

# • Meet the Author •

## Matt Novak

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).



Photo from [www.mattnovak.com](http://www.mattnovak.com)

Matt Novak has been writing and illustrating picture books for over 20 years. Among his many titles are *The Everything Machine*, *A Wish for You*, *Flip Flop Bop*, *The Last Christmas Present*, and *Elmer Blunt's Open House*. His *Mouse TV* was a *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, and *Newt* received an IRA Children's Choice Award.

Matt has been a puppeteer, a teacher, and a Disney artist. While at Disney, he worked on such films as *Rescuers Down Under* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Along with writing and illustrating, he is also Executive Producer at Zam Studios, an animation production company. He and his family live in Pennsylvania.

**There is something of the tall tale about *The Everything Machine*, something folkloric about its embedded lesson. Was that your intention as you started out with it?**

**MN:** Not really. It just seemed a natural outgrowth of the idea. I rarely set out to have a lesson in a story, but they very often find their way in.

**I especially enjoyed your three main Quirkian characters, Mr. Galaxia, Miss Cosmosis, and Little Greebo Moonhead. Can you talk more about each one and whether they were based in any way on real people? And how did you come up with those names?**

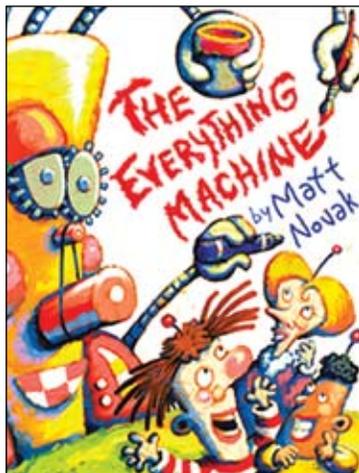
**MN:** Since the story takes place in outer space, I wanted their

names to have an intergalactic flavor. Names for me are very often about the way they sound, and don't necessarily have to have any background or significance attached to them. If they sound right and fit the character, in my mind anyway, then I run with it. Sometimes I may do a drawing of a character before I can determine a name—very much like a parent who wants to see the baby before deciding on a name. Sometimes the name comes first, and then I design the character to fit the name.

In the case of [Mr. Galaxia, Miss Cosmosis, and Little Greebo Moonhead], I think I had the names before I designed the characters. I have always loved the way that Roald Dahl named his characters. Charlie was a simple kid so why not give him the last name of a simple object like "Bucket"?

**Were there other characters who "auditioned" for a part in *The Everything Machine* but didn't make it into the final book? What were they and why were they not a good fit in the end?**

**MN:** None that I can remember. Of course, I probably did many sketches of each character until I settled on just the right look.

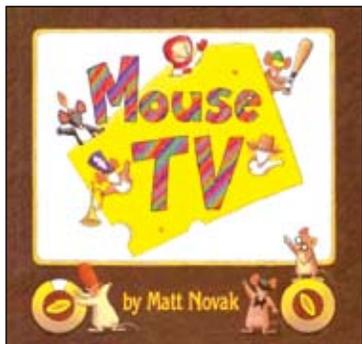


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**How did the “everything machine” come to you? Was it something you dreamed of as a boy—having a machine that would do everything for you? Or was it more an adult observation of how automated our lives have become. Tell us more!**

**MN:** This book was about ten years in the making. If I remember correctly, it began with a story I wrote about a small village where mysterious things were happening (i.e., laundry disappearing from clotheslines, things getting knocked over, etc.), and in the end, it turned out to be the wind doing it all. That book did not get published and it sort of sat around for a while. Then I re-worked the “wind” idea at some point to have a wind-driven machine that perhaps failed to work on a certain day, and the people were not able to figure it out until the wind picked up again. Then, I think that evolved (with the help of my agent, Jane Feder) into the Everything Machine.

**Tell us more about your artistic style and media. What distinguishes your art from that of other illustrators and how did you become an illustrator?**

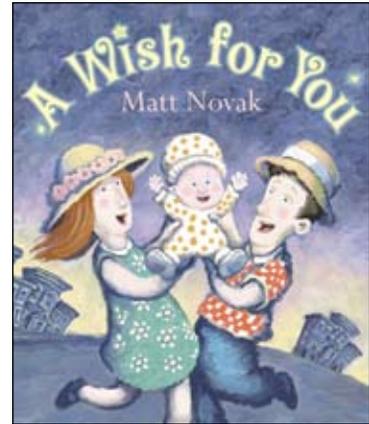


**MN:** I knew I wanted to be an artist for as long as I can remember, even before kindergarten. I loved cartoons and wanted to grow up to work for Disney. When I graduated high school, I went to School of Visual Arts in New York City. I studied animation and loved it, but then I took a children’s book course with Jane Breskin Zalben and fell in love with that as well. Up to that point I hadn’t even given one thought to being a children’s book writer and illustrator. I’m not even sure I knew it was a real job! My senior thesis was a book dummy entitled “Rolling.” It was accepted by Bradbury Press in 1985 just before I graduated, and I guess I was off and running.

I have experimented with just about every medium under the sun. I’ve created book art with watercolors, acrylics, colored pencils, and pen and ink. These days I am working mostly with digital media. I use Photoshop, Illustrator, and Corel Painter. I still do all of my drawing by hand.

Perhaps one thing that might distinguish my illustrations from others could be my willingness to experiment. I don’t just want to settle into one style as so many illustrators do. For me, each book seems to require something special that may result in my use of a new medium or style.

**I see that you occasionally illustrate books by other authors, but more often you write and illustrate your own stories. What is each experience like and which do you prefer?**



**MN:** I don’t think I prefer one experience over another. Both are fun and rewarding. When I illustrate other people’s stories, it’s somewhat easier because I have a lot of the content already figured out for me. When I’m writing and illustrating, it’s a bit tougher because I have a lot more decisions to make. Of course, having that kind of creative input on both words and pictures is very fulfilling to me as an artist and writer.

**How can readers learn more about you and your books?**

**MN:** They can head out to their local bookstore or library, and they can also visit [www.mattnovak.com](http://www.mattnovak.com).

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*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of twelve picture books, most recently Adventure Annie Goes to Kindergarten (Dial, 2010) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).*