

SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS  
THE SPIDER-VERSE

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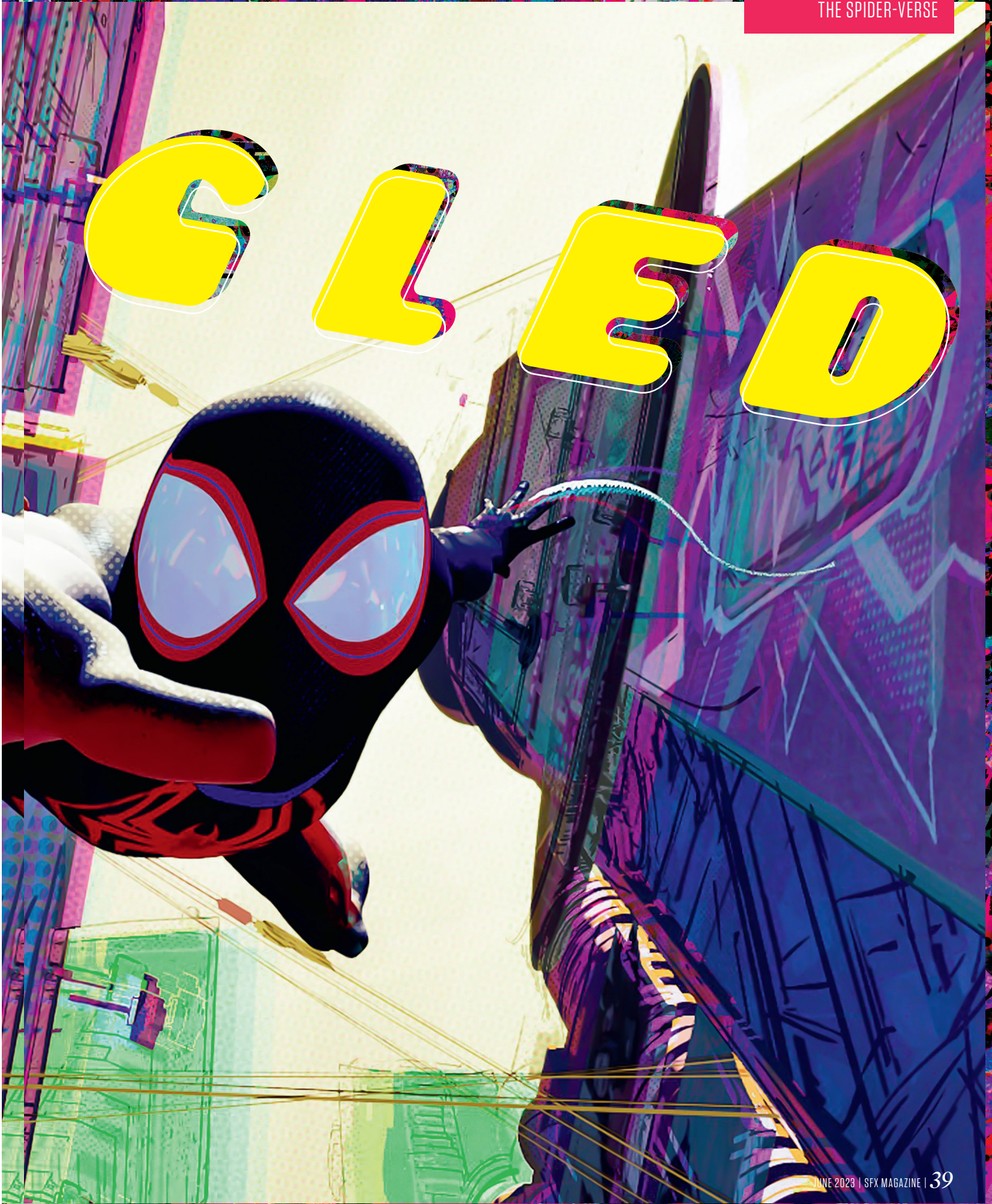
MILES MORALES RETURNS – AND WITH MORE  
SPIDER-FRIENDS THAN EVER, THE DIRECTORS OF  
**SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS  
THE SPIDER-VERSE**  
GUIDE US THROUGH THEIR WEBBY MULTIVERSE.  
TRY NOT TO GET TANGLED

WORDS: JACK SHEPHERD

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# GUIDE



## SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE



**S**PIDER-MAN: INTO THE Spider-Verse was a revelation; a cinematic masterpiece that pushed the boundaries of animation. “It just opened up what is possible, what is acceptable, what the audience is willing to take in,” says animator Joaquim Dos Santos. “I came in at the tail end and there were still some screenings where executives were going, ‘I don’t understand, why does it look blurry? I don’t know why these dots are all over the place.’ And it’s like, ‘I promise you, when it’s all together, you will understand.’”

