

CONJECTURE INSTITUTE · FELLOW SPOTLIGHT

Hollywood's Optimistic Heir

Conjecture Institute Fellow Dimitri Vallein is building optimistic science-fiction worlds with real-time 3D, immersive technology, and a philosophy of progress.

BY LOGAN CHIPKIN



Image by Amaro Koberle

CREATING WORLDS FROM SCRATCH

Conjecture Institute Fellow Dimitri Vallein first put his hands on a camera when he was ten years old. Fascinated not only by the image it could produce, but by the technology behind it, he began exploring every new creative tool he could get his hands on. What started with cameras soon expanded into coding video games, augmented reality, 3D worldbuilding, and immersive experiences.

By the time he was 27, Dimitri had developed video games that reached number one on the App Store, generated half a billion views with his augmented reality (AR) creations, built a YouTube channel with tens of millions of views, worked closely with Balaji Srinivasan, and directed three science-fiction short films recognized by film festivals including Animation First in New York, Dances With Films LA, and the Berlin Music Video Awards. He has also presented his work at VIEW Conference and is now launching Revery, a technology company building immersive storytelling systems to simulate dynamic futures.

“As a kid, I learned everything I could about filmmaking,” Dimitri remembers. “How the camera works in detail, the technical elements that go into making a quality video, how to edit videos on a computer, and how to shape an image. I’d later apply that same learning process to every new tool I encountered: coding augmented reality experiences with Unity, creating entire 3D worlds from scratch in Blender, and building cinematic virtual experiences in Unreal Engine.”

Having spent his childhood in the French countryside, Dimitri knew that if he was going to make it in the film and technology industry, he’d have to move to the big city. At seventeen, he ventured to Bordeaux, the nearest urban center. Three years later,

he would be selected for an entrepreneurial talent program. That gave him the confidence to put all of his chips into technology-driven storytelling, and he dropped out of his university program and moved to Paris.

Dimitri's passion for creating optimistic movies with cutting-edge technology would be foreshadowed when he first discovered software that was tailor-made for film production. Just around the time he moved to Paris, he learned about software programs such as After Effects, Cinema 4D, Unity, and Unreal Engine, all of which elevated Dimitri's interest from just making films to almost literally turning his dreams into reality.

"It was the most mind-blowing moment of my career," Dimitri says. "For the first time, I realized that I could use these tools to create entire universes from scratch, worlds that had previously existed only in my imagination. Once I understood that potential, I knew this was what I wanted to devote the next chapter of my life to."

Dimitri's first short film, *The Last Star*, came out in 2022. With hardly any help, Dimitri wrote, directed, animated, edited, and even created music for this under-four-minute animated piece of science fiction. Over the next few years, the movie would earn official selections and awards:

- Best Animation, Berlin Music Video Awards, alongside major artists such as The Weeknd, Pharrell Williams, and Muse
- Best Music Videos, Dances With Films LA
- Best Fantasy/Sci-Fi, Short to the Point
- Best Animation, Venice Shorts
- Best Animation, Rome Music Video Awards
- Best Animated Short, Vesuvio International Movie Award

Dimitri's opening salvo in filmmaking also earned him screenings at over forty international festivals.

“The success of my first film was a huge shot in the arm,” Dimitri says. “I made it alone on my computer, with a budget of practically zero. It was shown across the world and finished at the historic TCL Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles.”

The Last Star



[WATCH ON YOUTUBE](#)

Set in the year 7437, a mysterious ancient civilization is systematically destroying all the stars in the sky. One of its agents is tasked with destroying the last remaining one, a beautiful blue star.

The film is a visually driven, dialogue-light piece that blends cosmic grandeur with themes of destruction, greed, and the unattainable beauty of the stars. It draws on mythical and futuristic elements, relying heavily on striking imagery, animation created primarily in Unreal Engine 5, and a haunting soundtrack.

Dimitri's next film, created in collaboration with Quentin Colus, was a marked departure from his first. Although *Vortex* retained Dimitri's passion for the philosophical, invoking the Greek myth of Sisyphus and age-old ideas about the differences between reality

and simulations, it was *not* driven by a linear narrative. This was more of a visually driven music video, dominated by infinite spirals, vicious and virtuous circles, and other mesmerizing imagery.

Vortex



WATCH ON YOUTUBE

In a desolate world, a lone wanderer embarks on a profound journey through abandoned landscapes, driven by an inner need to find meaning and purpose.

