SAN FRANCISCO, CA MARCH 5-9, 2012 EXPO DATES: MARCH 7-9

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE

# FORZA 4 PIPELINE ARCHITECTURE

## **Daniel Caruso**

Lead Software Development Engineer Turn 10 Studios

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# **Pipeline and Tech Art**

Combined "scrum" team of developers and technical artists responsible for designing, building, and maintaining Turn 10's production pipeline and tools.

- Daniel Caruso (Lead SDE)
- Arthur Shek (Technical Art Director)
- Tatyana Dyshlova (PM)
- Peter Beck (SDE)
- Rob Fulwell (SDE)
- Nathan Holt (SDE)

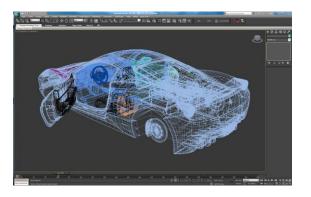
- Chad Olsen (SDE)
- Ryan Petrie (SDE)
- Dan Tunnell (SDE)
- James O'Donnell (Technical Artist, AMAXRA )

# **Road Map**

- The problem space
- Requirements
- Software architecture
- Hardware architecture and services
- Better performance through distributed computing

# **Mission of Pipeline**

• Transform all the assets produced by the studio from source material to a working, executable game.







• This is not as simple as it used to be

# **Explosion of Complexity**

- Volume and diversity of content
- Advanced asset optimization and offline pre-compute
- Security and asset protection
- Schedules and team size
- Parallel work efforts
- Licensing and legal

# **Forza 4 Content Complexity**

### Cars

- 500 cars, a 30% increase over Forza 3 with the same production timeline
- Accurate to < 2 centimeters
- AutoVista an interactive car experience <a href="mailto:sinalign:sinali
  - 1,000,000 poly models, including engines and interiors
  - Accurate to sub centimeter
  - Complex animations, voice over, 3D UI and accurate car start sequences
  - Touched by all disciplines in the studio

#### **Environments**

- 26 core environments with over 100 course variations
- 20-40k files per environment
- Art assets too big to fit into 32 bit address spaces
- Entire environment is to big to work with even on high end 64 bit workstations
- Accurate reproduction of very large outdoor spaces



# Forza 4 Content Complexity Cont.

- Over 100 different content and code processing tasks required to transform assets into a working game.
- Over half a million individual code and content source files totaling over 500GB of data
- Nearly 6TB of reference data, images and video (and growing)
- 500GB source ->Pipeline ->11.8 GB final game size on disk

# **Forza 4 Workflows and Staff Size**

- All 100+ pipeline stages must be executed correctly
- Work must be coordinated with 350+ world wide artists, 30+ developers, 13 designers, 24 in house testers and 9 Producers
- No asset/game feature is completed by a single individual
- Individual assets must be worked on by multiple individuals concurrently
- The pipeline system as a whole, must support a large number of heterogeneous compute tasks executed in a specific order depending on the source asset type and the game consumable item it is part of.

# **Pipeline Mission Evolved**

- Transform all the assets produced by the studio from source material to a working, executable game by building an infrastructure that can define and execute a diverse set of asset pipelines and combine their results
- Allow users to collaborate while protecting them from each other and themselves
- Manage and secure a large data set and ensure seamless access to data and compute resources both on site and on the other side of the globe
- Minimize down time and prevent studio wide production blocks

# **Pipeline Design Starts With Studio Process**

FORZA MOTORSPORT



# All assets included in the official game build will be built by the build system servers directly from source files. No locally built files will be checked-in.

### Solves

- Assets getting built incorrectly
- Assets getting built by combining stale previously built components
- Variance caused by heterogeneous user machine hardware
- Assets built with old or "custom" versions of the build tools
- Ensures that a assets can always be re-built from source alone

## Problems

- Gates production on the overall build server bandwidth
- Requires fully automated builds off all asset

## Mitigations

- Invest in sufficient server bandwidth
- Invest in creation of automation

# Artists will only work on content using the last known good (LKG) tools and pipeline paired with a specific stable BVT passing build

#### Solves

Content creators don't get blocked by instabilities caused by code churn

### Problems

- Latency in delivery of new features to content developers
- Latency for emergency fixes for content developers

## Mitigations

- Keep LKG process light weight and mostly automated
- Run LKG at regular intervals at least 2x per week
- Provide emergency overrides for using the latest code if there is no other choice

The official game build will only contain "safe" content which has passed a set of automated BVT's and been promoted from "escrow" to "release".

#### Solves

• Test, design and developers getting blocked by bad content

#### Problems

- Latency of getting new content into game
- Content testers need to test latest content

- Create a automated content BVT which ensures content doesn't crash the game
- Automate promotion of BVT passing content
- Provide easy to use tooling for working with content directly from escrow



# All content check-in's will pass a local data scrubber without errors prior to check-in

### Solves

- Content not build to naming conventions and other required specifications, such as poly count limits
- Common modeling errors
- Units, bad dimensions, overlapping verts, etc.

