

Game Narrative Review

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Month/Year you submitted this review: 09/2018

Game Title: The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker

Platform: Nintendo GameCube

Genre: Action-Adventure

Release Date: December 2002 (Japan), March 2003 (USA), May 2003 (Europe)

Developer: Nintendo

Publisher: Nintendo

Director: Eiji Aonuma

Writers: Mitsuhiro Takano, Hajime Takahashi

Overview

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker is an action-adventure game set among the islands of a fantastical archipelago and the treacherous seas that stretch between them. The protagonist, Link, is a young man who departs from his home on Outset Island after his sister is kidnapped by a monstrous bird and imprisoned by its sinister master. Link's journey to save her becomes unexpectedly fraught with peril when he finds himself faced with the task of destroying an ancient evil and restoring life to the sunken husk of the kingdom of Hyrule, which sleeps beneath the sea.

The Wind Waker's rich narrative and exciting gameplay are supported by a cast of stunningly expressive characters, dramatic environments rendered in beautiful cel shaded graphics, a spectacular soundtrack, and fluid, intuitive mechanics.

Characters

- **Link** – The player avatar and the game's silent protagonist. Link is a young man from Outset Island whose thirteenth birthday is unexpectedly interrupted by violent chaos that ultimately results in the disappearance of his younger sister, Aryll. Link is the kingdom of Hyrule's eternal hero, resurrected at the behest of its goddesses as a paragon of justice and courage. He has the power to control the wind, which was granted to him by the mysterious King of Red Lions, and is the champion of the Triforce of Courage, one third of a mystical force that governs the balance of the kingdom of Hyrule. He is the hero chosen to bear the Master Sword, a legendary weapon with the power to seal away darkness and evil. He is

brave, curious, resourceful, and compassionate. Love and concern for his sister and the people he loves motivate him to continue on his journey.

- **Tetra/Zelda** – Tetra is the fiery, independent, fearless young captain of a gang of pirates who roam the high seas in search of treasure and glory. Unbeknownst to Link for the better part of his journey, Tetra's true name is Zelda. She is the heir apparent to the throne of the lost kingdom of Hyrule and the bearer of the Triforce of Wisdom. Tetra's spunky attitude and self-reliant tendencies set her apart from other iterations of Princess Zelda, who in previous games is usually characterized as meek and distant until the magical abilities granted to her by the goddess(es) come to be of use to Link in his final confrontation with Ganon. Tetra's unrelenting determination and witty advice serve as inspiration and motivation for Link throughout his journey.
- **Ganon** – Ganon is *The Wind Waker's* main antagonist. He is physically imposing and witheringly cruel in his pursuit of the Triforce and the ancient kingdom of Hyrule. He is *The Wind Waker's* incarnation of the everlasting evil force that taunts Link and Zelda in each game in the *Zelda* franchise. His lust for power and greedy motivation make him the perfect counterpoint to Link and Zelda, who are defined by compassion and bravery. Ganon bears the Triforce of Power.
- **The King of Red Lions** – A magical talking boat that guides Link on his journey. Like Tetra, The King of Red Lions has a secret identity. He is Daphnes Nohansen Hyrule, rightful king of the sunken kingdom of Hyrule. Despite having been turned into a boat after the fall of the kingdom of Hyrule, the King of Red Lions remains unwaveringly optimistic during his travels with Link. He grants Link the power to control the wind by offering him the titular Wind Waker. He acts as both mentor and guide, providing helpful council and tips during Link's journey.
- **Aryll** – Link's younger sister. She is kidnapped by the Helmaroc King early in the game and spirited away to the Forsaken Fortress, where she remains while she awaits rescue. She is kind-hearted, determined, and brave.
- **Grandma** – Link and Aryll's grandmother. It is heavily implied in the game that she raised Link and Aryll after their parents died. She is kind-hearted and warm. Players can return to Link's home on Outset Island at any point in their journey and Link's grandma will make them "elixir soup", one of the most powerful healing items in the game.
- **Medli** – Medli is a young Rito woman. She is an attendant of Valoo, the great dragon who makes his home on Dragon Roost Island. Medli is smart, courageous, faithful, and determined. She is the latest inheritor of a magical lyre and the title Sage of Earth, both of which were passed down to her through generations of Rito women. She is deeply dutiful, and aims to uphold the traditions of her people in all she does.
- **Makar** – Makar is a Korok, one of the small forest spirits that make their home inside the Great Deku Tree. He is small but powerful, bursting with energy and enthusiasm for his job as fiddle player for the Korok rituals. Makar is the inheritor of the title of Sage of Winds, and is tasked with praying for eternity in a sacred shrine to bring the Master Sword power.
- **Jabun** – A relic of the kingdom of Hyrule, this ancient spirit makes his home in a cave on Outset Island. Jabun gives Link guidance while he is travelling around the

archipelago to find the Pearls of the Goddesses, sacred artifacts that will help reawaken the Master Sword. He communicates in the dead Hylian language and can only speak with the King of Red Lions.

