

Analysis of the Design of Hero Characters in the Top Ten Digital Games in the World (Eighth-Generation Third-Person Games Based on the GameSpot Index)

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Abstract

The design of hero characters in digital games is one of the most crucial elements contributing to the success of game production and audience engagement. In eighth-generation games—particularly those employing a third-person perspective—the hero character functions as the primary interface between the player and the game world. These characters play a central role in storytelling, evoking excitement, constructing identity, and fostering empathy. With advancements in graphics, technology, and narrative structures during this generation, hero character design has become increasingly complex and purposeful. This study aims to provide a practical analysis of the design characteristics of hero characters in ten leading eighth-generation digital games, based on a list published by the reputable GameSpot website. The research adopts a descriptive–analytical methodology with an applied approach. Data were collected through direct examination of the games, narrative content analysis, review of theoretical sources, and visual–structural analysis of the characters. The study begins by clarifying foundational concepts, including the definition of the hero character, narrative features of third-person games, and the structural characteristics of eighth-generation titles. It then presents a comparative analysis of key hero design features in the selected games, focusing on visual elements (costume, body form, and color scheme), narrative background, psychological traits, personal skills, and interactions with the environment and other characters. The findings indicate that games featuring deep, balanced, and narrative-driven character designs are more successful in creating emotionally engaging player experiences. Such designs enhance storytelling and play a critical role in sustaining players' cognitive and emotional engagement throughout gameplay. This paper offers an analytical framework based on successful examples, providing a practical model for game designers, interactive media researchers, and narrative developers in the gaming industry.

Keywords: Character design; Game hero; Eighth generation; Third-person games; Character analysis.

1. Introduction

Character design in digital games—particularly the design of hero characters—plays a vital role in attracting audiences and conveying narrative and interactive experiences. From the moment players enter the game world, heroes function as emotional and operational representatives, mediating the connection between players and fictional environments. In the eighth generation of digital games, advancements in technology, graphics, and narrative complexity have significantly increased expectations for character design. Given the volume of digital game production during this generation and the heightened emphasis on hero character development, the central research question of this study is: Which components contribute to the design of hero characters in the most successful eighth-generation third-person games? It is hypothesized that successful hero character design emerges from the interaction of visual, narrative, interactive, and identity-related elements within the game structure.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to identify and analyze effective elements in hero character design within selected games and to propose a practical design model. Beyond enhancing understanding of successful game development strategies, a systematic analysis of hero character design can assist character designers, game developers, and digital art researchers in creating more compelling and effective characters.

2. Literature Review

Extensive research has examined character design in video games, addressing aspects such as character development, player interaction, and overall gaming experience. Jenkins (2004), in *Games as Narrative*, emphasized that character design must function in harmony with narrative structure to create a cohesive and immersive experience. Bartlett and Sterling (2013), in *Character Design and Emotional Engagement in Digital Games*, highlighted the importance of strong narrative backgrounds in fostering

player identification and emotional engagement. Choi and Liu (2018), in *The Role of Visual Design in Player Engagement*, demonstrated that visual character design directly influences player participation and engagement with the game world. Overall, existing literature tends to focus on isolated aspects of character design. Some studies prioritize narrative dimensions (e.g., Jenkins, 2004), others emphasize visual and artistic features (e.g., Choi & Liu, 2018; Hartas, 2005), while others explore cultural or vernacular contexts (e.g., Qaderi, 2018).

However, relatively few studies provide a comprehensive analysis of hero characters by simultaneously examining psycho-narrative and visual-appearance dimensions, particularly within eighth-generation third-person games. The originality of the present research lies in its comparative and integrative framework, which analyzes narrative, psychological, and visual characteristics of heroes across ten leading games of this generation. By addressing this gap, the study aims to expand existing knowledge and offer a practical analytical model for game designers and scholars.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive–analytical methodology with an applied orientation. Data were collected through direct gameplay observation, narrative content analysis, review of theoretical literature, and visual-structural character analysis. Initially, fundamental concepts—such as the nature of hero characters, narrative features of third-person games, and the structural characteristics of eighth-generation games—are outlined. Subsequently, a comparative analysis of hero character design in the selected games is conducted, focusing on visual elements (costume, body shape, and color scheme), narrative background, psychological traits, individual skills, and interactions with the environment and other characters.

