

WHETHER OR NOT THEATRE AUDIENCES VOTE A FILM TO THE CLASSIC MOVIE LIST, THE CONSUMPTION OF FEATURE FILM SPECIAL EFFECTS creation has become a visual feast. Viewers may not even be aware of the computer graphics they're watching. Some of the "little" people falling a very great distance from the top of the sinking TITANIC were actually animated drawings. Even the rain and debris background in the latest GODZILLA was digitally animated (ya had to notice the digitally generated monsters). Maybe the "story" in a film makes it a classic, but the "look" of its cinematic sequences can also provide inspiration for game developers. The high end film arena is now, in fact, a developing ground for the latest tools in computer games.

Side Effects Software's next-generation 3D animation package *Houdini* was born out of work done by principals Kim Davidson and Greg Hermanovic, who co-founded the company in 1987. Davidson and Hermanovic worked together prior to that at Omnibus in Toronto, where they developed programming to solve animation challenges

Side Effects Software, a leading player in special effects technology based in Toronto, is the creator of *Houdini*, a 3D animation package. *Houdini* is used by Hollywood production houses like Centropolis (GODZILLA), VisionArt (DR. DOOLITTLE) and Digital Domain (TITANIC). On the game front, *Houdini* is used by Square USA of Los Angeles in its recent Playstation game PARASITE EVE (right), Japanese gaming giants Sega and Namco (ALPINE SURFER, below, and RIDGE RACER, left), and VectorBoy Studios, early Windows NT developers, in KAHUNA (bottom).



Houdini uses a modular software model which allows for a network of production operations that can be divided between different content developers. User-developers can view a complete "recipe" for any job that lets them examine and revise content at their own pace. This also facilitates the use of *Houdini* for training junior game designers in game development. Individual elements of a *Houdini* project may also be incorporated into another project.

Houdini's High End 3D Magic

BY DINAH TOLTON

in broadcast. After purchasing the rights to the code they had written, they set out to build non-proprietary products for animation and gaming developers, which led to the release of 3D animation system *Prisms*.

Side Effects' Richard Hamel describes *Houdini* in terms of its "procedural paradigm". According to Hamel, the procedural network unique to the software is based on a series of what one might describe as building blocks, each allowing open access. In creating the components of an animation, such as wire frame, textured environments, lighting, and 3D animations, any part of the creation, no matter how complex, can be accessed and changed at any time.

Houdini was introduced in September, 1996. Version 2.5 was just released in July/98. It runs on Silicon Graphics and Windows NT and is fully compatible with Avid's *SoftImage*, Alias *Maya* and Pixar's *Renderman*. The full animation package sells for \$17,000 (US). For more information visit www.sidefx.com. Check out PARASITE EVE by Square USA at www.squareusa.com. *