

Fun with Others, Truly!

Game Analysis: Multiplayer Co-op

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<http://helpinghands-salem.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/helping-hands-bg.png>

What is a Multiplayer Co-op game defined as? To understand that, one needs to understand exactly what a multiplayer game is. Of course if one read the previous entry on what a multiplayer game is, one would know the general consensus of the term “multiplayer”. In case someone like that hasn’t however, here is a basic summary. In its simplistic form, a multiplayer game is one that can host two or more non-npc players experiencing the game at the same time within the same environment. Technology has evolved from screen sharing to internet use to allow people across the world to share game experiences in the same environments presented.

Co-op is a style of multiplayer game in which 2 or more non-npc players, usually with different approaches or tools, work together in order to achieve a commonly unified goal. To truly understand Co-op games however, one has to realize that, by innate standards, games are competitive. Even if players are not directly facing off on each other, such as in multiplayer versus, there are still many factors that determine a player’s skill in which they compete with others passively. These aspects are not as apparent in Co-op, but very well exist, such as character stats, score, and experience in that “role” the player takes on for the team.

Usually, co-op games have players working to overcome difficult challenges that are either nearly too impossible to complete alone or grants players additional rewards when working together. There are three kinds of co-op games, generally defined by in-game terms of connections: Party, instance, and massive. Party games, such as the Borderlands series, can be

played alone but are designed for multiple players working together to obtain the full experience. The multiplayer experience of Party-style groupings are usually between 2-6 players with one person hosting the game. The instance based co-op style is usually seen in MMOS or can become an aspect of local Co-op games. Instance-based co-op style forms an instance, or separate zone of the main game that allows players to work together without outside influence of other players. This is similar to how MMORPG's design dungeons and raids. The Massive style, however, is a single world in where players can constantly intermingle and work together (or be detrimental to one another). A good example on how this is different from the other styles is the pixel shooter *Realm of the Mad God*, where every area of the game is accessible to the public for hundreds of other players "helping" each other for their own personal gain.



<http://shirtoid.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/CO-OP-Gaming.jpg>

Co-op multiplayer games are something I try to get involved with for most of my gaming experience, mainly because it used to be my only communication method for friends. They

allow either perfect strangers or best friends to get together and work to solve ideals and puzzles that wouldn't have a possible chance of happening in earth. Co-op games can create powerful memories and draw people together...or split them apart if the teamwork ends up in shambles. The thing about Co-Op games is that they are a very testament of how much a person trusts others. It can either forge boundaries between people or tear them apart for them to get closer and understand one another. IT can lead someone to be cold hearted and see no excuse in failure or make them more companionate and teach the ones who fail how to succeed. I feel as though all games can create these moments, but none stronger than those where fellow players work together to achieve a common goal.

Let's take a moment to understand just how much of a significance co-op gaming has impacted itself upon the gaming industry. The very first games were either versing a computer or another person in arcade machines. Crowds used to surround these arcade machines and watch a single person (or, in the rare case, two people) play the game and compete for a high school or victor. People would lean over the shoulder of others, giving pointers or worried about their previous high score. The small crowd cheers when a level is beaten and aw'h's with shoulder pats when the player loses. The first widely accept co-op games were side-scrolling brawlers or shooters, of that such of Double Dragon, Gauntlet (top down instead), and Contra. Sadly, these moments don't exist as much, but now they can be experienced all over the world through cooperative games. These game gave birth to entirely new genres and playstyles of games, many of which populate history's most memorable storylines and experiences in technology.



<http://www.blogcdn.com/www.joystiq.com/media/2011/12/dungeonddefenders530mainrandom.jpg>

A current multiplayer game that screams cooperative gameplay I have been exploring is the Dungeon Defender Series. In this game, the player chooses one of 4 heroes (At base) and works together with others in order to protect the crystals. At its heart, it's a 3rd person hero and tower defense game, but each unit the players control has specific abilities the other heroes do not have. To compensate, heroes need to work together and combine their abilities in order to successfully control, halt, and eliminate the enemy's waves. There is competitive elements in statistics, gear, and even some pvp elements, but those are not the focus of the game. Furthermore, some levels can be soloed in the beginning, but the further one goes into the game, the more difficult it gets. Eventually, the player is unable to even finish the levels by themselves and must team up with others with the game goals to see that victorious sign.

Bad examples are more common in cooperative because the developers try to spread the games functionality between multiple play-styles. Usually these are seen when the developers of a game want the game to still have single player accessibility or handicap the game for anyone to have fun. This usually limits co-op players to a secondary or pointless role that a single person could have easily done themselves.



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/7/76/SuperMarioGalaxy.jpg>

A good example of this obvious scope creep and poor design choice is the first Mario Galaxy. The co-op is simply shown as a second person holding a Wii remote and collecting stars like a point and gather. Their role is easily replaced in single player and has little to no impact on the gameplay. The important thing to keep in mind when it comes to co-op is the same lesson that one should learn with versus multiplayer: counter-play, but in a sense of sharing power rather than facing it. As a designer, one should ask themselves “would this be a fun role to play with someone else?” An ideal to look at is isolating that portion of the cooperative experience and seeing if that stand-alone ability and character could be fun in its own experience. While it sounds detrimental and the opposite of what one would expect, it actually helps fuel the balance of what each character does.