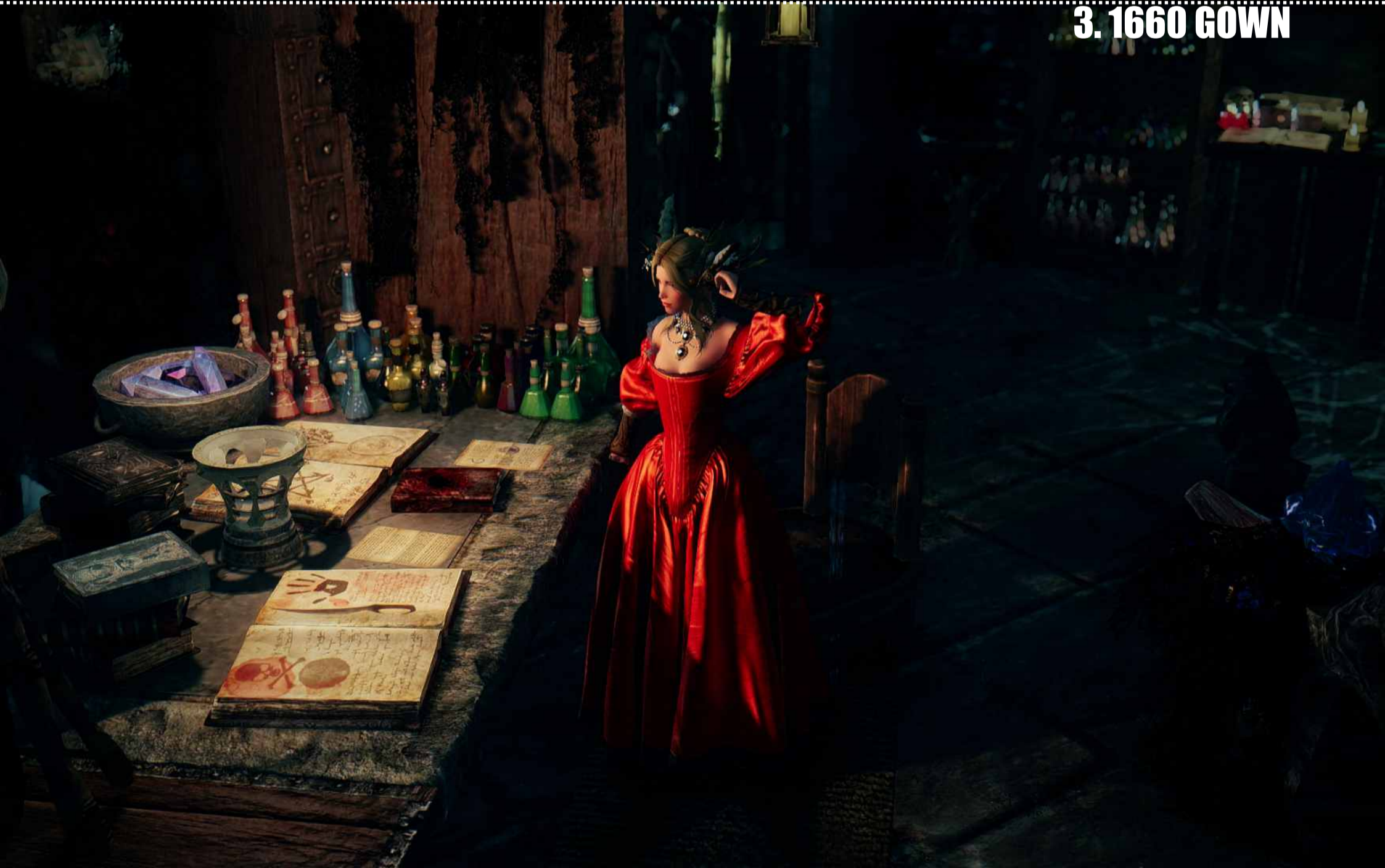


**KOZAKOWY'S THE STORY BEHIND**  
**3. 1660 GOWN**



## Introduction

The third part of our „The Story Behind” series is right before you. This time I'd like to tell you a bit about a very special outfit I decided to make in 3d. It was my first historically inspired piece of clothing designed for Skyrim (a way of designing gaming assets I really like to revisit over and over again). It was also the first time I noticed that 3ds Max + NifTools + Creation Kit + Skyrim had a huge potential for recreating literally any kind of fashions in 3d and incorporating them into the realms of the North. Let me tell you briefly then, about what made this project happen, what was the main inspiration and what were the biggest challenges here. Shall we? (*Below you can see the very first version of 1660 gown*)



## 1. The Man In The Iron Mask

I have to admit, that I had a huge fondness towards the 17 century fashions since I was a child. I remember watching the Three Musketeers movies and admiring the beauty of the sumptuous early baroque gowns and also men's doublets and hats. Also the knee length boots were a thing back then of course. The main villainess of the Musketeer series - Milady De Winter was always the best dressed of all in my view, sometimes even better than Queen Anne herself.

