

# **EFFORT UPON EFFORT:**

## **JAPANESE INFLUENCES IN WESTERN FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS**

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An Interactive Qualifying Project Report

Submitted to the Faculty

of the

**WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE**

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

**BACHELOR OF SCIENCE**

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December 17, 2015

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# Abstract

This paper takes an extensive look at two Western-made first-person shooters, *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* and *F.E.A.R.: First Encounter Assault Recon*, which successfully transplant Japanese cultural elements into their design. *Shogo* manages to capture the essence of mecha anime by seamlessly blending the man-machine bond characteristic of Japanese mechs with the first-person perspective, enabling players to ‘become’ the pilot/robot and fully immerse themselves into an anime experience. *F.E.A.R.* embodies the mystery and sense of psychological vulnerability of Japanese horror films by making use of dark, dreary environments and chilling sound effects to heighten the atmospheric tension. The author argues that Japanese-influenced first-person shooters can make for riveting and engrossing experiences when Eastern cultural elements and Western game mechanics are harmoniously mixed.

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# Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank those who helped me in completing this paper. Without the essential assistance of the following individuals, this project would not have been possible:

- Professor Brian Moriarty for giving me the opportunity to write this paper and serving as my project advisor.
- Professors Jennifer deWinter, James Dempsey and David M. Samson for helping me structure my paper, and providing me with valuable information about Japanese culture and influence on Western art.
- Craig Hubbard, Brad Pendleton, TerminusEst13, Warren Spector, and John Romero for sharing important facts about their games.
- Jeff Orkin for introducing me to Craig Hubbard and Brad Pendleton, and offering me useful suggestions on my paper.
- Abigail Nack and Alexandra D'Ordine of the WPI Writing Center for aiding me in editing my paper.
- My family for constantly supporting me throughout the fall semester.



Figure 1. Box art for *Shogo* and *F.E.A.R.*

<http://www.mobygames.com/game/shogo-mobile-armor-division/cover-art/gameCoverId,2917/>

<http://www.amazon.com/FEAR-Ultimate-Shooter-Edition-Download/dp/B008Y21QAE>

## 1. Introduction

Over the past decades, video game technology has evolved considerably, allowing game developers to take advantage of advancing hardware and experiment with it to make their passions and dreams come to life. The resulting titles embody elements from the designers' knowledge and experience, influenced by the culture in which they were raised.

Some adventurous designers have also borrowed elements from cultures that they did not grow up in, but found fascinating nonetheless. This strategy has proven successful when done with thoughtfulness and integrity.

One example of cross-cultural influence that has emerged in recent years is Japanese-influenced first-person shooters (FPS), which combine aspects of Japanese culture with first-person shooting mechanics made popular in the West. This paper examines two titles that successfully transplant Japanese culture into first-person experiences — *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* (Monolith Productions, 1998) and *F.E.A.R.: First Encounter Assault Recon* (Monolith Productions/Sierra Entertainment, 2005).

Injecting foreign cultural elements into a video game allows the designer to create an experience that possesses a distinct identity. For example, the Aztec beliefs of the afterlife that adorned *Grim Fandango*, the Cherokee oral traditions that shaped *Prey*'s mechanics, and the Norse mythological elements that enhanced *Too Human* accentuated the sense of exoticism evoked by these games. Japanese art forms have proven particularly appealing to Western game designers seeking to create novel experiences. But gaming is hardly the first Western medium to borrow from Japanese culture.

## 1.1. Historical background

The origins of Japanese influence on Western artworks can be traced back to 1542, when Portuguese merchants, whom the Japanese designated as *Nanban* (Southern barbarian), first arrived on the island of Tanegashima. Other European nations soon followed. During the *Nanban* trade period (1543-1614), the Japanese were introduced to several technologies such as ship-building and firearms, and cultural practices such as Christianity. In addition, many artistic works from Europe were imported to Japan, which resulted in the production of *Nanban* art that combined foreign subject matter (e.g. depiction of Catholic missionaries) with Japanese styles of painting such as *byōbu* (folding screens). Although Western influence “would prove quite limited overall, leaving native Japanese

aesthetics fully intact” (Macewan) and resulting in a decline of *Nanban* art towards the end of the trade period, the cultural exchange between Europe and Japan would result in the former taking an interest in the latter’s culture, especially Japanese art.



Figure 2. Kano Domi, *Barbarians from the South*.

<http://www.tofugu.com/2015/02/06/japonism-japan-shaped-modern-art/>

Ceramics were the first products of Japanese artisanship to capture popular demand in Europe. Pottery styles such as Japanese blue and white porcelain and *kakiemon* (enameled ceramics) were not only exported, but also reproduced all across the European continent, most notably at the Meissen and Chantilly factories in Germany and France respectively. Lacquerware proved equally fetching, with “Christian missionaries taking a liking to Japanese items embellished with *maki-e* (sprinkled picture) gilded decoration, and employing lacquerware in such items as frames for religious



paintings and Bible stands” (Watanabe). However, the Tokugawa shogunate’s implementation of *sakoku* (locked country) policies throughout the 1630s prevented nearly all foreign countries from doing business with Japan, the only European exceptions being the Netherlands and the Dutch East India Company who operated in the trading outpost of Dejima near Nagasaki. Despite this, the high volume of Japanese art already available in Europe had established strong interest in Japanese culture among Europeans.

This forging of cultural contacts with Japan received a major boost following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when Japan ended its isolationist foreign policy and re-opened trade relations with the outside world. This political change, combined with enhanced networks of transportation and communication, accelerated the waves of cultural fusion that would pave the way for Japanese-inspired Western artworks.

Around the same time, several Western artists started looking to foreign artistic styles, including Japanese, for fresh ideas in an attempt to break away from traditional Western aesthetics. While significant inspiration was drawn from ceramics and textiles, the foremost medium of Japanese influence was the woodblock print, *ukiyo-e*. Such prints had the advantage of being easily mass-produced, making them widely accessible. The exotic imagery (e.g. cherry blossoms, temples, kimonos, lanterns) and unorthodox styles (e.g. prominent outlines, flat colors, asymmetric perspective) of *ukiyo-e* proved alluring to Western artists, who realized that “these techniques could unlock unique aesthetic experiences” (Macewan). This fascination with *ukiyo-e* helped give birth to the artistic specialism known as Japonism, a subset of the broader movement of Orientalism.



Figure 3. Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Emile Zola*, and  
Claude Monet, *Madame Monet in a Japanese Kimono*.  
<http://www.nippon.com/en/column/g00284/>

Coined by French art critic Philippe Burty in 1872, Japonism described the influence of Japanese aesthetics on Western art, which would gradually bewitch Europe and the rest of the Western world (Watanabe). Painters such as Edouard Manet and Claude Monet lifted imagery from Japanese paintings and incorporated them into their works. Emerging artistic styles such as Anglo-Japanese and parts of Art Nouveau reflected the Western appreciation for Japanese art and design. Japonism also influenced other art movements, including Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, spreading beyond Western Europe to Russia, North America, Australia and New Zealand.

However, the enthusiasm for Japanese aesthetics decreased substantially by the 1930s and '40s. As Japan flexed its military muscle by occupying Manchuria and bombing Pearl Harbor, people started associating the nation more with aggression than with artistry. Despite this, Japonism left a strong legacy that would continue to inspire multiple Western art forms, eventually including video games.

## 1.2. Rise of Japanese pop culture

From the 1980s onward, Japan became a cultural superpower, partly thanks to the international success of anime/manga works like *Dragonball* and *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, and also to the 'revival' of the gaming industry by the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) following the video game crash of 1983. This event paved the way for other popular consoles such as Sony's PlayStation, together with revolutionary games like *Final Fantasy* and *Street Fighter* whose gameplay and presentation captivated international audiences.

The exportation of Japanese products worldwide not only exposed Western audiences to the distinctive qualities of Japanese works like *Akira* and *The Legend of Zelda*, but also sparked an interest in all things Japanese (e.g. history, pop culture), providing a unique source of inspiration for several Western game designers. The depictions of feudal Japanese warfare in *Total War: Shogun* and *Skulls of the Shogun*, anime-inspired aesthetics of *Oni* and *Skullgirls*, and JRPG structure of *Sudeki* and *Child of Light* demonstrated the Japanophilic mindset that Western game designers adopted. This influence spanned multiple genres popular in both Eastern and Western markets, including fighting games and role-playing games (RPGs). It also found its way into a distinctly American genre, which made the inclusion of Japanese cultural elements all the more intriguing: the first-person shooter.



Figure 4. *Oni*, a *Ghost in the Shell*-inspired action game by Bungie of *Halo* and *Destiny* fame.

[http://halo.bungie.net/images/games/Oni/wallpapers/oni\\_1600.jpg](http://halo.bungie.net/images/games/Oni/wallpapers/oni_1600.jpg)

Popularized in the 1990s by games like *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom*, *Quake*, and *Duke Nukem 3D*, the first-person shooter immerses players into the game world by presenting it through the eyes of the protagonist, essentially ‘becoming’ the hero. It empowers them with an arsenal of realistic/fictional weapons, enabling them to single-handedly blast hostile NPCs to pieces. This simple ‘individual vs. world’ concept is heavily derived from American culture and ideals, with roots leading back to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Revolutionary War.

### 1.3. Philosophical differences

In his pamphlet *Common Sense*, which inspired the Thirteen Colonies to fight for independence, Thomas Paine stated that “those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it” (Paine 147). Rebels were forced to use firepower to express their will and defend their rights and land against British tyranny. Thus the concept of the ‘citizen soldier’ was born, the idea that all that an everyman needed to stand up and fight was a cause, determination and a weapon. The musket became more than just a firearm: it was considered a symbol of individuality and personal liberty, an idea later cemented by the Second Amendment, which granted American citizens the right to keep and bear arms. This individualistic philosophy differs from the collectivism typical of Japanese culture and games, which value the group more highly than the self, emphasizing friendship and cooperation — for example, a group of characters working together to overcome incredible odds in a Japanese role-playing game.

But the differences go deeper, and can be seen in the ways America and Japan view conflict, warfare, and the significance of weaponry. In Japanese culture, there is an emphasis on the warrior (*samurai*) culture which predates the advent of the gun, and prioritizes spiritual attainment and mastery above all else, concepts derived from Shinto and Buddhist traditions. Yamamoto Tsunetomo made this philosophy clear in his book *The Hagakure* (Hidden by the Leaves), one of the most popular expressions of *bushido* (way of the warrior) taught in Japan:

‘In the midst of a single breath, where perversity cannot be held, is the Way.’  
If so, then the Way is one. But there is no one who can understand this clarity at first.  
Purity is something that cannot be attained except by piling effort upon effort  
(Yamamoto 25).



