

# **BLOWING UP THE INTRODUCTION**

When we play and design roleplaying games we often seek inspiration in cinema. Whether we're sending our player characters on an epic quest, toward the stars, or into costumed hero battle, movies act as a shared reference point as we assemble our storylines. With a game like *Feng Shui*, which has action movie roleplaying right in the subtitle, a look at the way directors and their action choreographers assemble thrilling scenes seems a no-brainer. Yet with so many elements vying for inclusion in a roleplaying core book, the game itself can make only a quick sideview shot at the topic, while keeping the main fire trained on that passel of eunuch sorcerers up ahead. Thanks to the Kickstarter backers for *Feng Shui 2*, I get the opportunity, as bullets ping the catwalk railing beside us and blade-wielding kung fu masters toss energy bolts overhead, to rifle key titles of the action flick canon for gaming inspiration.

Each of the twenty-four essays in this compact, easily-concealable volume examines the film itself, then seeks ways to translate one of its central virtues to your gaming table. The balance between analysis and play advice varies between essays. Sometimes an exploration of a film's hallmark technique carries us through the entire entry. In other cases I've yielded into the temptation to digress a bit.

The essays serve as bite-sized treatments of each title, meant to spark thought and action. Much more could be said about most of these films. The intensive beat-by-beat breakdown I give to *Dr. No* (1982) in another of my books, *Hamlet's Hit Points*, lies outside the remit of *Blowing Up the Movies*. In keeping with the explodey spirit of the titles at hand, this book adopts a looser, more casual, more directly play-oriented approach.

In seeking a particular angle in each piece I am leaving out a host of other observations that might be made about it. Both *The Matrix* and *Star*

*Wars* brilliantly present exposition and invoke the mythic King Arthur/Christ narrative. To keep each piece distinct, I look at exposition in the *Matrix* essay and the archetype of the chosen one in *Star Wars*. In an alternate universe where I got onto a tube train with Gwyneth Paltrow at just the right moment I might as easily have done them the other way round. The *Big Trouble in Little China* piece is mostly about pop-cultural cross-pollination, with a side note on playing a comic bad-ass. Again, that emphasis could as well have been turned on its head, had Gwyneth not gotten to me first. Once you think of her as a high-ranking Ascended operative a lot of stuff suddenly makes sense. But I've said too much.

In other words, in my effort to focus on a particular idea in each essay, I may be missing the Thing You Always Say about your favorite film. But then you already know that and don't need me going around saying it too.

If these essays get you thinking about the relationship between your gaming choices and the media source material they reference, the book has accomplished its task.

This book tackles only a quick cross-section of the films that inform the *Feng Shui* spirit. The choices focus primarily on Hong Kong action cinema. Within that category it further favors what I regard as the classic era of that tradition, which runs more or less from the mid-eighties to mid-nineties.

Kickstarter backers picked some of the titles. Patrons pitching in for the special Fistful of Popcorn tier selected a movie apiece, stretching my boundaries to encompass an 80s action classic, key Kurosawa, a Cornetto-munching action comedy, and a masked rider duology. Not to mention an HK classic I should have picked myself and the central film of the geek canon. Two more titles won inclusion via a poll of all backers: the dystopian gun-grabber *Equilibrium* and that Indonesian brutalist rave-up *The Raid: Redemption*.

When I need to cite a game mechanic or term, I'll be invoking *Feng Shui* 2. As roleplaying game fan, even if you don't know that specific game, you have the grounding to work out their meaning from context. Although if

you like both RPGs and action movies and haven't yet familiarized yourself with *FS2*, WHAT THE HECK HAS GONE WRONG?

I've gone light on synopses. For well-known titles I'll give you just enough to remind you of the film if you haven't seen it in a while. More obscure movies may warrant a little more description. When I can count on you to have the film hard-burned into your frontal lobe, I'll toss the synopsis entirely.

These pieces of analysis best help you sharpen your games if you've seen the films already. Go and watch them, then read the accompanying essays. I've granted myself a license to spoil.

Subtitles of Hong Kong films often assign the characters Western names not actually heard in the dialogue. As these are easier to remember for those of us unversed in Cantonese, I'll go with the English name seen in the subtitles, should one exist.

To save you page flipping between books, we've reprinted the filmography from *FS2* here. We haven't changed it any, so you need not pore over both in hopes that one of them has slipped in a recommendation the other omits.

Definitions may be in order for the uninitiated. The term "wuxia" refers to Chinese high fantasy, with martial arts abilities that seem positively sorcerous. *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon*, *A Chinese Ghost Story* and *Hero* all fall into this category. The outlaw demimonde of martial arts warriors depicted in these films is sometimes called the "giang hu" world. "Heroic bloodshed" films belong to a sub-genre of crime drama that heavily emphasizes fatalistic melodrama. Examples include *A Better Tomorrow*, *The Killer*, and *SPL*.

Enough preliminaries. I hear vampires hopping outside the door, so it's time to get on with the narrative secrets that propel them, and the giang hu warriors, maverick cops, masterless samurai, grasshopper-styled cyborgs, and jedi knights populating the pages to come.

If I don't make it out alive, go forward, my comrades, and bravely game. Bravely game.

**BLOWING  
UP  
THE MOVIES**