

STAR SEARCH

Looking for the hottest place to intern this summer? Get your application in quick, 'cause spots at George Lucas's Industrial Light & Magic are gonna fill up after May 19. A&F's got the lowdown on one of our favorite companies—after Abercrombie & Fitch, of course.

EXT. A SUBURBAN STREET IN SAN RAFAEL, CALIFORNIA. MORNING.

"Is that it?"

"No, it can't be—it says 'Parsons Medical Supply.'"

"What the hell? Where is this place?"

"Stop the car. Let's go in and ask."

We double-park, get out, and walk through the door. Standing in front of us are Darth Vader and a Storm Trooper.

"Is this Industrial Light and Magic? Forget it—stupid question."

"Here's a better one: Why isn't there a sign outside? We've been looking for this place for 30 minutes."

The receptionist is used to irate visitors. "Sorry," she says. "When we took over the building, we never got around to changing the name. Besides, it keeps the tourists away." (Later, we find out that Lucas Digital [ILM's predecessor?] was full of these misnamings and secrecy. George Lucas realized an important fact: Though movie making is an extremely high-profile business, it is best done away from pressure-packed Hollywood. The theory is, if you take the best people and provide a low-key, more creative environment, you can create the best movies. With ILM's track record, it's hard to argue. But the hush-hush atmosphere does make finding it a bitch.)

"We're from the A&F Quarterly. We're here to take a look at Lucas Digital."

"Oh, there you are," brayed our tour guide, Stephen, who also seemed to just appear, like a special effect.

"We have to find you guys a parking spot," the receptionist said. "Why don't we give them a client spot?"

"That's quick thinking, young lady."

"I always think quick. It prepares me for the future of Lucas Digital," she said with a chuckle which sounded as if she'd really enjoyed parroting a line that she'd seen one too many times in a training video. This is the type of person who works at Lucas Digital—smart, friendly, and definitely "on the team."

Industrial Light and Magic was created by George Lucas more than two decades ago to create the special effects for his film *Star Wars*. Movie-making—

and movie watching—hasn't been the same since. Unable to find a studio advanced enough to produce the groundbreaking special effects he planned, Lucas gathered the best artists and technical people he could find and brought them together in one place. Since then, ILM has won 16 Academy Awards for its work on movies like *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *Jurassic Park*. ILM represents the leading edge of sfx technology. From *Star Wars*—where they were the first to use a fully computer controlled camera—to the pulsating organs inside this summer's forthcoming-blockbuster *The Mummy* and all the creatures in *Mighty Joe Young*, nobody does it better than ILM.

To maintain this degree of excellence, Lucas has continually hired the best and brightest minds he could find, not just people who could work a computer. The company philosophy is that you can teach anyone to use a computer, but it's infinitely harder to teach someone to think like an artist. Furthermore, George Lucas has always cared more about hiring the best people, rather than simply employing the best technology. "Technology will not save us," he has said, a surprisingly Luddite view for the inventor of modern technological moviemaking. But after you visit ILM, it makes sense. The people are energized, intelligent and impressive.

One example of how good the people at ILM are occurred during the making of *Jurassic Park*. Originally there were many more dinosaur models planned and fewer digital effects. Then, to blow off steam, a group of four young computer-graphics guys decided to create a digital dinosaur, just to see if they could do it. Once Spielberg saw the bone skeleton they'd made in their spare time, he flipped out and added more digital effects. It's safe to say that these guys improved the entire movie just by screwing around.

Another thing that shows the top-to-bottom quality of ILM is that at nearly every other special-effects company, key executives are ex-ILMers. Scott Ross, head of Digital Domain, used to run ILM's commercial division; Ken Ralston, who worked on *Star Wars*, is now the head of Sony Imageworks. In the small world of special effects, all roads lead to Parsons Medical Sup—sorry, Industrial Light & Magic.

The first stop we saw on our tour was the ILM screening room, a small Art-Deco theater that seats about 100 people. It's equipped with the new THX/Dolby sound that will first be used in *Episode One*. The new THX (Lucas's benchmark for high-quality theater sound) standard has an extra large subwoofer that gives a whole new meaning to "megabass." To the left of the screen stands R2D2, lest you forget where you are.

The first person we spoke to was Sean Kelly, a low-level animator. Right next to his desk was a giant six-foot tongue from the monster in the film

Digital animator Sean Kelly and conceptual artist Aaron McBride hanging with a Storm Trooper at ILM, photographed by Chris Chapman.

Dragon Slayer. ILM offices are filled with the wackiest things.

Sean loves working at ILM. "People are excited about what they're doing. Everyone's trying to get better and improve. Also, everyone is amazingly friendly and very willing to help." He fiddles with a Jack Skellington toy on his desk. "I really couldn't imagine a better work environment."

