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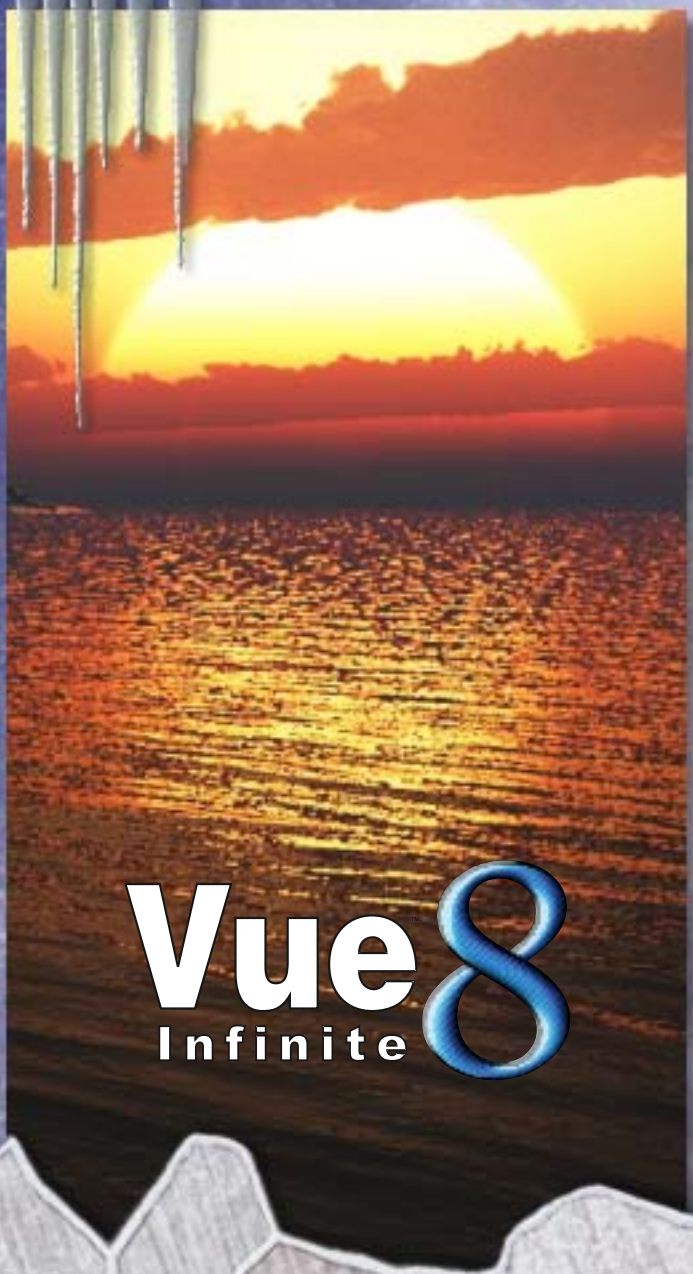
PLUG-IN

IMAGE CREATION, MANIPULATION & EDUCATION



ALIEN SKIN SOFTWARE

Eye Candy®

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Header and background effects created with Alien Skin Eye Candy 6

ISSUE #16

Since our last issue there have been several new releases of plug-ins, digital imaging applications and 3D programs, and they're all featured this time around.

One of the oldest plug-in developers, Alien Skin, is back with version 6 of its venerable Eye Candy suite, this time with all of its effects offered under one title. The folks at Topaz continue to put out product after product that are shaking up the plug-in industry with their low cost and high quality. onOne just released version 5 of its high-end Plug-in Suite, assisted in its development and used by some of the top names in the photographic industry.

The incredibly versatile Filter Forge is now in the public beta-testing phase for version 2, while AV Bros. ingenious Puzzle Pro has reached version 3. Synthetik is about to release version 4 of Studio Artist, and we have a sneak peak. e-on software now offers version 8 of its Vue line of terrain-generation products (and Geekatplay Studio is keeping Vue users up-to-date with free and inexpensive Vue training and add-ons). Speaking of 3D, Cheetah 3D 5 for Mac is now available.

Don't forget to keep an eye on our website's Discount page so you can avoid paying full price for plug-ins and actions! And our Services Directory is a great place for extremely low-cost advertising.

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A straightforward factory scene degenerates into a post-apocalyptic meltdown with the help of a few of our favorite plug-in suites from Topaz, Alien Skin and onOne. This sequence shows the original image at left, the Topaz alterations next, followed by the addition of Eye Candy 6 and PhotoTools/PhotoFrame effects. See the final version of this image as featured in the Closing Artwork on page 20.

TOPAZ LABS

Masking the subject of an image is never fun, but it's one of the most commonly required image editing tasks. Topaz ReMask aims to make the job easier and it's true, it doesn't get very much easier than this!

