

Lawrence May    Undead Return:  
Japanese Videogames  
and Nuclear Memory

Abstract: This article examines the origins of the videogame zombie by tracing their appearances in the Japanese videogames *Phantom Fighter* (Marionette 1988), *Sweet Home* (Capcom 1989) and *Biohazard* (Capcom 1996). The nascent versions of interactive zombies in these games offer a distinctively Japanese variation to the mediated figure of the undead. Their monsters draw upon and contribute to traditions of Japanese folklore teeming with *yōkai* (supernatural demons, monsters and ghouls). Through analysis of *Phantom Fighter*, *Sweet Home* and *Biohazard*, I demonstrate how Japan's prototypical videogame zombies build upon their *yōkai* roots to reflect a public consciousness that is grappling with the jarring reanimation of long-unresolved trauma: the tragedies, crimes, and anguish of the Pacific War and its devastating conclusion. The figure of the zombie—trading in abject and uncanny forms of monstrosity, and upending sense and meaning through its impossible terrors—appears to be a natural product of this moment of rupture in Japan's post-war history. The appearance of the zombie in these videogames invites players into the mediation and negotiation of popular cultural memorial anxieties. Keywords: zombie, Japanese videogames, cultural memory, Yōkai, World War II, Shōwa Era.

## Introduction

The figure of the zombie has become a mainstay of videogames over the past three decades, providing players with plentiful virtual targets for righteous forms of violence, terrifying obstacles requiring stealth and courage, and visceral visions of decaying faces and gnashing teeth in moments of

in-game death. I examine the emergence of the now iconic, ludic undead in three Japanese videogames: *Phantom Fighter* (Marionette 1988), *Sweet Home* (Capcom 1989) and *Biohazard* (retitled *Resident Evil* for international distribution) (Capcom 1996).<sup>1</sup> While these games are not the only texts to offer undead encounters over this eight-year period, they have been selected as representative of the key points of development in the early existence of the ludic zombie and for their reflection of contemporaneous underlying apocalyptic anxieties. I set out, in this article, to answer a simple question: why did these videogame zombies emerge when they did? The answer to this question draws together two important foundations of Japanese popular culture in the twentieth century (and today): the folkways and histories of the monstrous *yōkai* (supernatural demons, monsters, and ghouls, including undead creatures), and the bitter traumas of the conclusion of World War II. What comes into view through these three texts is an understanding of the videogame zombie as a hybridised monster, drawing both on *yōkai* traditions and the apocalyptic traumas that are shown to be dislodged from deep within the national cultural memory during this eight-year period.

As Michael Dylan Foster notes, Japan and its cultural landscape continually changes, but each new epoch provides “fertile terrain” for a new generation of weird, mysterious, and terrifying *yōkai* “to develop its own affective, aesthetic role in the story of the Japanese nation” (Foster 2009, 26). The emergence of these videogame zombies between 1988 and 1996 marks the end of an era within which Japanese cultural memory was radically reconfigured to reinforce revisionist accounts of wartime history and to support an age of triumphant economic growth. This carefully cultivated outlook was fractured violently by a combination of catastrophes at the end of the Shōwa era in 1989. Decades of repression of the trauma of the country’s wartime experiences faltered, and Japan’s apocalyptic scars and ghosts returned to the discursive fore.

In a nation that had lived through apocalyptic wartime experiences and found itself after 1945 in a state of economic, emotional, political and social living death, the ludic zombie appeared as a spectre—as so many *yōkai* do—from the ‘other’ world of danger, undeath and repressed memory. The mediated appearance, from 1988 onward, of a Japanese-inflected zombie aptly illustrates the regenerative nature of *yōkai*. Slowly, over this eight-year period, the zombie enters Japanese popular culture, its rotting flesh and decay resonating with re-emerging post-war trauma and imagery. Recalling *yōkai* traditions by bridging the gaps between the “intangible and tangible, [and] spiritual and material” and scaring its subjects with its unnatural and impossible “weird corporeality” (Foster 2009, 24), the

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<sup>1</sup> Both Japanese and English-language versions of all three of these games exist, through a combination of official and unofficial releases. My textual analysis is specifically based upon play of: the North American, English-language release of *Phantom Fighter*, an unofficial English-language fan translation of the Japanese-language release of *Sweet Home*; and the North American, English-language release of *Biohazard* under the name *Resident Evil*. In all three cases, my play has been supplemented by reference to online paratexts (videos and screenshots) depicting playthroughs of the original Japanese-language releases.

videogame zombie proves itself a comfortable fit in the *yōkai* genealogy. By approaching these early ludic zombies through the lens of their *yōkai* heritage, we can see that these monsters afford cultural and memorial engagements that are particular to the post-Shōwa context in Japan.

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### **Japan's Eerie, Mutable Monsters**

While the Japanese videogame industry—beginning with the 1996 release of *Biohazard*, one of this article's case studies—is credited with stimulating the modern zombie genre's revival in popularity worldwide (Dendle 2007, 53), zombies appear to be largely absent in Japanese culture prior to this watershed moment. To be more specific, what is absent is the widely known archetype of the zombie popularised from the 1960s onwards by Hollywood film productions: reanimated, shambling, decaying human figures, typically with arms outstretched, green-tinged flesh and gnashing teeth. Kazuhiko Komatsu, Japan's leading expert on the country's monstrous mythologies, confirms this, stating his view that “we do not have such cases in Japan” of the generic zombie trope of “spiritless flesh reanimated” (Vétu 2021, 116). At the same time, an examination of Japanese folklore, teeming with a “plethora of figures—demons and witches, goblins and ghosts” whose stories are interwoven with mythologies of Japan's major religions (Ashkenazi 2003, 55), reveals a long-running cultural fascination with monstrous forms of life beyond death. Japan's three major spiritual traditions (Buddhism, Shinto, and Christianity) have combined to ensure “an inescapable focus on death and life after death” in Japanese society, meaning that in folklore and spiritual traditions “every custom is bound up in every way with relationships between the living and the dead” (Iwasaka and Toelken 1994, 6). Shinto, in particular, evokes the recurring concept of *onnen* [怨念], or the ability for the dead to return to the world of the living, driven by currents of intense emotion (including anger, sorrow and pain) (Pruett 2010).

