How narrative techniques affect players’ engagement in action RPG

Dark Souls II

Faculty of Department of Game Design

Author: Lukas Graff

Bachelor’s Thesis in Game Design, 15 hp

Program: Game Design and Graphics, 120hp

Supervisor: Ernest Adams

Examiner: Magnus Johansson

24-08-2018
Abstrakt

Syftet med denna studie var att få en bättre förståelse för hur spelarens engagemang påverkas av de narrativa tekniker som används i spelet Dark Souls II. De fyra mest framstående narrativa tekniker som identifierades i Dark Souls II var Cutscenes, föremålsbeskrivningar, NPC’s och miljöberättande.

Kvalitativ och kvantitativa data samlades genom en enkät som lades upp på Dark Souls II forum/"subreddit". Svaren från 100 deltagare tolkades med koder samt kategorier genom metodologin innehållsanalys.

I denna studie kunde det konstateras att narrativa tekniker som negativt påverkar spelarens frihet, kommer reducera deras engagemang i spelet. Detta noterades bland annat när spelare var tvungna att kalla på NPC’s till bossfighter för att kunna fortsätta denna NPC’s uppdrag. Det angavs även att detta fungerade åt andra hållet, när spelarens förmåga att kunna ta egna beslut tillåts så ökade även spelarens engagemang i spelet. Detta noterades i spelmekaniken att spelaren bland annat tillåts döda fredliga NPC’s.

Nyckelord: Narrativa tekniker, Dark Souls II, Engagemang I spel, Filmsekvenser, föremålsbeskrivningar, NPC’s, miljöer, berättande, spel
Abstract

The purpose of the study was to get a better understanding of how players’ engagement is affected by the narrative techniques which are used in the game *Dark Souls II*. The four most prominent narrative techniques that were analyzed in *Dark souls II* were cutscenes, item descriptions, NPC’s and environmental storytelling.

Qualitative and Quantitative data was collected in a questionnaire that was posted on the forum/“subreddit” Dark souls II. The answers from 100 questionnaires were analyzed using content analysis methodology.

It could be concluded in this thesis that narrative techniques that interfere with the players sense of freedom will reduce their engagement within the game. An example in *Dark souls II* is when the player is forced to summon NPC’s to boss fights in order to progress in the NPC’s storyline. This also works the other way around: i.e. the player experiences increased engagement if the narrative techniques allow the player to decide over their own actions. An example in Dark Souls II is when the player is given the opportunity to kill friendly NPC’s.

*Key words: Narrative Techniques, Dark Souls II, Engagement in games, Cutscenes, Item descriptions, NPC’s, Environmental Storytelling, games*
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 6

2. Background .................................................................................................................... 7
   2.1 Environmental Storytelling ..................................................................................... 7
   2.2 Item Descriptions .................................................................................................. 7
   2.3 Non-Player Characters .......................................................................................... 8
   2.4 Cutscenes .............................................................................................................. 8

3. Aims and Purpose .......................................................................................................... 10

4. Method .......................................................................................................................... 11
   4.1 Design of study ..................................................................................................... 11
   4.2 Content Analysis .................................................................................................. 12
      4.2.1 Codes ........................................................................................................... 12

Example of how coding was done: .................................................................................. 12

Another example of the coding process: .......................................................................... 13

5. Result ...................................................................................................................................... 16
   5.1 Quantitative data Result ...................................................................................... 16
   5.2 Qualitative data Result ......................................................................................... 16

6. Analysis ............................................................................................................................ 26
   6.1 Quantitative data Analysis .................................................................................... 26
   6.2 Qualitative data Analysis ....................................................................................... 26
      6.2.1 Cutscenes ........................................................................................................ 26
      6.2.2 NPC ............................................................................................................... 27
      6.2.3 Item descriptions ............................................................................................ 28
      6.2.4 Environmental storytelling ......................................................................... 28
      6.2.5 General ............................................................................................................. 28

7. Discussion ......................................................................................................................... 29

8. Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 30

9. Future work .................................................................................................................... 31

10. References ...................................................................................................................... 32

1. Supplementary figures .................................................................................................. 34
   1.1 Age ......................................................................................................................... 34
   1.2 Sex .......................................................................................................................... 34
   1.3 Platform used ......................................................................................................... 35
   1.4 Time played (Approximated) ............................................................................... 35
   1.5 Other Dark Souls games ....................................................................................... 36
1.6 State of mind when playing ................................................................. 36
1.7 Played with someone or alone ............................................................ 36
1.8 Earlier knowledge about how Dark Souls use narrative techniques .................. 37
1.9 Did you talk to the NPC’s until they had nothing new to say? .......................... 37
1.10 Did you accidentally/purposely kill any NPC’s? ....................................... 38
1.11 What did you feel about the voice-lines from the NPC’s? ............................ 38
1.12 What did you think about the cutscenes? .............................................. 39
1.13 Do you feel that the cutscenes contributed to the game’s story? .................... 39
1.14 Did you use forums/other sites to fill in possible gaps about the story? ............. 40
1.15 Did you finish the game? ........................................................................ 40
1. Introduction

Storytelling has been a big part of human history. A book lets the reader participate in the story when the reader’s eyes swipe along the text, which makes our brain design the experience by creating emotions and pictures. Movies let the audience follow along the story by looking through a lens that captures the hero’s journey where enhancing effects and sounds contribute to an increased feeling of involvement (Jongeneel, 2013).

However, both movies and books are media that lack the aspect of letting the participant affect or interact with the story. This is what games do so well, by letting the player be a part of and influence the story.

In games with interactive storytelling, the player’s actions serve as the spark that will drive the story forward. It is up to the player to decide what path the protagonist will take. From this a special bond is created between the game and the player, or rather the avatar and the story they participate in. You could say that the player becomes the story (AnonA, 2017).

In the last couple of years, the technology has evolved and the possibilities to create awesome looking games has increased. But the engagement and feelings players experience in video games are not only based on how visually good the game looks. Gameplay, such as the mechanics together with the narrative, play a huge role to create a unified picture which makes the player feel like they are playing a good game. How the story is told is essential to make sure that the players feel that their presence in the game matters, and that it is the player who drives the story forward by their actions (Batchelor, 2017).

With story rich games like The Last of Us (Naughty Dog, 2013) and Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End (Naughty Dog 2016), players have been given the opportunity to feel the power of involvement a game can give through its story – and this has resulted in high expectations on future games from players around the world (Schneider, 2016).

