

Of Bare Chested Men and Violence: Barbarians and War in 1980s games and press coverage

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by Aurelia Brandenburg and Adrian Demleitner

This text traces a joint inquiry into a loose link between bare chested men as protagonists and the depiction of violence in 1980s video games. For this analysis, we collaborated from our respective perspectives from historical and design research. Aurelia Brandenburg has a background in history, digital humanities and gender studies and Adrian Demleitner in software studies and design research. Our focus was on the reception as well as visual semantics of video games that used barbarian- or soldier-themed characters.

We recently worked on *Ball Raider* (1987), an *Arkanoid/Breakout*-style game that was developed in Switzerland and published in the United Kingdom⁽¹⁾. Besides other details, the graphics of the game were a significant distinguishing feature. Whereas the original *Arkanoid/Breakout* games and their clones strived towards more minimal interfaces or the abstract, *Ball Raider* used illustrations as backgrounds during gameplay.



Figure 1: Screenshot of the title screen of *Ball Raider* (1987).

Screenshot of the title screen of *Ball Raider* (1987).

The game also features a character, that most likely was inspired by Dolph Lundgren in his role as He-Man in the film *Masters of the Universe*, looking like the stereotypical 80s bare-chested barbarian. During our research on *Ball Raider*, we came about the sarcastic blog post titled *Amiga Title Screens Featuring Large Shirtless Men*, which included *Ball Raider* in its listing. At first, we were amused, but quickly started to discuss the prevalence of this depiction within our research team. Why were there so many games (and movies) with bare-chested men? Was it a newfound erotic liberation after the 1970s? Is this visual signifier important for the semantics of the game they accompany? Or simply a harbinger for the way games were beginning to deal with hypermasculinity and, thus, violence?

Research Setup and Contextualisation

Methodological Approach There were too many games depicting bare-chested men to be ignored. We also had at least two games in our own corpus having bare-chested barbarians in their visuality – Ball Raider and the unreleased DragonSlayer⁽²⁾. Using those two games as well as the above-mentioned blog post as our vantage point, we set out to inquire these phenomena. Our approach included roughly the following process.

1. Definition of general research inquiry
2. Definition of corpus: Which games do we include and for what reason
3. Discourse analysis: Focus on two aspects – the visuality of the games and the reception of these in German video game magazines
4. Merge our findings: Write-up and bringing together our different perspectives

The two aspects in the discourse analysis relate to the methods and approaches we bring in from our respective research backgrounds. Analysing the visuality included looking at screenshots, paratextual material, like covers and advertisements, but also inquiring other media that were relevant for this specific visual trope, such as film posters, book covers and textual descriptions of characters. To get a better picture of the reception and discussion of our chosen games, we focused on reviews in German video game magazines.

Game Clusters After an initial scan of the relevant games that were taken from bespoke blog post as well as the corpus of Confoederatio Ludens, we reduced our choices in what we wanted to investigate. The blog post already included too many games, and we felt that we needed to reduce the list to a workable saturation. We then continued to formulate two clusters around the games' protagonist that would be played by the gamer: Barbarians and soldiers. See "Games" under medialist for the complete list of works we analysed.



Starting Screen for Barbarian for the ZX Spectrum (1987)



Starting Screen for Ikari Warriors for the Atari ST (1986)

What unites them is the implementation of the bare-chested man as main character(s), and as a visual item that is very present. The two clusters have a character design that is, in both cases, inspired by movies. In the first group we find *Conan: The Barbarian* as inspiration, and in the second we have *First Blood* (Rambo). Both movies came to the cinemas in 1982, and are based on written stories that got published in magazines or books. There is lots to be said about the movies themselves and their relation to power and the politics of bodies. Going into the details would expand this blog post into a full-blown paper and, sadly, might need to be ignored for now.

Images The images used in the analysis consisted mainly out of covers of 14 books, 4 magazines, 2 films and 5 video games, from 1934 until 2005, as well as in-game screenshots. The collection of covers was created through manual research and validation of publication date and illustration artist, and can be explored via this Conan Covers Omeka collection. The corpus of in-game screenshots was produced via API calls to Mobygames, automated scrapping of other platforms as well as screenshots made by us. We worked with Tropy to analyse the images, whereas the analysis was mostly of heuristic nature. The corpus can be downloaded from Zenodo. In the process of researching the two clusters, the visual analysis focused mainly on the barbarians.

Gaming Magazines and Violence in the 1980s Apart from the visual similarities, the games of both clusters are part of a broader discourse about violence, war and masculinity in games during the second half of the 1980s. With the archetype of the Barbarian, violence as something raw and seemingly primal came into focus, sparking more and more questions about the brutality of these games. At the same time, games like *Commando* began depicting war as a setting to collect points for killing as many enemies as possible, perpetuating another, related archetype of a single, superhuman soldier who fought not for himself but for 'his' country. Both ideas were very influential, partly because they helped to build the idea of gaming's "toxic meritocracy" (3) of gamers as Lone Wolves and a form of gaming elite, but they also created discursive problems that did not fixate on the brutality of certain animations or mechanics, but the whole game design on principle. Primal, masculine violence was one thing; Its glorification in the form of war something entirely

different.

These similar, yet distinct, debates can be traced well in the gaming press of the time. Since the early 1980s, the market of gaming magazines began growing slowly worldwide and by 1985, when *Commando*, the earliest game of our corpus, was released, even a couple of different national traditions of magazines had begun developing. In 1981, the first issues both of the British *Computer and Video Games* and the American *Electronic Games* were published and soon after other countries and languages such as the French *Tilt!* (1982) and the German *TeleMatch* (1983) followed.⁴ Those magazines would later go on and develop the local terms and language to talk about, compare, and even measure a game's quality and determine much of what it means to talk about games, gaming, and being a person who plays digital games. To put it plainly: to examine violence and masculinity in those two clusters of games means examining their context and the discourse surrounding them.

Jugendschutz, Journalism and the German Index Given this context, we deliberately decided to focus on German magazines in particular for our study. Partly, to limit our scope in general, since normally there are more than one article about a single game, and partly, since different magazine landscapes operate under different circumstances and produce different approaches to discussing the themes of our selected games. While bigger debates about violence and games as an alleged reason for real-life violence only peaked much later in the 1990s and early 2000s, its origins for the German-speaking market began much earlier in the 1980s. During that time, magazines began wrestling with their own role as a form of press trying to cover a new medium with a young audience, and came to different results that can be traced very well in our corpus. Could it be appropriate to recommend a game that was perceived as very violent? What about games that seemingly glorified war without depicting its horrors? And where was which line regarding these issues?