My 17 century fascination became complete with two further movies. Another Alexander Dumas novel adaptation - „Man In The Iron Mask” with Leonardo DiCaprio and Judith Godreche. The costumes there were top notch. And one of Christine's gowns (the main female character) really caught my eye, so much that I just couldn't get them out of my head (*Just see for yourself below*).

Another stunning 17 century period movie that strongly inspired me during the creative process was „Marquise” with Sophie Marceau - it was a dramatic story of a French actress of that time, again visually stunning.



**2. Before The Automobile**

Apart from the movies and paintings, which provided some nice visual references, I really wanted to know more about how a proper 17 century gown is constructed. During the research I stumbled upon a very interesting historical costuming blog by Merja Palkivaara entitled Before The Automobile. Merja provided there a „making of” documentation of her 17 century silver gown, which caught my eye instantly with the simplicity of it's form and the historical accuracy of techniques which led her to creating a really impressive garment. (You can have a glimpse below of this astonishing silver gown).



This particular dress eventually became the main reference for my 1600 gown mod. I only did some small alterations, which I will discuss later on. Thanks to Merja's blog I learned a lot about this type of garment's structure, and that it consists mainly of three parts.

The first one is a conical fully boned bodice, based on a pair of 17 century stays, but the dress bodice isn't a separate piece, it's rather an overlay of the stays. That's why the bodice seems extremely smooth in the final look.

The second part is a beautifully pleated rectangle-based skirt (I actually failed to recreate it in my mod, since the simulation was too complicated for me back then. I was really happy that I was able to get a working skirt simulation, whatsoever ;)).

The third and the last part were the puffy sleeves also with some nice pleats and a white lace trimming.

*(Below a quick peek inside a 17 century bodice and between the layers)*



**3. The Process**

With quite a lot of information about the 17 century fashions in mind, I threw myself into the dark abyss of 3d modelling. It was also the first time I modelled an outfit using more or less the method I describe nowadays in the Outfit Creation Guide.

This means I started with a box, and then moved on to shaping the bodice via adding points/edges and also using turbosmooth and symmetry modifiers. The symmetry modifier led me to a serious mistake I made while mapping the bodice which I will explain later on, but now I never map the bodices symetrically - it always looks odd.