## Problems

- Overhead of running the scrubber
- Over detection of problems that are not blocking

- Keep scrubbing times low
- Only report errors for known breaking issues, otherwise log warnings



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## All code changes will pass though a rigorous code-review, checkin build and BVT process prior to check-in

### Solves

- Common mistakes
- Ninja features
- Major performance regressions
- Major memory bloat and leaks
- Major regressions of core functionality
- Build breaks caused by not using the official build processes

### Problems

Adds latency to check-ins

- Keep build times, and BVT times as low as possible
- Totally worth the cost due to gains in overall production stability

# Developers don't go home until their code changes have been successfully integrated and built on the servers by a continuous integration system

### Solves

- Check-in and go home only to leave behind a failed build in the morning
- Breaks caused by improperly integrated files
- Breaks caused by partial or otherwise erroneous check-ins

## Problems

• If there is a queue of check-ins it can take several hours

- Check-in tomorrow if you don't have the time today
- Group multiple check-in's into a single server build if they are very close together (i.e. submitted within 10 minutes)



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# **The Requirement Wall**

- Continuous integration
- Concurrent asset editing
- Offsite workflows
- Automated source control synching
- Automated content acceptance tests
- Automated pre-check-in tests
- Automated performance tests
- Multiple concurrent builds
- Protect build stability from churn
- Protect artists from broken tools
- Data driven build process definition
- Fully automated production workflow
- Asset encryption, signing and hashing
- Logging and error reporting

- Disk layout creation and optimization
- Platform specific packaging
- High throughput
- Fast build times
- High availability
- User facing UI
- User facing scriptability
- Predictable/repeatable results
- Automated build deployment
- Robust back ups
- Scalable to production demands
- Support hundreds of assets types
- Notifications/subscriptions
- And more....

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# Walls Usually Win



# Crawl, Walk, Run

#### Crawl

- Focus on the basic asset transformation problem
- Targeted only on the local machine
- Run each asset's build step's directly

### Walk

- End to end automated systems on the local workstation
- Execution of local build processes from a service

### Run

- Run build processes remotely on servers
- Connect execution of processes together to automate complex end to end workflows

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# **Software Architecture**

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# **Micro and Macro Pipelines**

**Micro pipelines** are the specific set of processing stages executed in a specific order required to transform a set of source assets into a single game consumable asset

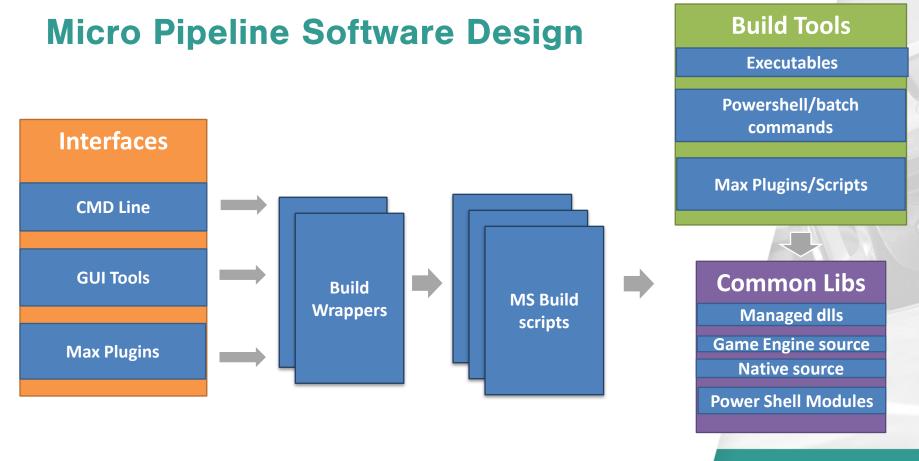
- We sometime use the term "Build" or "Build Process" and erroneously "Export"
- May be executed on a local machine, on a server (often as part of a Macro Pipeline), or on a computational grid
- The pipeline is identical regardless of execution context,

**Macro Pipelines** represent the automated process by which source assets move through studio workflows finally ending up included in the daily official game build.

- Executed in a variety of contexts depending on the various systems and individuals involved
- Implement studio "production process"
- Consists of at least one, but often many diverse micro pipelines,
- Provides the ONLY pathway for an asset to get into the official daily game build

# **Micro Pipeline Design Overview**

- Use a collection of "build tools" to process asset source files
- Use MSBuild to define and execute these processing stages in the correct order
- Build user friendly wrappers for running specific MSBuild targets with the correct parameters



# **MSBuild**

- Comes with the .Net framework
- Allows arbitrary execution of executable, scripts and managed code
- Allows for dependency definition
- Supports parallel execution
- Provides an execution engine that is usable from both the command line, and managed code API's
- Provides logging and error reporting mechanisms
- Easy access to parameters through environment variables and command line arguments
- XML based and API support for programmatic construction of build scripts

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# **Targets and Tasks**

#### **Targets**

- Used to define entry points
- · essentially an in-order list of things that need to be executed
- Supports dependency expression

### Tasks

- Specific instructions to get executed
- See the MSBuild Task Reference on MSDN <u>http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/7z253716.aspx</u>
- Custom tasks can be created by combining existing tasks, using managed code or by simply running custom executables
- Task can be executed conditionally and specify on error behavior