Gaming magazines and journalists were not the only ones who tended to ask these questions. At the same time, the German *Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Schriften* (Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors, BPjM) and German government offices for youth welfare began examining games as something potentially harmful to minors. Based on the German *Jugendschutzgesetz* (Protection of Young Persons Act) it was (and is) possible for the BPjM to index media that is considered harmful to minors and thus, should not be accessible to them. Technically, indexed media (such as games, books, or movies) is not banned in Germany, but it is illegal to both sell and advertise indexed titles to minors in Germany. Owning indexed media is not illegal which always made bordering markets such as Austria and Switzerland an attractive way to circumvent German restrictions which sometimes could water down attempts to ban minors from access to certain titles. Nevertheless, since “advertisement” can be understood very broadly in this context, this had direct influences on the German press as well. First of all, once a game was indexed, the German press stopped covering it altogether, but even in the cases where it became impossible to avoid mentioning a certain indexed game, they began to censor its title at any instance where it might appear in the magazine. This included both reviews that might mention an indexed game as influence on the reviewed game, same as letters to the editor where readers might mention it. For example, when reviewing *Dogs of War* for *ASM* in 1989, Peter Braun mentioned *Ikari Warriors* as a similarly brutal game, but since the game was indexed, the title printed in the review read “Harakiri Warriors”⁵. The reason for this was very specifically related to German law. At the same time, most German-speaking magazines in general were produced and published in Western Germany, but distributed in Austria and Switzerland as well. This in turn resulted in an international, but very German-dominated discourse about violence and the protection of minors in the German-speaking gaming press.

Selected Articles For the nine games we examined, we found a total number of 33 articles, mostly reviews, spread over seven different magazines: *Aktueller Software Markt (ASM)*, *Happy Computer*, *Power Play* (which began as part of the Happy Computer and later became its own magazine), *Amiga Joker*, *64er Magazin*, *Play Time*, and *PC Games*. The earliest review is from 1986 and the latest from 1993, and while four out of the nine games of our corpus got indexed, all four of them received some coverage before that decision. The clusters through which the games themselves can be sorted are meanwhile mirrored in the content of the articles, although the way *how* journalists discussed themes of violence, war and masculinity developed over time with the ongoing debate around brutality in/of games. A full list of all articles can be found on Zenodo.

Masculinities

Barbarians At one end of the bare chested men and violence spectrum, we needed to figure out why Conan looks the way he looks like. As a first step towards knowing more, we tried to build up a visual genealogy of Conan. We were also keen to learn where this visuality started and how it changed over the years.

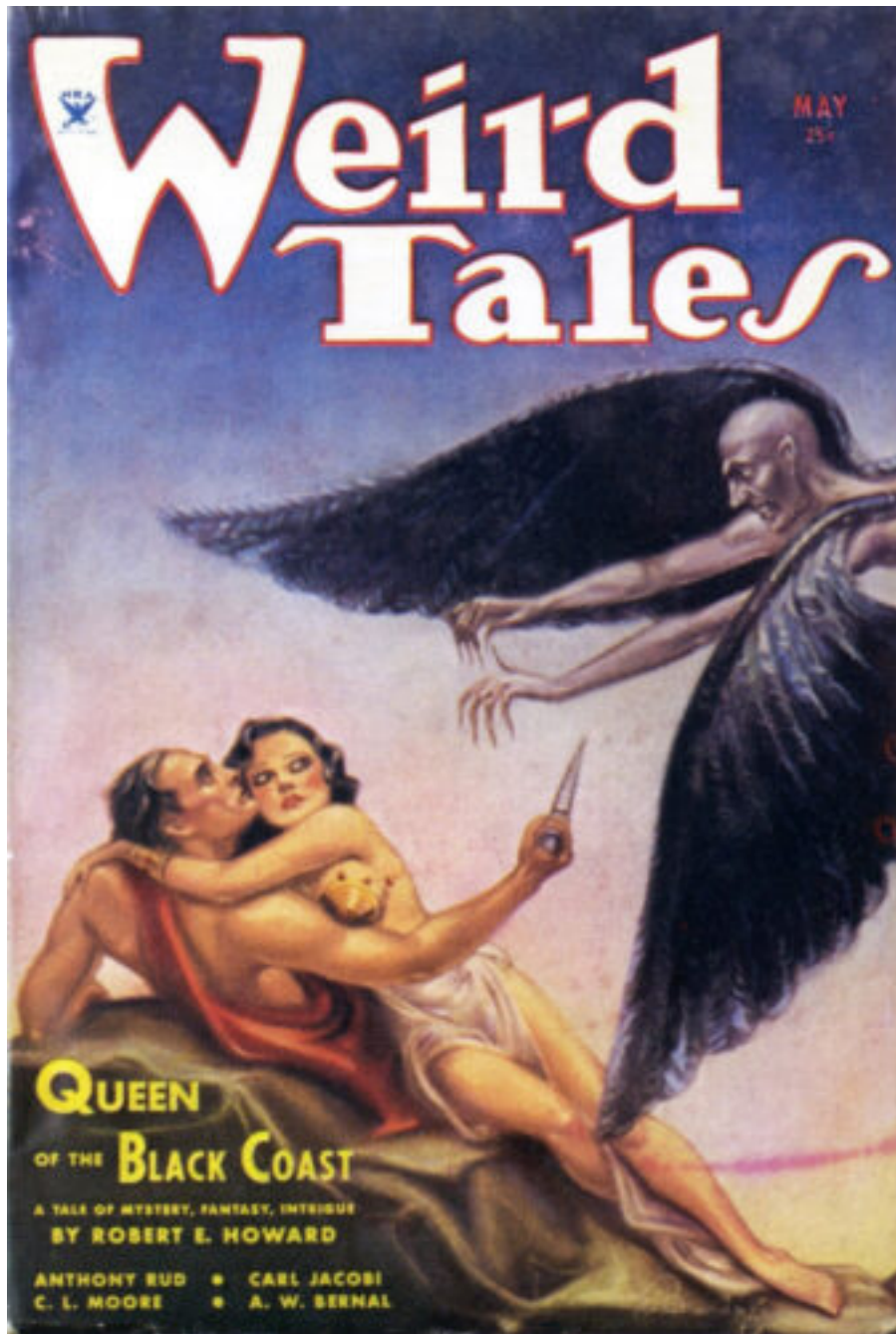
Conan goes back to his original author, Robert E. Howard, an American writer who wrote pulp fiction stories. The first story with Conan as a main character was published in *Weird Tales* in 1932, titled *The Phoenix on the Sword*⁽⁶⁾. To figure out how Howard imagined Conan, we used natural language processing on the original seventeen stories to extract visual descriptions of this character.⁽⁷⁾

Two extracts from this analysis are exemplary of many other instances where Robert E. Howard was not shy to describe Conan in all his glory.