Figure 5. West and East: Is cultural compatibility possible?

[http://www.gameinformer.com/cfs-filessystemfile.ashx/\\_key/CommunityServer-Components-ImageFileViewer/CommunityServer-Components-UserFiles-00-00-25-27-58-Attached+Files/1307.east 2D00 vs 2D00 west 2D00 picture.JPG 2D00 610x0.jpg](http://www.gameinformer.com/cfs-filessystemfile.ashx/_key/CommunityServer-Components-ImageFileViewer/CommunityServer-Components-UserFiles-00-00-25-27-58-Attached+Files/1307.east%20vs%20west%20picture.JPG%20610x0.jpg)

Thus the weapon is not so much an external tool of warfare as it is an extension of the self, one that requires the warrior to channel inner force and rely on their training in order to properly wield a weapon’s power. This contrasts with American ideals exemplified by first-person shooters,

which instantiate the idea that anyone can become a warrior through external empowerment (i.e. the gun).

## 1.4. Methodology

With all of these cultural differences taken into account, the idea of a Japanese-inspired first-person shooter becomes all the more fascinating. The mixture of Eastern themes and Western mechanics could potentially result in a shallow, haphazard game that treats its cultural sources disrespectfully. But there exist several FPSs that manage to get the tone and gunplay right, seamlessly blending them to create a title that is cohesive in its design and captivating in its execution.

*Shogo* and *F.E.A.R.* represent two of the Western game industry's most successful attempts at transplanting Japanese cultural elements into first-person shooters. Several criteria were used to select these titles:

- The game had to be produced by Western designers.
- The game had to be played exclusively from the first-person perspective, or emphasize that perspective as the preferred method of play.
- The game had to prioritize gunplay, or make it one of the most effective combat options.
- The game needed at least one distinctive influence from Japanese culture (preferably more) constituting such a major part of the experience that omitting it would result in the game being severely altered.

Other relevant games that met most but not all of these criteria will be briefly discussed in the concluding chapter.

## 2. Becoming the Mecha

In the early 2000s, the Japanese government started to evaluate the value of the country's popular culture industry following international successes in anime/manga (*Pokemon*, *Dragonball*), games (Nintendo's *Legend of Zelda* and *Super Mario* series) and films (*Spirited Away*, *Ringu*). Realizing that its cultural influence expanded despite the economic setbacks of the Lost Decade, Japan sought to promote the idea of 'Cool Japan', an expression of its emergent status as a cultural superpower. For the next dozen years, the Japanese government made use of its soft power and 'Cool Japan' strategy "to boost cultural exports" (Hofilena) from its creative industries, including one of its oldest and most influential anime genres: mecha (an abbreviation for the English word 'mechanical').

Since their inception, mecha anime and manga have dazzled fans with epic tales of battles fought by giant robots. Evidence of the genre's popularity is readily apparent in Japanese society, from the life-sized replicas of giant robots in public spaces to the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party's "efforts to make piloted, two-legged walking humanoid robots a reality" (Loo). Such war machines serve "as containers for spiritual and physical transcendence for the pilots or operators who control them" (Lunning, "Between" 268).





Figure 6. *Gundam* statue in Odaiba, Japan

[http://www.sakura-hostel.co.jp/blog/Odaiba\\_Gundam\\_20090823%20big%20best.jpg](http://www.sakura-hostel.co.jp/blog/Odaiba_Gundam_20090823%20big%20best.jpg)

## 2.1. Origins

The origins of Japanese mecha can be traced to the end of World War II, when Japan witnessed the destructive power of modern technology in the form of atomic bombs that obliterated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These dramatic events served as an inspiration for Japanese survivors who later became cartoonists. During Japan's Occupation and post-Occupation years (1945-early 60s), an explosion of artistic creativity occurred in the manga industry, possibly aided by the medium's exclusion from U.S. Occupation censorship policies (Schodt, "Manga"). These policies forbade depictions of war and Japanese nationalism, despite the fact that Article 21 of the Japanese

Constitution prohibited all forms of censorship. One artist, Mitsuteru Yokoyama, took advantage of this loophole to craft one of the most influential mangas of all time.

Yokoyama was motivated to become a cartoonist following the breakthrough success of Osamu Tezuka's *Mighty Atom* (Astro Boy, 1952), the story of an android who fought crime with mechanical powers yet was capable of displaying human emotions, essentially acting "as an interface between man and machine" (Tezuka 1). Yokoyama took a different approach, drawing heavily from his childhood encounters with war, technology and film. As a child, Yokoyama was "astonished by the terrifying power of the B-29 bombers that reduced his hometown of Kobe to ashes, as well as the *Wundervaffe* (wonder weapons) that the Nazis built during WWII" (Allison 104). The movie *Frankenstein* (Universal, 1931) convinced Yokoyama that the "titular monster did not have a will of its own, but rather followed the commands of its controller without taking morality into account" (Schodt, "Inside" 78-79). In contrast to Astro Boy's human demeanor and moral compass, Yokoyama crafted a giant, remote-controlled robot "that was expressionless, emotionless, and unbeatable" (Ladd and Deneroff 123-124), similar to the Martian fighting machines in H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*.

The result was *Tetsujin 28-go* (Iron Man No. 28, 1956), "a parable about technology's dangers and benefits" (Camp and Davis). It told the story of Shotaro Kaneda, a boy detective who fought criminals by commanding the titular robot by remote control. Tetsujin was created by Shotaro's late father as a WWII superweapon that would have turned the conflict in Japan's favor. Their adventures were depicted in fast-paced, action-filled panels reminiscent of a well-edited action film.



Figure 7. *Tetsujin 28-go*: the series that begot the Japanese mecha genre.

<http://pinktentacle.com/2010/10/tetsujin-28-manga-covers-1956-1966/>

Much of *Tetsujin 28-go*'s appeal could be attributed to the strong bond between Shotaro and Tetsujin, enhanced by the robot's benign and knight-like design, suggesting an avatar of unstoppable justice which readers could identify with and cheer for. *Tetsujin 28-go* was the first instance of a Japanese cartoon based on the idea of a giant humanoid robot controlled by a human being, with the former acting as a tool for the latter to use for realizing his fullest potential. This concept could be seen as a "metaphor for a resurgent Japan, reawakening like a giant from the rubble of WWII" (Ladd and Deneroff 123-124), evoking a strong sense of empowerment through technological means that would define subsequent mecha anime/manga works.

## 2.2. Man-machine union

If Yokoyama established a link between man and machine with *Tetsujin 28-go*, then Go Nagai forged that link into a union. Having read both *Mighty Atom* and *Tetsujin 28-go* as a youngster, Nagai sought to create his own robot manga. One day, while waiting to cross a street, Nagai “contemplated the backed-up traffic and mused about how the drivers were wishing for some way to get past the other cars” (Hornyak 60). This inspired a novel idea: what if the car suddenly transformed into a robot that a person could ride and control like a regular vehicle? Fortuitously coinciding with the spread of personal car and motorbike ownership in Japan, Nagai’s concept -- a pilot sharing the body of a robot -- made the man-machine bond both figurative and literal. The resulting manga, *Mazinger Z* (Tranzor Z, 1972) would prove to be the next big evolution in the mecha genre.



Figure 8. *Mazinger Z*: man and machine as one dynamic entity.

[http://mazinger.wikia.com/wiki/Mazinger\\_Z\\_\(TV\\_Mecha\)](http://mazinger.wikia.com/wiki/Mazinger_Z_(TV_Mecha))

*Mazinger Z* told the story of Koji Kabuto, an orphaned schoolboy who stumbles upon the titular giant robot in his grandfather's secret lab. The robot's name evoked the image of a *majin* (demon god) with its similar-sounding syllables ('Ma' meaning 'demon' and 'Jin' meaning 'god'), reinforcing the idea of a machine "built by humans in need of protection that also appears as an ancient, unfathomable being" (Holland-Minkley). This is echoed by the dying words of Koji's grandfather: "With this mechanical monster, Mazinger Z... You have the power to impose what you will on anyone!" (Nagai 36).

Mazinger's appearance was striking for its time: a brightly colored mechanical juggernaut ornamented with "a mixture of military equipment and samurai armor" (Gilson 367-69). Its design resembled the sleek new roadways, bullet trains and skyscrapers being built in Japan during the 1970s, an era of rapid industrial development. A small hovercraft docked on the robot's head housed Koji, who acted as its 'brain,' directing its powers via voice command. This established Mazinger as more than just a humanoid war machine. It served as an extension of the pilot's abilities and will, preserving its mechanical identity while symbolizing a powerful symbiosis between man and machine.

### 2.3. Splintering of the genre

*Mazinger Z*'s formula proved successful, spawning numerous imitators such as *Brave Raideen*, *Combattler V*, and *Danguard Ace*. But before the decade ended, another development in the genre appeared that surpassed Nagai's work in both popularity and influence. Created by Yoshiyuki Tomino who believed that the predictable, "menace-of-the-week storylines of commercial mecha" (Hornyak 61) had grown stale, *Mobile Suit Gundam* represented a massive shift in both tone and scope. In place of isolated weekly episodes, *Gundam* presented a continuously developing story with a more

ambiguous sense of morality that “targeted the lines between good and evil and the effects of war on the people who fought” (Gilson 367-69). Its complex story focused on the war between the Principality of Zeon and the Earth Federation, with the latter unveiling a new giant robot known as the RX-78-2 Gundam, piloted by the teenage civilian mechanic Amuro Ray. Instead of humans using machines to fight off evil aliens, *Gundam* had humans fighting humans, with both sides having their own ideological motivations. By favoring realism over fantasy, *Gundam* felt grittier and deeper than *Mazinger Z*. This new approach led to the splintering of the mecha genre into two subgenres: Super Robot and Real Robot.



Figure 9. *Mobile Suit Gundam*: rewriting the mecha rulebook.

<http://www.pageresource.com/wallpapers/44555/gundam-seed-destiny-pictures-high-definition-hd-wallpaper.html>

Whereas Super Robot stories focus on near-godlike mechs in fantastical scenarios, the Real Robot subgenre emphasizes drama, “human characterization, a realistic civil-war-in-space backdrop, and plausible mech creations that required adjustments and repairs” (Camp and Davis). Real Robot mechs are firmly grounded in conventional physics and credible technological advances. They make use of oversized versions of traditional firearms like rifles and cannons, manually operated rather than voice-activated, with realistic technical limitations (e.g. ammo, fuel). This could lead to moments when the protagonist might actually lose a battle if their machine was not properly operated and maintained. This is in contrast to Super Robot works, which depict mechs as near-invincible entities that only seem to sustain damage when needed to drive the plot.

