



MERCUNA

User Guide

v0.8



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## Installing the plugin

The Mercuna plugin is a standard Unreal game plugin compatible with Unreal Engine 4.16+. The plugin can be installed by simply copying the Mercuna directory into the **Plugins** directory within your game project. Alternatively, Mercuna can be installed as an Engine plugin in the appropriate engine folder. Once installed, the Mercuna components, actors and menu will automatically be available when you next start the editor.

## Configuring the Navigation Octree

The Mercuna Nav Octree is used to find paths for pawns through 3D space, much like the Nav Mesh is used to navigate pawns over terrain.

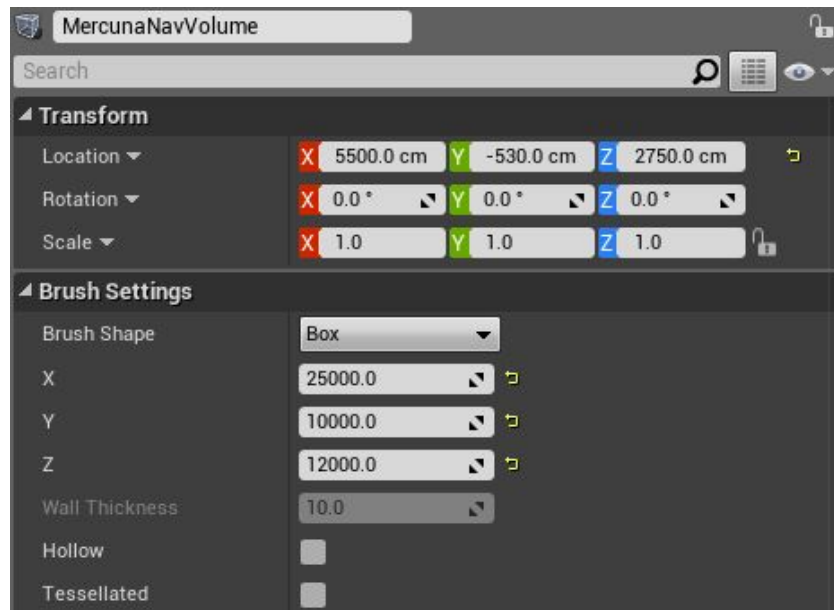


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Nav Octree is generated in the level everywhere that is within a **Mercuna Nav Volume**. Multiple nav volumes can be present in one level, and if they overlap then pawns can navigate seamlessly between them. All space outside of the Nav Volumes is treated as un navigable.

## Setting up the navigable space

To set up a nav volume, first add a Mercuna Nav Volume actor into the level, and size it using the Brush Settings. Only axis aligned boxes are supported, so you must not rotate or scale the volume, and you must leave the brush shape set to Box.



Example settings for Mercuna Nav Volume

After the first Nav Volume is added to the level, a **Mercuna Nav Octree** actor is automatically added to the level. There can only be one Mercuna Nav Octree actor per level regardless of how many Nav Volumes there are.

The octree generation parameters to be used in this level are configured on the Mercuna Nav Octree actor. Upon creation, the parameters are set to default values. These defaults can be modified in the Mercuna project settings.



Example settings for Mercuna Nav Octree



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The parameters determine how detailed the representation of the navigable space is in the octree, and the sizes of pawns that can accurately navigate through it.

The **cell size** determines the side length of the cubes that make up the lowest level of the octree. Cells are considered unnavigable if there is any level geometry within them, so the larger the cell size the greater the error margin in the representation of the geometry.

The **minimum** and **maximum pawn radius** determine what navigation data is stored in the octree. Paths will never go closer to geometry than the minimum pawn radius, and the octree doesn't store data to allow paths to be found with more clearance from geometry than the maximum radius.

The radius is expressed as multiples of cell size, so for a cell size of 30, a minimum radius of 2 and a maximum radius of 5, entities of radius between 60 and 150 can be accurately navigated through the level. Entities that are smaller than the minimum radius will navigate successfully, but might not take paths through small gaps they could fit through. Entities that are larger than the maximum radius can't be navigated properly - paths might make them collide with geometry.

