

Blockbuster gaming franchise to feature "authentic" Mohawk hero

By Chase Jarrett
Writer

The highly anticipated *Assassin's Creed 3* (AC3) is on the market but with a unique twist...play the game and you will hear Mohawk spoken

Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* videogames have been huge hits. The series' third entry AC3, has thrown mainstream gaming a curve ball: a Mohawk hero in the form of Ratoohnhake:ton (Radoon-hagay-doh), or Connor Kenway.

Tom Deer, cultural consultant for Ubisoft's AC3 development team, says having this Mohawk hero is a positive.

"Our people are finally going to be able to identify with a protagonist in something so mainstream. Up until now, the only depiction of Native Americans in games or comic books is usually very generic. Usually based upon a lot of stereotypes," said Deer. Deer thinks an authentic representation will help cull these stereotypes.

"I think to have a Haudenosaunee character that is culturally authentic for the outside they'll see us in a more accurate light... and see our contribution to the world we live in today," he said.

Deer is hopeful AC3 inspires some digging into history. "Who knows maybe somebody will look into our involvement into the American revolution and find that we inspired the U.S. Constitution."

He said for native youngsters it's even a bigger positive. "For us I think people are gonna be excited to have such a mainstream iconic character. I'm not a big gamer but I've heard of *Assassin's Creed*. I know there are people that are fanatical about that game, it's one of the best selling games that's out there. To have the main character be a Haudenosaunee Mohawk person? I think our people, a lot of younger people, will be excited about it."

And Six Nations youth are excited. "It's cool to go around and say they're what we are. He is one of

us," said 11 year-old Jacob Smith.

"For once we're not Indians," said Chris Montour, also 11. "It's not always about a feather in the hair or those big Chippewa headdresses," he said, adding that he's relieved about Kenway's weaponry. "When I first heard they were making a Mohawk character I was like don't tell me he's going to have a sword we didn't use them." Montour said he was happy with the tomahawk.



Tom Deer
from Kahnawake

Justin Williams, 11, said he thought the history in the game was cool. "This is also in a place we can drive to. It's in Mohawk Valley."



Lead Developer of AC3, Alex Hutchinson, said when building a game set during the American Revolutionary War, the idea for a Mohawk hero took root when developers sought ways to give gamers a unique take on the times. "We wanted a hero not aligned with either side," said Hutchinson. "A character who was able to take a step back and give us a different perspective on the conflict."

Hutchinson said a Mohawk hero would also let gamers see something new. "He's a



unique hero, someone you haven't played."

Another dimension of the choice, Hutchinson said, was an evolution of the fighting mechanics. "Part of it is just evolving the franchise," said Hutchinson. "We envisioned someone who's very fluid and always in motion who can run into combat kill X number of guys then run out again."

Past entries in the series feature dagger-wielding Syrian and Italian assassins. But with Connor Kenway, AC3 incorporates two traditionally Mohawk weapons: the bow and arrow, and the iconic tomahawk. We asked ourselves what a Mohawk would carry into battle, explained Hutchinson.

Meanwhile, a Mohawk hero has brought the issues of "Indian" stereotypes to the forefront. Hutchinson himself said in research for the game he learned Mohawks did not live in tipis, but in longhouses. "You realize how indoctrinated you are by cliché." This is stuff people don't know, he said.

The development team, said Hutchinson, has put a lot of effort into creating an authentic Mohawk man. "We didn't want to tell a story about being Native American. He just is, he goes about his life as that person. There are ups and downs but it's not the center of his existence."

A big part of this effort to be socially conscious included Cultural Consultant Tom Deer who Hutchinson says helped the development team with "everything from language to cultural artifacts to dress and jewelry."

Hutchinson offered the example of wanting to in-

clude false faces in the game. "He (Deer) found all kinds of things to switch", said Hutchinson. "We wanted to include masks as an important spiritual element. He told us this is a no-go, this is something that's too sensitive. We never would have known that if we hadn't been speaking to him."

Deer, a ceremonial keeper at the Kahnawake Mohawk community, got involved in the project last fall. Deer said the biggest piece of the consulting job was "to look at cultural sensitivity."

"A lot of it was to put out

fires before they started," said Deer. "To make sure they didn't do anything that was offensive to Haudenosaunee people."

Deer said he scrutinized plot points and helped with the history. He also provided information about traditional Mohawk clothing, weaponry, and equipment.

"Also they wanted to bring me in on the linguistic. They wanted to incorporate some Mohawk language." The game includes scenes entirely in Mohawk with English subtitles. Hutchinson said it felt disingenuous to have Mohawks speak English in a Mohawk village.

Deer said that while he didn't craft the character or plot of the game, he did help choose Connor Kenway's Mohawk name, Ratoohnhake:ton (Radoon-hagay-doh).

"The name was kind of a difficult thing when they asked me for a Mohawk

name," he said. "The last thing I wanted to do was pick a name and someone be offended that I never got permission from a clan."

Deer said he told Ubisoft they couldn't copyright the name. "They got their legal team on it and the lawyers telling me that there's no way that Ubisoft could own any part of Mohawk culture or any part of the language including names." "Just to be safe I ended up offering my son's name," he said. "I felt it was a little bit safer to use a name I knew other people didn't have."

Deer said Ratoohnhake:ton means roughly to cling to life. He said when his son was born his family wasn't sure he was going to make it. "When we came up with that name it was specifically that he was a survivor in a sense."

"The guys at Ubisoft thought it would be a great name for their main character because Connor himself is a survivor in the story."