



BY LINCOLN REIGN

Story and characters property of Nintendo™
Novelized by Lincoln Reign
August 2017

CHAPTER THIRTEEN:	▲▲▲▲▲▲▲	103
<u>THE GATE OF TIME</u>		
CHAPTER FOURTEEN:	▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲	108
<u>ZELDA</u>		
CHAPTER FIFTEEN:	▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲	115
<u>THE FINAL TEST</u>		
CHAPTER SIXTEEN:	▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲	122
<u>THE TRIFORCE</u>		
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN:	▲▲▲▲▲▲	126
<u>THE FINAL FIGHT</u>		
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN:	▲▲▲▲▲▲	137
<u>SAYING GOODBYE</u>		



This is a tale that you Humans have passed down through uncounted generations...

It tells of a war of unmatched scale and ferocity, the likes of which would never be seen again.

One dark, fateful day, the earth cracked wide and malevolent forces rushed forth from the fissure.

They mounted a brutal assault upon the surface people, driving the land into deep despair...

They burnt forests to ash, choked the land's sweet springs, and murdered without hesitation.

They did all this in their lust to take the ultimate power protected by her Grace, the goddess.

Handed down by gods of old, this power gave its holder the means to make any desire a reality.

Such was the might of the ultimate power that the old ones placed it in the care of the goddess.

To prevent this great power from falling into the hands of the evil swarming the lands...

The goddess gathered the surviving Humans on an outcropping of earth.

She sent it skyward, beyond the reach of the demonic hordes. Beyond even the clouds.

With the Humans safe, the goddess joined forces with the land dwellers and fought the evil forces, sealing them away.

At last, peace was restored to the surface.

This is a tale that you humans have told for many ages, generation to generation...

But there are other legends, long hidden away from memory, that are intertwined with this tale.

Now, a new legend bound to this great story stands ready to be revealed.

A legend that will be forged by your own hand.

Prologue: The Legend



CHAPTER 1

SCAVENGER HUNT

The ground shook menacingly as the trees shook in the eerie breeze. No creatures stirred for fear of the great evil presence they felt around them.

Suddenly, from the darkness cast by the branches above, the ground broke. A large scaly beast clawed out of the earth, pushing aside the trees and bellowing into the night sky. Waves of dark energy emanated in all directions as the creatures of the forest fled.

The beast was awake, crippled from his long imprisonment but furious nonetheless. Its power returned to it, it could feel it. Soon enough, it would have the strength to exact its revenge.

Soon enough, it would destroy... her.



As the morning sun broke through the clouds beneath the village, the Loftwings stretched their wings as the students of the knight's academy trained for the upcoming wing ceremony. It was business as usual; each Skyloftian beginning their day as they always had, in peace. Even with the bustle of training, things were hardly different than the day before.

Not much ever changed in the quiet village of Skyloft. The shopkeepers set up their wares in the bazaar; Beetle peddled his shop in his floating hut above the village; the knights patrolled the skies; and the villagers arrived at the markets for work or... or, well, whatever it was they usually did I suppose.

But there was one person whose routine had changed considerably with the upcoming wing ceremony. Her name, was Zelda.

While the knights of the academy were hard at work training themselves and their Loftwings, Zelda was busy memorizing lines and

sewing uniforms. She found most of it dull, and often snuck away from her duties to join her friends in the sky. But there was one thing she enjoyed working on; the Ballad of the Goddess.

It was Zelda's duty to portray the Goddess herself in the wing ceremony, and that meant learning to play the harp, and singing.

As her Loftwing descended towards her, she finished her song.

"en dashevu, nobe, shondu
tje shotu kewenu sale
en dashevu, nobe, doju
tje shotu nobe dezu dotshe"

Zelda lowered her harp and pulled out a letter she'd had tucked in her belt and handed it to her Loftwing. She'd have delivered it herself, but her father, Gaepora, was on the path there and she knew he'd only turn her around and tell her to continue her practicing.

Besides, her bird knew the way, it's not like the academy was very far. Her Loftwing took the letter in its beak and flapped its wings, soaring off into the sky. Zelda smiled, always taking joy in watching the Loftwings take flight.

But her smile dropped when she felt a strange presence. She turned, but there was nothing there.

Perhaps... she imagined it?

—

There was one other person whose day was about change, if he'd only wake up to see it. His name, was Link. And, just as always, this boy was asleep long after the others in the village had awoken. But this dream he had now was, odd.

Link felt a warm glow as he opened his eyes, but found no light. All around him he saw only darkness. But before he could even ask himself where he was or what he was doing, a large beast erupted from the ground in front of him!

A large beast of black scales, a large gaping mouth stretched upwards in an angry roar. Black smoke curled off of the beast, making the already dark area he was in even darker.

Then a light shone above the beast, a blue light. And a voice.

"Rise, Link... The time has come for you to awaken..." The light shone brighter, flickering as the words echoed in Link's head. "You are

fated to have a hand in a great destiny, and it will soon find you..."

Link wished he could conjure up a sword, or at least a shield to protect himself with, but he was only capable of standing there, facing the demon and the light.

"The time has come for you to awaken," the voice repeated.

With a final roar, the light faded and the demon disappeared from view. But though it seemed to be over, Link could still hear screeching from somewhere nearby.

He turned, and found himself face to face with Zelda's Loftwing.

Link screamed as he awoke, falling from his bed with a sharp thud. He groaned, thinking how half of Skyloft must have heard him.

He cracked open his eyes and stared at the ceiling. Then above him he saw Zelda's Loftwing again, its large head poking through his window. It simply spat the letter him, squawked, and flew away. The window slammed shut behind it, leaving only a few feathers behind.

With a heavy sigh, Link sat up and rested against his bed, picking up the letter. Zelda's name was scrawled across the bottom of the envelope, but Link didn't need to see her name to know it was from her. He opened the letter and began to read it.

"Hey, sleepyhead. I know how much you like to sleep in, so I'm guessing this letter will be your alarm clock this morning. Did I guess right?"

Link scoffed, half smiling. He could almost hear her voice in the words, always sounding so matter-of-factly.

"Rise and shine, Link! Today's the Wing Ceremony! You promised to meet me before it starts, remember? You'd better not keep me waiting. -Zelda"

Link tensed at that last line. *She's gonna be mad*, he thought.

He tossed the letter on his desk, put on a clean shirt, and hurried out the door.

As Link arrived at the statue of the goddess, he was met with the sounds of Zelda's harp, echoing through the courtyard. She continued her song without mind of anyone nearby, not that she would have to mind, as after all the practice during the last few weeks hadn't gone unrewarded. Her efforts showed, and the villagers walking through the streets nearby didn't mind the music as they went about their mornings.

Then the music stopped as Zelda noticed Link. She smiled at him

from across the courtyard. "Hey!" she called. "Good morning, Link."

Link waved. "Good morning!"

"I'm glad to see my Loftwing got you out of bed," Zelda said, standing up to greet him. "I was pretty sure you'd sleep in and forget to meet me this morning."

"One of these days I'm gonna put a lock on the window," Link joked. "Then you'll have to actually come get me yourself."

Zelda spun around, so focused on everything that was about to happen that she didn't really hear Link's remark. Instead she twirled in her dress and held up the harp. Until now, the knights in training hadn't been allowed to see the work Zelda had done (one of the reasons her father would've stopped her from seeing Link earlier) so now that Link was here Zelda was excited to show off a bit.

"But look at this instrument!" she exclaimed, holding the harp up in front of Link. "And look at this outfit! They're mine to use today in the ceremony, since I'll be playing the role of the goddess."

Zelda looked at the harp in awe, its golden surface catching the light of the sun. "Aren't they beautiful?" she asked. "Especially this instrument! They told me it's just like the one the goddess was said to have in the legends. It sounds gorgeous to."

"What is it?" Link asked. He realized after he said it just how stupid it sounded out loud, but this time Zelda actually heard him. He hurried to explain. "I've, never really looked into musical instruments I mean."

Zelda laughed. "I asked father about it," she answered, hinting at how she'd actually never heard of one before either. "He says it's called a harp."

Then she immediately went back into rushing to explain all the other things she'd done, like the speeches she'd memorized and the songs she'd planned to sing. But eventually it came back around to her dress.

"And look at these clothes!" she said excitedly, practically bouncing. "I made this wrap myself, and we get to use it in today's ceremony! Between the harp and this outfit, I'm going to make a great goddess today!"

Link laughed. "It's gonna be fun isn't it?" he asked. "We've spent such a long time in the academy, I'm actually surprised the day's finally here."

"Well that's why I called you out here," Zelda told him.

"What do you mean?"

"I got you up early this morning because I wanted you to be the

first to see me like this, Link." She folded her arms behind her back and tilted her head slightly, looking up at Link.

Link was about to respond but he was interrupted before he could even speak.

"Ah, there you are, Zelda. Are you all prepared for today's ceremony?"

Link and Zelda both faced the entrance to the courtyard where Gaepora was walking towards them. "Oh, hello, father," Zelda said.

"Ah, Link, you're here too, Outstanding." Link heard the slight irritation in Gaepora's words, knowing that he'd interrupted Zelda, but Gaepora was a kind man all the same. What's done is done, though he wouldn't pass up an opportunity to take a jab at Link. "It's encouraging to see you up so early, given your capacity for sleep. No doubt today's ceremony had you too excited to close your eyes for once!"

Link chuckled. "You got me," he sighed, shrugging. "Guess this was too important."

Gaepora gave a hearty laugh, patting Link on the shoulder a little too hard. "If you win today's ceremonial race, you'll get to participate in the post-race ritual with Zelda, so give it your best out there."

Link knew what he meant; Zelda had worked hard in preparation for this day. If Link ended up ruining it for her, he'd have to answer to her father. And knowing the other students at the academy...

But it seemed Zelda didn't have as much confidence.

"Yes. About that..." Zelda lowered her gaze to the ground, thinking of how to word what she was about to say. Finally she looked up at her father and hoped for the best. "Father, I don't know if he can do it!"

Link winced.

"Recently Link hasn't been practicing much at all for the ceremony!" Zelda continued. "And even when he's out riding his Loftwing, he's just lazily gliding around. Probably daydreaming! ... I don't know what he's thinking. He's going to have to be in perfect control of his bird to win today."

Link looked away from her, not sure what to say.

Luckily Gaepora was able to speak up for him. "No need to worry yourself, Zelda." Link gave him a thumbs-up and Gaepora sighed. "Though you may have a point."

Link's hopeful smile dropped and he just put his hands behind his head, not wanting to say anything that would make things any worse.

"Today's Wing Ceremony tests the skill of the rider as well as his bond to his bird," Gaepora continued, folding his arms. "Victory will not

come easily."

He turned his attention directly at Link. "And, as you pointed out, I haven't seen him practicing as hard as some of the other students. But you've known him since you were both very little. You should know better than to fret about him!"

"Exactly!" Link said reassuringly. "Don't worry, I've got this!"

"You see, Link and his Loftwing share a special connection. I've never seen anything quite like it." He looked up at the sky, a few wispy clouds above them and some knights passing by on their usual routes. "As you know, each of us in Skyloft is but one half of a pair. We are only made whole by our Loftwing, the guardian birds that the goddess bestows upon each of us as a symbol of her divine protection."

As the knights disappeared behind the courtyard wall Gaepora turned back to them. "When we are young, every one of us meets our Loftwing under the great statue of the Goddess. It's quite a big moment, as I'm sure you recall."

Now he returned his gaze to Link. "Ahh, but that first meeting between Link and his Loftwing was extraordinary. The bird that came to him was a Crimson Loftwing. It is a breed so rare we were sure for some time that it had vanished from the line."

By this time Link had actually stopped paying attention. He was never one for listening to Gaepora's speeches, which he made often. Link expected this to go on for hours as usual and was no busy keeping an eye above him, half expecting his bird to come flying in at any time.

Yet Gaepora droned on. "Yes, and the boy and his bird seemed to share a profound connection from the moment they met." He looked down at Zelda. "Do you recall when Link and that Loftwing of his first met? What a sight!"

Zelda watched Link as he absentmindedly paced back and forth a bit, now looking at the small dock near the back of the courtyard.

"The little boy just hopped up on the bird and gracefully flew away," Gaepora laughed. "Without even a moment of instruction! They were meant for each other." He saw the way she looked at him. "And judging by how jealous you were that day, I'd say the friendship he shared with his bird didn't go unnoticed by you, my dear."

Link looked back up to the sky, a gentle breeze on the wind. It was almost calming, but for some reason, something suddenly felt off.

Gaepora didn't seem to take mind to it however, now almost as absentminded as Link had been. "Ah, but who can blame you?" he asked. "I'm sure you weren't the only one envious of the powerful bond shared by

Link and his bird. Anyone who is a part of something special is bound to catch some nasty looks sooner or later, hoo hoo."

Zelda sighed, then looked up and glared at her father. "This contest is nothing to laugh at, Father!" she exclaimed. "This ceremony is part of the final test for those training to become knights of Skyloft!" She lowered her gaze once more. "If Link doesn't fly fast enough during the race..."

She looked back up at her father, no longer angry as much as she was... lost. She was deeply worried about Link. "What if Link messes up his big chance?" she asked. "What if he's not allowed to become a knight?"

Gaepora saw her worry and rested a heavy hand on her shoulder. "Calm down, my dear," he told her. "It will be fine. Honestly, it's almost as though you become a completely different person when you worry about Link."

Zelda nodded and Gaepora took his hand away. She held her harp tightly at her side and strode over to Link. "Listen Link," she said, snapping him back to attention. "You'd better fly your heart out today. At the very least, you need to squeeze in a little practice time before the race!"

Gaepora sighed as he watched his daughter drag Link away.

She held his arm as she made towards the small dock. "Come on!" she shouted. "You'll thank me later!"

"Um, Zelda," Link stammered, trying to catch his footing.

Zelda pushed him to the edge of the dock. "Here we are," she said, smiling. "Go on now. Jump off the edge and call your Loftwing. It's almost time for the ceremony, so try to practice seriously for once!"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you!" Link argued. "Something's wrong. I don't... I can't sense my bird."

"Hmm?" Zelda raised an eyebrow. "Oh yeah? You can't 'sense' your bird out there?"

"Yes!" Link answered.

"Oh, I get it. You're trying to weasel out of having to practice!" Link sighed but Zelda's smile widened. "Nice try, but you're not fooling me."

"Wait-"

"Off you go." Zelda pushed him one last time, sending Link tumbling over the edge.

He was used to this by now. The falling anyway, not getting shoved off a cliff, that doesn't usually happen. But the familiar feeling of the air rushing up at him calmed him at least. *Maybe I'm imagining things.*

He whistled, calling his bird

...

Link looked around, seeing no sign of his Loftwing.

Gaepora looked over the edge, standing next to Zelda and looking down at Link. "Hmm... His bird sure is taking a long time to get here..."

"Something's wrong!" Zelda exclaimed, jumping off the dock. She whistled for her own bird which immediately flew down to her. Meanwhile Link continued trying to call his Loftwing which still wasn't anywhere nearby.

Zelda landed on her bird and grabbed Link in its talons. "Hang in there, Link!" she told him, flying back up to the goddess statue. "I've got you!"

Zelda came to a halt, hovering above the courtyard. Her bird let go of Link in the grass then sat down. Her Loftwing wasn't used to being called on such short notice, or to being used for moving quickly like Link's. Hers was a bird meant for slow traveling or sending a message, so when it sat down it gave a few heaving breathes, tired.

Gaepora came over to them as well, seeing the shocked condition of both Zelda's bird and Link. "Are you two alright?"

"I think we're fine," Link answered, sitting up and rubbing his head. "But, I'm not sure what happened."

Zelda pet her bird. "I'm sorry friend," she apologized. "I didn't mean to push you so hard. You didn't sprain your wing, did you?"

"This is very odd, Link," Gaepora said numbly, looking up at the sky. "What could have possibly happened to your Loftwing? For a bird to ignore the call of his master... It's unheard of." He looked down at Link who was brushing himself off, getting to his feet. "And you still can't sense your bird nearby, eh, Link?"

"No," Link sighed, shaking his head. "It's not here."

"This is quite a problem," Gaepora huffed. "Especially considering the wing ceremony is about to start..."

Zelda knelt by her bird, not looking at Link. "Link," she said. "When you said you couldn't sense your Loftwing, well... I should have believed you... I'm sorry."

"Don't worry," Link told her. "All that matters now is finding it and making sure it's okay."

Zelda nodded. "I need to tend to my own Loftwing, so I'll catch up with you later. You'd better go on ahead and see if you can find where your bird has gone!"

"Right," Link agreed. Automatically he took a few steps forward,

but suddenly the bell atop the academy building rang out in the distance.

"My, how did it get to be so late?" Gaepora asked. "If I recall correctly, this year Instructor Horwell is presiding over the ceremony. Link, you should go explain the situation to him and see if he's willing to delay the race a little so that you can find your bird."

Link nodded. "Right," he said again, taking another step.

"But, father," Zelda started. "You're the headmaster of the academy! If Link asks Instructor Horwell, he'll probably just come talk to you about it."

Gaepora stood there for a moment, not having thought of that. "Ah, quite true," he realized. "As usual, you make an excellent point, my dear. Very well, I'll explain the situation to him myself. Link, run along and tell Instructor Horwell to come see me in my quarters."

Finally Link was allowed to leave. He made for the exit of the courtyard and hurried down the bridge to the path leading to the academy. Turning at the gate that led to the village, he headed southwest along the path until he reached the academy doors. There he saw Instructor Horwell standing by the building on the lower grounds. Link leaned over the edge of the academy and called out to him.

"Something you need?" Horwell asked, looking up at him.

"Headmaster wants to see you in his quarters," Link told him.

"Whatever for?" Horwell asked.

"Something happened to my bird," Link answered. "It's gone missing."

"Oh dear," Horwell gasped. "Well I do hope you find it. I'll speak with the Headmaster straight away."

Link nodded and was off again. This time he headed into the village, making his way back and going through the gate he'd passed. There was a gate by the academy as well, but it was locked today. As he entered the market area of Skyloft he kept an eye out for one person in particular. Link knew that if anyone had something to do with the disappearance of his bird it would be this person.

Crossing passed the bazaar which was currently closed as well today for the ceremony, Link stood at the edge of a short drop overlooking the plaza where the ceremony would take place. And lo and behold, there he was, Goose.

He could even hear them talking about what they'd done.

"... You know, Goose, that sure was a pain, what with all the scratching and pecking." Stritch, one of Goose's personal goons and fellow knight-in-training at the academy, was currently massaging

Groose's back. He treated them like slaves more than friends, but if they minded they didn't show it.

"Course it was," Groose boasted. "You thought a big Crimson Loftwing like that was gonna go down without a fight? But we got him, and I don't care how tough those birds are supposed to be. He's not getting out of that pen anytime soon, boys."

Link crossed his arms and glared at them from behind. Groose stood, not noticing him, but Cawlin and Stritch turned and saw him. They each took a step back, and Groose noticed the tension. He finally turned to see Link and grimaced at the sour look he was giving.

"Whoa!" Groose exclaimed. "Link! So, uh... yeah. Just how long you been standing there?"

Reclaiming his composure the familiar doofy grin of his returned. With a little more confidence, Groose began pacing around Link. "What's your problem anyway?" he asked. "Oh, wait... I got it. You're here to talk about today's race. I can see it in those dopey eyes of yours."

He began exaggerating his movements, dropping to his knees. "They're pleading; 'Oh, Groose, can you find it in your heart to let me win today? Please!'" He got up and jabbed a finger at Link. "You're just desperate to win so you can get some alone time with Zelda up on the statue of the Goddess at the end of the ceremony. Well, sorry, pal. Groose doesn't do charity for wimps. My advice? Work hard and wish with all your heart. You might even come in second."

If you're so sure of yourself why did you steal my bird? Link thought bitterly, but he didn't say it. Instead he said; "Nice hair." Which in hindsight probably wasn't his smartest move.

"Don't mess with my do!" Groose growled, pointing at himself for emphasis. He pointed back and Link, jabbing a finger at his nose. "You know, we're all getting tired of how you never let anyone forget you and Zelda go way back. You've been friends since you were kids? Big deal. It doesn't change the fact that you float through life with your head in the clouds."

Link didn't feel like pointing out to him that technically all their heads were in the clouds.

Groose noticed Link's act of biting his tongue and crossed his arms, glaring down at him. "Would you wake up, straighten up, and grow a backbone already? Dopes like you are dragging our honorable academy's name through the mud!"

"And just who might you be talking about, Groose?"

They all turned to see Zelda standing in the center of the plaza.

She'd heard the whole thing, and she was not impressed.

"Oh... Zelda," Goose stammered, suddenly feeling very uncomfortable. "Hey. Nah, it's... uh..."

This was one argument Link didn't want to step into the middle of. He stepped aside as Zelda walked right up to Goose, jabbing a finger in *his* face. "Don't even try it, Goose!" she barked. "You're picking on Link again, aren't you? He's a student at the academy, like all of us. Why do you insist on bullying him around so much?"

Goose awkwardly rubbed the back of his neck, not looking her in the eye. "Yeah... I suppose..." he mumbled his words so they were barely audible.

Yet still Zelda heard him. "You suppose?" she scoffed. "Suppose what?"

Goose's face turned bright red. "I... suppose..." he forced himself to try and not smile. "You... Er..." Finally he gave up trying to do anything and turned his back to them. "Pfft! Forget it! I wasn't supposing anything, OK?"

He made his way to the edge of the plaza to the docking area and his friends followed closely behind. "OK, we're outa here, boys. Later, Link! Hope you find your bird, or else you're gonna have to sit out today's race! That could be a major setback towards knighthood, so find that bird or get real used to the taste of failure! It's your special flavor."

They all jumped back off the dock, their birds swooping in under them to catch them. Then they were gone, flying off into the distance.

"I hate to say it," Zelda growled. "But I'm beginning to suspect that those blockheads had something to do with your Loftwing's disappearance."

I guess you missed the beginning of the conversation where they outright admitted to it, huh? Link thought. He folded his arms and stood next to her.

"Link, those guys aren't going to help us find your bird, so we'd better start searching."

"Any idea where to start?" Link asked. "I was kinda hoping they'd have something more to say about it, give us a hint at least."

Zelda stepped away from him, towards the dock. "I'll fly around Skyloft and see if I can spot any trace of your bird," she told him. "Father said he'd talk to Instructor Horwell about delaying the start of the Wing Ceremony, so don't worry. We'll find your bird in time."

"I'll ask around the academy," Link decided. Zelda nodded and started towards the edge of the dock. "And Zelda, thanks... for earlier."

Zelda smiled back at him and waved she jumped off.
With that, Link hurried back to the academy.

Link spent the next hour talking to some of the other students. Fledge wasn't much help, and he seemed busy with something else. All Fledge told him was that they wouldn't delay the race forever, so Link should hurry and ask someone else.

So Link moved on, eventually speaking with Karane who told him that at best, Link could at least hope his bird was still in Skyloft and not on some other island he could no longer get to.

After that he spoke with the chef, and Instructor Owlén. Neither of which knew anything.

You'd think that as loud and boastful as Goose is someone would've overheard something, Link thought as he made his way down to the sparring hall. There he found Pipit and Fledge.

"Hey, Link!" Pipit called, giving a half wave as Link came over. "Just in time."

"For what?" Link asked.

"You gonna tell him?" Pipit asked Fledge.

Fledge looked at his feet, unsure if he should remain quiet or not. Finally, he forced himself to speak up. "Goose and the others captured your bird," he mumbled. "I'm-I'm sorry, I didn't say anything sooner... I overheard them talking about it... and they told me to stay quite or else he'd lock me up too."

"Locked up?" Link asked. "Where?"

Fledge looked back at the ground again. "The-the waterfall," he stammered. "Behind the waterfall."

Link nodded and was already turning around, but Pipit stopped him. "It's dangerous to go alone," he told him. "I can't go with you, but I'd recommend grabbing your sword from the sparring hall first."

Link nodded. "Thank you," he said, running inside the sparring hall.

"When Goose finds out can we at least pretend Link found it on his own?" Fledge asked.

Pipit chuckled, waving as he started leaving. "Sure," he told him. "You never said a word."

Link shut the door behind him and walked up to Eagus. "I need my sword," he told him.

"Is the wing ceremony over!?" Eagus asked. "Wait you won? Well congratulations I guess."

"No," Link said. He quickly explained what had happened and what he had to do. Eagus nodded, understanding.

"Just make sure to bring it back," he told Link. "If it turns out you *don't* win the race, I can't let you keep it."

Link strapped on the belt and bowed. "Thank you," he said. "I'll return it as soon as I can."

"Good luck!" Eagus said as Link hurried out.

Chapter 1: Scavenger Hunt



CHAPTER 2

THE WING CEREMONY

As Link ran down the streets of Skyloft he noticed how empty they were becoming. Everyone was already on their way to the ceremony, which meant Link had to hurry. Even if they were delaying it, he'd make everyone mad if he made them wait too long.

And then if I lost they'd never forgive me, Link thought. He growled at himself. *Think about that later.*

He skipped across the boulders in the river and bolted up the hill to the cave by the waterfall. There Link drew his sword, and entered.

Inside was dark and damp. A bit of light broke through cracks in the ceiling, and water dripped from above as well. Training was often held here, fighting the little monsters that crept inside, so he was used to dealing with the Keese and Chuchus that inhabited the cave.

It was natural to him, sword-fighting, a simple task he could do without thinking, so it was no surprise that he easily found his way through to the other side with little complications. Most of the creatures actually tended to avoid the Humans, which is why they lived in caves instead of invading their homes, but there were still a few who were brave enough to try and attack so Link was glad Pipit reminded him to grab a sword.

When at last Link had arrived at the end of the cave he sheathed his sword and looked down the path that followed the edge of Skyloft. Here there was nothing below him, and the path was thin. With his bird he would've had nothing to worry about, but now if he fell there would be nothing to stop him.

Luckily, after a moment of walking close to the wall, falling wasn't a concern anymore. From around the corner he saw Zelda flying towards him on her Loftwing. She dropped down on the edge and ran up to him.

"Hey, Link," she smiled. "I was hoping I'd find you here."

"How'd you know where I was?" Link asked.

"I heard you'd gone searching for your bird around the waterfall," Zelda answered. "So I thought I'd fly around and help you look."

Zelda looked around them. The ledge only led one way but she was half hoping Link's Loftwing had been in the cave. "How's your search going? Any sign of your Loftwing?"

"Not yet," Link said sadly. "I actually wouldn't be surprised at this point if Goose changed his mind about where he hid my bird since Fledge overheard him."

"Oh no," Zelda gasped. "Well, let's not lose hope yet. There's a place up ahead that Goose and his gang are always hanging around. Maybe we'll find something there!"

Zelda turned her head slightly, looking over her shoulder at the clouds below them. "Huh?" she mumbled. "Who... Who's that? Who's calling me?"

She spoke so quietly that Link couldn't hear what she'd said. So instead he just gave her a confused look. "Something wrong?" he asked.

"Oh," Zelda said sharply. "Sorry, Link. I got distracted for a moment. Let's go!"

She moved passed him, already moving on from whatever had happened and now ignoring safety by hurrying down the narrow path. Link held a hand on his sword as he followed, Zelda's Loftwing gliding beside them.

Zelda ran ahead, turning the corner and calling back to Link; "Look! There he is!"

Link rushed forward and skid to a stop at the small landing in front of Zelda. There he was indeed, trapped in a small cave and blocked by planks of wood. Luckily however, Goose wasn't very smart and instead of just bolting the wood to the rock wall he tied the wood to the bolts.

"No doubt about it," Zelda said. "That's your Loftwing Link!"

As soon as it saw them the Loftwing started squawking and flapping its wings as best it could trapped in such a small hole.

"Hold on," Link told it, drawing his sword. "I'll get you out in a second." He used his sword to cut the rope that bound the wooden planks. When the last board fell his Loftwing jumped out of the hole and nudged its head against Link's arm.

Link patted its beak as it stretched its wings. Then it darted away from him and launched itself off the ledge. It circled a few times and glided happily now that it was free.

"We should hurry, Link," Zelda told him. "Now that your Loftwing

is free, you should fly to the ceremony..."

"Something wrong?" Link asked as Zelda stared passed the clouds. She had a strange look on her face, not quite sorrow but not confusion either.

"But before you go, I have to ask you something," Zelda lifted her head a little, looking at the clouds above them now. "... I heard this voice a few moments ago. Did you hear it too?"

"Is that what distracted you earlier?" Link asked. "... No, I didn't hear anything, sorry."

Zelda nodded. "It's been happening a lot lately," she said. "It's the strangest feeling... Almost like someone is calling out to me."

Link almost told her about his dream then, but decided against it. It couldn't be the same thing, and she'd probably think he was only making fun of her anyway. Instead, he stayed quiet.

"Have you ever wondered what's beneath the clouds?" Zelda asked, stepping closer to the ledge. The breeze was heavier here, and it was made a bit stronger by their Loftwings as they flew passed them. "Some say that it's an empty, barren place, or even that there's nothing at down below, but I just have this feeling that they're wrong."

"We've know that there was nothing down there our whole lives," Link told her. "What *could* be down there? It's just clouds."

Zelda shook her head. "Some of father's old texts talk about a place called the surface. The old tales describe a whole world under there, far more vast than Skyloft. The thing is, no one's ever been down there to see it, and our Loftwings won't fly through the cloud barrier."

"If no one's ever been down there to see it," Link started. "Then how are there texts about it? It could just be a story you read, nothing more."

Zelda brushed her hair out of her eyes, looking at the thunderhead that stood north of Skyloft. "... But I can't help imagining the wild things that might be waiting below. Someday, I want to see for myself."

"Well I don't," Link laughed. "A world bigger than Skyloft seems *too* big, I'd get lost too easily. I'd prefer just the open sky."

