

## Plays nice with others

3D Software  
Curious Labs Poser Pro Pack

by Ron Giddings

So what's so "pro" about the new *Poser Pro Pack* from Curious Labs?

Having played with this for the last couple of months, we found the real heart of this update to lie in the virtual explosion of file formats which *PPP* uses. So before you even think of loading the *Pro Pack*, make sure you back-up your original *Poser 4*. Things like bump maps and texture maps will be translated into formats *Poser 4* does not recognize. Knowing that there are many of us out there with enormous Runtime folders, it would be a tragedy to be completely locked into using only the *Pro Pack*.

Not that that's necessarily a bad thing, because what the *Pro Pack* offers is much more useful on every level than the basic software.

The most obvious addition to *Poser* is the choice of multiple views. Having a top camera, face camera and main camera on at the same time is something new to *Poser*, but pretty familiar to other high end 3D software. The biggest advantage here comes when trying to use *Poser's* spotlights. In



(left) And you thought *Poser* was only for making warrior princesses? This bunch of characters is provided in the *Poser Pro Pack*, each with a selection of cute, short animations. Why? With *PPP* exporting to Viewpoint Experience Technology, you will be able to have interactive "AVATARS" on your website. New plug-ins such as Adobe's Atmosphere are just around the corner to provide "virtual environments" for *Poser* people.

case you haven't tried it already, delete all the default lights (by clicking on the Trash in the Lights icon). Each new light you create (with the same icon) becomes a spotlight, the angle of which you can now control with the lighting dials. In *Poser 4*, one couldn't even see where the new lights arrived in the set without zooming back. Now with *PPP*, one of the cameras can be zoomed back, allowing for correct positioning of these spotlights. The results are fabulous (see the following page).

*Poser* remains one of the few inexpensive 3D packages that has soft lights that fall off like real photo studio lighting.

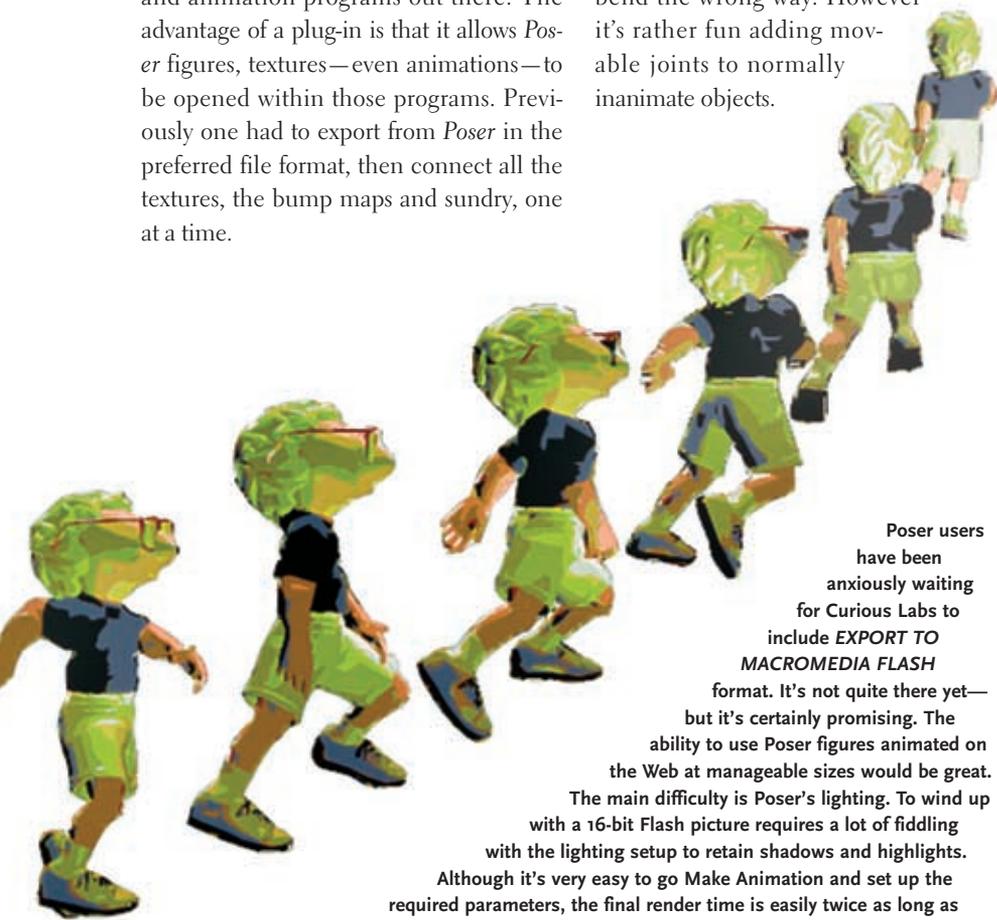
### SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Perhaps the hottest new additions are the plug-ins for both *Lightwave* and *3D Studio Max*, two of the most widely used 3D and animation programs out there. The advantage of a plug-in is that it allows *Poser* figures, textures—even animations—to be opened within those programs. Previously one had to export from *Poser* in the preferred file format, then connect all the textures, the bump maps and sundry, one at a time.

