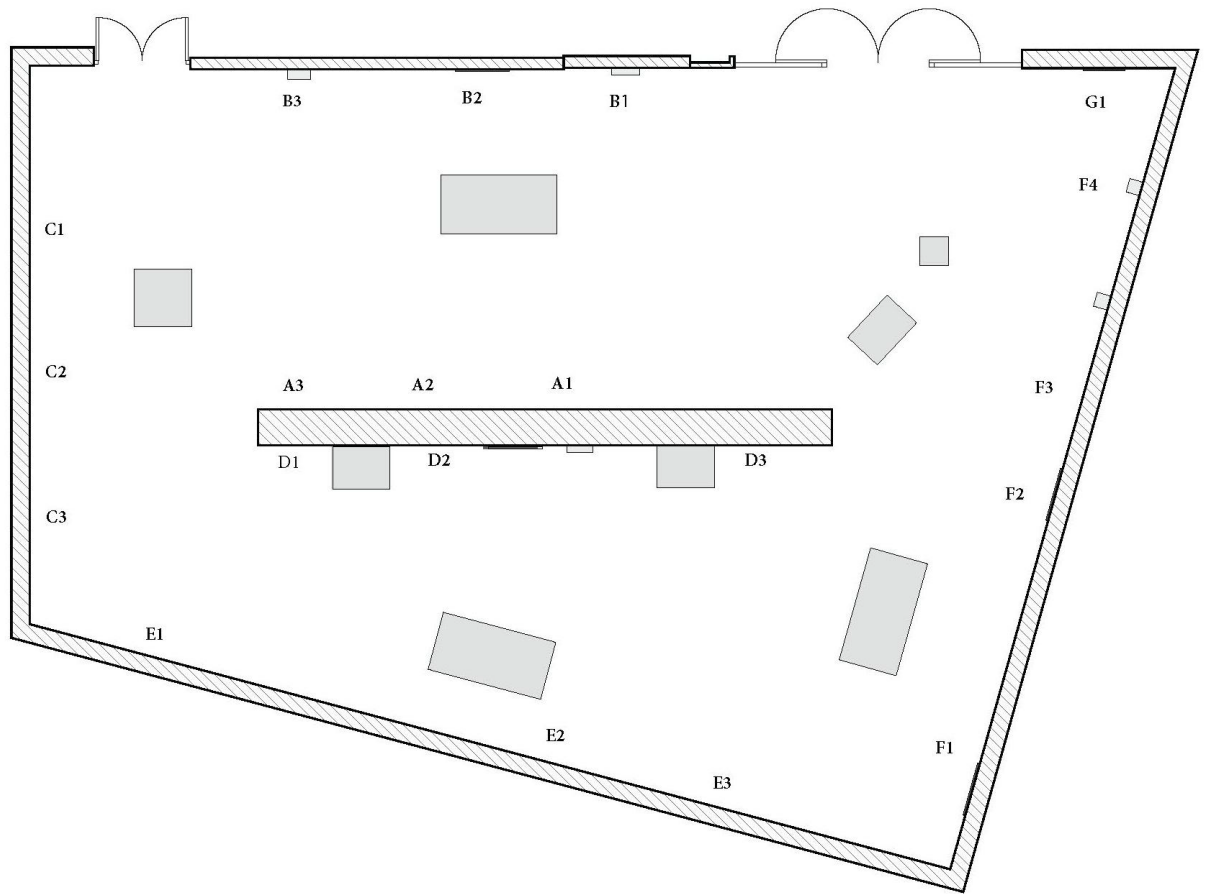




A1. Cine Gēmu

Video games arrived in Japan more than fifty years ago and quickly became part of its popular culture. In their early years, they coexisted with other local entertainment industries such as toys, manga, and anime. But in addition to this national sphere, *gēmu*, or Japanese video games, soon set their sights on another inexhaustible source of ideas: popular cinema, particularly fantasy, science fiction, and horror.

