

Spidey would not have come alive without the help of its technical director. CHRISTINA KOH finds out how the web was spun.

BELIEVE it or not, three Malaysians were involved in the making of *Spider-Man 2*. One of them is Ipoh-born Foo Sing-Choong, 34, senior technical director for Sony Pictures Imageworks.

While fellow Malaysians Tan Suan Ching and Tan Ka Yaw were involved in the lighting of digital scenes in the latest *Spider-Man* movie, Foo has the distinction of being with the show from the start.

Whether it was Spidey battling it out with super villain Doc Ock on the face of a building hundreds of metres high, or the Green Goblin zooming around on his glider, Foo was the one responsible for making the characters look as real as possible.

Although not directly involved in the animation side of things, his team had the important task of making sure the characters' visual effects blended as naturally into the background as possible through the power of computer graphics.

"In the *Spider-Man* movies, there's a huge amount of visual effects involved, like for most of the battle scenes, or scenes where it's not possible to use stuntmen. Basically, when you see Spider-Man or any of the villains defying physics, that's where we come in," he said wryly.

It helps that Foo, a graduate of Cornell University in New York, had earned a Masters degree in engineering physics before pursuing his second Masters in computer graphics.

His studies into optical physics gave him that extra insight into the lighting and shading of objects, like figuring out how to make animated hair and rustling cloth look right.

During his university days from 1989 to 1997, Foo spent

Web wizardry

four years heading the graphics research laboratory for the internationally renowned Cornell Programme of Computer Graphics.

He joined the movie industry seven years ago, and since then he has worked on films like *Men in Black 2*, and contributed to the research and development of the upcoming project *The Polar Express*.

Now based in Los Angeles, California, the father of three children usually returns to Malaysia twice a year. He shares with *StarTwo* how he got hooked on the industry.

How did you get started in the United States?

In 1997, I applied for a job in Blue Sky Studios which did the animated feature *Ice Age*. I got in, and worked with them for two years. My professor actually wanted me to finish my Masters first, but I've wanted to be involved in movies since I was in secondary school.

My favourite film is Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. It's absolutely beautiful because it is 100% creative in terms of score, music, concept, design and animation.

After graduating in 1993 with my engineering physics Masters, I stuck around for another four years to do computer graphics with a minor in video and film. I did a number of short student films, both in colour, and black and white. I suppose I could have been a Nasa scientist or a Silicon Valley engineer, but I find so much more satisfaction having

MALAYSIANS ABROAD



Fact file

Name: Foo Sing-Choong

Age: 34

Hometown: Ipoh

Education: SM Poi Lam (Suwa), Perak; Cornell University, New York

Occupation: Senior technical director, Sony Pictures Imageworks

Current base: Los Angeles, California

Years abroad: 15

people look at my (student) films than, say, doing research in some laboratory.

How did you come to work for Sony Pictures Imageworks?

From Blue Sky Studios, I worked for PDI (Pacific Data Images), which was eventually bought over by Dreamworks, from 1998 to 2000. I joined Sony in August 2001, and by then they were already doing the research and development of the first *Spider-Man* film. I worked on that one for about a year and a half. *Spider-Man 2* took me nearly two years.

What do you love about the job?

I think this is one of the few industries that involve a blend of science and art, using science and technical skills to achieve an artistic outcome. Although I oversee and work with a team of about six to 10 people, I love going hands-on on a project. My working hours can vary from 10 to 14 hours - much of it with me tinkering on the computer.

What is your greatest achievement?

I designed a new colour pipeline for *Spider-Man 2*. This is considered "rocket science" in the film industry. When you save computer-generated images, you use different formats to store the pictures. Normally, the usual method of storing digital data for these images is not good enough for a truly beautiful film. A lot of images end up looking poorly generated or unrealistic.

I came up with a totally different way of storing the images. This ensures you get the richest colours for a high quality film. There's a lot of complicated programming involved, like looking at the physics of how light behaves.

What film projects are you working on at the moment?

I took leave in July to be a guest lecturer in Beijing at one of its biggest digital production houses. I came back to Malaysia for two weeks in August, and then left with my family for another guest lecturing stint in Taiwan.

Usually, my team knows what projects we have to do. When working on a particular movie, we would sit down and discuss the scenes that need to be rendered. I can sometimes request to work on a certain film. I'm currently working on a rendering technique that involves capturing the photographs of actors in different lighting, which is one of the most difficult projects I've done. It's a new way of recreating the realism of human actors using digital imagery.

Any future plans?

I'm hoping to be able to do the visual effects for an Asian animated feature, perhaps even a blockbuster for China or Hong Kong. When I was in Beijing and Taiwan, I was also exploring opportunities there. I would also be quite happy to work on a Malaysian animated feature. I'd love to do a production of my own someday. It would be something adventurous and suitable for all ages.

What do you miss the most about Malaysia?

The food, definitely! I think Ipoh food is still the best, like the taugeh chicken and satay!

EMBROIDERY SYSTEM BROWNAISSANCE™ [Original Creator]

Beauty begins with perfect eyebrows

A pair of perfect eyebrows can make a difference in one's desired look. Now, with BROWNAISSANCE™ Embroidery System, you can own those perfect eyebrows and look more beautiful than you've ever looked before within 20 minutes.

Say bye-bye to your eyebrow pencils!



wholly owned by :



Business Hours :
Monday - Friday 10.00am - 7.30pm
Saturday & Sunday 10.00am - 6.00pm

KUALA LUMPUR
SUNGEI WANG PLAZA
Lot S-065, 2nd Floor,
Tel : 03-2142 6186
03-2142 6187

NEW OPENING
MID VALLEY BOULEVARD
No. 9-G, The Boulevard,
Tel : 03-2282 1328
03-2284 1328

MID VALLEY MEGAMALL
Lot S-012, 2nd Flr, North Court,
Tel : 03-2283 4128
03-2283 4129
(Business Hours : 10am-10pm)

PETALING JAYA
JAYA SHOPPING CENTRE
Lot 3.03-3.04, 3rd Flr, Sec 14,
Tel : 03-7955 3178
03-7955 3179

SUBANG JAYA
SUBANG PARADE
Lot F09, 1st Flr,
Tel : 03-5636 7328
03-5636 8328

KLANG
No. 11-G, Jalan Tiara 2B,
Bandar Baru Klang,
Tel : 03-3341 8328
03-3341 9328

PENANG
PRANGINMALL-KOMTAR
Lot133-03-62, 3rd Floor,
Tel : 04-263 5228
04-263 6228

GURNEY PLAZA
Lot170-4-3A&5, 4th Flr,
Tel : 04-226 8268
04-226 8269



This article is part of the ever expanding archive that can be found at <http://allmalaysia.info>. Begin your exploration on all things Malaysian today. *AllMalaysia.info*