

Introduction

As one of the most beloved games of all time, Disney and Squaresoft’s *Kingdom Hearts* (2002) is a crossover between Disney’s animated films and Squaresoft’s *Final Fantasy* video game series, focusing on main protagonist Sora’s search for his missing friends through various Disney worlds and fighting the forces of darkness. As a crossover between Disney’s films and Squaresoft’s video games, Kingdom Hearts acts as a crossover of American and Japanese culture. These trends end up being a factor in the direction concerning the game’s story and characters.



Kingdom Hearts Picture Source:
<https://www.cnet.com/news/kingdom-hearts-and-when-judging-a-game-by-its-cover-goes-so-right/>

Context (American Culture)

1. Pushback against video games
 1. Result of avid players committing mass shootings
 2. Exposure to violent games causes aggressive thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and arousal, and decrease in helping behavior
2. Response to 9/11 terror attacks
 1. Avoidance of imagery of violence and mass destruction
 2. Disney’s *Lilo and Stitch*’s (2002) climax was altered due to the attacks
3. Popularity of the fantasy genre and family-friendly material
 1. Cinema leaned toward family friendly and fantasy films
 2. Success of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* and *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* in 2001



9-11 Picture Source: <https://theconversation.com/world-politics-explainer-the-twin-tower-bombings-9-11-101443>



Mickey Mouse Picture Source: <https://mickey.disney.com/>
Donald Duck: Picture Source <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/some-fun-facts-about-disneys-most-popular-character-donald-duck/articleshow/58980271.cms?from=mdr>



Kingdom Hearts: An Unusual Crossover of American and Japanese Culture

Presented by Cooper Newton (In Progress)

Context (Japanese Culture)

- *Sekaikei* genre was popular in Japanese media in the early 2000s
- *Sekaikei*-focus on apocalyptic crises and a school romance
- Inspired by the success of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996)
- Followed specific gender roles
 - Male protagonist is a high school student who is an “observer” of the heroine’s suffering,
 - Male protagonist loathes himself for incompetence
 - Female heroine-invincible warrior who loves the protagonist and fight to save the world for their love interest



Evangelion Picture Source: <https://www.polygon.com/2019/6/19/18683634/neon-genesis-evangelion-hideaki-anno-depression-shinji-anime-characters-movies>

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Methodology

- I will be analyzing the development of the game by:
- Looking on interviews from Tetsuya Nomura reflecting on the game’s development pertaining to certain pieces of information about the changes made to the game’s story
 - Historical cultural trends in both Japan and the United States, analyzing the trends present in shows and films at the time of the game’s release

Storyline

- Main Characters: Sora (main protagonist), Donald Duck, Goofy, Riku (Sora’s best friend turned rival), Kairi (Sora’s love interest), Ansem (main antagonist),
- Setting: Various worlds inspired by Disney films like *Alice in Wonderland* and *Aladdin*, as well as original worlds like Destiny Islands, Traverse Town, and Hollow Bastion
- Main Objective: Find Riku, Kairi, and Mickey Mouse, save the worlds from the Heartless (creatures of Darkness) and Ansem

Conclusion

This topic is important because it informs potential similarities between Japan and the United States. The two cultures were shown to have two very different sets of values at the time of the game’s release. It also informs the difficult balance of respecting the values of two different cultures. The game’s director, Tetsuya Nomura, had to respect the wishes from Disney and the staff at Squaresoft for what the game is supposed to be like throughout the game’s development. Finding the middle point between the two companies is clearly difficult, especially considering the cultural trends in both countries at the time of the game’s release.