



PRESS RELEASE

Mr. X Recreates Antarctica in Whiteout

Using Visual Effects to Build Dramatic Tension in Mystery Thriller



TORONTO: September 15, 2009... *Whiteout*, which opened in theatres this weekend, includes 415 shots completed at Mr. X, one of Canada's leading creative visual effects houses. Set in Antarctica, the mystery thriller was directed by Dominic Sena and stars Kate Beckinsale. Beckinsale plays a US Marshall who must solve a murder with just days to go before the start of the six-month winter, during which travel to or from their remote base will be impossible. As the lead facility on the project, Mr. X defined the look and feel of the film by creating set extensions and augmentations, which transformed shooting locations in Quebec and Manitoba into the menacingly beautiful landscape of Antarctica.

"The primary challenge was to create the illusion of being there," said Dennis Berardi, founder of Mr. X and VFX supervisor on the film. "The narrative on this film is very much driven by the harsh conditions in Antarctica and the imminent arrival of winter. The director wanted us to make the environment, the bitter cold, and the threat posed by winter real for the audience."

Along with the Antarctic landscapes, the artists at Mr. X did set extensions for the research station, created a CG Otter aircraft, added various atmospheric effects, and killed off a villain, recreating the character entirely in CG for the shot. One of the greatest challenges, however, was the great winter storm at the heart of the story.

"It's difficult enough to create a sense of scale and dimensionality, never mind drama, when all you have to work with is white on white!" explained Berardi. "Dominic wanted the storm to feel like a creature, embodying the threat that it represents for the characters. The storm design was a challenging and fascinating task for us."

The studio used the particle system in Houdini to design the storm. "As we worked on it, we made some interesting discoveries," said Berardi. "For example, the particle system had to be sized carefully relative to the background plates. If it was too big, it had the effect of 'miniaturizing' the mountains and they would look like little models as the storm sweeps in. We noticed a similar effect if the storm moved too quickly."

To solve the problem, the artists at Mr. X studied footage of desert sandstorms, where the impact of wind patterns were easier to discern. That research allowed the team to revise their particle system movement and lighting to better communicate the size and dimensionality of the storm. “We used the lighting to create internal self-shadowing and hundreds of layers of renders,” explained Berardi. “When [producer] Joel Silver came in, we showed him the work and his response was ‘That looks like a storm.’ We knew we had nailed it.”

Being unable to see is a central theme of the movie and in Antarctic, storm visibility is often less than one foot. This created challenges for the key fight scene in the film. “The artist had to calibrate the scene shot-by-shot to find the right balance between visibility – so that the audience knows what is going on – and invisibility, which is the reality of an Antarctic snowstorm.”

One of the final scenes, in which a villain is killed, includes a full CG character. “We extended the live action shot of the bad guy’s last moments. The whole last part of the shot, and a second shot showing the dead and bloodied corpse, were all created here. That was fun!”

Warner Bros.’ *Whiteout*, Directed by Dominic Sena, opened in North American theatres on September 11, 2009. Mr. X completed 415 of a total of over 900 visual effects shot on the film. The other facilities on the project were Hybride, Café FX, Anibrain, Rocket Science and Invisible Pictures. For more information on Mr. X and the studio’s work on the *Whiteout*, please visit www.mrxfx.com.

About Mr. X, Inc.

Founded by Dennis Berardi in 2001, Mr. X is a digital studio specializing in feature film animation and visual effects. By collaborating with filmmakers from pre-production through post, Mr. X helps to define the look and feel of a film. Mr. X has facilities in Toronto and Montreal with a combined staff of over 100 filmmakers, artists and programmers. For more information, visit www.mrxfx.com.

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