

CALENDAR

PART II

Friday, February 16, 2007

E34 FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2007

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Just not into that awards game

The videogame trade has a tough time getting members to leave their computers and play celebrity for a night.

By HEATHER CHAPLIN
Special to The Times

In 1998, when the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences hosted its first award show for videogames, it laid down a red carpet to add Hollywood glamour. Confused game makers, not knowing what it was for, carefully skirted it. Ten years later, they know what it's for, but they're still not sure they like it.

Flashy awards shows may be a popular way of conveying legitimacy and status on our cultural chosen ones, but not all culture makers were created alike and not all were meant — or want — to get in front of the camera and play the celebrity.

"When the academy was created, it was to have a platform to showcase great games each year in a manner similar to the Oscars, Emmys and Grammys," said Joseph Olin, the academy's president. "And I think there was a certain level of naiveté about how easy this would be."

Last year, game-of-the-year nominee David Jaffe e-mailed Olin to find out if he could wear jeans. (When his game "God of War" won, his acceptance speech included a heartfelt wish to

smoke some pot.)

"How hard is it, one night a year, to dress up and pretend we're grown-ups?" Olin lamented.

Indeed, over the years Olin and his predecessors have struggled not only with people refusing to dress up but no-shows, heckling of presenters, boos from rivals and attendees choosing the bar at the back of the room rather than their tables by the stage. And then there are the deeply divided feelings as to whether this kind of Hollywood-style event was even for them.

"For celebrities, being in public is what they do," said Alex Rigopulos, co-founder and chief executive of Harmonix, which was nominated for four awards this year, including game of the year for its hit "Guitar Hero 2." "But game developers sit in dark rooms working at their computers all day. That's what we do. So we're kind of out of our element when you ask us to do things like walk a red carpet or get up on stage."

Though it has finally penetrated the mainstream consciousness and can boast retail sales that surpass Hollywood box-office take, the videogame industry is still relatively young and is still suffering the growing pain of making that shift from being a technology industry with roots in the toy business to entertainment juggernaut.

This year's awards took place Feb. 8 at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. The 725-

plus attendees started with a pre-party at Body English at the Hard Rock. They were welcomed by women in leather short-shorts, fishnet stockings and leopard-print vests. Not exactly Nicole Kidman and Kate Winslet in Chanel and Gaultier, but there were raw oysters and sushi displayed around an ice sculpture of the AIAS award statue.

"We're always apologizing for what we do, and it's stupid," said Phil Harrison, president of Sony Computer Entertainment Worldwide Studios. "We have our own ground to stand on, and that's the art and technology of what we do, and a fan base that is not insubstantial."

As Harrison spoke, Richard "Lord British" Garriott, creator of the "Ultima" series, last year's inductee into the Academy Hall of Fame, was nearby doing card tricks while wearing a satin pinstriped tux, with faux diamond buttons and cufflinks.

For this year's ceremony, Olin and his team of organizers took steps to forestall the kinds of problems they had had in years past. Assigned seating was introduced, and waiters were instructed to keep the alcohol flowing to the tables so that the game makers wouldn't have any reason to wander.

Much to the delight of the audience, host Jay Mohr roared with off-color comments. Winners — including Cliff Bleszinski, whose "Gears of War" dominated the show — were stewarded off stage for media interviews. And

while there were only three news crews, mostly for websites, and a handful of reporters sitting on folding chairs along the edge of the room, they were pushed up against the logo-laden backdrop where the cameras' bright lights made them glow as if they were celebrities.

The swag bags may have contained flannel pajamas and a 512k-megabyte USB drive rather than Cartier watches and digital cameras, but they were provided by Target — not exactly Moët & Chandon but at least a mainstream retail brand and not a game company sponsor, a first for the AIAS.

