

Dark souls weight calculator

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"...you are the only men who think you know the future more clearly than what is before your eyes..." - Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War There's nobody left here. I'm running up a staircase toward a cathedral at vesper hour, the sky orange and filled with red dragons, whose shadows slide across the flagstone steps like sperm in war regalia. I have been running up these steps for the past five days. They were once guarded by giants in black armor with swords and shields as big as their bodies. There were also horn-headed men covered in gold carrying curved swords in each hand. A reanimated dragon lies at the end of this path, a city-block-sized cross between cat and lizard, mysteriously brought back from the time before time began, the last remaining life form in this world that I haven't yet killed. For days I climbed these stairs, slowly chipping my way through the scorched hulks, before coming to the top, passing through one last misty arch and finding the precursor of all life in the universe there on a stony circular pedestal with nothing but sky behind. And for days he killed me dead in one move, leaping into the air and spraying a pool of fire down in a circle so wide I couldn't get out of its way, no matter how fast I sprinted. So large was this beast that when I was close enough to attack the toenaal of his forepaw, the rest of his body would be impossible to see. The few visible cues he gave in advance of his fiery leap would go unseen, and then I'd be dead and thrown back to the bottom of the stairs, only to run back up through the gauntlet to be killed again. And then, as if exhausted from seeing me caught in the same loop again and again, those soldiers began to disappear, bored by the predictability of my appearance, or in merciful recognition that repeated battle with the same enemy in the same place had begun to lose its meaning. And on the fifth day, at 3AM, after having branded every microsecond of the dragon's movement into memory, I'm finally able to trick him into moving in whatever way I want and at just the time that I want. Then, finally, after pantomiming with the computer code operating his limbs and head, I swipe away at his body with my sword for another few minutes and kill him. There is no mystery to it. I've known since the beginning what I would need to do in order to kill him, but like the gap between understanding how to hit a homerun and being able to do it, I have finally transitioned from observer to practitioner, and my prize is a small token that highly suggests this god dragon, progenitor of worlds, is an impostor, a mimic built from the husk of another species and mutated through sorcery into a replica that has actually been dead form the start. The last living creature in the highest point in the world has been mastered and killed, and now there is nothing left here except for me. My reward for this murder is emptiness. And so I look at the wind disentangle the clouds on the horizon, swing my sword through the air a few more times for old time's sake, then walk back down the staircase alone, every square inch of the world belonging to me, along with every inanimate thing remaining in it, not a single soul left to contest my claim. The Excrement of Action Released this week for PCs, Dark Souls II is the sequel to what I have long thought of as the worst game ever made, a work that demonstrated how and why videogames could become, to paraphrase Jeanette Winterson, the excrement of action, an elaborate network of interrelated parts oriented around an end goal of staggering waste. Like its predecessor, Dark Souls II is an open world combat game offering players a seemingly infinite variety of ways to do the same thing over and over again. You can kill with a sword, or magic spells, or giant clubs, or spears infused with fire. You can kill by striking first, or using a shield to block and then counter, or wear no armor and agilely roll beneath your enemy's attacks then hit them from behind. But in every case you can only drain the fixed number of health points each enemy has, wiping them from the world, removing them from your path so you can move further along, where you can try another variation on the same basic idea. Maybe it will be better next time. Image via author. I hated the first Dark Souls and so I decided I should learn it better than any other game. I have spent between 300 and 400 hours playing it, running through its escalating levels of New Game+, in which the amount of damage required to kill an enemy increases alongside the amount of damage they output, a structure that ensures the game is never entirely solved but continually produces new mathematical variations. You might have killed Ceaseless Discharge once, but can you do it again if he can kill you with two hits instead of three, and when you need to hit him 16 times instead of 11? The game's traditional roleplay categories worked in concert with this infinity loop of new problems. You have finished the game as a knight with a shield and sword, but can you do it as a sorcerer, or as a thief using tiny daggers? Have you tried playing the game without any armor at all? Or without ever leveling any of your character's skills up? Have you beat the game using only your bare hands? Have you played online, competing in duels with other players, taking turns hitting buttons that produce second-long animations, trying to guess in advance how your opponent will respond while compensating for internet latency that ensures the movement and location of your opponent is never really accurate. The first time I played the game it took me 90 hours to finish, and the last time I ran through it took me around three hours, having learned every hidden trick and obscure mathematical relation it hid beneath its combat puppetry against horned demons and scorpion pyromancers with pornografied breasts. The game's vagaries were so successful in triggering a masochistic cycle of obsession that a large community of players formed around it, sharing secrets and walk-throughs of advance copies imported from Japan, helping one another with the labor of unwrapping the game's opaque systems. What did the "poise" category do, for instance? What was the difference between a counter hit and a critical hit? What does it mean when a weapon says it has "B" scaling with