

SIMS MOVIE MAKING WITH APRIL HOFFMAN  
NEXGEN ENGINE COMPARISON  
GAMEDEV CONFERENCE  
MACHINIMA AT FMX  
MEET GAME ART

MACHINIMA SIX





It's summer! Go out and submit your movie!

Folks, this is going to be a hot summer. With so many new festivals popping up that take machinima into their programs as standalone categories, our movies have to prove themselves. Is machinima ready for this?

Last year, we got told that machinima lacks artistic expression (at the Ottawa Animation festival), this year it's time to prove the opposite. With more and more attention coming towards our movies, the demand for high quality production rises. Let's show them what we got. Let's not let them turn machinima into some media-hyped shootingstar that's vanishing as fast as it entered the stage.

This is the time to prove that machinima is well worth the buzz it's been getting lately.

Bitfilm and New York are awaiting your submissions!

Yours,  
Friedrich Kirschner



# The new shape of machinima

It's almost 9 months now since the Sims 2 has officially shipped and we can already see the impact the game has on movie making in a virtual environment.

New, great series are coming up all over the place, most of them featuring character development and animated acting hardly been seen before.

How come this game changes the shape of machinima so much? If you've been into the medium for the last couple of months you could hardly get past them – a whole load of newly released films, some of them the beginnings of series, some of them very music video like, but the majority really representing an enormous amount of all those nice little things that make movies the wonderful thing they are. You see people talk and move their lips, see them dance and -behave- in ways which you've never seen actors in a machinima piece before.

All of a sudden, we experience plotlines that range from -put favorite sitcom name here- to talking heads movies to mystery series.

Sims 2 it seems, gives you the tools to create almost anything you see on TV inside your computer. Do a voiceover, capture it and you're done.

We talked with April Hofmann („The Awakening“- see review in this issue) about her workflow and setup and on how to best use the tools to get what you want.

Hey April, i hope you're fine. Let's talk a bit about your background. Have you been making movies ever since..?

I began making movies in the fall of 2004, shortly after the Sims 2 was released. I had no previous movie making or editing experience, and wasn't even aware that I enjoyed making movies. It was when I stumbled upon the movie section of the Sims 2 website, I was instantly inspired to produce movies as good, if not better, than the ones showcased online. There began the long journey of learning several different editing programs and all the "do's and don'ts" of Sim movie making.

How did you get into machinima?

It was an accident, actually. Although the new movie-making ability in the Sims 2 had been aggressively advertised before its release, I bought the Sims 2 with the intention of only playing the game. Then one day, after a month or so of playing, I decided to visit the Sims 2 website. When I stumbled upon the movie making section, I was immediately inspired by what I saw. I chose to start filming more than playing because it was an outlet for creativity; there was a finished product to be seen (whereas game playing is endless). I also enjoyed the camaraderie and recognition of fellow Sim moviemakers. I've always loved the arts and computers, but the marriage of the two has been the perfect outlet and combination for my abilities and interests.

Did you know that there was a community centered around moviemaking in virtual environments?

I had no idea. Like I said, this entire field and hobby is new to me; but I'm enjoying it very much!

How do you make your movies? Is there a certain workflow you've developed?

In a nutshell, I usually think of an idea first and then write out a script and/or shooting sequence. I work in a very linear fashion in that I film scene by scene, in order. I usually can envision what I want in a scene, so I'll shoot it many different times, from different angles. Or, if I know 'exactly' how I want it to look, then I'll only shoot it enough times for the Sim to cooperate and not 'think' while he's performing the action! I edit as I shoot. So I'll film a sequence, then import it and see if the footage I took is good enough to piece together. And so it goes, one scene at a time.



What do you think is the key benefit of making movies in Sims2?

One advantage I can see in using the Sims, compared to say – first person shooter games – is there is probably a bigger variety of stories that can be told, being that the Sims game is about "life" in general, and not just a conquest to kill an enemy. Also, since Maxis comes out with expansion packs every six months, the movie making options will continue to expand.

Is there a story that you'd love to see told in a game engine?

Yes, and actually, it's the story that I'm telling in my "Awakening" series. I don't want to give the end away, however, so you will just have to wait to see what happens!

Which feature would you add to the Sims game to make it more movie-shooting friendly?

This answer could take up a small novel. There are dozens and dozens of features that I would change to make The Sims more movie-shooting friendly. In fact, it's a dream of mine that Maxis will make an expansion pack just for making movies. The main feature would be that ALL the actions, emotions, reactions, etc. of





a Sim would be available at command. Basically, complete control over every movement of the Sim. It is very time consuming to have to set up scenarios between Sims (or an object) to get them to do a certain action. Half the time it's not quite right, and the other times they 'think' which produces a "thought bubble", ruining your shot. Along with that (and many other changes and additions), I would want more flexibility and control over the camera.

Thanks April for letting us know!

# The Sims 2, Movie Making Tips

By WelshRogue

## Introduction

This short Tutorial has been created to give people brand new to the Movie Making Game that is the Sims 2 a foot up without the need to read the rather large tutorials that other Websites provide. While the others give you more depth, this one should provide you with fast answers right off the mark, so lets get started.

## Writing the Script

This one is where you get to go nuts. Get all your Ideas down on paper First. What kind of film do you want to do? The Sims 2 allows you to do so much but be warned, that anything outside of the standard layout could be very difficult to achieve. By all means, but adventuring but if this is your first project, I would suggest something a bit simpler. I chose a typical Drama/Sit Com style because the Sims work well with that kind of stuff. I write a script the way I wanted to do the Drama that I am working on and did it outside of the boundaries of the Sims 2, then I went back and altered it with what I could and could not do. Best way to write a script is to play the Sims 2 so you know what the engine is capable off, but at the end of the day, this is totally up to you.

## Creating the Set

Depending on the Scale of your project you may want to design a brand new neighbourhood for this. Take your Time. Design all the little features in the Area, build each individual house (Tip: You can package houses from other Neighbourhoods and use them in yours) and then film all your Neighbourhood shots NOW before you go any further. This is to avoid seeing the Plumb-bobs on the houses. Remember that House Design is depending on what you're filming. I can't really help you out there, but try and avoid too many wall hangings that might block your camera, and make sure there is some open space for characters to act in.

## Creating the Actors

Firstly, DO NOT Create the Sims in the Game until AFTER you have used the Body Shop. The Body Shop is important as you may need to clone Sims later, plus its great for making a few bits of custom content that will make your movie unique. After you are done creating your cast, make them in game, selecting the template from the character creation screen. (Tip: It's always good to create an extra Sim to hold the Plumb-bob while filming which you can hide out of the camera view)

Now, here comes the difficult part. I tend to make all my characters be 'Knowledge' Aspiration as that's the easiest one to control. Also, make your Sims personalities be equal in all areas, again this is for control. Now you have two options available, if you are going to shoot scenes in multiple Residential lots, you are going to need to clone the family as many times as there are houses you need to use. So for example, if you want to use 3 houses, you should clone your family 3 times. This is because sims can visit lots. With this method, when you go to another lot, all of your actors are there waiting.

