

Guitar Hero has audiences begging for encore

■ ADAM HOLMES

Staff Reporter

The pounding beat of music erupts. Screams fill the room. Hearts thump with energy. All of this is the result of one lone musician, armed only with a guitar.

Is this skilled musician a famous rock star from AC/DC, Van Halen or Guns & Roses? No, this is a teenager whose weapon is a guitar with the only objective being to rock in the video game "Guitar Hero."

The basic gameplay of "Guitar Hero" is simple: using a special guitar shaped controller, your goal is to rock on to famous rock and roll songs from the 1960s through today. The controller (which comes in two different guitar models: the Gibson SG and the Gibson X-Plorer) has five different colored buttons at the end of the guitar neck and a strum bar near the bottom of the controller.

"I like 'Guitar Hero' because it lets me pretend to be a rock star. And no one makes fun of me," Jon Binswanger, junior, said.

Similar to the previous music game series "Dance, Dance, Revolution," this game is rhythm-based. After choosing a song to jam along with, an extended guitar neck and five keys in rows will appear on the screen. The keys are the same colors as the buttons on the controller.

"Guitar Hero" made its debut performance in November 2005 with the first game, "Guitar Hero," for the Playstation 2 game console. The game surprised many

people with its innovative gameplay and its use of a guitar shaped controller instead of the standard console controller.

Selling nearly 1.5 million



David Stocker, senior, jams to the popular video game "Guitar Hero."

Photo by Malia Chong

copies in the first year, its company, Harmonix Music Systems, released "Guitar Hero" II in 2006 for the Playstation 2, and later for the Xbox 360. Since then, two more games have been released, entitled "Guitar Hero": Rocks the 80s and "Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock," with Legends of Rock released in October 2007 and available for Playstation 2, Playstation 3, Xbox 360, Nintendo Wii, PC, and Mac.

When the game starts, different colored markers (also known as keys) will travel down the screen as the music progresses. The goal is to hit the button of the same color on the screen, while at the same time hitting the

strum bar. This will strike a note on the screen. Different combinations of keys will appear as the game moves along, that correspond to the notes in the song, making the game more of a challenge.

In order to measure how well you rock, there is a "rock meter." If you are simply amazing, you are in the green. If you are so-so, you will be in the middle at yellow. If you are failing miserably, you'll be at red, and if you are not careful, you might hit zero, and the game will be over.

During some of the songs, different keys will appear that are outlined with glowing stars.

If the player can successfully score a certain number of these notes, the "Star Power Meter" will be filled. By accomplishing this task, the player will score double points until the meter runs out.

In addition, the controller is equipped with a whammy bar for the more skilled players. By using this device, you can score extra points and give the song a more electric feeling. By the end of the song, it will show how many points you earned. The more points you earn, the more your audience will love you.

"Guitar Hero" is unique because it doesn't follow

the traditional video game dynamics. It is one of the few games that combines a popular interest in rock music, and allows you to play these famous rock songs without actually learning how to play the guitar. Instead, it gives people the look and feeling about what playing the guitar in a real "Rock Band" is like.

"If people spent half as much time actually learning how to play the guitar instead of playing that game, they would be skilled musicians," Cameron Frank, junior, said.

Some people may notice that this game is similar to a recent game released

called "Rock Band." These games are produced by the same company and are also musical based, but "Rock Band" has more of an emphasis on a band as a whole performs, and gives you the option of playing instruments other than the guitar.

"Guitar Hero" remains a popular video game among gamers, and its popularity is increasing. Two more "Guitar Hero" additions will soon be released, one for the standard gaming consoles, and a special version for the Nintendo DS. Only time will tell how much longer this game will remain cool.

Neopets provides safe website

■ MARY WOOD

Staff Reporter

Many times, I've found myself sitting idly at the computer, staring at a screen displaying a Myspace or Facebook profile. The allure of getting a glimpse into other people's lives has worn off, and boredom has set in. I'm sure many of my fellow students have experienced the same and wished for a more entertaining way to spend their internet time than reading their friend's Myspace comments and bulletins all night.

Not only do these social networking sites lead to untold amounts of mediocrity, but can also lead to danger. Some teens have become the victims of online predators they met on these types of sites. If only there was a place on the internet that could offer fun and safety to people of all ages.

But there is a place like that! It's a virtual pet website called "Neopets."

Neopets was founded by Adam Powell and Donna Williams in 1999. Later, in 2005, it was purchased by Viacom. It's easy to see why the company bought it: it's a great website! Not only does it provide a safer environment than most websites youth frequently visit, but it has many more opportunities for fun.

