

You're listening to Imaginary Worlds, a show about how we create them and why we suspend our disbelief. I'm Eric Molinsky.

I was blown away by the animated series Blue Eye Samurai, which is on Netflix. And I'm not alone. The show has a 100% rating on Rotten Tomatoes. And in this episode, I try not to give any many spoilers beyond the premise. If you want to watch it first, the first season is very bingeable. But I should warn you just because it's an animated show doesn't mean it's for kids. The content is very adult. A lot of people have compared it to Game of Thrones. In fact, George R.R. Martin is a fan of the show.

Blue Eye Samurai takes place in 17th century Japan. The borders are closed. Westerners are forbidden. Anyone born of mixed race is considered less than human or demonic. The main character is a samurai named Mizu. Mizu has blue eyes.

MIZU: At the time I was born, there were four white men in all of Japan. Men who traded in weapons and opium and flesh. One of them took my mother and made of me a monster, a creature of shame.

Mizu is on a quest to kill those men. But it's complicated. She's not a hero trying to track down bad guys for the sake of justice. Mizu's motivations come from a sense of self-hatred and internalized racism. And the fact that Mizu is biracial isn't her only inner conflict. Mizu is also a woman pretending to be a man in a society where women are given very limited roles. The only person who knows her secret is her apprentice, Ringo.

MIZU: I'd never, ever, ever tell anyone you're a girl!
SFX: SLICE.

Mizu also has a special sword that is out of this world. The metal was forged from a meteorite. So, it's blue like her eyes. And as we just heard, it can slice a tree in half. And because she can fight with just about anything, she actually thinks it's a waste to use that sword on fighters who can't rise to her level.

TAIGEN: Are you afraid to fight with steel?
MIZU: Thank you. No one has yet deserved my blade.

Mizu walks softly through the world. Her large hat tilts over his eyes, which are further concealed through tinted glasses. Her fighting style actually reminds me

of Daredevil. She's fast and quick. She trains obsessively. She can take down an army of bad guys if she fights from the shadows. And she never gives up, despite sometimes having terrible injuries. Her enemies are so afraid of Mizu, they see her not just as a man but as a monster.

HAIJI: The man I met is no man. A demon. Eyes empty. Nothing can stop him.

The animation is stunning. It looks like a painting come to life or hand drawn animation from an earlier era. But it's made with the latest technology, so camera movements are really dynamic. And since I used to work in animation, I really wanted to know how this show came together.

The show is set in Japan, but it's not made in Japan. The show was created by an American couple. They're a writing team, Amber Noizumi and Michael Green. The animation was produced in France. And as I kept learning about the show, I became fascinated by the director: Jane Wu. She grew up in Taiwan, and California.

And I got a chance to speak with Jane. We talked just after Netflix announced that Blue Eye Samurai was renewed for a second season.

JANE: I had always told my team, I said, I think the show's going to do well. I mean, if anything, I'm proud of it. A couple of our friends will like it. Maybe some critics will like it. And that was enough for me. I just, I never expected this kind of global response that we've been having. And it's, it's made all the hard work and the long nights very, very worthwhile.

Jane began her career as an animation storyboard artist in Los Angeles. I was also an animation storyboard artist. In fact, we were working at different studios across L.A. in the early 2000s. Back then, I was drawing storyboards with paper and pencil. Today, people draw them directly on to digital devices like an iPad or a Wacom tablet.

Now if you're an animation storyboard artist, particularly for television, your job is to take the script and draw what it's going to look like on screen. You choreograph the action sequences. You figure out the key poses for the characters. And you figure out the camera angles. You ask yourself, should I draw this in a long shot? Should I cut to a close up? Then your storyboards are sent to animators and other artists who bring your ideas to life.

The fact that Jane came from storyboarding made total sense to me. When I watched Blue Eye Samurai, I kept noticing how cinematic the shot compositions were. The visual language of the show reminded me of samurai films by Akira Kurosawa, and Westerns by Sergio Leone and Quentin Tarantino movies like Kill Bill.

