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WRIT 250

Professor Mock

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Video Games and Growing Pains

"Did you get any further in Zelda while I was gone?" I ask, grabbing my Switch controller and sitting on the coffee table. The floor feels cold under my feet, so I quickly sit criss-cross and scoot back a little. The TV sits only a few feet in front of me, but I don't have my glasses on, and going upstairs feels a little too inconvenient after I've just settled.

Hana sits on the green leather couch behind me, mimicking my position. "No, I'm stuck at the place where the Gorons are. You know the place with the Gorons? Where the volcano is?"

"You mean Death Mountain?" I boot up my profile of Zelda and select my most recent save file— from five weeks ago. My character, Link, appears on screen, standing at the edge of a sky island. I dive out into the open air and open up my paraglider, sailing for a few seconds before I suddenly change my mind and open up the map, selecting a location on the opposite corner of the sky islands and fast-travelling to it.

"Yeah, that! Can you help me get through it? I'm almost to the top of the volcano, and I can't figure it out."

I turn around a little and grin. "Nope! Sorry."

"What?! But Megumi, I don't wanna figure it out! It's too hard."

"I haven't explored that area yet. And besides, you'll figure it out eventually. You haven't had my help since the tutorial, and you're already almost about to face one of the main bosses."

I laugh a little as she pouts and folds her arms. She gives me her signature 'stink eye', but keeps watching me play. We go back to the usual 'ask question, give answer' routine that happens every time I play Zelda in front of her– or any video game, really. Our mom likes to tease our dad for getting Hana into video games at such a young age, but really, I'm to blame.

“I think I’m almost as tall as you now,” Hana pipes up. I glance over at her as she grins. “We should measure.”

“Yeah, you tell me that every time I see you.”

She’s not wrong, though. Hana, twelve years younger and barely two inches shorter, has been the only one in her age group in our house. And yet, she has the emotional maturity of someone my age – hell, I'm still learning some of the stuff that seems to come so naturally to her – that sometimes I forget that she's only nine years old.

“You can do archery like that in real life, right?” she asks, pointing at Link, who’s just fired off three arrows at a sentry Bokoblin.

“Uh, kind of? I don’t slow down time when I do archery like Link does, but I took some lessons. I want to try shooting again when I head back to school this time.”

“Can you teach me archery?”

I hesitate a little. “I, uh, I don’t think you’re quite old enough for lessons.”

Hana frowns. “But you did archery when you were my age.”

“I was in middle school, Hana. The shop I went to doesn’t offer lessons to kids your age.”

“Well, that’s silly.”

“I know.” I try to change the subject to cheer her up a little. “Have you played any other games? Like Pokemon?”

It works. She thinks about it for a little before pointing up in the air. "I beat the second Pokemon gym in Pokemon Violet! And... I made a new character in WoW. Dad lets me make characters in it."

Oh, she is *not* old enough for World of Warcraft. At least it's just character creation. But I just nod along. "Anything else?"

"I played Minecraft with Dad on the PS4 sometimes. And Mom helped me catch a Hisuian Pokemon in Pokemon GO. And I can beat this super hard level in Rayman Legends! I need to show you after you're done."

"Cool! Yeah, you'll have to show me. Ray and I used to play Rayman when we were younger; we were never very good at it."

I feel a little better, knowing she's not too lonely right now when she's not playing with her friends. It's video games that tie many of our family interests together, from working in the industry to playing multiplayer games together to talking about what we played on our own and giving advice for beating certain enemies and levels. Of course, Hana and my shared interests have grown to books and art and movies, but video games have always been the foundation.

"When are you going back to school?" she asks, after grabbing a snack from the kitchen. She's always snacking, something she told me she tried to limit to two snacks a day a couple weeks ago, when she came up with a lifestyle plan for herself. It lasted a couple days before she told Mom that maybe she'd been 'too strict with herself' and 'should be nicer'.

I'm only half-focused, fighting off a camp of Bokoblins onscreen. "Um, whenever Ray decides we should leave on Sunday. He has morning classes on Monday."

"Aw. Or you could just quit instead."

I glance back to see her grin at me, giggling at her own suggestion, one that she's made dozens of times before in the past two years. She's mostly joking at this point. Much less so when I left for college the first time. Hana usually takes things pretty well, even big changes in life, but she's still a kid, who's now living alone with our parents, waiting for her two adult siblings to come home every once in a while to see her again. A pang of guilt fills my stomach, but I sigh dramatically and play into it.

"Ugh, I wish I could. But I need to graduate, Hana. Otherwise I went to school for no reason."

"How many years do you have left?" she asks.

"This is my last year. After that, no more school."

She lights up. "Then you can come back and live here again!"

"Yeah, I could. If I get a job at Dad's work, I can stay here." I don't think about what will happen if I get a job somewhere else. I just focus on bashing monsters. And I try to plan out what to give her for her birthday. I wonder if she's old enough to read Lord of the Rings. The Lego game for it was a lot of fun for my brother and I when we were little. Knowing her, though, she'd probably prefer something Zelda related.

Hana gets up from the couch and sits next to me on the coffee table, and I scoot over to give her room. "And then you need to teach me how to make a video game. We still have a ton of Pokémon to make for our Pokémon game. Don't forget, I want to make a portfolio on Artstation so I can show people my drawings."

"Sure. As soon as I'm done with school, I can come back and we can figure out how to make a game."

"Okay!" She points at the TV. "Are you going to fight the hydra?"

"Gleok."

"Gleok. Are you going to fight it?"

I think about it, and shrug. For her, anything. "Sure. I'll fight it."