

= Drakengard (series) =

Drakengard , known as Drag @-@ On Dragoon in Japan , is a series of action role @-@ playing video games . The eponymous first game in the series was released in 2003 on the PlayStation 2 , and has since been followed by a sequel , a prequel and a spin @-@ off . It was conceived by Takamasa Shiba and Takuya Iwasaki as a gameplay hybrid between Ace Combat and Dynasty Warriors 2 . The story was created by Shiba , Iwasaki , Taro Yoko and Sawako Natori , who were influenced by European folklore and popular anime series and movies of the day . Shiba , Yoko and Sawako have had involvement in every entry of the series since its debut .

The setting of the main series is a Northern European @-@ style dark fantasy world where humans and creatures from myth and legends live side by side , while the spin @-@ off game is set in an alternate reality leading from one of the first game 's possible endings . The stories generally focus on the fortunes and personalities of a small group of protagonists either directly or indirectly connected to and affected by the events of the story . Dark or mature plot and character themes and multiple endings have become a staple of the series . Their popularity in Japan has resulted in multiple adaptations and additional media in the form of novelizations and manga .

The series is considered highly popular in Japan , having sold well and gained a cult following , though it appears to be a niche series in Western territories . The main games have become noted for their dark storylines and mixture of ground @-@ based and aerial combat , while Nier stood out because of its mixture of gameplay styles . The series has received mixed to positive reception in both Japan and the West : the majority of praise has been given to its story and characters , while the gameplay has come in for criticisms for being repetitive or poorly designed .

= = Common elements = =

= = = Setting = = =

The Drakengard games take place in a dark fantasy version of Medieval Europe called Midgard . Humans appear to be the predominant species , although races such as dragons , fairies and elves are shown to exist . The setting , mythos and landscape borrow extensively from the lore of Northern Europe . The world is overseen by a group of unnamed gods who have yet to make a personal appearance . The gods are served by beings known as the Watchers , entities created to destroy humanity because they are considered a failure . The Watchers are kept from entering the world with the seals , which act to keep the world in balance : should the seals be destroyed , the Watchers would enter the world and destroy humanity . At the core of the seals is the Goddess of the Seal , a mortal virgin female chosen and branded with the final seal : if all the seals are destroyed , all that stands between the Watchers and the world is the death of the Goddess herself . A core element of the Drakengard universe is the ability for humans and beasts to form a Pact , a magical bond which links their souls and grants the human partner great power at the cost of some physical ability or personal trait (their voice , singing abilities , etc .) . Pacts are normally entered into by beasts so they can feed off negative emotions , but sometimes they will enter a pact for other reasons . A recurring element across the series is the representation of magic using the Celestial Alphabet , with a common letter arrangement representing the human gene .

The universe of the Drakengard series is split between multiple timelines . Events in those timelines are separate , but they can overlap . The core timeline is formed from Drakengard and its sequel . Drakengard 3 acts as the first game 's prequel , but most of its events take place in separate timelines leading to different outcomes . In Drakengard 3 , a malevolent flower uses servants called the Intoners , women gifted with the power to use magic through song , as instruments of humanity 's destruction . In Drakengard , which succeeds the a fifth version of Drakengard 3 's events detailed in a supplementary novel , the Watchers use a group known as the Cult of Watchers to spark a religious war and destroy the seals . In Drakengard 2 , the Watchers continue to use the former head of the cult to destroy the new seals , while the dragons prepare to usurp the gods and rule

over the world . Nier is set in an alternate reality created by events stemming from Drakengard 's fifth ending : in this reality , the world was decimated by a plague created by the magical beings who came through the portal , bringing humanity to the brink of extinction . Nier : Automata takes place after the fourth ending of Nier , featuring appearances and mentions of characters from both Nier and the Drakengard games .

