

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF IMAGINATIVE MODELLING AND SPECIAL EFFECTS

# Sci-Fi & Fantasy MODELS



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Bob Keen's Image Animation

## Derek Meddings

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## 20,000 Leagues

Sci-Fi with rivets!

## U.S.S. Defiant

Modelling the new Ertl kit

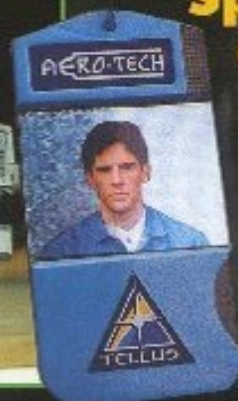
## Photographing models

Tim Hooper tells you how



## Space: Above and Beyond

Props exclusive

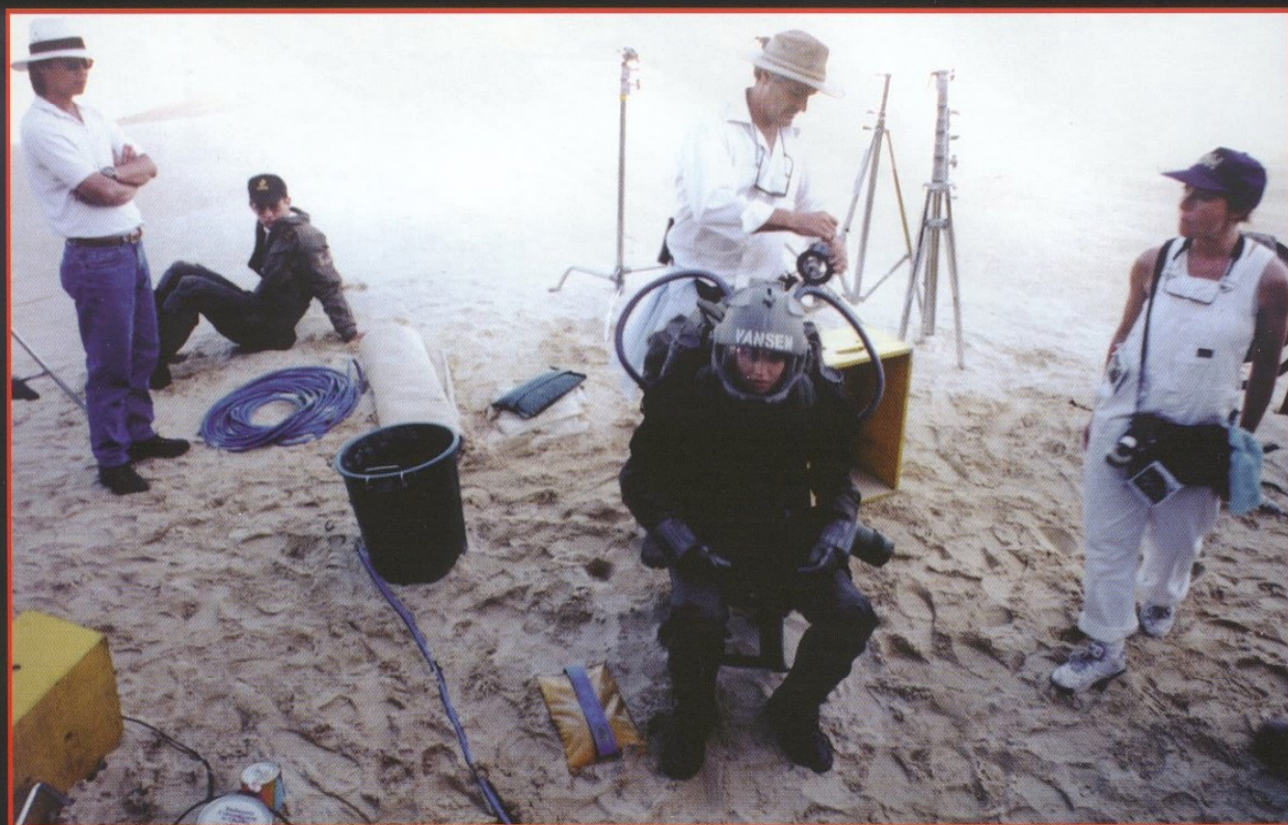


Next Millennium Models Ltd/July/Aug 1997



# Creating the props for Space: Above and Beyond

Michael Daczynski



**E**arly in 1995 a meeting between Bernard Hides (production designer for *Space: Above and Beyond*), David Tremont, Michael Daczynski and Wayne Nelson took place. The result of that meeting was the decision that Australian FX house *The Model Smiths* would fabricate various prop pieces for the pilot episode of this new SF TV show from the writers of the *X-Files*.

After going through the script a few times by ourselves and also with Bernard, we finally came up with the following list of items to build:

*For the Tellus colony:* ID tags; rebreather pack; helmets; bracelet.

*For the police:* helmets; handcuffs; Taser pistol with darts; nightstick.

*For the Aliens (Chigs):* ID tag for

the alien suit; hand gun; flame throwers.