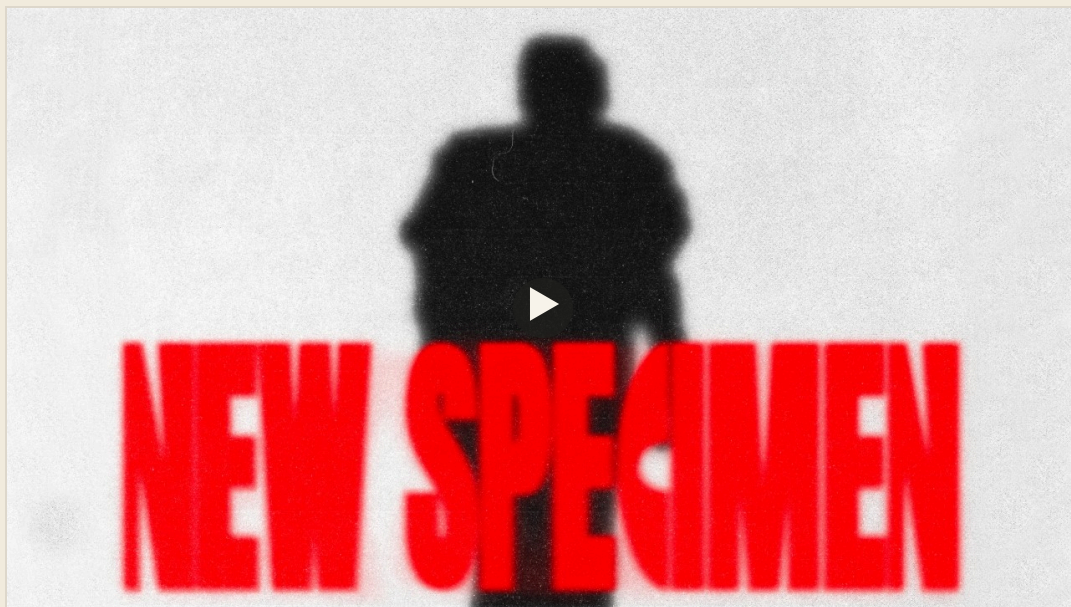
Dimitri would create his third film, *New Specimen*, just a couple of years after his first two. This one was also science fiction and philosophically tinged, but it was also Dimitri's first time incorporating cyberpunk themes into his work.

New Specimen received at least as much recognition as *The Last Star*:

- **Semi-Finalist**, Flickers' Rhode Island International Film Festival in the Best Animated Short category
- **Finalist**, Rome Prisma Independent Film Awards, Prisma Award for Best Animation Short
- Official selections at Stockholm City Film Festival, Valencia Film Festival, Animation First Film Festival, and VIEW Conference

"My panel discussion with Dyens at the Animation First Film Festival gave me a sense of the future of filmmaking," Dimitri says. "He produced *Flow*, an animation film that won an Oscar. He used free software and a very small team to outcompete DreamWorks, Disney, and the other big players. There's a new wave of filmmakers that are using these new technological tools to compete with all of the established companies. AI is only accelerating this trend, and I intend to make full use of it."

New Specimen



WATCH ON YOUTUBE

In a distant future, a secretive lab conducts unethical experiments by immersing test subjects in ultra-realistic simulations. The lead researcher descends into madness, allowing a sinister entity to take control. The new specimen must survive deadly challenges where reality and illusion blur dangerously.

A NEW PHILOSOPHY FOR HOLLYWOOD'S SUCCESSOR

After *New Specimen*, Dimitri did not want to create a fourth short film that might only be incrementally better than his first three. He had grown comfortable, almost bored, with the tools he had used thus far. Now he wanted to jump into a new paradigm entirely: an immersive experience.

“I asked myself, ‘What’s next? What is the next step?’” Dimitri says. “But I quickly realized that the next step wasn’t the most interesting question. The more interesting question was: ‘What is the *final* step?’ And to me, the answer was immersive technology, specifically virtual reality. The idea that you could be inside a simulated world, inside a story, surrounded by its characters and environments, rather than just watching it in 2D from the outside. That was an exciting turning point for me. I felt like I was starting to work on something the future was pointing toward, and I wanted to play an active role in popularizing it.”

Not only did Dimitri want to evolve the *technological* aspects of his craft, but he thought a lot about the *content* of his future stories. He was disappointed with the philosophical pessimism that had dominated Hollywood for decades, especially in his own genre of science fiction. Nearly every such film was about why humanity was doomed, or else it imagined some hellscape future: humanity at war with technology, humanity enslaved by machines, humanity at the edge of survival because of its own mistakes.

“That is not what I want to create,” Dimitri says starkly. “Those movies are always about the end of humanity as we know it. Maybe a biological weapon wiped most of us out, or maybe we’re stuck living indoors following a nuclear war and can no longer see the blue sky, or maybe much of humanity has transformed into cannibalistic zombies.”

To be sure, Dimitri does not have interest in creating the mirror image of dystopian films. Stories of some problem-free utopia strike him as uninspiring and misleading, since there is no such thing. Rather, Dimitri is interested in *protopian* storytelling, tales of how humanity can and should make progress, regardless of current circumstances. Neither doomerism nor perfection would define Dimitri’s future work, but rather the possibility and desirability of progress.

Dimitri rightly recognizes that it is *ideas*, not any particular technology, that determine the fate of humanity. For example, if people one day find themselves fighting mindless robots, then humans will either create knowledge of a viable strategy for defeating, taking shelter from, neutralizing, or transforming the robots, or else they will fail to create such knowledge and possibly go extinct. Either outcome depends on the ideas that they may or may not create. As Dimitri thought about the philosophy that would define his future projects, he realized that, fundamentally, all human conflict is about conflicting ideas, and better ideas could always win out, in principle.