REMASK 2

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More about ReMask ▶

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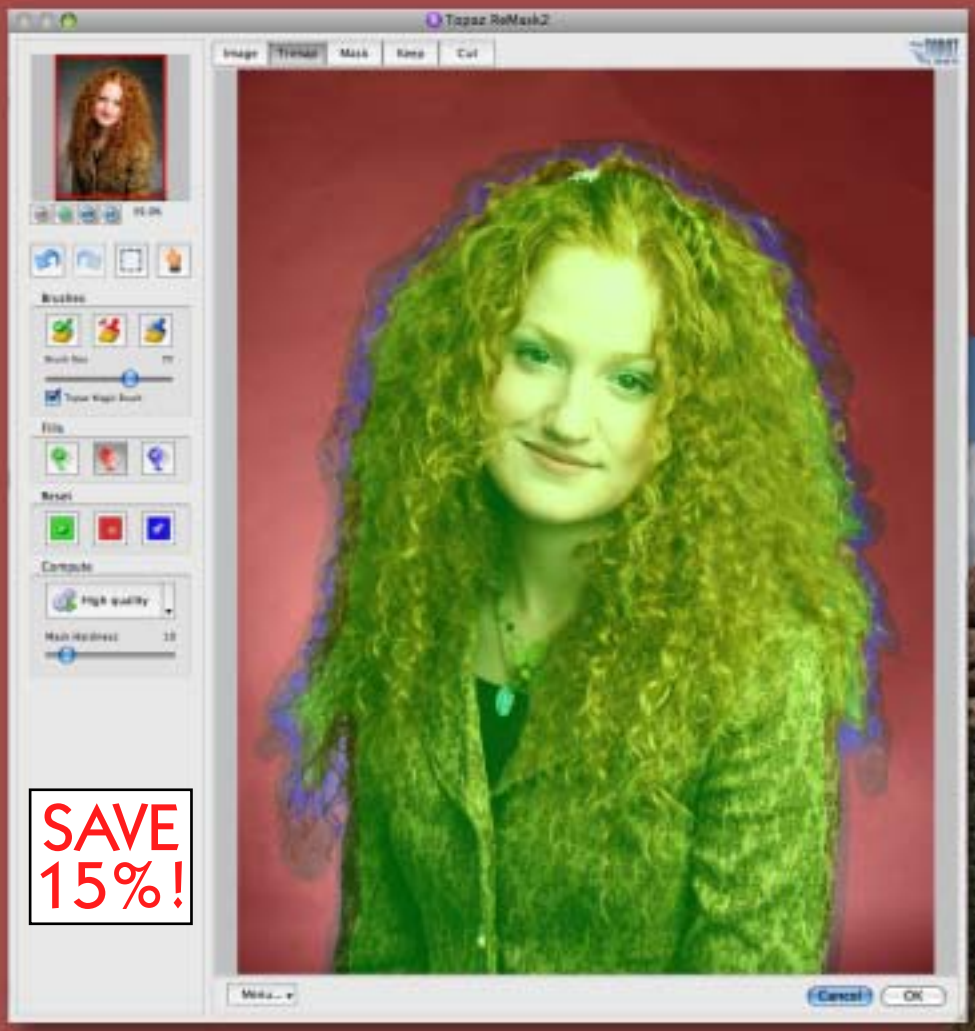

ReMask 2 is yet another killer plug-in in the Topaz product line, a very practical tool to go along with their creative ones.

Remask works on the principle of the Trimask: Areas to keep, discard and those with elements of both.

The example shown here involves selecting a model with a tangle of hair and placing her in a new setting.

The ReMasking process is actually quite simple: Open your image, duplicate the background layer. With the duplicate layer selected, open ReMask from the Filter menu (Photoshop). You'll see the interface as shown above, with your image covered in a green tint.

Choose the blue Compute brush, and draw an outline around your subject. Make it narrow when possible, and wider when necessary. In the Mask tab, click on the red Flood fill brush and click on the background area. You'll see something similar to the trimap in this screenshot.

Next you need to compute the mask, using the Draft/High quality button. Which quality option and Mask Hardness setting you choose will depend on the image and the results you are getting.

In the Keep and Cut tabs you can make further refinements as needed with the Topaz Magic Brush. Any remaining gray (background) areas can be removed with the red Cut brush; lost subject areas can be restored with the green Keep brush. Further calculations can be done with the blue Compute brush.

When you're happy with the results, click OK.

topaz tipz:

If you wish to remove areas that are within the subject area (as opposed to just the background) or even remove unwanted parts of the subject, feel free to draw around those areas with the blue brush. ReMask will do the necessary calculations.

topaz detail 1.1

Topaz Detail can be considered a follow-up to the wildly popular Topaz Adjust. Both plug-ins can be used (among other things) to create a faux-HDR style enhancement in your images, or you can tweak the presets and go in a totally different direction.

Detail mainly concerns itself with offering a high degree of fine-tuning for its artifact-free detail enhancement, splitting its image operations into three detail sizes (small/medium/large), with full user control over the application of the amount and boost for each.

Detail 1.1 (a free upgrade from 1.0) is an improvement upon the initial release, reducing pre-processing time by half in most cases and offering greater stability and compatibility on certain Windows-based systems.

An added bonus is that Detail is quite adept at performing conversions to black and white!

