**Session 1: Before Playing | 15-30 minutes**

Each of these question aims to get at a general notion, “what expectations (about this game) am I

coming in with?” The goal in this reflection is not to test the accuracy of your predictions; rather, the

goal is to identify and reflect upon the assumptions and biases you, as an observer, are bringing into

the experience, as catalyzed by the games’ promotional material, introductory screen, any other

descriptive or suggestive information.

Answer the Questions: Game selected: ELDEN RING

With this in mind, respond to each of the following questions:

What will I like / dislike about it? I I think I will like the gameplay, graphics, and freedom that Elden Ring provides. I am someone who plays a lot of games for a lot of different reasons: some for a great story (The Last of Us), fun gameplay (Mario Kart 8), or to play with friends (Fortnite). In the past I have only played one SoulsBorne game from From Software, and I did not complete it due to life getting busy and its difficulty spike. I like a challenging game that pushes me to get better but in a game that is designed but like many other people don’t want to play a game that is so difficult it no longer becomes fun. So, while I don’t think there is much I will dislike, I am worried that the game will be too difficult and will lose its fun.

What will I find interesting about it/boring or tedious about it? From the review and minimal gameplay, I have seen, I believe that I will find the game mechanics and freedom to be the most interesting. To create a character with a specific skill set and play style that fits me is something I love about Action/RPG games. The thing I may find boring or tedious about the game would have to be the potential grinding of experience/in game currency. In a game like Elden Ring, there will likely get to a point where I come up to an enemy that is too strong and will need to go back and fight lower leveled enemies for an undetermined period to level up. I am personally not a fan of playing the same section repeatedly to level up, and if I must do that then it would take some of the fun out of the game for me.

What will I need to do in it? I am not sure what the story/plot of the game is, so the general goal of my character is unknown to me currently. I do know that I will need explore, fight, and level up my character.

What will I need to learn within it? I will need to learn perseverance, quick reaction time, and the ability to keep an eye on multiple enemies at once. I know that these types of games throw a lot of variety at the player all at once. I will also need to learn to be mindful of all the small details that may be clues towards other pieces of information for the game later.

What will it be like / similar to (other games I have played)? In the past I have played similar Action/RPG games like Bloodborne, Horizon Forbidden West, and most recently God of War: Ragnarok. These games encourage players to try new things, explore, level up, and push them with overcoming difficult enemies. Bloodborne was developed by the same team that created Elden Ring. I image Elden Ring will be challenging, open ended, fun, with great combat and level design.

Final Thoughts: Overall I am very exciting to play this game; it has received universal acclaim for its gameplay, score, environment, and atmosphere. I expect that for I will do well for the first bit of the game as it eases you into the mechanics and then it will have a significant difficulty spike.



**Session 2: Solo Playthrough | 45 to 60 minutes**

Play the game on your own: familiarize yourself with the controls, mechanics and interface; get an

initial understanding of the game’s narrative and its aesthetic. Your goal is to “get a feel” for what it is

asking from you, in terms of: inputs, emotion, and attention.

Note: If you use outside help at any point, make a note of that. The effort here is not to do anything

“correctly”, but to diligently record whatever you do as you try to get a ‘handle’ on the game.

a) Descriptive Notes

Just write as you play -- write anything descriptive, records of objectives, hints, fragments of ideas,

anything. You may elect to write as you play (i.e. pausing the game) or right after you have completed a

play session. Try to get at least 60 minutes of play time.

-loads very quickly

-very detailed character creation. I generally do not take a lot of time to create my character and go for as close as I can to look like me, but I could see someone spend a lot of time customizing how their character looks.

-the opening cutscene explaining the plot is throwing a lot of exposition without much context. I am left a bit confused but also equally curious.

-in the opening room, it appears that people can leave messages for each other to read. There have yet to be any instructions on how to play or what to do.

-encountered the first boss and lasted all of 10 seconds. Not sure how to block or run and the one hit I got on it did barely any damage. Seems like I was supposed to lose to move forward.

-fighting the first couple of enemies, they seem to be easy but I feel like I am getting a false sense of confidence.

-the game is now providing me with how to play in a tutorial like dungeon. The enemies are far easier than the boss I encountered earlier.

-I defeated my first boss, and while I feel like the fight was easy, I still lost a lot of health as I continue to learn the mechanics of the game.

-the game gives little to no instruction on what to do next. I feel kind of lost at the moment.

-entering the open world, I am left awestruck. It looks stunning and there is so much to explore. I am very excited.

-first enemy I encountered in the open world was a boss who rode a horse. I got one good shot in before being killed. This game does not hold your hand for long.

-I am so lost. I have no idea where to go or what to do but I am really enjoying exploring and encountering enemies that don’t kill me in one hit.

-slowly feeling like I am getting the hang of it. Entering my first cave within the open world.

-it took me three attempts to clear the first section of the cave with wolves in it. Not sure how I feel about the rest of the cave.

-beat the boss in the cave on my second attempt. I forgot midway through the fight that I could jump and that made for an easier fight.

-I am beyond confused on where to go and how to level up, so I am Googling it to give me a sense of direction.

