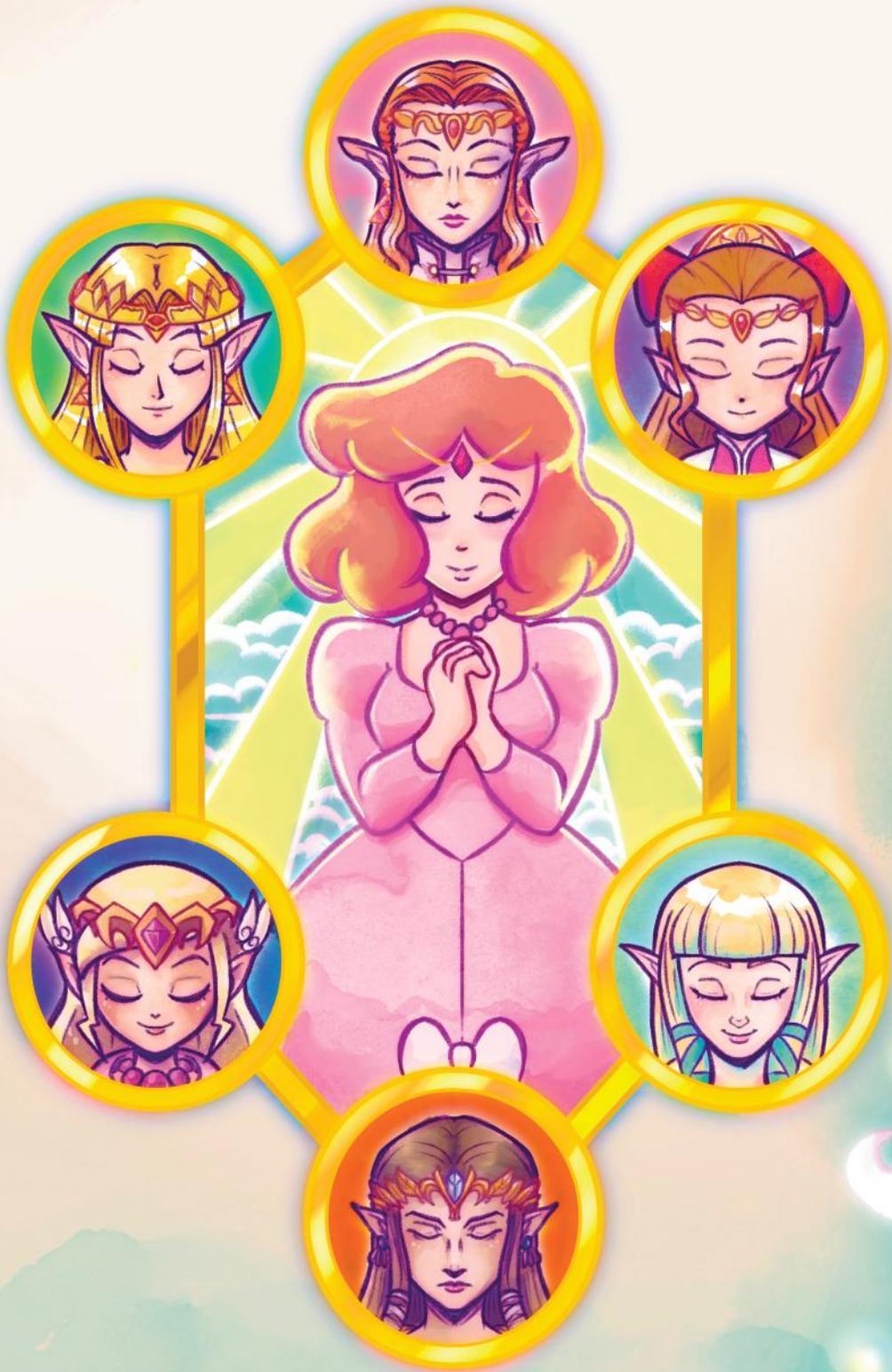
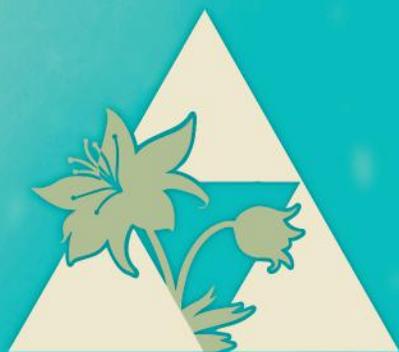




silent princess
- a zelda zine -





silent princess
- a zelda zine -



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softening of the earth

by seeking

Roots Beneath

The Legend of Zelda is an odd title for a series where the main character is, quite famously, not named Zelda. It's an awkward revelation for the newcomer to learn that *the legend* is not Link, with his blistered ankles and polygon smile, but a princess in chronic need of rescue.

The question that then follows is an understandable one: why is Zelda *the legend*?

The Oxford Dictionary definition of *legend* implies an almost unfortunate flavor to the title. Legends are folktales and bedtime stories, accounts of adventures so extraordinary that they are nearly unreal. And perhaps they are, Oxford suggests, as legends are “often regarded as untrue.” Their protagonists are not quite people, but the idea of them: a mirror too idealized for us to see ourselves with them. To become a legend is to become abstract, impersonal—a collection of ideas in a familiar shape.

There is a coolness to the term. A degree of removal and antiquity that feels appropriate in the space of common Zelda iconography: old temples, moss-covered statues, dust motes around ancient relief sculptures. Goddesses with no faces. A lullaby, almost happy, in G major.

From this, concluding that Zelda's legend is her contribution to the series' baroque aesthetic seems natural. Link is just a boy, only sometimes a man, and Zelda is a princess. If the prerequisite to becoming legendary is high status

and a higher pedestal, the princess is a shining solution.

But even this conclusion leaves the core question unanswered. The series title is *The Legend of Zelda*, not *The Legend of Princess Zelda*. The omission of her royal title is deliberate. A flush of individuality that feels contradictory in the light of her legendary status: the statues, the tapestries, the cool springs and distinct silence. How is it, then, that the legend in question is not the princess, but rather the girl under the crown?

To frame the question in an alternative light: why is *Zelda* the legend?

Stars Above

A seed of an answer is planted in the first installment of the series, *The Legend of Zelda* (1986). And she is exactly that—legendary. Zelda's name carries such allure and caliber that the first NES interaction of Link, a foreigner, travels to Hyrule with the simple hope of meeting her. Instead, he finds not her but her presence, pervasive: she is on the lips of every citizen, a curse in the mouths of monsters, a kind hum at a healing fountain. A proper princess, but not yet a person.

The weight of the legend grows heavier in the second game; Link saves Princess Zelda the First, a girl frozen in time, and the player learns that every firstborn princess carries her name in her honor. A proper legend, a proper princess ... but something is still missing.



Zelda returns again in *A Link to the Past*, now a voice in the wind, the shared destiny of Link and her people. And at pace with the series, the legend blossoms. In *Ocarina of Time*, she is enriched with music—a lullaby—and cutscenes slow whenever she is present. A fourth-dimensional show of deference. Her legend grows increasingly ornate with each following installment of the series: she is both the cause and the answer to a forgotten kingdom's regrets in *The Wind Waker*, and a martyr in *Twilight Princess*. In *Skyward Sword* she is the fully realized incarnation of Hylia herself, and in *Breath of the Wild* and *Tears of the Kingdom* she is the last hope of a kingdom lost.

Zelda, as Hylia, is fully realized as far beyond a girl in a dress. The blue of her eyes is the sky above Hyrule, her hair the fields, and the music around her a resonant frequency of warmth and renewal. She is the crystallization of her people's dreams. Their ultimate salvation.

A Small Sprout

And yet this answer is still unsatisfactory. The series is named *The Legend of Zelda*, not *The Legend of Hyrule* or *The Legend of Hylia*. So what is it, beyond her goddess status and permeation of Hyrule's past and future, that makes her legendary?

Who is Zelda, the girl, and what makes her a legend?

It's a question that Zelda herself struggles with. As she has grown to become equal parts goddess and girl, the burden of reconciling her two halves becomes ever more complex.

Every reincarnation of the princess is aware of her past, knows her future, and is entirely unsure of the space between.

The texture of this struggle is unique from game to game. In *Ocarina of Time*, Zelda continues in her role as Hyrule's protector by adopting an alter ego. Famously tomboyish even before her days as Sheik, the move appears to be one of rebellion, and yet her future incarnations come to revere her transformation into a warrior-princess.

In *The Wind Waker* this conflict comes into high resolution, with Tetra and Zelda being one character with distinctly different designs. Tetra finds her destiny to be entirely undesirable ... until she realizes that her wit and sharp aim are as necessary to defeat Ganon as Link's sword. And in *Phantom Hourglass*, she is back to her pirate ways, albeit with the added challenge of insisting her crew refer to her as "Tetra" only.

In *Skyward Sword*, Zelda is a schoolgirl who finds herself an involuntary goddess. And despite the cold flow of time and the radical redefinition of her future, she is strangely the same: the music around her is familiar, her jokes identical, and she greets Link with a constant joy. Rather than Zelda becoming a statue, Hylia becomes human: a smiling goddess turned into a smiling girl.

This revelation turns technicolor in *Breath of the Wild* and *Tears of the Kingdom*, with Zelda's growth and transformation becoming literal. Through the changes she suffers, she redefines the legend with her own hands—a sage and scholar, a princess

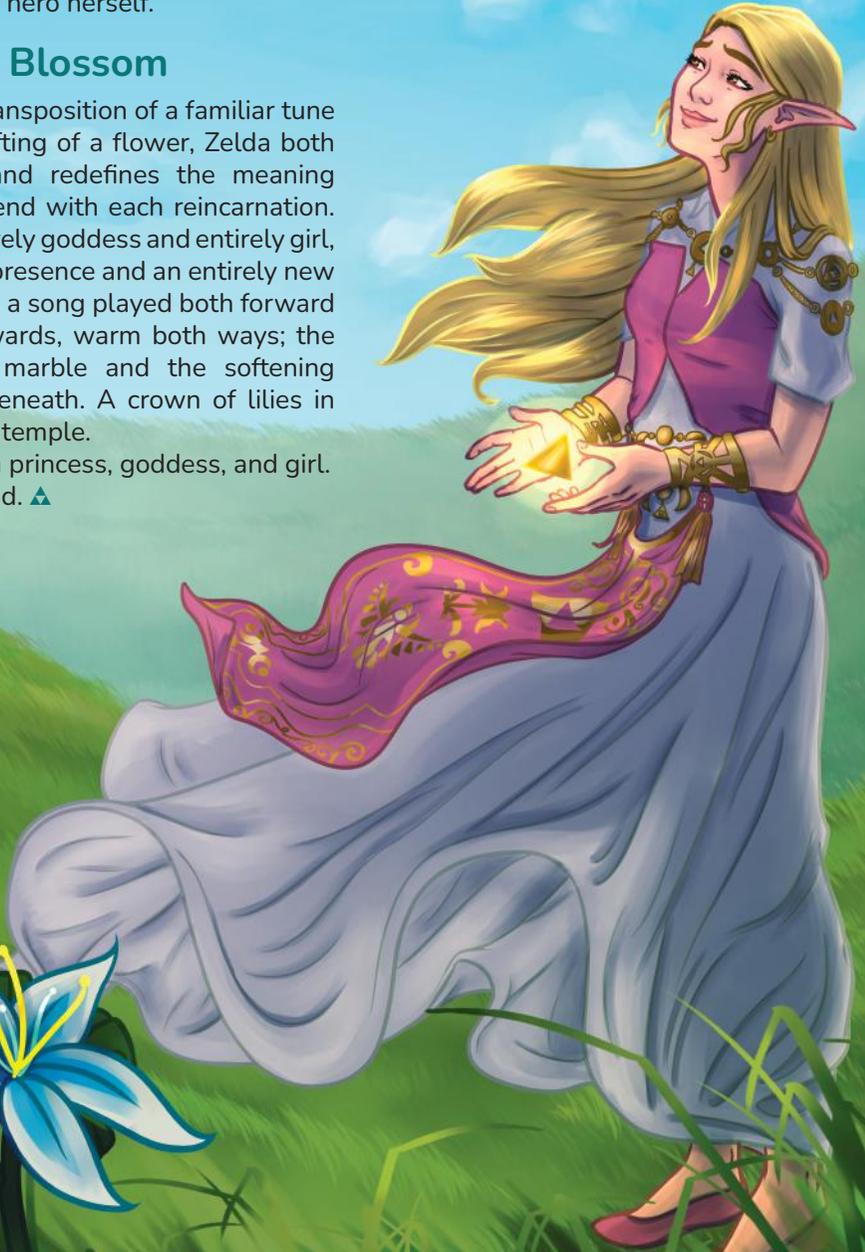


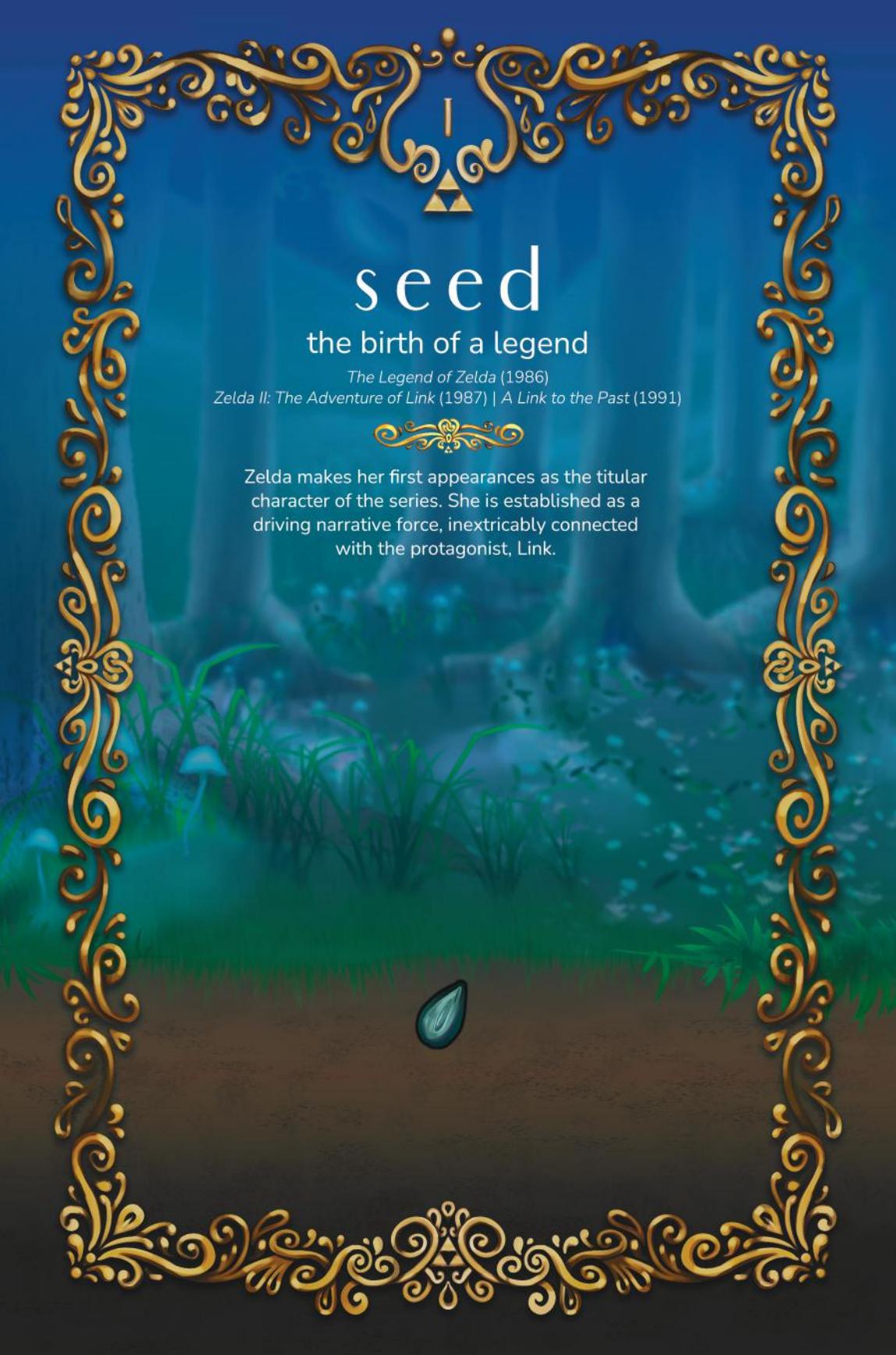
and daughter, a protector of her people. She is Hyrule's ultimate salvation and best friend. And now, surrounded by the soft wavelengths of her past and the echoes of its wisdom, Zelda becomes a hero herself.

A Blue Blossom

Like the transposition of a familiar tune or the grafting of a flower, Zelda both reclaims and redefines the meaning of her legend with each reincarnation. She is entirely goddess and entirely girl, a familiar presence and an entirely new one. She is a song played both forward and backwards, warm both ways; the statue in marble and the softening of earth beneath. A crown of lilies in an ancient temple.

Zelda: a princess, goddess, and girl.
A legend. ▲





seed

the birth of a legend

The Legend of Zelda (1986)

Zelda II: The Adventure of Link (1987) | *A Link to the Past* (1991)



Zelda makes her first appearances as the titular character of the series. She is established as a driving narrative force, inextricably connected with the protagonist, Link.

wisdom of the waiting princess

by rynling

At first glance, Princess Zelda seems to be the archetypal damsel in distress. In the original 1986 *The Legend of Zelda*, she sleeps in a sealed room in an underground dungeon deep within Death Mountain after having been imprisoned by Ganon. Zelda's piece of the Triforce is shattered into eight fragments that Link must recover from monsters if he is to rescue the princess. Zelda appears to be without agency, but it was she who orchestrated this situation in order to defeat Ganon. Zelda's wisdom lies in understanding the past to set in motion events that will play out in the future, a theme with resonant echoes throughout the series that bears her name.