*For the Marines:* trainee helmets; Mars helmets; fighter pilot helmets in white and black; rifles; geiger counter; global positioning system (GPS); dress watches; backpacks; left and right armbands; medals; dog tags.

*Miscellaneous items:* note pad; "cook book" (to be used in conjunction with the pad); Newton's

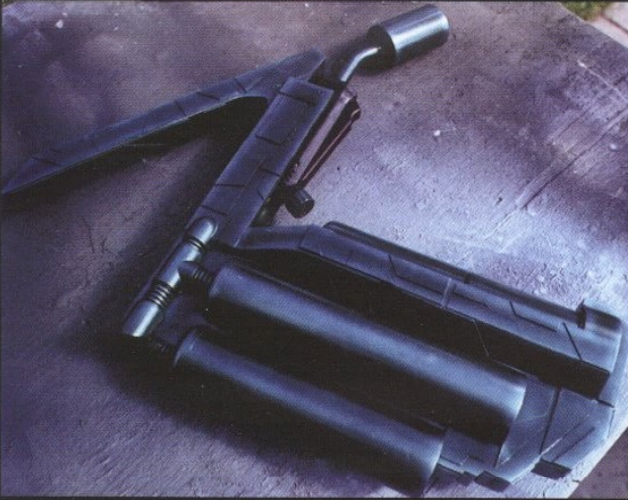
telescope; CD player with CD.

In general, items were made, moulds taken and the pieces then cast in fibreglass and/or urethane resin from these. The props were then assembled, lights added to them if required, and they were then painted and weathered. "Masters" of the Marine IDs, medals, GPS, geiger counter, CD player with CD, Newton's telescope, cook book, note pad, flame throwers and Taser

pistol with darts were used, as only one or two of each of these items was made and this did not justify the moulding process. The *Tellus* colony helmets and police helmets were bought items with added pieces, so these, of course, were not moulded either.

Blueprints of the vast majority of items were supplied by the art department (some highly detailed, some not). Exceptions were all the helmets (both the bought ones and the Marine helmets). The Marine helmets were produced following the development of a mock-up. Many adjustments were made to this before the final version was reached.

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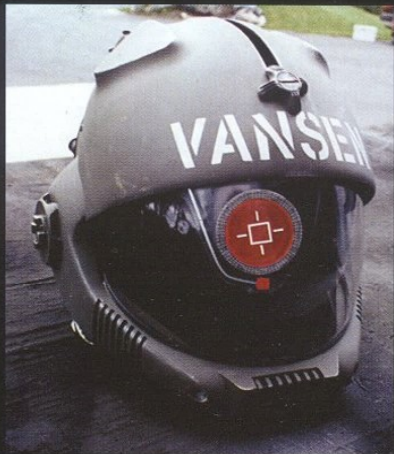
Top: Flame thrower; ID tag for alien suit.

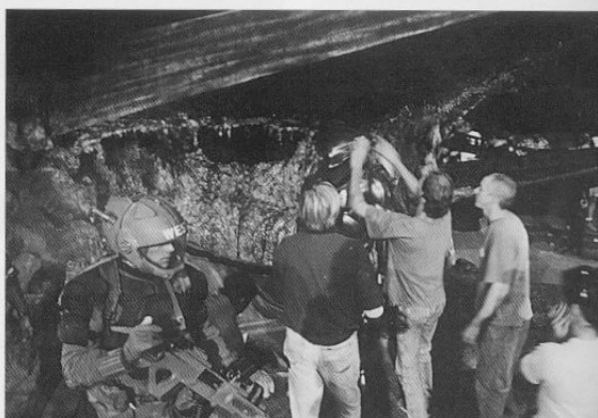
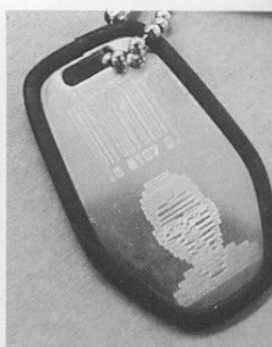
Left: Note pad and cook book.

Above: alien hand gun.

Right: marine arm band.

Below: marine helmet (Damphouse), marine martian helmet with night sight (Vansen) and Tellus colony helmet.



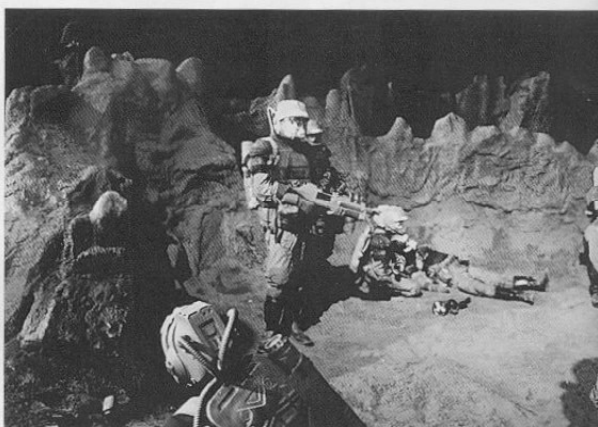


Top left: fighter pilot helmets.

