



November 3, 2004

Sanctuary

Visuals Effects Brief 1 - GUI – Graphic User Interface

Sanctuary is a re-mixable live action graphic novel

In the near future, Blake is a sixteen year old girl in small town Australia. In the space of 24 hours she goes from being an unruly school kid to one of the State's Most Wanted. After witnessing the death of her father she adopts his legacy in a way he would never have imagined.

The key is telling the story in a way to make the distinction between real and virtual worlds crystal clear and let the audience follow Blake's relationship to her father, and follow her adventure like on a roller-coaster. The technology is largely window dressing.

We are trying to communicate to two diverse groups; One that loves character driven narrative and one that loves a high concept idea around virtual worlds and will want to hack the resulting film.

GUI aesthetic in Sanctuary

Space

Our hero (Blake) is a hacker, able to move freely between different computer systems, represented by different GUIs. The aim is to enable a passive non-technical audience to understand Blake's power over virtual worlds, and any constraints, in a realistic manner. This constitutes the film's "hacker" aesthetic.

The story is set in the "near future" after the point where there has been a fundamental step in the evolution of the man-machine interface. A non-invasive technology called The RIG can be used to plug into the mental processes of any willing user and use this data to render an "augmented reality" point of view (POV). This POV can be of a wholly virtual world (e.g. the State Registry) or a view of the real world (e.g. the bush) as recorded by surveillance hardware. Surveillance is all-pervasive. Smart networks monitor the world.

The characters in the story do not distinguish between real-world footage (surveillance cameras), virtual world visualisation (photo-realistic data rendering) and recorded brain activity (character POVs). The key suspension of belief has to be that technology has advanced to the point that context is the only way to determine what is real. Any data source can be made to look the same. Hence the term the State uses to collectively refer to all its recorded data – “virtual memory”.

Sanctuary makes little reference to how virtual world or the man-machine interface operates. The focus is on watching Blake rather than understand what she’s doing. The notion that everything has been recorded by the system is only revealed in the credits, a pay-off and incentive to re-run and play.

The degree to which the RIG can be used depends primarily on what OPS (Operator Privileges) are available. For example, the State’s surveillance system within the sanctuary is only supposed to be available to privileged State personnel. Blake’s power is that she can exploit security holes to steal OPS.

Time

The film leads the audience through the story in “real-time”, witnessing how Blake becomes Blade as events actually unfold.

The film’s payoff is that anything is record-able. All the events witnessed have been captured within the State’s “virtual memory”.

"Anything is record-able" is a fundamental rule of this world. Any POV shown in the film, in the context of the narrative, can be replayed by accessing a system with the right level of OPS. It is no coincidence that the whole film functions as a loop.

Blade’s origin story is preserved for subsequent review by characters themselves as well as the audience. The film functions as a time-capsule and seeds the idea that there are other characters sifting through “virtual memory” along with the audience.

GUI Interfaces in Sanctuary

The story-telling involves the use of two visually distinct GUIs (Graphical User Interfaces).

The use of these GUIs is a device for depicting visually, to the film audience what information (POV) is available to the State and the Indy (the eco-activists).

The use of a GUI POV also indicates what OPS (*operator privilege*) available to the viewer (or system) in the story universe. Each GUI places restrictions on what can or can't be done by the user. The GUI is uncluttered because the interface is attuned to mental process (we see only what the person or system is focusing on).

1. The State interface

Used by the Department of the Environment and Network Resources, the standard government interface across all public and secret government services. Used by State Troopers heads-up-displays, State Monitor Room Screens, Classroom and Bush surveillance cameras.

Think futuristic 3D, corporate styling. Pict.1.

The state interface feels unwiddly, over designed with lots of animated transitions (e.g. window closing), too much data.

The State technical philosophy is everything is recordable.

2. The Indy interface

Used by the eco-activists who monitor the State. The Indys are a hybrid of media and the Australian Conservation Society.

Think minimalist 2D, purely functional styling.

The Indy interface looks and feels more streamlined. The styling is more a comparison of Window 95 vs. Window circa 94.

The Indy philosophy is "don't look at computers, let them look at you".