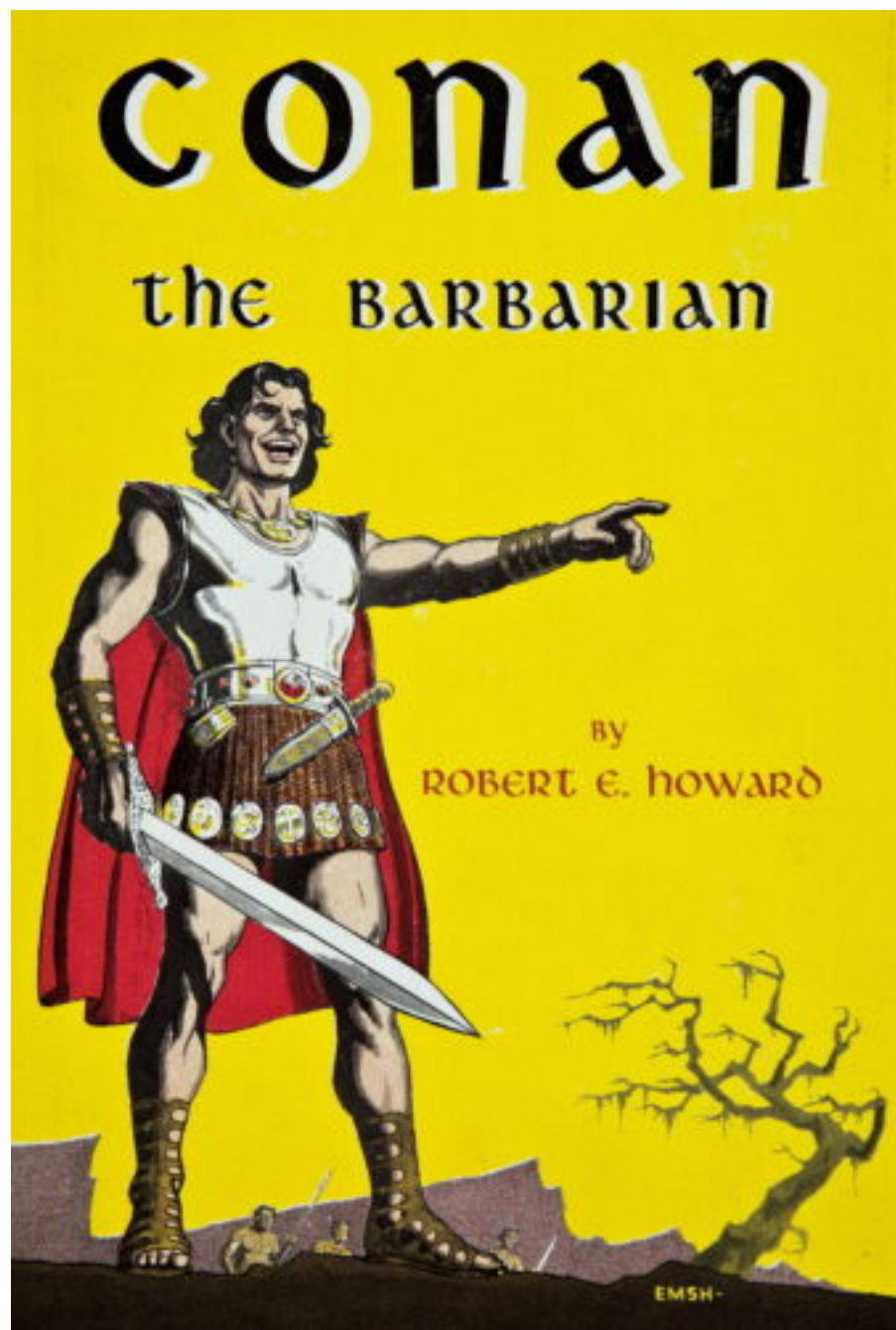
“Hither came Conan, the Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the jeweled thrones of the Earth under his sandalled feet.” (Howard, 1932)

“In strong contrast stood Conan, grim, blood-stained, naked but for a loin-cloth, shackles on his mighty limbs, his blue eyes blazing beneath the tangled black mane which fell over his low broad forehead.” (Howard, 1933)⁽⁸⁾

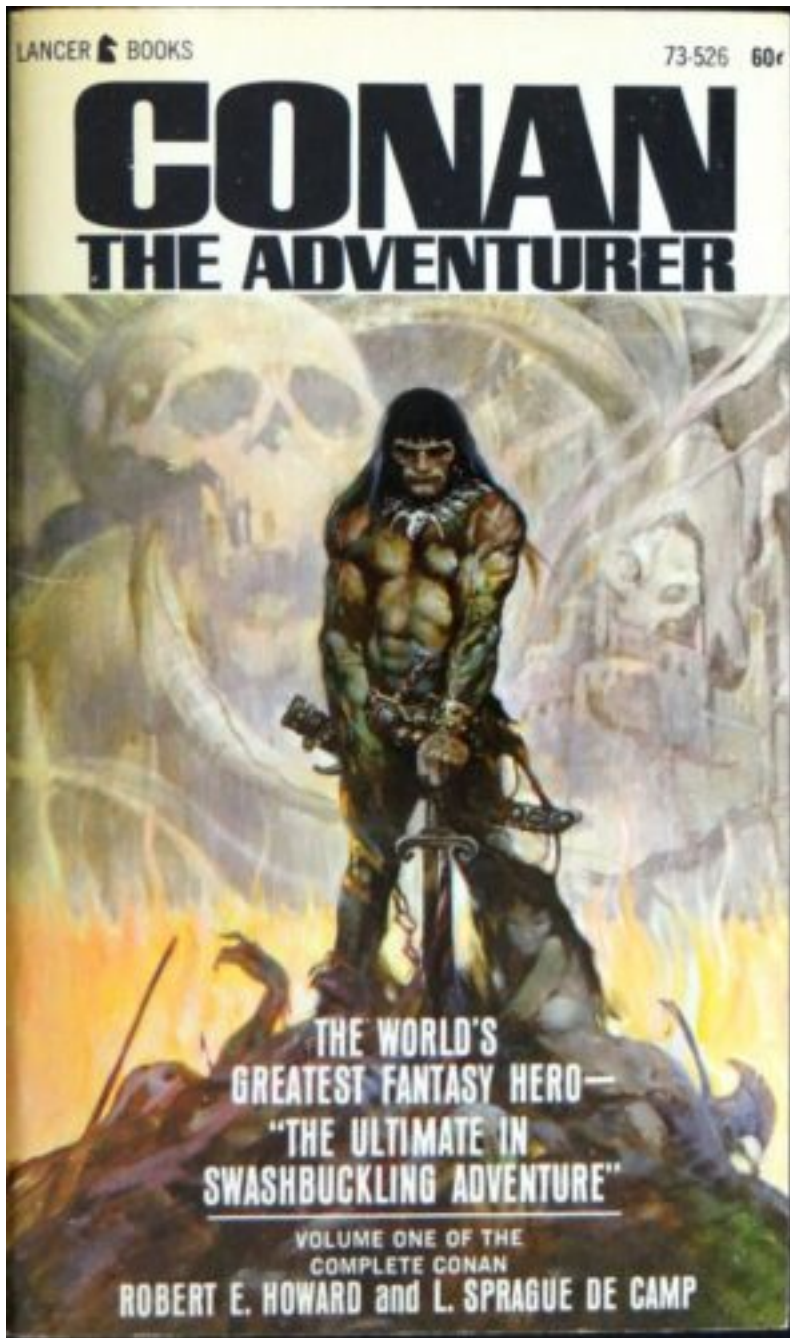
Conan was not described in terms of cultural attributes or styles, but in terms of physical attributes. This left the illustration of this character more or less up to the artist’s imagination. In the 80 years that followed up to 2023, depending on the artist, Conan leaned toward Greek mythology, Roman centurions, Celtic warriors, or middle eastern rogues. The final change in Conan’s visuality happened when the illustrator Frank Frazetta reimagined him in the 1970s. Whereas former Conans leaned towards the elegant and statue-like, Frazetta’s version was grim, pumped and dynamic. That is the Conan we know of today, who’s image got dispersed in films and video games.