“Humans are never actually at war with machines,” he explains. “Rather, there are factions of different ideas that are at war with each other. So many interesting science fiction stories can be told through that lens: what principles are the different factions based on? Why do some factions ally and some go to war? How have these factions evolved over time? How might the conflicts resolve? Which factions foster progress, and which inhibit progress? It’s extremely rare for mainstream films to explore these sorts of questions.”

Putting aside the *content* of his philosophy, Dimitri came to appreciate that many of the biggest studios, such as Pixar, have a singular philosophy that drives all of their projects. While each individual movie produced by Pixar tells its own story, they all speak with a similar voice, and their messages for the world fall under one philosophical umbrella. Dimitri decided that it was time for his art to do the same, so that the world would instantly recognize a Dimitri Vallein creation as uniquely his, in pathos, ethos, style, and worldview.

Dimitri's next film, *The Day I Met You*, will be the first visual manifestation of the philosophy that he wanted to see in the world. His most ambitious project to date, this twenty-minute film fuses a romantic tale with cutting-edge science, quantum computing and the multiverse in particular.

And he is well aware that the themes of progress and optimism grate against the tide. "Hollywood has become repetitive, pessimistic, and mechanical, addicted to the same franchises," Dimitri says. "They've stopped developing bold new ideas that push the boundaries of our imagination. There's an opportunity here for the new generation of filmmakers to create innovative films by harnessing optimism, new technologies, and our deepest scientific ideas. So this next project will focus on a hopeful future, one where scientific discovery moves civilization forward."

The Day I Met You is scheduled for a late 2026 release.

With the desire to create immersive films colored by philosophical optimism firmly set in his mind, Dimitri plotted his next move.

IDEAS, KNOWLEDGE, AND DREAMS

Dimitri could have continued to operate completely on his own, but he decided that a company would be a far more effective vehicle for implementing his two-pronged innovative approach to film. In

2026, he founded *Revery*, which is currently in stealth mode. Part-storytelling company, part-technology company, *Revery* is already serving as a kind of creative incubator for Dimitri and his team as they play around with the latest software, 4D Gaussian splatting and VR, AI, and other algorithmic gadgets with which they can push their medium forward.

“Artists have been playing around with the latest technological tools since art began,” Dimitri says. “And the technology shapes the medium. We can’t tell the best stories if we’re not up to date on the best tools available.”

Revery’s first film is already in preproduction. Longer than any of Dimitri’s earlier solo ventures, *Memetics* will be about ninety minutes long. The script is currently in development, and production is just around the corner.

True to Dimitri’s newfound drive to explore philosophical optimism and the centrality of ideas, *Memetics* tells the story of a young man, Arya, who discovers a simulator that allows users to visit societies across the past, present, and future. Throughout the story, Arya learns about the ideas and memes that have shaped history, and he discovers why certain ideas protect humanity while others threaten the emergence of a better future.

Dimitri and his team are currently developing tools to make the story fully immersive, with NPCs embedded in the environment and trained on their own philosophical framework, allowing them to approach and speak directly to the viewer. The result may become a hybrid between film and video game.

Dimitri sees *Memetics* as a way to tell the world about important philosophical and scientific ideas they may not have heard about. “So many great ideas have been written about in books and articles,” Dimitri says, “but lots of them haven’t made it into mainstream culture. There’s too much logos in the way that those

ideas are usually conveyed. With our immersive storytelling, we hope that the pathos we imbue our work with will make the ideas more interesting for laypeople.”

In particular, Dimitri wants to tell the world the fascinating truths about how ideas spread, why some ideas foster progress and others foster stasis, and how humanity’s knowledge grows in the first place. These are largely issues from the field of *epistemology*, the philosophy of knowledge. It is not well understood or appreciated in the culture despite being relevant in everything from morality to economics to science to beauty. With *Memetics*, Dimitri is taking what people might regard as dry ideas and bringing them to life.

At *Revery*, Dimitri and his team consciously package logos and pathos together to form what they call *mythos*. They hope that their films catalyze the spread of myth-like stories for the modern era that inject good and true ideas pertaining to the philosophy of optimism, progress, and humanism into the culture.

Memorable stories, whether fictional or true, have changed the world before. The tale of Newton discovering his law of universal gravitation after an apple fell upon his head is surely false, and yet it continues to spread and bring along with it actual facts about Newtonian physics. And in the realm of human affairs, Frederick Douglass’ written account in 1845 about his life as a former slave humanized the African-American experience to the free whites, significantly contributing to the abolition of slavery only decades later.

There is no reason that Dimitri and his team cannot do the same for optimism and other ideas about the nature of progress.

“A well-told story sticks with you after you watch it. Maybe you tell your friends about it, maybe it leads to fruitful discussion. That’s how we can change the culture for the better.”

REFERENCES

1. New Specimen [View project](#) →
2. The Last Star [View project](#) →
3. Vortex [Watch video](#) →
4. Revery [Visit site](#) →

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