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The entertainment industry has taken turn after turn in an ever-evolving scheme of creation and recreation to suit the desires and demands of our world's population. One such need was first beginning its fulfillment a little over a half-century ago in the year of 1958. In that year, on 18 October, people clamored and crowded outside the Brookhaven National Laboratory to take part in the first ever video game.¹ This video game, *Tennis for Two*, marked the beginning of a medium of entertainment that we have taken to new heights and we raise the bar annually. However, the history behind this mode of entertainment is not well-known. *Tennis for Two* was an achievement and a milestone, but not the end-destination. My research has provided opportunity to study the evolution of Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) gaming. Insight, driven by both fact and opinion, will help me as I attempt to shed light and share knowledge on the subject.

To find the beginning of Massively Multiplayer Online games there is a need to clarify the definition of this phrase before proceeding further. The complication of a definition arises in the form of diversity. One is very unlikely to find any two players that regard any game as the other does. Eliot Lefebvre, from *The Daily Grind*, sums it up best by letting us know that even one of the most popularly-accepted MMOs, *World of Warcraft*, has had its station in the genre called in to question in the past as differences collide on what is a true MMO.² Given such information, we shall take the words of the terminology by their most literal sense in this essay. This will help prevent any confusion as we develop and define this topic up to present day expectations and renovations across this widely formatted area of gaming.

¹ Joe Gettler, *The First Video Game?*, Brookhaven National Laboratory website <http://www.bnl.gov/bnlweb/history/higinbotham.asp> accessed on 31 October 2012.

² Eliot Lefebvre, *The Daily Grind: How do you define MMO?*, Joystiq website <http://massively.joystiq.com/2012/01/22/the-daily-grind-how-do-you-define-mmo> accessed on 31 October 2012. This was a necessary citation to show that the term MMO could be a loose understanding, given premeditated expectations.

For all intents and purposes of this essay, the term MMO henceforth is any game that is played by massive amounts of people across the two major players of information broadcast mediums – the present-day Internet and its predecessor, ARPANet. For a brief explanation, the ARPANet was a form of broad connectivity for computing devices that allowed for the transfer of information between the origin platforms.³ Likewise, the Internet is the similar but it boasts a network capable of greater distance and ability.⁴ For clarity, any and all other forms of connectivity between people will be excluded from my research. They are not statistically traceable by reliable means, such as local area connections between two devices⁵. Alternatively, they have little to do with the evolution of the specific gaming genre this paper is written about.

The various forms of game types have seen many changes throughout our past. However, one of the largest appeals is the ability to achieve and overcome obstacles; often times this is done through competition. It is feasible to argue that the process of natural selection or sexual selection played a role in how the video game industry began to become more popular over the years.⁶ Whether it was done purposefully or not, at some time every game publisher or marketing firm considers what will be the most attractive aspect of a new product that will drive customers to them. For example, Travis Stanton at *Exhibitor Online* has written a detailed article on how present-day social media impacts marketing movements.⁷ There are sizable population differences, and desires, of the people who interact with video games between now and the nineteenth century. However, it gives credit to Darwin's theories on

³ Jonathan Strickland, *How ARPANet Works*, HowStuffWorks website <http://computer.howstuffworks.com/arpamet.htm> accessed on 31 October 2012. This is a summarized understanding of ARPANet, useful for quick briefing for the term's limited mention in my paper.

⁴ Alyson Shontell, *What The Heck Is The Internet?*, website <http://www.businessinsider.com/what-is-the-internet-and-how-the-internet-works2011-6?op=1> accessed on 31 October 2012. Like the ARPANet citation, this is just as brief depiction on what the Internet does for us.

⁵ The lack of inclusion for any other type of connectivity stems from the inability to reliably count, hypothesize, or keep track of what individuals use them. It would require a sizable census the likes of which I know of no organization that would invest in. I imagine it holds little promise to show monetary profits for this information.

⁶ Berry Sinervo, *Adaptation and Selection*, University of California at Santa Cruz website http://bio.research.ucsc.edu/~barrylab/classes/animal_behavior/SELECT.HTM accessed on 19 November 2012.

⁷ Travis Stanton, *Social Studies*, Exhibitor Online website <http://www.exhibitoronline.com/exhibitor magazine/jun12/research-social-studies.asp#.UKr0Ooczqic> accessed on 19 November 2012. Travis explains to us the impacts and considerations of marketing attempts by present day organizations as online, social media rises in popularity.

how people make choices. With that in mind, every type of interactive, competitive video game play we see today can be narrowed down approximately to an origin year of 1974.