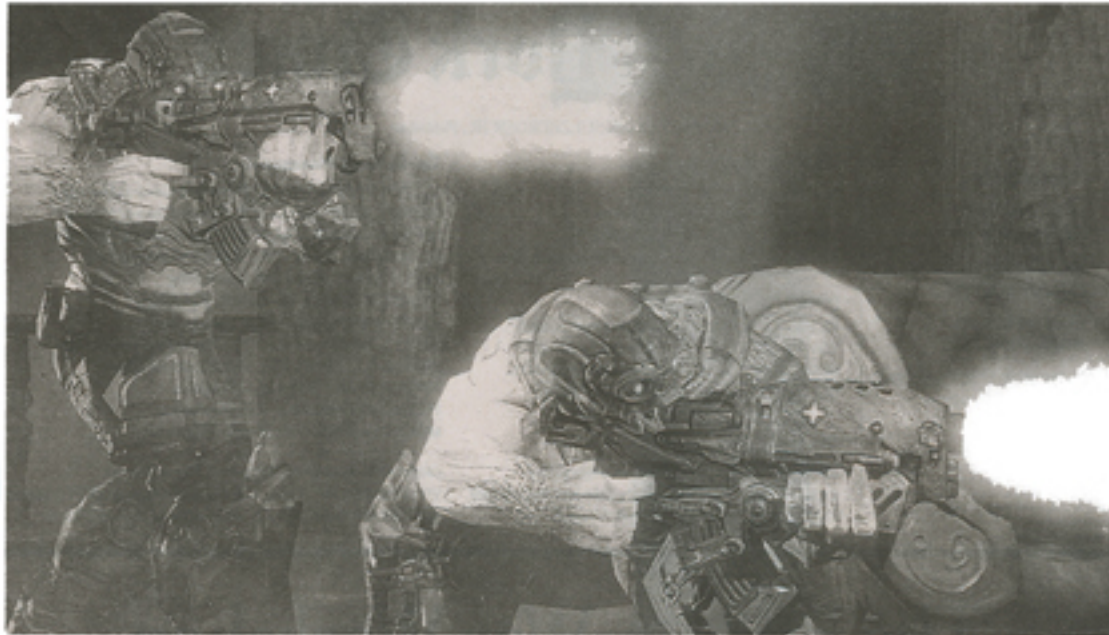
Olin was so pleased with this year's show, in fact, that he's reconsidering the importance of TV coverage, once the academy's holy grail. In part this has to do with a dawning awareness that TV is no longer the be-all and end-all for either cultural legitimacy or communication. (And if anyone should know this, it's the head of the AIAS.) But it's also as if Olin has finally been beaten into recognizing that no amount of shoving and cajoling is going to get game makers to act like happy celebrities.

"You know those family occasions where there's a kids table and an adults table?" Olin said. "Well, what I'm realizing, and this has been a slow realization, is that maybe we're better off at the kids table eating ice cream for a main course. It's certainly more fun, and you know, I guess that's who we are."

The New York Times

Copyright © 2007 The New York Times

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2007



Microsoft Game Studios

A scene from Gears of War. The video game won in eight categories at the Interactive Achievement Awards.

Gears of War Is Victor at Game Awards

By SETH SCHIESEL

Gears of War, the intense but glossy combat romp for Microsoft's Xbox 360, owned the competition (to use the online vernacular) on Thursday night as the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences announced the winners of its 2006 video game awards. Games for Nintendo's innovative Wii console also did well, while Sony titles mostly came up short.

The overwhelming importance of word of mouth among gamers means that the annual Interactive Achievement Awards, now in their 10th year, are far less important in selling games than the Oscars are in the film business. Nonetheless, the prizes are the most prestigious laurels in the \$25 billion video game industry. The comedian and actor Jay Mohr presented the awards at a ceremony and party in Las Vegas.

As if selling two million copies of Gears of War in just a few months were not enough, winning eight awards on Thursday was a big vindication of Microsoft's strategy to position Gears of War as the first must-

have game for the Xbox 360. In lieu of another installment of the hit franchise Halo, Microsoft had gambled that Gears of War would be good enough to blunt Sony's introduction of its rival PlayStation 3 console last holiday season.

Developed by Epic Games under the creative director Cliff Bleszinski (known as CliffyB to millions of gamers), Gears of War delivered. In addition to game of the year, Gears took awards for best console game, animation, art direction, online play, visual engineering, male character performance and best action-adventure game.

Wii Sports, the showcase game for Nintendo's new console, came in second with three awards. The Wii has become a breakout consumer electronics hit because it allows people to play by simply making intuitive physical movements, like swinging a tennis racket, rather than having to master complicated controls. In addition to the award for outstanding innovation, Wii Sports also won for best design and best game-play engineering.

Even without Wii Sports, it was a

big night for Nintendo. Howard Lincoln, chairman emeritus of Nintendo of America, and Minoru Arakawa, former president of the same unit, took the academy's first lifetime achievement awards.

The latest installment of Nintendo's hit Legend of Zelda series, called Twilight Princess, won for best story and character development, and Brain Age won for best handheld game for the portable DS machine.