## Nav Seeds

In order to identify which regions should be considered navigable Mercuna requires you to place **Mercuna Nav Seed** actors into levels. This allows uninteresting regions, such as the small isolated areas inside hollow geometry or large areas outside of the level boundaries, to be excluded and avoids pawn positions getting clamped to the wrong side of polygons.

A Mercuna Nav Seed needs to be placed in the main part of the level where pawns will move. This seed is used during construction of the octree to find all connected reachable cells, by flood filling the region starting at the nav seed. If you have multiple disconnected areas in your level where you expect pawns to move, a seed must be placed in each separate area.

## Building the octree

The octree must be built after it is first configured or after the level geometry has changed. Do this by selecting Build octree from the Mercuna menu (accessed by clicking the Mercuna button in the Toolbar). The octree will also be automatically rebuilt when any octree configuration parameters are changed or any nav volumes are moved or resized. An on screen notification displays the progress of the octree construction.

If full Mercuna logging is enabled (see [below](#)), then you will see the generation progress for each navigation volume in the output log, and the total memory consumption of the octree is reported.



## Multiple levels

Mercuna supports both level streaming and world composition by saving the octree that is relevant to each streamed or composed level (sub-level) in that level.

When using level streaming or world composition, Mercuna Nav Volumes and Mercuna Nav Seeds should be placed in the sub-level so that they are loaded and unloaded at the correct times. Nav Volumes and Nav Seeds should only be placed when editing the sub-level.

When editing the Persistent level you will see one Mercuna Nav Octree in each sub-level, this is automatically associated with the Nav Volumes and Nav Seeds that are in that sub-level.

Mercuna does not currently support navigation between octrees from different levels. Nav Volumes in different sub-levels must be non-overlapping when they are loaded in the Persistent level.

The best way to generate the octrees is from the Persistent level. Load all sub-levels in the and then select Build Octree from the Mercuna menu. This ensures that geometry that overlaps between levels is correctly represented in each level's octree. Once generation is complete, save all the sub-levels.

If it is not possible to load all levels due to memory constraints, load and generate groups of levels at a time, saving only the levels for which all overlapping geometry is included after each generation.

## Memory usage and Performance

The main influences on memory usage and performance are:

- **Cell size:** Smaller cell size octrees use significantly more memory and take longer to generate.
- **Density of geometry:** Large open navigable volumes are stored efficiently, and are quick to pathfind through, volume with dense geometry and narrow corridors use more memory and take longer to find paths through.
- **Maximum pawn radius:** Larger maximum pawn radiuses take longer to generate and slightly increase memory usage.

## Pathfinding

Finding paths through the nav octree can be done implicitly by making your pawn movement controlled by Mercuna, this method allows you to take advantage of the Mercuna steering and avoidance systems. Alternatively, path finding can be requested explicitly by making a directly request to the octree (via Blueprint or C++) and receiving a MercunaPath object which can then be used as required.



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As pathfinding is performed asynchronously, the returned MercunaPath object is not immediately valid, but can take one or two frames to complete. You must either check each frame to see if it is ready yet or subscribe to its PathUpdated delegate.

For longer paths Mercuna uses hierarchical pathfinding. An approximate path is found through a simplified representation of the level and then a detailed path find is performed guided by the approximate path. This allows much longer paths to be found than would be possible with simple A\* pathfinding alone.

Mercuna also supports partial paths (enabled by default). A partial path is returned when a complete path can't be found to the specified destination, if it is disconnected from the start point, for example. Instead Mercuna returns a path to the closest point to the destination that is reachable.

## Path Testing Actor

In order to easily debug and understand pathfinding problems a pair of **Mercuna Nav Testing Actors** can be used to generate test paths. Simply drag two testing actors into the level, and on one of the actors set the other one as the 'Other Actor' property. When you do this a test path will be drawn connecting the two actors. This path will update when either actor is moved. A red path means a complete path could be found, while an orange path means that only a partial path could be generated.

The Radius property specifies how much clearance there should be around the test path - this allows you to check what path larger and smaller actors would take.