A large-scale discovery of 1974 was the game *Mazewar*. It was developed as a first-of-its-kind first-person shooter, or FPS. It came with a radar and kill counter, which are predominant aspects of any current day FPS. *Mazewar* was first created by Steve Colley and redesigned by different authors to add new aspects of the game. The first to be added was a multiplayer mode that allowed up to eight players. This development was done with major contributions by Greg Thompson and Howard Palmer of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The biggest, however, and likely most revolutionary, aspect of the game would be its incursion to the ARPANet. This was done with the additional help of Christopher Kent in the year 1986. *Mazewar* had become the indisputable, first-ever online video game, and set the pace for the evolution of nearly every game online. While different games could bring new genres in to the fold, or add new innovations, the idea had originally piqued in the mind of these gentlemen.⁸ They set abroad for one of the greatest cyber-destinations people take part in today.⁹ While the history of gaming is a great topic, pockets deep in knowledge and controversy, this development laid the groundwork for the genre specific to this paper.

The MMO game defined as the first ever could be arguable. The discussion could propagate from various ways, ideally influenced as to how people understand and observe the history of the genre. However, a strong position could be made from two very viable directions. First, one should consider the diverse and complex game play MMOs can harbor. For example, the games are often times labeled as either “sandbox” or “theme park.”¹⁰ These two types are weighed and documented at the Lorehound website in an attempt to define MMOs at a broad view on how players interact with the

⁸ New genres or innovations relates to styles of play and add-ons to games that would come in the future, whether or not related to *Mazewar*. Such inventions include, but not limited to, role-playing and campaign-style games.

⁹ Justin Olivetti, *The Game Archaeologist: Maze War*, Joystiq website <http://massively.joystiq.com/2012/06/12/the-game-archaeologist-maze-war/> accessed on 31 October 2012. This article provides pictures and information of the game, including history, visuals, and interactive concepts.

¹⁰ Lorehound Staff, *The Merits of “Sandbox” versus “Theme Park”*, Lorehound website <http://lorehound.com/news/the-merits-of-sand-box-versus-theme-park-mmos/> accessed on 1 November 2012.

game on a large scale. There are other definitions that can be stapled to the MMO genre. In fact, Samir from *Dragon Blogger* lists up to sixteen¹¹. This wide range of possibly stereotypical mediums for the genre lend credit to any person who believe some gameplay aspects are standard for an MMO while others are a key point from separating one type of game to another. The other standpoint one could hold in defining the first MMO is the vagueness of the term. The other genres are a bit more streamlined, with less subject material to be considered. They include, but are not limited to, first-person shooter, strategy, and role-playing. It is plausible that games like *Mazewar* were MMOs in their time. There is no demonstrable player base perceived to have participated or enjoyed the game yet there are numerous articles across the Internet that documents it as one of the greatest achievements of its time. In fact, the developer went on to assist NASA in creation of computer software and hardware for the *Mars Rover* project.¹² This sort of fandom is a stark reminder that the game is well-remembered and constantly looked at even thirty years after it left a mark on this world, and sub sequentially had to have a lot of exposure to the population given the amount of people who know about it.

Another venue to consider is the Multi-User Dungeon, or MUD. These games were entirely text-based that gave players a bit more flexibility. The idea of a text-based game did away with the need for a graphics engine, instead only focusing on producing text-driven actions and responses. This opened up participation for a wider range of players. This genre came into existence in 1975. Will Crowther developed *Adventure* that year and linked it between multiple universities and other organizations via ARPANet¹³. This was soon followed by another, called *Island of Kesmai*, which embodied much of the same aspects present-day MMOs do.¹⁴ The likeliness of current games to past games is irrefutable, so perhaps people will define them as the first MMOs. In light of all this

¹¹ Samir, *16 Different Types of Massively Multiplayer (MMO) Online Games*, Dragon Blogger website <http://www.dragonblogger.com/16-types-massively-multiplayer-mmo-online-games/> accessed on 21 November 2012.

¹² Digibarn Staff, *The Digibarn's Maze War 30 Year Retrospective*, Digibarn Computer Museum website <http://www.digibarn.com/history/04-VCF7-MazeWar/> accessed on 21 November 2012.

¹³ Richard Bartle, *MUD History, How MUDs were invented*, Living Internet website http://www.livinginternet.com/d/di_major.htm accessed on 21 November 2012.

¹⁴ Michael K., *The First MMORPG – The Early History of the Genre*, MMOHuts website <http://mmohuts.com/editorials/the-first-mmorpg> accessed on 1 November 2012.

information, there is a particular MMO that was a nation-wide success and boasted players from every remote corner that could access the Internet. This game, *Neverwinter Nights*, was published in 1991. *Neverwinter Nights* was developed by Stormfront Studio along with various publishers including America Online and Wizards of the Coast.¹⁵ The second publisher was originally Tactical Studies Rules, but the company was bought out by Wizards of the Coast in 1997.¹⁶ This was the first herald of an explosion to the MMO medium. It would happen around the turn of the century, bringing new titles and technology to a multitude of categories further defining the game styles available.¹⁷

