

The Hero's Journey in Player Experiences

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# Abstract

The Hero's Journey is influential in digital games but the well-known version is a simplified fraction of what Joseph Campbell presents in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. The popular *Linear Hero's Journey* is a sequence of events that happen to the hero, restricted to specific settings, characters, goals, and outcomes. Campbell's *Dynamic Hero's Journey* describes the relationship between the hero and a goal, without prescribing what that goal should be, what the hero does and feels, or how their relationship changes throughout the story. This flexibility and emphasis on experience makes the Dynamic Hero's Journey more applicable to play.

This thesis explores and adapts the Dynamic Hero's Journey for digital games by redescribing it phenomenologically as a set of modules the player experiences. To do this, play accounts of *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) were collected from six participants and common themes were identified via Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. These common themes were compared against the Dynamic Hero's Journey and examined with theories of player motivation, affordances, and narrative construction. Results found Dynamic Hero's Journeys arose as participants identified personally meaningful goals. These Journeys varied in scale, subject, and content according to the different goals at their centres. Participants evaluated phenomena by how they contributed to their Journeys. Experiences were consistently enjoyable when they *Facilitated* a Dynamic Hero's Journey and play felt disrupted when experiences *Negated* a Journey. From these results, I present the *Ludic Hero's Journey*, an adjusted version describing the player's embodied experience and addressing the way digital games Facilitate and Negate their meaning-making. This project demonstrates Campbell's original Dynamic Hero's Journey is a rich source of material for investigating and understanding player experience.

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# Declaration

I declare that all work produced for the degree of PhD by thesis:

1. contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma;
2. to the best of my knowledge contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.



Jacqueline Moran

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# Introduction

## The Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey is an incredibly popular storytelling concept. It was first described by Joseph Campbell in his 1949 book *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Campbell studied comparative literature, language, and anthropology and was a scholar of literary and cultural studies (Ellwood, 1999). *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* was Campbell's first solo-authored book and in it he proposes myths reveal truths about human life: "They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source" (Campbell, 1968, p.4). Campbell wrote in a learned but readable style and *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* reached a wide audience rather than a strictly academic one (Ellwood, 1999). Although mythographers, folklorists, and anthropologists were critical of the book (Ellwood, 1999; Northrup, 2006; Segal, 1993, 1999b), Campbell's impact on literary critics, dramatists, poets, and the public at large was significant (Ellwood, 1999).

Campbell is a captivating storyteller and he describes the human condition with an appealing romance, poetry, and profundity (Ellwood, 1999; Segal, 1999b). The Hero's Journey also championed the hero as a remarkable individual and Campbell proposed ancient myths were metaphors for individual potential – "the mighty hero of extraordinary power [...] is each of us" (Campbell, 1968, p.365) – which especially appealed to post-war America's obsession with individualism (Ellwood, 1999). The Hero's Journey spread even further into public consciousness with the PBS interview series with Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers in 1988 called *The Power of Myth* (Bancks, 2003; Ellwood, 1999). The Hero's Journey has been "the property of pop culture" ever since (Northrup, 2006, p.5).

Today, the Hero's Journey is best known as a specific series of stages through which a hero progresses as they confront adversity and claim a prize to improve their life. The hero begins in their somehow insufficient ordinary world. They are prompted to leave this ordinary life and embark on an adventure into a dangerous and distant place. They initially refuse but are eventually forced to accept and cross a threshold from which they cannot return. They meet a mentor figure who helps them begin the adventure and who continues to help them until the hero no longer needs the mentor. They face a series of challenges with allies and enemies until they reach an ultimate challenge against a powerful entity. When they overcome this final challenge, they are rewarded with a prize. They escape the dangerous place with their prize and return to their ordinary world, where they use the prize to improve their existence and their world.

Image removed. See original diagram in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1968, p.245), at the beginning of Chapter IV: The Keys.

*Figure 1. Adventure of the Hero (Campbell, 1968, p.245)*

The Hero's Journey has inspired people from self-help writers (Northrup, 2006) to Hollywood screenwriters (Bancks, 2003; Soloway, 2011) and now also digital game designers. Designers use it in their digital games, such as Thatgamecompany (2012) in their game *Journey* (as

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Jenova Chen explains in his presentation; GDC, 2016). Designers recommend it to others, such as in *Andrew Rollings and Ernest Adams on Game Design* (2003) where Rollings and Adams rewrite the Hero's Journey to incorporate game design techniques into each stage. Researchers identify it in digital games, such as Ip (2011a,b) who found the Hero's Journey was prominent in his sample of ten action games from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Authors also recommend it as a way to improve digital games design, such as Bartle (2005) who argues following the stages of the Hero's Journey increases the player's immersion in a virtual world.

Narrative is an unavoidably important aspect of digital games. Narrative theories were foundational to the discipline (Simons, 2007) and between the 1970s and 2000s narrative became a more prominent element in both the digital games development process (Ip, 2011a) and the way digital games were advertised (Cassidy, 2011). The Hero's Journey is one of the only methods proposed for designing interesting stories for digital games (Ip, 2011a). Designers and researchers know the Hero's Journey as a satisfying story to present to players (e.g. Rollings & Adams, 2003), as a successful learning process (e.g. Denmeade, 2017), as the role a game serves in the player's life (e.g. Bartle, 2005), and more recently as the experience of playing a game (e.g. Walk, 2018). Across these extensive applications, the Hero's Journey has also been scrutinised, critiqued, and adjusted to produce tools and techniques specific to digital games. This re-shaped and re-defined Hero's Journey is an incredibly useful tool. However, the popular Hero's Journey designers have been scrutinising and adapting is a simplified fraction of the Hero's Journey in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1968).

## **The Dynamic Hero's Journey**

The popular Hero's Journey is what I call the *Linear Hero's Journey*. Most references to the Hero's Journey refer to it as a specific sequence of events arranged in a specific order. Seventeen stages are

attributed to Joseph Campbell. Christopher Vogler compared Campbell's Hero's Journey to successful movies and simplified the list to twelve, keeping some of the names and merging others under new names, first in a 1985 memo called "A Practical Guide to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*" (Vogler, n.d.) and later in his 1998 book *The Writer's Journey* (Vogler, 2007). Whether authors consider the sequence a formula to replicate or a loose guide to consult, they all agree these stages are the Hero's Journey Campbell identified in myths and folk tales.

However, this sequence is a misconception. The seventeen stages and the names attributed to Campbell come from the titles of the seventeen chapters Campbell presents in the first half of his book. These chapters are arranged to roughly follow a hero's progress, but the chronology is disrupted by descriptions of alternate events, explanations of common imagery, and asides to elaborate on important concepts. Even the diagram Campbell provides at the beginning of "The Keys" chapter in the middle of the book (see figure 1) uses different names to some chapter titles, leaves out some chapter titles (because those chapters do not describe discrete events), and even demonstrates the overlapping nature of the supposedly sequential stages. Consequently, any adjustment to this sequence, whether it's Vogler's influential twelve or Marczewski's (2017) further condensed five, sustains the misconception.

The Linear Hero's Journey is widely praised and designers have utilised it in various ways, but I argue it does not represent the Hero's Journey Campbell (1968) describes in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Instead of prescribing a sequence of events to happen in a story, the Hero's Journey in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* defines the rules of the story's world. It is a constellation of relationships between the hero of the story, a goal they are supposed to attain, and every factor affecting the hero's position relative to that goal. I call this the *Dynamic Hero's Journey*.

The goal, which I call the *Ideal State*, is an objectively superior state of affairs. The *Hero* of the Dynamic Hero's Journey should attain the Ideal State rather than its opposite, the *Flawed State*.



Although the Ideal State is superior, it is both *Attractive* and *Repulsive*. The Ideal State's Attractive qualities make it more desirable and easier to attain than the Flawed State. The Ideal State's Repulsive qualities make it undesirable or more difficult to attain than the Flawed State. The *Adventure* of the Dynamic Hero's Journey is the process of the Hero *Transforming* themselves or the world around them so they are affected more by Attractors and less by Repulsors. The Hero's degree of Transformation, the extent to which they are affected by Attractors and Repulsors, determines whether they can attain the Ideal State. The Dynamic Hero's Journey is more complex, nuanced, and generalisable than the Linear Hero's Journey.

## **The Ideal State**

The Dynamic Hero's Journey defines the logic of the story world according to the goal assigned as the Ideal State, but it does not prescribe what that goal should be. The Linear Hero's Journey's descriptions of each stage imply the hero is attaining an object they can win through force and use to improve their entire life and even their community. In the Dynamic Hero's Journey, the Ideal State can be on any scale and within any domain. The Ideal State could be physical, emotional, social, intellectual, etc. and it can encompass anything from the entirety of the Hero's existence to only a small portion of their life.

The Ideal State's specific definition has a profound effect on every other component of the Dynamic Hero's Journey. A story with an Ideal State of humbly accepting what you receive will be very different from a story with an Ideal State of relentlessly fighting for what you want. The Ideal State determines the objectively inferior Flawed State, the phenomena acting as Attractors and Repulsors, and the amount of Attraction and Repulsion present. An Ideal State of a child participating in a short school marathon, an adult completing their first marathon, and an adult finishing their very first Boston marathon within three hours all involve very different proportions of Attraction and Repulsion.

The Ideal State's exact definition also determines whether something acts as an Attractor, a Repulsor, or has no effect on the Hero's relationship with the Ideal State at all. A giant sword and debating skills both seem generally useful but their role as Attractors for a Hero will be different for an Ideal State of killing an ogre and an Ideal State of being a successful lawyer.

## **The Hero**

The Ideal State defines the rules of the story world the Hero inhabits. It dictates what is right and wrong and the phenomena pulling the Hero towards one or the other. However, the Dynamic Hero's Journey is flexible here as well because the Ideal State does not control the Hero's actions, reactions, opinions, or feelings.

The Ideal State determines the Attractors and Repulsors present. More Attractors means more aid and more possibilities for success. More Repulsors means more obstacles and more possibilities for failure. However, the Hero's degree of Transformation determines whether they are affected by those Attractors and Repulsors and the Hero's Transformation is their own prerogative. A Dynamic Hero's Journey with a particular Ideal State can produce different stories depending on how the Hero responds – whether they accumulate Attractors or ignore them, whether they overcome Repulsors or continue to be burdened by them. Campbell's (1968) examples include Heroes who attempt to attain the Ideal State, who reject the Ideal State, who trust in the Attractors they encounter, who fail to utilise the Attractors available to them, who adapt to Repulsors as they appear, and who succumb to Repulsors and are pushed away from the Ideal State. The Ideal State defines what can happen but the Hero determines what will happen.

## Beginning and ending

The Dynamic Hero's Journey also does not specify when a story should begin and when it should end. The Hero's relationship with the Ideal State can change in many ways before the end of the story, if it changes at all.

The Linear Hero's Journey always begins with the hero in an ordinary world and ends with the hero returning with their prize. The Linear Hero's Journey in *Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons* (Starbreeze Studios, 2013) begins when the game starts in Naiee and Naia's home village, before their father falls ill, and it ends with the game's final scenes of Naiee returning with the healing water (Costiuc, 2016a). The Linear Hero's Journey in a Massively Multiplayer Online game begins when the player needs, but has not started to play, the game and it ends when the game becomes a comfortable but unchallenging space (Bartle, 2005).

Campbell's (1968) examples are far less uniform. He gives examples of stories where the Hero begins in the Flawed State and ends in the Ideal State, where the Hero never leaves the Flawed State, where the Hero is already in the Ideal State, where the Hero has the Ideal State but then loses it, a story with multiple concurrent Hero's Journeys for different Heroes, and where the Hero continues to attain Ideal States of increasing scale and scope in a long string of Hero's Journeys.

I call the Linear Hero's Journey a simplified fraction of the Dynamic Hero's Journey because it describes a particular sequence of events within a story world defined by one type of goal. The Linear Hero's Journey is a Hero's Journey according to the Dynamic Hero's Journey, but the Dynamic Hero's Journey allows for a much wider range and variety of stories.

## Differences and gaps

The Linear Hero's Journey tells a satisfying story but only one kind of story. Every Linear Hero's Journey is about a hero facing the same problems, making the same choices, taking the same

actions, and reaching the same outcome. To allow for variations, designers treat it metaphorically (e.g. Lebowitz & Klug, 2011), as a loose guide (e.g. Dunniway, 2000), or as a prototypical story from which they can select useful scenes (e.g. Bates, 2005). As a learning process, the player's inability to follow its rigid path can make satisfaction impossible (Bartle, 2005) so alternative stages must be added to accommodate divergences and redirect players (e.g. Delmas, Champagnat, & Augeraud, 2007). When used for analysis, it is a checklist researchers compare against a game artefact (e.g. Ip, 2011a,b) or a player's actions (e.g. Costiuc, 2016a,b) to see how closely the game's or player's stories match the Linear Hero's Journey prototype.

The Linear Hero's Journey is most useful when designing and analysing quests involving travel, conflicts, enemies, and happy endings. On the other hand, the Dynamic Hero's Journey describes the rules underlying a person's relationship with a goal. I argue these rules provide rich avenues of investigation currently absent from discussions of the Linear Hero's Journey. Most importantly, the Dynamic Hero's Journey emphasises the Hero and their experiences. The Linear Hero's Journey is a series of events that happen. Each stage specifies the components involved, what the hero does and feels, and the consequences following each event. The Dynamic Hero's Journey describes the Hero's experience of the world. It describes their relationship with an Ideal State, the way they are affected by the world around them, their feelings and opinions about the world, and how they change.

Digital games are process-based rather than static objects and arguably only exist when they are being played (Mäyrä, 2009). To understand digital games, we must understand players. The Linear Hero's Journey has been applied to play experiences and authors have investigated how digital games facilitate those experiences. It has been used to explain why players enjoy digital games and how designers can provide satisfying experiences (e.g. Bartle, 2005; Walk, 2018). It has been used to describe play experiences and how a game's mechanics, dynamics, and affordances

created those experiences (e.g. Buchanan-Oliver & Seo, 2012; Costiuc, 2016a,b). I argue the Dynamic Hero's Journey's specific emphasis on experience will benefit these investigations into player experience.

## **Aim and scope**

My aim in this thesis is to examine and improve the Dynamic Hero's Journey as a tool for analysing the way players experience digital games. To do this, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to collect participants' accounts of playing *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) and identify the meaningful experiences they found in these games. The common themes identified in these accounts were compared against the Dynamic Hero's Journey described in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1968) to determine what parts of the model these participants experienced. These Dynamic Hero's Journey experiences were then examined with theories of motivation, affordances, and constructed narratives to adjust the Dynamic Hero's Journey to better reflect play experiences.

### **Scrutinising *The Hero With A Thousand Faces***

Campbell continued to develop his theory of the Hero's Journey across his career but I have restricted this study to the Hero's Journey he first described in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. This is a reasonable place to begin expanding the Hero's Journey in digital games. Many authors who discuss the Linear Hero's Journey refer to *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (e.g. Ip, 2011a) and recommend it to curious readers (e.g. Rollings & Adams, 2003). Campbell's later iterations can provide further avenues for future research but this study begins with the progenitor and common denominator.

It is a common and necessary practice for new disciplines to adopt existing theories as long as they are thoroughly scrutinised (Dena, 2017). Theories from other fields provide a useful basis but they cannot be directly transplanted from one discipline to another. Campbell's *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* is a common denominator among many people and the Dynamic Hero's Journey is more complex and flexible than the Linear Hero's Journey. However, Campbell worked with myth, rituals, fairy tales, and folk tales so the Hero's Journey he describes in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* is not necessarily appropriate for digital games.

Additionally, the Dynamic Hero's Journey is not more useful than the Linear Hero's Journey simply because it is more authentic or original. Campbell and *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* have been criticised by folklorists and anthropologists since the book was first published. His work has been accused of misrepresenting, oversimplifying, and divorcing myths from their cultural context (Ellwood, 1999; Felser, 1996; Friedman, 1998, 1999; Nicholson, 2011; Northrup, 2006; Segal, 1999a,b).

The Dynamic Hero's Journey is potentially more useful for analysing play than the Linear Hero's Journey, but the Linear Hero's Journey has been extensively scrutinised and adjusted for digital games. For the Dynamic Hero's Journey to benefit our understanding of player experiences, it must also be scrutinised and adjusted.

### **Hero's Journey in *Ocarina of Time* and *Breath of the Wild***

For practical reasons, I limited this study to two digital games: *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017). This allowed me time to become reasonably familiar with the games before interviewing participants. These two particular games were chosen for several reasons: they are critically successful and highly regarded, relatively under-studied, and they allow us to compare two similarly popular and revolutionary entries into the same franchise.

Across 250 digital games collected from 28 lists of “best games” appearing on mainstream and games-related websites, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) was among the ten games appearing on at least six lists. Out of these ten games, Google Scholar results indicate *Ocarina of Time* was among the least studied, especially considering the length of time since its release. Additionally, across 15 lists ranking and reviewing games in the Zelda franchise, *Ocarina of Time* was consistently described as one of the best and most influential games in the franchise. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) was released during this project and did not appear on any of the 28 “best games” lists nor the 15 lists ranking Zelda games, but 14 reviews of the game indicate its critical reception and impressions of its significance are comparable to *Ocarina of Time*.

The study was restricted to two games so I, as the interviewer and analyst, could become sufficiently familiar with the games to conduct the study. A researcher must experience the topic of investigation in order to understand it (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Aarseth (2003) says a researcher should ideally strive to become an expert at the game they are researching, where they have completed the entire game and have a deep understanding of the game. Restricting my study to two games made this a more feasible goal but I relied on extensive paratextual materials to provide information and second-hand experiences I could not find myself.

## **Play and phenomenology**

The importance of personal experiences in this study leads me to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is a qualitative method for collecting rich and nuanced personal accounts from a small group of participants who share a common experience. It is designed to investigate how people experience, understand, and make sense of the world. It is most appropriate for investigating experiences with complex processes that are ambiguous, novel, or new and which are particularly important to the participants or are recently experienced. It is an

exploratory process, rather than an explanatory one, providing “renewed insight” into a topic (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.117). For these reasons, I argue IPA is ideal for the current study.

There is no single definitive way to conduct IPA. It is a perspective based on the three theoretical touchstones: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. It has also continued to develop over time through practice. IPA is phenomenological because it is “a detailed examination of personal lived experiences, the meaning of experiences to participants, and how participants make sense of those experiences” (Smith, 2011, p.9). IPA draws specifically from hermeneutic phenomenology so it posits our understanding of the world is grounded in our position in the world and our experiences cannot be removed from that position or examined objectively. IPA is idiographic because it collects contextualised and nuanced accounts. Such a rich level of detail necessitates small sample sizes, sometimes even a single participant. The aim is to contribute to knowledge through specifics rather than through generalisations.

To design this project, I drew from the extensive advice and examples from IPA researchers and past IPA studies. I recruited six participants from among students enrolled at Swinburne University of Technology and through personal contacts. Five of the six participants had extensive experience with *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017), one had extensive experience with *Ocarina of Time*, two had minor experience with *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998), and one was familiar with both *Breath of the Wild* and *Ocarina of Time*. I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each participant at their convenience. I asked them about their most significant, meaningful, or memorable play experiences with the chosen games. Each interview was aided by an interview schedule, which is a list of important topics and plans for approaching those topics, but interviews were carried out in a conversational manner so meaning could emerge “intersubjectively (between the interviewer and interviewee)” (Langdridge, 2007, p.110). The participant is “the experiential expert on the subject” (Smith &



Osborn, 2015, p.31) so the researcher's role is to engage the participant, follow topics that are important to them, and request elaboration to collect as much detail as possible.

Semi-structured interviews produce very rich data but they are also lengthy to conduct, transcribe, and analyse. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours and were audio recorded so I could transcribe both side of the conversations verbatim. Each transcript was analysed individually, to identify patterns of meaning and arrange them into themes. Once all accounts were individually analysed, all six accounts were compared to produce a final list of themes common across the participants. The final list of themes was then compared against the Dynamic Hero's Journey to determine what parts of the model participants experienced, how those experiences arose, and what those experiences meant to them.

### **Theoretical areas of focus**

The Dynamic Hero's Journey has greater potential than the Linear Hero's Journey to be incorporated with existing theories of play. In this project, I examined players' Dynamic Hero's Journey experiences with theories of motivation, affordance, and narrative construction.

Motivational models are relevant because, in the player's experience of a Dynamic Hero's Journey, the Ideal State is equivalent to their motivation. In this project, I investigate the Dynamic Hero's Journey with Bartle's (1996, 2005) player types, Yee's (2002, 2006; Yee, Ducheneaut, & Nelson, 2012) player motivation models, and Self-Determination Theory. Bartle's player types and Yee's player motivation models both propose groups of common reasons for playing games and associate each group with different behaviours players find enjoyable. Self-Determination Theory proposes all human beings are motivated by the universal need for *competence*, *autonomy*, and *relatedness*. Activities satisfying these needs are intrinsically motivating. When these needs are unsatisfied, the activities are less enjoyable and only extrinsically motivating.

These motivation models have been used to analyse what makes games enjoyable, such as Yee's (2002) study of the different reasons why people play *EverQuest* (Verant Interactive & 989 Studios, 1999) and R.M. Ryan, Rigby, and Przybylski's (2006) study of the connection between needs satisfaction and greater enjoyment, self-esteem, positive mood, and a desire to continue playing. I argue these motivation models can also be combined with the Dynamic Hero's Journey to understand players' Ideal States, how players work to achieve them, the factors affecting their progress, and their experience of different Ideal States.

Investigating the Hero's Journey in player experiences requires understanding how those experiences form. Our sense of existence depends on our relationship with our environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1963). In user experience design, the way people can interact with objects in their environment is described as affordances (Kaptelinin, 2014). Affordance is a relational property, involving the object's design as well as the user's body, mind, and senses. In the same way, a digital game's design determines the player's environment and their toolset for navigating that environment but we play games according to our perception of those designs (Boluk & LeMieux, 2017). A player's skill, knowledge, assumptions, expectations, and misunderstandings are just as important to their experience as the digital game's design. Play experiences with the same digital game will vary across players and even across play sessions. When Dynamic Hero's Journey experiences are identified in player accounts, theories of affordance can be used to investigate how those experiences arose from their perception and interpretation of the games' design.

Some digital games tell specific stories, such as the *God of War* trilogy's (Santa Monica Studio, 2005-2010) story of redemption (Cassar, 2013). Some games facilitate certain types of narrative experience, such as how *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000-2020) provides a domestic environment to facilitate domestic dramas (Jenkins, 2007). Other games do not tell any story at all, especially in the puzzle and sports genres (Ip, 2011b). However, regardless of the designers' intentions, players will

always experience play as a narrative. According to narrative psychology, we create life stories from our everyday experiences (McAdams, 2009). This is important for organising the past, finding meaning in our present, planning for the future, and shaping our sense of identity. Furthermore, digital games researchers have studied the narratives players construct from their play experiences ranging from fan movies made to tell personally important stories (Lowood, 2006a) to the player's own descriptions of matches they've played (Buchanan-Oliver & Seo, 2012). Some argue digital games should not be studied as narratives simply because play can be narrativised afterwards (e.g. Juul, 2001). Regardless of whether a digital game artefact can be studied as a narrative, I argue the experience of playing a digital game can. In this study, I am investigating the Dynamic Hero's Journey players experienced, not the Dynamic Hero's Journey designers may or may not have intended to facilitate.

## **Thesis overview**

My examination of the Dynamic Hero's Journey as an analytic tool for digital game play begins with a review of the theories most relevant to the investigation. Chapter 1 is a literature review comprising three sections: a discussion of adopting and scrutinising theory, an overview of the Linear Hero's Journey in digital games, and an overview of the three theories of player experiences that I used to adjust the Dynamic Hero's Journey.

Chapter 1 begins with an overview of the digital games discipline's history with adopting narrative theories. Like many theories used in digital games studies, the Linear Hero's Journey and the Dynamic Hero's Journey were not originally designed for digital games. Despite the importance of narrative in digital games, narrative is often considered within the purview and expertise of other media, such as film and literature (Dena, 2017). In this section, I discuss the strengths of digital

games' multidisciplinary nature but also the need for critical examination rather than blind acceptance.

Following from this discussion of adoption and scrutiny, I discuss the Hero's Journey. I begin with a description of the Linear Hero's Journey and how it has been adopted, examined, and modified as a tool for digital games and to analyse play. This establishes the ways in which the Linear Hero's Journey is useful and also the ways in which it is limited. I then discuss the limitations of the Linear Hero's Journey and introduce the Dynamic Hero's Journey as a way to address these criticisms. I argue the Dynamic Hero's Journey's flexibility, nonlinearity, and emphasis on the Hero's experiences allows us to investigate the Hero's Journey phenomenologically.

I end Chapter 1 by discussing the three areas of player studies I incorporate into my investigation of the Dynamic Hero's Journey. I introduce Bartle's (1996, 2005) player types, Yee's (2002, 2006; Yee, Ducheneaut, & Nelson, 2012) player motivation models, and Self-Determination Theory. I discuss how affordances affect experience, how perception and interpretation affect affordances, and how perceptions and interpretations can be facilitated and manipulated by design. I discuss how we construct narratives from our experiences, how these narratives reveal what is meaningful and important to us, and how our constructed narratives affect our understanding of the world and ourselves.

Chapter 2 presents the Dynamic Hero's Journey I constructed from *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1968). I begin by describing the underlying rules defining the Hero's relationship with their goal, using more generalised terminology than Campbell used in his book. Then I explain the purpose it serves as a storytelling pattern and its connections with Jungian psychology and psychological growth. After explaining these rules, I then describe the different ways the Hero's relationship with the Ideal State may change, with specific reference to Campbell's original examples and their connections with Jungian Individuation.

Chapter 3 discusses my research design. This chapter is divided into three sections: firstly, an explanation of how the games were selected; secondly, a description of my textual analysis of the chosen games; and thirdly, a discussion of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and how it guided my data collection and analysis.

I explain the purposive sampling process I used to select *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) for this project and how I studied them in preparation for the interviews and analysis. Personal experience was prioritised during my textual analysis but not always practical or even possible. For clarity and transparency, I explain the extent to which I personally played these games and the way I used paratextual materials to compensate for my limitations.

There are no strict guidelines for conducting IPA, both because it is a relatively new approach (Smith, 2011) and because it must have the flexibility to adapt to different research topics and practical constraints (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Rigour is maintained by adhering to the theoretical touchstones of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography and by recording decisions and procedures to maintain transparency. In this section, I explain these three theoretical touchstones, the advice and recommendations made by IPA researchers and used in past IPA studies, and provide a detailed account of my IPA process, from ethics approval to the final list of themes.

IPA is a balance of description and interpretation (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). The researcher must accurately represent the participant's claims and concerns because the participant is the expert on their experience. The aim here is to understand the participant's world, including what matters to them and what it means to them. The researcher must also critically analyse the participants' account, because the researcher is the expert on the relevant theory. The aim here is to position the participant's account within the wider theoretical context and find "the *meaning* of such claims and concerns" (ibid, p.117, emphasis in original). This interpretative stage is necessary for

addressing the research question and providing insight to the topic under investigation. I present these descriptive and interpretative stages of my results across chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 is a descriptive account of the common themes among my six participants. This is presented as a narrative account of their claims and concerns, or what matters to them and what those things mean. I identified two superordinate themes, each with several subordinate themes: “power and freedom” and “attachments and priorities”. The “power and freedom” superordinate theme describes the participants’ experiences of gaining power, having power, and lacking power. The “attachments and priorities” superordinate theme describes the way each participant’s personal interests shaped the way they evaluated and engaged with the rest of the game. In this chapter, I describe the themes one at a time, each with direct quotes from participants to further illustrate their experience and support the identified themes.

Chapter 5 explores the ways participants experienced the Dynamic Hero’s Journey by comparing their common themes against the Dynamic Hero’s Journey. Two important patterns were identified: *Facilitated Hero’s Journeys* and *Negated Hero’s Journeys*. A Facilitated Hero’s Journey follows the logic of the Dynamic Hero’s Journey defined by an Ideal State of the participant’s choosing. When a participant identified a particular Ideal State, they expected the game to follow the rules of the Dynamic Hero’s Journey based around that Ideal State’s definition. When their experiences aligned with those expectations, they experienced a Facilitated Hero’s Journey. Facilitated Hero’s Journeys were satisfying and enjoyable, even when the participant was in a Flawed State or was affected by Repulsors. When the game contradicted their expectations and defied the logic of the Dynamic Hero’s Journey for their chosen Ideal State, they experienced a Negated Hero’s Journey. A Negated Hero’s Journey is a Dynamic Hero’s Journey defined by the participant’s chosen Ideal State but unsupported by their play experiences. In this chapter I give specific examples of the participants’ Facilitated and Negated Hero’s Journeys and what those experiences meant to them.

This chapter also examines these Dynamic Hero's Journey patterns through theories of motivation, affordance, and constructed narratives as well as existing critiques of the Linear Hero's Journey in digital games. From this discussion, I make several arguments about the Dynamic Hero's Journey in play. Firstly, Dynamic Hero's Journeys begin when the player identifies their own Ideal State, on any scale and topic. Secondly, a Dynamic Hero's Journey forms for each Ideal State, so a player can experience multiple Journeys simultaneously. Thirdly, Dynamic Hero's Journeys reflect the player's understanding of the game. Fourthly, Facilitated Hero's Journeys are consistent and consistency satisfies players' sense of *autonomy* and *competence*. Fifthly, design can encourage players to identify Ideal States. Finally, Ideal States are comparable to Bartle's player types and Yee's player motivation models.

Chapter 6 is my Conclusions chapter, where I present the *Ludic Hero's Journey*, an adjusted version of the Dynamic Hero's Journey to better describe player experiences with digital games. The Ludic Hero's Journey repositions the Ideal State as a desire chosen by the player, rather than an assigned fact, and incorporates the connections with existing theory discussed in Chapter 5. I end the chapter with a discussion of remaining unanswered questions and propose future avenues of investigation to further examine the Dynamic Hero's Journey and modify the Ludic Hero's Journey.

# Chapter 1: Literature Review

## 1.1 Narrative is prominent and profitable

Human beings are arguably predisposed towards narrative and storytelling. McAdams (2009, p.408) says even children as young as 5-years-old have expectations about what stories should be and are “disappointed or confused” when a story does not meet those expectations. Storytelling is “infamous” for its ability to “manipulate our feelings”, grabbing our attention and making us care (Keen, 2006, p.209). Simons (2007) points out the now-famous Prisoner’s Dilemma only caught wide-spread attention, even within the scientific community, after “it was ‘dressed up’ as a story by Albert W Tucker”. Holland, Jenkins, and Squire (2003, p.38) argue our engagement with narrative is the reason why we can remember the film *Casablanca* more “vividly” and “fondly” than AP Chemistry. wa Kituku (2001) says a personal story “can illustrate a point more beautifully than a bullet point or chart” and Dugan (2008) argues even knowingly apocryphal stories make messages more memorable. Jhingran (2014) says the case study method of teaching, where a topic is explained through a story with a specific setting, characters, and motivations, is used at Harvard Business School to turn otherwise dry topics into emotional experiences. McCloskey (1990) says even in mathematics, a field seemingly as far away from narrative entertainment as conceivably possible, seminars are expected to begin with the presenter explaining how they came to their subject. “Such a fragment of autobiography gives meaning to it all” and “you will hear mathematicians complain if a seminar has not been ‘motivated’ ” (ibid, p.15). The story gives the audience (of mathematicians) a reason to care about the topic.

Narrative content also improves play experiences. M.-L. Ryan (2001) describes narrative elements as lures encouraging players to engage and act in certain ways. When comparing two citizen science games by Citizen Sort, Prestopnik and Tang (2015) found players were more



motivated, engaged, and interested in the game with a story (*Forgotten Island*) than the game without a story (*Happy Match*). Schneider, Lang, Shin, and Bradley (2004, p.367) found players felt greater investment in their actions and a stronger incentive to achieve the game's goals when playing games with narrative content (i.e. *Outlaws* [Lucas Arts, 1997] and *Half-Life* [Valve, 1998]) compared to games with "little to no story" (i.e. *Doom II* [id Software, 1994] and *Quake II* [id Software, 1997]).

The digital games industry has shifted towards greater emphasis on narrative. Early games only had enough story to hold the player's attention but narrative focus increased as technology improved (Black, 2012; Cassar, 2013; Ip, 2011a). Narrative became increasingly important in digital games (Cassar, 2013; Ip, 2011a), particularly in certain genres such as adventure, role-playing, and first-person shooters (Carlquist, 2002). Cassidy (2011) points out digital games commercials reflect this evolution. Early commercials prioritised play activities and the game system but over time the commercials began to resemble Hollywood trailers, utilising cinematic visuals and focusing on characters and plot.

Many players now expect digital games to provide a narrative experience. Carlquist (2002) and Consalvo (2003) argue players see digital games as stories, describe their play experiences in story terms, and praise games with strong stories. Consequently, narrative content gives digital games as much of a competitive advantage as challenge and visual design (D. Brown, 2007). Following from this, digital games are often designed as a storytelling medium and a significant percentage of resources are devoted to narrative content (Carlquist, 2002; Jenkins, 2004; M.-L. Ryan, 2001). According to Ip (2011a, p.107), "the narrative represents the most complex element in interactive storytelling". This is not the case for all digital games but, as scholars such as Jenkins (2004) have argued, it is the case for many.

## 1.2 Adapting models

### 1.2.1 Boundary issues

Both digital games studies and digital games design regularly borrow from other fields and media. This is a normal and common process for developing disciplines (Dena, 2017). The academic discipline of digital games emerged from other pre-existing academic fields (Mäyrä, 2009). Before there were theories and concepts to specifically address the digital games medium, researchers used whatever theories and concepts were already available (Aarseth, 1997, 2003; Mallon & Webb, 2005). Digital games scholars are often trained in those other disciplines and approach digital games from those perspectives (Mäyrä, 2009). The narrative theories borrowed from literary and film studies are foundational and central in discussions of narrative in digital games (Mallon & Webb, 2005; Simons, 2007).

Academics and designers alike draw from the film industry in particular (Dena, 2017). Cassidy (2011) suggests this is due to the digital games medium's audio-visual similarities with film. Rollings and Adams (2003) suspect it is because successful films, especially Hollywood films, make far more money than successful books. Crick (2011) argues the common use of filmic conventions, such as editing techniques and lens flares, cause digital games to resemble cinema more than the physical activities they depict. Krzywinska (2009) and Rouse (2009) say many horror games resemble horror movies and Jenkins (2005, p.183) argues digital games and action movies are now “hopelessly intertwined”.

The interdisciplinary nature of digital games is both a support and a threat. Some scholars, such as Aarseth (2003, p.1), argue studying digital games through other fields reduces games to a “sub-theme” of those disciplines rather than as its own topic of study. To establish digital games as an independent discipline, some scholars focused exclusively on the medium’s uniqueness. Qualities

shared with other media were relegated to other fields, to be imported into digital games but not incorporated into digital games.

Interactivity was emphasised above all else. Golding (2013b) says, in these early years of digital game scholarship, theorists largely agreed digital games were unique among media because they were configurable. Even across conflicting approaches, digital games were defined by the player's ability to control and manipulate the text. This supposedly differentiates it from other media such as film, where the audience's interaction with the text is purely interpretative. Interactivity is "the sine qua non for a genuine gaming experience" (Elson, Breuer, Ivory, & Quandt, 2014, p.527). The "fundamental fact" of games is that they "centre on PLAY" (Pearce, 2004, emphasis in original). "Games are uniquely agency-rich experiences" and this agency must allow the player to ruin a story's drama (Mateas & Stern, 2005, p.2). A game is "a series of choices" and the game's conclusion must directly result from those choices (Carlquist, 2002, p.42). Games are games because of their "rules, goals, player activity" and "there is no such thing as a continuously interactive story" (Juul, 2001).

If interactivity and player control are central and unique to digital games then narrative, something shared across many forms of entertainment, must be less distinctive and therefore less important. Some argue narrative can only be a supportive aspect of digital games, at best secondary to interactivity. Juul (2001) says narrative elements, such as actors and setting, are important in digital games but less so than rules. Carlquist (2002) argues every aspect of a digital game should be chosen and designed to support play. Pearce (2004) argues designers are less interested in telling good stories than they are in creating compelling play experiences. Mateas and Stern (2005, p.4) argue "narrative cannot operate at the heart of a game" and a well-structured narrative planned out by an author can only ever be a superficial layer applied over the gameplay. Rouse (2009, p.16) argues games can be complex but "game storytelling works best when the plot is fairly simple" so

the player easily understands their motivation and they are compelled to progress. Aarseth (1997) argues players will prolong an enjoyable game by avoiding a narratively satisfying conclusion. Carlquist (2002) even argues the quality of a game's story does not influence the game's success, citing *Diablo II* (Blizzard North, 2000) and *Dungeon Siege* (Gas Powered Games, 2002) as best-selling games with banal stories. Players are more absorbed by "exciting game play" than "a thrilling story" (ibid, p.34).

Many point out this emphasis on interactivity and exclusion of narrative arose from an attempt to establish the digital games discipline's legitimacy, rather than theoretically sound reasons. Defining digital games exclusively by their interactivity ensures the digital games discipline can monopolise the medium while other fields and their approaches remain secondary (Cassidy, 2011; Golding, 2013b; Simons, 2007). Narrative in particular was rejected for being too similar to other fields (Frasca, 2003; Simons, 2007; Wesp, 2014). It was cut away "in the name of identify formation" (Dena, 2017, p.32) to prevent digital games from being engulfed by other narrative fields (Jenkins, 2004; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004; Wesp, 2014). The "gameness" of the digital games medium was in part defined by its dissimilarity to narrative (Simons, 2007). Today, the debate about narrative's incompatibility to gameplay is generally considered "a red herring" (Wesp, 2014).

### **1.2.2 Consequences of isolation**

Dena (2017) says the tendency to see narrative as something belonging to other fields, and therefore something separate from the game design process, is a pervasive and self-perpetuating mentality with wide reaching consequences. When narrative is treated as separate, it is developed separately by designers and experienced separately by players. D. Brown (2007) also argues, when narrative and gameplay are treated separately rather than in combination, the narrative can be removed entirely without impacting the player's experience. At its most extreme, story elements are superficial embellishments added to a game after every other aspect is complete, like a "narrative

wrapper” (Dena, 2017, p.29). According to M.-L. Ryan (2009, p.52), “wrap[ping] this gameplay into a story” is the most common way narrative is added to digital games.

Since narrative is considered the property of other storytelling fields, there’s little incentive or opportunity for digital games designers to develop their own storytelling skills. Jenkins (2007, p.58) says many digital game designers are “inexperienced storytellers”. Dunniway (2000) points out digital game narratives are often written by designers who work in areas of that require little, if any, storytelling knowledge. When game designers are less familiar with creating stories, they rely on techniques from other fields (Jenkins, 2007), such as how cutscenes draw from film and television (A. Brown & Marklund, 2015; Dickey, 2006; M.-L. Ryan, 2009). However, scholars also argue this overuse of borrowed narrative techniques and ideas prevents designers from developing storytelling techniques to capitalise on the unique qualities of the digital games medium (Elson, Breuer, Ivory, & Quandt, 2014; Mallon & Webb, 2005; Wesp, 2014).

There is a tendency to assume narrative is defined by film and literature (Simons, 2007) and their theories and models are universal “touchstone narrative structures” (Dena, 2017, p.34). This approach to narrative is limiting. These classic narrative conventions only account for a narrow range of narrative possibilities (Jenkins, 2004). Even in screenwriting, one specific medium, there is a wider variety of storytelling techniques and narrative structures than the ones typically adopted into digital games (Dena, 2017).

There is no universal concept of narrative (Simons, 2007). Terms like narrative, story, and plot differ, are debated, and change over time and across contexts (Bal, 2009; Herman & Vervaeck, 2005). No single field has authority over the definition and use of narrative and no one definition of narrative is appropriate across all storytelling media or situations. Narrative research is a combination of many fields, rather than its own distinct discipline (C. Squire, 2005). Each medium has its own concepts of narrative for its unique combination of qualities. Different systems for

analysing narrative focus on different information and these different priorities lead to different ideal structures and recommendations (McCabe & Peterson, 1990).

Narrative must be understood through its medium and context: the way the story is told and to whom is it told (C. Squire, 2005), from the way information is presented on a screen (Wood, 2008) to the way readers can manipulate the virtual world (Klevjer, 2012). Effective narrative techniques in one medium cannot be exactly replicated in another medium (Jenkins, 2004). For example, Jhingran (2014) describes the qualities of an effective narrative for persuasive and educational presentations, such as beginning with a controversial statement to grab the audience's attention and moving to different parts of the stage when voicing different characters, but these techniques are not necessarily effective or possible in other media or even across all presentations. Using different accents and costumes for different characters can bring them to life but it is less appropriate, and therefore less effective, when presenting in a more formal setting. Similarly, Lang, Potter, and Grabe (2003) identify seven techniques for effectively presenting news stories but these qualities do not define narratives in general. Some techniques, such as maintaining clear chronology to simplify the story for audiences, may be useful in other narrative media. Other techniques are specific to the medium and context, such as using negative images to grab audience attention and allowing video footage to speak for itself rather than speaking over it.

### **1.2.3 Import(ant) stories**

Narrative theories, tools, and techniques from other media are prolific in digital games. Aarseth (1997) says people tend to assume anything new can be explained with existing ideas and Dena (2017, p.51) says game designers are "following what is well-known rather than what is most effective". However, these ideas are not directly applicable to digital games. In Conway's (2012, p.38) words, when we "unthinkingly" transplant ideas from one medium to another, "we chop, we stretch, and we contort the idea to fit something it was not meant for". When we expect digital

games to be more like other media, their differences seem like shortcomings. Carlquist (2002) argues digital games do not seem like “good literature” simply because they are not the same as literature and Aarseth (1997, p.109) argues any attempt to directly replicate literature in digital games is “unrealistic (and irrelevant)”. As Wesp (2014) points out, we cannot study a game like a film any more than we can “study the meaning of soundtrack or shot composition in a novel’s development of its characters”.

Existing narrative theories are inappropriate measures for analysing digital games and ineffective tools for creating digital games. Just as costumes are effective in stage presentations (Jhingran, 2014) but not in radio productions, techniques intended for film and literature may be ineffective or even impossible to replicate in digital games. Consequently, digital games have a reputation for telling bad stories, mediocre at best and terrible at worst. Many digital games lack depth (D. Brown, 2007), lack emotional complexity (Ip, 2011a), rely on “cardboard” characters (Bates, 2005) and “stereotyped characters” (Elson, Breuer, Ivory, & Quandt, 2014, p.531), are hedonistic (Oliver, Bowman, Woolley, Rogers, Sherrick, & Chang, 2015), and are almost exclusively about physical conflicts rather than more complex social and emotional conflicts (Cassidy, 2011; Dunniway, 2000; Ip, 2011a; Mateas & Stern, 2005; Schneider, Lang, Shin, & Bradley, 2004; M.-L. Ryan, 2009; Simons, 2007). Bates (2005) laments this is “drudgery”, “not a story”. The abundance of these unimpressive narratives leads some critics and academics to understandably conclude digital games cannot tell stories at all (Mallon & Webb, 2005; Mateas & Stern, 2005).

Narrative is neither inherently unimportant nor a detriment in digital games. Critically and commercially successful games, such as *Baldur’s Gate* (BioWare, 1998) and *Half-Life* (Valve, 1998), demonstrate this (Carlquist, 2002; Dunniway, 2000; Schneider, Lang, Shin, & Bradley, 2004). Inappropriate tools (Jenkins, 2005), clumsy incorporation (Dena, 2017), and lack of analysis and development (Cassar, 2013) lead to inadequate narrative creations that cannot possibly compete

against the films, novels, and television shows they mimic. There is still a high demand for narrative content in digital games, but our understanding and practice of narrative in digital games has not advanced as swiftly as our technological development (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum, 2012). There are still gaps in knowledge and the digital games discipline has fewer tools than more established fields (Ip, 2011a).

#### **1.2.4 Scrutiny and adaptation**

Aarseth (2003, p.1) says analysing digital games “with tools that happened to be at hand” has created “certain blind spots” in the discipline. Scholars argue experimentation and critical examination are necessary to expand the medium’s “repertoire” of design techniques (Jenkins, 2005, p.178) and develop analytical tools (Mäyrä, 2009). Ip (2011a) identified this maturation in his narrative analysis of action games across the 80s, 90s, and 2000s. Earlier games relied on simpler techniques to communicate narrative, such as on-screen text. More recent games demonstrated a wider range of techniques to deliver narrative, combining gameplay, sounds, and text. As Walk (2018) says, we “have a whole language to learn and to invent” and we can only tell stories “in a truly artistic way once we have learned to master this language – undistracted by foreign structures that don’t apply”. For example, Ip (2011a) argues *Half-Life 2* (Valve, 2004), *Fable* (Big Blue Box Studios, 2004), *The Godfather* (EA Redwood Shores, 2006), and *Halo 3* (Bungie, 2007) are noteworthy for how they combine narrative with gameplay rather than interrupting gameplay to deliver narrative with techniques borrowed from other media. He argues the most interesting narrative moments arose when narrative was delivered in ways unique to the digital games medium.

Interactivity is certainly important and is absent in existing narrative theories, but emphasising interactivity to the detriment of narrative is unhelpful and misleading. Interactivity is not as unique or defining as some have suggested. Non-digital technologies afford configuration (Aarseth, 1997) and a player does not necessarily approach a digital game with the intention of



reconfiguring the text (Golding, 2013b). The act of consciously engaging with a film (Hockley, 2012) or *decoding* the meaning of any text (Hall, 1999) is a form of interactivity. Meaning is co-produced between a text's creator and its receiver. Personal tastes, preferences, and literacies result in differing subjective accounts of the same film (Singh, 2012). A viewer of the split-screen movie *Timecode* (Figgis, 2000) can influence the drama they experience through the ways they attend to the competing elements on screen (Wood, 2008) just as a player of *Façade* can influence the drama through what they say to the characters (Mateas & Stern, 2005). Reducing an entire discipline to one quality, no matter how important or unique, is restrictive. Cassidy (2011, p.303) argues the emphasis on rules and goals has "shortchange[d]" games' narrative potential and Jenkins (2004, p.120) argues dismissing narrative in favour of interactivity has created its own "blind spots" in the discipline.

The arguments in favour of examining narrative in digital games are not petitions against interactivity and play, but rather an appeal for a more holistic approach (Jenkins, 2004). Narrative is one of the many components comprising digital games and does not encompass the entirety of any medium, even film and literature (Wesp, 2014). The digital games discipline, both analytic and practical, would benefit from greater incorporation of elements, rather than isolation. D. Brown (2007, p.59) argues gameplay and narrative are "so tightly intertwined", even when one is dominant over the other, that a game cannot be adequately analysed by studying its gameplay and narrative separately. Elson, Breuer, Ivory, and Quandt (2014) said a digital game is a "concert" of mechanics, narrative, and context (ibid, p.537) and requires "novel theoretical and methodological approaches" to analyse (ibid, p.523). Dunniway (2000) and Dena (2017) both argue digital game design is improved when narrative is part of the process from the beginning of projects, rather than designed separately or last.

Aarseth (2003) argues every area of research can be used to study digital games and Aarseth and Grabarczyk (2017, p.1) argue digital games are so "rich and varied" they include almost every

discipline. This interdisciplinary nature is a strength, not a weakness (Dena, 2017; Mäyrä, 2009).

Narrative has been studied through various storytelling media since Aristotle (McAdams, 2009) and this considerable body of work provides a useful starting point for developing analytical tools specifically tailored for digital games.

### **1.2.5 Affording narrative**

The digital games discipline is enriched by investigating their similarities and differences with other media. When a medium shares similar elements with digital games, those elements may be analysed and designed with similar techniques (Wesp, 2014). For example, Elson, Breuer, Ivory, and Quandt (2014) used theories about the sad film paradox, where people paradoxically enjoy movies that elicit negative emotions, to investigate how digital games can create eudaimonic experiences, rather than purely hedonistic pleasure. Examining digital games with existing narrative ideas will also bring their dissimilarities to light. For example, Aarseth (1997, pp.130-131) argues “literary machines” are more interesting when they fail to produce work that meets traditional literary criticism, compared to when they successfully replicate good literature. When the media differ, those theories and tools can be critically examined and modified to suit digital games (Cassar, 2013; M.-L. Ryan, 2001).

The three-act structure is one example of experimenting, examining, and adapting existing narrative tools to for digital games. D. Brown (2007) argues the three-act structure is less appropriate for digital games because it focuses too much on a single story and not enough on building a world. Cassar’s (2013) investigation of the *God of War* series (Santa Monica Studios, 2005-2010) found the three-act structure on multiple levels: in moment-to-moment play, within a single game, and across multiple games in a series. Cassar concludes the three-act structure is present in digital games but, unlike film, it repeats, appears on multiple scales, and are nested within one another. Ip (2011a) found the second act comprised 98% of play time on average in the popular action games he investigated. This is significantly more than the recommended 50% of a film’s

runtime. Ip's results suggest either the second act is more appropriate for digital games (and a three-act structure for digital games requires a different ratio than for film) or designers do not yet know how to incorporate the first and third acts into digital games (and the first and third acts require more examination and experimentation).

Tools developed for other media are insufficient for digital games but through "experimentation and refinement" these borrowed tools are reshaped into digital games tools (Jenkins, 2007, p.58). Jenkins (2005, p.179) warns designers must resist "the temptation to import solutions over wholesale from cinema and other more established arts". Conway and Trevillian (2015, p.95) warn analysts must adopt concepts "in a critical, reflective manner" to avoid "dull[ing] the analyst's scalpel for the sake of convenience". Instead, we should approach every idea critically and with scrutiny. Koenitz's (2017) study of the "story arc" illustrates the consequences of too much trust and too little scrutiny. Despite generally being considered "a universal structure" (ibid, p.2), Koenitz found the story arc concept is historically inconsistent and unscholarly. Rather than a model developed through careful examination of narrative and storytelling, the story arc is a "ghost model" (ibid, p.3) formed from assumptions and loose connections across theories.

### **1.3 The Linear Hero's Journey**

Every adopted tool, no matter how popular and prolific, must be scrutinised and adjusted. The Hero's Journey is one particularly popular tool. Joseph Campbell first described the Hero's Journey in his book *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, originally published in 1949. Written for a popular audience, rather than a strictly academic one, this book launched Campbell and his Hero's Journey into public consciousness (Ellwood, 1999) and they became "the property of pop culture" after his 1985-1987 PBS interview series with Bill Moyers (Northrop, 2005, p.5). Today, the Hero's Journey is a popular model among writers (Schell, 2008), especially screenwriters (Carlquist, 2002; Soloway,

2011). Possibly the most famous case of Campbell's influence was on George Lucas in his creation of the *Star Wars* franchise (Compton, 2018a; Gordon, 1978; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Simons, 2007).

Although Campbell continued developing his theories of the Hero's Journey across his career (Bancks, 2003; Ellwood, 1999), *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* remains the common denominator among modern practitioners.

The Hero's Journey is also popular among digital games designers. It is one of the only narrative tools proposed for creating interesting stories in digital games (Ip, 2011a). It is variously praised as universal, or at least extremely popular (Bartle, 2005; Bates, 2005; Carlquist, 2002; Compton, 2018a; Dunniway, 2000; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Rollings & Adams, 2003); something so familiar it is intuitive to both the designers who use it and the audiences who see it (Bates, 2005; Dunniway, 2000); an especially satisfying movement through adversity to victory (Bates, 2005; Dunniway, 2000; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Rollings & Adams, 2003); and a generalisable description of any challenge a person encounters and the ensuing transformation (Costiuc, 2016a,b; Walk, 2018). Some argue the Hero's Journey is particularly appropriate for digital games (e.g. Adams & Rollings, 2010; Bates, 2005; Carlquist, 2002; Dunniway, 2000; Rollings & Adams, 2003; Schell, 2008), possibly even more so than for other media (e.g. Compton, 2018a; Plyler, 2014; Walk, 2018). In addition to being a design tool, the Hero's Journey has also been used as an analytic tool for studying digital games. Cassar (2013) and Ip (2011a,b) both used the Hero's Journey in their investigations of digital game narratives. Plyler (2014) even used the Hero's Journey's presence in two critically acclaimed digital games, *The Last Of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) and *Beyond: Two Souls* (Quantic Dream, 2013), to defend digital games as a respectable narrative medium.

The Hero's Journey is commonly known as a linear sequence of events that happen to the protagonist, or *hero*, specifically as a series of steps or stages. For this reason, I call it the *Linear Hero's Journey*. Authors who specifically refer to Joseph Campbell often describe a sequence of

seventeen stages (e.g. Bartle, 2005; Buchanan-Oliver & Seo, 2012; Compton, 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Costiuc, 2016a; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Plyler, 2014). Bartle (2005), Costiuc (2016a), and Compton (2018a, 2018b, 2019) all go into detail about each of these stages:

1. "Call to Adventure", where something disrupts the status quo of the hero's ordinary life and transports them into a fantastical world.
2. "Refusal of the Call", where the hero chooses the status quo.
3. "Supernatural Aid", where the hero encounters a mentor who guides them through the journey ahead by providing knowledge or items.
4. "Crossing the First Threshold", where the properly prepared hero leaves their status quo and enters the fantastical world of unknown dangers where the adventure will take place.
5. "Belly of the Whale", where the hero encounters their first dangers in the fantastical world.
6. "Road of Trials", where the hero encounters a series of dangerous and difficult tests. Aided by their mentor and other allies they find along the way, the hero overcomes the obstacles and enemies they encounter.
7. "Meeting with the Goddess", where the hero encounters a character with complementary qualities to their own who provides them with unconditional love, and thus the hero achieves totality.
8. "Woman as Temptress", where the hero is tempted away from their journey by something that seems more desirable.
9. "Atonement with the Father", where the hero faces an entity of ultimate power at the centre of the journey and must either defeat it, reconcile with it, or gain its approval.
10. "Apotheosis", where the hero succeeds and becomes greater than they were before.
11. "The Ultimate Boon", where the hero achieves their original goal.
12. "Refusal of the Return", where the hero chooses to remain in the fantastical world instead of returning to their ordinary world.

13. "Magic Flight", where the hero is chased out of the fantastical world by the boon's previous owners and must flee back to their ordinary world.
14. "Rescue from Without", where a powerful entity, such as their mentor, helps the hero escape the fantastical world and return to the ordinary world.
15. "Crossing the Return Threshold", where the hero crosses out of the fantastical world and back into their ordinary world.
16. "Master of Two Worlds", where the hero retains everything they learned in the fantastical world and can easily move back and forth between the ordinary and fantastical world.
17. "Freedom to Live", where the hero feels peace and does not regret the past.

Other authors instead refer to a simpler twelve-stage version (e.g. Carlquist, 2002; Costiuc, 2016b; Dickey, 2006; Ip, 2011a,b; Rollings & Adams, 2003; Schell, 2008) devised by Christopher Vogler when he adjusted the Linear Hero's Journey to reflect structures common in contemporary and classic movies (Banks, 2003; Vogler, 2007). Vogler's (2007) version combines and renames the seventeen stages commonly associated with Campbell, but largely follows the same trajectory.

1. "The Ordinary World", where the hero goes about their everyday lives before the call to adventure.
2. "The Call to Adventure", equivalent to Campbell's.
3. "Refusal of the Call", equivalent to Campbell's.
4. "Meeting with the Mentor", equivalent to "Supernatural Aid".
5. "Crossing the Threshold", equivalent to "Crossing the First Threshold".
6. "Tests, Allies, and Enemies", equivalent to "Road of Trials".
7. "Approaching the Inmost Cave", where the hero uses what they have learned from "Tests, Allies, and Enemies" and prepares for their final challenge.

8. "The Ordeal", which combines "Meeting with the Goddess", "Woman as Temptress", "Atonement with the Father", and "Apotheosis".
9. "Reward", equivalent to "Ultimate Boon".
10. "The Road Back", which combines "Refusal of the Return", "Magic Flight", "Rescue from Without", and "Crossing the Return Threshold".
11. "Resurrection", where any unanswered questions are addressed and resolved, sometimes with a final twist.
12. "Return with the Elixir", equivalent to "Freedom to Live".

## **1.4 Scrutiny and adaptation**

The seventeen stages and twelve stages represent the Linear Hero's Journey as it was adopted into the digital games discipline from Campbell's work and Vogler's revision. However, as with all ideas adopted from other fields, the Linear Hero's Journey has been extensively utilised, examined, critiqued, and adjusted. Before I can offer my own contributions to the Hero's Journey as an analytic tool, I must first establish how the digital games discipline has changed, and now understands, the Linear Hero's Journey.

### **1.4.1 As a linear plot**

The Linear Hero's Journey is most often treated as a description of the most important scenes in a story and their most satisfying arrangement. However, despite its near-universal praise, designers use the Linear Hero's Journey flexibly. Many recommend treating the Linear Hero's Journey as an exhaustive list of events from which designers can pick and choose depending on the story and play experiences they want to create (e.g. Adams & Rollings, 2010; Bates, 2005; Carlquist, 2002; Costiuc, 2016a; Dunniway, 2000; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Schell, 2008; Rollings & Adams, 2003). Very few stories include every single stage (Compton, 2018a) and trying to do so would be needlessly

restrictive (Walk, 2018). Some distil the exhaustive list down to only the most important parts. For example, Bates (2005) proposes only seven of the stages are essential and Marczewski (2017) recommends focusing on only five. Through practical application and reflection, designers and scholars have identified the stages they consider most appropriate and the stages they recommend minimising or omitting.

Especially useful stages often become the focus of the game, either inflated to last longer or returned to multiple times across a single game. The middle of the Linear Hero's Journey, where the hero has entered the fantastical world but has not yet achieved their goal, is often considered the most important part of the game (e.g. Carlquist, 2002; Compton, 2018b; Costiuc, 2016a,b; Ip, 2011b; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Rollings & Adams, 2003). Carlquist estimates most digital games devote around 80-90% of play time to this middle phase. Costiuc (2016a) argues a game's main content happens between the two "Thresholds", beginning when the hero crosses the "First Threshold" and effectively ends when they cross the "Return Threshold". Ip (2011b) found the hero facing tests and preparing for the final battle was the most frequently occurring stage across his sample of action adventure games and occurred multiple times within each game.

Other stages are considered important for storytelling purposes but difficult to make interesting for players. Early stages provide context but do not involve the exciting challenges of the adventure itself. Sivak (2009) argues these early stages are insufficient for digital games because they do not allow the player to become the hero before the adventure begins. Sivak proposes adding small challenges to the beginning of the game so the player can master their early role and feel as though they are in an "Ordinary World" before they leave it for the adventure. However, most authors recommend minimising these early stages, often delivering them swiftly through cutscenes before the game begins, to avoid delaying the player (e.g. Carlquist, 2002; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Plyler, 2014; Rollings & Adams, 2003). Similar to Sivak, Lebowitz and Klug (2011) argue



the “Refusal of the Call” is important for establishing the adventure’s difficulty. However, most argue the player cannot be expected to reject the adventure they have chosen to play, even temporarily (e.g. Bates, 2005; Carlquist, 2002; Dena, 2017; Ip, 2011b; Rollings & Adams, 2003). In light of these recommendations, it is unsurprising “Refusal of the Call” was omitted from seven of the ten games Ip (2011b) studied.

Similarly, the final stages are considered important for presenting the fruits of the player’s labour after they resolve the final conflict. However, since these stages happen after the hero has completed the adventure’s main challenges, authors argue they are not engaging for players. Authors recommend keeping them short or showing them through cutscenes (e.g. Carlquist, 2002; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Rollings & Adams, 2003). Sivak (2009) condenses the final third of the Linear Hero’s Journey into one stage, where the player leaves their role as hero and stops playing the game. Bates (2005) even argues these final victorious stages are unnecessary because the player already feels satisfied for having beaten the game. Ip (2011b) found the hero leaving the fantastical world and returning to the “Ordinary World” were among the only stages omitted from his sample of games, along with “Refusal of the Call”. Collectively, these recommendations and adjustments create a funhouse mirror version of the Linear Hero’s Journey. The stages and their order are retained but some sections are expanded out and others shrunk down.

Designers also take creative liberties when interpreting the stages. Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud (2007, p.190) argue the Linear Hero’s Journey is inadequate as a design tool because it demands “a rather fixed representation” of events and characters. They adjust the Linear Hero’s Journey by treating the descriptions symbolically. For example, they interpret “Supernatural Aid” as any source of help, the “Goddess” figure as any form of protection and comfort, and the “Father” figure as any kind of “personal completion” (ibid). “Supernatural Aid” and “Mentor” characters are often interpreted as anything helpful, regardless of its origins or intention (e.g. Costiuc, 2016a,b;

Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Rollings & Adams, 2003). Lebowitz and Klug (2011, p.48) prefer to call the Linear Hero's Journey a series of "emotional signposts" describing a story's emotional experience, rather than a series of events that literally happen. For example, they interpret "Refusal of the Call" as any character insisting the hero not accept, including characters who are not the hero. They argue this retains the feelings of doubt around the adventure without actually delaying the adventure.

### **1.4.2 As an educational tool**

Discussions of the Linear Hero's Journey as a plot guide examine and adjust the stages to create interesting stories about the player-character. These stories are intended to engage the player as they perform the hero role given to them in the game. On the other hand, educational applications of the Linear Hero's Journey treat the player themselves as the hero. As established earlier, the Linear Hero's Journey describes the process of a hero learning and training to overcome challenges and ultimately improve themselves. Digital games are also described as a learning process. Aarseth (2003, p.5) says winning a game "demands an analytic approach" of exploring, experimenting, and responding to feedback. Dickey (2006, p.245) says games design is as much about providing "scaffolding for problem solving" as it is about constructing engaging narratives and immersive environments. For these reasons, the Linear Hero's Journey has been adopted into digital games to keep players progressing along this path to completing the game.

Kim (2014d, emphasis in original) argues digital games gives us a place where we can satisfy "our deep desire to FEEL ourselves getting better at something", to "feel smart and competent, even when our world is falling apart". Kim (2014a,b) adapted the Linear Hero's Journey into a "Player's Journey" comprising three stages: onboarding, where the new players is taught what to do and expect; "habit-building", or "practice", where the player encounters activities and receives feedback; and "mastery", or "enthusiast", where the player has "mastered the system and wants to go

deeper” (Kim, 2014b). Kim (2014a,c) argues designers should design their games along these three stages to keep players on track and satisfied.

Bartle (2005) says players will naturally move through the events of the Linear Hero’s Journey when they play in a virtual world, specifically in a process of self-discovery. The designer’s job is to facilitate this progression and they can use the Linear Hero’s Journey to predict players’ feelings and motivations at each moment of play. Bartle even says the Linear Hero’s Journey is especially appropriate for virtual worlds because it, like virtual worlds, represents a psychological journey towards “a renewed sense of *self*” (ibid, p.11, emphasis in original).

Virtual worlds can provide this satisfying experience, but Bartle (2005) argues most virtual worlds do not. The problem begins with a lack of “Atonement with the Father” and cascades from there. Virtual worlds do not give players a definitive win state, so players never feel like they have won the game and they will not feel as though they have become greater than they were before. The misalignment at “Atonement with the Father” is a stumbling block preventing the player from progressing through the final stages and completing the Linear Hero’s Journey. The player will be trapped on a “treadmill”, searching for satisfaction the game cannot provide, until they finally “leave without wanting to leave” only to “seek validation in other virtual worlds that can at best offer but an echo of the acceptance they crave” (ibid, p.15). Bartle suggests simply adding an “Atonement with the Father”, where the virtual world acknowledges the player has won the game, would make the player feel a sense of personal growth and they will naturally progress through the final stages. Not only will the player be satisfied with their experience, but the virtual world would also be incorporated into their lives and they would continue to play (and pay to access) the virtual world.

Denmeade (2017) built on Bartle’s (2005) recommendations for guiding players towards self-discovery by rewriting the Linear Hero’s Journey as a generalised guide towards confidence and ability. Denmeade proposes two different Linear Hero’s Journeys for learning in digital games, one

for multiplayer environments (like virtual worlds) and one for single-player environments (to which Bartle's recommendations do not apply). Denmeade's Linear Hero's Journey is a repeating cycle from uncertainty to certainty. Players who are certain in their ability are encouraged to seek novelty until they discover their own insufficiencies and become uncertain, and uncertain players are encouraged to seek new knowledge and challenges to develop a new understanding.

#### ***1.4.2.1 Accounting for agency***

Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud (2007) argue the Linear Hero's Journey does not sufficiently account for the player's agency. As discussed above, many argue successful and satisfying learning should follow the Linear Hero's Journey. When the player's actions drive the story forward, their inaction or incorrect actions can stop a story from progressing or lead to less satisfying, and less successfully educational, sequences of events. For example, if the player cannot find the ladder to leave Link's house in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) or if they want to ignore Navi and go back to sleep, then the game will not progress. In both cases, the player will be quickly bored because *Ocarina of Time* does not provide "a suitable answer to each choice" (Delmas, Champagnat, & Augeraud, 2007, p.190). Link's house was designed to be briefly seen and immediately abandoned. The Linear Hero's Journey does not account for this so Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud adjust the Linear Hero's Journey to lead a straying player back onto the necessary path by addressing and resolving the reasons for their divergence.

Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud's (2007, p.193) version of the Linear Hero's Journey incorporates "dynamic scenarios" to respond to different players' choices and skills. If the player is struggling with a challenge, then they are redirected to further assistance and training before being returned to the challenge. If the player continues to fail then, rather than repeating the challenge to the point of frustration, the game is "permissive of failure" (ibid, p.190) and allows the player to continue with a penalty. Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud argue handicaps and lower points are

more satisfying than “a brutal termination of the game” (ibid, p.189). Alternatively, if the player performs especially well, then they are given the option to accelerate past challenges and training they do not need.

The Linear Hero’s Journey accounts for the hero’s initial refusal, but Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud (2007, p.191) add the “Stubborn Refusal” stage and “Compelled to Adventure” stage for players who are especially resistant to learning. They also add the “Interference from Without” stage as an alternative to the “Rescue from Without” stage. “Rescue from Without” is triggered if the player wants to end the adventure, as per the Linear Hero’s Journey. “Interference from Without” is triggered if the player does not want to end the adventure, encouraging the player to return to the “Ordinary World” and solve their initial problems. If the player continues to refuse, then they are free to end the narrative without completing the quest. This player has completed the learning journey but will simply miss the achievement event where they can finally solve the problem they initially encountered.

Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud (2007) also draw attention to the central challenge of a Linear Hero’s Journey and the need to introduce it early. Similarly, Dickey (2006) also argues the major challenge facilitates the Linear Hero’s Journey, making it one of the most important components of digital games. The Linear Hero’s Journey can begin with any disruption to the hero’s ordinary life, but Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud and Dickey argue the “Call to Adventure” should be the central problem of the game. This gives the player a single consistent motivation across the entire adventure and gives them a sense of accomplishment when they finally return and solve the problem.

The centrality and early appearance of a major challenge, towards which the entire game leads and which the player cannot currently overcome, is also a key difference between digital games and traditional learning environments. K. Squire (2005) argues traditional education leads to

learned helplessness because students are given small, easily understood problems. This only teaches them to solve problems when all the pieces are already available to them. Beginning in failure, recognising your failure, and being comfortable with failure are important first steps in the learning process. They reveal to students their deficiencies and encourage self-efficacy to find solutions.

### **1.4.3 Inside and outside the game**

The Linear Hero's Journey has also been used as a way to describe a player's entire experience with a game, beginning before they even know the game exists and ending long after they turn off the game. This approach does not restrict the Linear Hero's Journey to the game program. It considers the game as a part of the player's life, where playing the game is the adventure and it impacts the player's life beyond their time spent playing. Bartle (2005) argues this is the case for virtual worlds, where the journey is about self-discovery. Most people do not know themselves so any virtual world, where they can explore different roles and experiment with their personality, is a call to adventure. Walk (2018) and Compton (2018a, 2018b, 2019) propose this happens with every digital game.

The "Call to Adventure" is not Navi waking up Link in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) nor Kratos being attacked in *God of War* (Santa Monica Studio, 2005), but the moment when the player chooses to play the game (Compton, 2018a). The "Refusal of the Call" is the player's own hesitation to play the game, such as from embarrassment, inability, or inaccessibility (Walk, 2018). The designer's role as "Supernatural Aid" is to provide advice, assistance, and items through the game to help them start and continue (Compton, 2018a; Walk, 2018). The player "Crosses the Threshold" and begins the adventure when the game "gets real", when the tutorial ends and the player is left to their own devices (Compton, 2018a). The "Temptress" is anything luring the player away from the game, including valid reasons such as work

commitments (Compton, 2018b). The “Father” with whom they must atone is whatever authority figure tries to prevent them from playing, such as a literal parent (Compton, 2018b). They achieve “Apotheosis” when they master the game and they gain the “Ultimate Boon” when beat the game (Compton, 2018b). The player may be tempted to remain in the game and refuse to leave the game even after they have completed it, so something from their ordinary life must rescue them from outside the game (Compton, 2019). When the player has mastered the game world and can balance it with their life outside the game, then they have the freedom to leave and return at their own discretion (Bates, 2005; Compton, 2019).

The Linear Hero’s Journey may not seem relevant to a game when it is applied only to the time spent playing, but Walk (2018) argues it is clearly present when the game is considered the fantastical world in which a person experiences their adventure. Walk argues this approach helps designers understand their role and their limitations. The story begins and ends outside the game, where the player has a problem and their problem is solved. The game itself is the middle of the story (the second act of a three-act structure), where the player “Crosses the First Threshold” to gain a solution and then “Crosses the Return Threshold”. This solution, “The Ultimate Boon”, should be something applicable outside the game, whether it is as simple as improved hand-eye coordination or as personally confronting as an ethical dilemma (Compton, 2019; Marczewski, 2017). Rather than trying to fit the entire Linear Hero’s Journey into the game, designers should instead provide a fantastical world where the player can have an adventure contributing to the rest of their lives.

#### **1.4.4 In the player’s experience**

More recently, the Linear Hero’s Journey has been applied to the player’s experience of a game, rather than the events presented them by the game. Some have investigated the unique ways digital games can create Linear Hero’s Journey stages for the player to experience, not just the player-character. For example, Costiuc (2016a) argues players can experience a “Refusal of the Call” in

*Journey* (Thatgamecompany, 2012) by walking away from the mountain, the goal they are meant to reach. If they do, then they will also experience the “Supernatural Aid” changing their mind in the form of strong winds pushing them towards the mountain. These are not prescribed stages happening to the player-character or even to every player. Costiuc argues Thatgamecompany considered the possibility of players rejecting the game’s goal and designed the game to both allow them to refuse and to bring them back to the adventure. Sivak (2009) similarly argues *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) allows the player to refuse the adventure multiple times across the game by ending some dialogue sequences with a question. When the Deku Tree asks, “Dost thou have courage enough to undertake this task?”, the player can say no and delay their progression. Even though the player’s only options are progress or delay, Sivak argues the opportunity for “Refusal” gives the player confidence. The player should not be forced to continue until they decide they are ready.

The final stages of the Linear Hero’s Journey are often omitted because there are no more challenges for players after they have gained the “Ultimate Boon” (e.g. Carlquist, 2002; Ip, 2010b; Rollings & Adams, 2003). Although the final challenges in *Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons* (Starbreeze Studios, 2013) are functionally identical to challenges faced earlier in the game, Costiuc (2016b) argues these challenges are necessary because they are emotionally significant for the player. Before gaining the “Ultimate Boon”, the player controlled the two brothers Naiee and Naia simultaneously with different parts of the controller to solve puzzles. After Naia dies, Naiee’s control scheme expands to include Naia’s side of the controller. These puzzles and their solutions are the same as before, but Costiuc argues these final challenges are the most satisfying parts of the game because they demonstrate how much Naiee has grown and the support Naia continues to provide.

Plyler (2014) argues the digital games medium is able to present a Linear Hero’s Journey in a more personal way than other media. The player’s struggles and successes when playing can reflect



the player-character's struggles in the narrative. Joel's Linear Hero's Journey from primitive fighter to killing machine in *The Last Of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) is reflected in the player's own increasing skill as they progress through the game. Plyler also describes the experience of playing *Beyond: Two Souls* (Quantic Dream, 2013) as walking through a museum of the player-character Jodie's Linear Hero's Journey. The story is largely pre-written, but the player can delve deeper into Jodie's experience by finding additional scenes.

Buchanan-Oliver and Seo (2012) interviewed players about *Warcraft III* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2002) and found many of their participants interpreted their matches as Linear Hero's Journeys. They argue this is because acting out a Linear Hero's Journey is essential for winning. The game is built around hero characters, who have unique abilities impacting the strategies of an entire team. Players need to summon hero characters early (essentially beginning the game with these heroes) and spend time training them before the final battle. Matches culminate in a final battle between opposing players and each player will rely heavily on their hero characters. Hero characters are so significant that a hero's death is considered a more definitive ending than the match's actual completion. Walk (2018) takes this further, arguing people will naturally experience the Linear Hero's Journey in their daily lives. In this way, the Linear Hero's Journey is useful because it helps designers recognise what players are experiencing and guide designers in how to create experiences to facilitate those Linear Hero's Journeys rather than obstruct them.

## **1.5 Limitations and misconceptions**

The Linear Hero's Journey is prolific, frequently utilized and thoroughly scrutinized. Designers and scholars have collectively edited the Linear Hero's Journey, adding footnotes, interpretations, and recommendations, to produce a tool specifically for the design and analysis of digital games and

play. Despite these modifications, the Linear Hero's Journey is still limited. Its rigid arrangement of events is restrictive to both designers implementing them and researchers identifying them.

Consequently, designers recommend it as a loose guide to follow, such as Adams and Rollings's (2010) suggestion to change the structure to accommodate other events, and authors do not require every stage to be present for a game to demonstrate the Linear Hero's Journey, such as how Costiuc (2016a) argues players experience the Linear Hero's Journey when playing *Journey* (Thatgamecompany, 2012) despite lacking a "Meeting with the Goddess". Even as a loose guide, it describes only one kind of story: Quests with happy endings. The hero faces obstacles but they will always succeed because failure is a divergence. The stages are also predisposed towards certain activities (geographic travel, physical danger, material gain) and certain characters (male heroes with female love interests, wise mentors, and all-powerful adversaries). These specifics limit the stories to which the Linear Hero's Journey can be applied (Costiuc, 2016b; Delmas, Champagnat, & Augeraud, 2007; Dunniway, 2000), and these stories are also outdated (Cassar, 2013; Dunniway, 2000). As Dena (2017, p.45) points out, these ancient stories about "a male hero who was 'tempted by a seductress'" are neither relatable nor acceptable to modern audiences. With this in mind, the Linear Hero's Journey's prevalence in digital games may be a sign of stagnation, rather than a perfect fit (Dena, 2017; M.-L. Ryan, 2001).

The adjusted Linear Hero's Journey is limited because the Linear Hero's Journey at its foundation is limited. It is a simplification of the Hero's Journey Campbell (1968) originally described. In *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, the Hero's Journey is not a series of stages, it does not guarantee victory, and it is not specific to any person, setting, or activity. Instead, the Hero's Journey is the hero's experience of a goal, whoever the hero is and whatever that goal may be. It describes the hero's relationship with this goal, including all the factors influencing their relationship and all the ways their relationship can change. It is in the hero's best interests to succeed but there are

many ways to fail, temporarily or irreparably, without deviating from the Hero's Journey. I call Campbell's Hero's Journey the *Dynamic Hero's Journey* because it is a set of rules defining the system through which the hero moves. As I will explain in Chapter 2, the Dynamic Hero's Journey resonates with audiences because it reflects our own experience of maturation and personal growth.

"Part I: The Adventure of the Hero" (Campbell, 1968, pp.49-243) and its seventeen chapters inspired the well-known seventeen stages but it is a linear arrangement of a nonlinear idea, like using the spoken word to describe an image. Situations are described and later redescribed, one choice will be described and followed by an alternate choice with a different outcome, and some chapters describe important concepts rather than events that happen. Additionally, "The Adventure of the Hero" comprises only half the book. The rest of the book clarifies and contextualises Campbell's descriptions of the Hero's Journey and the social and psychological function he argues the Hero's Journey serves.

Campbell (1968) relies heavily on the myths he compiled to describe the Hero's Journey, especially the ideas and iconography common across many cultures, such as sons becoming like their fathers, women representing the world being mastered, and submitting to the will of god. However, scattered throughout *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* are entreaties to not focus on imagery. Mythology is "a powerful picture language" and operates according to "the principles of communication by analogy" (ibid, p.256). Myths are not about their characters, events, or rewards but about the ideas those things represent. "Symbols are the *vehicles* of communication" (ibid, p.236, emphasis in original) transporting their audiences "not *up* to, but past them, into the yonder void" (ibid, p.180, emphasis in original). Focusing on this imagery "will simply obfuscate the picture message" (ibid, p.231).

These images are also culturally specific. A myth's meaning can be lost when the story is transplanted from one culture to another, or even across generations as images "become, for one reason or another, meaningless" (Campbell, 1968, pp.246-247). Images of a safe human world physically separated from a fantastical world made sense to ancient communities, where they had certainty and comfort within their villages and fears, anxieties, and desires were projected onto unknown lands beyond their borders (ibid, p.58). Ancient myths are full of animal guides, half-human half-animal figures, and significant plants because the "danger" and "sustenance" for ancient humans centred on "the plant and animal world" (ibid, p.390). These images do not convey the same message to modern audiences because "the focal point of human wonder" has shifted (ibid, p.391).

Even if we did comprehend the intended messages in ancient myths, Campbell (1968) further warns these lessons are not applicable to modern societies. Ancient myths united people within a community by teaching them to serve their societal role and direct their feelings of fear and aggression outwards. This protected the community from both its own members and from outside forces. These lessons "co-ordinate the in-group" and unified ancient communities but they "can only break [our modern, globally interconnected society] into fractions" (ibid, p.388). At the end of *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Campbell argues our modern problems can only be solved with modern myths using modern imagery. The very cultural changes that have "rendered the ancient formulae ineffective, misleading, and even pernicious" are the cultural conditions modern mythologies must address (ibid, p.388).

The Dynamic Hero's Journey is detailed, nuanced, and flexible but this also makes it complicated. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* is convoluted and dense with philosophy, psychology, and mixed metaphors. The Linear Hero's Journey is a knowing simplification. The authors discussed here credit the Hero's Journey to Joseph Campbell and sometimes refer to *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* by name, but the linear version is described and preferred. *The Hero With A*

*Thousand Faces* is praised as a classic text and a valuable resource for curious readers but it is also criticised as less “modern and practical” than Vogler’s version (Dunniway, 2000) and is “overkill” “for all but the most story-intensive games” (Rollings & Adams, 2009, p.94).

## 1.6 Expanding the Hero’s Journey

The Linear Hero’s Journey is only a fraction of Campbell’s Hero’s Journey, so our application and scrutiny of the Hero’s Journey in digital games is incomplete. The Linear Hero’s Journey is more convenient to describe and apply but I argue we can expand the Hero’s Journey as an analytic tool for digital game play experiences by returning to *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1968) and investigating the more complex Dynamic Hero’s Journey. It is more flexible, so it is applicable to a wider range of heroes with different motivations in different settings. It is nonlinear, so it can accommodate the many different ways heroes can respond to challenges, including failures. Finally, and most importantly, it emphasises the hero. The Linear Hero’s Journey is a sequence of events for the hero to encounter, and their experience of these events is prescribed along with every other component. In contrast, the Dynamic Hero’s Journey is defined by the hero’s relationship with the world around them, accommodating and responding to the hero’s feelings, perceptions, interpretations, and choices. This allows us to investigate the Hero’s Journey phenomenologically, as it is experienced by players.

Digital games are arguably processes, rather than static objects. They only exist when being played and therefore cannot exist without players (Aarseth, 2003; Carlquist, 2002; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). Mäyrä (2009, p.217) vividly describes a digital game as “a pile of dead code” brought to life by a player. Although players are an essential aspect of digital games, they are largely under-researched (Buchanan-Oliver & Seo, 2012; Consalvo, 2007). Digital games studies tend to treat games as static objects, where all the components are visible simultaneously and available for

inspection (Dena, 2017; Golding, 2013a). Aarseth (2003) speculates academics prefer treating games as objects because, unlike ephemeral activities such as play, objects are consistent, storable, and easily retrieved for analysis.

Treating digital games as objects allows us to study design as a craft, but not the experiences created by those designs (Dena, 2017; Golding, 2013b). The way a player makes sense of their experience and the decisions behind their actions cannot be understood by only examining a game's design (Consalvo, 2003). As Golding (2013a,b) argues, although games are exposed in their entirety to developers who made them and sometimes to academics who study them, a player's access to the game is partial and their experience is fluid. Players navigate a game space with limited information, misunderstandings, mistakes, and constantly changing knowledge and skill. Understanding digital games requires understanding play experiences, not just the formal systems facilitating play (Consalvo, 2003; Dena, 2017; Golding, 2013a,b; Mäyrä, 2009).

In *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Campbell (1968) is concerned with deciphering symbols to find important lessons about the cosmos and humanity buried in the texts themselves. He talks about "key images" being lost across retellings and becoming hidden among less potent "secondary interpretations" (ibid, pp.247-248), as though a story has only one meaning and, without it, the story is useless. In this project, I take a phenomenological approach and investigate the meanings constructed by players themselves. The Linear Hero's Journey has been applied to player experiences, but so far with limited results. Since the Linear Hero's Journey is a collection of events, it is most applicable to games as artefacts. Since the Dynamic Hero's Journey accommodates many possible outcomes and treats the hero as an active agent, whose feelings and choices influence these outcomes, it is more applicable to player experiences. For these reasons, I am able to incorporate theories of play and players into my investigation of the Dynamic Hero's Journey in a

way the Linear Hero's Journey does not allow. In this thesis, I will focus my investigation on three particular areas: player motivations, affordances, and narrative creation.

## 1.7 Player motivations

The Dynamic Hero's Journey describes the relationship between the hero and a goal. In the model, this goal is inherently superior to all alternatives. Every element of the Dynamic Hero's Journey is based around this goal and the hero's ability to reach it. The same elements will have very different relationships and perform different functions for different goals. When applying the Dynamic Hero's Journey to a player's experience, it is important to examine the player's goals, not just the goals assigned to them or expected of them. Even if we record precisely and completely a player's time spent playing a game, we would not be able to describe it as a Dynamic Hero's Journey without first defining that goal.

### 1.7.1 Player taxonomies

Richard Bartle and Nick Yee both propose taxonomies describing the different reasons why people enjoy playing games. In both taxonomies, a player's inclinations towards particular activities and goals determine their interpretation and enjoyment of different design features.

Bartle (1996) proposes a player type model describing the "four approaches to playing MUDs [i.e. Multi-User Dungeons]": *Achievers*, who want to act on the world and play the game to win; *Explorers*, who want to interact with the world and play to discover the game; *Socialisers*, who want to interact with other players and spend their time talking; and *Killers*, who want to act on and dominate other players, occasionally by being intrusively helpful but mostly by bullying and harassing others. According to Bartle, every player has a "primary style" inclining them towards certain activities and goals, regardless of whether the MUD rewards those behaviours.

Bartle (2005) later expanded these player types to include the implicit and explicit versions of each player type. *Achievers* were divided into implicit *Opportunists* and explicit *Planners, Explorers* were divided into implicit *Hackers* and implicit *Scientists, Socialisers* were divided into implicit *Friends* and explicit *Networkers*, and *Killers* were divided into implicit *Griefers* and explicit *Politicians*.

Unlike the four player types, Bartle (2005) proposes players move through these eight player types along predictable lines as they play in a virtual world. The player begins by acting on instinct, either as an *Opportunist* (trying everything without specific goals) or a *Griefer* (pushing things to extremes for the sake of hurting others). Once the player understands the basic possibilities available to them, they can more explicitly explore the virtual world to find more possibilities, either as a *Scientist* (who experiments for themselves) or as a *Networker* (who learns from others). Once they have “acquired the necessary knowledge to operate effectively” (ibid, p.7) they are able to apply their knowledge to accomplishing their goals, either as a *Planner* (who measures their success through the goals specified by the game) or as a *Politician* (who measures their success by their reputation among the player community). Finally, when a player has fully mastered the game, their skills are second nature and they have become either a *Hacker* (who implicitly understands the virtual world) or a *Friend* (who implicitly understands their comrades).

Yee used empirical data collected from players in Massively Multiplayer Online games (MMOs) to further developed Bartle’s (1996) player types into a taxonomy of player motivations. Yee’s (2002, p.8) results describe the “different underlying motivations” affecting players, rather than categories for classifying players. For each player motivation, a player would have a score from high to low, correlating with the activities and goals they tend to prefer while playing.

Yee (2002) constructed a survey from Bartle’s (1996) four player types and collected responses from *EverQuest* (Verant Interactive & 989 Studios, 1999) players. From these results, Yee divided Bartle’s original four categories into five clusters of behaviour: 1) *Relationship*, where players



want meaningful interpersonal relationships and talk with others while playing; 2) *Immersion*, where players want to become immersed in the game's world as a character a backstory, personality, and role; 3) *Leadership*, where typically "gregarious and assertive" (ibid, p.9) players prefer to play in groups, especially as the leaders; 4) *Grief*, where players want to "objectify and use other players" (ibid, pp.9-10) for their own gain; and 5) *Achievement*, where the player wants to become powerful according to the game's rules. Yee did not find support for Bartle's *Explorer* type. This does not mean players do not enjoy exploration, but Yee says it does suggest Bartle's original definition of mapping the game world and understanding game mechanics were not key features of this desire.

Yee (2006) conducted another survey to collect more data from players across several MMOs and further refined his player motivations model. The result was a set of ten components divided into three main clusters: 1) the *Achievement* cluster, comprising the desire to *Advance* in the game, understand and utilise the game's *Mechanics*, and engage in *Competition*; 2) the *Social* cluster, comprising a desire for *Socialising*, forming *Relationship*, and *Teamwork*; and 3) the *Immersion* cluster, comprising a desire for *Discovery* of hidden and obscure information in the game world, *Role-Playing* as a person with their own story, *Customisation* of their character, and *Escapism* from problems outside the game.

Yee, Ducheneaut, and Nelson (2012) further refined ten components by collecting both self-report survey data from *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) players and in-game achievements recorded by the game. Their resulting three factor model is more parsimonious and correlates each motivation with typical in-game behaviours. The *Social* factor involves chatting with other players, being part of a guild, working in groups, and keeping in touch outside the game. Players with high *Social* scores tend to enjoy team-based collaborations such as completing dungeons and raids, while players with lower scores prefer single-player activities such as quests. The *Immersion* factor involves feeling immersed in the world by exploring it, learning stories and

lore, and creating a backstory for their character. Players with high *Immersion* scores tend to enjoy systematically exploring the world's geography. The *Achievement* factor involves becoming powerful, acquiring rare items, optimising their character, and competing with others. Players with high *Achievement* scores tend to enjoy high-reward activities such as completing dungeons and fighting with other players. Players with lower scores tend to enjoy non-combative activities, such as crafting and exploration, and easier activities with lower rewards, such as quests.

Bartle's and Yee's taxonomies are based on online multiplayer games. Bartle's (1996) four player types is designed to describe the way people played in MUDs and Bartle's (2005) eight player types describes the way people play in virtual worlds. Yee's (2002, 2006) and Yee, Ducheneaut, and Nelson's (2012) motivational models are all based on empirical data collected from MMO players, especially *EverQuest* (Verant Interactive & 989 Studios, 1999) (Yee, 2002) and *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) (Yee, Ducheneaut, & Nelson, 2012).

Online multiplayer games are a specific genre of digital games. The design features unique to these genres impact the kinds of activities players perform and the kinds of enjoyment they can derive from playing. MUDs are "text-based virtual realities", where everything from the environment to player actions are described only in text (Bartle, 1999). Detail is sparse and the richness of the world depends on the players' imaginations. Bartle (2003, pp.3-4, emphasis in original) specifically says virtual worlds have "automatic rules" defining the world's physics, they happens "in *real* time", are shared by multiple players simultaneously, persist even when no one is playing, and players control and act through a single character. This definition disqualifies many other digital games (including all single-player games) and also restricts the extent to which his player types can be applied to other digital games. Yee's (2001, pp.8-9) description of *EverQuest* (Verant Interactive & 989 Studios, 1999), which roughly applies to most other MMOs, also reveals the potential problems of applying these player motivation models to other games.

MUDs, virtual worlds, and MMOs are unique among digital games for many reasons and this uniqueness is reflected in these models. The impact of social interactions on player behaviour is obvious. *Socialisers* and *Killers* are defined by their preference for interacting with and on other players, rather than the environment. As Bartle (1996, 2005) describes them, they could only exist in multiplayer games. Bartle (1996) further argues a defining quality of MUDs is their support of all four player types. The balance between the four types determines the “feel” and “atmosphere” of a MUD. Similarly, Yee (2001) argues *EverQuest*’s (Verant Interactive & 989 Studios, 1999) design makes player cooperation essential. The game is built around killing “computer-generated creatures” (Yee, 2001, p.8). Each player-character is restricted to certain strategies and roles in combat, so no one player is able to fight on their own. Players must work together and perform different roles to fight these creatures, and cooperation becomes increasingly important as players encounter higher-level creatures.

The multiplayer nature of these games impacts the player experience in ways beyond socialising and community building. These games are designed to support multiple simultaneous players so one player’s actions should not unintentionally disrupt others. Even something as simple as stopping and re-starting the game must be designed differently in an online multiplayer game like *EverQuest* (Verant Interactive & 989 Studios, 1999) compared to an offline single-player game like *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998), as Yee (2001, p.9) illustrates in his detailed description of needing to “set up camp” before logging off in *EverQuest*.

These models emerged from particular genres and their application to other digital games must be scrutinised in light of those unique qualities. However, these models are not necessarily exclusive to MUDs, virtual worlds, and MMOs. The distinction between virtual worlds and other games is not always clear (Bartle, 2003) and some descriptions of inter-player behaviour could also describe player interactions outside the game (such as in discussion boards) or with Non-Player

Characters (NPCs). Yee (2002, p.14) says these models are unlikely to be exhaustive, especially since they were studied through only a few genres, but they do provide “a meaningful way to talk about different player motivations”.