A test path between two Mercuna Nav Testing Actors

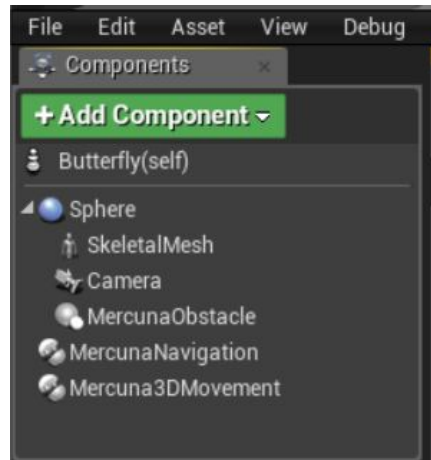
## Creating a Mercuna navigated Pawn

In order to allow pawns to use Mercuna to navigate they need to have the following components:



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- **Mercuna Obstacle** - this marks the pawn as a dynamic obstacle for the purpose of 3D navigation. The obstacle component must be a child of the root scene component.
- **Mercuna Navigation** - this component provides the pawn with navigation capabilities, accessible through Blueprint.
- A suitable **movement component**, e.g. the **Mercuna 3D Movement** component



Pawn blueprint setup for Mercuna navigation

## Movement

In order for the Mercuna navigation component to drive the moment of a pawn, the pawn needs to have a suitable movement component. A simple default movement component is provided - the **Mercuna 3D Movement Component**. This is suitable for a variety of 3D flight styles.

Custom movement components can easily be implemented, but in order to be used by Mercuna they must provide the **IMercuna3DMovement** interface. The Mercuna Navigation component automatically detects and uses the first movement component it finds on the pawn that provides that interface.

## Mercuna 3D Movement Component

The Mercuna 3D Movement component provides a Newtonian flight model for a pawn moving freely in space. It allows you to configure:

- **Max Speed** - The maximum speed the pawn may move at
- **Max Accel** - The maximum acceleration of the pawn in each axis direction (in the pawn's local coordinates).
- **Max Ang Speed** - The maximum angular speed the pawn may rotate at, in radians/sec
- **Max Ang Accel** - The maximum angular acceleration allowed on each axis, in radians/sec



## Steering

Mercuna navigates the pawn down the path taking into account the maximum speed and acceleration configured on the pawn.

Mercuna offers dynamic obstacle avoidance to ensure that pawns don't collide while moving. Any actor with a MercunaObstacleComponent is automatically considered as an obstacle that needs to be steered around for the purpose of avoidance. The avoidance algorithm used by Mercuna is a modified version of ORCA velocity obstacle method that additionally takes into account the fixed level geometry stored in the nav octree.

## Blueprint Functionality

The following functions are available on the Mercuna navigation component and can be used to direct a pawn to move between goals:

- **MoveToLocation** - move to a position, stopping within end distance of the goal.
- **MoveToActor** - move to within a given end distance of a destination actor, if the destination moves while the pawn is moving, the path will be updated to track the destination.
- **TrackActor** - get to and stay within a given distance of a target actor
- **Stop** - bring the pawn to a complete stop as quickly as possible.
- **CancelMovement** - immediately terminates the pawn's current movement action
- **OnMoveCompleted** - a delegate that is triggered whenever a movement action is complete. Returns the result of the movement action as to whether it completed successfully, failed, was cancelled or was invalid (usually due to an invalid destination).
  
- **LookAt** - specify a target actor that the pawn will try to face as it moves. If no look at target is set then by default the pawn faces in the direction of movement.
- **CancelLookAt** - clear the look at actor.
  
- **CheckReachable** (Latent action) - Test whether the pawn would be able to move to a given destination position from its current position.

