

## Out of this World Visual Effects from The Computer Café Group

"By forming The Computer Café Group," says Jeff Barnes, "we're offering clients in the film, commercial, and music video arenas the best of both worlds: artists with years of knowledge and experience in their respective specialties, plus the ability to combine our Group's resources to facilitate large or specialized projects." Playing an important role in the company's ability to offer these benefits, Barnes adds, is Discreet **3ds max**.

The Computer Café Group is a new corporate structure composed of animation and visual effects facility

**3ds max® and flame® play integral roles in blockbuster projects such as *Armageddon*, *The Core*, and *Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over***

Computer Café, and its sister company, visual effects and telecine studio The Syndicate. Under the new corporate structure, which became effective September 1, Computer Café will be renamed Café FX. Both Café FX and The Syndicate will remain in Santa Maria and Santa Monica, California, respectively,

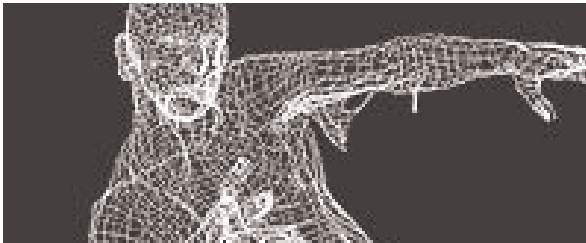
with the former specializing in film work and the latter focusing on commercials and music videos.

Although the company's structure is new, its use of **3ds max** isn't. In fact, **3ds max** has played an integral role in Computer Café's projects since 1999. "We've been using **3ds max** since our work on *Armageddon*," says Barnes, who founded the company with David Ebner in 1993. "We've been very pleased with its specialty animation tools," he says.

Barnes adds that the assortment of plug-ins to **3ds max** also is beneficial, citing that they, along with **3ds max**, have helped the facility achieve complex effects for several blockbuster films. Recently, for instance, artists utilized Sitni Sati's **AfterBurn** (which produces volumetric effects) and **3ds max** to create nearly all the water effects in the Golden Gate Bridge sequence in Paramount Pictures' *The Core*. "Using standard particles created in **3ds max** and volumetric effects created in **AfterBurn**, we generated 'heated' water that churns, steams and bubbles as it travels up the San Francisco Bay and melts the bridge," says Grant. "Plus, nearly every splash you see as the bridge crumbles into the water we created in **3ds max**."

They also relied on **3ds max** and Sitni Sati's **DreamScape 2** to create sky elements for *Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over*. The artists created the CG effects in a sequence in which Spy Kid Juni Cortez battles a fellow virtual-reality game player. Besides creating the staffs the actors fight with, the artists also created the environment into which they were composited, relying on **DreamScape** to give the sky elements the look director Robert Rodriguez wanted. "With **3ds max** and **DreamScape**, getting this look was fast and easy," Grant comments.

Meanwhile, for 20th Century Fox's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, the facility relied on **3ds max** and Autonomous Effects' **Scene Genie** plug-in for

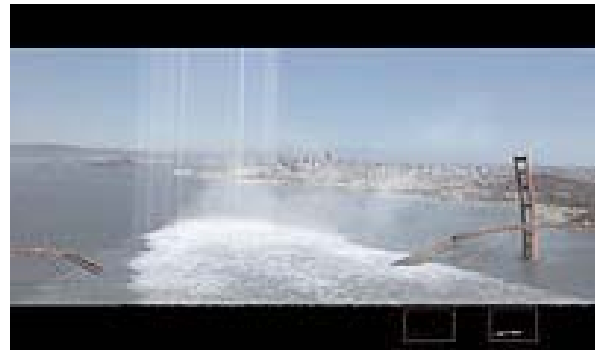


Today the facility takes advantage of the full range of **3ds max** tools, but particularly appreciates the Particle Flow Extension in **3ds max**, an event-driven particle system for creating complex yet realistic particles. "With this tool, creating particles is fast and easy," says effects animator Victor Grant. Using the Particle Flow Extension, Grant can create particles, add events, and route the results wherever he wants them to go. He can then visualize each component contributing to the overall effect through Particle View, an intuitive schematic view. "I don't have to guess what's going on, as I would in other 3D programs," Grant notes. "I can see everything working together."

head-tracking shots involving Rodney Skinner, a.k.a. The Invisible Man (played by actor Tony Curran). In the film, Skinner renders himself visible by smearing white greasepaint on this face and donning a black leather jacket. "We tracked a CG head to the actor's head, rendered out a white alpha where the paint would be, and used that to cut out his actual skin," recalls Grant. "We had his real skin floating in the air, and the track was like a cookie cutter of his face."

"**3ds max** and **Scene Genie** were crucial to this effect," he adds. "I don't see how else we could have pulled it off."

In addition to Computer Café's four seats of **3ds max**, The Syndicate, which Barnes and Ebner formed with associates Kenny Solomon, Beau Leon, and Leslie Sorrintino in 2002, owns two seats of Discreet's **flame**® for visual effects and compositing. Moving forward, Barnes says both **3ds max** and **flame** will continue to play an integral role at The Computer Café Group. "Over the years we've been happy with these tools," he concludes. "We look forward to many more incredible results in the future."



images courtesy of The Computer Café Group