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Bringing Alien Vs Predator to life
Plarium's Soldier, Inc.


Image courtesy of Plarium Games

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~ Vyacheslav Lisovsky, Head of Video Production Department

Pioneering motion capture since 1984.

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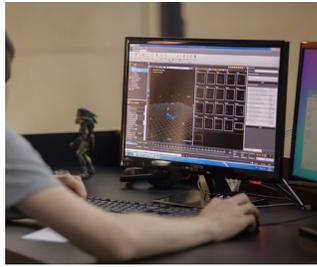
With over 180 million registered users for its social and mobile games, Plarium is used to providing entertainment on a large scale. When it hooked up with Twentieth Century Fox to create the Alien vs. Predator (AVP™) event for Plarium's hit Facebook game, Soldiers, Inc. however, the games developer knew that it would have to bring something special to the party.

The Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) strategy game is set in 2019 in the fictional realm of Zandia where foreign powers, multinational companies and underground criminal organisations are all fighting to locate rare minerals in a starving and depleting state. The AVP addition to Soldiers, Inc. ran for 90 days and included two separate Alien and Predator campaigns at 12 missions each.

Marketing the event called for Plarium to create a powerful cinematic trailer featuring the characters from the game. This had to adhere closely to the look of the Twentieth Century Fox film series. The quality bar was thus set high and a high level of realistic CG animation was required.

"Mostly the hard work on the video concerned the animation of the Predator," adds Vyacheslav Lisovsky, Head of Video Production Department. "Very specific animation was required, such as the character's hand movements, so it was better for us to work with mocap for this purpose."

Planning for capture

"We made the decision a year ago to buy a motion capture system," explains Lisovsky. "Previously we were animating everything by hand in 3D. We got in touch with Vicon to find out the best system for our purposes — to create realistic animation for cinematics and visual assets for trailers."

A team from Plarium travelled to Vicon's headquarters in Oxford, to learn how to use the system over two days.

"We got lessons in everything," Lisovsky says. "We are all experienced at working in CG, but working with motion capture is very specific. We were introduced to the whole process of mocap, how to position and calibrate the cameras, how to actually capture the data and how to use it. We also learned how to export data and how to clean it up with Vicon's Blade software."

Taking on the Predator™

"We were working with a limited license from Fox, so the actual time we had from conception to the finished video was two months" says Nicholas Day. "Up until then this would not have been something we would have tried, because there would have been no way to realistically do this with key frame animation to get the level of quality we would need."

In one sequence the team wanted to animate the Predator's arm, as it pushes wrist-mounted buttons. A local actor was brought in and instructed in how the Predator moves, using footage from the movies.

As lead animator Lisovsky used the mocap data straight from Vicon's Blade software, rather than resort to an intermediate retargeting application like Autodesk MotionBuilder or IKinema.

"I built my own workflow using Blade and Maya Reference System," Lisovsky explains. "I uploaded a few skeletons and was able to retarget the mocap data directly to the Predator rig in Maya - the data was that clean."

"The animation took two weeks from shooting to final animation. If we were to do this by hand, with key frame animation, it would have taken us a month or maybe more, so motion capture offered a huge speed increase."

Sound investment

Simultaneously the Plarium team was working on sound design and also trying to add a score to the trailer. The benefits of the Bonita motion capture system could be seen here too.

"The fact that we had these data points for the animation meant that we could pre-rig it and show loosely where everything was going to be before we actual came to the final rendering," says Nicholas Day. "So we were able to get the composer and the sound FX studio involved much earlier, in a way that we couldn't previously do with keyframes."

"To be honest, Fox was really blown away by the trailer," concludes Day. "They seemed pretty impressed that we'd done it all in-house, in such a short space of time."

"It's great that we can make marketing content and trailers, but with mocap we have the technology now to actually do really cool in-game rendering, to actually use it in projects," he adds. "We're going to make the games pop out a bit more, and make them feel more personal to the player."

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