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Breath of the Wild Review

A couple years ago, I had sent a physical business letter to Nintendo inquiring about the lack of quality titles being pumped out by the company for its failing Wii U console. I had expected to hear from the CEO of Nintendo, Reggie Fils-Aime, like the naive instigator of criticism I was at the time. Somebody working there had eventually responded, saying that they were very understanding of my anguish and disappointment towards the company. They appreciated the feedback and the time I had put into writing the letter to begin with. However, the writer wrote about how he hoped that Nintendo could restore my faith through its upcoming titles. I had no idea what I was in for until they presented the initial trailer for their next title, “The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild.” The world of the game looked plentiful and fertile, with luscious nature at every sight shamelessly shown off, as if they had incurred the touch of Midas and were basking in the world’s golden radiance. The gameplay and physics engine incorporated into the final build make for a unique gameplay experience that offers a variety of options for when it comes to just about anything. This allows for the player to experiment with different mechanics and adds depth to the combat system. The sense of freedom evoked by the game’s opening cinematic as the hero, Link, runs to the edge of the mountain to get a lay of the world around him is simply breathtaking.

The formula for the Zelda series’ gameplay was established through key features ranging from letting the game do all the jumping for you without having to push a single button to allowing you to access different items that enhance your abilities and allow for different controls to use to your advantage. However, for when it came time to create the next big Zelda game after the release of “The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword” in 2011, the development team made the idea of breaking the traditional conventions of the Zelda games one of their mission statements. According to the producer and creator of the Legend of Zelda, Eiji Aonuma, “With Skyward Sword, the way the game world was set out, the areas a player could explore were actually reasonably limited - you would land from the sky into an area, and then explore that area, but the areas themselves weren't really connected. A lot of people who played the game said to me that they wished they were able to explore the areas between the areas, the gaps between the areas. So that idea of having a large open connected world was in my mind as soon as Skyward Sword was finished, really. And then the Wii U hardware made realising that idea a possibility.” The idea of an open world sounded like a dream at the time and after playing more than 170 hours, I can assuredly say that it plays like a dream. The switch (pun, intended) to an explorable world with so much to do allows for a more unique gameplay experience for each person. The mechanics are introduced through a series of four trials that need to be braved in order to acquire a paraglider. The mechanics in question that are used are the remote bomb, magnesis, stasis, and cryonis. The remote bomb is self-explanatory in terms of its utilization in gameplay. Magnesis gives Link the ability to lift and move large metal objects using the magnetic forces created through Link’s Sheikah Slate. Stasis allows for objects to be temporarily frozen in time, which can be used to Link’s advantage as it can allow for him to pass through areas that would otherwise be impossible to enter through. Cryonis allows for little towers of ice to form on water, which can be used as platforms (up to three at a time) on water. They are used interchangeably throughout the game in various instances through the exploration of the open world as well as the various shrine trials that are scattered throughout said world. Some of the mechanics in question can be upgraded as Link progresses and becomes stronger, obtains different weapons and items, and more. This is a major difference when compared to previous Zelda games. The mechanics in those games were usually given sparingly (one item for every dungeon) and the utilization of more than one mechanic for certain puzzles shaking the up the gameplay was rare. However, Breath of the Wild’s gameplay makes full use out of every mechanic learned in the game, all of which are offered very early in the game.

The story of Breath of the Wild is one of tragedy as your character, Link, wakes up from a resurrection chamber 100 years after an evil known as Calamity Ganon strikes on the world. The aftermath of the event is on clear display wherever you are in the world of the game. The sting of defeat lingers around Link as his initial inability to recollect his memories from 100 years ago plagues him. The event bears greater significance once he finally does remember everything later in the game. Link is asked to save the dying land of Hyrule from the evil calamity that lies ahead. Once you start exploring the world, Link begins to learn that he was one of the Champions of Hyrule led by the Princess Zelda. This story is one of the primary elements that make Breath of the Wild a stand out title as it ties in directly to the core of the gameplay: exploration. It is only through exploring the ginormous world of the game that you will be able to start piecing together what happened 100 years ago. This makes getting to the point in the game where Link is able to remember everything all the more satisfying as well as endearing, due to how the story increases your investment and motivation towards the primary objective of the game which is to defeat Calamity Ganon and save the dying kingdom of Hyrule. Another interesting thing that I found out through my own playthrough is that you can go and defeat Calamity Ganon as soon as you step outside of the Shrine of Resurrection, which is an interesting choice that the developers made in service of the nonlinearity the game provides through its core gameplay as well as its story. However, once you attempt to fight the Calamity, he is clearly the strongest opponent in the game who will immediately proceed to have you dead in a single hit. Even if you manage to beat him eventually (which could take a while and a whole lot of skill), this approach doesn’t make the game feel nearly as satisfying as Zelda asks, “May I ask...Do you really remember me?” The sting of not having any recollection lingers, but can quickly go away when playing through the game the way a majority of people have by exploring the world.

Breath of the Wild allows for the player to be able to weave together narratives solely based on their experiences and time playing the game. This makes playing even more gratifying as the sandbox offers more through the gameplay approach used by the developers. There are a load of materials and collectibles for Link to find throughout the game. One of my favorite experiences was attaining the Master Shield not too far from Hyrule Castle where the final boss resides. Sure enough it was a fetch quest for an elusive item. However, the process of attaining it makes the moment you finally have the item in your inventory feel earned, adding to the immense amount of satisfaction one can have playing this game. This amount of satisfaction can be compared to another sandbox game with a load of it packed in: Super Mario Odyssey. This game came out the same year and for the same console, so one can imagine how sales have been for Nintendo after these two juggernaut titles have made tidal waves among the gaming community. Where Mario Odyssey is loaded to the brim with fun and constant gratification that can be borderline addicting at times, Breath of the Wild knows how to pace out quests perfectly. Naturally, from a gameplay perspective, both games have clearly different intents. However, when you beat Mario Odyssey, there isn’t as much you can come back to as in Breath of the Wild. You then start to appreciate just how much the developers cared about crafting a multitude of experiences in one game for many players to go out and live out as their “Link.”