That snapped Zelda back to reality. She remembered just how late they were. "Oh, sorry, Link," she apologized. "We don't have time to talk! Let's get going. Look, your bird's waiting for you!"

Link smiled. "Right!" he huffed. "We have people waiting for us too. Come on!" This time he was happy to jump over the edge, knowing that his Loftwing would there to catch him. He and Zelda whistled for their birds and the Loftwings came swooping under them.

They lowered towards the back of the plaza, the whole village waiting for them. The Instructors and the Headmaster stood off to the side by the lighthouse while the knights-in-training rested by the small barn off to the side, and the spectators stood at the back of the dock.

"Your Loftwing really is amazing," Zelda whispered to Link as they stepped off their birds. "Especially considering everything the poor guy has been through this morning."

"We've been through a lot," Link smiled, petting his bird's beak. "I'd be surprised if he *didn't* come out on top."

Zelda bowed. "I'm going to go and tell father what happened."

She left him and Link headed towards the other knights. He figured it was where he was supposed to wait, but seeing Goose made him wish this was all already over.

"Well, well, if it isn't Link!" Goose laughed as Link came over. "Word around the plaza is you found that dumb bird of yours."

"No thanks to you," Link muttered under his breath.

"Well, that's just great. Because you and your dumb bird can't tell time, all the pre-race warm-ups me and the guys did were for nothing'. Now I'm all stiff."

And whose fault is that? Link hissed.

Goose continued with no regard for Link's anger. "We've been waiting forever for the race to start, and they delay it for you? I don't get it. The big flake gets special treatment?"

"I'm not a flake!" Link argued. "You're just a thief and a sore loser!"

Goose lowered his stance, getting in Link's face. "You're almost a man, yet you still can't go anywhere without Zelda," he growled. "I bet you can't even decide what to have for lunch on your own, huh?"

Link didn't have a response to that. In truth he'd noticed that before on several occasions, the way every time Link gets in trouble Zelda's always the one who has to bail him out. But Goose wasn't done making him feel bad.

"And don't think we haven't noticed the smug looks," Goose continued. "Ooh, Zelda and I are BEST friends. We go everywhere together.' Ugh!"

"Just shut up," Link told him. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"...You think you're pretty suave, don't you?" Goose asked.

"Well? Don't you!"

Behind Goose even his own friends seemed a little on edge.

"Goose has been going on forever about how he's going to be the one to be with Zelda," Cawlin muttered. "He's really got his pompadour in a ruffle about her!"

Stritch only stifled his laughter.

Goose straightened up and looked down at Link. "I hate to break it to you," he lied. "But today's the day I bust up this adorable little fantasy-land you're living in." He smiled, now mostly talking to himself. "Zelda's playing the role of the goddess at today's ceremony, and I'm gonna be the one to claim that sailcloth." He looked back down at Link, a jerkish grin on his face. "When I heard she made it herself, man, no way was I gonna let some scrawny clown snatch that prize from me."

Goose turned away from Link. "Oh yes," he laughed. "That sailcloth--Zelda's sailcloth--will be mine! Duh huh huh... Oh, man, I bet she was thinking about me when she was stitching it... Yup, I can see it now. First, I win the big race, and then Zelda and I finish the ceremony together on the statue. Just the two of us... It'll be our special moment alone. Nobody is stopping me and Zelda from having our moment. Oh, it's so real I can... I can see it..."

"All I see is a big dumb oaf," Link muttered. Goose didn't hear him however, he was stuck in his own fantasy-land.

But his friends were doing everything they could to snap him out of it.

"Goose!" Cawlin hissed. "Psst, Goose!"

"Behind you!" Stritch hissed. "Right behind you!"

Goose looked up, then turned around and saw Zelda glaring at him. "Gah!" he exclaimed.

Zelda put her hands on her hips and narrowed her eyes. "Care to explain just what you meant by 'our special moment alone'?"

Goose panicked, not sure what to say anymore. "I...uh, nothing big, really. Just... Just..." He looked at Link. "Link! Yeah, I was just telling my buddy here how glad I was he found that red bird of his. Boy, am I looking forward to a fair race!"

Goose ran his hand through his hair, making sure it was still in place, and smiled brightly. "Anyhow, later, Zelda. Look for me during the race. I'll be the one pulling off all the dangerous moves."

He strutted away and Zelda turned her sour gaze to Cawlin and Stritch.

"Hey, Goose!" Stritch called. "Wait up!" They both went running

after Groose.

"Did you hear that guy?" Zelda scoffed. "A fair race? Yeah, the chances of that happening are just about less than zero." She shook herself off and smiled at Link. "Either way, don't let those fools get you down, Link! Just get out there and fly the best you can!"

Link nodded and behind him Gaepora began making announcements to the audience. "The Wing Ceremony will now begin! Participating students, please assemble!"

As the academy students made their way to the docking platform, the show began. Several graduated knights flew above them on Loftwings, leaving behind trails of different colored smoke. Trumpets played as the students lined up and the knights finished their short performance with a glide over the audience.

"Your attention, please," Owlen announced. "At last we are ready to begin the Wing Ceremony. I was beginning to worry that we'd have to proceed without Link, but luckily that is no longer a concern."

Groose elbowed Link with a sly grin on her face, as if to say; "I'd have just started without you."

"I'm glad you could all make it," Owlen continued. "Before we start, I'll explain the rules for today's competition." He motioned to his yellow feathered Loftwing beside him. "I have attached a small statuette to this bird, who I will then release to the skies. Whoever catches the bird and claims the statuette will be this year's champion."

Owlen lowered his arms and gave the students a stern look. "As you well know, today's champion will graduate to the next class, bringing him one step closer to knighthood. He will also receive a gift from the young woman chosen to play the role of the goddess in this year's ritual. Today is a special day for many reasons, but it is also the 25th anniversary of our fine institution. To celebrate the occasion, today's champion shall also receive his gift high atop the statue of the Goddess. I hear the young woman performing the role of the goddess this year has crafted the gift herself."

He looked out of the corner of his eye at the headmaster who nodded in response, so Owlen continued.

"And as you all well know, the role of the goddess this year will be performed by..." Owlen motioned to the side, but his expression stayed fixed. "The lovely Zelda."

Zelda waved at everyone smiling brightly as ever.

Owlen lowered his hand again and bowed to the students. "Let's see your finest flying out there," he told them. "Show me just how hard

you've been practicing."

Then he looked directly at Goose, a dark look behind his eyes. "Also, I want to see good, clean flying. Anyone caught interfering with other riders will answer to me!"

Goose didn't seem to be paying attention, so the Headmaster made it clear. "That goes double for you, Goose!"

Goose staggered a bit, alarmed by his sudden outburst.

"All right, gentlemen," Owlén finished. "Line up. At my command, the competition will begin."

Stritch, Goose, Link, and Cawlin lined up with the other knights-in-training facing the cliff. With the signal from Instructor Owlén, they were off, running down the dock.

Goose automatically took the lead, but Link knew that as fast as he was on foot, he was nowhere near as fast on Loftwing. One after the other they jumped from the dock and called their birds, dropping into the sky below. As they took off the yellow Loftwing set out behind them, flying back in the other direction.

The sound of trumpets grew fainter as they flew further away from Skyloft. Link sped towards the yellow Loftwing, circling back towards Skyloft as a few other knights did the same. Goose was one of them, and he was actively trying to stay in the lead. He pushed his way in front of the others, flying in their way so they couldn't go faster. Cawlin and Stritch split off from the rest, but other knights were right on their tails.

But Link saw an opening, and he took it.

Crossing the paths of two knights arguing with each other, Link sped up, bringing the Loftwing's wings in close and dropping. Then once he was a fair distance away from the others, he launched back upward, the wind carrying towards the yellow Loftwing.

It was right there! Link could see the sun glinting off the statuette as it swung in the Loftwing's talons. He was closing in on it, but somehow, so was Goose.

Behind him, he noticed why Cawlin and Stritch had circled around everyone else; they were closing the gaps in the competitors. The knights started ramming against one another, and a few ended up dropping out, falling back.

Link growled and set his sights back on the statuette.

But right before he could grab it, something sharp hit him in the back. He was knocked sideways, and Goose took the lead again.

That was when Link remembered something he should've done before hand, something he'd meant to do. Link grabbed the hilt of the

sword on his back.

His Loftwing squawked at him.

"What?" Link exclaimed. "It's not like I was going to stab him! I was just gonna knock him off course a bit!"

The Loftwing squawked again, sharper this time.

"Fine," Link sighed. "Then come on, we need to move faster."

His Loftwing flapped its wings hard, gaining speed as it charged towards Goose. Another knight came down from above then, taking the lead from Goose. That was all Link needed.

Using the other knight as a distraction, Link swooped up from below as Goose was furiously trying to swerve around the other knight.

Link reached up, and took the statuette from the yellow feathered Loftwing. The other knights behind him groaned as he held it up, showing that he'd obtained it.

Link laughed and slowed down, patting his Loftwing's head. "I guess we don't have to give the sword back." The bird squawked.

"Link!" Zelda shouted.

Looking up, Link realized they'd now flown beneath Skyloft, and before he could do anything Zelda jumped down. He raced forward as she crashed down on them, nearly knocking them both off the Loftwing. She shook herself off and sat up like nothing happened.

"Don't worry--I'm fine!" She said cheerfully. "Great flying, Link! Congratulations!"

"Thanks," Link nodded.

"Now we'd better get on with the ceremony!" Zelda spun around so she was sitting forward and pointed up at Skyloft, her bird now following behind them.

Their Loftwings fluttered back to the ground as Link and Zelda stood atop the Goddess statue. Zelda turned to him, holding out her hand. "Link," she said. "Hand me that bird Statuette you grabbed in the race. I must offer it to the goddess."

Link nodded and handed her the statuette and Zelda placed it in the shrine embedded into the goddess statue. Then, she stepped back, and pulled out her harp. As she started singing Link noticed how different the song sounded up here; louder and clearer than it had been in the courtyard below.

Somehow it seemed shorter as well, but Link knew Zelda couldn't

continue the ceremony and keep singing as well.

She clasped the harp at her side and held her hand out to Link. Link placed his hand in hers and knelt.

"Great goddess," Zelda began. "Guiding light and protector of our people, grant us your blessing and mercy as I act in your stead during this ceremony."

Now she spoke louder, so that her words echoed down below for the others of the village to hear. "Valiant youth who grasped victory at the celebration of the bird folk... In accordance with the old ways... I now bestow the blessings of the goddess upon you."

She untied her shawl and folded it in her arms, presenting it to Link. "The blessings of the goddess drift down from the heavens aloft a sail, which I now pass on to you."

Link accepted the gift and held it up, smiling proudly.

"Link! Quit goofing," Zelda whispered, trying not to laugh. "This is supposed to be a sacred ritual, remember?"

"Sorry," Link bowed.

"You know," Zelda continued. "They say that the goddess gave the sailcloth to her chosen hero long ago. Of course, the one you're holding isn't the same one. I've been working hard to finish making this sailcloth in time to give it to today's champion. I'm really glad I got to give it to you, Link. Make sure you take good care of it, OK?"

"I will," Link said. "I promise."

"Thanks for making it up here to do this with me today like you promised, Link." Zelda gave a warm smile, holding her hands behind her. "Now we really should finish the ritual."

She stepped up to him. "You... do know what happens at the end of the ritual... right?"

Zelda smiled and before he could respond, she spun him around. "You have to jump off the statue!" she exclaimed, pointing down. "Look down. See that big, round design on the courtyard below?"

"Yup," Link nodded.

"To finish the ceremony, you need to drop down right into the center of it!"

"Sounds easy enough," Link grinned.

"Just how brave are you?" Zelda asked. "If you were really fearless, you'd wait until the last second to use your sailcloth... So, ready to jump?"

"Sure-"

Zelda pushed him, sending him over the edge.

"Stop doing that!" Link called from his descent. Zelda only laughed from above as Link hurried to pull out the sailcloth. Just as Zelda had said, Link used it at the last possible second, dropping into a roll in the center of the courtyard.

There was light applause from the audience as Zelda flew down on her Loftwing to meet him. The festival music picked up again and Zelda set foot on the courtyard.

"That was perfect!" Zelda laughed. "You're amazing, Link!"

Link meant to turn to face her but stumbled a bit.

"Almost perfect," Zelda chuckled.

Link looked over his shoulder. The headmaster and the instructors were already ushering the spectators out of the courtyard. That was it, the ceremony was finally over.

"You know, Link," Zelda said, getting his attention back. "Seeing as how you won today... And with the weather being so nice..."


"What is it?" Link asked.

"You think maybe you'd like to, you know, fly around the clouds together?" It was obvious she had something on her mind, and Link remembered their conversation from earlier. She was still stuck on the surface.

Link looked over his shoulder again, everyone else had mostly gone. He turned back to Zelda and nodded. "Sure," he smiled. "Why not?"

She returned his smile and grabbed him by the arm, once again dragging him to the dock by the statue of the goddess.

Chapter 2: The Wing Ceremony



CHAPTER 3
A HERO IS BORN

The sky was clear as they glided along in the warm breeze of the early afternoon. Link laid back, lazily staring up at nothing, and Zelda flew up beside him.

"...Link?" Zelda asked. "Hey, Link!"

Link looked up at her. "Yeah?"

"Today was amazing," she said. "Watching you win the race and performing the ritual together..." She looked away, staring in front of her. "I'll always remember this. It really was wonderful."

Link smiled. "The way you say that," he noticed. "... I feel like you're leading to a downside here."

Zelda slowed down a bit and Link matched her speed, nearly stopping.

"You know... Link," Zelda started. "There's something I've been meaning to talk to you about."

Suddenly she fell quiet.

"And that is...?" Link looked over his shoulder at her, not watching ahead.

Then there was a flash of light and Link started paying attention.

"What is that?" Zelda exclaimed, gusts of wind forcing them back.

The sky darkened and before they knew what hit them a black tornado formed. Their Loftwings lost control and spiraled away from each other, the tornado only getting bigger.

"What's going on?" Link shouted.

Unable to move or control his bird, Link was helpless as he saw the strong winds knock Zelda off her Loftwing. She tumbled downward in the storm as their birds chirped in fear. Zelda screamed, calling for help, but Link couldn't get close enough.

As she began to disappear into the darkened clouds below, Link made a desperate dive to try and save her. But the winds were too powerful, and the sheer force of the winds threw him up into the grey sky. His Loftwing toppled, unconscious, and Link was quickly following.

Again Link found himself swallowed by the darkness, but this time he was falling. As the air rushed around him he heard the voice again, same as the one from the strange light in his dream.

"Link...?" It said.

Link watched above him (or below him as he upside down) as a figure appeared in the light. A young girl in blue, wearing a strange shawl that spread out almost like wings.

"I am waiting for you," she continued. "The time has come for you to awaken. You are vital to a mission of great importance. Link..."

It was like he blinked and everything changed. He was no longer looking at the blue girl, but instead Zelda. Everything flipped upside down then, winds rushing up at him as Zelda continued falling. He reached out to her, but just as before he was too far away.

Again, Link was powerless to do anything.

Then below them, the beast from before made its return, opening its mouth wide and swallowed her whole.

Link started himself awake, gasping for air in shock. It took him a moment to realize he was laying on his bed in his room. Just outside, through his open door, he saw Gaepora and Owlén speaking. Gaepora noticed Link sitting up.

"Ah, you are awake," Gaepora said. He nodded to Owlén who left as Gaepora entered the room, sitting down in a chair. "When your Loftwing carried you back, you were limp and unconscious. I feared the worst. Fortunately, you don't appear to have any serious injuries. For that much we can be grateful."

Link folded his hands in his lap, not looking him in the eye. "Gaepora... I..."

"But, Link..." Gaepora said. "Where's Zelda? She was with you, was she not? What's happened to my daughter?"

Link turned and hung his legs over the side of his bed. "We were just flying, talking," he answered. "Then suddenly, out of nowhere, this black tornado appeared." He took a shaky breath. "Zelda... she fell. I couldn't get to her..."

Gaepora shook his head. "A black tornado, you say?" he muttered. "Hmm. That was no ordinary storm." He stepped away, pacing.

Link tried to stand, wincing as his legs went stiff.

Gaepora stopped him before he fell over. "You must not push yourself. You're still recovering."

Link sighed heavily, sitting back.

Gaepora sat back down as well. "Tell me," he said quietly. "When you saw Zelda today, did anything about her seem... off?"

"I don't know," Link huffed. "Before we were hit by the storm... Before she fell... she said she'd been meaning to say something." He considered telling him about her wanting to see the surface, but he feared Gaepora would take that as Zelda being sent beneath the clouds... He didn't want to think of that.

"I... I did have a strange dream," he said, changing the topic from Zelda. "Something about a great mission. And..."

Link fell quiet, thinking to himself. He asked like he already knew something else had been wrong, so maybe it was important?

Gaepora gave him a look, like he was waiting for Link to confirm what he already knew.

"No... wait," Link sighed. "Zelda said something about the surface world. ... I don't know... it all happened so fast..."

Gaepora nodded, turning away. "I see. She was talking about the surface then? And you've been having dreams about a "great mission"? How interesting..." He stared at the window, keeping his thoughts to himself.

Link knew he was thinking the same things he was, about how Zelda might've fallen beneath the clouds. That was their worst fear.

"I'm sorry," Gaepora said suddenly, getting up and patting Link's shoulder. "I was lost in thought there for a moment. It's all very strange, but I doubt there's much of a connection between these things. I'm concerned for Zelda, but so long as she's with her Loftwing, I'm sure she'll be fine. Either way, daybreak has yet to arrive. It would be very difficult to spot one girl and her bird in the dark of night. It would also be very dangerous."

Gaepora headed towards the door, not looking him in the eye. Link knew he was trying to convince himself as much as he was trying to convince Link, but it didn't seem to be working for either of them.

Gaepora opened the door and turned back. "Rest now, Link," he ordered. "Zelda's going to be fine. She's out there alive, I know it."

He left and Link fell backwards on his bed.

The night drug on, moving ever slowly. Link kept glancing out his window to see the moon, then after what felt like hours would look again to see it hadn't moved.

He hated waiting; if Zelda was out there, alive, she could be hurt. Darkness shouldn't matter, not to the knights, right? This is the kind of thing they trained for!

It's the kind of thing I trained for, Link reminded himself.

He sat up, and stared at the door, hesitating.

He could walk out, right now, and find her himself. If no one else would, then why shouldn't he?

He'd probably lose his promotion to knight, but after a few minutes of finding that to be the only consequence other than possibly dying *with* Zelda, he decided it was worth the risk.

Link stood, strapped his sword to his back, and opened the door.

He'd half expected someone to be standing there, but to his surprise there was no one. As he continued down the hall of the academy however, he felt a presence. It felt similar to the blue girl in his dream, but... She couldn't possibly be real.

Stepping out of the building through the back entrance, the presence suddenly felt stronger. He tried to tell himself it was just his imagination, that it was late at night and he was just a little tired, but something about it was... strange.

Link arrived at the gate, planning to walk through, and jump off the nearest dock. But before he could step through the presence grew a little more powerful, but it seemed to point him in a different direction.

Trying you lead me somewhere? Link thought.

Link looked through the bars in the gate. No one else was around, and once again the moon seemed to have barely moved.

He thought about the 'great mission' the blue girl had told him about. If the presence was in fact her, did that have something to do with her leading him somewhere? There was no denying now that he felt *something* watching him, leading him.

Taking one last look at the gate, he stepped away from it, following the presence.

It led him down the path to the other gate, but once again it turned him in the other direction. He faced the Goddess Statue and began walking up the bridge. When he reached the courtyard, for a moment he thought he actually saw her; the blue girl! But she quickly vanished.

However, something had changed behind her. Link froze, staring at the door in the base of the Goddess Statue. The crest on the carvings glowed briefly and disappeared along with part of the wall and the blue girl. Now there was a stairway leading down into a darkened chamber.

Before he realized it, Link had already moved closer, his own curiosity getting the better of him. He couldn't see quite where it led exactly, but he could see a light at the bottom. There was something down there, and the presence of the blue girl seemed to be pushing him towards it.

Against his better judgment, Link entered the Goddess Statue.

Cautiously, he walked down the stairs, ducking his head down to see the chamber. When he reached the bottom he stopped once more. It was a large room, pillars in each of the eight corners. At the far end of the room was an altar with the familiar Loftwing crest, and in the center was a wide platform.

There, stood a sword in a pedestal.

Its hilt seemed to glow a faint blue color as Link stepped closer. And when he reached it, there, before him, appeared the girl. Her hair ended in a point on her head, and her shawl concealing her arms was clasped with the same gem as the sword she seemed to appear from.

She looked up at him. "The one chosen by my creator," she began. "I have been waiting for you. You will play a role in the great destiny."

Link was dumbfounded, but somehow managed to stumble his words out. "So you keep saying," he mumbled. "But... uh... what does that mean?"

"According to your social customs, I should provide you with my personal designation. Fi is the name I was given." Fi didn't seem to move, her face remaining blank as she spoke. "I was created for a single purpose, long before the recorded memory of your people. I must aid you in fulfilling the great destiny that is your burden to carry."

"Destiny," Link repeated back. "What does that *mean*?"

Fi moved to the side so that Link could see the sword behind her. "Come, Link," she said. "You must take up this sword. As the one chosen by my creator, *it* is your destiny."

Link hesitated, staring at Fi and the sword beside her. "You appeared in my dream," he said slowly. "... What does this have to do with Zelda?"

"The strange dreams troubling your sleep. My sudden appearance. Uncertainty surrounding the fate of one you hold dear." Fi hovered, looking down at him with unfeeling eyes. "Under the circumstances, it is

only logical that you would exhibit some apprehension."

Link took a step back, hand on his own sword. "I have more important things to do," he told her. "I'm sorry, but whatever this destiny is, I.."

"To minimize your uncertainty, allow me to share some information," Fi said before Link could leave. "My projections indicate that this information has a high probability of altering your current emotional state."

Link stood there, confused. He tried to think of something to say to that, but all that came out was; "What?"

For a moment, it almost seemed like Fi's expression changed slightly. She seemed a little more serious. "The one you seek, honorable Zelda, is still alive."

"Wh-"

"And the spirit maiden... the one you call Zelda... is another chosen one fated to be part of the same great mission." Once again, Fi moved slightly so that Link's attention would be shifted towards the sword in the pedestal. "Therefore, should you wish to meet with your friend, I highly recommend you take up this sword before you set out to search for her."

Link lowered his hand from his sword, but he didn't step forward.

"Does that information invigorate you?" Fi asked. "Are you ready to accept this sword?"

Link took a few steps toward Fi, looking at her. She floated upwards as he came closer, looking down at him again.

Link was silent for a second, thinking about his answer. Finally, when he decided, he looked at the sword. "...At least, if I find this is all some sort of trick, I'll be the one with the weapon."

"It seemed that further persuasive measures will not be required," Fi chimed. "In the name of my creator, draw the sword and raise it skyward."

He took the last step towards the sword and placed his hand firmly on the hilt. It looked to be fairly planted in its pedestal, but as Link claimed it slid out of the stone with ease. Hesitantly, he raised it into the air above his head. The blade glowed, gathering light around it.

It felt powerful.

Link lowered his sword, looking at its reflection. It was light and sturdy at the same time, balanced. The training sword on his back was meant as an easy-to-use blade that anyone could wield, but holding this sword he knew; it was specific to him.

"Recognition complete, Master..."

Link looked away from the sword. "Eh, uh... Link, is fine."

Fi nodded. "Link... My master."

It was all a bit overwhelming. Fi appearing outside of his dream, the sword, the destiny... but he didn't have much to think about it.

"Link!" Gaepora exclaimed.

Link whipped around, nearly dropping his sword. Gaepora stood on the steps behind him, a look of disbelief on his face.

"I've had my suspicions, but until now I wasn't sure," Gaepora said softly. "Yet here we are in the Chamber of the Sword, the very place where it was foretold the youth of legend would one day appear. It is said that this place was left to our people by the goddess herself. The very knowledge of this room's existence is a secret passed down to a select few each generation, along with a handful of words..."

Gaepora began walking down the stairs, standing before Link. "When the light of the goddess's sword shines bright, the great apocalypse will wake from its long slumber. Do not fear, for it is then that a youth, guided by my hand, shall reveal himself in a place most sacred."

Gaepora looked passed Link, watching Fi as she hovered above the pedestal. "It started days ago. The sword that I've kept secret all these years... It began to give off a faint, otherworldly light."

"So then, you knew?" Link asked. "About this place? About her?"

Gaepora thought for a moment, as if the answer wasn't quite *yes or no*. "At first I thought I was seeing things, here alone with the sword," he answered. "There was simply no other explanation. I never dreamed the prophecy of legend would come to pass in my lifetime." He looked up at Fi. "The words I have sworn to keep secret are coming true before my very eyes... As for Fi, I knew of her, but I've never met her."

"Of her?" Link asked.

Gaepora nodded. "The youth will be guided by one born of the blade," he remembered, quoting it as he was taught. "One who is also youthful in likeness yet wise with knowledge immeasurable."

Fi looked him in the eye. "Ah yes, the oral tradition, one of the least reliable methods of information retention and transmission. It appears that critical sections of the passage have been lost over the generation."

Link and Gaepora looked at each other. Gaepora shrugged. "A lot of time has passed."

Fi lowered herself in front of them, bowing once before standing straight again. "The youth who draws forth the guiding sword shall be known as the goddess's chosen hero, and it is he who possesses an unbreakable spirit. He shall be burdened with the task of abolishing the

shadow of apocalypse from the land. Such is his destiny. With the spirit of the blade at his side, he shall soar over the clouds and plummet below..."

Link grit his teeth and Fi looked directly at him, putting a little more power in her voice. "...And united with the spirit maiden, shall bring forth a piercing light that resurrects the land."

United with the spirit maiden, Link thought. He remembered Zelda, telling him about the land below.

"Some of Father's old texts talk about a place called the surface," she'd said. "The old tales describe a whole world below, far more vast than Skyloft!"

Just picturing her face made him realize just how much he missed her. He looked down at the sword's blade, the energy from earlier now gone. "The surface... is real?"

"Master," Fi said, getting his attention back. You must embark on a great journey beneath the clouds to the vast realm of the surface. It is only through this journey that you can fulfill the mission set before you by my creator, the goddess. It is also the only method available for you to reunite with the spirit maiden, honorable Zelda."

Link nodded. "Whatever it takes, right?"

"This is no easy task, Link," Gaepora warned. "The world below is a forsaken place, and to reach it you must pierce the cloud barrier below. In living memory, no one has ever done this."

Fi held her arms out in front of her, her hands still concealed under her shawl. There, she held a light, which then formed in it a stone tablet. It hovered in front of Link.

"This tablet will illuminate a path through the clouds to the land below," Fi explained. "Take it, and place it in the altar behind me."

Link took the tablet from the air and stepped up to the altar. As he set it in place the building rumbled.

Though they could not see it from inside, a beam of light was sent from the goddess statue above. It flew through the air, faster than any Loftwing, and hit the cloud barrier, piercing it. Those awake in Skyloft could see in the distance a pillar of green light, but only for a moment. And when it disappeared it left behind a hole in the clouds. Within the chamber however, the rumbling had stopped when the light faded.

"Master Lin, it is done," Fi said. "Until now, a cloud barrier created by the goddess has separated the world you know from the one below. The tablet you placed in the altar has opened a small rift in the barrier. You can use it to travel through the clouds to the realm below."

"And you?" Link asked. He didn't want to clarify, but he also didn't

want any more strange dreams with her appearing with cryptic messages.

"I have recognized you as my master," Fi answered. "And so it is my duty to follow you wherever you may go."

Link didn't necessarily like that idea any better, but he supposed it was better than her being in his head all the time.

Instead of voicing these concerns, he instead asked simply; "When do we go?"

"As soon as you are ready," Fi answered. "Before I return to the blade however, I must inform you of one last crucial bit of information."

Link nodded.

"If the sword is raised skyward as before, it is charged with energy." Fi hovered above Link. "These blasts are formed of pure energy that charges within your blade when you lift it skyward. However, it drains you. It is a strain on whoever wields it. Though its use is powerful, use it sparingly."

Fi returned to the gem in the hilt of sword and Link once again looked down at its blade. "Noted," he said quietly.

"Link," Gaepora said. "Listen a moment."

Gaepora stepped forward as Link looked away from the altar. "The nature of the great apocalypse mentioned in the old texts is a complete mystery to me. But whatever it turns out to be, it seems that both you and Zelda have big roles to play in the destiny of this land."

"I guess," Link nodded. "But still... it's a bit overwhelming... I feel if I wait any longer I'll end up telling myself that staying home is the better option."

"Just think," Gaepora encouraged. "If what this Fi says is true, Zelda is alive! Alive and no doubt coming to terms with whatever it is the goddess has in store for her. Should you heed the call of destiny, I don't know what dangers you may have to face, Link. Especially down there..."

Gaepora rested a hand on Link's shoulder. "But if you've decided to brave the unknown, please find my daughter and bring her back to me."

"I promise," Link bowed. "I'll bring her home."

Gaepora patted his back and began walking back towards the exit. "Dawn is drawing near. It has been a long night for the both of us, hasn't it?" Link followed behind him. "Do you still feel up to the task?"

Link nodded. "I do."

"You have a great journey before you, Link, and those clothes... They don't look up to the task." Gaepora shook his head.

Link looked down at himself. A simple cotton shirt and pants, the standard wrap and an old leather belt to keep everything together. "I

suppose," he agreed.

"The uniform you were to receive for winning the race should be ready by now," Gaepora told him. "A sturdy uniform like that will prove much more suitable for a long journey. You'd better change before you go."

Link nodded as they stepped out into the morning light of the courtyard.

