

BUILDING A *WORLD OF WARCRAFT*: CYBER-COLONIALISM
THROUGH “OTHERING” STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a rhetorical analysis of the popular video game *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) and related material. The subscriber base of this game makes it a particularly prominent example of discourse with potentially great influence. Where previous studies have focused less on *WoW*'s narrative in favor of a psychological or sociological approach, this study attempts to examine the rhetorical implications of the game's storyline. The study situates *WoW* within a suitable critical space and shows how strategies used to emphasize racial differences result in a new theoretical framework described by the term "cyber-colonialism."

The study highlights three strategies through which *WoW* emphasizes the differences between racial groups and thereby creates its cyber-colonial portrayals: constructing opposing binaries, the role of geography and climate, and the use of color as a marker of deviance. These strategies all have an established history within ancient, medieval, and modern literature and likely influence the way in which participants view *WoW*'s cultures.

The remainder of the rhetorical analysis highlights three arguments *WoW* itself teaches about particular rhetorical strategies. In particular, this study shows how *WoW* embraces cross-cultural cooperation, rejects scapegoating as an appropriate rhetorical tool, and encourages the involvement of native cultures in solving problems. *WoW* has great potential as a teaching tool and considerable room for future analysis and arguments.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my lovely wife, who I'm sure is still amused by the academic possibilities of video games. Without her, I would've never found myself in position to pursue this accomplishment.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the *Mists of Pandaria* (*MoP*) release date of September 25, 2012, approached, I began to grow more excited. Having played the *Warcraft* games throughout the 1990s and early 2000s before taking up *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) in 2009, I felt that the game universe was a childhood love. As a proud paladin of the Alliance, I had served my country in Northrend fighting the dreaded Lich King's minions and the treacherous forces of the Horde. In *Cataclysm* I'd fought to save Azeroth from the nefarious Twilight's Hammer, who tried to destroy the world with the help of the insane dragon Deathwing. *MoP*, however, was the first *WoW* expansion I was prepared to anticipate. I'd started playing after the release of *Wrath of the Lich King*, and I let my subscription lapse and didn't play in *Cataclysm* until after it came out.

Leading up to the *MoP* release, I tried very carefully to avoid spoilers for the expansion's narrative. Although others had played in the *MoP* beta, I wanted my first experiences to be untainted by prior knowledge. I wanted to experience the long-hidden continent of Pandaria with fresh eyes and exploratory wonder. As the end of *Cataclysm* neared, I spent my days battling the Horde over control of the island of Tol Barad, remembering their aggression against the Alliance and hoping that a new expansion would see some sort of reckoning for their transgressions.

Aidros was not disappointed. *The Skyfire*, a massive Alliance gunship, hovered above Stormwind City, waiting to take heroes to Pandaria to seek the city's missing prince. The ship's commander, Sky Captain Rogers, expressed her distaste of the Horde in no uncertain terms: "The

Horde won't be able to hide from her reach. Not on land, not at sea, not in the air" (*MoP*). When questioned about her hostility, she mentions the suffering brought upon her by the undead Forsaken's offensives: "I grew up in Southshore.¹ My parents are buried there – what's left of them" (*MoP*). We'd already heard that an Alliance fleet carrying Prince Anduin had found and battled the Horde. With no time to lose, we quickly launched toward Pandaria.

We weren't disappointed. The Horde had established their own base on the continent's southeast side, and the *Skyfire* launched gyrocopters and foot soldiers to destroy it and its allied navy. Explosions rained through the air, and no quarter was given. After hard combat and an alliance made with a local pandaren village, we were eventually victorious. Despite the Horde's fierce resistance, we had made landfall on Pandaria.

Justification

Such an experience shows only a small slice of the intensity of *WoW*'s narrative. This game has been mostly neglected as a rhetorical artifact, but *WoW* is worthy of study by rhetorical scholars for several reasons. First, it is a widely popular game. Video game players generally make a large investment in their games, in terms of both money and time. So how many players are invested in *World of Warcraft*? At the height of its popularity, roughly 12 million people played *World of Warcraft*. To gain a sense of perspective for that figure, we can see it is a bit more than the current population of the state of Ohio. Also, the figure is three times larger than the population of the United States when the country gained its independence. Almost fifty times as many people participated in *World of Warcraft* as gathered in Washington, D.C., to hear Martin Luther King, Jr., speak in August 1963. With such a sizeable audience paying a subscription to play, *World of Warcraft* would seem to have considerable rhetorical clout. If so

¹ Southshore was an Alliance town in the nation of Lordaeron that was completely destroyed in a chemical attack by the undead during the *Cataclysm* expansion.

many people are potentially influenced by this game, then rhetorical scholars ought to be interested in studying it.

As *WoW Insider* reports, subscriber numbers have hovered around 10 million for a couple of years, and in 2010 subscriptions hit a high of 12 million. This means that *WoW* functions inherently as a large-scale, widespread communication vector. Second, its longevity is almost unprecedented for a video game. Since beginning in 2004, *WoW* has remained a commercially successful endeavor, as evidenced by subscriber numbers. The number of participants steadily increased for six years and has decreased by only a couple million players during the last two years. With no end seemingly near, *WoW*'s long lifespan is notable in a field in which technological advances cause most video games to be considered outdated within a few years. Thirdly, the size of *WoW* makes it the premier massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG), allowing it to influence video gaming trends in and outside this particular roleplaying game (RPG) genre. Rival MMORPGs, such as *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, mimic *WoW* in its two-faction approach, fixed ethno-cultural alliances, and distinct player roles. Fourthly, fantasy works of all media forms make heavy use of racialized discourse but use strategies that extend to other forms of rhetoric as well. Power reproduces itself in rhetoric, and *WoW* is no exception.

The world of *Warcraft* contains extensive storyline development and fictional world-building. As a result, we may reasonably consider *WoW*, or the *Warcraft* universe as a whole, an example of rhetoric built and shaped by its corporate authors. We find a game that has been produced specifically to attract an audience and be consumed as a rhetorical artifact. Additionally, because *WoW* uses a subscription model, its particular audience is literally “buying in” to participate within this world. The attention and detail contained within the world of

Azeroth,² as well as Draenor, the orcs' homeworld, provides a large supply of material to analyze. Examining this fictional world raises questions about how *Warcraft*'s designers view an ideal world and what the game's portrayals of different fantasy creatures and races suggest or imply about our own world.

The *Warcraft* series is important to analyze as rhetoric because it projects an attitude of "cyber-colonialism" that privileges traditional Western attitudes and pushes the uncivilized "other" into a subaltern role. That is, the more primitive, less "Westernized" races of the Horde are cast as "savages" in this virtual world and therefore reflect the prejudices of our own. I define this process as "cyber-colonialism," which is the projection of real-world power imbalances, "Othering" strategies, and racialized depictions into a virtual electronic space. The analysis of *WoW* provided in this thesis attempts to provide a theoretical basis for identifying and understanding cyber-colonialism. The process of cyber-colonialism is not unique to this game and in many ways merely extends existing rhetorical strategies that divide groups and negatively emphasize differences. As will be shown, *WoW* builds off of previous "Othering" strategies seen as far back as ancient times.³ However, there is a germ of a more positive approach within *WoW*: as other analysis shows, the game also reflects contemporary scholarship in how it portrays the evils of colonialism and its suggested strategies for dealing with intercultural conflicts.

² Confusingly enough, "Azeroth" has been used as the name of three different geo-political areas in different games: first, it was used in *Warcraft* and *Warcraft II* for the human kingdom now known as Stormwind; second, it was and is the name of the southern continent on which this kingdom was established; and thirdly, it has been used as the name of the world itself since *Warcraft III*. Throughout this thesis, Azeroth as a single term will be used to describe the world of *Warcraft*, and any deviations will be clearly marked by phrases such as "kingdom of Azeroth" or "continent of Azeroth."

³ Margaret Sinex traces certain "Othering" strategies back to ancient classical writers, including Aristotle, Pliny the Elder, and Ptolemy of Alexandria (179).

The Critical Space

In rhetorician Raka Shome's essay "Postcolonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Canon," she makes an impassioned argument that rhetorical study has traditionally privileged Western ideals and discourse to the exclusion of other thought traditions. Shome recognizes that "people are constantly discriminated against by virtue of their skin color or by virtue of their belonging to 'other worlds'" (41) and argues that process can be seen throughout a wide range of discourse. As Shome explains, developed countries frequently present "subjects of developing countries and racially oppressed groups (whether *in popular media* or in academia) as an 'other'—racially inferior and hence open to subjection by (white) Western discursive practices" (42, italics added). In agreement with Shome's position, rhetorical scholar Luke Winslow posts that hegemonic "Othering" in popular discourse may present "a particularly dangerous and underexplored hegemonic" because of its subversive and unnoticed qualities (259). From this perspective, then, popular culture is the area in which hegemony is truly established; Chris Barker calls it "the ground on which this consent is lost or won" (9).

There is little question that *WoW* is a solid example of certain generic traits that are shared with other fantasy works. In recent years, the fantasy genre has seen a great deal of growth within popular culture. Although other authors have affected the development of the fantasy genre, J.R.R. Tolkien's influence through his published works, primarily *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings (LotR)*, can scarcely be overstated. With little exaggeration, we could argue that almost the entire genre is grounded in his work. In his work *Shared Fantasy*,⁴ sociologist Gary Fine asserts, "Virtually every fantasy gamer has [...] read Tolkien's *The Hobbit*

⁴ Fine's work is one of the earliest on tabletop RPGs, such as the quasi-medieval *Dungeons & Dragons*, to which *WoW* also owes a great intellectual debt.

(1966) and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy [sic]⁵ (1965)” (35). Throughout his book, Fine describes Tolkien’s influence on RPGs: “Referees use an illusion of the essence of medieval realism, perhaps based on Tolkien or on the Knights of the Round Table” (82). Fine also considers Tolkien’s literary world as more engaging, almost more real, than that created by any other author: “The closest literature comes to permitting an engrossment that transcends mere reading or viewing is the vision of Middle Earth [sic] created by J.R.R. Tolkien” (124).

The fantasy genre, as it has developed under Tolkien’s influence, stands as a notable example of “Othering” discourse for at least two reasons. The first of these is what I call its subversive duality: fantasy discourse presents a particular message, but the genre is crafted in such a way as to deny or dismiss responsibility for that message. A fantasy work can therefore downplay its messages by claiming, “It’s only a story.” The genre has an in-built excuse as to why it may not correspond with real life. As Winslow argues, “Hegemony makes use of fanciful texts [...] precisely because they do not seem to be about current political realities” (258). That is, fantasy discourse can present a message that supports or erodes discursive power for a particular group without appearing to give that message at all. Media analyst Sue Kim, in her examination of the *LotR* film series, also notes the duality present in those movies, which “both invoke and deny the discourses and politics of race, while sweeping other salient and concrete issues under the rug” (875). But this metaphorical silence does not suggest that fantasy has no influence on public attitudes or beliefs. As Kim says, “[O]ne of the weaker reasons for dismissing *The Lord of the Rings* novels or films is that they are ‘not true’” (876). Winslow develops this point further:

Books about wizards, movies about vampires, music about police brutality, or television ads about cavemen do not connect to most people on a surface level. But on a more

⁵ Referring to *LotR* as a trilogy hardly seems correct. Although the six books were broken into three volumes for initial publication, the novel is more properly considered as a cohesive whole.

formal level, these texts can instruct audiences through formally bridging content across seemingly unrelated objects, actions, and experiences. (258)

In other words, while fantasy discourse may not have immediate application in terms of dealing with specific fantasy situations, such rhetorical texts still tell us how to behave when confronted with social situations involving difference. The rhetorical bridging of using the same approach to apply to such different situations is known as homology; in Winslow's words, homology is when "a formal pattern has been established that crosses disparate orders of experiences" (261).

The second factor that makes the fantasy genre especially suitable for examining "Othering" discourse is its *explicit* racialization. As sociologist Melissa Monson says, "Among the more significant of these fantastical elements has been the development of unique breeds of creatures, extraterrestrials, and other sentient beings. These beings are typically referred to as 'races'" (53). This racialized element is almost universal among fantasy works. *World of Warcraft* establishes conflict between the "races" of the Alliance and the Horde and constructs a "game encoded racial essentialism which determines alliances, language, intellect, temperament, occupation, strength, and technological aptitude" (Monson 49).

Almost every fantasy game establishes "race" as a category through which its characters are described. To illustrate how habitually fantasy works employ this category, video game researcher Nathaniel Poor notes that *D&D* uses "Race" as an identifier on players' character sheets (377). Kim similarly focuses her *LotR* film study on the "politics of race" (875). In his discussion of Tolkien, Poor attempts to justify this rhetorical decision:

Tolkien described his elves and humans as the same race, they were "different aspects of the Humane" [...], and if we understand humans, elves, gnomes, and ogres, when they are playable characters and have human-like thoughts, feelings, and action, as humane entities, then it is easier to see how the fantasy use of race can apply. (377)

Poor not only grounds his argument in the historical development of the genre, but he also explicitly says fantasy audiences are expected to identify with and understand the different creatures that inhabit these worlds. Although fantasy “races” may appear to be or actually *be* different species, the underlying discursive message is that these races are in some manner essentially “human.”

As previously mentioned, Fine’s *Shared Fantasy* is one of the earliest works to examine RPGs, which were at the time restricted to their “tabletop” forms. In his book, Fine justifies and grounds these games within the broader history of communication studies. He says, “Because gaming fantasy is based in shared experiences, it must be constructed through communication” (3). Later, he asserts that elements of these games can also relate to other social contexts: “the *processes* by which these games are organized are relevant to gaming occasions and social settings generally” (7). Finally, he makes a strong push for *rhetorical* justifications of gaming:

Recruits do offer “serious” explanations for why they play. Whether the effects are real, the rhetoric of gamers in claiming serious effects for their leisure activities is real. Such claims are treated as rhetoric in that they convince others (and oneself) that games have a useful purpose and a beneficial effect. They provide an account for why individuals spend time in an activity that non-gamers consider frivolous [...] The four themes that emerge regularly as justifications are: [sic] the educational components of gaming; gaming as an escape from social pressure; games as aids in increasing one’s sense of personal control or efficacy; and games as aids in dealing with people. (Fine 53)

All four of these themes are certainly worthy of study, and Fine is one of the first sociologists to examine the social dimensions of roleplaying. But of his four themes, the first and last are the most important for rhetoric. Educational themes help players learn more about the world. Fine focuses more on the “real-world” educational topics; he mentions discussions of armor weights, Roman Catholic social structure in medieval Europe, and the influence of atmospheric pressure on rocket design (54). Nonetheless, gaming can provide instruction about behavioral processes, too. *WoW* has the potential to teach others how to respond in social settings, and Fine touches on

skills such as decision-making and leadership (54). Games also help in dealing with people, which is often a concern of rhetoric. For this last theme, Fine mentions that games can be used in “teaching players to accommodate each other” (59). For the purposes of this study, I expand this remark considerably. *WoW* teaches players not just to accommodate individuals but also how to interact with other groups and cultures. By establishing this point and showing how *WoW* itself creates these themes, I hope to distinguish myself from Fine’s sociological study with a more rhetorical approach.

Most existing research into virtual identification has focused on individuals’ avatars and has taken an essentially psychological approach.⁶ Electronic communication scholar Marlin Bates rightly notes, however, that the companies that produce such games use *rhetoric* extensively to draw players into the game and foster identification with their character avatars (104). Identity in such environments is constrained by the limitations of the game, which serves to restrict the possible identity performances by players and forces them into sanctioned roles. As Bates explains, these performances occur through player behavior but also, importantly, through their use of rhetoric:

The MMORPG players present not only an identity, but also a method of performing and altering that identity. The identity is created using guidelines presented by the software itself, web pages, and other users. Identity is then performed by the users within the game and on related web pages. The creation of identity occurs as users choose what they wish to be in the game. Users further refine the performance of their identity within web pages related to the particular MMORPG. Although the in-game performance allows users to perform the identity to a certain extent, time and space constrain the number of other player-characters that are able to witness that performance. The player-characters also use the web pages to further expand the professions and personalities available for performance. However, the newly expanded professions are still constrained by the identity process created within the game. (102)

⁶ For examples of these works see the citations for Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler; Park and Chung; and Bailenson, Blascovich, and Guadagno.

In noting the constraints on player performances, Bates touches on an idea about the influence that corporate authors have on players. Game limitations not only constrain identity performance but also function as rhetoric to shape players' ideas about the virtual world they temporarily inhabit.

Bates' introduction here could just as easily apply to one's online *social* identity⁷ as to one's online *character* identity. Bates borrows rhetorician Maurice Charland's ideas about constitutive rhetoric, which describes how rhetoric creates an identity for a group of people, in order to apply them to individuals. That is, the rhetoric players experience in video games creates an identity and accompanying performance expectations. Bates' description can certainly apply to online group identities as well. As Bates' analysis shows, players are consistently encouraged through a shift into second-person pronouns and direct addresses to think of themselves as their characters (107). This step is an important one, and I would like to take the argument further: in online games in which players choose a particular faction with which they affiliate themselves, constitutive rhetoric encourages players to identify with their faction as well. In the case of *WoW*, players are often pushed to think of themselves as Horde or Alliance, reinforcing the "Othering" binary prevalent in the game. This binary influences the way that *WoW* is constructed as a world of conflict as well as the way that players think of Azeroth specifically. As Edwin Black's "Second Persona" theory explains, rhetoric identifies and pushes its audience toward becoming an ideal audience; it should be considered a "vector of influence" (334). Reasonably, then, the rhetoric of a virtual world would do the same. Although some players have attempted to resist these impulses, emergent behavior is still notably constrained by game processes.

In his "The Settler-Colonial Situation," social researcher Lorenzo Veracini explains how the rhetoric of colonization privileges settlers by establishing their position as normative (103).

⁷ In *WoW*, this is the Alliance/Horde binary.

In subjugating an indigenous “other,” Veracini says, the rhetoric of colonization “confirm[s] a high/low dialectic” (104). Interestingly enough, the rhetoric of *WoW* provides a similar privilege to the more human-like and Westernized races of Azeroth. *WoW* creates an impassable distinction between the Alliance and the Horde for its players. As in the rhetoric of colonization, Veracini notes “the line separating settler and indigenous must be approached but is never finally crossed” (107). Veracini’s model is an example of postcolonial theory, which explores how power imbalances created by primarily European colonial relationships persist in contemporary societies. His model examines the dialectical tensions present in such circumstances, and it provides a suitable explanation for *WoW*’s rhetorical treatment of the two opposing factions, which cast the Alliance as civilized colonizer and the Horde as the subjugated, savage colonized. Thus, an analysis of *WoW*’s racialized discourse falls quite naturally into the postcolonial frame developed by Shome, Veracini, and others. As media scholar Tanner Higgin says, “For example, [...] the conflict between the races of the world of Azeroth bears similarities to imperialism and colonialism” (12).

Text, images, and composite artifacts can also be viewed through a lens that uncovers *WoW*’s privilege toward the White/Occidental perspective and subjugating the non-White “Other.” Adding to that perspective is a tripartite analysis borrowed from literary scholar Margaret Sinex’s essay “‘Monsterized Saracens,’ Tolkien’s Haradrim, and Other Medieval ‘Fantasy Products.’” Sinex draws a parallel in how Tolkien constructs his human antagonists with how medieval Christian rhetors demonized their Muslim enemies (175). Sinex highlights three characteristics of “Othering” found in J.R.R. Tolkien’s legendarium that reflect “the othering process of the Christian West” (175). The three features she identifies are 1) the use of binaries, 2) the role and influence of geography and climate in racial development and

theorizing, and 3) the use of color to describe characters and influence audience perceptions (176). The generic connections between Tolkien and *WoW* are well-noted, so such a frame was eminently suitable for studying this game.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to analyze rhetorically the popular online RPG *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) and certain associated materials. These additional materials include three *Warcraft* video games, all of which predate *WoW*, website information provided by Activision Blizzard, and selections from what might be termed the *Warcraft* literary corpus. Several novels and stories that take place within the fictional world of the video games explain events that have happened on a more personal level. I refer to a few of these as well as some of the *Warcraft* tabletop RPG books, which provide rules for a game experience similar to that of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Rhetorical scholars such as Raymie McKerrow (101) and Michael McGee (279) have noted that rhetorical artifacts are essentially constructed from fragments, so consulting related non-game material to assemble a composite text seems useful here. These other works provide additional perspective and information about the world of *WoW* and often explain things that go unmentioned within the game itself.

For this study, I posed four primary research questions:

1. How do *WoW*'s fictional cultures use real-world rhetorical strategies that emphasize or reinforce the differences of other people negatively?

In *WoW*, players must choose to belong to one of two, and only two factions, the Alliance and the Horde. Both groups consist of allied civilizations who share certain cultural traits or goals while being uniformly hostile to the civilizations in the opposite affiliation. The game design therefore provides a clear and simple struggle between these two groups, and this binary, along

with the game's other rhetorical strategies, reinforces the sense of a hostile "Other," no matter which affiliation players choose. For both the Alliance and the Horde, there is a clear "us v. them" conflict dichotomy.

2. How do the rhetorical strategies used in *WoW* reflect real-world power imbalances and offer racialized depictions?

WoW portrays the Alliance, which includes the game's version of humanity as well as other human-like races, to be a group of civilized colonizers. Those civilizations comprising the Horde are depicted mostly as primitive savages. By casting the Alliance—that is, humanity and its allies—as sharing Western European cultural values and traits, *WoW* seems to impart positive attributes to the Alliance and to suggest that those shared attributes are at least in part what it means to *be* human. On the other side, several races of the Horde—who are physically less human-like than their Alliance counterparts—display traits associated with non-White cultures.⁸ The game therefore seems to fit easily into a post-colonial critical framework, by privileging Western influences and by depicting other cultures as, perhaps, even sub-human.

3. How does the narrative seen in *WoW* handle cultural conflicts?

If we look at this game as a piece of rhetoric composed by its corporate authors, we find a story that is all about cultural conflict. At the heart of *WoW*, and even more prominently previous *Warcraft* games, is the Alliance/Horde binary and resulting wars. The different cultures of Azeroth, the game's world, have been in almost continuous conflict for what is portrayed as decades,⁹ and each game features instances of widespread war and hostility. On its website for *WoW*, Blizzard describes this conflict as foundational to the game itself. On the "Beginner's

⁸ E.g, trolls have Afro-Caribbean accents and practice voodoo, while tauren, who live in tepees, have a tribal system of government, and craft wooden totems, are clearly Amerindian analogues.

⁹ The in-game timeline has covered about 30 years between the original *Warcraft* and *Mists of Pandaria*, the most recent *WoW* expansion.

Guide” page is the following description: “In *Warcraft*, there are two large, opposing factions. On one side is the noble Alliance, [...] on the other side is the mighty Horde.” A link from the “Game Guide” page, entitled “The Story of *Warcraft*,” features a small picture of an orc and human face-to-face with expressions of anger or hostility.

4. What particular rhetorical strategies are reinforced or rejected by the *Warcraft* narrative?

In situations of cultural conflict, the game seems to imply that certain rhetorical acts are more or less effective. In his essay “The Rhetoric of Video Games,” Ian Bogost argues that “video games can make claims about the world” (125). Through the reinforcement of gameplay, performed behavior, and the resulting stories shown by their narratives, we know that games can teach us how to behave. Although more modern and more complicated than previous roleplaying games, *WoW* is no different in that respect than its predecessors.