Life, death, and interstitial states are central to Japanese cultural contexts. Horror-tinged forms of resurrection, liminal states of existence and challenges to biological and ontological certainties all course through *yōkai*—Japan's historical monsters—just as they do through cinematic zombies in the West. In order to address *yōkai* as contributing to the monstrous genealogy of the zombie, I follow a growing tendency among scholars of undead media to embrace more open definitions of undead monsters in which the nature (rather than appearance) of these figures is emphasised. Dunja Opatić, for example, describes a “new (un)dead” that

should be primarily defined by its occupation of a “hymenal space of floating indetermination between life and death” (2014, 2). This kind of undead figure is a “liminal monster, the threshold persona [that] exists in the margins” (Opatić 2014, 2), and Chera Kee elaborates that we might “reconceptualize zombihood as a state existing somewhere between the human and the not quite human, as a state of liminality” (2017, 15). The zombie continually summons such liminality, manifesting an “interzone that makes murky a distinction between the living and the dead, the natural and the unnatural” (Lauro 2011, 55). This figuration of the living dead can also be understood and defined through the threat it poses as it “exerts violence against difference and transgresses the boundaries of individual subjectivity” (Opatić 2014, 2), proving to be thus inexorably deconstructive and driven by the “infectious negation of the individual subject” (Swanson 2014, 385). Defining the living dead requires recognition of the multiplicity and malleability of this monster (Guynes-Vishniac 2018, 912) and, as Vétu notes, a “celebration of heterogeneity” with respect to their physical form (2021, 119).

*Yōkai* are supernatural entities which are, according to Foster, “the weird and mysterious ‘things’ that have been a part of Japanese culture [...] for as long as history has been recorded” (2009, 2). The word itself is constructed by compounding two *kanji* characters [妖 and 怪] which both carry meanings of mystery, uncanniness and suspicion (Foster 2015, 19; Papp 2010, 8). Fundamentally, *yōkai* are best understood as eerie phenomena (Komatsu 2017, 12), which sometimes manifest in unsettling animal or human figures (Papp 2010, 8). Driven by this underlying inclusiveness, the meaning of ‘*yōka*’ is remarkably diffuse and can equally account for a “monster, spirit, goblin, ghost, demon, phantom, specter, fantastic being, lower-order deity, or any unexplainable experience or numinous occurrence” (Foster 2013, 135). The term ‘*yōka*’ also encapsulates a number of other more specific monstrous formulations that have circulated at different points in Japanese cultural history, some of which are no longer commonly invoked by common applications of the label. These include the following: decayed and degraded anthropomorphic forms of *kami*, which is the power of natural entities (mountains, bodies of water, trees, rocks, weather even, and so on) to wilfully influence peoples’ lives (Ashkenazi 2003, 27); *mononoke*, a kind of supernatural and primordial energy force (Foster 2009, 6; Papp 2010, 10); and *bakemono*, a broad label for shape-shifting, transformed, disfigured; and otherwise anomalous creatures (Foster 2015, 18).

*Yōkai* have long been tenants of the Japanese isles and the menagerie of monsters developed over the centuries is myriad. However, a central

characteristic that unites *yōkai* is their inhabitation, and exploitation, of the murky boundary spaces that surround humans and the meanings we construct for ourselves and our world. Foster describes *yōkai* as rooted in ontological margins, in the “contact zone between fact and fiction, between belief and doubt” (2015, 8). This is an uncanny space that brings together *gense* (this world) and the lives of humans with *takai* (the other world) and underlying *kami* energies (Papp 2010, 12). In other accounts these binary zones are known instead as *konoyo* (the world of the living) and *anoyo* (the world of the dead) (Murphy and Ryan 2016, 195). By drawing these two worlds together, *yōkai* perform a relatively simple function: they are able to render what is certain—whether physical, biological, or even ontological—transmutable (Papp 2010, 10) and dangerously unstable (Foster 2009, 13). When *yōkai* manifest, “laws of nature are challenged” (Foster 2015, 8) and states of being that are “unimaginable and word-defying” (Li 2013, 182) are conjured into existence. Consider, for example, one of the more common consequences of the intermingling of worlds by *yōkai*: the return of a monstrous form of life to deceased figures, or the transformation of inanimate entities with a vengeful half-life (Foster 2009, 6). *Yōkai* ply the border between the real and unreal, the possible and impossible, and human and monstrous, and their appearance invites their witnesses to find horror, uncanniness, and mystery in the otherwise everyday. My interest is not merely in the fact that *yōkai* inhabit states between life and death, but that they occupy ontologically deconstructive boundary spaces, directly threatening and destabilising biology and subjectivity. In this way, I argue, *yōkai* have the capacity to invoke zombification. While it is certainly not the case that *yōkai* and zombies should be directly conflated with one another, Japanese folklore’s cast of liminal terrors appear to offer an important and distinctive contribution to the mediation of the undead.

### Remembering Through *Yōkai*

In the post-war period of the twentieth century, *yōkai* and their myths experienced a significant explosion in popularity and reach through animated television series (*anime*), comics and graphic novels (*manga*), and blockbuster cinematic productions (Papp 2010, 161–62; Foster 2013, 149–50). As Hiroki Azuma observes, the various manga, anime, and videogames popular with local and global audiences are “steeped” in traditional Japanese mythologies and folkways (2009, 9). As new generations and evocations of these “remarkably mutable and resilient” (Foster 2013, 134)

monsters are introduced or reinvigorated *yōkai* continue to be apposite monsters. Foster, for example, invokes Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's widely cited explanation of the critical power of monsters as "an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" (Cohen 1996, 2), elaborating that *yōkai* bear an allegorical power as "specters haunting the nation," offering "surprisingly lively metaphors for comprehending broader national-cultural paradigms" (Foster 2009, 26). Indeed, in a country where religious, household and national rituals are tightly bound (Ashkenazi 2003, 1), understanding *yōkai* is a prerequisite, as argued by Komatsu, for deeper understandings of contemporary Japanese culture (2017, 6). In Japanese videogames such as *Phantom Fighter*, *Sweet Home* and *Biohazard*, not only do players encounter new iterations of *yōkai*-infused monsters but they also experience first-hand encounters with "deep-seated Japanese attitudes and values" found in the surrounding historical milieus attached to these texts (Hutchinson 2019, 1), as well as the echoes of Japan's earlier apocalyptic trauma.

