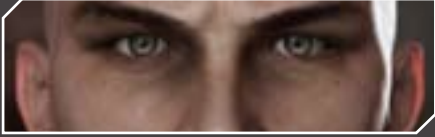




rich
diamond
an interview with



rich diamant

Hi Rich, Thanks for talking to us. Apologies for the first most obvious question, but how did it all start for you?

No problem! Well let's see. I've probably been drawing and painting for as long as I can remember. So I always knew I'd want to do something related to art. I think I actually wanted to become an architect at some point. Don't ask me why!! Around the time of high school I started getting more into portrait painting, while trying to achieve a very realistic style to my art. I think I've always been more into realism than "cartoony". I actually had one of my paintings tour all of New Jersey, where I'm originally from. It was a very cool feeling! And considering I, like most artists out there, didn't get the best of grades, it finally gave me the confidence to realise that I won't just be one of those starving artist types. I got my first powerful computer in my sophomore year of high school and pretty much everything changed from there. I got heavily into video games and computers in general. I was a big Warcraft and Diablo fan and absolutely fell in love with their cinematics. I think it was then that I realised I wanted to make games for the rest of my life. I am the type of person that goes after what he wants.



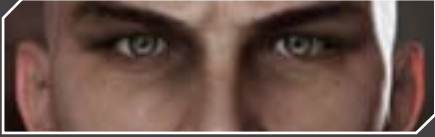
So, considering I knew that I wanted to make games, I did as much as I could to make that a reality. Computers have always come easy to me. So I knew I had the technical background to learn anything I needed to learn. The hardest part was finding out information. The internet

was just starting to get big. The only two choices I remember having for service back then was 'AOL' or 'Prodigy'. Great choices huh!! There really were no cg forums yet. At least not that I knew of. So my only choices really, were to try to figure out what I needed to do on my own.

I begged my parents to buy me some type of 3d software. Again... I knew nothing! So I went to my local computer store and found the only 3d software that was available. Truespace! Well, I tried. It was hard. That's all I'm gonna say about that. With college just around the corner, I did my best to research as much as I could and to find a schooling that would teach me anything that had to do with 3d. Being from the east coast I had some good school options available to me. I got into both the School of Visual Arts in New York and the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. SVA had a really amazing silicon graphics lab but I wasn't too keen on being in New York. So I chose the latter. During my freshman year, the University of the Arts had started a brand new Multimedia program. It gave me the chance to learn a wide variety of different programs. I also had access to learning my first real 3d package, Softimage 3d. After 3 years in the program I started to have the feeling that I wasn't learning what I needed to learn. The program was tailored towards web page design and multimedia presentations, rather than anything game-related. So I decided to leave school and see what the real world was like. About a week after leaving, I started looking for a job and one sort of fell in my lap. A local game company, Hypnotix, was looking for a 3d guy to help get their cinematics finished on one of their games.



In the interview I remember telling my boss that I would work for free, as long as I get to work on games. That probably wasn't too smart considering the salary they offered me was close to that! Its ok though, I think if I saw the work I showed them back then I wouldn't have hired me! I also made the mistake of wearing a suit to the interview. I got laughed at, a lot, but of course I didn't find that out until about 6 months after I started! Word to the wise, DON'T WEAR A SUIT ON AN INTERVIEW! What did I know? I'm from Jersey! Everyone wears suits to job interviews around New



York! Well, I got the job, soaked up everything I possibly could, got about 3 pay-raises in the course of a year and got promoted to Lead Artist when I was about 22. The rest, as they say, is history!

“WITH COLLEGE JUST AROUND THE CORNER, I DID MY BEST TO RESEARCH AS MUCH AS I COULD AND TO FIND A SCHOOLING THAT WOULD TEACH ME ANYTHING...”

And what made you take this career path?

Well, since Hypnotix had a fairly small team, I had the opportunity to work on just about every aspect of the game. It really was great being able to work on both environments and characters. It gave me the chance to understand all of the technical aspects that go into creating a game from every angle. Being on the east coast, however, did limit my knowledge of



how other game companies worked. So when I decided to move on from Hypnotix, I knew I had to decide which area of the game I wanted to focus on. I always enjoyed making environments, but loved making characters. So when I started applying to other studios, I decided to apply as a character artist.

“...I GOT THE JOB, SOAKED UP EVERYTHING I POSSIBLY COULD, GOT ABOUT 3 PAY-RAISES IN THE COURSE OF A YEAR...”

What is it about character creation that makes the job so great?

That's a hard question. There are so many great things about working on characters, especially if you get the chance to work on the main ones. For one, your characters get to be the centerpiece of the game, if the game permits. They do tend to get the most scrutiny however, but they also tend to have the greatest reward. I don't think there is any greater feeling then when you hear, "Wow, that character is amazing!"

In my opinion, working on characters has a huge advantage over environments. Because it's just one character, you can really focus all of your attention on one task, not having to worry about a gigantic area to populate. There is also a huge technical side to creating game characters, especially with next generation ones.

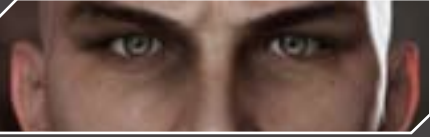


That is one of the areas that I really love. I love figuring out new ways of achieving results and new and more efficient pipelines.

