Episode #97 – Chris Clarke Audio transcript

Chris, thanks for doing this, man. That's all right. Really appreciate my pleasure. Love. This is nice. Looking forward to this for a long time. Really? Yeah. I better, I have don't disappoint. I have something to live up to then.

Okay. I'll do my best to fulfill. This was it today or yesterday?

Joey the Horse: Behind the Scenes of Warhorse

We were talking about Joey. Yeah, Joey the horse. Yeah. Joey's a funny one. Talk us through Joey the horse from the movie Warhorse. It's funny, Joe, I've had a lot of good publicity from my Joey footage when I first. I took that footage first to show Spielberg.

We were he didn't know we built that and we were in Dartmore and it was super foggy and we were hanging around and we just took this stuff down in case he might need it. Of course, horses are really good to train. They're really easy to train. So a lot of these things, like on some films, you build them as an insurance policy just in case you can't get the horse to do it.

But of course they didn't get the horse to do it. It's better. So I filmed this thing and I took it over to him to show him and it, you actually was really funny. So I took the video camera, but it wasn't a phone, it was video camera. How long ago it was now. And I showed him, he said, oh what did what did we.

Doing impressions of him. Oh, what, sorry, Mr. Spielberg. So wait, what are you gonna show me? He said, yeah. So I played this footage and he just sat there, like looking down at it and he's got a slight fro. And he goes yeah, okay, one, what am I looking at? He says, I'm he said, every day I'm surrounded by fucking horses.

Why am I looking at another one? And then he pulled back to show me on the back of it, and he veed back from the camera. He went, oh shit. He said, look, wow. He said, that's not, none of that was real. I said no. So we didn't we barely used that horse. But what it did do is shown that we can actually do a believable horse.

So it opened up the avenue to making the horse that's in no man's land. Of caught in the barbed wire. 'cause I think at the time they didn't know how they were gonna do that. I think they're gonna think they're gonna do it digitally. So yeah, Adrian Parish and Terry Jones then made that version while I was doing other things.

Terry Jones, the making, not Terry Jones. Yeah. Not Python. Yeah. Not Terry Jones, the Python alumni. Yeah. So he always, the, and they put that together and then we all got underneath in

the wooden box and under the ground and puppeteering it, our puppet with the head and the neck, and then other guys did the body and the feet.

Now I've got that video that I've, I show students and on that pullback, it is always up. Yeah. Because it, it looks like you're, up to your elbows in a horse's ass. Yeah. But just the movements of that face are incredible and still that's down to papa, but there's a lot going on under that skin.

I've got multiple paddles going on under the nose to try to replicate the stretch they can do in the reach. But I've also got loads of paddles at the sound, around the mouth corners. 'cause when you watch a horse chew all the muscles around the mouth, corners, all pulse and there's ripple.

So I put a few paddles in there and then program them to kinda shift and move and twitch at, whenever you move the mouth, try and replicate that muscle and tend move, you get underneath skin and it just adds a believability. You can't put your finger on, but it's there. Where does that ability, it's gonna sound really lame, so forgive the clumsy manner in which I'm about to say what I'm gonna say.

The Art of Animatronics

How do you know how to do that? Are you watch horses, did you have to study horses? Or have you done this so many times before that it's just in your head. If I was doing a cut, I know I don't need to see a cut to do it or. I'll that in two ways. Yeah. Yeah. There's a lot of study loads of things in life.

I watch, I'm one of life's observers, and I think people, other people who do my job with any kind of amount of success does the same thing. And you study the world and you notice not only what it does, but then you try and put logic to why, the, why it does it, why an animal might act the way it does.

It's like you watch a bird, birds do this thing. They're obviously at the bottom of the food chain, they are, they, the cats, dogs, anything, grab all of it. And whether they look around, they twitch here and they twitch there and they stay still. Then they look, because if they drift around looking, you can't really focus.

And when they're still, they're not as seeable, and then you have to put logic to why it's doing that. And where if you understand why it does it, then it's easy to replicate it. Because you understand the, everything's logical. Everything has logic, even illogical, there's logic to it.

So yeah. And then the second part of it is actually being bothered to do it. There's a lot of people saying, oh, no one will notice that. And I get this all the time. When you working in 10 say, oh no, I

notice that. I wouldn't not bother putting down on that movement. I know I'll notice. And they might not notice it, but subconsciously they'll notice it's not there and it, do you know what I'm saying?

I do. And I think some of the thing like that looks wrong and I don't know why, but if you put this thing in and it won't look wrong, and then you don't need to know why, because you've actually covered that base. Yeah. So I find those little flinches and twitches and do make all the difference.

No it's brilliant. I love it.

The Importance of Details in Animation

Same thing with stop motion animation. Look at the Aardman stuff, the other Wallace and Grommet here. They're sitting at the kitchen table talking about wimbley cheese and so on. Yeah. And there's a clock on the wall, and the second hand is, that's it.

It's in the background. It's not even in focus. Yeah. Not part of the scene. It's in the windows open. Birds fly by outside and the trees are just kinda moving a little bit. And yeah, the curtains, but it stops the action from just being that localized pot of movement and suddenly it's the whole of movement, which makes it, rather than just being this ball of action, it makes it a world of action.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And that's the same thing. I think it's the same thing. Yeah. Because it doesn't significantly change the story, but it's about how it's told rather than atory. It makes it alive. You might not notice it, but you look at it and go, something's off. You don't notice that drip of water getting bigger and bigger out of the faucet in the sink, and finally going into a coffee cup in the sink.

So there's a fair bit of what's there, a fair bit of you accumulating all these things. So you're not really thinking about, and I think it's the same with makeup. You don't start with the thing you do, you look at the thing you're gonna be working on, and then you translate it into what mechanical aspects you would've to create.

This comes to my first, anybody who asks me anything about animatronics. I'm trying not to sound, like a self important asshole here, but people ask me, and they ask me for what? For a reason. I don't question it. But my, my whole thing with animatronics says you start at the end and you work your way back.

You never work from the servos or the hydraulics forward. You work for the desired end result. Then you work backwards from there, from the skin backwards, and you never lose sight of that fat. You never lose sight of. It's if someone shows you and she'll never showed you a magic trick and you go, wow, that's amazing.

How the hell did that happen? Then they show you the mechanics of it. But what you must never lose sight of is that reaction that you had when you saw it not knowing how it worked. And it's the same thing. You gotta look at what reaction, the way you want something to move or look. Never lose sight of that.

You just gotta, and then as you are going through the stage of coring out and sculpting and molding and never lose sight of what the end result is supposed to be. And that's what you are working towards. That is the Bible. That's the data that you are working to, is the fact that it's gotta look realistic, it's gotta look fearful.

It's gotta look like a flight animal or a flight animal. And those things are really important. Yeah. I think that's a good, that's why people who do what they do very well, they're not distracted by the mechanism of the tools or the materials. Yeah. You should be so familiar with those that you don't actively think about them.

You're just concentrating on the end result. So when my pet hates I hate being referred to as an engineer. I hate that. And sometimes if you're struggling to crew up a job and they go, oh, I know this guy, he is a good engineer. I go we can make use of that. But we're not engineers, we're animatronic creature designers and builders.

