walk and run cycles were sent to me for approval, I

fell out of my chair. And Daniel Ingram's songs were grander than I ever imagined. The voice actors made authentic stars out of the characters. Tabitha St. Germain, for example, added a

I don't think the consequences of this minor change in direction were really felt in Season 1 except for the quantity of the types of stories. The tone or humor would not have been different, and the expectation that we could start going in that direction in later seasons gave me hope that I could still fulfill some of the characters' grander destinies; but, truly, I always wanted this show to be an ensemble-cast comedy first and foremost. If we had penned more adventure stories, the only difference I can think of is that perhaps you would have seen more of Luna and Zecora. Zecora was designed to be a sage and mentor to whom the ponies could go for information about their quests. She was designed to be a second mentor to Twilight, but that didn't come to pass. And Luna, though good, was meant to be associated with darkness and night - and these are considered (by some) to be iffy themes for a show for young girls - so she had to slide to the wayside. 16. Thanks for clearing that up! Here's hoping it dispels some of the idle gossip about the intro arc. Now, at the heart of the show are its well-designed and endearing characters indeed, the show has differed slightly from previous incarnations by choosing to focus on

chronicling the escapades and developing the personalities of six main ponies (plus Spike!).

How did the team's ambitions drive the construction of the main cast and their excellent compositions: fantastical yet relatable, strong yet flawed, caring yet selfish, appealing yet

I doubt any team of writers sits down and strategizes whether or not to have good characters or lousy characters. Everyone wants good characters - just, not everyone can execute it. We had a great team who could. Not to toot my own horn, but the foundations of the characters were the chief

described in their introduction. The writers took these ideas and ran with them in the scripts, the actors with their voices, and the story artists and animators with their expressions and posing. I

kept tight watch, especially in the beginning, to make sure all this input was cohesive, pushing and prodding when needed. For instance, I encouraged people to keep the wacky gags exclusive to Pinkie. I cleared some of the initial confusion about how to make Fluttershy and Twilight funny, and

17. Your body of work demonstrates a zeal for character-driven media. What have you seen in your career that compels you to champion and create this style of media, and why do you

pursue your specific dreams and aspirations? In short, what does Lauren Faust hope to

I champion character-driven stories and humor because character-driven stuff is just what I like to watch and what I like to do. I think making your audience experience an emotional reaction is the core of good storytelling, and you can't evoke emotion without likable, relatable characters. Some

comedy that has a sincere emotional core...and humor that comes from characters, not one-liners.

My specific dreams are still to make great entertainment for girls. I just don't think there's enough

shows focus on gags and written jokes and have an exclusive goal to get laughs, but I prefer

focus of my pitch bible. I literally wrote the characters with their "good traits" and "bad traits"

Rarity needed special care to keep her from being the typical shallow debutante character. I

created these characters, and I felt the need to protect them.

achieve - and leave behind?

over technicality.

Somehow, it's just a bit of a strength I have.

received? By far the most common message I received was "I'm a guy and I love this show - what have you done to me?!";) I've received a lot of notes from men in the military who are fans of the show. That's been a wonderful surprise! I've also received many messages from people who say the show has helped them through depression, which is truly touching. And I really love when I get letters from dads who say it's their favorite thing to share with their daughters. Another favorite, common note is from young female artists who say the show has inspired them to write their own stories or pursue a career in animation. 22. Describe how the various media reports impacted your direction and outlook, if you would. At first, several outlets were noticeably caustic, owing either to insufficient information or simple misunderstandings. More recently, the level of positive coverage from

the media has been trending sharply upward. What do you make of all the articles - both positive and negative - and why do you suppose that the general perception has changed,

When I accepted the job in the first place, I expected that the usual "ew gross, girls!" response was inevitable. I even expected that people would actively hate it without even watching it. So, when the first uninformed, unjustifiably negative articles surfaced, I was disappointed, of course - but not surprised. I just thought of the girls who'd finally have a worthwhile cartoon to watch and tried not to

worry about the folks we weren't targeting. I knew (or at least I thought I knew) we wouldn't sway