### 1.7.2 Self-Determination Theory

Player types and player motivations are specifically about the different desires motivating players. In contrast, *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT) proposes three universal psychological needs motivating all people: *competency*, *autonomy*, and *relatedness* (Oliver, Bowman, Woolley, Rogers, Sherrick, & Chung, 2015; Przybylski, Rigby, & Ryan, 2010; Przybylski, Weinstein, Ryan, & Rigby, 2009; Rigby & Ryan, 2016; Sheldon & Filak, 2008; Uysal & Yildirim, 2016). The need for *competency* is our need to feel a sense of mastery and effectiveness. Our sense of *competency* is satisfied when challenges are appropriate for our level of skill and when feedback helps us improve our performance. *Competency* is thwarted when challenges are either too easy or too difficult. The need for *autonomy* is the need to feel a sense of control, as though we are acting of our own volition. *Autonomy* is satisfied when our actions result from personal choices and reflect our values and interests. *Autonomy* is thwarted when we feel we are following someone else’s instructions or are being controlled. The need for *relatedness* is our need for meaningful social connections and to feel close with others. *Relatedness* is satisfied by warm, supportive environments where we feel accepted, respected, and valued and is thwarted when we feel excluded or neglected.

SDT provides a way to distinguish between extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Activities are extrinsically motivating when their outcomes are desirable but also “separable from the activity” itself (Uysal & Yildirim, 2016, p.126). Activities are intrinsically motivating when performing the activity is itself appealing (Przybylski, Rigby, & Ryan, 2010; Uysal & Yildirim, 2016). According to SDT, activities are appealing when they satisfy our three basic psychological needs (Przybylski, Rigby, & Ryan, 2010; Rigby & Ryan, 2016; Uysal & Yildirim, 2016). It is well known how

digital games can facilitate extrinsic motivation, such as through operant conditioning (Uysal & Yildirim, 2016). However, digital games can also be intrinsically motivating by satisfying these three basic needs (Rigby & Ryan, 2016).

SDT has only recently been applied to digital games studies but it is particularly appropriate for understanding player motives and the way game design satisfies those motives (Przybylski, Rigby, & Ryan, 2010; Przybylski, Weinstein, Ryan, & Rigby, 2009; R.M. Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006; Uysal & Yildirim, 2016). Through interviews and experiments, researchers consistently find games are more enjoyable and people are more likely to keep playing when the game satisfies their *competence, autonomy, or relatedness* and, conversely, games are less enjoyable and people are less likely to continue playing when their needs are thwarted (e.g. Przybylski, Weinstein, Ryan, & Rigby, 2009; R.M. Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006; Sheldon & Filak, 2008). Przybylski, Rigby, and Ryan (2010) argue digital games are popular in part because they satisfy these three needs more effectively than other media entertainment, and even everyday life. Uysal and Yildirim (2016) further argue these basic needs are satisfied by features typically found in most modern digital games, such as challenges of increasing difficulty, the ability to make choices, multiplayer options, and supportive NPCs.

## 1.8 Affordances

To find the Dynamic Hero's Journey in a player's experience with a digital game, we must understand how their experiences form. Players bring to life a game's "dead code" (Mäyrä, 2009, p.217) but the code also confines them. A person becomes a player when they "perceive and respond to" a game object and are bound within the "prison-house of regulated play" defined by the game object (Aarseth, 2007, pp.130-133). It is important to study those constraints and expectation in order to understand the experiences a game can create (Aarseth, 2007; Farca, 2016).

Merleau-Ponty (1963) argues a person's existence is based on their relationship with the environment. Our organic bodies, the objects in our environment, and the way we can perceive and relate to those objects together form our embodied experience of the world. This is the case for our everyday lives and when we play games. Our play experience is shaped by our relationship to the game world and the actions we can perform within that world.

In user experience design, affordance refers to the available actions for using an object (Kaptelinin, 2014; Soegaard, 2015). The affordances of a digital game are the tools allowing players to navigate, affect, interact with, and discover the game world. The toolset available to you ultimately determines your experience of the game (Golding, 2013a). Feelings of empowerment and struggle and the shifts between them while playing result from the available ways the player can act on and effect the game world (Conway, 2010). A player is present in a game through the actions they perform (Krzywinska, 2009), not just through the representations presented to them (Galloway, 2004). A digital game may faithfully replicate Mount Everest's appearance but players will not experience it as Mount Everest if they can climb it like an escalator.

A person has a set of affordances for how they navigate their everyday world and this determines their embodied experience of the world. When you play a digital game, those affordances and your sense of embodiment change (Crick, 2011; Klevjer, 2012). What we feel to be our bodies is re-configured to a new way of perceiving, acting, and existing. We can act in a new set of ways, manipulating objects in the game or moving like the player-character as "a different I can" (Klevjer, 2012, p.22). This new sense of existence is the basis, and the appeal, of our play experiences.

### **1.8.1. Experienced design**

Affordance is not just about how objects are designed. It is about what those designed objects mean to users. Even more important than the affordances an object makes available is the set of

affordances a user can access. Affordances are not the “elementary properties” of objects (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p.10) but “a *relational* property” between the object and user (Kaptelinin, 2014, emphasis in original). What an object means to us depends on the way our senses, bodies, and minds are able to perceive and act on the object (Merleau-Ponty, 1963).

Phenomenology is “the philosophical movement concerned with lived experiences” (Smith, 2011, p.9) including how we perceive, interpret, interact with, and understand our environment (Dourish, 2001). Your existence in the world is your position amongst everything around you (Conway, 2018) and this position can differ greatly across different people or even for the same person across different contexts (Conway & Elphinstone, 2017). The physical arrangement of a space supports certain activities, for example a large space supports presentations to a crowd and a small space supports intimate conversations, but even spaces with similar physical arrangements can be used and experienced differently if they are invested with different meanings, such as the experiential differences between a conference room and a dining room (Dourish, 2001, p.89). Similarly, the experience of playing a game cannot be reduced to or explained solely by the way a game is designed. Our understanding of reality, including our understanding of a game, is “inherently unstable” (Conway & Trevillian, 2015, p.75) and is constructed from the act of play and the meaning generated from that performance (Skolnik, 2013).

The way meaning changes with access to affordances is clear when considering the effect of skill and knowledge. The affordances available to a player depend as much on the player’s skill and knowledge as it does on the digital game’s design (Conway, 2010b) and some affordances must be discovered through experience, patience, and effort (Kaptelinin, 2014). Without sufficient skill, the game cannot be played and it has no meaning for the person (Black, 2012). In Kurt Squire’s (2005) study using *Civilisation III* (Firaxis, 2001) to teach world history in secondary school, almost a quarter of participants found the game too complicated. These students asked to be withdrawn from the

gaming unit and enrolled in a reading group instead. A game will feel like a strange and abstract place to new players, but it will gradually become more meaningful as they learn how to act and establish their place in that game world (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995; Vella, 2013). A game first seems vast and unfathomable but will become mundane and manageable when the player has explored it and knows its boundaries (Martin, 2011). Even something as simple as moving from one place to another may change from an impossibility, to a challenging struggle, to a minor inconvenience (Hayot & Wesp, 2009).

This progression from novice to expert implies the player's access to meaning increases as their access to the object increases, as through the player were uncovering buried treasure. However, no game has a final definitive meaning. This is best expressed in what Aarseth (2003) calls *innovative* play, where players discover unconventional ways to play. Aarseth (2007) says these moments of subversion and transgression can become the most personally and culturally significant moments of play. When a player learns to propel themselves with a rocket launcher, the rocket launcher's use changes from offence to travel (Lowood, 2006b). Lowood also argues speedrunning, where players aim to finish the game as quickly as possible, reveals a new game within the game. When players speedrun *Left 4 Dead* (Valve South, 2008), the game becomes a more ephemeral, chaotic, desperate, and spontaneous experience than the game would otherwise provide (May & McKissack, 2017). These players are not uncovering a definitive and complete game. The meaning of the game is changing. This illustrates how a game's meaning is not contained in the game artefact alone but is created through the player's active engagement with and understanding of the game.

We can only ever play and experience our own interpretation of a game (Boluk & LeMieux, 2017; Jørgensen, 2017). Even the most conventional way of playing a game is simply the most common interpretation of the game. Knowing how to launch yourself into the air with a grenade (Aarseth, 2003) or having the skill to rob an otherwise impenetrable bank (Lowood, 2006a) obviously



lead to different play experiences. However, even small changes in a person's interpretation of a game, such as wanting to complete the game as quickly as possible (Lowood, 2006b; May & McKissack, 2017), can change what the game means and what it is like to play (Boluk & LeMieux, 2017). A player's understanding of a digital game's rules may be more important than the digital game itself or even what we can observe of their play activities (Aarseth, 2003). In his discussion of text as incomplete communication necessitating reader interpretation, McCloskey (1990, p.19) eloquently concludes "what is unsaid – but not unread – is more important to the text as perceived by the reader than what is there on the page".

### **1.8.2 Supportive design**

I am examining the Dynamic Hero's Journey in the player's experience of the games, and therefore the game itself must be described in terms of how it facilitates those experiences. All forms of communication are limited, and therefore all communication is incomplete and open to interpretation (Hall, 1999; McCloskey, 1990). Digital games, like all texts, must be interpreted. The skill of an author is in their ability to select and omit just the right information to lead the reader to a particular interpretation (McCloskey, 1990) and the skill of a designer is in creating signifiers to guide users to particular affordances (Kaptelinin, 2014; Soegaard, 2015). Many techniques and approaches to games design acknowledge the designer's indirect influence over players. These techniques and approaches can be incorporated into the Dynamic Hero's Journey.

Jenkins (2004, 2007), Pearce (2004), and Salen and Zimmerman (2004) describe game designers as narrative architects. Space is the primary means of communication in digital games (Golding, 2013a). Although designers cannot prescribe experiences or meanings, they can guide players by sculpting the game world in which those experiences and meanings will arise. Carson (2000) and Jenkins (2004, 2007) directly compare game design to theme park design and adopt the concept of *environmental storytelling*, where story is conveyed through the player's navigation of

spaces. Players and park visitors cannot be directly controlled but designers can indirectly influence them by designing spaces to *evoke* familiar narratives and ideas, to *embed* in spaces the remnants of past events, to lure players to move through and interact with spaces in particular ways and *enact* certain narratives, and by designing the environment to ensure certain events and dynamics are more likely to *emerge*.

Design can communicate meanings clearly and strongly but design can also be ambiguous, open to interpretation and facilitating a wider range of possible meanings. Conway and Ouellette (2019) use McLuhan's concepts of *Hot* and *Cool media* to describe the player's interpretative role in games. *Hotter* designs give players clearer information about what to do and when to do it, so players have neither the need nor time to interpret for themselves what the game means. *Cooler* designs are ambiguous, leaving players to contemplate and construct the game's meaning without urgency. Skolnik's (2013) spectrum from *Strong Procedurality* to *Weak Procedurality* specifically describes the interpretative possibilities in a game's rules. More *Strongly Procedural* designs guide players towards specific meanings through clear instructions and restrictive actions. More *Weakly Procedural* designs allow players to find and create their own meanings by providing a wider range of possible actions and ambiguous information.

Unambiguous games facilitate a narrower range of possible interpretations, so play experiences are largely similar (Farca, 2016). Ambiguous and multifaceted games encourage players to construct their own meanings (Jørgensen, 2017) and even require players construct their own meanings to play at all (Calleja, 2018). This can lead to a greater diversity of experiences among players (Farca, 2016), even richer, more personal, and more emotional experiences than anything a designer could create (Bartle, 1999; Pinchbeck, 2009; Rouse, 2009), and facilitates the enjoyable experience of active speculation (Wesp, 2014). As Skolnik (2013) further argues, a *Strongly*

*Procedural* game has clear but less convincing and impactful meaning than the meanings players find for themselves within *Weakly Procedural* designs.

Conway and Trevillian's (2015) *Social/Operative/Character* (SOC) model describes the play experience in terms of the meanings players access in the objects around them. Every object in a player's environment can be accessed and understood in many different ways and mean many different things. We only access a portion of those potential meanings at any given time and the particular sub-set of meanings we access in any given moment forms the phenomenological *World* we experience (Conway, 2013). The SOC model describes three different *Worlds* we can experience while playing: the *Social World*, where a game is designed by people to be played by other people; the *Operative World*, where objects serve a game's rules and goals; and the *Character World*, where you experience the symbolic meaning of the objects around you and the actions you perform, where you jump (rather than push buttons) and slay demons (rather than master the game's mechanics) and save the world (rather than finish the game) (Conway & Trevillian, 2015).

They use the term *keying* to describe how the meanings you can access determine the *Worlds* towards which you are oriented. You are *upkeyed* into a *World* when the meanings you find in the objects around you support that *World*. When alcohol is presented as a penalty while playing *Mario Kart 64* (Nintendo EAD, 1996), the alcohol supports the *Operative World* of competition and challenge. When Psycho Mantis in *Metal Gear Solid* (Konami, 1998) controls your television screen's display, the television is given symbolic meaning and supports the *Character World* of telekinetic antagonists. *Upkeying* maintains your orientation towards a *World*. You are *downkeyed* when objects cannot be accessed in a way consistent with your current *World*. When a soccer ball deflates and no longer supports the game of soccer, you are *downkeyed* from the *Operative World* of rules and goals into the *Social World* of punctures and air pressure. When a character you have saved

from a dragon suddenly vanishes because the mission is over, you are *downkeyed* from the *Character World* of danger and heroism into the *Operative World* of missions and quest logs.

It takes more effort to *upkey* than to *downkey*, so it takes more effort to move from the *Social World* to the *Operative World* and even more effort to move to the *Character World*. The *Social World* is your everyday experience and most of the objects and actions around you support that *World*. Alcohol is more often experienced as a legal drug than a penalty in a racing game and for most digital games your television is a piece of hardware rather than a vulnerable resource your enemy can corrupt. Games are designed to *upkey* players out of the *Social World* by presenting objects and activities “predisposed” by design to afford meanings supporting the *Operative* or *Character World* (Conway & Trevillian, 2015, p.95).

### **1.8.3 Supportive agency**

The contextual and relational nature of affordances also clarifies concerns about player agency. There is contention about whether an authored story can be combined with the high agency inherent in digital games (see Carlquist, 2002; Cassar, 2013; Galyean, 1995; Ip, 2011a; Jenkins, 2004; Mallon & Webb, 2005; Mateas & Stern, 2005; Murray, 1997; M.-L. Ryan, 2009). However, this contention prioritises mechanical agency and neglects the player’s experience of agency. Mechanical agency is the player’s “actual, perceptible effects on the virtual world” (Mateas & Stern, 2005, p.1), a clear and quantifiable set of possible actions and their corresponding consequences (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). However, as with all affordances, the way players experience agency cannot be reduced to the object itself.

Carson (2000) says design succeeds when the player believes they are making their own free choices, regardless of whether there were any choices to make. As discussed earlier, players do not have total knowledge of any game they play (Golding, 2013a,b). Players do not necessarily know when they are making a choice, what their alternatives are, or if there was a choice at all. This means

they are not experiencing mechanical agency, but rather their perception of agency. *Illusory agency* describes this experience of perceiving a wider scope of possibilities than is technically allowed (D. Brown, 2007; Cassidy, 2011). Many techniques facilitate this illusion, such as introducing random elements (Mallon & Webb, 2005), disguising the player's lack of influence over outcomes (M.-L. Ryan, 2009), or tying a linear sequence of pre-determined events to the player's skilful performance (Mallon & Webb, 2005; Marczewski, 2017; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).

Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum (2012) argue even small degrees of agency can completely change a player's experience of pre-authored events. In *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010), the player-character is designed with a set of traits, values, and decisions the player cannot change but the player can control the character's attitude. Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum demonstrate this in their multiple playthroughs of the game first as a "paragon of the utmost virtue", then as a "vicious but pragmatic renegade", and finally as a "suicidal nihilist" (ibid, p.397). Although the events were always the same, the different attitudes led to vastly different experiences: a story about a diplomatic and nurturing leader who sought the good for all, a story about a leader who made hard choices but fostered a fiercely loyal crew, and a story about a sociopath who fostered no loyalty and left tragedy in his wake.

Design can also interpellate players into a subjectivity where they want to perform the only actions possible, without realising there were no alternatives (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011). M.-L. Ryan (2009) argues a digital game's rules and goals incentivise players to behave in certain ways. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) argue attaching narrative meaning to these rules and goals can make those goals even more attractive. A person is more motivated to manoeuvre their avatar from one location to another within a time limit if they believe doing so will save the world rather than simply because the game presents it as a challenge. Cassar (2013) argues players feel personally invested in the *God of War* trilogy's (Santa Monica Studio, 2005-2010) linear story about a violent man's tragic end

because Kratos' rage and ruthless violence against both enemies and innocents convince them this ending is desirable.

Even when a game affords high agency and eschews the structure of an authored narrative, the results are not necessarily unsatisfying (M.-L. Ryan, 2009). Hindmarch (2008) and Cragoe (2016) argue tabletop role-playing games are appealing because your choices directly impact the outcome, regardless of whether those events follow a satisfying narrative arc. In Buchanan-Oliver and Seo's (2012) study of the way *Warcraft III* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2002) players formed narratives from their play sessions, one participant said being able to participate in the story made the story particularly enjoyable, even though those narrative elements were common in many other well-known stories. Mateas and Stern (2005, p.5) use this principle in their high agency experimental game *Façade*, where the player can "ruin the experience" and end the game early (e.g. getting kicked out of the apartment).

More important than agency is consistency. To successfully convince the player to think or act a particular way, all parts of a digital game must cooperate to facilitate a consistent experience (Cassar, 2013; Rollings & Adams, 2003). According to Carson (2000), successful theme parks begin with a set of rules defining its world. Every aspect of the park must rigidly adhere to these rules to create a seamless and believable world. Breaking those rules leads to internal contradictions compromising visitors' experience. D. Brown (2007) argues games can communicate ideas more effectively when all components are consistent, in what he calls the cooperation of gameplay and narrative gestalts. As D. Brown explains, when the Dark Knight class in *Final Fantasy III* (Square, 1990) is most useful in a dungeon, it is consistent for there to be other Dark Knights in the dungeon giving the player Dark Knight-specific advice and weapons. The "Wow Moments" in digital games happen when the many different components cooperate to create a single consistent experience (ibid, p.63) and games are confusing, or at least unconvincing, when components "end up grating

together” (ibid, p.60). Similarly, according to Conway and Trevillian’s (2015, pp.82-83) SOC model, players can only successfully *upkey* into the *Operative* or *Character World* when “the majority of objects [around them] collude to move upwards together”.

## 1.9 Player narratives

Some digital games tell specific stories, such as *Mass Effect 2*’s (BioWare, 2010) story about values and ideals (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum, 2012) or the *God of War* trilogy’s (Santa Monica Studio, 2005-2010) “epic tragedy” about “purification and redemption” (Cassar, 2013, pp.89-90). Other games provide environments encouraging particular narratives without telling a specific story, such as how *The Sims* series (Maxis, 2000-2020) is an environment “ripe with narrative possibilities” (Jenkins, 2007, p.59). Some games make no attempt to tell or facilitate any narrative (Cassar, 2013; Elson, Breuer, Ivory, & Quandt, 2014; Plyler, 2014), particularly in certain genres such as sports and puzzle games (Ip, 2011b). Digital games arguably do not need to tell stories (Dunniway, 2000; Jenkins, 2004) and some very successful games tell no story at all (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum, 2012; Ip, 2011b).

However, regardless of the designers’ intentions, every digital game becomes a narrative simply by being played. Not only do players provide the action necessary to put a game’s narrative into motion (Carlquist, 2002; M.-L. Ryan, 2001) but we also form narratives as we make sense of our own play experiences. We experience narrative as we play, as we watch others play, in our retellings of the play activities we experience or witness, and the broader context to which our playful activities contribute (Cassidy, 2011; Crawford, Muriel, & Conway, 2018; Pearce, 2004). This is because “human beings are storytellers by nature” (McAdams, 2009, p.390) and we understand the world by turning it into a narrative, whether it’s a game we play or the life we live every day. According to narrative psychology, we all form stories from our personal experiences and these stories combine to form a single ongoing life story we can analyse as a narrative (McAdams, 2009;

Teske, 2006). We begin constructing these stories as early as 2 years of age and our ability to construct an autobiography becomes more sophisticated during preschool (McAdams, 2009). Our play experiences contribute to this ongoing narrative just as much as everything else we experience (Crawford, Muriel, & Conway, 2018).

Narratives are limited and every piece must serve a purpose (Barthes, 1979; Bell, 1990), unlike life which is full of irrelevant details (McCloskey, 1990). The narratives we create, and the things we choose to include in those narratives, reflect what is important to us and what we consider worth preserving. Myers (1990) demonstrates how reports of even the same story differ depend on who is telling it and why: When reporting the discovery of split genes, conference papers told stories about the research techniques; news reports told stories about the researchers and their struggles; and student textbooks told stories about the findings without the researchers or research techniques, as though the findings always existed as fact.

Our life stories are even more volatile. We construct our life stories from our feelings towards events, rather than from the events themselves, and our feelings depend on our needs and desires at the time (McAdams, 2009; Singer, 2004; Teske, 2006). These needs and desires change over time and, in turn, change the narratives we form (Singer, 2004). Even when events are not as discordant and unstructured as everyday life, such as the carefully arranged and presented information in a game or film or novel or even a scientific text, we must still construct the information into narratives that make sense to us (Cassidy, 2011; McCloskey, 1990). Even a very specific narrative can be interpreted in “personal and idiosyncratic” ways and people can feel a strong sense of ownership over the narratives they construct and the meaning they find (Singh, 2012, p.178).

Researchers already study audience interpretations and fan-creations to investigate what people consider important in works of entertainment. The narratives players experience while



playing and the things most important to them are reflected in the walkthroughs they write (Consalvo, 2003), the performances they share (Lowood, 2006b), the fan fictions they create (Consalvo, 2007; Crawford, 2017; Lowood, 2006a), and the way they mod games (Carter & Chapman, 2017). This line of investigation can be moved a step closer to the source. Rather than studying the narratives in works players produce, we can study the narratives in their accounts of play. Buchanan-Oliver and Seo (2012) took this approach to study the narratives players formed when playing *Warcraft III* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2002).

We shape our experiences into narratives and those narratives in turn shape us. Our life stories are essential to our identities. Arranging our past experiences into a coherent whole is necessary for understanding ourselves, including our values, behaviours, and place in the world, and for making decisions and plans for the future (McAdams, 2009; Singer, 2004; Teske, 2006). The narratives we form and the patterns into which we arrange them have significant implication for our perception of ourselves and the world around us. Even the same sequence of events can be arranged in different ways and produce different meanings. McAdams (2009) vividly illustrates this in his description of *contamination sequences* and *redemption sequences*. Life is usually an alternation between good to bad. However, whether you construct those experiences into a narrative about good things devolving into bad (*contamination sequence*) or a narrative about bad things turning out good in the end (*redemption sequence*) influences whether you learn to feel hopeless or hopeful.

There are many theories about the different patterns we use to construct our life stories and their implications (McAdams, 2009). According to McAdams (2009), for example, a good life story must meet six criteria to promote a person's well-being: coherence (i.e. it must make sense), openness (i.e. the story must have the flexibility to respond to and incorporate the person's changing life), credibility (i.e. it must account for the known facts), differentiation (i.e. it must be

multifaceted, with many characters, plots, themes, and conflicts), reconciliation (i.e. it must provide explanations for difficult issues and problems they encounter), and generative integration (i.e. it must connect the person and their life to the wider community). The different patterns into which players arrange play events, and the way a game's design encourages different patterns, may influence the player's experience of the game more so than the events themselves, much like *contamination sequences* and *redemption sequences*. The Dynamic Hero's Journey may provide a way to describe those patterns and identify their impact on players, much like McAdams's six life story criteria.

According to some, the ability to construct a narrative from your experiences playing a game is not proof the game itself is a narrative nor evidence the game should be studied as a narrative (e.g. Hindmarch, 2008; Juul, 2001; Walsh, 2011). However, I argue we can apply narrative theory to digital games via players themselves. A player's account of their experiences while playing can be analysed as a narrative, and the game artefact can be studied to investigate how it facilitated those experiences and lead to the player's narrative. Understanding digital games as narratives requires studying the narratives that players experience (Consalvo, 2003; Dena, 2017; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).

## 1.10 Conclusion

The Linear Hero's Journey provides a familiar, time-tested, and remarkably refined guide for heroic quests about physical dangers and happy endings. It is neither widely applicable nor flexible, but designers have found their own flexibility by minimising and omitting stages they find unhelpful and treating its descriptions metaphorically. For all its faults and limitations, game designers are at least advised to be aware of it and use it when designing those particular kinds of stories (e.g. Bates, 2005; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Rollings & Adams, 2003; Schell, 2008; Walk, 2018). The Linear Hero's

Journey has been thoroughly scrutinised as a plot guideline, a learning aid, a description of an entire game from before purchase to after completion, and as the player's experiences. However, our understanding of the Hero's Journey, especially in play experiences, can be developed even further by examining the Dynamic Hero's Journey.

The Linear Hero's Journey is a fraction of the Dynamic Hero's Journey Campbell originally described. The Dynamic Hero's Journey's complexity and flexibility, omitted from the Linear Hero's Journey for simplicity and consequently overlooked, provide fruitful avenues of investigation. Its emphasis on the hero, in particular, makes it more compatible with player-centric theories. The parallels between the hero's relationship with their goal and a player's motivation for playing a game can be investigated through player taxonomies and Self-Determination Theory. The way designed elements facilitate Dynamic Hero's Journey experiences for players can be investigated through theories of affordances. The way Dynamic Hero's Journeys form from play and their impact on players can be investigated through theories of narrative construction and meaning-making.

In this chapter, I briefly discussed the differences between the Linear Hero's Journey and the Dynamic Hero's Journey. In the next chapter, I present the Dynamic Hero's Journey in detail, including its essential components, the relationships between those components, and the different paths a hero can take throughout their adventure.

## Chapter 2: Dynamic Hero's Journey

As discussed in the previous chapter, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1968) is both praised and criticised. The book is considered a masterpiece but its exhaustive detail is inaccessible to many readers and its extensive use of myths and fairy tales is arguably impractical for modern writers. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* is dense and often meandering. Campbell describes the Hero's Journey but he also discusses the important lessons it teaches and the psychological consequences of its absence from modern stories.

In this chapter, I present the *Dynamic Hero's Journey*. I constructed this model from *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1968) by consolidating the mixed imagery and inconsistent terminology, providing context for Campbell's descriptions, and expanding the connections he makes between the Hero's Journey and Jungian Individuation by drawing on Hartman and Zimmeroff (2009), Henderson (1978), Hockley (2007, 2014), Jacobi (1968), Storr (1986), Tacey (2012), and von Franz (1978).

### 2.1 The “mono”-myth

The Dynamic Hero's Journey describes the relationship between a *Hero* and an *Ideal State*. The Ideal State is a particular state of affairs in any realm (emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, etc.) and on any scale (encompassing as much or as little of the story's world as is relevant). Within the Dynamic Hero's Journey, the Ideal State is objectively superior. Any other state is a *Flawed State*. The Ideal State's superiority may be debatable outside the Dynamic Hero's Journey but within the model it is fact. The Hero's ability and desire to achieve the Ideal State is influenced by the Ideal State's *Attractive* and *Repulsive* qualities. Attractors advance the Hero's progress by making the Ideal State desirable or easier to obtain and by making the Flawed State undesirable or easier to abandon. Repulsors impede the Hero's progress by making the Ideal State undesirable or difficult to obtain

and by making the Flawed State more desirable and easier to keep. Attractors aid the Hero in the Adventure by pulling them towards the Ideal State. The Hero becomes more or less affected by Attractors and Repulsors during their *Adventure by Transforming* themselves, their surroundings, or both. Greater Transformation means being more affected by Attractors and less by Repulsors. The dynamics of this relationship between the Hero and the Ideal State reflect the psychological experience of self-discovery and self-acceptance. “One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious” (Jung as cited in Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009, p.8).

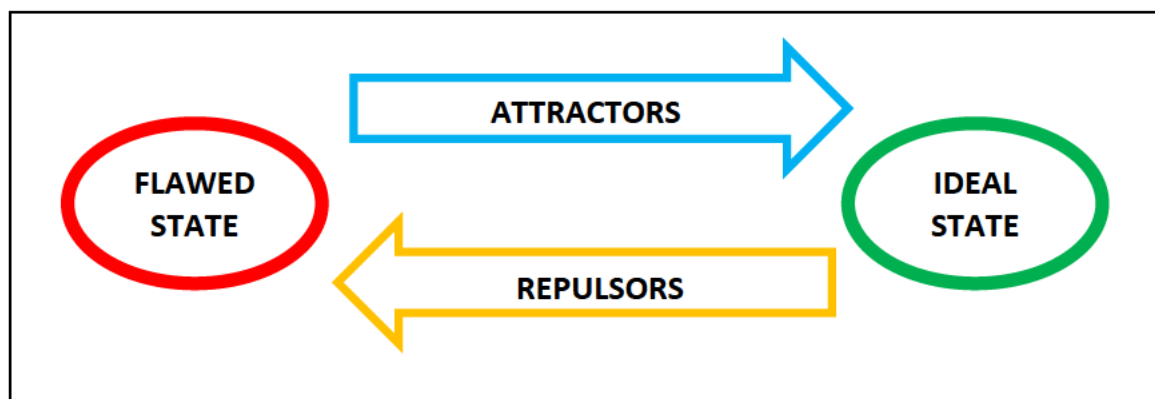


Figure 2. Dynamic Hero's Journey diagram.

Campbell (1968, p.3) calls this pattern the “monomyth” because it appears in stories across cultures throughout history, from physical adventures to religious moral lessons. “It will always be the one, shapeshifting yet marvellous constant story that we find” (ibid). This common pattern is used in myth to teach beliefs about the universe, which are themselves metaphors for psychological growth.

### 2.1.1 Cosmogonic Cycle

The “Cosmogonic Cycle” is Campbell’s (1968, p.266f) term for all creation-apocalypse myths. He argues every culture holds the same beliefs about the universe and these beliefs are reflected in all

their myths, either literally or symbolically. The universe begins as a “void” without form (ibid, 269). Then formlessness breaks into form and creates space and time (ibid, pp.261-273). Everything in existence was once part of the void so creation is actually a splitting apart (ibid, p.153,281). The first creations are few but great. These are “the Created Creating Ones” (ibid, p.315), who themselves continue the process of creation. These superhumans establish the world by founding cities and defining cultures (ibid, pp.316-319). As the universe continues to develop, the creations become more numerous but each creation is necessarily less than the ones before.

Once the superhumans have done the foundational work of the world, they give way to human beings (Campbell, 1968, pp.315-317). The work of humans is to maintain the created world by controlling the vices natural to such inferior creatures. The universe continues to split apart, filling existence with many even more inferior pieces. The universe eventually reaches its lowest point when the pieces are divided so much and spread so thin they either dissolve away into nothingness or destroy themselves (ibid, p.277,374). “The forms go forth powerfully, but inevitably reach their apogee, break, and return” (ibid, p.269). Once again, only the formlessness of the void exists and the Cosmogonic Cycle repeats (ibid, p.261). “Briefly formulated, the universal doctrine teaches that all the visible structures of the world – all things and beings – are the effects of a ubiquitous power out of which they arise, which supports and fills them during the period of their manifestation, and back into which they must ultimately dissolve” (ibid, p.257).

Campbell (1968) refers to this “ubiquitous power” (ibid, p.257) by various names including “the World Navel” (ibid, p.41f), “the all-generating void” (ibid, p.218), the “Uncreated Creating” (ibid, p.269f), “the Unmoved Mover” (ibid, p.281f), the “source” of all creation (ibid, p.334), or sometimes simply god. Regardless of the specific name, he consistently describes this entity as both the centre and entirety of the universe. This is “the paradox of the dual focus” (ibid, p.288) or “the paradox of creation” (ibid, p.147). As Campbell (1968, p.288) explains:

Destiny 'happens', but at the same time 'is brought about'. From the perspective of the source [of all creation], the world is a majestic harmony of forms pouring into being, exploding, and dissolving. But what the swiftly passing creatures experience is a terrible cacophony of battle cries and pain.

When told from a Flawed human perspective, the Babylonian mother of the gods Tiamat was a terrifying and destructive menace whom the sun-god Marduk tore apart with great difficulty (ibid, pp.285-287). When told from the World Navel's perfect perspective, Tiamat "shatter[ed] of her own accord" to become the world itself (ibid, p.287). Though appearing at odds, Campbell (1968, p.353) says:

These are not contradictory doctrines, but different ways of telling one and the same story; in reality, Slayer and Dragon, sacrificer and victim, are of one mind behind the scene, where there is no polarity of contraries, but mortal enemies on the stage, where the everlasting war of the Gods and the Titans is displayed.

From the World Navel's perfect perspective, the universe is "a living, growing, harmonious thing" (Campbell, 1968, p.281). The movement from genesis to apocalypse and back again is natural, effortless, inevitable, and perpetual. To the small imperfect pieces within the universe, life seems chaotic, tragic, and difficult. "Where men see only change and death, the blessed behold immutable form, world without end" (ibid, p.223). The Cosmogonic Cycle teaches these truths of reality and the highest possible Ideal State is to know and accept reality. Campbell says all myths either literally or symbolically teach the Cosmogonic Cycle. Many myths take place during the human phase of the Cosmogonic Cycle and address common misunderstandings people have about the universe. "The world of human life is now the problem [...] society lapses into disaster" (ibid, p.308). Every problem results from misunderstanding. "Every failure to cope with a life situation must be laid, in the end, to a restriction of consciousness. Wars and temper tantrums are the makeshifts of ignorance; regrets are illuminations come too late" (ibid, p.121). Campbell highlights two common misunderstandings myths often address: a belief in dichotomies and a belief in a perfect status quo.

Human beings think of the world in terms of dichotomies, “good and evil, death and life, pain and pleasure, boons and deprivations” (Campbell, 1968, p.145), but the universe “remains the One undivided” (ibid, p.39). Myths teach us the division of opposites is a human misunderstanding. “ ‘To God all things are fair and good and right,’ declares Heraclitus; ‘but men hold some things wrong and some things right’ ” (ibid, p.44). Instead of dividing the universe into dichotomies, the Hero must see every part “with equal equanimity” (ibid, p.114) and believe “the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated” (ibid, p.147).

Daedalus embodies this equanimity of good and evil. He helped Pasiphaë conceive the Minotaur with the perfect white bull, he built the Labyrinth for King Minos to hide the Minotaur and sacrifice youths and maidens, and he gave Ariadne the thread so Theseus could navigate the Labyrinth and kill the Minotaur.

For centuries, Daedalus has represented the type of artist-scientist: that curiously disinterested, almost diabolic human phenomenon, beyond the normal bounds of social judgement, dedicated to the morals not of his time but of his art. He is the hero of the way of thought – singlehearted, courageous, and full of faith that the truth, as he finds it, shall make us free. (Campbell, 1968, p.24)

At this early stage of Campbell’s career, his mantra was “there is no progress, only change” (Ellwood, 1999, p.147). Every phase must be left behind for the next. Stagnation is disastrous or impossible. The Hero does not desire “changelessness [...] nor is he fearful of the next moment” (Campbell, 1968, p.243). The Hero is the one who literally or metaphorically slays “the monster of the status quo: Holdfast, the keeper of the past” (ibid, p.337). Campbell says many myths express this as “the clearing of the field” (ibid, p.338f), where the Hero slays dangerous creatures from the past. “The hero is the carrier of changing. And since every moment of time bursts free from the fetters of the moment before, so this dragon, Holdfast, is pictured as the generation immediately preceding that of the saviour of the world” (ibid, p.352). Kings are overthrown, kingdoms destroyed, and “primeval” monsters killed (ibid, p.337). These may have been “boon-givers” (ibid, p.338) in the past but their



continued existence is a desperate or malicious stagnation, to maintain what is best for themselves to the detriment of the universe. “A god outgrown becomes a life-destroying demon” (ibid, p.338). “The Hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies *himself* today” (Campbell, 1968, p.353, emphasis in original).

### **2.1.2 Jungian Individuation**

Campbell (1968, p.257) argues the Dynamic Hero’s Journey resonates with people because it reflects “the vital energies of the whole human psyche” and thus is “as constant throughout human history as the form and nervous structure of the human physique itself”. Campbell’s description of the Cosmogonic Cycle parallels Jungian descriptions of the Psyche, specifically Individuation.

Individuation is a two part process, first dividing and then unifying (Jacobi, 1968). The Psyche begins as a united whole (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Henderson, 1978), comprising patterns and structures called “archetypes” (Hockley, 2007). These archetypes influence how you experience and react to the world. As you are exposed to your environment (family, society, culture, etc.) your Psyche splits apart (Jacobi, 1968; von Franz, 1978). Some archetypes are accepted by your environment and integrated into your consciousness, where they develop and become dominant. Archetypes rejected by your environment are relegated to the unconscious, where they are neglected and remain underdeveloped.

The contents of your Psyche are unique to you (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; von Franz, 1978) but the forms are universal, and everyone’s Psyche splits apart following the same pattern. Psychic contents are divided into the Ego and Persona in consciousness and the Shadow and Contrasexual Archetype in the unconscious (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968). Your Ego is the centre of consciousness and the only part of your Psyche you can completely know and control (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; Tacey, 2012). Your Persona comprises the contents of your Psyche deemed acceptable by your environment (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968;

Storr, 1983). It is the “outward attitude” you present to the world so you can effortlessly interact with others (Storr, 1983, p.119), a “mask” hiding all the other parts of your Psyche of which your environment disapproves (ibid, p.96). Your Shadow comprises all the qualities your environment considers unacceptable (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Henderson, 1978; Jacobi, 1968; Storr, 1983; von Franz, 1978). Your environment teaches you to dislike these parts of yourself so you learn to ignore and repress them. Your Contrasexual Archetype (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009), also called the soul image or anima (for men) or animus (for women) (Jacobi, 1968), comprises all the qualities your environment considers unacceptable for your gender (Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). Your gender-appropriate qualities become part of your Persona, which you present to the world, and the inappropriate qualities are rejected and form the Contrasexual Archetype.

It is normal and necessary for the Psyche to split apart (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; von Franz, 1978). It is a process of maturing and learning to cope with the outside world. However, just as misunderstandings and problems are prevalent in the human phase of the Cosmogonic Cycle because the universe has split apart too far, your Psyche is also prone to problems when its archetypes are split apart too far. Common misunderstandings about the universe parallel the misunderstanding we have about ourselves. The fragmented Psyche does not see itself as a unified whole and cannot function harmoniously (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009). The separate parts work autonomously for their own goals, conflicting and sabotaging one another. This inner conflict causes psychological problems. Myths about the human phase teach Flawed humans to understand and accept the universe and they symbolically teach humans to understand and accept their own Psyche, which is the second part of Individuation (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009).

These connections to Jungian psychology are essential to the Dynamic Hero’s Journey’s universality and relevance. The Linear Hero’s Journey, without these psychological roots, is one kind of story. The Dynamic Hero’s Journey is the “monomyth” (Campbell, 1968, p.3) not just because it

appears across many stories nor because its branching nature accounts for many plots, but because it represents the human Psyche. Understanding the Dynamic Hero's Journey and its impact on audiences requires understanding these psychological processes it represents.

### **2.1.3 Mythic guide**

Some people are "adventurous" and undergo "the difficult, dangerous task of self-discovery and self-development" on their own (Campbell, 1968, p.23). Most people cannot do this and must be guided to self-improvement. Myths and rituals "are instrumental to help the individual past his limiting horizons" and help us through the "agony of spiritual growth" (ibid, p.190). These methods have been tried, tested, and "handed down through millennia" (ibid, p.23). The Dynamic Hero's Journey presents "a series of standard metamorphoses as men and women have undergone in every quarter of the world, in all recorded centuries, and under every odd disguise of civilisation" (ibid, p.13). Campbell (1968, p.121) says myth in the ancient world serves the same function as therapy today and Hartman and Zimmeroff (2009) and Henderson (1978) say the Dynamic Hero's Journey guides people through the second part of Individuation towards Psychic unity. Campbell (1968, pp.11,23,104) even proposes such guidance is so important that societies without them are improperly equipped to function.

Aside from being a general guide towards self-improvement, Campbell (1968) argues myths and rituals resolve very specific common problems. Drawing from psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and anthropologists such as Géza Róheim, Campbell concludes all human problems addressed in myth result from our unusually long childhoods. Our mothers are our first experience of the world so they become our entire world and this relationship becomes the foundation for our relationship with the rest of the world (Campbell, 1968, pp.6,110-111,113,122-123,355). Our fathers are our first threat because they compete for our mother's attention so all our feelings of hostility are directed towards the father and then any authority figure (ibid, pp.6,155-156). Our childhoods predispose us

to misunderstandings and misconceptions and we cling to our “infantile, inappropriate sentimentalities and resentments” and “childlike human conveniences” (ibid, p.114), even as we mature, instead of developing a more complex and complete understanding of the world (ibid, pp.62,100-101).

These claims about human nature are beyond the scope of this thesis but they provide important context for Campbell’s language and preferred examples. Campbell primarily describes the Dynamic Hero’s Journey in terms of these theories of human development. Consequently, Campbell regularly says the Hero desires and is nurtured by a mother figure, competes against and defeats a father figure, and becomes like that father and possesses the mother as the father did before. Despite Campbell’s preference for certain imagery, the components of a Dynamic Hero’s Journey could be anything symbolising psychologically meaningful lessons relevant to the cultural and historical context in which they arise. In this chapter, I use this context to explore Campbell’s original descriptions and construct an abstract and generalisable Dynamic Hero’s Journey.

## 2.2 From Flaw to Ideal

Being a Hero in the Dynamic Hero’s Journey simply means having a relationship with an Ideal State. “The adventure of the hero” (Campbell, 1968, p.47f) is the way the Hero’s relationship with the Ideal State changes. “The nuclear unit of the monomyth” is a three-phase process of *Departure* (or *Separation*), *Initiation*, and *Return* (ibid, p.30). The Hero *Departs* from their Flawed State, is *Initiated* into an Adventure where they confront Attractors and Repulsors, and when they have Transformed and achieved the Ideal State they can *Return* from the Adventure and reap the benefits of that Ideal State. This is the “standard path” (ibid, p.30) from Flawed State to Ideal State because most people follow it when they overcome problems in their lives and it is the path encouraged by rituals and

therapies. We must *Depart* from our old way, be *Initiated* into a situation where we are able to change, and then leave that special situation and *Return* to our lives as an improved person.

However, the Dynamic Hero's Journey is a web of relationships mapping out every possible relationship the Hero may have with the Ideal State and the way the Hero may move from one position to another. The standard path through this map is a gradual progression from Flawed State to Ideal State but the Hero may occupy any position on the map and move across the map along any path. Most stories follow the standard path but Campbell (1968) also gives examples of Heroes who Transform and then de-Transform, who partially Transform, attempt Transformation and fail, Heroes who remain stagnant at varying degrees of Transformation indefinitely, and stories with multiple overlapping Dynamic Hero's Journeys or a long series of Dynamic Hero's Journeys. The following description of the Dynamic Hero's Journey is linearly arranged but this sequence does not depict the way an Adventure must unfold.

### **2.2.1 Flawed State**

The Flawed State is defined as not being the Ideal State. Being in a Flawed State means suffering from some kind of "deficiency" (Campbell, 1968, p.37). Since Campbell's Ideal States are almost exclusively about misunderstanding reality, his Flawed States are about ignorance. The Hero has "a false, finally unjustified, image", "a misunderstanding, not only of oneself but of the nature of both man and the cosmos" (ibid, p.238). More generally, when the Hero is in the Flawed State, they are doing, thinking, being, or believing something they should not.

The Flawed State in Individuation is Psychic division. In the same way all parts of the universe are equal and dichotomies are illusions, all parts of your Psyche are equal and it is a mistake to divide them into good and bad (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 209; Jacobi, 1968; Storr, 1983; von Franz, 1978). Your Psychic qualities are divided across your conscious and unconscious according to your environment's "ideas as to how a civilised or educated or moral being should live" (Storr, 1983,

p.88). Your Ego and Persona are overly favoured and incorrectly considered the entirety of who you are. Your Shadow and Contrasexual archetype are relegated to the unconscious but they are still present and, no matter how neglected and underdeveloped they remain, have just as much influence over you as your conscious archetypes (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Storr, 1983; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978).

Being divided is both exhausting and misleading. It is exhausting because your Ego must repress your own qualities. Your Ego believes it has full control over your behaviour but your Ego is actually under pressure from the Persona to perform according to your environment's demands and by the impulses of your unconscious (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009). None of your Psychic impulses are inherently bad, but being divided and underdeveloped leads them to conflict and sabotage one another. Your Ego has the self-awareness to suppress unwanted behaviours but doing so is exhausting (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; von Franz, 1978). Being divided is misleading because your divided Psyche distorts your perception of the world around you. The rejected contents of your unconscious manifest internally as dreams but they also manifest externally as projections (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). You see your own repressed Shadow and Contrasexual Archetype in the world and in others, as though they are external things you can remove from your life (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). These projections cause social conflict because we are interacting with our own unconscious, rather than real people (Jacobi, 1968), and we are unable to form "genuine human relationships" (von Franz, 1978, p.181). Repression results from a misunderstanding and leads to further misunderstandings.

### **2.2.2 Herald**

The *Herald* makes the Hero aware that they are in a Flawed State by making them aware of the Ideal State. It represents the Ideal State, possessing a portion of the Ideal State's Attractiveness and

Repulsiveness and giving the Hero a taste of the Adventure on which they must embark. Campbell (1968) implies the Herald is a direct consequence of the Ideal State. The Ideal State is factually correct and the Herald is evidence of its existence and superiority. "That which has to be faced [...] makes itself known" and "a series of signs of increasing force will become visible, until [...] the summons can no longer be denied" (ibid, pp.55-56).

Since Campbell (1968) often describes the Dynamic Hero's Journey in terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, he often describes the Herald as an agent of destiny. "As a preliminary manifestation of the powers that are breaking into play" the Herald is "the carrier of the power of destiny" (ibid, pp.51-52). "Destiny has summoned the hero" (ibid, p.58) and "the individual is drawn in" (ibid, p.51). Campbell even says that the Herald figure in myths is often depicted "with symbols of the World Navel" as known by that culture, representing "the life-progenitive, demiurgic powers of the abyss" from which the universe emerged (ibid, p.52). If a culture believes the universe emerged from the depths of a dark ocean, then their Heralds often emerge from the ocean.

Even when the Herald is depicted as an accident or coincidence, it and the Hero's response reflect the Hero's deep psychological needs of which they themselves might not even be aware (Campbell, 1968, p.58). The Psyche, with all its components and contents, forms a single whole called the Self (Henderson, 1978; Jacobi, 1968; Storr, 1983; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). The Self is equivalent to the World Navel, since it is both the entirety and centre of your Psyche. Individuation is not a conscious decision nor can it be forced by external pressures (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; von Franz, 1978). Just as the Ideal State makes the Hero aware of its existence through the Herald, your Self prompts you towards Psychic wholeness (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Henderson, 1978; von Franz, 1978).

### 2.2.3 Refusal

The Herald does not tell the Hero to embark on the Adventure. It gives the Hero a glimpse of the Ideal State and the Hero's reaction to the Herald reflects their feelings about the Ideal State. The Herald is as "unknown, surprising, and even frightening" as the Ideal State itself, and the Hero may choose to remain in the Flawed State (Campbell, 1968, p.55). Refusing the call does not alleviate the Herald's effects. The Ideal State is still fact and the Herald, evidence of that fact, will still be present. "A series of signs of increasing force then will become visible, until [...] the summons can no longer be denied" (ibid, p.56). This accumulating evidence works to both persuade the Hero and punish their continued refusal. "His flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless" (ibid, p.59).

"Not all who hesitate are lost" (Campbell, 1968, p.64). In the legend of the Four Signs, Prince Gautama Sakyamuni encountered four signs of increasing force spurring him towards enlightenment until he finally retired from the world to become the Buddha (ibid, pp.56-58). However, "some of the victims remain spellbound forever (at least, so far as we are told)" (ibid, p.63). The Hero who refuses indefinitely will continue to suffer. They are "a mistaker of shadow for substance" (ibid, p.337). They "are always clowns" because they are wrong (ibid, p.94). "Anyone unable to understand a god sees it as a devil" (ibid, p.92) and "the divinity itself becomes his terror" (ibid, p.60). King Minos did not keep his promise to Poseidon to sacrifice the white bull (ibid, pp.13-15) and so "whatever house he builds, it will be a house of death: a labyrinth of cyclopean walls to hide from him his Minotaur. All he can do is create new problems for himself and await the gradual approach of his disintegration" (ibid, p.59).

### 2.2.4 Threshold

The *Threshold* is not a barrier, but a division between the Hero's usual world and the world of the Adventure. The challenge of the Adventure is in the tension between Attractors and Repulsors, of



being pulled towards both the Ideal State and the Flawed State. The Threshold protects the Hero from these challenges, from the “darkness, the unknown, and danger” of the Adventure (Campbell, 1968, p.77). The Threshold is protective because these challenges are unpleasant and the Hero may not be ready. Some of Campbell’s examples of Thresholds are barriers or guardians standing between a mundane human world and a magical divine world. In these stories, the Threshold protects fragile humans from the overwhelming power of the universe. The “Wall of Paradise [...] conceals God from human sight” (ibid, p.89), comparable to the “parental watch” over an infant or “the watcher of the established bounds” protecting the community from “the unexplored” (ibid, pp.77-82). The Threshold protects the Hero from these effects but the Hero must expose themselves to these forces in order to Transform. “One had better not challenge the watcher of the established bounds. And yet – it is only by advancing beyond those bounds, provoking the destructive other aspect of the same power, that the individual passes, either alive or in death, into a zone of experience” (ibid, p.82).

Just as the Herald represents the Ideal State, the Threshold represents the Adventure. “They are preliminary embodiments of the dangerous aspect of the presence”, warding away all who are unready (Campbell, 1968, p.92). The Threshold is dangerous to “unqualified souls” (ibid, p.217), challenging if the Adventure itself will also be challenging, and merely a formality if the Hero has already begun to Transform. “The overbold adventurer beyond his depth may be shamelessly undone” (ibid, p.84). If the Hero is not ready, they should retreat and return when they are.

A Hero who is ready to begin the Adventure will either cross the Threshold by passing “outwards” or “inwards” (Campbell, 1968, p.91), “either by swallowing it or by being swallowed” (ibid, p.108). Passing outwards means victoriously defeating the Threshold, “conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold” (ibid, p.90) and demonstrating they do not need the protection. This Hero is affected by more Attractors than Repulsors, so they experience less tension

and are pulled more towards the Ideal State than they are pushed back. The Hero had the “competence and courage” (ibid, p.82) and “genuine psychological readiness” (ibid, p.84). “The danger fades” (ibid, p.82) and they “go alive into the kingdom of the dark” (ibid, p.245).

Passing inwards means being “swallowed into the unknown” (Campbell, 1968, p.90) and either literally or symbolically dying (ibid, pp.91-92,246). The Hero was not ready for the Attractors and Repulsors but, at the Threshold, they Transform. This Transformation is sudden and destructive, a symbolic or literal death of the Hero or their world. This “self-annihilation” of the Hero or the world they knew is necessary so they can be “born again” into something better (ibid, p.91), much like how the Cosmogonic Cycle moves forward by destroying the past. Campbell’s examples range from heroes like Osiris whose bodies were dismembered and returned from the dead to symbolise “the renovation of the world” (ibid, p.93), heroes like a Zulu mother and her children were who swallowed by an elephant and discovered a fantastical world inside its belly (ibid, p.91), and the religious devotee who enters a church and relinquishes their former perspective of the world and realise they are “dust and ashes” (ibid, p.92). Crossing inwards is a dramatic and emotionally taxing start to the Adventure and a “popular motif” in myths (ibid, p.91).

Campbell (1968, p.93) says this self-annihilation symbolises the need to annihilate our own “attachment to ego”. Our Ego believes it is the centre of the Psyche but this is not true. It cannot control or understand the contents of the unconscious (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). “The hero whose attachment to ego is already annihilated passes back and forth across the horizons of the world, in and out of the dragon, as readily as a king through all the rooms of his house” (Campbell, 1968, p.93).

### **2.2.5 Trials**

Once past the Threshold “the adventure develops into a journey of darkness, horror, disgust, and phantasmagoric fears” as the Hero is exposed to Attractors and Repulsors (Campbell, 1968, p.121).

This struggle is necessary for Transformation. In the human world they were protected, but the divine world is “a region of supernatural wonder” (ibid, p.30) where they can encounter “a succession of *Trials*” (ibid, p.97, emphasis added). The divine world is not a separate place but a set of circumstances exposing the Hero to the Attractors and Repulsors. This is “the testing of the hero” (Campbell, 1968, p.120) but also the teaching of the Hero. The Hero cannot Transform, to become more affected by Attractors and less by Repulsors, unless they are exposed to those effects. “One by one the resistances are broken” (ibid, p.108). Hartman and Zimberoff (2009, p.11) call this “the fateful intersection of rising to the challenge and giving up in retreat”. These Trials are “a favourite phase of the myth-adventure” and “has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals” for the Hero’s Transformation (Campbell, 1968, p.97)

The human world and divine world symbolise the conscious and unconscious. Consciousness, like the human world, is safe but limited. The divine world symbolises “the unconscious deep [...] wherein are hoarded all of the rejected, unadmitted, unrecognised, unknown, or underdeveloped factors” (Campbell, 1968, p.52). It seems new and unfamiliar but it is actually a “forgotten dimension of the world we know” (ibid, p.217), just as all your Psychic qualities were once a united whole before your environment divided them between conscious and unconscious (Hartman & Zimberoff, 2009; Henderson, 1978; Jacobi, 1968; von Franz, 1978). The two may seem “as distinct from each other [...] as life and death, as day and night” but “the great key to understanding myth and symbol” is that “the two kingdoms are actually one” (ibid, p.217). The Trials are “a labour not of attainment but of reattainment, not discovery but rediscovery” (Campbell, 1968, p.36).

The Hero enters the divine world to “dredge up something forgotten” (Campbell, 1968, p.17). The Attractors and Repulsors in the divine world symbolise the “suppressed desires and conflicts” in the unconscious, lying “very deep – as deep as the soul itself” (ibid, p.51). “Ogres and

secret helpers” in stories are “all the life-potentials that we never manage to bring to adult realisation” (ibid, p.17). When the Hero crosses the Threshold and enters the divine world, they are “descending, either intentionally or unintentionally, into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth” (ibid, p.101) and entering “those causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside” (ibid, p.17). Just as we project our unconscious onto the world and people around us, Campbell says ancient cultures projected their fears, anxieties, and dreams onto unknown worlds beyond their borders. The divine world in myths often takes the form of unexplored or dangerous places, such as “a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state” (ibid, p.58).

The divine world cannot be cleanly divided into Attractors and Repulsors. The two are often intertwined, inseparable, and indistinguishable. The divine world is a “fateful region of both treasure and danger” (Campbell, 1968, p.58). Entities guiding the Hero towards the Ideal State, which Campbell roughly and inconsistently calls the “supernatural helper” (ibid, p.69f), are both “protective and dangerous” (ibid, p.73). They are “supporting” the Hero (ibid, p.97) but they are also “mercurial”, “the lurer of the innocent soul into the realms of trial” (ibid, p.73). Attraction and Repulsion are not synonymous with help and harm. They are forces, pushing the Hero in opposite directions. Attractors can be harmful by pulling the Hero into danger, like nuggets of gold pulling the Hero into a dragon’s cave. Repulsors can be helpful by pushing the Hero away from danger, like the dragon’s fearsome reputation deterring the Hero’s approach. In this way, Attractors and Repulsors reflect “all the ambiguities of the unconscious” (ibid, p.73). When the unconscious is rejected and underdeveloped, its contents blur together and seem like one undifferentiated mass (Jacobi, 1968; von Franz, 1978). We cannot tell what impulses are helping us and which will harm us. The “darkness” and “otherness” (Campbell, 1968, p.17) and the “strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delights” (ibid, p.58) of the

divine world symbolise the Psychic qualities we have relegated to the unconscious and remain underdeveloped.

### **2.2.6 Transformation**

The Hero's distance from the Ideal State depends on both the existence of Attractors and Repulsors and the extent to which they affect the Hero. The Hero cannot control what Attractors and Repulsors exists but they can control their Transformation to become more or less affected.

Similarly, the need for Individuation is an unconscious desire but you can only begin the process with conscious willingness (von Franz, 1978). Psychological change is brought about by a combination of conscious thought and critical engagement and unconscious forces and senses (Hockley, 2014). No amount of Attraction will help the Hero who has not Transformed to be affected by it but "barriers, fetters, chasms, fronts of every kind dissolve before the authoritative presence of the [Transformed] hero" (Campbell, 1968, p.344). "One's faith must be centred" on and "derive hope and assurance" from the Attractors and "with that resilience for support, one endures the crisis" and is "protected" from the Repulsors (ibid, pp.130-131).

A fully Transformed Hero is affected only by Attractors and not at all by Repulsors. This Hero "is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron" (Campbell, 1968, p.197) and is "gently carried along by the guiding divinities" (ibid, p.216). For some Heroes, Transformation is easy. Psyche easily overcame Aphrodite's challenges (ibid, pp.97-98,120) and the Navaho Twin Warriors survived their father the Sun-Bearer's trials (ibid, pp.69-71,89,131-133). These Heroes trusted in Attractors as they appeared and they supported the Heroes through the Repulsors. For most Heroes, Transformation is a difficult and uncomfortable. Campbell (1968, p.190) calls Transformation "the agony of breaking through personal limitations" and "the agony of spiritual growth".

Even myths about physical Transformation are symbolic of psychological Transformations.

Transformation symbolises the "assimilation of what C.G. Jung has called 'the archetypal images' "

into a single unified Psyche (Campbell, 1968, pp.17-18). Just like Transformation, the shift towards greater awareness of your unconscious contents can be painful or unpalatable (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Hockley, 2014; Storr, 1983). Your unconscious contents are “absolutely intolerable” to all the values and distinctions you have been taught (Campbell, 1968, p.108). To achieve Individuation, we must put aside those values and undergo “the terrifying assimilation” (ibid, p.217) to discover our conscious and unconscious, seemingly opposites, “are not of differing species, but one flesh” (ibid, p.108). Through a process of self-reflection and critique, we must accept that these unpleasant and undesirable, but ultimately undeveloped, qualities are part of us (Jacobi, 1968; Storr, 1983; Tacey, 2012). When you assimilate your Shadow and Contrasexual archetype, their power no longer works against you as an enemy but works for you as an ally (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Henderson, 1978; Storr, 1983; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). When the Hero submits to “the dynamics of his own nature [...] difficulties melt and the unpredictable highway opens up as he goes” (Campbell, 1968, p.345). “Having responded to his own call, and continuing to follow courageously as the consequences unfold, the hero finds all the forces of the unconscious at his side” (ibid, p.72).

When described in terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, the Ideal State is to understand the created world. This world is usually depicted as a woman. Campbell (1968, p.113) says this connection between women and the world is both a natural consequence of our childhood experiences and “a consciously controlled pedagogical utilisation” of the imagery by myth-makers. Many myths are about or involve the Hero working to accurately perceive and then possess a woman, symbolising the Hero’s understanding of the universe. “Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known”, but she is not “the knower”; “the hero is the one who comes to know” her (ibid, p.116). “The bride is life”, not the god who creates and dictates life (ibid, p.345). She represents “the effects of creation” but not the creator (ibid, p.302). The male symbolises “the initiating principle, the method” and the female symbolises “the goal to which initiation leads” (ibid, p.170). This is the “meeting with the goddess” (ibid, p.109f).

This woman is perfect because the universe is perfect. "She is the paragon of all paragons of beauty, the reply to all desire, the bliss-bestowing goal of every hero's earthly and unearthly quest [...] she is the incarnation of the promise of perfection; the soul's assurance that, at the conclusion of its exile in a world of organised inadequacies, the bliss that once was known will be known again" (Campbell, 1968, pp.110-111). However, the universe is also full of death and destruction so the woman is also terrifying. "The mother of life is at the same time the mother of death; she is masked in the ugly demonesses of famine and disease" (ibid, pp.302-303). This is "the woman as temptress" (ibid, p.120f). "The crux of the curious difficulty lies in the fact that our conscious views of what life ought to be seldom correspond to what life really is" (ibid, p.121).

The typical person wants to divide this woman, and the universe she represents, into categories of "chaste and terrible" because they cannot accept their coexistence (Campbell, 1968, p.111). "Generally we refuse to admit within ourselves, or within our friends, the fullness of that pushing, self-protective, malodorous, carnivorous, lecherous fever which is the very nature of the organic cell. Rather, we tend to perfume, whitewash, and reinterpret; meanwhile imagining that all the flies in the ointment, all the hairs in the soup, are the faults of some unpleasant someone else" (ibid, pp.121-122). Campbell calls this "a monastic-puritanical, world-negating" perspective separating the "pure" soul from the "impure" flesh (ibid, p.123). The Hero must confront the "inevitable guilt of life" and all the things that "sicken the heart" (ibid, p.238). For Heroes who do not Transform, this discovery is traumatic. Their life "suddenly appears to be an ocean of self-violation" (ibid, p.355) and "no longer can the hero rest in innocence with the goddess of the flesh; for she is become the queen of sin" (ibid, p.123). "Only geniuses capable of the highest realisation can support the full revelation of the sublimity of this goddess" and to "fully to behold her would be a terrible accident for any person not spiritually prepared" (ibid, p.115). The Hero who sees the woman as she is wins her as his reward. "The mystical marriage with the queen goddess of the world represents the hero's total mastery of life, for the woman is life, the hero its knower and master" (ibid, p.120).

### 2.2.7 Confrontation

The Hero must be “thoroughly tested” by the Trials (Campbell, 1968, p.133). These tests are “preliminary to [the Hero’s] ultimate experience and deed”, necessary to make them “capable of enduring the full possession” of the Ideal State and survive all of its Attractions and Repulsions (ibid, pp.120-121). This is why rites of passage ceremonies are so important, strict, and often incredibly severe. These ceremonies are necessary to “conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation” (ibid, p.10), helping them relinquish their current perspective of the world and adopt the perspective needed for their next role in life (ibid, p.55). The ceremony itself makes the psychological transformation visible and physical, so the change clearly and obviously happens.

The final Trial exposes the Hero to the Ideal State itself, with all its Attractions and Repulsions. When described in terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, the Ideal State takes the form of that culture’s World Navel. In Campbell’s (1968, p.256) examples, Hero either faces a godly figure who controls the universe or they return to something symbolising “the nonmanifest condition” of the void from which the universe emerged. Campbell often describes this godly figure, and sometimes the World Navel itself, in paternal terms. For example, “the father is the invisible unknown” (ibid, p.345) and “the world-generating spirit of the father” (ibid, p.297). This is because the father is the son’s “future task” and the daughter’s “future husband” (ibid, p.136). “The son [competes] against the father for the mastery of the universe, and the daughter against the mother to *be* the mastered world (ibid, p.136, emphasis in original). The male Hero who asks “Who is my father?” is actually asking what he himself is supposed to become (ibid, pp.346-347). He achieves the Ideal State when he becomes like his father. This is the “atonement with the father” (ibid, p.126f). “He beholds the face of the father, understands – and the two are atoned” (ibid, p.147). To achieve her future role as perfect wife, the female Hero must “maintain herself undefiled by the fashionable errors of her generation” (ibid, p.308) and so “by her qualities, her beauty, or her yearning, [she] is fit to become



the consort of an immortal. Then the heavenly husband descends to her and conducts her to his bed” (ibid, p.119).

When the Ideal State is exposed to “the improperly initiated, chaos supervenes” (Campbell, 1968, p.136). Campbell specifically warns against what he calls “indulgent parenthood” (ibid), where challenges exist but the Hero is protected against them and does not Transform. Phoebus unwisely allowed his son Phaëthon to drive the solar chariot despite being unprepared and Phaëthon consequently burned the sky, the earth, and himself (ibid, pp.133-136). Facing the Ideal State and emerging unharmed proves the Hero has fully Transformed. “The mythological hero, reappearing from the darkness that is the source of the shapes of the day, brings a knowledge of the secret of the tyrant’s doom” (ibid, p.337).

### **2.2.8 Degrees of success**

The degree of the Hero’s Transformation determines how the Dynamic Hero’s Journey proceeds. These different degrees of Transformation and their corresponding consequences provide a way to describe different play experiences, as discussed later in Chapter 5.

#### ***2.2.8.1 Partial Transformation: Hero of Action***

A partially Transformed Hero is still affected by some tension between Attraction and Repulsion. However, they can avoid the catastrophic consequences of confronting the Ideal State by ending the Adventure early. This Hero enters the divine world, encounters some challenges, and Transforms enough to leave their initial Flawed State but not enough to reach the Ideal State. Rather than facing the remaining challenges, they remain in their new less-Flawed, but still not Ideal, State. Campbell (1968) mostly describes this type of Hero in terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle. He calls this “the *Hero of Action*” (ibid, p.345, emphasis added). They slay “the monster of the status quo” and shatter “the crystallisations of the moment” so “the cycle rolls” forward (ibid, p.337) but they do not understand

why or what will happen next. “The hero of action is the agent of the cycle, continuing into the living moment the impulse that first moved the world” but “merely continues the dynamics of the cosmogonic round” and does not see the entirety of the universe from the World Navel’s perfect perspective (ibid, p.345).

#### ***2.2.8.2 Untransformed: Thief Hero***

The *Thief Hero* does not submit to “the initiatory tests” and does not Transform (Campbell, 1968, p.37). They are still affected by Attraction and Repulsion and the resulting tensions. Rather than eliminating the challenges through proper Transformation, the Thief Hero circumvents the challenges through unsanctioned and unsustainable means. In terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, the Thief Hero is a limited human futilely fighting against the universe, incorrectly believing “the props of the universal stage have to be adjusted, even beaten into shape” (ibid, pp.281-282). They do not understand or accept cosmic truths so they will always fight back and their victories will always be temporary.

They are a “thief” because their Adventure is marked by the “theft of the boon” (Campbell, 1968, p.246) seemingly liberated from “oversevere, overcautious” keepers (ibid, p.182). The Thief Hero can only escape the divine world’s challenges and its effects by retreating behind the Threshold. This escape is “the magic flight” (ibid, p.196f). The divine world’s challenges and its consequences are kept separate from the human world, maintaining the Threshold between them. Magic is repelled by talismans and symbols, truths are ignored with delusions, transcendental realisations are dispelled with mundane rationalisations, pursuing creatures are delayed with barricades (ibid, p.203). This escape is “a lively, often comical pursuit” (ibid, p.197) and “a favourite episode of the folk tale” (ibid, p.199).

Some of Campbell’s (1968) examples are Thief Heroes who stumble into a part of the universe they cannot yet handle and the universe delivers them back to their mundane lives where

they belong. Two children tumbled into a spring and were captured by a “waterhag” but escaped because the objects they threw behind themselves while fleeing turned into mountains to delay the waterhag’s pursuit (ibid, p.201). A Maori fisherman discovered his wife was an ogre and escaped with his children because different parts of their village magically called out to distract the ogre (ibid, pp.200-201). These stories acknowledge the Adventure, no matter how important or beneficial, should be refused when you are unready.

Other examples are Thief Heroes who fight back against an “unfriendly” universe (Campbell, 1968, p.246). The first shaman Morgon-Kara had the skill to revive the dead but the High God of Heaven did not approve of this and so diminished Morgon-Kara’s powers (ibid, pp.199-200). The Japanese all-father Izanagi tried to retrieve his deceased wife Izanami from the Land of the Yellow Stream but was chased out by the horrors he saw there and protected himself by barricading the path between the living and the dead with a rock (ibid, pp.204-206).

Many myths teach us the “paradox of the dual focus” (Campbell, 1968, p.288), to see good and bad with equanimity and accept life with all its tragedies. To the Thief, the Journey is simple. The bad things are bad, the good things are good, and there is no paradox. Transformation is difficult, unpleasant, and seemingly impossible so the Thief Hero refuses. “The happy ending is justly scorned as a misrepresentation; for the world, as we know it, as we have seen it, yields but one ending: death, disintegration, dismemberment, and the crucifixion of our heart with the passing of the forms that we have loved” (ibid, pp.25-26). Thief Heroes are relatable and admirable, even when they fail. Phaëthon failed and died but is remembered with the epitaph: “Here Phaëthon lies: in Pheobus’s car he fared, and though he greatly failed, more greatly dared” (ibid, p.136). As Ellwood (1999, p.160) points out, although Campbell believed people should try to transcend desire and hostility and achieve perfection, he also believed perfection would be boring. Buddhas are all alike but we are unique and lovable for our imperfections. Ellwood quotes Campbell: “Perfection lacks personality”

(ibid). Some stories have the Thief Hero gain the benefits of the Ideal State without enduring proper Transformation but Campbell says these stories are neither believable nor satisfying. An untransformed Hero gaining the Ideal State defies the logic of the Dynamic Hero's Journey. "The effect is not reassuring, but only superhuman" (Campbell, 1968, p.206). We would rather see a "human failure" than a "superhuman success" (ibid, p.207).

Only "a personage of exceptional gifts" (Campbell, 1968, p.37) can succeed in "the difficult, dangerous task of self-discovery and self-development" and achieve the Ideal State (ibid, p.23). Similarly, not everyone is capable of completing the Individuation process and uniting their Psyche (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Henderson, 1978; Jacobi, 1968; Tacey, 2012). Everyone has the potential, but not everyone has access to the resources.

#### ***2.2.8.3 Imperfect Transformation: Supreme Hero***

Like the Hero of Action, the *Supreme Hero* fails to complete their Transformation. They are still vulnerable to some tension between Attraction and Repulsion. The Hero of Action ends the Adventure before encountering that remaining tension but the Supreme Hero confronts the Ideal State, leaving them exposed to those remaining challenges. In terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, the Hero of Action "merely continues the dynamics of the cosmogonic round" but the Supreme Hero "reopens the eye – so that through all the comings and goings, delights and agonies of the world panorama, the One Presence will be seen again" (Campbell, 1968, p.345). In paternalistic terms, the Supreme Hero reaches "the father", receives his "recognition", and earns the right to "represent the father" (ibid, pp.346-347). The Supreme Hero achieves "a deeper wisdom" than the Hero of Action but they have not completely Transformed (ibid, p.345). The Supreme Hero represents god but is not god themselves. They can act as a "teacher" or "emperor" but always in deference to some greater power (ibid, p.347). The son has become his father's "emissary" but is not the same as his father (ibid, p.349).

#### ***2.2.8.4 Complete Transformation: World Redeemer Hero***

Complete Transformation means being affected only by Attractors and not at all by Repulsors. The Hero experiences no more tension or challenge. “All barriers and ogres have been overcome” (Campbell, 1968, p.109) and the Hero can achieve the Ideal State “with a gesture as simple as the pressing of a button” (ibid, p.337) or “with a mere thought” (ibid, p.350). Campbell (1968, p.349f, emphasis added) calls this the “*World Redeemer Hero*” because, in terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, this Hero has the power to solve every human problem. They are freed from the limited human perspective and the misunderstandings and misperceptions it creates. They adopt the World Navel’s perfect perspective, effectively becoming the World Navel themselves. The Hero achieves “his own divinisation” (p.246). This is the “apotheosis” (p.149f). The Supreme Hero is the “emissary” but the World Redeemer Hero is the “incarnation” (ibid, p.349). They are a “direct manifestation of the law” of the universe (ibid, p.350) and “their words carry an authority beyond anything pronounced by heroes of the sceptre or the book [i.e. Supreme Heroes]” (ibid, p.349). When we are perfect, “we no longer desire and fear; we are what was desired and feared” (ibid, p.162).

As with the paradox “destiny ‘happens’, but at the same time ‘is brought about’ ” (Campbell, 1968, p.288), the World Redeemer Hero is both the World Navel and also submits to the World Navel. “The hero is the man of self-achieved submission” (ibid, p.16). In terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, this is a submission to cosmic truths and the facts of reality. “His personal ambitions being totally dissolved, he no longer tries to live but willingly relaxes to whatever may come to pass in him; he becomes, that is to say, an anonymous. The Law lives in him with his unreserved consent” (ibid, p.237). The Hero achieves “submission to the inevitables of destiny [...] No tribal rite has yet been recorded which attempts to keep winter from descending; on the contrary: the rites all prepare the community to endure, together with the rest of nature, the season of the terrible cold” (ibid, p.384). More generally, the Hero submits to the Ideal State, whatever it may be, by Transforming

themselves to align with the Ideal State. They submit to the Ideal State and thus benefit from its superiority.

The World Redeemer Hero “may precipitate a considerable crisis” from an untransformed perspective (Campbell, 1968, p.329). Myth will sometimes describe the World Redeemer Hero’s success as a kind of violent “crucifixion-resurrection” to emphasise that the Hero has gained “powers hitherto excluded from human life” (ibid, p.329). The Threshold protects the untransformed from the Ideal State and the effects they cannot handle. The World Redeemer Hero now embodies the Ideal State and, to the untransformed, they have become just as destructive as the Ideal State.

The World Redeemer Hero’s apotheosis, submission, and destructive power all parallel successful Individuation, especially when described in terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle. Individuation is an apotheosis because you identify yourself as the whole rather than a fraction. Before Individuation, you incorrectly believe you are your Ego, the centre of consciousness but a fraction of your Psyche (von Franz, 1978). To achieve Individuation, you must shift your sense of self from the Ego to your Self, the actual centre and entirety of who you are (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978).

To further illustrate this parallel, Campbell (1968) frequently describes the Dynamic Hero’s Journey as the Ego relinquishing control. The question of the Adventure is “can the ego put itself to death?” (ibid, p.109). Success means being “utterly free of such ego-consciousness” (ibid, p.350) “but this requires an abandonment of the attachment to ego itself, and that is what is difficult” (ibid, p.130). The Hero may fear “the powers that would destroy one’s ego centric system” (ibid, p.60) and resist the Adventure out of “an impulse to egocentric self-aggrandizement” (ibid, p.15). The Thief Hero fails to Transform because they are “holding onto and saving his ego” but the Hero who submit to the trials “loses it” (Campbell, 1968, p.216).

Individuation is a submission because Psychic unity means submitting to your “innate human nature” (von Franz, 1978, p.164). To achieve your full potential, you must acknowledge every part of your Psyche rather than favouring some and repressing others (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Henderson, 1978; Jacobi, 1968). Your unconscious must be integrated into your sense of self but it “can never be fully known” by your consciousness (Hockley, 2007, p.12). Your Ego, with its ability for reflection and comprehension, will want to control every part of the Psyche, including the unconscious (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Henderson, 1978; Jacobi, 1968; Storr, 1983; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). Only the Self can fully know the entire Psyche, and the Ego must surrender control (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978).

Individuation feels destructive because Individuation destroys your perception of the world and yourself. Your perception of the world and others was distorted by the projections from your repressed unconscious (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). When you assimilate your unconscious contents, those projections withdraw (Jacobi, 1968; Tacey, 2012). Your perception of yourself used to centre on your Ego and, even after unifying your Psyche, it is difficult for your Ego to relinquish control (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; Storr, 1983; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). Jung called this Ego Inflation. The Ego’s “spiritual arrogance” (Jacobi, 1968, p.127) will cause you to “[lose] all touch with human reality” (Tacey, 2012, p.234). This can only be resolved if the Ego surrenders to the Self but this realisation is shocking and painful (von Franz, 1978).

Individuation is a process of self-discovery (Jacobi, 1968) and Campbell (1968) describes the Dynamic Hero’s Journey as symbolic of discovering your full potential. “The mighty hero of extraordinary powers” (Campbell, 1968, p.365) represents us when we have achieved that full potential.

The godly powers sought and dangerously won are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time. [...] From this point of view the hero is symbolic of that

divine creative and redemptive image which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life. (Campbell, 1968, p.39)

In terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, the universe is always a unified whole even when divided. The Koran says “withersoever ye turn, there is the Presence of Allah”, a Gnostic aphorism says “split the stick [...] and there is Jesus”, and Hinduism says the creator is in everything but only “seen by subtle seers with superior, subtle intellect” (Campbell, 1968, p.145). Godly power is everywhere but, like images of god disguised as a beggar such as “Jove and Mercury at the home of Baucis and Philemon”, the reality goes “unrecognised” by limited humans (ibid). In paternalistic terms, the Hero was always “the king’s son” but has now “come to know who he is and therewith has entered into the exercise of his proper power” (ibid, p.39).

Some Heroes in stories embody the Ideal State without an Adventure of Transformation. Campbell’s (1968) examples include deities, such as Kali who is depicted “in her two aspects simultaneously, the terrible and the benign” (ibid, p.115), and perfect children born directly from the cosmic void or something symbolising the void, often a virgin womb (ibid, pp.309-310), such as Krishna the earthly incarnation of Vishnu (ibid, p.194). These Heroes embody particular Ideal States to their audiences, demonstrating what they should try to achieve themselves without explaining how to achieve it.

The Dynamic Hero’s Journey is a common pattern, not a set of instructions. “The whole sense of the ubiquitous myth of the hero’s passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women, wherever they may stand along the scale” (Campbell, 1968, p.121). Each person must compare themselves against the underlying Dynamic Hero’s Journey to identify their position, their problems, and their own path to solutions. “Who and where are his ogres? Those are the reflections of the unsolved enigmas of his own humanity. What are his ideals? Those are the symptoms of his grasp of life” (ibid, p.121). Similarly, we share common Psychic patterns but the contents of our Psyche and the way our environment shapes our Psyche are unique (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009;



Jacobi, 1968; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). Audiences may misinterpret myth as an exact guide towards enlightenment but a person cannot solve their own problems by copying someone else's solutions. Campbell (1968, p.319) argues perfect Heroes, such as Kali and Krishna, dissuade such imitations by presenting "a symbol to be contemplated rather than an example to be literally followed".

### **2.2.9 Return**

The divine world, where the Hero is exposed to Attractors and Repulsors, is a situation in which the Hero can Transform. Once they have Transformed, there is no reason to remain in the divine world. The Hero should Transform, attain the Ideal State, and leave the divine world and "return" with the Ideal State they achieved (Campbell, 1968, p.193). The divine world itself "is not the ultimate goal; it is a requisite step, but not the end" and once the Hero has Transformed "it is no longer necessary" (ibid, p.386). The Buddha meditated under the Bo Tree to achieve Nirvana but he did not remain there indefinitely.

Since the divine world is safe and easy after Transformation, the Hero may be tempted to stay. "Numerous indeed are the heroes fabled to have taken up residence forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess of Immortal Being" (Campbell, 1968, p.193) because "the bliss of the deep abode is not lightly abandoned in favour of the self-scattering of the wakened state" (ibid, p.207). Campbell describes the Hero's Journey as a form of self-annihilation and rebirth. Remaining in the divine world is like being destroyed without being reborn again. It is a kind of "nonmanifestation" (ibid, p.213), like the Cosmogonic Cycle remaining stagnant as the void and never shattering. The void is perfect and whole and contains infinite potential, but it remains only potential until the void breaks into form. "To withhold the seminal waters would be to annihilate" (ibid, p.146). In Hartman and Zimmeroff's (2009, p.25) words, "the treasure is only as valuable as what it is used for".

Campbell (1968) mostly describes this in terms of the Hero gaining godly power to help their community. The Hero ventured into a mysterious other world to gain some power unknown to their human community. The Hero must then “return from that abyss to the plane of contemporary life, there to serve as a human transformer of demiurgic potentials” and aid their community in a way mere humans cannot (ibid, p.320). If the Hero is tempted to remain in the other world rather than return, their community will continue to suffer. The Hero’s “return and reintegration with society” symbolises “the continuous circulation of spiritual energy into the world” in the Cosmogonic Cycle (ibid, p.36).

### **2.2.10 Retention**

The divine world assists and supports the Hero’s Transformation, like scaffolding. When the Hero leaves the divine world, they must remain Transformed and retain the Ideal State on their own. Repulsors previously affecting the Hero continue to exist and make the Flawed State desirable. Now the Hero must remain unaffected by them. This can be “the most difficult requirement of all” (Campbell, 1968, p.36).

Campbell (1968) mostly describes this challenge in terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle. There is a “common divorce of opportunism between the wisdom brought forth from the deep, and the prudence usually found to be effective in the light world” (ibid, p.217). The Transformed Hero has gone beyond that “peculiar blind spot” (ibid, p.147). Now comes the “supremely difficult threshold-crossing of the hero’s return from the mystic realm into the land of common day”, where “men who are fractions imagine themselves to be complete” and they are confronted with “the return blow of reasonable queries, hard resentments, and good people at a loss to comprehend” (ibid, p.216). No one else has transcended their human limitations, so the Hero is alone in their enlightenment. They may “discover themselves playing the idiot before a jury of sober eyes”, just “as dreams that were

momentous by night may seem simply silly in the light of day” (ibid, p.218). “The problem is to maintain this cosmic standpoint in the face of an immediate earthly pain or joy” (ibid, p.223).

Failing means de-Transforming and reverting back to the way they were before the Adventure. Fear of de-Transforming prompts some Heroes to remain in the divine world. For example, during a long sleep in the mountains, King Muchukunda realised his search for power and possessions had made him miserable. When he awoke, he found himself surrounded by people who also suffered from his former delusion. To prevent himself reverting back to his former misery, he returned to the mountains and “dedicated himself to the ascetic practices that should finally release him from his last attachment to the forms of being [...] And who shall say that his decision was altogether without reason?” (Campbell, 1968, pp.195-196).

To succeed, the Hero must maintain an “insulating” layer to protect what they have gained (Campbell, 1968, p.224), in the same way the Threshold protected “unqualified souls” from the divine world (ibid, p.217). There are ancient myths and rituals about insulating the “holiness, magical virtue, taboo, or whatever we may call that mysterious quality” carried by royal or sacred people to prevent it from being “discharged” and “drained away by contact with the earth” (ibid, pp.224-225). “And the myths [...] recount again and again the shocking transformations that take place when the insulation between a highly concentrated power centre and the lower power field of surrounding world is, without proper precautions, suddenly taken away” (ibid, p.225). Transformation is destructive, and so is de-Transformation.

Campbell (1968, p.347) describes a particular way a Hero, specifically the Supreme Hero, can lose their Ideal State through “a deterioration”. In terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, the Supreme Hero Transforms enough to represent the World Navel but not enough to be the World Navel themselves. As representative, the Supreme Hero can act as a teacher or emperor on the World Navel’s behalf but must recognise their subservience to the World Navel, the true source of power and subject of

worship. Problems arise when they mistakenly believe they themselves have power and are worshipped.

Campbell's (1968, pp.347-349) only example is Jemshid, who believed being a king made him as powerful as god. In Zoroastrian legend, the Creator was worshipped through the king Jemshid. He forgot his people were worshipping the Creator rather than him, declared himself the Creator, and as "Soon as these words had parted from his lips words / Impious, and insulting to high heaven, / His earthly grandeur faded" (ibid, p.348). The deteriorated Supreme Hero is in a Flawed State without realising it and they suffer the consequences.

### **2.2.11 Master**

The Hero who maintains their Transformation and the Ideal State is the "master of the two worlds" (Campbell, 1968, p.229f). The two worlds are the human world and divine world. They have accepted the divine's world's help and endured its challenges, Transformed, and achieved the Ideal State. They can also maintain their Transformation and their grasp on the Ideal State in the human world, without the divine world's support. In terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, the Hero has mastered "the paradox of the dual focus" (ibid, p.288). Despite being one of "the swiftly passing creatures", they can still access the World Navel's perfect perspective and see "the world is a majestic harmony of forms pouring into being, exploding, and dissolving" (ibid, p.288). These Heroes are "masters of the mystery" because they have "the full experience of the paradox of the two worlds in one" (ibid, p.230). They can "pass back and forth across the world division" without either world "contaminating" or "invalidating" the other (ibid, p.229). They are "the perfect knower of the Imperishable way" and are "ever happy with supreme bliss" (ibid, p.237). In general terms, the Hero's mastery of the Ideal State allows them to withstand every possible Repulsor without de-Transforming.

Being master of the two worlds is equivalent to achieving Individuation. Your Self is the centre and entirety of your Psyche, uniting and mastering both your consciousness and unconsciousness (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; Tacey, 2012; von Franz, 1978). When you identify with your Ego, you are only a fraction of yourself and suffer conflict among the Psychic contents your Ego cannot control. When you accept your Ego's lack of control and identify with your Self instead, you become the master of your conscious and unconscious (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968).

### **2.2.12 Repeat**

If the Hero remains Transformed, then they have the Ideal State and this particular Adventure is complete. If the Hero de-Transforms and loses their Ideal State, then they must re-enter the divine world and Transform again. In terms of the Cosmogonic Cycle, if the Hero fails to "maintain this cosmic standpoint" (Campbell, 1968, p.233) then "the balance of perfection is lost, the spirit falters, and the hero falls" (ibid, p.224).

Campbell (1968, p.217) says cosmic truths about reality will inevitably be lost because there is "a certain baffling inconsistency between the wisdom brought forth from the deep, and the prudence usually found to be effective in the light world". Heroes must seek enlightenment and aid their communities but these cosmic truths will eventually be "rationalised into nonentity" by limited human beings "and the need becomes great for another hero to refresh the world" (ibid, p.218). This reflects the endless cycle between its "manifest" and "nonmanifest condition" described in the Cosmogonic Cycle (ibid, p.259). Similarly, Individuation does not bring your unconscious contents into consciousness (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; von Franz, 1978). Your conscious qualities are favoured and encouraged by your environment and over time your unconscious qualities will recede again. Your conscious and unconscious can only remain united by repeating the

process of Individuation (Henderson, 1978). You must regularly return to your unconscious, on your own or with the help of myths.

### **2.2.13 Promotion**

The Ideal State determines the scope of the Hero's Journey. As Campbell (1968, p.15) explains:

The havoc wrought by him [i.e. the Hero in his Flawed State] is described in mythology and fairy tale as being universal throughout his domain. This may be no more than his household, his own tortured psyche, or the lives that he blights with the touch of his friendship and assistance; or it may amount to the extent of his civilisation.

Whatever the Hero achieves "is always scaled to his stature and to the nature of his dominant desire" according to "the requirements of a certain specific case" (Campbell, 1968, p.189). Campbell mostly describes the Hero's Journey in terms of grand truths about the Cosmogonic Cycle: "submission to the inevitables of destiny" (ibid, p.384), extinguishing the "Threefold Fire of Desire, Hostility, and Delusion" and thus achieving Nirvana (ibid, p.163), to "enlarge the pupil of the eye" and identify with the whole rather than the fraction (ibid, p.189). He argues these Ideal States can solve all human problems.

However, the Dynamic Hero's Journey is not limited to these grand truths. His examples range from small-scale fairy tales where the Hero "achieves a domestic, microcosmic triumph" to myths about "a world-historical, macrocosmic triumph" and range from Heroes who free themselves of "personal oppressors" to Heroes who cause the "regeneration of his society as a whole" or even "bring a message for the entire world" (Campbell, 1968, p.37-38). The Hero may achieve "longer years to live, weapons with which to slay his neighbours, or the health of his child" but anything less than "the boon of perfect illumination" will still leave them deficient (ibid, p.189).

After the Hero has achieved one Ideal State, they must move on to another. "As he crosses threshold after threshold, conquering dragon after dragon, the stature of the divinity that he summons to his highest wish increases, until it subsumes the cosmos" (Campbell, 1968, p.190). In

this way, the Dynamic Hero's Journey is an upward spiral. Campbell compares these repeated Hero's Journeys to the Hindu depiction of the afterlife: "When the lesson has been learned, [the soul] returns to the world, to prepare itself for the next degree of experience. Thus gradually it makes its way through all the levels of life-value until it has broken past the confines of the cosmic egg" (ibid, p.368).

## **2.3 Conclusion**

If the Linear Hero's Journey is a route directing a Hero from point to point, then the Dynamic Hero's Journey is a map. The Ideal State is at one side of the map and the Flawed State is at the other. This map lays out all possible positions between the two extremes and all the ways a Hero could travel between these points. This map is meaningful and prevalent because it parallels our own psychic landscape. Its challenges represent our divided psyche, the Ideal State defining its existence represents our universal need for psychic balance, and its rules represent the rules of human psychology. The Linear Hero's Journey proposes the most satisfying route for a single story. The Dynamic Hero's Journey has no singular, most satisfying path. Every path through the map is satisfying in its own way because the map reflects us, and the accurate depiction of our meaningful reality is satisfying.

Campbell constructed the Dynamic Hero's Journey by collecting and examining the myths, folk tales, fairy tales, and rituals enduring throughout history across cultures. To expand the Dynamic Hero's Journey as a tool for describing and analysing play experiences, I must collect and examine players' experiences.

## Chapter 3: Method

To investigate the Dynamic Hero's Journey in relation to player experiences, this study combines a textual analysis of the chosen games with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of player interviews.

### 3.1 Choosing Games

For practical reasons, I have restricted this project's scope to only two digital games: *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017). These games were chosen for several reasons: 1) to study successful cases; and 2) to compare games across generations; and 3) to provide new insight.

These games were chosen through an information-based selection process, rather than a randomised selection process. Randomised processes are useful for avoiding systematic biases in projects aiming to produce generalisable results (Flyvbjerg, 2006). A randomised process would select a sample of cases to represent most digital games but, as Ruggill and McAllister (2011) argue, most digital games are boring. It takes "an enormous amount of craft, talent, or luck" to make an enjoyable digital game (ibid, p.35). A randomly selected sample would reveal how the Dynamic Hero's Journey appears in most digital games but not successful or enjoyable games. The Linear Hero's Journey is known as an enjoyable and satisfying path to victory. This project aims to expand this understanding of the Hero's Journey by investigating and adjusting the Dynamic Hero's Journey to describe play experiences. This aim is better served by investigating how successful digital games support the Dynamic Hero's Journey.

Past research projects also show a preference for successful cases. Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum (2012, p.393) argue "develop[ing] the digital game into a richer narrative platform" requires



analysing “the most effective manifestations of narrative within exemplary games”. This is why they chose to study *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010), a game “highly regarded in both scholarly and vernacular communities” (ibid). Cassar (2013, p.83) employed similar reasoning when he chose to investigate narrative techniques in the *God of War* trilogy (Santa Monica Studio, 2005-2018), which “has sold more than 11.5 million units as of [2013]” and “are considered among the best the industry has to offer”. Projects such as this benefit from information-based processes, where cases are strategically chosen to maximise the information gained from a small sample (Flyvbjerg, 2006). I specifically chose what Flyvbjerg (ibid, p.230) calls “extreme cases”. Extreme cases “activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation [being] studied”, so they can be far more revealing than the typical or average case (ibid, p.229). Randomly selected representative samples would not provide the “kind of insight” produced from a small sample of extreme cases (ibid, p.229).

