

› DEMOSCENE OUTREACH TOUR: THE FULL STORY (PART 1)◀

BY GLOOM OF EXCESS

By now, most of you are probably aware of the demoscene outreach trip to San Francisco that took place at the end of October 2007. What you probably don't know is how it all came to be in the first place, and what actually went on behind the curtains during the trip. This is the full story, as told from my personal perspective.

THE BACKSTORY

In the beginning of May 2007, I was present at FMX/07 as a PR-representative for Scene.org to host a screening of selected works from the 5th Scene.org Awards, held the previous year at the Breakpoint demoparty. I had been at FMX the year before, doing the exact same thing, and being invited once more to such a nice event was truly a great feeling. I was present at FMX/07

together with Gargaj from Conspiracy and Steeler from DKEV/Breakpoint organizing, who were hosting screenings and talks of their own.

The previous year, Knos (also of Scene.org fame) and I had worked together to produce a DVD that we could hand out to the participants of the screening. This DVD contained most of the nominated productions and a simple DVD menu-structure that allowed the viewer to quickly watch video-captured versions of the demos. At FMX/06, I had run out of these DVDs moments after the screening, because everyone wanted a copy, so in 2007 I made sure to burn twice as many copies.

**“THE SCREENING WAS
ABSOLUTELY PACKED”**

This turned out to be of little help, because the screening was absolutely packed (“people sitting on the floor” packed, that is!) and after the screening was over, I once again found myself out of DVDs. That was something like 70 DVDs gone in just over a minute. Clearly, people were interested in the demoscene.

THE MAN FROM THE AUDIENCE

I was handing out DVDs after the show when I quickly checked my bag and seeing that I was seriously quickly nearing the end of my supply, I realized that it would be stupid of me to run out of discs on the second day of a five-day conference. I covered the remaining few discs and started telling people around me that I unfortunately was out of discs. A little nasty perhaps, but I would need them during one-on-one outreach meet-ups later on. Suddenly a guy approached me from the back of the now thinning crowd of people. “Do you have one for me as well?” he said. “Okay then,” I thought, and handed him a DVD. “Thanks for this” he said, “it was a good show just now - well, see you around!” and walked away.



The info-poster at FMX

The next day I went to the complimentary speakers dinner together with Gargaj and Steeler, and on the way there we bumped into the guy from the audience the previous day. We started talking and ended up sitting at the same table that night. As it turned out, his name was Rick and he had worked at Pixar Animation Studios more or less since the company was founded. The evening was spent talking at great length and enthusiasm about computer graphics, the demoscene, and pretty much everything. During the rest of my visit to FMX/07, I met up with Rick several times, almost always together with Gargaj and Steeler, and we had several nice talks throughout the event.

**“NOW THE ONLY QUESTION WAS:
COULD WE AFFORD THIS
ADVENTURE?”**

When the last day of the conference came around, Rick was jokingly suggesting that if we were ever in the San Francisco area, we should give him a call and he would take us on a tour of Pixar. It was one of those comments that people sometimes throw around even though there is a slim-to-none chance of it ever coming to life. Little did any one of us know what was to happen next..

ZE GERMANZ ARE HERE!

After FMX/07, I went back home to Norway and resumed my normal day-to-day routines, something that can be rather tricky after such an exciting trip. I had accomplished a lot during my time in Germany (amongst others, a promise of a \$5.000 sponsorship deal with Pixar), and felt like I had done plenty of good outreach work, but now it was time to focus on slightly other matters, such as my own demoparty in Norway, Solskogen and an upcoming trip to Assembly in Finland as well. During (and after) FMX/07 I had talked to Steeler about him maybe coming to Norway to visit me and also do some sightseeing, since he had never been to Norway and really wanted to come here. At some point during our talks of this, a plan started to form: he would come to Norway for Solskogen, stay some days with me, leave for a week to travel around and then join me and some other guys to go to Assembly (which was taking place two weeks after Solskogen). The plan turned into action, and before I could say “Pretzel”, I had a german living on my couch.

A PLAN IS HATCHED

During one late night, we started talking about Rick and his informal offer, and I can't really say how or why, but I ended up sending Rick an email, just to say hello, thank him for his help in securing the donation for Scene.org and also to check if the offer was indeed a valid one. What I didn't know at the time was that Gargaj,

home in Hungary, had been keeping in semi-regular email contact with Rick, mostly talking about obscure rock-bands and such, but still. A few days after I had sent the mail to Rick (and forgot about it, to be honest) I got a reply, and it was indeed a reply with an oomfh - “You bet, the offer is most definitely still valid.”