## Setting the Scene

Right, you have designed your set, hired your actors and made sure they are available on all the lots there needed on. Most people think this is the most difficult part of making the movie, but it's not when you know what your doing. As I said above, it's all about Control. Sims always have these desires to run off and do what they want and they can be VERY difficult to please, but these tips will help you keep control of the situation.

Firstly, turn Free Will OFF. This can be found in the Settings Menu while in game. This will stop your Sims from moving around so you can keep them in the places you want them when filming. Next thing you need to do is apply the 'boolprop' cheat which is key to most movie control. This cheat will allow you to modify Need Bars, modify skill bars and even relationship bars. This will make it much easier for you to perhaps spark a fight, for a character to do Yoga or maybe even faint. More information on this cheat later.

You will likely have already done this but using a cash giving cheat such as 'kaching' or 'motherlode' will make it a lot easier to get the props you need for your movie. Two more cheats you will need are 'ageing' and 'moveObjects'. Ageing will keep consistency with your characters throughout your movies and Moving Objects (which includes Sims) will also help when you're after that special shot. All Cheat Codes and their explanations will be found at the end of this document.

P.S If you want to get rid of the 'Balloon Bubbles' above your Sims heads for your movie, download the 'No Balloon Patch' from <http://www.simlogical.com>.

## Shooting the Movie

Now that you're geared up with the right stuff and have all the tools at your finger tips, its time for lights, camera and action. So let's go in that order. Firstly, Lights. Yes its picky, but depending on which lights you use and their positioning, you can make some good lighting effects. Fireplaces in the middle of the night for example, are a great effect.

Camera is nice and easy. Press 'V' to start filming and again to stop. But try and keep your angles good. Press the 'Tab' Key to go into Camera Man Mode, so you can zoom down to the Sims and get the best shots. Also, make sure when you shoot with buildings that you bring the walls up. I can't stand watching movies when people are standing outside and I can see the indoor furniture. Also try and hide the gaps above the walls by lowering the camera a bit. Make sure that you make good use of the Pause Button and remember to use your 'Plumb-bob' holder Sim we made at the start so he can take the Plumb-bob outside of the Camera View.

Don't forget to choose the Video Quality and Size before you start shooting. On Some machines, its set at a rather poor quality to start off with, but don't go making High Resolution shots if you don't have the HDD or Webspace to store them, when you start taking large amounts of shots it can get a bit excessive and flood your Hard Drive. I purchased a 120GB Drive, purely for Sims 2

Video Capture. Also note another important Filming factor, SOUND. I film with the sound on, but I turn off Music and Voices. As I use Voice Acting in my movies and provide my own music when needed, but the game captures the Sound Effects, so I don't need to add them in later.

Finally, ACTION. With all that information above, you should now be able to make a pretty spiffy movie. Get your Sims into position, mess around with them, and shoot every shot you can and then piece it all together later, which now brings me onto my last section.

## Editing the Video

Now that you have shot your pieces, you need to put it all together. This is where the magic happens. For those with Windows XP Home or Professional, you will already be blessed with a Free Video Editing Software called Windows Movie Maker. I myself use this, because im too cheap to buy the more professional and expensive stuff, but it does the job so there's no problems.

It's pretty self explanatory. Remember to put Titles up on it, displaying your movies name and if you want, add the 'Made with the Sims 2' Video as I do, which you can download from the Sims 2 Website. Once your happy with your finished product, seal it up to WMV Format (this is supported with Windows Movie Maker) and ship it off to the Web. Remember if it's fewer than 10MB you can publish it to the Sims 2 Website in you're Sim Page.

Just a quick note on Voice acting as well. If you do get Voice Actors, WAV is a good format to get the sound files in on, but if you're using Windows Movie Maker, Voice and Music don't go well together, so you need to keep them separate, otherwise it gets a bit messy. You can use the Windows Sound Recorder to make your Voice Files, or ask other people to do voice acting and then send you the files through the Web or Email. (Tip: If you're asking people to send you Sound Files over the Web, then make sure you get the sound files first, before you do any filming. Traditionally, filming and putting the sound in at the same time works great, but in some situations its just not possible, so your better off taking the sound and then getting the Sims to sync up with the sounds)

## An Ending and the Codes

Well, that's about it. The rest of it that's not mentioned here I probably can't answer but there is no better way to learn then to play the game itself. The Sims can do some outrageous things and I feel that anything is possible, especially as more expansion packs are released.

As promised, here are the Cheat Codes that will help you Develop your Movie:

Press 'Shift+Ctrl+C' while in Game to bring up the Console. Then Enter the bellow codes.

'kaching' – Gives 1000 cash.

'motherlode' – Gives 50,000 cash.

'ageing on/off' – Turns Ageing On/Off.

'MoveObjects on/off' – Enables moving Sims On/Off.

'boolprop testingcheatsenabled true/false' – Allows you to adjust Needs/ Skills Bars in Game. (Note: This cheat must be activated in Neighbourhood View)

Happy Movie Making!

-Elliot Roberts

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WelshRogue (Director & Editor)

Game Engines: The Sims 2



# When i try to get a reasonable definition of life,

i realise there is no such thing. You find all sorts of biological theories in most encyclopedia. Apart from that, science classifies life through certain properties: reaction, agility, mortality, inheritance, reproduction, growth and differentiation, individuality and evolution through mutation and selection.

So that's life, heh?

I personally would love to know if „the Sims“ are life-forms themselves as well...

Is there some sort of artificial intelligence that does not just simulate life but actually „lives“? Do the Sims need the right to be protected from thousands of sadistic human users and their experiments?

Can we shoot the very first documentary about artificial life with the „Sims 2“ game?

I set up an experiment:

I start Sims2 and set up a series of tests. My 8 test-Sims are being randomly generated, 4 men and 4 women.

They're all adults and do not have any sort of family relationship to each other.

Next, I create an environment in which they find everything they need to live: food (in form of an oven and a fridge), a bed for each of them to sleep in, a toilet and a room, well, for reproduction. Besides, there is a garden and a couch as a sort of meeting point.



My theory:

If the Sims succeed to stay alive through a couple of generations and reproduce without any interference from my side whatsoever – a lot of the above mentioned properties would have been met.

So i let the sims move in and just use the mouse for surveillance of their vital functions. And it seems to work. The sims grow interested in their new environment, spread and interact with each other. There's queues in front of the toilet and the mood drops to red. Obviously they seem to avoid getting into the double bed room with someone from the opposite sex.

I remain silent and do not interfere. All in all it seems to work out. The test-Sims begin building up relationships and changing their environment. I watch how some of them keep house and garden clean and some others love to cook.

One week passed when suddenly there's a fire. The oven catches fire and all the Sims go running in the kitchen, screaming and watching in bare desperation. Though noone really thinks about calling the fire department. Little by little, i see how my Sims, the furniture and the house burns down. Animated death catches the last of my Sims in the toilet. Just after use.

I am shocked.