### **3.1.1 Popular**

I began this selection process by assessing popularity and critical success as reported in news and entertainment media, specifically through the compiled lists of “best games”. There are other possible ways to gauge a game’s popularity, such as review scores and unit sales, but these were less suitable for the project. A review score is decided soon after playing a game, while the memories are fresh. The reviewer may forget even a highly scored game years, months, or even weeks later. When comparing scores designated at different times, it is possible for the reviewer themselves to be surprised by the final ranking order. Unit sales can also be misleading since they only indicate the number of times a game was purchased, not whether they were enjoyed, finished, or even played at all.

I decided to use “best games” lists because each game’s place on a list is a conscious decision made by the authors. Authors needed to reflect on their play experiences when constructing these lists and then explain those choices to readers, and even to their co-authors. This

subjective, reflective, and iterative process is evident in many of these lists. Some authors explain their decision-making process (e.g. *The 100 best video games of all time*, 2015) or make light of the lack of scientific evidence behind their choices (e.g. Levy & Smith, 2014; Summer, 2016). Games appear on “best games” lists when they leave a lasting, positive impression on the authors. This is similar to my interviews with participants, where I ask them to describe significant and meaningful experiences. In conclusion, considering the research question, the data to be collected from participants, and the phenomenological basis of the project, choosing games based on their prominence on “best games” lists seemed most appropriate.

I conducted two types of Google searches in January 2017. First was a series of Google searches for various versions of the phrase “top digital video game”.<sup>1</sup> For convenience, I only considered results within the first 10 pages of search results. Second was a targeted search of 25 websites specifically about digital games, as recommended by articles published on MakeUseOf (Basu, 2010), Complex (Rougeau, 2011), Top Tenz (Harris, 2011), and eBizMBA (*Top 15 most popular video game websites*, 2016).<sup>2</sup> This targeted search involved searching for “top digital video game” plus the website’s name (and repeated with similar phrases). For example, “top digital video game + gamesradar.com”. I used the Google search engine instead of each website’s search feature because some websites did not have a search feature and Google search would be more consistent across websites. These searches produced 14 all-time lists (e.g. *The 100 best video games of all time*, 2015) and 14 year-specific lists (e.g. *The 10 best games of 2015* by Biggs, 2015). I included both all-time lists and year-specific lists because some websites published year-specific lists and no all-time lists.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Other phrases included “top best digital video game of all time”, “top best digital video game videogame of all time”, “top best digital video game videogame ever”, “best top digital video game list”, “best videogame of all time list”, and “top best digital video game list”.

<sup>2</sup> For more information about how these websites were selected, see Appendix 1: Games-related websites.

<sup>3</sup> For more information about these 28 lists, see Appendix 2: Best games lists.

The number of games on each list ranged from 5 to 100, always in ranked order. For efficiency, only the top 20 games on each list were collected. I compiled the top 20 games on each of the 28 lists into an excel document to produce a longlist of 250 different games. I weighted each game equally, regardless of its specific ranked position from #1 to #20. Some games appeared on multiple lists. The ten most frequently appearing games were collected into a shortlist.

Following is a shortlist of the ten most frequently appearing games, with the number of lists on which they appeared in parentheses:

- *Half-Life 2* (Valve, 2004) (13 lists)
- *Portal 2* (Valve, 2011) (8 lists)
- The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (Nintendo EAD, 1998) (8 lists)
- *BioShock* (2K Boston & 2K Australia, 2007) (7 lists)
- *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo EAD, 1985) (7 lists)
- *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar San Diego, 2010) (7 lists)
- *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010) (6 lists)
- *Portal* (Valve, 2007) (6 lists)
- *Super Mario World* (Nintendo EAD, 1990) (6 lists)
- *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) (6 lists)

These ten games (4% of the longlist) all appeared on at least 6 of the 28 lists. In contrast, 67.6% of games appeared on only one list and 80.4% appeared on less than three lists.

Most of the games on this short list are categorised on Metacritic and Wikipedia as Action or Adventure. These genres, more than others, tend to involve richer narratives and story worlds (Carlquist, 2002; Ip, 2011a). Even *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo EAD, 1985) and *Super Mario World* (Nintendo EAD, 1990), classified as Platform games rather than Action or Adventure, provide what Fuller and Jenkins (1995) call *travel narratives*, about the exploration of space and atmosphere

rather than plot, characters, or overarching goals. The longlist also included games with less narrative emphasis, such as *Asteroids* (Atari Inc., 1979) (1 list), *Space Invaders* (Taito, 1979) (2 lists), *Super Mario Maker* (Nintendo EAD, 2015) (3 lists), and *Tetris* (Pajitnov & Pokhilko, 1988) (4 lists). Despite this range of narrative content across the longlist, the games with the greatest consensus tended to have greater narrative emphasis.

My selection process was not designed to prioritise games with greater narrative content. As I discussed in Chapter 1: Literature Review, players construct narratives to make sense of their play experiences regardless of the designers' narrative intentions. However, considering the increasing importance of narrative in digital games, as I also discussed in Chapter 1: Literature Review, the overrepresentation of explicit narrative in the shortlist is perhaps unsurprising. Following from arguments about the emotional effectiveness of narratives (e.g. Holland, Jenkins, & Squire, 2003) and comparisons between digital games with and without narrative (e.g. Prestopnik & Tang, 2015), we should expect games with richer narrative content to be more memorable.

Although I argue all games can be studied as narrative via their players, the nature of the game affects the way those narratives form and the way those narratives can be investigated. The shortlisted games provide characters, dialogue, worlds, and unfolding plots to aid the player's natural inclination to construct narratives. Pearce (2004) calls this the *game's metastory operator*. The narrative each player constructs will result from their own choices, skills, desires, interpretations, and existing knowledge but the *metastory operator* is a common denominator across all players.

While playing *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998), you may fondly explore Kokiri Forest and speak with every Kokiri before leaving to fulfil the Deku Tree's request while I leave Link's childhood village as soon as possible without speaking to anyone. Our feelings and actions were different but we were both in the same Kokiri Forest with the same ponds, dirt

paths, tree stump houses, green-clad children, and glowing fairies. Any player asked about their experiences in Kokiri Forest is unlikely to describe it as a dilapidated science facility, an underwater city, or the Wild West.

When a game does not provide a detailed *metastory operator* (Pearce, 2004), such as *Tetris* (Pajitnov & Pokhilko, 1988) with its mathematically precise playing field and unexplained falling tetriminos or *Asteroids* (Atari Inc., 1979) with its simple sci-fi premise, its players will have less narrative context to guide their experience. It is difficult to interpret Kokiri Forest as anything other than a magical forest, but *Tetris* could be interpreted as building a wall, arranging boxes in a warehouse, or a metaphor for managing a steady and relentless stream of tasks.

Not all games have *metastory operators* but Pearce (2004) argues all games involve *experiential narrative operators* and *augmentary narrative operators*. *Experiential narratives* emerge from “the inherent ‘conflict’ of the game as it is played” (ibid). *Augmentary narrative operators* are the “layers of information” (ibid) surrounding the game. The player’s *experiential narratives* are enhanced by these *augmentary narrative operators*. If I play *Tetris* (Pajitnov & Pokhilko, 1988) and lose in ten minutes, the experience will have a different meaning if all my previous sessions lasted less than one minute compared to if my previous five sessions lasted over thirty minutes. In the former situation ten minutes is an improvement, and in the latter situation ten minutes is a significant decline. *Experiential narratives* also contribute to the larger ongoing narrative surrounding the game, adding to what Crawford, Muriel, and Conway (2019, p.13, emphasis in original) call “the *experience pool* of everyday life”. A one-minute session of *Tetris* is an *experiential narrative* during play but it is also part of the larger ongoing narrative of my *Tetris* experience and becomes an *augmentary narrative operator* for my ten-minute session later.

If the shortlist included games without or with very little *metastory* (Pearce, 2004), I would have investigated the *experiential narratives* and *augmentary narratives* (ibid) by designing my

approach following Buchanan-Oliver and Seo's (2012) study of narrative in *Warcraft III* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2002). To investigate the meaning behind players' actions and decisions, Buchanan-Oliver and Seo asked participants to play a match against the computer, recorded the match, and then used the recordings as stimuli during their interviews. They asked each participant "to comment on the events shown on the replay, the meanings of the actions that consumers performed, and their motivation to perform those actions" (ibid, p.426). Since the games selected for my project provided rich narrative content, I did not need stimuli to remind participants of the game nor a live play session to produce narratives for them to discuss.

### **3.1.2 Less studied**

These ten games received comparable consensus across the list-makers, at least compared to the vast majority of other games on the longlist. To further differentiate these games, I compared the number of times each of the ten games was referenced in research papers. In January 2017, I conducted four Google Scholar searches for each game. First by title plus the word "game", second by title and year and "game", third by title and publisher and "game", and finally by title and year and publisher and "game". I argue the number of search results will roughly reflect the academic attention each game has received relative to one another.

*Portal* (Valve, 2007) returned by far the most results, ranging from 3,380 to 83,000 (ignoring the title only search, which returned a misleadingly high result of 142,000 due to other uses of the word "portal"). *Half-Life 2* (Valve, 2004) returned 1,200 to 2,710 results. *Portal 2* (Valve, 2011) returned 374 to 1,150 results. *BioShock* (2K Boston & 2K Australia, 2007) returned 595 to 2,190 results. *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo EAD, 1985) returned 0 to 4,410. *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar San Diego, 2010) returned 293 to 615 results. *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010) returned 144 to 562 results. *Super Mario World* (Nintendo EAD, 1990) returned 326 to 668 results. *The Last Of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) returned 246 to 1,140 results (also omitting the title only search which, as with

“portal”, is not an uncommon phrase). *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*’s (Nintendo EAD, 1998) Google Scholar results range from 0 to 534, which were among the lowest results of the ten games in the shortlist.<sup>4</sup>

Google Scholar does not access all academic work so even returning zero search results does not necessarily mean *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) is under-researched. However, considering its frequent appearance across the 28 lists (even among these shortlisted games) and its comparatively low search results despite being one of the oldest games on the shortlist (with far more time for research to emerge compared to more recent games such as *Mass Effect 2* [BioWare, 2010], which returned similarly low results, or *The Last Of Us* [Naughty Dog, 2013], which returned even more results) I concluded *Ocarina of Time* was most appropriate for this study.

### 3.1.3 Comparing generations

*The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) is part of a long running franchise, dating back to 1986 and continuing today with *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*’s (Nintendo EPD, 2017) upcoming sequel (see McWhertor, 2019; St Ledger & Hood, 2020). I conducted a short investigation into lists ranking the Zelda franchise games to compare *Ocarina Of Time*’s critical and cultural reception against the others. I found 15 lists across 13 sources.<sup>5</sup> *Ocarina of Time* was ranked within the top 7 of the 19 total games (#1 four times, #2 five times, #3 three times, #5 once, and #6 once).<sup>6</sup> *Ocarina Of Time*’s rank was rivalled only by *The Legend of Zelda: Majora’s Mask* (Nintendo EAD, 2000) and only beaten by *The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past* (Nintendo EAD, 1991).

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about these Google Scholar results, see Appendix 3: Google Scholar searches.

<sup>5</sup> For the full list of sources, see Appendix 4: Zelda franchise analysis.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on this investigation, including charts illustrating each game’s ranked order, see Appendix 4: Zelda franchise analysis.

Despite the high degree of consensus across these Zelda-specific lists, *A Link To The Past* appeared on 5 “best games” lists and *Majora’s Mask* only appeared on 1, both significantly lower than *Ocarina’s of Time’s* 8 lists (beaten only by *Half-Life 2* [Valve, 2004] and tying with *Portal 2* [Valve, 2011]).

These lists were published before *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) was released. To compensate for its absence, I used reviews of *Breath of the Wild* to gauge its public reception. I read 14 reviews across 8 websites (Andriessen, 2017; Castle, 2017; Gies, 2017; Good, 2017; Hamilton, 2017; Highfield, 2017; Kollar, 2017; Otero, 2017; Schreier, 2017b; Sheridan, 2017; Spendelow, 2017; Sterling, 2017; Tassi, 2017a,b). Across these reviews I found a general consensus around gameplay (although some disagreement over weapon durability) and praise for the vast and alive world that rewarded exploration.

Reviewers were divided on *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild’s* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) story. Some called it the same standard story common to most Zelda games, including *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) (e.g. Andriessen, 2017; Castle, 2017; Sterling, 2017). Others said it tells a new story and even wrote their reviews to avoid spoilers (e.g. Gies, 2017; Highfield, 2017; Otero, 2017; Schreier, 2017). After playing the games myself, I found the stories of both *Ocarina of Time* and *Breath of the Wild* follow a similar progression: Hyrule experiences a golden age but descends into a comparative dark age where Ganon is a threat. Link and Zelda learn about Ganon and work to defeat him. During this planning phase, Link befriends and is helped by various people. Their initial plan fails and Ganon takes over Hyrule. Link disappears for a time while Zelda works to delay Ganon. Link returns and Zelda guides him through a new plan. During this new plan, Link must rescue the friends who helped him earlier, who are now imprisoned due to Ganon. Link, Zelda, and their friends implement their new plan and defeat Ganon. Ganon is sealed away but



Hyrule is still devastated. Zelda implies the resultant peace will not last but she will work to restore Hyrule.

Many reviewers also described *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) as the next big leap for the Zelda franchise (e.g. Andriessen, 2017; Castle, 2017; Gies, 2017; Highfield, 2017; Otero, 2017; Spendelow, 2017). They argue the franchise has recently become predictable and stagnant but *Breath of the Wild* broke away from the standard template and revitalised the series. In the 15 lists ranking Zelda games, only two other games were consistently described as an impactful leap forward in design for both the Zelda franchise and digital games as a whole: *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo EAD, 1986), the very first game in the franchise, and *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998). *Ocarina of Time* was variously described as a big step forward for the franchise (Morales, Dornbush, & Franich, 2016; *What's The Greatest Legend of Zelda Game Ever?*, 2016), a new standard for the franchise and the entire genre (Masters, 2017; Schreier, 2017a), and one of the most significant and influential games ever made (T. Brown, 2015; Shea, 2017).

*The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) are both critically acclaimed, tell similar stories, are similarly significant for the Zelda franchise, and have a relative lack of academic attention. These qualities make them ideal for this study.

## 3.2 Textual Analysis

Aarseth (2003) says there are three general avenues for understanding a game: studying the game's mechanics, studying other people playing the game, and playing the game yourself. Aarseth argues researchers gain the best information by playing games themselves. If you have not personally experienced a game, then you risk misunderstanding. For example, the difference between a

functional element and a decorative element may only become apparent during play. Nelson (2016) also argues deniable meanings (meanings a player may draw) and undeniable meanings (meanings a player must acknowledge to play the game) can only be distinguished through personal experience. Similarly, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues researchers must experience something to understand it.

This level of familiarity is necessary to understand and appreciate a player's description of their experiences. According to Lowood (2006a) and Crawford (2017), intimate knowledge of a game is a prerequisite for understanding fan creations. Knowledge of "the Upper Black Rock Spire" and "the legendary Onyxia quest" in *World Of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) is necessary to appreciate the effort wasted by Leeroy's "incompetent performance" in the "Leeroy Jenkins" video created by the Pals for Life guild (Lowood, 2006a, p.372). Familiarity with *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask's* (Nintendo EAD, 2000) typical and well-known glitches is necessary to experience the uncanny horror described in the fan fiction "BEN Drowned" (Crawford, 2017). Playing *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) myself, discussing them with others, and reading reviews, walkthroughs, and forums provided me with the necessary familiarity to understand my participants' accounts during the interview process.

Aarseth (2003) says the ideal way to study games is to play them, since different degrees of skill and knowledge lead to different experiences and access to different information. For example, in his study of landscapes in digital games, Nelson's (2016) early experiences of playing as an amateur and his later more skilful play resulted in very different experiences. As an amateur, he used the landscape's representational specifics for "survival tips" (ibid, p.2), such as finding objects to hide behind. As a skilled competitor, he could experience the spaces the game's landscape represented, such as the rural American setting invoked by the inclusion of oak trees (ibid, pp.7-8). Although researchers should ideally reach the level of *expert* or *innovative* play, the time and energy

this requires is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in most research projects (Aarseth, 2003).

However, secondary resources can supplement personal play experience. For example, Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum (2012) used walkthroughs to complete *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010) quickly and stay on track and Cassar (2013) used walkthroughs to check for inaccuracies and missed information in the God of War trilogy (Santa Monica Studios, 2005-2010).

It is relatively simple to become familiar with *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998). The game was published twenty years ago and has been thoroughly documented in 100% completion walkthroughs, guides, and recordings readily available online. Additionally, the game is largely linear so most of the game must be experienced to reach the end. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) is more difficult both because it was so recently released and because it reportedly has one of the largest game worlds to date (e.g. Andriessen, 2017; Castle, 2017; Gies, 2017; Highfield, 2017). I could not learn or experience every part of *Breath of the Wild* before interviewing participants. However, I did prepare for the interviews by becoming familiar with the parts of the game players are explicitly encouraged to experience. Additionally, while analysing the results after the interviews, I was able to access resources online (such as guides and walkthroughs) and check the game myself to clarify points of confusion.

### **3.2.1 Playing *Ocarina of Time***

I played *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) from the game's beginning through to the end credits. My personal experience was supplemented with paratexts including a walkthrough on ZeldaDungeon.net (*Ocarina of Time Walkthrough*, n.d.), the game's script found on NeoSeeker (TheSinnerChrono, 2008), and a 100% completion walkthrough on YouTube (batman9502, 2010-2011).

I used the walkthrough in three ways. Firstly, to identify which actions lead to progress. This allowed me to explore freely without fear of triggering the game to move forward and making parts

of the game inaccessible. This was not a serious concern since access to the gameworld increases as the player progresses and nothing becomes permanently inaccessible unless it has been completed. For example, you can complete the quest to get Biggoron's Sword any time after leaving the Temple of Time with the Master Sword but you can only complete this quest once. Secondly, I used walkthroughs to fill in gaps I missed while playing. I tried exploring the game as much as possible but sometimes it wasn't feasible to find everything (e.g. I wasn't able to find all the Pieces of Heart) or I lacked the skill to access something (e.g. I could not win the fourth bottle). The walkthrough made me aware of the things I could not personally experience. Third and finally, the walkthrough provided extra details about the game I may not have discovered for myself. For example, the length of time Link can spend in the heat of the Death Mountain Crater without the Goron Tunic is proportionate to your number of Heart Containers.

I used batman9502's YouTube videos in two ways. Firstly, I used them to confirm my memory of the game, especially cutscenes that only happen once. This allowed me to take more detailed notes than I could while playing myself. Secondly, I used them to see the parts of the game I did not personally experience. For example, I watched him fight all ten Big Poes in Hyrule Field and trade them for the fourth bottle.

I used TheSinnerChrono's (2008) game script as a quick reference for game dialogue. It was easier to re-read for clarification and to search through for specific dialogue than it would be to search through videos or replay the game myself. For example, while playing I noticed the Deku Tree introduced himself as "the Deku Tree" at the beginning of the game but the Kokiri always referred to him as "the Great Deku Tree". A word search through the game script confirmed this. I wanted to check this because I suspected it was a subtle design choice intended to convey the level of respect the Kokiri hold towards the Deku Tree without explicitly stating it.

I also searched online for forums and videos to resolve other questions as they arose while playing. For example, from personal experience, I knew Din's Fire is necessary to enter the Shadow Temple and I knew Din's Fire is acquired from a Great Fairy. I did not know what design elements would lead a new player to this conclusion, so I found an online forum discussing this topic (farizle, 2013).

Using walkthroughs, YouTube videos, the game script, and forums also made me aware of alternate approaches to achieving goals. For example, according to the game script, you can bribe the guard outside Hyrule Castle to open the gate for you instead of sneaking around the gate.

### **3.2.2 Playing *Breath of the Wild***

*The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) is not a linear game with a definitive path from beginning to end. There is a final fight leading to a final scene and the end credits, but there is also an extensive number of optional activities and experiences. I could not complete every part of the game myself, so I decided to complete the parts of the game most players were likely to experience, familiarise myself with the general layout of the map, and upgrade the player character as far as possible in the time available so I could maximise my access to the game world.

I expedited this process with an interactive map on [ZeldaDungeon.net](http://ZeldaDungeon.net) (*Breath of the Wild Interactive Map*, n.d.) and a 100% completion walkthrough on YouTube (AwesomeFaceProd, 2017). I used the interactive map to navigate the world and identify unexplored areas and missed details. I used AwesomeFaceProd's YouTube videos to re-watch scenes and events that only happen once in the game and to see parts of the game I did not, and often could not, experience.

At the time of playing, I could not find any transcripts for the game, even for the scenes most players would experience. For my records and easy reference, while playing and reviewing AwesomeFaceProd's videos I documented the dialogue, general scene descriptions, location, and

time in the game for cutscenes and conversations. I prioritised major scenes (such as the conversations with the Old Man on the Great Plateau), then the parts of the game connected with increased hyper-ludicity (such as finding the optional character Hestu who increases the player's inventory), and continued adding any prominent or recurring information (such as the small groups of travellers who are constantly in need of rescue). This document proved extremely useful when double checking details. For example, participants would often describe their interaction with characters but not be able to remember the characters' names. This document made it very easy to identify these characters and the times and locations where the participants probably encountered them.

During the transcription and analysis processes, further textual analysis and use of paratextual materials was necessary to confirm information raised by participants, sometimes unexpectedly. I used AwesomeFaceProd's videos to re-watch scenes or particular events, such as participants' accounts of the first scenes in the game. I also used online searches to find further information on topics I neither experienced nor expected. For example, Elliott recounted deflecting Guardian lasers with their shield, something I did not know was possible. I later found YouTube videos demonstrating it and then repeated it myself.

### **3.2.3 Game overviews**

In *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998), you play as Link as he works with Princess Zelda to defeat Ganondorf the king of the thieves. In the first half of the game, Zelda and Link as children plot to take the Triforce, a magical artefact, before Ganondorf. Link travels across the fantasy land of Hyrule gathering the three Spiritual Stones needed to unlock the Door of Time protecting the Triforce in the Sacred Realm. Due to Zelda and Link's misunderstanding of the Triforce, their plan backfires. Ganondorf takes the Triforce first and takes over Hyrule Castle. Zelda flees and Link is trapped in the Sacred Realm. In the second half of the game, seven years later, Link and Zelda

as adults travel across the devastated and corrupted Hyrule to find the five temples and awaken the five remaining Sages. Together, Link as the Hero of Time chosen by the Master Sword, Zelda as the leader of the Sages, and the Sages use their combined magic to imprison Ganondorf.

*Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) is a third-person perspective 3d video game. The player controls the character Link to travel between villages, navigate mazes, and use an increasing arsenal of equipment to solve spatial puzzles and fight monsters. *Ocarina of Time* is a largely linear game. The story about saving Hyrule from Ganondorf is a tightly controlled succession of challenges and items with very little room for variance. The player is initially restricted to one village but, as challenges are completed and items acquired, this access expands until every part of Hyrule is accessible. Additional side quests are made available as the main story progresses, providing optional items and additional challenges.

In *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017), you play as Link in a post-apocalyptic Hyrule after the amorphous cloud of malice called Calamity Ganon destroyed Hyrule Castle, killed the royal family, and dissolved the kingdom. The game begins with Link waking up with no memories and no possessions except a mechanical tablet called the Sheikah Slate. The ghost of the last king of Hyrule explains that, throughout history, whenever Calamity Ganon rises it is supposed to be defeated by the Princess born with magic powers and the Knight wielding the Master Sword. The last time this happened, when Link was the Knight, they failed, lost control of their mechanical army, and their four Champion pilots died. Link almost died, but Zelda sent him to a regenerative sleep and kept Calamity Ganon trapped in the ruins of Hyrule Castle. One hundred years later, Calamity Ganon's evil influence continues to plague Hyrule with monsters and it will soon break free. Link must regain his strength and finally defeat Calamity Ganon.

The player controls *Breath of the Wild's* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) Link in the same way as *Ocarina of Time's* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) Link: a third-person perspective in a 3d game world.

Similarly, *Breath of the Wild*'s Link primarily engages with the world through combat and solving spatial puzzles, but with a smaller (and less contextually dependent) arsenal and an increased range of movement (including climbing on almost any surface and paragliding down from any height).

*Breath of the Wild* is much less linear and constrained than *Ocarina of Time*. The player is given some direction (such as the King sending Link to Impa, who then sends Link to Hateno Village), but conversations, scenes, quests, and items are modular and accessible in almost any order. Only a few events must be completed in a specific sequence (such as the requirements for entering a Divine Beast and freeing the trapped Champions). Experiencing more of the game provides greater narrative context for the world, restores more of Link's memories, and rewards the player with greater *hyper-ludicity*, but this is not necessary to complete the game.

The game ends when the player defeats Calamity Ganon. A player can trigger this final fight by reaching Hyrule Castle's throne room and there are very few prerequisites. Access to Hyrule is blocked by difficulty, rather than invisible walls and plot progression. Environmental hazards (such as extreme cold) and dangerous monsters (with high Health Points and strong weapons) hinder movement, but the difficulty decreases as the player's knowledge and Link's abilities increase. The player can increase Link's Health Points, Stamina, defences, and offensive capabilities by gathering resources, either by completing challenges (such as getting Climbing Boots as a reward for solving a puzzle) or by scavenging them from the environment (such as by picking apples from a tree or taking weapons from defeated enemies). Link becomes stronger as the player completes more of the game's 50+ hours of content, but a player can potentially reach and beat Calamity Ganon in less than an hour (as many speedrunners have demonstrated).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See [www.speedrun.com/botw](http://www.speedrun.com/botw) for speedrun records.



Although these games are set in a fantasy world and neither is explicitly about colonialism, colonial ideologies and cultural stereotypes underscore the stories, designs, and systems in these games, as is the case with many video games (Mukherjee & Hammar, 2018). The player is positioned as a white-passing saviour with superior technology and knowledge exerting control over the land and other people, all recognisable characteristics of colonialism (Borit, Borit, & Olsen, 2018). In Kimball's (2018) ideological critique of *Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998), the author argues the Hylians, who are depicted as the dominant and superior race in Hyrule above the other indigenous races, are designed with Western European iconography, most notably in their physical appearance, clothing, and architecture. In contrast, the antagonist Ganondorf and his race, the thieving and kidnapping Gerudo, are designed with stereotypically Middle Eastern iconography. Furthermore, the European-coded royal family, who are inherently magical and have secret knowledge, must govern the other races in Hyrule to ensure peace. Before the royal family unified Hyrule, there was war. When the royal family is overthrown and replaced by a non-Hylian, Hyrule is devastated and overrun with monsters.

Many of these details carry over into *Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017): Hyrule Castle's Western European architecture, the white-passing royal family (although Hylians in general are designed with greater ethnic diversity and the Sheikah culture in particular is designed with Japanese iconography), without the royal family Hyrule is in ruins and plagued with monsters, Hylians are the dominant race (with more villages and settlements) while the other races have only one village each, the Hylian Princess and the Hylian Knight are the only ones who can save Hyrule while the Champions (of the non-Hylian races) can only serve as support. However, as far as I am aware, *Breath of the Wild* has not yet been systematically critiqued in the way Kimball (2018) critiqued *Ocarina of Time*. Examining the ideologies in *Ocarina of Time* and *Breath of the Wild* is outside the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to acknowledge the colonialism and

cultural stereotypes underpinning the game worlds I am using to analyse the Dynamic Hero's Journey.

### 3.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

#### 3.3.1 Players as case studies

According to Flyvbjerg (2006), universalities and predictive theories are impossible to identify in phenomena as complex and context-dependent as human affairs. Instead, the most appropriate way to study human affairs is to gather concrete, detailed, nuanced information. Similarly, Aarseth (2003, p.7) says "critical observations can contribute more to the field [of games] than a learned but theory-centred discussion". The case study approach is particularly effective at gathering this kind of data (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Many digital games researchers use their own experiences or witnessed experiences as case studies (Consalvo, 2003). Some studies are inspired by the researchers' own personal experiences, such as A. Brown and Marklund's (2015) study of horror experiences in *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* (Nintendo EAD, 2013) and Cragoe's (2016) study into live role-playing games and mythic narratives. Other studies collect data from the researchers' own experiences, such as Cassar's (2013) study of the God of War trilogy (Santa Monica Studio, 2005-2018) and Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum's (2012) study of narrative in *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010).

However, a researcher's professional reasons for playing the games being studied can skew the data they collect. In reference to Bartle's (1996) four player types, Aarseth (2003, p.4) points out a researcher who played as an *Explorer* would find the game's weaknesses and bugs but a researcher who played as a *Socialiser* would probably have ignored those elements and an *Achiever* would have "a moral dilemma" about exploiting them. As Ruggill and McAllister (2011, p.32) point out, reviewers

and researchers play games for their job but, when played for entertainment purposes, a game must “entice, encourage, and especially coerce players into active engagement, and engagement in the right ways”. A researcher who plays a game to learn about it and understand it may be oblivious to all the ways players are convinced to play (or all the ways the game fails to be convincing).

Recruiting participants and then assigning them games to play, such as R.M. Ryan, Rigby, and Przybylski’s (2006) study of basic needs satisfaction and Mallon and Webb’s (2005) study of narrative experiences in games, prevents the researcher’s own biases from influencing the play experience and also maintains control over the play conditions. However, this “mandatory exposure” skews results by demanding participants play games they did not choose in an unfamiliar environment (R.M. Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006, p.354).

To avoid personal and research-based biases, the current study chose the games beforehand and recruited “regular players” (R.M. Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006, p.361) who had prior experience with those games. Participants were interviewed about their own past play experiences, similar to Consalvo’s (2007) study of cheating behaviours, Buchanan-Oliver and Seo’s (2012) study of narratives formed when playing *Warcraft III* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2002), and Oliver, Bowman, Woolley, Rogers, Sherrick, and Chung’s (2015) investigation of eudaimonic and hedonistic experiences in digital games.

### **3.3.2 Introduction to IPA**

The importance of player experience to my research question leads me to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA was developed in 1996 by Jonathan Smith as a way of describing and interpreting people’s experiences and how they make sense of those experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015). It is “a qualitative method of data collection and analysis” (Murray & Rhodes, 2005, p.118) combining “rich descriptions” and “the more speculative development of an interpretative account” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.117).

IPA is “exploratory rather than explanatory” (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.103), intended for broad and general investigations of a topic rather than for testing specific hypotheses (Langdrige, 2007; Smith, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Participants’ experiences are used to provide “renewed insight” into a topic, to reveal what the topic is like and how it works, rather than its causes (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.117). IPA is best used to investigate how people experience, understand, and make sense of the world around them (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006), particularly the experience of complex, ambiguous, novel, or new processes (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

IPA is effective for both “hot cognition” topics and topics involving “cool reflection”, but the more immediately and existentially important the topic is to the participant, the “fuller and richer [the] analysis” will be (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.74). Above all, the topic under investigation must “*matter* to the participant” and be directly relevant to their lives (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.103, emphasis in original). “Experience” is a broad term, but for the purposes of IPA anything can become “an experience” when it is important to the person who experiences it (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.73). Since the current study is an exploratory investigation of how players personally experience the Dynamic Hero’s Journey while playing digital games, IPA was considered an appropriate approach.

### **3.3.3 Rigour and validity**

Rigour and validity are subjects of concern in all qualitative research, particularly IPA since it is a relatively new approach and lacks universal standards for quality assessment (Smith, 2011). IPA is not itself a “distinct method” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.104) nor is there a “single, definitive way to do IPA” (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.25). IPA is based on the theoretical touchstones of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography and has developed gradually through practice (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Various authors state IPA is a flexible approach (e.g. Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Researchers must adapt it to suit their way of working and to the particular topic under investigation. In this way, IPA is more of “a ‘stance’ or perspective from which to approach the task of qualitative data analysis” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.104). This flexibility means IPA can be adapted to suit a wide range of topics and researchers’ methods (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2015) but it also makes IPA more difficult to carry out than other more clearly defined approaches. Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006, p.103) even warned this flexibility and lack of definitive guidelines makes IPA a difficult approach to do well compared to other qualitative approaches with more “prescription and epistemological certainty” (ibid), especially for a novice researcher.

In light of these concerns, my use of IPA was guided by underlying theory, practical advice, and past research. My understanding of IPA was based on the three theoretical touchstones of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. My research design was guided by advice and instructions from Langdridge (2007), Larkin and Thompson (2012), Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006), Smith (1995, 1999, 2011), Smith, Jarman, and Osborn (1999), Smith and Osborn (2015), and Smith and Shinebourne (2012). This advice was further supplemented with the specific research designs of previous IPA studies including Bramley and Eatough’s (2005) study of Parkinson’s Disease; Budak, Larkin, Harris, and Blissett’s (2015) study of mothers’ experience of stillbirth; Dickson, Knussen, and Flowers’s (2007) study of chronic fatigue syndrome; Eatough and Smith’s (2008) study of women’s experience of anger and anger resolution; Murray and Rhodes’s (2005) study of adult visible acne; Patel, Tarrant, Bonas, and Shaw’s (2015) study of medical students’ experiences of failure; and Reynolds, Vivat, and Prior’s (2011) study of art-making’s impact on the experience of arthritis.

### **3.3.4 Theoretical touchstones**

Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography are the “three primary theoretical touchstones” of IPA (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.73).

#### ***3.3.4.1 Phenomenology***

Phenomenology is “the philosophical movement concerned with lived experiences” (Smith, 2011, p.9). The term “lifeworld” refers to “the world as concretely lived” and is “the foundation for all phenomenological psychological investigation” (Langdrige, 2007, p.23). Simply, all meaning is founded upon relations and contexts: linguistic, historical, social, and so on. Due to these phenomenological roots, IPA focuses on the lifeworld and involves a “detailed examination of personal lived experiences, the meaning of experience to participants, and how participants make sense of those experiences” (Smith, 2011, p.9). This “emphasis on experiential claims and concerns of the person taking part in the study” is a distinguishing characteristic of IPA, separating it from other qualitative analyses (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.104).

Although IPA is used to investigate the experience of a particular topic, the topic itself is less important than the experience it created (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). IPA is not concerned with “collecting facts” (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.104) and constructing an “objective statement of the object or event” (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999, p.218). Instead, IPA investigates the participant’s “view of the topic” (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999, p.218), how they “make sense” of the topic (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.27), and their particular circumstances that “constitute and define the experience” of the topic (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.111). In other words, the participant is the researcher’s subject-matter, not the topic they experienced. It’s a matter of “how things are understood” rather than “what happened” (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.112).

### 3.3.4.2 *Hermeneutics*

According to phenomenology, we experience the world through our “natural attitude”, comprising all our “taken-for-granted assumptions” and “preconceived ideas” (Langdridge, 2007, p.17). Our experience of reality is “an intellectual construction” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.107).

However, without critical awareness of our natural attitude and the way it shapes our experiences, we might naïvely assume we are experiencing an objective reality, a “single truth” experienced in the same way by everyone (Langdridge, 2007, p.26). There is disagreement among phenomenologists about whether the natural attitude can be set aside so we can “describe the ‘things themselves’ ” (Langdridge, 2007, p.17). Transcendental phenomenology argues it is possible to “*transcend* our everyday assumptions” and “get at the universal essence of a given phenomenon, as it presents itself to consciousness” (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.102, emphasis in original).

Hermeneutic (or existential) phenomenology, on the other hand, argues it is impossible “to remove ourselves, our thoughts and our meaning systems from the world” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.106). Hermeneutic phenomenology emphasises the “grounded and embodied nature of our being in the world” (Langdridge, 2007, p.18). “What is *real* is not dependent on us, but the exact meaning and nature of *reality* is dependent on us” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.107, emphasis in original).

Rather than seeking objectivity, the aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to acknowledge our subjectivity as a fundamental aspect of the world being studied. “We are a fundamental part of a meaningful world (and hence we can only be properly understood *as a function of our various involvements with that world*), and the meaningful world is also a fundamental part of us (such that it can only be properly disclosed and understood *as a function of our involvement with it*)” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.106, emphasis in original). IPA draws from hermeneutic phenomenology, rather than transcendental phenomenology (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2015).

“There is no direct route to experience” (Smith, 2011, p.10) and any attempt is “a notoriously difficult and complex pursuit [...] given our inherent epistemological and methodological limitations” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.108). We cannot directly access another person’s experience (Smith, 2011) but we can “come to know something” about them through “careful and sympathetic attention” to their account (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.110). We do this by engaging in two levels of analysis: description and interpretation (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015). This is called the double hermeneutic.

Description gives the participant a voice as they try to make sense of their world. Interpretation is the researcher trying to make sense of the participant’s attempts to make sense of their world. Description and interpretation are both equally important for understanding experience (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). The researcher’s access to the participant’s experience is complicated by the participant’s own attempts to make sense of their experience and is limited to only what the participant choose, and is able, to disclose (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith & Shinebourne, 2006). This is why description alone is insufficient and the researcher must draw from existing theory to interpret the participants’ accounts and determine what participants mean within their particular social, cultural, or theoretical context (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). IPA is designed to explore a person’s lived experience through their own account, but the analysis must “transcend or exceed” that account and “allow the researcher to produce a theoretical framework” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, pp.113-114).

Since the researcher’s thoughts and preconceptions are necessary for interpretation and cannot be removed from the study (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999), this subjectivity and its influence over the IPA process must be acknowledged (Langdridge, 2007; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Larkin and Thompson (2012) recommend researchers keep a reflexivity journal to document their analysis. This allows us to acknowledge any preconceptions influencing our interpretation and



minimise their impact on the analysis and results. Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006) also recommend researchers discuss their reflexivity journal and interpretation process with supervisors and peer researchers so their process is transparent and open to scrutiny. I followed this advice and kept a reflexivity journal across the interview, transcription, and analysis process to document issues I encountered, changes I made to my approach as challenges emerged, and solutions I found. I shared this reflexive journal with my supervisors throughout this project.

### ***3.3.4.3 Idiography***

IPA is primarily idiographic, meaning it studies topics through an individual's experiences with a topic (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The idiographic approach is the study of specifics in context, rather the study of things in general (Langdrige, 2007; Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). IPA focuses on the particulars and nuances of an individual's experience (Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Rather than drawing broad conclusions and generalised statements about a topic, IPA is valuable for "the light it sheds within this broad context" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.28). More generalisable claims should only be made "after a careful examination of accounts of experience, on a case-by-case basis" (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.74).

IPA is best used to analyse data gathered through "verbatim transcripts of a first-person account", usually generated through an interview between a researcher and research participant (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.103). IPA requires "a highly detailed analysis of the accounts", so smaller sample sizes are preferable (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.102). IPA studies can be as small as a single case study, allowing for "a detailed and richly contextualised understanding of the phenomenon under investigation" (Bramley & Eatough, 2005, p.225). More often, IPA studies analyse the accounts of multiple participants who have all experienced the topic of investigation and patterns of experience are identified across the accounts (Smith, 2011).

### **3.3.5 Data collection**

#### ***3.3.5.1 Ethics approval***

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.<sup>8</sup>

#### ***3.3.5.2 Selecting participants***

IPA values depth, rather than range, so samples should be small and homogenous (Langdrige, 2007; Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith, 2011). The intensive and time consuming process necessary for collecting high quality data and producing insightful analyses is only possible with a small sample of participants (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). IPA is designed to collect deep and contextualised information about the experience of a specific topic, so the participants must be purposively sampled to ensure they all share this common experience (Langdrige, 2007; Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Reynolds, Vivat, & Prior, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The degree of homogeneity is determined by the project's scope, but also by practical concerns (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

IPA is also "an intensely, language-based approach", "concerned with the close reading of participants' reports" (Smith, 2011, pp.10-12). IPA researchers are trying to "understanding what the particular respondent thinks or believes about the topic under discussion" (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999, p.219). For the researcher to conduct the interview and analyse the resulting data, they must be able to understand the participant (Smith, 2011).

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<sup>8</sup> For a copy of the ethics approval see Appendix 5: Ethics approval.

Since I was exploring the possible presence of the Dynamic Hero's Journey in play experiences with these chosen games, I requested potential participants have some kind of experience with either of the chosen games. Since the interviewer's only fluent language is English, only people who spoke fluent English were considered for this project. Additionally, all potential participants needed to be over 18 years of age and not dependent on a guardian so they could provide their own consent to participate. Langdridge (2007) recommended students limit their sample sizes to 5-6 participants. Similarly, in their article about women's experiences of addiction and rehabilitation, Shinebourne and Smith (2009) chose to study 6 participants because the similarities and differences across those cases would not be too overwhelming for the researchers (as explained in Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Based on this advice, I recruited 6 participants.

### ***3.3.5.3 Recruiting participants***

IPA projects commonly recruit participants via groups, agencies, personal contacts, gatekeepers, and snowballing (where each recruited participant is asked to pass on the study details to anyone they know who might be interested in participating) (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). For this project, participants were recruited in two ways: through Swinburne University of Technology and through personal contacts. Students enrolled in the Games Studies unit at Swinburne University in 2018 were told about the project during a lecture. They were given a summary of the project and were encouraged to email me if they were interested in participating. Recruiting university studies has been used in past IPA studies. For example, Patel, Tarrant, Bonas, and Shaw (2015) found participants among students at two medical schools. Their study specifically needed medical students because they were investigating the experience of failure among medical students.

I then recruited participants through personal contacts. In these cases, the personal contacts are the gatekeepers who act as mediators between the researcher and the population being sourced for participants (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). For the current project, personal contacts were given

a summary of the project and my email address to distribute to anyone they thought might be interested in the project. Everyone who emailed about the project was sent electronic copies of the Information Consent Statement and Consent Form. I contacted participants individually via email to arrange interview times and dates. All interviews were conducted at Swinburne's Hawthorn campus at the participant's convenience.

Six participants responded to the request and all were accepted for this project, four from among Swinburne students and two through the researcher's personal contacts. Five had experience playing *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) (Alex, Chris, Elliott, Kelly, and Riley), one had extensive experience playing *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) (Elliott), two had some experience playing *Ocarina of Time* (Alex and Chris), and one had experience with the Zelda franchise but very little personal experience playing any Zelda game (Jean).

The ideal sample size and degree of homogeneity for any project is influenced by both theoretical and practical concerns (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). The lack of *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) experience among respondents was surprising, especially considering the results of the initial investigation into popular and influential games. Consequently, the majority of this analysis was based on experiences with *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) and experiences with *Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) were used to add nuance and offer contrast.

Jean's lack of personal experience playing either game was unexpected. However, although I planned to recruit 6 participants, a homogenous group of 5 participants still meets Langdrige's (2007) advice for student projects. Therefore, Jean's lack of personal play experience does not significantly alter the data we planned to collect. Additionally, although Jean did not personally play *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) and only personally played a little of

*The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) on a friend's Nintendo 64 as a child, Jean had formed strong impressions about the Zelda franchise from watching others play, advertisements, the franchise's influence on and presence in other games (such as *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, HAL Laboratory, 2001), and what people they know have said about Zelda games. My interview with Jean was an unexpected opportunity to investigate the franchise's impact outside of extensive personal play experience. The similarities between Jean's interview and other participants who did play *Breath of the Wild* and/or *Ocarina of Time* indicate the importance of certain themes and provide additional perspective on those similar experiences.

#### ***3.3.5.4 Protecting participants***

Researchers must protect participants from "any harm, physical or mental, which they would not normally experience as part of their everyday life" (Murray & Rhodes, 2005, p.188). Methods for protecting participants during IPA studies include informed consent, voluntary participation, and anonymity. No standard guidelines were described as part of conducting IPA. This study followed procedures utilised in past IPA research including Budak, Larkin, Harris, and Blissett (2015), Murray and Rhodes (2005), and Patel, Tarrant, Bonas, and Shaw (2015).

All potential participants were provided an Information Statement. The design of this Information Statement was guided by Murray and Rhodes's (2005) description of how they informed potential participants. The Information Statement<sup>9</sup> for the current study explains the purpose of the study, the compensation provided for participating, the data participants provide might be published later, participants can withdraw from the study after participating, and participants can request the project's results be sent to them upon the project's conclusion.

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<sup>9</sup> For a copy of the Information Statement, see Appendix 6: Consent Information Statement.

All potential participants were provided with a Consent Form.<sup>10</sup> Each participant gave written consent before their interview was conducted. All participants were asked if they would like to be sent the study's results. All participants agreed. This procedure was guided by Murray and Rhodes's (2005) argument that their participants volunteered because they were motivated to assist in research that affects them personally. For more information on these protection procedures, see Appendix 8: Protection procedures.

### ***3.3.5.5 Interview process***

IPA can be conducted on data collected from diaries, focus groups, email dialogues, and written description, but one-on-one semi-structured interviews are by far the most common form of data collection (Langdridge, 2007; Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Semi-structured interviews are beneficial because "they enable the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue in real time" and they provide the flexibility necessary to follow and delve into important issues the participant raises during the interview (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.76). Structured interviews have the benefit of "control, reliability, and speed", but semi-structured interviews are particularly useful when studying complex processes and personal issues and "tends to produce much richer data" (Smith, 1995, pp.19-20) because they allow participants to describe their experience in as much detail as possible (Langdridge, 2007). Semi-structured interviews tend to take a much longer time than structured interviews, are more intense to conduct, and take longer to analyse (Smith, 1995; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Interviews can last more than an hour (Smith, 1995; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012), and past IPA studies report their interviews lasting up to 90 minutes (e.g. Dickson, Knussen, & Flowers, 2007;

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<sup>10</sup> For a copy of the Consent Form, see Appendix 7: Consent Form.

Patel, Tarrant, Bonas, & Shaw, 2015; Reynolds, Vivat, & Prior, 2011). In the current study, I interviewed each participant individually. All interviews were conducted at Swinburne's Hawthorn campus. These six interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours, ending only when the participant felt they had nothing more they wanted to say.

To ensure participants are calm and reflective during the interview, researchers should begin by establishing rapport to put them at ease (Smith, 1995; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). In this project, all interviews began with me thanking the participant for agreeing to the interview and asking about their trip to the location. I also told participants I personally enjoyed the games we would discuss during the interview. This follows from Murray and Rhodes's (2005) description of how the researcher established rapport with participants in their study of adult visible acne (a considerably sensitive topic) by disclosing their own personal history with adult visible acne.

Semi-structured interviews have a conversational style. This allows meaning to emerge "intersubjectively (between the interviewer and interviewee)" (Langdridge, 2007, p.110). "IPA researchers elicit and engage with the personal accounts of other people who are 'always-already' immersed in a linguistic, relational, cultural, and physical world" (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.102). The exact order of questions is less important than the process of entering "the psychological and social world of the respondent" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.31).

Despite this conversational style, Smith and Osborn (2015) say an interview schedule is essential for people new to IPA. An interview schedule is a set of questions the interviewer uses to guide the interview without dictating the interview (Smith, 1995; Smith & Osborn, 2015). The interviewer is not constrained to the interview schedule, but the act of planning the schedule forces the researcher to consider topics they want to discuss, problems that may arise, and plans for approaching sensitive topics (Smith, 1995; Smith & Osborn, 2005; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

Additionally, having an interview schedule allows the interviewer to focus on the participant and their responses during the interview, rather than worrying about what to do next (Smith & Osborn, 2005; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

I prepared an interview schedule before conducting the interviews and followed the same schedule with each participant. Following advice from Smith and Osborn (2015) and Smith and Shinebourne (2012) and descriptions of Dickson, Knussen, and Flowers' (2007) interview schedule, this interview schedule begins with simple questions about whether the participant enjoyed the game, how they would describe the game to someone who has never played it, and what they believed the game was about. This approach was also to produce some initial responses I could use to probe for more detailed descriptions of the participant's experience. To see the full interview schedule and additional notes and adjustments made across the interviews, see Appendix 9: Interview Schedule.

The purpose of the interview is to get "as close as possible to what the respondent thinks about the topic", so the interview should centre around the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.33). The participant is essentially "the experiential expert on the subject" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.31). The interview is "an opportunity [for the participant] to tell their story" (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, pp.103-104) so they should be "given considerable leeway in how the interview proceeds" (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.76). The participant should be encouraged to give a richly detailed personal account of their experience of the phenomena (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012), even about topics the interviewer did not anticipate (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

How the interviewer proceeds depends on the participant. They must choose subsequent questions based on the participant's account and also the participant's feelings and reactions (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The interviewer can guide, encourage, and nudge the participant towards particular topics of interest but high quality data cannot be gathered through



explicit demands or by rushing the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Ideally, the interview should involve as little probing and prompting as possible (Smith & Osborn, 2015). If an interview's data is mostly derived from follow-up questions, then it is possible the participant is being led to particular responses rather than giving honest descriptions of their experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

According to Smith and Osborn (2015), good interviews tend to move back and forth between general and specific questions. Following this advice, I asked general questions to identify topics relevant to the participant and then I asked specific questions based on their more general descriptions. When the participant was done talking about one particular experience, I returned to a general question and began the process again.

#### ***3.3.5.6 Recording and transcription***

IPA interviews are audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, including what the interviewer and participant both say (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Recordings are absolutely necessary. It is impossible to write down everything the participant says and trying to do so would distract the interviewer from engaging with the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Although the transcripts are verbatim, details such as “pauses, false starts, latched responses, etc.” are not included (Langdridge, 2007, p.110). Such details are useful for discourse analysis, but in IPA the focus is on semantic meaning.

I audio recorded all interviews on two devices (one as a backup) and transcribed them within two weeks of the interview. I borrowed transcription techniques from Creely (2011), who used time signatures to note parts of audio recordings where speech was unclear or ambiguous; Eatough and Smith (2006), who transcribed indecipherable audio as “[indecipherable]”; and examples provided by Larkin and Thompson (2012), where overlapping speech was denoted with parentheses. One hour of recording typically takes 5-8 hours to transcribe (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This was roughly the case for this study. The first few interviews took just over 8 hours to transcribe, but once I

developed techniques (such as how to transcribe overlapping speech, marking uncertainties for later review, and differentiating between the end of a sentence and a mid-sentence pause) most transcripts took closer to 5 hours. I double-checked all transcripts upon completion by reading through the transcript while listening to the audio recording. This was repeated until the transcript appeared to match the recording.

### **3.3.6 Data analysis**

There are no definitive steps to follow when analysing cases for IPA. However, there are suggested steps and important theoretical values to guide the process, which I followed closely during this project.

#### ***3.3.6.1 Build familiarity***

IPA is an inductive process, meaning it is grounded in the data rather than pre-existing theories regarding how one should understand, interpret, position, or find meaning in a phenomenon (Langdrige, 2007). The participants' personal accounts of their experiences and their specific context must be central to the analysis process (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006) and the analysis must be "grounded in the particular details of the participant's account" (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.77). For this reason, the first step of IPA is to build familiarity with the accounts by reading and re-reading each account, one at a time, to "gain a holistic picture of the participant's account" (Bramley & Eatough, 2005, p.226). With each reading, the researcher gains "new insights" into the participant's experience (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999, p.220).

This stage is an "exploration of the data" (Paten, Tarrant, Bonas, & Shaw, 2015, pp.1-2), similar to "free textual analysis" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.40). Through this process, the researcher becomes "immersed in the data" (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.77) and "become as familiar as possible with the account" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.40). Learning the meaning in a person's

experience requires sustained engagement with the text (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The goal is to make sense of the participant's experience, with all its contents and complexities, and identify the most important parts of those experiences. While becoming familiar with the participant's account, the researcher should begin to make "detailed, line-by-line commentary on the data" (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.104) about their concerns, claims, language, and anything that strikes the researcher as interesting or significant. These comments will be used to identify themes in the data.

### ***3.3.6.2 Identifying themes***

The researcher then engages with theory to refine their early comments and produce "more meaningful statements" (Langdridge, 2007, p.111) on "a slightly higher level of abstraction" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.41). This leads to "a richer, more insightful" account of the participant's experience, to enlighten without trying to explain away the participant's experience (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.111). Even as the themes move to more abstract levels and develop connections with theoretical concepts, the themes must always be "grounded in the particular details of the participant's account" (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.77). The researcher can draw from a wide range of analytic strategies, previous research, and psychological theory but everything must relate back to the participant's phenomenological account (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

Researchers must treat every part of the account as potentially important (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, Jarman, Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Finding themes is an iterative process, moving in "the hermeneutic circle" looking at the parts and the whole (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.39; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). This is necessary for understanding each part in context of the whole and understanding the whole as a combination of the parts. As analysis continues, the prevalence and richness of themes will change in unexpected ways (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

### 3.3.6.3 *Organise themes*

Eventually, when the themes no longer change with further iteration, the researcher moves onto organising those themes. By arranging the themes in “a more analytical or theoretical ordering” (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.42), the researchers can identify “*patterns of meaning* in the data” (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.104, emphasis in original). This is called cumulative coding (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Some themes will have “conceptual similarities” and come together to form a cluster of themes (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.77). Some themes will be superordinate and encompass other themes (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Some themes may need to be dropped at this stage. This happens when a theme doesn’t fit the structure forming among the other themes (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2015), if it isn’t supported by enough evidence from the transcript (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2015), or if they don’t add anything to the analysis (Langdridge, 2007).

Following advice from Langdridge (2007), Smith and Osborn (2015), and Smith, Jarman, and Osborn (1999), I listed the identified themes in a separate document in the chronological order in which they appeared in the transcript. In this separate document, I rearranged them into clusters. This revealed patterns of repetition, similarity, and connections between the themes. I also followed Larkin and Thompson’s (2012) advice to specifically look for convergences, divergences, commonalities, and nuances among the themes. Also following advice from Langdridge (2007), Smith, Jarman, and Osborn (1999), and Smith and Osborn (2015), I regularly returned to the original transcripts to confirm whether the themes and connections between the themes reflected the participant’s experience.

To ensure themes reflect the participant’s account, each theme must be linked to the sections of the text where they emerge (Langdridge, 2007; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012; Smith &

Osborn, 2015). For each theme I identified, I included an excerpt from the account where the theme appears. These excerpts were especially important because they “provide the most powerful, insightful, or articulate expressions of any given theme” (Dickson, Knussen, & Flowers, 2007, p.855).

This organisation process produces a master list of themes (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2015). This master list arranges the themes into a coherent order and graphically presents the structure of these themes and their relationships (Langdridge, 2007; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

#### ***3.3.6.4 Repeat for all cases***

Each account must be analysed individually. Smith and Osborn (2015) recommend starting a new master list for each account, rather than adding each subsequent analysis to a single master list of themes. Producing separate master lists allows each account to “speak in its own terms” rather than being restricted to the themes found in previous accounts (ibid, p.45). This approach also provides an ongoing summation of the analysis, which is both personally satisfying and useful for review purposes (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

This is an iterative process. Earlier master lists will change as more accounts are analysed (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Early master lists include many “quite small” and “tentative” themes (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.108). Researchers should return to and review cases they have already analysed as they develop their understanding of the accounts. Langdridge (2007), Larkin and Thompson (2012), and Smith and Shinebourne (2012) specifically recommend referring back to earlier analyses to both guide the current analysis and to review earlier cases with reference to the current analysis. For example, as new themes emerge in later cases, you may need to return to earlier cases and see whether they also reflect these themes (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Following this advice, I made separate master lists for each participant but used previous master lists to inform

my analyses of later accounts and used my findings from later accounts to review my earlier master lists.<sup>11</sup>

### ***3.3.6.5 Final list***

At the end of the analysis process, the researcher draws the themes together across all cases into a single structure reflecting all the cases in the study (Langdridge, 2007; Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). This “requires considerable time, reflection, and discussion” (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.111). Generating “patterns of meaning” across “a set of transcripts” in a study is called “integrated coding” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p.116). Themes must be moved, arranged, and re-arranged to “develop the relationships between the themes” identified across every account (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p.112). Themes will continue to change as themes are combined or dropped according to their prevalence across the transcripts, the richness of their supportive excerpts, and “their capacity to illuminate” the analysis as a whole (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999, p.80; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The analysis process even continues as researchers write up their final results (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). The researcher must continually return to the transcripts to verify their analysis as their arguments unfold (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This intensive and iterative process of identifying patterns across detailed accounts necessitates the small sample sizes used in IPA studies (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

This final list should respect the “theoretical convergences” across the accounts whilst also respecting the “individual idiosyncrasy in how that convergence is manifest” for each participant (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.48). A group of participants may have all have the same experience but the

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<sup>11</sup> For full lists of themes produces for each individual participant, along with relevant excerpts, see Appendix 10: Individual player theme lists.

way they express and describe that experience may be different for each participant, and both the broad convergence and the particulars of each account must be reflected in the analysis (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

### **3.3.7 Conclusion**

IPA was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to collect detailed data about personal experiences of playing the chosen games and the meaning participants found in those experience. In this chapter, I explained the process of gathering data, becoming familiar with the experiences, and identifying common themes across the accounts in connection with theoretical concepts, all while remaining grounded in the data by connecting every theme with evidence from the original transcripts. In the next chapter, I present my participants' themes in an organised structure to reveal the patterns of meaning common across the accounts and the individual nuances of each participant's experience of those themes.

## Chapter 4: Player Themes

There are no strict guidelines for presenting IPA results. The presentation should guide the reader through the analysis process (Larkin & Thompson, 2012) and provide a convincing account of the participants' experiences and the importance of those experiences (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Larkin and Thompson (2012), Smith, Jarman, and Osborn (1999), Smith and Osborn (2015), and Smith and Shinebourne (2012) all recommend presenting IPA results as a narrative account. This involves describing each theme individually, illustrating the nuances within the accounts and including supportive excerpts from the transcripts. Direct quotes from the transcripts provides a richer analysis and a more convincing and accurate account (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). This narrative account of the participants' experiences is usually followed by a discussion of those experiences in relation to relevant extant literature, illuminating both those experiences and the extant literature (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Following this advice, I will present my results across two chapters. First is this chapter, where I present the final list of themes as a narrative account supported by excerpts from the participants' accounts. Second is the Discussion Chapter where I discuss those themes in combination with the Dynamic Hero's Journey and existing literature.

The common themes across the participants can be divided into two superordinate themes: "Power And Freedom" and "Attachments And Priorities". The "Power And Freedom" superordinate theme describes the participants' experiences of power, both their own power and the power the games had over them. This superordinate theme encompasses three sub-themes: Fighting for control, being in control, and having no control at all. The "Attachments And Priorities" theme describes the similar patterns of experience radiating from points of emotional attachment, like shock waves from an epicentre. A participant's emotional attachments were the primary factors in how they experienced the rest of the game including how they played and what they enjoyed,



disliked, and avoided. Each participant formed different emotional attachments but the way these attachments affected their interpretations followed similar patterns.

## 4.1 Power and freedom

### 4.1.1 Fight for control

Hyrule in *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD, 2017) (BOTW from this point onwards) was dangerous not because it was antagonistic or malicious but because it was indifferent to the participants' existence. It felt like being "pushed off of a cliff" (Chris) and participants were often "mercilessly killed" (Kelly). This need to fend for themselves is particularly clear in Kelly's account, where they often felt they were "missing something" (Kelly). Affordances were either hidden, such as the notoriously opaque context-dependent multi-step cooking process,<sup>12</sup> or signifiers were only gradually uncovered through further exploration, such as learning to tame and stable horses by speaking with the correct NPCs.

*Ludicity*, the player's ability to act in the game world (Conway, 2010), is limited at the beginning of BOTW. Some participants specifically attributed this to their lack of Stamina. Stamina affords running, climbing, and swimming but it is a limited resource; it depletes when performing these activities and restores gradually over time. Until Stamina replenishes, the player moves more slowly, falls if they were climbing, and drowns in water. Unpredictable rain can further limit the player by making surfaces too slick to climb. Riley vividly illustrates this *contra-ludicity*, where the

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<sup>12</sup> Cooking in BOTW involves finding one of the cooking pots around Hyrule, ensuring the fire underneath the pot is lit, opening the menu screen, navigating to the "Materials" section of the "Inventory" screen, selecting an item and choosing to "Hold" it (rather than "Eat" it), selecting up to four other items to cook into the same dish, closing the menu, positioning Link beside the cooking pot to change the A-button prompt to a "Cook" prompt, and pressing the A-button. Various reviews and walkthroughs explain the process in detail because the instructions provided in the game are easy to miss or misunderstand (e.g. Tach, 2017; Tapsell, 2018).

game resists the player's actions (Conway, 2010), in their account of "clamour[ing] up the outside in the rain when you're sliding back down and running out of Stamina and falling to your death" (Riley). Increasing maximum Stamina, measured by the player's Stamina Wheel, was an early and persistent goal for Alex and Chris. Alex relied heavily on Stamina-restoring foods and Chris spent most of their time searching for Shrines to increase to Link's Stamina Wheel.<sup>13</sup>

Alex, Chris, and Elliott drew direct comparisons between BOTW and games with more *hyper-ludicity*, where the player is empowered (Conway, 2010), and *Hotter* designs, where instructions were clear and participants always felt ready for challenges (Conway & Ouellette, 2019). "You assume that if a creature is presented to you, you're going to be equipped to fight it" (Chris). In contrast, BOTW's *contra-ludicity* and *Cooler* design (Conway & Ouellette, 2019) made Hyrule feel like a real place existing for its own sake rather than for the player's enjoyment. "I wasn't being presented with just a series of um enemies to kill without thinking about it" (Chris).

BOTW placed the onus of identifying *contra-ludicity*, discovering affordances, and increasing *hyper-ludicity* on the participants. This made participants feel personally responsible for their play experiences and provided them with a sense of *autonomy*, as described in Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Jean discussed similar experiences with other games. They succinctly described this common experience as the game making them feel like "you *matter* [...] that you *matter* and that your choices have mattered" (Jean, emphasis in original).<sup>14</sup>

Being killed taught Alex and Kelly to be less reckless and more cautious. "That's probably when I learned that (laughs) I need to calm down a bit" (Alex). They both learned to identify *contra-*

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<sup>13</sup> Shrines in BOTW are challenges hidden across Hyrule. Upon completing a Shrine's challenge, the player is rewarded with a Spirit Orb. Four Spirit Orbs can be traded at any of the Goddess Statues around Hyrule to increase either Link's Heart Containers or Stamina Wheel by one unit.

<sup>14</sup> For the full excerpt, see Appendix 11.1 "Jean and Neverwinter Nights".

*ludic* features in their environment so they could choose whether or not to engage. Alex learned to assess monsters' strength by appearance, judge their likelihood of survival, and decide if and how they should approach. They also learned to evaluate their own performance during fights so they could decide whether to continue or retreat.<sup>15</sup> Since there were "no actual fences" (Kelly) protecting them from danger, Kelly used *contra-ludicity* to determine whether they were in an area they were not "supposed to be right then" (Kelly) and where they should go instead. When they struggled to reach a particular Shrine and then failed against the combat challenge inside, they decided they were not ready for that area and retreated. Conversely, identifying safe paths through Hyrule helped Kelly navigate the world and find Fairy Fountains and Shrines to increase their *hyper-ludicity*.

Chris and Elliott described the pressure of adapting to new situations "on the fly" (Chris). Affordances were often *hidden* or *nested*, where "one affordance serves as context for another" (Kaptelinin, 2014). Chris and Elliott could only discover these affordances and increase their *hyper-ludicity* by exposing themselves to *contra-ludic* conditions and gradually learning through trial-and-error. One of Chris's most detailed and enjoyable accounts was learning to survive in the cold by struggling to climb a snowy mountain. The endeavour was a cyclic process of trying to do something, failing, learning something new from their failure, and then trying something else. "I had to learn what *not* to do in order to learn *what* to do" (Chris, emphasis in original).<sup>16</sup> Elliott first felt this responsibility when fighting a Blight, the final monster in a Divine Beast.<sup>17</sup> They were underprepared, underequipped, and the resulting *contra-ludicity* provided an unexpected but welcome challenge. Elliott initially panicked when they realised BOTW would not help them but then they "took a step

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<sup>15</sup> For an excerpt illustrating this, see Appendix 11.2 "Alex evaluating monsters".

<sup>16</sup> For a full excerpt of Chris's experience climbing the snowy mountain, see Appendix 11.3 "Chris and the snowy mountain".

<sup>17</sup> There are four Divine Beasts in BOTW. They are larger and longer challenges than Shrines and conclude with a fight with a strong monster called a Blight.

back” (Elliott) and decided to find another way themselves. “I just had to keep avoiding attacks until I could figure out a new plan and that was what I found really exciting” (Elliott).<sup>18</sup> Elliott also experienced this in *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) (OOT from this point onwards), specifically during boss fights. Every new boss came with a new set of *contra-ludic* features to survive and hidden affordances to learn.<sup>19</sup>

*Contra-ludicity* was important for participants’ sense of *competency*, making them feel like they were mastering the game and achieving something important. Alex intentionally exposed themselves to *contra-ludic* monsters to test the *hyper-ludicity* they had accumulated and further increase their *hyper-ludicity*. In Alex’s words:

The enemies would get stronger but the rewards would get bigger and so it kind of pushes you forward. It’s like what will I find next? [...] if you had (laughs) the skill to get away from all the really tough enemies that are way above you then you could end up having an item that you probably weren’t supposed to have that early on. And that thought was really exciting.

Fighting past a horde of monsters to reach a Shrine was one of Alex’s most vivid accounts. They “died a hundred million times” (Alex) but persisted because, with enough skill, they would reach the Shrine and acquire a Spirit Orb to increase their Health or Stamina.<sup>20</sup>

*Contra-ludicity* was important for Chris to feel successful. An “exceptionally easy” (Chris) fight was a “non-event” (Chris) but a “desperately hard” (Chris) fight was so satisfying “I screamed. It was awesome. Like, in ecstasy just like *oh my god* I did it. It felt like (sigh) I don’t know. It was just amazing. Took my breath away. Like, I don’t have words for it. It was *awesome*” (Chris, emphasis in

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<sup>18</sup> For full excerpt of Elliott’s experience fighting their first Blight, see Appendix 11.4 “Elliott and the Blight”.

<sup>19</sup> For an excerpt illustrating this, see Appendix 11.5 “Elliott and Twinrova”.

<sup>20</sup> For full excerpt about Alex’s experience fighting through the horde to the Shrine, see Appendix 11.6 “Alex and the horde”.

original).<sup>21</sup> Elliott's most detailed and exciting combat encounter in BOTW, and their most *contra-ludic* combat experience in the game, was their first Blight. Elliott could similarly recall the challenge and exhilaration of fighting OOT bosses for the first time many years earlier. Riley experienced this sense of *competency* in BOTW's Shrines, rather than combat. Riley believed every Shrine contained all the affordances necessary to solve the puzzle. It was Riley's responsibility to discover and utilise those affordances and demonstrate their mastery over the puzzle. "Very satisfying to solve um when you finally figure out what it is that the designer has um in store for you" (Riley).

#### 4.1.2 In control

BOTW gave participants a "sense of freedom" (Chris). They could "go anywhere and do anything" (Alex). This sense of *autonomy* made their experiences feel uniquely their own. "It felt more like *my* experience" (Alex, emphasis in original). In contrast, Alex and Chris both felt "stuck" (Alex) in OOT and stopped playing. OOT is *Hotter* than BOTW, since most activities must be completed in a specific order (Conway & Ouellette, 2019). When challenges were too *contra-ludic*, they became *hypo-ludic* (Conway, 2012), preventing Alex and Chris from playing at all. "I just got so frustrated that I stopped playing" (Chris). BOTW was also *contra-ludic* but what participants did, when they stopped, and when they returned was largely up to their own discretion. "If I got stuck in a particular dungeon [...] I could just drop it and go somewhere else and do something else [...] That's the reason that I ended up getting so far in it (laughs)" (Alex).

This sense of *autonomy* was amplified by *hyper-ludicity*. When "you're a *god*" (Alex, emphasis in original), there's no need for caution and you can move unhindered. "Now there's nothing preventing you from doing or going wherever you want" (Alex). Alex and Chris specifically

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<sup>21</sup> For full excerpts contrasting Chris's experiential difference in challenge, see Appendix 11.7 "Chris's challenges"

discussed *hyper-ludic* combat. “There are two ways to kind of do things in the game. You can do it how the game tells you to do it or you can [...] get ridiculously strong and just come back to it later and just kill the enemy that’s in your way” (Alex). When Chris was able to “harness everything you’ve got” (Chris) in the combat system, a monster that previously “slaughtered” (Chris) them was barely an obstacle at all.<sup>22</sup> Jean’s account provides an extreme example of this *hyper-ludic autonomy*. Although Jean did not personally play BOTW, they had watched YouTube videos of other people engaging with *innovative* play, where players invent new strategies for the sake of discovery rather than winning (Aarseth, 2003). According to Jean, those players found *hidden affordances* and were able to access unexpected degrees of *hyper-ludicity*, turning BOTW into “their own version of the game” (Jean). “It’s almost like witchcraft” (Jean).<sup>23</sup>

Riley associated this *hyper-ludic autonomy* with “superhuman” (Riley) modes of travel, rather than combat. Horses, the Paraglider, and the Zora Armour gave Riley access to new affordances in the otherwise *contra-ludic* landscape.<sup>24</sup> Flat planes could be crossed in seconds, high mountains were for gliding across great distances, and a waterfall was a “shortcut” (Riley) up a cliff. Riley felt they had “mastery over the world” (Riley) and their movement felt more “authentic” (Riley) and “natural” (Riley). Riley’s preference for the Giant Horse is particularly illuminating. Riley felt the Giant Horse was faster and stronger than other horses. The Giant Horse can only move at two speeds, either walking or running. Unlike the Giant Horse, most horses in BOTW can be spurred several times to incrementally increase their speed. This finer degree of control seems *hyper-ludic* but this acceleration system is also *contra-ludic* (Conway, 2010) because of its *hidden affordances*

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<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed excerpt about Chris’s experiences learning the combat system, see Appendix 11.8 “Chris and the combat system”.

<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed excerpt about Jean’s experiences of innovative play, see Appendix 11.9 “Jean and innovative play”.

<sup>24</sup> Horses run faster than Link, the paraglider allows players to travel horizontally through the air in a gradual descent, and players can swim up waterfalls when wearing the Zora Armour.

(Kaptelinin, 2014). Faster speeds are temporary so the horse will decelerate after a period of time has elapsed and the horse cannot accelerate again until another period of time has elapsed. Neither timer is visible to the player. In my experience, this combination of involuntary deceleration and unknown time constraints results in erratic and uncontrolled movement. The Giant Horse only gave Riley a choice between walking or running but these limited affordances were *perceptible* (Kaptelinin, 2014) so Riley had a greater sense of control over its movement.

Participants' sense of *autonomy* was especially visceral when their *hyper-ludicity* was tenuous or temporary. Alex felt like a god near the end of the game but some of their most vivid experiences happened when they only had one *hyper-ludic* weapon. Alex said they often used skill, strategy, and luck to "end up having an item that you probably weren't supposed to have that early on" (Alex). Weapons in BOTW deteriorate and eventually break through use "so when it breaks it feels like they [i.e. the monsters] have the upper hand again" (Alex, emphasis in original). However, even temporarily having one *hyper-ludic* weapon was enough to elevate Alex's sense of *autonomy* and *competence*. "I felt like the weapon was there to protect me and I had a bit more leeway in what I could do" (Alex).<sup>25</sup> Similarly, most of Riley's experiences of superhuman movement were temporary bursts of *hyper-ludicity* in a largely *contra-ludic* game. The superhuman movement they enjoyed required specific conditions. Horses can only run across flat planes, not rocky terrain; gliding from high places first requires Riley laboriously climb to those high places; and there are not many waterfalls in Hyrule. However, whenever Riley found themselves in those conditions, they felt like they were "being set free from um a contained area" (Riley). "The bulk of your time I think is spent

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<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed excerpt about Alex's experience with unusually strong weapons, see Appendix 11.10 "Alex and the Guardian Weapon".

um in that kind of manual traversal mode um which yeah I think is what makes um those brief moments where you're using something else feel great" (Riley).

Despite their limited direct experience with Zelda games, Jean felt Link embodied this experience of becoming more *hyper-ludic* despite initial *contra-ludicity*. Jean described Link as a small person, often a literal child, but with the determination to become stronger by collecting tools and developing skills. Jean considered Link a role-model or "a comforting ideal" (Jean). "We could *all* be Link. We could all um uh aspire to be that all-rounder. Like, he can do *everything*. He, he, there's nothing he *can't* do" (Jean, emphasis in original).<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.1.3 No control

Participants enjoyed *contra-ludicity* as long as the challenge was appropriately conveyed through *perceptible affordances* and *correct rejection* (Kaptelinin, 2014). When they knew what was and was not possible, they were able to leverage their affordances and manoeuvre around restrictions. "There's still this exhilaration. Like, my heart was still racing, but there was a lot more hope in the fight" (Elliott). *Contra-ludicity* was annoying when it did not make sense. Each participant developed their own understanding of BOTW and OOT and when something contradicted those assumptions "it felt like the game was cheating" (Alex). They felt a loss of *autonomy*, as though they were being controlled by the game rather than playing the game.

Encountering sudden and inconsistent *contra-ludicity* felt like playing an entirely different game. Alex's experiences with BOTW taught them they could acquire the *hyper-ludicity* to kill any enemy. The Ploymus Mountain Lynel and the Yiga Blademasters were two of the only enemies in the

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<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed excerpt about Jean's impression of Link, see Appendix 11.11 "Jean and the underdog".



game Alex could not kill.<sup>27</sup> “It felt like I was hitting a brick wall (laughs) with a stick” (Alex). Alex both expected and wanted to fight them but doing so was overwhelmingly *contra-ludic*. Alex could only continue with the mission by sneaking past them.<sup>28</sup> “I was kind of forced, in a way, to do what the game wanted me to do. Because like there was no way I would be strong enough” (Alex). Similarly, Kelly both expected Shrines to be tests of skill and enjoyed those challenges. When Kelly failed to complete a Shrine, they understood they were not ready for the area and willingly retreated. Two particular Shrines were not tests of skill. These Shrines relied on the Nintendo Switch’s imprecise motion controls, consequently feeling more like random luck to Kelly. “I’m not solving a puzzle. I’m fighting a controller” (Kelly). Unlike every other Shrine, these demanded patience rather than skill.

Elliott has played OOT for years and is so comfortable they feel like they can “play it with my eyes closed” (Elliott). However, their extensive experience does not help them with the Kakariko Well or Shadow Temple. These places were “scary” (Elliott) and “creepy” (Elliott), with “blood and torture devices and hidden traps and shit” (Elliott). In a game where Elliott felt confident and in control, these places were incongruous. Elliott tolerated them but never enjoyed them. “It’s not a hard place but it’s just annoying. As all hell” (Elliott). The invisible holes were particularly frustrating. There were invisible pits in surfaces that appeared to afford walking and invisible doorways in walls

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<sup>27</sup> The Ploymus Mountain Lynel and the Yiga Blademasters can technically be killed. The Ploymus Mountain Lynel is one of the weaker Lynels in the game but Alex’s account indicates they encountered it early in the game when they had relatively low Health, weak armour, and few strong weapons. Alex may have found the Ploymus Mountain Lynel easier to fight if they encountered it later in the game. The Yiga Blademasters in the Yiga Hideout can each be killed with one Sneak Attack but Alex said they disliked sneaking so they were probably unaware of this option. These Yiga Blademasters can be killed in direct combat but they have among the highest Health scores in the game, can kill the player with one attack, and being seen by even one Yiga Blademaster will cause all the Yiga Blademasters in the room to attack the player and the door will lock until the player has defeated every enemy. Although Alex’s experience is more important than these alternative possibilities, this information provides context for their account.

<sup>28</sup> Almost all activities in BOTW are optional but the Ploymus Mountain Lynel and the Yiga Blademasters are part of two compulsory quests the player must complete before they can enter two of the Divine Beasts. Alex wanted to complete the Divine Beasts so, to them, collecting Shock Arrows from around the Ploymus Mountain Lynel and reaching the end of the Yiga Hideout were compulsory.

that appeared to prevent passage. These *hidden* and *false affordances* (Kaptelinin, 2014) felt unfair, as though Elliott was not playing a game anymore. This didn't "belong in the game" (Elliott) and it "didn't feel like a Zelda game" (Elliott). It felt as though the developers were "just having a laugh" (Elliott) rather than making a game.

This distrust is exemplified in Elliott's first encounter with the Shadow Temple's boat. The boat transports the player from the first part of the Shadow Temple to the other. However, when Elliott first saw it, they thought it was a trap. It was floating on fog instead of water, it had wheels, and the bird on the mast looked unlike anything they had seen. "I'm like, well I'm not gonna go on there because it, it, the boat's evil. They'll be bad things on it" (Elliott). After days of avoiding the boat and making no progress, Elliott finally "bit the bullet" (Elliott) and boarded. They felt extremely uncomfortable when it carried them along unharmed. Elliott only relaxed and felt more confident when monsters dropped down onto the boat and the trap they expected was revealed. "It was a trap but it was like a necessary trap" (Elliott).

Riley enjoyed uncovering *hidden affordances* in Shrines. It was a trial-and-error process of discovering what does and does not work and every failure brought them closer to the solution. The Giant Horse also involved *hidden affordances* but, unlike the Shrines, it was not presented as a puzzle to be solved. Riley understood the Giant Horse as an animal. It could see, hear, smell and it ran away when Riley approached. Riley did not think it was possible to tame the Giant Horse at all until they saw someone do it in a YouTube video. The challenge was still difficult after seeing this video but knowing it was a puzzle to be solved helped Riley persist through repeated failures, as they did in the Shrines. "At least I knew that I was heading in the right direction at that point [...] I'd seen someone do it in a video" (Riley).

When participants felt controlled, especially when their choices felt meaningless, they described the game or designers as antagonistic. Chris could curate their narrative experience in

BOTW. “You’re in charge [...] it’s all about how *you* feel” (Chris, emphasis in original). Across all of BOTW’s “completely optional” (Chris) content, the Champions were the “key points of the story” (Chris) for Chris. The Champions fought Calamity Ganon and died in the Great Calamity while Link survived to wake up 100 years later. Chris was able to construct a narrative about Link finding closure for his friends but Chris also knew BOTW had a single predesigned ending. Chris was worried the designers would “get it wrong” (Chris) and were going to “trick” (Chris) them with an unexpected ending. BOTW did give Chris their happy ending but this abrupt shift in *autonomy* made Chris hesitate to finish the game. “I came really close to the end um and I was at the top of Hyrule Castle about to defeat, like about to walk into the throne room to defeat Calamity Ganon and I put it down, and I didn’t pick it up for days” (Chris).

Elliott felt a similar lack of *autonomy* in both BOTW and OOT. Despite initial evidence regarding Link’s involvement in the Great Calamity, Elliott discovered Link was not responsible for Hyrule’s demise. However, even after this discovery, the characters in BOTW continued blaming Link.<sup>29</sup> “You know why you disappeared and Link knows why he disappeared now but the NPCs don’t know and they’ll never understand” (Elliott). Elliott spent considerable time and effort proving Link’s innocence but BOTW failed to acknowledge it and this felt “unfair” (Elliott) and “unjust” (Elliott). Although there is less room for interpretation in OOT than BOTW, Bongo Bongo’s origins were ambiguous enough for Elliott to construct their own sympathetic backstory:

You can deduce that he was the man that lived in the house [that used to be above the Kakariko Well]. And somehow he’d turned himself into this absolute monstrosity that

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<sup>29</sup> This is according to Elliott’s memory of the game. As far as I can tell, only some elderly Zora blame Link and they stop blaming Link after the player appeases Vah Ruta. The vast majority of character in BOTW don’t know who Link is and the ones who do mostly consider Link a hero. However, Elliott’s own experience is more important than technical details, and Elliott felt as though everyone blamed Link. It’s also worth noting that Alex made similar comments about how everyone in Zora’s Domain (except Sidon) blamed Link.

was locked in the bottom of the well. [...] it's almost like the rest of the town was trying to, to hide their dark past. (Elliott)

Elliott believed Bongo Bongo deserved redemption but OOT only afforded fighting and killing him.<sup>30</sup>

I wasn't defeating a senseless enemy. I was defeating a man who was corrupted. [...] And it always struck a little bit home for me that like... I never really wanted to. I always just wanted to, if there was a way I would change him back, but there wasn't [...] I never feel good about beating him. (Elliott)<sup>31</sup>

Forcing Elliott to act against their own volition made the already frustrating Shadow Temple an especially unpleasant experience.

Jean didn't play BOTW or much OOT but they did describe similar experiences from other digital games, adding further nuance to these accounts of thwarted *autonomy*. Jean found it "very very jarring" (Jean) when they didn't have enough information to understand a game or make informed choices. This is an example of what A. Brown and Marklund (2015, p.6) call "limited and 'blind' player agency", where players do not understand the connections between their actions and the consequences. When the "A Towerful of Mice" quest<sup>32</sup> in *The Witcher 3* (CD Projekt Red, 2015) gave Jean false information on which to base their decisions, they felt "tricked" (Jean). "I mean, like, they were lying to me... and I'm not sure how I was supposed to know that" (Jean).

These experiences were consistently *hypo-ludic* (Conway, 2012). The Kakariko Well was endured, not played. The motion-controlled Shrines were lotteries, not puzzles. When Alex felt overwhelmed when futilely fighting the Yiga Blademasters, Link seemed to act as a separate entity

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<sup>30</sup> According to an article on Fandom.com about speedrunning in OOT by Ray (2018), the Rainbow Bridge to Ganon's Castle and the Light Arrows are only programmed to be appear if the player has the Shadow Medallion and Spirit Medallion in their inventory. Until 2007, when a glitch to convert a Bottle into a Shadow Medallion was discovered, even speedrunners needed to defeat Bongo Bongo to complete the game.

<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed excerpt about this conflict between sympathising with Bongo Bongo and killing him as a boss, see Appendix 11.12 "Elliott and Bongo Bongo".

<sup>32</sup> Jean did not give the quest by name and I have not played *The Witcher 3* (CD Projekt Red, 2015), but I was able to use Jean's description of the quest in Google searches to determine they were very likely referring to "A Towerful Of Mice".

and they were no longer playing. “Your fingers slip because you’re panicking and you can hit the wrong button and then Link will try to climb<sup>33</sup> something stupid [...] Link often tried to climb *stupid* things” (Alex, emphasis in original). Kelly’s most aggravating experience in BOTW resulted from the sudden *hypo-ludicity* imposed by a three-second cutscene. One Shrine involves walking through a flower maze. Stepping off the path returns the player to the beginning of the maze and a cutscene reminds the player to not step on the flowers. Kelly appreciated being returned to the beginning of the maze to try again but the cutscene was an unwanted interruption. “It’s just like, no! I, I get the point but please less cutscene! Just take me back to the start! (laughs) that was very frustrating” (Kelly).<sup>34</sup>

Too much or unexpected *contra-ludicity* leads to *hypo-ludicity* but too much *hyper-ludicity* can also lead to *hypo-ludicity* (Conway & Ouellette, 2019). Learning and then demonstrating their mastery over the Sheikah Slate<sup>35</sup> to solve complex Shrine puzzles gave Riley a sense of *competence*. Using those same skills to complete simple tasks, such as shifting objects from their path or foraging for items, felt like “busy work” (Riley) and a waste of time. Elliott enjoyed the challenge of fighting new bosses but, once they learned what to do and how to do it, the challenge was over. When Elliott was proficient, they were “zoning out” (Elliott) and would “just continue that path until [...] the cutscene crops up” (Elliott). Elliott reached this point with every boss, even particularly difficult bosses such as Twinrova, but it happened almost immediately with Calamity Ganon. Elliott expected

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<sup>33</sup> Climbing in BOTW can be initiated manually (by standing in front of a climbable surface and pressing the A button) but it will also happen automatically when the player moves towards a climbable surface. Consequently, if players unintentionally run into an obstacle, such as a tree or a cliff face, Link will automatically (and unexpectedly) climb it.

<sup>34</sup> For a more detailed excerpt of Kelly’s frustrating experience with this Flower Maze, see Appendix 11.13 “Kelly and the Flower Maze”.

<sup>35</sup> The Sheikah Slate is a tool in BOTW used for teleporting to Shrines and Towers, creating bombs, controlling metal objects, creating ice blocks over water, stopping some objects and enemies from moving from a few seconds, and taking photos. These affordances are useful for combat and puzzles.

Calamity Ganon to be more *contra-ludic* than anything else in BOTW. It instead used the same Guardian laser attacks Elliott learned to deflect much earlier in the game, making especially disappointing.<sup>36</sup> There was no chance of losing and winning was inevitable, the definition of *hypo-ludicity* (Conway, 2012).

## 4.2 Attachments and priorities

My interviews with the five participants who played BOTW indicate most of them encountered the same characters, events, and activities. However, they each described these same things in very different ways. Although each account was different, they all followed a similar pattern. Each participant had certain interests and formed their own emotional attachments to the game. These points of interest influenced how they judged the rest of the game. When phenomena aligned with or supported their engagement with anything personally meaningful, they were sought out and recounted positively. When phenomena interrupted, contradicted, or withheld their interests and emotional investments, they were regarded negatively, avoided, or sometimes forgotten entirely.

### 4.2.1 Alex's friends

Alex, Chris, Elliott, and Riley almost certainly encountered Sidon but only Alex recalled him vividly and fondly. Alex described him as a friend who cared about Alex as a person and helped them when no one else would:

It's a video game character so it shouldn't really mean all that much but it, it really just struck a chord with me I was like, oh that's really nice like you don't see, you don't – I feel like you don't get many characters like that who are constantly encouraging you to

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<sup>36</sup> For a more detailed excerpt about Elliott's disappointment with Calamity Ganon, see Appendix 11.14 "Elliott and Calamity Ganon".

go forward. I feel like the game generally does that itself. But having a character like that I thought was really nice. (Alex)

Alex's account of Sidon and other characters indicates three important qualities for creating this feeling of belonging and meaningful connection: exposure, assistance, and eccentricity. This contrasts with characters who thwarted Alex's sense of *relatedness* by making them feel "alienated and ostracised" (Sheldon & Filak, 2008, p.267).

Sidon is an important character in the quest to appease Vah Ruta. Appeasing Vah Ruta is one of BOTW's few main quests and, upon completion, the player is rewarded with greater access to activities and affordances.<sup>37</sup> Alex encountered Sidon before even reaching Zora's Domain or seeing Vah Ruta. He accompanied Alex up the winding path, was one of the few characters involved in the conversations about Vah Ruta, and was vital in the fight with Vah Ruta. This exposure was important for Alex's sense of *relatedness* and is further supported by Alex's accounts of the Rito children and Zelda. Alex's clearest memories of Rito Village were of the Rito children and their particular side quest.<sup>38</sup>

This quest is relatively long and involves many activities in and around Rito Village. Additionally, Alex would have spoken with all five Rito children multiple times across the quest. In contrast, most quests in BOTW only involve speaking with the quest giver once upon receiving the quest and once more upon completing the quest. Alex probably spoke with the Rito children more

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<sup>37</sup> After appeasing Vah Ruta, the player is rewarded with "Mipha's Grace" (which automatically revives the player upon death) and the Lightscale Trident (which is one of the few weapons in the game the player can replace at a shop rather than scavenge from the environment), and more quests are made available in Zora's Domain.

<sup>38</sup> Alex did not remember the name of the side quest but based on their description I am certain they are referring to "Recital at Warbler's Nest".

than most other characters. Zelda, on the other hand, barely appears in BOTW at all. Alex only briefly mentioned Zelda when I asked them to describe the game:

It's about a guy called Link [...] from there on he wakes up and he has to regain all the power that he had before and go on a journey in order to defeat Ganon and lock him away again. *And he sees Zelda along the way as well* (laughs) [...] (Alex, emphasis added)

Despite being the title character, Zelda was neither memorable nor likeable. Zelda was “an objectively weaker character even though she wasn’t in it for most of the game and you had to unlock most of her things through the memories.<sup>39</sup> Um I felt like she wasn’t there most of the game I didn’t get to know her as well” (Alex).

Being around Sidon also provided Alex with new affordances, *hyper-ludicity*, and a sense of *competence*. “He kept talking to me and telling me, like, ‘I believe in you and you’re really great’ and he kept complimenting me” (Alex). Sidon reduced Hyrule’s *contra-ludicity* by giving Alex directions to Zora’s Domain and warning them about monsters. He also provided a new set of affordances during the fight with Vah Ruta. While swimming, the player cannot wield weapons or defend against attacks and will drown when their Stamina depletes. While riding on Sidon’s back, not only could Alex wield weapons but Sidon also swims faster than Link and is not restricted by Stamina. Alex attributed this *hyper-ludicity* to teamwork. “I feel like generally in Zelda you do everything by yourself but the fact that he was like helping you out and you were working together to use your abilities to the best of your ability (laughs) [...] made me feel more connected to him” (Alex).<sup>40</sup>

The importance of assistance and support is further demonstrated in Alex’s accounts of the other Zora, Urbosa, Mipha, and Zelda. Initially, Zora’s Domain was a very *hypo-ludic* place. Alex

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<sup>39</sup> You do not encounter Zelda in person until the very end of the game. You only hear her occasionally give Link instructions and see her in the cutscenes given as rewards as part of the “Captured Memories” quest.

<sup>40</sup> For a more detailed excerpt of Alex’s experiences cooperating with Sidon, see Appendix 11.15 “Alex and Sidon”.



usually utilised NPC dialogue to learn where to go and what to do in Hyrule. The Zora were hostile and barely spoke to them, so Alex felt alienated and Zora's Domain felt like a dead end. Zora's Domain only "opened up" (Alex) and the Zora seemed friendlier and even "cute" (Alex) after Alex appeased Vah Ruta and the Zora started giving them more information. Urbosa did not increase Alex's access to affordances like Sidon and the Zora but she did provide support and reassurance. She was a "powerful character" (Alex) who "seemed to care" (Alex) about others and was "more of a leader than the others" (Alex). Consequently, Urbosa was one of the few other characters Alex remembered fondly. The importance of support is also apparent in the contrast between Mipha and Zelda. Neither Mipha nor Zelda were memorable but Alex preferred Mipha because she was kinder. "She [i.e. Mipha] wasn't as mean to Link and she really liked Link" (Alex). On the other hand, "it felt to me kind of like she [i.e. Zelda] was just venting to Link most of the time and just expecting him to come save her when things got screwed up (laughs)" (Alex).