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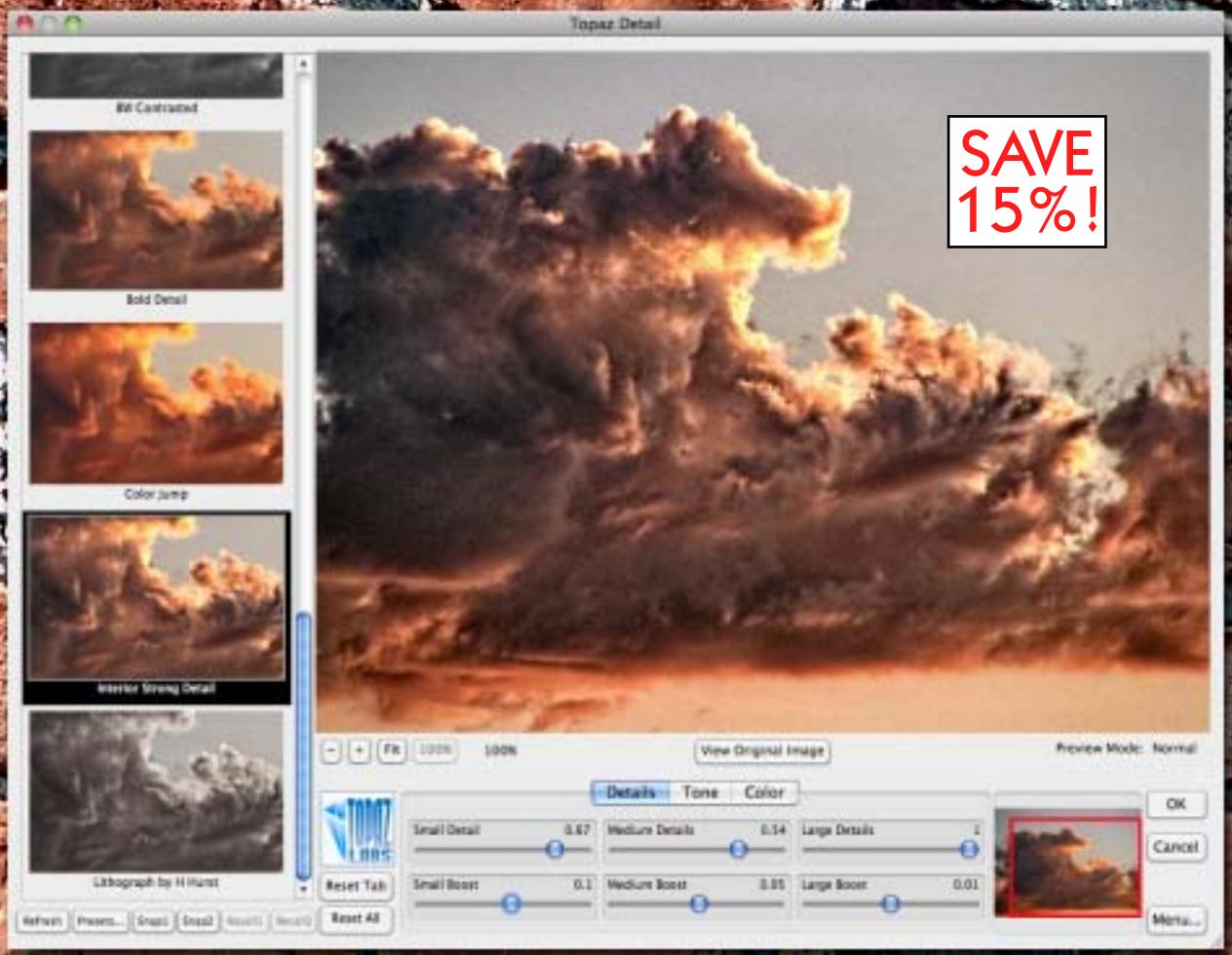

Alien Skin Eye Candy 6

Alien Skin has upgraded their Eye Candy series of plug-ins. Eye Candy 6 adds an accelerated rendering engine, scaling modes, better organized and improved presets, panels for easy access to effects and for button making, improved Fire effects, non-destructive editing and support for production environments with 16-bit/channel, CMYK, multi-processor and 64-bit capability. Below are examples of text effects using presets.

More Eye Candy effects ▶

Eye Candy 6 effects are the basic building blocks for your creative designs. Whether you use its fully customizable Text & Selection effects or its Textures collection (or both), you can create unique and outrageous fantasy or conservative client-pleasing works starting with nothing more than a blank white RGB image or some text.

On the previous page are examples of what Eye Candy presets (which include bevel, chrome, corona, glass, motion, rust and more) can do for text. On this page are examples of Textures applied to a blank white layer. These include animal fur, brick walls, metal, marble, reptile skin, stone, swirls, water, weave, wood and various textures.

Your job is to use this raw material in various combinations to create some interesting designs!

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on Plug-In Suite 5

The Award-Winning Plug-In Suite 5 Includes:

- FocalPoint 2 for Selective Focus
- PhotoTools 2.5 Professional Edition for Photographic Effects
- PhotoTune 3 for Color Correction
- PhotoFrame 4.5 Professional Edition for Edge & Frame Effects
- Genuine Fractals 6 Professional Edition for Enlarging Images
- Mask Pro 4 for Removing Backgrounds

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onOne FocalPoint 2 frees you from worrying about what focal length lens and aperture you are using and allows you to concentrate on capturing your subject without unnecessary hindrance.

In post-processing, you can add realistic selective focus, depth-of-field and vignette effects using the intuitive FocusBug controller (as seen in the screenshot at left).

The FocusBug has control handles for controlling effect width, blur amount and vignette lightness. New in version 2 is the FocusBrush tool to paint sharpness or blur right where you want it.

The side panel has settings to fine-tune the FocusBug, Blur, FocusBrush and Vignette, along with access to presets.

onOne PhotoTools 2.5 includes 17 separate categories for applying image enhancement and creative effects to a wide variety of subject matter.

The sets begin with basic brush paint-in effects, followed by image optimization, landscape and portrait enhancements, color, B&W and tinting treatments, lighting effects, photo filters, camera tricks, film & darkroom, stylized effects, art effects, type & graphics, overlay effects and finally, edge and frame treatments.

The right panel offers Photoshop-like layering of effects (toggle visibility, fade, remove) and access to categorized presets, including several from NAPP. Jack Davis and Kevin Kubota have also contributed effects presets. A masking option with Wacom support is offered.

onOne PhotoTune 3 optimizes the dynamic range, color and sharpness of your image without your needing to access and learn Photoshop's native Levels and Curves dialogs.

PhotoTune 3 is a nice improvement over past versions. It gets you started by offering three different mode choices (images with/without people and Pro Mode). In the basic modes, you click through a series of steps while adjusting dynamic range, auto color, brightness and sharpness (plus skin tone in People mode), after which you apply the results.

In Pro Mode (shown at left), you get access to more detailed refinements under the categories of Tone, Color, SkinTune and Detail.

onOne presets are also provided, plus you can create and save your own.

onOne PhotoFrame 4.5 is perhaps the most effective way to enhance your images for display. You can either choose from and apply hundreds of preset frames created by onOne as well as industry leaders such as Helene Glassman, Jack Davis, Jim DiVitale, Kevin Kubota, Laurie Excell and Rick Sammon, or drop your image into one of the prepared layouts (featuring themes such as Baby, Bohemian, Event, Holiday, Magazine, Senior, Wedding and Whimsy).

