"Transformers": Giant Frickin' Robots

Organizer
Miles Perkins
Director of Marketing and Communications
Industrial Light & Magic

Moderator
Barbara Robertson
CG Goddess & Freelance Writer

Presenters

Scott Farrar
Visual Effects Supervisor
Second Unit Director
Industrial Light & Magic

Russell Earl
Associate Visual Effects Supervisor
Industrial Light & Magic

Scott Benza
Animation Director
Industrial Light & Magic

Jeff White
Digital Production Supervisor
Industrial Light & Magic

Richard Bluff
Digital Matte Supervisor
Industrial Light & Magic

Bringing 30-foot-tall robots to life in this summer's blockbuster film "Transformers" required some of the most complex modeling and animation ever attempted at Industrial Light & Magic. With 14 fully computer-generated characters, some containing over 10,000 individually controllable pieces of geometry, new systems had to be developed to make this not only feasible but production friendly - a challenge not to be underestimated. From oil filters and axles to pistons and body panels, each piece had to be individually controllable while operating within a substantially complex system. Transformers are more than the sum of their parts.

Scott Farrar joined Industrial Light & Magic in 1981 as a camera operator on Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan and was promoted to Visual Effects Supervisor on Who Framed Roger Rabbit? in 1987. In 1985, Farrar received an Academy Award for Best Visual Effects for his work on Cocoon. Farrar’s ability to carry out the vision of filmmakers has earned him several additional honors including Oscar nominations for Backdraft in 1991 and A.I. Artificial Intelligence in 2001. On A.I. Artificial Intelligence, ILM created the first real-time interactive on-set visualization process allowing filmmakers to place actors in virtual sets providing complete freedom with camera moves, earning Farrar a British Academy Award nomination for best achievement in visual effects. As a member of the DGA, Farrar’s futuristic environments in Minority Report earned him another British Academy Award nomination. He has been nominated for Best Visual Effects for his work on The Chronicles of Narnia.

Prior to coming to ILM, Farrar worked as a freelance cameraman in the LA area. In 1975, he was invited to visit the set of the then unknown “Star Wars” and saw the first motion control system in action. Inspired by what he saw, he began work for Robert Abel and Associates, and eventually for Doug Trumble working on Star Trek: The Motion Picture.

A California native, Farrar received a his Bachelor of Arts and Masters of Fine Arts in Theater Design with an emphasis in Film from the University of California at Los Angeles.

Russell Earl joined the ranks at Industrial Light and Magic in 1994 as a technical assistant on Casper. Since then, he has contributed to films such as Mars Attacks!, Men in Black 2, Mission : Impossible : III , and Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest, which was awarded the Oscar® for best visual effects. Known for having a keen eye and deep technical knowledge, Earl has risen from Technical Assistant to Technical Director, Sequence Supervisor, CG Supervisor and now Associate Visual Effects Supervisor. Most recently, Earl served as Associate Visual Effects Supervisor on Michael Bay’s Transformers.

Prior to ILM Earl worked for Douglas Trumbull putting both his model making skills and digital artistry to use on the Luxor ride film. While in college, Earl interned at VIFX and contributed to feature films such as Patriot Games, Batman Returns, and Toys. Earl holds an industrial design degree from Rhode Island School of Design.

Scott Benza joined Industrial Light & Magic in 1997 as an Animator. He holds a degree in Commercial Art with a minor in Video Production. Prior to his work at ILM, Scott worked as a Senior Animator for Microsoft Inc. in Redmond, WA. As a Lead Animator at Industrial Light & Magic, he is responsible for many aspects of the development of a CG character, as well as providing creative and technical direction to animators. Some of his most notable projects have included animation and simulation work for the Rock Monster in Galaxy Quest and development work done for crash/destruction simulations for Pearl Harbor.

Jeff White joined Industrial Light & Magic in 2002 as a creature technical director. He is a graduate of Ithaca College’s Cinema and Photography program and has a Masters of Fine Arts from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Prior to graduate school White worked as technical director for Laika Studios in Portland, Oregon.

Since arriving at ILM, he has worked as a Creature Technical Director on Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest, Lemony Snicket: A Series of Unfortunate Events, War of the Worlds, and
Star Wars: Episode III “Revenge of the Sith”. Responsibilities on the shows included rigging and enveloping a wide variety of creatures running flesh, cloth and hair and muscle simulations.

Richard Bluff joined Industrial Light & Magic in 2003 as an artist in the digital matte department and has most recently taken on the supervision for the group.

Prior to joining ILM, Bluff served for three years as a digital artist and supervisor at Venice, California-based Blur Studio where he worked on numerous projects including video game cinematics, 3D ride-films for theme park attractions, and the feature film Bullet Proof Monk. Bluffs’ career began in 1997 when he was hired at Revolution Software in the U.K. as a CG Trainer. A short time later he was promoted to Lead Artist overseeing the studio’s work on a variety of video games such as In Cold Blood. Bluff’s most recently worked as a digital matte supervisor on Michael Bay’s Transformers.