Engineering is just one tool that you use to fulfill your own personal brief. I'm not an engineer. Engineering is just part of what I use to make the actual end result. The desired end result. It's a tool out my box. Yeah. It's not the be all and end all of it. Yeah. And if I don't, if I think engineering is going to, engineering looks lovely, but I think it's gonna harm the movement at the end, then I won't use it.

Yeah. I'll do something that's a bit more Heath Robinson. Yeah. Because it's the best way of doing it. Okay. Not the smartest looking way of doing it. Amazing.

Early Inspirations and Career Beginnings

How did you start doing that stuff? Did you, were you always interested in it as a kid? It was a hobby as a kid. Yeah. Everyone else was kicking an inflated pig's platter between jumpers.

Were you dissecting Furbies football fer? Bit late in the day bit. Yeah. Bie, yeah, I was dissecting action now. But football board meter tears. I was in the garage. I used to build stop motion puppets. I built an optical printer when I was 12. I found two. I looked, I found the process of how you actually composed shots.

So I, I found two identical bell and how projectors, and I worked washing cars to buy them and then strip the back mechanics down so I could run two pieces of film. And the register was terrible. You couldn't get, but I found a way of making my holdout mats and then up we were actually projecting that film onto the back of a opaque screen.

So the end result was awful, but. I actually managed to do a composite shop as, as bad as it was, and as, as bad as the actual mat lines were. It doesn't matter. I'd managed to do it and I've made the mechanics to do it. That's crazy. And that was, yeah. What made you wanna do that at first place?

Were you like looking at the making of styles or something? Yeah, I used to, I remember when I watched Star War sorry, it was a, what's the other, what's the captain? Oh, star Trek. Star Trek. Remember watching Star Trek the movie, and there was this shop where this it was one of the war birds, as it called the War Birds kind of cling on.

Yeah. It peeled past the camera lens and it cloaked so it just went invisible. So I jumped up and went in my garage to try and replicate it. So I had an X Wing fire model. I had the stop motion rigged that I built, which he had a marks on it where, so you could actually mark down what positions it in.

So I actually. Stop motion animated it, but then took all six axis to the, and then I could actually run it again and set them up and do the exact same move and work with a light wall behind to make that, make the hold down, Matt. And then I got some got some plastic and heat it up and made it all wobbly.

So if I went past the lens, it would make things look like they were going through water. And that's how I made it. The footage I don't know. Then I turned the, like down on the actual take and I replicated in eight millimeter and that was my thing. I just came into face. Do you still have that?

I don't. Do you know what you got? You got in my nan's it was in my nan's loft that my nan died and everything got cleared out and it all got lost. I've got one roll of film somewhere, but if I watched it back now, I'd probably think, oh, it's awful. That was your first kind of thing though, but Yeah. But it was just, I just enjoyed the technicalities of it and how it works. Fantastic. And I think that's missing from film now.

Challenges and Triumphs in the Industry

I used to love, I think it's missing for a lot of kids now, taking things apart and putting 'em back together after you figure out how it works in such a way you can't dismantle them.

When was the last time you watched a, you saw a making of book of any Not about notability. Every film came with a Making on. Yeah. Yeah. We used to go and get it and through probably the Grinch, it's probably the Grinch that's 20 odd years old. That's it. Yeah. Yeah. And I remember, and I used to like the heyday, like you'd watch back to the Future and you could see that it was a, an effect shot.

But it was, it's, it was, I think it was the Haddi 'cause it was good enough to be convinced by it. A little bit of squinting. You can just believe that it's all real, but you could still just about see as an effects. And it made you interested in how they've done it. And the process, if it's done too good, it is.

You've lost that interest in the effect. 'cause it's just too believable sometimes. That's just my thing anyway. That's an interesting point. Never thought of it like that. There's a scene in, I think there's the second one where the DeLorean takes off. Yeah, I know. It's coming in. It flies in then it fly.

It does. It curls in, it's the model on the MoCo rig, then it comes back, then it, at some point it goes behind a tree. And it becomes the real car coming off a ramp and it matches perfectly. And I love that and. 'cause then you can see, oh, you can just about see where the model becomes the real car.

And that just made me interested in effect. There was a golden age though, when we I'm 51 now. Are you? I'm 55. So we're very similar. Yeah. Similar love. Yeah. So things like explorers and, or the Goonies and that there were lots of sexy movies and all the Labyrinth and the Jim and stuff's great.

And even MPE Laura Mpe show was glorious. It was amazing. Amazing time to be alive. Star Fighter. Yeah. Yeah. That it, yeah. But they made you feel so good. Those films and those TV shows. They were really they were cozy and nice and so so it was like, you were, it was a cuddle.

It was a kind of a hug, it was a warm feeling. Yeah. But you were witnessing all these things that you knew weren't real, like the Muppet show. You can tell them Muppets, you can see the rods, but yeah, you, the performances were so good that you didn't care. You were looking at a sock puppet.

No you were sad when Kermit was sad. And I think you you could believe it was good enough to this's what I'm saying. It was good enough to believe in it enough to buy and what it's doing for the story. But it was also a chance to witness the creativity and be in awe of it.

Of it. Do you know what I mean? And think how have they done that? And be interest in how they've done that. Oh, who framed Roger Rabbit? That was awesome. That was such a good film, that blending of live action and puppetry and Colton. Yeah. And then things underneath and then, and that, I think that was one of the first films where they, even though that was done with animation, it was a way of highlighting even more the visual effects shot today.

Now you have to actually. Do the interaction part, the shirt's being pulled by a CG character. You have to make the shirt move, and there was a lot of that there, but it was being frame animation. Yeah. It was good cell animation. It was great. Yeah.

The Evolution of Practical Effects

I loved the fact I was around when it was those films when it was ET and it was just the last half by, and I wish they would make more stuff like that instead of all cg. It just Yeah. Doesn't have the same feel. It does. And I, it's one of these things before we started it is, like you say, you've gotta be careful what you say 'cause still working it.

But we were talking today about why the prequel to the thing didn't work and. And I've seen a lot of the stuff that, my, my friends at the A DI did and I just really wish I'd seen that. Make it onto camera. And embellish that a little bit with post rather than replacing it.

Yeah. I don't know. Because I think they missed a trick, the whole point that the whole fan base for the thing is based solely in practical and the fact that they didn't go down that route. Yeah. And they should have worked to make that work. Yeah. Is, I think there's nothing digital in it and yeah, not at all.

And it's like there's a little bit of stop motion and it's all just in Canberra practical. This is, and it's all about for it. And it's still today after all this stands up. Amazing. You never have to squint at all. And the other, think the other thing as well, just as a side point, we were talking about the pre cool.

The thing that I think made the original one work is because when, whenever the thing did anything, whenever it split open and grew arms and thing it, it was for a reason. McCready comes in and starts firing a shotgun into it, so has to get away. So it grows arms out, back smashes through the boards and pulls itself up to the ceiling.

Then Charles comes in with a flame thrower so it splits open and this sort of flower of dog tongues comes and tries to grab it and everything it does is for a reason. But in the prequel it's just doing weird stuff for the sake of looking weird. 'cause it looks freaky. Yeah. But no point did I feel it's doing it for a reason.

You know what I mean? It wants to hide until it can't hide anymore. Then it will do whatever it takes to survive. And this is just doing stuff all over the place for the sake of it. And it's a bit of a shame for me 'cause I love the things. It's one of my favorite films of all time. Yep. I think the bottoms works.

