



# LEGENDS OF LOCALIZATION



Book 1:  
The Legend  
of Zelda

Clyde Mandelin

---

ローカライズの伝説  
第一巻 ゼルダの伝説

クライド・マンデリン



## THOSE PESKY POLS

There are weird, yellow enemies in *Zelda* called “Pols Voices”. They have whiskers and big ears and bounce around all over the place. They’re also really tough to defeat if you try to use your sword. So if you were a kid during the NES days, you probably checked the instruction manual to find information about them and came across this:

*“A ghost with big ears and a weak point - he hates loud noise.”*

The manual tells you that Pols Voices are weak against loud sounds... So what’s the immediate, natural conclusion? Use the flute item! That oughta do it!

But nope, it does absolutely nothing to the Pols Voices. I remember being confused by this as a kid, thinking, “Why would the manual say that then? What else could it be talking about?” I didn’t realize at the time that there was a lot more to the story.

Basically, the Japanese Famicom system is different from the NES in a lot of little ways. One of these differences is the controllers – the Famicom came with two controllers

permanently connected to the system, and Controller #2 had a built-in microphone. But when the NES was released, it was stripped of this microphone hardware.

So when Japanese players read that Pols Voices were weak against sound, they might’ve thought of the flute too. But astute players would’ve also thought, “Hey, I wonder what happens if I try to use the microphone on Controller #2?”

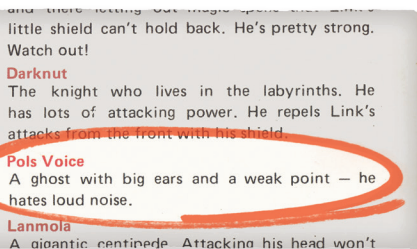
It turns out that blowing into the microphone or making enough sound will cause all the Pols Voice in a room to die instantly!

To compensate for the lack of a microphone, the NES version makes the Pols Voice enemies weak against arrows. They’re completely invincible to arrows in the Japanese versions, though.

To get really technical, the Pols Voices are still weak to the microphone in the NES version – that weakness was never programmed out. So if you could somehow add microphone support to your NES, you could theoretically kill them the loudmouthed way!



▲  
*Microphones in my Zelda?  
It's more likely than you  
think, but mostly a gimmick*



▲  
*Darn you, properly-  
translated manual!*



These regional weaknesses were carried over in various ports and re-releases too, so Pols Voices are weak against arrows in all the English ports, while they're weak against the microphone sounds in the Japanese versions.

But how do things work on Japanese systems other than the Famicom Disk System? At first you might think the Pols Voices have no weaknesses in these versions, but the developers got crafty...

A redesign of the Famicom was released in 1993, but it didn't include a microphone! This was a problem for *Zelda* fans, naturally. I've heard that you can still kill Pols Voices by pausing the game for a bit and then pressing A, but it's never worked for me. They're still somewhat vulnerable to swords, luckily.

In the Japanese Game Boy Advance port, the Pols Voices can be instantly defeated by pressing Select four times. This doesn't work in the English versions, though, since they're still weak against arrows.

The GameCube and Japanese Wii Virtual Console releases map microphone input to the right analog stick. By twirling it around for a few seconds, you can simulate sound input, thereby killing the Pols Voices.

The Japanese Wii U Virtual Console release is simple: you just shout into the microphone on the gamepad!



