well, it seems that machinimag works even
better than I expected in the first place and after some of you
wrote or told me to come out more often, machinimag now gets
to be
published every month more or less, to get you even more in-
depth views into machinima
related topics.
But before we start I want to adress a topic that might look a
little strange at first.
The majority of machinima movies still has to do with war in
one way or the other. What I want to adress in here is the
"other" way.
What about the very first Anti-War-Machinima?
I mean, it's there. We have everything we need to do it. Tanks,
choppers, planes, guns,
soldiers.
Most of us have the skills needed to replace the M16 with a
Transparent and change a crowd of gut-wretching soldiers into
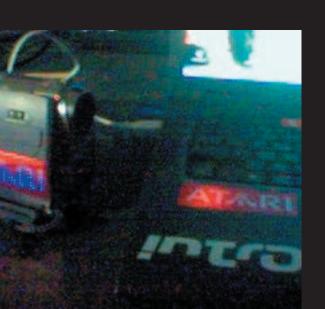demonstrators for a good thing.
Let's make them stop the war machine, let's make them lower
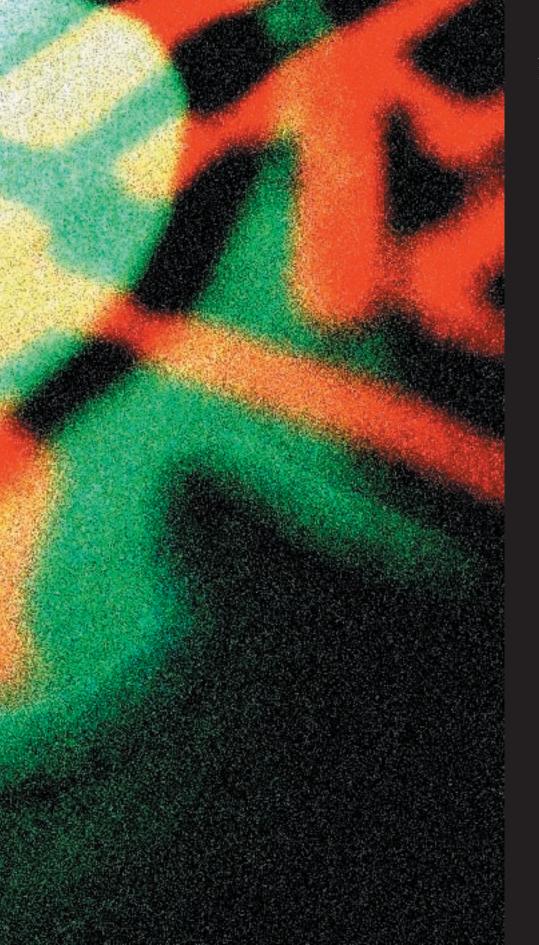their guns and rise their minds.
There already are some great approaches that combine a
strong sense of humour with the senselessness of killing each
other.

Let's take this road further and make a
statement.

Friedrich Kirschner

\\original editorial from Issue02

HI DANIEL, HOPE YOU'RE FINE. ANY PROJECTS THAT WAIT FOR YOUR TIME RIGHT NOW?

My immediate focus is with ClanWars, the last counter-strike machinima film in the pipeline. I hope to have it completed within 1-2 months, although these timelines change constantly.
I'm also working on Pre/Selection, our natural-selection machinima film. That should be ready soon after ClanWars.
There are a few other projects in development which I cannot talk too much about, but they include a feature film, mix of software rendered CGI and machinima, a coproduction between myself and an Independent Toronto studio and various segments for an upcoming internetTV network

OK, LET'S START WITH THE ROOTS. WHEN WAS THE FIRST TIME YOU HEARD THE TERM MACHINIMA?

I heard it after I finished my first machinima piece, Militia1. It was cool to see an active community based around such a thing.

HOW DID YOUR OPINION ABOUT THE MEDIUM DEVELOP FROM THAT TIME ON?