Incredible. It's the, again, still stands up over the waste time. Yeah. So how did you go from that to working, your stuff?

Breaking into the Film Industry

How did you start work? Who did you, what was your first work in that area? I was a northern chap. I came from this small town called Congleton that no one's ever heard of.

It's it is a bit like Trumpton by day because, and Beirut by night, but yeah, I grew up there and no one there knows anyone who works in film or anything else. So my thought in the door was scenery. I just thought I went I'm dyslexic, which is amazing that I've actually magazine my books now.

I've trained it away, but that's something else. I enjoyed effects, but I tried going down the college route and I did a year at college because of my dyslexia, my inability to convey basic information, I realized I was never gonna pass the exams. So I stopped going after a year. And I thought, and my mom said what you're gonna do now there?

I said, why? I'm gonna try and get the films and television? She goes, how are you gonna do that? You don't know anybody. And she's been in films. She was one of the, she was in hard days night and chitty bang and goodbye Mr. Chips. She was a dancer. Yeah. And she said, you don't know anybody. And there some cha in that you have to know someone a bit.

There's a little bit of a cliqueiness to it, so I rang the BBC and I said, who does your scenery? 'cause I knew the B BBC didn't do anymore. And they said studio 2000 and Watson, Cory. And they named these things. So I rang them up. And I'd done a bit of engineering work in apprenticeship mill looked late and bit of welding they said, can you do that one?

What have you done before? So I reeled off all these, this is my lie. I reeled off all these shows. I've done scene before. He said, that sounds great. Yeah, we're looking for someone. One, come in now. All these shows I reeled off were local lamb drum.

I built scenery for and sets, but I was turned, I was quite good at it and people used to use me a lot, so it wasn't a lie really. I just didn't get paid. But with, within a year I was I was running the mechanical bill for you be that. Oh, okay. That's amazing. Yeah. To build all this stuff for you be so yeah, that was my foot in the door.

But then I became. I worked for Alton Towers over winter 'cause TV work dried up. So I found they, they did all their new theming and stuff over winter. So I went to Alton Towers while TV work while they were doing all their new scheduling. And then Alton Towers was bought out by two Swords.

So overnight I became the head of metal work for the two Swords art workshops. So then we did the Chamber of Horrors. We fit, and I went down to London to fit all this stuff and I met a load of prop makers and stuff and working TV and film. And then they said, oh, we should try art. So I stopped in art on my way home and I met Haley and then I got home.

We didn't have mobiles then I got home and my mom said, she said, oh, someone called Haley's call and they gave me a job there. And then, so they got me in. A small world, I guess so I, I have to tell them old towers, I don't work for them anymore. They were, they weren't happy. Yeah.

What was the first puppet you ever built? You mean for production? No, just that. Where did that come from? I, it was a finger and I think I think I used to say I was somewhere between six or eight and I built a finger of my finger and I took a mold out plaster Paris, and then I made a skin just outta copy neck, which eventually went I think I tried to even phone it up.

Did I put some stuff in it? Did I try and put some bicarbonate, toros it up? That's quite a thing to think of as a seven, 8-year-old. Yeah, I know. But that's the way my brain works. That's impressive. Bizarre. Then I made sort bone and put some string on it and some things and pulled it, and then I made this finger that looked, it looked really real.

I had the bone sticking and I used to get people to hold it like a kiwi. Then they pulled the string and they were twitching their finger and they, that was the first thing I ever made. So you just figured it out? Yeah, I just figured it out. I just had a go. So you knew what you wanted and you just filled in the blanks.

Yeah. Which is what you but I got this from books. Books. And there was always, every time you've looked at a making of book, there was always a bit of information missing, wasn't there?

So I used to have all the books open. When I found out to do composite shots, I learned most of that from the making of Tommy book.

About the making of Tommy, the Dr. Who movie? Yeah. And they had a whole thing about. Blue screen, and so I knew I didn't have the process, the filters to make the chroma key blue, turn black and all that. So I just made my, found a way of making my own whole out max. And then I made optical printer and went from there.

So that was it. It was just gathering information that was never complete and then trying to make it complete. I used frog DNA to complete this sequence. I ended up with a dinosaur could be produced. Life fights away. Life does find a way. Were you a writer as a kid? No, I was terrible.

As I say I came away with score with not very much, but I got the only a, it was called a plus when I, this a star thing sounds like something from kindergarten. But yeah, you the highest thing you could get for an exam was an a plus. And the only a plus I got was my engineering drawing. And I completed the exam in 20 minutes.

I just, there was all these like different views with that one. And I did a couple of drawings and then I went and handed it in. I remember the teacher, 'cause they had such a low opinion of me, the teacher was sitting the exam. I came and handed it in and they went, look, if you want to come back in a bit, I shouldn't do this and try again.

I went, no, I've finished it. And they were like, yeah, if you want to come back in a bit and try again and, try and finish it. I let, I'll let you back in. I went, no, I've done it. And she's yeah, if you want to come back. Thought, okay. So I walked off having finished it and I got an a plus on that 'cause it was shapes.

It was shapes, it wasn't words, it was shapes. And I could do shapes and I think that's the basis of whatever my skills are now, if I got any. Yeah. But writing, for me, writing stemmed from the fact that I struggled so much. I seen it,

it started the, my decades long quest for a cure started when I fell in love with this girl I met when I was young. Her name was Helen. I can see her face now. She was lovely. And IF it's quite embarrassing, I felt compelled to write this girl a poem. So I wrote this poem and I did it on parchment type paper.

I found, and I stained it with tea bags a bit, make it look old. And I wrote this thing out and I stuck it on doll so you could roll it up. And I made little ILS with a file and sandpaper stuck them and I handed it to this girl. That aside, as embarrassing as that is, I didn't get a date with her. I think she just spa on my back and walked.

I was hoping for more, but but yeah, but I suddenly went, hang on, I just wrote a poem and I didn't see them encounter the same blocks I did. When it comes to just conveying basic information, apparently it's a different part of your brain, really. So it wasn't that you had a thing you wanted to attend to that overrode it.

It was just the nature. By chance. I wrote that. So I carried on writing poetry and then poetry became something quite flowery. Literary p short stories. And then I tried to make them less literary and make them a bit more mainstream, a bit more genre, and after years of doing I all, but I've always got rid of the dyslexia.

Yeah. And I think I was spurned on for doing it 'cause I had such a bad time at school and I was ridiculed by the teachers. I think that pushed me. And finally getting published was all my metaphorical flag in the top of a metaphorical. Mountain that I'd climbed, to get published when I got an offer to publish. So I took it. It was a nice feeling, yeah, I bet. Yeah. Because school can sometimes do a lot of damage because they teach you a certain way, and if you can't line up in the way that they teach it, then you're you're a problem. And there's a, you can be intelligent without being academic.

Yeah. And when we were at school, that wasn't really recognized, was it? No. It's, it was one avenue still not as recognized as it could be. Just because you have a master's degree doesn't mean you're really, you're smart. No, that's it. And my partner, Zoe, is she's a doctor. She's got doctorate and she says the same thing, said it's just a piece of paper and it shows.

That you can knuckle down and complete things. It shows you can do hard work, but that's as much as it means. I remember was it David Cameron was in power that he was and he was trying to address this thing that some people aren't academic, the better with their hands and they have skills.

