

The CRM

## Graphics & Animation News

February 2002

Welcome to the February 2002 edition of the Graphics and Animation Newsletter. This month, we'll look at DarkTree Textures, ToonBoom Studio, the Ladybug Player, and some news from Pixologic. All of these applications are very valuable additions to your graphics and animation toolkit.

### DarkTree Textures 2.0

DarkTree Textures, from Darkling Simulations ([www.darksim.com](http://www.darksim.com)), is a Windows-only application used to design procedural and bitmap textures. Procedural textures are designed for a number of 3D applications (3ds max, LightWave, AnimationMaster, Cinema 4D, and a few more), though Bryce is not among the procedurally supported group yet. The textures, however, can readily be saved as bitmaps, including a selection of wrapping options, which you can use in Bryce. Because even the bitmaps stem from procedural algorithms (formulas), the bitmaps retain the look of a procedural texture.

DarkTree procedural textures can either be built from algorithmic components, or can be constructed from one or more layers of texture presets. Any preset can also be edited on its own for more customized variety. In this chapter, we'll take a look at the non-edited preset method for creating some Bryce bitmap textures in DarkTree. If you own DarkTree Textures version 2.0, you can work along with the tutorial. If you don't own it you can skim this tutorial and whet your appetite for a possible later purchase.

### Working With DarkTree

DarkTree presets come in four basic varieties: Color data, Bump data, Percent data, and a layered form that may combine any or all of these components. On the left of the interface is a list of the presets in their appropriate folders. Clicking on a preset in any folder will show it in the upper preview window, as well as giving you a short verbal description of what it is. See Figure N1.

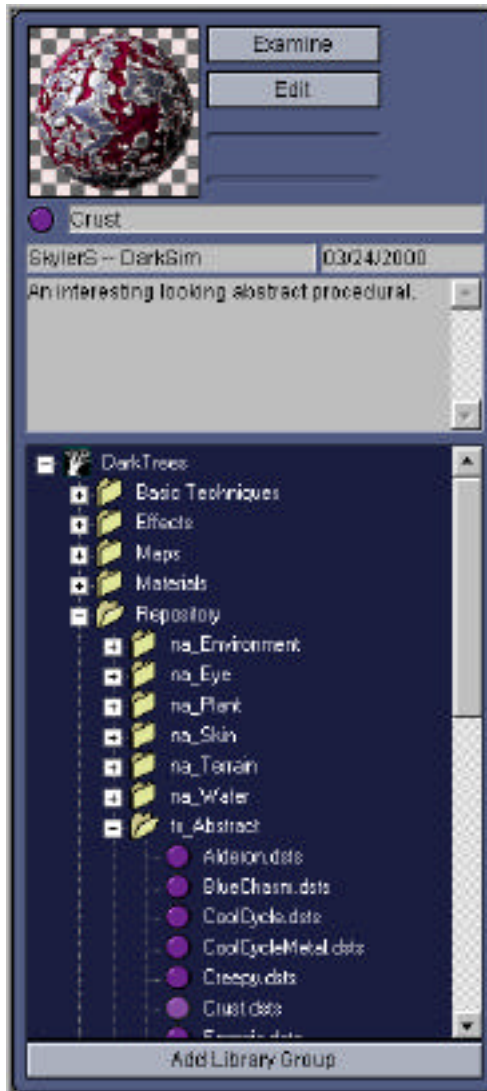


Figure N1 The Presets list, preview window, and descriptor of a selected preset.

Clicking on the *Examine* button at the top of this area brings up another preview that can be scaled, and the content antialiased. Other alterations like tiling and altering the orientation of the procedural, as well as selecting a mapping type, can be performed in this examination window. See Figure N2.

