The
Marathon
Scrapbook

The Marathon Scrapbook

BUNGiE

It all started with PONG. Well, a ripoff of PONG anyway.

It was 1991 and Alexander Seropian was in his basement apartment in Chicago's Hyde Park, cheerfully blowing off classes at the University of Chicago. Normally this quiet, intense young man would be too responsible to do this sort of thing, but this day was different. Alex had stumbled upon a resounding truth while chewing his Cheerios that morning, and his whole outlook on life changed in an instant.

"It is better to be The Man," Alex realized, "than to work for The Man."

Alex scribbled out a list of career options that would allow him to rapidly ascend to The Man-hood in comfort and style. "Starfleet Commander" was out; Alex needed a short-term solution. He also crossed out "Sultan of an Oil-Rich Country," although the idea of buxom wenches feeding him goat cheese and fanning him with peacock feathers was incredibly appealing. After crossing out "Jimmy Page circa 1970" he found himself left with a single choice: "Benevolent Dictator of a Computer-Game Empire."

Alex dropped his cereal bowl in the sink, jogged down to the campus bookstore and skulked up to the register with a copy of Think C. He returned home to his Macintosh, determined to do whatever was necessary to become a one-man wrecking crew in the software industry. He agonized over what he would name his company, finally settling on "Bungie" because "it sounded fun."

His first shot at glory, GNOP!, fell somewhat short of the global-dominance mark. A black-and-white clone of the game that started the whole home videogaming industry back in 1972, GNOP! was enjoyable enough if you had an unquenchable nostalgia for the 'Good Old Days of Gaming,' but most people saw it for what it was: Pong, but backwards.

Alex distributed GNOP! as shareware via online services and the Internet. A handful of people sent in their shareware fees, and a few kind souls even took him up on his "Complete GNOP! Source Code for $15" offer. Encouraged, Alex set about writing his next project, Operation: Desert Storm. O:DS was a more ambitious project than GNOP. Alex spent a lot of time researching modern tank warfare and wove a fair amount of detail into the game. Operation: Desert Storm was also the first boxed, shrinkwrapped Bungie product aimed at capturing shelf space. Packaged in Alex's apartment, on floppy disks swiped from Alex's summer internship at a megalithic software company, O:DS was an unknown property from an unknown company and had a hard time finding distribution. Alex still managed to sell about 2500 copies of the game.

Shortly thereafter, Alex met up with fellow University of Chicago student, Jason Jones, a talented 23-year-old programmer who had written a game called Minotaur: The Labyrinths of Crete. Minotaur was a top-down tile-based fantasy game in the tradition of the early Ultima series, with one major difference: it had no single-player scenario. A proper game of Minotaur required two or more people playing over a network - a remarkable option at the time. Minotaur was little more than a dorm-room diversion in Jason's eyes, but after a few all-night Minotaur sessions, Alex realized it was a viable commodity and convinced Jason to publish Minotaur as a Bungie Software title. Minotaur began shipping in the spring of 1992. Once again, finding distributors for the game proved nearly impossible. Alex and Jason, quickly tiring of their bean-burrito-and-tapwater diet, took a grassroots approach selling the game at trade shows and directly to the consumer. A handful of distributors eventually took an interest in the game, but sales once again topped out at the 2,500 mark.

(It's worth noting, purely as a point of contrast, that these days Bungie gives away about that number of copies of each new game to journalists and industry pundits.)
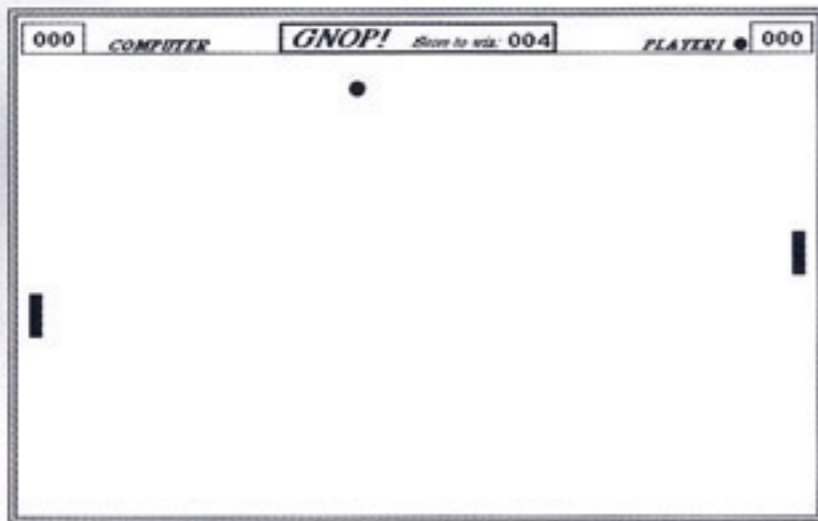
Bungie's first game, GNOP or pong spelled backwards. It was released as freeware in late 1990. Check out those amazing graphics!
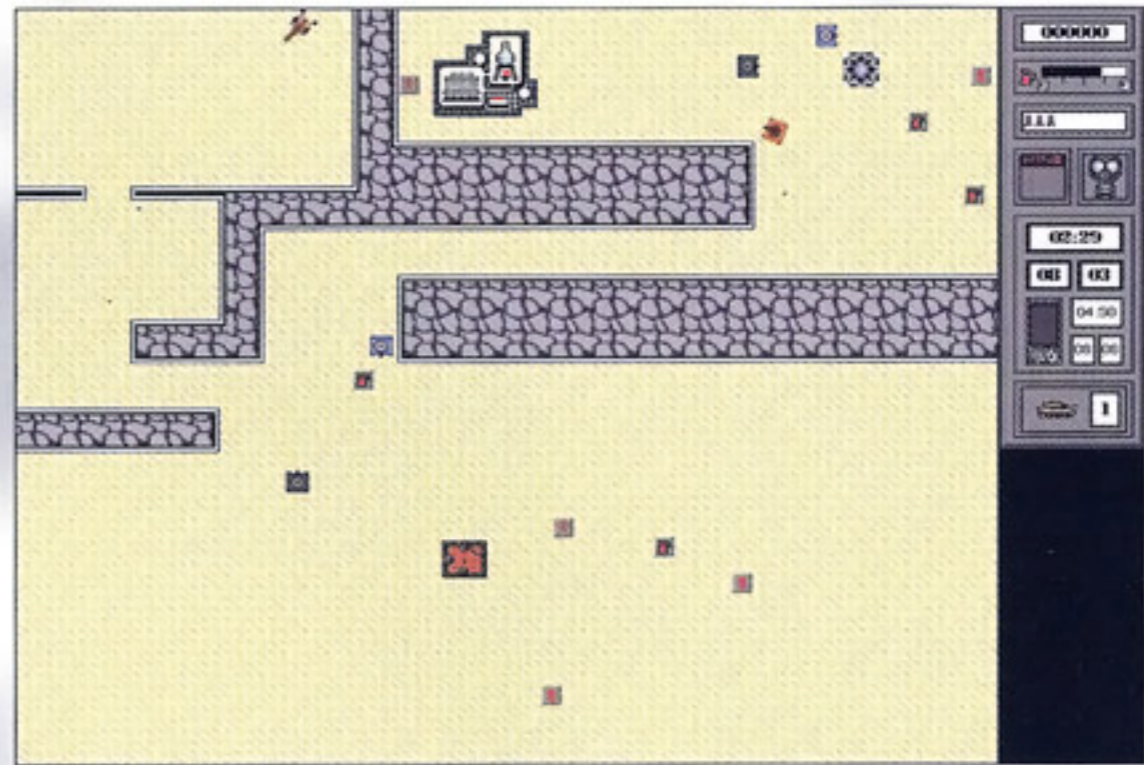
Bungie's first commercial game, Operation: Desert Storm. Norman Schwarzkopf would be proud!

Minotaur, Bungie's second commercial game, made just enough dough for Alex to splurge on a brand new white Dodge Neon. According to Alex it "handles a lot better than a Testarossa."

Jason dropped by Alex's apartment fairly regularly to help shrinkwrap copies of Minotaur and swipe some of Alexander's food. On one of these visits, Jason brought up a new project, a 3D, first-person-perspective, blast-fest with a handful of roleplaying elements tossed in. Jason called it Pathways Into Darkness. Alex, knew a good thing when he saw it, and the two became partners to publish the title. Jason began to work on Pathways in earnest with the help of his friend Colin Brent, who did the artwork. Jason coded by day on the Mac IIfx in his apartment; Colin would visit in the evenings to work on the game's graphics.

Jason wanted to create a compelling backstory for Pathways rather than simply dumping players in a dungeon and instructing them to blast their way out. Numerous scenarios were written and discarded until Jason came up with an alien race known as the Jjaro, and their ultimatum to humanity: neutralize a Lovecraftian "alien god" buried in a pyramid or suffer a hideous fate at its hands.

Pathways pushed the technological envelope farther than any previous Macintosh game, offering real-time, three-dimensional texture mapping. "It's the closest you can get to virtual reality without a helmet" ran the advertising slogan, which is actually true if you ignore the fact that most "virtual reality" experiences do not include encounters with lurching, pumpkin-colored obscenities sporting tongues the size of a small dog. Alex and Jason harbored modest hopes for Pathways; they thought it might sell enough copies to allow them the luxury of eating real food again. Pathways Into Darkness shipped in August 1993 and met with immediate critical and popular acclaim, winning a trunkload of awards and establishing Bungie as a major entity in the Macintosh games market.

The commercial success of Pathways allowed Alex and Jason to move out of their Hyde Park apartments to a real office in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood. (Alex tried to retain that "homegrown" atmosphere by picking an office without heat. "The Crack House" behind the building provided Bungie with the name of their office fileserver.) More importantly, Bungie could now afford to hire additional programmers and artists for their next project - whatever that might be. Ryan Martell, halfway through a yearlong break from Duke University, signed on as a programmer at the end of 1993 and began work with Jason on a new game, code-named Marathon. Marathon was originally intended as a sequel to Pathways that addressed customer complaints about speed (not enough) and challenge (far too much). Jason divided his time between Marathon and another 3D project dubbed Mosaic. (All that is known about Mosaic is that it had nothing to do with the web browser of the same name and that Jason is extremely reluctant to discuss it.)

Marathon started out as a series of coding experiments; Jason modified the Pathways engine to make it faster and more structurally elegant, but concentrated the most on enhancing monster intelligence. Bungie demoed this first alpha version, aptly titled Marathon Zero, at the San Francisco Macworld Expo in January 1994. But as Jason recounts, the game barely made a ripple at the show; many people dismissed the game as Pathways with minor cosmetic enhancements.

Determined to salvage the Marathon project, Bungie returned from the Macworld show, barricaded themselves in their Pilsen office and went to work. Jason abandoned the Mosaic project and devoted his full attention to Marathon. He and Ryan rewrote the game's rendering engine from the ground up. Ryan also began work on Vulcan, a Marathon map editor which is best described as all the madness and misery in twenty lunatic asylums, distilled into a single Macintosh application.

In February, Greg Kirkpatrick joined the Bungie team. Several months earlier Jason had declared that if Marathon was going to have a story, Greg would have to write it. Greg, who had recently suffered a direct blow to the head from a washing machine, readily agreed. Doug Zartman joined Bungie as their first paid employee in May. He started out doing tech support for Pathways but found his role expanding into public relations in the same way that petty larceny eventually

Jason (pictured) and Alex move into new digs closer to downtown Chicago. Jason hopes the new digs will "impress" the chicks. Yea, right...

Jason putting Minotaur boxes together.

Jason (left) and Alex (right) at Macworld Expo San Francisco '95.

The first version of Marathon was shown at Macworld San Francisco in January 1994. This version of Marathon was eventually canned because it looked too much like Pathways Into Darkness.

EXPANDS INTO GRAND THEFT AUTO. COLIN BRENT LEFT FOR GRAD SCHOOL. IN THEIR STEAD CAME REGINALD , AN ARTIST WITH A FLAIR FOR THE MOODY AND BIZARRE WHOSE STYLE RAN TOWARD THAT OF THE FRENCH COMIC ARTIST MÖEBIUS. THE LAST MEMBER OF THE MARATHON TEAM, ALAIN ROY, JOINED IN THE SUMMER. ALAIN WROTE MARATHON'S BYZANTINE NETWORKING CODE AND RECEIVED A QUADRA 660AV AS COMPENSATION.

