

# JUNK: THOUGHTS ABOUT E.T.A.

BY AXEL OF BRAINSTORM AND MENACE OF SPACEBALLS, BOOZOHOLICS AND KEYBOARDERS

**zine**  
BEHIND THE SCENE

At Breakpoint 2007 the Danish group Junk caused quite some buzz with the release of its short-film “E.T.A.” that grabbed the audience with a hilarious joke, mocking Ridley Scott’s classic movie Alien. The 4-years-in-the-making E.T.A. won the animation competition and subsequently was shown at several festivals, where the Danish team even won a prize as “Best Newcomer”. Furthermore, the team won a Scene.org Award for their previous work on “Of Mice & Monsters” from 2006. ZINE met with Heinrich, Trenox and Dfekt to discuss E.T.A and the processes behind its creation.

## THE FOCUS WAS NOW 100% PRE-RENDERED DEMOS

Henrik Bjerregaard Clausen, frequently known as HEINRICH, made his first steps into computer graphics on an Amiga 500 using PhotonPaint. Later he switched to an A1200 and started doing small animations in DeluxePaint, ImageFX and later moved on to 3D using Imagine. This was about the time he was introduced to the demoscene and met Michael and Søren (Trenox) before attending The Party 1995. From there he concentrated more and more on 3D animation and combining different scenes to use in wild-demo competitions. It was

about this time that he met Rasmus (affectionately known as ‘Tytte’) at a local computer party and found they had a shared



love for goatrance and electronic music. A few years later Heinrich joined Junk, and Rasmus would occasionally supply them with music in the last hours before deadline for their numerous weekend wild-demo productions. At this point Heinrich had switched to the PC platform and started using 3DS

Max as his primary tool. “I started working professionally with 3D in 2002 for a small studio in Aarhus, Denmark, producing tv commercials for national and regional broadcast,” he recalls. “I am currently working full time as a freelance Visual Effects Artist doing a broad range of 3D and compositing work. In my sparetime I develop and direct short films aspiring to become a fulltime director of animated/live action fiction.”

Søren “Trenox” Pødenphant Andersen visited his first demoparty in December 1994; the legendary The Party. Bitten by the bug, he visited parties like Meltdown and Scene Event, where he met

several of the other members with which he would form Junk. He also went to High School with Michael, and dabbled around with computer graphics and artwork in general. He recalls, "Junk was originally formed by two programmers who then left, and with Henrik on board the focus was now 100% pre-rendered demos." His evolution as an artist has led to him currently working for IO Interactive in Copenhagen, Denmark as an environment artist.



The ZINE team asked the question on everyone's mind; How hard is it really to come up with a main joke like the one in

E.T.A? Trenox replied: "I am not really sure how strong the punchline would be without the whole big setup. It was a pretty basic story that began with the premise rather than the punch: A lonely guy in space in front of all his computer screens, or-

ders some coffee and then 'something' approaches him. I think it ended up being

more a straight up alien spoof than what was initially intended. In the original storyboard the coffee appears from the monsters belly, but the tongue gag was just too obvious to miss."



Trenox continues, "A lot of the motivation for the idea was also to create a story in one small and over viewable setting so we could concentrate on cramming in as much detail as we wanted to make it look sufficiently good. It was very much a quality

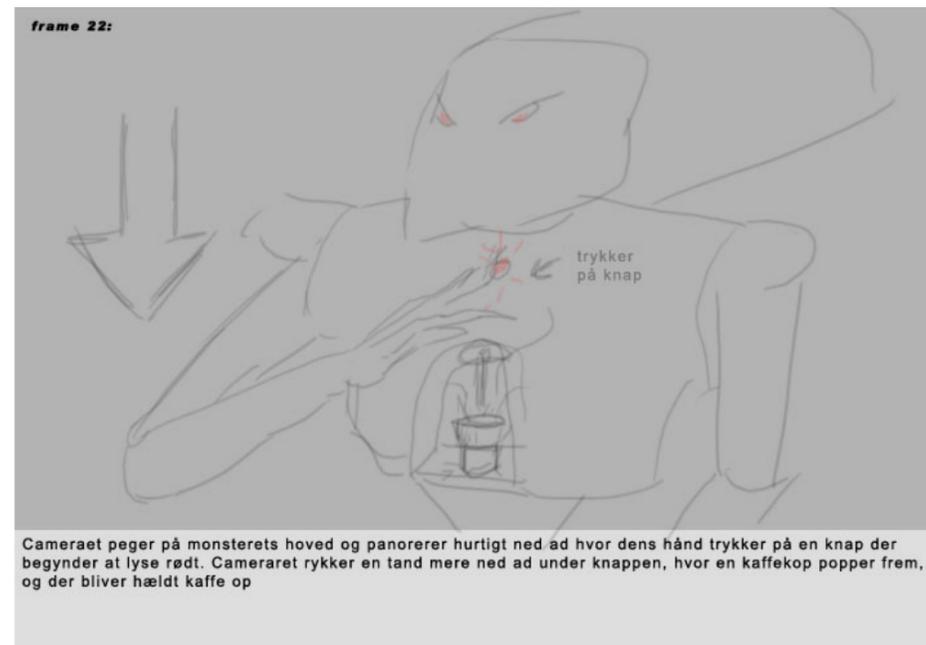
over quantity production. Having too many sets and too many characters just causes a lot of problems in production. If you increase the quality