So his thing was we have to teach them plumbing and that was it. That was the answer. You are not academic. We'll teach you plumbing and I have to laugh. Yeah. The relocation of water. That's it. That's all you good for. So that made me laugh. But even then it wasn't that case. The relocation of water.

Yeah. It's a funny, it was a funny time, but it obviously left a scar, but yeah I, it pushed me to do something. Yeah. That's awesome though, that you were determined to do things that you wanted to do and when you were doing the things you wanted to do, like the mat, figuring out how to do composite shots and things, you just went for it.

Yeah. And that's really good and I think people should know that, if they've been hit by things, I think, like at school it's easy I think to just dwell on what you're not good at. And then you never really think about what you could actually be really good at if someone doesn't encourage you.

No, totally. Did we mean totally encourage or did you encourage yourself? I encouraged myself. There was a funny time. We were in metal work class and I remember, I dunno how this ever happened. I remember we spent about two months making a poker and it's, so there's a stick in the middle, there's a handle hand place poker.

Yeah. There's a handle and a pointy bit. And I dunno how the hell that la that, that lasted weeks. But it did. So he was showing grazing one end on, and I was there with a little pad just doing stuff, not taking any notice. 'cause I sold it stuff all the time and I just knew what it was, yeah. Bit of boar expedited things and flame whatever, don't get it too cherry red, otherwise it's probably gonna carbonate. And so I was doing, and suddenly in my haze of writing this stuff down, like Charlie Brown's, teacher Voice, Clark? Clark. Clark. Oh yeah. He goes, I don't know what's so interesting there, blah, blah, blah, that you think you are gonna learn how to make this book.

So he made me stay after class. It was the last class of the day, he says, so what was so much more interesting than learning how to do something? So he got me to get my pad out and he said, what's this? I said, I'm working out the gearing on how to make two be and how projectors into an optical printer because I've got my I've got a bastardized two mechanism, so the actual for to shuttle the film down, getting sink and it doesn't throw.

And he's what? And at the end of this conversation, me explaining what it was, and I said, I do sodo at home, so I know it works. And he said to me, I remember, never forget this. He said, I'll never bother you with pokers every week.

And I thought it was really nice to a collective relief, I'm sure. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. I could've been taken the wrong way. It were madam. Yeah. That's awesome. That's so cool. Yeah. So yeah, that was, that's how that all birthed.

Innovative Projects and Techniques

So when was, what was the last animatronic project you had? Yeah, I work, I've been working lately a lot in.

The special effects field. I think it's, I think I did five Star Wars in the, at the end of that, I just think I, I got offered to work with SFX, which I still do an electronics within the remit, but I get to do other things as well, which is quite interesting. But the last, could we even say it's animatronic?

If you've seen the trailers or you've seen Wicked, there's a 17 or 18 foot tall animatronic face and it's the odd head. And that's the last thing that was my puppy. So for my baby, if you want to call it. And that was interesting 'cause I got on that film when I, the first thing I built was you've seen the library and the trailers.

It rotates and that's all practical, so built, and we got a great team of guys building that thing, but I had to build a scale model of it first. So I built the things and the model making and molds and built the mechanics so they could see how it's gonna work and use that to work out the choreography, for the dance sequence.

But then this head, this enormous head hod into view, and they didn't really know how they were gonna do it. I think they had this, and I love this. That's the whole Wicked is one of the favorite films I've ever worked on outta the 65, 70 films they were worked on. Wicked is my favorite. And they had this thing where we'll do it practically until we can't.

And that was the saying, that was the brief. We'll do it practically until we can't. So they wanted to do it practically, but they didn't really know how. So I asked them just to print all over the bits out. And the reason I'm questioning if it's animatronic, 'cause I always, if anyone asks me what is an animatronic, I always say it's a mechanical representation.

Organic life, so is the face made out of panels? Organic life, but it's supposed to look organic. So that is anima trying, isn't it? It's just huge. Just a huge animal trying, it just acknowledges it's mechanical. Like Bobo the owl from Clash of the Titans, that's it. Yeah. You've gotta believe it's living, but it's clearly mechanical. But the movements have to be organic to actually sell it, to actually build those triggers that make you look at it and see Owl, or see faith, yeah. So I went away to my own workshop for three days and built Mark one, and then from Mark one they could see what I'm getting out.

And then I drew a map of where I think the panel should be. But it turned out Martin was odd. I didn't realize this till a while, short while ago. As he did this the new design work on the shell designs. So they printed out on 12 scale set of those for me. Again, I had to change shapes some of 'em and were to stack them, move them, built the second iteration and they loved it so much.

That's the one we built. It was there 63 or 65 panels in total, and we just scaled up my drawings and made it hydraulic and yeah, they are puppet here on the day and it's, I think there's only five lines or six lines in all of the two films, but but it just, it's just, it's quite a imposing thing when you see it, it's huge and it kinda looms at you out about these threads that hang over.

Its faith. It's quite imposing, but yeah, it's good. Quite pretty proud of it. Pretty proud of it. There's also, how much can I say? When's this going out? Probably not for a few weeks, but again, we can hold onto it. We're seeing it. Yeah, no, that's fine. You could, there's. In the film receives a letter inviting her, and people know this 'cause it's in the trailers, inviting her to go to the wizard's palace.

And it's delivered on this little balloon. And and it was originally it was gonna be a little miniature hot air blue with a basket and the letters in it, but we went further than that and it's got these three animals on it. There's a wall with playing the symbol. And there's a couple of, but my, I come up with this thing that if these, there's a penguin and a puff in, I said these penguins shuffle around and press a button and the letter box thing flaps open and the other one shuffles around, presses another button and then the letter shoots out and then all the, all shuts again and it's got these propellers blowing it along.

So I had a light from doing that, so I mechanized. It's look like it's an automaton, like it's got gears and cam. So I mechanized look automat in, but instead of going to Cams, I sent it to Servo so we could change the timings on the fly. We have three of us puppeteering this thing with loads of switches sort, getting in there, turning the turn, the propellers off and coming in, and so one's doing the propeller.

Then we go round, we press that button, flicking switch the thing, then the letter pops out. So there is a really complicated little thing in this tiny little box. And that was great for, but I suppose that's, I get way to see that now when you're doing something like that is, do you have to do you decide that, does someone say we wanna do this other Medtronic, or do you find yourself in a position saying, look, this is why you should do it this way, because I know you probably wanna cut corners be, although you did say they want to do it live as much as possible.

'cause sometimes with makeups I know you have to say we want to go this route because da. And you almost have to make your ground first. How much freedom did you have in the design process? I, this is what I think I'm told has happened. I turned up and then I got involved and then they, soon they seemed to, I was told by someone high up I say, was that they've realized that there's a guy here who can.

Build animatronics and s and make things. And and that started a dialogue off a sort of an action dialogue. So I started liaising with props then and what else can we do? We got this guy here, what can we give him to do? And we, they started using me, which is quite fun. So it wasn't too depend, sometimes departments' no, it's mine, we don't want any, no. That kind seizing things. No, that's really good. Yeah.

Prop Making Process

Jamie, who was the head of props was we I'm actually, he's head of props. On the next film we continuing the same thing. So they've got an idea. I tell 'em how we can make it, if we can make it work and what it could do. And they go, yeah.