*Gundam* mechs were designated by numbers, not names. This highlights another important difference between Super Robot and Real Robot: the former treats mechs as unique, semi-mystical beings, whereas the latter considers them mass-produced tools of war that take a narrative backseat to the character development of their human pilots. Despite initially low ratings, these distinctive qualities led to the *Gundam* series becoming a smash hit, paving the way for more complex mech series such as *Macross*, *Robotech*, *Patlabor*, and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.

## 2.4. Characteristics of Japanese mecha

Soon after the appearance of Real Robot manga/anime, a geek subculture called ‘otaku’ developed in Japan and spread to the West, exposing international audiences to the distinct aesthetic qualities of Japanese mecha. Unlike clunky, lumbering Western mechs such as those found in *Battletech*, Japanese mechs were anthropomorphic and highly mobile entities. They “espoused recognizable classes of people — snipers, soldiers, knights, etc. — including symbols of Japanese culture like the samurai” (Maradin). This can be seen on the RX-78-2 from *Mobile Suit Gundam*, which sported a fluted helmet and a skirt of armored plates on its torso.

Motion was equally important. Like the *samurai* sword, the mobility of Japanese mechs was managed by the user within, whose own bodily control and prowess determined the mech’s amplified analogues of human action. This granted the mechs a striking (if occasionally incongruous) agility as the humans inside the mechs became empowered and amplified, reflecting the man-machine merger whose symbolic effectiveness would be diluted if the machine displayed an inhuman design like those of many Western mechs. The Japanese mecha philosophy promotes the idea of having people “work alongside powerful machines with a familiar human shape, a desire that is associated with Japan's long religious history and culture” (Maradin).



Much like the Western superhero genre, with characters like Superman and Wonder Woman inspired by Judeo-Christian “ideals of an anthropomorphized God” (Lunning, "Giant" 274-82), the Japanese mecha genre is influenced by East Asian culture and religion, specifically Shinto and Buddhism. Both the Shinto concept of revering natural phenomena, including non-humans, as *kami* (gods) and “the worshipping of carved images of Buddha in Japan” (Maradin) suggest the protean notion of inner energy that can manifest itself in a mechanical form that may be anthropoid in shape and even showcase some human traits. This harnessing of power can be seen as a “representation of *ki*, the energy possessed by every person and object in the world, which can be stored, released, and controlled through bodily channeling and disciplinary exercise” (Brophy 11). This is the Japanese mech’s most distinctive characteristic: it is the tool through which its pilot expresses their power and will to overcome by bonding with the machine. This intimate union imbues the mech with a ‘soul’ that controls its advanced abilities, gratifying both the pilot’s need and the viewer’s fantasy of power, authority, and technological competence.



Figure 10. *Shogo*: an amalgamation of epic mecha anime and high-octane FPS gameplay.

<http://dumee gamer.com/timemachine/shogo.html>

### 3. *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division*

*Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* offers an example of a Western FPS that captures the thrilling essence of Japanese mecha works like *Patlabor*, *Macross Plus*, and *Venus Wars* by combining speedy, agile mechs with the fast-paced gameplay of *Doom*. Released in 1998 by Monolith Productions, *Shogo* puts players in the shoes of Sanjuro Makabe, a wise-cracking commander in the United Corporate Authority (UCA). Orphaned at a young age, Sanjuro is emotionally recovering from an accident that led to the death of his brother Toshiro and childhood friends Kura and Baku.

Sanjuro is tasked with taking down Gabriel, the leader of the religiously fanatical Fallen<sup>1</sup> before he can gain control of the planet Cronus and its precious ore, kato, which allows for quick intergalactic travel and the manufacturing of powerful energy-based weapons. The Cronian Mining Consortium (CMC), the governing body which promotes the kato mining business, has complicated matters by declaring martial law on the planet, killing anyone who tries to foil the CMC's attempts at independence from rival factions including the UCA and Fallen. Sanjuro must fight his way through several dangerous locales that are filled with hostile infantry and mechanized forces from the CMC and the Fallen, both on foot and while riding a Mobile Combat Armor (MCA).

### 3.1. Audiovisual presentation

From the outset, *Sbogo* displays many of the characteristics of anime. On booting the game, the player is treated to an anime-style movie sequence, accompanied by a Japanese pop song that was “developed from rough drafts received from a Japanese publishing company” (Hubbard). The lyrics embody typical anime themes of courage, perseverance and optimism, idiomatically juxtaposed with the over-the-top action shown onscreen.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the name ‘Gabriel’ and term ‘Fallen’ refer to the archangel and fallen angels in Abrahamic theology respectively, which constitute a nod to *Neon Genesis Evangelion*'s use of religious themes and symbolism.



Figure 11. *Shogo*'s anime-style presentation defines the experience.

<http://www.pcgamer.com/reinstall-shogo-mobile-armor-division/>

[http://www.gog.com/game/shogo\\_mobile\\_armor\\_division](http://www.gog.com/game/shogo_mobile_armor_division)

<https://biskmater.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/shogo-12.png>

The audiovisual design is equally noteworthy. Unlike other 3D games released in the late 1990s, *Shogo* adopts a distinctively anime-inspired art style for its characters, visual effects, and environmental props. The large, bright eyes of the characters, grandiose explosions and in-game mock advertisements are characteristic of the anime aesthetic, as are the cheesy one-liners, hand-wringing angst and cocky humor of the dialog. This is especially apparent in Sanjuro's conversations with allies like Kura, and foes like Samantha Sternberg, a Fallen soldier who repeatedly assaults Sanjuro throughout the game:

Kura: "Watch my ass!"

Sanjuro: "My pleasure."

Kura: "You say the sweetest things!"

Samantha: "We meet again!"

Sanjuro: (After defeating Samantha for the third time) "I think you need to get over this obsession; it's not healthy."

But *Shogo's* anime influences go deeper. Upon close inspection, references to several popular anime series become evident. Some sound effects are strikingly similar to those heard in *Gundam Wing* and *Ghost in the Shell*, especially the robot-vehicle transformation and mission log activation sounds. In the second level of the game, the names of certain characters are borrowed wholesale (e.g. Isamu Dyson from *Macross Plus*, Rick Hunter from *Robotech*, Noa Izumi from *Patlabor*). Posters and billboard for 'CURV' and 'War Angel' directly allude to *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Battle Angel Alita* respectively. These fan-delighting tributes ooze with Japanophilic character and charm.



Figure 12. Sanjuro frequently cracks jokes when conversing with allies and foes alike

(Samantha top, Kura bottom).

<http://www.mobygames.com/game/windows/shogo-mobile-armor-division/screenshots/gameShotId,10378/>

[http://cdn.overclock.net/2/2e/2ead549b\\_20120608234144dac.jpeg](http://cdn.overclock.net/2/2e/2ead549b_20120608234144dac.jpeg)

## 3.2. Narrative

In addition to its audiovisual design, *Shogo* displays strong mecha anime influences in its narrative, which is appropriately chaotic, conspiratorial and convoluted. The plot contains many sudden twists and turns that leave Sanjuro questioning his alliances and objectives as he is caught in a conspiracy that will determine who gains control of Cronus and its resources.

The tone of *Shogo* leans more towards *Gundam* and Real Robot than *Mazinger Z* and Super Robot. The UCA, CMC, and Fallen all have their own legitimate reasons to fight one another, with no faction being unambiguously good or evil. The Fallen and its leader Gabriel, in particular, become less antagonistic in the eyes of the player through a late-game revelation that unveils the Fallen's *raison d'être*: to front the interests of a Cronus native superbeing known as Cothineal. This underground creature is the secret source of kato, and is trying to regain freedoms accidentally stolen from it by the colonizing conglomerates. Its alien nature makes it one of the few Super Robot elements in the game.

Further complications arise from Sanjuro's commanding officer, Admiral Akkaraju, who gradually becomes irrational in his attempts to eliminate the Fallen, even going as far as to use a kato cannon to obliterate them without taking collateral damage into account. This places Sanjuro in a dilemma: should he stick to his initial orders and eliminate Gabriel, even though the Fallen is trying to help an abused being reclaim its rights from the corporate factions? This moral uncertainty is something that the player must deal with near the end of the game when given the ability to choose one of two paths: either bring Gabriel to justice, or help him seek a truce with the UCA to put a peaceful end to the conflict. The latter option mirrors a situation in *Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam*, where Amuro Ray and his rival, Char Aznable, set their differences aside to achieve a common goal. As one

of the first FPS games to feature a branching storyline, *Shogo* gives the player the chance to make a morally gray choice and explore its repercussions.

This Real Robot complexity also applies to Sanjuro's personal relationships with his allies. Much like the *Macross* series, *Shogo* features a tangled love triangle that involves Sanjuro, his radio contact Kathryn Akkaraju, and her (presumed dead) sister Kura. The game's opening monologue summarizes the relationship as 'kind of complicated', an understatement of the rivalry between the two Akkaraju sisters which becomes more apparent as the game progresses. More complications arise with the revelation that Sanjuro's allegedly dead brother and childhood friends are actually still alive. Baku and Toshiro -- who turns out to be none other than Gabriel! -- had defected to the Fallen, further muddling the distinction between good and evil. Such plot convolutions drive the ambiguous struggles endured by *Shogo's* main characters.

All of these audiovisual and narrative elements serve to imbue *Shogo* with a distinct mecha anime 'feel' that balances drama and playfulness, a feat made all the more impressive by the game's Western origin. But *Shogo's* real appeal and biggest nod to the mecha genre lies in the four Mobile Combat Armor (MCA) suits that players can choose from and pilot throughout their adventure.





Figure 13. *Shogo's* mechs (clockwise): Enforcer, Ordog, Predator, and Akuma.

[http://blood-wiki.org/index.php/Shogo\\_MCA](http://blood-wiki.org/index.php/Shogo_MCA)

### 3.3. Mech design

The “roughly 30 feet tall” (Hagen) MCAs in *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* exhibit many of the visual characteristics synonymous with Japanese mechs, from the humanoid architecture that enables the MCAs to perform elaborate and acrobatic maneuvers to the knight-like armor that adorn their mechanical bodies, a design often shared by the heavy infantry soldiers that the player faces throughout the game.