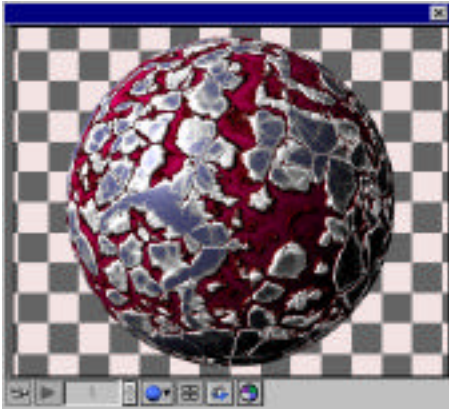


Figure N2 You can examine the selected procedural up close.

Clicking on the *Edit* button brings up the Editing interface, showing you exactly how the selected procedural is made up from its linked components. Any of these components can be edited and altered, added to and/or deleted, to create entirely new procedurals. We will not cover that process here, though it is obviously DarkTree Textures most creative process. See Figure N3.

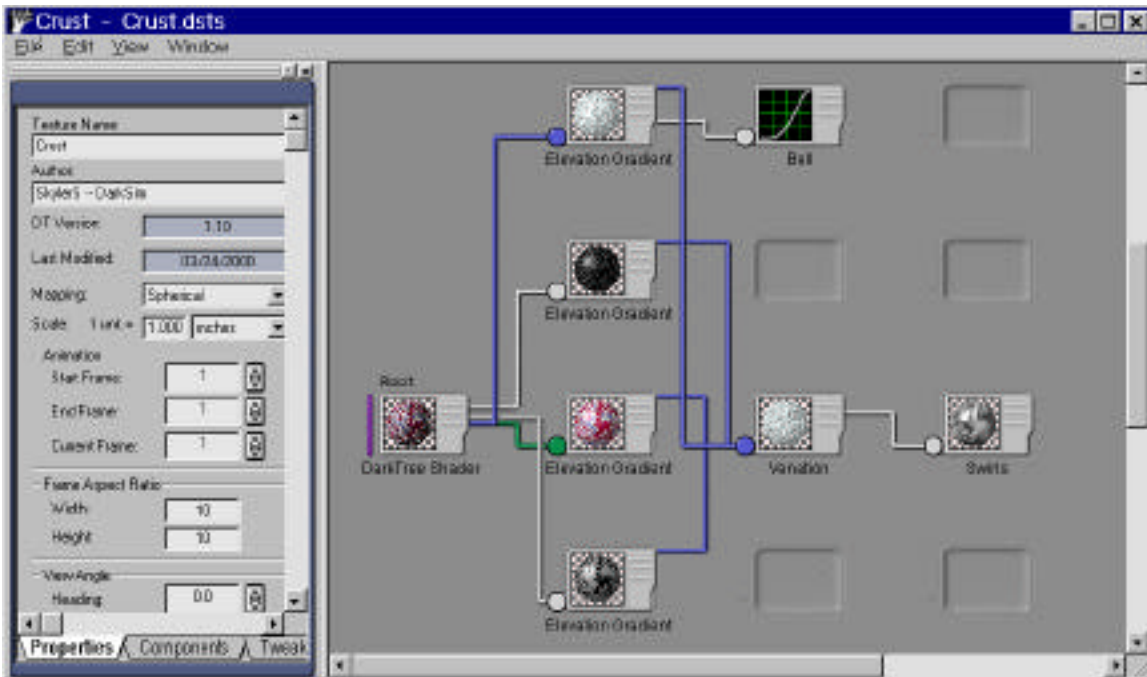


Figure N3 A procedural's linked hierarchy displays its component structure.

The right 2/3rds of the interface is dedicated to the Bitmap Renderer. The controls and options that exist here are of vital importance when you want to create bitmaps of the procedural presets for use in Bryce. Presets are dragged/dropped into the large preview window for display. Multiple presets of different types can be dropped here to form a renderable stack. In addition to rendering a composite bitmap from all of the items in the stack, you can also render and save individual presets in the stack. You can also set the

pixel size of the bitmap, antialiasing options, and a mapping type (cubic, cylindrical, planar, or spherical). The 2D format, bitmap name, and folder destination are also selected here, after which you render and save the bitmap for export to Bryce. See Figure N4.

