Hollow Knight

Hollow Knight is a Metroidvania video game developed and published by Australian studio Team Cherry. The game saw released for Microsoft Windows in February of 2017, and later for macOS and Linux in April of 2017. Development for the game was partially funded through a Kickstarter crowdfunding that raised over 57.000 dollars by the end of 2014.

The game tells the story of a Knight (our main character) who is on a quest to discover the secrets of the long and abandoned insect kingdom of Hollownest, whose depths draw in the adventurous and the brave with its promise of treasure and answers to mysteries of long past glories and tragedies.

The Kickstarter was officially revealed in November of 2014 and it reached its initial goal in December of the same year. The beta state was completed by September of 2015. The project suffers some delays in part because of the engine switch that the developers did from Stencyl to Unity.

In June of 2017, Team Cherry announced a free update entitled "Hidden Dreams", set to release in August of 2017. On October of 2017, the second free expansion "The Grimm Troupe" was launched. Finally in January of 2018 was announced the third expansion for the game, "Gods & Glory" which is expected to be launched right after the release of the Hollow Knight port for Nintendo Switch.

Jed Whitaker's score it a 10/10 on Destructoid, adding:
"It isn't perfect since nothing is, but came as close as you could get in a given genre. The new leader to beat in its sector, we're talking pure ecstasy here".

Pc Gamer's Tom Marks scored the game a 92/100 with the consensus:
"Hollow Knight is a new classic, with a dense and detailed world full of secrets to discover".

As of November of 2017, the games had sold over 500,000 copies. The game was also nominated for Best PC Game in Destructoid's Game of the Year Awards 2017, and Best Platformer in IGN Best of 2017, winning the first one. It was also nominated in SXSW Gamer's Voiced Awards - Gamer's Voice (Single Player), The Game Awards 2017 - Best Debuted Indie Game, Game Developers Choice Awards - Best Debut (Team Cherry), and the 14th British Academy Game Awards - Debut Game.

A Stag to Hollownest

The story of Hollow knight is one that is not told through dialogs and cutscenes, instead is hinted in the environment, the music, the positioning of the objects, the bosses and the enemies, and in riddlers scatter all around the world, as well as given to you directly by other NPC`s in their dialogs, just like the saga Dark Souls does, and it does this excellent, you just like Dark Souls.

The story begins with the Knight arriving in Dirtmouth, a little town above Hollownest, for no apparent reason. Once there, he meets an old guy that tells him a bit about how this town, just as Hollownest, has seen better days, as well as how he hopes someone can, someday, bring back the glory of the Kingdom and the little town. Right after that encounter, the knight decides to go down to Hollownest and start his adventure, and we the players still have no idea why, but time will tell us why; he furthers through the forgotten kingdom and encounter with different inhabitants of Hollownest, and some of the town folks of Dirtmouth who are trap down there. The inhabitants of Hollownest are, during the period in which we play, being overcome by an infection that emanates from a sealed temple, a strange and holy place. During the journey, the Knight encounters Hornet, the self-proclaimed protector of Hollownest, who attempt to stop the Knight's quest. After the encounter with Hornet, as well as some other NPC's the scrip will start to advance in the same way a Dark Souls game does, and these NPC's start to become more of characters in a story and seem less like NPC's just place there in the world to guide or sell stuff to the Knight. Eventually, after exploring the kingdom, the Knight is contacted by some strange, mystical beings called The Dreamers, who implore the knight to undo the seals they keep for some unknown purpose. As the Knight continues to deepen in Hollownest he not only seeks to complete his quest, but starts to discover his own story, one that can only be understand and experience if you explore every inch of the world of Hollownest and collect ever item scatter throughout the Kingdom, as well as defeat every boss, and Dream World bosses.

As can be appreciated, the game has deep lore, and to avoid spoilers this is a very breve summary of it. There is still a lot of debate about the game's lore and how it unfolds and what it tells, special knowing that the game has 3 different endings. There is also a lot of speculation about some of the origins of some character because this game gives the player enough information for it to understand the story but not enough to always be certain about the way everything started or ended, and this helps the game's lore expand because, just like the Souls saga, it forces its fans to speculate, elaborate theories and share their thought about the lore, expanding it and adding to it on a daily basis.

