CINEMA SPECIAL EFFECTS AND THEIR PRESENTATION ON THE WEB

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"We are moving toward a time when the only limitation on filmmaker is his or her imagination. But that will only be true if we stay abreast of the skills and technology the visual effects industry has to offer."

James CAMERON
Director / Filmmaker

The words of James Cameron, director of the Terminator I and II, Aliens, The Abyss, True Lies and Titanic, summarizes us the perspectives of filmmakers and the final point arrived in movie industry today. Imagination, fantasy and virtual reality dominate the themes of highly respected films, and the visual effects industry helps filmmakers in offering their fantasy worlds for audience appreciation.

Developments in technology have made a significant impact on filmmaking. The emergence and adoption of television as a new medium in the 1930s caused a decline in movie attendance. It took a long time for movie industry "to recover from this decline and to readjust to the fact that movies were no longer the main entertainment medium in North America."[1] But over time, the dramatic improvements in sound and visual technology and advantages of using a wide-screen helped the movie sector to prove itself as a challenging rival of television in the entertainment business. Today directors like Peter Jackson, Christopher Colombus and Wachowski Brothers know how to use special effects as a movie-making tool rather than a crutch. With this ability, they are able to pull millions of viewers to virtual worlds they created and the reflections of these fantasy worlds on the movie screen make millions of dollars on the Box Office, by awarding them an undisputable success.

Until recently, for most of us, a good movie meant a good story line, good actors and a talented director. But today, they are not enough, and maybe some of these required factors are not needed because sound and visual effects came to the stage. With the skill of special effects wizards, actors can compete with moving bullets, they can fly, fight each other on the sky, and big battles we cannot imagine to see on the screen take place in movies.

In the last version of The Lord of the Rings, The Return of the King, more than 1400 special effects shots were used. Weta Digital, which handled all digital and visual effects of The Lord of the Rings trilogy, was founded in 1993 with the help of director Peter Jackson. Weta Digital designed a piece of technology called Massive. Massive is a software that teaches characters to fight each other using artificial intelligence. This software gives characters a repertoire of military moves pre-taught through motion capture. The artificial intelligence would set their ability to win or lose a given battle.[2]

In the Harry Potter series, about half the film's budget went into effects so audiences would believe that magical places like Hogswart Castle were real. Nine separate effects houses around the globe worked on the film, including Industrial Light and Magic, with a task of mixing live action with computer animation. The filmmakers of Harry Potter from different parts of the world put the 35-millimeter film clips into an encrypted digital format and made them available to staffers globally via a private satellite network.[3]

In the Matrix sequels, the filmmakers used very impressive techniques to accomplish amazing special effects. In one of these techniques, a collection of still cameras is fixed around the object. At the moment when the action should freeze, all the

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[1] Garth Jowett and James M. Linton. Movies as Mass Communication, Sage Publications, California, USA, 1980, p.116.

[2] Tracey Marx, Tech Live, in http://www.techtv.com/news/scitech/story/0,24195,3588726,00.html, 19.12.2003.

[3] http://abcnews.go.com/sections/scitech/TechTV/techtv_harrypotter011116.html, 16.12.2003.

cameras shoot at once. The images they catch are played one after another to show the rotation. In addition to rotation, the actor also moves in slow motion during the rotation. In Matrix trilogy, filmmakers combined at least five different special-effect techniques to form the final image:[4]

-A large number of still cameras capture the scene, but they fire sequentially around the actor rather than all at once.

-The cameras shoot the actor on a green-screen background .

-The actor is wearing a wire suspended from the ceiling so that he can fall only part-way or appear to float in mid-air.

-Once the scene is shot, software similar to morphing software interpolates between the images to allow the slow-motion feel. The filmmaker can therefore slow down or speed up the action at will.

-Computer-generated backgrounds are then superimposed onto the film.

Dan Glass and D.J. Des Jardin, visual effects wizards of the Matrix sequels state that they used large sets for the characters to interact in, but they are surrounded by a lot of green and blue screens. For the real world, the color of the screen was green and for the Matrix it was blue because of the fact that the Matrix world is sort of green-shifted, so for Glass and Des Jardin, it was better to use a blue screen behind that, and then everything in the world would have a blue tone to it, so they used a green screen.[5]

As seen, very complex and amazing techniques are used to create today's most popular movies. When we decided to write a paper about special-effect miracle movies, we thought that there must be a lot being said about the technical side of this issue, and we are not experts about it. So, this paper focuses on something else: This kind of movies' presentation on the Web. It cannot be denied that once something

gets popular, it immediately takes place on the Internet. In addition to its official website, many more sites are designed and devoted to it.

Harry Potter's Official Website:
The site creates an interactive environment that mimics the magical world J.K. Rowling's (the author) characters inhabit in the Potter books. Visitors can conjure up their own magical creatures or play interactive games of Quidditch. The design of the website was inspired from a flying ball and stadium, which were used during the sports competition in the first Harry Potter movie. It gives us the impression that we are looking at the stadium from above. We see ball is flying, and players with their brooms are moving. When surfing in the website, it feels like we also are in the game because when we move our mouse the flying ball accordingly moves in the same direction.

The target audience of Harry Potter's website, like its movies and books, are children. Colors used in background are yellow, blue, and green, in other words, lively colors.

Harry Potter's website offers 11 different language options to its users. When we click on the link "Hogwarts," we are asked to write our name, and after this moment, the website addresses us with our name, and this makes it personal. For Harry Potter's website, unlike the other sites, we are a "student" not a "visitor." As a student of Hogwarts, we can communicate with other students (visitors) via a message board.

