



Dan Davie (OG '10)

## ► Me and My Animations

Whilst at St George's I enjoyed playing rugby and music, and like many Georgians, made some great friends who I still keep in touch with. Perhaps most importantly of all, I learned to keep asking myself 'what it is I really enjoy doing, and why?'

After St George's I studied History at Royal Holloway which turned out to be so much more than I had hoped for. Being a campus university it had a family vibe to it and I met lots of interesting people who, alongside the inspiring lecturers who led my courses, helped to shape who I am today. During that time I developed a real passion for hard work and a confidence in myself which had been lacking before. I also began to explore something new and totally unrelated to my degree - 3D animation, or 'VFX'.







In 2010 DreamWorks released the animated film 'How to Train Your Dragon'. The film is full of colourful characters and heart-warming relationships and I remember thinking maybe I could learn to help create stories like these. Many of my friends at University were computer scientists and they suggested software I should learn and I began to focus on animation in my spare time. When I graduated I knew this is what I wanted to do.

3D Computer Generated Imagery (CGI, or VFX) is made up of many different elements. Take the dragons in Game of Thrones. First the creature has to be modelled which is done by software, rather like sculpting in 'electronic clay'. You start with basic shapes and carve out the form of the creature, basing it usually on a mixture of reference photos of anatomy and concept art, before adding details like skin folds, scales and scars. This model is then painted and put in a scene where an animator will make it move, and a

lighter will light it to match the lighting of the shots taken on location. This is only a very brief description of all the things that go on and this is just for the creatures - there are usually explosions, environments and all kinds of other things that have to be done.

After Royal Holloway I retrained at Escape Studios. I then joined a London Studio called Time Based Arts which was an awesome place to work, and I had the chance to learn from some very talented people. We modelled flying origami birds for Mercedes; a dancing robot for Vodafone; trains, people and automobiles for Honda and, my highlight, the WWF 'Just Like Us' Christmas campaign where we were tasked with creating a full photo quality herd of elephants. I was given the job of sculpting which allowed me to study elephant anatomy in some detail, and it was a privilege to be even a small part of WWF's campaign which aims to bring about a ban on the ivory trade worldwide.

After a few years at TBA I began to get a bit restless and felt the need for a new challenge and so last year I moved to Canada. They have a vibrant film industry, most Canadians are about as friendly as they come, and one of my best school buddies Alex Day has happily settled here in Vancouver. So I applied for a working holiday visa and have just finished up working on a new TV show at Method Studios, one of the local post houses.

One of the best things about the move has been establishing a better work life balance. The very nature of CGI/VFX will always suck you into overtime, but here in Canada they are far better at discouraging overworking. I have been able to make more time to go hiking, snowboarding and getting out with my camera to take pictures of the amazing wildlife. To top it all off my commute is a 15 minute walk with a 360 degree view of the ocean and mountains - that sure beats the Northern Line!