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Holy Ocarina! Exploring Religion in/of/through *The Legend of Zelda* Series

Johnathan Sanders

Abstract

Initially a presentation by a panel of scholars at Penny Arcade Expo (PAX East) 2020, the *Holy Ocarina! Project* is an ongoing collaborative project that aims to act as a resource and an inspiration for those seeking to write about the intersection of *The Legend of Zelda* series (1987-2017) and religion. At PAX, the panelists conducted an audience-directed discussion surrounding the fictional mythology and apparent religious practices within the narrative worlds of the *Zelda* series (*Religion of Zelda*), the influence of real-world religious symbols, stories, and ideologies on the series' plot and mechanics (*Religion in Zelda*), and the ways in which fan engagement with canonical and non-canonical elements of the series resonates with the practices of religious communities (*Zelda as Religion*). This research report aims to present an overview of the topics discussed by the panelists before, during, and after the PAX panel; compile many of the academic, ludic, and popular resources on which these discussions were based; and present provocative claims or lines of inquiry that can serve as a foundation for future researchers to pursue.

Keywords: *The Legend of Zelda*, *Mitsuuroko*, Ritual Spaces, Ritual Objects, Japanese Folklore, Orientalism, Shinto, Canon, Female Protagonists, Fan Studies, gameenvironments

To cite this article: Sanders, J., 2021. Holy Ocarina! Exploring Religion in/of/through *The Legend of Zelda* Series. *gameenvironments* 14, 198-220. Available at <http://www.gameenvironments.uni-bremen.de>.

“Link, the hero of the Legend of Zelda, does not yet exist. You create Link by first registering your player name.”

The Legend of Zelda Instruction Booklet (Nintendo of America 1987, 11)

It is statements like the epigraph above that launch dissertations. They are small, to be sure, and are almost certainly not intended by their creators to carry deeper meaning (this one is drawn from Nintendo’s attempt to explain the concept of the now-familiar in-cartridge save system to an 80’s audience) but neither of these caveats hampers their profundity in the mind of an imaginative reader. What was mere description of a menu screen becomes an ontological mystery: a creation ex-nihilo of a hero. What video game character could be said to exist before the game is played, before the player ascribes to it their name and animates it as if it were a rabbinic golem? And what does that imply about the one who puppets this avatar, their literal *link* to another world through which they can enact their will? Inquiries like these can seem silly or self-indulgent in the wrong context, but there is a sort of joy to this activity of conceptual expansion, of contemplating these accidental koans hidden within the mundanity of an instruction manual or blocks of mistranslated digital prose. Creating a space for this sort of activity and sharing it with the wider world is a driving force behind the *Holy Ocarina! Project*, a collaborative inquiry into the religious implications of *The Legend of Zelda* series (1987-2017) that cumulated in a talk at the 2020 Penny Arcade Expo (PAX East).

The ethos behind the whole project came after an initial application to PAX about a general religion in games panel was rejected (due, in part, to its use of academic jargon and its heavy subject matter). This prompted a reflection on the value of our work to the game-playing public. Classical academics in the humanities have a tendency to kill the proverbial frog, to take the fun and mystery out of a subject by reducing it to a distinct, verifiable set of concepts that explain how it functions and

the socio-political causes and effects of that functioning. Apprentice scholars are taught to leave any personal evaluations or emotional attachments to a subject at the door, excising / from our papers and propping every original idea up with at least two canonical, usually French, scholars who somehow got away with saying whatever they wanted (looking at you, Foucault and Deleuze). As a result, a great deal of the arguments we make are so provisional or hyper-specific as to apply to a tiny sliver of human experience, mired in arcane jargon that warrants polite but confused nods from our non-academic friends and family. Game studies is no exception to this: consider, for example, the early branding of digital games as a subset of “ergodic literature” by Espen Aarseth (1997), or the wide array of disciplines from which Ian Bogost (2006) had to draw in order to define games in terms of “unit operations.”

