

The Making of ... Turok : Dinosaur Hunter

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THE MAKING OF...

IGGY POPULAR

The development team's intro calling card shows their pet iguana avoiding a hail of Turok's dinosaur-slaying arrows. "Iggy was always very close to us as a mascot – he's still part of the Acclaim logo, and many of us still refer to Acclaim Austin [the developer was renamed a couple of years back] as Iguana," says David. "We just thought it would be fun to do, and the artists and animators actually did it in their spare time so that we could get it in the game."



THE MAKING OF... TUROK:

Days after the N64's UK launch, a FPS arrived that put its PC cousins to shame in terms of graphics, speed and spectacular enemies. Producer David Dienstbier reveals how this memorable sequel-spawner came to life...

Before 1997, we had a fairly good general idea of what to expect from a Nintendo console. On a machine from a company that had long specialised in primary colours and family fun, the last thing anyone anticipated was the kind of cutting-edge first-person shooter that was previously the sole preserve of expensive gaming PCs.

Turok changed all that, and established a system-selling franchise that would eventually continue long after the N64 itself had been superseded. Iguana Entertainment's brief was simply to create an N64-exclusive title based on Acclaim's Turok comic series, and producer David

Dienstbier was hired to decide how it was all going to be done.

3D powerhouse

David explains the reasoning behind opting for a first-person game: "The N64 had some graphic capabilities that were not possible on the PlayStation. It was quite a powerful machine in terms of its 3D capability, and 3D games – first-person shooters specifically – were just coming to fruition on the PC. It was time to make the transition to the console, but in many ways to make it better than it had been on the PC."

Acclaim's influence as a long-term third-party supporter of Nintendo meant Iguana enjoyed Dream Team

WHY TUROK: DINOSAUR HUNTER WAS A CLASSIC

MAGIC MOMENT CHEATER

DINOSAURS There aren't actually all that many dinosaurs in the game – raptors are the only common ones. Their scarcity makes the occasional unexpected appearance of monsters like the triceratops particularly scary and impressive.

CONTROLS Variations of the control system pioneered by Turok can be seen in just about every console-based FPS. The default settings in GoldenEye and Perfect Dark are a little different because of the R-button targeting feature, but most others have Turok-style controls.

The game's numerous inventive cheats were included after a final brainstorming session. Various members of the development team suggested ideas, such as the ability to combine cheats for different effects, and everything lead coder Rob Cohen considered feasible was included. Personalised cheat modes were even created in honour of the team's long-suffering girlfriends, providing some light relief after months of punishing 18-hour working days.

CHAINGUN There was a chaingun in Doom, but it certainly didn't look this good. The way the spinning barrels slow down after unleashing a deadly volley is very satisfying. It mysteriously vanished in Turok 2, before returning for Rage Wars.

SPEED Turok moves like greased lightning. It's almost overwhelmingly fast and smooth, causing some players to complain of headaches and motion sickness. It's still the speediest console FPS, with most new games opting for a slower, more realistic pace.



DINOSAUR HUNTER

status. "It put us under intense pressure but the benefits were obvious," says David. "We had more direct feedback from Nintendo; we got Mario Club

was an enormous challenge for Iguana. "Very few people know that almost everyone on the Turok team was new to the industry. It was the first game I'd

Surprisingly, Nintendo had no qualms about the amount of graphic violence in the game.

input earlier on; and we spent more face-to-face time with them during development. We had a closer relationship than was normal."

Even with Nintendo's considerable input, though, working on the game

ever actually developed," reveals David. The talented but inexperienced team put in months of gruelling overtime in order to learn the tricks of the trade, and design the tools required to produce a videogame.

Walking with beasts

One thing for which Iguana was grateful was Acclaim's prowess in motion-capture technology. The company was regarded as something of a pioneer in the techniques used to create lifelike 3D animation, and at a time when the expensive process was only just beginning to filter down into the wider videogame world, already had its own dedicated motion-capture studio up and running.

Consequently the humanoid characters could be smoothly and convincingly animated without too much trouble – it was simply a case of cutting down the large amount of data generated, in order to squeeze it onto a

64Mb cartridge, and cleaning up any rough edges by hand. Animating the dinosaurs was much harder, though, since there was so little reference material available. "If you look at the older films and things that had been done with stop-motion, they lacked the sort of detail, the weight, the subtlety that current computer-generated films depict in their creatures," explains David. "The animators spent some time looking at existing material such as Jurassic Park and other dino-themed films from the past. They also looked at wildlife footage, and tried to create motion that they felt looked realistic for creatures that we obviously couldn't go and look at first-hand."

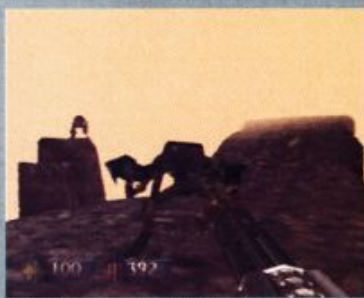
THE MAKING OF...

