Warcraft Adventures: Texts, Replay, and Machinima in a Game-Based Storyworld

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In October 2004, the fourth World Cyber Games were held in San Francisco. Contestants competed in this international tournament, the "video game Olympics," for championship titles in each of seven competitive games. The prize money was substantial: $20,000 for first place to each of the individual winners in games such as the popular real-time strategy title *Warcraft III*. More than seventy players from forty-four countries arrived to compete for this championship alone. Few spectators were present at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium to see the *Warcraft III* finals between the favored player, WelcomeTo (real name: Hwang Tae-Min) from Korea, and the underdog, Grubby (real name: Manuel Schenkhuizen) from the Netherlands. Many more observers would view the game by other means, via Webcast or replays, eyes glued not on the human contestants but on the player-controlled units, interface, and contested terrain depicted in the game.

Relatively little attention has been given in game studies to digital game spectatorship, though players especially of multiplayer and competitive games frequently watch other players play. Replays of played games such as these *Warcraft III* finals have become one of the most popular forms of game-based "video." Web sites such as ⟨http://www.wcreplays.com⟩ or ⟨http://www.warcraftmovies.com⟩, and viral video sites such as YouTube, offer literally tens of thousands of competitive replays and video captures in various formats. Of course, every replay tells a story, and such stories extend the experience of playing games such as *Warcraft III*, both for the creator and the viewer. As replay documents played games, the stories associated with them have to do with cyberathletic performance in a competitive arena. Spectators who watch replays are usually intimately familiar with the spaces and player actions depicted in them. In order to understand the popularity of digital game spaces as "sets" for animated movies that their creators use to tell fictional stories rather than document played games, we must start by trying to understand what player-spectators see—in both senses of the term—in replays.

One way to tell the story of the *Warcraft III* finals match revolves around a pivotal moment: a stunning reversal that led to Grubby's upset win. What did spectators see? After losing the first match in the best-of-three finals competition, they observed roughly six minutes into the second match that units controlled by the two players were skirmishing near Grubby's main base. WelcomeTo was perhaps threatening to end the match, but after the battle intensified, his army fell back. His critically important main hero character (a "Farseer") had suffered quite a bit of damage, and so he decided to use a portal scroll to teleport his army back to the safety of his home base. To this point the game action was easy for spectators to follow, but suddenly something unexpected happened: as soon as his army teleported into his base, WelcomeTo's Farseer toppled over dead. The disastrous setback led to Grubby's win in the match, accompanied by wild cheers from the small, largely European crowd in the auditorium. Clearly rattled, WelcomeTo played poorly in the third match, and Grubby won the championship. But what had happened to the Farseer? What caused his demise? Only experienced players could quickly understand the sequence of events.[1] Players looking carefully at replays, with access to the game's interface and both players' view of the action, could eventually translate the crucial ten seconds or so of action into Grubby's rapidly executed player actions. Here is what they then saw:

Grubby's own Farseer hero had earlier in the game taken a "wand of lightning" from a gnoll assassin while "creeping," and for most of the game it had stayed unused in his inventory. When WelcomeTo activated the portal

35.1 Grubby defeats WelcomeTo, World Cyber Games 2004.

scroll, his Farseer was invincible, but Grubby instantly clicked on his wand (or hit a key selecting it), moused his cursor over WelcomeTo's *second* hero, a Firelord, and clicked the mouse to cast a lightning shield on *him*, not the Farseer. This shield would do damage over time to any unit standing *next* to the Firelord. Grubby knew instinctively what would happen and executed his idea in an instant: WelcomeTo's heroes landed together in their base; instead of finding safety, the wounded Farseer died simply from standing next to his charged ally. I have shown the replay of these pivotal moments to academic audiences and players on several occasions. Only one or two viewers have been able to explain what Grubby did to win. If you don't play the game, you can't translate the on-screen action into Grubby's mastery of *Warcraft* tactics and interface skills. For those who understood it, Grubby's masterful performance became a story about the match, a subjective version of what happened during the game. A story that directly translated into game syntax, with beginning and end at an arbitrary point in the game, was a *chronicle* of that game. *Warcraft* Web sites and forums offered chronicles of Grubby's victory, with a fair amount of enunciation and commentary by knowledgeable players. Others *emplotted* the game action by explaining or giving dramatic structure to what transpired.[2] A one-sentence example of such a text might be, "Grubby's brilliant use of the lightning shield to kill Zacard's hero was the turning point of their match, brought about a shocking comeback against the favored player, and led him to the 2004 championship in the World Cyber Games *Warcraft III* tournament." At this level of narrative there is greater latitude for the description; it is no longer a derivative of the sequence of game actions. Some spectators might miss the brilliance in Grubby's move altogether, others might prefer to see this game as a morality tale about an overly confident Korean favorite or the triumph of a lesser-known, hardworking European opponent

35.2 Poster for Riot Films' *Edge of Remorse*.

who has since taken over the throne, and so on. What many players see as the value of these replays is not just the training they provide but the capacity for telling stories as fans of their games and its players.

