Dino-Might: Turok 2: Seeds Of Evil

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Interview with Iguana and Turok 2 preview.

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Dino-Might!
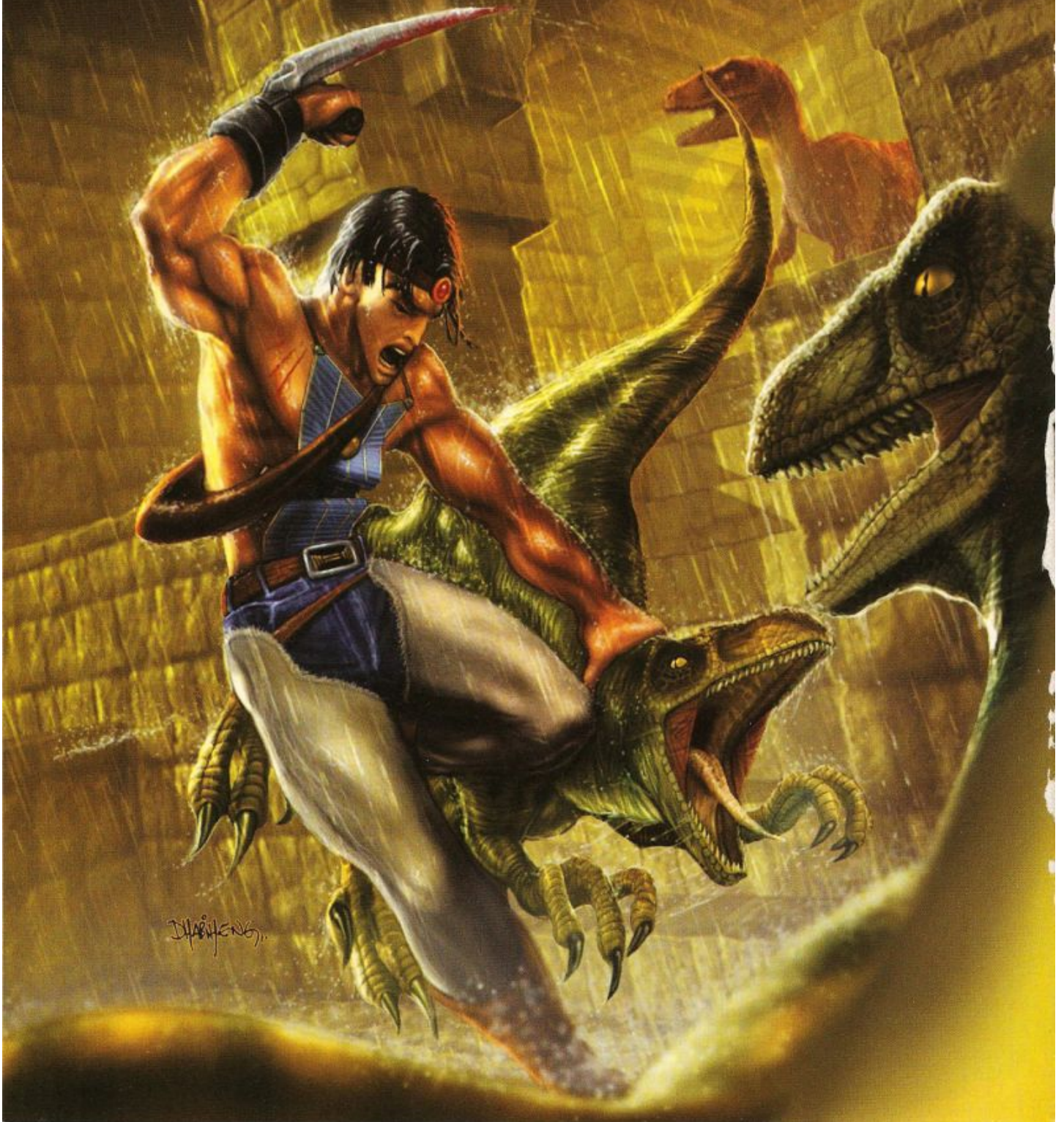
turok 2
seeds of evil

We visited the Iguana team for some hands-on game time with Turok 2. What we saw was a spectacular sequel that does more than take the dino-hunting hero out of the jungle—it's also one of the first titles to really tap the N64's considerable power.