The Legend of Zelda opens with Link standing alone in a scrubby wasteland outside a cave where an old man waits with a sword. The paper instruction manual included with the game cartridge provides the context: Link is a traveler who has been guided to Hyrule by a royal servant named Impa. To restore peace to the kingdom, Link must save its princess, Zelda.

While Link adventures across Hyrule to seek the eight pieces of the Triforce, Zelda lies sleeping in Ganon's fortress. Although she appears to be a passive presence in the game, this is not the case. According to the scenario outlined by the game manual and expanded in *Hyrule Historia*, Zelda is the key figure who drives the story of *The Legend of Zelda*.

Long before Link's arrival, Zelda witnessed Ganon's acquisition of the

Triforce of Power, and she understood that Hyrule was in danger of falling to his army of monsters. She therefore split the Triforce of Wisdom to conceal it from Ganon, thus ensuring the possibility that a hero could challenge him in the future. She then sent Impa out into the war-torn wilds to seek a worthy contender for the Triforce.

Since the pieces of the Triforce of Wisdom are hidden within dungeons, it stands to reason that Princess Zelda herself navigated these underground labyrinths to conceal the shards. Zelda was ultimately captured and imprisoned by Ganon's forces, but it's not beyond the realm of possibility that she allowed herself to be taken captive. Ganon was at the peak of his power when he conquered Hyrule; but perhaps, after his vigilance waned with the passing years, he could be defeated.

Regardless of whether Zelda intended to be captured, she foresaw Ganon's conquest of her kingdom and planned accordingly. Zelda may be imprisoned when Link arrives in Hyrule at the beginning of the game, but his ultimate victory over Ganon is only possible because of the prior groundwork she laid with her own hands.

The folkloric trope of the captured princess has a long history. Partially due to the success of the 1959 Disney movie *Sleeping Beauty*, Charles Perrault's 1697 fairy tale of the same name has remained in our contemporary cultural imagination, but the tropes of the story stretch much



deeper into the past. In his 8 CE verse cycle *Metamorphoses*, the Roman poet Ovid recounts the Greek myth of the traveling bard Orpheus, who braves the terrors of the underworld to return his lover Euridice from the lands of the dead. Japan's oldest written record, the *Kojiki*, opens with a story of how the divine hero Susano-o rescued a princess from a great serpent who imprisoned her within an eight-walled fortress.

This trope seems to place female characters in subordinate positions. The male hero embarks on grand adventures, but the princess simply waits. The hero is active and has the agency to change the world around him, while the princess is passive and merely serves as a trophy to be won. As the hero becomes stronger, the princess remains confined. She is not allowed the courage awarded by confronting adversity, nor is she granted the power that comes from wielding a sword.

If we look at the situation from the perspective of the captive princess, however, the story changes. Cutting a path forward with a sword is not the only way to change the world, after all. The princess is able to survive in a mysterious realm in the presence of evil, thus serving as a keeper and warden. Perhaps the princess cannot act on her own, but she does not need to. She places her trust in other people and relies on their help to overcome challenges in ways that are no less effective for being indirect. Her wisdom lies in long-term planning, strategy, and careful coordination.

Princess Zelda is an action hero in her own right, but she's much more than a girl exploring dungeons. Zelda's study of the past has allowed her to understand the nature of Ganon and the Triforce, and this knowledge provides her with the tools she needs to predict the future, correctly determining that she cannot stop Ganon on her own. Instead of confronting the threat to Hyrule directly, Zelda carefully prepares to suffer a temporary loss so that she might ultimately achieve victory once conditions are more favorable to her cause.

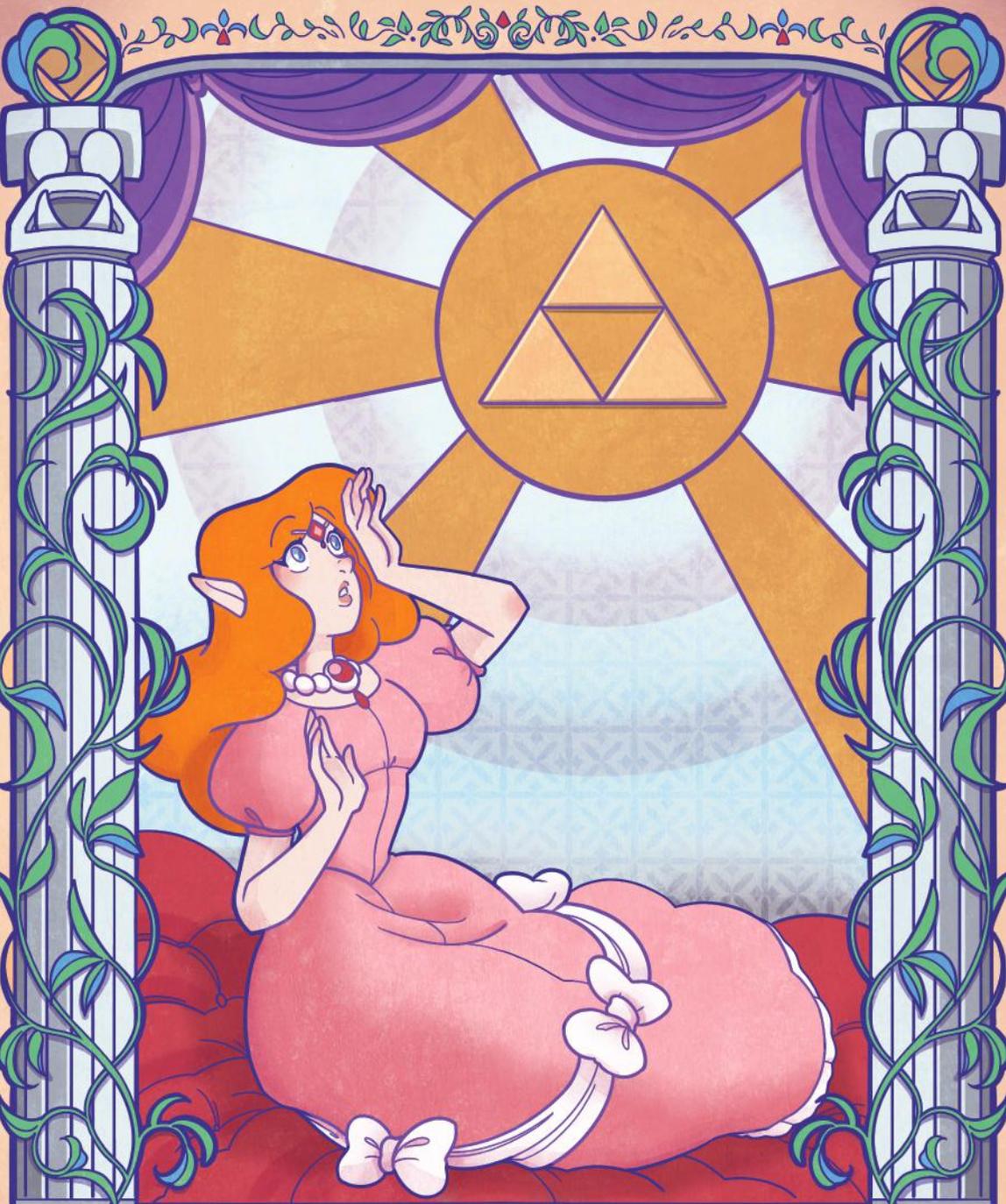
If the original Zelda were simply a captive princess waiting for a hero, her story would not resonate so strongly throughout the series. In *Twilight Princess*, Zelda drops her sword so that her people will not be dragged into a war. In *Breath of the Wild*, Zelda walks to Hyrule Castle alone and unarmed so that Ganon will be distracted and unable to escape. In *Ocarina of Time*, Zelda assumes the disguise of Sheik in order to guide Link through the trials he must face to prepare himself to confront Ganondorf. In *A Link to the Past*, Zelda takes advantage of being sealed inside a crystal to help Link cross the treacherous Dark World by telepathic communication.

Zelda's battles are not fought with a sword, but with patience, strategy, and a heroic willingness to trust the allies she has chosen. Her wisdom lies in understanding the past while looking forward to the future. Instead of simply waiting to be rescued, Zelda takes decisive action and radiates brilliance from the center of the stories that form her enduring legend. ▲









The princess
AWAKENS



princess of wisdom

by *zartophski*

illustrated by *hylianzs*

Zelda shoved her way through the chaos of the castle halls, ignoring the shouting soldiers around her. Their swords and armor shone in the torchlight. She knew her father would be leading them to battle, but she tried to not think about the fate that would meet him there. The defense of the castle was a task she could not aid in, but that did not leave her helpless.

There was a room tucked away deep in the castle, unbeknownst to most of the Hyrulean populace. In it, an ancient artifact was hidden away. Entrusted by the gods to the royal family, it was a gift of prosperity to the fledgling kingdom, but with that gift came an equal threat to the very peace it brought.

Her feet carried her toward the relic's room with hardly a thought to their course. She had run these halls countless

times, but never before with the urgency that followed her. The noises of the guards dimmed as they ran in the opposite direction to face the beast. They knew what it sought, and they knew the cost should the demons get a hold of their prize.

Zelda ducked into the secret passageway hidden behind a tapestry. Its stitches told of the noble hero of ages past, his valiant fight against the darkness a symbol of courage. Every soldier in the land looked to his spirit for inspiration.

Yet, Zelda never felt comforted by his tale. The tapestry, though mighty in its grandeur, always left her with a strange sadness. The hero was a small, solitary figure against the waves of monsters. She couldn't help but see fear in his stitched eyes, as if he didn't want to face them alone. She yearned to reach out and somehow pluck him from the scene, to protect him from the dangers he faced.

She could not protect the hero from millennia ago, but she could protect her kingdom.

The passageway was dark and cool, the thick fabric of the tapestry muffling her steps against the stone floor. At the end of the hidden passageway was a spiral staircase, and Zelda descended quickly. Across the small room at its base, a single, unassuming door separated her from the artifact she, and so many others, sought.

There was no hesitation as she ran to the room, shoving the heavy door open and slipping inside. It was empty aside from a lonely pedestal, and Zelda felt an ethereal awe wash over her as she gazed upon the Triforce of Wisdom.

It flickered, humming the lonely tune it sang her whole life. Zelda had never seen the Triforce whole, the legend of the Triforce of Courage nothing more than a hopeful fairy tale. But she knew it must exist, somewhere, and the Triforce of Wisdom missed her. Zelda could hear the sorrow in its song, when the magic curled around her heart. It was always grateful to have her company, but as soon as she stepped into the room, the Triforce could tell her visit was different. Its magic reached out in a question, but recoiled from her when it found her purpose.

"No, no, don't! Please!"

Zelda reached out again, with her magic and her body, as she rushed further into the room. Her heart pounded as she threw

herself up the steps and grabbed the edges of the pedestal, leaning so close her nose nearly touched the ancient relic. "You must help!"

The Triforce was uninclined to do so, and it pressed a barrier against her magical consciousness, attempting to block her from interacting with it. The rejection stung deep, something Zelda had never felt the Triforce do before.

"Please!" she gasped. "Surely you don't want to fall to the darkness! I can't let them take you!"

Something in the Triforce wavered at the thought of it, and she pressed against the cracks. "It is my duty to protect my kingdom," she reminded it. "We have no hero, but as long as I am here, I will do everything I can!" She reached out, picking it up gently from its place on the pedestal.

The emotions of the Triforce of Wisdom grew stronger, and for a brief moment, Zelda could have sworn the Triforce was trying to show her something. But before she could concentrate on its message, shouts and clanging echoed down the hall, reminding her of her purpose. She refocused on the relic, clutching it tightly.



“They’re coming,” she whispered in horror. “Please, you can’t let them take you!”

Zelda could hardly move, hardly think past the sounds of battle that crept closer and closer to her. She flinched back at the sound of something slamming against the door. She was running out of time.

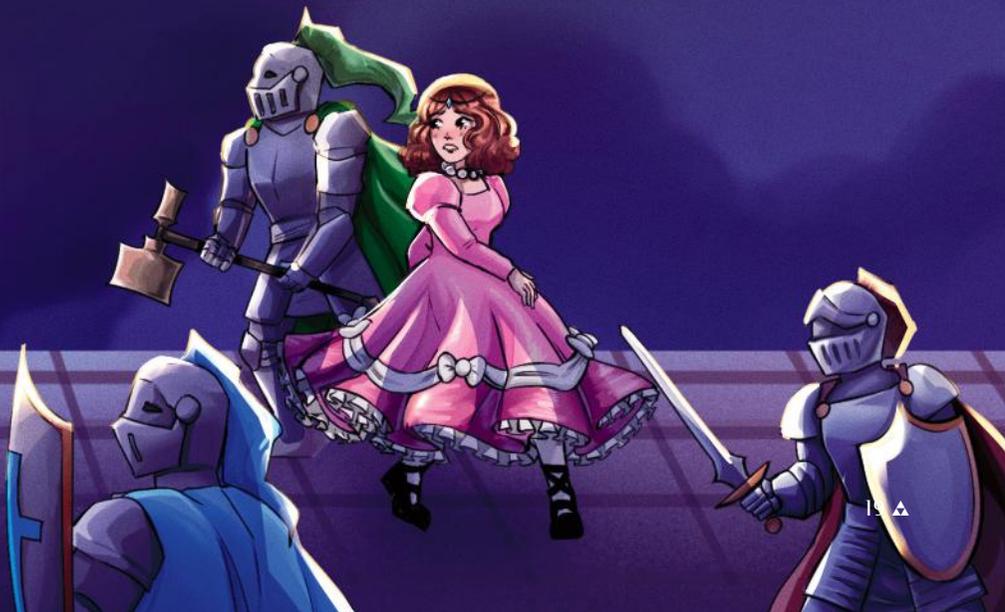
The Triforce of Wisdom, cradled in her hands, screamed. Its pain echoed through her head, lashing out in agony as they both realized what was happening. The door banged again, the shouts of her guards outside numbering fewer and fewer with each passing second, until silence.

She whimpered, a tear streaking down her face. It glowed in the dim light, though reflecting the Triforce or the magic radiating through her body, none would know.

Even the Triforce quieted its struggles. Perhaps it, too, could sense the gravity of what massacre transpired just outside its sanctuary. The fear that Zelda carried in her chest suddenly blossomed out through her body as her horror sank in.

The castle was never this quiet.

“Please,” she whispered, begging the artifact of the gods to listen to her. “Please, you must ...” Zelda flooded her thoughts into the Triforce, begging it to understand. This was the only way she could protect the kingdom she loved. She could not fail her people now. Not when they fought so hard against the evil, not when they had thrived and survived for countless generations.



For a moment, it seemed the Triforce would ignore her pleas. But the golden power of the Goddess Nayru flooded her senses, and when the door finally broke open, it was more than just the mortal Princess Zelda who faced the beast.

She turned, figure glowing radiant golden hues. The Triforce of Wisdom shined even brighter than she did, its power tangibly humming through the room. The pair faced the beast together, and its eyes narrowed at the sight of the ancient artifact. Its teeth were bared in an imitation of a sneering smile, already claiming its victory. Against the back of the beast's hand, a triangle burned bright, humming oppressively.

The Triforce of Wisdom called out to the Triforce of Power, but Zelda felt it recoil, singed by its corrupted magic. Her sister was wounded, burning so brightly out of pain rather than her true power. Zelda shed another tear that did not belong to her, the Triforce of Wisdom mourning through her mortal body.

"The Triforce shall be restored to balance once again," Zelda declared, her voice warping as it spoke through the power of the Goddesses and their holy artifact. To the Triforce of Wisdom, her words were the assurance it needed, and its struggle finally ceased. To Ganon, the beast of darkness, her words were a threat.

The demon roared in rage, raising its trident in preparation for attack. Instead of fleeing, Zelda simply raised her hand, the Triforce of Wisdom glowing brighter in her hold, as it finally granted her wish. Fractures splintered through the relic, the overwhelming power of it radiating out of the cracks. For a moment, it paused in its damaged state, but Zelda held no fear of her wish failing.

The Triforce of Wisdom shattered.

Ganon swung its trident, trying fruitlessly to swipe at the splintered pieces that whizzed and zipped around the room. But they evaded his grasp, disappearing as they sought safety outside of the castle walls.

Zelda sighed in relief, even as she felt the comforting embrace of the Triforce's magic leave her. It would be weakened, but it would be safe. Her duty was complete.

She closed her eyes, prepared for whatever fate she and her kingdom would face while they waited for the hero to return. ▲







sprout

a new beginning

Ocarina of Time (1998)

Oracle of Ages/Seasons (2001) | Four Swords (2002)



In her 3D debut, Zelda takes a more present and active role in the story for the first time. Her alter ego, Sheik, depicts her as a warrior and a guide, allowing her to step beyond previous roles.



the mistress of disguise

by starlitnova

On February 21, 1986, the first *Legend of Zelda* game was released in Japan on the Famicom Disk System. Because her name is featured in the main title of the series, one would think that Zelda herself is the main character, or at the very least, someone that plays a pivotal role. While she does bear the Triforce of Wisdom, she only has a rather minor part from *The Legend of Zelda* up to *A Link to the Past* (omitting *Link's Awakening*).

In the first few *Zelda* games, Zelda is almost non-existent. She can even be seen as rather one-dimensional, usually relying on Link's aid while falling into the typical damsel-in-distress trope as she is kidnapped by Ganon.

But in 1998, everything changed.