The staff really likes what they do. They like living in San Francisco, away from the hustle and smog of L.A. They like the creative atmosphere. And because people genuinely like ILM, they stay for long periods of time as opposed to Hollywood job hopping; ILM doesn't lose its investment. It's also nice to work at a place where you know that the department brass were in your shoes 10 or 15 years ago.

Lucas has also gone against the Hollywood grain by creating the Skywalker Ranch, home of Skywalker Sound, ILM's sister company 25 minutes down the road in Marin County. Gordon Radley, president of LucasFilm, describes the Ranch as being like a good, small liberal-arts college. "There is an academic tradition that says the quest for the truth, or for art, needs to be apart from society, away from the trappings of daily life. George understood that and wanted to enhance the experience by allowing creativity to emerge free of stress and distraction."

Lucas said he created the Ranch because "in some places, editors are in rooms 10 hours a day. Having been an editor, I have always thought that was wrong. People need to get out into the light and walk around and hear the birds sing. So this place was designed to give us all a sense that there is a world outside. For me, movies are made in editing rooms. That's where I do the major part of my creative work, and it's extremely important to me that there be an atmosphere conducive to solving problems and coming up with good ideas."

Lucas wanted the Ranch to be what USC film school was for him. "At the time, the school was an enclave of creative people working together with everything we needed to make movies in a pleasant environment. It was quite a bit different from the way studios were set up." Later, his friend Francis Coppola visited a mansion-turned-studio in Europe. "He'd seen one in Denmark that was an old mansion. Francis said it was like a boutique studio, without soundstages. It was like a big home, a big fraternity where filmmakers could work and create together." Most importantly, Lucas realized that studios were set up around soundstages but that the environment to create stories and do postproduction is an entirely different place. That's the thinking behind Skywalker Ranch.

When building the Ranch, Lucas wanted to give the impression that it had been built up over time. The main technical building, the story goes, used to be a winery up until Prohibition—but the truth is, the building was only built in 1985.

The main house at Skywalker Ranch, a Victorian farmhouse that was sup-

posedly built long after the vineyard first opened, houses an exquisite 15,000-volume library within an incredible stained-glass dome. Many of the walls and staircases are made of rare redwood removed from bridges as they were modernized. Around the main house are small bungalows, so the directors can have congenial settings while laying down the soundtrack for their film.

The main house at the Ranch also has a restaurant; like the rest of the place, it's equal parts sophisticated and friendly. We were treated to lunch by an ILM publicist. As we ate, he told us that "George comes in about once a week." No luck today, though. The publicist tried to get us to trade an unspecified amount of A&F clothing for preview passes to *Episode One* this summer. We told him we'd get back to him.

After lunch, we went to LucasArts, the video gaming arm of George Lucas's empire—ILM and Skywalker Sound are each half of Lucas Digital; LucasArts and LucasFilm Ltd. round out the picture. LucasArts is Lucas's way of parlaying his *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* properties to the gaming world.

LucasArts has a different feel entirely from the fine-art-tinged ILM or the laid-back elegance of Skywalker Ranch. First, there are no misleading signs and no tourists to shoo away. Second, while computers are used at ILM, the people who use them are artsy types who consider them a tool to earn their daily bread. At LucasArts, the people were techies through and through—and not just that, but computer gamers as well.

Have you ever walked by a comic shop window and seen a \$200 statue of Captain America or the Hulk or a \$300 statue of a topless Barbarella and wondered, "Who the hell would slap down good money for that?" Yup, you guessed it—the people at LucasArts. It's also a great place to find out the best strategies for beating the expert level of Minesweeper.

Amid this sea of your typical, computer-programming/comic-reading/hair-not-combing nerdy guys, we met Tabitha, the most interesting person at LucasArts—she ran the "hints" line. Tabitha has the Elvira look going, long black hair accentuated by multiple piercings. She works downstairs in an enormous basement that looks like a dungeon. A clean, quiet dungeon, but a dungeon nonetheless. Tabitha loves her job, and she's perfect for it too. "Some people call so many times that we know each other by first name."

As we finished our meeting with Tabitha, another publicist gave us some nice LucasArts T-shirts, even though that's like giving your Ford dealer a car for his birthday. If there's one thing we have enough of, it's shirts. But it was a nice gesture. They're cotton, purple, and long-sleeved, and we like 'em.

SOUND EFFECTS FROM LUCASLAND

Sean Kelly is a low-level animator, who's been at ILM for one year. He animates characters digitally to create scenes. Each scene takes him about two weeks.

On his desk is stuff that inspires him—Jack Skellington from *Nightmare Before Christmas*, some *Star Wars* stuff, a Yoda from when he was a kid, and a statue of Goofy swinging a bat. Behind his head is a cardboard cutout of a dinosaur that was used for *The Lost World* so the actors would know where to look.