Consider *Contra* (Konami, 1987): on its original cover, we find undisguised doubles of Stallone from *Rambo* and Arnold Schwarzenegger from *Commando* facing what looks like an egg (a chestbuster on the international cover) from *Alien* (1979). This is an example of what theorist Iwabuchi Koichi calls “Japanization”: the appropriation of foreign cultural influences to adapt them to the sensibilities of the Japanese market.

The global success of *gēmu* produced a counter-movement: within a few years of the birth of its industry, Japanese video games were already being exported all over the world, and with them, local popular culture reached a multitude of countries. Cultural critic Matt Alt has proposed the idea of “fantasy-delivery devices” as Japan's main product: movies, manga, anime, games, mascots, and toys are fantasies shared by a large part of the planet.

This exhibition offers a journey into the imaginary world of *gēmu*, its sources and its mutations, in a journey that includes robots, aliens, zombies, *kaijū*, vampires, heroes with swords, Lynchian villages, demons, and ghosts, but also mascots such as Hello Kitty and series such as *Dragon Ball*. We invite you to discover, recognize, or rediscover a world of fantastic and terrifying icons that have become an important part of the global imagination. *Gēmu on!*

A2. First Steps: From Video Games to Cinema

Popular telling of history tells us that *Super Mario Bros.* (1993) was the first video game adaptation to hit the big screen. However, when this film flopped at the box office in the United States, Japan had already been putting out adaptations for almost a decade: in July 1986, Mario himself had starred in the anime *Super Mario Bros.: Peach-Hime Kyushutsu Dai Sakusen!*, released in theaters.

That same day, Hudson Soft promoted its new game *Star Soldier* with a double feature in theaters: the anime *Running Boy: Star Soldier's Secret* accompanied by a match between two icons of the video game industry, Takahashi Meijin and Master Mori. The game's creator, Takahashi Youichi, even sang the theme song for that anime.

In December of that same year, Fuji Television co-produced with Nintendo, as part of its *Getsuyou Drama Land* program, an adaptation of the video game *Nazo no Murasame-jō*, released that same year. This was most likely the first ever live-action version of a video game. It was followed by oddities such as *Dragon Quest Fantasia Video*, a recreation of the iconic Enix franchise accompanied by an orchestral recording and released on LaserDisc in 1988, and experiments such as *Sweet Home*, a horror project produced by Itami Juzo that included a film directed by Kurosawa Kiyoshi and a role-playing game for Famicom directed by Fujiwara Tokuro (Capcom).

Almost a decade of releases, experiments, and crossovers have been overshadowed by the dominance of the United States in global popular culture.

A3. First Steps: From Cinema to Video Games

During the 1980s and 1990s, it was common to adapt movies into video games to capitalize on their success, and often the “official game” of a movie would be released alongside it to promote it. Thus, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Alien* were among the first blockbusters to become interactive, and the failure of the adaptation of *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* for Atari is well known.

Given that popular cinema had its centre of power in the United States and video games were dominated by Japan, the strategy resulted in unusual collaborations between countries: for example, Disney teamed up with Capcom to create numerous games starring Mickey Mouse or adapt blockbusters such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, and *The Lion King*.

Capcom and Konami covered most of the icons of their time. The latter adapted *The Goonies* (1986), *Top Gun* (1987), and *Aliens* (1990), bringing them into the dominant genres of the moment, such as beat 'em up. They even created a sequel to *The Goonies*, *Goonies II: Furatterī Saigo no Chōsen* (1987), in which the protagonists must rescue a mermaid. We can also find a *Batman* from Sunsoft and a *Robocop* from Data East.

Outside Hollywood, the most striking case is *Spartan X* (1984), known in Europe as *Kung Fu Master* and based on the Hong Kong film *Wheels on Meals* (1984), shot in Barcelona. Little remained in the video game of the confrontation between the trio formed by Jackie Chan, Yuen Biao, and Sammo Hung against Pepe Sancho. Years later, Agnès Varda would use it as an excuse for an unusual romance in her film *Kung Fu Master* (1988), closing a bizarre (love) circle.

