Being Bad at *Street Fighter* and *Marvel vs. Capcom*

Being bad at fighting games sucks. This was my experience of both *Street Fighter II*, *IV*, and *Marvel vs. Capcom*. Having never really played any fighting game aside from *Super Smash Bros.*, I found the experience of playing these two games extremely frustrating, both in victory and defeat. However, over the course of playing the game I developed an understanding of how it *could* be a fun, even profound, experience, an understanding that was further increased when I watched the play of two more skilled, evenly matched players. This understanding revolves around the importance of a discrete moments in the game, any one of which can determine the match's result.

Playing *Street Fighter II* or *IV*, as well as *Marvel vs. Capcom*, went something like this for me: I would press the few buttons whose output I understood, and if I was playing against someone else knew to the game, I would either win or lose. If I played against someone with even a cursory knowledge of the game, I would usually lose. Regardless of the result of the match, however, I rarely found the experience particularly engaging. Without really having a grasp of what you are doing in the game, it is hard to feel a sense of mastery over the techniques employed, which also prevents any sense of accomplishment or liability. Rather than feeling like I had beaten my opponent, even in victory I felt strangely powerless by my lack of understanding of what had taken place. This doesn't really make the game really fun for me. However, while playing the game, there were certain moments which broke this pattern, where I could grasp what had happened and why. Rather than centring on input, however, these moments generally centred on the mental interaction between the two players, or Yomi.

Once I had figured out an input scheme in the game, I would use it repeatedly as a tactic, which means I didn't really *understand* the action I was doing, I was using it arbitrarily. On brief occasions, however, I would see something my opponent might do, and use one of the few tools in my skillset to counter it. This is what was called, in the lecture, Yomi. These moments are actually incredibly satisfying, a fact that really solidified for me the extent to which fighting games are really mental games. These moments came up rarely for me while actually playing the game myself, but they offered brief insights into how the game could be played at a high skill level. Each time one of these moments occurred, I could see it as a turning point in the match. I would think "If I hadn't jumped there, but instead I had blocked, my opponent wouldn't have been able to do that attack, which means that..." etc.. Each of these moments was a potential turning point in the match, since your health is always going down, and the game has a strong positive feedback loop. Essentially, there is the feeling that the match could be won or lost at any moment. I would contend that it is this feeling that makes the experience absorbing, that motivates new players to keep going: the sense of awareness of responsibility, and hence of agency, that gradually replaces a sense of powerlessness.

When I watched NAME and NAME play against each other, these discrete moments of decision-making became more apparent, and I could see how engaging this would make the game. They were always reading each other, paying close attention to their virtual (and, at times, physical) actions, making the payoff for a correct read that much more rewarding.