There are certainly valid reasons for writing this way, of course, and great work has been done and continues to be done in this paradigm. But, especially for those who study games and/or religion, this leads to a certain amount of cognitive dissonance. After all, few of us got into this business because they wanted to explain how Deleuze’s concept of the virtual maps onto the rhetoric of an HTC Vive commercial, or because they had to tell the world which version of *The Arabian Nights* inspired the depiction of a particular digital djinni. What drew us to this line of work were questions, big questions regarding the things that move us in all of the worlds we inhabit: the actual, the virtual, the spiritual, and all the places in between. The most enjoyable academic projects are those driven by questions that make us *want* to think deeply. One of the struggles of being an academic (and, arguably, being human) is fostering the innate curiosity that produces these questions while dealing in the minutiae of the everyday. By creating a presentation for a largely non-academic audience and making our research available for the curious to use, we aimed to do just that.

Methodology

The *Holy Ocarina! Project*, for us, was a chance not only to revel in the interpretative questioning that drove us to be academics initially, but also to encourage others to ask the same questions of the things they love – in this case, the *Legend of Zelda* series. Following recent trends in the academic study of religion and video games, we chose to define our lens of religion as *value systems that shape and orient thoughts, actions, and feelings of individuals and communities as they relate to this world and otherworldly forces, places, and beings* – a broad and relatable definition that opens up rather than closes off the sort of inquiries we were aiming to promote.ⁱ Inspiration for the project’s accessible format came in part from the video essays of Andrew Henry (2017) and Javed Sterritt (2019).ⁱⁱ The result was a group of scholars from differing backgrounds, all bringing their own questions and interests to a single body of texts and generating as many exciting lines of inquiry as we could think of.ⁱⁱⁱ

As we found out, *The Legend of Zelda* series has plenty of fodder for these questions, as its weave of intercultural and intertextual influences rivals the mythic structure of its magical world. We ended up categorizing our questions into a few broad clusters, but even these categories seem limited. Soon enough, researching and debating these questions produced far more material than we needed for an hour-long PAX panel. Instead of cutting things down and lecturing on the result, we decided to bake the spirit of inquiry into the panel itself. At multiple points within the presentation, we gave the audience a chance to vote on which cluster of questions we should pursue using a polling app on their phones. Then the moderator would ask the panelists to explore some of the questions surrounding that topic, using our academic backgrounds and interests to open up rather than close off the sort of discussions that inspired the project.

What follows is an adaptation of the discussions generated by this project, both during the panel itself and from our conversations before and after it. While the claims here will be rarely attributed to a specific contributor (out of a faulty memory as much as the dialogic nature of the collaboration), I hope they reflect the general shape of our thoughts on the subject as they relate to the three broad headings of the PAX talk: Religion *of* Zelda (the way religion operates within the diegetic space of the game world), Religion *in* Zelda (real-world religious or mythic influences appearing in the game), and Zelda *as* Religion (how the game series and our engagement with it act in religious ways).^{iv} Although they do not present a singular condensed argument about *The Legend of Zelda* and religion, the following pages are aimed at opening up avenues for further study and compiling resources that may prove to be useful starting points for those interested in writing on this subject.

Religion of Zelda

When we think about religion in the *Legend of Zelda*, we need look no further than the mythological implications of the title itself: what exactly is the *legend* of Zelda, and why call it a *legend* in the first place? The term *legend* itself (Japanese *densetsu*, or “explanation of tradition”) connotes a fictional tale about the deeds of a prominent individual with some grounding in historical reality, setting it apart from adjacent genres like god-oriented myths (*shinwa*) or morally-inflected fables (*setsuwa*).^v The ambiguous nature of the true or historical versus the fabulating mythological is a key question and issue in the study of the narratives from various religious traditions. For example, consider the European traditions in which King Arthur and Robin Hood can be said to be legendary figures while Zeus and the Minotaur may be said to be mythical ones and Tortoise and Hare sit comfortably within the territory of fables. Putting aside the porous boundary between these genres and the sometimes

problematic implications behind categorizing cultural narratives as one or the other,^{vi} describing the *Legend of Zelda* as a *legend* implies its grounding in some sort of reality and its emphasis on the agency of heroic individuals over the cosmic quarrelling of immortal gods. The term thus simultaneously invokes the fantastic adventures of age-old stories while simultaneously granting the world in which the games are set (primarily the kingdom of Hyrule) its own history, authority, and reality that parallels our own.