B1. Media mix

Media mix is a creative and marketing strategy similar to cross-media or transmedia: when faced with a creative project, producers from different industries (film, animation, music, toys) come together to finance it and exploit it in each of their respective fields. Thus, a popular manga can be adapted into anime and live-action films, songs, toys, pachinko machines, light novels, official cosplay materials, and even kabuki plays. This commercial strategy allows for the maximum possible return on a franchise, but it also appeals to the communicating vessels that have been established between the different vehicles of Japanese popular culture.

This type of media convergence, unique to Japan, appeared in the 1960s and became the norm in the 1980s. It produced a cultural environment in which characters and their universes are constantly in circulation and reproduction. Thus, a character such as Atomu (known here as Astro Boy) continues to feature in video games, toys, new films, and merchandising decades after the end of his original manga.

Gēmu is increasingly occupying a central place in the media mix, to the point where we can talk about a “ludo mix” in which games are the focal point of distribution and consumption strategy.

B2. Franchises that came from manga: Shōnen Jump

For decades, manga has been the great creator of icons for Japanese popular culture. The flexibility, speed, and economy of the medium have allowed for experimentation, adaptation, and transformation of franchises and characters until they connect with the right audience. And the ideal space for this constant experimentation is magazines, where authors and editors refine their proposals week after week. Magazines also allow the demographic profile of the reader to be defined: children, young males and females, and adult males and females.

The thief Lupin III, created by Monkey Punch, began in *Weekly Manga Action*; Golgo 13, a hired assassin, was born in *Big Comic*; Rumiko Takahashi created *Ranma ½* and *Urusei Yatsura* for *Shūkan Shōnen Sunday* and the romantic drama *Maison Ikkoku* for *Big Comic Spirits*. All of them have been adapted into video games, bringing together diverse audiences in the same space.

Perhaps the magazine most closely associated with gēmu is *Shōnen Jump*. Proof of this is the special edition of Famicom Classic Mini, a small-scale replica of the original console with a selection of notable games from its catalog stored in its memory. The console was launched in 2017 and the Shōnen Jump version, in gold, arrived in 2018, just in time for the magazine's 50th anniversary. It includes 20 games that adapted the magazine's franchises in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Kinnikuman, Captain Tsubasa, Dragon Ball, and Hokuto no Ken.

B3. Characters and Toys

In his book *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*, academic Marc Steinberg argues that Japanese pop culture always places characters at the center of its creative and commercial plans. This explains phenomena such as Sanrio, the company behind characters such as Hello Kitty, Gudetama, Hangyodon, and Pompompurin, which exist without central narratives and adapt to the needs of each moment, be it stickers or video games.

The influence of Tezuka Osamu, popularly known as the God of Manga, on character design extends throughout Japanese popular culture. In 2020, the Osamu Tezuka Manga Museum in Takarazuka organized the exhibition *CAPCOM vs. Tezuka Osamu CHARACTERS*, in which Capcom icons such as the characters from Street Fighter, Rockman (Megaman), and Biohazard (Resident Evil) were brought together with others created by the Tezuka, exchanging styles and illustrators in a crossover exercise similar to those that Capcom has historically exploited in its fighting games.

Another reason for prioritizing characters over plot is that they lend themselves well to toys, which have always been an important part of Japanese culture, such as *kokeshi* dolls and *netsuke* miniatures. Beloved figures such as Lupin and Lamu from *Urusei Yatsura* are often turned into carefully crafted collectible figurines. Keshigomu or *keshi* dolls, simple and monochromatic, are a frequent means of exploiting franchises. The Licca-chan doll, created in 1967 by Takara, adapts easily to phenomena such as Mario and, in an exercise in media mix, has starred in video games.

One of the most celebrated forms of toys in Japan are model kits, best known for Gunpla or “Gundam Plastic Model,” robots linked to this veteran fictional universe that are sold ready to assemble and constitute, in themselves, a peculiar form of play.

C1. Japan Through Its Genres

Narrative genres and fantasy settings dominate video games, including Japanese ones. Similarly, internationally popular playable genres (fighting, shoot 'em up, racing) tend to be also present in Japan. Added to this mix, recognizable to fans around the world, are idiosyncratic elements of Japanese pop culture, such as *kaijū* or giant monsters, tokusatsu, robots (whether super robots or real robots), *yōkai* or *yūrei*, and interactive forms such as visual novels (originated in adventure games and digital comics) or pachinko simulators, an enormously popular form of entertainment in the country.

