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RESIDENT EVIL

Paul Anderson sees undead people

Tomb Raider blew. *Final Fantasy* sucked. Within the past year, most would agree that video-game movies have lived up to their "potential" in the eyes of the mainstream—total crap. So why should things change on March 15, when Screen Gems releases *Resident Evil*, based on Capcom's bestselling survival-horror series?

Paul Anderson, director of the \$40 million picture, has an answer. "They're different beasts, video games and movies," he says. "They do overlap a little bit, but I think it's not enough just to adapt a video game. You've gotta make a good movie. You've gotta make a movie so that if you don't know the game from a hole in the head, it doesn't matter—it still delivers as a film." *Resident Evil*, he claims, is such a cinematic experience.

But what does that mean to the diehard Resident Evil fans? You know, the guys who

wear their S.T.A.R.S. jackets with pride and plan to visit Raccoon City on their next vacation. Stop by any Internet message board relating to the subject, and one feeling toward the film runs rampant: concern. Concern about the unique plot. Concern about the new characters. Concern that maybe Anderson's desire to cater to the masses will completely taint the epic tale of walking human corpses they hold so dear.

If you find yourself relating to these concerns to even the slightest degree, we've got one thing to say to you: chill. If any director out there seems qualified to helm a Resident Evil film, it's Anderson.

"I lost about six months of my life to Resident Evil," confesses the 37-year-old Brit, whom many gamers know well as the director of 1995's *Mortal Kombat*. "I never really wanted to go back and do another video-game

movie until I played Resident. It was just so good, I couldn't not do it."

And Anderson isn't alone in his fandom. "I'm a huge fan of the game—I mean a *mas-sive* fan," he says. "And so is Milla, and so is Michelle."

Of course, the others he refers to are stars Milla Jovovich (*The Fifth Element*, *The Messenger*) who plays Alice and Michelle Rodriguez (*Girlfight*, *The Fast and the Furious*) as Rain, who together lead a squad of commandos into Umbrella Corporation HQ to isolate a horrible infestation one month before the events of the first Resident Evil game. Seems the bioengineering company's top-secret T-virus (sound familiar, Resident Evil fans?), with the help of a supercomputer known as the Red Queen that controls the building's environment (OK...maybe that doesn't), has been let loose throughout the build-

ing, infecting workers and turning them into zombies. Eventually, the only thing important to Alice and Rain is their own survival.

Yes, this story is entirely unique—but Anderson makes no apologies. "Just imagine how boring it would have been if we had done [an adaptation of] Resident Evil 1," he points out. "There's no tension in that movie. There's no suspense. It's kind of like watching *Alien* for the first time and in the opening credits it says, 'By the way, Sigourney Weaver is the only one who's gonna survive.' It's blown the whole movie for you."

Mention the use of new characters as opposed to established ones, and Anderson has even more to say: "This isn't like Tomb Raider, where in every single game you play Lara Croft—she is the central character. Resident Evil is very interesting because the universe is ever-expanding. Certainly, a difference between Resident 1 and Resident 2 is 2's got completely new characters in it.



"The way we developed the movie was very much to view it as another Resident Evil game."

And I think most game players didn't sit there being really pissed when Resident Evil 2 came out going, 'Where the fu—'s Barry Burton?! I hate this piece of sh—!'"

"I thought the way we developed the movie was very much to view it as another Resident Evil game," he continues. "It's another installment of the Resident Evil franchise, only this time instead of going and buying it at your local game store, you're going to see it in your local cinema. So, I felt I really needed to exist within the Resident Evil universe—to expand upon that universe. I think that what makes the Resident franchise really strong is that it does progress. You *do* meet new characters; you go to new places; you learn new things. It's not the same old same old, again and again and again."

"[The movie] doesn't have Jill Valentine

in it—so shoot me," Anderson goes on. But, "although Milla is not playing Jill Valentine, she is *playing* Jill Valentine. In her mind... the character she's playing...she *looks* like her—she's very much a Jill Valentine type. What we tried to do was take the archetypes from the game—like the really strong female lead, whether it be Jill Valentine or one of the others from the game—and that's what Milla's playing; she's kind of an amalgam of those characters."

Still, don't be surprised to find, or at least notice an allusion to, the occasional familiar character. "If you're clever, you'll spot them," Anderson teases.

And the nods to fans don't end there—not by a long shot. "We built a ton of stuff that was basically straight from the game," says Anderson. "We also shot it a lot like the game. [Someone] would go, 'This is a

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Resident Evil star Milla Jovovich shares a humorous behind-the-scenes moment with director Paul Anderson.

MEET PAUL ANDERSON

Before taking the helm of zombie video-game flicks, Paul Anderson took charge of a few other projects—including a non-zombie video-game flick. Anderson's directorial career began with 1994's *Shopping*, in which Sadie Frost and Jude Law "shopped" by ramming their cars into store windows and taking things at will. The following year he released his most successful film, *Mortal Kombat* (\$70.4 million earned domestically), which many gamers consider the best live-action film based directly on material from a video game. Anderson's other theatrically released directing credits include *Event Horizon* (1997, starring Sam Neill and Laurence Fishburne) and *Soldier* (1998, Kurt Russell), both critically lambasted.