-after looking up how to level up, I wonder how long it would have taken me to get to this point without guidance. There was no indication on where to go or how I would go about doing this.

-I slowly feel like I am getting better but still have no idea where to go or what to do.

-I played for about 90 minutes and so far am really liking it. It presents a challenge in both combat and exploration. I am excited to play it further.

b) Analytic Notes

After playing, consider your experience more holistically -- What problems did it present me with?

What options did it give me (to address those problems)? When and how does the game invoke gender,

class, race, violence in ways that might be problematic? What about learning? Does anything stand out

as a ‘defining’ or ‘unique’ feature of the game?

-The problems that Elden Ring presented to me were its combat and its lack of instruction. As you first start the game, there is no prompt to explain how to do anything and puts the player into a fight against a boss that is designed for you to lose to. Once I got through the initial tutorial area, I began to explore the vast open world, but I had no idea where exactly to go. The game gives you no indication on where to go and the only way I found out how to level up was by looking it up online. I believe that is the appeal of this game is to be challenging in that regard, so more causal gamers may be put off by it.

In my time playing the game, Elden Ring did a good job allowing players to customize their character’s appearance as they saw fit. Violence is in this game, but I would not say it is directed a particular group of people, but rather fighting unidentifiable soldiers and creatures.

The thing that stands out the most to me in this game is its difficulty. The game challenges its player to have quick reflexes and try to piece together where to go and what to do. The only options you have are to figure it out or Google it, which I had to do to find out how to level up. I am sure I would have found it eventually but how long that would have taken is unknown. Many games have stunning graphics and an amazing musical score, but not many AAA titles actively work towards making the game for the player as hard as possible.

c) Affective Notes

Playing and analyzing games are subjective activities -- as you played, you were likely: engaged,

irritated, startled, sympathetic, angry, bored, etc. Identify the affective responses you had while playing,

and do your best to account for the in-game circumstances that gave rise to them (i.e. where, when,

intensity, etc.) Don’t worry about being exhaustive, just mention what you think matters.

-I was very engaged with the game so far. I enjoyed exploring and slowly getting better with combat. I hope that as I progress through the game that I can find better equipment and can see my progress made in combat skill. There was one boss that I encountered in the cave that killed me, to which I got frustrated by the death and determined to beat it. During my second attempt, I had remembered that I could jump, which I had forgotten that I could do (since playing God of War: Ragnarok that does not have a jump button) and that allowed me to defeat it. That victory provided a sense of accomplishment, which I think this game is know for.

Session Fieldnotes

At the end of your fieldnotes for session two, craft one or two sentences (no more) that, for you,

summarize your experiences of learning this new game, and what specific elements/skills/etc., based on

your experience of solo play, to be the most important in getting a ‘handle’ on the game. Include at least

one image that demonstrated this/these crucial game elements/skills/characteristics.

A picture containing text, night sky

Description automatically generated-Elden Ring forces the player to overcome challenging foes while also leaving you to explore the world with no hints on where to go. My first 90 minutes of playing it have got me hooked to get better, find new gear, and become a better player.

This image is of me first entering the open world area, which signifies the vastness the game offers. It also shows that there is no compass or waypoint telling me where to go, but rather to go explore.

Session 3: Video observation | 45 to 60 minutes

Watch an online video of your game, either via live-streaming (Twitch.tv) or conventional video

(YouTube). Get a sense of how an expert plays that game: see how they understand and react to the

game and how that differs from YOUR playthrough; see what it is like to watch the game not just as a

viewer, but as a mass media spectator. Again, organize your account into three kinds of notes.

a) Descriptive Notes

Document what the player is doing, paying attention to, ignoring, prioritizing, but also what they are

talking about (i.e. what they verbally frame as important during the playthrough). Make notes of what

the player is paying attention to, prioritizing, and/or ignoring and if and how that is different from your

play.

- <https://www.twitch.tv/videos/1719486714>

-watching SebbywebzTV’s first playthrough of Elden Ring

-Sebby is very active when engaging with his Twitch chat.

-Sebby spends over an hour chatting with his chat and getting ready before playing Elden Ring. I had to skip ahead to when he starts the game.

-he notes that this is not his first Souls game, I wonder if he has played them all before or only one or two. Myself have only played Bloodborne and did not complete it so I am hopeful to get some hints from his stream. He is also has a beer as a beverage so he must be confident in his skill.

-he notes that when creating a character that there are two separate prompts to pick which class you want, that was something I had not noticed myself.

-he does a bit where he goes over each class and provides a different voice when reading their description.

-he decides to go with the Vagabound class, while I went with Warrior. I am eager to see if he has an easier time dealing/taking damage.

-I skipped ten minutes ahead to see where he was at and he was still at the character creation, playing around with facial attributes. As I predicated, you could spend a lot of time playing around with the detail. I am going to skip ahead to the actual start of gameplay to move things along.

-gameplay starts after an hour of the character creation section.

-Sebby prioritizes creating a funny looking character to for the laughs of it and to provide comedy for his chat.

-he immediately runs off the map and dies. That was something I did not do. Maybe I am going to be better at this game.

-he starts off looking around like I did, seeing if he can find loot.