Space and medieval-inspired fantasy realms are commonplace, but Japanese creators soon began to use locations they knew in the real world as well. Released in 1983, *The Portopia Serial Murder Case* is a mystery adventure set in Kobe and Kyoto. Since then, players around the world have been able to explore cities such as Tokyo in a multitude of games such as 428: Shibuya Scramble, Osaka, Sapporo, Naha, and towns such as Onomichi in the Like a Dragon series or Yokosuka in Shenmue, making them visually recognizable, even familiar, without ever having visited them.

The use of real cities and contemporary settings does not prevent fantasy elements from appearing in games. Kyohei Toshi puts us in the shoes of an ordinary citizen during *kaijū* attacks and battles between characters such as Ultraman. The Tokyo of games such as *The World Ends With You* or *Persona 5* combines recognizable places and everyday rhythms with fantasy battles typical of anime.

Classic Japan, whether historical or folkloric, is also a frequent setting in gēmu. Legendary heroes such as Momotarō have been common in genres such as action and role-playing since the 1980s, and games such as *Nazo no Murasame-jō* and *Ninja-kun Ma-jō no Bōken* depict an era full of samurai, ninjas, and other icons of the past mixed with native and foreign monsters.

C2. Fantasy Worlds

Digital role-playing games (RPGs) evolved from their analogue counterparts, particularly games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974). Their origins are strongly linked to an epic fantasy world of swords and sorcery and adventure, and all of this was maintained and expanded in the transition to digital. Franchises such as Wizardry (launched in 1981) aspired to reproduce the experience of a tabletop role-playing game.

Japan did not follow this natural evolution. Wizardry and Ultima arrived in the country in the early 1980s, and the first *Dungeons & Dragons* ruleset was not translated and distributed until 1985. Fighting Fantasy gamebooks also reached the Japanese market before role-playing games: the offsprings of roleplay games became popular without a point of reference.

Gēmu quickly adapted these systems and narrative tropes, and in 1984 local players were able to enjoy seminal titles such as *The Black Onyx*, *Hydlide*, *The Tower of Druaga*, and *Dragon Slayer*, filled with knights, dragons, magic, and other motifs familiar to any fantasy fan. When *Dungeons & Dragons* finally arrived in the country, players were already familiar with its universe and had made it their own, which perhaps explains the boom it caused and phenomena such as *Record of the Lodoss War*, a series of novelizations of *Dungeons & Dragons* sessions that would eventually give rise to anime, manga, and video game series.

Thanks to these exchanges, Japan at the end of the Shōwa era was also a place full of dragons and dungeons.

C3. Science-fiction Reaches Anime

Nishikado Tomohiro, creator of *Space Invaders* (1978), says he was inspired by the success of *Star Wars* for his most famous creation... even though the film had not yet reached Japan and he had not seen it. Such was the impact of George Lucas' work, a movie that would end up being a huge hit with Japanese audiences when it was finally released there.

The Force joined a landscape already filled with robots, spaceships, and space adventures. The science fiction icons created by Tezuka, such as Atomu, shared ground with Matsumoto Leiji's productions, which included space operas such as *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974) and *Galaxy Express 999* (1977-1981), and the birth of the Gundam franchise (1979). The ease with which Japanese pop culture adopts, naturalizes, and remixes produced pastiches such as *Cobra* (1978-1984), a manga that combines space opera, spies, and even spaghetti westerns, which would later become a source of inspiration for other works.

All of this was reflected in *gēmu*, which was full of robots, aliens, spaceships, and exotic planets. *Star Wars* had its own video games created in Japan, which were so flexible with Lucas's canon that Darth Vader became a giant space scorpion. The design of ships such as the *Star Trek Enterprise* served as a thinly veiled model for portable machines such as the Onko Super Space Jack (1981), itself a variation on *Space Invaders*. *Cobra's* laser cannon arm was later seen in *Metroid*, perhaps the most popular space franchise in *gēmu*, and also heavily indebted to Ridley Scott's *Alien*.