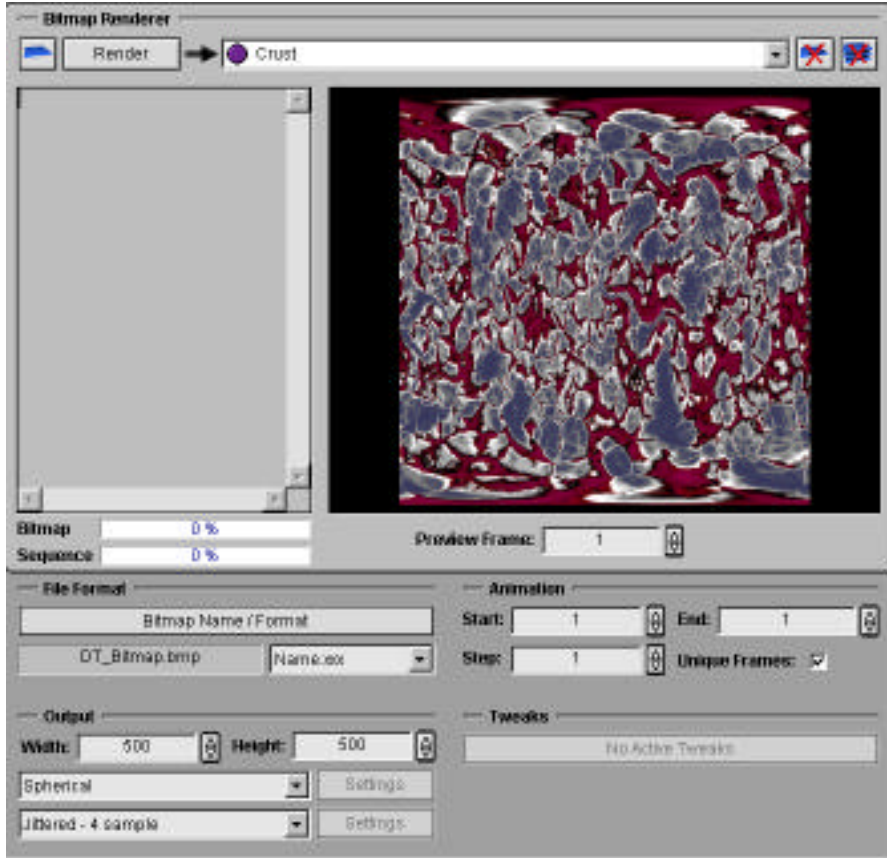


Figure N4 The Bitmap Rendering area and controls.

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**Note:** Procedurals contain components that can be quickly tweaked and altered in subtle ways.

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Although DarkTree Textures is targeted mainly toward the applications it supports directly (3ds max, LightWave, and other high end applications) it can also be used with any 3D software that supports applying images as textures. This is due to the fact that any DarkTree texture can also be saved out as an image file for any use imaginable.

## ToonBoom Studio 1.0

ToonBoom Studio ([www.toonboom.com](http://www.toonboom.com)) is the latest advance in the creation of software capable of creating animated cartoon-like content, especially for the web. There has been a lot of talk lately about the next version of *Flash* from Macromedia, since Flash has

become the standard for posting vector graphic animations to the web. The talk has centered around whether or not the next version will incorporate 3D. With the release of ToonBoom Studio, it doesn't matter much if the next version of Flash incorporates 3D or not. ToonBoom Studio allows you to work in a unique 3D environment, and it writes out Flash .swf files.