Not all game videos are replays, however.[3] A new narrative medium, called machinima, has sprung out of computer game technology and play since the mid-1990s. Machinima has been defined as "filmmaking within a real-time, 3D virtual environment," and it means using game software and gameplay to create animated videos (Marino 2005).[4] The growth of machinima has provided an outlet for players to work in a story-driven medium. Machinima also extends their engagement with games that they enjoy playing as well as the storyworlds that can provide a narrative context for their gameplay. Roughly ten percent of the videos based on the massively multiplayer online game *World of Warcraft* and hosted by the most popular site for downloading them, ⟨http://www.warcraftmovies.com⟩, have been categorized as "story line" movies. These are machinima projects that present linear narratives through the recording and editing of in-game performances.

An example of such a *World of Warcraft* movie is the award-winning *Edge of Remorse*, produced by Riot Films and directed by Jason Choi.[5] The story recounts how two brothers choose different sides in the war ravaging Azeroth (the world in which the game is set) and reveals the origins of their split as love for the same girl, with whom they grew up as an inseparable trio. In the end, rivalry and betrayal results in the tragic death of all three. Choi's telling of the story in machinima form never makes direct reference to events of the game's storyworld, nor does it present unadorned gameplay or settings from the game as a player would typically see them. *Edge of Remorse* does not name its protagonists or setting, or use spoken dialogue to bring the viewer back to reference points from the game on which it is based. It relies instead on the skillful use of a variety of filmmaking and video editing techniques (montage, foreshadowing, flashback, sound effects, musical scoring, compositing, and chroma keying) to focus on the universal aspects of the story: the intertwined fate of three characters and the revealing moments leading to their demise. Lasting roughly eight minutes, with some 120 cuts and fades, *Edge of Remorse* is no replay or continuous recording of gameplay, but an intricately composed piece of visual storytelling. Nonetheless, players recognize it unmistakably as a story set in the world depicted by the *World of Warcraft*. The plot's logic is determined by the eternal conflict between Horde and Alliance; the twist in *Edge of Remorse* is to explore the destructive nature of this world in the form of a vignette, a small, precise piece that comments on the tragic nature of warfare by showing the impact of specific events on ordinary characters. Choi's work thus engages players while moving beyond the self-referentiality of much machinima, and viewers unfamiliar with the *World of Warcraft* or the *Warcraft* series of games can easily grasp its message.

35.3 Screenshot, *Edge of Remorse*.

Introduction

This chapter will focus on a particular meeting point of game developers and players in the cocreation of a storyworld: movies made with the software used to develop and play computer games. It will consider the full range of game-based productions, from game replays that document actual matches, to story line movies through which players seek to tell stories about game worlds or completely unrelated topics. In particular, I will concentrate on the ways in which game-based replays and machinima have extended player engagement with a specific game series and associated storyworld: that of Blizzard Entertainment's *Warcraft* series, including its extension to the massively multiplayer *World of Warcraft*.

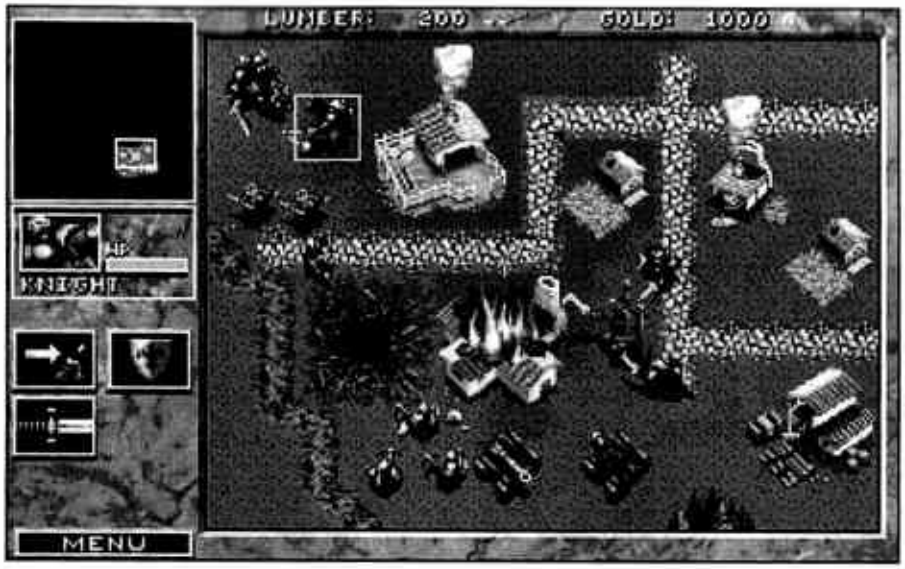
The subject of this chapter is the community player; that is, the player who performs for other players and spectators. Like other activities, such as modifying games or posting opinions about games, recording and showing gameplay or using games to make a movie are forms of performance dominated by players. How do these projects extend both player engagement with the storyworld created by Blizzard's developers and the narrative space itself through the works created by these players?