But Jane didn't go to school for animation. She studied fashion and design. After she graduated, she worked in fashion, and ran a comic book store.

JANE: I had wanted to get into penciling for comics, but there weren't a lot of females back then doing it. And in fact, we had, we would have booths at Comic-Con. I used to just bring my drafting table out there and I would also draw in, you know, the Artist Alley. And I would get comments like, hey, you draw pretty good for a girl. But I met a lot of comic book artists that eventually went into animation, and they thought, oh, hey Jane, you'd be really good at this.

So she put together a portfolio, submitted to Sony Animation, and to her surprise, got a job.

JANE: It, I was just literally drop kicked into animation and really learning on the job. And I struggled for several months and I, I was just thinking to myself like, oh man, I'm like too old to be reconsidering another industry. So I talked to a few veterans, and they gave me some exercise and some books to read, and I just gave myself that summer to figure it out because if I couldn't, I was going to go back to fashion. But in that training session, I'd just like come home every night after work and just start training myself. Something did click and I remember handing it in and my director was just like, you know, a little crooked smile and go, yeah, that's pretty good, Wu and walked away. And I was like, yes!

Wow.

JANE: Yeah.

So, it's funny, you know, it always like, pretty good, Wu. You're saying, I think in one interview that you, the storyboard department was dominated by guys.

JANE: Yes.

I noticed that even we as storyboard artists noticed the same thing. Like, why are we all men? Because, I mean, I think we had one woman who was a storyboard artist, but then the other departments were not all men.

JANE: Full of women.

Yeah. So, I, I never understood why that was like a macho thing, to be a storyboard artist.

JANE: Because in children's television, they call it pink, blue and beige. Beige is for, um, preschool stuff where it, it didn't, you didn't have to go into the boy space or the girl space, but once you got a little bit older into the action space, they start dividing, whether it's a girl show or a boy show. I predominantly fell in the boys show section because I did action. I don't do comedy, I don't do cute, I don't do any of that stuff. I just do action. And that's always where I loved to be. And I never learned how to draw cute because of what I'm interested in. Like, it kills me to draw a Smurf. I can't do it **<laugh>**.

JANE: And I knew that I come in sort of as a unicorn, in which I do understand that action space. I do understand kind of like that testosterone. And back in our days, what we call tomboy is today's non-binary. Right. So I grew up as a tomboy. I always hung out with guys and most of my diet of things that I watch is like John Woo and martial arts films and things like that. So I fit. And then I remember a lot of the guys would just try to outdraw each other, you know, and put the camera in like these really impossible angles. And one day, I said, you know, let me read the script and see what the characters are going through. Let me start, try to board what these characters are going through instead of like forgetting all, forget all these dynamic angles and all that special effect stuff. Right. And I remember people coming up and saying, oh, I really liked your boards. Yeah. It was like really, like I could feel it. And I think that's when I really found my voice that I didn't have to try to be one of the guys that I just had to really understand the characters and understand how I interpret that character's moment.

I heard that when you, when you were approached with Blue Eye Samurai, that there are many levels that you identified with Mizu. You were like, I get this character.

JANE: Absolutely. Yeah. Well, for one, she has to masquerade as a man in order to gain access to what she wanted. And that's what I had to do too. I had to be one of the bros in order to be accepted, in order to have work. I stopped using my name and just used my initial so nobody could judge me as a woman first but judge my work first. And I realized that after that guy had made that comment, say, hey, you draw pretty good for a girl. I was like, oh crap, that's because you could see my face, but if you couldn't see my face and you couldn't see my name, you would not know that a girl drew this.

She eventually moved to Disney animation, and her reputation as a storyboard artist grew to the point where Joss Whedon asked her to plan out action sequences for The Avengers. And from there, she made a transition to live action storyboarding. She worked on a bunch of Marvel films. But she felt much more creative freedom when she got a job as a storyboard on Game Of Thrones.

