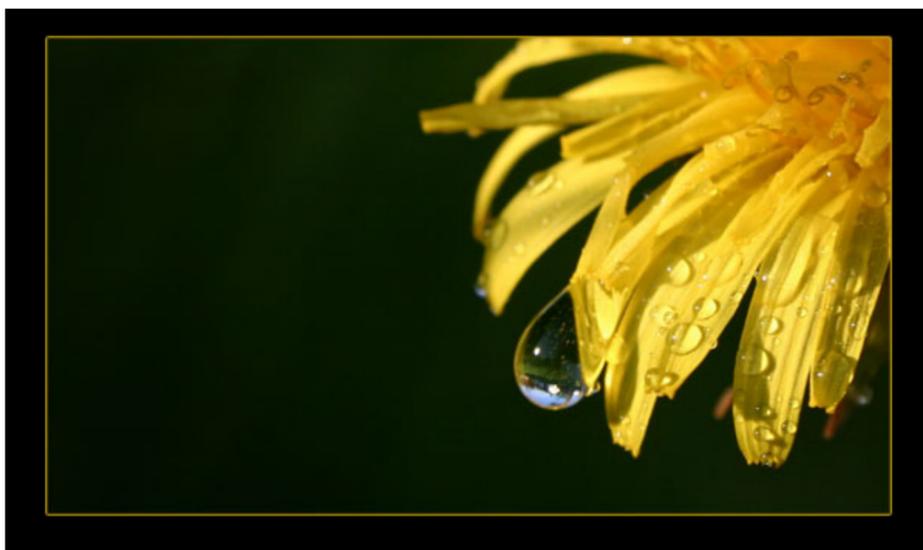


LOVE, MAGIC AND OUTRACKS

BY AXEL OF BRAINSTORM

One sunny day in Spring 2007, ZINE first came across Zeila's work. Her photos were so beautiful that the editorial team first wanted to integrate the photos into the layout of ZINE 12. The first tests didn't look too promising though, as the two worlds - photographs of nature, and the Demoscene - proved too difficult to merge, particularly under time pressure. Nevertheless, ZINE wanted to know more about the person behind the photographs and artwork, which for example found their way into productions such as "Still Puzzled?" by Outracks.



Flower droplet photographed by Zeila

Mia "Zeila" Aasbakken grew up in a little Norwegian town called Elverum, which is about a two-hour drive from Oslo (with your nose pointed towards the north pole). Zeila, her parents and her younger sister Mari lived in a quiet neighbourhood that had lots of children her own age, and all of them ended up in her class when she started school. "Elverum is a pretty small place with a population of 20,000, so you have that 'everybody knows everybody' feeling there, at least among the youth", explains Zeila.

Zeila's time at school wasn't too extraordinary, she recalls. "I wasn't the most popular girl in school, but I wasn't bullied either," she says. "The main weird thing people saw in me was that I liked trance, techno, electronica, went to LAN-parties and loved computers. I had a little group of friends that were very close to me, especially my childhood friend Ine, who lived across the street for 15 years or so. After junior high, I started hanging around with boys, since there weren't that many female nerds in Elverum."

And that's when a certain phenomenon named Demoscene crossed her path. Her first encounter with the Demoscene was after her cousin went to The Gathering in the late '90s. She had seen something that resembled music videos, but which was way cooler than that. "We logged into The Gathering's FTP and started downloading video dumps of various demos," explains Zeila. "I was like under a spell. I watched them over and over again, and felt like this was something I wanted to know more about. This

happened when I was still in elementary school. I really wanted to go to The Gathering with my cousin to see these things live, but my parents refused for some reason. I finally went to TG in 2003, and got to watch demos on the big screen with my own eyes for the first time."



Dandelion photographed by Zeila

She thought the Demoscene was magic. "It was something so mystical and beautiful, which only a handful of people could create. I couldn't believe they had programmed what I saw on the big screen. How was that possible? I had great respect for the people who were in the Demoscene. I remember sitting at TG03, wanting to make a GFX entry for the pixel compo. But I didn't dare to hand it in. I felt I lacked the spirit and skill that the other participants

had. In fact, it took me three years to finally deliver something! I'm such a wuss," she laughs.



Trondheim, Norway - Zeilas current home town

In 2006 Zeila moved to Trondheim to study computer science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), something she's still doing up to this day. After she went to Duckers' "Demomaking for Dummies" seminar at TG, some of the magic disappeared from demos. I understood more what a demo really was, but it was still very far-fetched for me. It was when I started at NTNU and began programming myself that the far-fetched part got a little less far-fetched. And of course watching Duckers code his demos, explaining everything to me. Lately, Duckers has got me into C++ (we learn Java at school), and began lecturing me

in software rendering. So I dare to say that I've seen through the demos now; they aren't magical at all anymore. They're still beautiful, though. Now I play around in my homemade 3D-engine, trying to make something that isn't butt ugly. In fact, I think I'll try to release something at TG08, where the stakes aren't sky high."

MEETING THE OUTRACKS

Her relationship with programmer Duckers of Outracks started harmlessly. "Actually, I was a fangirl of Outracks," reveals Zeila with a laugh. "I ordered a fan T-shirt from the Outracks webpage, and that's how we made contact." But they didn't meet face to face until she moved to Trondheim.



