

- 1     *Can you name any computer/ video games that have been made into a movie?  
Which do you think is more popular, the movie or the game? Why?  
How do you think computer games will change in the future?*

### **I'm game for the movies**

Many films go on to become video games but do you know which films started out as video games? You may be surprised to find out that there have been quite a few. Which do you think was the first video game to make it to the big screen? I asked this question to a friend recently and he came up with *Tron*. My friend didn't know that *Tron* didn't start off as a video game. First, it was a 1982 science fiction film by Disney and although it was about a video game it was actually the film that spawned the game. The prize for first live action film based on a video game was in fact '*Super Mario Bros*' in 1993 starring Bob Hoskins as the moustachioed title hero and Dennis Hopper as the bad guy. Though Bob Hoskins received praise for his portrayal of the popular game character, the film itself received very negative reviews and did poorly at the box office.

During the mid nineties there then followed a spate of kung fu and kick boxing video game / film crossovers, the most famous of which were the run of '*mortal combat*' films and *Street Fighter*. Such stars as Christopher Lambert, Jean Claude Damme and even Kylie Minogue brought these video game titles kicking, if not screaming, to the big screens. Initially both titles proved to be commercial hits but unfortunately, the negative reception of each subsequent film meant that the prospect of further releases is minimal.

It was not until *Tomb Raider* and Lara Croft (played by Angelina Jolie) hit the screens in 2001 that a video game could really lay claim to having successfully made the leap to the movies. In takings it broke the record for a film that featured a female lead and took over \$300 million at the box office worldwide. It not only remains the most successful video game adaption to date but also launched Angelina Jolie's career as a Hollywood actress.

Ironically enough the next video game to successfully make the transition from computer screen to cinema screen also starred a female protagonist. In *Resident Evil* Mila Jovovich also plays a gun-totting amnesiac heroine and a secret underground genetic research facility called the 'Umbrella Company'. The trouble starts when the company is responsible for accidentally releasing a virus which causes dead bodies to reanimate as blood thirsty zombies. To date three live action movies under the name of *Resident Evil* have been released. The fact that the movies took an average of \$20 million on their opening weekends and grossed \$150 million worldwide means that Alice's fight against the Umbrella Corporation is sure to continue.

The talk of the computer game town at the moment is the prospect of Peter Jackson's (director of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy) involvement in HALO. HALO is a very successful first person shooter video game. It will be interesting to see how a video game that took \$300 million in its first week of sales will make it as a movie adaptation. There are many sceptics who simply believe that a successful video game loses its principal appeal once it becomes a movie. You watch a film passively for a couple of hours at the most. A video game requires active participation and it is the choices that

you make that decide the story. Also a video game, from start to finish, can provide anywhere in the region of 100 hours or more of play.

So what is the future for computer games at the movies? Rather than seeing movies and video games switching back and forth we may see the two blending together to form a single new media. The technology perfected by James Cameron to film his new movie *Avatar* may hold the key to this future. As James Cameron himself says, he used “a big, powerful game engine” to capture actors’ motions to let them interact with computer generated characters on a real, live-action set while shooting live action. Perhaps the video gamer of the future will interact with a game environment in a similar way putting the player inside the game in real time. This will bring a whole new meaning to “I’m into video and computer games”.

2 *Answer these questions with a partner*

Which film mentioned later became a film?

Were *Mortal Combat* and *Street fighter* successful films?

Which films were successful sequels?

What arguments are there for not making a movie based on a game?

Which two films mentioned are not based on a game?

3 *Find the language below in the article above and underline them. With a partner can you guess what they mean?*

**Spawned**

**do poorly**

**hits**

**leap**

**lead**

**launched**

**totting**

**grossed**

**to be into something**

**makes it**

**line up**

4 *Find words and phrases to do with games and movies in the article. Compare your list with a partner and explain the words and phrases without the help of a dictionary. You will need these words and phrases for the speaking practice below.*

5 *Do you think video games make good movies or movies make good video games? Why? / Why not?*

6 *How do you think technology will effect either movies or games in the future?*

## Teachers' notes

To introduce the topic you could present the 4 photos of the video game film characters to the class. Ask the class if they know who they are and to tell their partner what they know about them.

Students ask each other the pre-reading questions (1) at the top of the article. They then read the article and discuss how the article answered the pre-reading questions.

Students work in pairs to do questions 2 - 6. When they have finished do class feedback.

Answers to question 2

Which film mentioned later became a film?

Tron

Were *Mortal Combat* and *Street fighter* successful films?

The 1<sup>st</sup> ones were, the sequels weren't.

Which films were successful sequels?

Tomb Raider & Resident Evil

What arguments are there for not making a movie based on a game?

See last 4 sentences of paragraph 5

Which two films mentioned are not based on a game?

Tron & Avatar

### Possible answers to exercise 3

Spawned	to produce or create
Do poorly	to do badly or not be successful
Hits	to be a success
Leap	move somewhere quickly
Lead	main or principal actor in a film
Launched	to start something
Totting	carrying something
Grossed	to earn money
Line up	to form a queue
Makes it	be succeed
To be into something	to be interested in