By turning to these three games, we can uncover the shared histories and anxieties that imbue their undead monsters with powerful allegorical meaning. This requires understanding that memories and narratives "exist not only on an individual level, but also on a collective level" (Seaton 2007, 12), and that popular culture is an increasingly significant site for public memory-making (Morris Suzuki and Rimmer 2002, 147). Media objects, and mediation, are crucial to the formation of popular cultural memory and can be understood "as a kind of switchboard at work between the individual and the collective dimension" of remembering (and forgetting) the past and present (Erll 2011, 113). Cultural memory is thus an evolving body of texts "specific to each society in each epoch," which come together to "stabilize and convey that society's self-image" (J. Assmann 1995, 132), constructing and disseminating specific "versions of past events and persons, cultural values and norms [and] concepts of collective identity" (Erll 2011, 114). An "intimate alliance between affect, memory and identity" (A. Assmann 2003, 18) means that popular culture is a powerful means by which to shape collective identification and action (Sakamoto 2016, 254) and amplifies the immanent power of mediated monsters to reflect, challenge, and otherwise allegorise the national psyche. In the case of *Phantom Fighter*, *Sweet Home* and *Biohazard*, there exists a particularly volatile relationship between a new and ludic type of zombie and a popular cultural memory that has carefully masked many of the apocalyptic anguishes of Japan's recent past. In unpacking different elements of these three games, I extend arguments made already by Guillaume Vétu (2021) and Kayleigh Murphy and Mark Ryan (2016) that challenge us to

understand the zombies found in Japanese cinema as not only influenced by those found in Western filmmaking, but representing new, productive forms of inter-cultural hybridity. I argue that, in the Japanese videogame zombies introduced at the end of the Shōwa period, we can identify not only the obvious influence of Western zombie cinema, but also the powerfully productive influence of the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic conditions of post-war Japan, and the threads of threads of long-running *yōkai* histories.

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### ***Phantom Fighter's Yōkai Traditions***

In *Phantom Fighter*, which features some of the earliest zombies in commercial videogames, the player takes on the role of a martial arts master fighting their way through eight different villages infested with *kyonshī*, a type of reanimated corpse which moves around by hopping, with arms outstretched. *Phantom Fighter* illustrates a close entanglement between *yōkai* mythology and Japan's growing videogame development industry in the late-1980s. Released for Nintendo's Family Computer<sup>2</sup> in 1988, the game's graphical style and play experience is in many ways typical of the era. Players observe a two-dimensional world and characters from a side-on perspective, using simple controls to move and interact within the game. An example of the 'beat 'em up' genre of games enormously popular during the 1980s and 1990s, *Phantom Fighter's* play centres on encountering, fighting and defeating varied (and increasingly powerful) types of *kyonshī* in simple hand-to-hand combat. Defeated zombies drop various items for the player to collect, including a glowing jade orb. Combining three orbs allows a player to summon the 'boss' *kyonshī* in each town, and once this more challenging undead foe is defeated, the player can move on to the next settlement.

The presence of hordes of *kyonshī* within *Phantom Fighter* establishes a bridge between the nascent living dead of videogames and the uncanny monstrosity of their *yōkai* forebears. The figure of the *kyonshī* is derived from the *jiangshi* or *goeng si* (in Mandarin and Cantonese, respectively)—a reanimated corpse originally found in Qing dynasty Chinese folklore, and made popular again in 1980s Hong Kong cinema (Ancuta 2021, 146–47). *Kyonshī* have been identified interchangeably as both 'hopping zombies' and 'hopping vampires' (Vétu 2021, 124–6), with both of these labels ultimately pointing to a *yōkai* monster (albeit shared across numerous Asian folkloric traditions) bearing fundamentally undead characteristics (Ng 2021). The *kyonshī* is, by nature, violent and cannibalistic

<sup>2</sup> Known more commonly as the Famicom in Japan, and as the Nintendo Entertainment System internationally.

because the cause of its revival is the persistence of a malevolent version of its former soul, seeking revenge for an untimely passing by extracting and absorbing the life essence (*qi*) of its victims (Ancuta 2021, 146), causing their limbs to be locked in place and their hopping movement a result of the onset of rigor mortis (Vétu 2021, 126). In *Phantom Fighter*, we are witness to the ludic introduction of an iteration of this undead *yōkai* monster. This creature loudly proclaims its zombiism by more closely mirroring the archetypal construction of zombies as undead corpses (with decaying flesh and outstretched arms reaching and grabbing) than any other *yōkai*.

By introducing *kyonshī*, which combine Hong Kong and Chinese cultural traditions alongside Japanese folkways, to videogames, *Phantom Fighter* extends a long tradition of Japanese mythology drawing upon the Daoist and Buddhist folklore of neighbouring Asian cultures. In this process, some tales and characters are imported directly, while others are mutated and localised (Ashkenazi 2003, 6). At first glance, *Phantom Fighter* might appear to locate its *yōkai* in the former category, primarily emphasising the *kyonshī* as a Daoist phenomenon with few distinctive Japanese characteristics. The game's opening cinematic sequences, for example, depict a stone coffin containing a corpse in the process of revival, wearing the garb of a Qing dynasty bureaucrat. The player's own character is introduced as a Daoist priest, and the motions of the character's attacks with arms and feet resemble the Chinese martial art of *wushu* (or *kung fu*, more popularly). The jade orbs the player aims to collect in each village also bear a strong association with Chinese spirituality, referencing a sealing off of the spiritual world of Daoism's supreme god, the Jade Emperor (Ashkenazi 2003, 6), through both their material and their function. Taken together, these design elements might suggest the game's zombies are *yōkai* transplanted with minimal localisation to Japan's particular cultural imaginaries. In order to illustrate the particular kind of Japanese monstrosity that underlies *Phantom Fighter*'s Daoist exterior, however, we must turn briefly to a key moment in Japanese history: World War II and the violence and devastation of its conclusion.

