

Crazy Fun Park

Interview with Enoch Mailangi



Enoch Mailangi is a recent MFA graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Arts. Enoch was a 2019–2021 Sydney Theatre Company Emerging Playwright, and is a current Urban Theatre Project Resident Artist.

They created and wrote the five-part AACTA-winning comedy series for ABC iView, *All My Friends are Racist*, which had its international premiere at Series Mania. Enoch has written across several series including Stan Original's *Year Of*, SBS's *While the Men Are Away*, ABC Kids' *Crazy Fun Park* and the upcoming Stan Original series *Invisible Boys*.

Tell us about your role as a writer for the television series *Crazy Fun Park*. What was involved in the process?

All writing rooms are different. Usually, there's a script producer and showrunner who puts together a team of writers to come together and help craft the details in the story. Then we get assigned episodes and go away and write and re-meet with the script producer. For *Crazy Fun Park* it was Nick Verso who was the creator and the show runner. The showrunner is basically the creative boss who makes all the wheels turn.

Creatively what was involved was Nick Verso's number one prompt:

"What do you wish you could have seen when you were younger?" And from this, the character of Nimrod was moulded and shaped over the writing room.

The words spoken by the characters should communicate who they are, what their relationship is to the other characters in a scene and help drive the story forward. How do you come up with ideas for what characters will say? How do you know when the dialogue is representative of who the character is?

I wasn't born during the era when Nimrod was born; language and what would've been the cool slang would be hugely different to what I was brought up in. That's one of the roles of the writer to figure it out. Maybe there's someone in the writer's room who knows what it was like to be a teen in the 80s. Maybe some language might still be in fashion to this day. So, I rely on people who are from that time (my mum), I watch and listen to things that Nimrod would've consumed at the time, and research. And in some way, I try as best as I can to get in the mind of Nimrod.

How do I come up with the ideas for what the characters will say? Well, for example, we might want a scene where a mechanic warns the owner of an amusement park that some of the rides are faulty and people might die. This is generally a straightforward scene – we can imagine what would be said. However, what if this scene happened in the 60s?

And what if the mechanic was a migrant from America? And what if the owner of the amusement park was only 12 years old? This is where things get interesting. And you just *write write write*.

How do I know when the dialogue is representative of who the character is?

You say it out loud. You get other people to read it. And you trust your gut. You know when a character is saying dialogue that is true, because you've put in the work to develop this character and get to know them. *Maybe* this character is inspired by someone in your personal life.

In Episode 7, 'Friends with Feelings', Nimrod's storyline is expanded when we meet Auntie Winnie. How did you and the writers you worked with develop the relationship between Nimrod and Auntie Winnie as characters in the script?

A lot of questions! For me personally, I wanted to see a different side to Nimrod who we've seen as a natural leader, an amazing athlete, popular. What does he look like when he is vulnerable, sensitive, and emotional? And in Nimrod's story, the way to show this side of Nimrod is introducing Auntie Winnie.

And then developing through asking questions: *Is Auntie Winnie playful or a stern Auntie? Would Nimrod be nervous to meet her after all this time? What did they wish they could've said to each other before Nimrod's death?*

Some answers we might never see on screen or in the story - but it does inform how our characters behave. For example, would Nimrod ever swear in front of *Auntie Winnie*?

No. He respects his Auntie. But this might come in handy if we ever wanted to create conflict.

So the short answer; ask questions, questions, questions, questions!

Crazy Fun Park spans many decades. Auntie Winnie, Nimrod and his friend Nautical were all featured in Episode 7 in the year 1984 and again in 2023. In the writers' room, what was considered important to keep the same and what changed about the characters in the two timelines? Do you have any tips for writers thinking about using time as a tool in storytelling?

A large theme of the series is grief and loss. As we know, grief changes who people are - especially on an emotional level. Maybe we've never experienced grief, but we might have seen someone who has.



PEDREA JACKSON (JINGILI, MUDBURRA, WARAMUNGU, GARRWA): NIMROD, CRAZY FUN PARK, WERNER FILM PRODUCTIONS (2022)

This can manifest visually as well sometimes; a haircut, a tattoo, a family heirloom we wear to remind us. Obviously in this instance, it's time and aging.

However, what was considered important to keep the same was the *emotion*. In this case, it was *love* – love between Nimrod and who he left behind. That's what anchored the story. This was a secret love story between Nimrod and his Auntie who he recognised as his mother.

A tip for writers thinking of using time as a tool in storytelling is to ask yourselves the following question; what does time as a tool do to accentuate what I'm trying to make my audience feel?

Positive representation of First Nations peoples is important in the film and television industries. From your perspective, what does it take for screen stories to be inclusive, meaningfully created, and representative?

I think an important distinction we need to make is the difference between representation and identification. Identification is a visual cue; *that character looks like me. That character has the same identity as me. I identify with that character.* This is important because the stories we tell should reflect the world we live in, and for marginalised people, this might be important to see people who look like them, doing things that they thought weren't possible for them. For example, a lot of young Black children identified with the new little mermaid because someone who looked like them was shown. Is this representation? No. Because as we know, mermaids don't exist. Or maybe they do, and I am yet to meet one!

However, representation is *below* the visual – the emotion, it's a *feeling*.

And the emotion is what people connect with, feel included by, feel seen by. *Feel represented by.* When watching new TV shows or films, I sometimes resonate with or feel seen by characters who could not look any more different than me or have very different lived experiences than me. BUT! What I do feel represented in is that I understand, for example, what it feels like to go through heartbreak that felt like that. Or I feel represented by this villain in this superhero movie because that's what it felt like to me when I was misunderstood. *Crazy Fun Park* is about *dead* people. No one knows what it's like to be dead. But let's see what we can do with a bunch of dead characters to make children of today feel represented.

No one can ever fully include every person's experience in *one* story, that is not the role of the writer or storyteller. Our role is to find the honesty in what we're trying to say and tell it in the best way possible. We can never make an entire community of people feel represented. But what we can do is try! Maybe you might bridge the gap by showing characters being truthful and vulnerable and hoping it can connect and surprise audiences it wasn't even intended for!