

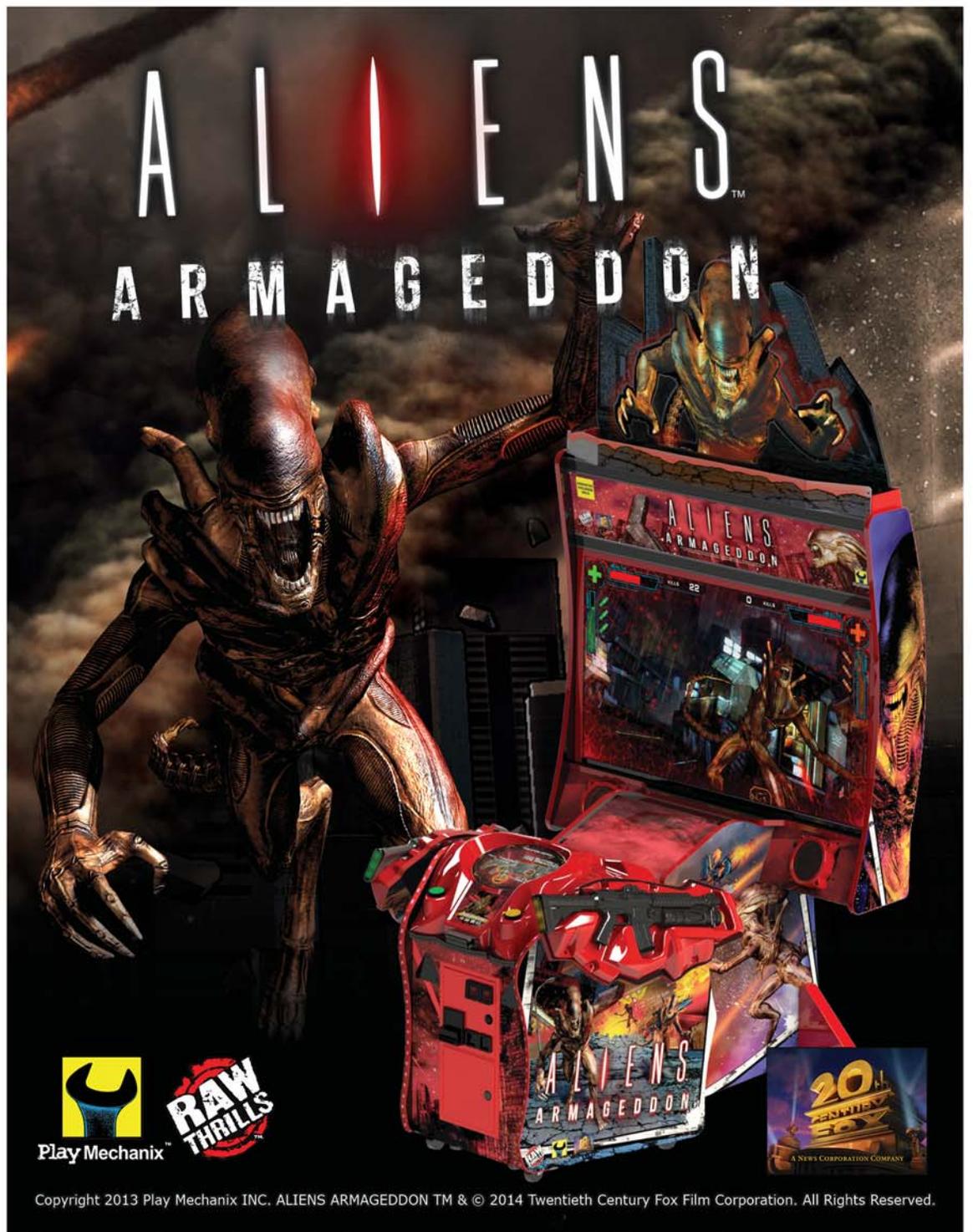
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Cover Story:
The hits
keep
coming for
Raw Thrills

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Two thumbs
up for
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in high
gear



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The Aliens Armageddon design team plus support staff from Raw Thrills.

The *THRILLS* keep coming

Not many companies can say they have had a string of hit games for 12 consecutive years. Raw Thrills can make that claim.

