Don't go Hollow, Friend.

An in-depth analysis of an online videogame community and their communication.

Student Name: Indy Ayrton Diets
Student Number: 545854

Supervisor: Dr. Leandro Borges Lima

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ABSTRACT

Technology is changing how people communicate, how people connect with one another, and how relationships between strangers and friends alike are constructed. This thesis aims to explore the configurational relationship between a form of media, in this case the videogames of the Dark Souls franchise, and a community that almost exclusively exists and interacts in virtual environments. The most relevant findings in this thesis were related to how members of this specific virtual community communicate with each other, express their sense of belonging to this community and how the Dark Souls videogame (communicative) mechanics play a role in this. Therefore, the research focuses on the Dark Souls videogame franchise gameplay, and the Dark Souls community that exists on the content-sharing and forum-like website Reddit. The aim of this thesis is to answer the question: *How are certain gameplay elements of the Dark Souls franchise used by the related virtual community to both construct and observe this community, and to communicate with other community members?*

A thematic analysis was used in this research to research the configurative relationship between Dark Souls gameplay and the Dark Souls Reddit community. Before the thematic analysis was conducted, several hundred threads and posts were collected from the three most active Dark Souls related 'subreddits'. Additionally, Dark Souls gameplay mechanics that allow players to interact with other players through online functionalities were analysed in order to make sense of some of the contents that were stumbled upon during the thematic analysis of the community on Reddit. The analysis of the gameplay also helps understand some of the most arguably most important mechanics within the videogame that, observable in the results of this research, configure the community, it's members and the communication among them.

The results of this research show that a configurative relationship between the Dark Souls videogames and the online Dark Souls related Reddit community exists. Usage of Dark Souls jargon in discussion on Reddit shows that the gameplay and lore of the franchise configure the modes of communication in the community. What also reflects that affectation of the virtual universe is the

way Dark Souls community members identified themselves, and how they expressed a certain sense of belonging to this specific community. Additionally, community members also discussed how individual gameplay experiences are altered by the larger Dark Souls community. The online functionalities of Dark Souls allow players to (involuntarily) enter the virtual world of other players, leading to unique, unintended gameplay experiences. What became evident throughout the analysis of the relationship between the community and the gameplay, is that the (common) experiences had by community members lead to a common understanding of emotions, jargon, gameplay interactions, discussions and more, showing the importance of the gameplay itself in the construction of the community and the subjects discussed, and even in what manner they discuss these subjects.

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busy, but always figured out how to spend time together. You proofread my thesis many times, and I am forever grateful for that. If it were not for your proofreading, everything would be incoherent and messy, you are a lifesaver. You also support my gaming hobby and enthusiasm, even if it does not interest you at all, you are understanding and loving nonetheless. Without you, I would have gone crazy while writing my thesis. In this time of Covid-19, writing a master's thesis and all other things, you kept me sane by just being there for me and listening to my rants.

Introduction

The original title for this paper used to be "Don't go hollow, *stranger*", rather than *friend*. The usage of the word stranger was based on the Dark Souls references used by a virtual community and refer to the fact that all community members are technically communicating with strangers. However, during the analysis of this community, at times, it felt like that members of the Dark Souls community did not consider each other strangers at all. People address each other as if they are friends, not having to explain their intentions and they can just share their opinions and feelings with one another. Towards the end of this thesis I felt like 'stranger' no longer fit the title, and friend or a similar term was more compatible with what I had observed within this specific community. Incidentally, my personal first contact with the Dark Souls community was through a close friend. He introduced me to the franchise, and before I even installed the game, he already gave me some advice: "Don't turn to the internet when you do not know what to do. When you are stuck, do not give up and keep trying. Otherwise you won't get the most immersive and extensive Dark Souls experience, trust me." And so, I did, I booted up Dark Souls 2, and began my first journey through the enemy infested areas of Lordran. It took me over 70 hours to reach the credits for the first time, but it was a unique gaming experience like I never had before. As my friend suggested, I never turned to the internet for help when I was stuck, which in some cases could be for days on end. I find that this advice really did provide a unique experience, in which I really invested both emotionally and mentally into the virtual universe of Dark Souls 2 (Namco Bandai, 2014).

When my friend gave me this advice, he could already be considered part of the Dark Souls community, and over the course of this research, it became clear he was not the only one who suggested that first-time Dark Souls players, experience the game 'alone', as many of the community members do too. Fast forward to now, I consider myself to be somewhat familiar with and part of both the Dark Souls franchise and its related online communities. Whenever I introduce someone else to Dark Souls, I (replicate) my friend's advice and tell them the same: to go into the game blind without any form of assistance. As I was pondering what a good research topic would be for my Master's Thesis, these questions arose: Why is this community so set on newer players experiencing the game in a certain way? Should not everyone decide for themselves how they experience a videogame? And what does it matter in the end anyway? Then, why am I too replicating the opinion that many have within the Dark Souls community? Besides the specific way of playing the game, the Dark Souls community voices many more intriguing opinions, and communicate them in unique ways. They use expressions that are seemingly strange, that make no sense if you have never played the game. The specific and peculiar ways that Dark Souls players interact, in which I participate, is what inspired me most to conduct research on this specific community and videogame franchise.

In this day and age, it could be argued that modern technology either brings people together or drives them apart, depending on who you ask. Communication across long distances is increasingly becoming easier and more accessible. These technological developments do not only eliminate the geographical limitations of communication, but also allow for the existence of communities in virtual spaces (Angrosino, 2011; Fernback & Thompson, 1995; Wellman and Gulia, 1997). How do communities online differ from communities in real life? What drives people to be part of a virtual community and where do they meet? In this thesis one specific virtual community will be the main topic of research, the Dark Souls community.

The 'Dark Souls' series (sometimes named 'Soulsborne series') is a Japanese, similarly named videogame series created by From Software. The first game in the Soulsborne series is *Demon's Souls* (Namco Bandai, 2009) and was released in 2009, however the first 'real' Dark Souls (Namco Bandai, 2011) game was what popularized the series. Dark Souls could be considered a genre defining game series, as other games that share similarities with the gameplay are often labelled as Soulslike games in reviews or by critics (Caldwell, 2019; Hamilton, 2015; McCormic, 2019). After Dark Souls became popular, developers became inspired by the gameplay and mechanics of Dark Souls, and in the 2010's many games that can be considered Soulslike were released. Which games exactly can be defined as Soulslike is not clear, but there is a plethora of games such as *Nioh* (Sony, 2017), *The Surge* (Focus Home Interactive, 2017) and *Code Vein* (Bandai Namco Entertainment, 2019) that clearly are heavily inspired by the Dark Souls franchise and therefore fall under that category. However, some games such as *Titan Souls* (Devolver Digital, 2015) are also considered Soulslike, but are visually and gameplay wise not as closely comparable as the aforementioned videogames. Dark Souls itself has a reputation in the videogame community and is known for its high difficulty and learning curve, which could be one of the many reasons for its success.

The main focus of this research will be trying to make a connection between the communication mechanics and lore within the Dark Souls videogames, and how these possibly affect the community on third-party platforms. I will look at how the lingo, communication and discussions in the online Dark Souls community configure the unique communication methods that players are limited to in-game. What makes the Dark Souls franchise and its community fascinating, is that in the virtual world, the communication between players is minimal due to the in-game limitations, yet it seems that there is a large community that can be found online. Previous academic research on the Dark Souls franchise exists, however, these mostly focus on the narrative, gameplay, or psychological effects within the trilogy (Barr, 2014; Graff, 2018; Neuen 2016). The Dark Souls community likely exists in many virtual spaces and might even have existed in real life spaces at

points in time as well. One place the Dark Souls community exists with many active members and participants is on the content sharing website Reddit, the focal point of the analysis.

In this thesis, I will argue that the unique way the Dark Souls videogames limits its players in-game in terms of communication, likely changes how the community around the game in online spheres is formed and interacts, therefore being an interesting aspect to research in-depth. I will aim to answer the question: *How are certain gameplay elements of the Dark Souls franchise used by the related virtual community to both construct and observe this community, and to communicate with other community members?*

However, in order to give a more nuanced and in-depth answer to the research question, the aim is to also answer some sub questions which will be used to provide a more extensive answer to in which way the Dark Souls community, franchise and gameplay are intertwined. For instance, what are some of the community related 'keywords' and their meanings? How do the in-game mechanics and gameplay contribute to the creation of communities, communication, and discussions? How does this specific community manifest itself outside the videogame franchise? And how do community members identity themselves in relation to the rest of the community and the Dark Souls franchise? In order to answer these questions several steps had to be taken both theoretical and analytical.

Societal and academic relevance

In this day and age, videogames in general are increasingly becoming a larger part of the media landscape, where its global value and revenue is projected to catch up with the global movie market, and is already far exceeding the global music market's value, earning its place in the media landscape economically (Gough, 2019; Watson, 2018a; Watson, 2018b). Therefore, it could be argued that it is important to get a better understanding of this type of media in general, as they are increasingly widespread, accessible, and enjoyed by many and therefore socially relevant. In recent years, videogames are even being explored to improve education. For example, some literature discusses the potential usefulness of videogames in classroom settings (Barr, 2014; Mileham, 2008). However, there are many angles that can be taken when discussing and studying the intricacies of videogames and the videogame industry, in this paper I aim to contribute to a broader and better understanding of this relatively new form of media by discussing a seemingly small and specific phenomenon observable through videogames. This research mainly focuses on the relationship between videogames and their specific (virtual) communities, and the way videogames may form the communication and communities in these virtual spaces.

How virtual communities are constructed and their complexities are quite different from regular communities. Online communities lack geographical proximity, and it is argued that therefore the relationships that are established within these communities are weaker than if they were to be established in a real life community (Blanchard & Markus, 2002; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005; Wellman & Gulia; 1997). Whether this is true, and how relationships in virtual communities differ from relationships between members in real life communities, has already been explored in the academic world and will be briefly discussed in this thesis. However, what is less explored is the potential affectational relationship between a virtual community, the members of a virtual community and a specific videogame franchise. In these virtual communities, the relationships between members are almost exclusively taking place online, and therefore the way members perceive one another is virtual as well. Understanding what drives the communication methods, the opinions and the general discussions of virtual communities could be of importance considering the rapid advancements within communicative technology over the past few decades. As an increasing number of people gain access to the internet and its capabilities of long-distance communication and thus community creation, complexity of these communication will also increase (Statista, 2019). Gaining a better understanding of (isolated) communities that solely exist in virtual environments could be important if communities in general may transition from real life to digital in the future.

Thesis structure

In this thesis, first, a theoretical framework will be presented, where the concepts of community, virtual communities and online communication will be explored. The concept of configuration will be introduced in this framework as well, which later will be used to make sense of the relationship between videogame and gamer (Lima, 2018). How videogame interfaces and virtual spaces can be observed and made sense of will be illustrated through related literature as well. Especially the important aspects of virtual communities will be highlighted, as this reflects most of the important findings in the data later on. Second, the methodology for data collection and data analysis will be provided. In this section, choice for thematic analysis will be substantiated. Additionally, the entire data collection process and decision making done throughout this process will be presented as transparently as possible. Third, the results of the analysis will be discussed. Certain Dark Souls gameplay mechanics and communication limitations will be analysed, with the purpose of enhancing the comprehension of the contents found in the dataset and exploring potential community inspirations. Then, an in-depth analysis of the Dark Souls Reddit community is included. This section of the chapter will be subdivided in several themes, which reflect the main patterns or important findings within the dataset, with the goal of providing a comprehensive overview of the analysed community and its intricacies. Finally, in the conclusion, the research

question is answered, as well as the main findings from the analysis and their relevance, will be

presented.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1 Previous Dark Souls literature

As mentioned previously, Dark Souls has been discussed in the academic world (Barr, 2014; Fusdahl, 2019; Graff, 2018; Neuen, 2016). The angles that other scholars have taken on this popular franchise are often focused on the game's narrative and storytelling, knowledge sharing or specific mechanics. At the surface, Dark Souls may seem like conventional action Role-Playing Games (RPG). However, Dark Souls is not only unique from a gameplay perspective, where it is considered ruthless, unforgiving but in the end rewarding. Story-wise, it is gloomy and daunting (Neuen, 2016). The story is not at the surface, and players are offered insights to the story in less-traditional ways. In the Dark Souls universe, dialogues players have with in-game characters are often only slightly informative for the general storyline. What makes the narrative 'techniques' of the franchise unique, is the fact that it is offered through 'item descriptions' and other environmental story telling techniques (Graff, 2018). Dark Souls is also studied as an experience, a simulated world where Foucault's (1991) notion of the 'panopticon' can be interpreted in a digital environment (Neuen, 2016).

Matthew Barr (2014) argues how gaming and related academic research has surged in recent years in relation to the educational benefits of videogames. Videogame players work together on multiple online platforms and outlets and engage in collaborative learning activities and discussions. Barr especially focuses on the importance of a specific type of 'social media', namely 'wikis'. Wikis are websites where game players go to for information or discussion and are often curated by a small team and are written by active contributors (Barr, 2014). The information that can be found on these wikis is often related to specific games and include things like: in-game map outlines, weapon statistics, monster location and much more. Although the contents of these wikis are considered non-academic, Barr argues that the way the contents are shared and organized should be considered 'scholarly'. Barr notes that the wikis that are created for the Dark Souls games are almost 'meant to be', and that the design of Dark Souls itself invites for documentation of information by third parties. The games themselves provide little to no guidance to new players, and therefore these wikis can be very helpful tools of information to learn more about the game's mechanics and progression (Barr, 2014). But beyond gameplay itself, the lore of Dark Souls game is also documented on these collaborative websites, as inside the universe itself the lore is hidden or vague. The main purpose of Barr's research is to find out why people collaborate in an academic way on these wiki sites, and why they are motivated and see how this could be applied in 'real' learning environments. Interviews revealed that Dark Souls community members mainly had intrinsic motivation to contribute to these wikis. They did not expect any reward, and purely contributed to support the community and out of love for the game (Barr, 2014). The importance of these wikis is

that the contributors aim to deliver high quality 'works' and even focus on structure and grammar among other things. They purely strive for perfection on these wikis out of their love of the subject, and if this could be simulated in academic worlds, it could be a tool to teach certain skills to student (Barr, 2014).

Thomas Fusdahl (2019) rather focuses on the narrative of videogames, and analyses Dark Souls 3 and its gameplay in-depth. Part of the Dark Souls gameplay appeal is that the player's character is vulnerable, and is expected to die in many ways, many times during the progression of the story (Fusdahl, 2019). However, this vulnerability is what impacts the narrative of Dark Souls as a whole and is intertwined in every part of the game from mechanics to story, according to Fusdahl (2019). He argues that the narrative and overall feeling of the game changes as players progress both inside the game and skill-wise. Dying is a way of learning in Dark Souls, and the feeling or pressure player get changes as they gain more experience with the game's mechanics and lore. Content creators in the Dark Souls community even have made explaining and exploring the Dark Souls lore their career. Michael Samuels or better known as 'VaatiVidya' is one of these content creators and is one of the biggest creators in the Dark Souls community. On his YouTube channel he delves deep into the Dark Souls lore and tries to piece together a complete story, which might be more difficult than one would expect (Fusdahl, 2019).

Like Fusdahl, Lukas Graff (2018) also focuses on the narrative of Dark Souls. Although Graff focused more on narrative rather than community, they conducted their analysis through the Dark Souls 2 related subreddit, where a questionnaire was posted with multiple questions. A more active approach was taken where the researcher analysed the questionnaires for results, whereas in this thesis the approach will be less active and already existing comments and threads on all Dark Souls subreddits will be analysed. Graff, too, notes how the Dark Souls franchise delivers the universe's story in a unique way compared to other videogames (Graff, 2018). They mainly focus on 'narrative techniques' that are used in Dark Souls 2, and how it affects a players game experience. The four major narrative techniques that were identified in Dark Souls 2 were: "Environmental storytelling, item descriptions, NPC interactions/dialogues and cutscenes" (Graff, 2018, p. 7).

Even though Dark Souls has been analysed and discussed in many ways by various scholars, only few discuss the community that has manifested online with the release of the gloomy videogame series. Scholars rather focus on the games' gameplay design or narrative choices, and how these are translated to the game players. The narrative of the Dark Souls is unique, and the work that has been done towards the aspect of the game can be useful as it could be influencing the community. In a videogame, everything is intertwined and especially the gameplay and narrative, it

is a whole and should therefore be considered as such. The focus of this thesis is mainly on the community and communication mechanics. However, the narrative is relevant and the research that has already been done will be used to make sense of its importance.

1.2 The concept of configuration

Before the concepts of community and communication will be explored, a concept that can be used to make sense of the interactions within videogame communities and their communications will be presented. This concept, the 'configuration', deals with the relationship between technology and its users and suggest that this relationship is a constant back and forth stream of affectation and feedback (Lima, 2018). Based on the original definition of Steve Woolgar (1991), several game scholars have tackled and improved the scope of the configuration concept over the years (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006; Giddings, 2006; Moulthrop, 2004). Stuart Moulthrop's (2004) interpretation of configuration reflects how a videogame intertwines with the digital world around it, by considering the medium as part of a larger digital system or construct within computer media in general rather than a separate entity (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006; Moulthrop, 2004). He argues that the videogames not only configure its users through interaction, understanding of production and play, but also have the ability to configure and affect the virtual environments they are part of (Moulthrop, 2004). Jon Dovey and Helen Kennedy (2006) highlight the presence of the player in the configuration process between videogame and player. They note how the connection between a players physical body and virtual avatar are also important to consider and are even somewhat intertwined during the constant feedback loop between software and person, and how this configures the relationship thereof during play (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006). Seth Giddings (2006) emphasizes the relationship in the configuration loop. He accentuates that configuration is continuous during play through every aspect of a videogame, from user interface options to in-game events and NPCs, which all reflect on a players experience and responses (Giddings, 2006).

The concept of configuration is defined by Leandro Borges Lima as "a continuous interactional process of mutual affectation between the medium itself (hardware, software), players/gamers, the videogame industry, societal values and culture." (2018, p. 42). This connection between user and text should be considered not as an isolated process or relationship, but rather within the context of broader network of relations in which the relationship can be placed (Lima, 2018; Moulthrop, 2004). The concept of configuration emphasizes that the relationship between 'game and gamer' is not just communication between the two parties, but rather an affective relationship, where the game affects the gamer and vice versa (Lima, 2018; Dovey & Kennedy, 2006). The rules set by a videogame affect the way its players are 'allowed' to manoeuvre in a

certain direction of how to interact with a medium, thus configuring their interactions with the medium. However, players can also choose to interact with the medium in (unintentional) personalized ways within the game's boundaries, essentially configuring the gameplay itself as well.