In considering this question, an important aspect is the relationship of two forms of creative expression—those of the developer and the player—and an important issue is whether their relationship is characterized more accurately as one of conflict or cooperation (or perhaps as something in between?). Another critical set of issues circulates around the nature of game-based moviemaking as storytelling. As a developer, Blizzard has expended great effort to create prerendered and in-game videos, particularly "cutscenes," that establish strong story lines and motivate players to follow lengthy campaigns organized as a series of single player "missions." Players, for their part, have created tens of thousands of their own videos, ranging from saved replays and remixed screen captures of competitive games to story based machinima pieces.

Spectatorship, multiplayer competition, and player communities have been crucial to the success of the *Warcraft* series of games as well as providing a context and culture for player-created replays and videos. At the same time, many machinima projects have focused on stories, characters, and events drawn from the "world of *Warcraft*" that might be described as textual production. Is it more useful to think of the storytelling possibilities of these projects in terms of textual production or as community play taking place in performance spaces? In short, what do we learn by paying more attention to the modes of performance available to the player, and the ways in which such performances are viewed, enunciated, and reworked by a community of players?

The *Warcraft* Series: A Brief History

The first *Warcraft* computer game, published in 1994, was called *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans*. Blizzard Entertainment, founded as Silicon and Synapse in 1990, was the developer, as it has been for every subsequent title in this series. The *Warcraft* series played a significant role in defining a new game form or genre that became known as real-time strategy.[6] *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans*, along with Westwood Studios' *Dune II* (1992) and Westwood's *Command and Conquer* (1995), are generally recognized as the founding trio of the real-time strategy genre, though of course there were numerous antecedents for various aspects of these games.[7] The notion of a "real-time" game stands in contrast to the turn-based game. In the latter, players take turns in sequence, one player moving his or her units while the other waits or watches, existing for all intents and purposes in a world for which time stands still. The difference in real time is not so much about what happens computationally as it is that the states of the game occur at specific times in a continuous stream—time flows in an uninterrupted (generally) and synchronous way for both players. Turns



35.4 The original *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans* interface (1994).

no longer freeze the passage of time for one player while the other contemplates the perfect move. Instead, time becomes a constant source of pressure and stress. Players multitask, meaning that they observe, think, plot, micromanage, manipulate the interface, and attempt to control their units, all while their opponent is moving and countermoving at the same time. Writing about the first game in the *Warcraft* series, the editor of *Computer Gaming World* described a "panicked pace," "split-second decisions," and a "mad-dash juggling of resources and demands." He advised that "if you can't manage the carpal calisthenics to right and left mouse click in rapid succession, you can forget about *Warcraft*" (Lombardi 1995).

The first *Warcraft* game offered an early version of this stressful multitasking as the basis for strategy play, but one that a decade later, *Warcraft III* players would certainly find quaint and slow paced. For this reason, it is necessary to consider *Warcraft* as an evolving series of games. There were many crucial refinements of game mechanics, technology, and interface. Especially important for performance and the creation of a viable storyworld, each version of the game introduced narrative elements, ranging from new information and content (maps, dates, characters, etc.) about the history of Azeroth, the fictional world in which events take place, to ways of telling the story through real-time strategy play and online role-playing in *World of Warcraft* (the association of audio with characters, skills, and spells associated with heroic characters, lavish cutscenes, game-based moviemaking, etc.). Moreover, both developers and players were engaged by the continuity and accumulating details of the storyworld as the basis for what Henry Jenkins (2003) has called "transmedia storytelling." As Jenkins has often pointed out, the intriguing issue with respect to narratives and digital games is not whether these games present us with self-contained stories worked out by playing them; instead, they provide elements for telling stories across media. In the case of digital games like *Warcraft* and *World of Warcraft*, these elements were not limited to characters and settings that could serve as seeds for stories in other media such as short stories or card games. It was also the case that the game technology itself could be used as a narrative medium, as was the case with game-based moviemaking such as machinima. Before turning to the ways in which this occurred, it is worth taking a moment to compile a brief history of the *Warcraft* series, along with the other game formats and media that it spawned, as a first

35.5 The *Warcraft II* interface (1996).

indicator of the sheer mass of the material available to players and fans of the series.

The two major revisions of *Warcraft* were the appropriately named *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness* (December 1995) and *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* (2002). These versions also spawned expansions, patches, and projects that brought the *Warcraft* settings to different game systems and media. Two conventional add-on titles, *Warcraft II: Beyond the Dark Portal* (May 1996) and *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne* (2003), primarily added new content (such as maps, campaigns, new units, etc.). *Warcraft II: Battle.net Edition* (1999) was an update that modified a few of *Warcraft II*'s features (including its expansion) and made it compatible with battle.net, Blizzard's network for competitive play.