THE ATMOSPHERE AROUND BUNGIE'S HEADQUARTERS DURING MARATHON'S DEVELOPMENT STAGE WAS MUCH LIKE A COMMUNE (WITHOUT THE LOFTY GOALS, HASH BROWNIES AND LACK OF RUNNING WATER). EVERYONE WORKED IN A SINGLE OPEN ROOM, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ALEX WHO WON THE RIGHT TO A PRIVATE OFFICE IN A BEST-OF-SEVEN THUMB WRESTLING TOURNAMENT. THIS CLUSTERED SETUP ALLOWED FOR KEY EXCHANGES LIKE THE FOLLOWING:

"HEY GREG."
"WHAT?"
"YOUR MOM."
"HEY JASON."
"WHAT?"
"NO, YOUR MOM."

A MINUTE DOING ANYTHING OTHER THAN WORKING ON MARATHON WAS CONSIDERED A WASTED MINUTE, SO ACTIVITIES LIKE SLEEP AND LUNCH WERE CAREFULLY KEPT TO A MINIMUM. MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE GROUP ENDED UP EATING AT LA COCINA, A SMALL MEXICAN RESTAURANT WITH THE DISTINCTION OF BEING THE ONLY EATERY IN EXISTENCE. THEY OCCASIONALLY GRABBED CANNED FOOD FROM A NEARBY LIQUOR STORE AS A TREAT.

THE SHEER AMOUNT OF WORK TO BE DONE WAS DAUNTING. JASON, RYAN AND ALAIN SPENT LONG HOURS COMPILING AND DEBUGGING NEW VERSIONS OF THE GAME ENGINE AND TWEAKING CODE FOR MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE. RYAN HACKED AWAY AT VULCAN, VALIANTLY TRYING TO TAME THE BEAST HE HAD UNLEASHED. ALAIN MADE NETWORKING HAPPEN THROUGH SHEER FORCE OF WILL. REG CREATED ALL THE ART: WEAPONS, ALIENS, CIVILIANS, THE PLAYER HIMSELF - NOT TO MENTION ALL THE TEXTURES USED TO ADD DETAIL TO THE MARATHON UNIVERSE. ALEX HAD THE TASK OF FINDING OR MAKING SOUNDS FOR EVERY POSSIBLE AUDIO EVENT IN THE GAME - ALIENS GRUNTING, DOORS BUZZING OPEN, GRENADES WHOOSHING THROUGH ECHOING METAL CORRIDORS - AS WELL AS COMPOSING A NUMBER OF ORIGINAL SONGS FOR MARATHON'S SOUNDTRACK. GREG HAD TO CONQUER VULCAN LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE TEN-ODD LEVELS FOR THE SINGLE PLAYER GAME. THE FIRST LAW OF VULCAN, "SAVE EARLY AND OFTEN," GIVES SOME IDEA OF VULCAN'S PENCHANT FOR DROPPING INTO A DEBUGGER OR SIMPLY LOCKING UP THE ENTIRE MACHINE. IT ONCE CRASHED SO HARD THAT GREG'S COMPUTER ACTUALLY SHUT DOWN.

MARATHON WOULD GROW OVER THE ENSUING MONTHS TO ENCOMPASS 27 SOLO LEVELS AND 10 NET LEVELS. THE SEROPIAN-DESIGNED "YOU DON'T NEED TO SEE MY I.D." WAS A SECRET LEVEL; THE TITLE REFERRED TO THE SCENE IN STAR WARS WHERE OBI-WAN KENOBI USES A JEDI MIND TRICK TO BREEZE PAST A GAGGLE OF STORMTROOPERS.

JASON JONES AND GREG KIRKPATRICK CREATED THE BULK OF THE SOLO LEVELS. JASON WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INFAMOUSLY TEDIOUS "COLONY SHIP FOR SALE, CHEAP" LEVEL, ALONG WITH SUCH LEVELS AS "BOB-B-Q" , "HABE QUIDDAM", AND "INGUE FERROQUE". JASON ALSO CREATED THE AFOREMENTIONED NET LEVEL "MARS NEEDS WOMEN", THE SECOND LEVEL EVER BUILT WITH VULCAN AND THE PRIMARY NET GAME TEST MAP.

GREG HAD A FONDNESS FOR CREATING MAPS WITH COMPLICATED OVERLAPPING AREAS. "G4 SUNBATHING", THE ONLY VACUUM LEVEL IN THE GAME, WAS ONE OF THESE. "G4" ATTEMPTED TO CONVEY AN IDEA OF WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO EXPLORE THE SURFACE OF A MOON-SIZED COLONY SHIP. THE NAME ITSELF REFERS TO WHAT THE PLAYER IS DOING WHILE TRAVERSING THE "COURTYARD" AREA OF THE STATION.
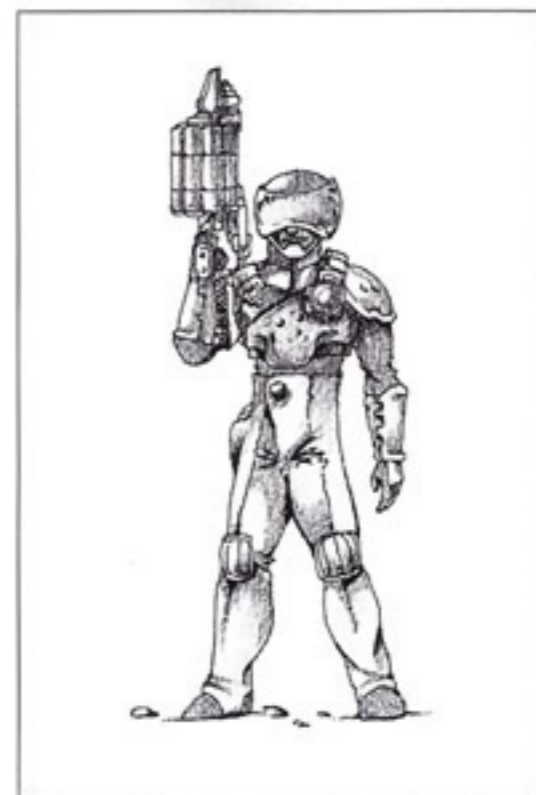
Greg stuffing his face with Chicago-style stuffed pizza.

An early sketch by Reg of the security officer on board the Marathon.

By May of 1994, Marathon began to really take shape. Much of the interface and graphics were changed later on, including the compass on the top left, which was taken out of the game because it required too much horsepower (in those days the Power PC was still in its infancy).

All but one of the bizarre Pfhor ship levels sprang from the mind of Reginald Dujour. Reg had a talent for making unorthodox maps as Jason explains:

> "Reg did a great job setting up the geometry and creating a distinctive style for the ship, but Greg and I spent a lot of late nights saying things like "How did he connect all 39 polygons to the same line like that?...Reg's mind worked in a way totally unlike Ryan's, who created the original Vulcan, and Reg found bugs which we never could explain and are probably still in Forge today."

Apart from "You don't need to see my I.D.", Alex also created "Arena" (which was - surprise - the first shot at the "arena" concept) and a handful of others. An uncredited Tuncer Deniz designed the solo level "No Artificial Colors" and the net levels "What Goes Up, Must Come Down" and "Waldo World Arena" (originally titled "Arema" but bowdlerized by Greg Kirkpatrick to save America's youth).

Reg brought an astounding level of detail to his work. Having attended med school, he could extrapolate from his vast knowledge of anatomy to explain (for example) how a given alien's blood color resulted from the amount of zinc in its biological makeup. Reg explained his working method:

> "Jason held a couple meetings in regards to what 'Marathon' was going to be about...the story, the characters, the basic feel of the game and the gameplay. Working from my notes, I did a few conceptual sketches of creatures and the player character. From there we agreed upon a test subject: a spider-like Pfhor. I drew the creature in five views (mirroring three more) with a walking animation in each of those views. Then we had to figure out the CLUT (the color palette the game would use), scan each image, import it into Photoshop and paint it, reduce it to size, reduce it to the appropriate CLUT, then import it into the editor, test the animation, see how it looked in a generic world and make whatever changes were necessary....It was an extremely long process, but I developed a kind of routine which sped it up..."

Reg designed three aliens that didn't make the cut for the final game: The Hound, the Armageddon Beast and a non-combatant alien crewman. The Hound moved quite fast but could not climb stairs and only had a melee attack. Hounds acted a lot like piranhas, guarding low spots on a map and wandering off when they couldn't attack the player any longer. The Armageddon Beast sucked down damage like the Big Blue Meanie in Pathways and shot streams of highly damaging little pellets. Both were dropped because no levels had been planned where these monsters would conceivably be fun to fight. The alien crewmen were intended to be Pfhor counterparts of the human civilians on the Marathon: weaponless and unable to defend themselves in any way. A memory limit on the number of monster types per level forced Bungie to abandon them.

Bungie planned to include a defenseless civilian character running around the Marathon from the start; later in development, they decided to give Bob, as he was informally known, a chance to speak his simple mind. Alex decided that Pathways tech support was less important than adding some color to Marathon and dragged Doug into his office to record some test phrases for the Bob character. The tests went over well, and the now-classic phrases "They're Everywhere!" and "Thank God it's You!" became part of the Marathon experience.

The hound (left and above) and the Armegeddon Beast (below) never made it into the game due to level and time constraints.

Concept sketch of the Pfhor

ALEX COMPOSED SEVERAL ORIGINAL SONGS FOR USE AS BACKGROUND MUSIC DURING THE GAME. THE SOMBER, ETHEREAL MUSIC LENT AN EERIE AIR TO THE DARK CORRIDORS OF THE MARATHON. SADLY, ALEX'S RAP VERSION OF LED ZEPPLIN'S "MOBY DICK" DID NOT APPEAR ON THE SOUNDTRACK.

MARATHON HAD STARTED AS A CODE-NAME, AND JASON HAD EVERY INTENT OF CHANGING IT BEFORE THE GAME SHIPPED. "WHAT THE HELL ARE WE GOING TO NAME THE NEW GAME?" WAS THE FOCUS OF AN EXTENDED BRAINSTORMING SESSION IN A CHINESE RESTAURANT AT MACWORLD SF EARLIER THAT YEAR. "PATHWAYS INTO URANUS" WAS THE FAVORITE TO WIN, BUT IT WAS EVENTUALLY REJECTED AS TOO OBLIQUE. AS TIME WENT ON, THE NAME MARATHON SEEMED LIKE A MORE APPROPRIATE CHOICE FOR A GAME THAT WAS A GRUELING TEST OF ENDURANCE AND EVENTUALLY THE CODE-NAME BECAME OFFICIAL.

BUNGIE FORMALLY ANNOUNCED MARATHON TO THE WORLD ON JULY 25, 1994, IN A PRESS RELEASE TITLED "MARATHON TAKES TEXTURE-MAPPING INTO SPACE." THIS PRESS RELEASE, COUPLED WITH AN EYE-CATCHING PREVIEW IN TUNCER DENIZ'S INSIDE MAC GAMES MAGAZINE, SERVED NOTICE TO THE MACINTOSH GAMING COMMUNITY THAT SOMETHING BIG WAS IN THE WORKS. A FOLLOW-UP REPORT FROM TUNCER ON THE COMP.SYS.MAC.GAMES NEWSGROUP ONLY SERVED TO STIR UP MORE INTEREST. "I THINK PEOPLE WHO GO TO MACWORLD ARE GOING TO BE AMAZED WHEN THEY SEE IT FOR THE FIRST TIME," HE WROTE. "IT'S NOTHING LIKE THE ONE THEY WERE SHOWING AT THE LAST MACWORLD...."

BUNGIE UNVEILED THE REWORKED MARATHON AT THE BOSTON MACWORLD EXPO IN AUGUST '95. THE REACTION WAS ECSTATIC. DEDICATED GAMERS AND CURIOUS PASSERS-BY CLUSTERED AROUND BUNGIE'S TINY BOOTH, VYING FOR A CHANCE TO PLAY. MACWORLD ATTENDEES WERE INVITED TO PRE-ORDER THE GAME AT THE SHOW. "THE GAME WILL SHIP IN TWO WEEKS," MORE THAN ONE ATTENDEE HEARD FROM EARNEST BUNGIE STAFFERS. "WE'RE JUST WAITING FOR THE BOXES." FAMOUS LAST WORDS. MARATHON DIDN'T SHIP IN TWO WEEKS, NOR IN TWO MONTHS; INDEED IT WAS SOME FOUR MONTHS BEFORE THE GAME FINALLY DID SHIP.