In *Ocarina of Time*, we are introduced to a new, mysterious side of Princess Zelda. This would mark the start of Zelda playing a more dynamic role in the series as she takes on the disguise of Sheik, a male descendant and survivor of the Sheikah tribe. He offered a striking new perspective on the titular character most players had probably overlooked, at least to an extent. While his exact backstory remains murky in the game, the *Ocarina of Time* manga, released in Japan in 2000, offers an interesting (albeit non-canon) interpretation of Sheik's origins. It's important to note that Sheik is not a different entity entirely from Princess Zelda, but merely an extension of herself.

Zelda is depicted as being a lonely child, rarely being able to leave the castle premises. She feels conflicted; part of her desires to live a normal life—one where she's not bound to royalty or heavy responsibilities. Feeling a little rebellious one day, Zelda sneaks off from the castle to play. In Castle Town, she meets Link, with the Kokiri Emerald in hand. He is searching for the princess, but since she is not donning her regal attire, he doesn't recognize her as someone from the royal family. Zelda makes a deal with Link to see the princess herself if he plays with her in town, which he agrees to. But before Zelda can have a chance to tell Link her name, she is pulled away back to the castle by Impa. Later, when Link meets Princess Zelda inside the castle, he is shocked to see a mature, elegant, and reserved girl—a stark contrast to the one he previously met in town.

After fleeing from Hyrule Castle with Impa, Princess Zelda proposes the idea of disguising herself as one of Ganon's minions. Because she felt useless during the attack on Hyrule Castle, even witnessing the demise of her own father, Zelda proclaims that she will become a boy and seal "Princess Zelda" away until Link's return. Reluctantly, Impa agrees and places a seal on Zelda, locking her consciousness away and making her believe she is a descendant of the Sheikah. From there, Zelda takes on the alter ego known as Sheik. With this new form, Zelda is able to discreetly aid the Hero of Time on



his quest to awaken the Sages and defeat Ganondorf.

In the game, seven years after Link draws the Master Sword, Sheik makes his presence known to Link in the Temple of Time. Somehow, Sheik is already aware of Link's fate as the Hero of Time, eagerly awaiting his arrival for years while he slept. While it's unclear who Sheik is or what his true intentions are, there's this mystifying, yet calming, aura about him. In a sense, it's almost familiar. Each encounter with Sheik before a temple is accompanied by the tranquil pluck of a harp and some words of wisdom. And then, before Link can assume anything about his identity, Sheik disappears in his typical fashion, vanishing in a puff of smoke, but not before reassuring Link that they will meet again.

Princess Zelda, under the guise of Sheik, lingers on the mistakes of her past. She feels downtrodden, guilty, and ashamed of her naivety from when she was a child. While her heart was in the right place, her short-sightedness led to Ganondorf gaining access to the Sacred Realm, even dragging Link down into her mess.

Zelda goes into hiding and assumes a new identity, left to watch from a distance as Hyrule is destroyed by a mad tyrant whom she foolishly gave the keys of the kingdom to. The memories of the past haunt her continuously to adulthood, yet also drive her to seek and correct her immature actions. As a princess, she cannot bring herself to sit back and watch from the sidelines. She has to take action for her wrongdoings, which leads her to picking up the mantle of Sheik. She

is a survivor who will do anything to heal Hyrule, no matter the pain it may bring her.

Zelda cannot afford to be herself. Sheik was born from her desire for freedom. Under this new guise, Zelda embraces her true self without being under anyone's control. Yet as Sheik, she embodies the qualities Hyrule's leader needs: the patience to simply wait, the courage to fight alongside her people, and the wisdom to right her wrongs. The princess who had enough foresight to prevent calamity inadvertently brings ruin upon her kingdom and bids farewell to her only knight—only friend—as penance. Zelda learns from her mistakes, wisely guiding Link from a distance and gaining an emotional intelligence that drives her growth from a reckless princess playing hero to a noble queen.

Ocarina of Time would go on not only to become one of the most critically acclaimed games of all time but also to light a new path for Zelda to grow as a character. The proactive role that started with Sheik continued with each subsequent incarnation. *The Wind Waker* stars the princess as Tetra, a spunky young woman who leads a band of pirates. She later fights against Ganondorf with Link and even helps co-found New Hyrule together with him. In *Twilight Princess*, Zelda gives up her freedom for the betterment of her citizens, risking her life and safety to help save Midna's life. *Breath of the Wild* and *Tears of the Kingdom* feature one of the strongest incarnations of Zelda we've seen thus far, truly showcasing her bravery, selflessness, and kind heart. ▲







It is I, the Princess of Hyrule,
Zelda.





FLAMES

muscle memory

by *bahbahhh*

illustrated by *michaele r.*

It took three years to convince Impa to start training her in combat. Three years of begging and pleading and relentless pestering until Impa finally conceded to the fact that if Zelda must live in shadow while they await Link's return, it only made sense she learn to fight in it as well.

You wanted this. Zelda reminds herself as she hits the ground—*hard*—for the fifth time that morning. Impa had caught her mid-spin with a stiff arm across the chest, as solid as a stone wall, and dropped her directly onto the square of her back.

All of the air immediately rushes out of her lungs. She squeezes her eyes shut against the pain and panic beginning to blossom in her chest and forces herself onto her side. She pulls deep, steady breaths in through her nose and out through her mouth, like Impa instructed her to do the first time it happened. She's had to repeat it so many times it feels as if it's the only thing she's really mastered in this first year of her training.

To be fair, the move she's trying to execute—a spinning downward heel kick—is more advanced than anything she's ever attempted before, but Impa insisted she was ready. She'd been all smiles and sunshine about it too, really keying up Zelda's confidence, and then proceeded to serve her dirt for breakfast.

"You almost got me that time."
She feels Impa kneel down beside her.



“Don’t ...
lie,” Zelda
gasps.

They both
fall silent
as she works
to control her
breath. They are
sparring in a small
clearing of the
trees in the woods
surrounding Kakariko
Village. Without any cover,
the sun quickly begins toasting
the exposed skin of her arms,
which means it has to be approaching midday.
In another round or two, she’ll be served dirt for lunch.

She sits up slowly and wipes the beads of sweat from
her brow. Impa rises and stands over her with her hands
on her hips. Her broad shadow shields Zelda from the
harshness of the sun. For some reason, it makes Zelda
feel worse about the kick.

Zelda hunches over herself, very unbecoming of a princess
(though she’d not needed to *be* princess-like in a long while),
and glares at the top of her boots.

“Let’s go again,” Impa says.

“Oh, just leave me down here. I’ll be back in another
round, anyway,” Zelda grumbles. Impa scoffs and extends
her hand down, but Zelda swats it away. “I’m never going
to get this right.”

“Not with that attitude, you won’t.” Impa reaches again
and wiggles her fingers in front of Zelda’s face.

You wanted this. The reminder echoes in a mocking,
sing-songy tone throughout Zelda’s skull. She narrows
her eyes and begrudgingly takes Impa’s hand, practically
floating to her feet with Impa’s strong tug. The Sheikah’s
strength is remarkable, and it makes her stealth all the more
impressive. Impa can trick her own shadow, disappear in a



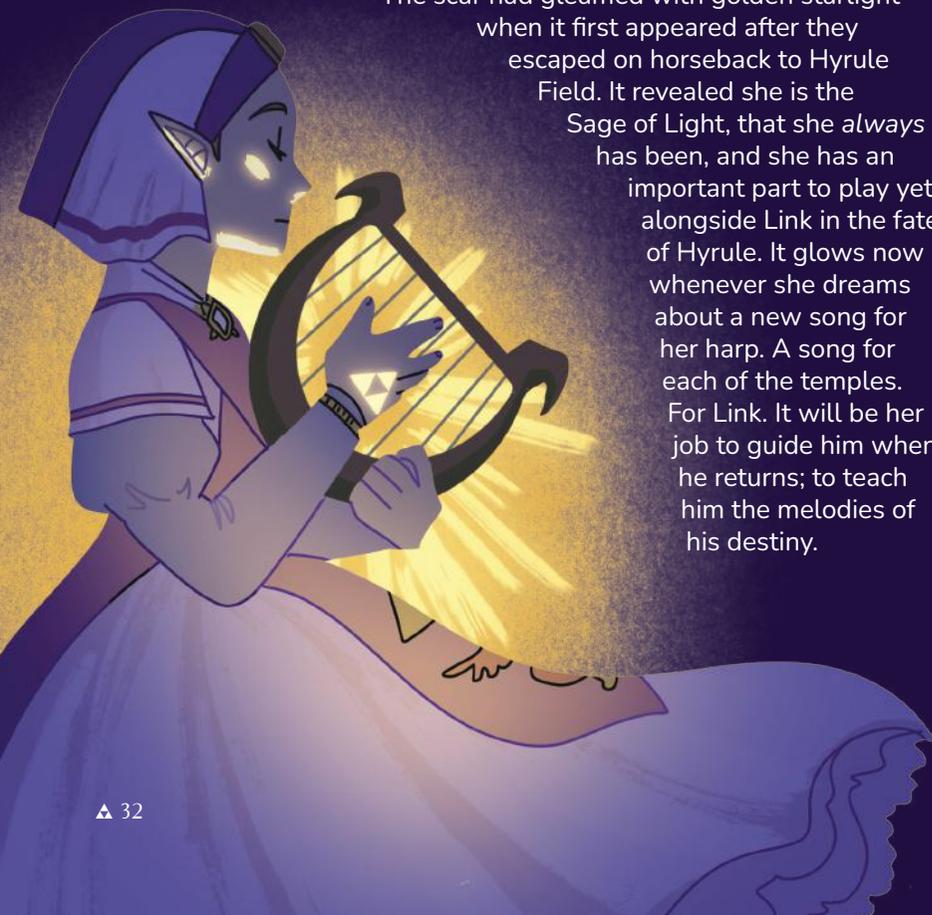
flash of smoke, and scale trees without rustling a single leaf. Zelda can't wait to use the smoke bombs ... if she ever manages to advance past this dreaded kick.

Impa gives her a reassuring pat on the back and resets herself. How many times had Zelda watched her take this same stance training the Royal Guard? Never in a million years did she imagine herself on the receiving end of that sharp stare; the receiving end of Impa's fist! Her father would be livid—

Her chest pulls so tight, so fast that she nearly doubles over. She breathes deliberately once again, eyes fixing hard and intense on a random spot in the treeline. Turns out, how someone breathes through grief is the same as how someone breathes when the wind is knocked out of them. Impa taught her that as well.

A phantom of the searing pain that exploded over the top of her right hand that fateful day vies for her attention. She holds her hand in front of her face and inspects the faint triangle-shaped scar under her knuckles. Wisdom's mark.

The scar had gleamed with golden starlight when it first appeared after they escaped on horseback to Hyrule Field. It revealed she is the Sage of Light, that she always has been, and she has an important part to play yet alongside Link in the fate of Hyrule. It glows now whenever she dreams about a new song for her harp. A song for each of the temples. For Link. It will be her job to guide him when he returns; to teach him the melodies of his destiny.



The third song had come to her just two nights ago—the *Serenade of Water*. Though she still has three more to learn—Light and Shadow and Spirit—the warping song of the Water Temple ignited a fresh sense of urgency inside her. Link slumbers in Sacred Realm while his body ages. Zelda doesn't know how old he must be to wield the Master Sword, but she has a feeling the day she hears the last song will be the day he wakes up.

She needs to be ready. To fight. To lead. They will not be granted another chance to right what she so terribly, foolishly wronged. Ganondorf is too powerful now. Too hungry. The last time she dared to look, a menacing black cloud swirled about the center of Hyrule Field. There have been rumors of unspeakable ruin in Castle Town. Monsters. The undead. Should Ganondorf gain the full power of the Triforce, his darkness will spread and consume the entire world.

A shiver crawls across her skin despite the heat. If Impa notices, she doesn't show it. She waits, arms crossed, sunlight catching the silver of her armor occasionally so it winks. Calm and collected as ever. The opposite of how Zelda feels now.

"I don't think my reflexes are quick enough," she tells Impa, shaking out her legs to keep her muscles from going stiff. "I wasn't permitted to run in the castle, much less train."

"I recall letting you run about when no one was looking," Impa says, looking down her nose at Zelda with a smirk. "I certainly recall chasing after you."

The memory finds her like a cool breeze. Zelda can't help but smile. A reprieve from the harshness of change.

"That's better." Impa nods approvingly. "So why are you really questioning yourself?"

"I don't know." Zelda shrugs and drops her eyes to her feet. She pushes a clod of upturned earth with her boot. "Maybe I'm just not built to be a fighter? Has there ever been a warrior princess of Hyrule?"



“Not yet.”

Zelda snaps her eyes back up to Impa. There is a hint of something more there. There always is with Impa. Zelda used to think it was an adult *thing*, some sixth sense she would acquire when she was grown as well, but now she thinks it's more of a Sheikah *thing*—an *Impa* of the Sheikah thing. It can't be a coincidence her handmaiden-turned-protector-turned-trainer just so happens to be the Sage of Shadow. A guardian of secrets. She *knows* something.

“Besides,” Impa continues, “you don't need fast reflexes to be a good fighter.”

“You don't?” Zelda tilts her head.

“You need perseverance, which you have, and you need to be consistent, which you have been. You are building muscle memory.” Impa speaks the words so firmly, so assuredly, that Zelda feels her spine straighten a little more with each one. “*That* is the key to becoming who you are meant to be.”

Zelda envisions herself in armor in the shade of twilight, with piercing red eyes, and a dagger in each hand.

“A Sheikah warrior, right?” she asks eagerly.

Impa gets a far-off look, the same kind Zelda's father used to get when he was reaching into the past for wisdom to impart upon her, or when he gazed toward the future for direction to guide his feet. But Zelda can't tell which direction Impa is looking.

“That, too,” she finally answers.

Zelda's entire life has been leading up to this point—to *this* task. It started with a song, and it's stuck on a kick, but it will end with a reckoning. Impossibly, it feels even bigger than her life, as if she stands on the precipice of a new beginning. An evolution. Impa seems to know it. And even more, Impa believes in it. In her. Almost as if she already knows the outcome. As if they've been here before.

The thought rejuvenates Zelda's confidence. Nourishes it.

You wanted this, she reminds herself, adding, *and you're ready for it.*

“Okay.” She resumes a fighting stance and is pleased to find it comes without her having to think about it. Not a reflex. Muscle memory. Just like Impa said.

With time, she'll get lighter on her feet. She'll strengthen her muscles and train them to recognize what is needed from her when she needs it. Perhaps in the future or wherever Impa was looking, during a moment of struggle or failure or insecurity, the muscle memory she is building now will remind her she is more than someone who must wait for the world to be saved. She never has been. It's partly why they are in this mess, but she's going to fix that. She's a survivor, a sage, a soon-to-be warrior, *and* she's a princess. Who knows, maybe she could be the one to save the world *and* Link!

She grins and prepares. Or they could do it together, just like they started. For now, she just needs to focus. She needs to dream of new songs and get her hands on a smoke bomb and figure out how she's going to avoid Ganondorf while she helps Link. Maybe she'll conceal her identity ...

But first, she needs to kick. ▲



AS A
CHILD,
I ALWAYS
BELIEVED
...



...THAT
MY
HANDS
WERE
BOUND
BY FATE,



DESTINED TO
SHOULDER MY
DUTY TO THE
ENTIRE
KINGDOM.
ALTHOUGH MY
FINGERS
TREMBLED,



IN THE HEAT OF
BATTLE,
THUNDER
ROARED IN MY
EARS AS I FELT
THE RUSH OF
DIVINE POWER
EXTEND FROM
MY PALMS.

GRIPPING THE
HILT OF THE
LEGENDARY
SWORD, THE
NOBLE HERO
DELIVERED A
FINAL,
DEVASTATING
BLOW.

CRACK

SHAAAAA



MY RAISED
ARM CALLED
UPON THE
POWER OF
THE SAGES TO
VANQUISH OUR
FOE ONCE AND
FOR ALL.





IT WAS
TIME TO
PUT AN
END TO
THE EVIL
PLAGUING
THE LAND.

I GREW
AND
EMBRACED
MY POWER.

SHRIEK

AS DAWN
BROKE OVER
THE HORIZON
AND A NEW
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FOR JUST A
MOMENT
LONGER.





III

leaves

growing beyond

The Wind Waker (2002)

The Minish Cap (2004) | *Four Swords Adventures* (2004)



Zelda continues to challenge her previous depictions—this time with an alter ego that is adventurous, bold, and playful.



the weight of the ocean: why tetra isn't boring in *the wind waker*

by kensa

Casual fans of *The Legend of Zelda* know *The Wind Waker* as one of the most divisive titles in the series. Most either love or hate it—it's rare to find someone who feels ambivalent about the game. Much of the criticism comes from the art style: many expected a darker, grittier *Zelda* to follow *Ocarina of Time*, especially after Nintendo's tech demo at *Space World 2000* featured a more mature art style—similar to what we would eventually see in *Twilight Princess*. Much of the other criticism points towards the game's writing, especially concerning its beloved pirate princess, Tetra.

Tetra is *The Wind Waker*'s tomboyish iteration of Princess Zelda. Unlike most female secondary characters featured up to that point—think Zelda in her previous incarnations, Marin in *Link's Awakening*, or Saria, Malon, and Ruto in *Ocarina of Time*—Tetra is the farthest thing from a damsel in distress. Throughout the first half of the game, she leads a crew of swashbuckling pirates with a level of sass and cockiness that would put even the most seasoned sailor to shame. She is defined by her willingness to do whatever it takes to get what she needs, be it catapulting a boy into a fortress of monsters or robbing a greedy shopkeeper completely blind. When push comes to shove, Tetra has no qualms about being the *shove*.