By John Davison

Turok's home, for the next few months at least, is the offices of Iguana in Austin, Texas, where the team responsible for the 1.3 million-selling original is hard at work preparing this much-anticipated follow-up for a late-summer release. Our arrival at the Iguana offices revealed a parking lot filled with obvious signs of success. A pair of NSXs sits next to a plethora of luxomobiles—Lexuses, BMWs and many decadently equipped 4x4s. Moving into their lobby, the lizardy imagery is more than apparent (as long as you ignore the squashed lizard road-kill we stepped over in the parking lot...a nice touch, if unintentional) as huge scale-like motifs adorn the glass walls, hiding the rooms of talent beyond.
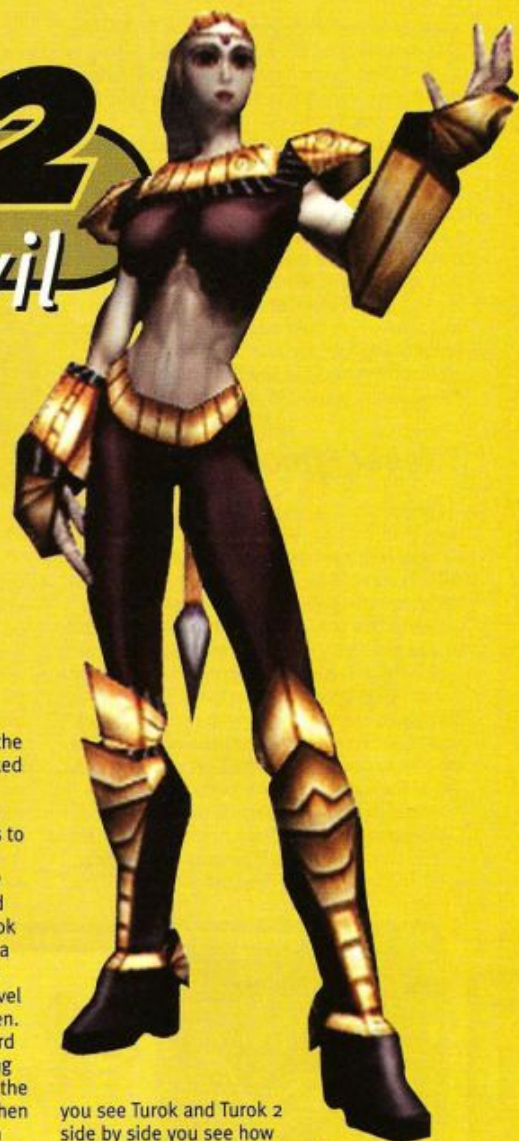
Iguana's offices are a warren of corridors and offices seemingly entirely upholstered in purple plastic and voluminous black leather. Each of the firm's many teams has its own vast area of space with meeting rooms, kitchens and offices, all linked in a sort of coders' community that can sustain them for days on end without any real need to go outside. There's a huge lunch room, a well-equipped gym, cupboards full of food and drink, TVs, videos and lots and lots of toys.
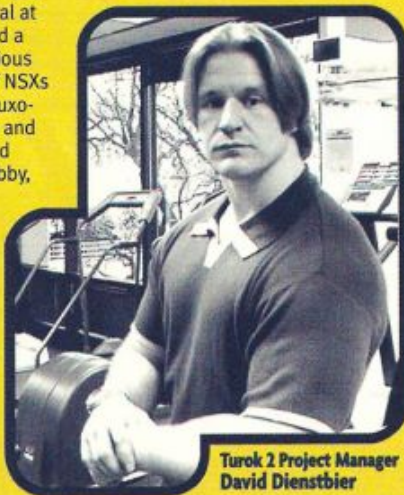
**Turok 2 Project Manager David Dienstbier**