With so few films to his credit, two now based on games, some might rush to label Anderson as "that video-game guy"—which doesn't bother him in the least. "[Games] are part of our culture now," he says. "I'd rather be 'that video-game guy' than 'that theater guy'...or 'that musical guy,' 'that pop-video guy.' I like games—a lot. They're just as valid to turn into a movie as a book or a play these days."

So, what's he think of other video-game films? "I think the gaming community has been burned a couple times, both by *Tomb Raider* and by *Final Fantasy*," Anderson relays. "Both had some good things about them, but had some very negative things about them, as well. *Final Fantasy* had some amazing graphics in it—I mean really beautiful imagery—but the story was terrible, and the acting was terrible." And what about *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*, which he had nothing to do with? "I didn't like it," he confesses. "As a fan, it didn't deliver."

Anderson is also considering, in addition to a possible *Resident Evil* sequel ("I'd be very excited," he tells us), bringing other game franchises to the big screen. He just won't say which—"just in case someone else buys them before I get a chance at them." However, a report on Ain't It Cool News reveals one such possible series. Think Grand Theft Auto would make a decent flick?





THE EARLY WORD

A few reviews based on test screenings of *Resident Evil* have surfaced on aintitcool.com. Here are a few comments:

"Paul Anderson has done a really great job here.... God, it is so faithful to the game."
—El Dorado

"If I were to rate this film on a 1 to 5 scale, I would give it a 3.7."
—Jesse Garson

"The movie plays like the Romero [*Night of the Living Dead*] trilogy starring the Marines from *Aliens*."
—Terry Tsuguri

"This film fails on every level."
—Choptop

"This movie rocks!"
—Gandolfino

HOW EXCITED ARE YOU FOR THE RESIDENT EVIL MOVIE?



I'll see it opening night!
29%

Sounds like a matinee candidate.
38%

It looks worse than *Tomb Raider*.
32%

poll taken from Gamers.com



great moment for one of those fantastic overhead shots," which is a real characteristic of *Resident Evil*. You know, you go to those fantastically chilling overhead shots. We even shot it in the same manner as the game."

The settings should also ring a bell to any who have ever wanted to change their last name to Redfield. "Although it's a fresh set of characters, they're

"There's a ton of stuff straight from the game."

moving through very familiar environments," he says. "You'll recognize the train from *Resident Evil 2*, for example. You'll recognize all the under-the-mansion lab sets from *Resident Evil 1* and a lot of the under-Raccoon City stuff from *Resident Evil 2*. We have street scenes in Raccoon City from *Resident Evil 2*. So there's a ton of stuff that is straight from the game."

But what may please fans the most is the wealth of explanations revealed in the flick. Says Anderson, "You'll finally have an explanation as to why, in *Resident Evil 1*, the mansion in the woods is overrun with undead, overrun with creatures. In *Resident Evil 2* they never explained where the Licker comes from; we have the explanation. There are lots of story strands that are not explained in the games that are

explained in the movie."

A few fans have also expressed fear that playing to a mainstream audience means taming things down to a PG-13 level. Not so. "I was very clear when I became involved in the project that this was to be an R-rated movie," Anderson enthuses. "Resident Evil has to be really scary. It has to be really gory. You can't do 'Resident Evil Light.' It has to

have decapitations. It has to have blood. It has to have axes in the head. It has to have people cubed. And body parts. It has to have zombie dogs with flesh hanging off. Has to have people with their eyeballs torn out. It has to be *Resident Evil*."

And, from all indications, it is. "What we're trying to do is give added value," insists Anderson. "To really deliver to gamers the things that they like from the game—the intricacy of it, the horror, the scariness, the blood, the kind of sexiness of the way the characters look. All that's in the movie.

"And also, it's f—ing terrifying."

—Chris Baker

Keep your eyes on our Web site, playstationmagazine.com, for our entire interview with Paul Anderson.

ZOMBIES, SOUND OFF!

"What we tried to do was stick to reality as much as possible," says Paul Anderson regarding the zombies in *Resident Evil*. To do this, he opted for traditional humans in makeup as opposed to all-out computer-generated walking dead, using CG only to enhance the grotesqueness of it all. And to further the realism, he held a veritable "zombie boot camp."

"We had actors and dancers and people who could dislocate limbs," he says, "and they were trained for weeks on how to move, how to sound. Each was given a character: 'Your character has died in an elevator crash; your leg is broken.' So that zombie has to move as though its leg is broken."

"We probably put 1,000 people into zombie boot camp, and only 300 survived it," he continues. "People dropped out because it was really hard work. But the result was, we got zombies that really moved right."



"We've got this great guy who can dislocate his foot," Anderson enthuses. "It's just fantastic in the movie, where you're tracking behind him and you see his foot dislocated and his bone is cracking inside. And it's horrible because it's real—and you can see it's real."



Like the games, the *Resident Evil* movie will be grisly, gruesome and loaded with disturbing imagery.