

// Same Game, Different Advertisement

A COMPARISON OF THE PACKAGE ARTS FROM THE MOST POPULAR PLAYSTATION GAMES IN EAST, WEST AND IN-BETWEEN



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by

Rainhardt Diklic

*For my family and all the people,
who have always supported me.*

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1.

PREFACE

1. Preface

1.1. ABSTRACT

In this thesis I would like to analyze the front-cover images of the most popular games released for the Sony PlayStation in Japan, America and Europe. By comparing those cover designs at a cross-cultural scope, and the use of several methods for interpreting their meaning – obviously they are created for a certain target audience – I would like to identify preferred characteristics and give an assessment of the three biggest market places for computer and video games.

1.2. MOTIVATION

As a student of Japanese Science in Vienna my interest for Japanese culture as well as sociological studies has grown very strong. Through the whole time of studying such a rather “exotic” field of study, the question permanently arose, where the interest for Japan really came from. Speaking for myself, now I definitely know where my interest derived from; it originated from playing computer games since I can remember. And by playing computer games “since I can remember”, I literally mean it that way. I might have been about four years old when I first got my hands on a very simple old fashioned handheld game, which my family and I lovely referred to as “Tocotronic”. I guess somehow we tried to combine the aspect that it was supposed to be some kind of watch (Tick-Tack-Tock), with the beeping sounds it made and finally gave the word some “electronic touch”. Of course it wasn’t officially called that way. It was called a *Game &*

Watch and several of these games – today prestigious collector items – have been distributed by Nintendo during the 1980s.

After playing like an addict even with such a simple game, my history of gaming continued with almost any platform available and might not end at all. Due to the process of becoming an adult the highlight of my gaming experience – so far – started at the time when Sony released the PlayStation in 1995 and ended approximately after entering the University. Ever since, I wanted to write my graduating thesis somehow related to video games.

Thanks to the sociological education and the deeper insight into Japanese culture I have obtained during the past years, I am confident to take this research not only to a well founded, but also to an informal and useful level. While participating on a study-exchange program at the Meiji University in Tokyo, I finally got the time and motivation to focus on achieving this goal.

1.3. EXPLANATORY

This text deals with many items from the field of entertainment and popular culter. Most of the time it will be explained directly within the text, but to avoid misunderstandings from the beginning, this chapter will provide a table with all the terms and abbreviations necessary to understand the contents. In addition I would like to point out that I used the Hepburn-System to transcribe Japanese text passages, as well as that there is a certain way I have used the opportunity to italicise expressions. – Except for Chapter 1. and Chapter 4. only direct references to video game titles will use italic letters, in addition to the standard guidelines for scientific publications. Because chapter 4. will deal with game platforms and systems for the most part, I decided that it would

become clearer to depict the names of the platforms in *italic*. For the rest of the text the names of the game systems will be displayed like normal text.

For this text the following table¹ also needs to be considered:

Terms and Abbreviations	
Computer Games	Games for Personal Computers (PCs).
Video Games	Games for consoles such as a PlayStation.
Platform	Umbrella term for all electronically based systems where games are played (PC, hand-held, console, etc.).
Genre	Defines the category of a game (Action, Platformer, Shooter, Fighting, Puzzle, etc)
RPG	Role-Playing Game (Genre)

Table 1

TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

¹ Please note, that this table is in this version of the next far from complete!

2. ADVERTISEMENT

2. Advertisement

Due to the fact that covers are also a form – actually the most important form – of advertising a certain product (explained in detail later), it is very important for my research to approach the term “advertisement” in general, before starting to analyze the different designs of the covers. The following chapters will deal with that necessity.

2.1. WHAT IS ADVERTISEMENT?

“Advertising is a form of communication that typically attempts to persuade potential customers to purchase or to consume more of a particular brand of product or service.”

(Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advertisement>)

“The business of drawing public attention to goods and services”
(<http://wordnet.princeton.edu/>)

I guess, when we think about the term “advertisement” in most cases definitions similar to the two examples above will come to our mind. However, the actual meaning of advertisement can be seen much deeper. What about flowers? – Don’t they advertise themselves to be visited by insects? What about us humans? Don’t we spend countless hours at the coiffeur or in shopping malls searching for some nice clothes to advertise ourselves? Although the word advertising itself doesn’t seem to fit properly within the last examples, because in most cases we only use it related to marketing, its meaning however stays the same.

To advertise developed from the Latin verb “adveniō” (to come, arrive), and therefore became part in many European languages. Basically, advertising means “to endeavor” or “to make an effort”, which becomes clearer when looking at the further transformed expressions “werban” or “vervan” from Old High German (Hutzel 2002: 2). Whether considering even wall paintings dated back to 4000 B.C. as advertisement or not, it is logical to assume, that advertisement goes along with the development of groups, communities as well as technology. At the beginning there was mostly word-to-mouth advertisement, followed mainly by the use of text, which later was combined with images, and so forth. Since the rise of industrialized nations, mass production and mass consumer goods, advertisement became what it is associated with today. When we think about advertisement, we imply terms like “sales”, “values”, “strategy”, “public relations”, “consumers”, “target groups”, “promotion”, “money”, etc. and know exactly what its basic goal is: To attract customers.

The peculiar thing about advertising is that it is its nature to be flexible in order to reach out for a continuously changing face of customers. While there are certain models which are supposed to be guidelines for good advertisements, like for example the AIDA-Model (**A**tttract-**I**nterest-**D**esire-**A**ction), the MAYA-Model (**M**ost-**A**dvanced-**Y**et-**A**ceptable) or the KISS-Model (**K**eeP-**I**t-**S**imple and-**S**tupid), I would like to emphasize the more or less smart connection between society and advertising strategies in general, instead of looking at those models in detail. Maibritt Hutzel also took a brief look at how advertisement changed in general since the Second World War in Europe, and I like to briefly summarize her analysis: Because there was more supply than demand, the time

shortly after the Second World War was constrained to deliver a message like: “At last... finally... it is there again...”. After the market has recovered from the chaotic situations caused by the war, it has become a demand-driven market again, but the advertising messages were still arguing rationally. The time of the big social changes during the 1960s shows, that advertising now started to sell products via guideline images and focused strongly on association. And finally since the 1980s the trend developed from usability of the product up to pure aesthetic characteristics and ended with advertisement becoming self-referential (making use of sarcasm, irony, etc.), target audience orientated and confident of itself (Hutzel 2002: 3-4).

2.2. IMAGES AND ADVERTISEMENT

Not present in this version!

2.3. THE ROLE OF COVERS

Not present in this version!

3.

ANALYSING IMAGES

Not present in this version!

4. VIDEO GAMING

4. Video Gaming

This chapter will deal with the basics of video gaming. First I would like to give a very brief summary about the history of the video game industry. Then I would like to describe the situation of video games during the period selected for research more detailed. While also describing my personal experiences I will lead to the next chapter where I will analyze who plays games in general and especially of which people we speak when we talk about the gamers of the last years of the past millennia.

Finally the last chapter will provide an assessment of the Japanese video game market as detailed as possible, and tries to explain what is different in Japan before the actual analysis, which shall finally conclude about this differences, begins.

4.1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES

Video gaming didn't start at home. Actually it didn't even start at the arcades. Video games were first used in military facilities during the 1950s to provide a way of escaping the daily military routine for recruits. Of course they have also been used at scientific research institutions like for example the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Sega (SErvice GAMES) was the first American company founded to become one of the most well-known and cherished companies related to the industry. – Especially after merging with Rosen Enterprises in 1964 and after being one of the main contributors to the Arcade-Boom of the 1970s. Though this might be the actual basis of video gaming, when it comes to the video game industry however, the names Steve Russell and Nolan

Bushnell are the most important one to be known. Steve Russell was an MIT student at the TMRC (Tech Model Railroad Club) in his early 20s when he developed a game named *Spacewar!* on a very primitive computer at the TMRC called PDP-1. Nolan Bushnell was the later founder of Atari, but more importantly the entrepreneur who made his dream of giving birth to a whole new way of entertainment come true by creating not only the Arcade-Phenomena, but also by establishing the market for home consoles.

When talking about the beginning of video games we speak about geeks, nerds or even freaks, who spent their time not only while working or studying, but also during their free time in front of their monitors, driven by one basic imperative: The *Hands-On Imperative*. This term is representing the fundamental thinking of a hand full of people known during that time as hackers, and it sums up the very idea, that by taking apart things and putting them together again in order to discover how they work, the truth of the universe can be understood. Furthermore it also states that all of such information should be free for anybody (Chaplin and Ruby 2005: 40-41). Though his first attempt to bring a spin-off of *Spacewar!* called *Computer Space* to a broader audience, Nolan Bushnell finally succeeded in creating the first Arcade Game *Pong* with the help of Alan Alcorn in 1972. In the same year another man named Ralph Baer finished his work on the *Magnavox Odyssey* – also known as the first home video game console – and demonstrated a game called *Table-Tennis*. It is very similar to *Pong*, and because Baer had it patented before, he sued Bushnell for stealing his idea also in 1972. The case however was settled outside the court rooms, and today no one can tell for sure who was really behind the idea of *Pong*. Though already earning a lot of money, Nolan Bushnell wasn't satisfied with a *Pong* only for this public places called "Arcades". When *Pong* was

played that way, he was already dreaming about a *Home Pong*, which would be supposed to be played on a usual Television. Although the *Magnavox Odyssey* (sales about 100.000 pieces) failed to become broadly accepted as the first living-room game system, Nolan Bushnell was far from capitulating. In 1975 *Home Pong* (the console) counted for about thirteen million copies and Atari's – his company's – revenues were about \$39 million. With the release of Atari's VCS (Video Computer System) – or better known as the *Atari 2600* – in 1976, his ultimate dream came true. According to Chaplin and Ruby, there were at least seventy-five other companies producing videogame machines in 1976, but Atari was still the number one manufacturer. When Bushnell sold Atari to Warner Communications for about \$28 million in 1976 – one of his biggest mistakes, as he states today (Palmer 2007: 5min) – the new Atari Inc. achieved yearly increasing revenues with a peak at about \$2 billion in 1980 (Groves 1990).

During the end of the 1970s amongst others it had been Atari Inc.'s development institutes that are responsible for ultimately leading to another form of using hardware: The Personal Computers (PC). Before and at the beginning of the 1970s personal computers – or rather what we can image to be very early PCs – were placed in technological research facilities, and could only be used by single persons like Steve Russell under limited access, and only related to work or rather research. It seems however that with *Magnavox* and especially the Arcade *Pong* of 1972, the technicians became very motivated – as mentioned above: By 1976 about seventy-five companies produced machines (Chaplin and Ruby: 62) – causing the technological development to increased rapidly. All this was possible – and goes hand in hand – with the development of the first microprocessor Intel 4004 by the very same company. There

have been predecessor of modern PCs called *Microcomputers* in the early 1970s, but it was undoubtedly thanks to the popularity of video gaming during this period, that later personal computers became what they are today. The microprocessor was the basis for calculation on circuits used in early console systems with changeable cartridges like the *Atari 2600*. In the end the development of PCs – or rather the development of a machine with the same idea of a PC: “To use completely assembled hardware with a variety of exchangeable software for multiple purposes” (Source) – derived from one man working for no less company than Atari and one of his best friends. Those man are known as Steven Jobs (a former technician of Atari, and today’s chairman and CEO of Apple Inc.) and Stephen Wozniac (Steve Job’s friend and co-founder of Apple Inc.), who released their *Apple I* in the same year as the *Atari 2600* was released².

Although I would like to write much more about the development of personal computers, I simply cannot due to limitations of my work. I just wanted to point out, that the development of video game related technology is strongly connected to the development of the desktop systems most of us use today. And even though the 1980s are nowadays mostly crowned to be the decade where video gaming and home console playing really started, thanks to a former toy-making company called Nintendo, games were also played and developed considerably on systems that resemble a PC more than a game console³. It is also very crucial to understand that

2 It should be noted, that the term “PC” is rather complicated to handle and actually derived from IBM’s early developments in cooperation with Microsoft (Source). Today it is mostly used to refer to hardware running Microsoft Operating Systems (Source).

3 Worth mentioning are for example the *Commodore 64* released by Commodore International in August 1982, or the *A1000 (Amiga 1000)* released 1985 not by Amiga Corporation but by Commodore, which acquiring

there is a certain difference between games created for personal computers and games created for console systems. Games differ for example in terms of “Gameplay” or general conception, and though we basically speak about two sorts of games: “Computer Games” (games for PC platforms) and “Video Games” (games for console systems), we only speak about one general industry and market: The “Video Game Industry” and the “Video Game Market”.

Would we travel back in time to the year 1978 and walk into an Arcade there would be no way of overseeing one particular game: *Space Invaders*. This is when the first Japanese name related to videogames – Toshihiro Nishikado – appears, and from this moment on Japan was going to play an important, if not the most important role in video game-related development. *Space Invaders* was released in Japan by a company named Taito (since 2005 member of Square Enix) and published in America by Midway. *Space Invaders* is said to be one of the most influential videogames ever created. Not only that it was authoritative for the creation of a whole new genre of games later called “Side-Scrollers” (leading to smashing Arcade Hits like *Galaxian*, *Galaga*, or *Xevious*), with all its sequels and spin-offs it brought Taito revenues at about \$500 million until 2007 (Source), and who hasn’t heard about the rumor that it was *Space Invaders*, which caused a coin shortage in Japan during the first months of its release? – The rumor, by the way, is true; Proof (Source).

Another game necessary to mention is *Asteroids*; the game to become forever the epitome of Atari, and also the first game using Vector-based graphics, released in 1979. Not only that Atari pulled ahead of Taito by selling 70.000 *Asteroids* games, they also used the profits to purchase exclusive rights for selling *Space Invaders* on their home-game consoles.

Amiga shortly before that time.

Space Invaders became the first classic Arcade Game ported for the *Atari 2600*, and it was a multimillion seller (Covert 1982).

The end of the 1970s did not mark the end of Arcade gaming, but it did mark the end of one thing which most Arcade Games so far had in common: Shooting something. In 1980 the most successful and most popular Arcade Game ever has been released, and it wasn't about shooting. Instead you played a character – actually the first real character in any game ever – inside of a mace and had the goal to eat as many “Powerpills” as possible in order to score points, while trying not to be killed by enemies. The game created by Tōru Iwatani and distributed by Namco was named after the games character *Pac-Man*, and it wrote game history by selling about 300.000 Arcade units worldwide (Source).

There is one last Arcade Title that has to be mentioned by all cost; it is called *Donkey Kong* and was released by Nintendo in the year 1981. The game, featuring a character known as “Jumpman” (soon to become one of the most famous characters worldwide), founded also a new genre of videogames – the “Platformer” – and was created by maybe the most famous game creator of all times: Shigeru Miyamoto. *Donkey Kong* became Nintendo's first big Arcade Hit, and since initial selling began in America, Nintendo earned about \$280 million during the first two years (Source). “Everything that has a beginning, has an end” (Quote), and while the Time Magazine in 1981 announced that Americans had dropped about 20 billion quarters into videogame machines, analysts and researchers declared the videogame industry to be dead until 1983 (Palmer 2007: ??min). At least in America we speak about an event called “Video Game Crash of 1983”⁴. An analysis beyond sales and stock statistics leads to the conclusion, that there have been several reasons for this crash:

4 There are two fascinating things about the video game crash: First the fact that this crash only affected companies and not consumers, because the supply of games was still way bigger than demanded, and second the connection of the crash to Atari. – In my opinion the bankruptcy of Atari shows bad mismanagement in general, but also was the cause for the crash, because Atari was the leading monopoly before it ruined itself over night.

First video game platforms had to compete against the up-rise of the first home computers, which offered other possibilities like basic word processing or calendars in addition to only play games. Second there was a cataclysmic war of prices between the different developers and manufacturers, dumping the prices from games which would have been sold for about \$30-40 down to about \$4. And third there have simply been too many companies producing way too many bad games for way too many platforms; “The market was flooded with crappy games reusing code and interfaces from older games all the time, and while there still was demand, there was no innovation what so ever that could satisfy it!” (Source).

However, in Japan there hasn't been any crash. In fact the crash in America allowed Japan to grab the game industry and become the one leading country of console and game development for the rest of the millennia. And especially because of Nintendo's new home console system, released in Japan 1984 under the name *Famicom* (Family Computer) and one year later in America under the acronym *NES* short for *Nintendo Entertainment System*, the industry was revived again in America and strongly anchored in Europe. In 1989 Nintendo's global market share was about 90% and in Nintendo already had a market value bigger than Toyota (Source). – Again, though I would very much like to get more into detail, I have to summarize the events until the year 1995 where I will enter the real scope of my research, due to personal resource management.

In 1985 the video game industry has been turned upside-down again. New consoles featured better graphics, better sound and new games which created dozens of new genres, real characters and stories. But above all it was new fascinating Gameplay that (re)attracted the players. SEGA saw the success of Nintendo and started to develop console

systems of their own, while still holding on to the arcade business in Japan. In 1985 SEGA released its *Sega Master System* – which took two years to be distributed in Europe by the way – and from this moment on the following decade was only about those two companies⁵. At the end of 1988 the *Sega Mega Drive* – or rather *Sega Genesis*, how it was called in America (1989) – was sold, and due to the fact that it was technically the most advanced console of those days, and because Nintendo was strongly focusing on an alternative market they've finally established in the very same year (Handhelds⁶), SEGA managed to overtake Nintendo for the first time (Source). However, Nintendo's reply didn't take very long and with the release of the *Super Famicom* (or *Super Nintendo Entertainment System* aka. *SNES*) in 1992 the real struggle about dominance of fourth generation of video games began.

Amongst the fourth generation's competing systems already mentioned (*SNES* and *Mega Drive*) were also two other well known consoles: The *Neo Geo* and the *PC-Engine*. Although both of this systems offered unique as well as impressive games, and both platforms are today considered to be very expensive collector's items, in the past they failed to reach a mass audience because their launch prices have simple been too high compared with the *SNES* or the *Mega Drive*⁷. As the history of video games

5 Of course there have been few other companies struggling for market share in this third generation of console systems (Atari for example tried to get into business again with the *Atari 7800*), but the fact remains that the market was driven only by Nintendo and SEGA until the fifth generation of console systems.

6 Among the first handhelds sold worldwide was Nintendo's *Game & Watch* – which might have been the first platform I've played a game on – but the real market of handheld consoles was founded by Nintendo in 1989 with their famous *Game Boy*.

7 PC-Engine: \$249.99 and Neo Geo (silver): \$399.99, compared to SNES: \$199.99 and Mega Drive: \$190.00 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/His->

had proven so far, a good console alone is no indicator for success. The companies became aware of the fact that a system not only has to be affordable and rationally conceived in terms of getting the best out of technology with the cheapest way of manufacturing, they also noticed the very intensive bond between consoles, brand names and the actual games. Like the forefathers of modern PCs had a special connection to the development of video games, video games became affiliated with the systems they've been developed for. This strategy – similar to branding – of bonding products (games) with certain features, to systems (consoles) with certain attributes became one of the most important factors of the video game industry. And though analog concepts can be found back at the arcade days as well, it was primarily the “battle” between SEGA and Nintendo – or rather their characters – that created the awareness of that mutual dependency and therefore shaped the future of the next generations of video games.

While Nintendo's character Super Mario – the former “Jumpman”, now as a plumber – celebrated his appearance as main hero in his fourth game *Super Mario World* on the SNES, and Shigeru Miyamoto didn't seem to run out of inspiration, a lot of other heroes have been cherished as well. The most famous character of SEGA for example was Sonic – a blue spiky hedgehog, who wasn't only claiming to run faster than Mario, he actually was. And even on PC some games like *Doom*⁸ or *The Secret of Monkey Island* featuring a wannabe pirate called Guybrush Threepwood showed innovation and are still acclaimed today. But there had been one event yet to happen, which again turned the world of video games upside-down: The release of Sony's *PlayStation*. The following chapter will give detailed information about the period between 1995 and 2000, when there was only one console to rule them all.

tory_of_video_game_consoles_(fourth_generation)).

8 Explained in detail in Chapter 6.2. at page 74

4.2. 1995-2000: THE GOLDEN AGE OF SONY

The term “golden age” is used very often when referring to a very lucrative or productive period of time for someone or something. In fact when talking about video games this term might be a bad choice because there already is a “golden age” expression, which is used in relation to the arcade times during the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. However, I still like to use the term on purpose to describe the time period between 1995 and 2000, because neither economically nor personally, I think there is any better way of calling it.

On December the 3rd in the year 1994 a new console was released in Japan – The *Sony PlayStation*. On the very same day it was released, it already sold about 100.000 units. America preordered 100.000 units and after it has been released on the 1st of September 1995 the United States bought two million units within the first year (Palmer 2007: 55min). Today Sony’s official records state that worldwide 102.49 million units have been sold until today (Sony 2009).

When the *PlayStation* was released in Europe at the end of September 1995, I was eleven years old and in the first class of a very strict catholic private school in Austria. I was a pretty normal kid and like to think that did mostly all the things other kids have been doing in their free time those days, but that might not be true, because the school I attended was also a half-residential school in a matter of speaking. Though the possibility existed, like almost all of the students I didn’t spend the nights in school, but for almost eight years I spent the whole days during the week inside the school grounds. We had classes until noon followed by some free time, but mostly supervised time to do our homework and study on the afternoon till the bell ringed at about 5pm. Of course

I spent most of the weekends and whenever possible outside in the nature with friends playing soccer or heading out in search of some adventures, but the main activity that defined the everyday life of me and my friends was playing video games. Most of us did it since we got hands on a *Game Boy*. Others had experiences with video games much earlier. Some of us played video games every day. Some even played during the classes, while others were reading magazines about video games instead of paying attention, drew characters, maps, made certain calculations or created plans of how to solve various tasks in games. Before that time I already had many game consoles, but I also used the first real PC my parents bought (some AMD Am486 model with DOS 5.0 and Windows 3.1) mainly for playing games which were released monthly along with a magazine called *Bestseller Games*. Personally I really favored the *NES* and later the *SNES*. When I was about seven years old I remember sitting in front of the screen endless afternoons desperately trying to figure out what to do in the *Legend of Zelda* games because I could barely understand more than “yes” or “no” in English. I also played a lot of games together with my sister, especially after we got the *SNES* on one cherished Christmas Eve. I guess my parents thought it would all be over after I would begin to study at this school, which was – and still is – known to have very high expectations about the students. – However, it was not. The only thing that ended was, that from the moment I entered the school, my parents never again gave me or my sister a whole video game console as Christmas present. In school I became best friends with many other gamers, but there was one guy who really knew it all and had it all. While at the beginning, I read only one single magazine about video games frequently, he had always about three in his schoolbag. We understood each other from

the very first moment and both of us were anticipating the new wonder toy from Japan like cats sitting in front of a mousehole.

