Outsourcing: *Best Practices*

for Artists, Designers and Management

Pandemic Studios

- ***Who am I?***
  - Executive Art Director
- ***What do I do?***
  - Oversee and maintain quality of art studio-wide
  - Manage production
  - Artist career management
  - R & D new technology
  - Relationship Management

Plus Outsourcing!!

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Pandemic Studios

- ***Outsourcing art for 6 years.***
  - **Star Wars: The Clone wars**
    - Vehicles & characters
  - **Full Spectrum Warrior (1 & 2)**
    - Buildings
  - **Mercenaries 2 and Saboteur**
    - Vehicles, buildings and characters
    - Roughly 60% of art

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- ***Outsource Company for Mercs 2 & Saboteur***

  - ***AMC Studio*** *(Romania)*
  - 37 employees
    - AMC Studio worked with Timegate Studios, Atari studios, Perpetual Entertainment, Digimation, Big Huge Games, Pandemic Studios and other game developers.

Pandemic Studios

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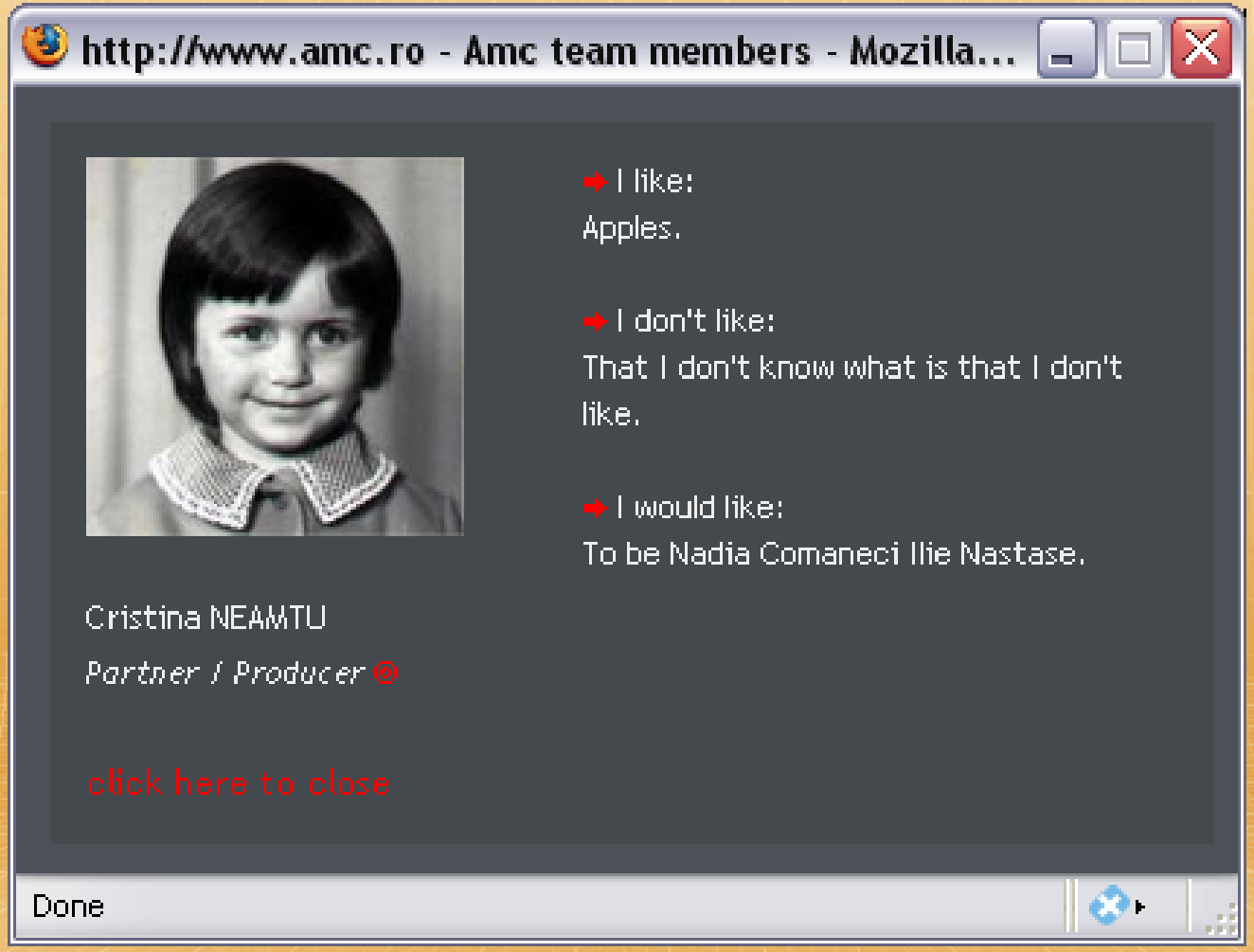
Pandemic Studios



Outsourcing is…

Outsourcing is…

- **NOT a WMP** (**W**eapon of **M**ass **P**roduction) – It's a tool.
  - Must be planned ahead of time in schedule
  - Should not be a last resort
- **A Front-loaded solution.**
  - Complete Asset List
  - Concept Art
  - Staff

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Where has it failed before?

- Lack of complete asset list
- Slow concept sheet production
- Slow revision requests
- Asset complications

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Planning for outsourcing

Planning for outsourcing

- Phases

Planning

Evaluating

Production

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Planning for outsourcing

- **Multi-departmental Planning**
  - **Producers**, **Designers** and **Artists** all play a role in an effective Outsource Plan.
- **Essential Personnel**
  - **AP for Outsourcing:**
    - Process management
    - Primary conduit between the OP and Pandemic
  - **Art Leads:**
    - In disciplines that are outsourcing

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Planning for outsourcing

Producers

- Manage deliverables, schedule and milestones.
- Get a Full Asset List done as early as possible!
- Make sure your asset list fits your project timeframe..
- Create staffing plan that makes sense.
- If needed, starting outsource testing early
  - **~ 3 – 4** months to fully test 3 art houses.
  - You need concept art to test them!

