

Assignment 2: Fieldnotes by Safa'a Abu Sa'a

Session 1:

I chose the game *Elden Ring* which is an action role-playing game developed by FromSoftware and published by Bandai Namco Entertainment in 2022.

Based on the cover of the game, the quick Google search, and most importantly the 6+ minutes overview trailer I watched, I expect to like the exploration of vast and varied settings, indulging in the mysteries of the game's fantasy world and its characters, the wide freedom to customize my avatar's appearance and abilities, the fulfilling feeling that results after successfully completing a quest, the very-well detailed and gorgeous graphics, and the fact that the game designers collaborated with the well-known and seasoned fantasy author George R. R. Martin to create the game's world, backstory, and history. Moreover, I appreciate the two different modes (single-player & multiplayer) the game has as I am not a fan of playing games with strangers from around the world.

What I am most certain I will dislike about the game is the much often and much needed violence and the dark and scary (less cute and happy) stories and characters.

I expect to find the quests, the characters, the resources, and the backstories interesting while the repetitive nature of the fights and quests will bore me, I am sure.

I believe I will need to kill enemies, collect items, meet non-player characters, and explore new terrains.

The learning I think will take place is mostly about how history shapes who a person is and determines their decisions and actions, how to expand my resourcefulness through crafting new weapons from items I collect along the way in the game, what being a hero is about, and strategies to not only fight enemies, but also to avoid unnecessary danger.

This game will be similar to other games I have played before in that they all cause tension and stress, and they all succeeded in hooking me and keeping me immersed in their worlds.

In conclusion, based on the promotional material I read and watched, I expect this game to be brimming in mysteries to be explored, exceptionally interesting characters, and brilliant resources all brought to life through high-definition graphics.



Figure 1: This image accurately and concisely describes what to look forward to in this game: the adventure, the mystery, the attractive setting, the fantastic resources, and the seemingly undefeated hero.

Session 2:

Descriptive notes:

To begin with, the game gives the player multiple options of character base: astrologer, samurai, prophet, wretch, warrior, etc. All have two "body types" to choose from, male and female. What's surprising to me was the many options the player can control that has to do with the physical appearance of the character base. From face structure to hair color, to even how many white hairs the character can have, to facial hair, age, voice, skin tone, etc. The details were countless. I think this is done to create a connection between the player and the character. The player can make the character to be identical to him/her in appearance, thus making the player infinitely immersed in the game world and strongly attached to the character. Each character has different attributes that are measured in numbers that the player cannot control, but can increase as the player plays through the game. The attributes include but are not limited to vigor, strength, stamina, faith, arcane, intelligence, and dexterity. The resources are limited at the beginning of the game but can increase as the player collects more items throughout the game. Honestly, the amount of details and resources and weapons and features and bars to keep track of is overwhelming for someone like me, most certainly because I have not played this new kind of complex games before. The game starts at a slow, nice pace, I am just exploring the beautiful, vast terrain, collecting resources, and enjoying the fantastic graphics. I chose to be a female astrologer since I liked that she can use sorceries and incantations, weapons that are more effective sometimes than swords, and that require more intelligence and skill than physical strength. My character has a shield, a staff, a bewitching branch, and a sword. There are so many enemies to fight and kill. There are some non-player characters to talk to. I still don't really get what they are talking about since I have just begun the game, but everything seems indeed interesting. I guess the violence is not too much so far. I must fight a bunch of wolves in a dark cave now. I have died several times so far. It is difficult indeed even with 3 "flasks of crimson tears" to recharge my health bar. After several tries, I have learned that the best technique to win the fight is to sneak behind the enemy and never give them a break, just keep hitting that attack button over and over until they are dead. I am collecting more resources and exploring a different area now. I am out in the woods. I like the music and I think it is suitable for the atmosphere of the game. I am excited to get to the level of the game where I get to use the "item crafting" feature which allows me to combine two or more resources to get a new one. I have a map that I can check to see where I am and where I need to go. There are multiple "grace sites" that are checkpoints I restart the game from if I die, provided I visit them first. There are a bunch of soldiers guarding a secret tunnel. They must be guarding something precious. I have to kill them in order to get to that tunnel. However, I think I can evade some. I shouldn't use up all my flasks just to fight these soldiers. I have killed a dozen of them. The graphics of killing here are not that gory or disgusting or scary. It is getting repetitive. I finally managed to kill all the soldiers. I am making my way through the tunnel now. There is a chest. I open it and find a very nice sword. I collect it and go back to exploring the

Lands Between. There is a huge monster that I must fight. I have tried so many times but have failed every time. I think this is too challenging for me. Maybe I am not ready yet.

