Introduction

Hello again. Welcome to the second part of The Story Behind Series - a place where I can tell you guys a bit more about the origins and the evolution of my mods and modding techniques. This time we'll be talking the Steampunk Outfit, which is actually a more practical sister of the Black Corset Dress. If you want to know more about the dress, please go back to part one of this series.
The Steampunk Outfit was also my first mod officially released, so doing and updating it was an intensive learning process for me. People still seem to use the mod for various reasons. Just the day I'm writing this part, someone wanted to use this mod with a Maven Black-Briar replacer, so it's still alive. :) Let's dive into the details then... (Below you can see one of the first complete and working versions of the outfit)

1. Fishtail skirts and when to avoid them

Previously I started the story with introducing Eve Vette - my main Skyrim character ever since. I will skip most of her story this time (If you're interested in Eve's backstory, again, switch back to part one of TSB series please). The first outfit I decided to make for her was of course the Black Corset Dress. But it was really hard for her to run through the woods or swim in these swamps in a fishtail skirt (although there is a word „fish" within the name... wink :D). That's why I started to think about a much more practical version of the outfit, with leather boots and trousers.

Of course Eve could go visit the Jarl or take a Sunday stroll or whatever in the Black Dress, but I was more and more certain that she needed something more smple for hunting monsters and digging the dirt. Also, I somehow thought, that a Black Corset Dress won't be well recieved at Nexus (there were not many couture dresses out there back then) and I need to turn it into something at least a little bit more lore-friendly before uploading. I was nearly sure that a non-lore-friendly mod would get easily criticised, which what later became clear, wasn't true Besides, the idea of Eve having a separate outfit for official purposes and another one for adventuring seemed also really fun. I liked to see her head home and change to continue to the next part of the journey - a little immersion boost :D That's how it all started.

2. Visual Inspirations

As far as steampunk is concerned, corsets are a must-have. Mainly because this particular style is based on 19th and early 20th century fashions. Many steampunk novels often present a world similar to this, that was a hundred years ago and a bit more, but on steroids. You get flying brass ships or complex mechanical steam-powered machinery and weapons ;) all of it working among historically-inspired architecture and spaces. Skyrim's Dwemer Realms are strongly based on Steampunk style. That's why some of the gamers do call it Dwemerpunk style.

There are many iconic examples of steampunk stories in culture like „Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea" by Jules Verne or Mary Shelley's „Frankenstein". As far as visual arts are concerned you might mention Barry Sonnenfeld's 1999 movie „Wild Wild West" or Benoit Sokal's iconic game series „Syberia". As far as games are concerned „Bioshock Infinite" was also a huge Steampunk thing.

In terms of fashion, Steampunk likes to expose the underpinings, thus to show corsets and cage crinolines with their brass fastenings and buckles and also leather belts holding the pieces together. It's also a kind of attention to structure and mechanics of clothes.

In case of my Steampunk Outfit I looked for something very simple, because my modelling and mapping skills weren't that good at that time. Thus I really wanted to reuse the corset designed for the Black Corset Dress outfit. Now I see that perhaps it wasn't that wise since I also copied my own errors as well.

At some point I became very interested in an alternative fashion collection called „Lost in Prague" by a very tallented Spanish courturier Maya Hansen. I really liked how she combined leather trousers with corsets, capes, belts and other accessories. She did a very stylish version of steampunk and it somehow fitted my Eve Vette's style quite nicely.

3. The Process

I started to shape the outfit with remodelling the corset, by just turning a v-shaped neckline into a typical "sweathart" decollette. Namely, I just stretched the cups of the BCD corset into the new desired shape and remodel the bust area a bit and voila! ;)

Then I moved on to redoing the bodice texture to make it a bit brighter. I wanted to make it not as that pitch black as the Black Corset Dress. Next I modelled the pants from scratch (I learned a lot about Skyrim pants then - it's crucial not to make them too low poly) and textured them in Photoshop with a nice leather tex found at textures.com. Below you can see the first version of the main shape with a pretty strange variant of the shoulder cape ;)

Then, it was time to model the boots. These were my first boots ever modelled in 3ds max. I started with finding photos of a nice reference pair online, which wasn't that easy to be honest. I browsed hundreds of images and I didn't like most of them. Finally, I found a series of pictures of a nice pair of over-the-knee boots at a shopping website or so. It was a relief after a really long search. Moreover, the images were good enough to try making a 1:1 texture out of them. I'm pasting the original images below.

