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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2007

POTTSVILLE (PA.) REPUBLICAN & HERALD

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Face of the future



Digital storytelling takes new turn with customizable show

BY DERRIK J. LANG
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Imagine a TV show created especially for you. Actors, sets and props would be completely customized depending on factors like your age, sex and location. Even the product placement would be tailor-made to suit you.

Online video game developer Kuma Games, in conjunction with the American Film Institute's Digital Content Lab, have developed such a storytelling device that merges instantaneous personalization with computer-generated filmmaking.

"With TV, this is simply impossible," says Kuma Games CEO Keith Halper. "You can't change things inside video. You can't change them the way that we do in video games and on Web sites. You can't measure their performance in real time. We're taking that stuff from video games and bringing it to TV, which is a huge and important market."

At last month's AFI DigiFest 2007 in Los Angeles, Kuma Games, best known for its military reenactment online games, unveiled PG and R-rated versions of "Leaving the Game," an animated short film about a sul-

try former assassin named Amber who attempts to land a more mundane job to pay the bills.

Unlike typical machinima — short films created with preexisting video game engines — "Leaving the Game" utilizes Kuma Games' own rendering engine, allowing the company to use special camera angles and dynamically swap out content like digital billboards, cars, cell phones and chunks of dialogue.

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GAMER: Learn more about the company working on customizable flicks: kumagames.com

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"Amber could be drinking a Coke in one scene," says Halper, "which could easily be changed to Pepsi or a beer later."

Halper hopes that "Leaving the Game" will be available for download in the near future and believes this type of ever-changing form of media could become yet another form of episodic entertainment.

"We created something that's very practical. We created a pilot for a television show," says Halper. "We hope it will get picked up and run on things that feel like traditional TV, but we could also see this coming down on your Xbox 360 on Xbox Live, for instance, as a television show that would play differently every time that you watch it."

In the computer-generated short film "Leaving The Game," the character, Amber, rides a subway. Advertising, such as subway posters, and other items can dynamically change in the film based on viewers' gender, age and location.



TEAM YOUTH
BY SAMANTHA BARNES

Christmas more than price tags

"It's the most wonderful time of the year."

The holiday season brings smiles to the faces of kids, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, who all come together to celebrate.

I remember when I was a little girl, riding around my neighborhood in awe at the bright lights and decorated houses, sitting in the back seat singing Christmas carols. Now entering my adult years, I am in the driver's seat blasting Christmas carol favorites and singing along, but it all feels so different.

As a kid, I anticipated the arrival of Santa Claus, yearning for that one big present that I stayed well behaved for the whole year-round. I would try to stay awake 'til all hours of the night on Christmas Eve to get a quick peek of Old St. Nick, but Mother warned me that he wouldn't come until I was fast asleep.

Now that I'm entering my adult years, I have begun to love giving instead of receiving. The happiness I felt as a kid to see huge presents waiting to be opened, I now feel seeing the happiness in the eyes of others.

I look forward to the big dinners I used to get bored at as a child, I look forward to talking and seeing my relatives and just sharing memories from previous years. After losing my grandmother on New Year's Eve, I have begun to miss the little things, such as the smell of the house when you walk through the front door on Christmas Day. So I carry on the tradition of cooking dinner for my family, so my cousins can have the full holiday experience.

I miss walking into the kitchen and seeing my grandmother preparing our meal. I would attempt to help, but just seemed to get in her way. She never admitted to me that I was being a bother; instead, she made me feel like I was a major help in getting everything ready.

As Christmas carols played in the background, my family and I would indulge in our holiday feast. Not realizing what I had, I now wish to have those moments back.

We need to always keep those special holiday moments dear to us, for you never know when they can become memories. We need to share the holiday spirit and begin or carry on traditions for our future generations. The real meaning of Christmas gets lost behind the fancy wrappings of the presents.

Instead of getting lost in the dollar signs and sales receipts, take in the sights, sounds and smells of the holiday season and share the time with loved ones. Don't take for granted the real gifts of the season, cheap in price, but expensive in meaning.

(Correspondent Barnes can be reached at sbarnes@republicanherald.com)

MySpace hit Tila Tequila rocks MTV dating show

BY DERRIK J. LANG
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — One man and one woman still have "A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila" — and viewers are very interested.

The zany reality show starring bisexual Internet celebrity Tila Tequila is among the top 15 cable shows and has become MTV's second most popular series, just behind Lauren Conrad and company on "The Hills," according to numbers from Nielsen Media Research.

"Who would have ever thought I'd be the girl who does that for MTV?" Tequila wonders.

Good question. In case you're one of the few people who hasn't seen or read a blog about



TEQUILA

If you watch

What: Finale of "A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila"

When: 10 p.m. today

Where: MTV

"A Shot at Love," the gist of the dating show is this: a 26-year-old MySpace pinup searches for love "Bachelor"-style among 16 men and 16 women, who compete for alone time with her in over-the-top challenges — chocolate syrup wrestling, for example — and share one oversized bed.

"It was kind of weird at first," Tequila told The Associated Press during a recent telephone interview about filming the show. "I thought, 'What am I doing here? Can I leave now?' But once you get to know people, you become involved."

In the finale, airing at 10 p.m. today, Tequila — whose real last name is Nguyen — will choose between Dani Campbell, a 29-year-old female firefighter from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Bobby Banhart, a 25-year-old male film student from Worcester, N.Y.

Tequila, who realized she was bisexual at age 11, says she's still dating the person she selected when production on the show ended earlier this year.

"I don't keep up with anybody except for the person I picked,"

Tequila says. "I've eliminated them."

However, Tequila will come face-to-face with at least 20 of the contestants, including a few folks that claimed they fell in love with Tequila on the show, during a special reunion show she says is filming Friday.

"It will bring me back right where we left off," she says. "I'll be able to say some things I never got to say to a few of them. Tell a few of them off."

"A Shot at Love," which has featured an ample amount of reality TV bawling and brawling, has ignited some blogworthy buzz for MTV, the aging cable network that's spent the past few years attempting to gain a foothold in the digital world.

The show has also attracted criticism, both good and bad, from all over:

A post on AfterEllen.com, a site focusing on lesbian and bisexual women in the media that posts video commentary on the series, questioned whether Tequila was the ideal representative for bisexuals. Meanwhile, the conservative group Media Research Center dubbed the show "MTV's latest poison."

The hype, however, bubbled over last month when the New York Post's Page Six called Tequila an "MTV skank" and quoted an anonymous source apparently associated with the production who claimed Tequila was faking bisexuality for MTV cameras.

"If they're going to accuse me of something like that, they could've at least been more articulate about it, instead of calling me an 'MTV skank,'" Tequila told the AP.