

# 8

## The Hero of Timelines

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And critique me that is the only way any one wil ever get this riht is to be critiqued!

—LINK-FAN-242

In contemporary popular culture, it's increasingly common for everyday people to "compete" with experts. As journalist Thomas Friedman put the matter:

When everyone has a blog, a MySpace page, or Facebook entry, everyone is a publisher. When everyone has a cell phone with a camera in it, everyone is a paparazzo. When everyone can upload video on YouTube, everyone is a filmmaker.

With the rise of the Internet, people carry these forms of everyday expertise quite far and often organize themselves into "communities of practice" in order to do so. Fan fiction writers organize into groups and even form "colleges" in ways that have virtually professionalized fan fiction writing. *Yu-Gi-Oh* players see and use language on cards and websites that is as complex and technical as the language in any academic domain. Players of *World of Warcraft* "mod" (modify) the game by building and downloading models which track and assess myriad elements of game play in highly statistical terms. Gamers make "machinima" movies from games, involving the scripting, lighting, and direction techniques of professional film production. Pop culture now tends to stress production and not just consumption, as well as expertise certified and

earned within digital communities and not only via professional forms of degrees and certification.

One of the most interesting areas in which these everyday people compete with professionals is in the area of intellectual argumentation, the seemingly arid concern of philosophers and scientists. Online discussions around games can be quite complex and involved, so that, like science, they come to belong not so much to just one person but to a group as a whole. Some philosophers and sociologists of science have argued that, despite our “great man” conceptions of science as something that flows from the individual minds of smart individuals, science makes its real progress as a “conversation.” The nature of this conversation is, of course, a matter of dispute, as well as its implications for *epistemology*, or the nature and construction of knowledge.

We see similarities between the kinds of informal discussions around *Zelda* and the kinds of argumentation that are often valued in other intellectual pursuits. But what could the point be—and what could arise from, say, discussions by *Zelda* fans about the chronologies of the multiple *Zelda* games? Do debates such as this mirror the ways that scientists and academics construct knowledge and, if so, how might thinkers such as Bruno Latour help us to understand them? Before answering these questions, let’s first look and then wonder—wonder what it is all about.

### **Debating Chronologies: The Hero(es) of Time**

Ever since players concluded *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, the role of time within the *Zelda* games has been a concern for many fans. The end of *Ocarina* left players with an adult Link, “The Hero of Time,” who had saved the land of Hyrule from the domination of Ganon/Ganondorf. Link was then rewarded with a trip back in time to a point before Hyrule had been conquered. This plot device—the use of multiple timelines—was a way to achieve a happy resolution to the game and reset Hyrule to its pre-Ganon beauty. As more and more *Zelda* games have been released, the issue of reconciling the games’ timelines has become a popular one to discuss on online forums, which, to the uninitiated, can seem surprisingly complicated, ranging in topic from how to employ game cheats to discussions of fan art. Let’s look at some of the fan debates regarding *chronology* and potential timelines in the *Zelda* series, and their central problem—the role of time in these games.

On the Nintendo NSider online forums (<http://forums.nintendo.com>), this topic has been popular for several years—a series of threads on the topic was started in September of 2004 and has continued through the time of this chapter's writing. Several dozen different posters (participants) have written over sixteen thousand posts (contributions) to this series of discussion threads (subtopics), proposing intricate theories of overarching storylines for the entire Zelda series, critiquing other posters' proposals, providing evidence, counter-evidence, and developing new timelines as new games were released. The degree of involvement for some of the posters on these threads was quite high—one poster's contributions totaled several hundred posts.

The size of these threads and the extent of some posters' involvement hints at interesting intellectual content in Zelda timelines for debate. With fourteen officially licensed Nintendo Zelda games, a comic book series, and a cartoon series, not to mention the obscure BS Zelda and Philips CD-i games, Zelda lore has many story elements to reconcile. Over the past twenty years, there has been very little clear information from Nintendo and the games' developers as to whether or not all of the Zelda games should be viewed as one large story, different versions of a common "legend," multiple storylines/timelines, or something else entirely. The "texts" of the games themselves are often ambiguous on these issues (other than a few games, such as *Majora's Mask* and *Phantom Hourglass*, which are explicit sequels to other Zelda games). We may not completely understand what motivates some fans to view it as their task to determine the "correct" organization of the Zelda timeline, but their activities show the complex ways argumentation and reasoning can occur in online communities.

