

Interview With Daniel Suarez, Activision Exec. Producer

Contributed by Quantumhawk
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As the release of *astf* nears, the Allspark is fortunate to have had the opportunity to talk details with Daniel Suarez, Executive Producer at Activision for the Transformers games. The Allspark: What memories do you have of Transformers personally?

Daniel Suarez: For this answer I thought it would be appropriate for those reading to understand that this franchise and this game really does mean a lot to those making it. Here are some quotes taken from different members of the Activision production team and our developers on their fondest Transformer memories:

Callum Godfrey (Producer - Console): When I was 4 years old... at my house in the village of Long Itchington and watching the G1 series and seeing teletran 1 scan the big rig that would become Optimus Prime, then seeing him come to life and transform in to it! At that point I was just stunned!

Jonathan Shaller (Artist- Console): When the Transformers the movie came out, I was invited to go see it at a friend's birthday party. The film blew me away. It introduced so many new characters which my brother and I and our neighbors would act out in backyards during play fights and other kid's games. My favorite toy was the Decepticon Scourge. Above all the transformers toys it seemed he looked and transformed in the most satisfying way to me. To this day Transformers the movie still holds a place amongst my DVD collection and many people I know.

Andrew Rai (Lead Artist & PSP): I really wanted Sharkticon when I was like 9, but my mom never got me one. My Sharkticon dreams later came true while in the San Francisco Chinatown on a family vacation; I was lured in by a red bootleg version that was at a price that not even my mother could say no to. I was quickly disillusioned as this version lacked the chewing action and quickly fell apart.

Chacko Sonny (Creative Director & PSP): I would fight with my sister for control of the TV remote so that I could watch Transformers. I remember the first time I saw Soundwave eject his "cassettes" & Ravage, Laserbeak, and Rumble. It was the coolest thing I had ever seen. Since then, Soundwave has been one of my favorite characters, followed closely by Ultra Magnus. AS: Will any other platforms have bonus characters besides the PSP version? DS: The PSP version of Transformers: The Game has the widest variety of bonus characters, but the Nintendo DS and console versions will also have special unlockable bonus characters. We can't divulge which ones they are yet, but we've been very careful to pick a variety of well known characters and even some unique repaints for the console and handheld games that will appeal to all the fanboys out there. AS: What about the TF movie licensed games do you see attracting the casual game player who may not have seen the movie beforehand?

DS: Let me see. Imagine playing a high speed sports car burning down the street at 80 MPH, suddenly transforming into a 20 foot Autobot and ripping up street lamps and slamming cars out of your way to unleash a barrage of projectile attacks against his Decepticon arch-nemesis (who just swooped out of the sky in the form of a jet and just transformed right before your eyes). Now combine that concept with the expertise of Traveller's Tales on consoles & who've been known for developing the Star Wars Lego games, as well as a number of other hit games over the last 15 years; Vicarious Visions on handheld, the team most notable for doing the handheld versions of Tony Hawk and Spiderman on Nintendo DS and lastly, Savage Entertainment who developed Star Wars Battlefront on PSP. I don't know about you, but I think that would appeal to the casual gamer.

AS: How do you hope to garner interest in these games with the public? Will you market them to Transformers fans primarily, or to the game review sites like gamespot.com?

DS: This game will appeal to a wide audience. The movie is the quintessential summer movie for all ages and will have something for everyone, and the game will be similar. We are focusing some of our attention on making the die-hard fans happy and are also doing things specifically for the gamer community because Transformers is important for them too. AS: What plans for the future do you have if these games are popular enough to greenlight a sequel? DS: Activision is committed to making Transformers: The Game and at this time we are concentrating our efforts on creating the best game we can. AS: What resources from the movie production were made available to you in making these games?

DS: We were very fortunate to get an early introduction to the creative design process on Transformers being headed up by Production Designer Jeff Mann and his creative crew. Working with Aaron Archer at Hasbro and Ian Bryce, producer on the film, we were able to get an all-access pass to the early storyboards, vehicle designs and inspiration for the film.

The producers were really instrumental in ensuring that we had access to the things we needed and the biggest breakthrough came when we were given access to the ILM character models used in the film. We were able to translate these film assets to the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions of the game and seeing them implemented for the first time was jaw dropping.

Lastly, we've been working directly with the film composer, Steve Jablonsky to develop our film score. Steve has created some great music for our game that has tremendous intensity and action in its tone. AS: Tell us about your excitement at rumors that Hasbro is interested in making toys of characters created for these games. DS: From the onset of the project we had to create a variety of Autobot and Decepticon soldier characters beyond the core characters from the film and franchise. They were needed to fill out the game world as adversaries. We began work with a very talented concept artist named Ken Christiansen who, in collaboration with Aaron Archer, designed the look and style of these characters. The thought of having some of these characters made into toys is exciting. AS: Do you have any plans to utilize the rapidly-expanding market for cell-phone games?