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Planning for outsourcing

- **Designers**
  - ***Generate your Mission Specific Asset List as soon as you can!***
    - *All other assets can be defined by Art team*
    - *Doesn't mean your assets have to be made first. We just need to know how many.*
  - ***That's it!***

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Planning for outsourcing

- Artists

Define your pipeline

Plan your Outsource strategy

Define your complete asset list

Plan your concept phase

Manage the wave

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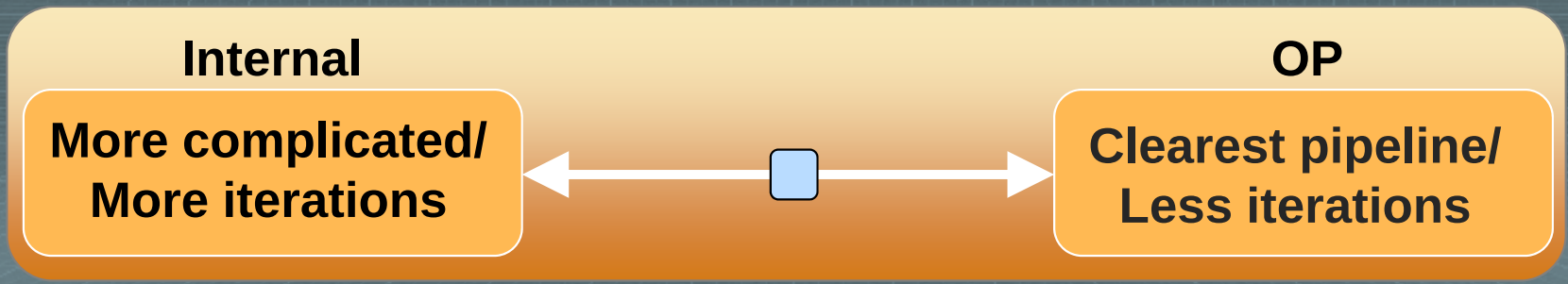
Planning for outsourcing

- **Pipeline Planning:**
  - *Define your pipeline with an "awareness" towards outsourcing.*
  - **What assets can go to outsourcing vs. what assets stay home?**
    - OP assets should be designed to have a clear pipeline solution.
    - OP asset pipelines should be resolved and tested as early as possible.

Designing assets specifically for OP creation:



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Planning for outsourcing

- **Choosing what to outsource**
  - What do you iterate on the most?
    - *Everything else is fair game*
  - **Other Outsourcing options to consider:**
    - Other Service Bureaus: Motion Capture
    - Asset Libraries should be considered as an Outsourcing resource (Dosch, Turbo Squid, Digimation, etc)
    - 3rd Party Technology should also be considered (Speedtree)
  - **Asset Flow Chart (next page)**

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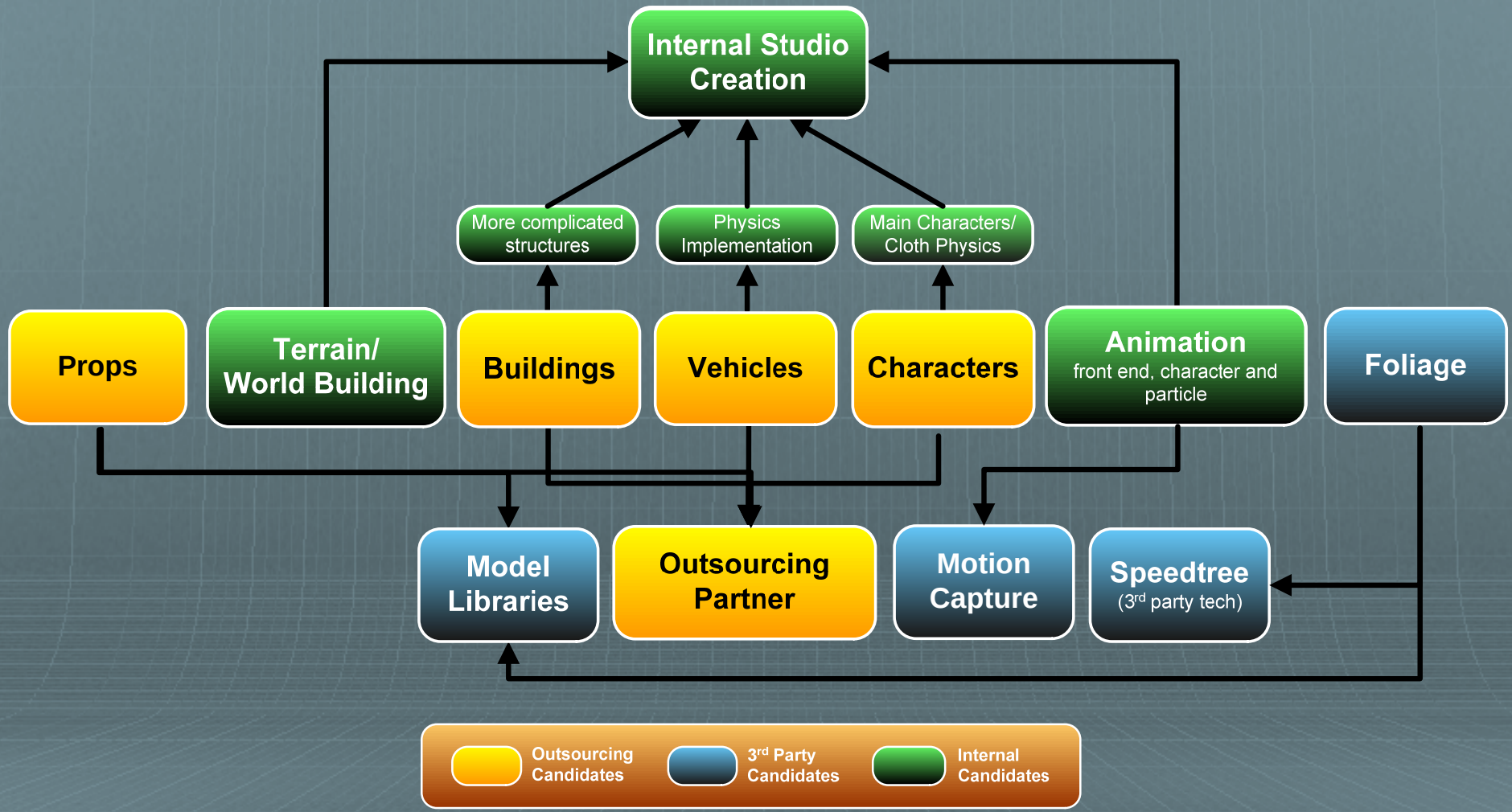
Asset Chart for outsourcing