I sent the reply I got from Rick to Steeler (who was in Bergen, visiting Dominei at the time) and to Gargaj. Pretty soon we had a hefty email-discussion going. We really wanted to do this, but the question was how. After a few rounds with Rick, we determined that the end of October/beginning of November would be the best for him, as well as for us (Steeler and me had time off work, and Gargaj was done organizing Function as well). During our many email exchanges with Rick, a plan started to brew in my head — we should see this as an opportunity to visit more companies in the San Francisco area. Going to Pixar and hosting an event showcasing the demoscene to Pixar employees was great, but while we were there we ought to visit more people. It turned out that Rick would be a great help here — he was involved with the San Francisco chapter of VES (the Visual Effects Society), and he promised to send a mail to his contacts in VES to try to expand our scope. A reply came pretty swiftly, and the Pixar gig was turned into a VES gig, which meant that VES members could attend as well. In addition to this, a VES member wanted us to come to Lucas Films/ILM. Yoda, it seems, appreciates real-time art.

In the time that had passed since FMX/07, we had also been to Assembly in Finland, where Steeler had met a very nice guy from NVIDIA called Temis. When Steeler informed him that we might be coming to San Francisco, Temis insisted that we also would visit NVIDIA while we were there.

Pixar, Lucas Films/Arts and NVIDIA — it was almost unbelievable. It would be the most ambitious outreach effort in demoscene history, and we had come half-way in pulling it all off. Now the only question was; could we afford this adventure?

DREAM BECOMES REALITY

For some time I had quietly been checking the price of travelling to San Francisco, and it was just no way we could afford to go (and stay) there without some kind of outside financial support. After talking it over with Steeler, we ended up sending requests to several demoscene oriented organizations which we thought might be interested in helping out. Digitale Kultur eV, the Breakpoint demoparty in Germany, Scene.org in Finland, and The Gathering computer party in Norway all received such requests. The answers came back much faster than anyone could have anticipated — everyone wanted in. Everyone wanted to sponsor this trip. We were ecstatic. This would actually happen!

I spent almost a full week trying to work out how we could do the

trip in the cheapest way possible, and it was a logistical nightmare. After all, we would come from three different countries, getting on different flights, meeting up somewhere and the whole thing was just an utter mess. After discussing it with the guys, I finally settled on a plan:

- I would travel from Oslo (Norway) to Hamburg (Germany) to stay at Steeler's house.
- Gargaj would travel from Budapest (Hungary) to Hamburg and join us at Steeler's house.
- We would (very early the next morning, I might add) travel from Hamburg to London, and then from Heathrow Airport in London to San Francisco.
- On our return flight, we would travel from San Francisco to Frankfurt (Germany), and from Frankfurt to Hamburg.
- Steeler would now be home, but Gargaj would travel from Hamburg back to Budapest, and I would go from Hamburg to Copenhagen and then to Oslo.

Yes, it was severely complicated and involved a lot of annoying airport time, but out of all the options I could make work, it would be the cheapest way. Simply put: it would make the trip a reality. However, no matter how I twisted and turned the numbers, I was still left with one big X on the expense-sheet: housing.

RESCUE IN KOLOR

I was still left with the issue of where we would stay in San Francisco. After checking several of the cheapest hotels I could find, it became clear that we would not have enough money to pay for our actual stay, just enough for the travel itself plus food and a rental car. This is where Shiva of Kolor rode in on a shining white horse. He worked at Adobe in San Francisco and said he would be delighted to have all three of us staying with him the entire week we would be there.

“EVERYTHING FINANCIAL WAS IN PLACE. PHEW.”

In addition to letting us all stay with him for free, he added his employer, Adobe Software, to our list of companies to visit. The trip started to take on a rather surreal glow now.

The dates were double and triple-confirmed and after securing three of our four incoming financial aid packages, I booked the flights and the rental car. Everything apart from our day-to-day expenses were now covered. Shortly after booking the tickets, the fourth and final donation came, and everything financial was in place. Phew.

GETTING THE MESSAGE STRAIGHT

Because of all the stress related to the financial issues and the organization of the trip itself, we had not devoted a great deal of time to work on our actual presentations yet. Since all of us had done similar work earlier, we thought it would go pretty smoothly to come up with something that would play well in front of an audience. Of course, it was not quite that easy. We didn't really have time to craft a completely individual message for all of the companies we were going to visit, so we would have to build a more general base and then shuffle things around when we got to San Francisco. We started on some texts, with each of us working on different pieces. The plan was to put it all together when we were gathered in the same room, because that always works best on collaborative efforts such as this. Since we were all experienced sceners who were used to thrive under pressure, our plan simple: we would do the bulk of the work on the day (and night) of our stay at Steeler's house.