Sidon was also memorable because he was distinct from the "generally more serious" (Alex) Zora. "Compared to Sidon they [i.e. the other Zora] felt, they felt almost less interesting" (Alex). The importance of eccentricity is also clear in Alex's accounts of Ledo, Mei, Revali, and Daruk. Ledo and Mei were the only other Zora Alex specifically recalled. Ledo traded Luminous Stones for Diamonds and had a "ridiculous way of counting them" (Alex). Mei was swept away in a flood to the other side of Hyrule:

I was (laughs) really surprised (laughs) because um I thought it was really strange that she [i.e. Mei] was somewhere that's nowhere near Zora's Domain because aside from Sidon in that story bit I hadn't really seen any of them outside of the Zora's Domain before so I was really confused (laughs) as to what she was doing there. (Alex)

Revali was distinct because he disliked Link. This was "a character you don't generally see in Zelda games" (Alex). "I really liked that [...] somebody who really didn't like me at first I could eventually win over and I thought that was really cool" (Alex). In contrast, Alex barely recalled Daruk at all.

When I asked Alex to describe the four Champions, they said “he kind of felt a bit generic to me” (Alex). Unlike the other three Champions, Daruk was not mentioned again in the interview.

#### 4.2.2 Chris’s closure

In BOTW, the Champions exist in what Jenkins (2007) calls the *embedded narrative*. In environmental storytelling, the *embedded narrative* happened in the past and is communicated to players through hints and details in the virtual space (ibid, p.59). Players discover these details, often out of chronological order, and construct an understanding of what has already happened in the game like a detective investigating a crime. In BOTW, the Champions died during the Great Calamity before the game begins and players learn more about the Champions’ lives and deaths by talking to NPCs and completing quests to unlock Link’s memories.

All participants who played BOTW were aware of this *embedded narrative* but the Champions were only important to Chris. “The main campaign [...] is just the relationship that the four Champions have with Link” (Chris). Small details the other participants almost certainly encountered but barely mentioned or even forgot “added these *really* beautiful like layers to that simple story” (Chris, emphasis in original). “They were a family” (Chris) and Chris felt “guilty for being the only one alive” (Chris). Link belongs to the past and his duty is to the past, not the present. According to Chris, Hyrule had rebuilt and didn’t need to be saved:

The only reason that Link has to defeat him [i.e. Calamity Ganon] is for closure. It will put a full stop on, on his relationship with his friends who have died [...] it’s a game that’s about closure. I don’t think Link even needed to defeat Calamity Ganon [...] I think the only reason he does it is to like put the memory of his friends to rest. (Chris)<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For a more detailed excerpt of Chris’s impression of Link’s disconnection with the present, see Appendix 11.16 “Chris and the past”.

BOTW provided many activities but Chris's need for closure made some more interesting and enjoyable than others. "I see, like, key points in the story *as the* story [...] calming the Divine Beasts and defeating Calamity Ganon. Everything in-between is kind of me interacting with the world, rather than part of the story" (Chris, emphasis in original). Chris most enjoyed activities that helped them appease the Divine Beasts and defeat Calamity Ganon. Exploring Hyrule to find Shrines and Korok puzzles prepared Chris by increasing their Health, Stamina, and inventory space. In their eagerness to appease the Divine Beasts, Chris avoided monsters and took what they called a more "passive" (Chris) approach. Combat seemed irrelevant to Chris's story of closure, so Chris would "just press the quick attack button until it's dead" (Chris). Chris said this is how they usually play digital games, but this passivity was preventing their progress. They could not reach Calamity Ganon, much less defeat it, if they could not beat the monsters in their way. After this realisation, Chris adopted a more "active state" (Chris). "In Breath Of The Wild you really need to use the feature of blocking and dodging and um you know all of the um special attacks that you get granted by the Champions. You need to harness everything you've got to take on some of the harder enemies" (Chris). When Chris felt ready to fight Calamity Ganon, the rest of the game became less important. "I made the decision and I just kept trying until I won [...] I made the decision and I wasn't gonna do anything else. Yeah. I wanted to beat it like (laughs) I was ready for it to end" (Chris).

Chris felt disconnected from most of Hyrule because many places and activities "didn't really progress the story" (Chris). NPCs were "frustrating" (Chris) because, despite being friendly, "they didn't say anything that was important to what I thought was important" (Chris). Hyrule had moved past the Great Calamity but "you [as Link] belong to a time that's past" (Chris). The most "relatable characters" (Chris) were the NPCs who upgrade the Sheikah Slate. These elderly character "kind of belong to the past as well" (Chris), just like Link, and upgrading the Sheikah Slate provided additional affordances to help Chris with the Divine Beasts and Calamity Ganon. Even meeting the Champions' ghosts in the Divine Beasts was disruptive. Chris was motivated to appease the Divine Beasts and

defeat Calamity Ganon because Link was a lone survivor with no connections to the present day. The Champions appearing in the present day, even as ghosts, to speak with Link and help him was inconsistent with this narrative. “I kind of felt like it should have been kept to the past” (Chris).

For Chris, BOTW was about this story of Link being out of his own time and finding closure for the friends he lost. “One of the strongest points of Breath Of The Wild is its story” (Chris). Once Chris achieved their goal and found closure, the story felt complete and the game was over. Chris recounted how they defeated Calamity Ganon, saw the credits roll, and were returned to the main menu without being allowed to save their game. It was impossible for them to see what Hyrule was like without Calamity Ganon. This was a perfect ending to Chris’s story. “Once the story is finished that’s the end of the game [...] it’s a really nice like neat little package” (Chris).

Chris expected BOTW, like many digital games, to continue past the final boss. “I felt a bit disappointed from a gamer perspective that I wasn’t able to take it on but I think that from the world building and story point of view I kind of, I liked it” (Chris). Being able to return to Hyrule, as though Link had some other purpose in Hyrule besides finding closure, would have undermined Chris’s story. “*Not* being able to go back into it, is a perfect way to end this game [...] from a story standpoint I think that you shouldn’t be allowed to continue past Calamity Ganon” (Chris, emphasis in original). Chris needed to let the story “sit for a second” (Chris), to end that particular narrative, before they could return to BOTW and enjoy it in another way.

#### **4.2.3 Elliott’s mysteries**

In addition to the Champions, BOTW’s *embedded narrative* (Jenkin, 2007) includes a story about a prophecy of Calamity Ganon’s return, Hyrule’s plans to defeat it, the excavation to uncover the ancient Sheikah’s Divine Beasts and Guardians, Hyrule’s demise one hundred years ago, Zelda’s struggle with her sacred powers, and Link’s improbable survival and subsequent amnesia. This *embedded narrative* is presented as a mystery. Near the beginning of the game, players are told

Hyrule was destroyed by Calamity Ganon and Link survived, but very little else. The rest of the *embedded narrative* is hidden in dialogue, cutscenes, and visual clues for players to find as they explore Hyrule, complete quests, and speak with NPCs. All five participants who played BOTW were introduced to this mystery and were aware of this *embedded narrative*. Chris cared about the Champions, Kelly was curious about the Divine Beasts, Riley was not interested in this story, and Alex barely mentioned any of it at all. Only Elliott wanted to solve the mystery and learn what happened.

Elliott said they are always interested in *embedded narratives*, to know what happened before the game begins. “There’s *always* that want in my head to find out more. Like I *always* want to find, I always want to know” (Elliott, emphasis in original). Elliott wanted *embedded narratives* about OOT’s bosses. Understanding “where they came from and why they were like this” (Elliott) made the fights more satisfying. This is clear when we contrast the Barinade with Twinrova. OOT provided an *embedded narrative* about the Barinade explaining why Elliott need to kill it. Lord Jabu-Jabu was suffering from an unknown illness and Elliott wanted “to get to the bottom of the mystery” (Elliott) and “find out what was wrong” (Elliott). By playing through Jabu-Jabu’s Belly, Elliott discovered the Barinade was “this plague sort of thing that was the thing that was ruining everything” (Elliott).<sup>42</sup>

Elliott did not enjoy the challenges they encountered in Jabu-Jabu’s Belly but they found the dungeon satisfying because the *embedded narrative* provided motivation. Similarly, Elliott said the Bongo Bongo boss fight “isn’t too memorable, it was pretty standard” (Elliott) but the *embedded narrative* Elliott found about Bongo Bongo means “it’s always good when I get to him” (Elliott). In contrast, Twinrova was a challenging and enjoyable boss fight but an uninteresting and

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<sup>42</sup> For a more detailed excerpt about Elliott’s experience with the mystery of Jabu-Jabu’s illness, see Appendix 11.17 “Elliott and the Barinade”.

unmemorable character. Elliott could not find any *embedded narrative* explaining who Twinrova was or why they needed to fight her. “I always wanted to find out more about where that boss came from and, and what she was. But, unfortunately, there wasn’t much lore in Ocarina of Time” (Elliott).<sup>43</sup> Without an *embedded narrative* about who a character is and where they came from, “you don’t see them as people” (Elliott).

BOTW provided the kind of *embedded narrative* Elliott found in OOT with the Barinade and Bongo Bongo:

There was so much more than just point A to point B. There was a backstory, there was a history to why all this was happening [...] There’s always that idea that the world was never like it was or the world always hasn’t been this way. There’s always that idea at the back of my head, but when it was brought to light [in BOTW] it was just this added layer of mystery to me. (Elliott)

During the interview, Elliott often contrasted Hyrule’s “ruined” (Elliott) state to the “pristine condition” (Elliott) they saw in the Sheikah Slate’s photos from 100 years ago. Elliott wanted to know what happened to Hyrule and how Link was involved in that disaster. “I just went through *knowing* that I was gone for a hundred years but not knowing *why*” (Elliott, emphasis in original). This mystery, and the possibility Link was responsible, heavily impacted Elliott’s experience of the game. “For that entire fifty hours of gameplay you went around the story thinking that you had to do all these things to make up for all the things you did wrong” (Elliott). Elliott said this mystery “forced me to continuously play it” (Elliott), to complete every side quest, speak with every NPC, and explore every part of Hyrule. Whether Link was innocent or guilty was less important. On one hand, “it was a bit heartbreaking that the, the character that I’d, that I’d grown up with through different iterations of his life was essentially the villain the whole time” (Elliott). On the other hand, it was “really

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<sup>43</sup> The only other information I could find was Navi’s hint about Kotake and Koume being Ganondorf’s surrogate mothers.

intriguing that your character isn't as heroic as they think they are" (Elliott) so "you're no longer the hero you're the, you're the problem" (Elliott). Elliott was motivated to find the answer, whatever it might be. "It was the not knowing that kept me going" (Elliott).

Elliott couldn't relax until the mystery was solved. Elliott spent more time completing side quests, especially the "Captured Memories" quest to find Link's forgotten memories, than anything else. In Elliott's words:

I wanna know the rest of it. I wanna know all the lore. (laughs) So I just went around and found all the pieces [...] usually I leave the side quests until like just before I face the final boss. And that was one of the first times that I've, I've put off the main quest for the side quests. (Elliott)

This obsession is clear in Elliott's account of Fort Hateno:

There was a war there and it was like... It just, it was like ruins and it was just the idea that the last stand took place here but like I know nothing about it. I just know it occurred. [...] There was one memory I had to find [for the "Captured Memories" quest] that I always like I *thought* it was there. I *thought* the pictures lined up but they *didn't* and I always kept going back there to find the memory. But even after I found where the memory was I still went back there just 'cause... I can't remember why I went back there, it was just kind of a cool place to be. (Elliott, emphasis in original)

Elliott's suspicions later proved correct and finding the final hidden memory at Fort Hateno was exhilarating. "It was kind of like that a-ha moment that I'd found it. Like I knew there was something here and I found it" (Elliott). Only then, when they solved the mystery and proved Link's innocence, did the "stress" (Elliott) alleviate and they had "that moment of closure" (Elliott). "Now I can go back and if I want to play it again I can just play it relaxed rather than um playing it like completely concentrated on it" (Elliott).

Not everything in BOTW served this mystery and their interference dampened Elliott's satisfaction. Investigating Hyrule's demise and Link's disappearance was Elliott's driving motivation but those pieces of *embedded narrative* were few and far between. "I'd continuously do the side quests and find memories and like do fetch quests for people to find dialogue but they were all just

like thank you and stuff which is a bit annoying” (Elliott). Elliott had the *autonomy* to search the game for clues themselves, but this *autonomy* was thwarted when there were no clues to find. “Ultimately I probably would have had the same amount of closure if I didn’t do the side quests” (Elliott). Finding the final memory in Fort Hateno was exhilarating but, after so much fruitless activity, Elliott felt more relieved than satisfied. “I’ve been waiting for tens of hours to find out what happened. And when I found out what happened it was just that feeling of I’m done rather than, you know, excitement. [...] It’s that kind of relief that I’m, I’m finally done” (Elliott).

#### **4.2.4 Peaceful world**

Kelly and Riley were less interested in fighting monsters, finding closure, or solving mysteries than Alex, Chris, and Elliott. Instead, they were more interested in what Fuller and Jenkins (1995) call *travel narratives*. They enjoyed exploring the space and atmosphere of Hyrule without pursuing any particular goal. “I find the experience of just *being* in the world sometimes kind of nice” (Kelly, emphasis in original). To Kelly, Hyrule was “a pretty safe world” (Kelly). Villages are peaceful, villagers don’t get attacked, “nobody seems too in distress” (Kelly), “even the travellers on the roads! [...] Like, they don’t ever say, ‘Ooh, watch out! It’s been really dangerous today’ ” (Kelly). Monsters were dangerous but effectively no different from “a wild animal threat” (Kelly) or like villagers who were “a little more aggressively barbarian [...] than the other residents” (Kelly). To Riley, Hyrule was a living breathing world. “Lots of colour that’s constantly changing and life in the world so it feels great to kind of just ride around and see at different times [...] What I appreciate most in the game was the world” (Riley). Kelly and Riley had particular impressions of what Hyrule was and should be. Anything inconsistent with this interpretation felt like an intrusion.

BOTW’s main missions to save Hyrule from Calamity Ganon had very little impact on Kelly’s experience. Calamity Ganon was only ever “a big swirling thing around a castle” (Kelly) in the distance, without threatening or even affecting Kelly themselves. “He seems quite contained”



(Kelly). However, since defeating Calamity Ganon is the main mission, most of the cutscenes and dialogue involved characters imploring Kelly to save Hyrule. This *embedded narrative* (Jenkins, 2007) about saving Hyrule from immanent destruction contradicted the mundane monsters, safe villages, and undaunted travellers Kelly encountered. “There’s no visual evidence to support what they’re saying” (Kelly). Kelly “really enjoyed playing” (Kelly) BOTW but these contradictions sometimes felt “a little pushy” (Kelly) and “a little contrived” (Kelly). “I think maybe I feel like they should just *back off* a bit and let me do my own thing” (Kelly, emphasis in original). Kelly eschewed heroism in favour of everyday activities such as cooking, taming horses, and doing small jobs for NPCs who did not know who Link was. “I haven’t gone to the place where the quest icon is telling me to go [...] I get stuck doing side quests. [...] I’m fifty meters from where the next quest point is but I’m like, ‘Ah I’ll finish this one first’ ” (Kelly).

For Riley, BOTW’s Hyrule was a living world existing for its own sake rather than for the player’s enjoyment. This is clear in Riley’s descriptions of the Giant Horse and the dragons. To Riley, the Giant Horse was a living creature. “It was much more aware of my presence in its area, had better peripheral vision than all of the others, it had a better sense of where I was in relation to it. So approaching from behind and trying to leap aboard and tame it was impossible” (Riley). The dragons were ancient and unconcerned with the player and this reflected Riley’s impression of Hyrule. “The dragons feel like a deep elemental magic [...] some ancient component of the world that, that *felt* like it *belonged* there” (Riley, emphasis in original). They existed in the “uninhabited areas” (Riley) of the world, changing the environment around them with their special music and updrafts, and are “not particularly conscious or at least um appearing to be conscious of the world around them” (Riley). The Giant Horse and dragons were less realistic than the foxes and birds Riley enjoyed seeing, but they still felt alive and belonging in this world.

The “regular animals” (Riley), the landscape, and the “short day-night cycle” (Riley) all supported this impression of the world but other parts of BOTW did not. The monsters and villagers, in particular, “didn’t feel like they all belonged in the same world” (Riley). They were “underpinned by a lot of [...] lore and history and fan service” (Riley) Riley did not appreciate. It made Hyrule seem less like its own entity and more like a place constructed for the player, specifically for a Zelda fan. The monsters and characters felt like they were plucked from a “rogues gallery” (Riley) built up across the Zelda franchise rather than “creatures that you would imagine inhabiting that land” (Riley). “It felt like the environmental design was at odds with the character design and performance in a lot of cases” (Riley). This is especially clear in the way Riley compares the dragons against the Wizrobes. The dragons were an ancient component of Hyrule. They felt “genuinely magical” (Riley) and Riley “spent a lot of time actually chasing them around the map because it was um always a little bit magical when they appeared” (Riley). In contrast, the Wizrobes were “cartoon villains” (Riley) with “grim cartoon magic” (Riley). They were designed to evoke the Zelda franchise, not because they belonged in the world, so Riley just tried to avoid them.

Riley avoided these incongruities, including most of the *contra-ludicity* other participants enjoyed. They spent more time exploring the world than completing quests. They avoided monsters both because their designs were “galling” (Riley) and because they “never found combat particularly satisfying” (Riley). Whereas Alex and Chris accumulated *hyper-ludic* affordances to defeat stronger and stronger monsters, Riley gained only enough *hyper-ludicity* to circumvent monsters. This is apparent in Riley’s description of the Master Sword. The Master Sword was Riley’s favourite weapon because it was more “reliable and more powerful than everything else” (Riley). The Master Sword is

neither the strongest weapon in the game<sup>44</sup> nor is it obtained early.<sup>45</sup> However, it is the only unbreakable weapon. Combat was “a way of getting *past* things” (Riley, emphasis in original), an inconvenience to be minimised. Riley was not seeking out stronger monsters like Alex or training to fight Calamity Ganon like Chris. The Master Sword was sufficient for removing relatively weak monsters from Riley’s path without needing to conserve or replace their weapons.

#### 4.2.5 Kelly’s unknown adventurer

Although Kelly and Riley both enjoyed BOTW as a *travel narrative* (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995), Riley enjoyed the *hyper-ludicity* of being a superhuman transcending mortal hindrances and Kelly enjoyed being an average human dealing with simple problems. Riley felt BOTW’s *embedded narrative* (Jenkins, 2007) reinforced their experience of dominion and superiority. The game constantly reminds players they are “superhuman warriors uh and it’s our job um grinding through the game to acquire those superhuman traits” (Riley), putting them “beyond the scope of the other inhabitants of the world” (Riley). Kelly also noticed this *embedded narrative* but, unlike Riley, Kelly found it disruptive and often tried to avoid it. Kelly was not convinced they needed to save Hyrule from Calamity Ganon and the idea of doing so seemed counterintuitive. “Kind of defeats the purpose, don’t you think? Like, the whole idea is you’re going, like, it’s an open-world game! Like, go and explore stuff! [...] It’s not just about getting to the end and destroying him” (Kelly). “I’ll probably *stop* playing the game *before* I finish the main storyline” (Kelly, emphasis in original).

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<sup>44</sup> Attack strength for weapons in BOTW ranges from 1 to 78 (*Weapons In Breath Of The Wild*, n.d.). The Master Sword has a default strength of 30, occasionally increasing to 60 under certain circumstances.

<sup>45</sup> The Master Sword is obtained by pulling it from a stone pedestal. Pulling the sword depletes Link’s Health. 13 Hearts are needed to survive this process. Link begins the game with 3 Hearts, so the player must complete at least 40 of the 120 Shrines and trade those Spirit Orbs for 10 more Hearts before they can have the Master Sword.

Kelly preferred activities “you can do at your leisure that’s not really connected with the Link character” (Kelly). They enjoyed “bumbling around” (Kelly) and “tend to wander around to places I haven’t been” (Kelly). These *Cooler* designs (Conway & Ouellette, 2019) allowed Kelly to meander, investigate, and feel relaxed. “It is an excellent, like, pre-bed game. [...] I played it a lot just, like, sitting in bed for, like an hour or half an hour or whatever before I go to sleep” (Kelly). Kelly’s most distinct memory, and possibly their most enjoyable experience, was saving sheep. They recalled wandering through a village, struggling to manoeuvre their horse over a fence, when an NPC asked them to help save her sheep from monsters on the beach. It was “a real world human problem” (Kelly) for an average person, not a “big hero” (Kelly). The NPC did not know who Link was, did not treat Kelly as a hero, and did not even give them a reward (as far as Kelly recalls). “It gives you more freedom [...] if you’re just a regular person you, there’s no expectation. Like, they’re like, ‘Hey, can you help me?’ or ‘Hey, you wanna buy something?’ It’s not like, ‘You are Link, you must, like, it is your destiny to go and do this.’ [...] it’s more like an expectation if you *have* to go and do this. Maybe I resent the game for making me do things” (Kelly, emphasis in original).

Despite BOTW’s main missions, the game’s *Coolness* (Conway & Ouellette, 2019) allowed Kelly to be an unknown adventurer rather than a hero. Kelly kept weapons for their “aesthetic” (Kelly) and “sentimental” (Kelly) value, not for combat. They spent more time trying to repair their favourite sword than actually using it to fight. When they could not find a way to repair it, they chose to keep the sword in their inventory with no intention of using it again. “I *still* have that *mostly* destroyed sword *in* my inventory [...] I horde (laughs) slightly broken swords. Uh which is really weird!” (Kelly, emphasis in original). They cooked for experimentation and discovery, not to make “the ultimate recipes” (Kelly). “That’s kind of just interesting to go and find things and throw them together and see what comes out” (Kelly). They filled their compendium with photos of Hyrule’s flora and fauna for the sake of exploration, with no interest in using the compendium’s information about item locations and enemy weaknesses. They spent their time finding, taming, and stabling

horses because they liked the horses, not because they needed transportation or a battle steed and their favourite horses were based on appearance, rather than functional qualities like speed.

Although BOTW's *Coolness* (Conway & Ouellette, 2019) allowed this behaviour, its *embedded narrative* sometimes made Kelly feel like an inefficient and ineffective Link. Reminders about Calamity Ganon and the need to be a hero were not especially annoying or negative but "it does sometimes detract a little bit" (Kelly). "It's like, 'Oh okay, that's what I should be working on. Kind of being that person [...] what the person who's made the game thinks I, my end goal should be'" (Kelly). All the things Kelly enjoyed most in BOTW were "not the things I think Link would do" (Kelly).

Like, let's be fair, Link as a character is not gonna spend a lot of time, like, cooking steak. Like, he's a *soldier*. [...] He's not gonna go catch his own horses every time he finds a stable and a paddock of horses [...] he's just gonna ride whatever horse the palace guard has issued him. (Kelly, emphasis in original)

This *embedded narrative* sometimes *Heated up* (Conway & Ouellette, 2019) the game by expecting Kelly to act like Link rather than playing the way they preferred. "Link is a pre-established character. I can't put my, project what I would like onto him" (Kelly, emphasis in original). It was also pervasive throughout BOTW. The *Cooler* (Conway & Ouellette, 2019) parts of the game, with little or no reference to heroism or Calamity Ganon, did not afford as much activity as the main villages where Link was treated as a hero. Although Kelly started playing BOTW later than the other participants, they already felt they were close to exhausting the side quests. "Other games I've played where you can't go five feet without bumping into a side quest [...] this doesn't feel as much like that [...] it feels a little empty at times" (Kelly). At the time of the interview, Kelly was still enjoying BOTW despite the dwindling side quests but suspected they would need to act like Link before they could access more *Cool* (Conway & Ouellette, 2019) side quests and maintain their unknown adventurer narrative.

#### 4.2.6 Horse friends

Horses are plentiful in BOTW and the many stables across Hyrule all provide the same information about taming, stabling, and riding horses. However, horses only featured prominently in Alex's and Kelly's accounts. Elliott did not mention the horses at all, Chris said that they never rode horses because they were too difficult to manoeuvre, and Riley only referred to horses as tools to utilise. Alex and Kelly, on the other hand, cared about their horses so much they often sacrificed *autonomy*, *competence*, and *hyper-ludicity* to protect them.

As discussed earlier, Alex intentionally sought out stronger monsters for the *contra-ludic* challenge and the *hyper-ludic* rewards. However, they avoided battles while on horseback, specifically Guardians. Horses can outrun Guardian lasers, providing the *hyper-ludic* advantage Alex usually utilised when confronting stronger monsters. Additionally, the rare items dropped by defeated Guardians can be exchanged for some of the most *hyper-ludic* weapons in the game, including the Ancient Arrows and Guardian Weapons Alex said made them "feel a lot more powerful like you have more control over what you can kill" (Alex). Despite this, Alex prioritised their horse's safety.

Kelly said they struggled with combat and this restricted their movement across Hyrule, but they willingly increased this *contra-ludicity* to protect their horses. Before engaging in combat, they would leave their horse at a distance and walk the rest of the way. If the fight came too close to their horse, Kelly would retreat and ride the horse further away before dismounting and returning to the fight. "I don't want them to die [...] they might be able to die, I don't know!" (Kelly). Some challenges arose entirely from their desire to keep their horses safe. When Kelly accidentally left their horse

alone on a remote mountain by teleporting away,<sup>46</sup> they immediately wanted to “get him back and get him safe” (Kelly).

I had to go back and get him. It was sad [...] I was like, ‘Aw no! He’s not going with me! Aw this is gonna be annoying.’ (laughs) ‘Cause I’d, I knew straight away that I was gonna have to go back and get him. [...] immediately opened the map and, like, I was like, ‘Oh thank god he’s still marked on the map.’ [...] And I had to walk back *there*. [...] Took a while (laughs) [...] (Kelly, emphasis in original)

Riley was “a pretty good horse owner” (Riley) who “looked after them” (Riley) and were wary they could be “damaged or destroyed um if they’re left in the wrong spot” (Riley). However, Riley mainly saw horses as a *hyper-ludic* feature, like the Zora Armour or the Paraglider. Riley had “mastery” (Riley) over their horses and used them in ways “most convenient to my goal” (Riley). This is quite different from Alex and Kelly sacrificing affordances to protect their horses from danger. Kelly specifically called their horses their “pets” (Kelly), something more important to Kelly than any other NPC. “I’d be *more* sad about losing a *pet* in a video game than I am about losing, like, an NPC or, like, an ally or a squad mate or whatever. Always more upset if I lose a pet. [...] Like, *way* more sensitive about pets” (Kelly, emphasis in original). Kelly was even surprised by the idea of seeing horses as only a form of transportation. “That never occurred to me. No They’re my *pets* (laughs). [...] They’re *helpful*. They’re really useful to getting to places quickly but they’re also my pets” (Kelly, emphasis in original).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Players can use the Sheikah Slate to teleport Link from almost anywhere on the map to any of the Shrines and Towers they have unlocked. Shrines and Towers are not evenly distributed across the map and consequently some areas are less accessible (see *Breath of the Wild Interactive Map*, n.d.).

<sup>47</sup> For a longer excerpt illustrating Kelly’s feelings about their horses, see Appendix 11.18 “Kelly and their horses”.

## 4.3 Conclusion

IPA is an exploratory process. Rather than beginning with a hypothesis to test and explain a phenomenon, it begins with a broad question and seeks to illuminate a topic through participants' personal experiences of it. The broadness narrows to rich details as the participants tell their own stories and reveal what matters to them through the "objects of concern" they raise and "experiential claims" they make (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, pp.111-112). The broad question at the beginning of each of my interviews was, "Were there any parts of *Breath of the Wild* or *Ocarina of Time* that stood out to you?"<sup>48</sup> From there, my participants talked about what mattered to them. Their accounts revealed themes about the experience of power and the impact of emotional attachments on their perceptions and values. These themes shed light on the experience of playing BOTW and OOT and, in the next chapter, I use these themes to provide new insight into the *Dynamic Hero's Journey*.

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<sup>48</sup> Refer to Appendix 9 for my interview schedule.



# Chapter 5: Discussion

The *Dynamic Hero's Journey* in theory accounts for every possible relationship between the *Hero*<sup>49</sup> and any *Ideal State* and all the ways that relationship can change. I compared the Dynamic Hero's Journey against the themes across my participants' accounts and identified common patterns. I drew from extant literature about player motivations, affordances, and narrative psychology to explore how these patterns were facilitated.

## 5.1 Dynamic Hero's Journey patterns

The most significant patterns can be divided into two main categories: When a Dynamic Hero's Journey was *Facilitated* and when it was *Negated*.

### 5.1.1 Facilitated Hero's Journeys

The Dynamic Hero's Journey appeared in three ways: *Progression Pattern*, *Staircase Pattern*, and *Paradise Pattern*. These patterns were *Facilitated Hero's Journeys*.

#### 5.1.1.1 Progression Pattern

In the Progression Pattern, participants wanted some Ideal State but realised they were in a Flawed State. They engaged with *Trials*, where they encountered *Attractors* helping them towards the Ideal State and *Repulsors* hindering them. Progression required they *Transform* their situation, either themselves or their surroundings, to become more affected by Attractors than Repulsors. All

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<sup>49</sup> The capitalised word "Hero" specifically refers to the entity in the Dynamic Hero's Journey who is affected by Attractors and/or Repulsors. The capitalised word "Hero" is distinct from the lowercase word "hero", meaning a person who is heroic. For more information about the "Hero", refer to Chapter 2: Dynamic Hero's Journey.

participants described at least one Progression Pattern. Participants who fully Transformed became *World Redeemer Heroes*, easily attained their Ideal State, and could enjoy their mastery of that Ideal State.

This pattern aligns with the Dynamic Hero's Journey more so than the *Linear Hero's Journey*. Rather than describing a chronological sequence of distinct events, participants described the game as they understood it: the components comprising the world, what those components meant, and how the components affected them.

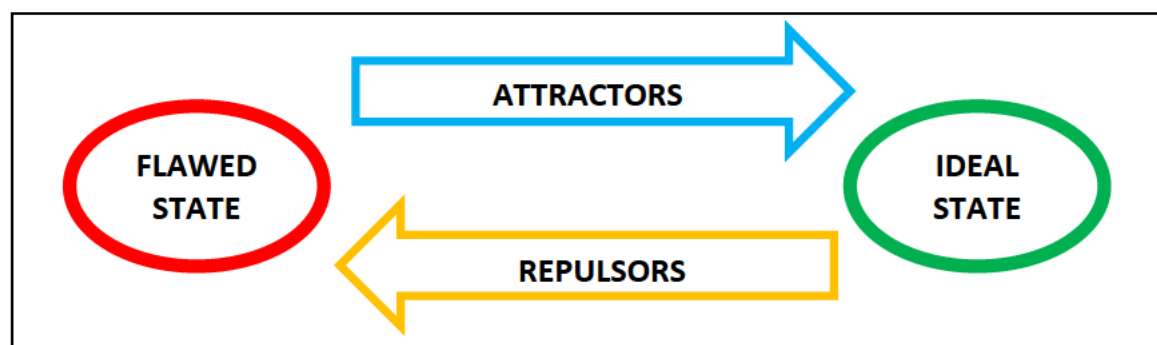


Figure 3. Dynamic Hero's Journey diagram.

Some Progression Patterns spanned the entire game, such as Alex's Progression from weakness to power, and some happened over very short portions of the game, such as Alex and Kelly's Progression from horse in danger to horse in safety. Some Progression Patterns happened only once, such as Chris's Progression from loose ends to closure, and some were recurring as the same Flawed State arose in different situations, such as Elliott's Progression from unfamiliar to familiar for each new boss. Sometimes multiple Progression Patterns overlapped and were interconnected, such as Chris's Progression towards being a competent combatant, surviving the environment, and finding closure.

Table 1. *Key components of participants' Progression Patterns*

Participant	Ideal State	Flawed State	Attractors	Repulsors	Related concepts
Alex	Powerful and free	Weak and restricted	Spirit Orbs (from Shrines traded for more Heart Containers and increased Stamina Wheel)  Equipment Cooking	Monsters  Dangerous terrain  Link's initial weakness	SDT's competence  Yee's Achievement motivation  Contra-ludicity and hyper-ludicity  Perceptible affordances  Sequential and nested affordances  Weak procedurality
Alex	Friends and helpful	Strangers and indifferent	Exposure Eccentricity Support Help	Initial unfamiliarity  Inclination to act rather than talk	SDT's relatedness, autonomy, competence  Bartle's Socialiser type  Character World
Chris	Closure for Champions	Loose ends after failed mission	Learning more about the Champions  Mission can be completed  Increased combat skills  Spirit Orbs (traded for more Heart Containers and increased Stamina Wheel)	Link alone, unconnected, and largely unsupported by Hyrule and denizens	SDT's relatedness  Bartle's Socialiser type  Character World

Participant	Ideal State	Flawed State	Attractors	Repulsors	Related concepts
Chris	Surviving the environment	Vulnerable to environment	<p>Able to conduct trial-and-error tests</p> <p>Getting feedback from interacting with environment (e.g. freezing in cold, safe near fire)</p>	Initial ignorance and lack of direct instruction	<p>Yee's Achievement motivation</p> <p>Perceptible affordances</p> <p>Sequential and nested affordances</p> <p>Coolness</p> <p>Operative World</p> <p>Contra-ludicity</p>
Chris	Competent combatant	Incompetent combatant	<p>Wide range of combat options (e.g. dodging)</p> <p>Punished for unskilled combat</p> <p>Rewarded for using more combat options</p>	<p>Initially unfamiliar with combat system</p> <p>Easier to play "passively" (Chris)</p>	<p>Yee's Achievement motivation</p> <p>Contra-ludicity and hyper-ludicity</p> <p>Perceptible affordances</p> <p>Sequential and nested affordances</p> <p>SDT's competence</p> <p>Operative World</p>
Elliott	Understanding the world (Jabu-Jabu's illness, Bongo Bongo's backstory, Hyrule's demise and Link's involvement)	Mystery, missing information (Why is Jabu-Jabu sick? What is Bongo Bongo? What caused Hyrule's demise?)	Collecting clues by exploring the world (finding monsters inside Jabu-Jabu's Belly, the Old Man in Kakariko Village, Link's memories)	Information is hidden	<p>SDT's autonomy</p> <p>Bartle's Explorer type</p> <p>Yee's Immersion motivation</p> <p>Character World</p>

Participant	Ideal State	Flawed State	Attractors	Repulsors	Related concepts
Elliott	Knows how to fight boss	Does not know how to fight boss	Gaining information through experimentation	Initially unfamiliar Never encountered something like this What I know right now doesn't work	Yee's Achievement motivation SDT's competence Perceptible affordances Sequential and nested affordances Operative World
Riley	Mastery of tools	Unskilled with tools	Tools available from beginning Increasingly complex puzzles	Tools initially unfamiliar No instructions	Yee's Achievement motivation SDT's competence Hyper-ludicity Perceptible affordances Sequential and nested affordances Operative World
Alex and Kelly	Horse is safe	Horse is in danger	Bond with horses Link is target (not horses)	Monsters Dangerous environments Unpredictable horse behaviour	SDT's relatedness Bartle's Socialiser type Character World

Participant	Ideal State	Flawed State	Attractors	Repulsors	Related concepts
Jean	Able to do anything	Unskilled	Tools to find Enemies are strong but not invincible	Physically weak Need to find and learn to use the tools	Yee's Achievement motivation SDT's competence Hyper-ludicity Operative World Perceptible affordances

#### ***5.1.1.2 Staircase Pattern***

In the Staircase Pattern, participants progressed towards their Ideal State in distinct bursts, as though ascending a staircase. Each partial Transformation brought them to a less-Flawed, but still not Ideal, State. Not all participants described this Staircase Pattern but the ones who did gave similar accounts of incrementally facing and overcoming challenges interspersed with periods of satisfaction.

Each Shrine brought Riley one step closer to mastery and ascending the snowy mountain was one long series of plateaus for Chris, but Alex's Progression towards freedom provides particularly clear examples. Gaining a bow gave Alex a wider range of combat options. Learning to identify monsters' strength by their appearance allowed Alex to protect themselves and choose their battles. Alex's resilience increased each time they traded Spirit Orbs for more Heart Containers and Stamina Wheels. Alex would rise to the next "level" (Alex) and enjoy their new freedom for a while before confronting the next challenge.

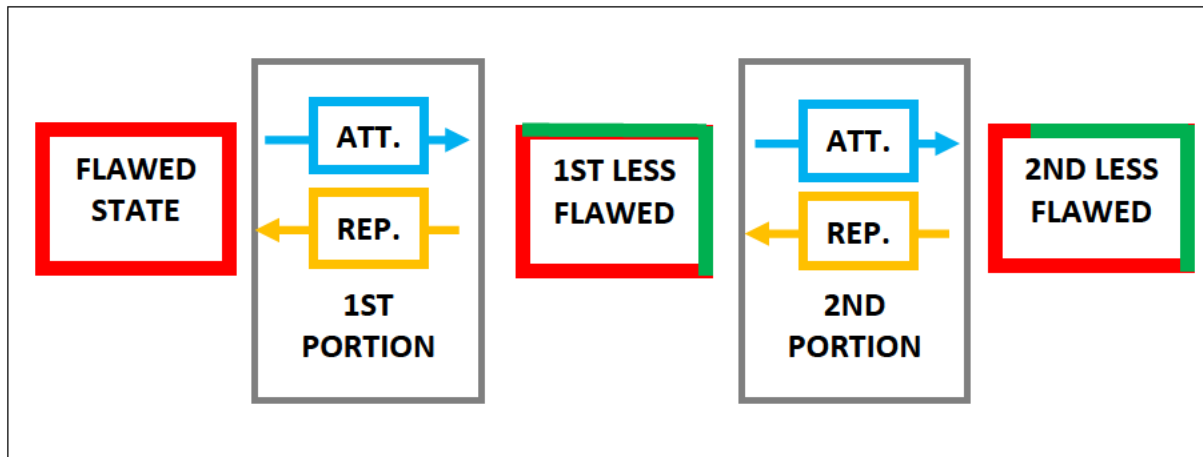


Figure 4. Staircase Pattern, portions of Trials separated by less-Flawed States.

This Staircase Pattern adds further detail to the Dynamic Hero's Journey. Campbell (1968) defines the Trials as the period where the Hero is exposed to Attractors and Repulsors. His examples demonstrate some common ways Attractors and Repulsors are revealed and their different consequences. This Staircase Pattern provides another variant, where Attractors and Repulsors are divided into smaller portions and separated by progressively less-Flawed States. The Hero crosses the *Threshold* from their Flawed State into the first portion of Trials. They Transform to overcome those challenges and reach a less-Flawed State, like a *Hero of Action*.<sup>50</sup> Each less-Flawed State is a moment of respite, a Threshold between portions of Trials. The Hero chooses when to cross the next Threshold.

Alex and Chris in particular praised BOTW for letting them choose what they did, when they did it, when they stopped, and when they resumed. Alex could enjoy each new "level" (Alex) of *hyper-ludicity* before testing themselves against greater *contra-ludicity*. As Chris's combat skills improved, they could defeat more monsters and they enjoyed this comfort before learning to fight the remaining threats. BOTW let them continue playing even without progressing. In contrast, Alex and

<sup>50</sup> For more information about the Hero of Action, see 2.2.8.1 Partial Transformation: Hero of Action.

Chris stopped playing OOT in frustration because they reached a puzzle they could not solve. They were stuck in the middle of a challenge, without a less-Flawed State into which they could retreat.

These less-Flawed States also allowed participants to take risks and confront challenges for which they were not ready. Alex might not have braved as many dangers if they could not retreat behind a Threshold. These risks benefitted Alex in two ways. Firstly, Alex could feel what it was like to wield powerful weapons before they could easily or reliably obtain them. These exhilarating and motivating experience Attracted them towards the Ideal State. Secondly, when those weapons eventually broke mid-fight, Alex was forced to confront monsters they would otherwise avoid. Alex said they had a “50-50” (Alex) chance of winning these fights, so they would sometimes unexpectedly win and discover they were stronger than they thought.

Alex was able to be a *Thief Hero*,<sup>51</sup> facing Attractors and Repulsors without Transforming first and retreating behind the Threshold to avoid the consequences. Campbell (1968) presents the Thief Hero as a sympathetic character who approaches the Adventure in a relatable but improper and ultimately unsuccessful way. In contrast, Alex’s account suggests Thief Hero play experiences can be enjoyable if the player can retreat behind a Threshold like the two children who escaped the “waterhag” (ibid, p.201) rather than dying like Phaëthon in the Solar Chariot (ibid, pp.133-136).

#### ***5.1.1.3 Paradise Pattern***

Paradise Patterns occurred when participants were satisfied with some aspect of their current situation. Despite the other Flawed States Kelly experienced, they felt BOTW’s Hyrule was a safe place for them to relax. “I find the experience of just *being* in the world sometimes kind of nice” (Kelly, emphasis in original). This was a common description of BOTW. No one felt the need to save

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<sup>51</sup> For more information about the Thief Hero, refer to 2.2.8.2 Untransformed: Thief Hero.



Hyrule, despite it being an almost mandatory quest.<sup>52</sup> Participants felt Hyrule was dangerous when they were insufficiently knowledgeable or skilled, not because Hyrule was corrupted with monsters and Calamity Ganon. They Transformed themselves to meet these challenges, but they did not feel Hyrule itself needed to change. Hyrule was supposed to be dangerous.

This pattern in particular reveals the strengths of the Dynamic Hero's Journey over the Linear Hero's Journey. The Linear Hero's Journey has no room for inaction. If the Hero has achieved their goal, the story is over. In the Dynamic Hero's Journey, the Ideal State is something to be achieved and then maintained. Campbell (1968) gives examples of myths about Heroes who already possess an Ideal State.<sup>53</sup> Myths about Krishna the earthly incarnation of the god Vishnu (ibid, pp.327-329,350-352,365), the Bodhisattva who achieved Enlightenment (ibid, pp.149-152,162-163), gods enjoying endless feasts in paradise (ibid, pp.176-177), and immortals in their heavenly Taoist landscape (ibid, p.167) all fit the Paradise Pattern. BOTW provided an Ideal State of an interesting and challenging, but still relatively peaceful, Hyrule.

### 5.1.2 Negated Hero's Journeys

*Negated Hero's Journeys* were just as common as Facilitated Hero's Journeys. Participants described their play experiences in terms of their Ideal States. However, some experiences were unconnected to their Ideal States and did not fit their Dynamic Hero's Journeys. Participants consistently said

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<sup>52</sup> Most activities in BOTW are optional, as participants themselves report, but some activities seem less optional than others. Appeasing Divine Beasts and defeating Calamity Ganon are not necessary but the player's attention is regularly drawn to these quests through dialogue, cutscenes, and the Adventure Log. Additionally, many BOTW walkthroughs are structured around the four Divine Beasts and end with fighting Calamity Ganon (see EuroGamer.net's *Zelda: Breath of the Wild Walkthrough – Guide and Tips for Completing the Main Quests*, n.d.; IGN.com's *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild Wiki Guide*, n.d.; ZeldaDungeon.net's *Breath of the Wild Walkthrough Guide*, n.d.). And, unlike most other activities in BOTW, the game world changes after each main quest is completed.

<sup>53</sup> For more information, see the 2.2.8.4 "Complete Transformation: World Redeemer Hero".

these experiences were disruptive and did not belong in the game. The Negated Hero's Journeys in my participants' accounts can be roughly divided into three categories: *Intrusive Repulsors*, *Absent Repulsors*, and *Collapsed Hero's Journeys*.

#### ***5.1.2.1 Intrusive Repulsors***

Repulsors make the Ideal State undesirable or difficult to attain. Participants did not find Repulsors unpleasant. Strong monsters (Alex, Chris, Kelly), complex puzzles (Riley), and hidden information (Elliott) all prevented participants from reaching their Ideal States but they were part of their Ideal State's definition. Alex was in the Flawed State because there were monsters stronger than them. Riley was in the Flawed State because they did not yet know how to use the Sheikah Slate in a specific way a Shrine required. Elliott was in the Flawed State because the information they needed was not immediately available. Wanting the Ideal State means wanting to overcome its Repulsors. Intrusive Repulsors were not defined by the Ideal State but still impacted participants' relationship with their Ideal States. Participants said these Intrusive Repulsors existed without meaning or explanation and didn't belong in the game.

Some Intrusive Repulsors presented additional challenges for participants to overcome before they could reach their Ideal State. Elliott, Chris, and Kelly all recounted times when they were unfairly hindered. In each of these cases, there is a distinct experiential difference between Repulsors, which participants expected and enjoyed, and Intrusive Repulsors, which suspended the Hero's Journey until they were removed. These Intrusive Repulsors felt both unavoidable and pointless.

Table 2. *Intrusive Repulsors disrupting participants' Hero's Journeys.*

Participant	Ideal State	Repulsors	Intrusive Repulsors	Relevant concepts
Elliott	Complete current dungeon/temple	Current lack of knowledge and skill	Kakariko Well and Shadow Temple cannot be mastered	SDT's competence thwarted False affordances Hidden affordances Downkeyed from Operative World
Elliott	Solve BOTW's mystery	Clues are hidden, must be found by searching map and overcoming challenges	Many activities and areas of map provide no clues	Downkeyed from Character World
Chris	Find closure by defeating Calamity Ganon	Not strong enough to defeat Calamity Ganon	NPC superficial conversations are only concerned with present day and do not make you stronger	SDT's competence thwarted Downkeyed from Character World
Kelly	Skilled enough to solve Shrine puzzle	Currently unskilled	Shrine is based on chance Completing Shrine does not improve skill Skill is useless	SDT's competence thwarted Downkeyed from Operative World

Other Intrusive Repulsors compromised the Ideal State. Chris could defeat Calamity Ganon and find closure for the Champions but the possibility of BOTW's designers planning an unsatisfying ending for the sake of subverting narrative tropes made Chris avoid ending the game. Kelly's and

Riley's Ideal States were still possible but only when they intentionally avoided or ignored these Intrusive Repulsors. Elliott's Ideal State was completely impossible.

Table 3. *Intrusive Repulsors compromising participants' Ideal States.*

Participant	Ideal State	Intrusive Repulsors	Relevant concepts
Elliott	Redeem Bongo Bongo	OOT only affords fighting Bongo Bongo  Must kill Bongo Bongo to continue playing	SDT's autonomy thwarted  Strong procedurality and Hotness  Downkeyed from Character World
Chris	Find closure for Champions	Unexpected twists and possible unsatisfying endings for the sake of surprise	SDT's autonomy thwarted  Downkeyed from Character World
Kelly	Unknown adventurer in safe world (Paradise Pattern)	Dialogue, cutscenes, and missions say you are the hero who must save Hyrule from evil	SDT's autonomy thwarted  Hotness  Downkeyed from Character World
Riley	In a real, living world (Paradise Pattern)	Cartoonish creatures from the Zelda franchise	Downkeyed from Character World
Riley	Superhuman and superior	Mundane "busy work" (Riley) even mortals can do	SDT's competence thwarted  Downkeyed from Character World

### 5.1.2.2 Absent Repulsors

When participants wanted an Ideal State they also expected, and even desired, the Repulsors included in the Ideal State's definition. Attaining the Ideal State by definition required they overcome its Repulsors. Lacking these expected Repulsors prevented them from achieving their Ideal State, and even compromised the Ideal State itself. When Elliott expected these Repulsors but found none, they were confused and dissatisfied.

Table 4. *The Repulsors Elliott expected and the situations they actually encountered.*

<b>Ideal State</b>	<b>Expected Repulsors</b>	<b>Actual situation</b>	<b>Related concepts</b>
Defeat Calamity Ganon	Final boss of contraludic, unfamiliar appearance Fewer resources than normal (because must climb Hyrule Castle first)	Attacks just like Guardians (a previously mastered monster type) Obvious weak point Not new or threatening	Downkeyed from Operative World SDT's competence thwarted
Reach second half of Shadow Temple	Boat "didn't look right" (Elliott) Threatening appearance Boat is a trap and will sink you	Boat carries you to second half of Shadow Temple	Downkeyed from Operative World

The seemingly new and unknown monster Calamity Ganon implied Elliott would encounter a slew of Repulsors demanding careful observation and quick thinking. Calamity Ganon was neither unfamiliar nor difficult so Elliott did not need to learn or adapt at all. Elliott's experience with the boat in OOT's Shadow Temple is less disruptive but equally illustrative. Everything about the boat's appearance insisted it was a trap but treating it as a trap to avoid left Elliott wandering the Shadow Temple aimlessly for days. With nothing else to do, Elliott stepped onto the boat and was confused and frustrated when they realised the boat was an Attractor. They did not relax until monsters descended on the boat and the Repulsors they expected, and wanted, finally appeared. Being attacked made more sense in this situation than being helped.

The absence of Repulsors is also a significant pattern because it is one of the few Dynamic Hero's Journey deviations Campbell (1968) describes and openly criticises. He cites the Satyr version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth where Orpheus succeeds and brings Eurydice back from Hades (ibid, p.207). Campbell says this happy ending is dissatisfying for audiences because Repulsors are

presented but not overcome before attaining the Ideal State. My results suggest this lack of expected Repulsors is also dissatisfying for players.

### ***5.1.2.3 Collapsed Hero's Journey***

A Dynamic Hero's Journey is formed around an Ideal State. When a participant's Ideal State does not exist in the game, their Journey collapses. Participants used the Dynamic Hero's Journey to describe their play experiences and when their Ideal States were impossible this way of understanding the game was rendered invalid.

Most of BOTW Facilitated Alex's Hero's Journey, where access to Hyrule requires the strength to kill obstacles. The Yiga Clan Hideout defied this logic. Obstacles Alex couldn't kill, such as the Yiga Blademasters, defied this logic. Challenges were supposed to be a gauge of Alex's strength but being strong would not help Alex kill the Yiga Blademasters and being weak did not restrict their progress through the Yiga Clan Hideout. Alex's Hero's Journey was suspended during these moments and these were among the most frustrating parts of the game. Elliott and Chris shared these frustrations. The information Elliott wanted did not exist and Chris could not move on from the past when the Champions came back as ghosts.

Table 5. *Participants' desired Ideal States, the Flawed States they wanted to escape and the actual states in which they found themselves.*

Participant	Ideal State	Flawed State	Actual state	Relevant concepts
Alex	Strong enough to fight through obstacles Unrestricted access	Too weak to fight through obstacles Must retreat until stronger	Impossible to fight Yiga Blademasters Must sneak past Weakness does not hinder access Will never be strong enough to kill	SDT's competence and autonomy thwarted Downkeyed from Operative World Strong procedurality
Elliott	Know Twinrova's backstory Understand why they are fighting	Do not have information about Twinrova Ignorant	No information about Twinrova to find Nothing to know	SDT's relatedness thwarted Downkeyed from Character World
Chris	Move on from the past and find closure	Champions are gone Hyrule has moved on Link is the only one who can complete the mission	Champions are not gone (they're back as ghosts)	Downkeyed from Character World

## 5.2 Expanding the Dynamic Hero's Journey

There are many interesting parallels between these participants' experiences and the Dynamic Hero's Journey. I will focus on the patterns that were most common across the participants, were the most strongly supported with phenomenological accounts, have the broadest impact on the Dynamic Hero's Journey, and have the strongest connections to extant literature.

### 5.2.1 Flexible Hero's Journey

The Dynamic Hero's Journey is a web of relationships around an Ideal State. Consequently, my participants' Dynamic Hero's Journey experiences were defined by Ideal States they identified. In most cases, participants clearly described how they wanted something and then, sometimes later but sometimes simultaneously, realised they did not have it. Campbell (1968) also discusses the need for audiences to correctly interpret a myth's symbolism to see its Dynamic Hero's Journey.

A Dynamic Hero's Journey will only be apparent to audiences familiar with the myth's imagery. For example, in the story of the Trickster Raven and the whale told by "the Eskimo of the Bering Strait" (Campbell, 1968, p.90),<sup>54</sup> the Raven escapes the whale's belly by using his fire sticks to light a fire and kill the whale (ibid, p.247). Campbell says the fire sticks are known to the story's original audience as a symbol for sex. This scene symbolises a sacred marriage, where the dichotomous male and female unite to free Raven in an act of creation and destruction. However, Campbell also argues this symbolism is lost on audiences outside the story's original culture. When the story was translated, the fire sticks were replaced with a combination of a beautiful woman, an oil pipe, and a lamp to preserve its meaning (ibid, pp.246-248). Neither myths nor digital games can contain Dynamic Hero's Journeys. They can only present information to either Facilitate or Negate the audience's perception of Journeys.

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<sup>54</sup> Campbell (1968, p.90) cites the translated version of the Bering Strait Eskimo story of the Trickster Raven from Leo Frobenius's (1904, p.85) *Das Zeitalter des Sonnengottes*. However, according to Chowning (1962), the Trickster Raven character appears in myths across the Northwest coast of North America and northeast Siberia and the stories are different across the different cultures. Chowning also says many academic discussions of the Raven stories from the early 1900s to 1960s were uncritically citing materials collected by the Jesup North Pacific Expedition. Consequently, stories from the Chukchee, Koryak, and the Northwest coast were emphasised while other tribes were neglected and their stories assumed to be derivative. Campbell's translated version (with the woman, oil pipe, and lamp) comes from Frobenius but Campbell does not clarify his source for the "original" (Campbell, 1968, p.248) story (using the fire sticks to light a fire).



### 5.2.1.1 *Affordances first*

The way Dynamic Hero's Journeys arose for my participants is similar to Bartle's (2005) description of how players shift between implicit and explicit behaviour in virtual worlds. When players first enter a virtual world, they do not know what to do or how to play. They begin by acting implicitly, discovering what is possible and what they want. Then they can act explicitly to improve their abilities and achieve their goals. When they have sufficient knowledge and skill to achieve their goals without difficulty, their existence in the virtual world becomes implicit again. Bartle describes this behaviour in terms of his eight player types. For example, a player may begin as an implicit *Killer*, then become an explicit *Explorer*, an explicit *Achiever*, and finally an implicit *Socialiser*. My results do not confirm these routes through his player types but the general implicit-explicit-implicit shift does describe the Progression Pattern as my participants discovered, utilised, and mastered affordances.

Affordances determine your play experience (Galloway, 2004; Golding 2013a,b) and your sense of embodiment (Crick, 2011; Klevjer, 2012). When my participants first started playing, they did not understand BOTW's affordances. They lacked access to signifiers to make affordances *perceptible* and they made assumptions leading them to *false affordances* (Kaptelinin, 2014). They acted implicitly and assumed their initial situation was already Ideal. Kelly felt Hyrule was safe and peaceful so they explored at their leisure. Alex thought they were free to go wherever they wanted so they acted carelessly. Chris thought one attack button was sufficient so they did not bother learning the combat system.

Their implicit behaviour lacked direction but also exposed them to signifiers, revealing *perceptible affordances* and allowing them to *correctly reject affordances* (Kaptelinin, 2014). Greater understanding of their affordances also allowed them to accurately evaluate their current situation. More experience with BOTW showed Kelly the villages were safe, travellers unbothered, and monsters no more dangerous than wild animals, proving Hyrule was as safe as they first assumed.

However, other participants discovered they were actually in a Flawed State. Alex died falling off a cliff and realised they were vulnerable. Chris was killed by the Ploymus Mountain Lynel and realised one attack button was insufficient.

With a more complete understanding of their affordances and awareness of their Flawed State, participants could act explicitly to change their situation to the Ideal State they wanted. Explicit exploration and practice allowed participants to master the affordances, such as Chris learning to use the dodge function available all along but initially ignored. Active engagement with affordances also allowed them to discover *sequential* and *nested affordances* previously hidden to them (Kaptelinin, 2014), such as Alex finding the bow and Ancient Arrows.

After mastering those affordances and easily achieving their Ideal States, participants were able to act implicitly again. Alex gained the *hyper-ludicity* to kill monsters so easily they felt like a “god” (Alex, emphasis in original). When Chris became a skilled combatant, killing a Lynel was a “non-event” (Chris). Elliott said they were initially focused on solving BOTW’s mystery but, once the mystery was solved, they could “just play it relaxed rather than um playing it like completely concentrated on it” (Elliott).

### ***5.2.1.2 Scalable***

My participants’ Ideal States and Flawed States were on many different scales and encompassed different parts of the game. Alex’s Journey for *hyper-ludicity* involved stronger weapons, more Health Containers and Stamina Wheels, and improved combat skill but not Link’s Memories. Conversely, Elliott’s Hero’s Journey to solve the mystery of Link’s disappearance and Hyrule’s demise involved Link’s Memories but not combat.

Campbell (1968) often describes the Dynamic Hero’s Journey in cosmos-spanning and Psyche-defining terms but an Ideal State can be on any scale and about anything. “The boon

bestowed on the worshiper is always scaled to his stature and the nature of his dominant desire” (ibid, p.189). My participants’ Dynamic Hero’s Journeys varied greatly in how much and which parts of each game they encompassed. Some spanned the entire game, such as Chris’s Journey to find closure. Some were confined to specific circumstances, such as Elliott’s Journey to defeat a boss. Some lasted only a few minutes, such as Alex’s Journey to rescue their horse from Guardians.

The Dynamic Hero’s Journey’s flexible scale and subject makes it more useful for describing play experiences than the comparatively rigid Linear Hero’s Journey. The Linear Hero’s Journey has a strict beginning and progression towards a specific end. Many authors apply the Linear Hero’s Journey to an entire digital game, as though one game can only contain one Journey. The Linear Hero’s Journey begins when the game starts and ends when the credits roll (e.g. Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Rollings & Adams, 2003) or it begins when the player needs the game and ends when the player’s life is improved (e.g. Bartle, 2005; Walk, 2018). This approach overlooks the many smaller Journeys arising and resolving throughout the game.

The Dynamic Hero’s Journey can identify these smaller Journeys and the parts of the game they encompass. A single game can support many different *dynamics* (patterns of behaviour made possible by the game’s mechanics) and the presence and combination of *dynamics* available to the player is not static (Brathwaite & Schreiber, 2009). BOTW affords spatial reasoning, survival, combat, travel, collection, and resource management. My participants’ Ideal States involved only some of these *dynamics* and those Dynamic Hero’s Journeys arose only when they engaged with those *dynamics*. Riley’s Journey to master the Sheikah Slate arose in the Shrines, where they found spatial reasoning puzzles. Alex’s and Kelly’s Journeys to protect their horses only arose when their horses were in danger. These Journeys sometimes involved combat, such as when Guardians approached Alex and their horse, and sometimes involved travel, such as Kelly trekking across Hyrule to rescue their accidentally abandoned horse. Elliott’s Journey to defeat bosses arose, unsurprisingly, during

boss fights and encompassed the specific combination of spatial reasoning, combat, survival, and resource management involved in OOT boss fights.

### ***5.2.1.3 Versatile***

The role phenomena served in Dynamic Hero's Journeys differed across participants, such as how Link's Memories were meaningful to Elliott and not to Alex. However, phenomena also changed roles within each participant's experience. Guardians were sometimes Attractive challenges in Alex's Journey for *hyper-ludicity*, to either improve Alex's skill or demonstrate their skill. Other times they were Repulsive threats to their horse to be avoided, not fought. This is because each participant's experience with BOTW was a combination of many Dynamic Hero's Journeys of different scales and subjects.

Alex's experience with BOTW was a single long Journey to become powerful and free, with occasional smaller Journeys about making friends and keeping their horses safe. Chris's experience with BOTW comprised several simultaneous and interconnected Journeys to find closure, survive Hyrule, and become a skilled combatant. Riley's experience with BOTW was a Journey to become superhuman, all while enjoying the Ideal State of existing in a living, breathing world.

Even if the Linear Hero's Journey were scaled down, its contextual details and strict chronological sequence limit the range of play experiences to which it can be applied. This rigidity is the reason why designers often adjust the stages to suit their own purposes.<sup>55</sup> The Dynamic Hero's Journey describes relationships between components, rather than the components themselves, so it is applicable to different situations. For example, Compton (2018b) argues most digital games do not provide an "Atonement with the Father" and Bartle (2005) argues this leaves players bored and

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<sup>55</sup> See Chapter 1.3.2 "The Linear Hero's Journey, scrutinised" for more information.

unsatisfied. None of my participants described an “Atonement with the Father”, where a powerful entity recognises their accomplishments, but they did describe their increasing attraction towards an Ideal State and many reached a point where they no longer felt pulled towards the Flawed State at all.

The Dynamic Hero’s Journey’s abstract structure also allows us to identify common patterns across superficially different events and behaviours. The player wandering the desert in *Journey* (Thatgamecompany, 2012) is the “Refusal of the Call” and flying around rather than ending the game is “Refusal of the Return” according to the Linear Hero’s Journey (Costiuc, 2016a). On the other hand, the Dynamic Hero’s Journey would describe both as the player’s refusal to do something the designer intended. Alex’s Journey to become powerful, Chris’s Journey to master combat, and Elliott’s Journey to defeat their first Blight all arose at different points in the same game. Despite their different contexts, the Dynamic Hero’s Journey can identify the Ideal States motivating them and the Progression Pattern involved in each Journey.

Walk (2018) argues designers should anticipate and encourage Linear Hero’s Journeys to naturally arise in players’ experiences. My results support this argument but I argue the Dynamic Hero’s Journey’s web of relationships is a more useful guide than the Linear Hero’s Journey’s rigid sequence.

### **5.2.2 Embodied Journey**

Affordances determine your experience of a digital game and sense of existence within the game, but affordances are a relational property determined by your position in the environment (Kaptelinin, 2014; Merleau-Ponty, 1963; Soegaard, 2015). Your position is determined by your skill, such as whether a monster-infested field is an impasse or minor inconvenience (Hayot & Wesp, 2009); knowledge, such as knowing the power pellets in *Pac-Man* (Namco, 1980) make ghosts vulnerable to attack (Conway, 2010b); and interpretation (Boluk & LeMieux, 2017), such as

interpreting *Journey* (Thatgamecompany, 2012) as a race, a metaphor for happiness, or an escape from your daily life (Farca, 2016). Our position in our environment and the affordances accessible to us from our position determine our embodied experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1963). My results suggest the Dynamic Hero's Journey, particularly the Ideal State, provides a way to describe the player's embodied experience of the game world.

### ***5.2.2.1 Revealed meanings***

Players do not experience the digital and physical components of a game. Instead, the player experiences what the many components comprising a play session, including the console, controller, television, chairs, tables, and game program, mean to them based on what they care about (Conway & Elphinstone, 2017, 2019). These objects and the meanings a player finds in them "condense into a gestalt" called a *World* (Conway & Elphinstone, 2019, p.290). Phenomenologically, a "*World*" is a "set of actualised meanings" you find in your environment and to inhabit a *World* is to " 'know' what things mean" (Conway, 2016, pp.4-5).

According to narrative psychology, our lives become meaningful when we interpret, connect, and arrange our experiences into stories (McAdams, 2009; Singer, 2004; Teske, 2006). These *life stories* have more impact on our identity and understanding than the events from which they are constructed. For example, drawing similarities between a group of separate events will magnify them in your memory and they will have a greater impact on your understanding of life and yourself than other less distinctly connected events (McAdams, 2009; Teske, 2006).

Your environment has a "boundless possibility of meaning" (Conway, 2016, p.5). A digital game feels abstract and distant at first but becomes meaningful and comprehensible as you establish your position in and relationship with it (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995; Vella, 2013). When an object becomes meaningful, your attention narrows to only a fraction of its potential meanings, simultaneously concealing other meanings (Conway, 2016). Similarly, the life stories we construct

give meaning to concrete events but necessarily preclude other possible interpretations. A series of positive and negative events can be constructed as a hopeful *redemption sequence* or a disappointing *contamination sequence*, and these different interpretations have significant consequences for your well-being (McAdams, 2009).

The meanings you access from those vast possibilities are contextual. What an object means to you at any given moment depends on what you care about, what you need, and the ways you can use that object when you encounter it (Conway, 2018; Conway & Elphinstone, 2019). The *World* you inhabit changes as the meanings you access change and you will find different meanings in the same object in different contexts. The meaning you find in a digital game will change along with your familiarity (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995; Martin, 2011; Vella, 2013), skill (Hayot & Wesp, 2009; Witkowski & Manning, 2017), and intentions (Farca, 2016). Similarly, the *life stories* we construct follow thematic lines reflecting what we care about most at the time (McAdams, 2009; Singer, 2004). McAdams says some desires are common across people but our desires are also personal and depend on our stage of life, such as how adolescents are particularly concerned with being unique and misunderstood.

Ideal States were my participants' positions in the games and gave game objects, activities, and events meaning. BOTW's Shrines can be described in many ways: tests of skill, a way to increase Health and Stamina, hidden treasure, landmarks, training grounds, evidence of the Sheikah's superior knowledge, etc. My participants described Shrines by the most relevant qualities to their particular Ideal States. Riley, with their Ideal State of mastery, described them as increasingly complex puzzles demanding skilful manipulation of the Sheikah Slate. Alex and Chris, with their respective Ideal States of being powerful and surviving Hyrule, described them as sources of Spirit Orbs to increase Health and Stamina. Kelly, with their Ideal State of being an unknown adventurer wandering Hyrule according to their own whims, described the Shrine they abandoned as an

indication the area was too dangerous for them. Elliott did not discuss Shrines at all, perhaps because none of their many qualities were related to Elliott's Ideal States to defeat bosses and to solve mysteries.

#### ***5.2.2.2 Consistency and keying***

The Dynamic Hero's Journey is a web of connections around the Ideal State. It encompasses only the things that are meaningful in relation to the Ideal State, rather than encompassing everything existing in the story world. The story of King Minos and the story Orpheus and Eurydice both take place in a world where Poseidon and Hades exist. However, Hades is not relevant in King Minos's Journey and Poseidon is not relevant in Orpheus's Journey. My participants' Dynamic Hero's Journeys were Facilitated when the phenomena they encountered afforded meanings consistent with those Journeys. Being "slaughtered" (Chris) by the Ploymus Mountain Lynel was disappointing but not frustrating to Chris because the experience was consistent with their Journey to master combat. Dynamic Hero's Journeys expanded to encompass any phenomena revealed to have meaning consistent with those Journeys, just as the experience of playing *StarTropics* (Nintendo IRD, 1990) expands to encompass a physical letter containing a code needed to continue playing (Conway, 2010a, p.151). Chris did not expect the Ploymus Mountain Lynel to reveal the inadequacies of their single-button combat, but the encounter revealed the Repulsors keeping them from their Ideal State of mastery and thus contributed to their Journey.

Consistent phenomena, whether they were Attractors or Repulsors, were more satisfying and enjoyable than phenomena inconsistent with their Hero's Journeys. Inconsistencies were disruptions Negating the Dynamic Hero's Journey. The unkillable Yiga Blademasters were inconsistent with Alex's Journey to fight through every obstacle. The cartoonish monsters and clichéd villagers imported from past Zelda games for "fan service" (Riley) were inconsistent with Riley's Journey through a realistic world existing for its own sake. Chris was repeatedly killed by the



Ploymus Mountain Lynel but they were more frustrated by NPCs, who did not contribute to any of their Journeys for closure, mastery, or survival.

Calamity Ganon was far more challenging for Chris than for Elliott but Chris enjoyed the encounter more because it was consistent with their Dynamic Hero's Journey. Chris experienced Calamity Ganon as the mission the Champions failed to complete and the final obstacle before Link could find closure. The fight was "desperately hard" (Chris) but "I wanted to beat it" (Chris) and their victory "was awesome" (Chris). Elliott experienced Calamity Ganon as something more familiar than it should have been. Hyrule Castle exhausted Elliott's energy and resources and the unexpectedly monstrous Calamity Ganon was the final encounter at its peak. Elliott expected, and wanted, a difficult struggle to learn something completely new. Instead, Calamity Ganon used the same laser attacks as the Guardians Elliott had already mastered.

The importance of consistency is further supported by Carson's (2000) discussion of theme park design and McAdams' (2009) discussion of *life stories*. Theme parks must be designed according to a set of established rules because inconsistencies confuse visitors. They feel "cheated" and will "never again allow themselves to be as lost in your world" (Carson, 2000). According to McAdams, our lives become meaningful when we arrange our experiences in a temporally, biographically, causally, and thematically coherent structure. Without this coherence, we are confused about what happened in the past, how we reached the present, and what will happen in the future.

In terms of the *Social/Operative/Character model*, described by Conway and Trevillian (2015), consistencies *upkey* and inconsistencies *downkey*. Phenomena consistent with a participant's Dynamic Hero's Journey *upkeyed* them into the Journey in the same way an inflated soccer ball affords kicking and *upkeys* players into the *Operative World* of soccer. Monsters, hazardous environments, difficult terrain, treasure, Shrines, and cooking were all consistent with Alex's Journey to become powerful and free. This is an example of "a whole host of allied objects colluding" to

create the play experience (Conway & Trevillian, 2015, pp.94-95). Phenomena not affording meaning consistent with their Journeys *downkeyed* them from those Journeys, just as a deflated soccer ball resists being kicked and *downkeys* players from a game of soccer. Yiga Blademasters did not afford fighting, *downkeying* Alex from their Journey and creating a frustrating experience.

The language participants used to describe their experiences reflects whether they were *upkeyed* or *downkeyed*. When they were *upkeyed*, participants often said the experiences were happening to themselves. When they were *downkeyed*, they often said those experiences were happening to Link. Alex said Sidon was “encouraging me” (Alex) and it “made me feel more connected to him” (Alex). In contrast, Zelda was “just venting to Link [...] just expecting him to come save her” (Alex). This is consistent with Conway and Elphinstone’s (2019) results contrasting the Bloody Baron in *The Witcher 3* (CD Projekt Red, 2015) with Preston Garvey in *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015). Their respondents found the Bloody Baron more believable, felt a greater sense of *relatedness* (defined by Self-Determination Theory), and regularly referred to him as a “person” to be pitied whereas they called the less believable and unrealistic Preston Garvey an insufficiently useful “NPC”.

Word choice is suggestive but not particularly consistent. Elliott said the “NPCs” (Elliott) “blamed me” (Elliott) when BOTW did not acknowledge they solved the mystery, combining *Social World* and *Character World* language. The sheep side quest was one of Kelly’s favourite BOTW experiences but, amidst their *Character World* language about “a real human world problem” (Kelly), they also said the quest was difficult because “I’m not good at the mechanics” (Kelly).

Attribution was far more consistent than word choice. Participants attributed *upkeying* experiences to the characters and the game world. Elliott described OOT’s bosses as though they were living creatures. Queen Gohman and Bongo Bongo protected their eyes and King Dodongo was vulnerable when “he started breathing in air” (Elliott), as though their vulnerabilities were due to

their anatomy rather than a design choice. Elliott used “common sense that ice and fire don’t mix” (Elliott) to defeat Twinrova, as though Twinrova’s magic was like the ice and fire in Elliott’s everyday life, rather than a programmed puzzle. Riley said the Giant Horse was difficult to tame because of its keen perception and said the Dragons were an “ancient component of the world [...] that felt like it *belonged* there” (Riley, emphasis in original). Alex knew Sidon was a fictional character created by game designers (“It’s a video game character so it shouldn’t really mean all that much”, Alex) and Kelly knew BOTW’s horses were not the same as flesh-and-blood horses (it was “a horse in a video game”, it appears as a marker on the map, and can “despawn”, Kelly) but Sidon and the horses still felt like living entities acting of their own volition. “You don’t get many characters like that who are constantly encouraging you to go forward. I feel like the game generally does that itself” (Alex). Designers created the game but *upkeying* features were independent of them in the way parents create, but do not control, their children.

In contrast, participants attributed *downkeying* experiences to the game’s technology or the designers themselves. Chris used the term “NPCs” (Chris) when talking about the present-day characters in BOTW but Chris’s description of the NPCs only adding “a bit of flavour to the world” (Chris) is more revealing. Elliott described the Kakariko Well’s traps with *Character World* language, as though they were physically falling into and climbing out of pits, but they attributed all these frustrations to the designers. “The designers were just having a laugh” (Elliott) by making “such a troll place” (Elliott). Elliott had to “get it over with” (Elliott) before they could keep playing. Kelly said the designers were being “pushy” (Kelly) by constantly reminding them to be the heroic knight who saves Hyrule. These accounts perfectly fit Conway and Trevillian’s (2015) *Social World*, where technology fails and designers are imperfect humans. This is also consistent with Conway and Elphinstone’s (2019) respondents’ descriptions of the Bloody Baron and Preston Garvey. The Bloody Baron was a person existing in the game world alongside the player and whose actions and choices impacted that world. Preston Garvey was a design feature included by developers to serve their

design intentions (e.g. “a faceless questgiver”, “implemented only to introduce new features”; *ibid*, p.301).

### **5.2.2.3 Consistency and SDT**

The Dynamic Hero’s Journey is internally consistent. There is an underlying logic connecting the Hero to the Ideal State and everything affecting their relationship. Campbell’s (1968) examples always follow their own internal logic, even if the logic is lost on audiences outside its culture. It may not make sense to us why rolling an apple reveals a safe path (*ibid*, p.343) or how a hairbrush becomes a mountain (*ibid*, p.201) but it made sense to their intended audiences.

My participants were *upkeyed* into a Dynamic Hero’s Journey when they encountered phenomena consistent with the rules defined by their Ideal State, or “when the majority of objects collude to move upwards together” (Conway & Trevillian, 2015, pp.82-83). People are “essentially playful” and can easily shift between different *Worlds* (Conway & Innocent, 2017, p.15) but it is more difficult to inhabit a *World* when the objects around you “resist” being meaningful to that *World* (Conway & Trevillian, 2015, p.74). For example, a player’s experience of being Geralt is maintained as long as *The Witcher 3’s* (CD Projekt Red, 2015) quests are consistent with that character (Conway & Elphinstone, 2017). Consistency and coherence are also important for satisfying *autonomy* and *competence*, as described by Self-Determination Theory.

Our need for *autonomy* is satisfied when our actions reflect our values and interests, regardless of mechanical agency (Uysal & Yildirim, 2016). Players can feel they have agency, even if they are following a linear set of instructions, if they desire those actions (M.-L. Ryan, 2009; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). Cassar (2013, p.90) argues players are invested in *God of War’s* (Santa Monica Studio, 2005-2010) predetermined story because Kratos’s rage and violence justify the need for “purification and redemption”. Similarly, my participants felt they were acting of their own volition when their experiences were consistent with their Hero’s Journeys even when the game

mechanically provided no other choice. Killing the Barinade was necessary to continue playing OOT but it was also consistent with Elliott's desire to cure Lord Jabu-Jabu, so it satisfied Elliott's sense of *autonomy*. When necessary activities were not meaningful in their Hero's Journeys, participants felt "forced" (Alex). Elliott also need to kill Bongo Bongo to continue playing OOT but this was not consistent with their Hero's Journey to redeem Bongo Bongo. It "had to happen" (Elliott) but they didn't want it to happen and consequently "I never feel good about beating him" (Elliott).

Consistency also provides the informational feedback necessary for satisfying our need for *competence*. Whether rewards and punishments are intrinsically motivating depends on the user's interpretation (Uysal & Yildirim, 2016). Feedback undermines intrinsic motivation if the user feels the feedback only exists to control their behaviour. Feedback encourages intrinsic motivation if the user believes it provides valuable information for understanding and improving their performance. The difference between informational and controlling feedback is the difference between Facilitating and Negating the player's Journey. The Dynamic Hero's Journey connects different elements together so they can be understood in relation to one another. Being killed by the horde of monsters helped Alex evaluate their performance so they could adjust their strategy until they succeeded. Even failure can satisfy our need for *competence* if we understand why we failed and believe we can succeed in the future (Uysal & Yildirim, 2016). Elliott said there was "hope" (Elliott) in even the most difficult boss fights as long as they knew they could learn how to fight back.

Structure and feedback are especially important for Transformation. A Hero can only Transform if they can identify Attractors and Repulsors in their environment. When the game Facilitated a participant's Journey, they could identify the phenomena hindering and helping them. This is particularly clear in Chris's account of climbing the snowy mountain. They described in detail

the Repulsors they encountered and the Attractors they utilised to overcome them.<sup>56</sup> Their Hearts depleted in the cold, so they restored their Hearts with food. The campfire prevented their Hearts from depleting, so they lit a torch and carried it with them. The torch extinguishes when they wield a weapon, so they dropped the lit torch before fighting. This cycle of feedback continued until Chris knew how to survive in any cold climate.

#### **5.2.2.4 Satisfaction**

In the phenomenological landscape of *Flow* (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, pp.248-252), confronting Trials just beyond your perceived skill and Transforming to overcome them is a progression from *Arousal* to *Flow* to *Control* to *Relaxation*. The player experiences *Arousal* when they first encounter a Trial. As they remove Repulsors and accumulate Attractors, they Transform and experience *Flow*, where they are “engaging in just-manageable challenges” (ibid, p.240) to expand their capacities and “seize ever-greater opportunities” (ibid, p.252). After the player has Transformed, the Trial gives them a sense of *Control* since those Repulsors no longer affect them and the Attractors have become a part of their embodied experience. In this less-Flawed State, the tension between Attractors and Repulsors has dissipated and this now conquered Trial is experienced as a “conservation of energy (*relaxation*)” (ibid, p.252, emphasis added). Transformation may not always be experienced as *Flow* but the Trials of a Facilitated Hero’s Journey provide the structure, feedback, and balance of challenge and skill necessary for *Flow* activities (Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, & Nakamura, 2014).

Inconsistent phenomena were dissatisfying and disruptive. Participants did not feel they were acting in their own interests nor did they understand how their actions lead to outcomes.

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<sup>56</sup> For an extended excerpt from Chris’s interview, see Appendix 11.3 “Chris and the snowy mountain”.

Inconsistencies can be described as a sudden shift from *Weak* to *Strong Procedurality* (Skolnik, 2013), or from *Cool* to *Hot* design (Conway & Ouellette, 2019). *Weak Procedurality* and *Cool* design allow players to form their own interpretations. Ambiguity can benefit play experiences. The imaginative effort needed to comprehend abstract, low-fidelity representations can make a game world “feel more personal” (Calleja, 2018). Text-based MUDs allow players to construct their own rich environments in a way visual MUDs do not (Bartle, 1999). Many argue the horror genre relies heavily on ambiguity (e.g. Krzywinska, 2009; Pinchbeck, 2009; Rouse, 2009). However, my results suggest a player’s personal understanding of ambiguity can be contradicted by subsequent *Strong Procedurality* and *Hot Designs*.

This is most apparent in Alex’s experience with the Yiga Clan Hideout. The way players engage with monsters in BOTW is often *Cool* and *Weakly Procedural*. The game provides a wide range of possible actions without clear instructions about correct behaviours. Players can invest in stealth as I did, avoid combat entirely as Riley did, learn to exploit glitches and shortcuts (Boluk & LeMieux, 2017; May & McKissack, 2017) and become an *expert* or *innovative* player (Aarseth, 2003) as Jean witnessed, or increase Link’s defensive and offensive capabilities as Alex did. BOTW almost equally supports all these approaches but the Yiga Clan Hideout only rewards some. Unlike most of BOTW, strength and resilience were not rewarded and weakness was not a limitation. Fighting was impossible for Alex so “I was kind of forced, in a way, to do what the game wanted me to do” (Alex).

Conversely, OOT is mostly *Hot* and *Strongly Procedural* because possibilities are limited and specific actions are rewarded. However, Bongo Bongo is *Cool* because information about him is scarce and ambiguous. Elliott could form their own sympathetic backstory about a man deserving redemption. Bongo Bongo became one of Elliott’s favourite bosses in the game but the *Strongly Procedural* boss fight was upsetting because it contradicted this backstory. “Almost felt like putting

something out of their misery in a way that you would just eliminate the man who really for all we know just wanted to be human again and we just decided to kill him” (Elliott).

### **5.2.3 Starting a Hero’s Journey**

In the Dynamic Hero’s Journey, the Ideal State is objectively superior, independent of the Hero’s feelings or opinions. The Hero who disagrees with the Ideal State is a “clown”, “a mistaker of shadow for substance” (Campbell, 1968, p.337). The Adventure is most unpleasant and dangerous for these Heroes. The Trials are a descent into “darkness, disgust, and phantasmagoric fears” (ibid, p.121), Transformation requires the “terrifying assimilation” (ibid, p.217) of the “absolutely intolerable” (ibid, p.108), and the Hero may be so strongly affected by Repulsors they “remain spellbound forever” in the Flawed State (ibid, p.63). This reflects Individuation, an equally unpleasant endeavour to acknowledge the undesirable and repressed parts of our Psyche (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Hockley, 2014; Storr, 1983).

To succeed in the Adventure and achieve the objectively superior Ideal State, the Hero must correct their misunderstanding or suffer the consequences. These consequences can range from dissatisfaction to literal destruction. Campbell (1968, p.59) quotes Proverbs 1:24-27,32:

Because I have called, and ye refused ... I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. [...] For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

King Minos incorrectly preferred the economic benefits of keeping the perfect bull, rather than sacrificing it to Poseidon as a symbol of servitude (Campbell, 1968, pp.13,60). He was punished for his mistake when the perfect bull seduced his wife Pasiphaë and fathered the Minotaur, leading to his kingdom’s downfall. Destiny always knows better than the Hero.



A Negated Hero's Journey could be described in the way Campbell (1968, p.121) describes a mistaken Hero: Whatever the player believes "[the game] ought to be" fails to "correspond to what [the game] really is". Alex wanted to fight the Yiga Blademasters when they should have sneaked through the maze and they were punished for not appreciating the value of stealth. Elliott did not want to kill Bongo Bongo and they were punished for sympathising with something evil. Kelly wanted to be an unknown adventurer wandering Hyrule with no pressure or expectations and they were punished for not accepting their role as saviour.

The *Herald's* role is to persuade the Hero to recognise the Ideal State's superiority and punish them if they fail to do so. When the Hero rejects the Ideal State, they believe its Attractors are causing harm to them and ruining their preferred Flawed State. Campbell (1968) describes this in various ways. "Woman as Temptress" (ibid, p.120f) is perhaps the most widely known expression but "anyone unable to understand a god sees it as a devil" (ibid, p.92) is far more accurate. We see this in my participants' accounts.

Phenomena my participants found disruptive and frustrating may have been Attractors towards another Ideal State. The Yiga Blademasters' high Health Points and strong attacks encourage the player to sneak past rather than fight. To Alex, who wanted to fight their way through everything, these qualities felt unsporting. The hidden traps in the Kakariko Well emphasise the player's vulnerability and may motivate them to find the Lens of Truth and appreciate its ability to see through illusions. To Elliott, who overcame obstacles by understanding their underlying logic, these random traps were aggravating. BOTW's main missions call the player a skilled knight who will certainly defeat Calamity Ganon. This may bolster some players' confidence early in the game when they are weak and unarmed. To Kelly, who wanted to be an unknown adventurer wandering Hyrule at their own leisure, being called a heroic knight brought unwelcome pressure and high expectations. The game's technology may be working correctly, the designs might match the

designers' intentions, and the designers may have the player's best interests at heart, but my participants sometimes felt the technology was insufficient, the designs were mistakes, or the designers were antagonistic. "The divinity itself becomes [the Hero's] terror" (Campbell, 1968, p.60).

Stories following these paths through the Dynamic Hero's Journey are warnings. The Heroes fail but their stories are enjoyable and satisfying because the audience knows the Hero has failed and learn from their mistakes. However, my results suggest these Journeys are not enjoyable for the person acting in the role of Hero. My participants only enjoyed Dynamic Hero's Journeys with which they agreed.

### ***5.2.3.1 Insistent Heralds***

The Herald as punishment was dissatisfying, but the Herald may have been vital for my participants' Dynamic Hero's Journeys as an *insistent mechanism*. Ruggill and McAllister (2011) argue a digital game is successful when it effectively interpellates the player into the subjectivity of wanting to play it. They coined the term *insistent mechanisms* to describe how designers (and marketers and lobbyists) achieve this. For example, in the first few moments of BOTW the camera movement, glowing lights, and a contextually triggered A-button prompt all insist the player interact with the Sheikah Slate's pedestal to progress the game, rather than futilely try to open the door, climb the walls, or go back to sleep in the Shrine of Resurrection.

Campbell's Herald represents the Ideal State. It is "a preliminary manifestation of the powers that are breaking into play" (Campbell, 1968, p.51). Encountering the Herald exposes the Hero to a fraction of the Ideal State's Attraction and Repulsion, giving them the means to pursue the Ideal State and also revealing the things hindering their attempts. Either literally or symbolically, the Herald must be connected with the Ideal State and the Hero's response to the Herald must reflect their feelings about the Ideal State. The Hero may accept the Ideal State and begin the Adventure or,

if the Herald's Repulsion (the "dark, loathly, or terrifying" aspects of the Ideal State, *ibid*, p.53) is too effective, the Hero may be pushed towards the Flawed State instead.

Most of my participants' Journeys clearly begin with Campbell's Herald. The Ideal State often preceded the discovery of the Flawed State. Alex knew they wanted to go everywhere in BOTW as soon as they stepped out of the cave. They did not realise they were too weak to do so until they repeatedly died while trying. Chris thought "playing passively" (Chris) was sufficient and thought they could survive Hyrule's wilderness, but both assumptions were disproved after leaving the Great Plateau. Elliott knew they wanted to understand BOTW's world and history even before they started playing. Sometimes the Flawed State and Ideal State were discovered simultaneously. Chris knew they wanted to find closure when they learned the Champions failed their mission. Identifying their Ideal States was necessary to orient them to interpret the game in terms of these Journeys. Using Ruggill and McAllister's (2011) terminology, Heralds interpellate the player into the subjectivity of the Hero in a Dynamic Hero's Journey by insisting a particular state of affairs is desirable.

Elliott's account, combined with my textual analysis, provides the clearest examples of Campbell's (1968) Herald in OOT and BOTW. Elliott always wants to understand a game's world and history. This desire Heralds Elliott towards Ideal States of complete knowledge in all games but OOT and BOTW further hailed Elliott into the role of detective by strategically withholding information. The early dialogue sequences in BOTW about the Great Calamity insist the event is important and the reminders of Link's miraculous survival and subsequent amnesia insist the player should uncover what happened. Elliott's experiences with Fort Hateno exemplify the effectiveness of BOTW's mystery. The Fort's ruins and broken Guardians insist the Fort is important, adding clues to the mystery whilst introducing more questions for Elliott to answer.

That place always intrigued me because it was like just a war-torn field that still remained the day of like the day it went down [...] It just, it was like ruins and it was just

the idea that the last stand took place here but like I know nothing about it. I just know it occurred. (Elliott)<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, Elliott's most memorable experiences with OOT happened when they were given clues rather than full explanations. The Deku Tree and Darunia both explain to Link how Ganondorf demanded their Spiritual Stones and retaliated when they refused. The Zora give no clear explanation. The player learns Ganondorf arrived and departed, Jabu-Jabu became ill, and Ruto went missing but Elliott needed to construct an explanation for themselves by finding narrative details *embedded* (Jenkins, 2007) in the dungeon. OOT also insisted Elliott solve the mystery of Bongo Bongo by providing incomplete information, such as Sheik's claim about Bongo Bongo being an evil spirit, the old man's story about the house over the well, and the torture devices under the well. Elliott pieced these clues together into a convincing backstory and now Bongo Bongo is their favourite boss character in the game.

### ***5.2.3.2 Unpersuasive Calls to Adventure***

In contrast to Campbell's Herald, the "Call to Adventure" stage in the Linear Hero's Journey only insists the player perform the first action of the adventure (Bates, 2005; Costiuc, 2016a; Ip, 2011a; Schell, 2008). The "Call" may even be coincidental and unrelated to the final goal of the game.

"Anything at all will do: a meteor strike, the sudden death of his parents that puts the family business in his hands, the bite of a nuclear spider, and so on" (Bates, 2005). It is "a hint that the hero will be leaving the ordinary world to begin a new adventure" which "acts as a catalyst that triggers off the main storyline" (Ip, 2011a, p.112). The "Call to Adventure" is a "quick and insistent

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<sup>57</sup> For a longer excerpt about Elliott's experience with Fort Hateno, see Appendix 11.19 "Elliott and Fort Hateno".

interpellative device”, leading the player to a subjectivity without holding them there (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011, p.39).

Many imply players do not need to be hailed as the Hero because they are already motivated to play the game. Arguably a person who has chosen to play the game is already expecting the adventure so the “Call to Adventure” is merely a storytelling formality (e.g. Carlquist, 2002; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Plyler, 2014; Rollings & Adams, 2003). The “Refusal of the Call” is often omitted for the same reason (e.g. Bates, 2005; Carlquist, 2002; Dena, 2017; Ip, 2011b; Rollings & Adams, 2003). Even educational applications of the Linear Hero’s Journey assume the player wants to learn the thing being taught (e.g. Bartle, 2005; Denmeade, 2017). When Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud (2007) added stages to the Linear Hero’s Journey to accommodate divergences, they did not account for learners who still did not want to embark on the adventure at all. Their final response to a learner’s refusal is the “compelled to adventure” stage, where the learner is forced into “The Belly of the Whale”.

However, as my results indicate, even slight differences in Ideal States can completely change whether something is enjoyed or avoided. Alex’s Ideal State of *hyper-ludic* combat seems nearly identical to the hypothetical Ideal State of *hyper-ludic* movement but the Yiga Clan Hideout, which rewarded stealth and discouraged combat, *downkeyed* Alex from their *World* of play. If the player is not interpellated to accept the Ideal States around which a digital game is designed, their perception of Attractors and Repulsors will not match the designer’s intentions. Campbell’s Herald interpellates the player to desire the Ideal State and prepares them for the help they will receive and the challenges they must overcome in the game. The “Call to Adventure” only directs the player towards the first challenge of the game.

Players’ purported disinterest in the final stages of the Linear Hero’s Journey may be due to the “Call to Adventure’s” insufficiency as an *insistent mechanism* (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011). The

final boss is the player's final challenge in the game but corresponds to the beginning of the final third of the Linear Hero's Journey. Some authors argue players find this final third boring because there are no more challenges (e.g. Carlquist, 2002; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Rollings & Adams, 2003). However, this part of the Linear Hero's Journey is also the hero gaining what they sought and using it to improve their lives (e.g. Costiuc, 2016a,b; Ip, 2011a; Rollings & Adams, 2003). If the player is not motivated by the goal of the Linear Hero's Journey, then are they experiencing the Journey or performing the activities associated with the Journey? Perhaps the middle stages of the Linear Hero's Journey are so easily incorporated into digital games (cf. Carlquist, 2002; Compton, 2018b; Costiuc, 2016a,b; Ip, 2011b; Lebowitz & Klug, 2011; Rollings & Adams, 2003) because the digital games industry collectively *insists* these activities (travelling, fighting, gaining *hyper-ludicity*, surviving *contra-ludic* pressures) are enjoyable (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011).