The four MCAs reflect the aforementioned Japanese philosophy of suggesting recognizable combat classes. They sport different visual designs that reflect their speed and armor stats, such as the Akuma's 'scout' look and the Predator's intimidating 'assault' design. Their naming conventions display an interesting mix of Real and Super Robot elements. On one hand, the MCAs reflect their industrial origin through the name of their manufacturing firm (Shogo Industries, Andra Biomechanics) and classification numbers (Mark VII, Advanced Series 7). Even the term 'Mobile Combat Armor' echoes *Gundam's* 'Mobile Suit.' These militaristic Real Robot motifs emphasize the idea that "mankind is the father of the mecha, and that he designed it as a tool used to enhance humanity" (Schuster). On the other hand, two of the MCAs bear Super Robot-style names that refer to malicious supernatural beings: Akuma means 'evil spirit' in Japanese, and Ordog is Hungarian for 'devil' (Lurker 143).

The mecha anime influences can also be felt in *Shogo's* high-octane gameplay. Unlike most '90s mecha video games, which generally consisted of simulators (*MechWarrior*) and role-playing games (*Front Mission*), *Shogo* married its mecha theme with first-person action inspired by id Software's *Doom* and *Quake*. This choice of perspective allows the player to 'become' the pilot/MCA, cementing the man-machine bond as they navigate battles filled with visual flourishes typical of mecha anime. These include the trading of shots while closing in and circling hostile mechs, 'Itano Circus' missile swarms (named after the animator Ichiro Itano who pioneered the effect in *Macross*), and massive explosions that fill up the screen. The player's mech is armed with an array of Real Robot-style conventional and energy-based weapons, ranging from the Pulse Rifle that fires energy balls with high damage, to the Red Riot that causes a powerful nuclear detonation, killing everyone within its blast radius (including the player if they are caught in it). Each firearm offers unique particle effects that serve to further evoke the dramatic combat seen in mecha anime series like *Robotech* and *VOTOMS*.

*Shogo*'s combat is further enhanced by the screams that enemies emit when killed, with some Fallen troops occasionally shouting 'For Gabriel!' before collapsing, and the heaps of blood and gore filling the battlefield. These details allow *Shogo* to solidly capture the cacophony and carnage of mecha anime battles, made all the more exhilarating by the MCAs' lithe maneuverability. While inside an MCA, Sanjuro is capable of performing virtually all of his on-foot moves including crouching, jumping, strafing, picking up and switching firearms on-the-fly, hovering and even swimming -- a far cry from the graceless machines seen in Western mecha works. This allows *Shogo*'s MCAs to mimic the speed and nimbleness of conventional FPSs like *Unreal Tournament* and *Rise of the Triad* in spite of the mechs' far greater size and mass.

The high level of mechanical maneuverability brings up another important aspect of Japanese mecha design: the "notion of the mech as 'body armor', intrinsically connected to the human body" (Napier 86). While *Shogo*'s MCAs express mechanical agility and technological prowess, they also display human elements in their design that go beyond their anthropoid architecture. When shooting an enemy MCA, for instance, hostile mechs stagger and recoil as if alive, making the MCA more of an exoskeleton than a bipedal tank by reinforcing the identity of the mech and its pilot. In gameplay terms, this means that the player's MCA can only withstand so much damage before blowing up and killing Sanjuro, "snapping [the player] back to the reality that the [MCAs] only thrive due to the existence of their human core" (Napier 86). The player is not invincible. Skill is more essential than the mechanical abilities of their mech.



Figure 14. Traversing Cronian canyons on an MCA in *Shoggoth*.

<http://www.forceforgood.co.uk/action/shogo-mobile-armor-division/>

### 3.4. Real Robot-style challenge

Sanjuro is sometimes accompanied by two friendly MCAs on his missions, recalling the three-unit teams found in mecha series like *Special Armored Battalion Dorvack* and *Metal Armor Dragonar*. This archetype reinforces the fact that the player is just another cog in the war effort, despite their character's high military ranking. Like Amuro Ray from *Gundam* and Noa Izumi from *Patlabor*, Sanjuro is not a child prodigy endowed with superhuman abilities or enhanced reflexes. He is just a typical armed participant in a wide conflict. Much of his valor lies in his skillful piloting of his MCAs, reflecting Tomino's "comparison of the pilot-mobile suit relationship with Formula One drivers in

that common people rely on machines to achieve a [heroic] goal” (Hornyak 64). As such, Sanjuro still needs to watch his back while engaging enemy MCAs.

This idea of an even playing field is reflected in *Shogō*’s critical hit system, which came “directly from Japanese role-playing games” (Hubbard). Although this system allows the player to occasionally deal more damage than usual and earn a health bonus when scoring critical hits on enemies, the system also grants these abilities to enemies. The player cannot afford to let their guard down, as either side can end a firefight in a matter of seconds by outsmarting the opposition, particularly since *Shogō*’s battles pit the player against multiple mechs. When one-on-one fights do occur, it is against stronger foes like Baku and Ryo Ishikawa, the game’s antagonist, who closely match Sanjuro’s skills and fill the role of rival pilots, much like *Gundam*’s Char Aznable and *Code Geass*’s Suzaku Kururugi. The differences between ‘regular’ and ‘*mano a mano*’ combat are tied to the player’s level of improvisation and choice of combat approach, much like mecha anime pilots in similar situations, such as the fight between Max and Milia Jenius in *Macross*. These elements reflect the game’s “focus on the ability of the [player], and not on the technological capacity [of their MCA]” (Vance). As a result, *Shogō*’s gameplay faithfully models the exhilaration of piloting a fast-moving and powerful mech, as well as the Real Robot repercussions of making poor combat choices that can lead to the player’s defeat.

### 3.5. Becoming the pilot/machine

By transplanting one of Japanese pop culture's most iconic media forms to the quintessentially Western first-person shooter genre, *Shogo* gives the player the opportunity to experience firsthand the chaotic action and drama typical of mecha anime, and live out their own power fantasies by 'becoming' the pilot/machine and forging their own path through combat experience and narrative decision-making. Through the game's use of the first-person perspective, the inputs of the player, motions of the robot and emotions of the pilot become one. This seamless mixture of Eastern themes and Western game mechanics makes *Shogo* a distinctive achievement. It actually *feels* like an interactive version of an over-the-top mecha series, a testament to Monolith's strong understanding of the elements that make Japanese mecha unique.

## 4. Don't Fear the *Yurei*

Following the collapse of the Japanese economy in the early 1990s which began the Lost Decade, Japan experienced another development in its mass culture that would “provide a suitable metaphor for the issues facing the modern individual” (Balmain, “Inside the Well of Loneliness”), and set the stage “for a movie trend in its postwar rollercoaster narrative” (Lu 38) that would captivate international audiences: an explosion of horror films.

The Japanese horror (J-horror) film genre represented a stark departure from the slasher and splatter movies that defined the Western horror genre. Rather than relying on high-impact violence and graphic/gory imagery to shock viewers, J-horror focused on psychological tension-building to unsettle audiences, using the icon of Japan’s bubble economy – the teenage girl – to explore disturbing topics deeply rooted in the country’s folk religion and history.

### 4.1. Origins of J-horror

The origins of the themes and tone of J-horror can be traced back to the Heian period (794-1185), when Japan’s oldest historical books such as the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matter), and the *Nihon Shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan) were compiled. These collections of records and myths described the birth of the Japanese archipelago (*Kuniumi*) and of the first gods (*Kamiumi*) through the creation myth (*Tenbikaibyaku*). Along with complementary works like the *Konjaku Monogatari-shū* (Anthology of Tales from the Past), they laid the literary groundwork for Shinto and Japanese mythology/folklore. This involved several mystical entities such as “*bodhisattva* and *kami* (venerated gods), *yokai* (strange apparitions), animals with supernatural powers like the *kitsune* (fox), the *tanuki* (a mixture of raccoon and dog) and the *bakeneko* (transformable cats), and the *yurei* (ghost)” (Perron 104).

The conception of these beliefs can be attributed to the combining of “Chinese ideas of demons, Indian notions of the transmigration of souls, and the native Shinto belief in nature and animal spirits, yielding a rich assortment of creatures, all of them odd, bizarre, and contrary to human notions of what is normal” (Kieje’e).



Figure 15. *Yurei* from Toriyama Sekein’s *Hyakkai Yagyo*.

<http://hyakumonogatari.com/2013/11/15/whats-the-difference-between-yurei-and-yokai/>

Of all the mythical creatures comprising Japanese mythology/folklore, it is the *yurei* that epitomizes the popular conception of a foreboding creature. This vengeful spirit originates from a person’s *reikon* (soul) which, according to Japanese belief, is left in purgatory following death, waiting



for the proper funeral rites to be performed so that it can join its ancestors. But if a person dies in a sudden or violent way, the *reikon* transforms into a *yurei*. The tragic fate and haunting demeanor of these spirits serve as the backbone for *kaidan* (ghost stories), which came into prominence during the Edo period (1603-1868), “possibly for political reasons” (Wierzbicki).

The regime at that time, the Tokugawa shogunate, was highly authoritarian. Women bore a lower status than men, and possessed fewer economic and political rights under Tokugawa law. This treatment of female constituents as social exiles can be attributed to the Japanese idea of groupism, i.e. how one should remain connected with their social and familial kin and conform to a specific cultural pattern. Women who did not adhere to these mores would endure hardships and severe abuse, and could be brutally murdered for their transgressions. Sometimes, these women would die without descendants or their kin knowing of their death, turning them into *muenbotoke* (unrelated spirits) and breaking the connection between them and the rest of society which, in turn, “dooms them to an existence of loneliness” (Barrett 81).

The *kaidan* represented “an extreme reaction to the repressed position of women in [Tokugawa] society” (Jordan 25-33), empowering them by portraying them as “vengeful spirits after they have died, with the entire world of selfish, unfaithful husbands and lovers having to take cover when one of these women comes back from the other world to seek revenge on those who have wronged her” (Leiter 495-514). They were also inspired by the Japanese beliefs in the body and spirit comprising two separate entities, and of “coexistence between the *kono-yo* (world of the living) and the *ano-yo* (world of the dead)” (Balmain, “Introduction to Japanese Horror Film” X). The former belief describes the “erection of two separate graves: one for the impure body and another for the soul ... At the time of death, the soul of a person can become either an angered or a peaceful spirit, according

to the psychological status of the person at the moment of death, with emotions such as jealousy, love or hatred engendering a very dangerous spirit” (Serper 345-76). The latter belief deals with the materiality of spirits and how they can bridge the gap between the *kono-yo* and the *ano-yo*, taking on a physical form as they do so. This evokes the Japanese idea of contradictions being “necessary and accepted aspects of a complete and holistic existence [whose] boundary between the physical and supernatural realms is penetrable, allowing both mortals and ghosts to cross between the worlds with ease” (Wee 59). Spirits are not simply seen as enemies, but also as supernatural beings who can reside in the human world.