Lima (2018) argues that configuration does not exclusively take place during gameplay, but rather that it is a 'communicational phenomenon' which includes everything that is happening outside of the communication in play as well. It could be argued that how players make sense of the gameplay experience in relation to their own perception of it, and how they act on it outside the gameplay, is all configured in this two-way feedback loop between game and player. Videogames, in this research, will be interpreted as 'configurative media', which affects the gamers in both their experience of gameplay and communicative interactions. The concept of configuration as presented by Lima (2018) will be used as a tool for the analysis of both the gameplay and the community interactions.

1.3 Communities and digital communities

1.3.1 Introduction to communities

Community is a broad and versatile concept and can be defined and approached in many ways. Even in the videogame industry alone, there are countless of different communities that can be distinguished: game specific communities, livestreaming communities, competitive communities, etc. However, before examining specific communities, or virtual communities, the general concept of 'community' needs to be discussed. The study of communities, and how it can be defined in multiple ways, dates to ancient Greece. Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that communities could be based on multiple definitions. He makes a distinction between an 'ethnos' and a 'polis', where the people in a polis are bound to one another through communication and interaction. In the ethnos people are considered a community purely based on the fact they live within the same walls (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). These are comparable to Stefano Tardini's and Lorenzo Cantoni's (2005) two main defined types of communities: 'cultural' or 'paradigmatic' communities and communities of 'practice' or also named 'syntagmatic' communities. Cultural communities are bound in the fact that they share a knowledge or expertise that other communities lack. Communities of practice are more actively engaged with the people that are part of the same community. Communities of practice often share a goal or passion and aim to deepen this passion or knowledge of a topic by interacting with one another (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). People are often part of the same cultural communities, as communities are often intertwined. In the case of Dark Souls, it could be said people who are part of the Dark Souls community, are also part of the broader 'gamer' community, and so on. The same happens for communities of practice (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005).

Though, with the coming of digital platforms, and growth of society, the concept of community has gained complexity, and can be approached in many ways. Celia Pearce (2011) makes a distinction between different types of communities and mainly focuses on the 'communities of play'. She describes communities as a group where the will of the individual is committed to the greater good of the group (Pearce, 2011). Communities can manifest themselves through different means and within different contexts such as religion or a sports club. Play is defined as an activity that exists outside of the 'regular life' sphere, while still being a serious activity practiced. Play exists within its own time and space with its own rules, and is ordered, and encourages the creation of a group within this time and space (Huizinga, 1950; Pearce, 2011).

Due to advancements in communication technology, community has transcended from something mostly local to being applicable globally (Angrosino, 2011; Fernback & Thompson, 1995; Wellman and Gulia, 1997). One way online communities are 'allowed' to exist, is through computer mediated communication (Fernback and Thompson, 1995; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). Some virtual communities already existed in the 'real world' before computer mediated communication, and improved their social interactions through it, other communities only purely exist because they could form through computer mediated communication (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005; Wellman and Gulia, 1997). The transition from 'real-life' communities to virtual communities and technological advancements raises some questions for the perceptions and intricacies of communities and relationships (Wellman and Gulia, 1997). For example: How does the internet allow for 'weaker' relationships to be sustained? Does the internet allow for intimate relationships between people? And how do virtual communities compare to the concepts of 'regular' communities? (Wellman and Gulia, 1997). Much like contemporary real-life relationships beyond close friends and family, online relationships and communities are often specialized and cater to one need or interest. When a person looks for a community or relationship on the internet, they browse specialized political topics or recreational interests before joining a discussion (Wellman and Gulia, 1997).

The Dark Souls community is a community that solely exists because of computer mediated communication. By default, as Dark Souls is a digital 'platform', the community around it can automatically only have come to fruition because of computer mediated communication, as Dark Souls itself falls under it. The communities that are analysed in this thesis also only exist in the digital world and are communities of mostly anonymous people who interact with each other based on their common interest in Dark Souls. The main difference between 'real-life' and the internet when distinguishing these relationships, is that the internet allows for easier, comfortable, and more efficient establishment of (specialized) relationships and communication. When comparing online relationships to offline relationships, online interactions are often more based on sharing and

providing information, though are not (devoid) of emotional support or sense of belonging (Blanchard & Markus, 2002; Wellman and Gulia, 1997).

Some of the features that are considered substantial factors of communities in general, can pose some 'critical issues' when ascribing them to virtual communities. The main features that can be ascribed to online communities are:

- a shared communication environment;
- interpersonal relationships that emerge and are maintained by means of online interaction;
- a sense of belonging to the group;
- an internal structure of the group;
- a symbolic common space represented by shared norms, values and interests. (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005, p.373)

One of the key concepts of community is 'belonging', which in most cases is a voluntary and aware belonging. Depending on the type of community, the belonging can be less voluntary and more aware, and vice versa (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). The issue with this concept for online communities is that, online, sense of belonging is often considered weaker. People online can click on a button and become 'part' of most communities to some extent (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005), although this does not mean that engagement between community members is necessarily weaker, as they can be very intimate and deep (Blanchard & Markus, 2002; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005; Wellman & Gulia, 1997). Sense of belonging is expressed by individuals through several factors, and how these are expressed or are observable depends on the context (Blanchard & Markus, 2002).

Like belonging, 'identity' is considered a feature of communities and virtual communities. However, similarly, the concept of identity changes when communities are virtual (Merchant, 2006). As the physicality of identity disappears in most virtual environments, it becomes a mostly linguistic construct. The way people chat or communicate and the (sometimes false) stories they tell are what constructs identity online. Because of this, an identity can be anything a person wants it to be in an online community (Merchant, 2006; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). People can not only create a different identity for themselves in virtual communities, they can also fabricate completely fictional 'identities' through which they can choose to communicate with others. A virtual environment where this is most commonplace is in MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games), where players create an 'avatar'.

An avatar can be seen as the embodiment of a player's 'identity' or representation in virtual worlds and is often used in MMORPG settings where the term is almost interchangeable with 'player

character' (Merchant, 2006). The usage of avatar is becoming increasingly more common when describing the virtual bodies controlled by players in (mainly) multiplayer worlds or games (Pearce, 2011). In a videogame, the avatar controlled by players is a co-creation by the game developers and player. Players choose from a set of given aesthetics that are made available by the game developers, therefore resulting in a co-creation of visual representation for the players (Pearce, 2011). When a player creates an avatar to inhabit a virtual population, there is the consideration of gender selection. Some male players may choose to create a female character, with varying motivations. Some argue that the female character in games look more appealing while playing, while others argue that the player to player interaction between female avatars is of higher quality (Pearce, 2011). However, in the case of Dark Souls, player to player interaction is asymmetric and incomparable to other online games where symmetric player to player interaction takes place. Female avatars are also less distinguishable from male characters in the Dark Souls games. Whereas most MMORPGs have visually different armour 'models' for each gender and race, Dark Souls armour models are constant, whether it is worn by a female or male avatar does not affect appearance (Pearce, 2011). Co-inhabitants of the (MMO)RPGs' virtual worlds are not necessarily always controlled by players. In (mainly) single-player games[1], such as Dark Souls, the virtual world the player's avatar or character is traversing is mostly inhabited by 'NPCs' (Non-Player Characters), which the player's avatar can often interact with in some way (Pearce, 2011). This interaction ranges from dialogue and combat to even trading and having a drink.

As mentioned, people can construct their identity in online spheres such as forums and discussion boards, as they are almost completely anonymous and construct their identity through linguistics and interactions with others (Rheingold, 2003; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). Nevertheless, virtual identities are not completely fictional or made up, and a person's virtual identity is often likely influenced or intertwined with their 'real-life' identity (Merchant, 2006). The construction of identity can be described as a 'performance' carried out by a person. What a persons' identity ultimately is constructed of is not entirely up to the person the identity is tied with. How others perceive the performance of identity, and in what manner they choose to observe and accept it as 'reality', plays a role in the construction of an individual's (virtual) identity as well (Merchant, 2006). Identity construction can also partially be done by 'reciprocating support'. Especially if the support being provided stems from a knowledge or expertise that is part of that person's identity, the reciprocation of support to 'anonymous' community members is done, against the expectations of

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[1] Dark Souls is not necessarily a single player game, as there are considerably important online functionalities. Though, the entirety of the game can be played without online functionalities, and online interaction is therefore completely optional for the core gameplay experience.

early virtual community analysts (Blanchard & Markus, 2002; Wellman and Gulia, 1997). Ultimately, identity construction is a very complex process, and the discussed factors are ways of viewing the construction of identity in virtual spheres, and what processes potentially take place in the construction and presentation of an individual's virtual identity.

A third feature of virtual communities is 'interest'. Communities gather based on a similar interest they have which is often the main motivator for community formation and communication between strangers who lack geographical proximity (Angrosino, 2011; Lechner & Schmid, 2000; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). However, it could be argued that in the case of Dark Souls Reddit communities, the fact that all users use the same website to practice this common interest for the franchise, they have a common 'virtual' geographical location in the form of Reddit, making Reddit the larger cultural community, in this case. The Dark Souls games themselves could also be considered the commonality for the cultural community of Dark Souls and depending on where parts of this community manifest on the internet, it makes the step towards community of practice. Though, what might be a critical issue with 'interest' in virtual communities, is the fact that the interest and therefore communities can become very homogenous. It is easy to exclude differences and purely focus on the main interest of the community (Fernback & Thompson, 1995; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005).

The videogame community in general manifests in endless ways on the internet. However, the Dark Souls communities in specific manifests mainly in a few specific places on the world wide web. As mentioned, Dark Souls lacks an intricate in-game guiding system or index, which likely resulted in the creation of the Dark Souls wikis and the community that built it (Barr, 2014). Secondly, the Dark Souls franchise has established itself within the videogame streaming community as well. The reason for this, is the high difficulty of the series. People like to view others overcome the challenges found in Dark Souls. The livestreaming community can be divided into three main categories or communities: the esports community, "Let's Play" communities and speed running communities (Smith, Obrist & Wright, 2013). Dark Souls is especially popular in the "Let's Play" community, where content creators often find that Dark Souls gameplay is considered entertaining by viewers. However, the most important for this research is the community that exists on the website Reddit, which will be the platform of relevance in this paper's research.

1.3.2 Participatory culture, community, and play: communities on Reddit.

One of the main methods I will use to get a better understanding of the online Dark Souls community is the analysis of posts made by individuals that are part of this community on the content sharing website 'Reddit'. Various scholars have also used Reddit as a case study, source or

subject of analysis in their works, showing that there is a precedent of using Reddit as a tool or subject in a research (Anderson, 2015; Duggan & Smith, 2013; Massanari, 2015; Moore & Chuang, 2017; Newell et al., 2016). Reddit is the self-proclaimed 'front page of the internet', where content about nearly any topic gets shared and posted (Anderson, 2015; Duggan & Smith, 2013). Reddit has free access, and users are free to create an account in order to post content and join discussions. The way Reddit and similar content-sharing websites are constructed, the users fill both the role of producer and consumer of content. Participation is therefore dividable in multiple categories, ranging from active content producers, active consumers, passive consumers and more (Moore & Chuang, 2017; Massanari, 2015). Reddit is structured through 'subreddits', which are smaller sub-communities where content regarding one specific subject gets shared and posted, together they form the 'larger' Reddit community (Anderson, 2015; Massanari, 2015). Reddit itself thus has one common 'culture' and community while also being a complex system made up of many different smaller cultures and communities existing within the subreddits (Moore & Chuang, 2017).

Adrienne Massanari (2015) discusses Reddit extensively and especially focuses on what methods can be used to analyses the site's content and learn from it. One of her methodologies is an ethnographic approach to research the online platform. Her main argument for using this method is because her aim is to understand online cultures by doing "participatory observations, text analysis, interviews and historical research" (Massanari, 2015). Massanari's research mainly focuses on the culture and community of Reddit as a whole, and even though this paper only aims to focus on one specific community within Reddit that is related to the main research subject, Dark Souls, her insights and work on the phenomenon 'Reddit' are a valuable theoretical foundation on which I will aim to build upon (Massanari, 2015). Reddit's design promotes certain types of content over others, therefore the community and culture within the Reddit spheres is somewhat steered in a direction. Especially the upvote and downvote system and the interventions of subreddit 'moderators' cause certain posts to do better, and likely reinforce certain discourses within the site itself (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Newell et al., 2016). This should be kept in mind when analysing a certain community on the Reddit platform, as not all voices or opinions can and will be heard by the users. It is also hard to uncover why certain posts are more successful than others, up and downvotes are semi-anonymous and the motivation of each user to rate a post cannot be found by just looking at a score (Massanari, 2015). Nonetheless, posts and comments that do not get upvoted and are therefore less visible, can still be found by filtering the content on certain keywords or popularity.

1.3.3 Who are Redditors?

Users of the website Reddit are named 'Redditors'. Redditors contribute to the content and discussions on Reddit and all subreddits, and therefore will be the sole contributors to posts that will be analysed in the Dark Souls specific subreddits. The way Redditors are viewed is mixed, by both non-Redditors and Redditors themselves. Redditors are illustrated in multiple ways, but often it boils down to that Redditors are white, male, privileged, nerdy, or geeky, sometimes cynical, educated atheists (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Massanari, 2015).

It is mainly Redditors themselves that have a negative perception of the populations of the website's community (Massanari, 2015). One main point of criticism that is made by Redditors towards the community, is the fact there is a 'hivemind' and that every Redditor is stuck in a large echo-chamber in which only opinions approved by this 'hivemind' are allowed (Massanari, 2015). However, it could also be argued that due to the wide variety of available subreddits and communities, Reddit attracts a much more varied userbase than commonly thought (Massanari, 2015). What motivated a Redditor to become a user of the website in the first place depends on each individual. As discussed, for a community to exist in a (virtual) space, actors or 'agents' need to communicate, interact, and establish relationships with others through a (digital) medium (Lechner & Schmid, 2000; Moore & Chaung, 2017). Communities choose to communicate through certain platforms or mediums depending on several factors. Though what motivates a community to interact through a certain medium?

The main role of a medium is to facilitate a community with a proper, personal, and somewhat customizable means of communication (Lechner & Schmid, 2000). When a community is already established on a platform, 'it' in itself can act as a motivation for other users to participate on the same platform within the community in multiple ways. For example, the community itself can act as 'an attractor' being the main motivation to join. The platform where the community has manifested can also play a role. Finally, the knowledge generated and shared by a community or platform can also act as a motivator (Lechner & Schmid, 2000). In the case of the Reddit Dark Souls community it is likely not just one motivator that is primarily responsible, but rather a combination of all described motivators as Reddit as a platform is already established and attractive due to its popularity and design. As of right now, the Dark Souls community on Reddit is likely also the largest that can be found within one 'cyberspace' on the internet, making it easier to find through search engines, more active and therefore likely more attractive for new users to join when sharing this common interest that is the Dark Souls franchise. Though, few main 'motivations for participation' can be distinguished for general participation in social media websites (Chuang & Moore, 2017).

Information seeking, socialization and community, entertainment and status seeking are the main motivators illustrated by Chuang and Moore (2017). Reddit's website design and the content on it makes it possible that each of these motivations are a possible driver for new users, with community and socialization being the most motivating and information seeking the least (Chuang & Moore, 2017)

1.3.4 Masculinity in technology and masculine Reddit culture

Content that is shared or produced on Reddit is not related to just videogames or general news and entertainment. Content can be uploaded by anyone, and communities can be freely created by anyone, which results in an extremely wide scope of communities and possible content that can be found on Reddit. Even so called 'NSFW' (Not Suitable For Work) content, which mostly consists of porn and other similar content, is popular and widely available on Reddit (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Massanari, 2015). The broader Reddit website community culture is intertwined with 'geek-culture', which is not necessarily a specific geek culture as it is considered a very fluid culture (Massanari, 2015). However, the culture on Reddit is primarily masculine, which influences the type of content that is popular or unpopular on the website. Technology, and technological competence in general is socially constructed to be perceived as masculine (Cockburn, 1992; Massanari, 2015). Masculinity and technology intertwine, and is therefore important to consider when discussing a topic that involves technology and therefore gender roles (Cockburn, 1992; Lohan & Faulkner, 2004). Both technology, gender roles and gender roles in technology are socially constructed. Gender roles in technology are asymmetrical, where the masculine or male side exerts power or dominance over the feminine (Cockburn, 1992). Videogames and internet-based communication platforms such as Reddit are by default socially constructed as masculine, as they are technologically developed or technological tools (Cockburn, 1992; Lohan & Faulkner, 2004). Therefore, the data that is being analysed in this research is also likely embedded within a masculine discourse, and the userbase of Reddit itself is also outspokenly considered more masculine (Massanari, 2015).

Because of masculine culture, white, young, and straight males are privileged within these social spheres found on the Reddit website. This does not mean there is an absence of other populations. However, the opinions and presence of the masculine and privileged Reddit population is more outspoken and active (Massanari, 2015). The opinions and content that can be found in popular Reddit 'threads' are therefore often within the scope of the discourses that are accepted and circulated within this masculine geek culture. The content that will be analysed in this thesis is therefore also likely produced or at least 'allowed' by this population and within the discourses of this culture, which should be taken into consideration when analysing the contents of Reddit posts.

1.3.5 From community to communication

In order to justify certain cultural linguistics and interactions within the Dark Souls communities and Dark Souls subreddit communities, the origins of those need to be considered. Communication inside the Dark Souls universe between both player and NPC and between players themselves, are likely inspirations for certain Dark Souls related community interactions or commonly used phrases. However, how is communication within videogames defined? And which type of communication is more likely to take up a place inside the online communities? Communication inside the virtual worlds of videogames is remarkably versatile, and it often depends on the genre, or even individual game, how players communicate with each other or with the world around them (Pearce, 2011; Tanenbaum, El-Nasr & Nixon, 2014). Communication through computer mediated communication can happen both verbally and non-verbally. Verbal communication online refers to person to person communication done through speech-programs or text. Non-verbal communication can happen in a multitude of ways, especially within videogames themselves, and even textually (Leavitt, Keegan & Clark, 2016; O'Neill, 2010). In real life, non-verbal communication cues are often what indicates a person's feelings and emotions. Therefore, communicating emotions and feelings through text alone is often difficult but not impossible due to unique usage of non-verbal cues online (Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2007). Although virtual body language of Dark Souls players will not be analysed in-depth in this thesis, it is still important to highlight some of the functionalities, as some community interactions or lingo is derived from the virtual body language communications between players and by NPCs. Dark Souls communication is limited and unique, as there is no voice chat or other way to directly communicate with other players. Instead, players are limited to asymmetric magical messages around the world, or non-verbal body language through their player character, which will be explained more in-depth in the gameplay analysis section of this thesis.