-at one point he tries to create a poll and uses the prompt “live or die” but couldn’t due to Twitch’s policy and he got annoyed/mad that he couldn’t use die. Said “apparently it is too triggering for some people.”

-fighting the first boss, he is immediately doing better than me. Sebby has definitely playing a Souls game before. He does eventually die but took out almost half of the boss’ health while I only got one hit in.

-Sebby takes lots of time to engage with his Twitch chat. I am going to skip ahead of the tutorial area to when the open world component comes into effect.

-Sebby’s play style is to pick a class that can take hits more and deal more damage. This is different from my character who is quickly and has better endurance.

-Sebby spends a lot of time exploring and killing the wildlife for experience and resources. This is probably a good idea that I did for a small bit but moved on to a dungeon due to ignorance. I am going to skip ahead to see what his approach to a dungeon and boss are like.

-he approaches a cave that has a user message that states “light required ahead”. He says screw it and goes into the darkness, while I went back to a merchant to get a torch. I am eager to see how this plays out.

-Sebby says he needs a torch, but his chat is telling him to go in without it.

-watching him play this dungeon after playing it myself, a torch would make this far easier to navigate and fight. Sebby chooses not to use a torch for the chat’s enjoyment.

-a lot of what Sebby is saying to provide comedy during the stream. He is likely a mix of a skill and comedy streamer when providing entertainment. He is clearly skilled at Souls games but has banter with himself that is fun to watch.

-Sebby does not notice that you can spawn in an NPC to help in this fight, nor has he unlocked the ability to call in the Ashes of War allies. He dies on his first attempt of this boss fight while I beat it on the first go.

-Sebby leaves the dungeon to collect more runes to level up.

-He consistently goes back to watch footage he captured minutes ago.

-Sebby goes back to the starting point of the open world and see the boss that roams the area. He goes to fight him and is confident in beating him. My attempt ended terribly so I am curious how he will do.

-Sebby also dies from this boss and does barely any damage like me. Happy to know that I am not the worst at this game.

-Sebby takes a break after that boss encounter, and that is where I think is an appropriate time to stop watching and reflect.

b) Analytic Notes

Review your descriptive notes and consider the problems the player encountered and the strategies/

solutions that they enacted. Furthermore, consider how the player navigated/commented on issues/

structures of race, gender, class, and violence. What did you notice about the game when you watched,

as opposed to when you played? Hold off on making any big conclusions for now.

-Sebby’s online presence was clearly aimed towards men and would often do things the chat suggested because he would get called out and called a “wuss” or a “beta”. At the point of the lightless dungeon, Sebby goes in without a torch and mentions that he now has a better chance to “pick up bitches at a bar”. This kind of humor is not one that I enjoy and I find it only perpetuates the discrimination that female gamers face every day.

Regarding gameplay, Sebby also found the game to be difficult and died numerous times during the time I watched him play. The difference between the two play styles were that Sebby was far more brash and ran into encounters, while I would take my time and read the different notes that other players left behind. His reasoning for this is likely because he is providing entertainment for his audience, while I am just playing for myself and wanting to progress through the game. Another difference I found was that I thought the game to be very open ended and gave me little guidance on what to do, but since Sebby has plays Souls games before, he felt that this game was quite generous with its aid compared to earlier entries from From Software.

c) Affective Notes

What affective responses did you observe the player having while playing? What evidence did you have

of their affective response/s? What did they choose to focus on? How were they different from

responses and focus/foci you had? Pay specific attention to instances where you were surprised by

something the player said or did. And if possible, reflect on how affective responses impacted the

‘learning’ or ‘engagement’ you think can be recognized and documented from this observed play

session.

-The affective response I had while watching SebbywebzTV was initially excited, and I laughed along with his character creation. It was clear that he had played games like this before so seeing him know what kind of play style wanted was useful. If I went back and created my character again, I would do things differently. Sebby focused on providing entertainment for his audience, whether that be creating a funny looking character, or entering a cave without a light source; his goal was to provide a fun viewing experience for his followers. Sebby focused on exploration and picking a character that has higher strength and can deal/take more damage, while I focused on higher health and dexterity.

One thing that took me by surprise was the shift towards misogynistic humor in the stream. I had not done any prior research into his work, but hearing that joke made me rethink my whole opinion of him. From that point I was disengaged with whatever commentary Sebby had. That behaviour is rampant in the video game industry and there are multiple stories of women being mistreated and unwelcomed to put it lightly.

Session Fieldnotes

At the end of your fieldnotes for session three, craft one or two sentences (no more) that, for you,

summarize your observations of a more skilled player playing this game. Include one image that

supports your conclusions.

-Watching Sebby play was both enlightening and frightening, for he was clearly skilled in Souls games but focused on sexist humor for entertainment. Sebby gave me some insight into how I should create my character, but not how I would joke if I were to stream on Twitch.

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated

The first image is a screen of Sebby fighting the first boss (one which you are supposed to lose to) and having dealt a significant amount of damage.

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated

The second image is a screenshot of the character he created, after having spent over an hour creating him. When I played the game, I spent amount 5 minutes creating the look of my character because I wanted to get into the gameplay quicker.