

Artifex Studios
(www.artifexstudios.com)
Vancouver, British Columbia

Autodesk® Maya®
Autodesk® Mudbox™

Maya helps us get great animation out the door quickly. With the help of Maya, our rigs and animation work have been produced in shorter timeframes and at very high-quality. And we've got great work to show.

—Andres “Andy” Asperin
Lead Animator
Artifex Studios

So Many Monsters

Artifex Studios uses Autodesk Maya and Autodesk Mudbox software to help create colossal collection of creatures for Nickelodeon's *The Troop*.

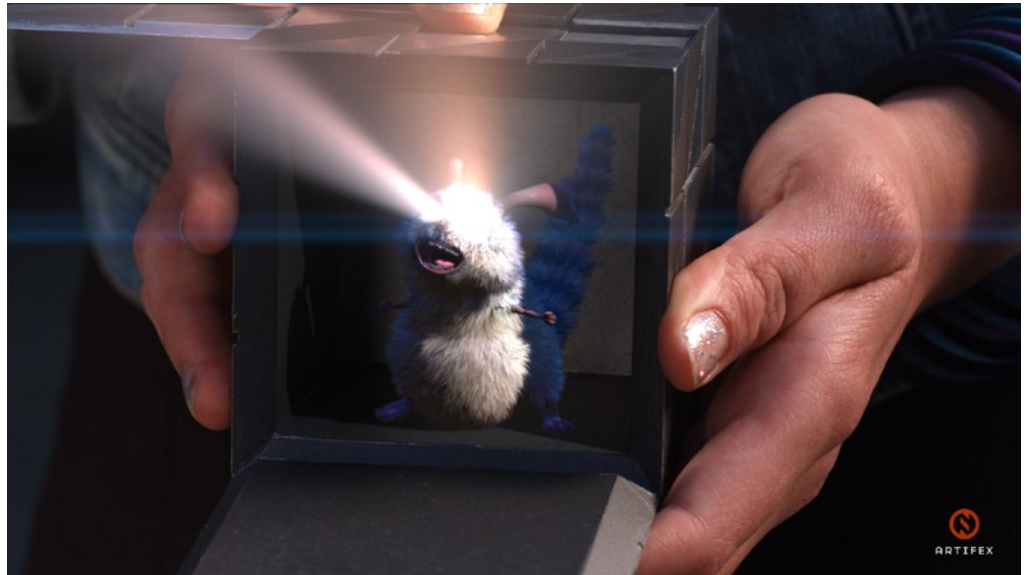


Image courtesy of Nickelodeon and Tom Lynch Co.

Summary

Back in 2008, Vancouver, Canada-based Artifex Studios joined forces with the Tom Lynch Company on a truly monstrous job. The task? Creating and animating 40 different monsters for *The Troop*, a new 26-episode kids' series on Nickelodeon. And these monsters were not just background characters. Each would have its own name, personality, and particular powers.

The Troop follows the adventures of a group of seemingly average high school students who are, in fact, protecting the “normal” world from a vast and varied collection of monsters. Though billed as a “live-action, single camera adventure,” the 3D animated monsters are the real stars of the show. Using a combination of Autodesk® Maya® software and Autodesk® Mudbox™ software, the Artifex team was hard at work creating and animating everything from tiny “Snark,” a mouse-like creature with the ability to make people forget; to the fearsome “Spider Goblin” who looks much like its name; to the fiery, immense Behemoth.

The Challenge

Though still facing a tight deadline for so many creatures, the Artifex team was fortunate to be involved in the process at the earliest stages. From the time that Nickelodeon gave *The Troop* the green light, Artifex was provided with episode scripts as soon as they

were ready, giving the modelers and animators the chance to sketch and design the monsters according to the individual storylines.

“The creatures are very much front and center on *The Troop*,” explains Roula Lainas, producer at Artifex. “They are not just part of the story. They are the story. We needed them to be just right and we needed a creative pipeline that would help us get the job done efficiently.”

“Even before the episodes and plot lines were figured out, we designed and modeled a bunch of creatures in Maya and fired them off to the production team,” says Elaine Fung, senior 3D artist at Artifex. “The writers were inspired by our designs and wrote scripts around the different characters. Each of the 26 episodes featured a hero monster and several subordinate creatures. Conceiving and creating them was a big challenge.”

With so many monsters to create, it was inevitable that the Artifex team would need to pull out all their creative stops. Fur, feathers, scales, tentacles; just about every texture and surface you can think of would need to be brought into play.

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“There was some seriously crazy tentacle work going on,” says Andres “Andy” Asperin, lead animator at Artifex. “Even with really good rigging, we had quite a time getting them to move believably and fluidly. We had to figure out just where the center of gravity was on some of these very strangely shaped beings, and precisely how they would move and react to certain things. It was a huge amount of work, but a huge amount of fun too.”

The Solution

To get their monsters up and moving in an extremely efficient way, the Artifex animation team made heavy use of the nonlinear Trax editor in Autodesk Maya,

“We made extensive use of the Trax editor to help initiate cycles for all of our creatures,” says Asperin. “The system makes it much easier to work with clips and to use animation layers and recycled animations. It’s also been very helpful when the client needs quick changes to some of these complex monsters. The changes are often pretty intense and we don’t have a lot of time to turn them around, but Maya helped us to be more efficient and to meet our deadlines.”

“On some of our creatures, we had to combine fur and cloth with feathers and elaborate rigging,” says Fung. “It can get pretty crazy. As each episode passes, however, we got more comfortable with our process and with the overall team. Each episode is different and has its unique challenges, but we have developed a solid rapport with the system. We have become much more efficient and confident, thanks in large part to the versatility of our tools. Maya software is our 3D tool-of-choice at Artifex. We built all of our base models in Maya, and then took them into Mudbox for sculpting. The interoperability between the products helped make everything easier.”



Image courtesy of Nickelodeon and Tom Lynch Co.

The Results

With the first season of *The Troop* in the can, a second season is looking more and more likely and, with it, more work for Artifex. With one season and 40 monsters under their belt, however, the team is feeling confident.

“Maya helps us get great animation out the door quickly,” says Asperin. “With the help of Maya, our rigs and animation work have been produced in shorter timeframes and at very high-quality. And we’ve got great work to show.”

For more information about Autodesk Media & Entertainment software, visit www.autodesk.com/me.



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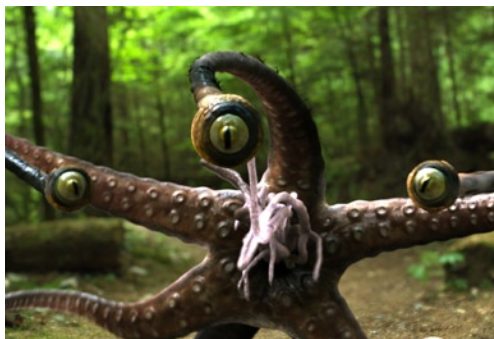


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