So they'll gimme a slight sketch model first and I'll make something around that. Then I'll go and address it. And it works really well. It works nice. And it's all the same skills you use for Medtronic. But the different things. But on Wicked it was, there was quite a few elements in it.

Material Choices and Techniques

And when you making like a mark one like this, what do you physically make it out of?

Do you make a card version or do you make it outta metal or just 3D print stuff? No, make out a metal. I just think it's so quick, but I'm, people spare me 'cause I'm just king of a bandsaw. I just bandsaw everything that is quick. If someone banned bandsaws, I'd be absolutely screamed. Are you doing aluminum or brass or, yeah, aluminum.

Yeah, aluminum and brass is my favorite things. And yeah, I don't know. It's funny, it's amazing how many people, they just need to have everything machined out by some computer control thing. And I just like the organic process. I just draw it all out a piece of paper and. Stick the piece of paper in a bit of Valley center punch drill in band saw ish.

It within two minutes, you've got the piece and you're bolting it on. It's so quick. It's so quick and it, but it looks like it looks machined, but it's quick. I noticed you ago I had to take, I won't say he made it. I had to take a job on set and it was one of these things where, oh, what do I say?

Servos had been glued in and, and anyway, it went wrong. So I had to go and crack things out. And invariably when you take the skin off, everyone leans in to say, oh let's have, look at this thing, and I noticed the comments were airing on the side of, oh, no one, no wonder it went wrong.

Look at the fucking thing, it's stuck together with glue, but I've noticed that if something goes wrong and it looks nicely made, they go, wow, look at this thing. Look at that. Wow, look at this thing they made for us, and they leave you alone. So I realized there's something good to have to be have from something looking well made, and also, but by the end of the day, I just don't think everything needs to be done on a mill machine or a lathe all the time.

I'm quite happy to ban the saw something out and line it and file it and bit of scotch, but it looks great, and it's quick. And it works just as well as something that's been engineered to death. Yeah. And that's my takeaway from it. Yeah. Kind of understanding the psychology of how people judge what you do and not, you say put on the show for 'em.

Yeah. Know in the right way.

Challenges and Learnings from Animal Farm

But it's also noticing we did Animal Farm years ago as a, it was a Robert, a Hallmark production. Yeah. I've got some pictures that you gave me for the book. And we did Animal Farm. We built 13, or was it 15 animals for that, the Henson's. And I always try and take something away from every film I work on.

The one thing I took away from that, we had all these pigs they're all hydraulic, they all weighed three, 400 pounds and they were absolute bastard to move around the hillside of Luga Law. We were exhausted at the end of four months of that shit, but but the one thing I noticed, the whole, the best moving animal out there.

Everything we built was the horse. The horse were boxer and all the horses were the same, but it was just a three wa power linkage at the neck, same as I used on the one on warhorse. And and it was so direct. You move one hand and the head moves, it's so direct, there's no delay, there's no lag.

And it was just completely organic. And the mechanics, all the mechanics did is set the actual geography of how a neck moves. Realistically, as long as you get that right then it can't help look organic. And that was my one takeaway, that the simplest make there was the best moving. And it's amazing.

I've seen so many times when people, they wanna build the hell out of something, make something with linear actuate, not 'cause it looks dead technical, it looks impressive, but it's not the best answer. Sometimes a rod. Three words with ujs at either end is the best way of doing it. I think just with the so and the way you know with hydraulics.

There's that, doesn't it? It's, you can't get that smoothness. You have to, you it gain and all sorts. Yeah. It could stutter a pain in the ass.

Weight and Efficiency in Animatronics

And and the other takeaway is the weight. I just, I try and peel the strip weight off everything because inertia is your enemy. The lighting, you can make something.

Then the easier is to slow it down without it wanting to, the inertia, the weight of the head on the end of the neck is one. Make it rock for the next five minutes. It was amazing how these big steel plate mechanisms I see. And I'm like, oh, you don't need that. And I was on one job. I won't say what the job was, but they built this thing and it was like big plate knuckle shoulder joints.

I said, why you made it out of that? And he went those servos all move 10 tons. I said, yeah, but the leg weighs 10 pounds. It's not about what the ser the sort of the servo the ram will do. And if

the ram will move 10 tons, it's probably too big a ram. So pull a smaller ram in it and then the same amount of oil moving will make it move quicker and it's less weight and you don't need a big knuckle.

And it just snowballs. It's this, they can snowball until you end up with this behe off, you can't get working and you have to ramp everything down and you're never gonna get like nice, sharp movements and anything about the organic. So yeah, wait, I just try and keep everything super weight super lightweight.

Like the liquor one wasn't evil. We knocked this thing up, had no time, no money. And we could, they used say, oh, how long to take this out, and now we finish this shot. I go two, two minutes. You've done screw the feet. And you could, one person would pick it up. They're like, oh yeah. Because it doesn't have to weigh two tons.

It doesn't. Yeah. Yeah, I don't know. I see. That's, I see a lot of that. It comes back down to your logic comments, making it, it has to make sense. Yeah. No, totally. Yeah. You gotta be a logic to it. Yeah, absolutely. Because I think ease of shooting it is as important as the realism. You could build the most realistic moving thing in the world, but it takes 10 days to move the thing.

Or you have to set up somewhere, build this, set around it, then there's no point in existing, as far as I'm concerned it doesn't have to be all, you're moving your skin and fiberglass. So nothing, I don't see why something should ever have to weigh. Dozens of tons, 'cause all these car on top of it is skin in the core, and a few SVOs.

The Resurgence of Animatronics

Can we talk a little bit about how, it seems to me, and I'm not as familiar with the world of animatronics as you are, but it seemed to me there was a time where probably about 10, 15 years ago, a lot of people were thinking it was just gonna die off because of CGI. We'd replace everything.

And then whereas we had the Jurassic Park and the Star Wars movies, it seemed like there was a swing right back the other way. Was that a fair thing to say or do you think I've got that a little bit over. Optimistic. No. I think it is fair, but I couldn't help. 'cause I was actually, at the time, I was in meetings on films at the time, and I could see a really interesting thing was said once we were in one of the meetings of.

Wasn't evil. It, it's actually quite a fun film. Was that for animated extras or That was animated, yeah. And we built this stuff, and it's none of it's great because we didn't have time money for great. It was the, it was there to fulfill a brief and basically to try and cover cut-ins in their interaction.

It was all gonna be cg, all of it pretty much. So that was a red rag to ball to me, Richard. Yeah, a great man, Richard. One, the guys who helped start RLM and Boss Effects, but he said to me in a meeting one day he said, look, he said I like your, 'cause I was going why don't we just shoot it with the animatronic?

And he and one day he stopped the meetings. He said, look, he said, look, I like your enthusiasm. Never lose it. He said, but animatronics looked mechanical. It's never gonna be on film. I don't wanna have to say this again. The kind of thing at me, I was like, oh, okay. So I sat back, I thought, all right.

So I just, I let all the last meetings happen and they went over to Germany and I said that sculpt carry on, sculpting it. Let's not mold it yet. He goes, yeah we need, I said, no, I'll just measure the scope. Don't change the dimensions. Don't start building the me around. Measurement makes, make it as good as it can be.

We ended up doing a lot of the shots with the Medtronic. We did a show and tell one day, and I said, Paul Anderson looked at it, and I remember the look I got from Richard to the back of my neck. Paul Anderson stood there and he says, Richard? He says, yes, Paul. He says, can you answer me a question?