Tanenbaum, El-Nasr & Nixon (2014), analyse the use of non-verbal communication in virtual worlds, and how it affects the experience of online play. Before looking into non-verbal body language and communication in the virtual worlds, a small introduction to non-verbal communication in the real world should be provided. 'Proxemics', for example, is the study of personal space and how people carry their body in space, used to analyse the 'semi-conscious' behaviour of people, and the possible cultural implications thereof (Tanenbaum, El-Nasr & Nixon, 2014). This analysis of behaviour and arrangement of bodies in proximities can be applied to any body in any space, even in the virtual worlds. The second, and more relevant term in body language studies, is 'kinesics' which deals with body language (Tanenbaum, El-Nasr & Nixon, 2014). Body language in both physical and virtual spaces refers to the communication through gestures and postures (Tanenbaum, El-Nasr & Nixon, 2014). Beyond proxemics and kinesics, there are other ways

of non-verbal communication, such as 'haptics' (touch) or 'oculesics' (gaze), however these are less relevant in the context of Dark Souls communicative mechanics (Leavitt, Keegan & Clark, 2016; Tanenbaum, El-Nasr & Nixon, 2014).

Across videogames genres, non-verbal communication can play a big role, though depending on the design and specific mechanics, non-verbal communication can vary greatly (Leavitt, Keegan & Clark, 2016). For example, in MOBAs (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) and other team-work related games such as *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) or *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016), non-verbal communication is implemented into the gameplay through 'pings'. These pings are used by players to communicate with other team-members in the same virtual environment through visual and auditory queues (Leavitt, Keegan & Clark, 2016). Dark Souls, on the other hand, implements non-verbal communication in a way that is much closer to real-life non-verbal communication, by using the players' avatars' bodily functions. One of the main methods to communicate non-verbally in Dark Souls is through 'gestures'. In non-verbal communication, gestures are described as a form of additional communication that adds more information or specificity to something that is being said or discussed, potentially referencing objects or spatially communicating actions. Gestures can also be a replacement for verbal communication, especially under constraint where verbal communication is not possible (Leavitt, Keegan & Clark, 2016). Non-verbal computer mediated communication can be restrictive, almost always depending on the extent of freedom within the technology or program they are being performed in. Gesturing or pointing done freely through an avatar differs from the communication when it is done with pre-defined possibilities of non-verbal communication (Leavitt, Keegan & Clark, 2016).

Within the Dark Souls franchise, communication functionality of players is limited, and direct symmetric verbal communication is nearly impossible, causing gestures to be a replacement communication tool in the universe. Though, the gestures that are available for non-verbal communication are restricted as well, only allowing the player to choose from a narrow set of gestures, or through the physical limitations of their in-game body movement possibilities. Non-verbal communication between community members does not only take place in the Dark Souls videogames. Textual communication on Reddit can also be enhanced non-verbally. Non-verbal communication through text is often done by using capital letters to express volume, or emoticons expressing emotions or feelings. The Dark Souls specific gestures will be discussed in more detail in the gameplay and user interface section of the analysis chapter. As gestures are essential for both player to player and player to NPC communication.

1.4 Videogame design and user interfaces

Videogames are a medium in which a player or multiple players interact with a digital world and each other. How players interact with the digital world is different for each game, although there are often similarities if those games belong to the same genre. Each videogame has a component which is called the 'user interface'(UI). A user interface can be defined as a component of a videogame that allows the players to interact with the game itself. Kristine Jørgensen (2012) notes that the user interface consists of both a physical and a digital layer. The physical is the tools or hardware that are used to play the game, while the virtual is the integrated layer of the software which allows the player to interact with the videogame world. Both layers "allow player input and provide game output" (Jørgensen, 2012, p.145).

The role of the user interface within videogames and other leisurely activity related software is different from 'regular' everyday usage software user interface purposes. Within videogames, the main purpose of the user interface is to positively affect the feelings and experience of the user, whereas in other software the fundamental purpose is to minimize negative experience and work effectively (Johnson & Wiles, 2003). Not only the user interface, but the overall gameplay and design of a game is constructed with specific (positive) user experience in mind (Gilleade & Dix, 2004; Johnson & Wiles, 2003). Through specific videogame design choices, emotions can be invoked, and even frustration can be used as a tool to affect and analyse the user experience positively (Gilleade & Dix, 2004). Frustration can for example be used to gauge the need for difficulty change in a game, allowing to player to continue in situations that are frustrating. Gilleade and Dix (2004) discuss two different types of videogame frustration: 'at-game' frustration and 'in-game' frustration. At-game frustration deals with the fact that physical player-to-game input and user interface interaction causes for difficulties in gameplay. When gameplay is the origin of frustrating scenario's it is considered 'in-game' frustration. Challenge and overcoming challenges are also part of motivation for some videogame players. Dark Souls is notorious for its difficulty and ability to frustrate players in-game, yet the game design does not offer or allow a change in difficulty, causing Dark Souls to be appealing to the players that look for a challenge to overcome.

A user interface is interacted with through the players' senses. It is important to note that the user interface are not just overlays such as menus and health indicators, but sometimes also in-game world items or animations that provide information on the game state or world itself (Jørgensen, 2012). One of the main objects of research for this thesis are 'messages' that are part of the Dark Souls gameplay which could be considered part of the user interface according to this definition. These messages are made by the game players but can also become part of the game

itself and be interacted with by other players. In the case of Dark Souls, the user interface consists of multiple layers as well. There is an overlay that is not integrated within the world of Dark souls itself, this overlay has several components which provides the player either with crucial information or lets the play perform certain actions. Similar to the gesturing system in Dark Souls, the messaging system will be analysed and laid out in the user interface and gameplay section of the analysis.

2. Methodology

This chapter outlines the steps taken in this study and the rationale behind it. First, it outlines the research design and justifies the choice of qualitative research. Second, the sampling methods and process will be presented, highlighting the time period of data collection, and explaining the which type of content was fitting for analysis. Afterwards, the perimeters for data will be provided, the process of data organization and categorization is explained, and why that was important for this specific dataset. Then, the process of analysis will be illustrated together with the operationalization. A statement on the credibility and validity of this research and process will be given, providing explanations for design choices and certain data collection circumstances. Finally, a small statement on ethics will be presented, explaining why certain decisions were made, and illustrating how qualitative research on the internet differs in ethics compared to when working with data that is not extracted from or through the internet.

2.1 Research design

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the Dark Souls community and communication in general (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The aim of the analysis was to find out how specific Dark Souls in-game interactions, mechanics, and interface options possibly configured community specific lingo and interactions, with the goal of answering the research question. The purpose of this analysis is to explore and understand a social phenomenon in the form of online communities. Qualitative research was mainly chosen for two reasons. First, the way the research question is constructed intertwines with the research methods and decision for qualitative research. Second, expressions, feelings, opinions, and statements of individuals are one of the main units of analysis and are what is being researched in this analysis. Research that deals with this type of data is ideally conducted through qualitative research (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

The way this research aims to analyse the phenomenon is both descriptive and exploratory, with the goal to see how both Dark Souls configures online communities and its communicative interactions, and what elements are causing this (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Besides the analysis of online communities, some gameplay elements of the Dark Souls franchise were also analysed to illustrate some of the important mechanics that allow Dark Souls community members to interact within the virtual world of Dark Souls. However, the analysis mainly focuses on the Dark Souls community found on the social website Reddit. 'Posts' that were made by users who are part of this community were studied in order to later answer the research question. What is exactly meant by 'posts' and how they were categorized and can be recognized in the dataset will be explained in more detail later on in the next section 'data collection and sampling'.

A thematic analysis was chosen because the aim of this research is to observe the community of a specific videogame franchise in an online sphere outside the videogames themselves. Thematic analysis is especially accredited for its flexibility in research, which provides space for creativity and problem solution when doing research towards a subject with little to no prior research on which the overall analysis method can be based upon (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2012; Braun, Clarke & Hayfield, 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Clarke & Braun, 2017).

2.2 Data collection and sampling

The main source of data were the Dark Souls specific subreddits on the platform Reddit. There are various subreddits that are created by and for the Dark Souls community, however, the main focus in this thesis is on the three 'main' Dark Souls subreddits[2]: '/r/DarkSouls', '/r/DarkSouls2' and '/r/DarkSouls3'. The three subreddits are all linked to their respective games. For example, /r/DarkSouls exclusively allows posts and content that are related to the first Dark Souls game and "Major franchise announcements"[3]. Similarly, /r/DarkSouls2[4] and /r/DarkSouls3[5] also only allow content related to the specific game of the franchise in question.

In the Dark Souls subreddits, posts are labelled with 'flairs'. The flair of a thread indicates the type of content it contains. To give an example, 'story' flair implies that the textpost of a thread contains a story, and an 'image' flair implies that the thread is about an image. When gathering threads for the thematic analysis, no type of thread was excluded, however, extra attention was paid to threads were labelled with the 'discussion' and 'story' flairs. Preliminary exploration of these subreddits had shown that these types of threads were more likely to contain in-depth discussions between community members or personal stories instead of 'shallow' content or discussions. Therefore, these threads were found to be more likely to contain fruitful data for the analysis and provide additional codes or themes. Other 'flair' threads such as threads with the 'question' or 'help' flair often contained gameplay related questions or assistance.

Most, if not all, posts were randomly purposively sampled, which allowed for a more flexible selection process of the data (Flick, 2012; Silverman, 2011). All sampled posts first had to adhere to the few boundaries that were established. Then, posts were purposively selected based on the extremities, typicality and convenience, while trying to keep the variation high to get a broader illustration of the Dark Souls communities within the empirical data (Flick, 2012). For example, posts

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[2] reddit.com/r/DarkSouls; reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2; reddit.com/r/DarkSouls3
[3] reddit.com/r/DarkSouls/wiki/posting_guidelines
[4] https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/wiki/posting_guidelines
[5] https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls3/wiki/posting_guidelines

that included Dark Souls specific lingo, or posts where users communicated through Dark Souls quotes, where purposively selected to fit within the specific scope of research of this thesis. Some sampling choices were embedded in the theory, for example, posts that indicated the inclusion of potential identity construction were also included. As the main focus of this thesis is the Dark Souls community, no posts were excluded based on users, since anyone who participates in online discussion could be considered part of this community.

In the early stages of data collection, which was done over a period of time between December of 2019 and May 2020, mainly data from the Dark Souls 2 and Dark Souls 3 subreddits was collected as they were more active and accessible through the regular Reddit 'frontpage' while browsing. The Dark Souls 3 subreddit is also the most active community overall, as it has the largest 'follower' base and is related to the most recent instalment in the series. /R/DarkSouls3[6] had 320.719 'subscribers' as of 12 May 2020, whereas /r/DarkSouls[7] had 274.533 and /r/DarkSouls2[8] only had 139.270. Before the data collection process and analysis were initiated, all three subreddits were 'subscribed' to, which means that popular content of the subreddits would show up on a general, personalized 'frontpage' of Reddit. During the data collection period, the personalized 'frontpage' was frequently checked, and threads that contained at least one interaction between two different users were eligible to be included in the dataset. The collection process was semi-structured with some restrictive perimeters for data, with the intention of maximizing the collection of 'valuable' data. The choice was made to collect the data overtime, in order to get a more realistic view of community interactions, rather than a snapshot. Due to the longer data collection timeframe, a larger variety of content was gathered. If all data was collected in for example one week, a specific type of discussions might have been popular during that week, resulting in all discussions found on the subreddits being related to one subject that is popular in that timeframe. Although, five months is not necessarily a very long timeframe to grasp all intricacies of an online community that has existed for multiple years, it should be sufficiently representative.

During the overall collection process, the amount of upvotes or downvotes and the exact time of posting were not of that much importance, as it is mainly the contents of each thread that matters rather than the timeframe or popularity of the post. In addition to collection of frontpage threads over the course of five months, some of the most popular and controversial threads were also gathered for each subreddit. These threads were found by using the filtering options on the reddit website, which allow users to filter posts based on upvotes and downvotes within certain

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[6] reddit.com/r/DarkSouls3
[7] reddit.com/r/DarkSouls
[8] reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2

timeframes. During the collection period, significantly less threads were collected from the Dark Souls 1 subreddit compared to the Dark Soul 3 and 2 subreddits. Therefore, for the Dark Souls 1 related subreddit, data was partially collected through filtering for popular all-time threads towards the end of the data collection period.

In general, threads that discussed more personal matters such as addiction or emotional connections to the videogame, were given priority during data collection. Priority was given to these types of threads, as they often contained more in-depth discussion in the comment sections, providing potential valuable insights to community interactions of the Dark Souls subreddits. However, other threads which included seemingly less 'interesting' topics of discussions were also gathered, in order to get a more representative final dataset of the content that can be found on the Dark Souls subreddits.

All content that was gathered and analysed are labelled as 'posts', however, a distinction is made between different types of posts. Due to the way Reddit discussions take place, it is hard to identify the length of one type of body of text, as the upper limit of a Reddit 'text post' is 40.000 characters, and 10.000 characters for a comment[9]. Therefore, the length of a specific unit of analysis varied greatly and had to be categorized to make it palpable. A distinction is made between five types of posts: textpost, comment, chain, long textpost and long comment. The textpost in a Reddit thread initiates the conversation or states a question in a Reddit thread. These textposts vary from a few sentences up to multi-page stories, hence the distinction was made between a 'regular textpost' and a 'long textpost'. 'Comments' are a response to the textpost of a thread, or a response to a different comment. Sometimes, separate discussions originate within the comment section. When there are multiple comments within the same chain that all discuss the same topic, it was identified as a 'chain'. Though comments and chains are categorized individually, a chain is made up of individual comments, causing the categories to overlap. Every comment that is identifiable within a chain in the data counts towards the comment category, but not the other way around. The threshold for when a textpost or comment is considered 'long' is set at 150 words for comment posts and 200 words for textpost posts. This was done mainly to provide structure to the whole dataset. However, it also became clear that longer posts more often contained stories that were personal or detailed, especially in textposts. These longer posts were categorized as 'textpost-long' and 'comment-long'. See table 1 below for a detailed description of each post category and an example. All these elements and types of posts can be found within one 'thread', and together make

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[9] reddit.com/r/changelog/comments/39hf9x/reddit_change_selfpost_character_limit_is_now/;
reddit.com/r/redditdev/comments/gpccr5/what_is_the_max_character_length_a_reddit_comment/

up the content of a whole page on Reddit. In total, around 675 posts were collected. A large portion of the posts were collected over time between December 2019 and May 2020. The rest of the posts were collected in a smaller period of time in April and May of 2020.

Type of post	Contents	Number of posts	Average length (words) (rounded)	Exemplary post
Textpost	These posts include the title and text that initiate a Reddit thread. Often include a question or discussion starter related to Dark Souls in-game content or Dark Souls content in general.	7	92	See appendix C: Textpost example post
Comment	Short, individual comments which are either a response to the textpost or another comment made by a (different) user.	605	28	"Illustration ahead" Love it, great job! (*/u/Gezz82*, Reddit)
Chain	A collection of comments which are all included in the same 'chain'. Often includes a discussion or conversation about one specific topic or response to the text post.	43	551	See appendix D: Comment Chain example
Textpost-long	Same as textpost, only the total wordcount of the post exceeds 200 words. More likely to include more personal stories related to Dark Souls lore and experiences.	7	296	See appendix E: Textpost-long example post
Comment-long	Same as comments, only the wordcount of the comment exceeds 150 words. More likely to include extensive responses or explanations.	11	252	See appendix F: Comment-long example post

Table 1: Post categorization

All subreddit thread-links were gathered and organised in folders and word documents. Initially, all data was organised based on subreddit and then numbered. Later, 'posts' were extracted from the Reddit threads and were then numbered and categorized by type of posts. All posts selected were then imported to 'atlas.ti', a program which is designed for qualitative data organisation and analysis. Atlas.ti is designed to be used as a supportive tool especially when conducting qualitative research. The open coding phase was entirely conducted within atlas.ti, where the initial codes were constructed and applied to excerpts from the texts. Before posts could be imported to atlas.ti, they had to be converted to PDF files. Extracted posts imported from the selected threads were first copy pasted into Microsoft Word, then edited in order to make it more comprehensive by removing website layout clutter, then they were converted into PDF files to be imported into atlas.ti. Because the entire coding process was conducted in atlas.ti, an extensive code 'report' could be generated, which a part of can be found in the appendix J.

In addition to textual data from the subreddits, some visual data was also collected in order to give context to some of the community interactions. Some of the visual data was used as additional guidance during data collection process and aided in deciphering specific quotes and non-verbal communication stumbled upon during the analysis. The visual data presented in the analysis was exclusively collected from personal recorded gameplay by the author, however, some content created by twitch streamers and YouTube content creators was also used as inspiration during the very early stages of the thesis[10].

2.3 Operationalization

The theoretical framework was initially used as guidance when compiling the dataset. Community related concepts such as belonging, identity and interest were used during the analysis of the posts made. These concepts are key in both constructing and understanding the mechanics and interactions in virtual communities. The concept of identity, for example, influences the way virtual community members portray themselves in an online sphere. By analysing stories, interaction and expressions in the dataset the construction of identity by individuals in the community became apparent.

The concepts of gameplay and user interface were mainly utilized to analyse the recorded gameplay more efficiently and aided in the presentation of in-game content and interaction. It was also used to understand how these in-game elements relate to the community itself. By having a

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[10] Ellajaz, a world-record holding Dark Souls Speed runner: twitch.tv/elajjaz and 'Vaatividya', one of the most popular Dark Souls related youtubers youtube.com/user/VaatiVidya?hl=nl&gl=NL are two examples of influential content creators

more in-depth understanding of how these elements can configure an individual game player, the way they possibly configure a community made up of these individuals could be uncovered. Concepts are also used to make better sense of the gameplay analysis that is provided leading up to the community analysis. The purpose of the gameplay analysis is to create a better understanding of Dark Souls game mechanics, how it relates to the theory and how it can be applied to the relation between Dark Souls videogames and its community.

