

***RISE TO HONOUR*[™]: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN GAMES AND MOVIES**

On paper, the concept is simple: People like games. People like movies. People like games that are similar to the kind of movies they like. So simply take one game and one movie in the genre of your choice, stick 'em together and what have you got? Why, you've got a massively popular hit on your hands, right?

Only history tells us it doesn't always work that way. That's not to say games based on films don't always sell – people often part with their cash without waiting to find out if the game is any good, unable to resist the chance to 'be' their favourite action hero / comic book character.

The problem usually arises when they get the game home and discover that it not only fails to live up to their expectations as far as being-in-the-film goes, but doesn't even meet their criteria for what makes a good, involving game. The end result is a lot of very fed up consumers feeling very let down, vowing to be wary of purchasing the developer's products in the future.

But now, it seems, things are looking up. Developers are starting to take a new approach to the game-movie crossover, and are addressing the problems which have plagued so many attempts to bridge the gap.

The forthcoming Jet Li blockbuster *Rise to Honour* is a shining example of this. SCEA are putting all hands to the game engine in a bid to create a game that's not only great to play but also features all the best bits of your favourite martial arts movies. But before we take a closer look at the game, it's necessary to ask one very important question – do people really *want* to cross the divide between their gaming experiences and their movie-going experiences?

Well, yes, judging by the numbers of gamers who hand over the ready for licensed titles – the good, the bad and the ugly – every year. And, although passive forms of entertainment such as music and movies remain immensely popular, those numbers are growing all the time. In 2000, an astonishing 35% of Americans cited computer and videogames as the most enjoyable entertainment activity, ahead of both watching TV (18%) and going to the movies (11%).*

As clichéd as it may be, it's true to say that the Internet – and now broadband – are changing the way we think about our entertainment. DVD sales may be soaring, but at the same time, more and more consumers are seeking out entertainment with an interactive element. They're looking for new experiences which they can control, share and become truly involved with.

So there's clearly a demand for game-movie crossovers, but what's the best way to meet it? Well, developers have realised that there are a few of lessons to be learned from history, otherwise known as The Great Universal Truths of Games Based on Movies.

Truth 1: No matter how cool and/or popular your action hero / comic book character is, it's just not good enough to stick him or her in a rubbish game engine and let them get on with it. The game's got to be fun to play, first and foremost.

Truth 2: Don't bother trying to fit the entire plot of the movie into the game. They are different forms of entertainment, and people enjoy them for different reasons. If someone wants to watch endless plot-furthering cut scenes, they'll buy a DVD. And it'll have better graphics.

Truth 3: There are elements of the film-making process which can be applied to game development, and by identifying and adopting these, it's possible to produce games which are involving, exciting and – most importantly – really make players feel as if they are starring in a Hollywood blockbuster.

It's this last concept which the makers of *Rise to Honour* are paying particular attention to. *RTH* is being developed in close collaboration with martial arts star Jet Li and his fight choreographer, Cory Yuen. Instead of trying to metaphorically sellotape an already-existing movie plot onto an already-developed game engine, SCEA's Foster City studio is looking at ways to take all the exciting elements of Hong Kong cinema and fully integrate them into a satisfying, original gaming experience. And it looks as if they're making a pretty good job of it.

Rise to Honour combines explosive gameplay, extensive motion capture and superb special effects with an intricate and involving story. But although it's a plot worthy of any high-grossing martial arts movie, it's been specially written with game mechanics in mind. The result is that the player is not only keen to find out what happens next, but truly feels like he or she is directly effecting the story's progression.

The game features some of the most spectacular in-game fight sequences ever seen, thanks to the thousand-or-so hours Li and Yuen spent recording moves in Sony's motion capture studios. The stunning slow-mo 'gun dive' effect adds to the whole "Blimey! That's me doing that!" feel, reinforcing the idea that the gamer is in fact starring in their very own action film. Li also found the time to turn in a voice performance, so his character sounds as well as looks exactly like him. All this is polished off with some very nice Hong Kong-style finishing touches, such as the inclusion of Cantonese speech and subtitles.

There's clearly a demand for games inspired by films, and that demand is likely to grow alongside the number of people purchasing consoles. But SCEA are doing something truly original here – in essence, plotting out a movie with the game in mind, rather than vice versa. By combining Hollywood production values, an intricate storyline, great gameplay and stunning visual effects, *Rise to Honour* is set to offer an incredibly involving entertainment experience.

* Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment Software Service