He goes, why aren't we shooting this fucking thing? And from that moment on, Richard, I don't think like me because I've proved that animatronics can move. Nice. And I heard secondhand, he didn't say it to my face, but someone said, look, Richard never said to, but he's actually said to me that irrespective of time and budget that you've had.

But he said that's, he said it's one of the best movie Medtronics he's ever seen, which is quite nice. You really organic movement. And in the film he just said flashing about, but it's really capable of doing some really nice subtle stuff. And that was a five rod version of the three rod that was used on the horse.

I, I developed this thing of a swinging T five rod and off the back of that, which I've used quite a lot. It's super organic, so yeah. Do you have pictures of that we can use? Maybe put in the show notes. You have, oh. Dig something out. Cool. Yeah, that'd be awesome. We'd have to do it again today, but it'd be good.

Yeah, email us some things. Yeah, do that. Yeah, we'd do that.

Writing a Book on Animatronics

I may be talking a long time ago about doing a book on animal trunks. Are you still going to do that? I've started writing it. Fabulous. Is that fabulous? I dunno. It's one of those things I get mixed feelings. I'm like, am I giving away?

And it's not like I've got secrets, but there are ways I do things. But then again I don't know. Yeah. But what I'm, I've dunno you've done this. I haven't done this textbook thing, so what I'm doing is I'm just, I'm spilling my brains out on the paper. Everything I know. Trying to keep it in the right compartments, in the right chapters, and then any, then I think my second stage is any drawings I need to do to describe what I'm.

As an example, I'll do all the drawings, get my drawing board out, do all those, scan them, and then I'm gonna go on a big hunt for everybody I know for pictures, reference the kind of thing. And then so we can have the pictures then compile it. But it's a, it is a hell of a thing to do. Would you? Yeah. Would you consider build it?

'cause I think you were talking a little bit, I'm sure, and we can cut this out if you don't want me to say about this. You were talking about doing like a, not like a kid's book, but like cutouts of basic linkages and mechanisms to describe the essential process to get people's head around it.

'cause there isn't much in the way of learning resources for anime animatronic stuff. No, there isn't. There's hardly anything Is that No. And nothing on a level that somebody without an ENG engineering degree would be able to unravel and yeah, understand. Because I would do a, I would do a section on, I've written two lists.

What you need, what you can get away with and build something or what would be ideal to own, from if you haven't got a bounce or got a hacks or that kind of thing, but but yeah, I, there was talk of doing that kind of thing wasn't there? Maybe I could even have a part of a thing pop out to show I was slave linkage work.

I think that just, aside of it, we don't have to put this in, just, I think if you made like a booklet where it's you used to get co costumes you cut out. No, see you always have mean just tabs on you fall around little tabs. Yeah. So you have that. They never held.

Yeah. But you had something like that where you basically have like a thing that you stick or it's in thick card and then you know they have the little split pins as mechanism. You can totally get somebody to mass produce laser cut pieces. Totally. You could, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I dunno if I wanna say this out loud because I dunno if it's a good idea, but I always loved doing Tammy Kit.

You, you get the TAM kit area control and I used to enjoy pointing together as much as thring up and down the road and jumping off curbs. But I thought I could design the tam, which is a

puppet thing, when you put this thing together and then you put this thing on, then you move it and it walks along the table.

You can, and has all the linkages and that'd be quite a fun thing to do. Yeah. Maybe go to somewhere like Tammy and see if they want to produce in Massachusetts it, but yeah. Dunno, just do a dragon head with a thing in there. It's got its linkages, man. Things that fan out and control.

Yeah. Because just from building, seeing how that comes together, music Yeah. What have I tried putting this into something completely different? Yeah. It's one of those things, it's a funny one. I find it fascinating subject because I think you take anybody and make anyone a better painter, but you're never gonna make anybody a great painter unless they're going to end them.

And I think there is people that are ripe for absorbing stuff and becoming good at a good thing. I'm accounts, I'm hopeless. That hopeless accounts great with shapes. We all have a strong point in their mind, happens to be shapes. So I, I've met people that you're telling them stuff over and over again and then just not getting it.

And that, I find that interesting when it comes to not anyone can become something. Not anyone can become an accountant. Not anyone can become someone who lays roads. They just don't get the timings of tarmac. And they just don't understand that when it's at this temperature, that's the time to roll it.

Sometimes some people won't get something, but but I think to put a resource out there that people follow would be, oh, it would be great. Quite fun, wouldn't it? Because we've had emails from people asking about how would I learn animatronics and stuff. I would love to write a book about it.

It, but I don't know enough about it to do it. Question a lot. Yeah. And I just go through the same thing. Get animals in motion. Get the anatomy and just, learn how to make stuff. I started learning I had a butcher's hacksaw, my uncle gave me, you one of the ones with the funny wooden handle.

So bloody awkward. They had down a few blunt files. And that's why I used to make my stuff out of, yeah. There is a, there was a company, I think they're called, I think it's called Automaton Magazine, and they make like wooden laser cut things. Oh yeah. And little model kits and stuff. And they have a book on basic linkages and stuff, but it's very niche and no one really knows about it.

But I just, yeah, you should do something. You've got a fucking million and one other things to do, but this is the thing. It's time, isn't it? And the reason I write is because it's another creative

outlet, and I think writing about what I do every day isn't a creative outlet. So I find it very easy to close that file, closed the file off mechanical principles of animatronics and robotics.

So finally we closed that down, then opened the file for sleek and start rewriting that again, because it's a creative outlet for me. Which, it's a real switch in your brain, isn't it? To be in a different head space. You're creative like I am, and you have to have another outside your work.

But when I'm not doing it, I need I need another creative outlet. And writing is it is creating worlds with just words. Yeah. You need to be stimulated and if no one's gonna give you that stimulation, you'll just come up with your own interest, which is really good that you can do that. Some people just can't do that.

They need to be imposed upon them to have a problem to solve. But it sounds like you will always dig around trying to find your own problems to solve. Yeah, that's it. No, totally. Yeah. But that's the thing though, isn't it? Don't you find, I find a lot of the people who got in the industry when we got in.

Were fan boys. They loved it. They were already into it. It wasn't an option suggested to them by some tutor or a teacher going, oh, you are quite good at art. Maybe you could work in film or television. Yeah. No, we always just wonder. We had never thought of that, we were like, we were actually into it.

Yeah. You're mostly being told there's no way you're gonna do it. That's what actually happened when you started it. Oh God. Yeah. That another red rag to bull boat. Yeah. And that's, that was the thing for my mom said, oh, that's never gonna happen, is it? And she was upset that I left college. And I thought that was it.

And by the end of two days, I had a job and Studio 2000 and she was like, oh, okay. How did that happen? Because I bloody made it happen. God damnit, yeah. I believed in myself. Even if you didn't. That's tenacity, yeah. Somebody tells you, oh, you're never gonna do that. I said, fuck you I'll show you.

Makes you wonder if those people do that, knowing that's enough. The result, I'm sure it does on some level with are they ignorant or they're just brilliant? Yeah. I've worked with guys who really stuck it hard to the students that they saw who had potential. The ones that they knew were never gonna go anywhere with anything.