Manifestations of virtual communication were also present in the dataset, through the theoretical fundamentals presented in this paper, a clear distinction between different types of virtual communication could be identified. The main purpose and idea behind each constructed main theme are embedded within the theoretical framework. Especially the themes related to virtual identity and online verbal and non-verbal communication were heavily inspired by the contents of literature related to these concepts (Pearce, 2011; Massanari, 2015; Merchant, 2006). Additionally, the application of non-verbal communication, and the role of the Dark Souls franchise therein, were able to be discovered in the analysis process because of the direct connection that could be made with theory discussions on non-verbal virtual communications (Leavitt, Keegan & Clark, 2016; O'Neill, 2010; Tanenbaum, El-Nasr & Nixon, 2014). In the analysis, the concept of configuration will mainly be used to make sense of the relationship between Dark Souls gameplay and the Dark Souls Reddit virtual community, embedded in the theory of virtual communities and communication (Lima, 2018).

2.4 Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is used in this thesis because it is a flexible and increasingly popular method to analyse qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2012; Braun, Clarke & Hayfield, 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Clarke & Braun, 2017), and is described as "a method for systematically identifying , organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set." (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). This method is thus used to make sense of commonalities and identify unique meanings and experiences across the dataset. Especially the flexibility in coding and analysing the meaning of the data is what makes TA suitable for this thesis, as the research questions is 'experiential and exploratory', and there is no real precedent to this topic and the data that is being analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2012). TA was also fitting for this research as it is applicable to any type of data regarding qualitative research data collection techniques (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

In general, a TA process can be separated in six phases: data familiarization, initial code generation, theme searching, reviewing potential themes, defining, naming themes and report production (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The data familiarization process helps with perceiving the

collected content as data and making initial assumptions in the form of notes (Braun & Clarke, 2012).
During the data familiarization phase, all collected data is read (repetitively). During this process
notes were made continuously while reading all collected data. If a thread or comment was found
potentially fruitful or interesting, a small note on the train of thought was made to reflect on it later
in the data analysis process. During the second phase, the initial code generation, or the 'open
coding' phase, is when the data was coded for the first time. Codes lie at the core of a TA and are
essential for the entire process (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The goal of the open coding phase and codes
in general is to 'label' the data that has been collected, in both a descriptive and interpretive way.
Ideally, all codes are relevant for answering the research question, however, it is possible codes that
are included which are removed later or combined during a revision of the codes (Braun & Clarke,
2012). After the codes are generated, the initial themes were generated, revealing patterned
contents from the dataset which can be deemed important in relation to the theory (Braun & Clarke,
2012).

The themes that are in this TA are not to be interpreted as a summary or collection of a
specific topic that is prevalent in the dataset. Instead, the main purpose of the themes generated
from the dataset is creating a "central point, idea or understanding" related to a concept (Braun,
Clarke & Hayfield, 2019, p. 5). Theme generation is an active process, and it should be kept in mind
that themes are not something that 'lie dormant' within the dataset to that can be unearthed (Braun
& Clarke, 2012; Braun, Clarke & Hayfield, 2019). The initially generated themes were reviewed and
checked on quality, discarding, altering, or combining themes where deemed necessary. These
quality checks were all done in relation to the entire dataset and research question, to make sure
that the final themes were reflective of the content that was analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The
final themes should be clear, concise, related to each other and directly relate to the research
question, collectively presenting a coherent story about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). After the
data was collected and coded, and the themes were defined, a general explanation of each theme
was given, and intertwined with the final analysis.

2.5 Execution

As stated earlier, all posts were gathered in atlas.ti. All posts were sorted by subreddit and
type of posts. After all posts were labelled correctly, sorted, and counted, the initial coding phase
followed. In the initial coding phase, all posts were read thoroughly, and any statement or
expression found in the posts that could be reflective or of importance for the research question
were highlighted and coded manually. Repetitions of the same code in comments were also
highlighted and registered for potential quantitative purposes. During the initial coding phase, a

digital 'notebook' was updated on any interesting findings during this process, to retain the thought process for later stages in the analysis. For example, posts that stood out, or were exceptionally representative for potential themes were also copied to the notebook for easy access or categorized as potential example for the analysis section.

In total, 58 individual 'documents' were analysed. A document is a label given by atlas.ti to a full thread, each document thus contained either an entire comment chain or a textpost. The initial coding phase resulted in the creation of 92 codes in total. Some codes were only applied to one specific comment, sentence, or word, while others were found applicable to many. One sentence could be applicable to many different codes, therefore a lot of 'double' coding took place, where one excerpt from the data was tied to multiple codes. Due to the large quantity of comments that had to be coded, this was done over the course of a few days. The generated codes accompanied with data associated with specific codes can all be found in the extensive code-report sample in appendix J. To create a more coherent overview of the codes in general, some codes were merged into one code if they were very similar. Following, codes that were similar but not merged were organized into 'code groups'. Names of the code groups were aimed to be representative of all the codes in the group. Two examples of the code groups presented in a table can be found in appendices A and B. To clarify, the exemplary posts in table 1 and appendices A and B were not selected for any specific reason. The only criteria for selection was that they were representative of the specific code and code group in appendices A and B and were an apt example of the post type in table 1.

Though it could be argued that there is a similarity between the code groups and final themes, there are more code groups than themes and they serve a different goal. The goal of the themes is to tell an overarching 'story' about the dataset in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The purpose of the code groups is to organise the data both visually and mentally and make it more efficient to navigate different posts and their related codes. During the entire coding, re-coding, and grouping of codes process, ideas for themes and themes were generated based on the contents of the dataset. These themes are all based in the findings of the posts and were constructed in a way that most of the generated codes could be categorized under one of the themes. The entire analyses process was guided by the concepts and frameworks of TA laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012; 2013; 2017). These readings provided the knowledge and know-how of applying TA to any type of data. The literature was not used as strict guidelines, but rather as starting point for shaping this specific analysis, as all TA differs based on content and theoretical framework (Braun, Clarke & Hayfield, 2019).

2.6 Validity & Credibility

The 'subject(s)' that are being analysed are (anonymous) users of the website Reddit, who partake in public discussion on the Dark Souls franchise related subreddits. It could be argued that when conducting qualitative research, all findings in data are subjective, as it is the interpretation of the researcher that is being presented as results (Silverman, 2011). During the analysis in this research, it was virtually impossible to look at the comments made by the community members completely objectively (Silverman, 2011). The purpose of this research is to look at the virtual Dark Souls community from an academic perspective, however, due to personal experiences with both the Dark Souls videogame franchise and Dark Souls Reddit communities, the way comments are interpreted is likely influenced to some extent. The perception of the researcher on the Dark Souls franchise and its community is thus likely less subjective compared to a researcher who has no experiences with these phenomena. If this data is looked at by someone that has no previous knowledge of Dark Souls and its communities, the coding of the data would likely have different outcomes or interpretations, even when using identical datasets, which should be kept in mind. The goal of the research is to observe the community, and how it acts 'naturally' without any influence or knowledge that it is being observed. Partaking in discussions or posting on the subreddits during the data collection period could be seen as 'steering' the data in a certain direction. Therefore, during the collection of data, there was no influence on the community exerted, nor participation in any of the analysed threads or posts has taken place.

To improve the credibility of the results presented in this research, full reports of initial codes and examples of the data analysis are provided in the analysis section and appendices. This is done to increase transparency of interpretations made during the analysis of the data, with the goal of helping create understanding of the overall process to readers of this research (Silverman, 2011). It should be kept in mind that the posts that are presented in the analysis section are all isolated and individual cases of phenomena, which fit within the theoretical framework and larger framework of the research. The presented data is intended to only be relatively representative of the Dark Souls community or Reddit as a whole, and rather aims to highlight the unique relationship between virtual communities and videogames.

2.7 Ethics

When researching and discussing content created and voiced by other individuals, it often raises the question of consent. When doing an analysis of community members in private (online) spheres, the members would have to be informed of the fact that an observation is taking place. However, when the content is posted on a public website, the consensus is that it is ethically

acceptable to freely quote messages as long as they are not directly identifiable (Angrosino, 2011). Though there are no official or international agreed upon guidelines or rules regarding ethics in internet research, there are parties who set out to form informational and supportive documents regarding ethics in these types of research (Franzke, Bechmann, Zimmer & Ess, 2019; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). According to the suggestive guidelines of ethics in internet research, ethics of internet research differ greatly as the contents and type of research that is conducted towards internet contents and users is of a great variety as well. Ethical decisions in this paper are therefore made based on previous researches with similar scopes, and after consultation with peers and other researchers that have dealt with internet research. The context of individual internet research should also be taken into consideration, and how the representation of individuals' expressions in data might have consequences for the individuals (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Based on the discussed elements, previous Reddit related research, Reddit posting guidelines[11] and discussion with peer reviewers, the final decision was made to leave the screen-name of Reddit users in this research (Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Massanari, 2015).

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[11] reddit.com/r/DarkSouls/wiki/posting_guidelines; reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/wiki/posting_guidelines; reddit.com/r/DarkSouls3/wiki/posting_guidelines

3. Analysis of the Dark Souls Franchise and Online Community

The analysis of Dark Souls and the related virtual community will be separated into two main sections. First, the arguably most relevant and important gameplay mechanics that possibly configure the players and community will be explained and analysed. The understanding of these in-game communicative allowances and restrictions are important to highlight in order to understand the configurative relationship between specific mechanics and community members who discuss the franchise on Reddit. Second, the Dark Souls Reddit community itself will be analysed, where several posts made by community members will be discussed in-depth, accentuating the unique communication choices and topics of discussions. These posts will be used to illustrate how virtual communities may differ from real-life communities, and what role Dark Souls plays within these specific virtual communities, the subreddits from which the posts are extracted. The Reddit post analysis will be divided in four main sections, each dealing with a theme constructed through the thematic analysis.

3.1 Dark Souls communication gameplay and design analysis

In the Dark Souls games, or any other game, players interact with the virtual world as well as with other users in that same world through the user interface, which allows for interaction with specific mechanics meant for communication (Jørgensen, 2012). The communication methods within the Dark Souls games are, as mentioned, unique, and compared to other videogames with online functionality, limited. To analyse the online Dark Souls community, and how it is configured by in-game communication and mechanics, an overview of the most important in-game communication tools and interactive mechanics will be provided. As the analysis will show, the in-game mechanics of communication seem to play a significant role in the community discussions and communication of the community both online and in-game. The illustration and exploration of communication in the Dark Souls games is important to get a better understanding of certain posts which were analysed. Although there are differences between all three Dark Souls games and their specific mechanics, the mechanics that are presented in this section are very similarly constructed across each game in the franchise. Certain Dark Souls gameplay and lore elements will also be explored which are seemingly important for both online gameplay experience and community interaction.

There are three main mechanics that allow players to interact with other players in the Dark Souls universe: messages, signs or summons, and gestures. 'Messages' are arguably the most integral part of frequent online gameplay, they play a large role in the communicative design of the Dark Souls franchise. Messages (see image 1) can be posted or 'put down' by any player at (nearly) any point in the game on the virtual floor. These messages are a non-symmetric way to

communicate information, thoughts, opinions, or emotions to other players. These messages often contain one of three contents: helpful information, misleading information, or humorous comments. Messages that contain helpful information guide people in the right direction, reveal secrets or give useful tips about upcoming content. Sometimes these apparently helpful messages are a façade, and are framed to look like useful information, but in reality, mislead others and often result in death of the player's character. Humorous messages are common too, and are often placed near NPCs or structures, often containing a joke or comment about the NPC or structure it is placed next to. Messages are considered an integral part of the Dark Souls gameplay experiences by some community members as well. As Reddit user Brobama420 expresses, the message system "(…) is one of the coolest aspects of the Dark Souls series and made me appreciate playing through DS2 mostly blind. You have to figure out which signs you can trust and what risks are worth taking." (Reddit). It could be argued that these messages are a way of Dark Souls providing a co-created guide, instead of a more traditional system. Though, the existence of Dark Souls wikis which provide more extensive information on the game are likely more useful for newer players who seek guidance (Barr, 2014). However, in essence, the messages become an in-game optional guidance system created by other players.

Figure 1: Example of a message in-game. It reads "visions of ring…" (Source: own gameplay).

How these messages can be constructed is also limited. Players cannot freely type any message and put it on the floor in the virtual world. Messages are created through a system which uses a template, allowing players to only choose from a limited selection of words and phrases, which can be combined to create messages with 'meaning' (see image 2). Effectively, all options in

the message template are related to Dark Souls gameplay, lore, or objects. Due to the limited options, sometimes seemingly nonsensical and weird combinations of words and sentences are created and posted by other players such as "In short, joy ahead". This could mean multiple things but depending on the location or context, it could be indicating that a safe area is ahead, or it could be referring to an NPC if it is placed in its proximity. It could also be a sarcastic message, leading up to a difficult boss fight.

Because of this unique and restrictive message creation system, players get creative and the messages that are found around the Dark Souls virtual worlds are often distinctive. When communicating online outside the Dark Souls universe, as can be seen in the dataset, players sometimes use phrases that can be created within this in-game messaging system. As these messages, these specific phrases, are unique to the Dark Souls gameplay, players of the game will likely recognize these references when reading them online.
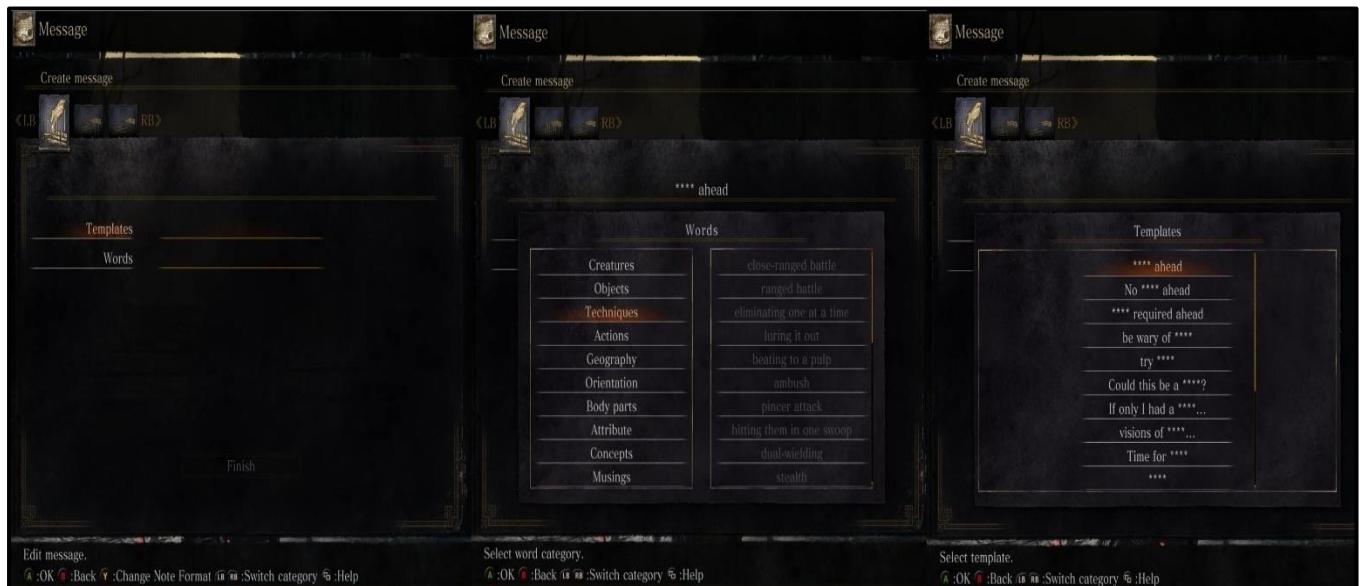

Figure 2: Message template interface (Source: own gameplay).

A way players can directly or symmetrically interact with other players is by 'summoning' a 'phantom'. Phantoms (which are often other players) can appear in a player's virtual world both voluntarily and involuntarily. When phantoms appear voluntarily, they are summoned by the player themselves through a 'summoning sign'. These signs can be put on the ground by all players, similarly to the messages. However, when a player interacts with these signs, they will summon the other player who has put down the sign. This is often done with the purpose of cooperation. For example, if a player has difficulty overcoming certain content, they may summon another player through a summon sign looking for assistance. Players can also choose the be part of a 'covenant', which are a type of guild or religion the player can be part of. Being member of a covenant slightly

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changes how phantoms work, depending on the covenant. Normally, phantoms are 'white', which is indicated by their physical appearance. Being part of a covenant can change the visual appearance of a phantom. For example, in Dark Souls 3, members of the 'Warrior of Sunlight' covenant will appear golden-yellow instead of white (see image 6). Being part of a covenant also offers some additional gameplay mechanics, however these are less important when discussing community interactions.

Figure 3: (left) White phantom summon-signs and (right) a white phantom. (Source: own gameplay).

A second way for phantoms to appear in a player's virtual world is through an 'invasion'. An invasion is an involuntary way for phantoms to appear, this is often with the purpose of hostile combat between two players instead of cooperation. Players can choose to invade other players, and fight them, effectively becoming an extra obstacle to the players they invade. These phantoms are also visually distinguishable from the 'friendly' phantoms by their colour. Regular friendly phantoms will appear white, while phantoms that have invaded the virtual space will appear red. Like white phantoms, red phantoms can also change their visual appearance by joining a covenant. Members of the 'Blue Sentinels' or 'Blades of the Darkmoon' covenants appear blue instead of white or red. Covenants and differently coloured phantoms might seem as a minor gameplay mechanic, however, players do get a sense of belonging to certain covenants or interact with each other differently based on covenants both in-game and on Reddit. For example, the phantom of members of the 'Watchdogs of Farron' covenant will appear blue-reddish in another players' world as can be seen in image 4. How this changes the perceptions individuals of other community members and themselves will be elaborated on in the next section of this chapter.

Figure 4: Two hostile phantoms. A blue-red 'Watchdogs of Farron' covenant phantom (left), and a red 'Rosaria's Fingers' covenant phantom (right). (Source: own gameplay).

