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**Casey Dame** helps the make-believe of "Ice Age 3" and other flicks come to life on the big screen. **BY ERIC BUTTERMAN**



**W**he has battled with Orcs in "The Lord of the Rings" and Wookies in the latest "Star Wars" movie. As a character technical director, Casey Dame has worked on some of the most successful special-effects movies. It's his job to figure out just how far an Orc can leap and to answer that age-old question: "If I were a Wookie, how would I move?" Check out his work this month in the brand-new "Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs."

### Boning Up

Every day on set offers a different challenge, but there are typical things to expect. "I get shots to work on and then figure out how to do them to meet the deadline," Dame says. He works with a number of computer programs, but Dame takes his work beyond the computer screen.

Dame has to ensure "the motion of the character feels right, the movement looks real enough that it doesn't take the audience out of the scene. I build the skeleton and study the anatomy to figure out where muscle joints should be, literally looking at a skeletal model of a human or animal."

### Unusual Challenges

Sometimes there isn't much to work with, as in "Star Wars: Episode III, Revenge of the Sith." Much of the action was shot on a blank green screen, and Dame and others added visuals later. To synchronize the motion of Jedis in a droid fight scene, he says, "We had to think about the laws of gravity and how they'd collide with other objects. We became, in our minds, Jedis." Turn the page for more of Dame's behind-the-scenes comments on some big movies.

**more >**

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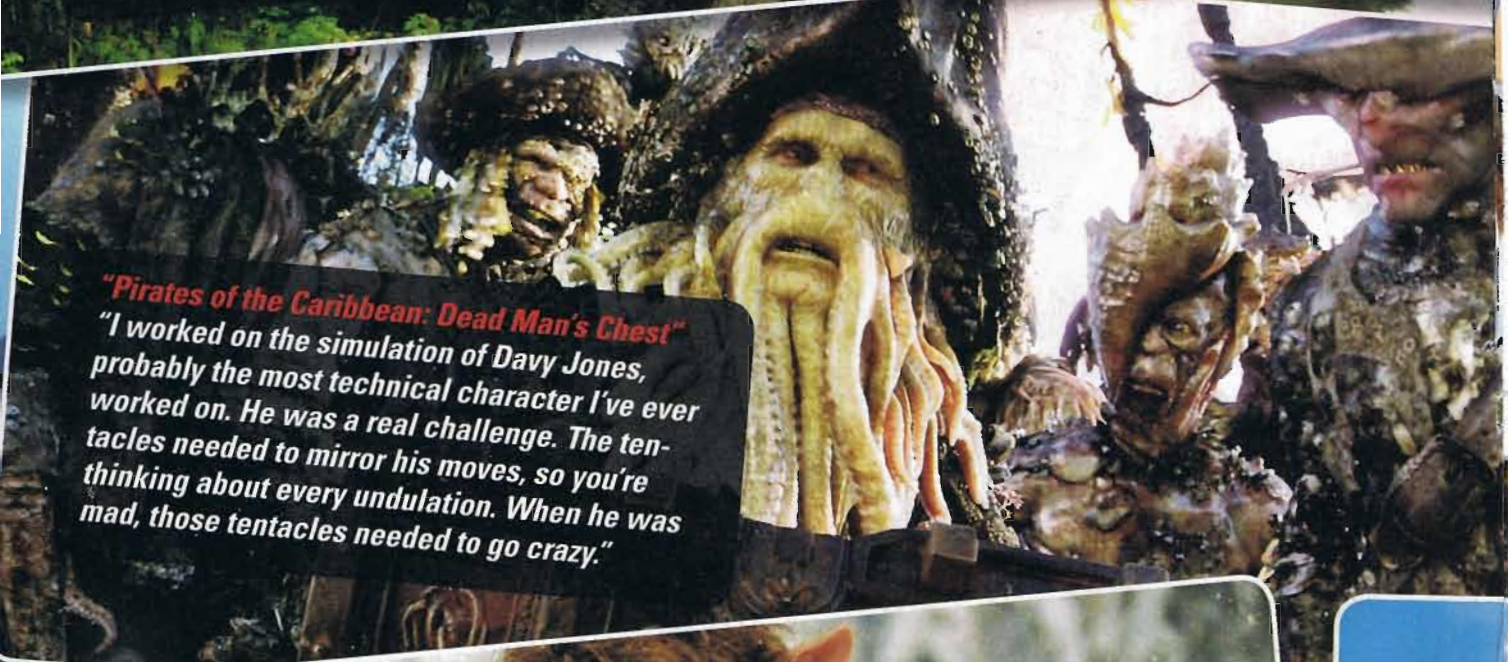
### **"Eragon"**

"Saphira the dragon's wings and feathers needed to react to wind while flying. We would take the animated wings and do a digital cloth simulation to make it look like a skin membrane with armored feathers. The wings needed to react and look as realistic as possible, even while crashing through trees and rolling down a hill."