I remember that I started with a flat heel, but added the high heel over time, because rising the heel also gave the boot an instant boost to attractiveness. The very first form looked quite weird. I did not know what I was aiming for, so the first results of my modelling looked funny. After some turbo smoothing and refining I finally got a first satisfactory version. I also tried to match the original boot photos, to make the texturing easier later on. The UVW map of these boots was rather simple - the left side, the right side, the bottom and some belts. I did all the textures in Photoshop by wrapping the original side-view of the boot over the UVW template I made in max.
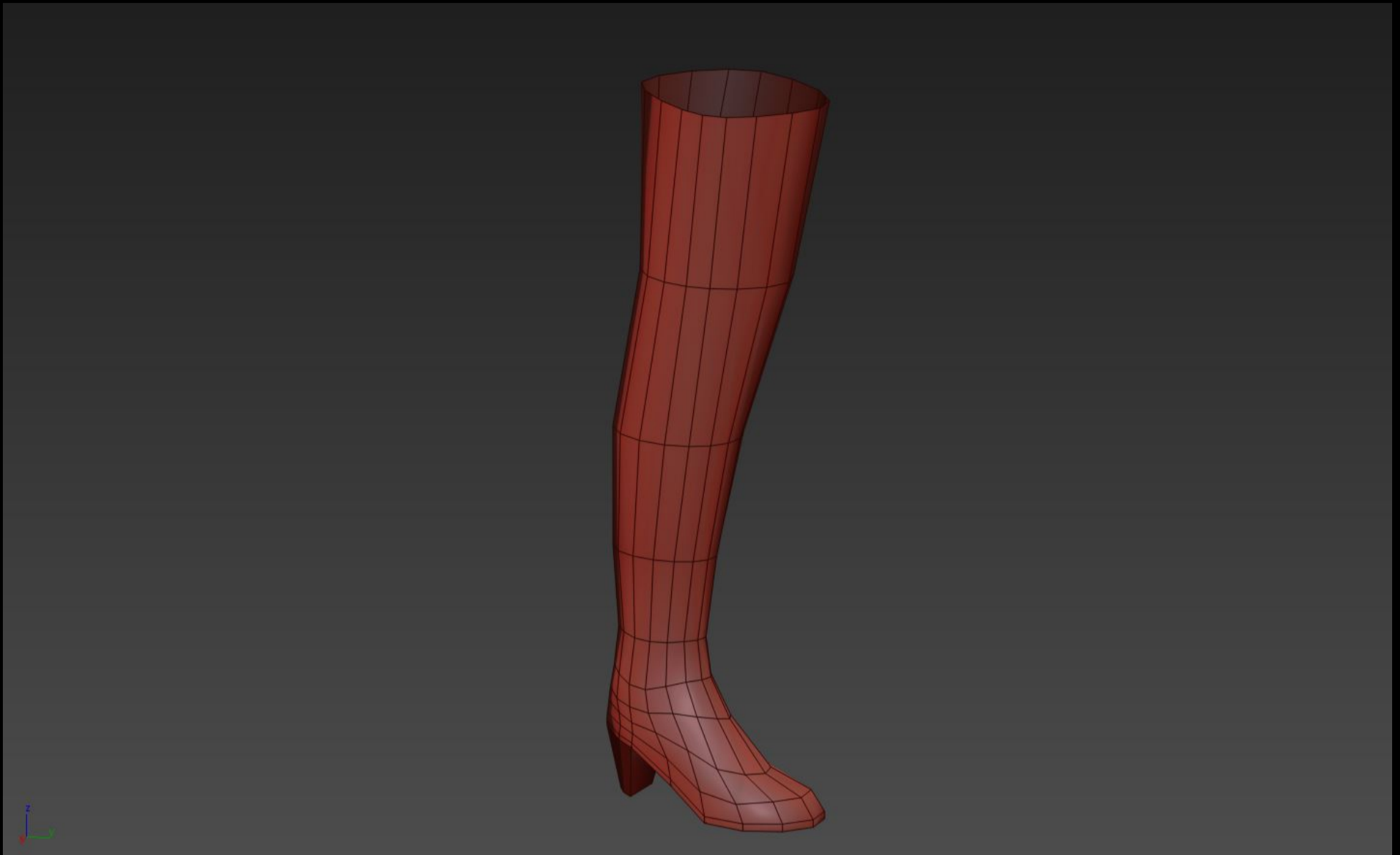

