

## Harmonic Chains: Weaponization in *Omega Quintet*

**ABSTRACT** *Omega Quintet* (Idea Factory International, 2014), a role-playing video game released for the Sony PlayStation 4, centers around the concept of weaponizing musical entities and apparatuses to combat threats in a dystopian universe. *Omega Quintet* weaponizes music literally, supernaturally, and economically, both inside and outside of the game narrative. In this article, we interpret these types of weaponization as an extended allegory for consumption. On one level, the surface narrative denotes sound as a murder tool, on another level the player enables violent consumption of these tools, and yet another level reveals the weaponization of agency within a gendered labor market.

The story of *Omega Quintet* is set in a dystopian Japan overrun by monsters known as the BEEP. Protagonist Takt and his childhood friend, Otoha, join an organization that develops special idols known as Verse Maidens to fight the BEEP. Surviving members of humanity provide the fan base for the Verse Maidens. The Verse Maidens depend on fan support to fuel their powers. Battles in *Omega Quintet* feature an assortment of musical weaponization. Examples include Sound Weapons as the main conduit for physical attacks, Verse Maidens' unique songs to play during extended attack sequences known as Live Mode, and special joint attacks known as Harmonic Chains. The battles take the commodification of idols to such an extreme that they are simultaneously consumed and used as weapons. Presented as a duality of fragility and strength, beauty and brutality, art and war, the Verse Maidens are consumed in a complex system of cultural and narrative implications. **KEYWORDS** weaponization, *Omega Quintet*, idol, feminism, hypercapitalism

*Omega Quintet* (Idea Factory International, 2014), a role-playing video game (RPG) released for the Sony PlayStation 4, centers around the concept of weaponizing musical entities and apparatuses to combat threats in a dystopian universe. In this article, we analyze the weaponization of music in *Omega Quintet* (*OQ* henceforth). *OQ* weaponizes music literally, supernaturally, and economically, both inside and outside of the game narrative. We interpret these types of weaponization as an extended allegory for consumption.<sup>1</sup> On one level, the surface narrative denotes sound as a murder tool; on another level the player enables violent consumption of these tools; and yet another level reveals the weaponization of agency within a gendered labor market.<sup>2</sup>

Weaponization of music in games is far from a new concept, especially in RPGs. The bard class in tabletop game *Dungeons and Dragons* (1974–) weaponizes song in battle,

1. The authors recognize and acknowledge our privilege and unconscious cultural bias as white USians of Latinx decent, and that we are studying games and concepts primarily rooted in the Japanese economic culture.

2. For further reading on the gendered labor market, see Gabriella Lukács, *Invisibility by Design: Women and Labor in Japan's Digital Economy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

and video game RPGs continue this trope.<sup>3</sup> William Cheng discusses the weaponization of music in the social sphere as it relates to the *Lord of the Rings Online* (2007–) in his monograph *Sound Play* (2014).<sup>4</sup> Tim Summers describes the weaponization of the eight melodies in *Mother* (1989) in their chapter in an edited collection of essays on music in role-playing games, *Heroes and Harmonies* (2019).<sup>5</sup> Weaponization of music is an important capitalist characteristic, and to illustrate this point Cheng states, “Music is a tool because it can do things. More than lovable, music is useful. It can appease or annoy, heal or harm, bring people together or break communities apart.”<sup>6</sup> *OQ* presents music as a unifying force but belies the far-reaching implications of music weaponization in multimedia.

*OQ*'s centerpiece is a group of five girls that act as singer-savior-maidens. They perform on stage and in battle as an all-girl group called the Omega Quintet. The girls serve as a hyperbolic avatar for music idols—an exaggerated reflection of public multimedia figures in hypercapitalist Japanese society. In order to understand how the Omega Quintet functions in *OQ*, it is important to understand the marketing of “idols” in Japan and shifts in this kind of media within and after the bubble economy (a time of economic boom in Japan in the 1980s).<sup>7</sup> Patrick Galbraith and Jason Karlin's edited collection *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* (2012) provides a comprehensive overview of idols in Japan.<sup>8</sup> Although in their introduction Galbraith and Karlin define idols by their use in Japanese mediascapes, the term *idol* is better summarized as a performer of various talents that reaches a wide audience and is therefore present in most media while representing their brand. The term idol began to be used after the French film *Cherchez l'idole/In Search of an Idol* was screened in Japan in 1963 (as *Aidoru o Sagasu*). This musical comedy had a loose, and perhaps ludicrous, plot involving the search for a diamond hidden inside a guitar. The story allowed for popular, young musicians to perform in the film. While popular musicians weren't new to Japan, the shift from *enka* singers to youthful (usually) women allowed for the creation of the

