We got a sneak peek at Elden Ring, a video game collab with 'Game of Thrones' author. Here's everything we learned

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In video games, there's probably no studio that generates more excitement than FromSoftware.

Founded in 1986, the Japanese studio rose to fame through video games such as Demon's Souls and Dark Souls, role-playing epics which earned praise for their level of detail and high degree of difficulty.

Naturally, fans have been eager to learn about From's next project: an action video game collaboration with George R.R. Martin, author of the "Game of Thrones" series, called Elden Ring.

The action role-playing video game is scheduled to launch on Jan. 21, 2022. U.S. TODAY recently watched the game in action. Here's everything we've learned about Elden Ring so far:

What's the game about?

You play as a Tarnished, roaming The Lands Between and battling all forms of enemies from dragons to giant ogres on a quest to become the Elden Lord.

The Lands Between feels vast. Players are able to freely explore however they choose. During their journey, they can collect map fragments to get a better view of the world and place markers to highlight key locations,

such as where an important treasure or a difficult foe lies.

"The story is told in a fragmented way, and we haven't changed our principle of providing a world, a narrative, the player can freely interpret for themselves," said Yasuhiro Kitao, who handles promotion, marketing and production at FromSoftware.

To help players get around, they can summon a Spirit Steed to quickly get to different spots on the map and even fight while riding.

Players can also specialize in specific combat tactics, whether they want to be an expert swordsman, sorcerer, or archer. As players advance, they can apply skills to their weapons to make them more powerful.

Of course, The Lands Between will have its fair share of threats, sometimes attacking the player by surprise. Early in U.S. TODAY's demo of the game, a dragon dropped in to attack the player.

How difficult is Elden Ring?

Kitao compares the challenge in Elden Ring to that of Dark Souls 3, which fits a similar mode as an action-driven RPG.

But Elden Ring will introduce several features to help players who want to play a FromSoftware title but feel intimidated.

"We hope this will allow those who aren't so confident in their action game abilities to enjoy the game and feel that same sense of accomplishment from overcoming its challenges as anyone else," Kitao said.

Don't take that as a sign the game will be easy. Kitao said it will still feature the "distinctive challenging gameplay" the studio is known for

creating.

"What we want to do is create games with a sense of value," he said. "We feel like some of that value comes from overcoming these hardships and challenges."

What are some of Elden Ring's key features?

Stealth play will have a key role in Elden Ring. During one sequence featured in a gameplay demo of Elden Ring, the game's character is shown sneaking through tall grass to quietly fire a sleep arrow at a knight guarding treasure. Another situation showed the lead character sneaking past a larger enemy too overpowering to conquer.

Players will also be able to summon spirits from the ashes of the dead to help them in fights. Let's say you end up fighting against a group of enemies or even a boss, the player can conjure allies to assist them in battle. In the case of one boss battle, a summoned spirit resembling a giant troll started to attack, allowing the player opportunity to strike from afar.

There's also online cooperative play, where up to three players can team up and explore The Lands Between together.

Legacy dungeons similar to Dark Souls experience

Another way Elden Ring matches with the Dark Souls series is through what Kitao called "legacy dungeons." He described them as large-scale dungeons which are "intricately woven and complex."

These dungeons feature different paths for players to explore and, of course, very tough enemies.

During FromSoftware's walkthrough, the player encountered a giant troll. There was an option to take that troll directly, but instead, the player used a sleep arrow while perched atop an outer wall to move forward.

'Game of Thrones' author George R.R. Martin's influence

Kitao said Martin, in collaboration with FromSoftware director Hidetaka Miyazaki, wrote the original mythos of the game, creating the history and backstory that happens many years before the events of the game.

Kitao said multiple lead characters will appear as part of the game's story.

"What it provided was this sort of this lineage for these character bloodlines," Kitao said of the fantasy world Martin helped build with Elden Ring. "He created a lot of political intrigue, a lot of familial ties that really have shaped a lot of our characters and the game world."

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