



Digic's mocap studio is on hand to help with any recordings, but is also hired out to others in the area.



# GROWTH SPURT

## THE RISE OF DIGIC PICTURES

After 15 years of producing the biggest game trailers and cinematics, Digic Pictures reveals how it became one of the leaders in the industry



We're somewhat surprised to find ourselves in a paradise. Overlook the overbearing logos of some of the biggest names in the tech industry, and you'd be forgiven for not believing that Graphisoft Park is a perfectly tuned oasis nestled only a short bus ride from the city life of Budapest's downtown.

The purpose-built technological centre of the Hungarian capital is a considerable shift from tall stuccoed buildings and ornate bridges, and its serenity amid lush green grass, intricate statues and the sound of trickling water certainly gives the location an eerie dissonance of the city it's a part of. Many such technological centres claim to be the 'European Silicon Valley', but with names like Microsoft, Canon and SAP claiming a portion of the cultivated land here with their gleaming glass buildings, Graphisoft Park certainly has a strong stake for the title. Hidden away at the end of a footpath that bypasses a

small pond practically covered with lily pads is Digic Pictures, and while there was a time that the 3D studio would have looked out of place in such an environment, these days it's easily as significant as its neighbours.

The company was set up in 2002 by founder and current CEO Alex S Rabb, initially comprising just a small team of passionate Hungarian artists keen on making strides in the 3D movie space. Its heritage was in videogames, however, and so it made sense that it began there. "I joined in 2004," says Tamás Varga, the lead of the character division at Digic Pictures, which makes him a solid candidate to explain the company's rise to the top. "I was one of the modelers." Varga explains that the company had three modelers from a total team of 15 or

so, and that this gave the studio a personal vibe. "Sometimes I do miss the days when it was just 15 of us. Basically, everyone was the division by themselves: 'I am the modeller, you're the set-up guy, you're the animator', and so on."

The first project was a series of CG clips that would be used in-game for a medieval strategy game created by a Hungarian developer, of which the early founders of Digic had an association with. It was the intro cinematic that would stand out the most, however: a strong *Lord Of The Rings* tone that matched the particular beats of *The Two Towers*' Battle of Helm's Deep: ferocity, glory, despair. While the inspiration was hard to ignore - *The Two Towers* was released in 2002, after all - it was nonetheless an impressive movie, so much so, in fact, that it even went on to be screened during Siggraph's 2003 Electronic Theatre - the first ever Hungarian project to receive this honour.

Games Workshop became involved after that, where the growing team produced the initial teaser and the opening intro, and once more its production gained global acknowledgment at Siggraph. "The game was an over-the-top strategy, so the characters were very small," recalls Varga. "It's based on a tabletop game where you have these small figures that have every thing completely unrealistically exaggerated. What happened was that Games Workshop - it wasn't even the publisher or the developer of the game - sent us dozens of boxes of these little toys and lots of albums, and a huge pile of books and images, and they said, 'Do something good. So we did our own story, our own concept work; it was absolute, complete, creative freedom. I do hear that a lot of people still think that that is our best work so far.'"

It must have made an impression, because things grew from there, with a considerable



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Tamás Varga,  
Character division lead

number of more projects coming in. It wasn't until around 2009 where Digic Pictures really began to make a name for itself, however, producing its first real trailer for a product rather than an in-game cinematic. This was for *Darksiders*, an explosive cinematic that featured a range of mythically based creatures, scaling tension and an important focus on the detail of the main character. It showed what Digic could do, and ultimately led to much more of this sort of work - and more staff members to help deal with the work load.

"When I started, for two or three years after I was the only lighting artist," says Balázs Horváth, who is now the lead of the lighting and compositing unit. "After that, the company started to grow, and we started hiring artists. The lighting and compositing team now has 15 members, but we have to work on eight projects at the same time, so it's very difficult to manage