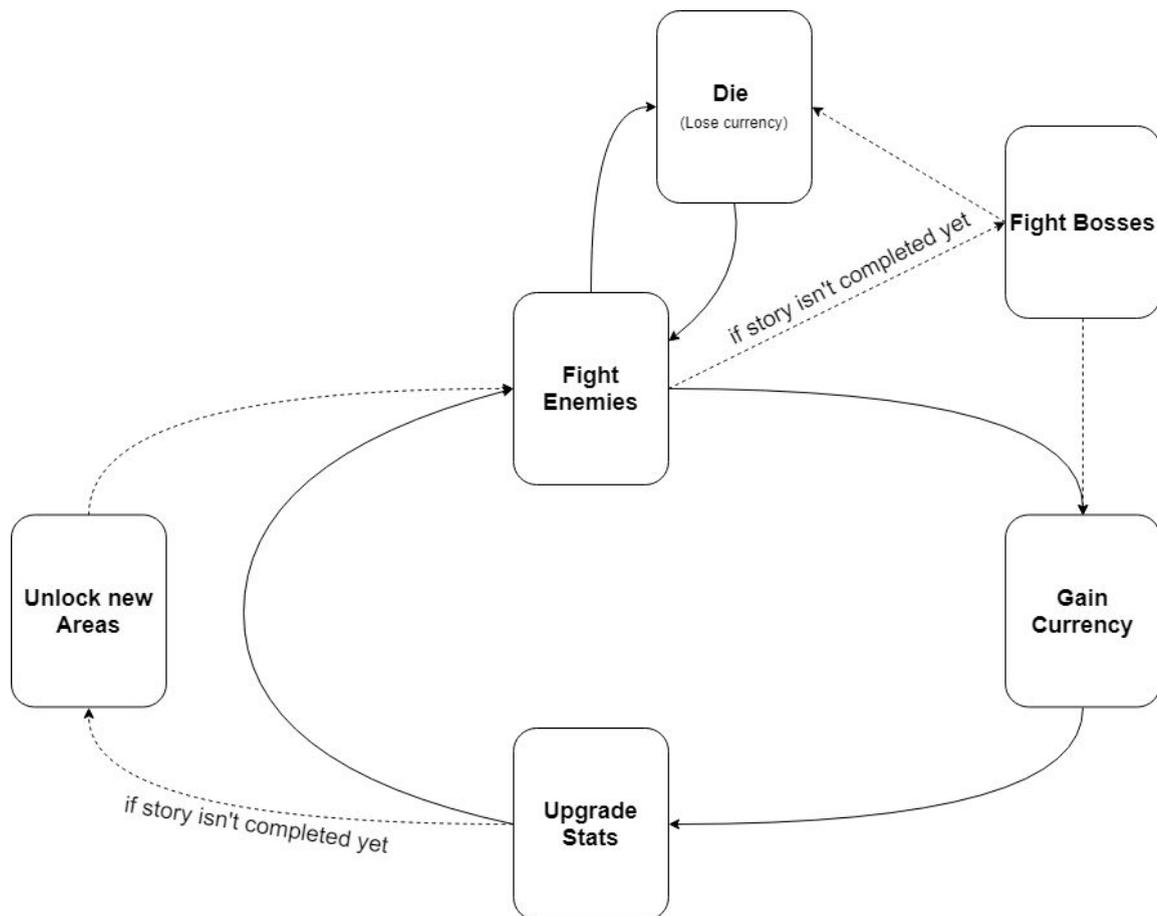


Game Design III

Game: Dark Souls III

Analysis

Game Core Loop



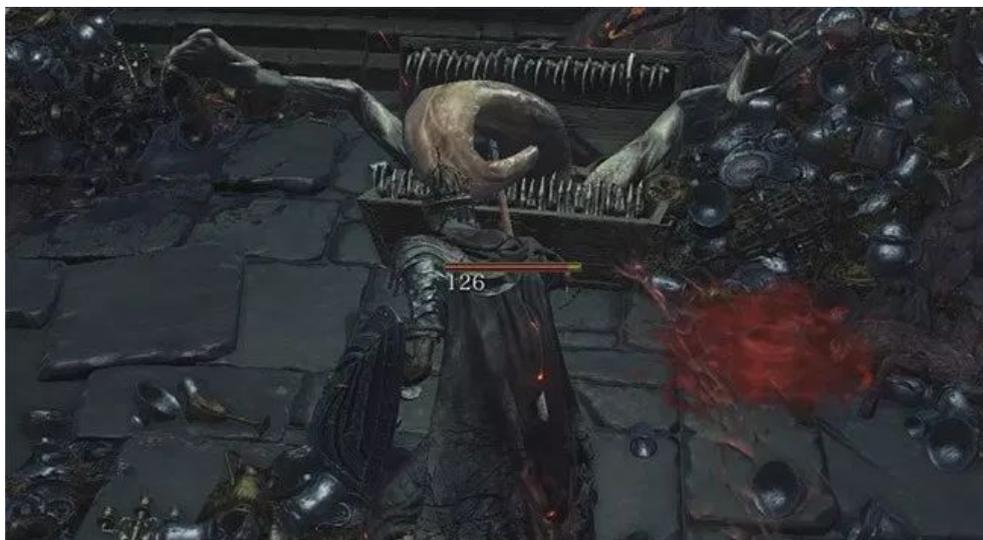
How does the Core Loop connect to the meta gameplay?

In Souls Games, combat is an essential part of the gameplay and create tension as well as empowerment after having succeeded.

They put players in situations where they are expected to fail or at least are put under pressure, providing a challenging or surprising situation. This happens through Level Design Patterns and precise usage of atomic parameters to adjust the difficulty of each encounter in its specific environment.



This gargoyle appears just as you go on the bridge, making chances high it throws you from the bridge into death.



Fake chests deal a significant amount of players without them being able to react, often killing them early in the game if they are harmed from previous encounters already.

Silvan Koch
GDP302

Dark souls' meta gameplay is about progression, and by keeping the player in the core loop by regulating the progression with blowbacks of dying, pacing in level design and increase of currency, they create a flow curve that players can find themselves in.

Also, the gameplay represents parts of the narrative and the context of the world space - you play as a hollow, dying over and over again with no meaning but to bring the lords of cinder back to their thrones. The theme of death and afterlife is depicted in the design of the enemies as well as the setting of the game, which you can see by fighting enemies / bosses, unlocking new areas and dying just to continue your journey.

Why is this fun?

The core loop alone works a lot with principles like **tension & release**, increase of **pacing** and player **rewarding**.

The fact that you can lose all your currency when dying creates tension. When you die, your currency is first dropped and permanently vanishes once you die again without having it collected from where you first died. Having this in mind, making one's way to the save spot or finding his dropped currency again gives the player a feeling of reward and success.