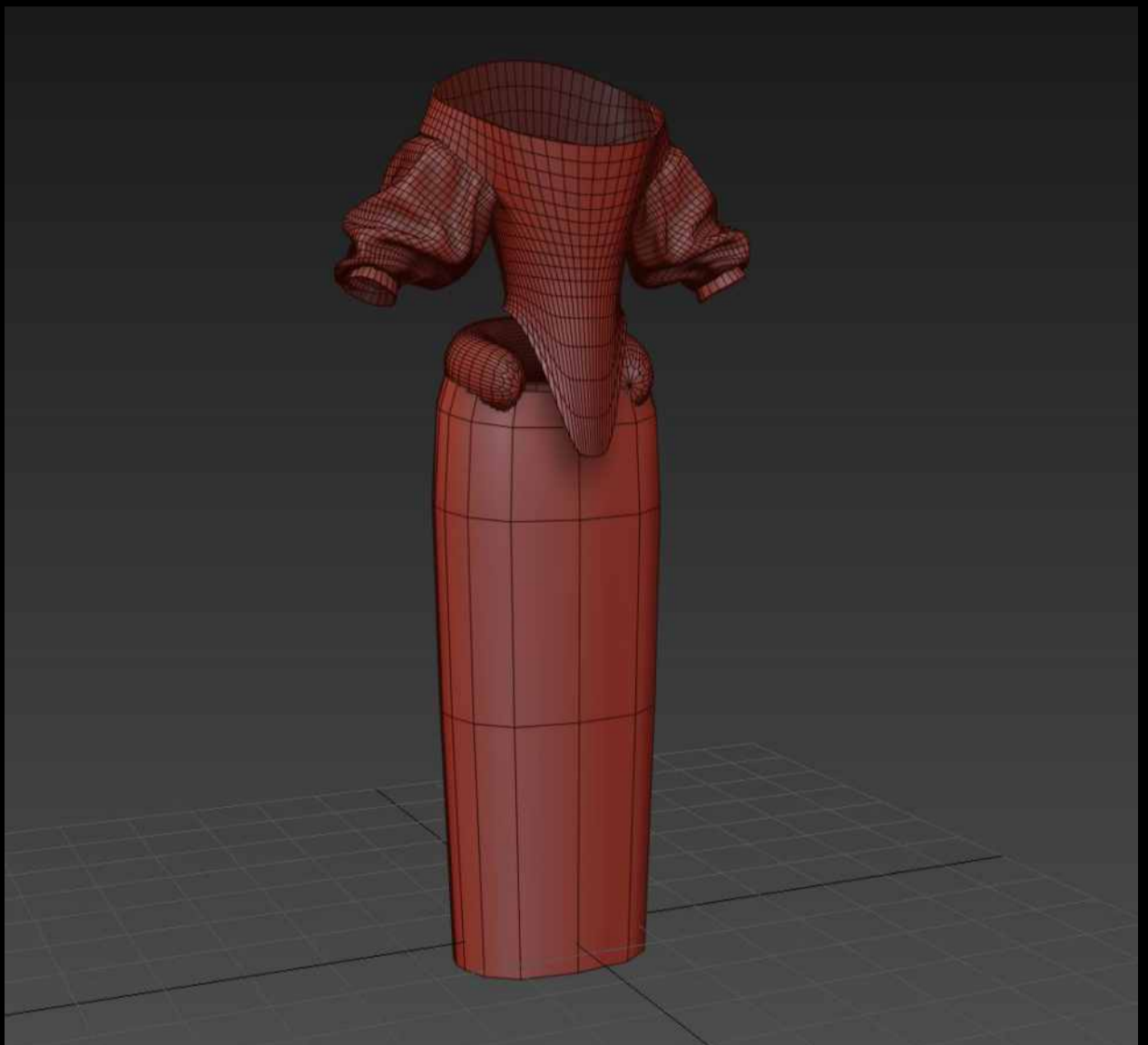
I was quickly quite satisfied with the basic bodice shape, and I moved on to the sleeves.

I decided to simulate the sleeves using the cloth modifier holding the shape of the arm hole and the elbow opening. After some quick experiments it looked quite convincing as a rough shape, so I planed to add more detail to the sleeves in the texturing stage.

I also added some extra height in the back of the bodice, since I found it really nice when the upper edge of the bodice noticeably surrounded the arms of the wearer.

Then I moved to the skirt simulation. (As you can see in the picture to the right), I also decided to add collision objects to the cloth sim rig. You can also notice a proper bum-roll-like element - to mimic the 17 century undergarments.

The bum roll usually helped to add some extra volume in the bach of the skirt but it also helped to form a nice hip spring (see below and bottom right).



The simulation results weren't quite satisfying, because much of the skirt volume went to the front of the character, and the skirt length was kind of random at the bottom (I used cut tool to trim it).

I decided to leave it like that, at the time, but now I'd do it differently today - probably trying to pre-model the rectangle based skirt and leave the simulation part only to add some extra wrinkles. But well, the experience comes over time. ;)



After I thought I couldn't get the skirt any better, I turned to adding some details that I liked in the Before The Automobile's gown.

I really loved the kind of „fins” over the line where the sleeves connect with the bodice, above the armhole area. They are a really nice detail in this rather simple design. I was pretty happy with them in the modelling stage (*you can see them in the picture to the right*).

Unfortunately I had to resign from making them in the rigging stage, since I didn't really know how to rig and weightpaint them in the context of the whole garment. Now I'd probably lower some of the skin wrap modifier radiuses and try to make it move very close to the bodice. But again I couldn't figure it out while I was doing this mod. That's also why I'd like to do another 17 century now including all the new solutions I can come up with.

I remember I tried to combine my models to a one continuous welded form back then, because I wanted to weightpaint it as a whole. Now I find it more convenient to divide bigger parts into smaller ones and rig them separately. This also spares a lot of time if you have to redo the weightpainting.

