THE LEGEND OF ZELDA : HD DOUBLE FEATURE

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER HD	THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS HD
GENRE(S): Action-adventure	**GENRE(S):** Action-adventure
AVAILABLE ON: Wii U	**AVAILABLE ON:** Wii U
DEVELOPED BY: Nintendo, HexaDrive, Imagica Digitalscape	**DEVELOPED BY:** Nintendo, Tantalus Media
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Like on the NES so many years before, two fundamentally different games in *The Legend of Zelda* franchise originated on the Nintendo GameCube: one, a classic family-oriented throwback to the very original game, with the land of Hyrule swapped for a great ocean, and the other; a cinematic action-adventure with realistic graphics and a dark tone, both completely new elements to the series. Both of these games were remastered for the Wii U system with a few years between them, to tide fans over and pave the way for the coming of a completely new *Legend of Zelda* game, available almost exactly a year after the later release. Being the masters of innovation that they are, Nintendo didn't just settle for an HD makeover of neither one of these games, but utilized the Wii U's interface to create two new-old games which are universally considered separate from their source material. I decided to do a ”double feature” on these two games simply because they're so different from each other, still both are *The Legend of Zelda* to the core. Let's start with *The Wind Waker*.

Link's first major adventure since *Majora's Mask* features a whole new incarnation of the character, born centuries after the original ”Hero of Time” on Outset Island. The land of Hyrule is but a myth, all that remains and surrounds the small island – for an initially unknown reason – is a vast ocean known as the Great Sea. On the day of his traditional coming-of-age celebration, Link saves a strange girl from a group of monsters. In turn, his little sister Aryll is kidnapped. In fair exchange for his help, the girl Link saved reveals her identity as pirate captain Tetra, and offers Link a ride to a dark fortress where Aryll is most

likely being held. Link's infiltration of the stronghold ends in a bad way, and the pirates dump him, but a new mysterious companion – a talking boat – promises to guide him to the deep-hidden secrets of the Great Sea, help him save his sister, and realize his true destiny.

This incarnation of Link is a child; an inexperienced and carefree island boy pulled into an adventure he doesn't fully understand, but has the courage to take it on anyway. With *The Wind Waker*, Nintendo – perhaps unintentionally – tried a similar approach as with *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* back in the day, by presenting the world as what it would look like through the eyes of such a child. The audiovisuals of the game are legendary for pissing off many fans; the cutesy, cel-shaded graphics which turn even the most legendary enemies into cartoonish, sometimes even comical caricatures of themselves (except for ReDeads, who are at their creepiest in this game!) are the first and foremost reason why some people consider *The Wind Waker* and its direct sequels the bottom of the (official) *Legend of Zelda* barrel. I was one of those people who were expecting a more mature game with each major next-generation title, but when I finally got to play *The Wind Waker* – over a decade after its initial release – I immediately saw past the surface and found not just one of the best games in the series, but an addictive, seriously unique action-adventure experience you can't have anywhere else, as no one has dared to try and bluntly duplicate it... although I'm seeing very early traces of naval *Assassin's Creed* here. Yes, I mean it.

For the first time in a home console game since 1991's *A Link to the Past*, the overworld map is presented as a grid with each screen having a designated number, and in this game's case: a name. EVERY screen in *The Wind Waker* holds secrets of some caliber, no matter how empty it looks. Although pressing forward in the story is quite simple and linear, and almost all of the most essential upgrades to your equipment come from simply moving on, the game does everything in its power to pique your curiosity to sail the uncharted seas, search small islands thoroughly and take part in the several sidequests available on the bigger, sprawling islands, including your home. The sea is your sandbox, however until you get past a certain point, you'll have to obey your boat's orders – whenever you try to sail just past something out of your league at that moment, your boat tells you not to go and turns you back around to the direction you

came from. That's something I don't easily tolerate in a game like *The Legend of Zelda*; I grew up with those games that sure had places you couldn't go to, but good reasoning behind it, not just someone (or -thing) barking orders and prohibitions at my face. Well, *The Wind Waker* is such a great game I'm willing to let this slide. This one time.