Blizzard also published "battle chests," anthologies, soundtrack CDs, DVDs of high-resolution cutscenes, cinematic trailers (including a theatrical release), collector's editions, and gift sets that included versions of the game, expansions, and more, such as strategy guides, art books, or soundtrack CDs. Other companies provided new content as well. Tewi Verlag's *Levels and Add-ons for Warcraft II* in 1995, Sunstone Interactive's *W!Zone* (1996), and Aztech New Media's *Aztech's Armory: Campaigns for Warcraft II* (1997) were examples of independently developed levels, maps, and campaigns for *Warcraft II*, while Electronic Arts published a version of *Warcraft II* for the Sony Playstation and Sega Saturn consoles, called *Warcraft II: The Dark Saga*, in 1997. And still that was not all. *Warcraft* also spawned *Warcraft: The Board Game* (Fantasy Flight Games, 2003) and *Warcraft: The Role-Playing Game* (Sword and Sorcery, 2003), based on the *Dungeons & Dragons* system, and that in turn has generated several books providing details about the characters, monsters, magic spells, and items that can be found in the world.

In late 2004, Blizzard released the eagerly anticipated *World of Warcraft*, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game that incorporated elements of these previous projects in presenting a digital version of the storyworld in which players could act as individual characters. An enormous success, *World of Warcraft* in turn became the basis

35.6 Interface mastery and competitive play: *Warcraft III* (2002).

for *World of Warcraft: The Role-Playing Game* (Sword and Sorcery, 2005), a revision of the *Warcraft*-based game *World of Warcraft: The Board Game* (Fantasy Flight Games, 2005) and the *World of Warcraft Trading Card Game* (Upper Deck, 2006). Writers such as Richard Knaak, Christie Golden, Jeff Grubb, and Chris Metzen have produced novels, stories, and comic fiction based on stories drawn from *Warcraft* or *World of Warcraft*. And finally, players of games in the *Warcraft* series and *World of Warcraft* have generated thousands of replays, dance movies, story line machinima, and player versus player movies.

High-Performance Play: Textual Production or Performance Space?

This lineage of games and other media testifies to the fact that *Warcraft* is not only a successful game franchise but also has generated story settings capable of being revisited through various media; some are other kinds of games, and others are what we more conventionally take to be (generally linear) narrative forms. It is important to be clear about this claim. Gameplay need not necessarily constitute a narrative medium for it to be the case that stories set in a game world extend engagement with games. Digital games such as *Warcraft* or *World of Warcraft* provide elements for storytelling that can extend the game experience in various ways, for both designers and players. It is clearly the case that these games supply what Greg Costikyan (2007, 9) has with respect to massively multiplayer online games called "story settings." Players are not obligated to care about these settings or the possibility of some sort of story arc that is enacted through them, but it is almost impossible to play inside game worlds and learn absolutely nothing about the characters, locations, and events that occur there. For those who do notice or perhaps even desire to learn about these settings while playing, knowledge about game worlds is readily portable to other media forms; settings can be elaborated or connected to each other. Sometimes developers do this in a way that tends to focus on the historical

continuity and consistency of game worlds, but just as often players are the ones eager to compile details about characters and elaborate on them by creating stories that occur in these worlds. The result—over a time period of roughly a dozen years, through numerous tellings and retellings of stories set in the world of *Warcraft*—has been the piecewise construction of a robust storyworld. Of course, this process can feed back to game development. The world of *Warcraft* might be thought of as a series of game settings, many of which have been borrowed from various media through which stories about the world *of Warcraft* have been told. They are cited and depicted in several different ways, including the actions of non-player characters, design of quests, or architecture and game objects found at various locations.

In addition to game settings, developers also create the game engines (software) that make it possible to play digital games such *as Warcraft* and *World of Warcraft*. One way of describing the history of machinima during a three-floor elevator ride is to summarize it as the transformation of game engines into narrative engines, in the sense that players learn how to use this game technology to create linear stories, generally game-based movies. As machinima matured from its origins as *Quake* movies, ambitious players (some with backgrounds in film, television, or improvisational comedy) decided that game-based moviemaking could move beyond a self-reflexive game culture, and they began to tell stories that no longer referred back to the particular storyworlds associated with the game engines used to make movies (Lowood 2007a).

Game-based storytelling embedded in established storyworlds and machinima offer players two game-derived story production options that can either be linked together or remain quite independent. In other words, the fact that stories told across media have been set in game-based storyworlds is not the whole story about how games have functioned as narrative engines. Some players are inspired by gameplay to tell stories about games, and others find more appeal in the idea of performing in game spaces. In order to address these forms of game-based storytelling and their relationship to each other, it is time to focus on the nature of performance in *Warcraft*.