Figure 16. *Chikaramochi Yurei* - The Strong Japanese Ghost.

<http://hyakumonogatari.com/2013/09/30/chikaramochi-yurei-the-strong-japanese-ghost/>

These beliefs form one of the major components of Japanese horror: atmospheric dread. In J-horror, the environment constitutes a critical aspect of the syntax of despair, emptiness, and isolation

through which suspense is built, with “horror emanating from empty and forgotten places - the *ano-yo* and the *kono-yo*” (Balmain, “Inside the Well of Loneliness”). The setting of J-horror reflects that syntax through the use of drab, cool colors (e.g. green, blue) and ambient silence, creating a corrupt, dirty and eerily quiet environment that reinforces the sense of loneliness and trepidation.

## 4.2. *Ringu*

1998's *Ringu* (Ring) is largely responsible for popularizing the J-horror genre. It embodies many of the characteristics that defined the *kaidan* (ghost tale) in pre-modern Japan, including the repercussions of violently killing those who do not fit in with the conventional mores of Japanese society. The central character, Sadako, represents the vengeful woman whose ‘otherness’ and supernatural traits caused her father to throw her into a well in order to hide her difference from society. The well can be seen as a symbol of the gap connecting the *ano-yo* to the *kono-yo*. In her unsuccessful attempt to climb out of the well, the ostracized girl tried to cross this gap before dying a slow, tragic and lonely death.

Sadako fits the description of both the *yurei* and the *muenbotoke*: not only is she banished from society by her own relatives as a result of her differences, she is also denied the posthumous rites that would have spared her from the loneliness that she must endure following her separation from human bonds. Her traumatic murder intensifies her rage and thirst for revenge on the *kono-yo*, which she hopes to quench by implanting her spirit into a cursed videotape which kills anyone who watches it.



Figure 17. *Ringu*: bridging the gap between two worlds.

<http://womenwriteaboutcomics.com/2014/10/26/the-scariest-movie-of-my-life-ringu/>

Despite Sadako's vengeful role, *Ringu* does not portray her as a mere antagonist. Drawing from the Buddhist idea of dualism, she is presented as one of "two linked forces that result in a balanced whole, with one keeping the other in check, reflecting a 'Both/And' mindset" (Lacefield 81-82). Sadako is not purely an undead monster. She is a wronged revenant with unfinished business in the physical realm.

### 4.3. Originals vs. American remakes

J-horror's embracing of the equivocal makes it a uniquely tense experience. This tension is often lost in translation when the West attempts to replicate similar experiences like *The Ring* (2002, based on *Ringu*) and *The Grudge* (2004, based on *Ju-On*). These films rationalized the ambiguity of their

sources, thereby reflecting “Western/Judeo-Christian notions of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ that are intertwined with notions of God in opposition with Satan or the Devil” (Wee 60). The ghosts in *The Ring* and *The Grudge* are unquestionably evil entities that need to be exterminated by the living. This establishes a tone different from the one J-horror tries to convey: that one cannot fully understand the universe, and that control cannot be gained by ‘explaining’ the supernatural.

This difference between J-horror films and their Western remakes extends beyond cultural differences. It also deals with the idea of ‘experience design’, i.e. trying to capture the core of an experience rather than focusing on ancillary details that are deemed ‘attractive’ (such as the West’s preoccupation with blood and gore). Video game designer Jesse Schell suggests focusing on “the essential elements that really define the experience [one] wants to create, and find ways to make them part of [the] design” (Schell 20-21). Western designers are well advised to take Schell’s ‘Lens of Essential Experience’ into consideration when attempting to convey an Eastern perspective on the supernatural.



Figure 18. Investigating a cannibalistic murder in F.E.A.R.

<http://i.imgur.com/8po2jGx.jpg>

## 5. *F.E.A.R.: First Encounter Assault Recon*

Monolith Productions' 2005 FPS *F.E.A.R.: First Encounter Assault Recon* is an example of a Western work that solidly captures the essence of Japanese horror. Originally designed as a futuristic shooter that “took inspiration from *Metal Gear*, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, and *Appleseed*” (Hubbard), *F.E.A.R.* puts players in the role of the Pointman, an operative of the titular organization who possesses superhuman reflexes. He is charged with containing a paranormal threat in the form of Paxton Fettel, a psychic commander who has the ability to control an entire battalion of cloned soldiers known as Replicas through telepathy. But a series of unexplained events unfolding around the player suggests that there is more behind the scenes than a telepathic rogue.

## 5.1. Approach to atmospheric horror

A goal of the *F.E.A.R.* production team was to disturb players' imaginations, instilling "the psychology of the [paranormal] encounter in the player in order to get under [their] skin" (F.E.A.R. Team). Craig Hubbard, *F.E.A.R.*'s lead designer and writer, describes the effect he hoped to achieve as "a subtle and cerebral type of horror [emphasizing] suspense and the shadows" (Green). This is a stark contrast to typical Western horror games like *Doom 3* which spoonfeed horror to the player. In *F.E.A.R.*, it's not so much about what lies ahead as it is about what should lie ahead but doesn't. This adds an element of unpredictability, toying with expectations to produce the aura of ambiguous terror characteristic of J-horror.

*F.E.A.R.*'s approach to horror also influenced the game's sound design. To heighten the feeling of uncertainty and tension, audio engineers Nathan Grigg and James Ackley adopted a minimalist and unorthodox approach to ambient sound effects and how they were triggered. They used cheap equipment to record sounds that aren't scary on their own, but become so in the eerie context of the game. In addition, they "structured music around individual scenes as to ratchet up the tension and keep players from recognizing the formula and not being scared anymore" (GameSpot Staff). This approach fosters an oppressive atmosphere that can crescendo at any moment, "made all the more potent by being framed, far more often than not, by *ma*" (Wierzbicki).

*Ma* (substantial silence) is an important tool of J-horror employed by *F.E.A.R.* to instill dread. In the game's most isolated environments, such as the water treatment facility, the player's footsteps are the only sounds that can be heard. Trudging through the dank locale, pockets of noise (knocked soda cans, scurrying rats) begin to break the silence, building the tension. Foreign radio chatter suddenly alerts the player to incoming danger.



Figure 19. Alma Wade, the *yurei* figure in F.E.A.R.

[http://ayay.co.uk/background/action\\_games/fear/alma/](http://ayay.co.uk/background/action_games/fear/alma/)

## 5.2. Alma Wade

Fearsome visuals also play a key role in *F.E.A.R.* Much of the game’s paranormal chaos appears in the form of a ghostly little girl. Alma Wade, whose given name means ‘soul’ in Spanish and Portuguese and is derived from Alma Mobley in Peter Straub’s novel *Ghost Story* (Hubbard), haunts the player at various points throughout their adventure. Aside from her red dress (*yurei* usually wear white dresses, which signify ritual purity in Shinto), Alma closely resembles J-horror entities like Yoko from *Seance*, and Mitsuko Kawai from *Dark Water*. According to Hubbard, Alma is thematically inspired by Sadako from *Ring* (the novel from which *Ringu* was adapted), who was raped by a smallpox-infected doctor and then murdered, becoming a viral ghost who spreads disease to her victims. Hubbard admits that “creepy little girls have been freaking [him] out since *The Shining*” (Spittle), and that Alma “was born out of a tradition of eerie, faceless female ghosts and not as an answer to any specific movie character” (Bramwell).



For *F.E.A.R.*, Hubbard adapted the disease concept from *Ring* into the plot twist of Alma being a literal and figurative toxic secret buried underground, seeping out and poisoning the game environment. This idea of a tragic secret that refuses to stay buried was inspired by two of Hubbard's real-life experiences. The first was the Waste Isolation Pilot Plan (WIPP), a nuclear storage facility near his childhood home in Southern New Mexico, which haunted Hubbard's imagination due to concerns about radioactive material leaking from the site and polluting the groundwater. The second was the smog monster Hedorah, from the 1971 film *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*, which impressed the young Hubbard with its ability to spread pollution and reduce the landscape to an uninhabitable wasteland. In a similar way, Alma's corrosive rage intensifies the effects of the chemicals that leak out of the underground facility in *F.E.A.R.*, leading to the abandonment of the district which the player visits in the game.

Alma's backstory and psychic powers are also inspired by J-horror ghosts and *yurei*. As a child, Alma was gifted with psychic powers, but suffered from nightmares that were made worse by the negative emotions of the people around her. Because of her powers, Alma began to be experimented on by the Armacham Technology Corporation (ATC), the game's antagonist, which tried to unlock her abilities through painful electroshock therapy and isolation, an analogy to the ostracizing of Japanese women who did not conform to social mores. Her forced 'recruitment' into parapsychological experiments is reminiscent of the suffering that the titular character in the classic anime feature *Akira* (1986) had to endure. Hubbard confirms that "*Akira* was a huge influence on Alma Wade" (Harris).



Figure 20. Auburn, the location of Alma's corrosive influence, accurately portrays the corrupted and dirty environmental aesthetics of J-horror.

<http://vignette3.wikia.nocookie.net/fear/images/8/81/Auburnabandoned.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20140204024247>

Throughout the game, Alma makes use of her psychic abilities to trigger supernatural phenomena. Some of her powers, such as the ability to project horrifying visions into a person's mind and transport people to an alternate dimension called the Almaverse are reminiscent of the *nensha* (projected thermography) that Sadako used in *Ringu* to burn disturbing images into a videotape. Telepathic scenes of bloody hallways and blank spaces engulfed in flames blur the line between the real and the imaginary, highlighting the dualistic philosophy underlying *F.E.A.R.*

Throughout the game, Alma is an omnipresent menace. Sometimes the player dies if they get too close. In other encounters, she vanishes in a blink of an eye, or turns to ash if the player makes physical contact, leaving uncertainty as to whether or not she constitutes a real threat. Is Alma

physically real, or does she simply exist as a frightening but harmless apparition in the minds of those who see her? The game doesn't give a clear answer, but encourages the player to piece out Alma's true and mysterious nature by exploring claustrophobic levels and collecting information from phone messages and computer terminals. But even without visual evidence of Alma's presence, indistinct whispers and a soft giggle give players the sensation that they are being stalked, made all the more terrifying when juxtaposed with the eerie silence that pervades the game's atmosphere.

