

Link's Awakening Study

Alexis Larson



Observations:

1. Link's proportions are about 2 heads tall.
2. It appears that much of his color could be accomplished in the workflow via vertex color and shaders, which might help reduce workflow demands.
3. His design is round, brightly colored, with minimal detail. These attributes communicate that the target audience is likely 8 - 16.
4. The action adventure style of game play expands that target audience to around 20 year olds.
5. This is a recreation of an old game, which further expands the audience to those who would have nostalgia. Upwards of 30 to 35 if the player was a child when the game originally released.
6. The proportions are not limited to Link, but to NPCs as well.
7. The color palette of most of the outdoor areas is jade green, amber yellow, azure blue, and dusky orange. Other colors are used sparingly, and to make things pop from the backgrounds.





8. Models are used repetitiously to build up detail, rather than having multiple unique parts



9. Repetition is useful as you build things in tile sets, which can then be broken apart and rearranged to build levels.

10. Pathway tiles are used to explicitly guide the player to certain areas and omitted for challenges such as dungeons



11. Some areas seem to have effects on the camera view that blur out the edges, perhaps like rising heat.



12. All assets are compact in design. From trees to stairs, owls, flowers. Plants are portrayed by chunks of vegetation.



13. Levels and changing levels affect color palettes. Outside is clear with little to no atmospheric changes. In a forest, the palette is toned blue and gray, and fog is added to the edges of the screen. A desert will be gold toned with start contrast to show that the sun is very prominent. A fairy fountain is dimly lit purple with accents of orange and yellow.



14. Most gameplay is done with the camera sitting at approx 60 degrees above the horizon point, looking down upon the player character
15. The camera may be changed for specific scenes for various reasons, such as in sections that need to specifically focus on the sky. Or when you go in underground tunnels. That will lead to a view in line with the horizon.



16. Dungeons follow the tile set type of build, along with repetition of assets
17. Fire is surprisingly realistic for the overall style compared to all other assets. Water seems to switch between realism and stylised in some scenarios.



18. Link has multiple tools, but for most problems, you can rely on his sword to be able to solve them, reducing the need to switch in and out of the inventory. This keeps the gameplay flowing.
19. The UI is minimal, allowing focus to be on the.
20. Controls are very simple, four buttons to control direction, and a minimal number of buttons for interacting with objects, actions such as attacking, or swapping out inventory.
21. Sound design is very interactive. Running around you have your general music and atmosphere, but as soon as you take any action, you can hear distinct sounds play. Are you unlocking a door? You have a xylophone type sound. Sometimes all other sound stops for these interactive sounds which makes them all the more important. It is how developers can lead players in their gameplay with innocuous senses.
22. Different areas have specific music. This is good for communicating mood to the player.
23. Actions & objects are accented with particles that have specific shapes. If Link swings his sword, a swipe shape plays briefly. This amplifies actions that are otherwise very simple. An enemy being hit will have an impact shape. Keys have a sparkle to catch the attention of the player.
24. Those particle shapes are also accented by color, which communicates its purpose. Yellow to red is aggressive, blue is being hit and so on.
25. Animations are simple for the background objects such as grass swaying. For players, NPCs and featured views, much more animation is incorporated.
26. The animations are often accented by sound.
27. Physics are hit or miss on the realism factor. Sometimes you need a special tool for certain tasks. Othertimes, you can literally just throw an elephant statue twice Link's size.

Similar games:

Stardew Valley - This is a 2D game that plays specifically on the pixel art aesthetic. The art is solid however it lacks the theming technique refinement that Link's awakening has. The game has a 60 degree top down view (this does not change). There is less of a story line compared to Link's awakening, but that allows for the player to choose their own style of gameplay. Stardew Valley uses tile sets, repetitious use of assets and a number of other qualities similar to Link's Awakening. There is very little animation of the environment.



Ni No Kuni (Specifically between overworld areas) - The art direction of Ni No Kuni was done by Studio Ghibli, which ensured it was stellar quality. There is no use of a distinct grid, and though assets are repeatedly used, it is rare to notice it. While both the previously discussed games rely on text to communicate their stories, and Ni No Kuni does the same at some points, Ni No Kuni also features voice acting for numerous scenes. Ni No Kuni has a more open ended approach to its storyline via it's semi-open world. Ni No Kuni's camera is normally at 30 degrees as opposed to Link's Awakening's steeper angle. Gameplay is far more complex, requiring master of its menus as much as movement. Unique animations are rampant, (including fully animated cut scenes!)



Tunic - This is an indie 3D game, that some have argued is a direct rip off of Legend of Zelda. The art direction feels far more simplified than Link's Awakening, with very visible polys. The color palette, lighting, and muddy atmosphere make it harder on the eyes as I personally need to squint to see what is going on. Sometimes the color balance feels odd and one moment you are squinting to see better, and the next your eyes are scorched by the vibrant blue of the ocean. This game uses an isometric camera angle, and a grid system, which means that instead of up, down, left, & right, you are moving at a 45 degree angle in your chosen direction.