I keep telling me that my test environment was far from optimal. If you would put a gas oven in a cavemans refuge, it probably would have burned down as well. So i install a fire alarm. It calls the fire department immediately if there's smoke in the kitchen. Together with this, i install a second toilet and a couple more beds.

It seems like the game would sense my plan. In the second test run, the kitchen's burning after only three days. Even though the fire can be put out, it starts breaking out every second day from then on. The life of my Test-Sims circles around their fear of fire. Some of them now even just sit on the floor, weirdly

talking to themselves.

Is my test damaging their psyche? I keep it running. Meanwhile, let's talk a bit more about life's properties.

An online forum reads: „Life needs a physical base and cannot solely consist of information“.

My harddrive's data is physically present through its magnetic drive surface, isn't it?

When the sims evolve in my test house, the surface of my harddrive changes as well. You could talk about a physical base here as well, even if it's very different from our own.

I read furthermore that time is a non-controlable constant for lifeforms as such. Time is constant? I can halt time in „the Sims“, accelerate or decelerate or even save your game and come back later.

Though the sims cannot do that on their own. They have no idea how much time had passed between my saving and loading.

Back to the experiment. The firebrigades comes and goes on a daily basis now to prevent the worst of things to happen. My Sims have real psychological problems. It even seems to disable their desire for reproduction. There are a couple of friendships, though no love relationship whatsoever developed. Additionally, the fridge is empty because noone was able to refill it. Some of them turn to me, almost seem to beg for help – do something!. But i won't.

They have to make it on their own.

The very first lifeforms didn't have someone to refill the fridge either.

And the Sims have more than a way to do so themselves. I even installed a telephone to call for a pizza. But they just don't get it. So there's already some of them fainting and collapsing. It hurts – i raise the game's speed.

When switching back to normal, the last female Sim just starved in front of the empty fridge.





It was a failure.

In an interview with Sims Mastermind Will Wright, i read that the artificial intelligence for the Sims was too elaborate during game development. The Sims would have been able to get along just fine all by themselves, become pregnant and raise kids. But because the player was intended to be a necessary part of the game, the developers put in some „mistakes“, making it impossible for the sims to get along by themselves. So it is not my fault.

The developers have created virtual life – and then erased it for the sake of playability.

I am truly shocked.

Then i think of the experiment again and another thought comes to mind.

Am I god? From the Sims' point of view?

Don't we human believe in a creator as well, observing our ways and more or less subtly changing how things develop? Don't we raise our hands to the sky and plea for help in desperate situations, just like the Sims do? Aren't many of us believing that there's a god that has all our life laid out just in front of him, while we are slowly moving right through? Maybe the game is more of a „god simulation“ than a „life simulation“...

Meanwhile, i wait for Sims3 and hope that there's an optin that reads „Turn off bad AI behavior“. Then i'll start a club for protection of the new species and begin writing letters to the government to disallow the AI mistakes once and for all. I will encourage everyone not to make any strange experiments with those creatures. As soon as you start the game you will be in responsibility for your sims just like you're responsible for your pet at home. And i will pray to god and repent for my shallow experiments in Sims2.

by Klaus Neumann, [machinimadeutschland.de](http://machinimadeutschland.de)  
translated by fk

# Machinima for the (game development) masses!

The academy of machinima arts and sciences showed presence at this years GDC with Paul Marino giving a well received presentation of Fountainhead's new Machinimation2 Beta Software.

The GDC was crowded, that's for sure. With almost all „big names“ showing technological breakthroughs and discussing gaming and game design, the list of lectures seemed endless and made you want to clone yourself to see everything at once.

Having in mind who was speaking at the second floor, surprisingly many people stopped by the Nvidia booth to hear and watch a presentation that had not so much to do with games but uses their technology.

The Machinimation2 Software works on top of id software's Doom3, giving you all your beloved machinima tools in your next generation engine of choice.





Though still beta, the tools seemed very straightforward to use and in a couple of minutes, we had our space marine being hunted down by an evil, flame-throwing imp and a smooth camera flythrough of the whole scene.

If your familiar with Machinimation you already know how things work.

The Machinimation2 Beta not only uses Doom3 as its engine, it also uses all of its assets, leaving you with a marine as your main character.

The way you shoot your movies basically follows three steps. First, you fly through your level and search for a place where the action takes place. You can load any doom3 level you want as a setting.

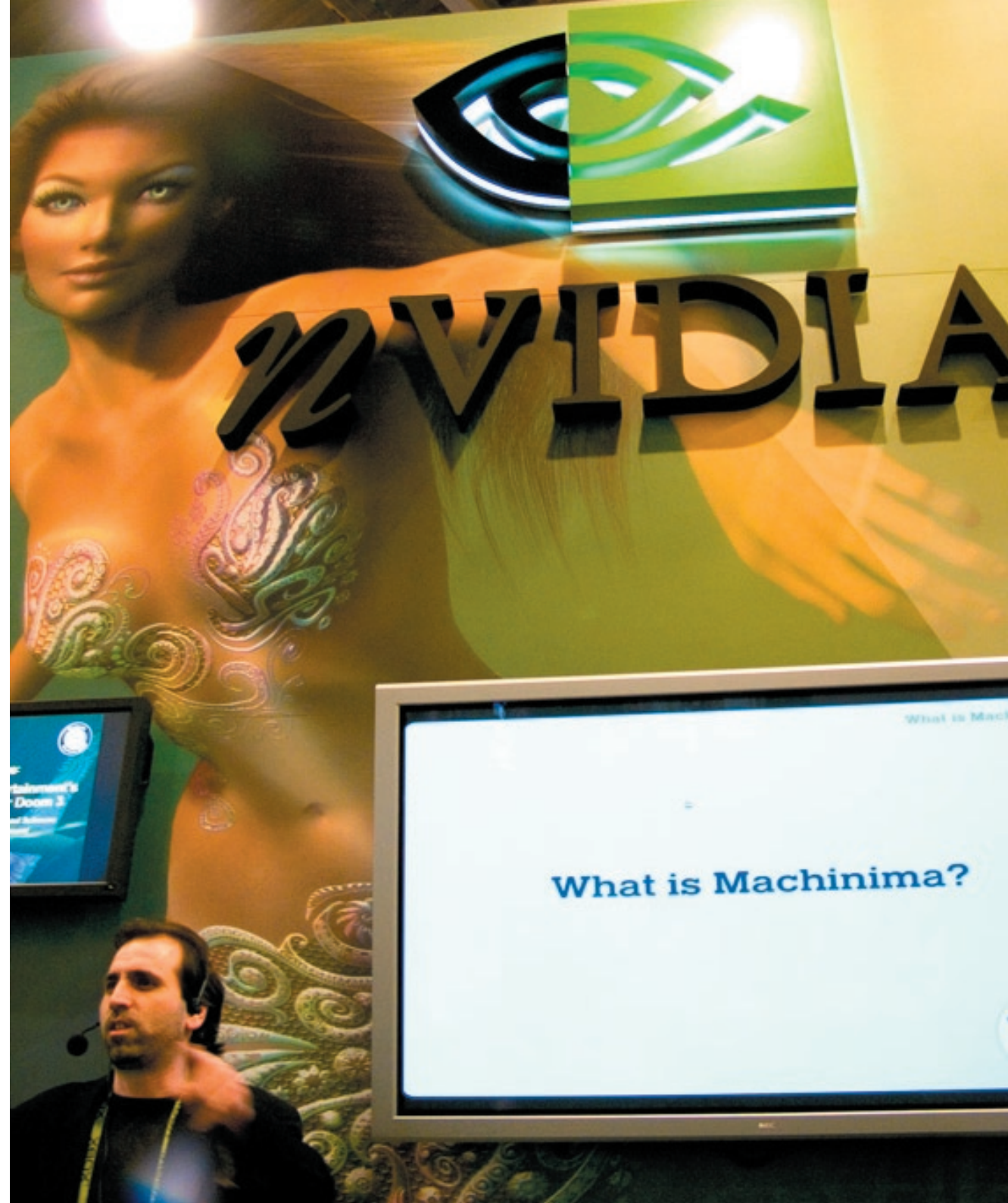
If you're satisfied, you start acting out your characters by creating a new recording of your character.