This is how she lived her life: taking what she wanted, when she wanted, and leading her pirate family fearlessly onto their next journey. Halfway through *Wind Waker*, however, that all changes when she follows Link to the lost kingdom of Hyrule and learns of her true identity: Zelda, the forgotten princess. In a flash, her roguish outfit of scraps and scarves is replaced by a silk dress and gloves, her hair is let down from its bun, and ... she loses her tan? It's as though her life as Miss Tetra, leader of the fearsome pirates, is completely wiped out by her new title of *Princess Zelda*.

This is the point in the game where fans say Tetra becomes “boring” and loses what makes her unique. Throughout this cutscene, Tetra—Zelda—is quiet and almost reserved. She is overwhelmed with the knowledge that her fate was not to live merrily as a pirate on the sea, but to aid a legendary hero in the destruction of evil as the “true heir of the royal family of Hyrule ... the last link in the bloodline.”

Everything up until that point in her life had been a lie. It makes complete sense that she wouldn't be able to come up with some witty, sarcastic comment at that moment; she no doubt was confused, hurt, and even angry—at the king for telling her the truth, at her mother for never revealing it, and even at herself for not



accepting it. King Daphnes even points this out directly, stating, “You are confused, aren’t you? I suppose such is to be expected.”

Before this, Tetra was a fearless captain who could handle herself. Now, she was a princess being locked away while the real hero saved the day—instructed to remain in hiding while Link and the king continued their adventure.

This is the last time we see Tetra until the end of the game. So much of the hatred for Tetra comes from this *one* cutscene that merely depicts a twelve-year-old girl coming to terms with information that would make *anyone’s* head spin. And even then, Tetra’s usual spunk is back in full force by the final battle: even as Zelda, clad in her pink dress and fancy hair, she’s more than happy to sass Ganondorf, asking with a haughty giggle, “What are you laughing at, Ganondorf?! You’re insane!” as she returns the Master Sword to Link. She even makes a joke despite the serious atmosphere, telling Link that she’s sorry for oversleeping—when in reality, Ganondorf had knocked her unconscious. Her ability to laugh in the face of danger, despite everything she had gone through up until that point, is to be lauded.

So many fans overlook Tetra’s dialogue in the final battle, as well as in the final cutscenes and further on into *Phantom Hourglass*, where her spark never dies. On the other hand, many fans cling to the interactions we *do* get and speculate further on what may have happened behind the scenes.

There is a popular theory that Tetra broke herself out of her basement

prison in *The Wind Waker*, rather than being kidnapped by Ganondorf. The final time Link comes down to Hyrule, he finds that the Hero of Time statue protecting the hidden chamber is broken. The remnants of the statue seem to indicate that they were broken *after* the chamber was opened, judging by how close they are to the statue’s base; if the statue was broken *before* the chamber was opened, the debris would have been farther away. This led many fans to believe that Tetra escaped, only to be confronted by Ganondorf on the way out, leading to the statue’s destruction. In a thread about the topic, Reddit user SlamNetwork even goes so far as to give a reason why the statue was broken as it was: it’s likely that Tetra, who is shown to be extremely agile early in the game, hopped up on top of the statue during her skirmish with Ganondorf, leading him to slice it in half with his twin blades to bring her back down to level.

If this is the reality of what happened, it aligns perfectly with Tetra’s character. After overcoming her initial shock, it makes complete sense that she’d want to do more to assist Link in his quest. No respectable pirate captain would sit pretty and wait around to be rescued while there was work to be done!

The reality is that Tetra was not nor will ever *be* boring. Rather, she is a well-rounded, dimensional character, as expected of any iteration of Princess Zelda. We get to watch her sink into her lowest, most vulnerable moments, and then build herself back up to the confidence that we know and love. That’s what makes Tetra one of the best versions of Zelda—as pirate *and* princess. ▲











submerged

by *kurokmask*

illustrated by *meifkoi*

As soon as she heard the statue slide back into place, panic seized Tetra's throat. She began to pace. It felt so weird, in these tiny, shiny shoes, their heels so skinny they drove into the ball of her foot like a spike. She kicked them off with a huff, watching them bounce down the steps and onto the floor.

She needed to get her bearings in this room, find any exits. Descending the pedestal, she made her way to where Link had just exited, bare feet against cold stone making her shiver. She didn't know what else she had expected, but the solid stone wall cutting off the stairwell made her feel worse anyway. She backtracked, went around the pedestal, and stared at the stained glass. They glowed—was there sunlight behind them? Tetra threw one of the shoes against the center window. It bounced off uselessly. She tried again, harder, her sharp cry echoing around





the chamber. Alright, fine. She could just shoot the dang thing.

Except all she had on was this dress, petticoats underneath, none of her worn-in equipment. No pistol, no dagger, no stone, nothing; just slippery pink silk. Tetra could feel the rage starting to bubble up inside her, frothing like the sea during a storm, threatening to capsize the whole ship. She had to get a grip; she was a pirate captain. But she was already breaking out into a sweat! Anxious to do something with her hands, her muscle memory went to tie her hair up, get it out of the way. But then Tetra realized she had nothing to affix it with.

Tears welled up in her eyes; she took a shuddering breath in as her hands began to tremble.

Who was she kidding? This was horrible. Miles under water, trapped in a dusty old castle, no hope in escaping, banished from the ocean she called home. How could this be what was happening?! Tetra's mind raced, relaying what that King of Hyrule had told her.

*"Abide by **the laws of the past** ... Princess Zelda."*

Tetra threw another thing off: her tiara, just to hear something other than her ragged breathing. It clanged against the ancient stone, refusing to break.

An hour ago she had been with her pirate crew. She had watched Link and his sister share food and chat about what he had been up to in the weeks Aryll had been imprisoned—imprisoned in the cage Tetra was supposed to be in. She had felt a pang of guilt, then. Now it felt like a wave crashing down on her, constant and relentless.

"... the very reason you live."



Tetra sat down on one of the steps, ripping her gloves off and putting her head on her knees. Princess Zelda, her true identity ... who even was she? What was the difference between her and Tetra? Wearing stupid clothes? Being buried at sea rather than sailing its surface?

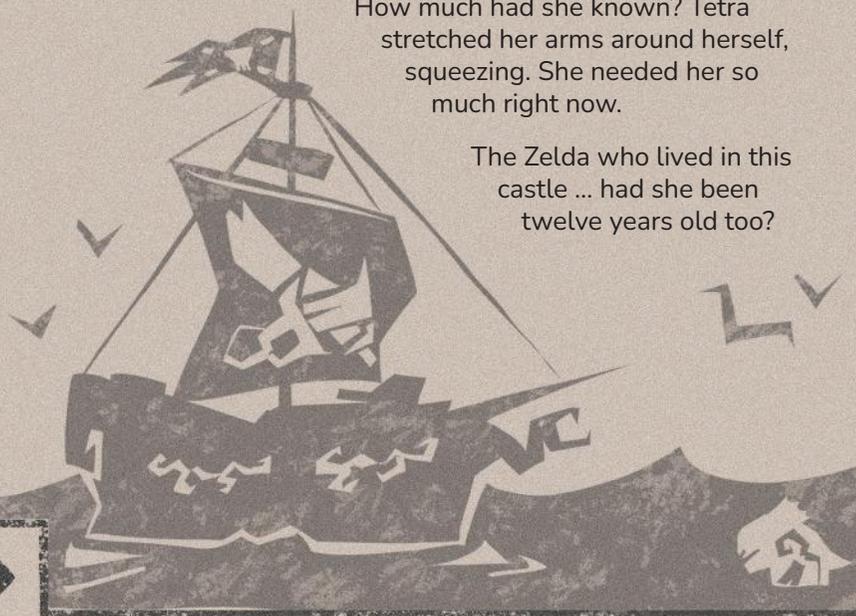
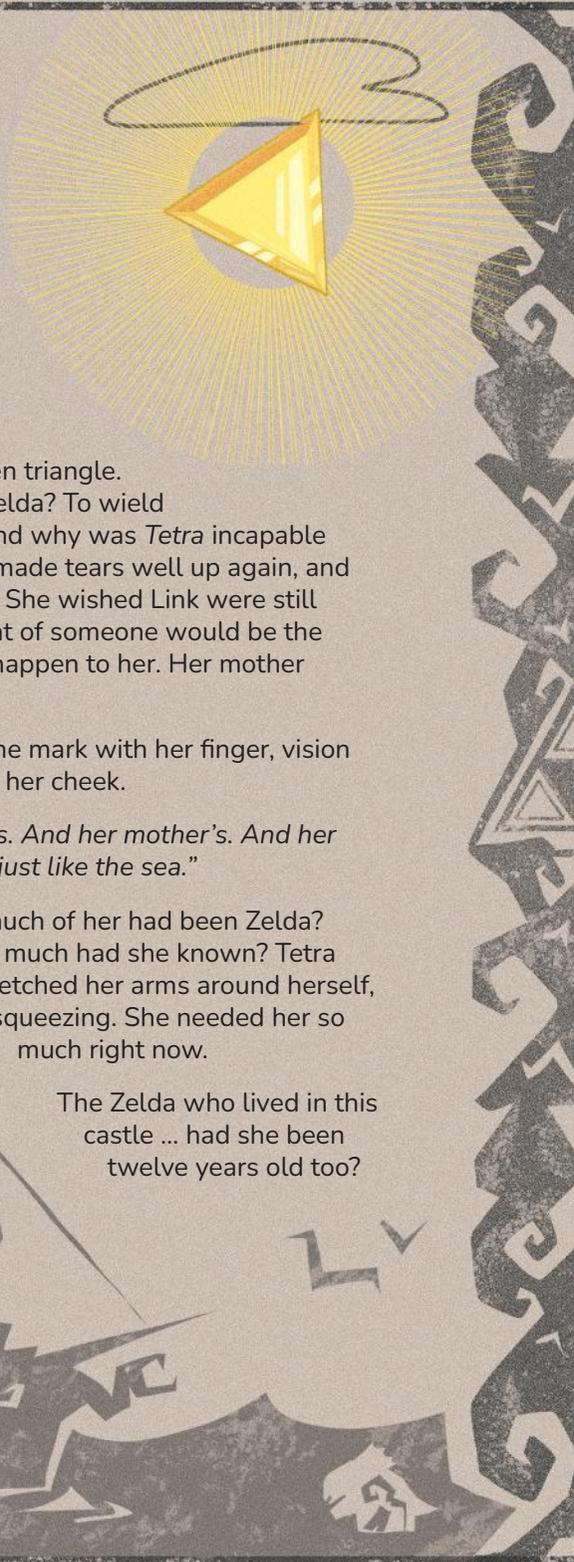
Tetra stared at her right hand, which now glinted with a golden triangle. Was this what it meant to be Zelda? To wield this power, whatever it was? And why was Tetra incapable of holding it? The thought just made tears well up again, and she let out another choked sob. She wished Link were still here, even though crying in front of someone would be the most humiliating thing to ever happen to her. Her mother would be so disappointed.

Her mother. Tetra traced over the mark with her finger, vision blurring as a hot tear slid down her cheek.

"This necklace was my mother's. And her mother's. And her mother's ... it goes on, endless, just like the sea."

How much of her had been Zelda?
How much had she known? Tetra stretched her arms around herself, squeezing. She needed her so much right now.

The Zelda who lived in this castle ... had she been twelve years old too?



Did she feel just as confused, and alone, marooned on an island called Fate with nothing but some sacred power she barely understood? Tetra rubbed at her eyes, trying to get herself to stop. She hoped she was. She hoped she had felt just as out of her depth as she did, hated this dress as much as she did.

Maybe she had yearned for freedom on the waves, the childhood Tetra had. Did this make her lucky, that she had been given a life outside of fate, even for just a few years?

Tetra sniffed, a sudden mist of calm descending onto her. She didn't want this, but maybe she could do this. When did she ever do something just because someone told her?

She closed her eyes and placed her palms against the cool stone floor. So what if some old guy told her to step in line? Where was he now?

"Big guy!" she shouted suddenly, shattering the silence, echoing all around her. "You don't know me at all, do you? What a moron!"

She laughed, shakily, feeling some power surge back with the petty insult. "Yeah, if you're gonna trap me down here, I'm gonna run my mouth! Yup! Like, this place sucks!" She opened her eyes, which had finally dried, and stood up, scanning the room. "You've just given me time to scheme. Y'know, what I'm best at?"

Her limbs still trembled, but Tetra stood tall, demanding the stained glass to say something, anything.

"You're just some sunken castle," she said, quieter. "And you can't tell me what to do."

Okay, Tetra. What would Mama say? Something about responsibility, probably. Tetra already knew about responsibility to a crew.



She knew about hard work, sacrifice for the greater good. But she'd always get something at the end. Treasure. Money. This? What would she get from accepting ancient duties?

Well, peace of mind. If accepting her fate would protect the ocean at large ... that sounded okay. Was that why Link was still fighting? He had gotten Aryll back. He could've asked Tetra to drop him off at Outset Island, left this whole mess behind him and gone back to his old life. But ... he didn't. And he wasn't a fighter like her—at least, she didn't think he was. She couldn't let a soft kid like that outshine her like this.

This thought made her laugh—shaky, a little wet, but it made her anxiety melt, a bit. Tetra didn't have a safe life to run back to. So what was she so afraid of? Hadn't she been forged for moments like this, her whole life? Had her mother known she was destined for this all along? If there was one thing Tetra knew about herself for certain, it was that no one could cage her in for long.

Her fists tightened. Selflessness was something that still felt foreign on her tongue. She was a pirate first, princess ... last. She couldn't put all her hopes in Link; she would need to hold that close to her heart if she was going to get through this. But she could put her faith in him.

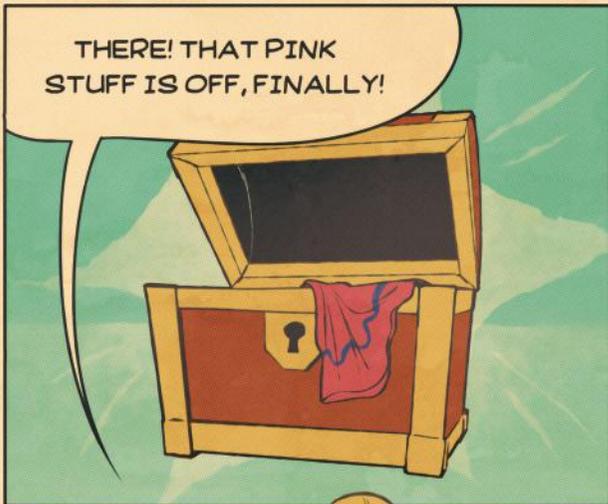
She took a deep breath and gathered her hair onto one shoulder, and began to braid, the way Mama showed her. She hadn't done it in so long, and yet her fingers knew the pattern. She didn't need to think; she just surrendered to the memory.

She understood, now. The women on her shoulders were not weighing her down, but holding her up. Weeping with her, yes, but urging her to stand, to walk forward—because that's what they must do. They must do it, because they're the only ones who can.

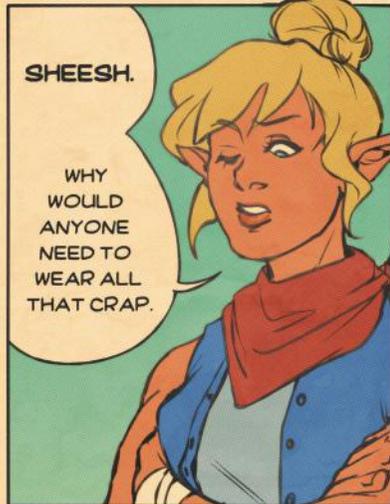
Tetra tied off the fishtail braid with her own hair and let it fall behind her back, finally out of the way. ▲







THERE! THAT PINK STUFF IS OFF, FINALLY!



SHEESH.

WHY WOULD ANYONE NEED TO WEAR ALL THAT CRAP.



THOUGH, HONESTLY, IT MUST BE WORTH A FORTUNE...

HEH, ESPECIALLY THIS TIARA-

I ACTUALLY THINK PINK SUITS YOU!



GLARE



GULP



WHOOOSH!!!

IV

roots

a steady anchor

Twilight Princess (2006)

Phantom Hourglass (2007) | *Spirit Tracks* (2009)



A darker, more sober side of Zelda adds weight to the character while illustrating her symbolic importance as a bringer of light and hope.



far from her twilight years

by t1meslayer

In an industry where franchises are often defined by vaguely enumerated sequels—your *Call of Duty: Black Ops 6s*, *Madden NFL 25s*, and *Tekken 8s*—Nintendo’s *Legend of Zelda* series uses well-defined subtitles to give consumers an idea of what to expect from any given entry. However, *Twilight Princess* is unique among the pantheon as something of a red herring for players’ expectations.

Across 40 years and 16 releases, *Zelda* titles typically fall into three categories: a relevant item, character, or gimmick. *Ocarina of Time* and *The Wind Waker* highlight world-altering objects. The *Oracle* duology is named after each entry’s central character. Meanwhile, *Echoes of Wisdom* tips its hat toward Princess Zelda’s ability to recreate items and enemies using the Tri Rod. There are crossovers, such as *The Minish Cap* being both a character and key item, and titles like *Breath of the Wild* break convention.

Twilight Princess is special, and not just because *Wii* can serendipitously be found in the console’s flagship launch title—a fact producer Eiji Aonuma called “fate” in a February 2007 interview with *Nintendo Dream* after noticing it on a billboard. Fans would first assume the titular princess is Zelda. Link’s companion in *Twilight Princess*, Midna, bolsters this idea upon introducing her to Wolf Link: “Poor thing, he has no idea where this is or what’s happened ... So, don’t you think you should explain to him what you’ve managed to do? You owe him that much ... Twilight Princess! Eee hee!”