### **An Undead Nation**

The conclusion of World War II was cataclysmic for Japan, and an understanding of the milieu that follows the nation's defeat in 1945 helps to explain the allegorical significance of the appearance of the living dead in late- and post-Shōwa era videogames. In particular, these ludic monsters stand in for the negotiation of the anguished collective memory of the



war's end, the legacy of which, as Azuma reflects, "has determined the entire culture of Japan to a greater extent than we imagine" (2009, 15). The destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by atomic bombs on 6 and 9 August 1945, respectively, are perhaps the most enduring and widely recognisable images of the end of the fourteen years of war in the Pacific and Asia. The atom bombs rendered an instantaneous form of absolute devastation, where a flash of blinding light preceded the eruption of fireballs burning at four thousand degrees Celsius. Everything in the path of the apocalyptic fury of these new weapons was vitrified or vaporised. And it was not only the atom bombs that brought such devastation to Japan's cities and towns: Allied air forces undertook firebombing campaigns, most notably against Tokyo on 9 and 10 March 1945, destroying one third of the city and taking 100,000 civilian lives. The battle for Okinawa, one of Japan's southernmost significant landmasses, resulted in the death of 100,000 of the civilian population, at the hands of both Allied and Japanese combatants, over eleven horrific weeks. Where accounts and images of apocalypse had previously been confined to folklore and mythological stories (Tanaka 2014, 35), and associated with supernatural powers and entities (Tanaka 2014, 41), the final months of the war gave destruction and monstrosity a decidedly human form.

What remained after these abject exercises in humanity's new-found capacity to destroy itself was a country ruined, with more than 800,000 civilians among Japan's toll of 3.1 million war dead, food supplies exhausted and entire settlements and ways of life erased (Seaton 2007, 34). Surveying the aftermath of the war, science fiction author and screenwriter Sakyō Komatsu recalls "how truly 'nothing' the charred remains of Japan were;" where cities largely built out of wood had "disappeared into the atmosphere without a trace" (quoted in Isozaki and Komatsu 2020, 55). Japan, as a nation state, was, for all intents and purposes, deceased; people, infrastructure, industry, food and more, replaced by ashes, decay, and deprivation. And yet, somehow, Japan managed to continue to eke out life in spite of its apocalyptic state, shambling on as an undead country. The survivors making up this zombified nation state would become known as *yakeato sedai*—the 'generation of the burnt-out ruins' (Rosenbaum 2009, 7), with the primal experience of apocalypse and the blight of undead during the immediate post-war years forming their foundational mythology (Isozaki and Komatsu 2020, 55). Within this generation of survivors another group experienced an even more acute and tragic version of living death: the *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivors), who continued to endure and survive nuclear terror through the inexorably damaging effects of radiation-related diseases (Tanaka 2014, 42). The *hibakusha* were, in a sense, sus-

ended in the moments of death and destruction of 6 and 9 August 1945 but were also required to carry on with life, constantly shadowed by the immanence of death (Seaton 2007, 41). These everyday Japanese experiences of all-too-human monstrosity and apocalypse sowed a deep association with states of living death into the country's collective memory which, five decades later, would blossom into spectacularly popular, mediated zombies.

### **Forgetting Living Death**

Despite the forms of undeath proliferating in Japan, almost as soon as Emperor Hirohito's announcement of the nation's surrender had been broadcast by radio on 15 August 1945, acknowledgement of these horrors was quickly repressed. Harsh censorship of journalism and artistic works was immediately introduced by the occupying powers (Suzuki 2009, 27–28), ensuring the atom bomb attacks, Japan's Imperial history and wartime conduct, Allied bombing raids, and even the very occupation of Japan could not be publicly addressed (Hutchinson 2019, 130). Editors and publishers also became well-versed in an enduring form of self-regulation, intensifying the chilling effect of the censors' own black ink and blades (Suzuki 2009, 29). Steadily, the Japanese population was guided toward compliance with a new, imported ideological agenda (Cho 2016, 15). This agenda, a central focus of the Allied occupation of Japan between 1945 and 1952, amounted to an intellectual restructuring of the country's identity as "America's Japan" (Iwabuchi 2002, 10). Japan's recent history—a "false history" to the occupiers—was obliterated from textbooks, classrooms, and public discourse (Gluck 1993, 66), so that the nation could be "reborn" (in the words of the Allied command) with democratic ideals (Gluck 1993, 69–70). The "destruction of the 'good old Japan'" by its occupiers and the determined severing of cultural traditions saw the nation reconstituted using an American cultural, political, and social grammar (Azuma 2009, 13), enacting a "black gap" of radical discontinuity between Japan's past and present (Steinberg 2004, 457).

This discontinuity represents another spectre of living death, one rendered at a national psychic and cultural scale. Japan was brought not only to a physical, emotional, political, and social death by Allied bombing campaigns and nuclear weaponry, but also through the post-war erasure of the histories, culture, and experiences that shape its populace. The Japanese nation state is reanimated by the Allied occupation, but this revival manifests as a compromised and decayed version of its former self, deprived

of identity and self-determination. That 'black gap' in Japan's selfhood is not resolved after the departure of the occupying forces in 1952. Instead, a conservative political class, centred around the Liberal Democratic Party, carefully controlled national discourse in an effort to preserve the nation's new, undead identity (Azuma 2009, 74; Gluck 1993, 71–73; Seaton 2007, 32). These efforts ensured that, through the twentieth century, "memories of the war were repressed and recast in the public imagination" (Allen 2022, 1). At stake was the surging success of the Japanese economic 'miracle' and the country's transformation into the world's second-largest economy (Steinberg 2004, 459; Sakamoto 2016, 244), fuelled by an intimate economic relationship with the United States of America (Sakamoto 2016, 255; Suzuki 2009, 33). In a country revived from death, or the brink of it, and reanimated in the United States' image, the combination of national zeal and the dizzying success of high economic growth drove a determined repression of war-inflected memories, traumas, and critique (Azuma 2009, 18).

Apocalyptic devastation in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Tokyo, and Okinawa, the tragedy of the *yakeato* and *hibakusha*, and the severing of the threads of continuity with pre-war culture represent a Japanese nation brought to the point of destruction and revived. Lying deep at the heart of Japan's post-war period, as Rachael Hutchinson argues, these cataclysms form a "cultural trauma" that "continues to reverberate through the Japanese arts" (2019, 130). These wartime wounds of the collective psyche are undead in their nature, "absolute and transcendent and precarious and invisible: flickering in and out of phase" (Isozaki and Komatsu 2020, 56), occupying a half-life in the shared consciousness of a country torn between its own simultaneous states of life and death. Over the expanse of what Carol Gluck describes as "the long postwar," a phenomenon whereby Japan spent five decades "still calling and thinking of itself as postwar" (1993, 66), the country's living dead do not disappear; the tensions they embody simmer deep under Japan's cultural surface. At different points during this 'long postwar' these repressed traumas emerge, especially through the 1950s and 1960s, through manga accounts of the depraved tragedy of the Pacific War (Sakamoto 2016, 255), burgeoning anti-nuclear protest movements (Seaton 2007, 41) and a growing clarity of anti-militarist sentiment and activism (Allen 2022, 10). Indeed, such irruptions can also be found in popular media other than videogames: consider the nuclear anxieties expressed in the film *Gojira* (1954), or the apocalyptic imagery that saturates the *anime* film *Akira* (1988). The living dead of videogames in the 1990s represent a new reflection of the traumas of the 'long postwar' period, and confront audiences by pointedly manifesting the very zombification that festers at the centre of Japanese popular cultural memory.