As you add frames to your image, they stack in Photoshop-like layers (see screenshot at left). You can further adjust each frame's size, positioning, opacity, background, border, glow and shadow.

Save your creations as presets for later use. Frames are applied to their own layers back in Photoshop for additional flexibility.

onOne Mask Pro 4 takes a different approach to masking from other plug-ins using trimaps. In Mask Pro, subject and background objects are chosen by Keep and Drop color selections, as shown at left.

Once these colors are set, it's just a simple matter of painting away unwanted elements! This is the perfect approach to isolating smoke, hair, glass and other such hard-to-select objects.

Included in the Suite but not shown: onOne Genuine Fractals 6.

If you need to upsize an image past 1000%, Genuine Fractals uses a fractal based interpolation algorithm that prevents loss of sharpness or detail in the process.

www.plugsandpixels.com/ononesuite.html

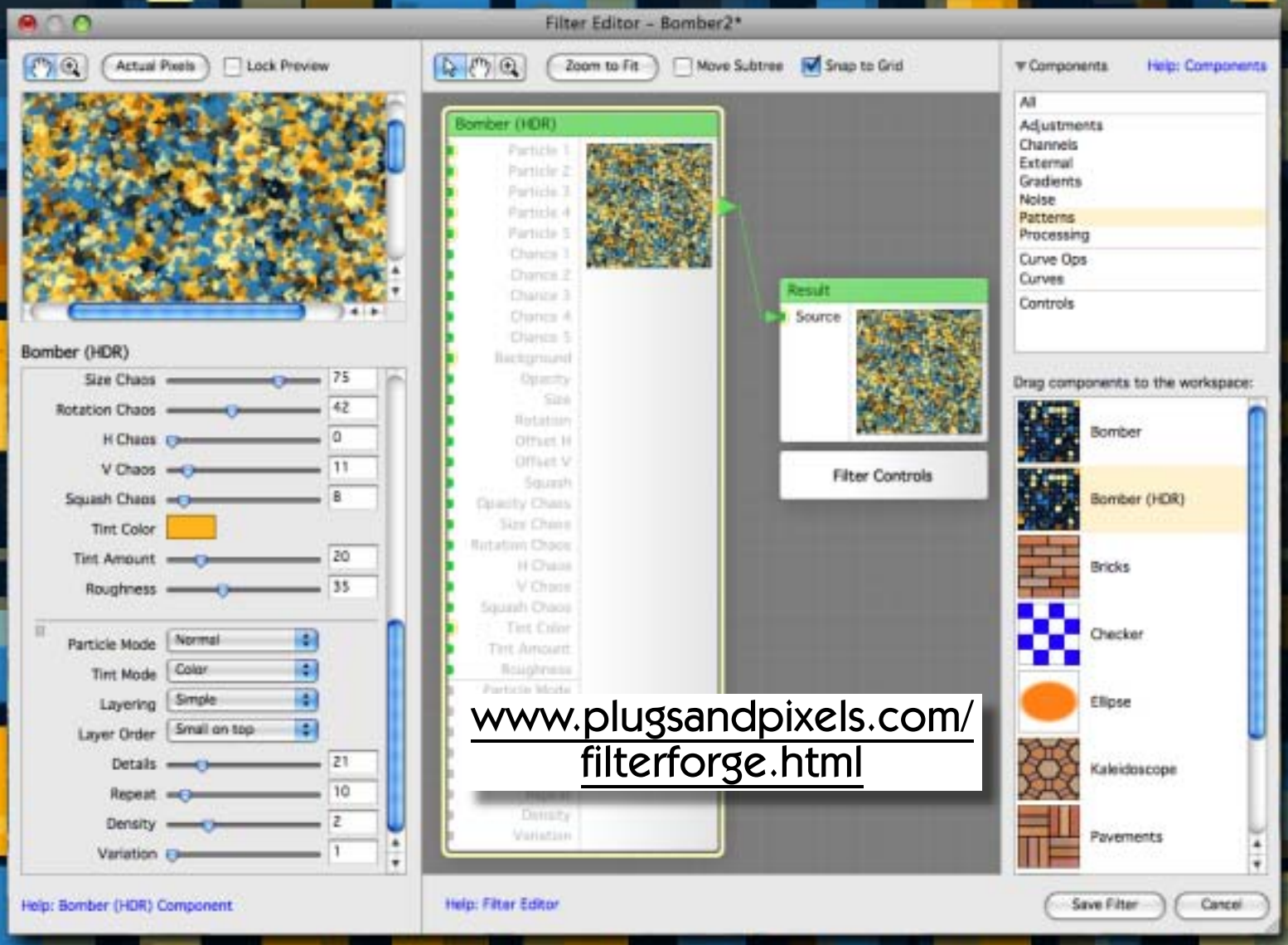
Filter Forge 2.0 Beta

The first phase of the public beta for Filter Forge 2 has begun! Filter Forge is a unique image effects and texture creator with over 6700 user-contributed filters currently available for download.

Filter Forge 2 adds features such as the "Bomber" component illustrated here, where you can create patterns by spraying image particles with full control over particle placement, coloration and randomization parameters.

Also included in beta 2 is full HDR support from input to rendering; a gamma-aware workflow with auto correction; minimum, median, maximum and custom percentile filtering; keyword-based filter searching to save you time without searching through the separate categories; a Polygon component which lets you generate symmetrical N-gons and stars with adjustable round corners, and an Ellipse component that generates circles and ellipses.