What this means is, you record your actions in-game either from first person or third person perspective. Once you're finished, you can add other characters and record actions for them as well.

If you're fully satisfied with your acting, you'll eventually add cameras, lights (boy, how sweet they look) and titles to assemble your action to a movie.

Well, i guess we are not the only one's now that can't wait to get our hands on a full working version of this full blown machinima making toolset.

Now just let me tell you that not all of us are favoring that one graphics processors manufacturer...



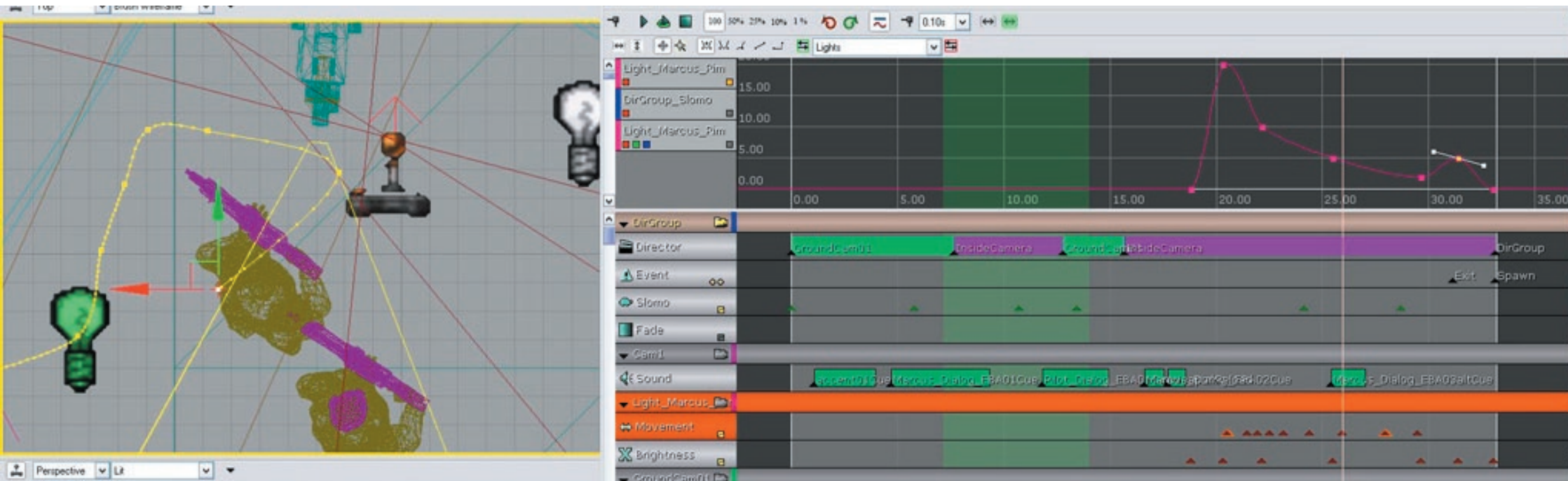




# Matinee for Real

The new unreal matinee tool might be just the way you wanted to set up your cameras from the very beginning. Basically, it's a keyframing tool, meaning that it can be used to control the position and rotation of a number of objects over time.





## how it looks

It looks pretty much like a standard non-linear editing GUI and is integrated into Epic's new scripting system called Kismet. You read that right, it has its own GUI, so you better start saving some money for that extra monitor you're going to need to make Unreal Machinima. Fitting the level editor, Kismet, Matinee and the asset browser all in one window will become rather difficult.

## how it works

If you're familiar with programs like After Effects or Shake you'll feel pretty much at home with the new Matinee tool. Setting keyframes to change position/rotation of a camera, the FOV or a light is as simple as clicking in the timeline.

Plus, you can't just set keyframes, you can change the blending behavior from linear to Bezier or other types of curves you never really want to know the names of.

Also, if you prefer to control your cameras without looktargets, the guys from Epic added a Free Camera that makes it a lot easier to frame your shots. Just set the starting position of your camera, place a keyframe, set the end position, place a keyframe and that's it.

Of course you can trigger events like that as well.

It's so easy you really wonder why they didn't do it in the first place...



## how it's gonna blow your mind

As said before Matinee is more than just a camera editing module. You can keyframe almost every parameter that comes to mind. Emitters for example are fully keyframeable, giving you a lot more options to create the stunning particle effects you want.

Also, the matinee sequences can be copied and applied to other objects as well.

But one thing that really make so much sense is the ability to scrub through animations. If you insert an animation in matinee, you can check what it looks like straight from within matinee, moving the timeslider back and forth and then adjust your scene accordingly.

All matinee keyframed objects can be viewed instantly in the editor.

## how disappointing

Of course there's a couple of things matinee can not do. It is no non-linear editing solution.

It's most obvious drawback though, has not really so much to do with matinee itself.

Moving your actors from point A to B is still something that is done in Kismet and not in matinee. So even though you place your cameras and cuts in matinee, the commands for your digital Actors are placed in a different way, using Epics scripting tool „Kismet“.

Or think of physics. We have all seen the gorgeous demonstration video that shows unreal3's physics engine in action. But obviously, none of those things can be predetermined and thus, none of it can be controlled in matinee.

## so...?

The next generation unreal engine doesn't just deliver the most beautiful real-time graphics a screen has displayed to date, it does come with very powerful tools to ease your way from the first idea to the finished movie.

The next generation matinee tools will finally enable people to easily assemble their movies like they imagined them to be.



# A thing called gameArt

The second Entermultimedia festival for new media art was one of the first art festivals to include machinima as part of their exhibition.

A selection of machinima movies was shown amongst pieces of game Art, ballet performances and seemingly strange sound concerts.

Did machinima fit in there?

The audience's reactions to the movies was mixed, though the term machinima was surprisingly wide spread.

There was no doubt though, that machinima could be recognized as a visually pleasing new form filmmaking.

