



Creative corner

# This gorilla bats in the big leagues

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## South Korea's Dexter Digital relies on Autodesk tools to help animate baseball-playing gorilla in upcoming 3D feature film *Mr. Go*.

So where would an 800-pound gorilla play baseball? Just ask Dexter Digital, the South Korean digital effects studio, and they'll answer, "...in the Korean pro leagues as a photorealistic, fully animated CG character in stereoscopic 3D."

Dexter Digital has applied its creative talents and technical chops to the production of *Mr. Go*, a new, animated, live action feature film based on a popular South Korean comic strip. And at every step along the way, Dexter Digital depended on the powerful 3D modeling and animation tools in the Autodesk® Entertainment Creation Suite to compete in the big leagues.

### Creating outstanding visual effects for a global market

In a place where being a 'large' digital effects studio means something smaller than what is found overseas, *Mr. Go* represents a breakthrough in world-class CGI-animated feature film effects by an Asian-based studio. Dexter Digital deployed their complete range of skills in the production of the film, which tested every part of the studio's project pipeline, including design, animation, and rendering.



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“We’ve worked on *Mr. Go* for the past two years, and we’re proud of how it’s developed,” says Taekyung Yoo, Creature and Modeling Supervisor at Dexter Digital. “We have around 180 artists in-house, which is big by Korean standards, but still small compared to Europe or America. To compensate, we need to be innovative in our workflows to put out creative work at the level of other studios around the world.”

### A dual set of challenges

A gorilla named Ling Ling is the main character in *Mr. Go*, and appears in full 3D photography in approximately 900 shots. Covered in fur and dressed in a baseball uniform, photo-realistically designing and animating this character proved to be a formidable artistic challenge. Ling Ling’s production also generated an enormous amount of data, necessitating a stable and efficient pipeline for moving massive data sets between design and animation teams within Dexter Digital. “This was the first time that an animated character like this was the lead actor in a Korean film,” says Yoo,

“so we had to find innovative ways to handle the creative aspects as well as data management.”

### Bringing *Mr. Go* to life

Ling Ling began as modeling data with the basic shapes created using Autodesk® Mudbox® sculpting software. Dexter’s creature team then rigged the model data using Autodesk® Maya® and arranged those data sets for use by the animation team. The motion data was then returned to the



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creature team for use within Autodesk® MotionBuilder® software. Work then flowed from MotionBuilder back to Maya where animators used the motion capture data as a reference for the key frame animation. Completed sequences were then routed to the rendering team using RenderMan® software.



Central to this entire workflow was Autodesk Maya. “Maya is not just a tool,” says Yoo. “It’s an integration process. It’s the backbone of our entire project pipeline.”

### Autodesk technology essential to Dexter team

Autodesk technology has become essential to the work of CGI artists around the world. As Yoo observes, “Autodesk Maya lets us create a pipeline to get done what we need to do. That was essential to *Mr. Go*. Maya comes with a lot of native tools inside that we use to create that pipeline.”

Because Maya is a tool with open architecture, Dexter Digital finds it much easier to connect it to their homegrown solutions. “The Autodesk Entertainment Creation Suite has open clusters, so we could use the open architecture to work with our in-house tools. The suite definitely helped us to be more creative with this film,” comments Yoo.

### Freedom to create

For Dexter Digital’s design and animation teams, the Autodesk Entertainment Creation Suite offers creative freedom limited only by the artists’ imaginations. As the Dexter Digital team experienced in creating *Mr. Go*, their creative vision was realized while still working within an organized and efficient workflow pipeline.

Audiences soon thrilling to the antics of a baseball playing gorilla wouldn’t have it any other way.



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# Rising 3D animator committed to giving back

Autodesk expert Christopher Erickson seeks his first industry job while helping current students master the art.

Growing up near Fresno, Calif., Christopher Erickson experienced a life changing revelation in 12th grade when he got involved with FIRST, an international robotics competition designed to give students real-world engineering experience. One of the event sponsors, Autodesk, was also sponsoring a concurrent CG animation competition on the side. Erickson, who had no prior experience in CG graphics, won that contest and discovered that he had an innate knack for 3D animation, using what was at the time called 3D Studio Max software.





Now a recent graduate with a degree in animation and visual effects from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, Erickson seeks his first career job, armed with an impressive demo reel and a bevy of awards for his work. But perhaps what distinguishes him most from other job seekers is his dedication, even at this early stage of his career, to giving back to the CG community in the form of on-going high school student mentoring. "After only a year of college myself, I started mentoring the high school team that I started up," recalls Erickson. "We eventually made some animations called *A Little Bird Told Me* and those won an international award. But I think that the most rewarding thing for me was just sharing everything that I was learning with those students. It was a really fun experience to see the kids freak out when I sculpted something in Mudbox. They were amazed by it and it was cool to relive my own discovery experiences through them."

### **Autodesk creates opportunities**

By winning the FIRST robotics CG animation competition for two years running, Erickson caught the attention of Autodesk, and a relationship began that saw Erickson study with industry experts at



Autodesk University and become a certified Autodesk student expert. "Autodesk noticed that I was really adamant about sharing all the things I was learning with students at my old high school," Erickson recounts. "So they called me and said: 'Hey, you're doing some really cool work with these students. How would you like to come and volunteer through Autodesk to reach out to students outside of your high school?' That led to some other volunteering opportunities at SIGGRAPH and GDC. I also got to intern with some really amazingly talented artists at studios like Pixar and DreamWorks. But what opened the doors were the opportunities that Autodesk created for me."

Image courtesy of Christopher Erickson.