Somewhere that feels like it's probably in the middle of all this is the Turok area—and tucked into the corner is Turok 2 project manager David Dienstbier's office. Wildly enthusiastic about his new project, he immediately wants to demonstrate just how much better the new game is than the old one. An original Turok cart is slapped into a nearby N64 and the now-familiar first level flashes on the screen. A soldier runs toward us and falls, gripping his neck. We watch the first raptor buy it. Then the cart is torn from the machine. Moments later, the N64 development station is revved up and we're treated to the first level of Turok 2, along with Dienstbier's running commentary.

"The obvious challenge was the inherent problems involved with doing a sequel," he begins. "You're a year later, the market's become more saturated with games and people may not be into your game anymore. We had to sit down and really think out how we were going to attack this. First we needed to decide what was wrong with the original Turok. We had to fix those problems and then see what we can do to make the new game twice as exciting. The first thing you'll notice is the visual stuff. When you see Turok and Turok 2 side by side you see how dramatically different they are."

He's not kidding, either. Level One is a visual feast of clever effects and imaginative design. Turok begins in a harbor, on a jetty with a huge galleon docked to one side. Moving forward into the city, Turok finds himself in the middle of a war. As he advances, boxes and buildings explode all over the place, leaving trails of fire and debris in their wake. Cool lighting effects spatter every nook of the terrain. "When you begin the level there's a lot of environmental stuff going on," Dienstbier continues, "and there's a lot of interaction with the environment. You'll hear lots of screaming and shouting and see people running around—and you'll notice that the graphics are very different from anything you've seen before. The lighting is used very effectively. There are subtle shadows and flickering light sources to add to the atmosphere. We're using real-time shadows on
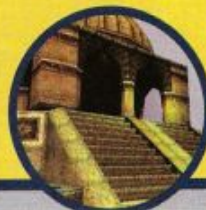
every creature in the game and not finding any discernible hit on the frame rate. Everything is lit according to the light sources in the room and it gives everything a much more solid and realistic look."

But amidst all this spectacular eye candy, one famous N64 "effect" is conspicuously toned down. Turok 2's skies may be a bit misty at times, but you never see the oppressive pea-soup fog of the original game. "What we've done is make the fog a purely environmental and atmospheric effect," Dienstbier says, pointing to the first level as an example. "This city is a coastal city in the early morning, so we've brought the fog in a little bit to give it that atmosphere. You can see five times as far in Turok 2 than you could in the original."

Trigger Effects

Further into the level, the scenery begins to discernably shake. What the hell is that? "This hallway collapses as you walk toward it," explains Dienstbier, "and you'll see all of these carts exploding and things flying through the air. All of this stuff causes lighting effects too—so you get a very cinematic and realistic look."

He's right. The impression of a living environment is portrayed very effectively. But we've only just begun to see the game's bag of cool new tricks. As we move further along, some of the new weapons make their first appearance. "All of the weapons in the game make use of real-time lighting and particle effects," Dienstbier continues, "so you see muzzle flashes and wisps of smoke whenever a weapon is used. In places there'll be firefights in really
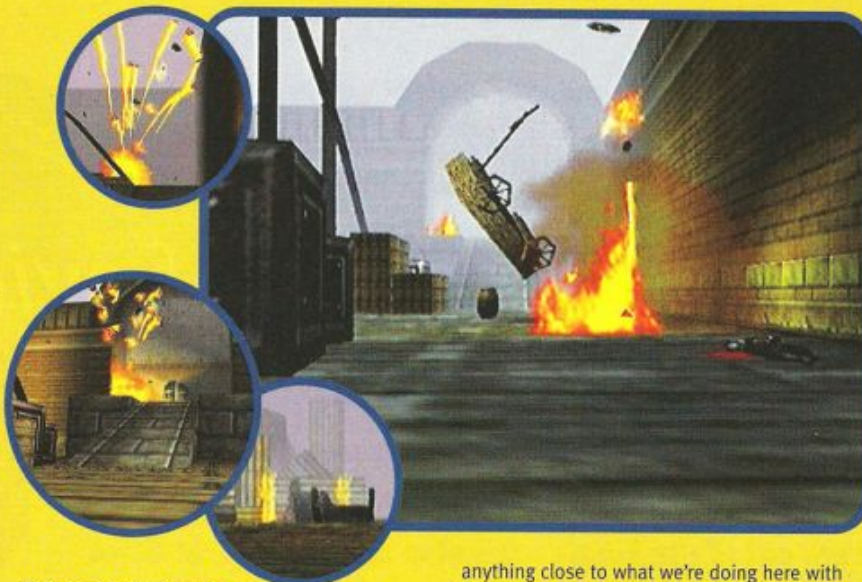
dark corridors where the only source of light comes from the guns, so we're going to get some very *Alien*-esque scenes."