The most apparent difference between the game art exhibit and the movies was the content though. While game art focused mostly on a critical debate about games and their argueable gameplay mechanics and relations to the real



world, machinima has a more naive, or open minded approach to using the medium as a form of artistic expression.

So? Machinima is not yet a medium of critique. There's only very few movies that really try to discuss the games they're made in on a serious level.

So what about that game art thing? Can we learn something from the way people that call themselves „artist“ approach their content? The site [selectparks.net](http://selectparks.net) offers some insight to the widespread field of gameart and gives some news coverage of what's going on. While browsing through the content, you may at first feel slightly disappointed. Game art, as far as I found out is a very abstract, concept based artform. Sometimes, the game itself, or the actual playing of the game is by far less important than the original idea behind the modification. The concept, the text that goes with the art and the thoughts that are projected on the fragment of actual

created art pieces you see.

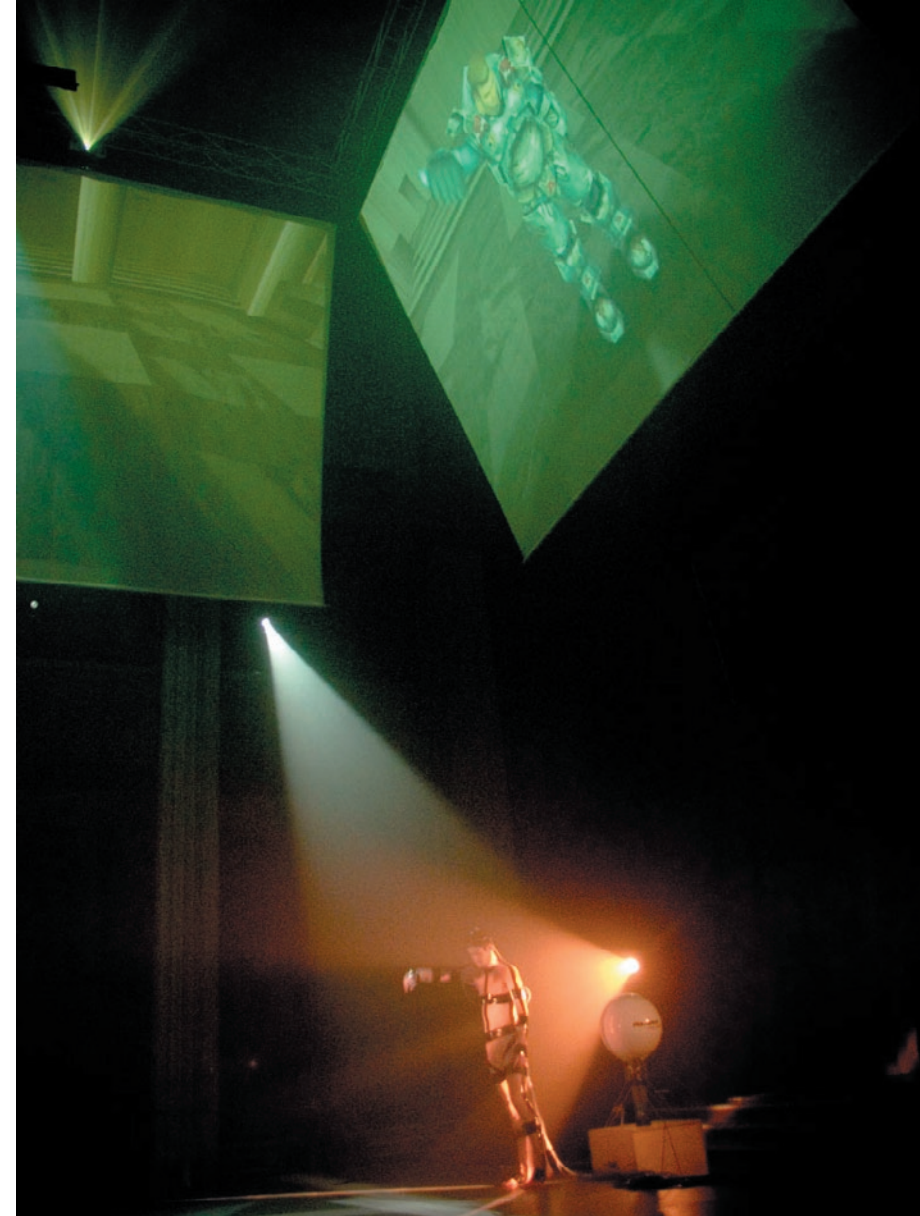
It seems strange at first to really think machinima could learn something from game art. There's only few pieces that really use the technology of games to full extend. A lot of pieces look rather uninteresting and most of the time you just don't get the point. But there's one thing about game art that fascinated me beyond the bad visual representation and mediocre technical implementation. Game art is mostly made for people outside the actual gaming world. The thoughts and concepts i found in game art seemed strange to me at first, but when i thought a bit more about it, they were just ideas that came from a whole new world that lies far beyond our own game-knowledge universe. Game Art seriously has much more real-world approach in it than machinima has right now.





We're still thinking too much inside the game. Maybe that's because gaming has become an ubiquitous part of our lives and we're unable to see with the eyes of someone who doesn't know what a polygon is, or a texture.

Game art, as naive as it might seem in the first place, viewed with our own cultural context, can transform into something more elaborate, more sophisticated if you expand your thoughts beyond the gaming culture and into the world outside.



# Bringing realtime together

The 10th fmx conference in Stuttgart, Germany, was bringing together demosceners and machinima movie makers to discuss this new hype thing called realtime. And guess what, we're not as far apart as it might seem.





Doing a contest and giving out prizes always helps to elevate the importance of a new medium, and so did the realtime film festival at the fmx. Embedded in the context of film, visual effects and 3D animation, this contest showed that the new forms of filmmaking aren't as „underground“ anymore as they would have been just a couple of years ago. With pieces shown in the categories Flash, Demo, Machinima and Cutscenes, the fmx contest showed some of the wide spread uses of realtime movie making.

Though, the really important part of the fmx was the lectures and talks given by machinima filmmakers and demosceners themselves. With enough timespace to really explain what realtime moviemaking is all about, a deeper understanding of the constraints and strengths of shooting movies in virtual reality was given, paving the way for a more accurate perception of what machinima or demos really are. But there was something else.

People from these different ways of dealing with realtime rendering met and talked to each other, breaking barriers and finding links between their mediums. Is machinima really so much different from demomaking? Yes and No. Of course, demos require a lot more coding and even on the content side, they differ a lot. While machinima movies most of the time try to transport a dramatic storyline, demos are very much focused on showing off the skill of the democrew in coding, graphics and sound.

But even demos have a dramatic arc. And just so do machinima movies rely on their representation.