Sony's game unit, which has struggled recently, did not fare as well. Only one game published by Sony, LocoRoco, won any awards, taking the prizes for original music composition and best children's game.

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, the sprawling single-player fantasy epic from Bethesda Softworks, won for best PC game and best role-playing game.

Videogames struggle on the red carpet

Honored game designers show signs of growing up, but they're still uncomfortable in the spotlight.

Heather Chaplin

February 15, 2007

In 1998, when the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences hosted its first award show for videogames, they laid down a red carpet to add some Hollywood glamour. Confused game makers, not knowing what it was for, carefully skirted it. Ten years later, they know what it's for, but they're still not sure they like it.

Flashy awards shows may be our way of conveying legitimacy and status on our cultural chosen ones, but not all culture makers were created alike, and not all were meant -- or want -- to get in front of the camera and play the celebrity.

"When the academy was created, it was to have a platform to showcase great games each year in a manner similar to the Oscars, Emmys and Grammys," said Joseph Olin, the Academy's president. "And I think there was a certain level of naïveté about how easy this would be."

Last year, overall-game-of-the-year nominee David Jaffe emailed Olin two days before the show to find out if he really couldn't wear jeans. When informed he couldn't, Jaffe had to run to out to Macy's and pick up a pair of slacks and to Banana Republic for a shirt. When his game "God of War" won, his acceptance speech included a heartfelt wish to smoke some pot.

"How hard is it, one night a year, to dress up and pretend we're grown ups and celebrate each other's work?" Olin lamented.

Indeed, over the years Olin and his predecessors have struggled not only with people refusing to dress up, but no-shows, heckling of presenters, boos from rival development studios, and attendees choosing the bar at the back of the room rather than their tables by the stage. And then there are the deeply divided feelings as to whether or not this kind of Hollywood-style event was even for them.

"It's hard because movie stars are beautiful and rock stars are sexy," said Alex Rigopulos, co-founder and CEO of Harmonix, which was nominated for multiple awards this year including Overall Game of the Year for its hit, "Guitar Hero 2." "For celebrities, being in public is what they do. But game developers sit in dark rooms working at their computers all day. That's what we do. So we're kind of out of our element when you ask us to do things like walk a red carpet or get up on stage."

Though it has finally penetrated the mainstream consciousness and can boast retail sales that surpass Hollywood box office take, the videogame industry is still relatively young -- Atari released Pong to an unsuspecting public in 1972 -- and is still suffering the growing pain of making that shift from being a technology industry with roots in the toy business to its new status as entertainment juggernaut.

This year's awards took place last Thursday at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. The 725-plus attendees started their night with a pre-party at Body English at the Hard Rock. They were welcomed into the cavernous club by women in leather short-shorts, fish net stockings and leopard print vests. Not exactly Nicole Kidman and Kate Winslet in Chanel and Goutier, but there were raw oysters and sushi displayed around an ice sculpture of the AIAS award statue.

"These awards mean absolutely nothing," said one jaded attendee who preferred to remain anonymous. "But at least they have one of these things," he added, indicating a flowing chocolate fountain.

Academy president Olin was happy to see that though t-shirts and polar fleece had not disappeared, most attendees seemed to have at least thrown on a collared shirt or a blazer.

"When we polish ourselves up, we're showing respect for ourselves and our peers," Olin cried. "Would you go to a dinner party at someone's house in a ratty t-shirt and torn jeans? I don't think so."

Though they may have been nervous on the red carpet – mostly standing in huddles, unsure of where to go, posing for cameras with uncomfortable eyes and frozen smiles – there was undoubtedly a sense among game makers this year that the kind of recognition an award show conveys is not only their right, but long overdue.

"We're always comparing ourselves to Hollywood and we should just stop," said Phil Harrison, president of Sony Computer Entertainment Worldwide Studios. "We're always apologizing for what we do, and it's stupid really. We have our own ground to stand on, and that's the art and technology of what we do, and a fan base that is not insubstantial."

Harrison was standing by the bar watching Richard "Lord British" Garriott, creator of the Ultima series, and last year's Inductee in the Academy hall of fame, doing card tricks in a satin pin-striped tux, with faux diamond buttons and cuff links.

"When the academy asks us to dress up, it means is 'Ok, you're on notice, the people who play your games are watching,' " Garriott said, executive producer at NCsoft North America. "Top games sell in the million of units, so whether you like it or not, you're having an impact on the culture, and at some point you have to take responsibility for that. You have to accept that you have, or you will have very soon, a public persona that people are going to look to for guidance."

