

THE SOURCE OF TF2'S PRESENCE

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Section 1: Formal Analysis

The Winglet, whose real name is Mark, created *Live and Let Spy* using the 3D video capture and editing software Source Filmmaker (also known as SFM). The main character is Spy, who works alongside his team to infiltrate the enemy base. The screenshot I'm using for this analysis comes from the third act of the video, where one of his comrades, Scout, is in the middle of a 1 vs. 1 during the big battle.

In this screenshot¹ (see fig. 1), the Scout is sliding down the rail of some stairs with the camera pointing up towards Scout. This is a full shot, showing Scout from head to toe as he slides down the rail, and since the camera is pointing up, it's a symbol of advantage and victory, which is accurate, as at this point in the video, he is about to win his duel. The clothing that he is wearing resembles track clothing, which fits Scout rather well, because he is known for being a fast Boston boy, who thrives off mobility and out-maneuvering his opponents. While sliding, he's holding a big melee weapon in his hand, which is a car jack with a car battery strapped to it, which actually doesn't belong to him, but belongs to the opponent that he is fighting. Scout's fondness of hitting people with some sort of melee makes this moment very much in his character, as he would be the kind of person to take someone's weapon and use it against them. Scout's body position and face are visible as he slides down. As he is a man of athleticism and cockiness, he slides down the rail with a lot of confidence, and the look on his face tells you that he knows he has won this duel. No other character from TF2 would slide down a rail like that, much less with such confidence.

¹ The Winglet. "Live and Let Spy [SFM]." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSQJbA9ZuL0>.

The entire video is filled with shots like these. Every character moves, acts, and speaks in ways that compliment their characters, which are supplemented by body language, facial expressions, and camera angles. Spy is a cunning sneakster who takes his role quite seriously, but he isn't perfect. He makes his mistakes, and you see how he reacts when he is in a losing and winning situation. His body language and facial expressions compliment that. Soldier is a loud and patriotic man who has a lot of dumb bravery, but it's bravery that helps protect his team, and you see that through his body movements and facial expressions.

Mark, the sole animator, handled all of those impressive camera angles, body movements, and facial expressions. Of course, he had some help from another person, who made all of the custom textures that he needed, but when a video of such high quality and such meticulous detail has been worked on by basically only 2 people, then it says a lot about the capabilities of Source Filmmaker. SFM is a free program, and you can make so much out of this free program. It is seen as primarily used for TF2 related videos, and by using TF2 characters, you can make content that puts these characters in situations you've never seen them in within unique stories, and still animate in such a way that the characters stay true to themselves, and if you need to change their personalities a bit to better fit the narrative, it's so easy to change the clothing of the characters to suit your needs. Is it necessary to use TF2 characters? Absolutely not. People have made CS:GO, Left for Dead, and Dota related videos using SFM, and some people even make original models and use them in SFM, like in the video "Agent Gunn."

Section 2: Research Essay

782 days. As of the making of this essay, it has been 782 days since the release of the last major update that Team Fortress 2 (also known as TF2) received. There hasn't been anything big that the developers have added to the game since, save for some balance patches for weapons and the addition of some cosmetics. How does a game that lacks regular updates and monetization stay popular? There is a lot of talk out there about the state of TF2, with many people calling the game "dead." The statistics that come from Valve, the company that made and runs TF2, state that the game averages anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 active players on a daily basis², putting it amongst the highest played games on Steam, the video game service that houses thousands and thousands of games, including TF2. In actuality, the total number of people that are actually playing the game, and are not just idling or have the game open for no reason, averages about 10,000 a day.³ While that doesn't sound like a lot of people, it's still 10,000 individuals playing the game right this second, with many more people participating in TF2-related activities while not actually playing the game, all coming together to form the community that the game has spawned, being a big reason as to why the game is so recognizable. Even if you've never played the game, there is a big chance you have heard about the game's characters and its artstyle. The TF2 community is not only vital to the survival of the game, but it also brings in, and is supplied by, a lot of creative, inspiring, and determined minds, and one of the most popular ways these minds support the community is through the use of Source Filmmaker (also known as SFM), which reflects the community by showing off the creativity

² "Team Fortress 2," SteamCharts, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://steamcharts.com/app/440>.

³ "Server Statistics: Gathered from Scanning all TF2 Servers," Teamwork, accessed December 4, 2019 <https://teamwork.tf/community/statistics>.

and the drive of the community members. This kind of dedication is good not only for TF2, but for every video game.