Warcraft—along with other real-time strategy games—redefined the strategy game as a performance arena in several ways. As it evolved, the real-time strategy genre highlighted a key aspect in the transition from turn-based, tabletop strategy play (board games, miniatures, and chess) to multiplayer, real-time games: *interface mastery*. To play *Warcraft* well, players must demonstrate rapid performance of interface skills, principally the interpretation of on-screen data as well as the manipulation of control devices such as the keyboard and mouse. Winning depends at least as much on interface mastery as the contemplative problem-solving and decision-making skills traditionally associated with the strategy game. In real time, hand-eye coordination became one of the salient qualities of successful players. Popular strategy game formats such as historical simulations (board games), tabletop miniatures, and even military wargames were transmuted into real-time game systems that redefined player skill and performance in terms of the rapid execution and mastery of computer interface and control. Though perhaps surprising to those who think of digital play as sedentary, *Warcraft* as a real-time game made possible by computer technology thus introduced an element of embodiment and physicality into "brain games." Put another way, player skill, especially in competitive multiplayer real-time strategy games, took a step toward a notion related to athletic performance. Since players often describe fast-paced digital games as "twitchy," the impact of real-time strategy as a genre can be characterized as taking the digital strategy game into a zone of competitive performance somewhere between thoughtful strategy and twitchy skill. The significance of interface mastery for game-based performance was that it provided a basis for spectatorship, skills demonstration, and learning through replay movies. Learning about the production, editing, and postproduction of demos and replays was the historical foundation for story-driven machinima based on game technology (Lowood 2006a).

Having established real-time strategy gameplay as performative, it is easier to think of the *Warcraft* player as creative. James Naismith may well be the "author" of basketball as a game form, but Michael Jordan was indisputably a creative genius through his gameplay. Ask any

basketball fan if they would rather read the original rules of basketball, or watch clips of Jordan's dunks and clutch shots. Still, the structure of the game system (text) and creativity in play (performance) work together to produce a context for skillful play as performance.[8] Of course, athletic competition and digital play are not the same thing, either with respect to performance or spectatorship, but noting this interplay of text and performance as part of competitive play can help us think about two important ways in which game-based moviemaking contributes to the extension of games as narrative spaces. The first emphasizes the use of game elements as *libraries* of texts available to moviemaking players, and the second involves the *archival* use that game-based movies can serve in recording performance in digital games as performance spaces.

While the foregrounding of interface mastery emphasized play performance as skills demonstration and the competitive game as a form of e-sports, in the *Warcraft* series the same play dynamics also propelled a relatively linear story arc built from the mission structure of the single-player campaign game. In this mode, players enacted stories grounded in the player's particular performance, but bounded by a linear structure developed—one might say, authored—by Blizzard's talented game designers. This does not mean that playing *Warcraft* is equivalent to simply enacting a text.[9] As already noted, however, the narrative aspects and threads found throughout *Warcraft* games do provide pieces for the construction of a storyworld—pieces that then can individually or collectively be elaborated through fan fiction or player-created machinima. So rather than portraying gameplay as interacting with some sort of text, it makes more sense at least for *Warcraft* to think in terms of players encountering a multitude of small texts during the course of gameplay. They may ignore the texts, simply notice them, remember them as part of the experience or the culture around the game, or choose to work on the further construction of a storyworld that can be constructed from these texts as building materials.[10]

Players, of course, are not the only ones who engage in the addition and extension of story elements. As the *Warcraft* series continued, each version of *Warcraft* grew more ambitious by this measure, as developers built out the storyworld and its history, added episodes to a gradually filled-in chronology of the world's history, and produced cinematic cutscenes that not only marked and rewarded the attainment of stages in the campaign but also presented key moments in the lives and lore of characters. It may be objected here that I am letting a "game as story" argument in through the back door of incremental contributions to a vast storyworld. Yet it bears repeating that in *Warcraft*, these story elements are activated in the course of gameplay; players are not compelled to view themselves as "reading" or even enacting a story, as opposed to simply playing a game.

The main point here is that a library of texts or story elements was deployed by *Warcraft* developers as an aspect of game design that only incidentally had anything to do with these games being read as texts. In this sense, despite the temptation to think of these texts as being like a library of books, they have just as much in common with a library of software routines or tools (which of course, at a level less obvious to players, they are). Consider examples of two kinds of story elements. The first is a *narrative touch*. It is a small, idiosyncratic part of *Warcraft* that nonetheless played a huge role in its player culture: the race-specific "pissed quotes" emitted when a player clicks on one of the characters in his or her army (e.g., Orc Grunt: "It's not easy being green"). Players quickly discovered that these characters could be made to say something new by mouse clicking on them repeatedly; this induced the in-game character to speak characteristic lines, deliver jokes, or otherwise amuse the player. Just as important as what the characters said, the characters' voices (many provided by *Warcraft*'s producer, Bill Roper) gave players a sense of their personal characteristics—dull-witted, idle Orc Peons, for instance. What began as a simple interface device, providing feedback to the player when selecting a unit, became a vital part of the game's lore. Players poked every avatar on the screen to find out what they said, or used utilities to search inside the game software for the corresponding sound files; FAQs and Web sites transcribed and cataloged quotes from each unit type in the game. Before long, pissed quotes became part of the shared experience of the player community;

35.7 An example of a narrative touch from *Warcraft III*'s *Frozen Throne* expansion: Heavy metal characters, music, and images reappeared in *World of Warcraft* character dances and machinima as well as the band featured at Blizzard's Blizzcon convention.

every *Warcraft* player appreciated jokes and references to them.