Plan of Study

Within this first chapter, I have aimed to present an overview of my study, establishing the justifications for this research along with its specific goals and discussing the theoretical grounds that connect the study within the field of rhetorical studies. There is a need to claim new fields for rhetorical studies. Studying *WoW* expands this field yet still falls within the scope of previous communication research on roleplaying and “Othering” rhetorical strategies. Essentially, *WoW* is a cohesive rhetorical artifact presented by its corporate authors, and its story makes rhetorical arguments. These arguments can then influence its players’ real-world conflict-solving behavior.

To address my research questions and to apply both post-colonial theory and Sinex’s “Othering” characteristics to *World of Warcraft* as a rhetorical artifact, the remainder of this study is comprised of four chapters. To help introduce this world to those who are unfamiliar

with it, Chapter 2 provides a more specific description of the virtual world created in *WoW*. I begin by identifying some of the challenges involved in studying this game and then provide a brief history of the world created in *WoW* and the previous *Warcraft* games. To assist understanding of game references in this section, I also provide a glossary of useful terms in an appendix. Much of this jargon originated with tabletop RPGs, but some is specific to video games and still more is characteristic of the MMORPG genre. Some “lore” terms specific to the *Warcraft* series are also identified.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature appropriate for establishing a firm theoretical base and critical space for studying this artifact. Beginning with a discussion of critical rhetoric and the rhetorical power of the game itself, I provide an account of why *WoW* is suitable for investigation within a post-colonial frame. I also examine carefully the conventions of the fantasy genre that fit this framework. For the “Othering” analysis that casts *WoW* as a thoroughly racialized world, I draw on both these generic conventions and Sinex’s three “Othering” strategies. I then show how *WoW* itself can be used as a type of narrative lens to examine which strategies are appropriate for dealing with conflict situations in a racialized world.

Chapter 4 presents a rhetorical analysis of *WoW* that addresses my first two research questions to show how cyber-colonialism pervades the text of *WoW*. To answer the first question, the reflection of real-world “Othering” strategies, I rely on Sinex’s three strategies of binaries, geography and climate, and color. *WoW* establishes binaries through its Alliance and Horde dichotomy and uses the dichotomy to set up other contrasts. I also look at ludic elements that solidify this binary, such as cross-faction interactions through combat and communication constraints. Similarly to the use of binaries, the geography of Azeroth contributes to a sense of separation between the two factions and between those civilizations that are more and less

human. This separation “Others” the less human-like races by locating them away from *WoW*’s version of humanity. Likewise, colors reinforce this separation between the civilized Alliance and the savage Horde. For the second research question, the presence of real-world power imbalances and racialized portrayals, I discuss how the “Othering” strategies reflect a process of racialization that creates Azerothian “counterpart cultures”—that is, cultures that reflect elements of and are coded as real-world cultural groups. I examine some particular rhetorical moves that establish these fantasy groups as different human cultures and the implications of coding non-White cultures as non-human in *WoW*. Even the addition of new races in *WoW*’s expansion does nothing but reinforce the rhetorical picture of the noble, righteous Alliance and the proud but primitive Horde.

The last part of Chapter 4 moves beyond this cyber-colonial establishment to discuss how *WoW* may be viewed as a way of identifying strategies useful in handling intercultural conflicts. The most recent expansion, *MoP*, has an overtly colonial element to it. In it, a new continent has been discovered in the southern reaches of Azeroth, and both the Horde and the Alliance establish military outposts and attempt to bring the indigenous peoples under their control. This colonialism brings a great deal of suffering to the people of Pandaria, and it seems to establish important “truths” about how to handle power imbalances and intercultural interactions. My in-game research has identified three strategies about which *WoW*, the *MoP* expansion, and related *Warcraft* material make statements. The first is encouraging cross-cultural cooperation between the Alliance and the Horde as necessary for the good of the world. Although *WoW* is centered on the conflict between the two sides, it is not inevitable, and some references indicate it will one day end. The second is the rebuttal of scapegoating, which I believe *WoW* rejects as an appropriate rhetorical tool. The conflict between the Alliance and Horde is not rooted in any one

particular individual or group; rather, the war continues because of deep-seated factional problems and grievances that neither group as a whole can overcome. The third is in the work of repairing the damage done by colonial ventures through native involvement. Colonialism is exposed as destructive for Pandaria when the Alliance and Horde establish settlements and more so when they recruit native races into their armies. Only by abandoning their factional conflict and working *with* and *for* the indigenous races does the damage begin to heal. These strategies show how *WoW* makes applicable real-world arguments for appropriate rhetorical strategies in conflict situations.

Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the opportunities this study suggests for future research. The vastness of *WoW* means that a single study cannot do justice to the material, and certainly ample work remains for future scholarship. Cyber-colonialism as a concept could easily extend to other video games, and many of them are nearly as vast as *WoW*. Other research could see how players respond to the messages presented in *WoW* and identify other arguments found in the game. Although its potential effects may not be realized among all players, the colonial problems highlighted in *MoP* could make an impression on some.

CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD OF *WARCRAFT*

If the Oxford professor J.R.R. Tolkien ever pondered the cultural implications of his second great novel just after its publication, he could have hardly realized the influence he would have on an entire genre of media. His novel, *The Lord of the Rings*, popularized the world of Middle-earth with its population of dwarves, elves, and wizards and established many of the fantasy tropes still in use today. In contrast to other folkloric depictions, Tolkien's elves are tall, fair, and immortal: idealized humans, not tiny shoe-making sprites. Not content with simply changing established conventions, Tolkien also invented essentially new creatures, bringing "orcs" and "hobbits" into the fantasy genre's lexicon. Initial print runs of *LotR* sold out quickly, and the novel has secured an established place in both popular and academic circles.

LotR has also made quite an impact on the tabletop gaming hobby. While early tabletop games concerned themselves with re-enactments of historical battles, a set of rules for including fantasy creatures within medieval battles was published in 1971 by E. Gary Gygax and Jeff Perren. This new game *Chainmail*, which eventually gave birth to roleplaying games (RPGs) such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, established fantasy within the tabletop gaming world and inspired others to follow. English company Games Workshop would eventually publish their own fantasy game and associated miniatures called *Warhammer*. Games Workshop included most of Tolkien's Middle-earth creatures as their game grew through different editions. Furthermore,

their green-skinned “orks” would eventually influence Blizzard Entertainment, an American software company looking to make it big.

In the early 1990s, Blizzard Entertainment was trying to create a new real-time strategy computer game that could handle multiplayer gaming. While rumors still persist that Blizzard’s project was intended to be a *Warhammer* game, at the very least, the finished product clearly took some inspiration for its creatures from Games Workshop’s designs. Blizzard’s *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans*, published in 1994, sold well, as did its sequel, *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness*, published the following year. Blizzard would eventually spin off the universe created for these games to develop the incredibly popular roleplaying game *World of Warcraft*, which first appeared in 2004 and had its most recent expansion in the fall of 2012. This chapter addresses the challenges and limitations surrounding this study and provides an overview of *WoW* and previous games.

The Challenges of Examining Azeroth

WoW is an enormous game. If this were the only obstacle for scholars, it would be surmountable given enough time, but several factors complicated the conceptualization of this project. First, *WoW* on its own is arguably not a complete text. *WoW* is a commercial brand almost as much as it is a computer game. The game’s universe has spawned novels, tabletop RPG books, board games, action figures, comics, construction toys, a collectible card game, and a collectible miniatures game. Many of these media came well before *WoW* had established itself as an industry juggernaut.

Furthermore, the story of Azeroth is heavily grounded in previous video games, and events and characters from those games recurred frequently through *WoW* and its first three expansions. It seems safe to say that the storylines of at least the first three *WoW* expansions, *The*

Burning Crusade (BC), *Wrath of the Lich King (WotLK)*, and *Cataclysm*, make little sense without knowing who the major villains are and what they have previously done within the *Warcraft* universe. Recent expansions have seen this trend intensify as events bridging the gap between expansions have been covered in associated books. For example, the novel *The Shattering: Prelude to Cataclysm* explains a number of changes that happened between *WotLK* and *Cataclysm*. These changes included such major events as a new leader for the Horde and brief civil wars within the tauren and dwarf civilizations. Although *WoW* saw appropriate changes when *Cataclysm* launched, the game itself did not explain them as thoroughly as the novel. These non-game materials provide a great deal of commentary on the world of *Warcraft* and can be consulted to explain aspects of the world.¹⁰ As Paul Semel's interview with author Christie Golden shows, Blizzard provides a great deal of input into these associated works, even giving authors "detailed outlines" for the books they want written.

For these reasons, examining *Warcraft* material in its entirety is certainly beyond the scope of this study. Although most of these materials reveal some piece of the world of *Warcraft* and provide meaning for the game's setting, some selection from among them was necessary to provide focus for this study. To examine cultural conflict strategies, this study focuses primarily on the games themselves, that is, the *Warcraft* series and *WoW*. For informing the analysis of the game's rhetorical impact, I also consulted Activision Blizzard's own discourse about its game, primarily the *WoW* "Game Guide" section of their website.¹¹ This site consists of a number of web pages describing what *WoW* is, how to play the game, and what new players should know as they try to engage this fantasy world. Several web pages found under the "Races" section of

¹⁰ The use of these supplementary materials reflects ideas by rhetorical scholars Raymie McKerrow (101) and Michael McGee (279) about constructing rhetorical artifacts from *fragments* of discourse.

¹¹ The primary website can be found at <http://us.battle.net/wow/en/>; individual pages consulted are listed in the bibliography.

WoW's Game Guide focus on the different inhabitants of *WoW* and how Blizzard chooses to portray their appearance and culture.

Being addressed to readers who are new to or unfamiliar with *WoW*, these website selections seemed especially relevant to this study for four reasons. First, the discourse “essentializes” *WoW* cultures by attempting to show how these inhabitants “are.” The authors of the website assume particular truths for this fictional world and present them from an omnipotent third-person view. Second, the website is essentially an advertisement that tries to recruit new players. That is, Blizzard wants the website to attract people to the *Warcraft* world. Third, this discourse displays a level of intentionality. Developing this web page was itself a consciously rhetorical act, requiring reflection on the world of *WoW* as well as the creation and selection of particular images and text to represent it. A fourth and final reason for using this discourse is that the website requires the least familiarity with *WoW* and is therefore more accessible to anyone reading this study.

This study of *WoW* tries to present an accurate and cohesive view of the game and the universe as a whole, but limitations exist when using this comprehensive perspective. My goal in this study of taking the *Warcraft* universe as a whole may in some sense be misguided. Differences exist across the different media that comprise the setting: for example, can *WoW* be accurately compared to the *Alliance Player's Guide*? Should novels and short stories be evaluated in the same way as *WCIII*? Did gameplay changes affect the development of the *Warcraft* universe? The shift to an MMORPG from *Warcraft*'s RTS roots involved more changes than just how people play the game.

As another limitation, treating all sources more or less equally ignores their relative contributions to *Warcraft* canon and, in some cases, provides a misleading view of the game and

universe. The human kingdom of the first game is called Stormwind, not Azeroth, which has become the name of the primary world. *WC* also has now invalid descriptions of orc and human religions that reflect real-world beliefs. The people of Stormwind no longer practice Christianity; they and most of their Alliance associates worship the Holy Light. Similarly, the ongoing nature of *WoW* means that information from older sources can be invalidated by a developer's whim. The most prominent example is that of the draenei, who underwent a massive change just before *BC* launched. Before this expansion, the draenei were merely another humanoid race on Draenor, hunted nearly to extinction by the orcs. *BC* changed their backstory; now, they are the Light-worshipping refugees who turned their back on the Burning Legion while many of their eredar brethren became high-ranking demons and leaders in the Legion's Burning Crusade. The information presented therefore holds "true" of *Warcraft* as of the current time but may not remain that way.

Additionally, the sheer scope of *WoW* material means that subversions exist for nearly all of the analysis and lessons presented here. While I believe the lessons have solid narrative support and I have provided examples for them, others might draw conclusions based on their own experiences and different textual samples. The fragments presented here compose a text, but another study might find itself creating a very different one. Perhaps the increased aggression by the Horde in the two most recent expansions undermines the air of cross-factional cooperation that was built beginning in *WCIII*, and perhaps Velen's vision is nothing more than a teaser of what *could* but never *will* be. Perhaps the idea that native involvement in (post)colonial situations can fix colonization's problems is naïve at best and glosses over real-world power imbalances and suffering that continues today.

One final limitation involves the study's methodology. Although Sinex provided an appropriate set of real-world rhetorical strategies found within *WoW*, relying on her analysis could mean that other relevant "Othering" strategies have been overlooked. Future study could expand identified strategies to be more representative of the game than these three. There may also be the question of these strategies' applicability to *WoW*. While the use of binaries overwhelmingly influences *Warcraft*, the specific colors identified by Sinex do not appear quite so prominently in *WoW* as they were seen in Tolkien. The way in which Sinex defines geographic influences is also less applicable to *WoW* than to Tolkien, although many real-world geographical similarities exist.

Beyond the problem of defining the text to be studied, another problem lies in the developing nature of *WoW*. Unlike many games, *WoW* has not at any point been "finished." Patches bring additional content to the game, many of which are quite significant to its story, and large expansions drastically change or expand the scope of Azeroth every few years. Accordingly, some restriction had to be placed on the scope of content to be included. For the purposes of this study, I have limited my investigation to game content no more recent than that included in the *Mists of Pandaria* launch. Blizzard's changes mean that the company has in some cases invalidated content from previous games. In particular, Blizzard's novels, *Tides of Darkness*, *Beyond the Dark Portal*, and *Rise of the Horde*, change certain events from the previous *Warcraft* games; as a result, actions or depictions related to those events no longer actually happened.¹² This study had to be conducted within the temporal context of the game as

¹² For example, the frequent references to the Christian religion in the *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* manual have been ignored by later games in favor of having humanity worship the Holy Light. Perhaps even more notably, the eredar of the *Warcraft III* manual had their story changed. Originally, they were an evil race of demons who corrupted the divine champion, Sargeras, but now they were once a peaceful race of scholars who were corrupted by the fallen champion. Those who refused Sargeras and fled his demonic army became the draenei, who originally had no connection to the eredar.

it currently exists.¹³ A final factor that poses obstacles for studying *WoW* is accessibility. A large game world, with unique attributes for common fantasy races and unfamiliar jargon, make *WoW* a daunting artifact for anyone unfamiliar with the game. In the next two sections, I attempt to bridge this accessibility gap. The first section summarizes each *Warcraft* game, including *WoW*, and all their expansions. Within this history, I also highlight trends in the rhetorical portrayals of Azeroth's major factions and discuss how consistently the emerging picture of the Alliance and the Horde is rhetorically reinforced. This background should provide the necessary groundwork for understanding the rhetorical and strategic analysis in Chapter 4.

Throughout this chapter, game-specific terms may occur repeatedly. As is the case with many artifacts, *WoW* contains jargon borrowed from its intellectual influences. In *WoW*, video games, roleplaying games, and generic fantasy combine to create a host of unfamiliar abbreviations and terms. The game's portrayal of certain civilizations also creates terms that even someone who understands the genre would not necessarily understand. To help readers understand this specialized language, Appendix 1 contains a glossary of definitions that may prove useful for this chapter. The glossary is separated into two sections. The *Game Terms* section deals with language frequently used in relation to the ludic elements of *WoW*. The *Lore Terms* section better reflects the concerns of this study and provides definitions for unfamiliar organizations, races, and places that occur in *WoW* and related games.

A Brief History of Azeroth

To understand *WoW*, one needs some understanding of the previous games and associated materials, such as manuals and documentation. These are essentially the primary artifacts that describe this fictional world and contribute to its lore. Although *World of Warcraft*

¹³In doing so, I acknowledge that future changes to the game could create better or less racialized portrayals of *Warcraft*'s civilizations.

is the most popular incarnation of Azeroth, the game has its roots in the RTS series that first appeared in November 1994. Even these earlier games grant understanding of how *WoW* casts its conflicts and in what ways the Alliance-Horde conflict has evolved over the course of years. These earliest representations have stayed fairly consistent throughout the history of Azeroth but slowly evolved into their more nuanced current structure; in contrast to previous games, neither the Horde nor the Alliance of *WoW* is portrayed as fully good or fully evil.

The first *Warcraft* game, *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans (WC)*, asserts its racialized conflict in its title. In comparison with the much larger story of *WoW*, the story of this first game is quite simple; it essentially pits two armies against each other. The righteous human kingdom of Azeroth,¹⁴ based at Stormwind (or Stonewind¹⁵) Keep, battles against the evil invading orcish hordes who came through the Dark Portal from another dimension. *WC* lets players command whichever faction they prefer, leading them through a military game against the opposite faction. Because each side destroys the other's capital in their version of the game's final mission, the campaign storylines are mutually exclusive, but the canonical storyline used by later games sees the orcs winning, destroying Stormwind Keep, and claiming its lands for their own. Upon the

¹⁴ Perhaps the game designers realized how confusing their use of "Azeroth" had become. This kingdom is rebuilt after *Warcraft II* and almost always referred to as Stormwind in *Warcraft III* and going forward. The primary human faction of *WoW* is this same Kingdom of Stormwind.

¹⁵ This sounds strange, but the game manual's map clearly lists the keep as *Stonewind*. In-game text and all later references within the world of *Warcraft* refer to the place as Stormwind.

initial release of *WC*, the game world seemed small, consisting of only this one kingdom and not featuring the wide variety of races and creatures seen in later games. Later world-building, however, would expand *Warcraft*'s rhetorical possibilities.

Even at this early stage, *WC*'s language suggested the rhetorical sentiments that would be clearly articulated in later versions. *WC* is thought to have drawn inspiration from Games Workshop's *Warhammer* tabletop miniatures



Figure 2.1 *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* Box Art

game, and it does not break out of the traditional fantasy mold. The cover art for *WC*, seen in Figure 2.1, features simply an orc and human facing each other. The orc's horned helm echoes the popular conception of Viking berserkers, while the human is a typical medieval knight, wearing a mail coif and hoisting a sword. This characterization of the two opponents reinforces the view of humanity holding chivalric ideals in contrast with the invading orc barbarians. As defenders, the humans are automatically more heroic than the invaders. The Azerothian army likewise employs medieval soldiers and tactics. Knights charge into battle atop their warhorses, footmen march in plate armor with broadswords and shields, archers fire crossbows at distant enemies, and catapults feature as the most damaging equipment imaginable. Stormwind's religion also evokes comparison with medieval times. Their clerics worship God and perform miracles of healing and divination, and Northshire Abbey, led by the Archbishop Alonsous Faol, is one of the most important locations for the humans.

In contrast, the orcs are presented as little more than invading, bloodthirsty barbarians. They wield axes and shun ranged weaponry more complicated than spears, which make good use

of their brute strength to hurl. Instead of domesticated animals, their “raiders” ride massive wolves into battle. While “the Horde” is not quite a term for the orcs in *WC*, it exists instead as the plural and lower-case “(Orcish) hordes” (*Warcraft Orcs Manual* 16). This term presents the orcs as uncivilized, savage, and ignorant, and the following sample of an orcish historical record from the game’s manual confirms that characterization: “*Thok go through shiny hole. Then me fall down, but me good. Me find many good things to eat. We find village. We mash them and eat their food. Thok stop now. Head hurt from write*” (*Warcraft Orcs Manual* 17).

The original *WC* is also a fairly ordinary Tolkienesque fantasy game in terms of religion, morality, and technology. The dichotomy present in this game is a moral as well as factional one. The humans are good and righteous, relying on the holy magic of their clerics and making references to God, Hell, and the underworld. As Tolkien’s and subsequently Blizzard’s enemy of choice, the orcs are thoroughly evil; they employ “necrolytes” to raise the dead, and their warlocks summon daemons. Other glimpses provided of their society paint orcs in dark shades: their religion involves blood sacrifices, and their foot soldiers have a taste for blood. The level of weapon technology in game is consistent with late medieval weaponry. Gunpowder does not seem to exist and has not made melee weapons or metal armor obsolete. Both factions rely on cavalry for their strongest melee warriors and on catapults for destroying buildings. The few other monsters in the game are likewise fantasy staples: ogres, slimes, giant arachnids, and elemental creatures, none of which has any sort of developed technology.¹⁶

Surprisingly, within a year, the next game in the series further developed these themes and expanded the world of *Warcraft*. *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness (WCII)* broadens the map in the aftermath of the orcs’ victory at Stormwind. Survivors of the destruction flee north to take

¹⁶ The elemental creatures also evoke a less-modern feel, being based on the classical four-elemental paradigm.

refuge among other, previously unmentioned human kingdoms, and the orcs, bent on continuing their conquests, decide to follow them. *WCII* keeps the faction dichotomy, but a much more distinctive identity emerges for the game series as it introduces a multitude of new races as allies for each side. The humans of Azeroth become part of an alliance of seven human nations led by the kingdom of Lordaeron. They are joined by the elves of Quel'thalas, the gnomes and dwarves of Khaz Modan, and the dwarves of Northeron. For their part, the orcs recruit their ogre brethren, ally with trolls and goblins, and force dragons into their ranks. They also use the corpses of the fallen knights of Stormwind to create magic-wielding “death knights” to replace their warlocks, who were slain during a brief civil war. These new confederations firmly establish the idea of two racially diverse factions, one still White-centered and one the exotic “Other,” that recurs in *WoW*. As was the case with the first game, *WCII* features two mutually exclusive campaigns, but the canonical result is quite different. Aided in large part by the orcs’ continuing their civil war, the Alliance prevails, and the bonds that form among its constituents shape Azeroth’s continuing story and assure the faction a place in the world’s future.

Many of the medieval fantasy trappings remain, and a few are even added as new elements; for example, the Alliance gains heroic paladins, the dwarves are expert blacksmiths, and the elves provide skilled archers and rangers. But as a whole, the new

racially diverse factions result in a much more unique identity for the *Warcraft* universe.

Although each of the new races has an established place in fantasy literature, most begin to

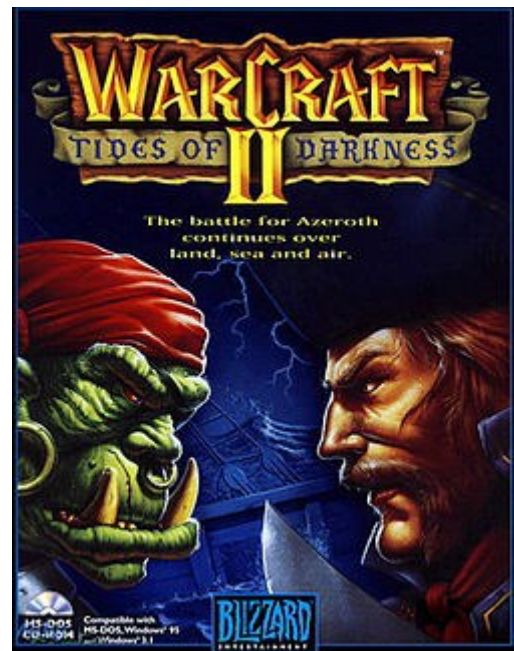


Figure 2.2 *Warcraft II* Box Art

develop characteristics that would become a hallmark of the *Warcraft* series. Ogres now have pot bellies and two heads when they had only one in *WC*, and they can be upgraded to become powerful spellcasters, despite their reputation for stupidity.¹⁷ The trolls regenerate, as is common in some representations, but they also wear their hair in mohawks and display cunning and woodcraft almost on par with the elves. The dwarves of Northeron live outside on the tops of mountains, not underneath them, and fly atop their gryphon allies into battle. The gnomes and goblins begin a trend of modernization by introducing much more advanced technology, including helicopters, submarines, and zeppelins. The two factions also both build powerful navies using oil and rely on air support throughout their campaigns. The game's cover art, shown in Figure 2.2, is quite similar to *WC*. It features an orc with a bandana and earring and a human with a tricornered hat, high collar, and cutlass. By calling to mind the post-medieval "Age of Sail," this picture implies increased modernity and a higher level of technology. The Azeroth of *WCII* is certainly a much more advanced world, and this trend only continues in future games.

