

The death mechanic of Dark Souls

Abstract:

This paper iterates in the death mechanic of Dark Souls and comes to the conclusion that the way it functions allows to reward the player for dying while also balances the game to adjust itself to the different skill levels of players.

Subject descriptions:

General – Games; Game Design; System Design;

General Terms

Game; Design; Theory;

Keywords:

Game Design; Death Mechanic; Death Punishment;

1. Introduction

Most classic games give the player the possibility to reload an earlier game state or have a perma-death mechanic that forces the player to restart the game in case of failure.

The Souls Series does something different in this regard. First of all, they include death in the story of the game that being said, this isn't really new and a number of games have done this before. More interesting is the way the game secretly rewards the player for dying and adjusts the game difficulty based on that, without changing anything behind the scenes. But to explain that it is important to know how death functions in this game.

2. Death in Dark Souls

If you die in one of the Souls games, you will lose all your souls at the position you died and you have to go there to get them back, if you die on that way to retrieve them you will lose your souls again and the ones you have lost before are gone. These souls are used to level up and buy/upgrade items. To earn souls something has to die it doesn't matter if it's an enemy or an NPC and if you die all enemies will respawn.

3. How this mechanic rewards the player for dying

Now at the first glance that seems like a punishment for the player, but since the player knows about this mechanic he or she will generally spend all souls at the save points. However, the lost souls generate mini-goals on the way to the actual game objectives and will reward the player for recollecting them. By doing so the game gives the player a form of accomplishment for every time he or she dies.

But this mechanic is also used to balance the game in a way that makes it more challenging for experienced players while also making it easier for new players. When recollecting the souls a player has lost he or she has slain the enemies on this way at least twice which increases his total soul count, this means the game secretly lets the player farm to grow stronger in experience as well as skill. By doing so the game stops players from proceeding until they have reached the required combination of both for them individually to move on. Now, on the other hand, this increases the game difficulty for more experienced players, since they will have a lower level at the same game state than someone who has died many times.