D1. The Promise of Interactive Cinema

Interactive cinema was born with the film *Kinoautomat: One Man and His House*, an experiment presented in the Czech pavilion at the 1967 Montreal Expo. In the United States, the rise of video games as a form of entertainment led to a tense relationship with the film industry, with fragile alliances and constant attempts to conquer each other's territory. While Hollywood and Silicon Valley competed, the structure of media mix allowed Japan to cross media seamlessly. The definitive leap forward was the arrival of LaserDisc, a physical format that allowed video sequences to be combined with interactivity.

Although the game that popularized it was *Dragon's Lair* (1983), it was first used in Sega's *Astron Belt* (1983), a spaceship game that included its own video clips and others borrowed from Star Trek and the Japanese space opera *Message from Space* (1978). After the format's boom, several companies rushed to remix Japanese anime for the arcade, such as the Lupin III films *Rupan tai Kurōn* (1978) and *The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979), which were turned into the game *Cliff Hanger* (1983). Others, such as Taito's *Space Battleship Yamato* (1985), mixed film footage with original animation.

The following years saw the arrival of numerous arcade games on LaserDisc, many of them animated by the veteran company Toei. This was the case with *Ninja Hayate* (1984) and the comic science fiction adventure *Time Gal* (1985), both from Taito, and the Data East productions *Thunder Storm* (1984) and *Road Blaster* (1985), the latter heavily inspired by the Mad Max series.

Thanks to these games, which would eventually become known as FMV (Full Motion Video), the boundaries between anime and arcades became even more blurred.

D2. Cinema Consoles

The success of LaserDisc games coincided with the widespread adoption of home video. This convergence opened up a new commercial and creative avenue: consoles and toys that brought the animated experiences of game centers into homes. Unlike LaserDisc, VHS does not allow skipping between scenes, so designers had to be creative with how to interact.

In 1987, toy manufacturer Takara launched Video Challenger, a laser gun capable of keeping track of hits on targets in recordings distributed on VHS. *Godzilla*, *Thunder Storm*, and *Road Blaster* movies were adapted for Video Challenger, as well as a recording of Sega's arcade game *After Burner II*. A year later, Bandai released Terebikko, a kind of four-button telephone that connected to a VHS player and allowed players to interact with a system of calls and questions. Games based on franchises such as *Dragon Ball*, *Ultraman*, *Super Mario*, *Hello Kitty*, *Anpanman*, and *Doraemon* were released for it.

VHS gave way to CDs, which allowed for lower quality video than LaserDisc but had a similar interactive structure. Soon, cartridge-based consoles received expansions with CD players, such as Hudson Soft's PC-Engine or Sega's Mega Drive, with the Mega-CD. Several FMV arcade hits, such as *Road Blaster* and *Time Gal*, were revived for Mega-CD, with significantly lower resolution and compression.

The last attempt to exploit the legacy of LaserDisc before the standardization of CD in consoles such as Saturn and PlayStation was Playdia, marketed by Bandai in 1994. With a catalog focused on FMV games with limited interactivity, Playdia brought together franchises such as *Ultraman*, *Dragon Ball*, *Sailor Moon*, and *Gundam*, proving once again the proximity of these types of systems to the world of cinema and anime.

D3. Don Quixote, Japanese and Interactive

For years, Japanese popular culture has drawn on great European authors such as Verne and Conan Doyle to produce new works that continue to fuel the imagination of people around the world. Such is the case with *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, Miguel de Cervantes' universal classic that has had a remarkable run in Japanese pop culture.

In 1980, a year after the well-known animated series by Cruz Delgado and José Romagosa, Tokyo Channel 12 premiered *Zukkoke Knight Don De La Mancha*, a 23-episode production reminiscent of Miyazaki's canine version of Sherlock Holmes. This was the first Japanese adaptation of Don Quixote, and it was soon followed by a video game: *Super Don Quix-ote* (1984), an arcade game created by Universal in the footsteps of the animated *Dragon's Lair* (1982). With an adventure anime aesthetic, *Super Don Quix-ote* asks the player to overcome athletic obstacles and face witches and dragons that would not be out of place in any Japanese role-playing game. This crossover between animated film and video game was made possible by LaserDisc, a video format that allowed players to jump between scenes.