From this perspective, it can be argued that technology has played a key role not only in the film's creation but also in its marketing. HarryPotter.com, the film's official website, has attracted more than 25 million unique visitors worldwide.[6]
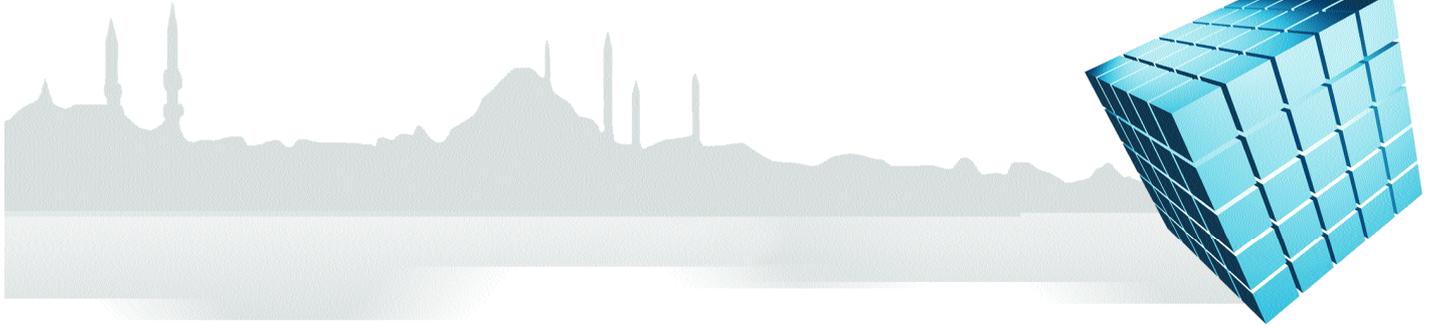
Lord of the Rings' Official Website
It was designed as if you are looking at movie screen, even though you are on the computer screen. Like

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[4] http://www.howstuffworks.com/question295.htm, 18.12.2003.

[5] http: Cindy White, http://www.scifi.com/sfw/issue317/interview.html, 19.12.2003.

[6] http://abcnews.go.com/sections/scitech/TechTV/techtv_harrypotter011116.html, 14.12.2003.

the movie, all the compositions are concentrated in the middle of a screen. The flat texture of movie screen is decorated with figures to create a mystic atmosphere. The colors used are mostly light colors, with this way, the mystic atmosphere is strengthened. Besides the links like message board, info& images, and shopping, there is a link that explains how the special effects are created for the film. This link also offers its users a chance and experience to use these effects.

In the The Return of King's website, there are links to go to the first two versions of the trilogy. When webmasters create an official website of this movie, we see that they paid attention to give detailed information about the story line and the characters. From that aspect, we can comment that Lord of the Rings' website are very explanatory even the people who did not see the movie can get a good idea what it is about by searching its official website. We cannot see this feature in Matrix or Harry Potter, because they give an impression that the design of their website is made for the ones who already have seen these movies.

The Matrix's Official Website

The first distinctive feature of the site is its dark design. Black is the dominating color. In contrast to the movie, whereas green screen is used to portray real world and the blue screen is used to reflect Matrix world, there is no color distinction between the two worlds. When we open the main screen on our computer, we realize that, like the movie, technology is the main structure, because we are immediately asked to specify whether we want to enter on high bandwidth, low bandwidth or lite version. We have to make selection according to system requirements of the computer used. The opening page is divided to two segments. On the left side, as the numbers flowing from up to down in the movie, links are flowing. On the right side, a scene from the movie appears and different download and language options are given below this screen. Unlike the other sites, language options are indicated by countries' flags rather than writing in Matrix's official website. Details and sketches in designing of the site induce users to investigate and at the end, give them an

appreciation of discovering something. This feature, at some point, covers the darkness dominating the website. In other words, the appealing of discovery beats the visual coldness.

In fact, some themes that we catch on the website are similar to the themes in the movie. In the movie, Nebuchadnezzar, the warship of Neo, Trinity and Morpheus, is lacking aesthetics visually but it is functional technologically. The general character of the website gives us the same impression. After we choose our connection type, we pass to a page with a bunch of computer screens connected to each other with a bunch of cables. It looks complicated but once you discover why these computer screens and cables are there, you will know they are functionally designed.

When we click on "Zion archives" on the website, we have a chance to examine the locations in the movie from 360 degrees aspect. With this experience, we can characterize some of the scenes in the movie three dimensionally in our minds. For example, after experiencing its website adventure, the room that we saw on the movie in which Neo was sitting will mean to us: "Neo is sitting on his bed and the door is behind me," or, "Neo is on his computer, but I know what he sees on the computer."

Conclusion:

As authors of this paper, we put ourselves in the position of a movie audience who has a critical viewpoint rather than the position of technical experts who worked on the subject of special effects for years. We hope that you evaluate this study from this perspective.

In our paper, we examined the official websites of the Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter and the Matrix which are the most popular movies of recent times including virtual reality themes. The Matrix, more than portraying the myths created on the screen, is famous for creating its own myth and therefore, it became the main focus of this study.

We asked whether the visual effects used in the websites are compatible with the ones used in the movies and if they complete each other. The

response of this question is a "yes," even stronger than we expected.

In the websites we investigated, we did not only watch the visual effects as if we watch the movie but also learned how these visual effects are created and which technologies are used to create them. With the help of websites of movies, producers offer audiences a chance to understand how the virtual worlds are created and webmasters offer them an experience to control these worlds. Maybe this is made purposefully so that the audience could appreciate the effort and time spent and the technology used during the production of movies.