SO WHAT HAPPENED? ALEX SEROPIAN EXPLAINED: "THERE WAS NEVER ANY INTENTION TO DECEIVE ANYONE. THE BOXES WERE IN PRODUCTION AND THERE WAS EVERY INTENTION TO SHIP IN TWO WEEKS. BUT SOME CHANGES WERE NECESSARY TO MAKE THE SOLO GAME ENJOYABLE." PUT BLUNTLY, THE SOLO LEVELS BUNGIE HAD DESIGNED TO THAT POINT WEREN'T MUCH FUN TO PLAY. THE CLEANUP PROCESS WAS A PANDORA'S BOX: A FIX FOR ONE PROBLEM INEVITABLY CAUSED THREE MORE. IN THE END, ALL THE SOLO LEVELS HAD TO BE REDONE.

LIKE PATHWAYS INTO DARKNESS, THE STORY FOR MARATHON WAS CONSIDERED AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE FINAL PRODUCT AND WAS REWORKED SEVERAL TIMES DURING DEVELOPMENT. A VERY EARLY PLOT INVOLVED GETTING RID OF MONSTROUS ALIENS ON A HOLLOWED-OUT ASTEROID COLONY NEAR THE PLANET PLUTO. THE HOLLOWED-OUT ASTEROID BECAME A HOLLOWED-OUT MARTIAN MOON (DEMIOS) AND EVENTUALLY BECAME THE COLONY SHIP U.E.S.C. MARATHON. THE SHIP'S DESTINATION: TAU CETI - A POPULAR INTERSTELLAR PIT STOP JUDGING FROM ITS FREQUENT APPEARANCES IN COUNTLESS SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES.

IN AN EARLY VERSION OF THE TAU CETI PLOT, THE COLONISTS FOUND AN ALIEN ARTIFACT NEAR THE COLONY AND FERRIED IT BACK TO THE ORBITING MARATHON FOR FURTHER STUDY, WHEREUPON ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE. THE PLAYER, A SCIENCE OFFICER SENT TO HELP RESEARCH THE ARTIFACT, WOULD ARRIVE TO FIND THE PLACE SWARMING WITH ALIENS. THE MYSTERIOUS ARTIFACT WAS IN FACT A TELEPORTATION BEACON BELONGING TO THE UNDISCOVERED AMPHIBIOUS NATIVES OF A NEARBY PLANET. UNABLE TO PENETRATE THE COLONY'S DEFENSE SHIELD, THE XENOPHOBIC ALIENS USED THE BEACON AS A TROJAN HORSE TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE COLONY SHIP. THEIR PLAN WORKED PERFECTLY EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT THE FIRST WAVE OF SHOCK TROOPS FOUND THEMSELVES BURIED IN THE MARATHON'S SCIENCE LAB.

THE IDEA OF DEFENDING THE MARATHON FROM A HORDE OF MALICIOUS NATIVES WAS EVENTUALLY REJECTED, PRIMARILY BECAUSE THE ALIENS WERE ONLY DEFENDING THEIR PLANET (AN HONORABLE MOTIVE) AND THE REALIZATION THAT AN ALIEN RACE WITH SUCH A HIGH LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGY WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE COMPLETELY UNKNOWN TO THE COLONISTS. IN THEIR PLACE CAME THE PFHOR, A RACE OF ALIEN SLAVERS INTENT ON CAPTURING THE COLONY SHIP AND ITS INHABITANTS. WIPING OUT HORDES OF ALIEN SLAVERS ON THE DECKS
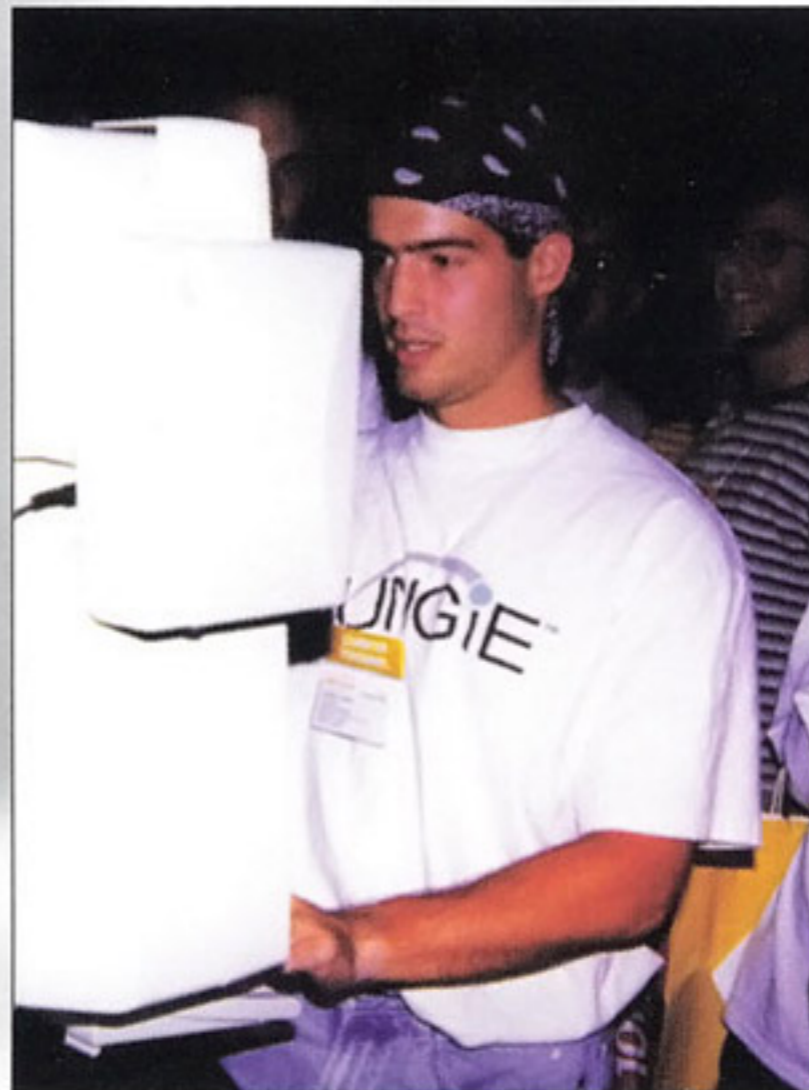
The boyz setting up the Bungie booth at Macworld Boston '94.

Doug, the voice of Bob, looking a little harried as he gets ready for the big Macworld show.

Bandana Jason, still trying to impress the ladies with a few good Marathon moves.

OF A CRIPPLED COLONY SHIP WAS DEEMED MORE ETHICALLY SATISFYING.

IN THE FINAL VERSION OF THE STORY, THE PLAYER WAS A SECURITY OFFICER BENT ON RIDDING THE MARATHON OF MARAUDING ALIENS. A STORY UNFOLDED OVER THE COURSE OF THE GAME, REVEALED BIT BY BIT THROUGH A SERIES OF COMPUTER TERMINALS SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE MAPS. INTERACTING WITH THESE TERMINALS FED THE PLAYER VITAL (AND SOMETIMES NOT SO VITAL) INFORMATION FROM THE MARATHON'S THREE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES: LEELA, DURANDAL, AND TYCHO. AS THE PLAYER PROGRESSED THROUGH THE LEVELS, IT WOULD BECOME OBVIOUS THAT EVERYTHING WAS NOT WHAT IT SEEMED ON THE GOOD SHIP MARATHON WHILE TRYING TO DEAL WITH THE THOUSANDS OF HOMICIDAL ALIENS STORMING THE SHIP, THE PLAYER WAS CAUGHT IN A STRUGGLE FOR POWER BETWEEN THREE AI'S, ONE OF WHICH WAS CERTIFIABLY INSANE.

THE STORY OF THE GAME WASN'T THE ONLY ELEMENT TO UNDERGO NUMEROUS REVISIONS. THE GAME'S INTERFACE WENT THROUGH A NUMBER OF ITERATIONS. EARLY VERSIONS FEATURED AN ICON OF THE PLAYER'S BODY THAT SHOWED WHERE THE PLAYER HAD BEEN HIT; MARATHON'S FAMOUS MOTION-SENSOR EVOLVED OUT OF A MUCH SIMPLER DIRECTIONAL AID: A COMPASS.

AN EARLY BETA VERSION OF MARATHON LEAKED ONTO THE INTERNET IN OCTOBER. WITHIN DAYS THE NEWSGROUPS EXPLODED WITH DISCUSSION OF THE BETA. MOST OF THE TALK CENTERED ON THE LEGAL ISSUES FACING THOSE WHO DISTRIBUTED THE BETA AND WHETHER OR NOT THIS LEAK WOULD HURT BUNGIE'S SALES OF THE FINAL GAME.

BUNGIE TRACED THE LEAK TO A TEMP AT A LARGE ADVERTISING AGENCY WHICH HAD RECEIVED A BETA COPY IN ORDER TO TAKE SCREENSHOTS FOR AN APPLE COMPUTER AD. THE SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE OF THIS INDIVIDUAL HAS NEVER BEEN CONCLUSIVELY TRACED TO ANYONE AT BUNGIE.

ABOUT A MONTH AFTER THE FIRST BETA LEAK, A SECOND MARATHON BETA APPEARED ON THE INTERNET, RIFE WITH ADDITIONAL FEATURES - INCLUDING MUSIC. ALEX HAD TAKEN A NEW BETA TO A SOFTWARE DISTRIBUTORS' CONVENTION, AND ONE OF THE ATTENDEES WAS SO TAKEN WITH THE GAME THAT HE BROKE INTO A LOCKED STORAGE CLOSET WHERE ALEX HAD SECRETED HIS MACHINE, COPIED THE BETA AND UPLOADED IT TO THE NET. BUNGIE TOOK STEPS TO TRACK DOWN THE PERPETRATOR AND HEADS ROLLED ONCE AGAIN.

WHILE THE BETA LEAKS WERE UNPROFESSIONAL AND DENIED BUNGIE THE RIGHT TO DECIDE WHEN TO RELEASE THEIR OWN GAME, IN RETROSPECT THEY DIDN'T REALLY DO ANY GREAT HARM (EXCEPT TO THE TWO POOR SUCKERS WHO LOST THEIR JOBS AS A RESULT). ALEX SEROPIAN REMARKED THAT THE REAL RESULT WAS PROBABLY POSITIVE: A LOT OF POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS WERE DYING TO HAVE A LOOK AT MARATHON AND THE BETAS PROVIDED THAT. THE ENDLESS DISCUSSION OF THE MARATHON BETAS FINALLY DIED DOWN ON NOVEMBER 23, WHEN BUNGIE FINALLY RELEASED THE OFFICIAL DEMO OF THE GAME. BUT THE THREE SHORT LEVELS OF THE DEMO ENDED FAR TOO QUICKLY FOR MOST, AND PEOPLE WERE LEFT TO WONDER IMPATIENTLY WHEN THE WHOLE THING WOULD BE AVAILABLE.

ONE OF MARATHON'S OUTSTANDING FEATURES WAS ITS NETWORK PLAY, WHICH IN FACT WON MARATHON A MACWORLD GAME HALL OF FAME AWARD FOR BEST NETWORK GAME OF 1995. SURPRISINGLY, NETWORKING WAS NOT PART OF MARATHON'S INITIAL DESIGN SPEC BUT WAS ADDED A FEW MONTHS INTO DEVELOPMENT. PROGRESS ON THE SOLO GAME SLOWED TO A CRAWL AS BUNGIE SPENT HOURS ENTHUSIASTICALLY "TESTING" THE NETWORK GAME. JASON JONES LATER ADMITTED THAT IF THEY HAD NOT ALL BEEN PLAYING THE NETWORK GAME SO MUCH MARATHON WOULD HAVE SHIPPED A MONTH EARLIER. ALTHOUGH PLAYING NET MARATHON CAUSED PRODUCTIVITY TO PLUMMET, THE TESTING RESULTED IN EXTENSIVE GAMEPLAY TWEAKING WHICH IMPROVED BOTH NETWORK AND SOLO PLAY.