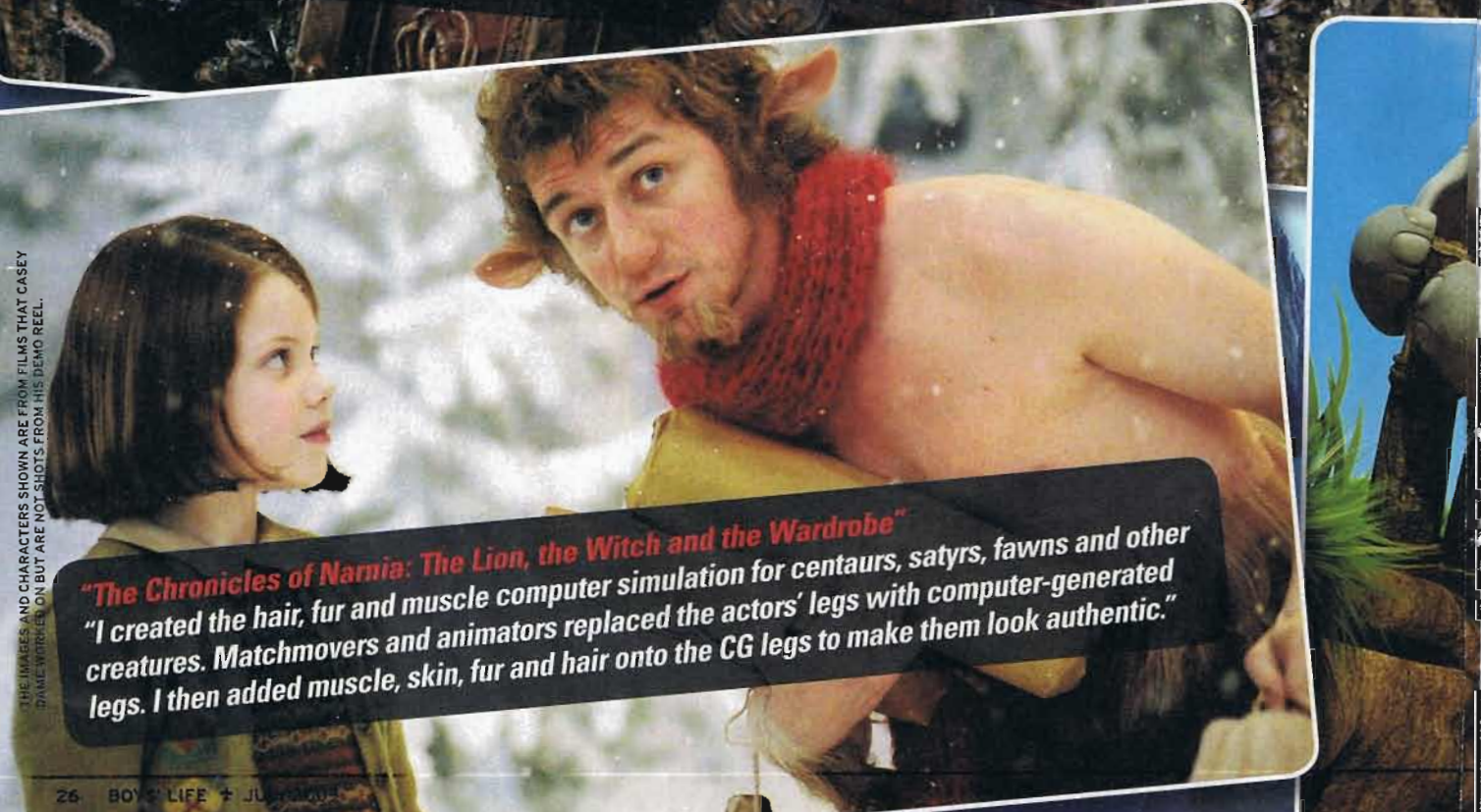
### **"Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest"**

"I worked on the simulation of Davy Jones, probably the most technical character I've ever worked on. He was a real challenge. The tentacles needed to mirror his moves, so you're thinking about every undulation. When he was mad, those tentacles needed to go crazy."



