

A Gaming Masterpiece

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The wind whipping past your face. A minuscule pool of water rapidly approaching you from the ground. When it finally hits, you expect it to go dark. Instead, you land in the water with a graceful “Sploosh!” and water drops rain all around you. If this doesn’t sound familiar to you, it is the final scene in the opening of *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*. Sounds majestic, doesn’t it? Well, not according to Paul Attard (2023) in his review of the game for *Slant Magazine*, titled “*The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* Review: Breath of the Familiar.” In the article, Attard (2023) claims TOTK is a disappointing and unimaginative follow-up to the first game (*The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, henceforth referred to as BOTW). He claims TOTK has “untapped potential” in the game’s new powerups, “copy-pasted land to traverse,” interactions that are limited to characters carried over from the first game, and ruins that are boring to explore. This couldn’t be further from the truth. Contrary to what Attard (2023) claims, TOTK introduces many new mechanics to expand on its predecessor BOTW. The new powerups completely change the ways in which players interact with their environment, the new map has many added segments of Hyrule to explore, the game provides a check in on how our favorite side characters from BOTW are doing (and what has changed about them), and the new dungeons are very interesting and exciting to explore.

Attard’s (2023) first and arguably most bold claim is that the new powerups are underutilized, and that they missed the mark. Conversely, in my opinion, the new powerups revolutionize the way players of TOTK interact with the world around them. If you look at the overall conversation surrounding the game, many other authors disagree with Attard’s (2023) assessment. In a 2023 article for *Gamespot* titled “*The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom Review*,” author Steve Watts writes, “[...] these new tools [the powerups] center Tears of the Kingdom around building and experimenting to overcome obstacles in inventive ways.” I firmly

agree with Watts here, as the powerups in TOTK are extremely open-ended in their function. Each of them allows you to solve problems in inventive ways. While most games don't want you to outsmart them by abusing their mechanics, TOTK encourages it, and is in fact entirely built upon that premise. Many of my most memorable moments playing TOTK are from either using the Ascend powerup to make an otherwise difficult puzzle trivial or making a ridiculous vehicle with the Ultrahand powerup and using it to "cheat" my way through the puzzle. By giving you such open ended powerups, Nintendo is banking on the idea that players will use their creativity to solve puzzles in thoughtful ways rather than completing them the intended way. In doing this, the player feels much more gratification and a greater sense of accomplishment for "gaming the system" to their advantage, and thus the game is much more fun to play through as a result. This puzzle approach is not necessarily for everybody, but it is certainly inventive and expands on the concepts from the first game.

Attard (2023) additionally affirms that TOTK has a boring map that is copy-pasted from the first game. I will concede that the map is technically the same map as in BOTW; however, Nintendo have completely changed many parts of it and how you explore it. Author Cody Gravelle (2023) describes this in his article for *Gamerant* titled "The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom Review - Building Excellence," saying, "Speaking of that vaunted Tears of the Kingdom verticality, the decision to essentially port over the base Hyrule map and then add one layer on both its top and bottom is largely an innovative, exciting one." Gravelle (2023) goes on to mention that the underground portion of the new map can feel frustrating to explore due to the darkness and tough enemies, but overall, he says that the new map is a great improvement on the original, with much more to explore than the first one. I mostly agree with what Gravelle (2023) says, although I believe the underground section of the game is more enjoyable than the sky

portion. There are tons of ruins, new enemy types, and a great deal to explore in underground Hyrule. One of my favorite moments in TOTK was when I was exploring the depths and stumbled upon a massive coliseum in the dark. After wandering inside, the door slammed shut behind me, and another door opened to release a Lynel (Lynels are large beasts that are essentially crosses between a minotaur and a centaur, they are always one of the hardest enemies in *Zelda* games). After exhausting some of my resources to kill said Lynel, another door opened to reveal another one, this one being stronger than the last. This happened a total of four times, nearly using up all my resources. Upon defeating the last one, a chest in the middle of the coliseum opened to reveal Majora's Mask, an item that essentially makes you invisible to enemies. All in all, the map for TOTK is a great upgrade to the original BOTW map. Introducing two new layers to the already massive map from the first game effectively doubles the size of the map, giving the player even more to explore than there was in BOTW (a game that was considered breathtaking in scope on release). Players will spend hours and hours exploring without seeing everything, and yet won't get bored. There's simply too much to see for the exploration to get boring.