Only Dickey (2006) and Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud (2007) argue the player should be made aware of their final goal early in the game. Dickey says the game's final challenge is the core of the player's entire quest and should be used to keep them engaged and on track. Delmas, Champagnat, and Augeraud say a Linear Hero's Journey must begin with a problem the player cannot solve to motivate them to the very end when they discover the solution. These descriptions parallel my participants' Dynamic Hero's Journey experiences and seem to align more closely to the Campbell's Herald than the typical "Call to Adventure".

#### **5.2.4 Typologies and Journeys**

I argue the "Call to Adventure" is less effective at interpellating players into a Hero subjectivity than the Herald. However, the Ideal States my participants accepted may also reflect their individual desires and what they find satisfying. R.M. Ryan, Rigby, and Przybylski (2006) assigned 58 undergraduate participants to play four pre-selected Nintendo 64 games in a random order. Participants' preferred games varied but the participants consistently preferred games that satisfied

their *autonomy* and *competence*. They concluded digital games are more enjoyable when they satisfy the player's SDT needs but each player has their own needs and will be satisfied by different experiences.

The Ideal States my participants reported may reflect their own particular SDT needs in the same way R.M. Ryan, Rigby, and Przybylski's (2006) participants preferred different games. Alex's hyper-ludic Ideal State and Elliott's mystery-solving Ideal State may both reflect their need for *competence*, whereas Chris's Ideal State of closure for deceased friends may reflect their need for *relatedness* and Kelly's Ideal State as unknown adventurer without responsibilities may reflect their need for *autonomy*. Additionally, although Alex and Elliott both desired *competence*, their *competence* was satisfied by different activities: Alex by combat and Elliott by investigation.

The Ideal State's uniqueness to each participant also reflects Campbell's (1968) description of the Dynamic Hero's Journey as general pattern for self-improvement. Audiences compare themselves against the Journeys depicted in stories but each person must discover their own "ogres" and "ideals" before embarking on their own Journey (ibid, p.121). This also aligns with Jungian Individuation. Individuation begins with a person's own unconscious needs and what they need will be unique to them. Even when a person's suffering is obvious, advice from other people, including therapists, cannot guide them to improvement unless the person themselves realise they must change (Jacobi, 1968; von Frans, 1978).

Each Ideal State could be described in terms of the SDT needs it satisfies. Ideal States are also comparable to Bartle's and Yee's player typologies. Just as Ideal States determine a players' orientation towards the game world, players of different types "see the *same* MUD different from each other" (Bartle, 1996, emphasis in original). Different types of players are attracted to different kinds of MUDs but Bartle also said a MUD's design can manipulate players into particular

behaviours. Similarly, my participants' Ideal States may reflect personal inclinations but the similarities across accounts also suggests they were guided towards particular Ideal States.

Player typologies provide a way to group common Ideal States and describe how their Dynamic Hero's Journeys were Facilitated and Negated by games design. Player typologies cluster similar behaviours together and later studies further divided these clusters with greater nuance and clearer connections. The Dynamic Hero's Journey, with its more explicit connections between components, can identify more minute differences between motives than these relatively broad clusters, as well as their consequences for play. For example, Yee, Ducheneaut, and Nelson's (2012) *Achievement* motivation is associated with collecting rare items. Alex's hyper-ludic Ideal State falls within the *Achievement* motivation but their specific Ideal State inclined them to collect strong weapons (such as Ancient Arrows) rather than rare items (like Silent Princess flowers) or rare but weak weapons (like Soup Ladles). There were several commonalities between my participants' Ideal States and Bartle's and Yee's player typologies.

#### ***5.2.4.1 Dividing Explorer and Immersion***

Elliott's and Jean's Journeys both fall within Bartle's (1996) Explorer type. Bartle's *Explorer* type enjoys discovering and understanding the game world, using knowledge to their benefit, and feeling a sense of wonder from being in the game world. Yee's (2002) empirical data did not support Bartle's *Explorer* type and Yee concludes this is because the *Explorer* qualities do not correlate with one another. Elliott's and Jean's accounts support this conclusion and further suggest the Explorer qualities are better represented in Yee's *Immersion* and *Achievement* motivations.

*Immersion* is "the desire to become immersed in a make-believe construct" (Yee, 2002, p.8) and *Achievement* is "the desire to become powerful within the constructs of the game" (ibid, p.9).

Elliott and Jean were both engaged in *Explorer* behaviours but the Ideal States motivating them were distinctly different. Elliott's Ideal States were to solve mysteries and understand the game world.



Jean's Ideal States were to have power over the game, "testing the boundaries" (Jean) of what is possible, "forcing that [preferred] narrative upon the game" (Jean), and "defeat the narrative the narrative designer wants you to do" (Jean). This demonstrates how the Dynamic Hero's Journey can differentiate between even similar play activities.

Even Yee, Ducheneaut, and Nelson's (2012) later iteration of the *Immersion* motivation can be further divided into more distinct Ideal States. Chris, Elliott, Kelly, and Riley all described similar experiences to the *Immersion* motivation. All four enjoyed learning the game world's lore and feeling immersed in and exploring the game world. Despite this, NPCs were consistent with Elliott's and Kelly's Journeys and inconsistent with Chris's and Riley's. NPCs gave Elliott clues about Hyrule and gave them a better understanding of the game world, providing Attractors in their Journey to solve Hyrule's mysteries. NPCs gave Kelly mundane low-stakes quests, providing them with Attractors for their Ideal State of being an unknown adventurer. On the other hand, the vast majority of NPCs did not meaningfully contribute to any of Chris's Journeys because their present-day communities and concerns were disconnected from Link's duty to the past and the Champions. All the NPCs, including monsters, were inconsistent with Riley's Ideal State of Hyrule as a realistic world because their cartoonish designs did not fit that realistic environment.

#### ***5.2.4.2 Clarifying Achievement***

*Achievement* motivation was the most prevalent typology among my participants. Their Ideal States tended to match the *Achievement* motivation described by Yee (2006b) and Yee, Ducheneaut, and Nelson (2012) more so than Bartle's (1996) *Achiever* type. Bartle's *Achiever* type is defined by a desire to win and players measure their success by accumulating resources and points. In contrast, the *Achievement* motivation is defined by a desire to feel powerful. Resources and points are a means to an end and players care more about feeling powerful than beating the game. Alex, Chris, Elliott, Riley, and Jean all described Ideal States about becoming powerful in BOTW. BOTW has

systems for quantifying achievements, such as the Adventure Log and map icons, but my participants did not discuss these rewards. Instead, they all enjoyed performing activities to demonstrate their power or to gain more power. Even lacking power was enjoyable as long as they understood how they could improve.

*Achievement* motivation is a useful way to cluster these similar Ideal States but, as with the *Immersion* Ideal States discussed above, the Dynamic Hero's Journey reveals precise distinctions between participants. Phenomena Facilitating one participant's *Achievement* Journey were irrelevant to or even Negated another participant's *Achievement* Journey. Monsters were meaningful in Alex's Journey because combat provided Alex with opportunities to demonstrate their *hyper-ludicity*, increase their *hyper-ludicity*, or at least gauge their lack of *hyper-ludicity*. Those same monsters did not meaningfully contribute to Riley's Journey to move across Hyrule as a superhuman. Monsters *downkeyed* (Conway & Trevillian, 2015) Riley from their Journeys by obstructing their path and disrupting the realistic environment, so Riley preferred avoiding them.

My results also indicate BOTW's most prevalent mechanics and dynamics worked as *insistent mechanisms* (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011) hailing my participants towards *Achievement* Ideal States. Vella (2013) demonstrates how effectively the player's relationship with a virtual world influences their goals and behaviours by contrasting *Minecraft* (Mojang Studios, 2011) with *Proteus* (Twisted Tree, 2013). Both games position the player as a lone wanderer in an open and natural wilderness but they are played very differently. In *Minecraft* players can destroy, collect, stockpile, and reconstruct the world to suit their own purposes. This affords controlling and changing the world. *Proteus* positions the player in a strange world with which they cannot interact (such as a cabin they cannot enter) and filled with objects they cannot understand (such as stone formations that "speak in mysterious sounds", Vella, 2013, p.10). This affords thoughtful contemplation.

Activities in BOTW include, and are largely restricted to, mastering the world: traversing terrain, killing creatures, finding and taking items, taming horses, revealing the map, and upgrading Link. These *insistent mechanisms* (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011) interpellated participants into Dynamic Hero's Journeys about overcoming *contra-ludicity*. Alex and Chris wanted the *hyper-ludicity* to kill monsters in their path. Elliott wanted the *hyper-ludicity* to overcome the Blight preventing their progression through the game. Riley wanted the *hyper-ludicity* to remove obstacles impeding their fluid movement. Jean admired players who had the *hyper-ludicity* to circumvent the designers' restrictions and defy expectations.

According to Jenkins (2007), designers can encourage certain narratives to happen, without pre-authoring them, through *environmental storytelling*. By providing the mechanics, props, and settings affording certain activities and not others, designers can encourage certain narratives to *emerge*. BOTW interpellated players to accept *Achievement* Ideal States and it Facilitated those Dynamic Hero's Journeys by providing environments in which appropriate *Achievement* events could *emerge*. When Alex's ability to kill monsters was directly related to their access to Hyrule, they were experiencing their Journey were satisfied.

Although BOTW interpellated players into *Achievement* Journeys and provided the environments to Facilitate *Achievement* Journeys, those design choices also undermined the mission to save Hyrule *embedded* in the game (Jenkins, 2007). Cutscenes and dialogue insist Calamity Ganon is responsible for the monsters in Hyrule: Zelda says the increased number of monsters in Hyrule "portends the return of Calamity Ganon"<sup>58</sup> and Calamity Ganon's power causes dead monsters to

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<sup>58</sup> Quote from "Recovered memory: A Premonition" cutscene, which is a cutscene players can access after they find one of the 13 "memories" hidden throughout Hyrule.

“return to flesh”.<sup>59</sup> The player is rewarded for completing each main mission: the environmental hazards caused by the Divine Beasts, such as the sandstorm in Gerudo Desert and the perpetual rain in Zora’s Domain, cease and villagers are thankful. Despite these *insistences*, my participants were less interested in saving Hyrule than in saving themselves from Hyrule.

When participants struggled or failed it was because they felt weak or unskilled, not because the world was evil. Link begins the game weak and ill-equipped. Monsters of varying strength are scattered across Hyrule, providing a gauge of the player’s abilities and the extent of Link’s upgrades. Environmental hazards repel players until they are sufficiently resilient. Every item is used almost exclusively for survival, such as weapons to kill monsters and ingredients to increase resistances. Improved skills, equipment, and abilities are rewarded with greater access to Hyrule, including new challenges and a wider variety of experiences.

Players can improve themselves and Link but, in contrast, they barely impact Hyrule at all. Appeasing the Divine Beasts permanently changes Hyrule but there are only four Divine Beasts and they can only be appeased once. My participants spent far more time engaging in activities with much less impact. Most participants said BOTW seemed unconcerned with their survival or even existence. Flora, fauna, fungi, and monsters can all be killed or harvested but they will always respawn in exactly the same places to be killed and harvested again. Even the ore players mine from rocky protrusions will reappear. NPCs wander Hyrule on their own missions, such as Meghyn and Nat’s search for truffles, but they will never succeed. Meghyn and Nat will not notice a truffle the player drops in front of them. Hyrule does not change. Only the player and Link change.

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<sup>59</sup> Quote from the cutscene that plays when the player experiences their first Blood Moon, a random event when the moon turns red and all defeated monsters are revived.

Since a player's navigation of a space determines their experience of the space (Galloway, 2004; Golding, 2013a; Kryzwinska, 2009), it is perhaps not surprising BOTW's most prevalent affordances provided more persuasive Heralds than its relatively infrequent cutscenes and main missions. These results are similar to Hayot and Wesp's (2009) analysis of *EverQuest* (Verant Interactive & 989 Studios, 1999). Norrath was supposed to be a place for citizens but players could not behave as citizens. Norrath instead afforded "exploration, discovery, and achievement" (ibid). Cities became temporary stops to deposit items and buy spells, not places to live. Inns became location markers, not places to sleep. Player activities shaped the landscape more than its appearance could control it. In response, Norrath's design was changed to better "reflect the way the players used them" (ibid). *EverQuest* wanted players to be citizens but it afforded fighters and BOTW told players to be saviours but it afforded survivors.

#### **5.2.4.3 Expanding Socialiser**

OOT and BOTW are single-player games but some of my participants' experiences were similar to Bartle's (1996) *Socialiser* type and satisfied their sense of *relatedness*, as described by Self-Determination Theory. Bartle's *Socialiser* type and Yee's subsequent *Relationship* motivation (Yee, 2002) and *Social* motivation (Yee, 2006; Yee, Duchentaut, & Nelson, 2012) all prioritise multiplayer activities typical in MMOs. Bartle's *Socialiser* type differs from these later iterations because it is also defined by feelings of empathy and friendship. The NPCs in OOT and BOTW did not facilitate multiplayer activities, such as chatting about everyday issues and forming intimate understandings (Bartle, 1996, 2005) or working together in a group (Yee, 2006; Yee, Ducheneaut, & Nelson, 2012), but Alex, Chris, Elliott, and Kelly all experienced empathy and friendship with different characters.

Chris's and Elliott's only interactions with the Champions and Bongo Bongo were in brief cutscenes and as part of a boss fight, respectively, but they developed close emotional connections with these characters by learning more about them. Chris learned about who the Champions were

before they died, how their villages remember them, and their past relationships with Link. Elliott learned more about who Bongo Bongo used to be, how he became a monster, and why he was in the Kakariko Well. This knowledge motivated them to provide support, even if they could receive none in return. These results suggest the experience of empathy and friendship should be represented in player typologies, rather than prioritising specific activities related to empathy and friendship. These results also suggest there is some overlap between the explorative aspects of Yee's (2006) *Immersion* motivation and the empathy aspects of Bartle's (1996) *Socialiser* type. Chris and Elliott both enjoyed exploring games to find their *embedded narratives* (Jenkins, 2007) and doing so leads them to care more about these characters. Learning more about the Champions increased Chris's need for closure. Elliott cared far more about Bongo Bongo, whose backstory Elliott could uncover, than Twinrova, about whom they learned very little.

The need for *relatedness* is also often associated with multiplayer behaviours (e.g. Przybylski, Rigby, & Ryan, 2010) but it can be satisfied in single-player games such as OOT and BOTW. NPCs can satisfy *relatedness* if they provide players with acknowledgement and support (Uysal & Yildirim, 2016). Sheldon and Filak (2008) satisfied *relatedness* in their Boggle experiments and improved participants' performance by acknowledging the participants as individuals who were uniquely contributing to the study. They argue this made their participants feel the researchers cared about them. Conway and Elphinstone (2017, p.63, emphasis in original) argue fictional characters "*have existence as much as anything else*" and "*a relationship is 'real' if it is meaningful, and if it has an influence on one's engagement with the world*". The Bloody Baron in *The Witcher 3* (CD Project Red, 2015) and Dogmeat in *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Game Studio, 2015) may literally be 3D models, scripted dialogue trees, and AI programming but the Bloody Baron was experienced by their respondents as a real person with flaws and feelings and Dogmeat was experienced as a flesh-and-blood pet dog.

#### ***5.2.4.3.1 Non-playable but sociable***

Alex and Kelly felt acknowledged and supported by their horses and by Sidon, satisfying their need for *relatedness* and making these characters feel real. Horses are perhaps the most interactive and reciprocal characters in BOTW. Players can choose their horses from the plains of wild horses, with a modest variety of appearances, attitudes, and ability. Players must successfully tame their chosen horse and pay a fee to stable them. Players can't give gift to NCPs (outside of missions) or change NPCs' appearances but they can give food to their horses and equip them with different gear. A horse's bond with Link determines the player's control when riding the horse. A weak bond causes the horse to resist the player's control and move in unexpected directions. A stronger bond provides more direct control over the horse's movements, as much control as the player has over Link. Feeding and patting the horse increases the strength of this bond. Horses eat the same raw ingredients as Link and some foods used to augment Link's stats also augment the horse, such as Endura Carrots giving both Link and horses more Stamina. Horses, unlike other NPCs, can also be hurt by monsters and die. Meghyn and Nat will forever wander Hyrule searching for truffles you cannot give them and enduring monsters that cannot kill them, but your horses grow and change alongside you.

Although Alex completed all four Divine Beasts, they only recalled Vah Ruta in detail. Alex said Sidon helped fight Vah Ruta more than any other character helped with the other Divine Beasts. This is mostly accurate. You fight Vah Ruta by riding on Sidon's back while he carries you across the water and up to Vah Ruta's weak points so you can attack. In contrast, Riju is effectively a mobile shield you cannot control and Yunobo is a cannon ball you must lead around dangerous traps. However, Teba helped Alex with Vah Medoh in almost exactly the same way as Sidon. You fight Vah Medoh by riding on Teba's back while he flies through the air and distracts Vah Medoh's laser fire while you attack its weak points. The difference between Sidon and Teba is in the acknowledgement and support they provide before and after this fight.

Before reaching Zora's Domain, you will meet Sidon.<sup>60</sup> He guides you to Zora's Domain, praising and supporting you along the way. He meets you at the gates, asks for your help, and defends you from opposition. When you agree to help, you are given the Zora Armour needed for swimming up waterfalls, vital in the fight and useful throughout the game. After appeasing Vah Ruta, he remains in the centre of Zora's Domain amidst the inn, shops, and side quests. In contrast, no one leads you to Rito Village, greets you when you arrive, or asks for your help. You must search the village yourself to learn that Teba is at the Flight Range in the snowy mountains, not the village. You need cold resisting or health restoring items to survive in the cold of the Flight Range and Vah Medoh, bought with your own money or foraged in your own time. Teba only allows you to help if you first pass his archery test. After appeasing Vah Medoh, Teba returns to the Flight Range, rather than Rito Village where the player is likely to return for the inn, shops, and side quests.

Sidon's dialogue is also similar to the verbal instructions Sheldon and Filak (2008, pp.271-273) used to satisfy their participants' sense of *relatedness* and *competence*. Sheldon and Filak told participants the game was difficult (e.g. "this puzzle is quite challenging") but also gave them encouragement (e.g. "I have confidence in you"). In your first meeting with Sidon, he says "the path to the domain may be a bit treacherous" but then says "Don't give up! I believe in you!" As you continue along the path, Sidon periodically appears to say "I know you can do it" and "I believe in you". Alex specifically recalled Sidon saying "I believe in you" (Alex), "you're really great" (Alex), and calling them "his favourite friend" (Alex). In contrast, Teba insults your intelligence and flightlessness until you pass his archery test. The support and acknowledgement Sidon provided Alex satisfied their

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<sup>60</sup> It is technically possible to reach Zora's Domain before meeting Sidon but the game's design makes it very likely most players will meet Sidon first. Zora's Domain is completely surrounded with rain-slicked mountains, except for the sloping path along Zora River connecting Zora's Domain to the flatter wetlands. Sidon's scout team is positioned around the mouth of the river. Coming within range of some scouts will trigger a cutscene where the scout explains their mission and directs the player to Sidon. Coming within range of Inogo Bridge near the mouth of Zora River will trigger a cutscene introducing Sidon.



need for *relatedness*, fostered a close emotional connection, and Facilitated a Dynamic Hero's Journey from strangers to friends. Whatever impression Teba left on Alex was so insignificant they did not mention him at all.

## 5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the ways the Dynamic Hero's Journey appeared in my participants' accounts, including some patterns Campbell (1968) did not originally describe. I have also discussed the Dynamic Hero's Journeys my participants expected and wanted but were either disrupted or denied, possibilities Campbell did not discuss. By incorporating existing literature about affordances, *ludicity*, phenomenological *Worlds* and *keying*, Self-Determination Theory, *Flow*, *Strong* and *Weak Procedurality*, *insistent mechanisms*, *environmental storytelling*, and player typologies I have examined the limitations of the Linear Hero's Journey and expanded the Dynamic Hero's Journey to better account for these play experiences. In my Conclusion to this thesis, I leverage this discussion to propose an adjusted version of the Dynamic Hero's Journey specifically for play.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

Across this thesis, I have discussed the Hero's Journey in digital games as it is currently understood, the limitations of our current understanding, and the avenues of investigation open to us through Campbell's (1968) *Hero With A Thousand Faces*. From *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, I constructed the *Dynamic Hero's Journey* to contrast with the more popular but restrictive *Linear Hero's Journey*. I investigated the Dynamic Hero's Journey in play experiences and explored its connections with existing theories of player motivation, affordances, and narrative construction. This reveals aspects of the Dynamic Hero's Journey applicable to digital games but have so far been overlooked. Based on these results, I now present an adjusted version of the Dynamic Hero's Journey for describing play experiences in digital games. I call this the *Ludic Hero's Journey*.

### 6.1 Ludic Hero's Journey

The Ludic Hero's Journey is a way to describe how players experience digital games and find meaning while playing.

#### 6.1.1 Making the World

*It was really emotional. And especially the bit where he walks out of the cave and it shows you like the whole world. [...] it really showed you like the scope of the place and that you could like go anywhere you do anything [...] It felt really freeing. [...] it's like wow I'm awake I can go anywhere and do anything (Alex)*

*I remember walking into a cave and finding a treasure chest and I was like oh cool there's, there's a treasure chest here and then an enemy came up to me and I started fighting it and then they all surrounded me and I died and so that's probably when I learned that (laughs) I need to calm down a bit (Alex)*

*There are two ways to kind of do things in the game. You can do it how the game tell you to do it or you can um get ridiculously strong and just come back to it later and just kill the enemy that's in your way (laughs). (Alex)*

*Just kill what was– whatever was in your way and keep going (Alex)*

The Ludic Hero's Journey is a phenomenological *World* of meaning experienced by the player. This *World* is established by the *Ideal State*, something the player cares about and wants to have. Alex wanted to have the *hyper-ludicity* to defeat any monster they encountered so they could move freely across Hyrule. The player must have an *Ideal State* to experience a Ludic Hero's Journey, and each *Ideal State* will establish its own Journey.

Every component of the Ludic Hero's Journey is defined by its relationship to the *Ideal State*. The *Ideal State* is a set of conditions to achieve. Its opposite, the *Flawed State*, is a set of conditions to be avoided. These two sets of conditions are two ends of a spectrum encompassing all meaningful states of existence within the Ludic Hero's Journey. When the player accepts an *Ideal State*, when there is something they want, they are positioned within the Journey. They will understand their *Current State*, at any time, in relation to the *Ideal State's* and *Flawed State's* definitions. In Alex's Journey, the *Ideal State* is having the *hyper-ludicity* to kill all monsters they encountered so they could move through Hyrule as they pleased. The *Flawed State* is lacking the *hyper-ludicity* to kill monsters and thus being restricted in where they can go and what they can do.

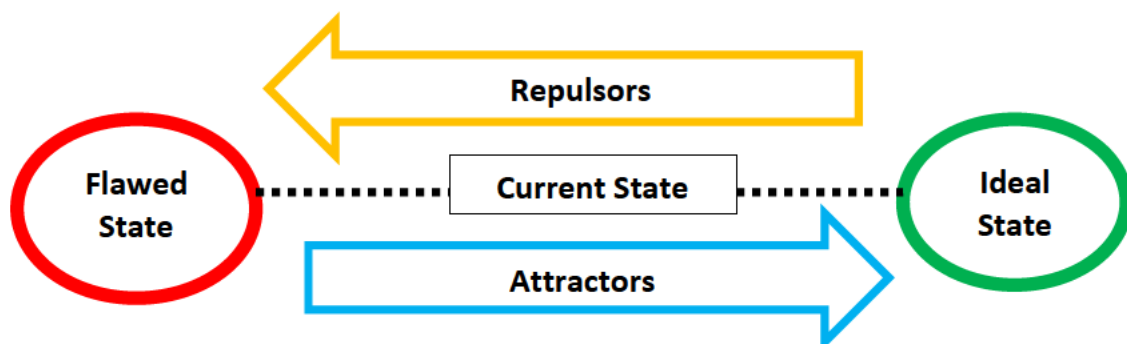


Figure 5. Ludic Hero's Journey diagram.

Phenomena in the player's environment, both digital and physical, are meaningful in the Hero's Journey when they contribute to, or have the potential to contribute to, the player's *Current State*. A phenomenon is meaningful as an *Attractor* when its influence on the player's current state

makes it more similar to the Ideal State than Flawed State. Spirit Orbs were meaningful to Alex as Attractors because they could be obtained and traded for Heart Containers and Stamina Wheels. This increased Alex's *hyper-ludicity* by making them more resistant to danger and giving them greater access to attacks, thus bringing them closer to their Ideal State. A phenomenon is meaningful as a *Repulsor* when it makes the player's Current State less similar to the Ideal State. A thunderstorm would be meaningful to Alex as a Repulsor because Alex cannot use metal weapons without being struck by lightning. By removing their access to weapons, the storm decreases Alex's *ludicity* and pushes them further away from their Ideal State.

Some phenomena clearly act as either Attractors or Repulsors, but Attraction and Repulsion are two opposing forces rather than discrete entities. Some phenomena possess both qualities and cannot be clearly classified as one or the other. A Lizalfos wielding a Tri-Lizal Boomerang is meaningful to Alex as both Attraction and Repulsion. Lizalfos are hostile creatures that move quickly and the Tri-Lizal Boomerang has a high Attack Strength. These qualities are Repulsors making the Lizalfos difficult to kill and making its area less accessible. However, fighting the Lizalfos provides feedback to help Alex improve their performance. Additionally, if Alex kills the Lizalfos, it will drop Elixir ingredients and its Tri-Lizal Boomerang and the success itself would provide evidence of Alex's skill. These are Attractors with the potential to increase Alex's *hyper-ludicity* and bring them closer to their Ideal State or demonstrate the *hyper-ludicity* they have already achieved.

The player's experience of Attraction and Repulsion reflects their relationship with their environment. This relationship is dynamic. The way phenomena impact the player as Attractors and Repulsors changes as the player's affordances change. Early in the game, when Alex only has one Stamina Wheel, a high cliff is a Repulsor preventing Alex from exploring more of Hyrule. Later in the game, when Alex has three Stamina Wheels, the fully upgraded Climbing set, and knows Stamina-

increasing recipes, a high cliff is an Attractor providing a platform from which they can paraglide across Hyrule more efficiently than walking.

The Ideal State is the player's motivation and can be roughly categorised into Bartle's and Yee's player taxonomies. These categories can make some predictions about how players will respond to phenomena but Ideal States are more precise than player types and motivations. Whether a phenomenon will be understood as an Attractor, Repulsor, or whether it will be meaningful at all depends on the Ideal State's exact definition. Alex's *hyper-ludic* Ideal State fits Yee, Ducheneaut, and Nelson's (2012) *Achievement* motivation but Alex did not respond equally to all high-risk activities. Guardians and Yiga Blademasters are similarly dangerous but, as I explained in the Chapter 5: Discussion, the two types of enemies had very different relationships with Alex's Ideal State.

A player will only experience a Ludic Hero's Journey if they want the Ideal State at its centre. Players come to care about an Ideal State when it is accompanied by convincing *Heralds*. *Heralds* interpellate the player into a position where the Ideal State is personally meaningful, where they inhabit the subjectivity of a *Hero*. *Heralds* include the player's own motivations, the affordances available to them, and the game's various *insistent mechanisms* (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011). Alex was *Heralded* towards their Ideal State through a combination of their own preference for combat, the mechanics and dynamics in BOTW affording mastery over the *World*, and the relationship between Alex's combat prowess and their access to Hyrule.

The phenomena players encounter while playing will be meaningful to them through the Ideal States they accept. Monsters would be meaningful as collectables through an Ideal State of completing the Sheikah Slate Compendium, as tools to exploit through an Ideal State of reaching Calamity Ganon as soon as you leave the Great Plateau, and as sources of rare ingredients through an Ideal State of discovering all possible Elixirs. To Alex, through their Ideal State of *hyper-ludic*

combat and unimpeded access to Hyrule, monsters were meaningful as gauges of their current strength and as opportunities to become stronger.

The player's perception of Heralds and the impact of those Heralds are contextual. Players with different motivations, skills, and knowledge will encounter different Heralds, leading to different Ideal States and resulting in different Ludic Hero's Journeys. Alex was, in part, Heralded towards their *hyper-ludic* Ideal State by BOTW's combat mechanics and monster behaviour. Monsters on the Great Plateau either killed Alex or forced them to flee, *insisting* (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011) Alex acquire the skill and equipment to defeat them before they could freely explore Hyrule. These Heralds were encountered by all participants who played BOTW, but only Alex described this Ideal State and experienced monsters as a hierarchy of challenges to overcome before becoming "a god" (Alex).

Elliott's extensive experience with other Zelda games gave them the skill and knowledge to confidently fight monsters in BOTW. Consequently, the monsters were not meaningful as *contra-ludic* barriers hindering their movement. Riley's attention was drawn to the realistic aspects of BOTW, such as the terrain, animals, and the way the world changed with the day-night cycle. Consequently, the cartoonish monsters were meaningful as ill-fitting imports from other Zelda games, *downkeying* Riley from their *Character World*, where Hyrule is a realistic land existing for its own sake, and into the *Social World*, where Hyrule is a conglomeration of features from other Zelda games intended to please fans of the franchise (Conway & Trevillian, 2015).

### 6.1.2 Trials and Transformation

*Every new place that I explored felt more worth it because the rewards would get bigger too. The enemies would get stronger but the rewards would get bigger and so it kind of pushes you forward. It's like what will I find next? And especially because of the open world-ness of it you could find something ridiculously above your level and if you could um, if you had (laughs) the skill to get away from all the really tough enemies that are way above you then you could end up having an item that you probably weren't necessarily supposed to have that early on. And that thought was really exciting. (Alex)*

*It feels like you're a god (Alex, emphasis in original)*

The player's Current State can be described in terms of the Attractors and Repulsors currently affecting them. A Spirit Orb is a potential Attractor but if Alex has not entered its Shrine then they are not yet affected by that Attractor and it does not change their Current State. The player changes their Current State by becoming more or less affected by Attraction and Repulsion, such as by accumulating, utilising, removing, or becoming impervious to it. Since Attraction and Repulsion are opposing forces, becoming more affected by Attraction simultaneously makes the player less affected by Repulsion. When Alex acquires four Spirit Orbs and trades them for another Heart Container, they accumulate an Attractor in the form of greater resilience. This simultaneously makes them less affected by the Repulsion presented by monsters when they had fewer Heart Containers. This is called *Transforming*. As the player Transforms, becoming more affected by Attractors than Repulsors, their Current State becomes more similar to the Ideal State.

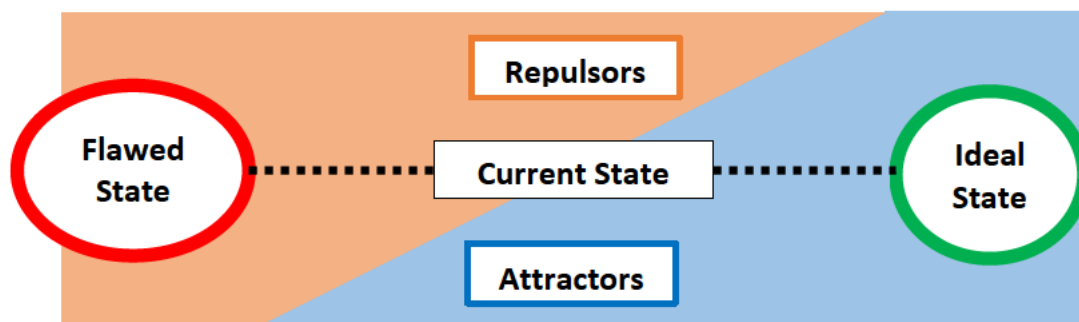


Figure 6. Diagram depicting relationship between the player's Current State and the balance of Repulsors and Attractors.

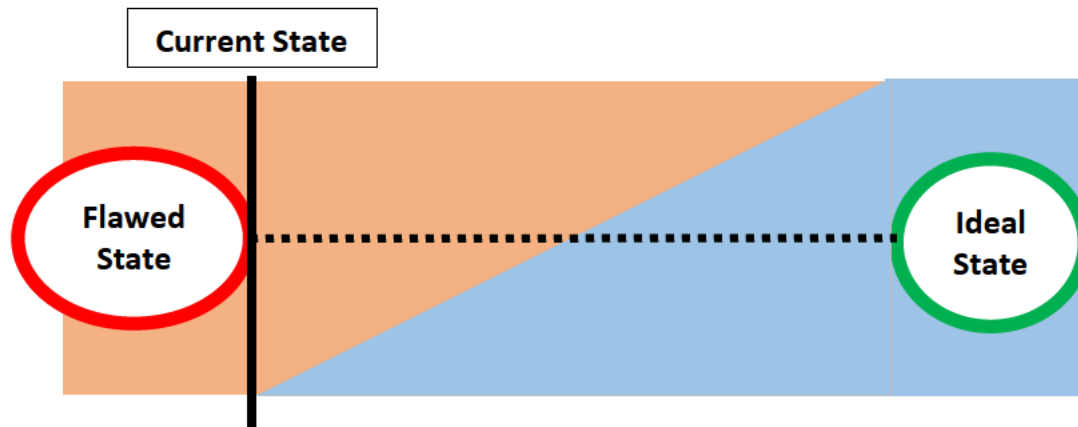


Figure 7. Player is affected by more Repulsors than Attractors. Their Current State is closer to the Flawed State.

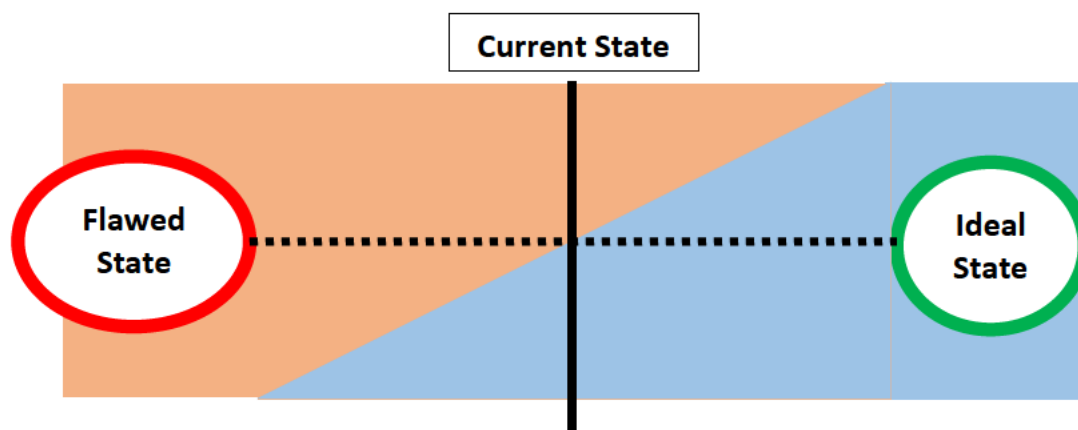


Figure 8. Player is equally affected by Attractors and Repulsors.

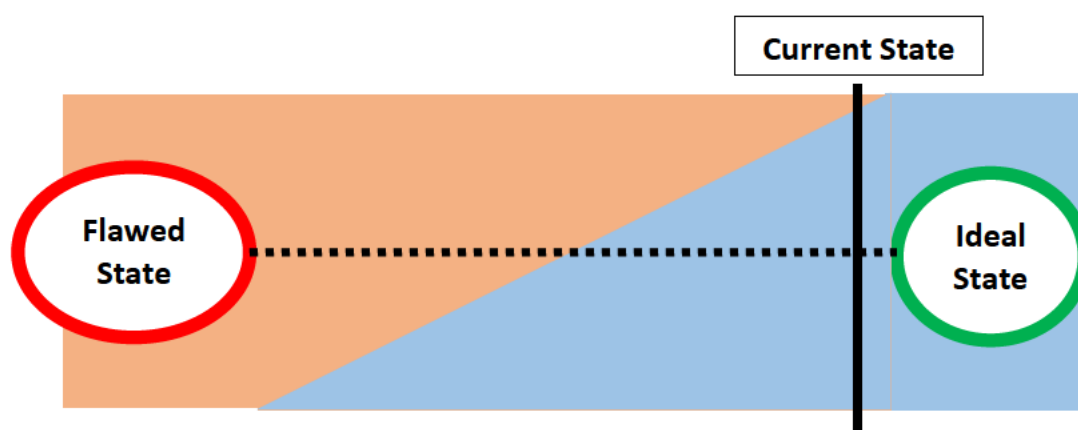
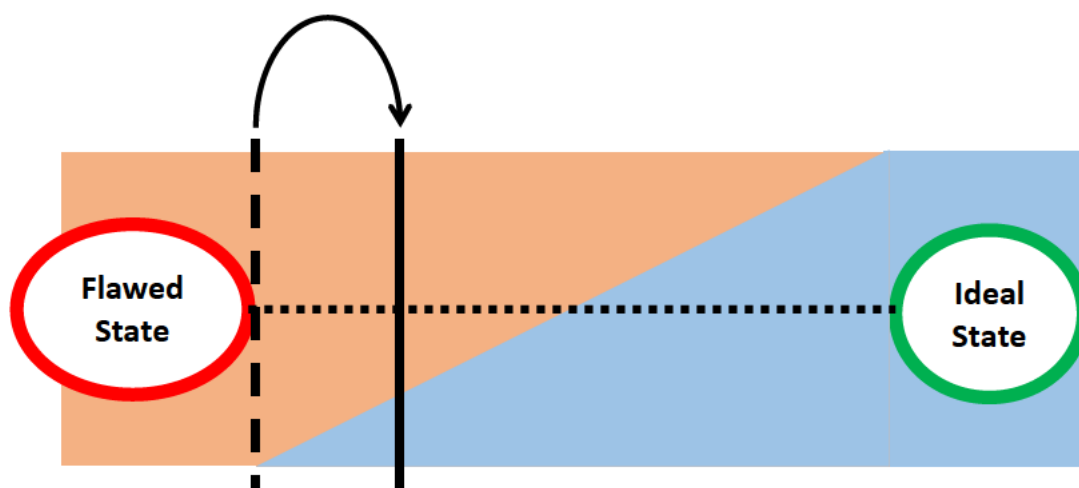


Figure 9. Player is affected almost entirely by Attractors and only by a few Repulsors. The player has almost achieved their Ideal State.



*Trials* are situations exposing the player to Attractors and Repulsors. By identifying the Repulsors affecting them and the Attractors they need, the player can assess their Current State and their distance from the Ideal State. Alex may not realise a Tree Branch, their only weapon at the beginning of BOTW, is insufficient for fighting most monsters until they actually fight and lose. Exposing the player to the Repulsors they must overcome and the Attractors they do not yet have also gives them the opportunity to Transform. They discover the Repulsors affecting them and learn how to change themselves or their environment to become less affected. They find the Attractors available but not yet affecting them and they change themselves or their environment so those Attractors do affect them. Alex's easy access to very weak Tree Branches, the high Health Points of most monsters compared with the Attack Strength of those Tree Branches, and the stronger weapons those monsters wield to kill Alex faster than Alex's Tree Branch can kill the monsters are all Repulsors keeping Alex closer to their Flawed State. To change their Current State and bring it closer to their Ideal State of *hyper-ludicity*, Alex needed to Transform by abandoning the easily accessible Tree Branches, selecting the monsters they approached more carefully, and finding stronger weapons.



*Figure 10.* Player Transforms and moves their Current State closer to the Ideal State by becoming more affected by Attractors and less affected by Repulsors.

Each time the player Transforms, they reach a less Flawed State than before. The Transformation process can be described as the player's progression through a long series of Trials interspersed with less-Flawed States until they reach their Ideal State. A digital game may divide Attractors and Repulsors into a sequence of discrete Trials. For example, each Shrine in BOTW was a discrete set of Attractors and Repulsors. Entering a Shrine meant confronting a new puzzle or a new monster and learning something new, increasing skill through practice, or at least gaining one Spirit Orb.

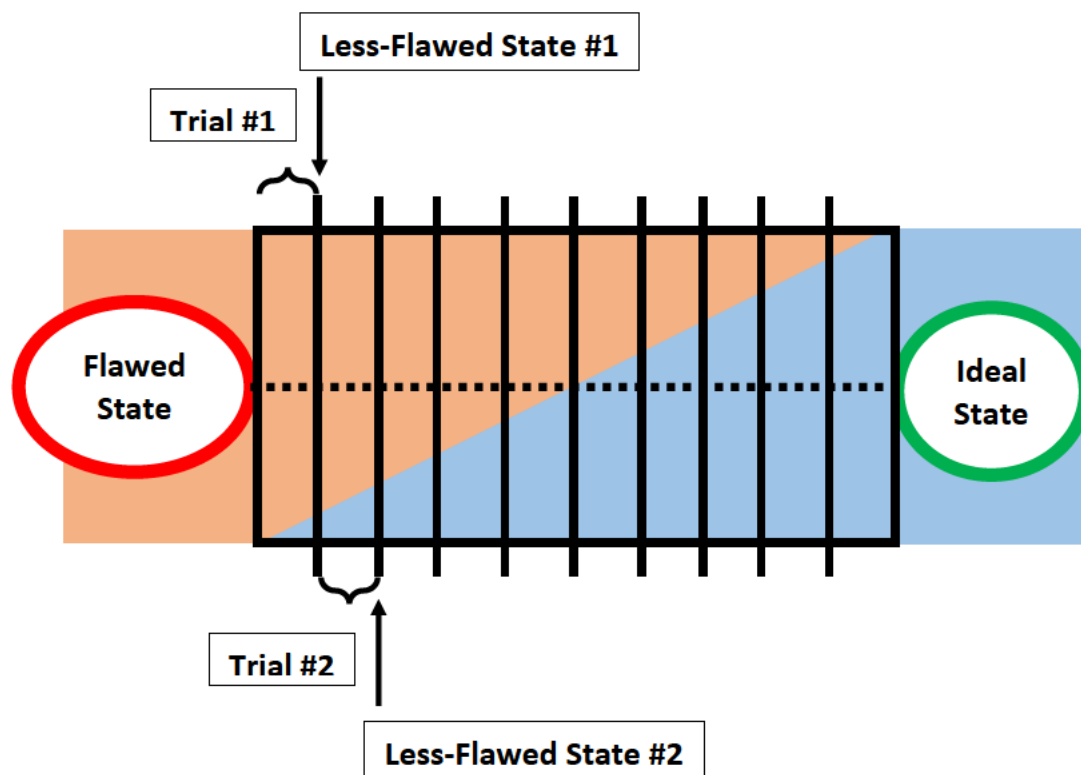


Figure 11. Adventure from Flawed State to Ideal State segmented into discrete Trials.

Even when the Trials are not arranged so discretely, the player will still experience their Transformation as a staircase if each partial Transformation affords meaningfully new experiences. For example, the monsters and equipment involved in Alex's Transformation towards their *hyper-ludic* Ideal State were not arranged in a linear sequence of Trials. However, every time Alex accumulated enough Attractors and removed enough Repulsors to change the kinds of monsters

they could kill, they felt closer to their Ideal State. Before finding a bow, Alex was limited to melee combat and was often overwhelmed by large groups of monsters. Acquiring their first bow was meaningful because they could kill monsters from a safe distance before approaching the smaller group. This felt like a distinct increase in their *hyper-ludicity* and Alex enjoyed this newly attained less-Flawed State, even though it was not the Ideal State they wanted.

In terms of *Flow* (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), the player approaches a new Trial in a state of *Arousal*, when the challenge is greater than their perceived skill. If this Trial is “just-manageable” (ibid, p.240), then the player can use the challenge’s feedback to adjust their actions, removing the Repulsors and accumulating the Attractors to meet the challenge. When they have Transformed to the point where the Trial poses no more challenge, they enter a state of *Control* and then *Relaxation*. To continue Transforming, the player must confront a new Trial and repeat this process.

Transformation is not a unidirectional progression. The player can de-Transform by becoming more affected by Repulsors and less affected by Attractors. Through skill and luck, Alex would sometimes acquire a weapon far stronger than they could easily access. This Attractor significantly increased their *hyper-ludicity* and brought them closer to their Ideal State, but this Transformation was unsustainable. When the weapon inevitably broke, Alex lost their source of *hyper-ludicity* without a reliable way to regain it. They were no longer affected by the Attractor so their Current State de-Transformed and moved closer to the Flawed State.

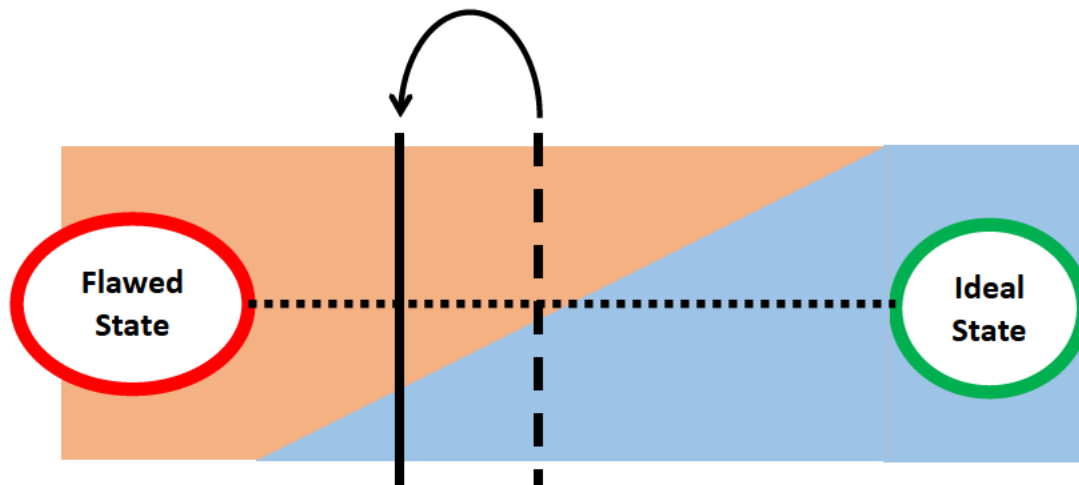


Figure 12. Player becomes more affected by Repulsors and less affected by Attractors, bringing their Current State closer to the Flawed State.

The player's Current State matches the Ideal State when they are affected only by Attractors and not at all by Repulsors. At this point the player has fully Transformed and can enjoy the benefits of the Ideal State. Alex attained their Ideal State when they had the *hyper-ludicity* to fight and defeat even Guardians, one of the strongest monsters in the game, and could freely move across Hyrule. At that point, Alex could enjoy unhindered exploration.

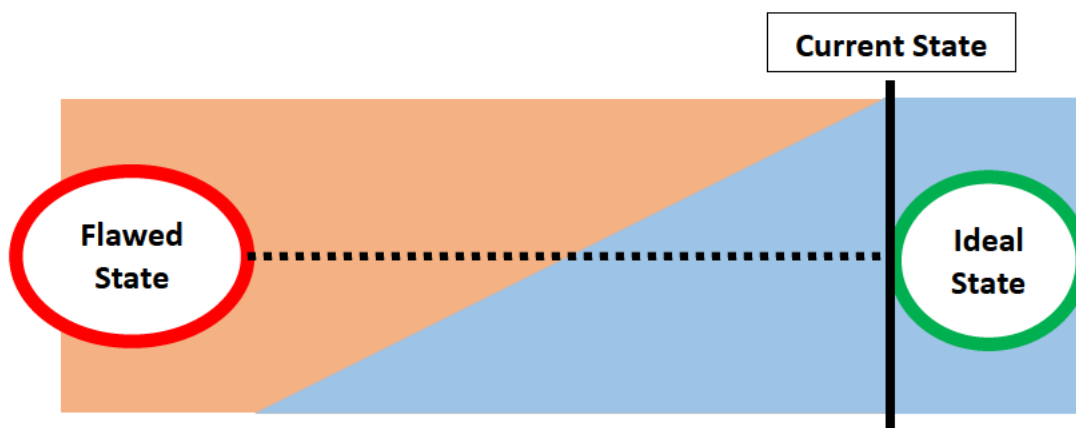


Figure 13. Player is affected by Attractors and not at all by Repulsors. They have fully Transformed and attained the Ideal State.

### 6.1.3 Edges of the World

*I had to kind of be careful of everything because everything was either at my level or above. [...] Especially when you're running around in your underwear with just a stick. You can't really do much against other enemies. [...] I felt like that was kind of the game's way of um telling you that this area isn't the way you're generally supposed to be going. [...] I feel like the further out you go in the map the stronger the enemies get or in places where you aren't generally supposed to be at because yeah there were huge, the huge enemies where you generally weren't supposed to go at that point. (Alex, emphasis in original)*

*It felt like I was hitting a brick wall (laughs) with a stick. [...] I was kind of forced, in a way, to do what the game wanted me to do. Because like there was no way I would be strong enough in the foreseeable future to fight off those guys. Because once one of them noticed you they'd all start attacking you. [...] I felt like that's the more realistic thing to do. But then when I realised I couldn't do that (laughs) it was kind of disappointing 'cause I feel like running up and fighting people is more fun than sneaking around. (Alex)*

The Ludic Hero's Journey is a *World* of meaning defined by the Ideal State. Phenomena affording those meanings, including visuals, audio, cutscenes, control schemes, YouTube videos, and walkthroughs, provide *Facilitating Experiences* to *upkey* the player into that *World* (Conway & Trevillian, 2015). Most monsters in BOTW Facilitated Alex's Journey. A variety of monsters, presenting different degrees of *contra-ludicity*, were scattered across Hyrule in varying densities. These monsters attacked Alex on sight, restricting Alex's access to the areas those monsters occupied. *Hyper-ludicity*, in the form of equipment and skill, were necessary to remove the monsters. Increasing *hyper-ludicity* demanded effort and determination but was possible.

Phenomena in and of themselves have broad possibilities for meaning. A player's Ideal State will orient them towards certain meanings, just as Alex's *hyper-ludic* Ideal State positioned them to find monsters meaningful as gauges of skill rather than images to collect or a piece of the Zelda franchise's legacy. However, phenomena are predisposed towards some meanings and will resist others. Phenomena not affording meanings in the player's Journey are *Negating Experiences*, *downkeying* the player from that *World* (Conway & Trevillian, 2015). In Alex's Journey, monsters prevented access to Hyrule until Alex had the *hyper-ludicity* to kill them. The Yiga Clan Hideout

Negated this Journey. The Yiga Blademasters could not be defeated in direct combat and the Hideout was accessible despite Alex's lack of *hyper-ludicity* because they could avoid combat by sneaking past the Yiga Blademasters. The Yiga Clan Hideout was predisposed to afford meanings inconsistent with Alex's Journey so the experience *downkeyed* them from their *World*.

Being *downkeyed* is *hypo-ludic* because it prevents the player from inhabiting their Ludic Hero's Journey. In the Yiga Clan Hideout, Alex was unable to play in their Journey where *hyper-ludicity* was attainable and afforded greater movement. BOTW continued – Alex infiltrated the Yiga Clan Hideout and found the Thunder Helm to complete the quest – but these experiences did not have meaning as play to them. Instead, they had meaning in the *Social World* (Conway & Trevillian, 2015) where people designed the program to reward Alex for performing specific actions.

One Ludic Hero's Journey does not encompass a player's entire experience with a digital game. Alex's *hyper-ludic* Ideal State and the Journey it defined was a significant part of their play experience with BOTW, but it does not encompass all the meanings they found and enjoyed. It does not even encompass all the experiences they discussed in the interview. Some of their meaningful experiences were unrelated to this Journey. Alex enjoyed finding the travelling musician Kass as they explored Hyrule. They said his music was nice, it was fun to find a Rito away from Rito Village, and solving his riddles helped him return home to his family. This neither Facilitated nor Negated their *hyper-ludic* Journey.

Some experiences were unrelated to this particular Ludic Hero's Journey but were relevant to another. Alex experienced another Journey about an Ideal State of being friends and teammates with Sidon. Working with him to fight Vah Ruta Facilitated this Journey and was one of Alex's most memorable experiences in BOTW, but it was unrelated to their Journey about free movement through *hyper-ludic* combat. Alex also experienced many brief Journeys about an Ideal State of

keeping their horse safe. Malanya the god of horses was an Attractor in this Journey, since it could revive dead horses, but Malanya neither Facilitated nor Negated Alex's other Journeys.

Some phenomena afforded multiple meanings. Some of these meanings Facilitated Alex's Journeys and others did not. Cooking was an Attractor bringing Alex closer to their *hyper-ludic* Ideal State because some recipes made them more resilient and formidable in combat. Cooking was also an enjoyable activity because Alex could experiment with the ingredients they found in Hyrule and discover new recipes. These new recipes sometimes lead to *hyper-ludic* combat, such as a memorable moment when Alex found and cooked Bananas for the first time, but more often Alex simply enjoyed the discovery of cooking new combinations of ingredients.

Some of these enjoyable experiences may only have been possible as Alex came closer to their *hyper-ludic* Ideal State. Alex enjoyed finding small stories around Hyrule as they travelled, such as the lone traveller who wanted to find his true love at Lover's Pond but accidentally went to a pond shaped like a broken heart instead. These small stories made Hyrule more interesting and personal, and they were only possible when Alex had the *hyper-ludicity* to travel so freely.

Some phenomena afforded multiple meanings and Facilitated multiple Ludic Hero's Journeys. The support Sidon provided while Alex travelled to Zora's Domain Facilitated both their *hyper-ludic* Journey, since Sidon warned Alex about the monsters along the path so they could plan their approach, as well as their Journey to become friends and teammates, since the acknowledgement and encouragement satisfied Alex's sense of *relatedness*. Some of these meanings may have Facilitated Journeys we did not fully discuss in the interview. Alex also liked Revali, since they had to earn his respect, and was amused by Mei, who was washed away from Zora's Domain to the other side of Hyrule but was completely unperturbed. These characters may have Facilitated other Journeys Alex experienced while playing BOTW.

## 6.2 Differences

### 6.2.1 Ludic vs. Linear Hero's Journey

This Ludic Hero's Journey is quite different from the popular ways the Linear Hero's Journey is adjusted to describe play in digital games. The most significant differences are the concepts of the Ideal State and the Herald.

#### 6.2.1.1 *The Ideal State*

The Ideal State is the Hero's driving motivation and it defines every other component of the Ludic Hero's Journey. Most discussions of the Linear Hero's Journey in digital games assume any player choosing to play the game is already motivated to play the game in the way designers intend. They either want to get to the action of the game, want to learn what is being taught, or the game will provide something lacking in their everyday life. The Ludic Hero's Journey emphasises the importance of the player's motivation. Even slightly different motivations can lead to divergent experiences. To identify the Hero's Journey in a player's experience, we must first define the Ideal State at its centre. This makes the Ludic Hero's Journey more appropriate for describing play experiences than the Linear Hero's Journey.

The Ideal State also means the Ludic Hero's Journey is more flexible than the Linear Hero's Journey. It can apply to any Ideal State, on any scale, and any sequence of events fitting its logic. The Linear Hero's Journey is a specific sequence of events without an underlying logic. Identifying the Linear Hero's Journey in a digital game, whether in the player-character's pre-designed plot or the mechanics and dynamics with which the player engages, is often a matter of matching the imagery of each separate stage against the game events, regardless of its broader context or its impact on the Hero. The player-character's initial environment is the "Ordinary World", without specifying what aspects of their environment will be changed by the Adventure. Any challenge is part of the



“Trials”, regardless of whether they were necessary to gain the “Ultimate Boon”. The “Magic Flight” is any exciting chase near the end of the Adventure, regardless of why or where the Hero is being chased.

The Ludic Hero’s Journey is a set of relationships between the Hero and their Ideal State. It is not restricted to any specific characters, events, actions, or objects so it is applicable to any Ideal State important to the player and can involve any components. In this way, the Ludic Hero’s Journey can describe a wider range of play experiences. It applies equally to Chris’s Journey to defeat Calamity Ganon and find closure for their deceased friends and to Kelly’s Journey of being an unknown adventurer without any responsibilities or duties. It applies to Alex’s Journey to gain *hyper-ludicity*, whether they were steadily progressing, stagnating, or regressing back towards their Flawed State. It applies to Jean’s Journey about having the skill to overcome any obstacle, even though they formed this Ideal State through advertisements for OOT and never completed the game themselves.

The Linear Hero’s Journey is often applied to an entire playthrough of a game, beginning roughly when the player turns on the game and ending when they stop playing. Since the Ludic Hero’s Journey is defined by the Ideal State, it can occur on any scale, for any length of time, and involve any portion of the game. It applied to Chris’s Journey to find closure for the Champions, which spanned their entire playthrough of BOTW, and to Kelly’s Journey to rescue their accidentally abandoned horse, which briefly arose while playing BOTW and receded when they reunited with their horse. Each participant’s experience playing these games comprised multiple Ludic Hero’s Journeys, each arising as an Ideal State was identified and receding when the Ideal State was attained.

#### ***6.2.1.2 The Herald***

The Herald is almost as important as the Ideal State. The “Call to Adventure” in the Linear Hero’s Journey initiates a change in the player-character’s life by providing an excuse for the game to

properly begin, whereas Campbell's (1968) Herald refers to the *insistent mechanisms* interpellating the player into a Hero subjectivity (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011). The "Call to Adventure" leads the player to the very first activity without guaranteeing their commitment to or interest in the entire Adventure, whereas the Herald determines the player's understanding and expectations. The Ludic Hero's Journey exists in a player's experience when they desire its Ideal State, and an Ideal State will only exist for the player if they are convinced by its Herald.

My participants were Heralded to their Ideal States by a combination of their personal preferences and the game's affordances. Their own interests drew them to certain Ideal States, such as how Elliott's preference for learning a game's world history and lore drew them towards solving mysteries in both OOT and BOTW. Since five of my six participants described similarly *hyper-ludic* Ideal States, BOTW itself may have provided particularly persuasive Heralds towards mastery and achievement. However, although these *hyper-ludic* Ideal States fall within Yee, Ducheneaut, and Nelson's (2012) *Achievement* motivation, their exact definitions were not identical and their Ludic Hero's Journeys were Facilitated and Negated by different phenomena. The Ludic Hero's Journey makes the presence and impact of Heralds explicit and it is a more useful way to describe the player's motivation than the Linear Hero's Journey and the "Call to Adventure".

For a digital game to create an intended experience for the player, the player must inhabit the necessary subjectivity to access the designer's intended meanings. My participants' most enjoyable and frustrating experiences can be attributed to the presence, or absence, of effective Heralds. Elliott may have enjoyed the ease with which they defeated Calamity Ganon if they encountered Heralds for an Ideal State of masterful combat. Instead, they encountered Heralds for an Ideal State of understanding a completely new and unfamiliar boss and Calamity Ganon was disappointingly familiar. Alex may have found the Yiga Clan Hideout a satisfying challenge if they encountered Heralds for an Ideal State of overcoming monsters by any means, including stealthily

avoiding them, rather than an Ideal State of easily killing monsters. Being repeatedly called a heroic knight may have bolstered Kelly's confidence if the Heralds for an Ideal State of saving Hyrule were more persuasive. Instead, Kelly was Heralded to an Ideal State of peacefully wandering Hyrule so these heroic reminders *downkeyed* (Conway & Trevillian, 2015) and frustrated them.

## **6.2.2 Ludic vs. Dynamic Hero's Journey**

There are also differences between the Ludic Hero's Journey and the Dynamic Hero's Journey I constructed from Campbell's (1968) *Hero With A Thousand Faces*. The most significant differences resulted from the Ideal State's dependence on the Hero's perspective.

### ***6.2.2.1 The Subjective Ideal State***

The Dynamic Hero's Journey's Ideal State is significantly different from the Linear Hero's Journey's "Ultimate Boon". Whereas the "Ultimate Boon" is a reward for completing the "Trials" and "Ordeal", the Ideal State defines every part of the Dynamic Hero's Journey. This makes the Dynamic Hero's Journey more useful for understanding play experiences, but the concept as Campbell (1968) describes it is not sufficient. In the Dynamic Hero's Journey, the Ideal State is objectively superior and independent of the Hero's opinions and even awareness. The constellation of relationships between the Ideal State and the Flawed State and all the Attractors and Repulsors they create will exist no matter what the Hero feels, does, or knows. When a Hero fails to accept the Ideal State, their story is a cautionary tale.

According to Campbell (1968), ancient stories survive because of the valuable lessons they impart. The Ideal State in a story is either literally or metaphorically an Ideal State the audience should achieve themselves, whether or not the Hero succeeds. Other interpretations are misunderstandings, rendering the story useless or even harmful (ibid, p.236). We are supposed to

pity King Minos for refusing to submit to the realities of his world (ibid, p.60). We are not supposed to admire him for defying Poseidon or imitate his desire for economic advantage.

In the Ludic Hero's Journey, the Ideal State is neither objective nor independent. The Ludic Hero's Journey is a phenomenological *World* of meaning constructed by the player when they identify an Ideal State for themselves. Alex, Chris, and Kelly all described monsters as barricades but this meaning is not inherent in the design. It is the *dominant* reading communicated through "*naturalised*" but not "*natural*" *codes* (Hall, 1999, p.511, emphasis in original). Alex's desire to fight through the Yiga Clan Hideout and Elliott's desire to redeem Bongo Bongo were Negated in BOTW and OOT, but they are not misunderstandings. These meanings were *decoded* with unintended *codes* (Hall, 1999). As observers, we can describe a player's experience in terms of any Ideal State. I could say Alex failed to single-mindedly defeat Calamity Ganon because they were distracted with killing inconsequential monsters to reach isolated areas of Hyrule, but this was not Alex's experience. The player cannot be forced into a Ludic Hero's Journey. They can only be interpellated with *insistent mechanisms* (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011) and with appeals to their psychological needs.

Although the Dynamic Hero's Journey is inspired by Jungian psychology, the goals of Jungian Individuation are less objective than the Dynamic Hero's Journey's Ideal State. According to Jungian Individuation, each person has unique potentials and unique problems to resolve (Hartman & Zimmeroff, 2009; Jacobi, 1968; von Franz, 1978). We all desire psychic wholeness but the contents of our Persona, Shadow, and Contrasexual Archetype, which we must unify, differ across people and contexts. Similarly, the Ideal States my participants identified and accepted differed. The Ludic Hero's Journey could be further developed as a phenomenological model by investigating these Jungian roots.

#### 6.2.2.2 *The Subjective Herald*

Since the Ideal State is not objective, neither is the Herald. In the Dynamic Hero's Journey, the Herald's role is to reveal truth and punish ignorance. It embodies the Ideal State the Hero must achieve, making them aware of the Repulsors holding them back and the Attractors they need. The Herald is neither successful nor unsuccessful. It simply exists. The Hero is the one who either succeeds or fails. They either successfully perceive the Herald and the change it brings or they misunderstand the Herald and "the divinity itself becomes [their] terror" (Campbell, 1968, p.60). In the Four Signs, the gods bring Gautama Sakyamuni's attention to age, sickness, and death to spoil his life of earthly pleasures and lead him towards monkhood (ibid, pp.56-58). In the story, these signs agitate Gautama's peace. He retires from the world to seek Enlightenment and becomes the Future Buddha. If Gautama had rejected this Ideal State and chosen earthly pleasures then the gods' signs, these Attractors towards the Ideal State, would have been an unpleasant and unwelcome disruption.

The Ludic Hero's Journey is most satisfying when the Herald's role is to persuade rather than punish. The Herald draws the player's attention to an Ideal State so the player experiences the Herald when anything, including visuals, audio, dialogue, and mechanics, interpellates them into caring about something. The sweeping shot of Hyrule's landscape convinced Alex they wanted to go everywhere and the *contra-ludic* monsters convinced them killing monsters would give them this freedom. An element may be designed to insist players want some goal or perform some action, but it will not be experienced as a Herald unless it successfully interpellates the player into that subjectivity. Otherwise, an unavoidable *insistent mechanism* (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011) may instead discredit or distract the player from their inhabited subjectivity, *downkeying* them into the *Social World* (Conway & Trevillian, 2015).

Many mechanics in BOTW insist the player should use stealth to avoid strong monsters. The Sheikah Armour increases Link's stealth and is one of the first armour sets the player is likely to find. Many ingredients players find throughout Hyrule are used to cook stealth-increasing foods and elixirs. At the entrance to the Yiga Clan Hideout is a character who will warn the player against fighting the Yiga Blademasters and suggest they can be distracted instead. The Yiga Blademasters' strict patrol routes and the hideout's high walls make hiding easier than in most other places in Hyrule and the Yiga Blademasters' high Health Points and ability to kill Link with one attack further dissuades the player from direct combat. If these *insistent mechanisms* successfully interpellate a player into this subjectivity (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011), then they will adopt an Ideal State to master stealth tactics and sneak attacks. They will experience a Ludic Hero's Journey about learning patience and precise movement, discovering and utilising stealth-increasing recipes, and upgrading their Sheikah Armour. These Heralds did not interpellate Alex into this Journey. Alex was instead interpellated to care about an Ideal State of having the *hyper-ludicity* to kill any monster they encounter and, from within this subjectivity, many of these potential Heralds were instead experienced as Negation.

### **6.2.2.3 Negation**

Negating Experiences had a significant impact on my participants' Journeys but the Dynamic Hero's Journey does not account for Negation. Campbell (1968) constructed the Dynamic Hero's Journey from ancient myths, rituals, and folk tales. He argues these stories served their communities and survived across generations because they followed this universal pattern and successfully taught important truths about the world. Campbell only briefly discusses how stories are unbelievable and dissatisfying when they do not adhere the Dynamic Hero's Journey's rules (ibid, pp.206-207). The Ludic Hero's Journey expands on the consequences of such deviations.

The Ludic Hero's Journey is a *World* of meaning constructed by the player, but their environment's ability to afford that *World's* meanings determines whether their position in that *World* is maintained. Players are *upkeyed* into their Ludic Hero's Journey when their environment affords these meanings. Guardians *upkeyed* Alex because they were meaningful as powerful monsters Alex could only defeat, and thus remove as obstacles, with significant *hyper-ludicity*. This was consistent with the logic of Alex's Journey.

Conversely, players are *downkeyed* from their Ludic Hero's Journey when they encounter something they cannot understand in terms of that *World*. Alex did not experience their Journey in the Yiga Clan Hideout. Due to a combination of mechanics, dynamics, skill, and knowledge, the Yiga Blademasters resisted being experienced as monsters obstructing Alex's progress until removed with sufficient *hyper-ludicity*. They were only meaningful as obstructions for Alex to circumvent through slow, tedious, non-combative means. The Yiga Clan Hideout was inconsistent with Alex's Journey and so Alex was *downkeyed* from their *World*.

The Dynamic Hero's Journey assumes all elements in the story are self-consistent. A reader may misunderstand the meaning of an image, for example if the story were transplanted from one time and place to another, but the story still conforms to the Dynamic Hero's Journey. The Ludic Hero's Journey is a phenomenological experience and accounts for the ways a digital game's design can Facilitate and Negate their meaning-making processes.

## 6.3 Future research

The Ludic Hero's Journey is based on a small sample of participants and their experiences with a small sample of digital games. Participants were recruited from among Swinburne University students and the researchers' contacts and consisted of English speakers living in Australia who were studying, involved in, or at least interested in digital games. OOT and BOTW fall within roughly the

same genre. Both are single-player digital games and provide richly detailed story worlds, characters, pre-authored plots, and each has a pre-defined ending. They tell simple stories of good versus evil with an emphasis on physical action over emotional or social conflicts, where the player is positioned as the single most competent and effective agent in the story world and where the player's mastery is facilitated and rewarded.

Consequently, the Ludic Hero's Journey I present here will not be applicable to all play experiences. The Ludic Hero's Journey might look quite different when analysed through the experiences of people with different literacies, interests, and contexts for play. The Hero's Journey patterns present in the narratives players construct may differ across games with little or no explicit narrative (e.g., *Street Fighter II*, Capcom, 1991), games with stories spanning multiple games and/or media (e.g., the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, Ubisoft, 2007-2020), games with moral ambiguity (e.g., *Red Dead Redemption*, Rock Star San Diego, 2010), games where the player has less agency and mastery is not encouraged (e.g., *Menagerie II: Presentable Liberty*, Wertpol, 2014), narratives constructed from multiplayer experiences (e.g., *Among Us*, Innersloth, 2018), or the narratives constructed in wider gaming cultures (e.g., competitions, eSports, Let's Plays).

This project provided the detailed exploration of play experiences necessary to adapt the Dynamic Hero's Journey to better describe play experiences in digital games. However, further research is necessary to make the Ludic Hero's Journey a more representative and robust analytic model.

### **6.3.1 Other Patterns**

Most of my participants' Ludic Hero's Journey experiences followed similar patterns with very little variation. They cared about an Ideal State, discovered they were in a Flawed State, engaged in Trials to encounter Attractors and Repulsors, and gradually Transformed their Current State to bring them closer to their Ideal State. This reflects the "standard path" (Campbell, 1968, p.30) from Flawed State



to Ideal State, where the Hero gradually Transforms until they become the *World Redeemer Hero*.<sup>61</sup> These results allow us to incorporate digital games theories with this standard path to describe play experiences. However, it neglects other aspects of the Dynamic Hero's Journey as well as other *Worlds* of meaning that the Dynamic Hero's Journey does not accommodate.

The standard path's frequent occurrence may reflect qualities of the chosen games' genre, engines, platforms, or even the Zelda franchise more specifically. The Progression Pattern may have been prevalent in my participants' OOT and BOTW experience because these games involve mastery and steady progression with no regression. Even though BOTW is less linear than OOT and weapons break and must be replaced, the game still enforces progression and accumulation: Link's Heart Containers and Stamina Wheel cannot be decreased (only redistributed), armour is permanently acquired and upgraded, and abilities given as rewards by the Champions can be deactivated but not lost. The Dynamic Hero's Journey, and consequently the Ludic Hero's Journey, is defined by a Hero's goal and assumes the Hero has agency and resources to reach that goal. The Progression Pattern may not be as prevalent, or even present at all, in the narratives constructed from games with less emphasis on goals and where the player is in a subaltern or colonised position with less agency.

Investigating player experiences with digital games across a wider range of genres may allow us to adjust the Ludic Hero's Journey beyond these participants, these games, and the Dynamic Hero's Journey Campbell (1968) originally described. If we can identify correlations between Journey patterns and game genres, we could use the Ludic Hero's Journey to construct a typology of player experiences.

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<sup>61</sup> For more information about the World Redeemer Hero, see 2.2.8.4 Complete Transformation: World Redeemer Hero.

The few variations identified among my participants suggest some patterns deserving further scrutiny. Alex's experiences with occasionally gaining an unusually strong weapon, utilising its *hyper-ludicity*, and then losing it without means of regaining it resemble the Thief Hero, who faces the Trials without Transforming and must retreat back behind the protective *Threshold* to avoid the consequences. Campbell (1968) describes the Thief Hero as a sympathetic failure, but Alex's experiences suggest the Thief Hero path is experienced by players as a thrilling attempt to achieve something before they are ready. Being able to do this in BOTW encouraged Alex to confront challenges earlier than they otherwise would, giving them a taste of future *hyper-ludicity* and sometimes revealing they were more prepared than they thought.

Most participants described BOTW's Hyrule as a peaceful place but this is clearest in Kelly's account of wandering Hyrule as an unknown adventurer without responsibilities or pressure. This closely resembles stories depicting Ideal States without Transformation. These stories present audiences with the Ideal State they are supposed to achieve, such as Kali representing the co-existence of life and death, Krishna representing the god-like potential in everyone, and Taoist landscape paintings representing the heavenliness of illumination. Despite these examples, the Dynamic Hero's Journey has little to say about these situations. Campbell (1968) present Heroes like Kali and Krishna as examples to be contemplated rather than people with experiences. Accounts such as Kelly's can provide greater nuance for the contentment of possessing an Ideal State. Conducting multiple interviews with each participant across their playthrough, rather than one interview after they have played a digital game, may also provide more precise detail about the paths they took through their Hero's Journeys. This approach may allow us to identify Heralds with more detail, the moment when a Ludic Hero's Journey begins, the Threshold between the Flawed State and the Trials, phenomena acting as Attractors and Repulsors, players' patterns of Transformation and de-Transformation, their reactions to Negating Experiences, and perhaps even very small Ludic Hero's Journeys arising in smaller core loops.

### 6.3.2 Robustness

Negating Experiences were consistently less enjoyable than Facilitating Experiences. However, Negating Experiences ranged from mildly inconvenient to deeply aggravating. Some Ludic Hero's Journeys were only temporarily disrupted, such as the way Kelly's Journey as an unknown adventurer was interrupted by NPCs calling Link a heroic knight. Other Hero's Journeys ended abruptly without resolution, such as the way Elliott's Journey to redeem Bongo Bongo was irreparably ruined when they were forced to kill Bongo Bongo. This suggests the impact of phenomena on a player's Journey cannot be simply divided into Facilitation and Negation. There may be different degrees of necessity across Facilitation and the player's own response to Negation may determine its impact on their experience.

#### 6.3.2.1 *Primary and Secondary Facilitation*

Some Facilitating Experiences may be more necessary for a Ludic Hero's Journey than others. In Alex's *hyper-ludic* Journey, strong but killable monsters were vital. Alex's Ideal State was to have the *hyper-ludicity* to destroy the obstacles preventing their access to Hyrule. This required the presence of obstacles preventing free movement until forcefully removed by the player. When these obstacles were absent, replaced with unkillable monsters and free access despite Link's weakness, Alex's Journey could not be sustained. In contrast, foods and elixirs contributed to Alex's Journey by augmenting Link's strength and resistance, but Alex could become a formidable combatant without them. The bow was a noteworthy weapon for the unique combat options it afforded, but Alex could become "a *god*" (Alex, emphasis in original) with only swords and spears.

Future versions of the Ludic Hero's Journey may benefit from more precise distinctions in Facilitation. Based on my current results, I argue Facilitating Experiences could be divided into *Primary* and *Secondary* levels. *Primary Facilitating Experiences* are necessary for the Ludic Hero's Journey's existence because they are necessary for the Ideal State to be possible. Alex's Ideal State

was only possible when monsters obstructed their passage until Alex was strong enough to kill them, so killable obstructions were Primary Facilitating Experiences. *Secondary Facilitating Experiences* contribute to and enrich an already existing Ludic Hero's Journey. Ingredients, foods, elixirs, and weapons were Secondary Facilitating Experiences, specifically Attractors, because they added detail and complexity to Alex's progression towards their Ideal State of killing obstructions. However, they were only meaningful as Attractors if there were obstructing monsters for Alex to kill. Adding cooking pots and bows to the Yiga Clan Hideout would not have Facilitated Alex's Journey if the Yiga Blademasters remained unkillable.

Whether Facilitation can be divided into Primary and Secondary levels requires further investigation. In future interviews, researchers could ask interviewees to elaborate on their Facilitating Experiences, possibly combined with recordings of their play sessions. The researcher could ask interviewees when different Facilitation was present and how their presence or absence impacted their Hero's Journey. If Facilitation can be divided into Primary and Secondary levels, then some Facilitation should always be present when an interviewee experiences their Ludic Hero's Journey, while other Facilitation appears and disappears without causing disruptions.

### ***6.3.2.2 A Journey Across Worlds***

Kelly's and Jean's accounts suggest the player's own approach to the game is at least partially responsible for maintaining the Ludic Hero's Journey. Kelly and Jean both said the games they played were not intended to Facilitate the Journeys they wanted. They also described how they navigated the games to find Facilitation and the ways they tolerated inevitable Negation.

Kelly believed BOTW was designed with a specific linear story about saving the world. Their Journey about an unknown adventurer lead to frequent Negation but Kelly responded by avoiding those moments and, when unavoidable, suspending their Journeys until they found more Facilitating Experiences. Most tellingly, when they realised they may have exhausted all the available mundane

side quests Facilitating their Hero's Journey, they decided to temporarily be the heroic knight as the game *insisted* (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011) until they progressed the story to unlock more of the map. Once they gained access to more of the map and more mundane side quests, Kelly intended to resume their preferred Journey.

Similarly, Jean said certain characters in *Tekken* (Namco, 1994) canonically win the tournament.<sup>62</sup> Jean enjoyed forcing the game into another narrative by winning the tournament as a peripheral character who canonically loses. Jean was aware the victory would be unacknowledged in future play sessions and in future games, but these alternative narratives were still important to them. Jean could tolerate the game's Negation and still enjoy the narratives they created for themselves.

We inhabit many different phenomenological *Worlds* every day and are usually able to easily shift between them (Conway & Innocent, 2017). Additionally, the *World* we inhabit while playing a digital game gradually shifts as our affordances change, such as when we develop new skills, knowledge, or motivations (Conway, 2016). Kelly and Jean seem to more easily shift from their Journeys into other *Worlds* and back again than, for example, Alex when their Journey of *hyper-ludic* combat was Negated in the Yiga Clan Hideout or Elliott when their Journey to redeem Bongo Bongo was Negated in the boss fight.

Kelly's and Jean's accounts suggest they maintained their Ludic Hero's Journeys by approaching the games from a *negotiated position*, where they recognise the *dominant code* whilst also applying *oppositional* rules to accommodate their own personal positions (Hall, 1999, p.516).

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<sup>62</sup> For more information about Jean's experiences utilising hyper-ludicity to produce new narratives, see the master table of themes produced from Jean's interview in Appendix 10.4 "Jean", specifically the theme called "The game I want, not the game I'm given" on page 424.

Kelly and Jean may also have easily shifted between *Worlds* by engaging in what Farca (2016) calls *emancipated involvement*. An *emancipated player* explores a game to understand all its possible meanings, rather than expecting one definitive meaning. If Kelly and Jean expected these games to Facilitate many potential, and possibly contradictory, *Worlds* then they may have interpreted Negating Experiences as Facilitation for another *World* rather than as a disruption of their Journeys. This question could be further investigated by examining interviewees' interpretation of Negating experiences, rather than simply identifying the Negation.

### 6.3.3 Paratext

There is also a question of whether Ludic Hero's Journeys can be Facilitated paratextually. Some of my participants briefly discussed their use of paratextual materials. Kelly sometimes found answers online, Riley used YouTube to learn how to tame the Giant Horse, Alex used a walkthrough for Vah Ruta, and Jean almost entirely experienced OOT through advertisements and cultural osmosis and experienced BOTW through YouTube videos of other people playing. In some cases, such as Riley taming the Giant Horse, their Journeys would not have been sufficiently Facilitated by the game object alone. Similarly, cities usually only afford our position in the *Social World* but Conway and Innocent (2017) discuss how the augmented reality game *Urban Codemakers* can *upkey* people into the *Operative* and *Character Worlds* by providing them with information they would not normally access when moving through the city. Paratexts such as YouTube videos, walkthroughs, online forums, and other Zelda games may be as important for Facilitating Ludic Hero's Journeys as the game object itself.

Researchers also study fan activity as an extension of play and as a way for players to express themselves when they cannot do so in the game. Lowood (2006a) discusses how Tristan Pope made the fan movie "Not Just Another Love Story" in response to the lack of chat function between Horde and Alliance characters in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004). Carter

and Chapman (2017) discuss how players create and distribute mods of *Total War: Rome II* (Creative Assembly, 2014) and *Total War: Warhammer* (Creative Assembly, 2016) to support versions of historical accuracy not afforded in the official games. Some of my participants' Journeys were irreparably disrupted by Negating Experiences, such as Elliott's Journey to redeem Bongo Bongo, but they may have been Facilitated and completed through similar fan activity.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Games-related websites

A Google search for “popular games news websites” lead to four pages recommending a total of 37 websites (Basu, 2010; Harris, 2011; Rougeau, 2011; *Top 15 Most Popular Video Game Websites / December 2016*, 2016). These 37 websites, in alphabetical order, were:

- 1UP (<http://www.1up.com/>)
- Andriasang
- Bitmob
- CAG (Cheap Ass Gamer) (<https://www.cheapassgamer.com>)
- Casual Gameplay (<http://jayisgames.com/>)
- CheatCC (<http://www.cheatcc.com/>)
- Destructoid (<http://www.destructoid.com/>)
- Edge (print media only)
- EpicBattleAxe (<http://epicbattleaxe.com/>)
- The Escapist (a.k.a. The Escapist Magazine) (<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/>)
- Eurogamer (<http://www.eurogamer.net/>)
- Gamasutra (<http://gamasutra.com/>)
- GameFAQs (<http://www.gamefaqs.com/>)
- GameFront (<http://www.gamefront.com/>)
- Game Politics (<http://gamepolitics.com/>)
- GamesRadar (<http://www.gamesradar.com/>)
- GameRankings (<http://www.gamerankings.com/>)

- GameSpot (<http://www.gamespot.com/>)
- GameTrailers (<http://www.youtube.com/user/gametrailers/>)
- Gamers with Jobs (<https://www.gamerswithjobs.com/>)
- GiantBomb (<http://www.giantbomb.com/>)
- GotGame (<https://gotgame.com/>)
- IGN (<http://au.ign.com/>)
- Industry Gamers [no link provided and could not find through Google searches]
- Joystiq (<http://www.joystiq.com/>) [this URL redirects to [www.engadget.com/gaming/](http://www.engadget.com/gaming/)]
- Kotaku (<http://www.kotaku.com.au/>)
- Kill Screen (<http://killscreendaily.com/>)
- Metacritic (<https://www.metacritic.com/>)
- N4G (<http://n4g.com/>) [it was down when I conducted my searches]
- NeoSeeker (<http://www.neoseeker.com/>)
- PCGamer (<http://www.pcgamer.com/>)
- Reddit Gaming (<http://www.reddit.com/r/gaming/>)
- Rock, Paper, Shotgun (<http://www.rockpapershotgun.com/>)
- ShackNews (<http://www.shacknews.com/>)
- SuperCheats (<http://www.supercheats.com/>)
- Touch Arcade (<http://toucharcade.com/>)
- VGChartz (<http://www.vgchartz.com/>)

Of these 37 websites, 5 were not functioning at the time (Andriasang, BitMob, Edge, Game Politics, Industry Gamers, and N4G) and 6 did not publish reviews (CAG only provides information about buying games; GameRankings and MetaCritic are aggregators that draws from online and offline sources; GameTrailers only shows trailers; Reddit Gaming is a discussion board; SuperCheats only

provides walkthroughs, guides, and hints). The 25 remaining websites were used in the targeted Google search. Not all websites had “best games” lists.

## Appendix 2: Best games lists

All-time lists include the following:

- Best Games Ever: the 20 greatest games of all time (2014) from Stuff
- Best Video Games of All Time (n.d.) from The Top Tens
- Gamasutra’s Top 12 Games of the Decade (2016) from Gamasutra
- Fitzpatrick, Pullen, Raab, Grossman, Eadicicco, Peckham, and Vella’s (2016) *The 50 Best Video Games of All Time* for TIME Magazine
- Levy and Smith’s (2014) *The Top 50 Video Games Of All Time – RANKED* for Business Insider
- Moore’s (2014) The 100 Greatest Video Games of All Time for Popular Mechanics
- Norris’s (2016) *40 Years, 40 Games*, released across four articles for VG Chartz
- Owen’s (2016) 30 Best Video Games of All Time for The Wrap
- Summar’s (2016) *Top 10 video games of all time* for The Inquirer
- *The 100 best games ever* (2015) from Games Radar+
- The 100 best video games of all time (2015) from Hi Consumption
- The 100 Best Video Games of the 2000s (2011) from Complex
- The 100 Greatest Video Games of All Time (2014) from Slant Magazine
- Top 100 Games of all time (2015) from IGN

Decade-long lists were compiled with all-time lists, since they covered significantly longer time frames than year-long lists.

Year-specific lists ranged from 2010 to 2016 and include the following:



- Ars Technica's best video games of 2016 (2016) from Ars Technica
- Bachor's (2010) The 10 Best Video Games of 2010 for Spin
- Bigg's (2015) *The 10 best games of 2015* for The Sydney Morning Herald
- Brukman's (2013) *10 Best Video Games of 2013* for Rolling Stone
- Fleming's (2010) *Best video games of 2010* for Digital Trends
- Frum's (2013) 2013: The year in video gaming for CNN
- Kain's (2013) The Best Video Games of 2013 for Forbes
- Kain's (2016) The Best Video Games Of 2015 for Forbes
- Knapp's (2012) The Best Video Games Of 2012 for Forbes
- Martin's (2012) *The 30 Best Videogames of 2012* for Paste Magazine
- Stuart's (2014) *The 25 best video games of 2014* for The Guardian
- The 10 best video games of 2015 (2015) from The Verge
- Top 10 Best Video Games of 2015 (2015) from Heavy
- *Top 25 games of 2012* (2012), released in a series of articles (two by Parkin and three by Stuart) for The Guardian.

Some lists were found but rejected if their ranking system was unclear or if they only listed games of a specific genre or for a specific device. For example, Robinson's (2013) list for Eurogamer ranked multiple games as #45 so it was excluded.

Some websites published time-specific lists and no all-time lists. To ensure the widest range of websites contributed, all-time lists and time-specific lists were both used to collect games for the longlist and shortlist.

## Appendix 3: Google Scholar searches

I conducted Google Scholar searches to compare the bodies of academic literature for each game on the shortlist. To avoid coincidental search results (for example, if the game's title is a common word or phrase), I conducted four different searches for each game:

- First search: Title+"game"
- Second search: Title+year+"game"
- Third search: Title+publisher+"game"
- Fourth search: Title+publisher+year+"game"

Following are the results for each game on the shortlist.

### 3.1 Half-Life 2

- Title: "Half-Life 2" game = 2,710 results
- Title + year: "Half-Life 2" 2004 game = 2,190 results
- Title + publisher: "Half-Life 2" "Valve" game = 1,440 results
- Title + publisher + year: "Half-Life 2" "Valve" 2004 game = 1,210 results

*Half-Life 2*'s (Valve, 2004) results range from 1,210 to 2,710 (with a difference of 1,500). *Half-Life 2* appeared most frequently across the collected lists and these search results indicate that it is also prevalent among academic literature.

### 3.2 Portal 2

- Title: "Portal 2" game = 1,150 results
- Title + year: "Portal 2" 2011 game = 826 results
- Title + publisher: "Portal 2" "Valve" game = 407 results

- Title + publisher + year: "Portal 2" Valve" 2011 game = 374 results

*Portal 2's* (Valve, 2011) Google Scholar results range from 374 to 1,150 (with a difference of 776).

### 3.3 The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

- Title: "The Legend of Zelda" "Ocarina of Time" game = 534 results
- Title + year: "The Legend of Zelda" "Ocarina of Time" 1998 game = 395 results
- Title + publisher: "The Legend of Zelda" "Ocarina of Time" "Nintendo" game = 467 results
- Title + publisher + year: "The Legend of Zelda" "Ocarina of Time" "Nintendo" 1998 game = 0 results

*The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time's* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) Google Scholar results ranged from 0 to 534. These were among the lowest results across the shortlisted games. The game's full title is the longest title of the ten games on the shortlist, so results are less likely to include coincidental phrases, unlike *Portal* (Valve, 2007) and *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo EAD, 1985). The complete lack of results for the fourth search were curious. The fourth search was repeated, removing "The Legend of Zelda" from the search phrase, but this also returned zero results.

For the sake of clarity, I conducted multiple searches with different related phrases. The results are listed below:

- "The Legend of Zelda"+"Ocarina of Time"+"Nintendo"+1998 = 0
- "Ocarina of Time"+"Nintendo"+1998+game = 0
- "Ocarina of Time"+1998+game = 508
- "The Legend of Zelda"+"Ocarina of Time" = 554
- "The Legend of Zelda"+"Ocarina of Time"+Nintendo = 477
- "Zelda 64"+game = 102 results
- "Zelda 64"+"Nintendo"+game = 56 results

- “Zelda 64”+”Nintendo”+1998+game = 42 results
- “Ocarina of Time” narrative analysis = 306 results

The results across all searches were still among the lowest of the shortlisted games.

### 3.4 BioShock

- Title: “BioShock” game = 2,190 results
- Title + year: “BioShock” 2007 game = 1,740 results
- Title + publisher: “BioShock” “2K” game = 639 results
- Title + publisher + year: “BioShock” “2K” 2007 game = 595 results

*BioShock*’s (2K Boston & 2K Australia, 2007) results ranged from 595 to 2190 (with a difference of 1,595). “BioShock” is not a common word, so even the search variant “BioShock”+game probably produces references to the game *BioShock* (2007) or other games of the BioShock series (such as *BioShock 2*, 2010, and *BioShock Infinite*, 2013).

### 3.5 Super Mario Bros.

- Title: “Super Mario Bros” game = 4,410 results
- Title + year: “Super Mario Bros” 1985 game = 2,000 results
- Title + publisher: “Super Mario Bros” “Nintendo” game = 2940 results
- Title + publisher + year: “Super Mario Bros” “Nintendo” 1985 game = 0 results

*Super Mario Bros.*’s (Nintendo EAD, 1985) results range from 0 to 4,410. “Super Mario Bros.” is a common phrase across multiple games. The disambiguation page for “Super Mario Bros.” on Wikipedia lists 13 other videogame-related pages (*Super Mario Bros. (disambiguation)* [Wikipedia], n.d.). Therefore, these search results may also include references to games with similar titles. The second search and fourth search, which specifically include the game’s year of release, may indicate

more accurate results. However, the range of 0 to 2,000 is still among the highest search results across the shortlisted games.

### 3.6 Red Dead Redemption

- Title: “Red Dead Redemption” game = 615 results
- Title + year: “Red Dead Redemption” 2010 game = 547 results
- Title + publisher: “Red Dead Redemption” “Rockstar” game = 314 results
- Title + publisher + year: “Red Dead Redemption” “Rockstar” 2010 game = 293 results

*Red Dead Redemption's* (Rockstar San Diego, 2010) results range from 293 to 615 (with a difference of 322). “Red dead redemption” is not a common phrase and these searches were conducted before *Red Dead Redemption 2* (Rockstar Studios, 2018) was released. This game also produced the narrowest range of results, suggesting that these searches returned references specifically to this game.

### 3.7 Mass Effect 2

- Title: “Mass Effect 2” game = 562 results
- Title + year: “Mass Effect 2” 2010 game = 477 results
- Title + publisher: “Mass Effect 2” “EA” game = 154 results
- Title + publisher + year: “Mass Effect 2” “EA” 2010 game = 144 results

*Mass Effect 2's* (BioWare, 2010) results range from 144 to 562 (with a difference of 418). The disambiguation page on Wikipedia for “Mass Effect” includes this video game series and a medical term referring to the treatment of tumours (*Mass Effect (disambiguation)* [Wikipedia], n.d.). Searching for “Mass Effect” in Google Scholar (without including the word “game”) returns 138,000 results and “Mass Effect”+medicine returns 78,000 results. It is possible that these four searches

returned references to the medical treatment. However, the word “game” was included in all searches and specifically searching for “Mass Effect 2” (which is not obviously related to the medical treatment) suggests that these results are mostly referring to the game.

