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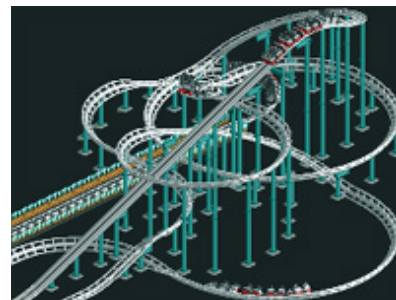
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Chris Sawyer Interview

We talk to the mastermind behind Roller Coaster Tycoon II & Transport Tycoon!

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On April 25 Chris Sawyer announced that he was hard at work on a follow-up to [Roller Coaster Tycoon II](#), a follow-up title to the ultra popular and best selling strategy theme park building game and that it would be published by Infogrames around the world. If you've been playing games in the last few years then there's no way that you could have missed Sawyer's masterpiece. The game, loved by both hardcore and casual gamers alike, has seen the launch of two successful expansion packs and has been highlighted and lauded by the mainstream and game media as a masterpiece. Its no wonder



[What wondrous adventures await you in Roller Coaster Tycoon II?](#)

that these things have occurred considering that the man behind these games is also the man behind another masterpiece called Transport Tycoon and that he has single-handedly developed all of these games all by himself. So it is with great pleasure that we offer an interview with Chris Sawyer -- the man that made hauling lumber and building wild roller coaster rides the most exciting things to do on a Saturday night:

GameSpy: First off tell us a little bit about how you came up with the concepts used in your cult classic Transport Tycoon, and why do you think the game was so popular.

Chris Sawyer: Transport Tycoon was very much inspired by the classic Railroad Tycoon, but I wanted it to be much more - I wanted to create a world which seemed to be living and breathing, where you could see things evolving, watch the competing companies' vehicles running around, and also have some fun just constructing and organizing the routes and vehicles. Perhaps it was so popular because of the depth and open-ended nature of the game - Like RollerCoaster Tycoon, you could play it in many different ways depending on what you enjoyed doing, and still stand a good chance of achieving your goals.

GameSpy: Will we ever see a sequel to Transport Tycoon?

Chris Sawyer: I'm sure we will see a sequel at some point in the future. I watch with interest when similar games are released, but so far none of them come close to what I see as the 'next' version of Transport Tycoon, so I think there is a good chance I will eventually create a sequel myself.

GameSpy: Tell us a bit about your new game, Roller Coaster Tycoon II. Beyond the fact that the first game and its add-ons sold millions around the world, what was your motivation for doing a follow-up? What will RC2 offer that RC1 and its add-ons didn't?

Chris Sawyer: RollerCoaster Tycoon II takes all the well-loved and familiar elements of the original game and expands on them with features like a larger map size, vertical scenery construction, a scenario editor, and my favorite - track designs which can include scenery, allowing a completely themed ride to be constructed with just a couple of mouse clicks. Of course there will also be new

rides, scenery, and parks, but the main reason for the new version was to improve the functionality and gameplay, something that wasn't possible through a further add-on pack for the original game.

GameSpy: You obviously love amusement parks and roller coasters. How long does it take you to conceive and implement a ride design and what's the most difficulty part of the process?

Chris Sawyer: Putting in a completely new ride design from scratch could take a couple of months work, but because rides like roller coasters all work in a similar way, code can be re-used, track models can be based on existing track models, and many other shortcuts can be taken to speed up production. 'Flat' rides (rides which don't have a player-designed 'track') can actually take even longer to produce. The most difficult part of the process for all rides is designing the ride so that it 'fits' within the game while still looking right. For instance the track sections of roller coasters have to align with the map squares, and the various inversions have to also align correctly with certain 3D coordinates so all the pieces can plug into each other.

GameSpy: Will there be any major changes to the aesthetics in RC2? Will it use a whole new engine or will it be based on RC1's technology?

Chris Sawyer: The 'look and feel' of the original game is carried through virtually unchanged into the new game, though technically there have been many changes. Code from another project I've been working on was used to improve the animation and detail for vehicles, and the whole scenery construction side of things is far better in the new game, but there are also some elements and graphics which survive virtually unchanged from the original game. I don't waste time changing things for changes sake - My goal was to keep the good bits and spend the time improving the not-so-good bits.

GameSpy: Will there be any changes in the game's AI to make it more intelligent?

Chris Sawyer: The AI of the little guests is an on-going personal challenge for me. It's easy to make the guests ultra-intelligent and always find their way around, but then the whole game runs at a snails pace if there are more than a handful of guests in the park! The trick is to make the algorithms simple and fast enough to efficiently handle upwards of 5000 guests at a time, while still making the guests intelligent enough not to get lost too often. I've added an additional layer of AI in the new game which if it proves reliable will make the guests decisions more natural, but of course some guests will always get lost, either because they can't work out how to read a map, or because the footpath layout is so obscure they can't work out how to get to where they want, just like in real life!

GameSpy: What's the biggest complaint you've heard about the first game and did you make any changes to gameplay based on gamers' feedback?

Chris Sawyer: I think the most common complaint from players of the original game is that it's too difficult to individually remove trees while building a ride! Well that's something I've fixed, along with many other things, which perhaps frustrate players (including myself).

GameSpy: Do you feel that you're a legendary developer? What's your perception of your status as a developer in the world?

Chris Sawyer: I don't know - I think the unique way I still create games virtually single-handedly lends itself to 'legendary' status, but perhaps instead of being a legend, I have created a legend in RollerCoaster Tycoon. I'm sure RollerCoaster Tycoon will be remembered long after I've been forgotten.

GameSpy: What's your opinion on violent games -- You've proven that a game can contain zero violence and be fun for the whole family? What's your opinion on

games that offer more hardcore gameplay and would you ever consider making games like that?

Chris Sawyer: I'm strongly against violent games, and while I'm not about to demand the banning of every violent game around I think we need more non-violent, positive, constructive games so people have the choice of what to play. Computer games are getting a bad name for themselves - Many people think all computer games are violent, perhaps not knowing that there are actually some pretty fun non-violent games out there. As games get more realistic, the violence issue will get worse - It's one thing killing a low-resolution pixilated cartoon image, but quite another when you see a photo-realistic rendered face dying in front of you. I think it's up to people like myself to create alternatives and show that you can have just as much fun playing a 'positive' game where you are rewarded for good design skills and achievement rather than destruction and pain.

GameSpy: Can we expect to see expansions for RC2 like we did with the previous game?

Chris Sawyer: It's always an option, but let me finish the game itself first!

GameSpy: In closing, what would you consider your crowning achievement?

Chris Sawyer: I think it has to be the original RollerCoaster Tycoon - I was told by many in the games industry that the game would never sell, the design was all wrong, and it had to use polygonal graphics, and yet I ignored the critics and ended up creating one of the best-selling PC games of all time. I doubt I'll ever be able to do better than that.

If there's one thing I'm certain about Chris Sawyer, it is that he will do better than that with Roller Coaster Tycoon II and with anything else he decides to create. Some developers wish they had the magic touch, turning every game they make into gold, but Chris Sawyer (like Sid Meier, John Carmack & Will Wright) has the magic. Thanks to Chris and Jayson Hill over at Infogrames for taking time out to talk to us. We'll have more information on this game during E3 so stay tuned.