== Gameplay ==

The Drakengard games feature a mix of action @-@ based hack @-@ and @-@ slash combat during ground @-@ based battles and aerial combat mixed in with RPG leveling mechanics . In the original , the player guides the characters around ground @-@ based battles to combat small groups of enemy units . In aerial combat , the player takes control of the protagonist 's dragon partner . In these situations , the dragon can either lock onto a target and unleash a barrage of small fireballs , or the player can manually aim and fire large bursts of flame , which do more damage but do not home in on a target . Basic gameplay changed little for Drakengard 2 , but there are some differences and additions , such as weapon types being tied to the character they are associated with , with changing them also swapping the character . The dragon gameplay remained virtually unchanged , apart from the ability , during air @-@ ground missions , for the dragon to swoop down on a group of enemies in a special attack depicted in a short cutscene .

In Nier and Drakengard 3 , the player controls the main protagonist with two other characters acting as AI @-@ controlled supports . Drakengard 3 was designed to be a faster experience than the previous games , with the protagonist being given a special hyper @-@ mode and the ability to freely switch between weapons without pausing the action . Aerial gameplay was also changed , with the dragon now capable of ground combat . Nier , while featuring similar hack @-@ and @-@ slash combat , also includes other gameplay types such as a top @-@ down view for puzzle areas , 2D style areas for buildings or similar structures . Side @-@ quests were also added , which often involved fetch quests , fishing and farming .

== Themes and influences ==

One of the running narrative themes for the main series is Immorality , which also became the key character theme and was expressed through their personalities and actions . The second game also focused on themes of war and death . The theme for the world of Drakengard 3 , as described by composer Keiichi Okabe , is " the sense of contrast " . Multiple anime series have influenced the series ' characters over the years , including Neon Genesis Evangelion , Sister Princess and Puella Magi Madoka Magica . The series writer , Sawako Natori , drew inspiration for her writing from sh?nen manga . The original game world was designed around Celtic and Norse myths , together with Japanese @-@ style revisionism . The team for the original game were influenced by Asian epic movies and western action @-@ adventure films such as the 1999 remake of The Mummy and Dragonheart . While developing Nier , the team drew inspiration from the God of War series , while the narrative structure was inspired by the September 11 attacks and the War on Terror . The central theme of Nier : Automata is struggling out of a bad situation , defined by the game 's staff using the Japanese word " agaku " .

== Games ==

== Related media ==

The games received multiple adaptations and additional story content in the form of novelizations , manga and supplementary material . The first game received two novelizations : Drag @-@ On Dragoon : Side Story on November 28 , 2003 , and Drag @-@ On Dragoon : Magnitude " Negative " on January 23 , 2004 . The first book was written by Emi Nagashima , writing under her penname of

Jun Eishima , and the second by Takashi Aizawa . The novelization of Drakengard 2 , written again by Nagashima , was released on September 30 , 2005 .

Nagashima wrote character stories and manga for Drakengard 3 leading up to that game 's release . The manga were Drag @-@ On Dragoon : Utahime Five , a prequel following the game 's main antagonists , and Drag @-@ On Dragoon : Shi ni Itaru Aka , which acts as a sequel although for the branch A as it along with branch 's B , C , and D lead to alternative timelines . A book detailing the narrative connection between Drakengard 3 and Drakengard , titled Drag @-@ On Dragoon 3 Story Side , which serves as the fifth branch similar to the events of B and D , narrated by Brother One was released on 28 August 2014 . Drag @-@ On Dragoon 3 Complete Guide + Setting , a complete guide to the game with extra features explaining the game chronology and a novella set after the events of Shi ni Itaru Aka , was published by ASCII Media Works in 2014 .

Nier was expanded after release with a CD drama which told of events immediately after the events of Drakengard 's fifth ending , and a supplementary book titled Grimoire Nier containing extra stories and concept art alongside a fifth ending for the game . Square Enix also paired up with WildStorm to create a digital comic which detailed the backstories of the game 's characters and world .