- **Valoo** – A massive dragon who perches atop Dragon Roost Island. Like Jabun and the Deku Tree he remembers the days when the ancient kingdom of Hyrule existed. In one story arc, the player must save him from a monster who is causing him pain and creating chaos on Dragon Roost Island.
- **The Great Deku Tree** – The Great Deku Tree is the spirit who oversees the Korok people on Deku Island. He is unknowably ancient and very wise. He communicates with the King of Red Lions in Hylian, but unlike Valoo and Jabun has the ability to communicate with the player as well. He tells them some of the story of the ancient kingdom of Hyrule when they speak with him.
- **The Helmaroc King** – The monstrous bird that kidnaps Link's sister and spirits her away to his nest in the sinister Forsaken Fortress. This ferocious, unkind monster answers to Ganon.

Breakdown

One of the most important aspects of the *Zelda* franchise is its definition and unabashed redefinition of traditional narrative arcs and character archetypes. *The Wind Waker* features a first story arc and a protagonist that break with long-established traditions and conventions surrounding coming of age stories. The player character in this game is a young man on the cusp of adolescence, thrust full-force into the perils and realities of adulthood by a single traumatic event – the kidnapping of his sister. Link's sleepy childhood on a quiet island, surrounded by familiar faces, kept safe even from the ocean by a sheltering harbor in no way equips him with the courage, self-reliance, and loneliness that his future journey demands. Indeed when his voyage begins, Link is unprepared. He loses his sword before his first battle, and when he regains it finds himself too weak to lay a single hit on the Helmaroc King, the beast responsible for tearing his family apart. He has failed. And as penance for his failure, Link is jettisoned out to sea by the very monster that robbed him of his sister. This failure is critical. It is the narrative hinge on which the entire game hangs, and the well from which springs a beautiful, heart-wrenching story of struggle and eventual triumph.

For those like me, who played *The Wind Waker* for the first time in the midst of our own adolescent insecurities, the creative team's defiance of the traditional coming of age story proved shocking and effective. As a child who grew up with Disney princesses and Marvel superheroes whispering in my ear, I came to expect that certain realities of storytelling would always be true. The hero would always win. The prince would undoubtedly find his princess. Bravery would certainly stand in stark defiance of the dark and rise above it to bring peace and comfort to those who suffered. So when Link – so clearly a hero – failed to accomplish his goal, I found myself shaken to the core. I thought of my own little sister and of the daily hardships that faced us both as we struggled to cope with our mother's recent cancer diagnosis. Would I fail her when she needed me? If Link, a hero chosen by the gods and time itself, couldn't help his sister, then how would I be enough to help mine? To this day, *The Wind Waker* is the only game that's ever made me cry.

I have director Eiji Aonuma and writers Mitsuhiro Takano and Hajime Takahashi's masterful defiance of the traditions established in centuries' worth of coming of age narratives to thank for that. The upending of narrative convention that came with Link's failure to rescue Aryll on his first attempt genuinely shook me and thousands of others like me, because it took Link out of fiction and made him suddenly, starkly relatable. Aonuma and his team's defiance of convention and the writers' unprecedented dedication to creating *Zelda* characters with whom their audience could relate is precisely what makes *The Wind Waker* so unique, and why I believe it is one of the most effective coming of age stories ever told. The creative team behind *The Wind Waker* reached into the heart of what defines adolescence and exposed it in wrenching detail to an audience who felt Link's pain as if it was their own. Because, for so many of us, it was.

In *The Wind Waker* the audience watches Link fail, and is then challenged to help him rise above. The game's narrative drives its players to see the challenges they face along with Link not as insurmountable obstacles, but as necessary stepping stones to help Link defeat his most important foes: the people who had once bested him. This focus on self-improvement and betterment permeates *The Wind Waker*'s every dungeon and puzzle and makes for a uniquely engaging, exciting play experience. Gearing the dungeons towards Link's personal improvement not only leads to fun gameplay, but assures that *The Wind Waker*'s touching story is reinforced with every puzzle solved and each swing of Link's sword.