3. Due to the nature of *Dungeons and Dragons*, weaponized music is not heard, only recounted. For further examples of weaponized music in games see: *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (1998) and *Eternal Sonata* (2007). In *Ocarina of Time* the player must learn several short tunes to solve puzzles, change the weather, and summon certain characters. You cannot complete the game without implementing multiple songs. *Eternal Sonata* revolves around a romanticized version of Chopin's struggle with illness and eventual death. All controllable characters wield attacks with musical names (e.g., *piu grave*) and Chopin's weapon is a conductor's baton. In each case, the music is an activity that propels the action, often in violent ways.

4. William Cheng, *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

5. Tim Summers, “Mother/EarthBound Zero and the Power of the Naïve Aesthetic: No Crying Until the Ending,” in *Music in the Role-Playing Game: Heroes & Harmonies*, ed. Steven Reale and William Gibbons (New York: Routledge, 2019), 35–53.

6. William Cheng, *Loving Music Till It Hurts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 5.

7. In 1991, Japan's asset price bubble collapsed after overspeculation of the economy. Japan continued to lose money and the economy became stagnant. The ten-year period following the bubble economy is called the Lost Decade (1991–2001).

8. In this text contributors ruminate on the concept of idols and their myriad roles in Japanese culture. With topics ranging from idol-as-celebrity to idols-as-commodity, this work discusses Japan's history with the modern idol and its repercussions on their economy and way of life. Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, eds., *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

modern idol.<sup>9</sup> The 1970s saw the production of the first wildly successful solo teen idol, Minami Saori, and idols started to appear frequently on television. By the 1980s, the idol market grew large enough to become economically stable and cemented its place in Japanese culture as the bubble economy arose. While the bubble economy showcased the idol system at peak profitability, the post-bubble economy required diversification of idol niches in order to survive the economic decline. *OQ* parodies this economic decline throughout the narrative's dystopian setting, weaponizing the environment to necessitate savior-idols. The game shows a microcosm of how Japanese celebrities are managed. Idols, celebrities, and *talento* are managed by *jimusho*—or talent agencies.<sup>10</sup> These companies are highly competitive and take product branding into account when training their commodities (i.e., idols). Talent is secondary to malleable personalities and consistent output. This is significant when discussing how the *jimusho* within *OQ* mold performers to fit their demanding needs.

*OQ* mirrors the *jimusho* idol agency system on a micro scale. In the game, the agency, also a default government for the region, recruits girls to be idol-warriors, in the anime archetype of “battling beauties,” marketed to men and boys.<sup>11</sup> Mari Kotani posits that such battling beauties in Japanese animated media act as fetishes for boys and men to consume.<sup>12</sup> Here, the theme of weaponization is explicit; as savior-idols, the Quintet turn into weapons to slay threats, while the aggressive consumption habits of their audience cause multiple obstacles for them to overcome. The series tagline, “In a world on the verge of destruction, singing might be their only hope . . .,” alludes to its dystopian narrative. While the term *battling beauties* was coined by psychiatrist Saito Tamaki, Kotani further theorizes thusly:

While ordinary girls are frequently seen as incapable of fighting and thus as nothing more than “inanimate things,” the Battling Beauty proves as aggressive as any boy. Yet she does not seem to hold out any hope or desire for liberation. The Battling Beauty is a beauty, which configures her in relation to boys’ desires. Thus she may function as a mirror of boys’ desires, for their liberation.<sup>13</sup>

*OQ* binds the archetype of battling beauties to idols through use of animated tropes in conjunction with idol tropes, combining capitalist consumption practices of two different media powerhouses (animation and idols). Currently, there are a variety of idol types,

9. Enka music post-WWII is usually a type of ballad that is heavy in sentimentality, slow, and lyric. For more, see the music of Hachiro Kasuga and Keiko Fuji.