The border between the corset and the trousers looked a bit emtpy to me at first. That's why I started to seek some belts inspiration over the web. I quickly found a nice elaborate belt with its tip wrapped around at one end. It reminded me a bit Yennefer's belt from The Witcher 3 (I love Yen's black and white style there. It's beautifully based on 16th/17th century men's fashion and has got sime nice details). First, I did a very simple, low poly model of the belt and mapped it very roughly. But I didn't like the outcome really, and quickly redid this part.

The second attempt was much more successful. I updated the geometry, modelled and textured the ending node anew. Even today I'm very happy with this result. The only thing I'd redo is the metal buckle which seems quite flat. Of course, today I'd paint the small details with height map and normals in Substance Painter, but back then, I just generated a normal map by converting the diffuse map with Nvidia Normal Map filter.

The last thing to complete the outfit was of course the fur shoulder cape. The first concept looked quite weird to me in terms of proportions, that's why I started to work on a new form with a nice collar. I still don't know anything about Skyrim's fur shader, so I tried to achieve the fluffyness with a standard EnvMap Shader. I did a dense mesh and applied Displace modifier for the large bumps (you can see the bumps in the image below) and the normal map for the small bumps. I painted the alpha channel by hand in Photoshop and I did the normals using Nvidia Normal tool for Photoshop. The resulting material still looks rather flat, but I think it's also quite ok as a first attempt :D
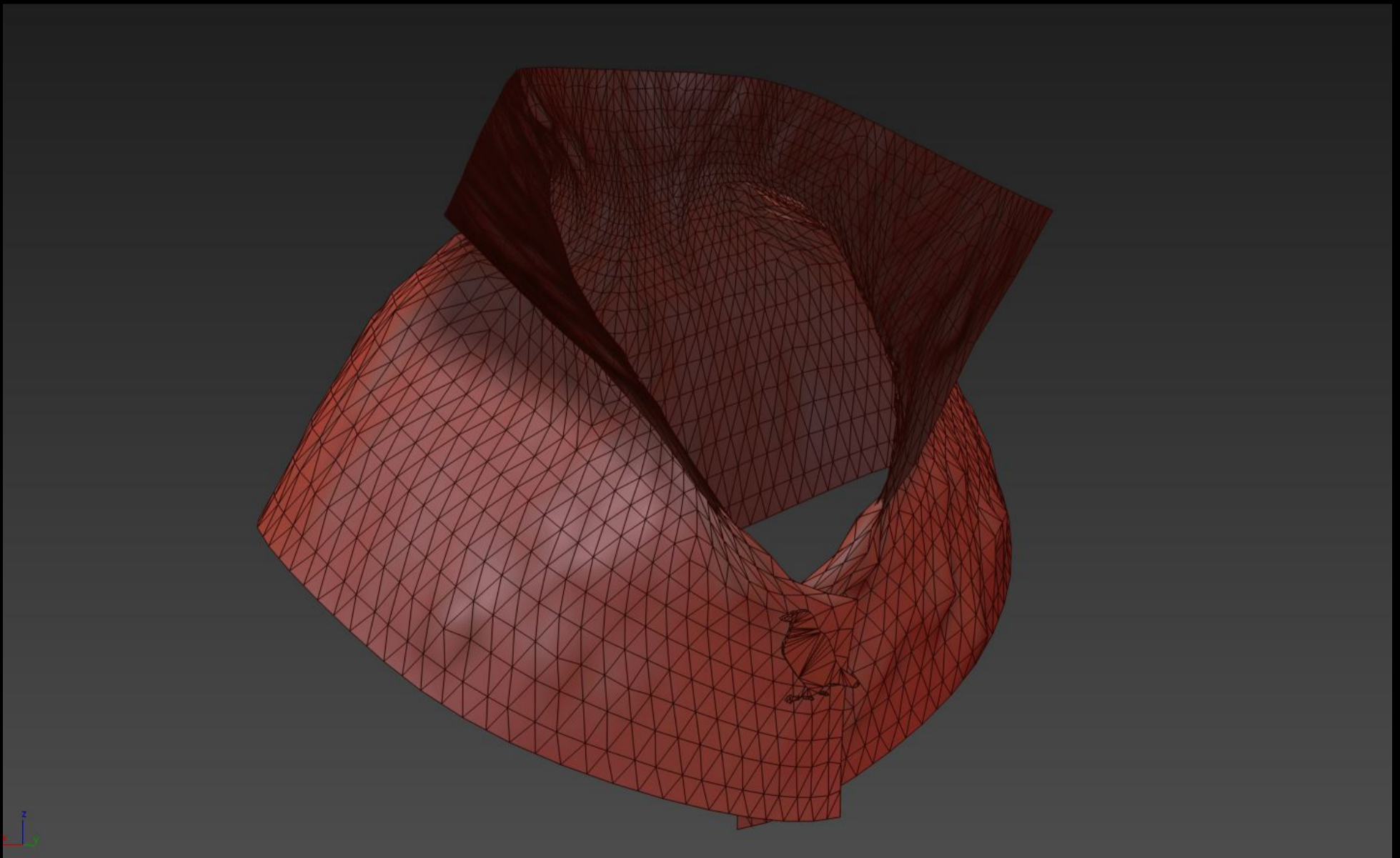
