EVE Online's war correspondents: player journalism as history

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Introduction

Launched in 2003, *EVE Online* is a persistent, Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG), described by its developers as the world's largest living work of science fiction (CCP Seagull 2014). The game has more than 400,000 subscribed accounts, and the vast majority of players play together on a single server.[1] The science fiction nature of the game results in an environment characterised by conceptions of the future, but this space is also pervaded by a sense of a past, manifest in the fictional backstory of the game – its 'lore' – and in more than a decade of player activity and its recollection. Player engagement with *EVE* as history is widespread (Webber forthcoming 2016), with illustrative examples found in the *True Stories* repository, created to celebrate *EVE*'s tenth anniversary; in the breadth of contributions to the *EVElopedia* (the official game Wiki); and in an extensive variety of blogs, *YouTube* channels, podcasts and other social media which report on and analyse various aspects of the game and provide player-produced stories couched in *EVE*'s lore.

Notable amongst these media are news sites which operate in a fashion clearly intended to be journalistic: *EVENews24* (*EN24*), *TheMittani.com* (*TMC*), and *Crossing Zebras* (*CZ*). All three sites self-consciously reproduce tropes from established media elsewhere, offering news, features, analysis, etc., and carrying appropriate descriptions: 'Your Daily source of EVE Online News!' (*EN24*); 'Eve Online & Gaming News Site' (*TMC*); 'EVE Online articles, videos, news' (*CZ*). They draw on the broad community of writers responsible for many of the most popular *EVE* blogs, and articles include battle reports, political examinations of game actions, and

opinion pieces, alongside more prosaic guidance about styles of play. These sites act not only as a record of events in and around the *EVE* universe, therefore, but as engaged community news services which attend in real time to those things the community is likely to consider important. Of course, other sites exist which replicate something of this mode and produce some similar material, although they do not seek to present themselves explicitly as sites of journalism, sites of *news*, in quite the same manner.[2] Thus, much as with real-world news production, these activities sit within a media ecosystem, which contributes to and enhances the experience of *EVE Online*. And importantly for our considerations here, in capturing events as they take place and in maintaining that record across time, these news sites contribute to recording *EVE*'s history in the making.

The role of journalism in history has long been noted. John Tosh indicates that the press (and by extension, written journalism) is the most important, published primary source for the historian (2015, 78), although historians have traditionally looked down on it, and downplayed it in histories of, for example, modern Britain (Bingham 2012, 311). Scholars have recently made significant efforts to more clearly understand journalism's role both in relation to history (e.g. Conboy 2014) and in memory work (Zelizer and Tenenboim-Winblatt 2014). Martin Conboy has remarked that 'historians' increasing preoccupation with language, discourse and identity has encouraged them to draw increasingly upon journalism texts' (2014, 2), while Horst Pöttker has noted the converse: the growing importance of history to journalistic work (2014). A historical consciousness is common to both; as Paula Hamilton has observed, 'some scholars have written about the struggle between journalists and historians to tell stories about the past in their columns' (Hamilton 2003, 137-8).

There has also been a tradition of transition from journalist to historian, with scholars such as Peter Hennessy emerging from a journalistic background. And perhaps significantly, Andrew Groen, author of the forthcoming book *A History of the Great Empires of EVE Online*, was formerly a journalist for *Wired*. The existence of 'journalistic' activity in and around *EVE Online* thus raises a number of questions, and while these are initially perhaps for the historian, by extension they are also of interest to the culturalist. In the light of analyses such as those mentioned, what is the historical work done by the journalism of *EVE Online*? What role do these sites, these activities of record, play? And assuming this *is* history, what kind of history might it be?

This chapter explores these questions and attempts to understand the relationship, in terms of *EVE Online*, between journalism, history and fandom. It questions the nature of the history that is produced and the extent to which we can consider this as fandom as opposed to as gameplay: does this writing constitute part of the game, or a reappropriative or extending act? How does this writing function, if at all, as historical discourse, or as public history? And what exactly did EVE's Creative Director mean when he referred to 'the history of *our* Universe' (Ólafsson 2013, my emphasis)?