At first I thought machinima was a joke… I mean, from a business standpoint it is hardly effective, using copyrighted graphics and patented technology to create something that looks pretty amateur. But once so many people started doing it, it hardly seemed amateur anymore.

WHAT IS THE NEXT BIG THING IN MACHINIMA WE'RE GOING TO SEE? WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP?

I don't think you're going to see one particular BigStep.

The community is similar to the independent film community, where small changes come bit by bit, and slowly things change. Every machinima maker is trying to create their own big thing for their own purposes, so eventually that benefits the community as a whole.

HOW COME MOST MACHINIMA PIECES ARE STILL DONE BY INDIVIDUALS?

There is no business in machinima, that's why.

There isn't any incentive for a large company or group to invest in something like machinima, that's why it's mostly done by individuals. There are some exceptions where people have formed teams and organized structure, for example Strange Company, Chaos Films, G.Worx, but mostly it's an individual's genre.

WHICH POSITIONS WOULD YOUR PERFECT PRODUCTION TEAM FOR A MACHINIMA PIECE CONSIST OF?

Positions change for every project, but ideally it's best to split up the creative elements. Machinima is a hugely technical method of making films. Consequently, the creative stuff usually gets crammed onto one person's plate. Most machinima films have a bunch of modelers, mappers, etc, then they have one guy who writes, directs, edits, acts, the whole deal.
A machinima usually benefits when more people share the creative load, just like real life film projects.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MAIN DIFFERENCE IN PRODUCING A MACHINIMA PIECE FROM PRODUCING AN INDEPENDENT MOVIE?

An independent film is more regulated, for one thing. There's more paperwork, more legal issues to worry about. However, a machinima film has its own production downfalls. Nothing is regulated.

There is no standard mapping structure for machinima, no standard in-game acting methods, no equipment to aid the filming process.

In the most general sense I would say that real films have a heavy preproduction load for a producer, whereas machinima has a heavier load upon postproduction, where decisions about audio dubs and edits are more heavily considered. In real film there is a certain acceptance of your footage once it has been shot. You know that you shot film and got it developed, and now that it is what it is. With machinima there is always the possibility of going back into a level and reshooting scenes or tweaking material.

That's why a machinima producer usually tries to give the director more freedom during production, because they know they can always arrange to fix something later, to a greater extent than real life film.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE RIGHT ENGINE CHOICE FOR A PROJECT?

I don't think the engine has that much to do with a project. I've seen Quake2 machinima still being produced today and it never gets trash-talked for looking ugly or technologically inferior. The new machinima engines, like Half-Life 2 or Doom 3 will probably mark their own distinct machinima styles a bit more as they have better tools to create the medium.

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE ACTUAL TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT? WILL THERE BE A CHANGE IN MACHINIMA QUALITY WITH THE NEW GAMES AND BETTER GRAPHICS?

The graphical change will be huge once those next generation games come out. However… I won't go so far to say that this necessarily creates "better" machinima…

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST ADVANTAGE OF MACHINIMA?

Advantage? It's not really an advantage but more so a creative decision. If you use machinima you usually work inside a video-game, and thus you must accept a certain look and style simply because that's how the game looks. If you are happy to work within those boundaries then it allows you to create animations much more quickly than software based CGI.

WHAT IS THE WEAKEST PART OF CURRENT MACHINIMA PRODUCTIONS?