The emotional impact of Link's initial failure in battle with Ganon and the Helmaroc King was not the only positive effect of defying narrative conventions in *The Wind Waker*. Railroading the player into failure in the ill-fated boss battle at the conclusion of the game's first act made Link's return to the Forsaken Fortress and defeat of the Helmaroc King in the game's second act far more impactful from a gameplay standpoint. When players encounter the Helmaroc King a second time they are more prepared, more powerful, and more practiced with the game's mechanics. They possess new items like the Skull Hammer, a powerful melee weapon that is required to shatter the eerie mask the Helmaroc King wears, and have substantially more "hearts" (the *Zelda* equivalent of a health bar). This made the second boss battle with the Helmaroc King a perfect opportunity for players to gauge their progress and in-game accomplishments. Besting a foe that previously defeated them makes players feel powerful, and reinforces the value of completing the dungeons and challenges scattered throughout *The Wind Waker*. The player is allowed a moment of incredible victory when the Helmaroc King is defeated as a gorgeous cutscene plays. In this cutscene, the player sees a sweeping pan of the Forsaken Fortress with the Helmaroc King hovering above, illuminated by brilliant spotlights. They watch as the bird cries out in fury, then in despair, and then finally explodes into an array of feathers and smoke. It is a joyful and exciting moment, and brings home the impact of the player's victory.

Regarding gameplay and narrative, the Helmaroc King's importance in *The Wind Waker* is undeniable. But Link's initial failure and eventual success in defeating him are not the only examples of rebellion against traditional coming of age narratives and their character

archetypes. Spiritual guides have long been important in coming-of-age tales; often offering wisdom, new battle techniques, or important revelations to younger and more inexperienced protagonists. They abound in *The Wind Waker*. Like all *Zelda* games, *The Wind Waker* contains a healthy dose of the non-secular and supernatural. Goddesses, ancient spirits, and magical instruments abound throughout the game's world and narrative. Many, like Jabun, Valoo, and the eponymous Wind Waker itself are examples of the type of lofty, ancient magic that usually characterizes the spiritual in fantasy settings. The inclusion of these grand figures and the power they wield was an excellent choice by the creative team, because it allows the player to frame their experience in the context of something much greater. At their heart, *Zelda* games tell sweeping and epic tales of heroes, goddesses, and ancient evil forces, and though *The Wind Waker* deviates significantly from many traditional coming-of-age tropes, it never strays from the magical.

However, the spiritual guides that prove the most narratively impactful are very different than typical spiritual guides. Their names are Medli and Makar, and like Link they are both young people searching for meaning and their place in the world. The player meets both early on in the game, and is introduced to the core values that define them through narrative arcs that take place on their home islands. They meet Medli in the Rito city on Dragon Roost Island, where she requests their help in getting into the temple of the great dragon Valoo, whom she serves as an attendant. From the time the player first meets her to the moment she successfully makes it into Valoo's temple, Medli is the embodiment of duty, perseverance, and patience. She is kind to the Rito people's troubled prince, eager to assuage the fury of the island's protective spirit Valoo, and undeterred by dangerous circumstances. Armed only with a lyre which she inherited as the latest in a long tradition of Rito women who serve Valoo, Medli enters a treacherous place untroubled by personal risk. Temperance and caution are both lessons she teaches the player during these brief, early encounters.

The lessons Medli teaches the player are important ones, but far more important is the struggle the player watches her go through when they meet her again during *The Wind Waker*'s second act. Instructing a young, headstrong hero to be more patient and tempered in their decision-making is a typical function of spiritual guides in coming-of-age stories, but where Medli stands apart is her uncertainty with seizing the destiny laid out for her by *The Wind Waker*'s goddesses. It is revealed in the second act that Medli is the Sage of Earth, and that the lyre she possesses is an important tool the player needs to rejuvenate their most powerful weapon, the Master Sword. When the player confronts her regarding this, Medli responds at first with uncertainty. But when Link conducts a magical song for her using the Wind Waker, Medli is awakened to her true purpose and power. At once, she is willing to leave her home on Dragon Roost island and set off towards the distant Earth Temple to pray for the Master Sword's awakening. It is at this point in the story where Medli teaches the player her most important lesson: to embrace their destiny.