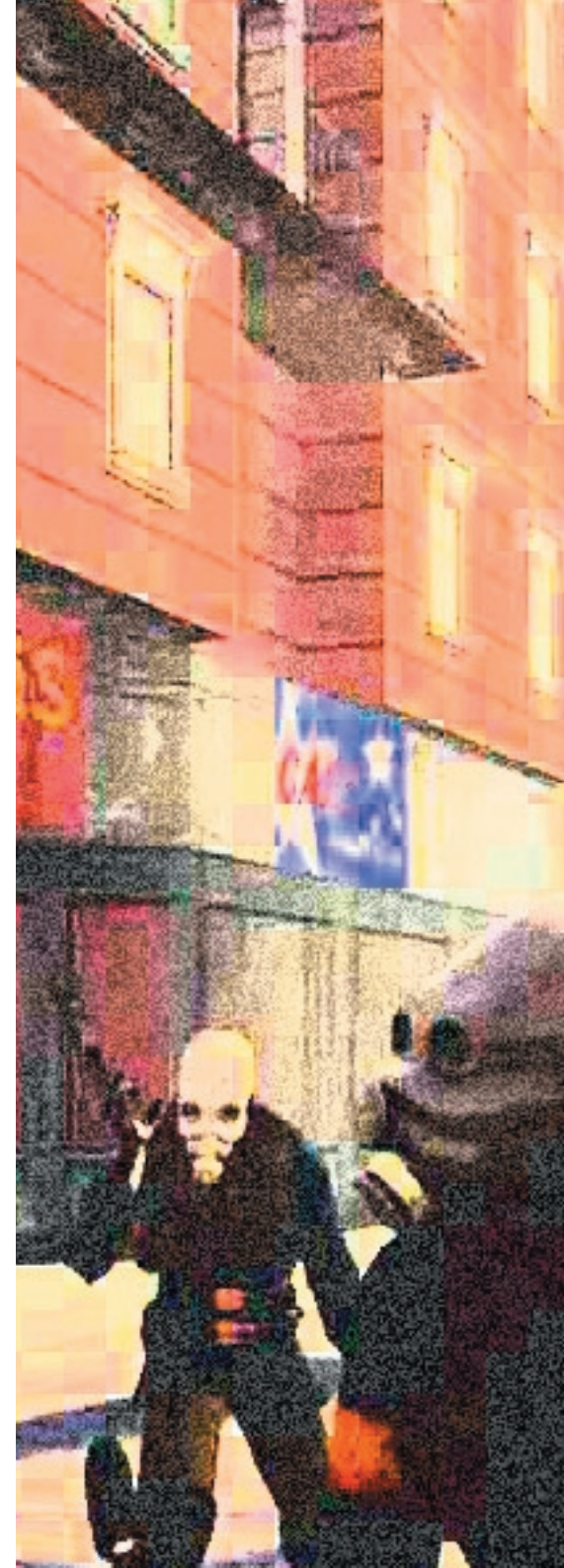
We're not that far from another. And we shouldn't fear to look at each other in respect and see the links that realtime is building between the demoscene and our medium.

Thank you fmx, for establishing a new showroom and a new place for discussion and progress.



comparing  
Doom3,  
HalfLife2  
and FarCry

...machinima style





# Doom3

Basic Tutorial site:	<a href="http://www.doom3world.org">www.doom3world.org</a>
technical Possibilities:	huge
Beginner friendly:	through machinimation2 – yes on itself – no
NoGunAnimations:	no
Animation possible:	game moves.
Actor Scripting:	difficult.
Level editing:	great. Accurate visual representation of final build. No build times. Intuitive lighting
Setting up the tools:	hard
Complexity:	huge
Coding possibilities:	great. Parts of the Source in C++
GameArt useable:	in SciFi/Horror movies.
Documentation:	<a href="http://www.iddevnet.com/doom3/">http://www.iddevnet.com/doom3/</a>
upsides:	real-realtime editing. Complexity
downsides:	complexity, huge need for 3rd party animation tools

What machinimag thinks:

Great editor if you're familiar with coding. Loads and loads of possibilities, though, not really beginner friendly if you opt for the „scripting your pawns“ way. Editor works in realtime. No Lightmap baking, no pregame calculations. Great prefab environment for horror movies. Though, very own distinct game structure you have to familiarize yourself with. Video Tutorials a big plus!

# HalfLife2

Basic tutorial site:	<a href="http://www.hl2world.com/wiki/">http://www.hl2world.com/wiki/</a>
technical Possibilities:	huge
Beginner friendly:	Hammer might be familiar to you, but too abstract visual representation.
NoGunAnimations:	yes
Animation possible:	game moves, game animations, FacePoser.
Actor Scripting:	through tools. Easy.
Level editing:	poor. Hammer seems counterintuitive. No texture representation. Long build times.
Setting up the tools:	easy
Complexity:	huge
Coding possibilities:	great. Parts of the Source in C++
GameArt useable:	in Millions of ways.
Documentation:	<a href="http://collective.valve-erc.com/">http://collective.valve-erc.com/</a>
upsides:	FacePoser and DemoSmoother. Lots of tutorials. Full 3D Toolset included.
downsides:	poor level editor.

What machinimag thinks:

HalfLife2 really got the tools. Doing facial animation bound to speech and posing your actors ingame really marks the spot. Recreating your cameras after recording a demo is huge. And having your own state of the art fully functional 3D software package to create your custom characters, Meshes and whatnot sinks the bomb. The only real downside here is the somewhat antique Hammer Editor. God knows why they didn't go for something newer here. God knows if they're doing an update... Community and VideoTutorials a big plus!

# FarCry

Basic tutorial site:	<a href="http://www.crymod.com/">http://www.crymod.com/</a>
technical Possibilities:	huge
Beginner friendly:	accurate visual representation. Realtime editor preview. Full written documentation.
NoGunAnimations:	few
Animation possible:	game moves, game animations.
Actor Scripting:	through Sandbox. Easy.
Level editing:	great. Fully documented Editor. Scripting language LUA. no build times.
Setting up the tools:	easy
Complexity:	medium
Coding possibilities:	medium through LUA. No C++ Source (some Headers though...)
GameArt useable:	for the „Gilligans Island“ machinima series... Sci-Fi indoor. No urban environments.
Documentation:	<a href="http://www.ubi.com/DE/Downloads/Info.aspx?dllId=488">http://www.ubi.com/DE/Downloads/Info.aspx?dllId=488</a>
upsides:	Realtime Editor. LUA Scripting. Full Documentation.
downsides:	small community.