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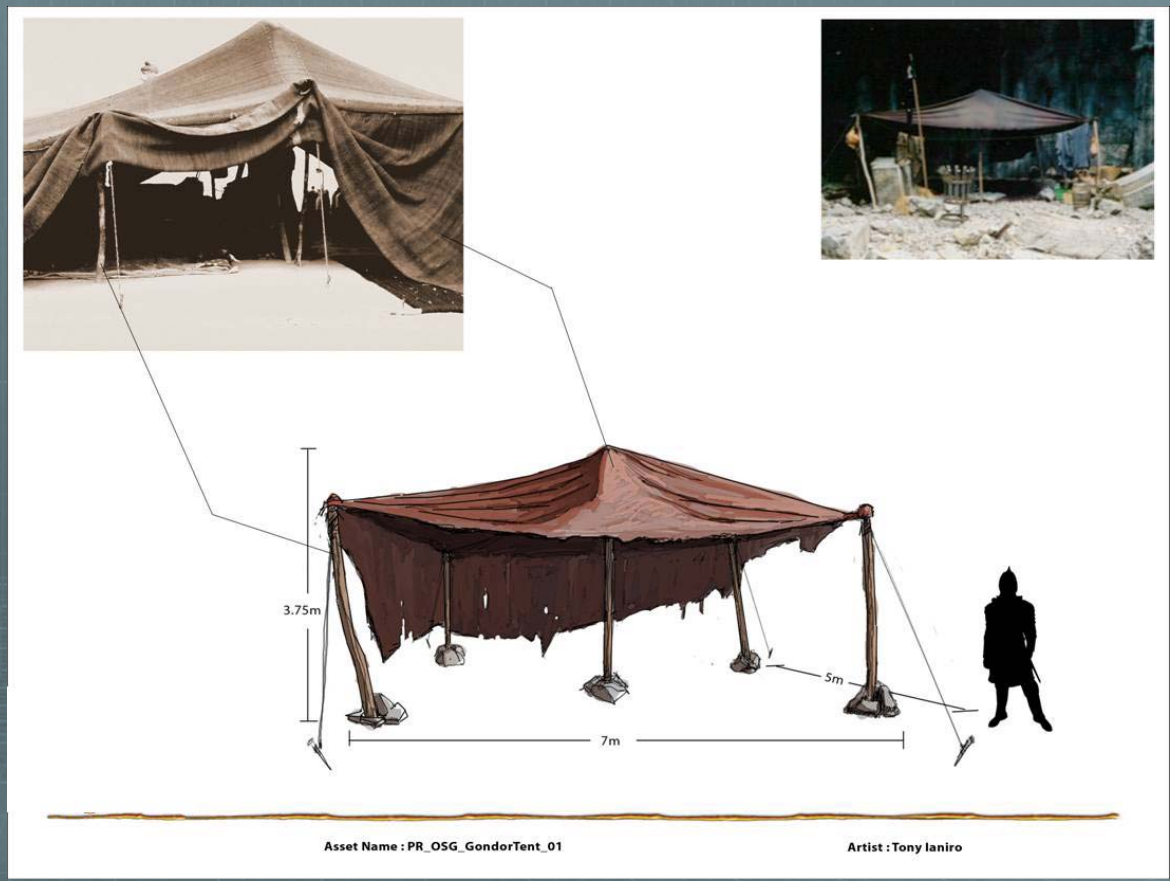
Planning for outsourcing

- **What's in a concept?**
  - Focus on accuracy.
  - Minimize options.
  - Be as simple and clear as possible.
  - Sometimes the word "*reference*" is another word for "option."



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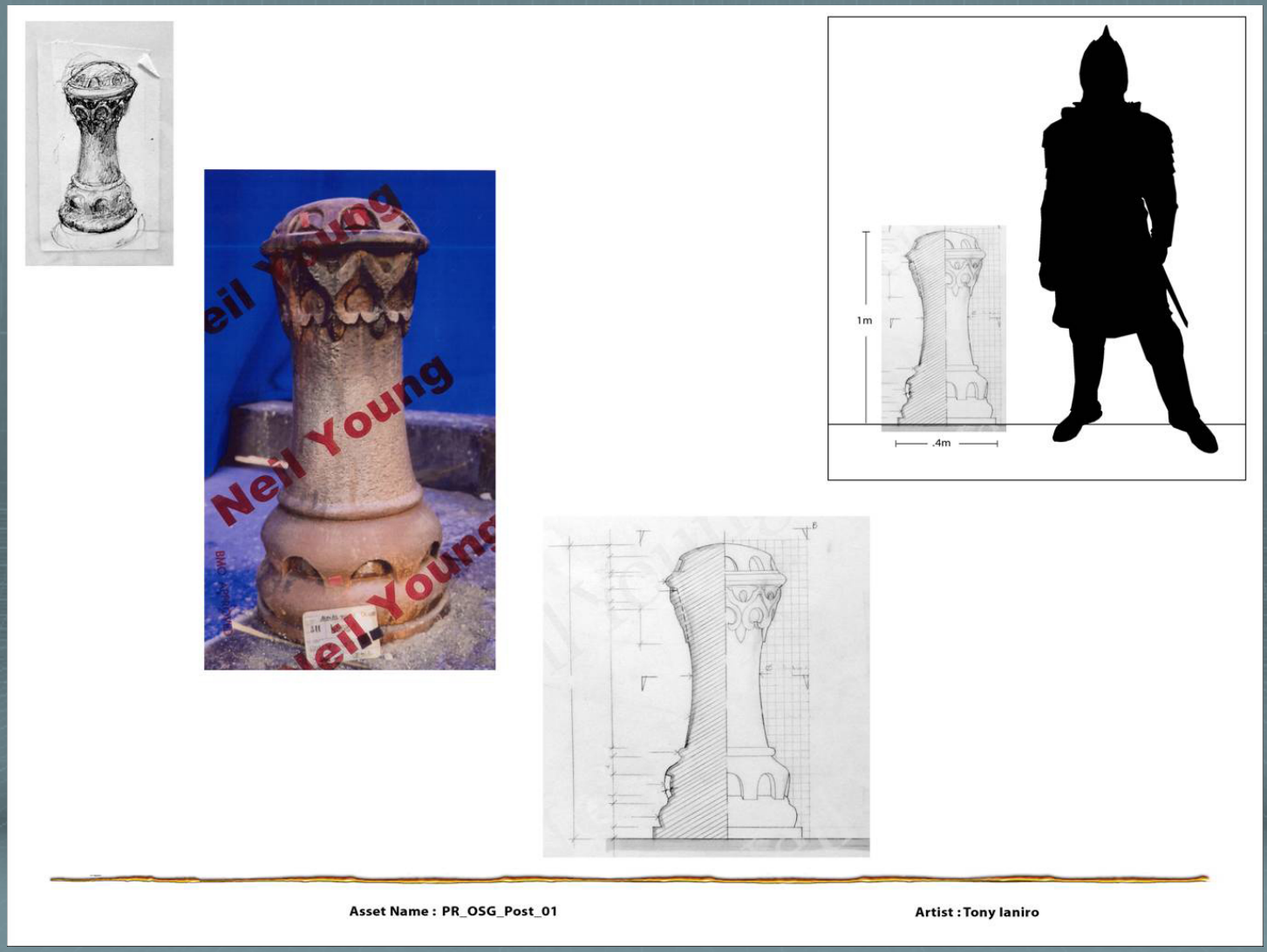
Planning for outsourcing

- Sample Concept Art (good)



Planning for outsourcing

- **Managing the bandwidth**
  - Rely on your AP to feed assets to your Lead team
- **Provide clear and consistent feedback**
  - All revision requests should sound like they came from one person.
  - All language should be clear and uncomplicated.
  - Use consistent subject definitions for each request
    - Provide a definition sheet for their benefit.