Much like how fans in other kinds of media have taken ambiguity as a license to create elaborate new fan-written stories (like the fan fiction around *Star Trek* and *Harry Potter*), Zelda fans have taken this opportunity to elaborate and argue explicit *theories* of how the games are organized—that is, why might the events of *Ocarina of Time* occur after *A Link to the Past*? Do the events of *Majora's Mask* occur in the same timeline as *The Wind Waker* or are there multiple timelines? The nature of these arguments varies, but all have at their root questions of *chronology*—how one should order the events of one game relative to the events of other games.

Many proposals rely on simple chronological orderings of the games to do much of the speaking about theories of time in Zelda.

For instance, in the earliest days of the first forum thread, many posts were simply proposals for timeline organizations, such as this one from a poster named SEGA42 in September 2004 (with SEGA42's acronyms decoded in the brackets):

Here is my timeline on the games:

FS [*Four Swords*]

OoT [*Ocarina of Time*]

MM [*Majora's Mask*]

TWW [*The Wind Waker*]

FSA [*Four Swords Adventures*]

TLoZ [*The Legend of Zelda*]

TAoL [*The Adventure of Link*]

ALttP [*A Link to the Past*]

OoS/OoA [*Oracle of Seasons* and *Oracle of Ages*]

LA [*Link's Awakening*]

I'm too lazy to explain it right now O, but I've thought over it a lot, and I find only one flaw: the geography of FSA. Its Hyrule matches perfectly with the Hyrule of ALttP, yet TLoZ and TAoL do not. I'm working on it . . . >\_>

SEGA42's timeline theory only included eleven games, since it was written before the release of subsequent games *The Minish Cap*, *Twilight Princess*, and *Phantom Hourglass*. The organization of the games into an intelligible timeline was a goal of many participants in this thread, and some, like SEGA42, started off by proposing their organization of the games, then opening it up for the rest of the forum to probe for flaws.

SEGA42 admitted that the geography of Hyrule might be a problem for his or her theory. For SEGA42, geography was apparently a marker for time in the game, indicating the time period in which the events took place. Since the Zelda games have featured quite different presentations of Hyrule (or, in the case of *The Wind Waker* and *Phantom Hourglass*, the Great Sea above a sunken Hyrule), fan theories have sometimes hinged upon "which Hyrule" was the setting for a game. For example, in September of 2004, another poster, SWORDM, described a chronological ordering of games based, in part, upon these differences in geography:

. . . the Hyrule found in these two games [*The Legend of Zelda* and *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*] is, for the most part, a barren wilder-

ness with spread out, isolated communities. This reflects the far-flung isles of the Great Sea in *The Wind Waker* much better than the close-knit kingdom of *A Link to the Past* and *Four Swords Adventures*. Observing landscape differences further brings to light the presence of a large sea bisecting the two halves of Hyrule, which was absent from *Ocarina of Time* or any game in the first timeline. This could reasonably be what remains of the Great Sea after the union of the lands by the Koroks.

In SWORDM's timeline, *The Wind Waker* was a much earlier game than in many other timelines (occurring well before the first two *Zelda* games), and the landscape's depiction ("barren wilderness" versus "close-knit kingdom") was used to hang certain posited events upon in the overarching story (for example, when the Koroks created a "union of the lands"). What's most interesting about the use of geography is not really geography per se, but the ways that it works as a stand-in for the passage of *time* in the game. Some posters (such as SWORDM) have put forward theories in which all of the games' narratives can be reconciled into a single timeline, while others refer back to the conclusion of *Ocarina of Time*, and argue that the future that the adult Link left behind continued in his absence and became the setting for future games' adventures.