Dexterity? Why does the rate of bonuses derived from scaling suddenly seem to stop after a certain threshold? There is no intuitive logic to these rules as they are broken down across a constantly shifting chart of variables. They cannot be intuited or thought through without empirical labor, switching back and forth between menus, equipping and unequipping weapons, moving points around, committing materials toward upgrading one piece of equipment while only guessing as to whether the time, currency, and scarce alloys used to strengthen it are being wasted on something suboptimal. And even once all these variously opaque systems have been uncovered, scored into one's unconscious memory somewhere between instinct and avarice, they suddenly stop working as they had hours earlier. The rule undoes itself as soon as you've learned it. This interruption of well-intended plans toward an optimal end-state mirrored the game's plot following the sorcerous contestations of mythic figures who overthrew their universe's original rulers (dragons), and found themselves fractiously fumbling with an overabundance of power that none could control. Among these thieving demi-gods were a scaleless traitor of his dragon bretheren, an outcast witch who taught her daughters pyromancy, a skeleton king who kept the dead at peace, and the king of sunlight who wore feather'd epaulets and could hurl lightning from his bare hands. It was like Ovid retold in the tobacco clouded arcades of my adolescence, assembled in fragmentary sentences hidden in item descriptions that became contradictory the further one read, mirroring the obsessive impossibility of mastering the game's over-complex fighting system with a nesting of story details that seemed only to produce best guesses made to endlessly doubt themselves. Each memorized pattern or statistical secret was agitated by the knowledge of how quickly and easily one can be killed. One is never safe, and one can never trust the particular splinter of skill one's mastered, always conscious of how many other possible splinters there are left to study. It's the worst and least ethical form of play, taking the naturally constrained single encounters of Chess or Go into the heart of an infinity spiral rotating out from the center of a box of microprocessors built out of a grand network of exploitive labor practices around the world, creating a transfixing hallucination sublimely disassociated from the networks of labor required to produce it. The friendships formed in message boards and YouTube comment threads offset by the number of lives pinned in place by the economic conditions necessary for the creation of such hallucinatory machinery, offering the great thrill of achievement for having done nothing but press a few half-inch buttons, hypnotized by the unseen patterns passing through the screen, scrutable only to those others who'd undergone the same rite of initiation and spoke the secret lexicon. You Can't Be Defiled Twice When I started Dark Souls II, I had little hope of not falling into another lightless pool of fixation. I had no rhetorical defense for why I was going to do it. You can't be defiled twice, and already having been swept away into the digital miasma of numbers and growth charts built around killing what was already dead, there was no way to believe it would be better this time. On the contrary, it would be worse, horrible, stupid, mendacious complexity, maximally toxic in its newness, each tortuously undiscovered secret and statistical twist energizing the swarm of play workers eager to find friendship and community in demonstrating their worth with game achievement and documentation. The game's formal irony verges into defeated sarcasm, its ruined fantasy world of corrupt kings warring over supernatural artifacts producing a community of fanatics sprung up in the cracks of socio-economic disintegration spread by the industries responsible for conjuring up the machinery of that dissolution, an arrangement that creates new emotional attachment to the game by worsening the circumstances that make its players needful in the first place. A hole to crawl into. Image via author. It's unsurprising that the sequel to the worst videogame ever made is also the worst videogame ever made. From Software have built a faithful variation of the original, simulating progress with a series of minimally impactful changes. Dark Souls' interconnected world, which that threaded back and forth across itself the longer one played, producing new entry points into old spaces, or a surprising new views of familiar landmarks, has been forsaken in favor of a world of constrained spokes leading away from the game's safe central area hub area without ever overlapping. This creates an anxious sense of distance, in which the further one advances down any particular path, the farther away one feels from all the others. There's a persistent sense of being caught in a narrow ravine masked by digital set dressings—a gaseous mining operation powered by a windmill, an onyx castle covered in midnight rain, an abandoned penal colony on a forgotten coastline, a hidden crypt from which some of the game's most illicit magics have come. In the first game these areas might have connected four or five times over, a secret door in a bookshelf revealing a link between crypt and mine or castle and prison, but here there is only one way in and one way out, with only a dead end waiting at the end of each spoke. To compensate, players are given the ability to teleport between checkpoints—visualized as eerie bonfires planted throughout the world. Instead of relating to the space as terrain to be read, the sequel makes relating one's immediate surroundings to the world at large secondary and in many cases, topographically impossible. One chips away in isolation, struggling through sealed-off objectives instead of plumbing the complexity of an integrated whole. Dark Souls II encourages a kind of amazed storytelling about how it was one managed to survive. The game is so large and hostile to the player's presence every moment feels like a precursor to some cruel twist or miraculous delivery from unexpected doom that could merit retelling. Victories and discovery only become meaningful to an audience who knows how much work must be put into them, and so these player tales are implicitly clouded by the unspoken murk of failure and defeat. This structure of play is ideally matched