



DARK SOULS ON STEROIDS

All about the gameplay of Nioh

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I never gave enough credit to Nioh. I merely relegated to the status of being a mere Dark Souls clone like the abysmal Ashes of the Fallen. When I got around to trying it, I was blown away.

The game starts off in typical Dark Souls fashion, with my character locked up in a dungeon with no weapon to fend for himself and no explanation as to why he was locked up in the first place. A guardian spirit shows me the blatantly obvious path to escape and I'm left baffled as to why the protagonist didn't think of it in the first place. Regardless, once the game showed me enough mercy to give me a sword and a pair of boots (no, nothing else) I was off to fight the guards.

As I fiddled around with the controls, I felt myself at home with the overall layout as it was the same as Dark Souls'. At first the combat felt faster than Dark Souls, then I figured it was faster than Bloodborne, which is regarded as the fastest Soulsborne game. After a few fights with multiple assailants, I thought to myself "This is Dark Souls on steroids!" The combat is extremely fast paced. It

puts the speed of Bloodborne to utter shame and the twitch reflex-requirement is much higher. Team Ninja seriously knows how to make fluid combat systems and Nioh wasn't any exception.

As I was scurrying through the London Tower, the place of my imprisonment, I came across a plethora of weapons each with their own unique moves and stamina consumption levels. I saw myself leaning more towards the spear and sword combo as a good mixture of speed and range.

I was actually having fun with the game and I thought that maybe this game is not just any Dark Souls clone but a very good one, at that.

Once I got to the boss fight arena, a pathetic excuse of a boss showed up and got dispatched in a few minutes. I thought this was going to be the one particular aspect that this game would fall short in. But, some creepy bald guy showed up and infused some sort of super-serum into the dead boss and resurrected him in a much scarier form. I thought that maybe this was going to tank a few more hits and that's it. Boy, was I wrong. The boss threw me around the arena like I was nothing. It's like the

difficulty had been bumped up from "Kiddy mode" to "Maximum pain" in just a matter of seconds. I was not going down so easy. After about 15 minutes of fighting the monstrosity, chipping away at its health while trying to save my puny, fragile self, I managed to slay it. The same feeling of adrenaline and satisfaction I derived from the Dark Souls series came rushing back to me. At that point, I realized my preconceived notions were entirely baseless.

I thought that was it about the game's mechanics. But after a while with the tutorial mission which comes AFTER you beat the level I just talked about, it became apparent that the gameplay of Nioh makes some important changes and additions that sets it apart from Dark Souls. First of all the stance system. You have the choice of switching between three stances, high, medium and low. High stance gives you stronger, slower attacks which cost a lot of stamina; medium stance strikes a balance between speed, strength and stamina consumption; and low stance speeds up your attacks in favour of damage. Then we have the Ki system. It is basically the stamina bar from Dark Souls but there is

a catch. Every time you attack, you are given the change to recover a large portion of the Ki you spent in attacking by timing the pressing of the Ki Pulse button. This adds an extra layer of depth to the combat as you have to time your Ki Pulse at the correct moments to keep up the onslaught of attacks. Then you have the guardian spirits who give you attribute bonuses and bestow on you moments of invulnerability and powerful new abilities when their pulse is charged enough.

The armour and weapons system is very much like the Dark Souls games but the design work here is top notch. Nioh has some of the best armour I've seen in a video game.

All in all, in terms of gameplay, Nioh carves its own identity by incorporating so many familiar elements of the Souls series with its own gameplay innovations. It is truly a must-buy for those who are looking for their Dark Souls fix after The Ringed City.

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