DAENERYS: They're all just spokes on a wheel. This one's on top, then that one's on top, and on and on it spins, crushing those on the ground. I'm going to break the wheel.

JANE: Boy, that experience was such a game changer in terms of this is what a really good team does and, and operates,

Huh. I mean, you did the, um, the battle against the White Walkers and the frozen lake.

JANE: Yeah. And also, and also the, the death of the dragon.

Yeah, and also had a zombie bear in there too.

JANE: Oh yes.

Was that one of those moments where you're like, we want to show what you can do on TV?

JANE: Absolutely. So when I, when I came onto Blue Eye Samurai, when they were, you know, when we were all just talking about it and when they were thinking about hiring me and I was thinking about joining and we were all just trying to see if we were all good fits. And I said, I want to do for this show what Game of Thrones did for TV, I want to break the wheel.

Oh, to quote Daenerys.

JANE: That's right. And I broke the wheel.

Yeah!

BREAK 1

I was not surprised that Jane went from animation to live action and back to animation again. A lot of live action science fiction and fantasy relies heavily on computer animation. They need storyboard artists to plan those sequences out.

Jane wanted to try something in reverse with Blue Eye Samurai. She said she wanted to take a live action approach to making animation. That sounded intriguing to me, but I was a little confused. How do you make animation like it's a live action show?

JANE: First and foremost, it means lensing. I think, uh, especially in a TV space, when you're doing 2D animation, there is no lensing. But we are in CG space now. We hardly do any 2D animation. And when you're in a CG space, guess what? There is lensing, there is a virtual camera because that's what you do in live action. That's what a director does. The first thing you do is lens up.

Can you talk about that a bit more? I mean, that's like something I learned as a film major. I remember being shocked at every time you put a new lens, how much that changes what you're seeing through the camera. For people who may not understand what that means, lensing.

JANE: Lensing influences how the story is delivered visually. Take for instance, when the character feels weird, you can pull up for a close up and use a very wide lens so that the edges distort to help sell the fact that the character feels weird at this point.

But as you're saying, it's always emotion and story based. You don't, you, you know, you don't do the thing that those storyboard artists are doing like, this would be cool, you know, what if the camera was inside the Coke can.

JANE: Yeah.

You know, it's more just kind of like, why, why is this happening? How is the character feeling? And how can this lens?

JANE: Where's the motivation?

Right.

JANE: Yeah.

Here's an example. There was a scene in Blue Eye Samurai which just hit me like a gut punch. I won't give away the content of what's happening on screen. But I can tell you that they use the virtual lens, so half the screen is Mizu in a close up. The background action is out of focus. But all the action is happening in the background, and what's going on in the background is really disturbing. And the fact that the background is out of focus tells us that she's becoming emotionally detached. And that's an important moment in her journey.

Here's another thing that Jane did differently.

When I was a storyboard artist, the first thing we'd do is figure out what the character is doing. Then we'd figure out what kind of background to draw. And when you design the background you have to design it in a way that spotlights the character. The downside to that approach is that sometimes the backgrounds in animation can feel more like backdrops on a stage than actual places that the characters are interacting with.

Jane took the opposite approach. Her team created 3D models of the environments. Then they decided how the characters were going to move and react to those spaces.

JANE: Because also in live action, you would scout the, the set to say, okay, you guys, and then, so the director, everybody who's working on it, you know, is, is on stage. And you would say, uh, I think I want to just mainly shoot this way because the lighting's better here. Or this looks more dynamic here. And that means we don't have to worry about the set behind me. That's all the pipeline that I pulled up front first. Where in animation, that's usually last when you start, when you get into a dramatic space. And

that's the space that I come from in live action, and our script, Blue Eye Samurai is very dramatic. So, I need it to ground the world in order for the drama to live.

