

## “No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle”: Erratic but Still Compelling

Written by Luke Hamilton

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With the Wii game lineup containing so many titles geared to children and family play, 2008's exclusive *No More Heroes* made a statement that "mature"-rated games can succeed on the motion-based system. Its intense action combined with a crazy yet compelling story and parodies of the gaming industry convinced me the Wii wasn't just for casual players and tapped into the "mature" market, which only consisted of *Resident Evil* titles at the time. The new sequel, subtitled *Desperate Struggle*, continues the story with new methods of madness to boot.

Several years after protagonist Travis Touchdown becomes the top-ranked assassin in the fictional city of Santa Destroy and walks away from the profession, his former promoters are trying to drag him back into the fold. He has no interest in climbing the rankings again, but the murder of his best friend motivates him to enter and name his reward: his best friend's killer served to him on a platter.

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After a hilarious fourth-wall-breaking segment telling players they don't need to care about events in the first game -- despite the obvious emphasis that *No More Heroes* puts on story -- *Desperate Struggle*

gets erratic. There are ranked-assassin boss battles that are focused and have meaning in the story, but there are also battles that are so absurd -- one fight has 25 football cheerleaders combine into a giant robot like Voltron -- that it gets to be too much, even for a game renowned for its strangeness. When trained on Travis and his beliefs in honor and his struggle to find the value of life, the story shines.

Combat involves Travis using a weapon similar to a lightsaber, with the "A" button used to swing the saber and the "B" button used to use kick and punch; aiming high or low with the Wii remote determines where the attack is placed. It's not the most natural style, but it's easy to adapt to within five minutes. Once an enemy is weakened enough, gameplay slows down and screen indicators pop up for motion-based finishers utilizing slash attacks or pro-wrestling moves. These could've been done just as easily with a button press but are gratifying to do with the simple motions.



You'll rip through many grunts on the way to the assassins on each level, and combat is fast and fluid when fighting other melée-based enemies. Enemies with guns cause aggravation because options to avoid and block bullets are limited, and it can feel unfair when being shot from afar while close enemies stomp on you. Difficulty from tough opponents is acceptable, but here it's more a fault in the game design.

The boss battles with ranked assassins are where the big appeal lies. Most are balanced affairs with intelligent blocking and evasion being applied by the enemy, and one slip can lead to a painful combo -- a nice change from the standard attack patterns other games give their bosses.

While some boss battles are ridiculous in nature (cheerleader Voltron comes to mind), the majority are quite engaging. A couple opponents are true villains, but others are anti-heroes with their own ideals and hopes. Some are even likable, even though they're trying to kill you. The only disappointment is that there's very little background given for each fighter -- just a quick clip when the fight is initiated and another when it ends.

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Given the Wii's limited processing power, the game does a decent job with its presentation. Punk rock dominates the background music, fitting well with the story and setting the mood for the intense assassin battles. Voice work is strong. During gameplay, however, you'll quickly grow tired of enemies calling you the same vulgarities over and over again. Character designs won't rock you, but they get the job done.

The *No More Heroes* series has been a major factor in me continuing to own a Wii. I like the console's casual games, but I get distracted by other titles so I don't play them for longer than a week or so. The action and story-building in *No More Heroes* kept me interested for the two-year gap between releases. I'll even pick up the high-definition remake of the original game for Xbox later this year; I think it's that good.

Anyone who owns a Wii and is craving a deeper experience than a game of golf or tennis will enjoy both these games.

*No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle is available for Nintendo Wii for \$49.95. For this review, the author completed the story on "mild" difficulty.*

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