## ***Kyonshī* in Japan's Land of the Dead**

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To return to *Phantom Fighter* and its hopping zombies, I suggest that, beneath the game's obvious Daoist cultural dressing lies an account of Japan's wartime devastation and subsequent undeath. After defeating the first zombified foe to appear in the game, the player rescues a fellow priest, who makes a dramatic declaration to the player: "Kyonshies, [*sic*] the infamous zombie phantoms are back from the land of the dead." The further into the game and through its different villages the player progresses, the more apparent it becomes that this 'land of the dead' is a spectre of the repressed images of the fire-and-atom bombed wasteland of 1945. While the first villages the player visits are filled with gleaming and sturdy buildings and structures, in the final three settlements, temples, homes and other buildings instead show the scars of severe decay and destruction. In these late stages of the game, players are drawn into battle with *kyonshī* in collapsing rooms, strewn with rubble and bones. Lighting is dimmed, and villages are cast in blue and brown hues. Traditional wooden buildings are burnt out, their roofs fractured and a patina of grime clings to walls. These later towns bear an increasing resemblance to the post-war symbols of ruination reflecting fire-bombed Tokyo, atom-bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki and countless other Japanese cities and towns torn up by aerial bombardment. This spectral connection to 1945 and the undeath invoked in Japan in that year is heightened by other aspects of *Phantom Fighter's* play experience. The combination of small, burning blue-and-white flames which float in the air near the player, accompanied by the on-screen prompt "there's danger in the air" (warning players of impending *kyonshī* attack) recalls the intense white flashes of the atom bombs and the airborne risk posed by radiation. An almost complete absence of regular citizens throughout the game's eight villages suggests the horrific wasteland left behind by the instantaneous nuclear vaporisation of communities and lives. *Phantom Fighter's* 'land of the dead' is, it seems, Japan—and its own long-repressed state of war-induced undeath.

At the same time as the game restages a war-ravaged past through its land of the dead, it also becomes evident that players are themselves being drawn further and further into the undead realm. While the player systematically kills off the *kyonshī* they encounter, their descent into increasingly apocalyptic environments suggests that even in individual defeat these monsters are successful as *yōkai* in other ways. Plying the border between possibility and impossibility, and the worlds of the living and the dead, as their *yōkai* forebears have for centuries, the game's *kyonshī* have ensnared their virtual human subjects in an intermingling of

these worlds. With every slain hopping monster and every step forward toward a new village, the player follows the trail laid by these new *yōkai* and descends further into the world of the zombie and the traumas of Japan's past. Indeed, while the bodies of *kyonshī* erupt into flame and vanish upon defeat, death by the player means reanimation back at the start of the village, another symbolic nod to the player's own inhabitation of an undead reality. Referring to the *yakeato sedai* (that generation indelibly grounded in 1945's burnt-out ruins), Sakyō Komatsu suggests post-war Japanese popular culture could be understood as constructing an imagined "space of ruins" in which "things that happened" (*atta koto*), "things that might happen" (*arieru koto*), and "things that could never happen" (*arien ai koto*) co-exist (quoted in Isozaki and Komatsu 2020, 61). *Phantom Fighter* slowly but surely leads its player into such a space of ruins. Apocalyptic images of what *did* happen flicker into view alongside popular cultural memories of the aspirational, prosperous and progressive Japan that *might* exist (which, of course, seemed as if it could *never* happen). Underlying *Phantom Fighter* is a layer of ruined space and the revelation of memories of Japan's own undeath. This trauma-tinged memorial substrate emerges in 1988 with *Phantom Fighter*'s iteration of the zombified *yōkai* and forms a thread that continues to run through Japanese zombie videogames in the early- to mid-1990s.

### Cataloguing Sweet Home's Frescoes and Frights

Where *Phantom Fighter* uses its undead monsters to lure players into an inexorable confrontation with memories of apocalypse, *Sweet Home* charges players more directly with the task of uncovering and capturing spectres of a cataclysmic past. Released for the same home games console as *Phantom Fighter*—Nintendo's Famicom—and utilising the same 8-bit graphical palette, *Sweet Home* nonetheless diverges significantly from the earlier zombie game in terms of its play style. *Sweet Home* is considered one of the earliest examples of a digital role-playing game (RPG), a genre which emphasises rich narrative detail, identification with characters and the development of characters' skillsets and statistical attributes. In place of *Phantom Fighter*'s lone priest, a figure with minimal characterisation, *Sweet Home* invites players to switch between a cast of five distinct characters, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as controlling one unique item. This party of five—Kazuo, Taguchi, Akiko, Asuka, and Emi—are investigators who set out to explore the secluded and deserted mansion of Ichirō Mamiya, a deceased painter, in order to locate, photo-

graph and restore a number of his hidden frescoes. The expedition quickly takes a dangerous turn, as the investigators become trapped in the mansion and terrorised by the lingering spirit of Lady Mamiya, once wife to the painter, and an array of monstrous creatures allied to her. Players are presented with two related objectives: escape the haunted mansion, but not before finding the hidden frescoes.

The imperative to locate, clean (using Asuka's special item, a handheld vacuum cleaner) and document (using Taguchi's special item, a camera) the twenty-three frescoes scattered around Mamiya mansion requires a methodical approach by players. Such thorough exploration of the building means that the player is required to systematically provoke the various horrors that lurk in every room, hallway and courtyard. The monsters encountered are clearly undead in nature: reanimated skeletons adorned with scraps of hanging green flesh; crawling torsos with entrails dragging behind them; almost-human figures with half their faces torn and skull bone exposed; and stereotypically green-skinned zombies, shambling along, vomiting blood and grasping at the player. Decaying bodies, lost limbs, and poisoned and sickly flesh recall images that have, in 1989, long been shut out of Japanese cultural memory: the disfigured and deceased victims of Allied munitions in the closing months of the war (and, indeed, the victims of Japan's own brutal wartime campaigns in Asia and the Pacific). As the player reveals frescoes and gathers scraps of notepaper near these artworks, they also uncover messages that explain, among other things, the revenant Lady Mamiya's motivations. These discoveries reinforce the game's spectral connections to Japan's traumatic past. Lady Mamiya's ghostly wrath, it is revealed, is steeped in tragedy: her two-year old son fell accidentally into the mansion's furnace and was burned to death, and she kidnapped a number of children to deliberately incinerate, hoping to provide her son with friends in the afterlife. The images offered to the player through these explanations—white-hot flames taking innocent lives, and the vaporisation of bodies for an utterly senseless cause—resonate further with the needless suffering of Japan's atomic tragedies.

