

Creating a Character Set

by Gary Wu

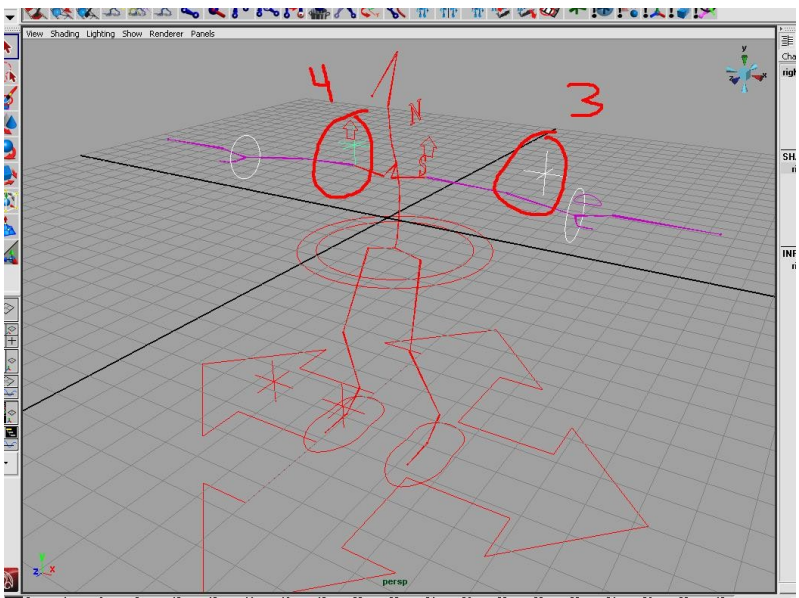
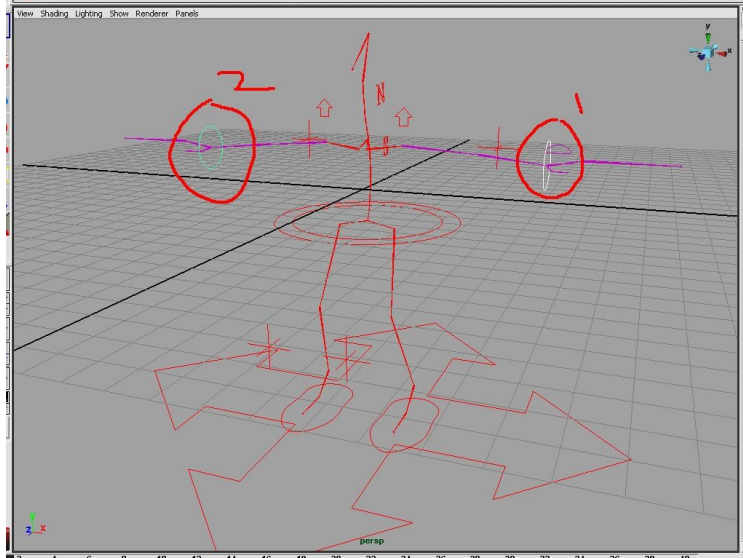
So now that you have your controller rig all set up, let's create a character set to assist in the animation process.

