

New Animated Short Film with Nvidia Quadro Graphics

Students at the Dave School Created Tofu the Vegan Zombie

October 31, 2007 - 10:47

The Dave School (Digital Animation & Visual Effects) at Universal Studios, Florida is a one year program to train production artists for the film and television industry. The program is nine months of instruction capped off with a three-month project where the students produce a professional quality film. Completing any short film in just three months is a daunting task, but completing a professional-quality, fully-animated short in that span of time is unheard of.

Yet, the class which finished in September 2007 did just that with Tofu, the Vegan Zombie. The short film is the tale of a friendly zombie named Tofu who lost his brain in a laboratory accident and had it replaced by a hunk of tofu. As a result, Tofu eats only vegetables and grains, but if the tofu falls out of his skull, he reverts into a human-flesh-eating terror. The five-minute short features the voice talents of Billy West (Futurama), who coincidentally is a vegan, and Ellen Muth (Dead Like Me).

The Challenge of Creating Zombies

The biggest challenge faced by the students at the Dave School was simply one of time. Faced with the task of completing the short, from modeling and rigging the characters through to final rendering and compositing in only two and half months, there was no time to waste. Just to complete the project, time-consuming tasks, such as lighting scenes and rendering intermediate images during production, would have to be dramatically reduced in length.

To accelerate the production process, the Dave School chose NVIDIA Quadro® graphics boards. Modeling and rendering for Tofu was done with LightWave 3D and compositing was done with Digital Fusion, both OpenGL applications that make heavy use of the NVIDIA graphics board.

NVIDIA Quadro graphics allowed the students to display large amounts of geometry and textures in real time and to create the lighting for the scenes in LightWave. "Without the real-time rendering power of Quadro graphics," says Tofu creator and producer William Vaughan, "the students would have had to resort to producing final renders instead of real-time intermediates. The time consumed would have made the three-month production schedule impossible."

The final scene, in particular, was a technical challenge. The scene begins in a dining room and features all five major characters in the film. The camera pulls out into another room and then out the window, showing the house, a graveyard, and hundreds of trees. Constructed with some four million polygons, the scene couldn't have been produced without NVIDIA Quadro graphics.

The End Result

The result is a professional, high-quality animated short that is funny and engaging. To help the Tofu character reach a wider audience, the creators are seeking to turn him into the star of a television series. The students leave the project with valuable, real-world production experience and compelling footage for their reels. The Dave School has a history of successfully placing artists in studios like Lightstorm, Zoic, and Digital Domain. And those who've worked on Tofu have a truly impressive student project to claim as their own as they seek out positions in the industry.

More Information at www.nvidia.com and www.tofu.theveganzombie.com - Video Courtesy of Dave School