MARATHON'S LAST POLYGON WAS FILLED AT 6:05 PM SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14TH. OVER THE PREVIOUS FOUR DAYS, THE BUNGIE TEAM HAD SLEPT LESS THAN TEN HOURS - THEIR LAST PUSH AFTER MONTHS OF 14-HOUR DAYS. BUT THE GAME WASN'T FINISHED YET: MANY DAYS OF PLAY-TESTING FOLLOWED. REG LIVED RIGHT ACROSS THE STREET FROM BUNGIE'S OFFICES AND RECALLS SEEING HIS GIRLFRIEND WAVING OUT THE WINDOW OF HIS LOFT, "SIGNALLING ME TO COME HOME - OR ELSE" ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION. ONE EVENING JASON DECREED THAT

THE SHAFT

NO ONE COULD LEAVE THE BUILDING UNTIL HE HAD PLAYED THROUGH THE ENTIRE SOLO GAME TWICE. ALEX AND REG WERE BOTH HALFWAY THROUGH THE SECOND GAME WHEN THEY STARTED TO FEEL NAUSEATED BY THE FAST FIRST-PERSON MOTION AND THE RULE WAS WAIVED WHEN REG FINALLY LOST HIS LUNCH. THIS "PLAY-TILL-YOU-PUKE" POLICY, GROTESQUE AS IT WAS, ALLOWED BUNGIE TO FINALLY ANNOUNCE MARATHON'S IMPENDING RELEASE ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21ST.

THE BUNGIE TEAM, DRAINED AFTER THE MANY MONTHS OF EFFORT, NOW HAD TO DEAL WITH A SHIPPING NIGHTMARE. BUNGIE HAD PRE-SOLD SOME 25,000 COPIES OF MARATHON. A LOCAL CHICAGO FIRM HAD BEEN CONTRACTED TO HANDLE THE PRODUCT ASSEMBLY, BUT THEY COULD ONLY FINISH 500-1000 UNITS A DAY. DOUG FIELDED HUNDREDS OF CALLS AND E-MAILS FROM IRATE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING THE GAME THEY'D PRE-ORDERED MONTHS AGO. ALEX FIELDED HOURLY PHONE CALLS FROM ANGRY DISTRIBUTORS WHO WERE OPENLY FURIOUS OVER THE PRODUCTION DELAYS. DESPERATELY TRYING TO BOX UP ENOUGH UNITS TO MEET THE DEMAND, ALEX MARSHALLED THE BUNGIE TROOPS AND DROVE OVER TO A WAREHOUSE IN THE CHICAGO SUBURBS TO HELP ASSEMBLE BOXES. IN ORDER TO GET THE GAME TO AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE BEFORE CHRISTMAS, THE FIRST UNITS SHIPPED WITHOUT BOXES - FOUR FLOPPIES AND A MANUAL SHRINKWRAPPED TOGETHER. IT WAS SOMEWHAT IRONIC THAT THE PEOPLE WHO GOT THE GAME FIRST DID NOT RECEIVE THE VERY THING THAT WAS INITIALLY SUPPOSED TO HAVE DELAYED SHIPPING BACK IN AUGUST. ONCE THEY RECEIVED THE GAME, HOWEVER, FEW CUSTOMERS FELT THE URGE TO COMPLAIN. MOST HELD IN THRALL BY MARATHON'S INTOXICATING MIX OF ACTION AND MIND-CANDY, WERE JUST HAPPY TO HAVE THE GAME AT LAST.

THE RELEASE OF THE FULL GAME BROUGHT A DELUGE OF THIRD-PARTY ADD-ONS AND UTILITIES. FTP SITES EVERYWHERE WERE FILLED WITH MARATHON MAP EDITORS, PHYSICS MODEL EDITORS, SHAPE EDITORS, SAVED-GAME EDITORS, AND THE BYPRODUCTS OF EACH. THE GAME SPAWNED ITS OWN NEWSGROUP, A POPULAR IRC CHANNEL, AN E-ZINE, AND AN ANNOYING TENDENCY AMONG MARATHON PFHANS TO SUBSTITUTE THE LETTERS "PFH" WHEN A SIMPLE "F" WOULD DO.

BUNGIE WAS OUT IN FORCE AT THE SAN FRANCISCO MACWORLD EXPO IN JANUARY 1995. THEY HAD A KILLER GAME AND WANTED TO SHOW IT OFF. BUNGIE'S BOOTH SWARMED WITH EAGER CUSTOMERS, AND THE GAME SOLD OUT EARLY IN THE SHOW. BUNGIE HELD THE FIRST ANNUAL MARATHON MAYHEM TOURNAMENT AT THE SHOW - MICHAEL GARRISON (AKA CYBERNATOR) WALKED AWAY WITH FIRST PRIZE — A NEW POWER MACINTOSH.

BUNGIE RETURNED TO CHICAGO FLUSHED WITH SUCCESS, HAPPIER THAN SYLVESTRE MATUSCHKA IN THE CONTROL ROOM OF GRAND CENTRAL STATION - A STARK CONTRAST TO THE DESPAIR WHICH FOLLOWED THE PREVIOUS YEAR'S SF EXPO. THE MONTHS OF HARD WORK HAD PAID OFF; MARATHON WAS A BONAFIDE HIT, WHICH WOULD GO ON TO SELL HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF COPIES AND WIN A PHENOMENAL NUMBER OF AWARDS.

BUNGIE TOOK A FEW DAYS TO GET THEIR AFFAIRS IN ORDER AFTER RETURNING FROM SAN FRANCISCO. DOUG WAS FAR TOO BUSY TALKING TO THE PRESS TO DOUBLE AS BUNGIE'S TECH SUPPORT OFFICE, SO MATT SOELL WAS HIRED TO HANDLE THE PHONES AND E-MAIL. SHORTLY AFTER THEIR RETURN FROM THE MACWORLD EXPO, BUNGIE'S OFFICES WERE BACK IN FULL SWING - ALTHOUGH THE ENTIRE STAFF WAS CURIOUSLY RELUCTANT TO TALK ABOUT THEIR FUTURE PROJECTS. ONE CLUE CAME AT THE END OF AN INTERVIEW TUNCER DENIZ CONDUCTED WITH JASON JONES FOR THE MARATHON STRATEGY GUIDE:

> "MARATHON'S ENDING REALLY DOES LEAVE A LOT OF ROOM FOR SOMETHING ELSE TO HAPPEN. I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY PEOPLE NOTICED THIS, BUT THE VERY LAST THING THAT HAPPENS TO THE PLAYER IN MARATHON IS THAT HE IS TELEPORTED OFF THE LAST LEVEL TO WHERE? MAYBE SOMEDAY WE'LL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS."

13
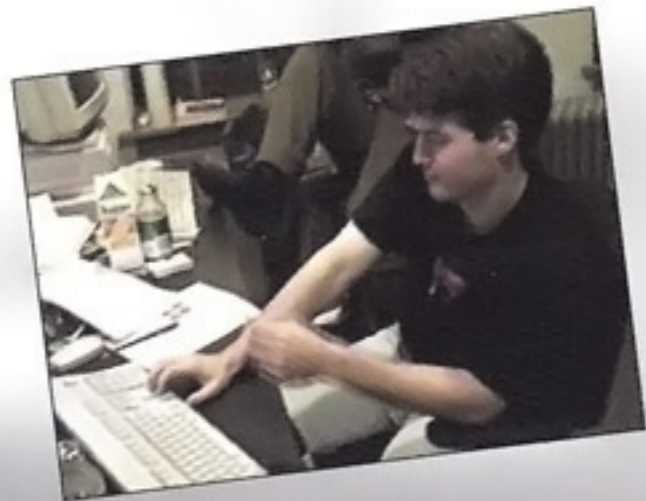
Bungie's announcement of Marathon 2: Durandal on July 19th 1995, took Marathon fans by surprise. Most of them were anxiously awaiting the Marathon 20/10 Scenario Pack, a collection of levels and additional network options advertised on a flyer in the Marathon box. A number of people had also discovered a message from Jason buried in Marathon's resource fork, promising a "network upgrade" with an extra weapon (the shotgun, if you must know). Few people guessed that a full sequel to Marathon was in the pipeline... especially since Jason Jones had once stated that he tended to dislike sequels because many only existed to milk an obvious cash cow. In hindsight though, the clues were there: Bungie staffers had occasionally bemoaned the absence of features that were not added to Marathon due to time constraints, and the story left many questions unanswered.

Marathon 2 arose out of the potential to improve on the original game and continue the story. Bungie's press release made it clear that Marathon 2 would incorporate more than just a collection of new levels. The game would sport a new wide-screen graphics format, ambient sounds, new weapons, monsters, and textures, outdoor scenarios, underwater exploration and combat, complex lighting effects, and gun-packing Bobs with an expanded vocabulary. Marathon 2 would also further develop the storyline, explaining some of the first game's unanswered questions while throwing more bizarre elements into the plot.

After much soul-searching, Bungie halted development of the Marathon 20/10 Scenario Pack. Doug Zartman relates how the decision was reached: "For a while we thought we could fit in a 20/10 pack and still get M2 out that year. It wasn't very long before we decided that if we did the 20/10 pack, M2 might get slighted, the levels might not be as carefully designed and might not make it for '95. M2 was the more exciting product and a higher priority, so 20/10 got canned. A couple of the maps intended for the 20/10 pack were retextured and refitted for M2."

Macintosh clone-makers Power Computing announced that they would distribute a sneak preview of Marathon 2 on CD at the Boston Macworld Expo in August. Diehard Mac gamers made plans for a pilgrimage to Boston. Those that couldn't make it joined a long waiting list hoping for a spare copy of "The Disc" once the show was over. Bungie announced that an official demo - which promised to be more representative of the full game than the Macworld preview version - would be released shortly after the Expo ended. Macworld came and went, but the demo did not appear, much to the frustration of Marathoners who hadn't been able to obtain a copy of the Preview. Two months passed before Bungie completed and released the official demo.

The announcement of the sequel caused a flurry of activity on the Internet. Discussion of the new Marathon flooded the newsgroups. Within days, a few people claimed to have played the preview game; once again, someone leaked the game to the 'Net. A collective Bungie scream echoed through the streets of Chicago.

While people busily discussed the leaked preview, Marathon fans online witnessed the quiet arrival of a web site which would radically alter people's appreciation for the Marathon series. The Marathon's Story page, a site maintained by Hamish Sinclair, went live on Sept 19th. The site focused on a somewhat neglected aspect of the game: the plot. In the nine months since Marathon's release, sporadic plot discussions had taken place on the usual newsgroups, but most of these dealt with the popular "Is the player a cyborg?" question. Hamish Sinclair recognized this mystery as merely the tip of a much larger iceberg. Marathon's plot contained more depth than possibly any game which had come before.