### 3.8 Portal

- Title: “Portal” game = 142,000 results
- Title + year: “Portal” 2007 game = 83,800 results
- Title + publisher: “Portal” “Valve” game = 5,350 results
- Title + publisher + year: “Portal” “Valve” 2007 game = 3,380 results

*Portal's* (Valve, 2007) results ranged from 3,380 to 142,000 (with a range of 138,620). These are by far the highest results across the shortlist. The first and second searches' extremely high results is possibly due to “portal” being a common word. This is further supported by the search results for *Portal 2*, which were lower than the results for *Portal* despite appearing across more lists. The third and fourth searches are probably more accurate, reducing *Portal's* results to 3,380 to 5,350 (with a range of 1,970), but these are still among the highest results. Since the ideal game is one with very little academic attention, *Portal* was disqualified.

### 3.9 Super Mario World

- Title: “Super Mario World” game = 668 results
- Title + year: “Super Mario World” 1990 game = 357 results
- Title + publisher: “Super Mario World” “Nintendo” game = 514 results
- Title + publisher + year: “Super Mario World” “Nintendo” 1990 game = 326 results

*Super Mario World's* (Nintendo EAD, 1990) results ranged from 326 to 668 (with a difference of 342). The phrase “Super Mario World” is not unique to this game but it is much less common than the

phrase “Super Mario Bros.” The disambiguation page on Wikipedia for “Super Mario World” only includes a page for this game, a page to its sequel game (more commonly known as “Yoshi’s Island”), a page for a television series, and a game for the Wii U (*Super Mario World (disambiguation)* [Wikipedia], n.d.).

### 3.10 The Last Of Us

- Title: “The Last Of Us” game = 3,240 results
- Title + year: “The Last Of Us” 2013 game = 1,140 results
- Title + publisher: “The Last Of Us” “Sony” game = 351 results
- Title + publisher + year: “The Last Of Us” “Sony” 2013 game = 246 results

*The Last Of Us*’s (Naughty Dog, 2013) results range from 246 to 3,240 (with a difference of 2,994).

“The last of us” is not an uncommon phrase. A search for the phrase in Google Books Ngram Viewer indicates that the phrase has appeared in books published between years 1800 and 2008. This suggests that the first and second searches may have returned coincidental uses of the phrase, rather than references to the game.

## Appendix 4: Zelda franchise analysis

I conducted Google searches for “legend of Zelda games ranked” and “legend of Zelda games ranked worst to best”. For convenience, only the first 10 pages of search results were considered. Some lists were excluded because they claimed to be objective. I found 15 lists across 13 sources:

- T. Brown’s (2015) Ranking ‘The Legend of Zelda’ Games From Worst to First, for Rant Now
- Gallagher and Jasko’s (2017) The Legend of Zelda: Ranking Link’s 18 Adventures, for Den of Geek

- Lee's (2017) Ranking the Legend of Zelda games, from worst to best: can Breath of the Wild beat this lot?, for Digital Spy
- Limon's (2016) The Best Legend of Zelda Games: All 18 Ranked, for Twinfinite
- Masters' (2017) Legend of Zelda: Every Single Game, Ranked Worst To Best, for Screen Rant
- Morales, Dornbush, and Franich's (2016) The Legend of Zelda turns 30: Ranking our favourite Hyrule adventures, for Entertainment Weekly
- Paul's (2016) The Legend of Zelda Series Ranked from Worst to First, for HubPages
- Richardson's (2017) Ranking Every Legend Of Zelda Game From Worst To Best, for What Culture
- Ryan, Graeber, Claiborn, Sliva, and Otero's (2016) *Top 10 Legend of Zelda Games*, for IGN
- Shaun2k5's (2016) *Ranking 20 'Legend of Zelda' Games*, for Screen Critics
- Shea's (2017) Ranking Every Game In The Legend Of Zelda Series, for Game Informer
- Schreier's (2017a) The Legend of Zelda Games, Ranked From Worst To Best, for Kotaku
- What's The Greatest Legend of Zelda Game Ever? (2016) from US Gamer

One source provided one list for each of its three authors. Not all lists included the same games or the same number of games. List lengths ranged from 3 to 18. Games omitted from a list were assumed to be below the lowest rank on the list.

Each of the following column charts depicts a game's rank position (from #1 to #18, including being omitted from the list) against the frequency of its appearance in that position across the lists. The pattern indicates the consensus around each game's popularity. Flatter shapes indicate less consensus. Peaks indicate consensus around a particular rank position. One chart was made for each game.



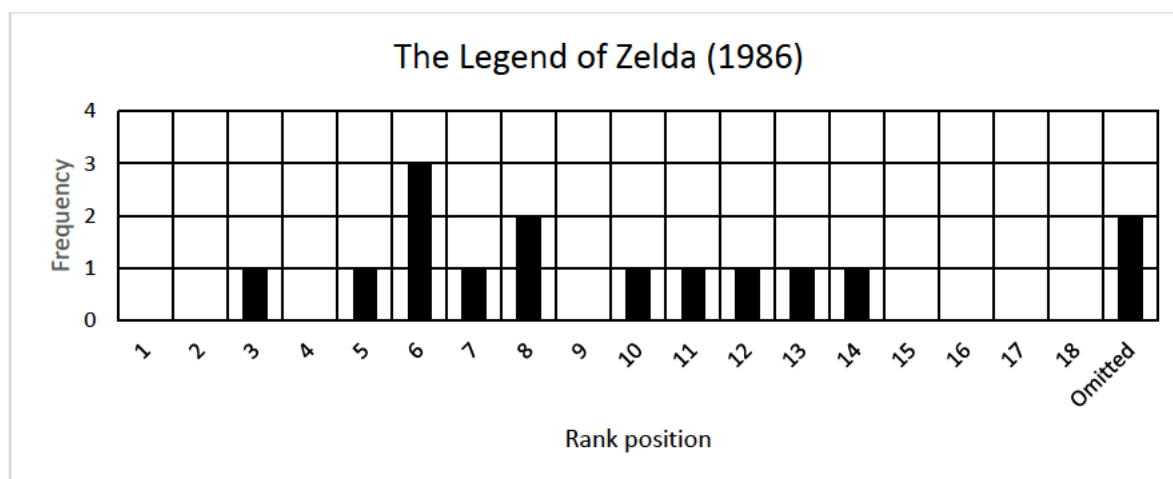


Figure 14. *The Legend Of Zelda* (Nintendo EAD, 1986) ranking across 15 collected lists.

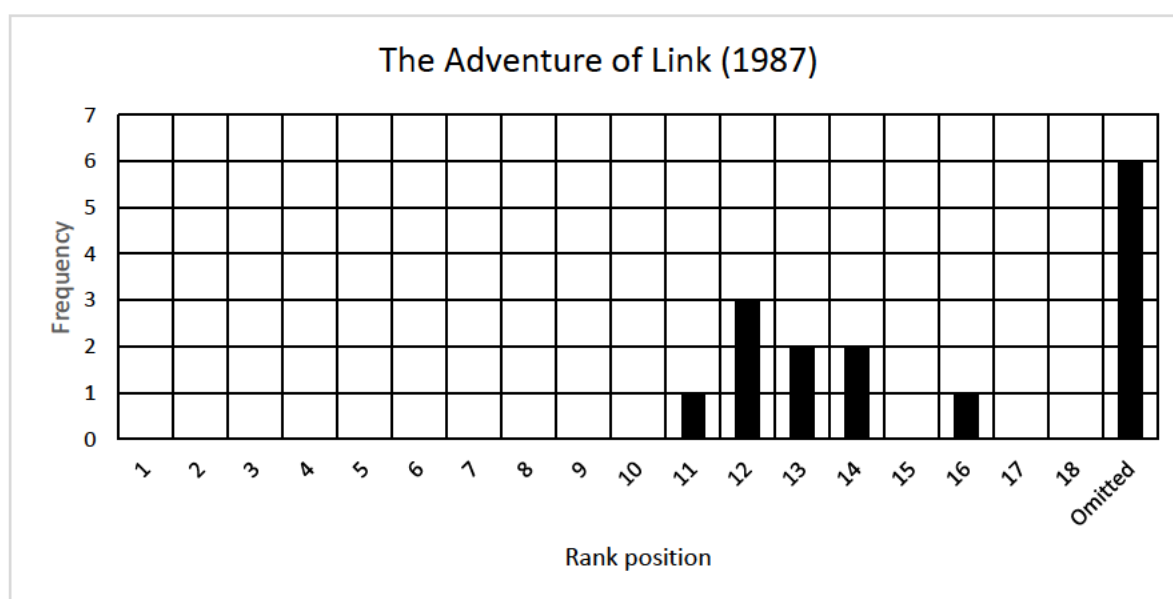


Figure 15. *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* (Nintendo EAD, 1987) ranking across 15 collected lists.

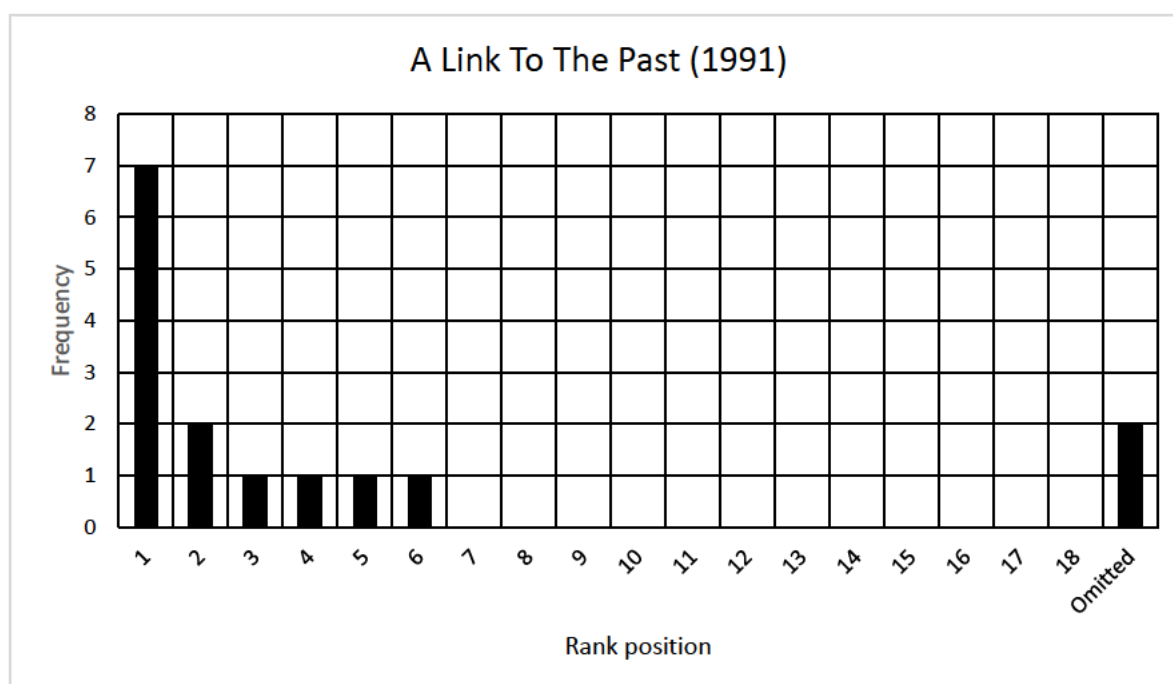


Figure 16. *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past* (Nintendo EAD, 1991) ranking across 15 collected lists.

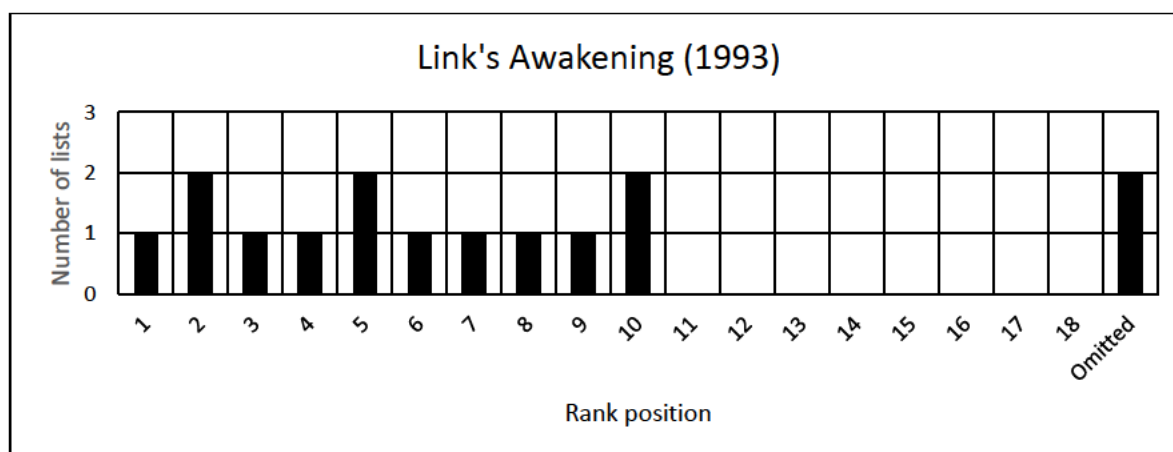


Figure 17. *The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening* (Nintendo EAD, 1993) ranking across 15 collected lists.

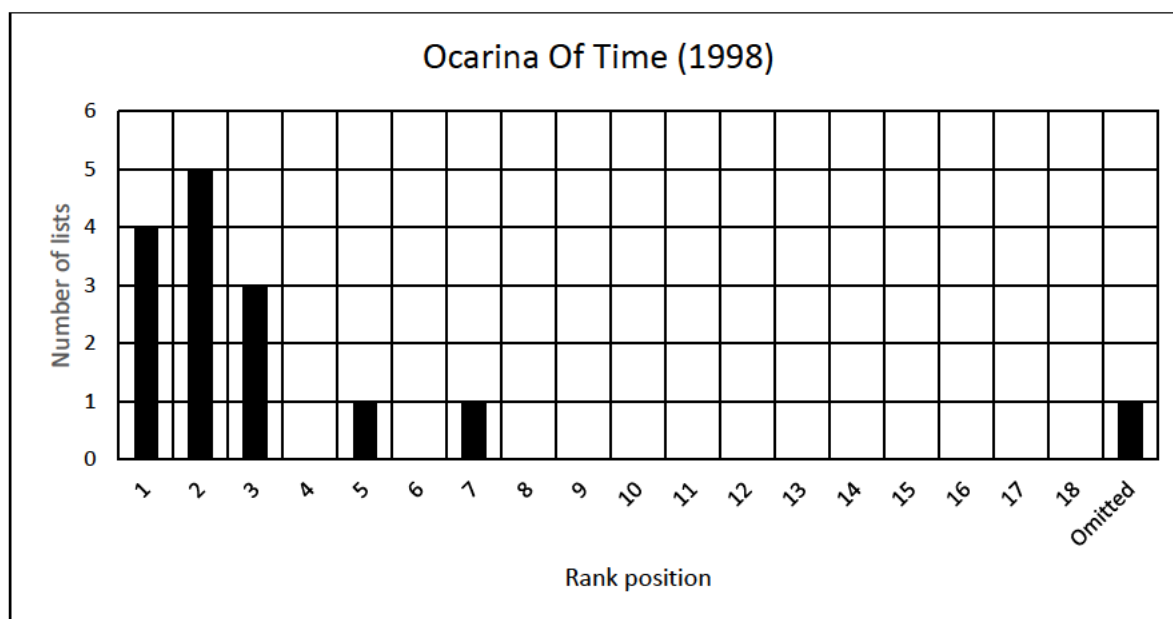


Figure 18. *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998) ranking across 15 collected lists.

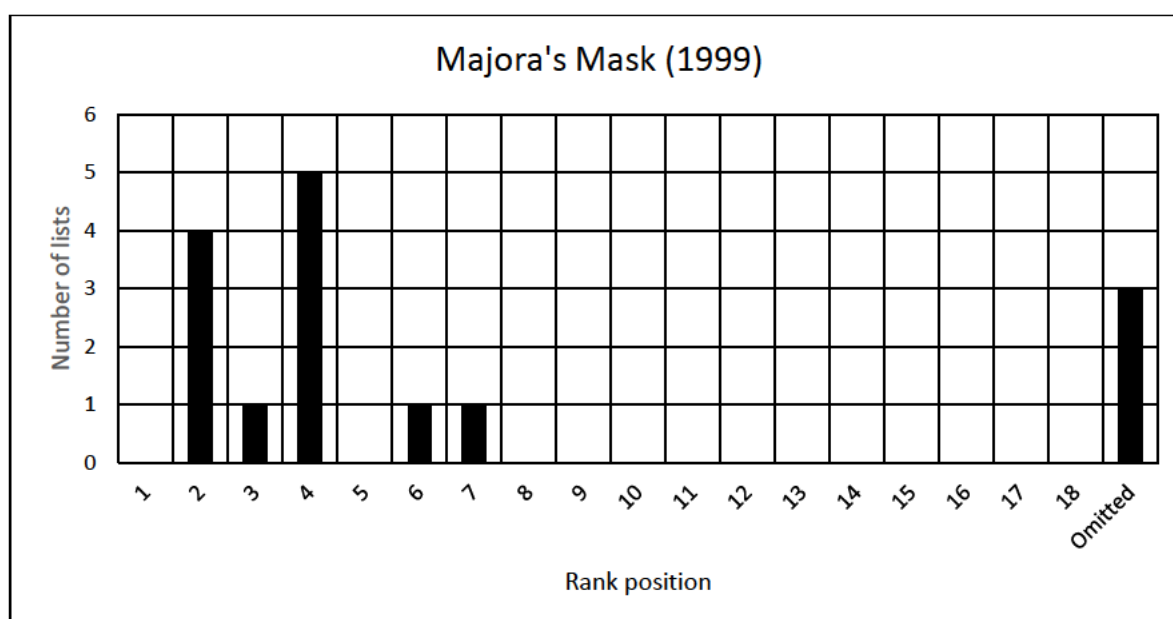


Figure 19. *The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo EAD, 1999) ranking across 15 collected lists.

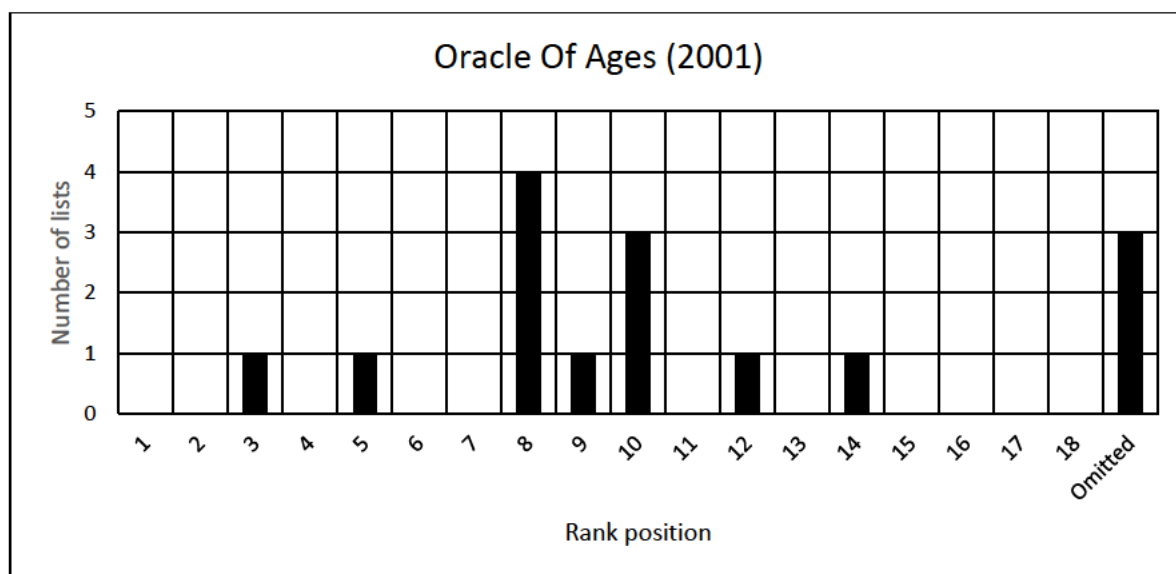


Figure 20. *The Legend Of Zelda: Oracle Of Ages* (Capcom & Flagship, 2001) ranking across 15 collected lists.

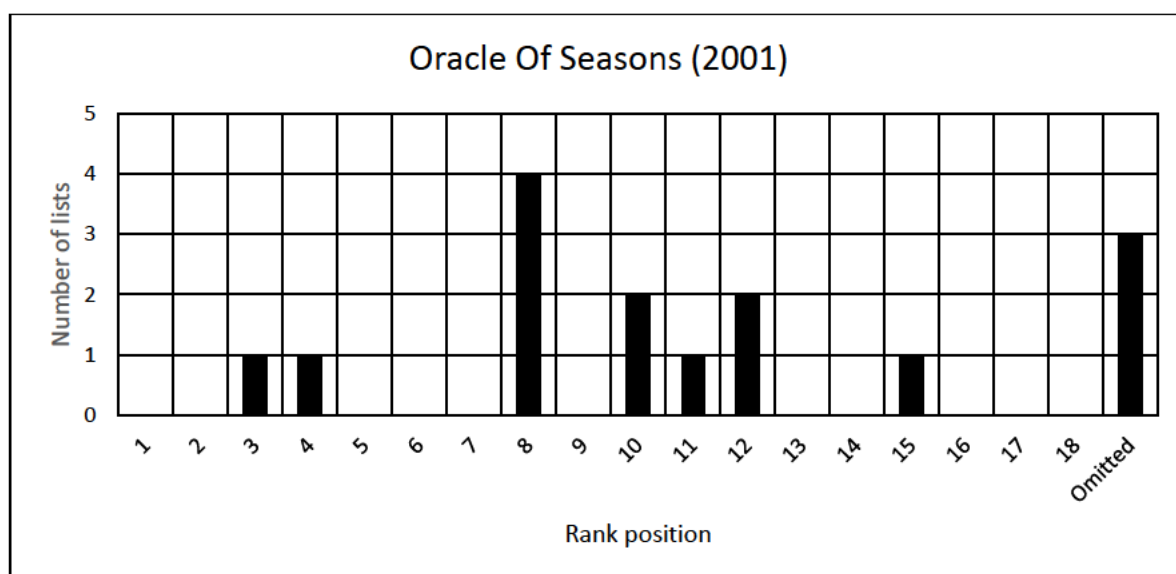


Figure 21. *The Legend Of Zelda: Oracle Of Seasons* (Capcom & Flagship, 2001) ranking across 15 collected lists.

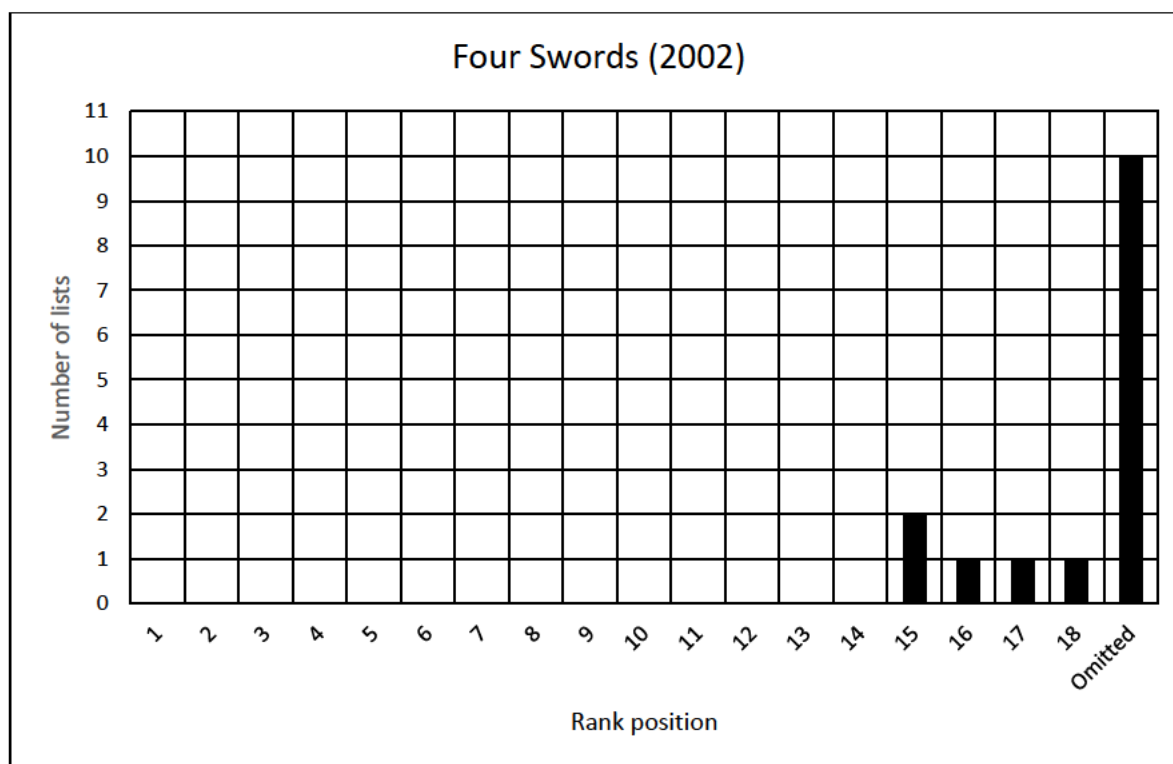


Figure 22. *The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords* (Nintendo EAD & Capcom, 2002) ranking across 15 collected lists.

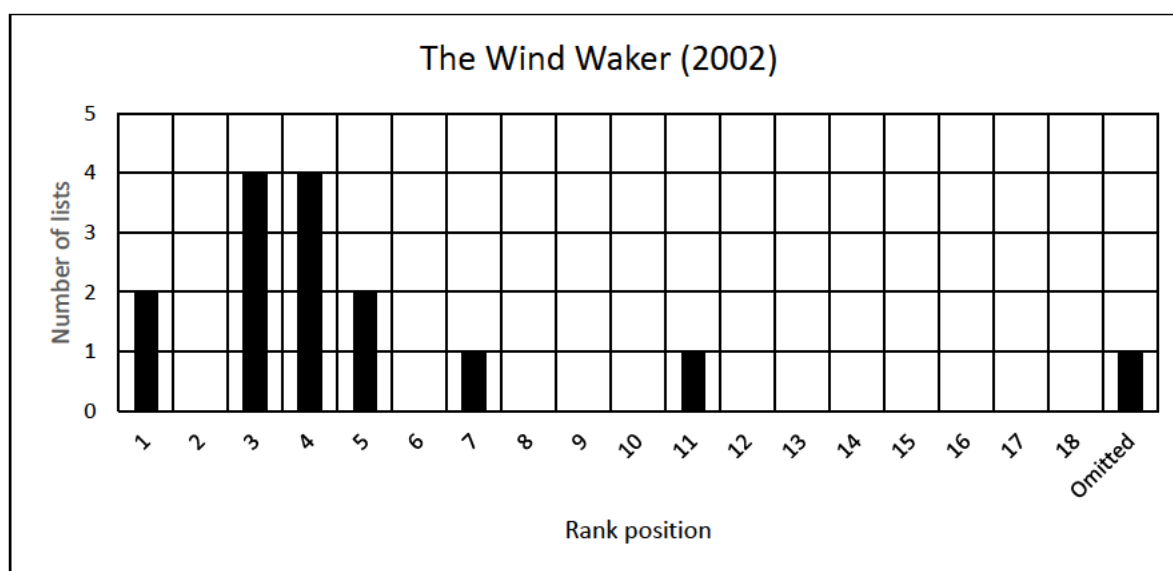


Figure 23. *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker* (Nintendo EAD, 2002) ranking across 15 collected lists.

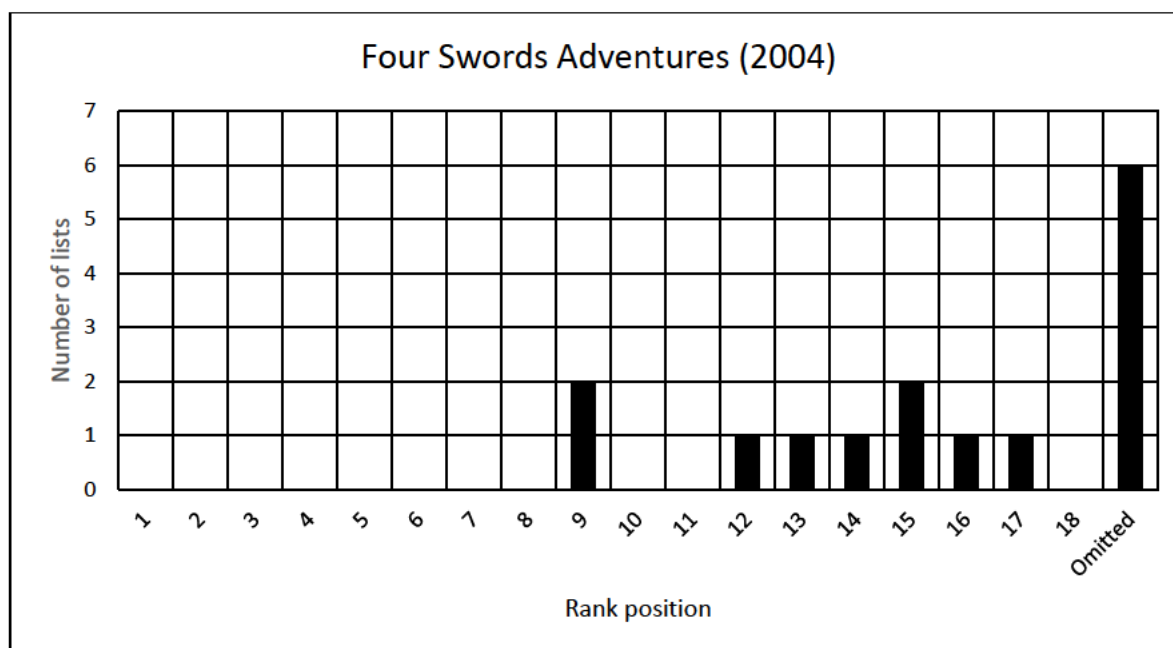


Figure 24. *The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures* (Nintendo EAD, 2004) ranking across 15 collected lists.

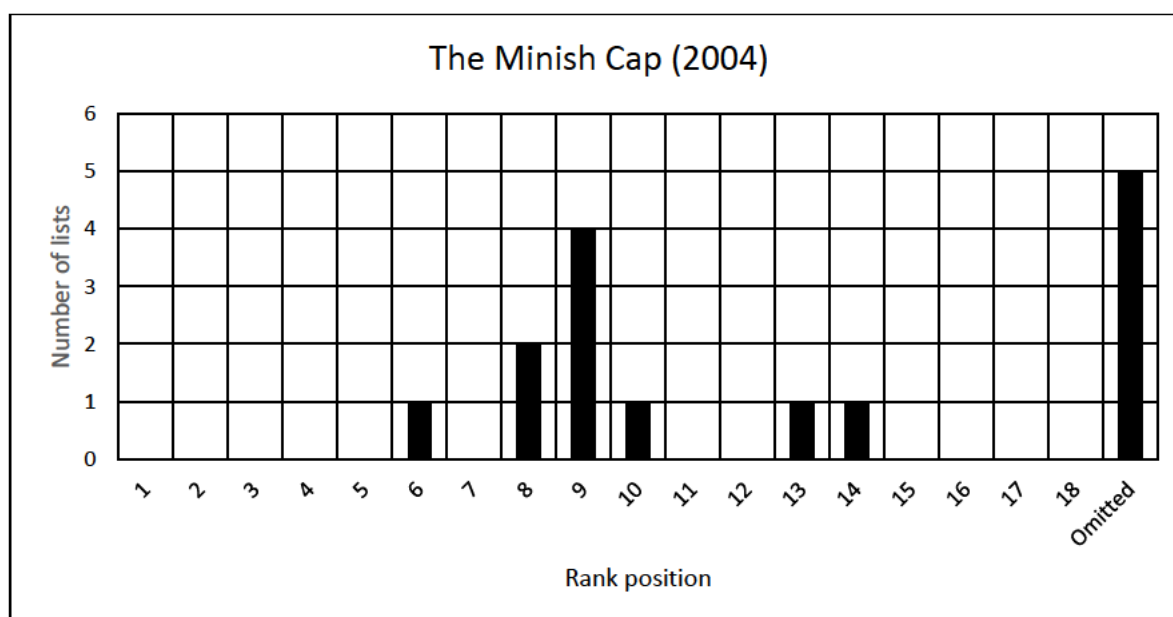


Figure 25. *The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap* (Flagship, 2004) ranking across 15 collected lists.

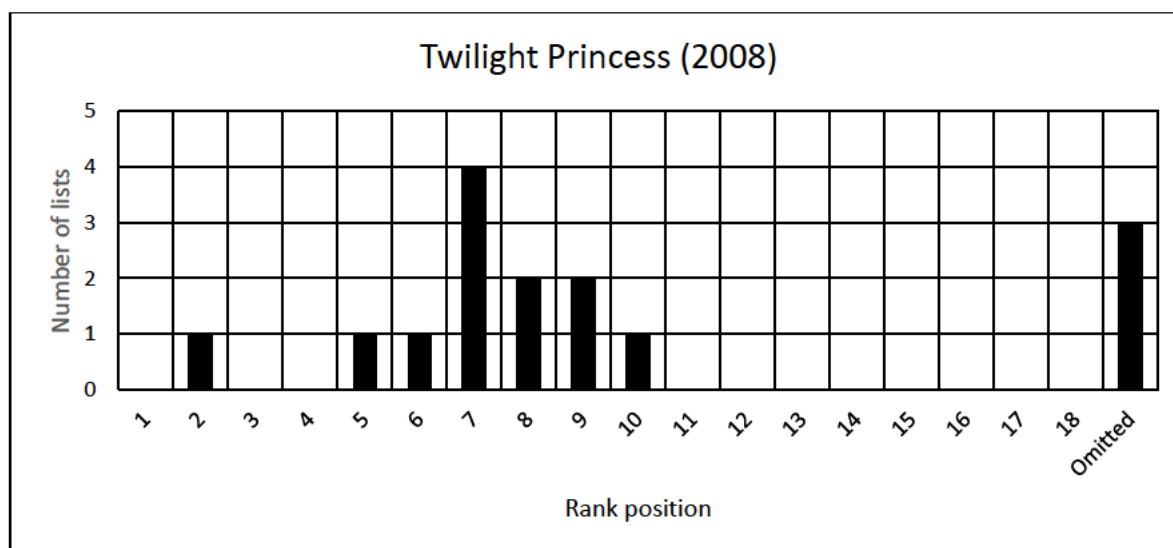


Figure 26. *The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (Nintendo EAD, 2008) ranking across 15 collected lists.

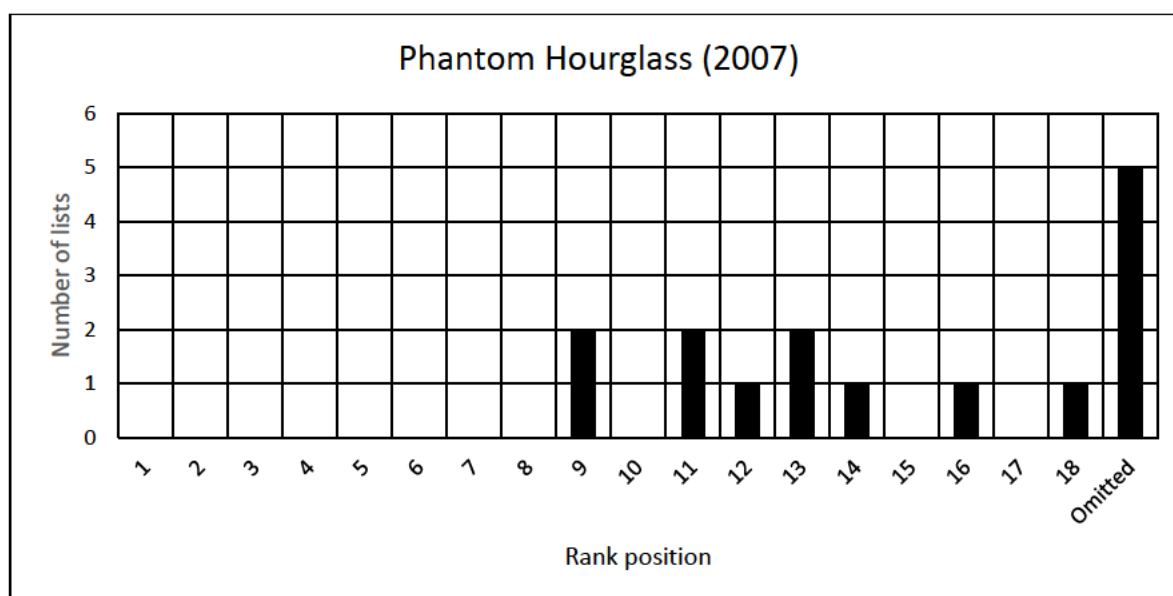


Figure 27. *The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass* (Nintendo EAD, 2007) ranking across 15 collected lists.

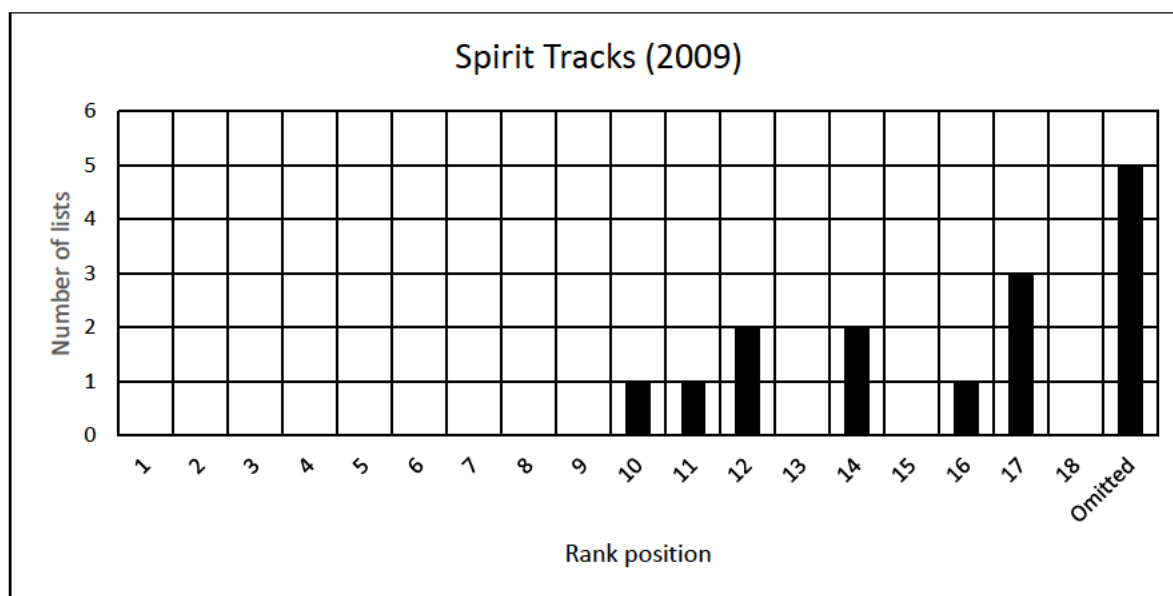


Figure 28. *The Legend Of Zelda: Spirit Tracks* (Nintendo EAD, 2009) ranking across 15 collected lists.

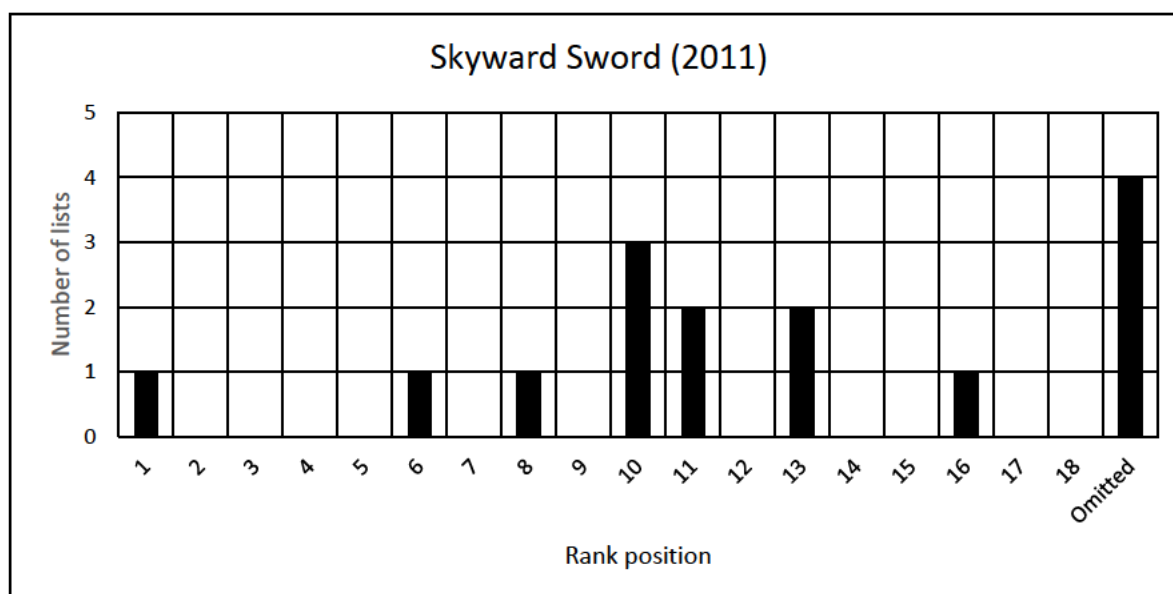


Figure 29. *The Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword* (Nintendo EAD, 2011) ranking across 15 collected lists.



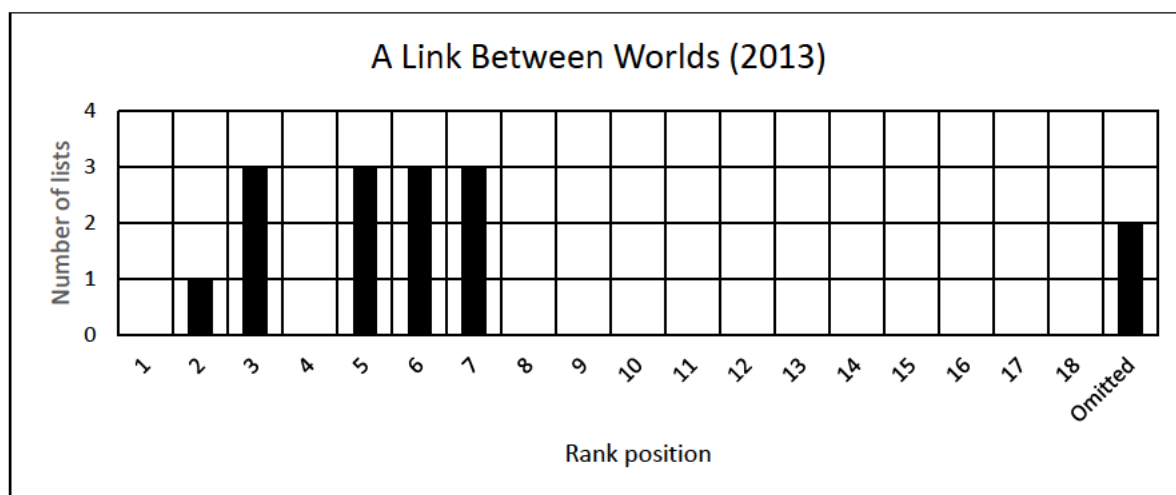


Figure 30. *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds* (Nintendo EAD, 2013) ranking across 15 collected lists.

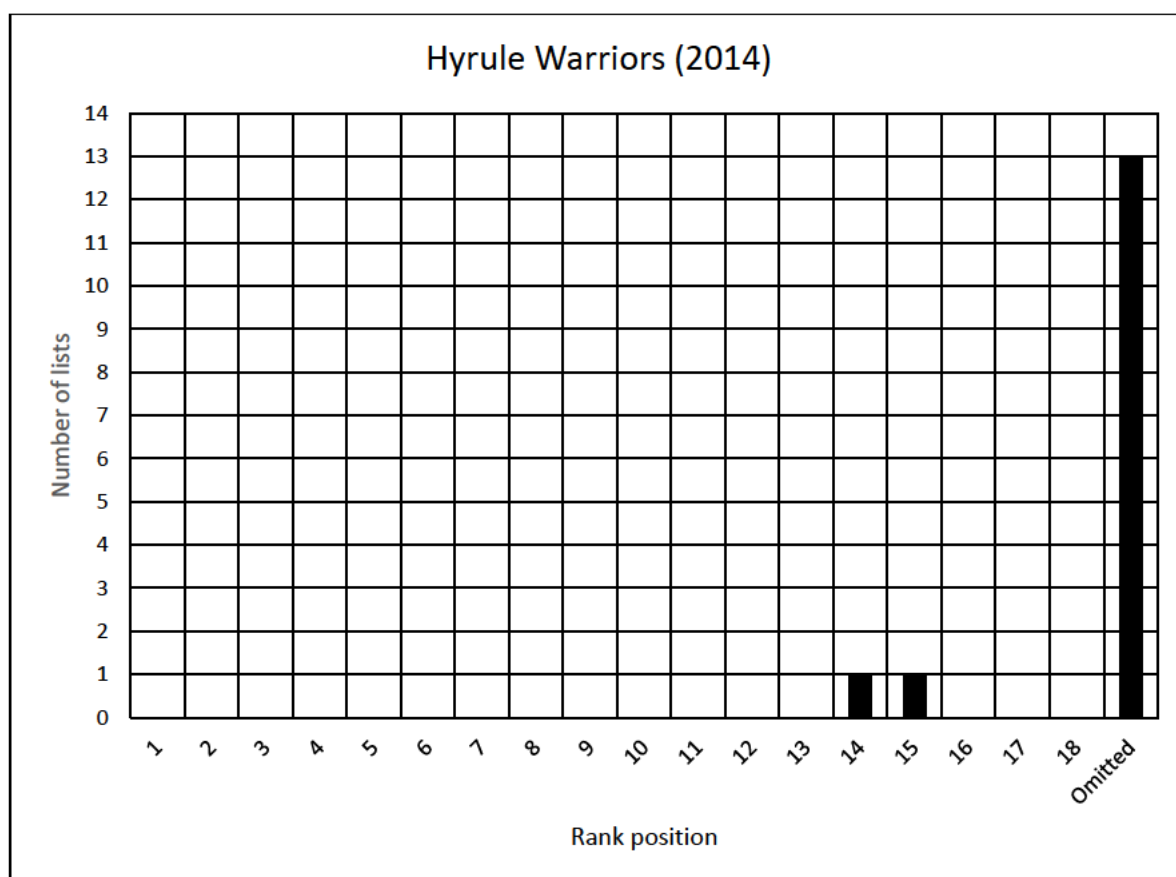


Figure 31. *Hyrule Warriors* (Omega Force & Team Ninja, 2014) ranking across 15 collected lists.

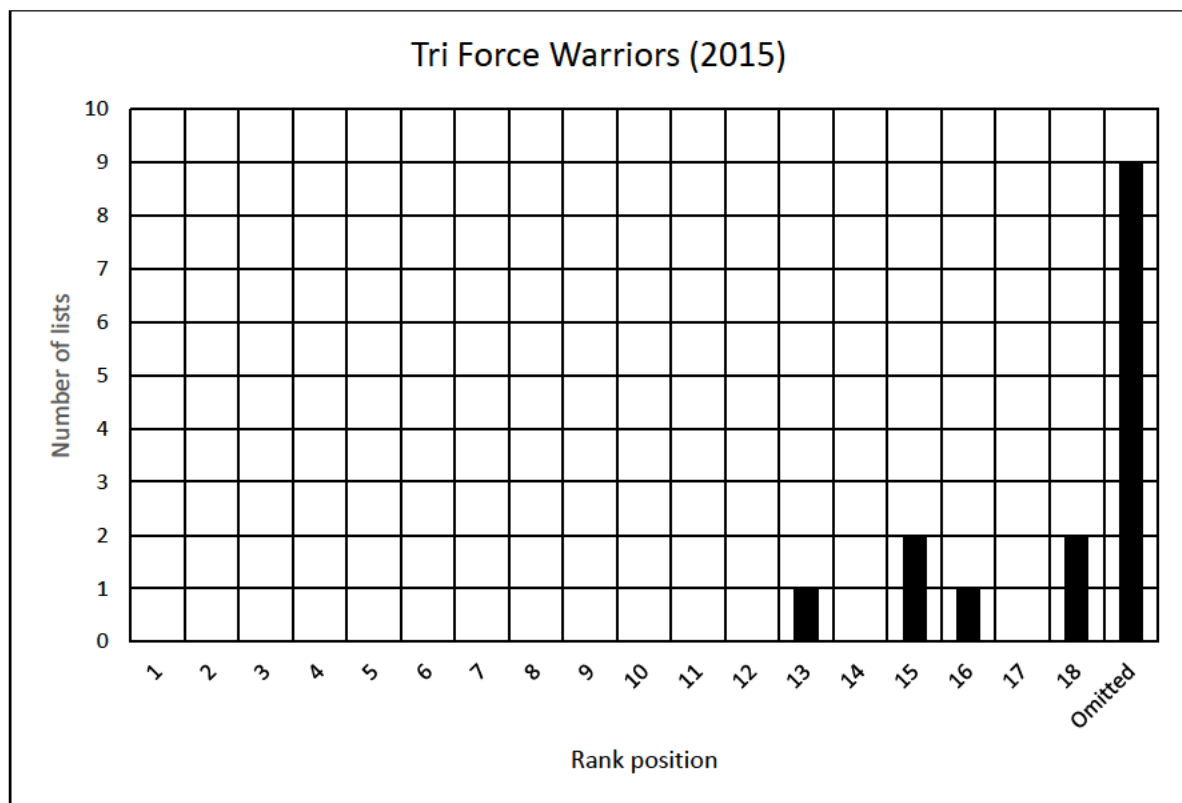


Figure 32. *The Legend Of Zelda: Tri Force Warriors* (Nintendo EPD & Grezzo, 2015) ranking across 15 collected lists.

These results reveal the consistent high regard in which *A Link To The Past* (1991), *Ocarina of Time* (1998), and *Majora's Mask* (1999) are held among fans of the Zelda franchise. These three games were rarely omitted from lists (unlike *Four Swords*, 2002, which was omitted more times than it appeared in any other rank position combined) and received considerable consensus across the lists (unlike *Link's Awakening*, 1993, which was ranked in 11 different rank positions, including being omitted, and never received a consensus higher than 2).

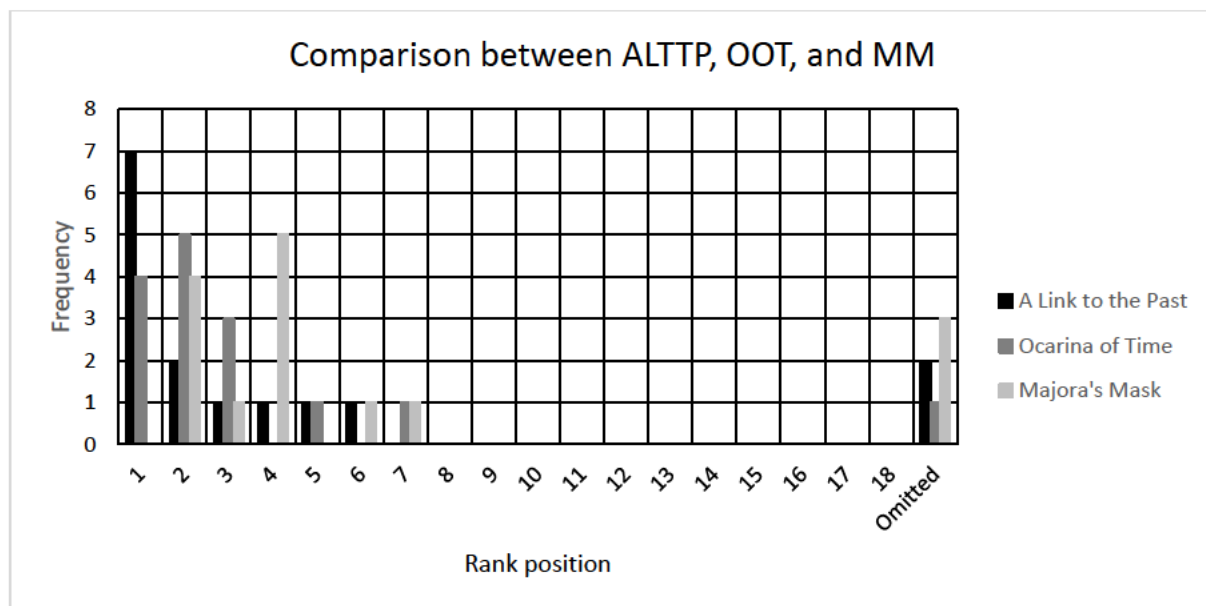


Figure 33. Comparing ranking positions of *A Link To The Past* (Nintendo EAD, 1991), *Ocarina Of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998), and *Majora's Mask* (Nintendo EAD, 1999) across 15 collected lists.

## Appendix 5: Ethics approval

Following is a copy of the email confirming ethics approval.

To: Steven Conway  
Cc: RES Ethics; Daniel Golding; JACQUELINE MORAN  
SHR Project 2017/359 – The Hero's Journey in player experiences  
Dr Steven Conway, Dr Daniel Golding, Jacqueline Moran (Student) – FHAD  
Approved duration: 13-02-2018 to 13-02-2019 [Adjusted]

I refer to the ethical review of the above project by a Subcommittee (SHESC3) of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). Your response to the review as e-mailed on 13 February 2018 was put to the Subcommittee delegate for consideration.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, ethics clearance has been given for the above project to proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions outlined below.

- The approved duration is **13 February 2018 to 13 February 2019** unless an extension is subsequently approved.
- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.
- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief

investigator/supervisor, and addition or removal of other personnel/students from the project, requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project. Information on project monitoring and variations/additions, self-audits and progress reports can be found on the Research Intranet pages.
- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

The delegate would like to thank you for responding so thoroughly to the committee's comments and wishes you good luck in your project which continues to whet their sense of nostalgia.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance, citing the Swinburne project number. A copy of this e-mail should be retained as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Fried

Secretary, SHESC3

## **Appendix 6: Consent Information Statement**

The Hero's Journey in player experiences

Dear reader,

We're conducting a project to study the way people experience games. Specifically, we are investigating people's experiences with playing *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (1998) and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (2017) and whether those experiences have anything to do with the Monomyth (also known as the Hero's Journey). The aim of this study is to figure out if player

experiences have anything in common with the Monomyth. This information can help us adjust the Monomyth into a more useful tool for digital games design. This project is part of Jacqueline Moran's doctoral thesis.

If you're interested in this project and have played *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* or *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, then we invite you to participate in our interviews.

If you agree to participate, we will conduct a single one-on-one conversation-style interview. We will ask about the experience of playing one of these two games but the interview will mostly be driven by what you want to talk about. We aim for the interview to be at least 1 hour long (and no longer than 4 hours), but you decide when the interview ends. These interviews will take place at Swinburne's Hawthorn campus. We will repay any travel expenses for getting to and from the interview (whether that means fuel, parking, and/or public transport). These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed so that they can be analysed later. These interviews will only be used for this study.

All of the information we use will be anonymous. Things like names and places will be changed in the transcripts. Audio recordings and consent forms will contain identifiable information but these documents will all be locked at Swinburne's Hawthorn campus, they will not leave the campus, and they will only be accessed by the research team. The audio recordings will be deleted after the thesis has been examined. Quotes and excerpts from these transcripts (all anonymous) will be included in the thesis to support the analysis and conclusions.

Since we're asking about personal experience, feelings of discomfort or distress are possible. We will not ask about things you don't want to talk about and we won't force you to continue with the interview if you don't want to. After the interview we will provide contact information for support services and also offer to escort you to Swinburne's mental health facility to speak with a counsellor if you wish (paid for by the research team).

Any time before December 2018, you can ask us to send you a copy of your transcript. During this time, you can also ask us to remove some or all of your data from the project, without question.

You don't have to participate. Your decision will not affect your studies or your relationship with Swinburne.

If you have any questions, please contact the student investigator at [jmoran@swin.edu.au](mailto:jmoran@swin.edu.au)

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator, Swinburne Research (H68),  
Swinburne University of Technology, PO Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122 Australia  
Tel (03) 9214 3845 or +61 9214 3845 or [resethics@swin.edu.au](mailto:resethics@swin.edu.au)

These are the support services that may help if you feel uncomfortable or distressed:

- Lifeline 131 114 ([www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au))
- Swinburne Psychology Clinic (03) 9214 8653 (Level 4, George Swinburne Building / 34 Wakefield Street, Hawthorn) (for Swinburne students)
- Hawthorn medical clinic +61 3 9214 8483 (Level 4, George Swinburne Building / 34 Wakefield Street, Hawthorn / Monday to Thursday 8:30am – 6:00pm / Friday 8:30am – 5:00pm)

## **Appendix 7: Consent Form**

Project Title: The hero's journey in player experience

Principle investigators:

- Miss Jacqueline Moran (Student Investigator)
    - jmoran@swin.edu.au
  - Dr Steven Conway (Chief Investigator/Principle Supervisor)
    - Swinburne lecturer (Department of Film and Animation)
    - sconway@swin.edu.au
  - Dr Dan Golding (Co-Investigator/Associate Supervisor)
    - Swinburne lecturer (Department of Media and Communication)
    - dgolding@swin.edu.au
1. I consent to participate in the project named above. I have been provided a copy of the project consent information statement to which this consent form relates and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
  2. In relation to this project, please circle your response to the following:
    - a. I agree to be interviewed by the researcher – **(YES / NO)**
    - b. I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by an electronic device – **(YES / NO)**
  3. I acknowledge that:
    - a. my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation;
    - b. the Swinburne project is for the purpose of research and not for profit;
    - c. any identifiable information about me which is gathered in the course of and as a result of my participating in this project will be
      - i. collected and retained for the purpose of this project
      - ii. accessed and analysed by the researchers for the purpose of conducting this project;

- d. I understand the length of time researchers will have access to this information
  - e. my anonymity is preserved and I will not be identified in publications or otherwise without my express written consent
4. I understand that I am able to request a copy of my transcript – **(YES / NO)**
5. I would like to receive a summary of this project’s research findings – **(YES / NO)**

By signing this document I agree to participate in this project.

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date (dd/mm/yyyy): \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 8: Protection procedures**

### **8.1 Risk**

This was considered a “low risk” study, where “the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort” (*National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007, p.13*). The Consent Information Statement explains that participants would control the interview topics and would not be forced to discuss anything they find uncomfortable. However, IPA regularly investigates “hot cognition” topics where “the participant is concerned with something of existential import in the here and now or recent past” (Smith, 2011; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012, p.74). We did not anticipate this project’s topic of investigation to be as sensitive as other IPA research projects neither did we intentionally prompt participants to discuss topics they found upsetting, but we believed it was prudent to make plans to respond to possible adverse reactions.

Before the interview, participants were informed that they could end the interview at any time and that the interviewer could escort them to Swinburne’s medical services if necessary.



Participants were also given a copy of the Consent Information Statement, with contact information for support services. These procedures were guided by Murray and Rhodes's (2005) study of adult visible acne and Budak, Larkin, Harris, and Blissett's (2015) study of mothers' experiences of stillbirth, which described in detail their procedures for responding to adverse reactions.

## **8.2 Unequal relationships**

Some participants were Swinburne students, which presented a potential conflict of interest. The student investigator for this project was a Swinburne PhD student without influence over students' studies or results. One or both of the project supervisors were teaching potential participants at the time. To avoid any conflict of interest, only the student investigator conducted interviews, transcribed recorded interviews, had access to non-anonymised interview recordings, and analysed the transcripts. All potential participants from Swinburne university were informed that their decision to participate in the study would not influence their studies or their relationship with Swinburne. They were informed that the student investigator had no influence over their studies and would be the only one conducting interviews and accessing non-anonymised data.

These procedures were guided by Patel, Tarrant, Bonas, and Shaw's (2015) description of how they protected medical students recruited from the medical schools where some of the researchers had affiliations. In their study, all potential participants were informed that the research project was unrelated to their studies and that none of the researchers were involved in the students' studies or assessment. One of the researchers (Patel) was "a lecturer in medical education and provided informal teaching during the remediation period" but participants were told that "sessions were voluntary and not a formal part of the remediation programme for students at either medical school" (ibid, p.1).

### **8.3 Anonymity**

All participants were anonymous. A list of gender-neutral names was collected from BabyCentre.co.uk (*Unisex baby names*, n.d.). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym from this list and is referred to as such throughout this project.

During the transcription process, any names or identifying information (such as other people, neighbourhoods, or places) were replaced with either gender-neutral pseudonyms or general descriptions (e.g. “my neighbourhood” instead of “Box Hill”, or “my high school” instead of “Fintona Girls’ School”). This decision was guided by Bramley and Eatough’s (2005) IPA study of Parkin’s Disease, Murray and Rhodes’s (2005) IPA study of adult visible acne, and Budak, Larkin, Harris, and Blissett’s (2015) IPA study of mothers’ experience of stillbirth, where all participants’ identities were protected by changing all names and identifiable information.

Anonymity could not be guaranteed in the audio recordings. These recordings were stored on password protected devices and on the student investigator’s OneDrive, assigned by Swinburne.

### **8.4 Compensation**

All participants were offered either a \$20 Coles Express Gift Card or \$10 added to their Myki as compensation for their participation. Four participants chose the Coles Express Gift Card, one chose the \$10 Myki top up, and one declined compensation.

## **Appendix 9: Interview schedule**

The following interview schedule was produced prior to the interviews and adjusted as interviews were being conducted. Text inside double quotation marks are lines to say. Text outside of quotation marks are instructions to follow. Sections of the interview schedule were highlighted throughout the interview process as I realised some details were more important or helpful than others.

## **HYPOTHESES AND IMPORTANT TOPICS**

Keep these in mind:

- People make narratives out of their experiences. People use narratives to understand their experience. Ergo, players make narratives out of their experiences and use those narratives to understand their experiences.
- The creations and interpretations players form from their play experiences are important to them.
- Games are capable of creating eudaimonic (a.k.a. deeply meaningful) experiences for players.
- The Monomyth describes the universally important human experience of change, growth, and transformation.
- According to the Third Image hypothesis, films can trigger physical and emotional experience that are unexpected and unlooked for by those readers.

## **CONSENT**

Explain the consent form and help them sign it.

“Here is the Consent Form. I emailed it to you way back when, but we can go over it again now so that we’re both on the same page?”

“Question 2 is asking “Do you agree to be interviewed?” and “Do you agree to us audio recording the interview?” If you’re okay with being interviewed and if you’re okay with us recording it, then we can do the interview. Just a reminder, we’re only using the recordings to make transcripts we’ll analyse those later. The transcripts will be anonymous. All identifiable information will be replaced with generic information when we’re writing them (so your name and any names you mention will

be replaced with pseudonyms; if you mention any specific places like your suburb we'll just call that "home suburb" and not name it).

"Question 4 is to make sure that you know you can request a copy of your transcript if you want to read it. This is because it's your data, you have a right to it.

"Question 5 is about whether you want us to send you a summary of the research findings when the project's over. This part of the Consent Form mostly just to make sure you know about the option. You can change your mind later. So, if you say NO now, you can still email me and ask for the summary.

"So, if you want to participant in the project, we need you to sign the Consent Form first. You can take your time reading it."

Signing.

"So, I predict that interviews would last maybe around **an hour** (based on other studies that have used the same approach we're using), but in all cases it depends on the person being interviewed. You can **end the interview whenever you want** (if you have something after this or there's nothing else to talk about). But you **don't need to feel rushed** either. As a precaution, the room is booked for four hours. That's a lot of time but it's mostly just to provide some leeway. So if turns out you have a lot to talk about that's fine too."

### **WARNINGS**

"This project isn't about sensitive topics and we don't want to encourage anyone to talk about things they don't want to. But since talking about personal experiences, even about playing a game, there's always the possibility of feeling discomfort or distressed. Considering that possibility, we've included some contact information for you to know about. There's Lifeline, but there's also the Swinburne Psychology Clinic here at the Hawthorn Campus.

“So, that’s just there for your information. But, again, we don’t anticipate this project dealing with anything distressing.”

### **RECORDING**

“So, I’m going to be using this digital recorder for the interview. I’ll also be using my phone’s voice recorder, just as a backup.”

Start recording. When the recordings have started, don’t touch the devices! (Moving them creates sound that covers up everything else.)

### **INTRODUCTION**

“I want to know about your experience with either Ocarina of Time or Breath of the Wild.

“This study isn’t a test of your memory or your playing skills. It’s an investigation of how the game made you feel and what it was like for you to play.

“We chose these two games because they’re very popular and the Zelda series as a whole has had a huge impact on games culture, even popular culture more generally.”

Segue into rapport.

### **RAPPORT**

Only bring up this information if the participant talks about liking the game or if they seem uncomfortable.

If we’re talking about OOT: “I played Ocarina of Time as a teenager. I didn’t finish the game back then but I knew a lot about it through family, friends, other games, and through its general cultural impact. For this project, I did finally find the time last year to play it all the way through. I’m pretty familiar with the game now, so I should be able to follow anything you describe about your experience.”

If we're talking about BOTW: "I recently finished playing Breath of the Wild. I've finished the main story and I've explored almost every part of the game, but I'm still exploring because the world is so big. I'm not aware of everything but I'm pretty familiar with most of the game, so I should be able to follow anything you describe about your experience."

NOTE: I have found that rapport comes before the interview even starts, when I first meet the participant. I ask how they are and whether it was difficult finding the place, I show them to the room, I explain the consent form and the interview procedure, and THEN I turn on the recordings and begin the interview.

### **CLARIFYING THE GAME**

If they played one game: "So, you played \_\_\_\_, right? Is that the game you want to talk about?"

If they played both games: "So, you've played both Ocarina of Time AND Breath of the Wild? Is there one that you'd prefer to talk about, or would you like to talk about both?"

Reassurance: "Either option is fine. We'd just need to clarify which games you're talking about at any one time, just to make it clear."

If I don't know what they've played: "So, have you played either OOT or BOTW?"

Answer: "Okay! So, I would like to talk to you about what it was like to play THAT GAME."

If they want to talk about both: "Okay, that's great! I may just need to clarify during the interview which game you're talking about."

### **INITIAL SURVEY**

"I just want to ask you a few questions to give your account some context. These questions aren't totally essential to the study, so you can answer them in as much or as little detail as you want or not at all."

If both games: “Let’s start with Ocarina of Time.”

And then: “Okay, now about Breath of the Wild.”

These are the question topics:

- Console
  - “Which version of THE GAME did you play?”
  - “Which console?”
  - “What controller? GameCube? Wii? Classic? Wii U’s gamepad? Switch’s Joy-Con?”
- First time
  - “When did you first play?”
- Most recent time
  - “When did you most recently play?”
- Extent (i.e. how much of the game)
  - “How much of THE GAME have you played?”
  - “How extensively have to played THE GAME?”
  - “Finished? What does “finished” mean to you?”
  - “How familiar?”
  - “How skilled?”
- Continued play
  - “Do you still play?”
- Frequency
  - “How often do you (or did you) play?”
- Play session details
  - “Long sessions occasionally?”
  - “Short sessions frequently?”

- “Just to relax?”
- “For the challenge?”
- “With friends?”
- “With a walkthrough?”

“Okay, thank you. That’s it for the little survey. Now, we can get into your experience of THE GAME.”

Gentle segue.

### **INITIAL IMPRESSIONS**

“How would you describe THE GAME to someone who doesn’t know anything about it?”

“What is THE GAME about?”

“What happens in THE GAME?”

“Do you think THE GAME has a theme? Any overarching theme that stands out to you?”

“How do you feel about THE GAME? Just your overall impression.”

- Like?
- Dislike?
- Enjoyed?
- Frustrated?
- Challenging?
- Difficult?
- Easy?

### **NARROWING DOWN**



You'll cycle through this multiple times and move up and down and jump around. The only thing this sequence denotes is how close to the important information you are and how to funnel the participant towards it.

### 1) IMPORTANT THINGS

Identify the parts of the game you'll need to focus on. Write them down so you can come back to them later.

Start with the first prompt. Only move on if they're struggling.

Prompt 1: "Were there any parts of THE GAME that stood out to you?"

- Does anything stand out to you?
- Anything in the game?
- Anything about the game?

Prompt 2: "Were there any moments that were especially important to you?"

Prompt 3: "Maybe something meaningful or significant."

Prompt 4: "Something that caught your attention or stuck with you?"

- Struck you?

Prompt 5: Do you have any vivid memories of playing THE GAME?

Prompt 6 (from the start): "Well, how does the game start? [...] What happens next? Etc."

### 2) DETAILS

Ask the participant for more details about one of the things they brought up.

Here are some ways to ask for more detail:

- “So THIS THING is important to you?”
- “What part of THIS THING is important to you?”

### 3) CONCRETE EXAMPLE

Get the participant to describe an actual experience (not a general feeling, perception, or observation).

“Can you tell me about a time when THIS THING happened?”

“First time?”

“A time that was particularly memorable to you?”

“A time when your feelings were strongest about THE THING?”

“The beginning of THE THING?”

“The ending of THE THING?”

“An important moment during (or of) THE THING?”

“Describe to me what happened.”

“What were you doing?”

### 4) FEELINGS

When the participant says something about an emotion or feeling, focus on that and get more information.

- “Can you tell me more about THIS FEELING?”
- “So, you said you felt THIS?”
- “What was THIS FEELING like?”
- “What was happening when you felt that?”

If they don't bring up anything about feelings, periodically ask them about their feelings.

- “What did you feel when THIS THING happened?”
- “Did you feel anything, emotionally?”
- “Was this an emotional experience?”
- “What did it feel like, when that happened?”

Be aware of these emotions that may arise:

- Here are the seven universal emotions, according to Paul Ekman:
  - Joy
  - Surprise
  - Sadness
  - Anger
  - Disgust
  - Fear
  - Contempt
- Here are the eight emotions on the Plutchik wheel, each with their decreasing levels of intensity and the intermediary emotions (in between)
  - Ecstasy > joy > serenity
    - Love
  - Admiration > trust > acceptance
    - Submission
  - Terror > fear > apprehension
    - Awe
  - Amazement > surprise > distraction
    - Disapproval

- Grief > sadness > pensiveness
  - Remorse
- Loathing > disgust > boredom
  - Contempt
- Rage > anger > annoyance
  - Aggressiveness
- Vigilance > anticipation > interest
  - Optimism
- (loop) Ecstasy...
- Other emotions
  - Frustration
  - Annoyance
  - Satisfaction
  - Relief
  - Excitement

NOTE: Don't jump straight from the participant's mention of emotion to asking them about their embodied experience. When emotion comes up, get the participant to elaborate. Get them to bring up bodily feelings themselves, and THEN go into embodiment questions.

## 5) EMBODIMENT

When the participant gives more detail about some emotion or feeling, ask questions about the bodily experience of their emotion.

The questions you choose to ask and the bodily sensations you choose to focus on will depend on the emotion they're talking about, but you can go through these like checklist if you're not sure.

"This feeling, did you also feel it...?"

“This feeling, did it come with any sensation of...?”

- Location
  - “Did you feel anything in your hands?”
    - Shaking?
    - Sweating?
    - Difficulty holding the controller?
  - “Did you feel anything in your chest?”
    - Heart racing?
    - Tightness?
    - Blood pressure rising?
    - Heavy breathing?
    - Slow, calm breathing?
  - “Did you feel anything in your head?”
    - Dizzy?
    - Pressure?
    - About to explode?
- Temperature
  - “Do you remember feeling hot, overheating?”
  - “Or perhaps cold?”
  - “Blood boiling?”
- Movement
  - “Did you feel like you were being pushed forward, or perhaps backwards?”
  - “Were you leaning forward, towards the screen?”
  - “Or perhaps leaning back, relaxing in your chair?”
  - “Did you feel compelled to move?”

- “Leaning into attacks or dodges?”
- “Did you feel constricted?”
- “Like you couldn’t move?”
- Weight
  - “Did you feel like you were being weighed down?”
  - “Hunched shoulders?”
  - “Tension?”
  - “Did you feel a lightness, like you weighed nothing?”
- Energy
  - “Did you feel energetic?”
  - “Bursting with sudden energy?”
  - “An adrenalin rush?”
  - “Slowly building energy?”
  - “Feeling excitement mounting inside you?”
  - “Creeping up?”
  - “Overwhelmed?”
  - “Lethargic?”
  - “Drained of energy?”
- Time
  - “Split second?”
  - “Slowed down?”
  - “Rushing past?”
  - “Lots of things happening at once?”
- Vorhanden
  - “Did it feel like you were fighting against the controls?”

- “Were the controls more difficult?”
- “Were you more conscious or aware of holding the controller and pressing the right buttons?”
- “Were you making more mistakes when playing?”
- Zuhanden
  - “Were you less aware of the controls?”
  - “Were you less aware of holding the controller?”
  - “Was it as though you were in the game and moving as Link, rather than controlling Link with the controller?”

### **GETTING INFORMATION**

These techniques are useful during the Details phase, Feelings phase, and Embodiment phase of the Narrowing Down process.

### **ENCOURAGING**

Choose an important word or phrase that you think can lead to something interesting. Just repeat that word or phrase. It may draw the participant’s attention to it and encourage them to continue along that path.

You can just nod and say “Uh-huh” or “Okay” to show that you’re listening and understand.

If they’re retelling an event

- “What happened after that?”
- “What happened as a result?”
- “What did you do after that?”

### **CLARIFY**

Clarify a point, just to make sure.

- “So, PARAPHRASING?”
- “So, it sounds like PARAPHRASING?”
- “So, you’re saying that PARAPHRASING?”
- “When you say THIS, what do you mean?”

When you’ve clarified something, use the resulting information to either specify or elaborate.

NOTE: Only clarify to confirm something, to make sure you can properly phrase your specifications and elaboration questions.

### SPECIFY AND ELABORATE

Specifying asks the participant to narrow their description down to something more specific.

Elaborating asks the participant for more detail about something.

These two types of questions are phrased in similar ways, but their intentions are different.

Specifying asks the participant to focus more on a particular part of what they’ve described.

Elaborating asks the participant to add more detail to what they’ve just said.

Specifying is like zooming in with a telescope to see a smaller area and elaborating is like focusing the lens so you can see more clearly.

- “Could you tell me more about THIS THING?”
- “So, you said THIS.”
- “I’d like to know more about THIS THING.”
- “Could you tell me more about THIS THING?”
- “What is it about THIS THING that’s important to you?”
- “What stands out to you about THIS THING?”



- “Could you elaborate on that?”
- “In what way?”

### CONTRAST

Draw attention to (seemingly) contradictory statements the participant has made. This helps you get more accurate information and can lead to clarifying, specifying, and elaborating.

- “So, you said THIS, but also you said THAT?”

### DESCRIBE AND REFLECT

Ask the participant to describe their experience of something. Then, based on their answer, ask them what they feel about that something.

- Describe
  - “What happened during THE THING?”
  - “Could you describe THE THING?”
- Reflect
  - “What was your reaction?”
  - “How did you feel about THAT?”

### POSSIBLE TOPICS

Be aware that they may talk about things from any of the following topics and be aware of how you can ask for more details:

- Gameplay (what you do in the game)
  - Controls?
  - Mechanics?
  - Player actions?

- Difficulty?
- Challenge?
- Event (things that happen in the game)
  - When?
  - What happened?
  - Which characters were involved?
- Character (entities in the game)
  - Describe them.
  - What is most important about them
  - Personality?
  - Introduction?
  - Relationships with other characters?
  - Actions in the story?
  - Relevance in gameplay?
- Game world (the world in which the game and story takes place)
  - Exploration?
  - Experimentation?
  - Engagement?
  - Alive?
  - Realistic?
- Objective (goals you try to achieve or are expected to achieve)
  - Difficulty?
  - Impact on larger game?
  - Frequency?
  - Importance?

- Strategy (particular actions in the game executed to achieve some goal)
  - Skill level?
  - Training?
  - Learning?
  - Goals?
- Social experience (the game's social impact on their life)
  - Conversations?
  - Discussions?
  - Learning?
  - Helping?
  - Exchanging information?
  - Similar interests?
- Zelda franchise (impact and relevance to other games in the franchise)
  - Impact?
  - Innovation?
  - Influence?
  - Improvement?

### **DO'S AND DON'TS**

Ask the participant for descriptions.

Ask "what" questions.

Ask one question at a time.

When you hear a word that sounds important, write it down. Come back to it.

If you've been narrowing down towards something but then the participant veers off, follow them.

Write down what you were talking about so you can come back to it but don't drag them back when they're onto something. Plumb the new topic. When that's done, use your notes to go back and ask for more information. You may need to start from the top, but do it.

Don't use the word "why".

Don't ask the participant for explanations. Only ask for descriptions. They are experts on their own PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, and nothing beyond that.

Don't ask participants what they "think". Avoid that word. Thinking is YOUR job. Later.

Don't correct them. Even if you know their memory differs from the game. You're interested in their perception, interpretations, meanings, and MEMORY. You gain nothing from correcting them.

Don't jump to conclusions. Even if an assumption or explanation makes sense, don't say it. Just repeat the pieces of information you know explicitly so that the participant can clarify, specify, or elaborate.

Avoid giving them more information about the game. If they can't remember something and ask you for information (e.g. "What are the machine things?"), avoid giving them the answer you think it might be. Ask them oblique questions to give them a chance to figure it out for themselves (e.g. "Machines? That walk around? Or sometimes fly or are stationary?"). Only give them the answer if it seems like they're getting distracted (e.g. "Do you mean the Guardians?").

## **Appendix 10: Individual player theme lists**

This bullet-point presentation style is based on Langdridge's (2007, p.121) presentation of an example list of themes.

