GameSpy Game Developer Diary – Part Three

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This week, Scott Shepherd, our Lead Character Artist, is going to take you on a trip through one of the creepy enemies you'll face in the upcoming *Condemned 2*. This is a unique enemy with a very cool gameplay element that clearly hits that 'creepy, disconcerting' feel that we've been working towards.

The Deform

Brainstorming

Approaching this project, the character team really wanted to push the enemies much further than we had done in the first *Condemned* game. We wanted them to be much scarier, weirder, and more grotesque than anything we had done before. We started by taking a look at all of the enemies we did in the previous project. We created a survey that was distributed to the entire company asking a series of questions about each of the various crazies you ran into in the game. Which ones were your favorites? Which ones were the scariest? Etc. etc. We then took this data and pulled out the strong and weak points of each and went to the drawing board. World Art and Game Design were busy coming up with all sorts of creepy locales for the game to take place in, so we took the most likely of these locales and started brainstorming characters to fit them. We took the data we had from the survey and pushed these ideas towards enemies we felt the players would enjoy fighting against and something we would enjoy making. We explored lots of ideas during this phase, but the goal was to create a direction (or two) to steer the vision of the games enemies in, not so much specific characters. However, in a few cases, an idea just stuck with us from start to finish.

We came up with the concept of having some sort of security camera in the game. But when we really started thinking about it we thought "okay but what would a *Condemned* security camera look like?" Some sort of disfigured, deformed person bound and suspended from the ceiling, obviously. We wanted to bring elements of characters or mechanics that have worked in other games, but we wanted to do them in a completely unique and *Condemned* sort of way. This is a quick preproduction sketch illustrating that concept.

Concepting

When it comes time to concept a character, we hold a meeting involving the Art Director, the concept artist, the lead character artist, the game designer, and the level designer responsible for the level the character will appear in. If this is a character we discussed during preproduction, we bring any materials or ideas we had generated from that time. We then talk with the level designer and game designer to see what kind of gameplay they are looking for out of this character. What does he do? Where does he live? Then we all sit around and throw out ideas of what we can do visually that takes advantage of the gameplay, the strengths of our technology, and feels at home in that environment. The concept artist then leaves that meeting with a bunch of ideas to explore and a list of goals to accomplish with this character.

One of the ideas that came out of the meeting for this character was that he was actually blind and used sound to track you. The original idea was that they were harmless and when they detected you, they simply screamed as an alarm bringing in other bad guys. The game designers felt the character should also have an attack, so we incorporated that into the design (though I'm not telling you exactly what it is). Chris Alderson concepted this piece and did a fantastic job of taking a rough idea and bringing it to that scarier, weirder, more grotesque place we all wanted to go.

Model Building

Once the concept piece has been approved by the art director and looked over for any technical risks, the task is then handed over to the Modeler (who in this case was the same artist who did the concept) The process from here is standard model building stuff. We create a highpoly mesh, and a low poly mesh and generate normal maps to transfer all the detail.
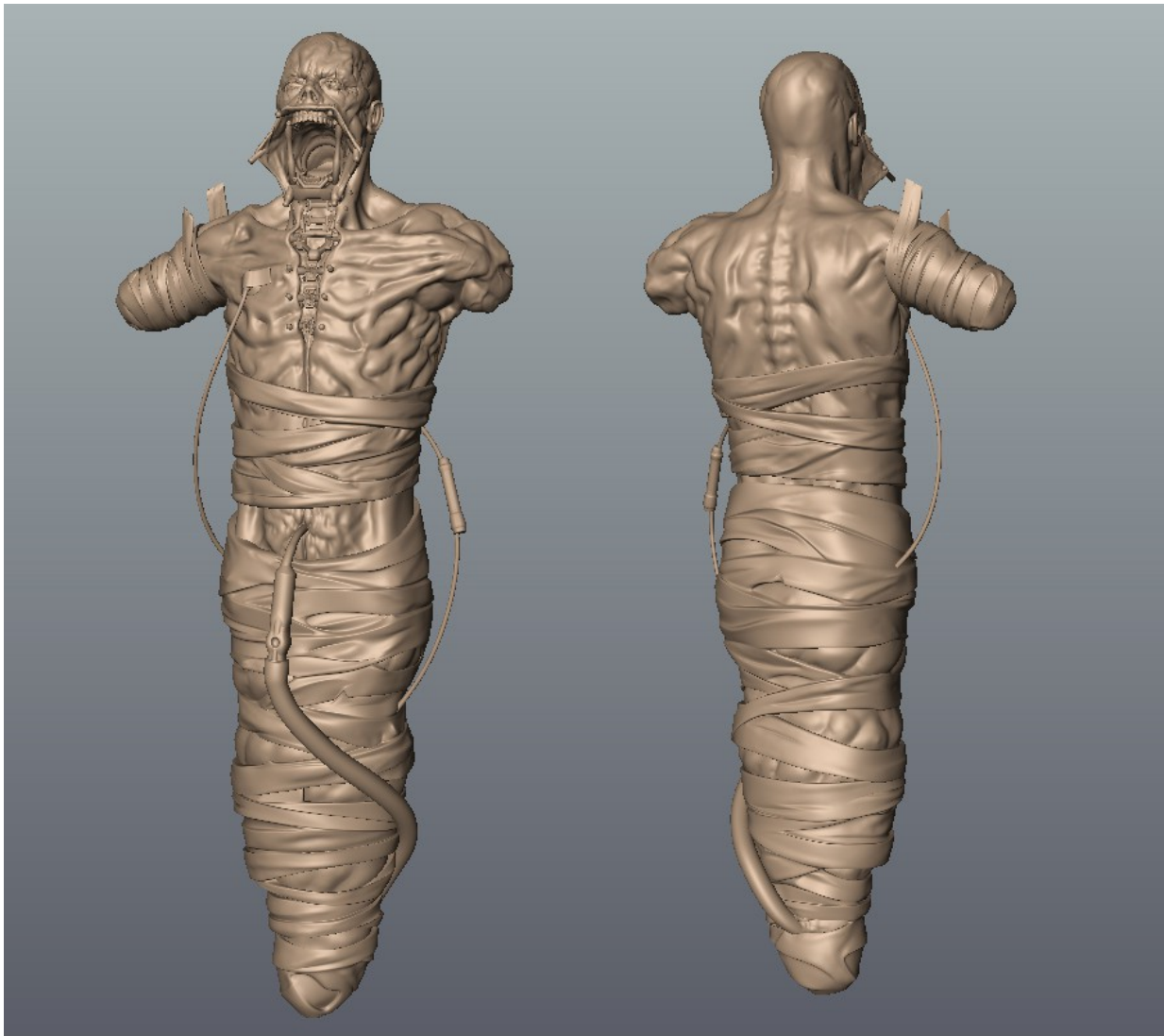
This high poly model was built in maya and then detailed in Mudbox. Once the normal maps are done the character gets put into the game with a flat color on it. The game engine shaders are more complex than what we see in maya, so all other texturing work is done directly in the game, on the console. Our tools allow us to paint in photoshop, save the file and it immediately updates the character in the game world. The finished result is what you see below. After this, it's off to the animators where the character really gets brought to life…

(mad respect to incredible Character Artist Chris Alderson for creating the concept and Model you see above… -- Scott)