One day he finally managed to buy a used but cheap *PlayStation* from a guy two classes above us, and I think you can image what happened. We met on the following weekend and played about 48hours straight. The peculiar thing is that we didn't even have a full game to play, because the older guy sold his games elsewhere. So first we only had the original *Demo-One* disc, but there was no end to our fun; just watching the dinosaur walk or playing *Battle Arena Toshinden* with only three available characters and a countdown for each round, which would reset the whole Demo back to the menu screen every sixty seconds, was enough to get – and keep – us addicted. Like I mentioned before, my parents – especially my father – weren't that happy that I insisted on having a *PlayStation* of my own, so in order to get one I had to meet certain demands like good grades, cleaning certain spaces of our house, do some work in the garden, save some money of my own, stop arguing with my sister, etc. I was so eager to have a *PlayStation* that I didn't even include a game into the financial calculations I confronted my parents with. And in fact, for the first two weeks I was very happy with playing only the same *Demo-One* disc, I played with my friend so intensively before. For whatever reason someday my mother went together with me to the shopping mall and bought me my first PlayStation game which was *Battle Arena Toshinden*. Today I earn about 100 PlayStation games and another 100 games for the *PlayStation2*.

"The battle for the living room is already over. Sony won. Sony won in the first year. Sony won by a pre- first round knockout!" Unknwon at (Palmer 2007: 129min 35sec)

Yes they did! – Definitely. Soon after me and my friend had our *PlayStations* almost everybody had one. We were reading

a lot about games, looking at our incomes from birthdays and other family related occasions in order to buy the next game, talking about the *PlayStation*, but of course playing. We even brought our *PlayStations* with us to play in school during our free time. Some of us had to buy more than one *PlayStation*, because we simple played it to death. There were certain hardware problems, which most of the *PlayStation* users might know. For example the slide where the laser of first generation *PlayStations* was riding on; it deformed slightly because the slide was too close to the power supply unit, which was heating up after hours of playing. Setting the *PlayStation* up-side down and customizing its interior helped for a while, but in the end we had to buy new ones. For the time when we were teenagers, it seemed to me that some of us had almost forgotten the glory days of playing Nintendo or SEGA systems, but not me and my best friend of those days. We weren't satisfied with only a *PlayStation*. We read all those magazines, we looked at everything, we bought everything, and naturally we played everything – including for example the *Nintendo 64* the *Sega Saturn*.

Today is not much different. My friend soon becoming CEO of a software company, who also claims with a distinct sparkle in his eyes, that he was the original inventor of the black market for video games in Austria, still plays. Everybody else I know plays. And me, of course I play as often as possible. If there really is one single system that can be held responsible for this, than it sure is the *Sony PlayStation*. As mentioned above, up until March 2007 Sony has shipped 102.49 million *PlayStations* and about 962 million games worldwide. For the *PlayStation* a total of 7.918 games have been produced (Sony 2009).

// Graphics will be included in the finished version of this text.

4.3. VIDEO GAME GENERATIONS: WHO PLAYS?

In this chapter I would like to take a closer look at the average video game player, and especially describe the players who actually played games on the PlayStation.

Historians suggest that games were primarily adult activities during the Middle Ages, but they became associated with childhood due to their relation to leisure activities during the period of industrialization (Sefton-Green 1998: 3). But this might not apply anymore. Especially when talking about computer and video games by now it should be more than a fact, that such leisure activities – for sure video games – are no longer just for children. Several surveys all deliver the same results: While Gamesinvestor⁹ suggests that during 1995 the average age of PlayStation players was between 20 and 25 years, the most currently available annual report from the Entertainment Software Association (ESA 2008: 24) shows that the average age of all gamers in the USA has even risen to 35 years today. This survey further concludes that the average player plays games for twelve years and that the average game purchaser is 39 years old¹⁰. In fact, the term “Games have grown up with the players” might have been the term I encountered the most during this research, and is symptomatic about the video game industry.

So apparently games have a strong connection to their players since 1972. But who are those gamers? About whom are we thinking, when using the word “gamer” or “player” related to video games? Strauss and Howe (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>

9 Games Investor is a consultancy researching about video games. For further details please refer to www.gamesinvestor.com.

10 Surveys from 2009 – by now only released on the ESA website – show a slight decrease of the average player’s age and several other interesting results.

wiki/Strauss_and_Howe) made a proper and widely accepted distinction of the American generations within the last century, which includes amongst others:

Generations	
Silent Generation	1925-1942
Baby Boomer	1943-1960
Generation X	1961-1981
Millennial Generation	1982-2001
Generation Z	2001-?

Table 2

GENERATIONS
ACCORDING TO
STRAUSS AND HOWE

Due to the fact, that American culture was distributed strongly in Europe since the 1930s and above all lastingly since the end of the Second World War, it is my opinion that those categories apply almost identically to the European people of the last century. Because most of the definitions for each generation are somehow related to the technological development and the access to (better distribution of) technology by (for) the masses, the only difference might be a minor shift upwards regarding the dates postulated by Strauss and Howe. Taking myself for example, born in January 1984 I would officially fall into the category of the Millennial Generation. Because of the things that influenced my way of thinking during my childhood (for example the movies I saw, the music I heard, the education I received etc.) and certain characteristics which are supposed to describe Generation X members, I do consider myself to fit more into the Generation X category¹¹.

Though the market of computer and video games is getting bigger and also changing every day, comparing the area of Sony's *PlayStation* and the contemporary situation, I think that one thing can be said without doubt: It was basically

¹¹ It is usually the case that the most influential pop culture – analog to technological development – from other countries takes a long time until it reaches Europe. I would like to refer to this as “Cultural Delay”.

the same like today. When Sony's *PlayStation* was released in 1995, a "console market" already existed, since Nintendo and other manufacturers provided platforms compatible with the average household television set for already more than a decade. When talking about the existence of a certain market, I actually refer to the consumers, and although there weren't as many customers as today, the demographics looked almost the same. In the period when the *PlayStation* was sold, the customers consisted of adults, young people, experienced players as well as newcomers. And the audience also consisted of all sorts of players; players who would play games occasionally, players who would play alone or with their family, players who would play intensively, school kids, students as well as the average middle age worker (Source).

– Basically the same as today. The only things that really changed are, that today gamers have much more sophisticated technology to play with, they have become many more, and also the affection of playing online has increased enormously. The latter can of course be seen as a natural development considering the global interconnectedness we witness these days, but going more into detail, it can also be seen as a certain demand of the Millennial Generation. Kids, teenagers and young adults of this category were the first that literally grew up with mobile phones and the internet, the first to use e-mails and social-networking websites on a daily basis, etc. According to Jeannie Novak networked peer-to-peer communications is one of the characteristics that describes this generation of players. Furthermore they are very open and don't hesitate to share information about their privacy, they are female dominated, and beside other characteristics strongly group and community orientated, which is exactly

the reason why the demand for multiplayer online games has increased so much since the year 2000 (Novak 2008: 62).

Back between 1995 and 2000 the situation looked something like this: I estimate according to the results of my research for the average age of gamers, that the average costumers of *PlayStation* & Co, was born between 1975 and 1988. This birthdates reduce the scope of the audiences to only two generations: The late Generation X, and the early Millennial Generation. According to Jeannie Novak the Generation X category represents people who grew up under difficult circumstances; It was during the time when America experienced the lowest birthrate ever, when it was common for parents to divorce just to get remarried again. Generation X kids had to be independent, they had no after school activities and were mainly educated by Television shows during the afternoon because their parents weren't home. When those kids grew up suicide, murder, and incarceration rates have been very high in America. Peter Markiewicz goes further into detail by explaining, that Generation X members have often been considered as disappointment by their teachers and parents, during the 1980s. They were mostly characterized as alienated, poorly educated slackers, and their heroes of movies and games symbolized survival rather than rebellion. I think his one sentence description fits so well that I won't have to go into any more details: "There can be only one"¹² (Novak 2008: 64-66).

Although most of the problems that America faced during the Generation X period might have not been the same for the people of the same age in Europe, the media made it real. People are aware of the influential power of the media – at least the Millennials are now supposed to be – but when I was a child and watched American movies it didn't seem to be much different from Austria to

12 A quote from the famous movie *Highlander* which was very popular during the late 1980s, stated by Markiewicz at Novak 2008.

me. Of course now I know about the differences, but not during the end of the 1980s. My point is that Strauss and Howe’s definition of generations fits for some researches, but to describe the average PlayStation gamer from 1995-2000 I think it is necessary to come up with a somewhat intertwined category because there are so many different factors that have to be combined. I think calling this category “The PlayStation Generation” does fit the purpose.

The PlayStation Generation consisted of matured Generation X members, and early Millennials who might fit to some characteristics of the real Millennials, but have certainly a much stronger connection to the Generation X. Taking this category of people into focus, the following list of ten of the most popular games which had been published on various systems from 1995 to 2000 makes much more sense¹³.

Table 3
LIST OF SOME OF
THE MOST POPULAR
GAMES BETWEEN
1995 AND 2000

Most popular Video Games from 1995 - 2000		
SNES	<i>Yoshi's Island</i>	1995
PC	<i>Duke Nukem 3D</i>	1996
PC	<i>Descent</i>	1995
PSX	<i>Resident Evil</i>	1996
N64	<i>Goldeneye 64</i>	1997
PSX	<i>Final Fantasy VII</i>	1997
PSX	<i>Gran Turismo</i>	1997
PC	<i>Unreal</i>	1998
N64	<i>Ocarina of Time</i>	1998
PC	<i>Counter Strike</i>	1999
PC	<i>The Sims</i>	2000

13 Making lists of successful and/or popular games was a very big part of my work, and there are in fact several of such lists. While this one is rather informal, the later lists are important for this thesis. How I created lists will be explained later in Chapter 6.on page 57.

These games show that obviously members of both generations have been supplied with the games they preferred, but when it comes to games exclusively developed for the *PlayStation*, there is one peculiar factor that links the average PlayStation gamer more to the late Generation X members than to members of the Millennial Generation: The urge for independency and variety. At the third quarter of 1997 – when Sony was mostly competing with Nintendo’s *Nintendo64* – Sony already had about 300 games released in America and Europe, while Nintendo only counted about 30 (<http://www.forbes.com/1997/09/19/feat.html>). The enormous amount of all sorts of different games, clearly counts in favor of the Generation X players, but also offers a big variety to early Millennials. On the other hand, Sony’s emphasized production of games through third party developers in combination with a cheap, easy to handle, widely spread medium, which could also be manufactured globally (the CD-Rom), provided independency to the game designers of those days – which definitely grew up known as Generation X.

4.4. THE INTENTIONS OF THE CREATORS AND COMPANIES

As I mentioned above, when reading and researching about the development of computer and video games, there is one statement that will come up so frequently, that it becomes symptomatically and has to be mentioned at all cost, with no need for quotation whatsoever:

“Video Games have been growing up with the players.”

Of course such a statement gives a lot room for interpretation, but I would like to focus not on the obvious one that the technology has advanced from two dimensional monochromatic dots, to three dimensional interactive environments with billions of polygons, I clearly mean to emphasize the contents of the games. Though it had been a continuous process, and a strong connection to the technological development is undeniable, during the 1990s games have revolutionized not only because of better and/or faster hardware, but because of their creators. Seamus Blackley said at an interview for *The Video Game Revolution* about the Xbox and the connection between hard- and software:

“The only way you make a bid into space is not by having your console be five dollars less than the other guys console, it’s by bringing them revolution, it’s by bringing experience to people that they’ve never seen, can’t get anywhere else.” (Palmer 2007: 127min 20sec)

After a better understanding of the PlayStation Generation – including both the costumers and the developers – and given the fact, that most developers must have been members of the Generation X, we can distinguish a different approach to video games during the area of the *Sony PlayStation*.

As we have seen, in the beginning there was curiosity; certain people attracted to technology driven by the bare inquisitiveness of how things work, simply had fun with dismantling and putting together technology with experimenting. Then there was Atari, and nothing else besides an uprising industry. Of course there were still the people fascinated by technology, but the main thing that specifies the arcade age and the beginning of home consoles was money. So while this approach of shameless abuse of technology lead to the death of video games in America, and most of the technicians behind video games started to focus

on PC development, Japan redefined video gaming by adding characters and stories. Since the third generation of video games, which started with Nintendo's *Famicom*, and during their battle with SEGA throughout the fourth generation, creators and of course the companies they worked were thriven by another strategy: Give the game life¹⁴. However, with the release of the *PlayStation* and its sheer unlimitedly exploitable opportunities for lots of independent third party developers, the market of "living" or rather "relatable" contents was expanded by a power of variety provided by Generation X creators who were mostly interested in expressing themselves and their ideas instead of getting a revolutionary understanding and therefore expanding the technology. The later was mostly covered on the PC sector, and until 2005 there had always been a distinctive difference between consoles and PCs. Not only when talking about games, but also when talking about the technology behind it. In fact, it was only since the release of the *Xbox 360* that the games really became multi-platform thriven. While Nintendo was – and still is – mostly relying on its anchored characters, series and the philosophy to approach games as toys, all almost uncountable third party developers for the *PlayStation* were crossing the line between game and reality in various ways. The same thing that happened when gamers put *The Legend of Zelda* into their *NES* and were overwhelmed by the seemingly unlimited ways of exploring and experiencing an adventure putting themselves on the screen in form of a little boy with green clothes, happened again on the *PlayStation* – naturally, given the number of released games, more frequently than on the *Nintendo64*. During the *PlayStation* area it clearly was the

14 Defined by game creator Shigeru Miyamoto it is still Nintendo's declared goal to make toys, and to give players fun by exploring and interacting on such a level.

goal of developers and companies to get as much fantasy thriven contents out of the technology as possible. Although this concept shows alarming similarities to the situation which caused the end of video games in America a decade ago, something was different: Not everybody could simply sell a game for a platform – for example inside a dog food package¹⁵ – because the clever strategy of including so called “Lock-out chips”¹⁶, which required a game to be licensed by the console manufacturer would not allow this. So even though, there have been many games on the market, the market itself wasn’t harmed because it was controlled by the manufacturers.

The creators of the most successful PlayStation games had one big advantage over the creators of Arcade games or even the creators of third and fourth generation console games: They were players themselves with experience for about 15 years. They knew what a game had to offer to draw attention. Of course they were experimenting as well, but in the end they aimed on realizing their own personal ideas and were again creating lots of new genres and innovative games. The following statement shall help to understand my point:

“Doom was totally immersive. You heard a simulation of your own breathing. The monsters you fought had scales and slime and rolling eyeballs. There was blood. Hard industrial-rock music blasted in the background. It was the thing for which people had been waiting, without even knowing it. No more monkeys swinging from trees collecting coconuts. Parents had been worried that too much Nintendo would harm their kids. Now those kids had become teenagers, and they were playing as heavily armed mercenaries, fighting it out with every

15 A famous background story behind the Video Game Crash of 1983, when there were so many games, that you’d even get a game together when purchasing dog food ([SOURCE](#)).

16 Introduced by Nintendo within the *Famicom*.

kind of sick and demented monster a guy like Romero could come up with.” (Chaplin and Ruby 2005: 102)

Connatural statements show exactly what creators like John Romero did, and above all they show the acknowledgement of the gamers of those days. It might seem to be a little bit of the topic, because *Doom*¹⁷, the game described in this quotation, was actually released for the PC before it was ported for the *PlayStation*, but the acceptance by the audience was just the same.

The situation today is different again. The video game industry has grown so big, that there is almost no chance for unknown developers to enter the scene. Even renowned developers have to be careful with developing games. Production costs for a contemporary video game have become so high, that there is no room for mistakes. One game that doesn't sell well enough and the developing studio might most likely go bankrupt. Today's video game development is no longer thriven by pioneers and great ideas that might revolutionize the industry. Of course from time to time such events occur, but for the most part the industry is now built on surveys and marketing research. Developer studios have to create there concepts as detailed as possible, and with them beg for enormous amounts of money from publishers, just to drive their game designers into madness because after the money flows, they find themselves restricted in their vision by statistics or rather certain obligations resulted from market research conducted by the very donators.

Most recent surveys show that, the genre of MMORPGs plays an important role, online-featured games make almost

¹⁷ Created by John Romero and initially released for the PC in 1993. Besides procuring a place within the realm of the most successful computer games ever made, due to the fact that it was the pioneer of 3D Shooter games, it also was the first game supporting networked multiplayer gaming. *Doom* basically defined the genre called “Ego- or First Person Shooters”.

70% of all the games available, games have become community driven and alienated from experiencing adventures on your own. Online gaming has become such a big issue, that by now several institutions exist to provide help for players, who have become so addicted to their alternate life, that they are faced with great problems when it comes to the real life. While today's surveys show, that realism and graphic are a very important aspects for players of the late Millennial Generation, especially players of the PlayStation Generation – after all still about 50% of the customers – now long for simpler concepts and wish a return to older values (ESA 2007: 2). Millennials on the other hand, feel very comfortable with the great diversity of online games they are provided with, and as a personal opinion I'd like to say, that they might not even be able to recognize the fact that games are a precious medium to deliver stories and important contents as a concern of the creator, beside the fact that they can be played with friends or strangers over the internet.

4.5. JAPAN AND VIDEO GAMES

Undoubtedly the video game industry in Japan is different from the American or European industry, how to explain the differences however is a very difficult task. In this research, I will try to explain the differences by taking a look at the cover designs of the 25 most popular PlayStation games, so the final analysis for Japan will be concluded at the end of this work. The goal of this chapter is just to give a very basic approach to the Japanese game market and to further enhance the understanding of the connection between video games and their cultural background.

„The Japanese Video Game Industry is nearly as large as the United States, although the population is only half as great. So, if you think about it that means that they are buying twice as much video games per capita than we do in the United States. It's a massive market!” – Jason Rubin¹⁸ (Palmer 2007: 40m 15s)

In 1997 the domestic market size of home consoles in Japan was about \$5.4 billion, composed of 26.6% of hardware and 73.4% of software sales (METI 2000: 3). In 2005 the game market in Japan had a value of \$11.6 billion, the home console market was about \$5 billion composed of 68% software and 32% hardware sales. The whole contents industry of Japan which includes movies, books, etc. was worth about \$138 billion (METI 2000: 11). ESA surveys indicate that the video game industry in America was valued at \$3.8 billion of the American Gross Domestic Product in 2006. To take a more detailed look: Video game sales (including software and hardware sales) in America grew from \$2.6 billion in 1996 to \$7 billion in 2006. While in 1996 about 74 million video games have been sold, the number rose to 250 million in 2006 (Siwek 2007: 9). ISFE reports suggest that in 2007 the game software sales in Europe had a value of €7.3 billion compared to €6.9 billion in America and €7.4 billion in Japan (ISFE 2008a: 6). Comparing the home console systems, Japan doesn't seem to have some special characteristics, but as Jason Rubin suggested taking into consideration that Japan has a population of estimated “only” 130 million people, whilst about 300 million people are living in the USA and about 500 million people are living in Europe, the importance of video games for Japanese people becomes clearer.

Another interesting fact about the Japanese game market is, that more than 50% of the whole gaming industry is composed of Arcade gaming compared to only 28% of home gaming (METI 2000: 11). In

America coin-operated video games are hardly played anymore and although experts claim, that the industry is still healthy and has a future, because arcades offer an experience a player can't get at home, the statistics show that in 2006 only 327.000 arcade units – about 1.4 million in the 1980s – were in use (Hurley 2008). In Europe an Arcade industry comparable to the American or Japanese one never really existed.

Japan leads in creating the most popular video game characters (avatars) worldwide. By random I chose one of many top ten video character ratings on the internet¹⁹ which shows the following result:

Table 4

RANDOM LIST OF
TOP 10 AVATARS

ORIGINAL SOURCE:
EGM

Top 10 Video Game Characters	
1. Super Mario	6. Pac-Man
2. Link	7. Cloud Strife
3. Solid Snake	8. Master Chief
4. Samus Aran	9. Pikachu
5. Sonic the Hedgehog	10. Lara Croft

Eight out of this characters originated in Japan, only one – ranked 8th – in America and one – ranked 10th – in Britain. Besides those characters Japan also leads when it comes to the production of whole series of games in production costs as well as produced sequels. I like to mention the famous series *Final Fantasy* by Square Enix. What started with *Final Fantasy* in 1987 on the *Famicom*, has become one of the most extensive video game series by now: At the E3 of 2009 Square Enix announced the 14th part of this series. Beside those 14 parts of the main series, there have been several other parts released for other platforms like for example *Final Fantasy Dissidia*

¹⁹ After searching the web and comparing many similar lists, I think that this one – available on www.1up.com/do/feature?cid=3145545, but originally published within the 200th issue of EGM (Electronic Gaming Monthly) – is thoroughly representing the currently most favored avatars.

for the *Nintendo DS*, and two movies were made about *Final Fantasy*. Jane Park states that *Final Fantasy I – Final Fantasy IX* had sold 35 million units and grossed more than 700 million, with two thirds of the game sold in Japan and the rest in America and Europe (Park NA: 10). Square Enix states, that all the production costs of all *Final Fantasy* related digital contents makes about \$unknown billion, with total revenues of \$unknown billion²⁰. By today Nintendo has released more than 25 games that feature Super Mario or Super Mario related contents.