Another point Attard (2023) makes is that TOTK lacks original characters, and most of the characters you interact with in game are the same as from BOTW. While this is largely true, these characters have changed greatly since BOTW. A large part of the fun of exploring the world of TOTK is seeing how it has changed in the years since BOTW's story. Many of the characters you know from the previous game have moved on to bigger things. One such example is the character Teba from both games. Teba helps you on your quest in BOTW, being the hero that helps you defeat the blight plaguing Divine Beast Vah Medoh (one of the main story beats in BOTW.) In TOTK, Teba has since had a child named Tulin, who takes on his father's role as a

hero and aid to Link. Tulin is very hotheaded and impulsive, largely unlike his father Teba, who was very cool and collected. Another such example is the character Purah. In BOTW, Purah is a very old scientist who underwent a de-aging experiment which left her looking like a 3-year-old. In TOTK, Purah returns as an adolescent, much more fitting for her confident and flamboyant personality. Seeing these characters that I had already cared about in BOTW develop and mature in TOTK made me feel extremely immersed in the game world. It was almost emotional for me seeing Zelda and Link exploring together at the start of TOTK after everything they had gone through in BOTW. All these returning characters had depth and emotion in BOTW which was expanded upon and amplified in TOTK, which makes up for a relative lack of new characters in the game. Additionally, it would make sense that most of the characters in TOTK would be the same considering that the game world is the same in both games. It would make no sense and be confusing if the same world you're already familiar with was inhabited by completely different people despite only a roughly five-year gap between the events of both games.

The last main point Attard (2023) makes is arguing that TOTK lacks interesting ruins to explore and is instead filled with boring ruins that lack rewards. This is not accurate as TOTK is filled to the brim with ancient temples that give you game-altering loot upon completion. The most prominent example of TOTK's great dungeons is the five primary story dungeons. Each one is a different and engaging experience. From a pyramid filled with zombies deep under the ground to a rock mine in the middle of a volcano, each one has an interesting setting. They are also filled with interesting and engaging puzzles, which work very well in tandem with Link's new powerups. The rewards for these story dungeons are permanent allies that help you on your journey. These are great, but my favorite example of TOTK's dungeons is the coliseums deep underground, as I mentioned earlier. They are always filled with waves of enemies to fight and

making it to the end of one rewards you with powerful gear, like the Majora's Mask I mentioned receiving. I find these dungeons so much more engaging and interesting than many other games. For example, dungeons in *Elden Ring*. I'll start by saying that I love *Elden Ring*, but the catacombs in the game tend to feel repetitive. They lack visual and enemy variety, as well as compelling rewards, which may lead to many players skipping over them since they are optional. Conversely, in TOTK, every dungeon has visual and enemy variety, as well as great rewards for completing them. The exception to this is the shrines, but many of the shrines are not even puzzles themselves. These shrines appear as a reward for completing puzzles in the world, giving the player a Blessing of Light (four of which can be exchanged for a heart container or stamina vessel). As for the shrines that are not rewards, they have a great variety in puzzles, which partially makes up for the lack of enemy/visual variety. Every other type of dungeon in TOTK is excellent and a great deal of fun to explore. Personally, I love the fifth and final story dungeon the most. It involves the player assembling a sort of mech suit, each piece requiring puzzle solving and critical thinking skills. Once they've assembled the mech, the player gets to pilot it into a mech fight boss battle in which you box with an enemy mech. It's another one of my most memorable moments in TOTK and is my favorite example of TOTK having excellent dungeon design.

All of this is to say that Paul Attard (2023) is wrong about *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*. The game has excellent powerups, an expansive map, emotive and interesting characters, and well-crafted dungeons to explore. Personally, my experience playing TOTK has been awesome. I was extremely excited for this game's release and went through a breakup shortly before it came out. This game helped me greatly with feeling better and moving on and is by far one of the best games I've ever played. Obviously, everyone is entitled to their own

opinions about a game. Just don't let a few negative comments prevent you from trying a game you would potentially love. Do your own research, for your own sake!

References

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