Despite the new developments, the rather simplistic moral dichotomy remains. The cover art clearly portrays the orc as a pirate, but the human evokes an image closer to that of a captain, admiral, or other naval commander. Again, the image of orcs as chaotic and bloodthirsty contrasted with the organized and disciplined humans remains. The humans still wield holy magic that heals their troops and destroy the undead, and one of their buildings is a church.¹⁸ They are once again the invaded, forced to defend their lands against the brutal orcs. The orcs for their part still live for slaughter; their soldiers "lust for battle" (*WCII* Manual) and can be driven into a frenzied bloodlust by magic. The orcs and their allies rely on fresh meat from pig farms for

¹⁷ Their intelligence is magically enhanced using an artifact taken from the elves.

¹⁸ If a player clicks on the church, a choir sings, "*Deo gratias*" or "thanks to God" (*WCII*).

their primary food supply (*WCII* Manual). Their death knights still use necromancy and summon the dead to serve them, and they have enslaved the Dragonqueen and her brood to provide aerial support. The Warlock Gul'dan, leader of the orcish Stormreaver Clan, consorts with demons on his quest to gain power, just as his predecessors did in *WC*. At the end of *WCII*, however, the “good guys” win. The Horde is defeated at the end of *Tides of Darkness*, and the Alliance also repels a second invasion from the orcish homeworld of Draenor in *WCII*'s *Beyond the Dark Portal* (*BtDP*) expansion.

In fact, *WCII* sees the factional dichotomy and racial presentation that shows up in *WoW* solidified. The new Alliance races are White near-humans,¹⁹ while the Horde races are less human and more monstrous. This game shows the first incarnation of the Alliance, and although story developments have changed the allegiance or status of individual nations, its core ideals and concept as formed in *WCII* remain for the rest of the series. Elven archers in *WCII* provide one of the first factional slogans by proclaiming “For the Alliance!” as one of their acknowledgement quotes. The racial ties forged in *WCII* persist into *WoW*. Humans, dwarves, and gnomes have all been playable for the Alliance since the beginning of *WoW*. Gilneas, one of the Human kingdoms introduced in *WCII*, rejoins the Alliance in *WoW*'s *Cataclysm* expansion.²⁰ Also, the concept of the different Alliance members specializing in various talents or vocations, such as arcane magic or technology, holds true throughout *Warcraft III* (*WCIII*) and *WoW* and further plays into the idea of race as determining cultural proclivities.

Likewise, the Horde sees its rhetorical identity solidified to a degree. “The Orcish Horde” becomes a widely used title throughout the game manual, though still rendered occasionally as

¹⁹ The exception here is the gryphons, who despite some measure of intelligence serve only as mounts and have no say in Alliance policy.

²⁰ They are no longer entirely human, however: a magical curse transformed the inhabitants of Gilneas into the wolf-people known in Azeroth as worgen.

“Orcish hordes.” Their adoption of a unified political identity is necessitated by their recruitment of allies in this war. From *WCII* forward, the orcs consistently make alliances with like-minded civilizations. However, while they carry this title and diplomacy throughout the next couple of games, the actual racial identity of the Horde shifts a bit due to their defeat. The orcs are rounded up into internment camps, depriving them of their allies, and each of the other races goes its separate way. In *WCIII*, ogres once again become neutral monsters, the trolls retreat to their forests and become hostile to all other races, and the dragons and goblins become neutral mercenaries—that is, players can recruit them for their armies on some maps.

Recent events in *WoW* have seen these changes reverse to some extent. Whether Blizzard has done it intentionally or not, the Horde of *Cataclysm* resembles the Horde of *WCII* quite closely. *WCIII*'s *The Frozen Throne (TFT)* expansion has a single ogre clan join the Horde. A single tribe of forest trolls rejoins the Horde in *WoW*. In *Cataclysm*, a different group of goblins joins the Horde. The Dragonmaw orcs, the clan in charge of enslaving the dragons, likewise rejoin the Horde along with some newly captured dragons. Finally, although the ogre race is not playable in *WoW*, two additional ogre tribes have been recruited back to the Horde in *Cataclysm*. Because these changes are more recent and so consistent with the Horde's composition in *WCII*, these demographic shifts may signal that Blizzard wants players to view the Horde in a light reminiscent of their older portrayals. If the conflict between the Alliance and Horde is crucial to *WoW*, then perhaps the company feels the two factions should be more sharply distinguished.

The rhetorical portrayals of later games start to find some basis in *WCII*. The orcs' portrayal gets broadened considerably by the introduction of the conniving Gul'dan and the gifted Warchief Orgrim Doomhammer, who show that orcs can be as clever as humans. Orcish society is still thoroughly evil and savage, but the upper ranks show intelligence and organization

through their webs of deceit and internal power structures. Gul'dan's alliance with the daemon Kil'jaeden and secret control over the Horde gives the orcs an excuse for their evil ways, and the clash between Gul'dan and Orgrim Doomhammer provided some room for Blizzard to reinterpret the original, uncorrupted state of the orcs. *WCIII* capitalized on this added dimension, revealing that the orcs had been corrupted by Gul'dan's dealings and were not all necessarily evil. This opening, as well as the destruction of the Draenor in *BiDP*, cast the orcs into a more oppressed role. Captured by the Alliance and robbed of the chance to return to their own planet, the orcs would need a new homeland. They would have to fight for their survival in an alien world instead of pursuing the destruction of the sentient races of Azeroth, bringing the possibility of sympathetic treatment within later games.

WCIII and its expansion are anomalous in breaking away from the factional dichotomy present throughout the rest of the *Warcraft* games. The long gap between *WCII* and *WCIII* saw Blizzard releasing the three-factioned *Starcraft*, a new RTS game with a futuristic setting, and it seems likely that *WCIII* was an attempt to build off of it. *WCIII* expanded the map once more, adding new continents to the north and west of Lordaeron and Azeroth, and the game featured four playable sides, each with distinct units and abilities. The Alliance, frequently referred to as the "Human" army, of humans, elves, and dwarves remained, while the Horde saw a great deal of restructuring. The orcs escaped their internment camps and found new allies who continued the kind of primitiveness characteristic of the Horde: the voodoo-practicing jungle trolls and the nomadic tauren. The two new factions were the night elf Sentinels of Kalimdor, a race of purple-skinned elves with an affinity for nature magic and druidism, and the undead Scourge of Northrend. *WCIII* broke with previous *Warcraft* games by removing canonically exclusive campaigns. Instead, *WCIII* featured a campaign for each faction that told a sequential story,

beginning with the Alliance before switching to the Scourge and the Horde and finishing with the Sentinels.

The good and evil moral dichotomy also shifted. The final mission of *WCIII* saw the Alliance, Horde, and Sentinels allied against the demonic Burning Legion and their Scourge allies. The demon-worshipping orcs began occupying a “noble savage” role. They turned to shamanism thanks to the influence of their new Warchief Thrall and the tauren of Kalimdor. The night elves fought their own war against the Burning Legion millennia before the events of *WCIII*, and therefore, despite initial hostility to the Alliance and Horde, they also receive a heroic portrayal. Out of the four playable factions, only the Scourge is truly abhorrent and evil, and they are the newest minions of the demons, explicitly a replacement for the redeemed orcs. The Scourge leader is in fact the orcish leader Ner’zhul from the *WCII* expansion, forced to create an undead army after the orcs failed their demonic mentor Kil’jaeden in *Tides of Darkness*.

WCIII's expansion, *TFT*, has a number of story developments that continue some of these trends but also work to restore the faction dichotomy present in *WoW*. The Alliance becomes steadily less moral; their new human commander in Lordaeron is racist against the other Alliance members. This Grand Marshal Garithos ends up driving away most of the elves of Quel’thalas who survived the Scourge when he imprisons and plans to execute them for accepting aid from the serpentine naga. These “blood elves,” so named because of their fallen brethren, eventually ally with the Horde in *WoW*. Another human leader, Admiral Daelin Proudmoore, invades the orcs’ new homeland in Kalimdor and briefly restarts the war between the Alliance and Horde. Although his daughter Jaina signs a treaty with the orcs after his death, tensions remain.

As hostility resumes between the Alliance and Horde, the seeds of realignment for the two new factions are planted in *TFT*. Eventually both night elves and undead are absorbed into

those opposing coalitions. The night elves draw closer to the Alliance as they deal with internal problems after the Burning Legion's defeat. Their leaders work with what is left of the Alliance in Lordaeron as they seek to recapture the rogue mage Illidan Stormrage and his naga followers. This partnership continues into *WoW*, where they become full-fledged members. The Horde's logging operations in the night elves' ancient forests proves to be another motivating factor for their allegiance.

The evil undead Scourge suffers problems of its own and has an internal split. The Lich King Ner'zhul, who guides them, loses control of many of his undead subjects in Lordaeron, and they form a new organization of independent undead, calling themselves the Forsaken. Despite their free status, they remain thoroughly evil. The Forsaken use mind control extensively to bolster their armies, and they employ cannibalistic ghouls and the horrific "abominations," undead creatures stitched together from a mound of corpses. Although they ally with the Alliance's Grand Marshal Garithos in order to drive the Burning Legion and their minions out of Lordaeron, once the battle concludes, they betray the Alliance, killing him and many of his soldiers. They declare their independence from the Scourge but eventually decide to seek allies among the living. Having burned their bridges with the Alliance, the Forsaken turn to the Horde in *WoW*. This move reestablishes Azeroth's factional dichotomy and darkens the Horde's newly discovered sense of morality.

WoW launched in 2004 with four races available to each side. Humans, dwarves, gnomes, and night elves comprised the Alliance, while orcs, jungle trolls, tauren, and the Forsaken made up the Horde. The genre shift from RTS games to an MMORPG necessitated more world-building than the previous games had done. The vast game space of *WoW* served mostly to enhance already established portrayals of these civilizations. The Alliance maintained its position

as the more advanced and prosperous of the two groups. Stormwind and Ironforge, the human and dwarf capitals, displayed an unseen level of technological sophistication by featuring a gnome-built subway linking the two cities and impressive architecture. Stormwind sits atop numerous canals and features extensive stonework, while Ironforge is a tiered city carved inside a large mountain. The night elf capital of Darnassus is a large city constructed in the branches of a massive tree and, according to the game's timeline, took only a few years to complete.

The Horde, meanwhile, seems disadvantaged by comparison. The orcs and trolls live in the red wastelands of Durotar and the Barrens. The formerly nomadic tauren have settled in more fertile territory in Mulgore, but their buildings are wooden lodges and tents instead of more permanent, sophisticated structures. The Forsaken have kept their human intelligence, but *WoW* sees them building Undercity beneath the ruined city of Lordaeron, living in what used to be the sewers and dungeons of their former capital. Their lands have been ruined by the undead plague and made unsuitable for living things, even if such desolation does not affect the Forsaken themselves.

The racial conflict of previous games is minimized in *WoW*. Alliance and Horde players are able to attack each other, but only when they are flagged for player-versus-player (PvP) combat. Otherwise, it seems as though both sides are content to engage in a cold war. Mostly, each side focuses on fighting other enemies, such as the nihilistic Twilight's Hammer or treacherous Black Dragonflight. The Alliance attempts to secure what was left of its constituent nations in the wake of the Third War, while the peoples of Horde try to settle into their new homelands in Kalimdor and Lordaeron. This relative peace was disrupted by Patch 1.6,²¹ entitled "Drums of War," which added three PvP arenas called "battlegrounds." These battlegrounds

²¹ *WoW*'s numbering system for their patches is relatively simple. Any patch with "1.X" is for the original *WoW*, and each expansion increases the first number; i.e., patches with "2.X" are for *BC*, patches with "3.X" are for *WotLK*, and so on.

pitted players working for subfactions of the Horde and the Alliance against each other with video-game objectives such as “capture the flag” and territory control. Humans and the Forsaken fought over Arathi Basin, night elves battled orc loggers in Warsong Gulch, and orcs defended their adopted home against dwarven prospectors in Alterac Valley. These localized conflicts, however, do not expand to the greater part of Azeroth for two more expansions.

WoW's expansions have done little to change this status quo, serving more to adjust and reinforce the game's initial rhetorical portrayals. *The Burning Crusade (BC)* adds draenei and their magical technology to the Alliance; this new race crashes their interdimensional spaceship on a string of islands near night elf lands. Refugees from Draenor, the draenei were hunted almost to extinction by the orcs and therefore share the Alliance's hostility toward the Horde. They also possess a gift with magic and wisdom born from their immortality and deeply spiritual culture. The Horde receives the blood elves, who are also quite intelligent, but the Scourge's invasion of their homeland left most of their number dead and much of their territory devastated. Their capital city is only half of what it once was; the rest is overrun with hostile creatures. The elves' beloved Sunwell, which bathed all blood elves in magical energy, was ruined, causing severe withdrawal symptoms. *BC* continues conflict between the two factions by re-introducing the shattered world of Draenor, now known as Outland. The draenei and orcs hope to reconnect with surviving members of their race, while the rest of the Alliance and the blood elves seek to contact their brethren who made previous expeditions to Outland. A new battleground called the Eye of the Storm also sees fighting between the draenei and blood elves over a ruined, floating chunk of Outland. These cultural conflicts are mitigated somewhat by the presence of their common enemy, the Burning Legion, and the expansion ends on what would seem to be a peaceful note. The draenei leader soothes the blood elves' magical addiction by using holy magic

to cleanse the Sunwell. This selfless act would seem to herald the end of open hostility, but future years show that the Alliance-Horde conflict can not be solved so easily.

Wrath of the Lich King (WotLK) opens the frigid continent of Northrend for exploration and adventure. Triggered by the Scourge's attacks on the Alliance and Horde capitals, Northrend sees invasions by both factions for the express purpose of deposing the vile Lich King and ending the undead threat to Azeroth. However, little occurs that would affect the portrayal of these two factions. This expansion highlights the Alliance and Horde going to war with the Scourge but adds no new races and no territory that is apparently claimed by one side or the other. Conflict continues in two new battlegrounds set on nearby islands, but they do not tie into the game world as closely as previous battlegrounds. This aggression persists even though the Scourge is considered such a serious threat that both sides ostensibly need to work together. While the Alliance seems focused on fighting the Scourge, the Horde launches at least two major attacks on Alliance forces, heralding the changes to come in the next expansion.

Cataclysm, in addition to changing and updating the two original continents of *WoW*, adds a new race for each side and resumes open war between the Alliance and Horde. The worgen of Gilneas, humans afflicted with a curse that transforms them into wolf-men, rejoin the Alliance after leaving it in *WCII* and building a massive wall to keep out foreigners. Despite its isolation, Gilneas is quite advanced. Their architecture and accents resemble those of Victorian England, and their military uses firearms and artillery to fend off first feral worgen and later the Forsaken. The goblins of the Bilgewater Cartel join the Horde, providing some much needed technological expertise, but their recklessness and greed bring out the dangers of industry all too clearly. Meanwhile, the Horde attacks nearly all of the Alliance races, fighting the humans in Vash'jir and Hillsbrad, dwarves and high elves in the Hinterlands, night elves in Ashenvale and

Darkshore, and the worgen in Gilneas and Silverpine Forest. The Horde is aggressive and dangerous, while the Alliance takes up the role of beleaguered defenders fighting to free their homes.

The *Mists of Pandaria (MoP)* expansion highlights Blizzard's treatment of the Alliance and Horde in an unprecedented in-game way. *MoP* adds the pandaren, a race of humanoid pandas that can choose to ally with either the Horde or the Alliance after their introductory section is finished. *WoW*'s constitutive rhetoric features explicitly in this decision. Going along with the pandaren culture are two competing philosophies: the Tushui and the Huojin. The Tushui, who are drawn to the Alliance, emphasize "meditation, rigorous training, and moral conviction" and "defend what is right above all else" ("Pandaren – Game Guide"). The Huojin, on the other hand, have a "scrappy practicality" and a leader who is "[o]utgoing, passionate, and not one for deep thought" ("Pandaren – Game Guide"). These descriptions are rhetorically reinforced when a pandaren player must choose his or her affiliation. Blizzard's own summary describing both the Horde and Alliance appears. The savage physical aspects of Horde races are emphasized: "Focused, ferocious, and sometimes monstrous, the Horde values strength and honor, but struggles to keep aggression in check" (*WoW: MoP*). The Alliance races, on the other hand, "all contribute their technical, arcane, and spiritual wisdom toward the goal of a peaceful and just world" (*WoW: MoP*). The Alliance is more cooperative and simply smarter. Blizzard's official interpretation of Azeroth can scarcely get less subtle.

While we see from the story of *WCIII* and *WoW* that neither the Alliance nor Horde could be considered completely good, the moral dichotomy still favors the Alliance. When *WoW* was first released, the righteous paladins, armored warriors who wield holy magic to protect their allies, could be found only in the Alliance. Even when the Horde gets paladins in *BC*, the

paladins of the Horde are less scrupulous and religiously organized than their Alliance counterparts. The Horde is the aggressor in two of the original three battlegrounds. In Warsong Gulch, a group of orcs is recklessly cutting down trees in night elf territory, and in Arathi Basin, a group of Forsaken calling themselves “Defilers” aims to control the human-occupied land and despoil it for normal habitation. The Horde is also mostly responsible for the open war that features heavily in *Cataclysm*.²² The Forsaken have for years worked on a plague that would destroy all living things, and in *Cataclysm*, they launch an invasion to destroy the Alliance nation of Gilneas and the survivors of other nearby human kingdoms. As many of these developments have been in more recent years, it seems as though even the moral dichotomy is being slowly restored to that of a good Alliance and evil Horde.

²² The war seems to have begun because of events in *WotLK* that led to the end of diplomacy between the two sides. Two events that led to this war were the orcs attacking an Alliance army while they fought the Scourge and a group of rebellious Forsaken destroying a combined Horde-Alliance army in a similar situation, which led to an Alliance invasion of Undercity.

CHAPTER 3

THE SCHOLARLY FRAME

Although I have incorporated scholarship about video games and roleplaying games into the framework for this study, the purpose of this study is situated within and aims to contribute to the field of rhetorical studies. The study of rhetoric, originating in ancient Greece and Rome, has always focused on public discourse, primarily speeches, but contemporary rhetorical scholars have broadened the range of their investigations to include various forms of mediated discourse as rhetoric. As such, video games represent a particularly unique and challenging form of rhetoric that may actually be more suasive than other types of mediated communication because of the blend of text and visuals within gameplay processes. Their rhetorical power seems to stem from the fact that, despite fantasy elements, the world portrayed in a game such as *Warcraft* is a relatively realistic one. That is, it borrows elements of real-world cultures, which increases its “truthfulness.” As we play, we feel as though we understand the game’s universe and easily make sense of what it teaches us. The rhetorical subtext comes to us through gameplay performance.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the scholarly frame that informs my analysis of *WoW* as a rhetorical artifact. Specifically, my investigation is based on the contemporary position of rhetorical critics who seek to explain and to interrogate rhetorical forms for the social

and cultural meanings they create. The following section discusses the foundation of this position: the ideological turn and the development of critical rhetoric.

The Ideological Turn and Critical Rhetoric

After witnessing declining use of neo-Aristotelian criticism among contemporary rhetorical critics in the 1980s, Raymie E. McKerrow proposed a new approach for rhetoric in his essay, “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis.” McKerrow explains this approach accordingly: “As theory, a critical rhetoric examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world [...] The critique of domination has an emancipatory purpose—a telos toward which it aims in the process of demystifying the conditions of domination” (91). In proposing this new approach, McKerrow relied heavily on the idea of an “ideological turn,” which had been proposed by Philip Wander before him. In his “The Third Persona,” Wander shows that ideological criticism better reflects reality: “such criticism leaves the asylum offered by a world of ideas to confront the world of affairs, the sensual, material ‘is’ of everyday life” (369). Essentially, Wander argues that ideology is pervasive and thus an important part of criticism: we need to understand these underlying beliefs if we are to criticize accurately. As Wander says about ideological criticism, “It entertains possibilities for action, and the actions it considers may go beyond actions sanctioned in the academy, namely the production of texts” (364). This “ideological turn” allows scholars to “take up issues meaningful in our everyday lives” (Wander 364) and more directly engage society.

McKerrow takes this ideological consideration and brings it directly into the field of rhetorical studies under the guise of *critical rhetoric*. What McKerrow advocates for critical rhetoric, then, is an attentiveness to power structures during its focus on communication or discourse as well as an impetus to recommend changes in discourse or behavior (92). Here,

McKerrow uses the term “discourse” more broadly than the more traditional view of rhetoric: “Discourse is the tactical dimension of the operation of power in its manifold relations at all levels of society, within and between its institutions, groups, and individuals” (98). For McKerrow, all forms of discourse that exercise power are worthy of study by the critical rhetorician, and power operates through a variety of social interactions. He explains that power “creates social relations and sustains them through the appropriation of a discourse that ‘models’ the relations through its expression” (99).

Clearly, critical rhetoric as McKerrow defines it has a broader focus than traditional rhetorical study. As he notes, “The acceptance of a critical rhetoric is premised on the reversal of the phrase ‘public address’—we need to reconceptualize the endeavor to focus attention on *that symbolism which addresses publics*” (101, emphasis in original). This approach opens almost any type of discourse for study and is especially important for drawing attention to the new forms of mediated communication prevalent in modern society. As McKerrow comments, “More often than not, the products of discourse are mediated—are no longer the simple property of a speaker-audience relation” (101). Likewise, he makes the shift to popular cultural artifacts explicit for the critical rhetorician:

“Facts of Life”²³ may never aspire to inclusion in the rhetorical ‘canons of oratorical excellence,’ but it may have more influence on a teenager’s conception of social reality than all the great speeches by long-dead great speakers. To ignore “symbols which address publics” in all their manifest forms has, as its ultimate consequence, the perpetuation of sterile forms of criticism. (101)

While traditional rhetorical analysis might ignore a text such as *WoW*, McKerrow makes it clear that doing so is a mistake. Despite being “just” an entertainment form or a video game, *WoW* commands a large player base that receives its discursive messages. The critical impulse aims to alert this audience by unpacking these messages. Once that has been accomplished, the critical

²³ “Facts of Life” was a National Broadcasting Corporation sitcom that ran during 1979 and for most of the 1980s.

rhetorician leaves this audience with his or her evaluation and, hopefully, what should be learned or done.

The modern rhetorical scholar can expand his or her view to include essentially all public discourse in whatever form it takes. If the artifact influences or promotes ideology, we should be attentive to its implications. Because *WoW*'s narrative reflects the power structures and imbalances of the real world, especially those of Western versus non-Western cultures, it becomes a textual artifact worthy of academic study. As Michael McGee puts it, perhaps more cynically, the requirement for “‘public address’ has clearly dissolved, being no longer a discrete object of study nor a necessary ground for critical judgment” (275). Mediated discourse cannot help but affect people, being pervasive as it is, and rhetorical critics can no longer afford to ignore such influence. If we examine these discourses carefully, we may find better ways to illustrate difference or at least be attentive to how we shape intercultural conflicts.