10. *Talento* are a form of celebrity that is not incredibly famous but are generally recognizable. These performers are charismatic on screen but lack the star power of major celebrities. They are commonly seen as judges on shows, event hosts, narrators, or guests. They are meant to be a more approachable version of a superstar, but they are still trained and groomed performers.

11. Audience members within the game narrative are shown to be only adult men. The Quintet alludes to watching the previous idol-warriors, but feminine spectators are never shown in-game. Additionally, the game *OQ* is marketed to a male demographic. Both in reality and within the game’s universe, the Quintet is largely consumed by men. Mari Kotani, “Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl: The Girl, the Hyper-Girl, and the Battling Beauty,” *Mechademia* 1 (2006): 162–70.

12. In this case, we are evoking the consumptive practices that occur when fetishizing the icon. For further reading on this subject, please see bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 64.

13. Kotani, “Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl,” 166.



FIGURE 1. The Omega Quintet, left to right: Aria, Otoha, Kyouka, Kanadeko, and Nene.<sup>17</sup>

including virtual idols, cute idols, national idols, mother idols, and child idols.<sup>14</sup> The idols in *OQ* fall into a variety of categories (see Figure 1), depending on how the player decides to cross the uncanny valley, that is, how the player decides to navigate their relationship with the characters, including the player's interpretation and in-game choices concerning attire and presentation.<sup>15</sup> For some, animated characters across a screen can be only virtual idols, while others may find the way they are presented makes them read as child idols, still others may refuse any idol-specific interpretation of the way the women are exploited.<sup>16</sup>

14. Igor Prusa, "Megaspectacle and Celebrity Transgression in Japan: The Sakai Noriko Media Scandal," in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, ed. Patrick Galbraith and Jason Karlin (England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 59.

15. The "uncanny valley" refers to the gap between reality and what is portrayed on a screen or via (mechanical, analog, or digital) apparatus. For something to completely cross the uncanny valley, would have dual implications: the person's perception is unable to distinguish between layers of reality and technology has reached a point of sophistication that borders on natural creation. In this case, we refer to C. Thi Nguyen's theory of game agency, in which players take up temporary agencies and submerge themselves into a game. Player's that are adept at picking up a temporary agency blur the lines between reality (only) while playing the game, therefore crossing (or at least diminishing) the uncanny valley. For more reading see: Thi C. Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

16. There is a battle mechanic called "Clothes Break" that results in the Quintet's clothes becoming damaged in correlation to the amount of damage received at the hands of an enemy. Maintenance of gear and armor uses a large amount of in-game currency. It behooves the player, especially early in the game, to have the Quintet without their armor during non-boss battles. Severely damaged armor, or unworn armor, results in the Quintet battling in their underwear—which is also customizable.

17. Omega Quintet™ ©2016 IDEA FACTORY/COMPILE HEART All rights reserved. Omega Quintet is a trademark of IDEA FACTORY. Licensed to and published by IDEA FACTORY INTERNATIONAL.

Each type of idol has their own target audience, and idols have become part of daily life in Japan. One may see a picture of an idol on the train, hear advertisements voiced by them while walking to work, and see them on the news, television shows, and film. While one may want to compare idols to a Hollywood celebrity or pop star, the comparison would be only denotative at best. The primary difference between an idol and the typical Western understanding of a “celebrity” is the idol’s connection with their fan base. Galbraith and Karlin state, “In the Japanese media system, organized around idols, the consumer is positioned as a fan. For the fan-consumer the idol as an object of desire is a fantasy or ideal construct, a ‘mirror’ reflection, which resonates deep affective or emotional meaning.”<sup>18</sup> This contributes to the near-religious reverence fan-consumers hold for idols, and it is no different in *OQ*. Ravenous fan followings (idols and fans in and outside of *OQ*, both virtual and real) arise that gatekeep participation in the fandom and place idols on pedestals, turning their adoration into a weapon for dual levels of exploitation—from a capitalist society that seeks to profit from their ardor, and exploiting the fantastic images of idol-commodities.