In *The Wind Waker*, Link is characterized slightly differently than the capable, unwitting hero he is known as in games like *Ocarina of Time* and *Twilight Princess*. He is far

younger, and far more reluctant to throw on the mantle of hero and leave home to rescue anyone but his little sister. His motivation for the first part of the game is just that – save his family and return home. Medli's determination and the willingness with which she accepts her role as one of the goddesses' chosen sages make her the perfect spiritual guide for Link, who encourages him to pursue his destiny and save all of his people, not just his own sister. Her immediate drive to fulfill her destiny represents a direct contrast to Link's initial hesitation, and in helping her down the path to that destiny, Link is brought one step closer to becoming a fully-realized adult himself. Medli's young age and the fact that she is unaware of her spiritual powers when Link first meets her both set her apart from archetypal spiritual guides like Yoda and Gandalf. Unlike these other spiritual guides, Medli has her own growing up to do. Over the course of the player's interactions with her, both in the first and second act, they are allowed the chance to watch her blossom from an uncertain youth into a confident, capable, magically-gifted woman.

Medli and Makar both have important lessons to teach. From Medli, Link learns temperance and patience, but from Makar he learns joy and freedom of spirit. Makar's arc is very similar to Medli's, with the player first encountering him near the conclusion of *The Wind Waker's* first act and then helping him realize his destiny as Sage of Wind about halfway through the second. But though the narrative surrounding Medli and Makar is similar, their characterization makes the experience entirely unique.

The player sees very little joy in *The Wind Waker*. Link travels alone for most of his journey, and often the people he meets are undergoing some kind of strife. Makar represents a bright and sunny contrast to this rule, and in this way provides an entirely different kind of spiritual guidance than many other spiritual guides, including Medli. Makar is jovial, easily startled, and never one to shy away from the opportunity to perform. It's almost impossible not to smile throughout interactions with him – even watching him waddle and skip across the screen is endearing. This joy and light-heartedness persists in Makar no matter what hardships he faces, including being asked to depart from home and journey deep into an unfamiliar temple to pray for the Master Sword's revitalization as the Sage of Wind. The fact that Makar never loses hope and never ceases striving towards his goal no matter what are both important lessons he teaches Link. If Makar, a tiny Korok, is capable of staying happy and free in the face of a life-altering destiny, then why shouldn't Link be?

Though different than the typical lessons taught by spiritual guides, in the context of *The Wind Waker*, Makar's joy is one of the most essential lessons the player learns on their journey. Link's reluctance to grow up characterizes him for the majority of the first two acts because he fears letting go of the carefree lifestyle that he lived as a child. But Makar's unrelenting, unhesitant joy, even after he has taken on an adult role in the story, shows Link that he is capable of being joyful and living a carefree life even as an adult. In terms of defying narrative convention in coming-of-age stories, Makar's characterization is one of the most important examples of how disregarding existing archetypes creates a more impactful narrative overall.

The opportunity to watch this transformation in Medli and Makar is absolutely essential to the narrative in *The Wind Waker*. Rather than presenting Link with spiritual guides that are all already in control of their destinies, who exude power and control, some of his most important ones are going through the same types of adolescent struggles, successes, and failures as Link himself. Link gets to experience the journey towards adulthood with them, and in doing so becomes more capable himself.

Youthful sages and ancient gods are not the only guides Link has during his journey towards adulthood. The most essential archetype in coming-of-age stories is arguably the mentor or role model. This is often an older man, usually a father figure, who offers the protagonist advice and epitomizes the values of courage, wisdom, and power that they need to learn to complete their journey. In *The Wind Waker*, Link's mentor figure is an unexpected one: Tetra. *The Wind Waker*'s incarnation of Princess Zelda. The creative team's choice to make Tetra Link's mentor rather than an older male is narratively genius, and absolutely essential to what makes this game such an exciting and fresh take on coming-of-age narratives. Tetra's age and gender are both important in making her an outstanding mentor figure, partially because they prove that inspiration and mentorship can come from anywhere but more importantly because they put her in direct contrast with Ganon, the main antagonist. Ganon is an imposing middle-aged man with an entire kingdom's worth of minions at his disposal. He has the power to shape and change the world, but uses that power for evil. He is greedy, vengeful, and cruel towards Link and the rest of the archipelago's citizens. He disregards their safety, their will to live, and their traditions in his quest to reach the ancient kingdom of Hyrule. Ganon represents all the things Link fears – his family being torn apart, the loss of his youthful lifestyle, and his own inadequacy as a hero.