Finally, the only way to put together this lore is by experiencing it, and not by reading it or investigating it, because a lot of what happens during the gameplay explains a lot of information in a way that it feels a lot more satisfying than to read it, as well as a lot more easy to comprehend.

Shake your Booty and Swing that Nail

Hollow Knight is a 2D action-adventure Metroidvania game, which takes place in Hollownest, as said before, a fictional kingdom. The mechanics of the game that involve the control over the Knight are just wonderful. Hollow Knight is one of the only few Metroidvanias that have a smooth and well response control over its character. The way it swings its Nail (sword), the jump animations and controls, the way it moves, everything about the way the knight responds to the game controls is excellent. Taking a look into the abilities that our character has and would acquire along the gameplay, they all work just wonderful and are simple enough to use, helping the control takes the passenger seat in the ride of playing this game, which helps a lot to get involve in the lore and the game instead of being focusing on timing or performing a sequences of precise movement to have a nice game experience.

The game level design is one of the most important game elements because Metroidvania games tend to be constructed in similar ways, but not all of them do it well. This game, however, nails it. Hollownest consists of several large, interconnected areas with unique themes. The way the map is designed does not bind the player to a linear path through it, but there are some obstacles that the player will encounter that will tell him, subtly, that that path is to be explored later in the game after acquiring the necessary ability to bypass those obstacles or advancing in the game story. The fast travel game mechanic is one of the most original remakes of an old idea that has to be part of the Metroidvanias for a long time. To fast travel you have to discover and activate different train terminal throughout the kingdom of Hollowknight, the difference being that there are two types of terminals, Stag Terminals, that take you to other parts of the map and interconnect the whole world, and train stations, that do not connect with the whole map like the Stag ones, but take you to some places a lot more difficult to reach.

One of the most original mechanics that the game has is the way it cartographies the map. As the player enters new areas, they do not have access to the map of their surroundings, that is why the player needs to find Cornifer, the Cartographer, to buy the map of that area. To make the map more accurate, the players have to buy certain items from Cornifers wife, back in Dirtmouth. Also, the positioning of the player in the map is only available if the player has a specific charm place on him, and each area has its color to help the player see where a certain area starts and where it ends.

This game has a lot of collectibles, and you have to be very wary as to were to search to not miss any, and they all serve a different purpose to the game and the lore. The money or Geo you find is used to buy upgrades for your Nail, items or abilities. Charms help you change your style game by giving the knight different additional abilities and buffs. There are some relics that you can sell to an NPC to get lore out of him, and mask pieces to increase the number of hits you can take, as well as soul vessels that give you the ability to store more magic (souls) to carry with you, which is important because souls are used for healing and spell-casting (ability-casting). Lastly, the save and checkpoint areas in this game are mark as Benches that you can find throughout the game's world where you have to sit and activate them.

Draw me like one of your Goth Girls

One of the many aspects that make Hollow Knight a unique and beautiful game is its visual art style. It is not unique to the world of video games, in general, the art style that is used in this game cause other IP's have similar art styles, games such as: *Don't starve to death 1 & 2,* and in a certain way games like *The Binding of Issac* and its sequel *Rebirth.* Still, the style that Hollow Knight has is different in many ways from these similar styles just mention before.

The game art style takes inspiration from 2 different illustration styles, Comics, and Gothic illustration. The comic influence can be traced to the borderlines of each element that are presented to us in the game: characters, environment, NPC's, enemies, etc.. Just as comics the borderlines of these elements are composed of thick lines of black that delimitates the boundaries of each element. A good example of the opposite style referring to the trace and the line is Ibb & Obb, a game that has no thick traces to delimit the boundaries of the different elements that appear throughout the game.

The second element, which is the Gothic illustrations are pretty much the elements that are more easy to trace and look at in this case. All of the colors in this game are, what is known in the art as cold Colors: Blues Purples, Pinks, Blacks, Greys, and Greens. This is something that can be traced back to the illustrations that appear in books such as *Emily the Strange*.

In this game, we can also find some cartoonish elements. This is something that we can appreciate in the way the knight and Hornet are portraits. Both of theme have a piece of cloth and their bodies consist of thick black traces, meaning that they do not have fingers or toes, and all of their movements from their articulations behave in the same way the 30's cartoons did. Also if we examine the skulls/masks they have, we can see that they do not tend to the reality of the image, but rather to a more minimalistic, but beautiful cartoonish recreation or interpretation of what they look like.

