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PDI Adds a New Dimension to The Simpsons™

Animation Studio Creates First-ever 3D Animation of Homer and Bart for Halloween Episode

October 24, 1995 (Sunnyvale, CA) -- For the first time ever, Homer and Bart Simpson will be brought to the screen as three-dimensional characters, rendered in state-of-the-art computer animation by Pacific Data Images. "Treehouse of Horror VI," the latest installment in The Simpsons' popular Halloween specials, features *Homer³*, a parody of a memorable episode of "The Twilight Zone" in which a young girl passes through a wall and is trapped in the 4th dimension.

As in years past, "Treehouse of Horror VI" features three vignettes, each a parody of a Hollywood legend or cultural icon. Spoofs of '50's monster movies, "Nightmare on Elm Street," and "The Twilight Zone," will be showcased in this year's episode slated to air on October 29th at 8pm on Fox.

In the climactic moments of "Treehouse of Horror VI," Homer accidentally steps into the third dimension while desperately trying to avoid his sisters-in-law, Patty and Selma. Having lived his entire life in the 2D world, Homer enjoys his new depth until, through a minor mishap, he creates a black hole which threatens to engulf the entire universe. Bart alone is brave enough to cross over into this other world, in an attempt to save his father. According to The Simpsons' executive producers, Bill Oakley & Josh Weinstein, "PDI has provided a caliber and quality of animation never before seen on series television ... with a surprise ending so stunning that most of America will still be in shock on Monday morning."

The story is replete with inside jokes poking fun at computer animation ("Has anybody seen the movie 'Tron?'" and "Man, this place looks expensive!"). Computer-generated backgrounds are filled with quirky mathematical equations, and historic CG references. Homer finds himself on a bright green infinite grid plane, and runs past a replica of the temple from the CD-ROM sensation, *Myst*.

PDI worked closely with the creators of The Simpsons to transform Homer and Bart from 2D cel animated characters into 3D form. According to PDI Animation Director Tim Johnson, "Homer and Bart are icons of popular culture, but we're used to seeing them as flat 2D characters.

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In 2D, when Homer is just standing there not moving, it's OK. But get him into the 3D world and its another story altogether."

In the early stages of production, maquettes of Homer and Bart were used as reference, digitized into the computer and refined to create convincing 3D versions of the characters. PDI animators quickly found that a whole new set of movements were needed to capture the spirit of Homer and Bart in 3D. This included the development of several small hand gestures and nervous ticks that convey Homer's signature nervousness – and Bart's mischievous nature – even when the virtual camera and characters are standing still.

PDI animators also provided a seamless transition effect from cel to CG animation as Homer and Bart pass through the "mystery wall." Other challenges faced by PDI included creating facial gestures, and synchronizing lip movements to the hilarious Simpsons voice track. Once the motion was complete, background elements and special effects such as the highlights and glints that spring from a sparkling road sign were added by PDI effects animators. PDI lighting specialists added beauty lighting for the characters and dressed the scenes for final rendering.

"PDI did a terrific job. They made Homer so real it kind of scared us," said Richard Raynis, producer for The Simpsons.

More than 3 1/2 minutes of computer generated character animation were created by PDI for The Simpsons' "Treehouse of Horror VI," representing the first time a traditional 2D character has been re-created in 3D form for television.

About PDI

Pacific Data Images is a recognized creative and technical leader in computer animation and digital visual effects. Celebrating its 15th anniversary, the company has provided high-quality images to the commercial, feature film and television production industry since 1980.

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