In the age of the internet and easy access to shared words and opinions, content made for the general public is how a video game gains popularity. Advertising is a fundamental way of showing off a video game, but the ads aren't personalized at all. You can't get the message of how special a game truly is through just an ad. That is where communities come from. Communities form when many people who play the same game become passionate over anything having to do with the game. Communities engage in a lot of activities, from discussions to forums to tutorials to mods to cosplays to fan material, such as videos, stories, and art. "A significant part of the fun of games is interacting with others and sharing the experience with other gamers. If you can support a community then you have already gone a long way into at least giving your game the chance to become popular."⁴ These communities are big reasons as to why some games become more recognizable. Halo, Undertale, Forza, and Counter-Strike are games that thrive off of the committed people playing and the community figures that play the games and show millions why these games are great. Marketing by the fans is another big thing, including community made economies, which give players a bigger incentive to play the game and spend money on the game, making the developers money and you more involved and possibly happier.⁵ TF2 is no exception to this, as it has one of the most developed economies of any video game, putting a price on almost every item, and making buying and trading a staple of the game. Going back to fan-made content, so many videos and art pieces are made by fans of the community showing off what a game has to offer, and TF2 is no different. You look up TF2

⁴ New York Film Academy, "Gaming Communities: The Game Developer's Marketing Dream," New York Film Academy Student Resources, 2014, <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/gaming-communities-game-marketing/>

⁵ New York Film Academy, "Gaming Communities: The Game Developer's Marketing Dream."

on YouTube and so many different kinds of videos are made under the TF2 name, but one of the biggest things many TF2 videos have in common is this tag: [SFM].

SFM is a tool that was practically built for TF2 fans. “Players got a taste of the unique features that it uses to make Internet videos. Source Filmmaker blends the experience of playing a video game with making a 3D animated film.”⁶ Using all of the assets that come from TF2, players use their beloved characters to make whatever kind of video they want to make, ranging from completely nonsensical and silly videos to handcrafted masterpieces. “One of the craziest and funniest underground Source Filmmaker movements is the Shrek Filmmaker scene. When asked to sum up these videos in one word, animator ‘PrIncessShrek’ responds, ‘Glorious.’”⁷ This is just one of many fun videos people have made, and the videos can go from these fun projects to handcrafted masterpieces. Valve has recognised this by giving the community a big incentive to make them. “To celebrate the best of what the community has to offer, Valve holds an annual awards show for Source Filmmaker creators and their films, called the Saxxy Awards.”⁸ The Saxxy is very comparable to the Oscars, from the categories to the award itself. One look at the Saxxy website and you get to see some of the most committed community members come together and compete in an award show, submitting fantastic content for the community to decide which is best. All of these types of videos show the scope of the TF2 community, where it loves to be fun and show off the stupid things that can be done with the characters, but can also absolutely knock people’s socks off with high production work, and

⁶ Emmanuel Gundran, “Source Filmmaker: Giving Filmmaking Power to the Players,” Cinemablography, April 14, 2016, <http://www.cinemablography.org/blog/source-filmmaker-giving-filmmaking-power-to-the-players>.

⁷ Jordan Minor, “Valve’s Movie Brats: Inside the Source Filmmaker Community,” PCMag, October 5, 2015, <https://www.pcmag.com/article/338276/valves-movie-brats-inside-the-source-filmmaker-community>.

⁸ Minor, “Valve’s Movie Brats””

really show off the potential behind the game and the community, putting the creators of these videos under the spotlight and giving themselves a name in the community.

One Source Filmmaker video that has gained a reputation of being high quality and representative of the community is titled “Live and Let Spy.”⁹ Made by the YouTuber Winglet in 2015, this 21 minute video is one of his longest most ambitious projects, and this is his earliest example at a series of videos with a complete narrative. It makes great use of the TF2 characters, making them move and act in ways that very much fit their character “It’s also one of the few community-made TF2 shorts I’ve seen that manages to use the game’s class dialogue in a way that doesn’t feel stilted or awkward.”¹⁰ You look at how each character talks and moves, and you get a great sense of their character from that alone. The main character, Spy, is a cunning sneakster with a determined mind and care for his teammates, but very much has his weaknesses and properly reacts to his mistakes. His close comrades, Soldier and Scout, each act exactly how you would expect them to. Soldier is loud, patriotic, and extremely brave, while Scout is fast, agile, and cocky. All of this attention to detail, combined with stellar camerawork, accurate sound design, and an enjoyable story, makes for one of the most iconic TF2 shorts made by the community. “This is good, and absurdly so when you consider it’s made almost entirely by a single person over the course of six months.”¹¹ Winglet made this video, and retroactively, made himself an icon in the community. You can look up “SFM” on YouTube, and you will find at least one of his videos on the front page.

⁹ The Winglet. “Live and Let Spy [SFM].”

¹⁰ Graham Smith, “Team Fortress 2 Film Live And Let Spy Is 20 Minutes Of Fun,” Rock Paper Shotgun, March 30th, 2015, <https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2015/03/30/live-and-let-spy/>

¹¹ Smith, “Team Fortress 2 Film Live”

“Live and Let Spy” is just one example of many amazing videos made by people in the community. Other videos like “The Interruption,” “End of the Line,” “Requiem for a Pizza: The Meeting,” the “Taking Words Literally” series, and “Tiny Desk Engineer” show off the variation in SFM content and creator minds, all of which represent the TF2 community very well. Without a tool like SFM, TF2 just would not be as popular as it is today, and without its community, TF2 may very well have become obsolete and forgotten. TF2 has its fair share of issues, just like any other game, but as long as the game has its community to back it up, the name of the game can keep spreading and influencing people around, and the wait for the next major update can be something we can all talk about and speculate on together.



(Fig. 1) Artist: The Winglet, *Live and Let Spy [SFM]* (2015), Medium: Animation

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