

Hercules

Muscle simulation and deformations for 3ds max, now with added jiggle

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PRICE

>> £330* (\$599)

*Currency conversion for UK price; US price is official

MINIMUM SYSTEM

>> Any system capable of running 3ds max

MAIN FEATURES

- >> Quick and easy Muscle Primitives
- >> Simulate bulging, flexing and wobbling flesh
- >> Muscles can be shaped to fit most forms
- >> Fast mesh deformation
- >> Automatic secondary motion
- >> Works with existing tools and plug-ins
- >> Very simple to use

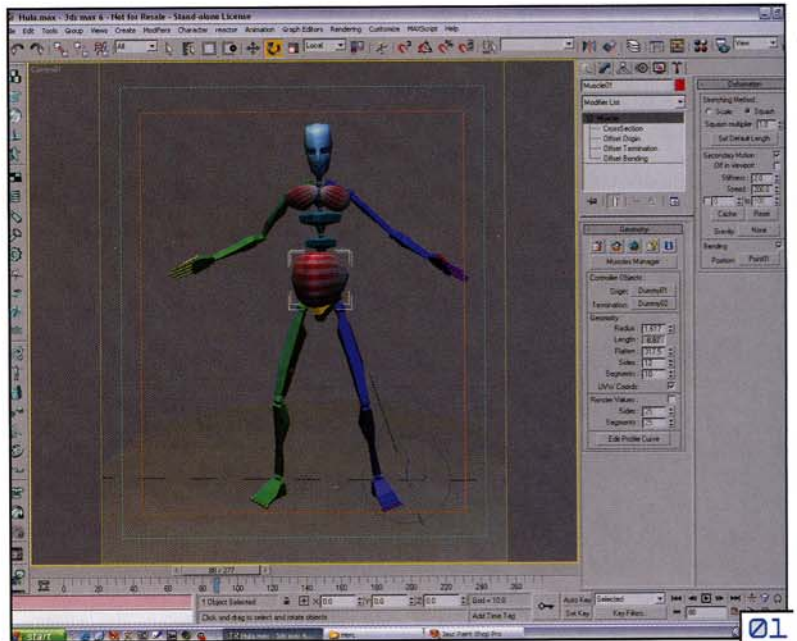
Hercules is a muscle creation tool for 3ds max that works in a similar vein (or possibly tendon) to *Absolute Character Tools* [3D World, issue 38]. Working alongside Skin modifiers, it adds subsurface deformation to simulate muscle bulge and distortion where you would normally just have static or stretching vertices.

Set-up is simple. Muscle primitives are attached between the desired bones, and a modifier is applied to tell the mesh which vertices are to be affected. Then, when you animate your bones, the skin modifier works as normal, bending the mesh for you; the Muscle primitive stretches or contracts; and the Muscle Deform tool shifts the vertex positions that extra bit to incorporate a contracting bicep or flexing back muscle.

Thanks to this easy-to-apply methodology and compatibility with most max tools and plug-ins (*character studio*, *Skin*, *Bones*, *Bones Pro*) you can easily go back and update old animations with minimal fuss. While this plug-in will be used a lot for making ridiculously pumped-up characters, it's the subtle uses that will be most popular. Aside from simple contraction and expansion, its ability to create secondary motion, or 'jiggle', is excellent for simulating the autonomous movement of masses of flesh. By strapping a large muscle around the front of a character's stomach, then bending it out slightly and carefully adjusting the desired values, an impressive natural bounce can be achieved as the model moves around. This is more convincing than a Flex modifier and definitely faster for the processor to work out.

WORK THAT FAT

This extra movement brings a character to life far more than excessively obvious muscle



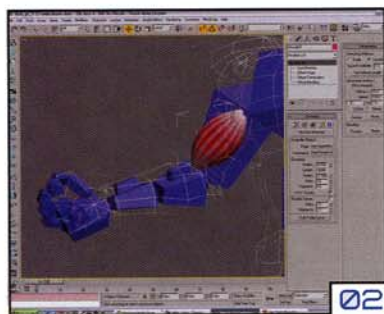
work does. A few strategically placed muscle primitives that are jiggling, but not flexing, can really improve a tubby character. If you've ever modelled an overweight creature, you'll know how tricky it is to animate the mass. But by adding some subtle cheek and jowl wobble, by making the arms flabby and carrying out the aforementioned stomach work, hey presto – the motion of all that weight is taken care of for you.

However, you're not restricted to only using the Muscle Primitives. Any solid max object can be used with the Deform modifier. Solid objects can be made to push against the skin like protruding bones, for example,

or you could simulate boxing gloves punching and pummeling a body with the skin reacting to each hit.

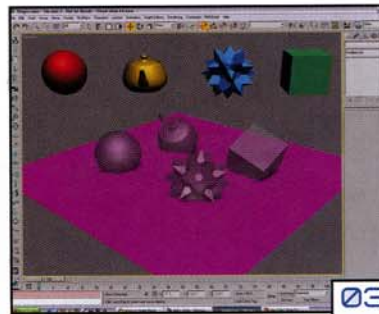
Using *Hercules* is a lot of fun, soon leaving you thinking you could build the Hulk. You probably could, but setting up a full body structure is pretty daunting, and not something you could do quickly – there is, however, a fairly complete one included, rigged to a *character studio* biped. But if you want to add just a suggestion of a muscle structure (a tricep here, some pectorals there), it provides not only eye-catching results, but ones that can be easily controlled and animated. The more you experiment with the plug-in, the more its speed and simplicity shine through. ■

[01] *Hercules'* muscle primitives can be used to simulate large masses of fat, swinging and bouncing as the character moves around



02

[02] Muscles can be quickly added to old characters to give them a whole new lease of life



03

[03] Even standard max objects can be used with the Deform modifier

3D VERDICT	8
RANGE OF FEATURES	7
VALUE FOR MONEY	8

PROS Very easy to use >> Impressive results achieved quickly >> Automatic Secondary Motion really adds life to your animations

CONS Setting up full-body structures can be daunting >> Tightly focused: few extra features