The historical work of EVE journalism

Journalism is often referred to as a 'first (rough) draft of history', a position which rests upon its response to society, and its existence within an ongoing set of discourses about the society to which it responds. Inherently, then, journalism's role is conditioned by its context; journalism is not, in and of itself, history or memory, but it is part of a process of history and of memory.

Traditionally (historically) that process has taken place not only with regard to society 'in general' but within a specific community, and it is this activity which lies at the heart of Benedict Anderson's thesis (1983) considering the role of the media in the formation of national consciousness – a sense of identity.

Within its community, in historical terms, journalism serves two roles: as the 'primary recorder of a shared past' (Zelizer and Tenenboim-Winblatt 2014, 2), it draws the community together around common experiences, but it also situates these experiences within a longer-term understanding of that past, as it 'regularly and systematically looks backward in reporting about the present' (Zelizer 2014, 33). Jeffrey Olick has suggested that journalism is 'temporary by design' (2014, 23); but this reflects only upon journalism the product, the individual news piece, rather than journalism as an ongoing activity. The more substantial contribution of journalism to the process of history is not only to offer a singular draft of the record of one event, but a draft of a framework of related events within which that event should, might or could be understood.

We can see this taking place through reiteration, through interrelation, and through a sense of historical position: ten years since, perhaps, or three weeks after. As Michael Schudson has indicated, 'stories that matter are stories that persist and take different turns over days or weeks or longer' (1986, 89). He illustrates this through the metaphor of ripples on water: the splash of the initial news, and the subsequent effect of important events (on both the past and the future) as they propagate outwards (1986, 88-91). Significant moments of reiteration, such as anniversaries, allow for the situation of events in history (see Robinson et al. 2014, 432), and the interrelationship of events serves to establish a sense of continuity, particularly through historical references.

> For the journalist, historical references serve many useful functions in the news story, not just by augmenting the story with context, but also by adding new pieces of evidence, revising a once-agreed upon past, marking a commemoration, and giving the story a narrative context (Winfield et al. 2002, 290).

Through these processes, then, journalism works to (help to) transform news *into* history. These are reminiscent of the processes of memory suggested by the ideas of Frederic Bartlett and Maurice Halbwachs (usefully explored in Garde-Hansen, Hoskins and Reading 2009, 2). Memory, too, depends on a revisiting of the past, and both memory texts and journalistic stories depend upon repetition and (intertextual) comparison in order to make meaning (Kitch 2006, 96; Winfield et al. 2002, 290-1). Yet memory's processes of recall also act on the past to *change* it; losing detail, as Pierre Nora observes, from generation to generation (1992/1996, 530). The process of history, conversely, is to *preserve* the past (or, at least, *a* past), and to cement it into place through links to other elements of preserved past. In reiterating, interrelating and positioning events historically, therefore, journalism contributes to this activity, acting to ensure that accounts of past events remain the same.

In terms of *EVE Online*, these processes can be explored through consideration of events which we might think of as the most significant to take place in New Eden: those which receive coverage by the mainstream media. While reports about *EVE Online* beyond the gaming community are occasional and sporadic, they do occur across a variety of major news outlets. What proves interesting is the ways in which the historical work done by mainstream media in respect of *EVE*, and that done by games journalism in general, and *EVE* journalism in particular, differs in material ways. And while we might expect these news providers to operate in a hierarchy of increasing focus and detail as they become closer to the source of the story –

increasingly engaged, perhaps, or more detailed – the historicising process of journalism seems subject to a similar structure.