But what are the dominant religious beliefs and practices of this parallel reality, and what can they tell us about the people therein? Much like in our own reality, the belief system of fictional Hyrulean peoples is somewhat hard to pin down. Multiple games in the series (notably 1998's *Ocarina of Time*, which devotes a cutscene to it) make reference to a creation myth in which three Golden Goddesses worked together to create the world, its inhabitants, and its laws, leaving behind a powerful artifact known as the Triforce when they ascended to a higher plane. Later games build upon the concept of a fourth goddess – Hylia – as a primary deity, protecting the Triforce from those who would use its power for evil. The Hyrule of *Breath of the Wild* (2017) is littered with small Hylia statues and shrines, while the opening sequence of *Skyward Sword* (2011) revolves around a festival honoring the goddess, eventually revealing Zelda to be a mortal incarnation of the divine figure. If the official *Zelda* timeline in 2013's *Hyrule Historia* is to be believed (more on that in a later section), *Skyward Sword's* position at the beginning of the timeline makes the general absence of the goddess Hylia in other games align with the waning of religious lore over time.

While the religious *lore* of Hyrule is relatively easy to pin down, actual religious *practice* among its peoples is somewhat more elusive. As Andrew Henry (2017) expertly discusses in his video essay on the subject, most of the cavernous and trap-

filled temples of the *Zelda* series – such as *Ocarina of Time*'s Water Temple or *Four Swords Adventures*' (2004) Eastern Temple – do not seem designed to be places of congregation or contemplation as real-world temples are, nor do they seem to be consecrated to any of the goddesses mentioned in the creation myth above. In fact, most of the sacred spaces in the game seem to be devoted to lesser spiritual powers with little or no explicit connection to the goddesses. The Great Fairies, a recurring presence in the series, sometimes have fountains or grottos where Link (and presumably other citizens) make offerings or seek aid. Then there are nature spirits like the Kuroks of *Wind Waker* (2002) and the Great Deku Tree (*Ocarina of Time*, *Wind Waker*) who act as guardians of particular regions rather than divinities to be worshipped. Complicating this further is the existence of multiple peoples within the *Zelda* universe, each with their own cultures and practices that conflict with that of the more populous Hylian culture.^{vii}

Yet despite the relative absence of observable communal ritual spaces in the *Zelda* universe, there is a wealth of sacred objects, many of which are either sought after or used by Link in-game. Most of the items Link comes across are given epithets which connect them with some explicit or implicit tradition within the game's universe: both *Wind Waker* (2002) and *Twilight Princess* (2006) contain scenes in which Link's iconic green tunic is referred to as "Hero's Clothes," signifying its connection to heroes of the past, while the Master Sword (or its various iterations) is almost always discovered in some grove, temple, or place of reverent significance. This focus on ritual objects even extends beyond the Hylian people: the Gorons and Zoras of *Ocarina of Time* have their own heroes' tunics to give Link, the spiritual power of Labrynna (the setting of the *Oracle* games [2001]) seem to be focused around magical artifacts which control time and the weather, and *Majora's Mask* (set in the land of Termina) is centered around the concept of ritual masks containing the souls of great heroes or

demonic deities, and many characters aside from Link wear and use them in everything from masquerade parties to sacred dances. If the people of Hyrule seem to have a single focal point of their religion throughout time, it is the symbol of the Triforce. This religious object – representing the forces of Courage, Wisdom, and Power – is often described as a powerful object rather than a specific godly entity. It is often referred to as being neither good nor evil, but can grant wishes to the one who controls it. The repeated use of the Triforce acts within the world of *Zelda* not merely as a signifier of Hyruleianism, but as a reminder for all people to keep Courage, Wisdom, and Power in balance.

