

**Steven Applebaum: How did you and your team become involved in the Captain Claw project? Did Monolith approach you or did you hear of the project and pitch what you could offer?**

Donald Wallace: Wallace Creative Inc., an animation and design studio in Portland Oregon was contacted by Monolith Productions. They were looking for an animation studio to produce all the “cutscenes” for their first game “Captain Claw”. An agreement was finalized pretty quickly since they knew we had experience producing traditional 2D animation and that was what they were looking for at that time.

**SA: At what point during the game's production did you begin working on the animated cutscenes?**

DW: I don't know how far Monolith was into the development of Claw, obviously they had considerable time already invested for the concept and preproduction stage, but I have a feeling my studio began working early on.

**SA: What sort of direction did you receive from Monolith? Did they already have a script written, or did they only have a general idea which you and your team worked out over the course of production?**

DW: We didn't receive a lot of direction from Monolith. I think there was a good trust factor there. They hired us to basically design and create the scenes and animation from just their narrative script. Since we needed the script and the narrator's voice recorded for timing all the animation, there was not too much we could do until we got that, except start designing the characters.

But the script was provided to us pretty quickly. From that script and the narrator's voice track, we began developing the storyboards and characters. They really didn't have a lot of scene description for us. Mostly we were given important plot points to be aware for each level and to make sure the visual sequences revealed proper story elements at that point. There were a few very rough sketches that Monolith provided for several of the main characters but not really anything we could use directly. We just referred to those drawings and refined the design so they could be animated easily. We also created a lot of the characters as we progressed into each cutscene after assessing what the scene needed.

The scenes and sequences were developed as visuals from what we could discern from the scripts narrative and input from Monolith in regards to “here's what the cutscene has to lead the player into for the next level of play. That understanding gave us a good idea of what visual path we had to take. Once Monolith saw some of the early storyboards, they really let us design the way everything looked for the cutscenes.

I hired additional artists/animators for the project. One gentleman was a veteran Disney animator who was semi-retired and living in Idaho. He and I would have story discussions over the phone and then he would send me art and animation through the mail, except for a couple times when he traveled to Portland and worked in the studio with us. He was amazing. I think he was in his late sixties at that time but could work tirelessly and for very long hours. Between the two of us, we created all the storyboard panels. He was an excellent storyboard artist. He had an incredible sense for layout and story-telling and I had a lot of fun working with him. His name is Ken Mundie and he's in his eighties and still animating.

When we had all the storyboard panels done for all the cutscenes, if I recall correctly there were about 10

cutsscenes, they covered every inch of wall space I had in the studio. We basically had wallpaper storyboards. There was well over a half-an-hour of animation in all of the cutsscenes.

I had three animators: Ken Mundie, Ed Anderson and a good animator friend and ex-business partner Jim Bradrick, who lived in Washington state, one CG animator/modeler, Peter Freeman, who did all the water, explosion and fire effects and model ship creation. I had one background artist, Lonnie Smith, who painted over 80 background elements. I would provide him with fairly tight drawings to size of what I wanted and he would produce gorgeous paintings. Many of the backgrounds needed to be quite large because I had to pan around within a scene and needed a lot of landscape area to work with. I would take Lonnie's painting and have a professional photography house scan the painting and give back to me a huge hi-res digital file that I would take into Photoshop and finesse. Rounding out the rest of the team was Peter Nguyen and Kelly Rose. Peter Nguyen did animation drawing cleanups, so did Ed and Jim cleaned up his own drawings. Kelly did a lot of the digital painting in Toonz. I hired a very good friend of mine, and master calligrapher, Bill McConaughy to design and create the calligraphic word title "CLAW" for the opening intro and I think Monolith used this throughout their packaging.

Besides being the director, I wore many other hats, as is the case many times with small studios. I did a lot of the storyboarding, scene design, character design, animation, digital painting, clean-up and all of the scanning and compositing of elements and renders.

I guess at this point I should explain the process for us back then with traditional character animation. All the cutscene character animation was done in the traditional style of drawing by hand on the standard animation disk with registration pegs. This was the standard way of producing 2D animation. These drawings were then tested (I scanned them into the computer and did a pencil test) to see if the animation was working correctly, if so, we would clean up the drawings, then they would be scanned back into the computer software program I had for 2D animation production. Back then, this software program was called Softimage Toonz and was owned by Softimage 3D, which now is called XSI, owned by Autodesk. I still use this program to this day. This 2D software was developed by an Italian company which is still operating in Rome as an independent animation software developer and sells this software as its own. This software was absolutely incredible. In the late nineties, software programs were starting to be developed that helped traditional animators have a lot of power in producing traditional animation.

