

THE FORCE UNLEASHED LAUNCH PARTY



Monday 15th September 2008 was the night of the Lucasarts Launch party for their highly anticipated new video game *The Force Unleashed* and I was lucky enough to attend.

The event was held at the Best Buy store on Harrison Street in San Francisco, not a million miles away from the Lucasfilm complex at The Presidio.

I had read a little on the internet before hand and was aware that some of the talent involved in the game were going to be present, and as a big *Star Wars* gaming fan, this had peaked my interest so I was keen to go and meet some of the “stars” of the game.

As things turned out I got much more than I expected.

The event kicked off at 7pm so I arrived a little early at about 6.30pm, there was already a fair few people there, along with the local 501st Garrison, providing the

usual costumed fan element. Obviously this event was all about promoting and selling the long delayed game and Lucasarts really pushed the boat out for this.

As well as many of the actors and game developers attending, the very special guest was none other than Mr George Lucas.

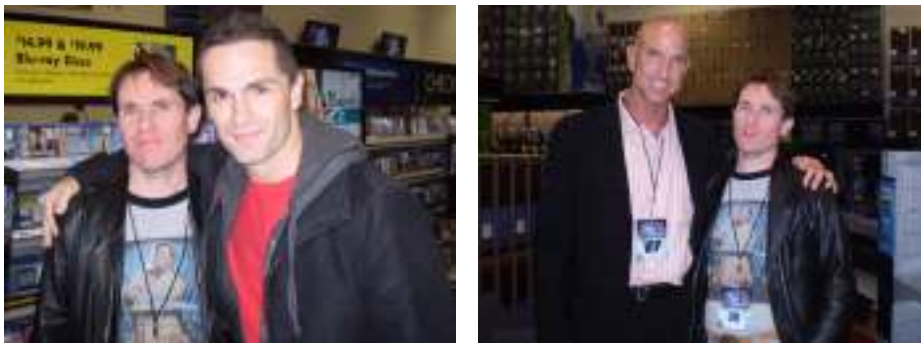


Promotional banners depicting characters from the game.
Starkiller: Vader's Secret Apprentice, General Rahm Kota and Darth Vader.

The store had been decked out with huge promotional banners for the game, as well as having numerous set ups of playable consoles covering all formats so you could try before you buy.

All attendees were given a raffle ticket for a chance to win Lucasfilm goody bags that would be given away throughout the evening.

A small raised stage had been erected upon which the hosts would conduct interviews with guests and whip the fans into a frenzy when throwing out free gifts.



Above. With Sam Witwer (Starkiller: Vader's Secret Apprentice) and Cully Fredricksen (General Rahm Kota)

Tables had also been set out from which guests would be signing autographs and doing meet and greets with the fans. Amazingly all autographs from the guests were

free, ok, some of the people are barely known but Sam Witwer who plays Starkiller is a reasonably well known TV actor who's star is on the rise.

Sam Witwer : Starkiller, Vader's Secret Apprentice

Sam was a great guy to meet; he was so friendly and enthusiastic about his involvement in the game. He told me it was a dream job for him as he was a huge *Star Wars* fan and had been since he was a child. As the main character in the game he spent ten weeks filming his scenes and character actions using the motion capture process. As the game was delayed by almost a year, he had several call backs to do additional work, often for just a few hours to do simple facial expressions or physical actions. He was thrilled that the game was finally out and gladly spent time with the fans he was grateful to for turning out to see him.

Sam was in high demand all night, doing interviews on stage and with the many TV crews who were in attendance. The whole event was also being filmed by Lucasfilm, presumably for their own records and in house promotions.

Sam had a long line waiting for autographs whenever he went to his table. This may have something to do with his appearances in other sci-fi and genre TV shows like *Battlestar Galactica* and *Dexter*. Sam was recently in Frank Darabont's movie of Stephen King's *The Mist* and will be seen in the new season of *Smallville* as a new Villain based on the Domsday character.

Sam also plays the role of Emperor Palpatine in the game.



Cully Fredricksen: Jedi Knight General Rahm Kota

The very tall (although his height is not reflected in the game character) Cully Fredrickson was another very friendly guy, happy to finally see his work on the game reaching the target audience. He initially spent just one day acting out his relatively small role but like all the other actors he was called back for many pick ups to capture gestures and expressions. Cully happily signed posters and game boxes as well as his action figure that some fans had bought along. The figures were released months ago to coincide with the proposed release date and oddly Hasbro did not produce a figure of Sam Witwer's character, despite being the lead role.

Cully has a string of film and mainly TV appearances to his credit, most notably for sci-fi fans in *Star Trek: First Contact* and an episode of *Star Trek: Voyager*.

He very much hopes the exposure from the game will lead to a higher profile for him.



Above: Adrienne Wilkinson alias Maris Brood, at her table and on stage.

Adrienne Wilkinson : Maris Brood

The very pretty and petit Adrienne was another thrilled by her involvement in *The Force Unleashed*. She commented on the lengthy make up process when I spoke to her, in fact she is perhaps the least recognisable when compared to her game character. She very much enjoyed the physical aspect of the game as her role as Maris Brood involved wielding two lightsabers.

Adrienne has a lengthy list of TV, movie and videogame credits to her name, most notably a stint on the genre serial *Xena: Warrior Princess*.

She was very friendly and gracious with the fans, happily signing and posing for pictures. Like Adrienne said herself, I hope this role leads to more roles and recognition.

Other guests at the event included long-time Lucasfilm employee and former *Star Wars Celebration* host, David M. Collins, who voices the role of Proxy, the droid assistant to Starkiller, along with many of the technical personnel who developed the game, including Haden Blackman, executive producer and author of one of the books based on the game.



George Lucas arrives on stage to thunderous applause. With Haden Blackman on the left and Sam Witwer, middle.

Just before 9pm the guest of honour for the evening was introduced on stage.

Wearing his trademark jeans, plaid shirt and sweater, George Lucas thanked all the fans for turning out and explained how grateful he is for our continued support for all things *Star Wars*. He said he was very happy with the game and hoped we all enjoyed playing it.

He was only on stage very briefly for about ten minutes at most but the fact that he turned out to promote a videogame is indicative of the need for his new SW ventures to succeed. With a lukewarm response both critically and financially to *The Clone Wars* movie, the success of *The Force Unleashed* is crucial in maintaining the franchise.

After George left the proceedings continued with more prize giveaways and opportunities to talk with and meet the other guests.

Another cool thing was that they had set up a small green screen area at which

you could have your picture taken and then have it composited into the box artwork for the game, hence becoming the Secret Apprentice.

This was something I did and the picture came out great, eventually, the whole process was plagued with technical problems all evening, but was worth the wait.

I hung around for a while longer, soaking up the atmosphere before making an early exit around 10pm, although it continued onto midnight when the game went on sale for the first time.

One person absent from this launch party was Nathalie Cox who plays the foxy Juno Eclipse in the game. David Collins told me she was in England (logical as she is British) and that she would be attending a UK launch party.

Others absent but who feature in the game were Matt Sloan who voices Darth Vader and Jimmy Smits who reprises his role of Bail Organa.



So after all this, was it a success? Well, the game sold 1.5 million copies in it's first week, a success by many standards but when you consider games like *Soul Calibur* and *Halo* sold between 3 and 4 million copies in their first week, it seems a disappointment.

As for the game itself, well I haven't completed it yet but from what I have played, it's a good game with great graphics, a good story and cool play features. However it doesn't differ that much from previous output from Lucasarts and is not quite the be all and end all that some were expecting. A worthy addition

to the Lucasarts library of games but not much more.

Ian Trussler