The story in Marathon 2 picked up where the first game left off. At the end of the first Marathon, Durandal teleports the player into a stasis chamber. Seventeen years later, Durandal releases the player on Lh'owon, the conquered S'pht homeworld. Durandal is determined to get his hands on a "space-folding" technology developed by the mysterious Jjaro. Certain that the secret of this
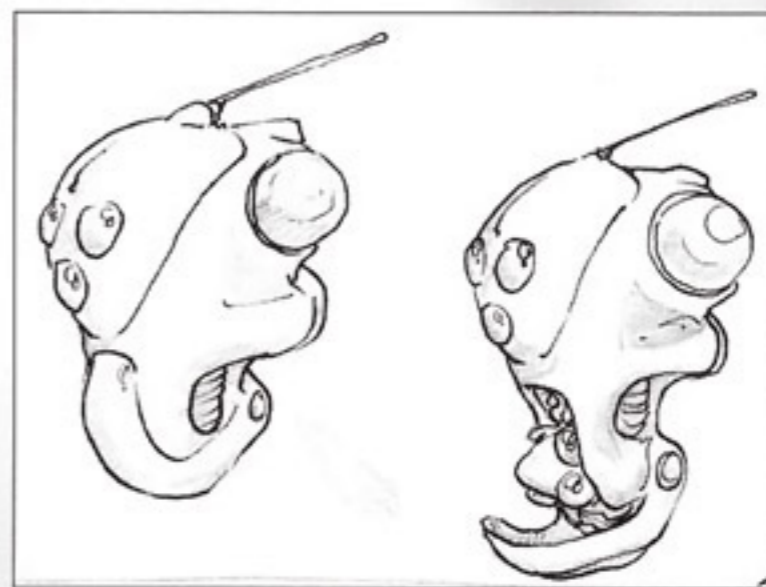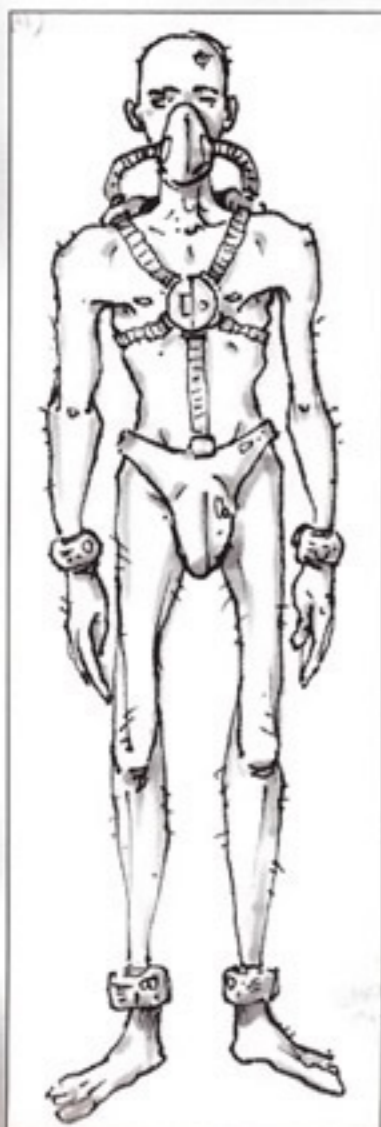
The new Compiler

Concept sketch of an enslaved Bob. He never made it into the game.
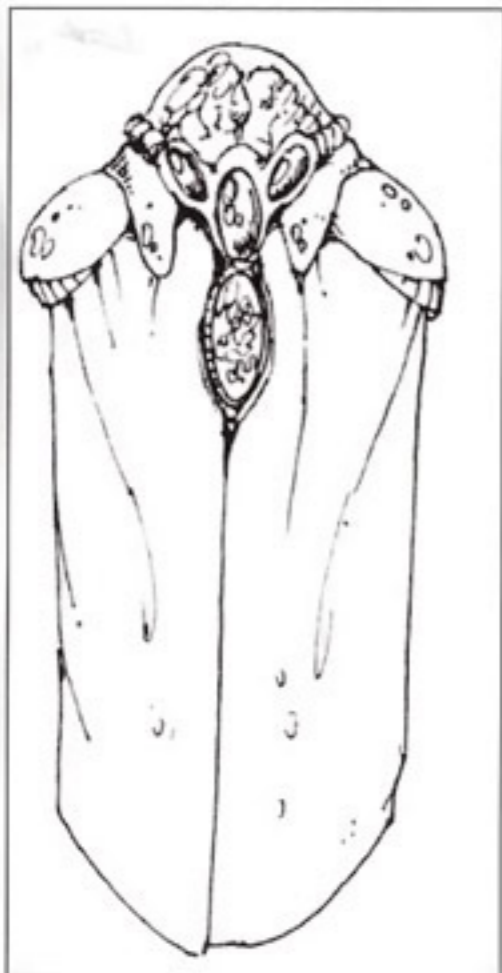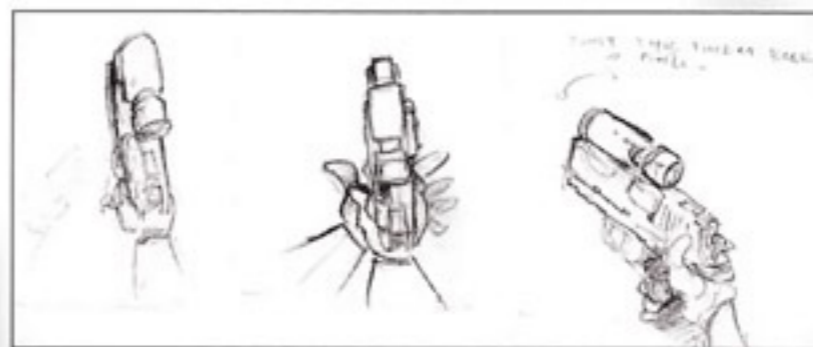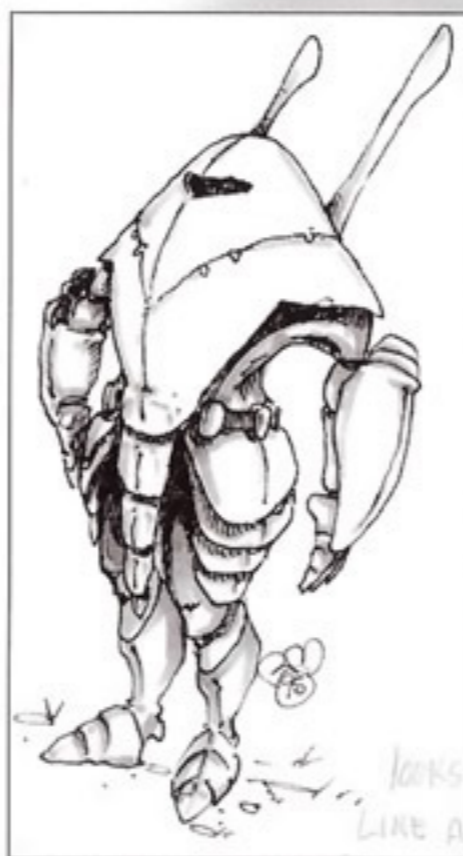
The Nar also never made it into the game.

GUNS! GUNS! GUNS!

Sketches of the Drones

Energy Recharge
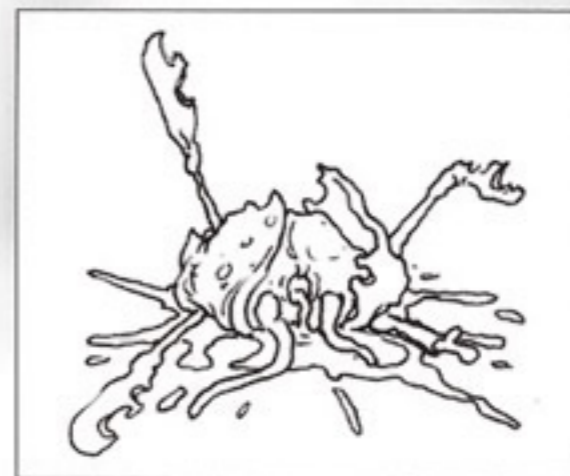
Clean up in Aisle 8!

technology lies buried on Lh'owon, Durandal uses the player to wipe out the Pfhor who are standing in his way. An early plan called for Marathon 2 to end by dumping the player in the first level of Pathways Into Darkness, thus making the connection between the two games explicit. Plans changed, though, and the only remnant of this idea is a vague allusion to "an entirely different reality than the one of the starship Marathon" in the Marathon 2 manual.

A great deal of effort went into enriching the storyline. Consider the following excerpts from Rob McLees' extensive history of the Nar, an alien race that the player never even encounters over the course of the game:

> "The Nar sprang into being exactly one week after the Universe sprang into being. They are an ageless race of immortal beings who, in the four billion odd years of their existence, have yet to develop a written language. This tends to hinder their scientific endeavors as they speak entirely in metaphor.

> "The entire Nar homeworld has been developed. That is to say that the entire surface of the planet has a three story building built on it. In other words, the Nar homeworld is encased in a three story structure that covers every square inch of the planet's surface. On the lowest level (or "ground floor") we have the Nar - the laborers and foot soldiers of the Nar. Living on the next level (or "mezzanine") are the C'Nar - the artisans and artificers of the Nar. At the highest level (living proof that filth rises to the top of any medium) are the Cf'Nar and the CFN Kommandoes - the Cf'Nar are the "Ruling Elite" of the Nar (mostly managers or scientific research facilities and heads of huge industrial combines) and the CFN Kommandoes are Warriors and Leaders of distinction, though the CFN Kommandoes usually go up to "the Roof" to hone their Martial Arts and tend the sod."

Once again, Jason Jones and Greg Kirkpatrick designed most of the maps for Marathon 2. Greg seemed determined to prove that mapmaking could be an art form when done properly, as in his map "The Hard Stuff Rules... " which consisted of no less than seven overlapping areas. But art has its price as Greg explains:

> "This level was named for the fact that it was incredibly difficult to make. In fact it was a triumph of mind over computer. My machine crashed every 5 minutes while making it, and I had to move each point at least ten times to get to the underlying areas."

Jason Jones finally put to the test the ghost of "Colony Ship For Sale, Cheap" with "All Roads Lead To Sol", and "Begging For Mercy Makes Me Angry!" as well as the hauntingly atmospheric "Kill Your Television". Tuncer Deniz, capitalizing on his success with the Marathon net level "Waldo World Arena", went one better in Marathon 2 by creating "Thunderdome", another classic 'arena' style net map, and a clutch of others.

Doug Zartman designed "Ex Cathedra", the only solo level not created by either Jason or Greg. Doug explained the creation process:

> "My only scenario level was partly inspired by the third-party Marathon map "Villa Banzai". At E3, a Marathon fan suggested I
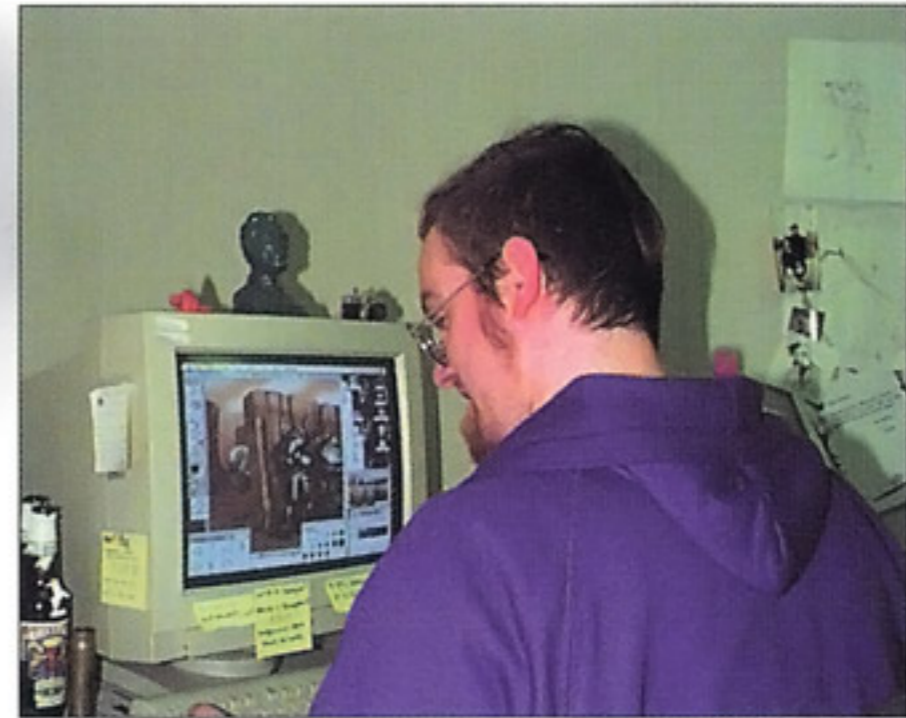
Artist Rob McLees slaving away on the Nar.

Mark Bernal, another Marathon 2 artist, was able to
create intoxicating art by drinking plenty of Celebrator
Bavarian Double Bock Beer.

check out this map. I did and thought it was great - beautiful realization of what was obviously an attractive real-world structure. Though I had done levels based on real-world structures before (i.e., my house, the office) I had never thought of doing one based on an architectural plan, much less of a building that was good looking. So I spent some time looking for plans, and found one of a cathedral in Durham, England that looked cool, but easy enough to replicate. I spent an enormous amount of time on it, about 4 from-the-ground-up revisions, maybe 80 hours over a period of 3 months (since level design wasn't my job, it was mostly done at home)."