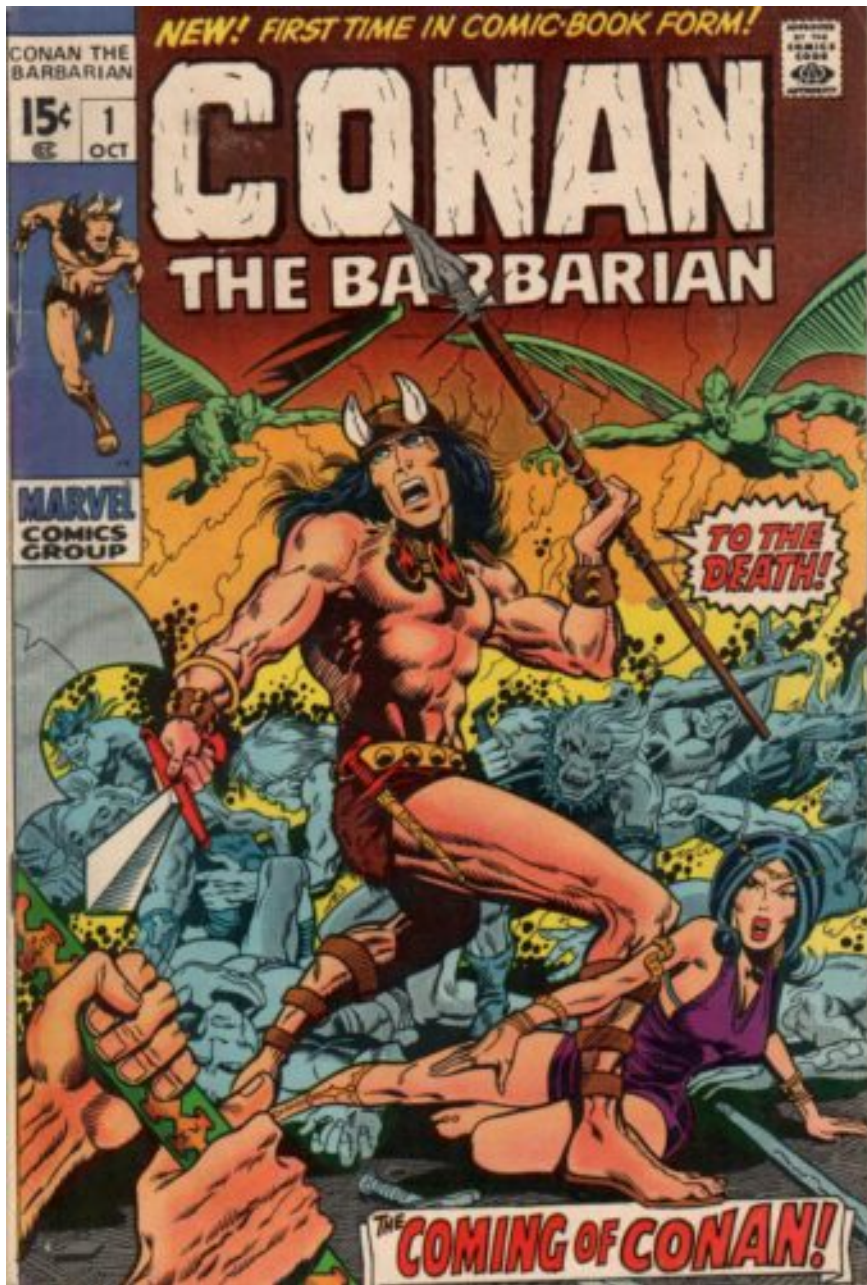
Weird Tales (May 1934)



