Digital Game Analysis

Dark Souls III

SFU

IAT 210

Date: July 17, 2020

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1. **Game and Website Bibliographic References**

   1.1 **Game Reference**

   FromSoftware, Inc. (2016). *Dark Souls III.* Tokyo, Japan.

   1.2 **Game Website Reference**

   FromSoftware(March 24th, 2016). Dark Soul III. Retrived from
   https://www.fromsoftware.jp/ww/detail.html?csm=097

2. **Game Definition**

   2.1 **Chosen Definition**

   A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome. -- Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E.

   2.2 **Definition Application**

   Artificial conflict is present in this game, where the player plays as the protagonist named "Ashen One", the player needs to defeat artificial intelligence enemies along the journey. The player can get in-game currencies by defeating enemies, and can spend the currencies to enhance the playable character by leveling up or getting better in-game equipment, which is a quantifiable outcome. The goals is to defeat the bosses in the game world. In order to progress through the game, the player needs to reach the next checkpoint without dying, otherwise all the unspent currency will be lost upon death, unless the player goes back to where the character died and retrieve it before dies again, otherwise the player need to restart from the last checkpoint(Death).

3. **Physical Interface**

   3.1 Interface Description

   The game was played using a PlayStation 4 Dual Shock 4 controller. It's a regular gaming controller consists of a combination of analog sticks and buttons. It weights 210 grams and has has dimensions of 162 mm × 52 mm × 98 mm (DualShock, 2020). The controller fits comfortably in my hands. In the default button map setting, player tilts the left analog stick to move the character into corresponding directions, tilts the right analog stick to adjust the camera angle. Player can navigate the menus by the d-pad, confirm or deny actions by press the face button of "cross" and " circle" respectively. The player can use the items equipped on right hand (mostly weapons) and left hand by pressing the right shoulder button left shoulder respectively. Button mappings can be customized by the player as well(Controls-Dark Souls 3, 2020).

   3.2 Interface Efficiency

   The controller is considered an efficient way to play the game. The latency is unnoticeable when buttons are pressed. Controls are natural in terms of ergonomic. Due to the button map layout, the player can press several different buttons at the same time to perform tasks. For example, in an enemy encounter, the player can move the character and adjusting the camera at the same time by tilting the analogy sticks using thumbs, attack or defend by pressing the shoulder buttons using index fingers. Because the right shoulder button corresponds to the right hand of the in-game character, so does the left, this makes the control feel one-to-one, thus improve the immersiveness of the game. While the game is also playable on keyboard and mouse, it certainly doesn't feel the same. I tried the PC version the game and played with keyboard and mouse. The movement keys are

"A", "D", "W", "S", which means moving towards left, right, front, back respectively. In this case, movement doesn't feel as natural as the controller where the character can move into any direction at any angles freely using the controller.

4. **Game Types**

   4.1 Game Type(s)

   This game is most closely associated with Action and Role Playing.

   4.2 Game Type Conventions

   For Action: The game offers intense real-time combat. Players need to learn the enemy's attack window and response to the attack accordingly. Boss fights can be difficult at time, and can take many tries. Mindlessly pressing the attack button is certainly not efficient.

   For Role Playing: The setting of the game is a fictional fantasy world, where monsters and magics exist. The lore of the game is rich. While the game doesn't explicitly tell the story to the player. The player needs pay attention to the details in the game world, which are related to the lore and has meaning behind them. When I was playing the game, I read the item descriptions to further understand the story behind the game. A huge selection of equipment is offered, players can customize their characters in many different ways. NPCs (non-playable characters) also has their storyline that the player can interact with.

   Mass effect is also an action role playing game has some similarities to Dark Souls III. The game also offers intense real-time combat. On top of that, the game offers an rich and expansive universe for the player to explore(Mass Effect, 2020).

5. **Casual Game Elements**

   5.1 Casual Factor 1: Fiction

   The fiction of the game set in a dark world, which can be told by thee name. It's quite emotionally negative. The game world is depressing, it tales place during the apocalypse, where the world is falling apart.

