

Ithaca Times, March 23, 2017

Noodleheads See the Future:

Duo's Newest Book Their Funniest Yet

by Chris Harrington



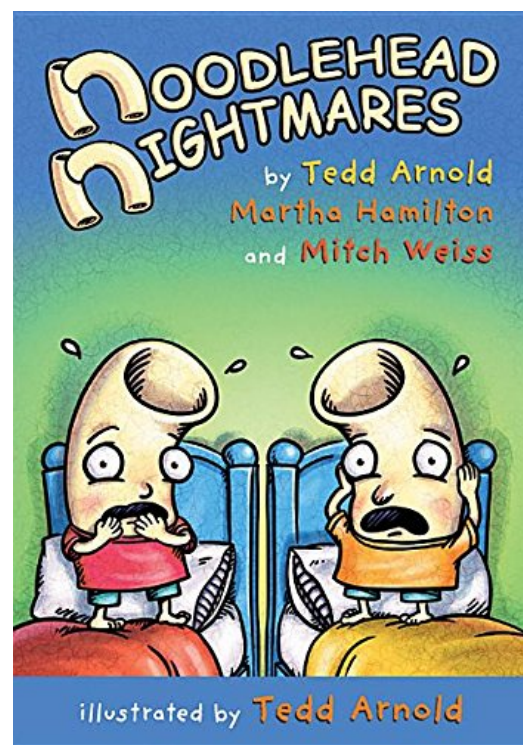
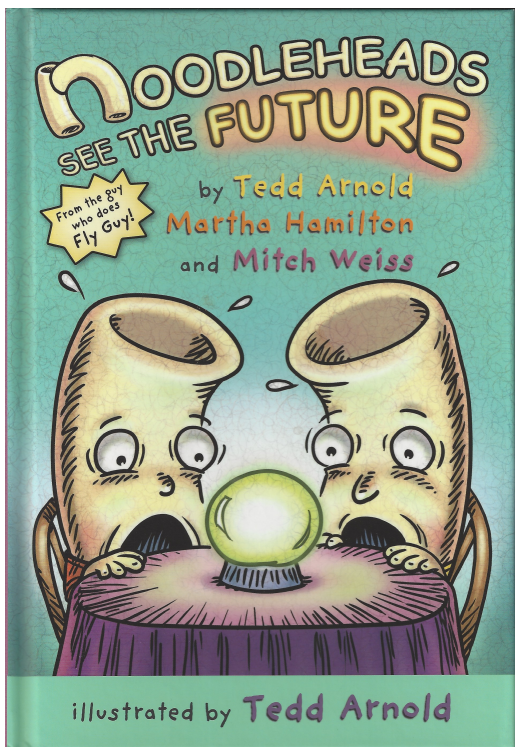
Mitch Weiss & Martha Hamilton celebrate the release of their second book in the Noodlehead series, 1 p.m., Saturday, April 1, Barnes & Noble, Ithaca. They will tell stories along with several third graders from Ithaca schools.

The powerhouse storytelling duo Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss has been blowing up the children's circuit for almost four decades. They've pioneered their hilarious style with a deft looseness and impenetrable joy. It's the unique rapport the two have that makes the stories they tell moving and memorable. What started as a love for books and stories and expression ended up being a career.

"It all started to snowball around 1984," Hamilton said. "We were getting a lot of work in the public schools and decided together to leave our jobs. And here we are today in our 37th year."

Along the way, the terrific twosome — who work primarily under the title Beauty & the Beast Storytellers — have written and collaborated on over 20 books and taught close to 10,000 Ithaca third graders the art of storytelling. Hamilton and Weiss’ method is impressively substantial and impossibly important, especially considering the assault on public schools in the past decade. Their educational goals are akin to the kind of movements that go beyond the classroom and its measured practicality: it’s about totality for these guys.

“It’s so sad to see what’s happening in education in our country today with so much emphasis on teaching to the test,” Hamilton said. “What we teach the kids cannot be easily graded on a fill-in-the-bubble test, even though the skills they learn—the importance of eye contact and vocal and facial expression, being comfortable speaking in front of a group, etc.—will be used throughout their lives.



Hamilton and Weiss’ newest endeavor is the surreal and wondrous

world of Noodlehead brothers Mac and Mac. The new series features a collaboration with New York Times bestselling children's book author and illustrator Tedd Arnold, who's best known for the popular series *The Fly Guy*. *Noodlehead Nightmares* came out last year to widespread acclaim, and this year saw the release of the equally dynamic *Noodleheads See The Future*. Mac and Mac are sort of like a mix of Bart Simpson and Milhouse Van Houten, Abbot and Costello, and a children's version of Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly's *Step Brothers*. It's bust out funny, even for adults.

"It took us three years to get up the courage to send Tedd our idea," Hamilton said. "Noodlehead stories have been around as long as people have told stories. It's not about lessons per se with the Noodleheads books — although they can be used to teach logical thinking — it's more about laughing about the foolish things we *all* do. The Noodlehead stories are so exaggerated; they make us feel better that we can't ever seem to remember where we put our cell phone."

Mac and Mac are the kind of characters destined for the big screen. As two actual macaroni pieces, the pair is so oblivious and slinky you lose sense of your surroundings as you follow their antics. And this is part of the magic. The ability to combine the ethereal and the grounded is where Hamilton and Weiss shine. Fun and joy and the sense of commonality reign supreme in their inspired visions, and working with Arnold has proved an astonishing fit. The physicality of Hamilton and Weiss' approach has found a visual artist with the same sense of immediacy.

"Tedd is the only artist who's ever worked with us one on one," Weiss said. "In general, the publisher doesn't want you to work directly with the illustrator. The editor is always the go-between." "Right now we're working on our third book for the Noodlehead series," Hamilton added. "We'll write a first draft and send it Tedd. He'll send it back with drawings and changes, and we'll figure out

how to make it all work. We're very grateful and excited for the future because the publisher, Holiday House, just signed us up for three additional Noodlehead books!"

So are all Ithaca third graders — scratch that — all humans, around the world.