While Ichirō Mamiya's frescoes are the ostensible targets of the documentary efforts of the five investigators, the search for these artefacts and the provocation of hidden monsters become inseparable acts. The player, ultimately, undertakes a methodical indexing of undead horrors, discovering every liminal reanimation, mutation, and disfiguration possible within the mansion. By staging these encounters, Mamiya Mansion gestures toward how new and existing *yōkai* come to be created, understood and disseminated. Influential folklore scholar Kunio Yanagita is credited

with ensuring the endurance of *yōkai* culture during the turbulent onset of modernity through his methodical documentation, in the early twentieth century, of individual monsters, their characteristics, and their habitats (Foster 2009, 139–40). Yanagita's encyclopaedic records ensured that *yōkai* continued to be understood, in a rapidly changing age, as important cultural commodities, and his work revealed and “positioned monsters as central to Japan's identity as a modern nation-state” (Foster 2013, 141). While revealing frescoes concealed by decades of dust and grime, players also move purposefully through the mansion in order to reveal, catalogue, and vanquish new, interactive *yōkai*. Just as Yanagita, blurring the boundaries between archaeologist and psychoanalyst, “purposefully dug up the buried monsters of the past in order to heal the trauma of the present” (Foster 2009, 157), *Sweet Home* offers its players a contemporary opportunity at memorial excavation. Using camera and vacuum (and the other unique items: lighter, first aid kit, and lock pick) players expose the game's undead and the abject visual metaphors they provide for an obfuscated and traumatic past.

As in *Phantom Fighter*, the construction of virtual space intensifies *Sweet Home*'s excavations of popular memory. Players view their characters, and the interior spaces of Mamiya Mansion, from a top-down perspective, as if peering down into a doll's house. As characters move around the mansion, its walls and rooms fade in and out of view, as the player is restricted to a narrow viewpoint centred upon the character they are controlling. This type of overhead point-of-view is a typical characteristic of Japanese RPGs, generating a specific sense of affect centred on disorientation and spatial illegibility for RPG players (Hutchinson 2019, 41). The neglected, decaying, and disconcerting spaces that players negotiate in order to find Mamiya's various frescoes, monsters and revelations appear an apt stand-in for the construction of Japan's post-war cultural memory: a memorial structure as deliberately mystifying and misleading as the painter's mansion. As the game reaches its end, the spatial and memorial illegibility is made permanent. Having confronted the mansion's many terrors, and quelled the all-powerful ghost of Lady Mamiya, a cinematic cutscene depicts the mansion crumbling into the ground and the characters being rescued. A heap of rubble and ruins signals that access to the revelations of undeath and the past is again sealed off.

*Sweet Home* culminates in a conclusion for its characters, and the player, that in many ways typifies the careful memorial calculations of Japan's 'long postwar.' It is possible for each of the five playable characters to die during gameplay, and in such cases their demise is permanent. For players, this results in five possible variations to the game's final scene:

if any of their characters have died during the game, they are witness to glowing blue orbs representing their souls, floating into the sky, and dialogue suggesting that the survivors abandon their documentary and professions in order to begin anew. In the situation where none of the playable characters have died, the triumphant investigators meet with their producer, celebrating the completion of their documentary. “You guys did great!” their employer exclaims, standing with his back to the group. Intoning “...except for one thing...,” the man turns to face characters and player directly to reveal that he is zombified, with half the flesh of his face rotted away. In all variations, the game’s conclusion appears to suggest that attempts to explore, uncover, and—most importantly—capture and disseminate repressed traumas are futile. The conservative cultivation of Japanese cultural memory will always reassert itself and extinguish accounts that illustrate the horror and undeath at the heart of the post-war Japanese imaginary. The zombified producer scene presents a further, darker commentary, seeming to suggest that even successful enterprises will be undercut by a zombified rot that surrounds those who seek truth and revelation.

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### The Ruptured Shōwa Era: Undead Return

*Sweet Home* foretells a lesson Japan would come to learn over the six years following 1989—that the horror, guilt, and tragedy of the past cannot be easily erased. Where *Sweet Home* offers us a view of tentative efforts to excavate collective memory, the final case study—*Biohazard*—illustrates a state of profound rupture, within which undeath and collective trauma run rampant. This shift in the allegorical tone of Japan’s video-game living dead reflects the context of the game’s release in 1996. By the middle of the 1990s, the slow-burning ramifications of the conclusion of the Shōwa era in 1989, and a series of sharp, traumatic shocks to Japanese life, had come together in a heady social, cultural, and political maelstrom. The Shōwa era, which commenced in 1926 with Emperor Hirohito’s ascension to the throne, concluded with his death on 7 January 1989. For Gluck, the ‘long postwar’ associated with the five decades following Japan’s World War II surrender was “awaiting a momentous event to end it” (1993, 93) and Hirohito’s passing provided this precise point of disjuncture. The continuation of Hirohito’s reign after 1945 required questions around the Emperor’s personal responsibility for events during the war be deflected and overlooked, and his death opened the door to a flood of public acknowledgments of the war’s brutality (for Japan both as victim



and victimiser) (Seaton 2007, 47–48) and revealed that public sentiment increasingly located responsibility for these tragedies with the former Emperor (Gluck 1993, 90). The end of the Shōwa era did not merely represent a change in calendars and terminology, but Hirohito's passing, in inviting reflection upon wartime trauma, guilt, and responsibility, had ruptured a key barricade which had repressed these matters in the national cultural memory over a nearly fifty-year period.