One of the most popular conceptions of the games' timelines has been a variety of so-called "split timeline theories." Starting with the multiple timelines shown at the end of *Ocarina of Time*, fans have used elaborate means to organize other games based on the two timelines seen in that game. The conception of time as nonlinear and involving potential branches (with some games occurring in the world that the adult Link left and others occurring in the world that the child Link was sent back to at the end of *Ocarina*) has led to elaborate models of the games' overarching story.

Philosophers such as David Lewis have explicitly addressed this kind of issue—is it possible that multiple "worlds" (timelines or realities) may exist?<sup>1</sup> A common read of Hugh Everett's and later Bryce DeWitt's interpretation of quantum mechanics implied that, for every quantum event, all outcomes that did not occur actually *did* occur in a separate universe. That is, the universe was conceived not as a solitary universe but a "multiverse," branching into separate realities with every event. This idea, in which multiple realities and timelines are potentially real, was popularized through

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<sup>1</sup> David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Blackwell, 1986).

various forms of science fiction, and likely influenced the Zelda discussions.

But, how are these conceptions of time *shaped* throughout the course of the discussion? As SEGA42 and SWORDM have shown, there are a variety of approaches a discussant may take in negotiating and arguing a theory of Zelda chronology.

### **Understanding Evidence: Opening the Treasure Chest**

As you might have guessed, many kinds of evidence have been used to support Zelda fan timeline theories. How evidence is employed in these debates sheds light on the ways that reasoning occurs in these settings, as well as the nature of many fan arguments. We propose a way of organizing the types of evidence used in Zelda chronology debates, which include (but are not limited to):

- **Dialogue within the game (What did Midna specifically say in *Twilight Princess*?)**
- **Existence and naming of characters (Is the villain named Ganon, Ganondorf, or both in a particular game?)**
- **Existence and placement of objects within the game (Where is the Master Sword found?)**
- **Geography within the game (Is Hyrule a “barren wilderness” or a “close-knit kingdom”?)**
- **Information from game manuals (The print materials for *The Adventure of Link*)**
- **Relational game marketing (*Phantom Hourglass* was an explicit sequel to *The Wind Waker*).**
- **Game designer intentions (Interviews with Shigeru Miyamoto or Eiji Aonuma)**
- **Game mechanics and game design (Is the game rendered as 2-D or 3-D?)**

To understand how these arguments work, we’ll need to dig into them in some detail, and carefully tease out the particular ways that

arguments are formed, grounding our claims in the statements of the thread's participants. How do these discussions *work*? That is, how does the back-and-forth of a forum debate show how people use evidence and argue their claims? What "counts" as evidence, anyway?

The following is an edited excerpt from November 2004 showing the proposal of a timeline by poster LINK-FAN-242, and a discussion with another poster (SWORDM again). In this series of posts, several kinds of evidence were used and called into question. For clarity, we've broken the exchange into "stanzas" and each line from the original posts has been numbered for reference purposes, but the included text remains otherwise unaltered (typographical and grammatical errors have been kept in):

***Stanza 1 (LINK-FAN-242):***

- 1 - Ok so here is the TimLine as I see it.**
- 2 - TMC\*TMC is first we all know that\***
- 3 - FS\*second\***
- 4 - OoT\*not sure\***
- 5 - MM\*know it is after OoT\***
- 6 - TWW\*know it is after MM\***
- 7 - LoZ\*has to be here because Ganon doesn't have the Trident\***
- 8 - AoL\*after LoZ\***
- 9 - OoS\*You'll se later\***
- 10 - OoA\*againg you'll see later\***
- 11 - FSA\*Ganon gets the Trident\***
- 12 - ALttP\*Master sword get put to sleep\***
- 13 - LA\*after ALttP\***
- 14 - Ok well OoA/OoS are where they are because the Master Sword gets put to sleep in ALttP and the Master Sword is in OoA/OoS.**

### ***Stanza 2 (SWORDM):***

- 1 - \* **You put *The Legend of Zelda* before *Four Swords Adventures* because Ganon doesn't have the Trident, but you also put *Oracles* before it. In *Oracles*, Ganon does have the Trident... It seems a bit inconsistent.**
- 2 - \* **Why is *Four Swords* second?... especially since it seems to feature the same Link as in *Four Swords*?**
- 3 - \* **How do you account for Twinrova's apparently difficulty-free revival, when Ganon, a much more powerful entity, had so much difficulty?**
- 4 - \* **Back on *Four Swords Adventures*, how do you explain Ganondorf being human again, and alive, when he died in *The Legend of Zelda* and wasn't properly revived in *Oracles*?**