One game series that has received attention for its unique way of delivering story is the franchise Dark Souls.

This study will investigate the four most prominent narrative techniques used in Dark Souls II. These narrative techniques were identified as the author (LG) played the game from the beginning - in order to answer the research question: What impact does the identified major narrative techniques in Dark souls II have on the players’ experience of the game?

The author conducted a survey of Dark Souls II players to evaluate how they experience the game’s narrative techniques and what impact those techniques had on the players’ engagement with the game. This was done by asking players questions about the identified four major narrative techniques.

“To understand what’s going on in any Souls game requires you to be some cross between Indiana Jones and Professor Layton, digging up random puzzle pieces and working out how to fit them together.” (Stanton, 2014)
2. Background

*Dark Souls II* is an action-RPG game released by *From Software* and *Bandai Namco Games* in March 2014. It is a medieval fantasy game that focus on exploration and challenging gameplay and is known to be one of the most difficult games ever released (Birch, 2015).

For this thesis the four major narrative techniques that were identified in Dark Souls II will be investigated. They were environmental storytelling, item descriptions, NPC interactions/ dialogues and cutscenes. Only the most prominent narrative techniques which the author found by playing the game will be used. Other narrative techniques could exist and will not be looked upon in this thesis.

### 2.1 Environmental Storytelling

In environmental storytelling the story lies embedded in the avatar’s surroundings. Level and game designer Jethro Jongeneel says that it is up to the player to interpret and make conclusions about what the player sees in the environment (Jongeneel, 2013). This results in multiple possible interpretations depending on who the interpreter is as well as their background and experiences. The environmental storytelling could be old ruins where the player can see remains of burnt wood or trees that are bent in a certain way because of windy climate.

"The viewer is actively filling in the whitespace, and creating his or her own story by adding up the different elements to create a whole."

From the designers’ perspective, it can be difficult to know how the environmental storytelling will be interpreted and Jongeneel argues that there is no right or wrong way. However, giving the player the possibility to read a story from the environment always results in a deeper and immersive game-world. Environmental storytelling serves as a useful tool for designers to increase engagement among the players. The designer delivers an “incomplete” story in which the player is invited to participate by “filling in the blanks” and therefore results in each player having a somewhat different experience.

### 2.2 Item Descriptions

In the world of Dark Souls each item is not only used for gameplay reasons, but also contains valuable narrative information. Items in *Dark souls II* have one informative text about the story of (or about) the item and one text for the item’s effect – like increasing the avatar’s damage (the stats the item provide is shown in another tab). It is always optional for the player to decide if they want to read the story that the item can tell. For the curious the items are essential to constructing a rough picture of the lore within *Dark Souls II* (Ascher, 2015).

The narrative content that lies in the descriptions of items in Dark souls II does not always give a clear picture which usually leaves an open space where the player must interpret the connection on an empirical basis. At times, the story-gaps are so uncertain that the player cannot know for sure and speculations between different players tend to arise on various forums.
2.3 Non-Player Characters

There are interactable NPC’s in Dark Souls II with various functions. Some are merely just designed to give the player the opportunity to buy items or upgrade equipment. Others serve as a source of narrative content about the NPC’s role in the lore.

A few NPC’s tell the player subtle clues about the world around their avatar. Some NPC’s serve as a necessary tool for the player to progress in the game. Therefore players often search for information about essential NPC’s on the internet in various forums. Merchant Hag Melentia is an example of an NPC that the player needs to find in order to buy a key which the player later can use to upgrade their avatars’ equipment (AnonB, 2017).

Some of the questlines involving NPC’s requires that the player summons them to boss fights in order to progress in the game. Whatever purpose the NPC’s serve, they have limited dialogues that are skippable if the player wishes to. However, the dialogues still need to be exhausted to make the NPC’s advance in their story, but the player is not required to listen to it.

Most of the NPC’s located in Dark Souls II are killable. If the player would kill an NPC, a tombstone will appear at their location. This effect does not necessarily happen at once and it can take several hours before it appears. The player can then visit the tombstone to resurrect the dead NPC by paying souls (the currency used in Dark souls II) and the NPC will appear as a ghost. Most of the functions that the NPC served before it was killed are still possible to access at this point, but the player will be unable to further progress in the NPCs’ questchain. Awards that could be obtained later in a questchain which was not unlocked before the NPC was killed, will not be possible to obtain unless the game is restarted or that the player completes the playthrough (which automatically start a “new game+”).

2.4 Cutscenes

There are many conflicting ideas about the use of cutscenes in games i.e. whether they should be used or not. Some argue that cutscenes are a good tool for developers to make sure that the story is delivered to the players. Others say that cutscenes does not belong in games at all, as cutscenes tend to contradict the players sense of control within the game space.

However, some things can be difficult to deliver through the eyes of the avatar. Daniel Floyd (2012) from the Youtube channel Extra Credits argues that if cutscenes are used properly, they should not interfere with gameplay or simply contain narrative information, but instead be used to deliver context for the player. Floyd calls this to “contextualize play” and mentions that a good example is to construct the game’s atmosphere before the player gets dropped into the game space. I.e. simply provide a better background about the setting of the game. This is useful because it is difficult to provide a clear context to the player with purely gameplay, and in some cases, it is required that the player understands in what context their character belongs – before being engaged in gameplay.

Cutscenes are also used by the designer to make sure that the story content/ information is delivered to the player without worrying that the player might not see them. However, cutscenes excludes the player from actual gameplay since the player is taken out of action for the duration of the cutscene. The ability as player to control the outcome is removed, and it can be compared to watching a movie, which is in conflict with the expectations of playing the game.
Adam Schnitzer (2003) says the following about cutscenes in an article on Gamasutra:

“When you leave the interactive world of the game and enter the cinematic world of the cutscene, the rules change.”

When cutscenes are shown, the flow of the game is interrupted which disconnects the player from the game world. Another dangerous aspect of using cutscenes is that it can show actions like attacks or movement that would not be possible while in-game and will leave the player wondering why their avatar cannot do that “cool jump” when they are playing.

A good definition to what a cutscene is, and the definition I will refer to in this thesis will be from Hugh Hancock’s (2002) article on Gamasutra:

“Perhaps the best definition of a cutscene is "any non-interactive storytelling or scene-setting element of a game".”