It all felt heavier than he'd expected.

He was wearing three layers of clothes, and one of them was chain mail. Standing up he tapped his foot on the ground, testing how well the leather moved. It would be something he had to work with, but he felt he could eventually get used to some of the restraints.

Finally, Link strapped on his gauntlets and picked up his hat from the table. He wasn't sure about its practical uses, but it went with the uniform so he didn't ask questions.

Then there was a knock at his door.

"It's open," Link said.

The door opened and Gaepora stepped inside. He saw Link and nodded. "That green uniform is what our knights will be wearing this year," he said. "To be honest, I've had my doubts about the color."

Link looked down at the green tunic he wore. Last year graduates wore yellow, and the year before that were red. But Link was the first to wear green.

"But oddly enough," Gaepora continued. "Seeing you wear this uniform, I can't imagine a more fitting color for you. It's as though you were born to wear it."

Link grinned. "Destiny, right?"

"Perhaps," Gaepora laughed.

Link nodded and was about to leave, ready to set out finally, but Gaepora stopped him. "One last thing before you go," he said. Link turned to see Gaepora holding out a wooden shield. "Not the sturdiest, but it should do you well on the coming journey."

Link took the shield and strapped it on over his new sword. "Thank you," he said.

"There's an apology with it," Gaepora told him.

"From who?"

Gaepora shook his head. "I was told not to say," he walked passed

Link. "Regardless, I believe now is the time for you to head out. I've already returned the training sword to Eagus, so there should be nothing else you need to worry about for now." He reached the door and turned around. "Please, bring back Zelda."

Link nodded and Gaepora left.

He looked over his shoulder at the new shield. Seeing the symbol painted on it, the footprint of a Loftwing, Link had a feeling he knew who it was from.



Before he knew it, he was already at the main dock, looking down at the cloud barrier. Off in the distance he could see the small hole in the clouds where he would have to go. There was nothing stopping him, but still he hesitated.

"You leaving?" Pipit asked.

"You coming?" Link turned around to face him. Pipit had his arms crossed, and he was also looking out at the hole in the clouds. On the way here Link had overheard several people mention that they saw it late last night, and they were all more than a bit suspicious of where Link was going and where Zelda had gone.

"Sadly no," Pipit answered. "Though I wish I could, I must remain here. Gaepora told me about the black tornado. If there are dangers here near Skyloft, the rest of us knights should stay behind to protect it. Even Goose, Cawlin and Stritch have offered to help."

"Oh have they?" Link looked over the edge. "Understandable... You make sure this place is still here when I get back."

"Just make you *get* back," Pipit told him.

"Deal," Link scoffed. He took one last look at Skyloft, and took a step backwards off the dock.

He fell through air, staring upwards for a moment and watching as Skyloft shrunk as he got further away. Then he turned over and whistled for his bird. His crimson Loftwing swooped down from under him and lifted him back into the air, flying towards the hole in the cloud barrier.

He saw knights patrolling the city and some of the other islands, probably checking for monsters. Or if they weren't informed, Zelda.

Link wondered how Gaepora explained to them his daughter had fallen to the surface, if he told them at all. It hadn't been long since Gaepora found out for sure where she was himself anyway.

But at least Link knew, and as he reached the break in the barrier,

he promised himself he wouldn't come back without her.

He looked down at the hole, hovering directly above it. "This is where I leave you," he told his Loftwing. It squawked in response and Link patted its head. "Don't worry, I'll come back."

Link swung his feet over his bird and looked down, pulling out the sailcloth he'd gotten from Zelda.

He took a deep breath, not sure what to expect, and jumped, plummeting to the surface world below.

Chapter 3: A Hero is Born



CHAPTER 4

FARON WOODS

The air rushed up at him with such force it was almost blinding, but by holding on to the sailcloth Link was able to see clearly the world that spread around him. It was... *massive*. There was so much of it that just falling from where the hole had been in the clouds, he couldn't see the ends of it.

Lands rose and fell in strange ways all over, forests covered large portions of it as well as fires and sand in other areas. Link wasn't sure he'd ever see all of it himself. It'd take several lifetimes to get around to seeing even *half* of the world he saw here.

But he focused on the immediate area below him, as that's where the hole had opened up to. Directly beneath him to be exact; a dense forest.

He aimed his descent towards an opening, a large crater. There he finally reached solid ground, sinking down to his knees as he rested on a cobblestone square.

Link stood and looked over the railing at the center of the crater, and Fi appeared from his sword.

"Master Link, we've arrived," she told him. "This is the fabled surface that has long been part of Skyloft legend."

Link looked around at everything; the enormous trees all around him, the giant temple structure to the north...

"By my calculations," Fi continued. "You are currently positioned in a location known as the Sealed Grounds."

Fi then disappeared into the sword again, leaving with just that.

Link nodded. *Yup*, he thought. *Thanks*.

He started towards the temple as it was the only landmark he could see from where he started, but as he got closer he stopped. He felt a dark

presence, not like Fi's from before when she lead him to the sword chamber. This was different.

Link looked over his shoulder at the crater, then stepped closer to the edge. He hadn't seen it before, but he noticed a small black marker at the very bottom. It emanated darkness.

"What is that?" Link mumbled, crouching down to get a better look.

Suddenly he was swallowed by darkness, and the only thing he could see around him was an eerie red light down below. Black smoke was expelled from within, and once again he saw the monstrous face from his dreams.

His head hurt, and before he could move the monster lunged up at him. Unable to do anything to defend himself against this, Link braced himself as he was devoured by the demon.

Then he opened his eyes, and he was still standing on the edge of the crater. Nothing seemed to have happened, and the marker was unmoved.

Link stepped away, now walking quickly towards the temple. He pushed open the large steel doors and stepped inside. *Bad*, he thought. *Very, very bad.*

The doors shut behind him and he looked around the chamber. Stone columns rose around him, some of them cracked and broken. On the other side of the room was another set of doors, and sitting in front of it, in a ray of light shining down from a hole in the ceiling, was an elderly woman in red robes. Her hair was braided to the side and tied into a wooden coin at the end.

"Ah... the traveler descended from the clouds above. I welcome you, child of fate." The woman motioned for him to come closer. "Tell me, what is your name?"

Link took a cautious step forward, looking back at the door behind him. "Uh, Link," he answered. "I'm-"

"Link?" The woman exclaimed, cutting him off. "Ah, Link. Good. Very good." She nodded several times, despite her not seeming to actually look at him. "I sense you have already gained control over the sacred power that fills your sword when pointed skyward, and have been properly warned of the strength it takes to wield it."

"Yes," Link answered. "But-"

She cut him off again. "It is proof that you are fit to bear the blade you carry, the Goddess Sword. I have sat here for many years waiting for you to arrive. All so that I could fulfill my purpose as your guide."

Link stopped at the bottom of the steps in front of her, eyes narrowed in suspicion. "My guide?" The woman nodded. "I'm looking for a girl, her name is Zelda. Do you know where she might be? Or if she's okay?"

The old woman nodded, waving her hand. "The spirit maiden you seek arrived here shortly before you, descending to this land in a shower of light."

Link took a deep breath, sighing with relief. He paced back and forth once or twice before sitting down, putting his face in his hands. "Good," he huffed. "She's okay."

"There's no doubting it," the old woman said softly. "The gears of fate have begun to turn. Yet all is not as it should be. The spirit maiden was not meant to reach this land in the manner she did."

Link looked up. "What do you mean?"

"I feel an evil power working in the shadows," the woman explained. "It moved to warp the destiny of which you two are a part of." She looked directly at him for the first time. "Link... You are concerned for the spirit maiden and seek her whereabouts, yes?"

"Of course," Link nodded.

"That is understandable," she said, not letting him say more again. "But for now you must focus on moving forward. That girl has her own purpose she must pursue, as do you."

"Excuse me?" Link scoffed. "Move forward?" He got to his feet, looking back at her. "You want me to give up searching for her before I've even begun?"

"No, not at all," she answered, shaking her head. "She set out for Faron Woods to discover that destiny for herself, and you must follow."

She pointed to a door to the side of the room. "Go now. You must head to Faron Woods and chase after the spirit maiden... the one you call Zelda."

Link looked at the door.

"And take this with you," she said. "It's dangerous out there."

Link looked back to the woman to see her holding out a small bottle with a strange purplish liquid inside. "What is it?"

"It is an old magic," she answered. "A revitalizing potion. There are dangers that lie ahead, and you will need this. It can heal any wound, use it wisely."

"Magic," Link said quietly. He pocketed the potion and looked back up at the old woman. "Thank you," he bowed.

"You are ready," she told him. "Leave through the door before you,

and head into the woods. I wish you a safe travel."

"There's still so much I don't know," Link started. "What dangers do you mean?"

"Know that all the questions you have now will be answered in time," she said firmly. "For now, Link, go bravely!"

Link opened his mouth to say more, but he knew she wouldn't answer him. So, he bowed once more, and walked out the door.

It slammed shut behind him as he set out through the narrow path towards the woods. To the south he could see the marker in the crater over the ledge, but he forced himself to look away from it.

Then suddenly Fi appeared in front of him, her face as unemotional as ever. "Master, your expression has not changed."

"What do you mean?" Link asked, finding it odd that she would say that about *him*.

"A common reaction to discovering a dear friend is alive is to show happiness. You do not look happy."

Link chuckled, shaking his head. "There's no difference to me at the moment," he explained. "Whether it's you or the old woman who says it. I appreciate the help, but I'll keep doubting until I see her with my own eyes."

"The spirit maiden is alive," Fi assured him. "You will meet her."

She returned to the sword and Link continued down the path. "Yeah," he sighed. "But when?"

He told himself it was just in his head, the ominous feeling he felt. The same wave of darkness that washed over him as he looked at the marker in the crater. But this was less powerful, so he tried to convince himself it was just him thinking about it.

But unbeknownst to him, there was an evil figure watching him from above. He stood in the trees above the path Link walked, looking down at him.

He was there only for a moment however, before vanishing completely.

After a very long walk down narrow paths between the trees and dirt walls that blocked his way, Link decided he was finally lost. At times he could've sworn some of the smaller plants were moving, but the only real danger he found were those strange red goblins.

"What are they called?" Link asked Fi as he pulled his blade from

the remains of one of the monsters.

"Bokoblins," Fi answered.

"Bokoblins," Link nodded.

"Bo-*koblins*," Fi corrected.

Link looked at her. "That's, what I said. Boko-blins."

Fi returned to the sword and Link placed it back in its sheath, moving on. Though as he continued to make his way through the forest, staggering near the side of the narrow paths, Fi appeared in front of him, face void of emotion, but voice full of concern.

"Master, you are tired," Fi said bluntly. "You should rest before continuing."

Link looked passed her, over the tree tops he could make out the shape of a tower's spire. "Look," he pointed. "We're almost there. Besides, that's gotta be where Zelda is."

"It'll only be more dangerous from here on out," Fi warned. "Are you sure you're ready?"

"No point in stopping now," Link answered, reaching a steep slope. "Come on, I'm fine."

Fi hesitated, but returned to the sword without saying a word.

Link slid down and walked to the end of the last road to the Forest temple, entering a clearing. He looked up at the tall, white marble structure. "Huh," he mumbled. "It's a lot bigger than I thought."

He started up the steps to the temple, staring up at the tall golden door before him.

Link stepped into the darkened cavern as the great door slammed shut behind him, echoing through the chamber. Stopping in the sudden pitch blackness, Link looked around for anything that would signify where the path went, but he found nothing.

"A lantern seems like it would've been a great idea right about now." Link held his hand out, searching for a wall or something to help get his bearings.

Suddenly, the gem on the sword's hilt lit up. "Will this light suffice, Master?" Fi asked.

The light shone over his shoulder, casting a glow over the stairs leading down in front of him. If he'd taken a step he would've fallen.

"That's pretty useful," Link said, starting down the steps. "And I told you, just Link is fine."

"I was created by the Goddess to help the chosen hero in any way I could." Fi told him.

"And helpful you are," Link agreed. "Though I don't suppose you happen to have a map of this place handy, would you?"

Fi was quiet for a moment, the light flickering. "No," she finally said. "I regret to inform you I have no map of this temple. Apologies."

"No problem," Link nodded. "This can't be too hard, right?"

Just then, from beyond the light's reach came a few hissing sounds, and movement.

"Wait, do you hear that?"

"Danger detected."

Link drew his sword. "This doesn't sound like those Bokoblins outside."

Link turned and saw right in front of him, a large spider, and its eyes reflecting the light of the sword.

Instinctively Link slashed with a wide swing, clubbing it in the side of the head as he jumped back towards the stairs.

"That is... a *very* big spider," Link threw up his sword as the spider jumped at him, furious at its sudden injury. "Whoa!"

Link threw the spider back, but it didn't do much but agitate it further.

"More spiders are near," Fi warned.

"How many?" Link asked.

"At least three."

Link gripped his sword, lowering his stance. "Eagus didn't train me for nothing."

Another spider came at him and Link held it off with his shield, then slashed upward at it to avoid the spider's legs. The spider screeched horribly, reeling backwards.

"They are weak underneath," Fi advised.

"Noted."

Link held his shield sturdy, waiting for the next attack. When another spider lashed at him, he held it up and stabbed through its chest. Link pulled back as the spider dropped dead at his feet.

There was a sound of scurrying as the other spiders fled in fear.

"Are they gone?" Link asked, catching his breath.

The light of the sword flickered again. "Yes, they are still in the area, but they should not pose a threat any longer."

"Either way," Link huffed. "This would be a bad place to stop and rest."

"I recommend you use the potion the old woman gave you," Fi said. "You are injured."

Link looked down at the pouch on his belt, carefully, pulling out the vial of potion. After a moment's pause, he put it back. "No, I'm fine," he decided. "I'll wait until I need it the most."

"... Very well," Fi fell silent once more and Link took that as the sign to continue.

He sheathed his sword and passed through the current chamber, entering the next room. Fi dimmed the light of the sword as most of this hall was lit by iridescent mushrooms. The bridge here looked to have fallen apart, but there were enough stone boulders and toppled pillars around the room that he was able to make his way to the other side.

From there it was easy enough to break through the old rusted lock on the door to the next chamber. It was a large circular room, similar to the sword's shrine in Skyloft with pillars circling the room, but instead of an altar on the other side there was a door.

And instead of a sword's pedestal in the center, there stood a man.

"Look who it is," said the man, facing the other door. He turned around, showing his face; one eye hidden behind his stark white hair, his upper body concealed behind a tattered red cloak. "I thought that tornado I stirred up would have tossed and torn you apart, yet here you are. Not in pieces."

Link grit his teeth. "You made that storm?"

"Not that your life or death has any consequence," the man continued. "It's just the girl that matters now, and I can sense her here... just beyond this door." He brushed his hand across the surface of the door.

"Zelda..." Link took a step forward.

"Yes, we plucked Her Majesty from her perch in the clouds, and now she's ours." He turned to face Link. "Oh, but listen to me. I'm being positively uncivil. Allow me to introduce myself."

Slowly, a dark sword began to appear in his hand.

"I am the Demon Lord who presides over this land you look down upon, this world you call the surface. You may call me Ghirahim." He slashed his sword, cutting through the air. "In truth, I very much prefer to be indulged with my full title: Lord Ghirahim. But I'm not fussy."

Link glared at Ghirahim, drawing his sword and preparing to fight. "Back away from the door... now."

Ghirahim laughed. "Did you really just draw your sword? Foolish boy. By all rights that girl should have fallen into our hands already." His stance dropped and he clenched his fists. "She was nearly ours when that

loathsome servant of the goddess snatched her away."

Dark energy began to surround him, trailing off like smoke. "Do you have any idea how that made me feel inside?"

"Furious!" He barked.

"Outraged!!" He shouted.

"Sick with anger!!!" The energy around him seemed to explode.

Suddenly he disappeared. "This turn of events has left me with a strong appetite for bloodshed." His voice echoed through the chamber, surrounding Link.

Then Ghirahim was behind him. "Still..."

Link jumped away, holding out his sword.

"...It hardly seems fair, being of my position, to take all of my anger out on you." Ghirahim glared back at Link. "Which is why I promise up front not to murder you..."

"Much appreciated," Link muttered.

"No, I'll just beat you within an inch of your life!" Ghirahim laughed as his cloak burned away. He held his sword high, then slashed downward, keeping it at his side.

Link hissed as he charged forward, but Ghirahim jumped back and made a wide sweeping motion with his blade, sending spiked ridges flying towards Link. Link rolled away, skidding to a stop on his knees as he threw up his shield.

Ghirahim swung his sword and dashed forward, but as Link stuck with his sword Ghirahim simply grabbed the blade's tip. "Such power," he said, wide eyed as he grabbed the blade. He pulled it from Link's hand and tossed it aside. "But not strong enough!"

Link jumped backwards, blocking Ghirahim's next strike. The blow cracked his shield, but it wasn't useless yet.

Ghirahim stood between Link and his sword. "What will you do now?"

Link grit his teeth and held his shield above his head.

Ghirahim smirked and Link pulled back, then threw the shield as hard as he could. Ghirahim laughed as he slashed the shield out of the air, but he wasn't prepared for Link to jump at him.

Bringing his foot down on Ghirahim's face, Link jumped over Ghirahim, and knocked him into the ground in an instant. He rolled to a stop beside his sword, then darted forward, slashing at Ghirahim's back.

Ghirahim stumbled. "Enough!" He jumped away, holding himself. "Well... you put up more of a fight than I would've thought possible for such a soft boy."

"I've spent years training in a knight's academy," Link smirked.

"You didn't expect me to go easy did you?"

"Oh don't clap for yourself quite yet," Ghirahim scolded. "That sword of yours is the only reason you still live. It has nothing to do with skill."

Ghirahim's sword disappeared from his hand, burning away like his cloak. "I fear I spent far too long teasing and toying with you. The girl's presence has all but faded from this place, which means there's no reason to linger here."

In a flashy show of flaming diamonds, Ghirahim disappeared, but his voice lingered. "Goodbye, sky child. Run and play. Get in my way again, though, and you're dead."

Then he was gone, and Link heaved a sigh of relief. "Right," he muttered. "Now..." he sheathed his sword and picked what was left of his shield as he walked to the door.

It glowed, and opened as Link stepped closer.

As he entered, he was met with disappointment, seeing that Zelda was nowhere to be found. Ghirahim had stalled him too long, and Zelda had moved on.

Link started walking through the spring, between the pillars that towered above him, across the short path that led out into the water, and stood in front of the altar.

Fi appeared beside him. "Link," she started. "There is a message here in the language of the Gods. Allow me to translate for you."

Link nodded and the gem on Fi's chest glowed.

"From the edge of time I guide you, the one chosen to carry out the goddess' mission. The spirit maiden who descended from the clouds must travel to two sacred places to purify her body. You stand in one of these places: Skyview Spring. The other is known as the Earth Spring. This second spring is hidden away deep within the scorched earth of Eldin. The spirit maiden, ever mindful of the heavy task entrusted to her, has set out for this second sacred place."

The crest on the pedestal glowed and spun, another fragment of the stone tablet map appearing before Link. Link accepted it and held it in his hands.

"Then... It's time to go back to Skyloft."

"Yes," Fi nodded.

Link turned to face her. "I guess we just missed her," he joked. "But this means she's for sure in Eldin, yeah?"

"Correct," Fi agreed. "I recommend returning to Skyloft immediately."

"Of course," Link nodded. He tucked the tablet away and turned back down the path. *Hold on a little longer*, he thought. *I'm right behind you.*

Fi tilted her head, trying to get a read on what Link was thinking.

"Come on," Link waved, already moving again.

Fi returned to the sword as Link started back towards the temple.

Chapter 4: Faron Woods



CHAPTER 5

THE RETURN HOME

Link was launched into the air, hanging on to his sailcloth as the winds carried him back above the clouds. As the winds subsided and Link began to fall again he whistled for his bird, which came a moment later.

He wasn't sure how he felt about returning to Skyloft so soon, especially since he didn't have Zelda with him. He knew the Headmaster would be disappointed in him, or more worried than before for Zelda's health. Yet, as much as he felt the need to avoid them, he knew he had to tell them how things have developed so far.

So he flew over Skyloft, circling around and landing in front of the academy when he spotted the headmaster on the lower grounds.

As Link started across the path to the academy however, he was stopped by Pipit.

"Link, you've returned!" Pipit exclaimed, shocked. "Have you brought Zelda? Is she safe?"

"Is that Link!?" Gaepora shouted from below. "Wait there! I'll be right up!"

Link sighed.

"So what happened?" Pipit asked. "Where's Zelda?"

"Apparently she has her own quest," Link answered. "It seems I'm meant to follow, though I'm a bit behind."

Pipit crossed his arms. "But she's alright?"

Link nodded.

"That's some good news at least, right?"

"Yeah," Link nodded. "Though now I have to find where she's gone next."

Gaepora exited the academy then stepping outside. "So it's true then!" he laughed. He looked past Link, hoping to see his daughter. He

had been smiling, but the happiness had gone as quickly as it came. "But... where is my daughter?"

Link looked away from them, then he turned to face the Goddess statue. "I'll explain on the way."

"So she's alive at least..." Gaepora shook his head, standing off to the side in the chamber of the Sword.

Link stood before the altar. "... Yeah, yeah she is. Now I just have to find her." He placed the new fragment next to the first and it glowed, the crest spinning. The chamber rumbled as it had before, signifying the new opening in the cloud barrier below.

Link stepped away from the altar. "And that's it, I think." He turned back to Gaepora. "I'll be heading back down as soon as I can... If Zelda's safe, then I think, for the moment, I can allow myself to rest."

"I'm glad I did some research then," Gaepora said. "If you think you're done here already."

"How do you mean?" Link asked.

"You said you were headed to Eldin next, correct?"

Link nodded.

"According to ancient texts," Gaepora began. "Eldin is comprised almost entirely of molten rock and fire. If you left as you are, you would not last long."

"So what do I do?" Link asked. "I can't exactly carry a barrel of water around with me wherever I go."

Gaepora laughed. "At *least* buy yourself a new shield," he suggested. "I can already see you've used it enough, it's worn out. You can't defend yourself with that, it will burn, and you along with it."

Link pulled the broken wood shield off his back, looking at the large chunk of it that was missing. "Fair enough," Link sighed.

"Here," Gaepora said, handing Link a small pouch of rupees. "This should cover the cost of a good shield at the bazaar."

Link returned his shield to his back and pocketed the cash. "Thank you," he bowed.

Gaepora looked away, staring at the altar. Link took that his cue to leave.

"You said that Zelda would visit two springs, yes?"

Link stopped and looked over his shoulder. "Yes."

Gaepora looked up at him. "Then once she's done, bring her back,

alright?"

Link nodded and headed off for the bazaar.

Link brushed aside the curtain covering the door and entered the bazaar, music playing from one of the shops. It was crowded and busy, but he only needed to speak to one person.

He sat down on a stool in front of the counter to Gondo's mechanical shop and rang the bell.

"Be with you in a second!" came a voice from behind the wall behind the counter. There was a heavy thud like a block of iron being thrown into another block of iron, and suddenly a large man stepped out from behind the wall, goggle helmet still pulled over his eyes.

"Link!" Gondo laughed. "Word had you disappeared."

"Well at least I'm not dead," Link chuckled.

"Watcha doing here though?" Gondo asked.

Link pulled off his shield, setting on the counter.

"Yeesh," Gondo winced, seeing the damage. "What've you been doing kid?"

"You heard about my disappearance," Link said. "No one knows why I was gone?"

Gondo shook his head and motioned for Link to come closer so no one would hear. Link leaned on the counter to listen.

"Being the supplier that I am," Gondo said quietly. "I hear a lot from the knights of the academy. Most don't want to talk about it, or don't know anything at all."

"What do you mean?" Link hissed. "The village doesn't have any idea what's going on?"

"Nope," Gondo shook his head. "And the headmaster wants to keep it that way, at least for now. He doesn't want to worry anyone."

Gondo sat upright. "But I hear it's not just you that disappeared."

Link looked away, staring down at the shield.

"So it's true," Gondo sighed, rubbing the back of his head. He jumped to his feet and grinned like a mad man. "Well, I can do you one better than just a regular Iron Shield!"

He stepped away and walked behind the wall. "Been working on this for a while!" he called from the back. "My masterpiece!" When he came back he was holding a large rectangular shield with a wing design on its front.

He sat it on the counter, next to Link's old shield. "Now this, THIS, is craftsmanship at its finest."

"Whoa," Link whistled. "It looks heavy, but it could definitely take a hit."

Gondo eyed the broken wood shield. "Judging by what you might've been through already," he said. "I'd say you need this more than anybody."

Link pulled out the pouch of rupees and handed them to Gondo. "This should cover it, I think."

Gondo inspected the pouch. "Headmaster's insignia on the bag," he scoffed. "It's really as bad as it seems... down there?"

Link nodded solemnly.

"Then this one's on me," Gondo said, handing him back the rupees. "Better things it could be spent on." He sat the pouch on the shield. "Take it, but when you get back, tell me how it holds up!"

Link strapped the shield to his back and bowed. "Zelda and I'll tell you all about it together when we return." He started back through the crowd as Gondo looked down to see a few rupees left on the counter.

"Hey kid!" Gondo shouted. "... Good luck!" He saw Link wave over the heads of other shoppers.

Chapter 5: The Return Home



CHAPTER 6
ELDIN VOLCANO

Link aimed his descent towards a small area off to the side, near the cliffs that surrounded the volcano. When he got close enough that the winds wouldn't alter his course he took out the sailcloth and floated downwards toward solid ground.

Getting better at his landings, it was easy enough for Link to land on both feet and start walking almost immediately after landing.

He started down the path, looking up at the volcano as Fi appeared.

"Link, this is Eldin Volcano," she floated passed him a bit, also watching the flames around them. "It is an active volcano rich with the powers of the earth."

The lava popped near the edge of the path, little cinders of fire burning at Link's feet. Fi hovered over the ground, then returned to the sword. "Approximately 60% is covered by lava," she continued from the sword's gem. "It is inhabited by a large number of creatures that thrive in the extreme heat and direct flame."

Link tightened his bracers, walking cautiously along the narrow paths so close to the lava. "Glad I got that new shield then..."

"Yes," Fi agreed. "But please exercise caution with flammable objects like wood and fire."

"Right," Link huffed as he climbed up a short cliff. "Onward and Upward I guess."

"Hey! Hey! HEY!"

Link froze, looking up and down the path but not seeing anything the voice could belong to.

"Y-you mess with our turf and you're gonna... pay?"

"Whoa!" Another voice gasped. "You're not... Yo, Ledd, I don't think this is one of those red creeps."

"Y-y-yeah, I think you're right," the first agreed. "No reason to scare the hair off us though."

"Who's there?" Link called, spinning in place. "Show yourself!"

Link half expected ghosts or something similar, but instead found mole-like men pop out of the ground before him! Waist deep in the rock they looked up at him.

"Sorry 'bout that pal," said the mole-man who belonged to the first voice. "These monsters showing up and messing with our turf has got me on edge. They show up here, and I'm gonna knock the red clean out of 'em! That's what I'm doing here. Yeah, me, Ledd."

"Yeah whatever, Mr. Too-scared-to-dig-in-the-dark," mocked the second. He turned to Link. "I'm Cobal."

"Anyway," Ledd growled at Cobal. "If you're looking for treasure, you should stay clear of those red guys."

"Yeah! But not here!" Cobal added. "Us Mogma have claimed this territory to search for riches. We're what you'd call treasure hunters. There are loads of those red, blue and green stones called rupees around here. Sometimes you can find silver and gold ones too."

"Actually I'm not looking for treasure," Link said, keeping the advice in mind anyway. "I'm trying to find a friend, they should've passed through here I think."

"Huh? You're looking for a friend? NOT treasure?" Ledd shook his head in disbelief, like nothing else existed that was more important than riches buried in the ground. But at least he was still paying attention to things above ground.

"So that must have been your pal that passed by earlier," Ledd continued. "Sprinting by without so much as a glance in this direction. It was sorta a blur of movement, so I didn't get a real good look, but I knew it wasn't one of those red creeps. You're friend must have gone straight up here, so why don't you follow?"

Ledd gestured passed them, up the path leading towards the volcano.

"Thank you," Link bowed.

"Don't mention it!" Cobal cackled.

The Mogma disappeared back into the ground, dirt sealing where the holes had been. Link nodded, correcting his belt and making his way up the path.

It was a long, winding path. Lava continued spilling out of every crack around the volcano, covering some paths and melting rocks on either side of him. Some paths fell away beneath him as he walked and he had to

hurry before being swallowed by the flames below.

And it would've been fine if the trial was left at that, but as Fi had said before there were many creatures here that called this place home, and it seemed few of them were as nice as the Mogmas. Whether it was blobs of sentient lava, or flaming bats, or giant turtles that spit fire at him when he got near.

He really was glad Gondo was good at his craft, at the shield was sturdy enough to take each blow. And with some skill and a little luck, Link made his way up the mountainside, arriving at a large bridge that crossed a river of lava. Intricate designs were carved along the walls, but pieces seemed to have crumbled with age.

As he set foot on the bridge however, he heard a sharp voice above him. "Hey!" it called.

Link looked up at the thin figure standing atop the arch on the far side of the bridge.

"You, the Goddess' chosen hero... Zelda is ahead... Hurry." The figure jumped back, disappearing into nothing before Link could get a word in.

Link growled, charging after her without a second thought. He raced up the mountain, rushing through tunnels where the halls were lined in flames, jumping over breaks in the ground, despite there being a deadly drop between each one.

Zelda is ahead, Link thought. But who are you? With Ghirahim? If you know where Zelda is, why aren't you helping her?

Link kept looking around him, trying to judge the fastest way up. He never took too long to think though, and decided on paths as soon as he arrived at them, picking whichever ones led up. Only once he hit a dead end, and he never caught up to the woman from the bridge, but eventually he arrived near the mountain's peak.