After a player 'summons' another player or is invaded, player characters will be present in the same virtual space, allowing for direct interaction between their avatars. However, when two or more players are present in the same virtual space, they are still not able to verbally communicate through voice or text chat. The permittance of physical presence in the same virtual space as other players, does allow players to communicate non-verbally through their avatar's body to some extent (Tanenbaum, El-Nasr & Nixon, 2014). 'Gestures' are a symmetric way of non-verbal communication between players. Gestures can exclusively be seen by other players when they are both present in the same 'physical virtual' space inside the game, for example when a phantom is summoned or has invaded. Gestures can be used for multiple purposes, but they are mainly used to express a certain emotion, or to communicate instructions. From personal experience, the most frequently used gestures are 'point'. This gesture makes a player's avatar point in a certain direction, used to show the way, or draw attention to a certain object or direction. Gestures like 'bow' and 'wave' can be used to greet other players when they first make contact as a courtesy. In total there are 33 gestures[12] that can be accessed by players, with the most commonly used being accessible from the start of the game, while others need to be unlocked through gameplay. Players are therefore also restricted to a limited selection of gestures made available by the game developers, limiting the

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[12] https://darksouls3.wiki.fextralife.com/Gestures

communication freedom even further (Leavitt, Keegan & Clark, 2016). Though, players are not limited to just gestures as a tool for non-verbal communication. Proxemics, or the simple act of moving an avatar from one physical location in the virtual world to another can be used to show directions as well (Tanenbaum, El-Nasr & Nixon, 2014). Additionally, using combat-related mechanics such as swinging a sword or casting a spell, have proven to be effective ways to communicate intent or strategy non-verbally, from personal experience.

Figure 5: Three commonly used gestures: Wave (left), Point (middle) and bow (right). (Source: own gameplay).

The usage of gestures is not only important for communication between players online, it also plays a role in offline gameplay and lore. In a way, the players are allowed to interact similarly with NPCs as they are with other players. Especially through gestures players can interact with the virtual inhabitants of the Dark Souls universe, even if they do not respond to all of them or register the meaning in a similar way as real people. Most of the Dark Souls universe is inhabited by NPCs, and on their adventure, players are more likely to interact with these NPCs rather than real people (Pearce, 2011). Certain NPCs that can be found in the Dark Souls universes also make use of gestures to non-verbally communicate with the players' character, even if they are able to 'speak'. The gestures that are used by these NPCs, and the meaning of them, is often related to that NPC's storyline and the emotion that it evokes by the player. For example, arguably the most popular NPC and gesture originate from the first Dark Souls game. The NPC 'Solaire of Astora' is a friendly NPC with whom the player can interact, and who is obsessed by the sun. He uses the gesture 'praise the sun', which is also an available gesture for the players character in every Dark Souls game. The interaction with Solaire of Astora is often interpreted as a positive interaction, which is considered rare in the Dark Souls franchise. Therefore, the gesture that is connected to this friendly NPC, is also often used for positive situations, or as an expression of happiness within the Dark Souls community. This specific gesture and NPC have even gained popularity beyond the Dark Soul community, and is

often referenced across the internet, and can be found as 'easter eggs' in other game franchises[13]. Though, many of the gestures can have multiple uses and meanings, heavily depending on context and individual interpretation.
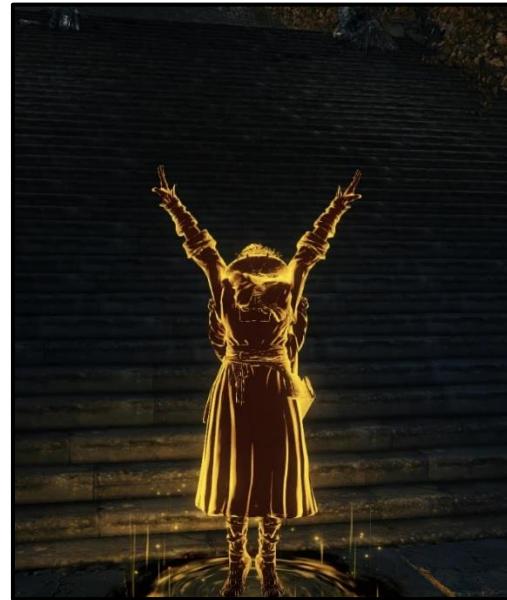
Figure 6: A golden phantom using the 'praise the sun' gesture. (Source: own gameplay).

The communication mechanics discussed (messages, signs, summons, and gestures) configure both verbal and non-verbal communication approaches within the Dark Souls subreddits. The dataset shows that people will use certain words which are only available in the message template to make a joke or put a gesture in parentheses at the end of a sentence to add a certain emotion or simply as a response. The goal of the thesis not to see if these mechanics change the way online communities communicate but rather how these references to mechanics and lore are used by and configure the community and configure communication and relationship perceptions within the community itself. The next section of the analysis will include excerpts from the Dark Souls Reddit community which are configured both verbally and non-verbally by these specific communication mechanics. The usage and configuration of (non-)verbal in-game communication mechanics will be discussed more in-depth during the discussion of themes across the posts in the next section.

3.2 Thematic analysis of the Dark Souls Reddit community

Various features of online communities can be found within the Dark Souls community, though they manifest in different ways, and different elements configure both gameplay perception

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[13] oldschool.runescape.wiki/w/Knight_of_Varlamore; https://kotaku.com/borderlands-2-tips-its-cap-to-a-dark-souls-fan-favorite-5945545

and expressions online. The themes and patterns that can be found in the posts that were analysed illustrate how the Dark Souls community of Reddit is built up from different types of content and discussions, depending on topic and configuration. Here, the common interest, community interactions, a sense of belonging and a shared 'experience' all emerge (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005).

During the analyses, four themes were identified and generated: 'Discussions of (personal) gameplay experiences', 'Experiences and discussions of community interactions during gameplay (in-game)', 'Usage of Dark Souls related terminology and quotes' and 'Sense of belonging to a community'. The upcoming part of the analysis will be divided in sections where each theme that was generated will be explained and discussed in-depth. The aim is to highlight the importance of each theme in relation to each other and ultimately the research question. Especially the illustration of how the gameplay configures the communication between Dark Souls community members, and the configuration of community members of unique gameplay experiences are of importance.

3.3 Discussions of (personal) gameplay experiences

What became clear in posts that compose this theme, is that nearly all community members were bound in experiencing a similar virtual world and story. Many discussions that take place on the subreddits are related to personal gameplay experiences, expressing how these experiences affected them or how they felt during certain adventures. A distinction is made between two types of experience which were most frequently shared in posts: positive and negative experiences. Positive experiences were in some cases induced by first-time experiences with the franchise, other times users shared a positive story of personal adventures they undertook in the Dark Souls universe.

3.3.1 Positive and negative gameplay experiences

For example, one user shared a first-time experience with Dark Souls 2, laying out early steps of their in-game journey:

> First playthrough, about 7 1/2 hours in and I'm only at Lost Bastille having exhausted the FoFG, Heides and No Man's Wharf areas and I'm still at the beginning of the game! I have noticed a lot of the areas in this game are quite dark so far and I haven't even gone down the gaping hole yet so expecting more dark areas, not a fault, but I'd like to see more daytime areas though! You can tell that From were given a proper amount of time to flesh out this game and really focus on it. What are the areas you absolutely love? Heides is probably my favourite area so far, and I actually quite enjoyed No Man's Wharf, I basically used the bow throughout for the first time and it's actually quite OP and I don't even have

the proper stats for it, I literally 2 [*shotted*] powerful enemies in that area!?

(/u/grantdredelic, Reddit)

This community member mostly describes in-game areas in detail, and their perception of it. Not only do they share their experience, they inquire about the opinion of other community members by asking what their 'favourite area' in the game is. This shows that beyond simply sharing personal experiences, the (secondary) purpose of the post is to look for interaction with the community. However, interaction on this type of posts seemed lower or less frequent compared to when negative gameplay experiences were discussed in posts.

Gameplay-inspired posts frequently originated from experiences that induced some form of negative emotions with the player, who then felt the need to share that experience with other community members who might have experienced similar emotions. Certain in-game areas or boss fights were most often the cause for these frustrations:

Except Pontiff, what the [*goodamn*] hell was that!? (…) That guy was unbelievable, I couldn't get one single hit on him (…) I feel bad for cheesing it but fuck that guy. (/u/RedditZacuzzi).

DUDE THIS ENEMY IS SO FUCKING ANNOYING. ALL IT DOES IS CRUSH YOU WITH ITS PAW REALLY FUCKING FAST. (/u/youwilldielmao, Reddit)

shrine of amana is like sen's fortress but with more evil. fuck those priestesses.

(/u/unfeelingzeal, Reddit)

These posts are an example of users sharing feelings of frustration brought on by a specific boss fight in Dark Souls 3. They complain about certain mechanics being too difficult, their opinion and experience on this specific boss or area is configured by the gameplay experience and has inspired them with the need to vent their frustration about this boss or area with others. There are more posts in the dataset similar to these, which single out a specific type of content that is experienced negatively by individuals, and sometimes by groups of people. Approximately 30 to 40 posts were coded with similar expressions of frustration in the dataset. Posts about negative or frustrating gameplay experiences are, compared to positive experiences, met with plenty of interaction. Other users respond with their own, similar, frustrating experiences, or share their opinion on other sections of the games where they felt frustration or anger as well. The higher frequency of interaction on the negative posts could be an indicator that the difficult design of Dark Souls is more likely to configure community interaction, or at least inspires the need for discussion or ventilation regarding the difficulties amongst individuals in the community.

Still, discussion based on gameplay experiences, both positive and negative, is to be expected in a community that organised around a certain entertainment medium. The main element that connects all the members in the analysed community is the interest in the franchise which they all are familiar with and the gameplay they all have experienced. Therefore, users are likely looking to share their personal experiences with the franchise and see if other community members can relate to these experiences with some of their own.

3.4 Experiences and discussions of community interactions during gameplay (in-game)

This theme explores how in-game online player to player interactions configures the Reddit Dark Souls community and perception of the game and community among individuals. The theme may seem similar to the 'gameplay experiences' theme, as the posts that are included in this theme also describe certain experiences of gameplay. However, the actual 'act' of gameplay is less important. How players configure the experience of other players within the limitations of online gameplay itself, during in-game interactions, are at the core of this theme. Here, the experiences shared by community members are likewise divided in positive or negative interactions with other players, rather than focusing on the gameplay itself.

3.4.1 Positive and negative interactions

Just got a Visit From a Priest

So there I was, wandering the halls of the great archives... When all of a sudden, I was invaded! But this is no normal invader, oh no.

This [ones] name was Priest. I had thought him to be a miracle build so I thought little of his strength in combat. But in reality, his strength was elsewhere. (…). He must have seen that I was mildly injured having just fended off several "Wax Walkers". Anyway, he casted a healing spell over me and began praying. Confused, I walked into it and let him heal my wounds. Just as I filled my hp he jumped for joy. (…) He was quite the friend until I was mortally wounded by the sage. I was struck down, fatally injured and my body lay lifeless on the ground. (…) I have yet to see that priest again, but when I do, I will have some souls to give that man... (/u/Sman0909, Reddit)

This unexpected cooperative interaction that took place between two individual players is in stark contrast with the regular, single player gameplay of Dark Souls, where the player's controlled character is alone in a gloomy environment with mostly hostile enemies in its path. Additionally, The invading mechanic the 'Priest' in the story used for this surprisingly friendly encounter with the

author of the post is (normally) done with the intention of hostile combat, making this specific interaction even more unique, rememberable and share-worthy.

As became evident in the posts which responded to this anecdote, an interaction such as described above is apparently not that uncommon, as other players experienced similar positive interactions through the invading mechanic. Users claimed that these interactions with other players configure their personal experience with the franchise, articulating their positivity towards both these individuals and the Dark Souls community as a whole:

Involuntary co-op. Only in Dark Souls. Man, I love this community. (/u/AdevilsboyU, Reddit)

and

I invade people in the Ringed City barehanded as Lapp sometimes.

Half of the people are really nice and accept my help. I lead them on and it normally ends with a thank you message once I leave.

(Some even ask me to just let them summon me for help!) I love it. It makes me feel like I'm making a difference in others' gaming experience, and I have fun doing it. (/u/Robodroid390, Reddit)

However, some in-game community encounters were experienced in a negative manner, and lead to discussions of certain gameplay interactions that are caused by arguably malicious players.

The other half, however, is everything that's wrong with the Dark Souls community. Way too many twink idiots spamming spells, pointing down, fight me for no reason and throwing shit.
While I'm barehanded.
And they still point down.
Man, sometimes... I hate this community. (/u/RoboDroid390, Reddit)

(…) Because twinking is a step beyond invading, it's going out of way to just ruin the hosts day. (…) (/u/WhiteSilverDragoon, Reddit)

These users express clear frustration with the Dark Souls community, referring to the actions or playstyle of certain members during hostile in-game online encounters. "Twink idiots spamming spells" refers to a certain playstyle that some players use in online interactions. 'Twinks' are a specific way of 'preparing' an in-game player's character which are able to interact with lower-level

players while still having the ability to use certain items or spells which are meant for higher-level players, effectively circumventing level-based player to player interaction restrictions. This is mainly done by experienced players with the purpose of gaining an unfair advantage against lower level or newer players in hostile encounters. It could be argued that this is one way players configure the Dark Souls gameplay, exploiting unintentional mechanics within the boundaries set by the software, which in turn configures the experience of the people they invade with this type of avatar (Lima, 2018).

In-game encounters with twinks are, understandably so, experienced negatively or induce frustration. Usage of twink characters is intended, by other players, to be unfair. Another anecdote, "pointing down (…) and throwing shit" (/u/Robodroid390, Reddit), refers to the negative usage of certain gestures and items available in the Dark Souls universe. 'Pointing down' refers to the usage of the 'point down' gesture, often used by hostile invading phantoms or players after they have defeated another player, likely with the goal of 'rubbing it in' after winning in combat. 'Throwing shit' refers to the usage of a certain item that can be obtained in the Dark Souls games called 'dung pie'. Usage of this item allows players to quite literally throw faecal matter at other players. Usage of the dung pie has some gameplay effects but is often done with the intention of frustrating other players as well. In all of these elements which take place in-game online, the player interactions are likely intended to be experienced as frustrating by some players, making it logical that the posts discussing these specific elements express 'hate' for the specific members of the community who partake in such negative behaviour.

Interestingly, posts about positive community interaction were more frequent, and more often included in-depth descriptions and appreciations of the experience. Four times as many posts were coded with 'sharing or the discussing of positive community interaction' compared to posts that discuss negative community interactions during the analysis. This is the opposite of the contents in discussions about 'regular' gameplay experience, which were more extensive when sharing thoughts on negative gameplay experiences. The posts which are part of this theme indicate that the Dark Souls franchise not only serves as inspiration for community interaction, but that the community itself configures gameplay experiences of individuals and the larger community as well. Dark Souls gameplay, when multiple players are involved, is a co-creation between the videogame developers and community members. Players construct their own in-game lore, characters, or gameplay to some extent. These experiences seem to resound with community members at a more personal level, likely increasing their bond with the community as a whole or at least increasing their sense of belonging. Considering the contents of these themes, and the high frequency of interaction surrounding discussions of gameplay experiences or community encounters both positively and

negatively, it ultimately does not matter what the emotion or feeling about or brought on by the experience is. Community members find commonalities in their experiences both negative and positive and share their thoughts and feelings with the community in general. With this in mind, it can be argued that it does not matter for the common interest or community interaction in general whether these experiences positively or negatively affected the individuals. What matters is the similarity of experience which other community members can relate to, enhancing the connections made within the community, or adding another layer of commonality among community members in the Dark Souls (Reddit) communities by discussing these experiences and being able to relate and discuss on a more personal level.

3.5 Usage of Dark Souls related terminology and quotes

Throughout the analysed posts, certain terminology and expressions were used that at first would seem strange to people who are not familiar with Dark Souls. 'Comment' posts most often contained Dark Souls terminology, and the terms were often used in posts that responded to other posts. The origins of these terms are not from a singular specific source within the Dark Souls franchise, as some originate from the lore or expressions made by NPCs while others come from the unique communication or gameplay mechanics.

In a Dark Souls 1 subreddit thread, one user shared a very personal story about their real-life drug addiction. In this textpost real life experiences of deteriorating mental health and addiction is described as 'going hollow':

So I committed. I was going to beat 2 bosses, then finally decide if [*i*] should trade my collection and find a new hobby. (…) I was googling [*wear*] to go (…) I needed help (…) And then it grew. Even in my solitude, and feeling of desperation, I had a community to reach out to [*to]* get help. A ton of people had been where I was, and were willing to help me out, with advice, or to accompany me if needed. I played it regularly, then ds2 and 3 I bought a PS4 to play Bloodborne. As I got into the lore I read more [*I*] to my addiction too. And the realization that my old life was a vicious cycle of repeating but ever hardening challenges. A trap of my own making, and the only way to win was to stop fighting. I got a tattoo of the dark sign to celebrate 5 years clean. Reminder to me that I was still "cursed" and while not **hollow** [emphasis added], I had to preserve my humanity. I love the souls games. I love my new life. I just needed to get this out there.

This place seemed like a good place for it. (/u/TheManOfOurTimes, Reddit)

'Hollowing' in the Dark Souls lore, is a process each player' character goes through, and to some degree can be described as losing humanity and becoming a 'cursed hollow'[14]. The person that posted this likely felt that this process their avatar goes through was comparable to their experience of (drug) addiction and used this terminology to communicate their experience in a specific way that the Dark Souls community would understand. In this case, the lore configures the communication of community members, augmenting their vocabular. Usage of 'hollowing' allows for a more intimate expression of feelings supported by a franchise they are interested in, sharing with the community that is related to it. This common understanding and usage of certain terminology or 'relevance keywords' is an essential feature of community interactions (Tardini, 2003). The usage of keywords such as 'hollowing' and 'cursed' in this post required no elaboration or implication. Rather, the community has a common acceptance of what is to be understood by these words through common experiences and context. The understanding and usage of these keywords can be interpreted as the virtual boundary of the community, instead of the 'physical' borders a real-life community could have (Tardini, 2003).

In the same thread, the comments which respond to this personal story also contain Dark Souls related terms. One commenter highlighted that they liked the usage of 'hollowing' when discussing mental health problems. This individual also shared personal experiences with similar real-life issues. They too used a Dark Souls mechanic when addressing the fact that he hoped his brother reached out to them for help:

> My brother is fighting with addiction right now and keeps heading to the graveyards and **Blighttowns** [emphasis added] of his life. I hope he can reach out for help. This gives me the hope **to keep putting my sign down for him. Hoping he'll summon me into his world** [emphasis added]. (/u/Barracudaloper, Reddit)

This sentence would not make a lot of sense to anyone who is unfamiliar with the Dark Souls franchise. "Blighttowns" refers to a specific area in the virtual universe of the first Dark Souls game named Blighttown. This area is notorious for its difficulty and is often the first thing that comes to mind when players are asked what area they found most difficult or disheartening. Not only gameplay wise, but also aesthetically this area is gloomy and dark. The user suggests through this analogy that their brother 'keeps going to dark places' in his life. They also mention that they hope they can help their brother, and that their brother will accept their help. They communicate this by saying they keep "putting my sign down*,* referring to the cooperation mechanic through which players can help each other overcome difficulties in the Dark Souls universe. They express their hope

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[14] darksouls.fandom.com/wiki/Hollow

of their brother accepting their help by stating "Hoping he'll summon me into his world", again applying the cooperation mechanic to their real-life situation.