Yeah. I got to say, I love that even though it's 3D uh, the characters are drawn 2D even if they're drawn like on a Wacom tablet or something because I just feel like you cannot replicate the emotions in a character's face through CG the way you can, there's something about a hand drawn...

JANE: So our characters are not hand drawn. Our characters are all CG.

What?!

JANE: Yeah.

There's not someone on a Wacom tablet drawing that?

JANE: No.

Wow.

JANE: We're, we are doing what's called 2 and a half D. I wanted a traditional animation look. I rarely like super CG look. because I think it, it can get too game-like, and it sometimes get into the uncanny valley. And I wanted these characters to look very stylized. Having been a character designer before, I think this is where it helped, where I realized that in, in, in 2D, it's all about line quality. It's all about that line. So we spent weeks looking for that line on the character. And the whole entire idea of Blue Eye Samurai was just to feel the artist's hand, the craftsmanship of it all.

Wow. They're blowing my mind. <laugh>.

JANE: <laugh>. Good!

Um, tell me about the, the character designs. You know, there aren't a lot of Asian characters designed for Western animation outside of, you know, I mean there's anime and then in the West there's, you know, maybe Mulan, um, like Turning Red. This is a very adult show. I don't think I've seen this many Asian characters in animation before. What did you want to make sure people got right?

JANE: I wanted people to understand the diversity amongst Asian faces and amongst Asian skin color as well. It ranges from dark to light. See, here's the thing. I feel like, you know, when Hollywood says diversity and then you have like an ensemble team, and then you put every single ethnicity group in there. So that means you only have one person representing that one color. Do you know how much responsibility that person has to have and then the writer that's writing it? That's why things get stereotyped. But if you do a show that is all one color, what you are diversifying is the characters, the personalities. And then from there you can go, oh, I know people like that. Because you can then show assholes, you can now show smart people, dumb people, sexy people, non-sexy people, big people, little people. You, you show that diversity in that same group and that's where you find the relatability in it. That's what I want people to come away with.

The other thing I think was really interesting is that I feel like a lot of shows they try to modernize historical costumes or hairstyles or facial hair to try to bridge the gap.

JANE: No! No!

And I, I love that you didn't do that.

JANE: Well, but that's also in children's space you do that because children can't see these little details or, or then they just look boring. Right. And I get that. You want to dramatize it for kids because kids see things in a bigger shape and simple forms. That's just their brain development. But as adults, you can see nuances. And that's what makes Blue Eye Samurai an adult show. It's not the sex, it's, it's not the violence, it's the sophistication in how we delivered it. I understand costume and history and all that stuff. And if I can catch things that are off, I don't want to watch it. That means you didn't do the research. That means you didn't think I was smart enough to see that.

In terms of capturing aspects of Japanese culture, there is one particular episode I wanted to ask her about -- episode 5 of season 1. Again, I don't want to give too much away, but I can tell you that there are two main storylines which are interwoven seamlessly.

The first one is Mizu taking on an army of bad guys. The second story is a series of flashbacks which give us insight into how Mizu became the person that she is. But there's a third element to the episode, which works as a framing device. The episode starts with a performance of traditional Japanese puppets called Bunraku puppets. And throughout the episode, the puppet show works as a commentary on the other storylines about Mizu.

PUPPET MASTER: Long before our great shogun ordained the sun to rise, there lived a Ronin.

Jane was thrilled when she read that script because she already had a deep appreciation for Bunraku puppets.

JANE: So our characters are designed after the Bunraku puppets because as a young person, I remember watching it with my aunt on Japanese TV and always fascinated by them. And because they, the way they moved, it's so haunting. You'd, you actually forget that there's puppeteers there. And I remember for Blue Eye Samurai, I wanted the same haunting feeling. And also from my fashion background, I knew I needed these characters to be long and lean.

Yeah, could you actually describe what Bunraku puppets look like?

