

## Family Guy ' Creator Part of ' Cosmos ' Update

By Dave Itzkoff  
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"Cosmos," the 1980 documentary mini-series that encouraged a generation of viewers to contemplate the origins of the universe and their place in it, and made an unlikely television personality out of the astronomer Carl Sagan, is poised to return to terrestrial airwaves. Only this time the starship is being steered by a pilot whose identity you might not surmise even if you had billions and billions of guesses.

On Friday the Fox network is to announce that it has ordered a 13-episode series, "Cosmos: A Space-Time Odyssey," expected to be broadcast in 2013. As part of a creative team that includes Ann Druyan, Sagan's widow and a collaborator on the original "Cosmos," one of the executive producers is Seth MacFarlane, the creator, producer, co-star and animating spirit of "Family Guy," the bawdy and irreverent Fox cartoon sitcom.

Yet behind a comic sensibility that is sometimes provocative and sometimes puerile, Mr. MacFarlane is a committed fan of the first "Cosmos" who laments a modern society that he says has lost its fascination with science.

"We're obsessed with angels and vampires and whatnot," Mr. MacFarlane, 37, said in a telephone interview, "when there are many more exciting and very real and much more spectacular things to be excited about, that are right in our own planetary backyard."

When the original "Cosmos" (subtitled "A Personal Voyage") was first shown on PBS from September to December 1980, it was a watershed moment for science-themed television programming. Sagan's look at existence at its most massive and microscopic, accompanied by a contemplative score by the Greek composer Vangelis, were eventually viewed by 400 million people in 60 countries, making it public television's most-watched short-form series until the Ken Burns documentary "The Civil War."

While its visions of intergalactic travel made an impression on a young Mr. MacFarlane (see the many "Star Trek" and "Star Wars" references on "Family Guy"), the intrepid spirit of "Cosmos" is now hard to reconcile with an era in which NASA has no clear successor to its recently ended space shuttle program.

"The older I got, I noticed a pattern in our culture of lethargy," Mr. MacFarlane said. "We got to the Moon, and then we just stopped."

In 2009 Mr. MacFarlane was introduced by Neil deGrasse Tyson, the astrophysicist, "Nova ScienceNow" host and director of the Hayden Planetarium, to Ms. Druyan, a "Cosmos" co-creator.



Seth MacFarlane is producing a new version of "Cosmos," the 1980 mini-series from Carl Sagan, for Fox. Andrew H. Walker/Getty Images

For several years Ms. Druyan said, she, Dr. Tyson and Steven Soter, another collaborator on the original series, pitched a new version of "Cosmos" to "the usual television network suspects" that did not quite see mass appeal in the series.

"We weren't interested in going to the audience that already knew that it loved science," Ms. Druyan said. "We wanted to go to the largest possible audience and attract people who'd never even thought about it."

But with the support of Mr. MacFarlane the "Cosmos" team obtained meetings with Peter Rice, the chairman of Fox Broadcasting, and Kevin Reilly, the network's entertainment president, who gave the series a green light last year. The new series will be produced with the National Geographic Channel, which will show episodes after they run on Fox.

Mr. MacFarlane and Ms. Druyan are now close friends and more compatible than their reputations might suggest. Ms. Druyan said Mr. MacFarlane was a hero in her household, where she and her children are regular "Family Guy" viewers.

Their personal politics also overlap from time to time: Ms. Druyan is on the advisory board of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, whose values are occasionally espoused on "Family Guy." And Mr. MacFarlane once assigned one of his writers to read an essay about abortion by Sagan and Ms. Druyan before tackling a controversial "Family Guy" episode on that same topic.

Mr. MacFarlane seems to have an ever-increasing entertainment portfolio. He is also serving as an executive producer of the Fox animated programs "American Dad!" and "The Cleveland Show"; preparing a revival of "The Flintstones" for the network; releasing a pop album; and directing his first feature film, "Ted," about a man with a living teddy bear. He said he understood that his love of lowbrow culture and low humor made him the odd man out on "Cosmos."

"I'm perhaps the least essential person in this equation," he said. "This is obviously a complete departure from anything that I've done professionally, but it's very comfortable territory for me personally." (Unlike Mr. MacFarlane's cartoon shows, the new "Cosmos" will not feature non-sequitur pop-culture jokes, and will be hosted by Dr. Tyson.)

Ms. Druyan said that though Mr. MacFarlane never knew her husband, who died in 1996, "I've imagined Seth and Carl meeting, an infinite number of times, adding that as "two men with just protean talents," they surely would have been kindred spirits.

"Now, I've heard stories about my husband before we were together, that he wasn't always that nice," Ms. Druyan said. "But the guy I knew was truly good. That's just the vibe of being with Seth."