He stood in front of the giant red doors, the same kind of designs carved into them as the ones from the bridge. This had to be the right place.

Link started for the door, but Fi stopped him. "Danger detected," she warned.

"Obviously," Link grunted.

"A worse danger than you have faced before," Fi said more sternly.

"...What do you mean?" Link asked, hesitating.

"There is an intense heat behind this door," Fi explained. "And a terrible darkness."

"That lady in black said that Zelda was ahead, and that I had to

hurry," Link rested his hand on the door, feeling the heat behind it himself. "If I wait any longer she could get hurt."

"Yes but-"

"If there's danger I have to move, now," Link growled. "While I still have a chance."

"...Very well," Fi finally agreed, returning to the sword.

Link pushed open the door.

—

The cavern Link stepped into was massive; stone columns rising around him, holding up arches and walkways, statues and sculpted designs were etched into the cave walls. Circling the entire chamber was a dragon, wrapped around the ceiling with its head on the other side of the room facing the door Link entered.

The ground was carved into a single path leading straight through the chamber, leading at an upward slope towards the exit door. However, as Link hurried onward, a familiarly annoying figure appeared above him, sitting on the dragon's head.

"Oh, it's you," Ghirahim said, waving his hand dismissively. He sat still for a moment, thinking. "Let me see... No, that's not it. This is so embarrassing, but I seem to be at a loss for your name." He looked down at Link with a cold stare. "Not that it matters, really. To tell you the truth, I'm feeling a bit frustrated, and right now I just need someone to vent to."

"I'm a little busy at the moment," Link growled.

Ghirahim ignored him, waving his hands around as he spoke. "I heard my underlings had finally captured the spirit maiden, so of course I rushed over here. What can I say? I was excited. Flustered, even..." He dropped his arms, sighing in disbelief. "But what did I find when I arrived? That agent of the goddess..."

He leaned forward, a look of pure rage on his face. Lowering his voice, he continued. "She had once again... You see, what I'm trying to say..."

Ghirahim jumped to his feet, fists clenched. "THAT GODDESS-SERVING DOG ESCAPED WITH THE GIRL! I MUST have the spirit maiden in order to resurrect my master. I MUST HAVE HER!"

Link readied himself, taking out his sword and shield. He didn't risk talking, just in case, but he wished Ghirahim would hurry and just leave without a fight.

Instead however, Ghirahim sat down. "... I got a little carried away

there didn't I?" he sighed. "I don't deal well with... complications to plans I've laid out so carefully. It's a character flaw of mine."

Suddenly he smiled. "Ah, but something good can still come from this day!" he decided. "I've had all this bottled-up anger smoldering inside me, and now I can release it."

Ghirahim snapped and disappeared, leaving Link very confused.

"...I don't..." Link looked around but saw nothing. "I don't get it."

Then came a loud rumbling all around him. Link noticed a large boulder making its way through the body of the dragon, finally dropping out from the dragon's mouth at the top of the slope.

"I don't have time for this-"

Before Link could finish his sentence, the boulder came barreling down the slope. It nearly crushed him and he barely had time to roll to the side and duck as it passed by him. The path was just narrow enough that it would've crushed him if it had been an inch closer. Either way, he was fine for now, and got to his feet as it crashed into the wall at the bottom of the slope.

Hoping another boulder wouldn't come crashing down on him, Link hurried up the slope to the door. But behind him the boulder wasn't done yet.

Link turned just in time to see it burst into flames, the rocky exterior cracking and eight long spider-like legs forcing out of it. Then there was the eye, a giant purple eye that moved through the rocks covering its skin.

"That's... not right," Link mumbled.

The demon screeched painfully loud, then charged upward at incredible speeds. Link hurried up the slope as fast as he could, nearly making it to the door. But as he reached the larger end of the path he managed to jump aside as the demon flew into the far wall.

It bashed into the door, still screeching. When it pulled away, Link noticed how damaged the door was. There was no way to open it now.

"Great, perfect- *Whoa!*" Link jumped to the side again as the demon swung at him. He managed to hit back one of the legs, but just being near it was so hot he felt like he was melting.

It was enough to offset it though, at it went tumbling back down the path to the entrance, crashing into that wall. The chamber shook ominously, dust and rocks falling from above.

This thing is too strong, Link thought quickly, looking back and forth between the monster and the exit that was now inaccessible. *Too strong to fight myself, but if I can-*

Too late to think things through, the demon came climbing back up at him, just as quickly as it had fallen.

"Fine then," Link hissed, jumping right into the line of fire. He made sure to stay on the larger part of the path, where he had room to move, and waved his arms, laughing. "Missed me!"

The monster roared, rampaging faster than before. Link jumped sideways, skidding on his shield as he hit the ground. The monster hurdled passed, ramming into the wall again. The wall cracked, sending splintered fissures up to the ceiling. Large chunks of rock fell into the lava around them, but the monster didn't seem to care.

"Whatever you are doing," Fi warned from the sword. "Hurry."

Lava spilled over the path, making it even narrower than before. "Right," Link agreed.

The monster screeched as Link darted back in front of the path. It ran towards him, but yet again he dodged. This time however, the demon didn't wait until making it all the way down to come back up, used its momentum to travel back up faster than ever.

Link threw up his shield as it crashed into him, sending him sprawling across the rock ground. He grabbed at whatever he could to keep himself from falling into the lava, but as the demon crashed into the wall for the last time, the wall fell. Large boulders of molten rock crumbled around them.

"Hurry," Fi repeated.

Link forced himself to stand, grinning at the wide hole in the wall. He gripped his sword and ran towards the monster. It spun its eye back towards him and as Link jumped he slashed at it. It screamed in pain as he sliced upward, cutting nearly in half as he continued running over it. Using it as a stepping stone, Link launched himself over the ledge of the wall, through the hole as the chamber fell apart behind him.

He tumbled to the ground as ash and smoke filled the air around him, rolling out of the dust onto the stone brick path of the second spring.

Link stood on shaking legs as he brushed himself off. "That could've gone better," he mumbled.

He froze, seeing Zelda and the woman in black at the end of the spring in the center of the large stone platform raised above the boiling spring water. A pillar of light sprung up before them, and the woman motioned for Zelda to enter.

But Zelda hesitated, looking back as she watched Link step forth. She smiled, stunned. "...Link!"

Impa threw her arm out in front of Zelda, blocking her way before

she could run back to Link.

"Hey!" Link called, glaring at the woman in black.

"You cannot go to him, your Grace," she told Zelda. "Remember what we discussed. Restrain yourself. Focus on the task at hand."

Link started up the stairs anyway, not caring for the woman who blocked his path, but Zelda turned away.

"I... I have to go," Zelda said quietly. "I'm sorry, Link."

Link continued up the stairs to the platform. "Zelda, wait!"

Zelda stepped into the light, disappearing, and the woman stood in front of Link, glaring down at him.

"Why are you doing this!?" Link hissed.

"It took you far too long to get here," she scolded. "Looking at you, I fear the goddess is mistaken in her choice of agents?"

"What?" Link growled.

"If this failure is any indication," she continued. "You have no hope of defending her Grace from those to seek assail her."

"You can't just-"

"Do my words anger you boy?" she asked. "Do my words sting? Let them. If I had not come when I did, your Zelda would have already fallen into the hands of the enemy."

"That's not-"

"The truth of it is you were late," she barked. "You were late, and you failed to protect her. I sent Zelda ahead to learn of the fate in which she is destined to play a part."

"Well excuuuse me, princess!" Link shouted angrily as he stepped up against her, jabbing a finger in her direction. "I didn't realize fighting giant flaming rock monsters was such an underwhelming task! Next time I'll ask them to try harder to kill me, would that make you happy?"

He glared at her, fists shaking with rage. "I am certain of this though," he said, his voice lowered. "I didn't come all this way to please you. And I didn't come all this way for Zelda just to have you tell me to go home!"

"You don't understand," the woman said quietly.

"I understand enough," Link continued. "This was the second of two springs, after that she was meant to come home." He looked at the pillar of light that Zelda had entered, forcing himself to calm down. "That's all I want... to bring her home. Let her go home."

"There are powers at play here you do not yet understand," she told him, still blocking his way. "It is not as simple as letting her go. This is what's best-"

"And what about her family?" Link cut her off. "Her friends? Don't they matter?"

"They will not be alive to matter if Zelda does not complete her task."

Link was silent.

"Listen well, chosen one," she explained, putting as much spite in the words 'chosen one' as she could. "If you wish to be of help to her Grace, you must summon a shred of courage and face the trials out before you. Only when you've conquered the trials will you be of use to Zelda. No sooner. Am I understood?"

Link could do little more than glare at her as the woman stepped back into the light. And even as he moved towards it disappeared, closing him from Zelda yet again. Link was left standing in the middle of the spring, fists balled tight and his legs shaking. He stared at the sky, hating himself for being too slow, hating that woman for holding Zelda back, and sorry for Gaepora who wouldn't be happy to hear that his daughter's return will be delayed once more.

"Link," Fi said. Link hadn't even noticed she appeared and forced himself to focus. "I have another message from the gods."

She hovered in front of him, facing the crest at the edge of the shrine. "*From the edge of time I guide you,*" she said, her voice echoing. "*The one destined to carry out the goddess' mission. The spirit maiden who descended from the clouds has passed through the Earth Spring and makes her way to a fated place. The parched desert of Lanayru... That is where the chosen will pass through the Gate of Time into a distant world.*"

Fi's translation ended and she turned back to Link, who was still looking at the sky.

"So says the gods," Link muttered under his breath.

The crest on the altar glowed and spun, and the final fragment of the stone tablet was presented to him. Link took it and looked at its surface, thinking about all that happened, and all that was yet to come.

"*It is time for you to awaken,*" Fi had told him.

"*Wake up sleepyhead,*" Zelda laughed.

Link turned away from the altar, tucking the tablet away. "Right," he said, shaking himself off. "Alright! Fine... Lanayru desert, that's where we go next."

"Correct," Fi agreed.

"Then let's hurry," Link said, already walking back towards the exit.

"Master," Fi said.

Link stopped, looking back at her.

"Your expression has changed."

Link smiled briefly. "Yeah," he huffed. "Zelda's alive. I saw it with my own two eyes."

"But you still have not gotten her back."

"No," Link nodded. "But I will, I promised."

Fi hovered silently for a moment, then returned to the sword without a word. After taking one last look to the spring behind him, Link returned to the caved in cavern of Eldin Volcano, knowing he was returning home empty handed.

Chapter 6: Eldin Volcano



CHAPTER 7

EMPTY HANDED

Link dropped down on the dock near the Goddess statue, immediately ducking out of sight when he saw Gaepora and Groose talking near the entrance to the courtyard. He knew he had to face them eventually, but not right now.

He snuck around the statue, avoiding their line of sight as he made his way into the chamber of the sword. Once he was deep enough into the chamber the darkened staircase kept him hidden and he slowed down, pulling out the tablet.

When he reached the pedestal however, Fi appeared. "Why are you avoiding your friends?" she asked. "Analysis shows no reason for this."

Link stepped up to the altar, looking at the other fragments of the tablet. "I promised them I'd have Zelda back by now," he answered.

"...You are worried they will show anger," Fi realized.

"No, it's not about them," Link corrected.

"Then your logic is flawed," Fi told him.

Link sat the tablet with the others. "Maybe," he said softly as the chamber rumbled. "Maybe I just don't want to face them."

He turned around, looking back at her. "If you failed, at anything, what would your reaction be?"

Fi hesitated. "... I do not know."

Link chuckled, shaking his head. "Yeah," he sighed. "No, of course you don't." He moved passed her. "Come on, we should get moving before-guh..."

Link stopped, seeing Gaepora slowly walking down the stairs.

"You've returned, yet you stayed silent," Gaepora said, disappointed. "I came as soon as I saw the light from the goddess. Are you leaving again?"

Link looked away. "It's... complicated."

Gaepora eyed Link, waiting for an explanation. When none came, he folded his arms behind his back and stood in front of the stairs. "...I see," he said. "Still, I would like to be informed of any developments."

"Yeah," Link nodded, still not looking at him. "I know."

"Has something happened?" Gaepora asked.

Link didn't answer for a while, trying to figure things out. He didn't even know what to say. *Sorry, your daughters alive but she's on a mission where I'm just supposed to follow blindly? I myself have no idea what's going on, and there are powers at play that don't make any sense? And who was the woman in black?*

Link shook his head. "I don't know," he finally admitted. "It's all so confusing... She's alive, Zelda's alive, but... She's headed to another place on the surface, not a spring though. Something called a Gate of Time."

He decided to leave out the bit about the woman in black, and the man Ghirahim who keeps getting in his way.

"But you saw her!" Gaepora exclaimed. "You found Zelda! Is she alright? Why aren't you with her?"

"She's safe," Link answered. "I'm just... supposed to go a different way I guess."

"Good..." Gaepora kept nodding to himself. "Is she alone? I don't like the thought of her traveling by herself."

Link sighed. "There's someone with her," he said bitterly. "A woman in black. But I don't trust her. Zelda does, but... she says she's protecting her."

Gaepora took a step back so Link could leave. "Very well," he said. "In that case, I wish you safe travels. All I ask is that you find out exactly what is going on. And next time you see this woman in black, demand some answers."

"Oh I plan to," Link hissed.

"Then get going," Gaepora ordered. "Before you fall too far behind."

"You were late. You were late, and you failed to protect her."

"Fi," Link said, headed to the stairs. "Come on."

Fi floated back to Link, returning to the sword.

Chapter 7: Empty Handed



CHAPTER 8

LANAYRU DESERT

Link crash landed into the sand, skidding down one of the dunes and tumbling until the ground was finally flat enough for the momentum to stop. He groaned, sitting up and brushing the sand off him.

Then Fi appeared. "Danger detected," she told him.

Link jumped to his feet, drawing his sword and shield. "Already?" he scoffed. "*Whoa!*"

The sand shifted beneath him and a large electric snail crept out.

"Back!" Link shouted, bashing it with his shield. The electricity shot through the shield, sending a jolt of pain up Link's arm.

"Fi!" Link shouted as more of the snails came out of the sand.

"I sense the spirit maiden nearby as well," Fi added.

Link rolled out of the way of one of the snails spinning towards him. "Which way?"

"This way," Fi pointed north before returning to the sword.

Link ducked as a large bird nearly bit his head off. The monsters swarmed him, and maneuvering was nearly impossible. His boots felt heavier than ever, yet the monsters seemed to have no problem staying above ground.

Knowing it would only sap his strength further to continue fighting, Link pushed off in the direction Fi pointed. He slid down another sand dune, doing a better job of keeping his footing this time, and escaped the danger the monsters presented.

At least for the time being.

As he climbed over the next hill in his path he saw a large ruins further down. It spread out like a web, but it looked old and broken. So many of the walls had completely fallen apart, all that was left was a cracked foundation and some dust.

"Is that where she is?" Link asked.

"No," Fi answered. "She is passed these ruins. There is a path to the west, that is where we must go."

"Understood," Link nodded. He dropped down from a short ledge, keeping a tight grip on his sword as he stomped through the sand.

It was easy enough to get through the desert, walking through the broken parts of the ruins and avoiding the quicksand areas. His shield might not have been very useful against the electric snails, but it kept away the vultures. The only real problem he had was the sun beating down on him, and the feeling of time running out.

He kept repeating the woman's words in his head, how he'd been late...

"I'm no failure," Link growled, standing on the last sand dune looking down at the rock tunnel that Fi was leading him to. In the distance he could see the spires of an ancient temple, old and broken as they were.

Fi lit up the gem on the sword as Link entered the darkened tunnel.



Link stepped out of the cave, walking out onto the stone path leading along a canyon's edge, the temple standing on the other side. There, in front of the temple, Zelda walked beside the woman in black.

Link smiled, running along the canyon. "Zelda!" he called.

Zelda spun around on the spot, just as ready as Link was for this all to be over. But as she tried to make her way to him, once again the woman threw her arm out in front of her, shouting at her to remain still.

This time however, it was for a much better reason.

The great marble wall to Link's side exploded, sending debris in every direction. And from the smoke, Ghirahim came flying out, a wide grin of malice on his face.

Before anyone could react, Ghirahim had positioned himself between Link and Zelda, throwing up a wall of fire to keep Link separated from the rest. Then without hesitating he made his strike towards Zelda.

And the woman in black struck back. Their swords clashed in the middle of the bridge, ringing out in the still desert air.

"Impa!" Zelda shouted.

Impa, Link thought, slashing at the fire that blocked his path. *So you do protect her.*

And protect her she did, throwing up a magical barrier to block Ghirahim's next attack. He continued striking against it, forcing Impa back.

"Your Grace!" Impa shouted. "Quickly, to the gate!"

Zelda hesitated, watching Link. "Link!" she called, fear in her voice.

Link grunted as he charged forward, bringing his sword down on Ghirahim's shoulder. As it impacted Ghirahim swept his arm, knocking Link back.

Impa looked over her shoulder as she continued holding up the barrier. "Go! Now!"

Zelda hurried to the gate in front of the temple, but she didn't enter. She couldn't leave knowing her friends were in danger, but she couldn't move as she didn't have any way to help them.

Then Ghirahim broke Impa's barrier, striking her. But before he could make another move Link stepped between them, blocking Ghirahim's attack with his shield and stabbing forward. Even though he didn't make the hit, he managed to push Ghirahim back.

"Link," Impa huffed.

"Get Zelda out of here," Link growled. "Hurry."

Impa stood, holding her injury. "You have my thanks... Link." She started backing away. "Return to the old woman at the sealed grounds. Tell her what happened here."

Impa hurried towards the gate, it's spinning circular surface glowing. "She will know where you must go! And know that we will-"

"I'll see you again!" Zelda called, Impa holding her back as they stepped into the gate. "This isn't goodbye Link! I promise!"

Zelda entered the gate, but Link called to Impa before she disappeared, still forcing Ghirahim back. "Hey!" he shouted. "Sorry I'm late!"

Impa huffed, stepping into the light.

As the light faded the gate exploded, bringing the front of the temple with it.

"Take that," Link hissed as he sliced at Ghirahim.

The demon lord only took a step back, glaring at him. "Now you've done it, Link," Ghirahim growled. "I blame myself. I should have reprimanded you the last time we met, but instead I was... soft."

"Your mistake," Link grinned.

"I'd take pleasure in punishing you, but I don't have time for recreation," Ghirahim's sword disappeared as he continued stepping away. "But next time I'll do more than just beat you senseless. I'll make the affair so excruciating you'll deafen yourself with the shrill sound of your own screams."

He jumped back towards the wall, disappearing in the air before he hit ground.

The air stiffened as the dust settled and once again Ling was left standing alone as the fires around him slowly died. He turned back to the destroyed gate, Zelda once again denied her return home. After a moment, half expecting something else to jump out at him, for Ghirahim to come back, or for the bridge beneath him to collapse, or something as just as awful, Link sunk to his knees.

"Always just a little too late," Link sighed.

Fi appeared beside him, floating for a moment as she watched the gate as well. Finally she looked down at Link. "Link, we should hurry and return to the Sealed Grounds."

"... Yeah," Link agreed. "I wonder what comes next."

Chapter 8: Lanayru Desert



CHAPTER 9
GROOSELAND VS THE
IMPRISONED

It was as bright a day as every other in Skyloft as Goose hovered in the air on his Loftwing. He'd circled around the village several times, and even searched some of the outer islands, but he refused to go near the strange openings in the clouds.

Link had been missing for a while, and he disappeared immediately after Zelda, which meant Link went to look for her! And if Link was looking for her, then so should he! Except Goose knew he'd find her first, even if Link had gotten lucky during the ceremony, Goose was still better.

But he had to find out where Link had gone first.

Judging by what he'd heard in the bazaar the other day, Link was onto something big. But then he'd disappeared again before saying anything! And on top of that, Link had broken the shield he'd spent so much time making!

"I'll show him!" Goose grumbled as he kept watch on the clouds below. "I'll find you sooner or later..."

For a moment, Goose sat in silence, his bird's squawking the only thing that broke the silence. But after awhile, when he was about to give up again and turn back around, Link came flying out of one of the breaks in the clouds. He rode his sailcloth into the air until the wind died, then his Loftwing picked him up and carried him from there.

"There you are!" Goose hissed. "So you *were* down there! Onward!"

He followed behind him, staying far enough away as to not be seen. But he stopped when he found where Link was going; another break in the clouds.

"What are you *doing*?" Goose exclaimed, watching as Link

dropped down through the hole.

For the first time, Goose forced himself to hover over the break in the clouds, looking down. It almost looked like ground below... but, that was impossible! There was nothing below the clouds!

Yet, there Link was, falling towards what looked like a large gathering of trees.

"Ah... uh... But..." Goose shook his head.

No! If Link could do it, then so could he!"

"This is no time for self doubt!" Goose decided. He pet his bird's head. "Farewell my friend. I shall return with Zelda in hand!"

He looked down again, and hesitated. "Eh, guh..."

His bird however, seemed to have already accepted the goodbye, and flapped its wings, knocking Goose overboard.

It flew off as he plummeted down like a rock.

"RAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!"

Link looked up, thinking it was just the wind whipping passed him as always, but his expression changed to one of surprise as he saw Goose falling towards him.

"Ah!" Link shouted as Goose wooshed passed him, grabbing Link's leg.

"Link!" Goose shouted. "HEEELP!"

Link fumbled with his gear as he tried to ready the sailcloth. It nearly flew right out of his hands but he managed to hold on, slowing their descent enough that it wouldn't kill them. They crashed into the ground, dazed, and slightly off of Link's original target.

Link sat up in the small clearing in the middle of the forest. It was near enough to the Sealed Grounds, but after a landing like that he didn't feel much like walking at all.

"... Ugh, are you trying to get us killed?" Link mumbled, rubbing the bruises on his arms.

"Rough... Landing," Goose coughed. "Think I mighta broke something." He sat up, holding his head. "Hey, Link, seriously... didn't anyone ever teach you how to land without crash--"

He froze at the sight of the small birds whistling at his feet. "Whoa!" he exclaimed, startling them and causing them to fly away. "B-birds? TINY birds?! Wh-what ARE they?!"

Just then a strange creature walked by, his body made of orange rocks and a large pack of supplies on his back.

"And what is that thing?!" Goose shouted. "But... how... Why... Wha-what..."

Groose threw his arms in the air. "WHERE AM I?!"

He grabbed Link and shook him furiously. "What's going on here?" he demanded. "Ever since Zelda vanished, you've been zipping in and out of town all in a hurry! So I figured I'd tail you and you'd lead me to Zelda. But this is... so wild! Seriously, what IS that thing over there?!"

Groose pointed back to the rock man, then gestured to all the trees around them. "And what's with all these trees? There are so many!" He grabbed Link and shook him again, though he was still recovering from last time. "Just give it to me straight! I can take it. Where are we? Is Zelda here? What's the deal with this place? If there's supposed to be nothin' below the clouds, what's all this?"

Link sighed, patting Groose's arm. "You've got a lot to learn."

Groose stepped back. "Huh?"

"There's more than this down here," Link explained, looking around them. "Mountains of fire, deserts full of killer birds."

"KILLER birds?!" Groose exclaimed. "And what are mountains?!"

"This isn't even the whole forest," Link continued. "Just a corner of it, and a small one at that." He pointed to a break in the trees. "And just through that path is a large temple, that's where I have to go next."

Link turned back to Groose, folding his arms. "Honestly, you wouldn't believe me even if I took you to see it all myself."

"And you've gone... to all these places?" Groose stood there, dumbfounded at how big this impossible surface world was. Just a few minutes ago, it didn't exist, and now...

"Not by choice," Link admitted. "Zelda's in danger, and I have to help her. She's okay for now, but... I've gotta hurry."

Groose sunk to his knees. "Uhhhh...Whoa... you're kind of imploding my mind right now... But I think I get what you're saying. If I've got this right, Zelda's down here somewhere and she's... okay?"

Link nodded.

"She's... she's okay," Groose huffed, his mind not able to focus on anything other than that. Everything else was just too much. "Oh, wow! That's so great! Duh huh huh... Hearing that is such a... huge weight off my mind."

He looked around the small clearing. "You know, Link," he sighed. "It's sort of all right down here."

"I'll admit," Link nodded. "It's growing on me."

"This place needs a name," Groose decided. "Yeah... A name fitting for the rugged, adventurous wilderness. From now on, we'll call it...

Grooseland!"

Suddenly everything felt awkwardly quiet.

"Uh, yeah," Link nodded. "We'll work on that later."

Goose grunted as he got to his feet, fixing his hair. "So lemme see if I've got this right," he grinned. "The old lady living in the temple down the road from here knows where Zelda is?"

"Yes-"

"I see," Goose said, cutting him off. "Right, Link. Thanks for getting me here, you've done a good job. You can go home now."

"Excuse me?" Link scoffed.

"Big Goose will handle the search for Zelda from here."

"Um, no, that's not-"

Goose started pacing, obviously ignoring Link. "Yup, I'll track her down," he said, nodding to himself as he planned everything out. "Save her, then give her a lift back to Skyloft... Then when we get back, I'll ask her if she wants to make our whole going-out thing official, and then the two of us will get some quality time together."

Goose stood there proudly, but Link just hung his head in disappointment. "You're not well."

Goose patted Link's shoulder. "Anyway, the point is you're work here is done. I got it covered from here!" He turned down the path Link had pointed to earlier and walked off.

"Of all the-"

"Catch you later Link!" Goose laughed from further down the path.

"Seriously," Link growled, heading after him. "Out of everyone, Goose? Could've picked Karen, or Pipit. Even Fledge would've been a better decision." He looked up at the sky between the trees. "Why, out of everyone, did you send Goose?!"

"Huh?" Goose chuckled in disbelief. "You've gotta be kidding me, Grannie!" He crossed his arms and stared down at the old woman as Link entered the temple from the other side of the room.

"You're messing with me," Goose continued, not noticing Link. "Say it again, I dare you!"

The old woman held up a hand. "I only speak the truth," she said softly. "You are not the one who will save her. The spirit maiden, your Zelda, can only be saved by another. It has been his fate to do this thing, and in doing so save us. As it was decided long before you were brought

crying into this world."

"Shut it, Grannie!" Goose barked. "You obviously don't know me well, cause if you did, you'd know that if anyone's going to save Zelda, it's Goose! How could it not be me? Plus, if it ain't me, why would I even be here? Pffft. If I'm not up to the job of being hero, just who is?"

Goose stood at the top of the stairs, waiting for the old woman to answer. She only looked passed, at Link who stood at the bottom of the stairs.

"Huh?" Goose turned around and watched as Link walked up to stand beside him.

"Oh... now I getcha," Goose growled. "Link, Grannie here has been trying to tell me you're going to be the big hero who rescues Zelda."

"From what I heard," Link nodded, staring Goose in the eye. "Yeah-"

"What a joke!" Goose laughed. He jabbed a finger in Link's face. "Look, all I've heard so far is a bunch of babbling about destiny, but that's a load of garbage. I know you, and you're no hero, shrimp!"

Goose stormed off, leaving the temple in a fit of rage, yelling nothing but noise as the large stone doors slammed shut behind him.

"Greetings, Link," the old woman smiled, ignoring Goose's tantrum. "Where you able to catch up to Zelda?"

"Yeah, almost," Link answered, looking over his shoulder at the door. He half expected Goose to walk back in, but he didn't come back, so link turned back to the old woman. "There was a woman in black with her, same as in Eldin. She told me to see you, that you'd know where I have to go next."

"Ah, I see," the old woman nodded. "So the guardian was there as well, was she?"

"You know her?" Link asked.

"The one you saw by Zelda's side is known as Impa," she answered. "She is a being sent forth by the goddess to aid Zelda in her quest. The two have traveled somewhere in order to accomplish the great task destiny has set before them. However, now that Impa has destroyed the gate that they used, there is only one way left to find them."

"And how do I do that?" Link asked.

"Take your sword," the old woman instructed. "Summon its power, and strike the pedestal in the center of the room. There is another gate here, and it's time to open it."

Link walked back to the pedestal in the center of the room, taking out his sword.

As he held his blade he remembered Fi's warning. *"If the sword is raised skyward as before, it is charged with energy...Though its use is powerful, use it sparingly."*

Still, Link raised his sword, gathering energy in its blade. When it glowed with power, he drove it like a key into a lock in the pedestal. The crest spun like the crests in the Sword Chamber and Spiritual Springs, and a ring of light circled Link as a large black stone rose from the ground behind him.

"The great slab standing before you is known as a Gate of Time," the old woman explained. "It is the last of its kind in existence... The only portal binding our world to the one where Zelda now resides. If you manage to open the gate and pass through, you will likely end up in the same place as Zelda."

"Why can't I now?" Link asked, sheathing his sword.

"Because as your sword is the key to summoning the gate," she continued. "It also the key to opening it. Though your sword does not yet wield the power to do so. To do this, you will need to endure many hardships and put yourself in great danger to awaken the gate from its dormant state."

"Only when you've conquered the trials will you be of use to Zelda," Impa had said. *"No sooner. Am I understood?"*

"Yeah," Link mumbled. "Understood." He looked up at the blank slab, its glassy surface somehow completely un-reflective.

"Though this journey will place you harm's way, Link," the old woman said. "You must endure. It is your fate as the chosen hero of the godde-"

Suddenly there was a loud rumbling that shook the temple, nearly throwing Link off his feet. He steadied himself and rushed outside, finding Groose who was also having trouble staying upright.

"Whoa! Wh-what's with all the shaking?" Groose toppled sideways but he managed to catch himself. "The whole ground is heaving... I thought it was supposed to be solid down here!"

Then Fi appeared and sent Groose reeling backwards in alarm. "What the? Wh-who is-"

Fi stared at Link. "Danger detected."