In complete, vibrant contrast to this is Tetra. She is fiery, kind, charismatic, and easygoing at once. Despite her youth, she wears her title of captain of a crew of pirates with grace. Her crew adores and respects her despite her youth and gender, and she never allows herself to be deterred or limited by either. Tetra and Link are canonically around the same age, and yet Tetra is already in control of her destiny, knows who she is inside, and think things through before she acts. She is everything the player needs to become, and so makes a perfect mentor figure. The creative team's choice to make Tetra and Zelda the same character, and to therefore place Zelda in a more narratively impactful role than other *Zelda* game typically cast her in, is another excellent example of how *The Wind Waker* defies not only coming of age narratives' conventions, but the conventions laid out by its fellows in the *Zelda* franchise. In other *Zelda* games like *Ocarina of Time*, *Twilight Princess*, and *Breath of the Wild* Princess Zelda is characterized as a benevolent figure who is wise beyond her years, distant from Link, and absorbed by her duty to her kingdom. *The Wind Waker* turns this expected characterization of Princess Zelda on its head by making her Link's companion and mentor. For many players, Zelda's thrillingly different role in this game meant they were able to connect with her in a meaningful way, and that when her true appearance and identity were revealed in the middle of the third act, they were even more driven to help her. Princess Zelda's characterization and her unexpected role as Link's mentor in *The Wind Waker* are further shining examples of

how Aonuma and his team bent narrative convention and created a glowingly impactful story as a result.

Eiji Aonuma and his team's brilliant narrative allowed each of its players to experience a full spectrum of emotion along with its protagonist. *The Wind Waker* offered everything from heartbreaking failure to eventual, blissful success. Its narrative would not only have been markedly shorter, but markedly less interesting if its main character had followed the conventions neatly laid out for him by Luke Skywalker, Frodo Baggins, Steve Rogers, and hundreds of other fictional young men who've struck out from home to find greatness and returned shrouded in glory and fame. But *The Wind Waker*'s Link is unlike these other giants. His journey began with inadequacy, and the meat of the story centers on his struggle to become anything more than inadequate. He, just like the player, is only human. *The Wind Waker*'s touchingly raw and vibrantly realized coming of age narrative brings the best and worst of adolescence to light, and masterfully allows the player to grow along with Link as they guide him through his journey.

Strongest Element

Critics often highlight *The Wind Waker*'s characters as its strongest narrative element, and I find it impossible to disagree. In particular Tetra's characterization stands out to me as unique because of her contrast to other iterations of princess Zelda. In games like *Twilight Princess* and *Skyward Sword* Princess Zelda is all distance and duty, while Link is battle-ready and courageous. *The Wind Waker* turns this dynamic on its head. When Link and Tetra meet, Link is by far the more hapless and uncertain of the two, while Tetra is a self-assured natural leader who charges unflinchingly towards danger. In the context of *The Wind Waker*'s fiction, Tetra is everything Link needs to become in order to survive a solo voyage on dangerous seas. And during the course of his journey, as he becomes more resourceful and self-sufficient, players are allowed the exciting experience of watching Link rise to the occasion, follow Tetra's example, and become the hero Hyrule needs.

The fact that Link's role model in *The Wind Waker* is a young woman rather than an older man is an excellent example of how the writing team ignored and improved upon traditions established by centuries of coming-of-age stories. The writing team's choice meant that Princess Zelda was no helpless damsel in distress, but a beacon of shining goodness that epitomized the values the franchise has established Hyrule's princess should aspire to. Tetra's characterization made her suitable to act as a partner for Link in his final confrontation with Ganon, and as a role model to aspire to be like throughout the game.

Unsuccessful Element

In order to get from island to island in *The Wind Waker* players must sail on their ship, The King of Red Lions. Sailing from one island to the next is an arduous task barely made tenable by a triumphantly upbeat and exciting soundtrack. Certain parts of the game require the player to sail between far-flung islands that can take up to 15 minutes to reach. This means that the player has a lot of distance to cover between narrative beats.

Long-distance sailing can be quite boring after a relatively short time, and can break immersion with the story.

Mechanically speaking, what differentiates sailing in *The Wind Waker* from the open world exploration in other *Zelda* games is the fact that the player has little chance to encounter and engage with micronarratives while travelling. In *Breath of the Wild*, for instance, the player must walk or ride horses for long distances to reach their objectives. But in *Breath of the Wild* walking and riding horses across Hyrule allow the player to reach towns they've never seen, collect materials for food or potions, and uncover new secrets. In *The Wind Waker* players are not so lucky. For the most part the ocean is empty, and when they do encounter islands they have to completely disembark from their ship and halt their progress forward to explore. While sailing, players have the option of "salvaging", or dredging the ocean floor for treasure, but in order to do it they must completely stop their ship. The misfortune of the sailing system in *The Wind Waker* is that unlike in other open world games the player must stop their progress towards their goal in order to fully explore the world.