### ***Stanza 3 (LINK-FAN-242):***

- 1 - **About the Ganon humen thing I seem to think that there could be two Ganons but I'm still working on that one.. And critique me that is the only way any one wil ever get this riht is to be critiqued!**
- 2 - **And about the BS *Zelda* I'm not even going to call it a *Zelda* game I'm sorry but I'm not just like I dont call the CD-I games *Zelda Games*.**

LINK-FAN-242 first presented a timeline with justifications for the placement of each game, followed by SWORDM picking apart that evidence and interpretation. LINK-FAN-242 responded, identifying the parts of his or her theory that were still in need of work, as well as delimiting the set of games that did not count as evidence (the BS *Zelda* games and Philips CD-i *Zelda* games).

Take note that LINK-FAN-242 used several kinds of evidence to shape his or her timeline of the games' chronology. Initially, in Stanza 1, lines 2 and 3, *The Minish Cap* and *Four Swords* were the earliest games in the timeline without explicit justification ("we all know that" and "second"). Soon after, LINK-FAN-242 began to provide some justification for the timeline: In line 5, *Majora's Mask* was

put “after *Ocarina of Time*,” since it was an explicit sequel, line 7 indicated that the lack of Ganon’s trident put the original Zelda at an earlier spot in the chronology, and line 11 argued that *Four Swords Adventures* must have been later due to Ganon acquiring the trident in that game.

Most interesting, however, were the ways that SWORDM addressed LINK-FAN-242’s timeline. Stanza 2, line 1 addressed an inconsistency in LINK-FAN-242’s chronology (according to SWORDM, lines 9 and 10, Ganon’s trident appeared in the *Oracles* games). Line 2 then addressed the assumption that games which have been marketed as sequels to one another and which are similarly designed (such as *Four Swords* and *Four Swords Adventures*) occurred after one another (much like how LINK-FAN-242 assumed that *Majora’s Mask* followed *Ocarina of Time* in lines 4 and 5). Line 3 tackled the revival of characters in the game—the “Twinrova sisters,” Kotake and Koume, from *Ocarina of Time*, *Majora’s Mask*, and the *Oracles* games—and how this seemed inconsistent with their relative weakness compared to Ganon (who, more powerful, would presumably have less problem reviving).

LINK-FAN-242 then explained in Stanza 3, line 1, that there may be more than one character named Ganon in his or her theory, and that critiques were valuable—speaking openly about the social construction of knowledge in these timeline debates. Finally, in line 2, LINK-FAN-242 explained which games weren’t “Zelda games,” claiming that the BS Zelda game (an obscure 1995 game released only in Japan) was on par with the “CD-i games” (three obscure, poorly-regarded games—*Link: The Faces of Evil*, *Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon*, and *Zelda’s Adventure*—none designed by Nintendo and all released on the Philips CD-i platform in 1993–1994). That is, LINK-FAN-242 dismissed the BS Zelda game as being on par with the games most often considered outside the “canon” of the Zelda games.

So, let’s step back and try to understand this: In this short interchange, we saw a number of different kinds of evidence employed to both bolster and critique an argument. These included the presence of Ganon(dorf) and his naming, the existence of Ganon’s trident, the location of the Master Sword, relational game marketing (*Majora’s Mask* was an explicit sequel to *Ocarina of Time*, while *Four Swords Adventures* was perhaps a sequel to *Four Swords*), and the game design similarities found between explicit sequels. Finally, the borders of what “counts” as evidence in these debates

was discussed—the BS Zelda games were declared as being outside the realm of legitimate evidence.

The issue of evidence is an interesting one, but most interesting was how LINK-FAN-242 *justified* his or her evidence. Obviously, this does not happen in a vacuum in online forums, leading us to wonder the manners by which evidence itself is socially constructed, and how that may resemble what we see in science.