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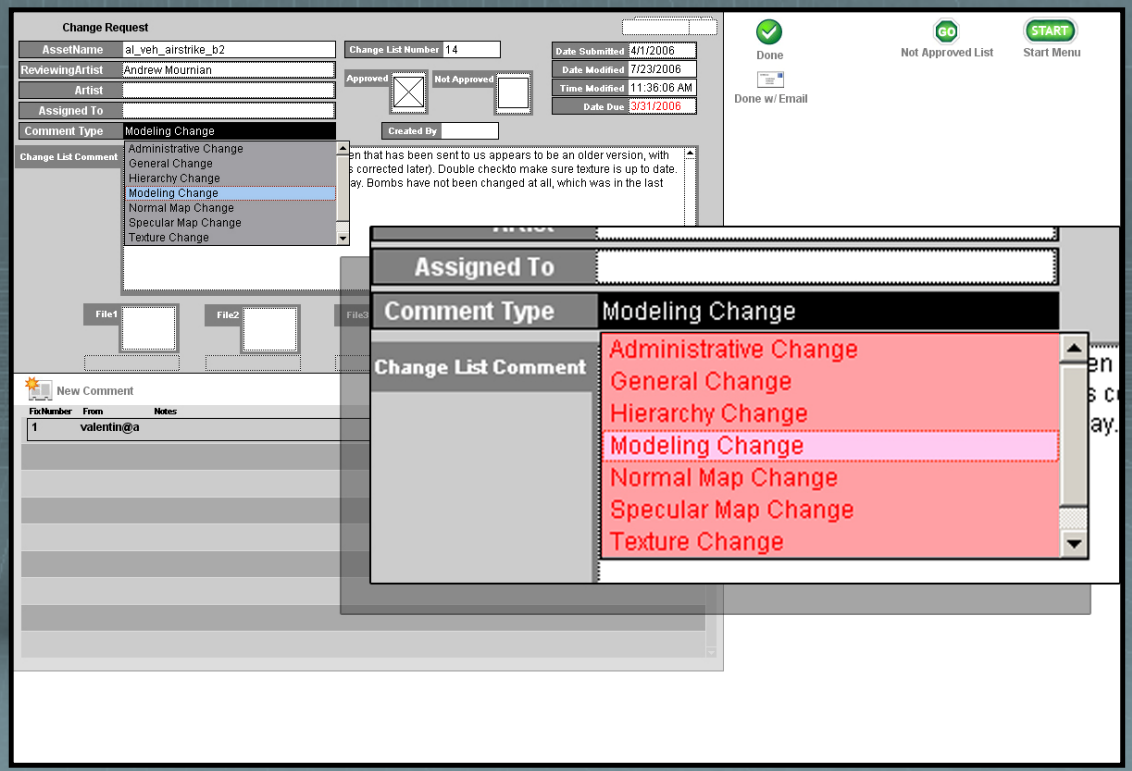
Planning for outsourcing

- **Sample Definitions (Mercs 2)**
  - Administrative Change
  - Specular Map Change
  - Normal Map Change
  - Hierarchy Change
  - Modeling Change
  - General Change
  - Texture Change



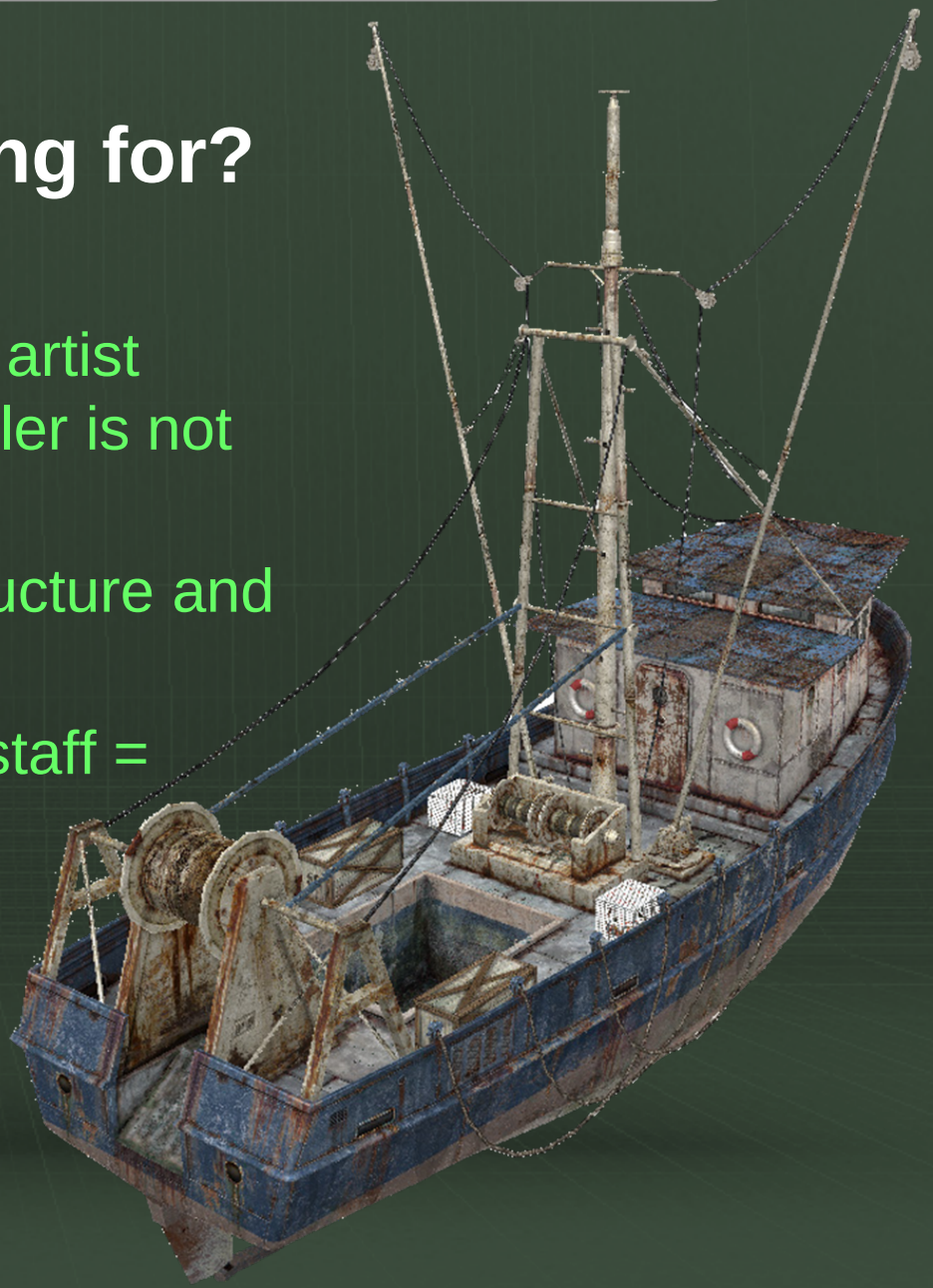
Evaluating Outsource Partners

Evaluating Outsource Partners

- What are we looking for?