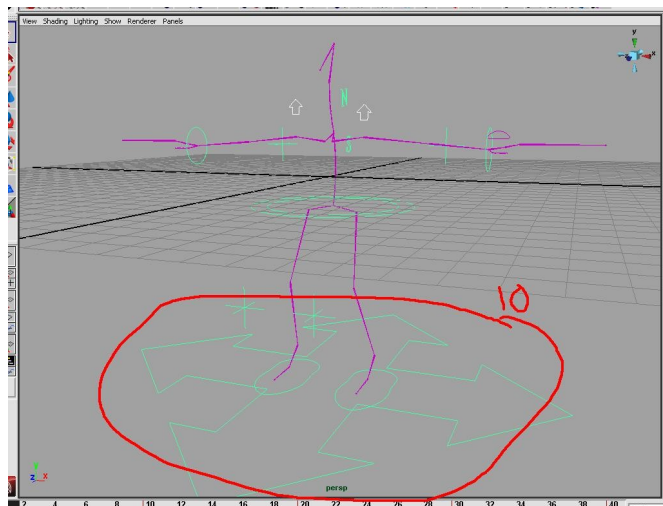
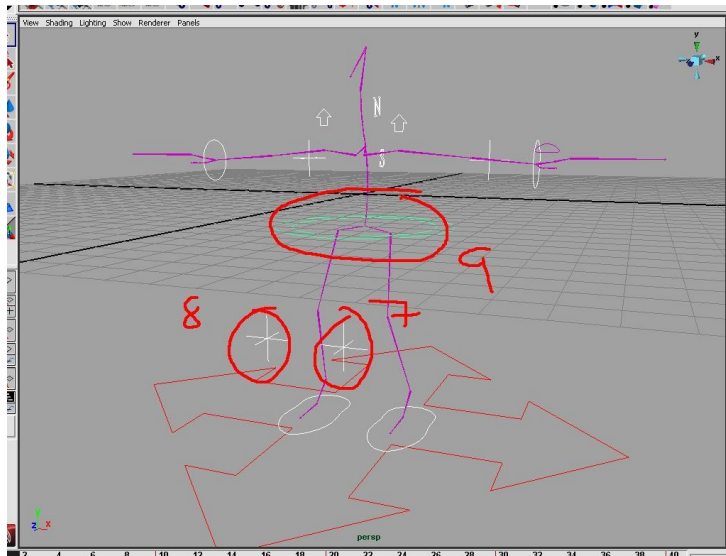
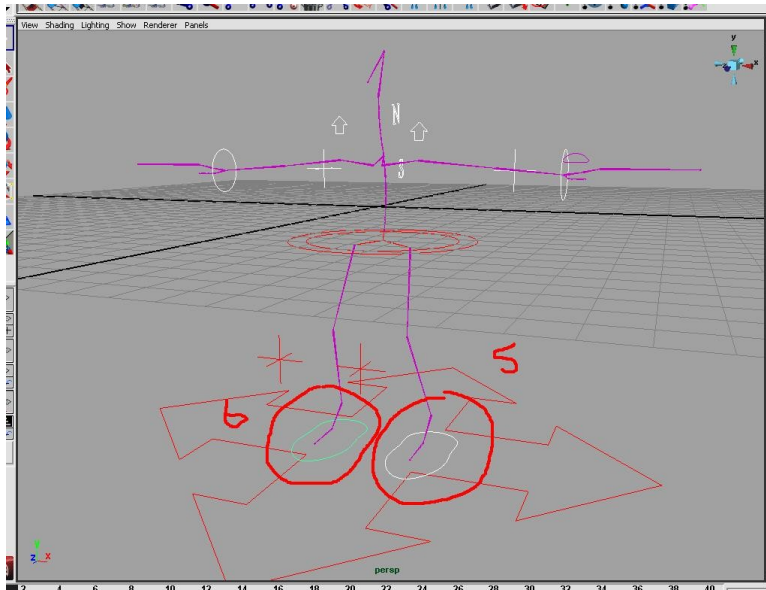
So exactly what is a character set? A character set is pretty much an aggregate of all the controllers on your rig. This helps organize and minimize the amount of objects and keyframes you will have to deal with when animating your character.

For example, say you wanted to make your character walk. With just controllers, you would have to set a keyframe for each individual controller on the arms, legs, hips, and head. This means for every pose you want to hit, you would have that many keyframes to edit and manipulate. Tracking these keyframes down can be very tedious. An alternative to that would be to create a character set. Since all of your controllers are contained in the character set, you would only have to move the controllers into position individually and set a SINGLE, individual keyframe for your character set. This makes editing the curves of specific controllers in the graph editor a lot easier.