It is with this conception of Hylianism in mind – a religion that focuses on religious objects over explicit religious spaces or practices within the world of Hyrule – that we can return to the question of what the *legend* of *Zelda* actually *is* in the context of the game’s storyworld. When looking at the many stories characters share about the eponymous Princess of Hyrule throughout the series (as opposed to the extradiegetic information presented solely to the player), it becomes clear that there is not *a* legend of *Zelda*, but *many* legends of *Zelda* in the *Zelda* universe. The character of Impa in *Zelda II* (1988) recounts a tale of a princess being put into a deep sleep by an evil wizard, causing her brother to decree that all future royal women bare her name (Nintendo of America 1988, 8); *The Wind Waker’s* King of Red Lions tells of an ancient kingdom lost beneath the waves whose ruler would be reincarnated as a long-eared, fair-haired maiden; and *Zelda* herself (now a reigning monarch) describes the fall of her kingdom to mysterious shadow creatures in *Twilight Princess*. What the variances in these multiple versions make clear is that, ultimately, the details of each individual legend is less important than the act of relaying it and the call to action it implies. In explaining these in-world traditions (*densetsu*) the denizens of the *Zelda* universe are

implicating Link (and the player) in the work of perpetuating the legend, transmuted ancient wisdom into courageous action that bolsters the power of the original tradition.

Religion in Zelda

Exploring the diegetic religion of the game and its denizens does not mean that the game is not without outside influence. Throughout the series, the designers have incorporated elements from the religious traditions of our world in order to color and shape the world of Hyrule. For example, the image of the Triforce was actually borrowed from a real-world symbol used in Japan (the *mitsuuroko*, or “three scales”), highlighting the porous boundary between the *Legend of Zelda* series and the stories, practices, and iconography of real-world religions. According to the text known as the *Enoshima Engi*, the island of Enoshima was raised from the sea by a beautiful goddess in order to protect the shore from the wrath of a powerful dragon (Juhl 2011). When the dragon saw the goddess on the island, it fell madly in love with her and asked for her hand in marriage, which the goddess gave only after the dragon promised to use its power to help rather than harm the people of the region (Juhl 2011). Centuries later, Hojo Tokimasa, the patriarch of a feudal family in 13th century Japan, came to Enoshima to seek guidance from this goddess (McCullough 1959, 134). After prophesizing his clan’s prominence, the goddess changed into a serpent and slid into the sea, leaving behind three scales which Tokimasa made into an emblem of his clan (McCullough 1959, 135). While there is no explicit reference to this tale in the *Legend of Zelda* series, the prominence of a powerful dragon, a wise goddess, and a courageous warrior has obvious parallels with the tripartite nature of its video game counterpart. Simply pursuing this game symbol’s origin is enough to imbue the well-known world with a whole new layer of meaning drawn from an ancient tradition.

The *mitsuuroko* is far from the only real-world iconography that has made its way into the *Legend of Zelda* series, of course, nor is it the only one to inject further meaning into the *Zelda* universe if pursued to its origins. The influence of Christian iconography, for example, can be felt in the architecture of *Ocarina of Time's* Temple of Time or the stained-glass windows of *Wind Waker's* long-sunken Hyrule Castle, decorated with images of important game characters in the style of Christian saints. The original NES game (*Legend of Zelda* 1987) even explicitly features the Bible (*Baiburu*) as an obtainable item, although the English instruction manual insists it is merely a "Magic Book" that can allow Link to "chant some fiery spells and send out flames" (Nintendo of America 1987, 26). While the implications of this are rather benign, other iconographical borrowing is more problematic. The original symbol for the Gerudo people within the *Zelda* universe – a desert-dwelling race of brown-skinned women often dressed in pajamas, cropped shirts, and veils – was a star and moon, essentially a mirrored image of the international symbol of Islam. While this was altered in later releases of the game (along with the sample of an Islamic call to prayer from the music of *Ocarina of Time's* Fire Temple [1997]), it still bears the markings of problematic Orientalist depictions of Near Eastern peoples and their religious practices. Combined with the facts that *Ocarina of Time's* Gerudo are depicted as bandits, are the only visibly human-like characters Link can damage, and happen to be ruled over by the game's villain (the only man among their people), this depiction echoes the Islamophobia at the turn of the 21st century.