The sailing mechanic makes already cumbersome parts of the game that much more time-consuming. For example, in the middle of the second act the player is tasked with collecting 21 Joy Pendants (collectible items with little value) from monsters all over the archipelago and returning them to a non-player character in exchange for the deed to a private island. This task – essentially a fetch quest repeated 21 times over – is made much more difficult and arduous by the fact that the player must sail around the archipelago in order to find the monsters that have the Joy Pendants. If fast-traveling were a more easily accessible option or the Joy Pendants were located in one place and therefore did not require the player to sail around for long periods of time to find them, this part of the game might have played more smoothly.

It is worth noting that many players disagree with my critique of the sailing portion of *The Wind Waker*. Adult players found the mechanic to be immersive and exciting, however players in the game's target audience – young adults – largely agree that the sailing does not help with immersion. The game's target audience is children, and children's attention spans tend to be far shorter than those of their adult counterparts. They may not understand the appeal of the sailing mechanic, and instead lose interest in playing the game because of how long it can take to get from action sequence to action sequence.

Highlight

The most narratively stunning moment in *The Wind Waker* is Link's failure to rescue Aryll at the conclusion of the game's first arc. Link doesn't just fail; he is so thoroughly bested by Ganon and the Helmaroc King that he is tossed aside like trash. This climactic moment defines *The Wind Waker* as a game that sees the narrative conventions of coming of age stories and raises them to new and improved heights. Rather than presenting audiences with the tired story of an adolescent man who leaves home and returns unscathed and glorious, *The Wind Waker's* writing and directing team offers its players a harrowing tale of failure, hard work, and eventual triumph. Link's failure to save Aryll on

his first attempt makes him relatable and sympathetic to audiences, while his struggle to improve and become a man makes him a genuinely interesting centerpiece for a coming of age narrative.

Critical Reception

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker received widespread critical acclaim and attention. Review aggregator Metacritic calculated its score at 96/100 based on 80 reviews, while Japanese magazine Famitsu and US-based *Game Informer*, *Game Pro*, and *Nintendo Power* all gave *The Wind Waker* perfect scores. Audiences and critics alike lauded the game's visuals, its expressive characters, and its often deceptively complex and detailed puzzles. Reviews for *The Wind Waker* also often highlighted the responsiveness and intuitiveness of its control system, which many critics and fans found to be exceptional for a game released in the early 2000s.

Lessons

- **In coming of age stories, the most effective and impactful protagonists are those with whom the audience can relate:** The fact that Link's first attempt at heroism is thwarted so completely makes him an interesting focal point for a coming of age story. The audience is allowed to watch Link grow and change as his skills improve, and watching those changes makes Link's eventual triumph feel more impactful.
- **Music can and should be used to heighten the impact of emotional story beats:** *The Wind Waker's* soundtrack is simply stunning. In addition to reimagining classic *Zelda* sounds like the iconic stinger that plays when the player uncovers a secret, it also features music for important environmental changes like day and night. Additionally, each important character has their own theme, which plays during key interactions with those characters. The music in *The Wind Waker* is undeniably one of the reasons the game – particularly conversations with its main characters – is so emotionally impactful.
- **In open world games, players should never have to stop their progress towards their goals entirely in order to fully explore the world:** The sailing mechanic in *The Wind Waker* forces players to choose between progression and thorough exploration of the world. The amount of time it takes to sail from place to place also means an increased risk of players losing touch with the narrative while travelling.

Summation

For the last fifteen years *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* has appeared on dozens of "Best Games Ever" lists, and has enjoyed some of the warmest critical reception of any game in the *Zelda* franchise. The game owes much of its success to its emotionally complex and vividly imagined characters. Their struggles, successes, and failures interweave to create a complex and engaging narrative that reinvigorates a traditional coming-of-age story that unfolds before an eager audience. Rarely does a comparatively

old game like *The Wind Waker* “hold up” against more recent narratively-driven giants like *Breath of the Wild*, *The Walking Dead*, and *The Last of Us*, but *The Wind Waker*’s brilliantly impactful narrative has granted it a status of pleasant immortality. All narrative designers should aspire to creatively bend convention and expectation as Eiji Aonuma and his team did with this masterpiece.