

Making filmmaking a game

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Thanks to technology, independent filmmakers and wannabes have yet another unique way to get discovered. Video-game maker Activision has released a brand new PC game about the film industry called The Movies. Think of it as "The Sims" but for the movie industry.

The game lets you take on the role of studio head, and you can create and manage a full movie studio from scratch. You do everything from signing and creating stars, managing budgets, research the latest film technology and more.

"I woke up at 5:00 a.m. one cold January morning with the thought, 'Why on earth has no one ever made a game about the movies industry?' I then woke up my girlfriend, asked her the same question and she quickly told me to go back to sleep. I went in to work later, told everyone I could think of about the idea, and they all agreed it was a good idea," said Peter Molyneux, gaming legend and managing director of Lionhead Studios, producer of The Movies.

"Within the month, we had a two-man team working on the game," he said.

The more interesting aspect of Activision's The Movies is the fact that it actually allows you to create movies. The game comes with a bunch of different tools that give users the ability to create short films using animated sim-like characters. You can create an original project by using the tools built into the game by using the movie-making wizard tool, which allows you to select genre, scenes and backgrounds.

Molyneux noted, "There are two ways of creating a movie in the game. You can commission a script, place it on a set, shoot it and have a computer generate a movie in about 15 seconds. Alternatively, you can customize your script, choose your sets, select scenes from thousands that are available, cast your own unique stars and shoot the film. Then, in post production you can edit the action, add your own voiceover, sound effects and create your own unique movie."

He adds, "The game guides you through the process very smoothly so that it is as simple as possible to play the game."

While The Movies has been on store shelves for a limited time, it's starting to get attention from industry insiders. "It is always exciting to see new technologies that both enable and inspire creativity," says Shelly Palmer, chairman of the Advanced Media Committee of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. "The democratization of production tools has empowered a generation of filmmakers and videographers. Several sectors of the media industry are highly focused on short-form content; The Movies could very easily play a role."

One thing Activision hopes to do with this game is inspire new people to take part in the filmmaking process and provide a way for material created with the game to become successful. To help with this goal, they launched a community Web site that allows people to post their finished products directly to the site. The Web site has already garnered it's first "hit" -- a short film called "The French Democracy" that has generated a lot of initial buzz.

Alex Chan, creator of "The French Democracy," describes his movie as "a shortcut made with The Movies technology about the recent events concerning riots in French suburbs. This movie is trying to help people have a better understanding of the origin of these events, as some reasons that pushed all this youth to have such violent acts. As a matter

of fact TFD offers a sincere inside view from a French citizen who lives in one of these neighborhoods where the riots took place. This fictional documentary is strongly inspired by real events and reactions and tries to make the spectator think more about how French society could and should potentially be."

The finished product of anything you create with The Movies won't be a "real movie," it'll be more of an animated short featuring sims-level animation with bad voice dubbing. Many have compared The Movies as a "Machinima" (people take animated footage from video games and dub their own voices to create short form film) creation tool.

However, according to Molyneux, "I wouldn't classify The Movies finished products as Machinima because that requires some technical knowledge and The Movies is obviously not the same as edited video footage. The Movies could be something new. The reason I say this is because anybody can create their own movie and tell their own story, however it is key to remember that this is also a game that helps people who never thought they would be any good at telling stories discovering that they are."

Chan said, "I don't know if this project has really opened doors yet. Maybe Peter Molyneux will recruit me as a fine worldwide RP (rep) or maybe the Home Secretary in France might put me in jail! Seriously, I met and still continue to meet people including journalists, TV reporters and even a politician who was moved and quite inspired by my movie. I just really hope that the movie will lead to positive actions."

For more information on the Movies Game and to watch shorts, visit: www.themoviesgame.com.

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