Current surveys show that in Europe the most used platform to play games is the PC, followed by the *PlayStation2* before all of the current generation consoles and handhelds (ISFE 2008: 25). And while playing games on the PC is also very important for the industry in America, where in 2006 from a total of 240.7 million games, about 40 million games were sold with \$970 million in revenues for the PC (ESA 2007: 12), the Japanese players aren't that eager to play on their PCs. In 2005 for example PC gaming made with about \$633 million only close to 6% of the Japanese video game industry (METI 2000: 11). However, handhelds are very popular in Japan (Source).

The last interesting characteristic of the Japanese game market I like to mention goes hand in hand with the fact that, given the number of games released for the *PlayStation*²¹, in Japan almost three times as many games are released than elsewhere in the world. When it comes to such a big amount of games, naturally the

20 This data will be provided by the marketing department of Square Enix, but is not present in this version of the text.

21 According to Sony's official records about 5000 of 7918 games have been released in Japan only (Sony 2009).

next question to ask is what those games would be.

Speaking as a player and contemporary witness of the video game development since 1988, again I would like to describe that according to my own personal impressions: When I was a child and playing video games defined my daily routine – as I explained before – the image that I constructed about Japanese video games mostly developed from reading. Though I don't remember the title of the game, I do remember the content of one particular article about a game released only in Japan that somehow shaped my image of Japanese video games; it was a dredge simulation game, where the player would control a digging machine and shovel dirt into a dumper truck. I just thought something like "Man, they have some really stupid games over there. Who would buy something like this?" Anyway, though it was just a small box with only one tiny picture somewhere inside one of those countless magazines, this article really imprinted my image of the Japanese game market. Of course by now I have gathered much more insight into Japanese games, but this image has yet to be changed!

Sometimes the enormous variety of games that are produced in Japan also leads to very shocking if not disgusting results. During my research I encountered – just by coincidence – a game called *Rapelay*²² published by Illusion Soft for the PC. *Rapelay* was released in Japan already in 2006 but I was sold since the beginning of 2009 by Amazon in America as well as Europe. Given the fact that *Rapelay* is supposed to be something like a molestation simulation, where the player has to take two girls and their mother as hostages, rape them repeatedly until they begin

22 (<http://us.oneworld.net/article/362520-global-campaign-condemns-japanese-rape-videogame> 18.06.09)

to enjoy it, and then force them to get an abortion. Now, the picture of the diversity of the Japanese game market might clarify to the “uniqueness” I like to point out.

5. THE RESEARCH OBJECT

5. The Research Object

The objects of my research are the front covers of the most popular PlayStation games released between 1995 and 2000. This chapter will first give an overview about the selection process according to which I choose the 25 most successful games for the PlayStation. Finally I will present the list of the games which covers are going to be analyzed later.

5.1. THE SELECTION PROCESS

Given the fact, that there are almost 8000 games available for the PlayStation I had to narrow my scope drastically. But I also had to take several other things into consideration. First there was the issue of performing a cross-cultural analysis, to accomplish that I had to focus on games which were released in all three regions. Still left with about 1700 games I tried to distinguish games by their success – meaning I looked at unit sales rates and/or revenues as good as the internet provided such information²³. Already narrowed the list down, I still had to choose a doable number of covers and therefore decided to select the five most successful games of each year. In this final selection I also added the popularity of games as a certain criteria. I did two things: First I took a look at the covers of a magazine called *Mega Fun* and another called *Video Games* (Illustration 1 and 2 on page 59), both very popular magazines during the 1990s in Austria and Germany. If a certain PlayStation title was listed on

23 I hope to receive further detailed information from the actual companies that published the selected games. Such information however can not be provided by this version of the text.

a cover I considered it to be very popular. Then I also used a lot of internet sites, which feature rating systems of games either by votes of the authors or by community voting. A few sites to mention in particular would be www.gamespot.com, www.gamerankings.com, <http://vgchartz.com>, www.gamestats.com or www.ign.com (see Illustration 3 and 4 on page 60).

What I also did, was considering a game as more popular or rather successful than another one, if it had sequels or is part of a series. For example the game *Tomb Raider*. Although it appeared on several covers and is rated as “great” by Gamespot with 8.5, it had “only” about 4.45 million copies on the PlayStation. However, taking into consideration that on the PlayStation alone four parts have been released with a total of 13.03 million copies, and that by today the whole series includes nine games, the game is at all to be titled as successful. If the game was (is) part of a series I always tried to list the most successful game, but given the fact that I could only choose five games per year, I sometimes had to shift priorities and so another – maybe not so successful – game of a series will be representing the series. This is for example the case with *Grand Theft Auto*. Though the actual first part of this series only sold about 2.28 million copies on the PlayStation, I had to choose this game for 1998 because in 1999 there was no more room for *Grand Theft Auto 2*, which sold about 3.42 million copies.

Anyway, with the understanding that some games might represent another game of the same series, and with keeping both of the facts in mind, that there is absolutely no similar thoroughly researched list available, and that it is very hard to measure popularity on such an immense pool of subjectivity, due to adding my personal experience as well, I think this list is not only balanced but above all fairly adequate.



Illustration 1

FRONT COVER OF THE MAGAZINE
MEGA FUN, Issue 6/96.

PROVIDED BY;
WWW.KULTBOY.COM

Illustration 2

FRONT COVER OF THE MAGAZINE
VIDEO GAMES, Issue 12/96.

PROVIDED BY;
WWW.KULTBOY.COM



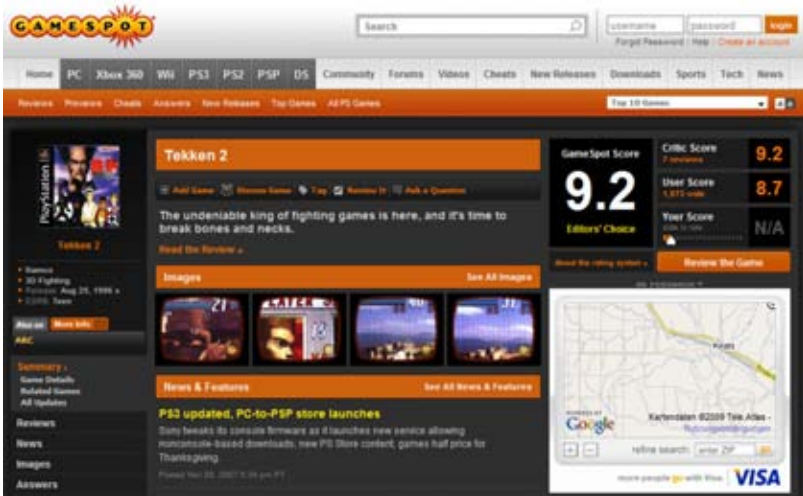


Illustration 3

PREVIEW OF THE WEBSITE WWW.GAMESPOT.COM



Illustration 4

PREVIEW OF THE WEBSITE WWW.GAMESTATS.COM

5.2. THE LIST OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PLAYSTATION GAMES

This is a basic depiction for the five most popular games of every year (American title). The final version of this research will contain an advanced table showing exact details of the games and why they have been selected (number of sequels, sold copies, appearance on magazine covers, ratings, and so on). The last title of 1999 has been kept as “not yet decided” to symbolize that this assembly is not complete now.

1995
<i>Battle Arena Toshinden</i>
<i>Doom</i>
<i>Tekken</i>
<i>Jumping Flash!</i>
<i>WipeOut</i>

1996
<i>Resident Evil</i>
<i>Ridge Racer Revolution</i>
<i>Mortal Kombat 3</i>
<i>Crash Bandicoot</i>
<i>Tomb Raider</i>

1997
<i>Mega Man X4</i>
<i>Final Fantasy VII</i>
<i>Castlevania: SotN</i>
<i>Soul Edge</i>
<i>Gran Turismo</i>

1998
<i>Grand Theft Auto</i>
<i>Armored Core</i>
<i>Diablo</i>
<i>Metal Gear Solid</i>
<i>Breath of Fire III</i>

1999
<i>Street Fighter EX2 Plus</i>
<i>Silent Hill</i>
<i>Tony Hawk's Pro Skater</i>
<i>Driver</i>
NOT YET DECIDED

6. ANALYSIS

6. Analysis

As explained in Chapter 3. I will mainly use semiotic methods in order to analyze the covers. I will take a look at the title: At translations, what they might imply, at the fonts used, the size, position, etc. I will examine the images and look amongst others for basic meanings of form or color, and certain attributes like for example realism or abstraction. I will take a look at schemes like for example Archetypes, and how they are characterized within the covers. Because those covers are naturally supposed to give a distinctive first impression to the potential buyer I assume they will be designed to project the contents of the game in one way or the other. Therefore I will always include certain information about the game itself during the analysis. I will always analyze one game at a time, starting with the cover of the region where it was released first. Although I will go into the games contents separately, it is necessary to read the analysis for respectively all three covers to understand the basic idea of the game. I will also try to specify how companies were eager to brand their company name, the game title, certain features or maybe characters when looking at the covers. There may be certain things that are specific and consistent to certain regions, for example the general layout for American cover, which always has a black bar on the left side showing the PlayStation logo as well as lettering, and an age rating. On the other hand, every single image might reveal something new. Unless it is important, I will mention similarities like the black bar on the left side of American covers only once and make a reference as such. However, I might have to use the same cultural backgrounds for explanatory purpose more than one time. I will not analyze the images in terms of what I like best. I will stay neutral

during my analysis, and although each triplet will hopefully lead to important conclusions, there will be a general summary after the analysis. Because it is of the at most interest and I think I will also reveal some helpful information to achieve a thorough conclusion to my research, I will also briefly examine a few selected titles from past areas of video gaming at the last chapter of this section.

6.1.EXPECTATIONS

Given the previous results of this work, I expect that most of the games were released in Japan first. Therefore I assume that the Japanese cover might have been some kind of guideline for the following designs. I guess that Japanese cover arts will emphasize difference in terms like they have to be more unique than other Japanese covers. – As mentioned above there are about three times as many as in other regions. To put it simple, I guess that Japanese covers will be colorful, character-focused and give the most room for interpretations.

I suppose American covers will primarily focus on transmitting action in a very photo-realistic way, instead of having a rather colorful approach. They may also emphasize the character and imply the “lonely hero”-theme stronger and more often, in order to reach an audience mostly consisting of Generation X members. I also assume that American covers will concentrate much more on branding than other region’s covers.

I think the European covers will show a very technological approach to the games they promote. As mentioned above, the Sony PlayStation was not only the most advanced and – amongst other reasons – therefore broadly accepted console of the 1990s, it was also the pioneer of next generation gaming due to the

fact, that it was technologically one step ahead of everything else. Though this will base solely on my personal impression, I always thought that Europeans are very interested in depicting technology – maybe because we are always one step behind the rest of the world most of the time. And while the same technology affection in terms of advertisement might describe an American cover, I don't think that when it comes to PlayStation games an average Japanese customer would have been impressed by the technology of the game, because in Japan – speaking also of personal experience – technology is emphasized at a daily basis in such an extent, that it almost seems to have lost its meaning. I assume that European covers will – similar to the American covers – also focus on showing the “power” behind the game rather than showing the game itself, as I suppose Japanese covers will do. Regarding certain aspects like the usage of schemes, archetypes, stereotypes, and so forth, I think that the conclusion will be, that all three regions use such impulse-stimulating techniques region-specific, but at the same degree.

6.2. GAMES OF 1995

Game Nr. 1

Original Title: 闘神伝 [Tōshinden / Legend of fighting Gods]
 Other Titles: **Battle Arena Toshinden**
 Developer: Takara
 Publisher: Hypersolid (JP), SCE (US, PAL)
 Released: 3.12.1994 (JP), 9.9.1995 (US, PAL)

"Eight travelling fighters brought together by a common destiny [...] some fighters have come for personal glory. Others have come to fight for those they love...", states the introduction, and describes the games story very well. *Battle Arena Toshinden* was a simple Beat'em'up game, but at a closer look it was different to other games of this genre. Actually it was the first 3D battle game which featured weapons for the avatars. You couldn't choose them, but each character's battle style was related strongly to the weapon carried. Due to the fact that the game was one of the launch titles for the PlayStation, it was clear that it had to show great difference to other titles from competing platforms and similar genres. – The game had to show improvement and sophistication especially when compared to Sega's *Virtua Fighter 2*, which was released for the Sega Saturn in the very same month.

Illustration 5a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 5b

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
CDCOVER.CC



Illustration 5c

EUROPEAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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Japanese Cover

When we take a look at the cover, the above mentioned intention is exactly what becomes visible. The cover doesn't feature any special design in terms of representing the contents of the game, instead it simply shows – and even describes with four lines of text – that this game is at a technical level way ahead of the competition. While the background is fairly simple compared to today's design guidelines, it sure was impressive back in 1995, due to its virtual components. If anything at all resembles something from the actual game optics, it is the background. I am not sure if this was the purpose, but I like to point out, that the background looks similar to the last battle stage of the game, which could be described as a firework of polygons and movement.

The title takes almost half of the whole cover and it is obvious that branding of this title was an intention. At a closer look the glowing stroke shows that the title *Tōshinden* goes hand in hand with the use of weapons.

American Cover

The American cover obviously wanted to present more of the contents instead of technical supremacy. Given the fact, that this game was released almost one year later in America it seems that the original competition between Sony and Sega took place only in Japan, where fighting games – typical games for arcades – have a special significance. The American cover shows two characters of the game in very “serious” action. At all worth mentioning is that the characters – Eiji and Mondo by the way – aren't drawn in a manga or rather anime-style. Instead their design

strongly resembles the optics of American comic characters with many details and emphasized muscles. The background shows the stage of Eiji and also even transmits elements of danger and excitement due to the suggestion that characters can fall out of the battle grounds because they are fighting at an edge.

The title is fairly small compared to the actual contents, and it seems that the focus was clearly on the characters fighting in a three dimensional manner almost similar to the looks of the game. The Kanji lettering stayed preserved, but the title is mainly composed out of English text, while the Japanese Signs went to the background. "Tō" wasn't transcribed correctly because either an "h" or a "u" or a stroke above the "o" for prolongation is missing. However, this is actually at most logical because most people, who haven't learned about the Japanese language or onomatopoeia, would be confused about the meaning of such symbols or transcriptions. Although the translation is not very accurate, because in no possible interpretation the name of a battle arena itself would actually be Toshinden, it kind of fits the purpose and contents of the game. Interesting is also that there is no glowing stroke integrated into the title or lettering. The designers might have thought that this is not necessary because the cover shows the weapons and the stroke in action. There is also no logo or lettering regarding the original developer Takara on this cover, and it is interesting to point out that later all American box arts of sequels of this game showed the Takara but no the SCE licensed logo on the front.

European Cover

The overall impression of the European cover is completely different again. Though the cover features actual contents of the

game, showing Gaia – the main villain – buyers who hadn't played the game before would never be able to figure that out. The whole ensemble seems to be intended to summarize everything into one big centralized logo; we can see the weapons, the tension of fighting as well as the third dimension, everything arranged very well and emphasized by a simple black background to let the eye wander only through the details of this single image.

The most interesting detail of this artwork is that the text written in katakana on the ensign in the back most probably states “デューク・バルテルミ・ランバード” [Duke Barthelemy Lambert]. Duke a brave knight-like fighter from France also uses a bi-handed sword to battle, but still the character at the image does look more like Gaia, the final boss and villain. It makes me wonder how to interpret this detail in terms of the storyline of the actual game series, because I have never played all of the parts and also have yet to watch a single episode of the anime series which was released later. I could understand the usage of a European character for the European region's cover, but why write the characters name in katakana, which supposedly no average 15 year old European PlayStation gamer of 1995 was able to read let alone look up, in times when the internet had yet to be established on a broad scale.

Furthermore worth mentioning is the detail, that the glowing stroke “reinvented” at the American box art found its way back into the actual lettering or rather “real” logo of the game.

Game Nr. 2

Original Title:	<i>Doom</i>
Other Titles:	-
Developer:	id Software
Publisher:	Williams (US), Williams and GT Interactive (PAL), Williams and Softbank (JP)
Released:	4.1.1995 (US), 16.11.1995 (PAL), 19.4.1996 (JP)

First, I know that Doom for the PlayStation is actually a port from the original PC version of 1993. However, in terms of ports for the PlayStation it was quite successful and although *Doom* would have undoubtedly been successful without porting it for Sony's PlayStation *Doom* was one of the most imprinting games of the 1990s – actually the father of all first person shooters – and is therefore as important to the PlayStation gamers as it is to all gamers.

The diabolic story of *Doom* is easy to explain: A space marine is trapped on one of two mars moons where teleportation experiments lead to the opening of a gate to hell. The marine fights his way from one moon to the other and all the way down to hell to defeat the evil. Lots of weapons, lots of creatures from hell, much blood and fear.

Illustration 6a

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
CDCOVER.CC



**Illustration 6b**

EUROPEAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
CDCOVER.CC

**Illustration 6c**

JAPANESE COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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American Cover

This cover shows a scene as it can be experienced in the game, drawn with a typical American comic style. Most noticeable is the perspective which causes the three dimensional room to become most conspicuous to the viewer. A closer look reveals the detail that the room actually combines several images into the walls. While the far back part shows some snowy mountains of one of the moons in the far distance, half of the walls are designed like a space station with metallic panels, the right wall shows bricks, and the bottom is similar to soil. This clearly shows the mergence between the “normal” world and hell, as it occurs in the game. The image – again drawn in a very realistic way – is very action driven; the main character of the game is literarily armed to his teeth and being attacked by monsters from several directions. His pose irradiates not only anger and that he obviously means it serious, it also emanates a somewhat self-confident demeanor like “Nothing can stop me”. – He is bleeding, he has taken several scratches, but he is still standing and fighting. It almost seems, that he is on some kind of drugs, which would be appropriate because to regenerate the characters life, the player could also use steroids or rather drugs while fighting through the levels.

The fact that there are several text notes on the cover shows that obviously *Doom* was selling very well for the PC market, and therefore the PlayStation version had to feature something different, something new. The so called “Custom PlayStation Edition” used a different engine with more color depth and alpha blending, it featured a new soundtrack making us of the PlayStation’s CD storage capacity, and – most important – the game consisted of more than 50 levels, because it was

actually a mix between *Doom* and *Doom II* for PC. The front cover doesn't inform about the new soundtrack but it shows that one of the most important things of *Doom* – the ability to play it with multiple players – could also be done on the PlayStation.

European Cover

This cover is only a part of the original cover. The background, the floor, and the enemy in the back have been left out leaving only the main character and parts of two monsters. The impression of three-dimensionality doesn't get lost, and by zooming into the picture there are much more details for the eye to observe. You can actually see the spots where the metallic plates are screwed onto the ceiling, but more important you can see the scars and wounds of the main character more clearly. With this zoom the character not only seems angry and serious, he also seems to suffer and experience pain much more than his American counterpart.

This cover does not show any additional hints regarding that it is a special edition with special features compared to the PC version, which leaves the mark that it wasn't quite necessary for the European audience to distinguish between those versions. In other words: The original *Doom* seems to have had a much bigger impact in America than it had in Europe, making it more likely to advertise the PlayStation version as somewhat special.

Japanese Cover

Taking a look at the Japanese box art reveals that in this case the Japanese stayed 100% accurate to the original design. The cover

is the exact same, the only difference is, that it shows even more of the scenery because Japanese PlayStation covers didn't use black bars on the left and right sides, like American covers did.

Of course the title is transcribed into katakana to somehow make sure that there is no confusion at all when reading it. Again there was obviously no need to emphasize the difference between the PC-Original and the port, and given the fact that PC was never very popular in Japan it seems like a logical consequence.

Game Nr. 3

Original Title:	鉄拳 [Tekken / Iron Fist]
Other Titles:	Tekken
Developer:	Namco
Publisher:	Namcot (JP), SCE (PAL), Namco (US)
Released:	31.3.1995 (JP), 1.11.1995 (PAL), 8.11.1995 (US)

Together with *Battle Arena Toshinden* this game was one of the first games to introduce 3D battling to the PlayStation. However, it was much more character driven and maybe even emphasized Japanese culture stronger than *Battle Arena Toshinden*. The story is about the “Iron Fist Tournament” which is arranged every few years by the Mishima Corporation. Every character has a unique background story and most of them are intertwined so that summarizing the whole story would take far too long. Assuming that Heihachi Mishima (head of the Mishima Company) and Kazuya (his son) are the main characters of the game, one could say that the story is generally about the battle between those two or rather the struggle about dominance over the company. *Tekken* was the first game that sold over one million copies worldwide on the PlayStation and was therefore awarded. Today the Tekken series consists of nine parts (not that order) and is cherished all over the world.

Illustration 7a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 7b

EUROPEAN COVER

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Illustration 7c

AMERICAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

The original cover shows all the eight main characters of the game. The way they are aligned makes it difficult to interpret on which one the focus lies. Of course the robot Jack in the back is the biggest of all, but still he is saturated more as if he would be a part of the background. The next bigger character is Kazuya with his right fist melting with the actual logo of the game. Because of his proportions he stands out a little more than the other characters, which makes sense because actual story of this part of the series is about him and his revenge on his father for throwing him into a canyon. However, the overall impression of this box art is that all characters are emphasized in a more or less balanced yet realistic manner. This speaks for the game and makes it outstanding to other games of the same genre. Most of the games of the *Street Fighter* series focused only on two characters on their package arts, and the overall competitor *Virtua Fighter* for Sega's Saturn showed the actual polygon models of the characters. The Tekken cover clearly showed potential buyers about the "realism" of the game by accentuating real characters and therefore realistic stories.