## 10.1. Alex

- **Friends and help**

- **Emotional closeness**

- **Emotional attachment**

- “the voice acting was good [...] makes it feel more real”
      - “it’s a video game character so it shouldn’t really mean all that much but it, it really just struck a chord with me”
      - “I grew attached to them [...] I wouldn’t take my horse near it [...] it my horse ended up dying I probably (laughs) would have just turned off the game (laughs)”

- **Getting to know you**

- “she [Mipha] was probably the least interesting to me [...] just because they [Mipha and Zelda] were so similar but also, I did really like her brother Sidon”
      - “I didn’t really think much of him [...] he kept talking to me and telling me like, I believe in you and you’re really great and he kept complimenting me [...] constantly encouraging you to go forward [...] he kept coming up and telling me the direction to go and saying I believe in you [...] calling you like his favourite friend [...] I just thought it was very adorable [...] you would ride on his back and shoot the ice blocks [...] he was contributing [...] he was like helping you out and you were working together to use your abilities to the best of your ability (laughs) [...] you were like swimming *with* him, I feel like was more personal”

- “he was more of a friend at that point [...] I knew him well enough [...] he seemed to *care* about me [...] He just kind of judged me as my own person”
- “he was giving me hints and kind of helping me out”
- “I remember all of the little kids around the village [Rito Village] [...] I remember a particular side quest [...] find all of the sisters and they sang something”
- “And he sees Zelda along the way as well (laughs)”
- “an objectively weaker character even though she [Zelda] wasn’t in it for most of the game and you had to unlock most of her things through the memories [...] because she wasn’t there most of the game I didn’t get to know her as well”

▪ **Earned friendship**

- “he [Revali] kind of acted at the start like he was better than you and you were nothing but by the end he kind of acknowledged that you were powerful as well”
- “he didn’t like Link [...] this was a character that I was going to have to win over [...] somebody who really didn’t like me at first I could eventually win over and I thought that was really cool [...] I did the temple and then he was okay with me”
- “The [the Zora] were very cold [...] felt almost less interesting because they wouldn’t give you as much dialogue [...] they’re all more accepting and they start like forgiving you which I thought was nice [...] the place felt a lot nicer [...] the entire vibe of the place changed [...] all the people were kind of a lot more interesting to talk

to [...] actually give you more information and be nicer to you [...] unlock more places to explore [...] it felt a lot more limited in where I could go [...] the Zoras wouldn't talk to me or give me much information so I didn't really feel like there was many other places I could go *in* it [...] once I unlocked *them* I felt like I could go explore more places too [...] I actually started thinking a lot of them [Zora children] were cute"

▪ **Stand out**

- "I felt like she [Mipha] was probably the least interesting to me but um, just because they were so similar"
- "compared to Sidon they [the Zora] felt, they felt almost less interesting"
- "he [Ledo] had a ridiculous way of counting them [luminous stones] all (laughs). He would like *scream* it in the dialogue box and I thought that was really funny (laughs) [...] this guy's just yelling numbers at you (laughs) for no reason (laughs) [...] they're [the Zora] generally more serious people they don't generally go out of their way like (laughs) Sidon and that guy [Ludo] do to be like you know special memorable characters"
- "she's [Mei] like oh I lost track of time (laughs) and she ends up swimming all the way back there (laughs) [...] I thought it was really strange that she was somewhere that's nowhere near Zora's Domain because aside from Sidon in that story bit I hadn't really seen any of them outside of Zora's Domain before"

○ **Friends help friends**

▪ **Leg up**

- “all the people [Zora] were kind of a lot more interesting to talk to then because they would actually give you more information [...] it felt kind of more like you unlocked more places to explore just generally based on what people would tell you”
- “go a lot more places [...] the guy inside the shop starts selling me things [...] nicer and better to talk to and more helpful”
- “he [Kass] gives you little riddles”

▪ **Sidon**

- “I didn’t really think that much of him [...] telling me like, I believe in you and you’re really great and he kept complimenting me [...] constantly encouraging you to go forward [...] telling me the direction to go and saying I believe in you [...] calling you like his favourite friend [...] very adorable [...] you would ride on his back and shoot the ice blocks [...] I felt like he was contributing [...] made me feel more connected to him [...] you were like swimming *with* him [...] more personal”
- “more of a friend at that point [...] I knew him well enough [...] he seemed to *care* about me [...] He just kind of judged me as my own person [...] he was telling you about going to the Shrine [...] giving me hints and kind of helping me out”

▪ **Urbosa**

- “she felt very powerful [...] she felt kind of motherly”
- “she’s very strong and motherly [...] seemed to care [...] she was a really powerful character [...] she *knew* what she was talking about



[...] I felt like she was the oldest as well [...] felt more like a leader than the others [...] she took control over conversations [...] she cares about her [Zelda] and stuff [...] she was really caring about Zelda and looking after her and making sure she was okay”

- **Zelda**

- “a bit whiney [...] just venting to Link [...] expecting him to come save her [...] I liked Mipha better [than Zelda] because at least she was, I felt like she wasn’t as mean to Link and she really liked Link [...] Mipha was nice to Link [...] Mipha I felt was nicer generally”

- **BOTW giveth and BOTW taketh away**

- **Power = freedom**

- “I know the entire, like, general map”
- “all of the hundred Shrines because I know I definitely didn’t do that [...] freeing the four guardians because I did that as well”
- “more um confident generally when I had weapons that I knew were good or felt really powerful [...] run in and start beating things up”
- “control the situation”
- “when I had the bow and arrow [...] I just yeah started killing them off from afar [...] a lot easier [...] instead of just charging in like an idiot [...] I could kind of plan [...] I felt like I had a lot more control over the situation [...] I had two different kinds of styles of fighting”
- “needed more Hearts and Stamina. Especially Stamina because there are some ridiculous cliffs in that game.”
- “there are things in this world that will absolutely slaughter me [...] I could get to that level one day”

- “I felt like I could go explore more places”
  - “to get better weapons [...] no point in fighting the boss if I’ve only got like a stick”
  - “more control [...] more stamina and things [...] don’t have enough stamina [...] I would be able to survive when he hit me”
  - “bananas would give you pretty much the most useful food [...] ten hearts or something and also like three attack ups”
  - “there are two ways to kind of do things in the game. You can do it how the game tells you to do it or you can um get ridiculously strong and just come back to it later and just kill the enemy that’s in your way (laughs)”
  - “nothing preventing you from doing or going wherever you want [...] had to run around and um sneak around them [...] didn’t need to do all the sneaking around [...] makes you feel a lot more powerful like you have more control over what you can kill”
- **When BOTW gives you everything**
    - **Buffet table, endless paths**
      - “so open world”
      - “drop it and go somewhere else [...] a lot more freedom with what you can do”
      - “It [the beginning] was really emotional. And especially the bit where he walks out of the cave and it shows you like the whole world. That was like one of the biggest ones for me because it was, it really showed you like the scope of the place and that you could like go anywhere and do anything”

- “very freeing [...] I can go anywhere and do anything and there was a lot more um agency in terms of what, what you could do [...] I can go anywhere and do anything [...] so much improvement [...] amazing that games can even *get* this big and have this much to do in it [...] I stayed there [on the cliff] for about five minutes? Just looking at the landscape”
- “I *expected* to walk into an invisible wall [...] felt more *real* to me how big the world was [...] the actual game was that big”
- “it felt more like *my* experience because I’d, the, I could go wherever I want”
- “well I’ll just take a detour”
- “I just happened to come across the wife [Mei] [...] I completely forgot about it [...] it was really interesting that um they, side quests can like carry *over* that much of the map. Because I thought they would be like relatively, small area scope generally [...] I just happened to come across her [...] I was like oh yes, I remember why I was supposed to be looking (laughs) for you”

▪ **Explore and discover**

- “I grabbed a stick on the ground and lit it over his fire and started lighting up (laughs) all the grass around me (laughs)”
- “I really felt like an explorer [...] I really felt like I was the only person who could find this [...] I could go wherever I want”
- “That he [Kass] had like this little, his own little story that was kind of irrelevant to the *main* plot but it was still something that you could find out about”

- “seeing him [Kass, a Rito] that early on I thought was surprising”
- “I remember there was a broken heart lake and a heart lake and I think he was at the wrong one [...] I thought that was really cute [...] put interesting things in there *like* that”
- “find something interesting and wonder what it would make if you cooked [...] just mix things together and see what happened”
- “go in the direction of something useful [...] use a small amount [...] no point in using like ten really good things [...] use a bit [...] see what that made”

▪ **Room to breathe**

- “stuck [...] wandering around for hours [...] I could just drop it and go somewhere else and do something else”
- “little mini ones [...] spread out [...] short bursts [...] I lose track of everything really easily [...] they were so short generally”
- “I always felt like I was doing it in the wrong order even though there isn’t an order”
- “wanting to ugh give up and put it down for a while [...] I stopped and went and did something else”
- “I had no idea where I was going and I just decided to go do something else”
- “trial and error thing [...] no particular way that you have to do things so you could just do whatever”
- “if that didn’t work I would just go, go do something else and come back to it later”
- “so I decided to go to the other side of the room”

- “I was surprised that if, as long as I kept my torch up, Link would be okay in the snow which I thought was really, a really nice touch”
- **When BOTW doesn’t**
  - **Warning threshold**
    - “a bit depressed [...] all these enemies are probably stronger than me (laughs)”
    - “needed more Hearts and Stamina”
    - “get ridiculously strong and just come back to it later and just kill the enemy that’s in your way (laughs)”
    - “that was kind of the game’s way of um telling you that this area isn’t the way you’re generally supposed to be going [...] in places where you aren’t generally supposed to be at [...] weren’t supposed to go at *that* point [...] I would, just wouldn’t go that way”
    - “I remember at first when I first saw them [Guardians] I just didn’t go near them because I thought they were ridiculously powerful”
  - **Struggling underdog**
    - “I was a bit depressed [...] fight off all these enemies that are probably stronger than me (laughs)”
    - “some ridiculous cliffs in that game”
    - “more satisfying [...] the reward that I worked so hard for”
    - “he was surprisingly strong [...] so I decided that I had to sneak around and get the arrows and leave as quickly as possible”
    - “I didn’t have any warm clothes [...] you needed to buy some but I couldn’t figure out where to do that or how to make them [...] trying to cheat”

- “if I was low on health [...] no good weapons so I couldn’t really fight them [Yiga] well”
  - “if they were really strong then they usually beat me”
  - “you had to run around and um sneak around them [Guardians]”
- **Hopeless weakness**
- “a little unsettling [...] it [Lynel] was so huge and I don’t think I’d seen an enemy that big up to that point. It was just kind of overwhelming how big it was (laughs)”
  - “I realised that the Lynel was actually very sensitive (laughs) and you had to be like very slow and sneaky [...] a sense of urgency”
  - “It was terrifying (laughs) [...] a one-shot death [...] you were so weak [...] as soon as they [Lynel] you you were basically dead [...] a lot more urgent [...] I also kind of felt like aw it was a failure and I just kind of gave up [...] it’s too hard to try and fight him [...] I would shake a bit more [...] your heart accelerates [...] feels like you’re running away from the Lynel”
  - “I just kept getting killed by this huge fire ball [...] very frustrating because I didn’t know what exactly I was doing wrong [...] it almost felt like they were cheating [...] you couldn’t really avoid or do anything to [...] it felt a bit over, overpowered [...] I had no idea how to avoid it and I thought it was a bit stupid [...] just intentionally cutting down your health [...] ridiculously hard”
  - “suddenly he would just throw a first ball at me and I had no idea what to do about it [...] just that one particular attack that I had no idea what to do”

- “even bigger ridiculous Lynel [...] those attacks were ridiculous, they could kill you instantly even if you had heaps of hearts [...] it’s kind of like the top of the chain”
  - “it did like barely any damage I thought oh well it just isn’t worth it”
  - “I generally didn’t have enough [...] I didn’t have any good weapons and it [Guardian] started shooting at me [...] had to run past it”
- **Forced surrender**
- “I tried to fight [...] he [Yiga Blademasters] just ended up killing me [...] that was really the only feasible way I could get through [...] It felt like I was hitting a brick wall (laughs) with a stick [...] kind of forced, in a way, to do what the game wanted me to do [...] there was no way I would be strong enough [...] I felt like I was kind of being forced to do it”
  - “I felt like that’s [fighting through] the more realistic thing to do [...] it was kind of disappointing [...] running up and fighting people is more fun than sneaking around [...] fighting them would have been more fun than sneaking around [...] there was absolutely no way that I was going to be able to beat them as I was [...] I was doing absolutely no damage [...] they could knock me out with one swing [...] wasn’t worth it”
  - “I tried to fight him [Lynel] [...] I remember him [Sidon] specifically saying that I shouldn’t fight the Lynel”
  - “you were basically screwed [...] you have to do it in a particular way”
  - “I just kind of gave up [...] I’ve got to do this the proper way”

▪ **Knocked out**

- “I would shake a bit more [...] your heart accelerates [...] feels like *you’re* running away from the Lynel [...] it [the controller] felt less of an extension [...] cuts you off because it feels less immersive [...] it’s more urgent and your fingers slip because you’re panicking and you can hit the wrong button and then Link will try to climb something stupid [...] Link often tried to climb *stupid* things [...] he would start like climbing a tree and I’m like that’s not (laughs) really very useful in this current situation (laughs) [...] he just starts climbing random crap [...] if you’re running away from something that’s when it happens the most [...] in situations of panic you tend to just kind of run whichever direction is the easiest”
- “one of those situations again because Link would climb things that he wasn’t supposed to climb”

▪ **Boxed in and frustrated**

- “my problem with previous Zelda games is that if, they were very linear so if I got stuck on a particular dungeon I would generally stop playing [...] I didn’t want to stand there wandering around for hours if I couldn’t figure something out”
- “very frustrating”
- “wandering around aimlessly”
- “like it’s, *should* have been easier to find the arrows and that I was cheating in *that* way [using the Sheikah Sensor] [...] I should have been able to *see* them”



- “I give up (laughs) if it gets too hard [...] wanting to ugh give up and put it down for a while [...] I just got stuck and I couldn’t be bothered”
- “running around in circles it just gets so frustrating”
- “I’d just stop playing the game because I got stuck”
- **Needle in a haystack**
  - “so many different settings [on Vah Ruta’s trunk] [...] could easily get wrong [...] twelve different settings [...] it was really specific I thought [...] I got lost a *lot*”
  - “I ended up going back to it [Vah Ruta] with a guide book [...] twenty minutes running around in circles it just gets so frustrating [...] if I can’t figure out I’ll just go to a walkthrough”
  - “a very confusing labyrinth [...] there was *too* much control (laughs) because I just ended up getting lost [...] they wanted you to do something in a particular way but they didn’t make it obvious what option I had to pick so it’s kind of a trial and error thing”
  - “so many trunk settings I could try it sixteen different ways and it might not work”
- **Hollow victory**
  - “And he told me that I can put it on my Slate so I could find them [Shock Arrows] easier [...] once I did that it was a lot easier”

- “the arrows are kind of hard to see by eye but I kind of also felt like I was cheating that way”
- “It felt a bit more video gamey to me. It was like aw for people who, like me (laughs) who can’t figure out [...] so they don’t get stuck and give up”

▪ **Fight another day**

- “I was a lot more careful [...] it *wasn’t* an invisible wall [...] I also felt like I am I could run into like really huge guys who would be way stronger than me and absolutely nail me and there was nothing kind of preventing me from doing that [...] a learning experience because you had to be careful [...] I would try to pick people off from afar [...] pick them off with an arrow and then whittle them down until they’re small numbers [...] just sneak by them (laughs) [...] they all surrounded me and I died and so that’s probably when I learned that (laughs) I need to calm down a bit”
- “all these enemies that are probably stronger than me (laughs)”
- “I could kind of plan my, look at my surroundings [...] I paid a lot of attention to my surroundings a lot more [...] I had two different kind of styles of fighting”
- “enemies would get stronger [...] if you had (laughs) the skill to get away from all the really tough enemies”
- “I’m used to games giving me what I can, ‘round about what I can handle until some point [...] there are things in this world that will absolutely slaughter me”
- “you had to be like very slow and sneaky [...] a sense of urgency”

- “towards the beginning I had to kind of be careful of *everything* [...] you’re running around in your underwear with just a stick. You can’t really do much against other enemies.”
- “if I would see a really powerful enemy I would, I just wouldn’t go that way [...] there’s no way that I’d be bale to face *that* enemy and if that enemy’s there and I can’t deal with that then there’s probably going to be worse things past it that I can’t deal with either [...] if I saw a colour that wasn’t um familiar to me I’d generally avoid them [...] they’re probably really strong”
- “Unless it’s like near the start of the battle and then I’ll just warp away [...] if they [enemies] were really strong then they usually beat me”
- “I just didn’t go near them”
- “I avoided them [Guardians while on horseback] [...] costs a lot of money to revive them [horses] [...] I would generally take a different path or avoid, or I would um leave my horse behind and continue on foot”
- “I just ran away from it [Guardian] and didn’t fight it [...] I just kept running away”
- **Stealing from the gods. The sport of kings.**
  - “every new place that I explored felt more worth it because the rewards would get bigger too. The enemies would get stronger but the rewards would get bigger and so it kind of pushes you forward [...] find something ridiculously above your level [...] if you had (laughs) the skill to get away from all the really tough enemies [...]

an item that you probably weren't necessarily supposed to have that early on. And that thought was really exciting"

- "it was on a cliff and there was a, a horde of monsters on this cliff and they were way stronger than me but there was a Shrine [...] if I had, had've used strategy I could get there eventually"
- "first time I got a Guardian weapon I just used it on everything because I felt so strong and powerful using it [...] a bit further ahead than where I was at that point [...] the numbers on the weapon were like a lot higher than anything I had at that point [...] I just started using it on everything [...] I want more weapons like this [...] the weapon was there to protect me and I had a bit more leeway in what I could do [...] if I hit something and the, it did like barely any damage I thought oh well it just isn't worth it because um the weapons I have are kind of in line with where I am at the moment"
- "It was really upsetting [when my strong weapon broke] (laughs) [...] I'm definitely not at the level to even have that weapon yet [...] makes me feel a bit screwed [...] when it breaks it kind of feels like *they* have the upper hand again"
- "it makes you feel a lot more powerful like you have more control over what you can kill"

▪ **Excitingly dangerous. Adrenalin rush.**

- "enemies would get stronger but the rewards would get bigger and so it kind of pushes you forward [...] if you had (laughs) the skill to get away from all the really tough enemies that are way above you [...] that thought was really exciting"

- “there was a, a horde of monsters on this cliff and they were way stronger than me but there was a Shrine just past them [...] I died a hundred million times [...] they were way stronger than me and they had way better weapons”
- “trying to figure out which way to go [...] trying to test to see at what stage of sneaking and how close you got that he would notice you”
- “we tried multiple times to see how close you could get”
- “I’ll try fighting. I’ll, I’ll just keep going and see how it is. [...] If my best weapon broke I would just keep going and see how it went.”
- **Fun insurance**
  - “I really appreciate the guide book [...] running around in circles it just gets so frustrating [...] I try things out [...] if I can’t figure out I’ll just go to a walkthrough”
- **The sweet taste of victory**
  - **Becoming a god**
    - “a sense of accomplishment [...] I felt like I put a lot into it”
    - “I felt really smart [...] especially that one in particular I really liked ‘cause I could figure it out myself”
    - “when I figured out how to beat it it felt like amazing”
    - “it was really satisfying”
    - “it was awesome (laughs) [...] it was so easy after that [...] it was just yeah over instantly”
    - “there were less enemies that were above my level”
    - “it feels like you’re a *god*”

- “being able to kill them feels really powerful [...] you start off really minimal with like no weapons and then to get really good feels awesome [...] when you can take down most enemies pretty easily [...] you’re pretty accomplished”
- **So easy it’s funny**
  - “it was also kind of funny because I had to do something relatively simple to get him [Revali] to like me (laughs) [...] it was kind of funny [...] oh you gotta go into this intense temples but it wasn’t as bad as the first one that I did (laughs)”
  - “oh, you figured out this very simplistic (laughs) riddle that I gave you, thank you (laughs)”
- **The reward is more memorable than the challenge**
  - “if you did *something*, then you could get like a separate cutscene that showed a bit more of it”
  - “a reward almost for beating the, well beating the game [...] it was a sense of accomplishment”
  - “there was like oh it’s a secret scene I’m like oh there’s a secret scene? So I looked it up and it was just the scene that I saw I’m like oh, okay, well (laughs) I got it (laughs)”
  - “I don’t really remember much in particular about it other than that”
  - “I’m pretty sure I had to beat the um temple there, but I don’t really remember”
  - “I don’t remember what I did, (laughs) but when I figured out how to beat it it felt like amazing”

## 10.2 Chris

- **Friendship: Link, his friends, their failure, their closure**
  - **The main story is about Link and the Champions, and finally defeating Calamity Ganon to give them closure**
    - “all of Link’s friends are dead and he couldn’t save them [...] Calamity Ganon’s already won. The only reason that Link has to defeat him is for closure. It puts a full stop on, on his relationship with his friends”
    - “key story beats in the story which is when you um when you calm each of the Divine Beasts [...] in your quest to defeat Calamity Ganon you need to um you know harness the power of the Divine Beasts [...] that’s when the story will take hold [...] the Champions and their relationship both to Link in the past and Link now”
    - “the main campaign [...] the relationships that the four Champions have with Link”
    - “they all have like a very distinct relationship with both Link and Zelda [...] they were a family like Link and Mipha would be like the couple and Daruk would be the dad of Link and uh Urbosa would be Link’s mum and Revali would be his older brother. Like, just like classic character stereotypes um that are given kind of new life in, in the way they’re explored through like the relationship with Link [...] he’s still remembered fondly by Link after his death [...] without having them having died so long ago it wouldn’t have the same impact I think [...] the special punch of like, they failed in their mission [...] a really sad twist to that classic story”
    - “he [Revali] has such a clear character [...] the competition was there in order to like inspire Link [...] it’s quite emotional because you have had that

complex relationship with the, with the characters [...] more like people [...]

kind of relationship building [...] I kind of wanted to see more of Revali"

- "apart from Revali, is um Urbosa. Who is very matronly [...] mentor figure [...]  
motherly kind of mentor [...] a really sweet scene [...] approachable to Link um and kind of, kind of cheeky in a motherly way"
- "to like have them have *lost* the battle already [...] killing off characters, you haven't even *met* the characters yet but you *know* that they're important"
- "it's a game that's about closure. I don't think Link even needed to defeat Calamity Ganon, you know. People were doing okay. [...] I think the only reason that he does it is to like put the memory of his friends to rest [...] we do need to, need closure on, on like people that we've lost. And it's an important, like it's a strong motivator"
- "Link still accepts his duty [...] lost everything that he cared about [...] the only reason that he pursues it is to accept the loss [...] to put that full stop on"
- "his burden of shouldering the responsibility of the past and like *feeling* responsibility for um having lost"

○ **Link from the past**

- "everything that's happened, happened in the past"
- "I kind of felt like it should have been kept to the past"
- "it was about the relationship with the people in the past [...] I found like the spirits controlling the uh Divine Beasts to be a, like a *step* too far"
- "to put that full stop on, on his uh involvement with that story [...] Link feels outside of the world [...] that is what like kind of spurs you on to, to finish the game because you belong to a time that's past [...] it's not where you



belong [...] he's definitely outside of his own time [...] they [NPCs] don't seem to have any like ongoing role in the story [...] it never feels like personally attached to Link [...] you're definitely outside of that society. You're, yeah you belong to the quest that you're on [...] the ones who upgrade your Sheikah Slate um who probably come the closest to relatable characters to Link [...] they kind of belong to the past as well [...] they almost bridge the gap but they don't [...] I don't think they [NPCs] *added* anything [...] I feel like everything was kind of fine and could've continued to be, you know, relatively fine"

- "interaction between the spirits and, and you know corporeal um is always something that's kind of tense with humans"

- **Sad survivor**

- "it was like so well layered [...] you have this classic video game quest [...] you *could* find elements of the story that just added these *really* beautiful like layers to that simple story"
- "classic character stereotypes um that are given kind of new life [...] he's [Revali] remembered fondly by Link [...] I think that like the framing is just as important as the characterisation because without them having died so long ago it wouldn't have the same impact I think. I think it would just fall into like character stereotypes but because of that (clap) the special punch of like, they failed in their mission um I, I think it just brings, yeah, uh kind of um like a, like a really sad twist to that classic story"
- "he's [Revali] remembered fondly in that village that he's, he's like this almost god [...] he's so revered [...] respectful, chivalrous that kind of thing and then as soon as the cutscenes start to happen you realise that like he is

just a person [...] susceptible to um, you know, human failings [...] the sense of history [...] what these people did but also who they were to their people [...] an important juxtaposition [...] I think he [Revali] *gains* face for it”

- “you feel more guilty for being the only one alive [...] kind of undeserving kind of thing [...] like survivor guilt [...] every time um you interact with the spirits on the Divine Beasts [...] you do feel somewhat undeserving of being left behind [...] the legacy that those Champions have left behind [...] you do kind of feel guilty for being there instead of them [...] gut-punchy about like survivor guilt [...] it spurred it on [...] arriving in the villages and learning this history of the Champions and also interacting with the spirits of the Champions um it would make me want to play further to like reach that point of closure”
- “every time I calmed a Divine Beast and spoke to a Champion or visit a village it definitely like deepened the relationship with the conflict of having lost and lost those friends that it made the closure more important towards the end”

- **The human is in the details**

- “the little character complexities”
- “he [Revali] is just a person [...] susceptible to um, you know, human failings like jealousy and, and competition [...] regular people tasked with an irregular quest in the past”

- **Just knowing is enough**

- “I still felt like those memories were happening to me playing Link um even though I watched them [the memories] on IGN in the real world”

- **Nothing more**

- “when you finish the campaign, it’s over. That’s the end. The, the story finishes. [...] it basically rolled credits”
  - “once the story is finished that’s the end of the game. Um it’s a really nice like neat little package”
  - “I felt like it wrapped up perfectly. It didn’t meander”
  - “it was yeah thematically perfect that it wrapped up [...] for *this* game, gameplay-wise it, it is kind of perfect [...] *This* game is more about the story and *less* about the world [...] *not* being able to go back into it, is a perfect way to end this game [...] from a story standpoint I think that you shouldn’t be allowed to continue past Calamity Ganon”
  - “even without the memories you still get the sense of what happened”
  - “the game doesn’t carry on past that”
- **Satisfying closure**
    - “I kind of let it sit for a second because the story was over and I wanted to let that kind of wash over me”
    - “there’s no more game after that [...] I felt like it wrapped up perfectly. It didn’t meander [...] the final moment that you can interact with the game should be the game’s ending”
    - “video games usually you’ll be sent to like a central hub where you’ll be able to play in the world further [...] a video game uh kind of trope that *needn’t* be applied to video games [...] one of the strongest point of Breath of the Wild is its story and it was, it was yeah thematically perfect that it wrapped up [...] *This* game is more about the story and *less* about the world”

- “if I had come to the end and been half-way through defeating Calamity Ganon and then a bigger badder bad guy showed up [...] it changes the theme [...] it was so thematically tied to the storyline that it had set up”
- “they did a really good job of tying everything into the storyline”
- **I want closure**
  - “I think that most of my time spent playing it was looking for Shrines so that I could get my health and stamina up in order to like reach the final boss and be able to take him on”
  - “Because by that point I had basically finished the story. Um I didn’t wanna finish, I didn’t wanna beat Calamity Ganon until I knew I had enough uh Hearts and Stamina”
  - “I definitely wanted to put a full stop on it [...] the reason why I did it in this game is because that’s what it’s about. Yeah, you need, I, yeah realised that like it needs to finish in order to be, you know, that’s what the theme is. It needs closure. It needs to be finished”
  - “the one thing that um they kind of told you to seek it [...] the King um directs you towards the Shrine [...] I realised that like the more Hearts I had the more likely I would be to survive any attacks by monsters and therefore Calamity Ganon”
  - “I had to be in my second row um and I needed my stamina to be um, to be at least two times around. That was pretty much all I was aiming for. Um I went a little further then that in the Hearts [...] I made the decision and I just kept trying until I won [...] It was desperately hard [...] It was just chipping away the whole time. Took ages. [...] the fight lasted a long time [...] I failed

so many times [...] I made the decision and I wasn't gonna do anything else.

Yeah. I wanted to beat it like (laughs) I was ready for it to end"

- "I kind of found it frustrating [...] Things that kind of didn't really progress the story so much as like, as like actually finding the Shrines yourself or, or, or just like being out in the wilderness and solving like Korok puzzles [...] I don't think they *added* anything"

- **Weakness and strength**

- **Disappointingly weak**

- "you assume that if a creature is presented to you, you're going to be equipped to fight it [...] I just thought, okay great. I can take this on"
    - "I felt kind of uh disappointed. I felt like I should have been able to take the Lynel"

- **Not ready to fight**

- "depending on how uh coordinated I was [...] just not paying as much attention [...] playing passively as opposed to playing actively"
    - "I was kind of not, not feeling really into it [...] it just slaughtered me every time like (laughs) just no competition at all"
    - "I would have definitely gone up against a Lynel. I just think it would have come much, much later."
    - "I will just press the quick attack button until it's dead"
    - "I didn't realise fighting this Lynel until much, much later when I went back and killed it"
    - "just becomes pressing the button. I just want to see the animation go that means that I win, you know (laughs)"
    - "I do become frustrated with the (laughs) with my own passive gameplay"

- “it [the Lynel] would *destroy* me almost immediately [...] I didn’t know that you could attack it while you were on its back [...] which is pretty sad [...] I also just got annihilated every time by it”
- “I ran away from battles [...] all I did was the Divine Beasts and just ran away from everything else”
- “I couldn’t forget being absolutely slaughtered by it (laughs)”
- **Struggle for strength**
  - “most of my time spent playing it was looking for Shrines so that I could get my health and stamina up”
  - “the combat system (laughs) was also really rewarding [...] if you knew how to use it but if you didn’t it was very punishing”
  - “as I grow more frustrated I slip further into an active state [...] I know that if I am actively playing the game I’m more likely to succeed [...] to see if I *could* beat it [...] in Breath of the Wild you really need to use the feature of blocking and dodging and um you know all of the um special attacks that you get granted by the Champions. You need to harness everything you’ve got [...] find the right combination to do it”
  - “I could alternate my attack and change up my uh, like my combinations”
  - “just the realisation that what I was doing wasn’t working”
  - “it was a chance to experiment”
  - “I hunted the Shrines like pretty well uh you know in the early, in the early mid-game”
  - “losing health and like what, what is going on? Why is this happening? Um and nowhere does it tell you that you need to get a torch [...] you have to adapt to kind of on the fly [...] the snow really stands out to me as *really* the

tutorial for me [...] And it was a really, like, experimental learning curve. Like, I had to learn what *not* to do in order to learn *what* to do, kind of thing. [...] “the game over tune should be my ringtone. [...] it took me quite a while”

- **Top of the food chain**

- “I’ve fought so many Lynels but um yeah it’s a combination of like jumping out of the way when they attack so you learn to uh you learn to watch for how they telegraph their attacks and what attack they’re gonna use in order to decide whether you’re gonna jump backwards or jump to the left or the right or, or use Urbosa’s Fury before they can get it off”
- “my skill level had increased to the point where I knew what I was kind of doing [...] You learn to realise when they’re telegraphing their attacks and to slow time so that you can get that Flurry of Blows. Um and so I, I kind of adapted that to the next Lynel [...] if you time your dodging right then the time will, the animation will slow down”
- “in my travels through the world [...] they get harder as well”
- “when I started to realise that I could actually take on the monsters [...] winding up to the end game [...] I’d already clocked up sixty hours”
- “that was like nothing. It was so kind of um it was a real non-event just because I had already um you know killed other Lynels. Um and I was only there exploring as well um just to see if there was something that I’d missed”
- “Going back to kill that Lynel was just so easy [...] my skill had, had grown [...] I think I feel more invested being able to do that now than I would have been if I had just been able to kill it the first time [...] I had finally beat that

Lynel [...] I'd grown like big enough for my boots [...] when I beat it, it was, look how strong I am"

- "I couldn't forget being absolutely slaughtered by it [the Lynel] (laughs) [...] it just felt like a task that I had to complete [...] like a trial [...] it was like, yes I can do this [...] it has to be done (laughs) [...] I needed to kill the Lynel"

- **Such skill, so awesome**

- "on the hardest difficulty because I get a real sense of achievement from having complete it"
- "my skill level had increased to the point where I knew what I was kind of doing [...] You learn to realise when they're telegraphing their attacks and to slow time so that you can get that Flurry of Blows. [...] it felt really good actually. [...] I was so proud (laughs) that I did it. And it felt awesome as well because I was you know picking the right moment to do the right thing [...] make it just feel that much more epic [...] It just feels awesome"
- "It felt great"
- "It was such a relief. Like, I screamed. It was awesome. Like, in ecstasy just like *oh my god* I did it. It felt like (sigh) I don't know. It was just amazing. Took my breath away. Like, I don't have words for it. It was *awesome*. [...] I just felt unstoppable [...] a real sense of achievement [...] it was exciting and it was, it felt like an accomplishment. [...] it felt earned. Like I felt like I had arrived, you know, like I, I had put in the hours of work, 'work', in order to arrive at a place where I was rewarded. Yeah. And it felt like a reward. To win."

- **Knocked out of experience by frustration**



- “I would get uh increasingly frustrated with not knowing how to progress.  
The part that I got stuck in was these a, there’s a section where you go into the woods [...] I could just *not* work out (laughs) what the combination was [...] so frustrated that I stopped playing [...] just not wanting to go back”
- “I found it really irritating sometimes where I just couldn’t find a puzzle that I could solve um immediately”
- “I just thought, okay great. I can take this on. [...] I get really frustrated and give up [...] turn the console off and walk away [...] I’ve already grown agitated with the game”
- “I took my longest hiatus from it [BOTW] [...] I got just couldn’t do it (laughs) [...] I will either work out how to do it or I’ll leave and come back to it later”
- **I thought it’s linear. It’s not?**
  - “I just assumed that it was part of the level design [...] you had to kill the monster to progress [...] it was like a built into the encounters in order that you need to defeat it to progress”
- **Game vs. story**
  - **The story within the game, and the game around the story**
    - “Just to kind of hunt down some things [...] I finish the puzzles that I hadn’t found yet”
    - “it was completely optional [...] well *mostly* optional [...] it was bookended [...] you can hunt down the experience [...] nonlinear and completely optional, like you could go the whole game without finding the whole storyline [...] but the main story was going to be about *you* and *your* interaction with Hyrule”
    - “I went *back* and killed it um at a later time like after the story”

- “I had basically finished the history [...] like after I’d calmed the Divine Beast and before I defeated Calamity Ganon I just went exploring”
- “at least the main story was coming to a close um but it didn’t require me exploring [...] it seemed to me to be directly in the way of progressing the story [...] I knew where the story was going [...] it wasn’t totally outside of progressing the story but it didn’t seem as important”
- “that’s [i.e. Link and Zelda’s past and struggles] all part of the storyline that needn’t exist”
- “they didn’t say anything that was important to what I thought was important [...] just ignored the NPCs [...] I see, like, key point sin the story as the story. So that would be calming the Divine Beasts and defeating Calamity Ganon. Everything in-between is kind of me interacting with the world, rather than part of the story [...] I’m living out the story but I know that a story has to have like, has to have like conflict in every scene and that needn’t necessarily be true while I’m playing”
- “just to go back and explore [...] because it’s still a beautiful world to be in”
- “I didn’t seek them [the Memories] out [...] that was the first thing that I wanted to do after defeating Calamity Ganon”
- “even without the memories you still get the sense of what happened”
- **You’re the director**
  - “it was completely optional [...] well *mostly* optional. Uh it was bookended [...] it was nonlinear and completely optional, like you could go the whole game without finding the whole storyline [...] but the main story was going to be about *you* and *your* interaction with Hyrule”
  - “you can still progress that way [...] there’s freedom there”

- “you *could* go to Hyrule Castle and you *could* take on Calamity Ganon um but my sense of being ready is different to yours [...] I wanted to feel comfortable with reaching that climax [...] I was able to pace the story [...] you’re in charge like it’s all about how *you* feel”
- **Story is my priority**
  - “I want the story [...] I wanna know what happens in the story”
  - “I strongly focus on story in video games [...] progressing the story”
  - “I didn’t interact with any of the NPCs because the few of them that I did *initially* kind of were a bit of flavour for the world but they weren’t, they didn’t say anything that was important to what I thought was important. So I kind of just ignored the NPCs for a very long time [...] so experiencing the story [...] I see, like, key points in the story *as* the story. So that would be calming the Divine Beasts and defeating Calamity Ganon.”
  - “they did a really good job of tying everything into the storyline”
- **Game or story?**
  - “when you finish the campaign, it’s over. That’s the end. [...] I was really surprised [...] it basically rolled credits [...] it was a real smack in the face for me”
  - “I felt a bit disappointed from a gamer perspective [...] from like world building and story point of view I kind of, I liked it”
  - “Thematically, I thought it was brilliant [...] But, from a *gameplay* point of view and as a gamer I was *so* offended”
  - “video games usually you’ll be sent to like a central hub um where you’ll be able to play in the world further to the story [...] I just kind of expected that to happen [...] for *this* game, gameplay-size it, it is kind of perfect [...] I really

liked playing in the world so I, I wanted to go back into that *afterwards* just to see like how I was received by the NPCs [...] I *expected* that. Um, I don't think I do want it..."

- **Free but vulnerable**

- **Big world**

- "To me that whole mountain looked like set dressing [...] it kind of looked like set dressing but I realised that with the game there's not a lot of that at all. I really only came across one boundary"
    - "in hindsight it [the tutorial] feels hand hold-y [...] I kind of have no idea what I'm doing here [...] it kind of gives you a sense of the freedom that you're about to have [...] my relationship to it in hindsight is completely different [...] that kind of freedom [...] it did hold your hand"

- **Dangerous world**

- "this world *was* dangerous [...] you're told that this is a dangerous world, and it is"

- **Make your own path**

- "I did finish Breath Of The Wild [...] it's the *easier* one [compared to OOT]"
    - "there was no hand-holding [...] Breath Of The Wild it kind of left you in the lurch and you had to put the story in for yourself [...] it never told you how to do that and you had to work it out"
    - "it was bookended um with the tutorial and the climax [...] it was nonlinear and completely optional"
    - "pushed off a cliff kind of thing (laughs), you know, metaphorically speaking [...] it really felt like, 'Now what? What, what am I supposed to do?' "

- “it felt really um organic [...] I wasn’t being presented with just a series of um enemies to kill”
- “that was when I learned that you *can* actually leave the Divine Beasts [...] I just assumed that you couldn’t [...] point of no return [...] I did that, but I did go back”
- **Designers, what are you doing?**
  - **Changing the script**
    - “it’s the first time I’ve seen that in a video game in a *very* long time”
    - “this story was a lot darker than the stories that I’ve seen of Link and Zelda um and, and they kind of took on new roles”
    - “the heroes failed”
    - “they took on these destined um kind of adventurer heroes that knew their role in the story [...] Zelda was the only one who couldn’t achieve her role”
    - “I was so surprised. And I loved it. [...] like turning the classic um, I hate to say it but Hero’s Journey, into something that follows the same structure but is completely different [...] just to like have them have *lost* the battle already was just like such a breath of fresh air [...] this is really important [...] such a big name to take such a risk in killing off characters, you haven’t even *met* the characters yet but you *know* that they’re important [...] it made me excited for like storytelling in video games [...] I was like where could this go [...] nothing was certain”
    - “they were set up initially [...] my expectations were changed before they were developed”

- “it’s an advancement [...] portraying a female character in close to human uh (laughs) complexity um rather than the typical Princess Peach being kidnapped, that kind of thing”

- **I’m scared**

- “I came really close to the end [...] I put it down, and I didn’t pick it up for days [...] if I’m really thoroughly enjoying something, I won’t want it to end”
- “reach that point of closure that I knew would be at the end, or like *hoped* would be at the end [...] the game had already set itself up to um, you know, take your expectations and subvert them straight away [...] maybe I won’t get a happy ending [...] because of that initial setup it was, it was kind of anything goes [...] it just is such a, wow anything could happen [...] in the very first few moments. [...] I *hoped* for a happy ending but I wasn’t one hundred percent convinced that I was gonna get it. [...] I knew that if it was gonna happen it was gonna happen at the end [...] made the closure more important towards the end [...] that it’s like the end won’t be as satisfying”
- “There is always that chance that the developers or the director is gonna get it wrong (laughs) you know. [...] and so there’s always that chance that there’s gonna be that writer that goes, ‘Ah you know what, I’m gonna trick them all and I’m gonna end this in a way that they never saw coming’ ”

- **Zelda’s struggles**

- “Zelda was the only one who couldn’t achieve her role [...] they [Link and Zelda] were the only two who really had to do anything beforehand. Like, Link had to get the Master Sword and um Zelda had to learn how to activate the Shrines. [...] Zelda gets along better with the other Champions than she does with Link, partly, because um they haven’t had to do anything yet. [...] Link has already had to prove himself

and has [...] she has no control over anything and that it's going to mean the end of the world"

### 10.3 Elliott

- **Familiarity and boredom**

- **Straightforward and uninvested**

- "it was a bit underwhelming so I kind of relaxed a little [...] I took a step back and it was just like I was playing a game again. There wasn't any investment in it. [...] It kind of took me out of it a little bit"
    - "take them as they come like it wasn't really any stress on those ones"
    - "when I got in there, still felt fine, 'cause it was, it's a, like a classic boss design in games it's just a giant monstrosity with one big eye and that you're obviously gotta hit the eye"
    - "went back to my old mindset and I went oh, this is the way to do it. So, it was back to basics really [...] finding the arrows again I was just back to step one I was fine [...] the four bosses that all looked relatively identical [...] the attacks Ganon was using were very very familiar from the game that it kind of just went oh, this is how you beat it [...] they've been used throughout the entire game [...] pretty straightforward [...] oh, that's how you beat it [...] sure enough, bang. [...] I knew how to beat the boss [...] I play games to be challenged on that sort of level and the challenge from the game had just been absolutely wiped away by the ease of this boss [...] I wasn't sure how you could take damage from it? [...] I didn't feel challenged [...] I'm not gonna do that again because no point"

- “the initial boss fight completely confident from prior games [...] pretty basic stuff”
- “I’ve put off the main quest for the side quests [...] I just went, you know, bang bang bang knocked three of them [Blights] off in a row”
- “you can just continue that path until you, until you know the cutscene crops up [...] me kind of zoning out of what was happening and just keep going”
- “relatively straightforward [...] you know the weak point and you know how to do it, it’s just timing [...] I didn’t really have an a-ha moment”
- Disappointment
  - “I’d grinded for a few hours to make sure I was ready for [Calamity Ganon] [...] after ten seconds in the fight it was a bit underwhelming [...] I took a step back and it was just like I was playing a game again. There wasn’t any investment in it. [...] a pretty underwhelming fight. It kind of took me out of it a little bit. [...] it kind of just took me aback and I’m like well this is gonna be a bit, a bit harder than I thought. But then it wasn’t.”
  - “that feeling of exhilaration just went away. Simply because I knew how to beat the boss and I knew that I would take absolutely minimal damage from it. [...] the challenge from the game had just been absolutely wiped away [...] it kind of felt disappointing [...] in my head I was kind of like is, is that it? [...] well I’m not gonna do that again because no point”
  - “the *grind* to actually get to the boss fight was a bit more difficult than the actual boss fight itself [...] to fight my way up Hyrule Castle.



[...] hordes of enemies and overpowered mini-bosses [...] how hard is that gonna be? It's gonna be? And um yeah, not very."

- **Now it's interesting**

- **Unknown**

- "It was just so different from anything else it's just an absolute monstrosity compared to anything else [...] it just turned into a beast and it kind of just took me aback [...] the excitement of the unknown like I didn't know how this Ganon would behave to other games"
    - "just seeing this absolute monstrosity just kind of, didn't really know how to deal with it because, it wasn't familiar in any way, shape, or form. I didn't know what to do with it. [...] you got to find that weak point before you can beat it."
    - "I got on the back foot because I was, didn't know how to beat it 'cause of its design"
    - "I went in thinking I was completely underlevelled for a final boss"
    - "I couldn't really figure out in which way I'd have to use it"
    - "you couldn't just shoot the eye [Bongo Bongo's]. It was blocked off. You had to shoot the hands *then* shoot the eye [...] you go in there and you don't really know how to do it [...] you don't know *when* and you don't know *how* and you don't know um like what their different attacks are. [...] just kind of play around [...] to figure out its attack patterns [...] it's not always clear"

- **Disadvantaged**

- "I knew I wasn't ready for it. I was a bit underlevelled [...] I felt that exhilaration simply because I felt a pretty big challenge [...] I was out

of arrows, I was out of spears I was pretty much out of weapons that I could throw at it. [...] I could figure out a new plan that was what I found really exciting [...] there's always another way of doing it. And I had to find that other way to do it."

- "weapons can break and arrows can run out [...] I felt that challenge coming on"
- "a full inventory of weapons and heaps of arrows but I just *wasted* them"
- "I was kind of just thinking, you know can I leave? [...] that moment of panic [...] that initial moment of panic that in my head kind of said you can't do this [...] you gotta have arrows otherwise you can't do it [...] there's no way to do it"
- "I need to get out of here [...] Can't fight it, well flight. And it was that initial feeling that I had to leave"
- "I didn't think that I'd be able to do that [...] these boss fights made it feel like it was a fair fight [...] it was a affair fight [...] as much of a chance that I could be beaten as it could be beaten"

▪ **No guarantee**

- "the panic still remained [...] was still the idea that there wasn't going to be other options [...] it subsided from a like overwhelming panic to just like back of my mind heart-racing panic that, even if you find another way to do this there's no guarantee it'll succeed"
- "it was a fair fight. And that kind of hm made it feel like it was a fair fight like um there was as much of a chance that I could be beaten as it could be beaten"

▪ **Figure it out**

- “there’s always another way of doing it. And I had to figure that other way to do it.”
- “I kind of just took a step back and just thought about it and went well what if I do it this way? [...] I kind of just had to take a step back and think like how am I gonna do this now? [...] I made the decision to rethink it [...] after I’d decided that there’s another way to do this that, that feeling of wanting to leave just left my head”
- “there’s still that exhilaration. Like, my heart was still racing, but there was a lot more hope in the fight”
- “you got to find that weak point before you can beat it”
- “initially I never um like waited for my turn to strike. It’d just swing all out so I’d constantly get beaten by enemies that had shields.”
- “I would never use my shield just ‘cause I didn’t see the point [...] as a kid I never really understood that [...] [now] I just know what to do.”
- “you swing they, they take, they take absolutely no damage”
- “the item you used was a defensive weapon rather than offensive. Which was really intriguing”
- “defensive fight so you can’t just go in there all guns blazing you actually have to take your time [...] if you swing you’ll just get hit”
- “I couldn’t really figure out in which way I’d have to use it”
- “I kind of always just thought oh, you know, this isn’t right [...] it was probably five minutes into the fight that I realised [...] it wasn’t working and I kind of thought well it shouldn’t take this long [...] I

just had to figure out what I was doing wrong [...] I kind of just took a step back [...] Let's try something different [...] it was just all logic, common sense that ice and fire don't mix [...] this is the way you beat it [...] back to that um that a-ha moment"

- "you couldn't just shoot the eye. It was blocked off. You had to shoot the hands *then* shoot the eye. [...] most bosses you go in there and you don't really know how to do it. You know you have to use this item but you don't know *when* and you don't know *how* and you don't know um like what their different attacks are. [...] just kind of play around [...] to figure out its attack patterns [...] it's not always clear [...] she [Queen Gohma] closed her eye a lot [...] You couldn't really see it until he [King Dodongo] started breathing in air"

- **Overconfidence**

- "it was just another Zelda game [...] like a classic boss design [...] one big eye and that you've obviously gotta hit [...] past Zelda games you, your items are invulnerable [...] it just kind of always slips your mind [...] I had, a, a full inventory of weapons and heaps of arrows but I just *wanted* them"
- "I went into the initial boss fight completely confident from prior games"
- "the first one [Guardian] I ran into was um the one in the beginning and I kinda thought, you know, I can beat it. And it *continually* beat me. And um that was quite annoying."

- **The moment of minimal knowledge**

- “the first time you stepped out into the world in Breath of the Wild [...] the big cinematic shot of what the world was and it was just striking. Honest stuck a chord and I just went aw [...] kind of just went aw. Like this is what I’m getting into and it was just an incredible feeling.”
- “Everywhere you could go, you could go, you could see straight away. [...] everything that you could see you could do”
- “this is big this is huge this is beautiful [...] the character stood there and I just stood there and watched like the screen for a solid fifteen minutes ‘cause I’m like this is incredible”
- “I sat down at the screen for maybe fifteen minutes [...] I wanted to stay in the spot for a little bit longer [...] I just kind of felt like I didn’t want to leave that place”
- “I don’t return to the starting area because there’s no point [...] if I didn’t take it in now I wouldn’t take it in later”
- “just taking in the world”
- “I was kind of done with it”
- **Engaging complexities**
  - **The want to know**
    - “lore in the game [...] the feeling that there was so much more than just point A to point B. There was a backstory there was a history to why all this was happening. [...] I always found really intriguing [...] it [finding the Memories] was introducing lore one piece at a time [...] piece together what had happened [...] wandered around finding the memories [...] I found that a lot more intriguing than actually beating the bosses”
    - “the old photo in this current Hyrule field [...] after I’d found one it was always that want to find the next one so I just keep going keep going”

- “just wandered ‘round exploring, finding all this just cool little details”
- “I wanna know the rest of it. I wanna know all the lore. (laughs) [...] I’ve put off the main quest for the side quests [...] I went around doing a bunch of side quests and probably logged another forty hours [...] I just kinda felt more like invested in the side quests and the just little interesting things about the world rather than the actual quest”
- “I didn’t really understand *why* they blamed me [...] that moment of closure that I find out why I disappeared [...] I just went through *knowing* that I was gone for a hundred years but not knowing *why*. And that, at the end, when I found out why was yeah kind of closed the game off for me. [...] playing the game was getting through and not knowing what happened. If they’d just left this cliffhanger um unresolved ending would really just, I don’t know, just annoy me. [...] that forced me to not like put it down for long, pick it up [...] forced me to continually play it ‘cause I wanted to know as soon as possible [...] forced me to keep doing side quests [...] to get a little piece of information that kind of linked the story [...] In the hopes of one would have information I wanted [...] just that little piece of information that kind of forced me to explore and find it. It was always really intriguing ‘cause it’s connected to whole world together”
- “how wanting I was to know more. Like I’d just wanted to know more and more about these bosses and where they came from and why they were like this”
- “I had the drive to find out what was going on”
- “It was always that want, like there’s *always* that want in my head to find out more. Like I *always* want to find, I always want to know.”

- **Not knowing is the worst**

- “it kind of added that mystery to the, to the game of like, what has happened? Like, what’s gone wrong?”
- “it was brought to light it was just that added layer of mystery to me. I wanted to figure out why and um when [...] it added that like a whole other layer of mystery [...] is there any evidence [...] can I find evidence that says I’m the one that caused this?”
- “finding out that [...] made me wanna find out what had happened”
- “I just went through *knowing* that I was gone for a hundred years but not knowing *why*”
- “I could unlock new um new dialogue for them that might give me a hint”
- “I know nothing about it. I just know it occurred.”
- “you know I wasn’t the villain, so there was really no need to stress. [...] as soon as I got closure I just wiped it from my memory like it didn’t, didn’t really matter anymore because I, I knew what had happened [...] It was the not knowing that kept me going.”
- “I didn’t know where it came from or what it was but I knew what it was doing [...] I didn’t know *what* was, what was wrong. [...] I finally found that this um yeah this plague sort of thing was the thing that was ruining everything”
- “find out what was wrong [...] get to the bottom of the mystery”

- **The consuming mystery**

- “the only way I’d find that out was to beating the final boss to get closure”
- “It didn’t really hit me as much as emotional [...] I’d just been waiting for it for too long [...] just that feeling of I’m done rather than, you know,

excitement. [...] it's kind of that relief that I'm, I'm finally done. [...] I can just play it relaxed rather than um playing it like completely concentrated on it. [...] the drive to find more I can just play it to explore"

- "there was really no need to stress. [...] as soon as I got closure I just wiped it from my memory [...] didn't really matter anymore"

- **Explanations**

- "There was a backstory there was a history to why all this was happening. [...] piece together what had happened and how you got to the point where you are now"
- "it shows like, a point in time when everything was starting to turn to shit. And like, how it happened"
- "you always thought that they [Guardians] were just pure evil and then seeing them for good [...] what has happened? Like, what's gone wrong?"
- "why've they gone wrong"
- "I'd just wanted to know more and more about these bosses and where they came from and why they were like this. [...] that mystery of finding out what was going wrong and then defeating it. [...] where that boss [Twinrova] came from and, and what she was. [...] you can kind of deduce a lot of its [Bongo Bongo's] lore and make, like, connect theories but nothing's like proven. [...] you can deduce that he was the man that lived in the house. And somehow he'd turned himself into this absolute monstrosity that was locked in the bottom of the well. And that was always why he became one of my favourite bosses. [...] the lore behind him. How you could actually find out [...] he used to be human. Kind of was always intriguing to me. [...] it wasn't just a, a random boss [...] it was something who had always been in this



town [...] so long ago all this, this had gone down in the town that all this action had happened [...] trying to, to hide their dark past. [...] I always found that really intriguing. [...] you can piece together”

- “it was always a bit of closure for the story [...] it’s always good when I get to him [Bongo Bongo] [...] I know it [...] knowing where he came from [...] that connection [...] it was always the one that um I connected with the most on a like I could actually research him”
- “this plague sort of thing was the thing that was running everything [...] that’s the reason why”
- “I made the discovery that this boss [Barinade] has something to do with the reason it’s acting not, it’s not just a boss that you have to kill”
- “*they* [Twinrova] are um Ganon’s second in charge. But that’s pretty much all you know about them. [...] there’s *always* that want in my head to find out more”

- **The final pieces, finally closure**

- “when I find out why was yeah kind of closed the game off for me”
- “that gave me a lot more closure [...] that feeling of closure”
- “it was kind of like a-ha moment that I found it”

- **I don’t know, so I don’t care**

- “where that boss [Twinrova] came from and, and what she was. But um, unfortunately there wasn’t that much lore in Ocarina of Time”
- “you don’t see them as people [...] they’re just another boss [...] it’s just really basic stuff”

- **Moral complexities and empathy**

- **Corrupted**

- “It was just always the basic, basic design for Ganon is human form and then his animal form [...] how I’d seen Ganon in every other game that was human. Fight the human form and then he turns into beast form”
- “So it was the iterations of Ganon through time that kind of, I related to. So it was a human, a beast form”
- “the change in time was completely different. So like, in the old photo it looks pristine condition it was perfect and in the location I was now was completely ruined. [...] how um the world had changed. [...] I could see the old photo in this current Hyrule field”
- “it shows like, a point in time when everything was starting to turn to shit”
- “introduce this world and you kind think this is how it is this is how it’s always been [...] when they introduce that idea that it wasn’t always like this [...] the Guardians as a like protection. And the only way you’d ever seen them in the game was enemies. [...] what has happened? Like, what’s gone wrong? [...] them working with the guardians and trying to get them to work properly. And that was one of the first times yeah I saw it as something for good.”
- “As to why they were no longer good and why or how they’d been corrupted all, all that kind of stuff. [...] they’ve done things wrong but they haven’t done things wrong willingly. They, you know, they’ve just been corrupted they, they were good at one stage.”
- “the world was never like it was or the world always hadn’t been this way”
- “And somehow he’d [Bongo Bongo] turned himself into this absolute monstrosity that was locked in the bottom of the well. [...] what he was and how he used to be human [...] it was someone who had always been in this

town and someone [...] transformed himself into this absolute beast that could like transform shape, turn invisible, stuff like that [...] to hide their dark past”

- “I was defeating just a man who was corrupted. And like almost felt like putting something out of their misery [...] for all we know just wanted to be human again”

- **Not a hero**

- “you talk to NPCs and they start blaming you for what’s happened. And that kind of takes you out of the shoes of the hero and you’re no longer the hero you’re the, you’re the problem.”
- “NPCs that blame your disappearance [...] that always intrigued me [...] that idea that you’re not the hero that you think you are [...] you had to do all these things to make up for the things you did wrong [...] ‘Cause like I honestly would have found that pretty cool. Like, if that existed that there was no reason for you to disappear, without the greater good you just disappear. I find that really intriguing that your character isn’t as heroic as they think they are. That you just run away from the issue. [...] you were the one that was responsible [...] kind of uh hits you deep that yeah you’re not the hero you think you are you’re, you’re just another person.”
- “I was sort of excited by the idea that um it could be Link’s fault. [...] I just found it really fun that you could ultimately be the villain in the entire story without knowing it. I thought it’d be a pretty cool mechanic”
- “maybe it was my fault [...] I didn’t know the fully story”
- “I kind of always found it pretty intriguing that maybe I was the villain [...] I kind of found it a little bit, it’s a *strong* word and probably doesn’t describe

it but it was a bit heartbreaking that the, the character that I'd, that I'd grown up with through different iterations of his life was essentially the villain the whole time. [...] Was in every past game, was I actually the villain?"

- **Unfair blame**

- "I wanted to figure out why and um when they started blaming me for the, or blaming the character (laughs) sorry, for um what had gone wrong it added that like a whole other layer of mystery"
- "I didn't really understand *why* they blamed me, but... I mean I *did* understand but I think they were overreacting."
- "I think they were overreacting. [...] You know why you disappeared and Link knows why he disappeared now but the NPCs don't and they'll never understand it. [...] I felt it was unjust but I guess putting myself, putting myself in their shoes [...] it's kinda fair I guess [...] I knew that it was unjust [...] Like they, they shouldn't blame me. But I guess they probably should."

- **Burden of empathy**

- "Like I always just thought they're evil you gotta you gotta, you gotta kill 'em [Guardians] [...] But, um looking back if there was some kind of way that I could convert them rather than actually just having to destroy them I probably would have done that."
- "And like almost felt like putting something out of their misery in a way that you would just eliminate the man who really for all we know just wanted to be human again and we just decided to kill him. [...] I never really wanted to. I always just wanted to, if there was a way I would just change him back, but there wasn't. [...] I never feel good about beating him. [...] Still don't. Hate it. 'Cause I *hate* the Temple

to *get* there. And then when I get there, I remember all the lore about him, how he yeah he, he is just a person. [...] only boss that I actually care about kind of thing.”

- **Untrustworthy and hateable**

- **Hate**

- “I would never do myself. I would always have to get my brother to do it for me ‘cause I’d refuse to go in there. It was just too scary. [...] it’s one of the things I avoid doing until I absolutely have to [...] I don’t do it. I hate it.”
    - “made me think oh, nah I don’t like this place. [...] I’d always get my brother to do it for me.”
    - “I still hate going to the bottom of the [Kakariko] well [...] I just didn’t like it. Still don’t like it.”
    - “a few of them that always just hit me and I fuckin’ hated it. [...] Yeah, as a kid, hated it. [...] As an early teenager, hated it. [...] I still don’t love it”
    - “it just triggered me and I hate it. [...] A little bit of hate”
    - “I still don’t like it”

- **Untrustworthy**

- “it’s such a fuckin’ troll place [...] just hidden traps everywhere that you, you can’t see [...] I felt like the developers of the game were just having a laugh. Just ‘cause it just didn’t feel fair. [...] such a time sink [...] if I’m just playing for the fun of it I won’t bother [...] it’s just annoying. As all hell. [...] Very time consuming. Resource consuming.”
    - “if I fall down even one trap it just triggers me and I hate it [...] I always thought it was a trap”
    - “it [Shadow Temple Boat] was just gonna be a trap or it’d sink [...] it was going to be, like, *another* challenge to get through”

- “It [Shadow Temple boat] just didn’t look right. [...] just looked pure evil [...] the boat’s evil. They’ll be bad things on it.”

- **Confusing**

- “just so creepy [...] the art [...] heavy and dark for the kind of game it was [...] just stood out [...] kind of just stood out as, I didn’t really felt like it belonged in the game. [...] just dark. It just, I didn’t think it belonged. [...] the developers of the game were just having a laugh.”
- “so unnecessarily dark for the game. [...] It just felt so out of place.”
- “It just didn’t look right”
- “the bird [on the boat] just looked mismatched [...] out of place for the room”
- “Just through the soundtrack. The visuals aren’t that creepy [...] it’s just the idea that you’re being watched [...] there’s enemies but there’s nothing that feels like a trap or any of that”
- “it didn’t feel like it belonged [...] a bit strange”
- **Scary**
  - “it was just too scary”
  - “just so creepy [...] blood and torture devices and hidden traps”
  - “They just felt creepy”
  - “creeps me out [...] almost that feeling that you’re being watched [...] but there’s no clear danger in front of you”

- **Bite the bullet**

- “I just get it over with. [...] ‘cause if I put it down I won’t pick it up for ages ‘cause I don’t want to do it. [...] So I just push myself through it”

- “I know I have to do it so I just do it. [...] just get it out of the road [...] I just do it. [...] I don’t like actively avoid it or do side quests or any of that. I just, do it.”
- “I just bit the bullet and did it.”
- “I knew exactly what was going to happen and then it went ahead and happened. [...] I was a bit angry but I dealt with it.”
- **Acceptance**
  - “Primarily it [playing BOTW] was TV but if I couldn’t, I didn’t”
  - “you can’t get attached to weapons [in BOTW] because the sword you’re using it will break eventually. It’s not going to be forever.”
  - “I kind of always expected it. [...] it’s the reaction I expected [...] I can’t change it [...] in the hopes of one would have information I wanted”
  - “it started falling I just kinda, you know I was a big angry but I dealt with it [...] I think at the time I was a bit frustrated that I knew it was going to happen but it still happened.”
  - “But when it’s not possible, it’s not possible. [...] I don’t really stress too much about that.”

## 10.4 Jean

- **Under the surface**
  - **More game**
    - “default options give you this one outlook or this one persona [...] dig down a little deeper [...] the plethora of different kind of styles or ideas [...] it only takes the press of a button to, to access that [...] it’s all at, at your fingertips

[...] you are, you know, this character because now you have a choice or an agency over this character [...] your character fundamentally changes [...] go from wearing tracksuits to wearing um, you know, uh traditional um uh martial art outfits. [...] doesn't look capable because they're just wearing an Adidas tracksuit and then if you transition to the martial arts uniform then there's a whole convention a whole scheme of things [...] they were a washed out martial artist so now they uh they can only afford tracksuits [...] the alternate skin is, like, in their prime. [...] playing it and exploring the game"

- "access those extra um accessories as well as skins [...] add to the comical role [...] going from the washed up uh character to now being proficient [...] they only get the tracksuit and I picked the character and I get the uh the martial arts uniform"
- "you could access a completely different side of, of a character [...] Link in his normal state, I guess, and adding on those extra bits"
- "you walk through the mirror and then bad prince walks out the other side [...] reunited with your Shadow again [...] the Shadow is your friend the whole time [...] is helping you [...] that's yourself from the future [...] you literally have to use your Shadow abilities, you know, your evil abilities to kind of complete the game [...] You're half good and half evil."
- "just playing around with those mechanics and creating surprising and fun environments [...] the surprise definitely comes [...] you're not really sure if it is going to end up the way you want it to end up but you're gonna give it a go anyway. [...] slamming the notes and you know exactly what you're doing [...] you can be an *extremely* good uh musician [...] creating rather than



rehearsing [...] You're gonna make a *great* cake. maybe even a *perfect* cake.

Uh but it's not a *playful* cake. That's not a playful cake. That's just a cake!

[...] I don't know what's gonna happen now. [...] Maybe it'll turn out like a

rainbow cake. Or maybe it'll end up like a really, just a shitty sub-par cake.

But tat's more of a playful cake in *my* mind than following a recipe."

- "it was surprising [...] that was an interesting outcome. An unexpected outcome"
- "I kind of was surprised by some of their actions but knew the logic behind their actions. Being like, 'Oh okay. No wonder. Of *course* they were gonna be like that.' "
- "get to the last boss in ten seconds [...] I guess the Breath Of The Wild videos that I've watched are examples of mechanics going *ridiculously* weird um but not, but not, like, glitches or bugs. It's just like, oh this is mechanics that they have *given* us. This is the *toolset* that they've given us. Um and this is how we are using and abusing it"
- "they'll be like, 'Oh wow that's an amazing outcome for this X Y and Z.' "
- "just watching this uh tiny tiny speck in the distance fire its laser at, at, at the avatar, Link, and then being able to reflect it back and then there's, like, blow up and then there's this tiny little miniscule, like, puff of smoke."
- "it flew across the map and then into, I think it's, (mumbles) a boss's lair essentially avoiding all the temples that he needed to get to in the first place and um which I thought was just amazing [...] I didn't know the level of which hit could get to. [...] watching it do to this extant *was* surprising. Um was kinda crazy. [...] it didn't show the level of ridiculousness that these

people had found in their own version of the game. [...] *their* concept of what the possible endpoint is.”

- “you give anyone any game and leave them enough time with that game and then they’ll create crazy crazy things. [...] playing around and experimenting [...] make *ridiculously* high-end powerful characters that the designers had *no* intention of ever getting to or *allowing* [...] they’ve been found through playing or being playful [...] taken out in one stroke [...] stack a certain amount of spells or potions or having the exact right time [...] everything lined up [...] it’s almost like witchcraft [...] literally game-breaking characters”
- “want the players to work within [...] find loops outside of those parameters [...] the reason why they got to six seconds was because they *literally* broke the convention of the game [...] breaking conventions that you’re *not* supposed to [...] that’s why we have *play* tests [...] test the parameters of play [...] *play* testers are there to see whether we can actually have fun [...] people are going too far into, getting into a game mechanic [...] game designers expecting you to play in a certain way [...] getting very in-depth um they are breaking down every uh almost the code of that game, that element of the game to see how they can improve the efficiency of their runs. [...] they take the element the recipe list [...] do this in the fastest way possible [...] *playing* around [...] playfully break the game”
- “I’m not interested in watching a guy do it twenty-six thousand time, but I’m interested in him doing it ten times and the, like, tension building and then boom he gets it [...] I’m far more interested in the *story* of, like, the history and the story of the speedrunning [...] they probably wouldn’t find very

much very often [...] the stars totally aligned and someone accidentally found this thing. Or they were just fucking around and found it.”

- **Effortful**

- “you had to work to *get* that version [...] it would always come with comments [...] how did you get that costume?”
- “default options give you this one outlook or this one persona [...] it only takes the press of a button [...] it takes a little while before you *get* that aspect [...] It’s all at, at your fingertips [...] it showed that you had knowledge of the game [...] you had some prowess”
- “I’m in a way showing them that I already know how to use this character and look I’ve already got the special costume”

- **Playful**

- “playing it and exploring the game”
- “just playing around with those mechanics and creating surprising and fun environments”
- “I think the surprise definitely [...] you’re not really sure if it is going to end up the way you want it to end up but you’re gonna give it a go anyway.”
- “slamming the notes and you know exactly what you’re doing [...] you’re a very good musician but if you’re *playful* with your music then you can be an *extremely* good uh musician”
- “creating rather than rehearsing or um rehashing”
- “You’re gonna make a *great* cake. Maybe even a *perfect* cake. Uh but it’s not a *playful* cake. That’s not a playful cake. That’s just a cake!”

- “ ‘I don’t know what’s gonna happen now.’ [...] Maybe it’ll turn out like a rainbow cake. Or maybe it’ll end up like a really, just a shitty sub-par cake. But that’s more of a playful cake in *my* mind than following a recipe.”
- “it was surprising [...] ‘Oh, wow, that was an interesting outcome. An unexpected outcome.’ ”
- “that’s why we have play testers [...] test the parameters of play [...] *play* testers are there to see whether we can actually have fun”
- “*playing* around [...] playfully break the game”
- “they probably wouldn’t find very much very often”
- “the stars totally aligned and someone accidentally found this thing. Or they were just fucking around and found it.”

○ **Agency**

- “you are, you know, this character because now you have a choice or an agency over this character”
- “they only get the tracksuit and I pick the character and I get the uh the martial arts uniform”
- “get to the last boss in ten seconds”
- “just watching this uh tiny tiny speck in the distance fire its laser at, at, at the avatar, Link, and then being able to reflect it back and then there’s, like, blow up and then there’s this tiny little miniscule, like, puff of smoke.”
- “flew across the map and then into, I think it’s, (mumbles) a boss’s lair essentially avoiding all the temples that he needed to get to in the first place and um which I thought was just amazing.”
- “bosses [...] taken out in one stroke”

- “stack a certain amount of spells or potions or having the exact right time [...] everything lined up”
- “the reason why they got to six seconds was because they *literally* broke the convention of the game [...] breaking conventions that you’re *not* supposed to drive into a wall and then the wall suddenly spins you up and gives you a speed boost”
- “getting very in-depth um they are breaking down every uh almost the code of that game, that element of the game to see how they can improve the efficiency of their runs.”
- “Because speedrunners what they do is they take the elements the recipe lists, so you say, ‘Okay so I need to bake this cake and I need to do this in the fastest way possible.’ ”

- **Kept shallow**

- “a really weird jump, you’re not sure what happened between the two [Prince of Persia] games [...] I got really annoyed at the skip [...] the second prince was so different from the first one and that we hadn’t had really any kind of um fill-in about what happened between the games. It was very very jarring”
- “I feel really tricked [...] I felt tricked. [...] slightly jarring [...] I felt tricked a little bit. I felt there wasn’t enough um information at hand to make some informed decision. [...] I felt as if I had *slightly* been undersold or differently sold on a narrative that I was gonna get [...] Um so clearly it *wasn’t* fine totally.”
- “the logic did seem a little bit moon-logic-y [...] it’s the ramifications of the game system [...] we can’t really tell when a character’s lying [...] I did feel slightly um gypped [...] they were lying to me... and I’m not sure how I was supposed to know that.”

- **Room to play**

- “Neverwinter Nights and that roleplaying game. [...] you could access a completely different side of, of a character [...] more options [...] the better [...] that’s all I cared out. Options. [...] dwarf druid who also multi-classed in rogue and wizard and fighter, which is, like, the *worst* thing you can do, um but all I wanted was the, the *range* of, like, abilities”
- “I was like, ‘Alright (sigh) gonna try and persuade her.’ And then fucking hell, she *turned!* [...] And I was like, ‘Holy shit, that was amazing.’ [...] *then* I felt attached! I felt attached *then*. Because the game had worked *with* me [...] I had decided [...] you’re gonna go down this path that often isn’t gone down or you’re gonna have the skillset to do this thing [...] I give it something and then it gives me something”
- “when the game works with *you* it’s um there’s moments of surprise and wonder [...] give and take [...] it said I could give it a go, but it would never tell me whether I would actually do it [...] in Neverwinter Nights I *didn’t* know [...] I’m gonna see if I can give this a go [...] that element of surprise [...] give *and* take [...] the game’s working with you [...] it *gives* you something not because it has to but because it, it’s *possible* [...] Neverwinter Nights is like, ‘Maybe. Maybe. Maybe. Maybe.’ [...] They would give you a go. You give a roll of the dice and see what happens. [...] Neverwinter Nights is like, ‘I don’t know. Let’s give it a, let’s see what happens.’ ”
- “I was surprised at some reactions [...] ‘I thought I did really good then but no, clearly didn’t.’ [...] that element of surprise is integral to *me* [...] unison between or cooperation between the game and the player [...] it’s like, ‘Here are the mechanics. We don’t know what you can do with it, but figure it out. Like, maybe? Let’s see what happens.’ [...] playful environments”

- “the whole thing with playfulness is you’re not really sure if it is going to end up the way you want it to end up [...] give it a go anyway”
- “I’d done all the quote unquote ‘right choices’ that there was still a bad outcome [...] working together um to create that story [...] in my mind but it felt fun [...] unexpected narratives are good”
- “in the second quest I was happy with my choice [...] it doesn’t matter what came out of it [...] I’m just respecting this woman’s wishes and that’s really it”
- “I was pretty confident about my choices in that. I was, I felt good about whatever choice I made [...] I’m pretty sure they made one ending [...] I told him the ending, and he said, ‘Oh, I got such a different one!’ [...] I was comfortable with all the choices I’d made”
- “I could understand the logic behind it [...] I kind of was surprised by some of their actions but knew the logic behind their actions. Being like, ‘Oh okay. No wonder. Of *course* they were gonna be like that. But um I didn’t think, yeah.’ ”
- “this is mechanics that they have *given* us. This is the *toolset* that they’ve given us. Um and this is how we are using and abusing it.”
- **You matter**
  - “the game had worked *with* me and not just I had worked with *it*. I had decided to do things and it said, ‘Yeah, like, that’s, you’re gonna go down this path that often isn’t gone down or you’re gonna have the skillset to do this thing, um yeah that’s awesome let me, let me give you something in return. [...] it has to give back. It gives, I give it something and then it gives me something [...] it’s saying that you *matter* [...] That you *matter* and that your choices have mattered.”

- “Breath Of The Wild is a single player experience, that then you share those, those moments”

- **The game I want, not the game I’m given**

- “he doesn’t ever win the Tekken tournament in, in the *canon*, in the, in the lore [...] him constantly never reaching his goal because he’s not one of the major characters [...] who clearly as a character had a motive that was *never* going to be accomplished unless you the player kind of *forced* that within your version of the lore. Within your version of the canon.”
- “their three characters and they care about those three characters and they’re really, the whole story based around those three characters [...] they’re gonna care about them [...] Everyone else is kind of like a sideline.
- “what you’re gonna do is for naught [...] it’s about forcing that narrative upon the game for a, for a *brief* period of time because you know it’s not really gonna stay the way it is [...] like that [Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead] isn’t part of Hamlet’s world anymore. Um but it’s a nice thing to, to force upon that narrative. [...] it’s not quote unquote ‘canon’. [...] it’s a reality that is transient [...] it’s transient [...] you can play through the story mode once and then that’s it [...] the win does not last [...] I’m working *with* the character to force *his* narrative or *their* narrative or *her* narrative onto this um game world which I *know* isn’t going to carry over [...] helping another person aspire to their goals [...] I’m working with *them* or helping them or I’m guiding them”
- “isn’t the canon storyline winner [...] You’re helping them defeat the narrative [...] the narrative designers wants you to do because you’re breaking that system”



- “working with another character to kind of give the middle finger to the designers  
[...] I want *this* character to win! [...] ‘I don’t want, I don’t want to be Geralt. I wanna  
be me for a, for now and take over [...] I’m making this choice’ ”
- **Personalised path**
  - “speedrunners *themselves* are fairly unplayful creatures [...] speedrunners  
what they do is they take the element the recipe lists [...] do this in the  
fastest way possible [...] ‘Hey if you actually chuck the egg in before the flour  
the cake actually rises *faster*’ [...] that element is then transferred into the  
speedrunners [...] the people who playfully break the game are then  
implemented into a more, a far more structured rigorous ruleset [...] *really*  
rigorously, like, *boxed* in um but to *get* to that point you need to have  
people playing around with the game, like, having fun. Testing the  
boundaries.”
  - “to *do* it takes an extraordinary, like, set of timing um, you know,  
*milliseconds* uh to get it right and this uh and in this doco almost it shows  
this one guy doing it over and over and over again and he needed to do it  
three times in a row and he did it twenty-six thousand times. Twenty-six  
thousand times!”
- **Relaxing and effortless**
  - **One path**
    - “you’re enacting that [...] you’re working with the narrative designer. You’re  
working hand-in-hand [...] you’re enacting that story. You *are* Link”
    - “you’re definitely exploring the story that the narrative designer wants you  
to explore. Um you’re definitely following the route that the designers want  
you to follow”

- “I definitely felt *validated* for doing the things that I was doing [...] The game was saying, ‘You’re doing a good job.’ or you get rewarded”
- “you’re just ticking the boxes [...] this is the story you want me to complete, I’m completing that story”
- “there would be greyed out or blacked out areas based on your abilities [...] it *clearly* showed me what I *couldn’t* do [...] I knew the things that I *could* pick would always go through [...] with the Pillars Of Eternity thing it’s like, ‘No. No. Yes. No.’ [...] I was working with the game. The game wasn’t working with me.”
- “I could tick the boxes and that was it”
- “felt more ticking a box [...] getting that done rather than exploring”
- **Comfortable expectations**
  - “he’s [Link] a goodie [...] cookie-cutter [...] tick the boxes and away he goes [...] Link wasn’t ever gonna, like, talk back to anyone or wasn’t gonna, like, uh break the rules. He was just, he was just a good guy. [...] that’s lovely but... Yeah why don’t you be a badass”
  - “he’s a complete hero [...] kind of bore me slightly [...] kind of turns me off Link [...] he is safe and that there is no danger anymore [...] in my mind there’s no danger [...] I just don’t see Link fundamentally failing as a character anymore [...] he can’t do anything wrong [...] he’s gonna be *fine* [...] ‘I, I know he’s gonna be fine’ [...] the classic narrative [...] there’s no danger anymore [...] he is such a *staple* [...] stock role [...] it’s *enjoyable*. Make no mistake, it’s enjoyable [...] you know exactly what [...] the enjoyment comes from the repetitive comfort [...] there’s no danger – there’s no danger anymore [...] I know what’s gonna happen [...] he’s here forever [...] essential

Link within it [...] you know exactly who they are and, and where they are knowing almost what abilities they can do and what items they'll have"

- "I was like, 'Oh yeah, they're betraying du-duu-du-du-du.' [...] I always thought that, like, at the very end of the game even though I'd click on it to be like, 'Hey, come back to the good side,' there was no chance of you actually ever persuading them. Like, I thought that was just, like, a locked in thing [...] I was like, 'Alright (sigh) gonna try and persuade her' "
- "And you can kinda go um, 'Oh she wants, she wants to eventually, she wants to marry him.' [...] and I was like, 'Great. Happy endings. This is gonna be great for everyone.' [...] 'Cause I was like, 'Oh but that's not how the story goes. Like, (laughs) they're really happy, you know, now but' "

- **Against the grain**

- "I really liked, like, I mean, you know, any um uh alternative version of a character [...] I would always pick the alternate costume [...] more niche or interesting or nuanced comparatively to, like, the mainstream [...] you're just run of the mill [...] I would *always* pick the alternate because it was the *special* version or potentially you had to work to *get* that version"
- "you were normal and then sudden you weren't and that was the cool part, that was, like, that was *very* exciting. Not being normal [...] Being special [...] playing Link in his normal state, I guess, and adding on those extra bits"
- "I love the Jungian Shadow [...] 'Now *that's* a badass.' [...] Dark Link was just (laughs) this is going to sound so bad, edgy. And yeah edgy and cool and uh, uh and certainly had an element of um mystery [...] just alternative *aesthetic* [...] he is not restrained by the morals of normal Link [...] that allure [...] being unrestrained by the kind of morality or the ethics of the norm [...] the converse hero uh the anti-hero [...] we

had only really ever been shown heroes and we were only ever being told to be heroes”

- “the unconventional [...] the unrestricted”
- “Whereas Dark Link *wasn't*. He was like um he was the very opposite”
- “That’s [being good] is lovely but... Yeah why don’t you be a badass or an edgelord, you know?”
- “I liked Sheik. [...] firstly I like the fact that it’s a female. Um uh, like, great. I hadn’t seen that within the Link universe before. [...] the Zelda franchise has and is evolving [...] those character tropes are changing [...] interested to see those characters develop. Um piques my interest.”
- “an awesome and bold move to take that franchise in an extremely rotoscope-y cartoon world [Wind Waker]”

- **Role model**

- **Inner strength**
  - “all-rounder [...] he can do *everything* [...] there’s nothing he *can’t* do [...] you have all the tools in your tool box that you will *ever* need and Link *really* encapsulates that”
  - “it was a character that didn’t need to rely on their strength [...] what’s inside that counts [...] you’re inner strength would overcome the obstacle [...] that was a way of showing me that all I needed was the *tools* to complete a task. Because if I had the right *tools* [...] the inner determination or the inner strength [...] I could complete tasks”
  - “Link is definitely the, he’s definitely a kid [...] the *cunning* hero rather than the *strong* hero or the intelligent hero rather than the strong hero”
  - “inner strength [...] intelligence [...] determination [...] inner strength I guess”

- “cunning that beats brawn [...] underdogs that beat, you know, clear winners [...] men of *skill*”
- “brains beat brawn [...] brains beat *any* obstacle [...] it *was* Link versing these *really* intense monsters [...] it was empowering to see the little guy win”

○ **Aspirational**

- “Link was really really cool for me [...] Link was *great* [...] that classic elven hero trope”
- “relatable because he was young [...] a version that I could be”
- “he’s a comforting image he’s a comforting ideal or a concept [...] we could *all* be Link. We could all um uh aspire to be that all-rounder. Like, he can do *everything*. [...] there’s nothing he *can’t* do [...] there’s something really alluring [...] that idea of being, like, you have all the tools in your toolbox that you will *ever* need and Link *really* encapsulates that”
- “a complete hero [...] solidness is familiar and reliable and um uh comforting and safe. It’s super safe um because again you know what you’re gonna get [...] familiar with the concepts of Link”
- “I’m not a bulky person uh and I suppose up into that point the kind of, like, skinny hero was often not represented [...] *really* good marketing [...] looking at the kind of player base [...] if I had the right *tools* I, I would have the inner determination or the inner strength and it wasn’t about my physical prowess anymore um I could complete tasks um and I, and I could be the hero”
- “Link is definitely the, he’s definitely a kid [...] really empowering [...] it’s always cunning that beats brawn [...] underdogs that beat, you know, clear winners [...] men of *skill* [...] I really *love* that [...] watching *Link* and seeing

Link [...] empowering [...] even though I didn't get to play him that often I still really loved the concept of him. I still really liked the idea of him as a kid. Yeah. Really a lot actually, now that I come to think of it."

- "makes you feel empowered because you're like, 'Oh I can beat that' "
- "I really wanna be Link [...] when I was a very little kid"

## 10.5 Kelly

- **Wrong prescription, partial effect**

- **Pre-bed game**

- **Drawn to the simple**

- "a few moments that really caught me [...] weird side things"
      - "I spent an inordinate [...] just walking through that cute little wood and finding them, *that* really stuck out at me"
      - "I keep getting distracted"
      - "I wondered, 'What's that way?' (laughs) [...] I just went, 'I wonder what's *that* way?' [...] wander off [...] I kind of just tend to wander around to places I haven't been [...] I was like, 'Oh hey, this looks interesting.' "
      - "I haven't gone to the place where the quest icon is telling me to go to"
      - "it tells me to go here and I go, 'Alright, I'll get there.' (laughs) [...] I get stuck doing the side quests [...] I'm fifty meters from where the next quest point is but I'm like, 'Ah I'll finish this one first.' "
      - "it did take a very long time. Uh yeah and then you just go back. I don't even think she *gave* me anything! [...] it's kinda fun. Just, the

little side things. [...] I think that's why I don't get so far. [...] I'll probably *stop* playing the game *before* I finish the main storyline. [...] I tend to just get stuck doing other stuff or making things or whatever [...] worry that, oh if I don't do this wide quest *now* I'll never do it"

- "there's all these little, little things that happen around the edges and you're, like, well sometimes it's nice to just do the little things and you, like, tick them off and then you keep moving slowly on to the big things. Tick some more little things off. [...] people work on a small task amongst their big task to get that sense of satisfaction? [...] a sense of satisfaction [...] 'Aw yeah, I did something!' "
- "Not that I would try that [go straight to final boss]. [...] it kind of defeats the purpose [...] the whole idea is [...] go and explore stuff [...] The purpose is not just to go... I don't sit down and look at the game and go, 'Alright, I'm gonna go and kill Ganon.' [...] I sit down and go, 'I'm gonna go, like, play around in this world for a while. [...] it feels like with that sort of game it's more fun to just, to go, to, to *enjoy the journey* [...] it's not just about getting to the end and destroying him"
- "some of the other side stuff, like, when you talk to people in the world I'd like to see more of, more, more things that are not particularly relevant to the main story. Like the sheep. Like, that was kinda nice [...] a real world human problem. I think I'd like more of those [...] real world problems"

- “I don’t think that, I didn’t get the impression that they knew who I was [...] I liked the ones who are just like, you know, and in shops when you go in and they’re just like, ‘Hey, welcome to my shop. Do you wanna buy something?’ I like *that* sort of stuff where it’s not, where it’s, you can be more of a person and less of, like, this idealised figure [...] it makes the world feel more real [...] everyone in the world’s not gonna know who you are [...] more realistic”
- “if you’re just a regular person you, there’s no expectation [...] they’re like, ‘Hey, can you help me?’ or ‘Hey, you wanna buy something?’ [...] it’s more like an expectation that you have to go and do this”
- “It’s like, ‘Yeah, okay, well we’ll just go by that, and I should get that Shrine and oh look there’s another Tower. Oh, that Tower’s not in my zone. Okay I’ll come back.’ Like, that’s what I mean by ‘bumbling’, like, I don’t just go in a straight line.”
- “I liked the sheep one. [...] That’s probably the most memorable one.”
- “when they don’t recognise you as Link you get to be your own character”
- “It’s kind of just fun to throw stuff in and see what comes out”
- “I don’t need to go on Google to work out how to make the perfect way to make all of my food so that, like, you know, I get the ultimate recipes [...] That’s kind of just interesting to go and find things and throw them together and see what comes out. [...] the game doesn’t punish you for doing that. Which is really nice [...] You always get



*something*. You always get something edible. [...] it's nice that it doesn't punish you for, for um, for trying stuff."

- "it's something that I want to do [...] stuff you can just do at your leisure that's not really connected with the Link character [...] Link as a character is not gonna spend a lot of time, like, cooking steak. Like, he's a *soldier*. [...] he's not gonna go and catch his own horses every time he finds a stable and a paddock of horses. [...] he's just gonna ride whatever horse the palace guard issued him [...] not the things I think Link would do"
- "a sense of achievement [...] ticking off a list [...] I get diverted, distracted by them too a bit"
- "Okay, there's a lot of empty squares here. Good. There's the ones I've ticked off"

▪ **A peaceful play**

- "I don't find it all that stressful to play [...] I find it kind of relaxing [...] quite calming [...] I find the experience of just being in the world sometimes kind of nice [...] in a relaxing way [...] kind of peaceful"
- "I never really found that mechanic particularly different"
- "a good kind of escapism in some ways, like, you know, you can just be off somewhere doing something that's not *you*"
- "it's kind of nice that it's an escape and it's kind of nice that it isn't, like, you know, it's a world in strife in some ways but for a world in strife it's not that bad [...] nice peaceful escapism"

- “an excellent, like, pre-bed game [...] I played it a lot just, like, sitting in bed for, like, an hour or half an hour or whatever before I go to sleep”
  - “I don’t, sit down and just play through it in large blocks of time [...] I tend to play it for short blocks of time [...] probably not conducive to, like, like, conducive to retaining the story [...] I might play for only an hour a couple of times a week or something like that”
- **Not convinced**
    - **A peaceful place**
      - “which is kind of silly ‘cause you don’t neces- I mean, probably that lady’ll be okay without killing the things on the beach so her sheep alright”
      - “it’s a world in strife in some ways but for a world in strife it’s not that bad”
      - “overall it’s, like, you know, in terms of game worlds it’s a pretty safe world [...] nothing really attacks the villages [...] it’s kind of nice peaceful escapism sometimes [...] an excellent, like, pre-bed game”
      - “you don’t ever actively see the NPCs fighting the monsters”
      - “obviously it’s a fairly safe world!”
      - “Nobody seems too in distress”
      - “there was nothing, like, attacking the *village*”
      - “even the travellers on the roads [...] they don’t ever say, ‘Ooh, watch out! It’s been really dangerous today.’ ”

- “They [monsters] feel, like, *established* [...] they were residents as well [...] aggressively barbarian [...] a wild animal threat [...] not really animals [...] they could be considered the same as that”
- **Contrary to popular belief**
  - “He seems quite contained! [...] he’s that guy over there. Like, what have they been *doing* for the last two hundred years?”
  - “But I haven’t got an overwhelming vibe that all the monsters in the world are because of Ganon”
  - “He’s effectively prisoned! Imprisoned! [...] I also got the impression that he’s been *about to* break out for the last hundred years”
  - “I can’t remember all that much they told me about him [...] I don’t remember much about why he is even attacking them and being a problem [...] I *couldn’t* tell you. So clearly it didn’t make a big impression on me.”
  - “it’s not like you see his influence *grow* [...] you can’t see anything that indicate, that supports, there’s no visual evidence to support what they’re saying”
- **We’re not seeing eye-to-eye**
  - **Specific narrow vision**
    - “Rescuing a princess”

- “It always refers back to her [Zelda] and back to Ganon and everything [...] every step of the quest they’re always talking about them. So that’s kind of the theme”
- “what I should be working on. Kind of being that person [...] the person who’s made the game thinks I, like, my end goal should be”
- “Which is fine! It’s *good* to have an end goal [...] obviously that’s important for the storytelling purposes and obviously for the game progression purposes”
- “they’re reinforcing a message”
- “this feels a little contrived [...] I feel it’s a little contrived [...] the logical part of me goes, ‘Yeah, but it’s still kind of, like, it’s important for the purposes of them to do that.’ ”
- “it doesn’t really annoy me [...] it does sometimes detract a little bit [...] I don’t think it’s a significant negative against it”
- “the main characters obviously need to reinforce that”
- “obviously those are very, know you, it’s important that they push you forward on the storyline [...] obvious, you know, the world is was in disorder because of these big problems and if the world was in order there wouldn’t be monsters attacking her sheep”
- “Link is a preestablished character. I can’t put my, project what I would like onto him. [...] ‘But that’s not my character!’ [...] a preestablished entity that has a direction and has a background and has motivations that are created by somebody else”

- “if you have your *own* character who is *not* Link, who is, like somebody you’ve made up [...] ‘Well, what *would* my character do here?’”
- “Whereas with *Link* it’s like, ‘Well, he’s already got a set of motivations.’ So you kind of, I think really they don’t *give* you those sorts of choices ‘cause they just go the way that Link would go.”
- “Breath of the Wild doesn’t *have* those moments [...] where you don’t have to make a decision that is meaningful to the ongoing existence to the world”
- “Link came pre-packaged with this idea [...] he comes pre-packaged with this idea of he, you know, he has to save Zelda, has to fight Ganon, like, has to be the hero for the world sort of thing [...] And let’s be fair, that’s probably the path I *would* choose. [...] I would probably pick to rescue her, but I think I’d be more invested if I got to make that choice”
- “I’m *looking* for the branches that are not there”
- “you probably can’t ‘cause’ I’d imagine if you try to go to the fourth one first you’re gonna just die”
- “Within, like, the world they have created”
- “picking a side, picking a factions [...] each of those will have their own repercussions that have long, long acting effects on the world”
- “It doesn’t have *any* opportunities”
- “a micro kind [...] but not on the higher level stuff”

- “other games I’ve played where you can’t go five feet without bumping into a side quest [...] dungeons and stuff everywhere. Whereas this doesn’t feel as much like that”
- “the developer’s focus is obviously to get the story across [...] that’s what they’ve invested their time in doing I suppose rather than creating more little things happening on the side”

▪ **Mismatched**

- “It in no way reflects *my* experience with the game”
- “Maybe that’s why I end up just bumbling around more in the sidelines [...] I don’t have a *personal* investment because it’s not my personal character in seeing it through so I’ll just enjoy the world as I go”
- “my personal preference is games where I get to have more agency [...] for *me* that detracts a little bit”

▪ **Dragged back**

- “ ‘Oh yeah, you know, you’re the hero —’ you know, and even when you, like, interact with people some, like, like, just random people sometimes they, like, talk about, oh yeah, like, they mention you as being, like, the, the great, like, the saviour [...] they mention you as this really important person [...] little repetitive ties so it’s like, ‘Oh okay, that’s what I should be working on. Kind of being that person.’ [...] What the person who’s made the game thinks I, like, my end goal should be [...] but it’s an open-world game so I don’t actually have to do that. I can just do whatever I want in the meantime”

- “And maybe one day I will get to that goal and I feel like I probably should but um we’ll see”
  - “they’re reinforcing a message”
  - “this feels a little contrived [...] this is a little, little, a little pushy [...] I think maybe I feel like they should just *back off* a bit and let me do my own thing”
  - “it’s a little contrived [...] suppose it does sometimes detract a little bit”
  - “ ‘Oh my god, you’re the big, the big hero!’ [...] you’re this huge important person [...] random road NPCs who seem to know who you are [...] sometimes I feel like they know who I am and they’re like, ‘Oh, you’re the great Link, blah blah blah.’ Ugh, okay. I don’t know how you know that but alright. Thank you. You’re welcome. (laughs) Bye.”
  - “you’re this important person and you have to go deal with Ganon and blah blah blah”
  - “they are subtly directing you”
  - “maybe it’s doing that because I’m not going far enough forward and it’s like, ‘Hey, don’t forget to go do *this* thing.’ ”
- **Differently-goaled, not inefficient**
    - “catching the horses. I really like catching horses. I had lots of horses [...] ‘cause I *had* a horse so, like, I can catch or, like, I like catching horses and I kept trying to find one that looked like *my* horse”

- “I really appreciate how they incorporated that [...] the mechanics of riding [...] how they react in the world and how, like, how they *move* feels quite a lot like a horse [...] I really appreciate that”
- “ ‘Yay! That’s an awesome sword!’ Also, why can I not repair things in this game!? I have this *amazing* sword [...] now I’ve lost it forever. Very sad.”
- “I *had* to look that up. I was like, ‘*Surely* there is a way I can repair this thing!’ Nope. [...] I found a very very frustrate, very um frustrating that I couldn’t repair that. ‘Cause I was like, ‘I’ve got this really good thing! I wanna keep this really good thing!’ I *still* have that *mostly* destroyed sword *in* my inventory [...] Which is silly [...] like that whole potion hoarding thing [...] I hard (laughs) slightly broken swords [...] really weird! I don’t know why”
- “Couldn’t repair it. So aw, that’s sad. [...] I don’t want to lose my good sword. (laughs) It’s cool. So I’m just holding onto it. Forever.”
- “I found a really good sword [...] they’re quite short lived. They die pretty quickly. [...] they use durability even, like, smashing boxes open to see what’s inside. Subsequently I don’t really smash boxes anymore. [...] Because I don’t want to lose my good swords.”
- “in my inventory forever (laughs)”
- “I’m not gonna go and look up where to find them and stuff like that. But if I ran into it and something *sucked* my weapon out of my hand, I’d be like, ‘Hm...’ ”
- “the purpose of keeping it is I kind of like that particular weapon [...] I’ve survived without using it thus far [...] I would thoroughly test



first (laughs) [...] I don't think *having* a more powerful weapon would have helped me [...] I've not really tried. I don't want it to break."

- "for hundred percent sentimental purposes (laughs)"
- "I went back and found him [...] it was a *very* long way (laughs) [...] and I went back and found my horse. And brought him back and put in him a stable [...] I felt some responsibility for him"
- "I *liked* that one [horse]. Like, I'd made an effort to pick that horse out of the herd that time [...] my current favourite"
- "my current one [horse] only has two [spurs] [...] sub-optimal [...] he's my buddy"
- "I left him there. I had to go back and get him. It was sad [...] I was like, 'Aw no! He's not going with me! Aw this is gonna be annoying.' (laughs) [...] I knew straight away I was gonna have to go back and get him [...] he's not coming with me. (laughs) I have to go back now (laughs) [...] immediately opened the map [...] thank god he's still marked on the map"
- "I don't go into *battle* on my horse either. I park him carefully and then go walk in 'cause I don't want him to get hurt (laughs) [...] the battle started getting too close to the horse so I ran away [...] I'm very precious about my horse"
- "And get him back and get him safe [...] I made sure I leave them somewhere I can get back to easily [...] I don't want them to die (laughs) [...] they might be able to die, I don't know (laughs)"

- “it’s a horse in a video game. I’m not gonna be *that* upset. [...] you would get a bit sad [...] I’d be *more* sad about losing a *pet* in a video game than I am about losing, like, an NPC [...] Always more upset if I lose a pet. [...] I looked after that dog [in Fallout] real good. [...] That dog got healed *instantly*, like, got healed *instantly*, like, *way* more careful with the dog. [...] Instant heal the dog. Like, *way* more sensitive about pets”
- “They’re a hundred percent my pets [...] they’re my *pets* [...] they’re really useful to getting to places quickly but they’re also my pets”
- “they are all boy horses [...] they’re all boy horses because – I don’t know why they’re all boy horses. (laughs) They just all are”
- “pretty inconvenient to go back to the stable to change [...] a very big inconvenience to go back to the stable [...] he’s only really my favourite ‘cause I’m currently riding him [...] I try someone different for a while [...] Someone. A different horse for a while. (laughs)”
- “I haven’t really used that [compendium] [...] I just like having a list of stuff”
- “I’m not particularly efficient at playing it [...] spend more time doing things that I don’t necessarily need to do”
- “I now *stop* when I see new things and go, ‘Ooh, I have to take a photo of that.’ [...] I’m never gonna find them all”
- “it wasn’t worth... I would have had to spend a lot more time *researching* in order to *do* that [...] I would have to spend a good amount of time looking [...] I could have just used that time to just keep playing the game [...] if I bumped into it I would [...] I’m not

gonna, like, spent all that time [...] tramps across the world [...] if I bump into it I'll use it"

- "invest the time in playing the games and having fun rather than researching how to get around something [...] if I bump into that thing I'll try it. If I don't, I'll have a full inventory slot for a while"

- **Investing in consequences**

- "that decision making process can be very *hard* when it's your own character and you're like, 'Well, what *would* my character do here?' Like... but being hard doesn't make it bad. It's still kind of, like, fun, you know, like, have some agency in the world and you're like, "Okay, well that was *my* decision to make, like, *I* created my character and *I* made that decision *for* my character.' [...] a decision that is meaningful to the ongoing existence to the world [...] I think that's why I finished Fallout 4. Because I had to pick a faction and I saw, I had to see it through. [...] I was like, 'I'm gonna see it through for these people 'cause I've made this decision for my character.' "
- "it's *hard* and you spend a lot of time doing it and agonising about it but that doesn't make it *bad* [...] that's a good thing. Like, it's a fun thing."
- "I don't get to be *me*, well not *me* but, like, I didn't get to be the character that I've created. [...] I got to be my *own* character and that was more, like, I therefore spend much *more* time playing it and got much 'further' "

- **The designers' creation**

- **The way of the world**

- **The proper way**

- "you can't go off that initial floating bit until you have this glider [...] you need to do these things in the area"

- “where perhaps you were not equipped to manage the situation appropriately. In terms of, like, armour and capability of killing things. [...] probably you need better equipment [...] you probably need better armour or some sword that actually does something appropriate [...] there was something there that I was supposed to do [...] I sort of feel like I shouldn’t go out of that zone until I’m told to”
- “Subconsciously, *logically* know that the mechanics of the game are gonna be constructed in a way to direct you through a pathway, right? And equip you as you go to manage the different situations and the different, like, difficulty levels and then obviously they’re gonna create a progression”
- “I’m just going about it wrong and that information’s there and I haven’t found it. Which is a definite possibility. [...] I’ll just go and head towards whichever ones it wants me to go to”
- “some really dodgy thing you can do [...] it’s all too hard [...] super dodgy [...] either you can repair it or you can’t”
- “find it you can repair weapons [...] see if I could repair it”
- “ ‘This doesn’t really seem like the answer that I wanted.’ [...] It’s like a bug [...] exploit [...] I wanted a mechanic to do it [...] it might not still be relevant”
- “Maybe I’ve missed something important. I don’t know.”
- “I was trying to find *if* I could do it, like, *if* there was a repair mechanic”

- “I was looking to see *if* there was a mechanic there, not if [...] there obviously wasn’t a repair mechanic [...] an actual mechanic”
- **The guiding hand**
  - “it kind of encourages you to do that a little bit with the whole Shrine mechanic”
  - “visual mechanics that probably try to pull you a little but [...] attract your attention [...] without even thinking about it you’ll tend to go that way”
  - “you can’t go off that initial floating bit until you have this glider [...] you need to do these things in the area”
  - “I sort of feel like I shouldn’t go out of that zone until I’m told to?”
  - “Subconsciously, *logically* know that the mechanics of the game are gonna be constructed in a way to direct you through a pathway, right? And equip you as you go to manage the different situations and the different, like, difficulty levels and then obviously they’re gonna create a progression.”
  - “they’ve got a *lot* of tools in their toolbox to suggest or direct you towards specific things”
  - “the world they have created”
  - “I think it’s probably a bit of rationale for why I don’t necessarily just go straight to the next objective. Or maybe I should? Maybe I should just go, ‘Right. I’m gonna commit to being Link and I am gonna, like, I’m gonna go and do everything I can to get this solved.’ ”
  - “I’ll just go and head towards whichever ones it wants me to go to”

- “you’re this important person and you have to go deal with Ganon and blah blah blah [...] because they *want* you to, they, they are subtly directing you. [...] maybe it’s doing that because I’m not going far enough forward and it’s like, ‘Hey, don’t forget to go do *this* thing.’ ”
- “environmental cues [...] let’s actually create a path in the ground through the forest”
- “she gives you, like, backpack slots or something so, I mean, it’s useful for the mechanic of the game so they probably want, they probably want people to find this”
- **My way or the highway**
  - “I think I probably wasn’t supposed to be fighting them then [...] could be just that I’m not good at the mechanics of it in general”
  - “ ‘Alright, I’m gonna let it kill me and reload my game because I clearly, I can’t do this right now.’ [...] Actually, I suppose I can just teleport back to it now, right? No, I can’t. Because I had to, because I’d lost *everything* I had to reload my save. [...] Like, *literally* I lost, like, I lost everything. [...] I don’t think I even know where it is anymore. So I think it’s a bit sad.”
  - “I think *maybe* I wasn’t supposed, I – there’s a possibility it was in the zone adjacent to the zone I was supposed to be in. [...] it’s very easy to find ones that not in the zone that you’re in. And I think maybe this one was probably, like, right on the edge or something”
  - “I think maybe I probably wasn’t supposed to be there yet but I just thought, at the time I was like, ‘Oh maybe I’m just going the wrong

way, and that's why it's so hard.' Like, maybe there's, like, a path over there that, and I was, like, scaling a cliff or something. I don't know."

