The Dinosaur Hunters

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Sujet de l'article : Turok: Dinosaur Hunter

Un article sur Turok.

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THE DINOSAUR HUNT

Following our exclusive preview of Turok: Dinosaur Hunter in the November issue, we've pinned down the guys behind the N64 masterpiece: Iguana Entertainment. We shackled Turok's Project Manager and lead designer, Dave Dienstbier to a firm object and probed him until he could take no more. Here's what we managed to get out of him…

SILICON IMPLANTS

Iguana have planted themselves firmly in the heart of America's Silicon Valley in Texas and it's from here that their game ideas become realities. Each part of their games is produced 'in-house', with full time programmers, artists and designers all on site. You'll also find sound engineers and musicians wandering Iguana's hallowed halls and it's up to them to make sure that the sound FX and music for each of the games is spot on. Since their 1995 link-up with Acclaim, they have New York motion capture studios at their disposal too. Is there nothing that these guys can't do?!

IT'S ALL IN THE PLANNING

As we've heard from Rare, EA and Ocean in the past, it's the opening stages of a game's development that are often the most crucial. Meetings, meetings and more meetings seem to be the order of the day as directors, project managers and even the president of the company all get involved at the start.

Way before designs, characters and gameplay are brought into the equation, a decision has to be made about what type of game the teams should tackle next. Whether it's a film license, a comic book conversion or a brand new project, the various pros and cons need to be weighed up. You'd think that producing a film license would be one of the easiest options for a new game but, as Dave Dienstbier points out, "Often times the studios have very strict rules and regulations regarding their materials that often mean delays".

According to Dave, you have to deal with a huge number of people who are absolutely nothing to do with the games industry when you produce a film license and they almost always insist on rigorous and lengthy approval processes. As well as that, a whole pile of stuff has to be weedled out of them such as copies of the script, blueprints of the sets, photos of the characters, costumes and scenery, etc. All this just adds up to more and more complications and often ends up involving "a lot more work than just creating the game".

Of course, it's not all easy going when you create a brand new game either. You have to make sure that what you're doing is completely original and that it'll jump off the shelf at you down at your local store. There's no point letting your imagination run riot if the finished game's just the same as a hundred others. And we thought these game designers had an easy life!

UP AND RUNNING

Once the decision's been made to go ahead with a project, more meetings are held and some of the finer points are decided. A team is assembled and a project manager is appointed (Dave in the case of Turok) and he'll create what's known as a 'concept document'. This usually runs to between 10 and 25 pages and explains the premise and treatment of the game. It also outlines the plot, the basic gameplay and controls, and ideas for bad guys and scenery. If there's any additional technical jiggery-pokery to be done, then that's noted here too. A few drawings might also be done at this stage before the whole document's passed round the team, discussed and fine-tuned. After all this (and plenty more meetings, of course) the project manager will put together a detailed design that follows the game from start to finish. This document's then waved in front of the directors who give it the all-clear and it's only when all these stages have been completed that the real development process can begin.

FROM PAPER TO PIXEL

Of course, once all the planning and meetings have finished you can't just sit down at a computer and create the game from nothing.

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IGUANA
ENTERTAINMENT

STATESIDE SUCCESS STORY

Often a process known as 'storyboarding' is used. Storyboarding is used right across the entertainment industry from cartoons, to movies to CD-ROM titles and it basically involves doing sketches and drawings on paper. The amount and detail that Iguana do usually depends on the type of project they're working on. Sometimes simple drawings of various elements of the game are all that's required. If the team are planning on using some full motion video footage though, they'll need more detailed boards and plans of exactly what footage they'll need to shoot.

HIT OR MISS?

