MMORPGs - Crash Course Games #12

Crash Course: Games
https://youtube.com/watch?v=YZ5j5fy-LiQ
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/YZ5j5fy-LiQ

===== (00:00) to (02:00) =====

Hi, I'm Andre Meadows, and this is CrashCourse Games. Today, we're gonna talk about a new kind of game that appeared in the 1990s and leveraged the new internet technology to connect millions of players in the gaming world where they could talk to each other, work toward completing quests, and compete or cooperate as they pleased. These games are called Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, which is too long of a phrase for me to say 14 more times in this video, so we're just going to call them MMORPGs. Games like these, usually found on PCs, have been nicknamed life-games, since they lack a traditional ending. You could literally play them for life, or at least as long as the servers are up, anyway.

Today we're gonna talk about a few of these fantasy worlds and find out why they bring us together in the real world, so slap on that tier 18 armor, grab your companion pet, make sure your expansion pack is downloaded, and let's go!

(Intro)

In the world of gaming, we have Massively Multiplayer Online Games, or MMO games, and role playing video games, or RPGs. MMORPGs are obviously the combination of them both. These games are usually hosted on servers by the games' publishers and are constantly evolving whether the players are online or not.

But before we get into that, let's talk about MUD. I don't know mean mud like the kind your dog tracks, but a MUD, or Multi User Dungeon, which would go on to inspire modern MMORPGs. MUDs are text-based, role playing games that have no graphics and only involve a few users. Players type in questions or commands, and the game responds with written responses. Using your imagination and pretending to see the adventure is a selling point. These games are usually fantasy-based, and most were inspired by Dungeons and Dragons. One of the most famous MUDs, called MUD, was created in the late 1970s by Roy Trubshaw on a PDP-10. We mentioned that in an earlier episode, because that's the same computer used for the invention of Galaxy Game, the world's first coin-operated video game.

MUD was simple, with players typing in N, E, S, or W for the four main directions and words like 'attack' or 'defend' to battle enemies. A few years later, those simple commands were replaced with more complex sentences, like, 'You were eaten by a grue', a famous phrase that many players of the game Zork encountered time and time again.

===== (02:00) to (04:00) =====

This popular MUD sold over 680,000 copies in the first 3 games in its series in the 1980's. These games emphasized leveling up, exploration, and monster hunting, which would become a common theme in many future MMORPGs.

But text based games have a limited audience because people like pretty pictures. And in 1986, Lucasfilm Games debuted Habitat on the Commodore 64. This game could support up to 10,000 players, but users could only play the game at night and on weekends when the server was running. It's like an old cellphone plan. Also, players had to pay by the hour. It's like old long distance charges.

In 1991, Quantum Computer Services, which would later be called AOL, debuted Neverwinter Nights which was the first modern MMORPG. By the time it went offline in 1997, it supported 115,000 players that payed $6 an hour to enter that world. It had fighting, leveling up, and the ability to create guilds, or like-minded groups within the game. This would become a cornerstone of modern MMORPGs, and the communities created within them.

In 1997, Ultima Online was the MMORPG that brought this game genre to the mainstream, reaching 100,000 subscribers in its first year and a peak user base of 250,000 active accounts in 2003. It helps that the Ultima series has been around since 1981, had 10 titles in its series, and had a huge fan base.

So this brings us to that quintessential, modern MMORPG: World of Warcraft. World of Warcraft, or WoW, has been running since 2004 and at its height had over 12 million active players. This game is so widespread that it's played in 244 countries and territories, and its players have created over 500 million characters and 9 million social guilds.

Today, WoW still has 5.5 million players, which isn't too bad considering that those players are still paying Blizzard 15 bucks a month to play the game. And the bonds people form in the game can even spill over into real life. The New York Times ran an article in 2011 documenting multiple couples who met and married thanks to World of Warcraft. And even death is also an accepted part of gaming in WoW communities.