Certain cultural appropriations need not have directly religious origins to evoke religious ideas. For example, Link's green clothing, youthful elfish features, association with fairies, and occasional fights with his shadow mark him as being intertextually related to Peter Pan, a fact confirmed by creator Shigeru Miyamoto in a 2012 interview (Audureau 2012). While Disney's (1953) depiction of the ever-youthful

character upon which Link was based is not strictly religious, Peter Pan’s lineage can be traced all the way back to the fey tricksters of the British Isles and the Greek half-goat god of revelry. Aside from their associations with the natural world (something retained in Link’s frequent ties to rustic settings), all three of these supernatural figures are known for a chaotic playfulness that shows little regard for human morality: fairies lure children away from their families to play in their groves forever, Pan is said to inspire irrational fear in his enemies (hence the word *panic*), and the Peter Pan of J. M. Barrie’s original 1911 novel had no qualms with abducting Wendy and her siblings or killing hordes of Neverland pirates on a whim. Though this behavior seems much more befitting of a character like Skull Kid (the antagonist of *Majora’s Mask*) rather than Link, it certainly puts the common player actions like breaking pottery, harassing Cuccos, and indiscriminately fighting any creature with a health bar in a new context!

While some of our questions regarding the relationship between religion and the *Legend of Zelda* series certainly arose from the appearance of these appropriations of real-world icons, even more arose from a subtler source: the actions one takes in the game itself. We questioned what sort of religious worldviews were encoded into the tasks the game presents players and the ethos they present. Although one could read Link’s journey in any given game through Joseph Campbell’s concept of the mythical Hero’s Journey (1949) or the tropes discussed in James George Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1915), a more productive lens can be found in the Buddhist and Shinto traditions in its country of origin. As Sterrit (2019) visualized in his video essay “Ocarina of Time: A Masterclass in Subtext,” much of the plot of the *Zelda* games becomes about restoring balance to the natural world: the game’s villains frequently corrupt the land and its creatures, turning once gentle creatures into monsters (as in *Ocarina of Time* or *Majora’s Mask*’s many bosses). This is achieved by contacting and

releasing spirits, whether those are woodland sprites like Koroks from *Breath of the Wild* or *Wind Waker* (largely based on the Japanese nature spirits known as *kodama*) or guardians like the Giants of *Majora's Mask* or *Twilight Princess's* (2006) "Spirits of Light" (similar to Japanese *kami*) each of which are associated with a particular locale or part of the environment. This contact with spirits frequently involves Link playing music, also borrowed from Shinto practice (the practice of *kagura*). By playing these games, then, players are (unwittingly or not) participating in practices aligned with Shinto thought and philosophy.

Zelda as Religion

The final section of our PAX talk looked outward, towards how real-world engagement with *The Legend of Zelda* acts as a religion, creating an institution, shaping worldviews, and providing spaces for a community together. As an organization, one of the most interesting and overtly religious topics *The Legend of Zelda* engages in is questions of canon. Though it has been appropriated into fandom discourse to indicate which aspects of plot material are *real* within any given fictional universe, the concept of canonization carries the connotation of religious orders determining whether certain religious writings and figures fit into their worldview. The 2013 *Hyrule Historia* (Aonuma 2013, 69) brings together the various contradictory versions of the *Zelda* legend explained in the first section of this article into a single timeline, one that branches into three discrete paths based upon the events that might occur in the time-hopping antics of *Ocarina of Time* before somehow converging again into a single timeline with *Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo 2021). How this occurs within the *Zelda* universe – how three possible timelines are in fact one – becomes a sacred mystery not unlike those in other traditions: while it cannot be fully explained by rational means, accepting it on faith affords *Zelda* fans a

profound way to interpret both their canon and the truths of the world around them. This contemplative activity actually seems to be the point, as *Zelda* series producer Eiji Aonuma has been quoted as saying the timeline has been kept intentionally hidden from players so that “everyone can find their own answer, in their own way” (Seedhouse 2018).

Interpretative plasticity aside, the authorities behind the *Hyrule Historia* did have to relegate some iterations of the *Zelda* legend as apocrypha in order to make the timeline coherent, leading to some interesting consequences that are not unlike those of Biblical canonization. Link’s appearances in games set outside of the *Zelda* universe are rendered apocryphal despite having numerous implications in the timeline as a whole. Though some of Link’s appearances (like those in *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* [2017] or the *Super Smash Brothers* series [1999-2018]) are mere mentions that make sense within another tradition, others have fully formed backstories that relate them to Hyrule. The backstory behind Link’s appearance in *Soulcaliber II* (Namco 2003), for example, involves the hero travelling to another dimension in order to destroy a demonic sword, which in turn reverberates through the entire *Soulcaliber* universe. The canonicity of these appearances are not unlike the various (and often contradictory) representations of canonically important figures across multiple religious texts or speculation surrounding the undocumented portions of these figures’ lives. Even without canonical basis, these depictions of Link (much like non-canonical depictions of religious figures) can bring potential converts into the cultural fold or give those already familiar with the source material new ways to engage with or appreciate them.