It is interesting that although the cover is designed for a Japanese audience, the actual lettering of "Tekken" appears to be almost intentionally emphasized aside to the two Kanji letters. It seems as if the creators wanted to brand "Tekken" together with 鉄拳, and when we take a look at the covers from all parts of the series it becomes conspicuous.

European Cover

The European version of the cover shows no differences to the Japanese one. Of course it was licensed directly by SCE, the

logo of the overall company Namco is shown instead of Namcot which was a side company of Namco, and there is also an ELSPA age assessment on the cover. The actual Tekken logo has been repositioned at the upper right corner, but this is only because the PlayStation logo was always placed in the top left corner. By repositioning it seems that it was made sure that the logo doesn't overlay any of the characters and so the image makes a much more balanced and ordered impression.

American Cover

The American box art uses the exact same image at almost the exact same scaling like the Japanese version. The question arises why there were almost no differences with the cover of this game. I think this had probably something to do with the fact, that *Tekken* was the first game to exceed one million copies for the PlayStation and therefore making it somewhat special.

Also because the original cover already featured an alphabetic title and seemed “realistic” – as I presumed above – enough for an American or European audience there might have been no need to change the arrangement. On the other hand is maybe important to preserve a distinctive consistency throughout all the objects that are supposed to be advertised under one brand on multiple markets, as explained in Chapter 3. Most products achieve this by using unified logos, but in this case it seems that the whole cover has been unified. Like I said, it was the first game to sell over one million copies worldwide. – That could have been the result of the fact that all covers looked the same.

Game Nr. 4

Original Title: ジャンピングフラッシュ！：アロハ男爵ファンキー大作戦の巻 [Janpingu Furasshu!: Aloha danshaku funky daisakusen no maki / The chronicles of Baron Aloha and his great funky venture]

Other Titles: ***Jumping Flash!***

Developer: Exact

Publisher: SCE (JP, PAL, US)

Released: 28.4.1995 (JP), 10.10.1995 (US, PAL)

Jumping Flash! is actually a 3D Platformer but it was unique because it was played by a first person perspective and therefore became very popular. The content of the game deals about an evil baron who wants to create his own land by stealing certain areas of the planet Crater. He controls many big space ships and removes the land masses into space. The planet calls for support and so the Universal City Hall sends in their best agent Robbit. Robbit is a robotic bunny and besides using a great variety of weapons his main ability is jumping very high. The player now has to go from level to level and separate the land masses by finding and reinstalling the jet pods so that the giant devices of Aloha can't carry them anymore and they will return to their original place.

Illustration 8a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 8b

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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Illustration 8c

EUROPEAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

As the actual game, the cover of this Japanese game also looks very colorful. It really creates the impression of a game developed for children. The not at all evil-looking baron flying in his propeller driven capsule, cute UFOs with eyes, some other fantasy creatures and land masses which all look somehow like amusement parks in the back, Robbit (short for a robotic rabbit – a very Japanese way of creating abbreviations) in the center foreground, and the whole scenery in front of a beautiful blue sky. Clearly this image shows a game far from any violent or brutal contents.

The composition obviously tries to present as many elements of the actual game as well as a preview of what the player would have to expect from this game. When reading the title it becomes clear that this game would mainly deal with jumping and when watching the scenery the only expected danger would be falling into the deep unknown blue. All the elements of this image are created by the computer. There are definitely no hand draw parts and all of the models did appear in the game. Personally I think this is rather unusual for a Japanese cover and that goes also against my expectations, but we still have to take under consideration, that the PlayStation was released only five months before that game in Japan. Therefore it is logical to assume that most new games had a very strong focus on their technical aspects and tried to convey them to the audience. Still, this game does not only show some technical details by putting the rendered main character and other models onto the cover, like I said before its real main focus lies on the fact that this is a game especially focused on having fun in somehow childish terms. The character itself is the main point of interest in this image and due to its simple design, the at most interesting way of combining

technology (a robot) with nature (an animal), and by keeping the result on a child-like level, the character should be most memorable.

The fact that this rabbit is actually a snow rabbit with white fur and red eyes might not necessarily have something to do with the assessment that Japanese people would prefer such a rabbit before the other kinds. If the rabbit would have been like a brown hare, maybe just by looking at its body – with no such things like teeth or real fur – the audience might not have understood the nature of this animal. The name “Robbit” is nowhere on the picture to be found, and the same character in brown could easily have led to a wrong interpretation as a guinea pig, and would also have deprived the uniqueness of the creature.

The title of the Japanese version – written with a very unique font and combining various colors – is simply put unbelievable. Not only that it has probably the longest subtitle of all PlayStation games, it basically explains almost every aspect of the game and leaves nothing unclear.

American Cover

The US version is completely different from the original. At the first look the differences seem few but still there are a lot. To get started with, the whole image is drawn by hand. The image might be edited, enhanced and colored with the computer for sure, but still the basic draft remains clearly sketched.

The character is basically the same but taking a closer look reveals certain indications for movement; while the robbit in the Japanese version could also be flying instead of jumping, this one here really performs a jump. Taking an even closer look it is jumping directly into the eye of the viewer! When it

comes to jumping in this game it is worth mentioning that the shadow, which is also intentionally visible in this image, was the only real clue of where the rabbit might land. The background of this image also changed. No UFOs with eyes, no fantasy creatures and no villain. Instead there are a lot of elements which emphasize the actual structure of the game in terms of its genre as a 3D Platformer. Also a lot of the elements carry some distinctive characteristics making them kind of rare or rather important and therefore worth protecting, like the sphinx, the pyramid or even the simple Hellenistic pillar.

The fact that there are no enemies at all in this image makes me wonder the most. Although I don't think that the enemy character is very distinctive in the Japanese cover art, looking at the American cover creates this definitive impression that the game is basically only about jumping through a 3D world. I think there is almost no story at all in this image. The whole subtitle was erased and so just by looking at the front cover no potential buyer would know about baron Aloha and his great – or rather evil – plans.

European Cover

The last box art for the European region is the same as the original, except for the fact that the subtitle was canceled as well, and that the background had much more white as a base color instead of blue. I think that European and American covers tend to generally avoid subtitles, and if really necessary they would have to be very short. For the fact that the Japanese image was used I think there could be two explanations, which can hopefully be proven at the end of the analysis: First I assume

that because most of the games were released at last in Europe, the European distributors tried to somehow protect the origin or rather the original character of the game. And second, when a game from Japan came to Europe using elements which – due to their origin – most naturally related to certain Japanese characteristics was a general approach for achieving higher revenues.

Game Nr. 5

Original Title: **WipEout**
 Other Titles: -
 Developer: Psygnosis
 Publisher: Psygnosis (PAL, US, JP)
 Released: 29.9.1995 (PAL), 21.11.1995 (US), 22.3.1996 (JP)

WipEout was the first game for the PlayStation that wasn't developed in Japan. It was developed and published by Psygnosis in England, and it was considered a launch title for the PlayStation in Europe. The game was very popular in Europe and after released in America it was also ranked number one in several charts. *WipEout* is a futuristic racing game and particularly important about this game is the overall graphical look as well as its Soundtrack. The graphics for this game were designed by a very famous English design company called Designers Republic, and the Soundtrack consisted mostly of electronica music.

Illustration 9a

EUROPEAN COVER

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Illustration 9b

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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Illustration 9c

JAPANESE COVER

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European Cover

This cover is “real art” in terms of modern computer design and concepts like this are typical for Designer Republic’s works; simple lines and geometrical basics combined together to form complex and extraordinary images. The use of colors is also very important when it comes to design, and Designers Republic was also renowned for their well balanced, unique, heavy contrast, but still basic color palettes.

The cover shows one of the racers in the center of the image which is accentuated from the very intensively patterned and movement suggesting background. The white symbols in the background represent the weapon systems which can be activated in the game. The upper left for example was the symbol for a heat-seeking missile. Next to the glider we can see the logo of the racing league from this game, the “F3600 Anti-Gravity League”, later games always featured another league. The upper part of the cover shows some technical information about the game or rather the PlayStation system “32-Bit” as well as “W’O” as some kind of logo or short form for the game, and float point data, which represents measurement, time, and therefore the general character of a race. I can’t read the names at the top section of the cover, but I will look them up in Austria!

The lower left part of the cover shows all the teams from the game: Quirex, Auricom, Feisar and AG Systems and their corresponding logos. The lower right part has embedded the logo of Psygnosis, and just to get an idea of what the in-game graphics designed by the Designers Republic – for example loading screens – have looked like, one can take a look at the images left to the Psygnosis logo. The most conspicuous thing is that Designers Republic actually put their name on the cover. Unfortunately I

didn't understand this when I was a younger, because it is written in katakana. Taking a look at several works from this design studio it becomes clear, that they were influenced and inspired greatly from Japan, and this image shows an adequate example.

The title of the game also written in a seemingly strange but unique font does imply that there is something to wipe-out – and of course shooting at other gliders was very important in this game.

American Cover

The Americans changed the cover completely. From real art in terms of unique and innovative design, the image is reduced to a photorealistic render from the game. Still the image shows a lot regarding actual in-game action, but the artistic aspect was completely deprived. The same technique to create the illusion that the object actually emerge from the scenery – by putting the black bar behind it – as in the cover of *Jumping Flash!* was used. – Again, to center the attention at the most important object, in this case the glider in the front, or rather to pull the viewer directly into the scene. Because the gliders usually reflected the light conditions during the tracks and because there was not too big of a difference between the looks of the gliders in the first game, it is very hard to tell which of these gliders is part of which team, or if they are at all (I will take a look at this in Austria as well). What we can see however, is that they are fighting. The one at the second position is firing a missile at the leading glider which evades the attack by steering left.

The title stayed pretty much the same except for the color, which has changed according to the image. Interesting is that a

subtitle has been added, and that the word “ballistic” has been used to describe this game further. Ballistic curves are mainly used to describe the behavior of projectiles. Therefore I assume that the element of shooting was intentionally emphasized at the American version of this cover. The logo of the league was persevered, and at a closer look we can also see some of the symbols for the weapons on the right side of the image.

Japanese Cover

The Japanese cover resembles almost 100 percent to the original. The only thing that has changed is the upper part of the image. In the original PAL version a lot of text was written there, and I think the text included some of the musicians who made the soundtrack for this game (CHECK). Maybe because most of them came from the British electronica scene it wouldn't have been of interest for the Japanese people.

Again, in this case I assume that the Japanese distributors – similar to the European ones – also try to generally preserve the original character of a game, presented by the front cover, as long as it wouldn't cause confusion. Besides, this cover shows such a big Japanese influence due to the works of Designers Republic, further alienation or rather cultural integration would probably not have been necessary.

6.3. GAMES OF 1996

Game Nr. 6

Original Title:	Bio Hazard
Other Titles:	Resident Evil
Developer:	Capcom
Publisher:	Capcom (JP, US, PAL)
Released:	22.3.1996 (JP), 30.3.1996 (US), 1.8.1996 (PAL)

"Bizarre murder cases have recently occurred in Raccoon City. There are outlandish reports of families being attacked by a group of about ten people. Victims were apparently eaten. Bravo team went to the hideout of the group and disappeared." This is a short extract of the original intro and basically it describes the plot of the game very accurately: Zombies are loose and eat people. As a member of a special police department of the local city, the player is sent to discover the mystery or rather to find out why the first team didn't report anymore. *Resident Evil* is part of a series which today includes a total of nine games (directors cut, special editions and gamers for platforms like mobile phones or arcades not included), six movies and several novels. While the "zombie-problem" had to be solved in many different locations, the first part plays solely in a big old mansion outside of the city. The characters not only discover that their colleagues are basically all dead, but also that Umbrella – a biogenetic research company – committed certain experiments in this mansion, which leads to the urge to exploit this company during the rest of the series. The game featured two main characters (a male and a female) with a somehow parallel and intertwined story progression. *Resident Evil* is today considered to be the mother of a genre called "Survival Horror" and has achieved cult-status amongst all gamers of all different platforms.

Illustration 10a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 10b

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
CDCOVER.CC



Illustration 10c

EUROPEAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

This Japanese cover is very designed simple. Above a black background an eye is visible, and the title is centered within the eye with capitalized letters in a blood red color. It is most obvious that this eye is expressing fear. – As if it would see the most horrible thing imaginable and causes the person to be frightened to death. Even the fine veins in the white part of the eyeball are emphasized, and the blood that drops down from the title gathers at the bottom lid just to emerge a bigger drop of blood. At most interesting is the text part above the eye, which states: “迫る恐怖！壮絶な死闘！これぞ、サバイバルゲームの真髄！！” [Semaru kyōfu! Sōzetsu na shitō! Korezo, sabaibarugēmu no shinzui / Fear of approaching! A fierce battle for live or death! As for this, this is the essence of a survival game!!] The text really tries to create a distinctive characteristic for this game as well as for the genre, which is also written at the bottom of the cover. Because it is not very common to write furigana above all the kanji, I think they were intentionally placed there to ensure that also younger people could understand how to read the text. Also necessary to mention is that every single sentence is emphasized with an exclamation mark, and when it comes to last part which could be interpreted as: “this is the essence of this genre that I am the mother of” two exclamation marks are used.

The bottom part of the box art shows the title written in katakana – probably to make sure that all Japanese people use the so called “katakana-pronunciation” instead of something that would resemble real English (MAYBE CANCEL THAT OUT!^^), and yet another area where the genre is written. I am not sure about the general use of those areas at the bottom which categorize a game in Japan, because they have been used rather randomly

by different publishers for different kinds of games than generally. Still in this case it seems almost intentionally placed to promote this game in terms of a brand new genre.

American Cover

The American cover shows a completely different approach towards the issue of fear and horror. This image shows a muscular soldier in a corner of a room or hallway almost forced onto the defensive. Although the soldier seems to be very strong and his weapon is literally as big as himself, his face clearly shows fear. Taking a more detailed look, his face actually could be separated into two parts with two emotions; while the right half shows an emotion similar to the Japanese original, the left half shows that he somehow means it serious, that he is angry and ready to kill.

What makes this image interesting and expresses kind of psychological depth are all of the only partially visible images integrated into the walls of this room or hallway, which by the way resembles the style of some rooms and hallways in the game. The two spiders in the lower section to the left and right are maybe the most obvious images, but after watching this picture a little longer one can also notice two claws from some kind of unknown creatures two the left and right above the spiders. If you look even closer we can also find the image of an eye directly above the players head. The eye will become the main image of the front cover for the US and some of the PAL versions of *Resident Evil 2*.

Furthermore interesting is that the title have been changed to “Resident Evil”, but this has in this case nothing to do with the original being improper, the reason why the game couldn’t be called “Biohazard” was because in America a game as well as

a music band called that way already existed. Resident Evil was picked, because the first part plays – like I said before – only at an old mansion. Besides the new name I think it is more interesting that the title wasn't integrated into the actual image, it just stands alone to the right and seems to give the picture all the space it needed to affect the viewer.

European Cover

The European cover goes this time directly after the American version instead of the original and uses the same image and design. The title was moved to the top and printed horizontally, like any title should be – in my opinion. Why the title was also inherited from the American instead of the Japanese version is still unclear, but I would guess that because actually two English titles were available Virgin simply followed along the American choice in order to keep transparency between America and Europe.

The image itself is used more of an upper section the original image, so that it now almost seems as if we could see the ceiling of the room, as well as two additional claws or rather teeth attacking the soldier from above. I don't want to go into details about the rating system for ages now, but it is still mentionable that this game was rated 15 in Europe and 17 in America, while there still was no such thing like rating games for appropriate ages or warnings in this early years of PlayStation games in Japan.

Game Nr. 7

Original Title:	<i>Ridge Racer Revolution</i>
Other Titles:	-
Developer:	Namco
Publisher:	Namco (JP, US), SCE (PAL)
Released:	3.12.1995 (JP), 1.5.1996 (PAL), 30.8.1996 (US)

Ridge Racer was first developed 1993 as a game for the arcades in Japan. The later first part of the series released as a launch title for the PlayStation in 1995 was a port from the original Arcade game. *Ridge Racer Revolution*, the second part, and the one I picked representing the success of the whole *Ridge Racer* series was not the most successful part of the series, but it fits the purpose. *Ridge Racer* in general is not necessarily a simple racing game rather than an arcade-style racing game. This means that the primary focus of the creators was not to simulate real driving conditions, for example with implementing detail physical structures, but to create a game that is entertaining when played in an arcade hall. Nowadays *Ridge Racer* parts have certain problems with this fact that has yet to chance. Part seven for example is criticized a lot because of its lag of real physical feeling when compared with "racing" or rather simulation games who made it their goal to achieve realism. However, back in 1996 nobody cared. The PlayStation was new everybody have seen or played *Ridge Racer* – by the way the first racing game for the PlayStation, and therefore the second part sold as well.

The PlayStation game was actually more like an advanced version of the seconds part Arcade game, because there were few chances regarding the courses, mostly some exchanged graphics. However, there were two bonus cars and the option to play it linked with another PlayStation.

Illustration 11a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 11b

EUROPEAN COVER

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Illustration 11c

AMERICAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

There is movement when looking at this Japanese cover, there is action, like it should be when thinking about this game as an Arcade Racer. A fierce battle about position one between the red and the blue car, and there is also one more car in the near proximity.

Before I go more into detail about the red car, I would like to briefly describe the background or rather scenery shown by this image. The whole image is undoubtedly taken directly from the game, of course edited afterwards, but still from the game. What we can see is basically an area from Ridge City, more precisely a beach area. Ridge City consisted of many different sections and area, like for example a city center, mountains or beaches. Most intriguing is the whole composition in terms of color. This cover emphasizes the natural character of the game to be a game and to be fun. I guess this is especially the case with *Ridge Racer*, because it is originally an arcade game.

The red car or rather the “Namco Racer” is a pure example of advertisement. I honestly have a hard time remembering about the other cars but and I can research this only when playing it again back in Austria! There are so many advertisements about Namco on this car, it is almost unbelievable. The first thing that stands is the color; red and white are symbolic for the colors of Namco, and of course it has written Namco on the body as well. Besides that there are however many other advertisements for other games from Namco: On the windshield “Galaxian” is written, referring to an older Arcade Classic from Namco. On the front part of the car “Druaga” is written and reminds gamer about another arcade game from Namco ドルアーガの塔 [Dorūāga no tō / The Tower of Druaga] from 1984. If we take a closer look, we

can also see a reference to the most successful arcade game ever – also by Namco – “Pacman” written on the side of the car.

There is not much to say about the title except for the fact that it is based on the lettering of the first part and emphasizes the overall colorful look of this cover. – The katakana transcription only translates the title into Japanese.

European Cover

When analyzing the European box art we can see structural similarities, but still a different image emphasizing other things. Looking at the scenery we can assert that the picture still shows a beach but some other part of it. However, the background doesn't show as much as in the Japanese counterpart, although the perspective is almost identical. In this cover about 50 percent of the image space consists of a blue sky, and comparing this sky to the Japanese one it is more detailed and structured with clouds, while the Japanese sky is only blue for the most part. The rest of the background looks similar to the original one and it becomes clear that this scene is also rendered directly from the game. The remaining 40 percent of this box art are occupied by only one car instead of three.

Before I go into detail about this car I like to point out, that with this arrangement already many things from the original got lost. Obviously the aspect of competition has been deprived. And more intriguing, the element of speed and action is also missing, because the car seems almost like standing still. Taking a look back at the original we can see that the red car is actually drifting, which today still is a very important aspect about style of driving in the games of this series.

So, what car do we have in this image? It is a car from the game, it is called “White Angel 0” and actually it is the strongest car in the game. More precisely it is a bonus car which can only be unlocked after playing the game through several times and meet some other demands. The question is – assuming that even racing games do have cars representing sort of a “main character” – why wouldn’t this car be shown on the cover? Furthermore why would it be replaced with another car that is not only even unavailable for the players for a long time, but more bewilderingly why abdicate all the advertisement of older games like *Pac-Man* etc.?

American Cover

Because the American Cover is the exact same as the European one, I will try to answer this questions here. First I think, that some racing games try to create the image of a main car, which kind of is part of a bigger story, but this was definitely not the case with any of the first parts of the Ridge Racer series. It was just a simple Arcade game – even on the PlayStation. You drive, and the only demand you have to meet is trying to avoid driving mistakes or rather reaching the checkpoints in time. By doing so you will be able to become first and win the race. There were no mission objectives, no points, or artificial intelligence which needed to be tricked. So even the Japanese cover tried to promote the actual “company car”, I think it wasn’t really necessary just to strengthen its character. But I am very sure that especially the advertisement of those older Namco games had an impact on the Japanese audience, while that would probably not have had the same effect in Europe because Arcade gaming was never that big in Europe. And for the question of why to put a car on the front

cover that cannot be selected to play with, I think that this would probably cause natural curiosity as well as a certain AHA-effect.

The last thing I like to point out is that of course the European Union and the USA are Christian societies. Therefore putting the image of something deeply anchored within the people on a cover might help to sell certain products. Still, the most important thing about *Ridge Racer* – at least as I always perceived it – is noblesse. – I think when looking at the box art for the PAL or the US region this becomes comprehensible. For me it wasn't just a racing game with simple cars, it was a racing game that expresses style through its noble cars – at least until another game called *Need for Speed* realized that theme in a more obvious and even better way.