The final version of Filter Forge 2 is expected in 2010.



www.plugsandpixels.com/filterforge.html

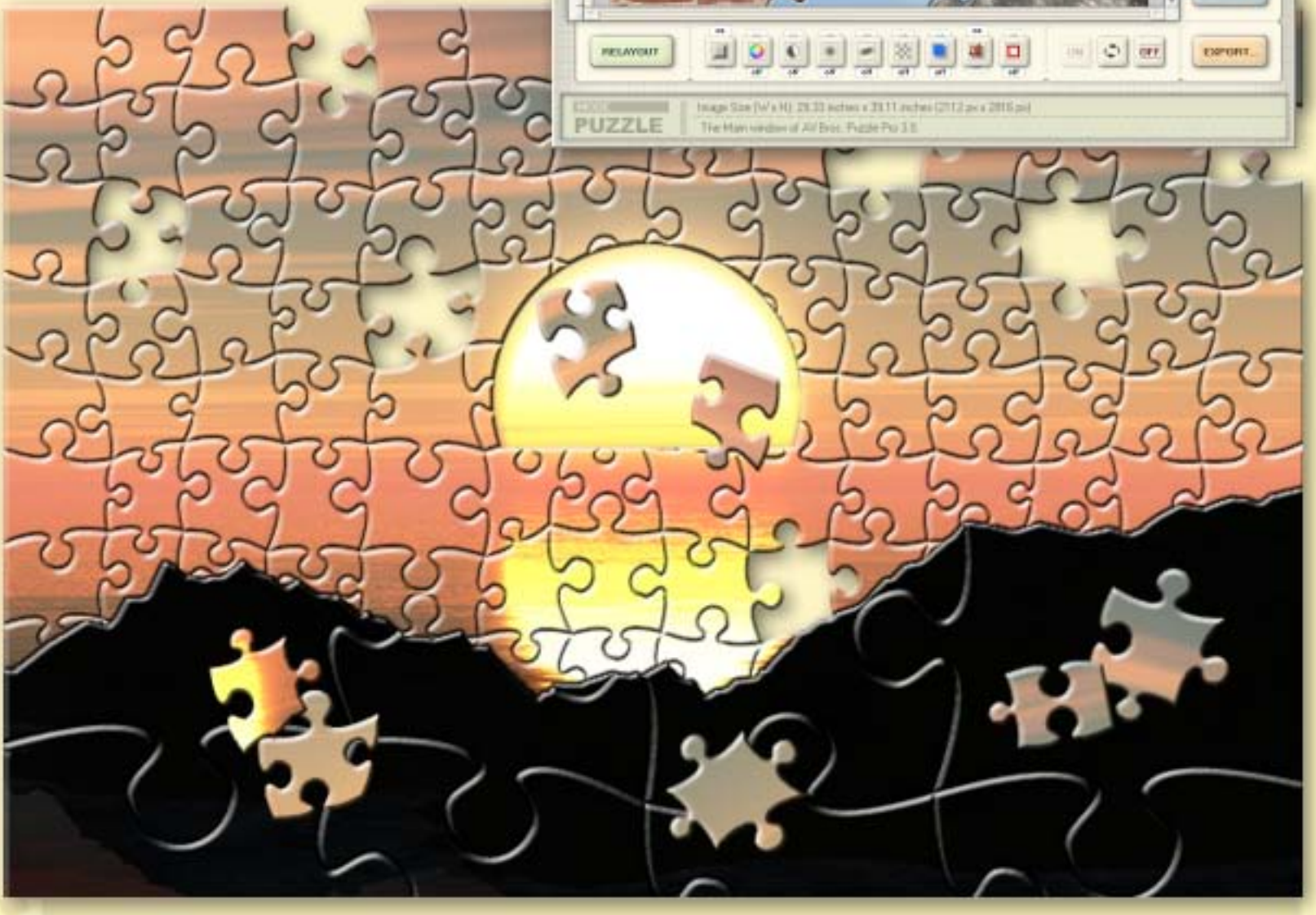
puzzle pro 3 What's new!

AV Bros. Puzzle Pro 3 opens up a whole new dimension in creative image editing, not merely turning your photos into simple puzzles, but giving you full control over the attributes of each and every piece!

In the example below you can see how different elements of an image (sun, clouds, mountains), when separated onto different layers, can be treated individually in Puzzle Pro (some elements cut out, the pieces sized differently in Layout mode, etc.).

During the export phase, each individual piece is saved to its own .PSD layer or separate .PNG file for further flexibility.

Speaking of layers, the screenshot at right demonstrates the Image Overlay operation, where you can specify which layer of the image appears on each puzzle piece! The possibilities are endless.