The information lending knowledge to this article is a culmination of subject material. This renders it useful to almost anyone, whether readers are advisors on a marketing board, students eager to understand, or readers gaining casual knowledge. With that in mind, there is no better way to show how an evolution came to pass than by an example relatable to the topic. The most commonly and easily accepted topic for an MMO evolution would be the game *World of Warcraft*, due to its popularity. For example, *World of Warcraft* boasted a subscription count of over eleven million of the world's gamers as subscribers to its title in the year 2010.¹⁸ The game has kept up its number of players for a multitude of reasons, however, and none that others are not capable of doing. Such as, the game has extremely low PC system requirements, a thriving storyline that is as deep as some novels, and releases new content and patches to keep people interested. The low requirements can be viewed on their website.¹⁹ This advantage of the game is that it allows for players with older computers to participate, thus allowing for remotely interested hobbyists or gamers lacking funds for new equipment. Next, you have

¹⁵ Logan Frederick, *Stormfront Nets Emmy for Neverwinter Nights*, The Escapist website <http://www.escapistmagazine.com/news/view/80545-Stormfront-Nets-Emmy-for-Neverwinter-Nights> accessed on 1 November 2012.

¹⁶ Marshal Oliver, *Wizards of the Coast: Introduction*, Examiner website <http://www.examiner.com/article/wizards-of-the-coast-introduction> accessed on 1 November 2012.

¹⁷ BioBreak Staff, *MMO Timeline*, Wordpress website <http://biobreak.wordpress.com/mmo-timeline/> accessed on 21 November 2012.

¹⁸ Guinness World Records, *Most Popular Subscription-Based Massively Multiplayer Online Role Player Game (MMORPG)*, Guinness Book of World Records [http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/6000/most-popular-subscription-based-massively-multiplayer-online-role-player-game-\(mmorpg\)](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/6000/most-popular-subscription-based-massively-multiplayer-online-role-player-game-(mmorpg)) accessed on 6 December 2012.

¹⁹ Blizzard, *World of Warcraft System Requirements*, Battle.net website <https://us.battle.net/support/en/article/minimum-system-requirements-for-world-of-warcraft> accessed on 1 November 2012.

the storyline. The *World of Warcraft* title has been licensing its lore and history to books, approximately seventeen to be exact, by various authors since the year 2001.²⁰ This sort of involvement offered beyond the digital world allows readers to partake in and engage themselves on a different level than your standard video game. It gives them a way to brush up on their mythological pastime through a different avenue, largely for knowledge and entertainment. Last, but not least, the *World of Warcraft* series gives out content patches and releases new expansions fairly regularly.

A large number of publishers have moved to giving out content more and more with each new game release. Blizzard has been capitalizing on this since the year 2007, and earlier depending on how far one can link content patches inside the initial game. While it may be arguable to some that this is a relevant standard for video games, BioWare marketing teams have surveyed to show otherwise.²¹ There are other possibilities that link to the games success but we must define what is relevant to the topic of evolution for this particular title. The history, for example, is a perfect point of contention. The extensive history of the game goes beyond books, as Blizzard was releasing titles surrounding the lore well before *World of Warcraft*. Such as, Blizzard had two early titles pertaining to the Warcraft universe. These two games, *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans* and *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness*, also served as a pathway to the current title. Blizzard did not have to seek out just new players to fill their ranks as they had prior strategy-based games that showed huge popularity and advancement for their time. In fact, they had huge successes in the Warcraft series well before *World of Warcraft* released.²² Both aforementioned titles were best-sellers and still get merit on Blizzard's game-legacy documenting.²³ With all this in mind, we must come to an understanding of what is considered an

²⁰ Blizzard, *World of Warcraft Novels*, Blizzard store website <http://us.blizzard.com/store/browse.xml?f=c:4,c:17,f:1#p2> accessed on 27 November 2012.

²¹ Mike Rose, *BioWare: Some players want day-one DLC*, Gamasutra website http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/175902/BioWare_Some_players_want_dayone_DLC.php accessed on 27 November 2012.

²² Blizzard, *Warcraft Statistics*, StatisticsBrain website <http://www.statisticbrain.com/blizzard-entertainment-statistics/> accessed on 1 November 2012.

²³ Blizzard, *Warcraft Legacy Games*, Blizzard website <http://us.blizzard.com/en-us/games/legacy/> accessed on 27 November 2012.

evolutionary aspect for this particular title. We must find a middle ground for all that encompasses this games advancement, whether for good or bad.

