Episode Entry: Vikings Season IV, Episode 410: ‘The Last Ship’

For Consideration for Category 102: Outstanding Special Visual Effects

68th Primetime Emmy Awards

In Vikings Episode 410, ‘The Last Ship’, Visual Effects were heavily depended upon to enhance the monumental battle between two brothers. This episode offers a prime example of how Visual Effects were used to not only strengthen the storytelling, but to convey the scope of the epic battle between brothers.

Scope and scale played a big part in Episodes 410’s battle. The live action plates were photographed using three practical Viking ships, one practical barge and two practical French ships. The fleet numbers were then expanded digitally to become 72 Viking ships, 24 barges, and 76 French ships. Every barge and ship was complete with a digital crew either rowing, fighting or plotting the next attack.
With such large fleet & warrior counts, optimizations and pipeline enhancements were essential to keep an efficient and streamlined workflow. Such pipeline enhancements were designed into the animation workflow, which allowed them to handle hundreds of ships, each containing 20+ warriors, resulting in thousands of on-screen animated characters in any given shot. These efficiencies allowed them to cache multiple hand animated cycles and populate scenes quickly and efficiently.
With ships playing more prominently on screen than previous seasons, the FX department revamped their tools to create a more believable and realistic motion to their cloth simulations, at the same time reducing general simulation times. These enhancements were then propagated to each boats flags, ropes, standards and sails. New water simulation toolsets were developed to allow the artists to ‘mimic’ the practical water in the plates, allowing them to generate accurate wakes, oar splashes and reflections.

During the battle, the French fleet attacked in ‘waves’ to test the Viking armada’s strength. With only two practical French ships on location, Visual Effects were tasked with expanding their fleet to 76 ships and showcasing the battle formations and divisions.
During the second assault, the French use their ships as battering rams to halt the Viking advancement. It was important during this second assault for Visual Effects to show the movement, collision and damage the French caused towards the Viking force. CG Ships manoeuvring, colliding, French soldiers swarming off boats, engaging in battle and general chaos all around.

With the Viking attack unsuccessful, the Vikings abandon their platforms and retreat. With very little in frame Visual Effects were tasked with adding the damaged Viking platforms & their ships, French ships, soldiers fighting and being thrown overboard, bodies floating in the water, along with the departing remains of the Viking fleet.
Ten years after the final siege of Paris, Ragnar returns home to Kattegat. It is now a large sprawling city he can barely recognize. For the final scene of the episode Visual Effects expanded the backlot set to merge with the Fjord environment the audience is accustomed to seeing. Fifteen unique houses with multiple variations were added to create the vast city of Kattegat. The final layout contained over 2400 houses, ships, water, and the Scandinavian Fjords.