The second example of a story element in the *Warcraft* library is a *narrative structure*. Roper and other members of the Blizzard development team realized that one problem with the notion of the game as story is that stories seldom provide much replay value. Few people watch the same film over and over. From the beginning, *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans* was essentially a competitive, multiplayer game; during the original rounds of testing, the game was balanced, in Blizzard parlance, for "sentient versus sentient" play, in part because the limited computing power available in the mid-1990s was not capable of producing adequate computer-controlled players in real time.[11] The essential unit of play was therefore the competitive round, player versus player, which in the single-player game became the "mission," a single round of play devoted to the accomplishment of a specific objective.

Since neither playing the same skirmish scenario on the same map over and over nor a strictly linear story development provided attractive options for a single-player game structure, Blizzard focused on a method for stringing together a series of missions in a compelling "campaign," a notion readily available from wargames or role-playing games. In order to accomplish this, the *Warcraft* designers gradually came to think in terms of "story nodes."[12] They aligned the game's skeletal story line in synchronization with a player's progress through the game by determining "nodes" in gameplay appropriate for the introduction of significant story elements. This technique reached maturity in another Blizzard title, *Starcraft* (1998), then was further refined during the lengthy development of *Warcraft III*. Player strategies and actions during a mission were usually open-ended, at least within the constraints of the game system; if a player defeated a computer opponent, he or she progressed to the next mission and eventually reached a story

"Why Don't You Bother Someone Else with Your Incessant Clicking?"

"Pissed sounds" (also known as "poke quotes" or "unit quotes") are short audio files buried inside the vast library of *Warcraft* game assets. They have played a major role in the shared player culture around the game. Each of these bits of spoken dialogue is associated with a specific character type or character in the real-time strategy game; when an on-screen unit is "poked" by clicking on it more than once, the poked character says something different from the normal confirmation sound. Poke it again, and it might say something different again; poke it many times, and you may get an infrequently heard bit of dialogue from the unit as it becomes more irritated. For example, the Blood Elf peasant unit introduced in the Frozen Throne expansion of *Warcraft III* will say, "Why don't you bother someone else with your incessant clicking."

As Bill Roper explained in a conversation at Stanford University on March 1, 2005, he and Glenn Stafford at Blizzard produced the first group of pissed sounds after testing the concept with the first quotations for Orc units. As the game series became more popular, especially after the publication of *Warcraft II*, players began to poke characters even more incessantly or dig into the game software to find them. The quotations became part of the fan culture around the game, so it is hardly surprising that player-fans began to produce texts to document what they learned.

MunikBleedsGreen's "*Warcraft III*: Pissed Off Unit Quote Collection" provided a comprehensive list; it also supplied information submitted by other players that traced sources for the references and jokes that Blizzard's developers cited in many of the quotations. For example, the Orc Farseer says, "I see dead people," and this quotation is traced to the movie *The Sixth Sense* as well as to an in-game cheat code. Easy enough. His second quotation, "Touch your tongue to mine," leads to a more complicated interpretation comparing two possible sources before deciding in favor of *Thumb Wars*. It is too easy for nonplayers to dismiss narrative touches such as *Warcraft*'s unit quotes and players' attention to them as trivial. In fact, such forms of fan engagement demonstrated by the players' shared knowledge of these quotations and commentary on them is an important aspect of the cultural economy around the game.

Orc Grunt

From MunkiBleedsGreen's "Pissed Off Unit Quote Collection":

—"Why you poking me again?"
>Other: Thanks to Bo Koch for pointing out that this is indeed a follow-up to the Grunt's "Stop poking me!" in WC2.
—"Why don't you lead an army instead of touching me?"
—"Poke poke poke. Is that all you do?"
—"Ooh, that was kind of nice."
—"Me so horned. Me hurt you long time."
>Movie: Play on the prostitute's line in Full Metal Jacket. *Much thanks to Chris Hall for the correction, your ears are working fine.*
—"Me no sound like Yoda. . . . Do I?"
—"It's not easy being green."
>Other: Kermit the Frog's signature song.

node. These nodes were usually marked by dramatic, prescripted cutscenes that functioned as rewards ("eye candy"), a kind of break in the fast-paced action, and taken together, a telling of the events of the storyworld's history in a chronological sequence.[13] Occasionally, and exceptionally, the designers would even pause a mission for a "major story point" (Pardo 2000).