The choice of which games to excise from the official *Zelda* canon also has other, more problematic implications as well, some of which are shared by real-world

religious communities. The fact that there are only two mainline Zelda games to date in which Zelda is the main player-controlled character – the infamously poorly received CD-i titles *The Wand of Gamelon* (Animation Magic 1993) and *Zelda's Adventure* (Viridis 1995) – calls attention to the character's recurrent role as a *damsel in distress*, an obtainable object of desire rather than a heroic avatar for the player (Sarkeesian 2013). Granted, modern games in the series have increasingly portrayed Zelda as having power and agency within the narrative, and the non-canonical *Hyrule Warriors* series (2014, 2020) have even made her a playable side character. But her active role in the scripted plot of these games is minimal when compared to her heroics in the CD-i titles, let alone Link's actions throughout the mainline games. Even Princess Peach – Nintendo's other famous damsel in distress – could be said to have stronger playable roles, whether within the playable segments of the *Paper Mario* series (2000-2020), her playable roles in platformers like *Super Mario Brothers 2* (1988) or *Super Mario 3D World* (2013), or her own original (albeit somewhat sexist) title *Super Princess Peach* (2006).^{viii} Despite many concessions by the developers, Zelda's role in the series that bears her name remains marginal; as is the case in many real-world religious communities, adherence to tradition trumps gender equality.

And yet, as is also the case with real-world religious communities, strict doctrine does not always define actual practice. As Katherine Hemmann chronicles in her article "The Legends of Zelda: Fan Challenges to Dominant Video Game Narratives" (2018), *Zelda* fans across the world have made and continue to make projects which simultaneously celebrate and critique the series through shifting perspectives to the series' female characters.^{ix} Others have modded or even made games that star female characters within the *Zelda* universe, as is the case with lierenwait's game *Fallen Kingdom* (2018) or the ambitious "Zelda Conversion Project" (Alexandra 2018) which aims to make Zelda playable in *Breath of the Wild*. That said, with Nintendo's hold on

the *Zelda* IP as strong as it is (the first of these heretical projects has been suppressed by Nintendo’s legal team), there is no real chance for an official schism from their canon – such fan-made projects remain in the margins, adhered to by a select few devotees under the umbrella of this larger belief system that is *The Legend of Zelda* lore.

But, as is the case with real-world religions, an examination of canonical doctrines and problematic ideologies as written cannot ever fully encompass the practices of the many communities that gather around *The Legend of Zelda*. Many of the audience members at our PAX panel took the titular princess’s current marginalization as an opportunity to ponder what a *Zelda*-based *Zelda* game might look like. Would such a game merely reverse the roles as *Wand of Gamelon* did (with Link needing to be saved and *Zelda* doing the saving), or could it borrow from managerial sims or role-playing games to explore *Zelda*’s role as ruler and magician as well as a hero? It is the pursuit of questions like these – those that expand the canonical, traditional thought of the series rather than those that cling to a pre-ordained doctrine – that allows both real-world religious communities and the fandoms that act like them to grow and survive to be passed on to future generations. Having a text, an alternative world to discuss, think about, and enjoy with others is a large part of what makes *The Legend of Zelda* (and in fact all games) act in the same way religious practice does. Gameplay has a ritual function, game narratives a mythological one, and gamer communities a social one, all of which can be passed down from generation to generation. To paraphrase the quote from the beginning of this research report, *The Legend of Zelda* does not exist; we create it by adding to it our names.