If you ever ask people in the gaming industry to tell you what makes a great game, they'll all give you a different answer. Most agree, though that it's great gameplay that really sells and no matter how impressive your graphics are your game will die if it's dull to play. We put the age old question to Dave: "I don't care how great a game looks if I'm not having fun playing it." Well, there you have it. But Iguana haven't exactly scrimped on the graphics in Turok have they? "Obviously the graphic quality was a very high priority and graphics are increasingly important in order to really immerse the player in the experience," Dave admits, "but gameplay will always be more important than graphics if you truly love gaming."
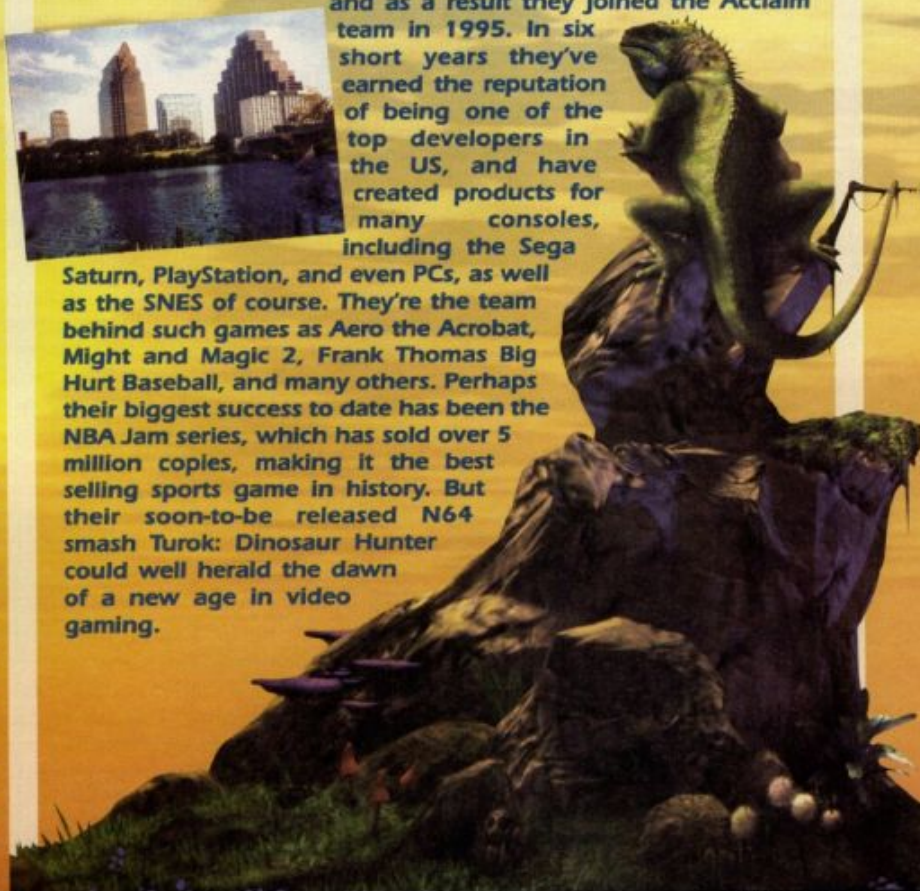
Iguana Entertainment Inc. was founded by Jeff Spangenberg back in 1991. Jeff had begun programming at high school in California, and his reputation quickly led to numerous projects with major development companies. His professional career evolved into the technical management of development teams, engineering systems for the SNES and Sega Genesis (MegaDrive), and eventually to the founding of Iguana. By 1993, Iguana were successful enough to expand their staff and move to the new Silicon Valley site in Texas. Iguana's work came to the attention of Acclaim, and as a result they joined the Acclaim team in 1995. In six short years they've earned the reputation of being one of the top developers in the US, and have created products for many consoles, including the Sega Saturn, PlayStation, and even PCs, as well as the SNES of course. They're the team behind such games as Aero the Acrobat, Might and Magic 2, Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball, and many others. Perhaps their biggest success to date has been the NBA Jam series, which has sold over 5 million copies, making it the best selling sports game in history. But their soon-to-be released N64 smash Turok: Dinosaur Hunter could well herald the dawn of a new age in video gaming.

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TUROK
DINOSAUR HUNTER

As we showed you back in November, Iguana's latest gaming offering is Turok: Dinosaur Hunter for the N64. Here we give you a look behind the scenes and show you the whos, hows and whys of producing such a ground-breaking game.

