

Getting to know Richard Taylor

EA Worldwide Studios



It's more than a cliché; in fact it's a no-brainer to say that with time comes a sort of evolution both within people and technology. It's not rocket science, I know, but one can't help be somewhat philosophical when looking at life – even someone else's -- in retrospect.

And in doing so I believe there are few people lucky enough to say they've been able to do everything they aspire to in life.

But Richard Taylor is that kind of person and although he says he still has a few things left on that proverbial list – he's not complaining because there's always time for more.

While Taylor may be a relative new-comer to EALA, in the role of cinematic director for *Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle Earth 2*, he has close to four decades of experience in live action direction, production design, special effects and CG images for film, TV and games in his repertoire of skills.

To say he's a pioneer in CG and special effects would be an understatement.



What the 60s and being a hippy launched

Holding a BFA in painting and drawing coupled with a Masters in printmaking and photography Taylor didn't start off his long and steeped career in the most conventional way. It was the sixties and Taylor was a self-described hippy – both of which led him to co-found a multi-media light show and graphics company Rainbow Jam, which toured with quintessential bands of that era like *The Grateful Dead*, *Santana*, *Led Zeppelin* and *Jethro Tull*.

“From 1968 to 1971 it was like running a small circus,” Taylor joked. “We were living in San Francisco and we did the graphics, posters and light shows for various bands. “The graphic methodology we created during that time is what led me to the techniques that I later evolved in my film career.”

Rainbow Jam offered a unique experience to the audience, a show that appeared to be graphically painted with light as well as rich in film imagery. Taylor shot animation and live action with his 16mm Bolex for the shows and ultimately this experience is what gave him the push to pursue filmmaking as a career.

The Commercial Effect

After earning his MFA, Taylor joined the LA-based Robert Abel and Associates, a studio that was a pioneer in television graphics and commercial special effects. It was at Abel that Taylor considers his “real” professional career began. All told, he won a string of Clios (the academy awards of the advertising and design industry) for his design and direction on the 7Up Bubbles “*See the Light*”, 7UP “*Uncola*” and the Levi’s “*Trademark*” commercials.

Taylor’s 25 years in the commercial business produced a large amount of the TV spots we grew up on – Duracell, 7Up, Coke, Intel, McDonalds, Disney, Reebok – to name a few.

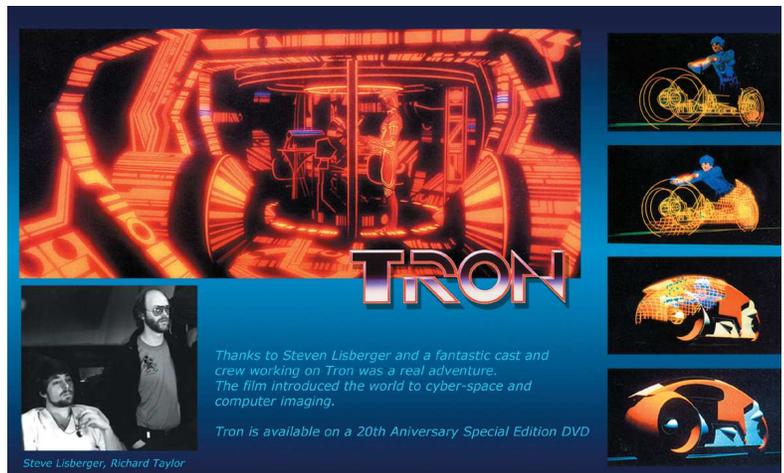
And then there was this little movie called *Tron*

Due to Taylor’s innate drive for experimenting with evolving technologies onscreen, his commercial work led him to working in feature films. His first foray into features gave him an opportunity to design and supervise the modeling for *Star Trek the Motion Picture*. But it was in 1980, when Taylor became the creative director at Information International Inc (III) that he carved out a name for himself in Computer Graphics Imaging (CGI).

While at III, Taylor was one of the first in his field to computer animate the entire human body with the creation of “Adam Powers.” But it was his work on Walt Disney’s cutting edge movie *Tron*, which married innovative special effects with computer-generated imagery that really put the spotlight on Taylor in 1982. It was through this unique movie that the world was introduced to computer simulation.



Some of Taylor's award-winning commercial work (from Top to Bottom): Duracell Cowboy “showdown”; 7Up spot; McDonald's *Batman* and Reebok.



Thanks to Steven Lisberger and a fantastic cast and crew working on *Tron* was a real adventure. The film introduced the world to cyber-space and computer imaging.

Tron is available on a 20th Anniversary Special Edition DVD

Steven Lisberger, Richard Taylor

“[Tron] afforded me the ability to become a director and special effects director on multiple projects over the years,” Taylor said. “But mainly it helped me pioneer computer simulation as an artistic tool.”

