

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**KEN RALSTON:** The films that inspired me when I was growing up-- six, seven years old-- were the films of Ray Harryhausen. He was a master of stop motion animation, miniatures, blue screen work, and he did most of it himself. Today it would take an army of 200 people to do the things that Ray did in *Jason and the Argonauts*. My mantra has always been, if it's possible, if you can shoot it for real, have it onset, or have it all in camera. Do that first and try to plan for that. There's lots of movies that use the forced perspective shots, where there's a great miniature foreground piece set in front of the action way in the background to look like buildings, to look like an alien landscape, mostly in older films.

I worked on the first three original *Star Wars* films. Some of the things that are in the movie-- In *Empire Strikes Back* there's an asteroid scene, and I deliberately stuck potatoes in the asteroid belt just to see if anyone would notice. Now it seems like just kind of a smart ass thing to do, but it really wasn't about that. It was about what can you get away with in a movie, especially of that sort of magnitude, that still looks just as good as what everyone thinks they're watching but isn't that thing. It's something simpler and cheaper to do.

In *Jedi*, I stuck, actually, a tennis shoe of mine in a couple of shots. And there's wads of gum representing a fleet of spaceships in the background of a bunch action scenes. So if you're doing your job right, and you're choreographing the scene, so it's the Millennium Falcon flying around, it's chased by Tie ships in this big, crazy battlefield, and there's all kinds of other spaceships, you design the scene so your eye is following the Millennium Falcon. The next bit of information is the Tie ships, and that's how you handle your compositions.

You really need to start from a basic understanding of film and what your eye perceives, what action is, how to do the basics basically of filmmaking. So you're trying to let the audience follow the information as seen. That's very important.

Once that's done, and that's where the audience is looking, then you fill in the background with what they think is the battlefield, and all the spaceships, and stuff like that. So you put in a couple of real spaceships, and then the rest can be easier. And what that tells you is that even though the shot can be a spectacular special effects scene, there are simpler ways of doing this work.

Tim Burton was a great director to work with. I'd never worked with Tim before, and he was going to do *Alice in Wonderland*. And I was asked to be on it, and I was very excited, to put it mildly-- because I always wanted to work with Tim-- to get on that project. So how it starts is, at least with Tim-- This is what he did, and this is what I appreciated from him, because at the forefront of everything he does is the artist. The politics and all the other nonsense you have to do comes later.

So the first thing he wanted me to do-- and I was in the middle of doing something here at Sony-- was to get on a jet, fly over to England, and meet with Tim, then I got on a jet, and I flew back here-- that fast. And it was mainly to see if Tim and I could sit in a room with each other and communicate, and understand each other, and appreciate each other, and connect. Because we're going to spend two years of our life together, you better love each other. So we did that, got along great, and it started from there.

Then you get a script, read it, and you start talking to the director about what he sees. I hope you find this where you get a group of people together-- all artists, creative people. And the energy generated is something I feed off of. And I love that part of this business-- where all these super talented folks are all contributing to the same thing and just going down those roads and enjoying that part of it. It's a lot of fun. I'm Ken Ralston. I do visual effects for motion pictures, and I've been doing it for a very long time.

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