



**Jedi rocks**  
The Secret Apprentice becomes forceful with Stormtroopers and chats to a robot but not C3PO, left with George Lucas



**Emperor strikes back**  
Actor Ian McDiarmid's character in the film was recreated for the video game

## Wanton destruction

Back across the Golden Gate bridge and after a drive up Lucas Valley Road (named after an 1880s rancher of no relation), Skywalker Ranch sits among the rolling northern California hills. A secluded retreat for film-makers that houses the world-famous audio production facility Skywalker Sound, the verdant tranquility of Lucas's workplace is utterly breathtaking and an odd place to be discussing a game about wanton destruction.

"It's hard to create a Star Wars character from scratch and just cross your fingers and hope people will like him," says actor Sam Witwer, relaxing in one of Skywalker Sound's offices.

Chosen to play the Secret Apprentice, the mysterious character at the centre of the game who is raised by Vader from birth to do his evil deeds, the engaging actor, most recently seen in horror film *The Mist*, was impressed by the depth of the storyline.

"The theme of *The Force Unleashed* is redemption," he says. "Whereas Luke Skywalker starts out in a very innocent place and gets sort of weathered by the war, this guy starts at the opposite end of the spectrum and makes his way back."

While it is not unusual for actors to lend their voices or likeness to a game, Lucasarts

## 'REDEMPTION IS THE THEME'

SAM WITWER, actor



have gone one step further by assembling a full cast for *The Force Unleashed* and having them play out the script as if it were a film, using ILM's

CloneCam technology – the same technique used to turn Bill Nighy into a squid-faced villain in *Pirates* – to capture their performances. "We didn't have scenery, we weren't on location, but on the soundstage we would be pacing out scenes and that really brought everything to life," explains Adrienne Wilkinson, the ex-*Xena: Warrior Princess* star who plays feisty Jedi Maris Brood.

"The characters are so multidimensional and dynamic and I think much of that is because we had the opportunity to bounce off one another." If Star



**Warrior princess**  
Ex-*Xena* actress Adrienne Wilkinson plays Jedi Maris Brood in the computer game

Wars: *The Force Unleashed* is successful, taking centre stage in a video game might well become a viable road to stardom for actors, although Witwer is cautious about the prospect. "Well, I don't know. It's a new thing, who knows?" he says. "I just hope that fans enjoy the story and that they get behind the character. As for whether it encourages people to seek out other work that I've done – if that happens great. If not, I still got to be in a Star Wars property, so I'm happy."

After being treated to a lightsabre fight with Witwer and Wilkinson and presented with our very own Jedi weapon, it is time to hit Lucas Valley Road again and head home.

## Game play

For all the remarkable technology that has gone into *The Force Unleashed*, its potential success will come down to whether it is enjoyable to play. Although the team have high hopes that the characters will connect with audiences in the same way that Luke Skywalker did back in 1977, in the game world, character and storyline must ultimately take a backseat to gameplay.

"Our ultimate goal was to make a fun game, so we didn't want to be too caught up in how cutting edge we were being," says Haden Blackman.

"We try to get the basics right first and then hopefully the story and the other things will help make the experience that much better."

Driving away from Skywalker Ranch, the notion that a video game could have the same cultural impact as a Star Wars film is still hard to imagine, but after spending time at Lucas's Marin County Empire, there is no doubting the director's uncanny ability to foresee the future of popular entertainment. ●

**Star Wars: The Force Unleashed is out in September**



**1983 – 1994:** Star Wars and Indy sequels continue to turn a profit, but other Lucas-produced ventures, such as *Willow*, fail at the box office

**1997:** Lucas releases digitally-retouched versions of Star Wars to packed-out cinemas

**1999:** Star Wars Episode one is released and, despite a critical mauling, takes more than £450m, with the two sequels reaching similar figures

**2005:** Forbes.com estimates that Star Wars has generated £10bn; £4.5bn of this has come from associated toys

**2007:** Lucas's personal wealth estimated at £1.3bn

**2008:** Lucas unveils *Indy IV*, Star Wars animated movie *The Clone Wars* and *The Force Unleashed*