MAGIC MOMENT DINO CRISIS

The T-rex was a cut above the other bosses, and remains the game's defining scary moment. "Its size created certain kinds of nightmare situations in terms of how collision detection works and the amount of space you need to interact with the thing properly. One of the biggest challenges was getting a creature that large in close proximity to the player, without having the entire thing break down into monotony," says David. Putting the enormous dinosaur into a very large open arena proved to be a simple, and very playable solution, to the problem.



PLATFORM PURGATORY



With the benefit of hindsight, David agrees that the game's precision jumping sections were somewhat less than enjoyable. Those scenes were included because the limitations of the game's engine meant that it was one of the only ways to break up the constant shooting and exploration. "It got a little bit out of hand," he admits. "That's one of the things it becomes very easy to lose sight of when you work so closely with a game for so many months – what seems like a routine bit of jumping or a very simple challenge to me or to another member of the team becomes tortuous or annoying at points to other players."

GUN CULTURE



"The weapon design process was simple," says David. "Everyone knows about the BFG in Doom – we thought that was neat, but we could take it much further than it had ever gone before."

The team decided what they wanted the weapons to do, then designed individual pieces of code for each one to achieve unique effects – such as the gunsmoke drifting from the barrel of the pistol.



Part and parcel of the weapon design was a particle system that enabled the team to create massive layered effects and intricate motions, used to create the spectacular weapon effects.

The guns are positioned to the side of the screen, as if held in Turok's right hand – something that's now a standard FPS feature. Previously, games like Quake had placed the gun directly in the centre.



BLOOD!

The N64 was often dismissed as a 'machine for kids', but people forget that one of its earliest games was one of the goriest on the market at the time. Iguana ensured that the violence, while graphic, retained a sense of humour. "The level of gore is almost kind of campy," says David. "You'll notice that we don't do anything that isn't just so over-the-top that it's almost absurd." Hence the blood that trails behind guards as they fly, shrieking, away from explosions that can be used to 'juggle' their bodies until Turok runs out of ammo. But despite the tongue-in-cheek, the German release was censored to remove all gore, and human enemies were replaced by robots.

Blood money

Surprisingly, Nintendo had no qualms about allowing a title with so much graphic violence to grace their console. In the past, the company had insisted that *Mortal Kombat* be cleansed of gore before they would allow the SNES version to be released, but times and attitudes had changed since then. "We were kind of concerned [about Nintendo's reaction]," says David, "but they knew we were aiming to create something that was geared towards the older gamer, and they knew that was very important for any platform if it

was aiming to appeal to the widest possible market. So we had no censorship from Nintendo."

A lack of time, technology and cartridge space had forced the abandonment of large parts of the original design document. Hundreds of pages of material ended up on the cutting room floor – for example the cave-dwelling Leaper enemies were originally supposed to be able to scuttle along walls and ceilings, and an entire scene featuring a vast brachiosaur during the Treetop Village level had to be cut. "The original design was quite

different, but interestingly enough it's very similar to what people are going to see in *Turok Evolution*."

"We were extraordinarily pleased with the reception *Turok* received," says David, recalling the game's critical and commercial success. "There's no way you can't be – you create a game, you work so hard with a group of very talented people that you get to know very well, and it bursts out and becomes a multi-million seller. It's the best feeling in the world."

And did he expect *Turok* to become such an enduring series? "Quite

honestly, no. I don't think any of us expected it to continue for so long, but I think that's also something that's changing with videogames these days – coders become attached to franchises. They want to create the next chapter and players want to experience it. So it's nothing but a thrill. Many people ask me if I ever get tired of working on *Turok* games, and the simple answer to that question is no." **NGC**

LEVEL TOUR: THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

MAGIC MOMENT I AM TUROK!

Turok's famous catchphrase was written by David, and spoken by a local actor called Dean Seltzer who was hired via an agent. A different actor has played Turok in each sequel, but the line is always included. "It's a bit of fun, really - everyone knows it."



1 • Turning the very first corner, you're confronted by a triceratops, fitted out with rocket launchers and ridden by a man who's sorely determined not to let you past to see what lies hidden within the dense fog over the ridge behind him. Looks like it's time for some killing, then.



2 • After a fierce and bloody battle, the stricken dinosaur falls, the rider slips from his saddle and is hilariously crushed beneath the beast's flank. His gruesome screams fade as you race to find whatever it was he was defending with such murderous passion.



3 • The huge enemy fortress looms into view, protected by remote cannons. The Campaigner tends to prefer using the heavily-armoured-robot tactic as his last line of defence within the fortress, and the metal mickeys put up an ammo-draining fight before eventually grinding to a halt.



4 • After a gruelling slog through this long and painfully tough level, the T-rex boss blocks the way to the final showdown with the Campaigner himself. This laser-eyed, fire-breathing giant is a lot more impressive than the boss man, but marginally easier to kill.



5 • Before moving on to the final scene, there's a gruesome torture room with what appear to be the corpses of unfortunate human guards dangling from the ceiling. Shooting a few bullets at them reveals that they're actually still alive, waiting to be put out of their misery.



6 • The Campaigner seems to be nothing more than an extra from some kind of hellish WWF tournament. After the eye-popping thrills of the battle with the T-rex it's a bit of a letdown, but this guy's size makes him elusive, and he's the toughest and most persistent opponent of all.