Doug designed "Ex Cathedra" before swimming had been implemented in Marathon 2, which served to illusrate the perils of making content for an unfinished engine. Doug describes what happened:

"When I began this level, there was no swimming in the M2 engine and so the watery Grotto was filled with dead ends and traps, like underwater pits. To reach the key room that opened up the rest of the level, you had to make it past a series of jumps between ledges that you couldn't see below the water - tricky stuff. Then swimming was enabled and suddenly the player could simply swim past the traps and tricks. There's a secret door set in the wall of an underwater pit in the Grotto that was originally a big time-saver; after swimming, it was useless and I'm sure few people have found it."

To make the game more realistic, Alex chose to use ambient sounds rather than background music. (As Alex remarked "How often do you find yourself running around a spaceship blasting aliens while the ship's computer is playing music over the loudspeaker?") Players went from the music-filled corridors of the colony ship Marathon to an alien world of thundering skies, howling winds and bubbling lava. The high quality 16-bit ambient sounds employed real-time stereo tracking to paint an aural picture of the environment.

Civilians became leaner and meaner in Marathon 2 as well. The once-hapless Bob had worked up the nerve to return fire and developed some witty repartee in his spare time. Doug Zartman once again supplied the vocals. Doug and Alex pared down a list of roughly 80 phrases (including "Hit the deck!", "Had enough, tough guy?", "It's Miller time!", and "Pull my finger!"), to the 36 which were included in the final game. Bob's voice was a balance of nuance and extremity, prompting fans to wonder if Doug had been attacked with a pair of pliers during recording. Doug explains how he managed the wide vocal range:

"I can't tell you exactly, but it has something to do with a vise and my gonads....I've had a lot of choral training and I used to sing backup vocals in a rock band, so I'm used to vocal performance. Also, we recorded multiple variations of each phrase; i.e., I did about 6 different versions of "Get me outta here!" at different pitches, volumes and stresses, some more funny, some more frightened, and we picked the one that fit best."

19

Doug on a really bad hair day

Alex, with puke bowl in hand, after experiencing extreme motion sickness from playing way too much Marathon.
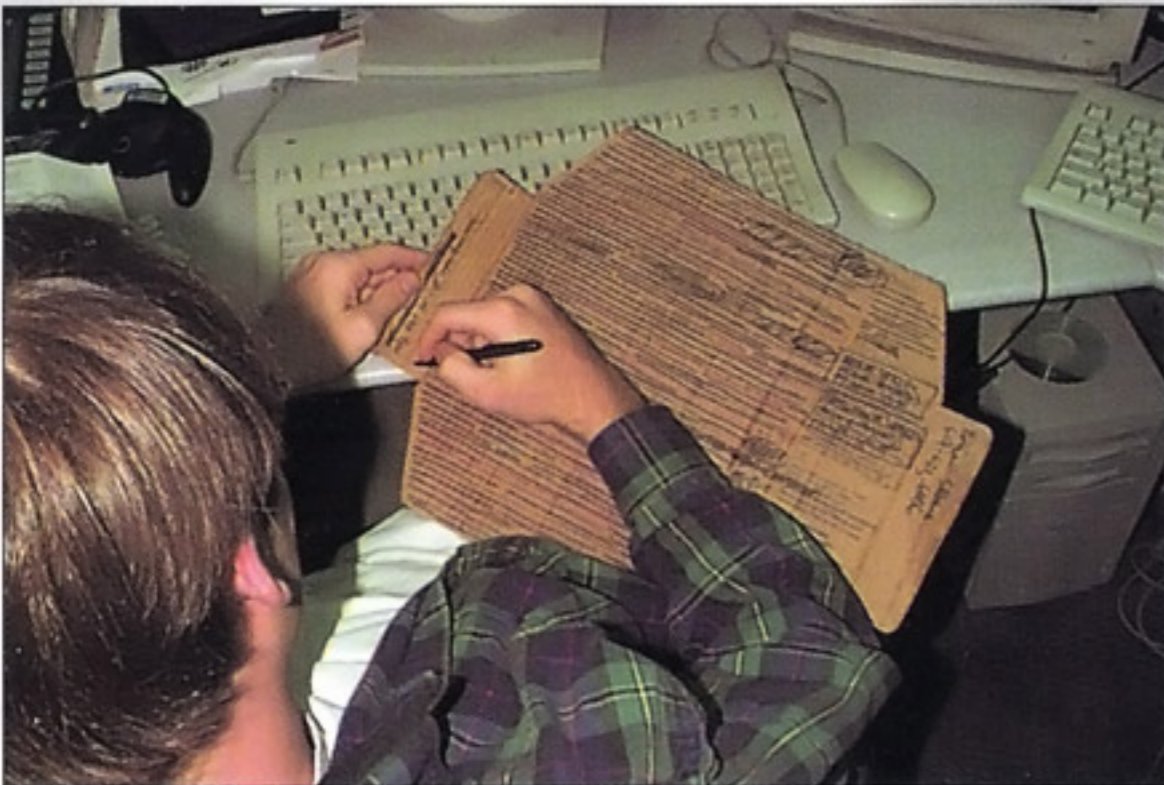
Ryan crossing out bugs on the official bug list (a Dominos pizza box top).

One of Bob's more unusual lines, "Frog Blast the Vent Core!", caused considerable controversy among fans. What was really said, and what did it mean? Doug explains how this arose:

"The idea was that some of the assimilated Bobs become insane from their conversion and run around yelling nonsense. Alex said to me "say something random", and that phrase tumbled from my lips. Totally spontaneous. While I could have sat down and thought up something more random than that, it worked out well, since it sounds close enough to a real sentence that it kept people guessing and generated some fascinating (and totally wrong) discussion about what the phrase was and its meaning. One popular theory was "God bless the Marine Corps!", which was a fair guess, but still wrong."

The stunning chapter art in Marathon 2 was created by Craig Mullins, an industrial designer and illustrator. Craig first came to Bungie's attention through his early Marathon paintings which were freely circulated on AOL and the Internet. Craig explained how these pictures led to his involvement with Marathon 2, and the creative process he used:

"I was approached by Bungie a few months before M2 came out and we discussed chapter screens, new sprites and textures etc. Alex sent me the chapter overview and I started mulling things over.

"I was initially leery of doing the chapter screens because time was very short for 10 images and other work that had been long planned was already in the works. My friend David Santiago twisted my arm to do them, so I agreed but they would not be as finished or well planned as I had hoped. Most of the M2 screens were done with no drawing and on the fly. Pour some paint out and rotate, distort, filter, hmmm, looks like a trooper in a nunnery.... lets go with that.

"I always liked to freely interpret the designs and situations in the game. I worried that the purists might not like that, but the Marathon universe is very large and so much takes place off-screen and is only hinted at in the terminal texts. I wanted to keep the feeling of expanding what was only suggested and go beyond what was already there. What, the marine with the Pfhor staff? Huh? Why not? So much was already done to try and get around the limiting factors of the games rendering engine. The terminal texts suggests that same variety that I hope my pictures do...It was enjoyable to start something and let it evolve and not know where it would end up. Too much of my commercial work is to spec anyway."

21

Midway through Marathon 2's development, Reg left Bungie. The game's graphics subsequently received a radical overhaul at the hands of Bungie's new artists Robert McLees and Mark Bernal. Rob redesigned the weaponry, making the motley assortment of guns and ammo look more functional and futuristic. He designed the famous dual shotguns (with their infamous "far too complicated to explain" method of reloading), answering the prayers of many Marathon fans. Rob also carried out some cosmetic surgery on the Pfhor, moving their third eye from what he describes as its "circus clown" position in Marathon to its more "enlightened" position in Marathon 2. This repositioning
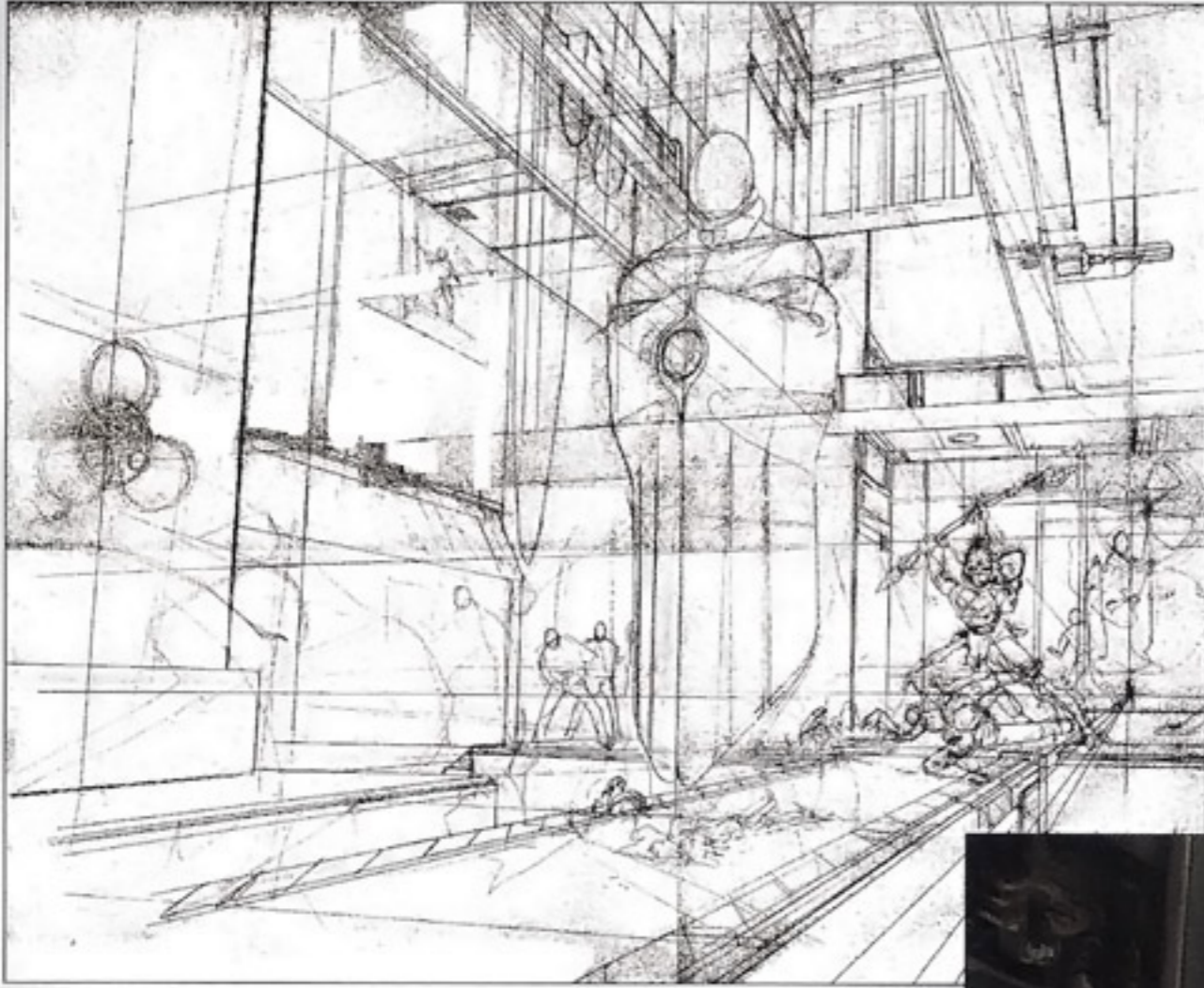
The art of Craig Mullins

ALLOWED HIM TO GIVE MOUTHS TO THE PFHOR. MARK REVAMPED AND CREATED A LARGE PORTION OF THE TEXTURES, MAKING THEM NOT ONLY USEFUL INDIVIDUALLY BUT ALSO AS A UNIFIED GROUP. (HE MANAGED TO HIDE HIS INITIALS IN ONE OF THE SWITCH TEXTURES.) MARK ALSO CONTRIBUTED A FAIR SHARE OF TERMINAL ART, INCLUDING A CARICATURE OF JASON, GREG AND ROB AS BOBS ON THE LEVEL "COME AND TAKE YOUR MEDICINE."