A&F: SO IT'S EXCITING TO WORK ON STAR WARS?

SEAN: It's a dream come true. In high school they told us to set these ridiculously high goals so that even if you don't make it, you'll still go far. I set this ridiculous goal of working on *Star Wars* and made it.

WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING AN INTERN?

It's mostly photocopying and helping with administrative stuff, but I get to stay and work the computers and use the software. I also get to learn from some of the best animators in the world. I'm surrounded by all these amazing animators, and I learn a ton of stuff every day.

WHAT ELSE IS COOL?

The working environment. Everyone here is great. Tom's a guy in B Building who has worked on all the *Star Wars* movies, all the *Indiana Jones* movies, *E.T.*, and *Back to the Future*. He's still an animator. It's cool to be able to go over to him when I'm frustrated and get advice.

DO YOU GET TO SEE YOUR NAME ON-SCREEN?

Jack Frost was my first movie, and I went with my family. We stayed during the credits, and they cheered when my name came up. It's kind of an amazing experience—kind of weird.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE AN ANIMATOR?

I was a film major in the beginning of college—I thought I wanted to direct movies, but I really liked drawing and writing and computers. You get to do all those things in animation.

HOW DOES THE MONEY FIT INTO ALL THIS? DO ILM'ERS GET PAID BETTER THAN THE REST OF THE INDUSTRY?

No. People at ILM aren't so focused on the money. In order to get here you need to have a love for the industry that extends more than how much money you make a year.

WHAT ARE THE COOLEST PERKS?

Free movies almost every weekend on Saturday mornings. Either the big movies or stuff we worked on. That's fun. The best perk is that you get to help make these movies.

WHAT'S THE ILM HALLOWEEN PARTY LIKE?

It's awesome. These people are building aliens for movies during the week. The prizes are incredible—computers, trips to Vegas or Paris.

DOES GEORGE COME IN SOMETHING COOL?

When I was an intern he didn't dress up.

SO HE WAS DRESSED AS GEORGE LUCAS?

Yeah, or someone had a really good George costume.

WHAT'S YOUR NEXT GOAL AFTER WORKING ON STAR WARS?

I'm writing some stories that I hope to make into a film someday.

Aaron McBride is a production assistant in the art department at ILM. He's 24 and does the conceptual art for *Star Wars* monsters and spaceships.

A&F: WHAT DO YOU GET TO DO?

AARON: When I'm not working on *Star Wars* I help the conceptual artist and the art directors—doing color corrections and things like that.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO BE IN FIVE YEARS?

A story board or conceptual artist.

WHAT'S THE COOLEST THING YOU'VE DONE AS AN INTERN?

One project I got to do was file away all this art that never made it into movies or "making of" books. No one else ever saw this stuff before and I felt really fortunate to see it.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU WANTED TO WORK ON STAR WARS?

Probably since I was three years old and saw *Star Wars* in the theater. I started crying during the trash compactor scene and my dad had to take me out of the movie theater. We went back five times and we never sat through the whole thing.

WHAT KIND OF STUFF DO YOU HAVE ON YOUR DESK?

I put up my own work as well as artists that I admire. I have this picture of Richard Dawson from *Family Feud* about to lay a really sloppy kiss on this woman.

WHAT'S THE COOLEST DESK DECORATION YOU'VE SEEN?

The guy next to me has an alien fetus in a jar.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF LUCAS?

He's the reason we're all here. He's an inspiration. He came up with all the stuff that inspired our whole generation.

WHAT'S THE COOLEST THING ABOUT ILM?

Just looking around and seeing the amount of talent and seeing what everyone else is doing. I feed off of and absorb what other people are doing—the sheer talent that's around. It's like sensory overload.

WHAT MAKES ILM DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PLACES?

I've always wanted to be involved in this kind of work, but the idea of going to L.A. never appealed to me. I think that's probably one of the greatest aspects behind the success.

GETTING A JOB AT LUCASLAND

Like what you've read? Have an aptitude for art and/or computers? ILM may be the place for you. They have openings for 10 to 20 interns for spring, summer, and fall terms.

Each intern must be a college junior, senior, or graduate-level student and must return to classes when the internship is over. High GPAs and awards are a plus. While summer interns come from around the country and work full-time, interns in the fall and spring must be taking classes at a local college or university.

Spring internship applications are due October 31, fall internship applications are due July 31, and summer internship applications are due March 1.

Selected applicants will be notified approximately two weeks before the start of the session. For more info, check out www.ilm-jobs.com.

A&F correspondent Rob Schlaff is a senior at Yale and an aspiring Jedi Knight.

