

# Climbing The Mountain

One Content Artist's Experience

Volume 1

3D is hard. There is no getting around that awful truth for those who feel inspired to create something because they have an idea, but who have no experience or knowledge (yet) of what goes into creating even a fairly simple asset. I'm going to try to do you a favor right now and advise you to turn around. Stop reading this. Don't go here. You can't do it. You don't have the patience, talent, or wherewithal. You lack the dedication. You have no love for it. You will surely perish on the path. There is no place for you, unwashed person, in this milieu. If you enter, you will become lost and die.

# Go away!



You're still here? Very well... you may not be afraid now but you *will* be. You *will* be.

## Part 1: First Hit Free

“Hello?”

“Hi Bill, it's Hannah” (not her real name).

“Oh hey, Hannah. What's up? How are Dean and the boys?”

“We're good. Listen, I was wondering if you were planning on paying rent.”

“Oh hell, what day is it? Crap it's the 10<sup>th</sup>. Hang tight, I'll be over soon and take care of it.”

“Great. Last month too?”

“What month is this?”

“May.”

...

Since this is in a way a story of addiction, I'll begin with this. I worked at a WISP startup on a barrier island in Texas. No budget for anything but infrastructure. No advertising but fliers and word of mouth. Since the name had an island feel, we thought a clown fish would be a good logo and it was. I had the idea that a 3D image would look good on the business cards and letterhead, etc. So I went online and began hunting for ways to come up with that damnable idea in my mind of what it should look like. I found Blender.

Blender is a free and highly capable 3D creation application. It's also extremely complex. If Daz Studio is a guitar duet, Blender is an orchestra. More on that later. I realized after a few YouTube videos that this program fit the bill. I could create anything I needed, it was FREE, and there was a huge support community to help me learn. All of those people having a wonderful time, getting high on 3D, and I could be one of them! Little did I know.

After a few months of becoming immersed in the possibilities of 3D with Blender I had created the fish to be sure. Also other things – also other things. None of it was any good except the fish, and as I said that was my first hit free. It looked nice. It was friendly and generated comment. A nice conversation starter when entering a business meeting or selling service. Heck, this was hard to learn at first but now the entire creative universe was mine for the taking! Yes, I had burned a lot of midnight oil and neglected the cat as well as the girlfriend – both moved out at some point which I only later realized was not necessarily at the same *time*, so I probably had a stray cat on my conscience – but by golly, I was a 3D artist!

Not so fast. I was still too ignorant to see that not only was I not a 3D artist, the surface hadn't even been scratched. At most there was an oily finger smudge on the paint. That gradually became apparent during moments of clarity which were few and far between.

Being stubborn and independent minded (I refused to let anyone teach me to swim as a kid and almost drowned more than once proving I could do it – which I did) I decided to master the art. I still haven't. I never will. No one will. But the quest goes on. A bare living is all that is in it for me right now, meaning, I learned to exist in the wilderness of this addiction with a stealthy camp and some fishing line and a home made bow. I am a hunter-gatherer, barely surviving. There isn't much money in this for most of us. Perhaps one day my animals will be domesticated and crops will grow around a mud and stone hut, making me “civilized”. Until then....

## Part 2: Pipeline

Producing a 3D asset requires a pipeline. In general, you have to first have a mesh. That's the collection of vertices which are arranged and connected, defined scaled, to make up a 3D object. It's the body of the asset. There isn't any good way around the fact that you must have facility in creating, or regular access to, a good mesh. A good mesh is 100% quads – not triangles and certainly not “ngons” – faces which have other than 3 (ugh, but okay) or 4 (now we're talkin!) sides. The reason for this is that a mesh behaves best if it is made of all quads. If it is intended for an animator to use, it must not only be all quads, it has to be perfectly symmetrical. If the idea is your own creation – and if you don't make the mesh, it isn't – YOU must create the mesh. Otherwise you're a house painter. I don't care how gifted you are with textures or animation, if you didn't create the mesh, it isn't your creation. The mesh creator – you – are the sculptor and architect. So get that into your head firmly. Got it?

Okay now you have a mesh. What did you plan on doing with it? Is it for still renders? Is it for animation? A game? This is a critical decision point, and it has to have been decided from the moment you conceived the asset. That means it has to have been in mind before you even made the mesh. Hobbyists mainly work in Daz Studio or Poser. For the purpose of this discussion you can consider these two programs equal. You have to have a flow and knowledge of how to get the mesh from your mesh editor to your rendering/animation/game platform. We're not going to get into the ugly details of that in this short post-apocalyptic tale of woe, but you need to know what you are going to need to know. This is a matter of putting the cart before the horse, in that you have that blasted idea in your head that the dress or airplane or molecule simulation you imagined is going to have to turn into something polished and final, and for that, you need to have decided what program you're going to use to present it ahead of time. A road trip to Cleveland has to know that it's going to Cleveland to be successful. On the other hand, Cleveland does you no good if what you really wanted was to see the Golden Gate bridge up close, ya know what I mean? So figure out where you're going with this thing first.

I work creating assets specifically for Daz Studio, and even more specifically, for Genesis 8.x females. I'm pretty specialized in where my work is going. I have a favorite destination and only occasionally go anywhere else. It's what interests me. Find out what interests you and go there. My pipeline works like this, roughly:

See something in the world.

Imagine what it will look like in 3D.

Fire up Blender and lock the door for a number of hours/days/weeks...

Export the mesh (I use wavefront, or “obj” for this).

Fire up Daz and import the asset.

Check it out. Is it clothing? Transfer it to a figure and see where it needs work.

Go back to Blender and tweak. Re-export it to Daz.

Wash, rinse, repeat.

Now think about textures and materials. Oh, I didn't mention that did I? That's because you would have thought I was being needlessly pessimistic. And you can't wait until NOW to start thinking about it, because you have to define surfaces, create UV maps, think about how the surfaces will interact if the asset is to be simulated in dForce, etc etc etc ad nauseum. All of this impinges on what you do in Blender and to a lesser extent in Daz. Oh, and they'll probably look like crap for a long time, because you didn't realize that texturing was so complicated and interconnected with mesh editing. Texturing is

an entire area of specialty in 3D. So is shading. If you're going to do it all without letting anyone help you (sort of like me learning to swim on my own) be prepared to drown a few... dozen times. It can't be helped.

Like I said, this is a hard business. It isn't like learning to do layers in Photoshop, or how to carve a camel out of a block of wood with your pen knife. You will go broke, alienate your kith and kin, possibly lose a cat, feel completely stranded and lost, and the end result will look like a train wreck with a giant meat loaf dropped on it from a thousand feet. Throw in a few blow flies and you get the picture. It will look like crap. And you'll be hungry.

Are you still here? Well. If you're still standing on the porch tomorrow morning, I'll tell you some sad and frustrating tales.

Causam

Texas, December 2021