===== (04:00) to (06:00) =====

In 2006, a World of Warcraft player died of a stroke in real life and her online friends chose to honor her with an in-game funeral. A huge number of players showed up in formal attire and left their weapons at home out of respect. A line formed so that mourners could pay their last respects to the player's avatar. But since this is a game, on the internet, things went horribly wrong when an opposing faction's guild raided the funeral and killed everyone. This is a real event, and one that questions the boundaries between the game world and the real world and the realm of human decency. So, games like WoW can say a lot about us as people, but what do they do they say about the systems and institutions we create? MMORPG's have created micro-economies that have helped economists model how these systems can be adjusted for the real world. Lets go to the Thought Bubble. Eve Online is a great example of a game as a microcosm of societal institutions. This sci-fi space opera released in 2003 has an economy almost completely driven by players. Eve Online has such a dynamic economy that in 2007, they hired Dr. Eyjolfur Guomundsson to be the game's lead economist. He and his team acted as the game's national economics institute, statistics office, and central bank. Describing his job as "any economist's dream because this is not just an experiment, this is more like a simulation, more like a fully-fledged system where you can input to see what happens." In Eve Online there are more than 5,000 items players can buy and sell, and over 1 million transactions happen each day using in-game currency known as ISK, or Interstellar Kredits. As of 2014, there are around 600 trillion ISK in the game, which translates to around 18 million real-world US dollars. But since that was all player made and tied to the creation of economic value, the game-makers could not act as a government and infuse the economy with fresh cash, so Dr. Guomundsson had to find more subtle ways of balancing out the economy by implementing broker fees, selling player skill-books and implementing sales tax to in-game transactions to avoid hyper-inflation. Also, Dr. Guomundsson believes that Eve Online can be used to study monetary systems by looking at how everything from the gold standard to crypto-currency such as bit-coin can function on a grand level within the game.

===== (06:00) to (08:00) =====

And here we thought the game was all just about building ships and blowing them up. Thanks Thought Bubble. And speaking of building ships and blowing them up, Eve Online has made history for having one of the biggest and most costly in-game online battles of all time.

You see, spaceship costs in the game can by translated to real-world money, with the smallest worth around 1-13 US dollars and the largest as much as $7,600. And just so we're clear, those values are based on the average hourly pay within the game across all players which can be converted to US dollars because players can use real money or in-game currency to purchase and trade play time. So in 2014, a battle that would become known as Bloodbath of B-R5RB raged over two days and when it ended, there was over 11 trillion ISK worth of damage, or 330,000 real-world dollars. Now players can make money inside the game, so most of that money wasn't spent from actual player's wallets, but still, that's a lot of subscription time. But real money is constantly going into these games. Players routinely sell, buy, and trade gaming aspects from this game and others, even though its forbidden. This is on top of the subscription, or pay-to-play, business model. Gaming professor and economist Edward Castronova demonstrated in 2002 that the MMORPG, Everquest, was the 77th richest country on the planet, with a GDP higher than that of China's. But say you don't want to spend all your time selling spiderling silk in the bazaar. There's a world out there for every type of player. Sci-fi fans have Star Wars: the Old Republic. Fantasy player's have got Lord of the Rings Online. There's even a DC Universe Online for comic book and super hero fans. And the future is showing a new generation of MMORPG's. Games like Guild Wars II, Final Fantasy Online, and many others are keeping the genre alive and well. A new MMORPG, No Man's Sky, comes out in 2016 and according to its developer, Hello Games, offers players the chance to explore over 18 quintillion life-sized planets. Each planet will have its own unique environment. Shaun Murrey, the creator, states that "even if you explore each planet once a second, our own sun will burn out before you can see them all. This is all done with the power of procedural generation."

===== (08:00) to (08:54) =====

And rather than ending with that existential crisis, I'll leave you with this: Humans have a few core drives. We wanna be together and we wanna explore new worlds, and with MMORPG's, we get the best of both. Thanks for watching. See you next time.

Stan Muller:Crash Course Games is filmed in the Chad and Stacey Emigholz Studio in Indianapolis, Indiana and it's made with the help of all these nice people. If you'd like to keep Crash Course free for everyone, forever, you can support the series on Patreon, a crowd-funding platform that allows you to support the content you love. Speaking of Patreon, we'd like to thank all our patrons in general, and we'd specifically like to thank our High Chancellor of Knowledge, Morgan Lizop, and our Vice Principal, Michael Hunt. Thank you for your support. *closing music*