Zeilas artwork for Still Puzzled by Outracks

Fast forward. Today, Duckers and Zeila are in love, and each respects the character traits of the other. "I like his creativity and that he always has a solution for things," comments Zeila. "He's also a very positive boy and drags me up when I feel confused or don't see the big picture." On the other hand she dislikes that he sometimes sits in his chair playing Call of Duty 4, and has empty Coca Cola bottles all over the place. Admittedly, she has to smirk while she's saying that. "But I guess he deserves to relax, even if it has to include an FPS game."



Droplets photographed by Zeila

On the other hand, Duckers thinks Zeila's greatest strength is that she is a real all-rounder. Artist and graphician by nature, but she is also getting more and more into coding and the technical side

of computers. According to him, her weakness is that she is sometimes too humble to realize her true potential and capabilities.

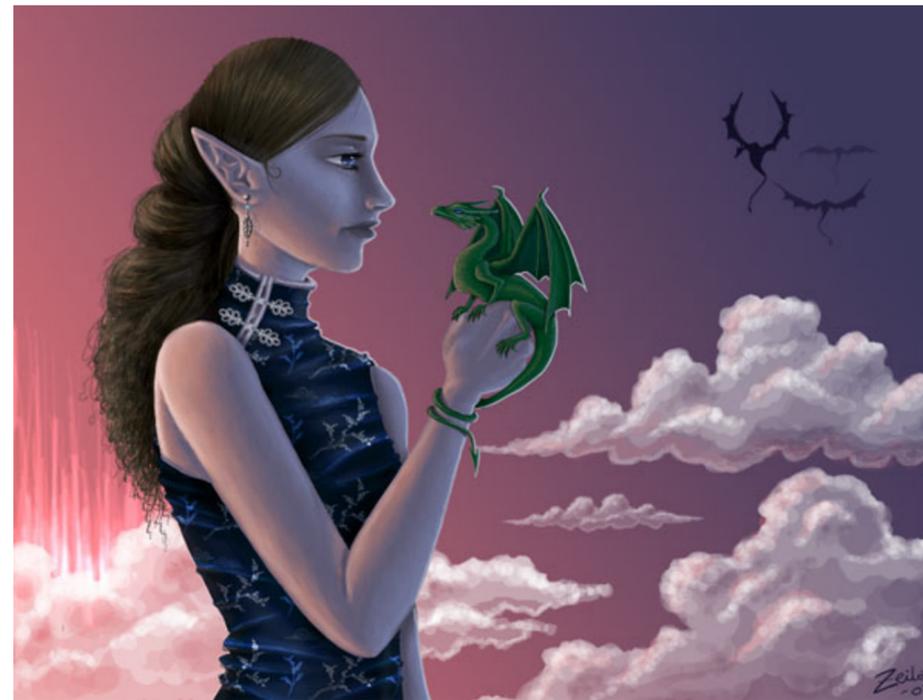
"I like drawing and doing pixel art," she confirms. "I have many concepts in my head. Everything that I make starts out as a concept, but not much gets realized."

Duckers, on the other hand, has totally different problems when it comes to the creation of demos. "Finding a name for it is the hardest part for me," he says. "It's always a pain in the ass and a long way up to the middle of my back. Most names have been thrown out at the last minute before the deadline, or are even temporary names which never got changed. Like `our.demo`."

"Secondly, finding a concept or theme for the demo is also hard," he continues. "Visually speaking, I'm not really much of an artist. I feel like I'm ending up with the same color scheme over and over again." Sounds like he found the perfect partner in Zeila.

When it comes to the challenges the Demoscene is facing today, many things come to Duckers' mind: "The Demoscene is facing many tough challenges. For instance, graphics in games are getting so good in quality that most non-sceners are no longer impressed by demos in terms of raw technical aspects. I think intros and demos for limited or old platforms are what is going to keep

the `doing the impossible' spirit alive in the scene in the future. For high-end demos, what we need to do is focus more on style, attitude, drive, and concepts, to keep up the entertainment value and make a clear distinction between demo and game graphics. This has steadily improved over the last years, but has the side effect that entering the scene as a new group requires a very high level of artistic skills and capacities in addition to coding skills."



Zeila has an affinity for elves

"If we don't want the scene to die its final death over the next decade, we also need to keep recruiting in mind," he continues. "One important factor is to stay represented at parties which involve non-sceners to attract fresh talent. This is one of the reasons why I've continued to support The Gathering for many years,

including holding Demomaking seminars."

At the moment however, Duckers is focusing on a game development competition, the Norwegian Game Award. "I've always loved making games. The NGA competition is a great motivation to finally get something finished. We are making an RPG/Strategy crossover with what we hope will be a slightly original twist. It's a lot of work though, so until the deadline on May 1st, 2008, there won't be much time for demo-making."

The Gathering has been Outracks' "home party" ever since the group was founded. Outracks has participated in the demo competition ever since 2003, and most recently scored first place again in 2007 (after winning in 2004), with the production "Gamma". In 2008, however, it could be that Outracks won't be present at the party. "I'm going on a mandatory trip with my university class," comments Duckers. "However, there have been a lot of changes going on in the The Gathering organization lately. I'm curious about what direction the party will take scene-wise this year and in the future. As for 2009, I've not yet decided whether I'll go to Breakpoint or TG."

But who knows? Maybe one of Zeila's concepts, hidden in one of her desk's drawers, will finally see the light of day and make it to the big screen.