For this year's ceremony, Olin and his team of organizers took steps to forestall the kinds of problems they had in years past. Assigned seating was introduced and waiters were instructed to keep the alcohol flowing to the tables so that the gamemakers wouldn't have any reason to get up and wander away from the show. (And if they did, the bar was roped off so attendees couldn't get within eight feet of it.)

Much to the delight of the audience, host Jay Mohr roared with off-color comments such as speculation on the size of Overall Game of the Year winner Cliff Bleszinski's genitalia. (One benefit of not being on television.) Winners were stewarded off stage and into a small room for press interviews; and while there were only three news crews – mostly for Web sites – and a handful of reporters sitting on folding chairs along the edge of the room, they were pushed up against the logo-laden backdrop where the cameras' bright lights made them glow as if they were celebrities.

The schwag bags may have contained flannel pajamas and a 512k-megabyte USB drive rather than Cartier watches and digital cameras, but at least they were provided by Target, not exactly Moët & Chandon, but at least a mainstream retail brand and not a game company sponsor – a first for the AIAS.

After the show, Bleszinski, who's game "Gears of War," swept the show, taking home eight out of ten nominations, may have been shooed out of the balcony where he was hanging out with friends and well wishers by a young security guard, but at least the security guard knew who he was, slapped him five, and said, "Congratulations, Dude!"

Olin was so pleased with this year's show, in fact, that he's reconsidering the importance of TV coverage, once the academy's holy grail. In part this has to do with a dawning awareness that TV is no longer the end-all and the be-all for either cultural legitimacy or communication. (And if anyone should know this, it's the head of the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences.) But it's also as if Olin has finally been beaten into recognizing that no amount of shoving and cajoling is going to get game makers to act like happy celebrities.

"You know those family occasions where there's a kid table and an adults table?" Olin said, as if musing out loud. "Well, what I'm realizing, and this has been a slow realization, is that maybe we're better off at the kids table eating ice cream for a main course. It's certainly more fun, and you know, I guess that's who we are."

VARIETY

VARIETY.COM ■ THE INTERNATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY ■ FEBRUARY 19-25, 2007

Smoke & Mirrors

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE BIZ'S DEALS, DECISIONS AND DIVERSIONS

HOT-BUTTON KUDOS

Vidgame biz twitchy on awards recognition

By BEN FRITZ

Videogames are a \$6.5 billion-a-year business. But when it comes to honoring their own, the industry is still looking for a golden pat on the back.

There's certainly no Oscar equivalent in the joystick realm, no single award that is widely recognized as the mark of videogame excellence.

In Hollywood, there's a clear pecking order among

the various kudos — all the ceremonies get at least some press coverage, and studios artfully plan marketing and distribution strategies to take advantage — but such a hierarchy hasn't yet taken root in the relatively young videogame biz.

Gamers have two major kudos — the 10-year-old Interactive Achievement Awards, held each February, and the seven-year-old Game Developers Choice Awards, held in March

— that honor developers. Both can mean a lot to the winners but they're virtually unknown outside the industry.

While there are two televised kudos — G4's Gphoria and the Spike TV Video Game Awards — both feature minor stars with no connection to videogames, and the kudos aren't regarded by those in the biz as anything but a marketing vehicle.

"We don't have a direct broad-based equivalent to the Oscars, Emmys or Grammys yet, though I think we're on our way," says Joseph Olin, prexy of the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences, which puts on the IAA kudos.

Turn to page 62



VARIETY

FEBRUARY 19-25, 2007

A VIDGAME KUDOS DUEL

Continued from page 4

Backers of the IAA and GDC nod each like to think they should be the videogame equivalent of the Oscars, with the other regarded as on a par with the Golden Globes.

But while their voting memberships overlap to a large extent, the two have significant differences.

The key difference: In order to qualify for most of the IAA awards, the publisher or developer of the game has to be a dues-paying member of the Interactive Academy. The GDC, by contrast, has no submission process and considers every single game released.

The IAA set-up can result in some embarrassing omissions: Because Japanese publisher Capcom doesn't belong, its widely honored title "Okami" didn't get any IAA recognition this year. But it's tied for the most GDC noms.

The IAA boasts 30 categories, resulting in a wide array of winners, but the GDC limits itself to just eight.