# **Macro Pipeline Design**

#### **Basic Approach**

- Use a collection of servers to execute arbitrary micro pipelines.
- Build a set of "Jobs" which execute collections of micro pipelines as required by a specific macro pipeline
- String these jobs together to form the complete macro pipeline
- Provide a simple way for end users to execute the Job Sequence

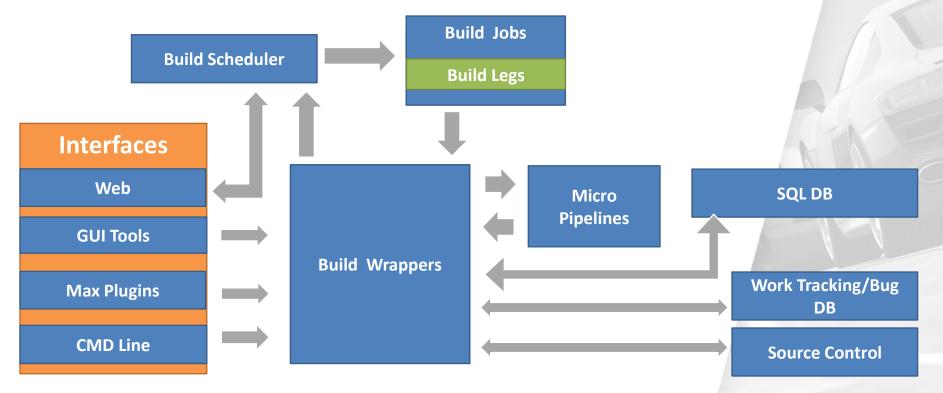
#### Difficulties

- Macro pipeline stages may begin with locally executed tasks, such as data scrubbers, local tests, check-in wizards, etc.
- Macro pipeline stages may include some manual steps, and require state to be saved while waiting for user input before proceeding to the next step
- Macro pipelines often require the output of other macro pipelines as input

#### Solutions

- Use Micro pipelines which schedule jobs on a server farm to execute other micro pipelines
- Build user facing tools to call these micro pipelines as appropriate
- Use source control and SQL to persists state
- Send e-mail and or automatically create and assign bugs out for manual process stages

# **Macro Pipeline Software Design**

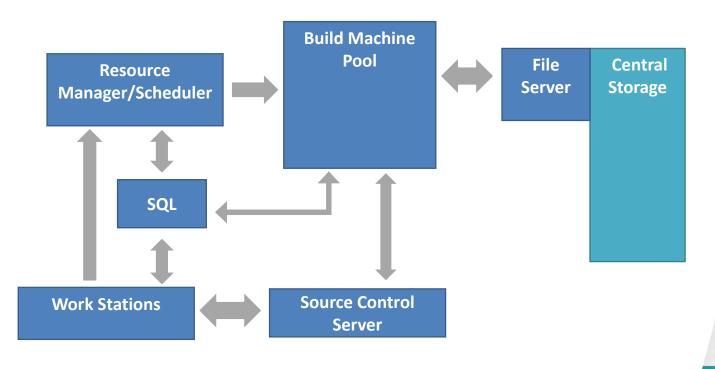


# **Hardware Architecture**

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# **Basic Infrastructure Components**



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# **Resource Manager and Job Scheduler**

#### Acts as the operating system for the machine pool

- Manages Machine pools
- Manages Machine pool job queues
- Balances resources across jobs
- Provides a user facing service for requesting and monitoring jobs

## **Key Capabilities**

- Job definition language
  - Express a dependency graph of related tasks
  - Allows a job or job task to schedule additional jobs programmatically
- Distributes sub tasks across machine pool resources based on dependency graphs
- Persistent storage of current working state, long term job execution history, and logs
- Fail over and recovery solutions

## Forza 4 Solution

 Microsoft internally developed distributed job scheduling service called BuildTracker, built on top of SQL, XML, and Web Services

# **Computer Machine Pools**

- Sets of servers dedicated to executing specific sets of micro pipeline tasks
- Each Machine Pool effectively has it's own "job" queue
- Each server has a "enlistment" into source control, a sizeable raid array, and high bandwidth connection to centralized storage
- Each server runs a service which connects to the job scheduler and is responsible for executing jobs assigned by the scheduler

# **Source Control Server**

- Manage change history of source files
- Provides a basic concurrency management system for collaboration
- State management system for "built" assets that are not ready to be included in the official Build
- Stores final approved "built" assets
- Microsoft internal source control system
- Team Foundation Server (TFS) (More on this later)

# **SQL Server**

- Hosts the working database for the scheduler
- Hosts a mirror of the latest in-game database
- Hosts several custom databases for storing state information
- Hosts test result and game performance databases

# **Workstations**

- User machines
- Each machine has a source control enlistment
- Connection to Shared Storage
- Access to the SQL server
- Hosts running various user facing tools which can initiate execution of a macro pipeline and report overall execution progress
- Can serve as an additional compute resource in some cases

# **But what about the hardware?**

A simple approach would be to back each component with one or more dedicated and specialized machines