   5.2 Casual Factor 2: Difficulty and punishment

   The game can be extremely difficult and punishing at times. The game punishes the player by playing a large portion of the game when the player is defeated. For example, when I was playing the game in one of its level(area), I died to the boss "Pontiff Sulyvahn", I had to play a larger portion of that level to even reach the boss, not to mention the difficulty of the boss fight itself. The boss has a tricky move set, and also deals substantial of damage to my characters. I died quite few times before I even got a chance to learn the move set of the boss.

   5.3 Casual Game Analysis

   Based on the two factors above. The game leans towards to hardcore heavily due to its dark world setting, and punishing game level design. Players would find the world depressing if played the game for too long, and might quit playing because they can not stand the punishment of losing a large amount of progress after dying.

6. **Chance and Skill**

6.1 Chance

Chance is present in this video game, mainly in item drops after killing an enemy(Item Discovery, 2020). While certain key items that are related to progression to the game are guaranteed, but drops for upgrade materials and equipment are randomized. There is an **implicit** chance element that players might not notice if the player doesn't play the game especially the boss fight many times. That is the chances are present in the enemy's attack move. Enemies have different move sets, sometimes it is random that which move the enemies gonna use. If a player gets lucky, a considered difficult boss can repeatedly use the "easier" move-set such like a slow attack, so the player can have more time to react and have an overall easier time during the boss fight.

6.2 Skill

Mental skills is primarily required for this game. Player's are required to observe the in-game environment when exploring, and enemy's attack pattern during combat. Also, due to the fact there is no map in the game, the player needs to memorize the layout of each level, so they don't run into stuff like dead end, or traps every time.

6.3 Chance and Skill Balance

While the progression of the game heavily relies on the character's equipment, which can be upgraded using materials that are randomly dropped by defeating enemies. But skills are just as important as the equipment. Even the one of the easier boss can defeat the a player who has good equipment if the player doesn't pay attention during the boss fight. When I was playing the game, once again, the "Pontiff Sulyvahn" boss battle, I died many times, even I had decent equipment because I was lucky that I got some nice upgrade drops from the enemies prior to the boss fight. But what prevented me from beating the boss was my skill. I was limited to certain upgrade level at the current progress of the game, in order to further upgrade, I had to beat that boss. So this forced to me to learn the boss's move rather than farm randomized dropped materials to upgrade my character equipment. Overall, this game maintain a good balance between chance and skill.

7. **Player Agency**

    7.1 Player Agency Definition

    The play has the ability to impact the outcome of the game. The decision that the players makes actually matters in the game, it is not just limited to the story, but can also have impact on the gameplay. The action that player performs can have consequence, and can effect how the game progress.

    7.2 Player Agency Experience

    From story standpoint, my action and decision at certain points of the game actually effect how the world changes. Like in some side quest I had the options to give the quest items to different NPCs, so the story would play differently. The game even has multiple endings just based on how I progress through the game.

    From gameplay standpoint, one specific example is that the player get to acquire "boss souls" from unique bosses, and only one can be obtained per playthrough. The "boss souls" acquired can be used for different purpose based on player's choice. The first time defeated the boss "Vordt" and acquired "Soul of Boreal Valley Vordt", I had the choice to use it to forge a hammer weapon or a

ring(Soul of Boreal Valley Vordt, 2020). I figured the hammer would be more beneficial for my playthrough because I didn't have a decent weapon at the time, so I made the weapon.

7.3 Choice

The game offers many choice the player can make. Player's choice heavily impact how the game progress. The player's character can be built in various ways. The build of the character is not limited to certain class, the player has the freedom to allocated the attribute points any way he wants. The game doesn't explicitly tells the player which way to go, the player has the option to progress the in-game level in different orders, that would also effect how certain event would happen in the game. This kind of player agency are constantly offered in the Dark Souls franchise, and due to the success of the franchise, some other "Soulslike" video game like "Lords of the Fallen" are inspired and offers similar player agency that allows the player progress through the game via different passages(Lords of the Fallen, 2020).

8. **Game Business**

   8.1 Business Model

   8.1.1 Value Proposition: The game has Few-to-Few business model. It was released on Play Station 4, Xbox One, and Microsoft windows platform (Dark Souls III, 2020).

