

Ed Anderson: So, this interview. What are you looking for? I mean, what do you guys want to know?

**Steven Applebaum: Well, I'm mostly interested in the development process as far as how the project began, what you contributed and the overall reaction once the project ended. Additionally, whatever interesting stories you can share. Ryan here is in game development, so he's probably interested in some of the technical details.**

**Ryan Hoss: Yeah. I'm not that familiar with Captain Claw because I just found out about it yesterday. (laughs) But, yeah. I'm a graduate student and I'm really interested in the whole game development process.**

EA: Well, I can tell you a little about it. I don't know if you're aware of this, but I worked for the animation studio that did the cutscene and title credits animation for the project. I was not directly involved with Monolith productions, which was the company that did the game development itself.

So, from a game developer's standpoint you may be disappointed to hear that. We were not at *all* involved with the game development. Our job at Wallace Creative, which was the animation studio that I worked at in Portland [Oregon], was to provide these very cinematic cutscenes for the game to tell the story. To perpetuate the ideas and things that were going along in the story and the themes.

So, we basically took story scripts from Monolith and then made storyboards and we did character designs and built some 3D models. There was a pirate ship and things like that that were in 3D and certain shots were composited. 2D and 3D were composited together, and then the rest of it was pretty much just 2D. Really traditional background art.

I forget the fellow's last name who did the background art. His first name was Lonnie. He's a really good painter/background artist, and one of the animators that we hired later on in the project was named Ken Mundie, who worked at Walt Disney for years in the late '60s/early '70s. He did some of the Captain Claw animation, some of the key drawings for that. I was in charge of clean-up. I was basically his assistant. He would send his key drawings and things from Idaho where he lived and I would have to clean them up and do all the in-betweening and everything.

So, yeah. From a game developer's standpoint I don't have a lot for you, but I actually went into software after I left Wallace Creative. They were pretty much just an animation studio. They didn't do any interactive or anything. I went into interactive after that and I'm still in it. I'm doing game development for iPhone and Android now, so kind of exciting.

So, have you been in touch with Don Wallace at Wallace creative? He loves to talk. Tell you stories, I betcha.

**SA: No, not yet. I actually just started sending out these E-mails a couple days ago, so I'm still waiting on a lot of responses.**

EA: Well, like I said I have a few anecdotal things. I know that the project went over-budget. I'm actually more interested in hearing about what kind of a following does this game have. I mean, I never really imagined that it had been that successful. I never got the impression that they did very well with the title.

**SA: Well, it's actually very popular overseas. The people that run the site and the main contributors are in Poland and the Netherlands and Denmark. So, they're generally in that Eastern European region. It's still very popular over there to this day. They hold competitions on servers where the fans compete in the multiplayer aspect of the game. I do know that some company released a pseudo-sequel using**

**fan-created maps. Most of them were created by those who run the site.**

EA: Cool. I'm really surprised.

**SA: Yeah. *The Claw Recluse* is probably the oldest website for the game. It's been up since 2004, and it's updated generally every week. At least once a month.**

EA: Very nice.

**SA: If you've had a chance to look at it, the site is available in 10 languages. So, the game is pretty popular around the world. I'm guessing it didn't do so well here in the U.S., but that's true for a lot of these cult classics. I think the European sensibilities tend to favor these type of projects a little more. They've really taken this game as their own.**

EA: Interesting. Yeah, you know I think I still may have some pencil tests and things from that project, and if I didn't, I know for a fact that Don would. I think that those could be really interesting sort of archival things to see some of that process. I think if you did some sniffing you'd probably find that Don has those because he was always very good at backing things up. (laughs) He used to back things up to tape, but I'm sure he back things up to DVDs now.

But, yeah. I would sniff around there. Show you some neat stuff. I used to hang on to things for years and years and it's been 15 years, almost, that I've gotten rid of some of the things. Used to have drawings and cells. We did all of the animation on paper to Softimage, to a program called Toonz that we were running. We did everything in Softimage at the time on platforms and even the 3D was Softimage as well. We did the digital ink in Paint program to get the line-art painted, but everything was drawn on paper. It was all hand-done.

A lot of art that's on the website you sent me was actually done by artists in Seattle. We didn't actually do that character art. You'll notice [that the] actual cutscene animations [don't] look exactly like the art that's on the box.