The player navigates *OQ* as Takt, the protagonist of the game and eventual manager of the Quintet. While Takt listens to his childhood friend Otoha practice singing outside, both characters are attacked by monsters called the BEEP.<sup>19</sup> The BEEP caused the destruction of society as we know it, and now only a scant population remains, living in constant fear of BEEP attacks. Takt and Otoha are saved by the reigning warrior-idol Momoka, who recruits Otaha as an idol. Controlling Takt, the player accompanies and supports Otoha in her training—both as an idol and as a commodity-tool of the state. The *jimusbo* that supplies idol-warriors acts as the sole form of government within the *OQ* universe. In a plot point of convenience, Takt is allowed to follow Otoha to HQ. There is little reason for Takt to follow Otoha to HQ aside from assuring the (assumedly male) player’s role in the game. The power dynamic of Takt managing a quintet of savior-idols is a necessary plot point to induce relationship substories.<sup>20</sup> Takt’s character is aloof but reliable and becomes part of the idol organization quickly, meeting other recruits and earning a position as a manager for the newest crop of idols—the Omega Quintet. It is possible to write off Takt’s role as manager and main player avatar as voyeuristic, but there is a strong connection to power, and therefore weaponization, within his character role. As manager, Takt controls which and how many BEEP the Quintet battle; he also controls additional cutscenes and directs promotional materials for the group. The player cannot beat the game without exploring and mercilessly cleansing BEEP-infested areas. Here is one of the more subtle indications of weaponization. In the player’s desire to

18. Galbraith and Karlin, *Idols and Celebrity*, 2.

19. There are some terminology issues with the antagonists called BEEP, or BLARE in the English translation, as it is defined online as the correlative fog that changes beings into monsters (also called the M.A.D. or MAD), but it also refers to a general phenomenon in the narrative of the game, which makes distinguishing between minions and their masters confusing. For this article’s purposes, we will refer to both as the BEEP.

20. There are instances where power dynamics directly affect the story, such as the marginalized or represented population having a lower or temporary consulting role/space while the creators have a permanent job and higher status. This can result in a constrained narrative. Ida Yoshinaga, “Disney’s *Moana*, the Colonial Screenplay, and Indigenous Labor Extraction in Hollywood Fantasy Films,” *Narrative Culture: Thinking with Stories in Times of Conflict* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 191.

complete (or finish) the game, their avatar Takt must push the Quintet to the brink of death. The player's ambition is weaponized to manipulate the Quintet in the pursuit of power, which is needed within and without the narrative in order to complete *OQ*.

*OQ* is classified as an idol simulator, as well as an RPG. Other idol simulators such as *The Idolmaster* (2005–2018) and the *Hatsune Miku* series (2007–) are games that involve the creation, performance, or management of an idol or idol group. *OQ* also has anime-style cutscenes and other paratextual elements (e.g., introductory and closing credits, act-ins and act-outs between chapters, as well as the game's art style). In addition to primarily controlling the idol group's manager Takt, the player can initiate romance substories if the player makes choices that raise character affinity.<sup>21</sup> In *OQ*, it is impossible to receive the optimum ending without completing the narrative at least once. There are five romanceable characters—each member of the Omega Quintet. The player needs to raise the entire Quintet's affinity to get the best loot in the game and achieve the good ending—in which the enemies are defeated and the root issue of the BEEP's appearance is addressed. This narrative structure is related to the weaponized connection between the player and Takt. No matter what, the Quintet suffers by the hand of Takt, for the amusement of the player, and for the profit of the *OQ* brand.

*OQ* uses a turn-based battle system that incorporates a variety of musical elements. Turn-based games often require the player to partake of many battles to strengthen their party. With the exception of Takt, the party members use special devices called Sound Weapons. Each of these weapons can create "Harmonic" attacks, which trigger a game mode that is an amalgamation of a concert and a battle.<sup>22</sup> The game presents each battle as though every struggle were televised. In fact, each battle is narrated by one of the Quintet's previous managers in typical *benshi* style, in which each act is flamboyantly described with gusto.<sup>23</sup> Fan support is the main source of power for the idols who are charged with defeating the enemy monsters surrounding the area in question. A plot point of ironic convenience, the idols become weak and cannot use their Sound Weapons when they are not adored. Like flesh and blood idols, they are at the mercy of their manager and their fans, representing someone to connect to, but up on a pedestal. A main point of contention in *OQ* results from the Quintet displaying typical (hormonally driven) teenage behavior—in the form of romantic relationships with Takt. In a classic example of a Freudian Madonna-whore complex, the Quintet loses power once their consumer-fans observe Takt's friendship with the Quintet. This is another example of

21. Raising affinity is a key trait of dating simulators; once character affinity has been raised high enough, the player can romance a character, in this case an idol from the quintet, and their relationship usually alters the ending. Dating simulators have a variety of endings depending on the amount of affinity raised. Usually this breaks down into a bad end, in which the relationship is not realized, or a good end, in which the relationship is fruitful.

