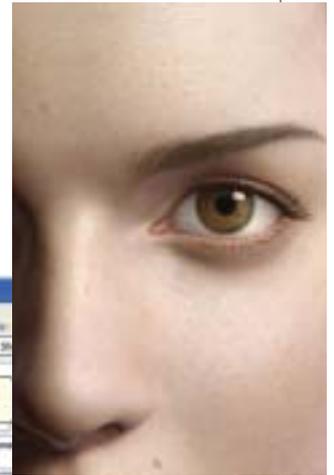
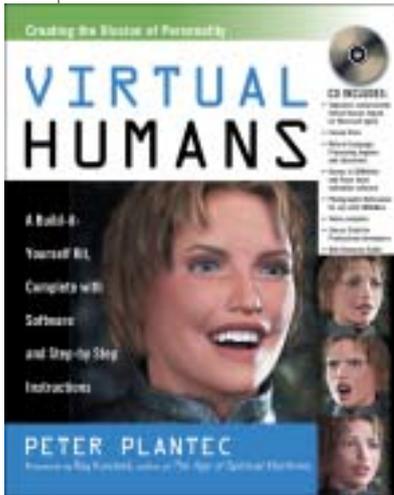


End Note

Make Your Own Avatar



They're called avatars ("an animated, articulated representation of a human which represents you"), or embodied agents, virtual humans, or synthespians. You might have talked to one when you called customer support, or maybe you recognized them in the mob scenes in *Titanic* or *Forrest Gump*.

With Peter Plantec's new book, *Virtual Humans*, from AMACOM, you can make a modest avatar of your own. The book has step-by-step instructions and references to programs, free and commercial, to help you. There are demos and programs included on a CD that comes with the book. The author assures you that "you can create an impressive example in a week's time."

Commercial and research avatars often serve as computer interfaces with human faces and voices, but your virtual human can be more like a combination of model building and psychological puzzle solving. First you decide if you want a cartoon-like figure (with software that's free from Microsoft) or one more human-like (with the help of programs like 3DMeNow or Poser). The more advanced modeling

techniques can be truly amazing. See the close-up of the face above from www.finalfantasy-spiritwithin.com/www/gallery.htm. Once it's downloaded or modeled, you animate your avatar according to the seven essential concepts in face acting.

Then the psychological challenge begins. You select from four dominant mind styles and begin "Brain Construction 101," writing the rules that will govern your avatar's responses. The basic rule is that you're not creating intelligence, you're just trying to trick others. It's the audience you're shaping rather than the avatar itself. You'll know you're done when your virtual has a history and personality—what the author calls an entity identity.

Peter Plantec's book is fascinating to read, even if you aren't into avatar building, as his style is conversational and entertaining. And what you'll learn about these embodied agents is worth the time spent in their world of circuits and simulations. After all, they will be showing up with greater frequency in our real world. ■