Master of his destiny

Jiu Ba-dao may look and sound slightly conceited, but the youthful best-selling writer and first-time director knows the value of hard work

BY **HO YI**
STAFF REPORTER

When he published his first short novel *Language* (語言) online in 1999, Jiu Ba-dao (九把刀) had no idea that one day he would become a best-selling writer and cultural pundit, adored by high school and college students alike. The free-spirited author, who crisscrosses genres such as fantasy, romance, thriller, black comedy, action and *wuxia* (武俠), or Chinese martial-art literature, is difficult to pin down.

His most talked-about achievements include writing 5,000 words a day and publishing 14 novels over a period of 14 months. At the age of 30, Jiu has more than 50 books under his belt, many of which have topped the best-seller chart, with others being adapted for television soap operas. The author's ultimate wish is to become the next Jin Yong (金庸), one of the Chinese-speaking world's top *wuxia* writers.

Jiu recently made a foray into film, directing a short movie that along with contributions from three other celebrities-turned-first-time directors form *L-O-V-E* (愛到底), which was released earlier this month. Starring pop idols Megan Lai (賴雅妍) and Van Fan (范逸臣), the story centers on a young man's dying wish to look after the woman he loves, even when he's gone.

Taipei Times: What does it feel like to be a first-time film director?
Jiu Ba-dao: I often felt clumsy. I am so used to being in complete control of my works as a writer. But in film, one's sense of fulfillment is not pure as making a movie is a collective work. The danger of writing novels is that one can get way too cocky, believing that he can achieve things alone.

Being a director certainly exceeded all my expectations for my career. Filmmaking used to be a mystery to me. After the film, I know that it's extremely difficult to make a movie, but it is no longer a mystery.

TT: How did you prepare for the project?
JB: Because I was totally clueless, I rented lots of DVDs and studied the behind-the-scene sections.

TT: Are you happy with the result?
JB: Yea, I quite like it. The pressure of making the film look good came from my fear of losing face. Lots of my book fans would go see the film, and I don't want them to leave the theater, thinking "Jiu Ba-dao should go back to writing novels."

TT: Speaking of your books, what propelled you to become a blog writer after *Language*?
JB: I was annoyed with sociology when I didn't get admitted to National Tsing Hua University's (清華大學, NTHU) graduate school, so I wrote stories during the whole time that I was supposed to be preparing to sit entrance exams for the next year. And I got addicted to it.

I put all my stories all online because I didn't have a personal computer back then. That's why I became a blog writer.

(After graduating from the National Chiao Tung University's (國立交通大學) department of management science, Jiu didn't settle down with a job at Hsinchu Science Park like many of his classmates did. He wrote *Language*, or what he called a fantasy novel laden with sociological awareness, for his graduate school application to NTCU's sociology department. He didn't get admitted, but instead found fame as a best-selling writer five years later after half a decade of sluggish sales.)

Like many young people in Taiwan, best-selling writer Jiu Ba-dao, above, reads manga, listens to Jay Chou's music and watches Stephen Chow's movies. His own film, *L-O-V-E*, was released earlier this month. PHOTOS COURTESY OF FILMKO PCITURES

[PC GAME REVIEW]

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
Developed by Infinity Ward
Published by Activision
(Mac OS X, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Windows, Nintendo DS)

BY **GARETH MURFIN**
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

To those with their finger on the pulse, a review of *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (COD4) might seem a tad late, given that COD5 is already out and there's even rumors on the Net of a COD6.

However, one should note that the COD franchise is published by Activision, which selects which of its development houses to use for each new version. Most versions including COD, COD2 and COD4 have been developed by Infinity Ward, and other versions such as COD3 and COD5 have been developed by Treyarch. Both of these development teams were acquired by Activision in the early 2000s and thus can be considered Activision's own development houses, alongside a list of other greats mostly based in California. The reason for alternating developers is that this allows Activision to release COD titles on a yearly basis, since each game generally takes at least two years to make.

COD4 is the first to step away from the World War II setting and actually takes place in the present day, whereas COD5 returns to the World War II scene. The general opinion is that while COD5 by Treyarch is good, COD4 by Infinity Ward is still better. Couple this with the fact that the next COD game will be developed once again by Infinity Ward, is an eagerly awaited direct sequel to *Call of Duty 4 COD4 — Modern Warfare* and once again is set in the present day, and you can begin to see why fans have stuck with COD4, branding it the definitive version and indeed the best "first-person shooter" ever.