The weakest part of machinima production - using too much copyrighted or patented material. If you want machinima to become investment material you have to make something original. Graphically, musically, the whole works.
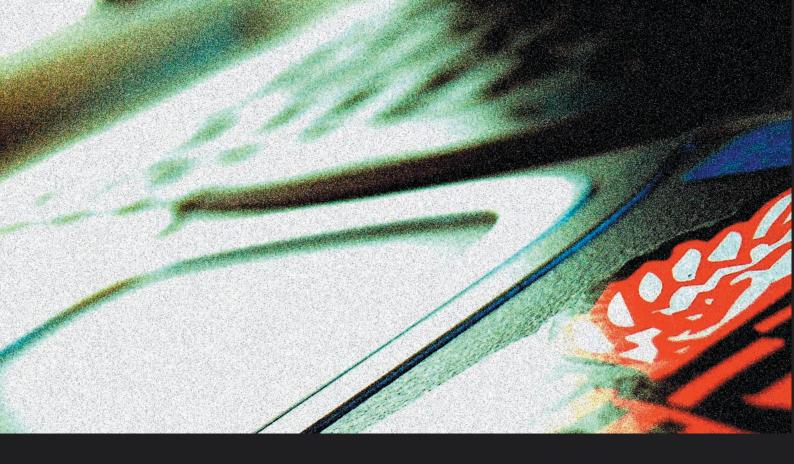
IS THERE AN EXISTING STORY OR MOVIE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN MACHINIMA?

I'm quite happy with the story we see these days. I'm not a huge Japanese Anime fan, but I admire the commercial industry of it. How their content is geared towards a mature audience. I'm glad that machinima has some content aimed at the teenager+ age group. My film, Militia 2, would never have been produced by a studio because there is no mainstream demographic in America for it.

However, with the aid of machinima I was able to make my film anyway, without any funding. That's somewhat how I think of machinima, as the Anime of videogame culture.

AS FOR EVERYTHING YOU DO
CREATIVELY□ IT IS MOS□
VITAL TO KNOW THE VERY
BASIC RULES OF YOUR
TRADE□ □ □ AND WHO TO
BREAK THEM□

The basics of telling a story have an extremely long tradition. Back then, nobody really knows the exact date, the greeks had a very strong opinion that the story of a theater play always has to start in the morning and end in the evening and that it is more or less divided into three parts.

Well, modern cinema theory has a ton of different approaches on how good stories are but the good old threesome is most often in one way or the other applicable.

So you have to get your characters into the brains of the audience first, show their motivation to walk through the story, their goals. Let it be difficult to reach, extend the final conflict into eternity and finally, let them overcome all the barriers and show how great live is after getting what your characters desperately needed.

This might seem quite short, but it is far from easy to implement. You have to visualize the motivation of your characters, make them perform actions that make clear what they want, what they need and why.

An extremely good example for this is Tum Raider. It works completely without dialogue and gets its message across in a very traditional dramatic structure.

And then, there are times when these rules seem all too obvious and you're playing with them. What if the motivation of your characters is zero? That might be a dramatic storyline itself. Experiencing what happens when you intentionally break the very basic rule of goal-motivation and overcoming can be great fun, as the world famous RedVsBlue shows more than once.

extreme storyline basics

One can argue about this one but in general, the less you notice a cut, the better it is set. There are fundamental rules of when and what to cut. One of these rules has to do with the position of the cameras you want to use for editing, another one with the focal length of each following clip. These rules have come out of experience and by analyzing the viewing habits of the audience. At least the latter is always changing, so the rules given are already too old and provide just a basic setup that can be spiced with faults and misuse.

A basic rule of camera positioning is, that every two shots that are going to be edited together should differ at least by a significant change in focal length or by at least 45 degrees concerning camera position and orientation. Another basic rule is, that eyes always form an axis in the direction in which they look. And one shall never cross this line in a cut.

Once you chose your first shot, do not place the second camera somewhere on the other side of that line. It would look weird.

There's tons of editing literature that can give you more rules to what you're allowed than you might like. But these two rules of thumb should give you a good start.

As stated above, breaking the rules nowadays almost is seen as a must. There is almost no new music video that would call itself hip that applies to all of the traditionl rules of editing. So feel free to fool around, as long as what you do is intentionally.

extreme editing basics

This one is going to be shorter than you might expect. Audio might be the most underestimated part of a movie. A small example will give you the general idea. If you ever tried to sleep while the guys next door watched an action movie, you could tell the story next morning, even though you might not want to. You could tell when there was tension, when there was love, when there were special effects and whatever. Well, movies without sound, on the other hand, tend to be extremely boring. Even if you see the greatest explosions of all time, it is nothing without the proper sound.