With hindsight, fans know Midna is the literal Twilight Princess; she’s ruler of the Twili people, usurped by Zant. Nintendo developers weren’t shy about teasing this twist, with Aonuma telling the now-defunct *Game Informer* in 2005 that the term *Twilight Princess* “may hint at Princess Zelda, but in some ways, it may speak to other things as well.” Still, interpreting the title as a description of the series’ namesake isn’t an inaccurate reading of the text. Zelda responds to Midna’s comment by saying, “The kingdom succumbed to twilight, but I remain its princess ...”

This 2006 release is not the first in which Zelda adopts a new name. Sheik from *Ocarina of Time* hides her identity to stoke a revolution. Tetra from *The Wind Waker* is revealed to be the unwitting disguise for Hylia’s latest reincarnation, who then returns to piracy in *Phantom Hourglass*. *The Legend of Zelda* is built upon these recurring elements, with even Aonuma’s Game Developers Conference fever dream that inspired the Wolf Link gimmick eventually drawing parallels to *Ocarina*’s shifting ages. But players need to get further into *Twilight Princess* to really understand the significance of what Zelda’s potential moniker represents.

One particularly notable element regarding *Twilight Princess* as a game title is right under players’ noses. Aonuma told *Nintendo Dream* the title was conceived in English—this being the first *Zelda* released worldwide simultaneously. However, he brought the title to Shigeru Miyamoto with



concerns about how it didn't follow the convention set by titles like *Ocarina of Time*. Aonuma said Miyamoto gave *Twilight Princess* his blessing, but they chose to keep the English title for the Japanese release since the direct translation "sounded a bit stupid" in Japanese. Aonuma added, "Changing patterns like those 'X of Y' titles, or 'left-handed/right-handed' is also a way to keep developers from feeling fettered by the past."

Regarding narrative design, there is an alternative track to consider with Princess Zelda's purported moniker. In perhaps the most iconic sequence from *Twilight Princess*, Zant leaves Midna on the brink of death. Wolf Link, to the earworm melody of "Midna's Lament," runs to Hyrule Castle, wherein Zelda gives her life to revive the cursed Twili. Midna is touched by this gesture; players can see her motivations shift to helping Link save both their worlds.

Despite the red herring approach to the game's title, in the end, Zelda proves to be just as much the *Twilight Princess* as Midna is. At the same time, she cements her legacy by choosing light in the midst of darkness. This Hail Mary act is consistent with Zelda's core characteristics, being someone who will always play the self-sacrifice card if it means a brighter future. *Skyward Sword* Zelda seals herself in amber to prevent Demise from using her Goddess-given powers. *A Link Between Worlds* ends with Zelda putting Hyrule at risk to share their Triforce with the people of Lorule. *Breath of the Wild* pits Zelda in a 100-year standoff with Calamity Ganon.

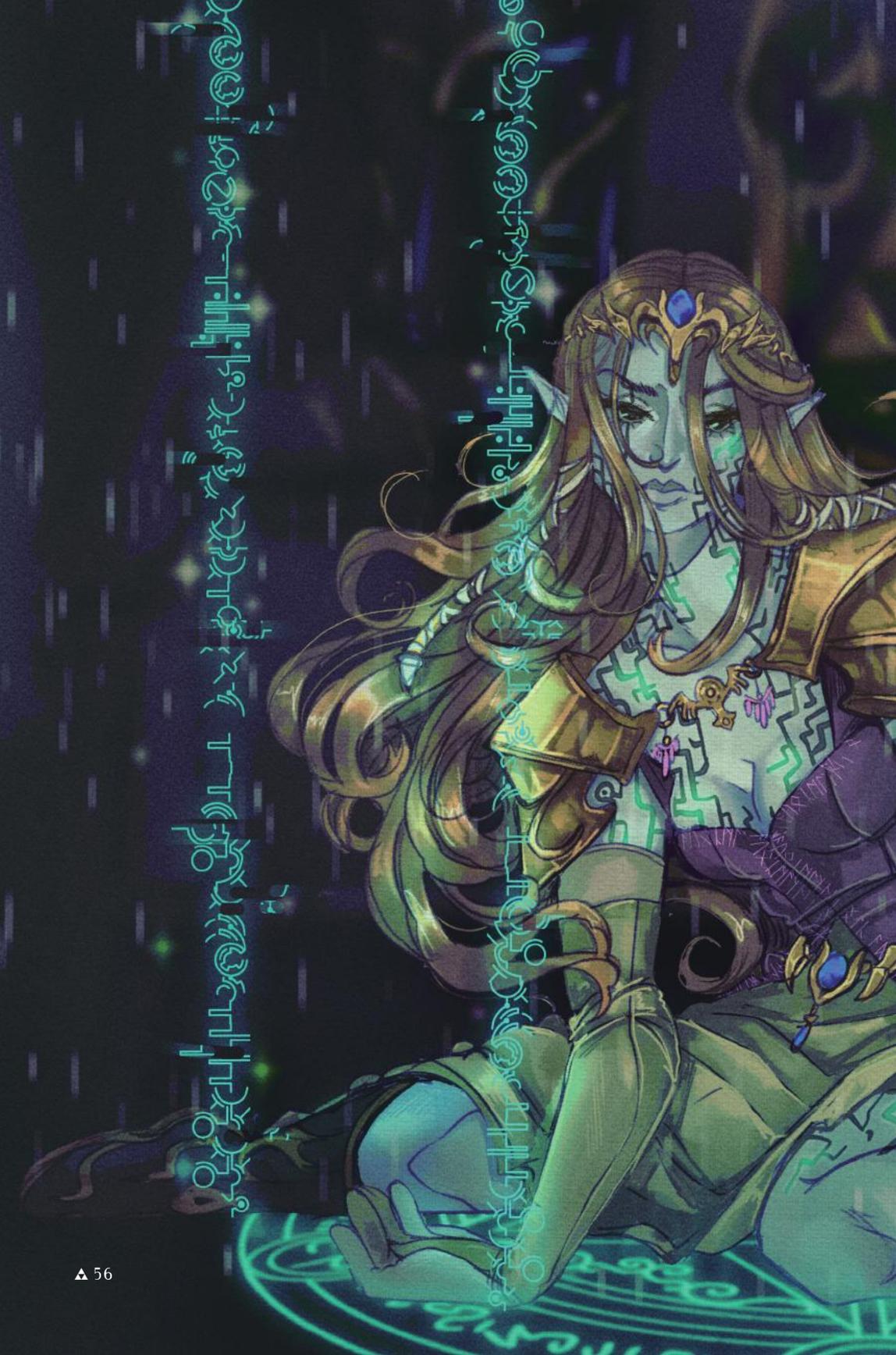
Twilight Princess undoubtedly boasts a story that fans have latched

onto—and not just because its iterations of Link, Zelda, and Ganondorf were the series' representatives in *Super Smash Bros.* for decades. Like the *Zelda* games that came before, it offers an interactive journey that connects with the players in a myriad of ways. To Satoru Iwata, Nintendo's late chief executive whose 2015 death looms large over developers and players, that diversity of connection is the *Zelda* franchise's greatest strength.

"I have a strong feeling that there are as many definitions of Zelda as there are people. But these definitions are not completely different from each other. Rather they all overlap to some extent," Iwata said in his titular *Iwata Asks* series for *Twilight Princess*. "Taking it one step further, I think the fact that there isn't a perfect definition that can be expressed in words is the reason that *Zelda* games offer such a rich and rewarding experience."

For me, the *Zelda* experience is at its most rewarding when it emphasizes the connections we make. While I will always remember the game for the strength of Midna's character or its stellar cast of bosses, from the eerie underwater Morpheel to Yeta's gradual unraveling, *Twilight Princess* remains my favorite because of my parents, who led me through my first journey using a gold-ornamented Collector's Edition guide. Even amongst Nintendo's greats, *The Legend of Zelda* is a community touchstone. The series is a generational bridge, forming bonds between friends and family as legendary as those between characters like Zelda and Midna, and helping us understand what makes those lifelong connections so meaningful. ▲













eos
by *ro_blaze*
illustrated by *aishuu*

Zelda didn't realize just how much she'd missed the sun. And yet, standing atop the hill overlooking the ruins of her home, she can do nothing but bask in it. The light, the colors, the *warmth*. Already she feels the chill that'd been haunting her for months, the sickness rooted somewhere in her lungs, begin to fade. Tears threaten to spill from her eyes as the glory of the morning unfolds in front of her, but she holds fast. Not yet. There will be time for tears later.

A few paces away, Midna and her hero discuss the situation in quiet tones. Zelda knows it's not her place to join them, though a small part of her wishes to. If only so she can express her gratitude to the hero. Link, that is—now that he has had the chance to introduce himself, she finally knows his name. For saving her, and for agreeing to assist her with one final task.

"I must remind you that this is not necessary," Midna tells her before she and Link head off for firewood. "No one expects it from you."

"I do," Zelda replies, a small smile on her lips. It feels strange to smile, after so long. "Everyone deserves a proper burial, Midna."

"Even your enemies?"

"Everyone." She glances towards her new keepsake, this sword that is nearly as long as she is tall, glowing almost white in the sunlight. A heavy burden. "We must treat all as we expect to be treated, in death as well as life. It is the least I can do."

Midna's eyes seem sharper now than they were before. Or maybe it is the sharpness of her wrath, held back only for the sake of the fondness between them. "Don't tell me you cared for him."

"I pity him. And ... empathize with him, perhaps. He was an unjust prisoner, just as I. Just as your people. He might've become a monster, but it was my ancestors who made him into one. As the princess of Hyrule, it is my duty to lay him to rest. To bear their sins."

Midna says nothing, though Zelda is comforted that her expression is not hateful. Merely ... pitiful. The Twilight Princess lingers for a moment longer, brushing her hand over Zelda's gloved arm in the shallow mimicry of an embrace, then walks away. Soon enough, she and the hero disappear into the early morning fog.

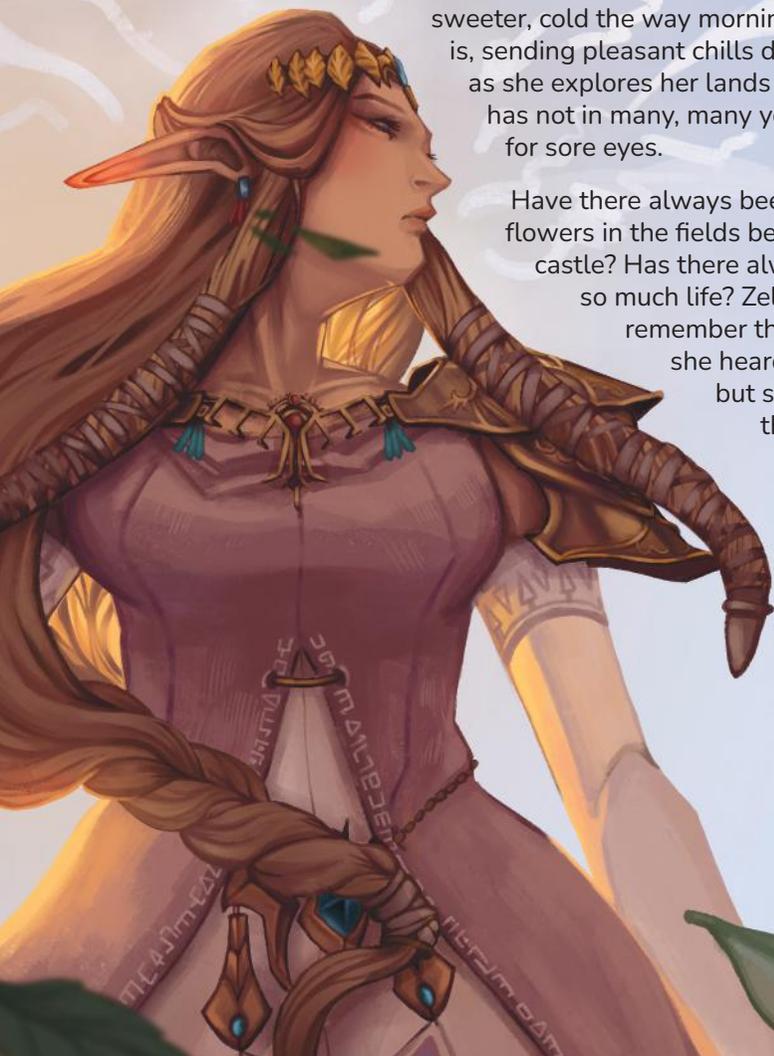


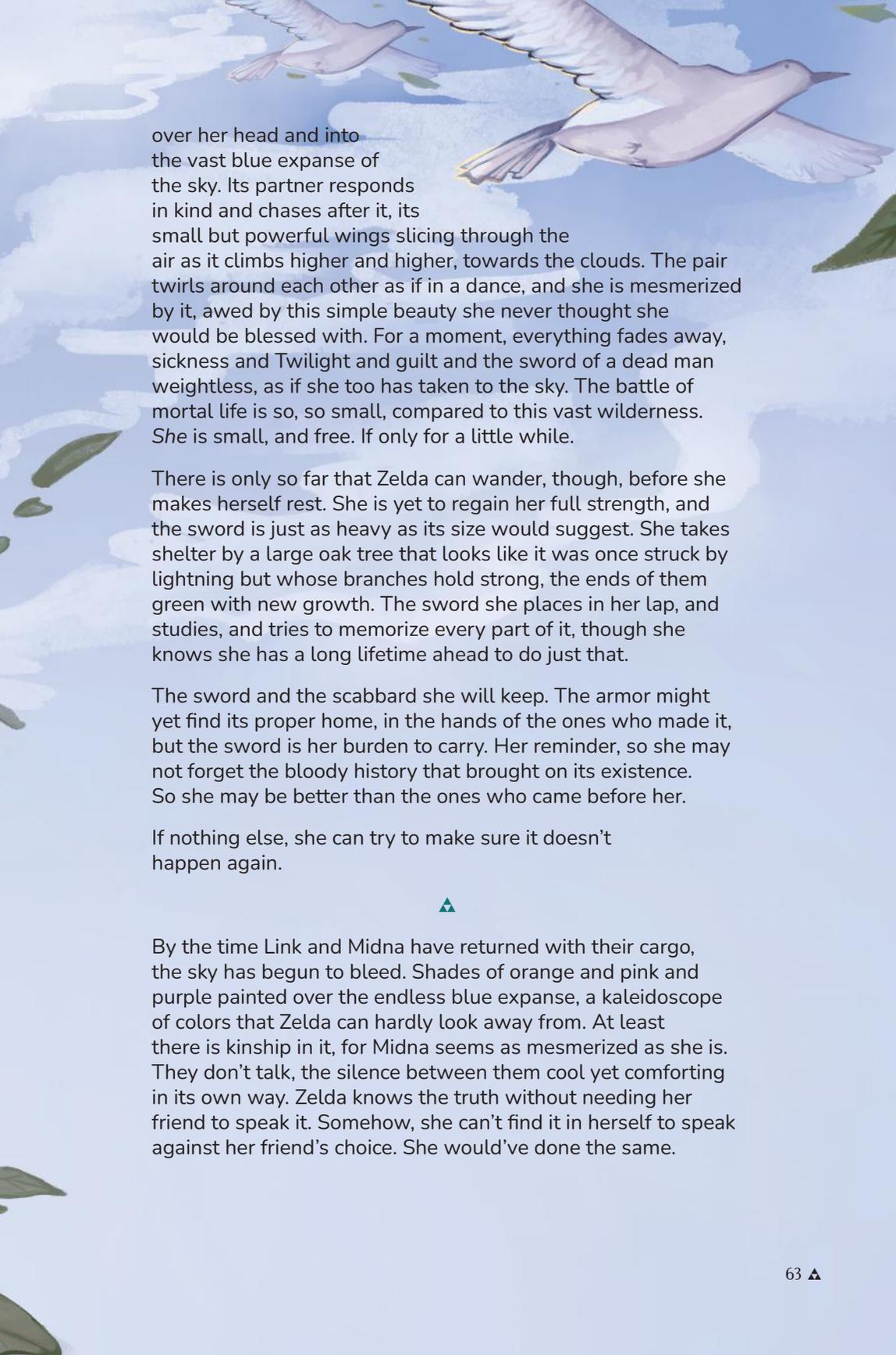
The city below is quiet. Have her people felt the barrier break? Have they woken to this new, beautiful sunrise? Zelda considers exploring the city, though ultimately decides against it, as if some unseen hand is keeping her where she is. Still, she has time to spend before her companions return with the firewood they need, and longer yet before sunset.

With the Sword of the Sages on her back, she begins walking through the wilderness. For once, without a destination in mind.

Hyrule has ever been beautiful to her, the daughter of this great and terrible kingdom, but in that morning, it seems the most beautiful it ever was. How the sun turns the very fields golden, dew glistening like diamonds. How the sky is so vast and so blue, the bluest she has ever seen, with clouds like cotton drifting along on unseen winds. How even the air tastes sweeter, cold the way morning air always is, sending pleasant chills down her spine as she explores her lands in ways she has not in many, many years. A sight for sore eyes.

Have there always been so many flowers in the fields beyond the castle? Has there always been so much life? Zelda doesn't remember the last time she heard birdsong, but she recognizes the sound of it as if it were a human voice, and laughs as a small bird flies





over her head and into the vast blue expanse of the sky. Its partner responds in kind and chases after it, its small but powerful wings slicing through the air as it climbs higher and higher, towards the clouds. The pair twirls around each other as if in a dance, and she is mesmerized by it, awed by this simple beauty she never thought she would be blessed with. For a moment, everything fades away, sickness and Twilight and guilt and the sword of a dead man weightless, as if she too has taken to the sky. The battle of mortal life is so, so small, compared to this vast wilderness. *She* is small, and free. If only for a little while.