### CRAWL TOGETHER NOW

The world certainly understood what was going on. *Into The Spider-Verse* brought the multiverse into the mainstream, paving the way for the Marvel Cinematic Universe to introduce multiple versions of the same character. Not only that, but many of the animated movies that have followed – *Puss In Boots: The Last Wish*, *The Mitchells vs*

*The Machines* and Seth Rogen’s upcoming *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem* – have emulated its form-pushing style.

“Establishing a new cinematic language is not something that people are usually open to,” explains Kemp Powers, who co-wrote Pixar’s *Soul*. “It really just gave everybody permission to go crazy,” adds Dos Santos.

Of course, with great box office success comes a great desire for more, and even before *Into The Spider-Verse* reached cinemas, a sequel entered development. In 2018, writers Phil Lord and Christopher Miller (previously best known for directing *21 Jump Street* and *The Lego Movie*) began working on a screenplay with David Callaham, while Powers, Dos Santos and Justin K Thompson came aboard to co-direct.

With their great responsibilities divided out, they forged ahead with creating a second film about the newly appointed Spider-Man, Miles Morales (voiced by Shameik Moore), one that takes our hero deeper into the multiverse than ever before.

If *Into The Spider-Verse* was about Miles learning that anyone could wear

the mask, then the sequel, *Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse*, is about him learning *how* to wear the mask. “It’s speaking to this idea of, there’s more than one way to be a hero,” Powers tells *SFX*. “As it pertains to Spider-Man, it’s speaking to this idea: what are the rules of being Spider-Man? What are the rules of being a hero? And do we always have to stick so rigidly to those rules?”

“Spider-Man, historically, is a character who has to suffer, who can never have everything that he wants. Miles is very different from Peter Parker. Parker often lives with his Aunt May, so the secrecy of his dual life is different to Miles, who has both his parents, and is incredibly close with his parents, and that involves not really having any secrets.

“Miles’s background, his upbringing, puts him at odds with what being Spider-Man is supposed to be, other than

Miles Morales (Shameik Moore) as Spider-Man.



Miles and Gwen Stacy take on The Spot.



and the directors keep hush on the specifics, but they do tease how the events of the first film tie into the sequel.

“When you think about the collider,” Dos Santos says, referring to the machine built by Wilson Fisk in the hope of bringing back his family from another dimension in *Into The Spider-Verse*, “and you think about how destructive a force that is, a lot ties back to that moment. There’s an inception moment there that took place again. That’s not a chapter that’s been closed. The fact that that happened created a bit of a mess that we’re in currently.”

**FUTURE SHOCK**

Perhaps surprisingly, the first two trailers for *Across The Spider-Verse* put less emphasis on rivalry between The Spot and Miles, and more on the tension and fighting between Miles and the leader of the Spider-Society, Miguel O’Hara (Oscar Isaac).

He’s also known as Spider-Man 2099, a futuristic version of Spider-Man who was not bitten by a radioactive spider but built a super-suit himself. He doesn’t stick to walls but climbs them using claws that can rip through metal; he doesn’t have a Spider-Sense but he does

have fangs and a toxin that he injects into people. He’s a different proposition to Peter Parker altogether.

“Miguel definitely becomes an antagonist to Miles, but his goals are very understandable,” says Powers. “Some people might side with Miles’s perspective, but some people might side with Miguel’s.

“You know, Miguel is the leader of this Spider-Force for a reason. He bears this incredible sense of responsibility. Spider-Man has always been your friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man, and Miguel is very different in that his responsibilities go way beyond any one neighbourhood. He’s just a fascinating character, but he’s not a villain. He’s a good guy.” →



being a hero who takes care of the downtrodden and protects the city.”

Miles, therefore, must come to understand what he stands for, and a guiding light on that journey is Gwen Stacy (Hailee Steinfeld). In fact, *Across The Spider-Verse* starts in Gwen’s dimension, immediately after the events of *Into The Spider-Verse*. The art style of her world is inspired by Gwen’s comic books, with watercolour washes that constantly change colour to suit her mood; when she gets angry, everything turns red.

“It looks strikingly different from the first film,” says Dos Santos. “It was really important to do that visually, to establish that there’s going to be new visual language in this film.”

“The Gwen opening is really about world-building and establishing the rules before we return to Miles, because we do a jump of over a year,” adds Powers.

