



Adobe

Pixel Liberation Front

Film, TV, entertainment, and
new media production

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Making magic

Bringing high-end visual effects to the big screen is a time- and labor-intensive process that involves coordination among many different creative units, vision and ingenuity, and powerful yet flexible technologies. Just ask Stephen Lawes, creative director of Pixel Liberation Front (PLF), who just finished VFX on *Iron Man 2*, from Paramount Pictures and Marvel Entertainment.

Lawes worked for a year on the project, with time out to work on *Terminator: Salvation* and *Avatar* as well. He supervised a team of eight talented artists designing and animating the head up displays (HUDs) showing what the world looks like from inside the Iron Man mask, as well as several other characters. "At PLF, we did 90 to 100 HUD shots and 50 or so monitor shots which all helped to tell key story points," he says.





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Stephen Lawes, Creative Director, Pixel Liberation Front

As with all of his projects, Adobe After Effects® software is Lawes' go-to tool. "For *Iron Man 2*, we built some pretty complex After Effects 3D camera rigs," says Lawes. "We had to work in 3D space and share the results among artists. It had to be efficient and the output had to render quickly. It was quite a feat because we had to keep track of zoom, point of interest, position, orientation, rotation keyframes, and more—all at once. In the end the movie was put together in 3D virtual space within After Effects."

In an environment that requires heavy rendering, Lawes is looking forward to putting After Effects CS5 into production. "With full 64-bit support in After Effects CS5, I'm estimating that heavy projects could render in about half the time," says Lawes.

"64-bit support is huge for us because we will be able to work dramatically faster—that's an enormous advantage when you're on deadline to crank out dozens if not hundreds of very complex shots."

Lawes is also excited about the highly anticipated new Roto Brush tool in After Effects CS5. Most of the time, the movies he works on are shot in stereo and involve extensive rotoscoping—a process that is so time-consuming he often opts not to make the attempt. "With the Roto Brush tool in After Effects CS5, I think about rotoscoping entirely differently now," he says. "I used to avoid rotoscoping if possible because it was so time-consuming and painful. But with the new Roto Brush tool, it might only take me a couple of hours to get a relatively good result. The Roto Brush tool in Adobe After Effects CS5 is going to save VFX artists countless hours on every project."



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