Evaluating Outsource Partners

- **What are we *really* looking for?**
  - **Size**
    - We are only looking at 30+ artist staffed OPs. Anything smaller is not worth our time.
    - Larger staff implies infrastructure and security
    - Larger OP staff to internal staff = savings
  - **Communication capabilities**
    - Network and ftp structure
    - Language barriers



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Evaluating Outsource Partners

- **What do we do after we find them?**
  - Send Outsourcing Questionnaire
  - Review their prior work
  - Free Initial Art Test
    - *Benchmark test for ranking*
    - *Not associated with an actual project*
    - *Using the same test allows for comparative analysis*
  - Once OP passes benchmark test, we pass them to a team for paid testing.

Evaluating Outsource Partners

- Testing process breakdown

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Evaluating Outsource Partners

- **Meeting expectations**
  - Key Metrics (How long should it take?)

Vehicles
15-20 man/days

Characters
15-20 man/days

Buildings
4-16 man/days

Animation
1-3 man/days

We generally calculate costs based on 20 day man-months at “X” man-day rate

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Evaluating Outsource Partners

- **Key Metrics (actuals)**
  - ***Based on AMC $186 man/day rate***

Vz m35
16 man/days; $2976

Pirate boss
15 man/days; $2790

Caracas firestation
7 man/days; $1302

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Production Phase

Production Phase

- **Initial Production Contract ~ 3 Rounds.**
  - Short enough to allow us to review and course correct
  - Long enough to make it worth their while
- **Why not 1 Round?**
  - Because it makes them nervous.
  - They might be inclined to find additional work
    - **Meaning:** you might lose your OP staff to another company!

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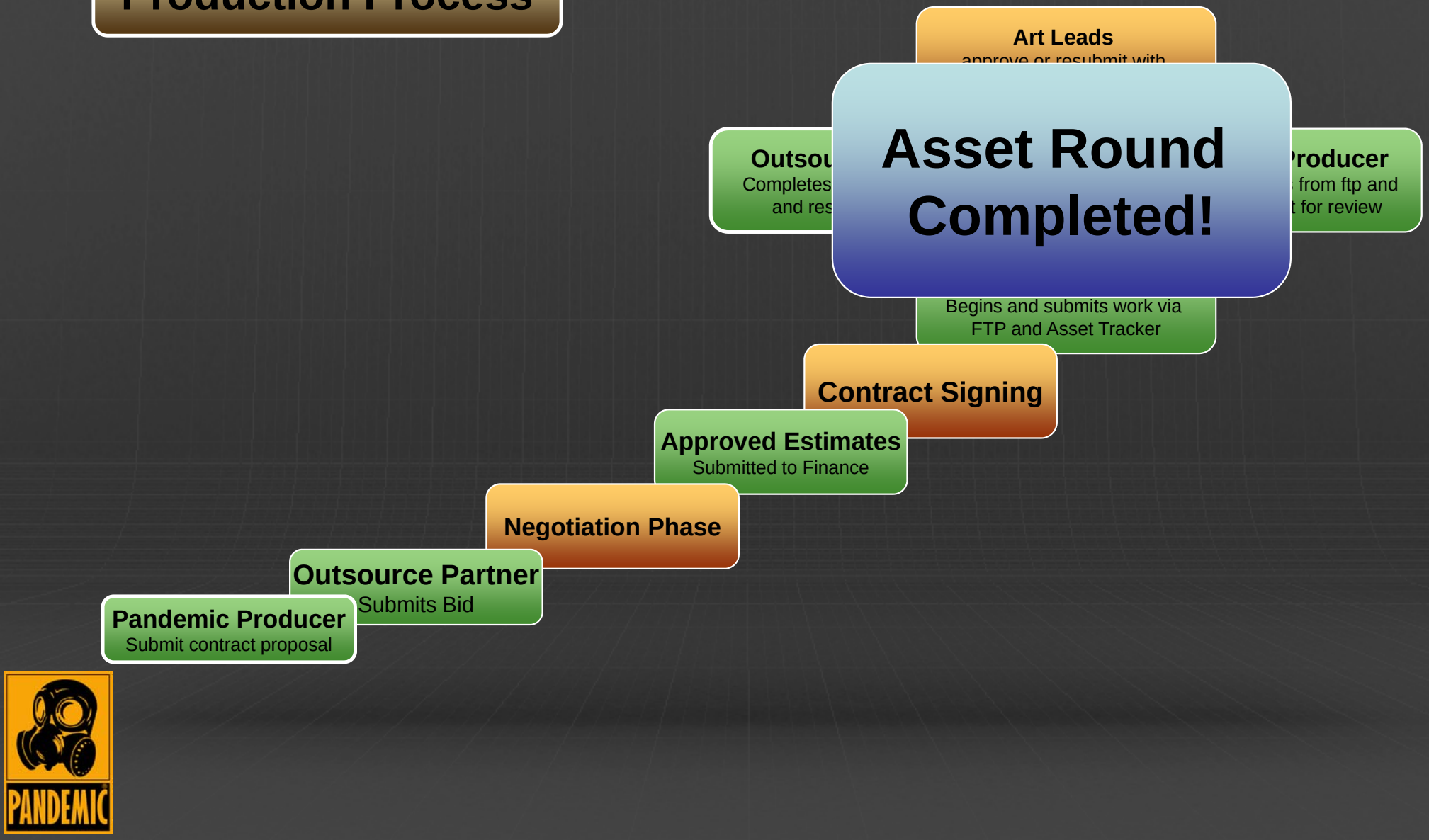
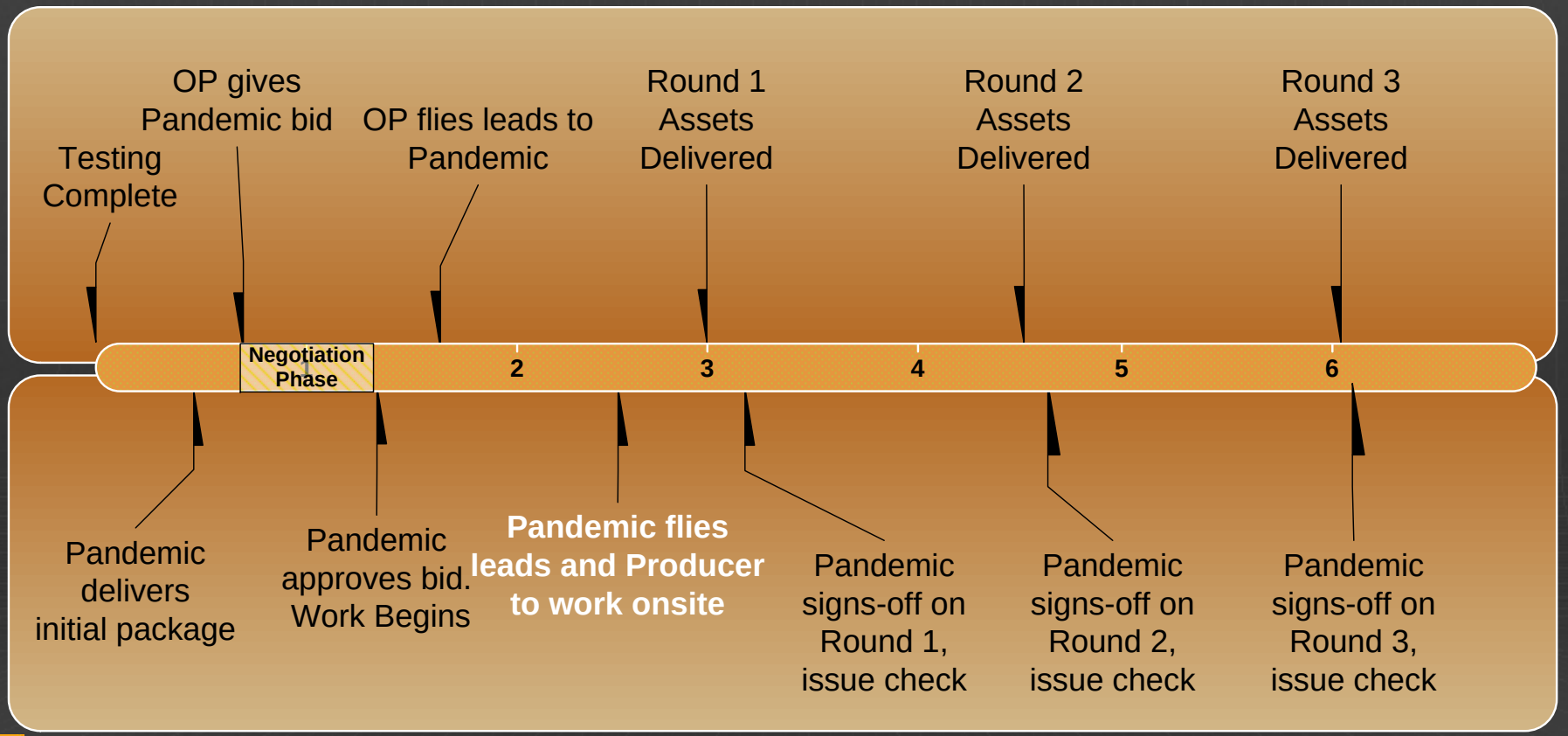
Production Phase