The man is clearly very impressed with what his team has been able to do. "You'll notice that our torch light actually flickers and that our reflective surfaces actually reflect," he says, "so if you look at the ceiling above the reflective water you'll see the light dancing around very realistically. We have one of the most experienced Nintendo 64 development teams on the planet in my opinion, and if not the most talented bunch of artists on the platform, then at least one of them. I haven't seen

anything close to what we're doing here with Turok 2, certainly not on N64. There are even things on PC with high-end graphics accelerators that don't match this."

Bigger is Better

So it's one of the first games to push the N64 to its limits then? Seems pretty early in its life for that kind of thing to start. "We tore the engine apart and optimized it to the point where we could incorporate so much new stuff," Dienstbier explains. "We have cool lighting, and an improved geometry engine. This is still the same basic engine from Turok, but
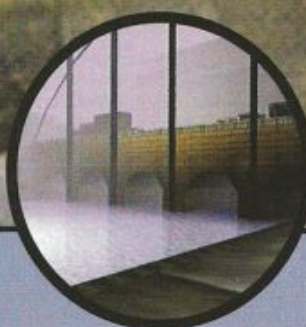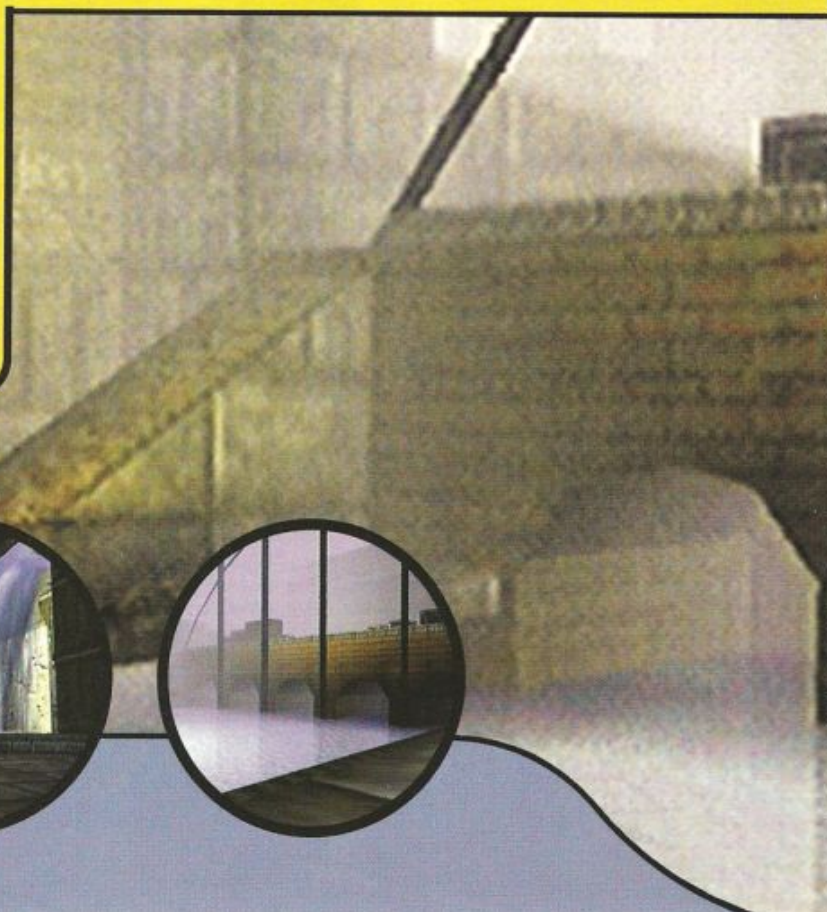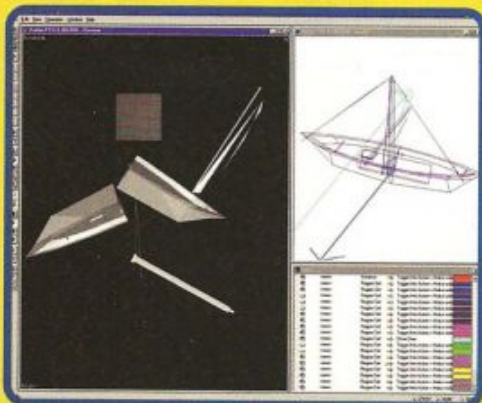
we've pushed it and changed every aspect to try to get the most we possibly can. The machine could handle more, but we'd have to go back and completely re-engineer the whole thing from scratch, which we just

