

A report on NZ Game Developer's Conference 2004

Dunedin, 26-29 June 2004

Trond Nilsen

Conference Attendees:

Trond Nilsen, Julian Looser, Billy Chang – (HITLab NZ & Dept of CSSE)
Raphael Grasset - (HITLab NZ)

Organisation:

- Very well organized, particularly for a first conference.
- No real technical or organisational problems; everything proceeded smoothly.
- The conference chairman, Simon McCallum was very friendly and enthusiastic.
- The audience varied from 100 to about 150, mostly consisting of students, game company staff, and various representatives from government and academia.
- Conference lasted four days – three days of presentations, one of workshops.

Keynotes:

- Ernest Adams – Independent Game Designer, Consultant, and founder of the IGDA (Independent Game Developer's Association). Gave an interesting keynote on game design from an artistic perspective (as opposed to purely commercial game development).
- Sheri Graner Ray – Senior Designer at Sony Entertainment (Austin, Texas). Gave keynote on 'Gender Inclusive Design of Computer Games', which covered different psychological behaviour between the genders, and the application of these principles in game design. These included styles of learning, collaborative behaviours and reactions to the 'price of failure'.
- Ken Kahn - University of London gave a keynote on the use of computer games in education. He covered similar material to his presentation at Canterbury on 2 July.
- Daniel Sanchez-Crespo - Novarama Games (Spain), author (Core Techniques and Algorithms in Game Programming) spoke about the engineering principles required to develop games within the heavy constraints necessary to meet commercial success.

Our presentations:

- Trond presented his paper 'Motivations for AR Gaming' to an appreciative audience.
- Trond also presented a seminar 'Introduction to AR Gaming' (90 minutes) as part of the IGDA stream (outside the main sessions) to about 30 listeners.
- Across three days of the conference, we presented our 'Tankwar' game, a multiplayer real time strategy style game in AR (developed by Trond & Julian, with programming assistance from Adrian Clark). Conference attendees were very enthusiastic about the demo, and asked countless questions.

- During the first day, a news crew from TVNZ was present. They filmed Julian playing Tankwar, and interviewed Trond about its development, and the potential value of it.

Other presentations:

- There were presentations on a variety of subjects, including business, game design, graphics and animation research, censorship and education.
- Te Manawa museum gave a presentation about their interactive exhibition on games, their history, and their impact on modern culture.
- Simon McCallum presented a post mortem of the new Game Design course at the University of Otago, and the Media Design School presented their new Graduate Diploma in Game Development course.
- Scott King (Otago University) presented interesting work in facial animation for speech. His demonstration was quite impressive.
- Mike Paulin (also from Otago) presented cross discipline work in Zoology and animation, consideration the application of mechanical principles in animal movement in animation.

Workshops:

- Geoff Wyvill gave a workshop on 3D visualisation, in which he attempted to train attendees to better visualise 3D objects, and then apply this skill to related problems, such as optical illusions, certain mathematical proofs and drafting. Trond attended this workshop, and though he cannot quantify any gains from it, he found insightful and stimulating, and is fairly convinced that his 3D visualisation skill improved.

Social & Contacts:

- Trond attended the conference VIP dinner, and we all later attended the conference dinner. All lunches and morning teas were provided by the conference, and provided ample opportunity for networking and discussion.
- Trond spoke to Richard Hicks III, along with other staff and students from the Media Design School (Auckland) about their work. (Trond visited their school a week later, and presented a short seminar on AR gaming).
- Trond met Tyrone McAuley & Mario Wynands, the technical and managing directors of Sidhe Interactive, New Zealand's largest game development company (30 personnel).
- Met Clare O'Leary from NZ Trade & Enterprise, and a specialist on economic development in the creative industries. Trond was later invited to present cut down seminar on AR Gaming at the 'Girls & Games' symposium on Auckland (on game development for the female market).
- Raphael & Trond spoke with Tracey Sellars, a PhD student at the Auckland University of Technology with interests in usability and HCI specifically in computer games.

Travel / Accomodation:

- Drove to Dunedin from Christchurch, with stops at Moeraki boulders, Timaru and a trip inland to Waitaki and Benmore hydro dams.
- Stayed at Adventurer's Backpackers. Comfortable, despite Dunedin's cold.