They said, oh, that, that looks really good. That's fine. And off you go. And then the other ones, they go, oh your shading is all wrong, this blah, blah, blah. Yeah. Push 'em to do better. So I'll show you. Push that buttons. Yeah I'll show you. How dare you tell me My work is subpar. I say it and that can, yeah, that does work for some people.

I've seen, I've taught, it wasn't really until I started teaching at various colleges. Yeah, you have to judge your right or you might just crush your life, but how I learned that there were people that didn't have aspiration. And that may be that I, I'm, maybe I was from a privileged enough background where I was surrounded by ambition and support, but it shocked me that there were like, entire classes of kids where there was very little aspir.

No, none of them. Or a large proportion of them felt that they wouldn't achieve much, and so they didn't aspire to. And I dunno if that's a new thing or if that would've been the same in a class full of your kids. And you were actually quite unique in that. I think Yeah. Does it, is it, is there a reality in it that if someone's told they'll amount to nothing or if someone's comes from quite a low enough background to think, I don't see any avenues.

That's interesting, isn't it? Yeah. But yeah, but maybe, I don't know. I don't know. It depends. I've known, oh, I gonna sound snobby here. I've known kids and friends of mine who live in counselor states, when I was young and they have a whole family, their mom, the dad, the grand, none of them were, and then they grow up thinking, why, when do I sign onto the doll?

And that was their lifestyle. I'm like, don't you want more than that? I love being between films. You get up between, you wrap a film, you think, oh great, I gotta take a month off before the next one starts. I'm gonna enjoy that, I'll make use of it. But you sit on the sofa for two days watching YouTube, a couple of reaction videos, or what's the, you start getting Nancy Bruce Roberts and and it's and then you think, God, I can't sit here all day.

But people, that's their lives. Some people, but they got no drive. And I wonder what I wonder what that does or doesn't feed that. Why there isn't that thing of going, oh, I can't just sit here all day. Whether that drive is that, that there's something that could be fired up in them to make them have drive?

Or is it just a case of you are quite. Rare in that you have that independent driver. Yeah. Maybe, I dunno, maybe it is a personalized trait that you either born with or you don't. Because you could have been in that same estate council house with people surrounded who didn't have aspirations or inspirations, but you would have.

Yeah. So it's yeah. But people, but then you find a lot of people do exist. How many millionaires and billionaires out there came from lowly backgrounds, and they thought, oh, I'm gonna climb out this bucket, yeah. I'm gonna sit here my whole life. I'm gonna do something.

Then they, as soon as they can, they get out and do something. Yeah, I think you are born with it. Not everything's a social construct. Just throw it out there.

Just a Do you mean they research a thing as empirical reality? Yes. Just the poker two, two venue, two avenues you can take. You have nothing and I want that. Yeah. I'm gonna work hard and get that. Yeah. Where there's I want that. I'm gonna steal it. I'm gonna steal it. Yeah. That's that. You can certainly, whatever happens, you can improve your s situation.

Most of the time. Stealing it is harder work than working hard to get it. Oh, absolutely. It isn't it, yeah. And how much more satisfying it is though, the fact that you worked hard and you honestly got it. Yeah. So you look at something that you made this and it works and Yeah. Yeah. People like it.

Yeah. But if you still constantly, eventually the consequences will catch up with you. So it's not generally no way to do things, is it, and all that does is then just close avenues off of your life and log you'll never get that now because you've got a theft on your records. You never get this because you've got, and all it does is your options dwindle away to nothing. And then you have on, don't steal kids.

I think stay in school. I think I nicked a gum bear once from one of those stations and 25 years that you Yeah. Good. I think it was a gum bear. Watch your six.

But yeah. Dunno. It's funny. It's it's interesting. It's all part of this is all part of observing. Yeah. Observing things.

The Importance of Believability

Do you know what, back to an electronics, I was thinking, just thinking in the back of my mind about believability and I was just, 'cause we're just talking about reality and that's the, that's the thing.

I let you get back. It doesn't have, it doesn't have to be realistic. It has to be believable. Yeah, totally. And it just made, it's just in the back of my mind there, as we were talking, it made me think of this trend I saw I've seen sometimes of things being made to look a like a product.

Trying too hard to try and make the animatronic or the makeup outlook look as close to a product and perfect as possible. Back to Animal Farm, we were on Animal Farm and we built the horses and the pigs and we were up on this flash flood happened. This storm came and we're in this, it was what?

It was this valley in Luo in Ireland. And it had its own weather system. It could be sunny as hell where you got, and then you got the thing and you walk down to this valley and it could be

actually like a thunder and lightning even. There's no clouds outside of this, so we were filming and they said, oh, there's a flash flood storm coming.

So we had to just tarp all the pigs 'cause we couldn't get them back. So we lay the horses down on their sides and put tarps on them and pegged it. And we had to get out there before the valley flooded. 'cause it was this bridge we drove over, had the walk going over. So we came back next day and the tarps had been blowing in the wind and on the crests.

On the sculpt it rubbed the flock off, leaving like just the pros aid and the black paint underneath. 'cause the skin were painted black, and we got it. I went, oh God, some of this going up. Then we stepped back and I went, this is my other takeaway from that film. I went, my god, it looks real.

Suddenly, it looks real. It's, it hasn't had this fresh flock that's been blown with air and brushed and it's spent a night under a tar Pauling being slapped and thing. And it looked like the, all these bits looked like scars, where it caught itself on the barbed wire fence. And suddenly this horse was so believable in camera.

And that was my takeaway, not making stuff too perfect. And I just think it's become as. As I think the techniques of makeup and animatronics and skins and everything has become a bit more standardized. I think it's become like making a product. Rather than how are we gonna do this?

And I to this though, and I'm not knocking 'cause I just saw Alien Romulus. I loved it. I dunno, I just thought really at last, a good alien film and I really enjoyed it. But Aliens one of my favorite franchise. I love Alien. Alien, the first film and the second film was great. Loved it as well, but I don't think the mouth of ever looked as good as that first mouth.

Which was done with piano wires and cables stretched, condoms glued on, which gave me a look really insect like. And I don't think the mouse have ever looked as good as that first mouth and that first aum, which wasn't done with a molding technique of doing that thing. And then. Sculpting that and taking off, doing it clear silicon, which is all lovely and it looks really good and producty, but that first mouth looks so organic.

That's a really good point to make. I just done a film with Chris Fitzpatrick. Yeah. And he does a lot of things with appliances where he'll go in and fabricate the interior of wounds that have, the whole thing's have been sculpted, but, and then work and snip into them and fabricate bits to make them look like they have a different quality, but a layer of silicon over the things you get depth because there's something about something coming out of a mold and then assuming that can be the complete thing.

Yeah. And actually sometimes fabricated things or adding fabricated elements to cast pieces, it just looks not made. I've just, I, I did when I was a kid, I did a bit of a zombie panel by face. My radiate was always lined up with plaster pepper bowls to dry out. I stiff paint copy deck in. That's all I had as a kid.

That's all you could find. Yeah. Get that from latex rubber. And and I wanted it to look all dried out. So I glued in the hole, I glued in rice Krispies. And when it was all dried, I knocked the tops off and then colored it and put goo in it. It looked great 'cause it wasn't, it didn't look sculpted.

'cause it wasn't sculpted. And that was the thing. It was made, it was done there. And then rather than being Scottish, just say the sculpting and the molding process does. Give it a certain look. Yeah. Doesn't it? Yeah. And you can be happy with that, but that there's more you can do to it.