The Battle (or Bloodbath) of B-R5RB (B-R for short)[3], which took place on 27 January 2014, is an event that provides an illustration of these distinctions. Resulting either from a bug or an oversight (widely reported as an 'unpaid bill'), this battle became far larger and more serious than any of its participants expected, apparently prompting Associated Press to send a 'war correspondent' (Good 2014), whose report (Lang 2014) was picked up and disseminated by outlets such as the BBC and USA Today. The message conveyed by these media was simple: this battle had resulted in around US$300,000 worth of damage, in terms of ships, equipment and structures destroyed, and it was large: 'the biggest battle of its kind in the game's 10-year history' (BBC 2014); 'the bloodiest battle' and 'the most destructive and expensive battle in the 10-year history of "EVE Online"' (USA Today 2014).

The mainstream outlets, then, told a story of massive financial loss, and a 'biggest ever' battle, clearly an attempt to establish these events as comprehensible to mainstream news audiences (and certainly the coverage helped to establish the significance of the battle as event[4]). These somewhat cursory reports of '*EVE* news' were significantly extended by technology and gaming sites, which, while including the same core messages, provided greater engagement and analysis. In a reference to the ultimately representative nature of such events, for example, Bo Moore of *Wired* offered a more humanising characterisation of the battle as one in which 'more than 20 million soldiers were killed and more than 600 warships… destroyed in a battle that raged for 22 hours', making this battle 'the largest and bloodiest in the history of warfare' (Moore 2014). Moore also worked to explain the battle in a broader context, providing details about the war of which it was part and the ships involved. Elsewhere, *Polygon*'s Jenna Pitcher provided an

interim report as the battle took place, including an interview with The Mittani, one of the leaders of the alliances involved, followed by a subsequent piece in which she engaged with further detail, including the recognition that this was only *EVE*'s biggest ever battle by certain measures (Pitcher 2014a; 2014b).

These positions represent a distinct contrast between treatments of the history within which this event might be contextualised. Mainstream news offered a narrative built in part upon a historical claim – this battle was the biggest *ever to have occurred* in *EVE Online* – but provided no further information to help the reader interpret what this claim signified in terms of the game itself. What, for example, were battles like, how many were there, and what, in essence, did this great battle mean? The gaming news outlets, conversely, gave additional, explanatory detail which made the historic claim make sense. Moore's unspoken 'if it were real' fits this event into a lineage of warfare in ready circulation in the media at large; his discussion of the Halloween War situates it in a discourse of an ongoing conflict, as opposed to leaving it as an isolated event of remark. Pitcher focused closely on the history of the *EVE* community, calling previous conflicts to our attention, the Battles of Asakai and 6VDT-H, which competed for scale of participation with B-R, if not for destruction. Notably, also, Pitcher expressed a sense of a journalistic narrative running alongside *EVE*'s narrative: she linked back to *Polygon*'s own coverage of Asakai, helping us to appreciate the flow of events but also to frame them in terms of history, of a narrative about the past. This distinction between levels of historical work is both stark and important. Indeed, it is underlined by the *capacity* of mainstream news outlets to undertake these engagements but their omission to do so: BBC News, for example, also covered 6VDT-H when it occurred (BBC 2013), yet offered its readers no connection between the two events.

Unsurprisingly, *EVE*'s news providers offered even more comprehensive coverage of B-R, including real-time updates and links to live feeds about the battle (e.g. Bobmon 2014a; Mittani 2014), end of battle situation reports (JustSharkbait 2014), extensive post-battle analysis (Aras 2014), reflections (Pellion 2014) and debrief interviews with major participants (Phoena 2014a). The usual financial and scale allusions were made, along with references to former battles and a blow-by-blow sense of escalation. This coverage and exploration of B-R was principally distinct, however, in acting historically in a way that others did not. Not only did *EVE*'s news sources report on B-R, but in a manner typical of journalism after a major event, they discussed it, they analysed it, and they kept on talking about it, exploring 'not just what happened, but whether what happened meant something and, if so, what' (Winfield et al. 2002, 290). The battle took place in January 2014, but articles reflecting on the battle and its impact were still being posted months later: in June (Alyxportur 2014), in August (Kumitomo 2014) and onward thereafter; in June 2015 (Blackfist 2015).