The sense of loss and revival of trauma brought about by Hirohito's passing was compounded by a cluster of other national convulsions in the first half of the 1990s. Japan's once envied 'miracle' economy derailed as a speculative economic bubble, fuelled between 1986 and 1990 by rampant inflation in real estate, stock, and other asset values, burst dramatically in 1991 and 1992 (Azuma 2009, 118). The event halted more than two decades of uninterrupted economic growth and inaugurated a deep economic recession (Tanaka 2014, 48). The myth of a booming economy and post-war harmony, in this fracturing moment, also gave way to harsh revelations of the true toll of such prosperity, including "widespread environmental destruction, diseases brought on by unfettered pollution, and a populace living in tiny anonymous apartments" (Foster 2009, 163). In a parallel to the bursting of the 'bubble' economy, the Japanese social system also appeared to collapse, with the start of the decade characterised by rising homelessness, widening inequality, alarming suicide statistics and increasing numbers of so-called *hikikomori* (socially withdrawn youth) (Hutchinson 2019, 122–24).

In 1995, the already grim six years that followed the conclusion of the Shōwa era were capped off by two tragedies. On 17 January, the Great Hanshin Earthquake (or Kobe Earthquake) struck in the southern part of Hyōgo Prefecture, killing six thousand people, injuring a further 44,000, and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless. With infrastructure devastated and residential neighbourhoods flattened, the earthquake "shook the image of the stable and safe society of postwar Japan" (Tanaka 2014, 48) and served as a "site of grotesque symbolism," betraying the hollowness and powerlessness that lay at the heart of Japan's post-war sense of confidence and rebirth (Rosenbaum 2009, 291). The earthquake was followed, on 20 March, by five coordinated sarin nerve gas attacks on the Tokyo subway network. Orchestrated by *Aum Shinrikyo*, a doomsday sect, the attacks were determined to be the cult's attempt to bring about apocalypse, and it represented another body blow to a fragile national psyche. Adding the final spark to the simmering trauma of earlier cataclysms of the 1990s, *Aum's* sarin attack heralds "the ultimate end and collapse of the fictional age" that had stretched since 1945 and established

a wide-reaching mythos of harmony, prosperity and progress in Japan (Tanaka 2014, 46).

Between economic ruin, the devastation of natural disaster and domestic terrorism, the sense of “lightheartedness” that defined earlier decades in Japan, as Azuma observes, well and truly evaporated in the 1990s (2009, 19). A fragile construction of collective memory was shattered, and as the security, social, and economic apparatuses of the state were overwhelmed by concurrent cataclysms, it became apparent in Japan that the “uncanny and unknown” were still lurking in the shadows and threatening total destruction (Tanaka 2014, 51). Philip Seaton uses the metaphor of ‘seismic activity’ to explain the long-simmering, destructive influence of stifled war memories. During the post-war period, such memories fester and generate “geological rifts” and “divisions deep beneath the surface” (Seaton 2007, 7). The period between 1989 and 1995 sees this seismic activity build to devastating effect, with disorder across the country’s social, political, and cultural milieus combining to allow once repressed wartime trauma surge to the surface. The end of the Shōwa era demanded that Japan (re)locate itself, and its collective cultural memory, in relation to historical violence and trauma (Sakamoto 2016, 254). Having failed to face up to contradictions and impossibilities created by wartime defeat and the reanimation of Japan as a zombified entity, this urgent—and violent—fracture charges popular cultural figures of monstrosity and undeath with renewed allegorical power. I argue that this historical moment—a backdrop of fracture, discord, and renewed attention to Japan’s apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic experiences—directly informs the images, narratives and gameplay mechanics related to apocalypse, monstrosity, and undeath that appear in all three of my case study texts. The connection between this period of cultural and psychic rupture and the emergence of videogame zombies is established most apparently, however, in the final text I analyse in detail: *Biohazard*.

### ***Biohazard*: Hubris and the Limits of Science**

*Biohazard*, and its array of bloodthirsty living dead, emerges as an ideal vessel for the uncertainty, angst, and disorder of 1996. The product of a period of significant technical development in the videogame industry, the game takes advantage of the hardware advances of the Sony PlayStation home console to offer players an early encounter with three-dimensional zombies in three-dimensional environments. This more detailed mode of digital representation granted *Biohazard*’s zombies new horrific licence:

bodies ambulate and swarm toward the player, blood and guts splatter across spaces, corners and shadows demand cautious attention, and weapons require careful aim in the frenzy of combat. Against the backdrop of the visceral scares now afforded by computing hardware, *Biohazard* adapts *Sweet Home*'s plot and gameplay. Again, players confront an ominous mansion setting, infested with undead monsters, littered with puzzles and secrets, and once more the game emphasises exploration and survival. Investigating the disappearance of a team of colleagues (who are in turn probing a series of grisly murders) within the secluded Raccoon Forest, four police officers are forced, after an attack by zombified dogs, to take refuge in the seemingly abandoned Spencer Mansion. Restaging *Sweet Home*'s first dramatic act, the player finds their entrance into the mansion a one-way act and, suddenly trapped in the home, a desperate struggle for survival and escape ensues.

Represented in three dimensions, *Biohazard*'s zombies are a dramatic evolution of the nascent zombies found in the two earlier case studies. Controlling one of the game's two playable characters (Officers Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield), players encounter bloated reanimated corpses tearing through tattered clothing; naked zombies with decaying and glistening flesh; plants with enormous, pulsating, sentient vines; and crows, dogs, giant spiders and snakes in varying states of mutation. *Biohazard*'s zombies take the role of the *yōkai* in moderating the border between possibility and impossibility to a dreadful extreme, viscerally challenging the taken-for-granted individuality and integrity of human and animal biological forms. These are not so much creatures that have returned from the 'other world,' as in *Phantom Fighter*, nor are they infused with the vengeful animism of a spirit such as *Sweet Home*'s Lady Mamiya. Rather, *Biohazard*'s zombies take our own, familiar subjectivities and flesh-and-bone bodies and show that we—and the animal species we share Earth with—can be taken, gruesomely, to the boundary with abject otherness and transformed. In uncovering the causes of these horrific mutations, and the circumstances surrounding the deployment of Valentine and Redfield to the Raccoon Forest, reflections of the chaotic collapse of Japan's post-war mythologies are uncovered.

