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Article Focus:

Joaquin 'Kino' Gil -- noted major film effects artist, independent filmmaker and Creative Cow's Maya forum host, reviews **MAYA CHARACTER CREATION: Modeling and Animation Controls** by Chris Maraffi and published by New Riders. Kino concludes his review with "...With this book anyone with a modicum of Maya proficiency can learn to rig and model professionally." [Read more...](#)

In the search of improved tools, anyone knows that research is something like half of the effort. Maya is a fantastic animation tool. We live in times where widespread diffusion of a few programs for 3D creation has created in turn a kind of "standard", and Maya's pervasiveness makes precisely one of such standards.

The good thing with this is that when something like Maya is so widespread, it becomes a platform. People's minds can finally take the thing for granted and use it for stuff or, what is even more interesting, the tool begins to be used as a language, developing grammars, syntax, styles...

Then, books like this one that occupies us today turn up.

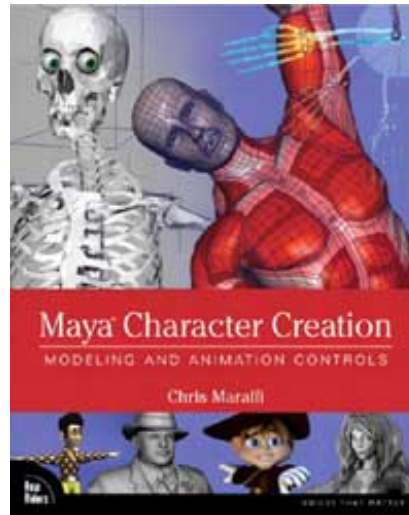
How to start? The Barn People know that I have no problem calling things by their name. A product I review that fails to pass muster is sure to get a unbiased account of why the damned thing is not worth the paper to wrap it to toss it out.

But by the same token I say so whenever the product or gizmo works. My "cows" are reticently awarded, as I subscribe to the old school of getting good bang for your buck, inflation permitting, but fully merited. I find it easy to stand by my cows, since I pull no punches to begin with.

It is really a pleasure to review a good book. A book that contributes to the art and the trade. But there is a larger pleasure.

To review a fantastic book. I've gotten a few of those. But that was before. This one I have before me is simply wonderful.

The BOOK



OK. Let's start with the physical side of things. The object.

Good size, this book. New Riders has done a very decent job of the publication without pricing it out of user reach. Quite the contrary. This seems to be a recurring quality with this publisher in other books of their line.

A bit on the wide side, the book opens flexibly and will for the most part spread nicely for work beside your workstation without needing to be held open by strategic placing of your coffee mug, CD player and/or other objects on your desktop.

The text is composed in a medium-small type and a two-columns-per-page format. The wider portion is the text proper interspersed with illustrations, while a narrower band gives the page breathing space and serves for inclusion of more illustrations and comments without graphically choking the text.

There are abundant illustrations, all in black and white or grayscale. This lowers the cost without detriment to the information since only one ink is used throughout. A small insert of colored plates has examples of finished characters displayed as a Gallery and since the material is thicker, it is the only rebellious portion of the book when keeping it open for study or work.

Good heft too. The information has been kept complete and practical and not hacked in pricey "volumes" or any other price-hiking scheme as is sometimes practice in publishers with less regard for the buyer. This is a good, solid buy of a book, with all the information promised really delivered inside. There is no accompanying CD or DVD, but they are not missed. There is enough quality info in the book to keep all but the most hardened CGI-animators happily busy and out of the streets.

The CONTENTS

Now for the contents.

This is easily the most complete and thorough manual on detailed modeling and rigging for a humanoid character I have seen. Period.

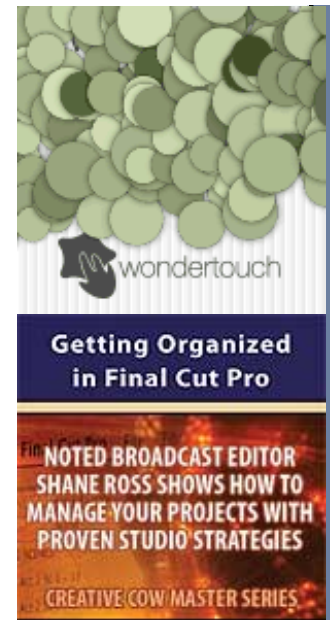
This is NOT a book about modeling, or animation or shading. It touches those themes in humanoid-character-specific topics, so you are left to extrapolate for non-humans and fantasy characters.

The book, however, covers all bases needed to successfully model for motion and rig for animation a reasonably humanoid character, complete with shading and modeling tips.

The fact that this is all done in Maya does not escape my beady, covetous eyes. Every blessed step has been explained and solved for the reader. Even I can follow the instructions, road map's SO clear. You get plenty screen captures of controls, screens and results so that if you know what you are trying to do, kind of hinted at by the title, you'll start to reap benefits merely with perusing the book.

Mind you: the full effect will only be gathered from actually doing the stuff. This is a learn-by-doing class with a master, and as any master class, it goes into all the spiny topics with enough depth that you do get good value: There is very little about rigging, if anything, left out. I can think of clothing and prop interaction as the only missing topics to the theme, and that is far from crucial for the pure modeling and rigging and most assuredly covered in the cloth info, parenting constrain info or elsewhere.

There is even time devoted to muscle and bone under-the-skin behavior. Very Cole Porter, very detailed



and not an ounce of fluff. Obviously a "labor of love" for the author. You will want this baby for the reference shelf, too. Juicy.

As with any specialized manual, it is assumed that you know the basics. No hand-holding there.

The information pertaining to the task at hand, however is abundant, informed and clearly written. Mr. Maraffi clearly knows his stuff well enough that he can explain it, tell it in simple terms which anyone will understand. His use of the necessary technical jargon is tempered by this clarity. So much, in fact, that the text can contribute to character creation for other 3D software packages, not only Maya.

In support of that claim is the detail of the explanations, the choice of the illustrations and the ordering of the presentation. This is a seriously thought-out book in which the author really shares his experience of many years in simple, concise steps and recommendations.

All the sections have been given equal importance as you are guided through the creation of an extremely detailed and complete human rig, although real life projects will require characters with diverse degrees of complexity, up to that degree. It falls to you to prioritize what part of the book is relevant for that job you got to do, or in your future career as a game-creature wizard or whatever, but as far as data goes, this is good, solid, trustworthy foundation.



Conclusion

I could go on and on, but I want to go back to the book and study some more. There are some things I have played with in the past that have suddenly become de mystified in here and I want to explore that. I have the crazy notion of suspending work and taking some time to forget all I know about rigging and do this book from start to finish.

The book is that good. If you want a mystery, get Chandler, or Gibson. If you want Grade-A Choice info, the skinny on it all about modeling and rigging, this puppy has "Get Me" written all over it. Good price, too. Way.

A headhunter acquaintance of mine once said in a party: " All I need is a guy who can do a walk cycle. Just a decent walk cycle." This book would have answered his prayers and then some. With this book anyone with a modicum of Maya proficiency can learn to rig and model professionally. That by itself is quite a career, and no small result one could get from this rare, well crafted piece of didactical writing. Excellent bang for the buck.

Five full-merited Cowdrupeds.

~M" ~M" ~M" ~M" ~M"

.k.