Top right: a medal from the series and marine dog tag.

Above left: Newton's telescope.

Above right and opposite: Mars set with alien craft.



David Tremont in Mars marine gear.

Below right: rebreather pack. Below: dress watch.



The original patterns for items were carved from *Korthan* foam and fibreglassed, or made from acrylic, wood, plastic, etc., or store bought items were used in their construction.

## Specific props – Construction Information:

**Dog tags:** The futuristic holographic effect on these was created by first photographing the stars, then printing the resulting shots onto clear cell. A holo-print pattern was then stuck behind the print.

**Dog tags:** These were cut out by hand and the pattern and bar code on them engraved by computer. They caused sound problems on set, however, so a rubber strip was added around the edge of the tags to eliminate the noise.

**Alien hand gun:** This was used only briefly in the pilot. The crystal was made by sticking shards of shattered acrylic together at random angles then casting the finished piece in clear resin. The gun incorporated a strobing red-pulse light circuit.



Newton's bracelet.

**Alien flamethrower:** This housed a *Primus* gas bottle and nozzle. It was changed quite a bit for the series as the three-fingered alien and wouldn't fit around the original prop.

**Alien ID Tag:** The piece was made to totally the wrong shape as it was originally measured against a piece of suit that subsequently wasn't used to

produce a final version of the aliens' armour. Consequently the ID tag had to be "tweaked" to fit and isn't symmetrical when viewed from the front.

**Notepad and cook book:** The screens on these pad-like computers were made to "function" by matting in graphics after they had been shot. Both props were later cut from the pilot!

**Taser Pistol:** These were toy guns enhanced with store-bought clips and hosing. The darts were made from styrene, and the guns had an air hose running through them, although the final effect of them being fired was computer generated.

**Marine Rifle:** Some of the most notable moments that occurred during the making of props for the pilot concerned Eric Backman's ordeal on the Marine rifle, which had to incorporate a practical rifle within it. Blueprints for this prop changed almost *hourly* on some days, while on a good day there were only two or three changes. I think at one stage Eric believed building this gun would be his career until retirement! The completed props fired blanks, so the muzzle flare you can see in the pilot is a real element of the scene. Cartridges had to be hand-made for the weapon, which constantly mis-fired.

**Newton's telescope:** The telescope was faithfully copied from the original and featured leather and turned brass.

Store bought items incorporated into the props included bits from huge water pistols that found their way into the backpacks; hockey players' body armour; garden hose fittings; ski boot clips and kit parts which were used to dress the helmet earpieces.

Also of note was the job that David Tremont and Michael Daczynski had to tackle. While the rest of the team were slaving over fibreglass shells, etc., these two were given the daunting task of fitting all the helmets to the major stars and background actors (in air-conditioned comfort, of course). Oh, well, someone has to sort out the rough jobs!

Times on the set were – interesting – as actors sat on or

slammed delicate props into walls and chairs, or floors, or anything else they could think of. Some scenes did not make the final cut of the pilot, so some of our props were not seen at all, but, believe me, they were there.

One notable miss was the Marines' martian helmet. This featured a sliding eyepiece under the visor cap, intended to magnify/give night vision, etc. to the marine. However, as the

star had an eye infection on the day of the shoot, this was never used. All that labour for nothing.

When the pilot wrapped all (??) the props were packed away and sent to the US, where I have noted that various items were used (some a little changed) in the series. Thus ended our journey into **Space: Above and Beyond**.

M. D.



Nightstick

## Credits:

**Chief Modelmaker:** David Tremont.

**Modelmakers:** Michael Daczynski; Eric Backman; Grant Radziwill; Marcus Johnson; Greg Martin.

**Assistant Modelmakers:** Don Meiklejohn; Glenn Ludgate.

**Casting done by:** Wayne Nelson.

\* Note: We *did* have a couple of work experience people too, but unfortunately names were not recorded.

## About The Model Smiths

*The Model Smiths* was formed to work in conjunction with *Photon Stockman Pty Ltd.*, Australia's leading Visual Effects company, as miniatures and props form an important contribution to this industry.

Their facility offers a wide range of services, from conceptual design through to the fabrication of miniatures, props, displays, prototypes and costumes, with the advantage of being able to call on other specialised services such as engineering, electronics and sculpting.

Most staff are hired on an "as needed" basis, keeping the operation cost effective. Eight main model makers work at *The Model Smiths* on a regular basis, plus five assistant model makers when required.

*Recent credits include:*

**20,000 Leagues Under The Sea** – US mini series, 1996 (models); **Paradise Road** – feature film, 1996 (model); **Flipper** – US TV series, 1995 (props); **Return To Jupiter** – Aust/Japan TV series, 1996 (props); *Warner Bros Movie World Germany*, 1995 (models and props); **S:AAB** – TV series pilot, 20th. Century Fox, 1995 (props); **Time Trax** – US TV series, 1992 (model and props); **Stark** – Australian mini series, 1992 (models).