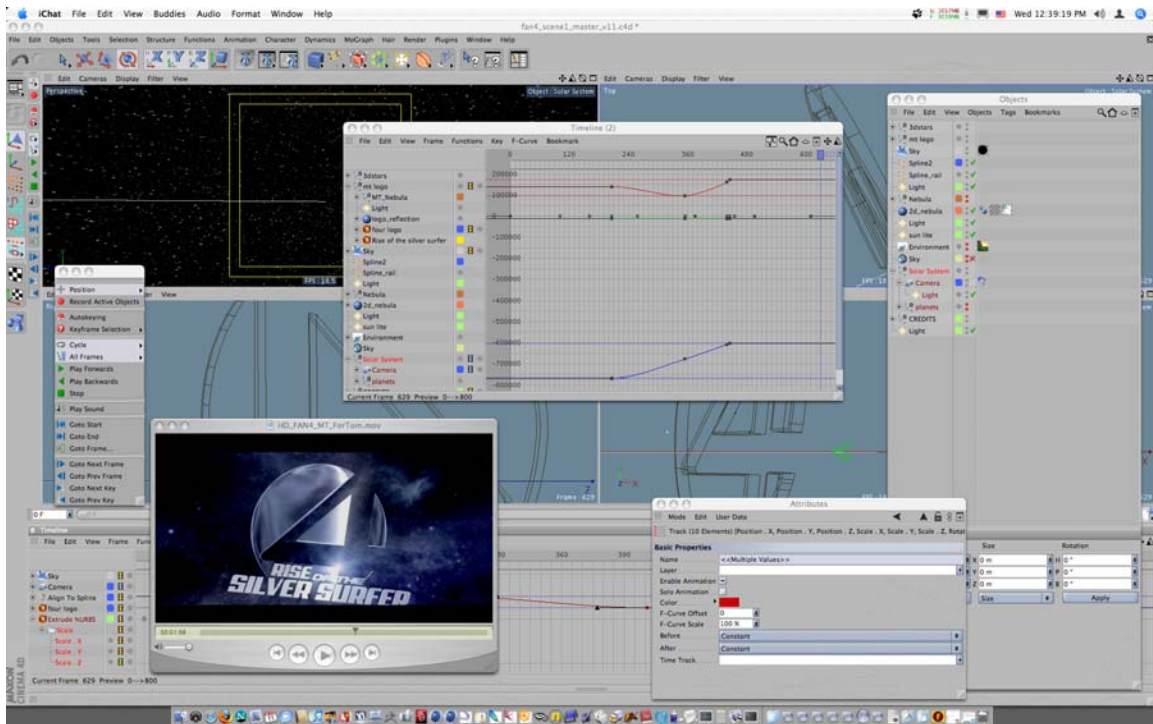*Framework Studio Brings Silver Surfer's Journeys to Life*

"Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer" moves its audience from the animated opening sequence into the first live action scene via a main title sequence done by Framework Studio using CINEMA 4D.

The title sequence begins with the Silver Surfer flying out of a collapsing planet, moving into and across the screen. The sequence takes the viewer on a 40-second intergalactic flight through and past nebulas, stars, planets and asteroids as the titles and opening credits flash by, ending with live action on Earth.

The original title sequence actually lasted around three minutes. George Cawood, owner of Framework and one of the designers on "Silver Surfer", said, "The unfortunate thing in this case is that the full title sequence turned out to be a bit too much time before we get to the story. So we did an abbreviated version for the theatrical film. When the DVD comes out, it will have the full-length version."

The main title sequence with the "Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer" logo…

…and a screen shot showing how the image was created.

Cawood said the original concept was to follow the point of view of the Silver Surfer as he flies through the universe, exploring different worlds and environments. "That's what we finished for the DVD. For the theatrical release, they took basically the first third of the original sequence. We delivered that part, plus the 3D type over the footage of the first scene of the movie. But on the DVD Special Features, it will be the full flying-through-space extravaganza."