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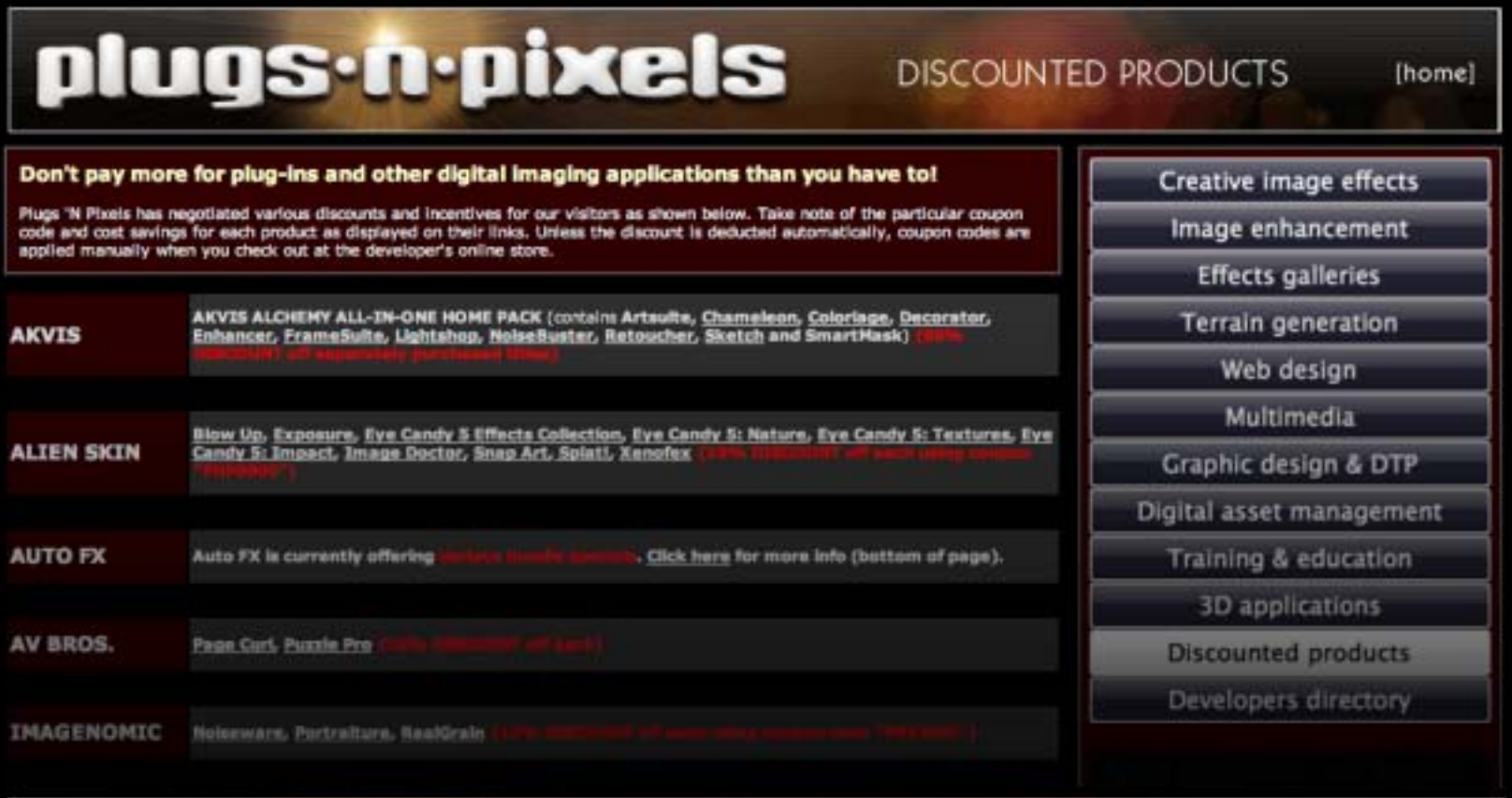
don't pay full price for plug-ins or advertising!

Plugs 'N Pixels has made arrangements with several software developers to offer our web visitors discounts off the full price of various plug-ins and actions. Keep an eye on our Discounts page for the latest deals.

And if you as an individual or small business wish to be listed permanently in our Services Directory, all it costs is a ONE-TIME payment of $10! There are no monthly or yearly fees. Download this PDF for more info.



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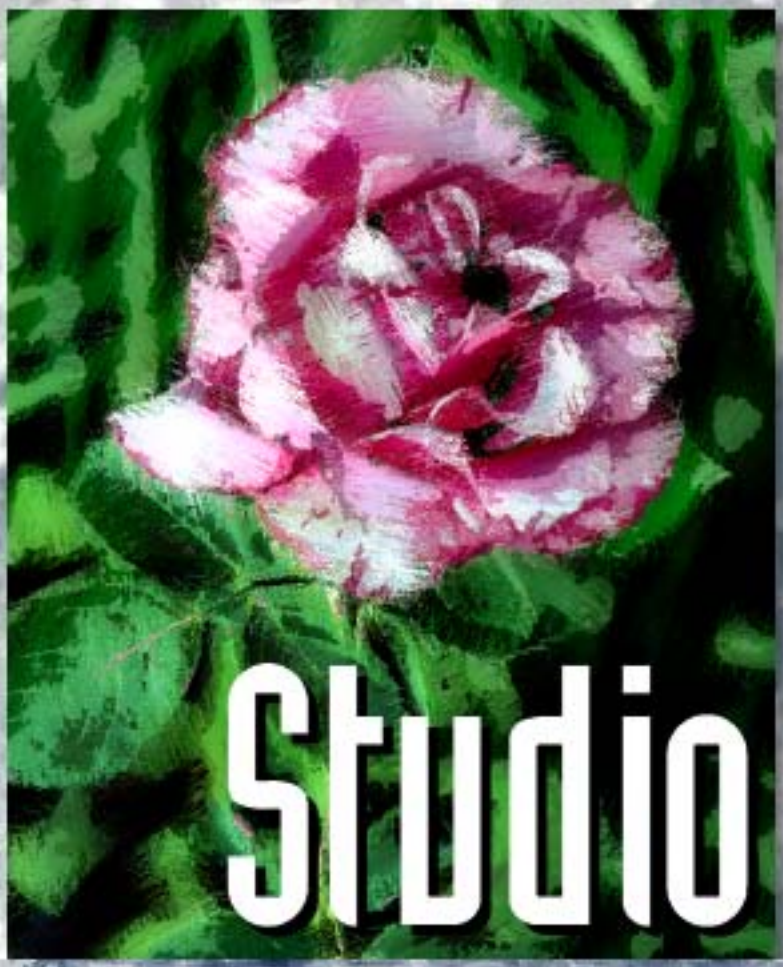


Synthetik Studio Artist is a resolution independent raster paint synthesizer, an extensive image processing suite with animation and auto-rotoscoping plus unlimited keyframe paint animation and video effects. In other words, it's perfect for the independent filmmaker and art show crowds!