Production Process



Production Phase

Quick Timeline Overview



Production Phase

- Sequence of Events leading up to Production **Day 1.**
  - **4 months from start:** Communicate with OP re:start date
  - **1 month from start:** Submit asset list for first contract
  - **2 weeks from start:** Submit concept package for Round 1
  - **3 weeks into Round 1:** Send Lead team to OP for management integration
  - **2 weeks from Round 2:** Submit concept package for Round 2
  - Etc, etc.

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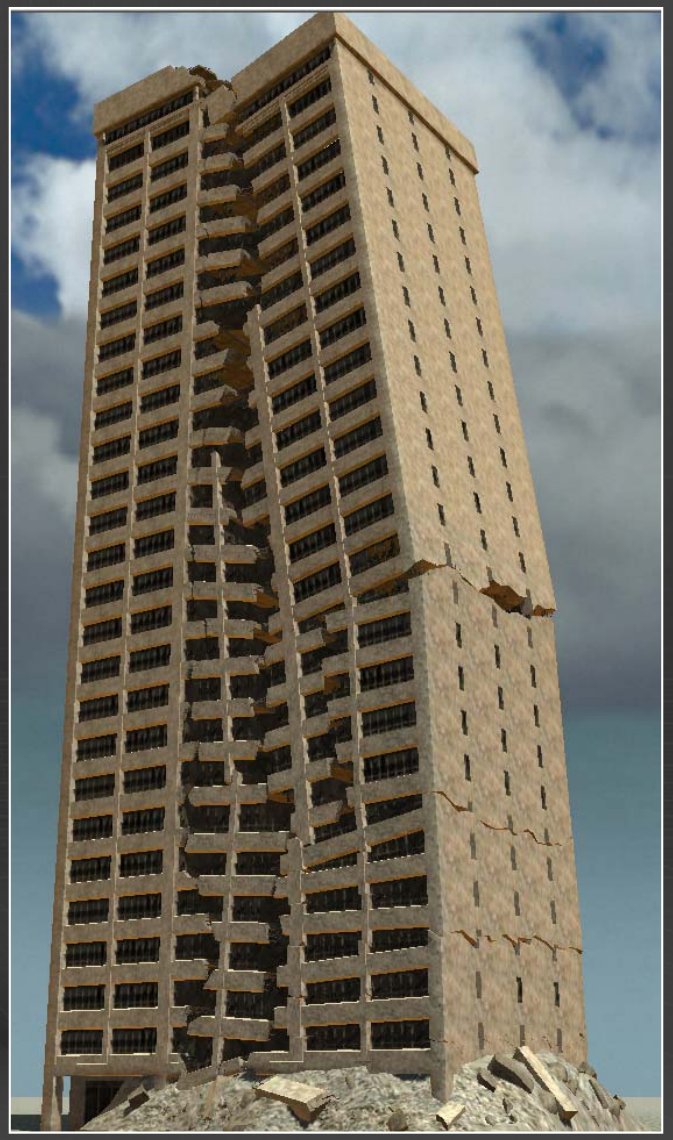
Production Phase

- **Production Team Trip to OP**
  - *Review management processes.*
  - *Asset creation problems.*
  - *“Good enough” policy*