Here, then, journalism in and around *EVE* acted to transform the news of the battle into history in a way distinct from the historical work performed by mainstream (and broader gaming) media. This is not, however, an isolated instance, and it is possible to see an ongoing historical discourse at work through *EVE*'s attendant journalism; I would argue, in fact, that *EVE*'s journalism is *self-consciously* historical. Not only does this writing engage with the three modes of historical production that I mention above (reiteration, interrelation, and position), it does so in a way which signals an awareness that this is a deliberate act; that history, here, is important in some way that makes referring to it worthwhile.

This historical awareness is signalled explicitly not only through columns and articles which recognise particular events or occasions as historic but also through those which discuss and

present histories of aspects of *EVE* and its community. These pieces are often written a substantial period of time after the events they describe, though perhaps not in normal terms long enough to satisfy historians' expectations of critical distance. However, it is in the nature of games, as entertainment, for timeframes to be tremendously compressed: *EVE* has run for only twelve years, yet in that time the political geography has changed dramatically and repeatedly, as empires have risen and fallen, and players have joined and left. Thus a week in *EVE* may in effect be much longer than the apocryphal week in politics, and possibly as a consequence, many of these journalistic pieces are reflexive in the manner of traditional narrative historical writing, conditioned by an acute awareness of the impact of an event, person or institution on *EVE*'s present. Such pieces include histories of community spaces (such as the now defunct Kugutsumen.com: Keller 2012) and of conflicts such as the Southern War (e.g. Christos 2011), statistical histories – of price data or activity levels (for example, Noizygamer 2014) – and historically-grounded analyses of *EVE* politics (e.g. Raimo 2015a). Notable among these are a number of pieces which set out to explain some aspect of game activity, comprehension of which requires a knowledge of *EVE*'s past – articles exploring particular conflicts may link to supplementary pieces which develop the historical background to those conflicts (e.g. Bagehi 2013), or those assessing the impact of new game mechanics may provide significant historical material to underpin the debate (e.g. Matterall 2015).

This explanatory activity underscores an issue common to many games, but especially acute within *EVE Online*: the need for game-specific literacy in order to participate fully in the game and its community (Steinkuehler 2007). Indeed, this can be highlighted by reference to other articles, in which discussions of matters such as ship fits are almost impenetrable to a non-player (see, for example, FearlessLittleToaster 2015). The historical work of *EVE* journalism thus

supports the process of sense-making among *EVE* players; to be successful, players not only need to understand what happens but how it happens and how historical activity has contributed to the production of the conditions of the present. And while this activity is in keeping with normal expectations of journalistic work – the 'explainers' which have become a feature of modern news sites, for example – it also plays a distinct role in the creation of informed, *EVE*-literate players.

In a variety of ways, then, *EVE* journalism takes news from within the game community and situates it within an ongoing discussion, a process which, over time, creates a culturally rich discourse about *EVE*'s past. The journalists of EVE tell and retell all or part of these stories, using them to explore and understand the complexities of the *EVE* community at the same time as they engage and inform that community, and bring it together through those activities.

CCP, lore and history

Although culturally rich, however, this is still a discourse concerned with the past events of a fictional universe; it is tempting to dismiss it as 'not history' on that basis alone. Yet as I have argued at length elsewhere (Webber forthcoming 2016), it is legitimate to consider explorations of *EVE*'s past as historical. As a form of society, *EVE* is susceptible to study by historians, and bears a credible and complete past of its own which merits such study. And while aspects of *EVE*'s history may be fictional, we should be mindful that histories anyway present a *discourse about the past*, not an objective truth (Jenkins 2003, 31-2).