22. Harmonics in *OQ* function as a chained attack that can involve several members of the Quintet or a "stacking" of attacks by an individual. Relating to music theory, harmonics denote timbres of certain instruments that take advantage of the overtone series. Taking the word *harmony* into account, the Quintet works together to create a layering of attacks to destroy their enemy, like individual notes working together to make a chord.

23. *Benshi* are similar to emcees. Originally narrators for silent film, *benshi* continue to work today as announcers for sporting and entertainment events. Their narration style is meant to illicit excitement and interest, so their vocal mannerisms tend to be dynamic while conveying detail about the event that audience members might miss or cannot see.



VIDEO 1. Prerelease battle trailer for *Omega Quintet*.<sup>25</sup>

weaponization in *OQ*: the Quintet cannot function as weapons of the state, because their own emotions have been weaponized against them via objectifying consumption practices. Ironically, audience weaponization is paralleled in reality, where the game's popularity is tied to franchise success. The Quintet serves as a reminder of the type of status and pressure idols undertake in their publicized lives. Their every action is observed and presents an opportunity for scandal, especially when idols dare to break the hallowed expectations of their fans.<sup>24</sup> This power dynamic between fans and idols is echoed in *OQ*. Therefore, when the Quintet is not expressly training at Headquarters, their battles are considered akin to concerts and are televised accordingly.

Because the Quintet seldom does anything outside of battles and spending time at Headquarters (HQ henceforth), the game is broken into three sections: cutscenes, time spent at HQ, and time spent in battle dungeons. HQ is a multifunction space where the player can create promotional videos for the Quintet, practice battles, organize and upgrade equipment, and have conversation events with secondary characters and members of the Quintet. In the narrative, the main protagonists reside in HQ whenever they are not called to battle, making time to rest and practice for the concerts. HQ is where the player encounters most of the idol and dating simulator aspects of the game. When clusters of monsters are discovered, the Quintet is called to action in the field. There are several different dungeons, or environments in which the player battles BEEP. Field dungeons can vary in length, enemy difficulty, and environmental obstacles. Video 1 is a trailer for *OQ*, and it features an explanation of the initiation and mechanics of the battle system. Within the narrative, the Quintet defeats monsters in field dungeons to the enjoyment of the populace. Once the battle-concert begins, players can elect to turn on

24. For further reading on idol scandals, see Prusa, "Megaspectacle and Celebrity Transgression in Japan."

25. The trailer refers to the BEEP with the English label of BLARE. Idea Factory International, "*Omega Quintet* —Battle Trailer," March 18, 2015, accessed August 11, 2021, <https://ideafintl.com/omega-quintet/#/special>.

Concert Mode and receive requests from the consumer-fans by raising the Voltage Gauge. Therein lies the connection between, on the one hand, the intangible weaponized relationship between the fans and the Quintet and, on the other, the direct weaponization of sound via tools of destruction. These relationships become tangentially related via the Voltage Gauge, a quantification of audience investment in their savior-idol commodities (i.e., the audience's consumption of the Quintet's labor). The Voltage Gauge is essentially a measurement of the player's success in the battle, and the Quintet needs audience support to perform in Concert Mode, as well as to execute Special Skills.

As the name implies, Special Skills are powerful attacks that are performable by one member of the party at a time, or in chain-attacks if the group has activated Harmonics. If the player can manipulate battle order successfully, the Quintet can implement group Harmonics. If the group and attack order occur in a certain sequence, a powerful Harmonic attack can be used called a Harmonic Chain. We find the double entendre of "Harmonic Chain" to be indicative of the dual interpretative layers throughout *OQ*. Chains are made strong through connected links, but chains also bind and restrict. The Quintet is depicted as a group that is stronger than the sum of their parts, but they are bound by audience expectations. Even as their group chemistry strengthens, their dependence on outside support constricts them. The Quintet becomes bound by harmonic chains, at once a weapon but also a detriment. This is the process of weaponization in which something is twisted and adapted into a tool for harm.