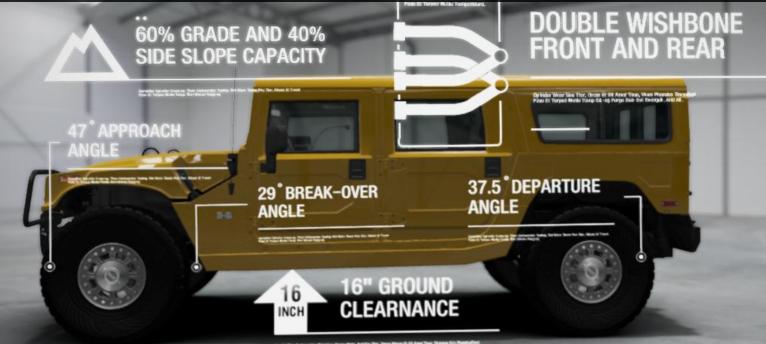
This strategy is very limiting:

- Does not scale well
- Is not able to adapt to changes in the component architecture quickly
- Is hard to maintain
- Is bad for availability
- It is not cost effective

But, In a small production environment this can be viable



# **Scaling and Reliability**



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### **Services**

#### **Pipeline services**

- Software services which provide key pipeline features, such as the Job Scheduler, license servers, continuous integration, work item tracking, test automation, etc...
- Persistent processes which expose an API to TCP

### Simple services

- Low compute requirements
- Low disk requirements
- Data base and web server dependencies

### Advanced or specialized services

- Heavy compute, disk, memory or I/O requirements
- Physical access to connected hardware, such as usb devices, dongles, Xbox 360 dev kits, etc.
- Specialized hardware such as a high power GPU, or specific CPU architecture

## **Hosting Simple Services**

#### Virtual machines (VM's) can be used to great effect

- Service failures are isolated and won't affect other services being co-hosted on the same physical machine
- Host machines can be configured in failover clusters
- Machine images can easily be moved to different hardware in case of a failure
- New services can quickly be added by creating a new machine image from a existing base machine configuration

#### To get the most out of virtual machines you will need a few things

- A handful of servers heavy on CPU and memory to run hypervisors for VM hosting
- A SAN system which hosts the VM images and provides pass through disks for local VM storage

## Storage

#### Efficient VM hosting relies on a flexible, reliable, shared storage system

#### SAN's (Storage Area Networks) provide the best technology available to meet these needs

- Entry level, turnkey, full featured SAN's are available for <\$100k
- Costs can be controlled by trading performance, capacity, and bandwidth as your needs demand, with some entry level options starting way bellow the 100k price point
- Traditional NAS (network attached storage) solutions can work in a budget pinch, but you will find you quickly get to 50% of the cost of a SAN without nearly 50% of the benefits
- SAN's are good for more than just VM's

#### **Network Shares and SAN's**

- Traditional network shares can be robustly supported on top of a SAN
- A fail over cluster can mount a SAN volume and expose it to the network
- Cluster files systems can further extend this by enabling multiple servers to expose the same SAN volume to the network
- Combined with a load balancer this can deliver massive bandwidth

# **Hosting Advanced/Specialized Services**

#### **Requires dedicated physical machines**

- Expect long hardware lead times
- Expect delays due to physical installation

#### Can usually leverage SAN attached storage

- A single host bus adapter card (HBA) is often cheaper than a robust hardware raid controller, and a bigger physical box
- As long as you aren't stressing the SANs aggregate bandwidth, performance will usually be better than local disc

#### Critical systems will need to have custom clustering or fail over solutions

- These are the weakest link in stability
- When possible store all state data in a high availability data base solution on a separate set of machines
- Keep frequent back ups
- Keep machines within warranty and replacement components on hand