## **2D Theory Plus**

The spatial environment that you are involved in when you work in ToonBoom Studio can really be called 2 1/2D. You are working in virtual 3D space when you place full 3D models in an XYZ space, manipulate them on their XYZ axis, and then place them farther from or closer to the camera. You are working in 2D when you place a 2D image on a 2D background, comparable to what you do in Photoshop. When you can move the 2D objects farther from and/or closer to the camera for an animation, you are in effect entering a 2 \_D environment. In a 2 \_D environment, every component in your resulting animation is an image or a series of images (animation frames) that can move relative to its Z axis (farther from or closer to the camera) in addition to any left/right (X axis) or up/down (Y axis) movement. The content is still flat, yet you would maintain control over the close/far (Z axis) dimension. If your needs for an animated project (especially a cartoony animation for the Web) demand a 2 \_D “flat look” capability, ToonBoom Studio is a great way to generate it.

## **ToonBoom Studio Features**

ToonBoom Studio was developed explicitly for the creation of animations that have the “flat” traditional comic book look. If you are unfamiliar with what this means, just tune into the Saturday morning cartoon shows. Most animations displayed there are constructed around the flat “toon” look pioneered early in the twentieth century by Disney and other studios. Creating these animations by hand, as was done for many decades, is a painstaking process that requires a fairly large group of animators, each with particular drawing, animation, and painting skills. The advent of the computer has allowed for several alterations in this process. For instance, some of the redrawing necessitated by the creation of countless in-between frames (“tweens”) from one keyframe to the next could be somewhat automated, saving loads of production time and cutting down on the size of the staff needed. Synchronizing the movement of a character's lips (“lip-synching”) to words can be accomplished more exactly through digital means, again speeding up the production process. Applying color and testing character movements (pencil tests) can also be done faster with just as much, and in many cases more, accuracy. Creating a path that an animated character can follow is also made possible by digital methods, cutting production effort and time even more.

ToonBoom Studio, designed as a production tool for all animators wishing to post their works to the exploding twenty-first century display medium, the Web, has all of the aforementioned features, and a lot more, including:

- \* **Complete Animation Path Controls.** This allows you to set an animated character on a path that moves it in any XYZ direction in space, like making a sun appear behind a hill but in front of the sky backdrop.
- \* **A large set of Ink and Paint tools.** ToonBoom Studio is a vector drawing and painting application, with all of the tools needed to create jaggy-free art. You can also import other vector art.
- \* **Sound Track incorporation.** The ability to see the audio track makes lip-synching and sound effects easier to target exactly to a frame.
- \* **Global controls over sequencing and timing.** You can reposition any elements in the scene in space and time.
- \* **Multiple views for exact placement of depth elements.** Using the top and side views of a scene, as well as the Camera view, you can move and modify elements on the Z axis.
- \* **Light Table.** Use this feature to develop animated movements from frame to frame.

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**Note:** One of ToonBoom Studio's most powerful attributes is that the finished animations can be translated into the Macromedia *Flash* format, a vector-based format that allows for much smaller file sizes for Web bandwidth restrictions and downloads. As an aside, ToonBoom Studio also allows you to import and incorporate external Flash movies (.swf files) into your animated content.

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Your animations can also be exported as QuickTime movies (.MOV files), useful for posting to the web or to a number of other mediums. ToonBoom Studio runs on Windows and Mac systems, though it demands OSX on the Mac. If you are in need of a superlative vector-based animation application, consider ToonBoom Studio. See Figure N5.