What machinimag thinks:

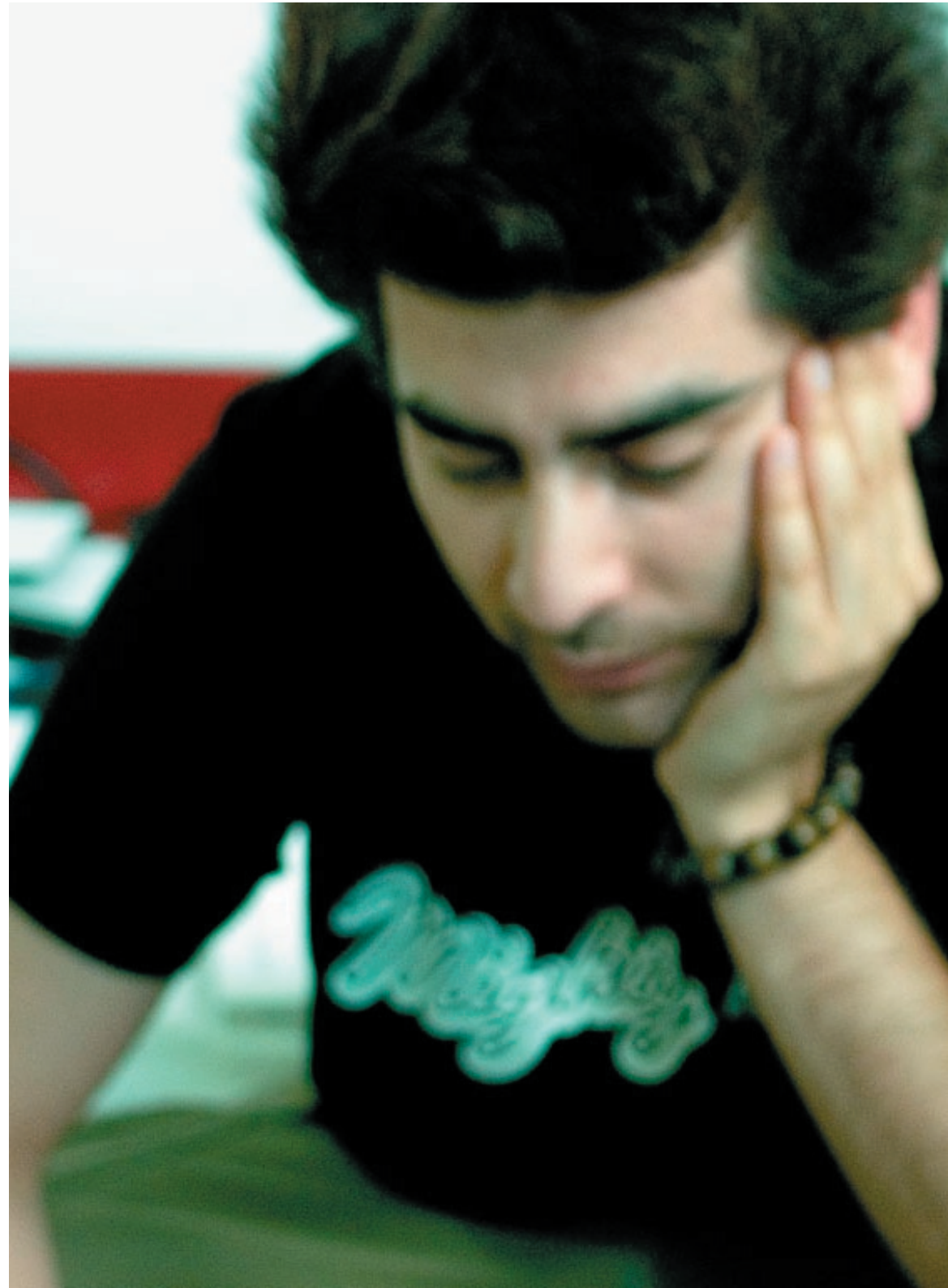
You can argue which nextgen game was in for best graphics last year, but FarCry really looked sweet as hell. With a fully documented Editor at hand, we were expecting some great mods to be made for this visual impact in gaming. Though, the long wait for the final SDK with all the standard exporters and the lack of a no-cost editing solution (though, it has gMax support now) made the community shrink until it was almost not existing anymore.

It's a shame. If you wanna know what's possible with the engine, check out „the project“, a realtime movie from the creators of farcry, at <http://www.ati.com/gitg/promotions/crytek/index.html>.



# “machinima will cease to exist”

we interviewed Ahmet Emre Acar who did a thesis project on the culture and media phenomenon called “machinima” and co-organised the recent symposium “Film and Computer” in Berlin.



>Hey Ahmet! Hope you're doing fine. Can you tell us what the  
>main goal of your research project was?

The conference was a bit stressful, but I'm doing alright. The main goal of my research was to create an ontology of game-based media, concentrating on the classification of machinima. I was supposed to analyze the aesthetics and technology of machinima and similar art forms, using both practical and theoretical approaches. During my research, I've analyzed over a thousand movies (their content, means of production and aesthetics). Also, we've created four machinima, one of which (Diebe!) ought to be known to the community by now.

>How have you first heard of machinima? And when?

There was an article called "Making Animation Child's Play" in the march 2000 issue of Wired Magazine. I found it quite fascinating and surfed to machinima.com to take a look at the movies. Incidentally, there were some (i.e. QDQ) which I already knew from the quake movies scene. Only later (during my research) I learned that machinima had evolved out of that scene.

>How would you classify it? A new Medium? 3D-Animation? A  
>new way of making movies?

None of those. The most precise classification of machinima would be that of an art movement as there are many parallels to that. It is not "game based performance", "virtual puppetry" or an "artistic game modification". I found current definitions to be imprecise or plainly wrong. At this point of time, it is not possible to identify machinima by means of production, since other game based media such as speed runs, trick movies and frag movies would also classify as machinima movies. An aesthetic description is impossible as there is no "aesthetics of machinima" yet. Maybe the community will be able to develop a unique visual language in time.

>Did the community appeal to you?

Which one? The community that deals with wow movies? Daoc movies? SWG movies? Sims movies? Or do you mean the 100.000 forum members of Rooster Teeth Productions? When I started dealing with machinima scientifically, I found many small communities working on machinima movies. Some of those aren't even calling their work "machinima". Members of the most prominent of all machinima series (Red vs. Blue) are rarely seen in the forums of machinima.com. There isn't "one" machinima community, but many communities that deal with different topics. The community that actively propagates machinima as a new medium is actually very small and seems to be getting smaller. I found the people to be nice and easy-going :)

>What's the future of machinima?

Don't get this wrong, but... there is none. As I said, machinima is a movement, not a medium. The members of the movement seem to have different (sometimes contradictory) goals and ideas. The fact that gamers outside the community produce their own (narrative) movies without introducing them to the machinima movement indicates a lack of acceptance of "machinima" as a terminus for game movies. Furthermore, it is always problematic for producers of a medium to build and maintain communities concerning that medium. The "tone" of that community will always be coloured by the interests of the producers. A community must be self-regulatory, working within their own set of austerities.

A big problem is also the lacking methodology in the exploration of the possibilities of production within games / virtual environments. I am referring to the early work of film directors in the beginning of 20th century.





Still, these are “problems” that can be fixed. One thing the community can’t do a whole lot about is the development in games and 3D suites. New games such as Sims2, Drivr or the Movies all have a “camera function” which enables players to shoot their own movies. This will increase in the future as game developers have recognized that enabling gamers to create their own content increases the longevity of their games (until the next release). We can expect more sophisticated movie-making tools in future games. Also, look at 3D software: most of them already have means of real-time production. The physics are only the next logical step. So, having tools to produce movies in a virtual, real-time, physics-enabled scriptable environment won’t be “special” in the future. The democratization that is postulated and desired by machinima artists will also destroy their own art form.

Either way, machinima will cease to exist.

