

Gamers rush to get Nintendo's new 'Zelda' after six-year wait

May 12 2023, by Mehdi CHERIFIA with Mathias Cena in Tokyo



Some fans in New York came dressed as their favourite Zelda characters to celebrate the launch of the game.

Video game fans around the world flocked to shops on Friday to get their hands on the new edition of "Zelda", one of the most successful

franchises in history and now central to the success of Japanese giant Nintendo.

Gamers queued hours before shops opened in cities from Paris to New York and Tokyo, desperate to be among the first to play "Tears of the Kingdom", featuring the exploits of Princess Zelda and elf-like warrior Link.

Standing in line outside a Paris store before midnight, 19-year-old Taylor Meguira told AFP the previous entry in the franchise's storied cannon, 2017's "Breath of the Wild", had been a "real revolution".

"Knowing that there is a sequel coming out in an hour or a little less, it's just incredible, it just makes me so happy," he said.

In Tokyo, Yutaka Hirai, 30, queued with dozens of others, telling AFP the seemingly endless scale of previous Zelda games helped draw him in.

"I want to find the same wide open spaces and adventure in this game as in the previous ones," he said, confessing he had played the previous title for "over 100 hours".

Early reviews have gushed about the game, giving it a score of 97 out of 100 on metacritic, a site that compiles ratings from reviewers.

The Zelda franchise has sold 125 million copies worldwide since its first edition in 1986.

It helped forge "open world" games where the player is free to roam in virtual landscapes—an idea later taken up by titles ranging from "Grand Theft Auto" to "Skyrim".



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Potential blockbuster

But its main challenge this year will be to boost earnings for Nintendo and prolong the life of its Switch console, which experts say is approaching the end of its life after more than six years on the shelves.

Earlier this week, Nintendo posted better than expected profits but issued a gloomy forecast for the year ahead.

The Zelda game is expected to be "by far the biggest contributor to Nintendo's sales this year", said Serkan Toto, an analyst at Kantan

Games.

Charles-Louis Planade, an analyst at Midcap Partners, reckons "Tears of the Kingdom" could become "the best-selling game in history," potentially approaching \$1 billion in revenue.

And so far, reviews have backed up the hype.

"It is easy to forget how to find the fun in adult life. Games such as Zelda help to remind you that if you look at things the right way, it's everywhere," wrote Keza MacDonald in a five-star review for the UK's Guardian newspaper.

The franchise has come a long way since its 1980s launch, which was something of a gamble for a company then best known for "Donkey Kong" and "Super Mario Bros".



Fans from Paris to Tokyo lined up for the latest iteration of the "Zelda" series.

- 'A pioneer' -

The first edition, "The Legend of Zelda", plunged gamers into an unknown universe largely without instructions.

"The scale of the game was huge at a time when most games were finished in an hour or two," said Kiyoshi Tane, an author specializing in the history of video games.

"It was something of a pioneer of what open-world games would become."

It was a smash hit and pushed the boundaries of game design for the next two decades.

After a slump in quality that saw fans drift away from the franchise, designers rethought the game entirely and created "Breath of the Wild" in 2017.

That game launched at the same time as the Switch and has since become the best-selling edition of Zelda by far.

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