For this thesis the cutscenes used in Dark Souls II will be split into “major” and “minor” cutscenes. The “major” cutscenes involve deeper story content: One is used in the beginning of the game and another in the end (there’s actually two different endings, with two different major cutscenes). The minor cutscenes are used as introductions to bosses and in a few specific situations such as a giant eagle who transports the protagonist to a new area.
3. Aims and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of what impact the major narrative techniques used in *Dark Souls II* had on players’ experience in the game.

**The research question:** What impact does the identified major narrative techniques in *Dark souls II* have on the players’ experience of the game?

**To address this research question, I will explore:**

Which narrative techniques are used in *Dark Souls II*?

What narrative techniques encourage players in *Dark Souls II*?

What narrative techniques make the player lose interest of the game?
4. Method

The study takes the form of a survey that was given to the players of *Dark Souls II* to collect qualitative responses to open-answer questions. Quantitative data was collected with check-box answers. The participants’ answers were analyzed with the method called “content analysis”. It was used to collect interesting findings in the survey that 358 players answered to.

The game *Dark Souls II* was played from the beginning to analyze what narrative techniques *Dark Souls II* uses. During the playthrough the author (LG) observed the game to find reasonable questions which could be used for the survey.

4.1 Design of study

In order to identify the different narrative techniques used in the game *Dark Souls II*, the author played the game from the start and observed them as they were introduced to the player. During this process, the author took notes about his feelings when the different narrative techniques were used, and tried to be as objective as possible during this phase of the background collection in the thesis.

When the author decided that enough content had been collected from the playthrough, the collection of background information from the game was paused. The researcher read through the notes and waited a few days to refresh some of the impressions, and then continued to collect notes for approximately five more hours, before the in-game background process was ended.

As the collection of notes was finished, the notes of the author’s feelings were looked upon as they were answers from an interview. The “answers” was analyzed by the researcher who then constructed questions seen appropriate for these “answers”. These questions were then used to build the qualitative questions in the questionnaire. The quantitative questions were made to provide background and demographics of the participants.

The first draft of the questionnaire was given to two different participants. While the subjects answered to the questions the researcher was located nearby, so the subjects could give instant feedback to questions they felt inaccurate or misleading. Based on the subjects’ feedback and answers in the questionnaire minor changes was done.

After the changes was done to the first draft, the questionnaire was sent out to the public. Two versions of the questionnaire were published. However, there was no difference between them and was made solely to be able and distinguish what group had answered to which questionnaire.

The first questionnaire was sent to the researchers’ friends and their friends. It was also published in a closed Facebook-group called *Nintendoklubben*. This questionnaire received 15 answers, and served as the initial target-group of this thesis.

The second questionnaire was published on the subreddit *Dark Souls II* and was closed after 30 hours after receiving 358 answers.

Reddit is an American based forum where members can post links, text comments and images. Members then vote negative or positive depending on if they like the content or not. The website Reddit uses different user-created areas of interest for visitors to easier sort and access content they find interesting. These sections are called “subreddits” and are usually theme-based subforums where specific topics are discussed. There are subreddits for different games, artists, news and more. It was measured that Reddit had almost 1.7 billion unique users in March 2018 (Statista.com, 2018).
4.2 Content Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed with a method called “Conventional content analysis” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

When the survey was closed, the participants’ answers were exported to a google spreadsheet. In summary the analysis was made in two stages. In the first stage, specific words in the answers were coded based on their meaning. The codes consisted of different colors, depending on the emotional meaning of the words. In the second phase, codes with a similar emotional meaning were grouped together into a category. These categories varied in color depending on what codes the answer contained.

Note that even if the category or code is called “negative” it does not mean that the answer is interpreted as bad.

4.2.1 Codes

The participants’ choice of words in their answers were color coded. Four different colors were used to code for positive, negative, neutral or mixed/other types of words.

Green code: For words that were “positive” such as good, excited, interested, intrigued etc.

Red code: For words that were “negative” such as bad, annoyed, lost interest etc.

Yellow code or blue code: For words that were neither positive nor negative. It could also be include of a different nature like “other” feelings, experiences or other thoughts.

The colors yellow and blue could vary depending on the question and what type of answers the question created.

Example of how coding was done:

An example of a question:

“What was your reaction when you understood how you could get involved with the story? Tell me what you felt.”

An example of an answer:

“It felt good; you were not some static element - you could participate in the story and that fact engaged me...”

In this situation the adjective “good” is marked green because has a positive value. The section “you could participate in the story” is marked blue because it is an opinion/ statement. The blue statement is also connected to the last green code “engaged me” since the participant described the reason why he/she felt engaged.
Another example of the coding process:

An example of a question:

“What was your reaction when you understood how you could get involved with the story? Tell me what you felt.”

An example of an answer:

“Main story felt forced on the player, side stories with NPCs were really interesting and made me look forward to meeting them again.”

In this situation the word “forced” is interpreted as something negative and “interesting” is marked green because it is positive. The player felt that the NPC’s were interesting and reported a consequence: “made me look forward to meeting them again”.

The blue sentence was interpreted as a consequence/ result that was born from the positive statement about interesting NPC’s.

4.2.2 Categories:

After the participants’ answers were coded depending on the words, their whole answer was put into a category. There were four different categories, colored accordingly:

Green category: When the participants’ answer only consisted of green codes.

Red category: When the participants’ answer only consisted of red codes.

Yellow category: When the participants’ answer had a mix between green and red codes, or if the answer was neutral.

Blue category: When the participant’s answer contained thoughts or other feelings.

Example of a yellow category, with mixed codes:

An example of a question:

“What was your reaction when you understood how you could get involved with the story? Tell me what you felt.”

An example of an answer:

“Main story felt forced on the player, side stories with NPCs were really interesting and made me look forward to meeting them again.”
Example of a **yellow** category, with a neutral code:

An example of a question:

“*What did you think about the cutscenes?*”

The participant answered:

> “Don’t remember… Haven’t seen a cutscene in years…”

Example of a **blue** category:

An example of a question:

“*What did you think about the cutscenes?*”

The participant answered:

> “Wish there were more”

Because the sentence was interpreted as a thought, it was marked blue. This answer was more of a request, and the meaning of the sentence had to be deciphered. In this case it was done as follows:

The participant probably enjoyed (green code) the NPC’s but is sad (red code) that there are not more of them. And then marked as a yellow category.
4.3 Method Discussion

Before the study started there was a worry that it would be difficult to recruit enough participants for the survey. It was estimated that the questionnaire would generate around answers from 20 subjects. Therefore, only two participants were included in the test run (pilot).