Backers of the two ceremonies also disagree as to whether they should be court-

ing attention from the mainstream.

IAA tapped comedian Jay Mohr to host its ceremony and pushes hard for publicity. GDC, on the other hand, is being hosted by developer Tim Schafer.

For now, awards are mostly a point of pride, as well as a way to earn cred among those who know what GDC and IAA mean.

"It took decades before the Oscars broke through to become something more than industry insiders in a hotel on folding chairs," says Jason Della Rocca, exec director of the Intl. Game Developers Assn., which runs the GDC kudos. "Unlike others, I'm taking the long view."

That's unlikely to change, however, until the game industry itself starts supporting the awards. That's not the case yet, because publishers don't see

dollar signs.

"In Hollywood, you have so many secondary markets where you can make money for an 'Academy Award winner,' but the game industry has a two- to six-week release window that has passed by the time awards come around," says Della Rocca.

As a result, publishers don't tend to support the awards beyond issuing a press release touting their winners.

That could change as game distribution increasingly moves online, where a title can easily be pushed back to the front of the store at no cost after winning "game of the year."

But for now, awards are mostly a point of pride, as well as a way to earn cred among those who know what GDC and IAA mean.

Recalls Schafer, head of developer Double Fine, whose 2005 release "Psychonauts" won two GDC awards but was a commercial flop: "We had a hard time in the marketplace, but for our next game every publisher still wanted to talk to us."



Gears of War Cleans Up AIAS Nominations

Chris Kohler

January 22, 2007



The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences has announced the list of nominees for the 10th annual Interactive Achievement Awards, which will take place in a gala presentation at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Vegas next month. I'll be there.

Gears of War led the nominations with ten nods in categories like Overall Game of the Year, Console Game of the Year, etc. Twilight Princess and Oblivion did okay too, with six nominations each. What's really surprising, to me anyway, is that Wii Sports is also up for Game of the Year. It's a long shot, but hey. It's probably more likely to take the Innovation award.

Elite Beat Agents is up for portable game of the year, but against Brain Age and New Super Mario Bros. it's gonna be a tough fight.

The press release, plus the major categories, are after the jump. The full list can be found [here](#).

Just What is "Episodic Gaming," Anyway?

GameTap VP of content, Rick Sanchez, offers his definition of the latest gaming trend

Kris Graft

February 2, 2007

GameTap VP of content, Rick Sanchez says that the idea of episodic gaming, a business that can just barely be deemed "in its infancy," has yet to be clearly defined. "I think if you ask any two people in the industry, you'll get a different answer [as to what episodic gaming is]," he says.

So how does he define episodic? First of all, Sanchez says that true episodes have to be released on a regular schedule or a defined period of time. "[A game] can't really be considered episodic when you don't know when the next episode is coming out," he argues.

Secondly, he says that each episode should have a relatively short duration of play. "A 40-hour game is not an episode, but something in the range of 30 minutes to five hours feels like an episode." He adds that a true episode is relatively standalone, but it is also part of a larger, more interesting whole.

So by his standards, the GameTap-distributed Sam & Max episodes from Telltale Games fit the definition, as they are short games released about once a month, but Valve's Half Life 2 episodes don't quite fit the bill.

But why is it important to have a mutual understanding about episodic gaming? One reason is so that the industry can talk about the same thing. A good example is how last summer at the Develop Conference in Brighton, England, Epic Games VP Mark Rein slammed episodic gaming, calling it a "broken business," as he questioned why gamers would want to buy "half a game... then wait six months for an episode." Rein seemed to have been talking about an idea of episodic that was different than that of Sanchez'.

Despite the jeers that episodic faithfuls directed towards Rein after his comments back in July, Sanchez agrees to an extent. "[Rein] had a lot of good reasons for saying [episodic gaming is 'broken,'], he says.

"From his perspective he was really right. If I were him and I worked for that company, I would agree with everything he said."

However, Sanchez counters, "But he's very focused on the next generation of technology, whereas I think episodic can be focused on the last generation of technology. [Episodic is] as much—if not more—about gameplay as it is how pretty the graphics are. If you spend more time really focusing on packing a ton of gameplay into a couple hours, you actually have a better chance of creating a product that people want to engage in over and over as you do if you spend five years and \$40 million to make something super-pretty."

Sanchez believes that people in the industry may have episodic gaming confused with something he calls "installment gaming." He explains, "I liken [installment gaming] to Empire Strikes Back and Return of the Jedi. Empire Strikes Back, in theory, is a self-contained movie, but it leaves you with such a cliffhanger and you have no idea when the next movie's coming out. [Empire] is really the second installment in a franchise, and then Return finishes it up."