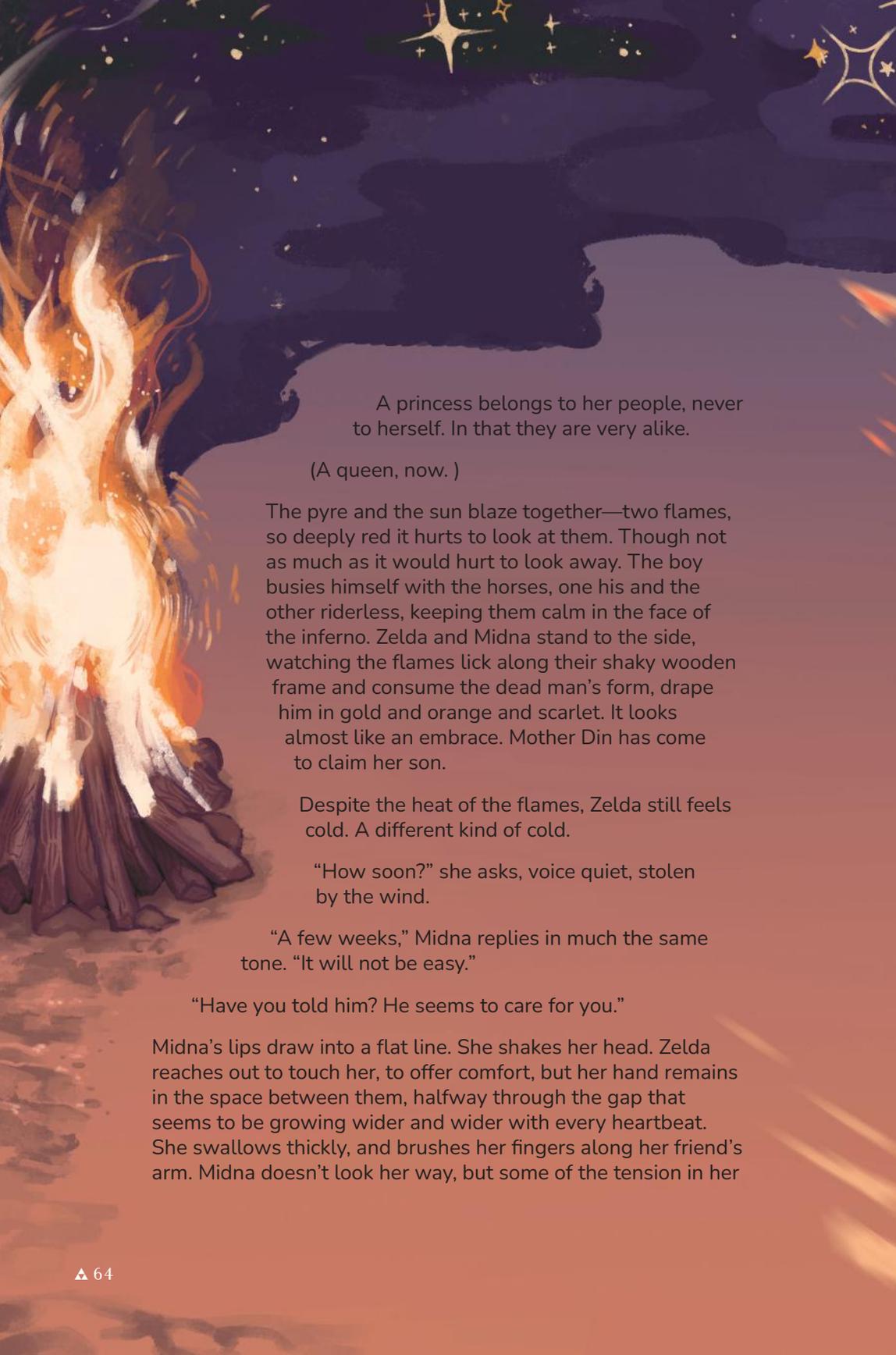
There is only so far that Zelda can wander, though, before she makes herself rest. She is yet to regain her full strength, and the sword is just as heavy as its size would suggest. She takes shelter by a large oak tree that looks like it was once struck by lightning but whose branches hold strong, the ends of them green with new growth. The sword she places in her lap, and studies, and tries to memorize every part of it, though she knows she has a long lifetime ahead to do just that.

The sword and the scabbard she will keep. The armor might yet find its proper home, in the hands of the ones who made it, but the sword is her burden to carry. Her reminder, so she may not forget the bloody history that brought on its existence. So she may be better than the ones who came before her.

If nothing else, she can try to make sure it doesn't happen again.



By the time Link and Midna have returned with their cargo, the sky has begun to bleed. Shades of orange and pink and purple painted over the endless blue expanse, a kaleidoscope of colors that Zelda can hardly look away from. At least there is kinship in it, for Midna seems as mesmerized as she is. They don't talk, the silence between them cool yet comforting in its own way. Zelda knows the truth without needing her friend to speak it. Somehow, she can't find it in herself to speak against her friend's choice. She would've done the same.



A princess belongs to her people, never to herself. In that they are very alike.

(A queen, now.)

The pyre and the sun blaze together—two flames, so deeply red it hurts to look at them. Though not as much as it would hurt to look away. The boy busies himself with the horses, one his and the other riderless, keeping them calm in the face of the inferno. Zelda and Midna stand to the side, watching the flames lick along their shaky wooden frame and consume the dead man’s form, drape him in gold and orange and scarlet. It looks almost like an embrace. Mother Din has come to claim her son.

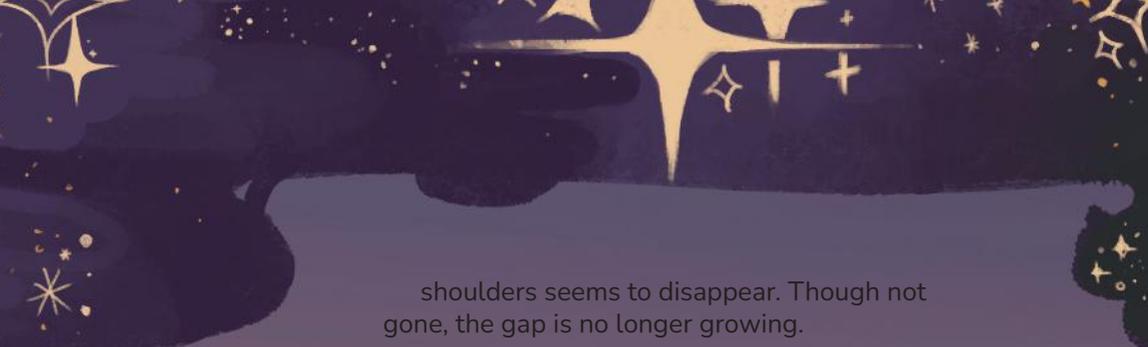
Despite the heat of the flames, Zelda still feels cold. A different kind of cold.

“How soon?” she asks, voice quiet, stolen by the wind.

“A few weeks,” Midna replies in much the same tone. “It will not be easy.”

“Have you told him? He seems to care for you.”

Midna’s lips draw into a flat line. She shakes her head. Zelda reaches out to touch her, to offer comfort, but her hand remains in the space between them, halfway through the gap that seems to be growing wider and wider with every heartbeat. She swallows thickly, and brushes her fingers along her friend’s arm. Midna doesn’t look her way, but some of the tension in her



shoulders seems to disappear. Though not gone, the gap is no longer growing.

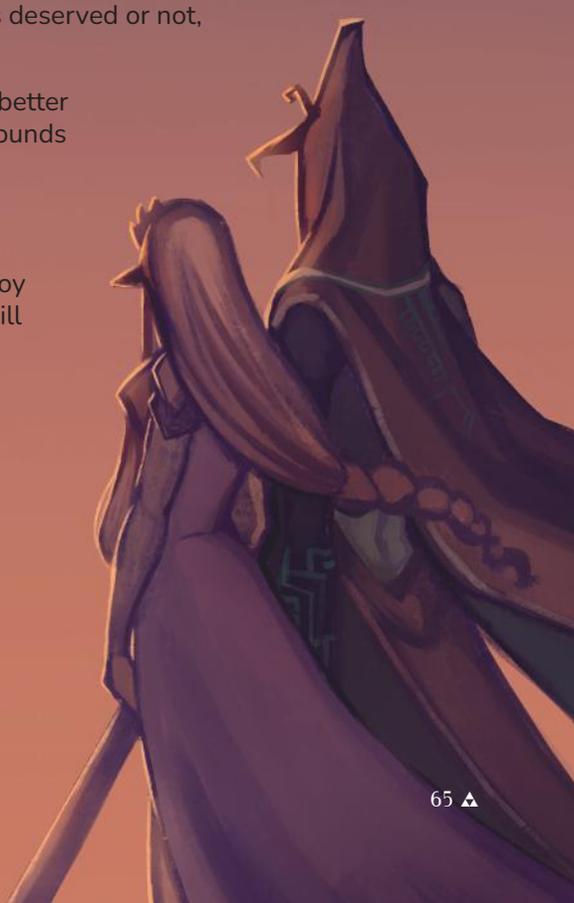
Zelda remains by the pyre till the end. Midna leaves at some point, seeking the swordsman and his company, but the Princess of Hyrule guards her post dutifully, the sword held on her back. In the coming days, she will send men to look for survivors, to mend the bloody wounds her ancestors carved. The truth of the invasion will remain a secret held between the three of them present here, to die along with them. It is better this way.

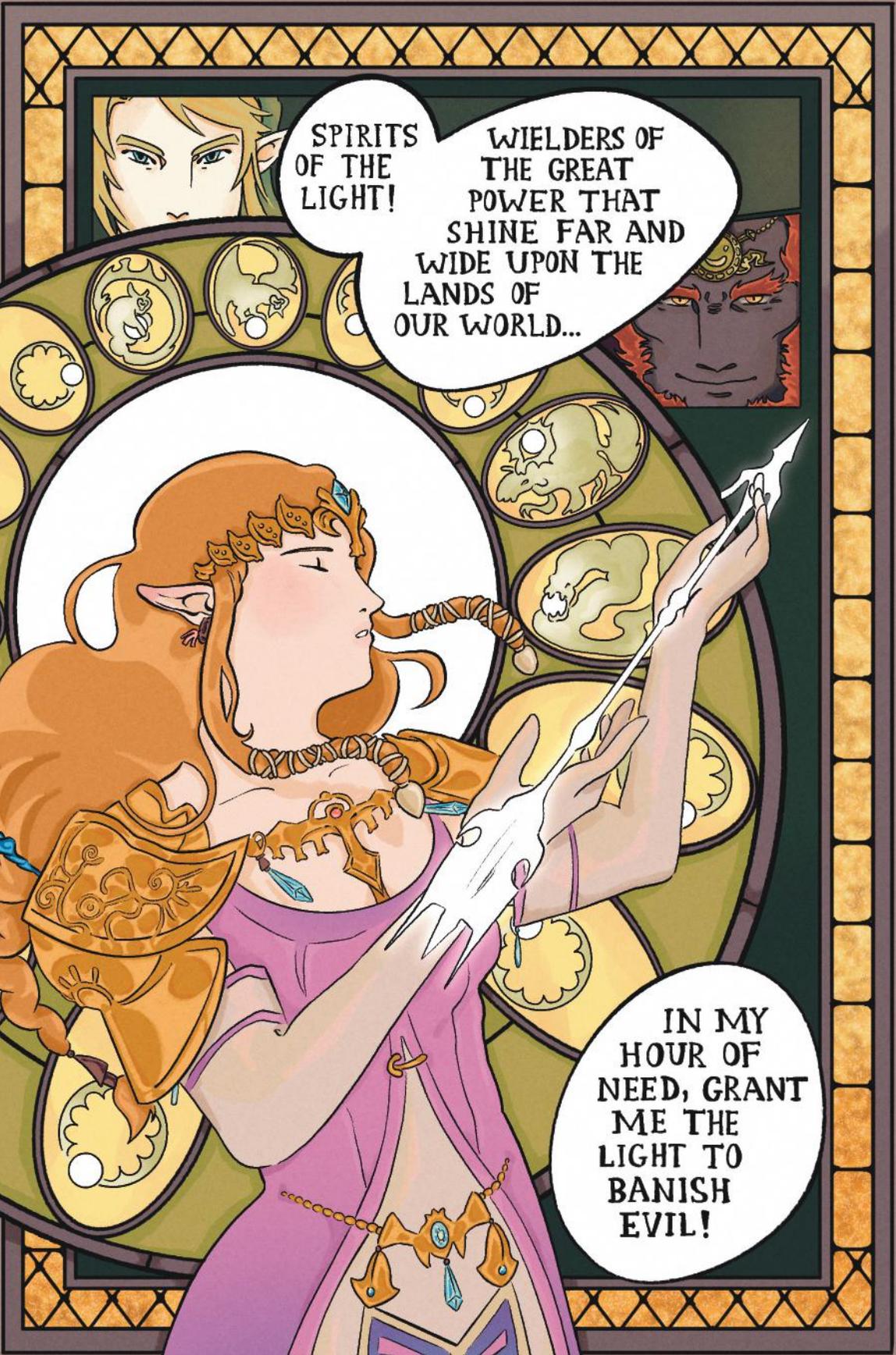
When there are only embers left, Zelda approaches the pyre and kneels beside it, moving her skirts out of the way as if not to singe them. The warmth scalds her face, almost painful but not quite. She has no eulogy to offer, no words of grandeur and honor, but a kindness she knows he won't accept. A prayer to guide lost souls to the Mothers' cradle. A prayer for forgiveness, though whether it's deserved or not, she can't tell.

Tomorrow will be a new day. A better day. The land will mend. The wounds will heal. And maybe ...

"It will not be written in blood forevermore," she promises to herself, and to him, and to the boy with the sword. "One day, we will be free."

She has to hope they will. ▲





SPIRITS
OF THE
LIGHT!

WIELDERS OF
THE GREAT
POWER THAT
SHINE FAR AND
WIDE UPON THE
LANDS OF
OUR WORLD...

IN MY
HOUR OF
NEED, GRANT
ME THE
LIGHT TO
BANISH
EVIL!







bud

a goddess unfolding

Skyward Sword (2011)
A Link Between Worlds (2013)



Zelda's true origin story is revealed, emphasizing her centrality in the mythos of the world of *Zelda*.



duty, sacrifice, and traditionalism: the triforce of *skyward sword*

by *grimrevolution*

Zelda—not a princess in this story, not yet—stands before a massive gear. It is inlaid with blue, Nintendo’s color that represents Nayru and the Triforce of Wisdom. She has spent the past five minutes explaining to Link how she had left him behind, praying to all the Goddess Statues. How they awakened something in her.

“I must maintain the seal that Hylia—rather, that I—created so long ago and keep it strong for as long as I am able,” she says. “With the memories of my former life returning to me, I can see now that this is my purpose.”

Purpose. What an interesting word to choose. *Skyward Sword* is all about that; purpose, duty, the willingness to sacrifice one’s own happiness for those of countless others. It is not just in this story but in many others under the *Legend of Zelda* title. A boy saves a nursemaid, agrees to find the shattered Triforce of Wisdom, and rescues the princess from her kidnappers. A child awakens in the middle of a stormy night to heed the cry of a desperate girl. Follows the last words of a father who was a tree. Saves friends kidnapped by the goblin king. Saves a sister.

The hero is said to be predestined, yet the hero does not leave the forests, does not enter the woods, does not board the ship, conduct the train, nor ride the horse without reason. Zelda, too, is said to be predestined with the blood of Goddess Hylia flowing through her veins.

Curiously, Zelda does not first think of herself as being Hylia. She does not consider herself to be Hylia reborn but rather Zelda. The young woman who pushed her friend over the edge of a flying town. Who defended her friend against those that would mock him. Who helped the people around her despite the fact that everything seemed perfect before the rug was ripped out from underneath her.

Duty is sacrificial. It is putting one’s wants aside for the needs of many. Zelda’s position as the next leader of Skyloft is not her honor but her job. She must seal herself away; not for herself, but to give Link a chance. She must hurt him to do this. She must, because her wants don’t matter, not when there are so many lives depending on her.

When playing *Skyward Sword*, it is hard to see things from Zelda’s perspective. We play the game as Link, the silent protagonist aided by the Spirit of a Sword that is so different from the warmth of Zelda that the harshness of her abandonment pains the player as much as it pains Link. Over and over again Zelda leaves him behind with only the glimpse of a smile or of golden hair before she’s whisked away by Impa.

There are no words exchanged between them. Not any that could be described as a conversation at least. It is only when Link finally catches



up that Zelda explains her avoidance and how she has used her friend. The destiny of the world rests on their shoulders, and he was led like a greyhound chasing a lure.

There could be an argument made that Zelda is knowingly manipulating Link. That she tugs him along like a horse with a carrot. She's not the only one that's cast in that shadow. The blame for Demise's curse is cast upon Hylia; Link's struggles are thrown upon Zelda. What an injustice done to both. Who else would have had the strength to follow Zelda to the very end except for Link? Link, who woke up late without her to prod him. Link, who trusted her enough to stand next to the edge. Link, who knew, without fault, that no matter how long it took she would still be there waiting at the end. They are not the wisest, nor the strongest, nor the ones with the most courage; they are simply the two most willing to give up everything in order for the job to get done.

Duty is not always about doing the good thing nor the kind thing nor the nice thing; it is about doing what is right. Even when the hordes of demons face down Link, he fights. Even when Zelda knows she must preserve herself to keep Demise back, she does so. Even so, they do not make these decisions alone. For Zelda there is Impa; hard, unmoving, and completely faithful that what she does she does for the good of all. With Link there is Fi; hard, unmoving, and also completely faithful. Two sides of the same coin. Two guides that serve the same purpose and have the same duty.

