Hatch FX co-founder and lead matte painter **Deak Ferrand** talks to vfxblog about his work for *Constantine*, which involved creating the imagery for John Constantine's (Keanu Reeves) ascent into Heaven.

Interview by Ian Failes

When did you start working on 'Constantine'? How long did the project last?

We began working on *Constantine* in April of 2004, the original delivery was set for the end of July. However, in mid July as we were finalizing the final composites, there was a drastic change in direction, which resulted in starting a new concept phase. So the project was delivered as final at the end of December 2004.
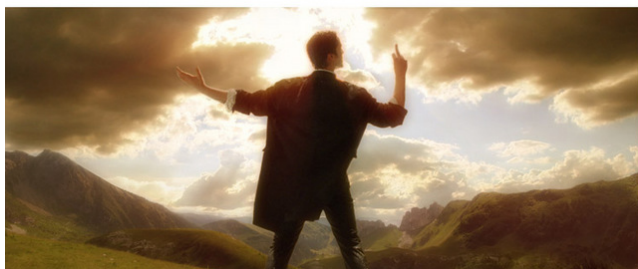
Heaven Concept 1

- *Concept #1: The first look Ferrand designed for Heaven.*

Heaven Concept 2

- *Concept #2: The final approved look on the green/lush Heaven design with IO mountains, prior to the change in direction.*

How was the look of your Heaven shots established? Did you reference any conceptual art or other films in which Heaven is depicted?

In the original design, Heaven was to be a very green lush and calm depiction of Heaven with a lake and lots of waterfalls. The director Francis Lawrence wanted us to add some mountains found in the IO valley. In the design that is ultimately in the film Francis referenced two artists: Maxfield Parrish and Odd Nerdrum. I brought in a book of Albert Bierstadt, another favorite of mine, to specifically showcase the lighting and mood.

Heaven Concept 3

- *Concept #3: This was the first design in the second phase. Francis Lawrence decided that Heaven needed to be a parallel universe of Los Angeles (as it is in the Hell sequence in the film). The idea was to have Keanu on a rooftop with the outline of the city of Los Angeles. Ferrand made it a little more in a Babylonian style so that it would look more Heaven-like.*

Heaven Concept 4

- *Concept #4: Ã¸ For this concept the outline of Los Angeles was retained and put into a more modern setting. Lawrence wanted the clouds in the city, but depending on lighting this looked a little too much like Hell (i.e. 9/11)*

Can you tell me about the tools and techniques you used to achieve the matte paintings?

The tools I used were primarily Photoshop for the matte painting. Mike Fink and I shot some liquid nitrogen for the foreground clouds that I used, mixed in with some painted ones. We use Softimage XSI for any projection mapping and After Effects for compositing. The layering clouds had some cg particles intertwined and for that we used Particle Illusion. Keanu was shot on bluescreen.

Heaven Concept 5

- Concept #5: In this version Lawrence wanted to see the LA grid, so Ferrand added the LA river with the large avenues lined with palm trees.


Heaven Concept 6

-Concept #6: This is the version that Production approved, basically now with Keanu is standing in a bed of clouds. The outline of Los Angeles still remains and the feeling is more dreamy and heavenish.

How did you interact with Mike Fink (the overall vfx supervisor)? Can you talk about the process involved in reviewing and getting feedback about your work?

The process was very straight forward. Mike Fink was a co-worker a few years back when I was another company and we had worked together on a few projects. Mike and Francis were busy on the movie, so we met a few times in the design phase where both Mike and Francis were present. I would then send versions to Mike via email and get client feedback until we all met again for film screenings towards the end of the process.
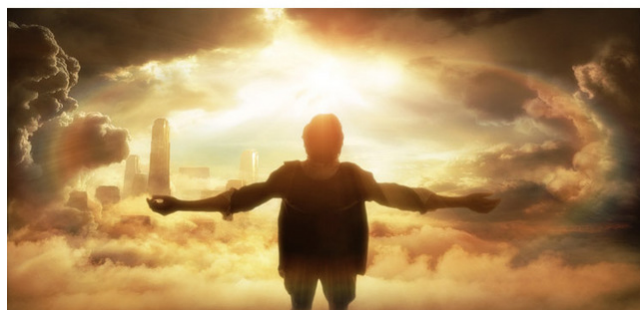
Heaven Shot 1 Final

- A final composite from the film.

Heaven Shot 1 Final

- A final composite from the film.

You've worked on some Heaven and Hell shots for 'What Dreams May Come' and 'Hellboy'. Any fear of being typecast?

You're right. Heaven and Hell for *What Dreams May Come*, Hell in *Hellboy*. I also designed Hell in *Little Nicky*. Another hellish environment for a David Navarro music video called 'Rexall'. Most often it has been Hell - dark moody environments are probably best suited for my style. But thank goodness Heaven comes in every once in a while to even things out!

I haven't been afraid of being typecast, as we say from Heaven to Hell and anything in between!

Heaven Shot 2 Final

- Another final composite from the film.

Related Links

Hatch FX

Official *Constantine* Movie Site

Special thanks to Deak Ferrand for participating in this interview, and to Cheryl Bainum for making the interview possible. All Constantine *images copyright Ã‚Â© 2005 Warner Bros. Ent. Inc. All rights reserved.*