

THE HACK & SLASH RETROSPECTIVE

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Among the various classes of video games, there is one gem that stands out – the hack and slash genre. In the wake of 3D gaming, polygons grew by the thousands as time progressed, and generations passed. This meant that certain fast-paced actions could be facilitated within video game characters. Hack and slash games are the epitome of a quick and, sometimes, gory fix. It's games like God of War III, Devil May Cry IV, Ninja Gaiden 2, No More Heroes and many others, which have kept many a man up through the night, while they beat (or dismember) baddies down to a pulp with no remorse.

Stringing along combos, dodging enemies swiftly left and right, and taking on foes larger than life became the staples of the genre. While many of these games are button mashers and only test a gamer's endurance rather than their intuitive thinking, there is a subset of games that do.

The strategic hack and slasher is a term I've been trying to coin for years now and there is a bunch of recent games that fit the bill. Before getting into the recent releases and talking about how they fit this supposed subset, I wanted to talk about two franchises in particular, The Souls and Ninja Gaiden series.

Team Ninja and From Software shaped the "strategic hack and slash" formula. The methodology followed by these two companies has always revolved around punishing the players for their mistakes and making sure they know how to assess every situation before running into it. The Ninja Gaiden games have always been considered top tier in the hack and slash genre. The gold standard being Ninja Gaiden 2; it revolutionised how the hack and slash genre was perceived. With Ninja Gaiden, Team Ninja introduced another layer of difficulty and strategy which changed the entire ball game. Ninja Gaiden didn't mess with the formula; it merely tweaked a couple of things which has kept the franchise fresh.

Team Ninja are set to release Nioh, the Dark Souls-inspired Ninja Gaiden-esque hack and slash RPG. By the time this piece gets published, Nioh will be out on the PS4 to tear everybody a new one. The game controls like Bloodborne with enemy designs inspired from Ninja Gaiden and the Souls series. A lot of the environments scream Demon's Souls, the first iteration of the Souls series. The combat in Nioh is a unique combination of stances, quick-steps, and it is just as punishing, if not more, than the games it takes inspiration from.

The strategic element in Nioh is similar to Dark Souls and has been implemented seamlessly. So, you really have to be on your toes and be cautious while traversing the dreary lands of Edo-period Japan. Nioh, along with other games, are following the footsteps of Dark Souls in terms of quality of environment and combat, taking inspiration and paying homage to the beloved series. Where games like Lords of the Fallen, Titan

Souls, Salt and Sanctuary and Necropolis all tried and succeeded somewhat in paying due respects, only Nioh is considered as the only intrinsically successful game. But there is one other video game, ready to step on the shoulders of giants and carve out its own place.

For Honor, which is set for release on Valentine's Day, is a competitive hack and slash 3rd person action game. The premise looks at three primary factions: Vikings, Knights, and Samurais, and the raging war between the three. The game's main attraction is its competitive online PVP.

A lot like Dark Souls, For Honor's PVP will be peer to peer, so every online match will be dependent on each player's connection. While Ubisoft has come under fire for not having dedicated servers for For Honor, the game has generated a lot of hype. The combat has been praised for being meticulously fleshed out. Taking inspiration from the sword and board style combat of Dark Souls, For Honor improved upon it and much more with the Art of Battle, engaging the player in the most tactical form of medieval combat. All three classes, with its three sub variants, have been balanced and tweaked and there is a level of depth to the mechanics which is not seen in any other game of this genre. Although the single player campaign needs a more compelling story to keep the players engaged, the competitive side of the game makes up for that. This is what Dark Souls' PVP could've been. The perfect love child of every competitive FPS you can think of and Dark Souls, with a bit of Chivalry and Mount and Blade genes on the side; For Honor is definitely worth picking up. Gift yourself this game for Valentine's Day and if you don't feel like this game is up your alley, being the heavily competitive game that it aspires to be, then you could pick up Nioh.

Asif Ayon's favorite color is a particular shade of ash but he tells everyone that his favorite color is blue. The alliteration in his name bothers him a lot too. To inquire more about what else keeps him up at night, hit him up at asifayon@live.com