▲ The Wii version requires much less anger



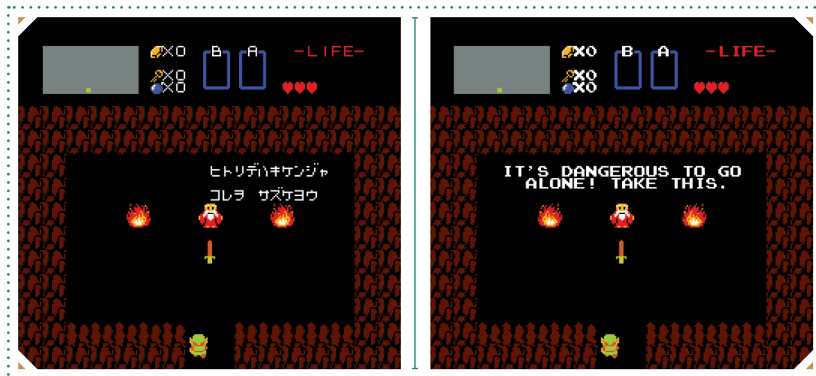
The Japanese 3DS releases are interesting: you need to press L and R simultaneously to bring up a controller select option, then press Y to switch to Controller #2. Then you can shout into the 3DS' microphone to simulate the Famicom's microphone!

#### HOW TO DEFEAT THOSE POLS

Famicom, JP Wii U VC	Japanese GBA	JP GameCube, JP Wii VC	Japanese 3DS	All English releases
Use microphone in controller	Press <b>Select</b> four times	Twirl right analog sticks	Press <b>L + R</b> , press <b>Y</b> to select Controller #2, use 3DS microphone	Use arrows

## HELPFUL SWORD GUY

“This is no gift.  
It is a curse.”



The first person you meet in *Zelda* is an iconic old man in a cave who gives you a sword. In English he says, “It’s dangerous to go alone! Take this.”

He says pretty much the same thing in Japanese: “It’s dangerous to go alone. I’ll give you this.” He also says it with an “old wise man” speech style that isn’t reflected in the English translation.

You’ll also notice that the text is positioned differently in the Japanese game – it starts printing right above the man’s head. It does this with all the other text in the game, too. This text formatting was probably meant to act like a speech bubble in a comic, only without a bubble.

Since it usually takes a lot more text to convey things in English, though, text in the NES version often takes up *all* of the blank space above characters’ heads. The vertical spacing was also changed to allow for three lines of English text in some rare cases. I personally find the English style a lot more aesthetically pleasing, although I can appreciate what the Japanese version was going for.

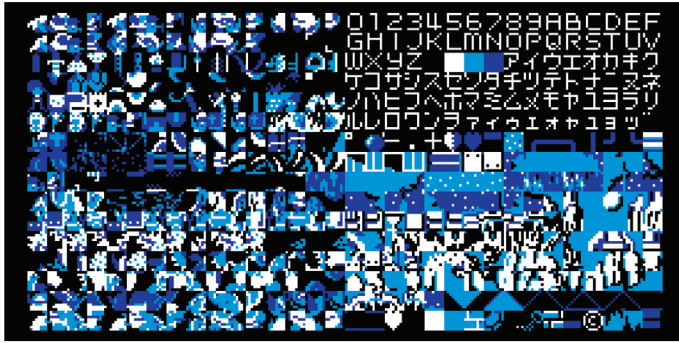
It should also be pointed out that all the Japanese text in the game is written in *katakana*. Without going into a lengthy Japanese language lesson, *katakana* is one of the three main Japanese writing systems... but it’s unusual to use this one system alone. Usually you’ll either see a mix of all three writing systems, or at least a mix of the two simplest.

So seeing only one writing system used here is a bit surprising at first, but there’s a good technical reason – there’s not enough video memory for more than one system! By digging into the guts of the game, we can see that the font shares very limited space with all the other graphics used in the game.

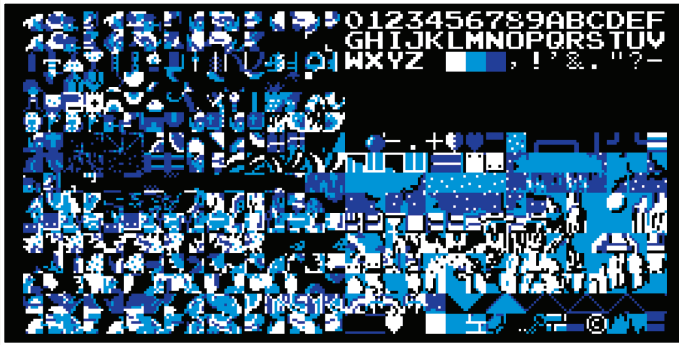


▲  
For example, the Japanese version of *A Link to the Past* uses three writing systems: *katakana*, *hiragana*, and *kanji*. Four if you count English. Five if you count our Arabic number system!