This program allowed me to scan in the drawings in complete registration with each drawing as I had done outside the computer, digitally paint the animation very quickly (which was not the case back in the day with the old-fashioned way of hand-painting cels) and then composite all the elements into scenes with unlimited layers (a lot of the scenes in Claw had over a hundred layers of art). You had all sorts of camera controls and special effects capabilities. When everything was ready, I rendered out to whatever file format the client requested. Having this animation program back then was critical for my studio to produce the amount of animation we had to produce.

**SA: About how long did it take to fully complete all of the game's cutsscenes?**

DW: We were in production for almost a full year.

**SA: Which scenes took the longest to complete due to technical or creative difficulties?**

DW: The introduction was the longest and most difficult because it involved a lot more of CG, CG effects and 2D animation and painted backgrounds. The other scene that was close to the amount of work of the intro was the tavern scene.

**SA: Do you recall if any additional scenes were written that were either cut during the script-writing process or midway through animation?**

DW: No. Everything was used. There were some ideas discussed with Monolith to extend certain cutscene levels that would have given more backstory details, but that notion was dismissed at some point before we ever started creating any art.

**SA: How was the artistic style decided? Ed Anderson, one of your animators, indicated disappointment that your team didn't work more closely with Monolith to develop a more realistic style similar to the game's box art.**

DW: This was the first time Monolith ever contracted 2D animation, obviously since it was their first game. They were working on Blood at the time, but that wasn't 2D. The style actually evolved from Wallace Creative developing the art. I remember them saying we want "Disney-style" animation. We tried as much as we could to honor their request, but we also had a budget that we had to be sensitive to. Spending the time to produce full-blown Disney animation would have taken more personnel and considerable more budget and more time. So there was compromise for sure.

The box art was created after everything was done by Monolith. I think Monolith was totally consumed with the demands of the inner workings of the game, as you can tell, it is a difficult game to master, and they were not concerned that the style of the cutscenes and the actual game were different. That was discussed in the very beginning from a question I brought up, but again, Monolith did not want the cutscene animation to look like the actual gameplay visuals.

**SA: If you can say, what was Monolith's budget for the cutscenes? Ed stated that it was pretty high for the time.**

DW: I can't really mention the figure, but it was okay, but it did give us restrictions as to how much we could do. To be quite honest, I wish we could have had a little more, so I could have added more personnel and produced more quality animation.

**SA: Once the project was completed, were you satisfied with the work that you and your team had done? Additionally, was Monolith satisfied with the work?**

DW: Overall, Monolith was happy with what we produced. They shared with me they had favorite parts, and I did to. Looking back there are areas I wish I could do over and places that I wanted to do a lot more, but time and budget, (you've heard that before) had to rule, unfortunately.

One other thing that bothered me was we were moving so fast I couldn't take time to maintain model

continuity on Claw like I wanted to. As you have probably noticed, depending on who was drawing him, his look changed, which bothered me a lot. I was trying to have all the drawings come through me and I would do the best I could to bring them back “on model” as we call it in the industry – but there was not enough of me to go around with all the hats I was wearing.

**SA: What did you personally think of the game upon its release?**

DW: I think Monolith did an incredible job. Remember when this came out – 1997. Technology has come a long way from back then. Just the fact that this game is still played around the world and still has a following, is quite an amazing testimony – I think that says a lot about Monolith’s vision!

**SA: Looking back, is there anything that you would want to do differently if you had had more creative control, a higher budget or more time?**

DW: Yes. Most definitely. I think I commented on that a little earlier. Some of the last scenes we were working on (not necessarily in order of first to last) I wanted to have more time to add value to the sequences, but I was told the scenes had to be turned in as is because the Monolith programmers needed them. That was frustrating because I knew I could do more, but time ran out. I really wanted to add as much as I could.

**SA: What do you think of the game and your work on it now, nearly 14 years later?**

DW: The game is great! After all these years, I still have not had time to get all the way through the game. I have been too busy creating animation and don’t get to play games that much. I still smile when I think about the experience. It was a fun and I had a chance to bring work to other artists and animators. Yes there are things I wish I could redo or improve on, but that’s the nature of what art is all about – you do it and learn and move on and hopefully improve each time you are attempting something else. You bring all the past experience to your next endeavor.

My studio went on to produce animation and art for three other games. I’m currently a partner in a story property that deals with futuristic space on a grand scale that we are taking transmedia and one of the media directions is a game.