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CMS.600: Choosing A Video Game Assignment

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I have chosen to play two games this semester, both of which belong to or derive from the ever-popular RPG genre: *Kingdom Hearts II* (SquareEnix/Disney; PS2) and *Dirge of Cerberus* (SquareEnix; PS2). I have long been an RPG fan (specifically, a Final Fantasy 7 fan), and I am hoping to explore new RPGs this semester. I have chosen these two for a variety of reasons that may or may not strike others as being logical.

Reviews and accounts that I have read online and heard by ear yield the general consensus that *Kingdom Hearts II* is excellent, while *Dirge of Cerberus* is arguably bad ("Kingdom Hearts II", "Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII"). Having played *Kingdom Hearts I* during the summer and enjoyed it, I am playing *Kingdom Hearts II* to see what has changed and what has remained the same in terms of gameplay, storyline, design, and content. My main complaints with the first game were that it lacked character development, that the in-game camera was terrible, and that the gummi ship system was poorly explained and overwhelmingly unimpressive. On the other hand, I was enormously fond of the more interactive battle system, a clear break from the wait-and-choose-an-option-from-a-limited-menu Active Time Battle system of Final Fantasy 7 and 8, and also loved the graphics and almost seamless integration of the wildly different Final Fantasy and Disney character designs. Talking to friends who have played the game before and reading the Wikipedia article, it seems as if the gummi ship system was entirely overhauled and replaced with a new interplanetary travel system that fixed the problems rampant in the first iteration of the gummi ship system, such as difficult, pointless construction

and a lack of motivation to use the construction system altogether. Furthermore, pandering to my button-mashing side, I am informed that there is a level where I have a chance to fight a huge horde of thousands upon thousands of enemies, and that while remaining essentially the same, the fighting system has been enhanced by some kind of special new attack (Bhat, Intihar). The overwhelmingly positive reviews that I have read for the game therefore provide a fairly strong impetus to play it, though it is also tempered by some rather widespread complaints that the introduction sequence is too long, the Atlantica singing level is ridiculous, and parts of the storyline are confusing if the player has not previously played *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*, the Gameboy installment between *Kingdom Hearts* and *Kingdom Hearts II* (Ramsomair, Peng, Bhat). Nevertheless, my desire to discover the improvements and possible detriments to this oft-praised series remains strong.

Quite in contrast to the overwhelmingly positive reviews for *Kingdom Hearts II*, *Dirge of Cerberus*, as far as I can tell, is generally regarded as a pretty awful game - the former received a Metacritic rating of 87, whereas the latter received an underwhelming 57 ("Kingdom Hearts II (Ps2: 2006): Reviews.", "Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII (Ps2: 2006): Reviews."). Although it is part of the *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII*, a multi-platform expansion project of the *Final Fantasy VII* storyline, *Dirge of Cerberus* is not, strictly speaking, an RPG. Unlike the original *Final Fantasy VII*, it centers on the secret character, Vincent Valentine, a formidable shooter and former "Turk", with a mysterious background that is hinted at in the original game. Accordingly, SquareEnix decided to make *Dirge of Cerberus* a third-person shooter game ("Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII"). The reviews are rather scattered - some seem willing to give the game a chance and acknowledges the fact that it is more of an RPG-shooter hybrid than strictly belonging to either genre, and thereby give it the benefit of the doubt; others lambast

the game for its poor gameplay, lack of challenge, and poor level design ("Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII (Ps2: 2006): Reviews.", Bettenhausen). One might wonder, then, why I want to play what is, at best, a mediocre game. The short explanation is that I'm a masochist, and like to inflict bad games on myself at times. The long explanation is that many of the complaints I've heard about the game are things I frequently find myself liking in "good" games, and therefore I'm curious to see what my reaction to those flaws are. For example: a common complaint about *Dirge* is that the movie/narrative sequences are frequent and long, and that the game plays more like a movie than an actual game ("Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII", "Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII (Ps2: 2006): Reviews."). I heartily enjoy long, narrative sequences, especially when they take place in a world I'm already in love with, and features characters I adore, and are rendered in stunningly beautiful graphics. Furthermore, I'm not a big fan of shooter games, as I am terrible at shooting moving things (or even stationary things), and shooter games are typically geared for players who are much more hardcore than I am. I am, however, a big fan of RPGs, and frequently find the relatively uninteractive style of RPG battle systems to be a little boring at times - therefore, I'm curious to see how well the toned-down shooter style of *Dirge* suits me. Lastly, I am a shameless *Final Fantasy VII* fangirl, and I really want to play the last (chronologically-speaking) episode of the series, as I can never really get enough of its universe.

Both games promise to take up more than 70 hours together, especially when one considers the type of gamer that I am. I'm the type of person who can run around in *Oblivion* for hours just picking little plants and making potions; I also am known to spend incredible amounts of time sitting around in *Final Fantasy VIII* Drawing magic from monsters just to get my stock up to 100 for each spell. Sandbox and RPG games are, fittingly enough, my favorite genre of games, and I am interested to see how these two RPGs/RPG-shooters pan out.

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