You recently moved to 'Naughty Dog' of Crash Bandicoot and Jak & Daxter Fame. How did that happen?

At the time I was working at NCSOFT in Santa Monica. When I got hired I was supposed to work on the cinematic team. Unfortunately that team only lasted a couple of months. The studio was formed initially as a concept house to handle all of the concepts for studios worldwide. They decided to get a hold of the giant talent pool in LA and see if they could also produce a functioning cinematic studio.





After a series of communication problems, they decided to get rid of the cinematic team after I was there for about 2 months. So anyone that had anything to do with 3d pretty much got laid off, except for me. They decided to keep me around since I had a vast knowledge of games and pipelines in addition to high end cinematic know-how. I was going to help out as much as I could in making sure that their next generation games were up to a certain standard.

I'll tell you, it really was an amazing place to work. The concept team that they had there was probably in the whole, the best I've seen anywhere. I learned so much from just being around those guys. Unfortunately, my role there never got clearly defined. I felt more like an outsider being the only 3d guy and realised that I missed working in an actual production environment. So it was about time to start looking into other options.

I actually got a hold of the Offset guys after seeing their amazing videos online and was originally supposed to be heading up the character side over there. After months and



months of waiting for deals to be signed and constantly wanting to be back in production, I decided to contact one of my recruiters and see what else was out there. He immediately sent me an opening for a texture/material artist over at Naughty Dog. I really wasn't too interested at first, since I wanted to do more than just texture and materials. But he convinced me to meet with them, since they are known as one of the best companies to work for in the industry.



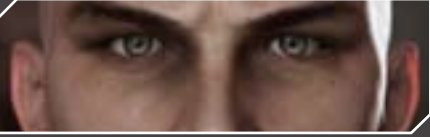
Rich Diamant an interview with

A couple of hours after agreeing to forward them my work, I got a call from Bob Rafei, the art director at Naughty Dog, asking me to come in the next day to interview. I was like, "sure, no problem!" I went on the interview the next day during my lunch break and presented them with some of my newer work that I can't present online. I also, upon their request, brought in sample files to explain my workflow in more detail. Since I had a limited amount of time, I pretty much ended up doing most of the talking and showing off. I didn't get a chance to see what project they were actually working on. Since it was top secret, nothing was really available for me to even see! So I left a little disappointed. However, the next day I got a call from Evan Wells, who is the co-owner of Naughty Dog, reassuring me that the position would not be limited to only texturing and shading. I told him I really needed to see what they were working on before I could make any further decisions. So he said no problem, come in tomorrow and he'll show me everything. So the next day I went back and Evan and Bob proceeded to show me everything they had. And I must say, I was truly blown away. The technology and plans they had would remove restrictions that hinder other game studios. I had a feeling it would be something special. After thinking over the offer for a few days, I came to the decision that nothing else even came close to Naughty Dog. I've been there for about four months now and it's been an amazing experience.



What is your main role at naughty dog?

I was initially hired as a character artist but have recently been promoted to Lead Character Artist, in charge of overseeing anything character related. I deal mostly with character pipelines and coming up with both new and innovative ideas. I also get the honor of working on all of the main characters in the game.



How does it compare to previous jobs you have had?

Naughty Dog is on the forefront of technology which allows me to be on the forefront of next generation character development. I've never actually been at a place that is all about setting new standards and has the means of doing so. Naughty Dog also has an amazing relationship with Sony, which allows us almost complete control of how our game turns out. The freedom we have to explore and innovate is truly amazing.

“...THERE ARE SO MANY GREAT THINGS ABOUT WORKING ON CHARACTERS, ESPECIALLY IF YOU GET THE CHANCE TO WORK ON THE MAIN ONES.”

What inspires you? (video games, films etc).

Everything really inspires me. I love video games, art, movies, music, computers and technology. If something is new and cool I'm all over it! I also get inspired by the people around me. I'm a very passionate person with my work so anytime I see that passion from someone else, regardless of the field, it motivates me to make a difference. I also try to inspire others around me. I'm all about pushing the envelope and getting everyone else excited to be a part of something special.

Do you get any time for personal artworks any more?

Not as much time as I would like. Its really hard trying to juggle a full time job that is very demanding, a girlfriend 3, 000 miles away, and a family across the country that I'm trying not to miss. Not to mention a social life! Every once in a while I make sure that I get the chance to do some personal work. I think it's an extremely necessary thing. It's the one time I get to really experiment and learn new things without worrying about deadlines. I'm also really big on learning and playing with new tools and

programs. I think I'd go nuts if I wasn't able to do at least some things at home.

In addition I am in the beginning stages of working on a series of DVD's with one of my co-workers, Judd Simantov, creator of www.cgmuscle.com, on character modeling and advanced TD work. It hopefully will be something new and extremely valuable to anybody looking to create feature quality work. Hopefully there will be some more information in the near future regarding this. (Blatant sales pitch!)

One piece of professional advice for our readers?

Don't stop learning! The most successful people I've met are the ones who are always on top of their game. They know the latest and greatest methods of working and are constantly trying new ways to enhance themselves as artists. A vast knowledge of tools and pipelines will easily give you an edge over someone else whose knowledge is very limited. This industry is not easy. To be the best, you have to work for it. Good luck to all and thanks for reading!

RICH DIAMANT

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