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# WANNA BE DOMINATED BY RUBY? GAMERS DO

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# RUBY IN THE SKY WITH DIAMONDS

Gaming icon created by rhinofx for tech manufacturer ATI

BY RAE ANNA FERA

**>** TORONTO – Unleash a towering, impossibly proportioned, ass-kicking computer-generated vixen in red leather on (mostly male) gaming journalists, and the mood quickly shifts from jet-lagged to rapt.

At a recent press conference for computer graphics chip maker ATI Technologies, a global contingent of journos shuffled into a generic hotel ballroom to hear about the latest and greatest in graphics cards and meet the company's shapely new branding vehicle – Ruby.

She's the main character in a new ATI product demo – the computer-based equivalent of a commercial – that shows off the graphics power of the Radeon X800 card. The technology may sound geeky but, as ATI senior vice president/general manager Rick Bergman said at the meeting, gaming is now competing with Hollywood for eyeballs.

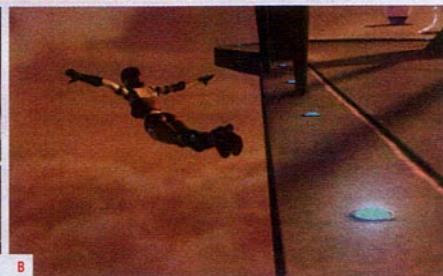
That's why ATI felt compelled to look outside its own industry for a creative partner that could crank up the content to entice game developers and deliver the Hollywood bang it craved.

The company tapped New York-based high-end visual effects house rhinofx to develop a compelling story and character that could be transported into real-time, which essentially means creating images that can be rendered at 30 frames per second, versus the minutes or hours traditionally needed to render high-end graphics.

Although ATI makes some of the world's best-selling graphics chips, Callan McInally, ATI's manager of 3D application, says his team wanted a spark of creativity to help sell the Radeon. ATI picked rhinofx because "they had the tools that worked well with our 3D technology, and [director] Harry [Dorrington] understood what we were trying to do".

Although the rhinofx team had to work to unusual tech specifications to make sure the demo would run on the new card, ATI did give them the creative freedom to develop a character and narrative. A two-month creative shootout yielded dozens of concepts. According to Dorrington, however, the decision to create a taut and tough female character was pretty much a no-brainer, "considering the demographic of video games". In all, it took rhinofx four of the project's 12 months to complete its part of the package.

A few challenges arose from culture clashes between the gaming and visual effects worlds. Grasping the concept of real-time was rhinofx's first hurdle. Then the prospect of creating characters and environments using considerably less data



(A-C) ATI's new graphics demo, starring Barbie-on-steroids Ruby, is designed to give gamers a frisson of excitement.

than in the high-end visual effects world appeared daunting. However, it ultimately became a blessing. Says Dorrington: "We now understand how real-time works, which can be useful in approaching future gaming projects."

Another potential issue was that the Radeon X800 was still being tested while rhinofx was making the demo movie. ATI had supplied the specs, but not having seen it actually run on the card, Dorrington was concerned whether it would translate properly. "This wasn't like rendering a movie," he says. "We were handing over files that were fitting into their technology." All the elements were created in Maya, then delivered to ATI as a single file for conversion into real-time.

Dorrington's fears were unfounded.

"The demo exceeded our expectations," says McInally. "I think we got more than we paid for."

The demo, *The Double Cross*, is a 1:30-minute action-packed story in which Ruby exchanges a computer chip for a big-assed diamond orb with a villain in the sky – only to be double-crossed, faced with angry ninjas, ultimately defeating all and escaping mere seconds before the sky craft explodes. It showcases photo-real skin, fluid movement, depth of field, multiple lighting sources, and improved hair movement – all major developments in gaming technology. It also closes with a cliffhanger ending that sets up future instalments – something ATI is considering.

Rick Wagonheim, rhinofx's partner/managing director, says the project was a great

opportunity to flex the studio's creative muscles outside of tried-and-true commercials. "We've always thought of the studio as being capable of high-end visual effects – not just for commercials, but for film, TV and games," he says, adding that given the convergence between advertising, gaming and Hollywood, "it felt right and made sense".

While the initial application for Ruby was to showcase ATI's current product, McInally hints that the gaming masses will see more of the arousing icon in offshoots such as Web content and comic books.

"A lot of effort was put into the models, textures and shaders on Ruby," says McInally. "I would be disappointed if we didn't use her again."

We suspect our gamer friends would be rather crestfallen, too. **o**

## CREDITS

**Client:** ATI Technologies

**Agency:** rhinofx

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ATI > [www.ati.com](http://www.ati.com)