It remains important, though, to consider the extent to which *EVE* journalism engages with, and makes use of, the fictional setting of New Eden, *EVE*'s gameworld. Significantly, and in a

different manner from much of the player-focused history recorded by *EVE*'s journalists, work focused on *EVE* lore engages directly with the intellectual property of CCP Games, the developer and publisher of *EVE Online* (for example, Raimo 2015b). Consequently, tensions exist between players and CCP around player-created historical material which engages with *EVE*'s fictional backstory (lore), tensions which result in two tiers of historical record: an authorised, canonical history, curated by CCP, and an unofficial or unauthorised history which is dismissed or deleted (see Webber forthcoming 2016). Yet it should also be noted that CCP's active production and curation of lore material encourages an environment in which *EVE*'s journalism serves as a form of historical record for this material too. Indeed history, and in particular the interrelationship of player history and lore, has been an important aspect of CCP's approach to *EVE* in recent years. The *True Stories* project (CCP Games 2013), for example, initiated as part of the celebration around the game's tenth anniversary, focused on players' tales of their *EVE* experiences. This ultimately historical material now lies at the heart of CCP's transmedia activity connected with *EVE*; the most popular story was turned into a graphic novel (Way et al. 2014), and further project material is to be used as the basis of a television series (Williams 2013).

In journalistic terms, CCP makes an important contribution through a variety of output, including a number of news channels,[5] developer blogs, *YouTube* videos and, more recently, through *The Scope Galactic News Network*, an in-character video news channel which covers both player activity and lore. According to a 2015 interview with *The Scope*'s creator, CCP senior media producer Ragnar Ágúst Eðvaldsson, the channel was started as a reaction to the mainstream media approaches to B-R5RB described above; as Eðvaldsson himself noted, 'The mainstream media picked up on the highlights, how much real money was lost, etc, but if you were someone

who knew nothing about *Eve* you wouldn't really know what was going on' (Maiberg 2015). The implication here is that *The Scope*'s content is aimed at a non-*EVE* audience, but it is more generally informative than that, pushing out information about game changes (such as the introduction of new ships) alongside coverage of lore and player activity.

The material produced by CCP is widely deployed by the player-run news organisations, although the mechanism through which this takes place varies: *EN24*, for example, directly (re)publishes CCP content under the by-line 'Eve Online' (e.g. Eve Online 2014), whereas both *TMC* and *CZ* seem to prefer to offer the content in an analytical frame appropriate to their particular news styles (e.g. Tubrug1 2014; Mizhir 2015). In addition, this engagement with the CCP-originated material drives some portion of the historical discourse at play, such as when the publication of a video about B-R (CCP Games, 2014) almost four months after the battle took place was picked up by *EN24* (Bobmon 2014b), encouraging journalists and their readership both to see this as history (the video was entitled 'Recording History: The Bloodbath of B-R5RB') and also to participate in a process of revisiting these events.

This relationship is not entirely one-way, of course, and CCP output also draws on material produced by players, as in the case of *True Stories*. In journalistic terms, an immediate example is the citation of articles at *The Mittani.com* as 'intel' for the developer blog written about B-R by *EVE* community manager CCP Dolan (2014). This reciprocal exchange of information and ideas is thus both influential and reinforcing, cementing a commonality of purpose through the practice of journalism as a historical process.

Who are the journalists?

Kari Andén-Papadopoulos notes that journalism often provides not just the first draft of history but in fact the only draft (2014, 149); and certainly, even though the process through which journalism produces history is dependent upon repeated re-drafting, there is often no drive to create a historical discourse which extends beyond the news itself. Clearly, then, we might look to a distinction between what constitutes journalistic significance (i.e. newsworthiness) and what constitutes historical significance (after Carr, that which causes historians to accord something the status of historical fact; 1964, 12-13). At the core of both journalistic and historical work, however, is a claim to truth, based upon verifiable evidence. Indeed, for some scholars, 'journalism looks a lot like history: it is a professional enterprise, it is public, it values sources and rules of confirmation, and its residues are relatively permanent' (Olick 2014, 23).