Link hurried to the edge of the cliff and dropped to his knees, focusing on the dark marker at the base of the pit.

"Link! What are you doing?!" Groose shouted.

A heavy cloud of dark energy surrounded the marker. Link jumped to his feet, taking out his sword again. "Stand back!" he

ordered.

The marker exploded, energy blasting out in all directions. The base of the pit opened up into a black hole ringed with flames. From this whole emerged a demon Link hadn't expected to see again; the very same as the demon in his dream.

It felt like an eternity ago, that dream. It was before Zelda had been taken from Skyloft by Ghirahim's storm...

This monster, Link thought bitterly. *Is this...*

"I knew it," the old woman said, walking out of the temple. Her short stature kept her from having too much trouble, but it was clear moving was hard for someone her age. "The seal has given way. I'll explain later but now is the time for action. We must keep that beast from escaping the pit! It must not reach the temple!"

"Fi!" Link said, readying himself. "Plan?"

"The marker is embedded in the beast's head," Fi explained. "There is a 57% chance that a blast from your sword will reseal the monster."

The Imprisoned brought its arms down on the spiraling path around it, shaking the ground yet again.

"57%?" Link asked. "That's pretty low!"

"There are no other options," Fi answered. She returned to the sword and Link stood by the edge again.

"Well," he huffed. "As long as it's over half."

This monster was massive. It was half as tall as the pit was deep. Its arms however were long enough that they could crush the ground Link and the others stood on. Link barely had time to move before one of its arms smashed him.

His plan had been to climb onto the Imprisoned's arm, but the monster was too quick. By the time Link had gotten back on his feet after dodging its arms had already moved back.

"I need a way," Link said through gritted teeth.

Groose looked back and forth between Link, who was running along the edge looking for an opening, and the Imprisoned, who had started climbing out of the pit.

"You're not the only hero around here," Groose swore, running towards the ledge. He skid to a stop, then ran in the opposite direction of Link. "He ugly! Come and get me!"

The Imprisoned turned its attention to him, leaving Link alone.

"What are you doing?!" Link shouted as Groose ran.

"I may not have some special sword!" Groose roared, running faster as the monster's arms crashed behind him. "But that doesn't mean

I'm a weakling like you!"

Link chased after him. *You're gonna get yourself killed*, Link thought. *But thanks for the opening.*

The monster's arm came down again and Goose slid away, but before the monster could retract Link jumped on board. He ran the length of its arm, gripping his sword and shield as he used the movement of its arm to propel himself forward. He grabbed at the marker as he lost his footing, the Imprisoned letting out a deep bellow and raising its head.

Link raised his sword, summoning power to the blade. When the tip shone with the blinding blue light, he drove it into the marker, sending a blast of energy that knocked him away.

As Link fell the Imprisoned burned away and the marker fell passed him. Seeing the ground come up at him, he forced himself to his senses and pulled out the sailcloth, dropping to his knees at the bottom of the pit as the marker returned to its place as the seal beside him.

The carvings on the marker glowed and faded several times before finally staying dark, signifying that the Imprisoned had once again been locked away.

Link fell backwards, winded.

Goose followed sheepishly behind the old woman as they came down to the bottom of the pit to retrieve Link. Goose opened his mouth to speak, but she cut him off.

"Nice going, Link," she said proudly. "Though Imprisoned had only just begun to awaken and break its bonds, I'm impressed you were able to restore the seal keeping it captive. Unfortunately, you have only succeeded in buying us a little more time in which to act."

Link got to his feet, sheathing his sword.

"The behemoth you beat back into confinement is a horror of unspeakable power," the old woman continued. "Judging by what I saw, I would not be surprised if the seal gave way again soon. So you are left with precious little time to complete the task with which you have been entrusted."

"So how do we defeat it for good?" Link asked.

"Return to the Sealed Temple, Link," she answered, turning to leave the pit. "We have much to discuss."

Goose didn't look Link in the eye as Link walked passed, his gaze was fixed on the marker in the ground. The seal that trapped the giant impossible monster. He stood there by himself for a long time after the others left, not sure if he was worth being part of this anymore.

You took the win from me then too, Goose thought sadly. *Then you*

were the one sent to save Zelda... then now...

Groose tore his eyes away from the marker and looked up at the temple. *Am I really that unnecessary?*

Chapter 9: Grooseland VS The Imprisoned



CHAPTER 10
THE FIRST TRIAL;
FORARE'S COURAGE

"...As you can see, the gate is nothing more than a slab of cold stone for now." The old woman sat back down in the same spot as always in the Sealed Temple, at the back of the room at the top of the steps in front of an old broken door. She took a deep breath, tired from her long walk up and down the pit. "It is sleeping. Rousing it from its slumber would require great power. And this power, you do not have just yet."

Link looked over his shoulder at the Goddess Sword on his back.

"Ah, sorry to disappoint you boy," the old woman smiled. "But for now your sword lacks the power necessary to open the gate."

"But I was able to fight the Imprisoned just fine," Link said.

"As I said, you have only bought time, nothing more."

Link nodded, turning to study the slab behind him. "Then what do I do?"

"First, you and your sword must grow together," the old woman explained. "Faron Woods... Eldin Volcano... and Lanayru Desert... A sacred flame is hidden somewhere in each of these lands. Seek them out, and purify your sword in their heat. Only after your sword has been tempered by these three fires will it be fully imbued with the great power for which you search."

Groose shifted awkwardly, taking a step back. "I hate even sayin' this, but I guess you got it all figured out, Grannie." He took another step back, looking around him at the massive structure of the temple. "Me, well, there's nothin' I can do to help Zelda..."

Finally, he hung his head and turned around, headed for the door. "I'm useless."

"Ah, you sell yourself short my friend," the old woman said cheerfully. "You'll see in time that you have your own role to play in all this."

Groose hesitated by the door, but didn't say a word as he left.

"Link, go now," the old woman said. "Trust in your fate to guide your feet. Your mission depends on it... as does Zelda's fate."

Link opened his mouth to speak, but wasn't sure what to say. He looked back at the door Groose had gone through, worried about what he'd do. "What about Groose?" he found himself asking.

"Don't you worry," the old woman assured him. "I'll keep an eye on him and make sure he stays out of trouble."

Link moved slowly, unsure of his next move. As he reached the door, he figured he'd just start here. If there was a sacred flame in the forest, that was his next objective.

The path narrowed and the trees closed in as he entered the forest. As before he followed it for a while, but eventually he realized he'd just end up at the same place as last time. Looking around for another path however, he found none.

"Fi," Link called. "Any idea where we're going?"

Fi appeared, quickly spinning in place to search the immediate area. "The Spiritual Spring was found in the north, and the Sealed grounds are in the west." She looked directly at Link. "I would recommend walking along the southeast edge of the forest."

Link nodded and they continued down the path, keeping an eye out for any other roads. Eventually though, Link figured they weren't going to find anything, and they stopped. "You don't happen to remember seeing another road, do you?"

"I do not recall a second path," Fi answered.

Link took a deep breath and looked through the trees to the south. The forest seemed to get thicker the farther back it went, getting darker and darker. "D'you think maybe it's off the path?"

"There is an 84% possibility of our destination being separated from the path," Fi agreed. "I recommend moving quickly but cautiously, I sense darkness in the deeper woods."

"Of course." Link drew his sword as he stepped between the trees. For a while it was as calm as the main road, but then monsters started closing in. He could hear the steps of Bokoblins running passed him, spiders hissing in the distance. Keese watched him from above, flapping their wings and screeching as he walked by.

"Immense danger detected," Fi warned, following closely behind.

"Nothing we haven't faced before," Link assured her.

"On the contrary," Fi countered. "This is far worse than anything we have faced before."

Link looked up, seeing a thin spire over the treetops. "Look, the temple," Link pointed. "We're close enough, I think we'll be fine."

"45% probability of us remaining that way." Fi returned to the sword and Link kept his shield in front of him as he continued on his own.

Finally, he was able to step out of the trees into a clearing before the temple. And he stopped dead there for a long time, looking up at it. The spires along the top of it, the carvings of gold that caught the sun, the marble stone it was all made of that seemed to be impossibly reflective.

But there was one obvious thing off about all of it.

"That's... not a temple."

Link stared up at the giant statue's face looking down at him. Its eyes were closed, like it was carved to resemble a sleeping god. Yet, as he took a step closer, the statue's eyes opened.

In an instant, the giant's arms darted forward, pulling swords out from its sides and bringing them down around Link. He was trapped, and before he knew it he was on the ground, knocked down by the force of the giant's power.

The giant bent down and stared Link in the face. "Have Courage."

Before Link could respond, a ring of shimmering lights sprang up around him, and a feeling like sinking consumed him.

Link opened his eyes as he fell through the darkness. He reached for his pouch to pull out the sailcloth, but he couldn't find either! Instead, he brought his arms and legs in and braced himself for the inevitable impact.

But a moment later, Link stopped falling, and when he opened his eyes he found himself already on the ground. Not the ground he had been however, but instead the ground of a twisted version of Faron Woods. Everything was dark, echo-y and warped. The trees seemed to bend around him, the sky a deep shade of purplish green, the grass glowed like moonlight.

"Fi," Link hissed.

She didn't answer, and when he reached for his sword, it was missing as well. He had nothing on him but his uniform.

To make matters worse, through every crack in the trees around

him he saw a pair of eyes. They all seemed to follow him, even as he backed up into the clearing he'd dropped into. He stood in the center, turning in place as he searched for a way out.

He found none.

"That's not fair," he mumbled. He lowered his stance anyway, preparing for a fight. "But I've trained for this... kind of."

Quick footsteps hurried towards him from behind and instinctively Link spun and kicked. The Bokoblin flew backwards, but when it hit the ground it dissipated into smoke and bones. Its skeleton lay on the ground for a moment, before standing up again.

"What is this?" Link asked.

Behind him, more Bokoblins rushed towards him. He rolled out of the way, letting them all crash into each other. No that made anything better, as the skeletons of those Bokoblins now continued towards him as well.

He didn't have anything but his fists and feet to fight off his undead attackers, but he'd trained in hand-to-hand combat at the academy. The only problem was that he couldn't defeat any of his opponents and they just kept coming. More and more of them appeared seemingly out of nowhere, or perhaps the forest, it was hard to keep track of where they all were, and eventually Link struggled to stay afloat in this sea of skeletal drones.

And then things got worse.

As small as the clearing was, there was barely enough room for all the creatures there as it was, yet out of the forest came a monster taller than the trees. It crushed them in its wake, and when it arrived it trampled the other monsters well. It looked like a Bokoblin, but it was much bigger, its face wider and it held in its hand a giant spiked club.

Link forced his way onto the onto the Bokoblin skulls and jumped to the side and the giant's club came down. He ran on top of the monsters as he made his way out of the clearing, entering the forest again. However, he stopped as soon as he was met with the guardian.

It was the same being as the giant which sent him here, but smaller and there were more of them. They lined the clearing from behind the trees, blocking Link off completely.

"What am I supposed to do?" Link whispered, trying to come up with a solution.

He had no weapons, and there were hundreds of them. And against the giant's...?

Then he remembered his fight just a few hours ago. How he'd

climbed the Imprisoned's arm to reach its head. From there...

Link ducked out from behind the trees, jumping back into the clearing and climbed on top of the Bokoblins once again. He charged at the giant Bokoblin as it brought down its club.

"You're a lot slower than that behemoth," Link grinned, jumping on the club. He ran up the monster's arm and grabbed onto the horns on its head. "Take this!"

He pulled back on the horns, forcing the monster to look upward. It roared in anger, slashing its club at random. The skeletal Bokoblins were destroyed in waves, swiped away and tossed aside.

And yet it wasn't over yet.

"Link!" a voice screamed.

Link froze, hearing Zelda's cry for help.

He searched for her from atop the giant's head, and eventually found her in the grip of another giant. It was crushing her as she struggled to get loose.

Link grit his teeth and forced his giant sideways. It toppled slightly, its club cracking against a tree. The impact broke the tree and set the giant off balance, and as it fell Link jumped towards Zelda.

Too late, Link realized this giant didn't have a club, but instead a sword. And as Link reached out to Zelda, as he propelled himself forward, the blade pierced through him. There he hung suspended as everything seemed to slow down.

He couldn't feel his legs and his arms were slowly dying as well, his head spinning. Zelda's voice was muted by the sound of blood rushing to his head, but he could still hear her reaching out to him.

Unable to do anything else, his vision blurred until everything went black.

"Not once did I sense fear in your heart."

Link opened his eyes, floating. He felt numb, but he could move, the feeling of dying still fresh in his mind.

"You have passed, chosen hero. You have proven you have courage within you. You may pass."

"Pass?" Link whispered, his voice echoing in his head.

As he watched a point of light appeared before him, expanding until it was all around him. Then suddenly he was back on his feet, in the normal Faron Woods, as if nothing had happened. He didn't even feel

tired.

Was it... all just a dream?

"Link," Fi said, appearing beside him. "Are you alright?"

Link thought about that for a moment, but he didn't feel like anything was wrong so he nodded. "Yeah," he said, looking down at his hands. "I'm fine."

The Guardian stood, the ground rumbling with its movement. It took a single step backwards, and sat behind the temple it had revealed. It looked small compared to the Guardian's size, but that didn't make the spectacle any less grand.

Yet still, with the last trial still fresh in his mind, Link hesitated. "No explanation?" he mumbled. He looked up at the Guardian as he could still see him over the temple. "You can't just use her like that!"

The Guardian remained silent, its eyes closed once more.

Knowing he wasn't going to receive an answer, Link swallowed his anger and entered the temple. "Come on," he said, motioning for Fi to follow. She returned to the sword and Link started down the steps through the open door.

The deeper he went the more the stairwell glowed with a florescent light. As he reached the bottom he entered into a large cavern filled mostly with water, only a small stone dock at the end of the stairs that led into the water.

As Link stepped closer, ripples were sent through the surface and the back of a long scaled creature swam through the underground lake.

"There is but one could enter this chamber..."

Link drew his sword and shield, not wanting to fight again so soon but not wanting to be caught unprepared again.

"So you have the sacred blade with you. Good, though it has not yet reached its fullest potential. In fact I would go as far as to say that sword is almost entirely useless."

Link took a step forward, watching as the long body of the creature seemed to get longer and longer. "Who are you?"

The water's surface broke, and before the dock the dragon's head emerged. As imposing as the dragon was, its face was clearly that of a woman, fins fanning out from the back of her head, and two long antennae protruding from her forehead. She wore a long blue robe that spread out around her.

"I, am Faron," she declared, staring down at him with a cold gaze. "Keeper of these lands, and the sacred flame of Farore."

Link nodded, returning his shield to his back. "The sacred flame,"

he said firmly. "That is why I am here."

"I know why you are here..." Faron moved forward, hovering over Link. "I can see into your heart, your desire to protect those dear to you."

She lowered her head as she moved back, sinking into the water a little. "Hold your sword steady."

Link planted his feet, gripping the hilt of his sword with both hands.

"Prepare child."

Faron blasted the sword with flames, and Link moved one hand to the blade to keep it stable. The green fires engulfed the blade as the sword glowed with a white light. Then the blade consumed the fires, and Faron moved back.

"Now, see your blade!"

The hilt seemed to have unfolded, the blade longer now. Though its weight remained the same, strong, but light.

As he studied it however, he noticed a symbol on the back of his hand. Three triangles, two faded but the bottom right glowed with a faint golden light.

Fi appeared from the sword. "The sacred flame has purified your blade," she explained. "Enhancing and evolving it."

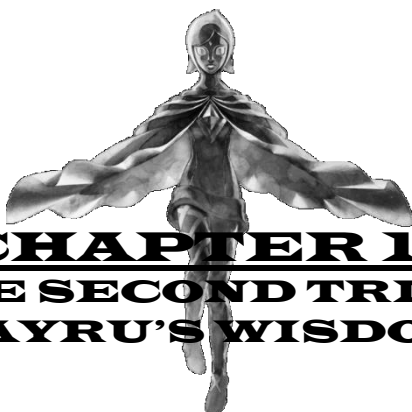
"And with your sword now enhanced," Faron added. "You are now ready for your second trial."

Link bowed, sheathing his new sword. "Thank you."

Faron rose. "Go now," she ordered. "And be swift." She dove back into the water without so much as a splash. Just as he had entered, the water was calm once again, casting its light about the cavern.

He bowed once more as Fi returned to the sword, then he left to continue his journey.

Chapter 10: The First Trial; Forare's Courage



CHAPTER II
THE SECOND TRIAL;
NAYRU'S WISDOM

"I recommend Lanayru Desert next," Fi said as she appeared beside Link. She floated along with him as he traveled above the clouds on his Loftwing. "It is closer to your current location."

Link nodded, changing course to head west. Then he noticed Fi staring at him. "Anything else?" he asked.

"Through this journey you have changed expressions many times," Fi noticed. "It is strange to me that you can have so many."

"Well," Link said. "I guess... that's just Humans?"

"No," Fi corrected, staring forward now. "It is Mogma, and Dragons as well. Even monsters you have faced and Ghirahim..."

"I-"

"Let us return to the mission," Fi returned to the sword, not letting Link give an answer.

"Right," Link mumbled.

He sped up his bird, coming up on the hole in the barrier leading to Lanayru. "Alright," Link huffed, getting ready to drop. He patted his bird's head. "I'm off." He dropped down again as his bird circled back around to Skyloft.

As Link fell he went through the last trial in his head again. The mass of skeletons swarming him, the giant Bokoblins which Fi had later told him might've been something like Moblins. But Link had faced some of them before at Eldin and those were considerably smaller.

But then there was Zelda.

He wondered if he made the right decision, rushing to save her without a real plan. He wished someone would explain it to him, but he was too stunned facing the Dragon Faron to ask.

Still, Link thought. It's not like I'm gonna give up after that.

As he landed on the sand dunes of the Lanayru Desert he drew his sword, expecting enemies to come out of the sand again. Though this time, none came.

He spun in place, not sure which way he'd gone last time to find the web-shaped ruins. "Which... way... to... go..."

He stopped, facing what he thought was the way he went last time. "Fi, you led me in the right direction last time, right?"

Fi appeared, facing north. "Yes."

"Can you sense the Guardians the same way you sensed Zelda?"

"I do not sense anything."

"Do you have to be close enough?"

"No," Fi answered, turning to him. "I do not sense anything. There is only sand, nothing more."

"What do you mean nothing?" Link asked.

Fi floated a ways away, pointing to the ground. Following her, Link saw a pile of broken bones on the ground. Paying more attention, the desert seemed to be littered with them.

"There is only sand," Fi repeated.

"Wh-what happened here?" Link huffed, putting away his weapons. "So... if there's nothing here, which way do we go?"

"I do not know," Fi admitted. "However, there are no paths to leave to know if it is off the usual course."

"So the same tactic from Faron Woods won't work here," Link nodded. "Alright... which way did we did we go last time? North? Maybe we can find a clue at the temple."

Fi nodded, pointing northwest. "That way."

Link started forward. "And, what was that earlier you were talking about-"

Fi returned to the sword before Link could finish his question.

Link traversed the dunes, half expecting the piles of bones around him to reanimate. He was glad to finally be rid of them when he arrived at the ruins. There were considerably less dead monsters here, but the walls looked more damaged than before, like something tore right through them. Entire chunks of them were just missing, obliterated.

Now moving cautiously, Link made his way to the tunnel leading to the Temple of Time, keeping an eye out for anything that might've been able to do the damage he'd seen. However, unlike last time, he didn't go through it. Instead he started climbing it.

"What are you doing?" Fi asked.

"Getting to higher ground," Link grunted, getting on top of the

tunnel. "I'm gonna see if I can find the next temple... or head of the Guardian I guess."

Fi hovered higher in the air, spinning. She stopped, facing south. "There," she said. "There appears to be a path leading from the ruins. There is a 65% probability of this path leading us to the Guardian."

"Then we head in that direction," Link agreed, already climbing back down.

Fi however, floated a bit higher. "Link," she added. "There is little to no ground between us and our destination?"

"What do you mean?" Link asked, looking at the ground between them and the path.

"The small road leading into the rock walls around the desert may continue," Fi explained. "However, passed the rock wall, there are many canyons, all in close proximity to each other."

Link nodded. "We'll cross that bridge when we get to it."

As they arrived at the path they discovered that it wasn't just a simple road, but an abandoned mining rail. There didn't appear to be a cart anywhere nearby, but the cave the rail led into was open. Low rocky hills meshed into the desert here, which is what made it hard to see in the first place, yet there were still obvious signs of destruction around the area.

"Whoever destroyed the ruins," Link said solemnly. "They came this way."

The tunnel the rail led them through was nearly pitch black, and once again Fi lit up the gem on the sword's hilt so he could see. It seemed to wind around in circles at first, but eventually it led out into the open and Link stared at the open canyon.

"You weren't kidding," he mumbled.

"I seem to have been mistaken," Fi said as she appeared beside him. "I had thought they were canyons, however they are actually more railways."

"And they don't exactly look stable," Link added, placing his foot on one of the railways. It creaked, but it didn't break, not that made it feel any safer. "Suggestions?"

"I recommend finding the path that is the strongest," Fi offered.

Link scanned the horizon on the other side of the canyon. There were a lot of broken rails between here and there, but he could almost see something on the other side.

"I think the Guardian is on the other side," Link said. "Can you tell which of these paths at least leads us in-"

Link was nearly knocked off his feet by a sudden gust of wind blowing through the canyon. It shook the rails, causing a few to collapse then and there. Most of the rails remained upright, but Link already had a new idea in mind.

He took a step back, taking his sailcloth out of his pouch.

"There is a very small chance of success," Fi warned sternly.

"No percentage this time?" Link joked.

"You would not want to hear it."

Link took a deep breath, paying attention to the way the rails swayed. Another gust was coming. "It's either this or walking the falling rails," he said. "I don't have much choice."

"... Exercise *extreme* caution." Fi returned to the sword.

As soon as it was close enough Link jumped into the gust of wind. For a moment, then he fell. The wind carried him forward, but he was too heavy and nearly crashed into the railway. He managed to run along it for a brief few seconds before the wind continued carrying him, but the next rail was lower.

Link braced himself as he slammed into it, the wood splintering. He held on to the sailcloth as he fell, almost laughing as the wind spun him around. Another strong gust lifted him back above the rails and as he floated over the tracks he looked down at them. More than half of them ran deeper into the canyon, and the other half seemed to crisscross from one side to the other.

Looking at it from a bird's eye view, he realized that if he *had* followed the rails, he wouldn't have ended up where he needed to go.

"I guess it *was* off the main road," Link said.

As he got closer to his destination he could see the Guardian more clearly. It was hunched over, covered in sand. The spires on its head and shoulders were broken off and the golden paint carved into its body had faded a long time ago.

The first Guardian had looked like a statue, still and silent. This one... it just looked dead.

Link tightened his grip and tried to aim himself towards the cliffs. As soon as he was able he let go, tucking his sailcloth into his belt and giving his arms a rest as he walked the rest of the way to the Guardian.

The closer he got the more broken it seemed; cracks in every limb, sand in every crack. He stood beneath it, looking up at the fractured face.

"Who did this?" Link said, thinking out loud.

As if activated by his voice, the giant slowly creaked to life. Its eyes blinked the sand away and its joints cracked as it tried to sit up. As before, its arms blocked Link from all sides, but one of its arms fell off at the elbow when it hit ground.

"Have... Wisdom..."

Link planted his feet firmly as darkness surrounded him again, but a moment later he was falling. He knew what to expect this time however, and waited for the warped version of Lanayru to appear before him.

However, when the world arrived, it was different from his expectations. It was the desert, of course, but it was completely flat with no markings to indicate when it ended. It spread out around him endlessly, making a perfectly straight line on the horizon as the darkened sky touched the blueish colored sand.

Remembering last time, Link focused on the immediate area, expecting monsters to appear. But of course, this trial was different from the last, and he was surprised when he finally noticed the line of the horizon getting closer. Soon, the sky faded down into darkness as the edge of the world shrunk.

Link stood in the center of the circle of land that remained, and one by one around him, bridges appeared. They stretched ever outward into the darkness, four in total.

"Am I supposed to choose?" Link asked himself, not actually expecting an answer.

He spun around slowly, trying to find differences in the bridges, but they were all exactly the same. From one however, he heard a faint whistling.

"This one?" he mumbled.

Link started down the bridge with the whistling, but as soon as he stepped onto it, he found himself walking back onto another circular piece of land.

"Wha-?" Link whipped back around, but he only found a bridge.

"Did I get it wrong?" Link grunted, choosing a random path this time.

Again, as soon as he set foot on the bridge the scene changed. This time however he found himself crashing through the bridge and impacting into another island surrounded by nothing.

Brushing himself off as he stood, the four bridges came up around the island again.

"So it's the whistling," Link huffed, listening for the strange tune.

As soon as he heard it again he started down that path, and found

himself once more in another area that looked almost identical to the last. This time, he made sure to continue following the whistling.

Where the next bridge led him was a similar area, but this time instead of four bridges there were six. Deciding not to risk it, he continued following the music. Another few bridges and again the number grew from six to eight. Then from eight to ten, and so on and so on, until finally there Link stopped counting after thirty. The islands kept growing to accommodate them, but the whistling was so loud now that it didn't matter how many bridges there were, it was always obvious.

Until, that is, when another sound came from another path.

"Link!" Zelda called.

Just as in the last trial, Link froze, turning in place as he searched for where her voice was coming from. It was a different bridge than the whistling, and Link forced himself to stop before following her voice.

Last time, he'd jumped in headfirst and died. This time he needed to think. Which was the right answer? Continue following the whistling? Or break from the path and go after Zelda?

"*Link!*" Zelda cried.

Link took a step back. Then another. Finally, he backed up enough that one more step and he'd step onto the whistling bridge.

"*LINK!!*"

Link took one last step backwards.

—

Link floated once more in darkness, opening his eyes at the sound of the Guardian's voice.

"You were... wise... to listen..."

Link hung there, limp. Only half of him was paying attention, the other half was just as angry as last time when the Guardian's trial tried to use Zelda as some sort of sick test.

"You have passed... Chosen Hero," the Guardian continued. "You have proven... you have Wisdom... within you... You may... pass..."

Link didn't even blink as the small point of light warped around him.

—

When he opened his eyes he was once again standing in the desert, the Guardian towering above him.

It took him longer than it should have to realize the Guardian was falling.

He jumped out of the way, Fi flying beside him to escape the collapsing giant. Sand shot up in all directions, sending Link spiraling across the sand. Fi simply floated in the air, completely unfazed.

"What...?" Link shook himself off, staring at the fallen Guardian.

"Link, the damage was too severe," Fi said. "I suggest we continue to the temple."

Link kept his hand on his sword, still watching the Guardian. "That's twice now," he said softly. "Kinda hard to be mad at you like that though..."

Fi tilted her head, as if confused, but she didn't ask anything before returning to the sword. Link took one last look at the Guardian, giving a sort of bow before moving on.

The temple wasn't so much of a temple, but instead more of an arch set in front of a cave entrance. It was built into a rocky wall that rose out of the sand, but the stairs leading down weren't anything more than simple stone. The end of the tunnel led out into yet another massive canyon, only a small strip of land along the canyon wall on Link's side.

What caught him off guard however, was the large skeletal Dragon that lay on the peninsula not too far away. It wrapped around the ledge, lying as if it had died in its sleep.

Fi appeared beside him, moving forward a bit. "Link... This Dragon has died."

"... I was too late," Link breathed. "Whoever caused all that... all this... they did this, didn't they?"

"I sense Ghirahim's presence," Fi said. "And... some-"

Link slammed his fist into the rock wall. "Ghirahim!" he barked. "Should've known... He's really this powerful, that he could make it all the way here, and kill the Dragon guarding the Sacred Flame?" He stepped closer to the Dragon. "He made sure we'd never complete our quest."

"Yes," Fi agreed. "This would be why I sensed nothing."

Link shook his head, refusing to accept this as the end. "No," he growled. "There's gotta be a way to fix this. We can't just let Ghirahim win." He looked back at Fi. "Fi, can you-"

"Calculations complete," Fi said immediately. "A moment ago I detected something besides Ghirahim, and I have found what that is."

"What is it?" Link asked.

Fi turned Link's attention to a small crack in the rock wall. "There is a cavern there, with a stone inside. In ancient times they were referred to

as Time Stones. This used to be a mining facility, remnants of that time remain."

Not needing to hear anything else, Link sped off towards the wall. It wasn't quite big enough for him to fit through, but he managed to use his shield to break some of the rock. Fi then returned to the sword as Link entered the cavern.

Scattered across the ground were broken bits of metal; gears and masks. It almost looked like there had been tiny mechanized people in the cave, which is not at all what Link had expected.

"Well... that's... strange," Link said, looking around the room. On the far side there was a large blue stone, a slot carved into the center. It was similar to the slot Link used to activate the Gate of Time in the Sealed Temple, and he wondered if they were related.

"Looks like it needs a key," Link said.

"Your sword appears to have traces of the same material," Fi told him from the sword. "It should function the same way."

Link drew his sword and placed it in the slot, turning it like a key. The stone glowed, and as soon as it clicked a blast of energy was expelled. Link threw up his arms, but the blast didn't seem to carry any force. He put his arms down and retrieved his sword, then noticed just how different everything around him looked.

The rock walls were still being carved, but the cave hadn't been sealed yet. The ground was even covered in grass, no sand to be seen. What startled him above all else however, were the tiny mechanized people.

"Hey! There's a thing in this cave!" one of the robots exclaimed.

"Is it alive?" asked the second.

"Weird," the third said simply.

They crowded around him, blocking him.

"Hey what are you?" asked the second.

"You look so strange!" the first said.

