

Janimation

(www.janimation.com)

Dallas, Texas

Project:

James Bond 007: Quantum of Solace videogame

Autodesk® Softimage® software

Autodesk® Face Robot® software

Face Robot really came through for us. It not only performed well, it completely exceeded my expectations about how fast and how well we could produce facial animation.

—Greg Punchatz
Senior Creative Director
Janimation

Face Time.

Janimation Stirred, Not Shaken, by Challenging Work on *James Bond 007: Quantum of Solace* Videogame.



Image courtesy of Activision Blizzard.

Image courtesy of Activision Blizzard and Janimation.

Summary

When it comes to Autodesk® Softimage® software (formerly SOFTIMAGE®|XSI®), you don't get much more expertise than the team at Dallas-based Janimation. The company has been around for over 15 years, and was the earliest of the XSI proponents, harking back to the days when the 3D software was still codenamed Sumatra. Even with all those years of experience, however, the company faced a new challenge when Treyarch, a video game development arm of Activision, tasked it with creating four in-game 3D cinematics for the James Bond 007: Quantum of Solace videogame based on the popular film starring Daniel Craig and Judi Dench.

In just five weeks, the team used Autodesk Softimage and Autodesk® Face Robot® software (formerly SOFTIMAGE®|Face Robot™) to create four and a half intense minutes of 3D footage, precisely synchronizing and incorporating dialogue from both *Casino Royale* (2006), the Bond film previous to this one, and *Quantum of Solace* itself. Janimation CEO Steve Gaçonner, Senior Creative Director Greg Punchatz, Senior Technical and Creative Director (and displaced Montrealer) Ludovick Michaud, and Senior Technical Artist Bradley Gabe all sat down with Autodesk to discuss tight deadlines, new software, and just being with Bond.

The Challenge: Bond on a Budget

"How can you say no to James Bond?" says Greg Punchatz, Senior Creative Director at Janimation.

While that may seem a fair question to many, the demands of the project would likely have prompted

most people to do just that. With just five weeks to precisely replicate and lip sync five familiar characters from the film, even the experienced experts at Janimation knew they had their work cut out for them:

"I'm not sure that just any studio could have handled this job," Janimation CEO Steve Gaçonner admits with all appropriate modesty. "The team at Treyarch was familiar with our past work on the *Spy Kids* films as well the videogame *Stranglehold*. For this assignment, Treyarch was focused on lip sync and speed. When you're both creating and recreating scenarios involving 3D versions of great actors like Daniel Craig and Dame Judi Dench, you want to be sure to get it exactly right. What's more, while we usually like to up-res models for this kind of work, Treyarch really wanted our models to closely match, but enhance what players would see while playing the game."

And it didn't stop there. After a decade or so in the same studio, Janimation decided to relocate its operations. As these things tend to, the move would happen just as the Bond job was gearing up for delivery.

"It was a little like running the Boston Marathon in record time, but switching cities with the finish line in sight," says Bradley Gabe, Senior Technical Artist at Janimation. "We actually holed up in Greg's living room for a few days, just to maintain our focus. In the end, with some help from Autodesk and Softimage, and particularly Face Robot software, we pulled it off."

Autodesk®

The Solutions

Though long-time aficionados of Softimage, the Janimation team had limited experience with Face Robot, although it admits to having heard positive reviews. Only Gabe had tested Face Robot extensively, and that while he was previously employed at the venerated Stan Winston Studios. Was this really the best time to try something new?

“We were already on a tight schedule,” says Gabe. “Then, in the final stages, the client asked if we could accommodate a change in the script. Keep in mind that we were doing more than facial animation and rigging on this project; we were also creating and rigging characters and environments, so time was at a premium. With Face Robot, we were able to get amazing quality in a remarkably short amount of time.”

“Face Robot helped streamline our workflow,” says Ludovick Michaud, Senior Technical and Creative Director at Janimation. “We knew that standard face rigging was going to take too long and cost too much. We ended up using Face Robot for over 85% of the facial animation.”

“Face Robot not only performed, it completely exceeded my expectations,” Punchatz agrees.

Beyond Face Robot, however, the team was quick to praise the more familiar, but no less valuable, features of Autodesk Softimage software,

“Softimage truly shines with the Animation Mixer,” says Michaud. “With all the motion capture data on this job, it was a huge benefit to be able to handle it all right within our 3D application. We were also able to use Autodesk Crosswalk to easily and seamlessly transfer all of the material provided by Treyarch from Autodesk® Maya® software to Autodesk Softimage.”

The Results

Remaining on the subject of data transfers, Gabe singles out the Generalized Attribute Transfer Operator (GATOR):

“To rig lots of characters really quickly, we’ve created our own nonlinear guide rig system that uses GATOR to transfer master envelopes to fit all kinds of characters. We had a lot of background characters to rig for *Quantum of Solace*, and on my best day, I was able to rig no less than a dozen separate characters. That’s really something.”



Image courtesy of Activision Blizzard and Janimation.



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“GATOR is a key feature that helps us transfer data between completely different meshes,” Punchatz enthuses. We can transfer all our skinning and weighting information, textures and shapes, basically all your surface properties, between models. GATOR has been a huge game changer for us, in terms of the kind of projects we’re now able to accept.”

James Bond: Quantum of Solace is now available for the PC, as well as the Xbox 360®, PLAYSTATION® 3, PlayStation® 2, Nintendo® Wii™, and Nintendo® DS™ game consoles, and the reaction has been nothing short of stellar, described as the first worthy successor to the hugely popular Bond game *GoldenEye 007*, which was created over a decade ago and sold over 8 million units.

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—Ludo Michaud
Sr. Technical and Creative Director
Janimation

“In the end, it was all worth it to work closely with James Bond,” says Punchatz. “And we lived to tell the tale. We’re not about to argue with that.”

Here’s hoping some dry martinis are part of their reward.