**SA: Yeah. The cover art on the box was actually why I first got the game. I was like "Wow! That looks so cool," and I watched the cinematics and it looked nothing like that. I was a little disappointed, but over the years I've grown to really like the cinematics. They're very dynamic and they do offer this spark to the game, so you and your team did a really great job with them.**

EA: Oh yeah. Well, I think it turned out pretty good. We were pretty small, so I appreciate the sentiment. I definitely wasn't in charge at the time, so whether it was pass or fail it wouldn't have been on me. It would have been on Don. (laughs) I did my best with what I was given.

I think I might even have a copy of Captain Claw. I had a few copies of it. I probably still have a copy of it lying around somewhere. It's interesting. I should sell it. Sell it on eBay. (laughs) Is it difficult to find a copy these days?

**SA: Oh, it's very difficult.**

EA: You would think it'd be very difficult.

**SA: I still have the original box and CD, but for the most part it's pretty difficult to come across. *The Claw Recluse* does offer some DVD rips for download.**

EA: I'll have to dig that up, because I know if I have it it'll be in the box, probably unopened. I never opened any of the software titles I have. I have all the software titles that I ever did animation for. I always made an effort to grab one and stick it on the shelf, but I'll have to look and see if it survived the years or not. I'll take a look and let you know if I do. (laughs)

**SA: We'd appreciate that.**

EA: Yeah, that'd be cool. (pause) But yeah. I would say that if you haven't contacted Don, definitely do that. I know that his website is still called "Wallyhood." You'll find him if you do a little search.

**SA: Yeah, I'm doing that right now.**

EA: I mean, you found me. That's impressive. I don't know how you did that.

**SA: Yeah. I just watched the credits and started typing in names. There were a few people I couldn't track down, so I just used the Internet Movie Database to turn up some additional contact information.**

EA: Yeah, I guess it's not so hard.

**SA: We've been able to contact some very high-profile people for other projects we're doing, so if you know what you're doing and you want to do it well you can do things like this.**

EA: Yeah. And, you know, I haven't been making any effort to be invisible. I mean, I'm in the business of animation and I'm in the business of promoting myself and my work. I think if anyone's out there trying to get their work out or their name out, it's pretty easy to find them these days. With even the most basic search engines you can pretty much find just about anybody you want, as long as they're not trying to hide. I admit I haven't been trying to hide, so. Well it's cool

Well, I wish I could give you some really juicy background info on the game itself. I know there was a lot of back-and-forth about design, years and years ago, but all I can I tell you, from our standpoint, I never dealt directly with Monolith, but Don did. I know there was some back-and-forth on game design and stuff and I just know that we worked a lot of really long hours and we really had an *incredible* amount of animation to do. At the time their budget was pretty good. They spent a fair amount of money on this thing. I still remember thinking that it was a lot of money.

So, hats off to them. I don't know if you could find any of the Monolith guys or not. I know that they all scattered around. I don't know whatever became of Monolith. I think it went out of business or was purchased by another company or something.

**RH: Yeah. Warner Bros. purchased Monolith, but they're still around and they've made some pretty popular games in the last couple years, like F.E.A.R and F.E.A.R 2.**

EA: Yeah. I've heard of them.

**RH: I've been looking at these cutscenes and they're really kind of interesting. It's an interesting kind of blend of traditional animation with the 3D. So, I'm trying to become an effects artist for games. Did you guys use Softimage for the effects like the smoke and the fire in addition to the 3D models?**

EA: Yeah, yeah. Particle effects in Softimage are kind of plug-ins. I remember we worked on the battle scene for a long time, with the cannons and things like that. Those probably look pretty chintzy these days by the standards we hold today, but I know that Softimage was one of the best animation packages you could really get back then. It was *really* a good package, and quite an expensive software suite as well as I recall.

But yeah: all of the particles and all of the effects were generated in Softimage. They just had plug-ins for those. And they're pretty straightforward. They're generic. You look at it now [and] it looks [like] really, really cheesy smoke. It doesn't look as goofy as if we did it again today. For sure.

**SA: Well, it still holds up pretty well. I mean, I watch them every time I play the game.**

EA: Nice. We had a 3D artist named Peter Freeman on there. He was in charge of all the 3D and the modeling and the rendering.

**SA: So, what I'm interested in as far as the script is whether Monolith already had something detailed written or if you guys had a little bit of creativity in what you could animate.**

EA: Well, they had a script because they were doing all the voice-records in Seattle and we had to basically follow the voice-records. The voice-records and the voice tracks kind of locked down what we had to do. We got some freedom with the storyboards, which is usually how it's done. You'll have a writer and the writer and the director will work on the script and then the director will hand off the script to the storyboard artist--in this case our studio--and we would do the storyboards and then turn them around. The director would look at them and makes changes or whatever notes and once the storyboards were approved we would go forward with the animation.

