"Great animators can do wonderful things with great software."

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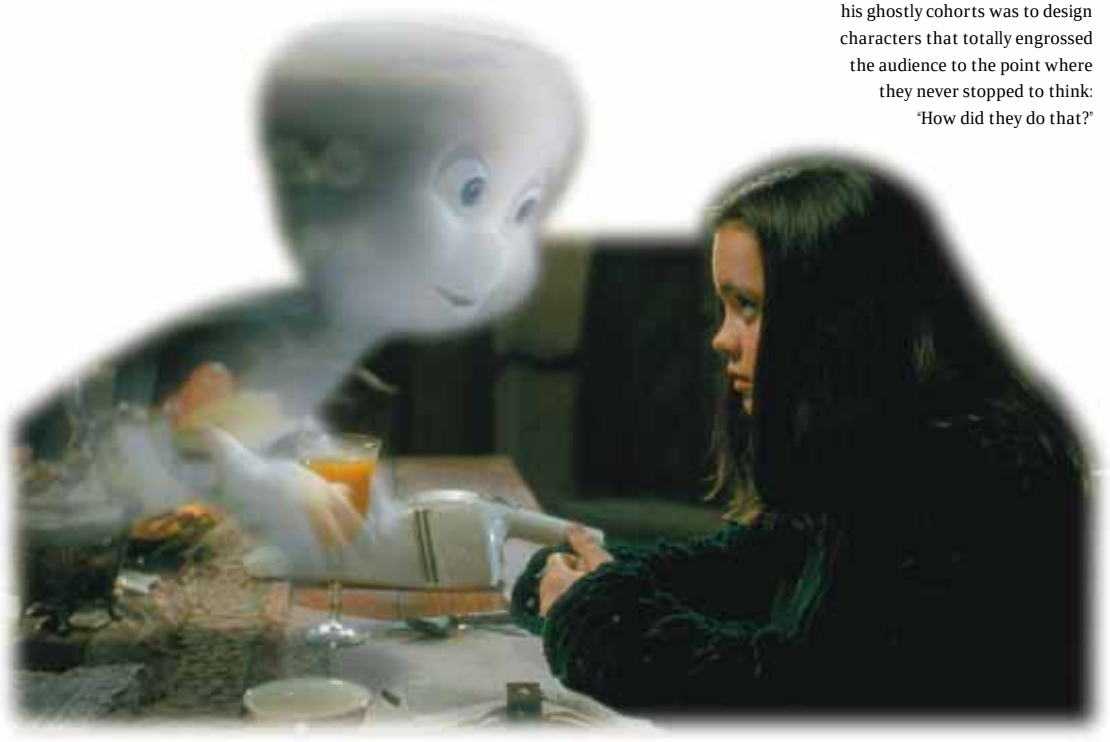

ILM's goal in creating *Casper* and his ghostly cohorts was to design characters that totally engrossed the audience to the point where they never stopped to think: "How did they do that?"

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A Ghostly Challenge

How do you make people believe in ghosts? You create the impression that they are unbelievably real. That's exactly what Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) has accomplished in the making of *Casper*. Their visual effects wizards have, yet again, created incredible feature film animation. Animation director Eric Armstrong says, "We chose Softimage 3D to animate and articulate the ghosts, camera and environment for *Casper* because it was the best software for this challenge."

The Productivity Factor

With a phenomenal 400 shots of visual effects to create–more than any other feature film in history–productivity was a critical factor. "With Softimage, we knew the software was flexible and powerful enough for the animators to accomplish the type and quality of animation that has earned ILM its reputation as the world's foremost visual effects facility. *Casper* is a testament to the quality and flexibility of Softimage 3D."

Casper Enters the Real World

A small grouping of the ILM contingent. From left: Janet Healy, Doug Smith, Dennis Muren, Miguel A. Fuertes, and Eric Armstrong.

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Industrial Light & Magic

Founded by George Lucas in 1975, ILM has set the standard for visual effects, creating world class visual effects for the *Star Wars* trilogy, the *Indiana Jones* series, *Jurassic Park*, *The Mask* and *Forrest Gump*. Based in San Rafael, California, the award-winning team's latest endeavor is *Casper*, featuring animated 3D characters using the latest in Softimage technology.

Animation Magic with Softimage 3D

A Matter Of Movement

Armstrong continues, “To animate the ghost, we imported the models into Softimage, chained them, then articulated them through inverse kinematics and hierarchical rotation.” ILM chose this method of animation because it gave them the flexibility to combine a variety of Softimage tools in unique and innovative ways. The result was a set of animated characters that ‘read’ as 3D with the free-floating, fluid motion the audience expected of ghosts. Ironically, ILM initially tested the motion capture tools in Softimage 3D, but the result looked too human. Armstrong knew that they wanted a more cartoon-like look with a greater range of fluid motion for Casper and his uncles.

A Learning Experience

Another challenge was training almost 30 traditional animators that ILM recently hired to work on *Casper*. This is another one of the reasons Armstrong chose Softimage animation software. “Every piece of sofware has its strong point. Softimage’s is its animation, flexibility, and intuitive interface,” adds Armstrong, “Great animators can do wonderful things with great software. Softimage 3D made the learning process a lot quicker and easier for the newly hired animators. It was so amazing to watch them experiment as the team came up to speed with Softimage.”

The ability to freely combine a variety of animation tools allowed ILM animators to create unheard of fluidity and motion for quarrelsome uncles: Fatso, Stretch and Stinkie.

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