Gwen soon properly introduces Miles to other worlds outside his own universe, and to a group of Spider-Protectors known as the Spider-Society, who guard the multiverse against potential threats. One of those threats is The Spot (Jason Schwartzman), a supervillain with multiverse portals all over his body. It’s not yet clear how the Dalmatian-esque nemesis will become a universe-ending foe,



Spider-Man 2099 (Oscar Isaac) has beef with Miles.



Jessica Drew (Issa Rae) as Spider-Woman.



## SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE



Miles: older and... wiser? Maybe just a bit.

# A MILLION MILES AN HOUR

Shameik Moore, the voice of Miles Morales, teases what's in store for his Spider-Man in *Across The Spider-Verse*

### Can you explain the emotional journey Miles goes through?

Miles has comfortably taken on the role of Spider-Man in his own universe. It's been a year and a half since the last movie and I think he's looking for that challenge now. The biggest challenge is staying in school and being a good son to his mom and dad, but as Spider-Man, he's looking for [a challenge].

His first real task was saving the multiverse and he did – he successfully got his friends home and beat Kingpin and stopped the collider. So he's like, "Alright, what's my next big thing?" There's a lot of emotion in that process.

And there's heartbreak in this film; we've seen [in the trailers] Miguel O'Hara chasing Miles. That is pretty heartbreaking because there's a whole Spider-Society, a whole group of Spiders that fight on the same side, and Miles just wants to be accepted, but they have a difference in opinion. That leads them to be on opposite sides of the fence, even though they're on the same field.

It's like looking up to somebody and then when you meet them they're not the person you thought they were. I can personally say that is one of the most heartbreaking things ever.

### Miguel and Miles's antagonistic relationship seems surprising...

Miles is heartbroken by Miguel. He's like, "Dude, I just wanted to be a part of your society, I'm the coolest Spider there is. But, if you want to be like that, then be like that, you're not gonna stop me."

### How did your approach to voicing Miles change for the sequel?

They wanted Miles to be a lot more confident. From day one, it was like "Miles knows what he wants." In the first movie, Miles didn't really get it until the very end of the movie. The interior of the work is more confident and Miles is more sure of himself.

### Lord and Miller wrote this movie, and many cast members have said they did improv that was used in the final cut. What was that like?

I didn't do much improv – I feel like I did more on the first one. The other cast members do, but with me, I feel as though they really want it by the book. Everything Miles says is very intricate, because certain lines lead into other moments. It's different with the other Spiders, but it's Miles's movie.

### Was there anything that you read on the page that, now you've seen it animated, surprised what you could have imagined at the time?

They definitely levelled up. The animation was already so beautiful, but this time around, they really stepped it up. Can't take any credit for that, but they truly know what they're doing in that animation department. I'm honoured to be the voice of Miles with that animation team. It's like 007's Q giving him gadgets – they really finish the character.

### Are you voicing any other character in this one?

I am Miles Morales... And they're... I will say I am Miles Morales. I guess we'll see if there are any more... I guess we'll see what that means!

### There's another sequel on the way too. Have you recorded lines for that one?

That's incoming. We're still on this film right now.

### The trailers also feature a mention of events in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It must be cool to be linked to that?

I feel like I know where you're going with this, and I absolutely would [like that!]. It would be an amazing opportunity. And if we can, if they decide to play with that, I'm ready.



Jessica and Spider-Man 2099, aka Miguel O'Hara.

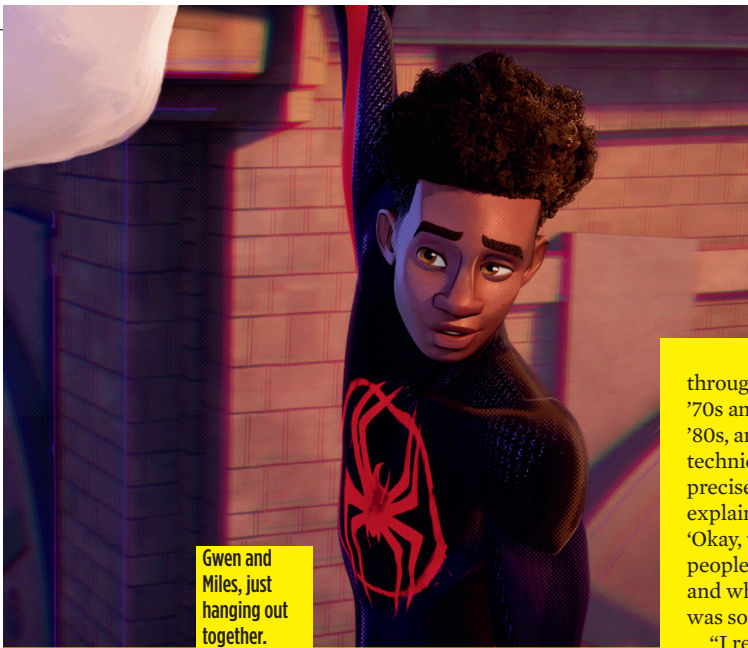


Miguel also happens to be the Spider-Man who, in the second trailer, mentions "Doctor Strange and that little nerd back on Earth-199999," a clear reference to the live-action movies. "The world of Miles Morales and Spider-Verse, it's not tied into the Marvel Cinematic Universe or anything like that," Powers explains.