COMIC INFLUENCE

Although the Turok comics were the starting point for the game's creation, the guys at Iguana didn't stick to them too closely. In order to make the game the best it could be, Acclaim allowed them to change quite a bit of detail. Apart from the velociraptors, only the Campaigner and Long Hunter (both boss characters) were found in the comics. The rest of the creatures, including 15 types of enemy, are completely original creations. Yet another obvious difference between comic and game is the weaponry that Turok has at his disposal (there are at least 14 different types of weapon you can access). Acclaim Comics wrote the new story for the game at the beginning of the development process but they were really open to suggestions and changes from the Iguana team. As Dave explains, "Acclaim Comics have been so supportive and open minded with us it's been a real blessing." What it came down to in the end was that if an element would improve the game, Iguana had a free hand to do it.
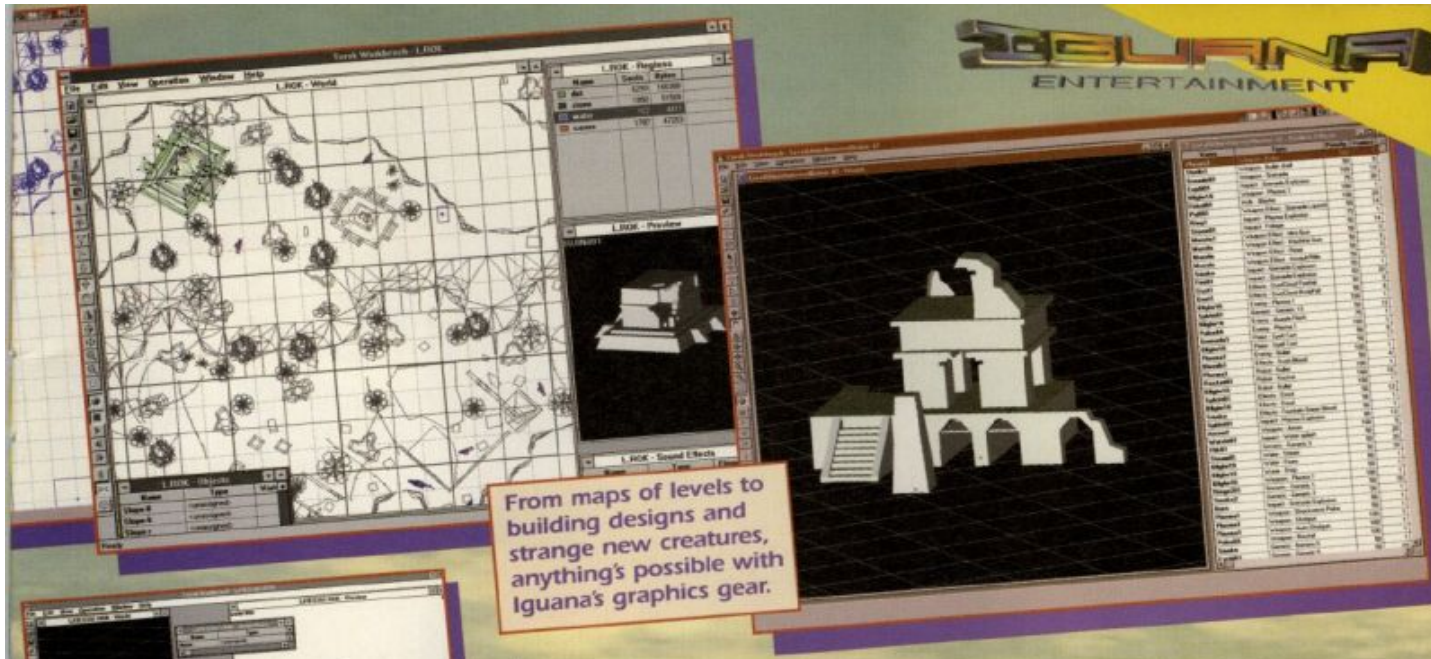
LOOK OF THE LAND

Although the designs for Turok were pretty solid right from the start, the look of a new game can change considerably as the project progresses. New ideas and new ways of doing things pop up all the time, and all the team members are encouraged to make suggestions. "We've added a lot of stuff towards the end of the project that's really helped make the game shine,"

The decision to create a game based on the Turok comic was made by Acclaim over two years ago. Iguana took on the development of the title and Dave Dienstbier was given the job of project manager. Right from the start, the team knew that a game like Turok would provide them with some great creative opportunities. After all, anything's possible in the Lost Land! There's a total of fifteen people involved full time on the project and, apart from Dave, they make up four programmers, two designers, six artists, a sound designer, and a musician.

Dave says, and they've also not held back when it comes to cutting out things that don't quite work. It's always the case that stuff has to be left out of a finished game for all sorts of reasons but as Dave states, "You just have to be realistic". At the end of a project there's always a pile of ideas that are held over to be used on another game some time.