In hindsight the pilot should have been done more carefully since answers from two subjects were not enough to reveal the ambiguity of some of the questions in the questionnaire. I.e. in the actual survey where answers from 358 subjects were obtained from the Dark Souls II forum, it became clear that some of the questions were too broad if all the data to be within the scope of the thesis. Furthermore, some questions were interpreted very differently between participants and thus generated a mixture of answers that did not contribute to the study aims. Due to the large amount of data the number of subjects included in the final content analysis was restricted to the first 100 who answered the questionnaire at the Dark Souls II forum.

It was planned to include 25 more answers from the control group once the first 100 had been analyzed, to perform a check for saturated answers. That is, to compare the 25 answers taken from the control group with the first 100 and evaluate if the answers were different. If the answers would not show any differences regarding the categories, the answers would be validated as “saturated”. This had to be excluded due lack of time.

Due to lack of experience in using the content analysis, the method for coding changed throughout the process.

A few quantitative answers did have an open field for own thoughts which made it more time consuming to get a good overview in google forms. It was also common that the answer written in the open field was the same as one of the options available as a checkbox-answer, and only resulted in more work.

Quantitative data was not frequently used, only in specific cases where the participant referred to their quantitative answer or in some cases to provide some background information about the participant. Like if the participant had any previous experience of the Dark Souls franchise.

Qualitative data: answers that subjectively felt off-topic regarding the aims and purpose of this thesis had to be excluded.
5. Result

5.1 Quantitative data Result

The quantitative data was used to describe the demographics of the study population, see supplementary figures 1-15.

All participants in the second questionnaire (Dark souls II subreddit) were included in the quantitative data analysis.

The age of the participants was categorized into age-groups and the three largest groups were between 17-20 (34%), 21-25 (36%), and 25-30 (18%) years of age. All other participants were 31 years or older.

The vast majority of the 358 participants were male (95%) and 5% were female. Less than 1% did not identify themselves with any sex.

The majority of the players had played the game for more than 61 hours (81%) and 73% reported that they had previously played games within the Dark Souls franchise. Most of the players played alone (86%) and 70% of all participants reported that they knew how Dark souls II uses narrative techniques to deliver the story before they started.

When asked a multiple-choice question on what state of mind they experienced when playing, it appears that the majority had a good feeling: the three most common replies were “relaxed” (58%), “could take my time” in the sense that they did not feel stressed (54%) to hurry through the game whereas 32% selected the answer “tense”, (multiple answers were allowed).

5.2 Qualitative data Result

In the qualitative part of the study, the participants responded in free text to the questions. The answers were categorized into for the sake of not making this thesis too long, answers that was collected from the survey that did not prove useful for the aims and purpose of this thesis had to be removed from the result.

In this section the major findings from the participants answers will be summarized with illustrative quotes. A full list of categories and codes created from the raw-data is available upon request (Raw data). Note that once the responses were coded, the coding was used to assemble quantitative data about the percentage of participants who answered in categories. The following discussion includes breakdowns of how participants responded.
Did you have any expectations about the story/ how the gameplay would be before you played the game?

The answers to this question could be grouped into three major categories: yellow category, blue category and red category.

In the yellow category, participants reported that they had expectations of the gameplay/ story to be equal to their previous experience in any of the other Dark Souls games.

“I expected the game to be very secretive and mysterious about its plot like the rest of the games. I also expected that the gameplay would be similar to the other Souls games, but was surprised to find some differences”

The second major category (red) mentioned that their expectations were based on rumors of how Dark Souls II would be – usually based on negative rumors.

“I had negative expectations, thanks to reviews and watching videos, but after giving it a try myself it's my fave of the entire series.”

In the blue category players reported that they did not have any expectations or tried to avoid information about the story/ gameplay before they played Dark Souls II themselves.

“Not really - just wanted to take everything in completely blind.”

Did you voluntarily participate in the story, or did you feel forced to take part in it?

A Large majority reported that they voluntarily participated in the story. Two percent of the participants reported a feeling of being forced or that there was no way of avoiding the story.

“The game is pretty linear so there's not really any way to avoid it”

Some participants reported that they did not feel forced, but had a hard time following the story, or was confused if there was a story at all.

“I didn't feel forced at all. And I wanted to remove the undead curse. I didn't link the fire through because I had no idea what the fire had to do with anything.”
How long did it take for you to understand how to collect narrative information? Estimate in hours played and how long into the game you were.

If the participant answered that they had previous experience, they usually answered that they knew how to collect narrative information from the beginning.

A common theme from the participants was that the players gained a much better understanding when they completed the game, or in the beginning of their second play-through – usually after they read forums or other third-party information. One percent reported that they ignored the narrative information.

“I remember googling "wtf just happened" when I first beat it. I didn't appreciate the story until my other playthrough after watching lore videos, reading theories etc.”

A few participants with no previous knowledge picked it up early (0-10 hours). While others (with previous knowledge too) reported that it took 10-100 hours.

“40 to understand the main plot and about 80 to nitpick the details. The item descriptions' patch added a lot, so I would say 100 hours to round it.”

What was your reaction when you understood how you could get involved with the story? Tell me what you felt.

Most of the answers to this question involved green codes. With words like excited, inquisitive, very intrigued, Honored and Satisfied.

“Though as I said before I didn't discover this in this Darks Souls I'll still answer it. I was amazed, it was mind boggling, to have such a great game with amazing gameplay and then find out that the lore of it's world goes as deep as it goes, it blew my mind. It is one of the reason why Dark Souls is one of my favorite games.”

Another participant answered:

“At first it was somewhat tedious reading item descriptions that repeated themselves or had seemingly insignificant info but once I started to piece things together it turned into a sense of wonder. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what the first sin was and how the forlorn relate to Aldia, for example.”

There were also several participants that mentioned that the item descriptions gave more meaning to most of the items. A few participants reported that they were disappointed, confused or frustrated about the difficulties of understanding the story.

“I felt confused and frustrated at how convoluted the story seemed and how difficult it was too progress ones understandings”
When/ if you understood how to collect narrative content, did the way you played the game change?

The most common answer from the participants that their gameplay changed as they understood how to collect narrative content from item descriptions, environmental clues and information from NPC’s. It was also common that the participant followed it up with a statement/ thought/ consequence from the blue code region.

“Yes, I began searching for every item I could and reading descriptions far more often.”

A few players reported that the way they played did not change. A small percentage of the participants that said that their gameplay did not change, reported that they already knew how to collect narrative content.

