



## Industry insider Brent Zorich

Character technical director,  
Lucasfilm

Each issue, 3D Artist finds out how the top people in the 3D industry got their jobs and what you need to know to get a foot in the door



### About the insider

**Job** Character technical director/lead rigger

**Education** Master's of Fine Art at ACCAD at The Ohio State University

**Company website** www.lucasfilm.com

**Personal website** www.brentzorich.com

**Biography** Prior to immersing myself in the animation industry, I had worked for the top two architectural firms in the world. I pride myself on trying to be on a team that does the best work, no matter what project. I push technology as far as I can on whatever team I am affiliated with

**T**here are few people in the 3D industry who can claim to have worked on bestselling EA games titles one year and hung out at Skywalker Ranch with Lucasfilm the next, but Brent Zorich is a man who can. Zorich was part of a steering committee meeting for Lucasfilm on film/game convergence. In addition, he was lead rigger on *The Force Unleashed: Ultimate Sith Edition*. On this title, he was working in the LucasArts division, looking at pipeline and storage optimisation and lead rigging on such characters as Jabba the Hutt and Boba Fett. Zorich was also dealing with convergence on all divisions from Lucasfilm to LucasArts, Lucasfilm Animation, Industrial Light & Magic and Lucasfilm Animation Singapore.

**3D Artist:** What did this role of working on convergence mean in practice?

**Brent Zorich:** As a part of the senior staff, I wrote proposals to help set the direction for Lucasfilm Ltd as a company. In Singapore, not only was I part of research and development prior to my promotion and relocation to the home office in San Francisco, I

also worked on colour correction and compositing for *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*.

**3DA:** How did you get this job?

**BZ:** I applied online and was hired after Lucasfilm Animation Singapore saw the great work I did on EA Sports' football franchise.

**3DA:** What kind of course did you do at university, or training did you do?

**BZ:** At ACCAD at the Ohio State University, I did extensive research on the following topics: VRML; procedural animation; Pixar's RenderMan; motion capture. I also researched Wayfinding in real-time simulation (the subject analysed and improved upon was the game *Spider-Man The Movie*).

First of all, the Wayfinding tool was created out of VRML and theories worked on with an eminent scholar. I also studied the enhancement of realism in computer animation through the incorporation of biomechanics and fatigue (the subject analysed was *Shrek*). Next, I looked at rigging of prehistoric animals with my project-based thesis *Mystery Dinosaur* work. Finally, I looked at creatures evolving based on the ecosystem around them. Classes were also taken in digital still-life lighting and theatre lighting.

**3DA:** For today's generation of students, what is the kind of educational grounding they should be looking to undertake to get a first job as a character animator, or is the entry level a less specific role?

**BZ:** This is the way that I do it. I have a television next to my monitor. I watch *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (the Buckbeak scene). If I am embarrassed to look at what is on my monitor then I'm not done, plain and simple. I am my own toughest critic and I have zero tolerance.

**3DA:** In your role as associate technical artist or lead rigger at EA Sports, what kind of work did that entail?



### portfolio highlights

Zorich has worked on a host of videogames over the years. Feast on these...

- 2008-9 *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, Ultimate Sith Edition*
- 2008-9 *Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings*
- 2008 *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*
- 2008 EA Sports MMA
- 2007-8 NFL Tour
- 2007-8 NFL Head Coach 09
- 2007-8 NCAA Football 09
- 2007-8 Madden NFL 09

- 2007 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09
- 2007 Madden NFL 08
- 2007 NCAA Football 08
- 2007 College Hoops 2K8
- 2007 NBA 2K8
- 2006 College Hoops 2K7
- 2005 Superman Returns: The Videogame
- 2003-5 *The Mystery Dinosaur* for The Discovery Channel



**A** Character rigging on SW Force Unleashed

**B** Brent at Lucasfilm Animation

**C** NCAA college football from EA



**BZ:** I needed a complete understanding of physiology of humans built for strength and speed. Because I was an athletic trainer who trained football players, it came to me naturally. I know how a football player flexes, I know how they run and sprint and I know how they get prepared for collision. Often, because I have a football player's body, I would go into the washroom at EA where there was a mirror, take off my shirt and flex both my traps and my arms to see the proper deformation. This is how I got into character and what made it so easy is that the character I was getting into was myself!

**3DA:** Is there much of a culture or professional working practice difference between working for someone like EA and a company like Lucasfilm?

**BZ:** You are who your team is. Lucasfilm, as a company, is a natural fit for me. We both have zero tolerance when it comes to the quality of our work.

We push the absolute limitation of technology in every way, shape and form. Because we are not on yearly titles, we have the ability to push back a launch date to guarantee that we are doing our best to break new ground.

**3DA:** What software packages and tools have you used for rigging and animation?

**BZ:** I use Maya, the proprietary software to Industrial Light & Magic, and After Effects and HyperCam for documentation.

**3DA:** Do you think there is a shortage of skilled digital artists doing animation and did you find it difficult getting into the industry?

**BZ:** My best advice to any student is try to do an internship in a studio. Do not rush to get out of school; stay in and develop your craft. Finally, do the Buckbeak test as I mentioned above.

**3DA:** What are the key skills required to work as a character animator or character rigger?

**BZ:** Observation, patience and the goal to push technology. Everything you do, imagine you have to present it to George Lucas. Then you will work harder and will expect the absolute best from yourself and your team.

**3DA:** If there was one feature missing from current software apps that you would like to see implemented to help with any aspect of CG animation, what would it be?

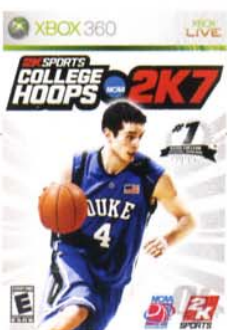
**BZ:** I saw a demo from a company where you can actually draw arcs of motion on a Wacom tablet and the object will have an animation path.

**3DA:** Professionally, what's the most satisfying project you've worked on and why?

**BZ:** Seeing my name at the end credits of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, Ultimate Sith Edition* makes me incredibly proud. I saw the first *Star Wars* film when I was three in 1977. It motivated my whole career. To see my name in a *Star Wars* product gave me a sense of satisfaction.

**3DA:** What would be your dream project to work on?

**BZ:** One that continues to push film/game convergence on every level. The ultimate goal for me would be to have an engine that supports a controlled character and the user cannot distinguish between real-time and render.



**D** Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09

**E** Character work on NFL Tour

**F** Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings

**G** Artwork from SW: TFU Ultimate Sith edition

**H** College Hoops 2K7

**I** The Ultimate Edition in full

