



## Forbidden Siren

---

### **Interview with a games enthusiast**

#### **Did you find Forbidden Siren frightening?**

I wasn't particularly confident that a video game could scare me but, surprisingly, Forbidden Siren did. It was a totally new experience of video games, I've not played or seen anything quite like it. What really impressed me was the thinking that had gone into the game. There was incredible attention to detail with all of the scenery and characters, which you expect for a good quality video game, but the story was excellent and when you add the two together it was genuinely absorbing. Of course, being absorbed in a video game isn't unusual for me, but being scared by a video game is. The tension that the game manages to build by making you think that about what might be round each and every corner. At points I could feel my heart beating as I felt my way round a corner, unsure as to what lay ahead, it is truly frightening.

#### **How would you compare Forbidden Siren with horror movies?**

There's not all that much blood and it's much too clever to be a 'slasher' movie. It's much closer to what I suppose you'd call a 'psychological' horror movie. The horror is rarely seen but there's always that lingering sense of fear. I've seen The Ring recently and there were a number of nice touches such as the alternating use of light of darkness that were similar to the film. There's also a touch of the zombie movie about the game, you know that some of the characters in the story aren't quite human any more but you're never quite sure which ones and whether to approach them. What I found really interesting was that with the game you couldn't turn away from the screen, I was too involved, this made it more frightening than a film.

#### **What did you find most interesting about Forbidden Siren?**

Without a doubt, the story was the most interesting part of the game. There are some very clever games out there such as ICO, but typically the story is just an excuse for the game or a means of tying different levels together. With Forbidden Siren the story was really absorbing and cleverly put together. I just can't think of games that made me ask so many questions about what was happening and why. In terms of game play, the Sight-Jack system was pretty innovative and worked really well with the story. I liked the way that you could borrow the eyes of other characters to feel your way round the levels and piece the story together.

## **Can you see video games challenging traditional horror mediums such as books and movies?**

The one thing about video games is that every time someone says that there's something you can't do with a video game, think football or golf, the developers build a game that does it. Two weeks ago I wouldn't have thought that a seriously scary 'horror' video game was either possible or worth making. I've changed my mind now. Video games offer huge scope for interaction and involving the gamer in the story, so they're almost a natural fit for psychological horror stories. If done well you can create that feeling that you're part of the story.

## **Could a video game be more scary than a book or a movie?**

With the right setting, absolutely. I turned the lights out, turned up the stereo and played the game on my own one evening. It probably took a little longer to get into than a movie but once I started progressing through the game it was incredibly scary.

Video games are much more mainstream than they were five, even three, years ago. The development teams are more mature and the industry is working very well with other creatives, such as horror writers and sports stars, to build more enticing games. So I'd have to say, although I'm probably a little bias, that games really do have the potential to be more scary than books or games. It's a really interesting development for the gaming industry.

## **What made Forbidden Siren different from other 'horror' video games?**

The use of a well-thought out story. Silent Hill comes close but it's too closely based on traditional games, the plot is quite flaky and is just used as an excuse to move between levels. With Forbidden Siren the plot is the game. Yes there are some clever controls, but what's most interesting is that it turns traditional thinking on games completely upside down. The game is in effect just a means of engaging in the story at a deeper, and consequently more scary level. Silent Hill is the only game that comes remotely close. It makes games like Resident Evil just look like shoot-em ups with a Halloween feel to them.

## **How would you like to see 'horror' video games develop?**

Lara Croft is now a film icon, so perhaps we'll see Forbidden Siren remade as a film in the near future. The links between games and films are closer now than they've even been so you never know. More importantly, what I wouldn't want to see is the release of games to mirror the release of a big film, the beauty of Forbidden Siren is that it's a new story for me. If I'd already seen the film and understood the plot I'm not sure I would have found it so engaging. Perhaps the developers can borrow from some of the newer games like Grand Theft Auto that abandon the traditional linear gameplay arrangement in favour of a completely interactive environment that you can explore at will. This could result in a myriad of outcomes and paths, where you effectively choose your own destiny. It will also extend the life of the game as no two sessions will ever be the same.

## **What opportunities do video games offer horror writers?**

As the video game industry matures, we are increasingly seeing developers who are either not hardcore gamers or who are working with people from other mainstream media. So there's no reason why we shouldn't see horror writers working with games developers and vice versa. Forbidden Siren was scary because it was a great horror story and the industry is going to need horror writers to create these stories. Video games also offer a popular medium for horror writers to draw attention to their creative skills. There is so much potential in video games, I mean who thought that we'd be playing games without a controller but with a motion sensitive camera instead, and I think it offers horror writers a really exciting outlet for their work.