Another group of respondents said that their playstyle did not really change, but that they started to read more of the item descriptions:

“Not really, but I did read a lot more item descriptions.”

Did you feel that the environment helped to tell the story, or told a story of its own? If so, how did it make you feel?

One percent said that the environment did not help to tell the story, or a story on its own. Some participants reported that the environment encouraged even more exploration and that it helped to tell the story.

“Yes, the environment told a story of its own; made me feel more like an explorer, archeologist than anything, but I liked it.”

Some pointed out that they felt lost or confused but it in fact increased their “immersion” or contributed to the atmosphere.

“A bit of both you could definitely feel the grim destruction that had fallen upon this place. You’d see these great buildings in their now desolate state. It helped set make the story about the curse and the many fallen kingdoms seem real. It made you understand the characters and understand their depressive nature and look up to those that did not give up. It is the thing that tied all these stories together and made them feel real.”
Did you go back and re-visit earlier locations for potential story content? (like searching for items or environmental clues)

Most of the participants (76%) reported that they went back with the purpose to search for story content in earlier locations of the game, 21% said that they did not go back. The remaining 3% said that they sometimes did, and/ or it varied depending on what their purpose for going back was:

“Only when getting new items that encouraged it. Keys/memor visiting ability.”

What did you feel if/ when you went back to earlier locations for story content?

Those who reported that they went back to earlier locations for story content, felt a positive sensation when they went back. Which they expressed as follows: “I felt powerful”, “like an explorer”, “awesome” and “epiphany”. A few also specifically mentioned that they enjoyed the feeling of progress when they could go back and easily kill earlier enemies that they struggled versus previously. It was also common that the participants reported that they gained a better understanding of the story when they went back to earlier locations and could use their new knowledge to piece things together.

“Mostly triumph and satisfaction. Going back to earlier locations and ploughing through where I once struggled, certainly made me feel accomplished and triumphant, clearly demonstrating to myself how much stronger I have become. Furthermore the satisfaction comes from finding pieces of the story in areas I’ve already seen, finding the satisfaction in clicking the story into place.”

Some participants reported that what they felt depended on whether they were rewarded for going back or not. If they were not rewarded some participants experienced it as a chore, or that they were forced to be able and understand the story.

“Depends on what I found, if I found nothing I felt I had wasted time... if I found a new wealth of clue to the story it was exciting and made me feel more engaged to the story.”

What did you feel about the interactions with NPC’s?

Most of the participants reported that they felt good about the interactions with the NPC’s (80%), whereas 7% did not care and 4% reported a bad experience. A common theme among those who reported a bad experience said that some of the NPC’s lacked any deeper meaning.

The remaining participants reported that they had mixed feelings about the interaction with the NPC’s. Some expressed adverse feelings about lip-animations. Some said that a few NPC’s were boring or that they lacked any bigger meaning within the game.

“Some of the NPC interactions where done really well but most of them (mostly because there were a huge number of NPC’s) were boring.”
What was good/ bad/ made you not care about the interactions with the NPC’s?

Some of the participants compared the NPC’s with the NPC’s in the other Dark Souls games and based their experience upon that. Some were disappointed or thought that the NPC’s in Dark Souls II were bad.

“Didn't like NPC interactions in DS2, they felt very bland and lackluster compared to DS1.”

Others reported that the NPC’s felt meaningful and had their own stories that made the player interested and curious. It was also common among the participants to compare NPC’s to other games (outside the Dark Souls franchise) and stated that they usually make better NPC’s in Dark Souls II.

“If you tried to follow their stories, the characters became round, even though they should not be due to their low amount of lines and interactions. I liked that some characters were involved in the gameplay, like Vengarl's summons or Agdayne's reaction to light.”

Special place in my heart: the undead who carry a torch and follow you. I felt bad killing those guys.”

Some liked the fact that they could/ had to summon NPC’s to boss fights in order to complete their quest-chain. Some pointed out that the fact that they had to summon NPC to boss fights was negative

“...Don't like having to summon Bernhardt and Lucatiel to continue their questlines. I love em as characters, but I don't appreciate being forced to summon for boss fights.”

If Yes, did it affect your playthrough? In what way? Follow-up question (if the player accidentally/ purposely killed NPC’s)

Most of the participants who reported that they killed an NPC said that they did it in order to complete a quest line. Some players said that they usually killed the NPC’s before they went on to a new playthrough. Some participants reported that they felt bad about killing the NPC’s, even if it was intentional.

“Mostly for finishing Creighton and Pate's quest lines (I chose to kill Pate, since they are both maniacs but at least Creighton doesn't lie to you), and after finishing the game, every other NPC to see if they have any unique drops.”

And

“Only once and at the end of a play through when guides will tell you you are supposed to for all the items but then felt horrible about it and never did it again.”

Others said that they wanted to know what would happened if they killed the NPC’s, usually to see what items the NPC would drop.

A small percentage of the participants that answered to this question who also said that they accidentally killed a NPC, said that they were afraid of missing something. Usually it resulted in unintentional consequences.

“I restarted or tried to find ways around anything I accidentally screwed up.”

Some players reported that they adapted their way of playing depending on what kind of character they played, and therefore took into consideration whether they could kill NPC’s or not.

“I often play high faith builds, so I had to take time to perform penance and obsolve myself from sin.”
Other thoughts about the NPC’s in Dark Souls II?

Some players reported that they liked a few specific NPC’s, and some also thought that other NPC’s were not as good.

“Its very possible that Dark Souls II could have a great NPC interaction. I think the story and the world is great, and I think that the NPCs could play a big role in the overall experience.”

Some also reported that the NPC’s story was divided unevenly over the game and they wanted the NPC’s to be more consistent. Some participants reported that they found the NPC’s interesting, enjoyable, fun to talk to and that the NPC’s added a deeper understanding of the game world and its inhibitors.

“NPC quests were another one of my favorite aspect. They helped tell the story of the main game as well as giving insight into people's life within the world.”
Why was the cutscenes good/ bad or made you not care?

Participants that thought that the cutscenes were good, pointed out that they contributed with access to lore and felt rewarded once they got the opportunity to watch a cutscene. Some said that it contributed to the theme of the game and added tension. A few participants pointed out that it was good that the cutscenes were skippable.

“Gave me a sense of progression and provided some exposition.”

And

“Great quality, to the point and still skippable. Well spread out and not overdone. Polar opposite of the "games" where you watch cut-scenes and press a button here and there.”

