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**Being Nick Delios or The Creation of the FMV Adventure Games
*Conspiracies & Conspiracies II-Lethal Networks***

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From Plato's conception, that the world we live in is imperfect and no more than a reflection of another world of 'perfect' Forms to William Gibson's prophetic *Neuromancer*, the idea of virtual worlds existed throughout human history. Today numerous possibilities exist in cyberspace for a person to learn, to work, to play, to express him/herself, to disguise, to escape even to change identity, offering ways to explore each aspect of one's selfhood. Moreover in our postmodern times when fragmentation, sampling and recycling dominate and truth is often conceived as culture bound, when openness and avoiding fixation are keywords it is expected and considered only natural to experience many identities .

It is well known that virtual spaces, especially games, offer the possibility to experiment with different "selves" through multiple roles. These roles sometimes have the form of pre-constructed game characters destined to become the real player's virtual self into the story of a specific game world. This is the case of Nick Delios, main character of the 3D FMV adventure games *Conspiracies* (2003) and *Conspiracies II-Lethal Networks* (released March 10th, 2011) by Anima-ppd Interactive (Drama, Gr). This presentation will discuss the creation of the game characters, worlds and locations, their cultural references along with the challenges and problems related to the development of an FMV adventure game in Greece.

Playing *Conspiracies* or *Conspiracies II-Lethal Networks* means to embrace the character of Nick Delios and perceive the *Conspiracies* "universe" through his eyes. But who is Nick Delios? Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, Sir Arthur Conan

Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Yannis Maris's¹ police officer Bekas² or computer adventure game hero Tex Murphy are some of the well known characters of police and mystery stories, who anybody may recognize in Nick's character. His goal is to solve mysteries and disclose conspiracies involving crime and politics. A failed academic in his past he is a private eye when the player first meets him (*Conspiracies*) who later becomes a governmental agent (*Conspiracies II-Lethal Networks*), Nick Delios is the "outsider", the smart misunderstood wronged loser, clever but lazy, humorous and resourceful when things get tough, who ends up saving the world, while nobody believed he had the ability or the "guts" to do it. His enemies are members of the political status quo, ready to risk Earth's future for more profit, co-operating with greedy and hostile races trying to expand their influence. Nick Delios offers the player the chance to experience not a perfect self but a loose, humorous, playful and clever one, full with flaws but also with potential.

Nick's time is the 21st century, our near future, while his world is Earth unified politically (now instead of countries there are just sector's) but dominated by big companies and not by its federal government. Tormented by poverty, famine and new deceases Earth is now in the process of joining other groups of planets like the Peripheral Galactic Alliance in order to get help and have a future. In this rather pessimistic world apart from the creators own vision for the future, one may detect references to recent European and American history, as well as to the worlds of Isaac Asimov and William Gibson novels, or to well known science fiction film worlds like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. *Conspiracies II* universe pictures 21st century Earth as a polluted place where ancient monuments in protective glass domes, huge company office towers, sport-centres and luxurious villas coexist with dirty underground roads, metal constructions, spaceports, suspicious nightclubs and secret scientific laboratories, where businessmen and mafia, public officers and secret agents, small crooks and extra terrestrials interact. Apart from Earth, worlds in other planets appear like the asteroid "Saiva", full of resorts for the rich and the powerful or desert planet "Landosa", since the story concerns the whole Galaxy.

¹ Yannis Maris (1916-1979) born in Skopelos, is probably the most well known Greek writer of detective novels in 1950's and 60's.

² A tribute to his main hero is the name of Nick Delios's best friend police officer Thanos Pekas, who helps him throughout the two games.

Conspiracies II resides in the discourse of virtual reality because it offers interactivity and tele-presence within its virtual world, where the player “lives” an adventure by wandering in strange environments, solving puzzles, riddles and mysteries through interacting or even merging with different characters.

So what does it mean being Nick Delios? Both games develop their stories through:

- a. Videos which are played by real actors in natural or virtual contexts (triggered by solving riddles during the interactive parts or by talking to other characters)
- b. A combination of a video and an interactive part, since Nick must talk to different game characters during the game.
- c. Interactive parts in virtual locations where Nick solves riddles in order to trigger videos and go further.

So, the player merges with Nick during the interactive parts using his eyes to explore the different locations and hearing Nick’s thoughts (through them Nick shares with the player information about almost everything: objects, locations, characters, functions etc) in order to forward the game and separates from him during the videos where the actor playing Nick Delios takes over.

In *Conspiracies II-Lethal Networks*, the dominance of Nick Delios is limited at the last part of the game. There, on the desert planet “Landosa” Nick Delios is wounded and the player is obliged to choose one of two other characters who are available and capable of continuing and conclude the game. He may become

- either Dimitris Argyriou, CEO of the Company “Detronics”, initially an enemy and then a friend and collaborator of Nick Delios or
- Mystery, a woman body guard and secret federal agent.

This choice has a serious effect on the game story, since it ends totally differently according to the character the player chooses to play with, offering him a chance to experience two different characters with different attitude and goals.

Concluding, one may say that in *Conspiracies II* universe no one is what he or she seems to be. Conspiracies within conspiracies rule, power and profit are the ultimate goals, friends are proven enemies and enemies regret their actions and change. The majority of the characters have their own agenda which most of the times

doesn't include the common good. It is a "liquid" world where a person's fate changes in a minute while he is trying to adapt and find a reference point in order to separate right from wrong, friends from enemies and heroes from traitors...

Developing the game

In order to create a game consisting of 12 different levels/ "worlds" with over 8-10 locations each (each location has up to 360,000 polygons), offering a 34 hour game play, with 2 ¼ hours of high definition video, 80 different actors and over 90 minutes of orchestral and electronic music in Greece was not easy –it actually lasted 5 years. The lack of tradition in this field in Greece, the lack of professionals (programmers, graphic designers etc) willing to risk working in such an ambitious and time consuming project as well as problems regarding production, distribution and marketing are some of the major issues that the team of Anima ppd-interactive had and still has to face.

Fortunately support also came from certain institutions as the Chamber of Commerce in Drama and the European Union program "Technogenesis", which awarded the Third Prize for innovation to *Conspiracies II* along with funding, facts that facilitated Anima's work and upgraded its technical equipment. A great help was also the public: the fans of 2003 *Conspiracies*, waiting to play Nick's sequel adventure, through their mails expressing appreciation and support, became an inspiration towards continuing and finally succeeding to complete the second *Conspiracies* game, which has just been released.

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