They are softened by Link and Zelda, just like how Zelda and Link are hardened by them.

That softness—Zelda's softness—makes the difference in the end. She is not the manipulative Hylia dragging Link along by a collar and leash. She is his friend, and those soft feelings despite her duty (or even because of that duty) make her radiant.

In the end, no matter how fast the player is, no matter how many side quests they do or skip, Zelda always waits. She waits, not because of duty but because Link is her friend. It is the last time she can afford to be a little selfish, and she chooses to use it for him.

Zelda seals herself away to maintain the barrier.

Link leaves to face Demise in both the past and present.

They do this not because they want to, but because they must. Who else is there? Who else has the power, the wisdom, and the courage? Zelda and Link could have been anyone, but they are who they are because they chose duty above all else. That was their purpose, in the end; the ones who could have turned aside and chose not to. ▲











Summer
Snow
Queen

an impending eternity of slumber

by *kenlair*

illustrated by *cynder*

The rhythmic flapping of wings ...
The screeching of birds ...
The gusts of wind ...

These were the sounds she had grown accustomed to while flying through the golden clouds. Blue feathers cushioned her legs while perched upon her Loftwing, though she still felt its muscles as it flapped higher in the sky. The air felt so liberating, and yet, her gaze was always focused on the barrier of clouds below.

With each passing day her curiosity would grow, wondering what was beneath the clouds. Though the endless sky felt boundless and free, it also felt so empty. What if there was more? No matter the reason for flying—whether to fulfill duties, to take academy tests, or even just to get a meal—what lay

beneath the clouds was always on her mind. At least, it usually was.

There was only one time during flight that her gaze wasn't on the clouds. For once, her eyes were focused above, watching another bird rider ahead. He was different from her, his bird a deep crimson hue, and his gaze was always relaxed as he basked in the freedom he possessed. He was tranquil and content with life.

While she wanted to know more about the world and its mysteries, she appreciated his simplicity. It balanced her boundless energy. They had always been a team, and she wanted it to remain that way. Forever. Gathering her courage, she opened her mouth to speak—to ask the question she had always wanted to ask. With a deep breath, she prepared to yell over the wind, the flapping of their birds' wings, and her rapidly beating heart—

The wings of the past faded from her ears, replaced with a far quieter environment. The wind no longer surrounded her; there were no large birds to ride, nor were there clouds for her to fly through. The flapping of wings she'd been accustomed to had been replaced with the slow, deep creaking of the large stone gear behind her.

She had made it—her dream fulfilled as she found herself unceremoniously stranded on the surface beneath the clouds, kneeling in one of the last remaining buildings. Despite her achievement, there was no smile on her face. The joy had been sapped away from her as her hands clasped together in prayer, awash in memories from a previous lifetime. Her purpose had been revealed to her, and she took no pleasure in it.

Having finished her prayer, she stood, her white dress billowing at her ankles. While she wasn't thrilled with her role in this newfound world, it was the role of another that bothered her more. What frustrated her most was knowing it was she who had thrust that role upon him, having done so a lifetime ago, knowing without question that he would run after her.

It was she who had deprived him of his contentment.

Turning on her heel, she looked down at the guardian who had saved and guided her through this new surface world.



The guardian—tall, thin, with platinum blonde hair—knelt to her from the bottom of the staircase before her, ever deferential in the face of her goddess. But Zelda didn't want her deference. She didn't deserve it anyway.

"He was used," she said hotly. "He's *being* used!"

"Your Grace ... *Zelda*," the guardian spoke, raising her head. "Please understand—"

"There's nothing to understand!" Zelda shrieked, her voice breaking. "It's so plain to see ... Hylia—no, *I*—knew Link would come after me. I set this up ... *became his friend* ... all so he could fight a losing battle! Impa ... I caused this."

"Your Grace ... hmm ..."

Impa paused. Suddenly, she took a deep breath.

"I stood by the Goddess Hylia for a long time. Of course, I can't say I knew her every thought, but I believe I understood her well enough to tell you that this was what had to be done. Link was destined to be chosen, for his spirit is unlike any mortal before him, and perhaps after; however, to say Our Grace—to say *you* used him ... is wrong."

"Impa ..." Zelda said, her eyes tearing up, but Impa shook her head.

"You became friends with that boy of your own free will," she spoke. "And he did the same. The bond you two shared before had nothing to



do with the roles you share now. You grew closer due to your own feelings, something not even Hylia herself could predict.”

“That’s ... not what it feels like,” Zelda said, lowering her head.

Rising from her kneel, Impa walked up the stairs and placed a hand on Zelda’s shoulder. In response, tears falling down her face, the girl looked up into Impa’s narrow eyes.

“The care you show for the boy now proves that. Never forget that,” the guardian said. She held Zelda’s gaze before taking a deep breath. “Though he may have been guided to do so, Link chooses to fight. At any time, he may lay down his sword

and turn away. Now is the time for you to make a choice as well. Now that you know what was before, and what is now, will you stop here? Or will you accept the past and present, to take on your own responsibilities as the Goddess Incarnate, and create a better future?”

Zelda’s brow furrowed as she looked into Impa’s eyes. Finally, she brought a sleeve up to her eyes, wiping away the tears before turning to face the empty stone room, where the echoes of her prayer still lingered in the air.

“I don’t like it,” she said. “Even with your kind words, I hate that I even guided Link into this mess, a mess that was my own ... but, what kind of friend would I be if I were to stop now, right when everything is within reach?”



She stepped forward, centering herself in the room.

“If I continue this plan ... will Link, and everyone else—those on the Surface and Skyloft—remain safe?”

“If this plan succeeds, everyone will live a life without the fear of an inevitable demise,” Impa said. “Including you.”

“It’s not my own well-being I’m concerned about ...” Zelda said without turning back, her golden hair sparkling in the light.

“But I do hope ... I selfishly hope ... that Link will come wake me from my impending slumber. I still have something I need to tell him. And other things beyond that.”

“Zelda ...” Impa said, her stony features softening.

With a saddened smile, Zelda turned toward Impa again, tear marks visible on her cheeks.

“Even though I know who I really am, I still feel like Zelda,” she said. “I still feel like my father’s daughter, a student at the knight’s academy. Link’s best friend. I am still Zelda, right?”

Impa gave a heartbreaking frown before closing her eyes and nodding.

“Before anything else, *you are Zelda*,” she said. “Though the Goddess Hylia’s blood and power courses through your veins, though you have her responsibilities and pain. Your greatest strength is your heart, and your love for those around you, a strength that comes from being you. From being *Zelda*.”

Again, Zelda wiped away her tears, now chuckling. She didn’t know if it was appreciation for Impa or her silly desire to ensure she knew who she was, but it felt good to laugh nonetheless. Suddenly, the large stone gear down the hall emitted a deep, grinding rumble, echoing throughout the building as though the very earth would crumble beneath it.

“It’s almost time. He’ll be arriving through the Gate of Time soon,” Impa said, looking back at the portal. “Will you be alright?”

“I will,” Zelda answered.

“I’ll greet him to give you a moment to prepare yourself,” she said with a rare, gentle smile. She turned to leave, yet Zelda called out to her once more.

“Impa ...?”

The guardian turned to see her taut expression, and Zelda bit her lip.

“W-will you ... watch over me?” she asked.

The guardian smiled confidently and nodded.

“I’ll stay by your side no matter how long it takes,” she said. “Days, months, or even years. You will never be alone.”

At this, Zelda gave a weak smile.

“Thank you,” she whispered. “With you and Link by my side ... I know I can do this.”

With a final smile, the guardian bowed before disappearing down the stairs. Zelda, turning back to the room, took a deep breath. It was time. It was up to her to ensure everyone would remain safe. It was up to her to give Link the time he needed to prepare for his duel. It was up to her to keep the bringer of demise at bay.

It was up to her to fulfill her duty, so that one day, she would finally speak the question she always wanted to ask. Thinking back to the echo of flapping wings, she closed her eyes and waited for her chosen knight to arrive. ▲



VI

blossom

a princess in full flower

Breath of the Wild (2017) | *Tears of the Kingdom* (2023)

Echoes of Wisdom (2024)



In the latest installments, Zelda's character gets more focus than ever before, allowing her to truly claim the title of *The Legend of Zelda*.



to find oneself

by alexandria fuertes

She is knelt in a flowering meadow, bent above a rare blossom shaped like a melting star. Cautious fingers whisper over the white fringes of its petals; she touches it as though it is blown glass, as if it might tip, dive, and shatter at her feet. This fragile plant, she explains, is a daughter of a dwindling line. Regret knits wheat-thick eyebrows together when she must admit, apologetic, that the species does not seem able to grow in civilization, in confinement. It will survive in wilderness, choosing for itself how it will grow, or it will not survive at all.

“All that we can hope ...” Her hushed voice bleeds tenderness, bleeds vulnerability. “... is that the species will be strong enough to prosper, on its own.”

Of course, she is not only referring to the flower, a gilded lily called a silent princess. She is Princess Zelda of the Wild Era, the deuteragonist of *Breath of the Wild* and *Tears of the Kingdom*. She is the body in the belly of the castle. She is the beast ribboning beyond the kingdom’s head. She is the elder’s antique tapestry, the child’s freshmade drawing, the name on every tongue, everywhere. Indeed, she is the legend. And yet, these doubtful words of hers refer, also, to Zelda herself. Perhaps because, at this time, the girl is not yet aware of the strong, prosperous woman she will someday grow to be.

The same cannot be said of her audience. They know that this poignant moment is a cutscene, a flashback, a recovered memory of a moment

experienced one hundred years before *Breath of the Wild* begins—a time when the princess was often called into question.

At the onset of *Breath of the Wild*’s adventure, players can steer Link to look upon the ruins of a sacred dais, setting off sparks of recognition in his mind, stealing him a century away. Suddenly, Zelda herself stands before him: a dispirited girl just shy of seventeen years old, casting a withering stare. Her hand is outstretched to a kneeling Link, but her palm is laid bare, fingers upright and arrow-straight, as if warding him away. Subsequent memories prove that her hostility here is a defense mechanism, the fruit of a decade’s fruitless effort to protect Hyrule from darkness with a flash of sacred light. In one scene, her father growls that her kingdom sees her as “the heir to a throne of nothing ... nothing but failure.” Later, at the Spring of Power, the princess smashes clenched fists into holy water, curses her goddess for ignoring her prayers, pleads to be told what is wrong with her. It is not only a truly tragic culmination of external pressures and her own insecurities, but also a moment that millions of self-conscious teenage girls can see their own reflections in. Zelda is one of them.

And, in truth, there is nothing wrong with her. When Zelda is not tortured by expectation, she is bright and curious. Some memories catch her in charming, silly scenes: reassuring her horse that she appreciates it, rambling about a new machine’s potential, and famously



insisting that Link try eating—“tada!”—a live frog, of all things! There are as many different sides to her as there are flowers in her kingdom’s fields.

And like a flower, Zelda blossoms. When the Calamity drags her knight to death’s door, she finds the confidence to defy its wrath. With Link on his knees behind her, a hand outstretched ahead of her, and a mechanical monster thrashing ever closer, she roars—and suddenly, she is warding it away from him in a thunderclap of blinding gold. And then she is marching into danger alone, with only her bare hands to protect her and her kingdom.

By the time *Tears of the Kingdom* begins, years have passed since Zelda sealed the Calamity away. When she is lost, vanishing into the past, players must scour the whole continent to find her. This time, the audience does not witness Zelda’s story through her knight’s eyes, but instead, through her own; a strange magic ripples in a dragon’s shed tears, and it opens windows into the missing princess’s mind. Zelda’s memories prove how richly scientific she is; the narrative they invent is more intent upon determining cause and effect than Link’s, with a laser focus that rarely wavers from her mission. By the fifth memory, she has already found one route home, though it comes at a terrible cost: “to become an immortal dragon,” she is told, “is to lose oneself.”

A younger Zelda may have been relieved to lose herself. But in *Tears of the Kingdom*, Zelda’s memories make it known that her blossoming did not end with that apocalypse. She greets strangers warily, but she meets

their eyes steadily, announces herself with temerity—a stark contrast to the frazzled reactions that danger drew from her when she was younger. She struggles to summon a strange new power, but she persists in her practice, and soon wields it successfully as a warrior and a sage. Zelda knows her own strength, now, even if she occasionally falters. And she knows that her purpose is to protect her kingdom, her Hyrule, no matter what she must lose. This is who she is.

At last, as the final dragon’s tear is dried, Zelda returns to modern Hyrule—but she has grown and changed beyond comprehension. Antlers erupt from the crown of her head, branching like a mountain buck’s, bluer than luminous stone. Blue-gold auroras spill into the atmosphere in her wake. An unbroken sword is embedded in her skull.

And as she bends above her home, the meadow underneath her bursts into full flower. Determined stems liberate themselves from the earth. White-rimmed petals stretch skyward. Like sunflowers chasing light, each of these strong, wild-blooming silent princesses looks up to the great Light Dragon, who acknowledges them only with the echo of a roar.

In choosing to become the dragon, she has become the arbiter of her own destiny. In losing herself, she has found herself. And in finding herself, her audience can find itself in her. ▲











never forgotten

by *embyrinalics*

illustrated by *reynelee*

On moonless nights, when the sky is darkest and the blood moon sleeps, they say a young woman steps out of the tomb of Hyrule Castle. She's windblown even in stillness and leaves no footprints, clad in gold and white linen that ripples with light too beautiful to be earthly. Her eyes are the same green as luminous stone, and are the saddest when she smiles.

Some say it's the dead princess, come to haunt her fallen kingdom.

That's not terribly far from the truth.

Her bare foot touches dry earth, and it's an anchor in the tempest. She breathes in the stillness, gathering far-flung pieces of herself from the darkest wilds and the farthest shores, and then steps dauntlessly over rust and bone.

The journey is familiar, though the scenery is ever-changing. The fires have died down, finally, and the scattered survivors have begun the tremulous process of rebuilding. It's bitter work, and the soil is still scorched. But it's a start.

She makes her way across barren fields and trudges beneath a forgotten mountain. She presses her palm against a glowing casket and smiles.

"Hello, Link."

There is no answer, of course, except for the hum of the shrine. It reminds her of him—unexpectedly gentle, soothing in its constancy. The silence is demanding, like a presence. That's familiar, too. It makes her lip twitch higher.

"Are you well?" she asks fondly. "Are you getting stronger?"

She knows he is. She can feel his heart beating in tandem with the pulsing of the energy coils—heavy, resolved, time-blind. The sound of it fills the room, and her bones, and her chest. It turns her eyes misty.

She settles beside him, leaning shoulder to stone, and adjusts incorporeal skirts with hands that aren't real. The contentment stammers, and she blinks hard and stops looking at herself.

"I visited Hateno," she tells him, which is only untrue in the strictest sense. She's long since stopped fumbling over particulars. "Little Uma is doing so well. It's a good omen, don't you think? It's been years since there's been a baby this healthy."

She takes his silence for agreement. His house is still empty, which feels unpleasant, so she doesn't mention it. Nor does she mention the Rito's latest attempt to board Vah Medoh, which cost them three men, or the eruptions plaguing Eldin, or that the southwest face of Fort Hateno had finally crumbled. She hadn't really prepared for this conversation.

He's patient. And they're both accustomed to silence.

She says, even though it's November, "The harvest was good."

His smile is warm. He tilts his head, narrows his eyes just so. The question brims off him and washes over her feet, like surf breaking on sand.



“I’m fine,” she assures him.

She smiles like she means it. It’s almost believable.

A growl shudders up the threads twisted round her fingers, a roll of distant thunder. She stops to listen, but nothing follows. A beast stirring in its sleep. She leans closer and presses a hand against the shrine’s smooth side, eyes lingering on intangible strings, glowing gold against celestine and seafoam.

“Do you ever dream?” she whispers, even though she’s asked before.

Her eyes slide over the glossy surface, looking for an imperfection in impenetrable armor. In all the years she’s come to visit, she’s never found one. That’s for the best—his protection is paramount. But she imagines it would be nice. She imagines catching a glimpse of refracted light, a splash of pale scar, a shadow silhouetted in glittering water, and her heart sputters. She can see him anyway, of course, watching her out of eyes that never fade.

Still, she searches.

“I think sometimes I do,” she murmurs. “I think sometimes he does. I think sometimes we dream the same dream.”

It’s a careless confession, and the words are out of reach by the time she reconsiders. The memory is like claws at her throat, all malice and smoke and hot breath on her neck. But she hasn’t come to burden him with it. She reaches deep into the well of her birthright power and draws up a smile.

It isn’t enough. He frowns at her, eyes troubled and bright.

“I’m fine,” she insists again. “I promise I am.”

He crosses his arms. So does she, hopeless though her efforts may be. She has never won at this game.

“What?” she demands—of the casket at her shoulder, of the mist-and-foxfire boy sitting across from her, to more nettlesome silence.

They’re both more patient than she is.

Her stubbornness boils to the surface and is all that keeps her from forfeiting. He has a knack for bringing out the worst in her, she thinks. Her temper, on more than one occasion; her selfishness, as often as he could, *encouraging* it and *smiling* when his efforts paid off, usually in those rare, wonderful moments that had her holding her sides for laughter; the horrible golden light, when her heart was burning her alive, that had burst out of her skin and her mouth and her eyes.

The world is hazily luminous as she blinks the memory away. She grounds herself with the cool stone beneath her knees, with the unbreakable stardust threads imprisoned round her fingers, with the incontestable loss of their staring match.

“You are infuriating,” she sighs, and lays her head on the Sheikah shrine and shuts her eyes. “I miss you.”

