

Jim Lee '86

Los Angeles, CA

At-Large Alumni Trustee Candidate

“Choosing not to follow in my father’s footsteps was one of the most painful, challenging decisions I have had to make,” acknowledges Jim Lee. “Like so many Asian families, my parents wanted me to become a doctor like my father.” Instead, though he majored in psychology while taking pre-med courses and sitting for the MCATs, Lee bargained with his father to give him one year after graduation to follow his own way to become a comic artist.

In that year, he drew comics for 10-12 hours a day, studied comic books and researched how to become an artist. And in 1987 he was hired by Marvel Comics, where he rose to prominence as the penciler for “Uncanny X-Men,” defining a new visual era for the franchise.

Lee is now an acclaimed comic book creator, editor and executive with over 30 years of industry experience. After Marvel, he co-founded Image Comics, where he reinvented business models for empowering creators to maintain control over their intellectual properties. He also was creative director of WildStorm Productions, an imprint of Image Comics producing critically acclaimed titles such as “The Authority” and “The Boys,” blending superhero storytelling with mature themes.

In 2010, Lee moved to DC Comics, where he is now president, chief creative officer and publisher. Among his executive responsibilities, he oversees the creative direction of DC Comics to ensure a compelling and cohesive universe and brand identity; creates artwork and designs for high-profile titles, including Batman, Superman and Justice League; and provides DC Comics’

creative support and oversight for DC's multimedia projects, including film, television, consumer products, Web3 and gaming adaptations.

The seeds of engagement with comics were planted long before Lee's time at Princeton. His family immigrated to the U.S. when he was 5 years old. He still remembers feeling thrust into a world that was foreign in every way, in language, customs and the unspoken rules of fitting in. He has described quietly watching and analyzing the differences in his pursuit of "learning how to fit in." Comics became a sanctuary. They were "an escape from everyday anxiety, a lifeline." They also provided models for overcoming injustice.

Just as reading those childhood comics was more than amusement alone, his work in entertainment is more than creating fun, engaging stories. He asserts that his role is about something deeper: preserving the past while shaping a brighter future. He maintains that storytelling is a way to keep traditions alive, to honor the history that has shaped us while ensuring it remains relevant. Without change and evolution, "our classic, beloved characters such as Superman, Wonder Woman and Batman risk becoming relics, frozen in time, instead of living, vibrant icons that continue to inspire."

Lee reflects that his own journey echoes that balance: honoring where he came from while embracing change. "What began as an outsider's attempt to fit in has become a lifelong mission to collaborate with others to create, to preserve and to build something new for the next generation of fans."

Through his career, he has been passionate about the intersection of art, storytelling and comics. He has been generous in sharing that passion with Princeton. He has served on the Advisory Council of the Lewis Center for the Arts since 2018, and he returns to campus to teach art classes and discuss his career path with students.

A trustee of Campbell Hall School in Los Angeles, Lee serves on the Public Partnerships Subcommittee. The committee's mission is to ensure that the school builds partnerships that engage marginalized communities for the purpose of supporting the public good.