### 5.3. Mystery and vulnerability

*F.E.A.R.*'s less-is-more approach to tension captures the essence of Japanese horror, allowing Alma to linger, permeate and haunt players, essentially 'baking' her into their minds. This, along with the player's inability to kill Alma, ensures constant anxiety throughout the adventure. There's no need to startle players with cheap effects. They're already terrified.

*F.E.A.R.* embodies the mystery and sense of psychological vulnerability of J-horror classics like *Kairo* and *Dark Water*. Using suggestion rather than literal representation, the game creates a mental conflict between what participants thought they experienced and what actually unfolded. *F.E.A.R.* succeeds in conveying its namesake emotion through its understanding and borrowing of the thematic elements that have made Japanese horror an international sensation.



Figure 21. Disturbing visions created by Alma abound in *F.E.A.R.*

<http://www.giantbomb.com/fear-first-encounter-assault-recon/3030-4800/>

## 6. Other Games

### 6.1. Retail titles

While both *Shogo* and *F.E.A.R.* replicate the tone and style of their respective influences, they are not the only FPSs that successfully blend Japanese culture with Western game mechanics. In recent years, the gaming landscape has seen the release of several first-person games that are similarly inspired. *Shadow Warrior* and *Red Steel 2*, for instance, borrow heavily from *kenjutsu* (Japanese swordsmanship) by making the *katana* the weapon of choice and encouraging players to make use of various sparring maneuvers while still allowing them to switch to traditional gunplay for long-range combat. In addition, FPSs like *Hawken* and *Titanfall* incorporate elements from Japanese mecha works into their mech designs, with the former taking cues from Kow Yokoyama's *Maschinen Krieger* figures (Plunkett) and the latter seeking inspiration from Masamune Shirow's works, *Appleseed* and *Ghost in the Shell* (Cavanaugh).



Figure 22. *Shadow Warrior*: first-person Japanese swordplay

[http://assets.vg247.com/current//2013/08/shadow\\_warrior\\_2013\\_01.png](http://assets.vg247.com/current//2013/08/shadow_warrior_2013_01.png)

Some cyberpunk FPSs have similarly been influenced by Japanese culture and works, particularly *Ghost in the Shell*. *Blacklight: Retribution*, for instance, borrowed elements from *Ghost in the Shell*, *Appleseed*, and *Akira* (Rainier) which influenced the game's 'Neo-Tokyo' environments and exoskeletal 'Hardsuits' that players can unlock with combat points. Likewise, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*'s aesthetic design is heavily influenced by Shirow (Geddes) and contemporary Japanese architecture, with spider tanks reminiscent of those in *Ghost in the Shell*, human augmentations (e.g. cloaking, machine gun arm) and capsule hotels in the in-game location of Hengsha clearly displaying the game's influences. Additionally, *EYE: Divine Cybermancy*'s dystopian themes are drawn from *Battle Angel Alita*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Akira* and Tsutomu Nihei's works *BLAME!* and *Biomega* (Stream On Studio). *Samurai* motifs can be seen in the armor design of *EYE*'s Jian Shang Di cybernetic warrior monks who mirror the *sōhei* (fighting monks) of feudal Japan.

## 6.2. Mods

The game modding scene has also seen its fair share of Japanese-inspired shooters. *DemonSteele*, for instance, is a *Doom* mod that adds swordplay and an anime/heavy metal presentation to id Software's classic shooter formula. The game possesses the cheesy, 'so bad it's good' feel seen in anime works like *Demon City Shinjuku* and *Blood Reign: Curse of the Yoma*, and captures the *tokusatsu* (films featuring considerable use of special effects) genre's sense of speed and chaos by putting an emphasis on swapping constantly between gun and sword and moving around quickly, making players feel like nimble and unstoppable anime action heroes as they traverse open-ended levels and effortlessly slay enemies *en masse* (TerminusEst13).

*Neotokyo*, a *Half-Life 2* mod, takes the "cyberpunk aesthetic and art style of films like *Ghost in the Shell* and *Akira*" (Stenchy) and blends them with the tactical, *Counter-Strike*-esque gameplay that emphasizes the use of gadgets and augmentations (e.g. auxiliary vision modes, cloaking). The result is a team-based multiplayer experience that accurately portrays the feel of technological warfare seen in its anime influences, and effectively sets the mood of the urban combat environments which is further enhanced by the 'futuristic Tokyo' architecture and signage that adorn the levels.

### 6.3. Japanophilia among developers

Such a wide range of Japanese-influenced FPSs suggest that Japanophilic game design is still seen as an interesting endeavor for Western developers, something that even famous designers like Warren Spector and John Romero undertook throughout their careers. In an email interview, Spector explains how he took inspiration from *Suikoden*, whose weighty moral choices and highly customizable fortress options resonated deeply with his design philosophy of player choice, to shape the decision-making and base-building mechanics of *Dens Ex* with the goal of making each playthrough impactful and personal to each player (Spector).

Romero, on the other hand, borrowed elements from several Japanese sources while developing *Daikatana*, with the design of the upgradable titular sword being inspired by Link's sword in *The Legend of Zelda*, and the characters and time-travel motif having been influenced by one of Romero's favorite games, *Chrono Trigger*. Romero even paid tribute to Japanese game designer Shigeru Miyamoto of *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda* fame by naming the protagonist of *Daikatana*, Usagi Miyamoto (Romero).



## 7. Conclusion

*Shogo* and *F.E.A.R.* demonstrate that the concept of a first-person shooter deeply influenced by Japanese culture is not far-fetched. The developers of these titles proved that a genre conventionally based on Western philosophy and design goals can be fused with apparently contradictory elements from Eastern culture in a way that does not compromise the gameplay mechanics, but rather enhances them, providing a refreshing and enjoyable virtual experience.

*Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* manages to capture the essence of mecha anime by seamlessly blending the man-machine bond characteristic of Japanese mecha with the first-person perspective, enabling players to 'become' the pilot/mecha and fully immerse themselves into an anime experience. The narrative employs Real Robot themes of militarization and moral nebulosity characteristic of its source genre. Stylized visuals and cheesy dialog add idiomatic personality to the characters and environments. The firefights closely replicate the oversized weaponry, wide-ranging maneuverability and visual chaos of mecha anime, while the critical hit system and high difficulty level maintain the genre's essential sense of vulnerability. These achievements make *Shogo* an FPS that remains faithful to its origins while immersing the player in first-person action with the full intensity and thrill of mechanized warfare.

As for *F.E.A.R.*, the game successfully embodies the ambiguity, atmospheric tension and psychological unease that define Japanese horror through the developers' understanding of that film genre's experience goals, making players feel mentally conflicted and apprehensive. The minimalistic presentation, sporadic but chilling sound effects, and dark, dreary environments reinforce the feeling of isolation, imbuing the game with an aura of unforeseen terror that keeps players guessing as to what may lie around the corner without truly understanding the nature of the threat. This feeling of oppressive suspense is enhanced by the *yurei* figure, Alma Wade, whose supernatural abilities and foreboding omnipresence haunt players as they witness her paranormal handiwork in the form of ghostly apparitions and disturbing hallucinations that blur the line between real and imaginary. This ability to instill unexplained dread into the minds of players without outright shocking them or relying on jumpscare is what makes *F.E.A.R.* a genuinely spine-chilling FPS that effectively evokes J-horror's emotional syntax of despair, emptiness, and isolation.

## 7.1. Prospects and takeaway

Japanese-influenced first-person shooters not only represent one of the more intriguing concepts to come out of the Western game industry, but also provide a fascinating and enjoyable experience that serves as a cultural dialog between East and West, with the former's themes and latter's mechanics making for a fresh and interesting design. With the increasing popularity of quintessentially Japanese games in the West such as the visual novels *Clannad* (Cowan) and *Muv-Luv* (Lada), and Japanese developers' gradual embracing of the PC platform following the commercial successes of Japanese role-playing games like *Dark Souls* and *Valkyria Chronicles*, the link between the Western and Eastern game industries is getting stronger. This is likely to encourage greater cultural interplay between East and West as well as the spread of Japanese cultural elements in Western titles and video game genres, including first-person shooters.

But despite their cultural differences, the East and West still have a universal language that their respective industries can use to create games that connect international audiences with one another. Rather than trying to split the cultural distinctions of art forms from different countries, developers can travel across the world taking bits and pieces of things they learn and enjoy, and then glue them together in their work to create an innovative and intriguing title that's more than just what they could do by themselves within the confines of their native culture (TerminusEst13). As Craig Hubbard notes:

Creativity is recombinant, and the more inspiration designers take in, the more they have to draw from and the higher the chances they'll produce something with a distinct perspective (Hubbard).

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# Appendices

[NOTE: Typographic errors in the original email messages have been silently corrected.]

## Appendix A. Craig Hubbard interview transcript

### **1 - What compelled the team to develop an anime first-person shooter like *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division*?**

The basic concept Jason Hall presented to me was to create a *Robotech*-style experience, in contrast to the *Mechwarrior*-style game most people seemed to think of when it came to giant robot games. In other words, fast, agile machines rather than slow, lumbering ones.

I think the inspiration was mainly that he loved *Robotech* and the super-fast pace of *Doom* multiplayer and saw an opportunity to do something cool and different by combining the two.

### **2 - How much did the mech designs in *Shogo* evolve throughout the development process?**

The original designs remained pretty intact because the concept artists had fully embraced the theme. We added some new playable mecha but I don't remember changing any.

### **3 - Have any anime works inspired the narrative and themes in *F.E.A.R.*?**

Back before the ghost story aspect came about, when the setting was going to be more futuristic, there were lots of inspiration from Japanese entertainment in general. The *Metal Gear* series was my main tonal reference, but there was also some *Akira*, *GITS: Stand Alone Complex*, *Appleseed*, etc.

Once the new game engine was far enough along to start prototyping, we realized the levels were going to have to be pretty tight and dark for performance reasons. Also, the art assets were taking

considerably longer to build than we expected. Additionally, the visual exploration to establish the near future setting wasn't really panning out. All of these factors led to a major reworking of the concept, making it more contemporary and introducing a creepy element to make the lighting constraints feel purposeful and less like the technical compromise they were.

Some of the initial influences are still recognizable in the final product, but it obviously transitioned into a more straightforward blend of Japanese ghost story and Hong Kong action.

#### **4 - Have elements from Japanese mythology and folklore influenced Alma's design?**

Probably, but there were other, more direct influences. Her name is a nod to Alma Mobley from Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*, which is one of my favorite horror novels. Her physical appearance was inspired by the little girls from Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Seance* and Hideo Nakata's *Dark Water*, and to a lesser extent the twins in Kubrick's adaptation of *The Shining*.