DS: Glu Mobile is publishing the cell-phone games based on the upcoming Transformers movie. You'll have to ask them that one. AS: How much creative license did Hasbro and the movie producers give you in creating the game and the characters?

DS: We were fortunate very early on in the process to be able to establish great relationships with all the key groups associated with Transformers: The Hasbro creative team (Aaron Archer and Richard Zambrano), the film makers (Michael Bay, Ian Bryce, Mark Vahradian, Erik Howsam) and the production team at ILM. They've given us tremendous support and we've worked closely with Hasbro and movie producers to ensure we get things right. AS: How different will the flow of the game be for a Decepticon player, compared to an Autobot player? DS: In the console game you get to choose your alignment at the start of the game. Are you a good and noble Autobot character or a wretched and evil Decepticon character? The choice to destroy the earth or protect it is yours. The storyline, game environments, missions and playable characters are different for the Autobot and Decepticon campaigns. The Autobots' campaign pretty much follows the storyline of the film. The Decepticons' campaign asks the question, "What if the Decepticons were able to win?" and lets you play it out that way. You get to play the Decepticons and blow everything in your path to bits playing as Megatron, Starscream and a squad of other deadly Decepticons at your control. AS: What's been the most exciting part of this game's development for you? DS: Wow, that's a tough one. First and foremost I would say having Steven Spielberg and Michael Bay see and play the game. Michael and his production team have been tremendous supporters for the game. We've been to his studio, we've been on set and he's even crammed about 20 members of the production team into his avid editing room to show us about an hour worth of the film very early on to inspire us and really allow us to understand his vision for Transformers. AS: Is the potential there for non-movie based games in the future, like a true G1/G2 game or a Beast Era game? DS: Like I said before, Activision is committed to making Transformers: The Game and at this time we are concentrating our efforts on creating the best game we can. AS: What have been some of the challenges in creating this game that you either hadn't anticipated or are unique to a Transformers game?

DS: What happens when a human is sitting in a Transformers character that's in vehicle mode and it transforms? This was in a piece of concept artwork that was given to us by Hasbro really early on in the process and it made me think, "What happens?" The point I'm trying to get at is that there are a lot of crazy things that can happen when you are dealing with robots that can turn into cars, planes, trucks, etc. I'd say that the transformations themselves were one of the most complex things we had to figure out. Since it is a core feature for the game and we allow players to do it at any time, it needed to look spectacular. Jez Pardon and Simon James, two of the animators at Traveller's Tales, reviewed and re-reviewed all different kinds of ways to do it by looking at what ILM was doing and then capturing the essence of it and making it fun. The results are awesome and definitely something that makes the game unique. AS: The Atari Transformers game gave fans hope that a good Transformers game could be made after so many previous disappointments. With that said, what would you like to tell all the fans out there about your project?

DS: Transformers: The Game will deliver the deepest Transformers experience ever in a videogame. The game's unprecedented character line-up lets gamers experience the massive scale, sheer strength and wide range of abilities of all their favorite Transformers including Optimus Prime, Bumblebee, Megatron, Starscream, Ironhide and many more.

The game delivers multiple new and unique features including the ability to transform at any time from vehicle to robot and vice-versa instantaneously. This gives the player the freedom to transform between robot and vehicle forms and combat enemies on the ground as gigantic robots, in the skies as military planes and helicopters or as speeding automobiles and semi-trucks. Additionally, the environments are interactive and destructible, so if you pick up a phone booth or lamppost and throw it at a building or Decepticon character — it will react by being destroyed and blowing off pieces of debris or getting knocked back to the ground. It makes for some really dramatic in-game fight sequences.

Lastly, we feel we're delivering a game that is both for movie fans and the G1 fans. This is a game based on Transformers: The Movie, but it's not your traditional — see the movie / play the game. The dual campaign option to play Autobots or Decepticons completely throws that concept out the window and gives die-hard Transformers

fans one thing they've always wanted – to be bad. With this game the choice is yours.

Since the very beginning, we've been very conscious to integrate characters, locations and even subtle acknowledgements to G1 anywhere we can. There are a lot of special surprises that we think the established fans will enjoy. I really think there's some unique elements and bonus features that will definitely get fans excited. AS: And that's it folks! A big thank you to Daniel for your time and all the folks at Activision. Be sure to check back here for further exclusive news and updates!