Some participants who reported that they did not care said that they were not too concerned about the story, that the cutscenes were boring or that they did not pay too much attention to the cutscenes. Players also reported that even if they liked the cutscenes, they prefer not to lose control of their character.

“The rendered cut-scenes were more jarring the more often I played, since the character had to be neutral; the in-engine cut-scenes were all better fitting, but I prefer not to lose control over my character”

Most of the participants who said that they thought the cutscenes were bad, specifically commented on the bloody vein effect that occurs before boss fights.

“Some of them were fine and fit, but the weird red flashing and heartbeat sounds during boss-intros were so so sooooo out of place.................”

Figure 1. Bloody eye effect. Screenshot taken from CalcoGamins' (2017) video on youtube.
Other thoughts about the cutscenes in Dark Souls II?

Answers to this question follow the pattern seen in the answers on previous question (3.2.13). The most common negative answer was about the “bloody vein” effect that served as an introduction to most of the bosses. However, some participants also said that they enjoyed the introduction to the bosses. Some of the players said that they wanted more cutscenes and others wanted the cutscenes to consist of more narrative content. “Good way to introduce bosses.”

“I loved the mystery behind a lot of them, specifically the opening cut scene.”

Did you feel a lack of knowledge about the story? If so, did it discourage you to continue playing?

Most of the participants reported that they felt a lack of knowledge about the story, but that it encouraged them to continue playing.

“Yes, but that is what makes exploration compelling.”

Some participants also reported that they knew before playing the game, that they would not understand everything about the narrative during their first playthrough.

“Yes (didn't appreciate all the details and nuances first time through) but no, no discouragement (knew ahead of time that the picture wouldn't be complete in a single playthrough).”

One percentage of the players reported that they felt a lack of knowledge about the story, and that it also discouraged the player to continue.

If you used forums/other sites for more information, did it affect your motivation/engagement with the game? Why did you feel that way?

The answers from the participants about searching for information about the story in Dark Souls II could generally be divided into three major categories.

One category consisted of players that reported a positive “boost” to their playthrough as they took part of others’ speculations. They said that by reading information about other players’ findings, they could get a better understanding of the story and how things related to each other - which increased their motivation/engagement.

The other category said that the information they found on forums or videos was not “correct”. They said that it was because the information found on forums/videos are mostly based on another players’ interpretation of the story.

Some said that they only searched for information once they completed their first playthrough and other participants reported that they spoiled the content by reading/watching videos.

“I dislike fan theories and lore explanations about dark souls games because they are usually speculative. furthermore, the community will collectively agree on a theory and announce it as completely true. ambiguity is vital to dark souls’ aesthetic and thematic concerns, and sets it apart from most games in that it is deliberately opaque. to enshrine speculation as fact is to miss the point of dark souls’ storytelling choices and ultimately diminishes them.”

Did you feel that you could decide to ignore or take part of the story if you wanted? What do you feel about that?

The most common answer was that players felt that they could decide for themselves whether they participated in the story or not. Participants reported that the option to choose to what degree they wanted to participate contributed to a sense of freedom and appreciation.
“Souls games are unique in a way that you don't need to understand the story to enjoy the game, since the plot is actually really simple and most of the story comes from the lore, but understanding it certainly enhances your experience significantly.”

Some players said that it was specifically nice that they could ignore the story and primary focus on gameplay. Other Participants said that some parts of the story could be skipped, but others not. A few participants felt that it was easy to miss story content even if they wanted to take part of it.

“No, felt more like the chance to miss parts of the story is very high.”

If no, why not? (If players finished the game)

Every one of the participants who reported that they had not completed the game for various reasons, said that they intend to continue.

What do you think about the way they delivered story to you as player?

Most of the participants answers fit in the positive category.

A big majority of the participants reported something positive about how the narrative is delivered to the player in Dark Souls II. The players used words like brilliant, unique, intriguing, engaging and “the best way to keep the world interesting”. Players also reported that they appreciated that the story was told in a subtle way and made the players work for it. Some participants said that they liked that the game did not try to force narrative content on the player.

“It was well hidden, and non-intrusive. You have equal opportunity to sit and comb through the lore as to play the game with no care for lore at all.”

Players reported appreciation for not being interrupted by longer cutscenes while some players said that they wanted the cutscenes removed due their lack of story content.

Some participants reported that the storytelling was too subtle and at times difficult to understand or that it required too much effort to be able and participate in.

“Its different, not for everyone. Its not my preferred way of content delivery. I would have liked more cut-scenes and more of a cinematic presence.”

Some participants also commented that they like the community that has been created around the Dark Souls II. One participant specifically pointed out that it is enjoyable how the community can make the game-world live on even when not playing.

Other thoughts on the narrative in Dark Souls II?

This question was removed due to big equality to last question (3.2.19) or answers that did not touch on the topic of this thesis.
6. Analysis

6.1 Quantitative data Analysis

The quantitative data was used to describe the demographics and background of the participants. These results were also helpful to deepen the understanding of some of the answers in the qualitative analysis.

6.2 Qualitative data Analysis

The analysis was divided into the four major narrative techniques: cutscenes, NPC, item descriptions and, environmental storytelling

6.2.1 Cutscenes

*Dark Souls II* uses cutscenes sparsely and with little valuable narrative content. The cutscenes that involve story is used exclusively to make sure that the gameplay is not interrupted. All cutscenes in *Dark Souls II* are also skippable.

There are only a few major cutscenes and that involve storytelling in *Dark Souls II*. As seen in the answers from the players, it rarely conveys a feeling of being forced to watch the cutscenes to be able and participate in the story. The fact that the cutscenes rarely contain any invaluable narrative content was interpreted as something positive in terms of the players’ engagement in the game.

An example is the first cutscene which is shown before the player is engaged in the gameplay and it does not interfere with the gameplay. This “major” cutscene sets the mood of the game world. Thus, the players get a vague understanding of what the game will offer already at the start. This cutscene serves as an excellent example of how to “contextualize play”.

Another cutscene that involves more narrative content is put at the end of a playthrough. At this point players are (hopefully) aware that they have defeated the last boss and the cutscene serves as the grand reward. The last cutscene also gives the player a better understanding of what their actions have led to throughout the game. The player can feel that they have achieved something great and stands as the winner of a great challenge, and does not expect to be engaged in any more gameplay – but rather expects to get rewarded. The cutscene is perceived as something positive in this context, since it can provide a content that the gameplay cannot.