However, the community that this sentiment is being shared with does not need a similar breakdown and is likely to understand this users' emotions and experiences, along with the hopes they have when reading their post. The usage of the Dark Souls keywords can be recognized as symbolic boundaries of the Dark Souls community. People who do not comprehend the implied 'meaning' of the used keywords among community members, cannot be considered part of the community. People can physically 'enter' and browse the Dark Souls subreddits and post comments freely. Though, if they do not understand the significance of the used Dark Souls terminology, they are not really part of this specific community, as they do not share the common experiences with the community members (Tardini, 2003). Therefore, it could be argued that the correct usage and understanding Dark Souls terminology is a rite of passage to be a part of the community (Tardini, 2003).

There were more instances where personal and emotional stories were enhanced by Dark Soul terms and in turn were met with responses rooted in Dark Souls lingo, dealing with many different personal anecdotes and real-life hardships. In addition to the role of Dark Souls in the relationship between the poster and the person they are talking about, sharing this sentiment with the Dark Souls community is likely an attempt of sharing specific emotions and feelings that can only be understood by Dark Souls community members. The Dark Souls messaging system also configures how some communication takes place within the community. The unique sentences or messages that come to existence due to the limited selection when creating a message are not just exclusively found during Dark Souls gameplay experiences but are frequently used to respond to posts on Reddit as well.

Good work
Therefore
Try victory
(/u/DarthCallidous, Reddit)

and

Amazing chest ahead
(/u/ihlaking, Reddit)

are two examples of responses to a post that shared the overcoming of a major obstacle in the first Dark Souls game. Dark Souls 'expressions' derived from the messaging system like these were more

often used in short response comments. These phrases, in most cases, reflect the contents of the comment they are responding to or aim to express a certain feeling or emotion while still communicating their response in a way that would have been similar in the Dark Souls universe itself. These posts could be considered enhanced non-verbal communication, even if it is textually communicated (Leavitt, Keegan & Clark, 2016; O'Neill, 2010). When discussing online communication conducted through text, when someone types in all-caps, uses italics or bold, this can be considered as non-verbally enhancing communication. For example, another way to non-verbally communicate a specific emotion or state of being through text is with the usage of things like 'lol', which is normally done non-verbally in real life by physically smiling or laughing (O'Neill, 2010). Similarly, by using quotes like 'Good work, Therefore, Try victory' could be done with the intend of non-verbally enhancing the meaning of the text. The way a reader interprets these specific words is in turn configured by their individual gameplay experiences with the Dark Souls universe and will likely connect this text to the first time they encountered this text within the game themselves. Though this is not an isolated process. If someone else stumbles upon these posts, before they might have had any experience with this specific text in the virtual world, their perception of it could be different. The observation of the message that contains this sequence of words in the virtual world, will then be configured by the community (Lima, 2018).

Though not only verbal expressions originating from Dark Souls made its way to the community, non-verbal communication in the form of gestures are also used in textual communication frequently in posts. Non-verbal communication is often done with the intent of presenting emotion and feelings (Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2007). By adding a gesture textually to a sentence, community members likely aim to communicate the emotion or feeling they think the community associates with that specific gesture. Again, similar to the usage of words like 'lol'. One gesture is often used to non-verbally communicate in the analysed posts is 'Praise the sun'.

Praise the sun! [emphasis added] Friends are a true gift in this world. (/u/lunzen, Reddit)

Some posts even contained a visual representation of the physical act of the gesture by adding '\ [T] /' to a response, which is meant to represent the gesture of praising the sun. This specific gesture is often used in a post that has positive purposes. The usage of this emote is partly configured by the positive encounter that can be had in the universe as discussed earlier.

Thank you, friend. Long may the sun shine! **\ [T] /** [emphasis added]. (/u/mobileSavage, Reddit)

The usage of Dark Souls terminology, phrases and gestures when communicating online is possibly also done to enhance the sense of belonging and to non-verbally communicate emotions that can only be understood by other community members. People that have not played Dark Souls would not understand what 'being summoned' means, let alone understand the potential emotional load it can carry. It is a reminder of kinship, showing that people that are part of the community also share a common 'language' which can be learned by being both part of the Dark Souls community, and having some history with the franchise.

3.6 Sense of belonging to a community

The meaningful elements of the posts and data related to this theme were more subtle compared to other themes, especially small expressions and the way members address themselves and others in the community were of importance. What can be considered an essential factor in both real life and virtual communities is the sense of belonging (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). Where there is a lack of geographical proximity, and when anyone can just 'access' a community by clicking on a virtual button, the concept of belonging becomes more complex (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). The overall 'sense of belonging' already emerged in all the other themes discussed, but is explored further in this section. Sense of belonging can be expressed or observed through multiple dimensions: membership, influence, emotional connection and more (Blanchard & Markus, 2002). 'Influence' can be observed in the second theme, where users share experiences from when they felt that the community had an influence on their gameplay experience, or how they interpret certain gameplay mechanics. Similarly, emotional connection is embedded in the 'shared history' of a community, which can be related to common experience had by members of the Dark Souls community. Members of the Dark Souls subreddits show in the posts that they reminisce over these experiences, as they feel that their adventures, and thus 'history', is experienced by other members as well (Blanchard & Markus, 2002). Exchange of support, which is considered a factor that leads to a sense of belonging and stronger relationships, has also emerged in the dataset (Wellman & Gulia, 1997). One post presented in the previous section, includes the sharing of an emotional story, which was met with comforting responses or the sharing of similar emotional situations (Blanchard & Markus, 2002). This showing of emotional support could be an indication of a feeling of obligation. As one feels that they are part of a certain community, they are more inclined to provide emotional support to other community members as well as expect to receive it in some way (Blanchard & Markus, 2002; Wellman & Gulia, 1997).

Additionally, deriving from the way users refer to the community in certain posts, users in the community verbally express that they feel and are member of a larger community. The posts

analysed and presented below are an example of how community members express 'feelings of membership', by identifying themselves as part of this community the Dark Souls community through the usage of 'we' and 'us' (Blanchard & Markus, 2002).

> Why do **we** [emphasis added] have to subscribe to 37 different subs? The very description of this sub states "for everything related" when in reality the sub is stripped off of a majority of content simply so **we** [emphasis added] can act like this series that started over a decade ago is still super niche. Because [*Dirk Sauce*] isn't for the [*Casuls*]. (/u/dolooresh4ze, Reddit)

In this post, 'we' is used to refer to the Dark Souls Reddit community in particular, rather than the Dark Souls community as a whole. The Dark Souls Reddit community and Dark Souls community in general should be and are considered two separate communities or entities. These communities will likely have a lot of overlap. People who are part of the Dark Souls Reddit community can almost certainly be considered part of the broader Dark Souls community. Though, not everyone that can be considered a member of the Dark Souls community is necessarily part of the Dark Souls Reddit community, which should be kept in mind. Yet, /u/dolooresh4ze refers to the Dark Souls Reddit community with a collective 'we', indicating that they identify themselves and the others who they are addressing as part of this community (Blanchard & Markus, 2002).

> I also don't understand this, if all the dark souled people were held at ringed city from the beginning, **then us, the ashen ones and hollows** [emphasis added] don't have dark soul inside **us**? **We** [emphasis added] do have the dark sign, so how? (/u/Montantero, Reddit)
>
> -
>
> I think that Lord Gwyn let out humans from his reservation (the Ringed City) who were sufficiently indoctrinated. **We** [emphasis added] absolutely DO have the dark soul inside **us** [emphasis added]. (/u/behanandgsha, Reddit)
>
> -
>
> **We** [emphasis added] were BRANDED with the Dark Sign not BORN with the Dark Sign. (/u/vupitsjanky, Reddit)

These posts discuss a specific lore related subject. Here, users also address each other with 'we' and 'us'. In this discussion, the in-game main character is being referred to. Everyone who has played Dark Souls 3, experiences the universe through their in-game character, branded as the 'ashen one'. Again, these posts show that users assume the common adventure experienced by all community members. By saying 'we' instead of 'the main character', it also shows the personal connection these users have with the avatar they control to traverse the games and connect that to the other community members as well.

Not only the main character that each community member has controlled in their adventures configures how community members identify each other and themselves, online mechanics such as covenants do as well.

> I don't need the help, but I always summon a **sunbro**. **I'm a blue boy** [emphasis added], I know the pain of farming your covenant. (/u/WhiteSilverDragoon, Reddit)

> I also try to be a **polite blue** [emphasis added], even if it sometimes just earns me a lightning urn to the face mid-bow. Twinks are rude. F. (/u/Hillenmane, Reddit)

In some of the posts, users refer to themselves and others based on covenant. In this specific case, the covenant they pledged to, turns their phantoms or character blue when interacting with other players in the virtual universe, hence the naming 'blue' and 'blue boy'. 'Sunbro' refers to a phantom that turns golden and is pledged to the 'Warrior of sunlight'. Referencing to other players in this fashion could be done purely to clarify certain experiences. Though, some users showed that they identify with their in-game covenant: "I'm a blue boy" *(/u/WhiteSilverDragoon, Reddit)*. In this example, the virtual avatar in the Dark Souls universe does not only embody the users construction of virtual identity in-game, but transcends it, and configures their expression of virtual identity and their perception of other community members on Reddit as well (Blanchard & Markus, 2002; Pearce, 2011). How they express this sense of belonging, is in turn configured by the gameplay mechanic of covenants. By voicing their allegiance to a certain covenant, they both alter their identity within the community and assign themselves with a specific status as well.

Essentially, all the themes discussed can be observed as an expression of feelings of belonging, depending on the contents of the posts, or the motivations that lead to discussions (Blanchard & Markus, 2002).

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between a videogame and the related virtual communities and how these parties configure one another. As discussed earlier in this thesis, communities, and the identities of the members in these communities differ from those in 'real' communities on several fronts (Blanchard & Markus, 2002; Merchant, 2006; Pearce, 2011; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005 ; Wellman & Gulia, 1997). In order to explore the intricacies of videogame related virtual communities, a thematic analysis was conducted on a part of the Dark Souls community on Reddit. Lima's (2018) interpretation of configuration was used to get a better understanding of the relationship between these two virtual entities. Throughout the analysis it increasingly became clear how this relationship manifested itself in the case of the Dark Souls community.

The findings in this thesis are not directly applicable to all virtual communities, virtual videogame communities or even the Dark Souls community in general. Rather, it is an attempt at getting a better understanding of how virtual communities are possibly shaped or constructed differently than real life communities, and how digital mediums and artifacts potentially configure the whole structure and intricacies of these virtual communities in general.

4.1 Main findings

Throughout the analysis it increasingly became clear that the connection between the Dark Souls Reddit community and the Dark Souls franchise is an interrelated relationship, where the 'consequences' of the constant feedback loop of configuration is observable in both the virtual communities of Reddit and the virtual universe of Dark Souls (Lima, 2018). For example, the Dark Souls (online) gameplay and mannerisms is configured by members of the extended virtual community in several ways. Community members encourage each other to take on a certain playstyle or inspire others to be more creative within the boundaries of Dark Souls gameplay mechanics, opening up new ways of gameplay for members of this community. However, some players aim to gain an unfair and perhaps unintended advantage within the virtual universe, configuring other player's' perceptions of the game while still operating within the ruleset of the Dark Souls franchise. These interactions, rules and playstyles in turn seemingly lead to both positive and negative discussions on these experiences brought on by other players within the community on the analysed subreddits.

Not only do players configure the gameplay experiences of other players within the Dark Souls universe, the Dark Souls franchise itself configures the community in multiple ways as well. On the analysed subreddits, players address each other based on appearances in the virtual universe,

and discussions arise, initiated by the sharing of gameplay experiences or insecurities about the lore. In addition, non-verbal and verbal communication is distinctively configured by Dark Souls through both the restrictive in-game communication tools, the lore, quotes and even physical expressions in the form of gestures that can be observed through the NPCs that inhabit the virtual universes in the franchise. For example, the dataset shows that members of the Dark Souls Reddit community express their emotions with jargon inspired by Dark Souls in several discussions. The usage of these specific phrases or words could be a non-verbal way of communicating specific emotions that are only understood by members of the same community that understand the implied meaning of the lingo. The understanding of these words is not only configured by the gameplay, but also by the general experiences of the player and their interpretations of it, thus the interpretation of these terms will differ for each individual to some extent (Lima, 2018). Though members of the Dark Souls community will likely have a similar understanding for 'keywords' like 'hollowing' as illustrated in the analysis chapter. What binds these members in this case is the common experience and therefore common knowledge and expertise of Dark Souls (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005; Tardini, 2003).

This research shows that, at least seemingly, the Dark Souls franchise and it's community do have an extensive configurational relationship, where a constant loop of feedback takes place between the Dark Souls videogames, specific gameplay mechanics, NPCs, and the community members themselves. This is observable in multiple posts, and some elements seem to be more frequently discussed by the community than others. Overall, it seems that which configures most interactions, discussions, and perceptions of the game among members, was the common experience everyone has of playing the Dark Souls videogames. Community members mostly share these experiences, and expect that other players too have had similar experiences, whether they were negative or positive ultimately does not matter for this configuration. It could be argued that in the case of negative community interactions, the perception or opinion that specific individuals have of the Dark Souls community would be different compared to an individual who enjoyed more positive gameplay interactions. Though, it makes sense that most of the discussions taking place within the community surround the gameplay, as the community in general is 'constructed' around Dark Souls, and one of the probable motivations for people to become a member of this specific community is the common interest in the Dark Souls franchise and the shared expertise and knowledge among experienced players and members of the community in general (Tardini & Cantoni, 2005).

4.2 Theoretical implications

The concepts of community and communication discussed in the theoretical framework were all observable in the dataset to some extent, though two features stood out the most. First, the concept of identity construction in virtual communities was readily observable among members of the Dark Souls Reddit community (Merchant, 2006; Pearce, 2011; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005). Identity was constructed by members of this community in multiple ways. The experiences that community members have in-game, and choose to share with others, is one way of how they construct their identity within the community. When users first choose to become part of the Reddit Dark Souls community, their identity is an empty canvas, and still have to present to others 'who they are' inside this community, and allow others to form an opinion or perception of them (Merchant, 2006). Sharing opinions and experiences on being part of a specific covenant, expressing aversion to certain content, showing affection for certain NPCs, sharing knowledge and expertise and all things related to personal gameplay experiences combined is what structures and contributes to the online identity of a Dark Souls community member (Merchant, 2006; Pearce, 2011; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005).

Second, the 'sense of belonging', and an expression thereof, was observed in most of the analysed posts and present throughout all the themes constructed based on the post analysed. The way members of the Dark Souls community refer to both themselves, others, and even NPCs in the virtual environments indicate that users who actively participate in these discussions consider themselves as part of a community. Usage of Dark Souls mechanics and terminology, both verbal and non-verbal, show that a members' perception is configured by the Dark Souls gameplay mechanics. It could be argued that Dark Souls players who pledge themselves to a covenant in the game, also find the need to represent this covenant outside the game. Usage of Dark Souls jargon does not only showcase a member's sense of belonging to the community, but it could also be interpreted as the digital border of the community, creating an imaginary line between internet users who do understand and partake in conversation that include these specific words and phrases, and those who do not (Tardini, 2003).

However, findings regarding sense of belonging in the analysis were not always completely covered by the concepts in the literature. The literature that was used for the concepts of virtual communities could in some cases be considered 'outdated'. It seems that not only technology is rapidly evolving, but the usage of words and languages on the internet is changing even quicker. Future researchers could focus on covering this phenomenon, and could help get a better understanding of how sense of belonging is expressed in virtual environments. This literature also

often posed the issue of 'intimacy of relationships' in virtual communities, and argue in some cases that these relationships are weaker than in real-life (Wellman & Gulia, 1997). Whether this is still applicable is arguable, seeing that frequent, and perhaps even on a personal level interactions, can take place online with ease in current times.

Though the relationship between users in virtual communities was not the main subject of this research, it did come up within the literature that discussed virtual communities often. Several scholars argued that the strength of a relationship between individuals in virtual spaces and within virtual communities is often not as intense or in-depth compared to relationships in real-life communities (Blanchard & Markus, 2002; Tardini & Cantoni, 2005; Wellman & Gulia; 1997). Even though, members of the Dark Souls Reddit community did communicate with each other as if they were long-time friends, and often did not need explanation for their intentions, the interactions were mostly unpersonal and almost exclusively related to Dark Souls. This could imply that different type of media or even videogame genres can generate different types of virtual communities, with different levels of emotional bonds and interactions between community members. Exploring the differences between separate virtual communities and the relationships in those communities could expand the understanding of virtual communities in general.

4.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This thesis mainly focuses on the relationship between specifically the Reddit Dark Souls community and the Dark Souls franchise and the configuration between both parties. This thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of virtual (videogame) communities and their construction. Especially when dealing with virtual communities where members share a common interest through a specific form of media such as a videogame franchise or possibly even TV-series, movies or other digital leisurely content, the results and findings from this research could prove to be useful in the future. Though, this research is not without limitations. An extended research on the Dark Souls community could relate and connect the Dark Souls community to other parties like YouTube content creators and Twitch streamers. These virtual platforms and content creators on these platforms possibly also configure virtual communities on both how they choose to play games and interpret certain elements within the franchise and their relationship towards other community members. Doing an extended research on the Dark Souls community could reveal the intricacies of videogame culture and community or even internet (pop) culture in general even further.

The analysis section of this research was limited to three specific subreddit communities related to the Dark Souls franchise. Though, in order to get a more complete observation of the broader 'Dark Souls' virtual community outside the Dark Souls in-game universes itself, all related

communities both on Reddit and other forums or content sharing platforms should be taken into consideration. The thematic analysis was also exclusively observational, and motivations of community members to say certain things or express certain feelings are based on the interpretation of the researcher. Future or extended research on the Dark Souls community and communication could include interviews with players and community members in order to get more extensive data on motivations of these players, and how they think the franchise configures them, providing with possible additional insights on the subjects. Although these approaches would have been beneficial for this specific thesis, it was difficult to explore this many methods of research due to time, knowledge and resource limitations.