We found these import plug-ins to have some surprising benefits, especially because the plug-ins work in both directions.

Master 3D artist Martin Murphy was able to take a raptor, which he created in *Lightwave*, into *Poser Pro Pack*—bump maps, textures and all—then add bones in the Setup Room, create an animation and bring it back into *Lightwave* with surprising ease. The usefulness of this feature is apparent when we imagine populating a *Lightwave*- or *Studio Max*-created set with *Poser* characters—walking, sitting on benches or riding horses.

A very nice touch is the floating HTML information box that walks you through the process of adding existing bones or creating new ones from scratch. There's still room for fine tuning movements so that, for instance, elbows don't bend the wrong way. However it's rather fun adding movable joints to normally inanimate objects.



Poser users have been anxiously waiting for Curious Labs to include **EXPORT TO MACROMEDIA FLASH**

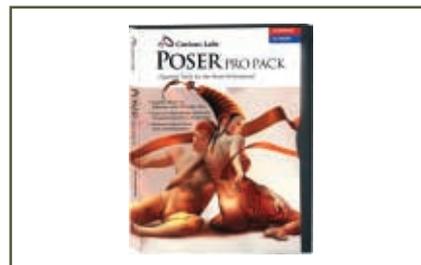
format. It's not quite there yet—but it's certainly promising. The ability to use Poser figures animated on the Web at manageable sizes would be great.

The main difficulty is Poser's lighting. To wind up with a 16-bit Flash picture requires a lot of fiddling with the lighting setup to retain shadows and highlights.

Although it's very easy to go Make Animation and set up the required parameters, the final render time is easily twice as long as saving to QuickTime. Having said that, Flash pictures are about half the size of QuickTime, which is what we're looking for anyway. QuickTime users, however, get to use PPP's 2D Motion Blur. Digital animation can appear overly sharp and unnatural; 2D Motion Blur takes advantage of Poser's tweening to create a more realistic blend of "frames".

### RENDER UNTO CAESAR

If there was one thing that made *Photoshop* the flexible monster that it is, it was Adobe's decision to provide open scripting for creating the multitude of plug-ins we are now blessed with. Curious Labs has decided to make *Poser* understand an API called Python Script (yes, it is named after MONTY PYTHON). This language has already engendered a number of nice little helpful scripts which are starting to appear on the Internet. These are beginning to provide functions that users have missed in *Poser* so far, such as duping a figure to create an army. Because Python gives us access to *Poser's* internal data, we'll probably see a number of useful scripts appear. The *Poser* community is famous for sharing everything from morphs to lighting setups



### CURIOS LABS POSER PRO PACK

#### Minimum System Requirements

##### MACINTOSH

- Poser 4
- Mac OS 8
- 32MB RAM (64MB recommended)
- 400MB free disk space

##### WINDOWS

- Poser 4
- Pentium class processor
- 32MB RAM
- Windows 95/98/NT 4.0
- 32MB RAM
- 400MB free disk space

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to finished figures, so there's no reason to assume Python won't be used in a similar way.

However this brings us to the point of some of the other files PPP has adopted.

### WATCH YOUR BUM

With all this trading between *Poser* users going on, both Curious Labs and DAZ (Digital Art Zone) have found a way to protect their properties while allowing user commerce to continue. New file formats such as MAP contain all the information about changes in texture or morphing, minus the original figure. Thus you must have a registered version of a figure to which you apply MAP files.

Another decision by Curious Labs was to include various compression software for both texture and bump maps. Now that PPP reads JPEGs as bump maps, BUM files are no more. An unfortunate side effect of this turned up with the appearance of the new VICTORIA 2 figure. Used in *Poser 4*, the bump maps are read as texture maps, giving the poor girl a very sooty complexion. A workaround for this can be found at [www.poserarcana.com](http://www.poserarcana.com).

Zlib compression is also used for on-the-fly compression and expansion of scene, figure and prop files to save hard disk space.

Still another file format is called Animation Sets. Imagine creating an animation and being able to save the hierarchy items and frame changes for use on an entirely different figure.