"I haven't seen anything close to what we're doing here with Turok 2, certainly not on N64. There are even things on PC with high-end graphics accelerators that don't match this."

don't have the time to do. The game is 16 Mb this time—that's a 128 Mbit cart, twice the size of the original Turok."

Moving on, we discuss some of the major differences and design changes. "The idea is to create a couple of different things," he says. "Turok was a 'go into a level, find the keys and then leave the level' linear kind of thing. Turok 2 is far

more of a mission-objective-based game with some influences drawn from Mario and Zelda. It's now absolutely necessary for the player to explore the environments and sometimes even go back into areas he's already been. The player has to be very thorough. There's a lot of re-exploration. You're going to have to make a lot of notes. In Turok we used lots of visual clues, like looking over ledges to see areas that you obviously needed to go to. In Turok 2 this is even more important. The player needs to be fully aware of the environment."

So what can we expect from the new missions? Dienstbier says they pack multiple objectives and are very story-driven. "One of the first mission objectives is to free some trapped children from somewhere in the city," he says. "The defenders are pretty much getting their asses kicked and whenever you see them they'll be in the process of dying—but somewhere are these kids. Now this is right at the beginning and is a relatively simple objective. As the game progresses we'll introduce new elements. That's something that we've learned from Miyamoto: Start things off simple and gradually add to it as you progress. Later objectives will make far more use of the dynamic environments."

THE STORY SO FAR

After using the Chronoscepter to defeat the Campaigner in the original game, Turok realizes that the device is too dangerous to exist. In an attempt to save the future, he travels to the largest volcano in the Lost Land and throws the Chronoscepter in, destroying it. (Like he couldn't just break it over his knee or something. Noooo, he's Turok—he has to throw it into a volcano.) Still, there are repercussions for such grandiose actions.

Unknown to Turok, the Chronoscepter was originally built from parts of a spacecraft (not necessarily the first thing you'd expect, but you can never tell these days), whose origins can be traced back billions of years to a crashed ship lying dormant at the heart of Lost Land, with a single occupant trapped inside. By destroying the scepter Turok has unwittingly released the Primagen, a nemesis who is the embodiment of the Lost Land, a being of vast power whose alien body, mind and soul have melded with the fabric of the land. His destiny is inextricably linked with the Turok lineage.

Now, Joshua Fireseed, the latest Turok (and understandably pissed off with his predecessor for being so stupid) must destroy the Primagen in order to save the universe. Though still trapped within his craft, the Primagen has used the power of his mind to affect simple creatures (Taco Bell drive-thru workers are notable in their absence) from around the Lost Land in a way that will make them serve him.