ROB WASN'T CONTENT TO SIMPLY REVISE OLDER ALIENS; HE CREATED SEVERAL NEW ONES AS WELL. ONE SUCH CREATION WAS THE "CYBORG TANK" WITH ITS MICHAEL JORDANESQUE WEAPONRY - THE BOUNCING BOMB. THESE WERE ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED AS SURGICALLY-ALTERED BOBS, AN "ENEMY" THE PLAYER MIGHT FEEL BAD ABOUT KILLING. (THEN AGAIN, SOME PEOPLE LIKE TO KILL BOBS.) ROB EXPLAINS HOW THE IDEA AROSE:

> "REMEMBER AFTER YOU AND DURANDAL HOOFED IT AWAY FROM TAU CETI, THE LARGER FORCE OF PFHOR SHOW UP AND RAIN ON EVERYBODY'S PARADE. BEING SLAVERS THEY GRAB WHAT THEY CAN AND TURN THE REST INTO SUB-ATOMIC SALSA. WELL I INITIALLY PUT FORWARD THE IDEA THAT YOU MIGHT RUN ACROSS THESE LOIN CLOTH-WEARING SHACKLED BOB'S ON ONE OF THE PFHOR SHIPS (AND AT SEVERAL LOCATIONS PLANETSIDE), BUT NO ONE WOULD GO FOR IT... SO THEN I CAME UP WITH THE IDEA THAT THE PFHOR HAVE ALL THIS INFORMATION ON YOU FROM TAPPING INTO THE INFORMATION STORED IN THE "PATTERN BUFFER DEVICES" THAT YOU DUMPED YOUR "PATTERN" INTO ALL OVER THE MARATHON. SO THE PFHOR HAVE A BUNCH OF SCHEMATICS AND ALL THIS RAW MATERIAL BUT NO EXPERIENCE THIS SORT OF ADVANCED SURGERY AND ONLY 17 YEARS TO "GET IT RIGHT". SO BASICALLY THE "CYBORG TANKS" ARE THESE UNFORTUNATE BOBS THAT HAVE BEEN "RADICALLY, SURGICALLY ALTERED" SO THAT THE PFHOR WOULD HAVE SOME HARD GUYS OF THEIR OWN WAITING FOR YOU WHEN YOU GOT TO LH'OWON! OF COURSE NONE OF THIS EVER MADE IT INTO THE GAME."

ROB ALSO CREATED THE S'PHT'KR DEFENDER, A SLEEK FUTURISTIC ALIEN. THE DEFENDER ONLY APPEARS NEAR THE END OF THE GAME, BUT AS THE FABLED LOST CLAN OF THE S'PHT RACE, THEY PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN THE PLOT. ROB CREATED THE DEFENDER IN STUDIOPRO; AS AN ASYMMETRICAL CREATURE, EVERY ACTION IT PERFORMED (SHOOTING, RAISING SHIELDS, CRASHING) HAD TO BE RENDERED SEPARATELY FROM EVERY ANGLE - ABOUT 40 RENDERINGS TOTAL. THE RESULT IS ONE OF THE MOST VISUALLY EXCITING ALIENS IN THE GAME.

LIKE THE FIRST MARATHON, THERE WERE A FEW ELEMENTS THAT NEVER MADE THEIR WAY INTO THE FINAL GAME. CHIEF AMONG THESE WERE THE ZOMBIE PFHOR. ORIGINALLY, THESE WERE PFHOR FIGHTERS THAT HAD BEEN MUTATED BY THE HIGHLY RADIOACTIVE LH'OWON ATMOSPHERE IN A LATER VERSION OF THE STORY THESE SADLY DEFORMED CREATURES WERE VICTIMS OF A BIOLOGICAL WEAPON DEVELOPED BY THE S'PHT RESCUED IN THE FIRST GAME. THOUGH CLOSE TO BEING COMPLETED, THE ZOMBIES WERE DROPPED WHEN SOMEONE POINTED OUT THAT A SUPERINTELLIGENT RACE LIKE THE S'PHT PROBABLY WOULDN'T DESIGN A BIOLOGICAL WEAPON THAT DIDN'T ACTUALLY KILL ITS VICTIMS, BUT TRANSFORMED THEM INTO SHAMBLING, BLOODTHIRSTY SAVAGES.

PRELIMINARY ART WAS ALSO DONE FOR A JET PACK, BUT THE IDEA WAS CANNED WHEN THE BUNGIE TEAM REALIZED THAT A PLAYER COULDN'T REALISTICALLY CONTROL THE JETPACK AND HOLD A WEAPON AT THE SAME TIME. PLANS FOR A NEW ALIEN WEAPON (WHICH FIRED ORDNANCE THAT EXPLODED INTO DOZENS OF DAMAGING FRAGMENTS ON IMPACT) WERE SCRAPPED DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS. ALSO SCRAPPED WAS A WRITHING VINE NATIVE TO THE S'PHT HOMEWORLD, WHICH FLAILED ABOUT AT ANY MOVING THING IN THE VICINITY.

WORK ON MARATHON 2 PROGRESSED OVER A LONG HOT SUMMER AND INTO THE FALL. MINDFUL OF THE PROBLEMS THAT ENSUED AFTER THEY ANNOUNCED MARATHON'S RELEASE DATE PREMATURELY, BUNGIE TOOK NO CHANCES THIS TIME. NO RELEASE DATES WERE OFFERED. SOME TOOK UMBRAGE AT THIS, BUT MOST FANS APPLAUDED BUNGIE'S DECISION TO PLAY THEIR CARDS CLOSE TO THEIR COLLECTIVE CHEST.

Concept sketch of the Cyborg
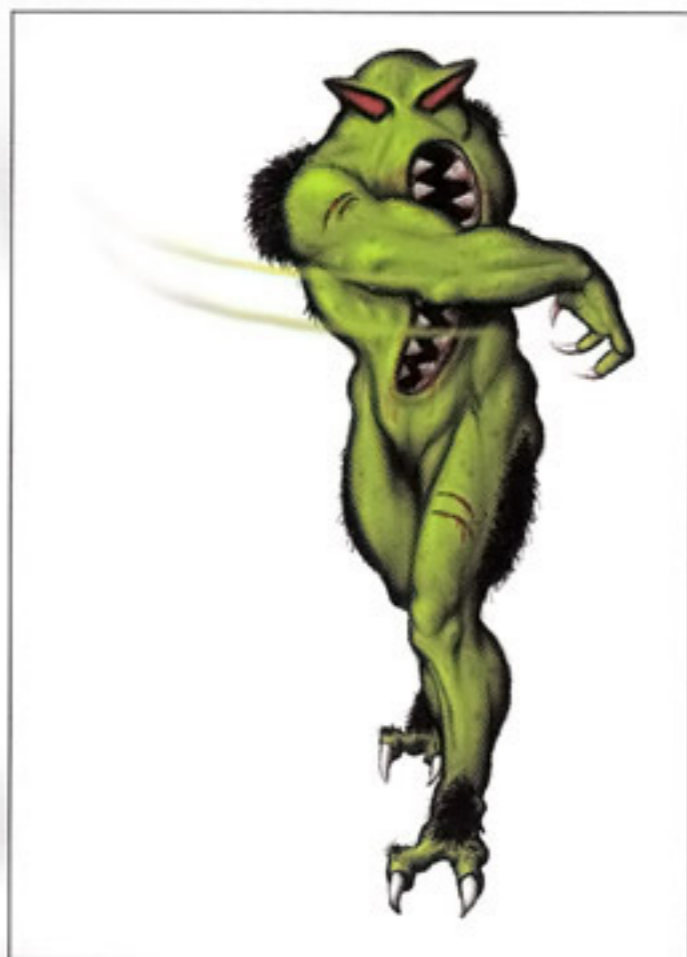
Mark Bernal's drawing of a Yeti

Concept sketch of the infected Pfhor. You guessed it, he also never made it into the game because the Elephant man's lawyers thought Bungie copied his "look and feel" a bit too closely.

Playtesting had become an almost constant process, occupying most of Bungie's time. Eventually Jason again issued an order that no one could go home without playing through the entire game. Over the course of the evening, someone stole Mark's hubcaps. Doug wussed out and stole away around 4 AM while nobody was looking. Matt was the last to finish, stubbornly plugging along until he finished the game at 9 AM. Having spent the twenty-four continuous hours staring intently at his monitor, Matt elected to take the rest of the day off and staggered downstairs to catch the first bus he could find.

A few days after this ordeal, Marathon 2 went "golden master." The team celebrated by eating a greasy breakfast at the Racine Cafe. It was agreed that, of the many lessons learned during the last nine months, the most important one was "Never eat at the Racine Cafe."

Marathon 2 shipped on November 24, 1995. The game consisted of 28 solo levels and 13 net levels. New network options included games like King of the Hill and Kill the Guy with the Ball. In addition, you could now play through the single-player scenario cooperatively with other network players.

The arrival of Marathon 2 revitalized third-party map-making. The online archives which had been set up to collate all things Marathon were flooded with new editors and new maps. Interest in Marathon had never been higher. Marathon 2 was outselling its predecessor. Ryan Martell graduated from Duke at the end of 1995 and returned to Bungie full-time to start work on the Windows 95 version of the game. Fans wondered what Bungie would come up with to top Marathon 2.

As it happened, Bungie was wondering the same thing. After returning from a triumphant Macworld SF in January of 1996, Bungie's programmers and artists secreted themselves away in The Lab, refusing to divulge the details of their work even to their coworkers (except for the occasional reference to "exploding soda machines"). Preliminary design was done for what was to be called Marathon 3, but this was abandoned after only a few weeks simply because everyone felt the urge to step out of the Marathon Universe and try something different. Jason began a brainstorming process which culminated in the development of a tactical wargame code-named Myth. As far as Bungie was concerned, the Marathon saga was over.

All together now, say "Computer Geeks!"

Heading home after a hard days work.

Rob McLees' drawing of the Marathon player kicking some serious booty.

Marathon Infinity (originally code-named "Extensor') happened only because Bungie wanted to release the tools they'd used to create the Marathon games. Of course, they couldn't just sell a Marathon map editor (that would be boring) so they decided to throw a few additional levels in the mix. This idea was quickly dropped in favor of a tripartite package containing a new solo scenario, new netmaps, a map and physics editor, and a Marathon 2 Strategy Guide.

Responsibility for the solo scenario fell to Greg Kirkpatrick, who was moving to Brooklyn, NY to set up his own game company with longtime friend Chris Geisel. In late February, Greg found an apartment big enough to double as an office, incorporated the company and Double Aught was born.

Double Aught started off working with Eric Klein, Bungie's licensing guru and third-party developer liaison. It became clear early on that everybody (Eric included) wanted to make something more than just a collection of levels - a scenario suffused with the eerie and perplexing plot twists that had set Marathon head and shoulders above the rest of the 3D shooters flooding the market. But because of time constraints, Infinity was initially limited to the same texture sets as in Marathon 2, meaning that the action of the game would necessarily be confined to the planet Lh'owon. Greg and Chris started fleshing out a story that would explore more of the Marathon universe but could still take place on the S'pht homeworld. Around this time Greg decided Double Aught would need some serious map making talents in order to finish all the solo levels they were planning and brought artist-hacker Randy Reddig into the Double Aught fold.

One thing that set Marathon Infinity apart from the previous games was the size and complexity of its solo maps. Infinity raised map-making to a new pinnacle with architectural masterpieces such as "Acme Station", "Aye Mak Sicur" and "A Converted Church in Venice, Italy". The game also contained some of the most bizarre levels in the entire series, including the Philip K. Dick-inspired "Electric Sheep" levels. Many of the solo levels were created "by committee" with Randy, Chris and Greg all lending a hand in their design and construction. The end result: a 25-level solo adventure laden with inspired map design, mind-numbing puzzles, and a storyline with a simply astounding level of metaphysical depth.

Infinity's storyline defies simple description, relying as it does on multiple realities and alternate timelines. Early versions of the story included a side-trip to the world of Pathways Into Darkness (since it had been cut from Marathon 2) but this idea was eventually shelved for good. The Jjaro connection is certainly not glossed over, although it takes a keen mind to understand the storyline at first glance.