Production Phase

- **Do timezones matter?**
  - Local Timezone (America, South America)
  - Non-local (everywhere else)
  - Pros and Cons



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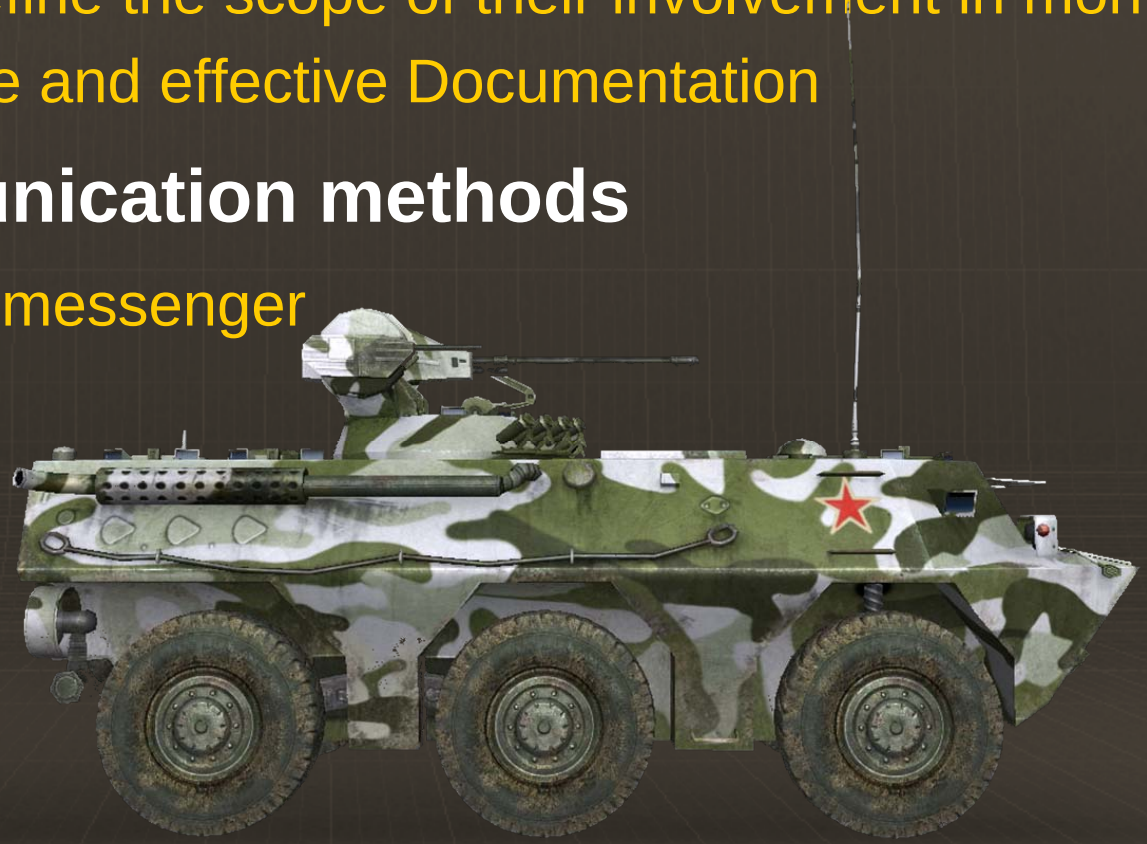
Communication

Communication

- **Communication**
  - Maintain communication well before project starting date.
  - When closer, define the scope of their involvement in months
  - Provide accurate and effective Documentation
- **Typical communication methods**
  - Email or instant messenger
  - Asset Tracker
  - Telephone
  - Face-to-face



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Communication

- ***What's in a package?***
  - Instruction Sheet
    - *Lists deliverables*
  - Content Creation Guide (CCG)
    - *Setup and method*
  - Concept Sheet
    - *Dimensions and details*

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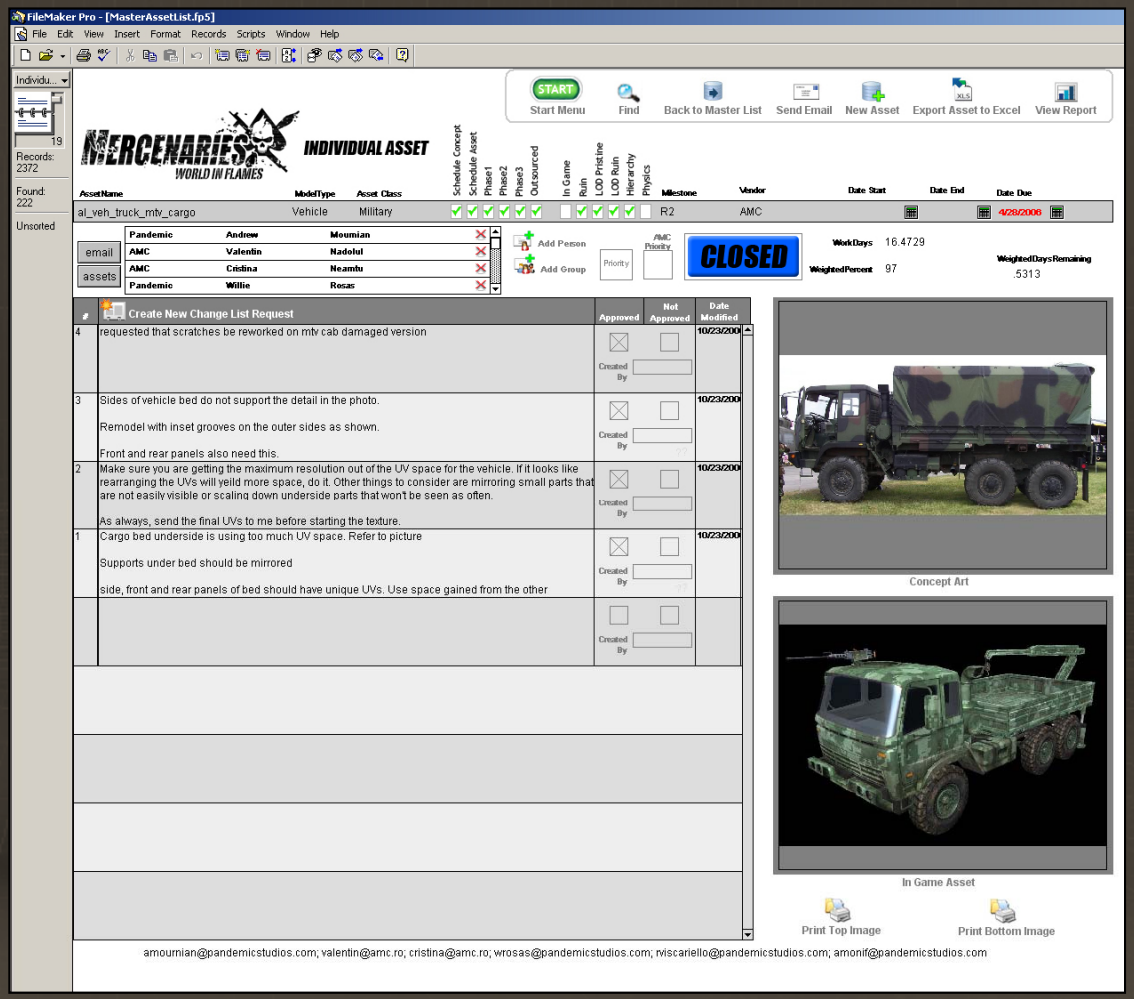
Communication