The Rhetorical Power of the *World of Warcraft*

If we are to investigate *WoW* as a rhetorical artifact, then two questions immediately come to the mind of a traditional rhetorical critic.. As a rhetorical artifact, who are the rhetors of *WoW*, and who is the audience it addresses? On the surface, it may seem that a video game, especially one with such communicative and performative freedom as *WoW*, originates its messages from players. Players create messages through their in-game performances. To some extent, this is true and a critical part of the game's “potential to be truly progressive” (Monson 61). A great deal of research has focused on how players form personal identities in virtual worlds and therefore enact particular messages. But the purpose of this study is not nearly so player-focused and instead focuses on the messages presented by *WoW*'s corporate author—that is, the company that produces the game. Ian Bogost argues that “video games do not simply

distract or entertain with empty, meaningless content. Rather, video games can make claims about the world” (125). The developers of *WoW* present a world that carries particular messages and invites audience participation to embody this rhetoric. These messages are powerful for at least three different reasons, all identified by different scholars.

One way in which the rhetorical power of *WoW* instills messages in its players is by using the principles of constitutive rhetoric.²⁴ Marlin Bates is one of the first to make this explicitly *rhetorical* connection. He notes that game developers use extensive second-person rhetoric to draw players into their games and help players identify with their virtual avatars (104). Bates has studied official suggestions that encourage players to conform to certain roles when creating their virtual identities. By noticing the rhetorical pressure applied through these in-game constraints, Bates has indirectly described the effect game developers exert on players. That is, not only do game limitations restrict identity performance, but they also function as rhetoric to shape players’ ideas about the virtual world they temporarily inhabit. Bates’ argument is reminiscent of the roleplaying restrictions mentioned by Monson (64-5). Bates reports that players are consistently encouraged through a shift into second-person pronouns and direct addresses to think of themselves as their characters (107), and this rhetorical pressure persuades them to act in certain ways.

WoW makes full use of this constitutive pressure. Blizzard’s introductory material for people unfamiliar with the game sets the stage for players to embody certain roles based on the race they choose to portray in-game. The company uses almost uniformly positive descriptions for Alliance races, while the Horde receives more neutral or even negative descriptors:

²⁴ The term “constitutive” rhetoric originated from a 1987 essay in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* by Maurice Charland. It has come to refer to the way in which a rhetor creates a particular group identity through discourse. Charland, for example, notes how rhetoric was used to establish a distinct national identity for the people of Quebec in contrast with the rest of the Canadian population.

On one side is the noble Alliance, which comprises the valiant humans, the stalwart dwarves, the ingenious gnomes, the spiritual night elves, the mystical draenei, and the bestial worgen; on the other side is the mighty Horde, made up of the battle-hardened orcs, the cunning trolls, the hulking tauren, the cursed Forsaken, the extravagant blood elves, and the devious goblins. [...] Choose your allegiance carefully. (“Beginner’s Guide”)

Even a cursory examination shows that positive connotations abound for the Alliance races, who are also implied to be smarter or more cerebral than the Horde. Because Blizzard provides expectations about how these types of characters should act, some performances of these identities will be more authentic than others. A cowardly dwarf or a pacifistic orc would not embody the suggested values and would therefore feel out of place in *WoW*.

The sentence, “Choose your allegiance carefully,” found in the “Beginner’s Guide” exemplifies Bates’ argument about how game developers foster identification by placing these performances directly onto the *player*. No *WoW* player actually belongs to the Alliance or the Horde; these are fictional organizations with fictional constituents. However, this sentence shows that the *character’s* allegiance is being conflated with the player’s, which causes players to identify with this virtual persona. Other paragraphs provided by Blizzard make it clear that this conflation is no accident:

World of Warcraft thrusts you into a central role of an ever-changing story. You and your friends will be active participants in events that are steeped in the rich lore of this fantasy universe. Fight for either the Alliance or the Horde, and experience a fully-realized fantasy world (“Beginner’s Guide”).

Again we see second-person pronouns used to make virtual characters’ identities and allegiances those of the participating players. This paragraph makes the role and experiences of a virtual world those of the player alone.

WoW’s power to transmit messages can be also seen through its fantasy veneer, which frequently masks the game’s more subtle messages of neocolonial discourse. For example,

messages about race and conflict are less notable and therefore more likely to escape criticism. But the hegemonic force of popular cultural artifacts has not gone unnoticed by scholars. In fact, Winslow argues that hegemonic “Othering” in popular discourse may present “a particularly dangerous and underexplored hegemonic” because of its subversive and unnoticed qualities (259). Chris Barker even argues that popular culture is the area in which hegemony is truly established; he calls it “the ground on which this consent is lost or won” (9). Fantasy discourse can present a message that supports or erodes discursive power for a particular group without appearing to give that message at all. In her analysis of the *Lord of the Rings* film series, Sue Kim observes how these films “both invoke and deny the discourses and politics of race, while sweeping other salient and concrete issues under the rug” (875).

Finally, video games hold a great deal of power through their rhetorically complex composition. Messages transmitted through more than just speech and text can be exceptionally potent, especially in visual media such as video games. Dana Polan argues that visual spectacle is so powerful that it disrupts other mental processes: “Rather, the very fact of showing (regardless of what *is* shown) becomes a spectacle (and spectacularly seductive) in the ways it blocks, ignores, shuts out, other forms of cognition” (137). Phil Chidester notes:

[I]f whiteness²⁵ consistently affirms and reinforces its claim to racial centrality and superiority in part through a distinctly visual discourse, then the absence of such symbolic markers might also communicate distinct meanings, particularly in moments when these symbols are expected” (159).

Alan Gross takes this idea a step further; he claims that imagery is not really subject to the same logic and reasoning as speech, and visual rhetoric therefore demands different criteria of judgment than verbal (149). Gross resolves the tension by more or less combining the two using

²⁵ Whiteness, as used by Chidester and other scholars, is the social construct that privileges “Western” or European influences in society. It is marked by, among other factors, social invisibility and an implicit power to control discourse.

Dual-Coding Theory, showing how images and words interact and work jointly to create particular associations and a composite meaning (150-1). The basic point for *WoW* is that its visual elements are an inextricable part of the overall meaning created by the video game, and it seems obvious to include also the audio elements in the composite artifact.

Similarly, Ian Bogost acknowledges video games as complex artifacts, but he argues that merely including them in the field of visual rhetoric is inadequate. Something more important than the complexities of verbal or visual elements is a part of video games, and to Bogost it is the “possibility space” of play (120). The rules and procedures of a game are more important in establishing meaning than other rhetorical elements (Bogost 121). A purely visual (or even verbal) examination would be insufficient to describe the most powerful aspects of the messages video games send. Bogost says:

To be sure, visual rhetoric is often at work in video games, a medium that deploys both still and moving images. But visual rhetoric does not account for procedural representation. This is not a flaw in the subfield of visual rhetoric; in procedural media like video games, images are frequently constructed, selected, or sequenced in code, making the stock tools of visual rhetoric inadequate. Image is subordinate to process. (124)

Bogost therefore urges a new type of rhetoric for games: procedural rhetoric, “the practice of effective persuasion and expression using processes” (125). Because video games are procedure-based, they can not only make arguments, but they also restrict player behavior in ways that *force* them to enact performances that agree with the game’s rhetoric. According to Bogost, the procedural rhetoric of video games can make “arguments about how social, cultural, and political processes work as well. Artifacts that deploy procedural rhetoric can also make arguments about how things *don’t* work just as easily as they can make arguments about how they do” (126). The suasive appeal inherent to this approach is simple: video games can provide immediate feedback about how game developers perceive the applicability of certain strategies, encouraging players

to adopt or abandon these actions in other settings as well. As Bogost explains, video games can also be used to interrogate ideology and to make or to unpack arguments (128, 130). For all of these reasons, it seems that the messages constructed by video games are quite powerful and certainly deserve careful attention. To help inform that attention in this study, I have relied upon the postcolonial theory posited by Raka Shome.

Postcolonial Theory

An analysis of such a composite artifact as *WoW* could begin from a number of theoretical grounds, but an examination of the explicit or implied racial elements of the game fits well with Raka Shome's postcolonial approach. Her essay, "Postcolonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Canon," is considered one of the foundational works in bringing postcolonial theory into rhetoric. Shome argues that rhetoric, as well as academia in general, has traditionally privileged a Western/White way of thinking while often excluding other ethno-cultural perspectives. This privilege is at the heart of rhetorical "Whiteness," which is the quality that describes how European cultural forces invisibly dominate discourse. She describes rhetoric as "a discipline that for years has celebrated the public voices of white men in power, and has derived most its theories from such foci" (Shome 591). This idea of a canon—that is, a group of academically approved works that ground the field of study—had already come under fire from critical and feminist rhetoricians, who wanted to expand the field of study to include important female and/or non-White speakers. Shome, however, carries these critiques into full-fledged postcolonialism. As Shome says, "[I]t is important to place the texts that we critique or the theories that we produce against a larger backdrop of neocolonialism and racism, and interrogate to what extent these discourses and our own perspectives on them reflect the contemporary global politics of (neo)imperialism" (592). Shome's argument here, essentially, is that the idea of

a universal rhetorical canon makes little sense, especially when carried into other cultures or societies. Shome highlights three aspects of postcolonial theory which she believes have special importance for rhetorical studies: discursive imperialism, cultural hybridity, and academic self-reflexivity (592).

Discursive Imperialism

The first of Shome's aspects obviously pertains to rhetoric by its very nature. Discourse is the essence of rhetoric, and Shome raises the question of neocolonial pervasiveness in modern international relationships. If people in "First World" countries use discourse to mark people in other countries as inferior, the critical rhetorician should pay attention. As Shome says, "The issue is not merely one of technological or cultural power, but also one of linguistic power" (593). According to Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek, this White-centered perspective has similarly grounded the field of communication studies (293). Jing Yin, in analyzing the film *The Joy Luck Club*, describes how this process assigns negative traits to non-Western cultures—crafting "the sexist, oppressive, mysterious, inscrutable, exotic, and savage cultural Other" (170).

The concept of discursive imperialism has been applied to *WoW* by a number of scholars, even if they neglect to use the term explicitly. The fantasy genre to which *WoW* belongs is thoroughly suffused with racial implications, going all the way back to its roots in Tolkien's work. Tolkien referred to his different groups of people—such as humans, dwarves, and elves—as "races,"²⁶ and most fantasy literature seems to have followed his example. Nathaniel Poor agrees, holding Tolkien at least partly responsible for this conflation of *race* and *species*

²⁶ Tolkien almost certainly did this intentionally. As a philologist, he gave careful attention to the language (and fictional languages) he used in developing his works, and his fantasy races were, one might say, biologically compatible. This is also more-or-less true for *WoW*—humans can breed with high elves, orcs, and probably ogres, and orcs can breed with ogres, humans, and draenei. No other explicit interracial pairings are known, but draenei-orc hybrids can even be fertile. The half-orc half-draenei Garona has a child born from her and a human mage.

(377). The racialized conflict found in Tolkien, between orcs and the Free Peoples of Middle-earth, is carried into *WoW* as a conflict between, at its heart, orcs and humans.

In the essay, “Blackless Fantasy,” Tanner Higgin argues that “the conflict between the races of the world of Azeroth bears similarities to imperialism and colonialism” (12). A more cynical reading of such portrayals might be that non-White cultures are somehow less than human, a point that seems more alarming when considering that non-White cultural traits are ascribed to non-human creatures. In other words, as Higgin notes, non-White cultural traits appear almost exclusively among the non-human races of the Horde (9). The White/Western Alliance, meanwhile, is comprised in its largest part of human and relatively near-human races. The Alliance’s non-human races reify this Whiteness by co-opting cultural traits from our world as well as sharing cultural traits with Azeroth’s humans. Groups culturally closer to Whiteness, or whatever hegemony is under consideration, can still be used to affirm the ideal nature of Whiteness, as Yin reveals in her film analysis:

In this movie the American White middle-class was the center of true humanity, to which Chinese culture, the negative Other, was the complete opposite. Unlike their mothers, who were the real exotic Other, the Chinese American daughters were becoming closer to the mainstream American culture through assimilation. When the White center was absent, the American-born daughters were promoted to the center as model minorities to confirm that the system in the United States is working. (168)

This same process of centering Whiteness by borrowing its traits for those who are culturally closer is repeated within *WoW*. The non-human Alliance races borrow culturally “White” traits that bring them closer to this “true” center. Dwarves, gnomes, and high elves physically resemble humans.²⁷ Dwarves are little more than short, stocky humans, gnomes are even smaller and less hirsute, and high elves are intelligent, magically gifted near-humans with pointy ears. All three races share a skin color and to some degree the same religion (the Holy

²⁷ These “races” all appeared first in *Warcraft II*.

Light) as Azeroth's humanity. The worgen of *Cataclysm* are humans transformed into wolf-people. They share some traits with the humans of Stormwind, but their most distinguishing cultural traits—Cockney accents and Victorian architecture, in contrast to flat American accents and vaguely medieval architecture in Stormwind—are thoroughly Western European. Most surprisingly of all, the alien draenei, who join the Alliance in *WoW: The Burning Crusade*, also follow the Alliance's major religious philosophy, which is portrayed as an analogue of Christianity. The religion as practiced on Azeroth carries many trappings of real-world Catholicism, including monasteries, cathedrals, and apparent bishoprics.

Other instances of cultural borrowing abound. *Warcraft's* dwarves retain a stereotypical “Scottish” accent, and draenei voices have a Slavic sound—both European traits. Night elves, the purple- (or blue-) skinned counterparts of the high elves, share perhaps the fewest commonalities with the other Alliance races,²⁸ yet they have a monotheistic religion that worships the only known deity in Azeroth (the moon goddess Elune). Night elves also practice druidism, borrowing a term describing Celtic/European practices in contrast to the culturally non-White “shamanism” practiced by many Horde races. This treatment of Whiteness reflects a centering process that “projects or naturalizes particular groups [...] as ‘human and universal,’ while it designates others as less human” (Yin 150). This centering is thoroughly characteristic of neocolonialism.

Whiteness may therefore be seen as simply better than other cultural positions. In the essay, “Fantasy, Realism, and the Other in Recent Video Games,” Leigh Schwartz makes a

²⁸ Pandaren, a newly playable (as of 2012) race of panda-like humanoids, can join either the Alliance or Horde and so defy generalization in the same way other races relate to their factions. While they borrow elements from Asian cultures, the Tushui pandaren who join the Alliance do share Western values that privilege intellect and morality—ideals such as “moral conviction,” “refined intellect,” and the drive to “defend what is right above all else” (“Pandaren – Game Guide”).

similar argument about how video games usually portray Whiteness or Western culture as superior:

In the American *World of Warcraft*, the more Western faction is learned, sophisticated, and religious, whereas the other faction is tribal, spiritual, and struggles to overcome a dark cultural history. These representations reflect the designers' views of their own cultures (321).

Such portrayals are implicit and are reaffirmed through the visual symbolism found in-game.

Schwartz describes how this discursive imperialism functions through the visual trappings of *WoW*:

To examine it further, in *World of Warcraft*, the more Western, or possibly First World, Alliance fights the more non-Western, or Third World, Horde. Although both cultures are presented more or less equally, with equal resources and impressive capital cities, many players insist that the Alliance are the “good guys,” and it’s easy to see why: One look at the Alliance’s bald eagle gryphon mounts is enough to show that the Alliance are “us” in this war. (319)

The “us” to which Schwartz refers is more precisely the United States, which obviously uses the bald eagle as one of its national symbols. And while *WoW* may subvert some colonial narratives and thereby offer a critique of its practices (Higgin 9), it still affirms humanity as foundationally White and frequently seems to cast the Alliance in a better light.

Cultural Hybridity

The second postcolonial development that Shome applies to rhetoric is the concept of cultural hybridity. This “borderlands” concept recognizes that people embody multiple simultaneous roles or viewpoints and encourages discourse that blends rather than excludes these multiple cultural perspectives. Remarkably, *WoW* creates a world that actively resists this possibility by conflating race²⁹ and culture, making the latter biologically determined. This

²⁹ Instead of being considered different kinds of creatures, the “humanoids” of *WoW*—including such diverse creatures as humans, orcs, tauren (cow people), and the catfish-whiskered and goat-hooved alien draenei—are universally termed as “races.” Melissa Monson ascribes importance to the term by saying that “the very use of the word race (rather than species) is significant as it simultaneously draws upon and reinforces the preconceived

conflation has provoked no small amount of scholarly criticism. Higgin highlights the practice “firmly fixed within the traditions of high fantasy in that race continues to be an immutable and deterministic quality of being” (21). Nathaniel Poor notes that the concept of “race” within fantasy works is considerably broader than its real-world use (376-7) and comments on its fixed nature: “Generally, players do not define races: races come pre-labeled and identified in the game itself, as the types of race you can play in the game are a part of the game’s mechanics” (377). That is, although race is essentially a social construction in our world and can be shaped by sociocultural expectations, race is strictly codified within video games in general and *WoW* in particular.

Melissa Monson continues this argument, saying that in our world “race is not real in any biological sense” (50), and she criticizes *WoW* for carrying on the ideology of racial essentialism: “the reproduction of a race-based society hinders its potential to be truly progressive” (61). She identifies and describes no less than ten separate traits—“geographic starting point, physical appearance, skill set, talents, intellect, temperament, career (class), language, technology, and culture” (57)—determined by a character’s race in *WoW*. As she puts it, “Here, knowing a character’s race gives instant insight into their essential nature” (53). And players are strongly encouraged through official roleplaying tips to perpetuate these racial traits when they take action as their character. Monson describes the rhetorical pressure *WoW*’s developers try to enforce:

Players are invited to accept the rubric they are given and to participate accordingly. [...] In essence, players are being asked to buy into the race-based society as created and to perpetuate it. Role-playing advice tells players to adhere to their preassigned racial stereotypes because if they don’t it will destroy the illusion that race exists. And such complexity will *cheapen* rather than enhance the main storyline. (64-5)

notions of a race-based society” (53). Nathaniel Poor seems to agree and points out that using “race” in such a way lets a game discuss real-world problems yet escape some of the attendant consequences: “By using the word *race*, fantasy settings can and do play with their own versions of real-world issues, but it is in a shallow manner” (391).

Cultural hybridity, then, is impossible within the world of Azeroth because culture among other traits is innately fixed by race.³⁰ While some racial hybrids exist, e.g., half-human/half-elves, participants cannot play as these hybrids, and they are often portrayed as having assimilated into one race's culture or the other. The *Alliance Player's Guide*—one of the tabletop roleplaying books—both supports and disconfirms this idea, saying at one point, “Half-elves are too few and scattered to have a united culture or society” (132) and on the very next page, “You can distinguish between half-elf and high elf architecture, and half-elf craftsmanship from human” (133). Nevertheless, the idea of both race and culture as fixed, innate, and universal with each other remains—there are authentic high elf traits, authentic human traits, and even at least a couple of authentic half-elf traits that can all be distinguished from each other.

Academic Self-Reflexivity

The last of Shome's postcolonial themes is academic self-reflexivity. She argues that “a postcolonial self-reflexivity entails that as scholars practicing in the west, we be aware of how our scholarly practices are often engaged in reproducing neocolonial patterns of intellectual domination” (Shome 598). *WoW* as a game seems to possess little awareness of its imperialistic tendencies.³¹ Implications of its racialized history are ignored, and racial conflict is inherent to

³⁰ Perhaps most interestingly, in *WoW* not only does race determine culture but the reverse is *also* true. Some of the exiled purple-skinned night elves of ancient Azeroth (known as “Highborne”) found over the years that their skin turned white, their stature and ear length shrank, and their eyes turned blue after they landed in Quel'thalas on the eastern continent. The physical changes to these “high elves” are vaguely attributed to their frequent use of arcane magic. After the high elves were mostly slaughtered during the Third War, most of the survivors took to calling themselves “blood elves,” at first changing mainly their dress but also increasing their use of demonic magic. A short span of roughly 10 “in-game” years later, and blood elves are considered a separate race from high elves in language, cultural practices, and even physical appearance—blood elves' eyes glow green and their skin is ruddier. The *Alliance Player's Guide* confirms this racial difference by making a distinction between “half-elves” (human-high elf hybrids) and “half-blood elves” (12). High elves can still become blood elves if they adopt their kindred's ways. Similarly, the Wildhammer dwarves, who ought to be genetically identical to their Ironforge dwarf cousins, have innate racial traits different from Ironforge dwarves in the tabletop RPG.

³¹ *Warcraft III*, on the other hand, is much more subversive in its treatment of the Alliance and Horde and also moves away from the strict factional binary that characterized previous and future *Warcraft* developments. For example, the Alliance keeps the defeated orcs in internment camps just before the game begins and generally proves

WoW. The world of Azeroth began, after all, with a game called *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans*. Lisa Nakamura says that “the game narrative is structured around the notion of racial conflict between distinct races that players must choose” (132-3). In fairness, Nakamura rightly notes that early computer games had these same tendencies; they “also encouraged the development of racialized personae in a supposedly ‘race free’ medium” (131). But blind devotion to fantasy tropes is harmful to the genre, as Poor argues: “By whitewashing fantasy games, game makers are not addressing their diverse audiences nor are they modernizing their fantasy world settings by acknowledging the cultural changes that have occurred since the medieval period” (390-1).

Shome’s concern is echoed by academic analyses of *WoW*, and consciousness of these problems is what postcolonial critiques of *WoW* have attempted to insert. Monson, for example, says, “Instead of being a place where participants are encouraged to ‘go beyond the possible,’ *WoW* (and other similar MMORPGs) becomes part of an ever expanding hegemony that propagates racial mythologies” (68). As part of some practical strategies for removing these hegemonic tendencies, Higgin urges reflexivity for game developers, suggesting “that game companies must understand the importance of tearing fantasy from its Eurocentric and colonial roots as well as destroying the connotation of humanity with whiteness” (21). He also encourages this same consciousness for consumers: “the optic white environments of MMORPGs need to be self-consciously motivated by a racially diverse customer base that exposes its hegemonic ideology and brings issues of race into relief” (Higgin 22). If the problems of neocolonial portrayals are to be addressed constructively, it seems certain that awareness is the first step. The difficulty, however, is that using fantasy terminology automatically implies certain traits and constrains the game developer in how these races can be portrayed.

itself no less evil, bigoted, and vengeful than the now-peaceful Horde races. Higgin pays the game little attention, but it is really more in *WCIII* that his mentioned “critique of colonialism” appears in *Warcraft* history (9).

We see that Shome's postcolonial themes are present within a rhetorical artifact such as *World of Warcraft*, and current scholars have been attempting to bring these issues to attention as well. Discursive imperialism portrays non-Western cultures as inferior and sub-human, and in *WoW* as actually non-human. In contrast to postmodern thought and critical rhetoric, cultural hybridity in *WoW* is resisted, a fact that has not gone unnoticed by critical scholars. These same scholars have also urged reflexivity on our part as consumers and on the part of game developers as rhetors. Once we achieve this awareness, perhaps we can move beyond fantasy tropes and subtle racializations toward a more positive portrayal of "the Other." As Yin concludes her media analysis, "A productive reconstruction of popular texts should strive to go beyond challenging the myths associated with the negative cultural Other to provide positive and contextualized interpretations of those cultural values" (170). In other words, we should look to rebuild texts in ways that provide a better understanding of and appreciation for the cultural Other that is so often vilified in media even today. To show more precisely some of the "Othering" strategies that *WoW* uses in developing its conflict narratives, I relied upon Margaret Sinex's genre-established framework.