Game Nr. 8

Original Title:	<i>Mortal Kombat 3</i>
Other Titles:	-
Developer:	Midway
Publisher:	Midway (JP, US), SCE (PAL)
Released:	7.10.1995 (US), 14.6.1996 (JP), 1.11.1996 (PAL)

Again, in this case *Mortal Kombat 3* stands representative for the whole series. *Mortal Kombat* is one of the most popular video game series off all time. Since *Mortal Kombat* started in 1992 as kind of a response to the very successful Arcade-style battle games of those days (like for example *Street Fighter* released by Capcom), *Mortal Kombat* may count hand in hand with games like *Doom* or *Counter Strike* to the most controversial games ever created. Intentionally written and pronounced with the letter "K" instead of "C" it becomes obvious that this game series had only one thing in mind: Violence and Gore. While the avatars fight, blood will sputter around the battle stages the likes few other games dare to show. And all this violence finds its climax in lots of finishing moves like "Fatalities", "Brutalities", "Animalities", and so on. *Mortal Kombat* was famous and different from other games not only because of its explicitly brutal contents but also because of its optics. Unlike in other 2D games where sprites have been used, *Mortal Kombat* used digitalized sprites (pictures from real actors) instead of drawn content. Due to its extreme depiction of violence *Mortal Kombat* was above others the reason why the ESRB, a rating system for video games in America, was facilitated. By now the series consists of more than 14 games, three movies, two television series and several novels. Because it would take far too long to describe the story of *Mortal Kombat* in detail, the following has to suffice: In the universe many realms exist, and basically most of the realms want to invade each other, more precisely it seems most of them want to invade earth, because earth is the only planet that hasn't suffered as many losses during wars like the others did. However, ancient gods and protectors of the worlds forbid the invasion of other realms, except a realm challenges another world for a Mortal Kombat and wins ten tournaments in a row. So basically the strongest fighters of earth fight against the strongest fighters of the evil parties in order to protect earth.

Illustration 12a

AMERICAN COVER

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Illustration 12b

JAPANESE COVER

PROVIDED BY:
CDCOVER.CC



Illustration 12c

EUROPEAN COVER

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American Cover

You might have noticed that this cover looks a little bit different than the other covers so far. This is because *Mortal Kombat* was sold in America with an old kind of CD-Housing. This housing was usually used when a game featured more than one disc, but for *Mortal Kombat* it had to be used because the standard CD housing for the American PlayStation games, which was the same like Music CDs, was too thin to hold the immense instruction manual for this game. The instruction manual was actually not that comprehensive but it was about eight millimeters thick because it included a lot of languages. In Europe we used the bigger CD housings also, but only if the game consisted of more than one disc. Europe had initially very thick custom-made packages for the PlayStation games and so the instruction manual fit in it with no problems.

This cover is very simplistic. It doesn't show any characters or any special background. In fact most of the games of this series relied solely on the lettering "MK" or the actual logo with the dragon, which has already become a successful brand with the release of part three. The unique font for the letter "3" however implies some violence due to its sharp edges. The logo shows a Dragon in most cases with fire in the background. The dragon represents the strength and the will to fight and has a strong connection to one of the main characters Lui Kang. – Basically most of the story has a strong connection to Chinese mythology, but I can't describe this in detail here. Because the cover for the European version is the exact same but the resolution is a lot better I will continue the analysis there.

Japanese Cover

This Japanese cover (not sure if it is the correct) also shows the same logo, but the background is different. Here we can see a red human

skull, some flames behind the logo, and two red stripes to the left and the right. The human skull is a common symbol for death in many cultures – including the Japanese one – and stands for the mortality of humans. Actually it could be a character from the game named “Scorpion” who is kind of an undead villain and hides a skull underneath a mask, but I don’t think the box art is supposed to express that. Red of course is also the color of blood and commonly associated with danger.

All in all this cover expresses the content of the game stronger than the other regions counterparts, but it hasn’t lost any of its simplicity. Another interesting fact is that there is nothing at all written on this cover except for the logo within the text. This indicates that *Mortal Kombat* was already very famous in Japan when the third part was released, and that it was not necessary. – Actually even the second part released for the Super Famicom in Japan had anything else besides the logo displayed on the package art.

European Cover

The European box art goes along with the original in every single detail. Here we see better that the letters are constructed of marmoreal stones, giving the tournament a more precious and important image. The background of this image now also can be viewed more closely. Basically it seems like something or someone tries to break through a wall or something similar, which is emphasized by the cracks. Anyway, there is not much more to get out of this image, and summarizing all three covers with the other box arts of the series in mind we can say that *Mortal Kombat* strongly relies on its actual logo and keeps the rest of the images simple almost nihilistic. Obviously the logo for this game has been branded so successfully in all three regions that it wasn’t necessary to put anything else into the image.

Game Nr. 9

Original Title:	<i>Crash Bandicoot</i>
Other Titles:	-
Developer:	Naughty Dog
Publisher:	Universal Interactive and SCE (US, PAL), Universal Interactive (JP)
Released:	1.9.1996 (US), 1.11.1996 (PAL), 6.12.1996 (JP)

Take a nice fairly unknown animal give it pants, a name, personality and let it save the world while rescuing its girlfriend. – Game history has proven, the perfect recipe for a popular game character and therefore for a successful game. Jason Rubin the creator of this series and also a big fan of Shigeru Miyamoto's games has obviously taken a good look at the concepts of his ideal. Personally I think this game could have been created one-to-one in Japan instead of the USA. Crash is a bandicoot. He can't do much except of jumping and spinning, but still he goes on a journey to defeat his very creator the evil Doctor Neo Cortex, and prevent him from polluting the environment of his beautiful islands in order to get world dominance. After all, the evil Doctor has also kidnapped his girlfriend Tanwa. With a clear conscience, the game can be compared to games with Super Mario regarding its structure. – After all the game was intentionally produced with Crash to create a mascot for the PlayStation (Sony) similar to Super Mario for Nintendo.

Illustration 13a

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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Illustration 13b

EUROPEAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
CDCOVER.CC



Illustration 13c

JAPANESE COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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American Cover

With the intention of branding a certain character in mind it is logical that this character would be on the package art of the game. In this case Crash is the center of attraction he literally comes out of the image, by using the same technique we have seen before and emphasized by the disrupted background. The big wooden sign above the bandicoot, which takes almost a third of the whole picture also makes sure, that the name of the game or rather of the character will be remembered.

Beside these intentionally emphasized elements we can see an image similar to the first levels of the game. Some pillars imply a connection to ancient mythology, a stone obstacle and some cliffs indicate the Jump&Run character of the game. Crash himself seems to be a fairly cool and self-confident character according to the way he moves and grins. – Actually he is. Who knows this game, knows that Crash takes his life pretty relaxing, spending most of his time in the sun on the beach. Crash also is famous about certain behaviors like scratching his bottom when talking with somebody. All this characteristics reach the viewer of this image and potential buyer for sure. Furthermore the whole image is very colorful and the preview of the stage in the background really makes appetite for exploration.

European Cover

This cover is the same as the original with the only difference that Crash does not emerge through a paper-like background. The actual model of Crash walks towards the viewer, but the background is shown completely. This allows the viewer to

examine the background more detailed, and in the end might increase this certain appetite for exploration even more. If it turns out at the end of my analysis, that the urge for seeing the whole thing instead of just a part of an image is indeed a characteristic of European game covers – as I suspect by now – I wouldn't argue with the result. Personally that's exactly the way I think about images. – I'd rather see the whole picture instead of some fancy effects that will be layered over and decrease my possibilities for examination.

Japanese Cover

The Japanese cover is completely different from the original(s). I stated before that I believe Japan might turn out to try preserving the original art instead of changing it except for the case that something might be misunderstood. Well, in this case there is nothing to be misunderstood I suppose, but this cover may be an exception because of the fact that it tries to really brand a certain character typ. And when it comes to certain behavioral structures or distinctive characteristics of avatars, the Japanese audience might prefer something different than the rest of the world. – This can be understood by anybody who has ever asked the question why the most important characteristic that Japanese man like to see in a Japanese woman is not their intellect or their beauty but rather if they are “kawaii” or not. “Kawaii” is a word that basically has no translation but most of the times it is translated with the word “cute”. However in truth it might be a mixture between cuteness and child-like behavior or rather characteristics. Assuming that it was the intention of the creators of *Crash Bandicoot* to brand this product – this character – successfully in Japan as well, there

is no doubt that an accurate redesign was necessary. Anyway, what are the differences between Crash US/PAL and Crash JP? To let the picture speak for itself and summarize briefly: The Japanese Crash looks literally cockeyed. His dumb character is even emphasized due to the fact that he still grins although a big stone threatens to overrun him. – Still I have to admit that the issue of Crash's face expression (especially his mouth) always was a big issue for his creators because his head is not separated from his body. Therefore giving him any other mouth expression than a grin didn't provide satisfying results (QUOTE). The rest of the cover shows also the jungle stage as a background but with the motion blur effect it transmits the element of action instead of the original "let's walk through the jungle casually" impression.

The last thing I like to mention is the fact that the Japanese cover art completely passed on the use of the alphabetic title, and so only katakana were used to depict it. This also shows that there really must have been a strong urge to imprint this game within the Japanese audience, by almost selling the image that this game was developed in Japan.

Game Nr. 10

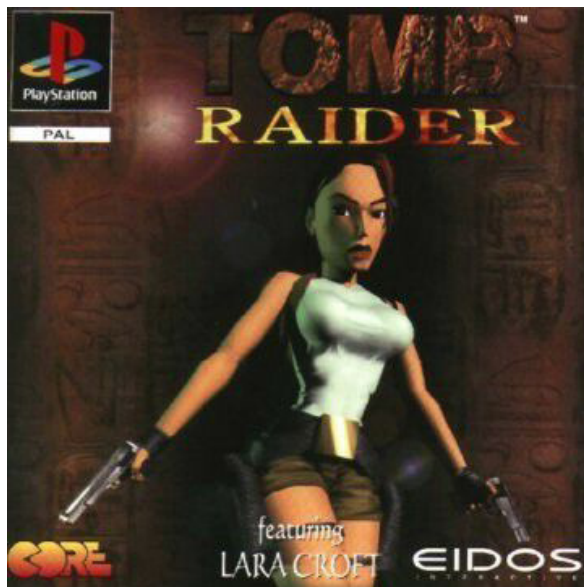
Original Title:	<i>Tomb Raider</i>
Other Titles:	トゥームレイダース [Tūmureidāsu / Tomb Raiders]
Developer:	Core Design
Publisher:	Eidos Interactive (PAL, US), Victor (JP)
Released:	22.11.1996 (PAL), 15.12.1996 (US), 14.2.1997 (JP)

Lara Croft, a name that might be even more famous than the title of this game and its series. Lara, the protagonist of this game series, is an archeologist who retrieves certain artifacts for money. Besides that she is very rich, well educated and physically in top form. I know it might sound a little misogynistic but basically she is an Indiana Jones with breasts. This game was created by Core Design, again an English developing studio. Originally it was designed for the Sega Saturn, but it became successful and famous all over the world after the release of the port for the Sony PlayStation. The team initially planned to create a woman that really resembles a tough man in terms of behavior and character. However as the development progressed, the creators realized that riddles and dexterity would fit the game better than action. Eventually Lara's personality became as charming as is today and helped to create an image of a woman in video games completely different from everything before; Clever, strong, assertive, independent and unafraid. Armed with these characteristics – and two pistols – Lara embarks to Peru to find the “Scion” (an old artifact) for a company called Natla Technologies. She is about to jump, climb, shoot attacking creatures, and eventually she will uncover some mysteries of the past.

Illustration 14a

EUROPEAN COVER

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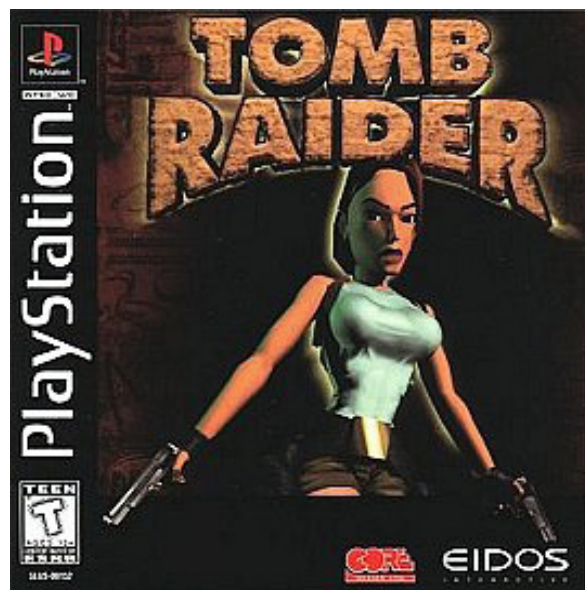


Illustration 14b

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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Illustration 14c

JAPANESE COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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European Cover

This original cover primarily shows two elements; archeology and Lara Croft. The latter is a polygon-smoothed edit of the actual model for the game. Lara clearly has certain characteristics that were supposed to attract male customers. Literally outstanding breasts and very short pants are only the most conspicuous features. Furthermore her eyes and lips are emphasized, and without a doubt gamers might have described Lara Croft as “the sexiest female game character” in 1996. In fact, when certain forums and communities make polls regarding that matter today, it is very unlikely that Ms. Croft wouldn’t be amongst the top rated avatars²⁴. It is obvious that this cover rather tried to brand the character instead of the title. The lettering “featuring LARA CROFT” at the bottom confirms that assumption.

The title on the other hand doesn’t stand out to much. While “Tomb” is textured like a stone nevertheless disappears in the background, “Raider” stands out, because it kind of shimmers in a golden color. However, I would not say that the accent lies on the activity of raiding rather than on the scenery of a tomb. I think the two words are equally emphasized and combined that way into a complete title. The background of this image shows some kind of Egypt hieroglyphics and therefore clearly makes use of the common association between archeology and Egypt.

When looking at the whole composition we cannot notice any actual content of the game besides the character, because the background is no in-game picture. The only things that draw attention aside to the avatar are the two weapons she is carrying. That not only transmits a certain portion of violence, by emphasizing the strong nature of Lara, but also a very important detail about

24 To show just one example: <http://www.japanforum.com/forum/japanese-video-games-toys/24607-most-sexy-female-game-characters.html> (01.07.09)

the actual Gameplay. In *Tomb Raider* the player could find several other weapons but ammunition was hidden very well, and therefore players would either have to search the environment very detailed, or rely on those two standard pistols, which were weaker but had infinite rounds.

American Cover

The American version shows basically the same as the original box art, but still there are some minor differences. Conjuging up the PAL cover and assuming that the disappearance of the word “Tomb” into the background indicated the character of exploration or rather the necessary aspect of discover the hidden, this American image doesn’t hesitate on emphasizing the two main element of this picture even stronger. – The text as well as the character glows in front of an almost black background. The fact that the way the title was written has changed, but still all the “important” parts of Lara can be seen, shows that the American has tried to combine the character with the title of the game to brand them together.

There is no “featuring LARA CROFT” text at this cover. Returning to the assumption that it was an intention of this games cover to transmit some kind of exploratory characteristic, this could have been achieved by the darkened background image, which reveals only a few hieroglyphics and creates curiosity.

The Japanese Cover

The Japanese box art varies completely from its predecessors. The most outstanding differences are that the title has been changed,

and the completely different pose of Lara Croft. Although the actual style of the title goes back to the original, it is most intriguing that Japanese cover speaks of more than one tomb raider. This could be because a transcription of the word “Raider” into Japanese would be done by using the syllable “ru”, and therefore lead to a rather strange result. Besides that, the word “Raiders” has already been transcribed and is well known to the Japanese audience because of the film *Indiana Jones: Raiders of the lost Arc*. The similarities between the contents of this film and the game *Tomb Raider* might also have played a certain role for this different title in Japan.

The second most obvious difference, regarding the main character and its depiction on this cover, leads to various other interpretations. Because Lara Croft is shown from the back the thought might occur that the Japanese audience prefers to observe the bottom of a woman rather than her breasts. – Speaking from personal experience when talking with my Japanese friends, I think that it actually is true to assume that most Japanese man prefer the bottom of woman over their breasts, maybe because in most cases the breast of Japanese woman are not that much developed compared with the breasts of American or European woman. And when we take a look at the school uniforms for girls, it also shows a very distinct emphasis of their bottom instead of their breasts – above all when the girls put their skirts way higher up than initially intended, just to follow a Japanese ideal of beauty. When it comes to assessing the heritage of the woman on this cover – again her name is unknown by just looking at it – a closer look shows that she is definitely not Japanese to the Japanese audience, because she has a braid. Braids like this one are very rare in Japan and definitely European or American the way it is braided. Although the braid became somewhat of a brand mark for Lara Croft, neither the European nor the American front cover

showed it. However, the pose used in the Japanese box art comes from the backside of the American package, more detailed it comes from a sequence of the actual game. The background of this cover tries, similar to the cover of the other regions, to show the archeological character of the game by displaying ancient walls with Egyptian drawings, but it also shows the actual item of interest – the Scion – at the end of a corridor in the center.

Worth mentioning is also the fact that the Japanese cover doesn't show the logo of Core Design, the developer of this game. Only the Japanese publisher Victor is present on the front cover.

6.4. GAMES OF 1997

Game Nr. 11

Original Title:	<i>Rockman X4</i>
Other Titles:	<i>Megaman X4</i>
Developer:	Capcom
Publisher:	Capcom (US, JP), Virgin Interactive (PAL)
Released:	1.8.1997 (JP), 9.10.1997 (US), 13.10.1997 (PAL)

The games titled *Megaman* – or *Rockman* as the Japanese people call it – go back a very long time. What started with a first part for the Nintendo Famicom (NES), continued to be a success throughout almost all platforms, and is by today almost uncountable in terms of sequels spin-offs. The original series consists of nine parts, plus eight additional parts for the X-series, about 25 games for mobile devices, and several television series. – Probably there are also several comics in Japan about *Rockman* (CHECK). In this case *Megaman X4* is mostly representative for the whole series and not the most successful part of it. It hasn't changed much from its predecessors and basically follows along the tradition of the X-series, with Sigma as main villain and the Maverick Hunters – advanced robots, including *Megaman* – to destroy him.

Illustration 15a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 15b

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
CDCOVER.CC



Illustration 15c

EUROPEAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

The Japanese cover with its unique anime-style shows some of the main characters of the plot. The main color of this composition is blue, the same as the color for Megaman. In the background we can see a gigantic image of General, Colonel and his daughter Iris to the right and Double on the left side. The center of the image shows Megaman and Zero, the two friends and leaders of the Maverick Hunters, fighting side by side. Zero appeared in several games of the X-series before, but in this part the player could choose between Megaman and Zero and therefore play them equally. – This cover clearly emphasizes that feature. When taking a closer look, we can see that Zero is actually laying his hand on Megaman's shoulder, as a symbol of their friendship, and that they both have a very serious expression on their faces.

The lettering is basically the same like in all the other parts of the X-series and therefore serves as the basic logo for Megaman. Actually Megaman used a font similar to this one and Megaman on the covers ever since.

American Cover

The American cover is designed very simple. The background is just a bright blue showing nothing at all. The title stayed the same as well, with the only difference that it has its own smaller background, which could also be seen in the game. What this image stands for cannot be answered so far, but given the fact that it has a certain technological character it either has something to do with the Hunters being modified and/or the evil Virus which is part of the story. From all the possible characters of the game –

including some evil bosses about 25 – the American cover shows only Megaman and Zero. Either Americans don't like too many anime-style characters, the designers of the box art wanted to keep certain elements as much as possible a secret, or the focus lies clearly on the friendship between Megaman and Zero. By noticing the glowing line around the two, this becomes more obvious.

European Cover

Besides the fact that it shows a little bit more of the overall image, this box art is the exact same as the American, and therefore needs not to be discuss any further.

Game Nr. 12

Original Title:	<i>Final Fantasy VII</i>
Other Titles:	-
Developer:	Squaresoft
Publisher:	Squaresoft (JP), SCE (US, PAL)
Released:	31.1.1997 (JP), 3.9.1997 (US), 17.11.1997 (PAL)

Final Fantasy is one of the most popular and influential RPG game series of all times. Including the most recent part the original series consists of 14 games. Aside to those there are several other games related to *Final Fantasy*, movies and other merchandise. By taking a guess, I would say that *Final Fantasy* has the biggest fan community of all RPG games ever. Although the series started over twenty years ago on the Famicom, it is undoubtedly thanks to this game, released on the PlayStation, that *Final Fantasy* has become so unbelievably famous all over the world. Actually none of the parts of the series (except part X and X-2) have a somehow intertwined story, but still they have several similarities which creates a very unique flair throughout them all. Because RPG games have a very deep and distinctive story element – most of them take an average of about 40 hours to complete – it is nearly impossible to depict all of it. A brief version might be something like this: Shinra, a ruthless company makes hold for nothing to drain the energy of the planet, in order to become mightier and richer day by day. And while the planet is losing its life and the citizens of Midgar (the biggest city of the world and seat of Shinra HQ) are already doomed to live a life in a two-tier society, a rebellious group launches attacks against the power reactors of Shinra. Cloud Strife, ex-soldier from a special unit of Shinra and hired as mercenary by this group, begins his journey to uncover his past and saves the world from the villain Sephiroth.

Illustration 16a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 16b

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
CDCOVER.CC



Illustration 16c

EUROPEAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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Japanese Cover

Since the Japanese release of part four, all the games of the series had a similar look in Japan and for the most cases also in America and Europe. They basically look all the same like this one; using the same font combined with a logo corresponding to each part, and a very simple design with most of the background just white. This is a very successful brand, and especially since the release of this PlayStation part it has become the brand mark for games of this series all over the world. The focus lies solely on the logo, with its unique design differing from part to part, underneath the same font. This font as well as the usage of roman letters to count the parts clearly transmits the characteristic of *Final Fantasy* games being epic games, with almost noble stories and historical dimensions.

The Japanese versions of *Final Fantasy* games always include the title transcribed in katakana. The logo of this cover is a simplification of a meteor, which is part of the story and symbolizes the end of the world in a matter of speaking.

American Cover

The American cover makes use of the same logo and keeps the background white too. However, about 75 percent of the image is filled with other contents. It shows Cloud – the protagonist – standing in front of the main building of the Shinra Corporation in located at the center of Midgar. While Cloud is colored yet saturated strangely, the building in the back is only inversed with very low contrast to melt it with the background. Cloud is shown with his main sword and seems almost ready to attack. The sword actually was that size, but the fact that it is shown

on the front cover leads to the thought that the American cover wants to transmit the association of an epic story hand in hand with the image of violence or maybe an element like action.