He said Silver Surfer "was a fun project." For the sequence set in our solar system, "you're locked into reality. But leading up to that, we could make up anything we wanted. With CINEMA 4D, we could create asteroid fields, nebula, any kind of 'crazy whatever you can think of' space environments."

The Silver Surfer title was created primarily on the Mac. "The backbone software we use is After Effects," Cawood said. "About a year ago, for 3D, we switched over to using CINEMA 4D, although we still use Maya sometimes." He added the studio also used Photoshop for texture painting, and Illustrator to create the artwork and text for the actual titles.

Jessica Alba's credit from the main title sequence of "Silver Surfer."

There is also a sequence "where we're cruising over a sort of Martian landscape," he said. That part was done on a PC using Terragen, a specialized piece of software that does close-ups of photo-realistic planet surfaces. "At the beginning of a transition, where you see the planet, it's all CINEMA 4D and After Effects. Once we descend to the surface of the planet, it's 10-15 seconds done in Terragen. Otherwise, anything you see from a distance – like you would see from a spacecraft – is all done in CINEMA 4D Release 10."

Framework is primarily a digital design company that does animated and live action-related design for marketing pieces for film. Those include television show openings, marketing graphics and design, the Spider-Man 3 movie teaser and the award-winning "Casino Royale" trailer. On main title sequences, he said, "X-Men: The Final Stand" was one of their big projects last year.

Cawood explained that having a relationship with one of the X-Men producers helped Framework get its foot in the door for Silver Surfer, along with a reel of prior projects that "shows them that we can do the work. Then we pitch ideas and concepts for the opening title sequence. We typically do a series of story boards and show maybe three different concepts – full color, beautifully realized 3D or 2D concepts, comped in Photoshop, We pitch our ideas to the filmmaker, the producer, the editor, and anyone else is involved in post-production."

An asteroid field provides the backdrop for the writers' credit.

The filmmaking group may pick one idea, or more often, puts together parts of several concepts. "In this case, we explored a few different things, as generally happens when there are a lot of people involved. We have the ability to explore a lot of options because much of it is 3D. It's always a process of refining, of seeing what works and what feels right and what has the right energy, and what fits in with the score. It's rare that the storyboard they sign off on is exactly the same as what ends up being delivered."

Because the title sequence is a collaborative and evolving process, Cawood continued, "The software you use has to be flexible enough so you can change things pretty quickly. The time frame is not always great. On this one, it was an ambitious sequence for the amount of time we had." Framework usually works on the marketing side with movie trailers, "and you never have a lot of time on those either. It's the nature of the difficulty of marketing films today."

From initial approval of the storyboard to final delivery of the title sequence took about two months, which included "some downtime while you're waiting for the filmmakers and studio to respond to works in progress. For the actual time that you know you're going down the exact path the director wants, it's a month or a little more."

The size of the Silver Surfer sequence "was a little bigger than our usual project," Cawood added. "The director {Tim Story} responded well to the idea of flying through space. Once he saw the concept, he wanted it to be bigger and longer and more elaborate. It became a very ambitious project." Still, he added, a three-minute title sequence is not unusual.

The Silver Surfer's board speeds by to the right of Andre Braugher's credit.

To tackle the large project, the sequence was broken into semi-modular sections about 35 to 40 seconds long, with transition points between the modules. "Since you're traveling over such long distances, it didn't really make sense to make it all one large project, he said. Six to seven designers, mostly consisting of visual effects artists, compositors and 3D artists, were active on the project at any given time, so they could work on sections independently.

Also, "this way, we could render it out as each piece was ready. We were outsourcing to a render farm for final renders and hi-res tests." He added rendering took one to one and a half weeks.

To experience the full impact of Framework's creative endeavor, check out "Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer" when 20th Century Fox releases it on DVD soon.

Bobby L. Hickman is an Atlanta-based freelancer who writes on a variety of business, travel and leisure topics. To learn more about his work, visit www.blhickmaninc.com.