There's nothing like watching software in the process of painting your choice of effects onto your image, or making animations from the results.

Studio Artist creator John Dalton has been busy adding a ton of new features to the upcoming version 4. The average user will never get to the bottom of the possibilities offered by Studio Artist, and it's only getting more advanced!

Be sure to visit our Studio Artist info page for more details and a link to the official Studio Artist blog (full of news, advanced info and tutorials).

Studio Artist™ 4

www.plugsandpixels.com/studioartist.html

Vue 8

Digital Nature

The 8th version of one of the most popular scenery solutions is now available

See more Vue examples ▶

When it comes to choosing a digital terrain-generating software package, e-on software's Vue 8 Infinite is one of your top choices. Used by CG professionals and home hobbyists alike, Vue 8 offers an amazing level of control over the content of your scenes.

Place mountains, seas, trees and plants and skies where you like and edit them with ease until your scene is exactly as you want it. When you're finished, render according to your output needs.

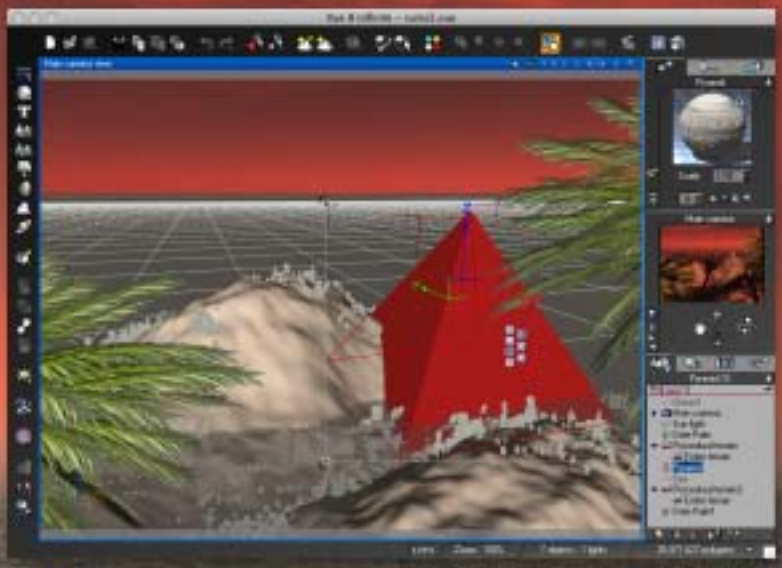
Vue is not difficult to use, with user forums to turn to for advice and a large amount of online and DVD training materials available to view for free or purchase (see page 16 for more info).

Vue 8 xStream and Infinite Personal Learning Editions are now available.

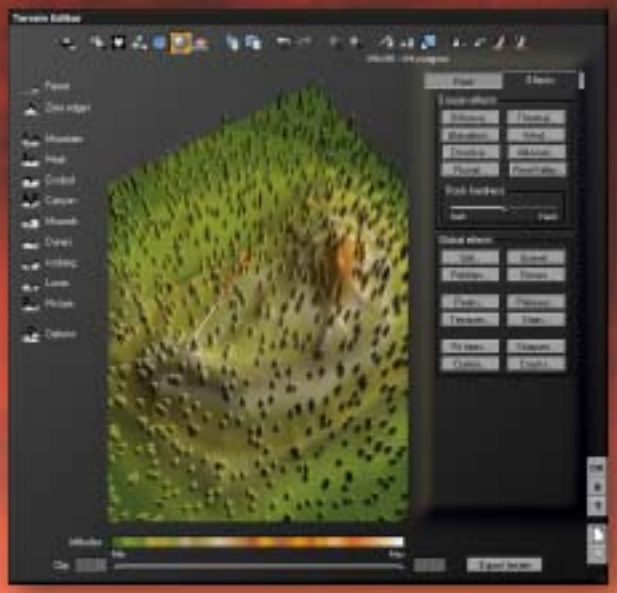
Vue 8 contains a number of innovative features and improvements under the categories of 3D terrain sculpting, large amplitude micro displacement engine, atmospheres and terrains (such as Spectral 3 atmospheres), precise artistic control and ease of use features, improved performance and content additions (see URL below for a complete breakdown).

For advanced users, remote dedicated rendering services are available through The Ranch Renderfarm.

www.plugsandpixels.com/vue.html

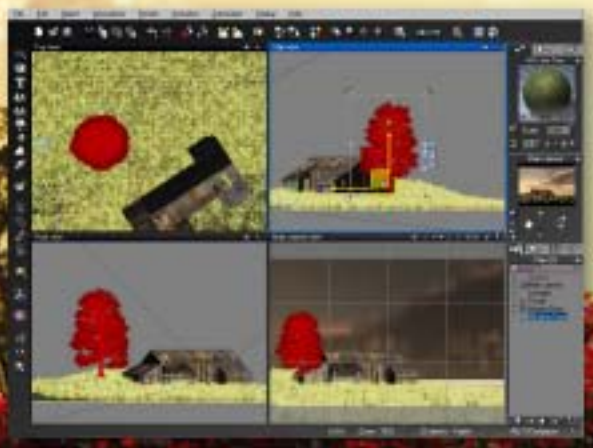


Note the improved preview (new shader-based OpenGL engine)



GeekatPlay™ Studio

Accelerate your Vue experience!



www.plugsandpixels.com/geekatplay.html

Learn e-on Vue 8!

E-ON CERTIFIED TRAINING RESOURCES

While it's not impossible to dive into Vue 8 and start clicking on icons and bugging around in dialogs in the hopes of creating a nice scene, you're not going to be accessing anywhere near its full potential unless you have an expert guiding you through the advanced settings and procedures.