Ever since its first game, Target: Terror, was introduced, Raw Thrills has followed with one successful game after another. And the hits and the thrills keep coming: Fast and Furious, Fast and Furious Drift, Big Buck Hunter HD and Big Buck Hunter World, Terminator Salvation, Sno Cross, Super Bikes, H2Overdrive, and Super Cars, to name but a few.

What's the secret? Talent, experience, and a keen sense of what appeals to players. The staff at Raw Thrills includes veterans like Eugene Jarvis, President; Andrew Eloff, Executive Vice President; George Petro, President of Play Mechanix studio; and Mark Struhs, Sales Manager.

But the real magic comes from the

mix of these industry veterans with a young, enthusiastic, and creative R&D staff of some of the most talented designers in the industry. From gifted graphic artists to software gurus, mechanical and electronic engineers, Raw Thrills' game creators are the best in the business.

In an interview with Eugene Jarvis in the fall of 2011 on the occasion of the company's 10th anniversary, Jarvis said, "Our foremost goal is to make it to our 20th anniversary and be counted among the companies continuing to provide great entertainment and value to our customers." The company seems well on its way.

Jarvis began his industry career at Atari in 1977 and in 1979 moved to Chicago to program pinball games for

Williams' Electronics. While at Williams/Bally/Midway, Jarvis was responsible for the development of such games as Defender, Robotron 2084, NARC, Smash TV, the Cruisin' driving game series, and many more. After Midway left the amusement business in 2001 Jarvis co-founded Raw Thrills with other Midway designers.

Play Meter caught up with Raw Thrills to find out more about game development and plans for the future. Jarvis responded, with some input from Struhs.

What inspires you (Jarvis and staff) to develop new games?

We are really a bunch of overgrown kids. Inspiration can come from a million things. It might be an



Aliens Armageddon



Batman



Barrel of Monkeys

action sequence from a new superhero movie, or maybe the inspiration of a classic game you played as a kid, or something crazy your three-year old is doing on her iPad. Then it hits you: Wow; that could make a cool arcade game!

How big is the R&D team today compared to the early years?

We started with just a handful of designers in 2001, and now we have over 60 game developers on staff.

What's the biggest misconception about what it takes to develop a game?

Everyone thinks it is all about coming up with the killer idea. But really that's just the start. Like Edison said, it's one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.

You really have to follow up that idea with great execution, the total package of graphics, game play, spectacular cabinet, theme to attract players, great sound, etc. And then the game has to be priced right to make a compelling value to the operator. And it better be reliable or forgetaboutit!

What is the game development process like? How long from initial concept to completed game, and how much testing before it's ready for the market?

Anywhere from six months to two or three years depending on how much rope we want to hang ourselves with. And testing is crucial. You need to make sure the game is optimized for fun factor and earnings. And if it truly is a dog, bury it before an operator ever sees it. Cuz, if you don't, you'll never hear the end of it.

What new technologies, such as big LCD screens, have made it possible to create exciting new game experiences?

The big LCD screens have been wonderful. They deliver huge impact, player appeal, and reliability much greater than the old CRTs. And now we have some cool interface innovations like touch screens and really fun, physical stuff like snowmobile and ski controllers.

In the next few years we are going to see some great virtual reality interfaces coming online. It seems like technology is only going to be limited by our imaginations.

What characteristics are most prominent when developing a new game?

No matter how sophisticated the technology or graphics you use, it has to have the fun factor. The player has to be engaged with a cool challenge. You gotta feel that the game is fair

and you have a chance.

The theme has to excite the player. But probably the most important thing is what Ralph Coppola of ICE calls the "play again" factor. It's the feeling you get when you almost win, but you are compelled to play again. You just can't stop playing because you are sure the next time is going to be the big one!

How has the distributor network grown domestically and internationally?

Mark Struhs: The U.S. domestic game market remains the largest and most successful business segment for Raw Thrills, thanks in large part to our proven network of distributors who provide guidance based on their tremendous knowledge of the local markets, innovative financing programs and promotions, used game trade-ins, consolidation of products for complete projects, and the deep customer relationships that sometimes go back multiple generations.

After contemplating the value propositions, cost efficiency, and the increasing need for strong focus, Raw Thrills is now even more committed than ever to our distributor network.

