



Shakefire sat down with Carlos Saldanha, director of *Rio 2*, to talk about the film and the creative process behind it. He spoke about traveling once again to Rio de Janeiro and going beyond the city into the Amazon rainforest as well as the heartfelt message the film hopes to deliver.

Shakefire (SF): Obviously you have a long standing relationship with Blue Sky. Tell me about the process that came together for *Rio 2*?

Carlos Saldanha (CS): It depends on a lot of the projects. I've been at Blue Sky for 21 years and more than half of that time was doing features, which was our dream in the beginning of it. When we started the first project was *Ice Age*, which was a script that came to us. Fox has already approved the script that they wanted to do an animation of and then took to us and we developed from there. But then the sequels for *Ice Age* we developed in house. We all developed from an original idea and all that from us but based it off of the first one.

In the case of *Rio*, as I was in the process of working on the *Ice Age* movies I wanted to do something that was more personal, something that was in my head. I remember pitching the story at one point, but I was in the middle of doing *Ice Age 2* so it was crazy and no time for the schedule. They loved the idea and in a way bought the idea but they shelved it until I was done with the project. Then I did *Ice Age 2* and then I started *Ice Age 3* right away, and I told them, "Look, I'm working on *Ice Age 3*. What about that old idea? I'm ready for some tropics! I love the project, but come on I got to do something more."

So it was an idea that came from me. That's different from the *Ice Age* movies because they were based on an idea that already existed as a script. Of course, the next ones I ended up being a part of the creative process as well. But this one was all in my head, the world I am trying to create. All those elements became much more personal.

And then it was one of those projects that's a name that nobody knows about, a movie that nobody knows. What's it going to be? And then the movie came out and it was a huge success and people loved it. Not only when the movie came out but afterwards. The movie had legs with the DVD and all the kid's stuff. Sure enough right after the movie was released they said we want to do *Rio 2* and I started right away. I barely got the excitement of finishing one and then I started another right away.

Here we are. It's been like three and a half years but it feels like yesterday. I remember getting the news I was doing *Rio 2* and before I knew it I'm here. The movie's done.

SF: Do you ever worry about getting shoehorned into doing sequels? Studios nowadays want to make franchises out of everything.

CS: Well, if I'm really not into it they usually don't force you into it. You have to be engaged with a project. You got to love the project. With the *Ice Age* movies I felt totally engaged all the way through it. When we got to the third one I felt that it was time for somebody else to do it. I've done three and I'm happy with what I've done, but I had this other idea so I was more inclined to do something new and move on. *Rio* is so personal to me that when they said they wanted to do 2 I wasn't ready to hand it off. I think there's a point in a project that you feel that you're still the best person to do it or you realize that you might not be the best person and let somebody else take charge of that. I still feel that I'm connected to *Rio* too much that I had to do it. Not that I'm shoehorned in, but there is this wish that movies could become, especially original ideas, a franchise.

SF: Can you talk about the cast for a bit? There are a lot of stars in this one.

CS: It's just fun. One thing that attracted me to sequels and why I think we don't get forced into it is the fact that we get a chance to renew it. We get a chance to bring people in. Usually one movie is not enough. Especially with animation, you only have about 80 or 90 minutes to tell the story and you wanted to tell more but your time is limited. I wanted to continue. One of my favorite characters is Nigel, the villain, and I wanted to do more with him. That's the idea where the poison frog came in with Shakespeare and the whole Romeo & Juliet and Kristin Chenoweth was like, "Let's do it." Andy Garcia, it's such an honor to work with a guy like Andy. Rita Moreno, I've always had this huge admiration for Rita and I was thinking about that character and was thinking in my head about her.

SF: With *Rio* it was all about Rio de Janeiro and giving audiences an accurate portrayal of the city. What do you hope to accomplish with the sequel?

CS: I wanted to take people beyond Rio. I've done a lot with Rio, and I think I exposed the city and the culture in a very interesting way because I explored the biggest thing that happened there, which is Carnival. Of course, the movie started in Rio on New Years, which is the next big thing, but I felt that there was an opportunity for me to just expand it. The family expanded, the story expanded, and I wanted to get out. I wanted to show the diversity of the country and have an opportunity to put in new characters and that's how it all came together with the Amazon.

I knew from the get-go the minute that we finished the first movie that if I would do another movie I wanted to tell the journey of the kids, the journey of the family. Not so much just the two of them, but what would happen to the family? What's the future if there are no more Macaws? There's no future so let's create the future. Let's make more Macaws and put them in a really spectacular place and take them to the Amazon.

SF: That also goes hand-in-hand in terms of the destruction of the Amazon as well.

CS: Exactly! It became thematic. It all clicked. I think that's the beauty of it. When you work through the characters' eyes, usually the story just clicks. So the Amazon became a no-brainer. So they go there and when you get there what's the problem? Destruction of the environment. What's the message I want to give? You have to stick together to protect it. The pieces of the puzzle start to make sense, and it felt organic, it felt natural, to move into that world right away. And then we just started to have fun.

The worst thing that can happen when you make a movie is that feels thing jammed in or "let's put it in just to put it in." I wanted to make sure it felt organic to the message, to the story I was telling. It's also something I believe. I'm not making a documentary about the Amazon, but I'm making a movie that hopefully when you walk out of the movie will spark a little light bulb in their heads and Google it and find more about the Amazon. Find out what's happening. Find out what we can do to help.

We're on the edge of the planet. Is it going to go bad or is it going to go good? We see it every day like long winters, weird summers, and tornados and all this stuff. We know that something's happening, but we don't quite know what it is so why not start young kids learning?

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