



PRESS START

Production Notes

Zack Nimbus (Joshua Stafford) is a typical suburban youth and volunteer monster exterminator living peacefully in a videogame world. It's a realm where people actually do cross rivers by jumping across alligators' heads (or being chomped to death in the attempt) and where injuries can be cured by eating food found laying about in old hallways. Here, the pleasant days are ending due to world conquest by the unspeakably evil but insecure and telephone-addicted wizard, Count Nefarious Vile (Peter Davis).

Zack soon finds himself recruited by battle-hardened space soldier Sam (Lauren Chambers) and enthusiastically bad-tempered ninja Lin-Ku (Al Morrison) to join a last desperate attempt to thwart Vile's imminent victory. But not before lampooning every videogame convention that comes their way.

Press Start was produced and directed by Ed Glaser and written by Kevin Folliard from a story idea by Glaser. While Hollywood has produced more or less serious adaptations of specific game franchises from *Mortal Kombat* to *Tomb Raider*, and fans have attempted both serious and parody versions of their favorite games, *Press Start* stands alone as the first motion picture to play with the videogame experience as a whole. Furthermore, it's the first film in which people who actually create videogames take part in spoofing themselves.

Among them are Daniel and Carlos Pesina, veteran martial artists featured as live action characters in the *Mortal Kombat* I and II games. Daniel portrayed Johnny Cage, Sub-Zero and Scorpion while his brother Carlos appeared as Raiden. Providing the original soundtrack is composer Jake Kaufman, who scored the music for games such as *Shantae* and the upcoming *Contra 4*.

Kaufman describes *Press Start* as “a videogame movie that doesn’t use any specific licenses, but instead it has all the physics and plot idiosyncrasies for which we love our favorite games. It takes all those people who say ‘Why would venus flytraps have treasure?’ and laughs... and that’s why it’s magical.”

Press Start will be available on DVD through the film's website, www.PressStartMovie.com, as of September 25, 2007.

ORIGINS

Glaser’s original idea was to make a parody that was essentially "Videogame: The Movie!" He envisioned a mishmash of videogame genres, with jokes and references piled upon themselves as the protagonist came to grips with the fact that his normal world had started to behave like a videogame. He carried that idea in the back of his mind while working on other films and searching for someone to write the script.

He found that someone in Folliard, who had worked with Glaser on other projects. An avid videogame fan as well as a funny writer, Kevin seemed like an ideal choice, and was immediately interested when Ed mentioned the idea. A couple months later, when Ed suggested that they start on the project, he was surprised and delighted to find that Kevin was already several scenes into a draft.

“Kevin took my original vague ideas and made them his own.” Glaser commented. “He took the parts that worked and reshaped them into something far better than I’d developed.”

MIRACLES IN MICROBUDGET

Glaser has, until now, been hesitant to talk about the actual budget for the film, quipping that, “Where some independent producers have investors, and others have credit cards they can max out, we have an empty mayo jar we dump our spare change into.” As it turns out, that isn’t far from the truth. The actual cost of filmmaking was in the low four-figure range. But it doesn’t look it.

Essential to making pennies do the job of dollars was Production Designer Meagan Benz. Creating props and wardrobe, doing make-up, constructing sets, and working out logistics, she worked closely with Glaser to ensure that the ideas in the script could be converted to reality

with the resources available — even when that meant coming up with new resources. She also appears onscreen as assorted incidental entities and provides the voice for Zippy, Sam’s adorable but annoyingly useless familiar.

Other members of the team kicked in as well, providing warehouses, garages, and martial arts dojos to function as studio sets. By the time everything was combined with Glaser’s camera trickery and CGI effects from Rod Contreras, the results looked far more expensive.

Veteran stage actor and theatre professor Peter Davis gives much credit to Glaser’s editing skills, saying, “I’m extremely impressed by how well this is put together. It’s edited in a brilliant way. For me the most fun was to watch the process as it was edited and changed and Ed has really put this together fantastically.”

“Probably the most compelling aspect of the project,” adds Kaufman, “was that the crew and cast dedication and their attention to detail was so insanely strong that a lot of the time you’re fooled into thinking they actually had a budget.”

CAMEO GUEST STARS

In truth, the film would not have been possible if a number of people like Kaufman hadn’t joined with Ed in taking it on as a labor of love.

“Ed sent me an email,” Kaufman explained, “and I said ‘Sure, I’ll do it.’ without even thinking about it. I have less than zero free time... but this was such an incredible idea that I had no choice, I just had to make time for it.”

Daniel Pesina echoes the sentiment, although he almost declined the project because he thought Ed’s email was asking him to appear in another videogame. Fortunately, his wife read the email more closely and suggested he do the same.

“I read it,” Pesina says, “and realized this was exactly the type of stuff I’d like to do. Somebody being creative. Then [Ed] sent me the script and I loved it!”

A similar contribution came from CGI artist Rod Contreras, whose enthusiastic efforts brought a small fortune’s worth of visual effects to the film. Aside from laying on the usual assortment of laser blasts, magic spells and such, Contreras created a 3D version of Count Vile’s lair; a talking, card-playing tree; and an entirely CG character in the form of Zippy.

The tree, a combination of CGI and an actual tree, was voiced by another guest star: Arin Hanson, who portrayed Bruce Banner in the *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* game.

MARTIAL ARTS

A major plus for the production was the degree of martial arts talent among the cast and crew. Aside from the renowned Pesina brothers, Stafford, Morrison and Chambers are accomplished martial artists in their own rights, as is Michael Kleppin, who appears as Lin-Ku's old foe, Captain Psychodrive. The results make for far more impressive fight sequences than one would find in a typical microbudget movie.

