The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

=======================================

Game Title: The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

Platform: Nintendo 64, Nintendo GameCube, iQue Player, Virtual Console

Genre: Action-adventure

Release Date: November 21, 1998

Developer: Nintendo EAD

Publisher: Nintendo

Designer(s): Eji Aonuma, Yoshiaki Koizumi

By: Justin Biller

Overview

The game begins when Navi, a fairy, awakens Link from his sleep. Link was having a nightmare which was foreshadowing his encounter with the main villain Ganondorf. Navi then brings Link to meet with the leader of the Kokiris, the Great Deku Tree. Link saves the Great Deku Tree from a curse (placed on him by Ganondorf), and receives a spiritual stone known as the Kokiri's Emerald. He is then sent to Hyrule Castle to speak with Princess Zelda.

Link meets with Zelda, who has been having dreams about Hyrule's future as well as Link's arrival. She reveals that Ganondorf is attempting to obtain the Triforce, a holy relic of great power. Zelda requests that Link obtain all three spiritual stones so they can enter the Sacred Realm and claim the Triforce before Ganondorf can. Link then obtains the Goron's Ruby from the Darunia as a reward for slaying King Dodongo, and obtains the Zora's Sapphire as a reward for rescuing the Zora Princess from inside the stomach of a massive whale.

Link then returns to the castle, where Ganondorf is seen chasing Zelda from the castle. Zelda throws Link the Ocarina of Time, and telepathically teaches him the 'Song of Time'. Link uses the 'Song of Time' in conjunction with the spiritual stones to open the door to the Sacred Realm. Link obtains the Master Sword while in the room, but while pulling it from its pedestal, Ganondorf enters the Sacred Realm and obtains the Triforce.

Seven years later, Link awakens inside the Sacred Realm and is told about the events by Rauru, the Sage of Light, and that he must use the Master Sword to defeat Ganondorf. To do so, they must imprison Ganondorf inside the Sacred Realm but they require the help of the other mages, five of whom do not know that they are Sages. Upon returning to Hyrule, Link is met by

a mysterious character known as Sheik, who tells Link of the five temples that Ganondorf is using to prevent the other five sages from awakening.

After cleansing the five temples from all the monsters inside, the five sages awaken. Sheik is revealed to be Princess Zelda and the Sage of Time. She informs Link that when Ganondorf obtained the Triforce it was split into three pieces. Ganondorf obtained the Triforce of Power, Zelda received the Triforce of Wisdom, and Link gained the Triforce of Courage. At this moment Ganondorf appears and imprisons Zelda inside a magical crystal and locks her away in his tower. Link pursues Ganondorf to his tower, defeats him at its peak and frees Zelda. As Ganondorf is dying, his tower begins to collapse. Link and Zelda rush towards the bottom narrowly escaping death.

After the tower has collapsed, the Triforce of Power transforms Ganondorf into Ganon, a massive boar-like monster. With the help of the Sages, Link defeats Ganon and imprisons him inside the Sacred Realm. Zelda then uses the Ocarina of Time to send Link back in time to live out his childhood.

Characters

Link

Link is the protagonist of the story. He starts out as a child, eventually being pushed into the role of savior. He is robbed of his childhood due to the events of the story, until the ending where Zelda graciously restores it upon him as reward for saving Hyrule. Throughout the story Link remains silent, as such does a very poor job of being relatable to the player. It also creates a significant disconnect between the game play and the story, which feel distinctly separate.

Zelda

Zelda is used as a guiding hand throughout the story, and as a plot device. Upon meeting Link, she gives the player a reason to continue playing the game by giving the player a fetch quest to complete with minimal initial impact on the story. She later gives the player the keys to progressing through the game by allowing the player access to the Sacred Realm and the Master Sword. Then she acts as a guiding character by entering the role of 'Shiek', who directly interacts with the player and gives the player details on the five temples. She is used to help resolve the conflict with Ganondorf by sealing him away in the Sacred Realm at the end of the game. She then helps restore Link to his original time, essentially erasing any effect that the game's plot had on the game's world.

Ganondorf

Ganondorf is used as a typical villain. He cares nothing about the world around him or anyone else but himself and only wishes to obtain power, by any means. He even sacrifices his own tribe, the Gerudos, in an attempt to obtain the Triforce. To make his

stereotypical characterization even worse, at the end of the game his exterior is transformed to match his soul, a monstrous black figure that only cares to destroy anything in its path. With very little dialogue and interaction with the character, he remains a very bland and poorly fleshed out character. He exists only to give the player an end goal, and that is to defeat him.

The Great Deku Tree

The Great Deku Tree is only around briefly, but his impact on Link is great. He is used as a stepping stone to Link's great journey and ultimately his destiny. He gives the player a small understanding of the game's universe, and the ultimate goal of the villain by describing the Triforce. Through his death he gives Link the only personal connection that exists between Link and Ganondorf, giving the game its only bit of character depth.

Navi

Navi is used throughout the game as the guiding hand of the designer. She constantly gives the player advice on what to do next, even going as far as to become annoying in her persistence to talk to the player. She is arbitrarily connected to Link, and is used mostly as a tool throughout the game to keep the player on track and constantly progressing through the game.

Breakdown

The story purpose for *Ocarina of Time* is clearly used as a mechanic to pull the player into the game and give them a purpose to continue playing from start to finish. As the characterization in the game is weak, due to a real lack of growth of the main character, it is clearly the only real purpose for the story. The main character, Link, begins the story as a young boy who wants only to have a fairy companion, as his supposed race normally obtains a fairy companion at sometime in their life.