"You weren't here before," the third noticed.

"Um, I was..." Link looked passed them, seeing the long tailed Dragon sitting on the peninsula. "Lanayru..."

Lanayru was a beast of a Dragon, though strangely friendly seeming. He wore a long yellow robe over his green scaled body, and had a bushy white beard like that of an old man. As far away as he was, he still seemed to tower over Link.

"Excuse me," Link smiled, moving passed the robots. "I'd like to speak to Lanayru."

Lanayru laughed wholeheartedly as Link stepped closer. "And there you are!" he bellowed. "You're a little early, I think, but I recognize that blade of yours!"

Link wasn't sure what to say. He wanted to ask about the trials, but something held him back. He wanted to ask about the rest of the desert, but as this area was in the past, Lanayru wouldn't know about any of that.

"Well don't wait any long!" Lanayru laughed. "Hold it out before me; you are here for the Sacred Flame, are you not?"

"Right," Link stammered. "Of course."

He held out his sword, but his grip was loose, and he wasn't looking the Dragon in the eye.

Lanayru noticed this, lowering his head. "I do not smell fear in you," he said. "Why do you hesitate?"

Link looked up at him. "It's nothing," he lied. "Sorry, still just a bit... foggy, after the trial."

"Ah," Lanayru nodded. "I am sorry. You expect an explanation, yes?"

Link nodded.

"I cannot give one," Lanayru said firmly. "The trials are for you alone to pass. I am not meant to understand what happened, nor do I wish to. What I can tell you, is that you *did* pass, so whatever you did, must have been the right decision."

Link considered that, but it still felt wrong. It was as if the answer was meant to be as simple as 'Keep doing what you've been doing' and at the same time 'Do the opposite, and ignore your instincts.'

For the trial of Courage, jumping into the line of fire and letting himself die even though he couldn't save Zelda... that was the right choice? And for Wisdom, ignoring Zelda's cries for help, that *couldn't* have been right, yet he'd passed and now here he stood.

"It doesn't make sense," Link finally admitted. "You tell me I've chosen correctly, but it doesn't feel that way. I... I can't justify it being the right answer."

Lanayru nodded. "I will not pretend to understand what you saw," he started. Suddenly he started coughing, waving away smoke. "Sorry lad. What I mean is, the right answer might not always be the easiest. Sometimes, there's no other way. Sometimes you have to make a choice, and you're going to want to choose one way, even though you know it's a trap! Who can say? But you're standing here yet, and I sense my sister's gift within your blade. Even if you don't understand it, you're as worthy a hero if ever I saw one."

Link thought for another moment. He supposed the Dragon was telling the truth, and it made sense the way he put it...

"Right," he said, taking a breath and holding up his sword again. "I guess, I'm ready then."

"You guess?" Lanayru laughed.

Link shook his head. "I'm ready."

"Much better," Lanayru grinned, holding his head up. "Here we go!"

He expelled all the air from his lungs, and ended up coughing again, blowing nothing but smoke. "Ah, excuse me... I'm a bit under the weather, as it were."

He tried again, this time engulfing Link's sword in a bright blue flame. Again Link underestimated the power of the fires and changed his stance to keep upright. In his hand the sword changed again. It felt heavier and lighter at the same time, like the weight had shifted. Somehow, it made it easier to wield, like it had changed to be fitted just for him. And when the blade had consumed the fires, it glowed a pale silver, the sword itself white as marble.

"There," Lanayru said proudly. "... It is done."

Link tested the sword's new weight as Lanayru looked around the canyon.

"A Time Stone is active," Lanayru said quietly. "Otherwise... the horizon would still be green..."

Link looked at the grass beneath his feet, and the sand at the grass' edge. The dull tan of the desert made the grass seem so much greener somehow.

"Why... is a Time Stone active?"

Link looked back at the cavern. "Well-"

Again Lanayru started a coughing fit, billowing clouds of smoke swarming him like angry storm clouds. As he waved away the smoke again, Fi appeared.

"Link," she said quietly. "I have come to the conclusion that Ghirahim did not kill Lanayru."

"But you said he was here?"

"Yes," Fi agreed. "However, Lanayru is clearly ill, and this Time Stone has changed the area back to a time long ago. This grass was not recently dead. This sand did not recently settle."

"So," Link realized. "Ghirahim came to kill Lanayru, but the job was already done." He shook his head. "I suppose that explains why this place is still as intact as it is. Maybe he rampaged through here in a hurry,

but simply moved on when he realized his job was done for him."

"There is an 83% chance these are the circumstances that transpired," Fi agreed.

"But isn't there something we can do?" Link asked.

"No, not if what you say is true."

Fi and Link both turned to Lanayru, who had been listening to the whole conversation. "I may be old, but my ears haven't gone yet."

"... Sorry," Link apologized.

"Don't be!" Lanayru chuckled, giving a warm smile. "If it is my time, let it be my time. You have at least given me a chance to say goodbyes. You however, are running out of time, and should hurry to obtain the next flame."

"There must be *something* I can do," Link pressed. "Medicine or something."

"Even if you healed my illness," Lanayru coughed. "I would still be faced by this assassin of yours. I would prefer to die this way, on my own terms."

Link opened his mouth to speak, but Lanayru held up a hand. "Hurry," he told him. "And thank you."

Link bowed hesitantly. "It was an honor to meet you," he said.

"And it was an honor to meet the Goddess' chosen hero!" Lanayru laughed. "Now farewell my friends, and good luck!"

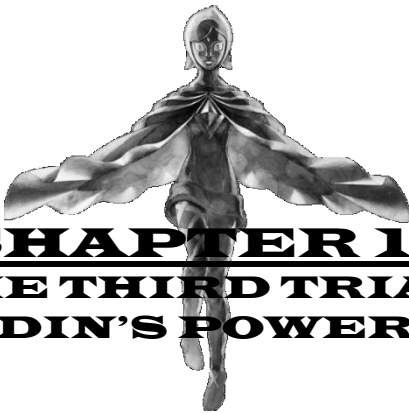
Fi returned to the sword as Link stepped off the grass and onto the desert sand once again. When he reached the stairs to the tunnel he turned back, the three little robots all hovering up to Lanayru, saying their goodbyes.

After a little while, the Time Stone finally deactivated. Lanayru went back to being skeletal remains wrapped around the peninsula, lying down as if he were sleeping. But this time, he was coiled around the robots, like a parent protecting its children.

Link turned away, looking at the symbol on the back of his hand. The bottom two triangles were glowing now, only one remaining.

Almost done.

Chapter 11: The Second Trial; Nayru's Wisdom



CHAPTER 12
THE THIRD TRIAL;
DIN'S POWER

"I wish it didn't have to end that way," Link said as he flew over Skyloft on his way to Eldin.

"That was but a window into a time long passed," Fi responded. "The Lanayru of today has already left us."

"Still," Link said. "Would've been nice to do *something*."

"You allowed him to say goodbye," Fi assured him. "I am sure in his final moments he was grateful to you."

As they reached the Eldin province, Link looked down to the lava covered land below.

"Is there something wrong?" Fi asked.

"No," Link sighed. "Just ready for this to be over is all."

Link dropped below the clouds, allowing himself to fall a ways, looking around. Not seeing any indication that the Guardian was nearby, he pulled out the sailcloth and landed safely on the island surrounded by lava.

Pocketing the sailcloth, Link started towards the volcano. "You'd think it'd be big enough to see from here," he said, looking at the other mountains around them.

"This mountain is tall enough that it could hide the Guardian were it on the other side," Fi suggested.

Link stopped on the edge of the path. "Over or around?"

"... Over," Fi answered. "There was a small road there when last we were here."

Link held a hand over his eyes, blocking out the sun that was coming from just over the mountain. "Over."

Walking the same road as last time, Link eventually came to the bridge where Impa had first stopped him. "*Zelda is ahead*," she'd told him.

"Hurry."

Still don't like you very much, Link thought as he picked up the pace. Then of course, he remembered how Impa had saved Zelda at the Temple of Time. *But at least you're good at your job.*

After several hours of tireless climbing, fighting the Moblins that now seemed so small compared to the other things he'd seen, he finally made it back to the top. He stood in front of the door again, seeing how broken it was now due to Ghirahim's monster ramming into it.

"This way," Fi told him, leading him towards the path they'd missed last time.

Passed a rickety bridge, through a short tunnel, and down a small winding path, they eventually came to a very steep slant carved smooth into the mountainside. It led straight down, ending at a cliff.

"I've faced worse," Link shrugged.

Fi's expression remained unchanged as she returned to the sword.

"One of these days I need to teach you how to take a joke," Link sighed. "You haven't laughed at anything I've said since I met you."

He jumped over the edge and slid down the slope. As he reached the end he flew forward, throwing out the sailcloth and floating down. Spinning in the air he looked back under the cliff to see the Guardian sitting in the rock. It almost looked like the mountain had grown around it, or at least carved to fit it perfectly.

Link dropped down onto a small stretch of land that ended abruptly, lava blocking him off from all directions. He looked up at the Guardian and it opened its eyes. There was no need for the Guardian to lower its swords, as the lava already blocked any escape, but it lowered its weapons regardless, glaring down at Link.

"Embrace Power."

"Wha-?" Before Link could ask what that meant, he was already falling.

He was falling faster than before, an intense heat rushing up at him. As he tumbled through the air he saw the fires beneath him, and braced for impact as he smashed into the ground.

Well, at least I'm not a flat cake, Link thought as he stood up, head

pounding.

He wondered why this Guardian said something different than the last two. "*Embrace Power*," it said. Not 'have,' but 'embrace.'

Looking around, there weren't too many clues to help him figure it out either. He was surrounded by fire, but it seemed to be still, not like wildfire.

Then, for what he hoped would be the last time, he heard Zelda's cry for help.

"Zelda," Link gasped, spinning around to face her. There she was, but Ghirahim was there as well.

"Not one step closer boy," he hissed with a smile as he held his blade to Zelda's throat. "Hear me out, or she dies."

Link forced himself to remain silent.

"Very good!" Ghirahim laughed. "Now, your girl here is in danger. *But*, both of us need her alive. That being said, only *one* of us cares about the rest of the world."

"...What are you talking about?" Link growled.

Ghirahim held Zelda by her hair and pointed his sword towards the flames. The fires parted and through them Link could see a large shadow looming over a great forest. The Imprisoned had risen.

"Here's my offer," Ghirahim continued. "Save her, or the world. Your choice!"

Link hesitated, trying to find the right move.

"Link, please!" Zelda sobbed. "Help me!"

Link faced the Imprisoned, a sudden feeling like his feet were nailed to the ground.

"Can't make up your mind?" Ghirahim asked. "Ah well, I guess I could through in a little extra incentive."

He snapped his fingers and another person appeared beside Zelda. Goose.

He sat with his head down, frozen in terror and grief. Another Ghirahim stood behind him, a sword to his neck as well.

"Does this make things easier?" Ghirahim 2 chuckled.

"Or harder?!" Ghirahim one laughed.

Link grit his teeth. "I don't get it!" he barked. "What does this have to do with strength?"

"Nothing!" Ghirahim 1 scolded.

"But it has everything to do, with power!" Ghirahim 2 added. "Power over Life..."

"... And Death," Ghirahim 1 tightened his grip on Zelda. "You

wanted to play the hero, boy, and these are the choices you have to make. So choose! Your girl?"

"Your rival?"

"Or the world?!" laughed both Ghirahim's in unison. "Choose!"

Link looked back and forth between everything, trying to come up with right solution.

"Link!" Zelda cried.

"Link," Groose mumbled.

The Imprisoned roared in the distance, trees falling to flames.

"Please!" Zelda begged.

"I think the answers obvious," Link hissed. "But I'm guessing I can't choose you."

"Consider us out of bounds," Ghirahim 2 answered.

Link nodded, forcing his legs to move. He stared at the Imprisoned, knowing that if he fought it, Zelda would most assuredly die. Then everyone else would follow anyway. If he chose Groose, nothing would change. As much as he couldn't let anyone die, Groose wasn't the right answer either. But if he chose to save Zelda, there was a chance...

But, Link thought he knew what these trials were trying to teach him.

Zelda was important, probably the most important person in the whole world right now... But he knew he had to set personal feelings aside.

If he just saved Zelda, and let the world die, she'd hate him for sure. There would be no point anymore.

Link knew this, and he knew Zelda knew this. They grew up together, training at the academy, and they both knew full well, that their duty was to the people first, no matter how hard it was.

"Well?" Ghirahim 1 smirked. "Do we have an answer?"

"Yeah," Link said quietly. "I've decided there is no right answer."

"Well if you choose none-"

"That's not quite it," Link hissed. "I'm not choosing none; I'm making my *own* choice."

"Sorry, but I can't allow to change the rules of the game," Ghirahim 1 growled. "If you're going to be so stubborn, then I shall choose-"

Link pounded his fist into Ghirahim's face. The man evaporated into smoke, but Link grabbed his sword before he was gone completely.

He turned, and threw it at the other Ghirahim. It impaled through the gem on his chest, and he fell to his knees.

"You were right," Link huffed, stepping up to Ghirahim. "I am 'playing hero.' But that means it's my job to stop you, and I'll do everything I can to accomplish that, even if it means going 'out of bounds.'"

Ghirahim laughed. "And yet you still failed!" he exclaimed, pulling the sword out. "The Imprisoned is still loose! You still have no weapons capable of stopping it! And I'm still more powerful than you!"

"Not in here," Link corrected.

"What?" Ghirahim faltered.

"These trials happen in my head," Link chuckled. "As far as I'm concerned, there weren't *any* options to *begin* with!"

He pushed Ghirahim back. "Out there, right now, you may be stronger than me. But in here, you mean nothing."

"Why you little-" Ghirahim froze in place as Link snapped his fingers.

"In the end, it doesn't matter which of us was right," Link sighed as the fires died down and the world slowly disappeared around him. "Not here, not when I know for a fact that you're wrong out there."

Link looked Ghirahim in the eye. "You don't scare me," he growled. "I will defeat you."

"I'd stay in your head if I were you," Ghirahim spat. "It's dangerous out there with a mind like that. You can't defeat me so easily when I'm in control."

"Maybe," Link agreed.

Ghirahim faded in front of him, leaving Link alone in the darkness.

"But here... at least I don't have to listen to you anymore."

Link blinked and he was back in Eldin again, Fi floating beside him. He looked up at the Guardian, waiting to hear if he'd passed or not, but the Guardian simply leaned back, silent. Yet, from the lava in front of him, a chamber entrance rose.

The Guardian grunted and once more Link wondered why this one was so different.

Well, it's not like I got to really talk to the last one, Link thought as he entered the chamber.

"Are you injured?" Fi asked, following.

"No," Link answered. "I'm alright."

"You are acting... strangely," Fi continued.

"I'm fine," Link said solemnly. "Don't worry."

Fi suddenly jerked forward. "Danger detected."

Link drew his sword and took the last step down the stairs, entering a large circular chamber. On the far side of the room, in front of the door, stood Ghirahim. It was just like when they first met.

"Ghirahim," Link growled.

"... Oh, Link," Ghirahim said, turning around. "I see you're still among the living. Fancy meeting you here."

"I've had just about enough of you," Link grumbled.

"Fair, we seem to bump into each other from time to time." Ghirahim stepped toward the center of the room, holding his arms out from at his sides. "Oh but that's no coincidence though, is it? You and I, we're bound by a thread of fate."

"What are you talking about?" Link barked.

Ghirahim motioned to the paintings carved into the walls around the room. "Look at these old drawings!" he exclaimed. "Until I found these, I was... upset about that little stunt the goddess' guard dog pulled at the Gate of Time. What was that twig's name again? Impa? Well, never mind that, because these drawings suggest the existence of a second Gate of Time. This news has just filled my heart with rainbows!" Ghirahim hugged himself, grinning like a loon.

"Get to the point!" Link snapped.

Ghirahim glared at Link, turning back to face him. "I've been a busy boy, searching here and there and everywhere for a second Gate of Time. And yet, I couldn't even find a single clue. Since I know I can be honest with you, I'll admit I got a little sulky. It was frowns all around." he gave an exaggerated frown as if that made his point. "The thought of never getting my hands on that darling young girl again was... well, more than I could bear."

Suddenly Ghirahim was gone. Link drew his shield and tightened his grip on his sword.

"But then..." Ghirahim reappeared directly above Link.

Link swung but Ghirahim had already teleported away again.

"Then I found this place!" Ghirahim laughed as he threw his arms in the air. "The prospect of a second Gate of Time has made me positively giggly!"

Link lunged towards him, but again he teleported away, standing on the opposite side of the room again.

"That girl... Your adorable friend..." Ghirahim smiled, narrowing his eyes, black smoke trailing off of him. "She will be instrumental in

bringing about the revival of my master. And though I feared she was now quite beyond my reach, I despair no longer! ... But before we talk any further on that subject, there's still the outstanding matter of your punishment, Link. Do you remember when I told you that the next time we met, I'd make your ears bleed from the sound of your own screams? Well, I've been thinking... Perhaps corporal punishment is a touch harsh. I might be willing to forgive and forget if you'll strike up a deal. ... All I ask is that you tell me where I can find the other Gate of Time. That's not too much to ask for, is it? Oh, and don't you play coy with me. I know that you know, so why not let me in on the fun?"

"No deal," Link huffed. "But I promise to let *you* live if you shut up and go home. I don't think *that's* too much to ask, is it?"

"Such behavior," Ghirahim scolded. "A mischievous boy like you needs to be dealt with firmly. I must warn you, I won't go easy on you this time."

He extended his arms as black armor began to cover his skin up to his shoulders. The black smoke intensified, and his stare darkened.

"You'll find the skin of my arms tougher than any armor," Ghirahim explained. "I am many things; Beauty. Strength. Vocabulary!" he smiled evilly. "Yes, I've pretty much got it all. Though there is one teensy, tiny thing I lack..."

His smile dropped and he darted forward. As he passed beside Link, for a moment everything seemed to freeze.

"Namely, Mercy."

Ghirahim sent Link flying back into the far wall, the stone cracking as his shield took most of the impact. He dropped to the ground, dazed.

"Come to me Link," Ghirahim challenged. "You and I, we're bound by that thread of fate. Destined to fight. So come close, Link! Meet me in battle, and the thread of fate that binds us will be soaked crimson with your blood!"

Just as Link stood Ghirahim was already darting towards him again. He threw up his shield and managed to push off of Ghirahim's attack, rolling back into the center of the room, but Ghirahim was unrelenting.

Link slashed and jabbed with his sword, but Ghirahim parried every attack. He kept spinning, dodging around Link's attacks, sometimes teleporting from point to point, striking where Link couldn't see him.

As Ghirahim's attacks quickened, Link had finally had enough, and swept in grand circle. He knocked Ghirahim back, but it did little more than cause him to stumble. And after a brief moment's hesitation,

Ghirahim summoned his sword.

"Not one step closer boy," he hissed with a smile as he held his blade to Zelda's throat.

Link grit his teeth, throwing out strategy as he lunged at Ghirahim. He turned the tables, forcing Ghirahim back as he refused to slow his movements. Even as his arm grew tired and Ghirahim continued to teleport away, Link began using his shield as a weapon, smashing it into Ghirahim's chest or head.

When Ghirahim finally knocked his shield away again, Link just kicked him. Against anyone else, their jaw would've broken, but it did hurt Ghirahim.

He rubbed his cheek, standing away from Link. He scowled, glaring at the door he couldn't open.

"... Enough of this foolishness!" he hissed. "I am Ghirahim! Demon Lord!! It shouldn't matter how powerful your sword is, you are still nothing... Not just a Human... a Human child! And yet you prevail!"

Link pointed his sword at Ghirahim. "And I'll keep prevailing. Every. Single. Time."

"You filthy scamp!" Ghirahim roared. "You have awakened a wrath that will burn for eons! I swear to you, whatever it takes, I will drag you into an eternity of torment!"

And then he was gone, burn marks on the ground where he'd stood.

Fi appeared from the sword, looking at the markings, then at the sealed door. "In accordance to the last two Sacred Flames," she stated. "The Dragon that holds the flame of power should be through that door."

Link nodded, picking up his shield and sheathing his sword. Fi hovered behind him as he pressed open the door, the seal glowing and allowing Link passage through. It shut behind him as he stood at the edge of the small platform on the other side of the door. The rest of the chamber was filled with lava as the first was filled with water and the second was an empty chasm.

"Eldin!" Link called.

The volcano rumbled, the ceiling crackling. "Another tried to enter this place," said a low voice. "But I sense his presence has faded... Who are you?"

"I am Link," Link answered. "I have-"

"I know why you are here," the deep voice hissed. "Why else would you pass through my door?"

Slowly, a Dragon's head emerged from the lava. It rose high in the chamber, its long red robe spilling into the lava. The horns on his head

fanned out like the design of a son, and his scales shimmered like fire. "You wish for the sacred flame... I see you have brought the sword, and have already tempered it with the other flames."

Link nodded, taking out his sword.

"Only the chosen one could have tempered the blade," Eldin said quietly. "Let alone retrieve it from its resting place above the clouds... .."

After a moment, Eldin rose higher, staring down at Link. "You, sky child, show me your blade and behold my power."

Learning from his past experience Link steadied the sword with one hand the blade, and lowered his stance. Eldin engulfed the sword in a blazing red fire, the force of it stronger than the last two times. The blade turned a darkened grey, like ashen stone. The hilt's wings spread upward as it turned blue. As he held his newly formed sword, Link noticed the final piece of the symbol on his hand turn gold.

"You have gathered the might of Courage, Wisdom, and now Power," Eldin stated. "However your quest is not complete."

"Now that your blade has been tempered by the last of the sacred flames," Fi added. "It has finally revealed its true form. You now hold the Master Sword."

"And with it you can open the Gate of Time," Eldin continued. "As it was foretold by the Goddess herself."

Link looked at the sword. "And then I can save Zelda, and defeat Ghirahim once and for all."

"Ghirahim," Eldin said coldly. "He was the presence which tried to break down my doors. He is evil, but not the evil you must fight."


"He wishes to revive his master," Link said, understanding. "But I can't let that happen."

"No you cannot," Eldin agreed. "And you haven't much time." The volcano rumbled as Eldin rose higher. "Now, leave this place!"

Eldin dove back into the lava, his words echoing through the cavern.

"Hurry, Link, or this world shall meet Demise."

Chapter 12: The Third Trial: Din's Power



CHAPTER 13
THE GATE OF TIME

Link dropped down into the Sealed Grounds, rolling across the stone and skidding to a stop in front of the temple. He drew his sword as he entered, shutting the door behind him and startling Goose who had been talking to the old woman.

"Ah, your sword!" she smiled. "There can be no doubt. The Sacred Flames have purified this blade. Well done, Link. That sword holds tremendous power. To look upon you is to see that same great power, now flowing through you and that sword you carry. Now that the sacred force dwells within your blade, you can open the Gate of Time. Climb upon the pedestal, and show the gate your sword's power!"

Link stood in front of the obsidian slab, raising his sword. Light shone down on it and the blade glowed.

However, before it could be fully powered, the temple shook ominously.

"WHOA-HO!" Goose shouted, leaning on a support column to keep from falling over.

"No," the old woman sighed. "I fear the seal has given way once again. That terrible beast is awakening even as we speak. It is likely that the monster reacted to the sacred power given off by your sword. I wish it had not happened, but there was no other way to open the gate. So it goes..."

"Does this sword have the power to seal it away for good?" Link asked.

"No, not yet," the woman answered. "For now, Link, you must imprison the beast once again."

"All right!" Goose cheered. "Bring it on!"

"How can you be excited at a time like this?" Link scolded.

"This is what I've been waiting for," Goose said proudly. "It's time

to break out my new toy! Trust me, that flabby bag of teeth doesn't stand a chance. So? What are we waiting for? I'm heading out there!"

Goose ran passed Link, not waiting to see if he followed. He threw open the door and charged towards the cliffs, looking down at the marker sitting at the bottom of the pit. Link arrived next to him, drawing his sword and shield.

Only a second or two later Goose was off again, climbing up the cliff around the Sealed Grounds and getting on top of a wooden ledge. He stood with a triumphant grin on his face as he gestured to a large cart beside him. "Duh huh huh! Try not to drool on your shirt as you stare at this amazing super-weapon I've been working on! I call it... the Groosenator!"

Link took a closer look at the cart and ledge. It was actually a catapult, pulled back and ready to fire, sitting on a long track that wound all the way around the pit.

"Leaves you speechless, doesn't it?" Goose laughed.

Below them, the marker cracked, and the Imprisoned began to rise again. One large hand after the other, it climbed out of the darkness. A sinister wind began to blow through the Sealed Grounds.

"I'll be impressed later!" Link shouted as he began to circle the pit. "Hurry and fire!"

"Right!" Goose shouted back, getting the catapult into position. He pulled a lever, and a giant bomb flew through the air. It impacted against the Imprisoned's head, a direct hit! Goose was already cheering in victory, even as he began loading the next bomb.

Link ran forward, sliding down the cliff side. *It's bigger than last time*, he thought. *But if I could topple it...* "Goose! Hit him again!"

"Oy!" Goose called back.

Link used the momentum from his slide and jumped towards the beast, driving his sword into its arm. It pierced the armor, and the Imprisoned roared in pain.

"Not strong enough to kill you," Link muttered. "But I can hurt you now."

Goose fired another bomb, this one hitting right in the face. The Imprisoned stumbled backwards, crashing into the pit wall. Goose started reloading and Link climbed the beast, latching onto its head as it stood.

"Get out of the way!" Goose shouted.

Link slid back a little, digging his sword into the scales on the back of its head. Another bomb impacted against the Imprisoned's face, and this time it had had enough. Its arms lashed out around it, and it began

climbing out of the pit, swatting above its head in case more bombs came down on it. But Link hadn't let go, and grabbed hold of the marker embedded into the beast's head.

Goose fired one last bomb, distracting the Imprisoned's arms long enough for Link to strike.

Link raised his sword, power glowing in the blade, and struck it down on the marker. The Imprisoned bellowed in agony, its screech echoing as its body was ripped away. The marker fell beside Link as the Imprisoned disappeared.

The blast sent him flying back towards the cliffs, and he didn't have enough time to get out his sailcloth this time. He hit the ground hard, sliding across the grass and slamming into the rock wall.

He groaned, rolling onto his back and staring up at the sky. "This," he mumbled. "Is a *great* shield."

Forcing himself to stand, he gave his arms a break and put his weapons away, thinking to himself how one day it'd be nice to actually set them down for more than a few hours. He made his way back to the temple then, Goose coming down from the track.

"Nice work there, Link!" Goose laughed. "Course, you couldn't've done it without me, but no need to thank Goose. I know I saved your tail. Now let's get that Gate of Time thing up and running."

"Right," Link huffed. "Nice shot."

"Right?" Goose laughed, going on ahead.

Link looked back over his shoulder. He couldn't see it over the edge of the cliff, and he didn't want to, but he knew the seal was growing weaker. It would be soon again that it would break.

He looked away, stepping back into the temple.

"It seems you were successful in imprisoning the monster again," said the old woman who had been waiting just inside for their return. "You have my thanks, Link. As do you Goose. I do not wish to dwell on what may have happened if you two hadn't been here."

"Duh huh, aww," Goose chuckled, rubbing his neck awkwardly. "You give me too much credit, Grannie. You were the one who got me to stop feeling sorry for myself and put my energy into doing what I could to help."

"I did what was necessary to get you to realize your full potential." The old woman turned away from Goose and looked up at Link. "Link, you must wonder just what it is you've been fighting out there in the great pit."

"I'm starting to," Link nodded. "Yes."

"There is much I could tell you," she sighed. "But suffice to say it is the root of the evil we face. When you pass through the Gate of Time, you shall learn more."

"What do you mean?" Link asked.

"We may seal it and reseal it into its prison a thousand times," she explained. "But it will always shatter the bonds that confine it. Such is its awesome power."

"So how do we stop it for good?"

"We must destroy it at its source or suffer this fate again and again." She turned to the Gate of Time. "There is no time to lose. Use your power on the Gate."

Link stepped up once more to the slab, drawing his sword. He hesitated however, staring at its non reflective surface. He wondered if the Imprisoned would awaken again, or what he'd find on the other side. Most of all, he wondered what would happen to him should he continue using the sword's power.

They kept telling him he was the chosen one, yet his arm grew tired even as the sword felt lighter than ever. He wondered if there actually had been a mistake, as Goose had said.

Yet still, he raised his sword above his head, and light was gathered in the blade. When it was done, he inserted his sword into the stone. As with the crest, and the Time Stone before, it acted as a key. Turning it, it glowed, a design etched in light spreading out from the sword. It formed a large gear shape, moving like an echo-y image just beyond the slab's surface.

He removed his sword and the gear kept spinning.

"Do not fear it," the old woman said reassuringly. "This is what we have waited for. At long last, the gate has been reactivated. Standing before you is a path that transcends the flow of time. It is a portal to the past... to the very place where Zelda now waits."

Link faced the gate, sheathing his sword.

"Go bravely Link," she told him. "If everything is as I suspect, the reunion with Zelda you've fought so hard for lies beyond this gate."

Link began to step forward, but stopped, looking over his shoulder. "You coming or not?"

Goose shook his head. "Nah, don't worry about me," he said. "I'm gonna hang back here, Link. That stupid monster doesn't know when to quit, and Grannie here keeps yapping on and on about how we never know when it might bust free again." He started backing away. "Someone's gotta stick around and guard the place. Might as well be me. And you

know what..."

He arrived at the door, not looking at Link as turned the knob. "If you see Zelda," he said loudly. "Tell her I said, 'What's up?'"

Link nodded as Goose left.

The old woman stepped back as Link pressed his palm against the slab's surface. The triangles on the back of his hand glowed, and the gate disappeared. Gears expanded back through the slab to infinity until they were hidden in darkness.