This suggests that it is perhaps problematic for conceiving of their work in historical terms that *EVE* journalists are not professionals in this mode. The vast majority of work is done voluntarily, and while there is occasional compensation in ISK (EVE's currency), this is not commonplace (Bobmon 2015a). Yet this does not prevent a public culture within which the three main news providers exhibit self-awareness of their role as journalists, and reflect on the ethical parameters of that role, as a lengthy discussion transcript at *CZ* indicates (Phoena 2014b). And while it is tempting to analogise this to citizen or hyperlocal journalism, the work of *EVE* journalists is perhaps less vulnerable to problems around the credibility of its information (highlighted in terms of crowd-sourced video, for example, by Andén-Papadopoulos; 2014: 150). Much of this journalism reports on conflict and on issues of sovereignty, and authoritative community sources such as zKillboard.com exist to verify claims to kills, for example, drawing on *EVE*'s 'CREST' application programming interface to check data provided against that held in the game's own databases. When set alongside the *EVE* community's active and engaged culture of contribution,

and its gameplay-driven sensitivity to misinformation, it is clear that certain forms of truth claim can be supported far more readily for *EVE* journalism than would be the case for journalism focused on other matters.

To further add to their credibility, many of the journalists deployed by these news providers are already established voices in the *EVE* community, authors of popular blogs or *EVE*'s version of significant public figures – some of those who are most active and engaged in the community. This includes several former and current members of, and candidates for, the Council for Stellar Management, an elected group that represents the *EVE* player base in discussion with CCP Games. The participation of these individuals is thus a warrant for the qualities of the sites for which they write; The Mittani is particularly notable here, both as arguably the best-known *EVE* player but also as someone whose name has in itself become a brand, as *TheMittani.com* indicates (Endie 2012). Equally, while it might be expected that such close associations are likely to represent an affiliation to a specific political view (in support of Goonswarm, for example, in the case of *TMC*), the sites themselves seem happy to present conflicting viewpoints (so, again in terms of *TMC*, the site has recruited writers from Goonswarm's opponents; Endie 2012).

In many cases, then, those who are producing *EVE*'s journalism are participants in significant *EVE* activities, able to add both credibility and an 'I was there' sense of authenticity to their accounts (for more on this with reference to *EVE*'s history, see Carter et al. 2015). Yet one commentator does observe that this presents difficulties in obtaining the perspective often readily available to real-world journalists, as journalists in *EVE* tend to be directly involved in events, making it harder to produce an authoritative account (Bobmon 2015a). In any case, it is evident that a developed knowledge of *EVE* and its community are necessary to these roles. However, although the vast majority of writers are current *EVE* players, recruitment calls (Bobmon 2015b)

and author biographies seem to imply this need not always be the case, and *TMC* in particular aims at a broader remit than writing exclusively about *EVE* (Endie 2012).

Fandom, journalism and *EVE Online*

The potential for commentators not to be players thus raises questions about the relationship between *EVE*'s journalists (*EVE*'s putative historians), the game, and its community. What role do these acts of writing play: are they part of *EVE*'s sandbox, do they extend it, or do they take place beyond it? And how might we define fans of *EVE* if they are distinct from *EVE* players? CCP's own approach to *EVE* journalism adds complexity to this picture: these news providers appear as 'Fan Sites' on the official *EVE* community webpage, but are also included alongside a collection of mainstream and gaming news sites in a section labelled 'In the Press'.