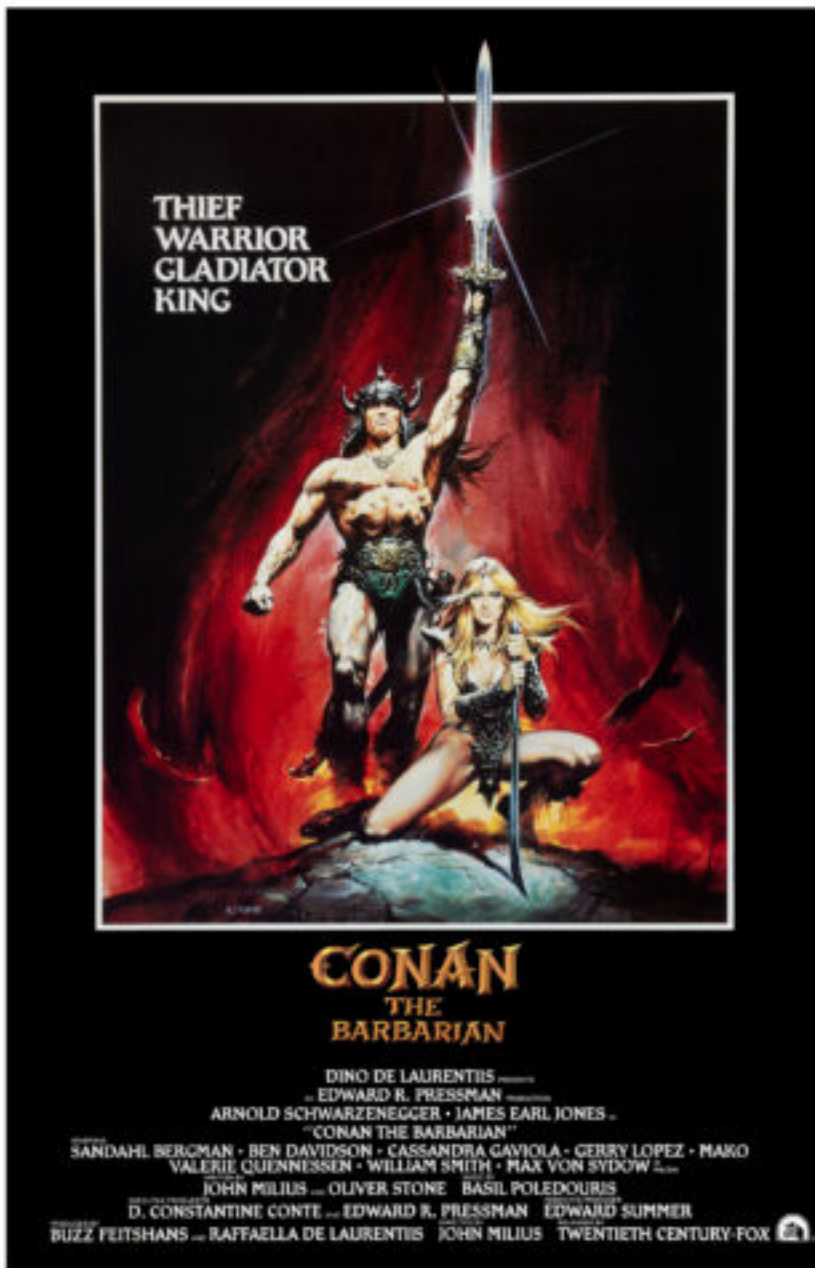
Conan the Barbarian (1955)



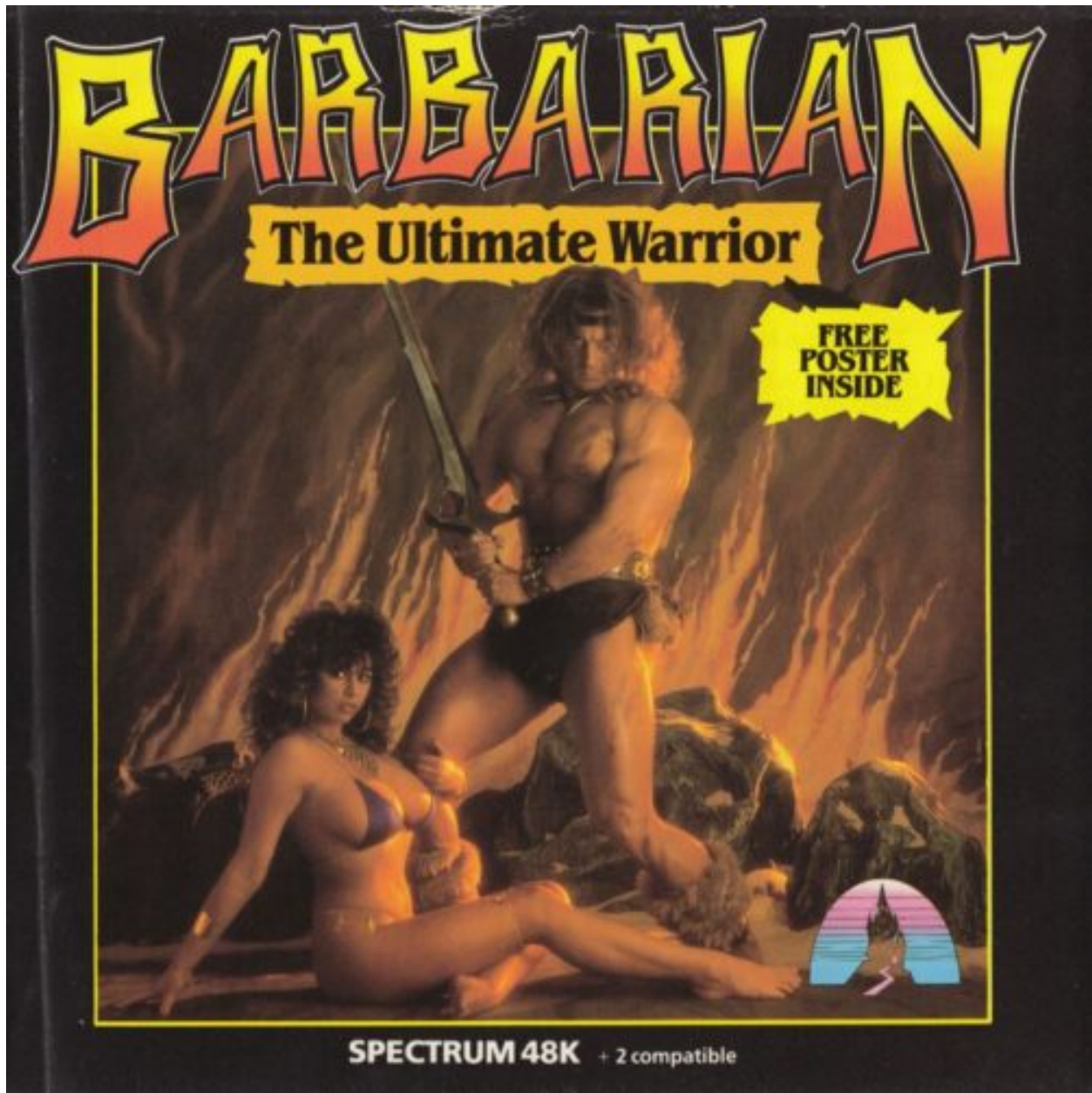
Conan the Adventurer (1966)



Conan the Barbarian #1 (1970)



Theatrical poster for Conan the Barbarian (1982)



Barbarian for ZX Spectrum (1987)

Since his advent, Conan has been a hypermasculine and over-sexualised character⁽⁹⁾, with a limited range of allowed emotions⁽¹⁰⁾, walking around basically naked and attracting women, being violent at will and always in control. Beginning with his textual description and ending up with countless visual depictions, this character worked as a projection of manliness since the interwar period until the advent of incel fandom (Wall, 2013).