What is also very interesting is the detail that the American box art includes a smaller image of three discs with corresponding text at the bottom. Usually games with more than one disc had that written on the sidebar of the cover, as did this version. I am sure that the fact that this rather unusual detail is pointed out additionally on the front cover was a marketing strategy to point out that this game will take very long and demonstrates an epic story.

European Cover

The European version resembles strongly to the original cover, and the only difference is that the logo is sized so big that it fills the whole width. All the other covers of the Final Fantasy games released for the PlayStation (parts 7-9) had the exact same look, and have been branded very successfully due to this coherence. Although this cover looks – similar to the Japanese version – very simple, it still gives a lot of room for interpretation and looks very noble in my opinion. The changing logo behind the lettering has become such an important detail about games of this series, that they are designed and shown to the public before anything else regarding a new development by Square Enix (former Squaresoft).

Game Nr. 13

Original Title: 悪魔城ドラキュラX: 月下の夜想曲
[Akumajō Dorakyura X: Gekka no Yasōkyoku / Devil Castle Dracula: Nocturne of the Moonlight]

Other Titles: **Castlevania: Symphony of the night**

Developer: Konami

Publisher: Konami (JP, US, PAL)

Released: 20.3.1997 (JP), 2.10.1997 (US), 1.11.1997 (PAL)

Castlevania games tell European stories about vampires and demons. Castlevania games date back to the Famicom and therefore include a massive amount of games. Sometimes they are sequels or connected between each other, sometimes they are not. All of them deal about vampires – in most cases about Count Dracula himself – and brave heroes who are mostly members of ancient clans, sworn to kill them. Including this part of the series, all Castlevania games had a distinctive characteristic about their design and Gameplay; they have been 2D-Platformers with a strong accentuation on their graphics to create a very authentic atmosphere for the game. For the chagrin of the fan-community this has changed after *Symphony of the night*, and modern parts take all place in a three dimensional setting, where most of the special Castlevania-Flair gets lost. Newer games that still resemble the true original style of the game are released today too, but only on handheld platforms such as the PSP. The story of this part is not about Richter (the former protagonist, who has an appearance nevertheless) instead it is about Alucard – the son of Dracula – who has to balance the might between good and evil, now the “Castle of Eternal Night” or Castlevania has appeared again. Amongst others, with introducing certain RPG-elements to the game, it became the ideal for future games of the series.

Illustration 17a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 17b

AMERICAN COVER

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Illustration 17c

EUROPEAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

The original box art has a very detailed and almost artistic design. Although the artwork might have some characteristics similar to a casual anime-style drawing, it thus shows a special style of drawing known as 美少年 [Bishōnen / Beautiful youngster]. This form of art depicts young boys and kind of emphasizes their feminine aspects rather than their masculinity. However, in terms of details this cover is outstanding beyond the usual degree. This is undoubtedly because of the nature of this game, taking place in the Transylvania of the 18th Century. The picture shows a candleholder which one would image it standing in Dracula's living room as well as other decorative items. While the main character Alucard wears clothing which looks like a typical baroque outfit and holds his sword like a knight full of honor, he also holds a Christian cross in his left hand. In the background we can finally see the ultimate symbol for Count Dracula's might, his castle. And while bats fly around this castle of evil and madness the moon wraps it in twilight of mystery and fascination. What is also very fascinating about this cover is the fact that – similar to *Bio Hazard* – the game was categorized at the bottom; this time as an Action game. Personally I wouldn't describe it that way, but it is possible. I think this comes because *Symphony of the night* was the first the first – and only – part for the PlayStation and therefore had to stand out. True Action games have always been rare and became replaced by Shooters slowly but sure, yet a very high percentage of gamers specify this true genre to be the one they like most. The title of this game goes basically hand in hand with the tradition of the series, the only thing that could be confusing is the roman "X" stands for "10", but this game

actually was the 13th part of the series²⁵. My guess is that the X was used on purpose to make clear that this game is a sequel to *Rondo of Blood* –the real number ten. One more thing that is very important regarding the title of this cover is that it makes no effort at all to stand out from the background. – It seems more as if the title was intentionally written and placed that way, so that the eye can concentrate on the artwork instead.

American Cover

The American cover dissociates itself once again from the original and instead shows a more or less realist depiction of a castle. Though the castle has certain characteristics that make it look like the Bran Castle (the castle where the myth about Count Dracula originated in Bulgaria) it could really have had any arbitrary castle as guide. Still, the castle does have some mystic properties, especially since lightning creates such a distinctive atmosphere. There is a moon in the background but it is also far more realistic than the one in the Japanese artwork. In this cover the title is the most obvious thing to notice, and while the subtitle is written in a font especially characteristic for something related to the 17th or 18th Century, the main title “Castlevania” uses the same, already branded, and therefore recognizable font which all Castlevania parts released in Europe or America used ever since.

Given the fact that the whole cover has changed into this, and got rid of the very artistic Japanese style completely,

25 In this case, the game actually is a sequel to 悪魔城ドラキュラX: 血の輪廻 [Akumajō Dorakyura X: Chi no rinne / Devil Castle Dracula X: Reincarnation of Blood] released for PC-Engine only in 1993. The kanji for “rinne” have been written with the katakana “ロンド” to force an alternate reading of “Rondo”, which also symbolizes reincarnation in a way.

it almost seems that Konami was worried about selling a game with a bishōnen artwork on its cover in 1997. As a matter of fact, Castlevania games are today very popular because of their bishōnen cover design, and have been sold with such successfully since the year 2000.

European Cover

The European box art is almost the same as the original. Yet, there is no declaration about the games genre, and with it the overall golden shimmer that has been added to the Japanese version disappeared also. The only thing that is different is of course the title, designed here by the “standard” logo or rather font for Europe.

Most interesting is the detail that a potential European buyer wouldn't be able to see the cross Alucard is holding until a thorough examination. Was the symbol of Christianity concealed on purpose, because this game deals with something that is rather unholy than holy, or was it just a coincidence?

Game Nr. 14

Original Title:	<i>Soul Edge</i>
Other Titles:	<i>Soul Blade</i>
Developer:	Namco
Publisher:	Namco (JP), Namco (US), SCE (PAL)
Released:	20.12.1996 (JP), 1.1.1997 (US), 1.5.1997 (PAL)

Soul Edge was another very popular 3D fighting game, which originated 1996 as an Arcade version in Japan. The game was edited and in the same year a port for the PlayStation was released in Japan. What makes this game different from other 3D fighting games is that the characters used weapons to fight. Being one of very few games featuring this opportunity, *Soul Edge* had another advantage: Characters didn't use of only one weapon, in fact they could use up to ten different weapons, created for each avatar and retrievable during a certain game mode called "Edge Master Mode". The games story takes place in the 16th century and revolves around a mysterious yet cursed sword, which gives its bearer ultimate power. Many warriors from all over the world seek this sword, some to use it, others to destroy it.

Illustration 18a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 18b

AMERICAN COVER

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Illustration 18c

EUROPEAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

The Japanese box art goes along with the tradition of fighting games, showing the characters of the game. All the characters – except the secret, but unlock-able ones – are present on the cover. The most outstanding character in this image is Mitsurugi, a Japanese Samurai. Not only, that it could be seen as logical, to depict a Japanese character on a cover for a Japanese game, to reach the audience there, personally I always had the impression that Mitsurugi was kind of the main character of the game. Of course, given the games nature of a fighting game, one could think that the story elements are equally shared amongst the avatars, but similar to the story of the *Tekken*, it seems that *Soul Calibur* – that's what all sequels and later parts of the series have been called – has a concrete storyline throughout the series.

Assuming that Mitsurugi is the main character, it would explain certain parts of the story, which deal about an early Japan and the problematic of guns against Samurai swords. Mitsurugi initially takes of the find the Soul Edge in order to defeat a person called Tanegashima, but when he finds the swords (Soul Edge appears to inherit another form depending on its bearer) he destroys them and faces him only with his own strength. The island of Tanegashima (種子島) is the place where Japan made contact with Europe and started trading in the 16th century, and it is also worth mentioning that the main villain of this game initially bearing the Soul Edge – Cervantes – is a Portuguese. – Obviously the game has a strong historical influence, and the cover might have expressed this.

American Cover

The American cover is similar to the original Japanese one, except for the most obvious detail that the title was changed and provides a picture of Soul Edge in its twin-sword form, completing the lettering to a kind of overall logo. The title was changed because there have been a dispute regarding the title as a trademark between Namco and Edge Games. Although the official ruling was in favor of Namco, the game was still called *Soul Blade* in America, Europe and Australia²⁶.

What is most interesting is the fact that the Japanese cover used a strategy so far seen only in American covers – the character Mitsurugi stands in front of the two white stripes of the background. This time, he does not emerge into the foreground at the American image.

European Cover

The European cover has the same title and logo as the American version, but the background is completely different. Though we can see some of the characters, we can't see all of them. – There are three characters missing: Seong Mina, Mitsurugi and Cervantes. So, why would this cover not show the villain or the main hero – at least as I believe Mitsurugi to be? I think the answer lies in the fact that by this time there were so many fighting games available, that it became necessary for them to differ from the competition not only in terms of Gameplay and characters, but also in the way the cover is designed. *Soul*

²⁶ Please refer to http://www.ipo.gov.uk/tm/t-decisionmaking/t-challenge/t-challenge-decision-results/t-challenge-decision-results-bl?BL_Number=O/337/02 (01.07.09)

Blade clearly was the outsider, and it had to compete against titles like *Tekken*, *Street Fighter*, and so on, therefore it had to attract potential buyers in a different way. Showing just another Samurai-looking character holding a sword at the package art wouldn't have accomplished that goal. Still, why some characters are not showing up at all in this image might simply have been a design issue, instead of an intended depriving.

What this cover shows above all is another character called Voldo. Actually Voldo's heritage is Italy, but still he is the most ugly and freaky character in this game. He even might still be placed under a top ten list of most ugly video game characters of all times. Again, I can hardly comprehend why the European cover shows this SM-fetish freaky character in any other way than explained above.

Game Nr. 15

Original Title:	<i>Gran Turismo: The real driving simulator</i>
Other Titles:	<i>Gran Turismo</i>
Developer:	Polyphony Digital
Publisher:	Polyphony Digital (JP), SCE (US, PAL)
Released:	30.12.1997 (JP), 30.4.1997 (US), 1.05.1997 (PAL)

Gran Turismo, or simply "GT" as the gamers like to call it, was the most successful PlayStation game in terms of revenues. – As mentioned before, until today *Gran Turismo* sold about 10.85 million copies. *Gran Turismo* was a driving game, but more precisely it was a driving simulation with a distinct focus on reality in terms of cars, physics, tuning, etc. Before a player could actually start to drive in several leagues with the main goal to obtain money, which then could be used to purchase other cars and/or tune the ones already in possession, he had to pass a test to earn a driving license. On one side reality was a very big issue for the developers, but on the other side none of the GT parts until today did ever include the possibility for cars to become damaged. – There are rumors that the car manufacturers which allowed their cars to be put into the game had a problem with that (SOURCE).

Illustration 19a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 19b

AMERICAN COVER

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Illustration 19c

EUROPEAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

The original cover depicts exactly what is most important for *Gran Turismo*: Realism. The fact that this alone makes the cover different to most of the other Japanese covers, results in the logic consequence that there is almost no need to depict anything else. Of course, the image is still edited with the computer, putting the whole image in a rather strange light condition, which looks familiar to a photography taken on mars.

The one thing that is most intriguing about this composition is the logo. It is a very flawless designed logo, so to speak, and brands the whole title into the blue and red²⁷ letters “GT”, while showing the actual title in italic, and a subtitle at the same time. There is absolutely no misunderstanding about this game, and when read the subtitle everybody should know what this game is about. – The fascinating thing is, that when it comes to cars, the potential Japanese consumers of this product, obviously doesn’t have to be informed with a katakana transcription of the English text.

American Cover

As expected, the American cover also uses realism to promote this game, but while the guidelines for the two images seem similar, it is different from the original version. The background shows also a realistic sky, but this sky seems to be much broader than the Japanese one. The sky here is also edited afterwards and puts the image also under a rather strange

²⁷ Blue and red are colors which can be associated in many ways. Those colors actually don’t get along very well, but because of their contradictory aspect they are often used in logos, and with a good design, the result can be very strong – as we can see at this image.

condition. The fact that the sky looks dark and surreal to such an extent makes the actual point of interest – the car – much more salient. Although we cannot see a car at all, the satin cloth with the high contrast to the background lets the viewer undoubtedly know that there is a car underneath it. Realism comes through in this image, not by an actual photo of a car, but by this artistic way of showing only the silhouette with a cloth, that moves “realistically” in the wind.

What is also very interesting is the detail, that the black bar at the bottom of the American package has been used as a ground for the car to sit on. Furthermore the package explicitly shows the buyer that it contains only one disc. This is a very rare thing, and similar to the American cover of Final Fantasy VII it had to have a purpose here. In this case the focus lies clearly on the fact that “so much realism is all at one single disc” instead of “this game is so epic that it requires three discs”, and therefore makes the game look like a technological miracle.

The American cover also does not use the subtitle, explaining that this game is a real driving simulator, and has also altered the logo so that it fits without it. That leads to the conclusion that because of the explicit depiction of the logo combined with the name of the game, there must have been a stronger intention of branding it.

European Cover

Although the European cover is different from the original and the American version, the focus on realism stayed the same. Instead of a photo of a car the image shows a photo of a tire, and this could be seen analog to the analysis of the cover from *Soul Blade*. By

this time there where so many racing or rather car games on the market, and all of those cover basically showed cars on their front package art, another approach to that theme would have been most natural. The tire not only seems very realistic, it also transmits a certain aspect of technology due to the fine structures of its tread.

The logo and text used is the same as the original cover showed, but the size of the logo is the biggest of all three versions. It should also be noted, that logo is complete as for the fact that it shows the subtitle too. The logo is emphasized the most in the European version, if we take a look at the Japanese cover, now that we have seen the European one, we can clearly see the difference. And even though the logo was depicted very explicitly in the American box art – it even was designed to inherit the third dimension – it still is emphasized the strongest in the European version.

6.5. GAMES OF 1998

Game Nr. 16

Original Title:	<i>Grand Theft Auto</i>
Other Titles:	-
Developer:	Rockstar Games
Publisher:	BMG (PAL), Take Two (US), Syscom Entertainment (JP)
Released:	1.12.1997 (PAL), 30.6.1998 (US), 27.8.1998 (JP)

Grand Theft Auto is a game from Scotland, and was developed by Dave Jones, the creator of the famous game *Lemmings*. This first part of the series might not have been very successful, but given the success of the series since *GTA III* on the PlayStation2 as well as the most recent part IV for PlayStation3 and Xbox360, it is most likely that the popularity had to start somewhere. *GTA* is today one of the most controversial video games and famous for its violent contents with nearly boundless opportunities that players have to express familiar urges. Unlike it seems to be played very often by the gamers, it does actually have a plot; the player finds himself in an enormous environment (mostly cities) and has to work for several gangsters and underground groups in order to get money. The players have to deliver things like drugs and collect the money, transport or assassinate people, etc. and therefore to avoid the police. If something goes wrong the police will chase the player and try to arrest him. During such exciting and enduring chases, the player is forced to steal several cars or motorbikes – that's why this game is called *Grand Theft Auto*. However, as mentioned before, most players were and still are fascinated by the sheer endless possibilities that games of this series offer. Gigantic cities, a rich repertoire of weapons, lots of different cars and bikes to drive with, and almost no rules what so ever.

Illustration 20a

EUROPEAN COVER

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Illustration 20b

AMERICAN COVER

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Illustration 20c

JAPANESE COVER

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European Cover

The original cover of this game doesn't really show as much violence as expected. The only thing that indicates the criminal character of this game is a police car obviously in action. The picture showed on this cover is definitely real and only the police car seems to be added artificially. The image shows a common city the looks of New York, and what is most interesting is that a kind of fish-eye perspective has been used. This was clearly intended in order to strengthen to already present feeling of being just one little element of a gigantic environment.

The title is written in a way that makes it into a logo for this series, and although the lettering or rather logo which is used today is a little bit different, one can understand its heritage for sure, when looking at this cover. The title shows flames coming out of the word "Theft" and clearly stands for the image of smoking wheels when stealing a car and driving away from the police. This gives the whole text some kind of movement together with the cars shown in the picture. The stars could indicate a certain detail from the game; stars represented how strong the player is wanted by the police according to his actions. – Three stars would already be pretty fatal for the player, by the way.

American Cover

The American box art uses the original images and logo, but we can see that the picture uses much more of its initial left and right imagery. So while the police car becomes centered and depicts the criminal aspect of the game in a stronger way, the city in the background appears to be much more abundant.

Japanese Cover

The Japanese cover clearly marches to a different drummer this time. Not only that it uses a completely different logo and background, violence and crime is a considerable focal point. Most of the image is black, and the background shows resemblance to a city at night – although this game was played only at daylight. The logo consists only of the three letters “GTA”, which – surprisingly or not – became the common abbreviation regarding the games of this series, a subtitle, a negative image of the statue of liberty and lots of blood. The letter “G” also embeds a distinctive pattern which resembles the treads of a tire. The original box art used in Europe and America could have been fairly misunderstood in Japan, because the only signs for crime in those images were expressed by a rather small police car and the word “theft”. This word might have been an English word hardly used within the anyway barely English-using Japanese society, and therefore I suggest there was a great urge to depict the criminal character stronger. Still, to associate crime, violence and blood with the Statue of Liberty kind of amuses me, and might represent a Japanese stereotype for America in a way.

What is also worth mentioning is the detail, that again there is no transcription in katakana. In this case that could have been intentionally to further strengthen a certain American characteristic, but as we will see at the following box arts, it could also have been the case that Japanese box arts have almost passed on using transcriptions at all.

Game Nr. 17

Original Title: ***Armored Core***
 Other Titles: -
 Developer: From Software
 Publisher: From Software (JP), SCE (US, PAL)
 Released: 1.7.1998 (JP), 1.7.1998 (US), 31.10.1998 (PAL)

Armored Core is a game that originated – of course – in the country where about 75% of the population knows and/or loves Gundam: Japan. Japanese really have a distinct affection towards human-piloted giant robots, and that is also basically what this game series is about. Although not all parts have been released in all three regions, the whole series consists of about 22 games (including games for mobile phones). The story of the game takes place in a not too distant future, where most of earth's population has been wiped out due to a big war, and only two corporations fight over dominance with big robots called ACs. However, the player will not join either of those two, but instead pilot for one of few smaller third-party groups called Raven. What made this game special was the opportunity for the player to earn money for completing missions and then customize his AC robot with a gigantic arsenal of weapons, body parts and other modifiers.

Illustration 21a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 21b

AMERICAN COVER

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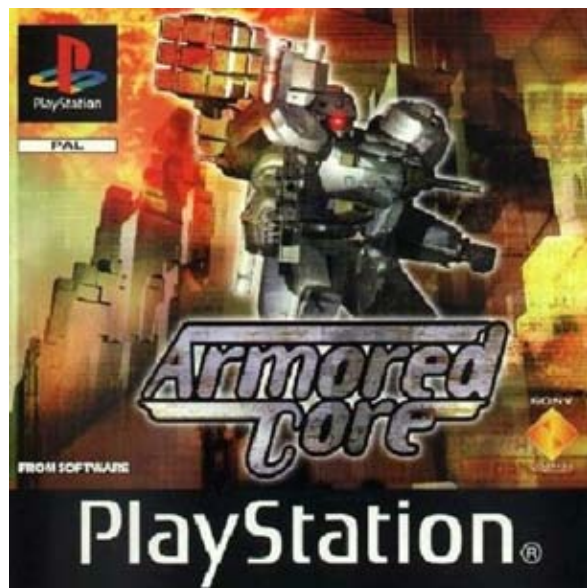


Illustration 21c

EUROPEAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

The original cover for this game has only two elements: The robot in its initial state and the title. The robot consumes the whole background – which is pretty logical regarding the fact that Japanese are fascinated by robots in an extended manner – and is shown as a negative image with saturated into the green spectrum instead of the black. It also shows a motion blur and therefore makes the impression that the robot is dashing backwards while aiming at the viewer. Because robots are very popular in Japan it could have been intentionally colored that way, so that it differs from the anyway big competition in this area.

The title is written in golden three-dimensional letters where the two Os are connected and kind of resemble two gears. The title was used in that way only in the Japanese versions of the first games released on the PlayStation and changed afterwards almost from every game to the next. Therefore it seems the there was no intention of branding the name together with the title in form of a distinctive logo.

American Cover

The American cover shows the same robot – obviously a render from a smoothed model of the games main robot – but abdicates the simplistic negative image and prefers the more realistic version. The background is a pretty simple illuminating blue dust cloud that seems to have no special purpose except for decorating the background.

The title has changed in terms of design and still looks like a logo, but basically it wasn't used any other times regarding the

sequels of this game – like the Japanese version. From the looks of it, it could be a metallic material with scratches on its surface to fit into the games characteristic attribute of futuristic robots.

European Cover

The European box art uses the same robot in the exact same pose but displays it in a smaller size and as a realistic version. What is interesting about this robot is that it has a missile pack attached to its shoulder like the Japanese original did. – That element was missing at the American cover. The background consists of a multilayered image that shows some buildings, flames and technological data that almost resembles a menu screen on the right side.

This picture clearly tries to get out as much as possible and creates an atmosphere appropriate for this kind of game. It almost seems as if only a robot would not have been enough to reach a European audience. The title is the same as shown at the American cover except for the fact that it is textured differently and outlined black to accentuate it from the background.