If cutscenes that involve narrative content were to be used frequently in a gameplay-heavy game like *Dark Souls II*, the player would most likely feel annoyed to get interrupted as it breaks the flow of the game. Participants of the survey commented that they appreciated the fact that the cutscenes did not contain any vital lore. This comment can be interpreted to mean that these nonessential cutscenes in mid-game were appreciated because they could be skipped without consequences to the understanding of lore.

*Dark Souls II* uses another kind of cutscene for introducing bosses. They do not involve as much narrative content as the two major ones just mentioned. These “minor” cutscenes are used to enhance intense situations where the in-game camera cannot. These are mostly used for boss fights where the feeling of threat for example is enhanced by the use of a different camera angle.

Based on the answers from the players it appears as if *Dark Souls II* has failed with their way of introducing boss fights. The players that reported that they did not like the cutscenes specifically mentioned something negative about the pulsating “bloody eye-effect” seen in the “minor” cutscenes.
Based on the answers this effect and the sound resulted only in annoyance with the boss introductions. Probably because it is repeated and lacks context.

“Some of them were fine and fit, but the weird red flashing and heartbeat sounds during boss-intros were so so sooooo out of place..............”

However, while participants that did not like the cutscenes pointed out the bloody eye effect as something negative, some players said that they liked the way the bosses were introduced. It is thus difficult to draw any general conclusions on the “boss introduction” cutscenes.

6.2.2 NPC

The design of the NPC’s appears to increase the feeling of responsibility among the players. The mechanic of letting players be able to kill NPC’s seems to be one of the aspects that gives the player a feeling of importance that affects not only their relationship to the NPC’s but also to the game as a whole.

Regardless of whether the player killed an NPC purposely or by accident, it provokes feelings. The fact that it is up to the player to decide if they want to kill the NPC’s or not is very positive if it is looked upon with the eyes from the theory of not letting the game decide what the player can or cannot do. Killing NPC’s can in fact remove possibilities for the player and can have negative consequences on the playthrough, but in the end it delivers a much more effective message – The player’s actions matter and have consequences. This is something that players in *Dark Souls II* find out in one way or another, and it is adding to the pile of things that makes the game “player centered”.

*Dark Souls II* also incorporates NPC’s in the gameplay by making interactions with NPC’s obligatory to progress in the game for example when you need a specific item from an NPC, or when the player can summon NPC’s to boss fights.

Based on the answers in the questionnaire there was a lot of mixed feelings about this. Some participants reported that the possibility of summoning NPC’s to boss fights added more depth and interest to the NPC’s. Some said that it was annoying to have NPC’s join the boss fights as an obligatory aspect to progress in their quests.

More players reported that the mechanic of having to summon NPC’s to boss fights to progress in their story was something negative than there were positive comments about it. It is of course different from person to person, but it is understandable as something negative if the same mindset is used for this situation as for cutscenes, and the player’s action matters.

The mechanic of making it possible for players to summon NPC’s to boss fights is standalone not a proof of bad design but becomes bad once it is made obligatory. The aspect of being forced to summon NPC’s to boss fights might not be seen obligatory to complete the game but is necessary if the player wishes to complete some of the NPC’s quest chains.

As soon as someone other than the player is brought to action, or if the player is totally taken out of action (cutscenes) it will interrupt the flow of the game. Especially in a game as *Dark souls II*, where co-operation with NPC’s is not a common mechanic. When it is an action that is being forced onto the player, the player will instantly feel that their freedom is being limited, since the player wants to be the one who decides what action to take, not the game.

As seen in the participants’ answers a core motivation for players in *Dark Souls II* is the sense of achievement when they have overcome an obstacle that they have been struggling with. The reward the player gets when they succeed is very important for their enjoyment in the game. Summoning an NPC that will help them achieve this, will remove a big part of the feedback referred to as triumph.
The decision whether the player should summon the NPC in boss fights should therefore be voluntary, to avoid players from feeling forced into undertaking an action that contradicts the rules of the game.

### 6.2.3 Item descriptions

A big majority of the answers from the questionnaire pointed out that item descriptions was their biggest motivation to take part of the story delivered in *Dark Souls II*. It was also the item descriptions that had the biggest impact on the participants’ playstyle. Players that knew how to collect narrative content from item descriptions before playing *Dark Souls II* – and therefore reported that they did not change their playstyle - were excluded from this conclusion.

Based on the responses in the questionnaire it can be concluded that once the players understood the importance of the item descriptions, it encouraged them to spend more time to discover the secrets of each item they obtained. Players felt that the item descriptions expanded their game world and added more value and meaning to the things they could discover. Players rarely felt that things they discovered or saw in the game lacked a purpose. Instead, item descriptions prompted the players to search every inch of the game to get a better understanding of the lore in the game world. The deeply hidden narrative makes players imagine that everything they see could be part of something bigger which added to the tension and atmosphere of the game.

### 6.2.4 Environmental storytelling

Based on the answers to the questions about the environmental storytelling, the most common answer was that this narrative technique encouraged exploration. However, what the exploration resulted in depended on how the player interpreted their reward. When the players were rewarded they felt a *very positive* feeling which contributed to more encouraged players regarding exploration. When players received little or no positive feedback when they explored the world, the players’ engagement was reduced and they reported feelings of annoyance or that they had wasted their time. This was especially common when players went back to previous locations to find content that they might have missed, or when they wanted to fill in possible gaps in the story that they might have missed. However, most of the feelings that the players’ reported was more based on what kinds of items or NPC’s they found while exploring. It was rarely mentioned that the players found major narrative content from simply “reading” what the environment had to say.

Another major opinion was that the environment contributed to the atmosphere of darkness and hopelessness which the game overall tried to convey.

No particular answers seen in the first 100 answers stick out as something negative about how the environmental storytelling was presented to the players. As players also were encouraged to explore areas for narrative content and that they found that the environment contributed to the atmosphere of the game, the environment could probably serve as a basis for a successful narrative technique in *Dark Souls II*.

### 6.2.5 General

An interesting finding that was noticed in multiple answers, was that many players understood the narrative much better once the player had completed the game at least once. It was common that players visited forums once they finished the game to get even more information about the lore. Even though players reported that they enjoyed the game from the beginning, it seems as if that players enjoyed the story even more after their second playthrough.
7. Discussion

No major conclusions could be drawn in this thesis due to the broad scope regarding the limitations of time and resources when this thesis was written.