A decade later, also on LaserDisc, Premier International Corporation released *Don Quixote: A Dream in Seven Crystals* (1994), a role-playing game with numerous animated scenes. The fantasy theme remains, and the animation is provided by Tokyo Movie Shinsha, a studio that was bought by Sega after the failure of the American-Japanese co-production *Little Nemo: Adventures in Slumberland* (1992).

E1. Playable J-Horror

Horror has been a genre present in *gēmu* since its inception, with pioneers such as *AX-2: Uchū Yusōsen Nostramo* (1981), heavily inspired by *Alien* (1979), and *Sweet Home* (1989). *Kaijū*, born as nightmarish creatures in the first *Godzilla* (1954), also brought their connection to the genre to *gēmu*. Horror video games exploded in popularity in the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s, when several landmark games were released in quick succession.

Clock Tower (1995) uses elements of graphic adventure and action in a story heavily inspired by the giallo films of Italian film director Dario Argento. *Biohazard*, known in the West as *Resident Evil*, kickstarted the genre known as survival horror. Originally conceived as a new version of *Sweet Home*, the game draws inspiration from the films of George A. Romero, director of *Night of the Living Dead*, and much of American B-movie horror. *Silent Hill* was released in 1999 and introduced a more psychological and literary style of horror, influenced by creators such as David Lynch. *Zero* (2001), known as *Project Zero* in Europe, was created as a counterpart to *Biohazard* and *Silent Hill*, offering a style of horror more rooted in Japanese traditions and tropes. In contrast to the United States of *Biohazard* and *Silent Hill*, *Zero* takes place in a Japan of temples and traditional mansions. The aim was to connect directly with the boom in so-called J-Horror that had led to the international success of films such as *Ringu* (1998) and bring the iconography of *yūrei* or Japanese ghosts into players' homes.

Since then, *gēmu* has continued to focus on horror, with games such as *Tsugunohi*, *Kuon*, *Siren*, and *Paranormasight*, which blend Western styles and themes with the supernatural world of Japanese folklore and aesthetics reminiscent of manga, anime, and Japanese cinema.

E2. The influence of David Lynch in gēmu

Few filmmakers have had such an impact on the imaginary of the fantastic as David Lynch, and not just in cinema. Japan had its own “Twin Peaks Mania,” which was so strong that David Lynch ended up directing a series of commercials in 1993 for Georgia Coffee based on the series and exclusive to that country, and *Fire Walk With Me* (1992) premiered there before it did in the United States (and was better received by Japanese audiences).

The trope of the small, seemingly idyllic town populated by eccentric and suspicious characters soon served as the basis for games that made no secret of their Lynchian debt. *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening* (1993) exploits it without hesitation, as acknowledged by some of its creators, such as Tezuka Takashi, Koizumi Yoshiaki, and Tanabe Kensuke.

Mizzurna Falls (1998), a mystery adventure that never left Japan created by Human Entertainment, the studio behind *Clock Tower*, takes up the idea and applies it to a design ahead of its time, with the town as an open world, the passage of time, and day and night cycles. Its creator, Ishizuka Taichi, cites *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet* as direct influences.

Perhaps the most Lynchian game, even more so than the *Silent Hill* series, is *Deadly Premonition*. This bizarre adventure created by Suehiro Hidetaka (SWERY65) continues along the path opened up by *Twin Peaks* and *Mizzurna Falls* and asks us to explore a small town in Washington to solve a violent crime, playing an eccentric FBI agent who seems to talk to himself, is addicted to coffee, and collaborates with a sheriff's deputy who looks identical to Naomi Watts in *Mulholland Drive*.

David Lynch's unique imagination has been pushing *gēmu* to explore its own eccentricities for years, and there is no indication that this healthy influence will disappear anytime soon.

