

NONE DARE CALL THEM GEEKS

Creators of *The Force Unleashed*, plus cast members, from left: John Stafford, Matthew Fillbrandt, Maris Brood, Peter Hirschmann, Darth Vader, Isa Stamos, Julio Torres, Matt Tateishi, Cedrick Collomb, Haden Blackman, Darth Vader's secret apprentice, Jim Ward, Rich Davis, Eric Johnston, and Matt Omernick, photographed in San Francisco.



THE GAME HAS CHANGED

This summer, Xbox and PlayStation junkies will get to feel as if they've gone inside a *Star Wars* movie, one that in some ways has a mind of its own. As the author discovers firsthand, video games are entering a whole new universe

BY FRANK DiGIACOMO

To visit the San Francisco offices of LucasArts, the video-game arm of George Lucas's entertainment empire, is to glimpse firsthand the dividends that his six-episode *Star Wars* saga has generated over the last 30 years. The \$350 million state-of-the-technological-art Presidio campus that the company shares with its moviemaking brethren, Lucasfilm and visual-effects house Industrial Light & Magic, boasts a commissary with panoramic views of the city (including, on a clear day, the Golden Gate Bridge); an employee gift shop stocked with Skywalker Ranch olive oil, *Star Wars* merchandise, and other Lucasfilm swag; and a plush 350-seat theater where employees can test-

drive video games on a full-size movie screen or watch the latest film releases after work.

In many cases, the employees themselves are byproducts of the influence of *Star Wars*: writers, designers, animators, and artists who, as kids and teens, were wowed by the movies and decided that they, too, wanted to create science-fiction and fantasy characters and visuals that were as fully formed and plausible as those that Lucas had put on movie screens. But instead of lining up behind the crowds jockeying to get into film school, these future storytellers chose as their canvas the much younger and more interactive medium of video games, a medium that increasingly overlaps with filmmaking—artistically, technically, and in terms of storytelling technique—but that also has its own rules,

philosophies, and cultural touchstones. On the Presidio campus there stands a bronze statue of Eadweard Muybridge, whose series of consecutive photos taken at a horse farm in 1878—known today as “The Horse in Motion”—is a motion-picture prototype. The Muybridge of the video-game industry is arguably Nolan Bushnell, co-founder of Atari and the creator in the mid-70s of *Pong*, the first successful, if primitive, home video game: a digitally generated ball was knocked between two digitally generated paddles until one of the players was declared the winner or fell asleep from boredom. Along those same lines, Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man are the equivalent of silent-film stars, and, for a number of LucasArts executives, the *Citizen Kane* of 3-D video games is Nintendo's *Su-*

HAIR, MAKEUP, AND GROOMING BY MEAGANNE MCCANDISS; FOR DETAILS, SEE CREDITS PAGE