in set A then you also need to increase it proportionally in set B,C and D and so on.. Having just one detailed set gives you a lot of freedom in production." DFeKT weighs in on the idea too, "In ETA's case the only thing that didn't change during the long production was the joke."

We push the issue a little further to gain more insight on how the team works, and pose the question of how they develop a visual gag that will 'work'. Trenox: "That's actually a good question and I think we asked ourselves that question many times during the production. We spent an awful lot of time finding the right balance between building tension and keeping the story snappy, without dragging it into a snooze-fest. I think we made three storyboards and 7-8 animatics to nail it down to those 4 minutes." HEINRICH also spent a lot of time worrying about this

Dfekt is now living in Copenhagen and the co-owner of a visual effects company called Resetfilm. He has been around the block as far as considering graphics ever

## IT ENDED UP BEING MORE A STRAIGHT UP ALIEN SPOOF THAN WHAT WAS INITIALLY INTENDED



since highschool, and started out designing computer cabinets in 3d. He then did a little architectural visualization, before becoming an illustrator and web designer at Jubii (Lycos) in Copenhagen. He then started his own company doing both 2D and 3D work, mostly for print and web, and finally in January 2007 buying into Resetfilm. Since then he has been doing more and more highend cg effects for film and tv.

aspect; “I did multiple storyboards and many more animatics and several 3D pre-viz edits of the film to try out different ways of building up tension and suspense. At one point, the film was more than 6 minutes long with a somewhat layered backstory explaining a bit about the pilot’s past, but it didn’t really work, so it was cut. After additional trimming, almost right up until the end of production, the film ended up as the 4 minutes and 24 seconds it is now. So, no, we did not test it on an audience. Only friends and relatives had the chance at sneak previews.” DFeKT sums up, “At the end of the day you just have to go with your gut feeling and the notion that if you yourself think it’s funny - it is likely that someone else will as well.”

While E.T.A and most of Junk’s other productions have been shorter stories, we were curious if they had any plans for even more elaborate productions. Trenox says: “I think we all would like to keep the momentum and make more productions with increasing high level of quality, but it is incredibly time consuming, and we are all working full time with our jobs atm.” Heinrich served as the director / all-round-wrangler on E.T.A, and certainly sees more ambitious projects in his future; “Personally I want to make my living directing films. Short films, live action films, feature films; telling stories that I care about, topics that I regard as interesting on a personal and philosophical level. I am very ambitious and have a long way to go.” DFeKT hopes

to be working on an effects driven TV-series within the next 6 months. “After that? Perhaps start working on full length feature films?”

## WE SPENT AN AWFUL LOT OF TIME FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

In closing, one can only think what this team could do with a game-quality engine in the realtime space. We asked this question of each of the teams members: Do you believe a strong 3d engine could transpose your movies to a realtime environment? Trenox says: “I think that the Junk consensus leans towards using pre-render when ever we want to tell a story and a realtime engine when the main focus is special effects and timing with music.” DFeKT ponders the idea; “To transpose a movie like this to a realtime environment would have to be planned from the start and add another variable to our workflow: The technical things like hair, dof, displacement, and other render heavy effects would have to be considered already in the design part. But a film like ours could of course be made for a realtime environment given that it was the goal.” Taking the idea one step further, Trenox weighs in with some surprising ideas and a small proposal to some of his Danish demoscene brothers: “I personally still have a soft spot for straight up effect demos and it could be fun to do just that. Fortunately we are good friends with TBC so maybe they can lend us a coder?”