= = Development = =

= = History = =

The idea for Drakengard originated in 1999 between Takamasa Shiba and Takuya Iwasaki . The gameplay was conceived as a blend of elements from Ace Combat and Dynasty Warriors 2 . The team developing the game went under the moniker " Project Dragonsphere " . The team was joined by director Taro Yoko , who was the main drive behind the game 's dark atmosphere . It was Shiba 's first project as a producer . As Yoko was told there would not be a sequel , multiple endings were created . When it was localized and released in the west , references to things such as sexual taboos were censored . In addition , the title was changed , as Drag @-@ On Dragoon was considered wrong for a western audience . Drakengard was considered enough of a success that a sequel was commissioned . Multiple staff members returned for the creation of the second game , although Yoko was mostly tied up with other projects and was replaced as director by Akira Yasui . Yoko still had a role in development , and he and Yasui had creative clashes during development . Yasui ended up making Drakengard 2 the thematic opposite of the previous game , employing a lighter tone and broader color palate .

Nier originated when Yoko and Shiba teamed up to create a third Drakengard game . As the project continued , it became more detached from the main continuity and eventually developed into a spin @-@ off . Despite what it became , Yoko has stated that he considers Nier to be the true Drakengard 3 . After the release of Nier , Cavia closed down and was absorbed by AQ Interactive , then Taro Yoko left the company to pursue a wider range of projects . A stalled attempt to begin production of further games in the series at AQ Interactive was blamed by Shiba on a prevalent trend at the time for light @-@ weight games for the general gaming community . Later , Yoko and Shiba came together again to create a proper second sequel to Drakengard , with the intention of creating a hard core RPG for the fanbase . Unlike the previous games in the series , Drakengard 3 was developed by Access Games , a developer whose noted games included Deadly Premonition , and brought in team members used to creating action games . During the run @-@ up to Drakengard 3 's release , both Yoko and Shiba expressed their willingness to continue the series on the PlayStation 4 if the latest game was enough of a success . Speaking in 2014 after the game 's release , Yoko stated that the series was on hold due to lack of funds . A new Nier game was revealed to be in development at Square Enix and PlatinumGames .

= = Writing and character design = =

The stories of the original game 's characters were written by Yoko , Shiba and Iwasaki , while the

main game script was written by Sawako Natori , who would go on to co @-@ write the main scenarios for future Drakengard games . Yoko designed the darker elements to both contrast and actively compete with the likes of Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy . Yoko conceived the " insane " characters around the premise that people who killed hundreds of people in pursuit of their goals and took satisfaction from it were naturally insane . During the production of Nier , his focus changed to writing a story where everyone believed they were in the right whatever their actions . Through the series , Yoko has also been attempting to answer the question of why people are driven to kill . Although some of the dark narrative themes were kept for Drakengard 2 , many of the other narrative elements were made more mainstream . Drakengard 3 was intended to return to a dark aesthetic , but also to include moments of humor and tie in with Nier .

The character designer for nearly all entries in the series is Kimihiko Fujisaka . Initially a minor staff member at Cavia , the team were impressed by his skill as an amateur artist and he was recommended for the post of character designer for the game . The designs for both the characters and the world were influenced by armor and clothing of Medieval Europe . He returned in the same capacity for Drakengard 2 , and later for Nier . Disliking some of his initial designs for Drakengard , he took the opportunity to remodel them more to his liking for the arcade game Lord of Vermilion . For Nier 's international release , the protagonist was redesigned from a teenager to an adult character . This was because the publishers felt an older character would appeal more to western players . In Drakengard 3 , Fujisaka designed the protagonist Zero around the dark themes of the game , although some unusual elements were nearly cut . The other female characters were inspired by Puella Magi Madoka Magica , while the male characters , considered a low priority , were designed around male archetypes and approved quickly . For Nier : Automata , the designs were handled by Akihiko Yoshida , an artist noted for his work on the Final Fantasy series . While he was initially expected to refuse , he agreed as several staff at his company CyDesignation were fans of Nier . For his designs , Yoko requested he focus on smooth outlines and black coloring .