Link entered the Gate of Time.

Chapter 13: The Gate of Time



CHAPTER 14

ZELDA

Link stepped out of the Gate of Time, and back into the Sealed Temple. The differences were immediately obvious; the stone was more polished, none of the columns were cracked, and the ceiling was still whole.

Then there was the door at the back of the room, at the top of the stairs where the old woman would sit. It was open slightly, and there was a golden light shining through the crack.

Before Link could hurry up those steps however, he heard someone behind him. He turned, seeing Impa standing beside the Gate of Time, waiting for him.

"... At last, I've been expecting you, Link." She had the same usual scowl, as if she were still disappointed in him, even after all this.

"I'm not late this time," Link told her.

Impa nodded, crossing her arms and looking down at him. "You are doubtless overwhelmed, so I will explain things as simply as I can." She looked around them, at the temple. "This is the Temple of Hylia, though it will come to be known as the Sealed Temple sometime in the future. You stand in the past, ages before your own time."

Link looked back at the front entrance to the temple, thinking of the Imprisoned. "So, the beast that's sealed away..."

"Here the goddess, Hylia, has only just sealed away Demise..." She looked up. "And little time has passed since she sent the outcropping of rock into the sky that would one day become Skyloft... It is true to its name. You have passed through the Gate of Time to an era in the distant past."

"How does that even work?" Link asked, facing the Gate. "A passage between two times... And Demise... Eldin said something like that."

Impa stepped away. "You will have many questions," she said.

"But for now you must proceed back through the great doors behind you."

She gestured to the doors at the top of the steps, where the golden light shone through. "It is there that the person you've risked life and blood to defend waits for you."

Link turned to the door. "Right," he nodded. "But eventually... I would like some answers."

Impa motioned for Link to pass and he made his way to the door.

He held his hand up to block some of the light as he entered, closing the door behind him. And there she was, standing on a platform on the far side of the room.

"Zelda," Link said, standing just off of the platform.

Zelda turned and looked down at him. "You've come so far, Link," she smiled. "I'm glad you made it. I imagine Impa filled you in on everything."

"Most of it," Link nodded. "The sword, the Gate... How far we are from home."

"Yes," Zelda nodded sadly.

"There's just... one question," Link said, looking away from her. "Something I don't understand."

"And what is it?" Zelda asked.

"Even after I found you... Twice," Link mumbled. "Why were we always split up? Why wasn't I allowed to come with you? Protect you myself as it was supposedly intended?"

"It is... a long story," Zelda answered. "It starts with why we are here in the first place."

"Ghirahim," Link said. "It was his storm that brought you here. He told me as much."

Zelda shook her head. "In this era, the wounds inflicted on the land during the battle between the goddess and the demon king, known as Demise, have not yet healed. The war that happened in this land, feels like just a fairy tale, but... incredible as it may seem, it appears to be all too real."

"War?" Link asked. "For what?"

Zelda tried to find the right words to explain, starting and stopping a few times before finally stopping for a moment. She took a deep breath and looked Link in the eye. "The old gods created a supreme power that gave anyone who possessed it the ability to shape reality and fulfill any desire. They called it the Triforce."

Link looked at the markings on his hand.

"In his thirst to make the world his own, Demise readied a massive

army of monsters for war. He sought to take the Triforce for himself. The goddess feared for her people. She used her power to send both them and the Triforce into the sky on a slice of earth she cut away from the land."

"And Skyloft... is that land."

"Yes," Zelda nodded. "And, after a long and fierce battle, the goddess, Hylia, succeeded in sealing away Demise. However, soon after the demon king was imprisoned, it became clear that the seal would not hold long against his fearsome power. Hylia had suffered grave injuries in her battle with the demon king. She knew that if he broke free again, there would be no stopping him."

"In order to put an end to the demon king, Hylia devised two separate plans and set them both into motion." Zelda stepped off of the platform and stood in front of Link. "First, she created Fi. She made the spirit that resides in your sword to serve a single purpose: to assist her chosen hero on his mission."

Link looked over his shoulder at the gem on the sword as it seemed to twinkle. "And her second plan?"

"Her second plan... was to abandon her divine form and transfer her soul to the body of a mortal. She made this sacrifice, as you have likely guessed, so that the supreme power created by the old gods could one day be used."

"But why?" Link asked. "Couldn't she use the Triforce herself? If it was all powerful as you say, couldn't she defeat Demise?"

"She could not," Zelda admitted. "For while the supreme power of the Triforce was created by gods, all of its power can never be wielded by one. Knowing this power was her last and only hope, the goddess gave up her divine power and her immortal form. You've probably figured it out by now, haven't you Link?"

She took a step closer, looking up at him. "You... are the chosen hero."

"And you are the goddess... Hylia... reborn as a mortal..." Link shook his head, holding Zelda's shoulders. "So... what happened?" he asked, worry in his voice. "What *was* your side of this?"

"The day of the ceremony," Zelda said quietly, looking away. "Ghirahim's tornado tossed me out of the sky and down to the world below."

Zelda looked passed Link, seeing Impa in the doorway. She'd probably been standing there the whole time, waiting like a concerned parent.

"I was nearly captured by the demonic forces," Zelda continued,

her voice softer. "But I was rescued at the last moment by the old woman who lives in the Sealed Grounds."

Impa backed away, the door closing silently.

"I had no memory at all of my existence as Hylia. But she explained it to me. She helped me to remember who I was... and what I had to do. I set out to pray at the goddess statues located in each temple across the land. Each statue stirred up memories within me. After I visited them all, Impa, an agent of the goddess, led me here... to the past."

"So that's it..." Link sighed. "Well I could've helped... That was what I was supposed to do, right?"

Zelda shook her head. "In the end, I don't think so," she answered. "No, your journey had to lead separate from mine, despite them having to intertwine. You see... all of this is part of the same great effort to prevent the revival of Demise."

"I think," Link said slowly, placing a hand on his sword. "I think I'm ready for that, I feel ready. I've fought that beast twice now. But with the sword at full power, I think I can end this."

"Sadly, Demise's true form is not the beast that emerges from the marker." Zelda said, folding her hands behind her. "Stripped of his true physical form by the seal that binds him, he takes the shape of an abomination. But even in his hideous state, he's more than capable of devouring this land if we allow him to do what he desires."

"So, even if I continue beating that *thing*," Link hissed. "It's not over until I defeat his true form."

"We must stop him from freeing himself." Zelda took another step, standing back on the platform. "At any cost."

Link shifted but before he could move Zelda stopped him with a determined look. "That is why I intend to remain here in this time and place... to sustain the seal as best as I can."

"Zelda-

"As long as I continue this vigil," Zelda stated. "We may be able to prevent the demon king from fully reviving in our own time."

"You can't be serious!" Link exclaimed, shocked. "You really mean to stay here the whole time? That could be... who knows how long... Zelda-

Again Zelda stopped with nothing but more than a look. "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. With the memories of my former life returning to me, I can see now that this is my purpose."

"So you really mean to stay," Link mumbled.

"Yes, I do," Zelda said. "And you must complete your purpose as well. The goddess created Fi and the great blade she's a part of for very specific reasons. For the task of standing against Demise in the monstrous form he now assumes rest solely on your shoulders. Back in our own time, you've already driven him back into his prison twice now. I can't thank you enough for that, Link. During your long journey, you've grown so much. Wisdom, Power, Courage... Now that those qualities reside in you, you are worthy of wielding the power the old gods left behind for our kind."

Zelda held out her hand. "You can claim the Triforce."

Hesitantly, Link took Zelda's hand, kneeling before her. He bowed his head.

When Zelda spoke again, her words echoed as they had that day atop the Goddess statue. Powerful and resonating. *"Valiant hero, you have endured many hardships and journeyed far in you quest to reach this place. Along your travels you have found Wisdom, Power, and Courage, and for this I shall bless your sword with the Goddess' power. May it give you and your sword the strength to drive back the abomination that threatens this land!"*

The mark on the back of Link's hand shined brighter than it had before. The same golden light that came down around Zelda.

"The mark you see is proof that you are the hero of legend and that within you dwells sacred power." Zelda pulled her hand away. "It is the mark of the Triforce. Stand now Link. Draw your sword."

Link stood, drawing his sword. As he watched, its form changed one last time. The blade widened slightly, and became as reflective as a mirror. The hilt's wings spread as it turned a deeper shade of blue. The gem on the hilt seemed to glow brighter.

Zelda turned away.

"It feels... lighter," Link said.

"Link," Zelda said quietly. "Before I say another word, I feel like I owe you an apology. If you can obtain the Triforce, we will have the power to vanquish Demise once and for all. The problem is, among the countless souls in this world, only a select few—those with an unbreakable spirit—can wield its might. It is impossible to know the true reason why the old gods created the Triforce. But I have a theory of my own. The gods created the Triforce, yet they specifically designed it so that their own kind could never use its power. Somehow, I think that may have been their way of giving hope to all the mortal beings of the land.

"... Which brings us back to you," Zelda turned back, a sorrowful

look in her eyes. "To face Demise and give the land hope, the goddess, Hylia, needed someone with an unbreakable spirit. That someone is you, Link. And so Hylia... I mean, and so I... I knew that if it meant saving Zelda, you would throw yourself headfirst into any danger, without even a moment's doubt..."

Zelda stepped further away towards the center of the platform. "I... I used you," she hissed. "I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am for pulling you into all of this Link. But you have to understand this is a war, and the fate of the land hangs in the balance. I need your strength to tip the scales in our favor..."

"Of course I understand," Link said firmly. "I know this can't have been easy for you. I mean, you haven't even been able to go home yet..." He shook his head. "I don't care if you used me, use me! That's what I'm here for."

Zelda looked at her feet. "All that may be well intentioned and true, but it doesn't mean it's right... and it doesn't excuse my actions."

Zelda held her arms at her side as the golden light around her began sparkling, like stars falling. "But I'm prepared to pay the price for what I've done. To ensure that the seal holds, I will remain here in this time... deep in sleep for thousands of years."

Link stepped forward. "Zelda, what are you doing?" he whispered. "Zelda stop!"

Zelda looked up, faking a smile. "Link... I can't say it enough. I'm sorry for the way I had to involve you in this. But until my memory of things before our lifetime returned to me, I had no idea we were fated to carry such a heavy destiny. Before all this, I was happy just spending my days hanging around with you in Skyloft. I wanted that feeling to last forever."

Suddenly the light solidified around her, sealing her inside. Link ran onto the platform, but Zelda was already trapped behind the hard light surface.

"While it's true that I am Hylia reborn," Zelda said, her voice muffled. "I'm still my father's daughter and your friend... When Demise is finally gone, there will be no more need for the seal that binds him, and then I'll be able to wake up. So I'm going to ask you a favor..."

Link placed his palm on the light surface. "Of course," he said. "Anything."

"Ever since we were kids," Zelda said slowly. "I'd always be the one to wake you up when you slept in. But this time, when all of this over, will you come to wake me up?"

Link was silent. As he watched the light began to solidify inside the gem as well.

"Link!" Zelda cried.

"I promise!" Link shouted. "I'll wake you up! I will!"


Zelda nodded, keeping her arms close. She closed her eyes, and when the light sealed her completely, it looked as if she'd simply gone to sleep.

"... I'll be right back," Link hissed. "Don't worry."

Link tore his hand away from the gem's surface as he backed away. He forced himself to not look back, knowing if he did he'd probably just run back to her and tear her out of the gem himself.

Instead, he sheathed his sword, and walked away on stiff legs. The large stone doors slammed shut behind him, sealing off Zelda completely.

Chapter 14: Zelda



CHAPTER 15
THE FINAL TEST

"Is it done?" Impa asked.

"Yeah," Link answered. "... it's done."

"Then you've spent enough time here, and must continue your journey."

Link walked down the stairs. "The Triforce... is in Skyloft, yeah?"

Impa nodded.

"Any idea where to start?"

"There are legends of the Thunderhead above the clouds. A dome of evil force. A fourth Dragon resides in it, and protects another temple. I know not if the Triforce is there, but it will most certainly lead you to it."

"But the Thunderhead is impenetrable. There's no way to enter it... Is there?"

"No, the ancient tablet let you enter the surface world..." Impa pulled a small gem from her sack. "My people have guarded this stone for centuries, waiting for the chosen hero to take it to the skies. ... This stone will allow you to enter."

Link took the gem, looking back at the stone doors behind him.

"I assure you, she will be safe. She will use her power to keep the seal closed on Demise, and I shall remain to watch over her. No harm shall come to her."

"... Good. I still need to fulfill my promise to her father to bring her back safely." Link looked back to Impa. "Make sure I get that chance."

Impa stepped aside. "Now, hurry. Once you return to your own era, you will have very little time to complete your task."

"Be quick."

Link pulled out the gem he'd been given as he soared over the clouds. He replayed the conversations with Zelda and Impa over and over

in his head, not sure which he hated more. There should've been another way, a way for him to prevent her from being trapped for a thousand years...

I hope you're sleeping, Link thought. I hope you have no sense of the time that passes.

He gripped the gem tightly as he flew in closer to the thunderhead. "Get ready buddy," he said as they flew into the storm.

His bird squawked, dashing through the winds. The gem hummed with energy, and it seemed to expel the winds around them. The clouds formed a sort of funnel around them as they pressed forward, like they were carving a path through the storm.

Lightning struck around them, and the clouds grew darker as they finally reached the interior of the thunderhead. shadowy clouds swirled above and below them, and monsters shrieked in the distance.

Link's bird chirped unhappily.

"It shouldn't be much farther," Link said, patting its head.

Then there was a rumbling that came from everywhere. A large shape formed in front of them, getting closer.

"Is that...?" Link narrowed his eyes, the shadowy image growing quickly.

Soon, the shadow grew to such a size that whatever it was, it would crush them as soon as it showed up if they didn't move. So Link dove his bird straight down, just as the giant beast broke through the clouds, its mouth open as it roared. The sound of thunder was silenced by the sound the Dragon made as it flew quick as lighting through the stormy winds.

His bird flapped his wings, wanting nothing more than to leave.

"I know," Link nodded. He took the gem tucked it into a pocket on the saddle. "That should keep you safe without me. Think you get me closer to the Dragon's back?"

His bird squawked and darted towards the Dragon. It matched its speed with ease, and Link lowered himself over the side of his bird's wing. He dropped as his Loftwing flew back towards the edge of the thunderhead where the monsters dared not go.

Link drew his sword and shield as he landed on the Dragon's back. There were holes in the Dragon's armor-like hide, almost like craters. There was a massive crater near the Dragon's head, this one blew ashy smoke, adding more darkness to the thick black clouds around them.

"Dragon!" Link shouted. "I wish to speak to you!"

The Dragon roared in response, seeming to fly faster.

Then Link noticed an eye stock peeking out of one of the smaller craters. It watched him for a moment, then hid again. A second later it popped out of another crater.

"So that's why you seem angry," Link hissed. "Fine then."

He slashed at the eye stock, but it sunk too quickly. Popping up behind it, it blasted him with what felt like acid. Link screamed in pain, tearing at his sleeves.

When it popped up again, this time he used his shield to block the acid, and stabbed the creature in the eye. It screeched and sunk back into the crater.

The Dragon roared in pain suddenly, and the large crater stopped blowing smoke. Link held his shield in front of him as a larger eye appeared, fins with four eyes each and a gaping mouth that seem to hang limp.

"You... are ugly," Link mumbled.

It shrieked, spitting more acid, keeping its center eye shut.

Link ducked the acid, keeping his shield up. "That's not gonna stop me." He launched himself forward, stabbing through the creature's eyelid. It made a sharp yelping sound, then fell limp.

Its long body slumped forward, and it crumpled as it slunk out of the crater, its roots trailing behind it as it fell into oblivion.

Link sheathed his sword as the storm started to calm around him. The Dragon slowed, and the air stilled, as if just him being in pain threw the entire thunderhead into turmoil.

As the Dragon started falling however, Link jumped off, his bird swooping in to catch him. A moment later, however, the Dragon came back up, flying slowly beside them.

"Tell me, boy," he bellowed in his deep voice. "Was it you who defeated the dark parasite?"

"Yes," Link answered.

"Then I must apologize for my earlier behavior," the Dragon rumbled. "That was a most peculiar and irksome pest that possessed me. I was not myself. But that business is done with now! With its destruction I have been restored to my senses."

"Are you the Dragon I'm looking for?" Link asked.

"I am the great spirit they call Levias," the Dragon answered. "Before she passed from this world so long ago, the goddess, Hylia, appointed me as warden of the skies." He looked sideways at Link. "And what do they call you, boy?"

"I am Link."

"Ah, a rather pleasing name, that. Your parents clearly have excellent taste in name!"

Link bowed as best he could on the back of his Loftwing. "Thank you."

"Hmm... You carry a curious sword, boy," Levias noticed. "And I sense a silent power dwelling somewhere in that little frame."

Fi appeared then, flying alongside them. "He is the hero, chosen by the goddess Hylia to defeat Demise."

"Ah, I see it now," Levias chuckled. "... How interesting... I assume you've come to hear what I know of the Triforce."

"Right," Link nodded.

"As I suspected," Levias said solemnly. "... Listen closely, and I will tell you. The goddess did everything in her power to prevent the Triforce from falling into the wrong hands. For the safety of all things, she hid the Triforce somewhere within the rock you call Skyloft. However, its location has been kept secret."

"Do you know where I could find it?"

"I do, I am he who protects it," Levias turned his attention downward as they passed over a flying island. "Look, boy, do you see the temple there?"

Link looked to see the old stone temple on the island.

"Within it is a key, and only this key can open the door to the Triforce that is locked away within Skyloft's walls."

"Sounds simple enough," Link said. "... What's the catch?"

"Ha! I would not make it so easy... there will be a test inside, of that I assure you. But I have faith in your abilities, for I sense the other attributes inside you... It shows on that mark you wear."

Link looked at the Triforce on his hand.

"You are ready," Levias told him. "... Enter, and finish this journey."

Levias floated away, disappearing into the clouds. Link circled back around above the island, dropping down to the pad outside the temple. His bird floated down with him, resting for a bit outside the temple as Link entered.

And then suddenly, he was in darkness.

"Choose," the familiar voice of the Guardian said.

"W-what?"

The darkness devoured him and Link found himself falling yet again.

When Link opened his eyes, he saw that he was in a twisted version of Skyloft, back in his normal clothes and unequipped.

"What's... happening?"

Zelda bumped passed him, waving him away. "Chosen hero," she said mockingly.

Groose shoved him the other way. "More like worthless Zero! Am I right?"

Pipit laughed from behind Link. "He certainly doesn't look the part."

"You've come all this way," Zelda said spitefully. "And yet it's pointless anyway."

"What are you talking about?" Link hissed.

Zelda laughed like it was obvious. "I'm still going to die!" she exclaimed.

"We all will," Pipit corrected. "That's what'll happen if you fail... Er, when you fail, I guess."

"I always knew you were good for nothing," Groose scoffed.

"Shut up, all of you," Link growled. "Zelda, you're not going-"

A wicked sword pierced Zelda's heart from behind, the tip protruding from her chest, dripping in blood. Then Ghirahim stepped out from behind her.

"Oh, how sad," he smiled. "... I guess you couldn't keep that promise."

Zelda's body fell to the ground with a hollow thud, a twisted grin plastered on her face.

"You should've tried harder," Groose barked.

"You should've sent me instead," Pipit hissed. "You knew you weren't up to the task."

Ghirahim wagged a finger. "Or maybe you are...?"

"... What do you mean?"

"Come now!" Ghirahim cheered. "You've already gained what you need to capture the Triforce!"

"And I'll use it to stop you!" Link shouted, reaching for his sword before remembering it wasn't there.

"Or you can use it to save her," Ghirahim suggested.

"... What?" Link scoffed.

"Think about it!" Ghirahim ordered. "You know you're too weak to fight against my master! He will be born anew and destroy this world!"

And everyone shall suffer."

Suddenly Ghirahim's smile dropped as fire began to rain down and destroy Skyloft.

"Stop this!" Link shouted. "Enough!"

"Give up!" Ghirahim demanded. "You can't win! But if you used the Triforce to *help* me..."

The fire stopped, and Skyloft returns to normal as if nothing had happened. People walked the streets around him, moving passed him like he wasn't there. Through the crowd he saw Zelda down the street. She saw him as well and smiled back at him.

Link took a step forward, but Ghirahim grabbed his shoulder, stopping him.

"You could have everything back," Ghirahim said quietly. "... You could live in peace, here, in your home. You wouldn't even remember anything that happened. No more worries, no more danger."

"... And what about the surface?"

"Oh forget about that place, you don't need it anyway." Ghirahim turned Link around, looking him in the eye. "All the trouble you've gone through, all the dangers you've faced... You were forced into this, but you can walk away."

Link shook off Ghirahim, staring back at him defiantly. "No!" he growled. "I won't let you have the Triforce."

Ghirahim's expression warped to a white hot fury. "Give it to me!" He grabbed Link by the throat, choking him. "This power is not yours to command! Demise shall rise again! If you do not give in to him you shall suffer the greatest loss of all!"

"Ne-Never!" Link swore. He felt the Master Sword's weight in his hand, and he thrust upward, stabbing through Ghirahim's chest.

Ghirahim fell and Link stood above him. His green tunic and his shield had returned to him. "I will beat you," he declared. "And Demise will remain imprisoned."

Ghirahim started to fade. "You speak so clearly," he grinned. "But I can sense your thoughts... You want nothing more than to use the Triforce for yourself.

"Yes," Link agreed. "But it's the fact that I would never act on those wants that makes me better than you."

Ghirahim scowled as he disappeared completely, the world following soon after. Then, Link was swallowed once more by darkness.

Link woke, kneeling on the ground in a stone chamber. Torches blazed around him, casting a warm light on the statue of the Goddess in front of him. It was at the end of the short bridge he stood on, a low ledge acting as a sort of rail along the sides of it.

As he stood, part of the statue's base opened and two small panels slide out, one above the other. On the top, smaller panel, rested a key. Below it, sitting on a larger panel, lay a new shield.

Link took the key, and looked at the shield. The Loftwing crest was painted onto it, beneath the Triforce symbol, made of a shining gold that reflected the torch light. It seemed to emanate a sort of magic, almost as if it was challenging him to test its strength. As he looked at his own shield, he realized how broken it was, the acid from the Parasite having melted parts of it, and the metal was chipped from past fights.

"We need only to gain access to the Triforce now," Fi told him. "Link, we must hurry."

Link nodded, placing his shield on his back and picking up the new one.

"Let's go find the Triforce."

Chapter 15: The Final Test



CHAPTER 16
THE TRIFORCE

It was night when Link landed back in Skyloft. He dropped onto the docking area to the south and walked up to the bazaar. It was closed of course, but he stood where he stood in his recent trial.

He half expected Ghirahim to be lurking behind him, or for one of his friends to come out of nowhere. Looking at the new Hylian Shield, he told himself his vision was over, that he had to keep moving to make sure what Ghirahim showed him would never happen.

As he walked onto the bridge leading to the goddess statue, Fi appeared from the sword and floated beside him. For a while she was quiet, her face expressionless as always.

She didn't speak until they were in the courtyard. "To achieve your destiny and keep the promise you made to Zelda, you must vanquish Demise. To accomplish this task, you will need to find and obtain the Triforce."

"Yeah," Link nodded.

"You seem doubtful of your ability to accomplish this task."

Link looked down the stairs that led into the Chamber of the Sword. "That's not it," he said quietly. "I can do this, that I know... I'm just not sure if what I'll do with it is the right decision."

"Then allow me to put your mind at ease," Gaepora said, standing in the center of the courtyard behind Link. "I have no doubt that you'll make the right decision."

Link turned around. "How'd you know I was here?"

"Your bird," Gaepora answered. "The last few times you returned it's started coming to my window."

Link nodded. "Makes sense," he mumbled. "It's a good bird."

"That it is," Gaepora chuckled.

"Sorry I didn't come back sooner," Link apologized.

"No worries, but..." Gaepora came closer. "Zelda, is she... is she safe?"

"... Yes," Link finally answered, turning away. "A guardian of the goddess watches over her now, Impa."

Gaepora nodded, his expression softening. "Good," he sighed, stepping away as he headed back towards the academy. "And Link... I can't imagine any other as worthy."

"Wait," Link said before Gaepora could get too far. He held out his old shield. "Could you give this back to Gondo? Tell him it served me well, and that any knight would be lucky to have one."

"It would be my pleasure," Gaepora nodded, taking the shield. "Good luck, Link."

Gaepora took his leave and Link turned entered the entryway of the Sword Chamber, placing his new shield on his back and taking the key out of his pocket as walked down the stairs.

Soon he arrived at the altar at the far side of the room. It seemed to react to the key as he got closer, and a small slit opened up beneath the crest. He placed the key in the lock and it took it from him, turning on its own.

The crest glowed and hummed with energy, the base of the pedestal spinning. It sunk into the ground, the floor closing over top of it as the wall that had been behind it slid open like a door. There, another secret chamber was lit by a line of torches. It was similar to the Chamber of the Sword, in that it had a sword's pedestal in the center of a raised platform, but this room was darker, ancient carvings on the wall.

Link stepped up to the pedestal and drew his sword, placing it in the slot.

The carvings glowed and the platform began to shake. Above him, the ceiling opened and a bright golden light shone down on him. As the platform started to spin Link staggered, keeping one hand on the sword as it raised him up towards the light.

Everything around him dissolved into light and Link shielded his eyes with his free hand. When he could see again he saw that he was standing at the top of the goddess statue, looking over all of Skyloft, the Master Sword had returned to his hand.

He looked down at the circle design in the bricks below, where Zelda had pushed him off at the end of the Wing Ceremony.

"Link," Fi said, looking up at the statue. "Look."

Link turned to see a brilliant light shining over the goddess.

"I can't believe it lasted this long," Gondo chuckled, looking at the shield. "Ah, glad to see it was used well."

"Yes," Gaepora nodded. "He said any knight would be lucky to have one."

"Ha!" Gondo laughed. "I guess I'll be making more of-" Suddenly a bright light shone through the door of the bazaar. "What's happening?"

"I think I know," Gaepora said, pushing through the crowd. He made his way through the door and Gondo came out behind them. They looked up at the goddess statue with everyone else, witnessing a sight they never thought they'd see.

"I couldn't be," Pipit exclaimed, standing outside the knight's academy. "But there it is."

"How?" Karene asked. "I thought it was just a legend."

"It's no legend," Eagus said, stepping up behind them. "There it is."

"But what *is* it?" Cawlin asked.

"Have we taught you nothing?" Eagus grunted. "That's..."

"...The Triforce," Link gasped.

Three golden pyramids spun around each other above the goddess statue. Their light covered all of Skyloft as the people of the village came out of their homes to watch the once in a lifetime spectacle.

"Link, I believe at this juncture a prayer is required." She tore her gaze away from the Triforce, hovering in front of Link. "The ultimate goal we have traveled so far for is now within reach. Focus now, and wish with all your heart for the destruction of Demise."

"You could live in peace, here, in your home."

Link stared defiantly up at the Triforce. *You were right, he thought. When you said it was a matter of life and death. But you weren't talking about me, you were talking about you. With this wish...*

"I will defeat you." Link closed his eyes as he faced the triforce, and made his wish.

The golden pyramids took their shape, taking the same form as the markings on the back of his hand. It radiated power, and the island shook.

The bridges that connected the courtyard to the rest of Skyloft shattered, and the island fell.

"What's happening?" Link stumbled as he sheathed his sword and knelt to keep steady.

Fi seemed unfazed as always, staring blankly up at the Triforce as they descended from the clouds.

Below them came a deep rumbling and Link drew his sword, recognizing it as the roar of the Imprisoned. But Fi threw an arm in front of him, stopping him before he could leap off the statue.

Link held back, the island sinking lower as the Imprisoned once more climbed from its tomb. And a moment later its screams were silenced by the island as it crushed the seal beneath it. A final wave of darkness was swept up through the seams in the land, but it too was dispelled by the Triforce's light.

The ground steadied then, and Link stood as the Triforce hovered above them.

"The isle of the goddess," Fi started. "Which was formally a part of Skyloft, has returned to the surface." She floated by the edge of the statue's platform, looking over the Sealed Temple. "Furthermore, I have detected the successful eradication of Demise. Your prayers to the Triforce have been heard. In light of these factors, the seal Zelda maintained through her age long sleep is no longer necessary. My projections indicate she will wake momentarily."

"Well what are we waiting for?" Link laughed, pulling out the sailcloth. "Come on!"

Fi returned to the sword and Link took a running start before leaping from the statue.

It's finally over, Link thought. It's about time.

Chapter 16: The Triforce



CHAPTER 17
THE FINAL FIGHT

Link threw open the door to the Sealed Temple, startling Goose and the old woman who were waiting patiently for Link's return.

"Took you long enough!" Goose laughed. "Glad to have you back Link."

The old woman got to her feet and started hobbling towards the back door. "Let's not keep her waiting any longer."

Link hurried ahead of them, reaching the door before the others had even crossed the room. The old woman had to stop Goose from running just as quickly, but Link had already entered the chamber where Zelda was being kept locked away.

He hesitated, his legs feeling weak as stared up at Zelda through the crystal she was held in. As he stepped up to the crystal, the Triforce on his hand glowed and he placed his hand on the crystal. It glowed in response, tiny cracks forming from his fingertips.

Link pressed harder, and the crystal surface shattered.

Zelda fell in slow motion, limp. She was weak from her thousand year sleep, and as Link caught her she felt lighter than ever.

"Hey," Link said quietly. "Time to wake up."

Zelda's eyes fluttered open, and she looked up at Link. She laughed softly. "Good morning... Link."

—

Link and Zelda stepped back into the main room, Goose staring up at them with awe from the bottom of the stairs.