E3. Monsters to Laugh At

Ghosts, vampires, zombies, and other paranormal creatures are not necessarily chained to terror. Godzilla himself, born as a terrifying nightmare, soon became a playful hero starring in lighthearted children's films. Something similar happens with *yōkai*, which in works such as Mizuki Shigeru's manga *GeGeGe no Kitaro* (1959-1969) or the *Yokai Monsters* film trilogy (1968-1969) oscillate between horror and heroism. This reflects a very Japanese fondness for the grotesque and the bizarre, which soon took on one of its most direct manifestations in *gēmu*.

This is the case with *Makaimura*, known in the West as *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, a platform game in which demons, ghosts, and other creatures stand in the way of a medieval knight's rescue mission after he loses his armor at the first blow. It is an iconic game that combines high difficulty with humour.

This playful and comical spirit reaches its peak in self-parodying games within successful franchises such as *Splatterhouse*, itself a pastiche of American horror icons such as Jason Voorhees, or *Castlevania* (*Akumajō Dracula* in Japan), in which classic Universal monsters cross paths with creatures from Greek mythology. With *Splatterhouse Wanpakku Graffiti* (1989), Namco turned its gloomy action game into a colorful platformer, adopting *kawaii* and super deformed aesthetics. Konami did the same with *Akumajō Special: Boku Dracula-kun*, a spin-off of the *Akumajō Dracula* series in which we control a childish and super deformed version of Dracula himself to recover his castle, in an adventure closer in tone and visual style to Toriyama's *Dr. Slump* than to Tod Browning's original film version.

F1. Gēmu's Star System

It is not unusual to find manga and anime stars working in gēmu. For example, the *Tales of* role-playing game series has featured the work of Inomata Mutsumi, animator and designer on productions such as *Urusei Yatsura* and *Gundam SEED*, as well as character designs by Fujishima Kōsuke, author of the manga *Oh My Goddess!*. One of the illustrators most strongly associated with a video game franchise is Amano Yoshitaka, connected to the Final Fantasy series, in which he has participated almost entirely. Perhaps the most popular artist in modern Japan is Toriyama Akira, creator of icons such as Dr. Slump and Dragon Ball. In video games, Toriyama created the characters and covers for the Dragon Quest series, thereby defining the entire imagery of a genre, the Japanese role-playing game.

The popularity of *gēmu* has not only attracted stars from other media to work in it, but has also led to the creation of its own star system. Players around the world recognize and celebrate names such as Miyamoto Shigeru, a key figure at Nintendo and creator of Mario and Zelda, and Kojima Hideo, author of works that explore crossovers with cinema such as *Snatcher*, the Metal Gear series, and *Death Stranding*, which features prominent figures from the world of cinema such as Guillermo del Toro, George Miller, and Oshii Mamoru.

The relevance of the author is not just a marketing element for *gēmu*. Their recognisability means that players know what to expect when they see the signatures of developers such as Yoko Tarō (*Nier: Automata*), Suda Goichi (*No More Heroes*), Mizoguchi Tetsuya (*Rez*, *Tetris Effect*), Ueda Fumito (*The Last Guardian*, *Shadow of the Colossus*), Kodama Rieko (*Skies of Arcadia*), and Sakaguchi Hironobu (*Final Fantasy*, *Blue Dragon*). Although video games are almost always a team effort, these popular stars guarantee a clear creative voice and a commitment to recognizable styles and themes.

F2. The Most Iconic Franchises

In the world of video games, franchises or IP (intellectual property) rule. Japan has managed to nurture and accumulate a handful of the most important franchises from the past and present of video games: Mario, Zelda, Pac-Man, Megaman, Street Fighter, Metroid, Resident Evil, Silent Hill, Dark Souls, Pokémon, Final Fantasy... Their success is due not only to their legacy, but also to their ability to invent mechanics and ways of playing that serve as a model for the entire industry and to constantly reinvent themselves in search of new creative avenues.