The growing popularity of Conan led up to the 1980s, with two movies being a success. Next to being a surprise for Universal Pictures, it also showcased Arnold Schwarzenegger and inspired a plethora of swords-and-sorcery movies throughout that decade. It is also the decade where our first Conan-styled game got developed and published, *Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior* (1987). The Wikipedia entry on the game has an interesting anecdote on the development of the game.

In 1985, Palace Software hired Steve Brown as a game designer and artist. [...] He was inspired by Frank Frazetta's fantasy paintings to create a sword fighting game that was "brutal and as realistic as possible".

Brown based the game and its characters on the Conan the Barbarian series, having read all of Robert E. Howard's stories of the eponymous warrior.¹¹

Violence, War and the ever-present scare of bans

Is it appropriate to consider a game both brutal and a masterwork? Brown's alleged quest to make *Barbarian* explicitly brutal and realistic as possible seems to have been a success, at least in terms of the game's reception. The German press both criticized and praised *Barbarian* for its violence and in the beginning, the game was very well received. Manfred Kleimann (*ASM*) called it a "masterwork"¹² and praised Brown's dedication to study human anatomy and fighting techniques during the game's development, and according to Heinrich Lenhardt (*Happy Computer*), it was "the best fighting game there is right now"¹³. At the same time, all reviews mentioned the game's iconic kick motion that allowed player's to decapitate an opponent. Gregor Neumann (*Happy Computer*) took the time to criticize this mechanic in more detail and concludes that this kind of violence would be inappropriate in a computer game while recommending to the programmers that they should have cut this part of the game.¹⁴

Neumann's recommendation is interesting since it also indirectly provides the link between the two cluster's of games we examined here. All nine games were of the type that tended to be considered violent for their time, but from our cluster of games depicting violence from the hands of 'Barbarian'-archetypes inspired by Conan, *Barbarian I* was the only one that got indexed in Germany.¹⁵

The German index is, partly since many (if not all) of the reports regarding indexing decisions of games during the 1980s are publicly available, a nice orientation on the perception of violence in games at the time. With *Barbarian*, Neumann's critique regarding the attack to decapitate an opponent was mirrored by the BPjM in their decision to index the game. They concluded that the game was too brutal, since it framed fighting and killing opponents as something positive and an explicitly *masculine* virtue. Furthermore, they argued that the animation of a goblin which drags a decapitated opponent's corpse out of the arena was playing down the gravity of a kill.¹⁶

This decision is interesting for multiple reasons regarding our corpus. First of all, it's an example where the German gaming press and the BPjM were in relative agreement about a game. The decapitation kick *was* considered very brutal at the time, no matter how much praise *Barbarian* got from the press for its game design. The exceptional brutality itself was not up to debate, but how to *react* to it.

Is it appropriate for a game to depict war? This echoes a tension that was common in the German-speaking discourse, at least in the way it can be traced through the gaming press. Especially games that depicted war ("Kriegsspiele") were a repeated source of scandals and controversies. This is also true for all four games from our second cluster: *Commando* (also called *Space Invasion* in its German version) got indexed in February 1987, *Ikari Warriors* in June 1988, and *Leatherneck* in late August 1988.¹⁷ Reviews for all three games, same as for *Dogs of War* in 1989, were overall positive. Not all explicitly mentioned the violence these games depicted or how players had to play a soldier fighting in a war, but when they did, it often was framed as a flaw, not a virtue. For example, Manfred Kleimann, who had reviewed *Barbarian* for the ASM without criticizing its violence, even went so far and openly asked in his review of *Leatherneck* in 1988 when games would stop conflating brutality with entertainment altogether.¹⁸ War, most reviews seem to agree, is supposedly something too horrific for a medium such as games.

The BPjM seemed to agree, and all three games were indexed due to their brutality and violence. Interestingly, the one review of our corpus that did not come to the same conclusion but rather framed war and violence as a positive feature was Peter Braun's review of *Dogs of War* for *ASM* in November 1989. For him, the game's violence was a sign of quality and the developer's persistence. After multiple games that had been indexed for their brutality, they dared another attempt, no matter the threat of the BPjM and succeeded creating a great game. Therefore, players who did have second thoughts nevertheless simply were supposed to "put their moral doubts aside"¹⁹ to enjoy a game he went on to praise highly. He even went so far to end his review with the recommendation to buy *Dogs of War* as quickly as possible as long as it was still available for sale. Yet, even in this very positive review, Braun acknowledged how the game was "tasteless" for its violence – even when he personally did not care about that.²⁰

The biggest problem both the BPjM and German journalists kept seeing in war games was not that these games depicted war at all but *how* they did. When *Commando* was released for computers on the German market, Elite Systems published a German localization under the title *Space Invasion* and changed the setting from a jungle into a science fiction scenery, probably to avoid conflict with the BPjM. Neither the BPjM nor journalists were convinced. *Space Invasion* was indexed, nevertheless, and the press reacted either indifferent or irritated by the choice. “I’m sick of this glorification of war under the disguise of games”⁽²¹⁾, wrote Gregor Neumann, and he was far from alone with this kind of assessment. Boris Schneider-Johne called *Commando* a waste of programmers’ energy and asked when developers would finally move on from “mindless shooting games”⁽²²⁾, and Ottfried Schmidt found that it was “a war game of the nastiest kind”⁽²³⁾ that should not be sold to people under fourteen. He still went on to review *Commando* just as any other game, although he made a point of giving the game’s idea a low rating of two points and the line listing the fun to play the game read “Motivation (sadly): 8”⁽²⁴⁾. In other words: The problem, as presented by the press, which in turn was mirrored by the BPjM, was not war per se but its *glorification*.



Figure 2: Scan of Ottfried Schmidt’s review of *Commando* in ASM 06/86, p. 37.

Scan of Ottfried Schmidt’s review of *Commando* in ASM 06/86, p. 37.

Discussion

One cannot simply analyse the images of these games for their violence. Looking at these games almost 40 years after their publication and with a modern eye, their attempt to be brutal seems ridiculous. Nonetheless, they have been received as violent and discussed as such. Context matters. Visuality is a socio-cultural construction of how and what we see (Rose, 2016), and our eyes have witnessed a lot more violence since. Formally, a few red pixels sufficed to indicate a character being wounded, whereas today we have hyperreal depictions and glorifications of all kinds of violence.

