Layer Masks

Matting is made much simpler by using layer masks. A layer mask is a grayscale image that is associated with a Photoshop layer in the following sense: the RGBA channel values of the layer are multiplied by the value of the mask at each pixel before the layer is composited with the other layers. In other words, you can use layer masks to create transparent and opaque regions of an element, then let Photoshop's built in **over** operator do the rest of the work.

Here's one way of creating a layer mask:

- Make a selection of the part of the layer that you want to be opaque using whatever selection tool you want.
- Make sure the layer you want to add the mask to is the current working layer (click on it).
- Go to the **Layer -> Add Layer Mask** menu and click on **Reveal Selection**.

This creates a new layer mask based on your selection and associates it with the layer. You can now stack other layers below this one (using the Layers window) and see them through the transparent regions you created.

Editing layer masks then becomes a process of painting either in black or in white (or shades of gray).

To edit a layer mask:

- It is always helpful when painting layer masks to have a bright colored layer directly below the layer you're editing. Make one now by creating a new layer and filling it with a good color. Then, you can drag that layer so that it is below the layer you want to edit.
- Click on the layer mask icon of the layer you want to edit in the layers window. This enables layer mask editing mode. If you click on the image icon, you will be editing the RGB values of the layer instead of the mask.
- When you are in layer mask editing mode, you can only select gray colors. For the time being, pretend you want to erase more of your layer. This would entail painting with black. So pick the color black, then select the paintbrush tool and an appropriate brush from the brushes window.
- Paint away. As you paint, you should see the bright background revealed through your layer wherever you paint.
- If you go too far, you can switch to the color white and try painting some more. This will reveal more of your layer.
- Brush choice is probably the most important thing when you are rotoscoping like this. You want a brush with as soft an edge as the edge is in your original image. Switch brushes when you're done with the detail work so you can fill in the bigger areas more easily.