Future research could focus on specifically the unique choice of words and modes of communication, exploring the linguistic intricacies of videogame communities and communities on the internet in general. This type of research could uncover why certain lingo is more likely to be accepted by a broader group of people or social circles compared to others. One example of this could be the 'praise the sun' phrase and gesture, which is not only frequently quoted by Dark Souls community members, but used by the broader videogame community on the internet as well. How videogames in general have some effect on the linguistics of internet users, and why that is the case could be interesting as well. This leads to the question of how the concepts of culture are evolving in this digital age. What is and is not considered culture in digital spaces? And where do cultural factors in virtual communities differ from real life communities? Which parties are familiar with which cultures? And will 'real' culture be affected by widespread of technology and internet access? Scholars that are knowledgeable about both culture and the internet could try and answer these questions, leading to a better understanding of how both current concepts of culture are applicable in virtual spaces, and whether new concepts need to be developed.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Code Group Example 1

<table>
<tr><th colspan="5">Code Group:
Discussion of Dark Souls game(play) design</th></tr>
<tr>
<th>Gameplay (design) discussions</th>
<th>Discussing online gameplay mechanics</th>
<th>Discussing the difficulty of Dark Souls</th>
<th>Negative emotions invoked by gameplay design</th>
<th>Individual code 5</th>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quests and NPCs in 3 seem geared almost entirely as rewards for repeat players, that the price of driving a questline to completion is deep, intimate knowledge of seemingly random quest triggers through trial-and-error and possibly a walkthrough. (…). Yeah, you can miss Siegmeyer in Sen's Fortress, but at least his appearances aren't particularly hidden and his questline doesn't prompt you to return to the early areas of Undead Burg again after Anor Londo for no conceivable reason other than to lock new players out of completing his story." (DS1_Post_1_Chain) (/u/substandardgaussian)</td>
<td>"I think 15% is correct. If it was 4% and he received 400k souls, that means he spent 10 million souls for his last level up…. which is impossible. The max level you can get is 713 as a sorcerer, which requires 8.89 million souls.(…)" (DS3_Post_8_Chain) (/u/nahteviro)</td>
<td>"That's the interesting thing about this game, specific bosses are harder for specific people. A lot of bosses that some people consider hard were pretty easy for me. Dancer of the Boreal Valley? Defeated her on the 3rd try. Champion Gundyr? No problem. Aldrich? 4th try I think." (DS3_Post_3.1._Chain) (/u/RedditZacuzzi)</td>
<td>"There's a difference between "esoteric" and "buried". Figuring out something esoteric feels good. Finding something arbitrarily buried in a random place feels like a waste of time, I can't even enjoy the quest anymore afterwards." (DS1_Post_1) (/u/substandard gaussian)</td>
<td>Example from data set 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>"She was originally supposed to be the fire keeper in the earliest version of the game from what I have heard. and the painted world was supposed to be the hub world like firelink. Real damn shame." (DS1_Post_7_Chain) (/u/Srajo_the_Obscure)</td>
<td>"Sorry forgive me, is the dried finger a use once only item or does it have infinite uses? Can I do this at soul level 60 on first play? And do I get souls for winning and lose souls etc? Thanks" (DS3_Post_9_Chain) (/u/Yaldinho)</td>
<td>"These games are amazing, but how am I supposed to find half of what it offers when there are 2 hidden walls. How was I supposed to get to ash lake without a guide? How would I get to arch dragon peak let alone know about it's existence</td>
<td>"I mean everything in there made me hate the game more than anything else. It was and is a place I actively avoid as much as possible. (…)"</td>
<td>Example from data set 2</td>
</tr>
</table>

		without a guide? Great games, but god damn." (DS1_Post_1_Chain) (/u/SomeBoredBoi)	(DS1_Post_6) (/u/The_ cogwheel)	

Appendix B: Code Group Example 2

Code Group: Usage of Dark Souls terminology				
Altering pop-culture references with Dark Souls lore or terminology	Using Dark Souls lingo to console other community members	Using Dark Souls lingo to express emotion or describe real life situations	Using in-game messaging system quotes to communicate	Using in-game quotes to communicate
The power of Seigbrau surges through his veins. He isn't in a pickle anymore, he is the pickle. (DS3_Post_4_Chain) (/u/TheNaughty - Avocado420)	Let us all raise a Siegbräu in the memory of your friend. May the flames guide him. (DS3_Post_14.2_Chain) (/u/Cyronsan)	First time i got to Sen's on ps3 and saw the big swinging blades across the thin walkway(…)I was full of appreciation for the sadistic genius of the game designers until i got to the silver knight archers, my controller went hollow against my bedroom wall then. (DS1_Post_6_Chain) (/u/Maxbeerbomb)	Good work Therefore Try victory (DS1_Post_5_Chain) (/u/DarthCallidous)	Seems like a nice cold, dark gentle place! Would make a great home for someone one day. (DS3_Post_1_Chain) (/u/davirmoverm2)
Tutkundzgn: "If I took that helmet off, would you die?" Nacka-da-Slacka: "It would be extremely painful." (DS3_Post_2_Chain) (/u/Theshimita)	May the flames guid him :'((DS3_Post_14.2_Chain) (/u/Bookofzed)	Reminder to me that I was still "cursed" and while not hollow, I had to preserve my humanity. (DS1_Post_2_Textpost) (/u/TheManOfOurTimes)	"Illustration ahead" (DS3_Post_19_Comment) (/u/Gezz83_)	I miss the ol bugger, I do... (DS3_Post_11.2_Chain) (/u/TheZealand)

Appendix C: Textpost example post

<u>Little theory about Sulyvahn's Beasts and the Gravetender</u> Greatwolf (self.darksouls3)

Recently I noticed that Sulyvahn's Beasts move in a similar way to the Gravetender Greatwolf,
they both use biting attacks, as well as elemental breath attacks and charges, the Greatwolf's
frost breath and rush attacks also share similarities with Vordt's rush and frost breath attacks.
I think this means the Pontiff admired the Greatwolf as a young sorcerer growing up In the
painted world and replicated it's fighting style for his own Boreal Outrider Knights (at least the
ones who have been sufficiently corrupted by the Pontiff Eye Rings) I'd be interested in seeing
anyone else's thoughts on this.

By /u/thatfacewhennodance in DS3_Post_5

Appendix D: Comment Chain example

[–]rdh2121 351 points
Solaire fails at finding his own sun too, though.
·
[–]**HolyKnightPrime 219 points**
There's a lesson there too. Obsessing over results is not good. The
guy left his home country and threw everything away to find his
supposed sun.
·
[–]**sabrosafb 54 points**
Or was it his son? Changes perspective
·
[–]**SaiyafChowdhury 71 points**
He wants to be as grossly incandescent as his son? Tf
·
[–]**rdh2121 47 points**
Tfw Solaire is actually Daedalus.
[–]**lowcarson98 11 points**
Subtitles specifically say "sun"
·
[–]**sabrosafb 4 points**
Do they? Or is it just fake news
·
[–]**lowcarson98 6 points**
Solaire does, yes, he specifically says sun
·
[–]**ennyLffeJ 12 points**
seems to me too many people finding "suns" instead of "sons" these
days. that's what's wrong with lordran
·
[–]**DragonSurferIchBin 2 points**
Oh shit!
[–]**nichinichisou 21 points**
Still better than Siegmeyer. The dude left his family to pursue an
adventure and he doesn't even put a slight bit of effort into it.
·
[–]**Twizlight 6 points**
As so many people I know have done...
[–]**_DeifyTheMachine_ 2 points**
Are you messing? He gets *around*. Sometimes it is a good idea to sit
and think about your next steps rather than just charging in and

getting yourself hollowed.

[–]**twoCascades 1 points**

You better put some respec on that name

[–]**JackNoir413 79 points**

Listen, i know you like to think that, but its bullshit so im gonna keep thinking he killed gwyn with us since any other opinion is fucking wrong

I swear im not in denial.

•

[–]**Deus_Vult9161 25 points**

It's ok, we're all in denial you don't have to hide it

•

[–]**JackNoir413 20 points**

I miss him :(

•

[–]**Deus_Vult9161 17 points**

So do i :(

[–]**Althideon 15 points**

Only denial i have is about to the cool pyromancy guy.

"Stay safe friend, don't you dare go hollow"

•

[–]**Deus_Vult9161 14 points**

I literally always refuse to tell him where I found the pyromancy so that he won't go looking in blight town and go hollow. Probably the kindest npc in a game ever

•

[–]**Althideon 21 points**

And he just accepts it. He has so much faith in your friendship and he goes like: "Well if you are refusing to tell me, i am sure that it is for my own good"

One of my favorite npcs in games, not bcs he is so badass or cool. Well you know why

•

[–]**Deus_Vult9161 9 points**

Exactly! I was expecting him to turn hostile and end up leaving firelink shrine and fighting me in a later part of the game but I thought it would be better than him going hollow after I basically told him where to go and essentially lead him to his death, but he just accepts it. He trusts you so much that he's confident that if you're not telling him then there's a good reason for it and he won't speak of it any further. He's probably also the only npc other than Solaire that's actually really nice to you and actually shows compassion

[–]**Tschmelz 2 points**

Same for me, but with Logan and Rhea.

[–]**f33f33nkou 3 points**

That isnt denial, he canonically fights gwyn at the end of the game. I suppose if he wins or not is something we cant know but he survives to the end.

•

[–]**JackNoir413 5 points**

I believe he linked his world's fire since the soul of cinder used the lighting spear. Yes, it could be someone else's, but...cmon, in the

whole series the only person that could've linked the fire and use the power of zeus is gwyn and he already has a whole phase in the soul of cinder fight. By default, solaire linked the fire and whoever says otherwise has VERY sad life.

[−]**Nahoy83 20 points**

Not if you make it with him until the end and kindle the flame to become his sun.

[−]**dyltheflash 27 points**

I thought that Miyazaki said Solaire canonically defeats Gwyn and lights the fire. I heard that from a let's play though so it might not be true.

.

[−]**NedHasWares 2 points**

Iirc that's what he *likes* to believe because it's a (relatively) happy ending. Even devs have their own interpretations.

[−]**EFlamezXC 8 points**

Well. Depends, there is an ending where he finds his sun. Don't want to spoil that ending for him though if you haven't gotten it.

[−]**con_ker 5 points**

It's not about finding the sun. It's about seeking it. That's life.

[−]**fioreman 4 points**

Because he put on all that armor but forgot to wear gloves. He kept getting hit in his bare hands until he went hollow.

[−]**DrHoly1337 1 points**

Does he though, really?

[−]**phlamez92 1 points**

Only if you let him down.

[−]**Calmdom66 1 points**

Goes crazy in the process

[−]**easily4gotten 1 points**

Hm. Ok, correction: the main lesson of Dark Souls is that everyone fails at everything, even the world eventually fails and nothing matters, so... follow your own sun? :/

[−]**VirtuteX points**

'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

Appendix E : Textpost-long example post

<u>"Hearest thou my voice still?"</u> (self.darksouls3)

 I'm more of a lurker so I'll try to keep it brief. I lost a friend to cancer 2 years ago. I was visiting his widow for the weekend, and we brought out his PS4 to watch a LOTR DVD. It was dusty. Dark Souls 3 was still inside.

She took the CD, held on to it for a minute before finding its case, placing it inside, and back onto the shelf. It's a ritual she's used to at this point.

We shed some tears. She told me spectating and playing games hasn't been the same for her, but that this game in particular always has a special place in her heart because it was so special to him.

My friend got me into the Souls series back in college. Coached me through the Undead Berg of DS1, taught me how to get the Drake Sword. I didn't beat the game until after he died, so the first time I linked the flame was surprisingly emotional for me.

I've since spent well over 1,000 hours across the games since then and beaten the sequels. It's my favorite series of games and I owe it all to my friend for helping me git gud.

Anyway, just wanted to show some gratitude for the Souls games and felt this community could relate. Thank you for reading!

By /u/mobileSavage_4 in DS3_Post_14

Appendix F : Comment-long Example post

Ugh, 3 was abysmal about this. 1 I thought was mostly fine, the Solaire Sunlight Maggot thing is among the only true "WTF?" parts of that quest. I do think the game wants you to replay it so you can do quests differently, which is why there are so many NPCs with questlines that are basically hidden or are easy to fail... but at least progression kind of makes sense. Characters tend to appear in more advanced/more difficult areas after advancing their quests in earlier areas, and they appear as NPCs in the world being obvious and taking up space instead of invisible-at-a-distance summon signs that you may fail to recognize are actually quest NPC signs you should look at.

3 throws all that "fairness" stuff out the window. Questlines in 3 often require you to return to basically completely arbitrary places you have no reason to ever see again. Since 3 had the bonfire warping from 2, you need a good, specific reason to return to an area you've already "cleared", but several questlines do require you to do some backtracking to pick them up again after advancing the quest. There's no indication that you need to do so as far as I can tell.

Quests and NPCs in 3 seem geared almost entirely as rewards for repeat players, that the price of driving a questline to completion is deep, intimate knowledge of seemingly random quest triggers through trial-and-error and possibly a walkthrough. That leaves a bad taste in my mouth, I don't think that's really acceptable even by Dark Souls 1 standards. Yeah, you can miss Siegmeyer in Sen's Fortress, but at least his appearances aren't particularly hidden and his questline doesn't prompt you to return to the early areas of Undead Burg again after Anor Londo for no conceivable reason other than to lock new players out of completing his story.

If they want to promote deep, intimate knowledge of the game, as Dark Souls players like, I do think they should have some NPCs whose quests are unlikely to be completed in a first playthrough...

hell, there can be NPCs that you're unlikely to even find in a first playthrough, which Dark Souls 1 had. What I don't think is okay is

to decide where quest advancement triggers go by throwing darts at a spinning dart board. There's a difference between "esoteric" and "buried". Figuring out something esoteric feels good. Finding something arbitrarily buried in a random place feels like a waste of time, I can't even enjoy the quest anymore afterwards.

By /u/substandardgaussian in DS1_Post_1

Appendix G: Dark Souls 1 subreddit thread links

1. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/ga19gu/for_all_of_you_who_say_to_go_into_the_game_blind/
2. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/g9bh4q/dark_souls_and_addiction/
3. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/g9ggvm/to_the_invader_at_anor_londo/
4. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/g91kcr/perhaps_the_biggest_lesson_from_dark_souls_is_in/
5. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/ghev2a/my_dudes_its_my_first_playthrough_and_i_beat_os/

6. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/9h0ih2/players_quitting_dark_souls_because_its_too/
7. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/bnbdwu/with_her_last_dying_breath_priscila_whispered_but/
8. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/flv9yv/invading_people_playing_because_theyre/
9. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/fvsd54/hey_you_yeah_you_dont_you_dare_go_hollow/
10. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls/comments/8qhca0/vaati_becomes_the_narrator_for_dark_souls/

Appendix H: Dark Souls 2 subreddit thread links

1. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/g8pv59/bradleyoftheoldguard/
2. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/g8ijst/level_up_warning/
3. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/g8fdf8/darksouls_2_pvp_2020/
4. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/g4bc51/favorite_quotes_from_dark_souls_2/
5. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/g33lki/this_game_is_bloody_huge_such_an_underappreciated/
6. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/g2mnkq/to_those_confused_about_the_earthen_peak_elevator/
7. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/g02e3y/about_the_demons/
8. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/fh94cj/petition_to_allow_regular_image_posting_on_dark/
9. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/fgfb29/it_finally_happened/
10. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/fd94jn/to_whomever_just_rated_my_dont_give_up_skeleton/
11. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/f9lsh3/to_the_people_purposefully_leaving_bloodstains_in/
12. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/f8v43w/a_message_to_all_blue_sentinels_be_proud_we_are/
13. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/f8pmve/what_is_wrong_with_drangleic/
14. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/f5r83r/why_ds2_stuck_with_me_for_longer_than_1_or_3/
15. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/envqca/dark_souls_2_im_tired_you_tired_vendrick_weeps/
16. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/eo0gwu/dark_souls_2_nailed_more_aspects_than_any_other/
17. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/eedzpn/the_worst_weapon_awards/
18. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/ee1h6s/rdarksouls2_salty_sunday/
19. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/ed13u2/dark_souls_2_has_some_of_the_best_lore_ive_ever/
20. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/e1p1gd/so_ive_got_a_theory_about_illusory_walls_in_ds2/
21. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/dyowpj/can_you_tell_me_the_worst_weapons_spells_armors/
22. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/dy7skq/need_a_moment_to_vent/

23. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/dtuesp/dialogue_appreciation_post_slight_spoilers/
24. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/g8uhmq/majula_depression_love_life_and_dark_souls_2/
25. https://www.reddit.com/r/DarkSouls2/comments/g981sw/today_i_discovered_that_a_tv_show_in_my_country/

Appendix I: Dark Souls 3 subreddit thread links

1. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/g8kdng/i_painted_lothric_on_a_canvas/
2. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/g74jyq/i_drew_my_ds3_character_naki_the_friend/
3. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/g6lreb/first_playthrough_of_ds3_one_of_the_best_games/
4. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/g5v06j/siegward_has_ascended_to_a_higher_plane_of/
5. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/g53v8f/little_theory_about_sulyvahns_beasts_and_the/
6. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/g3w861/i_drew_all_curved_swords_as_minecraft_items/
7. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/fxoh0v/lords_of_cinder/
8. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/fx7rp8/wtf_i_just_got_400k_souls_during_an_invasion/
9. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/ffs9xf/the_godlike_red_phantom/
10. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/fflqvv/toss_a_like_to_all_the_golden_phantoms_who_died/
11. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/ffem6d/so_i_just_finished_this_game_and_holy_shit/
12. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/fd2wzo/just_had_a_dark_phantom_invade_me_then_he_dropped/
13. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/fb98jc/to_the_true_heroes/
14. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/faf3n3/hearest_thou_my_voice_still/
15. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f8i8y0/how_would_you_describe_dark_souls_hmmm/
16. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f8arph/in_honor_of_my_first_finished_playthrough_of_ds3/
17. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f7zy1j/just_got_a_visit_from_a_priest/
18. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f7nnc3/estus_flask_project/
19. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f6tbv1/bonfire_lit_dark_souls_art/
20. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f6afey/self_sirris_of_the_sunless_realms_cosplay/
21. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f6kyuq/role_playing_as_a_merchant/
22. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f5wgmn/the_nature_of_the_undead_curse_and_the_deep_and/
23. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f33r0r/return_to_drangleic_february_23_2020/
24. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f2lviq/clumsy_build/

25. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/f18v45/i_just_figured_out_exactly_why_dark_souls_is_my/
26. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/ew2xo6/i_just_lost_75_million_souls/
27. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/evyu9t/to_everyone_who_got_gud_at_ds3_pvp/
28. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/er9h6d/my_friend_has_been_messing_with_photoshop_lately/
29. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/er2zys/a_spoilerfree_guide_for_enjoying_dark_souls_3_for/
30. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/eijbuf/saved_up_my_siegbr%C3%A4u_worth_it/
31. .https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/eewooa/so_i_just_fought_a_demon_with_a_fat_onion_man_and/
32. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/edrrcj/i_finally_came_back_to_the_consumed_garden_after/
33. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/eaybl8/fuck_you_friede/
34. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/eapuea/to_whoever_just_helped_me_defeat_aldrich/
35. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/eanxm9/invasions_like_this_keep_me_playing/
36. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/e6bccn/over_a_year_ago_i_started_my_dark_souls_3_journey/
37. https://www.reddit.com/r/darksouls3/comments/dz4k0f/i_painted_the_intro_cutscene_as_a_comic_strip/

Appendix J: Extensive (initial) code report generated with Atlas.ti (10% of final total code report)

Project: DarkSouls Coding

Report created by diets on 04/06/2020

Code Report

All (92) codes

○ **Accepting lore related community-theory as truth**

2 Groups:

Discussion about in game lore rooted in uncertaintity / highlighting the importance of Dark Souls community influence

3 Quotations:

7:1 I like that. I'm going to consider it canon. (1:43 [1:88]) - D 7: DS3_Post_5.1_Chain_Comments5

I like that. I'm going to consider it canon.

