Elden Ring review

Intro

I should probably preface this whole thing by declaring myself a Soulsbourne noob.

My only experience with a From Software game prior to Elden Ring was a brief encounter with Dark Souls. I had heard talk of its difficulty and assumed I was up to the challenge. I was not, or so I thought.

The Dark Souls journey started rather well for me since I beat the Asylum Demon quite handily. However, from there, I was taken to another location. This is where it turned sour.

I went left and down a set of stairs. Following the path around until I arrived at a graveyard. This area was populated with sword wielding skeletons. I attempted to combat these skeletons but could not defeat them as whenever I’d knocked one to the ground and broke the skeleton apart, they would reform and once again rise to their feet.

I tried this several times and died repeatedly.

My next plan of action was to run past the skeletons instead of engaging them. I ran into a giant skeleton.

After several hours of failing to get out of this area, I gave up. Clearly, the confidence I had in overcoming the perceived difficulty of this game was unfounded. I then believed I was not up to the task.

Fast forward a few years and I saw a video on YouTube from WhatCulture Gaming titled ’10 Mistakes All Gamers Made.’

This list contained an entry for Dark Souls and the mistake was described as ‘heading left and going to the graveyard first.’ They explained that the graveyard is a later game area as you can obtain weapons and equipment that’ll keep the skeletons down for good rather than having them reform. Apparently, there were two more options available to me regarding a direction to travel in, I did not notice these as the time but with this information, I vowed to one day go back to Dark Souls to challenge myself once again. The game remains installed on my Xbox hard drive to this day.

A short while after watching that WhatCulture video, I heard that Elden Ring was in development.

It was stated that George RR Martin would be heavily involved in the project and as a huge Game of Thrones fan (except the last two seasons, but that’s another story for another day) I was drawn in immediately.

I closely followed the development of Elden Ring, regularly watching YouTube videos and reading articles pertaining its progress.

Before I knew it, February 25th, 2022, rolled around and it was time to venture into the Lands Between.

Would I manage to overcome the challenging difficulty of this game, or would I falter at the first hurdle like I did with Dark Souls?

Click the ‘Review’ button below to find out how I got on.

Review

Game World

The Lands Between is an incredibly vast and utterly beautiful world. Spread across several different biomes, you will never be more than 40 seconds from something new catching your eye and drawing your attention away from whatever task or quest you have set yourself upon.

After the initial opening cutscene, which we’ll discuss a little more when it’s time to delve into the story, and the character creation screens, you’ll be thrust into the world and almost immediately be faced with the first boss fight of the game.

I took one hit from this boss and died right away. Given my experience with Dark Souls, I’m sure you can imagine the sense of dread I was suddenly cloaked in.

Am I just not cut out for games this difficult?

Would I just have to watch a streamer on Twitch to experience the game?

Fortunately, it was neither.

This was a scripted death because after a short blackout, a new cutscene played which kickstarted the game proper.

My character woke up in a new area which contained an easy to miss tutorial. This tutorial taught me the basics of combat with some very weak and slow enemies around to practice these newfound skills on. After trawling to the end of this tutorial cave area, another boss fight. This time, I put up a fight and defeated this tutorial boss with relative ease.

Beyond here was a lift to an upper floor and a large door leading to the open game world of The Lands Between.

When that door first opened, I was wowed. A sprawling landscape. So vibrant and awe inspiring.

This is a feeling that repeated throughout this game with every new area discovered.

Exploration is rewarded with stunning vistas from all corners of the map. You may find caves, dungeons or even hidden villages. All with bosses to defeat and items to collect.

At the time of writing, I am sitting on close to 100 hours of play time and still discovering new areas tucked away out of sight. Just when I think I’ve seen it all, more content appears.

Be careful when out at night as the Lands Between is much scarier in the dark due to the night-time bosses that can be found out in the wild. I found this out the hard way travelling through an area I must have only visited during the day and was ambushed by a new enemy.

I’ve never enjoyed exploring a virtual world as much as I have this one.

To make traversing this vast and detailed landscape easier, you are gifted a summonable horse named Torrent early on should you follow the main questline. Whilst on horseback, you will have a double jump feature to use and get to high up and hard to reach spots.

Yes, you heard that right…

A DOUBLE JUMPING HORSE!

I may have put Torrent to use a little too much early on, however, as I am now finding things in the early game areas that I must have just raced past at the time.

There are also underground areas to explore as well as the huge overworld and I still don’t think I’ve seen everything there is to see yet.

I look forward to discovering the rest.

Story

I’ve noticed some critique online regarding Elden Ring’s perceived lack of story, but it is completely unfounded. I will say that this game certainly doesn’t hold your hand at any point, and this does include the narrative.

There are some great cutscenes for the main bosses in which they cut some fantasy jargon monologues that’ll normally inform you of who they are within this world and what their intentions are.

You will also find dozens of NPC’s scattered around The Lands Between. Some you may be able to obtain items from, others may give you a quest to embark upon. All of them will have a story to tell.

Your exploration is also rewarded by adding to the story and expanding the lore of this world within the items you find and collect. In the descriptions of things like spells, armour pieces and weapons, there is always a short passage describing the origin of the item which will give you more of an idea as to what exactly is going on.