Conclusion

While Covid-19 put the *Holy Ocarina! Project* on hold, the questions we raised and the research we pursued collectively gave us hope for deeper dives into *Zelda* and religion in the future. Our goal remains to ask questions and make connections that may inspire others – especially those outside of traditional academia – to think deeply about the religious implications of the things they love. Far from merely being a way to get through a school paper, such thought can be a creative endeavor in and of itself, one that grants texts new meanings that can resonate with one’s personal and intellectual interests. In an attempt to make this easier, our eventual goal with the *Holy Ocarina! Project* is to compile resources for those who want to engage with *The Legend of Zelda* series in this fashion, whether they are articles on religious studies, think-pieces about *Zelda*, questions raised by fans, or teaching materials that one could use to bring the study of games and religion to an even wider audience. The present research report aims to be a part of that effort, presenting a narrative of our thoughts and a list of resources (in the notes and bibliography) for those who want to delve deeper into the mysteries of the *Zelda* series and do not know where to start. In the words of a certain cavern-dwelling sage: “It is dangerous to go alone. Take this” (*The Legend of Zelda* 1987).

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ⁱ This definition is developed from conversations at the workshop on video gaming and religion by the International Association for the Study of Video Games and Religion (IASGAR), August 12th, 2018 in Boulder, Colorado.

ⁱⁱ Both Sterritt (who runs the channel "Good Blood" on YouTube) and Henry (creator of the "Religion for Breakfast" series) were actually invited onto the project early on. Though neither were able to appear at PAX in-person, they participated in lively discussions over social media channels, and Sterritt even was able to put together a stunning video introduction to for our PAX presentation.

ⁱⁱⁱ The 2020 PAX panel was moderated and organized by Jordan Brady Loewen (Syracuse University) and consisted of John Borchert (Syracuse University), Bo Eberle (UNC Chapel Hill), and myself (Syracuse University).

^{iv} The categories of *of-in-as* are inspired by the prepositional demarcations from the work of Rachel Wagner and Jeremy Stolow in the study of religion and new media. See Wagner's *Godwired: Religion Ritual and Virtual Reality* (2012) and especially Stolow's "Religion and/as Media" (2005).

^v The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Bowker 2003) clarifies that what separates *shinwa* from *densetsu* is the focus on spirits and demigods known as *kami*, and that the former "more closely resembl[es] myth than densetsu or setsuwa." It also mentions two other genres of religious stories, including *engi* (which tend to focus on miraculous events surrounding holy places) and *reigenki* (stories of Buddhas and bodhisattvas).

^{vi} In his chapter on the subject in *Film as Religion*, for example, John Lyden (2004, 56-57) discusses how "the term 'myth' is so laden with negative connotations that it is practically unserviceable for the study of religion," not least because "it has usually been reserved for the stories of religion other than one's own."

^{vii} One audience member at our PAX panel asked us to comment on the idea that the people of Termina – the land in which *Majora's Mask* takes place – are put in mortal peril because they do not

honor the gods of Hyrule. The central human town contains no temple, after all, and the game’s four temples seem to be associated with four guardian giants rather than the mythical characters repeated through Hyrule’s history. Our sly response to this question was it seemed like a very *Hyruleianist* way of seeing the world: the peoples of Termina may very well have their own religious practices apart from those in Hyrule (the task of the game, after all, is to awaken the Four Giants from their places of slumber), and rather than read the Terminans as a parable along the lines of the Tower of Babel, we might see them as a cultural force in their own right.

^{viii} In addition to the typical platforming of the *Mario* series, the gameplay of *Super Princess Peach* revolves around tapping one of four hearts – Joy, Rage, Gloom, or Calm – to unleash the title character’s emotions (called *vibes*) in order to get past certain obstacles. The *gloom* vibe, for example, makes Peach cry a stream of tears which can make plants grow or put out fires, while tapping the *rage* vibe consumes her in a pillar of fire that can burn wooden platforms or melt ice. The sexist implications of *emotion powers*, as well as the game’s uncharacteristic lack of difficulty and gendered marketing, has been noted by reviewers such as *Gamespot’s* Ryan Davis (2006) and *Screenrant’s* Joseph Fonseca (2021), and *Feminist Frequency’s* Anita Sarkeesian mentions the title in her “Tropes vs. Women in Video Games” series (2013).

^{ix} For more on fan practices and projects, see Henry Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers* (1992) and *Convergence Culture* (2006).