Involving many different narrative techniques resulted in only being able to touch the surface of the various narrative techniques. For more depth they should be looked at more carefully. It would probably have been better to just include one of them for a thesis like this. Therefore, there was not enough resources to dive deeper into the analysis. The amount of responses also made the analysis much more time consuming than counted for.

My questions about environmental storytelling did not provide any significant information about how the players interpreted the story given from the environment. I got the feeling that most of the answers covered what player’ experienced in the level design. More specifically, what could be found in the world and how the different areas were connect to each other.

One reason for the lack of answers regarding what players learned from the environment might depend on how my questions were constructed. The questions the players received was not specifically asking questions about how they interpreted the environmental story or what they could understand from it. Some players did mention that they were able to get story content from the environment, but my questions did not invite players to any deeper analysis.

The amount of questions in the survey could also affect the participants patience for longer answers. Especially regarding the questions about the environmental storytelling, as those questions was in the last section of the questionnaire.

For the validity of the results reported from the questionnaire, it would have been good to have several individuals that could go through them individually.
8. Conclusion

The major purpose of the thesis was to gain a better understanding of what impact the major narrative techniques used in *Dark Souls II* had on the players’ experience of the game. The study shows that players enjoy narrative techniques that complement the game-play but detest being forced to choose specific actions. The game should also include proper and appropriately balanced rewards to keep up the players’ motivation. Besides these general results the study also suggests that the players enjoy the subtle way of *Dark Souls II* storytelling. It encourages players to be active in their search for clarity regarding the story. The fact that the story is not only delivered through one narrative technique but a combination of multiple different techniques also appears to be highly appreciated by the participants in the study. The way *Dark souls II* mixes the narratives techniques generate yet another level of challenges which could be seen as another objective for the player to overcome. In a gameplay focused game like *Dark Souls II*, freedom for the player to decide what action to take seems to be a major factor as to why the game has become so successful in how it delivers the story.

Furthermore, the players’ reported experiences of the cutscenes in *Darks Souls II* suggest that it is heavily dependent on the context in which they are shown and that cutscenes should be used with caution to avoid the risk of interfering with the gameplay. Based on the information that was collected in this thesis, cutscenes should not involve narrative content if there is a risk that the player is taken out of action in the middle of a playthrough. Cutscenes should always be skippable, otherwise they may be perceived as an annoying element.

With its difficult and frustrating gameplay, *Dark souls* might be targeted to a specific group of appreciating gamers who seem to be particularly interested in the lore. Whether or not the second playthrough is more enjoyable or not, it can be concluded that *Dark Souls II* has a high replayability.
9. Future work

There are still another 258 answers from the questionnaire that was used for this thesis and could be further evaluated. It could also be interesting to look more deeply into each one of the narrative techniques used in *Dark souls II*. An example could be to get a better understanding of how *Dark Souls II* structure the narrative connections between the different narrative technique
10. References

Available at: https://www.ceros.com/originals/narrative-design-video-game/
[Accessed 24 May 2018].

Available at: https://darksouls2.wiki.fextralife.com/NPCs
[Accessed 24 May 2018].

Available at: http://www.firstpersonschrnor.com/narration-of-things/
[Accessed 24 May 2018].

Batchelor, J., 2017. gamesindustry.biz. [Online]
Available at: https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2017-11-23-why-casual-games-need-a-narrative
[Accessed 24 May 2018].

[Accessed 24 May 2018].

Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_CV0W0FYcE&list=PLobwFu_SShYpawhy4ev_sYhmuOg2Yt9h&index=12
[Accessed 24 May 2018].

Credits, E., 2012. [Online]
Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGXR2dlktc
[Accessed 24 May 2018].

Available at: http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/131410/better_game_design_through_.php
[Accessed 24 May 2018].


Schneider, S., 2016. Tech Times. [Online]
Available at: http://www.techtimes.com/articles/156344/20160506/how-the-last-of-us-influenced-uncharted-4-a-thiefs-end.htm
[Accessed 24 May 2018].

Available at: http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/131298/how_to_build_a_better_cutscene.php
[Accessed 24 May 2018].

1. Supplementary figures

In this section the quantitative data collected from the second questionnaire (participants from the subreddit) is presented.

1.1 Age

Supplementary figure 1.

1.2 Sex
1.3 Platform used

Platform used
357 responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xbox</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playstation</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4 Time played (Approximated)

Time played (approximate)
357 responses

- 81% played 1-5 hours
1.5 Other Dark Souls games

Had you played any of the following games before Dark Souls II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dark souls</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark souls III</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

357 responses

1.6 State of mind when playing

How was your state of mind when you played?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State of Mind</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could take my time</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often interrupted</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressed</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other: 9.0%

358 responses

1.7 Played with someone or alone

Did you play with someone by your side or alone? Pick the option that reflects how you played the most

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Played alone</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Played with company</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

358 responses
1.8 Earlier knowledge about how Dark Souls use narrative techniques

Did you know the way Dark Souls II uses item descriptions, environmental clues and NPC appearance as a way of delivering story BEFORE you played it?

358 responses

- Yes: 70.4%
- No: 27.1%
- Other: 2.5%

1.9 Did you talk to the NPC's until they had nothing new to say?

Did you talk to the NPC's until they had nothing new to say?

356 responses

- Yes: 97.5%
- No: 0.8%
- Other: 1.7%
1.10 Did you accidentally/ purposely kill any NPC's?

Did you accidentally/ purposely kill any NPC's?
356 responses

- Yes, by accident: 44.9%
- Yes, purposely: 38.5%
- No: 9.3%
- Other: 7.3%

1.11 What did you feel about the voice-lines from the NPC's?

What did you feel about the voice-lines from the NPC's?
354 responses

- Good: 75.1%
- Bad: 13.5%
- I preferred to read: 4.2%
- Did not care: 0.8%
- Other: 6.3%
1.12 What did you think about the cutscenes?

What did you think about the cutscenes?
354 responses

- Good: 67.1%
- Bad: 18.9%
- Did not care: 5.1%
- Other: 8.1%

1.13 Do you feel that the cutscenes contributed to the game's story?

Do you feel that the cutscenes contributed to the game's story?
353 responses

- Yes: 19.3%
- No: 5.1%
- Did not care: 67.1%
- Other: 8.5%
1.14  Did you use forums/ other sites to fill in possible gaps about the story?

Did you use forums/ other sites to fill in possible gaps about the story?
352 responses

1.15  Did you finish the game?

Did you finish the game?
353 responses