Spencer Mansion, it transpires for players, is a covert research laboratory for a multinational pharmaceutical firm, the Umbrella Corporation. Under the cover of its day-to-day medical enterprise, Umbrella has been undertaking research into genetic engineering, with a view to developing an undead, humanoid bioweapon. The research, however, has gone awry and a biohazard has erupted on the site, spreading the so-called t-Virus and its infectious mutagens across victims and species. In representing

the horrific possibilities wrought by scientific misadventure, *Biohazard* touches on anxious bioethical and technological discourse circulating in Japan in the 1990s. Scientific endeavours in genetic mutation and bio-engineering were popularly cast as centred on a dangerous hubris, borne of a seeming commitment in the national psyche to pursue prosperity and progress at all costs (Hutchinson 2019, 153). In a country that General Douglas MacArthur, arriving to lead the Allied occupation, compared to a ‘twelve-year-old child’, and where a controversial (to Japanese audiences) contemporaneous American newsreel superimposed the words “the end of a country without science” over images of burnt-out ruins in Japan, science and technological progress was seized upon as a *raison d’être* for the post-war reanimation of Japan (Suzuki 2009, 33). By economically depressed 1996, however, in place of scientific advancement, “disease and pollution became part of the cultural imaginary” and indelibly associated with the post-war economic miracle (Foster 2009, 197). Environmentally induced health problems, including illnesses brought on by pollution and contamination, had been revealed as the cruel flipside of unmitigated economic progress, underpinned by a much-vaunted technological and scientific prowess within Japanese industries.

In a 1996 that appeared to be the nadir of a tumultuous seven years for Japan, during which guilt-infused wartime memories had catapulted back into national discourse, *Biohazard’s* zombies also allegorise the trauma of World War II and its ending. As in *Phantom Fighter* and *Sweet Home*, it is a short leap from the rotting flesh of virtually rendered zombies to the once-repressed memories of incendiary attacks, atom bombs, *hibakusha* survivors and the *yakeato*. *Biohazard*, however, goes further and locates symptom and cause together. Human cell modification echoes the scientific experimentation with a different kind of nucleus that lies at the heart of atomic reactions and weaponry. Umbrella’s shadowy research also evokes another set of odious wartime memories: human medical experimentation carried out by the Japanese military, for the purposes of developing biological and chemical warfare techniques, conducted under the auspices of Manshu Detachment 731 (also known as Unit 731). Fighting their way through Spencer Mansion, *Biohazard’s* players’ first-hand, three-dimensional encounters with disfigured and zombified monsters recall the revelations of “the limits of our hold on technology and science” experienced in the aftermath of atomic destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima (Hutchinson 2019, 171), and also in the laboratories of Unit 731 and other frontlines of a vicious world war. The consequences of an absolute power to create, mutate and destroy are, as players are reminded, abject, self-destructive, and futile symptoms of the pursuit of ‘progress.’

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The intermingling sensations of trauma and guilt that drove post-war amnesia over the conduct of the conflict are mirrored in *Biohazard's* zombies. As officers representing state authority, Valentine and Redfield undertake a journey of vivid disillusionment during the game's events. Evidence uncovered by the player through the discovery of memoranda, journals, photographic slides, and computer logs points to a deep conspiracy orchestrated between the state and Umbrella and an active and violent cover-up of the biohazard disaster at Spencer Mansion. Valentine and Redfield's assured faith in their own mission, and the motivations of their masters, disintegrates in an act of symmetry with the unravelling fictions of the post-Shōwa era. *Biohazard's* zombies and the game's contemporaneous context share similar volatile discursive fuel. Murky American corporate interests, and a hubristic nation state, cooperate in the Raccoon Forest to obfuscate clandestine technological advances and suppress the evidence of disaster, suffering, and undeath. This fiction is directly linked, through the incendiary and allegorical power of the game's living dead, to the collapse of a popular memorial order motivated by the cosy interrelationship of American diplomatic influence, the economic drivers of a miraculous post-war prosperity and a conservative Japanese establishment all too eager to obscure the traumas of 1945 and the wartime years preceding it.

### The Ludic Zombie

Surfacing over the eight years between 1988 and 1996 in the videogames I have analysed is a new addition to the centuries-long parade of *yōkai* monsters, infused with the apocalyptic trauma of Japan's twentieth century. This new monster was the ludic zombie—an interactive undead figure for the videogame age—and one that has come to be widely, and internationally, repeated and refined. The living dead creatures in *Phantom Fighter*, *Sweet Home* and *Biohazard* make an important contribution to the broader genealogy of the mediated zombie. Because of the close association between the zombie and its representation in Hollywood cinema from the 1960s onwards, this undead monster is often considered a “fundamentally American creation” (Bishop 2010, 12). Japan has been overlooked by a zombie studies focused on its American cultural influences (Vétu 2021, 116), and the broader milieu of *yōkai* has been largely invisible in scholarly discussions of the monstrous outside of Asia (Foster 2009, 17). This, as Murphy and Ryan observe in one of the few extant studies of Japanese (cinematic) zombies, has meant that an “important case study

of the impurity, hybridity, and diversity of the contemporary zombie” outside Western media traditions has been neglected (2016, 204). The nascent, ludic zombie found at the end of the Shōwa era challenges the primacy of the Caribbean-derived and Hollywood-boosted undead, and demonstrates the ‘double inscription’ of global and local concerns that underlies the cultural logic of popular culture in Japan and East Asia (Cho 2016, 19). In considering such an example of alterity in the cultural heritage of zombies, the heterogeneity and global relevance of these monsters is illustrated, as is, also, the consistency of their capacity to stand in for deep-seated local anxieties and trauma.

In the games I have analysed, Japanese, Chinese and Western folklore, spiritual traditions, cinematic archetypes, and both recent and distant histories are hybridised together and manifest in the videogame zombie. When addressed through the lens of the *yōkai* traditions that shape these monsters, it is clear that these early videogame zombies afford cultural and memorial engagements that are particular to the post-Shōwa context in Japan. Whether delivering priestly salvation in *Phantom Fighter*’s apocalyptic villages, unearthing and cataloguing Mamiya Mansion’s wretched monsters and memories in *Sweet Home*, or confronting the worst excesses of scientific and state hubris in *Biohazard*, the videogame medium’s earliest zombies all draw the player into the dark recesses of a national psyche where trauma has festered dangerously since the onset of occupation and censorship. The zombies of *Phantom Fighter*, *Sweet Home* and *Biohazard* are visceral embodiments of the anguish of atom bombs, the discursive disarray of the end-of-Shōwa era, and the traditions of ontological destabilisation found in *yōkai*.

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