You make what's called a "beat track," which [has] the voice-records in it and you basically kind of time out the scene with the voice-track and the story boards laid down together, so that you can see the length of each shot and the length of each scene and the length of each cut and you kind of time out the scene that way. Some people call it an animatic, but it's really not at this point an animatic because there's no animation in it. It's just so you can see how the flow would go, but the script was definitely written by Monolith. We didn't make many changes to it, but we did get a lot of influence over the storyboards in terms of deciding how the action would be.

Now, there were notes in the script about what was going on and they wanted a story outline, essentially. It wasn't completely up in the air. I mean, they said "The story is that Captain Claw is captured and he goes to this castle and this, that and the other," and so we kind of knew that we need a castle scene, we need this boat scene. We need this, that and the other.

We were told, essentially, what we were doing in terms of where we were going to be, but exactly how the action was framed up and how everything was kind of cut together, that got to be our choice. At the end, I think that's the way you generally do it. You will not generally hire an animator or an animation studio and separately hire a storyboard artist to work with them. It's typically easier if you can get those two in the same room. That's not uncommon.

**SA: Cool. Yeah, it came together pretty well.**

EA: Yeah, I think so. Like I said, I'm surprised and I'm going to do some research now. (laughs) Honestly, I had just figured that it had faded away into the ether. I never would have guessed that it had a following somewhere.

But, you know. it's funny. Everything has a following somewhere. It's usually Germany or somewhere where there's this obscure group of people that like something, like David Hasselhoff. He has this huge following in Germany. No idea why. Just something that happens, I guess.

**SA: And then there's people like Ryan and myself that run a website devoted to The Super Mario Bros. movie, so.**

EA: (laughs) There you go. Something for everyone.

**SA: Everything has something to offer. It just needs to key into your particular sensibility and Claw really had something to connect with people.**

EA: Yeah, very good. I'll have to look at it again and maybe even play it. Is there a patch or something that's been written for it, because I know when that came out Windows 95 was the operating system platform of choice. I don't believe... Was the disc Mac-compatible? I would think that the software would need patching by now.

**SA: Well I've been able to put it on my computer fairly easily. I mean, it's one of the more recent PC games, at least compared to DOOM and Wolfenstein. I've had difficulties playing those. It should be fine.**

**RH: It looks like they had to make a patch for Windows XP, but yeah. The game works just fine on my computer, too, interestingly enough.**

EA: GL driver, or something. There's always some graphics thing that breaks because they went through graphics drivers so much back then. They were using DirectX and they were trying to use GL drivers nobody could really figure out what was better in that era, there were so many problems with video cards and software for video cards surprised, frankly, that there's still support for it. It's easy enough to patch those things these days, but I just wonder how easy or difficult it would be. Sounds like it's not too bad.

Well, that's good. Well, Ryan. What is your status right now? Are you a student?

**RH: Well, I graduated with my BF last year and right now I'm about half-way through with a Masters program in digital media. I'm focusing on real-time effects in games. I'm kind of job-hunting right now. I did get to go to GDC a couple weeks ago. That was really cool. I got to talk to a lot of companies there and get some feedback on my demoreel and that kind of stuff.**

EA: Where are you located? Where is your market?

**RH: I'm in eastern Tennessee, but I'm looking everywhere. I'll go anywhere. (laughs)**

EA: Right. I was going to say that you might need to relocate to get into a better market for gaming.

There's really not a lot that I'm aware of in Tennessee.

**RH: No, there's not.**

EA: Isn't there a game company in Nashville?

**RH: I don't think that there is. There's a company in Knoxville that does the animated intros for HD TV and Food Network shows, but there's a big gaming hub around Raleigh. That's where Epic Games is and Insomniac is there.**

EA: Well, I'll tell you the market is huge. I'm going to E3 in June. I've been a few times, but this is the first year in awhile that I've been. The market is so big and it's growing so fast. Especially the mobile computing market. I don't know if you know any programming languages, but if I had to give you any advice at all-- if you were at all a programmer, I don't know if you are or not, but...