DOWN TO THE BARE BONES

Turok is a real breakthrough in gaming technology and the power of the N64 is letting developers like Iguana really go to town in the realism stakes. The incredible detail and diversity in each world is obvious from the screenshots we've shown you so far, but you might not appreciate just how much better it is. According to Dave, the game levels in Turok are made up of as many as 300,000 polygons. That doesn't mean much until you realise that this figure is as much as 30 to 60 times more 'geometry' than in games on lesser systems.

Characters too, are incredibly detailed and are structured with as many as 800 polygons (2,500 for the bosses!) and it was important to the designers that the player could see the enemies right up close without losing any definition. And even when you've wiped out a bad guy he'll lie there in the landscape so you can go up to him and check out his wounds, or look at the detail in his teeth!

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From maps of levels to building designs and strange new creatures, anything's possible with Iguana's graphics gear.
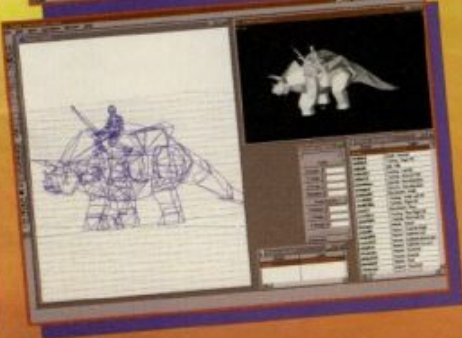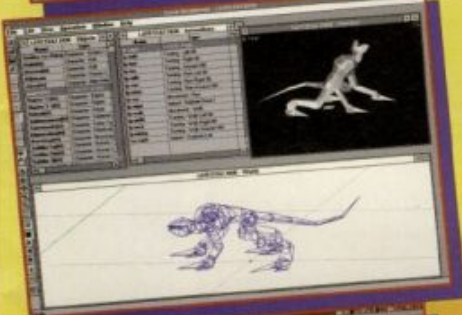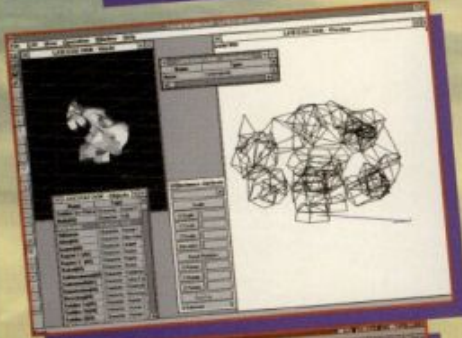
THE LEGENDS OF THE LOST LAND

Turok is a Kiowa-Apache brave (a classic Valiant Comics character) and the story follows him in his quest to thwart an evil overlord called the Campaigner. Turok's found himself trapped in an inter-dimensional rift known as the Lost Land where time has no meaning. Both dinosaurs and aliens walk among men, allowing a great mix of barbarian-like characters and high technology weaponry.

The Campaigner has learned of the existence of an ancient weapon called the Chronoscepter. He plans to use the strength of this powerful artifact, combine it with a huge focusing array, and slice through the fabric of time to rule all of existence across all ages. The only trouble with this plan is that the Chronoscepter itself has been split into eight different pieces and scattered throughout the Lost Land. It's up to you, as Turok, to locate the eight pieces before the Campaigner does.

The game consists of eight levels with each one hiding another piece of the Chronoscepter. In the first you must not only find a total of six keys, but also the location of a set of ancient ruins that serve as the 'hub' of the game. From here, you can open the portals to the other levels. Once a portal's opened, you can come and go through it as you like. This means that at any time, you can exit a level and go back through to find things you've missed, or to pick up weapons and powers that might not have been accessible when you first encountered them. If you manage to locate all eight pieces of the Chronoscepter you can use the weapon to destroy the Campaigner and prevent him terrorising space and time.

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TUROK SHOWCASE

"Turok promises to go beyond anything previously imagined in terms of graphics, speed and playability."

"Although every system has its own limitations and problems, for the most part the N64 has been great to work with. I'm definitely looking forward to developing for the N64 again in the future."

"We have been extremely impressed with the power of the N64."

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"If you can turn a game on for ten minutes or sit down with it for two hours after you've beaten it and still really enjoy yourself, than that's a game you'll keep coming back to."

"The introduction of the incredibly powerful N64 system provides even greater challenges and opens up entirely new realms of possibility."

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