Sanchez adds, "A lot of what people describe as episodic is really just a demo for a full 40-hour game that they don't have the money to finish. Well, that's not really episodic. Those are games that are intended to be 40-hour games."

Sanchez will be delivering his presentation, "What's Next in Episodic?" on the afternoon of Thursday, February 8 at the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences' D.I.C.E. Summit in Las Vegas.

http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/feb2007/id20070201_955194.htm?chan=top+news_top+news+index_innovation+%2B&+design

Vid-Games: Hero's Goodbye; Cool 'Gears'

Lou Kesten

February 14, 2007

--ATOMIC DOUG: Most players have never heard of Doug Lowenstein, but his impact on video games far outweighs that of, say, John Madden or Tony Hawk. Since 1994, Lowenstein -- as president of the Entertainment Software Association and its predecessor, the Interactive Digital Software Association -- has led the fight against video-game censorship. Alas, he's leaving the industry, but not before he delivered a stinging valedictory speech at the DICE (Design, Innovate, Communicate, Entertain) Summit, an annual gathering of industry pooh-bahs in Las Vegas.

Lowenstein surprised the audience by passing up a chance to attack politicians and lawyers who are trying to ban violent or racy games; instead, he took aim at companies that publish such software and then "cut and run."

"Nothing annoys me more," he said. "Don't pass the buck. Don't look for others to fight the fight for you. ... Stand up and defend what you made."

Lowenstein also took on the gaming press, which he said "needs to take itself more seriously," and urged designers to focus more energy on educational games. "I hope companies will continue to take risks, push the envelope, find new ways to use the technology," he concluded. "Let's not be self-satisfied as an industry."

--YEAR OF 'GEARS': The DICE Summit was also the site of the 10th annual Interactive Achievement Awards, honoring the best video games of 2006. The big winner was Microsoft's "Gears of War," which chain-sawed through the competition to collect eight trophies, including game of the year. Now, we like "Gears" and its enthusiastic lead designer Cliff "Cliffy B" Bleszinski, but that's overkill, and its triumphs in a few unlikely categories (art direction? male character performance?) raised some eyebrows.

On the other hand, Nintendo's "Wii Sports" fully deserved the three prizes it gathered (including "outstanding innovation"). Other multiple winners were Bethesda Softworks' "The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion," Activision's "Guitar Hero II" and Sony's "LocoRoco."

--'OKAMI' STRIKES BACK: The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences, which votes on the Interactive Achievement Awards, was widely criticized for ignoring Capcom's "Okami." I thought "Okami" was the best game of 2006; the influential IGN Web site agreed, calling it "the one game that was enjoyed by everyone across the board." The members of the Game Developers Conference are on board too. When the nominees for the group's Game Developers Choice Awards were announced, "Okami" and "Oblivion" led the pack with four nominations each. Both are up for the best game trophy, competing with "Gears of War," "The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess" and "Wii Sports." The awards will be presented March 7 in San Francisco.

--BLU NEW YEAR: For all the difficulties that surrounded last year's launch of the PlayStation 3, at least one part of Sony's strategy seems to be working. Blu-ray, the Sony-backed high-definition DVD format that's integral to the PS3, is taking off. Citing figures from the consumer research firm Nielsen VideoScan, Sony said Blu-ray has passed the rival high-def format, HD DVD, in cumulative sales since the PS3's introduction. Ninety percent of PS3 owners have watched a Blu-ray movie on the console, Sony said, and Blu-ray discs outsold HD DVD three-to-one during the second week of January. The whole fight between Blu-ray and HD is reminiscent of the war in the 1980s between VHS and Sony's Beta format; this time, Sony may prevail.

--NEW IN STORES: Fans of Nintendo's "Wii Sports" finally get the follow-up they've been craving: "Wii Play," which includes a shooting gallery, air hockey, billiards and six other games, and comes bundled with one of those elusive Wii remote controls. ... Valentine's Day is also a holiday for PlayStation Portable owners, with Sony's "Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters," Atlus' "Monster Kingdom: Jewel Summoner" and Rockstar's "The Warriors." ... 2K's "Ghost Rider" (for the PS2, PSP and Game Boy) screeches into stores a few days before it hits theaters on Friday. ... And then there's a genuine oddity: Natsume's "Chulip" (for the PS2), in which your goal is to impress a cute girl so she'll give you a kiss. Romance games are very popular in Japan; "Chulip" could be the first to find a U.S. audience.