Aware that the Primagen is a threat, the elders of the Lost Land—called the Lazarus Concordance (silly name, important job)—have erected vast energy totems in critical areas of their realm. These totems and their immense power keep the Primagen imprisoned. But as his power increases and his servants swell in number, the totems are under threat from attack. Turok's job is to protect the totems before traveling to the spacecraft and killing off the big bad guy.

A Whole New World

Speaking of environments, what can we expect this time? Is it more of the same jungle and temple stages of the original? This question catches Dienstbier on something that is clearly close to his creative heart. "There is no jungle level in this game," he says. "One of the first rules I set down when we started was this game was to break new ground. I didn't want to see us repeating ourselves and just doing what you tend to see elsewhere. What you often find with sequels is that you just get a cookie-cutter sequel. We want to outdo ourselves."

As we move through some of the other, less-complete levels in the game, it's immediately clear that Turok 2 is very different from its predecessor. As the levels unfold, there's a definite sense of progressing through different domains. "The first two levels are slightly different as you are pursuing this force through the environments," explains Dienstbier. "By level three, though, the player is thrust into environments that are the domains of the individual creatures. Turok travels to lands where the creatures come from and you'll see unique graphics sets that represent each of these environments. We have dark underground caves, primitive cities, alien environments. There's even a level set on a space ship. All of these are completely unique, and each level looks completely different in terms of its geometry, the textures and the creatures that roam around.

In Turok we shared graphics sets between levels. In Turok 2 there's none of that. Every level looks unique, and also you'll find that each level has its own indigenous species of enemy that's unique to that level."

Some of the levels really are spectacular. As we walked around Iguana's numerous offices of graphic artists, programmers and animators, we were treated to some truly stunning creations. We saw vast, dark caverns flowing with extremely convincing-looking water and filled with dank vegetation. We saw titanic alien spacecraft with huge chambers, long winding corridors and computer screens at every junction. We saw cavernous insect egg chambers filled with pulsating larvae and acres of straight-from-*Alien* pods. All the environments make dramatic use of lighting and particle effects along with some stunning examples of transparent textures. The alien levels, for example, feature walls with curved, bulbous windows, behind which you can see other animated textures. Most impressive though will be the insect larvae squirming within their transparent egg sacs. Gross? Sure. Cool? You betcha.

Nice Ass

"Ooh...there's something else you need to know about," Dienstbier adds. "Turok has a special friend this time around who acts as an advisor to him. Her name is Adon, the 'Speaker

> ## "Obviously we're aware that the cool (weapon) effects were very much a part of the original, so you can expect some cool guns."

of Forever Light,' and she'll help Turok out, tell him what he needs to be doing, help him save games—even provide some health or ammo. She's not actually an in-game character, but she is an integral part of the game. She tells you the story basically. I'm really very happy with the way she worked out...and she has a really great ass doesn't she? Look at that."

An early model of Adon is brought up on Dienstbier's PC. "She's not going to be there to baby-sit you," he says, "and I want to make sure we control her in such a way that there's a discernible relationship between her and the player. There won't be any romantic entanglement crap—she's just going to be a friend that you depend on."