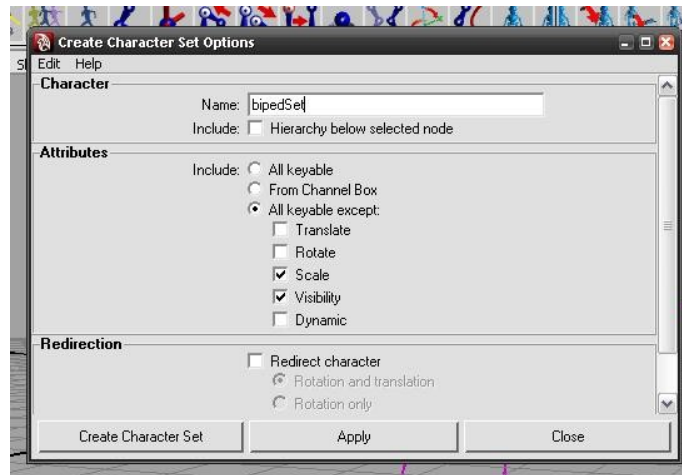
Great, now that you have some background info, let's start!

Open your controller rig file. Now starting from the outside in, select your controllers individually. By outside in, I mean choose the controllers lowest in the hierarchy and move your way up top. A rule of thumb would be to check if you clicked on a controller, and a controller you have not selected yet becomes highlighted, you know you selected the wrong controller. A simple order would be as follows: left_arm manip, right_arm manip, left_arm_pv, right_arm_pv, head_manip, left_leg manip, left_leg_pv, right_leg manip, right_leg_pv, hip_manip, then end with master_manip. No matter what your sequence is, you should always end with your master_manip since all your controllers should be parented under this manip anyway. Some sample images:

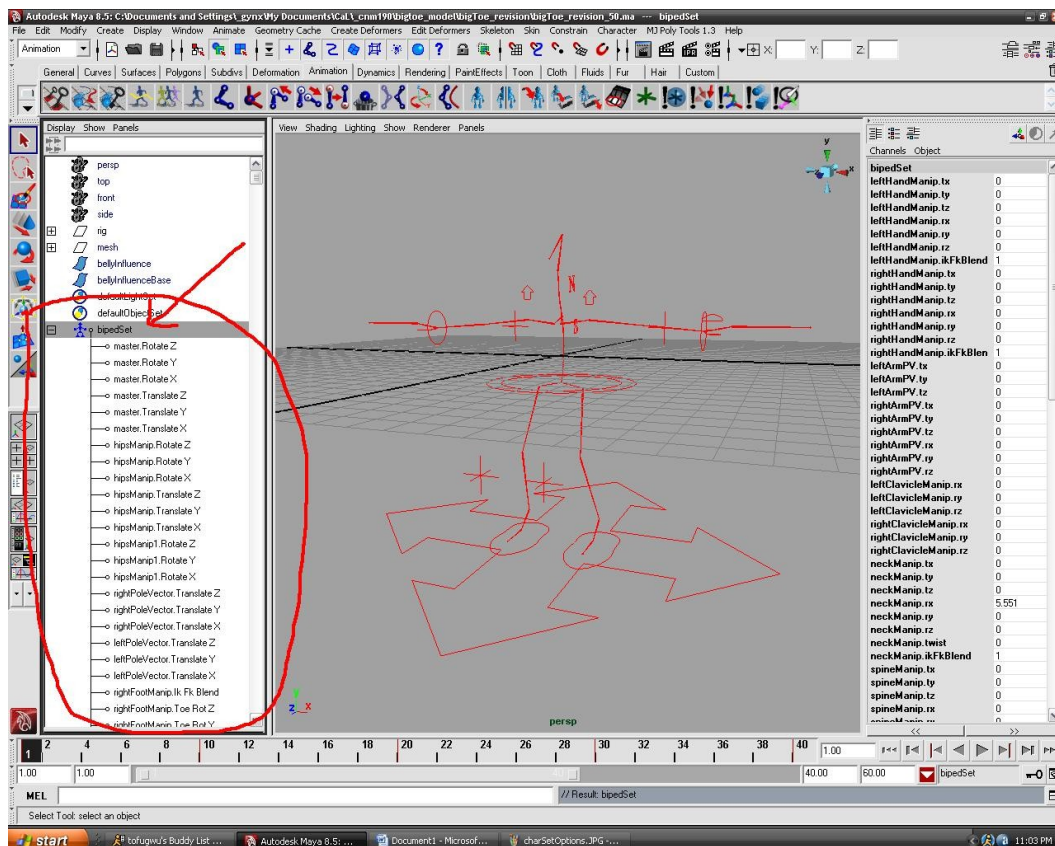




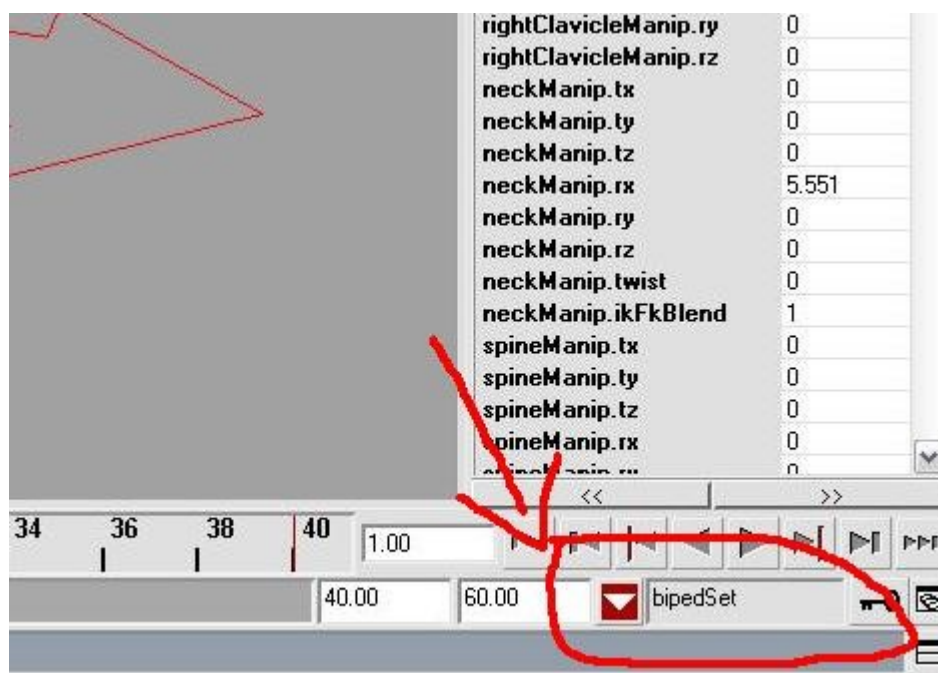
Great, now that you have all your controllers individually selected from the outside in, (make sure you are in the animation taskbar) go to the top menu and choose Character>Create Character Set>(option box)



Name your character set in the “Name” field. I named mine bipedSet. The default setting should be good and then click “Create Character Set.” After you have created your character set, open up your Outliner and make sure you see the name of your character set in there along with an icon of a little blue man (or Smurf Man!). If you expand this (by hitting the plus button), you should notice that all of your controllers and their keyable attributes should appear in this massive list under your character set.



Also notice that in the bottom right corner of your Maya screen, you should see a little red and white down arrow followed by the name of your character set.



This is where you specify (if you have multiple character sets) which character set you are dealing with.

As a side note, if you select your character set and open up your Graph Editor, you should notice this giant list of keyable attributes underneath this set. What's great about this is that if you select an individual controller on the screen, you can isolate that controller's attributes and edit it, and it will update in the character set (this is assuming you have keys set on your character set already). Also notice that when you actually do set a key for your character set, it sets an individual key for ALL of your controllers. So you can move all of your controllers and just set one key for all of them to register. If this doesn't really make sense, I don't blame you. It's easier to just play around with your character set to see what I mean.