Analytical notes:

I think the game is okay so far. I believe I have to play more in order to really know it and appreciate it, but up until now there are no problematic representations of gender, violence, race, or class. On the contrary, the game is very inclusive and diverse. The main characters in it are both males and females without one being dominant over the other. All skin tones and racial features were offered. The violence wasn't exaggerated. What I have learned from this game is to know when to engage and when to avoid the enemy, the best strategy to win a fight, and how to wisely use resources. The problems it presented me with is how to win very challenging fights. It provided me with a few weapons, resources such as flasks I can use to recharge my health bar, and resting places where I can recharge those flasks.

Affective notes:

The game made feel a little entertained for a short bit when I was exploring the terrain and collecting resources. When the killing got repetitive and there were no more new places to discover or tasks to accomplish, it got seriously boring. I felt very intense stress when I had to fight the wolves and the huge monster. At the end of the session, I was very frustrated as I have failed several times to defeat the huge monster. I was particularly overwhelmed by how many things I have to learn before even beginning the game. There were too many attributes and resources to get familiar with.

Summary:

The game was okay I guess. The most important skill to learn in order to succeed at the game is to know when and how to attack an enemy. It made me feel entertained at the beginning but got repetitive and bored me as I played through.



Figure 2: So many detailed options for the base character.

Session 3:

Descriptive notes:

I chose to watch the widely popular Twitch personality Ninja play *Elden Ring*. Ninja is the most followed broadcaster on Twitch with over 17 million followers.

Ninja starts by choosing his character base and its features. He chooses to be a male samurai. He is experimenting with how he moves the character and testing the controls and familiarizing himself with everything the character can do. He is very systematic and organized as he explores every corner of the setting he is in and never leaves a certain spot without making sure he discovered everything there is to discover and collected all the resources he can collect. His techniques are impressive indeed. His aim is perfect, and he hits his enemies with precision and strength. He knows which weapons to use and how to use them quickly and efficiently. He has great attack moves. He just jumped right on his enemy and slashed him. It usually does not take him more than one or two hits to kill enemies with regular strength. He reads all the tips and explanations that pop up on the screen. He does not really have the patience to listen to every word non-player characters in the game say so he skips a lot of it. He seems to be very engaged and focused. It only took him 2 tries to kill the pack of wolves in the dark cave which took me over 5 tries to accomplish. He thinks the narrative is cool and the graphics iconic. There is a huge soldier he wants to kill, but it seems impossible at this level as this soldier is much stronger than his character. He tries about 15 times to win but in vain. He

finally decides to avoid this fight but preserves his pride by saying, "I could kill him if I wanted to, but I don't want to now." He is commenting on how slow the movements of the character are sometimes and that, "that's how they get you" in these games. He is using his resources wisely and not spending too many of the "runes" that he collects. He only exchanges a few of them to level up one level or point of "vigor" and one of "strength". Now he is being selective about which enemies to fight and which to avoid.

Affective notes:

Ninja seems very interested and entertained by this game. However, he is frustrated now as there are so many options and attributes and resources he does not know anything about and does not understand what they are and when to use them. It seems this game is not very standard in this regard. He is most stressed and experiencing high tension when he is about to die. He was extremely frustrated by the multiple losses, but very insistent on killing the huge soldier. He finally accepted that it is not possible to defeat this enemy at this stage of the game as his power or stamina is limited, but he still tried to hide his wounded pride by saying, "I could kill him if I wanted to, but I don't want to now." I think he was serious when he said this, but he did learn a very important lesson which is that sometimes some battles are better left unfought as he did this later in the game. He is still having fun even though it is getting repetitive to me.

Analytical notes:

The biggest problem that faced Ninja was being unable to defeat the huge soldier. He solved it by simply evading that fight. He does not comment on race, class, gender, or violence even though he used an inappropriate word to call the "maidens" in the game. As a spectator, I was cheering for Ninja to defeat all the enemies. I wasn't feeling as stressed as when I was playing myself.

Summary:

I enjoyed watching Ninja play *Elden Ring*. He is very skilled and there is so much to learn from his techniques and strategies. He expresses his feelings about what he likes and what frustrates him in the game. He does not comment on any race or gender or violence issues perhaps because they are not existent in this game.



Figure 3: Ninja disappointed as he has lost this fight so many times.

Final Bridge:

For this assignment I chose the game *Elden Ring*. It is an RPG game that was released in 2022. Based on the promotional material, I expected to like the exploration of varied settings, the freedom to customize my character, the interesting non-player characters and backstories, and the beautiful graphics. What I was almost certain I would dislike is the violence and gory scenes. The learning I expected to take place was mostly about fighting techniques and the value of a person's history. I decided to watch the famous streamer Ninja on Twitch play this game as he is an expert gamer.