23. You did well in that! Of course, any discussion of My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic

phenomenon of 2011: Bronies! I'm a brony, Lauren - as are scores of thousands of other

of the brony phenomenon? How closely did you end up following it as the first season

Oh gee - I feel old to admit I did not know about 4chan until I was checking comments on an

the show on 4chan, so I moseyed on over and WOW - was I surprised! I checked in regularly

teenaged and adult fans of MLP:FiM. First off, how and when did you and the team first learn

episode that had been put on YouTube. Someone pointed out that people were freaking out about

(strategically ignoring unsavory material as best I could) and pointed it out to some other members of the crew. Then came Equestria Daily and Ponychan. I couldn't believe how the fandom was spreading - or the amazing creativity that was coming out of it! It was just such a FASCINATING

24. What aspects of this brony phenomenon took you by surprise? How did it impact the direction of the show and morale of the crew? What were the most encouraging aspects of this newfound fanbase - conversely, what logistical difficulties accompanied our advent?

Just how it kept growing and growing and growing and how it seemed to inspire a revolution of kindness on the Internet! It never ceases to amaze me. I think the surprising fanbase invigorated the crew and kept us going when we were getting exhausted. There's no better morale booster than making an actual impact. I can't say it affected the direction of the show beyond crossing

production by the time the brony phenomenon took hold. We couldn't change anything at that

bronies affect ponies - in our purchases, discussions, fan works, and the rest?

you follow Equestria Daily and other major pony fan sites?

Derpy's eyes, however. All of Season 1 and the opener for Season 2 were written and underway in

25. The Hub television network has earnestly been reaching out to us in the recent months. What's your take on primary vs. peripheral demographics? How did you seek to unify the two, and what do you expect will be the standard moving forward? Put succinctly, how do

While we were moving forward on Season 2, we all felt that we attracted this audience with the

would be shortsightedly incomplete without targeting the most incredible online

anonymity! I totally lurk, guys...so careful what you say! ;) 27. Wow, thanks much! (And how clever of you!) How about the rest of the fanbase - fan art, music, videos, and the like? You and several other FiM crew members have been very active on sites such as deviantArt and Facebook. This high level of communication and interaction with the fanbase has been unfailingly valuable, and we most certainly appreciate it! How often are you able to keep up with all of the pony fan output - and would you like to say a few words to those who create it? Not to disappoint, but I'm afraid I don't read fan fiction - I just don't have time, and I don't want the accidental influence. But I love looking at fanart, fan comics, custom toys, and the YouTube mashups. There is some talent out there that completely floors me. 28. Thank you so much, Lauren - believe me, we all sincerely appreciate your support! Now, once again, new horizons are spreading before you - horizons as yet unknown to the rest of us. As much as you can, without giving anything specific away, could you tell us what we

can expect from Lauren Faust in the months and years to come? What's the next move for

I have a lot of irons in the fire right now, and I'm waiting to see which one shows the most promise. It is still difficult to sell animation for and/or about girls, but MLP gives me something to point to as a successful example. People didn't even believe girls' shows could be legitimately funny and that boys might actually watch them...yet, between Powerpuff Girls and FiM, there's proof that lightning

The most lasting effect working on this show will have for me is the literal 'dream-come-true' facet of

childhood to life in the manner I had dreamed it could be since I played with ponies as a child, but it was also a chance to put my theories about entertainment for girls into practice. Seeing it work so well that it brought in an additional, unexpected audience was a triumphant bonus. However, what will also stick with me is the sadness I felt when I realized I had to leave it. It was a horrible, painful

29. We'll definitely miss you moving forward, Lauren. Thank you for all you've done so far. How do you expect Friendship is Magic to end when it inevitably (and unfortunately) does? What do you foresee taking place in the final episode? More personally, how would you like

to see the show end when it inevitably (and unfortunately!) does? What would constitute