"Othering" Strategies in the Medieval World and Middle-Earth

Because *WoW*'s racialized discourse falls quite naturally into Shome's postcolonial frame, rhetorical analysis of this game can focus on racialized text, images, and composite artifacts through a lens that uncovers *WoW*'s privilege toward the White/Occidental perspective and subjugates the non-White "Other." Margaret Sinex's essay, "'Monsterized Saracens,' Tolkien's Haradrim, and Other Medieval 'Fantasy Products,'" fits nicely into that postcolonial perspective. Sinex shows how Tolkien used "Othering" strategies that reflect "the othering process of the Christian West" (175). Sinex even traces the use of such strategies back to ancient

Greek and Roman writers such as Aristotle, Pliny the Elder, and Ptolemy of Alexandria (179). The generic connections between the fantasy setting crafted by Tolkien and its legacy in *WoW* are well-noted, so such a frame seems eminently suitable for studying other media within the fantasy genre. She also makes a connection between the real world and fiction by observing that “Othering” behaviors in medieval culture created an enemy that was no less fictional than anything Tolkien described, i.e., the monstrous yet “imaginary Saracen” that threatened Christian Europe (Sinex 175).

The main strength of Sinex’s argument is the three-part analysis she uses to describe how Tolkien shaped the antagonistic cultures of Middle-earth. Sinex highlights three characteristics of “Othering” found in J.R.R. Tolkien’s legendarium: 1) the use of binaries, 2) the role and influence of geography and climate in racial development and theorizing, and 3) the use of color to describe characters and influence audience perceptions (176). To use Sinex’s descriptors, binaries in medieval literature generally classified people into categories such as “inner/outer” or “saved/damned” (176), but there were also gradations in which some marginalized groups could be considered closer to the center than others. As Sinex says, “There was a distinction to be made, the learned believed, between lepers who lived in Christian Europe (and yet were set apart) and pagan Saracens who lived outside of Europe in remote, ill-defined lands to the east” (176). In a sense, *WoW* also reflects these degrees of marginality if we consider humanity the center; the Alliance races are still good and righteous by being close to human, even if they do not fully participate in its nature.

Locating certain races in certain regions, as Monson notes *WoW* does (57), also plays into the use of geography in casting groups as “Other.” Just as medieval Christianity found itself threatened by Muslim enemies to the south and east, so do the inhabitants of Azeroth find

themselves attacked by invading orcs. Sinex illustrates the ancient beliefs that “the extremes of northern and southern climates can explain characteristic physical features” (179), which she also connects to morality. To Europeans, “Unfamiliar physical traits such as black skin (unfamiliar, that is, to the European ethnologist) signaled grave spiritual flaws” (Sinex 179), and nearly all constituents of the Horde have inhuman physical features. Additionally, Sinex notes the ancient perspective “that climate also shapes the characteristic behavior of races” (179). In a similar fashion, the orcs’ homeworld of Draenor, ruined as it is by their misuse of demonic magic, reflects their moral deficiencies. In general, Horde races are more bestial and crude—perhaps so they can survive in their respective homelands rather than using technology to shape their surroundings as do the more civilized people of the Alliance.

Color is the last of Sinex’s “Othering” strategies and again recurs frequently in *WoW*. On the surface, skin color is immediately apparent as a distinguishing factor between Horde and Alliance—the

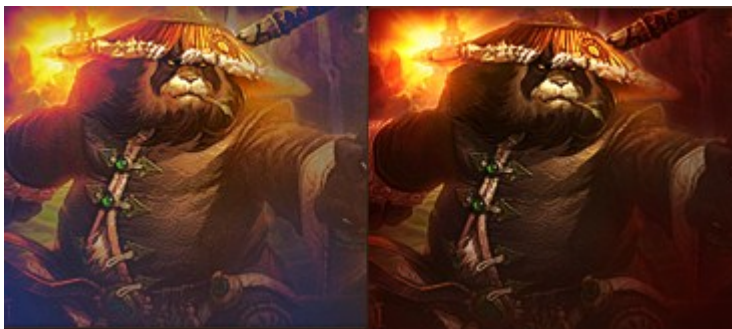


Figure 3.1 Alliance and Horde Pandaren

Horde’s orcs, goblins, and trolls are all green-skinned, while four Alliance races are White. But Tolkien’s use of color has less to do with race, and the Sinex’s identified colors do occur to some degree throughout *WoW*.³² Yellow can be seen in the sickly glowing eyes of the evil undead Forsaken, and the haughty blood elves decorate their rebuilt city in red and gold. The Horde as a whole is associated with the color red. For example, the online Game Guide shows two almost-identical but differently tinted pictures of a pandaren as seen in Figure 3.1, one for the Alliance and the Horde. The Alliance picture is tinted blue, and the Horde picture has a red hue. The

³² Sinex identifies black, yellow, and red as the colors associated with Sauron’s servants (183).

Horde military banner is typically a black Horde symbol on a red field. Orc architecture has often featured red buildings, and since *Cataclysm*, many buildings in their capital city Orgrimmar have added dark metallic spikes. The color black is otherwise little used in *WoW*; the game typically features vibrant palettes for its artwork. But Higgin treats the term “blackness” more broadly in his video game analyses—“blackness as *not White* in the specific circumstances of the game world and as informed by culture and politics” (5). In this sense, the Horde certainly suffers no shortage of color.

Sinex even gives attention to the audible barriers that established Tolkien’s foreigners: “Tolkien’s attentiveness to the aural impression of speech heard but not understood evokes something analogous to the ancient Greeks’ experience of encountering the Other” (189). Speech was one of the ways in which Greeks distinguished between themselves and the somewhat subhuman barbarians who occupied other lands. Similarly, *WoW* places language barriers that prevent Alliance and Horde players from communicating with each other, although these take the form of textual conscription rather than anything audible. Overall, Sinex certainly establishes “that the many pairs of polarizing binaries considered here have ancient roots. As assimilated and adapted by the medieval church they persisted, informing the theorizing of western European Christians for centuries, not merely for a few decades” (190). In fact, these strategies are still at work in discourse today, as this study discusses in the analysis of the *WoW* universe in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE *WARCRAFT* UNIVERSE

From the discussion in the previous chapters, it should be apparent that the world of the *Warcraft* games has evolved into a fantasy environment that uses highly racialized language and is marked by severe intercultural conflicts among its inhabitants. My first research question for this study seems especially appropriate to pose here: *How do WoW's fictional cultures use real-world rhetorical strategies that emphasize or reinforce the differences of other people negatively?* To address the question, this chapter presents an analysis generated from the three strategies developed by Margaret Sinex, in her essay, “‘Monsterized Saracens,’ Tolkien’s Haradrim, and Other Medieval ‘Fantasy Products.’” Herein, I show how *WoW* uses all three strategies, as well as address my second research question: *How do the rhetorical strategies used in WoW reflect real-world power imbalances and offer racialized depictions?* The analysis that follows shows how *WoW* projects a clear distinction between the privileged, more Westernized Alliance and the subaltern position occupied by the Horde. These strategies illustrate perfectly how cyber-colonialism functions in *WoW* and hopefully provides a starting point for which this same attitude can be located in other electronic “texts.”

Binaries

The world of *Warcraft* is, at its core, constructed around the conflict between civilized humanity plus friendly near-human races in the Alliance and the orcs with their Horde allies as a

savage “Other.” Historically, the Alliance and the Horde have been at odds from the beginning. The very first game, *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans*, asserts this opposition in its title. Leigh Schwartz identifies this conflict as central to the game: “*World of Warcraft* presents a fantasy world that attempts its own internal consistency, pitting players against other players in the epic battle of Horde versus Alliance” (317). Blizzard likewise sees this hostility as foundational. On their “Beginner’s Guide” page they have the following description:

In *Warcraft*, there are two large, opposing factions. On one side is the noble Alliance, which comprises the valiant humans, the stalwart dwarves, the ingenious gnomes, the spiritual night elves, the mystical draenei, and the bestial worgen; on the other side is the mighty Horde, made up of the battle-hardened orcs, the cunning trolls, the hulking tauren, the cursed Forsaken, the extravagant blood elves, and the devious goblins.

This factional divide therefore cuts to the very essence of *WoW* participation. There is no overlap or composite identity between the peoples of these two factions; they are *either* Alliance *or* Horde, not both or neither.

The main “Game Guide” web page reinforces this binary in subtle yet easily apparent ways. A link entitled “The Story of Warcraft” features a small picture of an orc and human, face-to-face and with expressions of anger or hostility. Similarly, “Races” are grouped beneath their “Alliance” and “Horde” labels. The “Races” page of Blizzard’s Game Guide also reinforces this binary through space, as shown in Figure 4.1 below. The Alliance races are encased in a boxed column on the left side of the page; Horde races are in a similar box on the right. In-game, although other factions exist and act in an antagonistic role, the fact that these two factions remain opposed to each other and are the only groups to which players can belong reinforces this two-sided view.

A binary approach has been subverted on occasion. *WCIII* briefly expands the binary into a four-faction compass by introducing the night elf Sentinels and the undead Scourge alongside

the Alliance and the Horde. Temporarily at least, the Horde occupies a “noble savage” role in contrast to its previous function as “violent invader,” which brings it toward the morally good axis. The Alliance, the Horde, and the Sentinels all ally against the Scourge and its demonic

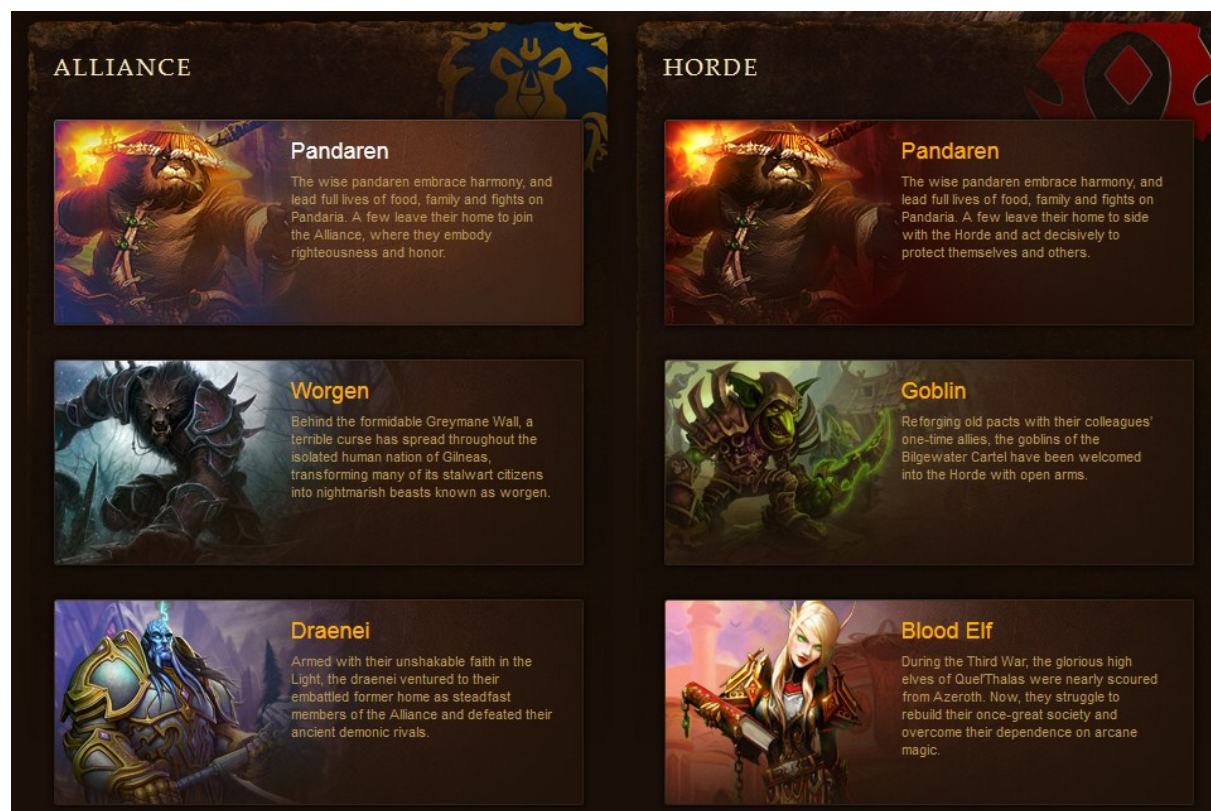


Figure 4.1 Alliance | Horde

leaders in the final *WCIII* mission. But this subversion does not last even into the *WCIII* expansion. The Alliance and the Horde resume their enmity, and by the release of *WoW* both new groups have collapsed into the factional binary. The more virtuous and attractive night elves join as full members of the Alliance; the Scourge instead fractures. Many of its undead masses stay loyal to the Lich King and retain their Scourge affiliation, but some of the now free-willed undead that call themselves “Forsaken” join the Horde. Neither this new partnership nor their freedom from the Lich King’s evil demands does much to change their cultural practices of necromancy and cannibalism, however.

Sinex lists four binaries found throughout medieval literature: “inner/outer, light/dark, Scythian/Ethiopian, [and] saved/damned” (176). In addition to the major Alliance/Horde binary, at least four additional binaries occur throughout discourse in and about the *Warcraft* universe. These four binaries correspond to the Alliance-Horde dichotomy as well as those identified by Sinex. The first binary in *WoW* is a moral binary (good/evil), which clearly mirrors the medieval ideas about salvation or damnation. The Alliance is held up as the more moral of the two groups, despite actions from both factions qualifying as reprehensible or immoral. The second binary in *WoW* is a mental binary (intellectual/physical), where the Alliance races focus on intellectual pursuits, while the Horde races focus on physical actions and development. The third binary is one of cultural development (civilized/savage), which corresponds with the distinction between Greeks or Romans and barbarians in classical times (Sinex 178). Despite cultural accomplishments on both sides, the Alliance is represented as more advanced and the Horde as more primitive. The fourth binary is based on appearance (attractive/grotesque), which is similar to the “light/dark” medieval binary that focused on skin color. In *WoW*, we see more attractive and more human-like races in the Alliance, while most of the Horde races have non-human physical features.³³ See the accompanying “*WoW* Binaries” table for a summary of the binaries under consideration for this study.

| | |
|--------------|-----------|
| Alliance | Horde |
| Good | Evil |
| Intellectual | Physical |
| Civilized | Savage |
| Attractive | Grotesque |

Table 4.1 *WoW* Binaries

Good and Evil in Azeroth

The world of *Warcraft* has always portrayed good and evil; even *WC*'s simple story introduces a moral dimension to the world of *Warcraft*. In *WC*, the human Kingdom of Azeroth must fight off the invading Orcish hordes who attacked through the

³³ Obviously, gender is frequently studied as a binary and has not gone academically unnoticed in *WoW*. However, the cyber-colonial representations do not seem like a particularly gendered binary, and such a binary would not fit the Alliance-Horde dichotomy these other descriptors do.

Dark Portal from another dimension. Because the orcs are the aggressors and looking for new lands to conquer, the humans' warfare becomes justified. Even non-game material for *WC* reaffirms this binary and its moral dimensions. Cover art for the game's box features a barbaric, horned-helmed orc facing a mailed human, evoking images reminiscent of heroic Europe attacked by savage, godless heathens. As defenders, the humans are automatically more heroic than the invaders. They fight to protect themselves and their homes from this monstrous "Other."

The *WC* morality clearly reflects Sinex's identified "saved/damned" binary (176, 179). The moral aspects are most overt in the first and second games. The humans wield holy magic, healing and protecting their warriors with God's own power. For example, the Abbot of Northshire Abbey encourages his disciples with the following words: "As the archangels took up swords of light to defend the heavens, so must we take up holy arms to defend our lands" (*Warcraft Humans Manual* 24). Likewise, the description of the Far Seeing spell directly references God:

[The ability] allows the caster to see in an all encompassing fashion, as God does. His vision extends to all corners of the land, and his view is omnipotent. The power of this divination is limited, for when one strives to see the world as God does, the human mind can only partake of a meager portion before it is forever blinded by the clarity of that sight. (*Warcraft Humans Manual* 25)

Similarly, *WCII* introduces paladins, holy knights wielding divine power against the Horde. These paladins have the spells "Holy Vision," "Healing," and "Exorcism," the last of which destroys the undead death knights and skeletons. The Church of *WCII*, where paladins can learn new spells, features a choir that sings "*Deo Gratias*" when clicked on during the game. These overtly religious references have been somewhat dampened since *WCIII*, when the religion of humanity became known as "The Holy Light," but nearly all of the outward religious trappings remain. The Church of the Holy Light is still headed by an Archbishop and based in a massive

cathedral, and priests and paladins still have the holy powers demonstrated in the first two *Warcraft* games.

The “hellspawned” orcs of *WC*, on the other hand, use black magic to animate the dead and summon demons. The death priests known as Necrolytes “have close ties to the dark forces of Hell” (*Warcraft Orcs Manual* 24). The Necrolyte description is particularly dark:

“Practitioners of the Orcish religions, these binders of souls command the black powers that hold control over the earth. Linked into the dominions of the lower plains, Necrolytes have power over all things dark and evil, including the raising of fallen warriors to create armies of the undead” (*Warcraft Orcs Manual* 23). Their typical temple is an “unholy place where Orcs come to make sacrifices to their gods, and the Necromancers of the land gather to invoke the will of their dark masters” (*Warcraft Orcs Manual* 29). Orc warlocks are “dark brethren of Hades” and “channel the fire and brimstone of hell through their bodies” (*Warcraft Orcs Manual* 29). Their most powerful ability brings a mighty daemon from the underworld.

The moral binary remains firmly fixed in *WCII*. Although a new Warchief takes over and has most of the Necrolytes and Warlocks killed, little about the orcs’ religion or military practices changes. The Horde enslaves the Dragonqueen Alexstrasza and forces her children into combat. Gul’dan, last survivor of the Warlock purge, creates two new types of magic users to replace his fallen brethren. His ogre-magi have inherited the abilities of dead Warlocks and can drive troops into a bloodthirsty rage with their signature “Bloodlust” spell. More horrifying, Gul’dan takes the corpses of fallen human knights and infuses them with the ghosts of his confederates. These newly created “death knights” have many of the Necrolytes’ old powers, draining life from their enemies and bringing the dead back as loyal skeletons.

Since *WCIII*, neither the Alliance nor the Horde could be considered completely good or evil, but the moral binary still favors the Alliance. At *WoW*'s launch, the righteous paladins could be found only in the Alliance, and even afterward, the paladins of the Horde are less moral and less religiously organized than their Alliance counterparts. For example, the blood elves once captured a Naaru, a sort of angelic being, in order for their paladins to wield holy magic the Alliance accesses through spirituality. The same blood elf paladins have a quest in *BC* to desecrate the tomb of Uther the Lightbringer, the (human) founder of the Alliance paladin organization, the Knights of the Silver Hand. Tauren paladins, meanwhile, have only recently taken up their path and maintain some form of sun worship but nothing resembling the organized church of their Alliance counterparts.

Battlegrounds likewise show the Alliance as defenders more often than not. The Horde is the aggressor in two of the original three battlegrounds. In Warsong Gulch, a group of orcs is recklessly cutting down trees in night elf territory, and in Arathi Basin, a group of Forsaken calling themselves "Defilers" aims to control the human-occupied land and ruin it for normal habitation. The Battle for Gilneas, added in *Cataclysm*, similarly features the Forsaken invading the worgen's devastated homeland. The PvP zone of Tol Barad, an Alliance island territory, also experiences a Horde invasion in *Cataclysm* from the orcs of Hellscream's Reach, an elite group chosen specifically by Warchief Garrosh Hellscream.

Moral failings can be highlighted for most of the Horde—the orcs lead the previously mentioned invasions, trolls are bloodthirsty voodoo practitioners, goblins are corrupt and greedy industrialists. But out of all of the Horde races, the Forsaken prove especially guilty of moral transgressions. Since the beginning of *WoW*, the Forsaken have worked on a plague that would destroy all living things, as well as their enemies in the Scourge, and in *WotLK* they finally use

this plague in a battle in which the Alliance and the Horde attack the Scourge. Their supreme leader, Sylvanas Windrunner, disavows knowledge of the attack and finds herself exiled from Undercity by the Forsaken apothecary who launched the plague,³⁴ but she wields this potent weapon against later enemies. In *Cataclysm* Sylvanas uses her plague with limited success against the worgen while invading Gilneas, and she completely destroys the human town of Southshore in southern Lordaeron with it. At her command, her armies kill most of the desperate Alliance survivors in the region and raise them into undeath as Sylvanas' loyal servants. The Forsaken have even poisoned land in the Western Plaguelands to make it useful to them and harmful to living creatures.

As many of these developments have been introduced in more recent years, the moral binary is being restored with a "good" Alliance and an "evil" Horde. Blizzard's rhetoric confirms that this binary is intentional. In Blizzard's "Beginner's Guide" text, the differences for each faction are emphasized: "the noble Alliance," which has "valiant," "stalwart," and "spiritual" races contrasts with "the mighty Horde," which has "cunning," "cursed," "extravagant," and "devious" races. The Alliance descriptors listed here have a positive moral aspect to them, while the Horde descriptors have more immoral connotations. The "extravagant" blood elves, for example, are generally considered the most intelligent and magically gifted of all playable races, but they have a moral deficiency mentioned instead of the text highlighting their arcane prowess. In the words of Leigh Schwartz, the Alliance are the "good guys" (319), while the Horde remains a morally dubious "Other."

Intellectual or Ignorant?

If the moral aspect were the only focus, perhaps Blizzard's representations would be less problematic. However, the world of *Warcraft* makes the moral failings of the Horde mirror a

³⁴ The Horde swiftly retakes the city and reinstalls Sylvanas as leader of the loyal Forsaken.

lack of intelligence and shows an intellectual/physical divide between the Alliance and the Horde, respectively. “The noble Alliance” has the “ingenious” gnomes, “spiritual” night elves, and “mystical” draenei, while the “mighty Horde” features “battle-hardened” orcs and “hulking” tauren (“Beginner’s Guide”). These Alliance descriptors illustrate positive mental traits where the Horde seems more focused on physical prowess. These terms characterize the Alliance as a more “normal” Western culture, which prioritizes the mind over the body. In his essay “Risky Dispositions: Thick Moral Description and Character-Talk in Sports Culture,” Daniel Grano identifies this “white brains/black brawn” narrative perspective, saying that the traditionally “White” approach focuses on using mental faculties to discipline the body and thereby achieve success, while non-White athletes are physically but, by implication, not mentally superior (256).

This intellectual/physical narrative is also emphasized throughout the *Warcraft* games. The clerics of *WC* can heal their allies and make them invisible, but the orcs’ priests focus exclusively on combat situations. The necrolytes can create undead soldiers and make their allies temporarily immune to harm at the cost of some health. Stormwind’s conjurers summon nimble water elementals in place of the orcs’ slow but powerful daemons. The elven rangers of *WCII* can increase their damage by learning Marksmanship, implying disciplined training, but the comparable upgrade for trolls is Regeneration that heals physical wounds. The paladins in the same game seem more spiritual and wise, using their faith to heal and dispel dark magic. The ogre-magi and death knights instead increase their allies’ physical strength and speed. Finally, the magically forged stormhammers, which require intelligence and arcane expertise to craft, let the Alliance’s gryphon riders fight dragons, with their innate size, strength, and fire-breathing, on equal footing.