A growing literature exists on the notion that video games are co-created experiences, reflecting on the unpaid work and dedication of those who produce assets such as game walkthroughs (Consalvo 2003, 328-9) and who generate other attendant material and activity through which 'the game is made animate' (Taylor 2006, 133). For scholars such as Mia Consalvo, gamers are, therefore, fans and active audiences (2003, 323). Yet it remains unclear whether or not we might conceive of a distinction between the 'simple' act of playing a game and the position of being a fan. In terms of MMOGs, Constance Steinkuehler has drawn a distinction between 'in-game practices' which take place in 'the game's virtual world', and 'the fandom that surrounds it' (2007, 303). The lengthy debate about the 'magic circle' notwithstanding (Steinkuehler herself notes the porosity of any boundaries which seek to define the limits of play here), the use of the

term fandom to describe the 'other stuff' of the game, the material pertinent to gameplay that exists outside the game client itself, is interesting.

To apply this distinction to *EVE*, however, seems problematic. Although the community refers to the 'metagame' to describe many activities taking place outside the client, metagaming is more generally used to describe theorisation and planning activities, such as theorycrafting (Paul 2011). There is a strong sense that, whatever metagaming might comprise, it is not the game itself. Douglas Wilson (2011) refers to the metagame as the negotiation around the game, noting that it has the potential to 'intrude' upon the game system. Yet, to use The Mittani as an example once again, certain *EVE* players rarely, if ever, log into the game client – all, or almost all, of their play takes place outside 'the game', in chatrooms and forums (Parkin 2015); and research on the practices of *EVE*'s industrialists indicates clearly that 'involvement in EVE does not stop once they log off' (Taylor et al. 2015, 381-2). Thus if we accept that limits on play are porous, for *EVE* we may have to accept that limits on 'game' are porous too.

Of course, this does not prevent that non-client game activity being read as fandom, although Hanna Wirman cautions us against doing so, noting that it is an over-simplification to see the textual productivity of gamers in this way (Wirman 2009). We might instead see it as a form of immaterial, player labour (see Taylor et al. 2015), part of the work of EVE signified in the conception of the game's realness (Carter et al. 2015). However, further nuance, and a clearer sense of what is occurring, is perhaps offered by the work of Renee Barnes, in considering the 'ecology of participation' which takes place in alternative and citizen journalism (2014). Barnes draws our attention to the fan-like behaviours around the participatory audiences for journalism of this kind, some of whom are the active contributors who write for the sites in question or who respond via comments to the issues raised, but the majority of whom are either 'engaged

listeners', or distributors of this material. Our understanding of the role of *EVE* journalism as a gameplay activity must, indeed, be predicated not only upon its production but also its reception by and impact upon its audience, and the capacity of that audience to contribute to the production, through writing, commenting, submitting intelligence and leaks, or simply circulating the 'news' through their networks. This is further borne out by the occasional tendency of both authors and readers to describe themselves as fans, either of *EVE* itself or of the news site reporting on it (see, for example, Bobmon 2015, comments 2043068773 and 2043317731).

Conclusion: History, fandom and journalism

EVE journalism, then, is a work of fandom but also of player labour, which acts to report news and, through a process of repetition, interrelation and positioning, to transform that news into the history of *EVE Online*. But what kind of history is it that is created by this process? It is tempting to see this as a form of public history, 'politically self-conscious, community-based […] open to all and usable in political struggles' (Jordanova 2006, 126); and certainly, it appears participatory and bottom-up, produced by *EVE*'s community, by those whose authenticity and credibility has been established in many cases through presence at the events that they describe. Yet it is generally accepted that contributors to online spaces represent only a fraction of those who read them (Arthur 2006); and, of course, those who read these news sites represent only a fraction again of those who care about or play *EVE*. Voter participation in the *True Stories* project sat at a level of only around 0.5% of active *EVE Online* accounts (Webber forthcoming 2016), and some EVE blogs suggest that a huge swathe of the player population are effective non-participants in

the EVE community, unaware of the vast productive activity that takes place, and only engaging, via the official forums, when unhappy (e.g. Scientist 2013; MinerBumping.com).