9:11 Oh I had no idea they were confirmed, I only knew the outriders were (2:502 [2:570]) - D 9: DS3_Post_5.3_Chain_Comments14

Oh I had no idea they were confirmed, I only knew the outriders were

36:6 I agree with the memory loss being an effect of hollowing. In Dark So…… (2:682 [2:905]) - D 36: DS2_Post_4.1_Chain_Comments8

I agree with the memory loss being an effect of hollowing. In Dark Souls 3 you can see it with Lapp, who says he's a hollow and that he doesn't remember who he used to be and sometimes doesn't even remember you very well.

○ adressing certain type of players/playstyle and expressing emotions towards them

0 Groups

3 Quotations:

16:5 Twinks are rude. (1:835 [1:850]) - D 16: DS3_Post_10_Chain_Comments5

Twinks are rude.

16:6 Twinks are the bane of my existence no joke (1:906 [1:948]) - D 16: DS3_Post_10_Chain_Comments5

Twinks are the bane of my existence no joke

16:8 not polite to are the twinks. Because twinking is a step beyond invad…… (1:1306 [1:1433]) - D 16: DS3_Post_10_Chain_Comments5

not polite to are the twinks. Because twinking is a step beyond invading, it's going out of way to just ruin the hosts day.

○ Adressing Dark Souls players with 'we', showing a companionship

1 Groups:

Referring to self and others in a collective way and as part of the Dark Souls community

1 Quotations:

42:6 when in reality the sub is stripped off of a majority of content simp…… (1:1524 [1:1681]) - D 42: DS2_Post_8_Chain_Comments5

when in reality the sub is stripped off of a majority of content simply so we can act like this series that started over a decade ago is still super niche.

○ **Appling 'Dark Souls philosophy' to real life**

1 Groups:

Personal/real life shared with Dark Soul community

2 Quotations:

52:21 It's not about finding the sun. It's about seeking it. That's life (3:1746 [3:1811]) - D 52: DS1_Post_4_Chain_Comments36

It's not about finding the sun. It's about seeking it. That's life

52:24 Hm. Ok, correction: the main lesson of Dark Souls is that everyone fa…… (4:198 [4:369]) - D 52: DS1_Post_4_Chain_Comments36

Hm. Ok, correction: the main lesson of Dark Souls is that everyone fails at everything, even the world eventually fails and nothing matters, so... follow your own sun? :/

○ **appreciating help from community members in-game through specific mechanics**

2 Groups:

highlighting the importance of Dark Souls community influence / In-game multiplayer positive interactions

3 Quotations:

21:1 If you took the time to place a helpful message. You have saved my li…… (1:89 [1:226]) - D 21: DS3_Post_13_Textpost

If you took the time to place a helpful message. You have saved my life countless times. Against mimics, ambushes and helped find items.

54:18 This is where reading soapstones comes in nicely. I don't wanna look…… (3:208 [3:413]) - D 54: DS1_Post_6_Chain_Comments51

This is where reading soapstones comes in nicely. I don't wanna look stuff up online cuz i like the blind playthrough but an in-game community where you gotta wade through the trolling is a good solution

54:20 This is one of the coolest aspects of the Dark Souls series and made…… (3:458 [3:659]) - D 54: DS1_Post_6_Chain_Comments51

This is one of the coolest aspects of the Dark Souls series and made me appreciate playing through DS2 mostly blind.

You have to figure out which signs you can trust and what risks are worth taking.

○ **Changing the meaning of acronyms to something Dark Souls related**

0 Groups

1 Quotations:

47:2 The real Most Valuable Phantom (1:342 [1:371]) - D 47: DS1_Post_1_Chain_Comment28_Commentlong1

The real Most Valuable Phantom

○ **Claiming that cooperation or interaction with other Dark Souls players ingame is crucial for the full gameplay experience**

1 Groups:

Discussion about Dark Souls game(play)design

3 Quotations:

47:16 You get glimpses of coop elements (invasions, summons, vengeance, mes…… (3:1455 [3:1864]) - D 47: DS1_Post_1_Chain_Comment28_Commentlong1

You get glimpses of coop elements (invasions, summons, vengeance, messages etc.) but these aren't just fun online extras.

They are instructions for how to explore the game properly. If you invade, summon, leave messages etc. you will find out more and progress further. If you want to 100%, or get "all bosses" or "all weapons" then you have to cooperate with/listen to other players.

Or be very lucky.

54:4 had my friend come "rescue" me haha, he escorted me out of blighttown…… (1:857 [1:971]) - D 54: DS1_Post_6_Chain_Comments51

had my friend come "rescue" me haha, he escorted me out of blighttown. i cooled off then finished it the next day

54:6 I was like FUCK THAT if no one helps me im done with this character…… (1:1525 [1:1633]) - D 54: DS1_Post_6_Chain_Comments51

I was like FUCK THAT if no one helps me im done with this character. Luckily I had a friend help me out.

○ **Combining internet culture with Dark Souls reference**

1 Groups:

Usage of Dark Souls terminology to communicate

5 Quotations:

4:4 laughs in Midir (1:567 [1:581]) - D 4: DS3_Post_3_Chain_Comments11

laughs in Midir

4:5 Cries in Midir (1:629 [1:642]) - D 4: DS3_Post_3_Chain_Comments11

Cries in Midir

4:6 M'dir (1:749 [1:753]) - D 4: DS3_Post_3_Chain_Comments11

M'dir

6:6 UwU onion dawdy notices your sword OwO it's so wong (1:438 [1:488]) - D 6: DS3_Post_4_Chain_Comments5

UwU onion dawdy notices your sword OwO it's so wong

47:1 Non-Solaire-Friendly Walkthrough (1:85 [1:116]) - D 47: DS1_Post_1_Chain_Comment28_Commentlong1

Non-Solaire-Friendly Walkthrough

○ combining real life events with Dark Souls terminology

1 Groups:

Personal/real life shared with Dark Soul community

4 Quotations:

56:2 Way of the Corona. Then after the pandemic ends you can always use a…… (2:1 [2:101]) - D 56: DS1_Post_8_Chain_Comments20

Way of the Corona. Then after the pandemic ends you can always use a plow and pretend to be drunk.

56:3 Way of White Covid19? (1:1383 [1:1403]) - D 56: DS1_Post_8_Chain_Comments20

Way of White Covid19?

56:4 Corona Whitus [–]HeeyWhitey 31 (2:138 [2:168]) - D 56: DS1_Post_8_Chain_Comments20

Corona Whitus [–]HeeyWhitey 31

56:5 I got invaded by CORVID-19. Appropriately, I was in Blighttown. They d…… (2:347 [2:460]) - D 56: DS1_Post_8_Chain_Comments20

I got invaded by CORVID-19. Appropriately, I was in Blighttown.

They didn't use poison though, missed opportunity

○ **Cross referencing Dark Souls franchise**

0 Groups

1 Quotations:

9:4 Or he played Bloodborne, lo (1:983 [1:1009]) - D 9: DS3_Post_5.3_Chain_Comments14

Or he played Bloodborne, lo

○ **Dark Souls as a reason for self-improvement/ emotional effect/affect**

1 Groups:

Personal/real life shared with Dark Soul community

2 Quotations:

17:1 Yeah i almost gave up early on ngl but i powered through it and now I…… (1:152 [1:244]) - D 17: DS3_Post_11.1_Chain_Comments2

Yeah i almost gave up early on ngl but i powered through it and now I feel like a new person

48:1 So proud of you for not going hollow IRL. I LOVE the analogy! It help…… (1:1 [1:90]) - D 48: DS1_Post_2.1_Chain_Comments9

So proud of you for not going hollow IRL. I LOVE the analogy! It helps me with my life.

○ **Dark Souls Lore vague-ness resulting in discussion**

1 Groups:

Discussion about in game lore rooted in uncertaintity

17 Quotations:

7:2 Thats how it works (1:135 [1:152]) - D 7: DS3_Post_5.1_Chain_Comments5

Thats how it works

8:6 I do wish they expanded the mythological significance of the greatwol…… (1:1526 [1:1651]) - D 8: DS3_Post_5.2_Chain_Comments8

I do wish they expanded the mythological significance of the greatwolfs in the Dark Sould universe. They have so little lore!

8:7 Are the greatwolfs a species? We have seen 3 of them, Sif, Farron and…… (1:1 [1:1651]) - D 8: DS3_Post_5.2_Chain_Comments8

Are the greatwolfs a species? We have seen 3 of them, Sif, Farron and the one in Ariandel.

Are they like what dragons are to wyverns, but as wolfs?

• [–]UnFaDable8Bit 29 punten 9 dagen geleden I'm pretty sure there a sub species of wolves in the lore [–]KosmicHunter 28 punten 9 dagen geleden It may have to do with Souls granting power, a great warrior teamed with a reliable hound could accrue more Souls than a single warrior. This could mean that the Dog having consumed so many more soul than its lone counter parts, would be much larger. Just my guess.

• [–]Makana149 27 punten 9 dagen geleden That would explain the various size differences between the three greatwolves we've seen. Sif had fought a a lot of bandits over the centuries while protecting her masters grave, making her massive.

While the Farron Watchdog was smaller because it rested in the tower. The one in ariandel is a medium, it fought and protected it's master's grave but there are obviously less people to threaten it in the painted world.

• [–]Hot-Za388 1 punt 8 dagen geleden Happy cake day!

[–]Moonborne_Ash 10 punten 9 dagen geleden That does make sense, but I do't think it would necessarily be the case. I think greatwolfs may be a species in the world of Dark Souls and are perhaps revered (look at the abyss watchers for an example).

• • [–]cpdk-nj 2 punten 8 dagen geleden The Abyss Watchers revere Artorias in general so it could be assumed the same with Sif • [–]Moonborne_Ash 1 punt 8 dagen geleden I do wish they expanded the mythological significance of the greatwolfs in the Dark Sould universe. They have so little lore!

9:8 It is confirmed that the beasts are humans experimented on by the Pon…… (1:1334 [1:1407]) - D 9: DS3_Post_5.3_Chain_Comments14

It is confirmed that the beasts are humans experimented on by the Pontiff

9:9 I'm not sure if confirmed, but from what I know, safe to assume. One o…… (2:39 [2:276]) - D 9: DS3_Post_5.3_Chain_Comments14

I'm not sure if confirmed, but from what I know, safe to assume.

One of Sully's beasts, the one at the bridge to Irithyll, drops one of the eye rings, which were given to knights, so it would make sense that they're deformed knights.

13:5 the flame, but is/was he really powerful though? I think like he, thou…… (1:627 [1:1072]) - D 13: DS3_Post_7_Chain_Comments13

the flame, but is/was he really powerful though?

I think like he, though has no exceptional qualities physically or otherwise, was determined to do something exceptional and decided that he would link the flame.

Also in one video vaati suggests that he might have abandoned the linking of the flame because of how painful it was which I hinted by his dream sequences, but either way, I think he wasn't much powerful than an ordinary man.

13:6 That's a neat theory, I personally like the theory that suggests that…… (1:1410 [1:1715]) - D 13: DS3_Post_7_Chain_Comments13

That's a neat theory, I personally like the theory that suggests that Ludleth was the original Pygmy lord that found the Dark Soul but was exiled out of jealousy from the other Pygmy lords. Leaves a few holes like how they ended up getting the Dark Soul from him but i still like it.

- [–]wonderwhokn

13:9 I think that Lord Gwyn let out humans from his reservation (the Ringe…… (2:256 [2:419]) - D 13: DS3_Post_7_Chain_Comments13

I think that Lord Gwyn let out humans from his reservation (the Ringed City) who were sufficiently indoctrinated. We absolutely DO have the dark soul inside us.

13:10 We were BRANDED with the Dark Sign not BORN with the Dark Sign. (2:461 [2:526]) - D 13: DS3_Post_7_Chain_Comments13

We were BRANDED with the Dark Sign not BORN with the Dark Sign.

36:5 Pretty sure they come to Drangleic when they die, to become undead. A…… (1:1777 [2:87]) - D 36: DS2_Post_4.1_Chain_Comments8

Pretty sure they come to Drangleic when they die, to become undead. And the "don't remember why I came here" means they

don't realize they're dead or remember dying. That's always how I've interpreted it.

36:6 I agree with the memory loss being an effect of hollowing. In Dark So…… (2:682 [2:905]) - D 36: DS2_Post_4.1_Chain_Comments8

I agree with the memory loss being an effect of hollowing. In Dark Souls 3 you can see it with Lapp, who says he's a hollow and that he doesn't remember who he used to be and sometimes doesn't even remember you very well.

41:1 but I was wondering how did the Demons we find get all the way from t…… (1:151 [1:275]) - D 41: DS2_Post_7_Textpost

but I was wondering how did the Demons we find get all the way from the Demon Ruins/Lost Izalith in Lordran to Drangleic?

52:17 I believe he linked his world's fire since the soul of cinder used the…… (3:670 [3:1051]) - D 52: DS1_Post_4_Chain_Comments36

I believe he linked his world's fire since the soul of cinder used the lighting spear. Yes, it could be someone else's, but...cmon, in the whole series the only person that could've linked the fire and use the power of zeus is gwyn and he already has a whole

phase in the soul of cinder fight. By default, solaire linked the fire and whoever says otherwise has VERY sad life.

52:18 I thought that Miyazaki said Solaire canonically defeats Gwyn and lig…… (3:1218 [3:1363]) - D 52: DS1_Post_4_Chain_Comments36

I thought that Miyazaki said Solaire canonically defeats Gwyn and lights the fire. I heard that from a let's play though so it might not be true

52:19 Iirc that's what he likes to believe because it's a (relatively) happy…… (3:1412 [3:1531]) - D 52: DS1_Post_4_Chain_Comments36

Iirc that's what he likes to believe because it's a (relatively) happy ending. Even devs have their own interpretations

52:20 Well. Depends, there is an ending where he finds his sun. Don't want…… (3:1575 [3:1705]) - D 52: DS1_Post_4_Chain_Comments36

Well. Depends, there is an ending where he finds his sun. Don't want to spoil that ending for him though if you haven't gotten it.

54:28 I like it because at that point in the game and in the lore, Gwyn is a…… (5:454 [5:738]) - D 54: DS1_Post_6_Chain_Comments51

I like it because at that point in the game and in the lore, Gwyn is a much weaker version of his normal self. His flame is fading and everyone knows it. The fight/area being underwhelming is meant to show that Gwyn's passing is simply fate, and you are its deliverer.

At least IMO

○ Debate about which (developer) game is the best

1 Groups:

Discussion about Dark Souls game(play)design

1 Quotations:

25:2 Sekiro has more fluent combat I'd say, it's more satisfying to play,…… (2:1669 [3:195]) - D 25: DS3_Post_16_Chain_Comments49

Sekiro has more fluent combat I'd say, it's more satisfying to play, and the expansiveness of ds3 is unrivaled.

However, bloodborne hits home two things better than any fromsoft game, atmosphere and lore. The atmosphere in that game, even after 5+ playthroughs and a platinum trophy never fails to dumbfound me, I really do feel like a hunter in a world plagued by beasts. And the lore is so captivating and vast just for one game. I think I speak for many that a sequel/prequel to bloodborne would

be a dream come true Also, I'd say it's gameplay is second only to sekiro.

That's all just my opinion, of course, I'm not the ultimate judge of fromsoft game quality. But that's my take on it.

○ Describing other community members and self as 'NPC' inside the game universe

2 Groups:

highlighting the importance of Dark Souls community influence / Referring to self and others in a collective way and as part of the Dark Souls community

1 Quotations:

47:21 I think there is meant to be no difference between you leaving me a g…… (4:586 [4:786]) - D 47: DS1_Post_1_Chain_Comment28_Commentlong1

I think there is meant to be no difference between you leaving me a guidance message and the Crestfallen Warrior telling me to ring the two bells. You are another NPC in my story, as I am in yours.

○ Discussing (online) game mechanics

1 Groups:

Discussion about Dark Souls game(play)design

35 Quotations:

14:1 Yea, you get souls based off the other people's level. So the phantom…… (1:44 [1:148]) - D 14: DS3_Post_8_Chain_Comments27

Yea, you get souls based off the other people's level. So the phantom that fell was prob very high level

14:2 Is it based on their level or how many souls they are carrying at the…… (1:226 [1:303]) - D 14: DS3_Post_8_Chain_Comments27

Is it based on their level or how many souls they are carrying at the time?

14:3 15% of the souls they last used to level up. (1:358 [1:403]) - D 14: DS3_Post_8_Chain_Comments27

15% of the souls they last used to level up.

14:4 Haven't checked but I thought it was closer to 4% for invaders receiv…… (1:452 [1:530]) - D 14: DS3_Post_8_Chain_Comments27

Haven't checked but I thought it was closer to 4% for invaders receiving souls

14:5 [–]TheCurrentsofSpace 69 punten 21 dagen geleden Wiki says 15% (1:536 [1:598]) - D 14: DS3_Post_8_Chain_Comments27

[–]TheCurrentsofSpace 69 punten 21 dagen geleden Wiki says 15%