Narrative touches and structure are elements of game design, first and foremost. Every player enacts or experiences the results during gameplay. Those interested in these moments find that despite variations in their strategies, capabilities, and successes as players, elements such as quotations from characters or story nodes are capable of supporting a common player culture and a fairly consistent storyworld. Despite the wild variability of in-game performance, players thus share the same (or at least a similar) vast, overarching narrative and storyworld. Blizzard's library of game texts were important for *World of Warcraft* machinima projects as story elements that could be retold, reworked, and remixed through player-created productions such as these movies.

Competitive performance in multiplayer games such as *Warcraft* offers a narrative potential that differs from projects based on the library of game texts. Stories based on

competition are, generally speaking, chronicles or emplotments of gameplay. They are *historical*. Replays and other game-based movies (speedruns, player versus player movies, clan demos, etc.) are *archival*, because they record and hence document performance in the agonistic arena of digital games. Game archives are created by and for players; at least in the first instance, the developers create the game libraries. In multiplayer, competitive *Warcraft*, gameplay rather than narrative elements provides the starting point, as syntax, tactics, and strategy of play are presented, studied, and supplemented by subsequent enunciation and interpretation.

The crucial roles played by spectatorship, multiplayer competition, and player communities in extending real-time strategy games in this fashion suggest that *Warcraft* can indeed be understood (even if metaphorically) as a performance space rather than as a text. The worn contrast of game versus narrative helps us little to sort out the complex intermixture of traditional strategic game form, the narrative unfolding of single-player campaigns, and competitive e-sports within a single package. In exploring relationships among gameplay, competition, narrative, and virtual world, it is a mistake to see the player merely as a kind of reader, or even enactor, when a huge community of *Warcraft* players has learned to see the player as *performer*. We need to pay more attention to modes of performance available to players and the ways in which their play performances are captured, viewed, interpreted, and narrated within this community of players.

The shift from the calculated decision making of turn-based games to the quick reactions, interface mastery, and micromanagement of units became a hallmark of *Warcraft*. While retaining much of the core gameplay from previous turn-based wargames focused on the strategy and tactics of battle, it emphasized not only understanding what to do but also rapid execution of the syntax of gameplay through mastery of the computer interface. By "syntax" I mean the sequence of coordinated mouse, keyboard, strategy, and reflexes in real time that correspond to a series of player actions during the course of a game.[14] These actions can be described as basic elements of gameplay, such as selecting units or having a hero unit cast a spell, but in terms of the player's activity they correspond to sequences of mouse and keyboard activity. An important aspect of player skill is understanding and rapidly executing this syntax. As mundane as they may seem, these actions play a crucial role in the archival recording of gameplay and forms of spectatorship based on the making and sharing of replay movies. First, recording these basic actions (keystrokes and mouse clicks) in the sequence of a played game has been the basis for most systems of replay capture. Leaving aside technical issues, in *Warcraft III* this might mean that rather than devising some arcane code for "the grunt attacked the dryad," the replay file essentially records each player's actions with a time-marking system to keep everything in synchronization. So the grunt's attack might be read as, "Moved cursor over Grunt—clicked left mouse button—depressed A—moved cursor over Dryad—clicked left button." These are two equivalent ways to chronicle gameplay. The viewer views avatars battling on the screen. Based on knowledge of the game system, the viewer can interpret this view as "something happened," "one unit attacked another," or "the grunt attacked the dryad." We might describe this straightforward, sequential depiction of gameplay as a chronicle of events based on the archival record (the replay file). It is not until players enunciate what happened during a competitive game that they begin to rework the chronicle into a narrative form, which we might call a *historical text* about the game.

Thinking about *Warcraft* in terms of player performance sets the stage for a discussion of the role of game-based movies in the cocreation by developers and players of two distinctive kinds of storyworlds. Movies made with *Warcraft* and *World of Warcraft* can be used to add to the *library of texts* or the *historical archives* associated with the game. In some cases, they may be able to do both.

The most viewed of all *World of Warcraft* movies, *Leeroy Jenkins*, tells a story about a player and an in-game event, whether staged or not.[15] One of the players recounts their plans, laying out elements of syntax and tactics, while another carefully calculates the probability of success. These are familiar moments for *World of Warcraft* players. The video can be read as an ordinary, if humorously disastrous replay. *Leeroy Jenkins* has also become a player-created nar-

35.8 The setup for *Leeroy Jenkins*.

rative touch in the game's storyworld, such as by the inclusion of a card named after the protagonist in the collectible card game. Indeed, it has even infested *other* storyworlds; for example, a non-player character named Kilroy Stoneskin in *Guild Wars* is clearly derivative of Leeroy Jenkins. It is time to turn to more examples of how game-based movies both extend and work within the vast narratives of *Warcraft*'s game space. What are the important connections and differences between game-based movies as player-generated *archives* that replay the performance of competitive skills (and stories about those performances), and player-created *texts* that extend Blizzard's library of textual elements and extend the *Warcraft* storyworld?