The folks at Geekatplay studios have over 25 years of experience in the field of computer assisted design and are ready to help you troubleshoot your Vue projects via phone consultation and in-house training. Online, Geekatplay offers training videos (many for free!), as well as training discs/downloads, a fully illustrated book and Vue add-on materials for purchase (samples from the "Epic Landscapes II" videos are shown above).

Easy-to-learn 3D for the Mac

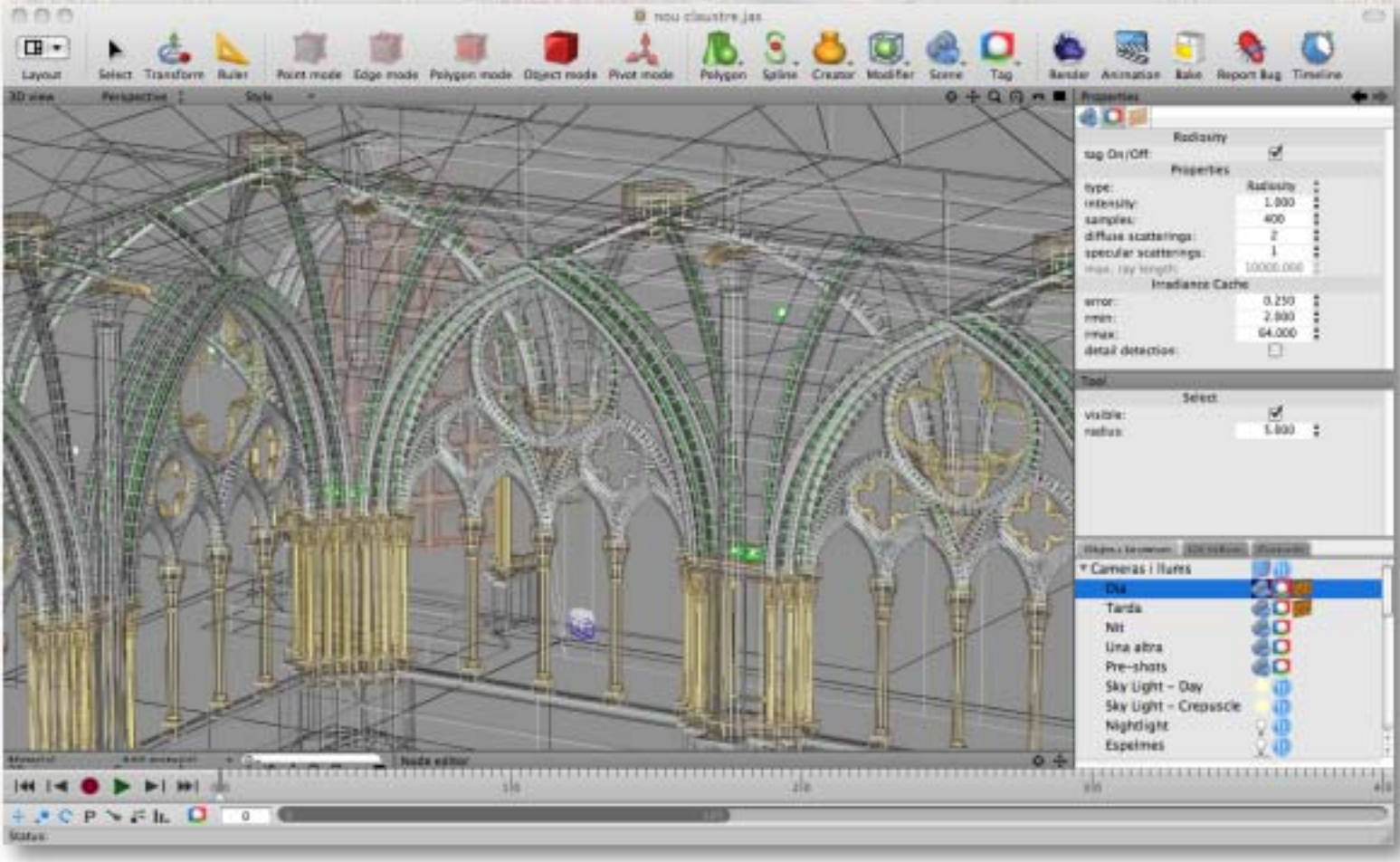
The creation of 3D objects and scenes has become a very intuitive and friendly process thanks to Dr. Martin Wengenmayer's Cheetah 3D 5 application (coded specifically – not ported – for the Mac platform only).

Offered at an unusually low price for 3D software ($149), C3D is perfect for both 3D newbies and advanced users. The Mac-friendly GUI and advanced features make a perfect combination for your home or commercial projects.

Version 5.1 of Cheetah3D not only contains many bug fixes and improvements, it adds many new features as well, such as an automatic skinning algorithm to create almost perfect weight-maps, advances in binding a skeleton to a mesh, an enhanced timeline with greater access for editing an object's hierarchy, copy/paste of polygon, edge and point selections, a node-based materials system with previews of all node types and improved memory management for 10x faster loading of small objects and 33% less overhead.

To add flexibility to your workflow, Cheetah 3D supports the import of objects from other 3D and terrain apps such as Google Sketchup and Vue, enabling you to add pre-made buildings and foliage to your scenes for further manipulation.

Andreu Cabre's Monestir de Poblet (right) was created in Illustrator and imported into C3D as an .svg format file.



www.plugsandpixels.com/cheetah3d.html

featured artist: brian slade

British photographer Brian Slade uses Topaz Adjust and Photoshop CS2 to create his artistic renderings.

After applying Adjust to add contrast, Brian uses a bit of Gaussian blur to add softness and sometimes a bamboo pen to add shade.

Brian's favorite subjects include portraits, wildlife, still life, landscapes and sports.

closing artwork

Photo and artwork by:
Mike Bedford

Created with:
Topaz Plug-in Suite
Alien Skin Eye Candy 6
onOne Plug-in Suite 5