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**From: Matthews Studio Equipment**

Effective:August 23, 2023

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**Key Grip Woolf Secures the Gear for *Guillermo* *Del Toro’s Pinocchio***

Jonathan Woolf has gathered a wealth of trade secrets from half a century working in the motion picture industry. His recent chapters have led him to key grip the miniatures unit on Peter Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy and act as a lighting technician on the 2022 *Guillermo Del Toro’s Pinocchio*. Woolf’s big job on *Pinocchio* was to find reliable equipment to last through the almost three years of production on the Oscar winning film.

When it comes to working with small sets and stop motion, he’ll be the first to say stability and precision is imperative for this type of production. Pre-production on *Guillermo Del Toro’s Pinocchio* began in late 2019. It had always been expected to be a long-running production, but when COVID-19 hit only a few months later, *Pinocchio*, like many other films and television shows, was thrown off schedule. “COVID had hit and they had to work out a protocol to continue working safely.”

“Because of the length of the project, it was decided to purchase all the equipment rather than rent it for obvious reasons,” Woolf relates, regarding *Pinocchio*’s extensive grip requirements. “Due to supply chain issues, people were struggling to buy six, let alone hundreds of C-stands at that time.” To support their award-winning production, the studio used over 500 Matthews stands, including C-Stands, Hi Rollers, Hihi Rollers, and Mombo Combos, as well as a sea of grip heads, apple boxes, flags, scrims, arms, clamps and other hardware. “A substantial reason I went with Matthews was that they could deliver that the highest quality equipment at the quantity we needed. Precision is such a critical thing. Far more so with stop motion animation and motion control than it is for live action. I don’t know if that many manufacturers realize how a flag can’t afford to drift even a 16th of an inch.”

The film relied on motion control technology to create its cinematic camera movement. “People who haven't been around grips in general, and specifically grips working with motion control, don't realize how creative you have to be to support things and keep them rigid,” relates Woolf. “When you're compositing shots, the camera moves are precise, computer-controlled, and exactly the same. Anything within the line of sight of that camera also has to be absolutely rigid and can't flutter around when somebody walks by.”

The camera moves, lighting adjustments, and even grip maneuvers were orchestrated using special motion control technology to keep every filmmaking aspect in sync. “For example, on a set of a great big field, there should be cloud shadows crossing. Obviously, you can't walk into the set with a cloud. That movement, again, has to be synced so that it can be re-shot over and over and over again. The ‘cloud’ movement gets hooked into the computer that's driving the other motion control equipment. Then that the cloud can move across in front of a light at a known, adjustable speed. Working with something that size requires a very intricate rig, because the motion control computer can only drive a motor that's so big. Consequently, I had to rig it with counterweights because the cloud was 20 feet by 20 feet on a frame. To enable a motor to pull something that big and heavy required a counterbalance rigged off a pulley. You build and you invent as you go along.”

The need for stability extends to the very stages that house the production. “Sets sometimes have to be bolted to concrete and even have to account for temperature control in the room because if you build a wooden stage, and you have a hot day, suddenly you don't have characters lining up.” The *Pinocchio* grip team went to additional lengths to ensure their equipment wasn’t going to move accidentally. “The C-Stands were hot glued to the concrete in the stages,” describes Woolf. “That's great until you spend 20 minutes setting up an intricate array of four C-Stands, and then it's like, ‘Well, actually we're going to have to move it over an inch.’ Then you have to un-glue everything.

"Playing with little stuff is harder than playing with real-size stuff,” says the key grip. “There's a number of animators who become almost a crossover between part of the crew and part of the cast. They move the models an iota at a time and need to get into the set to manipulate them. Getting stable access for them is critical. Take the church set which was built on a steel scaffold platform because there was so much activity around it. Access becomes a very important part when you have set decorators and animators and puppeteers needing to walk onto the set. That could lead to things getting bumped and moved. We rigged catwalks so that crew could get out onto the set to maybe touch up a little paint or move things around prior to a shot without disturbing the whole rigidity of the thing.

“I think my main contribution to the film was connecting production with Matthews and getting first-rate equipment that did the job. I don't think anything got sent back because it was faulty. I don't remember anything breaking. I don't remember any complaints about anything, and I didn't see anything waggling in any of the shots. [laughter] The ultimate test. So it's not just a case of the people who are operating the equipment, it's the quality of the equipment. Everybody worked so hard and with so much heart.” With 55 years of filmmaking behind him, the veteran key grip concludes, “I can only say good things, apart from the fact that my wife won’t let me go back and work again anymore, because as she puts it, ‘You've retired three times. That's enough. You're done.’ So now I am looking forward to staying home and playing with my vintage cameras.”

*Guillermo Del Toro’s Pinocchio* was awarded an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature at the 2023 Oscars to add to its many other honors, including Golden Globe and Annie Awards. The movie is available to watch online through Netflix.

***For more behind the scenes see:*** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUoS-CBi4iA> or watch the full BTS featurette on Netflix.

***To read the Jonathan Woolf’s full interview:*** <https://bit.ly/MSE-Pinocchio>