San Francisco Chronicle

Dani Bunten Berry, pioneering video game designer makes the Hall of Fame

Ryan Kim
February 8, 2007



M.U.L.E. Dani Bunten Berry's seminal multi-player game

Multiplayer games are getting so popular -- see the 2.4 million games World of Warcraft sold recently in one day -- that it's hard to think back to where it all began. But there was a time when it was just an idea in the head of game designer Dani Bunten Berry.



Bunten, who died in 1998, is credited with creating one of the first multi-player video game called M.U.L.E. in 1983, well before the Internet and broadband helped link players around the world in epic virtual contests. Bunten's imagination helped eventually shape the face of video gaming, inspiring luminaries like designers Will Wright and Sid Meier.

Now, nine years after her death from cancer, Bunten has been named today to the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences Hall of Fame, the 10th such honoree joining Wright, Meier and other legends like Shigeru Miyamoto of Nintendo fame.

Bunten was never a huge commercial success, at least not by today's standards. But her titles were innovative and opened the door for a more community and social-oriented approach to gaming.

The most influential game was M.U.L.E. (Multiple Use Labor Elements) published by Electronic Arts. The game allowed players to work a plot of land, competing against and cooperating with other players in a sort of virtual economy. It opened the door for more real world games that could appeal to players beyond the hardcore set. Games like Meier's Civilization and Wright's The Sims all owe a debt to Bunten's philosophy.

"Ask most game designers what their favorite computer game of all time is," said Wright, in an interview with Salon, "and you'll get M.U.L.E. as an answer more often than any other title."

Richard Hilleman, Dani's last producer at Electronic Arts said gaming world takes for granted many of the quiet contributions of Bunten and his vision for the industry.

"Dani was remarkable because she was focused on the kind of gaming that has become our future," said Hilleman.

"Community-oriented gaming like massively multiplayer online games, things like Xbox Live and Xbox Arcade and social gaming like the Wii, this is the world Dani was playing in 20 years ago."

Bunten's life, like the industry she helped shape, underwent a lot of changes and turmoil. After her third marriage failed, Bunten, who was born Daniel Bunten, underwent sex reassignment surgery in 1992. She continued to work on games until her death in 1998 to lung cancer, but maintained a quiet profile in her final years.

http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/sfgate/detail?blogid=19&entry_id=13313

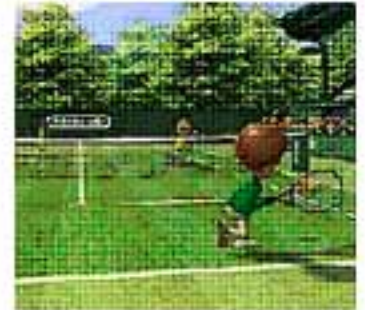


Stepping Up Their Game

Annalisa Burgos
February 9, 2007

Battle evil underworld creatures. Jam like a rockstar. Play sports without having to go outside. Those are concepts behind some of the best-selling video games of 2006.

As the video game industry marks its 10th annual Interactive Achievement Awards ceremony Thursday, much has changed from 1998 when it first started doling out honors. Sales now top \$12.5 billion a year, versus \$3.7 billion a decade ago. Moreover, the awards ceremony in Las Vegas will reflect the industry's evolution as well as several new forces, from the popularity of Wii and Guitar Hero to the huge success of "Gears of War," which leads with 10 nominations and has validated Microsoft's status as a major industry player.

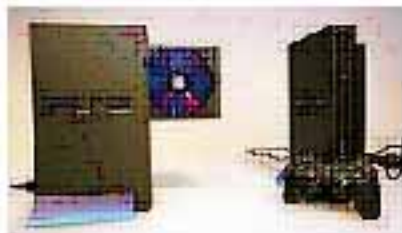


Wii Sports - Tennis

The awards are part of the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences' D.I.C.E. Summit, which runs through Friday. The conference brings together more than 600 of the industry's top executives and creative minds, including icons Will Wright and Sid Meier.

A Banner Year

The \$30 billion global video game industry has a lot to celebrate. Despite a rocky transition into a new generation of consoles, consumer demand for video games remains strong.



