

It's Just A Fantasy

The more lost you are, the more you have to look forward to." Such is the title character's philosophy in *Ally McBeal*, a new drama airing Monday nights on Fox. Ally, a Yuppie lawyer on the surface, struggles with her personal life and insecurities. Her crises are complemented by fantasy sequences, flashbacks and voice-overs. Although effects sequences sporadically grace the screen, "they are secondary to the story the show is trying to tell," says Steve Robin, co-producer.

In the pilot, Ally fantasizes about making love with an ex-boyfriend in a hot tub-sized coffee mug. "We knew

early on that we wanted to avoid CGI in the pilot, and we did," says visual effects supervisor, Mike Most, Encore Video, Santa Monica. The mug and the actors in a hot tub were shot simultaneously on a green screen stage at Ren-Mar Studios, Hollywood, using two Panavision cameras. The coffee mug was shot with a Macro lens two inches away from the Panavision camera, which contained Fuji 250 film, to give it a larger appearance. "We ran into some grain issues on the high-speed photography," says Most. "The high-speed film was too grainy for green screen shots, so for all the effects sequences we switched to 500, the lower-



All of life is a search, as seen on Fox's *Ally McBeal*.

speed film." The elements were then composited in Quantel's Henry.

"We also used Quantel's Henry and Discreet Logic's Inferno and Flame," says Most. "Each system has its separate strength. Henry's strength is its artistic tools. It has great paint tools, and the people resources are a lot greater on Henry," he says. "People gravitate to certain platforms based on their own talents, and I find, in general, that really good Henry artists come from a graphic arts background. They are highly skilled in animation and painting, and Henry really lends itself to that. In Flame and Inferno, you get more people who are from editing and compositing backgrounds."

Inferno was used for displacement mapping skills, such as Ally imagining her breasts growing to an enormous size, and her secretary's head blowing up like a balloon to portray her over-sized ego. "We wanted the fantasy sequences to be funny and quick—to make a point and move on," says Robin.

Jennifer Vacchio

Sign of the Times

When director Markus Horak and Flame artist David DiNisco, ViewPoint Studios, Boston, were asked to create an open for *Science Times*, a show airing on The Learning Channel, they were faced with the challenge of taking viewers from point A to point B in 20 seconds. "We wanted the show open to be interpreted as a journalist or scientist looking for information, so we had to give it a variety of topics that science covers, in addition to engineering, physics, and archeology," says Horak. An old African mask was used to portray archeology;

3-D objects, like computer screens and menus, were used to portray computer sciences; and a mannequin was used as a representation of eastern medicine.

All elements were shot on Digital Betacam, using an animation stand, against green screen. The live-action objects were then brought into Discreet Logic's Flame, where they were all heavily painted and color-corrected. "A lot of the objects, like the African Mask were old and dirty-looking, not to mention we shot on video, which drained the color from the objects," says DiNisco. "Flame allowed us to bring in a lot of color, and it also added a film grain to the sequence so that the elements didn't appear to be shot on video."

Using a plug-in for Flame, Sapphire Sparks, provided the creative team with glows, glints, random edits, and a time warp RGB effect. "This open was one big composite," says DiNisco. "The Flame was fast in processing and allowed us to bring everything together for one continuous story."

Jennifer Vacchio



An African mask was used to portray archeology in an open created by ViewPoint Studios for The Learning Channel's *Science Times*.