Just as Cuphead, Hollow Knight is a hand-drawn game, the difference being that this game was animated, colored and worked on a computer, while Cuphead used modern-day old school way of animating their visuals. This was a very smart choice, for Hollow Knight would have taken even longer to develop if they had gone with Cuphead's philosophy of animating and creating their visual, for Hollow Knight has a lot of different elements scatter around the immense world that is the kingdom of Hollownest. The used of hand-drawn elements as the base of the creation of the visual style was a smart move, for this gives the game not only a unique aspect that forces you to remember and appreciate the animation and the illustration in ways some other games can't.

This is one of the most beautiful and amazing art styles that can be found in video games and is one of the big aspects of why this game is so good, leaving aside the gameplay and lore elements we have mention before. For anyone out there who is looking for a game to analyze for its visual style, and at the same time appreciate a gorgeous game, this is a must-have and play.

The Symphony of the Nite… The Hollow Knight

The music of Hollow Knight was in charge of composer Christopher Larkin, an Australian music composer who had worked previously with some of the developers of the game composing music for short films is this one of the reasons they decided to contact him for the job. His work on Hollow Knight consists of an OST composed of 26 songs with a duration of approximately one (1) hour. All of these 26 musical pieces were used for boss fights and in-game location on Hollow Knight. Just as said previously at the begging of the document, with the release of the DLC's, this work has acquired approximately four (4) musical pieces more making a total of 30 compositions.

The music of Hollow Knight is one of the more gorgeous and complex works that have been created for a video game. The first aspect that can be said about the pieces is that they have a clear academic influence. Most of the compositions tend to be fully orchestrated and show clear references to classical, modern and contemporary academic music. For instance, the music that plays during the Mantis Lords boss fight, *Mantis Lords*, is a composition that uses and is constructed using Counterpoint, a form and musical way of composing in with the idea is not to generate cords or harmonies like in traditional/popular music, but rather use the consonance and dissonance from two (2) or more independent musical melodies to create music, just as its name implies, its a note against note way of composing. This is a clear renaissance music influence, and Counterpoint was mostly worked and used by Johan Sebastian Bach, who explore all of the different species of Counterpoint that exist: **Note against note, two notes against one, four notes against on, notes offset against each other (as suspensions), and all the first four species together, known as "florid" counterpoint.** Other elements can be found in the different pieces of this OST such as Sonata forms, Marches, mini symphonies, textural music, atmospheric music, and contemporary approaches of the different instruments to created and generate new or nonconventional sounds, as well as micro compositions and small pieces.

The second aspect that makes this work so good is the orchestration and the main protagonist of the orchestra used for these compositions. According to Larkin himself, the main idea at the moment of composing this OST was to use as main instruments the Piano and the Viola. Even though each piece has its characteristics and orchestration, they all have a section where the Piano, and others were the Violas, shine, either as melodic instruments or solo instruments. One of the pieces that help understand the importance that these instruments have is Hornet's boss fight music, *Hornet*. This piece is a fully orchestrated composition which melody and solos are lead by the Violas, for the most part, and the Piano. This is one of the most memorable musical pieces of the whole OST, and it is played two (2) times in the game, for Hornet is fought two (2) times during each playthrough. Another good example of the importance of the Piano and the Viola is the game's theme, *Hollow Knight*, a Piano, and Viola musical composition. It's a short piece, but one where the only instruments you will hear are the Violas and the Piano, altering between the melody and the accompaniment. This is unique, for there are very few musical compositions that focused on the Viola and the Piano as main interments, making this a differentiating aspect of the music as a whole compared to other similar works.

Lastly, there are the academic music theory influences of the pieces. Even though we are not going to talk in detail about this, is important to note that the chords and chord structures, the harmony, the forms, the compositional and orchestration techniques as well as the chord progressions, and many other theoretical music approaches and tools are all perfectly used according to academic and traditional music theory. This not only tells us that each piece was carefully composed and thought out, but also that Larkin has an academic background and a possible *"classical music"* and college formation. In other word, composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, Hayden, Bach, Chopin, Liszt, Stravinsky, and many others among many would be proud to see the amount of correctness these compositions have in the music theory application.