Stafford and Morrison doubled as fight choreographers, with further contributions from Kleppin and the Pesinas.

“Not only are all the fighting characters actually able to handle the action,” says Glaser, “but every character has their own distinct martial arts style.”

BONUS LEVELS

Fans of Glaser and Folliard's videogame humor have already received a taste of what's to come through a series of monthly animated prequels entitled *Bonus Levels*. These Flash cartoons introduce the world of the movie along with the major characters. In fact, they greatly expand the movie's world in portraying other satirical characters who could not appear in the film, although several were referred to.

Over the past year, *Bonus Levels* has developed a large, enthusiastic fan base, thanks to exposure on sites like Newgrounds.com and YouTube.

Not only did the animated series allow the *Press Start* team to tell stories and jokes beyond the scope (and budget) of the film, but it also allowed for the appearance of several additional guest stars. Contributing their voices to Bonus Level characters were John Turk (Sub-Zero in *Mortal Kombat 3* and *MK Mythologies*), David Humphrey (Shadow the Hedgehog from *Sonic Adventure 2* and *Sonic Heroes*), Robert Belgrade (Alucard from *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*), and the aforementioned Arin Hanson.

Several of the *Bonus Levels* cartoons will be included with the Press Start DVD. All may be seen at the www.PressStartMovie.com web site.

THE CAST

Joshua Stafford (*Zack Nimbus*) is more than merely a videogame enthusiast; he's also a game tester for Volition, Inc., the developer of such games as *Summoner*, *The Punisher*, and *Saints Row*. He is also a skilled martial artist, with several years of experience in Ninjutsu, Kobujutsu, and Iaido.

Lauren Chambers (*Sam*) is a model and an experienced martial artist with 13 years of training in Tae Kwon Do, which she currently teaches in Champaign, IL.

Al Morrison (*Lin-Ku*) is an Iaido instructor and second degree black belt, with additional experience in Kendo and Kobujutsu.

Peter Davis (*Count Nefarious Vile*) began his career as a professional actor, director, writer, and dramaturg over thirty years ago in California, working with such companies as Synthaxis and Theatreworks. After more than two decades in higher education, he moved to Chicago in 2003 and began acting again, including productions with Defiant (*A Clockwork Orange*), Strawdog (*Three Sisters*), and Remy Bumppo (*Arcadia*, *Aren't We All*, and *The Best Man*), where he is also the resident dramaturg. He will be performing again next season in Remy Bumppo's revival of *The Philadelphia Story* and the American Theatre Company's production of *Born Yesterday*. Since 1991, he has been a professor in the Department of Theatre at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where he chairs the MA/PhD Program. His book on the history of America's first play is being published next spring by the University of Iowa Press.

Andy Dallas (*Shopkeeper*) is a world-renowned performer and former president of the Society of American Magicians. He has appeared in several of director Ed Glaser's previous films, including *Dead by Dawn* and *Night of Anubis*.

Daniel Pesina (*Sasori*) is perhaps best known for his multiple roles as fighters Johnny Cage, Scorpion, Sub-Zero, and Reptile from the first two *Mortal Kombat* videogames. His film career includes roles in the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movies and *The Book of Swords*. As a martial artist, Daniel has won numerous awards in forms, weapons and fighting on the A.A.U.,

N.A.S.K.A., and U.S.A. KungFu/Wushu circuits. He currently teaches Wushu in Chicago, IL.

Carlos Pesina (*Lei Gong*), aside from being an accomplished martial artist with 20 years of experience, is a motion capture artist and animator for Midway Games. He's renowned for his behind-the-scenes work on fighting games, where his research into martial arts styles has added new levels of depth to game play and his motion capture expertise has earned him the nickname "One Take." *Mortal Kombat* fans, however, best know him for his on-monitor performance as the thunder god Raiden.

THE FILMMAKERS

Ed Glaser (*Producer/Director/Editor*) is a filmmaker, freelance videographer, and founder of Dark Maze Studios. He is a graduate of the theater directing program at the University of Illinois, and although he has directed several stageplays, his true passion has always been for film. He has directed several microbudget movies including *Dead by Dawn*, *Dead by Dawn 2* and *Night of Anubis*. *Press Start* is his first feature length film.

Kevin Folliard (*Writer*) is a graduate of the colleges of English and Rhetoric at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has appeared onstage in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and as the title character in *The Graduate*. He has also assistant directed Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Film credits include *Dead By Dawn 2* and *Night of Anubis*. He has recently completed two sci-fi/fantasy novels.

Meagan Benz (*Production Designer*) has worked on production design for several microbudget films, including *Dead by Dawn* where she also served as Assistant Director, and *Night of Anubis*. Besides her work on props, sets and costumes, she is also the PR/Marketing Assistant for Dark Maze Studios.

Jake Kaufman (*Composer*) is a prolific and versatile musician and videogame composer. He has created soundtracks for numerous games, including *TMNT* (DS), *The Legend of Kay* (PS2), *Shantae* (GBC), and the upcoming, much-anticipated *Contra 4* (DS). In his spare time he

programs new music using vintage game consoles like the NES, TurboGrafx16, and Game Boy.

Rod Contreras (*Visual Effects*) has always had an interest in art and illustration. Although his background is mostly in computer aided design it was just a short jump to the use of 3D and video editing programs, all self taught. Rod has provided visual effects of various levels for several independent short films, ranging from small 3D props and digital sets to fully animated sequences. His visual effects work for *Press Start* has been the most extensive to date.