The publisher and developer Blizzard stuck to its roots, offering its players familiarity along with deep history, rich content and low requirements. The evolution began there, but it continued with good practice and diligence. Blizzard offered a multitude of other services, all keening to different aspects that would attract players. The title came with the ability to modify the game through a system dubbed *Add-ons*, which allowed players to make enhancements to the game that suited them. It allowed for creation of multiple characters, so one could experience the many avenues of the game. Lastly, it also created a good mix of the theme-park and sandbox style world. This was harnessed and debuted through their standard Player-versus-Environment and Player-versus-Player aspects, or modes, of play.²⁴ It becomes easier to understand, with these facts, that Blizzard has travelled miles forward with their title, retaining enjoyment and customer satisfaction, by progressing inherent traits and values that people enjoy. However, that sort of achievement takes a deal of its own processing. The theory of MMO evolution does not stop at creating and recreating positive environments but it begins or renews there.

The idea that we merely log in to the game and enjoy what Blizzard has served to us on a silver plate is putting it mildly. The company has taken to monitoring their game for a multitude of reasons; be it population, statistics, cheaters, or otherwise.²⁵ With this information Blizzard can more accurately keep a positive and safe environment for its subscribers. Like an early-warning weather system, Blizzard can react to changes in its game's market, what players like to do or see more of, and what other trending situations might arise. This information has contributed vastly to the evolution of the game, allowing for them to tune events or aspects and introduce new gameplay modes or tweak old

²⁴ Justin Eldridge, *What is PvE? The definition of Player versus Environment*, Examiner website <http://www.examiner.com/article/what-is-pve-the-definition-of-player-versus-environment> accessed on 29 November 2012.

²⁵ Mike Schramm, *How Blizzard monitors realm populations*, Joystiq website <http://wow.joystiq.com/2007/04/26/how-blizzard-monitors-realm-populations/> accessed on 29 November 2012.

ones. In fact, Blizzard held a recent interview explaining how they look at and altered the newest expansion from how they interpret what people want to see more of.²⁶ Blizzard has done quite a bit to push their MMO, taking quite a few scenarios to mind to keep track of what people want. The evolution of any MMO stems from different ideologies, not inclusive or exclusive to specific mindsets. Blizzard, in this case, has proven this – that it does not boil down to one specific event.

The evolution of a video game can have many beginnings and endings, but the overall progression is determined by how and what the publisher and developers employ. They must decide if they will take at face-value the information given to them, or with weighted consideration. This includes, but is not limited to, the feedback from players and testers, games of the past, whether it be their own or foreign designs, and how they will develop and project their fantasy world. They also suffer and grow in the influence of those around them, such as marketing agents. All of these opinions from varying sources allows for amazing growth, disastrous death, or any outcome in between. The evolution of gaming is a well-oiled machine, running constantly to continually reproduce an outcome; that of enjoyment for its players. Yet, there is more to this machine. It features advanced technology, honed from approximately a half-century of refinement and critique.

This machine must produce product at faster rate, with better quality, and a unique feel with almost every time it turns over. We understand this through various examples. Perhaps one could make an argument that the evolution of an MMO is a sound example of how socialism should be.²⁷ The developers at Blizzard, as previously stated and cited, have taken in to account the wishes of their players. They may implement, at their discretion, these wishes. However, this is not our only venue of relation. In this light of information, we can relate the MMO evolution as a situation parallel to the

²⁶ Nick Cowen, *Blizzard on Mists of Pandaria*, Computer and Video Games website <http://www.computerandvideogames.com/369843/interviews/blizzard-on-mists-of-pandaria-we-got-really-geeked-up-about-this-expansion/> accessed on 29 November 2012.

²⁷ Dictionary Staff, *Socialism*, Reference.com website <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/socialism?s=t> accessed on 29 November 2012. This paper is not elaborating on what is or is not socialism, but referencing the origin diction for example purposes.

entitlement players feel of recent generations.²⁸ These situations are particular, and while felt to be considered possible with an overall view, could be elaborated on at much greater detail. With merely a feeling to insinuate and spark the curiosities therein, this paper will not expand on the topics of what could be but what most definitely is.

In conclusion, the evolution of the MMO genre has blossomed over many years. It has had a little bit of nearly every section of economic society instilled in to it. Technological advancements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have given it an edge over many others, allowing people across the world to come together and share in universal studios adapted to the mindsets of few and many. Enhancements have been made that allow for greater detail, longevity, and monetary outcomes. The evolution of an MMO has solid roots in not only the technological conquests betrothed to it, but in the people and devices that propel it. There is no set standard for what makes an MMO evolve but the initial idea that sparks the creation of it. With everything the mind can feasibly understand, who can say, definitively, what made it all evolve? An impossible question with an impossible answer but given to us by the possibilities of our imagination. At the least, it is inarguable that MMOs evolve by our thoughts.

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²⁸ Bill Keller, *The Entitled Generation*, NY Times website <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/30/opinion/keller-the-entitled-generation.html> accessed on 1 November 2012. Perhaps a whole new story to cover, but one could argue a portion of technological advances were done to suit the needs of people expecting more for less.

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