### **"The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe"**

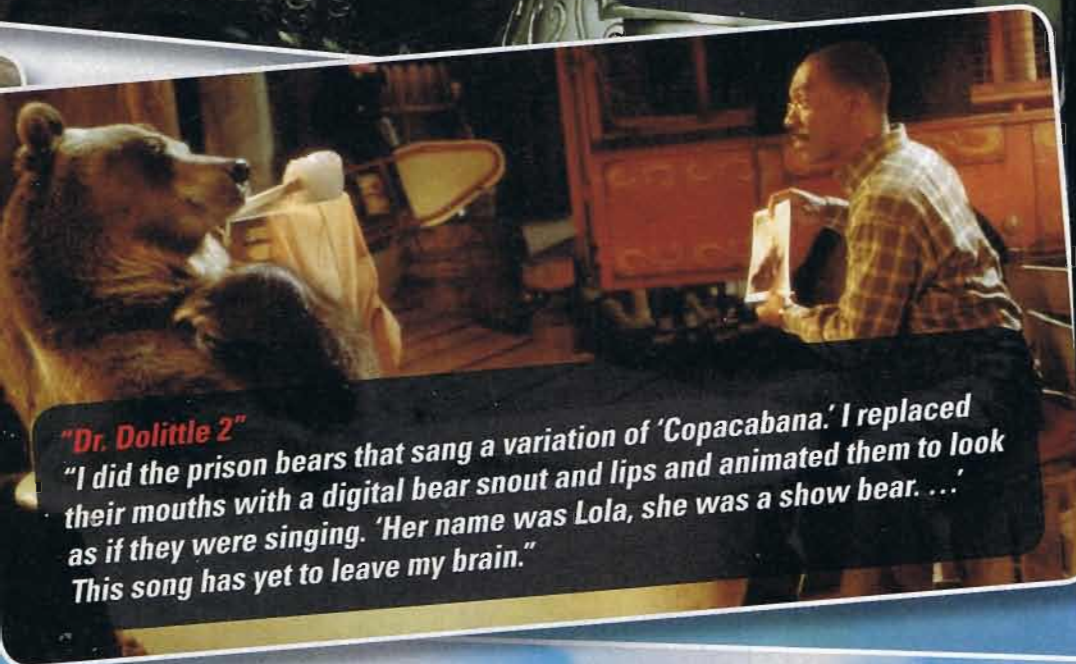
"I created the hair, fur and muscle computer simulation for centaurs, satyrs, fawns and other creatures. Matchmovers and animators replaced the actors' legs with computer-generated legs. I then added muscle, skin, fur and hair onto the CG legs to make them look authentic."



THE IMAGES AND CHARACTERS SHOWN ARE FROM FILMS THAT CASEY DAME WRITERS ON BUT ARE NOT SHOTS FROM HIS DEMO REEL.



**"The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King"**  
"Most of the work I did can be seen in the Pelennor Fields battle scenes. We'd have these tusks swipe around and hit the horses with people riding them. But, of course, it's really creating animated horses and then making the action appear real."



**"Dr. Dolittle 2"**  
"I did the prison bears that sang a variation of 'Copacabana.' I replaced their mouths with a digital bear snout and lips and animated them to look as if they were singing. 'Her name was Lola, she was a show bear. ...' This song has yet to leave my brain."



**"Horton Hears a Who!"**  
"I worked on Horton, Morton, Katie and several creatures in the Jungle of Nool. The main challenge with Morton the field mouse was that he had to perform on the same level as Horton, even though he was very small. I rigged Morton so that he could stretch, twist and move himself and still match Horton's motion. "I spent months shape-correcting Horton so he could bend and twist in extreme poses and do things that a real elephant would never do, such as a crab walk." ♣

#### CHARACTER TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

**JOB OUTLOOK:** "The film industry always has opportunities," Dame says. "The field will be getting more technical, so skill sets have to become more technical."

**EDUCATION:** Art background and math skills (calculus, linear algebra, geometry and trigonometry). Top colleges to shoot for are the California Institute of the Arts and the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning in Canada.

**MUST HAVE:** A top demo reel, which is a video example of your work. "You want it to have your best work, movies or projects you've worked on most recently," Dame says. "It also needs about three minutes of high quality. Even after that, it can be difficult. It took me sending out 80 reels before I landed my first job."

**SALARY:** Depends on experience, but top character technical directors can make at least \$100,000.