>Thank you very much for your time! What are your plans now?

>Anymore research on game-related stuff?

No problem. Currently, I am researching on the virtual economy of MMORPG, but I intend to go back to the basics (why do animals play?) and start from there. So, the first games I’ll be working on (again both practically and theoretically) in the future will be functioning without electricity. I won’t be dealing with machinima any longer, as my work on machinima mainly resulted out of scholarly interest. I must admit that producing the machinima clips was lots of fun, though. There is some potential to making movies in games (such as “real” outtakes), but I’ll leave that to the community.

# Ricard C. Gras of la.interactiva and co-organiser of several machinima screenings in the UK on machinima

I got to Machinima by accident. When researching interactive content and branching narratives for interactive DVD and IDTV in 2001 I found myself having to shoot scores of hours of video. Researching, in constant transit between computers located in different departments and without the time to find the enormous funding needed for ‘small’ pilots with numerous potential endings –Machinima became the answer. With this state of affairs I started to get images from videogames without knowing there was already a community of people doing that with religious dedication. I knew nothing about the influence of Doom, Quake or Half-Life on this movement. In any case, for an artist with a passion for both film and interactivity (and no business constraints at that time), the crossovers felt obvious and natural. I have always remembered eagerly the cut-away scenes from ancient videogames and products like Dragon’s Liar and love pieces (like interactive cinema-based motion rides) that did not care about defining what field they fall in or what theoretical rules they obey but just wanted to provide different and valuable new experience to audiences. So Machinima felt like a familiar space.

The result of my initial work took the form of a two shorts entitled Vengansa (I and II), which tell one story from the points of view of two characters. The script was intended for film so when I finished I somehow sensed it had too many heavy concepts for the new medium. I felt Machinima wasn’t the correct medium to explore stories with depth or touched on social issues. But from the feedback I got I decided I was wrong. Machinima, I’ve come to accept, is good for anything.

It didn’t take me long to stumble across a range of amazing new pieces made by people who, like me, used the medium possibly without knowing too much about complex 3D modeling or programming languages. It was a relief, almost enlightenment. Suddenly I became part of a community that was small yet devoted, amazingly helpful and marvelously modest.

Having suffered the conservative views of so many for so long the Machinima crew was in my eyes a bunch of self-unaware wild pioneers. Machinimators have knitted a tight web of relations amongst them therefore innovating in how communities can and should be developed online. They/We have assembled a group who watch and produce at the same time, which helps the



erudite and unacquainted alike... and all with no commercial interest. A very democratic space.

Machinima is an example of an original use of broadband (crucial for uploading/downloading material) and also one of the truly achievements of the arrival of digital video. In theoretical terms Machinimators (somehow with a strange distant respect) beautifully despise all known genres and are surely inventing new eccentric pieces as we speak. Some Machinimators are what I call “virtual puppeteers”-they use their joystick as a camera and move it hoping for the best. Audiences actually love that because it makes them wonder (especially if they know the game) how certain movements have been achieved. Another (unexpected?) novelty. And that’s something traditional animation can never have. Weirdly this creates a firm bond between the piece and the audience.

The last great honor Machinima deserves (for now) is perhaps the recognition that it blurs the concept of audience, as we know it, making it more complex and interesting. It feels natural to just say –it just makes it more contemporary. Thousands of people who should have been doing what videogames companies truly wanted them to do (i.e. buy and play games quietly) were actually making movies with their products, challenging full-on the idea of ownership. I just hope these companies don’t pull the plug and they help us carry on building this castle in the sky which, let’s not forget, is giving them promotion and ideas...

In recent years the variety of shorts is growing and so is the community. It hasn’t yet lost the ingredients that made the community strong and the genre is receiving more and more consideration (especially in the US).

Four years have gone by and Machinima feels now like home. I have enjoyed producing more (this time linear) pieces and might use the medium for some interactive pilots. Recently I finished a short entitled Pua Libertad that is trying to provide a serious cinematic experience plus also look at sex from a distinctive and more comical perspective. Something the cinema and videogames industries cannot afford getting too much into due to legalities.

But Machinimators are as loyal as producers as they are as viewers. This

month I curated a selection of Machinima shorts from Europe and the US which was shown in a UK videogames festival –probably the first full Machinima screening to take place there and one of the first in Europe, which was a success. It’s great to see what people come up with from one week to another. In Europe there’s a lot of good stuff going on in Germany and there are some interesting things happening in the UK. I’m waiting to see when France, Italy and Nordic countries will wake up to the phenomenon. However I am really looking forward to seeing how people who cannot get into these industries are going to do. People from West Europe, Africa, Oceania, the Middle-East, South-Asia, women, kids, the elderly... if you want to get into the videogames industry or do animated films –this is your chance. In the new quest to change civilization Machinima could be an accessible and pioneering testing ground...



# three Film Reviews





# The Awakening

April Hofmann

The awakening is a Sims2 based series about... well... Sims2. Imagine your Sims2 characters weren't mere digital simulations but had their own minds and actual self awareness. If you were one of them, wouldn't it seem strange that the firemen only need a couple of seconds to get to your house when your grill goes up in flames?

Stunningly shot and with witty dialogue and plot twists, this series is a must see for everybody interested in what machinima is about. By integrating the game mechanics into the overall storyline, April Hofmann manages to turn the weaknesses of machinima into a big strength. I cannot imagine a story like this told in anything else but a computer game!

No weapons, no fighting, no „we didn't get right of those thought bubbles, but hey“. Show it to your friends and watch them smile as the story unfolds. The great voice acting and fine camera angles make this movie a sure festival selection!

# Dead\_Dogma

Sam Goldwater

Dead Dogma is a lot. First of all, it is not an aristotle-style dramatised movie with clear plot and stuff. It more like a mood. Set in the world of HalfLife2, or at least using the assets and characters from the game, dead dogma talks a lot about religion and philosophy, and dwells in beautiful camera angles and nice scripted characters.

The somewhat diffuse narration fits nicely to the rather empty and clean stage design.

But the voice recording here is a big problem.

The movie has enough potential to get serious recognition, but whilst narrating mainly through voice-over, the rather poor sound recording is a serious problem. If you look past that, the film is easily thought provoking and the visuals amaze you no matter how often you watch it.

Camerawork really is a big strength here, but unfortunately not enough to cover the lack of a decent sound environment and voiceovers.

Watch it though, it's one of the better Half Life 2 movies out there!

# Invasion Series

Tacoshack27

Invasion is a Sims2 series that tells a plot driven story unlike many of what we know in machinima. „They are here, and Robert Smith knows why“ pretty much sums up the content of the story without giving too much away.

This time though, the game itself is not an issue in the story filled with all sorts of subtle hints and rememberable dialogue.

Science fiction with the Sims2 is a tough task, but it really works out just great, reminding of the good old “X-files” feeling. Solid cameras, nice voiceacting, but really, the plot is the big thing here...

Unfolding in four episodes and hitting your PC as soon as there are a couple of mirrors popping up again.

Can't we make a whole festival out of excellent Sims2 movies by now?



the  
end

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