

Steven Applebaum: What led you to become an artist and how did that lead you into doing work for video games, specifically Monolith?

Matthew Hayhurst: I had always had a knack for art and always knew I was going to go to art school. At the time, I didn't really think of going into the video game business. My illustration training was mainly in commercial art, and I actually did very little with the computer. The job placement department of my school hooked me up with an interview with Monolith.... and I got the job. :)

SA: In your own artwork, how would you describe your personal approach and style in designing characters and creatures?

MH: Honestly, a lot of it is done in my head. Which probably isn't the best way to design characters, but with my time constraints, I don't always have a lot of free time to sit and sketch. I can run through hundreds of quick designs just using my imagination. Then when I have a good basis for a character I will commit something to paper.

SA: Do you remember how the Captain Claw project started and why you were brought on to do work for it?

MH: I really wasn't privy to why I was brought on other than I knew they needed a character designer.... and they needed a fast one. Part of the portfolio I brought in was a folder of character designs (most I would cringe at today). Normally I wouldn't recommend bringing in folders of character studies into a job interview, but that is what they wanted to see.

SA: Was it always planned to focus the story and characters around anthropomorphic cats, or did that develop later?

I really have no idea how the concept of Claw came about. That was all the brainchild of my boss Garrett Price.

SA: What sort of direction did you receive from Monolith in designing the characters? Did they already have specific characters in mind or only a general idea of who and what Claw would face?

MH: I had an incredible amount of freedom on this project. I would do a few designs real quick, Garrett would tell me what he liked/didn't like and then I'd move on. One of the easiest concept development jobs I have ever had. They had a few ideas, but mainly the only description would be "leader of Pirates Cove", "Sea monster type character".

SA: Did you take inspiration from anything in particular when designing the various characters, such as pirate movies or certain breeds/species of cat?

MH: I actually mostly used books as reference. Not so much for cat or dog breeds, but mainly just for the pirate stuff. You can only use the eye patch, hook, or peg leg so much. The Scottish terrier character was designed and named using my dog as reference: Milo.

SA: How was the artistic style of the characters decided? Do you know if they wanted a more realistic or cartoony world?

MH: Well, I actually had little to do with the development of the 'look' of the game beyond what the characters looked like and what they were. I think they were going for something with a more painted style than anything Disney was going at the time, so there wasn't any two tone characters or outlines.

SA: How did the design and visual "personality" of the various characters, Claw in particular, progress?

While I came up with the base design for a lot of the characters, our head animator actually developed the look and personality of the characters. Emma and Rebecca really did a great job bringing some of my creations to life

SA: Interestingly, it seems as if the King Aquatis character was originally conceived as a half-cat/half-fish being (a "catfish") before he ultimately became more of a generic sea beast. This gives him the distinction of being the only non-feline or canine boss in the game. Do you remember why his character's concept progressed in this way?

MH: It has been so long that I honestly don't remember. I think it was a game design decision to give him tentacles so that he would be a more interesting boss to fight. I always thought that he looked as though he was the offspring of Ursula from the little mermaid and a huge ugly toad. He is definitely one of my favorites.

SA: When watching the boss cutscenes in the game the player is given the distinct impression that Claw has personal history with the characters he encounters. Was any sort of backstory sketched out for these characters? If so, can you briefly outline them?

MH: Ok, so in my mind I had backstory to a lot of the bosses that I created....and 3 really stick out that I can remember (I guess you can consider this cannon since I did create the character)

Katherine O' Ninetails: She was Claw's Ex first mate that had tried to mutiny and take over his ship. She was stopped, but Claw was merciful and let her live. She still holds a pretty large grudge. She was also supposed to be Claw's ex-girlfriend, but our lead animator had a problem with Claw slapping around his Ex. I can understand why we changed that.

Magistrate Wolvington: He basically is one of the many lawmen trying to capture Claw for the reward. He is corrupt and ruthless. Claw had taken his eye and injured his hand in one cutlass thrust.

Captain Marrow: He is pretty much Claw's old mentor that is blackmailed by Redtail to do his bidding.

Yeah, there isn't much meat to those background stories, but I designed them in a matter of a few minutes... What do you want :)

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?

Claw is still one of my favorite projects I have worked on. I learned a great deal from being on that team. Monolith, I think, was pretty happy with the final product. But the bottom line is very important in this business and I don't think Claw had been as huge as they wanted (that leads to Claw II).

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

I was really excited as it was my first published game. That and I was a core character designer on it. Really big moment in my life up to that point.

SA: Looking back, is there anything that you would want to do differently if you had had more creative control or more time to work on concepts?

The main thing I would have liked to do is add more of the animal kingdom in there. I was planning for more of that in Claw 2.

SA: What do you think of the game and your work on it now, nearly 14 years later? I'm still really proud of it all this time later..... but I do look back at some of the character cells I painted and just shudder. I have gotten way better at Photoshop in the last 14 years.

Some of the Boss designs I wouldn't change all that much. Minor characters however make me wish I had more development time.

SA: You indicated that the unreleased sequel to Claw actually went pretty far into production before it was cancelled. Do you know why the project was ultimately cancelled?

Money. I think it was pretty much money. The initial interest in Claw wasn't big enough to warrant a sequel (I may have overstated how far a sequel got. We did some character development, and a demo level just to hash out a style. It would have been cool though).

Although, I never would have imagined the cult status the game has taken overseas. I'm really honored that fans still play and enjoy Claw.

SA: Was a story of any kind outlined for the sequel?

I don't remember much about the sequel. Other than some Bosses I created such as Arch Bishop Carindale and Govenor Thorson. I know we were going to have some elemental animals in there (fire, air, water, earth).

SA: What work, if any, did you do for the sequel?

Really, the only thing I did on the sequel was some preliminary character designs (some of which are in the materials I gave you.) I was really looking forward to it...but it was not meant to be :(