Genre analysis

# Introduction

## Brief overview

The genre I will be analysing is: the action genre. The action game genre is one of the most popular genres in video games, characterized by fast-paced, physically demanding gameplay that places players directly at the centre of the action [1].

## Purpose of Analysis

The action genre has stayed a popular genre since its inception, even now a lot of top 10 games are of the action genre (or action subgenre). Since I don’t have a lot of experience designing games of this genre, I’m doing this genre analysis. This is to figure out key characteristics and mechanics that make the action genre a success.

# Historical Context

## First Appearance

The action genre emerged alongside the birth of video games themselves, with pioneering titles like Donkey Kong (1981) and Galaga (1981) establishing the fundamental principles of action gameplay [1]. These early games focused on basic but challenging interactions, setting the stage for the genre's evolution.

## Evolution Over Time

The genre's progression can be tracked through several distinct phases:

**1. Arcade Era (1970s-1980s):** - Simple, challenging gameplay mechanics

- Limited lives system

- High-score competition focus

The action games of this era were focused on fun (simple to understand) challenges to complete in a short time. This was mostly because of technical limitations (the short gameplay duration).

**2. Home Console Period (1980s-1990s):** - Introduction of platforming mechanics

- Development of character-specific abilities

- Enhanced narrative integration

The action games of this era were focused on adding new elements/mechanics to the action games that came before. This is mostly because (with the switch to home consoles) the competitive fun of arcade games decreased. With new technology, games also became bigger and developers could fit more content into games aside from basic mechanics found in games prior.

**3. Modern Era (2000s-Present):** - Complex combat systems

- Open-world environments

- Sophisticated physics engines

The action games of this era focused on adding more “sensation” to games. As technology evolved, so did the possibilities of games. Because gaming became a more widespread pastime enjoyed by many, a lot of subgenres of “action” emerged.

Each milestone in this evolution brought significant innovations: Donkey Kong established the foundation of platforming and character interaction, while Galaga refined the shooter mechanics. Super Mario Bros. perfected the platformer formula, leading to Sonic the Hedgehog's speed-focused iteration. Street Fighter II revolutionized fighting games with complex combos and special moves, paving the way for modern combat systems. The transition to 3D with Devil May Cry introduced deep combat mechanics, which combined with GTA III's open world to create the sophisticated action games we know today.

# Core Mechanics and Gameplay

## Definition of Core Mechanics

The fundamental mechanics of action games include:

- Immediate player control and responsiveness

- Physical challenges requiring timing and skill

- Direct confrontation with obstacles or enemies

- Quick reflex requirements

Action games are focused on quick reflexes and thinking from the player. While it’s easy to think that all fighting games would fall under “action”, this is actually not the case. For example, a game with turn based combat (where the player can take as long as they want per turn) doesn’t fall under the action genre, because it doesn’t have the same core mechanics.

## Gameplay Loop

The typical action game cycle consists of:

1. Challenge presentation (enemy encounter, obstacle, etc.)

2. Player action and decision-making

3. Consequence resolution

4. Progression to next challenge

# Thematic Elements

## Common Themes

- Heroism and overcoming adversity

- Competition and achievement

- Survival against overwhelming odds

- Exploration and discovery

These themes help flesh out the gameplay for the player. It gives the player a goal to work towards or a “Why?” to give the player a reason for performing certain actions.

## Visual and Audio Style

Action games typically feature:

- Dynamic camera systems

- Impact feedback through visual effects

- Intense sound design emphasizing action moments

- Responsive control feedback

Action games are usually focused on creating an energetic environment for the player. It’s to prepare the player for challenges or to make the player feel powerful.

# Influence and Innovations

## Influential Titles

Several games have significantly shaped the genre:

- Street Fighter II revolutionized fighting mechanics [1]

- Resident Evil established survival horror elements [1]

- Devil May Cry defined stylish action combat

- God of War reimagined character-driven action narratives

## Cross-genre Influence

The action genre has influenced numerous other categories:

- Action-adventure hybrids adding exploration elements [1]

- RPG-action combinations introducing deep combat systems [1]

- Survival games incorporating resource management [1]

Darkwood and Driftmoon (games that I have previously analysed) both fall under the action genre.

Darkwood is a survival horror game that uses action as a way to survive and for the player as a reason to survive. (If you don’t prepare during the day, than you won’t survive fighting monsters during the night)

Driftmoon is an action RPG with a semi-automatic combat system. You can prepare well for combat, but once combat initialises, you can’t escape. (You can use items/spell in real time to help you fight)

# Genre Subcategories

### Platformer

- Characteristics: Focus on jumping, climbing, and precise movement

- Examples: Super Mario Bros., Sonic the Hedgehog [1]

### Shooter

- Characteristics: Emphasis on projectile combat

- Subtypes:

- First-person (Call of Duty, Half-Life)

- Third-person (Fortnite, Splatoon)

- Top-down (Galaga, Space Invaders) [1]

### Fighting

- Characteristics: One-on-one combat focus

- Examples: Mortal Kombat, Street Fighter II [1]

### Beat-em-up

- Characteristics: Wave-based combat against multiple enemies

- Examples: Double Dragon, Castle Crashers [1]

### Stealth

- Characteristics: Emphasis on covert operations

- Example: Metal Gear series [1]

### Survival

- Characteristics: Resource management and endurance

- Examples: Resident Evil, Fortnite [1]

These subgenres differ from the main genre (action), because they add different elements/mechanics on top of the core mechanics that action games have.

# Current Trends and Future Directions

## Recent Innovations

- Integration of cinematic storytelling

- Advanced physics systems

- Dynamic difficulty adjustment

- Cross-platform play capabilities

Because gaming isn’t for one specific user group anymore, games (and genres) will broaden and evolve with the changing user group. Technology will also continue to evolve and improve, giving developers more room for creativity when designing games. The action genre has already evolved a lot since its inception and I think it will continue to be the cornerstone of a lot of new subgenres in the future.

## Future of the Genre

The action genre appears poised to evolve through:

- More sophisticated physics and destruction mechanics

- Enhanced accessibility options

- Continued hybridization with other genres

As previously mentioned, I think the action genre will stay a key genre while combining with different genres/creating new subgenres.

# Conclusion

The action genre stands as a cornerstone of video gaming, demonstrating remarkable adaptability while maintaining its core appeal of direct, challenging gameplay. The genre's continuous evolution suggests it will remain a cornerstone in gaming's future, adapting to new technology while preserving the core elements/mechanics that made it a success from its inception.

# References

The information presented draws primarily from the provided web results, particularly from idTech's comprehensive genre analysis [1], supplemented by insights about the evolution of action-RPGs [2].

[1] [Ultimate List of Different Types of Video Games | 49 Genres & Subcategories](https://www.idtech.com/blog/different-types-of-video-game-genres)

[2] [The Evolution of Action Role-Playing Games: From Humble Beginnings to Modern Innovations | by JohnTheKraken | Medium](https://medium.com/@johnthekrakentv/the-evolution-of-action-role-playing-games-from-humble-beginnings-to-modern-innovations-8b8da78f1bdc)