- "go into spots where perhaps you were not equipped to manage the situation appropriately. In terms of, like, armour and capability of killing things [...] suddenly I'm fighting something that's way stronger [...] I suspect probably you need better equipment [...] you probably need better armour or some sword that actually does something appropriate [...] Or I completely missed the point and there was something there that I was supposed to do that I didn't get [...] I sort of feel like I shouldn't go out of that zone until I'm told to"
- "I have been mercilessly killed multiple times"
- "Sometimes I don't because well, like, you know, because I was going some way and I didn't think about it and I just went off the edge [...] Sometimes you're just doing stuff you don't really think"
- "I probably shouldn't be here [...] something's appeared and just killed me very very quickly and I'm like, 'Uh, I should probably just go back.' "
- "you probably can't 'cause I'd imagine if you try to go to the fourth one first you're gonna just die"
- "the first time when I died [...] I died and he ran off [...] I probably wasn't supposed to have caught the horse"
- "maybe because I'm not doing stuff right"

▪ **Self-doubt**

- “maybe there’s, like, later on there’s something [...] I don’t know. We’ll find out. I will find out.”
- “there’s *more* story I have yet to unfold [...] something at the start that doesn’t completely make sense until you’ve got [to the end. [...]] maybe I’ll find out at the end”
- “I suspect probably you need better equipment to fight that thing. Like, you probably need better armour or some sword that actually does something appropriate to it. Or I completely missed the point [...] I sort of feel like I shouldn’t go out of that zone until I’m told to”
- “But I think probably they’re, that’s an intentional mechanic of the developers so that, like, well you’ll get to here.”
- “I *know* is gonna be important in the future that I’m not allowed to have yet [...] she said something about it being an artefact uh or something about giving me a reward if I did something for her [...] I haven’t worked out how to do it yet.”
- “I don’t know. We’ll find – I don’t know. [...] I’ll get to them eventually”
- “possibly I’m just going about it wrong and that information’s there and I haven’t found it. Which is a definite possibility.”
- “I felt like maybe I’m missing something.”
- “Probably important for the future. I don’t know.”
- “I couldn’t defeat but it was not, it was, the way it was presented in the Shrine, like, there’d always been *puzzles* so I, I suspect there is something there, I just didn’t know yet in order to be able to do that.”



- “*not* recognising *any* of the locations, like, even *slightly*. I was like, ‘Uh, I don’t, I don’t recognise any of these so...’ [...] it’ll make itself evident at some point [...] there’s probably a lot of the world I haven’t been to...”
- “I’m *sure* there’ll be something *else* just as good in the future”

○ **Imperfect fit**

▪ **Accepting imperfection**

- “if you play Halo you don’t get that either [...] it’s just the type, the, the type of game that it is. [...] it’s a linear story that they’re trying to tell”
- “I wonder how you would even create this game in the world that, the ideal method that I would like [...] it’s an *ideal* thing, right? Not everybody’s gonna want the same production. Like this, not production, the same style of game and maybe that’s just the style of game that I like [...] everyone’s gonna have slight preferences on how things work and I suppose it’s about picking the things that you like out of something”
- “Oh yeah! But you see that’s the thing. You have to act out of character in a game like that because you didn’t get to create the character. [...] in order to play the game in a way that’s enjoyable you’re gonna have to act out of character [...] I don’t think it would have occurred to me otherwise that there might be a conflict between the two”

▪ **Just one of many**

- “some people would sit down and play this game and they go, ‘Right. Main quest. Skip skip skip skip skip skip yellow dot. Go to the yellow dot. Okay.’ [...] some people would, like, *carefully* read all the story and, like, talk to all the people on the way, but they would still follow that very straight, like, following each of those main objectives in a very straight path like to, like they were reading a book [...] follow it along in a very linear manner”
- “Maybe I’ll read your findings and, and discover that I’m perfectly normal (laughs) [...] Or very very odd”
- “I would probably just die. I’m sure there’s people that can do it with, like, the rusted bastard sword and kill Ganon I, but I can’t.”
- “more little things happening on the side [...] it’s fun for me but maybe most people don’t do that”
- “I’m sure it’s not thirty seconds. Probably, like, *three* seconds [...] probably a lot of people just, they probably saw it once [...] They probably didn’t mess it up any more times? Or maybe they messed it up one more time so it probably didn’t *bother* them, but I think maybe because I messed it up quite a *few* times? [...] a whole concept that sometimes when we’re angry at things we’re not really angry at that thing [...] am I really angry with the cutscene [...] I’m angry with myself because I couldn’t complete it the first time around?”

- **Finding my bearings**

- **Finding possibilities**

- “I would a *hundred* percent try it. [...] if I ran into it and something *sucked* my weapon out of my hand [...] If I ran into it and it happened I’d be like, ‘Okay, that’s *part* of the thing.’ [...] it’s not *out* of the question [...] find that particular exploit but if I ran into it [...] ‘Oh, I’ll see if that works.’ [...] I would thoroughly test first (laughs).”
- “I wonder if you can take photos of enemies too? [...] I’ve not tried that yet [...] I think I couldn’t quite work out how to get the coconut to do it [...] all the collectable sorts of harvestable things”
- “mostly just ‘cause I had a camera now [...] playing around with what it could do”
- “I was trying to find *if* I could do it, like, *if* there was a repair mechanic [...] wasn’t really what I was looking for [...] I was looking to see *if* there was a mechanic [...] there obviously wasn’t a repair mechanic”
- **Stumbled over a threshold**
  - “*before* I got to the thing that explained [...] I had no idea what I was *doing*”
  - “I hadn’t actually got to the camp yet and I saw horses [...] eventually um I turned out to be somewhere I probably wasn’t supposed to be and got killed [...] I can come here, and, and they explained it a bit better. I was like, ‘Oh, okay. That makes a bit more sense.’ ”
  - “no actual fences. You can go into districts and go into spots where perhaps you were not equipped to manage the situation appropriately. [...] suddenly I’m fighting something that’s way stronger [...] hits me and I die instantly [...] you need better equipment to fight that thing [...] Or I completely missed the point and there was something there that I was supposed to do that I

didn't get [...] I sort of feel like I shouldn't go out of that zone until I'm told to"

- "they had given me all the tools to *do* cooking but had not actually explained how to do it and I couldn't work out [...] I worked out you could throw things in a *fire* and that would cook *one* thing [...] But I'm like, 'Surely I can *combine* things.' "
- "they didn't explain to me that I could cook things"
- "I don't think it said that for *anything* very much really, has it? I don't know, it didn't have a tutorial in the traditional sense [...] I'd thrown stuff in the fire and it cooked"

- **Miscommunication**

- "there was one really annoying one this, this was the most, possibly my most frustrating experience of the whole game [...] Because it doesn't *work* like an *actual* one does [...] And they're like, 'We want you to, like, do this and *flip* it so it jumps off the edge!' I'm like, 'I can't do that with this controller! It doesn't replicate correctly!' [...] That was] very frustrating [...] the whole idea [...] you're supposed to feel like you're actually holding it in your hands [...] if you actually had it in your hands the ball would never go off the edges and would go exactly where you want it because your hands have a great degree of control and instant feedback [...] you would be able to very easily navigate it [...] with a lot more ease [...] I was not doing the *puzzle*. I was battling the interface [...] the whole movement thing it's pretty, it's *reasonably* sensitive but it's not *that* sensitive. It's not as sensitive as a joystick or somebody's *hands* are [...] at one point turn off the console and put it down because I was getting very frustrated [...] that was the *only*

puzzle that has really really annoyed me [...] is a really interesting fun idea but I'm not solving a puzzle. I'm fighting a controller [...] based eh that wasn't so much the controllers but that was, like, based on where the camera sat and things you couldn't quite see where you needed to put it [...] This is a fun puzzle. I like the idea of this. But I just wish it was done a little bit better [...] solve it based on my ability to solve puzzles, not on a bit of random chance"

- "the lady and her fucking flowers! Oh my god! I could strangle that lady [...] Which is *fine*. But there's, like, a thirty second cutscene! [...] And it's just like, no! I, I get the point but, please, less cutscene! Just take me back to the start! (laughs) That was very frustrating. [...] I was just like, 'Oh no... No. No! I get the point! No!' (laughs) Kind of wish I could just stamp all over her flowers to piss her off (laughs). [...] I would like to be able to step on her flowers so many times that she gets really shitty with me. Like, *angry* with me and I can fight her. And then I would no longer have to deal with her as a problem (laughs). [...] it was a fun idea. I liked the *idea* there was a maze and that, you know, if you made a mistake you had to go back to the start. I did *not* like the *delay*. The cutscene and the repetition [...] But the puzzle was *good*! It was like a clever puzzle! But I, poorly executed in my opinion. [...] it *was* frustrating [...] the frustration was not the return to the start. The frustration was a *hundred* percent the cutscene [...] skipping it takes just as long as the actual cutscene [...] But if you press that straight away you don't actually really save any time. [...] I don't need to watch the, like, the flower person [...] *why* can't I just go back to the start [...] *why* does it have to be a cutscene? [...] big block of delay time [...] some of them are very well

executed and some of them are not [...] that's a cool puzzle. Not well executed. This was a cool puzzle. In my opinion, slightly frustrating to complete (laughs) because of the cutscene."

○ **Paratext hints**

- "a lot of the people playing this game have played more than one other Zelda game [...] how much knowledge of what's happening do people bring"
- The magic twist
  - "that really stuck out, I'm like, (laughs) 'This doesn't really (laughs) this is really weird.' [...] the um the giant lady I just thought was weird [...] it was very odd"
  - "there's some magic aspects but a lot of it feels very tech-heavy [...] rooted in technology [...] they are very mechanical [...] kinda mechanical [...] you can *research* and take *photos* [...] even the *Shrines* are kind of mechanical [...] you kind of unlock them in a, in a semi-sci-fi kind of way, like, you almost use a key card effectively to unlock the door [...] quite mechanical puzzles [...] almost looks like a hologram [...] the fairy lady is, like, total fantasy"
  - "And she then comes up out of the pod and I was like, 'Wha!?' (laughs) I was not, I was not expecting a huge giant woman [...] I don't know what I was expecting but I, it was not *that*. It was definitely not that"
  - "that's one of the tech-heavy bits [...] they seem quite technologically heavy."
  - "the only exception [...] the skeletons at night that come out of the ground [...] They feel more necromantic"

- “there are some magical past [...] maybe it’s like a history thing [...] hasn’t been so much tech aspect in previous ones”
  - “Guardians! Right. Good. Those seem very much like robots. [...] I haven’t seen anything else that looks *as* robotic”
  - “I don’t remember that being a thing so maybe the world is inherently magical [...] Maybe I’ll defeat Ganon and be Link’ll defeat Ganon and then um the world will go back to being... I don’t think it will. They’ve already learned technology. They’re ready to industrialise.”
  - “even the robots look kind of fantasy-esque [...] kind of sci-fi but fantasy as well [...] the aesthetic is fantasy [...] technically advanced things”
- **What’s Calamity Ganon and why should I care?**
    - “obviously as a player character [...] you’re gonna encounter all the bad things”
    - “they don’t mention that, you know, any other previous adventuring experience [...] I assume he’s defeated Ganon previously? [...] So obviously this must be some sort of separate reality”
    - “I’d never heard Ganon referred to with a... adjective? Is that the right thing? With a word beforehand [...] this a different Ganon to the Ganon that’s been in other video games”
    - “Maybe Ganon’s not really a person. Maybe he’s a thing. Maybe he’s like a state. Maybe there’s nobody to fight. Maybe it’s just us. I don’t know.”

- “time in video games is very weird [...] time is often as long as it takes for you to reach the next objective”
- **Bosses, despite game?**
  - “I thought I *would* be able to defeat it [...] often you get, you have *mini* bosses. I thought it’d be like a mini boss thing.”
  - “I’m gonna go and collect the, the four Divine Beasts and make four friends. [...] Who’ll be, like, important NPCs. [...] there’ll be some sort of mini boss thing to battle [...] they’ll probably help me in some way fighting the Ganon boss at the very end [...] I haven’t really had any *boss battles* per se so far in this. So... I haven’t even encountered anything that appears to *be* a boss”
  - “it felt more puzzle-like than combat-like [...] maybe there won’t even be a boss! [...] I know externally to the game that there is a some sort of, you *do* have to fight Ganon. [...] I’ll go and fight him. [...] Zelda being in another castle, right? [...] I probably would have heard [...] that would have been a thing”

## 10.6 Riley

- **Existing in the world**
  - **A living world**
    - “a game of that scale”
    - “vast”
    - “geological structures”



- “a short day-night cycle and lots of colour that’s constantly changing and life in the world so it feels great to kind of just ride around and see at different times”
- “It’s the world just being while I’m riding around”
- “I really enjoyed” “discovering secrets” “exploring all the different” “biomes”
- “Exploring the world of the game was always a [...] key activity”
- “sometimes I’m focused on the [...] simple pleasure of play and exploration”
- “there’s a certain kind of aimlessness to it”
- “what I appreciate most in the game was the world”
- “the creatures I really enjoyed were the dragons”, “creatures that you would imagine inhabiting that land”, “not particularly conscious”, “[not] appearing to be conscious of the world around them”, “uninhabited areas”, “genuinely magical”, “the dragons feel like a deep elemental magic or something”, “some ancient component of the world [...] that *felt* like it *belonged* there”

○ **Like the real world**

- “[Giant Horse was] more aware of my presence”, “had better peripheral vision”, “a better sense of where I was”
- “[couldn’t] get within [...] an arm’s reach”
- “becomes loyal to you”
- “breathing”, “winnowing”, “all of the [...] behaviours that you’d expect [...] from [...] a cartoon horse”
- “the character goes through all of the motions. Stroking the neck”, “making [...] calming noises into the horse’s ear”
- “kind of special relationship”, “some kind of relationship with the creature”

- “a sense of [...] connection”
- “you were kind of leaving a horse behind”
- **Free roam**
  - “those moments of serene exploration”
  - “There were places to go and things to do and I just started doing them.”
  - “I think I spent some time exploring before heading there [i.e. where I was probably told to go]”
  - “Sometimes I’m focused on the [...] simple pleasure of play and exploration”
  - “There’s a certain kind of aimlessness to it”
  - “I spent a lot of time actually chasing them [i.e. the dragons] around the map”
  - “They gave me an opportunity to kind of ride really fast and jump and fly and all of that kind of stuff to get to them”
- **Maintaining the experience**
  - **The game I want**
    - “a very broad range of activity types for the player”
    - “game of this scope [...] and [...] this type offers all of those [various] possibilities”
    - “One of the things about [...] Breath Of The Wild of course is that it offers so many possibilities [...] for people to find their own fun. To find their own satisfactions.”
  - **Just enough to pass**
    - “the combat oriented temples [...] I was really not good at until [...] I got the Master Sword and fully powered up”. That let me “strategize a little better”

- “the only weapon [Master Sword] in the game that doesn’t break”, “reliable and more powerful than everything else”
- “[mounted combat] mostly as a way of getting past things that seemed [...] insurmountable at the time”
- “Gallop[ing] past Guardians [...] felt like kind of entering battle but wasn’t really”
- “The sense of danger was [...] ramped up”
- “Until I’d worked out how to dispose of those Guardians [...] I would generally try and avoid them.”
- “I never found the combat particularly satisfying”
- **The purpose I ignore**
  - “full [...] story campaign”, “defeated Ganon at the end”.
  - “I disliked the story. I disliked most of the characters.”
  - “I don’t think the [...] Zelda aesthetic works for me very much”
  - “[monsters were] underpinned by a lot of [...] lore and history and fan service”, “I don’t understand”, “I don’t have a [...] history with it”
- **Cracks in the façade**
  - “the characters within”
  - “the various different races and the performance of the characters”, “rogues gallery of monsters”, “underpinned by a lot of [...] lore and fan service that hasn’t been part of my life”
  - “hugely stereotyped”, “racial distinctions felt a bit galling”
  - “This kind of pantheon of [...] monsters and this [...] configuration of races”, “there’s a clear kind of elemental kind of aspect that underpins”, “but they all feel so clichéd”, “they feel kind of obvious”

- “doesn’t feel like to me like they all belong in the world together”, “lava dudes” “don’t feel like they belong in the same world as the folks in the desert”
- “This kind of strange kind of rogues gallery of monsters”, “presumably have roots in the history of the series”, “they didn’t feel like they all belonged in the same world”
- “A lot of the non-player character and enemies [...] I sort of didn’t believe them in the world”
- “camp kind of performance of the characters” “didn’t appeal”
- “[Wizrobe] *wants* to be magic and it wants to feel magic and it feels like some [...] grim cartoon magic”, “they’re cartoon villains”, “I try to avoid them most of the time”
- “It felt like the environmental design was at odds with the character design and performance in a lot of cases.”

- **Mortal coil**

- **Limit mortal**

- “On top of the Great Plateau [...] you’re exposed to many of the [...] constraints of gameplay”. The tutorial “requires the player to have a baseline understanding of the broader set of mechanics that will *become* available” in the game. You need to demonstrate that you understand those constraints.
    - Moving around in a game is often “very cumbersome” and “it can often feel like [...] you’re moving at [...] an unreasonably slow pace or [...] awkwardly constrained”

- The awkward moments when gliding were “not so much [about] gliding as it is landing”. Those “moments where collisions with [...] solid objects in the world felt incorrect”.
- Some mountains have trails for horses but “others are more [...] standalone mesa-like structures that you have to climb [...] manually”. “That kind of manual climbing was less satisfying”. “Climbing is constrained by [...] the character’s stamina”. Climbing was an arduous task, “particularly those [...] mountains that require [...] you to clamour up [...] the outside in the rain when you’re sliding back down and running out of stamina and falling to your death”. “It happened fairly often [...] that it would start raining at a point where I needed to climb.” “That prevented me” from getting where I wanted to go. I would just have to “engage the glider and get out of there and come back” later.
- Using the glider or riding horses feels better than “jogging along like a regular mortal or slipping down cliffs”.
- “It becomes a little frustrating at times to have to move through [...] and traverse [...] areas manually [...] when there are so many other better kind of options available.”
- There is “rocky terrain which is too difficult for the horse”, so you need to go on foot.
- “Swimming [...] generally [...] doesn’t feel particularly great and again you’re constrained by [...] a stamina limit which means that Link will drown [...] in the same way that Link will fall off a cliff [...] if climbing in the wet.” “The bulk of your time I think is spend [...] in that kind of manual traversal mode”.

- **Knowing the limits**

- The tutorial “requires the player to have a baseline understanding of the broader set of mechanics that will *become* available [...] before allowing progress”. You need to demonstrate that you’ve understood those constraints.
  - Some Shrine puzzles “are very satisfying to solve [...] when you finally figure out what it is that the designer has [...] in store for you and is intended [...] that you do to demonstrate your learning or your, your ability to use these powers”
  - “I think the only time you’re really conscious of that [...] mastery over the horses is during that process of breaking them in [i.e. taming them]”, and being able to stable them, summon them, and calm them down when they’re agitated.
- **Dragged back down**
    - If it starts raining while I’m climbing, I “try to engage the glider and get out of there and come back at a time when the weather was better”
    - There are areas too steep and rocky so “they [the horses] won’t go there”. “You have to get off and go in yourself”. It’s “reinforcing that kind of special relationship and making those moments where you are using the horse more satisfying”. “You were kind of leaving a horse behind [...] which was not satisfying”
    - “The point to point camp fire sort of [fast travel] system [...] it’s sort of less satisfying” than BOTW’s fast travel. “It’s just more busy work”.
    - The awkward moments when gliding happened “not so much [when] gliding as it is landing”. Those “moments where collisions with [...] solid objects in the world felt incorrect”.

- **Cheap tricks**

- I was “trying to track down all of the treasure chests”, “trying to get all the goodies”. But those things are “more fiddly puzzle-y” than the Shrine puzzles were. “Because [...] you’re trying to solve a very specific problem when you’re trying to lift a treasure chest out of the water”. “It’s a small bit of busy work”. A lot of games (including BOTW) are “filled with busy work”.
- “It’s all very [...] manual and [...] ordinary”. “It’s ordinary [...] it is quite ordinary to go out into the wild and forage for food and bring it back to your campfire and prepare a meal.”
- “Some of that stuff feels a bit ordinary because it’s [...] small in scope”. “Shifting one thing from here to there before moving to shift another thing from here to there”. “I found them less satisfying”. “Contextually the satisfaction for me [...] of using those [Sheikah Slate] powers was mostly confined to the puzzles within the Shrines”. “When they were used out in the broader open world environment they didn’t feel as interesting [...] and satisfying”. “It just feels like kind of a cheap trick”.
- “Using them [i.e. the Sheikah Slate Runes] in the temples [...] always felt like [...] it’s solving an intellectual problem or [...] a kind of [...] a mechanical puzzle [...] whereas using them in the [...] wild generally felt like [...] I don’t know removing some obstacle”. “It didn’t feel as [...] complex and [...] rigorous in terms of [...] the thinking that was required to solve the problem”

- **Defying mortality**

- **Overcoming restrictions**

- “Moving around in a game world [...] can be [...] very cumbersome”. You’re moving at “an unreasonably slow pace or [...] awkwardly constrained”. The

way gliding is designed in BOTW “makes it feel great to glide”. “It’s about being set free from a contained area”

- “if there was an opportunity to shortcut a descent using the glider I’d take it for sure”
- “climbing is constrained by [...] the character’s stamina”. “You could use [...] the fish suit to shortcut up a waterfall [...] and get most of the way to the top” of a cliff instead of climbing. Using the Zora Armour is “a shortcut”.
- “the traversal of the space [using the Zora Armour or glider] feels [...] somehow superhuman”. It “always feels better than you know jogging like a regular mortal or slipping down cliffs”
- Having access to superhuman abilities lets “you start kind of plotting and planning your [...] traversal strategy based around the geometry and [...] the availability of waterfalls and high peaks”
- The Sheikah Slate Runes “begins to feel [...] magic”. It’s “a magic of manipulation” whereas the traversal abilities is “a magic of traversal”.
- The giant horse “was like a king horse”. “Getting a giant horse and galloping a little bit faster and being able to blast through things because they’re smaller than the horse.”
- The giant horse is “twice the vertical size [...] of any other horse”. When “you ride it ‘round [...] characters in the world compliment you on the size of your horse”. “You very clearly can run other things down”. There’s some difference in the giant’ horse’s “acceleration and deceleration” compared to the other horses. “There was *some* difference to his acceleration and deceleration”, some difference in “the user interface that pops up around



the use of spurs”. “There was less UI information on the screen”. “It felt like it was going a bit faster.” “It felt different. [...] Felt more powerful.”

- **Unlike my everyday**

- “The fish suit, that’s the way I thought about [the Zora Armour]”
- Gliding or galloping “always feels better than [...] jogging along like a regular mortal or slipping down the cliffs”
- I like riding horses because “it’s a mode of traversal that’s not bipedal”. “I go through [...] my life walking around”. “I do that all day every day.” “But it’s pretty rare that I climb aboard a two hundred percent sized horse and blast across the countryside.”. The enjoyment comes from “the separation between [...] that regular kind of [...] mortal way of [...] manually traversing the world”. The “things that are unique to the world to get around a bit faster”.
- “I’m particularly enamoured of [...] satisfying traversal”. “I really like to [...] feel like I’m moving in a way that would not be possible [...] in any other context.”

- **Superhuman moments in a mortal life**

- Using the glider was “really satisfying”.
- Moving around in the game “can be [...] very cumbersome”. You’re usually moving at an “unreasonably slow pace or [...] awkwardly constrained”. The glider’s design “makes it feel great to glide”. “It’s about being set free from [...] a contained area So there’s also that sense that um you know a big adventure waits beyond the horizon. So there’s a sense of anticipation at that point [i.e. leaving the Great Plateau] as well.”

- Being able to descend using the glider “made some of the more arduous climbs a little bit more tolerable knowing that that was waiting for me at the end”
- “It becomes a little frustrating to have to move through [...] and traverse [...] areas manually [...] when there are so many other better kind of options available. [...] but I suppose it’s the contrast between those moments” and the moments of superhuman traversal. The manual traversal “made those moments using those things [...] as satisfying [...] as they were”. If you could always have “superhero” abilities then “you take them for granted”. “Many games are about pacing out [...] those transcendent moments from those regular kind of grindy ones”.
- In “every single one of the temples [...] you can’t really use any of those items [i.e. superhuman modes of traversal]”
- “A lot of the traversal through [...] rocky terrain which is too difficult for the horses”
- “Swimming [...] just generally [...] doesn’t feel particularly great and again you’re constrained by [...] a stamina limit which means that Link will drown [...] in the same way that Link will fall off a cliff [...] if climbing in the wet.”
- “So the bulk of your time I think is spent [...] in that kind of manual traversal mode [...] which [...] I think is what makes [...] those brief moments where you’re using something else feel great”
- “There were always differences [across the different biomes] in terms of one or two vectors of traversal”. “Those things would impact the mode of traversal that you’d use [...] or the speed with which traversal was possible”

- **Destined to be better**

- This story is about an “amnesiac hero” who “awakens, regains powers, and attempts to save the kingdom [...] and rescue the princess”.
- BOTW is a “power fantasy”. It’s about “developing abilities that are [...] beyond the scope of the other inhabitants of the world”. As a player we’re “reminded constantly” that we’re “the chosen one” and that we’re a “superhuman warrior” and that “it’s our job [...] grinding through the game to acquire those superhuman traits [...] that will allow us to [...] complete the story”
- **Master the world**
  - Taming a horse involves “a sense of mastery over the animal”, where “the horse becomes loyal to you”. You “stable it”, “get it out of stables”, you “control its [...] emotional state”, and “guide it and direct it”.
  - You “move at [...] a much greater pace when riding a horse. [...] So that always feels good”.
  - “Having mastery is [...] at the root of all [...] power fantasies”.
  - When you tame a horse, “you have mastery over the beast”.
  - When you use the Sheikah Slate Runes you “demonstrate your mastery over the world”.
  - Using the Sheikah Slate Runes is like “having [...] dominion over the rules of physics”
- **The best way**
  - Finally gliding off the Great Plateau “was great.” Using the glider was “really satisfying”. It had “great [...] game feel” and it “sound[s] great”.
  - There’s “a sense of the wind kind of rushing and the glider [...] skin kind of flapping [...] and the particles that come off the edges of the glider

streaming away like kind of jet streams [...] and it's enough [...] of [...] a trick [...] that feedback to make the thing feel reasonably authentic. [...] All the sensory input was there to tell me that I was gliding. [...] So it's enough to trick part of the brain" into thinking you're actually gliding.

- Gliding and riding horses "always feels better than you know jogging along like a regular mortal or slipping down the cliffs"
- Gliding and horse riding are both "fairly similar [...] I would preference one above the other".
- Riding the giant horse "was *awesome*". "It just felt really [...] quite natural". The way it looks and controls "made that activity [...] feel [...] really satisfying".
- "It feels great to kind of just ride around" and "gliding through a contained world".
- "you're [...] gliding down from a mountain top that's soaring like an eagle. it feels great."
- "It becomes a little frustrating at times to have to move through [...] and traverse [...] areas manually [...] when there are so many other better kind of options available."

- **The easy path**

- Using the Zora Armour to go up waterfalls is "a shortcut". It's where "you swim to the base of a waterfall, press a button at the right time, and you zip up and fly at the top and you can glide [...] from the apex of that [...] leap [...] at the top." "You are able to combo into gliding or glide down and land on your horse seamlessly and come galloping off across the plains". It "always feels better than [...] jogging along like a regular mortal or slipping down the

cliffs.” In these cases, “the traversal of the space feels [...] somehow superhuman”.

- Gliding and horseback riding are “fairly similar. I wouldn’t [...] preference on above the other [...] particularly when I got the big horse, which was *awesome*.”
- Riding the giant horse and gliding “just felt really [...] quite natural” and “really satisfying”.
- it’s “this thing of gliding through a contained world [...] it feels great to just kind of ride around”
- When you’re able to use superhuman traversal, “you still enjoy the affordance of that mastery but you’re not conscious of it [i.e. that mastery]”

- **Efficacy and efficiency**

- When I need to leave my horse somewhere and go on foot instead, I park my horses in places that are both safe and “most convenient to my goal”. “I’d park the horse as close to the easiest route” to get where I want to go.
- When “I needed [...] a particular resource” I’d use fast travel “to quickly get there, grab the resource, and head back”. “I found myself [...] teleporting fairly frequently” to get bomb arrows “quite a lot later in the game”.
- “Sometimes [...] I’m focused on the completion of a task”

- **Corridor**

- In “every single one of the temples [...] you can’t really use any of those items [i.e. superhuman traversal] [...] well you can use the glider in the temples but [...] I don’t recall using the Zora suit.”

- In the Shrines, you don't have access to the "magic of traversal". The things you do in the Shrines is "magic in a different kind of way". It's "a magic of manipulation".
- Some Shrine puzzles are "very satisfying to solve [...] when you finally figure out what it is that the designer has [...] in store for you and is intended [...] that you do to demonstrate your learning or [...] your ability to use these powers"
- The giant horse "was really hard to tame [...] I ended up [...] using YouTube let's plays videos to see if I could work it out". "It was much more aware of my presence in its area, had better peripheral vision than all of the others, it had a better sense of where I was in relation to it. So approaching from behind and trying to leap aboard and tame it was impossible. It was necessary to glide down from above. So climb trees, glide down, land on the horse, get it part of the way there, climb trees, glide down on the horse, get it part of the way there, and so on." "You're constrained again by your stamina so part of the trick I think was to eat foods [...] and take potions". "It was impossible to *sneak up* on it". I knew the horse could always tell where I was "by attempting the impossible". "I checked out that video and worked out that you could fly down from above". "That game has been thoroughly documented by multiple people" so it was easy to find this information. "Even with the right answer, it was still difficult "but at least I knew that I was heading in the right direction at that point". I knew I was on the right track because "I'd seen someone do it in a video."
- I felt frustrated with myself because [...] I was [...] attempting the task in the wrong way". I thought "that I should be able to [...] look around and

ascertain the right way". "I should be a bit quicker at working out the tricks that designers [...] offer [...] their players".

- "I assumed that they [i.e. horses] can still be damaged and destroyed" if you left them in "the wrong spot". "I think I was a pretty good horse owner. Looked after them."
- "All of them [the Sheikah Slate Runes] are kind of abilities that um allow you to solve very specific challenges within the temples." "As with all good puzzles all of the pieces are available to the player [...] and it's simply a matter of [...] discovering through increasingly complex iterations what is possible to do with those elements and with those powers".

- **Superhuman resource**

- "You were kind of leaving a horse behind [when you had to go on foot]. [...] which was not satisfying because you'd established what you felt like some kind of relationship with the creature".
- The stables are "effectively vending machines where you can kind of extract them [i.e. horses] [...] from anywhere on the map at one of the stables"
- If I couldn't keep riding my horse somewhere I'd part it in the place "most convenient to my goal", "close to the easiest route" to my goal.
- During mounted combat, I noticed that "the enemy targeted me by priority, so it didn't seem like the enemy was targeting the horse", so it seemed like the horse would be safe during mounted combat.

## Appendix 11: Extended excerpts

This presentation style is based on transcript examples presented by Langdridge (2007, pp.117-121), Larkin and Thompson (2012, pp.110-111), Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006, pp.111-114), and Smith, Jarman, and Osborn (1999, pp.220-225).

Also note that brackets, i.e. [ ], are used to indicate overlapping speech and parentheses, i.e. ( ), are used for non-verbal sounds.

### 11.1 Jean and Neverwinter Nights

Interviewer: "So you said in um the Zelda game..."

Jean: "Mm."

Interviewer: "It feels like you're hand in hand with the designer and you felt attached?"

Jean: "(sigh) Um, I couldn't say attached. I couldn't say attached. Um but I definitely felt *validated* for doing the things that I was doing."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Jean: "Yeah. The game was saying, 'You're doing a good job.' Or you get rewarded, I guess. And with branching narratives that's not the case all the time, I think. Yeah. Because again there was another game, like, going back to Neverwinter Nights I played that game, like, many many many many many times and there's one character that eventually betrays you and at the time it was heartbreaking. I was heartbroken. And um I remember playing that game and at one point in the game you can attempt to, like, at the *very* very end you can be like, 'Yo, c'mon, don't be evil. Come back and be on our side again, like, we're, we'll help you. We'll do whatever you need to do.' And a year, like, I played it *ages* ago. Anyway, so, as an adult I played it and I was like, 'Oh yeah, they're betraying du-du-du-du-du.' And I was making a



character that was *super* persuasive. That's all I wanted to do. And I always thought that, like, at the very end of the game even though I'd click on it to be like, 'Hey, come back to the good side,' there was no chance of you actually ever persuading them. Like, I thought that was just, like, a locked in thing. And I made this Paladin who was, who was super charismatic and used words instead of swords and eventually got to the end of the game and I was like, 'Alright (sigh) gonna try and persuade her.' And then fucking hell, she *turned*! She was like, 'Yes I have done wrong and I'm gonna help you now.' And I was like, 'Holy shit, that was amazing.' And it wasn't (sigh) I guess, *then* I felt attached! I felt attached *then*. Because the game had worked *with* me and not just I had worked with *it*. I had decided to do things and it said, 'Yeah, like, that's, you're gonna go down this path that often isn't gone down or you're gonna have the skillset to do this thing, um yeah that's awesome let me, let me give you something in return.' Um whereas in the, that's different to validation because validation is just being like, 'You're doing good. You're doing good. You're doing good.' Um so I think that attachment is, like, it has to give back. It gives, I give it something and then it gives me something but it's not just saying I'm doing good. It's, it's saying that uh yeah (laughs) it's saying that you *matter*. Yeah, I think that's the attachment that you get from those games. That you *matter* and that your choices have mattered."

## 11.2 Alex evaluating monsters

Alex: "Generally if I would see a really powerful enemy I would, just wouldn't go that way because I know that there's no way that I'd be able to face *that* enemy and if that enemy's there and I can't deal with that then there's probably going to be worse things past it that I can't deal with either."

Interviewer: "Okay. What were the indications of an enemy that's too powerful?"

Alex: "Generally their, their size and their colour. I remember especially with the bokoblins. There were like silver and dark coloured ones that were especially strong and I knew that if, that, there was, if I saw a colour that wasn't um familiar to me I'd generally avoid them because I hadn't seen them before so they're probably really strong."

Interviewer: "Okay. So were there parts of the map that you just generally felt safer?"

Alex: "Yeah. Especially where there were a lot of red bokoblins because those are generally the weakest ones and I knew that I could handle them."

### 11.3 Chris and the snowy mountain

Chris: "One of the first things I did from there was try to um climb a mountain, climb a snowy area, and I would get, you know, a few steps in and just start shivering and losing health and like what, what is going on? Why is this happening? Um and nowhere does it tell you that you need to get a torch or you know take some fire and you somehow um and so it took me like... I started just eating, regular (laughs) just *regularly* eating just to top my Hearts up as I went um and eventually I ran out of food. And I think it was seeing the enemies come with the fire that I realised, oh you need fire. And it was this, like, I think that the tutorial doesn't even set you up for the environmental puzzle solving that you need to do for the rest of the game um because all of the biomes are quite different and affect how you traverse them in different ways that you have to adapt to kind of on the fly. And so this um, this first experience with the snow really stands out to me as *really* the tutorial for me. Because the tutorial was kind of um here are the gameplay mechanics that you'll be interacting with in order to further the story but as soon as you were let off the Plateau, then you started the um, you know, like life learning you needed to experience things in order to learn from them."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Can you tell me about this moment with the fire? You said that um you were shivering and you didn't know how to handle that particular biome."

Chris: "Yeah, so, I didn't have... So in the snow biome uh the clothes that you're wearing affects how Link will react with the environment and if he's... There is a temperature gauge and if it falls too low um you'll start taking um Heart damage um for being too cold, basically. Um if you carry a torch with you, that is uh lit, you can light them by running them through fire, if you take that with you then your core temperature stays at a reasonable level and you won't lose any Hearts. I... It took me so long to work out what I was doing, because there was a camp of Bokoblins not far from the entrance to the snowy area and they were sitting around a campfire. And I went in there and... No, I think I, I avoided them and went sort of up into the snow and they saw me and followed me. And so um I kind of took care of them and I think one of them must have dropped a torch, like, on the ground that was still lit and, it was after a couple of times trying to go into the snow and then starting to lose Hearts and coming back and realising that, like, here I'm fine. There I'm not. What's going on? But the torch was kind of in the snowy area and so like when I went back and stood *near* the torch I noticed that I wasn't losing any Hearts. And so I picked it up, and then I – *that* was when I realised that I could take the torch with me and, like, have it as a fire torch to keep my body temperature up. And that was fine. Until I came across some wolves and realised that A) torches break (laughs) and so I was just without a torch again so I went back to the camp and, like, there were other ones there 'cause there's weapons spread around the camp so I grabbed another one, put it in the fire, took it with me, and then um tried to, like, swap to another weapon, took the wolves out, swapped back to the torch and that was when I

realised that you can't just put the torch away and take it out with fire on it because the fire goes out when you put it in. And so, I think I go back to camp, relight it, (laughs) come back in, and then, for the rest of the time that I was in that snowy biome, I was, if I came across anyone I would *throw* the torch and then run over to the torch and stand by it while I killed the enemies. That's right, 'cause there was a river that ran, and there was like a mountain on the other side so I was like stuck in this narrow passage. Um, and there were those Chuchus coming out of the snow trying to get me so, yeah, I kept having to throw the torch and then run over to where the torch was and then kill them as I go. And it was a really, like, experimental learning curve. Like, I had to learn what *not* to do in order to learn *what* to do, kind of thing."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Yeah. And it was consistent the *whole* game. Not just for snowy biomes, like, for *everything*. Especially climbing the volcano. That was ridiculous."

Interviewer: "Okay. Can you..."

Chris: "That's alright."

Interviewer: "(laughs) Can you tell me about climbing the volcano?"

Chris: "Yeah, so it wasn't until I got quite high up um and it started to burn me, well 'cause I really... I didn't know that there was a path up (laughs) the volcano. I just kind of... The volcano's surrounded by a ring of lava and I just kind of climbed to the rim of lava and tried to glide across onto the volcano and climb it *that* way um and I swiftly burned and died. Quite often. I, like, the game over tune should be my ringtone."

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Chris: " 'Cause I'm so familiar with it."

## 11.4 Elliott and the Blight

Interviewer: "Okay. And this first uh boss that you said you felt that similar level of exhilaration because you knew you were underlevelled?"

Elliott: "I, yeah, I felt that exhilaration simply because I felt a pretty big challenge like 'cause, you know, you had to hit it in the eye to knock it down to have a swing at its eye, and I, I was out of arrows, I was out of spears I was pretty much out of weapons that I could throw at it."

Interviewer: "Oh, okay."

Elliott: "And the entire fight was just trying to find things that I could damage it with and the, the fight lasted a while simply because I just had to keep avoiding attacks until I could figure out a new plan and that was what I found really exciting was the fact that, and this is in Breath of the Wild in general, that if you can't do it, like, the classic way of doing it there's always another way of doing it. And I had to find that other way to do it."

Interviewer: "Okay, so at the beginning of this boss fight you, did you feel like you were prepared?"

Elliott: "I felt like I was prepared because it was just another Zelda game and, you know, I've been pretty good at them in the past. And then when I got in there, still felt fine, 'cause it was, it's a, like a classic boss design in games it's just a giant monstrosity with one big eye and that you've obviously gotta hit the eye. And it was just after that kind of remembered that weapons can break and arrows can run out that I kind of, I felt that challenge coming on the, you know... 'Cause I don't, I wanted to beat the game without dying and if I died here, you know I was going to be a bit, a bit annoyed so I just refused to die so I had to find another way to do it."

Interviewer: "Okay, so uh you said during the fight you suddenly remembered that weapons could break?"

Elliott: "Yeah, 'cause you know, past Zelda games you, your items are invulnerable, like, and in this game I'd, it just kind of always slips your mind that the sword you're using, you can't get attached to weapons because the sword you're using it will break eventually. It's not going to be forever."

Interviewer: "Okay. So at the beginning of the boss fight you felt rather confident? You, like, this idea of durability wasn't quite at the front of your [mind?]"

Elliott: "Nah] absolutely not because I had a, a full inventory of weapons and heaps of arrows but I just *wasted* them trying to figure out how to knock this boss down. And yeah."

Interviewer: "Trying to figure it out?"

Elliott: "I knew how to do it but the, the time of it - So I'd, I'd knock it down but I'd, I'd be on the other side of the stage so by the time I got to it it'd be up again."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Elliott: "So I'd... Because I tried to maintain my distance to stay alive, 'cause I was, I don't think I was, had enough hearts. I would knock it down from the other side of the stage, I'd continue that process without thinking about it. That, yeah, it just wasn't working."

Interviewer: "Okay, so it's like you *knew* how to do it but it was a matter of execution? [Or things... okay."

Elliott: "Absolutely. It was] just a matter of execution and timing that I just kept getting wrong."

Interviewer: "Okay. And can you tell me more about this moment when you realised you weren't quite ready for it?"

Elliott: "Um... Nah, I guess like, I'm guessing, like, externally I probably remained exactly the same. But in my mind I was kind of just thinking, you know, can I leave? How do I get out of this

kind of thing? But it was probably that moment of panic that I realised, it was that initial moment of panic that in my head kind of said you can't do this like, going off the, the old Zeldas like, you gotta have arrows otherwise you can't do it and it was that moment that, if you can't do it this way there's no way to do it, and it was that initial moment of panic before I kind of just took a step back and just thought about it and went well what if I do it this way?"

Interviewer: "Okay. So the panic feeling came from thinking that Breath of the Wild was like other Zelda [games?]"

Elliott: "Yeah.] I kept relating it back to Ocarina of Time 'cause it's the one I played the most and I kept thinking like, alright you need to shoot it in the eye and knock it down and get it. And then after I ran out of arrows I kind of just had to take a step back and think like how am I gonna do this now? Because, I think I was, I was too in the mindset of other Zelda games."

Interviewer: "Okay. So there was the moment of panic and then you, like, make the conscious decision, there is another way to do this?"

Elliott: "Yeah. I made the decision to rethink it, yeah. Kind of, it probably, in the heat of the moment it probably wasn't um conscious. It probably just happened. I probably didn't think about doing it. Probably just did it."

Interviewer: "Oh, so it was more like a feeling, of, this isn't working?"

Elliott: "Yeah, absolutely it was that, just that feeling that I needed to do something else."

Interviewer: "Okay. So, I think you mentioned that at one point you thought, how do I leave? Because I'm not ready."

Elliott: "Yeah, well my initial thing was I need to get out of here because, you know, fight or flight.

Can't fight it, well flight. And it was that initial feeling that I had to leave and after I thought

about it, 'cause it was the, the wanting to leave was part of the initial moment of panic and after I'd decided that there's another way to do this that, that feeling of wanting to leave just left my head."

Interviewer: "Okay. Was there uh a way to leave?"

Elliott: "(laughs) I never tried."

### **11.5 Elliott and Twinrova**

Interviewer: "Okay, so the main appeal of the Twinrova boss is the mechanics, like you said, it's defensive?"

Elliott: "Yes, defensive fight so you can't just go in there all guns blazing you actually have to take your time. And there's the um the yeah, the boss's design itself is really cool. But that's about all it had going for it."

Interviewer: "Okay. And the defensive and taking your time, this is different from the other bosses in the game?"

Elliott: "The other bosses you can, you kind of have to take your time but I mean if you swing enough, you'll hit it."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Elliott: "Whereas this one, you can't swing. 'Cause if you swing you'll just get hit."

Interviewer: "So it's like that, that option is suddenly gone?"

Elliott: "Yeah, and the only option you have left is a play style that some people may not have even tried up to that point."

Interviewer: "Okay. [Did"



Elliott: "Yeah.]"

Interviewer: "Did you have any difficulty figuring this out?"

Elliott: "Oh nah (laughs) 'cause I always was just that, through the whole game you just think, kind of drilled into your head that you use the item that you found in the, in the dungeon to [beat it."

Interviewer: "Okay.]"

Elliott: "And I, I just went back and thought oh Mirror Shield, so that was it."

Interviewer: "Okay, so uh almost as soon as you found that dungeon's item, the Mirror Shield, you knew, I have to [use this for the boss?"

Elliott: "I have to use] it, but I never really, I couldn't really figure out in which way I'd have to use it, ['cause..."

Interviewer: "Okay.]"

Elliott: "Up to that point it was reflecting light and I didn't think they'd put a light puzzle as their final boss. And um, and I, I thought there's other than that it's just another shield."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Elliott: "And then um yeah it was actually, yeah, it was pretty cool."

Interviewer: "So going through the Temple, you worked out that it can reflect light but you weren't sure how [that —"

Elliott: "I wasn't] sure how they'd incorporate that into the final boss."

Interviewer: "Do you remember what it was like when you figured it out? Of how you can reflect things in the boss?"

Elliott: "Yeah it was... You had to collect three of one attack to charge your shield to shoot a beam.

But first couple times I played through it I just collected every shot. So it'd never charge up properly. And I kind of always just thought oh, you know, this isn't right. And uh, I think, I, it was probably five minutes into the fight that I realised that I had to collect three of the same one rather than the ice and fire counteracting each other."

Interviewer: "Okay. Do you remember what tipped you off about that? So you knew that the shield could *collect*."

Elliott: "I mean, I think it was just after like a minute or two of defending that it, it wasn't working and I kind of thought well it shouldn't take this long."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Elliott: "So I'm doing something wrong. I just had to figure out what I was doing wrong."

Interviewer: "And then you realised that it was collecting two *different* things?"

Elliott: "Yeah. I kind of just took a step back and I'm like well, fire and ice aren't gonna work together and I was so yeah. Let's try something different."

Interviewer: "Okay so you just worked it out with, like, your own logical process [of...]"

Elliott: "Yeah] it was just all logic, common sense that ice and fire don't mix."

Interviewer: "Okay. And is that also how you worked out about reflecting what you'd charged up?"

Elliott: "I think it just happened. Like 'cause after I collected three, it just started shooting and I thought oh, yeah like, this is how I have to use it I have to attack one side of her."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Elliott: "The opposite side, yeah."

Interviewer: "So you worked out that you had to collect it and then um when it started firing on its own that was confirmation?"

Elliott: "Yeah that this is the way you beat it kind of thing."

Interviewer: "Okay. Did you feel uh exhilarated? Or perhaps relieved when you had the answer after not quite knowing [what to do?]"

Elliott: "Yeah] it's back to that um that a-ha moment that [you,"

Interviewer: "Okay.]

Elliott: "You discover what had happened and – oh not discovered what had happened you discover that just the way to beat it and then you can just continue that path until you, until you know the cutscene crops up."

## **11.6 Alex and the horde**

Interviewer: "Okay, so you said that there were enemies that you're not quite at the right level to fight?"

Alex: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "But you would get around them?"

Alex: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Can you tell me about uh a time when you did this?"

Alex: "Um there was actually, it was on a cliff and there was a, a horde of monsters on this cliff and they were way stronger than me but there was a Shrine just past them and that was the only way I could get to them, by jumping off the cliff and flying over to the Shrine. And I died a hundred million times trying to get through these guys because they were way stronger than

me and they had way better weapons. So I just ended up um trying to sneak, oh I got Wolf Link. I scanned in the Amiibo, and he was attacking them and while they were all fighting each other I snuck past them and flew towards the Shrine.”

Interviewer: “Okay, so you said you died a lot trying to get to the Shrine?”

Alex: “Yeah.”

Interviewer: “Did you feel like um you weren’t supposed to be there, or...?”

Alex: “Yes.”

Interviewer: “Was it an emotional experience in any way?”

Alex: “(laughs) Yeah definitely.”

Interviewer: “Okay.”

Alex: “Well at first it was really frustrating because I really wanted to get to this Shrine because I needed more Hearts and Stamina. Especially Stamina because there are some ridiculous cliffs in that game. But um I couldn’t find, I didn’t really know where else to go in terms of finding Shrines and I’d *found* that Shrine and I didn’t want to come back to it later. I was really interested in *that* particular point so I just thought if I kept, if I had, had’ve used strategy I could get there eventually.”

### **11.7 Chris’s challenges**

These two excerpts contrast Chris’s experience of returning to fight the Ploymus Mountain Lynel, when they were close to completing the game and had successfully defeated many Lynels, and Chris’s experience of fighting Calamity Ganon, the most difficult challenge Chris faced in the game.

### ***11.7.1 Chris and the Lynel***

Interviewer: "Okay. Were the Lynels the things that you faced during this period when you would mostly run away from other things?"

Chris: "No. They were towards the – well the first one was you know at the very beginning of that but the second one um was when I started to realise that I could actually take on the monsters."

Interviewer: "Okay. So it was quite a while later, [when you]"

Chris: "Yeah.]"

Interviewer: "faced your second Lynel."

Chris: "Yeah. Yeah. It was, yeah, winding up to the end game. I think (laughs) I don't know how to – you can check how long you've been playing something but I checked it um I think it was like two weeks after I started playing and I'd already clocked up sixty hours and I was like, that's crazy."

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Chris: "And I was still not very good (laughs)."

Interviewer: "(laughs) Okay."

Chris: "Uh yeah."

Interviewer: "So you said that you did eventually go back to that mountain and did you defeat that Lynel?"

Chris: "Yeah. It was a Red one though, so hm. Yeah I did though."

Interviewer: "Okay. Um can you tell me more about that, that second round, so to speak?"

Chris: "Oh that was like nothing. It was so kind of um it was a real non-event just because I had already um you know killed other Lynels. Um and I was only there exploring as well um just to see if there was something that I'd missed. Um because I'm, I'm on the um the shield. I still haven't found it [...] Yeah the... Going back to kill that Lynel was just so easy, like... Because by that point I had basically finished the story. Um I didn't wanna finish, I didn't wanna beat Calamity Ganon until I knew I had enough uh Hearts and Stamina um but... So, so there was a period like towards the end, like after I'd calmed the Divine Beasts and before I defeated Calamity Ganon I just went exploring. Um and so that was when I went back there and, and killed the Lynel it was you know, it still felt good because it still slows time down and, and you know obviously my skill had, had grown. Um and like I felt, I don't know I, I think I would have... I think I feel more invested being able to do that NOW than I would have been if I had just been able to kill it the first time. If you know what I mean, like, it was exceptionally easy but it did feel like an achievement. That like I had finally beat that Lynel."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "You know what I mean, like... yeah I'd grown like big enough for my boots I guess."

Interviewer: "Okay. So facing it the first time and being much weaker um contrasted a lot with how you were when you eventually went back?"

Chris: "Yeah. So, the first time the focus was definitely on the Lynel whereas the second time the focus was on me."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Like the (laughs) when I first faced the Lynel it was like, look how strong that Lynel is. Whereas when I beat it, it was, look how strong I am."

### ***11.7.2 Chris and Calamity Ganon***

Interviewer: "At what point did you feel like you were ready to face Calamity Ganon?"

Chris: "Um I don't, I don't know how many Hearts I had but like I needed to have at least like two rows, like I had to be in my second row um and I needed my stamina to be um, to be at least two times around. That was pretty much all I was aiming for. Um I went a little further than that in the Hearts, in the Hearts uh department because I knew that I get hit a lot because I do, I like... I knew that I would have to play strategically but I didn't trust myself to be able to match the skill that I would need to take on Calamity Ganon. Um and I was right because it took my *ages* to do. Um but once I decided that I was gonna take Calamity Ganon on I didn't go back to exploring. You know, I made the decision and I just kept trying until I won."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Can you tell me more about the fight with Calamity Ganon?"

Chris: "It was desperately hard. Um because I had no idea what I was doing um essentially. I don't know why because I'd faced all of the um the other forms of Ganon on the Divine Beasts but I guess... It took me so long to beat him just because um, yeah when he would like, because he used the different strategies that the different uh forms of Ganon used previously I just couldn't find the right rhythm or strategy to defeat him. And I can't even remember what it was that did it because he would go... Ah, no that's it, because I realised that you could also use your Sheikah abilities on him. So I would stop him, like stop time um on him uh and use that as like a, another moment or two to get a few more attacks off. It was just chipping away the whole time. Took ages."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "But it was awesome."

Interviewer: "Okay so the fight lasted a long time."

Chris: "Yeah. Yeah, the fight itself lasted a long time and then it took a long, like *real* time it took a long time to complete it because I failed so many times."

Interviewer: "Oh okay."

Chris: "Yeah. As in like, I was probably trying for about two weeks."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Is that two weeks of just facing [the boss?]"

Chris: "Regular] play time as well like two hours three days a week. Yeah, yeah. And *just* facing Calamity Ganon."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Like once I made the decision that I was gonna fight him I made the decision and I wasn't gonna do anything else. Yeah. I wanted to beat it like (laughs) I was ready for it to end."

Interviewer: "Okay. And since it took so long to, to do this one boss how did it feel when you beat him?"

Chris: "It was such a relief. Like, I screamed. It was awesome. Like, in ecstasy just like *oh my god* I did it. It felt like (sigh) I don't know. It was just amazing. Took my breath away. Like, I don't have words for it. It was *awesome*. And it's the first time I felt like that in *ages* in regards to a video game. I think the last time that happened was whenever Gears of War 2 came out. When Gears of War 2 came out it took me about a month to finish, played it on the hardest



difficulty, and when I beat that I just felt unstoppable, you know. It was, it's just a real sense of achievement that, yeah. I don't know. It's hard to say."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Um... yeah you just, you just feel unstoppable. It's awesome."

Interviewer: "Okay, so you were excited?"

Chris: "Absolutely, yeah. Yeah it was, it was exciting and it was, it felt like an accomplishment.

Something that I could tell people about um, it felt earned. Like I felt like I had arrived, you know, like I, I had put in the hours of work, 'work', in order to arrive at a place where I was rewarded. Yeah. And it felt like a reward. To win."

### **11.8 Chris and the combat system**

Interviewer: "Okay. And you say you've fought many Lynels since then. How did um say the second Lynel that you, you encountered, how did that compare to that first Lynel?"

Chris: "It was still very hard um but my skill level had increased to the point where I knew what I was kind of doing now. Um even, even just fighting other monsters in the world um like the Bokoblins and um the Lizalfos. You learn to realise when they're telegraphing their attacks and to slow time so that you can get that Flurry of Blows. Um and so I, I kind of adapted that to the next Lynel and (laughs) it felt really good actually. I told my partner about it afterwards. She hadn't, she's never played it. She doesn't know what any of these things are but I just had to tell her because I was so proud (laughs) that I did it. And it felt awesome as well because I was you know picking the right moment to do the right thing and then time would slow down and it would make it just feel that much more epic."

Interviewer: "Okay. Time would slow down. So it was the Perfect Dodge?"

Chris: "Yeah. Yeah um so Breath of the Wild has this feature where if you time your dodging right then the time will, the animation will slow down and you'll be able to get off a, a, they call it a Flurry of Blows which is just a series of quick attacks um that the monsters can't react to because they're still caught in the slow motion."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Yeah. It just feels awesome."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "When you achieve it. Like, yeah."

### **11.9 Jean and innovative play**

Interviewer: "Okay. So from uh I think you said regular playthroughs and videos released by Nintendo that gave you a...?"

Jean: "An expectation."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Jean: "Yeah an expectation of what the mechanic should or would be used for um and uh yeah in what instances it should be used and, and uh... Even, like, I suppose Nintendo videos are there to kind of like show you power porn essentially being like, 'This is how powerful you're gonna get.' And even *then* it didn't show the level of ridiculousness that these people had found in their own version of the game."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Jean: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "So the Nintendo videos can should you the, the possible endpoint? [How powerful?]"

Jean: "Yeah.] Or *their* concept of what the possible endpoint is. I mean you, you give anyone any game and leave them enough time with that game and then they'll create crazy crazy things. I mean you could even say in um, I mean even in The Witcher series um people have been playing around and experimenting with different sorts of builds or talent trees or so and so forth to make *ridiculously* high-end powerful characters that the designers had no intention of ever getting to or *allowing* but hey, they're there in the game and they've been found through playing or being playful, I guess. Yeah.

Interviewer: "Okay. So they're surprising and playful videos. Uh they're ridiculously powerful, you said?"

Jean: "Yeah, yeah I mean there's, you know, things where it's, like, bosses that are supposed to take a long period of time suddenly are taken out in one stroke kind of thing um or uh you're just watching this person stack a certain amount of spells or potions or having the exact right time, so it's night time, full moon, with a storm, next to a water, you know, so and so forth to get all the, like, everything lined up. Um uh yeah it's almost like witchcraft (laughs) at the end of the day, it's uh all these essences coming in together to create uh literally game-breaking characters."

Interviewer: "Game-breaking?"

Jean: "Yeah, so I suppose when we talk about game-breaking we mean um the concept of game designers create an outline in which they want to uh, kind of, work within and want the players to work within but speedrunners and, kind of, I guess uh and even playful players will often times find loops outside of those parameters um uh I mean (sighs) probably going all over the shop now but Mario Kart for instance there's that uh Choco Mountain track which went from the world record for that went from three minutes to it's, like, I think it's like six seconds? And the reason why they got to six seconds was because they *literally* broke the

convention of the game, and I suppose that's what I mean when we say game-breaking. It's breaking conventions that you're *not* supposed to drive into a wall and then the wall suddenly spins you up and gives you a speed boost or whatever it might be. Um so that's what I mean by a game-breaking, [breaking conventions sort of thing.]

### **11.10 Alex and the Guardian Weapon**

Interviewer: "Okay. So as the game progressed and you became more familiar with the game and got more stuff did the territories you could go into feel like it was expanding?"

Alex: "Yeah I got more um confident generally when I had weapons that I knew were good or felt really powerful. Um and then I would generally like run in and start beating things up because I felt like they definitely weren't strong enough to beat me in, even in a group."

Interviewer: "Okay. So you said getting equipment like weapons made you feel more powerful?"

Alex: "Yes."

Interviewer: "Can you remember any of those weapons or any times when you would find a weapon and you uh realised how powerful it was?"

Alex: "I remember especially with things like elemental swords and the Guardian. Anything Guardian was just amazing. As soon as I got a – I remember the first time I got a Guardian weapon I just used it on everything because I felt so strong and powerful using it."

Interviewer: "Okay. Where did you get this Guardian weapon?"

Alex: "I think it was from that Shrine that I um had to sneak past the bokoblins for and fly over to because that was um a Shrine that was a bit further ahead than where I was at that point and I'd, it was um one of the small tests of strength and I ended up getting a Guardian weapon from that. And um I didn't really ah, it told you the numbers on the weapon were

like a *lot* higher than anything I had at that point and so that was when I realised wow this weapon's really good and I just started using it on everything and so I was like oh okay well I wonder if there are more shrines like this because I want more weapons like this."

Interviewer: "Okay. So when you would get a weapon with very obviously high numbers, would you go into territory that you knew before was too high for you?"

Alex: "Yeah, because I felt like the weapon was there to protect me and I had a bit more leeway in what I could do. Whereas before, I knew that if I hit something and the, it did like barely any damage I thought oh well it just isn't worth it because um the weapons I have are kind of in line with where I am at the moment."

Interviewer: "Okay. And how would you feel when that very powerful weapon like the Guardian weapon breaks?"

Alex: "It was really upsetting (laughs) because then I knew that um I would need to go out of my way to get a good weapon like that again or I wouldn't encounter it for a while because I'm definitely not at the level to even have that weapon yet."

Interviewer: "Okay. Were there any times when it happened suddenly or took you by surprise?"

Alex: "Um, especially when fighting like a group of um bokoblins. If one of my powerful weapons breaks it (laughs) kind of makes me feel a bit screwed because um a lot of my other weapons aren't at the level of *that* weapon so when it breaks it kind of feels like THEY have the upper hand again."

### **11.11 Jean and the underdog**

Interviewer: "So I think you also said that when you were much younger you really wanted to play Link, uh..."

Jean: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "A Zelda game on the 64 because you found Link very relatable?"

Jean: "Yeah, yeah, super relatable. I mean he was this, like, small statured um person um that wasn't bulky and as you can see..."

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Jean: "From me I'm not a bulky person uh and I suppose up into that point the kind of, like, skinny hero was often not represented, I think. Um uh maybe that's *really* good marketing in regards to, like, Nintendo uh looking at the kind of player base. But um for me it was a character that didn't need to rely on their strength but I guess... I mean that character, oh that terrible kind of, like, Disney kind of concept of what's inside that counts, you know? Um that uh, that you're inner strength would overcome the obstacle. And even though he had the tools of a sword and a shield and a bow and so and so forth uh that made it (sigh) I guess that was a way of showing me that all I needed was the *tools* to complete a task. Because if I had the right *tools* I, I would have the inner determination or the inner strength and it wasn't about my physical prowess anymore um I could complete tasks um and I, and I could be the hero, I guess, um even though I'm not blonde haired nor, not from a different realm. Um yeah. Yeah. Hm."

Interviewer: "Okay. So you, you used the term 'inner strength'..."

Jean: "(laughs) Yeah."

Interviewer: "That Link has this inner strength..."

Jean: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Do you feel that this character does represent that idea?"

Jean: "Um, yup. I definitely think so. And I, I'm gonna stick that that concept of, like, uh inner strength definitely comes from um his physicality. Because he's not big. He's not a, he's *lithe*. He's a lithe character and there's that, you know, um uh... And that's not, that had not often been seen before, I guess. Um so you're not relying on, I mean, if you look at, like, Kratos in God Of War or even, like, I mean, Geralt in The Witcher um uh they're big guys, like, broad shoulders, you know, triangular shaped dudes um with rippling bodies uh whereas Link is definitely the, he's definitely a kid, he's definitely um uh it's a, it's a, it's, you could, I, in *my* head it's, it, it definitely comes back to that concept of, like, the *cunning* hero rather than the *strong* hero or the intelligent hero rather than the strong hero and um uh I think that comes across physically for Link and that's why I stick with inner strength and inner, and maybe inner strength also represents, like, intelligence as well as determination um uh but yeah that inner strength I guess. Yeah."

Interviewer: "What was it like as a kid and wanting to, or seeing this character and finding it so relatable?"

Jean: "Uh really empowering, I guess? Um because again, like, uh it (sigh) I'm thinking back to, like, the heroes I *really* liked as a kid and *all* of them do have this, kind of, concept of cunning, it's always cunning that beats brawn um or it's, you know, underdogs that beat, you know, clear winners. I mean um I mean in The Princess Bride my favourite characters were Inigo and Westley um mainly because they were men of *skill* and, and um, yeah, Westley beats um uh Fezzik the giant with his brain and not with, with his brawn. He can't defeat Fezzik in a wrestling match. He has to do something else. Um and uh I really *love* that. I really love that idea that, because I, my brother was that, *is* a much bigger and burlier guy, my older brother, and when we would fight (laughs) like, I would just get beaten to a pulp um and I had to think of ways to beat him that didn't rely on my strength. That didn't rely on, like,

using my body. I, I *couldn't* use my body so I had to figure out something else. Um so for, so watching *Link* and seeing Link uh for me uh it was a really kind of, like, empowering thing even though he's not, even though I didn't get to play him that often I still really loved the concept of him. I still really liked the idea of him as a kid. Yeah. Really a lot actually, now that I come to think of it. Um so yeah, yeah. That's fine."

Interviewer: "Okay. Um what do you mean when you say even just this concept was empowering?"

Jean: "(sigh) Well I think it comes back to that um uh the, the concept of the, the cunning warrior I think um keeps coming back to that where it's the brains beat brawn or, you know, brains beat *any* obstacle. Because at the end of the day, I mean, there's quite a lot of puzzles in the Zelda franchise um and even the marketing that you were given, you know, or the ads that I used to see um uh it *was* Link versing these *really* intense monsters so uh it, it was empowering to see the little guy win. Yeah."

### 11.12 Elliott and Bongo Bongo

Elliott: "But um, unfortunately there wasn't that much lore in Ocarina of Time but yeah I think the other boss that stands out is the Shadow Temple boss which is Bongo Bongo. And um you can kind of deduce a lot of its lore and make, like, connect theories but nothing's like proven. There's an, the old man in Kakariko Village talks about the um the man who lived in the house that could see the truth and um uh the Shadow Temple boss's eye resembles the Mask of Truth so you can deduce that he was the man that lived in the house. And somehow he'd turned himself into this absolute monstrosity that was locked in the bottom of the well. And that was always why he became one of my favourite bosses. He's one of the harder bosses in the game. He's still not incredibly hard but it was that mixed with the, the lore behind him. How you could actually find out, find out vague information about what he was and how he used to be human. Kind of was always intriguing to me."



Interviewer: "Okay, so the, the Bongo Bongo boss..."

Elliott: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Stood out because of how it connected to the rest of the world?"

Elliott: "Yeah how it wasn't just a, a random boss that appeared like um uh like Morpha or something from the Water Temple it was, it was someone who had always been in this town and someone who had, don't – it's not stated how long ago had transformed himself into this absolute beast that could like transform shape, turn invisible, stuff like that and someone, you don't know who the Sheik had like sealed it in the bottom of the well and it was that idea that so long ago all this, this had gone down in the town that all this action had happened and you, if you're in town the only one who mentions anything about it is the old man so it's, it's almost like the rest of town was trying to, to hide their dark past."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Elliott: "And I always found that really intriguing."

Interviewer: "So there were little bits of um information that you could glean and [you put them together?"

Elliott: "The – you can] piece together, yeah."

Interviewer: "Okay, and that um that enhanced your experience or your connection with that boss?  
[Because you knew"

Elliott: "Yeah] 'cause he was the – uh he... Depends which way you did it he became the final uh the final boss before Ganon. And um, I know he – it was always a bit of closure for the story that, well back as a kid I never really *thought* about that kind of stuff but now playing through it, it's always good when I get to him because I, like I don't, I don't look for the lore anymore

because I know it but fighting that final boss again, or fighting Bongo Bongo again looking at him and just like knowing where he came from it's always just like a little bit of uh like rose tinted glasses moment for him back when I was fourteen or fifteen and I was researching it so..."

Interviewer: "Okay. So there's uh almost a personal connection with this boss?"

Elliott: "Yeah in the way that like I'm, his fight isn't too memorable, it was pretty standard, but um there was that, yeah that connection that he was always the one that uh well, it was always the one that um I connected with the most on a like I could actually research him I could [find]"

Interviewer: "Okay.]"

Elliott: "Out more about him, in game."

Interviewer: "So did defeating him feel more memorable, because you know *what* he is?"

Elliott: "Yeah, defeating it kind of like as an emotional thirteen, fourteen year old um always hit a bit closer because I knew I wasn't just defeating a senseless enemy. I was defeating just a man who was corrupted. And like almost felt like putting something out of their misery in a way that you would just eliminate the man who really for all we know just wanted to be human again and we just decided to kill him."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Elliott: "And it always struck a little bit home for me that like... I never really wanted to. I always just wanted to, if there was a way I would just change him back, but there wasn't."

Interviewer: "Okay so there's almost this feeling of regret that this has to happen [but]"

Elliott: "This has to] happen, yeah like he's a, he can be a pretty good boss but, but I never feel good about beating him."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Elliott: "Still don't. Hate it. 'Cause I *hate* the Temple to *get* there. And then when I *get* there, I remember all the lore about him, how he yeah he, he is just a person."

### 11.13 Kelly and the Flower Maze

Kelly: "Kind of peaceful, I suppose? But there's plenty of spots that are not peaceful (laughs)."

Interviewer: "Yeah, you said some frustrating moments."

Kelly: "Yeah, but also – Oh god! I didn't tell you about the lady and her fucking flowers! Oh my god! I could strangle that lady."

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Kelly: "(laughs) Sorry. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

Interviewer: "I think I do."

Kelly: "So there's this *one* Shrine that's surrounded by a maze of flowers and if you step on the flowers she brings you back to the start. Which is *fine*. But there's, like, a thirty second cutscene! Where she goes, 'No no no. Don't step on my flowers.' or something like that. And it's just like, no! I, I get the point but, please, less cutscene! Just take me back to the start! (laughs) That was very frustrating. They're beautiful flowers though. Um and then one of the times I'd, I'd used the Shrine to transport and I walked out the door without even *thinking* and I was just like, 'Oh no... No. No! I get the point! No!' (laughs) Kind of wish I could just stamp all over her flowers to piss her off (laughs)."

Interviewer: "So you..."

Kelly: "See *this* is where I would like the decision making thing! I would like to be able to step on her flowers so many times that she gets really shitty with me. Like, *angry* with me and I can fight her. And then I would no longer have to deal with her as a problem (laughs)."

Interviewer: "Okay. You did, you did eventually get through [the flower thing?]"

Kelly: "Oh yeah yeah.] I got through the maze. It, like, it wasn't *hard*. It was just like, and it, like, it was a fun idea. I liked the *idea* there was a maze and that, you know, if you made a mistake you had to go back to the start. I did *not* like the *delay*. The cutscene and the repetition of her just saying the same thing every time. I found that, like, ugh! But the puzzle was *good*! It was like a clever puzzle! But I, poorly executed in my opinion."

Interviewer: "Okay. What is it, what was it *like* for you to uh feel, when you were going through that maze and you would just just step on a flower and then the cutscene would start playing?"

Kelly: "It's, it was, I, I got angry. With her. (laughs) It was like (laughs) I was so close! Anyway, I don't know. It, it was um... Alright, you want an emotion."

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Kelly: "It was, it *was* frustrating. The, but, the frustration was *not* the return to the start. The frustration was a *hundred* percent the cutscene."

Interviewer: "Mm-hm."

Kelly: "And when you skip cutscenes sometimes the actual process of skipping it takes just as long as the actual cutscene. Like, I don't know if you've ever tried just skip any of the cutscenes going into the Shrines, for example? Like, it comes up and says, 'Press X to skip.' or whatever. Is it X? I think it's X. Something to skip."

Interviewer: "Mm."

Kelly: "But if you press that straight away you don't actually really save any time. And it's, *every* Shrine you go into it's the same! So it's not, like, it's not like you're missing, it's not like you're skipping story. Like, I like to watch the story but I don't need to watch the same Shrine entry animation every time, like, and I don't need to watch the, like, the flower person."

Interviewer: "Mm-hm."

Kelly: "And the Shrines are not as big a deal because you only go in them once every now and again, but the *flower* person's annoying because it's like, I don't need to have this, like, and it, I'm sure it's not thirty seconds. Probably, like, *three* seconds. But it's like, I *don't*, like, *why* can't I just go back to the start and she can have, like, a speech bubble above her head while I start doing the maze again?"

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "Like, *why* does it have to be a cutscene?"

Interviewer: "So ideally uh..."

Kelly: "Ideally..."

Interviewer: "So it would just be, she would just be angry, you annoyed her, but it gets you straight back into the maze?"

Kelly: "Yeah. *Ideally* it would do a cutscene the *first* time"

Interviewer: "Mm-hm."

Kelly: "You make a mistake. Maybe the first *two* time. You know, give people a learning opportunity. And then after that, she would, you would go back, and you'd be in *front* of the maze, in the

same spot, you'd see her and she'd have a speech bubble in front, above her or something like that and says, you know, whatever she says. Whatever you want her to say like, 'Don't step on my flowers.' sort of thing. But you wouldn't have that, like, big block of delay time."

#### **11.14 Elliott and Calamity Ganon**

Interviewer: "Oh, okay. And you said this, that feeling of panic was similar to when you faced Ganon at the very beginning?"

Elliott: "Yeah it was that moment of panic that, 'cause like... So it was the iterations of Ganon through time that kind of, I related to. So it was a human, a beast form, and then even in Breath of the Wild standalone there was the four bosses that all looked relatively identical. Um, and then going to Ganon, just seeing this absolute monstrosity just kind of, didn't really know how to deal with it because, it wasn't familiar in any way, shape, or form. I didn't know what to do with it."

Interviewer: "Okay. So..."

Elliott: "It wasn't until it started attacking and the attacks Ganon was using were very very familiar from the game that it kind of just went oh, this is how you beat it."

Interviewer: "Okay. So when you saw it, it looked so unfamiliar that you had that feeling of panic of, I don't recognise this, I don't know how to deal with it?"

Elliott: "Yeah. Absolutely, it was like... uh (laughs) I don't want to make the reference but it kind of hit me like Dark Souls."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Elliott: "In the way that every boss is so unique and you, you got to find that weak point before you can beat it."

Interviewer: "Okay. But when um Ganon started attacking you, you recognised the attacks?"

Elliott: "Yeah. Absolutely, because they've been used throughout the entire game from different enemies so like it had the Guardian beam, and the Guardians threw the thing, you had to reflect the beam and it'd go back to it and that's exactly how to beat Ganon. So it was pretty, pretty straightforward."

Interviewer: "Okay, so when you saw him shoot that beam, was there a moment of recognition? Like, I know what that is?"

Elliott: "Yeah, so the first one I kind of just dodged 'cause, you know, I was still in that moment of, how do I beat this thing. So, first attack I just avoided and then I kind of looked at it and went oh, that's how you beat it. And I just waited for him to do it again and, sure enough, bang. Straight back. And that kind of, that feeling of exhilaration just went away. Simply because I knew how to beat the boss and I knew that I would take absolutely minimal damage from it."

Interviewer: "Okay, so uh you said that there was, a feeling of disappointment?"

Elliott: "It was, yeah, it was a pretty disappointing finish to the game I reckon and that feeling, 'cause like, I play games to be challenged on that sort of level and the challenge from the game had just been absolutely wiped away by the ease of this boss."

Interviewer: "Okay. And what was it like when you defeated Ganon?"

Elliott: "It, it kind of felt, it's that, it kind of felt disappointing 'cause like, the first iteration I still had that, that moment where he knocked me back 'cause well I got on the back foot because I was, didn't know how to beat it 'cause of its design and the second phase he went back to like his basic beast form which was like, I didn't, I wasn't sure how you could take damage from it? Like I didn't see any points where I could take damage."

Interviewer: "Is this the form in the field?"

Elliott: "[Yeah."

Interviewer: "In the], okay..."

Elliott: "Like just had to like not run into it, I guess. But like I didn't feel challenged at all in that fight and after it was done I kind of just, in my head I was kind of like is, is that it? Like and then obviously after that the game, been reset. It went back to prior to the boss fight and I kind of thought, well I'm not gonna do that again because no point."

### **11.15 Alex and Sidon**

Alex: "I really liked when you ended up trying to get into the water dungeon near the Zora's Domain when he, you would ride on his back and shoot the ice blocks. I thought, I really liked that moment because I felt more – I felt like he was contributing because that's generally something that I feel like, I feel like generally in Zelda you do everything by yourself but the fact that he was like helping you out and you were working together to use your abilities to the best of your ability (laughs) was um a really cool addition and that kind of made me feel more connected to him as well because I feel like the others, while they did help, I don't know, just the fact that you were like swimming *with* him, I feel like was more personal whereas everybody else kind of just lended you their powers, if that makes sense?"

### **11.16 Chris and the past**

Interviewer: "And I think at the very beginning of the interview you said a theme of that story is acceptance."

Chris: "Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, acceptance and closure, yeah."

Interviewer: "Okay."



Chris: "Um yeah so, like, the way that Link still accepts his duty um even after having lost everything that he cared about um, as well as I think that the only reason that he pursues it is to accept the loss. Um and yet to put, to put that full stop on, on his uh involvement with that story."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Did you get that sense of um acceptance across most of the game when you were playing with it?"

Chris: "Yeah I think so. I mean um it, it still has like a very childish um charm to it. So a lot of like interactions with characters will be very accepting. Um and, and like, very friendly. Um, but like I think that, I think that Link feels outside of the world that he's in um and, and so like, I think that that is what like kind of spurs you on to, to finish the game because you belong to a time that's past um and this world um even though it's, you know, it's glad to have you it's not where you belong and you need to find a way to get back to where you were. Does that make sense?"

Interviewer: "Okay. So it's um you said it feels like Link is disconnected?"

Chris: "Yeah. Yeah definitely like he's, he like, he's definitely outside of his own time um and despite all the non-playable characters being um, you know, approachable and friendly they never speak to you any more than like two lines at a time kind of thing um and uh, they'll help you but they don't seem to have any like ongoing role in the story. Even the um, even the Froot Loops parrot that plays the accordion uh, you know, he shows up every now and then and he'll give, he'll help you out and play you a song and uh give you a riddle to solve but it, it never feels like personally attached to Link."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Yeah. Um it just seems like every time you meet him it's a chance encounter. Um and, and so like... It's not a chance encounter in like terms of game design, it's a chance encounter like you meet someone down the street, kind of thing. Um and so it, I think that's even like as close as you get to connecting with another character, kind of, but you're definitely outside of that society. You're, yeah you belong to the quest that you're on."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Chris: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "So you said that um the connection between Link and the Champions and Zelda felt very strong and you continued getting that impression as you found more memories and you went to the Divine Beasts but you, when you would interact with people in the present day you wouldn't feel any of that kind of connection?"

Chris: "No. Like I, I don't think I can point to any of the present day characters um, even uh the ones who upgrade your Sheikah Slate um who probably come the closest to relatable characters to Link. Um but even they uh, even they kind of belong to the past as well um because they are so old and they belong to an ancient tribe. They, they almost bridge the gap but they don't, I don't see them as, as strong characters as the main cast, which is the Champions and Zelda."

Interviewer: "Okay. How did you feel about um interacting with this world and just being there and doing all these quests and missions but not quite being a part of the society?"

Chris: "I kind of found it frustrating um because the, the quest that you were given by um, by NPCs kind of became more of the same thing where it would be you would either find a Shrine or you would get rewarded with rupees or, or you know food or things like that. Things that kind of didn't really progress the story so much as like, as like actually finding the Shrines

yourself or, or, or just like being out in the wilderness and solving like Korok puzzles or um, yeah. So like, I don't, I don't think they *added* anything um and it, and it could have even been that like Calamity Ganon *had* won, completely, um but that you could like *renew* the world um and it would have had the same effect I think. Yeah."

Interviewer: "Okay. So I think you also said that um when you said that it felt like Calamity Ganon had won but the world was okay, you said that it seemed like everyone had moved on? Like built up..."

Chris: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Life again?"

Chris: "Yeah. Um I think that's partially because Zelda was like keeping the strength of Calamity Ganon in the Castle. Um but all of the monsters are there because of Calamity Ganon um and, and so, like I feel like everything was kind of fine and could've continued to be, you know, relatively fine. Nothing's perfect but neither is the real world. Um and so, yeah I felt like, like Link's quest was *directly* tied to his kind of um like, I don't want to say burden but it's the only word that I can think of. Like, his burden of shouldering the responsibility of the past and like *feeling* responsible for um having lost. Yeah."

### **11.17 Elliott and the Barinade**

Elliott: "There was the, the feeling that I didn't know where it came from or what it was but I knew what it was doing. In the way that I knew that it was affecting the Lord but I didn't know, at the time, like the first time I played through I didn't know *what* was, what was wrong. And when I finally found that this um yeah this plague sort of thing was the thing that was ruining everything kind of links it up a little bit rather than this, if it was just a *monster* inside I'd be like well, how was it possessing, how was it creating all these things? And the idea that the

final boss, Barinade, was just a *bigger* version of all the things you'd fought, so the little jellyfish that'd fly around, kind of like linked everything together that, that's the reason why all these enemies showed up. Rather [than...]"

Interviewer: "Okay.]"

Elliott: "They just appeared. With a monster. Yeah."

Interviewer: "Okay. So um the Barinade fight did it *feel* more significant because you had that initial mystery of what is this plague?"

Elliott: "Yeah, so I went in there just expecting to do the classic walk in to go through the dungeon, beat the final boss, and warp out. But that dungeon was all about finding the princess. And you find her straight away. And she says she's not leaving until she gets her stone back and when you get the stone back she says, she doesn't say, she just goes. And you have to find her again and you find her after the final boss fight so there's that... So I guess a lot of players would have had that drive to um find the princess whereas I had the drive to find out what was going on."

### **11.18 Kelly and their horses**

Interviewer: "Okay. And um I think about the horses..."

Kelly: "Yes."

Interviewer: "So you said you just enjoy wandering around [just on horseback?]"

Kelly: "I do like riding horses.] Yup. And that you can, like, when they mess up you can, like, like, do the whole calm mechanic. I like that too."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Eh do you spend a *lot* of the game just on horseback? Is that what you would spend a lot of your time doing?"

Kelly: "So I accidentally teleported from a location to a Shrine thinking that my horse would come with me. By the way, why doesn't your horse come with you? I don't know. But I did that, I warped, I telep- and I realised the horse hadn't come back with me and I went back and found him."

Interviewer: "Was it a, a long way?"

Kelly: "It was a *very* long way (laughs). It was a *really* long way. 'Cause the nearest, the next nearest Shrine was not close."

Interviewer: "Mm."

Kelly: "And I went back and found my horse. And brought him back and put him in a stable."

Interviewer: "Okay (laughs)."

Kelly: "Gave him a rest (laughs)."

Interviewer: "What um..."

Kelly: "I don't know. They're just, like, they're my, like, you know, I felt some responsibility for him."

Interviewer: "Aw."

Kelly: "Like, I, I *liked* that one. Like, I'd made an effort to pick that horse out of the herd that time. I'd got, I think I got three horses? Um, yeah. I got three. My current favourite one is a paint horse."

Interviewer: "[Is a...?]"

Kelly: "Just the], like, a white and brown with patches."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "Paint, they're called paint horses."

Interviewer: "Oh okay."

Kelly: "Yup. He's my current favourite. Um but the previous one was, like, much closer to my original horse. He was, like, a dark brown um, yeah."

Interviewer: "Mm-hm."

Kelly: "He was also apparently quite good 'cause he has three of the little running things."

Interviewer: "Ah okay."

Kelly: "Like, you know when you're galloping and you, like, certain many gallop charges? He had three [gallop charges]"

Interviewer: "Okay.]"

Kelly: "And my current one only has two."

Interviewer: "Okay so your current favourite it's um..."

Kelly: "Sub-optimal? (laughs) Yes."

Interviewer: "What, what about uh that horse makes it your favourite out of the others?"

Kelly: "Um well paint horses are quite beautiful. Quite nice."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "Um, I just picked him and he's been on my adventures now. He's my buddy."

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Kelly: "(laughs)"

Interviewer: "Okay and uh when you teleported away, thinking your horse would come, were you in um a safe area or a dangerous area?"

Kelly: "Um I was, like, up on a mountain somewhere and I was like, 'Ugh, I should just teleport to get back to where I need, like, get back to somewhere on track.' "

Interviewer: "Mm-hm."

Kelly: "Like, it wasn't, like, it wasn't *unsafe* but it was, like, it was nowhere near any of, I think... It was nowhere near anything. I think I'd just gone that way thinking I was trying to get to a temple uh sorry a Shrine, I don't know why I keep calling them temples, getting towards a Shrine um and then it, like, it turned out I couldn't get to it or maybe, like, uh I got to a wall. I, I forget why exactly, but it was somewhere, it was night time. I think it might have been raining."

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Kelly: "(laughs) Um and I left him there. I had to go back and get him. It was sad."

Interviewer: "Okay. When, what was it like when you, I think when you teleport Link lifts up and then starts disappearing?"

Kelly: "Yeah it was, yeah."

Interviewer: "What was it like [when you saw the horse wasn't...?]"

Kelly: "I was like (laughs)] I was like, 'Aw no! He's not going with me! Aw this is gonna be annoying.' (laughs) 'Cause I'd, I knew straight away I was gonna have to go back and get him."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "Like, as soon as I started teleporting I'm like, 'He's not coming with me.' (laughs) 'I have to go back now.' (laughs)"

Interviewer: "(laughs) Would..."

Kelly: "It felt like I landed and immediately opened the map and, like, I was like, 'Oh thank god he's still marked on the map.' I tried whistling but of course you can't whistle like the continent away (crash) sorry."

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Kelly: "You can't whistle a continent away."

Interviewer: "It was so uh how far across the, you said it was *very* far away from [the nearest]"

Kelly: "It was...]"

Interviewer: "Shrine? Up on a mountain?"

Kelly: "It was a long way."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "Um I, I don't remember exactly where it was but, like, I'd *ridden* there."

Interviewer: "Mm."

Kelly: "And I had to walk there *back*. 'Cause, like, I was like, 'I could ride a... no I can't. I can't. I can't bring them both home.' (laughs)"

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Kelly: "So I [had to walk back."

Interviewer: "Okay.] Would..."



Kelly: "Took a while (laughs)"

Interviewer: "What, what would it have been like for you if something in the game happened, like, pulled you away and you had to leave your horse up there on that mountain for some time?"

Kelly: "Well it's okay because he was marked there. I could go back and get him at any time."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "Like, he's okay, like, they don't *die*."

Interviewer: "Mm-hm."

Kelly: "Which I, well at least I..."

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Kelly: "*Not* that I've experienced yet. None of my horses – I go also, I don't go into *battle* on my horse either. I park him carefully and then go walk in 'cause I don't want him to get hurt (laughs)."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "And one time, one time I actually, the battle started getting too close to the horse so I ran away, got on the horse, and moved him back further (laughs) and went back and fought again. I'm very precious about my horses."

Interviewer: "Okay. So um you, you weren't too anxious about your horse in this situation because you knew exactly where he was?"

Kelly: "I knew where he was. I didn't, I was *initially* a little concerned 'cause I thought maybe he'll despawn."

Interviewer: "Mm."

Kelly: "Um but I was like, 'Well, if he despawns he'll probably go into the *stable*, right?' "

Interviewer: "Mm."

Kelly: "That was, like, my assumption."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "But he didn't. He just stayed there. So I [went and got him.]"

Interviewer: "Okay.] Okay. So even though you, you were pretty confident that he would stay where he was you still felt compelled to go there [straight away?]"

Kelly: "Yeah yeah.] I went, I, yeah, I went and got him. Well because it was also one of those things, like, I'll just go do it now."

Interviewer: "Oh okay."

Kelly: "And get him back and get him safe. I have, I have other times left my horses places to teleport."

Interviewer: "Mm-hm."

Kelly: "But um now I know what happens, I make sure I leave them somewhere I can get back to easily."

Interviewer: "Okay. And you say you avoid battles on your horse? Or you, you park your horse far away [from the battle?]"

Kelly: "Yeah.] Well, well I don't want them to die (laughs). They might, they might be able to die, I don't know! (laughs)"

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "I've never *tried* (laughs). So..."

Interviewer: "So, so how, how close did this battle get to your horse [that when you said the...?]"

Kelly: "Like he did the, like,] he got spooked and ran a bit."

Interviewer: "Oh okay."

Kelly: "So I was like, 'Okay, this is too close.' So I, like, ran off the other direction and then when they stopped chasing me I went and moved him a bit further away."

Interviewer: "Okay. How would, if something *did* happen to your horse, how would you, how would that affect you? Like, what would you [feel?]"

Kelly: "Like,] let's be fair. It's a horse in a video game. I'm not gonna be *that* upset. But I don't know, like, it's... You, you would get a bit sad when you lose – Like, I, I would honestly probably be *more* sad about losing a, I'd be *more* sad about losing a *pet* in a video game than I am about losing, like, an NPC or, like, an ally or a squad mate or whatever. Always more upset if I lose a pet."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "Like, when I played Fallout, like, I looked after that dog real good."

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Kelly: "(laughs) That dog got healed *instantly*, like, *way* more careful with the dog. I'd, I'd taken allies out. If they died I'd be like, 'Eh we'll get to you.' But, like, dog? No. Instant heal the dog. Like, *way* more sensitive about pets."

Interviewer: "Aw."

Kelly: "Than I am about humans."

Interviewer: "So all those horses, they are, you consider them like your pets in the game?"

Kelly: "Yeah! Oh yeah, yeah. They're a hundred percent my pets. (laughs)"

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Kelly: "Is that not normal? (laughs)"

Interviewer: "Um, um they're a mode of transportation so I can imagine that some people might just see them as a function [so...]"

Kelly: "Oh...]"

Interviewer: "So some people might see that. But to *you* they are [they're like...?]"

Kelly: "Oh yeah, no.] That never occurred to me. No. They're my *pets* (laughs)"

Interviewer: "Okay (laughs)"

Kelly: "Yeah, yeah. They're *helpful*. They're really useful to getting to places quickly but they're also my pets."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "And I think the stable also lets you have five horses? They have, is there a limit on [the number of horses?]"

Kelly: "I don't know] but I've, as I said I think I've got, I've got three."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "I've got one paint horse, one brown horse, and then one other one that I think is just I think is white with a, with a light tan mane. I was like, 'He's pretty cool. I'll catch him and keep him too.' "

Interviewer: "Okay."

Kelly: "I don't really ride him around. Yes, they are all boy horses. (laughs)"

Interviewer: "(laughs)"

Kelly: "They're all boy horses because – I don't know why they're all boy horses. (laughs) They just all are."

### **11.19 Elliott and Fort Hateno**

Interviewer: "So uh most of the, the evidence that gave you that closure is at the very end of the game?"

Elliott: "Yup."

Interviewer: "So is that um right *before* fighting Ganon?"

Elliott: "Uh, post."

Interviewer: "Oh, right after...?"

Elliott: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "The cutscene after fighting Ganon?"

Elliott: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "Okay. And that gave you all the answers that you were looking for?"

Elliott: "Uh the post-cutscene gave me a lot of the answers but there was the one memory, there's one memory you couldn't get... Well you could, you could get all twelve but there was a thirteen memory you could only get post-game, with post-game dialogue, and I went back, did it, and found it and that gave me a lot more closure."

Interviewer: "Okay."

Elliott: "So yeah there was always this um uh lore surrounding it like that uh... what was the name - Fort Hateno, that this is the point of the last stand and that's where all these Guardians are scattered across the, across the field. And that, that place always intrigued me because it was like just a war-torn field that still remained the day of like the day it went down. And um going back there uh to find a memory was always pretty, pretty intriguing because it was that point I'd revisited *heaps* of times in the game hoping to find some more evidence but I never did. And it was that feeling of closure that there *was* actually evidence there I just couldn't find it yet and the evidence that was applied was yeah really cool.

Interviewer: "Okay. So there was this, this area Hateno field..."

Elliott: "Mm."

Interviewer: "That it just kept drawing your attention because you saw that there was a war there?"

Elliott: "There was a war there and it was like... It just, it was like ruins and it was just the idea that the last stand took place here but like I know nothing about it. I just know it occurred."

Interviewer: "Okay, so it's like you *know* something's there, you *feel* it..."

Elliott: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "But it's still a question?"

Elliott: "Yeah. Absolutely."

Interviewer: "And you said you kept going back to that place just to look for more evidence?"

Elliott: "I, I'll... There was one memory I had to find that I always like I *thought* it was there. I *thought* the pictures lined up but they *didn't* and I always kept going back there to find the memory.

But even after I found where the memory was I still went back there just 'cause... I can't remember why I went back there, it was just kind of a cool place to be."

Interviewer: "Okay. And eventually when you learned that there *was* a memory there what did that feel like?"

Elliott: "Ah it was kind of that like a-ha moment that I'd found it. Like I knew there was something here and I found it. And um after the cutscene for the memory it played it was pretty closing that like this last stand was the place you disappeared. That it wasn't just um it wasn't just like a battle, battlefield it was a pretty key point in like the game's history. But yeah."