So the very basic rule of audio is to use it. And it's the same with music. Grab yourself someone that knows how to do a score, even if it is a basic one. Get some sounds in your level, let the action be heard. You will notice that your movie gets more fluent, much faster, more exciting and easier to watch..

Break this rule? You wouldn't expect me to tell you not to use any music or sounds. But then again, doing a silent movie with a live piano player at every screening might be a not too bad idea...

extreme audio basics

Previsualisation is the keyword. Or even better, knowing what you want to do. Make a list of features, be it technical, visual or storyline. Nail down deadlines and try to draw sketches of at least your key scenes. The more you think and try the more problems will show up that can be solved before you finally start producing your piece. Take a look at photobooks and magazines to get an idea of your visual style. If you have the time, do an animatic, a pre-visualisation using sketches that are assembled and edited to get a feeling for the pacing of your movie. You can't do too much preproduction. This counts even more if you are not relying solely on your own skills but need other people to help you with your project.

And sometimes, great things happen when you just sit in front of your computer and you start playing around. Sometimes it makes sense to get into a new direction even though it is not planned. Be open for twists and turns. In the end, every project turns out to be chaotic in one or more ways, but eventually when it is finished, everything seems to have worked just fine.

extreme production basics

Exaggerate. We have to cope with more than enough boundaries when turning games into movie making machines. So if you cannot get over a certain problem, just exaggerate it.
Experiment. Go do something and get it out to the public. Get feedback, get back to work and so on. The community is still small and very helpful. Use it. There more you do, the better you get.
Work with other people. Machinma might sound as a great medium for one man shows but it is not. The more people you get to work on a machinima project, the better the overall result will be. Noone can animate, program, direct and write at the same time. Well, except a few blessed minds...

And last but not least, feel free to use machinima as a tool, still in development, to do whatever you want with it. You don't need to make narratives, video clips or whatever. Just be sure to tell us what you do with it.

extreme machinima basics

THERE'S MORE THAN
ENOUGH BOUNDARIES IN
MACHINIMA PRODUCTION.
WE LOOK AT SOME
CREATIVE WAYS TO DEAL
WITH THEM.

A decent visual style might be the key to reaching a broad audience with a machinima piece. In the past, there's been some games that used appealing visual styles to get the message across.

Sometimes, less is more. Noone would disagree with that, but for computergame graphics, the general approach is rather different. Boombastic visual effects shot at your eyes when playing state of the art games, even announcements of future titles are first judged according to their graphics.

But reduction can sometimes look a lot better than overkill. As well as low budget non-hollywood movies can sometimes overtake multi million dollar hollywood movies just because they reached for a different visual style than reality simulation, computergames and machinima can rise their value by developing their own, unique visual language.
Even though we are hyped by E3 videos showing better visual technology each year, we're far from reaching a state in which we could simulate reality. After all, games will still lack the quality of traditional computer animation.

And even in that area, we are quite a few steps from getting 100% believable results.
So shooting for the stars might be the wrong direction.
When comparing machinima to comic books, we see a ton of differences, but there's a lot of things that can be learned.

Comic books look good because they have their own visual style.

They would not work with photography, even if it would have been digitally enhanced.

It's the mix between the visual appearance and the content that makes them unique and appealing. Most comic pictures work in a very reduced way, putting in detail where it's needed. Most of them aren't colored and still work, transport emotion and make us want to know how the story goes on.
When doing machinima, we come across a lot of problems that comics adress as well. We don't have time to model every plant in a detective's office, we don't have the resources to show a big, prospering city in a wide angle shot with all the people, cars and trains bustling around. And we might not have the money to motioncapture every possible action our characters take.
We need to stylize.

One form of reduction and stylization is the quite popular cell-shading approach.