The very first (private) version of the 1660 Gown also had the edge bindings modelled. They looked quite ok in game, but I stopped doing them at some point to avoid rigging problems. I used skin wrap to rig them along with the main shape, but the bindings still used to move a bit differently than the base shape edge, creating holes in some poses.

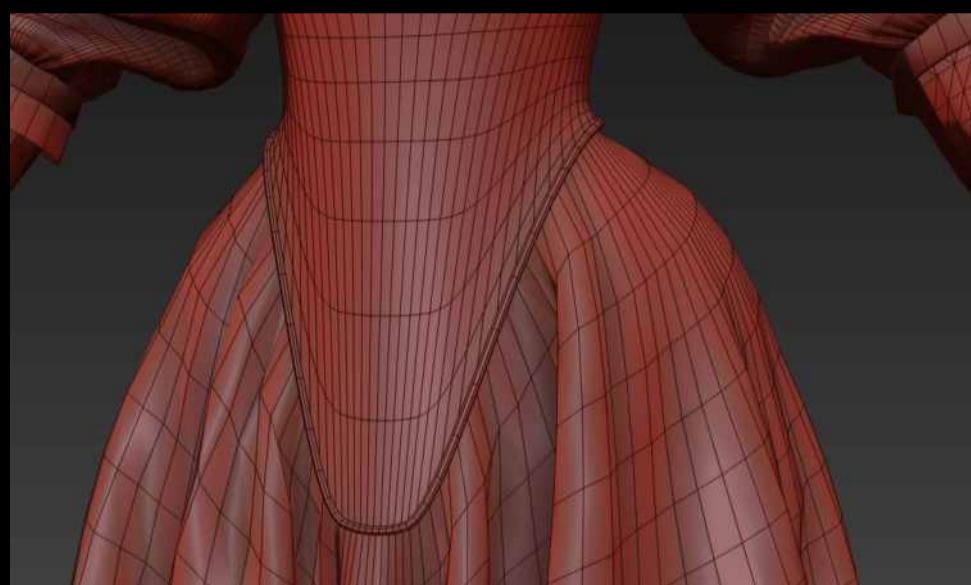
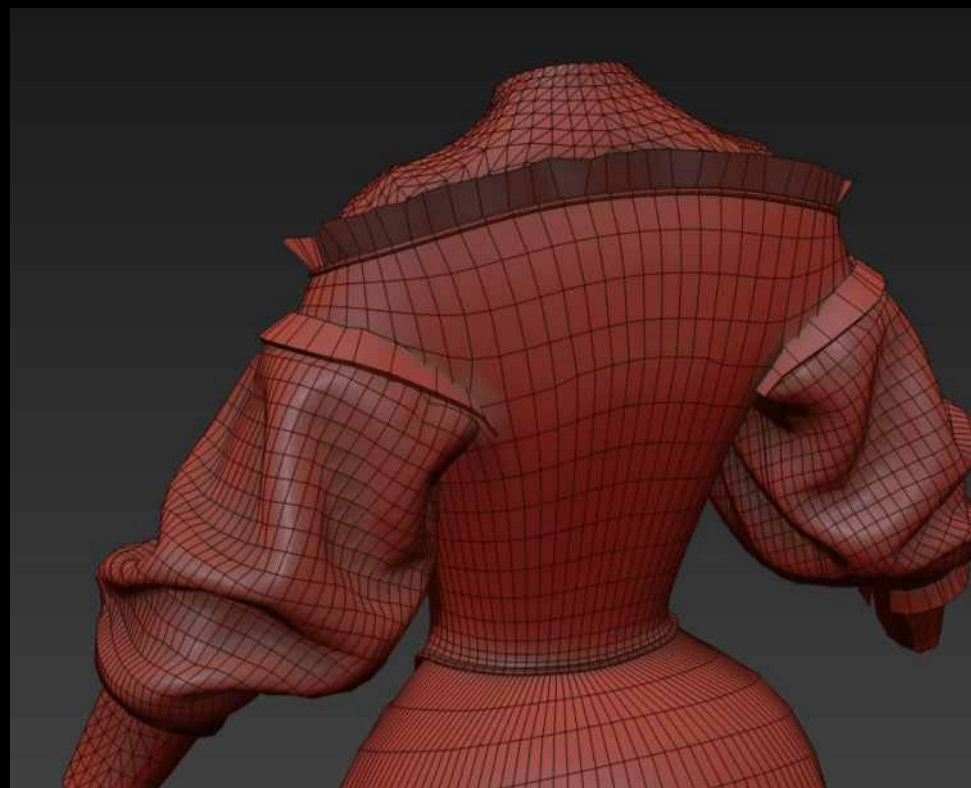
Nowadays I draw the bindings in the texturing stage using height map and normal bumps. They look ok in most cases, and there is no need to skin wrap them. Today I try to avoid modelling bindings if I can.

