

JET LI: A BIOGRAPHY

Jet Li Lian Jie was born in Hebei, China on 26th April 1963. He developed an interest in wushu at a very early age, enrolling at the Beijing Sports and Exercise academy when he was only eight. Li's skills developed quickly and when he was 12 years old, Li swept the board at the National Wushu Championships. His victory came much to the delight of the Chinese public, who were enthralled by the stylish power and grace of his fighting.

Li went on to win competition after competition and was already a national hero by the time he made his screen debut in *Shaolin Temple* (1979). It was the first modern wushu movie to be made in China, and kick-started a boom in the kung fu film industry that lasted throughout the 1980s.

After appearing in a series of hit Shaolin movies, Li made his first venture into more contemporary storylines with *Dragon Fight* (1988). Two years later, he hooked up with producer / director Tsui Hark.

This was to be the start of an extremely successful chapter in Li's career. In 1991 he took the role of Wong Fei-Hung in *Once Upon a Time in China*. The movie was a massive hit in the East, inspiring a new interest in period martial arts films, and today it is still widely regarded as one of the greatest kung fu movies of all time.

Li went on to star in *Fong Sai Yuk* (1993), where he worked for the first time with legendary fight director Cory Yuen Kwai. Yuen had attended the same Peking Opera School as Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung, beginning his career as a stuntman before working his way up to choreographer and then director. *Fong Sai Yuk* was another huge success and marked the beginning of a long-running relationship between Li and Yuen, who would go on to work in some capacity on almost all of the actor's future films.

In 1994, Li appeared in a remake of the Bruce Lee classic *Fists of Legend*. When filming began, he decided not to employ the 'wire-fu' techniques he had recently been using to perform hyper-realistic stunts. Instead, he developed a style akin to Lee's tougher, more credible way of fighting. The new style was popular with his fans, many of whom still cite *Fists of Legend* as Li's best film.

By now, Li was a fully fledged megastar in the East, and it seemed news of his fame had finally started to reach American shores. In 1998 he was approached by the producers of *Lethal Weapon* who were looking for someone to play the villain in the fourth instalment of the popular series. Li accepted the offer, on one condition – that Cory Yuen could choreograph his fight scenes. The producers agreed and Li headed to the US once again.

The film was a success, and American audiences at last began to sit up and take notice of Li. In fact, his performance was so well-received that the distributors added his face and name to the promotional posters in the days following the opening weekend.

Lethal Weapon 4 triggered a Stateside revival of Li's earlier works, and videos of his Chinese and Cantonese films began to sell extremely well. The star's popularity

continued to grow with *Romeo Must Die* (2000) and *Kiss of the Dragon* (2001). *The One* (2001) was to be his biggest hit so far, grossing \$20 million in its opening weekend. Li went on to star in *Hero* (2002) and *Cradle to the Grave* (2003).

Now Li's career is set to take another turn as he prepares to make his debut on PlayStation®2. In *Rise to Honour*[™], Li plays Kit Yun, undercover cop and bodyguard to a notorious Hong Kong crime boss. Li has been working extensively with Cory Yuen and the Sony motion capture team to ensure that the in-game fight sequences capture all the power, speed and grace of his style. For the first time ever, gamers will have the chance to star in their very own Jet Li blockbuster, performing all his signature moves and spectacular stunts. *Rise to Honour* is already eagerly awaited by martial arts fanatics and gamers alike, and it's sure to set the small screen alight when it's released next year.