ART DEPARTMENT POST MORTEM

3/9 Milestone
>Animator: Eric Hedman
>Character modeler: Eric Chin
>Object Modeler: Charles London

GOALS:

To assess the efficiency of the various art creation pipelines
To recommend changes and additions to the various art creation pipelines

EVALUATION

DEFICIENCIES and REMEDIATION:

PROBLEM: *COMMUNICATION*

>Due to the **absence of the production art staff at the 2/26 Art Review at WC**, many of the comments relating to specific issues were more difficult to parse, out of context. This made it difficult at times for animation and character design resources to fully understand the scope of the milestone. As well, constantly changing milestone targets made it harder for the production line to be confident in their progress and direction.

SUGGESTED SOLUTION:

>**Work out a better attendance scheme** whereby the relevant artists with work at issue are exposed to the critique, while artists whose work is not central to the review discussion remains at the office, working. This will conversely require a **more focused art review agenda** so the audience may direct its attention more strongly on the particular subset of content under scrutiny. Where changing milestone goals and contents were due to illnesses and absence, there is nothing to be done.

PROBLEM: *LAG TIME FOR OBJECT CREATION*

>The efficiency of the object rendering artist's time is most profoundly affected by his or her **inability to quickly place an object into the game and view it.** This was hampered in two ways:
>- The .omk was not ready early enough
>- There was no available button in the catalog with which to buy the object

SUGGESTED SOLUTION:

>Regarding the .omk, the most straightforward solution would be to **have more lead time for the programmer** to write the necessary .omk file. This depends on a robust and well-defined set of database records having been put through their Designer and Artist passes. A second solution is for the **Art department to take some aspect of the .omk generation off Programming's plate**. If all that is at issue here is the generation of drawgroups, this can probably be done. Functionality need not be provided, since keyboard sprite preview is available.

>Regarding the button, absent the dynamic catalog, it would be nice to have some **dummy button** that is whatever object you wish it to be; perhaps it looks in /Objects/ to see all the .iff's, and lets you pick any object listed therein, with no cost.

PROBLEM: *LAG TIME FOR ANIMATION VIEWING*

>The efficiency of the object rendering artist's time is most profoundly affected by his or her **inability to quickly insert an animation into the game and view it.** Objects must have their trees ready for the animator to see them run, or use a clunky and hard to edit "dummy" object with

simple animation slots. As well, registered animations are very hard to review when they have not stub graphic ready to be played against.

SUGGESTED SOLUTION:
- Some kind of **improved dummy object(s)** that is easy for the animator to **load and remove animations** and graphics, and which appears in the dynamic catalog.
- Educate animator in the use of cbspr/cbcleanspr to allow finished, in-progress or stub graphics to be loaded onto dummies by the animator.
- Schedule animation and object creation so as to build up a backlog of object graphics for use by animator
- Keep VSS object graphics current with stages in creation procesdure so as to maximize the use of in-progress graphics
- Create a lean yet robust set of generalized stub graphics for use by the animator for when the graphics are not yet ready

PROBLEM: *MULTITILE OBJECTS and POKETHROUGH*
Currently, we have an "either/or" problem with **multitile or contiguous object pokethrough**. The best example is counter1 or bed3, where we want a seamless joining with an identical, or related, adjacent, like-oriented object, but don't want a poke-through into the wall. Currently, our strategy is to **"bleed" the object over the 3' width and make it overlap the adjacent object**, which works perfectly. Unfortunately, when the object sits **next to a wall, it pokes through.**

SUGGESTED SOLUTION:
The most straightforward solution is to manually **push back the z-buffer values** of the object until they no long intrude. This, however, is **very tedious and fraught with error**. A better solution would be for the **sprite export tool to do this** for us.

PROBLEM: *MODELING--LONG CREATION TIME*
Bringing the **models of objects and skin meshes up to the new bar of quality took longer per item** than expected. The three main obstacles are:
- the inadequacy of the Max default renderer in producing realistic lighting effects
- General clunkiness in some of MAX's mapping techniques.
- the lack of rendering speed on the authoring machine for tackling the complex multiple lights/shadowing effect.

SUGGESTED SOLUTION:
MAXv2 is known to have a **radically improved rendering engine** and **realistic lighting model**, so the migration to Max2 will take care of much of this problem. As well, there are now available at least 1 **third party radiosity/raytracing plugin package** for rendering, should the new, default renderer be deemed lacking.
MAXv2 also ships with **more sophisticaed mapping and previewing tools.**
Upgrading the machine used to author the objects to very fast processor with OpenGl accelerator card & Big RAM (no brainer)

STRENGTHS:

- The orderly process of Designer, Artist, Programmer DB passes first emerged this milestone.
- Skin iteration was quick and seamless
- Motion iteration was quick and seamless
- The Art Review of 2/26 commentary was rolled in, with dramatic results.
- Chin is now up to speed regarding VSS and other standardized software

SUMMARY

The art department performed very well under trying circumstances and shifting goals. The art improved radically between the 1/30 and 3/9 milestones, and the team had its widest exposure to all production pipelines to date. This milestone was a success for the Art Department

Requested new tools/functionality:
- Improved animation preview dummy object
- Auto z-buffer "pusher" to clip out pokethrough
- Dynamic catalog
- More powerful computer for object graphics making
- MAXv2

Suggested technique changes:
- More lead time for .omk and object stub/IP graphics creation for dependent resources
- Deeper team artist participation with general Art Reviews/more focused reviews