

VARIETY

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2006

'War,' 'Kong' top visual effects kudos

By DAVID S. COHEN

"King Kong" and "War of the Worlds" were the big winners at the fourth annual VES Awards Wednesday as each pic walked away with three awards and at least one top honor. But an emotional tribute to Pixar toon titan John Lasseter stole the show.

Lasseter was saluted with the Visual Effects Society's George Melies lifetime achievement award. He was hailed for melding computer science with the principles of traditional animation to create the foundation for today's visual effects and CG-animation industries.

"King Kong" garnered top honors for visual effects in an f/x-driven picture, and snagged kudos for animated character in a live-action pic.

In accepting the top award, "Kong" visual-effects supervisor Joe Letteri saluted Lasseter, saying, "All the principles of animation you were preaching years ago, some of us were listening."

Pic also drew the created environment nod for its high-altitude depiction of New York at dawn.

But "War of the Worlds" grabbed honors for the year's best single visual effect, the "Fleeing the Neighborhood" sequence, as well as awards for its models-and-miniatures work and compositing.

"Kong's" rivals for top honors, "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," "Star Wars: Episode III — Revenge of the Sith" and "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" were shut out. "Kingdom of Heaven" took the supporting visual effects kudos.

On the TV side, TNT's "Into the West" won two awards, while HBO's "Rome" drew the prize for visual effects in a series.

The tributes to Lasseter included digs at Disney, which rebuffed his efforts to launch computer animation at the Mouse House some 25 years ago.

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'KONG,' 'WAR' VISUAL VICTORS

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Presenter John Ratzemberger quipped that the day he saw the news that Pixar would be taking over Disney animation, "I also saw a little item that Walt Disney had stopped spinning in his grave."

Lasseter, in his acceptance speech, recalled going to work in 1980 at Disney, "the place I'd wanted to work all my life," only to find "they'd reached a plateau."

Recognizing huge potential in the work being done on "Tron," he worked on a demo to show what computer animation could do.

"It fell on deaf eyes," he said.

Lasseter was careful not to disclose any plans as animation topper for the Mouse once the purchase of Pixar is complete, saying only that he is "looking forward to working with the pioneering artists" there again.



Lasseter



"War of the Worlds" was one of the big winners at the VES Awards taking three nods, including the honor for best single effect.

Lasseter's tale hit a nerve among the assembled visual effects pros, many of whom were disgruntled ex-Disney animators.

Fellow Pixar vet Ed Catmull, who also goes with Lasseter to Disney, will receive a sci-tech award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences on Saturday.

Pixar's Jim Morris received a special honor, the VES board of directors Award. Morris is a longtime Lucasfilm vet who left to join Pixar in 2004.

Morris managed Lucasfilm's transition into digital production and was saluted for being a linchpin of the VES during its founding and early growth.

For a complete list of winners go to variety.com/ves

Look for 'Honeywee'