Furthermore, while many deaths and overwhelming situations can certainly feel frustrating, these circumstances empower the player's perception of meaning and the impact of their actions. Souls Series players seek challenges, and through that, successes in this game mean a lot.

After having won a boss fight or passed the last group of enemies before a save spot, the player instantly knows that he has reached the peak of difficulty, and that he has passed it. Followed is a release in difficulty, mostly giving players the option to save the game, return to the "lobby" of the game where they can buy items and upgrade their stats. From there, the players get to see their progress once again by having a larger amount of currency to spend and by being able to access new areas.



Defeating a boss rewards the player with a big prompt on the screen and gives access to a save spot.

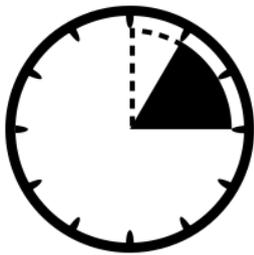
Rational Design

What player skills are required?



Reflexes

Players need to recognize enemy attack patterns quickly and react to them. Bosses have set patterns with windows of opportunity that players need to use, or else, fights will be much more difficult than intended / necessary.

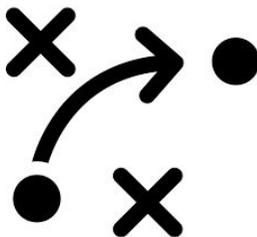


Timing

In Dark Souls III, dodging attacks has been refined and reward the player when performed correctly.

Depending on enemy attack patterns, the player has concrete time spans and directions in that the player can dodge to evade the whole attack. This is necessary especially when they are enemies that cannot be

parried.



Strategy

Players need to actively think about how they face different enemies. There are many situations where fleeing / repositioning is much more efficient than sole combat. Also, bosses can be fought with a long-term plan instead of adjusting character stats and abilities in general.



When fighting the Abyss Watchers, players can wait for clones of the boss to appear, which can cause fights between themselves. That opens a window of attack possibilities for the player.

Atomic Parameters

Combat is the core mechanic of the game, so combat situations are portrayed here.