The MercunaNavOctree actor offers the following Blueprint functions:

- **IsNavigable** - Does a point fall within navigable space
- **ClampToNavigable** - Clamp a position to the nearest point in navigable space
- **Raycast** - Perform a raycast through the navigable octree. If it fails, return the first point it hit
- **CheckReachable** - Check whether there is a path from Start to End
  
- **FindPathToLocation** - Start an asynchronous path find from Start to End positions
- **FindPathToActor** - Start an asynchronous path find from Start position to End actor. Path will update as the destination actor moves





## EQS

Mercuna currently offers three simple EQS tests. These tests are simple filters returning whether a point passes or fails, and do not score the points. The available tests are:

- **Navigable** - test whether a point is within the seeded, navigable volume for a pawn of a given radius. Be aware that the points might be disconnected from the querying pawn, however this test is much cheaper than a reachability test.
- **Reachable** - test whether a point is reachable by a pawn of a given radius from its position within a specified path distance. If the path distance is set to 0.0, then a faster test is used that only filters out points with extremely long paths.
- **Raycast** - test whether there is a clear straight line path from the context to the positions.

Additionally, Mercuna offers one EQS test that modifies the positions of the test points:

- **Project** - test whether a point is in or close to navigable space. If the point is outside then clamp it to back to the closest point within navigable space that is within a given search radius. The test fails and the point is not moved if the point is further than the search radius from navigable space.

Mercuna offers two EQS generators, they simply generate points without considering whether the resulting points are in navigable space or not. Add the Mercuna Navigable or Reachable EQS tests to filter out points in navigable regions or inside objects. The two available generators are:

- **Sphere** - generates points in concentric shells either uniformly or randomly distributed.
- **3D Ring** - generates points in rings in multiple vertical layers.

## BT Nodes

Mercuna offers the following Unreal BT nodes:

- **Reachable** - Decorator - Test whether a given point is reachable by a particular actor
- **MoveTo** - Task - Move a pawn with a Mercuna navigation component to a specified location or actor read from the AI's blackboard. If the blackboard value is a location and the value changes while the node is running the path will attempt to update.

## Debugging Problems

If you find that your pawn is not moving as expected, or at all, there are several debugging mechanisms available within Mercuna to help quickly identify problems.



## Logging

Mercuna makes logs to the Unreal logging system to indicate progress and error conditions. By default only errors and warnings are logged, but you can easily enable full logging in order to get more information from the Mercuna menu in the toolbar. When doing full logging debug information is additionally logged to a dedicated Mercuna.log file, located in the same directory as the standard Unreal logs.

## Debug Actor

When trying to understand the actions of a particular pawn, it can be useful to set it as the Mercuna debug actor. This can be done by selecting the pawn and setting it as the Mercuna debug actor in the Mercuna toolbar menu. The same menu also allows the debug actor to be cleared.

On screen log messages will be displayed for the Mercuna debug actor and additional debug draw is available.



Onscreen logging and information available about the debug actor

## Debug Draw

In order to help understand the current movement of Mercuna controlled pawns the following debug draw is available from the Mercuna editor menu:

- **General:** Shows speed and velocity vector for all Mercuna actors
- **Obstacle bounds:** Shows blue spheres representing the dynamic obstacles registered with Mercuna
- **Paths:** Shows all paths currently being followed by Mercuna actors
- **Steering:** Shows the desired velocity vector for the current debug actor
- **Avoidance:** Shows various pieces of avoidance related debug draw for the current debug actor including the velocity obstacle cones and the ORCA planes.



## Octree Debug Draw

In order to help understand Mercuna's representation of the geometry for navigation, you can draw the navigation octree, there are the following modes:

- **Unnavigable:** Draw the unnavigable part of the octree (in red).
- **Navigable:** Draw the navigable part of the octree (in yellow).
- **Navigable and unnavigable:** Draw both.

If the Mercuna debug actor is set, then the navigation radius of that actor is used to determine which cells are treated as unnavigable.

There are also options to particular cells in the octree:

- **Seeded cells:** This will draw all cells reachable from any nav seed, or if you select a particular nav seed, it will draw only the cells reachable from that seed.
- **Pathfind:** This will give a visualization of the last pathfind through the octree made by the Mercuna debug actor, or by a Mercuna Nav Testing actor. Explored cells are shown in green, cells that are on the path are shown in cyan.
- **Reachability:** This shows the cells that were included in the last reachability query. Like the pathfind, it gives a visualization of how the test flooded through the octree from the test point.