The growth over the past 10-12 years of the family entertainment center (FEC) market segment has



At the RAAPA Expo 2014 in Russia: Mark Struhs (l) with the Raw Thrills distributor in Russia, Alexander Petrov of BB&B.

contributed greatly to the success of Raw Thrills and our distributor partners and we believe we have returned the favor to companies that have invested in a variety of Raw Thrills titles.

Those titles include: Super Bikes (I and II), Fast & Furious Drift and Super Cars, Terminator Salvation, Guitar Hero, H2Overdrive, SnoCross, and the Big Buck Hunter franchise, just to name a few. The latest Raw Thrills releases are Batman, Aliens Armageddon, Big Buck HD/Duck Dynasty, and our new video redemption game, Barrel of Monkeys.

Big Buck HD/Duck Dynasty is unique in that we have a partnership with A&E, the cable network that produces the popular reality series "Duck Dynasty." We want to deliver something fresh not only in content, but also in the business model.

While our roots are here in the U.S. amusement game industry, Raw Thrills was founded over 12 years

ago with the objective to design and market arcade games that have global appeal.

Thanks to the continued support from our strategic partners around the world and the increased popularity of FECs in many foreign countries, we have made good progress towards that objective. International shipments now represent about one third of the total business at Raw Thrills and it's growing every year.

To augment the successful sales strategy for Raw Thrills in both the domestic and international markets, we recently expanded the sales team by bringing on two key professionals:

Jeff Tash, Distributor Sales Manager based in St. Louis, Mo., works through our distributor sales force. He spearheads the Raw Thrills domestic sales strategy by calling on street operators and FECs around the U.S. Jeff has earned the trust and



At the CIAE Expo 2014 in China, (l-r): Chris Kelley of Raw Thrills and Frank Ballouz with Lucy Chen and Aaron Wong of Wahlap.



Eugene Jarvis (l) of Raw Thrills studio and George Petro of Play Mechanix studio merged their two companies into Raw Thrills Inc.

admiration of our customers as their strongest advocate within Raw Thrills.

Chris Kelley, our dynamic Asia Representative based in Guangzhou, China, heads up our fast growing East Asia market. He works with our Chinese partners that manufacture and sell Raw Thrills games specifically for the China market and selected foreign countries.

How valuable is the feedback you receive at trade shows and other industry events?

Mark Struhs: Raw Thrills has learned through experience the importance of listening to feedback from our customers, people who have invested their hard-earned money in our products and who now have personal experience. We learn a lot from the strategy of lis-



At the CIAE Expo: Chris Kelley of Raw Thrills and Raylee Wu of UNIS.



RAAPA Expo attendees play Aliens Armageddon.



Mark Struhs with Jeff Tash, Distributor Sales Manager.

tening to our customers and we actually enjoy the process.

Raw Thrills has been exceptionally successful in the video game category. Will the company branch out into other products?

That has always been the crazy thing about our industry. Once a company has some success they always want to try something new. Of course there have been some arcade game companies that have gone on to do big things in the consumer arena like Nintendo, Sega, and Atari. And Bally and Williams (WMS) have become major players in casino gaming.

But at Raw Thrills we are arcade guys at heart. That's why we founded the company; that's why we're here. Just like the billions of arcade players out in the world, we know that arcade games are the most fun gaming experience there is.

What's next on the drawing board?

We have some real cool simulators and gun adventures coming up with a number of blockbuster licenses. We are also reimagining a couple of golden eight-bit classics into compelling redemption titles. We have a big surprise up our sleeve that I hope pans out into a major craze—but what do I know?—it's the players that will decide!

What are you most proud of achieving in the last 12 years?

It sounds kind of silly, but really what makes us most proud is just staying in business. Making great games for the players and operators, and at the same time making payroll! All the game companies I worked for before went out of business (Midway and Atari). So to be able to be the kids in the candy store and get paid to make and play

games, what can be better?

Where do you see the company in the next five years?

The downside of being in a really fun business is that it is rapidly changing, and product lifetimes are very short. So every couple of years the company has to be completely reinvented. We have to really accelerate our game. We have a lot of inspiration but we need to turn it into the practical reality of new mind-blowing games.

The players out there have a million channels of content swimming around in their brains. We need to make the craziest games they have ever seen. So it is going to be either "Game Over," or if our Raw Thrills team has anything to do with it, "Game On!"

For more information on Raw Thrills, call (847)679-8373; Web (www.rawthrills.com). ▲