Yeah. To push it. Yeah. Absolutely. It's a stage rather than the state. The finished thing. That's it. Yeah. Yeah. And if I cut my arm open, now the skin stops and then there's something happening underneath. It's not one solid igneous piece. And it can work. Of course. There's amazing sculpt out there. And that's one of the thing I feel so happy about. And honored about working in film. See some of the amazing talent you get to work around, yeah. Coat sculptors, the hair punches and the feathers and the painters just amazing. They used to walk around on Star Wars and just, they go and do a round and look at whatever they're doing and just think, wow.

Amazing bunch of artists you all get to work with, and, then you go to an art gallery and someone's just dumped, load the bricks on the floor and peed on it, and everyone's going, Ooh. Oh, how amazing. You see what I've been looking at all week. But people just, they look at it and they don't notice it on film because it's been so good.

They didn't even know that what it looked at wasn't real. And you think people have made that and you've been thought by it. That's amazing. It is amazing. Yeah. It's an illusion that goes hiding in plain sight. It's completely unobserved. And notice, yeah, I remember someone saying I said, I did worked on warhorse in the animatronic stuff.

I'm not saying it's full of it, but they're saying there's no one on Medtronics and warhorse. There is, there's like galloping horses and one's falling dead, and then the one caught in the barbed wire. There's a sequence you seen in the do and. The fact that you didn't see it means we've done our job.

Yeah. That's the point. If you didn't notice it, then you've done it right. Isn't it? Is there anything you want to talk about that we didn't cover that you think we should do? Okay.

Animatronics vs. CGI

I just hope that animatronics and make of effects is gonna carry on because you actually, you asked a question earlier about did I ever think an joints was gonna go away and I didn't, and I said I was in the meeting and never finished the story.

And it was really interesting to me, and this is the point where I knew it wouldn't, is when Paul Anderson, we were talking about, oh, we, we can do that shot. And he goes, oh. And he said I said, yeah, we could do that, we could do that. And then, and Paul was sat there and he had a phone and he says, am I right?

I'm thinking, am I right? I could add a thousand extra shots. And as you are here already, just servicing, he wouldn't cost us a penny more. I went, yeah, that's true. And he sat fucking, and he went, but you had one CG shot and you gotta pay for a whole thing. Roto scoping, scanning, blah, blah, blah, practic, the digital lighting.

And every shot you add adds money. But when you build an animatronic, as long as you are there just a puppeteer through the whole shoot, you can add another thousand shots. As long as that thing doesn't fall apart and it costs no more money. And that's where I knew there's a place for it. And that's what the visual effects guys don't get or they don't want anybody to get.

Because it's more money for them. But, visual effects is far more expensive. But I deal with visual effects a lot and they're, they really like, if we can get it in can or something in Canberra that we can manipulate, it's better. And they're really good. There isn't this, them and us thing did exist for It did, that's a thing.

It did a hundred percent exist. It was huge when I was still in it. Yeah. They were like, yeah, we can do everything. We were, and we were on the defense service. It did exist. It was a big wall up. I just didn't remember that on the first Harry Potter. There were meetings about the cent and Yeah.

We did in the creature effects department, we did a bunch of stuff and SD did tests with flocking and they were gonna make this, yeah. Practical version. And then it went visual effects in the end. But now I think there's so much we know there's gonna be visual effects involved in chain of the sky and all kinds of stuff anyway.

Yeah. Yeah. That they're not looking for more stuff to do. 'cause they already know they're gonna be in every single fucking shot. That's it. Yeah. No. The grading and everything. Can I please take some of the work off us? They make our job easier. I think that's what, what made beauty and the Beast the one worth with Emma Watson.

Yeah. In it, because I think Dave Elsie did the original suit for that. I worked on that. The first was gorgeous stint. Yeah, it was spectacular suit. And then they fucked it all up by going VFX for the whole thing. I was on that at the start and it was there, there was a definite, I think Dave and Lou were trying to sell the idea, doing it real, because they were like, no, you are just building a reference suit.

That's all it's for. And I think there was this feeling that, but I, they were fighting a losing battle 'cause they just weren't interested. They'd already made their mind up and they said we did this thing. And they said, oh, don't bother with a tail. 'cause you can't make a tail that moves.

And I made a tail in a day. We put it on the, because and the producer actually said, I don't want to upset any producer. But the producer said, you can't make a tail that looks real, so forget tail. Just don't do your tail. So I made the tail, pulled the skin over and stuck it on for this test when I had the tail kind of, I just swinging like this and everyone went, wow, that tail is awesome.

From loads of people get going, that tail looks so real. That's great. It was like, let's not use it and ta And my sense was that got the backup up of this producer, he got the backup of the producer. And Doug, his using Dave's this is great that we can do the tail. But it got his backup because he said that it couldn't be done.

It just, he can't do face by instilled this push away that was happening. But that's the thing, like they said oh, it can't be done. Rather than asking you if you go done and then just pay for a fucking few days to try. I prove in a day I made it in a day, one day and it was done and it moved.

And you could have filmed on it for weeks. And that's the thing. It doesn't have to take all the time, but that's the danger we have to make sure. The animatronics never because it, it's very possible to think, oh, let's just do this thing and make it super expensive, but we reside within the bubble that we are cheap and we have to remain cheap.

We can be, it depends what the ratio is of how much air time there is. We can be generally cheaper than cg and we have to stay that way. We start trying to over make everything an over technical, what's the best, make it the best, easiest way to make it work, not the most expensive and wow flash bang wallet way, because suddenly then it's you're gonna get comparable to what it's cost to do ct.

And that's the danger, isn't it? Because of quite a few directors these days who don't, oh, gonna dis directors now they don't. I think they just need an education. They don't seem to have the vision. But I think it's only necessity. People had to know what they wanted before they went into a film because they had to do it practical.

But I think now they don't have to. I think it's easy to be lazy and think we'll design the creature later 'cause we're sticking in post. We'll just film everything first. And they're not willing to put the effort in to decide what they want so you can build it real, and that's a danger that happens.

Yeah. They probably wrongly are assuming that animatronics are gonna be more expensive than CGI. How many times it's not. You get this. Yeah, but because of CG cheap going, have you seen the credit list? It's not cheap enough. It's unreal. Yeah. You think it should be because we've built every single kind of barrel, every single at the table.

There's a bunch of stuff we don't have to make anymore. That's not a big PT for nothing. I have not. I iation they people reinventing the wheel because they're, they don't share stuff with each other. Yeah. I have a load of admiration. CG is great. They can do photo real anything but the time it takes to do that and the actual print time the time to actually render it is what restricts them.

I'm not dissing if there's a focus at all. It's amazing tool, but I think we have a place and we have to be realistic what that place is. If there's some close interaction, if there's some, we can do a good job of it. And I think, I always found films I watch when they cut from one, from a, from an animatronic to a makeup to a bit of viz effects back to the animatronic.

When you cut in between them seamlessly, you stop looking which one's which, and you just accept it what it is. I find that, I found that on Jurassic Park. Sometimes you think was that and you find out shots you think must have been cg, actually the someone in Boots, and it becomes a bit seamless and you stop looking.

You just start watching the film for it is load of dinosaurs killing everyone, which is great.