JANE: They're three feet tall puppets. It takes about three people to operate them. The person that operates the head is considered the puppet master. The person that operates the foot is on the lowest totem pole. And then you have to learn from the feet up to the head. And it takes a whole generation to learn that skillset. The puppets themselves have no hard spines or anything, it's really just the fabric of the, the costume. The head and the hand and maybe the feet are the only thing that are hard. So the body have this like very language movement, but then also can be stiff at times. And it's all because of the skillset of the puppeteers. And that's what I was trying to capture in Blue Eye Samurai.

Well, I want to, I mean, I have to say episode, not to keep showering you with compliments here, but, um, <laugh>

JANE: No. Keep it. No, no. Do!

Don't stop!

JANE: Don't stop. Yeah.

Episode five of, of season one was one of the best hours of an animated show I have ever seen. I mean, it was, it blew my mind. I mean, it was brilliantly done.

JANE: So, the way it, so the way it was written or the way you're seeing it is exactly the way it was written. And it was written beautifully by Amber Noizumi. We did it sort of like live action, those two storylines. We shot it or boarded it linearly and then we edit it.

Right. So, you planned it out as if they were two separate half episodes and then you edited them.

JANE: Right. So, we had an artist just do the Bunraku stuff. We had two artists do the flashback stuff. We had another two artists, you know, so it was just a way to keep things consistent in terms of performance.

So, the funny thing is, when I first started watching the show, my first instinct was, was this animated in France?

JANE: Yes.

Yeah. And it was, it was,

JANE: Thus, we are not anime. I just want to make it clear.

Yes.

JANE: Because I've been getting feedback saying, oh, I love the anime. I'm like, okay, I'm not going to correct it because, you know, it's a compliment. We are not an anime because we were not produced in the East. This is a hundred percent produced in the West. We also don't have big doll eyes, which stylistically makes it anime.

Yeah, because I feel like I, I actually, I really admire French animation. because they, they, it's often realistic but not stiff. You know, like I feel like it's very often it's realistic, but very fluid. And I feel like you're either, I feel like a lot of animation is either realistic and stiff or fluid and cartoony. Is that why you picked a, a French studio?

JANE: Yes! It is, um, mainly because, look, there's been so many great Japanese anime out there that I'm not going to reproduce because I'm going to fail.

Hmm.

JANE: Like all those great Samurai anime, not going to touch those. And I know I didn't want to do the Mulan Disney thing. I didn't want to go that Western. It had to be, it really had to be a hybrid. And everything in the show, the philosophy of the show came from Mizu. She's a hybrid, therefore the production's hybrid. Everything on the show is hybrid.

So, were there many Asian artists working at the studio, which is like in the middle of France?

JANE: Nope.

<laugh>. So, what did you, what were some of the things that you wanted to make sure they got right?

JANE: I dragged a suitcase full of kimonos over to France in like a hundred degree heat, wearing all these layers to show them how heavy, actually a kimono is. In a kimono system. It's not a bathrobe, it's, you have to puff and layer it because the look is to be upholstered. And what the erogenous zone for Asia is not the same as here. So therefore, you know, you have to pad up. And it's not about the bust, it's not about the waist. It's not about the booty. So it was to show them how padded things are. It was to show them how heavy those kimono fabrics are, how a woman walks in a kimono, how they sit in a kimono. Everything is different because of what the costume does to you. So that was very important. And then I also dragged stunt sword, which was a foam sword over to show them a couple of martial arts move and to show them how to punch and kick so that they can feel what part of the bodies move.

I got to say as a storyboard, I don't know what great shape I was at the time, if someone handed me a sword, I mean what was that like working with them in that regard?

JANE: It obviously looked like a lot of them don't get out the chair, but I think they were all happy to be up and moving and learning a new skill and learning, and they were definitely very enthusiastic.

BREAK 2

As I mentioned earlier, Blue Eye Samurai was created by a married couple, Amber Noizumi and Michael Green. The inspiration for the show came after their daughter was born. Amber Noizumi said that when she saw their daughter's blue eyes, she was delighted. And then she started to wonder why she valued blue eyes. That led to her to start thinking about the history of race relations in Japan.

