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Rich Ting on why everyone should see The Summit of the Gods



by Victoria Davis

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TWEET

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Voting begins today, Feb. 4, for the [49th Annie Awards](#) and, next to other anime such as Mamoru Hosoda's *Belle* and STUDIO 4°C's *Fortune Favors Lady Nikuko*, Netflix's *The Summit of the Gods* has been nominated for Best Indie Feature.

The film, based on a manga series of the same name by Jiro Taniguchi and on the 1998 novel by Baku Yumemakura, follows Japanese photojournalist Fukamachi Makoto as he tracks down the famed and elusive mountain climber, Habu Joji, in an effort to retrieve the camera of George

Mallory—real-life Everest explorer who lost his life while attempting to summit in 1924—in order to discover who truly was the first to reach the mountain’s peak.

During his investigation that could define his career, Fukamachi learns more about Habu’s story, why he disappeared years ago, and why he’s now attempting to summit Everest without oxygen. Soon, the two men find themselves tackling the world’s most dangerous peaks together.

We got the chance to talk with Hollywood actor Rich Ting—who voices for Habu in director Patrick Imbert’s film—about the personal connection that drew him to the role, his long-time fascination with mountain climbing stories, Asian representation in entertainment and why he says that everyone needs to see *The Summit of the Gods*.

Interview with The Summit of the Gods’ Rich Ting



Hidden Remote: How did you get involved with the project? What drew you to *The Summit of the Gods*?

Rich Ting: Because

throughout my career but then most recently, through the COVID, I really started getting a ton of requests. And out of those requests came the submission for *The Summit of the Gods*. I wasn’t familiar with the story, but they requested me to read for Habu [Joji] and I completely just fell in love with the role.

But it wasn’t until I actually got into the studio and started watching the film that it really just blew my mind. It was so impactful for me, not only as an actor, but as a person.

Hidden Remote: What was it about these characters and the story of *The Summit of the Gods* that was so moving to you?

Ting: Well, first off, there's a lot of ignorance out there where people think, because it's animation, that it's going to be like a cartoon. But the story is so well written and the fact that it's been done in different languages [French, Japanese and English], and it still has that impact, just shows you how high quality the writing is.

But also, as an actor, when I'm playing someone, I always try to find that connection. Even in voice-over, I need it to be real and be able to bring that emotion to my voice. And I connected with Habu because I felt like I was living part of his story.

Not only seeing the evolution of Habu from a young kid with ambition, with goals and dreams, but specifically when that kid [Buntaro] comes up to Habu and he's like, 'I want to go with you,' that really hit home for me. I've had those characters in my own life. The Bruce Lee characters. But he wasn't someone that I could go up to and actually talk with about my goals as an Asian American actor.



But, as I've gotten into my career and into the business, kids will come up to me today or dads will come up to me and ask questions with, like what Habu is for Buntaro. I could physically meet them and ask questions with, like what Habu is for Buntaro.

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Hidden Remote: And what about the second half of Habu's life? He's gone from being a hungry, full-speed-ahead climber to sort of falling off the grid and being so tunnel-visioned about his goal to summit Everest. How did you make a personal connection there for the role?

Ting: In my career these days, it's not so much of a rush for me anymore as it is about being more strategic and focused and wise in the projects I choose to do. And I use that calmness to

ground me for the second part of Habu's life, keeping your head down and just keep making those steps to get to that summit.



And, tying in that moment at the end of the [*The Summit of the Gods*] with the beautiful speech, if I were to die tomorrow, I would have done more than I would ever have dreamed of doing in this crazy Hollywood business. And this is something, truthfully, I want to be doing until I die. When I'm a 90-year-old Asian guy, I hope I get to play roles as 90-year-old Asian guys.

Rich Ting on The Summit of the Gods mountain climbing research and more

Hidden Remote: For live-action roles, it's pretty common for actors to do extensive research on the professions of the characters they're playing, be it the realm of business tycoons or professional athletes. But as a voice actor in an animated film, how much research into mountain climbing did you have to do?

Ting: Honestly, I treat every project as if I'm going on camera. So, of course, I did a ton of research. But, fortunately, I had a lot of help from the production team. They had a ton of excursion documents and photos of the mountain.

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And, as a kid, one of my school trips was to Yosemite and I was able to hike up Half Dome. I don't know how they allowed us to do that, because we were in sixth or seventh grade and not roped in. I remember the initial rush and being so scared going up that mountain, and that's a carved path. So I can't even imagine what it's like for these guys who hike these summits with no paths. I just have a ton of respect.



I think I've been drawn to these kinds of movies and documentaries because of the determination and the perseverance and focus it takes. On top of that, movies like this show these guys' personal stories outside of just what they've achieved in the news. It's not about the overnight success. It's about the longevity and doing it because you love it. It's what wakes you up every morning.

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Hidden Remote: The scenes in *The Summit of the Gods* could be characters on their own as well. The animation of these mountain peaks throughout Asia is so beautiful and captivating. How much did the visuals inform your acting and appreciation for the story, especially as an Asian American actor?

Ting: When I'm on a set, I love to let the environment of that affect me. And in the studio I was working in for this... of me of these large... was really there. But when you watch it move, it's truly mind-blowing.

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I loved the accuracy and the detail of these mountains, as well as the accuracy of the illustrations of the characters. I'm Chinese and Japanese and my wife is Korean, so I'm very culturally sensitive and I was really excited to see the attention and accuracy put into making these characters truly look Japanese and not fall into stereotyped animation. Each culture—whether you're Chinese, Japanese, Korean—there's culture in the way they walk, in the way they sit and have coffee, and every culture is different.



Even the izakaya bars they were in looked and felt exactly like what I've experienced going to Japan myself.

***The Summit of the Gods* could get nominated for Best Indie Feature for the Annie's**

Hidden Remote: Were there scenes that were more tangible for you than others?

Ting: That scene where Buntaro is hanging off the cliff after he slips and falls. I remember watching that whole sequence, from the minute they start their climb, all the way through. And when the kid cuts the rope, that was so emotional for me. It's crazy when an animation gives you the same stimulus as if you were seeing a real film or a real documentary.

These 2D illustrations impacted me on such a high level because of their realness. When I scream when that kid cuts the rope, that's real. I couldn't believe how much the visuals were affecting me. It was a very unique and special experience.

Hidden Remote: As an anime epic series, it's interesting

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***Gods* not only make its way through the crowd but also get nominated for Best Indie Feature for the Annies. Why do you think this is a story people need to see?**

Ting: I think it continues to break down these stereotypes and these profilings. When you hear "Japanese Anime," you think crazy hair, glitter, high action. And when you come across [*The Summit of the Gods*], it expands that spectrum and kills that ignorance and gets you out of that tunnel vision mindset and opens your eyes.



The challenge is getting people to stop scrolling past these animated films on Netflix and actually give them a watch. A lot of my friends even, who knew I did this anime, they were like, "Oh, I guess I'll let my kids watch it," and I've had to explain that the kids might enjoy it, but adults will enjoy it more. It goes deep.

It's not just a story about mountain climbing. It's a story about taking each step at a time, not being overwhelmed with the greater goal, and all the obstacles and all the distractions and negative energy going on in the current, sticking to your roots, to your passion. It touches on mental health, commitment, perseverance and not listening to the excess noise. This story hits on all those crazy levels as an animation written so many years ago, but so current to 2022. It's such a life learning experience. And it's so motivating and timeless.

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