

# The Mill: so Professional as always

## *New Spot for Virgin TV*

September 15, 2009 - 23:27

It opens with a woman walking passed a film studio lot late at night, noticing that the security guard is sleeping in his booth she sheepishly walks through the gates. There she begins an incredible journey exploring behind the scenes of the studio back lot. From magical creatures and Aztec Indians sitting around a fire, to a space ship, dramatic police chase, a wild orangutan in the rainforest to a charge of cavalry men on horseback, she sees it all. The tag line simply reads "Discover the World of Virgin TV".

Lead 2D Barnsley explains the spot's main challenges, "The style and gentle pace of the narrative, dictated that all the FX and action of the characters should be relatively understated. This presented us with an interesting challenge of telling a big story with very subtle movement. The climax of the film sees a police car transform into a UFO.

This story was told in effectively, just three scenes. We found it very important to reduce the movement and transformation to a minimum, to help create scale and weight, in keeping with the rest of the film. Of course designing and building a CG UFO is very much a blank canvas with unlimited opportunities. After numerous variations and styles, we finally settled on a design which we felt is in keeping with the rest of the film. We spent a fair amount of time experimenting with lens flares and camera aberrations to help bed the UFO into the scene.

"Like most projects, there is always a large number of FX that we hope will go unnoticed. The 21 horse cavalry was actually just seven horses, which were digitally tripled up to create a more impressive parade. The modest size of the real film studios in Vancouver were significantly extended to give the impression of a gigantic "Hollywood style" studio and an impressive entrance gate and arch was added to set the scene. The wardrobe sequence was also given the same treatment, again to create scale."

Adam Burnett, CG Supervisor, explains how The Mill created the impressive orangutan, "The brief was to create a photo-real Orangutan to be seen in full frame shots of a studio backlot. Among the challenges were producing realistic hair and integrating it with skin within the complex and dynamic lighting environment of a studio. Another challenge was making a muscle structure that could drive the skin to move realistically in the extreme poses common in orangutan behaviour. Orangutans also present the issue of facial control since they have the same complex facial dexterity and subtlety that is present in humans."

He continues, "For the Orangutan model, an anatomically correct skeleton geometry was created in Maya. This geometry was used to assist the rigging process and as proportional reference to the outer skin. An animation rig was created and our muscle system was used to create an approximate muscle structure

around the bones and skull. Next I created a poly mesh skin and exported it into "Mudbox" for finely sculpted detail and displacement. I then textured this using high resolution, photographic references of various Orangutans faces, hands and feet. A hair system was groomed using "Shave and a Haircut" in Maya, the groom was cached per shot and rendered using a geometry shader. The animators created the body and head performance for each shot and our in-house facial capture system recorded a variety of facial performances and transferred them to the facial muscles of the character. Finally 15 render passes, including Subsurface Scattering, diffused HDR reflection and occlusion were composited together to produce the final images."

More Information at [www.themill.com](http://www.themill.com). Image and Video Courtesy of Virgin Media Group