When I started the game, I was both fascinated with and overwhelmed by the number of details I had to decide on. The character and other objects in the game have many properties that impact how they interact with each other in the game system. "The properties of objects form a block of descriptive data that can be essential to determining interactions of objects in a game system." (Fullerton, P. 130, 2018). Ninja exhibited the same reaction when he first encountered those properties. I admired how diverse and inclusive the game is making every skin tone and racial feature available. The resources (weapons, stamina, life, and health bars, the items used to recharge those bars, and collectibles) all have both utility and scarcity. The player starts with only a few and can work to increase them. "By definition, resources must have both utility and scarcity in the game system. If they do not have utility, they are like our example of sushi in *Diablo III*: a funny and strange thing to find, but essentially useless. On the same note, if the resources are overly abundant, they will lose their value in the system." (Fullerton, P. 80, 2018). The game starts at a nice pace so players can familiarize themselves with it. I explored the wide terrain and collected some items. It seems that in strategy games like this one the terrain itself is an important resource as many areas in it hold very essential collectibles. "Special terrain is used as a resource in an important part of some game systems, especially those that are map-based systems, such as strategy games. In games like *WarCraft III*, the currency of the game (wood, gold, oil) is extracted from special areas of the terrain, so these areas become important primary resources." (Fullerton, P. 83, 2018). This probably explains why Ninja takes his sweet time exploring every nook and cranny trying to discover any special collectibles in the terrain. Enemies start to emerge and some fights seem inevitable. Some enemies are fairly easy to kill, even boring, while others are especially difficult and require more advanced techniques to defeat which is probably why it took me many tries to defeat the pack of wolves while it took a professional like Ninja only 2 tries. The designers of this game surely know how to keep all types of players engaged as they vary the levels of challenge to make it individualized according to the abilities of players. Some enemies were impossible to defeat even for a professional like Ninja which made him very frustrated. This balance between frustration and boredom is what the Hungarian-American psychologist Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow". "In flow, an activity balances a person between challenge and ability, frustration and boredom, to produce an experience of achievement and happiness." (Fullerton, P. 99, 2018).

Undoubtedly, the premise of *Elden Ring* is amazing and engages the players emotionally. From the exposition, everything sounds very interesting and is making the players curious and motivated to play the game till the end. Every element from the old and charming time, the fantasy place where magic is real, the very unusual and mysterious characters, and the intense and exciting conflict where “the tarnished” must rise and seize the Elden Ring, they all are wonderful indeed and thoughtfully and creatively designed. This is the main reason I chose this game, and Ninja also shares the same opinion as he commented, “so cool” when he learned the exposition. “Without a dramatic premise, many games would be too abstract for players to become emotionally invested in their outcome.” (Fullerton, P. 105, 2018).

The learning that happens in the game is fantastic in so many ways. First of all, I thought only about the outcomes of learning and ignored the methods, but later on, when I studied them more closely, I discovered that in *Elden Ring*, a huge part of learning what to do and how to achieve certain goals happens through the in-game messages that players leave at certain sites. These messages can warn other players about dangers ahead, teach them certain tricks they need to use in order to accomplish a certain task, or simply wish them luck! In addition to that, having the multi-player option is very helpful as it provides an opportunity for cooperative learning through playing. Furthermore, the design team did a remarkable job balancing the freedom of discovery with guides and tips offered in-game. As Kiron Ramdewar, one of the developers of the game explains, “Giving players the feeling of discovery and freedom means you do not want to bombard them with tutorial screens or guiding arrows. It is a tricky balancing act when working with millions of players with varying ages, skills, and experience with the genre.” In *Elden Ring*, he adds, “You are encouraged to experiment and try things in the game, and I think that is a massive part of the game’s success.” (2022). What’s even more fantastic about the learning in this game is that it creates and maintains a cardinal element of human learning: curiosity. “In *Elden Ring* you are being asked to stay curious at all times.” (Canellas, 2022). This supports and emphasizes the aspect of play that the American researcher James Gee explored in his research: the aspect of discovery, of “surmising new possibilities” (2008). When our curiosity is triggered, we probe the world around us and discover new possibilities and learn new things. This of course is what happens in *Elden Ring* and basically any other good video game.

In conclusion, *Elden Ring* is a great game which both modest players like me and professionals like Ninja can enjoy and learn through. It is very thoughtfully and creatively designed that it makes an ideal example through which game design elements can be critically and practically studied. It might seem repetitive at first, but given enough time and play sessions, it is surely to become very addictive.

References

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