Thematically, she owes a massive debt to Sadako in Koji Suzuki's *Ring* novel. In the book, Sadako was raped by someone with smallpox and then murdered, so she essentially becomes a viral ghost. I more or less ripped off the disease concept but gave it the twist of Alma being this literal and figurative toxic secret buried deep underground, seeping out and poisoning the surrounding area.

That idea was inspired by several things. One was the WIPP nuclear waste storage facility in Southern New Mexico, which had haunted my imagination growing up because of concerns about radioactive material leaking from the site and polluting the groundwater. The other was Hedorah (aka the Smog Monster), which had also made a huge impression on me as a kid. And of course many ghost stories are rooted in an act of cruelty that someone has tried to conceal but refuses to stay buried.

**5 - Aside from Japanese horror, what other elements of Japanese culture had an influence on the overall design of *F.E.A.R.*?**

Mainly just the elements I've mentioned. Things probably would've been different if we'd continued in the original direction.

**6 - *Shogo: MAD* opens with an anime-style intro that plays a catchy J-pop track. How did you manage to get such a song into the game? Did you collaborate with Japanese composers/singers, or did you simply license the song? If it's the former, what was it like to work with them and what did they think of the project?**

At that time, Monolith was owned by a Japanese publishing company that was able to get us some rough drafts of songs. I never clearly understood whether they were composed internally or outsourced, but the song we chose was in the second batch they sent, and they developed it from there. I didn't have any direct contact with the composers or musicians and I doubt they knew much about the project aside from maybe the basic concept.

**7 - What led to your interest in Japan being a strong component of your design philosophy?**

I grew up on *kaiju* and *samurai* movies and have always loved Japanese aesthetics. I don't know where it came from, but it dates back at least to grade school. That said, it's part of a complex *mélange* of influences that includes Arthurian stories, the Icelandic sagas, Hong Kong cinema, film noir, 50s flying saucer movies, James Bond, and so on *ad nauseam*.

My belief is that creativity is recombinant, and the more inspiration you take in, the more you have to draw from and the higher the chances you'll produce something with a distinct perspective. So I try to maintain a rich and varied diet of entertainment and education.

**8 - You came aboard as lead designer when *Shogo* was already well into development. Could you please give me a few examples of how you changed the characters and plot in the game to make them similar to that of your conventional mecha anime, while still remaining true to the FPS formula?**

I had seen some mecha anime but wasn't at all an expert. I started by watching as much as I could find. The original narrative premise was very Hollywood-inspired, which probably could've worked fine, but I had really fallen for the way a lot of anime combined very down-to-earth, personal stories about friendships or relationships with epic situations involving the fate of civilizations. I also loved the juxtaposition of drama and playfulness in even a lot of the more serious anime.

At the same time, I didn't want to alienate the team by coming in and sweeping away all the elements that had already been developed, so I worked my ideas into the existing story as much as possible. Another consideration was that my original plan was way too ambitious, so much of what I'd personally hoped to do never made it into the game. The result, in my opinion, has some clear anime influence but its own weird point of view.

As far as specific examples, much of the interpersonal story elements came from me. I can't clearly recall which characters I introduced and which already existed in some form (aside from Hank, who I definitely added), but their personalities and relationships were mostly my doing. But because of the cuts and technical constraints, I've always considered *Shogo* to be a very rough first draft of a game that needed more iteration to really come together.

**9 - What inspired you to include the critical hit system in *Shogo*?**

That came very directly from JRPGs. It was one of those cases where I knew it was probably a mistake to allow enemies to get criticals on players, but it added a dash of absurdity I couldn't resist.

**P.S.: I would also like to know if the original game design documents for *F.E.A.R.* and *Shogo* still exist. Just curious.**

Yeah, I keep everything.



## Appendix B. Warren Spector interview transcript

**1 - You mentioned in an interview with *Pixelitis* that *Suikoden* heavily influenced the design of *Deus Ex*. Were there other Japanese games that had an impact on your game?**

Honestly, *Suikoden* is the only Japanese game that influenced me, and that in only a couple of ways. First, the ultimately false choice about whether to leave an ailing friend behind in a suicide mission to cover your back, and the choice as to whether to fight your father at the end. If those had been real choices, it would have been magnificent. Second, the idea of building a base that would be unique to each player based on how he or she played. Those were big design decisions for me.

**2 - *Deus Ex* dealt with the theme of transhumanism and allowed the player to cybernetically augment their character. What inspired you to include those elements?**

The inspiration for the idea of asking players to think about what it means to be human came from simply paying attention to what was going on in the world. I find a great deal of inspiration in the real world and, in the 1997-ish timeframe there were reports in the news about military applications of human, mechanical augmentation. Similarly, the potential and fears about nanotechnology were all over the place. It also didn't hurt that Bruce Sterling, one of the "fathers" of cyberpunk science fiction literature was my first D&D gamemaster! I was kind of steeped in that world.

## Appendix C. John Romero interview transcript

### **1. What was the inspiration for the save gem and upgrade systems in *Daikatana*?**

Ever since starting work on FPS games in 1991 I have been pushing new features into mine. *Daikatana* was the latest on that evolutionary path for me, so adding attributes made sense. The player avatar already had all those variables (speed, jump height, etc.) assigned to fixed values in my previous games, so I decided to make them variable like an RPG. After gaining enough experience, the player would level up and assign a point to any of the 5 attributes.

The save gem idea was part of my decision to make *Daikatana* a difficult game. It was so easy in my previous games to quicksave, open door, die, quickload. That removed some challenge. So I wanted to create a system where the player needed to find an item to save the game – exhaustive exploration offered a meta-reward in the save gem. After enough complaints rolled in, I made them optional.

### **2. Though *Daikatana* takes place across several time zones, Japanese influences can be found throughout the experience. Why did you choose to go with that particular style?**

Well, the name of the main weapon is Japanese, so I decided to set the first episode of the game in Nintendo's home city, Kyoto, and name the main character Miyamoto as a homage to Shigeru. With the game set in Japan, everything in that area had to reference Japanese culture.

### **3. What were some of the influences that went into designing the *Daikatana* sword?**

The idea for the sword came from a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign that id Software had played for years. The end of the D&D world came about because I gave the demonic plane full access to the material plane for the reward of a +5 Ancient Daikatana. Eventually, the world fell due to the vast

number of demons flowing through and killing everything in the world. I loved the name Daikatana and decided to use it for my game's name. Then, the design of the sword was based on Link's sword in *Zelda* – one weapon that got more powerful over time. The Daikatana has 5 power levels if the player uses it enough and levels it up. The 5th power level is pretty insane.

**4. The protagonist, Hiro Miyamoto, shares his last name with game designer Shigeru Miyamoto. Was that a conscious design choice?**

Yes, see above.

**5. You once mentioned that *Chrono Trigger* was one of your favorite games of all time. Did that game, or any other Japanese games, influence the design of *Daikatana*?**

No other Japanese game influenced the design of *Daikatana*. I just focused on the characters, sword, and episode 1 location to create the story around. Incidentally, the person who wrote the story and dialogue for *Daikatana* is the same person writing the *Life Is Strange* series, my life-long friend Christian Divine.

**6. What influenced the design of the Mishima factory and labs in Japan, and the hideout in San Francisco?**

There were no external influences for the Crematorium or Hideout. Those were just created to fit their place in the game.

## Appendix D. TerminusEst13 interview transcript

### 1 - What compelled you to create an anime-themed FPS like *DemonSteele*?

There was a whole bunch of little things that came together into the total whole of *DemonSteele*. I'd been wanting to do a melee-focused mod for quite some time, and actually had experimented with it a few ways. Likewise, with being a big fan of the *tokusatsu* genre, I'd been wondering what it'd be like to play as a fast-paced action hero like that, with crazy over-the-top guns and weapons slaying enemies *en masse*.

Perhaps the real pushing point for me, though, was playing two fantastic mods -- one that was great for all the right reasons, and one that was great for all the wrong reasons. *GMOTA* and *Swan Fox* were incredible, *GMOTA* in melding old-school action and fun melee together into a single mod, while *Swan Fox* was hilariously corny and all the worst things people could do when making an anime adventure.

While most people would simply be content to simply rip it a new one, call it shitty, and move on (and I did), I got to sitting and thinking. Why is it that a lot of people wanting to make anime-themed stuff just ... don't do it right? Why is it always so weird? Why isn't it usually fun? Why is it so amateur, most of the time?

That's not to say that anime-esque shooting hasn't been done before. *Shadow Warrior*, both the old and the new one, were absolutely fantastic games. And both *Shogo* and *Oni* took the anime ball and ran with it all the way, showing that it was viable. But outside of that ... there really isn't a whole lot, is there?

I think the big problem people tend to run into is the idea of anime as some specific kind of style or genre that needs to be adhered to. And it's the biggest problem with a lot of "anime in *Doom!*" attempts, or in fact "anime in X!" suggestions as a whole, because it's trying to think of anime as something that it isn't. Anime is not a genre, anime is a medium.

The reason why things like *Shogo* and *Oni* work is because they're not trying specifically to say "Let's do an anime game!". They're taking inspiration from very specific sources, and an animated art style is only one facet of it. The reason they're good isn't specifically because of the anime art influence, it's because of the fun gameplay, cool music, and awesome guns.

That's not to say there isn't an "anime style", of course. Stylistic quirks come with every medium. It's incredibly easy to tell the difference between how an Eastern studio and a Western studio approaches matters, whether it's something like RPGs or something like animated shows. But I think it's vital to understand the "why" and "how" of the differences, rather than just try to copy silly faces and big eyes. There had to be a delicate science to this, and while I'm certainly no scientificologist [sic], I wanted to see if I could dig anything up.

So I decided to try my hand at it. I had a gameplay concept I'd been wanting to use, and now I had a theme to go with it. So I got to work.

## **2 - Can you name some Japanese works (anime, games) that had an impact on *DemonSteele's* design?**

I have a very fond spot for kitschy, cheesy, so-bad-its-good stuff. Anime-wise, *Blood Reign: Curse of the Yoma*, *Demon City Shinjuku*, and *Ninja Resurrection* are great places to start -- *Demon City Shinjuku*, especially. You can practically see the *DemonSteele* dripping off of every minute. Also, while it's not exactly anime, I'm also a massive *tokusatsu* fan ... I guess it's pretty much live-action anime, right?

*GARO* acted as an endless source of inspiration, especially the first and second season; the *Iron Maiden* is practically 1:1 both in function and form with the golden knight armor. Even now, with every transformation, I feel a slight shiver.