The Horde continues to focus on physical strength in *WCIII*. In this game, the Horde's warriors have more health and damage than comparable Alliance or Sentinel forces. A fully upgraded orc Grunt, for instance, has almost double the health of a human Footman and more than three times the health of a night elf Archer. The mighty tauren warriors have at least ten percent more health than their counterparts in the other three factions. Despite focusing on spiritual magic as opposed to demonic knowledge, orc shaman even retain the Horde's signature "Bloodlust" spell. However, the Horde uses relatively little technology in the game, deploying catapults as their only real technological unit. In contrast, the Alliance can build steam-powered tanks, cannon towers, and helicopters and order dwarven riflemen³⁵ and mortar teams into battle. The night elf Sentinels have little technology as well, but they take a less overtly aggressive approach, relying on speed and stealth to win battles.

The tabletop roleplaying game (TRPG) books make clear the intellectual/physical binary that distinguishes the Alliance and Horde. Alliance races are, quite simply, smarter than their Horde counterparts. Humans, high elves, gnomes, and night elves all receive bonuses to some kind of mental attribute or skill. With the exception of blood elves, which are statistically identical to high elves, the Horde races all have bonuses to physical attributes. Orcs and trolls also suffer penalties to their intelligence. Even the clever goblins receive a bonus to their Agility where gnomes possess an Intellect and Charisma bonus, although they do have a substantial bonus to skills that involve working with technological devices.

Although their different strategies in warfare are well-established by the *Warcraft* games, the TRPG books identify these different approaches unambiguously. The Horde clearly focuses on unsubtle, aggressive attacks: "The Horde's blood sings for battle. The Horde's tactics are

³⁵ It would seem to make more sense to call them "rifledwarves," but the game does not. Humanity is clearly centered in this universe.

more blunt than the Alliance's. While many great generals do work on more refined tactics, the Horde focuses on overwhelming power" (*HPG* 190). The Horde has a clear physical advantage over the opposing faction: "The front lines of the Alliance are always in danger against the physically stronger Horde" (*APG* 182). The Alliance, by contrast, focuses on more skillful tactics, using flanking maneuvers, combined arms, and mobility on the battlefield. Cavalry supports infantry, infantry supports artillery, and artillery supports any assaults. They "believe that greater brain power wins out over primal force" (*APG* 182). The faction's more diverse composition from a cultural standpoint is a strong advantage: "The Alliance can boast of many strengths in its army; it lacks in no area" (*APG* 181).

The TRPG books even note the two sides' differing approaches to technology: "Technology is still a new science in the eyes of the Horde [...] Only the Forsaken look upon technology as more than a curiosity" (*HPG* 120). The faction "severely lacks in technological prowess since the goblins left their alliance [...] technology still baffles the Horde" (*HPG* 192). In the Alliance, meanwhile, dwarves "are perfectly comfortable with technology," gnomes "are innovative thinkers," and humans "have become adept at working with new technologies" (*APG* 100). The races of the Alliance "are sophisticated and learned, and they excel in the intellectual pursuits such as arcane magic and engineering" (*APG* 182). This intellectual approach gives them the advantage when it comes to new devices: "Technologically speaking, the Alliance is strong, with gnomish and dwarven inventions" (*APG* 181).

In *WoW* itself, the technological inferiority of the Horde has often shown. The Horde's technological approach in *WotLK* and earlier, before goblins joined the Horde in *Cataclysm*, seems especially notable. Instead of linking their cities with naval fleets or a subway tram as the Alliance had done, the Horde employed goblin zeppelins to ferry passengers between major

settlements. *WotLK* makes this difference even more apparent. As none of the current Horde races used advanced technology, goblins were employed throughout Northrend by Horde forces to mirror the Alliance's use of gnomish engineers. For the Horde, goblins built a flying artillery platform and provided siege engines in locations such as Wintergrasp and the Strand of the Ancients, even though no goblin factions officially joined the Horde. Since *Cataclysm* brought the Bilgewater goblins into the Horde, they have continued this technological responsibility, but the Alliance also has dwarves, draenei, and worgen who contribute industrial production and knowledge.

On the whole, the Horde races receive a clear physical emphasis to balance their technological deficiencies. This physical emphasis can be most clearly seen when Pandaren characters are given the chance to choose their faction: "Focused, ferocious, and sometimes monstrous, the Horde values strength and honor, but struggles to keep aggression in check" (*MoP*). Here, physical traits correlate with a moral or mental difficulty. The Alliance races, on the other hand, "all contribute their technical, arcane, and spiritual wisdom toward the goal of a peaceful and just world" (*MoP*). The Alliance is marked as intellectually superior, which reinscribes real-world prejudices into this fantasy. Grano explains clearly how this prejudice functions in the athletic realm, which displays an identical intellectual/physical binary between White and Black athletes:

The threat of African American athletic success (and its damage to white athletic esteem) has long been explained through compensatory assumptions that the black athletic body is genetically or biologically superendowed with primitive drives, while white athleticism marks a "civilizing" resolution of mind, rationality, and, in the idealized language of contemporary sports culture, character over a supposed deficiency in natural physical excellence. (256)

In other words, Black athletes struggle with keeping aggression or other instincts in check but are gifted with greater physical ability, while White athletes use their mental advantage to achieve their goals. The intellectual/physical binary of *WoW* works in exactly the same way.

Civilized or Savage?

The “intellectual/physical” binary blends into a “civilized/savage” binary that conflates morality and intellect with socio-cultural developments. As Schwartz puts it, “one team reveals a Western or First World influence whereas the other is more tribal or Third World in style” (322).

As Schwartz explains more thoroughly:

In the American *World of Warcraft*, the more Western faction is learned, sophisticated, and religious, whereas the other faction is tribal, spiritual, and struggles to overcome a dark cultural history. These representations reflect the designers’ views of their own cultures, a viewpoint that is taken on by gamers through interaction with the virtual environment. (321)

This moral/cultural conflation occurs in medieval literature as well. Sinex also remarks on “the *perceived* similarities between the inhabitants of Ethiopia and of Hell” (180). In her film analysis, Jing Yin comments on how building these representations influences our perceptions of other cultures: “This [Western] humanity is also that standard against which all other cultures should be evaluated and judged” (165). In fact, the “savage” deviant of this binary in *WoW* is *explicitly* non-human. *WoW* therefore “mirrors the use of binaries we have traced in Western European racial theorizing—Christian/Saracen, good/bad” (Sinex 182).

Although many aspects of the previous binary similarly highlight the civilized/savage binary, the Horde is clearly marked as savage or more primitive. “Science is new to the tauren,” and the jungle trolls show a primitive superstition by not considering “technology a science, but another form of magic” (*HPG* 120). The *HPG* makes this point most bluntly:

Perhaps its greatest weakness, as a whole the Horde is a group of primitive savages bound together by extreme circumstances. Subtlety is a four-letter word to these guys,

and most prefer to talk with their fists. Even the Forsaken are bloodthirsty and prone to violent rages, as well as an inherent distrust in anyone else. A cunning general can incite rages in a warband and laugh as the Horde's best-laid plans fall apart while the savages fly mindlessly into combat. (192)

While the Horde is considerably better off than many other civilizations in Azeroth, there is a clear hierarchy of development with the Alliance at one level and the Horde below: "Thus, the dwarves of Ironforge are said to be more advanced than the tauren of Mulgore, who are themselves far more advanced than, say, kobolds or troggs"³⁶ (*APG* 100). Even a cursory overview of Alliance and Horde settlements exhibits a clear contrast, such as that between the fortified stone ramparts of Stormwind and the teepees of the recently settled Mulgore. The Horde has a history of exile and migration, while Alliance territories have been more or less claimed by their inhabitants for a number of years.

Attractiveness and Ugliness

A final binary found within *WoW* extends into physical descriptions and an attractive/grotesque divide. Beginning in *WCII*, a whole host of new races enter the expanded Azeroth. Dwarves, elves, and gnomes, all human-like, side with seven human kingdoms to form the righteous Alliance, while the more monstrous and grotesque ogres, trolls, and goblins join the depraved Horde. As Sinex observes, medieval Europeans possessed "a 'common pejorative visual vocabulary' across a range of art forms and media that helped European viewers recognize their perceived foes" (183-4). This vocabulary included exaggerated, almost grotesque or inhuman, physical features (Sinex 184). The physical depictions of *WoW* races show a similar perspective. Humans obviously represent White humanity, and worgen, who possess the cultural markers of Victorian England, have the ability to switch into a human form. Dwarves and gnomes are little more than differently sized humans. Night elves certainly have odd purple or

³⁶ Kobolds in *WoW* are a race of small rat-like humanoids that usually live underground in mines. Troggs are an exceptionally primitive race that might be summarily conceptualized as "Neanderthal dwarves."

blue pigmentation and considerable height, but they possess no distorted physical features, aside from large ears. Among the Alliance races, only the alien draenei, with their hooves, horns, tails, and chin tentacles, are an exception. From the waist up, however, they have vaguely human silhouettes, with the males broad-shouldered and noble and the females lithe and curvaceous.

The Horde, meanwhile, has a much more grotesque roster, reminiscent of Saracen figures with “giant proportions, and a body composed of human and bestial elements, a monstrous hybrid” (Sinex 186). Although blackness as a skin color is more or less absent from the Horde and most races in Azeroth, trolls are perhaps the best example of this exaggerated humanity. As seen on the “Troll” web page and in Figure 4.2 below, they have long limbs that end in a strange



Figure 4.2 Troll

number of digits. *Warcraft* trolls have only three fingers and two toes. The male trolls portrayed also have long, curving tusks reminiscent of a warthog or perhaps an elephant. They frequently slouch³⁷ but stand roughly seven feet tall. Trolls are also the most athletic Horde race; all troll males can perform backflips while standing still, one of their “idle” animations in some *Warcraft* games.³⁸ Even something as seemingly mundane as

hairstyle reveals the trolls as a racialized, non-White “Other.” Of the six trolls shown on Blizzard’s “Troll” page, five of them have large, brightly colored mohawks. While the name of this hairstyle references the subjugated Other, in this case an indigenous American tribe, these grooming standards position the trolls outside the norms of Western culture.

³⁷ This references a racially “Black” stereotype.

³⁸ This athleticism is another reference to a Black stereotype.

The other Horde races fare no better. As do the trolls, the tusked orc males “slouch,” and their heads and shoulders even jut forward from their bodies. The tauren possess horns, hooves, cattle-like “humps,” and bovine hair and faces. The Forsaken exhibit obvious signs of decay. One facial option features a missing jaw and dangling tongue, some have horrific scars or missing eyes, and all have skeletal elbows. Their posture is hunched over, presumably due to rotting or missing muscles, their hair comes in strange styles and colors, and their intact eyes glow with inhuman light. The tiny goblins have triangular faces sharpened by large noses and long, pointed ears. Only the blood elves, who are former members of the Alliance, embody largely human qualities. Although quite popular among players, blood elves are not significantly over-represented in official *WoW* material and stand out more as an anomaly within the Horde. Their popularity may in part be due to their subversion of the established intellectual/physical, civilized/savage, and attractive/grotesque pairs. Nevertheless, with all of the negative binaries ascribed to the Horde, it seems likely that players and the Blizzard creators would have a more difficult time associating good qualities with Horde characters. As Sinex notes, physically deviant traits also entered the good/evil binary as moral deficiency was connected to inhuman features:

[M]edieval ethnological theory drew a crucial correspondence between a race’s inner spiritual state and its outer appearance. Bodily features deviating from the aesthetic canons of the western European analyst—such as a very dark complexion—were often held to be deformities signaling serious, hidden, spiritual defects. (178)

Each of the four binaries, good/evil, intellectual/physical, civilized/savage, and attractive/grotesque, thus all connect to each other to form a positive view of the Alliance and a negative view of the Horde.

Geography and Climate

The second rhetorical strategy identified by Sinex concerns the connection of physical space with moral qualities. She mentions “the crucial significance of geography in racial theorizing” (Sinex 176), and the geographic connotations through the *Warcraft* series are quite interesting. *WC* evokes both the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire as well as *LotR* in featuring a savage horde invading from the East. By locating the orcs in the mysterious “Black Morass,” as well as giving them a vaguely described native dimension, *WC* makes the orcs parallel medieval Europe’s “pagan Saracens who lived outside of Europe in remote, ill-defined lands to the east” (Sinex 176). *WCII* expands the map of Azeroth by placing additional human and near-human kingdoms to the north, so the resulting invasion now comes from the South. Both of these orc invasions, as those of Tolkien’s threatening Southrons and Easterling hordes, correspond nicely with “medieval Christendom’s perceived enemies to the south and east” (Sinex 175). It may also be worth noting that the forest trolls who join the Horde in *WCII* live southeast of their elven adversaries.

WCIII also mirrors our Euro-centric culture in a surprisingly specific way. Faced with an imperative to expand Azeroth again, the game’s designers created a massive new continent across a wide ocean to the west. This “American” counterpart continent, Kalimdor, is home to the night elves and the nomadic tauren, who both share an affinity to nature consistent with Amerindian stereotypes. In keeping with their “noble savage” role and turn to shamanism, the orcs also relocate to Kalimdor and even bring with them a tribe of trolls they encountered during their flight from the “Eastern Kingdoms.” This relocation places all of the Horde’s non-Western races³⁹ away from the “proper” domain of the Western-centered Alliance and fixes what would

³⁹ The Forsaken are undead humans and therefore share many (if occasionally perverted) cultural similarities to their living “brethren,” while the blood elves once supported the Alliance and are culturally Occidental.

at *WoW*'s launch be the Alliance's only non-White race on a different continent. That is, both Horde and Alliance see their less-human members located away from Azeroth's Europe-like continent. It seems hardly an accident that *WoW* consistently maintains this pattern: the worgen homeland is in the Eastern Kingdoms, but the blue-skinned draenei join the night elves in Kalimdor. *Cataclysm*'s goblins likewise settle there, near the orcs, when they join the Horde. Azeroth therefore reflects our own Euro-centrism by privileging its Europe analogue and removing difference to a "new" continent to the west.

Considerations of fictional cartography aside, Schwartz expands the idea of virtual geography to include cultural elements: "One type of representation of geographical ideas is through equating fantasy cultures to real-life cultures, to real-life cultural traditions such as 'Eastern' or 'Western'" (Schwartz 318). This approach to looking at "geography" also reinforces *WoW*'s established binaries and goes along with already established observations. The geography of Azeroth already codes several races as ethnic, and other cultural elements reinforce this message. Schwartz has a lengthy explanation of how counterpart cultures established through rhetorical symbols influence participant perceptions of *WoW*:

To examine it further, in *World of Warcraft*, the more Western, or possibly First World, Alliance fights the more non-Western, or Third World, Horde. Although both cultures are presented more or less equally, with equal resources and impressive capital cities, many players insist that the Alliance are the "good guys," and it's easy to see why: One look at the Alliance's bald eagle gryphon mounts is enough to show that the Alliance are "us" in this war. With the fantasy trappings of this game, designers mask a world infused with modern constructions and messages as a fantastic world, influencing the way players take in these constructions and messages. Perhaps the representation of the Alliance as owning a large library is a reflection of the idea of Western learning, for instance. (319)

Although not *every* race is directly correspondent with a real-world culture or ethnicity,⁴⁰ these counterpart cultures are common throughout *WoW*. Higgin highlights the Horde races in particular as “as appropriating various forms of ethnicity or blackness” (9).

Again, trolls adopt cultural cues that mark them as non-White, though in this case they are coded as almost explicitly Black, with a subcurrent of indigenous American culture. Blizzard’s “Troll” web page assigns racial abilities that reflect Black culture. Their “Da Voodoo Shuffle” ability, which makes movement-impairing abilities less effective on trolls, simultaneously speaks to three Black stereotypes. It establishes a troll voice that speaks in a degenerate form of English, similar to Ebonics; it highlights trolls’ physicality and rhythm, seen most especially in Black athletic and dance stereotypes; and it reveals the troll religion—voodoo—named directly after the real-world Afro-Caribbean practices. Their “Mohawk” hairstyles and use of less advanced weapons, such as spears and bows, in a world in which firearms are common, also mark them as a lesser culture.

Of all of Azeroth’s counterpart cultures, the tauren are perhaps the most blatant: along with their geographical separation in Azeroth’s version of the “New World,” nearly everything about the culture is created from Amerindian cultural markers. Monson catalogues a long list of indicators that create this cohesive portrayal:

As natural warrior herbalists, the Tauren are immersed in a culture that looks distinctly Native American. [...] NPCs have names such as Stonehoof, Cloudseer, Windhawk, and Mistrunner. Cities [...] are filled with colorfully painted totem poles, dream catchers, stretched animal skins, canoes, kilns, hand-woven baskets, ceremonial drums, and tapestries. (63)

⁴⁰ For example, Monson excepts draenei and night elves from being counterpart cultures in her piece (62). I would tentatively question whether this exception extends also to orcs and Forsaken.

The tauren then represent the idea of a mythical comprehensive Amerindian culture, and as such it seems impossible that they can escape the implications of savagery and power imbalance such a portrayal conveys.

If we can examine cultural symbols as geographic markers, then the “lived-in” space and attendant cultural markers of *WoW*’s races should also be studied for racializations. Blizzard’s “Game Guide” depicts the wide racial variety seen in architecture and homelands. Already dehumanized physically, the trolls may also be the most explicitly racialized and primitive group when it comes to their living space. On the “Troll” web page, they are shown to be primitive, crude, and unskilled architecturally. Sen’jin Village is a “crude settlement,” and Darkspear Isle is described as a “network of huts and bridges” yet “a symbol of the tribe’s glory.” The two pictures of troll architecture display relatively simple, fragile buildings constructed of what seems to be wood, straw, bone, and rope, not more advanced or robust materials such as iron or brick.⁴¹ By contrast, the orcs, who have lived in Durotar no longer than their troll allies, have built and refurbished their capital of Orgrimmar into a heavily fortified, walled city. The only defense, perhaps, could be the trolls’ temporary exile at Zalazane’s hands, if the web page’s text did not make it clear that this betrayal came only a short time after their initial relocation, giving the trolls plenty of time to make more out of their living space.

Sinex traces the perspective “that climate also shapes the characteristic behavior of races” as far back as ancient Greece (179). She quotes Ptolemy of Alexandria, who considered Ethiopians savage because the sun afflicted them and made them dark (179). The troll race also evokes a similar image, drawing on the European perception of Africa as the “Dark Continent.” The jungles of Africa compare easily to the remote jungle island initially inhabited by the

⁴¹ Compare the perceived primitiveness of Amerindian architecture with European standards.

Darkspears.⁴² Savagery and heat are again connected in the trolls' new home in the Echo Isles, which is "tropical" and has "vibrant jungles." The islands' wildlife likewise shows the area to be primitive and untamed, full of "raptors, tigers, and other dangerous predators." The presence of living dinosaurs is undeniably archaic, but it may conform to our world in another specific similarity. Real-life stories of saurian creatures living in the remote jungles of Africa persist to this day and have been recently investigated with some seriousness.⁴³ Despite a history of exile, it seems that the trolls cannot escape their geographic roots; wherever they go, their homeland conforms to the dark, mysterious jungles that have sheltered Azeroth's troll tribes for centuries.

The tauren have similarly racialized depictions from their corresponding web page. The tauren's nomadic history "hunting the great kodo beasts" across the Barrens keeps with their cultural correspondence and mirrors the Plains Indian tribes following buffalo herds. In another similarity with Plains Indians, the tauren settled because their previous lifestyle was no longer

⁴² In fact this island was their *second* jungle home. The Darkspear tribe originally lived in the jungles of Stranglethorn Vale near other troll tribes, which often war with each other and practice cannibalism.

⁴³ See, for example this planned expedition that was funded by Kickstarter, at <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/817864170/new-species-expedition-to-congo?ref=live>; *The Huffington Post* wrote an article about this group's attempt to solicit funding.

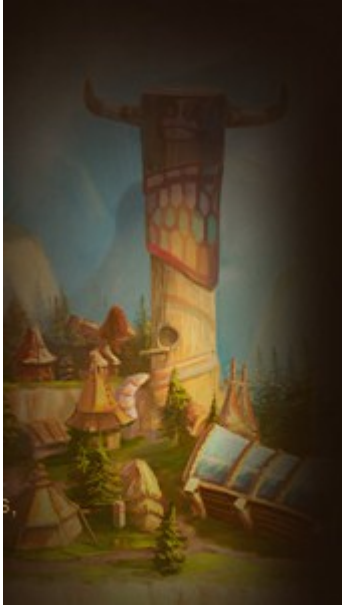


Figure 4.3 Tauren Living Space

tenable: “the centaur wiped out the area’s wild game, threatening starvation for the beleaguered tauren” (“Tauren”). But they still inhabit a plains setting, settling in the “grasslands” and “serene plains” of Mulgore. As Monson summarizes, “Taurens [sic] occupy the mesas and plains of Azeroth” and have cities “with names like Thunder Bluff, Bloodhoof Village, and Freewind Post” (63).

The tauren’s current living space and architecture is also coded in a racialized way, as Figure 4.3 shows. A large totem rises in the background above a tauren village. Many of their dwellings are circular tents resembling teepees or long wooden buildings resembling longhouses (Monson 63). These structures may imply that the tauren do not have a history of settled life and that they are either reluctant to give up their nomadic past or ready to resume it if necessary. What is not apparent from these images or the text is the large elevators that raise visitors hundreds of feet to the mesas on which Thunder Bluff is built. That is, the tauren are capable of advanced engineering, but Blizzard does not consider that an essential part of tauren culture, choosing instead to portray them as a primitive people unused to the ways of civilization.

Color

According to Sinex, even such ancient thinkers as Aristotle and Pliny the Elder thought that climate caused the dark skin of African peoples (179). And it cannot simply be said that blackness was thought of as a characteristic of these people; medieval analysts considered dark complexions indicative of defective character and frequently presented foreigners as black (Sinex 178, 181-2). Although Sinex’s analysis of Tolkien’s world shows that he uses color in a

more complex manner than medieval writers, color is an important consideration in visual media. Higgin treats the term “blackness” more broadly in his video game analyses: “blackness as *not White* in the specific circumstances of the game world and as informed by culture and politics” (5). This expanded idea of “blackness,” or “color,” for a more appropriate term, seems more suitable for examining a fictional realm such as the *Warcraft* universe in which black and dark brown skin colors are mostly absent. The portrayal of color can be exceptionally strong in visual media, which certainly include video games. Phil Chidester notes, “if whiteness consistently affirms and reinforces its claim to racial centrality and superiority in part through a distinctly visual discourse, then the absence of such symbolic markers might also communicate distinct meanings, particularly in moments when these symbols are expected” (159).