Jakob Birken recently expanded on the topic of aesthetics, realism and historical reception regarding video game graphics, as well as their drive towards violence (Birken, 2023). What we acknowledge as evidently realistic, he outlines, is always relative to our perception. As players, we are generally interested in accepting

an illusion as persuading. He continues to describe the history of techno-aesthetic progress in video game design as the need to constantly overwhelm our perception through the next generation of games. From a techno-historic perspective, the excessive focus on violence can be interpreted as an application of this principle to gain the attention of media and players alike, and as a factor of differentiation in the market. Violence and overwhelming as a way of concealing aesthetic sameness or deficits.



Screenshot from Barbarian for the Amiga



Screenshot from Barbarian for the Commodore 64



Screenshot from Barbarian for DOS

This also fits very well with our work and findings: The way the games we selected depicted and discussed

violence, same as the way the press coverage talking about it later, was one aligned both with youth, masculinity and a form of provocation. *Barbarian I* and its clear irony through the lens of a Conan-style aesthetic played into this, same as the general irritation over the scandalous way games like *Commando* turned war into a game of collecting points and beating levels. Both are very much bound to their times, which even was mirrored by the BPjM (among others) at times. For example, in 2005, *Commando* was removed from the German index even before the standard period of 25 years since its appeal simply had ceased. By then, it only had a kind of “retro charm”⁽²⁵⁾, but could not be considered a serious threat to Minors any more.



Screenshot from Ikari Warriors for the NES



Screenshot from Ikari Warriors for the NES



Screenshot from Ikari Warriors for NES

Thus, as this example demonstrates, the history of depicting violence in video games is also a history of the development of the visual symbol as a signifier of violence to the realistic reproduction of the signified. A handful of red pixels are hardly recognisable as blood, but they indicate such. If media socialisation and competence frame it as realistic at the time, they carry that meaning. The red pixels are closer to the word than to resembling blood. In this light, the considerations that went into the banning or censoring of these games are especially interesting.

Conclusion

Apart from our first findings, this project was an experiment in multiple ways: For us personally when it comes to collaborating on a topic while coming from different angles and sources but with similar methods and a joint focus, but also regarding the analysis itself. Looking at games and their culture from a historical perspective means identifying and analysing their themes in more than one way and while we *suspected* that there would be a connection between the depiction of hypermasculinity and violence in the games and press of the 1980s, we looked at our sources with an open outcome on purpose.

For the visual side of our analysis, we concentrated mainly on paratextual visual material, such as covers and

posters. There is still a lot of potential in the rest of the image corpus. We were able to acquire in-game screenshots of all games and have had a preliminary look at them. To expand on our points made in this article, we would now need to return to these images and inquire how they relate to masculinity and violence from a formal perspective. It would be especially interesting to deep dive player reception of formal elements in the discussed video games, especially when it comes to their connection to the discourse in the press. For this project, we mostly concentrated on reviews, but not on further sources like letters to the editor or articles and coverage related to violence instead of individual games, which is a reasonable way to limit a corpus, but also leaves some further questions open for investigation.

Generally speaking, our corpus and its related analysis underlines how violence as a masculine virtue and ideal could be portrayed and perceived in a very different way from violence as a phenomenon of war, even in discourses on brutality and violence. The distance created by a fantasiesque Conan seems to have been large enough to give these games and their aesthetic of masculine brutality more room within the discourse, while war games stayed too close to earn such treatment. Judging from the attempt to lighten *Commando's* scandalous contents by changing them into a science fiction setting, developers seem to have been aware of this as well, even if that attempt was futile in this case. While both clusters of games were quite brutal for their time, Conan and the idea of barbarians could exist far more easily within its fantastic, over-the-top space, while war games regularly seemed to cross an invisible line. With our study, we only scratched the surface of that tension, but it would be interesting to commence a more profound investigation of these matters.

Medialist

Games

Barbarians Barbarian I (1987), Barbarian II (1988), DragonSlayer (1989, unreleased), Torvak the Warrior (1990), Conan the Cimmerian (1991)

Soldiers Commando (1985), Ikari Warriors (1986), Leatherneck (1988), Dogs of War (1989)

Magazine Issues

- 64er Magazin: 04/86
- Happy Computer: 03/86, 01/87, 07/87, SH 11, SH 17, SH 21
- Amiga Joker: 11/89, 01/90, 11/90, 12/90, 01/90
- Play Time: 03/92
- PC Games: 11/92
- ASM: 06/86, 01/87, 08/87, 05/88, 09/88, 10/88, 04/89, 10/89, 11/89, 12/90, 12/91
- Power Play: 05/88, 06/88, 10/88, 04/89, 07/89, 01/91, 02/92, 03/93

A full list with all individual articles and links to digitized versions of each article can be found [here](#).

BPjM decisions All decisions als linked below were accessed through the publication of an inquiry by Nils Bühler to the BPjM from July 2023 through Frag den Staat. For the full inquiry see Inquiry #284245, Frag den Staat, 19.07.2023. Online: <https://fragenstaat.de/a/284245>.

Barbarian I (1987)

- BPjM report on decision #3072 (V), 16.10.1987. Online: <https://fragenstaat.de/anfrage/indizierungen-und-nichtindizierungen-von-automaten-und-computerspielen-zwischen-1980-und-1990/832465/anhang/e-3072-v-barbarian-der-maechtigste-krieger-geschwaerzt.pdf>.
- BPjM decision I 62/87, 15.12.1987. Online available: <https://fragenstaat.de/anfrage/indizierungen-und-nichtindizierungen-von-automaten-und-computerspielen-zwischen-1980-und-1990/832465/anhang/i-62-1987-barbarian-geschwaerzt.pdf>.

- BPjM decision I 5/89, 23.01.1989. Online: <https://fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/indizierungen-und-nichtindizierungen-von-automaten-und-computerspielen-zwischen-1980-und-1990/832465/anhang/i-5-1989-barbarian-anonymisiert.pdf>.

Commando / Space Invasion (1985)

- BPjM decision #2801 (V), 19-02-1987. Online: <https://fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/indizierungen-und-nichtindizierungen-von-automaten-und-computerspielen-zwischen-1980-und-1990/832465/anhang/e-2801-v-commando-geschwaerzt.pdf>.
- BPjM decision I 18/88, 24.06.1988. Online: <https://fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/indizierungen-und-nichtindizierungen-von-automaten-und-computerspielen-zwischen-1980-und-1990/832465/anhang/i-18-1988-space-invasion-geschwaerzt.pdf>.
- BPjM decision A 120/5, 24.08.2005. Online: <https://fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/indizierungen-und-nichtindizierungen-von-automaten-und-computerspielen-zwischen-1980-und-1990/832465/anhang/a-120-2005-commando-anonymisiert.pdf>.