Bungie officially announced development of Marathon Infinity on February 22, 1996 at the Tokyo Macworld Expo. The title "Marathon Infinity" came from Doug Zartman, who postulated that the name of the game should convey the idea that the game was virtually limitless, since it endowed players with the ability to make their own maps and scenarios. Alex Seropian asked Doug to come up with a title for the scenario: "...something cool, like 'Blood Tides of Lh'owon'." Doug came up with dozens of names, but none of them were quite as evocative as "Blood Tides of Lh'owon," so it stuck.

A few more outcasts and miscreants swelled Bungie's ranks at the beginning of 1996. Tuncer Deniz stopped hanging out on the sidelines and officially joined Bungie as Production Manager. Eric Klein, busy with a number of other projects, passed Infinity's reins to Tuncer. He spent the next six months nursing the product to fruition. Tuncer had long been associated with the Marathon series and was good friends with those at Bungie. His input into the Infinity project proved crucial to its development and ultimate success.

Jason Regier, a part-time game author, also joined Bungie in March and took on the onerous task of rewriting Vulcan for public release. Vulcan, though never shown outside Bungie's own offices, had a reputation for being extremely user-unfriendly. Jason accepted this assignment despite having

27
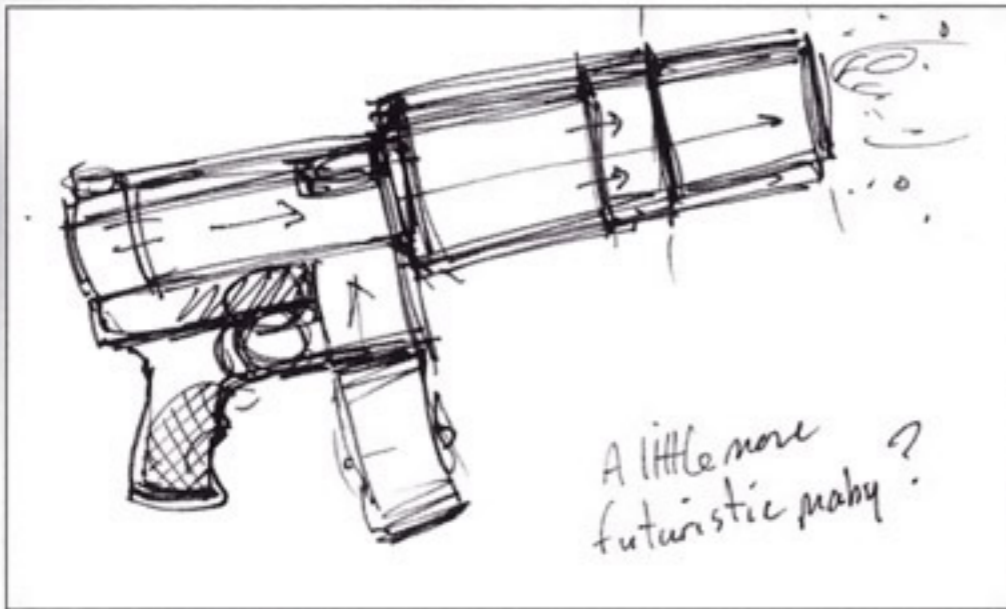
Concept sketch of the SMG for Marathon Infinity.

Alex (left) and Doug (right) working on Vacuum Bob sounds for Marathon Infinity.

Jason Regier (left) and Tuncer (middle) talk Forge strategy.

Jonas taking his after lunch nap

LITTLE PREVIOUS MAP MAKING EXPERIENCE. WORKING WITH SUGGESTIONS FROM JONAS AND TUNCER, JASON CAME UP WITH A COMPREHENSIVE FEATURE LIST AND HACKED AWAY.

BUNGIE ALSO COMMISSIONED MICHAEL HANSON, CREATOR OF THE THIRD-PARTY PHYSICS MODEL EDITORS FOR MARATHON AND MARATHON 2, TO WRITE ANVIL - A PHYSICS, SHAPES AND SOUNDS EDITOR FOR INFINITY. THEY ALSO COMMISSIONED RANDALL SHAW, ONE OF THE MOST TALENTED THIRD-PARTY MARATHON MAP-MAKERS, TO CREATE A NUMBER OF NETWORK LEVELS AND CONVERT ONE LEVEL FROM EACH OF THE THREE MARATHON GAMES INTO A SPECIAL "VIDMASTER CHALLENGE."

DOUBLE AUGHT SPENT A HECTIC SUMMER WORKING DAY AND NIGHT TO FINISH THE MAPS AND TERMINALS. DESPERATE FOR ADDITIONAL HANDS, THEY HIRED DAVID LONGO TO DO TERMINAL ART WORK. DAVID MESHED PERFECTLY WITH THE REST OF THE DOUBLE AUGHT TEAM; HE COULD TAKE A MINIMUM OF GRUNTING, MONOSYLLABIC DIRECTION AND DISTILL FROM THAT WHAT HE NEEDED TO CREATE BREATHTAKING ARTWORK. DAVID ALSO WENT ON TO CREATE THE VACUUM BOBS AND THE AMBIENT LIFE FORMS THAT WANDER AROUND MANY OF THE LEVELS. COLIN KAWAKAMI AND BETH ULMAN PROVIDED ADDITIONAL TERMINAL ART.

LATE IN THE SUMMER OF 1996, TUNCER SLAPPED EVERYONE INTO WAKEFULNESS AND ANNOUNCED THAT ENOUGH TIME REMAINED TO CREATE NEW TEXTURES AND A NEW WEAPON. DOUBLE AUGHT WERE PSYCHED EVEN THOUGH THEY HAD NO TIME TO REVISE INFINITY'S STORY, AT LEAST THE GAME WOULD HAVE A DISTINCT LOOK AND FEEL. RANDY REVAMPED ALL THE OLD TEXTURE SETS OVER TWO CAFFEINE-SOAKED DAYS; GREG HAD TO FEED RANDY LARGE QUANTITIES OF ARIZONA GINSING TEA TO BRING HIM BACK TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING. (CHRIS ALSO KICKED HIM A LITTLE.) BACK AT BUNGIE HQ, ROB MCLEES ADDED A NEW WEAPON, THE KKV-7 FLECHETTE, TO THE PLAYER'S HI-TECH ARSENAL. ALEX AND DOUG RECORDED A SLEW OF NEW BOB SOUNDS (AMONG THE DISCARDED ONES WERE "DOMO ARIGATO, MR. ROBOTO", "NO, YOUR MOM!", "SHOOT TO MAIM", "POCAHONTAS? I HARDLY KNOW HER!", "WHERE'S THE LOVE?", AND "THAT WASN'T IN THE MANUAL").

A HARDENED CADRE OF OVER FIFTY MARATHON ADDICTS SET ABOUT BETA-TESTING INFINITY. BUNGIE HAD NEVER USED EXTERNAL BETA-TESTERS BEFORE, BUT BUNGIE'S PROGRAMMERS AND ARTISTS WERE WORKING FLAT OUT ON THE MYTH PROJECT AND COULDN'T SPARE ANY TIME TO TEST INFINITY. TO THEIR CREDIT, THE BETA TESTERS DID A FANTASTIC JOB.

UPHOLDING THE TRADITION THEY HAD STARTED WITH MARATHON 2, BUNGIE MADE NO MENTION OF A RELEASE DATE FOR INFINITY UNTIL THE GAME WAS FINISHED AND SENT OFF TO THE CD PRESSING PLANT. MURPHY'S LAW WAS IN FULL EFFECT; INFINITY'S PRODUCTION WAS PLAGUED WITH PROBLEMS, AND BUNGIE WORRIED THAT THEY MIGHT NOT MEET THEIR ANNOUNCED SHIP DATE. THUMBSCREWS WERE APPLIED AS NECESSARY, AND MARATHON INFINITY SHIPPED AS PROMISED ON OCTOBER 15, 1996

PUBLIC REACTION WAS ENTHUSIASTIC. FANS OF THE GAMES HERALDED "BLOOD TIDES OF LH'OWON" AS A RETURN TO THE DARKER DAYS OF THE FIRST MARATHON. MAPMAKERS EMBRACED THE POWER AND VERSATILITY OF FORGE AND ANVIL.

AND BUNGIE, SATISFIED AT LAST THAT THE MARATHON SAGA HAD REACHED A FITTING CONCLUSION, CLOSED THE BOOK ON THAT CHAPTER OF THEIR HISTORY.

AND HERE WE ARE, SEVERAL YEARS LATER. MARATHON IS AN INSTITUTION, A LANDMARK AMONG MAC GAMES, A TOUCHSTONE FOR MAC GAMERS. BUNGIE HAS SOLD HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF MARATHON GAMES, AND THOSE WHO HAVE PLAYED THEM CAN TESTIFY TO THEIR STAYING POWER. BUT NOW, AS BUNGIE PREPARES TO LEAVE THE MARATHON UNIVERSE BEHIND AND SAIL INTO UNCHARTED WATERS, ONE MUST WONDER WHAT THEIR PURPOSE IS IN GATHERING THESE THREE GAMES TOGETHER FOR ONE LAST ASSAULT ON THE PUBLIC'S SENSES. IN AN INDUSTRY WHICH CONSTANTLY CELEBRATES THE NEXT BIG THING, WHY WOULD BUNGIE RETURN AGAIN TO A GAME THAT HAS ALREADY ACHIEVED CLASSIC STATUS? PERHAPS IT SERVES BEST AS A TIME CAPSULE, A REMINDER, A TESTAMENT TO WHAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH TENACITY AND FIERCE CREATIVITY.

Tuncer - "Greg, where are those maps, we need to ship!"
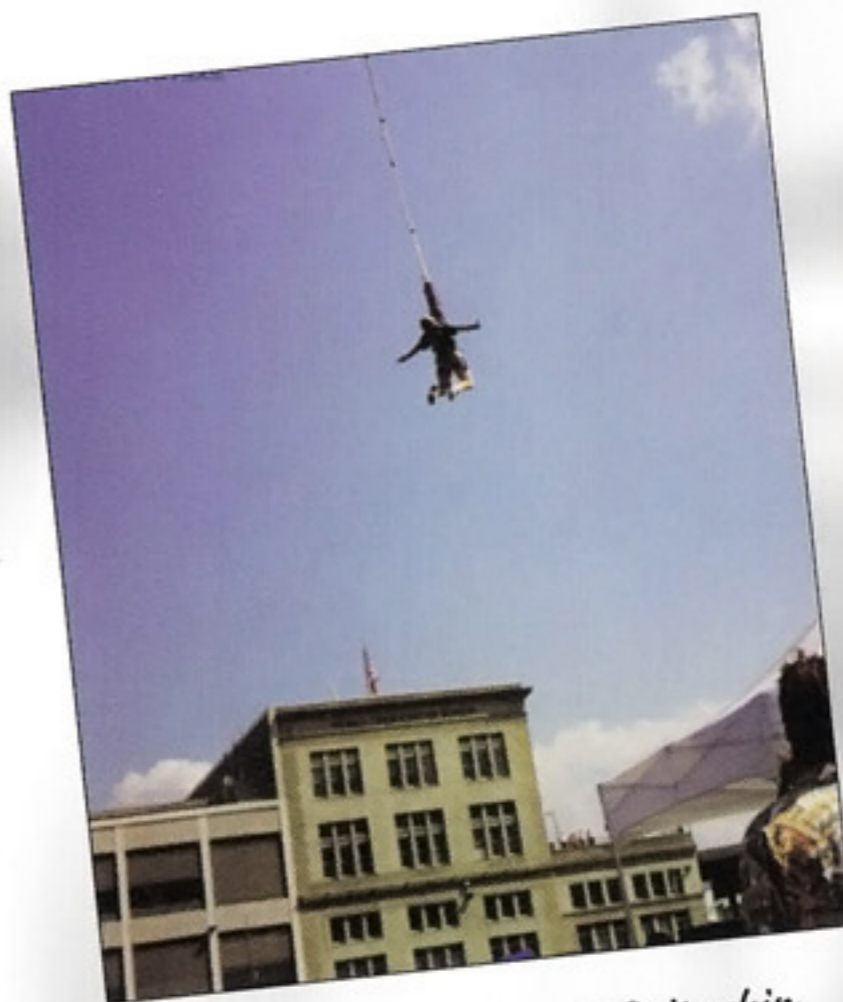
Alex attempts suicide as Infinity ship dates slip and slip!

Infinity finally ships! Throngs of Bungie babes surround Jonas.