Link can use two of the key items – namely the Grappling Hook and Bombs – out on the open sea as well as during on-foot exploration. The Grappling Hook is used to salvage treasure from the bottom of the sea, ranging from money to special maps to even heart pieces. The Bombs are used to arm the boat's cannon, which is essential if you're planning to break into the few ocean strongholds to gain access to even more treasure. You are also able to use your projectile weapons such as the Bow and Boomerang from the boat's deck, so no, boating your way through this world will not make you any more bored and vulnerable than travelling by foot. Sure, the boat is a bit slow, and you need to manually change the wind direction often to keep your momentum up (in the HD version, there's luckily a hidden remedy for that which I'll get to later).

A few momentary frustrations, questionings and the endgame escort missions aside, the design of the multi-storied dungeons in the game is nothing short of genius. Very often, the most difficult puzzles have the easiest possible answer. Just simply looking around, recognizing and isolating the actual problem at hand is much more efficient than just giving up the moment you step into a room that might seem like an impossible enigma. Listening helps too; yeah, there are a lot of weirdos in the game (this is *The Legend of Zelda*, after all) and the dialogue might seem completely irrelevant at times, but there are valuable clues to what almost everyone says in the game. The sidequests... well, since usually these end up with you gaining a heart piece, you can't expect every sidequest to be fun. For example, we have a purely luck-based and expensive minigame inspired by real-life *Battleship*, in which you're allowed a ridiculously unforgiving amount of misses (luckily the board is a lot smaller and there are way less enemies than in the real *Battleship*); a sword trainer that challenges you to hit him 500 times (consecutively, and literally) before he's able to land THREE strikes at you, and finally, a lengthy, meek and frustrating sidequest based

on trading decorative items between merchants around the world, not really knowing or even guessing the final benefit until it lands in your hands.

The HD version of the game brings in a small load of new, seemingly minor but actually fundamental features to make the game even smoother and more fun than it ever was. It's so nice to see that a ”mere HD remaster” can spark new innovation to an already innovative game that's over a decade old. First of all, the Wii U Gamepad takes away the frustration of menu toggling, and eases the use of the namesake Wind Waker (the magical instrument that replaces the Ocarina of Time). The overworld and dungeon maps are presented in real time on the Gamepad's screen, along with your movement on them. The items and their assignment to different buttons are also accessible via the Gamepad. All of the songs you've learned to play with the Wind Waker come up on the small screen every time you whip it out. Treasure Charts are much easier to track with the real-time map as your aid, and finally, you can use the motion controller to aim. By shifting gameplay from the big screen to the Gamepad entirely you naturally revert to a more classic interface. The single most important update to the game, in my opinion, is a new secret item which can be used to drastically speed up your boat – and also removes the need to use the Wind Waker to change wind direction.

With good comes the bad: some puzzle- and exploration-based sidequests have been unnecessarily eased up by the removal of entire steps or phases (Tingle's quest is removed altogether; not a big deal though), while the most frustrating ones based on combat, luck, time and/or reaction speed are left just as they were. It's utterly unnoticeable if you're playing *The Wind Waker* for the first time in HD, but at the very least weird and questionable if you're a veteran. Nothing to get too upset about, though. The shutdown of the Miiverse in 2017 naturally abolishes the game's messaging system, disguised as a part of the game as in most Wii U games; this is just a side note, not really critique on my personal part.

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, as it is on the Nintendo GameCube, is one of the franchise's most unique and satisfying games; *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD* on the Wii U is better by a step or

two, and assuming you weren't there to experience the original, a perfectly fine reason to own the Wii U.