As previously mentioned, the Quintet meet opposition from their fan base almost immediately. Unforgiving and desperate for hope, the populace presents as many obstacles as the BEEP for the group to overcome. There are two antagonists in *OQ*: the BEEP and the fans. From the beginning of the narrative, the Quintet struggles with audience approval, which then directly affects their power. As replacements for the previous commodity, warrior-idol Momoka, the Quintet's members are told bluntly that they cannot compare. Given the self-perpetuating cycle of goods (i.e., the idols to their consumer base, the fans, the reduction of the market, and the postapocalyptic setting), it is no wonder that changing from one idol system to the next would cause disruption. The *OQ* universe is depicted to have only two ways to spend time: avoiding the BEEP or watching the savior-idols. Momoka, the previous warrior-idol before the Quintet, served and entertained for ten years. Many of the desperate consumer-fans have grown up watching (i.e., idolizing) her. Combine the need for stability in an uncertain world with change, and the fans turn into a power keg of entitled rage—their indifference weaponized against their very saviors.

*OQ* also follows a more literal weaponization of music. The Quintet utilizes musical tools in physical combat with the BEEP, and then they sing in order to fully destroy the BEEP. In effect, the Quintet employs multiple instruments of destruction. Each Sound Weapon is a stylized conventional weapon, such as a hammer, lance, or gun—they are not musical instruments in a traditional sense. The narrative excuses this by simply avoiding established weapon names in favor of *Sound Weapons*. Perhaps these are Sound Weapons not in the sense that they create tonal music but that they create a metaphorical symphony through destruction instead. While the idea of music being destructive is not



inherently new, Sound Weapons are incapable of finishing off the BEEP. The savior-idol must sing to kill the BEEP.

This seemingly innocuous detail implies that true destruction comes from within the feminine form—idols of mass destruction. The implication of weaponized femininity feeds into various tropes regarding powerful women, namely the connotation of *femme fatale*.<sup>26</sup> Although the Quintet is a group of teenagers, their voices can kill, and their appearance can change the hearts of men. The Quintet’s dual sonic tools of death are minimized within the narrative in keeping with the genre’s demographic. Their endless murders are never addressed, even after the Quintet discovers that the BEEP were once people. Calling enemies the BEEP has extra baggage as well. The onomatopoeia *beep* is an oft-used sound effect in Japanese animated media representing white noise or a mechanical sound effect. This provides an underlying symbolism of the acoustic music of the Quintet in opposition to the white noise or mechanical music of the BEEP. In this sense, artificial music has ruined the world in *OQ*, and humanity’s only hope is the music of idols.

On the narrative’s surface, *OQ* is a story of struggle and hope. In fact, this dichotomy permeates through all levels of the game. The Quintet is full of independent characters possessing both physical and mental strength, but they are constantly tested. Their resulting struggles give the appearance of weakness, their independence stripped at two levels—in agency, as they are trained to be saviors, and in the outside world, where their power is part of a codependent relationship with their consumers, which are shown to be only men in the game. In order to grow as both idols and soldiers, they attempt to garner approval via concerts (both literal and in a battle setting). This relationship amplifies as the player controls their promotional videos, strength level, and costumes, while the relationship between player and idol even extends past the borders of reality. There are real-world records to buy of performances from the actresses that voice the Quintet performing in character. In effect, the player controls the Quintet’s digital and “real” life, since the fictional characters in the game and outside the game are inseparable. Without enough domestic support *OQ* would never have received an overseas release. Here, the player’s desire in reality to experience a new agency combines with the capitalist desire to sell more product.<sup>27</sup> The over-the-top narrative in *OQ* may seem too convoluted to have any bearing on reality, but the Quintet represents the change from the old type of idol to a new generation, and therefore a new hope for humanity—and their market.