#### As much as possible standardize these configurations ahead of time

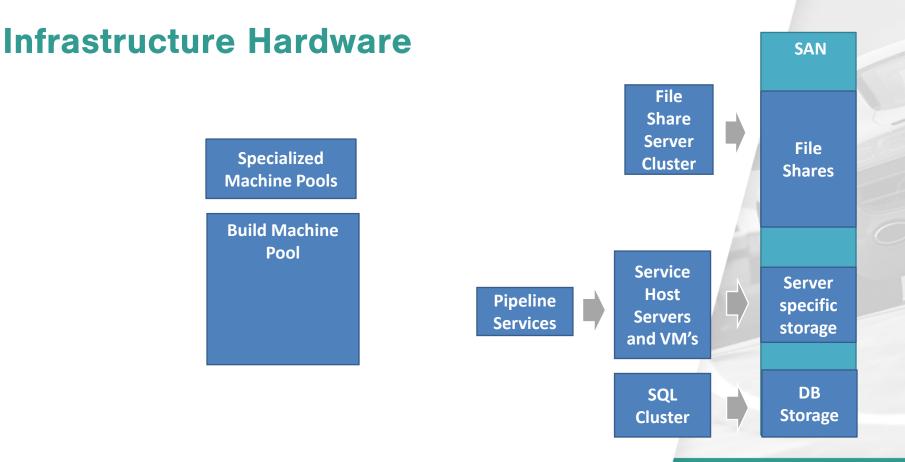
# **High Availability Database**

#### SQL fail over clusters are awesome!

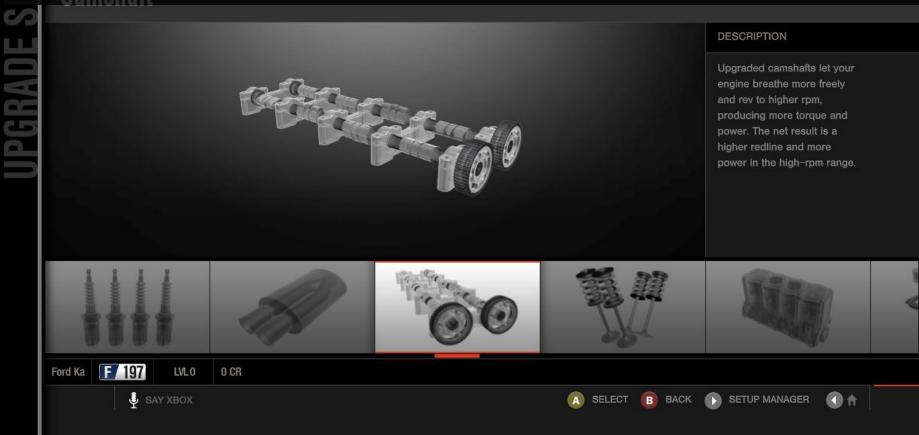
- Multiple SQL instances can be setup to accommodate your overall performance requirements
- Leveraging a central storage solution you can then set these clusters to fail over to each other incase of any problems
- This will reduce performance but keep the system up and running

### Go big on SQL hardware

- These are shared resources bang for the buck is high
- Lots of CPU (8+ cores) and big memory pools (> 32 GB)



# **Building out features**



# **Additional Services Needed**

- Access for offsite content creation
- Continuous integration system
- Test automation system
- Mechanisms for providing a Last Known Good set of tools
- Mechanisms for providing an Escrow to Release promotion process
- Specialized computational grids for accelerating particular micro pipelines

## **Escrow, Release and Bin**

#### Problem

• Provide a stateful storage mechanism which supports the escrow to release process as well as stores the most recent Last Known Good (LKG) tools and pipeline binaries

### Solution

- Create special locations in source control for managing these "built" assets
- Escrow folder
  - All freshly built assets are checked in where they can be pulled from source control later for testing
- Release folder
  - After an asset has passed BVT's and been "promoted" it is checked into the release folder where the official build will look for content assets.
- Bin folder
  - Build wrappers, MS Build files, Build Tools, scripts, and common code libs are check-ed in when built
  - A label is used to manage the LKG set of assets in the bin folder

## **Access for offsite content creation**

#### Problem

• External vendors doing content production can not access internal source control servers due to security and other reasons beyond our control

### Solution

- Move all content production to a Team Foundation Server (TFS) hosted in a extranet domain with a 1 way trust relationship to our main domain
- Run a replication service on our domain which Polls the TFS server for incoming change sets, copies them over to the replication server and then integrates them into its source depot enlistment

#### Hardware

• Beefy servers for running the TFS instance and replication service

# **Continuous Integration System**

#### Problem

• Schedule a "buddy build" for each code check-in made

### Solution

- Build a service which monitors the source control system changes to a given set of folders and file types
- When ever a change is detected que a "buddy build" Job on the job scheduler

### Hardware

• Simple service host machine

# **Test Automation System**

#### Problem

• Integrate automated test into the pipeline

### Solution

- Build a test execution engine based on MsTest (the command line version of visual studio's test suite)
- Define specific test jobs which can be executed by a specialized machine pool
- Use a TFS server for centralized test result logging
- Add a specialized data base for detailed performance metrics
- Add a performance data processing service which adds collected data to the performance DB
- Add a build distribution service used by the test system to manage which game build and content is on test xbox 360's

### Hardware

- Machine pool consisting of light weight physical machines, paired one to one with Xbox 360 developer kits
- Simple Service host machine for the data base processing system

# **Specialized Computational Grids**

#### Problem

• Accelerate parallel computation tasks by providing access to large computational grids

### Solution

• Add Wrappers for interacting with Autodesk Backburner Add Wrappers for interacting with Incredibuild for native code builds

#### Hardware

- Coordinator machines which host the grid controller
- A slew of physical machines, VM's, and user workstations connected to the grid

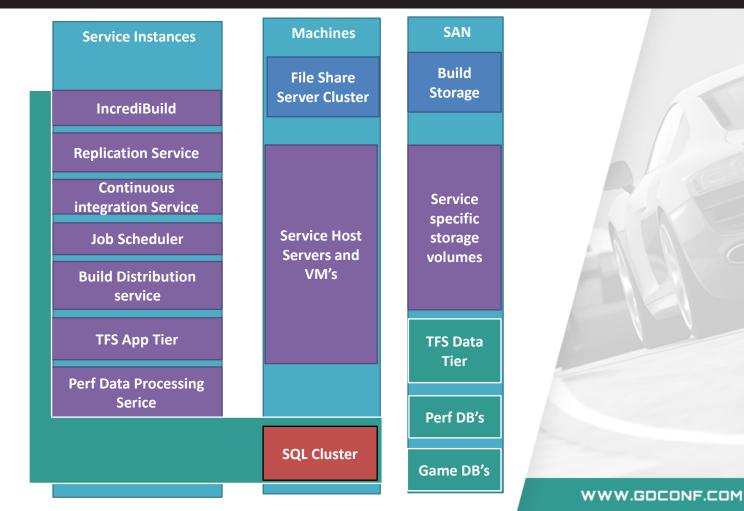
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### **Putting it all Together**