As Link progresses through the story, events occur around him yet don't change him or his nonexistent attitude. Since Link doesn't communicate throughout the story, it is difficult for the player to connect and feel any real emotion. The distinct lack of any connection that Link has to any of the characters in the story, outside of the Great Deku Tree, makes it hard to feel any real connection to the environment and other characters as a great tragedy befalls them.

The lack of any real character growth as well as his detachment from the rest of the characters and environment make the progression of the story feel forced, as if the guiding hand of the game designer is pushing everything along. Because of this, the story really lacks a true premise other than a reason to play the game.

Character psychology is also weak, as the characters are extreme stereotypes. Link represents true good, as the characters detachment from the universe prevents him from having a real goal or reason to help anyone. He dives head first into danger for no reason other than

helping. Ganondorf, the main antagonist, represents pure evil. He seeks true power at the cost of everything else. Zelda, the main female character, is purely a damsel in distress.

It is truly unfortunate that the story elements of *Ocarina of Time* are so weak, as the game play is incredibly strong which made it a ground breaking game for its time. These problems have continued throughout the *Legend of Zelda* series, as in each game the protagonist remains incredibly disconnected from the events happening in the story. While the game play has always remained a strong point, these issues will continue as long as the protagonist Link remains the classic silent hero and all the support characters remain stereotypes.

Strongest Element

The strongest element of the game lies mostly in its game play, and its use of the story to constantly provide goals for the player. As the story lacks real depth and character development, it is full of cheap opportunities to provide the player with reasons to fight monsters and explore dungeons. By placing key characters in constant danger, and then providing plot advancing items at the end of dungeons, the player is never without a direction or reason to continue playing. Because of the stereotypical use of the games characters, the game play is never second to the story. The player never has to stop and think about the depth of the plot, they only need to push forward with the game while the plot works itself out in a clear and simple fashion.

Unsuccessful Element

The lack of depth of the characters and the story is easily the most unsuccessful element of the game and its plot. The plot does nothing to go beyond from the stereotypical silent hero, who pushes on with no real reason beyond saving everyone. It even maintains the 'do bad things to obtain power' stereotype that fuels most games villains. It even gives a physical form to the designer's guiding hand with the creation of Navi, who will interrupt the player to spell out in great detail what he should do next. The game's plot does little to be memorable, and the only reason that the game manages to maintain its iconic status is through the strength of its game play mechanics.

Highlight

When Link is introduced to the Great Deku Tree, an explanation of the game's environment quickly follows. Then after Link saves the Great Deku Tree from his curse, Link is pushed out of the small Kokiri village on to fulfill his destiny. This concludes with the death of the Great Deku Tree, creating the only personal connection between Link, the player, and Ganondorf. Unfortunately this is never used as a major driving force for why Link is going on his adventure, or why he wants to desperately defeat Ganondorf.

Critical Reception

Ocarina of Time was released to critical acclaim, becoming an instant gaming classic and being instantly financially successful by selling 2.5 million copies in 39 days. Eventually *Ocarina of Time* went on to sell 7.6 million copies. Numerous gaming publications gave *Ocarina of Time* perfect scores, and praised the titles level design, game play mechanics, and sound. Even the quality of the graphics obtained praise, with many publications noting that the characters animations and character expressions being of the greatest quality for the time. *Ocarina of Time* translated the quality of the 2D Zelda titles and translated it perfectly into 3D.

While the music in the game was compared to work by Philip Glass, the overall technical quality was brought into question due to the use of MIDI files due to the storage limitations of the Nintendo 64 cartridges.

Lessons

I. Games do not need incredibly deep stories to be successful. *Ocarina of Time* is considered one of the greatest games of all time, yet has an incredibly weak story and characterization. Very few publications said that the story was one of the game's strong suits, and all focused on the game play and level design. Incredibly strong supporting elements, such as level design, graphics, sound, and game play, can easily make up for a weak plot and lack of true premise.

II. Game stories require good characterization to immerse the player. *Ocarina of Time* fails miserably at creating deep and interesting characters, instead opting out for stereotypical character design. This creates a large disconnect between the player and the game, and thus prevents the plot of being a successful element. In the end the plot merely gives the player an excuse to experience the game's superb level design, and fails to leave a lasting impression on the player.

III. Game play greatly benefits from clear goals being presented by the game's plot. Despite failing miserably at creating an interesting premise for the player to experience, the game does an excellent job of making goals incredibly obvious and easy to find. The plot is specifically built to provide game play opportunities, and does an excellent job of guiding the player through what exists of the setting and plot. Due to this, the game moves at a brisk pace that prevents the game from becoming stale and overwhelming, both of which contribute to players from failing to complete the game.

IV. Technology can help create atmosphere which helps bring the game and its plot to life. Despite not creating an immersive plot, the visuals and audio of *Ocarina of Time* brought the environment to life on its own. This helps immerse the player into the game, and acts as a crutch to the games plot by succeeding where the plot failed. It could be an even more powerful tool if the plot was successful in creating immersion by itself, but succeeds despite the failures of the story.

Summation

Despite being a massive failure on the storytelling front, *Ocarina of Time* managed to engrave itself into the gaming mythos by being one of the first and most successful 3D action-adventure titles ever created. The game's plot while weak, musters up enough direction for the player to know what to do so they can experience the true purpose of the game, enjoying the combat and puzzle design. The plot in *Ocarina of Time* can be likened to any good plot in a summer action movie, it does a good enough job to set up the events to come and gets out of the way so that the audience can experience the well choreographed action scenes.