

30th January 1995

Mark,

Further to our 'phone call, I just thought I'd jot down some notes on the clay idea...

Method:

- ◆ Make a relief model in clay of whole vivarium, viewed sideways-on (as at present).
- ◆ Use diorama techniques (flattened perspective) for distant features on surface and for foreground objects. Model need therefore be no more than 2 inches deep.
- ◆ Paint it (acrylics? + varnish?)
- ◆ Add separately modelled objects (tables, etc.) made from clay and/or fabric, wire, wood. Could use ready-made dolls-house furniture, crockery, etc. if appropriate?
- ◆ Photograph in several sections with longish lens on big format (2¼ square) camera, to reduce perspective effects.
- ◆ scan photos in 24-bit colour.
- ◆ Matte images. Stitch edges & dress up artwork (use 'natural' paint tools).
- ◆ Convert to 246-colour tiles.
- ◆ Cut out foreground objects & convert them to sprites.
- ◆ Make creatures and animateable objects out of clay, too.

I've done some experiments, and within the limits of my feeble artistic talent and lousy digitiser, they show a lot of promise. It took me less than a day to model, dry, paint, digitise and stitch one small furnished room and a portion of surface, so even with a lot more care, I don't think it would take an impossible amount of time to do.

Pros & Cons

Advantages

- ◆ 3D look and feel. Excellent texture & lighting effects.
- ◆ Charming dolls-house, tin-pot, "Tales from the Riverbank" sort of a feel. Very endearing.
- ◆ Creatures will look 3 inches high (they'd probably look 6 feet high if rendered, because rendering is too 'perfect').
- ◆ *Must* be faster to execute than rendering.

- ◆ Better natural textures and randomness than rendering. No restrictions about how many elements, or how complex they can be. No need to repeat elements - every tree can be unique.
- ◆ Gain some kudos from association with highly popular clay animations (Creature Comforts, etc.).
- ◆ Novel method (almost) for a computer game - nobody to compete with or be compared to.
- ◆ Creatures and animated objects could be done the same way - characterful; expressive; excellent animation potential.
- ◆ Model exists as a real object - allows photograph quality promotional & box art; could sell porcelain miniatures, even!?
- ◆ *Every* element in the game would then be a novel or unusual one: articulated animation, brains, computer pet concept, user interface *and* the graphics technique.

Possible problems

- ◆ Size of model - maybe 6x4 feet for Outgard! (though can split into sections).
- ◆ Might be slow or costly to produce (though I'm greatly encouraged to find that we have the skills in-house!!!).
- ◆ Parallax effects might cause some problems: fish-eye distortion; clipping problems (though these would be at least as troublesome in a rendered world).
- ◆ Effect might not be as good as I hope.
- ◆ Are there severe practical problems working with large amounts of un-fireable clay that I don't know about?

Other thoughts

Split Albia into several separate regions (vivaria), starting with a modified Outgard and adding others (jungle etc.) if we have time - else provide them later as add-ons. Put a physical barrier near both edges, e.g. sea to west, mountains to east. Ship, balloon, etc. could then be the means of travelling from one region to the next.

Could possibly produce decent geology by laying down layers of coloured clay and folding/faulting them under pressure (or as they are laid down) to produce the basic substrate that the burrows are carved from. Some layers could contain sand or small pebbles.

If it's not possible to model creatures and small objects in the same scale as the backdrop, we might be able to make many of them larger, and scale them down after digitising.

Let me know what you think!

