Study of Lieve Oma



Bill Zhuoyuan Fang (2022)

Lieve Oma (2016), illustrated and developed by Florian Veltman, is a story-telling focused game set in an autumn forest with a graphic style consisting of flat shapes and a warm colour pallete. The story is told through a constant dialogue spoken between a young kid and her grandma. You play as the child with the primary gameplay of collecting mushrooms while wandering around in the forest. Through it's use of worldbuilding, music and ambience, the game is not so focused on interactions, mechanics or any gameplay elements at all, but more so to provide an slow and nostalgic experience that invites the player to reminisce about their own worldliness outside of the game world.

The world and setting of the environmental design decisions metaphorically shape two primary characters, while simultaneously convey mood and storytelling throughout Lieve Oma. In the first scene, we are greeted with a warm and vibrant analogous colour palette consisting of orange, yellows, and browns, that we associate with a certain time of the year. Autumn is often a symbol of "ripening and change" (Interesting Literature 2021), informed to us later in the game when the girl opens up to her grandma about her recent problems regarding school, friendships, which may be rather relatable to the player, inviting them to see a part of themselves. "At the same time, Autumn is also a symbol of decline, old age and even death," (IL 2021) as yellow leaves fall and scatter the ground. This directly relates to the grandma's old age, further enhanced by her slower movement-speed in comparison to her companion, who moves much faster having the wanderlust and enthusiasm of a child. The use of seasons as a visual motif is further exemplified through the

attending to being concerned with anything else." (Time, Perception... 2010) The experience of Lieve Oma encourages the player to think outside of the game world, and see themselves as the child, with their grandparent, rather than 'playing' a character in a fictional game world.

It is no surprise that sound and music work together with visual elements to help enhance gameplay and overall immersive experience in Lieve Oma. The sound of car doors closing can be heard along with birds chirping from beginning the game, immediately grabbing the player's attention while also supporting the visual storytelling of how the game starts. This way, we know our characters drove to the forest, and came for a walk, rather than being spawned directly in the middle of the forest. Gentle footsteps on rustling leaves shortly follow as grandma the player start walking around, the footsteps also match the player's walk speed, adding another layer of realism relating to how hiking in forests sound in real life. These basic sound effects are diegetic as they "refer to something that belongs to the story world" (Meaningful Noise 2005) as the in game characters are expected to be able to hear these naturally occurring sound effects in the visual environment of a forest, adding another level of immersion. When a mushroom is collected, a gentle tone with a rising pitch is played, along with a mushroom icon counter going up, telling the player that they have found an object of importance in simple way. However, this sound effect is likely non-diegetic as they fall out of the naturally occurring sounds of the forest environment our characters belong in. "Despite this disconnection, non-diegetic sounds are also often part of the sounds of playing," (MN 2005) when utilised in an effective and meaningful way. Had an inventory UI of some sort opened, it would drive away both the immersion of the game world and the simplistic nature of the game. "Music is an integral part to adding to the feel and experience of playing a game," (TP 2010) as it can helps build mood and atmosphere. An acoustic piano is used as the sole instrument for the background music throughout the game, playing a constant slow repeated tune in lower octave, followed by a conjunct-descending riff starting at a higher octave. The music is composed in a way to express a nostalgic, yet melancholic emotion fitting to the thematic appreciating your grandma. The simple melody along with the flat colours and minimalistic shape design of the visuals creates this mellow aesthetic, elevating the otherwise not so engaging gameplay of finding mushrooms and bringing them back. Minecraft (2011) is a sandbox game about exploring, mining and building was rather simple during its initial release, sharing a similarity with Lieve Oma in many design areas, including the nostalgic pianic melody paired with ambient sounds of nature. The magic of Minecraft’s music comes from its infrequency,

as many sometimes there would be moments of silence. When the player is performing a mundane task such as mining a hole for your base, the music may start again, without the player actively noticing. With the music coming on at random and the silence in between, it allows the player take in and appreciate the whole atmosphere so much more. This absence of music is also utilised in Lieve Oma, such arriving at the first bridge, the child opens up to grandma about their struggles with friendship from moving to a new school. The music fades away, creating an emphasis on a key moment of the story, diverting the player's attention to the dialogue. The same occurrence is seen again when the time skips happen, time to time within the story. The feeling of daydreaming nostalgia is gone, as we are left with the present in a much harsher winter environment.

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