Atomic Parameter	Easy	Medium	Hard
			
Target size on the screen <i>[% of screen size]</i>	>3x Player size ~33-25% of the screen	~Player size ~10% of the screen	~Player size/ 2 <5% of the screen
Movement frequency <i>[Position replacement / s]</i>	Rarely moves <1	Moves evenly 1-3	Moves steadily >3
Speed <i>[Δ% of screen size / s]</i>	Slow <20%	Medium 20%-40%	Fast >40%
Avg. Combat Duration <i>[s / kill]</i>	Weak enemy <2s	Normal enemy 2-4s	Tank enemy >5s

Level Design Patterns Table

Key:

- Each “Easy” element counts as 1, “Medium” as 2 and “Hard” as 3.
- Each explicitly needed player skill counts as 2
(explicitly needed: the situation differs from normal gameplay and requires the skill at that moment more than normally)
- Index number: Grouping to segments of the game;
index letter: Increase of pacing in this segment

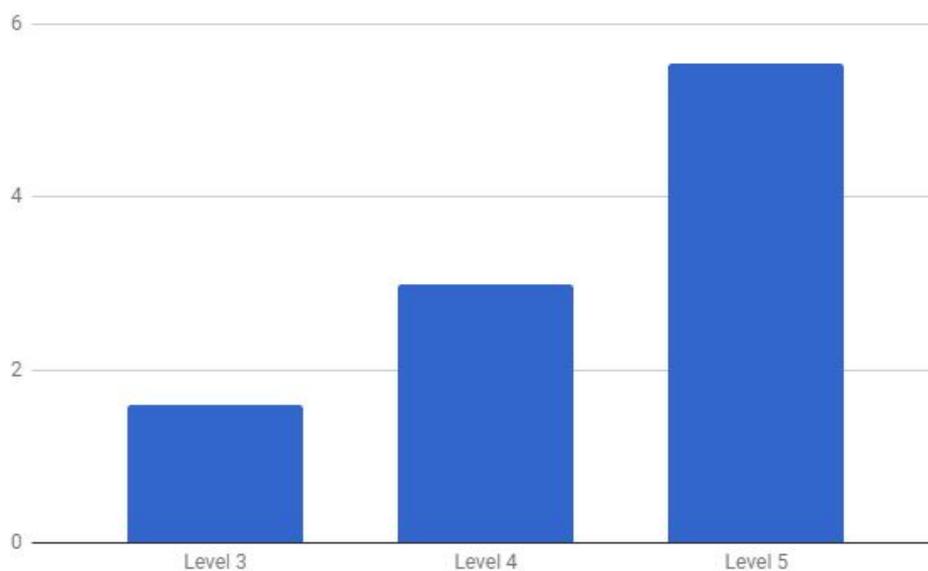
Pattern index	Description	Easy	Medium	Hard	Needed Player skills	Difficulty
1A	 1 normal enemy, visible on screen	1	0	0	---	1
1B	3 normal enemies	3	0	0	---	3
1C	 2-3 normal enemies (one ranged), visible on screen but distanced	1	1	0	Timing (dodge projectiles)	5
1D	One strong enemy	0	0	1	Reflexes (adapt to attack pattern)	5
2A	2 medium enemies, 2 easy enemy	2	2	0	---	6
2B	 One strong enemy with terrain	0	0	1	Strategy (alternatives to pure combat) Reflexes (reacting to attacks with environmental constraints)	7

	disadvantage					
2C	2 strong enemies	0	0	2	Timing (find windows of opportunity)	8

