

## BOOKS

# Cave Art Appreciation

**W**hen Paleolithic artists first pressed brittle lumps of charcoal onto the coarse surfaces of cave walls, they never could have imagined that their sketches would one day be among the most studied and controversial art in the world. Tens of thousands of years later, debates now rage among scholars over everything from the images' dates to why they were created. In a new book, *Cave Art* (Phaidon Press, \$90), art historian Jean Clottes focuses on questions of aesthetics and technique.

He discusses cave art as *art*. About a drawing of rhinoceroses and horses from Chauvet Cave in France, he writes, "They were no doubt painted by the same person, who made very skillful use of the wall surface, mix-

ing charcoal with surface clay to obtain various hues and achieve a range of effects...A true masterpiece!" He also offers insight into how to appreciate this mysterious art form, pointing out that the artists would have worked in the dark under the flickering light of oil lamps, which would have reflected off the artwork's surface, creating unearthly auras around the figures.

Featuring some 300 color pictures of decorated caves and rock shelters and related artifacts found in 85 locations from Norway to Australia, the book provides a rich variety of artistic expression, from Lascaux's famous



The 11,000-year-old mouthless faces of rain spirits called Wandjinas peer from a rock in northwest Australia's Kimberley region.

herds of chunky bison to less-well-known engravings from Niger of baby giraffes nuzzling in the necks of their mothers. The lively writing that accompanies each work makes *Cave Art* easily accessible to novices, but its sumptuous photographs make it a must-have visual reference for experts.

—ETI BONN-MULLER

## GAMES

# The Revolution Will Be Civilized

**I**t is a real wake-up call when my armies are routed for the fourth time by the vastly superior forces of...Gandhi. That's when I know my culture is not destined for greatness.

I am playing the latest version of Sid Meier's famously addictive *Civilization*, in which a player guides a society, for better or worse, from 4,000 B.C. to the space age. Now, the game is making the leap from personal computers to the console gaming platforms Xbox, Nintendo DS, and PlayStation 3.

In its essentials *Civilization Revolution* is the same game that kept a generation of archaeology students up at 2:00 A.M. shirking their term papers on the origins of urbanism. The object of the game is still to out-compete rival civilizations—led by the likes of Julius Caesar and



Montezuma—by building cities, maintaining armies, and researching cultural developments that range from agriculture to the Internet. But I was surprised by how much more dramatic the game is when played on a large TV screen.

While the experience is epic, it's also comparatively brief. On the PC, it was possible to spend 200 hours on a single game. The average *Civilization Revolution* game won't last

much longer than three hours, and the swift pace creates some glaring anachronisms. For instance, it's possible your culture can make it to A.D. 1000 without learning about ceremonial burial, something that shows up in the archaeological record as early as 30,000 B.C. Older versions of the game were more faithful to the pace of history, but one flaw all versions share is they are rooted in the 19th-century notion that every culture progresses neatly through the same stages of social and technological development. There are no dark ages in which cultural developments disappear.

Despite being crushed by Gandhi's armies, I enjoy the new version immensely. Who knew winding up on the ash heap of history could be so fun?

—ERIC A. POWELL