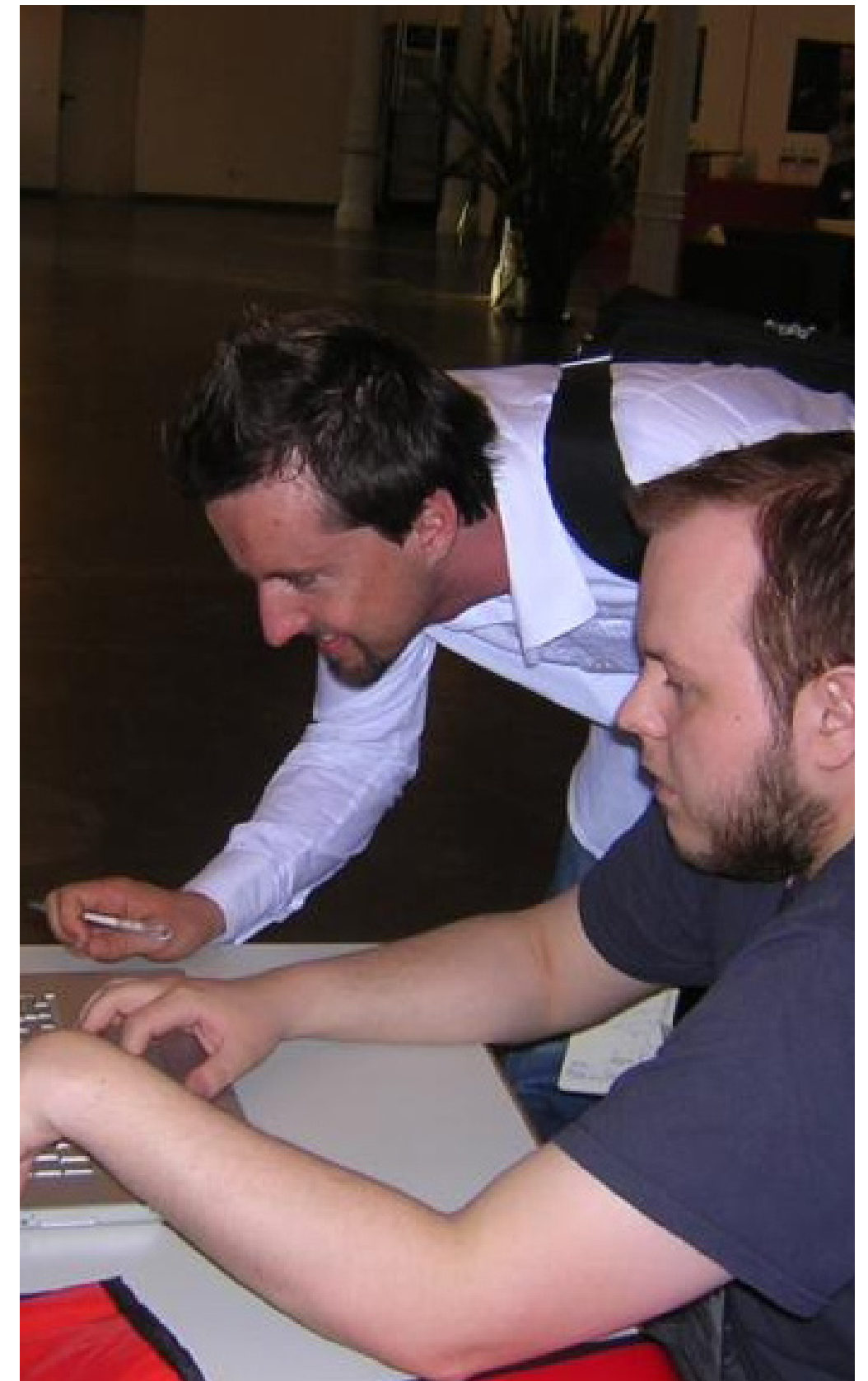
AND SO IT BEGINS

In the very early hours of the 28th of October, I found myself dragging a huge suitcase, two bags, my laptop and my camera-bag down to the bus station to go to the airport. It was dark, wet and just your typical Norwegian crappy autumn weather. The bus-ride was over in about 40 minutes, and about an hour later I had checked in all of my luggage apart from my laptop which I used to

continue working on my part of the presentation. I knew Steeler had started on a PowerPoint template, but I really wanted to use Keynote on my mac to "style it all up", so I prepared all of my texts in a normal text editor. After what seemed like just a few seconds, my plane was boarding, and I plugged in my iPod and fell asleep on the plane.

After what seemed like just a few minutes, I was awoken by a grouchy-looking stewardess who told me in very bad English that I needed to turn off my iPod and raise the back of my chair. Despite this rough awakening, it meant that we were landing in Hamburg, which was a good thing. While waiting for my luggage, I turned on my phone and called Steeler. Despite being German, he was running late, so I had a few hours of airport waiting to look forward to. I got myself a couple of pretzels (oh how I love them) and sat myself down on an easily visible spot near the entrance to work on my texts. After about an hour, the battery on my laptop ran out and I had to shut it down to save all of my work. While sitting there, listening to a few Little Bitchard tunes on my iPod and looking around the airport it suddenly struck me; this is all real — this is all happening. It was insane, but true.

This article continues in ZINE 14.



Gloom showing Cougar/Sanity demos at FMX/07