   8.1.2 Value Delivery: The game was developed by FromSoftWare and published by Bandai Namco Entertainment. The game can be purchase both physically and digitally (Dark Souls III, 2020).

   8.1.3 Value Capture: The revenue model is pay-to-play. It is currently prices at CDN $ 66.49 on Steam (Dark Souls III). The game also offers paid download-able content. There is no in-App purchases or advertisement in the game.

   8.1.4 Value Communication: The game was advertised before and after its release. I was advertised on the internet via online ads like Youtube video trailer, and official social media channels. There was a closed beta prior to the game's release(DARK SOULS 3 CLOSED BETA REGISTRATION OPENS TOMORROW). The game has a M-rating which targets the audience of age 17 and above.

   8.1.5 Distribution: The game can be purchase from physical store like Best Buy and Ebgames, or digitally from Steam, Humble Bundle, Sony's PlayStation store, and Xbox Live.

   8.2 Marketing

   The game was first revealed on the event of of E3 in 2015(E3 2015: Dark Souls 3 Officially Announced, 2015). The game was a sequel to its predecessor "Dark Souls II", was advertised as the final installment of the franchise. It was "the fastest-selling game in Bandai Namco's history". The game received positive reviews from online critics during its release time period (Dark Souls III, 2020).

9. **Narrative, Audio, and Visual**

   9.1 Narrative Summary

   The game takes place in a imagery dark fantasy world. In this game, the player plays as the "Ashen One". The player needs to travel around the game world, and the goal is to defeat the "Lords of Cinder" and collect their souls in order to link the flame(Lore, 2019). While the game does not explicitly tell the player the story of the game, the player need to obtain information from NPC dialogues and even read item descriptions in order to understand the lore of the game.

9.2 Narrative Structure

9.2.1 Exposition: The game started with a brief introduction of background of the word, that the game takes place in transitory lands of Lothric(Lore, 2020).

9.2.2 Conflict: The conflict is external in the game. I as a player need to fight against the enemies around the world in order to complete my task.

9.2.3 Rising Action: As I played through the game, I needed to beat Lords of Cinder in each area of the game, and this builds up to the final battle of the game.

9.2.4 Climax: The final boss battle against "Soul of Cinder", it is the final showdown of the game.

9.2.5 Falling Action: After defeated the final boss, I had the choice to link the flame or not. I chose to sacrifice myself and fulfil my goal.

9.2.6 Resolution: This was based on the choice during the ending. Because I linked the flame, the cycle of the game world was restored.

9.3 Visual and Sound Design

9.3.1 Visual Design:

The game has a gorgeous visual design. The environments are dark and consists of the main theme of the game. The visual design differentiate itself from other vide games. Because the game takes place in the apocalypse, the world was dying. The visual gives the player a feel of that the fire is burning out. I saw ashes all around the world when I was playing the game, and the world was fading. The game offers a huge varieties of terrains like forest, mountain, castle, and even swamp. Each area has it's own color theme. Anywhere the player can see in the game is also reachable. This further elevates the immersiveness of the game.

9.3.2 Sound Design:

Sound Design of the game is also incredible. Each boss's battle has its own background music theme, which reflects the boss's characteristic. The background music also reflects the theme of the environment. For example, during my gameplay, whenever I was in central hub, "Firelink Shrine", a calm music is being played. It gave me a feeling of peace, It was so powerful that I could feel myself was really resting in this collapsing world. Different weapons also makes different sound when hitting objects, and it makes the game feel realistic.

10. Cultural Artefact

10.1 Cultural Artefact

The architecture and armors are inspired by medieval era. The game has a wide range of armor sets such the player can dress as knight, bishop, scholar. Also the game offers cold weapons like sword, spear and axe. During melee combat, players would expect to fight just the like the soldiers in the medieval era.

10.2 Similarity Example

One of the most iconic location "Anor Londo" in the game that in both Dark Soul and Dark Souls III, was inspired by a magnificent building, Milan Cathedral (Nix, M, 2014). The cathedral is located in the center of Milan, Italy. The construction of the cathedral started in 1386, and only finished in the last century(Milan Cathedral, 2020).

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