

Q&A with Ru Weerasuriya of Ready At Dawn Studios - Game Director for God of War: Chains of Olympus

As Co-founder and Creative & Art Director of Ready At Dawn Studios®, Ru leads the company's creative development, as well as its art & design supervision. For the last few years, he has also served on the judging panel of the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences' achievement awards, and recently as a member of the Visual Arts Advisory Board for the Game Developers Conference.

1. What's been the most challenging aspect of squeezing GoW onto PSP? The streaming? The visual quality? Something else?

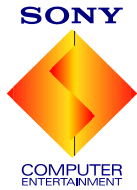
Switching game genre from platformer to action/adventure was definitely not an easy task, but the team did an amazing job adapting and really understanding what makes a God of War game. Of course we also had to push the hardware further than we did with Daxter to be able to do the GoW franchise justice. For the streaming, we continued from where we left off with Daxter. Just as in our previous game, the goal is to give the player a seamless gameplay experience with GoW: Chains of Olympus.

2. How much did Daxter help, in terms of experience? Were you surprised at just how much you could coax out of PSP? And does GoW borrow any tech from Daxter?

Daxter did help a lot. Understanding each others' strengths is what makes a good team. That's why we felt that we could take on God of War. Daxter used the Ready At Dawn Engine 1.0 which we made available for external licensing after we released the game. But for the requirements of God of War: Chains of Olympus we needed to go further in almost every aspect of our tech. We spent the initial part of development improving our tech. The game now uses Engine 2.0 which has really tapped into more of the PSP's power, as you can see from the screenshots we've released.

3. Given how part of GoW's renown as a franchise is in how much it managed to push the visual boundaries of what the PS2 was capable of (and the visual quality players expect from the series)... did you ever think you were going to bite off more than you could chew by creating a PSP instalment?

Of course, the prospect was daunting. We knew it would push us further as a team than we had before. But I think it's that challenge that makes you achieve higher goals than you normally would. You can't sit back and hope that things will come together by some miracle. As developers, we strive to learn, inspire and challenge ourselves with every game we decide to make.



4. Given the plotline, are we going to see a lot more battles against humans, alongside the mythological beasts? Will there be any flashback-style sections where we get to play as Kratos *before* he was inducted into the service of the gods, and was a barbarian-slaying badass?

You will get the opportunity to battle more mythological creatures as well as epic bosses in our game, just like you did in the first and second ones. The story will take Kratos to unlikely places and new lands than no man has walked upon, and the player will also get a glimpse of Kratos' past. But I can't tell you much more than that right now... :)

5. Given where GoW and GoW2 have taken Kratos, are we pretty much guaranteed a grim ending to Chains of Olympus?

After playing the first two games, you already know where Kratos' journey takes him. In our game you'll witness more of his path, anger and hatred towards the Gods of Olympus. But there's really more to Kratos than his single minded goal to take down Zeus. Our story will show you another side of his persona, and there will be some major story twists. Ultimately, I hoped to give you a deeper look into Kratos' human side with this story. As for grim endings, I'm a huge fan of Greek literature and I really wanted the plot to play like a Greek tragedy.

6. Were you tempted to not use Kratos as a lead character, to give more freedom to explore the GoW universe? Or was he too essential a component to jettison?

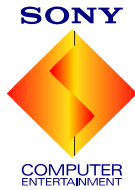
I don't think we ever toyed with the idea of using another character. That would have made this game more of a spin-off. Our goal was to add to the already vast overarching story of the God of War franchise, and more specifically, to that of Kratos.

7. Have you managed to add any actual historical events into the mix, as set-pieces?

As a matter of fact, I tried using an actual event as the foundation of the opening sequences of our game... although we did end up by losing a lot of the historical facts when the final design was implemented. The opening sequences were an homage to the Battle of Thermopylae and Marathon... although these events did take place a decade apart in history.

8. Have you had a problem coming up with new enemy types, given how the PS2 GoW games have already plundered so many of the most famous/iconic creatures from Greek mythology?

It was a little tough as Sony Santa Monica had used a lot of the known creatures of Greek mythology. But the bestiary is so vast that we were able to create some really interesting enemy types for our game.



9. Will there be real-time magic and weapon change? How will the issue of right-stick evasion be tackled?

There will definitely be magics in our game, just like in the other ones. They will tie directly into the story and give you abilities that you haven't previously seen or used. As for the dodge mechanic, I know that people were worried about the lack of a right analog stick. But we've toyed with some solutions and I really think we have some very cool options to go with. We've seen people use them in focus tests and we've had great feedback.

10. And are there any plans to dip a toe in the world of downloadable content (or even leaderboards for Challenge of the Gods-style aspects, say)?

We haven't explored downloadable content. We wanted to give the player the best possible single-player experience on the PSP. We do have a few ideas up our sleeves we hope to implement that will give the player something beyond what they expect.

11. Can you reveal any info about new weapons planned for the game? Or, even, any that you wanted to put in, but have decided to drop?

I'd like to talk more about new weapons but unfortunately, that would reveal part of the story. That's a discussion I'll leave for later. We did go through a multitude of ideas for alternate weapons, we even animated the combat moves for some of them. But the choice we went with will give the player something they have never experienced with the other games.

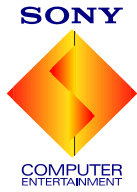
12. Are you going to be retaining the power-up systems i.e. red orbs, gorgon eyes and feathers?

Absolutely, you will get the chance to upgrade your weapons and magics just like you did before. That's really one of the cool parts of GoW; to see different people use alternate upgrade paths depending on their style of play.

13. Can you give us any kind of brief rundown of how the game will open i.e. the details of the set-piece itself? Is it aiming to be as typically epic as the PS2 GoW games?

You will be thrown right in the midst of action. Kratos is sent by the Gods to stop a Persian invasion on the shores of Attica. The city itself is under siege by a barrage of fire from the Persian fleet. But you soon find out that there is more to this than a simple siege.

I love the idea of starting with a bang and putting the player in a dire situation right away. It's going to be a rollercoaster ride from then on.



14. Any plans to include a WiFi two-player mode, perhaps, even if just for certain mini-game-style challenge arenas?

We decided not to explore any Wi-Fi connectivity with our game. Instead we decided to put all our efforts into delivering the best possible single-player experience we could for GOW Chains of Olympus.