Nearly all of the major human characters of Blizzard’s *Warcraft* series share one obviously apparent trait: their skin color. Higgin argues that someone “can play World of Warcraft and be dazzled by the rather commonplace cultural borrowing or ethnic mash-ups of the fantastical races and then suddenly recognize the more arresting situation of pervasive whiteness” (10). This strategic choice in building a fantasy world contributes to the erasure of race in *WoW* and portrays “Whiteness” as the default nature of humanity. Jing Yin makes a similar note in her analysis of the film *The Joy Luck Club*, “The claim of universality is essentially problematic in that rather than representing a full range of human beings, it in fact projects or naturalizes particular groups [...] as ‘human and universal,’ while it designates others as less human” (150). And Whiteness as a skin color and racial marker stays predominant within the Alliance: of six Alliance races, the four that live in the Eastern Kingdoms are White. Only the blue- or purple-skinned night elves kept mostly to their forests in Kalimdor until they were joined by the blue-skinned draenei crash-landing on a series of islands north of their domain.

The Horde, on the other hand, abounds with racial color. Orcs are largely green-skinned, but players can select from a range of tones that includes a bluish green to a tanned yellow. Some other orcs are dark brown, some are vibrant red, and in *Cataclysm* some have dark gray skin. The trolls and goblins share many of the same hues as their orcish allies; playable trolls are blue or green while goblins range from green to a yellowish brown. Tauren can choose to be white, but this appearance comes from the hair that covers their bovine bodies, not necessarily their underlying skin tone. They have a wide variety of hair patterns to choose that have various combinations of brown, black, and white. Forsaken skin, in what places it remains, is mostly a corpse-like gray, but such characters can have traces of blue, red, green, or purple around their elbows and face. The Horde's blood elves are the most ethnically "White," but they have options for a reddish tint to their skin that makes them darker than their pale high elf counterparts who remain in the Alliance.

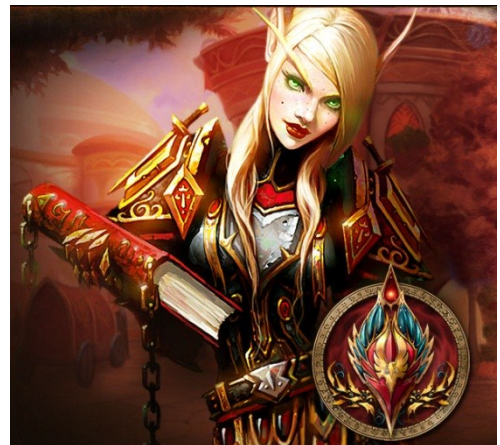


Figure 4.4 Blood Elf

The Alliance, then, is thoroughly White, and the Horde is Colored. However, Sinex also identifies the additional colors red and yellow as "colors of infamy" that mark the servants of Tolkien's dark lord Sauron and that functioned as medieval pejorative markers (185). She posits an association of these two colors with fire and blood to explain their use (185). Interestingly for a *WoW* analysis, the not-quite Colored blood elves take specifically these two colors as primary ones. As "blood" elves, they predictably dress in red to remember their fallen people, but yellow also features strongly. Their "Blood Elf" web page, as shown in Figure 4.4, shows an elven woman with blonde hair wearing red-and-gold armor that identifies her as a paladin or in blood elf terms a "blood knight." The "Icon of Silvermoon" just below her

features a stylized red-and-gold phoenix holding a red blood drop and flanked by golden branches. The only contrasting colors for the female paladin and the icon are her green eyes and the green wings of the phoenix, but within the context of *WoW* green is often a symbol of demonic corruption.⁴⁴

The Horde as a whole uses red and black as two of its primary colors. In contrast to the Alliance, the Horde forces are represented with red in battlegrounds, at flight paths, and in other similar circumstances. The primary Horde symbol is an orcish rune usually portrayed as a black design on a red banner, shown in Figure 4.5. During *WCII*, the primary orc clan, the Blackrock, used red for their color, and the Warsong Clan that formed the core of *WCIII*'s Horde used red as well. Emblems for individual races also feature red in some degree: the orcs' Icon of Battle (Figure 4.6) has blood-stained axes, the tauren have a red hoofprint in the middle of their Icon of the Earthmother (Figure 4.7), and trolls put red voodoo masks in their Icon of Shadows (Figure 4.8).



Figure 4.5 Horde Banner



Figure 4.6 Icon of Battle



Figure 4.7 Icon of the Earthmother



Figure 4.8 Icon of Shadows

⁴⁴ The blood elves' green eyes are in fact symbolic of how they use "fel" (demonic) magic to drain creatures of magical energy, and the orcs' green skin was caused by their contact with and past service to powerful demons.



Figure 4.9 Gryphon

Black appears sparingly aside from the main Horde symbol, but the Forsaken use a range of dark colors in their architecture and apparel. Sinex's other color, yellow, appears infrequently among the Horde's Kalimdor cultures but shows up in the yellow hair, architecture, and apparel of the blood elves and the unearthly yellow eyes of the Forsaken. Green might be another suitable "color of infamy" in *WoW* terms, given its association with the blood elves and the skin tones of many Horde races. The Alliance, meanwhile, uses mainly blue as its color in battlegrounds and other such settings. The people of Stormwind have been portrayed as favoring this color since *WCII*, which explains its popularity in the current Alliance. White can also be seen in some locations, in the white eagle heads of the Alliance's iconic gryphons (Figure 4.9 above), and, in a racialized sense, the skin tones of several Alliance races. Lordaeron, the other major human kingdom of *WCII*, used white, which is also frequently seen on the armor or apparel of human characters and extensively in the former city of Theramore. These colors seem to code the Alliance as symbolic of American power or culture, and this implication is reinforced in other ways. The human inhabitants of Stormwind have unaffected American accents and generally reflect White norms in their hairstyles, names, and dress. The ostensibly gender-equal society depicted in *WoW*⁴⁵ speaks to democratic goals and values. Schwartz references the ubiquitous gryphons, used as mounts by the humans, dwarves, and gnomes of the Alliance (319). Even the very name "the Alliance" implies a particular democratic ideal: groups of different people agreeing to work together for a common purpose.

⁴⁵ That is, men and women in Azeroth have identical attributes other than their appearance and can be members of any "class" (a game construction roughly equivalent to profession). This is a major reason that the gender binary is less salient for this analysis. In ludic terms, there is no real difference in a male or female character.

Only a couple of other colors stand out in the Alliance. The night elves and draenei feature purple in not just their skin tones but also their wildly divergent styles of architecture. The color yellow shows up on the primary Alliance banners, which have a gold lion head against a blue background as seen in Figure 4.10. The gold lion represents the kingdom of Stormwind, and so the color yellow seems less pejorative within *WoW* when compared to its medieval connotations.

Research on *WoW* highlights in many ways how much the game is an artifact of its genre. Where Tolkien used particular strategies of opposing binaries, geographical considerations, and color-coding to influence the depictions of his fictional cultures, *Warcraft* often does the same. The literally Light-worshipping members of the Alliance inhabit a European analogue and wear “virtuous” colors in contrast to the savage, literally Colored Horde races. The “Othering” attitudes seen in ancient Greece, Rome, and medieval age are still quite present in today’s Western world.

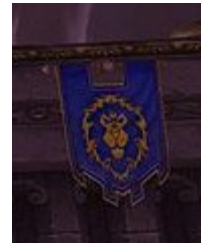


Figure 4.10
Alliance Banner

The world of *Warcraft* is not all bad, however. Along with the racialized setting comes an understanding, a kind of equivalency at work in portraying the Horde and the Alliance as political counterparts with similar strength. Although much of *Cataclysm* showed the darker side of the Horde as aggressors, the Alliance has its share of sins as well. There *are* subversions that show the Horde to be more than primitive savages, such as Thunder Bluff’s elevators and the trolls’ skill with arcane magic. Even the Horde’s exceedingly unintelligent ogres built functional battleships during *WCII*. The problem is that these instances are buried within the game and absent from the discourse provided by Blizzard to draw in audiences. Blizzard makes it clear that both factions have good people in them and cooperation is important for the world’s sake, but

they have so far proven inattentive to the racialized implications provided by their “Othering” strategies within the world of *Warcraft*.

Strategies for Intercultural Conflicts

As established, *WoW* portrays a world in which cultures remain in almost constant conflict. This fictional world has been created using rhetorical techniques well-established in the real world. The “Othering” strategies of *WoW*'s ethnocultural groups reflect real-world prejudices and portray these conflicts rather realistically. It would be easy to stop the investigation here, where previous research has: we could mark the text as racially charged and hope to bring its portrayals to players' attentions. However, merely noting these tendencies, as Monson, Higgin, and others have done, does the rhetorical artifact a disservice. Critical rhetoric demands better investigation and an evaluation of the discourse for better or worse. In the case of *WoW*, its realistic rhetorical strategies mean that the game can serve as a model for real-world conflicts, and *WoW* in fact displays the effectiveness of certain rhetorical strategies in handling intercultural conflicts. Some of these arguments are identical to points made by other rhetorical scholars, and this study identifies three arguments made by *WoW* that have also been represented among current scholarship.

First, *WoW* argues for the ability of people to effect change in the world and to end their cultural conflicts, an attitude shared at least implicitly by most critical scholars. The critical impulse points out power imbalances with the intent of changing or influencing them. As McKerrow says:

In practice, a critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power. The aim is to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society—what possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to effect social change. (91)

The critical approach argues that these power structures are not the only way in which we can organize our world. Similarly, *WoW* does not see the major Horde-Alliance conflict as inevitable and necessary, despite its central focus. Although the inhabitants of Azeroth fight with each other, *WoW* still holds out examples of intercultural cooperation between the Alliance and Horde and looks forward to a future in which this major conflict is no more.⁴⁶

Second, *WoW* rejects the scapegoating process. Scapegoating is a common practice, and scholars such as Brian L. Ott and Eric Aoki have provided an overview of how scapegoating works as a rhetorical strategy by placing blame on a particular person or small group. However, scapegoating has major shortcomings when it comes to changing societies (Ott and Aoki 281). The strategy thus seems unsuitable for a critical approach, and *WoW* seems to confirm that. The conflicts of *WoW*, while strongly influenced by particular leaders, resist such an easy solution. Rather, the Alliance and Horde have deep-seated cultural issues that must be addressed on a widespread basis if their conflict is to be resolved. Likely this strategy permits players to sympathize with whichever side they choose, but it has the benefit of resisting the more obvious moralizing of *WoW*'s cultural representations. The solution to the Alliance-Horde war lies not in removing particular leaders from power, even if some have made the war worse, but in educating their constituents and teaching them how to live in harmony on Azeroth.

Third and finally, *WoW* encourages engagement by native or indigenous cultures as the preferred solution for handling cross-cultural threats. Rhetorical scholars have made similar arguments. In his essay "Indigenous Knowledge in the Decolonial Era," Michael G. Doxtater criticizes previous scholarship for overlooking indigenous peoples and their methods of knowing. Instead, Doxtater supports "reengaging Indigenous knowledge with a practiced culture

⁴⁶ What this would mean for *WoW* as a game is unclear. It may be that ending this conflict would signal the end of *WoW* altogether, perhaps returning to the intellectual property's roots to make another RTS game. Such an idea is mere speculation, of course.

rather than merely a performative culture” (629). This approach holds benefits for a number of fields: “From here on we emancipate Indigenous knowledge of governance, sovereignty, agriculture, architecture, mathematics, astronomy, communications, medicine, and healing” (Doxtater 629). Jason Black likewise argues for involving American Indians more in public discourse, especially about issues involving their heritage (32-3).

MoP illustrates this approach most clearly, given its introduction of a new and densely populated continent previously undiscovered by the Alliance and the Horde. When the two factions go to colonize this new world, their attempts to incorporate the natives within their factions end in disaster and unleash a powerful mutual threat. This subjugating approach is not completely abandoned, but subsequent clashes between the Alliance and the Horde and their Pandarian proxies fare little better. *MoP* offers an alternative narrative, however. When the Alliance and Horde heroes in Pandaria take on a more subordinate role to the native cultures, problems seem better solved. *MoP* therefore goes a step farther: not only should natives be involved, but they should also be placed in leadership positions because they are better equipped to handle problems peculiar to their homeland. While perhaps an idealistic view, the clear parallels would hopefully cause players to have a greater awareness of cross-cultural differences and a desire to consider the input of these other cultures in real-world situations.

Cultural Cooperation

Although *WoW* seems focused on the conflict between the Alliance and Horde, the narrative has numerous instances of cross-cultural cooperation. *WCIII*, for instance, sees these factions partner against the threat of the demonic Burning Legion and the undead Scourge, and nearly every incarnation of *WoW* has similar collaboration. Patch 1.7 had heroes from both factions uniting under the leadership of the Zandalari trolls to defeat the trolls of Zul’Gurub,

while Patch 1.9 saw the rise of an ancient insectoid kingdom that was only stopped by a combined offensive called the “Might of Kalimdor.” The Scourge also attacked in Patch 1.11, so both factions worked with the Argent Dawn to stop them. *BC* featured the return of the Burning Legion, pushing Alliance and Horde to work together for most of the expansion, while the expansion closed with the draenei restoring the blood elves’ magical Sunwell. Despite the animosity that arose during *WotLK*, the Alliance and Horde fought the Scourge together in several locations. Representatives from both factions also cooperated to send the Old God Yogg-Saron back into slumber. Even during *Cataclysm*, when open war returned to Azeroth, the insane dragon Deathwing was stopped by heroes from both sides under the leadership of the Dragon Aspects and the ex-Warchief Thrall. Only in *MoP* does it become hard to think of instances of cross-faction cooperation. The best example is likely when the Prince of Stormwind and the tauren Sunwalker Dezco converse at the Temple of the White Tiger.

This cultural cooperation, surprisingly enough, seems crucial to the eventual story of *WoW*. One quest line in *Cataclysm* alludes to a final confrontation that will seemingly see cooperation from all the mortal races of Azeroth. During the quest “Remember the Light,” the draenei prophet Velen comes to visit a dying draenei and perform his last rites. While there, he makes the following prophecy: “Even now, the true battle between the forces of Light and Darkness approaches. We will all be called to join, and in the face of this conflict, all mortal suffering will be meaningless” (*Cataclysm*). While unclear, Velen’s words seem to indicate that this battle will include more than just his own people.

This prophecy, however ambiguous, was revisited in one of Blizzard’s short stories about the *Warcraft* universe. In “Velen: Prophet’s Lesson,” the draenei gets another vision of the coming battle that is even more explicit than his previous prediction:

Whether it was on another world or Azeroth, Velen couldn't quite tell. And suddenly the dark sky above erupted with the combined chivalry of Azeroth's races. The blood elves, orcs, trolls, tauren, and even the accursed undead and scheming goblins rode flying mounts of every sort and description. [...] Beside the legions of the Horde, the ancient night elves charged with humans, dwarves, and gnomes, whose ancestors formed the original Alliance, and the shape-changing worgen were united with them. Velen's own draenei bolstered the army, their ranks adorned in otherworldly metals and bearing crystalline maces and swords. (Hutcheson 9)

While the enemy they face is left uncertain, being referred to only as a terrible "shadow" (Hutcheson 9), the outcome is clear: the Alliance and Horde can eventually unite. Velen's visions may not always come true—one future he had foreseen is called a "a possibility among many" (Hutcheson 7). But that he sees a future in which they do unite means that it *can* happen. As *WoW* and its expansions have shown, in the face of world-ending threats the two groups usually put aside their differences and work for the good of Azeroth.

Rebuttal of Scapegoating

Another lesson from *WoW* concerns the game's rejection of the rhetorical strategy of scapegoating. A great deal of rhetorical work has examined the function and process of scapegoating within media. In its usually conceptualized form,⁴⁷ scapegoating involves projecting mistakes or transgressions onto others and holding them solely responsible, rather than critiquing deeper social or institutional factors. Tom Douglas defines a scapegoat simply as

⁴⁷ Kenneth Burke, in his *Attitudes Toward History*, distinguishes between two scapegoating processes—what he terms "factional" and "universal" tragedy (188-9, note). As Desilet and Appel describe the difference:

Both instances of conflict, the factional and the universal, involve scapegoating as the factional identification and purging of pollution (evil). But in the universal case the faction of evil resides in an inner part of the self rather than entirely in an outward other. By revealing the pollution to be inside the main character or characters, universal tragedy generates within the audience (through identification with the characters) a vision of self and other that triggers the experience of what Burke calls 'humble irony'. (349)

This distinction is certainly valid, but they fail to distinguish another necessary difference: between *intra*-group scapegoating (blame of a group member in order to ease transgressions and alleviate guilt) and *inter*-group scapegoating (blame of another group or individual to provide an enemy against which the group can rally). As Chris Carter in *Kenneth Burke and the Scapegoat Process* puts it, "Everywhere we turn groups demonize each other, each making the other the culprit for its own sense of insecurity, sometimes literally driving the other to its grave" (133).

“a person standing-in for others in order to accept blame and responsibility for some occurrence”

(5). Gregory Desilet and Edward C. Appel describe the process of scapegoating as follows:

This error believes in the possibility of a type of certainty—a fanatical clarity of mind and emotion that frees judgment to assign evil to others to the point of consigning them to inhuman or subhuman status. Scapegoating, as erroneous projection, heaps error on error, mistake on mistakenness and leads to the intolerable error of victimage scapegoating—the slaying of others. (351)

The scapegoat is then purged from the group because of the guilt or blame placed on him. He is no longer part of the group because of this transgressive status and must be purged from the group.

Scapegoats are blamed in order to alleviate a group’s collective guilt by offering the scapegoat as a kind of atonement.⁴⁸ When it comes to such a scapegoat, no consideration is given to group problems that could account for the transgressions placed onto the scapegoat. The transgressors find themselves rejected as group members by their previous social groups; their mistakes are characterized as individual flaws and failures unrelated to their identity as group members. By focusing on one person or set of persons, a group can deflect blame from systemic problems and focus them only onto the scapegoated individual(s). This “projection of inner pollution onto others” (Desilet and Appel 351) absolves the larger group from blame because it uses individual behavior as an explanation. Groups can feel better about themselves because they do not have to consider themselves complicit in the transgressions committed. Scapegoating in any form also turns a critical eye away from group practices that potentially contribute to negative behavior. This lack of examination means not only that change is unlikely but that it will be considered unnecessary by the dominant group.

⁴⁸ I focus here on the process of intra-group scapegoating.

Ott and Aoki agree with this assessment, arguing that scapegoating situates problems within Burke's tragic frame and removes an impetus for change: "Our analysis of the Matthew Shepard story⁴⁹ suggests that it was framed primarily in tragic terms, in which the public, through the scapegoat mechanism, cleansed itself of the guilt associated with prejudice" (496). This framing, they argue, lets society preserve itself and its flaws: "The shortcoming of tragic framing is that it brings about symbolic resolution without turning the event into a lesson for those involved. [...] On the contrary, this mode aggressively perpetuates the status quo" (496). Instead, they turn to Burke's comic frame as an alternative. This frame has nothing to do with finding humor: "it is about maximum consciousness" (497). The comic frame provides an opportunity for groups to learn from the mistakes of their members and understand other positions. This frame by extension teaches the audience about these mistakes so that errors can be corrected, not merely punished (497).

Douglas refers to scapegoating as a common rhetorical tactic—"a ubiquitous occurrence in groups of all sizes" (5). As Chris Carter says in his book *Kenneth Burke and the Scapegoat Process*, "[O]ur lives in groups, especially in large groups, are cast as a drama of surrogate victimage" (134). It seems likely, then, that a virtual environment featuring such intercultural conflict as *WoW* could scapegoat certain characters to excuse factional responsibility for the Alliance-Horde conflict. To a limited extent, this tactic does appear. *WotLK* brought King Varian Wrynn back to the Alliance, and his consistent enmity toward the Horde creates an atmosphere of hostility between the two factions. *WotLK* also introduced the orc, Garrosh Hellscream, as Varian's foil who believed in Horde superiority. *Cataclysm* saw Garrosh promoted to Warchief, giving him supreme authority over his faction and making him a full-fledged counterpart to

⁴⁹ The story Ott and Aoki mention involved media coverage of the violent death of Matthew Shepard, a young white gay male brutally murdered, in 1998, by two men who claimed he made advances toward them.

Varian. At Garrosh's urging in *Cataclysm*, the Horde attacked Alliance territories throughout Azeroth.

WotLK also brought out the undead Forsaken's warmongering side, who have two leaders that could be blamed for increased conflict. Grand Apothecary Putress openly attacked not only the Lich King's undead armies but also the Alliance and his nominal Horde allies. His betrayal sparked a counterattack from the Alliance and the Horde in the quest "The Battle for the Undercity," and King Varian declares open war on the Horde when he finds out about the lethal experiments the Forsaken performed on Alliance prisoners:

Look around you, brothers and sisters. Open your eyes! Look at what they have done to our kingdom!⁵⁰ How much longer will we allow these savages free reign in our world? I have seen the Horde's world. I have been inside their cities. Inside their minds [...] I know what evil lies in the hearts of orcs. (*WotLK*)

Although specifically the *Forsaken* ruined their home and used prisoners to develop a poison that turns the living and undead alike into a green sludge, Varian still holds the entire Horde responsible for their actions and thus calls for open war: "Peace? Useless... it's gotten us nowhere. We have lost some of our greatest heroes to 'peace.' Let us see what battle brings" (*WotLK*: "The Battle for the Undercity"). *Cataclysm* continues this thread, as the Forsaken Queen Sylvanas Windrunner and her followers, faced with pressure from Garrosh, wage war against Gilneas, Dalaran, and other Alliance territories near their kingdom. They continue the use of their special "Blight," reducing the town of Southshore to a poisoned, sludge-covered ruin, and they convert many former Alliance citizens into Horde-aligned undead.

Despite these examples, *Warcraft* texts make it clear that the conflict is rooted in factional disputes and affiliations. To work as scapegoats, these characters would need to bear

⁵⁰ The Forsaken inhabit what is left of the human kingdom of Lordaeron, but they have rendered it unsuitable for living creatures. For example, the Undercity, built in the sewers beneath the ruins of Lordaeron's former capital, overflows with bright green waste, and the land nearby is blighted and poisoned.

almost exclusive blame for these conflicts, but the Alliance and Horde were already fighting each other. The situation in *WoW* before Varian's rejection of peace at the Undercity was not considerably peaceful. The Forsaken had begun their horrible experiments in the original *WoW*, enlisting Horde adventurers to gather plague ingredients in a series of quests aptly titled "A New Plague." Similarly, in *WoW*'s Patch 1.5, Garrosh's own Warsong Clan began fighting the Alliance's night elves in Warsong Gulch, while a group of Forsaken called the Defilers would battle humans of the Alliance in Arathi Basin in Patch 1.7, long before Varian would return to lead his people. RPG material likewise acknowledges the fighting, advocates peace, and still argues against an easy solution or scapegoat. For instance, the dwarf Brann Bronzebeard decries the Alliance-Horde conflict but offers no real solution to the problem: "There's no good reason why the Horde should be a threat to us [the Alliance] at all. The overwhelming majority of the problems with the Horde are of our making—but all that said, we still have to deal with them" (*APG* 175). He admits at almost the same time, however, that the Horde has a share of the blame as well: "As much as I preach peace with the Horde, they do have their bad apples, and those should be the first ones we break" (*APG* 175).