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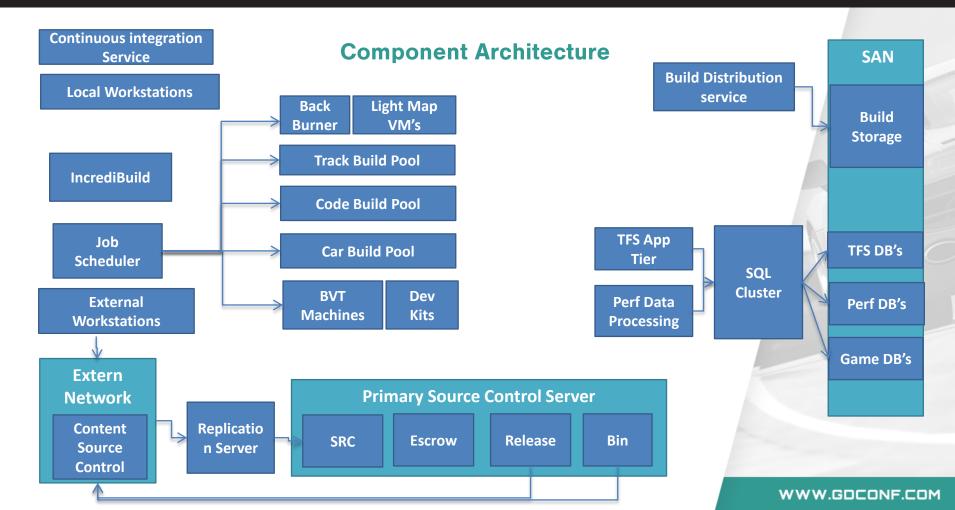
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The Service Stack



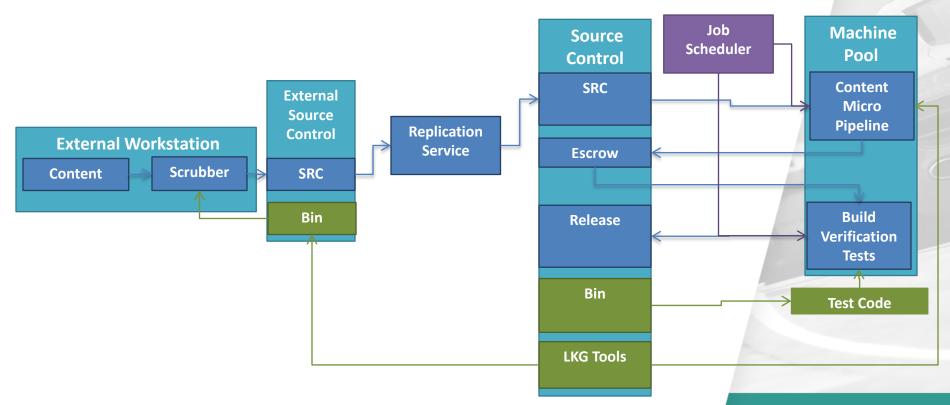
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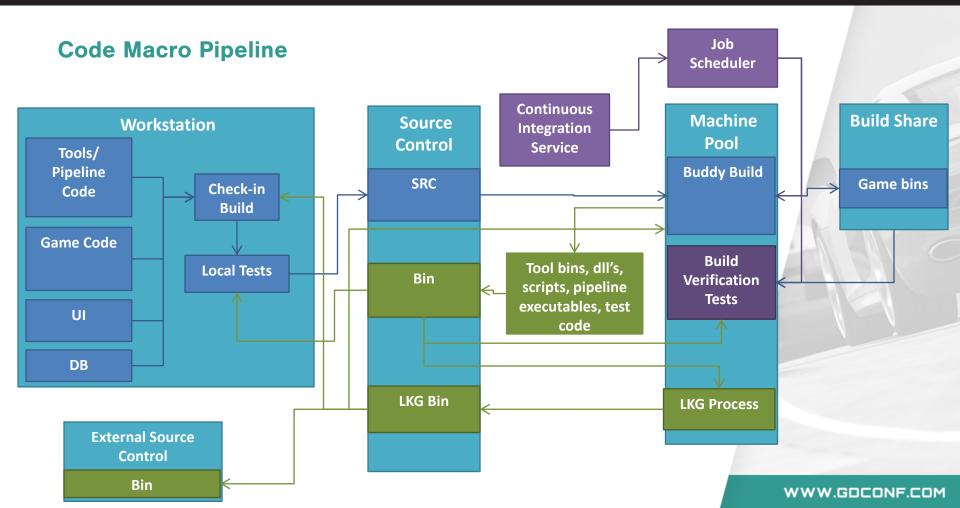
### **Macro Pipeline Examples**

### **Content Macro Pipeline**



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# **Go Faster With Distributed**

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## **Forza 4 Daily Build**

- Takes ~4 hours to complete
- It uses 10x 8 core machines
- Estimated 20+ hours linear execution time
- The long running non distributes tasks account for most of this time
- During these tasks we only use 1-3 machines due to dependencies
- Our estimates predict a build time of less than 1 hour if we can break up each of these tasks into at least 3 equal sub tasks
- But that's all theoretical...