**RH: Very slightly. I can do a little bit of light-scripting in terms of effects. A little bit.**

EA: Even if you don't know the coding languages, the tools that you're going to want to get familiar with 3D engines being utilized for mobile platforms like Unity and things like that. You really could benefit from getting very good at those. Even the smaller packages like 3D Studio Max and things like that, because nobody is really using the high-end stuff for gaming anymore. Things like 3D Studio Max [are] pretty generic. It goes across platforms. Unity 3 is pretty big.

Getting into the mobile market you won't be out of work for awhile. There's a lot of demand for game companies because that whole market is opening up right now. It's brand-new. Android and the IOS markets are just blowing up. I mean, the expansion of phenomenal. You see 3000% growth annually very often.

**RH: The devices are so much more capable now. They have the Unreal Engine on the iPhone now. The stuff I've seen with that is just amazing.**

EA: Oh yeah. And you better believe that in the next two years the iPhone you're holding in your hand right now is going to look like a dinosaur. They're going to have dual-processors in those things next year and they'll probably have a friggin' quad core processor in them. Mobile computing is very quickly becoming the game platform to be on.

It's doing a fair amount of harm, frankly, to the traditional CD-ROM/DVD-Rom market because they're capable of selling millions of millions of copies for \$5, \$10, \$15 versus selling a million copies for \$50. People are just opting for those cheaper games, those micro-games, those casual games. It's scary how many you can sell for \$2 or \$3 overnight.

And you save. The overhead is so much lower. You don't have to print all those DVDs. You don't have to print all those boxes. You don't have to get that distribution channel opened up. You don't have to compete for shelf-space in some store, in some Gamestop or something. You don't have to pay some retailer. It's really phenomenal. A \$4 downloadable game has overhead that is like pennies compared to a \$50 game, which has overhead that's about \$30. The percentage of overhead is so much higher on those games that companies have to do so much more just to get them purchased. If I were putting my chips on anything I would look to that market, especially since you're just starting out.

**RH: Yeah. That's something that I've considered.**

EA: I know it's appealing to work for companies like EA or what the hell's the [company] called that does Left 4 Dead. That's a good game company.

**RH: Valve.**

EA: Yeah. Those guys obviously are having a lot of fun and I would love to work for those platforms, too, because their performance ceilings are so much higher right now. They can push the Xbox, they can push the PS3 and they've got such higher system capacity that they really can have fun with lighting and textures and graphics and frame-counts. At the same time, like I said, you're going to have some pretty high ceilings for mobile devices. It's pretty impressive.

But I got some stuff I need to do.

**RH: I have one last question on my end. Compared to Captain Claw, storytelling in games is really becoming more and more prominent and a lot of it is in engine rather than through cinematic cutscenes. What are your thoughts on the growing emergence of storytelling in games and is it viable?**

EA: Yeah. I see a lot of games that still do very much the same thing as what Claw did, but I think that if Claw were done today it might do a lot of things differently. I think that they're changing the way that they tell the story simply by virtue of the fact that they can. They take the game graphics, the game models, the models which are maybe a little higher-[resolution] than what they're using in the game and they can render out this beautiful cutscene without going all the way back to scratch, to zero.

Frankly, I think it's an economic decision. That's what I think, because anyways and they can make a cutscene using their existing backgrounds, textures [and] models put that together render it out and it works. Claw couldn't do that because the endgame graphics were *not* up to any cinematic snuff. You weren't going to believe a cutscene--(laughs)--starring this little pixelated cat character. It just wasn't going to work, so they went with the sort of movie-style or television animation-style of cutscene and at the time I think that really worked. It added value and it added a richness. It just gave it another dimension, I think.

I think that the box art that they went with was great. I wish that they had incorporated or at least instead of simultaneously to what they were doing I w a little bit more. I would have liked to have seen either the model in the cartoon or the model on the box look a little bit more similar to each other, frankly. I think the inconsistency is a testament to perhaps some poor planning and some hubris on someone's part. I think it was probably just poor management, because I think the guys in Seattle or the marketing team or whoever hired the illustrators for the box art and the promotional art didn't really think about what that was gonna end up looking like into the animation design process. We could have incorporated some of those differences and some of those designs early on if we had them. We didn't even see the box art until we were finished and we were quite shocked to see that they looked a little different and in some cases very different from what we were doing. I think that's an odd inconsistency. I don't think that anybody notices that the game graphics looks different from the animation, but I think it is kind of obvious that the art on the box looks different from the animation. It's just kind sort of a sore spot in terms of the visual style of it. I think that could have been a lot better with a little bit better management and resources.

But I hope that's a sufficient answer to your question.