### **Socially Constructing Knowledge: The “Legendary” Zelda**

In the philosophy of science, evidence and the ways that it interacts with theory has been a central concern from Comte and Popper to Kuhn and Lakatos. Historically, an assumed distinction between evidence and theory has had its roots in particular conceptions of science, but has been actively critiqued by philosophers who have aimed to better elaborate the ways that science and scientific knowledge are created.

For Bruno Latour, the construction of knowledge loomed large in his model of scientific practice. In *Laboratory Life*, Latour and Steve Woolgar challenged traditional notions of science and the scientific method, via ethnographic observations of a neuroendocrinology laboratory.<sup>2</sup> The importance of the single, critical experiment was devalued by Latour and Woolgar, and they emphasized the ongoing construction of knowledge through social interaction in a community of practice with shared norms. In Zelda fan debates, the meaning of evidence is constructed through the arguments in the online forums. In the previous example, posters negotiated a particular chronology of the Zelda games through several proposals and critiques of a theory. The very nature of these debates involved a give and take in the development of the meaning of various pieces of evidence, and constructing timelines necessarily involved discussion to some extent. Evidence isn't simple value-free information—it's shaped by practices and norms which are held by those using it.

Therefore, what “counts” as evidence in these fan debates is, like in many scientific settings, a *theoretical construct*. It is unclear from the previous example whether or not SWORDM and

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<sup>2</sup> Bruno Latour and Steven Woolgar, *Laboratory Life* (Princeton University Press, 1979).

LINK-FAN-242's believe that the BS Zelda games or the Philips CD-i games have explicit reasons for not being legitimate evidence, but given the other posts in these forums, there is certainly an implicit social norm which denies that those games are legitimate. For example, a post from April 2005 by poster MEERKATMAN stated:

I don't take [the BS Zelda games] as canon because they aren't available legally now, they are, in essence, remakes. The story is pretty ludicrous and generic IMO, and is pretty much just thrown on there for flavor. It is more like a mini-game than a real game.

The justifications for why these games are not considered evidence contain embedded value judgments—MEERKATMAN privileged the original creative work of Nintendo designers, the availability of the games, the quality of the games, and even aspects of the game design (“mini-games” vs. “a real game”). The combination of these factors seemed to influence whether or not a game could be considered evidence in a timeline debate; this mirrors Latour's emphasis on how evidence is theory-laden in constructing scientific knowledge.

To illustrate further, let's look at how and why the meaning of a particular piece of evidence can quickly change through debate and negotiation. The following is an exchange between posters GAMEFAN#1 and SGM2 from June 2004:

***Stanza 1 (GAMEFAN#1):***

- 1 - Okay, you remember that the first time when OOT Link pulled the Master Sword from the pedestal.**
- 2 - Seven years later, he grew up.**
- 3 - Then Sheik appeared to Link**
- 4 - and said he really does look like the Hero of Time.**
- 5 - So . . . How did Sheik know how the Hero of Time is supposed to look like?**
- 6 - That implied that there was another Link before OOT who became the Hero of Time.**
- 7 - That means OOT Link is the second Hero of Time.**

***Stanza 2 (GAMEFAN#1):***

- 1 - Also, when Navi first saw the Master Sword,**
- 2 - she said it was the legendary blade.**
- 3 - So, what made it legendary in the first place?**
- 4 - Unless another Link used it before OOT**
- 5 - and that Link is the first Hero of Time.**

***Stanza 3 (SGM2):***

- 1 - I am not saying there was not another hero before the game**
- 2 - but it could of become legendary just because it was created by the sages**
- 3 - and that it repels evil.**

***Stanza 4 (GAMEFAN#1):***

- 1 - First off, it is not legendary if it hasn't done anything significant yet.**
- 2 - For example: I forged a knife.**
- 3 - Does that make that knife legendary right after I forged it?**
- 4 - No, of course not.**

***Stanza 5 (SGM2):***

- 1 - If you later do something famous**
- 2 - that knife will become the legendary knife of GAMEFAN#1.**
- 3 - The sages created the blade.**
- 4 - They are also the protectors of the triforce.**
- 5 - It would be llegendary just by being created by them.**