When Jane was asked to direct the show, she immediately identified with the character of Mizu on multiple levels.

JANE: Growing up here, I'm the Chinese girl, right? And then when I go back to Taiwan, I'm the American girl and I never understood why I needed to be labeled. Why I couldn't just be me and if I'm being labeled, is there an expectation that I need to have? That's where the whole self-hatred comes in. And, and when I was younger, that's, that's where Mizu is at her point. I'm, I'm much older now. I'm a little bit more well-adjusted. So this is where Mizu needs to end up. So, in guiding this character through her quagmire and the things that she has to go through, um, I, I know how to guide that in terms of I've gone through it myself.

And you have a background in martial arts too?

JANE: I do. I studied Wushu for a bit. And, uh, I think once I had, my daughter, really had no time, so I really should say I'm retired.

<laugh>

JANE: Also, my body won't do what it's supposed to do anymore. So I'm retired. But it definitely has helped, um, in that I think I'm one of the few storyboard artists out there that can choreograph a whole fight set and then you can just give it to the stunt crew, and they'll know what to do with it.

Yeah. Tell me about that. So, you worked with Sonny, Sonny Sun was the fight choreographer.

JANE: Yes. Yes.

Tell me about your, uh, friendship with him and, and, and the work that you both did in choreographing the fight scenes.

JANE: Uh, he came to the United States as a tender young man of I think early twenties. And, you know, we have a group of martial arts community. So when he came, um, he was always at my house having dinner and, and we were always looking for a reason and an opportunity to work together. And when this opportunity came up, I'd like, he was the first one I immediately called. I said, drop, whatever you're doing, you need to come and do this with me. And he just went, yes, sir. He's just came along. And it was wonderful because we both have the same background in martial arts training, although he's like a thousand times better than me. So therefore, in choreographing a lot of these fights set, it was really seamless. Also, he was working from China at that time, and his team was all Chinese. Right. And I'm still fluent in Chinese. So he and I can speak in Chinese and be more fluent and, and have it even more seamless. Because I'm, I'm fluent in languages and I'm fluent in cinema in terms of, you know, all the Asian cinema and all the Western cinema, I've always been looking for an opportunity just to merge the two because being bicultural, I'm here as a Chinese person go, why do you Americans do it like this and you don't do it like this? Or me being a Chinese person going, why do you Chinese people do it like this? And you don't

do it like this? One of the things I really pounded into Sonny's head is that it's always character first. It's always story first. So when we talk about an action scene, we always talk about where Mizu is in her head and what changes emotionally in this scene.

So did you do that with all the, every, when you were choreographing the fight sequence, what were some of the thoughts in terms of like any, just in general with fight sequence was your, how would you translate, this is what Mizu is going through emotionally and this is how this will get translated through action?

JANE: Yeah. We, we go through story first and we go through some of the, the bigger keystone points that need to be hit. And then we would talk about what are some of the martial arts movement or body movement or action that can happen to help service that. So for instance, in the pilot 101 when Mizu goes into the dojo and all those students are mouthing off to her, for her to pull out people's teeth is a way for her to say, shut the F up.

WARRIOR: Be warned, you face my Shindu-Ryo.

MIZU: The problem with Shindu-Ryo is it's trash.

JANE: Because it's not exciting to see swords go clack, clack, clack and stab, stab, stab. You can't really feel that, but my God, you know what a toothache feels like, don't you? Yeah. So if I pull out teeth, you know how painful that is, right? Yeah.

By the way we use the, use the pronouns. He, uh, sorry. She, for her, even though in the show people call Mizu, he on the crew you refer to, to Mizu. And so I think some articles have actually referred to Mizu as they,

JANE: I think we're happy that people are having discussions about who Mizu is. This is why we wanted to make the show. Well actually in the script sometimes, you know, in 101 and when, from when we're speaking about Mizu, we speak as a he, but then physically, you know, it's a she. So we're just happy that people are having these conversations about this character.