- **Asset Tracker!**
  - Web interface
  - Email Status Notification
  - Displays concept and in-game images
  - Organize and coordinate detailed information
  - Bug database



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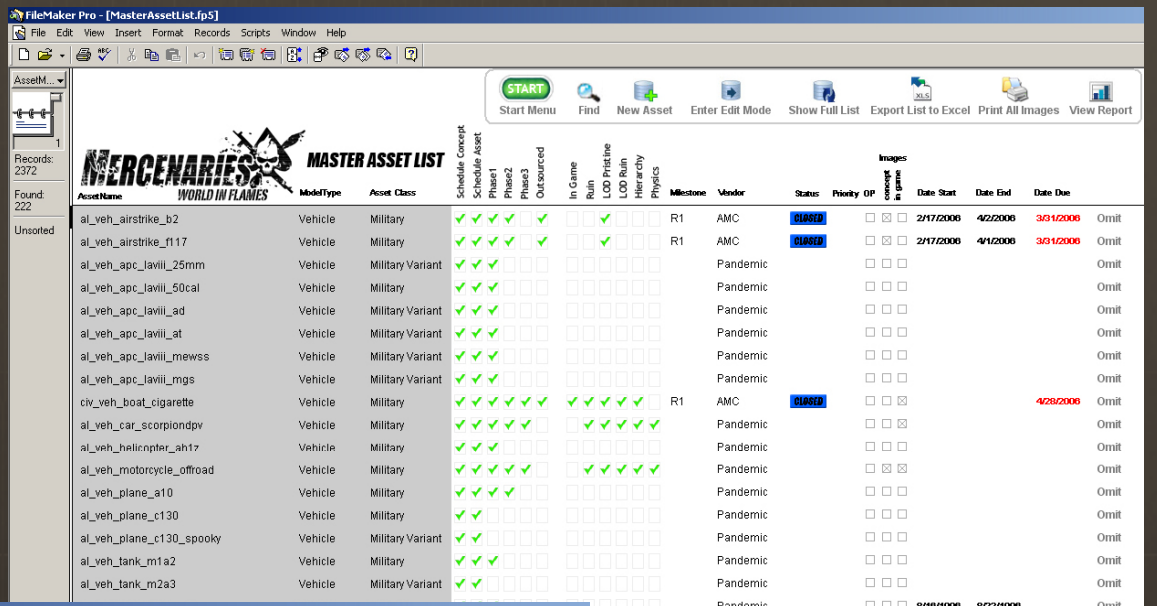
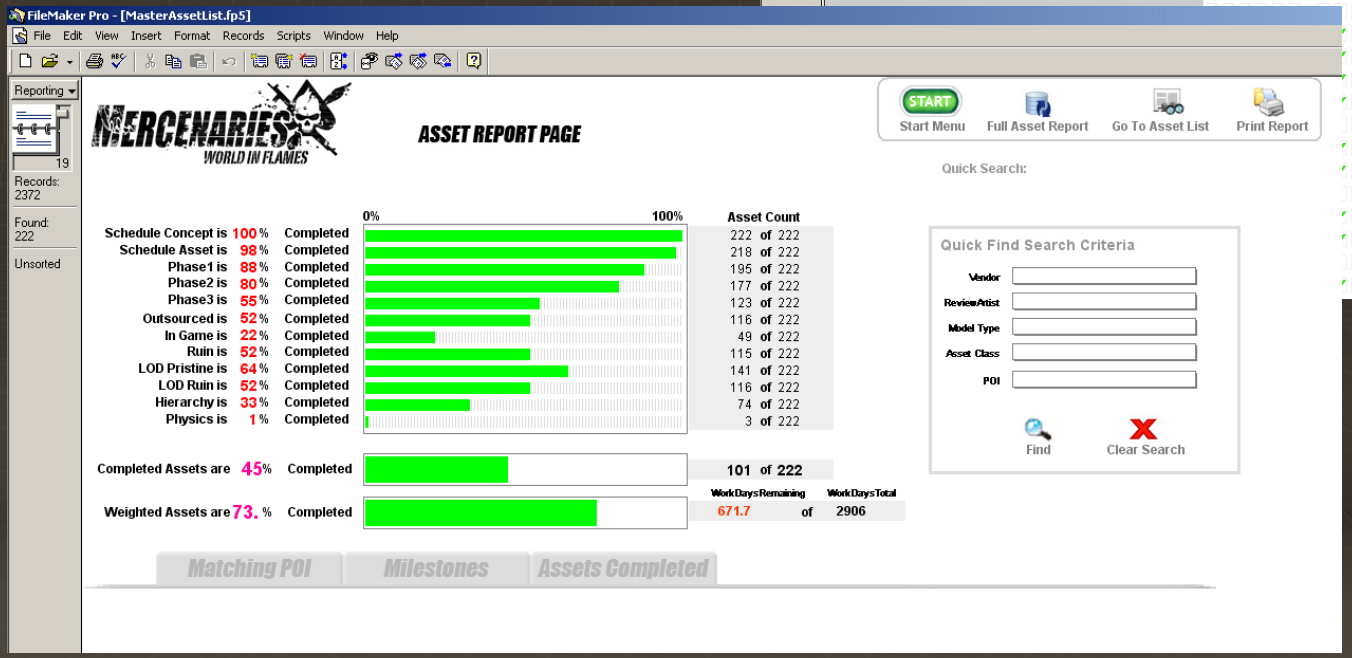
Communication

- Project Status
  - Master Lists
  - Reporting
    - Time remaining
    - Current Progress





Communication

- **Additional Best Practices**
  - Conference calls: *At least once per week*
  - Maintain up-to-date and accurate data in Asset Tracker
  - OP visit to Pandemic.

Do's and don'ts

- **#1:** Don't assume they are mad if they sound mad.
- **#2:** Do blame yourself first if they don't do something right.
- **#3:** Do, above all, be diplomatic.
- **#4:** Do foresee the future.

Thank you for your time!