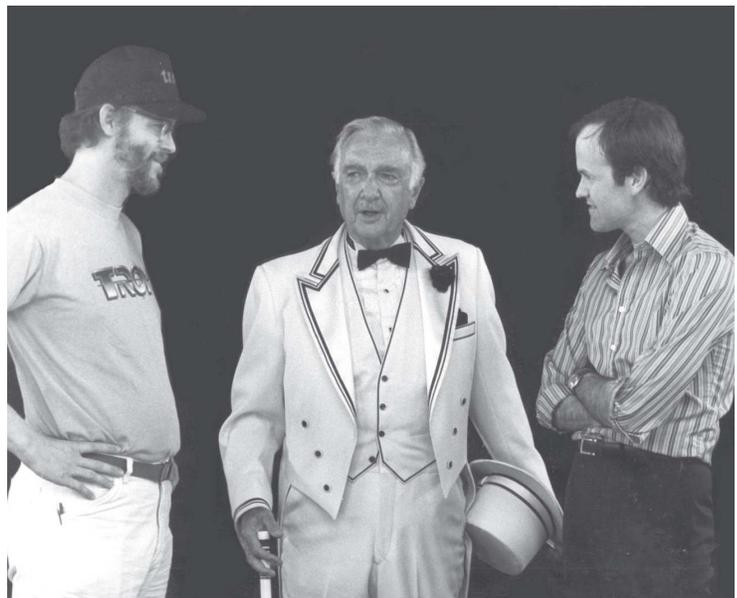
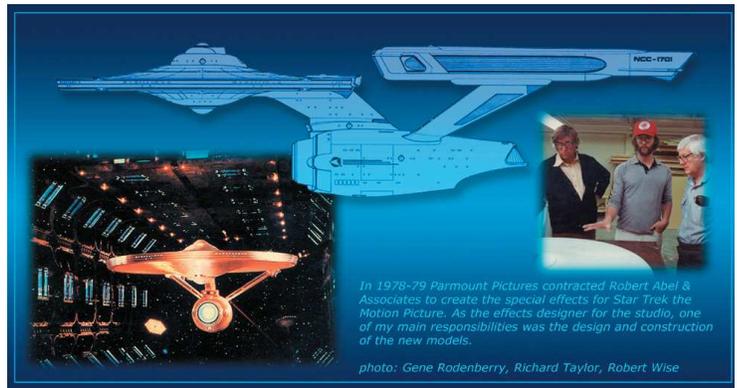
But after working on three films in the following years and not having any of them come to fruition, a disillusioned Taylor moved out of the film industry and into commercial directing.

“That was three years of my life creating storyboards and conceptual work on films that didn’t get made – I may as well have thrown those years in the wastebasket,” Taylor said. “All the visuals that I could have done, that could have ended up on screen didn’t happen.”

But Richard isn’t one for hanging onto ‘what could have been...’ and while looking for the “next edge” he landed in the gaming industry, which turned into love at first sight.

“It totally energized me and I realized that I was looking at the next horizon of entertainment,” he said. “I became infatuated with the fact that here we are making computer-simulated images that are photo-real and in gaming they’re real-time interactive and that’s just phenomenal. Especially when I look back at Tron and the state of CGI 25 years ago.

“I was drawn into games because I love all that potential. Games are the next frontier [no Star Trek pun intended].”



On the set of *Tron* Taylor (left) shares a few moments with newsman Walter Cronkite (middle) and special effects cosupervisor Harrison Ellenshaw (right).

Landing at EA

For his first plunge into the gaming industry, Taylor worked for a year on three games at Microsoft Gaming Studios. But it wasn’t long before EAC VP and Chief Visual Officer Glenn Entis – an old friend of Taylor’s – came knocking with an offer.

“[Glenn] enticed me and I looked at EA and the quality of their work and the potential that was there,” Taylor recalled. “And I felt I could make a bigger difference – in the look, feel and quality of the games – at EA.

“And you know it’s nice to work where you can really make a difference and bring 37 years of experience to an industry. I felt the cinematic sequences we did for *Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle Earth* showed some of that potential.”

Long considering the movie industry “capped out and special effects not being special for quite a long time now” because of their pervasive presence in feature films and commercials, Taylor sees the gaming industry as having deeper potential.

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“It’s about making extreme imagery and immersive communications, which will be limitless,” he said.

Taylor feels that he can bring a wide range of his skills (in cinematography, directing and designing, storyboarding and production) and film production techniques (preproduction design, pre-visualization) into game design at EA.

Ah... that retrospective look

Not one to sit idle, this man has goals both inside and outside of EA. Inside EA he’d like to keep pushing the envelopes of cinematography and design as well as work on different intellectual properties or as Taylor says succinctly, “I’d like to do anything I can to help EA kick some visual ass.”

And in that same vein he’s hoping to put a few of the scripts he’s penned over the years to good use.

“One of my scripts I’m now developing as a game,” Taylor said. “It’s an extreme science fiction piece that sets up nicely to be a damn cool game. So hopefully a lot of the work that went into that will come around in another genre.”

“...I’ve been extremely lucky to have worked with a phenomenal range of talented people.”

Outside EA, he still directs some commercials and has some “other” long-term projects in the works but essentially, the guy just wants to learn and be as creative as he can for as long as he can.

“I’ve had a pretty interesting and varied career,” the always modest Taylor reflected. “I’ve always loved learning and in that regard I’ve been extremely lucky to have worked with a phenomenal range of talented people – actors, art directors, writers and cinematographers – and I’ve been thrilled that I’ve actually gotten paid for it.

“There’s one thing I’ve been able to do that’s been really enlightening. Having been in this business as long as I have, I’ve watched the digital era evolve. Most people I work with only know the digital era and they can’t know how complex or difficult it was to shoot elements for an optical composite or shoot 25 passes of handmade art on an animation camera to make an image.

“Now you can do anything you imagine, which wasn’t the case 27 years ago. It’s amazing how the evolution of technology always pushes the limits of art and expression.”

Aside from directing commercials and game cinematics, Richard creates original art that has been featured in table top books on computer art. His work is represented by Phillips Gallery in Utah.

His most recent project with EALA has been the cinematic sequences for Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars.