"Happy Feet": Thawing the CG Pipeline

Co-Organizers

David Peers
Layout and Camera Director
Animal Logic

Nick Hore
Training Supervisor
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Panelists

Aidan Sarsfield
Character Supervisor
Animal Logic

Ben Gunsberger
Lighting Supervisor
Animal Logic

Justen Marshall
R&D Supervisor
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Due to its strong connection with traditionally animated films, CG filmmaking has historically been a realm of limited editorial control. Story, characters, environments, and even camera moves are firmly locked prior to commencement of production. This panel examines the implementation of a much more live-action approach to CG filmmaking.

On "Happy Feet," Animal Logic strove to engage a live-action director with the CG filmmaking process by providing familiar tools, procedures, and terminology to work with. From real-time lensing stations, motion capture, auditions, and screen tests to casting and crew, the challenge was to free up the CG filmmaking process, and create an environment in which the director had many live-action parallels.

David Peers
Layout & Camera Director

Since graduating from the Queensland University of Technology in 1995 David Peers has become one of Australia's most promising young talents in digital filmmaking. His credits include music videos for Australian bands such as Silverchair, Something for Kate and Powderfinger and film credits including George of the Jungle 2 and Inspector Gadget 2.

David’s role in Layout and Camera Direction for Happy Feet could be thought of as a digital version of the live action cinematographer. George Miller is renowned as a live action director and with Happy Feet the lensing process was designed to allow him a seamless transition to directing in a digital environment. David’s role in working with Miller involved establishing camera setups and camera moves, and blocking the motion-captured and animated characters in each scene within the context of the offline edit. It was then possible to block characters in shots, their spatial relationships to each other, the set and to the camera in the context of the edit, using proprietary tools developed by Animal Logic.

Aidan Sarsfield
Character Supervisor

Aidan Sarsfield joined Animal Logic’s film division in 1999 following a successful career as a freelance industrial designer and in-house product designer for fashion label Mambo. Since joining Animal Logic, Aidan has worked on high profile projects such as Baz Luhrmann’s Moulin Rouge!, on which he was a Senior 3D Animator, as a 3D Supervisor on Matrix: Reloaded directed by the Wachowski brothers and on Jane Campion’s Holy Smoke.

As Character Supervisor, Aidan was instrumental in bringing together an international crew that developed, built and maintained the Animal Logic character pipeline for Happy Feet. Aidan managed character technical directors, riggers, modelers and texture artists, a team that grew from six to 40 in three years.

Ben Gunsberger
Lighting Supervisor

Ben Gunsberger began working at Animal Logic in 1996, not long after graduating from the University of NSW in Computer Science. He soon joined Animal Logic’s 3D team, and worked on feature films such as The Matrix as a Technical Director. Ben pursued job opportunities in the US, working on Shrek and Matrix: Reloaded. Ben returned to Australia in 2003 and joined Animal Logic again, this time as Lighting Supervisor on George Miller’s Happy Feet. As Lighting Supervisor, Ben supervised a team of CG artists, Technical Directors and Compositors who were responsible for lighting characters and environments within a sequence or scene. Ben was also responsible for critical aspects relating to the technical and production pipeline as well as crew management. In 2003, Ben’s core team consisted of five Lighting Artists and Technical Directors – this grew to almost 70 specialist and support personnel during the making of Happy Feet. In 2006 Ben also took on the additional role of VFX Department Supervisor which involved him working closely with the Digital Supervisor to oversee shot production for the entire film.

Justen Marshall
R&D Supervisor

A computer science Honours graduate from University of Technology, Sydney, Justen Marshall joined Animal Logic as a Systems Administrator before moving into Research & Development. Justen has developed proprietary software for films such as The Matrix, for which he wrote the program that generated the film’s signature green raining code. As a Software Development Manager, Justen’s work has helped Animal Logics’ digital artists to create effects such as the sparkling particle systems that turned Kylie Minogue into ‘the green fairy’ in Moulin Rouge and the generation of the bioluminescent, vaporous “Twins” in Matrix: Reloaded. Justen is also credited with writing proprietary software that helped artists create the swirling leaves in the forest fight sequence in Zhang Yimou’s acclaimed martial arts film Hero.