

Content to converge

What can game developers learn from other creative folk (other than how not to ask for a 'trendy' haircut)? **Michela Ledwidge** reports from the first BAFTA Interactive Festival...

Despite not attracting nearly enough developers, the recent inaugural BAFTA Interactive Festival successfully brought together a mix of 'interactive' people that normally exist in parallel universes. BAFTA is uniquely placed to nurture a creative community spanning linear and non-linear entertainment, and at a time when spreadsheets are merging, the cross-pollination of interactive entertainers has barely begun.

Only a few years ago, I remember the film and game industries announcing 'There will be no convergence'. Well, times change, and the Festival dedicated a whole day to the subject. Certainly amongst the weird non-gamer types I hang out with this seemed to be somewhat of a draw card even if, for many, interactive entertainment consists of reading recycled jokes in the email.

The irony is that in response to industry feedback, BAFTA this year split the traditional Interactive Awards into separate Games Awards

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conch shell, forecast that the future of sound (as per the name of the session) would involve the loss of hearing. He urged the crowd to "go to nature to get in tune with the system that built us".

Going back to nature was a theme I picked up again in the session I chaired ('What's the Story?') on interactive storytelling. This debate between filmmakers and game designers had a diverse audience from all walks of life, and exposed many home truths. No one really knows how to deliver interactive fiction. Games miss out on the equivalent of film vocabulary to inform you of what is about to happen. Filmmakers relish the fluidity of real-life shooting. MODs make for interesting times. And lastly, low tech albeit money-spinning interactive entertainment like a sing-a-long *Sound of Music* is totally under the industry radar. Keep It Simple Stupid? Yeah right...

For those who made the effort, it was the diversity of perspectives on offer that provided the pay-off. The school and university exhibits were a real highlight. Teenagers tracking video motion, schoolkids filming stop-motion animation – let's face it, we're still laying down the turf. Can we please have some real fun while we're doing it?

DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE

At the heart of the convergence debate there seems to be a worrying assertion that the game industry has to simply learn the ropes from the film industry. Is it really appropriate to use Hollywood as a template?

Let's not ape an industry grappling with its own spiralling costs, technological upheaval and entrenched forms of social and gender inequality. Beneath the hype, the power struggles say precious little about where art is coming from. So go figure why it's 'technically impossible' to make a game on your own these days. Who's zooming who?

How about some game equivalents of *The Blair Witch Project* next year? More recognition for developers? Feminine game designs that go beyond global search and replacing lad brands with girlie brands?

Maybe it boils down to this: Art produced in a vacuum ain't art. Sorry. Not in a networked world and perhaps never. The interesting stuff is coming from the cross-pollination of several industries, all keeping each other on their toes. Maybe the truth of the matter – clearer after throwing different kinds of practitioners in a venue for a few days – is that the zeitgeist comes from those who try. Trying in this game means a certain willingness to share.

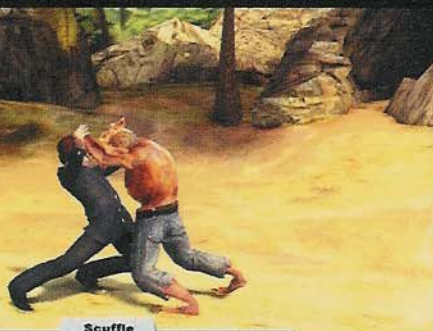
■ <http://modfilms.com>

MINIBIO



Michela Ledwidge (<http://michela.thequality.com>) is a filmmaker, new media plumber, systems architect and member of the BAFTA Interactive Committee. She is currently developing re-mixable films, designed for the Semantic Web, and chuckling about the emergence of EBS (Enterprise Blogging Systems). In researching this article, she emulated the hard living gamer types she knows in the interest of authenticity. It's done her lungs and liver no good at all.

Title: **Celsius233**
Director: Chad Best



Scuffle

Violence



B

Cancel

Storm



A

Ok

■ *Lionhead's The Movies brings games and film together, but that's only for fun, not work. At The Festival Peter Molyneux reminded his audience that anyone attempting to really make a film is mad.*

and Interactive Awards. It had to happen but here's hoping that both 'sides' stay in touch even if only to avoid re-inventing the flat tyre.

MIXING IT UP

But forget the market-speak and sales pitch – I was at the Festival to talk to game developers. It wasn't easy.

The only developers in evidence were either The Names up on the panels or the alumni of various famous titles. Where were the rest? Down the pub heaping scorn on the establishment? Cooped up in a code farm? Waiting for the webcast? You were missed.

Sound folk were unusually visible, with a welcome number of audio sessions. From an 'Interactive Audio in Games' discussion hosted by John Broomhall to ear-splitting 3D spatial surround performances hosted by the Illustrious Company, the message was loud and clear – ignore the so-called poor relation of the creative arts at your peril. Yet the irony was also clear in that game sound people aren't coming close to pushing the audio capabilities of current devices like the Xbox, hamstrung by cross-platform development constraints. How about letting us publish a couple of audio-only titles, Bill? We all know that there are kids using the Xbox more as a jukebox than anything else.

As expected, the best sound bites were invariably low-tech. The installation artist Charlie Morrow, in between blowing on his