### LET'S PUT THE FUTURE BEHIND US

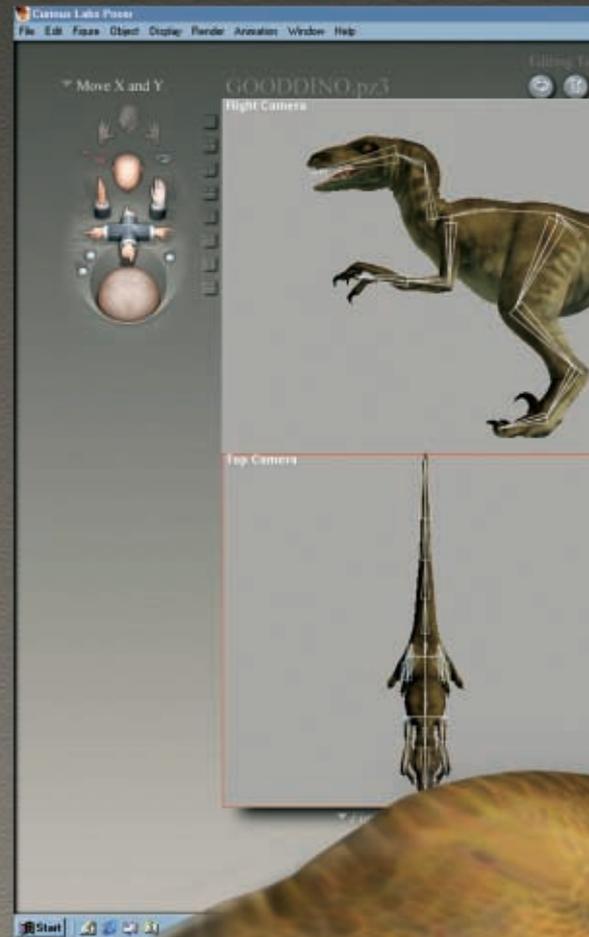
What software product can call itself "pro" these days without exporting to the Web?

*Poser* users have long awaited *Pro Pack's* ability to export to *Macromedia Flash*. Whether still image or animation, a file can be translated into SWF simply by using the Make Movie command. Parameters such as number of colors and frame rate are all there. The difficulty in doing this is that the multi-lighting setup which *Poser* does so well can't always be translated into sixteen colors or less. One light can completely blow out a face, for example. Only the future will tell if this can be an easier-to-use solution than it is at present.

Another wait-and-see capability is the Export to Viewpoint Experience Technology. This 3D Web format allows for interactive triggering of short animation sets. The plan seems to appeal to users who have an eye on Adobe's new 3D world creator software, *Atmosphere*. It can be easily accessed through PPP's Viewpoint Export function. It's doubtful at this time whether many of us will be downloading a 5MB *Atmosphere* plug-in for our browser to use this technology, but it sure is intriguing.

With all the new languages that *Poser* can now speak, the *Pro Pack* is a standing invitation to everyone to come out and play. 🎮

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We asked Toronto's Martin Murphy, who created the *Poser Pro Pack* cover image, to check out PPP's *INTERACTIVITY WITH LIGHTWAVE*. He had just finished doing the magnificent raptor above in *Lightwave* and brought it into *Poser* where he was surprised to find how easy it was to add "bones" and animate his creation. The Setup Room allows one to either use existing *Poser* skeletons, adjusted to the new figure, or create bones from scratch. A little HTML walkthrough appears on the desktop to make sure you've got it right. After setting IK and other parameters, one can take full advantage of *Poser's* keyframe animation. At this point, if one prefers, one can import the new figure into *Lightwave* for rendering. It's fun to imagine the things that can be done in a *Lightwave* landscape populated by animated *Poser* characters.



▼ Figure 1 ▼ Total Hair

And you thought Poser couldn't make "real" people? Here we have DAZ's new VICTORIA 2, the first model to take advantage of the new file formats that PPP can read. Her *BUMP AND TRANSPARENCY MAPS* are now JPEGs and PNGs (file formats more familiar to Web designers). This allows for compressed storage of properties with alpha channels. Believe it or not, there are Poser fans out there who have collected all the free models and props available on the Web, winding up with Poser folders well over a gig!! Unfortunately for people who don't have the PPP upgrade, JPEG bump maps get translated as texture maps and the figure looks like a chimney sweep,

covered in soot. We highly recommend visiting [www.poserarcana.com](http://www.poserarcana.com) to find workarounds and other valuable tips not available in the manual. The rendered picture above uses *Total Hair* from [www.renderosity.com](http://www.renderosity.com). This is without a doubt the most versatile and realistic hair we've seen for Poser figures. One nice thing they included was a lighting setup done with soft spotlights just like a photographer would use for a hair product shot. It's remarkable how good Poser's lighting really is when one deletes the default settings and replaces them with these lights. In comparison, the lighting in the program most used by Poser people, Bryce, is very hard.