**Stanza 6 (GAMEFAN#1):**

- 1 - Ah, but remember in ALTP's backstory.**
- 2 - The Master Sword was forged for the purpose of sealing the evil away.**
- 3 - But... If OOT was the Imprisoning War,**
- 4 - then why was the Master Sword already there as if it had been forged long time ago?**
- 5 - That means there must be a game before OOT**
- 6 - and that game is the true ALTP's backstory.**

**Stanza 7 (SGM2):**

- 1 - I'm sorry.**
- 2 - I am getting mixed up in a conversation.**
- 3 - I am just saying that saying it is legendary is not great proof.**
- 4 - I am not saying the IW was in OoT**
- 5 - or if it was not.**
- 6 - The thing is stuff can happen even if it is not in a game.**
- 7 - The IW may not be in a game as we know it so far.**

This series of posts dealt with the necessity of another Link pre-dating the Link of *Ocarina of Time* ("OOT" to the posters). In Stanzas 1 and 2, GAMEFAN#1 proposed a theory based on two pieces of evidence: First, that Link in *Ocarina* was recognized by the Sheik as the "Hero of Time" (stanza 1, line 4), implying that there must have been an earlier Link who was called that and, second, that Navi referred to Link's Master Sword in *Ocarina* as "legendary" (stanza 2, line 2), meaning that the Master Sword must have been used by a previous, "legendary" Link. It is the interpretation of "legendary" that dominated the rest of the thread.

In Stanza 3, SGM2 presented a direct challenge to the understanding of “legendary” as proposed by GAMEFAN#1, stating (in lines 2 and 3) that “it could of [*sic*] become legendary just because it was created by the sages and that it repels evil.” This is a very different “legendary” than GAMEFAN#1’s: for GAMEFAN#1, the source of what makes a sword “legendary” was the original sword’s owner’s actions and thus the sword inherited this property from a previous, heroic Link. However, for SGM2, the source of what made the sword “legendary” was the provenance of the sword (in this case the “sages,” mythical characters in the game’s story), as well as the sword’s properties (it “repels evil”). So, one interpretation of the term “legendary” meant assigning the “legendariness” of the sword to a hypothetical earlier hero, and one did not.

In other words, for GAMEFAN#1, “legendary” initially meant something about a character in the story: Link was recognized as being a “legendary” hero because there must have been an earlier hero who spawned the legend, implying that there must have been a game (or story) that occurred before it. In Stanza 4, GAMEFAN#1 challenged SGM2’s reading of “legendary” by proposing a hypothetical situation in which GAMEFAN#1 (presumably not a “legendary” person) created a knife that was then “of course” (Stanza 4, line 4) not inherently “legendary.” The intent of GAMEFAN#1 seems to have been to criticize the interpretation of “legendary” as having anything to do with who created it — at this point, GAMEFAN#1 argued that the *only* interpretation of “legendary” that made sense was one in which “legendary” referred to an earlier character’s reputation being inherited by the sword.

SGM2 replied in Stanza 5 by incorporating aspects of GAMEFAN#1’s original concept of “legendary”—by “doing something famous” (line 1), GAMEFAN#1 could pass on “legendary” qualities to the hypothetical knife. The concept of “legendary” was thus malleable for SGM2, unsurprising given the reactive stance he or she adopted to GAMEFAN#1’s initial proposal. However, this was not a conciliatory move, since SGM2’s point was still to address a flaw in GAMEFAN#1’s reasoning; for SGM2, the adjective “legendary” still referred to a property of the sword, inherited from the “legendary” status of the creator of the sword.

In Stanza 6, GAMEFAN#1 took a different approach, retreating from further discussion of the term “legendary” and addressing why the Master Sword was supposedly created within the text of *Ocarina of Time* (“sealing the evil away,” line 2). Here, the useful-

ness of “legendary” in the argument was essentially jettisoned; GAMEFAN#1 switched from relying upon “legendary” to indicate the existence of a previous heroic Link to acknowledging that if “legendary” was the property of the sword, there was still a need for an earlier event in the chronology. In Stanza 7, SGM2 tried to clarify his or her criticism over the entire “legendary” discussion (Stanza 7, line 3).