A Question of Self Control

Another issue that is doubtless on the minds of anyone who's a fan of the original Turok is, "Are there going to be more control options this
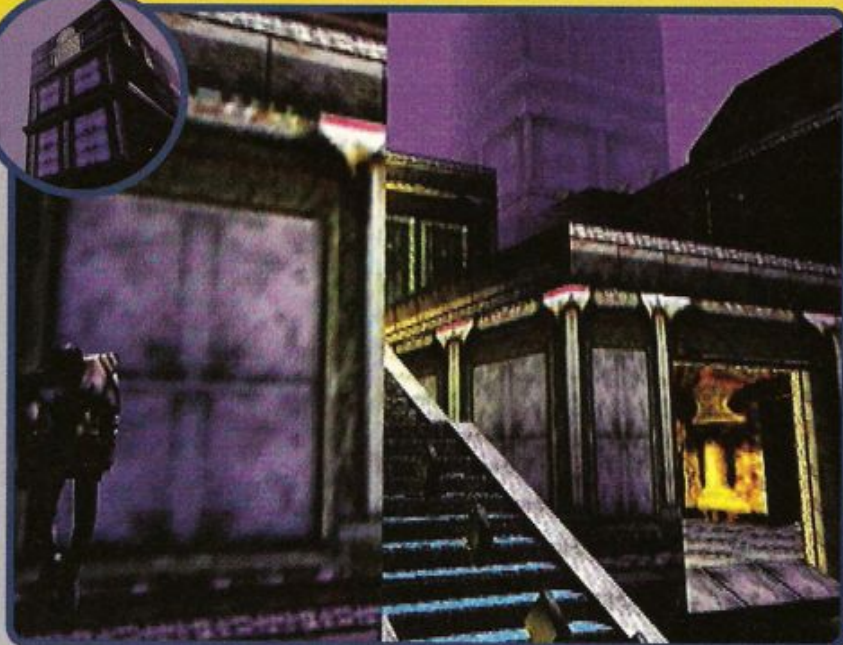
ENEMY MINE

Turok was notorious for its gory deaths and fabulous animations—so you'd expect more of the same in the sequel, right? "In Turok we had two classes of death: regular deaths and violent deaths," explains Dienstbier. "This time we have three classes: regular, violent and extreme, where you can find huge chunks of the enemies being blown off with blood and gore and stuff just flying everywhere. It's a lot more to do with bodily dismemberment."

Fortunately, the team is taking care to make the combat as realistic as possible, too. "We are generating impact flinches in real time this time around," he says, "and we're calculating impacts based on the geometry of the enemy. A shot to the head will do more damage than a shot to the shoulder." Also expect to see even more of the amazing death animations that made it so much fun to blast baddies in the original—although Dienstbier promises the effects won't be overdone. "If you use the bow and fire an arrow at an enemy, the guy will flinch and you'll see the arrow actually sticking out of him," he explains. "Now, we don't want to do any 'ow, you shot me in my big toe' animations like in some other games, but we do want the creatures to react to where they've been shot. We just don't want to break the rhythm of the game. That's really important to us..."

It's not just the way foes react after being shot that's changed; enemy AI is much more advanced, too. Now there's a hierarchy within each race—noticeable leaders who control groups of creatures as they attack. Some will ambush you as you go about solving mission-related problems. Others will simply try to overpower you with sheer numbers. "You have to be clever with a lot of the creatures in the game," says Dienstbier as we round a corner to be faced by a pack of raptors. "With a lot of the more vicious guys, you're not going to out-run them. Creatures like the raptors are bigger, faster and more violent than the player. You have to get yourself into a position where you can kill them, but they can't get you."

The AI extends beyond basic behavior, though. Enemies incapable of ranged attacks will dart in close and attack you hand-to-hand. And get this: Some can even unleash combos, Killer Instinct style, complete with finishing moves. But what about Bosses? "Oh yeah," Dienstbier adds. "You wouldn't believe the Bosses we have. They're huge...and much more intelligent and dynamic than they have been before. We don't have them all in place at the moment, but we've really outdone ourselves."

EGM 105

time?" There are clearly two schools of thought on the subject—those who prefer the Turok setup versus those who prefer GoldenEye's control—and the team has taken both into consideration. "As far as we're concerned," Dienstbier explains, "it's pretty clean cut what is going to give the player the best control of the game. For me, even when I play GoldenEye I always switch it to the Turok layout. It's just that it gives you everything you're going to need to play the game effectively. There are places in both the original Turok, and more importantly in Turok 2, where you need to be able to look around freely while moving, and especially with the new Sniping Mode, the player needs more freedom with controlling the views. That said though, we can't ignore the demand for different control systems, because GoldenEye was such a hit. We're not going to be able to give the player the freedom to con-figure each button...but there'll be a selection of different layouts provided with the game."

Multiplayer?...Yes!