One notable thing to know about Breath of the Wild is that it is the sole game that drove sales when Nintendo launched their newest console, the Nintendo Switch. However, another notable thing to know is that the game was in development for about 4-5 years and that the game was originally slated to come out in 2015 for their current console at the time, the Wii U. The game ended up coming out for both platforms simultaneously. However, the game fared better on the Switch then it did the Wii U. Breath of the Wild is a huge game, which means that on the Switch, you can play it at home or on the go. As for me, I had a Wii U at the time of the game’s release, but regardless I paid up for the Switch as well as a copy of Breath of the Wild. One inquisitive reader could stop to ask why I didn’t just buy a copy of the game for my Wii U since I had already owned it for about 4 years. I could’ve saved $240. However, the game’s expansive world and rich gameplay and the added benefit of being able to take it with me and play it anywhere are the main reasons why I doled out the extra cash. In my eyes, the game and the newest system is was on were worth it. An additional thing to note is that the game runs at the same framerate at 720p on both consoles, with minor hiccups on the Wii U version that don’t detract from the experience.

Breath of the Wild is truly a special game to me. This game truly restored my faith in a company that I genuinely thought would cease to exist. However, the sheer scale and quality of their work has always blown my mind and this game is definitely no exception. To say that this is the greatest game on the Switch would be a genuine understatement as this game may just well be one of the greatest video games ever made by the company. The people who worked hard to make this game possible should be extremely proud of themselves for the astounding work and time they’ve put into the project, and I couldn’t be more happier for Aonuma and his staff as they’ve finally created the game they’ve always wanted to create for a long time. When people come back to this game several years from now, my hope is that people will remember this game as nothing short of legendary. My final score for this game is a 10/10. This game is in a masterclass all its own, with flair and confidence in getting players everywhere to become invested in what could only be described as the definitive legend of Zelda.

Rules For Writing The Review:

Before leaving IGN to go on to work for Nintendo, Jose Otero reviewed several video game reviews for that media company, the likes of which include Mario Kart 8, Super Mario Maker for Nintendo 3DS, and of course, The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. There are five rules which Otero adheres to in writing his reviews which I attempted to emulate and further expand upon for my review of Breath of the Wild.

1. He starts of his reviews by explaining how the gameplay works and how it affected his experience of playing the game. I decided to further expand upon how his experiences were shaped by providing a brief anecdote regarding my opinions on the company at a point several months before the game came out. I felt as though this was appropriate to add because I thought that it would show how Breath of the Wild was the game that restored my faith in the company I once thought would get swept under the rug as the rest of the competition in the video game industry would continue to thrive off of games that were more often than not incomplete and unsatisfying.
2. Otero then goes into more detail about the game and how it bucks the trends of previous titles in favor of providing a fresher experience, especially in his review of Breath of the Wild. I used a quote from the series producer, Eiji Aonuma, as evidence to show that such a profound decision was made to allow the franchise to be developed as a modern contemporary to previous Zelda titles. He then went into some detail about gameplay mechanics, which I didn’t find nearly as fleshed out and if anything being used in context fairly broadly. I decided to go into more detail to show how these mechanics could be used interchangeably among other combat mechanics. This extensive detail allows for me as a reviewer to come off as more credible, not that I’m saying Otero isn’t just as credible, but more detail can go a long way.
3. He gets around to discussing the intricate systems that make the game a stand out title, when compared to others. More specifically, in his Breath of the Wild review, he compares the quests in the game to the quests in another open world title: The Witcher 3, going on to say that while the quests aren’t as interesting as those found in The Witcher 3, they are still fun to play with new, interesting character to meet and new materials to find, often allowing stat upgrades to Link. I use this rule and make a comparison to another sandbox game that came out the same year: Super Mario Odyssey. As mentioned earlier, while the intent of Odyssey is to provide an experience that is solely designed to be nonstop fun, that Breath of the Wild has a better idea of pacing out the satisfaction of exploring the world better.
4. Otero goes on to describe the playing the software on the specific hardware it was made for. In Breath of the Wild’s case, it was originally developed to be a title solely for the Wii U. However, Nintendo pushed the release date so that it could be a launch title for its newest console, the Nintendo Switch. That being said, the comparison to be made here is how the game plays on both respective consoles. I use this rule to inject my thoughts about getting the new console and how this game in particular influenced my decision to spend $300 on a brand new console instead of just paying $60 to play it on my older Wii U console.
5. Otero concludes with a verdict concluding with what makes the games great, but also somewhat flawed. However, with his review of Breath of the Wild, Otero isn’t able to recognize any real glaring flaws with the game, going as far as to describe it as, “a masterclass in open-world design.” I decided to go farther in this aspect as well, showing how the game affected the modern video game industry and how big of a game changer it really is not only to the traditional formula of Zelda games but also to the open world formula of modern video games as well. The sheer freedom and flawlessness in this game is something to commend, however for other titles, that may not always be the case. Nevertheless, the verdict is a critical aspect of every one of Otero’s reviews that should be taken into consideration when emulating his style of writing.