

the LEGEND of ZELDA

THE FANDOM OF HYRULE RULES!

By Nathan Lee Adamus

Tn 1985, *Donkey Kong* legend and co-creator Shigeru Miyamoto began working on two games that would eventually come to define the Nintendo Entertainment System. One featured a plumber who gained super strength from performance-enhancing mushrooms. The other game was designed to showcase the system's true potential, making full use of the system's eight-bit graphic engine and storage capacity.

In February 1986, that game was released in Japan as *The Hyrule Fantasy: The Legend of Zelda* on the Famicom Disk System. The game gathered themes from almost every genre, combining platforming, RPG elements, an inventory system, puzzles and more into a medley of Zeldawesomeness.

Nearly two years after *The Legend of Zelda* launched in Japan, a gold cartridge with an internal battery-powered save feature landed on American shelves several months before Christmas. By this time, America was already drooling with anticipation for what many were touting as the greatest game ever made. The hype was well worth the long





delay, and what started as an attempt to show game developers what they could accomplish with the Nintendo engine became one of the biggest franchises in video game history.

NOT YOUR TYPICAL PRINCESS

A common misconception of the *Zelda* series is that it is about a young boy named Zelda. The confusion is understandable, especially if you haven't played the game or watched your children or grandchildren toss their controllers in frustration during a boss battle. The elfish youth with the green tunic in the series is named Link and his likeness is often featured on the box art. He is the face of the franchise, but the game is named after Princess Zelda, who is routinely captured by the series' monstrous red-haired antagonist Ganondorf, or Ganon for short. However, instead of playing the stereotypical damsel in distress such as Princess Peach in *Super Mario Bros.*, Zelda is not always under house arrest and frequently aids Link on his quests, even participating in monumental battles against Ganon.

LINKED TOGETHER ONLINE

Although there is no official name for *Zelda* enthusiasts (the terms "Zeldites," "Linkies," "Zeldies" and "Zeldians" are sometimes tossed around

generically though), the *Zelda* fan base is one of the most passionate crews in video game history. Even as next-gen systems like the Xbox and PlayStation threaten to reduce the number of new fans, the gamers who grew up with *Zelda* haven't neglected the "Legendary Hero of Hyrule."

Zelda's luscious artwork has been recreated by *Zelda* fans for years and even inspired the late Robin Williams to name his daughter *Zelda* in honor of the franchise. The characters of Link and *Zelda* are also frequently recreated in cosplay.

Several fan sites are dedicated to Link, including a number of Wikipedia clones that are *Zelda* specific. If you have an abundance of free time to waste, venture on over to the *Zelda* Wiki (zeldawiki.org) or the *Zelda* Wikipedia and see just how deep the rabbit hole goes.

"IT'S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE! TAKE THIS."



THE MAGICAL MUSIC

When the original *The Legend of Zelda* thrust its way into video game lore, its soundtrack was considered one of its most endearing features. Since that edition, its spacious musical landscapes have been a staple of the series. Many artists and orchestras have released albums covering the reoccurring themes and iconic melodies from *The Legend of Zelda* series. In fact, underground producers Team Teamwork fused the *Ocarina of Time* soundtrack with popular rap songs from artists such as Dr. Dre, Aesop Rock and Clipse. The album was cleverly given the name: *Ocarina of Rhyme*.

Sound Bites

"It's a secret to everybody."

"Grumble, grumble."

"Dodongo dislikes smoke."

"I am Error."

"I... I shall consume. Consume... consume everything..."



BEHIND THE SCENES

Shigeru Miyamoto confirmed that Link was based on the Disney version of Peter Pan and that Zelda was named after Zelda Fitzgerald, wife of author F. Scott Fitzgerald. Before the first version of the game was released, Link began his adventure with sword in hand. But late in the process, the developers decided that Link should start the game without a weapon and have an old man warn that "it's dangerous to go alone" before giving him his first sword. Because Miyamoto worked on *Super Mario Bros.* and *Zelda* simultaneously, many elements like fireballs and piranha-like flowers are in both games. Developers had a good time designing the maps in *Zelda* as well, as all of the dungeons are named after their respective shapes (i.e., the lion dungeon looks like a lion when shown on a map) and the first five dungeons in the second quest actually spell the word "Zelda." The second quest in the game, which contains more dungeons and harder enemies, was added later when developers discovered that only half of the available cartridge memory was being used and they didn't want the remaining space to go to waste.

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But *The Legend of Zelda* was almost released without its epic theme music. The game's original overworld music was a classical midi reproduction of Ravel's *Boléro*. Right before it was released, Nintendo discovered that the music was still copyrighted. In a last-minute attempt to replace the music, Nintendo hired Koji Kondo to compose a new theme, which he managed to create in only one day. Make sure you thank Ravel's copyright lawyers next time you get the *Zelda* theme music stuck in your head.

THE LEGEND LIVES ON

Despite its honored place in video game history, *The Legend of Zelda* hasn't really branched out into popular culture. For the most part, it has a cult following and has been limited to occasional references in television shows and movies. Nintendo is notorious for protecting its characters, and other than some fan-produced films and an occasional guest role in Nintendo-based cartoons like *Captain N: The Game Master*, Link and Zelda haven't made many appearances outside the video game arena. Considering the debacle that was the *Super Mario Bros.* movie—labeled by critics as one of the worst

movies of all time—this is probably a good thing. *The Legend of Zelda* was briefly turned into an animated series, comprising of 13 episodes that aired within a three-month period.

Perhaps its biggest pop culture claim to fame occurred when online video game and entertainment giant IGN fooled its audience into believing that a live-action motion picture was in the works. Despite the article and trailer video appearing on April 1, 2008, the quality of the video was so good that many fans failed to recognize it as an April Fool's joke.

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

For the most part, newer generations of hardcore gamers have traded in their Nintendos for next-gen Xbox and PlayStation platforms, favoring their faster processor speeds and more realistic graphic engines over kid-friendly systems like the Wii and Wii U.

Despite a decline in popularity, diehard fans are always clamoring for a new installment and the series hasn't lost much steam overseas. Unfortunately, many of the American fans who grew up with *Zelda* are now in their 30s and 40s, a demographic that doesn't play as many video





games as they once did in their youth. Though statistics will suggest this age group is still very active in the video game market, the dawn of mobile gaming has skewed these numbers. Gamers in that age group tend to get their video game fix in quick doses, favoring gaming apps on smartphones and tablets to adventure games that need large chunks of time like *Zelda*.

Even though Nintendo has slipped a bit in the next generation console war, the

series still manages to remain relevant. Nintendo knows its audience well and continues to release *Zelda* handheld installments and the occasional console title. The last edition in the console series, *Skyward Sword*, received nearly perfect reviews from a variety of gaming authorities, selling 3.5 million copies worldwide. To put that in perspective, the original gold cartridge sold almost 7 million copies in 1987.

On September 26, 2014, Nintendo, in collaboration

with Koei Tecmo, released a hack-and-slash action game featuring elements and characters from the extended series. The game is a departure from the open-world adventure formats of previous installments and is not considered part of the main series. However, the new direction indicates that Nintendo is attempting to expand its reach, perhaps creating a hybrid between the adventure games of the past and fast-paced action games that are popular today. ☐

AT A GLANCE

- 1 **Bestselling game:** *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (7.6 million copies sold)
- 2 **Number of games in franchise:** 17
- 3 **Number of copies sold:** Over 70 million
- 4 **Shigeru Miyamoto (co-creator):** *Donkey Kong*, *Super Mario Bros.*, *Super Mario 64*