After the main model was completed, I also kind of wanted to create some extra accessories for the gown in the first (private) version.

I thought of creating a whole outfit for a villain character like Milady De Winter. That's why I started doing a structured decorative lace hood - similar to the one Faye Dunaway wore (*see bottom right*) in the Musketeers movie. I strongly recommend costume research as far as The Musketeers stories adaptations are concerned. It was always a big thing all throughout the history of cinema.

I also did some more accessories like lace gloves and a neck lacer, but I didn't include it in the first public version of the mod, since the textures were very poor in quality.

I got back to the accessories topic last year and I was able to add a nice set of extra equippable 17 century details, but the amount of the ideas is almost infinite if you take a look not only at the movie costumes but also the classical paintings of the masters.



After I told you a bit about 3d modelling, let's talk a bit about textures. The main textures of the first working version of this outfit were made totally in Photoshop. I simply rendered the UVW template in 3ds Max and wrapped some textures found over the web around the template. I also used some of my reference 17 century gowns photos as a base for this texture. The bindings textures were also made by bending some straight binding photos. The specular map was made by filtering the layers of the diffuse texture a bit, just to add some reflection here and there. The normals were generated by putting the diffuse map into the Nvidia NormalMapFilter - so it was rather to mimic the normals than create some real fully controlled ones.

You can see (*below*) that the overall material looked rather flat and clay-like. I wasn't that happy with it, but I kind of liked the smoothness of the bodice there.



The Photoshopped textures were included in the very first (private) version of the outfit in DXT1 and DXT5 formats - I was playing on a potato PC back then, :D but soon I realised, that if I wanted to upload this outfit as a mod, I have to do some higher quality textures. That's why I redid the photoshopped textures enhancing their quality a bit and saved them as an Unsigned 8.8.8.8 format. The whole thing became traditionally heavy as hell. ;)

A longer while later, when I got my hands on Substance Painter, and after my first experiences with texturing some Black Corset Dress accessories in this brand new software, I decided to retexture the whole 1660 Gown as well.

I changed the detailed diffuse channel into a more plain one, but thanks to SP, I was able to do more detailed specular and normal channels. I also wanted to add a kind of silver thread to the grey version of the gown, and I don't think it worked well (*see below*). Also a mistake I did at the UVW mapping stage became very visible here. I mapped the bodice symmetrically, which looks just awful and messes the normals up in game, but I haven't thought of it as a problem then. I was very happy with the result :D I changed my mind after doing several other projects a bit differently later on.



All in all, the textures that you can get now at Nexus along with this mod are almost the ones made during the first shot in Substance Painter. I have to say though, that the black version as well as the purple (bronze) one looks quite ok, but I still want to redo this outfit every time I see it. :D

Last year I finally managed to add the lace hood to the official set, along with some other details like a small ruff, a set of wide collars and Flemish-styled lace headdresses (*previews below*). I have to say that I admire 17 century Flemish fashions just as in Vermeer's or Terborch's portraits. The inspirations for the lace hood and the lace collar was, as I mentioned, the Musketeers movie series, but the small ruff was inspired with a 2020 Autum de Wilde movie entitled „Emma”.

I really enjoy doing accessories, since the rigging is (in most cases) rather simple, and rigging is what I hate doing. ;) On the other hand I love creating textures and materials with all the intricate details - it's a great way to relax a bit, after a whole day of working in 3ds Max.



#### 4. To Sum Up

Well, it's hard to say that the story of this outfit is complete. I'm currently planning a new 17 century outfit, but in a bit different form. It's also likely that I'll remap and retexture the good old 1660 Gown, since the model is pretty nice to be honest. But you never can say anything certain. I also don't really like revisiting old projects - there is always something that you get and something that you loose in such situation. I'm happy though that I did this gown once, since I could shoot some historically inspired scenes with my favourite Skyrim characters :)



Hope you enjoyed this episode of The Story Behind. Stay tuned for more 17 century vibes in my works. You can be pretty sure that they will appear eventually. Also feel free to ask me questions about modding and inspirations. I'll be more than glad to answer.

Take care!

K.

