The Mark of Kri™ – Questions & Answers

Answers supplied by: Dan Mueller

1. What were your goals when developing The Mark of Kri?

Everything we did, we did with one thing in mind -- entertainment. We wanted the player to look good at playing the game, and feel good about how he looked when playing it. You know, when someone's playing a game and his buddies are pushing him to hand over the controller because the game looks that much fun to play. That reaction was our ultimate goal.

2. How long was the game in development?

A couple years.

3. In your estimation, did you meet your intended goals for the project?

Yes, I do. We are thrilled with the reaction the game is receiving. It's very satisfying when you've been working on something for two years, and you hear the players get excited about the stuff you hoped they would.

4. What went right (and wrong) in the development process?

Hmmmm.. Ok, the stuff that went wrong first.
        The game took longer, and cost more than we anticipated. We underestimated the sheer amount of information we had to impart on the player to get our new game mechanics across. We underestimated the sheer amount of information we had to impart on the player to get our "Mark of Kri" story line across.

The stuff that went right- but I'm biased.
        The combat system actually working as well as we hoped. Bringing animation to the forefront of the game, making the player look good- without having to be a professional gamer. The juxtaposition of animated style and brutal combat. The integration of an interactive musical score, that actually helps the mood without annoying the heck out of you. Telling the story in a more creative way than just plain old boring CG. Injecting legitimate strategy and depth in an action game. Being able to actually fight nine guys's at once. Managing to disguise an arcade game in the wrappings of an RPG. Getting Sony to allow us to put the axe, and all of it's nasty glory in the game.

5. Was it difficult to get the performance you desired out of the PS2?

Not as far as I'm aware. We limited the amount of enemies based on game-play, not performance. This gave the engineering team a somewhat solid number to work with (except we did change it once I think).

6. The game runs at 60 fps (frames per second) but gets choppy during busy scenes. Do you feel that a more or less stable 60 fps should be a goal of more game designers today? Is 30 fps on the way out?

I don't know if I would say that it's on it's way out. It all comes down to the game- if it's fun at 30fps, I doubt that the consumer would abandon the game in favor of a mediocre game that runs at 60fps. We chose 60fps because of our combat system, and animation. It works, and looks good at 60fps- now if we found the gameplay needed twelve guys attacking you to really shine, we may have gone to 30fps.

7. What were the main inspirations behind Kri's gameplay?

We wanted to make a game in the fantasy genre that didn't smack of dungeon and dragons influences. Something like the original "Conan" movie – clearly fantasy, but with some plausibility to it. We built on this initial idea as people joined the development team; the painted look we hoped would set it aside from other titles in the same genre, as we hoped the main character would too. The animation was an early decision, as I mentioned before- we wanted the player to look really cool when he was playing the game, causing that "grab the controller from your buddy" dynamic.

When we first set about creating the combat system, we were frustrated with the games that were already out there. We referred to these as using "Focal attack" systems, where the player was required to aim his character in order to attack. Having to physically turn your character to attack the guy behind you, is slow and frustrating, and in no way simulates dexterous combat. In *The Mark of Kri*, we aimed for a combat system where you could hit enemies from all directions with the dexterity and fluidity normally seen in Kung-fu movies.

Removing the need to orientate oneself during combat really sped up our game, and it also allowed us to place the camera in more cinematic locations, than just behind the main character.

8. The character art style reminds me of that seen in the recent Disney movie Lilo & Stitch. Does Kri have any Disney connection? What were the major artistic influences?

Only in the sense that some of our artists formerly worked in some of the animation studio's in LA.
The style came from a number of locations. Tim and I loved the dark, grittiness of the original Conan movie, and it's plausibly fantastic nature. We are huge fans of Frank Frazetta, and his work in the fantasy genre, and wanted to make a Fantasy game that reflected this side of fantasy- and not the Elves and leopard people side. But when Jeff Merghart and Erik Medina came on board was when the look really began to solidify. They took our original vision (Conan, Frazetta) and injected an animated flavor to the concept art- taking inspiration themselves from movies such as Mulan and Tarzan.

9. It's nice how the hand-drawn cinemas fade into the real-time 3D game engine. Was this effect hard to get exactly right? What was made first -- the 3D scene or the 2D drawing?

Both. Well, we conceptualised everything, and some of it has transitioned extremely well into the game. But, as for the "bookend" effect- we first built the level, then Jeff sketched backwards, or forwards from it.

10. Kri's enemy targeting system is rather innovative -- so much so that you've applied for a patent. Isn't that rather unprecedented for a video game element of this nature?

I think that patents are becoming more and more visible in the videogame industry. Sony felt that the combat system was something that they wanted to patent. We (the team) were not the ones who pursued this, but were in a way were flattered that Sony had that kind of faith in the system. It's my understanding that all of the big companies are getting into the patent thing. Whatever, I just want to make games.

11. Are you satisfied with the final implementation of the targeting and battle system? What might be improved in a following game?

Yes. Again I'm biased- but I think it works really well. How would we improve on it? Well if I told you that I'd be giving away our ideas for a sequel- and we all know what a plagaristic bunch of bastards we all are in this industry- hence the need for patents….. Just kidding.

12. In regard to future games, will we be seeing Kri's targeting system (or a variant of it) anytime soon?

Unfortunately, I'm not at liberty to talk about future games right now. But….. I want to build on the combat system. We feel it needs to evolve in a very obvious direction, and that is something I would personally love to see happen.

13. Do you think Sony would allow a GameCube or Xbox developer to license this system?

Who knows- I just make the games man.

14. Does the team have any best times / body counts for the Arena challenges they'd like to share?

Nah, people were beating our high scores within the first week. Some people that we read about on various message boards have got really good at the game.

15. There's an interesting little story behind the origin of Rau's name, isn't there?

Not that I'm aware- we do have some real interesting late night beer stories though.

16. The end of the game hints at a sequel. Do you have any definite plans so far?

If the public continues to respond to the game with as much enthusiasm as we've seen so far, yes. Then will get the opportunity to further explain the origins of the Kasai, the Rakus, and Kri in future games- not to mention expanding on the combat system. But, the game has to sell first- so buy, buy, buy.

17. What's next for your studio?

Of course we would love to do a sequel to "MOK", but in the interim we have "ATV offroad fury 2" that we are producing coming soon, and some other fun games in the pipeline that I'm not allowed to talk about yet.

Speaking for the "MOK team", we want to make games that smack of pre-production, that are beautiful, but ultimately fun. Whether we make a sequel to "the mark of Kri" or not, you can be sure that the next title we do make will have the same values. So watch this space.

Developer: SCEA San Diego Studio	**Publisher:** SCEE	**Genre:** Action Adventure
Players: 1	**Peripherals**: Analog Controller (DUALSHOCK 2), Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2)	