



Forbidden Siren

Q & A with Stephen Jones

Stephen Jones is the winner of three World Fantasy Awards, three Horror Writers Association Bram Stoker Awards and three International Horror Guild Awards, as well as being a Hugo Award nominee and a fifteen-times recipient of the British Fantasy Award. One of Britain's most acclaimed anthologists of horror and dark fantasy and also a specialist film publicist (the first three *Hellraiser* movies, etc.), he has more than seventy books to his credit, published in many different languages around the world. You can visit his web site at www.herebedragons.co.uk/jones

Did you find *Forbidden Siren* frightening?

It takes a lot to actually scare me these days (laughs), but I must say that *Forbidden Siren* definitely unnerved me. The realistic graphics, combined with creepy music and the claustrophobic settings certainly inspired a sense of mounting dread, which is exactly what a good horror story should do.

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

Well, of course, no computer game can compete with the latest Hollywood blockbuster – yet. But they're definitely getting there. I was particularly impressed by the interactive aspect of the game – the scope of the settings and the ability to control the action from various different viewpoints. When you are playing *Forbidden Siren* you definitely feel that you are *inside* the story.

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

Besides the sense of realism it invokes, the game also has an otherworldliness to it that creates a dream-like quality when you are playing it. You feel that you are somehow dislocated in time, trapped in a nightmare world and fighting for your life to survive.

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

They already are. There is definitely a synergy there now, with many video games adapting films and fiction to the electronic format, while at the same time the most popular games are being turned into successful publishing and movie franchises. Video games may still not be quite so popular as books and films yet, but they still represent a major creative outlet in the genre and, as such, must be treated with equal respect.

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

I guess it *could* be but, to be honest, the purest fear lies in the imagination. That's where books or even audio have an edge over the visual medium such as movies or comic books. Of course, having said that, it will probably only be a matter of time before Sony or somebody comes up with an electronic game that will be scarier than anything we've seen before! *Forbidden Siren* is certainly a move in the right direction . . .

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

Although *Forbidden Siren* has many of the same attributes as other 'horror' video games – i.e. a 'kill or be killed' scenario – it also goes that little bit further with background story and atmosphere. It's not rooted in the 'shoot-'em-up' zombie games that used to be so popular. I also think that the Japanese setting gives it an exotic feel and a mythological resonance missing from many other games.

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

There have been so many terrific stories and books published in the horror field over the years, I would like to see video games tapping into more of that history of the genre. Imagine what the result would be if you combined the imaginations of some of the great horror writers with the kind of visuals you are now capable of creating electronically. The combined result could genuinely rival books and movies as a powerful medium for horror. It may also have the added advantage of introducing newer readers to some of the best books and authors in the genre.

What opportunities do video games offer horror writers?

It hasn't really been tapped yet, but there are plenty of contemporary writers out there doing great things with horror fiction these days. These are the people who have grown up playing video games – they understand the technology because they've been using it all their lives. If we could get some of them involved in creating new games, the results could be a quantum leap for the entire genre.

For example, so far as I'm aware, nobody has yet attempted to create an electronic horror 'anthology' – taking a number of different stories by established writers and combining them into a single game. *Hmmm* . . . now there's an idea . . .