9.1

Twilight Princess was historically the first – yet not the last – *The Legend of Zelda* game to be released as the final first-party game for a dying system (Nintendo GameCube) as well as a launch game for their new platform (Wii). Both versions were met with typically high critical acclaim, but as years have gone by, *Twilight Princess* has become one of the more divisive titles in the main series. While I've met none who absolutely hate the game, I've also met none holding the game in a higher regard as just ”OK” on the fabled *Legend of Zelda* standard. ”OK” is a short, sweet and absolutely correct description of *Twilight Princess* in my opinion, as well. It has a lot going for it on the surface, such as another unique take on a familiar world, a darker tone, and arguably the most attractive audiovisuals of the series up to this point – but its linearity, wide but empty spaces, somewhat soulless attempts at breaking into the hack and slash genre, cinematic nature and an incredibly slow start eat away at the satisfaction.

Link is a well-known and -liked farm hand at Ordon Village, who is set to begin a journey to Hyrule as the village's messenger and spokesman to establish a trade route. On the eve of his departure, a group of monsters kidnaps the village's children. Chasing after them, Link is pulled into a parallel dimension called Twilight, where he transforms into a wolf. Guided by a dark, impish creature calling herself Midna, Link meets with Princess Zelda of Hyrule, who tells him that Hyrule has been invaded by creatures of the Twilight. To save the kingdom, Link needs to find and save the four Light Spirits, whose powers combined should be enough to dissolve the darkness enveloping Hyrule. Link sets out to do just that by utilizing his new lycan powers and the questionable help of his new companion.

Playing through *The Wind Waker HD*, and even struggling through its low points to reach 100%

completion for a second time was fun and inspirational. Replaying the first three to four hours of *Twilight Princess HD*, I felt like I had already played through a lengthy game altogether far from fun and inspirational, and this review was delayed – by a lot. That's right, I wrote the *Wind Waker* segment FIVE YEARS AGO. It took at least a very thorough playthrough of *Tears of the Kingdom*, and the awesomeness of the *Ocarina of Time* remake to get my *Zelda* fire burning bright enough to get me back to *Twilight Princess*. I do not hate the game; on the contrary, there are many things I adore and respect here, and no matter how hopeless it seems during the first few hours into a back and forth run with minimal action, lines upon lines of small talk and dramatic back-to-back cutscenes, flawed mechanics and the introduction of perhaps even a more obnoxious companion than Navi in *Ocarina of Time*, *Twilight Princess* is a classic *Legend of Zelda* adventure, and in many ways, a more natural successor to *Ocarina of Time* (and *Majora's Mask*) than the experimental *Wind Waker*.

Even though it's sprinkled with some more or less unwelcome fairy stardust I just quickly mentioned, the core premise of *Twilight Princess* is just what you'd expect. You are a very young, seemingly ordinary, somewhat lazy but well liked guy within a small community. Something awful happens, and you suddenly find out you're the ”chosen one”, the one person who takes it upon himself to leave the community to seek a higher calling, and you'll end up having to stop a megalomaniac asshole from destroying the whole damn kingdom – something which cannot be done within the confines of just one reality, and/or without the help of a certain princess. Yes, that's *The Legend of Zelda* in a coarse nutshell, and what follows is what *Twilight Princess* brings to the familiar table.

Amidst all less attractive features I've mentioned a few times even if the review hasn't even properly taken off, *Twilight Princess* has a much more realistic and darker audiovisual tone, and more action-oriented gameplay than in any *Zelda* game released up until. I would best describe the game as a three-way cross between *Zelda*, *Kingdom Hearts* and *God of War*. What...? Where did that last one come from? Well. Of course the very basic combat system is as simple as ever before, but in the hack and slash style, you can learn new combat skills by reading hidden scrolls, and there is a whole lot of constant fighting

going on against swarms of enemies. Some of the regular battles in the game are scripted; they're against shadow monsters that appear in groups of three, and they all have to be defeated simultaneously, or else the last one standing will just scream for help and reset the fight – kind of reminds me of Cerberus' pups that multiplied and transformed back into a daddy if you didn't kill 'em fast enough in *God of War*, same goes for the magic hands in *Ocarina of Time* actually. The boss fights and some level design, as well as cinematic presentation within dungeons are the things that originally made me think of *God of War*, that previous analysis came as an afterthought.