Game Nr. 18

Original Title:	<i>Diablo</i>
Other Titles:	-
Developer:	Blizzard
Publisher:	Electronic Arts (PAL, US, JP)
Released:	1.4.1998 (PAL), 1.5.1998 (US), 9.7.1998 (JP)

The PlayStation version of this game was not the original, but an adapted port from the PC game of 1996. *Diablo* is actually not present in this list because it was one of the most successful PlayStation games, but because it was one of the most influential and important games of all times. Although there were several games before *Diablo*, it still is *Diablo* that is today known to be the father of all modern Action-RPG and Multi-User Dungeon games. Though there were many other games that have been more successful on the PlayStation than *Diablo* – in fact many gamers must have been annoyed by the *Diablo* version for the PlayStation because it took a total of 10 blocks from a 15 blocks Memory Card to save the game – I still couldn't deny the connection of this genre-creating game and the games (MMORPGs) that are played so eagerly nowadays. *Diablo* creates a very unique atmosphere and puts the player into the role of saving the world in the very old battle between good and evil. *Diablo*, one of the three prime evils has freed himself from the Soulstone old heraldic managed to capture him, and while his evil minions terrorize a town called Tristram, he waits deep down in the catacombs beneath an old church for the hero to face him. *Diablo* was created by Blizzard North in California, and had all the features a modern game from the same genre has: Character- and weapon classes, tons of items, player stats and leveling, magic, and – amongst others – of course networking capabilities. Eventually it inspired games like *Dungeon Siege*, *Titan Quest*, *Baldur's Gate*, *World of Warcraft* and many more.

Illustration 22a

EUROPEAN COVER

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Illustration 22b

AMERICAN COVER

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Illustration 22c

JAPANESE COVER

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European Cover

Although the game was released first in Europe, it originated in America. I think the PC version was so successful in America that it was better for Blizzard to release this port in Europe first. The very simplistic cover shows Diablo – the enemy of the game – and nothing else besides the title. The depiction of Diablo fits pretty much to the standard image of the devil. For Christianity and some other religions the opposite to god, and therefore the manifestation of the worst is the devil. And basically there are several names that have been given to this evil entity. Just list a few, there is Devil, Satan, Beelzebub, Lucifer, and of course Diabolo²⁸, which was obviously the foundation for the name of this game's incarnation of evil.

Like I mentioned before this image goes along with all the common associations of the devil in a natural form; we have sharp teeth, is muscular, ugly, has many horns coming out of his body, and above all his skin color is red, while he is constantly in a bad mood, so to speak. Red is danger, and therefore only one small step away from evil – which is a very common association. The title is written in a very characteristic way, with all the letters capitalized and burning, and the first and the last letter enlarged. – This lettering has become the logo and main brand of this game series.

American Cover

The American cover is almost the exact same as the European cover, only one detail is different regarding the image:

28 The word comes from the Greek “Diabolos” which means “slanderer”.

It shows a little bit more of Diablo. Another interesting detail is that it not only emphasizes that this is the PlayStation Edition, but also the option to play the game together with another player.

Japanese Cover

The Japanese cover shows an image that looks almost exactly like the actual cover for the PC version of the game. The only difference is that in this image there is much more color and flames than in the original. It basically shows Diablo all the same, but this time only his head and it is drawn, instead of rendered by the computer. The same image, except for the flames was used during some loading screens of the game.

I think it would be pointless to discuss whatever cover had the more frightening version of Diablo displayed, but one thing could have caused this result for the cover designed for a Japanese audience: Given the fact that Japanese gamers are not and never have been playing PC games on a scale comparable to Europe or America, they might have not known about Diablo, and therefore they could have misinterpreted a rendered model on the cover as the main character to play instead of the villain to beat. – Taking under consideration the great variety of different games that are released in Japan only, it also becomes more likely that such a detail could have led to confusion.

Game Nr. 19

Original Title: ***Metal Gear Solid***
 Other Titles: -
 Developer: Konami
 Publisher: Konami (JP, US, PAL)
 Released: 3.9.1998 (JP), 21.10.1998 (US), 6.11.1998 (PAL)

Created by Hideo Kojima this game commonly also known as *MGS* or simply *Metal Gear* was soon to become one of the most successful games for the PlayStation and its developer Konami. *Metal Gear Solid 4* is today the most successful game for the PS3 (SOURCE) and everything thanks to this first part, that not only revived and probably created the genre called "Stealth Action" but also got everything out of the PlayStation. There was no other game that could overtrump *Metal Gear* anymore, because the limits of the PlayStation have been reached and surpassed by far. The story is about a special agent named Solid Snake who is sent out to an isolated island called "Shadow Moses" in order to prevent terrorists from launching nuclear missiles from a gigantic robot call Metal Gear Rex. Solid Snake's actual first appearance goes back a long time to the year 1987 and the Famicom – more precisely to the MSX2 computers. The most fascinating thing about *Metal Gear Solid* was undoubtedly its strong connection to the reality of war. Although there is a very distinct resemblance to the famous movie *Rambo*, on the other hand there is not, because unlike Rambo, Snake had to try to avoid enemy encounters for the most parts of the game. – This is what makes the flair of *MGS* and describes the genre of Stealth Action games.

Illustration 23a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 23b

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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Illustration 23c

EUROPEAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

Metal Gear Solid was sold out in Japan very fast, and therefore this game has been released with two package designs (not including any special edition). For this research I will only take a look at the original first cover from September 3rd of 1998. This cover seems to have the same intention or rather motto as the covers of the Final Fantasy series: Keep it simple, by all means noble, and brand the title with a unique font using as much space as possible. If that was the intention, it clearly succeeded. The fact that the title is written upside-down confuses me a little bit, but if done otherwise the resemblance to the Final Fantasy cover might have been too obvious and maybe even actionable. The title really seems to have its main focus on “Metal Gear” and “Solid” kind of looks like a possible subtitle. The following sequels of this game all use the whole text “Metal Gear Solid” as title and added another “real” subtitle. The intention by writing this title this way could have been to show a certain connection to the old game called “Metal Gear” on the NES and therefore to attract gamers from those days as well. Besides the title we can also see “Action” written in the field at the bottom, which describes the genre of the game.

Actually *MGS* was categorized as Action Game, but when other similar games have been released and used the description “Stealth Action”²⁹ it became clear and common practice to refer to games of the *MGS* series also as such. – In fact both specifications are used depending on the experience with video games of the person who talks about it.

American Cover

The American cover uses the same logo as the original version with nothing in addition. The only thing that has been altered – except

²⁹ The first real Stealth Action game might have been *Castle Wolfenstein* for the Apple II, but the genre became instantiated and famous only with the release of *Metal Gear*.

for the fact that the title is not aligned properly – is the color, or rather the surface of the text. Obviously to make the game appear even more rare and noble, the American cover's text consisted of another, a shiny red material than the rest of the package.

Metal Gear Solid had two discs, and it seems to be of no importance to explicitly put this detail on the front cover this time. A possible reason could be, that it might have ruined the whole luxurious appearance of the design.

European Cover

The European cover is completely different from all the other covers before. – Well, not completely different when we take under consideration, that the first edition of the Japanese version was already sold out when this game hit the stores in Europe, and from that moment on the Japanese cover also looked different (PROOF). This cover shows the same text or rather logo than before – by the way, this text is also displayed at the title screen of the game – but it is simple colored in an alerting red color. Aside to the text this image has a strong accent on the character of Solid Snake and displayed his fierce looking and chiseled face almost all over the background. Seeing the actual face of the character changes the whole statement of this cover enormously. This cover actually shows the excitement and danger of being a special agent who has to avoid being spotted by enemies while sneaking through a military base. The red light that seems to be reflected by him almost looks like as if he accidentally triggered an alarm and is very tense at the moment. All this associations derive mainly from the use of the red color.

Game Nr. 20

Original Title: ***Breath of Fire III***
 Other Titles: -
 Developer: Capcom
 Publisher: Capcom (JP, US, PAL)
 Released: 11.9.1997 (JP), 30.4.1998 (US), 1.10.1998 (PAL)

Breath of Fire III is an RPG game from the famous and popular – by now five parts comprehending – Breath of Fire series, which started with the first part on the Super Nintendo in 1993. The first part actually was the first try of Capcom (back then mostly renowned for *Street Fighter* and today for *Resident Evil* games) to get a hold in the RPG genre as well. The game is a role-playing game in its classic definition. However several features made this game outstanding to other games from the same genre: First the use of real three dimensional environments – yet depicted with a restricted isometric perspective – a strong tendency towards anime-styled characters, and above all the colors of the game. In fact only few other RPG games dared to use such colorful imagery like *Breath of Fire III*. The story is about Ryu a boy who doesn't know about his past and is able to transform into all sorts of dragons and his friends, who help him to reveal his past and save the world, of course. Similar to games of the Final Fantasy series, *Breath of Fire III* is also very famous amongst the RPG community because of its outstanding and unique jazz-like soundtrack.

Illustration 24a

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 24b

AMERICAN COVER

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Illustration 24c

EUROPEAN COVER

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Japanese Cover

The original cover is – almost as expected – a composition showing anime characters. As mentioned above, one of the characteristics of this RPG game was the explicit depiction of all the characters with the typical minimalistic, Japanese anime style. – The cover shows several, but not all. All of the four depicted avatars good and eventually become party members³⁰. We can see Ryu with his characteristic blue hairs, Nina (the girl with the wings) – by the way, the two main characters of this game, as well as Rei (some kind of werewolf-tiger) and Garr (a very strong Dragon-like creature). For the most cases Japanese RPG game avatars are very balanced not only, to master the game with any individual selection, but also to give the players as much diversity as possible. My theory for showing those four characters is that the cover tries to show that diversity. The main characters (courage and magic) had to be shown by all cost, and not showing a female character on a box art – if there is such an avatar in the game – would in any event be unthinkable in Japan. But the two of them are supplemented by both a fighter and a trickster, and therefore completed with the elements of strength and speed. All in all a very solid party for a standard RPG game.

The background shows a section of a very wide and beautiful land together with a great open sea. This image discloses a very interesting combination between collapsed or rather ancient ruins (past), and a technological building that looks almost like a space station (future), while nature is emphasized strongly. This image reveals a lot about the actual game's contents and story, and is for sure explicitly design

³⁰ In RPG-terms, a “party” is the sum of all playable characters. An “active party” consists of the selected avatars that will fight, should an enemy appear.

for a community that likes that rather stereotypical image of an RPG. At the bottom left corner we can also see the title which could easily be overlooked in this colorful composition.

The title, that is conceived like an overall logo is constructed upon the roman “III”, which suggests that this is the third part of the series, but also gives the title a very epic and historical undertone, similar to the games of the Final Fantasy series. However, while the numbering stayed the same, no other title of the series used the same logo again. What is intriguing about this cover is that this time the title has been transcribed and written in katakana. – I am very curious about the end result, because so far it looks rather random when this is the case or not. I just wonder why a game with a rather rare and difficult title like “Grand Theft Auto” wasn’t transcribed in order to get a more or less correct pronunciation out of the Japanese, but yet a title like “Breath of Fire” – consisting of three words that for sure every Japanese person knows and can pronounce – is written in katakana. Agreed, the pronunciation resulting from “Buresu ob faiya” is also everything but correct, so why would there be such an emphasis in this special title? The most logical answer is: Because it is an RPG game and would also be played by younger Japanese gamers. Again we can also see the categorization of the game at the bottom of the cover.

American Cover

The American cover shows a completely different arrangement. It distances itself from the colorful and very Japanese version with its anime-style, and again shows photo-realism by making the cover black and putting a more or less realistic flame on about 75 percent of it. The flame almost seems to either come out of a

sword, or to head towards the sword and therefore towards the viewer. The sword also emits some lights that could indicate some kind of a magic spell, which again could either cause the flames or is intended to protect from them. What makes that sword interesting is the fact that it is black, and therefore wouldn't be visible without the flames in the background, that it is obviously pretty short and strongly resembles the weapon that the main character Ryu uses during the first part of the game when he is a child, and that it is aligned at the center, which emphasizes its importance. The title of the game is written in a simple font and on the first glance wouldn't appear to be some kind of logo. However it was branded that way, and the same font is used in most of the sequels and other editions of this games series released in all three regions (CHECK). Taking a closer look at the text we can see that the word "of" has a smaller size the other words, which makes "Breath", "Fire" and "III" much more outstanding. In fact the "III" is written depicted with the biggest size, which could be interpreted in many ways. And while the viewer still wouldn't have known anything about the game – assuming he or she didn't know the predecessors – he or she might have taken notice about the additional text that is written underneath the "III": "The classic role playing game". – Not just "a" classic RPG it is "the" classic RPG! Using the definite article further emphasizes that this game is some kind of general example and could represent games from the same genre, like some sort of template. The font that was used for this text seems very similar to the font that was used in *Diablo*, and further underlines this "classical"-character of the game.

European Cover

The European cover uses the logo from the original but, besides that there are no outstanding similarities whatsoever with the covers from the other regions. The picture is split into two parts, and therefore maybe tries to emphasize the connection between nature and technology. The ring that appears to be integrated into a metal surface has actually nothing to do with the game, and must be some decoration only. When we take a good look at the background behind the girl, we can see that it actually contains the original background, but it is only barely visible. The focus of this cover clearly lies on the girl with the burning feet. – I really have no idea whether her feet are really burning or not, the image itself so strange, it makes it almost impossible to tell. In fact, first I didn't even realize that this girl is a character of the game – Nina! This game had absolutely nothing to do with 3D models and therefore it makes we wonder why there was a 3D-Nina depicted on the front cover! Not only that this cover had been deprived of almost any characteristic that the Japanese original had, by adding a 3D Nina the cover has become even more estranged than the American version and what was left is a cover that has hardly any of the characteristics that appeal to an average RPG gamer. In fact *Breath of Fire III* shows the least sales rates in Europe and its reputation only grew very slowly, but has still managed to become one of the most famous RPGs of all times – especially due to its distinctive Japanese characteristics – with the beginning of the new millennia and the rise of Japan's popular culture thanks to Pokemon & Co.

6.6. GAMES OF 1999

Game Nr. 21

Original Title: ***Street Fighter EX2 Plus***
 Other Titles: -
 Developer: Capcom
 Publisher: Capcom (PAL), Arika and Capcom (JP), Capcom (US)
 Released: 4.1.1999 (PAL), 22.12.1999 (JP), 30.12.1999 (US)

Street Fighter games are very popular throughout the whole world. The first *Street Fighter* was released in 1987 and played in Japanese arcades. However, the series became so popular that it was soon ported for many different platforms, while constantly spawning new titles. Today *Street Fighter* accounts for nine series with an average of three titles each. Furthermore, there are films, comics, card games and other merchandise. What makes *Street Fighter* outstanding to its competitors is not only its distinctive two dimensional graphic (based on Japanese anime drawings), but also a very coherent Gameplay and character cast. Although the story became kind of more complex as the parts progressed, it is basically about fighters from all over the world who attend on a Fighting Competition. Similar to other fighting games like *Tekken* all characters have their own background and story, but it is clear that the general story is about the Japanese fighter Ryu, and his comrade – yet also rival or rather archenemy – Ken (who is an American). This game here is part of the EX series which was developed from Capcom and a company called Arika as the first part using the third dimension. Actually this part – as is the whole EX series – was not the most successful *Street Fighter*. Again, this game is representative for the success and popularity of all the *Street Fighter* games.

Illustration 25a

EUROPEAN COVER

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Illustration 25b

JAPANESE COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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Illustration 25c

AMERICAN COVER

PROVIDED BY:
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European Cover

The first thing that comes to my mind, when taking a look at this cover has actually nothing to do with it. – It is the fact that this game was first released in Europe before somewhere else. It's *Street Fighter*! The Japanese love *Street Fighter* maybe even more than *Tekken*. Why would it be released in Europe almost half a year before it was released in Japan? – I cannot answer that question just yet, but I will take a look at this issue while completing this research. I guess we would have to take under consideration that in Japan about 50 percent of the whole video game industry takes place in arcades and that the same game was released for coin operated machines already in 1998.

The cover shows basically the original (Japanese) artwork for the game. The depicted characters consist of Ryu standing next to Sagat, Vulcano Rosso and Bison in the back, and we can also see parts of Area (behind the title) and Darun Mister carrying Pullum Purna to the left. What is interesting is that there is no image of Ken as well as the fact that four of those seven characters are not original characters of the main *Street Fighter* series. In fact the EX series of *Street Fighter* was special in the way that it was a joint project between Capcom (featuring the original cast) and Arika featuring a lot of other characters – amongst others, the depicted ones: Vulcano, Area, Darun and Pullum. What is most intriguing about this image is the detail, that there are several characters not visible, either due to bad design or on purpose. I cannot come up with any special and above all reasonable assumption (for example that there are only men on the cover the way it is now, etc.), so I think it was just a simple design issue that led to that result. The main focus lies clearly on a battle between Ryu and Sagat, which however is

not really point of the main story, but still Sagat was the final boss of earlier parts, and is known to all real Street Fighter fans.

The title that we can see uses a font and style that is typical for games of this series, and was already branded successfully years before this part.

Japanese Cover

The Japanese original is – as mentioned before – basically the same as the European cover, but we can clearly see that the characters are much more emphasized. In terms of design, this box art is naturally the better one, because it doesn't conceal any of the contents. In other words, while the “unnecessary” big body of Sagat is used to display the title, we have unlimited view on all the other elements (in this case characters) of the game. I think it really is nearly impossible that a female character could be accidentally overlayed by another item within a Japanese box art.

What is also interesting about this cover is that in Japan there was obviously the intention to put the name of the company Arika on to the cover as well. Because it is a Japanese company and the founder of Arika was the actual designer of the Street Fighter characters for the first parts, many Japanese might have known that name. Therefore this probably would have been a nice additional advertisement and encouraged people to buy this game. Furthermore we can see the category, which only states “V.S. Fighting”. – This is actually a very rare denotation, and although it doesn't fit very much in my opinion, it might have fulfilled a certain purpose. Still I can't stop wondering why it was described as something like “3D Fighting”, because this part was 3D after all. We can also see that the title was written in katakana

as well, and in fact most of the common *Street Fighter* covers had the title transcribed that way. The same as before, I think that the reason for this might be because *Street Fighter* also attracts a much younger audience than other games.

American Cover

The American cover shows a different version. The cover shows only one character and a more or less minimalistic background. The character that is depicted at the American box art is Ken, who is the American main character and somewhat rival of Ryu. Although there is hardly any contrast between the avatar and the background he still is emphasized greatly, because basically there is nothing else to look in this image. The fact that this character is shown as a render from the actual three dimensional model of Ken, shows a great accentuation on the fact that this game was in 3D. Although the notion of Ken being depicted intentionally to appeal to an American audience seems to be very strong, it has to be mentioned that the American cover for the port of the first part of the EX series on the PlayStation – called *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha* – had a similar design concept, but only showed Ryu on the cover. Therefore I think it was rather a decision towards creating a cover that goes along with its direct predecessor, instead of an intended depiction of Americanism.

The title or rather logo is the same in the box arts of the other regions, but in this version it fills almost the whole picture, leaving the strong impression that the main focus lied almost entirely on the already well renowned title.

Game Nr. 22

Original Title:	<i>Silent Hill</i>
Other Titles:	-
Developer:	Konami
Publisher:	Konami (JP), Konami (US), Konami (PAL)
Released:	31.1.1999 (US), 4.3.1999 (JP), 1.8.1999 (PAL)

Silent Hill was created by Team Silent – as are most of the other parts of the series. Silent Hill parts don't have a connected storyline but they all have something to do with a town called *Silent Hill*. The game is popular for the most part because it deals with very dark and psychological issues such as fear, suicide, killing, abuse, etc. Although it has become common to put games like *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* into the same genre, of "Survival Horror" I think it is more appropriate to speak of Silent Hill as "Psycho Horror" or something similar, because the contents of those games is so severe. Besides, that way *Silent Hill* would be officially rewarded adequately for what it actually did – creating an awesome and innovative new game experience and influencing many other games to come. In this first part of the series the main character is Harry Mason, and he drives with his daughter Cheryl through the night when he suddenly has to evade a girl on the street and causes a crash. When he awakes his daughter is gone. As he tries to find her, he finds himself trapped inside of a town with many grotesque creatures that apparently also exists as a nightmare version.

Illustration 26a

AMERICAN COVER

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Illustration 26b

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 26c

EUROPEAN COVER

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American Cover

Though the game was developed in Japan according to the most often encountered release dates it seems that it was first released in America. – Regarding that matter I have to examine it further, because not only that it seems unlikely, I also encountered several sources that confirm the fact that an already complete – apparently the Japanese version – went under censorship before it was released in Europe or America. Personally I think that the Japanese version was released before the others (CHECK). The cover of the American version has only red as the color of the title and the rest of the image shows shades of grey due to a negative imagery. Because of its color, the title is the most outstanding element of this design, and it uses a very distinct font that should become characteristic for *Silent Hill*. The image shows the main character Harry with a very inquiring face expression, another character Cybil integrated into his picture, and in the background we can see a house with lights on in only one room and a little girl (Cheryl) walking in front of it. What we can also see is a lot of fog as well as snow, which all fits very well to the actual optics of the game. If we take a closer look, we can see the face of another girl hidden in the fog; this girl is Alessa Gillespie and has a very deep connection to Cheryl. – Unfortunately I cannot describe that in detail, but to put it simple Alessa might be the cause for all this pain and suffering for she wants to suffer everybody the same she did. All the images that are put together in this cover come from cut-scenes of the actual game and therefore show real material from it.

The main focus of this game is obviously the characters, and it seems that it was also a big intention to depict everything within a certain twilight caused by the negative images, to further enhance the psychological depth of this game.

Japanese Cover

The Japanese cover on the other hand doesn't show anything of the game and is illustrated in a rather alienated and artistic way. We can see that the whole image is designed like a wall in a bathroom, and that onto the tiles something is written with red letters. Well, it doesn't take much to associate the red with blood due to its realistic color and several splashes that can be seen around the text. – The text itself seems to be the exact same as the text of the logo, and when taking a closer look we can also see the same splashes (only in white) at the title. The image of a bathroom is very interesting to transmit the element of fear and grotesqueness. A bathroom is usually a place where we like to retire ourselves into privacy, where we are naked and therefore most vulnerable regarding our private sphere. The association between blood inside a bathroom has become very common since 1960 and the movie *Psycho* by Alfred Hitchcock, with its famous shower scene that kind of defined suspense and horror. Just as some additional information: There is a hotel in the game that is called "Bates Motel", which is a clear allusion to this movie.