"But this is a Lord and Miller film. We like to have a little bit of fun, we like to be a little bit meta and to acknowledge the world in which we are creating these stories. That's the best way to explain it.

"This isn't something where we did anything in conjunction with Marvel. Miles's universe, trust me, there's plenty to work with. That gag is one of many, and my favourite gag is one that people don't know about yet. But I think when they see it, they're going to be pretty stunned. It's a serious film, but it's also a film with a lot of fun in it."

Despite some probing from *SFX*, Powers won't confirm or deny reports that the sequel includes a



Gwen and Miles, just hanging out together.



through the late '70s and early '80s, and the printing techniques "weren't super precise," Dos Santos explains. "You're like, 'Okay, that's a crowd of people', but look up close, and what was actually on the page was some squiggles.

"I remember we walked into a screening room [for an animation test], there were squiggles on the screen, and we were like, 'Yep, those are the squiggles.' Then they started moving like people. And we were like, 'Wow, what just happened here? This is madness.'"

Equally challenging was having dozens of Spider-Men on screen at once. There's a point where there are over 50 on screen, and each has their own unique animation style. "Movement is an indication of character," Dos Santo says, "and that gets applied even to those massive scenes."

The problem was accentuating certain heroes while trying to avoid having the background characters become one singular, non-distinguishable horde, "like a *World War Z*-style army crawling at you." The animators therefore had to consider how every character was animated compared to Miles, Miguel and Gwen.

"A lot of design work went into characters that, let's be honest, show up for a few seconds," Powers says.

The directorial team went on various deep dives into Spider-Man lore to find characters to inhabit their movie, finding some "absolutely bonkers" and "obscure" superheroes. "Legally we couldn't use half of them," says Dos Santos.

Scarlet Spider is one addition he's particularly proud of. The character's

appearance will play with his anatomy, similar to how some of the '90s comics saw Spider-Man pull off some extreme, physically impossible poses. Powers, meanwhile, points to Web-Slinger,

the cowboy Spider-Man on a horse, as a particular favourite.

"There's also a few from videogames, and from some old cartoons, and there's something really funny about seeing their style done," he says. "It was surreal," Dos Santos adds. "I worked as a story artist on [2008-2009 animated show] *The Spectacular Spider-Man*, and then seeing Josh Keaton, who did the original voice, come back was just crazy."

And this is just the beginning of the follow-ups. The directors say you should be just as excited for the sequel, *Beyond The Spider-Verse*, scheduled for release in March 2024.

"*Across The Spider-Verse* is a movie on its own, but it definitely ends on a bit of a cliffhanger," says Powers. "I think it's a good cliffhanger. We hope that it's a satisfying tee-up for what's coming in the third film, because you want people to be excited about what's coming next."

"And it helps that we knew going in that this was part two of a three-part story. Since you already know that that third story is guaranteed, you can tackle it a bit differently. That being said, there's a lot of key characters in this film, and there's a story in this film that has an arc of its own that we needed to complete."

"I was very satisfied after *The Empire Strikes Back*," adds Dos Santos. "And hopefully, this is our *Empire*." 🕷️

*Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse* is in cinemas from 2 June.



live-action segment featuring Tom Holland's Peter Parker or either of the other incarnations of the character, instead reiterating that Miles has more than enough alternate, animated universes to explore. Indeed, there are five distinctly styled dimensions in which Miles gets entangled during *Across The Spider-Verse*, each with its own distinctive look.

"The first film, we're in Miles's world and other characters are entering into his world," Dos Santos says. "This is about Miles going out across the multiverse and being in these different worlds. We're not just getting snippets of these worlds - we need to create entire worlds, essentially five or six films in one. That was a scary prospect."

### HISTORY REPEATING

One world that was a particularly tricky proposition was the home of Pavitr Prabhakar, called Mumbattan. The animation style was inspired by comic books from India that were distributed



Gwen (Hailee Steinfeld) welcomes Miles.