Gameplay-wise, I'm very much a fan of old, classic beat-'em-ups, the Capcom and Konami and SNK brawlers. I grew up on fighting games and other bare-knuckle adventures, which influenced a lot of the combo-focused fast-paced gameplay of *DemonSteele*. Another technicality would be the Korean online shooter, *GunZ: The Duel*. Its emphasis on swapping constantly between gun and sword and moving around quickly really resonated with me, and I was sad that it hadn't been replicated in another game.

A lot of people say they get *Devil May Cry* vibes, but ... honestly, I hadn't really played those games? I'm kind of worried, with how many places advertise *DemonSteele* as a *Doom May Cry*! Aaaaaaaa, come on guys, it's more *Shadow Warrior* than anything else.

### **3 - What were the inspirations that went into the design of Jung Hae-Lin and Sun Shihong?**

Hae-Lin and Shihong are unique in that they take from a wide variety of different sources of inspiration. In a way, they're trying to be a whole lot of things at once.

Both of them are stereotypical protagonists of their genre. Hae-Lin's an urban fantasy anime protagonist (with an outfit cribbed straight from Rei Hino and *Violence Jack*), and Shihong's a cyberpunk anime protagonist (with an outfit very much like *Strider Hiryu*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Cyborg 009*). Hae-Lin is very straightforward, eager, since the anime she's involved with tends to follow linear stories or Monsters of the Week formula. Shihong is a little more in-depth, as the anime types she takes after question themselves and the world around them, and take a little more time to savor.

Likewise, both of them are representative of different genres of metal. Hae-Lin is straight up thrash metal and power metal, the denim-wearing everyday dude [sic] who gets thrust into a great tale of dragons and demons, wielding a sword of great power and with the roaring of the skies behind her. Shihong takes a lot more from more modern progressive metal and atmospheric djent [a genre of heavy metal], with more complicated schematics and a more technical playstyle, and often a more melancholy/philosophical take on subject matters.

Also, since *DemonSteele* always has an angle where the tongue is planted firmly in cheek, both of them are representative of different types of hilariously bad anime OCs [original characters] people insert into works. Hae-Lin is the plot-absorbing protagonist who does very little of their own volition and yet the plot showers them with incredible luck and equipment and amazing powers and more. Shihong is the perfect Mary Sue who's rich and beautiful and the best at martial arts and can do anything and comes from a secret ninja clan and everyone is jealous of her abilities.

Ultimately, though, both of them are designed in mind with the idea that they should be fun. Not just to play, but fun as a character -- a player is going to be playing WITH them, rather than just AS them. Because you join the protagonist on their journey, in many ways they're like the buddy on the couch gaming with you, commenting over the adventure as well and joking about how fun everything is. They should be characters that are fun and enjoyable to be with, someone you like hanging out with and want more of.

**4 - With *DemonSteele*, what aspect(s) of the anime experience were you trying to instill in the player?**

Above all, the main thing I wanted people to get from the style of anime that *DemonSteele* takes from is that of speed and chaos. While there are certainly a lot of jokes about how lovably wacky and surreal Japan is, in a lot of ways I think that works in its favor.

There's a comic I'm very fond of, showing a non-anime fan and an anime fan watching the same show. The anime fan is very pumped, excited, energetic, raving about the show. "What an insightful metaphor for the degradation of modern culture!" he roars triumphantly, fist pumping into the air. The non-anime fan, however, has his brow furrowed, slightly befuddled as he points at the screen, "Why isn't that girl wearing pants?"

While obviously made in jest, I think there's definitely a point to be made. This obviously isn't universal, but after so long your brain tends to block everything out and focus more on enjoying the ride. You stop thinking and start reacting. There's always the periods of "whoah did that mech just combine with the moon?!" and "whoah did Shounen Bat just turn into a giant shadow blob?!", but you go along with it.

For *DemonSteele*, I wanted to try and really recreate these moments. The enemies needed to have new attacks that come out of nowhere, the player needed to move lightning fast and have a variety of attacks, weapons needed to be loud and blasty and over-dramatic, and there needed to be a stupid amount of over-the-top nonsense. It's a sensory overload, pure chaos and forcing the player to react instead of think -- enforced by punishing the player if they dawdle or try and plink [sic] away.

## **5 - What kind of impression were you trying to leave on the player with *DemonSteele's* mix of Western (metal, FPS) and Eastern (anime, swordplay) elements?**

As mentioned, *DemonSteele* is a very primal gameplay experience that focuses on the rush of adrenaline and the joy that comes from it -- guns are loud, enemies are fast, projectiles are everywhere, the



protagonist is whizzing about left and right, and all of these (hopefully!) blend together into an experience that tickles a player's primal hungers.

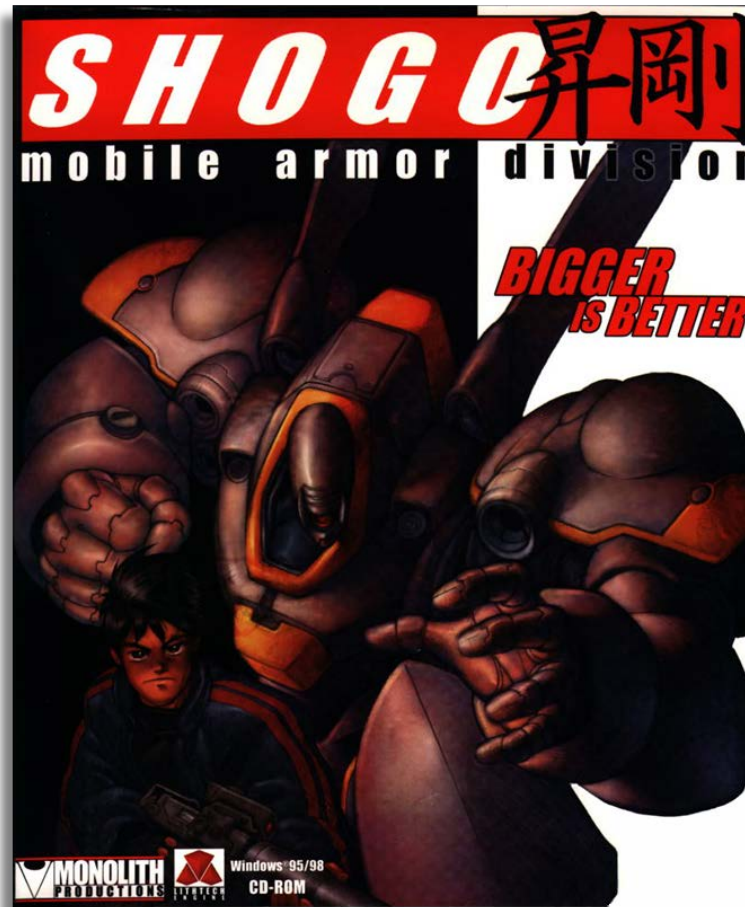
Though the inspiration comes from both Western and Eastern sources, the reaction is still the same. Entertainment is unique in that it has the ability to manipulate people's emotions and expectations without physically affecting them at all -- simply by showing them something "cool" or "pretty" and they react accordingly. When people are listening to a rocking guitar solo, the adrenaline surges even though nothing is actually physically around them. When people see a beautifully-animated fight sequence between an anime protagonist and a villain, the adrenaline surges even though nothing is physically around them. You could say the same for shooting loud guns that have massive fireworks, or cutting down hordes of enemies in one clean swipe.

While this seems like simply stating the obvious (fun things make the player have fun? You don't say!), there's something more important to note here. Despite the regional differences, we still have a universal language that we can use to connect with other people. Rather than trying to split the cultural distinctions of "this is Japanese-style anime" or "this is British-style metal" or "this is American-style gameplay", we can travel across the world taking bits and pieces of things we learn and enjoy, and then glue them together in our work to create an experience more than just what we could do by ourselves.

And in a way, beyond the adrenaline rush, I suppose that's the biggest impression I was aiming for -- the world is just awesome. Learn something new about something you didn't know about.

Hope this helped!

## Appendix E. Game details



### *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division*

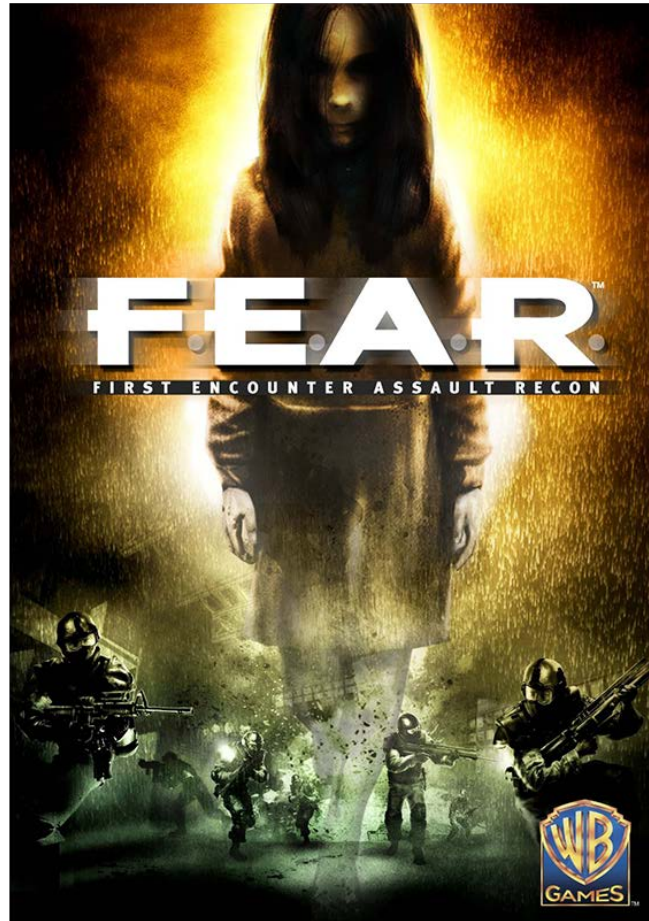
**Developer:** Monolith Productions

**Publisher:** Monolith Productions

**Initial release date:** September 30, 1998

**Platforms:** Microsoft Windows, AmigaOS, Linux, Mac OS

**ESRB Rating:** M for Mature (17+)



*F.E.A.R.: First Encounter Assault Recon*

**Developer:** Monolith Productions

**Publisher:** Sierra Entertainment

**Initial release date:** October 17, 2005

**Platforms:** Microsoft Windows, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3

**ESRB Rating:** M for Mature (17+)