JAPANESE FONT MEMORY



ENGLISH FONT MEMORY



◀ This is where the "pieces" of the game's graphics are stored. There's very little room here for text characters, which is why only one Japanese writing system was included

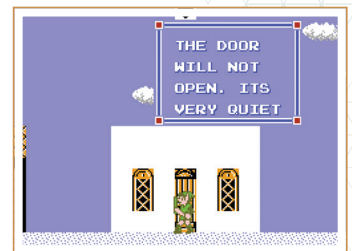


▲ Because of this, nobody uses contractions in *Zelda II*. Compare that to the first word said by the first guy in the first game!

Just for fun, if we take a look at the same thing in the NES release, we can see the thicker font in action... and that all the Japanese characters have been removed!

In fact, some of the Japanese characters have been replaced with punctuation that didn't exist at all in the Japanese release. This is interesting stuff – just imagine if the first *Zelda* game had no punctuation at all!

It sounds silly, but adding in this new punctuation was probably one of the best decisions made during *The Legend of Zelda's* localization. You might think it was a no-brainer, but the localizers for the *next* game in the series didn't add any new punctuation. This led to some awkward phrasing and loads of typos in *Zelda II*... More on that in another book, maybe!



▲ English teachers hate this game

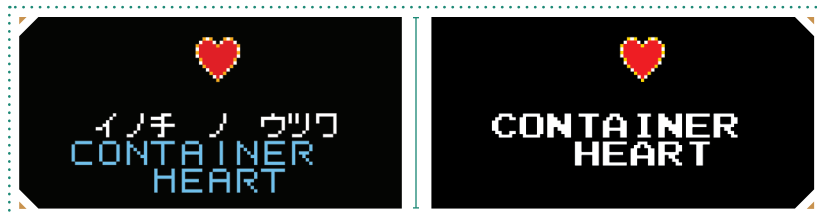


### Mato Says

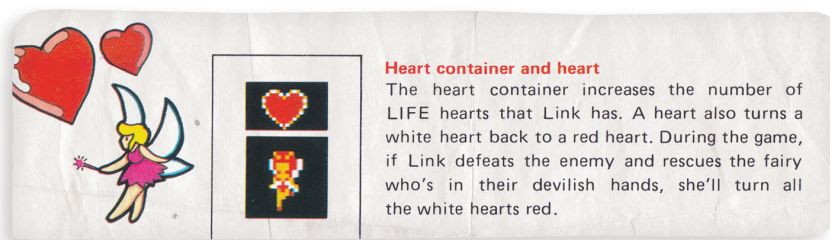
You know, after deleting those Japanese characters, it looks like they could've used all that blank font space for a lowercase English font!

## HEART CONTAINERS

I really don't like how later *Zelda* games started giving these out in quarter pieces. I understand the reasoning, but I still don't like it. Now go fetch me my ribbon candy



It turns out what I had always known as a “Heart Container” was actually called a “Container Heart” in both the Japanese and the NES release of the game! It seems my confusion stems from the fact that it was called a “Heart container” in the manual. The game and the manual are pretty inconsistent like this, as we’ll continue to see.



Incidentally, the Japanese name for this item literally translates to “Life Container” or “Container of Life” rather than “Container Heart”.

## RUPIES

I'm impressed that the Japanese developers knew to pluralize their made-up currency name by removing the 'y' and adding 'ies'. Or that they knew to pluralize the term at all!



The *Zelda* series' currency has experienced some growing pains throughout the years, particularly around this first game's release. Let's take a look!