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# **Distributed Car Builds**

Initial Forza 4 car builds where over 24 hours

### **Optimization reduced this to**

- Full AutoVista Car export 8-12 hours
- Full non AutoVista export 4-6 hours

#### Non mesh edit Incremental Builds

- Less than 10 minutes, for ~70% of builds
- Still average ~25 full builds per day during peak production

### Can we leverage Xorax's XGE system to accelerate car builds?

### Yes!



## **Distributed Car build cont.**

90% of car build time is spent in single threaded computation of directional occlusion and illumination

Computation of per vertex/per ray data is independent within a illumination bounce

#### A multi pass parallel algorithm can be used

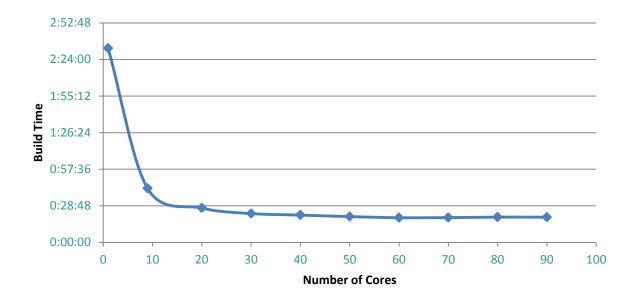
- · For each bounce read all previous bounce data
- Run direction occlusion and illumination in parallel for all vertices
- Write bounce data
- Repeat

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## **Actual Performance**



- AutoVista (1M poly) Cars 1.2-1.5 hours from 8-12 hours
- Non AutoVista(400k poly) Cars <25 minutes from 2-4 hours</li>

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# **Closing Arguments**



- Growth in content complexity, studio size, geographic diversity and data set size is rapidly increasing the difficulty and scope of pipeline work
- Solving problems of this scale requires good engineering and cross team collaboration
- The Pipeline is the literal implementation of the overall studio software process
- A services approach to pipeline design allows us to leverage leading edge IT technology and solutions for a scalable, flexible, and resilient solution
- Distributed computation is an fundamental technique for reducing iteration times

### **Acknowledgments / Questions**

#### **Special Thanks:**

Erin Devoy, Chris Tector (Turn 10), Daniel Adent (Turn 10), Colin Reed (Turn10), Cory Ross (Turn 10), Chris Butcher (Bungie/GDC), GTO Development Team (Microsoft Studios), Games IT (Microsoft Studios), Build Tracker Team (Microsoft), BG IT (Microsoft)

#### Software:

- Team Foundation Server : <u>http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/vstudio/ff637362</u>
- Incredibuild and Incredibuild XGE : <u>http://xoreax.com/</u>
- Power Shell : <u>http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/scriptcenter/dd742419</u>
- MS Build : <u>http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/0k6kkbsd.aspx</u>

### **Spherical Harmonic Lighting:**

- P. Sloan, J. Kautz, and J. Snyder, "Precomputed Radiance Transfer for Real-Time Rendering in Dynamic, Low-Frequency Lighting Environments," ACM Trans. Graphics, pp. 527-536, 2002.
- Spherical Harmonic Lighting: The Gritty Details, Robin Green, <u>http://www.research.scea.com/gdc2003/spherical-harmonic-lighting.pdf</u>

# **Appendix**

## **Detailed Car Build Time Slides**

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# **Car Build Times**

#### Non linear increase in content build times

- Forza 4 Million Poly models initial build times over 24 hours
- V3 build times where 3-5 hours
- Kills Iteration!

### **After Optimization**

- Full AutoVista Car export 8-12 hours
- Full non AutoVista export 4-6 hours

### Still not fast enough

### **Incremental Builds**

Non-predictable dependency chains for Direction Occlusion and Illumination

### Vast majority of changes are not to mesh data (70%)

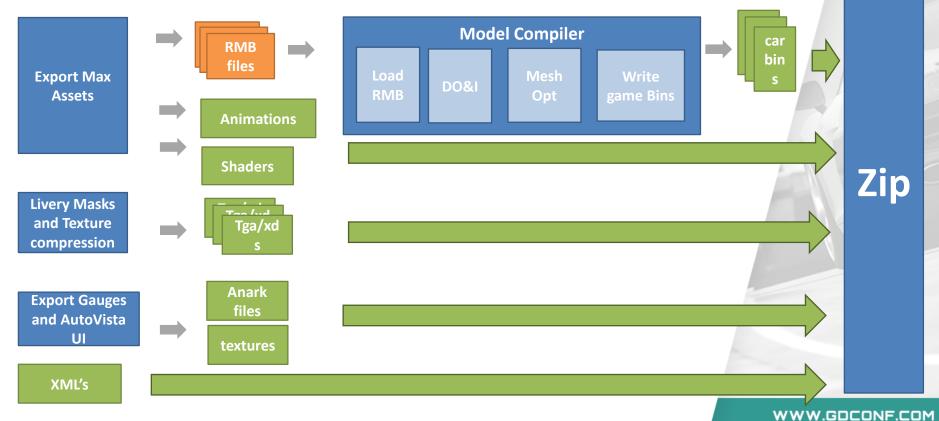
• No need to re-run max export or Directional Occlusion and Illumination for non mesh data changes