Another fascinating thing about the music of this magnificent game is the way it behaves and brings life to the whole kingdom of Hollownest and their inhabitants (NPC's and Bosses). The music in Hollow Knight can be divided into two different categories, Boss Battle Music, and World Music.

The world music on Hollow Knight is one of those works that does transport you to a whole new world and brings that world to life. All of the pieces help create an ambiance of mystery, calmness, and history that very few OST's can do. Pieces like *Crossroads*, *Greenpath*, and *City of Tears*, are some of the many examples of the world music in this game that can not only be appreciated during the gameplay experiences to help the player get immersed in this world, but that can also be heard and appreciate as a simple musical piece like any other traditional music composition. Every single composition that can be related to an in-game location. Almost all of the music found in this category have a very soft and sutil melody, they are more atmospheric.

The bosses musical compositions, on the other hand, are a lot more upbeat and catchy than the world locations music. This is an excellent element because during a boss fight you want the player to feel excited and engage to what is happening between them and their opponent, and this music does this is a way that can only be compared to the Soul series or Bloodborne. Each piece has its unique flavor that not only has you engage during the whole fight but also describes pretty well the personality of each Boss you encounter during your adventure. Pieces like *Hornet*, *Mantis Lords*, and *Dung Defender*, are all memorable song that pretty much everyone would recognize if they have played the game, and that is an important element that every video game developer should have always in their mind because video games are a lot of time not only remembered by their gameplay, visuals or story but also because of their music and how memorable it was. Each one of this pieces is a good composition to analyze if anyone seeks to understand and learn how to create memorably and excellent quality music for a video game project around the idea of an action-adventure video game with Boss encounters.

Finally, for anyone seeking to dive into a video game full of amazing and memorable music that will help you keep engaging, that will be stuck in your head and which you are going to be hearing over and over again for mere pleasure, this is the prefect product to buy, play, and enjoy, if possible until the 100% completionist mark to hear and experience all of what this OST has to offer.

End of the Line

Hollow Knight is a wonderful game that has a lot of material to talk about. It's a game that not only shows how to create an awesome product and well done, but it also contributes with new ideas to the industry from all point of view, ranging from gameplay mechanics to music composition for video games. It is also a lesson on how to take something that seems already established, as is the Metroidvania game genre, and giving it a differentiating touch with new mechanics and original new ideas. Is a game that shows how to create a new and fascinating world, making it coherent and giving it its personal and unique set of rules. Lastly it shows everyone that it is possible to create an excellent game with excellent mechanics, that at the same time has an original, interesting and well-formulated lore/story to tie everything up and give the player a big enough excuse to learn and explore a world, or play a game, aside from it having an excellent playability.

This is a game that has to be play and experience by everyone who loves video games, and no matter the type of games you like, this is probably going to be one of the best games you will ever play. For certain there will be something, from all of the different elements that this product has to offer, that will catch your attention and make you enjoy it.

Finally, Team cherry and Christopher Larkin should be more than proud of what they have accomplished with their product in general. Every aspect of what they have developed and composed is well done and so polish that some times it feels as if this was a product developed by a triple-A studio and not an Indie company. Lets hope the next adventures Team Cherry has prepared for us to be as fun, charming, and magnificent as Hollow Knight, as well as the next music compose by Larkin for the next project he decides to work on, be it video games or films or conventional music or any project, in general, he decides to collaborate with.

Bibliography

- En.wikipedia.org. (2017). *Hollow Knight*. [online] Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hollow_Knight [Accessed 25 May 2018].

- En.wikipedia.org. (n.d.). *Counterpoint*. [online] Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counterpoint [Accessed 25 May 2018].

- *Hollow Knight Soundtrack Interview*. (2017). [video] Australia: Team Cherry.

- Hollowknight.com. (2017). Hollow Knight | An atmospheric adventure through a surreal, bug-infested world. [online] Available at: http://hollowknight.com/ [Accessed 25 May 2018].

- Hollowknight.wikia.com. (2017). *Hollow Knight Wiki*. [online] Available at: http://hollowknight.wikia.com/wiki/Hollow_Knight_Wiki [Accessed 25 May 2018].

- Team Cherry. (2015). *Hollow Knight*. [online] Available at: http://teamcherry.com.au/hollowknight/ [Accessed 25 May 2018].