= = = Music = = =

The first game 's soundtrack was created by Nobuyoshi Sano and Takayuki Aihara . The two created the score using samples from well @-@ known classical composers . The second game 's soundtrack was composed by Ryoki Matsumoto and Aoi Yoshiki , who had never before been involved with video game soundtracks . The game 's Japanese theme song , Hitori , was sung by Mika Nakashima . The music for Nier was composed by Keiichi Okabe , who composed the soundtrack as something different from the main series , and to directly reflect the sombre tone of the game 's setting and story . Singer Emi Evans (Emiko Rebecca Evans) wrote and sung the vocal tracks , and performed many tracks in different languages , including an invented one for one of the tracks . Okabe returned to compose the soundtrack for Drakengard 3 : in an interview , he stated that , in composing the music , he tried to emulate the work of the earlier composer without imitating them . He also commented that the result was very unlike the traditional Square Enix game . The game features two theme songs : " Black Song " , performed by Eir Aoi , and " This Silence is Mine " , the game 's theme song proper , written and sung by Chihiro Onitsuka . Okabe is again providing the music for Nier Automata , with singer Emi Evans also returning .

= = Reception = =

The Drakengard series has received mixed to positive reviews over the years . So far , the original Drakengard has received the most positive response . Nier has the highest aggregate score overall so far for the PS3 version of the game and slightly lower scores for the Xbox 360 version . Drakengard 2 and Drakengard 3 have received lower scores . Each title in the series has received favorable review scores from Japanese gaming magazine Famitsu .

The common point of praise for the series through most of its life has been the story . While individual aspects have come in for criticism , the dark atmospheres , unconventional characters and general scenarios have been cited as one of each game 's strengths . Despite some mixed feelings

from reviewers either for the story as a whole or certain aspects of it , the characters and plot of Drakengard 3 have also been praised . The major exception is Drakengard 2 : the story 's lighter tone and more traditional narrative were noted and sometimes criticized for being overly simplistic or too similar to other games in the genre . The Drakengard characters have remained popular in Japan , with Dengeki holding a popularity contest for those characters to celebrate the series ' tenth anniversary and the announcement of Drakengard 3 . Among the most popular characters were the first game 's main protagonists , Caim and Angelus (the former having earned the nickname Prince (?? , ouji) among fans) . The characters of Drakengard 3 have also proved to be highly popular .

The gameplay has so far come in for major criticism , with the original title 's aerial and ground @-@ based gameplay being seen as repetitive and dull , although some reviewers found it entertaining . Drakengard 2 also came in for such criticism , although minor improvements were cited . In contrast , the gameplay of Drakengard 3 was generally praised or seen as an improvement upon the previous two entries , though the dragon @-@ riding segments came in for criticisms for difficult controls . Opinions were divided on Nier 's unconventional mix of gameplay styles from multiple game genres , with some praising the variety and others seeing it as poorly executed . The series as a whole has gained a cult following in Japan .

Each game has sold relatively well in its home market . The original game was a commercial success , selling over 120 @,@ 000 units in the first week of release and eventually selling over 240 @,@ 000 copies in Japan . Drakengard 2 's first @-@ week sales were similarly impressive , selling 100 @,@ 000 units . It sold over 203 @,@ 000 copies by the end of 2005 . Drakengard 3 sold just over 15 @,@ 000 units in its first week , and over 150 @,@ 000 units by May 2014 . The two versions of Nier ? Gestalt and Replicant ? sold roughly 12 @,@ 500 and 60 @,@ 000 copies in their first week respectively . Replicant eventually sold over 121 @,@ 000 in Japan by the end of May 2010 . The series has sold over 770 @,@ 000 units in Japan as of May 2014 . Sales figures for western regions are unavailable . The first two games in the main series have both been included in Square Enix 's Ultimate Hits series , re @-@ releases of popular titles developed or published by them .