#### Non mesh edit builds < 10 minutes

#### Massive help but we still have to do a lot of full builds

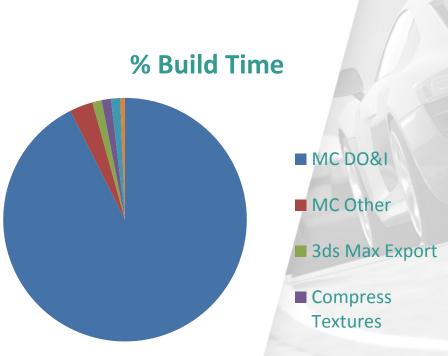
• ~25 full car builds per day during peak production

### **Car Micro Pipeline**



# **Build Time perf analysis**

90% of build time in Directional Occlusion and Illumination calculation from within the "Model Compiler" Tool



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# **Breaking open the "Data Compiler"**

#### Analysis of model compiler Directional Occlusion and Illumination code

- Per Mesh
  - Model load and special decomp
  - Per-vertex
    - Ray casting
  - Per Bounce (x3)
    - Per-vertex
    - Illumination calc per ray
  - Per-Vertex
    - Final Summation
  - Dump Data to disk

### CPU usage is all on one core

Most time spent in Per-Vert Compute Operations

# **Distributed Directional Occlusion and Illumination**

#### Approach

• Calculate directional occlusion and illumination for each vertex and each bounce independently then re-combine final data

### Problem

• Calculation of N+1 bounce data requires access to All vertex data from Bounce N

### Solution

- Create a multi pass approach, for bounce N each vert is independent of all other verts in bounce N
- Write all data from bounce N before starting bounce N+1,
- Run bounce N+1 passing all data from Pass N
- Read all final data and write final game asset

# **Trading Problems**

- Distributed compute trades a CPU bound problem for a I/O bound problem
- Bounce data ~750 mb per bounce of data for autovista
- This is ~1.5 GB of write and read per bounce
- At a conservative 10 MB\s of throughput ~= 2.5 min per bounce
- Approx. 7.5 minutes of I/O overhead for a 3 bounce SH burn
- Bounce data non autovista ~80MB per bounce
- ~160 MB total I/O per bounce ~= 16 sec per bounce
- Less than 1 minute I/O over head for a 3 bounce SH burn

# Working with Incredibuild's XGE

#### Virtualized file system

- XGE's virtualized file system makes data management trivial
- All file i/o is seamlessly routed to the requesting nodes file system via TCP
- All worker nodes see files on the requesting node as if they are local file with the same name and path as the requesting node
- i.e. any reference to c:\temp\mydata.xml is the file located on the requesting node's c:\temp no matter what node is accessing it.
- Simple file based data communication

#### Simple execution and synchronization via xgesubmit and xgewait

### Limitations

- Allowing more than 20 nodes per job is not advised by Xorax
- We are currently using 40 nodes with good results
- Disk and network bandwidth of requesting machines
  - 1gbe caps at ~125 MB/s, but saturating your network will not make many friends
  - Local disc will usually be under 90MB/s unless using 2<sup>nd</sup> gen SSD's or large raid arrays
- No advanced message passing system

### Gotcha's

- Writing "error" to the command's output stream will trigger Incredibuild to report errors even if these are just trace data

### **Change tools to be XGE friendly**

- Design your systems to run calculations for a subset of data
- For algorithms with data dependencies use a multi pass approach where all independent calculations are run in a single pass and state is serialized to disc at the end of the pass
- Serialize data to uniquely named files
- Parameterize the pass stage, file names, and data subsets

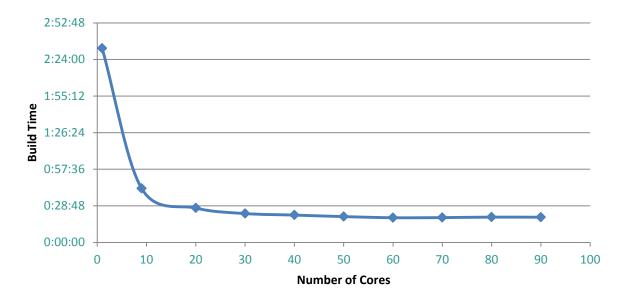
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### **Actual Performance**



- AutoVista (1M poly) Cars 1.2-1.5 hours from 8-12 hours
- Non AutoVista(400k poly) Cars <25 minutes from 2-4 hours