His eyes are still there in the dark, a desperate, silent reassurance, willing her to hear him through his deafening silence. Willing her to believe in him, when he’s already sacrificed all he had to give and the shrine is taking the rest.



It's not necessary. She has always believed.

The next breath she pulls trembles, but she embraces the grief: stands on the shore as it barrels at her like a wave and roars overhead, and then floats in the depth of it, feet swept off the sand and ears plugged and ringing. For a moment she is alone, and the ocean is endless. But she knows who and what she is, and the strength and compassion that affords her stamps out fear. A gift forged in fire.

Being a goddess is lonely. But she's never alone.

She breathes out, and the ache passes. Her eyes slip open as she rights herself and fall on the pedestal where the Sheikah Slate rests—the key to his journey. The key to *remembering*. It seems a small gesture in light of everything; but she has faith it will be enough.

There's nothing else she can give him, now, except time. At least she has plenty of that.

Another growl rattles up golden threads and through her bones, louder than before, angrier, and the call is too strong to ignore. She frowns, pressing her palm flush to the shrine in a silent promise. She gazes upon the place he rests one last time, and then opens her eyes.

Her body is entombed in malice, and sheathed in power so old it no longer has a name, no vocabulary to express its breadth besides *inheritance*. It burns when she breathes, and the womb pulsing around her has her pressed beyond movement. She stares into the giant, furious eye of a beast. His hatred is sweltering, and his jaw spasms against the chains that keep him from devouring her. But the slitted pupil fixed on her trembles.

For all that he is wrathful, he knows enough to fear her.

That is the difference between them. She has already lost everything she feared to lose, and survived. His fate still awaits him, the future set in inexorable motion, and she knows there's no escaping it. She knows, because she believes. She believes in Link, because she knows his courage.

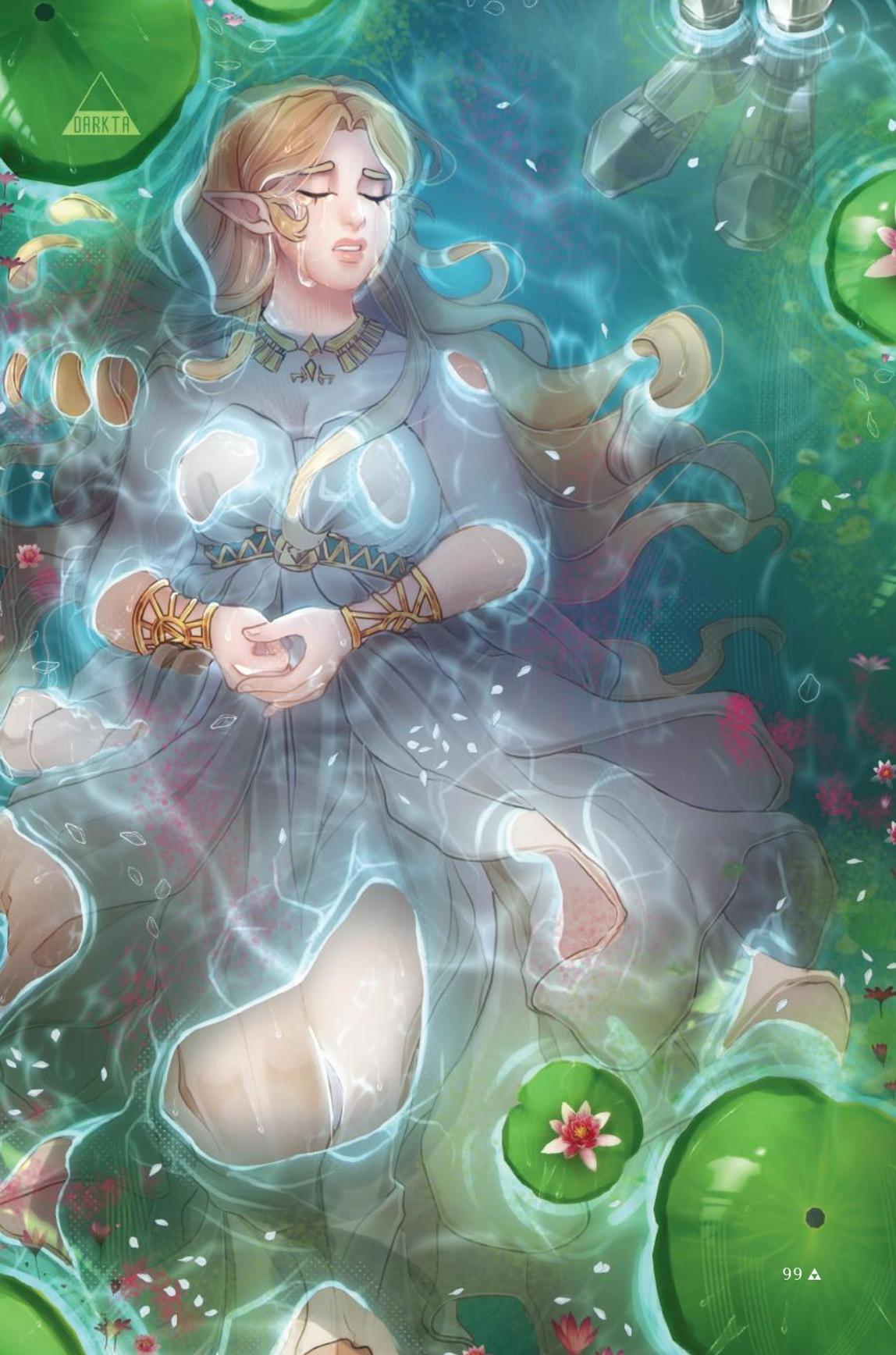
And courage need not be remembered, for it is never forgotten. ▲







DARKTA







Day 30 of training

Zelda, dearie,
it's getting late.
How about we head
back inside?



"Coax it back to
its original position."

Focus...
urk-



Why...

Still...
nothing.



Zelda.



There is always
tomorrow. These
things do not come
so quickly.

I know...





It just... takes me back.



Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if my light powers never came to me...



But it did, didn't it?



And so will your time powers.

Do not fret. You are not the same girl you were before.

In due time...

14 days later



I can do this...

...I know you can succeed.

why the legend of zelda?

the significance of a female namesake

by chakell wardleigh herbert

A legend is a story from the past that is believed by many people but cannot be proved to be true. Legends are tales of adventure, usually including epic battles, dangerous trials, and daring escapes. And often, they are named after the most prominent figure in the story, like *Beowulf* or *The Odyssey* (named for the hero Odysseus). But what about our favorite video-game series? One would think that this legendary story would be named after its playable protagonist, Link—the brave hero who defeats the evil Ganon time and again. But instead, it's named after the princess, who appears only briefly in the early games, and sometimes not at all.

So why? Why is this series called *The Legend of Zelda*? And more importantly, why does it matter?

A Royal Role Model

When I was growing up, I felt out of place compared to other girls my age. I loved princesses, Barbies, and ponies as much as the next, but I had a secret side to me that the world often tried to smother through its more exclusive gender roles at the time. (This was the 90s for you.)

I loved video games, especially *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*.

The game had a life-changing story with everything I loved, including princesses and ponies (thank you, Epona). I loved Link, of course. Who wouldn't? But I was immediately

enamored with Princess Zelda. I saw a wise, confident, and courageous princess who was not afraid to take matters into her own hands, especially when no one was taking her seriously. She was everything I wanted to be.

But none of the girls I knew liked video games, especially ones where you played as a boy! So, I felt alone in my obsession with Hyrule and its princess, and for a long time, I felt like I needed to snuff out this interest to fit in with those around me.

All I truly wanted was to be confident in myself. What was a pony-loving, swashbuckling girl to do?

No Girls Allowed!

It's really no wonder that I felt out of place as a tween-aged gamer girl. Since video games first became popular in the 80s, there was a target demographic: boys. Most early video games were made by men, for men, and the stories usually revolved around male characters.

We had *Super Mario Bros.*, named after the Italian plumbers we all know and love. And while there was a princess in the Mushroom Kingdom, she was little more than a damsel in distress. *Donkey Kong* starred a grumpy ape who (surprise, surprise) was holding a woman hostage. Most *Zelda* titles followed a similar pattern, with Link rescuing Princess Zelda, who is trapped in some way for the entire game.



Video games seemed to be just for boys, and everything about them, from story content to marketing, made it clear that this was *not* a welcome space for girls. Even the original UK trailer for *Ocarina of Time* taunted: “Willst thou get the girl? Or play like one?” (*Cue the feminine rage.*)

Eventually, though, game companies started offering the first video games that targeted girls, like *Barbie: Super Model* (1993) on the SNES. I played the heck out of this game as a kid; however, it required little strategy and lacked depth and difficulty. But 16-bit Barbie definitely had sex appeal! (See the problem?)

We did have Samus from *Metroid* (1986), but the female empowerment fell flat for me. With her armor and helmet, she was designed so the player would assume she was a man and be shocked when she was revealed to be a woman. (Not to mention, the better your completion time was, the less clothes she’d be wearing at the end. Yikes.)

There was also Lara Croft from the *Tomb Raider* series in 1996, who was an instant hit with gamers. However, she sparked controversy for her busty design, which was claimed to empower women but instead seemed to be intended just for the male gaze.

Problematic elements aside, these characters were still pioneering efforts for female inclusion in video games. But even these iconic heroines didn’t have their name in the title at first. This is what set *The Legend of Zelda* apart.

You might already know the story of how the *Zelda* series got its name.

Creator Shigeru Miyamoto borrowed it from Zelda Fitzgerald (an American socialite and novelist from the 1920s) simply because he liked the way it sounded. Just like that, *The Legend of Zelda* was born.

Despite his simple reason, Miyamoto gifted us with one of the first games of its kind: a massive adventure with the female lead’s name in the title—when she wasn’t even a playable character.

To some, this may not seem like a huge victory. What was the point, if Zelda wasn’t playable? However, I believe this beloved series wouldn’t be what it is today if it had been called *The Legend of Link*.

A Legend in the Making

It’s always amusing to me when people who aren’t familiar with this series mistake Link for Zelda. It’s only logical to assume that the series would be named after the main character whom you control and traverse Hyrule with. But when you think about it, it makes sense that Zelda is the one who is called legendary.

Link is certainly heroic. But he is usually up close and personal with the action. To the king of the Zoras, and the needy shopkeepers, and the traveling Gerudo, he isn’t a legend—he’s real. He is seen and admired and loved. A visible savior who gets his well-deserved recognition as the Hero of Hyrule.

On the other hand, Princess Zelda is usually doing just as much, if not more, in the background. She sets the story in motion. She is the reason Link fights. She is the key to everything. Over and over, she illustrates her



strength, compassion, and wisdom. But her actions and sacrifices are often unknown to everyone until much later.

For example, in *Ocarina of Time*, she defies her father and tries to save Hyrule before it's even in danger. As Sheik, she rescues Princess Ruto and guides Link throughout his journey. At last, she aids him in defeating Ganondorf. And while she ensures that Link is remembered as a hero in her timeline, her own role in the story fades away.

In *Twilight Princess*, Zelda wisely surrenders Hyrule to Zant to save her people—and later makes the ultimate sacrifice to save a friend. But her subjects are completely unaware of what she has done for them, and she somberly mourns her crumbling kingdom alone.

In *Skyward Sword*, Link may slay Demise, but it's Zelda (and her previous incarnation, Hylia) who sets a massive plan in motion and keeps the deity imprisoned for thousands of years—unknown to her people, who know her not as a goddess but simply a girl from their tiny island in the sky.

In *Breath of the Wild*, Zelda saves Link when he is inches from death, lays the Master Sword to safely rest, and bravely faces Calamity Ganon alone, sacrificing herself to prevent the entire kingdom's obliteration. Yet by the time Link wakes up a century later, everyone has all but forgotten that their princess is still fighting for their lives in the "abandoned" Hyrule castle.

Don't even get me started on her role in *Tears of the Kingdom*. Her selfless sacrifice to become the Light Dragon is captured on Hyrule's

obscured ancient murals. Yet in modern times, no one knows of her courage to make an impossible choice to ensure Link had the keys he needed to defeat the Demon King.

Even in the original *Legend of Zelda*, she proves that she's more than just a damsel in distress. Yes, in this 8-bit overworld, she needs to be rescued. However, she has gone through great lengths to keep the Triforce of Wisdom out of Ganon's hands—a task she had to tackle alone. She didn't wait helplessly and allow herself to be spirited away. She was wise. Determined. *Defiant*.

At a glance, Zelda's role in the games that bear her name seems to leave a lot to be desired, but clearly there is a lot more going on under the surface. Before Link adventures through Hyrule as the people's local hero, Zelda has always laid the groundwork to ensure his later success. Her magic and wisdom are what guide him on his journey. In fact, her actions are sometimes so unbelievable and fantastical that she becomes a legend among her people. In *Breath of the Wild*, some even question whether she is merely a fairytale.

But many of her people still believe in her stories, and her legend continues to be passed on from generation to generation, timeline to timeline, and incarnation to incarnation.

And now her legend has been added to in a way we've never seen before. Finally, after nearly 40 years, we've had the chance to play as our beloved princess for the first time in a mainline *Zelda* title. *Echoes of Wisdom Zelda* proved to be just as wise, strong, and heroic as her predecessors, stepping



into the spotlight at last to take the leading role in saving her kingdom (and her loyal knight).

Still Growing

Like Samus and other female video-game icons, Princess Zelda has come a long way from her humble debut in the '80s. As the gaming community has become more inclusive and the gender gap among players has closed, video games have begun to offer more space and recognition for female characters, and *The Legend of Zelda* is no exception. Over time, in each adventure in Hyrule, Zelda's role and presence has expanded. We've seen this character grow from seed to blossom, and now we get to celebrate our princess in full flower.

I've come a long way too since my insecure childhood years. As I've grown older, the fear of not meeting social norms has faded, and I've realized that being a woman doesn't mean I have to look or act a certain way. Instead, I choose to have confidence in who I am, nerdy obsessions and all.

The silly troubles of childhood are minuscule compared to the threats I faced in adolescence and adulthood. There have been figurative monsters and seemingly impossible challenges in my path. There have even been moments when I have related to Princess Zelda—when I've felt imprisoned and powerless, simply surviving while trying to keep the darkness and chaos in my life at bay.

During the most painful points of my life, the story I always turn to for comfort, courage, and hope is *The Legend of Zelda*. Princess Zelda (and

Link, of course) have always inspired me to press on with courage and strive to become a wiser, kinder, more compassionate version of myself, no matter what challenges I face.

So does it really matter that this series is called *The Legend of Zelda*? To me, it does. It elevated Zelda's significance in the series and forged a stronger connection between me and this character—something I needed back then, and appreciate even more now. When I was a kid, I felt empowered through Princess Zelda, even though her role in the story seemed small. Now, a whole generation of little girls is picking up a *Zelda* game for the first time and seeing themselves in the heroic princess whose story they get to help tell. Now, *Zelda* fans of any gender can relate to Zelda and be inspired by her the way we have with Link for the past four decades.

Zelda is and always has been one of my favorite fictional heroes. I don't think I'll ever stop looking up to her. Because she is the type of woman I will always strive to be.

Legendary. ▲









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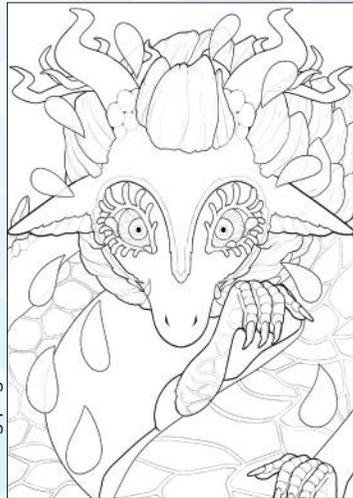
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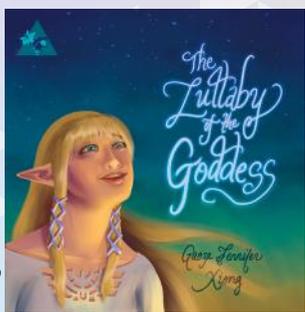


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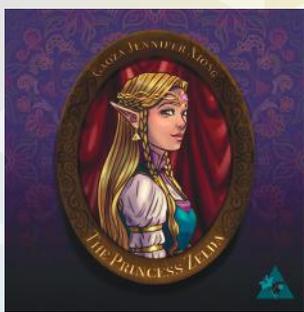


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song collection



<https://tinyurl.com/y46knmk8>
"The Lullaby of the Goddess"



<https://tinyurl.com/43jbtstv>
"The Princess Zelda"



<https://tinyurl.com/2ys5jff2>
"The Flow of Time Is Always Cruel"

 **Gaoza Jennifer Xiong**  @gjenniferx  @whalephart

writers



Alexandria Fuertes
@LexicallyFlowery



kurokmask
@kurokmask
@kurokmask



bahbahhh
@bahbahhhart
@bahbahhh



ro_blaze
@ro-blaze
@ro_blaze



Chakell Wardleigh Herbert
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T1meslayer
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@t1meslayer



Kenlair
@kenlair



Zartophski
@zartophski
@zartophski

special contributors



Bailey Nicole
@luckyclovergazette



Luna Taylors
lunataylorscos.carrd.co



Gaoza Jennifer Xiong
@gjenniferx
@whalephart



The Littlest Gifts
thelittlestgifts.com
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Mozy

mozygan.carrd.co
head mod, graphics mod,
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seeking7.carrd.co
writing mod & meta writer



Miniyuna

theminiyuna.carrd.co
art mod & artist



Kensa

blombergart.com
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nocturnalcardist.carrd.co
consultant mod & artist