Sony Playstation 2

2006 was a record year for the video game industry, boosted by the launch of the Sony PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Wii as well as sales of current systems like the PlayStation 2 and Xbox 360. In the portable segment, Nintendo's Dual Screen (DS) was the big winner.

U.S. retail sales of video games, which include hardware, software and accessories, jumped 19% to \$12.5 billion in 2006, up sharply from the industry's previous record of \$10.5 billion in 2005, according to NPD.

"The industry was really firing in all cylinders," says Anita Frazier, entertainment industry analyst for the NPD Group. "A lot of growth in many areas led to the boost. The PS2 was the biggest platform of the year and gave a solid foundation for the industry."

Game makers release more than 1,000 game titles a year in retail outlets alone. The no. 1 selling game in 2006 was Electronic Arts' "Madden NFL '07" for the PlayStation 2. It sold more than 2.8 million copies. Nintendo's "New Super Mario Bros." for its DS system came in second with 2 million units. The latest installment of Zelda, Activision's "Call of Duty 3," "Gears of War" and "Guitar Hero II" were among the best-sellers in December.



Red Octane's Guitar Hero II

Analysts say innovative casual games like Guitar Hero and Wii Sports are fueling a renewed sense of creativity and experimentation among game developers and opening new sources of revenue. Hard-core gamers are still the ones driving sales because they are spending the big money on the expensive hardware, says Paul-Jon McNealy, who covers the Consumer and Gaming Software sector for American Technology Research.

Wii Changes The Game

"Hard core is the bigger market, the proven market," McNealy says.

"The casual game market is still a few years off, but the Wii is bucking that trend early on."

But casual gamers aren't the only ones buying Wii. Professional video gamer Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel plays Guitar Hero and Wii Sports when he's taking a break from competition.

"I brought it with me on vacation in Arizona. I love the bowling game," says the 12-time PC-game champ, who has won more than \$500,000 in prize money and raked in \$1 million more in sponsor deals. Wendel recently inked a deal with DirecTV to be a play-by-play commentator for its Championship Gaming Invitational, airing Feb. 10 and 11.



Nintendo Wii

"The Wii has rejuvenated the industry from a creative standpoint and is inspiring designers to look at video gaming in a whole new way," says Nintendo spokesperson Beth Llewelyn. "We are excited about big and small developers bringing unique and innovative content to the system."

This demand for more content for the new consoles is partly why video game publishers are forecasting 13% to 18% growth year over year, analyst McNealy says.

Electronic Arts, Activision and THQ saw strong holiday quarters, reporting better-than-expected earnings. Activision, in particular, cashed in on its \$100 million May acquisition of smaller publisher RedOctane, responsible for the hit "Guitar Hero II," which sold more than 1.3 million copies in two months.

"Everyone gets the feeling of playing guitar without having to practice for hours," says Ted Lange, associate producer for Guitar Hero at RedOctane, who's been a guitar player for 13 years.



Activision's Transformers Game

Activision is also expected to benefit from new games based on big summer movies, including "Spiderman 3," "Shrek 3" and "Transformers."

"We see another growth year as the PS3 and Wii ramp up supply, hardware dollars will go up and the market for software sales will grow and portable isn't showing any signs of slowing," says Frazier.

Microsoft's Big Hit

New hardware technology initially raised concerns about surging development costs, with some designers fearing games would cost as much as \$35 million to make. Take Two Interactive's "Grand Theft Auto" reportedly cost \$25 million to develop.

But Epic Games and Microsoft proved that was not the case with its blockbuster "Gears of War," selling more than 3 million copies in about two months. The game has been praised not only for its stunning graphics and technology, but also for its surprisingly low cost of \$10 million.

"We designed cutting edge technology that enables us to create content in a reasonable period of time and at a reasonable cost," says Epic Games VP Mark Rein. "Over the next few years, the industry will find more efficient ways to capitalize on the capabilities of these systems."

"'Gears of War' has beaten our highest expectations," says Microsoft senior global product manager John Dongelmans, who also credits the success of the overall marketing campaign surrounding the game.

Dongelmans would not comment on Microsoft's recent lowered forecast of Xbox 360 sales for 2007, but said the company is pleased sales have topped 10 million units and is looking forward to the release of more big titles this year.

"We're going to see impressive, significant games across all three new console platforms this year," says Joseph Olin, president of Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences, pointing to such highly-anticipated releases as Will Wright's Spore. "And the quality of games in terms of depth of interactive experiences is always improving. That's great for the industry and consumers."



Microsoft Game Studio's Gears of War