**RH: Yeah, it was awesome. (laughs)**

EA: I think that's the reason that a lot of the 3D games or runtime games are doing their cinematics that way simply because it's cheaper. They're taking advantage of resources that they already have.

**SA: The interesting thing is that the Hungarian, Korean and Australian releases of the game do use the cinematic-style of artwork on their box art. It's the artwork from the opening cinematic where Claw has one arm back and one arm forward and he's shooting a gun while snarling. They use that graphic for the cover.**

EA: Oh, cool.

**SA: And the Polish release uses a more cartoony style, but it looks *entirely* different from even the cinematics. He has red hair and he kind of looks like Tom from Tom and Jerry.**

EA: (laughs) Yeah, that's weird. You know, there was an original design of Claw that had him as red and he was changed to blue. That was one of the original designs that we had done, and because there was this bad guy they ended up doing red. I forget his name. Big tiger guy.

**SA: Red Tail.**

EA: Yeah, Red Tail. They thought he was too similar, so they changed him to blue and changed his whole color [option], but one of the color options we had done was red. I think that may be a coincidence.

**SA: That's interesting.**

EA: It's cool that they're doing their own box art. That's kind of neat.

**SA: Yeah, it seems like the English and Russian releases are the only ones that use the more realistic style, but I think that's true of most games. Japanese titles generally use a more cutesy, whimsical style of cover art, but when they bring it to America they have to make it look "bad ass" for Americans.**

EA: Yeah, exactly. (laughs) check out this website. A lot of fan art. I might even dig around. I used to have a lot of stuff. I'll dig around to see if I can find any of the artwork that I had from the production. It'd be kind fun to share it.

**SA: Well, if you could turn anything up I'd love for you to send it to me. We'd put it right up. All of the fans would enjoy it.**

EA: Yeah. I will. That's really neat. That's really cool. This website has a lot of stuff.

**SA: I also wanted to comment on how you said that videogames can now be on iPods and cell phones. A few years ago they actually ported Claw to cellphones. The graphics style was similar, but very simplified.**

EA: Interesting. Wow. I'd like to get my hands on that. What was the cell phone platform? Was it on Windows phones, or what?

**SA: It was for the Sony Erickson line. No one on the site has actually played it. There was a link to the developer, but it seems to be dead now. I don't know if anyone has actually taken the time to play it, but they certainly thought there was interest in it for a portable game.**

**Editor's Note: I've since learned that the mobile version of Claw has indeed been played; by several people on the Recluse, in fact. To hear what they had to say check out these two topics on the Recluse forums: [Claw na komórkê](#) and [Claw Mobile](#)**

EA: Cool. Yeah, I'm looking at this Australian box-version and that [was] lifted-- Well, it looks like it's been reworked. It's obviously had a lot of shadow maps and highlights and stuff put on it, but that's essentially a tracing, more or less, of a frame from the animation.

I recognize that frame because Ken Mundie drew that pose and he was so minimal in his drawings--He was an older fella, you see. He was in his '80s--He would probably put three or four lines on a piece of paper and call it a drawing. (laughs)

**SA & RH: (laughs)**

EA: Nothing was there. There were no details. There was no eyes, no face, no hands, no gun... It was like one line represented the arc of his body and the other line represented his shoulders and there would be a curve or something and that would recognize the action.

It was like, "Okay. I'll just fill in the rest. Thanks Ken." I'm supposed to tween this, but instead I'll just draw the whole thing. But yeah. I don't think I ever stopped bitching about that, but no one would listen to me because I was the "lowly assistant." So, essentially I drew that. (laughs) But I had to go from Ken's beginnings.

**SA & RH: (laughs)**

EA: Yeah, I'll take a look at this and I will dig around, I promise. If I find that CD and that box I will definitely send it to you because I am certainly not using it and it sounds like you guys could get some kicks out of it. Maybe you could pirate it or something.

**SA: Or you could sign it. (laughs)**

EA: Oh yeah. I'll sign it for you. Sure, if you want. Absolutely.

**SA: That'd be cool. Well, thank you for taking the time out. This has been very interesting.**

**RH: Yeah, thanks.**

EA: No problem. Thanks to you and good luck to both of you. Be sure to keep in touch, too. If you have any more questions just give me a call or drop me a line.

**SA: Well if you see anything on the site and you want to comment just send me an E-mail with whatever you're thinking.**

EA: Okay. I'll do it.

**SA: Thank you.**

EA: Great. See you.

**SA & RH: Bye**