

George Lin

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Choosing a Game

Wii Sports & Guitar Hero III: The Social Gaming Experience

There are two types of games that I enjoy above all others: games with an engaging storyline and atmosphere, great attention to detail and solid gameplay that immerse you in its world, and games that are a delight to play in social settings, where you can laugh, cheer at victory, and even groan at defeat along with your friends. I have very fond memories of playing the Zelda series, God of War, and the Starcraft campaigns. However, being immersed too long in a fantasy world may lead to drowsiness, fatigue, loss of contact with the real world, and a zombie-like state, at least for me. As such, I have decided to focus on the other kind of game I enjoy, the social game. Of course, this can also lead to side effects, but I don't think they are quite as bad, since you usually can't get your friends to play the same game with you for 10 hours straight.

For the beginning of the semester, I have decided to focus on a few games that I tried out in the past: Wii Sports and Wii Play. Although these two games were received with only lukewarm reviews by most critics (Wii Sports has a critic's score of 7.6/10 on metacritic.com, while Wii Play has a critic's score of just 5.8/10), it seems that the gamer population holds these games in higher esteem (Wii Play is rated 6.8/10 among users, and Wii Sports rates at an incredibly high 9.1/10). There are many casual (and non-casual) gamers that enjoy these games not for the fun provided in simulating another world, but rather for the fun of competing with

your friends in a social context (Poon), which is one aspect that I suspect many game reviewers don't give enough weight.

Another great aspect of the Wii gaming experience that I am looking forward to is the prospect of actually exercising while gaming. Of course, this is an idea that is easy to see, but to my surprise there have actually been scientific studies demonstrating the viability of Wii Sports as a form of exercise (Suburbia). I don't enjoy exercise for its own sake, but the prospect of working out while having fun is too enticing to pass up.

As fun as the Wii series may be, there are some foreseeable problems. Gameplay may not last for 70 hours over the course of this semester without it becoming too repetitive (Lau), and I can only play it at parties and with friends for so long in one semester. Despite the prevalence of the series among casual gamers, there is no vibrant, established online community for it. These problems can all be solved with another social game: Guitar Hero III. Many bars are starting to hold Guitar Hero nights (Robison). In addition, getting to an expert level of playing ability could easily take tens or hundreds of hours of gameplay (Lau), and the community at ScoreHero.com is probably one of the most passionate communities for any single series of games. Many of ScoreHero's top-ranking players are known and venerated even before their first tournament appearance, and some have even helped Guitar Hero III's developers test the game (ScoreHero). ScoreHero is a place where people can brag about their accomplishments, ask others for guitar-gaming advice and strategies, and even participate in rivalries, leagues, and tournaments. Therein lies another aspect of the social gaming experience – although I may not be able to play with people online, I can still connect with them in other ways.

I've played a few hours of Guitar Hero I and II before, but not enough to even get good at medium level difficulty. However, I am very excited about the third game in this series for quite

a few reasons. I'm psyched about Battle Mode, a new multiplayer mode in which a player can earn power-ups that are used to attack the opponent. This not only introduces new gameplay elements such as double notes, lefty flip and blurry fretboard, but also levels the playing field to a certain degree, allowing less-skilled players a chance to attack and beat more-skilled ones (GamePro). Career play even features boss battles against the likes of Slash and Tom Morello to make the single-player mode more interesting. Compared to the 40+ songs of the previous game, Guitar Hero III features 70+ songs; some of these are among my all-time favorites, i.e. "Barracuda", "Cherub Rock", and "Even Flow" (Wikipedia).

At first glance, the Wii series may seem like totally different games from the Guitar Hero series. However, they share many similarities. Although they can be played by oneself for enjoyment, I believe that at the core they are also social games. Of course, I look forward to the fun of just practicing and becoming more skilled for my own enjoyment, but I also look forward to the fun of competing with others, talking about it with others, even just watching others play. Maybe one day I'll even be good enough to win some competitions, and I'll have this class to thank.

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