Though Neopets does have ways for users to meet new people online, its methods are much safer than many other websites. The Neoboards, Neopets' chat rooms, are monitored to assure that online predators would have an extremely difficult time trying to meet and abuse people. Any talk of romance sets off a trigger and the user who discussed it is warned. Any further infractions result in more warnings and/or the freezing of the user's account.

But these restrictions don't limit the fun. There is much more to do on Neopets than any other site I've heard of my peers using. One of the first tasks after making a Neopets account is to create a pet. There are many species to choose from,

along with four colors, unless you decide to invest in changing them to a fancy color later. (Your pets could even look like pirates if you were so inclined.) Additionally, you can buy a pet for your pet, and sometimes you can stumble across a pet for your pet's pet.

Once you create a pet, there's plenty to do. You can feed it, read to it, and give it toys. Additionally, you can equip it with supplies for a battle in the "battle dome" (a place to fight classic Neopets characters and other users' pets), build it a house, or dress it up.

To do this, however, you need neopoints, the currency used in Neopets' world of Neopia. Thankfully, these aren't too hard to attain. There are many places to go in Neopia every day to receive neopoints and other free prizes, but a guaranteed way to earn neopoints is through playing games. There are tons of great games on the site, and though there's a limit of how much you can play a game for points each day, there are enough games that running out of games is never an issue. You can even earn trophies for playing certain games. The game Cheat! (similar to the card game BS) is a particularly easy one to earn a trophy in, but Snow Wars (like Battleship) can easily get you a medal.

With all these things to do, there's no way to get bored! For those who are especially committed to their Neopets lifestyle, it is possible to sign up for a premium account for a fee of \$7.99 per month, adding many other exciting features, including advertisement-free pages.

Ultimately, Neopets is probably one of the best websites around for youth. It's safe, fun and exciting, ensuring a great time for anyone. So when you go to surf the web this weekend, try giving Neopets a chance before spending two hours looking at the Myspace pages of your best friend's brother's friends from Minnesota. I guarantee that it'll be worth your while.

McCarthy delivers another classic

■ SARAH CHICOINE

co-Editor-in-Chief

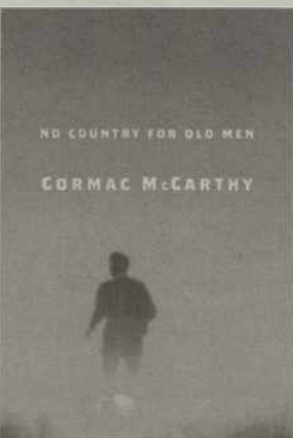
First of all, I dare not Romanticize my reasoning for reading what is sure to become a contemporary classic. For an AP English project, I had to choose a contemporary novelist. I gave the list of suggested authors to my dad and asked which one was easiest and which I'd enjoy the most.

My dad suggested "All the Pretty Horses" by Cormac McCarthy. Well, if Matt Damon liked it enough to make a movie, it had to be good enough for me, right? But in a state of procrastination, I had not yet gotten the novel half a week before we were supposed to be done reading (Sorry, Mr. West!). So I started reading "No Country for Old Men," merely because it was the only McCarthy book I could find.

As I started to read, I was pleasantly surprised. With an unknown first person narrator and changing point-of-view, McCarthy is a true contemporary with influences from Modernist writers like

William Faulkner.

The novel throws the reader into the plot line by graphically describing a gruesome murder within the first few pages. In the words of my doctor, Chigurh, the antagonist and mass murderer, is a real bad guy. His murders are countless,



ruthless and continuous throughout the novel.

After being introduced to Chigurh, the story jumps to introduce protagonist Llewelyn Moss. While hunting, Moss finds a drug deal gone very wrong, a truck full of

cocaine, dead bodies, guns and lots of money. Tempted by greed, Moss takes the money and starts the "cat and mouse game" for his life.

Set between the borders of Texas and Mexico as most McCarthy novels are, this 1980 western follows Moss and Chigurh. However, a simple game of chase would be far too simple for McCarthy. The novel is told through different points-of-view and is laced with the first person narrative, of a local sheriff, Bell, who is also looking for Moss and Chigurh.

The details and different ways McCarthy adds to the storyline are far too many and too complicated to explain. For this reason, I am unsure how the movie will be able to do justice to such an intricate, yet straightforward story. I am still anticipating seeing how they incorporate the differing view-points within a film context which is already out in theaters. However, since I enjoyed the novels innovative techniques and captivating plotline.