

Creating Effects at Rhythm & Hues: Brock Stearn

This lighting and technical director has worked on feature films like *Superman Returns*, *Constantine*, and more.



Lighting and technical director Brock Stearn helped create realistic sequences for the animated film *Happy Feet*.

So *Ultraviolet* didn't win any Oscars. And yeah, it may have a mere 7 percent 'freshness rating' on rottentomatoes.com. But that doesn't bother lighting technical director Brock Stearn. "Some of the best effects are in the worst films," he jokes of the film he worked on.

While this *is* sometimes true, Brock has plenty to be proud of for his work on films like *Happy Feet*, *Superman Returns*, *Constantine*, and *Meet the Robinsons* at Rhythm & Hues, one of the most highly regarded and oldest animation and effects studios in the business.

Rhythm & Hues actually employs two Full Sail graduates—Digital Arts & Design alum Shaun Comly and Computer Animation grad Seth Brower. So, it was especially valuable for students to hear from Brock about his creative contributions to the largest private visual effects studio in the world, during his recent visit to campus.

Brock's artistic touches add moments of beauty, excitement, and sophistication to movies with arguably mediocre plot lines. He describes that, after a character is modeled, rigged, and animated, "it comes to me and basically it has no color information. It's just gray...It's my responsibility to apply all that work correctly and [add] lights to make it look like whatever CG object [or character] was there on set when they shot the live action."

Rhythm & Hues was asked to assist Australian animation studio Animal Logic on a few scenes for the animated film *Happy Feet*. "We did the sequence where basically the killer whales are trying to eat the penguins, and the sequence where Mumbles [a character in the film] goes after the fishing ship trying to see where all the fish are going," he explains.

For these challenging scenes, Brock's team had to light the ocean, the surrounding snow and ice, the water running off of the killer whales, the water shooting out of their blowholes, and the water that splashed on the penguins and everything else.

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Brock also had a hand in developing the scene for *Superman Returns* in which Lex Luther launches a crystal into the ocean and a new island is created. "The crystals come out of the ground, so there's water, splashes—one of the crystals spears through the boat," he explains. The team had to develop a realistic looking ocean that reacted to changes in light and to objects, which proved challenging because "we were doing stuff we never did before," he confesses. "Rhythm & Hues is mainly known for [being] a character animation shop, like a *Scooby Doo* movie or something like that."

Brock took that project as a learning experience, which goes to show that you never know what the

industry will hand you. "... I did more overtime on that show than I've done on any other project, but it was just a very fun experience."

And when it comes to making it in the business, Brock recommends newcomers choose and stick with a specialty within animation. He says it's best to look for internship or apprenticeship opportunities, exercise patience while studios examine demo reels, and never send the same material more than once.

"If you get rejected, wait nine months, and send a new demo reel," He suggested. "And showcase whatever skill you really excel in."

Most importantly though, "you have to be an artist first," he shares. "Anyone can teach you software, but the way to use it in an artistic manner and take feedback and take that and develop something—that's what you really need to concentrate on."