I mean, in terms of, uh, is also a more delicate question in terms of like this, I mean, there's a lot of sex on the show as well.

JANE: Yes.

Uh, was there, there must have been a lot of conversations around that too.

JANE: There was a lot of conversations, and we were always very sensitive about who works on them because, and also with, with the, with the violent scenes too, with the action scenes, we had to make sure that the artist was comfortable and if they weren't comfortable, we just recast it to somebody that was more comfortable. Right. So with the sex scenes, like particularly in 102, the Akemi and Taigen in the bedroom scene, we used the mirror as a device for ego.

So when she says 102, that's season 1 episode 2. And the characters she's referring to are a princess named Akemi and a samurai named Taigen. Taigen had a perfect record until he went up against Mizu. She humiliated him in a sword fight. Now he's worried that he lost the standing he had to ask for Akemi's hand in marriage.

TAIGEN: The cut is so clean, a masterful cut.

AKEMI: You can't kill yourself over a brawl with some monster.

JANE: So, Taigen kept looking at himself in the mirror until she could say something about his ego, and he turns back at her. Once he turns his head and looks at Akemi. Now Akemi has the, the power fluctuated in into her character. And now from there on, everything was seen from her point of view.

AKEMI: I can see it now. You challenge him and like a dog he comes running. He faces you, his demon eyes. But your courage drives him back like a squall against the sea. You in sheath your magnificent sword.

JANE: If you have a violent scene or a sex scene come through from a character's point of view, it's never gratuitous. And, and that's just directing having a point of view. Right? **Yeah.**

JANE: I think action is actually very easy to board. There's only certain ways you can do a punch. There's only certain placements that you can put the camera to have that, that, to have that landing impact. But when you get to a dramatic scene, boy is that hard. There's no rule for that. Right? It's just like, can you feel it? Can you not feel it than you go, oh my God, maybe I'm doing this wrong. Like, I freak out more in, in dramatic action sequences. And also to go back to, you know, when you were talking about action sequences and about, you know, having Sonny choreograph them, he only choreographs the big, huge stunt sequences and some of the smaller ones like Mizu, you know, the beach fight with Chiaki and the waves. That was completely choreographed in my kitchen.

Really? How so?

JANE: I brought a friend in that also is a stuntman martial artist, and we worked it out and once we were happy with it, I shot it and then I boarded it and then sent that in as a reference. A lot of, you know, the, when Mizu was, uh, a kid and she got hit by Chiaki and then there was that whip and fall. I had to do that fall in the backyard on a mattress and I broke a fingernail.

Wow.

JANE: Akemi jumping off of that palanquin that was swinging around. I had to get in a kimono and jump off, um, two steps to show them what that landing looked like, because she shouldn't land like a superhero.

It's amazing how much of yourself you put into this. Like in every way.

JANE: Yeah. Literally, right?

To me, Blue Eye Samurai represents the best of what streaming services can do. They can fund projects that TV networks probably wouldn't have in the past. And instead of going for the widest possible audience, they're trying to appeal to a more narrow demographic of highly dedicated viewers.

But the streaming boom is over. A lot of shows are being canceled. Blue Eye Samurai was a gamble. It's an original story -- not an adaptation or part of a franchise. The fact that we can talk about there being a fanbase is impressive.

The show itself actually reminds me of Mizu. It doesn't quite fit in anywhere, but it's made a name for itself through sheer determination, focus and talent.

I don't know if Blue Eye Samurai is going to have a tragic ending or not, but if we get to see how Mizu's plays out, all the way to the end, that will be enough of a happy ending for me.

That's it for this week. Thank you for listening. Special thanks to Jane Wu.

My assistant producer is Stephanie Billman. If you like the show, please give us a shout out on social media or a nice review wherever you get your podcasts. That helps people discover Imaginary Worlds.

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