

## Nic Howe Action-Adventure CPR

Dark Souls is famous for its difficulty, it is punishing and requires an immense amount of trial and error in order to figure out the best strategies to take on the different levels and bosses. Dark Souls harkens back to an older time before extended tutorials took up the first half hour of gameplay to teach you every mechanic of the game. The game forces you to learn its style of deliberate combat by making every mistake incredibly punishing, and additionally, through careful boss design it implants certain habits into you that make the combat experience incredibly rewarding if you adopt the methods it's pushing onto you.

The Undead Asylum in Dark Souls is a very basic, linear area. There are optional tooltips teaching you the controls, and the game gives you your equipment piecemeal. There is no real challenge in the area, but the boss is a first gate for many new players to the Souls series. The mooks that you fought running up to the boss were all easily disposed of without a care in the world. You could run up to them swinging and take them down no problem. Once you get to the Asylum Demon, you really have to learn how to do the basics of Souls combat if you want to get through.

The Asylum Demon teaches the player the basics of dodge and attack combat. The boss has slow attacks, but attacks that will take off almost all of your health if you get hit. For newer players, they may just run up and start swinging, but that will end poorly for them. Asylum Demon forces new players to learn the basics of dodging and waiting for their opening—the very basics of the Souls combat, all through pure gameplay.

These basic principles will carry the player through the early game. The Taurus Demon can be easily disposed of using the same methods, and not many of the enemies you meet

along the way should give too much of an issue. However, this all changes with the Gargoyles. The Gargoyles are what make you learn to play Souls combat properly. The Souls games have a lock-on system, but it seems designed for ranged combat rather than melee. Not being able to control the direction you're facing and the camera makes fighting groups of enemies very tough, something the player will be doing very often as the game progresses. The Gargoyles exist to teach the player this. Two powerful enemies, one of whom has a slow punishable ranged attack, and the other quick melee strikes. The fight is designed to teach the player that using the lock-on all the time results in lowered awareness and mobility, two things which are very necessary to being successful in the Souls games.

It's of course possible to finish these fights otherwise, but it feels much more rewarding to accept the lessons the game is teaching you, and it makes the remainder of the game much more rewarding as well, as the game introduces new challenges that the player learns from and grows as a player from, but the two most important the game hammers into you at the beginning, just to make sure you tread water.