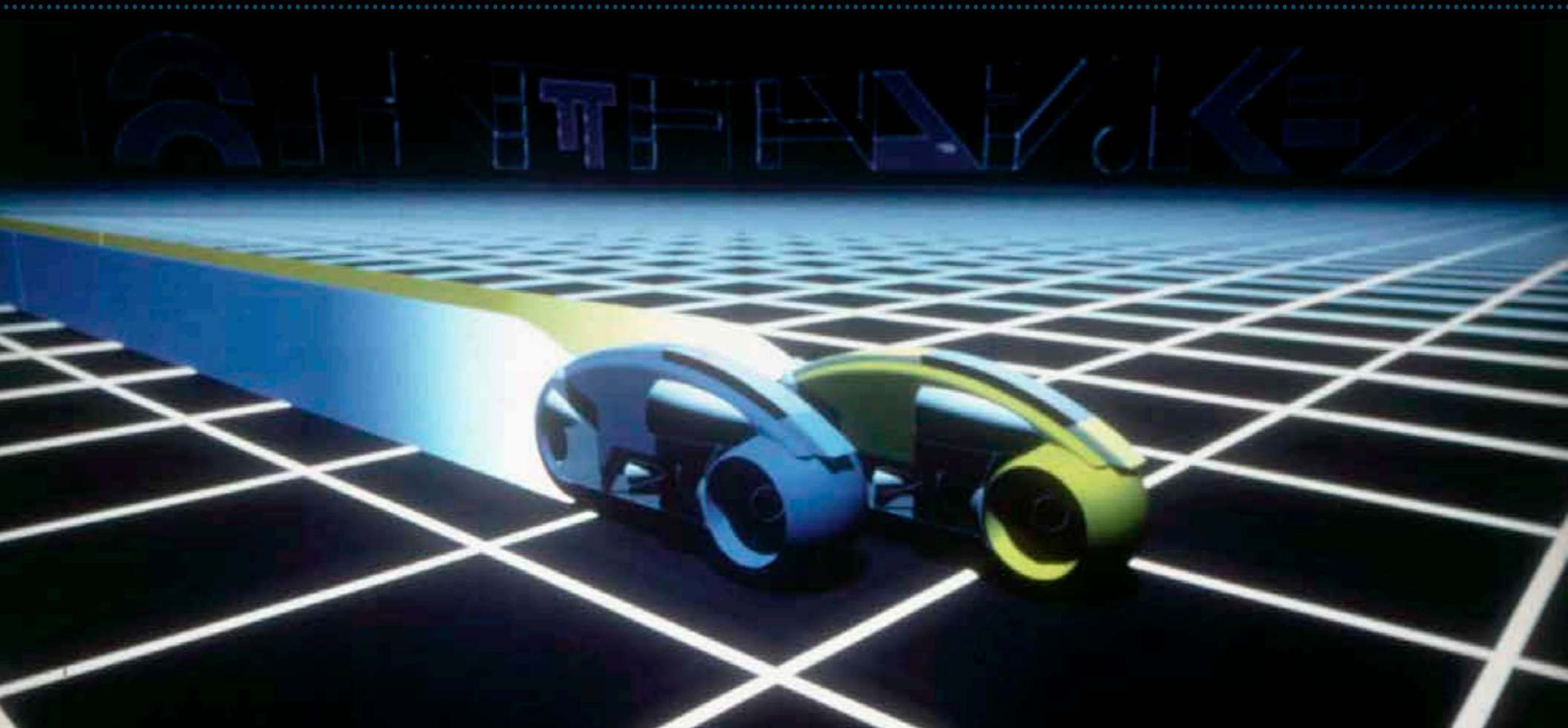


OPPOSITE AND RIGHT Alan Bradley/Tron (Bruce Boxleitner) on a light cycle in *Tron* (1982), directed by Steve Lisberger. Though the film was produced by Disney, four outside companies were assigned the CG-animated portions of the movie. The light cycle at upper right was created by MAGI/Synthavision. Triple-I contributed a couple of complex, spaceship-like vehicles, including the graceful Solar Sailer (left). Robert Abel and Associates was responsible for the key scene in which the movie's principal protagonist, Flynn (Jeff Bridges) enters the electronic domain (lower left).

For scenes "inside" the computer, the actors wore white costumes overlaid with a grid of black lines suggesting computer circuits. They were then filmed in a black limbo so that — except for their faces — they photographed as a monochrome web of vectorlike marks against a black background. Each frame of this footage was reshot on an animation stand while being lit from behind, so that the characters would seem to glow as if illuminated from within.



Space Invaders and *Pac-Man*, and so were a few thousand CG animators and enthusiasts (above).

The inspiration for *Tron* came from a young animator named Steven Lisberger, who, in 1976, was introduced to *Pong*, and at around the same time saw a sample reel from MAGI/Synthavision, the studio that, as previously noted, had produced the first raster-graphics commercial. Lisberger became convinced that it was possible to make a feature-length movie displaying the visual style and energy of video games, and he decided that the way to do this was to combine hand-drawn backlit animation with CG imagery. As he began to shop the idea around, Richard Taylor, from the CG animation company Information International Inc. (Triple-I) suggested that the project could be made far more economically if it was produced with a combination of CG animation and live action. Taylor — who would become the film's computer-effects supervisor — based this suggestion on a clever but essentially simple idea. Lisberger was quickly convinced.

Initially, he and his business partner Donald Kushner hoped to finance the film independently. When that proved impossible, they pitched it to several studios before it was finally taken on by Disney, largely thanks to the enthusiasm of Tom Wilhite, who had a brief but fertile tenure as vice president for creative development, and who, with the help of a test reel produced by Lisberger, convinced the front office that this was a viable product.

There was less enthusiasm in the Disney animation department, where most of the veterans looked on this kind of digital nonsense as a malignant virus threatening the industry. That did not make for a wholesome atmosphere. The old-guard animation establishment could not scupper the project, however, because the animated portions of the movie had been assigned to four outside companies. Triple-I was one; the others were Robert Abel and Associates, MAGI/Synthavision, and Digital Effects, Inc. All four had backgrounds in the production of CG commercials, television logos, and the like, and some of the principals had put in time on feature films. Richard Taylor, for example, had directed visual-effects sequences for *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

The four companies did not collaborate but rather were assigned different tasks in different sequences. Abel's primary contributions were for the titles and the key scene in which the movie's principal protagonist, Flynn (Jeff Bridges) enters the electronic domain, with conventional cinematography giving way