So we've seen the huge new levels, the incredible environment effects, the control schemes and a great ass. Now, finally, we get to the question everyone wants to ask about Turok 2: Will it have a Multiplayer Mode this time? "Here is the 'official' deal," Dienstbier begins. "T2 will feature a single-player Quest Mode as well as several different types of deathmatch play. These include 'Bloodlust' deathmatch (an every-man-for-himself kill fest) and team Bloodlust, in which players can play in two-on-two, two-on-one or three-on-one type teams. 'Frag Tag' is an all-new game mode that promises to make T2 the best party game around! One player is 'it'

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and must search out the others to kill them. The hunted must find predetermined safe-spots, whereupon another 'it' is chosen randomly. Here's the catch, though—the hunted have no weapons whatsoever. And to make things worse, they have targets painted on their backs.

"Characters for the multiplayer stuff will

obviously include Joshua (Turok) and Adon; along with a Pur-Linn (the large ogre-like creatures from Turok and Turok 2); a Sloth, which is a kind of undead Pur-Linn that slops around the place; a Flesh Eater, who will be a point-for-point match with Turok; and Gant, a dinosoid creature. Finally there will be a hidden character that will probably be a Raptor. In addition, expect lots of cool power-ups, weapons, etc., that can ONLY be found in our death-match game. The level graphics will indeed be more basic in design (less geometry than the single-player environments) in order to ensure fast, smooth multiplayer gaming fun. We are really excited about our four-player capability. You can expect it to be the best on the N64 by a long shot!"

Out-GoldenEye GoldenEye?

Now that's one heck of a claim, especially considering that arguably the best multiplayer game currently on the N64 is another first-person shooter, GoldenEye 007. So obviously we have to fire off the final question—have any other games influenced the way the Turok concept has advanced? "We don't want to get into a situation where we're trying to out-GoldenEye GoldenEye," Dienstbier says. "They have their game and we have this. One of the mistakes people often make is, say, to try to out-Quake Quake. It's like trying to out-id id. We just want to make a marked improvement over our original game. ⬤

LETHAL WEAPONS

The original Turok's levels and enemies were impressive, sure, but it was really the game's immense arsenal of way-cool weapons—and their dazzling special effects—that drew the most oohs and aahs from players. Now, the Turok 2 team clues us in on the few weapons they're prepared to unveil before the game is released. "You'll see that the knife is gone and has been replaced with this kind of glove/talon thing that you wear on your arm with these two nasty-looking claws sticking out," Dienstbier explains. "You'll have the pistol and the shotgun like before, which have just been beefed up a bit, as well as some cool particle effects like smoke and muzzle flashes when you fire them. Then you have the normal bow and Tek bow, which look pretty much the same as before. The Tek bow is a much more powerful weapon than before, though.

"Next we have a tranquilizer gun which is pretty cool because it can drop an enemy without actually killing him. And there'll be some parts of the game where the player won't necessarily want to kill a creature. For example, there's a room where the player will find he has to open a door using a pressure plate—but if you step off the plate, the door closes. What you can do is shoot an enemy with the tranquilizer when he's standing near the plate and he'll fall onto it. Because he doesn't die, he doesn't disappear, so he'll hold the door open for you.

"Further along we have the Firestorm, which is the replacement for the minigun in the first game. We have a few others which we haven't decided on yet. Obviously we're aware that the cool effects were very much a part of the original, so you can expect some cool guns."

After much cajoling we did manage to see (very briefly) a number of other weapons that really show off the graphical power of the N64. A flamethrower (which may not end up in the final game) spews forth a blast of spectacularly realistic flame by making use of the game's powerful particle engine—a method by which flames, water and smoke can be accurately modeled by simulating the "particles" within the effect.

The final and most spectacular weapon we saw was the new-and-improved rocket launcher. Now, six rockets at a time whip out anime-style before hitting their target, sequentially bouncing it into the air as it explodes and shoots out gorgeous rings of flame. Yep, you want cool weapon effects, you definitely get them in Turok 2.