This is not, equally, an official history. I have already alluded to CCP Games' desire to interweave player activities with game lore, and to advance a transmedia agenda drawing on the history of *EVE*, a history which the *True Stories* site refers to as 'the history of our Universe, as told by those that inhabit it' (Ólafsson 2013). We can, however, see in *True Stories*, and in other official historical venues such as *EVElopedia*, that the company is very protective of its intellectual property in this area, as we might expect, and as I mention above, there is a sense that player histories are, in fact, devalued by CCP and seen as in some way inferior to game lore (Webber forthcoming 2016). Located outside the remit of CCP's immediate control, however, the history produced by *EVE*'s journalism is of a different form. Material originated by CCP is published and examined; importantly, though, it does not *have* to be. The historical agenda is thus set not by the developers but by the interests of the players. The widespread focus on player experiences reduces the impact of CCP's lore on the construction of EVE history; there is still interest in conflict between the peoples represented in the lore, such as the Amarr and the Minmatar, but far more in that between player organisations like CFC and N3.

We cannot, though, escape the fact that this is not a genuinely public history but rather that of a highly-engaged elite. The great battles and political movements which are most regularly recorded are only a small part of the activity which takes place in New Eden, and their stories are generally presented consistently by the same writers, the same voices. That many of these voices are also part of the blogging community, while advancing their credibility as contributors, reduces the plurality of voices in the historical space. Yet we must also be mindful that the purpose of these sites is not primarily historical but journalistic, and thus bound to some extent

by concerns of newsworthiness. Industrial news, for example, may be less regularly reported, but is also less immediately eventful; the specifics of activity in high security space (high-sec) are thus relatively rarely discussed, although economic analysis is commonplace.

The key here would seem to be the issue of the sandbox, a widely-used description of *EVE*: the game affords a significant variety of styles of play, and player responses to the game, and the meanings that they make from it, are contextualised by the play approach they take. There are relatively few voices in *EVE*'s journalism, but its audience is also relatively small; its 'community' is not perhaps as broad as we might imagine. The history produced by this journalism, produced for and through its readership, responds to a small, highly-interested group – those who actually care about the history of *EVE*. The significant role that this history seems to play in *EVE* literacy is clearly vital within that community, informing as it does their understanding of the events occurring in the game, but as the apparent level of engagement seems to indicate, it is perfectly possible to play the game in ignorance of all of this material, without this interpretative framework. This is not, however, to suggest that players who do so are not emotionally involved in the game – indeed, responses to destruction of their assets, recorded at length on MinerBumping.com and similar sites, demonstrate a high level of investment from these players, just not an investment in the interpretative construction of the game offered by *EVE*'s journalists.

To consider this, then, in terms of fandom, it would seem that *EVE*'s journalists can be more readily interpreted as fans of a particular form of *EVE* play and its attendant community than as fans of *EVE* in a more general sense. To its journalists, *EVE* is a highly-politicised and newsworthy space, affording the production of an equally political and complex history. The journalism that they produce is informed and tempered by this fandom; it, and the history it

produces, are inherently partial, excluding (however unintentionally) the voices of the majority of *EVE*'s players. Ultimately, then, it would seem that *EVE*'s journalism produces not a fan history of *EVE*, but a history of a particular form of *EVE* fandom.

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[1] See Drain 2015 for the detail. Estimates suggest that there are between 335,000 and 338,000 live accounts on *EVE*'s main server, Tranquility, with around 73,000 on the Chinese server, Serenity. Many players have multiple subscriptions, so accurate player figures are difficult to estimate.

[2] Notably, there are non-English news sites, such as EVENews.ru, which offer similar approaches to the extensive Russian-speaking EVE community, but the language barrier prevents analysis here.

[3] Most areas of space in EVE Online are referred to by alphanumeric designators.

[4] At least sufficiently to ensure its addition to Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloodbath_of_B-R5RB.

[5] Including two labelled 'game world news' and 'interstellar correspondents': see http://community.eveonline.com/news/news-channels/.