

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Indie film takes on Pixar - with the aid of an invisible badger.

Can one small film company compete with Pixar, with home PCs and no budget? Only if their film is shot by an invisible badger.

Edinburgh-based Strange Company have released the first part of 'BloodSpell', a computer-animated feature film. Thanks to computer games technology and 'Machinima', a new way of making animated films, they were able to complete their film in under three years, with a mostly-volunteer staff and a budget of less than £5,000.



'BloodSpell' is an action-adventure fantasy film, telling the story of a world in which some people carry magic in their blood - when their blood is spilled the magic is released. It follows the adventures of Jered, a monk of the magic-hating Church of the Angels, as he discovers he is one of the "Blooded" and has to flee for his life into the bizarre magical underworld.



'BloodSpell' was shot using the visual technology of the computer game 'Neverwinter Nights'. Using the game's graphics to create the visuals for the film, Strange Company were able to shoot their film for a fraction of the millions of pounds companies like Pixar and Dreamworks spend on their animated epics.

But in order to use the computer game as a film set, Strange Company's Executive Producer Hugh Hancock had to come up with some unusual workarounds. If a character in BloodSpell looks around for a reaction shot, it is because there's a dragon standing behind his co-star. If there's a low-angle shot that needs to be taken, Hugh's got the ideal cameraman - an invisible badger.

"Modern computer games have immense graphical capabilities, which we've harnessed for BloodSpell" says 28-year-old Hancock, who has worked on 'Machinima' films for the BBC and Scottish Screen. "But they're not really designed for filmmaking, so we have to find some bizarre ways to get the shots we need. If we need a low shot, for example, we use one of the in-game "spells" to make our cameraman into a badger, then turning him invisible and film the scene from his perspective!"

Quick Statistics

Budget: Less than £5,000.
Length: 90 minutes
Number of viewers so far: over 30,000
Website: www.bloodspell.com
Cost to view: £0
Number of invisible badgers in first episode: 5

Although it has only been available on the Internet for two weeks, 'BloodSpell' has already attracted widespread attention, with articles in The Guardian and trendspotter website BoingBoing, and an appearance on CNN. Technology commentator and science fiction author Cory Doctorow, one of the founders of the BoingBoing website, said "There's some damned fine storytelling and editing/production work here -- Machinima is still finding its legs, discovering what it's for, and the

Strange Company folks are at the forefront of using the medium for feature-length drama."

Some of the attention BloodSpell is getting may be due to Hancock's controversial decision to



release 'BloodSpell' for free under the 'Creative Commons' project. At the same time that Hollywood is becoming increasingly desperate to curb movie piracy, Hancock's film is available free on the Internet for anyone to download - and under the 'Creative Commons' mantle, downloaders can also freely share the film with their friends, via the Internet or in person. Over 30,000 people have viewed the first part so far.

"It just doesn't make any sense for us to restrict what our viewers can do with BloodSpell." says Hancock. "I'm not convinced that it makes sense for anyone to do that, in fact. But for a small filmmaker, the struggle to gain exposure is a far bigger problem than that of "piracy". I know of larger, more expensive films than ours which have never even been released, and have ended up sitting in their maker's basement. Thanks to our releasing BloodSpell free to download and share, that's never going to happen to us."

BloodSpell is available for free download from www.bloodspell.com.

Glossary:

Machinima: The technique of using computer games technology to create animated films for a fraction of the cost of conventional animation. Now a cult underground movement featured at the Sundance Film Festival and in the New York Times.

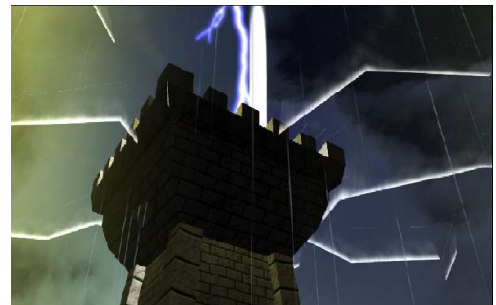
See: www.machinima.org

Creative Commons: Creative Commons is a nonprofit organization that offers flexible copyright licenses for creative works, offering alternatives to the traditional "all rights reserved" copyright. Controversial aspects to the licences include the ability to freely distribute works offered under Creative Commons, provided no commercial transaction takes place.

See: www.creativecommons.org

Neverwinter Nights: Bestselling computer game produced by Canadian developers Bioware. A fantasy adventure game, it achieved success partially through the revolutionary tools distributed with the game, allowing players to make their own games within the Neverwinter Nights 'engine'.

See: nwn.bioware.com



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