

3D Films/ Anthony Lucas

By Karen Raz



The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello. Images courtesy of 3D Films/Anthony Lucas.

The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello powered by steam... and a production toolset including 3ds Max, Maya, and Combustion.

Australian director and animator Anthony Lucas is going nowhere but up these days. On the wings of an Academy Award®, a Grand Crystal award at Annecy, two Australian Film Awards, a BAFTA nomination, and many other accolades, his animated short *The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello* has been lauded with international recognition.

The 26-minute film, an adventure set in an imagined 13th century navigated by steam-powered dirigibles and inspired by Edgar Allen Poe and Jules Verne, was brought to life using paper cut-outs, 2D backgrounds, 3D models, and effects. Autodesk® 3ds Max®, Autodesk® Maya®, and Autodesk® Combustion® software products combined to form the toolset for creating 3D airships, particles, and clouds as well as compositing hundreds of 2D elements.

Creating Collages in 3D

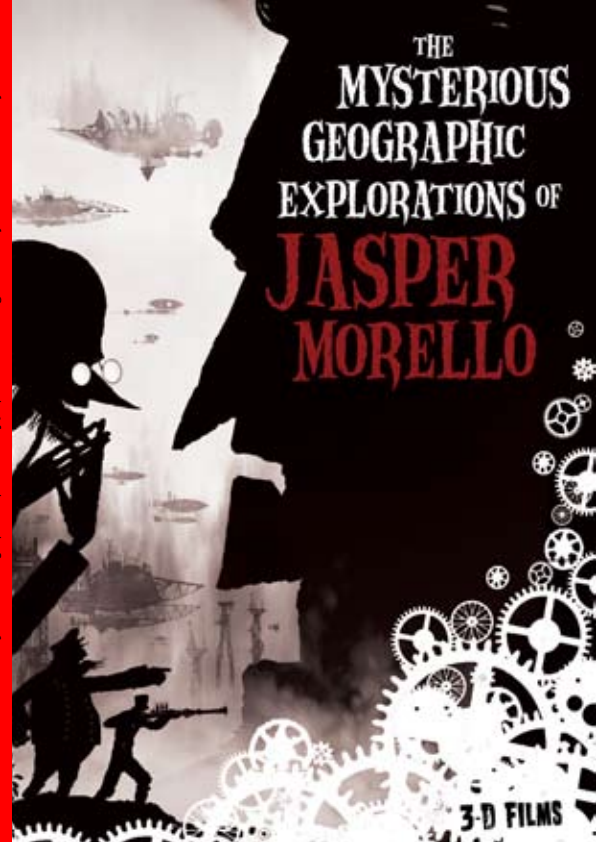
Lucas developed a knack for stop-motion animation at age 11 and added to this knowledge of digital technology on the desktop while working on television commercials as an adult. *The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello* uses a silhouette paper-cutting technique, with characters that were drawn on paper, scanned into the Adobe® Photoshop® application, and then “chopped up” into layers and manipulated digitally.

Autodesk®

“We leveraged creative capabilities from an Autodesk toolset made up of Combustion, 3ds Max, and Maya to manipulate, model, composite, and lend realism and dimension to a film that at its core was based on a very non-technical, cardboard cut-out collage style of filmmaking.”

—Anthony Lucas, Director
The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello.

The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello. Images courtesy of 3D Films/Anthony Lucas.



“There was a lot of 3D to 2D work where we would bring in 3D models, scanned artwork, miniature, and other layers into Autodesk Combustion as our program-of-choice for transforming and manipulating these elements and marrying them together,” commented Lucas. “Combustion was a real lifesaver, especially because it accurately reads Photoshop files, provides a really sophisticated toolset, but is easy to learn and use.”

Digital Sculpting

Lucas’ cut-and-paste experience in stop motion also translated into his unique method of 3D model building. “I approach 3D model building in a very non-technical way. The way I build models is more akin to the way a sculptor works with found objects—and the 3ds Max user-friendly interface made it a practical and logical choice for this project.” Lucas purchased a variety of different ships from the Despona 3ds Max model library and disassembled them for ‘parts.’ These parts were then combined and reconfigured to construct the signature look of the vehicles and ships in the film. Airships animated and rendered in 3ds Max could be imported and tracked seamlessly in Combustion via the RTF file format.

Though they appear to be 3D, the backgrounds in the short were created using photographed miniatures and feature some 60-80 layers each. Photographs of the miniatures were brought into Combustion to manipulate the z-depth and create a very stylized landscape collage that seemingly exists in three-dimensions.

Atmospheric Effects

The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello transpires in the clouds with many and various vehicles, such as dirigibles and iron ships—Lucas leveraged Autodesk software to add a range of essential particle and atmospheric effects. Real-time particle effects for chimneys, smoke stacks, etc., were created and tracked in Combustion onto 3D airships, which were modeled in 3ds Max. Autodesk Maya was integrated into the production pipeline exclusively to generate the clouds that dot the film’s landscape.

The film was written by Mark Shirrefs and the visual effects supervisor was David Tait. Artists who contributed to the film’s CG creation include: Animators Janelle Kilner, Brock Knowles, Jacob Winkler, David Cook and Anthony Lucas; Background, Layouts & Character Designers Jacob Winkler, Xavier Irvine, and Anthony Lucas; and 3D Artists David Tait and Fionnuala O’Shea.

The mysterious geographic explorations of Jasper Morello are indeed mysterious: the ground floats, aircraft defy physics, and a lack of reflecting light leaves the characters cloaked in silhouette. The look the film achieves is highly creative—a unique mixing of computer technologies that are of the moment and animation techniques that have been around for centuries.