Objects

OBJECTS	State UI	Indy UI	Notes on usage in reference to script
Interface logo <i>Local*</i>	x		DENR logo appears when starting, logging into, or re-establishing connection to, a State system.
Motion sensor <i>World**</i>	x		Troopers use this to locate activists hiding in bush; floating arrow indicates the direction in which movement was detected. Additional information appears alongside arrow - approx distance, camera network ID
Floating panel <i>Local and World</i>	x	x	Standard interface window. Any size from small insert on Heads-up-Display through to wall-size panel in the void seen by Blake. Separate viewpoint, separate data source. State panel must clearly be distinguished from Indy panel (e.g. 3D border vs. no border)
State ID <i>Local and World</i>	x		Personal data that is accessible by the State. Passport No, Radio Frequency Identification data (RFID), Last name, Initial, occupation
Media player <i>Local</i>		x	Basic digital music player in Blake's bedroom RIG, playback status of OGG track (to be determined), EQ, volume, source info, scrub bar
GPS <i>Local and World</i>	x	x	Geographic Information Systems - coordinate data of the viewpoint in the real world (maybe also used as GIS Map element below)
Temperature gauge <i>Local</i>	x		Safety indicator used in bush sequences after explosions and fire
Network signal strength <i>Local</i>		x	In real world, nanobat tries to fly away, in the virtual world, it tries to web cast recorded events out of the network with difficulty.
Virtual objects <i>World</i>	x		Visualisation of virtual elements like Blake/Blade and low-polygon models of real elements (e.g. outlines of trees avoided by nanobat) <i>Pict.3.</i>
GIS Map elements <i>World</i>	x		Outlines of indigenous rock carvings, map features, street markings. Geographical Information Systems
System text message <i>Local</i>	x	x	User feedback and error messages - any crucial information for audience that needs to be BIG and in front, e.g. Initialising, OK, Network error, buffering...
Text log <i>Local</i>	x	x	Bottom left scrolling upwards text (like Nybble screenshot supplied). Audio-to-text transcript (classroom), Mental interface-to-text transcript (e.g. Troopers "thinking to each other"), Nanobat emergency web cast. <i>Pict.2.</i>
Edge detection <i>World</i>		x	Similar to Sony Eyetoy configuration mode, detection of moving edges
Network host detection <i>Local</i>	x	x	State analysing network for intruding presences (e.g. nanobats/Blake's avatar, Nanobats trying to reach external host
Collision detection		x	Bat-style echo-location navigation system used by nanobats to fly during bush sequence

* Local: Positioned relative to screen (viewpoint)

** World: Positioned within environment visible on screen.

Events

EVENTS	State UI	Indy UI	Notes
Panel maximise	x		Realistic but more MacOS then Linux
Panel minimise	x		Realistic but more MacOS then Linux
Panel move in 3D space	x	x	State transitions more fluid, corporate-like, Activist ones are quick and dirty (i.e. often no transition at all)
Network interference	x	x	Strobing, screen freeze, opportunity to slow down pace of film due to "technical problems" and "dodgy systems", a key theme
Movement within 360 panorama		x	Nanobat capturing its "video" as 360degree frames which Blake is seen to manipulate

Reference Images



Pict .1. The State Interface



Pict .2. Text Log



Pict .3. Virtual object

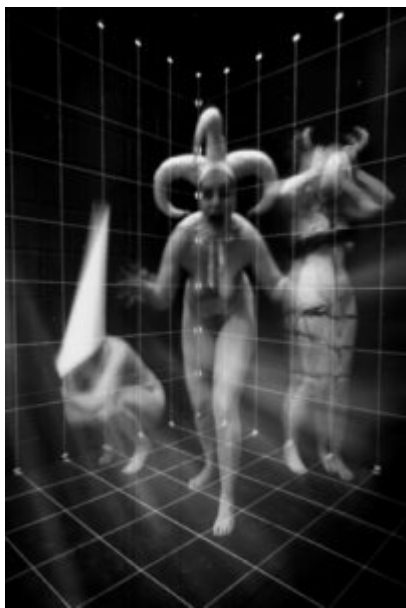
Location References



The Classroom



State Monitor Room



The Void



The bush

The references stills above are for visualising the four of the main locations; the Classroom, The State monitor room, Blake's virtual work space (The void) and the sanctuary itself (classic eucalypt forest).

Also find attached larger sized images.

The attached quicktime file is a test sequence from the bush for trying different User Interface.