On this cover we can further see a rather large warning sign stating in Japanese that this game contains violent scenes as well as grotesque contents. I think this sign never appeared before on Japanese packages, the fact that it was used the first time – but still is used on a common basis today – speaks for the uniqueness, the importance and the influence of this game. Again we can also see a categorization for this game labeled "Horror Adventure". As a matter of fact, though there are general conventions about how to describe a game using common expressions for genres, but the truth is that actually all developers can categorize the game the way they think is most appropriate. In this case, referring to

the game as “Horror Adventure” is not only very clever to distinct it from games of the Resident Evil series – the only games that might be comparable with *Silent Hill* – but also very adequate, in my opinion.

European Cover

The European cover shows another image, which obviously tries to transmit grotesqueness as primary element. The whole design seems to be filtered and altered to somehow resemble the looks of an old broken camera in terms of quality. Except for the black background, that brings a very hard contrast to the silhouette of the head, making it almost look like if it was separated, we can see almost no coherent surfaces. – Everything looks dirty or rather smirched and begrimed. Those dirty textures on the face (of Alessa) make the head almost look like as if it belongs to a corpse. Though they don’t belong to a corpse, they come pretty close to the original footage, and it has to be mentioned that the image is taken out from a cut-scene of the game, and actually only the title has been added to complete this cover.

The title is displayed so large that it had to be separated into two parts, and the way it is written here it has an even bigger impact. The branding of this title was definitely successful, although the sequels never again depicted the title in this form.

Game Nr. 23

Original Title:	<i>Tony Hawk's Pro Skater</i>
Other Titles:	<i>Tony Hawk's Skateboarding</i>
Developer:	Neversoft
Publisher:	Activision (US), Activision (JP), Activision (PAL)
Released:	31.8.1999 (US), 30.3.2000 (JP), 21.7.2000 (PAL)

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater is a sports game where the player takes control over several professional skaters and can perform countless skateboard tricks throughout gigantic levels. Although some of the tricks might appear to be unrealistic, most of them have been “nailed” – as a skater would say – in real life. In fact Tony Hawk himself might have invented about half of them by himself. *Tony Hawk's* – as commonly abbreviated by fans – was not the first game about skateboarding, but what made it so successful (by now about nine parts on various platforms) is undoubtedly its almost 100 percent authentic physics as well as its unique way of giving insight into the real realm of the skateboard culture. The series shows, tough guys, professionals nailing awesome tricks as well as bailing (falling and hurting) while doing so, it shows American television idols from the series Jackass, and most of the time adults that are mostly concerned about having fun. And while the players completed one career mode after another, collected money, bought new skateboards and/or equipment, were happy about landing tricks like a “Switch-540-varial-frontflip-to-fifty-fifty” and started not only to use words like “nailing” in their daily life as well as listening to punk music, but also started to skate, their parents eventually became worried not only about the school grades of their kids.

Illustration 27a

AMERICAN COVER

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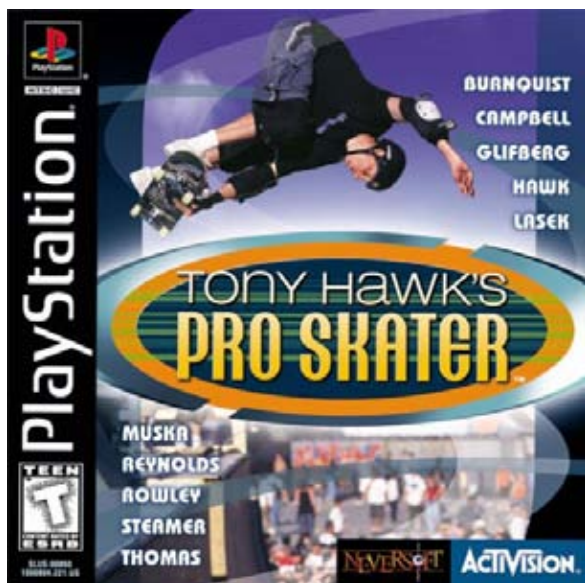




Illustration 27b

JAPANESE COVER

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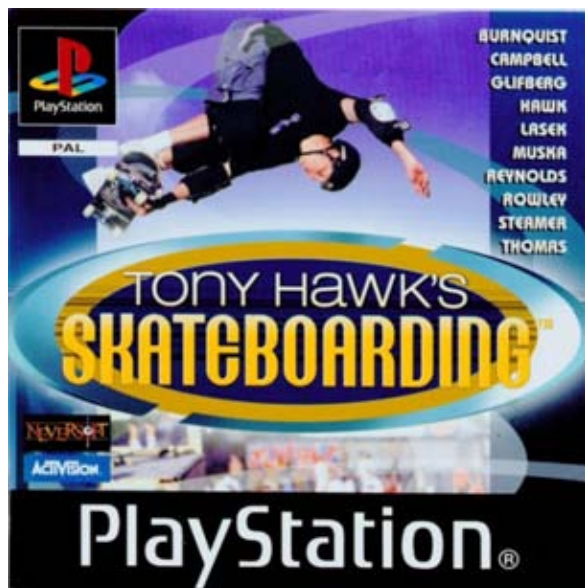


Illustration 27c

EUROPEAN COVER

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American Cover

The American cover comes with a real photo of Tony Hawk seemingly unaffected by gravity while performing a trick (apparently just a simple Indy-Grab) in a Half-Pipe above the heads of an audience. Actually most of the box arts for this games series featured Tony Hawk on the cover – after all it is his name on the title. That combining a sports game together with a renowned star from the particular field of the sport has been proven to be very successful for quite a long time. It might have started back in days of the Apple II and the Commodore 64 of 1988, when on the first part of the Madden NFL series, called *John Madden Football*, a picture of John Madden appeared on the package art. However, today it is very common – especially for games developed under Electronic Arts contracts – to make deals with athletes in order to promote a video game that way³¹.

The title that is transformed into a logo is designed in a very modern way with clear edges, light effects and endorsing colors, and emphasized not only because it is big and centered, but also by the fact that Tony Hawk seems to float above it. – The logo was refined, but basically stayed the same until the fourth part of the series.

What we can also see at this cover are the surnames of the ten professional skaters that have been playable in the game, which is a clear strategy to promote the game. But still it also shows an important feature of the game itself; All the skaters available started with different stats and tricks, and after finishing the career mode a video clip showed the particular skater in real

31 Nowadays the marketing of sports games along with stars has actually become so advanced, that the athletes are even different from one European country to the next. However a few examples are: EA's *Madden '99* featuring Garrison Hearst, EA's *FIFA07* featuring Ronaldinho and Wayne Rooney.

action, which somehow showed the player the great diversity that is present in this sport and further enhanced the perception of the skater scene.

Japanese Cover

The Japanese cover takes only an enlarged part of the whole picture used in the original and therefore shows only Tony Hawk. The overall design however hasn't changed and the title –although scaled down – stayed beneath Tony Hawk. We can see a transcribed version of the title, but much more interesting is the text on the top: 世界ランクトップ10のスケートボーダーが実名で登場!! [Sekai rankutoppu 10 no sukēto bōdā ga jitsumei de tōjō / The world's top ten ranked skateboarders appear]. I assume this text was preferred instead of the actual names of the skaters, because their names might have been hardly known amongst the Japanese audience.

European Cover

The European version is only a little bit different from the original. It shows the exact same image, but abdicates the bottom part, due to the black bar with the PlayStation text in it. The result seems to lack of consistence because at the first glance the viewer can hardly notice the elements of the half-pipe, which leaves Tony Hawk really flying. This might appear to be similar to the Japanese interpretation, but the impression there is different because there is nothing else for the eye to relate to except for the blue background. What is different in the European version is the

title, where “Pro Skater” has been replaced by “Skateboarding”, and that the list of the available skaters has been unified to only the upper right corner of the image. The letter could have simply been a design issue, which resolves after taking a look at the layer which contains the logo, the curves and the background that causes the image to fade-out to the left and the right side. The logo has been enlarged so that the alternative text fits into it and in conjunction with that the layer containing the left and right parts has naturally scaled down. Now we can see a bigger empty blue space in the upper right section, which presents a good place to put in the names not only unified but also better to emphasize.

So, why are the names written on the European cover at all? I think the answer to that might be that at the time, this game was released in Europe skateboarding was already on the verge to become very popular. I think many people have seen those professional skaters on television, and therefore even known some of them. – I personally knew a few, and the ones I didn’t know imprinted into my mind after playing this game. It is very hard to prove, and might seem to be fiction because it could have happened without this game as well, but I am really confident that this game was authoritative for the big skateboard-boom of the late nineties in Europe – or at least in Austria. Regarding Austria it might have even been the biggest skateboard-boom since the late 1980s. Skating was part of the everyday life of almost every twelve to twenty year old boy; on the streets you could hear the sounds of skateboards day and night, villages started to build ramps and other stuff at public parks, and skater-clothing became the fashion Nr. 1. Anyway, I still have no idea whatsoever why the title has been altered to “Skateboarding” instead of “Pro Skater”.

Game Nr. 24

Original Title:	<i>Driver</i>
Other Titles:	-
Developer:	Reflections Interactive
Publisher:	GT Interactive (US), GT Interactive (JP), GT Interactive (PAL)
Released:	30.6.1999 (US), 9.3.2000 (JP), 2.7.2000 (PAL)

Driver was created by Reflections Interactive, a developing studio from England that has become very famous for creating the very successful games of the Destruction Derby series during the early time of the PlayStation. *Driver* was not just another racing game, a lot of attributes made it outstanding from its competition: Exciting car chases, more or less realistic behavior of the car, a director mode (which allowed the player to playback his driving and choose from different camera angles, resulting in a feeling of being a movie director), but above all its unique setting that took place around a 1970s America. The game shows several parallels and hints to the television show *Starsky and Hutch* and the film *The Driver*. In this game the player controls an undercover cop with the task of infiltrating and collecting evidence against several syndicates and their bosses. His main objective – while working for the syndicates – is to steal cars, bring a person from A to B, and mostly avoiding and escaping police cars. The game clearly deals with criminal contents very similar to games of the GTA series. By now the series of Driver games consists of seven games (including one PSP and two mobile games) and a new part for the PlayStation 3 has already been announced.

Illustration 28a

AMERICAN COVER

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Illustration 28b

JAPANESE COVER

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Illustration 28c

EUROPEAN COVER

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CDCOVER.CC

American Cover

The original cover for this game apparently is focused on action. The image shows a police car chasing after another car that looks like a sports car. Actually – except for the colors – it comes pretty close to the famous Ford Torino that Starsky and Hutch, from the correspondent TV series of the 1970s, were driving. A lot of fans would recognize this car, and so displaying it not only shows the actual atmosphere of the game, but also is part of a marketing strategy. The cover seems almost as if it would state, that in this game action and excitement are guaranteed, because the picture shows so much movement. In fact, the only thing that might be missing to complete an action scene is an explosion, but we can still see a lot of smoke resulting from burnouts. The latter were also a very characteristic feature of this game. In the background of the image we can see a rather realistic picture of a city, which obviously is San Francisco, judging from a bridge that resembles the Golden Gate Bridge. Like many other similar games the game featured real cities (Miami, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York) however only partially accurate to the original. What we can also see is a map integrated into this background that further enhances the element of driving within certain city limits. Furthermore we can see the head and face of the undercover policeman Tanner in the upper left corner of the image.

The title uses a special font with a shadow effect to outstand from the background. The fact that the letters are depicted with the same color as the car leaves no unanswered questions about who is going to be the driver and what he would have to do. Still we can also see a subtitle that emphasizes this matter even more. What is most interesting about this cover is the additional text above the developer and publisher logos: Capitalized and

provided with motion, it gives an important information about the creators of this game, and obviously tried to sell this product in the name of two other, already very famous and popular games.

Japanese Cover

This Japanese version of the cover for *Driver* seems to have almost nothing in common with the original. – Well, besides the car, which is taken from the original exactly, it doesn't. We have a completely different depiction here. This whole image consists only of four elements: A plain red background, a white silhouette of a man with a gun, a car, so black that there are almost no details left, and the title in blue. The latter uses the same blue color as the original did and depicts the title with no transcription.

What is very interesting about this version's title is the subtitle, stating not as maybe expected a translation for "You are the wheelman" but "潜入！カーチェイス大作戦" [Sennyū! Kācheisu daisakusen / Secret Intrusion! The car-chase venture]. Apparently it also describes the contents of the game, but much more detailed than the American subtitle. This approach was maybe necessary because a potential buyer wouldn't have been able to tell what the game is about, only by looking at the images shown at the Japanese cover.

What is much more intriguing about this subtitle is the actual font it is written with. This font seems to be a mixture between the fonts that were used to write the Japanese title for two James Bond movies with Roger Moore in Japan 美しき獲物たち [Bishiki emonotachi / A View to a kill (original)] and 私を愛したスパイ [Watashi wo aishita supai / The Spy who loved me (original)]. Considering this interesting detail, the whole composition of this

cover starts to make sense; the red background together with the white silhouette of a man holding a gun – by the way, the player couldn't use guns in that game, it was a driving game. Obviously the main focus of this image lied on injecting elements like being a secret agent. Not that it would be completely misplaced regarding this games contents, but in my opinion it seems to be more of a marketing strategy than an accurate description of the game, even though we have a car, with enormous contrast to the other elements, displayed on the image.

European Cover

The European cover also shows a different approach to depict this game on its cover. Similar to the Japanese version with have a rather simplistic design with only few elements that stand out next to each other; a plain white background, a multiplied title and the silhouette of a man which includes a background and a car. The background that we can see inside of the man depicts a city, which is melted with a map similar to the American cover, and the car, which judging from its lights obviously is a different car (maybe a Ford Torino Talladega) but still resembles the one from *Starsky and Hutch*. It is interesting that the car doesn't stand out very much in this cover, because it takes the coloring of the background. Aside a different font and the absence of the original subtitle, the title has also changed regarding his alignment and the effect that causes the text to invert its color from black to white, if it is layered above the silhouette of the man. As in the Japanese version we can also see no face of the actual main character of the game. That gives automatically the impression that the player will be the driver, and therefore explains the subtitle in the American cover

as well as its absence in the box arts of the other two regions.

Another detail worth mentioning is the fact that only the original American cover explicitly depicted a connection to the very popular and successful games called *Destruction Derby*. This could be because a car-sport similar to the contents of *Destruction Derby* called “Demolition Derby” is far more popular in America than it is in Europe. All in all the European cover leaves the distinct impression that the main focus was to depict the individual in conjunction with the title and a very minimalistic design. – The Japanese cover achieved something similar except for the fact that elements related to espionage as well as to James Bond have been emphasized at a broader scale.

Game Nr. 25 (not yet decided)

Possible Titles: Dino Crisis, Suikoden II, Vagrant Story

To leave the symbolic impression that this text is still far away from being finished, I decided to leave this last place empty for the time being.

6.7. WHAT DO A FEW PAST COVERS INDICATE?

Unfortunately this chapter will only be provided in the finished version of this research.

6.8. RESULTS AND SUMMARY

From the selected 24 covers a total of 14 games and therefore about 70 percent of the games originated in Japan, which goes perfectly hand in hand with the fact that in Japan three times as many games for the PlayStation have been released. Six games originated in America and after all four games came from Europe. With a total of 14 cases, it was Europe where the game has been released the latest. On the second place is Japan with six cases, and America with only four cases seems to be the region where popular PlayStation games have never been imported the latest. It can be postulated as a rule, that games which originated in Japan were released in America before they have come to Europe. On the other side, American games appear to be exported to Europe before they come to Japan and vice versa.

Regarding the changes of the cover this research concludes, that amongst this games there have been four cases where we witnessed a completely different (design differs above 80%) cover for the same game in all three regions. On the other hand there have been three cases where the cover stayed completely the same (design resembles above 80%). In a one on one scope, we can see that a cover is most likely to

change when it comes from Japan to America (seven cases). When it is “imported” from Japan to Europe it will also change with a probability of 25 percent (six cases). Covers tend to stay basically the same when exchanged between America and Europe, while only one cover stayed the same when imported from Europe to Japan, and only two characteristics of an original American cover have been preserved after released in Japan.

Regarding deprivation and inject we can see that all regions seems to be equally neutral (minor changes, but the original character was preserved), that American covers tend to emphasize and inject American characteristics, that the most deprived elements of the covers have been Japanese characteristics – which is however not very surprising, given the fact that about two thirds of the games originated there – and that the least deprived characteristics are American ones.

Basically all covers used archetypes and schemes to create associations between the viewer and the cover, and we can also see that these methods have increased and developed over the years. Furthermore every cover single cover in every region has a very strong focus on trying to brand new products and uses already branded elements to increase the sales of the game. The most distinctive element of each cover in terms of branding has proven to be the title or rather the logo of the game.

The last things that we can see on short notice are that all regions feature the importance of contents equally (at an average value of 50 percent, depicting the actual game contents on the cover is the most important issue for all three), that with four cases the covers of the European region tend to depict technological elements before other region’s covers, that the main focus regarding American game covers is realism, while Japanese and European covers deal greatly

with art. Above of all, the covers of the Japanese PlayStation games seem to try awakening the strongest emotional responses.

The final version of this text will include several figures and detailed lists to show these results in a more appropriate manner.

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

7. Conclusion and Future Perspectives

After a rather premature survey of this really interesting yet complicated field of entertainment, that has indeed become one of the most lucrative businesses and inspiring entities of leisure activities, I think the results are obvious. We definitely have three different markets. We have the American market that is and always has been all about money, advertisement and models of success. We have the European market that is basically a construct of personality versus apology, that although pretends to be liberated from the bonds of justification regarding the use of free time. And then there is the Japanese market that is so alive yet certain that it manifests in an enormous overproduction together with seemingly unlimited demand. But still, we can never forget that those are games we are talking about, and games are played by people.

However, getting to know the three biggest regions for video games in the world better, led ultimately to the conclusion that games are more than just simple consumer goods. Video games did really travel a long way; from monochromatic dots on monitors accessible only to a hand full of people to complex models on the screens in our very living rooms. What started with curiosity conveyed technology, broadened the opportunities and removed certain barriers in the way people are thinking. Today video games are everywhere, everyone is a player and every game tells a story to which somebody can relate to. Some stories are so popular and cherished by the gamers of all over the world, that they have already found their place in history. Although the world itself is still far away from being united – we humans fight and argue

like we did ever since – but still there is one thing that we all share the same; curiosity. Our thirst for knowledge gets us further day by day, and if there is one thing that every human wants to know, then it is how the story ends. This is why we play! – Not because we want to escape the unavoidable, but because playing allows us to develop ourselves in unimaginable ways throughout unknown dimensions. We will never stop because we have to experience the new. Life has become downtime and games have become the future.

Games will develop and adapt to the changing demands of the players, which are driven by this very urge to experience, and there will be a constant progress because players become creators. The future will integrate games and networking much stronger into our daily life than we can image today. Driver by nostalgic video games will never crash again, because due to a matured and global market video games will never become boring again.

8. APPENDIX

8. Appendix

8.1. LITERATUR

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8.2. LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

Is far from complete and therefore not provided by this version of the text!

SINCE THE GREAT ATARI-CRASH IN AMERICA OF 1983 UNTIL THE NEW MILLENNIUM THE DOMINANCE OVER VIDEO GAMES LIED SOLELY IN THE HANDS OF ONE COUNTRY: JAPAN! AND IT WAS DURING THE MID-NINETIES THAT ANOTHER VIDEO GAME CONSOLE FROM JAPAN SHOULD INFLUENCE AND RULE OVER THE DIGITAL DAILY ROUTINE OF GAMERS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD. THE SONY PLAYSTATION SHOULD SOON BECOME THE EMPRESS OF FIFTH GENERATION GAME CONSOLES, CRUSH ITS COMPETITORS AND SHAPE THE WAY FOR MODERN VIDEO GAMING AS WE EXPERIENCE IT TODAY.

//

YET, PLAYING VIDEO GAMES IS DIFFERENT IN AMERICA, JAPAN AND EUROPE - THE THREE BIGGEST REGIONS REGARDING THIS DOMAIN OF ENTERTAINMENT. AS THE CULTURES DIFFER, SO DO THE GAMERS, THE MARKETS, THE INDUSTRIES, THE MARKETING STRATEGIES, THE ACTUAL GAMES AND THEIR PACKAGE DESIGNS.

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THIS RESEARCH TAKES A GOOD LOOK AT THE COVER DESIGNS OF THE 25 MOST POPULAR PLAYSTATION GAMES RELEASED IN THESE THREE AREAS AND APPROACHES SIMILARITIES AS WELL AS THE DIFFERENCES IN TERMS OF A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS. THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF THIS COMPARISON IS TO ASSESS THE PREFERENCES OF JAPANESE, AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN PLAYSTATION GAMERS, AND THEREFORE TO REVEAL COMMON MARKETING AND BRANDING STRATEGIES REGARDING THE ACTUAL REPRESENTATIVE OF A VIDEO GAME: ITS FRONT COVER.

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FURTHERMORE THIS RESEARCH GIVES A BRIEF INSIGHT ABOUT THE HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES, THE BASICS OF ADVERTISEMENT, THE CONTENTS OF THE SELECTED GAMES, THEIR CREATORS AND THEIR PLAYERS.

//

BEING A GAMER MYSELF, THIS TEXT WILL INCLUDE SEVERAL OF MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND IMPRESSIONS DURING THE "GOLDEN AGE OF SONY", AS I LIKE TO CALL IT.

Rainhardt Diklic

