Forbidden Siren

Interview with a film enthusiast

Did you find Forbidden Siren frightening?

Undoubtedly, it's both atmospheric and realistic. I am a huge fan of psychological horror movies and I loved the way that the game creates a sense of fear without having to resort to overt shock tactics or buckets of blood. I am not a hardcore gamer so initially I found the game controls a little odd but I found myself drawn into what quickly became a surprisingly chilling story. They've really learnt from the movie business and borrowed some of the best elements from the more successful movies. The way the story builds by stealing other people's view of events and mixing up the timeline, creates a real sense of anticipation, while the attention to detail in the scenery and the characters helps add a sense of credibility to the story. The surroundings look and feel both damp and misty, while the way the game moves from light to dark creates a genuine sense of claustrophobic fear.

How would you compare Forbidden Siren with horror movies?

It's most definitely closest to a psychological horror movie rather than a 'slasher' flick. The most obvious link is with the new wave of Japanese horror. The success of The Ring, which was a remake of an earlier Japanese film Ringu, has really opened up this market to the West. The use of dampness and fog, which really characterises the Japanese cult films, comes through well in the game and is used to create an incredible feeling of fear. In particular the use of light and dark was really reminiscent of Ringu and the Ring. There were also elements of the Thing and the Evil Dead in the game. Some of the people from the village were quite obviously zombies, while others you couldn't be sure of until you approached and talked to them, reminiscent of the sense on uncertainty created in The Thing.

What did you find most interesting about Forbidden Siren?

Once I'd got used to the controls, it was the way I became the focus of the story. In effect a living part of the story. It's both authentic and intriguing and the more I got

into the character the more questions I wanted answers for. Who am I? What has happened? This created a real hunger for the next part of the story which is where it became really interesting. You progress through the game by hijacking the vision of other characters in the story, a psychic power that allows you to look through the eyes of others, which is a genuinely clever way of building the story. But your character can't move when you're remote viewing so there's also that fear that something terrible will happen while you're occupied elsewhere.

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

For video games, it's all in the interaction with the story. With films and books you're always going to be slightly detached from the story, looking in from the outside as the story unfolds. With Forbidden Siren you're an active participant in the story. I do love horror and I've always thought that games could bring something new to the genre because of this interaction. But previous attempts at generating horror through video games have been dull and uninspiring. The horror is either tasteless 'slasher-style' shocks or so obviously telegraphed that it just doesn't work as horror. With Forbidden Siren, the horror is much more clever and subtle and, in my opinion, gives books and films a run for their money. Just as with books or films, it's all in the quality of the story, if video games attract good writers then the fact that you can be part of the story might just make games better in the long run.

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

Undoubtedly, Forbidden Siren was at least as scary as some of my favourite psychological horror films and books. Which for the first psychological horror video game isn't a bad effort. Again it's all about the fact that you feel part of the story rather than someone looking in from outside. There are hundreds of years of great horror writing and films out there to learn from and, what with the new interactive medium of games to work with, I can't wait to get my hands on the next game.

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

I have to admit that it really surprised me. My mate has a PlayStation and I have played other supposed 'horror' games such as Resident Evil. And while there were scary elements to the games they were nothing compared to the deep sense of fear that built up as I played Forbidden Siren. With the other games you simply get the impression that they've started with the classic video game formula of 'shoot as many whatevers as you can without dying to get to the next level' then just added a couple of zombies, haunted house scenery and buckets of blood. This just isn't scary.

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

Forbidden Siren borrows from such a small percentage of horror works out there, so there's certainly more scope for good 'horror' video games. I really enjoyed being part of the story so, while new content is what keeps the horror industry ticking over, I'd also like to see some of the horror greats like The Night of the Living Dead reworked as video games. There's also huge potential for more open-ended horror games where the player is more responsible for creating the story that unfolds and the fate that befalls them.

What opportunities do video games offer horror writers?

Video games offer a completely new medium for horror stories. I'm not sure that simply releasing a video game of the same name at the same time of a horror movie is going to bring out the best content. But, it is an exciting platform for horror and I'd like to see horror writers working with games developers on exclusive projects.