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Game Choice: Disgaea 2 and Wrath: Unleashed

I've always enjoyed games, even before I was introduced to video games. I find board games like Stratego and Settlers of Catan quite entertaining, not to mention old classics like Chess. I enjoy games where the players have time to think, and need to outthink their opponents to prevail, in general. When I started playing video games, I realized that the vast majority of console games are played in real time, which creates a lot of separation from these turn-based board games. Turn-based strategy video games do exist, but like board games, they are becoming less and less common. To combat the takeover of the more action-oriented digital age, board games have started incorporating new types of media (Scene It, for example asks questions via a DVD rather than cards), while turn-based tactical video games have started blending in other genres to make them more engaging to the general populace.

It would appear that there is an audience for tactical games, if only because the board games that they are so similar to have lasted for many, many generations. Is there anything inherent in video games that prevents them from being as classic as Chess, Axis + Allies, or Stratego? My sources generally agreed that, if given a good amount of effort, the tactical games that do exist are especially satisfying compared to other games that might be based more on chance or reflexes. So why are there so relatively few of them being made now? Hopefully I can get an idea of what the problems and the solutions are this term.

Another of my goals for this term's project is to explore the ways that turn-based tactics games are attempting to expand the genre, and how they borrow and improve upon traditional board games. One combination of genres that has created several successful games is the

placement of tactics combat within an RPG. A friend of mine who is a connoisseur of tactics-RPGs recommended Final Fantasy Tactics and Disgaea, and I have decided to play Disgaea 2, which is the most recent incarnation of these series. This game received very positive reviews, especially for its battle system, which appears to have a good amount of depth by itself, and which is the part of the game that I am most interested in.

I asked another friend of mine, who plays quite a bit of both Starcraft and Chess, whether he prefers turn-based games or real-time. He pointed out the merits of both, saying he likes Starcraft just because it's exciting and engaging, and he likes Chess because it is a game of pure logic. These echo my sentiments, so I also plan to try out a Playstation 2 game called Wrath: Unleashed, which blends a tactic-style game with real-time action combat. This is one of only a few games that have ever combined these types of gameplay (the only other two that I know of are The Unholy War and Archon, which is an old, old Commodore game that is the inspiration for Wrath). The reviews for Wrath were only partially positive, so the question is whether combining these genres had a negative effect more than a positive one. Does the action ruin the "pure logic" of the game, or does the tactics portion slow down the game too much for the action gamers? Or is this a fine genre that simply hasn't had a high-quality game made for it in decades?

By playing Disgaea and Wrath, I hope to find out if these hybrid genres can deliver the same kind of satisfaction that can be found in winning games of pure tactical strategy. I also hope to find out what these games are doing well to make tactics games more fun and exciting, and see if there's anything else they could be doing to improve player's experience with the genre. I also hope to enjoy myself quite a bit, since I've never been motivated enough before to track down games of this type, even though I have enjoyed all the ones that I have played before.

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