4. Findings

The analysis of hero characters in the selected games was conducted along two primary dimensions:

A) Visual characteristics, including body structure, costume design, color palette, facial details, and identity markers.

B) Psychological and narrative characteristics, including character background, motivations, intra-narrative interactions, and responses to challenges.

The analytical process involved the following steps:

Selecting prominent eighth-generation games based on GameSpot rankings.

Extracting hero character attributes through reliable sources and direct observation.

Organizing data into an analytical table encompassing four axes: visual design, character traits, narrative interaction, and environmental interaction.

Conducting comparative analysis to identify patterns and distinctions.

The findings reveal significant diversity in hero character design. For instance, Geralt of Rivia in *The Witcher 3* exemplifies a realistic fantasy aesthetic combined with moral ambiguity, offering a multifaceted interactive experience centered on ethical decision-making. In contrast, Kratos in *God of War* represents a mythologically grounded, emotionally driven hero whose narrative emphasizes anger, fatherhood, and direct combat.

Arthur Morgan in *Red Dead Redemption 2* stands out as a complex gray hero whose layered narrative and open-world context foster strong player identification. Similarly, Jin Sakai in *Ghost of Tsushima* illustrates how traditional Japanese aesthetics combined with inner transformation can create a multidimensional hero. Heroes such as Aloy in *Horizon Zero Dawn* and Cassandra in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* emphasize exploration, curiosity, and player agency through futuristic and classical design elements. Peter Parker in *Marvel's Spider-Man* bridges comic-book tradition and interactive storytelling through a modern visual style and

a witty, altruistic personality. Characters like Sam Porter Bridges in *Death Stranding* and Jesse Faden in *Control* reflect a trend toward symbolic and surreal design, blending minimalistic visuals with psychological depth. Finally, Deacon St. John in *Days Gone* embodies a gritty survival narrative, portraying loyalty and violence within a post-apocalyptic setting. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that successful hero character design requires a balanced integration of form (visual appearance), meaning (narrative and motivation), and interaction (engagement with the environment and story). The stronger the harmony among these dimensions, the more profound and enduring the player experience becomes.

5. Conclusion

This study examined hero character design in ten leading eighth-generation third-person digital games. The findings indicate that successful hero characters emerge from a balanced synthesis of visual elements (costume, facial features, movement), narrative depth (background, values, and motivations), and interaction (player agency and engagement with the game world). Moreover, fidelity to a game's stylistic and atmospheric identity plays a crucial role in character design, as seen in titles such as *Ghost of Tsushima* and *Horizon Zero Dawn*, where heroes reflect the essence of their fictional worlds.

Hero characters function as mirrors for players, enabling identification, moral reflection, and deeper narrative engagement. This insight provides a strategic pathway for designers aiming to create enduring and impactful games. In eighth-generation titles, hero characters are no longer mere drivers of the plot; instead, they engage with complex psychological, ethical, and identity-related challenges that shape both narrative progression and player experience.

From a visual perspective, hero character design extends beyond physical attributes to reflect psychological states and internal

transformations. For example, Jin Sakai's evolving appearance in Ghost of Tsushima symbolically represents his moral conflict, while Arthur Morgan's changing appearance in Red Dead Redemption 2 mirrors his psychological and ethical development.

Ultimately, the integration of psychological depth and physical design results in hero characters that are rich, compelling, and memorable. In eighth-generation games, heroes are defined not only by their appearance but also by their moral complexity, inner transformation, and narrative integration—offering players experiences that surpass those of earlier generations.

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Author's Contribution

The research was conducted solely by the author.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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