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May
2004

ANIMATION

MAGAZINE



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VFX Round-Up

Your Guide to What's New, Who's Doing What and How They're Doing It (in vfx that is)!



Building the Perfect Furry Creatures

Timothy Albee, the creator of the new animated film *Kaze*, *Ghost Warrior*, recently spoke to us about his favorite software package for creating CG fur or hair—**Worley Labs' Sasquatch** (www.worleylabs.com). "I use it in all my work now because it sports a hefty control influence for extreme animatable details and also creates good-looking hair and fur, right out of the box," he says.

Albee explains that when working with hair or fur simulations, the biggest challenge is getting the fibers to lay the way you'd like them to. "With hair you've got just one area to deal with. With fur, you've got an entire pelt, from nose to tail, that needs to be styled." He believes that one of the beautiful aspects of Sasquatch is it gives users the ability to successfully and intelligently comb fur away from selected parts of a character.

The styling on all Albee's furry characters—the wolves of *Daybreak*, *Denali* or the other-worldly characters of *Kaze*—was done in a matter of minutes by telling Sasquatch to make the fur flow away from the nose. He says, "Sasquatch itself is

what makes the fur patterning flow perfectly around the eyes, over the entire body, all the way down to paws and tail."

He also used **LightWave's** tool-sets because they let him focus on being an artist instead of a programmer. "Thanks to LightWave's tools, in two weeks, I was able to build and rig one character, complete with facial morph targets I'd need to achieve every facial expression," he notes. "From this finalized character, I re-sculpted his mesh into all the 16 other characters in a matter of one week."

Another challenge was calculating true shadowing on fur which takes a long time when you figure how many millions of fibers need to be taken into account, each one receiving and casting its own shadow along its length. His solution was to pre-bake the shading of the model's skin to a UV texture map that was applied to the fur's color channels during the render. "This cheat alleviates the need for figuring shadows on a fiber-by-fiber basis," he points out. "It isn't perfectly 'real,' but it looks beautiful. It also saves time in rendering. Using this technique brought the rendering times for my KGW character plates down from 20 minutes to 58 seconds per frame!"

To find out more about *Kaze*,

Ghost Warrior, visit <http://wordware.com/ghostwarrior>.

Kaydara's Dutch Treat

On a typical day, you wouldn't think that **ONLINE v5**, Kaydara's broadcast solution for realtime character animation and the Queen of Holland would have much in common. That's because the results of this unusual pairing only show up at night, during *Café de Wereld*, a satiric CG cartoon series airing as part of the comedy show, *VARA laat*. To help the show's characters—a zany mix of politicians, celebs and dignitaries—poke fun at each other or embarrass themselves, production house **IdTV** enlists the resources of **Motek**, a motion-capture specialty firm based in Amsterdam. Character models, created by Comic House, are built in 3dsmax, Maya and LightWave and then imported into ONLINE for the creation of skeleton rigs, detailed enough to include finger movement. During the realtime shoot that feeds data into ONLINE, up to three performers are tracked using **Polhemus** magnetic body capture systems, four pairs of **5DT** gloves, joysticks for character expressions, eye movement and prop control,



Café de Wereld can be seen late-night on Dutch TV.