"Zelda!" he exclaimed. "You- you woke up..."

Zelda bowed, a warm smile on her face. "Hi Goose."

For a moment, Goose stood there, unable to make up his mind on

what he wanted to do next. Eventually, a steady stream of tears trickled down his cheeks, and he couldn't stop himself from crying. Link and Zelda laughed, coming down the stairs.

Goose grabbed Link, grinning widely. "You did it!" he sobbed. "You actually managed to do it!" He let Link go and hugged the old woman.

Link shook his head as he steadied himself, Zelda still beaming beside him.

Then in an instant it was all over, and something exploded in the middle of them, knocking them all back. When the smoke cleared, Ghirahim stood with his arms out wide, laughing.

"This is all very touching, really," he chuckled. "But I'm afraid I have to cut this emotional moment short." He picked up Zelda, who had been knocked unconscious by the blast, and slung her over his shoulder. "It's best for everyone if you forget about your friend. The little goddess is mine now!"

Ghirahim tossed Zelda into the air, suspending her with magic. He kept her just out of reach of the others. "My master may have perished in this age, but in the past he lives yet! I'm taking the girl back through that gate to help me revive the demon king!"

"Unhand her, now!" Link demanded.

"You've been so adorably dogged in your quest to get in my way," Ghirahim scolded. "And as much as it has delighted me, I can no longer tolerate you nipping at my heels."

"Bite me," Link growled, drawing his weapons.

Ghirahim looked at him, unimpressed. "... You know, boy, you've really pushed me too far. The moment I sweated and bled for is at hand. I don't even have the time to grind my heel into a worm like you. Not now."

Suddenly Ghirahim disappeared, Zelda along with him, then he reappeared in front of Goose, startling him. Link stumbled towards them, but Goose stood between Ghirahim and the Gate of Time.

Goose spread his arms, blocking Ghirahim's way.

"...Stand down," Ghirahim ordered. "You're in my way, and the sight of your appalling hair infuriates me."

Before Goose could even respond, Ghirahim hit him in the side of the head with a spinning kick. Goose was hurled to the side, a pillar cracking as he crashed into it, and Ghirahim looked back at Link. The portal opened behind him as Zelda fell down into his arms.

"You've done a fine job of spoiling my plans to revive the demon king in this age," Ghirahim said. "So I see no point in dawdling here. But

the past..." he smiled wickedly. "Oh the past... So full of possibilities. I shall resurrect him there with the divine soul of this golden-haired girl!"

Ghirahim jumped back into the portal, disappearing into the past.

Link grit his teeth, running towards the portal. Before he entered however, he looked back at Goose. He was sitting by the pillar he hit, uninjured, but looking completely dejected.

"Are you coming or not?" Link asked, more harshly than he'd wanted. "...Come on."

"I couldn't stop him..." Goose hung his head. "He took Zelda..."

"I couldn't either, but we're still gonna get her back. Are you with me?"

Goose looked up to see Link holding out his hand.

"Go!" the old woman barked. "She needs your help!"

Goose made a short coughing sound, but stood. He shook Link's hand. "Eh-Right!" he nodded. "Zelda needs me!"

Link stepped back as Goose stepped up to the Gate of Time. "Come on Link," he said. "We've no time to waste!"

Goose shut his eyes and jumped into the portal without looking back. Link gave one last nod to the old woman, promising to return with Zelda alive, before diving in after Goose.

Link skid to a stop by the edge of the pit beside Goose, a ring of fire separating them from Ghirahim who stood at the bottom with Zelda. Ghirahim smiled as Zelda was raised upward, sucking the light out of her soul as she hovered between him and the Imprisoned's marker. There were several other rings getting smaller and smaller as they reached closer to Ghirahim, and to make matters worse, bokoblins filled every space in between the rings.

"Bokoblins..." Link hissed.

"You've fought these things before?" Goose asked.

"Not this many," Link answered. Then he remembered the first trial. "Not really anyway."

The bokoblins charged towards them in waves. Twenty or thirty at a time, Link and Goose fought to push back the enemy, even as more of them crawled out of the ground around them. Goose had taken one of their swords and was fighting with that, but it was clear he hadn't trained as often as Link.

Goose kept staggering, falling back to find better footing. Link

found himself holding back to make sure he could keep an eye on him.

"Goose, I got-

"Get Zelda!" Goose roared, slicing through a bokoblin as another hit him from behind. He kicked one away. "I'll hold them off!"

Link hesitated, keeping up the fight, but not moving forward. Goose couldn't keep going, at least not much longer.

I'll be quick, Link thought, stabbing a bokoblin and launching himself over it. He hacked and slashed his way through the army, waiting for the opening in the flames when the enemy units would come through. He ran through the flames, hurrying towards the center of the pit.

"You're far too quick, boy!" Ghirahim shouted as Link stepped up to the last ring. This one had no opening, but the bokoblins weren't swarming him either. "I realize a simple child like you knows nothing of magic, but spells like this take time and a steady hand."

Link attempted to run through the flames, but they lashed back at him, growing hotter. He wouldn't get through unless Ghirahim allowed it.

Ghirahim shook his hands furiously. "Can't you wait quietly like a good boy? HMM?" he glared at Link for his futile attempt at getting through the fire. "You petulant brat... You've pushed me too far. I've waited my whole existence for this! This is my moment!" He looked at Link, seeing the determination in his face. "You know what? Fine!"

He threw Zelda up high into the air. "If you're so intent on hurrying to your grave, I'll be happy to show you the way!"

Link looked up at Zelda as she fought against the dark forces that bound her. She was awake again, and still alive. Which meant he still had time to save her.

"This time there will be no heroic escape," Ghirahim continued. "I was a fool to toy with you and let you walk away with your life before, but I won't make that mistake again!" Dark energy surrounded Ghirahim. "That I promise!"

Link gripped his sword tighter as he was suddenly lifted into the air on a magical golden platform. Ghirahim exploded as he began to show his true form, his entire body covered in the same thin black armor that had covered just his arms before.

"If only I'd put you in your place from the very beginning," Ghirahim growled. "Show a Human a little mercy and the think you know, he thinks himself your equal! Given my station, I had to maintain some semblance of dignity, so I let you run with your life... Twice, even... such a guilty pleasure..."

Ghirahim paced back and forth as the platform continued to rise.

"But instead of scurrying away like any creature with a basic instinct to survive, you just keep coming back. Again... and again... and again."

The platform stopped rising, and Ghirahim stopped pacing. For the first time during his entire rant, he focused all of his attention on Link. And Link could see the dead hatred in his eyes.

"I've let a mere boy make a fool of me for the last time." He started walking towards Link. "You stand before a demon... or should I say, a weapon without mercy!"

For a moment, Ghirahim's figure flickered. The image of a giant broadsword taking place of him, but in an instant it was gone again.

"I don't care what you call yourself," Link hissed, ready for a fight. "I will stop you."

Ghirahim shook. "GRAAAH! Your body will serve as sustenance for the demon king!"

Ghirahim flew throwing a powerful punch that Link barely had time to deflect. He swept Ghirahim's feet out from under him, stabbing at the ground where he fell. Ghirahim had already jumped back up, blasting Link with a fiery energy.

Link took the brunt of the hit with his sword swinging in a wide circle and using the momentum of Ghirahim's attack to slice back down at him. His sword pierced Ghirahim's armor, and the force of the attack sent Ghirahim sliding back across the arena.

Not letting up, Link darted forward, continuing to cut away at Ghirahim's armor. Roaring in anger, Ghirahim summoned a sword of his own and struck back. Link threw up his shield again, parrying the Ghirahim's next move, and stabbing forward. Ghirahim jumped back slicing at an angle, but Link rolled to the side and slashed upward, staggering Ghirahim.

They traded blow after blow, but Link's sword was stronger than before, and its power drove Ghirahim to the edge. Link used this opportunity to kick him off, and Ghirahim toppled over the side.

He fell, but he managed to summon another golden platform before he hit the ground. Link jumped, thrusting his sword downward. His blade pierced the gem on Ghirahim's chest, cracking it.

Ghirahim screamed, throwing Link off of him and getting to his feet. He was broken, but not yet defeated. Standing on shaky legs, he made the new platform bigger and summoned a greater sword.

Link didn't wait for Ghirahim to make the first move this time, stabbing at Ghirahim and knocking his sword back with his shield. Ghirahim continued to stumble as he tried to defend himself. But it was

useless, Link's sword too strong.

Ghirahim's blade chipped away with his armor, and it looked like he was at his weakest Link raised his sword.

He channeled more power into it than he ever had before. The blade glowed a heavy blue and he made the final move. The gem on Ghirahim's chest shattered and the platform disappeared, the smoke in the air rushing passed them as they fell.

Link landed on his feet, rolling away into a standing position. Ghirahim however, landed face up, his back taking the hit full force.

Ghirahim coughed, forcing himself to at least sit. "This... this is preposterous," he swore. "Driven to my knees by a simple child of man. Laughable! No matter how many times we clash, I can't prevail!" He glared up at Link. "You think I can't defeat you? You think I can't win?!"

Ghirahim shook his head, unable to comprehend how he could have lost. "Boy... what are you?"

Link pointed his sword in Ghirahim's face. "I am Link," he answered. "Chosen hero of the Goddess Hylia. I *will* not lose to you."

Ghirahim looked up, and through the smoke he saw just what he needed to see. "Ah, it doesn't matter now," he laughed. "Victory is still mine to savor. While we fought, the ritual I started continued..."

"What?" Link hissed.

Ghirahim smiled, limping as he stood. "At last, it's complete!" he exclaimed, throwing his arms into the air. "The demon king shall devour the soul of the goddess and resurrect in his full glory!"

Suddenly the ground shook, and the seal broke. The marker shattered and incredible power erupted from the now broken ground. Zelda fought against this new power, but it was pointless. Directly below her, a column of darkness fired up towards the sky, enveloping her.

The darkness exploded and the light from Zelda's soul was completely swallowed by it.

"*NO!*" Link shouted.

"Don't you see?" Ghirahim laughed. "It's all over! You and your kind have lost! This world and everything in it now belong to darkness! They belong to my master!"

A strong wind whipped around them and as they watched, from the darkness emerged Demise, the Demon King. A tall, muscular man with scales as the Imprisoned had had, his hair fire that ran down to his shoulders.

Ghirahim bowed. "Welcome back to us, Master."

Demise raised a hand, and killed Ghirahim with a single blast of

red energy. Using his power, Demise lifted Ghirahim's limp body into the air, and pulled from his corpse, a large sword. Then as the sword had come from Ghirahim, Ghirahim was returned to the sword, devoured as energy that made the black blade glow.

Demise let his arm hang by his side, loosely gripping his sword as he turned to Link. "...So you are the chosen knight of the Goddess. Intriguing..." he looked Link over, judging him. "The Goddess lowered herself to a mortal existence to keep me imprisoned. How pathetic." He looked up at Zelda. "This bag of flesh pales in comparison to the magnificence of her previous form."

He waved a hand and a whirlwind appeared, throwing her from the sky.

Link lurched forward, but then he saw Goose at the top of the pit, the monsters seeming to have disappeared. "Don't worry, Link!" He came flying down the cliffs at top speed, kicking up dirt and sand as he rushed to catch Zelda.

"GROOSE," he shouted. "HAS. GOT THIS!"

He made a final dive-bomb towards the ground, just before Zelda hit. He brought his arms in as he rolled across the grass, ending in a sitting position.

Goose sat Zelda in his lap. "Link, I... I caught her! She's okay!" He gave Link a thumbs up.

Link sighed a breath of relief, turning back to Demise.

Demise barely moved, still looking down at Link. "Hmm... So you and that other human would stand before obliteration to aid the goddess, would you?" he tilted his head. "How curious... The humans I've known were weak things. Hardly more than insects, shivering under rocks and ready to flee at a mere glimpse of me. When last I walked this world, they did little more than scream and cling to their goddess, mewling and praying... counting on her to protect them. How amusing to think those cowards begot someone like you."

Link stared back at Demise, unfazed. "Humans have changed a lot since you've been away," he said firmly. "We're a lot stronger than you give us credit for."

Demise chuckled faintly. "You grow more fascinating by the second, Human. I never imagined I'd meet one of your kind who wished to stand against me in battle."

Link readied himself, preparing for a fight at any moment.

"Very well then," Demise said calmly. "I shall prepare a place for us where we will not be bothered by distractions. If you still have the

courage to face me, seek me there."

Link stepped forward, but Demise didn't care about him anymore. Instead, the Demon King raised his sword, sending up a column of darkness which opened like a portal.

"If you fear for your life, do not follow me," Demise warned. "You can spend what little time your world has left cowering and crying, as befits your kind. But if you truly desire to raise your blade against the world I would build, come for me."

Demise stepped in front of the portal. "I've waited eons to return. I can spare a few moments for you to decide." he entered the portal and it wavered for a moment, but it stayed in place, waiting for Link to follow.

"Go Link!" Goose called. "I've got things here, you stop him!"

Link nodded and ran through the portal.

Zelda lay limp in Goose's lap. "It's up to you now, Link..."

Link stepped out of the portal and it disappeared behind him, trapping him in the new arena Demise created for them. It looked like he was standing on nothing, as the sky above and around him was reflected perfectly in the unmoving water beneath his feet.

"Ah, so you've decided to meet your end in battle after all," Demise said softly. "It pleases me greatly to see such misplaced valor, Human. Take a moment to appreciate your surroundings, for where we stand shall serve as your tomb for eternity."

"We'll see about that..." Link started slowly circling the area, watching Demise.

Demise began pacing as well. "The only question left is how long you will manage to remain standing before I take your life. Try to keep it interesting for me, would you? And when you do fall, know that your world and everything in it is mine to dominate... Mine to subjugate... Mine to rule! When I finish with you, you can take solace in knowing your friends and kin will soon follow, as I wipe all who oppose me from the face of this world!"

The clouds began to darken around them.

"And know that when *you* fall," Link growled. "You will disappear from this world entirely... A stain in our memories, if remembered at all. I will protect my friends... my home... and you will perish."

"This power within you," Demise mumbled, impressed. "I know this presence..." He raised his sword, pointing it at Link. "So that's it... I

will take the Triforce for my own... And the world shall be under my foot for eternity!"

With incredible speed, Demise made the first move, smashing his broadsword into Link's stomach. Link was sent reeling sideways, but he managed to stay on his feet. As Link tried an attack of his own however, Demise brought his sword down.

Link threw his shield up, but was smashed into the ground. He rolled out of the way just in time to dodge another swing, but was unable to get close enough to make a solid hit.

"You shall fall like the world before me!" Demise bellowed as he kicked Link in the face.

Again, Link toppled sideways, and again he barely had time to put up his shield before the next strike. Over and over, Demise struck, his attacks relentless.

Finally, one good hit sent Link's shield flying, his arm broken.

He yelled in pain as he grabbed at his wound, but Demise simply smiled. He stabbed through Link's shoulder and sliced through his chest, then kicked him back. Demise stood over him as the Master Sword fell from his hand.

Demise shook his head, walking passed him, unimpressed. "You were destined to fall by my hand," he said. "There was no other way this could have ended."

Link coughed up blood, unable to even breathe let alone move. He stared blankly up at the sky.

"Link," Fi said from the sword. "You are injured..."

Link nodded. "Yeah," he choked.

"I strongly suggest something?"

"All shall bow before me," Demise continued, seeing through the sky to the world he planned to conquer. "As I take their lives away, as I have taken yours."

Behind him, he heard the sound of Link's sword sliding across the ground.

"I wouldn't count on it," Link growled.

"What?!" Demise hissed.

He turned to see Link standing as if nothing had happened, his wounds completely healed. Link wiped the blood from his mouth, the potion bottle clattering to the ground.

"That tasted worse than I expected." Link looked up at Demise. "Alright... let's finish this."

Demise glared at Link. "*No!*" he barked. "You should be *dead!*"

Thunder rumbled around them and lightning struck Demise's blade as he raised his sword, charging it with his own energy. He threw electricity at Link, but he deflected it with his sword.

"Take this!" Link shouted, raising his own sword. Lightning struck the blade, charging it faster than it would have normally.

Maybe Demise was too fast to dodge Link's sword, but he wasn't fast enough to dodge the lightning Link fired at him. Demise staggered, and Link recharged his sword, striking a second time.

"Link," Fi warned. "You are using too much energy!"

"You grow weaker," Demise spat. "*Boy.*"

Link roared as he charged his sword again, slicing Demise's chest. Electricity rippled through the air as Link cut through Demise's sword, sending shards of it flying in all directions.

A fourth time, Link charged his sword, cutting through Demise once more.

Demise staggered backwards, unable to comprehend the sword's power, or Link's determination to keep fighting. He threw a futile punch, but Link sliced at his arm, and raised his sword as it was struck by lightning yet again.

He felt drained, but he refused to give up, even as Demise looked down at him with unyielding eyes.

"It... cannot be," Demise murmured, stepping backwards.

Electricity ran the length of Link's sword, and Demise knew one more strike and he'd be finished. He used all his strength, and hurled himself towards Link.

Everything slowed down in that moment. As Demise propelled himself through the air, and Link raised his sword one last time, charging it beyond its limit. As Link roared in anger as he bashed his shield into Demise's head, knocking him to the side. As Demise lay face up on the ground, dazed and confused.

And finally, Link drove his sword into the scars he'd made in Demise's chest.

The blast sent Link flying backwards, all the power in the sword expelled at once. Demise's sword that had been laying on the ground as well, disappeared, signifying the end of the Demon King's strength.

Link sat for a moment, then forced himself to stand, his legs barely able to support his weight.

The Demise moved.

He rolled to his side, and stood, looking down at the sword embedded into him. He pulled out the sword, wincing as its power burned

his hand. The Master Sword clattered to the ground.

"Fi," Link mumbled.

"Extraordinary," Demise scoffed, speaking slowly. "You stand as a paragon of your kind, Human." He looked at Link, his gaze weaker than before. "You fight like no man or demon I have ever known. Though this is not the end. My hate... never perishes. It is born anew in a cycle with no end! I will rise again!"

He grimaced, coughing as he fell to his knees. When he spoke again his words were pained. "Those like you," he choked. "Those who share the blood of the Goddess and the spirit of the hero... They are eternally bound to this curse. An incarnation of my hatred shall ever follow your kind, dooming them to wander a blood-soaked sea of darkness for all time!"

Demise grabbed at his wound, staggering forward on his knees and leaning against the ground. Finally, he fell, his body already turning to ash in the air.

"No... no you don't."

Link retrieved the Master Sword, holding as tight as he could in the air.

The darkness was devoured by his blade, and the storm clouds parted around them, revealing the bright sky he always knew.

Then he fell, his legs finally giving out.

"I have confirmed the eradication of the Demon King," Fi said from within the sword. "His residual consciousness has been absorbed into the Master Sword... and is now sealed away."

"Good," Link mumbled numbly. "That's... good..."

Link's vision blurred, and the bright sky disappeared as he fell back.

Chapter 17: The Final Fight



CHAPTER 18
SAYING GOODBYE

"Link! ... Link! Please, wake up!"

"Wake up buddy!"

Slowly, Link's vision came back to him, and he found himself staring up at the ceiling of the Sealed Temple. Zelda and Groose were by his side, watching over him, concern turning to excitement as they saw him waking.

As Link propped himself into a sitting position, Zelda tackled him, nearly knocking him over again.

"Link!"

"Ow," Link gasped. "Wha-what happened?"

Impa looked down at him from the steps to the Gate of Time. Her arms were crossed as usual, but the familiar look of scorn on her face by a proud look. "You bested him," she said. "Just as I knew you would. Congratulations."

Link leaned back against the pillar. "So... that's it?" he asked quietly. "It's finally over?"

Impa nodded. "You have done well, Link."

Link closed his eyes, giving a sighing with relief.

"Link," Zelda said, sitting beside him. "Thank you... it's all over."

Groose gave a hearty laugh. "Nice job you two," he chuckled, starting to walk away. "You guys were totally amazing in this little adventure I like to call *The Legend of Groose!*" he stopped and waved away the thought.

"... That's a little joke," he laughed, but to himself he said; "Though I may write that down..."

"Joke or not," Impa said. "Your contributions to our efforts were heroic. You have my thanks."

"Aww, well, you know..." Goose shuffled awkwardly. "Just glad I could make myself useful. I'm happy things turned out okay."

Goose turned back to Link and Zelda. "Hey, so things look pretty sewn up here," he started. "What do you guys say? Ready to head back to our own time? Grannie was really worried about you two. We don't want to keep the old girl in suspense too long."

Link nodded, but as he was helping Zelda get back on her feet, Fi ejected from the sword.

She looked at Zelda, bowing. "Hylia, your grace," she said. "Or perhaps you prefer "Zelda." It pleases me to know you are safe."

Fi looked away, not looking at anyone before suddenly turning her attention to Link. "... Link, I must speak to you."

Link let go of Zelda's hand and followed Fi to the back of the Temple, by a pedestal in the ground.

"Link," Fi said. "You have successfully protected the goddess reborn and defeated Demise, fulfilling your role as the hero of legend. My purpose here is complete. Therefore I ask you to dissolve our arrangement as Master and Servant." She hovered behind the pedestal. "Drive your sword into the pedestal behind you, and I will return to the sword to enter a sleep without end."

"Without end...?" Link shook his head. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Link, you have achieved the purpose you were chosen to fulfill. Please, set the sword in the pedestal and bring the goddess' mission to an end."

Link didn't move, unable to look away from the pedestal.

"Now, Link," Fi said. "It is time to conclude our necessary companionship."

She returned to the sword, the gem on the hilt glowing faintly before going dim once more.

"Necessary companionship?" Link mumbled.

"Link," Impa said, making him turn around.

"You knew the consequences of using that blade," Impa continued. "It requires great energy, energy you spent in your battle against Demise."

Link looked over his shoulder at the sword's hilt. "So... because of me... she won't wake up again..."

He remembered how angry he was while fighting Demise. He remembered how drained he felt.

"Link!" Fi had warned. *"You are using too much energy!"*

He wished he'd listened, but even now he couldn't think of any

other way he could've defeated Demise...

Impa saw the depressing look on her face. "And that is why she did not tell you," she sighed. "She knew you would only blame yourself, but I felt you deserved to understand."

"But it is my fault," Link mumbled. Then he saw Zelda come up to stand at the bottom of the stairs.

"It's okay, Link," she said. "She'll be okay. This is how it was meant to be."

Link looked away from her. He knew she didn't believe what she'd said, yet she was right all the same.

So he drew his sword, his arm seemingly fighting him as he retrieved it from its sheath. Impa stepped back as Link placed the sword in the pedestal, the base glowing a flash of golden light. The mark of the Triforce appeared on the pedestal, and the stone fused with the blade, and he knew none but the chosen hero could retrieve it again.

Link disconnected the sheath and sat it beside the sword, placing the shield with them as well. He bowed. "Thank you, Fi."

Zelda and Goose looked on as Link finally forced himself to step away. But when at last he turned away, he heard the sword twinkling.

He looked back at the sword, the gem glowing.

"Link," Fi said from within the sword. "Link, hear me. My purpose was to obey the command of the goddess and lead you, the chosen hero of this land, on your quest. When I first awoke and began this task, I perceived it as merely serving my function as a servant to her grace. However, I have come to consider the information corresponding to our time together among the most precious data I have on record."

Link stepped back towards the sword as Fi appeared for the last time, hovering in front of the sword. "I do not have the capability to fully comprehend the Human spirit Link... But now, at the end of my journey with you, as I prepare to sleep within the Master Sword forever, I experience a feeling I am unable to identify. I lack sufficient data to be sure of my conclusion, but I believe this feeling correlates closest to what your people call... Happiness."

"It's been fun, hasn't it?" Link said quietly.

"Our partnership is at an end," Fi continued. "And even as we speak, I feel my consciousness fading away. Before I enter the sleep that calls me to the sword, I wish to relay words to you that I recorded several times over the course of our journey. Many have said them to you thus far, but now I wish to say them myself..."

Fi bowed, almost kneeling in the air. "...Thank you, Link."

"Fi," Link said, lifting his hand, not even sure what to say.

"Mortals are strange creatures," Fi said, floating upright again. "With many expressions. I ask only that now that you have rescued your friend, you no longer wear such a sad one."

Link choked on his words, unable to come up with the necessary words needed to explain what he was thinking. He couldn't seem to tell her just how badly he didn't want to say goodbye.

So instead, he simply smiled, as Fi had told him to.

"May we meet again in another life..."

"Fi," Link stammered. He bowed. "...Goodbye, Fi."

When he looked up, Fi had already gone. The sword had already stopped glowing. He opened his mouth to speak, but he knew she could no longer hear him. The sword was sleeping now, and somehow he knew that even if the sword were reawakened, Fi wouldn't be...

He stepped away, tearing his gaze from the sword and walking slowly back down to his friends. As he came closer he realized they were saying goodbyes of their own.

"What?" Zelda exclaimed. "Impa, why? Come with us!"

"Zelda," Impa said firmly. "Your Grace, you possess the memory of the goddess. You must understand why that is not possible. I am a being of this age. My place is here."

"I... I know that," Zelda mumbled. "But..."

"You must return to your own time," Impa told her. "I will take care of the Gate once you have passed through."

"I... can't do that," Zelda shook her head. "You and I have been through so much together. I don't want to leave you alone. Please, Impa. Come back with us."

Impa rested a hand on Zelda's shoulder, calming her. "Zelda, at the command of the goddess, I passed through the Gate of Time. I did so to protect you and aid the fight to prevent the world's destruction. The last remnants of Demise are decaying slowly within the sword. Someone must stay behind and watch over this blade. His spirit must not reawaken. He must never be allowed to threaten the world again. This is the nature of the task given to my tribe. As a member of the Sheikah, the goddess' chosen guardians, I gladly welcome this duty."

Zelda pulled away, looking at the ground.

"Zelda," Impa continued. "I shall watch over the Triforce. Its power is too great to leave in the grasp of man. Dependence on its might is an invitation to disaster. When it has served its purpose, it must be secreted away to lie dormant once again... the knowledge of its existence

hidden from mortal history... These are the words the goddess spoke to me long ago. I remember them well. As do you, I'm sure."

Zelda nodded, looking back up at her. She removed from her wrist, one of her bracelets she wore, and handed it up to her. "Please, take this," she said. "I can't leave you with nothing..."

Impa placed her hand on it, that took it and held it at her side. "Do not despair, Zelda. You and I will surely meet again someday." She stepped out of the way as Link came down the steps to stand beside Zelda.

"Come on," Link said. "Let's go home."

Together, Link, Zelda, and Goose walked to the Gate of Time, each bowing in turn one last time to say goodbye to Impa before stepping into the Gate.



They stepped out of the Gate of Time, back in their own age. Behind them, the Gate lit up, and disintegrated into thousands of little lights. They watched until the lights died down, then saw on the far side of the room, the old woman of the Sealed Temple, waiting to greet them upon their return.

Link and Goose took turns explaining to her what had happened, but Zelda noticed something. She moved passed Goose and Link, standing in front of the old woman.

Zelda held out her hand and the old woman reached up to her, showing the bracelet on her wrist. It was the very same one Zelda had given to Impa only moments ago, yet for Impa, here and now, it had been so many years.

"...See?" Impa smiled. "I told you we'd meet again." She stepped back, and before anyone could do anything to stop it, she faded from this world. Just as she had done to the Gate of Time so long ago, Impa dissipated into lights, the bracelet falling to the ground at Zelda's feet.

Goose fell to his knees in shock and Link rested a hand on Zelda's shoulder.

Zelda bowed her head. "Impa... Thank you. Thank you for everything."

At the top of the stairs, the door began to creak open, revealing the Master Sword resting in its pedestal. A golden light shone down on it, and the hilt glistened. The gem reflected the light, almost as if it was awake once more.

But Link knew that wasn't possible.

He stepped away from the others. "Come on," he said. "Let's go."

"Right," Zelda nodded, walking back with him.

Groose followed and they started trading stories of what they'd done without the others.

Together, they started for home.

Producer: Eiji Aonuma

General Producer: Shigeru Miyamoto

Executive Producer: Satoru Iwata

Director: Hidemaro Fujibayashi

Authored by: Lincoln Reign

Original story copyrighted by NINTENDO

Any added material is non-cannon

Link and Zelda stood under the statue of the goddess as a few others from Skyloft came flying down. Zelda greeted her father, and she and Link told them all that had happened.

Groose met up with his friends for the first time in forever, showing off his invention. Cawlin and Stritch couldn't believe how small the birds were, and Groose told them about the giant killer birds that lived in the mountains, which he still hadn't seen for himself.

After a while however, after all the stories had been shared, Groose and his friends returned home to Skyloft, Gaepora along with them. Groose waved back to Zelda as he flew up on his Loftwing, and Zelda and Link sat down at the top of the goddess statue.

"Look around us," Zelda said in amazement. "As a child, I always dreamed of a world below. I wanted to see the surface with my own eyes and feel the land's warm breeze on my skin."

"It's nice without all the monsters," Link agreed. He looked up at the sky, unable to see Skyloft from this far away. "Not as good as home, but..."

"I... I think I want to live here," Zelda said.

"What?" Link laughed.

"I always want to feel solid ground beneath my feet," she explained. "See the clouds above my head, and watch over the Triforce." She looked at Link. "What about you Link? What will you do now?"

Link looked over the horizon, then back up at the sky. He opened his mouth to speak, but he didn't have an answer yet. In truth he wasn't sure what it was he was going to do now. He knew he missed being in the sky, the wind in his face, that feeling of falling without danger...

But there was so much to explore still, down here on the surface world...

In the end, Link simply shrugged.

Zelda elbowed him. "Don't go silent on me now!"

They laughed, watching their Loftwings fly above them.

Chapter 18: Saying Goodbye



The End