Not to give a disappointing answer, but - as I won't be involved, I don't know how to expect the show to end. I had my own ideas for an end to work towards, with certain characters fulfilling

specific destinies. Only some of those plans were well-formed, though; others, I had hoped to work out as the series progressed. I'd rather not share what my plans were at this time - it will diminish

the opportunity. Not only was it a chance to bring one the most inspirational aspects of my

you, and how - and, more importantly, why - are you blazing that trail? How have ponies shaped your philosophy and outlook moving forward, and what do you expect will be your single most poignant and lasting memory from your time as the watchful shepherdess of the

what the new people in charge ultimately do. Plus, it just really bums me out that I can't do them. 30. Stepping back and viewing the larger picture, how do you perceive this show has shaken the stereotype of a young girls' show? Friendship is Magic is certainly a constructive step toward portraying that media in an intelligent and positive light, but a large stigma nevertheless persists. In your estimation, what's the next step - and what else must be done before that detrimental stereotype can begin to fade into irrelevancy? I think the show may have opened the minds of a number of specific individuals, but I don't think its influence is really far reaching enough to make that big an impact - yet. I'll be curious to see how the attitudes of the young girls and boys who enjoy the show grow as they do. Perhaps having enjoyed the show will make them less resistant to similar content as they grow older, and perhaps it will inspire them to create similar things.

Next steps are just to continue in this direction. Networks and studios need to be willing to give

feminine concepts a try, the people who can make this kind of stuff need to be given more chances, and audiences need to put their preconceived notions aside and give female content a try. They

need to somehow let go of the idea that liking something feminine is belittling. I think that last one is

31. How do people such as bronies factor into this situation? What distinctions between a "boys/guys" show, a "girls/gals" show, and a "family" show should and should not exist, to you? Why do the current distinctions exist, in your mind, and how can people such as the

women and girls and that other content will mostly attract men and boys. I think that's okay too - not to mention fun. The problem is the positively ancient issue that a girl will watch a show or a movie about a boy - but a boy won't watch a show or movie about a girl. The people who profit from media need to protect their investment, and they know they'll get a larger audience and make more money if they default to "for boys." It remains the most common reason why girl stuff isn't made. The only thing that will change this is support. The audience supplies the ratings and the profits, and that's what the money people are looking for. If you like a show involving girls, watch it and buy the stuff. Spread the word, refuse to be ashamed, ask for what you want, and visibly support artists who do it well. All of this encourages the people with the money to give this kind of content a

As you said, the divide between the genders may be dwindling...but the gap, in my opinion, is still large. If you look around you, people still insult boys by comparing them to girls ("pick up the pace, ladies!") and praise girls by comparing them to boys ("wow, you draw as good as a guy!" - to quote what someone once said to me when I was a student). The question of what it will take for everyone to consider the genders equal is way too big a question for me. I have no idea. But I think it's up to everyone as an individual to carefully and honestly evaluate their own attitudes and at least try to make things better - if only in their own lives and the way they treat people they know. 32. Thank you so very much for taking time to answer all of these questions, Lauren - and for spearheading the magical cartoon that is My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic. We love it, and we love you too. To you and the rest of the FiM crew: Thank you all - so immeasurably

much. This concludes the Equestria Daily Season 1 retrospective interview with Lauren Faust. On behalf of everypony, I wish you the absolute best. If you've any final thoughts or comments, Lauren, please share them with us. Just a great, big, extremely sincere thank you to everyone who watches the show! This kind of fan

reaction is the sort of thing every artist dreams of but doesn't dare believe can actually happen. I always worried that, despite the late nights and work-filled weekends - the blood, sweat, and tears (well...not blood) that went into the making of this show - it would go almost unnoticed, as many shows do. You guys make it all worthwhile, and I can't thank you all enough.