To this day, *Twilight Princess* boasts the biggest, most complex and elaborate dungeons in the whole series. They're HUGE, open and multi-storied areas which seriously feel more like levels in the first *God of War* than the cramped puzzle boxes of yore. For the first time, ever, Heart Pieces are not just found from the field or won from completing sometimes extremely silly side errands, they're also hidden in the dungeons, behind some combat challenges or minor puzzles. Each full Heart Container holds five pieces instead of four, so you've got your work cut out if you want to end the game with a full reserve. ...And no, not all of it is fun. Every dungeon in the game has a miniboss, who's usually guarding the special item of the day, and the big one, who's usually literally BIG – but will fall, quickly, to a sure-fire strategy always linked to that just mentioned special item. Yeah, it still sounds familiar, so let's go to the gimmick of the day.

After a LONG, fully scripted sequence of different tutorials and mandatory dialogue disguised as essential narration – or sorry, the FIRST one – you will witness Link getting pulled into a dark spirit world by an unseen force, where he transforms into a wolf. Playing as ”Wolf Link” isn't all that different when you get the hang of the controls in properly open spaces, but very often you'll have to work with very narrow ones. There's never generally been this much pitfalling in any *Zelda* game, ever, and believe you me, trying to control that wolf's movement in combat makes any bottomless dump your worst enemy in this game in under two hours. Wolf Link can't climb, or open doors, but he can burrow into holes in the ground – sometimes in and out of otherwise locked houses – sense for nearby treasure and dig for it, and his

movement is much faster than that of the human version. He can also jump long gaps with the help of Midna, who physically exists only in the Twilight world, initially. Thank God. 'Cause you'll grow tired of having to talk to her. That also happens within the first two hours into the game.

Every area in the game needs to be cleansed of the darkness of the Twilight before you can enter the actual dungeon; I don't want to go into detail of what happens once you clear the first act of the game, but that first act is all about ”cleansing” the world, and it lasts for about 10-15 hours, a very critical time window in which you'll probably decide whether you want to go on or not. This basically means you'll always enter a new area as Wolf Link. You have limited access in the region – since you can't use any of your special items, you have to scour through the area for certain insects and swat them to collect Tears of Light into a magic vessel. Once that's full, the Light Spirit of the area will awaken (or be freed) and once again engulfs that area with light, enabling you to return to your human form and finally take care of your actual business. I don't mind the groundwork; it's just very upsetting that you can't do any actual exploring in any of these areas before you've already run through them a few times, the indoor areas included, and butchered those God damn bugs. When you've done that, that particular area just blooms with new activity, which you might not have the energy to deal with anymore. You just want to get the fuck forward. But, on the other hand, you need to get more Heart Pieces. 'Cause you're gonna get your ass kicked if you don't. Very conflicted stuff. Considering the best times I've ever had with *Zelda*, I could use that sentence to describe the whole game and be done with this review, 'cause it holds true to just about every aspect of *Twilight Princess*. It's flawed and inconsistent, but only because I know exactly what this franchise had already been capable of.

I think I went over the most important stuff I had on my mind, so let's lend Wii U's *HD* version a few lines of its own. In contrast to the many minor and major improvements of *The Wind Waker HD*, *Twilight Princess HD* doesn't have any new special in-game features or items. In TV mode, all the items and the buttons appointed to their use are managed using the GamePad, and you can get a much clearer view of the maps by zooming in on the small screen. There are some amiibo-related perks and stipulations, but

using Wolf Link, and ONLY that amiibo, unlocks a whole new dungeon. Any amiibo that isn't directly related to the *Zelda* franchise doesn't work with the game.

What we have here is a great game. All the crap I've flung here is pure comparison to what this franchise is at its best. *The Wind Waker* wasn't too far from that. As far as the *HD* versions go, again *The Wind Waker* pulled the longer straw by being a more essential upgrade to the source title. If *Twilight Princess* (*HD*) happens to be your first *Zelda* game, you're in for an absolute treat, but I personally don't think that it counts among the best in anything except for the audiovisuals.

8.0