As an addition, I shortened the Black Corset Dress gloves and the neck corset to match this a bit more practical concept. I also had to struggle a bit more with the textures which were DXT1 and DXT5 formats at first. As I mentioned in the Black Corset Dress post - these textures looked awful because of the intensive compression. Then to fix this I used 8.8.8 24bit and 8.8.8.8 32bit Unsigned formats for a long time afterwards, which looked great but weighed whole tons. Nexus users just hated my mods for being so heavy. Many joked that when they equip a Kozakowy's outfit - everything freezes :D The current version is bc1 bc3 but still the very first Photoshop made tex :)

Lastly, some time ago I did a brown retexture to match more of the initial visual references. This made the outfit also more suitable for „Dwemerpunk" style shoots, which I really love.

As for animating this one, the rigging was relatively simple. The bodice, pants and the boots worked just out of the box - you only had to apply the SkinWrap modifier. The only part that needed some focus and love was the shoulder cape to make the under-arm stretching nice and smooth.

4. To Sum Up

I have a great fondness for this outfit since It's the first one I uploaded to Nexus. I remember putting the first version online, and all these emotions when I saw people downloading the mod, commenting it and posting pictures of their characters wearing my stuff. That was so rewarding that I decided to continue and we are where we are now. I'm. happy I could share at least some of these details with you guys. Do not hesitate to tell me what else would you like to know about the story behind my mods and I'll try to answer. You can leave your comment under The Story Behind post at my Patreon feed.

Hope you enjoyed this episode of The Story Behind. I hope I'll revisit this project someday and add some more Steapunk/Dwemerpunk stuff. Until next time!

K.