What provokes this vehement passion? Why are the multiplayer gaming servers still teeming with COD4 players two years after its release? How has it managed to stay in the public eye and receive so much attention, such as the three Baftas it received last week in the UK? The answer is that COD4 is deeper than any other multiplayer game before it. This depth takes some time to be noted, but once noted lasts for a very long time.

It's my firm opinion that reviews of any modern game with many layers of depth cannot be written merely weeks after the game's release. Yes, you could rampage through "single-player mode" three times in one day (it's way too short for a next-generation title) and feel duly justified in reviewing the single-player mode. But when it comes to understanding and reviewing the multi-player side of a game, especially a game that would be considered quite awful without it, then reviewers must have really gotten to grips with it before they can express their opinions. By this I mean constant playing the game for at least six months. So I sit here as someone who has done that and I feel now ready to review this title with a genuine advantage over the reviewers who did so way back in October 2007, when the game was released.

Not since the *Grand Theft Auto* series have we seen a game that actually delivers more bang for your buck than was expected or even demanded in your wildest dreams. I won't spend more time talking about the single-player mode because to be honest, it is average and disappointing, even alongside the single-player modes of flagship titles such as *Resistance: Fall of Man*, which has been gathering dust on most people's shelves for a couple of years now.

Where the game really shines is multi-player mode. Initially looking like any other multi-player game with near-photorealistic graphics (something we have become accustomed to), COD4 seems quite fun. The selection of weapons is large enough and the gun add-ons and "perks" are varied. (A perk allows your player special abilities: for example, the "martyrdom" perk allows you to drop a live grenade when you die, which can be good for storming into the enemy base on a suicide mission.) On the whole it feels very much par for the course, with most of the initial fears being forgotten in minutes: no huge glitches like bad collision detection, no obvious ways for players to cheat (like waiting for you to appear and killing you) and a generally high standard of players.

If you give it some more time, however, you uncover a depth not yet seen in any other multiplayer game. The character responds quickly and realistically: swapping guns, tossing grenades and using your knife become second nature, allowing you to feel like you are in the game. The way the reward system is designed to give you gratification adds to the urge to keep on playing. For example, the first time you manage to toss an opponent's own grenade back at him you will be rewarded with a huge bonus and some very satisfying music and on-screen messages. This is only the beginning; as you improve you are able to experience absolutely mind-blowing gaming moments as you take out rooms full of the enemy while sidestepping rockets and knife lunges. Consecutive kills earn rewards such as the ability to call in an air strike and even your own helicopter, which arrives armed to the teeth with rockets. Sooner or later you will find yourself exhilarated by the gameplay, with your heart actually racing and at times your hands shaking so much you can barely hold the joy pad. This is usually due to a killing spree that has the power to make you feel like John Preston from *Equilibrium* or even John Rambo.

Since all your statistics are recorded in a worldwide table, you are able to see where you rank globally. Though it's interesting at first to laugh at your rank of No. 5 million, the COD4 standings have the potential to become as important to you as your favorite sports league tables. The feeling of personally working your way up the global standings can become somewhat addictive. Similarly, even meeting other players who rank in, say, the top 5,000 can feel like meeting a minor celebrity or coming up against an unstoppable force. With time, dedication and, of course, some serious first-person-shooter skill, it is possible to feel highly proud of your abilities and the moments you have experienced. So much so that it spills over into your real-life conversations — it reminds me of meeting down at the pub to discuss the game of sport you just played. Coming from a computer game, this is pretty much unheard of.

The bottom line is that COD4 is the most impressive multiplayer first-person shooter I have ever played and has rightfully earned its title as my favorite game of all time, knocking classics such as *Super Mario World*, *Street Fighter II Turbo*, *Quake* and *Perfect Dark* down the list, which is not something that has happened in the past 10 years. If you own a system capable of playing COD4 and don't own this game, you should consider this a grave error. The longevity of COD4 alone will justify its cost tenfold, especially when it can now be picked up second-hand.

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