

Steven Poster, ASC has earned some 50 cinematography credits in just about every film genre. *Cats & Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore* was a new experience for him. It's the first film that he has shot with real dogs and cats in all leading roles. Chris O'Donnell plays Shane, a human character who interacts with the animals, and Kiernan Shipka portrays a young girl, but the story is really about the cats and dogs.

Cats, Dogs

Steve Poster explores new territory

"It's an intriguing James Bond-type story about dogs and cats putting the ongoing war between their species on hold when they join forces to defeat a rogue cat with sinister plans," Poster says. "After about 30 seconds, you believe the dogs and cats are smart and funny and that they really know how to talk."

Cats & Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore was produced on stages and at practical locations including a large amusement park in North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, by Village Roadshow Pictures for distribution by Warner Bros. this summer in both 3-D and 2-D formats.

It was Poster's first collaboration with director Brad Peyton. "Brad is one of the smartest people I have ever met," Poster says. "He had a sense of how to put the story together in a graphic way that made it an intriguing experience for me. I think the fact that Brad has directed animated films has a lot to do with the emotional quality that he brought to the way the story unfolds."

Poster also had close collaborations with visual effects supervisors Jerome Chen, Richard Hoover from Imageworks, and Blair Clark from Tippett Studio. He had worked with Chen on *Stuart Little 2* and with Hoover on commercials. "We used computer-generated animation to replace animals' faces when

they were talking," Poster explains. "It's amazing how seamlessly they blend with live-action film."

Poster had shot previous films with animals, including *Stuart Little 2* and *Big Top Pee-wee*. Based on that experience, he knew that it would distract the dogs and cats if cameras and/or people were too close to them.

He covered scenes with two cameras in 35mm format composed in 1.85:1 aspect ratio. The film images were converted to 3-D during post-production. "It was produced in 2-D because shooting with large 3-D rigs would have distracted the animals," Poster says. "We had a Panaflex XL camera with Primo lenses on a 20-foot Technocrane most of the time. That allowed us to get incredible close-ups without startling the dogs and cats."

Poster chose KODAK VISION3 500T 5219 film, which he occasionally rated for an exposure index of 800 in darker settings. He also consistently used Tiffen Glimmerglass filters to help take the images a little toward fantasy.

Boone Narr, the trainer, and his crew were the only ones who came close to the animals. He and Poster had previously collaborated on *Stuart Little 2*.



and 3-D

"Boone doesn't teach animals to do tricks," Poster observes. "He teaches them how to learn. You can only get two or three animals together at the same time, so we filmed them separately when we could shoot split frames. There are scenes with 30 to 40 dogs in different places. We needed to flawlessly repeat both our camera moves and focus in order to create seamless splits in post-production. On the smaller set-ups, we would use the Libra remote head that could record and play back moves. For the introduction of Doggie HQ, where we had many dogs in the shot, we did 56 passes in a giant motion control shot."

Complicated scenes

Lighting dogs and cats is a different art and craft than lighting human beings. Poster explains, "Their fur eats light. We were filming a German Shepherd with a black snout, and an Anatolian Shepherd, which is a very large white dog with a black face. That's about the worst combination you can imagine. When I was shooting close-ups on the main German Shepherd, whose movie name is Diggs, I had to be aware at all times that not only were the dog's eyes on different sides of his face they were deep set and surrounded by deep black fur. I used Kino Flo BarFly's on short stands on either side of the dog to aim into each eye. Sometimes, I even had to add a third one over the front of the camera to get the catch light in his eyes. If you can't see their eyes the audience doesn't get the emotions."

Brian Pearson and Roger Vernon both shot additional units. "They were invaluable colleagues who were able to finish off complicated scenes that had many small parts," Poster notes. "There were several scenes that they shot from scratch. A great asset is a second unit that can be married to your style of shooting and can match what the first unit is doing."

Intimate shots of dogs and cats, occasionally interacting with each other, are the heart and soul of the story, but Poster was also covering scenes with huge scope. "We shot for about a week at an old amusement park," he says. "It's the climax of the story that takes place at night. We lit this huge expanse in almost every direction every night we were there. We had four very high Condors with large lamps outside of the corners of the park that we could use as backlight whichever direction we turned. We did as much fixing of existing lights and pre-rigged our own, so we could use the various areas we needed to shoot in."

Technicolor in Vancouver did the front-end lab work. Poster took digital stills of set-ups. He manipulated them at night and sent the images to the dailies timer. The lab provided digital dailies.

1 Diggs as voiced by James Marsden (left), Catherine as voiced by Christina Applegate (center) and Butch as voiced by Nick Nolte (right) in Warner Bros. Pictures' and Village Roadshow's family comedy *Cats & Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore*, released by Warner Bros. Pictures. (Photo Warner Bros. Pictures) **2** Cinematographer Steve Poster, ASC on the set. (Photo Kimberly French)



"I always feel it's necessary to screen dailies for a movie projected on a screen. This is the only way to understand the scope and scale of the movie you are making. Projecting dailies can be simple and inexpensive. I use a Panasonic AE3000 digital projector and either paint a white wall or have the grips build a simple frame and stretch fabric to make it into a screen. Every day at lunch a regular group of us would eat in the dark and delight in our work from the day before."

Ambitious endeavor

While the film was still in production, David Cole, the DI colorist at LaserPacific in Los Angeles, would get batches of the still photographs from Poster to give Cole a sense of the cinematographer's vision for the look. Poster and Cole have collaborated on six other projects. It was an ambitious endeavor, because more than 1,000 visual effects had to be seamlessly melded with live-action film during DI timing.

The timed DI was converted to 3-D format at Stereo Pictures in Los Angeles (the company is based in Korea with a U.S. branch). "It began with converting key frames from each scene," Poster says. "We sat in a big screening room wearing 3-D glasses, and told them things like, 'That dog in the foreground needs to be more at the plane of the screen, and that object has to be a little further back. Bring that object off the screen. Let the convergence fall a little further back.' We guided them through every aspect of converting the images to 3-D, and later we analyzed each shot in motion to see if any fixes were needed to make the scene work seamlessly for the audience."