Ikari Warriors (1986) BPjM decision #3271 (V), 24.06.1988. Online: <https://fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/indizierungen-und-nichtindizierungen-von-automaten-und-computerspielen-zwischen-1980-und-1990/832465/anhang/e-3271-v-ikari-warriors-geschwaerzt.pdf>.

Leatherneck (1988) BPjM decision #3353 (V), 23.08.1988. Online: <https://fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/indizierungen-und-nichtindizierungen-von-automaten-und-computerspielen-zwischen-1980-und-1990/832465/anhang/e-3353-v-leatherneck-anonymisiert.pdf>.

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- Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (4th edition). SAGE Publications Ltd. <http://study.sagepub.com/rose4e>.
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1. We will publish an in-depth analysis of this game in due time. [back]
2. More information on this in the blog post series by Beat Suter on LINEL – a Swiss Publisher. [back]
3. Paul, Christopher A.: *The toxic meritocracy of video games*. Minneapolis 2018. [back]
4. Interestingly, both *TeleMatch* and *Tilt!* were licensed exports of the *Electronic Games* for their respective local markets. See Kunkel, Bill: *Confessions of the game doctor*. Springfield 2005, p. 16. [back]
5. ASM 11/89, p. 39. [back]
6. The Phoenix on the Sword – Wikipedia [back]
7. Details on the process, as well as the dataset, can be found via <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8320970> [back]

8. The two quotes were taken from the two short stories by Robert E. Howard “The Phoenix on the Sword” (1932) and “The Scarlet Citadel” (1933), which were also the first two stories published. [back]
9. The illustrator of the pulp fiction covers for the first Conan stories, Margaret Brundage, had to abbreviate her name to not be recognized as a woman. A woman doing covers for such frivolous stories would have been too obscene for the public to handle. [back]
10. Mostly rage . . . [back]
11. Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior – Wikipedia [back]
12. ASM 08/87, p. 10. [back]
13. Happy Computer SH 21, p. 25. [back]
14. “Als Idee ist er [der Angriff, mit dem Gegnern der Kopf abgeschlagen werden kann] sicher nicht schlecht, zumal er mit dem kleinen grünen Gnom witzig aufgemacht ist. Ich halte ihn aber in einem Computerspiel für fehl am Platz. Die Programmierer hätten sich diese Einlage lieber verkneifen sollen, denn sie bringt ein gutes Spiel in Verruf.” (Happy Computer SH 21, p. 25) [back]
15. Meanwhile, our second cluster features three of four games that were considered harmful to minors in Western Germany and the fourth, *Dogs of War*, was expected by the press to be indexed soon after release in 1989, although it seems as if the BPjM never actually screened it. *Dogs of War* received relatively few reviews in the German press, maybe because of that, but it seems as if it never was indexed since there seems to be no entry regarding the game in the Bundesanzeiger where any index decision, including revisions of earlier decisions, have to be published. Furthermore, according to an inquiry to the BPjM by Nils Bühler, *Dogs of War* was not indexed or even officially screened by 1991 which suggests as well that the game was never on the German index in the first place. See: Inquiry #284245, Frag den Staat, 19.07.2023. Available online: <https://fragdenstaat.de/a/284245> [back]
16. “Das Computerspiel ist verrohend, weil es den Spieler dazu anhält, sich an brutalen und grausamen Kampf- und Tötungshandlungen aktiv zu beteiligen. Es stellt Kampf- und Tötungshandlungen als positiven Wert dar und läßt die kämpferische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Schwert als hervorragende Bewährungsprobe für männliche Tugenden und heldische Fähigkeiten erscheinen. [...] Der Tötungsvorgang wird im Spiel bagatellisiert und ins lächerliche gezogen. Ein frosch-artiger Gnom nimmt die jeweilige Leiche bzw. den enthaupteten Kopf und transportiert diese nach einem Gequake vom Bildschirm.” BPjM report on decision #3072 (V), 16.10.1987, p. 3-4. Available online: <https://fragdenstaat.de/anfrage/indizierungen-und-nichtindizierungen-von-automaten-und-computerspielen-zwischen-1980-und-1990/832465/anhang/e-3072-v-barbarian-der-maechtigste-krieger-geschwaerzt.pdf> [back]
17. See BPjM decision #2801 (V), 19.02.1987 (Commando), BPjM decision #3271 (V), 24.06.1988 (Ikari Warriors), and BPjM decision #3353 (V), 23.08.1988. All available online: <https://fragdenstaat.de/a/284245>. [back]
18. “Leider aber wurde schon wieder ein kriegs- und gewaltverherrlichendes Spiel (zum Thema: Vietnamkrieg) daraus entwickelt. Wie lange noch werden diese Jungs, vermutlich von den Software-Häusern, angehalten, Brutalität als perfekte Unterhaltung anzupreisen? Warum dürfen/können diese Jungs nicht mal auf einen anderen Trip gehen? So, wie LEATHERNECK vorliegt, ist es ein allererster Kandidat für eine Indizierung.” ASM 09/88, pp. 52-53. [back]
19. “[. . .] sollte der geneigte Spieler nun seine moralischen Bedenken beiseite legen [. . .]” ASM 11/89, p. 39. [back]
20. “Gut, die DOGS OF WAR sind brutal und geschmacklos, aber das Spiel macht trotzdem Spaß und motiviert recht lange. Dagegen habe ich überhaupt nichts! Greift zu, solange es das Ding gibt!” ASM 11/89, p. 39. [back]
21. “Mir hängt diese Kriegsverherrlichung unter dem Deckmantel eines Spiels zum Hals raus.” Happy Computer SH 11, p. 19. [back]
22. “Wenn man diese Spiele sehr genau betrachtet, dann ist man ziemlich böse, daß sp viel Programmierer-Energie für ein derartig ’mieses’ Thema verschwendet wurde. Dachte man schon, daß die Softwarefirmen endlich vom hornlosen Ballerspiel losgekommen sind, wird man von diesen Neuerscheinungen eines Besseren belehrt.” 64er Magazin 04/86, p. 156. [back]
23. “ein Kriegsspiel der übelsten Sorte” ASM 06/86, p. 37. [back]
24. ASM 06/86, p. 37. [back]
25. BPjM report on decision A 120/05, 24.08.2005, p. 2. Available online: <https://fragdenstaat.de/>

[anfrage/indizierungen-und-nichtindizierungen-von-automaten-und-computerspielen-zwischen-1980-und-1990/832465/anhang/a-120-2005-commando-anonymisiert.pdf](#) [back]