The opening cutscene, regardless of the riddles it seems to spew, does give you insight into what your purpose is whilst introducing some of the main players in this wonderful but dangerous world.

The transcript is as follows:

“The fallen leaves tell a story.

The great Elden Ring was shattered.

In our home, across the fog, the Lands Between.

Now, Queen Marika the Eternal is nowhere to be found,

and in the Night of the Black Knives, Godwyn the Golden was the first to perish.

Soon, Marika's offspring, demigods all, claimed the shards of the Elden Ring.

The mad taint of their newfound strength triggered the Shattering.

A war from which no lord arose.

A war leading to abandonment by the Greater Will.

Arise now, ye Tarnished.

Ye dead, who yet live.

The call of long-lost grace speaks to us all.

Hoarah Loux, chieftan of the badlands.

The ever-brilliant Goldmask.

Fia, the Deathbed Companion.

The loathsome Dung Eater.

And Sir Gideon Ofnir, the All-knowing.

And one other. Whom grace would again bless.

A Tarnished of no renown.

Cross the fog, to the Lands Between.

To stand before the Elden Ring.

And become the Elden Lord.”

There are 6 endings to the game in total, but I believe in all of them, the goal is to rise from a lowly Tarnished to become Elden Lord and restore the Golden Order. The ending you get will depend on the quests you complete.

I must have spent at least a few hours in game reading the descriptions of the items to grow my understanding of the world around me and I’ve loved every second of it. There’s even a huge twist and reveal hidden away later in the game that is hinted at a couple of times throughout the game and I’m sure will be the cause of much debate going forward.

If you’re a fan of fantasy fiction and need a new IP to sink your teeth into, look no further than Hidetaka Miyazaki and George RR Martin’s latest body of work.

Game mechanics

There is a vast array of weaponry in Elden Ring. From swords and axes to giant chainsaw like pizza cutters and staffs from which you can cast magic spells. In this first run, I’ve chosen to build my character around wielding a singular sword with two hands, but the choice and possibilities are seemingly endless to fit your desired play style.

When I’ve done everything I can with my current character I am going to be using a special item called Larval Tear to re-spec my attributes, so I am able to competently cast magic before I start NG+ and begin the journey again. This is something I can see myself doing over and over until I’ve exhausted all options available.

Combat in this game can be very challenging but at the same time, greatly rewarding. There have been many bosses I died to repeatedly that caused growing frustration with each death. However, it’s always possible to learn the attacks of your opponent by reading their animations to know what’s coming next, giving you time to block or roll out of the way.

Each time I have struggled to defeat an enemy but eventually overcome them, I have felt a huge sense of accomplishment and a little wave of euphoria travel through my body. I get such an adrenaline rush during the epic battles that Elden Ring thrusts you into.

Every enemy you defeat will provide you with Runes which can be used to buy items from merchants or level up your characters attributes at safe points called Sites of Grace that are littered around The Lands Between.

Resting at these sites of grace will refill your flasks (used to regain health or focus points) but also respawn any defeated enemies, minus bosses and a select few others. If you die whilst out and about in the world, you will drop ay runes you currently hold and be respawned back at the last site of grace you visited. You can then travel back to your location of death to retrieve your lost runes but be warned, if you die again before collecting those runes, they will be lost forever. This caused many cautious expeditions back to where I died in order to retrieve my lost runes.

There is a crafting system that I only really utilised towards the end of the game but once I discovered it, I never looked back. Around the world are many different crafting items to collect from things like flowers and bones to land octopus ovaries. You can create arrows, elemental grease to coat your weaponry in and consumables to grant you protection for certain kinds of attacks for limited periods of time amongst many other things. The different greases were a game changer for me as it could provide an advantage over certain bosses should you be able to figure out what they’re weak to.

The target acquisition/lock-on feature did cause me a little trouble when there were multiple enemies in my line of sight as it was often difficult to target the desired enemy. Many deaths occurred due to this, and it was rather frustrating having my character lock onto a smaller foe a short distance away rather than the huge burley axe wielder barrelling right towards me.

I’m positive that there are many aspects of this game that I am yet to discover but I have made it my mission to throw myself into this world entirely until I have seen everything there is to see!

Please click the ‘Summary’ button below to see my final thoughts about this game.

Summary

The title of this review asks a question. Is Elden Ring a masterpiece? The answer is a resounding YES!

A few tweaks to the likes of the targeting/lock-on system and certain boss battle difficulties could be made to improve the experience further but even with that, it’s still a solid 10/10 for me.

Never have I played a game so beautiful yet so haunting at the same time.

There’s so much to see and do in The Lands Between that the vow I made to myself to return to Dark Souls will have to remain on the backburner for now. It may be a while before I play another game, especially if the talk of upcoming DLC comes to fruition.

Throughout my playthrough, I constantly got the feeling that Elden Ring could become my favourite game of all time and now that I’m at the end game (without beating the final boss) and still finding more areas and bosses around the world, I can unequivocally say that Elden Ring now holds the top spot.

The future of gaming is certainly bright with Elden Ring as the benchmark all other devs will now endeavour to exceed.