



October 21, 2013

### Agenda:

- The Return of the Article of the Week!—*Breaking the Mold: Designing a kung-fu game that's not about fighting - Part 1*
- AuroraGDC student applications!
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Game Jam—Oct. 25-27 (This weekend!)
- Reminders to our freshmen...

### Article of the Week:

## **Breaking the Mold: Designing a kung-fu game that's not about fighting-Part 1** *by Brice Morrison*

*This is part one of a series in which I'll blog about the Making of Shuyan the Kung Fu Princess - Designing a kung-fu game that's not about fighting.*

### **Part 1: The Search for True Kung Fu - Defining Our Essential Experience**

The opportunity to work on our upcoming iPad release *Shuyan the Kung Fu Princess* was a wonderful mash-up of my love for Kung Fu and video games.

I trained in Wing Chun Kung Fu for four years, and it left a deep impression on me. So from the beginning of our game's development, I was adamant that our game had to be true to the spirit of kung-fu teachings. My kung fu teacher often said things like, "Kung Fu is to have no intention. You have to learn to fight without fighting." I felt we absolutely could not make a typical button-mashing action game and call it kung fu.



We knew we wanted to give players the experience of kung-fu training and authentic kung-fu combat, but had no idea on how to achieve this, or where to begin. I deliberately avoided borrowing designs from other melee combat games, because I wanted our game to be a new and unique experience.

We prototyped and playtested a number of ideas, but nothing stuck. That led me to search for wisdom from the developer community. After hearing Jesse Schell talk at a local interactive conference, I picked up his book and found what was missing. [The Art of Game Design](#) provided a blue print and a process for our team in making *Shuyan*.

Key to this was defining our "essential experience," the overarching idea that weaves into all aspects of design and ensures a unified, powerful gaming experience.

The most amazing thing about my training in Wing Chun Kung Fu was that 95 percent of it was not about how to hit people, but about how to not get hit yourself. The vast majority of movements are deflective movements. But what makes the deflective movements possible is that you constantly give way to your opponent, letting him or her throw all the punches and kicks they want. You don't try to stop them, you don't fight force with force. Your ability to do this depends on your amount of physical self-control and mental self-restraint, both of which come through diligent training.

Thus our essential experience was formed: "Finding self-restraint through kung fu training, by learning to have no intention to fight," (which leads to advantages in combat).

Once we nailed our essential experience, our game really took off. It was much easier to decide which ideas, mechanics, or systems should be pursued, and which should be ignored. We simply asked:



October 21, 2013

Does it fit within our essential experience? Does it have to do with restraint, or lack of it? If not, we tossed it out.

At the same time, prototyping and playtesting were critical. It was a very iterative process, where we constructed an idea from our essential experience on paper, quickly built it, and tested it to see if it worked. We gathered feedback, refined the prototype, and tested again as quickly as possible.

Armed with a unique essential experience and a new take on melee combat, we then began re-evaluating established action-adventure and fighting game genre tropes and trends, as well as design principles for these genres. We followed a convention when it fit into our essential experience, and broke it when it didn't.

Our essential experience wasn't just part of our game mechanic design. It guided all other aspects of our production. We wanted an authentic kung fu training experience, so we sought for authenticity everywhere. The 2D backdrops are hand-painted by a local Chinese painter. The comic-book styled cut-scenes are illustrated by a former Star Wars comic-book artist originally from China. And the music features authentic Chinese compositions.

We used our own motion-capture studio to capture authentic Wing Chu Kung Fu movements, which we used to animate our 3D models. The training equipment we worked into the game is also authentic, and we weaved a powerful story into the game that emphasizes kung-fu principles of self-control.

We were really lucky to have backers on this project that supported our direction. Multi-language TV broadcaster New Tang Dynasty Television shared our vision for a kung-fu experience that captured the principle of self-control. And we benefited from the favorable funding environment in Ontario, Canada, with support from the Bell Fund, Canada Media Fund, and OMDC Interactive Digital Media Fund.

Back when our essential experience was first defined, it was a big relief. It gave us a clear vision we could all understand and get behind.

But on the mechanics side, how were we going to translate that into a concrete combat system? How do you perform combat in a kung fu game that is not about fighting?

*Watch out for [Part 2 of the series](#) where I'll get into how our team decided on our Primary "Attack".*