with a culture of emotionally and socially isolated individuals—still primarily men—who rush toward non-intimate prompts for social exchange, creating the impression of a community without requiring any reciprocal vulnerability nor emotional obligation. Dark Souls provides an empirical baseline to use in describing one's own experience, which makes admissions of weakness or incompetence tolerable through the impersonal nature of the game's system. There no psychoanalytic backdrop to distinguish sorcerers from warriors or thieves. It's often argued the Dark Souls II teaches players, but one rarely hears about what is being taught. In its exploded plot we are told about love, guilt, greed, sex, war, chauvinism, hatred, and many other safely fictive themes, but we aren't taught anything about them, nor are they presented in a way in which players could meaningful begin to experiment with them on their own. The game only teaches players about itself. The amount of time and effort spent in learning its lessons is dramatically outweighed by the significance of having that knowledge. What good does it do me to know that intelligence scaling for magic users becomes half as effective after level 40? What have I learned by knowing that The Rotten's overhand smash attack can be dodged by rolling directly into it, or that his offhand sweep attack will automatically cause damage even when your character is several feet away. I learned all this and more, too much more. It took hours, and days, and weeks, and even now, after 150 hours of play, I have only just started to unravel the most arcane parts of the game. Why? This is less an education than a massive structure of enforced compliance, insisting on obedience to illogic by dressing it up as a fantasy diversion, and counterposing curiosity with swift and punishing traps that reset major progress, a kind of negative reinforcement that's long been established as the least effective form of instruction possible. This fusion of the worst possible teaching method with the least worthwhile knowledge become insidious when applied to a play structure designed for endless repetition, in which the next goal is always moving farther away. The Zombie in the Progress Narrative is Me In Techniques of the Observer, Jonathan Crary described the emergence of Modernism as something that "presented the appearance of the new for an observer who remains perpetually the same, or whose historical status is never interrogated." The rhetoric of modernity, which once flourished around cinema, has easily migrated to videogames, advocating for them as progress accelerants in schools, international aid, and social change, all of which can be optimized with game-like principles. We have become passengers embarking toward the future, and the videogame is, if not the vessel, at least fuel for it. But what kind of progress does Dark Souls 2 offer? It may be that the great achievement of videogames is to further entrench an epoch of mediated pacification, accelerating our disengagement from the physical world in exchange for enrapturement with the symbolic. It's hard to even identify what a videogame is—both a physical disc storing a collection of files, edited and manipulated over the course of years, assembled inside a specialized computer, and then projected on a screen. The videogame is the perfect 21st object in that its essence is nowhere to be found in any of its physical manifestations—even the spirit of a game like Dark Souls II can be ruined in a few instants by hacking its code to make one's character invincible, reducing a struggle of weeks into a few minutes of effortless floating from beginning to end. It was only play when we were being punished for failing to precisely comply with an invisible set of rules communicated through a rosetta of numbers, glyphs, and fragmented fictions. There's nothing produced, nothing furthered, nothing questioned, nothing intimidated—there are only commands, and the community they call into being, each wrestling with the system's inflexibility in the most personal way possible. But the personal desire can never exceed the system's right to punish, the game becomes purposeless when every player within it is free to choose their own purpose. Baudrillard described an arbitrary sign as something produced when, "instead of linking two persons in an unbreakable reciprocity, the signifier starts referring back to the disenchanting world of the signified, a common denominator of the real world to which no one has any obligation." Videogames produce this sort of paradox in requiring depersonalized adherence to arbitrary order to qualify as play, while simultaneously engendering forgetfulness of the ethics surrounding them the more game-like they become. This is not a problem in need of a solution, but it is a useful compass for navigating the different kinds of obsession that games can create. And there is no one in more need of navigation advice than I, who set out in all this knowing I would find only a dead end down every spoke of meaning I chased. And still I chased, absorbing the math and the topography and the names for things I don't wish to know. I don't want to know a Velstadt, or a Vendrick, or a Vengari, nor how they all relate to one another. But do not think I was forced into following their stories by any hand other than my own. In so joining that chase I have come to embody the incoherence I wished to project onto the world, all from a position of pacified focus on a thing that was only ever partially there to begin with, and something which left me only partially there the longer I played it. We have reached a point in our modernization where it seems we are more indebted to our symbolic objects than the people we live amongst, in terms of both time, energy, and attention. If we are indeed advancing through history and not trading water or actively receding back into it, our progress might be traced through our willingness to exchange one another for symbolic succor, and the farther we progress the more interchangeable the game and the player become. The longer I spend on these quests for achievement and advancement, the more I wish to have never begun them at all. I can think of no worse end to an undertaking than to regret its conception, and for me there can be no better measure for saying Dark Souls II the worst game I've ever played.

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