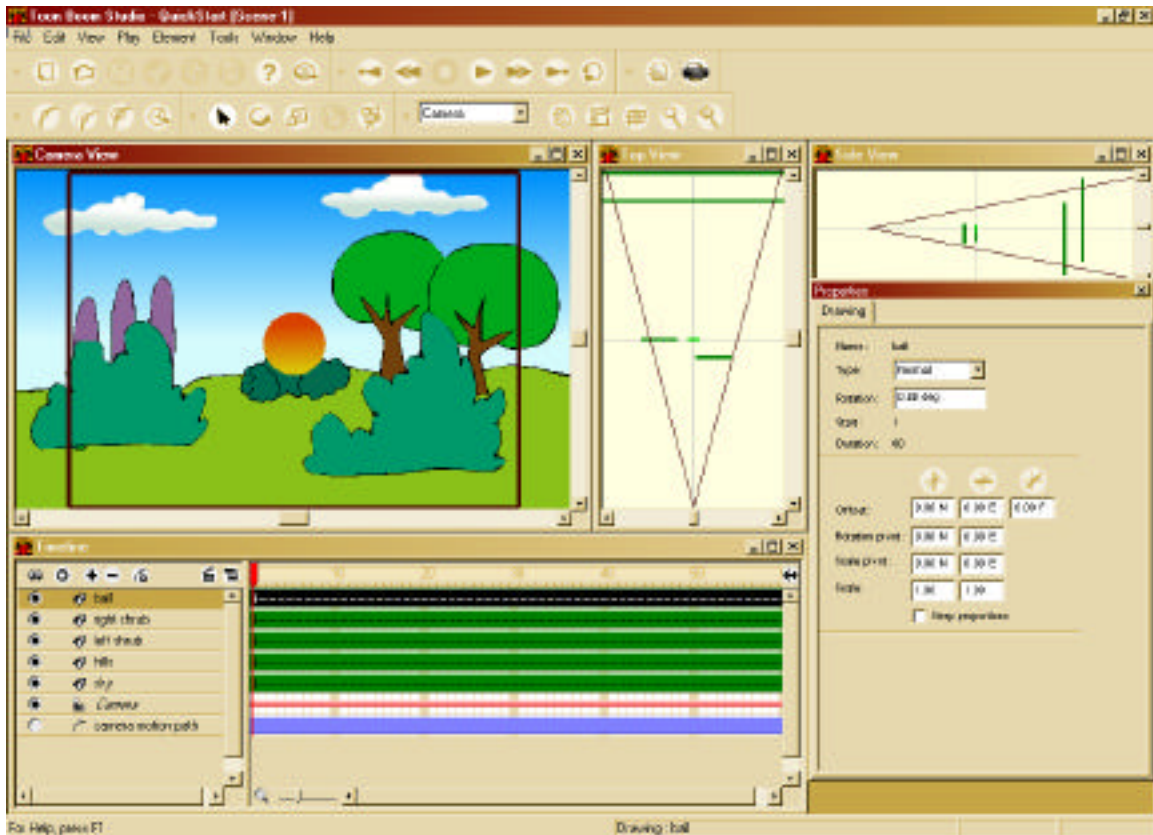


Figure N5 ToonBoom Studio is a creative gem when it comes to developing vector-based animations for the web.

## The Ladybug XP Player

If you operate on a Windows system (98, ME, NT, 2000, or XP), and you need a media player with wider options than the standard AVI player can provide, this application is for you. The Ladybug XP player (get it at [www.neatware.com](http://www.neatware.com)) can run just about any media format you can dream of, and it contains an online help file too.

The list of media that can be accessed from this player includes: MPEG, AVI, VCD, WMV, Divx (with codec), Video, MP3, WAV, WMA, MIDI, AU, SND, and AIFF. You can add and delete playlists, change the rate of playback, and even select from a list of transition effects to apply to the content. This is a very hot item. You can also reach the developer to suggest additions to future versions by calling (416) 291-3813.

## **New from Pixologic**

Fans of Pixologic's ZBrush software will be interested that two new ZBrush utilities have just been released. These are the MaterialPack and MaterialList ZScripts, available for free download from their web site ([www.pixologic.com](http://www.pixologic.com)). The MaterialPack supplements the default ZBrush material with 100 new materials. Browse and use any of them as needed. Any of these materials can also be modified. MaterialList allows you to store any of your customized materials with icons, making them accessible to any future project. Each new list can contain up to 100 materials each.

Until next month, happy creating!