Even the most sensible and peace-loving *Warcraft* characters cannot escape this conflict. The recent *Tides of War* novel portrays the intensifying war from the perspectives of Alliance and Horde characters who would be considered moderates relative to Varian and Garrosh, yet they wage war with seemingly little hesitation. Tauren chieftain Baine Bloodhoof, friend to Varian's son Prince Anduin, leads his people to battle the Alliance despite his lack of hatred for them. Despite his regret over killing Alliance soldiers, he nevertheless joins an attack against the Alliance citadel of Northwatch Hold personally (*Golden* 87). Baine even admits that the Alliance attack on Camp Taurajo was justified (*Golden* 82). Troll chieftain Vol'jin, despite openly

despising Garrosh, accompanies Baine and slaughters Alliance soldiers seemingly without misgiving. Long-time Alliance leader Jaina Proudmoore, who had advocated and even maintained a truce with the Horde for several in-universe years, sees her city destroyed and most of her subjects killed. After this massacre, she renounces her peaceful ways and threatens to destroy the orcs' capital city of Orgrimmar, stopped only when former Warchief Thrall and the blue dragon Kalecgos convince her to back down (Golden 295).

When we consider other kinds of texts and real-world situations, *Warcraft* materials, perhaps uniquely, portray both sides of the story and encourage players to understand *both* factions' motivations in a manner consistent with Burke's comic frame. Although surface-level readings paint the Alliance as good and the Horde as evil, the situation as experienced in *WoW* is much more complicated than that, as is our own reality. Highlighting this dual perspective resists the tendency toward scapegoating by portraying the grievances and justifications of both sides and points its audience toward Burke's ideals about understanding:

Human enlightenment can go no further than in picturing people not as *vicious*, but as *mistaken*. When you add that people are *necessarily* mistaken, that all people are exposed to situations in which they must act as fools, that every insight contains its own special kind of blindness, you complete the comic circle, returning again to the lesson of humility that underlies great tragedy. (41)

Instead of expelling group representatives and assigning blame, Burke argues that conflict situations should create teaching opportunities and an awareness of our own flaws, whether as individuals or as a group.

WoW uses its quests on both sides to give players a more nuanced view of conflict that resists easy scapegoating. *Cataclysm*'s storyline surrounding Camp Taurajo is a prime example. Despite being a civilian settlement, the village housed tauren hunters and other potential military personnel and was looted and destroyed by Alliance forces. The Horde sees the attack as an

unjustified massacre, and quest-givers let you see the last moments of certain dead characters who sacrificed themselves for their allies. Stirred by this sympathy and a desire for vengeance against the Alliance, the Horde player eventually ambushes and kills the commander responsible during the quest entitled “The Butcher of Taurajo.” The Horde is able to scapegoat General John Hawthorne and kill him, but there is no hint that killing him accomplishes anything more than vengeance. Hawthorne’s wife Clarice says after her husband’s death, “John and I had always talked about settling down when the conflict subsided. I don’t think the fighting will ever stop. Do you?” (*Cataclysm*).

The Alliance perspective on Taurajo is significantly different than what the Horde sees. Because of its role in equipping Horde adventurers, Hawthorne needed to destroy the camp, and he acted to limit Horde suffering as much as possible. Although his soldiers surrounded Taurajo, he left a gap within the ring for civilians to escape, but the gap led straight to hostile quillboar and most of the Horde survivors died at their hands. Looting was done by Alliance deserters and conscripted criminals against Hawthorne’s orders, and he instructs Alliance players to execute the looters. Hawthorne himself tries to justify his actions in destroying Taurajo:

There are some, even in Alliance High Command, who argued that I let an opportunity slip away. That I should’ve taken hostages. But I don’t see the value in those sort of terror-tactics. [...] I want this war to end someday. It won’t ever stop if we butcher or imprison civilians. I just pray that there are those on the other side who see things as I do. (*Cataclysm*)

Although some might find Hawthorne’s justifications weak, players likely have at least some sympathy for this point of view, especially given the contrast between Hawthorne and his successors.

Despite this sympathetic portrayal, *WoW* does not absolve General Hawthorne of responsibility for continuing this conflict. He seems uncomfortable with destroying Taurajo, and

as mentioned earlier he eventually pays for his actions with his life. Hawthorne is nevertheless complicit in the war; as the commanding officer for the attack, responsibility falls on him. However, Hawthorne is not the only Alliance leader involved in the war, and there is the suggestion that his death will only make things worse for both sides. Alliance leaders in fact plan to make a martyr, not a scapegoat, of the fallen general. According to Barton Trask of Fort Triumph, “Were he still alive to avenge himself, General Hawthorne would have no doubt ordered a retaliatory massacre of biblical⁵¹ proportions” (*Cataclysm*). Commander Roberts agrees. Making the situation even worse is Hawthorne’s replacement, who lost his son Marley in battle with the Horde. As seen in the quest “Reinforcements from Theramore,” the dwarven General Twinbraid takes over Fort Triumph, and his first quest after learning of his son’s death—“Kill ’em All!”—instructs Alliance players to take vengeance on the Horde goblins for their part in Marley’s death.⁵² Thus the cycle of hatred continues, with no one commander or faction to blame and seemingly no end to violence in sight. Every retaliation makes things worse and leads to more suffering, but as *WoW* argues, scapegoating a single person, as some of the Horde tries to do by blaming General Hawthorne, cannot remove the underlying factional problems that prop up the conflict. The Alliance likewise assigns him the responsibility for Taurajo but will continue to use his name to further their martial agenda. The Alliance and the Horde will never end their conflict unless change happens at a wide, factional level. Because players are not restricted to one side or the other, the nature of MMORPG narrative means that *players* are likely to be aware of both sides of the story and see both groups in a sympathetic light.

⁵¹ I leave the question of how Azeroth has the *Bible* for other scholars to consider.

⁵² Similarly to John Hawthorne, Marley dies as a part of the Horde’s vengeance for Taurajo; with help from a goblin infiltrator and Horde players, the tauren Gann Stonespire blows up the nearby dwarven fortress of Bael’dun and causes Marley’s flying machine to crash.

In this example, neither side has full knowledge of the situation and so each faction acts in hostility. However, major *Warcraft* characters understand both sides and yet persist in factional conflicts. For example, Baine knows the Alliance story associated with Taurajo, that Hawthorne attempted to minimize casualties and give Baine's people a chance to escape (Golden 82). These facts are mentioned matter-of-factly, implying that they are common knowledge at least to the Horde leadership. But for all of this understanding, Baine barely seems to consider relinquishing his role in perpetuating war. His regret at killing Alliance soldiers does little to keep him away from battle, and his moderate and supposedly peaceful personality argues against making him an intra-group scapegoat. That is, no one Horde leader or even group of leaders is responsible for continuing the war against the Alliance: the entire faction, because of its goals and ideology, is to blame. It is no different for the Alliance—an organization, it should be said, formed initially to defend its people against the Horde.

The lack of in-game resolution to this cycle seems narratively frustrating. How can a situation with no closure illustrate this comic frame and provide a learning opportunity for the groups involved? The answer is simple: in *WoW*, the learning opportunity falls to the *players*, not to characters such as Garrosh or Varian. By leaving these conflicts open, *WoW* encourages players to resolve the narrative for themselves by seeing the foolishness of such fighting and learning from the mistakes of these fictional characters. In fact, given that players hold allegiance to either the Alliance or Horde, they are themselves implicated in the cross-factional conflict. *WoW* leaves its players unable to scapegoat others because of their own involvement. In this way, the comic frame completes itself and casts *WoW* in the form of a morality tale for its participants.

Native Involvement

A final lesson from *WoW* concerns the involvement of native cultures in situations of conflict or outside threats. Rhetorical scholars have encouraged this type of cross-cultural interaction, and this approach can be seen as early as *WCIII*. When the orcs migrate to Kalimdor, they have no homeland of their own and little culture, having rejected their demonic worship and lived much of their lives in Alliance internment camps. When they meet the tauren, they find peaceful allies who welcome them to the continent and help them restore their shamanistic culture. The orcs likewise assist the tauren against their centaur enemies, and both races benefit from their alliance. Similarly, the night elves of Kalimdor lead the final battle against the Burning Legion as the mortal races fight to prevent Azeroth's destruction.

MoP emphasizes this lesson even more. Neither the Alliance nor Horde has any experience in dealing with this new continent, but both groups immediately establish themselves on its shores. In the Jade Forest, the first region *WoW* players encounter in *MoP*, the Alliance and Horde construct military bases and recruit Pandaria's inhabitants to their banners. After destroying a Horde base, the Alliance forces take shelter with the pandaren of Paw'don Village and make an alliance with the fish-like jinyu. The Horde do essentially the same, quartering at the pandaren Honeydew Village and choosing instead to recruit the monkey-like hozen. However, early quests make it clear that bringing war to Pandaria will end badly for the two factions. In the quest "The Fall of Ga'trul," the pandaren leader Taran Zhu warns the Alliance about their actions: "But we will not participate in this... genocidal... bloodbath of yours. Your conflict will have immense consequences here. Do NOT bring your war to these shores!" (*MoP*). Taran Zhu says the same to the Horde in the quest "The Darkness Within." Both sides have already seen the *sha*, manifestations of negative emotions, emerge during the initial fighting, but

neither side listens to the pandaren's warning. Near the end of the Jade Forest storyline, the Alliance and jinyu and the Horde and hozen march to war against each other. As the fighting erupts, the *Sha* of Doubt emerges. The massive creature destroys most of both armies, lays waste to the area, and takes control of the Temple of the Jade Serpent. As adventurers continue to explore Pandaria, they realize that their war has unleashed five other massive *Sha* that wreak havoc across the continent. The Alliance and the Horde's attempts at colonization do nothing but disrupt the land's harmony and leave only suffering in their wake.

In contrast to the colonialist approach, *MoP* shows the good that heroes can do by working with native groups. In the Jade Forest, Taran Zhu shows the ability to exorcise minor *sha* from their hosts, and he and his Shado-pan followers work to heal the hurts caused by the Alliance and the Horde. In Townlong Steppes, players work for the Shado-pan to defeat the *Sha* of Hatred and protect the pandaren from further invasions by the yak-like yaungol. In the Dread Wastes, the insectoid mantids have been stirred to invade the rest of Pandaria by the *Sha* of Fear. Players stop the attacks by working with a rebel mantid group, which wants to preserve what they can of their culture and stop the *Sha*'s influence on their Empress. In Kun-lai Summit, players can convince the August Celestials to open the gates to the Vale of Eternal Blossoms, providing refuge for those displaced by the recent warfare. Whenever players work for and with the native inhabitants of Pandaria in *MoP*, the pattern shown is one of healing, reparation, and progress. While this may oversimplify the problems subjugated cultures face, rhetoricians seem to see this approach as, at least, the best one available to us. In a similar fashion, *WoW* argues that native cultures are an inextricable part of their homeland and that they know best how to solve the problems they face.

CHAPTER 5

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

WoW and by extension other MMORPGs hold a great deal of potential for teaching players new strategies not limited to the rhetorical emphasis of this study. For example, sociology scholar Zek Valkyrie suggests that MMORPGs permit players to embrace a broadened idea of sexuality. Researchers Nic Crowe and Simon Bradford argue that participation in these games can be liberating, giving players an increased sense of agency and motivation. Digital rhetorician Elizabeth Losh examines *WoW* for how violence is justified and perpetuated. These more subversive studies show that *WoW* and games like it hold potential for many interpretations and performances. However, this study shows that the game's core narrative has a lot of potential that has only been cursorily studied. Similarly, this study is not meant to be an exhaustive look at *WoW* and its related media, and some possible future directions for scholarship are noted below.

The explosion of digital entertainment media means that future directions for similar research seem almost unlimited. *WoW* is currently the most popular MMORPG and one of the most notable examples of the fantasy genre in gaming. However, this provokes a question: is *WoW* representative of either its gameplay or setting genres? Does it use the same strategies as the similar *Dungeons & Dragons Online*, which through its *D&D* connection is grounded even more firmly in the fantasy genre's history? How does *WoW* compare to its predecessors in *Everquest*? Do non-MMORPG fantasy games use these same strategies? Given Tolkien's

influence on the fantasy genre as a whole, these questions could be almost certainly be answered in the affirmative. However, notable subversions may exist, and we could analyze more precisely how typical *WoW* really is.

Using a different setting may also change the rhetorical strategies that emphasize difference and the lessons that can be learned from a fictional world. Many MMORPGs include sci-fi, superhero, or present-day contemporary elements. Do these games have pervasive cyber-colonial representations? Does a game such as *Star Wars: The Old Republic* use the same strategies and tropes found in *WoW*? How does the superhero RPG *Champions Online* differ, if at all, in its portrayal of cultural contact? While Sinex's borrowing of real-world rhetorical strategies would suggest that they could easily crop up in non-fantasy settings, perhaps they are introduced differently or used in different ways. If these strategies seem consistent across gameplay and setting genres, we could almost make the argument that their use is universal.

The depth of *Warcraft* material means that future research has plenty to analyze within the game series. One could uncover a number of other rhetorical strategies that emphasize difference and find new lessons to learn from the game. The lessons presented here have not been intended to represent the totality of *WoW*'s implicit arguments. For another direction one could take a less holistic view of the *Warcraft* games and focus on the rhetorical *differences* between games rather than presenting them as a continuously developing narrative as in this study. Finally, the specific ludic elements introduced by the gameplay shift from RTS to an MMORPG have been essentially ignored. Creating *WoW* necessitated a great deal of new "world-building" and the accompanying visual and textual rhetoric. Did this change or influence the rhetorical strategies used, or was it merely the natural evolution of previous game developments and narratives?

The *Warcraft* universe also contains enough non-game material that whole studies could focus on different aspects of it. Do rhetorical strategies change when looking at different types of *Warcraft* media? Are lessons learned in *WoW* reaffirmed or undermined? Is it helpful to examine these other textual fragments when looking at *WoW*, or does the game essentially stand on its own? Although this study has taken positions on some of these questions, there is room for alternative views in other rhetorical analyses.

The ongoing development of *WoW* means that new stories and new developments will almost certainly take place in the future and provide new discourse for analysis. The current study covers *WoW* until the release of *MoP* (Patch 5.0), but Patch 5.1 has already added content about the Alliance-Horde conflict in Pandaria. Future patches for *MoP* seem likely to do the same, with Garrosh being fought and deposed at some point during this expansion's lifecycle. If the aggressive Warchief of the Horde is removed from power, what will that signal for intercultural interaction in Azeroth? We cannot really know because it has not been written, but at some point in the future, people will almost certainly find out. This continuous development cycle also has undermining potential for research, as events in *WoW* may be subjected to retroactive continuity—that is, developers may decide that something in *Warcraft* did not happen the way it was previously portrayed, and their new description of the event becomes “reality” so far as it exists for a fictional universe. The *Tides of Darkness* and *Beyond the Dark Portal* novels, which retell *WCII* and its expansion, are examples of the games' story being modified to fit *WoW* developments. Previously developed insights could potentially be subverted by the new narrative, although drastic story changes are quite rare in *WoW*.

Finally, more quantitative or ethnographic studies could examine the audience that plays *WoW*. What messages do they perceive within the game? How do cyber-colonial portrayals

affect their perceptions of real-world situations? Is *WoW* an effective tool to suggest these strategies to players? Is the transformative potential here being realized or ignored? For example, Emily Orr, Craig Ross, and R. Robert Orr have studied how players' factional allegiances correlate with psychological traits and symptoms. Perhaps the messages contained within these games also has some bearing on real-world behavior.

This study hopefully establishes *WoW* and similar video games as worthy objects of *rhetorical* study. While MMORPGs have been studied in the social sciences for theories about identity creation and maintenance, little attention has been focused on the implicit arguments of such games. While a few scholars have brought up the racialized aspects of *WoW* mainly as a prominent example of the fantasy genre, the analysis has usually stopped there. More attention should go to locating rhetorical theories and strategies within these kinds of discourse. This study addresses racialized coding in a more methodical manner by analyzing *WoW*'s use of binaries, geographic connotations, and color to establish a web of connected cultures. I have also attempted to fill a gap in research by focusing on specific narrative arguments that fit within the conclusions of previous rhetorical scholars, including cross-cultural cooperation, scapegoating, and native involvement. Taken together, this analysis shows how, despite the problems of cyber-colonial representations, *WoW* suggests better ways to handle real-world conflicts.

The Alliance's foothold on Pandaria seemed tenuous at first. While the initial Horde forces were defeated by *The Skyfire* and her crew, King Varian Wrynn ordered the gunship back to Stormwind. Faced with a lack of soldiers, the remaining Alliance forces opted to recruit and arm the local *jinyu*, who asked for help against their ancestral enemies, the *hozen*. As the two races approached each other in battle lines, the resulting negative emotions proved devastating for Pandaria. The massive *Sha* of Doubt erupted from stasis, destroying the two armies and

possessing the divine Jade Serpent who watched over the forest. Across the continent, the negative emotions brought by the Alliance and Horde awakened other *Sha* as well.

And as Aidros traveled through the towns of Pandaria, I saw the devastation our war had wrought. Pandaren farmers in the Valley of the Four Winds being harassed by hostile mantid. The *grummles* of the Burlap Trail enduring *hozen* raids on their caravans. The *yaungol* of Townlong Steppes driven by anger and hunger to invade the Kun-lai Summit. The Dread Wastes' *sha*-induced desolation. Each region portrayed new suffering, new peoples affected by what we and our Horde enemies had done. The healing of Pandaria will not be an easy thing, but at least one paladin—and countless adventurers after him—will work with its people to solve the trouble brought to it by an outside war.

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APPENDIX

GLOSSARY

WoW is a complex rhetorical artifact using a great deal of jargon specific to itself and its genre. While not comprehensive, this section is included to help readers understand abbreviations and important terms. The following glossary is divided into two sub-sections for ease of reference. *Game Terms* covers abbreviations and discourse *about* the game, including information potential players would encounter as part of gameplay. *Lore Terms* covers specific in-universe rhetoric, identifying major names, places, and civilizations. Entries are organized alphabetically.

Game Terms

- Aggro – derived from aggression, a system used to show which character computer-controlled opponents will attack.
- *BC* – *The Burning Crusade*, *WoW*'s first expansion released in 2007. *TBC* is sometimes used as an abbreviation for the expansion.
- *Cata* – *Cataclysm*, *WoW*'s third expansion released in 2010. *Cataclysm*'s short title means that this abbreviation is infrequently used.
- Class – a description of a character's capabilities, organized into distinct fantasy tropes such as a wizard or warrior. In *WoW*, a character's class can be Death Knight, Druid, Hunter, Mage, Monk, Paladin, Priest, Rogue, Shaman, Warlock, or Warrior.

- DoT – “damage over time.” Some characters have abilities that continuously deal damage without further input; Warlocks are the most notable example.
- DPS – “damage per second.” DPS refers to a character who is focused on defeating enemies as quickly as possible.
- Expansion – a large amount of additional video content that substantially modifies the base video game for which it is released. All *Warcraft* games other than *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* had at least one expansion.
- Mob – “mobile (object).” Mobs are generally hostile computer-controlled creatures or characters who inhabit the game world. Mobs are frequently quest objectives.
- MMORPG – “massively multiplayer online roleplaying game.” MMORPGs, of which *WoW* is one, are distinguished by maintaining a persistent world and their large size, allowing hundreds or even thousands of players to interact with the game world at the same time. The roleplaying game part for *WoW* is characterized by players controlling a single character who advances in strength as the player accomplishes objectives.
- *MoP* – *Mists of Pandaria*, *WoW*'s fourth expansion released in 2012.
- NPC – “nonplayer character.” NPCs are generally non-hostile computer-controlled characters with which players can interact. Shopkeepers, bankers, and quest givers are all examples of NPCs.
- PC – “player character.” In *WoW*, this is usually shortened to simply “player” or “character.” In tabletop roleplaying games, the term distinguishes between the players, who each control a single character, and the game master or referee, who controls all NPCs as well as the entire game world.

- PvP – “player versus player.” As the name indicates, this involves aggressive interaction between players, typically those of opposite factions.
- Quest – an objective or series of objectives given to a *WoW* player to complete. Completing quests makes characters stronger by awarding “experience,” in-game items, or in-game currency.
- RTS – “real-time strategy.” The first three *Warcraft* games belonged to this genre, which features armies fighting against each other to accomplish particular objectives.
- Tank – a character whose job it is to hold aggro and take damage for other characters.
- Vanilla – *World of Warcraft* (or any *Warcraft* game) before its expansions. “Classic” or “original” are adjectives used as synonyms when referring to a base game.
- *WotLK* – *Wrath of the Lich King*, *WoW*’s second expansion released in 2008.
- *WoW* – *World of Warcraft*. This is a generic reference to the game with any or all of its expansions.

Lore Terms

- Alliance – the coalition of civilizations led by humans that as of *MoP* features humans, dwarves, gnomes, night elves, draenei, worgen, and pandaren as playable characters. Non-playable allied civilizations include the high elves, the jinyu, and some furbolgs.
- Azeroth – either the primary world in which the *Warcraft* series takes place or the southernmost continent of the Eastern Kingdoms. Azeroth also once referred to the kingdom now known as Stormwind.
- Blood elves – a race of light-skinned, thin, pointy-eared humanoids that joined the Horde. Named in honor of the high elves who died in the Scourge’s invasion, the blood elves

turned to the Horde after being cast out of the Alliance. They feed off arcane energy and have developed glowing green eyes from their exposure to demonic magic.

- Draenei – a race of blue- or purple-skinned humanoids that joined the Alliance. They have goat-like hooves and roopy tails that stop short of the ground. Males have catfish-like tendrils and females have horns. Hunted nearly to extinction by the orcs, the surviving draenei have their capital in the crashed transdimensional spaceship known as the Exodar.
- The Eastern Kingdoms – the large eastern landmass of the world of Azeroth, which consists of the continents of Lordaeron, Khaz Modan, Quel'thalas, and Azeroth.
- Forsaken – a race of undead humans and elves that joined the Horde. The Forsaken gained their independence from the Scourge and established an independent society before looking to the Horde for support.
- Horde – the coalition of civilizations led by orcs that as of *MoP* features orcs, tauren, trolls, the Forsaken, blood elves, goblins, and pandaren as playable characters. Non-playable allied civilizations include the ogres, half-ogres, and hozen.
- Kalimdor – the large western continent of the world of Azeroth, home to the night elves, draenei, orcs, trolls, tauren, and goblins.
- Khaz Modan – the continent that makes up the middle part of the Eastern Kingdoms and is home to the dwarves and gnomes.
- Lordaeron – the continent that makes up the northwestern part of the Eastern Kingdoms.
- Night elves – a race of tall, thin, pointy-eared, purple- or blue-skinned humanoids that were one of four playable factions in *Warcraft III* and joined the Alliance in *WoW*.
- Northrend – the northernmost continent of Azeroth, home to the Scourge.

- Outland – the damaged remains of Draenor, ancestral home of the draenei and orcs.
- Pandaren – a race of humanoid pandas. Two competing groups of Pandaren split from their ancestral home on the Wandering Isle in *MoP*. The Tushui joined the Alliance, while the Huojin joined the Horde.
- Pandaria – the southernmost continent of Azeroth that was hidden from the rest of the world for centuries. It was finally revealed in *MoP*.
- Quel'thalas – the small subcontinent that makes up the northeastern part of the Eastern Kingdoms and is home to the blood elves.
- The Scourge – a faction of undead, led by the Lich King Ner'zhul, who invaded Lordaeron in *Warcraft III* and were one of four playable factions.
- Tauren – a race of humanoid bovines that joined the Horde.
- Worgen – a group of werewolves that mostly joined the Alliance. The Alliance worgen are the former inhabitants of the human nation of Gilneas, who were afflicted with the worgen curse by invading feral worgen who were summoned to fight the Scourge.