Cell shading is not assigning a certain color tone to each pixel of a 3D model but merges innocent bystanding pixels into "cells" that get the same color. There are tons of different technical approaches to this, but the results all look more flat and rougher than the standard shaded model.

This is not a loss in visual quality though. Instead, you turn the disadvantage of low-poly modelling into something you exaggerate and use as your visual element. You have much more possibilities to get the details in where you want them to be.

A big plus might be the reuseability of this technique. A flat, intentionally reduced visual experience is considered as a more timeless form of visual expression. You can work a lot longer with one engine once you developed a decent visual style that is not as short-living as computer game graphics.

The RebelVsThug machinima is a very good example for this. It is done using the Quake2 engine and a cellshader plugin and it still looks great because it has its own visual style. So does the machinima movie TheSearch.

There's a couple of computer games that make use of this technique. If you look at pictures from the game XIII for example, they not just look different. They do not look outdated. It is the same with the console game JetSetRadioFuture, still looking great

even compared to Far Cry or other state of the art games.

And the interesting looking Killer7 makes no difference as well and is yet to be released.

Reducing your visual appearance can serve your story and can change a technical problem into a useful styleguide. Just take a look at old school 8 bit graphics that are reused in modern webdesign and even in videoclips.

THE DEMO SCENE

We all know these nicely animated logos in front of the early commodore games that a friend of a friend brought along in the good old times…
We know the disks that showed the grafical potential of the amiga 2000. And we all know that there were mailboxes and sysops long before the internet became what it is now.

Yes, there was a time when the term demoScene seemed to ring a bell in many of us. Now what happened to that bell?
As you might guess, the demo scene is still alive and it managed to preserve a lot of its mystery and underground status even in a time when everything underground is just a google-search away.
Even though the demoscene evolved from early hacker groups, nowadays it has nothing to do with illegal activities.
Sceners meet at so called demo parties to celebrate, show each others work and take part in contests and showcasings. Some of the bigger Convetions are the "assembly" in finland and "the gathering" in norway, but there's tons of smaller parties all over europe. All these events evolved from small to huge and are most often organized by volunteers from within the demo scene or people interested in it.
The demo scene nowadays defines itself as a field of people creating technical and creative master-pieces in form of short realtime videoclips. Yes, it's realtime and

it looks and sounds awesome. The clips are most often programmed in a self developed graphics engine and incorporate astonish-ing 2d and 3d realtime graphics and mostly electronic synthesized music that's being rendered in realtime as well.
But it's not just pushing the state-of-the-art hardware to its sensual limits. Demos and Intros, as the smaller ones are called, often come in extremely low filesizes. There's 4k Intros showing a great sense of design and, of course, technical skill. 4k here stands for 4 kilobytes to say that again.
However, the main goal of a demo or intro is not narration. Most of the works only have a quite loosely tied thematical relation for their pictures. They live through graphics, sound and good editing very much like mtv video clips. Now how come machinima and the demo scene have nothing to do with each other?
 It might be that it's a matter of approach. As machinima serves primarily as a narrative instru-ment (although you might very well argue about that), the demo scene is all about the skill. Here, you show what you're capable of. Fast, small and great looking are the key components to a succesful demo production it seems.
But there's more. The scene an old institution with it's own long history and tradition. It began when home computing began, in the early days of the C64 and it has gone through a lot of changes, from illegal to legal, through vari-

ous computer systems and hard-ware boundaries.
Although the scene nowadays is open to everyone who's willing to participate and contribute his work and skill, it avoids to blur the edges to different mediums. Maybe that's one of the reasons why they're still there.

From a machinima point of view, we could only be glad if a coop-eration across the self constituted borders of our mediums could happen, since we share a lot of our instruments and tools. There's no machinima creator who wouldn't profit from a decent coder or artist providing tools, content or know-how for his project. And maybe the demoscene wouldn't mind getting some more narrative struc-tures as an exchange.
This is not about merging. It's about helping each other and cre-ating great creative experiences. Let's see what the future brings.