So, once more, let’s step back and try to figure out what this means. First, we can see that evidence was, again, negotiated—but more than that, theories of the games’ chronology actively hinged upon the negotiated meaning of evidence. If “legendary” referred to a previous Link’s actions, then this implied a Zelda timeline in which *Ocarina* was placed early. However, if “legendary” referred to the influence of the sages (the creators of the Master Sword), then *Ocarina* would not necessarily need to be posited as an earlier game in the timeline. The interpretation of a single piece of evidence—in this case, a single *word*—can have a great deal of impact, driving the theories taken by participants in these discussions.

One can see that the social construction of Zelda timelines matches much of what Latour argued about scientific knowledge. Evidence isn’t simply passive information; knowledge is *necessarily* situated and constructed. By the 1986 revision of *Laboratory Life*, the term “social” was so redundant with “construction” as to be unnecessary in the subtitle of Latour and Woolgar’s text.

### Putting Together the Triforce

The blurring of distinctions between theory and evidence, between agent and tool, and between individual and group knowledge are seen in fan discussions about Zelda like they are in the practices of science. The philosophical implications of this are considerable—if the kinds of issues that arise in the development of scientific theories are found even in fan discussions around videogames, perhaps new ideas of how knowledge is constructed should be entertained. This is a point that has significance beyond either science or game fandom and tells us something about *argument* itself.

With Zelda fans, the forms of argumentation and debate around timelines included complicated interpretations of texts, negotiations of evidence, and vigorous debate. Much like other intellectual pursuits, the construction of knowledge is *social*, contingent upon the specific uses of tools, interactions of participants, and even the

ways that people use Internet discussion forums. Without a set of official Nintendo forums online, timeline debates would not have had the same character as they presently do (if they were to exist at all), and these examples show that, at the very least, the interplay between participants in these threads is often surprisingly constructive.

We don't argue that the typical Zelda fan is interested in debating about chronologies because he or she is inherently interested in elaborating a theory of time, nor because he or she is consciously trying to emulate an academic. Comparing Zelda timeline debates to those in, say, neuroendocrinology, physics, or sociology, it's clear that the game discussions do not rise to the level of broader significance that these established scientific fields often have. But, let's not forget that there are strong similarities in *form* and *practice* between what goes on in science and what goes on within fan debates.

In the GAMEFAN#1/SGM2 excerpt alone, the path of the social knowledge construction should appear familiar:

- **A theory was proposed, with evidence provided**
- **The evidence was critiqued and reinterpreted by another**
- **The proposer of the original theory defended the original evidence**
- **The original evidence was dismissed in favor of stronger evidence.**

Stripping the discussion of its context, we can see argumentation which is similar to that in scientific debates and other academic arguments in general. Time and again, fan activities around games have been shown to embed serious intellectual practices (or, at least, mirror them), and we find that to be the case here as well. The content of the debate may be quite different from one in, say, geology, but the nature of the debate is one in which evidence is forwarded, critiqued, and evaluated in service of developing a theory.

If we are to take the proposal of Latour and his colleagues seriously, this has implications beyond science—knowledge *in general* is constructed within and is dependent upon networks of tools,

agents, and social/cultural commitments. Within this view, there is no sense in debating what “counts” as science any more than there is in debating whether or not chemistry and economics are both “science”; what’s important for us to see are not the particular tools used in the construction of knowledge as much as the simple fact that this is how knowledge is constructed. Again, what science and Zelda fan debates share are common *practices*, and a common approach to discussing investigations of the world, though they differ in terms of application to real problems and the specific tools used to conduct those discussions.

Thus, we find ourselves returning to Latour and Woolgar’s rather bold claim about epistemology—the conception that knowledge is formed “intrinsic to the mind” simply cannot be reconciled with the practices of how knowledge is constructed in real scientific laboratories nor discussions in fan communities such as Zelda’s. The Zelda timeline debates show that the construction of knowledge is *necessarily* mediated and shaped by the use of tools, interaction with others, and the use of discourse practices. Like all knowledge, Zelda timeline knowledge is constructed socially.