Most of these franchises are also popular outside Japan, but this is often a happy accident: their focus is on a very dedicated and vocal local audience, with an almost direct relationship with the creators. Thus, the Dragon Quest series was created to make a Japanese variation of Western role-playing games that were beginning to succeed in the Japanese market. To do this, they enlisted the help of illustrator Toriyama Akira and composer Sugiyama Koichi, both very popular in their country, and used adventure manga and anime for young people as references. The aim was to freely “Japanize” foreign styles and works. Each Dragon Quest release is an event in the country and encapsulates the ideal of role-playing so well that when the Ryu Ga Gotoku series moved into that genre with *Yakuza: Like a Dragon* (2020), the creators chose as their protagonist a fan who interprets his entire world as a game of Dragon Quest.

The exchanges between Japan and the West are even more visible in the work of Kojima Hideo, especially in his Metal Gear series, often a pastiche of American films such as *Escape from New York*, *Terminator*, and *The Rock*. Kojima, a self-confessed film buff, Japanizes his influences by passing them through his own local filter, as he also did with *Snatcher*, which clearly owes a debt to *Terminator*, *Blade Runner*, and *Lethal Weapon*. With these identifiable elements, Japanese franchises are not only a safe space for repetition for the industry, but also a place of exchange where Japan, voluntarily or involuntarily, ends up transforming the global popular imagination.

F3. Beyond Big Budgets: GameCenter CX, the Great TV Icon of Gēmu

The crossover between cinema and gēmu goes beyond big-budget productions. In 2003, Fuji TV premiered *GameCenter CX*, a low-budget program starring comedian Arino Shinya. Arino appears as the head of a fictional traditional Japanese company, GameCenter CX, which gives the program its name, and in each episode he takes on an old video game that he must complete in a single day. Arino's challenges are combined with visits to traditional gaming venues, such as arcades, and interviews.

The format was several years ahead of the gameplays popular on YouTube or Twitch and crystallized a retro imagery in Japan. In *GameCenter CX*, Arino appears as a regular player who struggles to complete the games and often fails or requires the help of his assistants. His catchphrases, his stoic attitude, and his everyday props, such as the Kobayashi antipyretic patches he applies when a game proves too difficult, have become recognizable icons.

With more than 300 programs and without compromising its style, *GameCenter CX* is an institution in its country: it has had travel specials, live programs that fill stadiums, video games, merchandising, a movie released in theaters, and even a traveling exhibition in 2023 to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

F4. Cine gēmu trash

Mario, Resident Evil, Silent Hill: these big icons dominate conversations about adaptations of *gēmu* to film. But Japan, thanks to its extremely agile media mix and diverse production strata, has gone far beyond recognizable names.

Five years before the American film *Super Mario Bros.*, Japan had productions such as *Mirai Ninja*, an ambitious extravaganza full of special effects created by Amemiya Keita, master of the most feverish *tokusatsu* behind works such as *Zeiram* (1991) and *Garo* (2005). *Mirai Ninja* was co-produced by Namco and released at the same time as the video game of the same name, for which Amemiya designed characters. It is difficult to say which of the two is the original and which is the adaptation: in reality, it is a twin media mix project.

Something similar happened the same year with *Star Virgin*, a fun action comedy made at the same time as an MSX video game of the same name. Both star a galactic superheroine in a metal bikini who battles monsters and aliens. The film was released directly to video, a year before Toei launched its V-Cinema line and established the format as a space for low-budget exploitation and experimentation.

Both films have been recovered by the Trash-O-Rama label, which specializes in rare and hard-to-find Asian cinema. They are trash in the best sense of the word: not low quality, but loose in ideas and form, bold in their use of their small budget and, above all, made to entertain. A side of *cinegēmu* that both cinema and video games need to remember.

G1. Gēmu Over?

This journey has been just a small sample of the fantastic and terrifying imagery of *gēmu*, as well as its intersections with cinema in both directions. The door has been left open, and behind it, many paths await. Now we know the device, but that only reinforces the fantasy.

Gēmu over? No, we continue dreaming. *Gēmu* continues to reach the big screen and cinema reaches our controllers. As is often the case in video games, after the credits roll, the option for a new game, a new game plus, opens up. Let's continue exploring the imaginary world of *gēmu* with the small map and compass we have shown here, without fear of encountering new monsters. New *gēmu* plus!