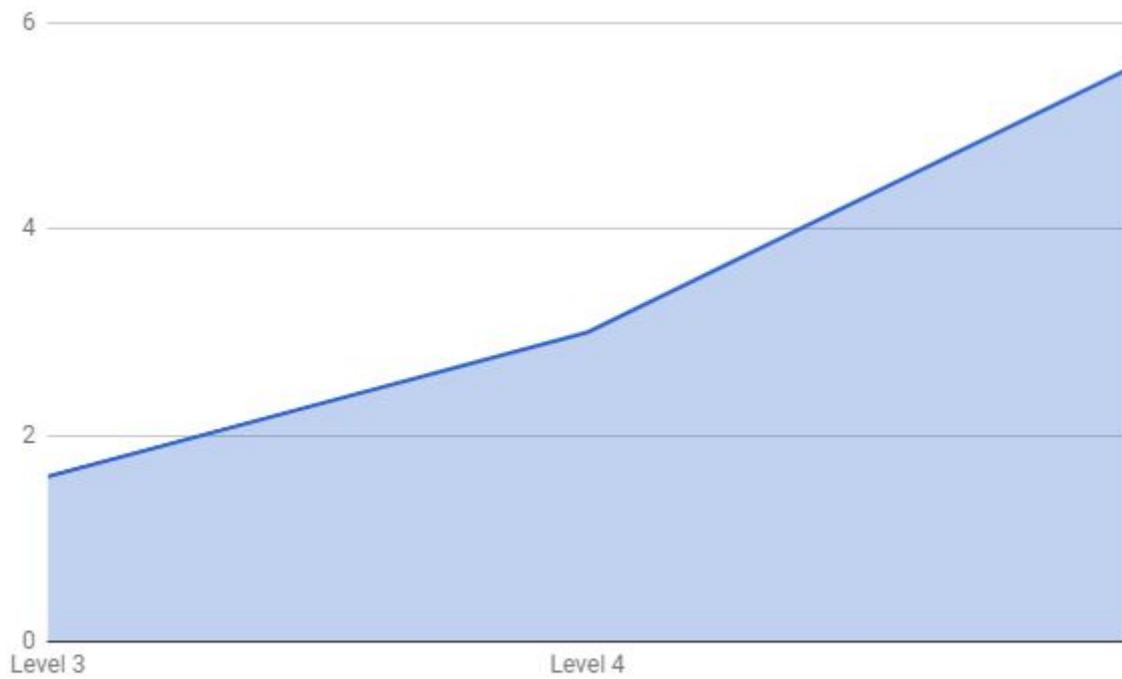
Level Design Patterns Overview

The player is unlocking a new area after Level 4 → Level 5, meaning an increase in pacing.

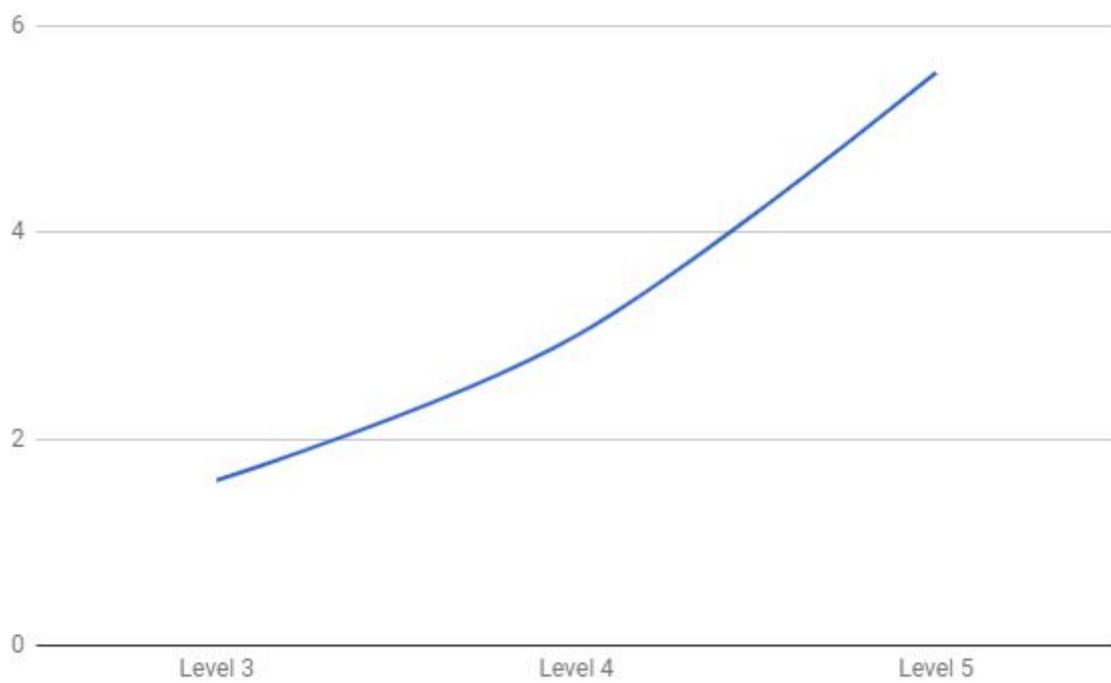
Pattern	Level3	Level4	Level5
1A	70%	30%	
1B	30%	40%	
1C		20%	30%
1D		10%	30%
2A			30%
2B			5%
2C			5%



The difficulty of the levels displayed as bar chart.



The increase of difficulty per level.



The general increase in pacing over the levels.