To begin, the “Rupy” is the currency used in both versions of the first *Zelda* game. The plural form is “Rupies”. As a kid, I assumed this was just a misspelling of “Ruby”, possibly because the manual called them “Rubies” and because of their gemstone appearance. But to add to the confusion, the official *Nintendo Fun Club* newsletter called them “Rubles”!

know how to use them, Link will never be able to get the better of Ganon!



**Rubies**

Rubies are the money used in this kingdom. They sometimes appear when Link disposes of the enemy. If Link collects enough of them, he can buy treasure from the merchant. Blue rubies are worth five times more than yellow ones. In all, Link can own up to 255 yellow rubies, and he may use them in any way he likes.

◀ I've never been a gem-knowing guy, but rubies ARE supposed to be red, right?

Later on in the series, Nintendo settled on calling them "Rupee" and "Rupees" in English. So for English players, the currency has been known as "Rupy", "Ruby", "Ruble", and "Rupee" at different points in time. For Japanese players, though, this same currency has always had just one name.

The revised 2003 translation fixed this issue by changing the spelling of "Rupy" to "Rupee" to conform with later *Zelda* games. Being able to go back and fix old problems is a dream for countless translators and localizers, so I bet many folks at Nintendo were glad to tidy up this little inconsistency!

When I was little, I was surprised when I learned that Rupees are an actual type of money in places like India, Pakistan, Nepal, Indonesia, and elsewhere. I thought there might've been some deep meaning behind the shared name, but in the end it sounds like it might've just been a coincidence!

RUPEES IN LATER ZELDA GAMES



A Link to the Past



Link's Awakening



Majora's Mask



Phantom Hourglass

2003 TRANSLATION



◀ I seriously wonder if "Rupee" was the result of A Link to the Past's localization team messing up or just not caring about consistency with previous localizations



◀ I'll take one Magic Shield, please!



▲  
This game box is actually deceptively small, about the size of a frozen Lean Cuisine

## Japanese Board Game

*The Legend of Zelda* quickly grew too powerful to remain in video game form! Bandai released an officially-licensed board game in Japan in 1986, the same year the video game debuted!

This board game is a very detailed, faithful reimagining of the Famicom release. The game takes place on the actual map from the video game – even the dungeon locations are accurately placed. Players are tasked with traveling the world in search of the eight Triforce pieces guarded by eight evil boss enemies. Then the completed Triforce needs to be taken to Death Mountain, where the final battle with Ganon will take place. The first player to defeat Ganon and save Princess Zelda wins!



The board game is so detailed that it actually provides all sorts of tips about the video game, including enemy weaknesses, hidden locations, and how to access certain areas. The old people in the caves will give you items, and you can even play a money-making game. The board game truly is a sight to behold!



▶ Sorry, old hint dudes. This board game teaches us everything we need to know!

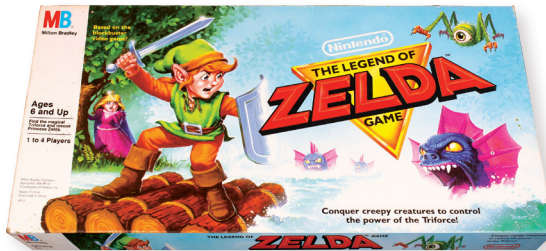




## North American Board Game

A completely different *Zelda* board game, published by Milton Bradley, was released in North America in 1988. This version isn't nearly as faithful to the original video game as the Japanese board game – instead, it features six “worlds” that players must traverse until they find the Triforce in the final world. Overall, it lacks the heart and sense of adventure that the *Zelda* series is known for. For example, uncovering the Triforce doesn't even guarantee you victory – the winner is just whoever has the most hearts at the end of the game!

For fans of the video game, this board game might be nice to own as a conversation piece. Unfortunately, it misses the mark in terms of atmosphere and fun.



*A Zelda board game?! Awesome!*



*\*Yawn\**



◀ Comparisons to Candy Land are not without merit, except Candy Land is fun

▶ The only thing this game teaches is the difference between “board” and “bored”