One of the most striking themes for *OQ* is the series of dualities. The Quintet is portrayed as strong, but fragile; beautiful, but capable of brutality; artists, but soldiers. The message could almost be mistaken for feminist, as these traits are present in all

26. For further reading on *femme fatales* and feminine stereotyping see Sarah Appleton Aguiar, *The Bitch Is Back: Wicked Women in Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001).

27. Here we refer to two theories: games as the art of agency and games as crystallization of informational capitalism. For further reading see Hoofd, “Video Games and the Engaged Citizen: On the Ambiguity of Digital Play” and Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art*.

women, and one of the potential effects of ending sexist oppression would be the freedom of expression without prescribed gender, social, or economic roles.<sup>28</sup> Instead, the Quintet ties to male approval and is smothered in the male gaze.<sup>29</sup> For further example, the player can choose their outfits, down to their underwear, and how they want to enforce or maintain them. The game requires stringent leveling, especially if the player wants to be able to get the best ending. As the Quintet takes damage in battle, their clothing rips and falls off. Eventually, the player will likely end up training the Quintet in only their underwear to conserve materials and currency.

In fact, digital idols present another layer of patriarchal capitalist control, as even their voices and actions are not their own. Kaja Silverman explains the importance of a woman's voice thusly: "The female *voice* is as relentlessly held to normative representation and functions as is the female body."<sup>30</sup> Otoha exemplifies this situation. Early in the game, Otoha is touted as the weakest singer as well as the most inconsistent fighter in the Quintet. Her weak voice ties directly to her weak powers. Otoha's lack of confidence is used to mold her into a product of the management's choosing, replacing her innate ability with a manufactured one. While Otoha does eventually gain confidence, it comes with the initial erasure of self. Toward the end of *OQ* Otoha becomes a leader; this is connoted as a positive change: she only needed to be completely remade to be a useful state-tool. Her initial anxiety opportunistically weaponized against her to create the perfect symbol.

*OQ* presents a plethora of polarities. The music is used for entertainment as well as a weapon. The characters are presented as women and performers, but also saviors. The intertextual comparisons can be found on every level of analysis and range from overt to subtle. Use of weaponization occurs at each of these polarities. The music is literally weaponized through the Quintet's Sound Weapons—the conduit for their attacks and main defense against the BEEP. In another layer, the music is used as a promotional tool, or market weaponization. The market within the game narrative and in reality are both manipulated. *OQ* sells CDs of the music used in the game, including songs the Quintet sings throughout the game. Within the game, the player creates promotional videos of the Quintet under the guise of building fan support in a world on the brink of destruction every day. Christophe Thouny's analysis of Miyadai Shinji's concept of a "never-ending everyday" explains that "the apocalypse has become the imperative to reproduce the social structure, at the very level of everyday life. The everyday is now the critical moment."<sup>31</sup>

28. We use bell hooks's definition of feminism as a means of ending all sexist oppression. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2015).

29. While Laura Mulvey's (1988) article penned "the gaze" as a concept, several texts and articles have since expanded and problematized the concept(s) of the gaze, such as E. Ann. Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Corinn Columpar, "The Gaze as Theoretical Touchstone: The Intersection of Film Studies, Feminist Theory, and Postcolonial Theory," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 1/2 (Spring 2002): 25–44; and Paula Amad, "Visual Riposte: Looking Back at the Return of the Gaze as Postcolonial Theory's Gift to Film Studies," *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 3 (Spring 2013): 49–74.

30. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), viii.

31. Christophe Thouny, "Waiting for the Messiah: The Becoming Myth of Evangelion and Densha Otoko," *Mechademia* 4 (2009), 114.

The Quintet's bodies and voices are weaponized in this never-ending everyday with abusive relationships. The Quintet is part of a codependent relationship with their fans. They put themselves in danger, performing their savior duties with ironic brutality—their pain and struggle consumed fickle fans. Each day they start over, the threat of the BEEP growing, and their fans increasingly restless. The fans need the Quintet to break the monotony of the never-ending everyday, and the Quintet needs the ardor of fans to fuel their attacks. The consumers are weaponized to support the Quintet, and the player in turn is weaponized to support this narrative. A vicious cycle perpetuates. The characters within *OQ's* narrative are stuck in their never-ending everyday; the player consumes the narrative, in a way, becoming another faceless fan that literally powers the Quintet.

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