Moviemaking and *Warcraft*

The first point I want to make about game-based moviemaking is historical. The brief history of demo movies, replays, speedruns, *Quake* movies, machinima, and other formats has included nearly every game genre, from first-person shooters and massively multiplayer online games to console games. As a historical rule, *archival* production has preceded *textual* production. That is to say, players have first documented gameplay and then turned to story line projects. Note that in the previous section of this chapter I presented textual and archival modes of game-based storytelling in the opposite order. My intention was to deflate the temptation to engage in a kind whiggish reasoning that would portray this as a necessary progression from lower to higher forms of narrative—say, from chronicles to histories. Noting the historical progression is nonetheless critical for at least three reasons. First, it reiterates the main difference between movies made in *Warcraft* (the earlier real-time strategy series) and *World of Warcraft* (the later massively multiplayer online game). *Warcraft* moviemaking is founded on replay, and thus is primarily archival and historical. Nearly all of the player-created texts contributing to *Warcraft* as a storyworld have been made using *World of Warcraft*. I will return to this point below. Second, *World of Warcraft* can be played as a competitive game (player versus player or speed leveling, for example), and even in

single-player or cooperative modes of play, player skills can be demonstrated and learned through replays. *World of Warcraft* movies are therefore inextricably connected to *Warcraft*'s replay culture, and in fact, *World of Warcraft* has been introduced to players through replay movies, from the beta period (e.g., JuniorX's replay of every moment in the first ten levels of his dwarf hunter) to the present (e.g., the movies accompanying Joana's Horde leveling guide). Third, as I have argued elsewhere, *Warcraft* was at the center of a virtual community of real-time strategy players and fans built on the foundation of competitive play as a mode of performance. It makes sense that the existence of this community as *World of Warcraft* was tested and launched goes a long way to explain the voracious appetite of its players, many of whom also play *Warcraft*, for game-based movies right from the beginning. Still, the question remains: Has the performance-oriented culture around replay movies had any impact on *Warcraft* as a storyworld, or indeed as any form of vast narrative?

Demo movies, spectator modes, machinima, and other modes of game-based moviemaking to document performances by "worthy gamers" (id Software) were introduced by players of first-person action games such as *Doom* (1993) and *Quake* (1996). *Warcraft II* (1994) was the first game in the *Warcraft* series to support matching services (Kali) and multiplayer competition via commercial networks (TEN, Mpath, and Engage Games Online). Within a few years, Blizzard had launched its own client-server network for multiplayer competition, ⟨http://www.battle.net⟩. Network support not only made it easier to play with others but also to watch others play, and of course the community of players also took advantage of network technology to share and discuss replays. Tournaments and a laddered ranking system, the matchmaking of players for pickup team games, team versus team skirmishes, and other ways to play against other players online were offered for *Starcraft* initially, and then to *Warcraft II* players. Player-created software tools such as War2BNE captured replays of battle.net and other games.

The release of *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* in 2002 intensified the player community built around competitive, networked play. Multiplayer competition became the primary basis for player discussion, commentary, and performance. In *Warcraft III*, built-in spectator modes and replay capture, Web sites for distributing replays and video on demand, reports and interviews from tournaments such as the World Cyber Games, and SHOUTcast commentaries of games contributed to the creation of a player-spectator relationship around competitive game performance and replays. Clan Web sites and Web sites such as ⟨http://www.wcreplays.com⟩ offered replays, audio commentaries, videos, interviews, and game news. These media outlets played a major role in creating a shared culture of stories about champion players, strategies, exploits of interface mastery (better known as "micro" for micromanagement), and the like. Take the previously mentioned Grubby, a premier player from the 4 Kings clan based in Europe. Replays showing his mastery of the Orc side in *Warcraft* are readily available: a few dozen videos at YouTube or Google Video, an entire page with articles, interviews, and features at ⟨http://www.wcreplays.com⟩, with nearly thirty replay files for the current patch of the game alone; more demos and replays at his clan site; and so on.

Competition in *Warcraft* has thus clearly produced archival production and demand for movies, and the vast amount of textual production devoted to star players, leading clans, and noteworthy performances has contributed to a shared culture around memories and stories derived from competition. The relationship between visual media and cultures of sports fandom is familiar; important examples include the impact of television on the Olympics or U.S. football, or heavily produced advertising shorts on the presentation of National Basketball Association stars such as Michael Jordan or Lebron James.[16] As we have already seen, multiplayer gaming and spectatorship were foundations for *Warcraft* as a performance space rather than as a text. It was especially key that unlike professional sports, *Warcraft* spectators were also players. This explains the crucial role that recorded replays have played as a media object in these communities. Repetition is OK. Without the dramatic tension of an unknown outcome, spectators who are not players are just not interested in watching replays; players (and coaches), on the other hand, watch them incessantly, mining this "game film" for the slightest edge in

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For *Warcraft* game movies as story texts, we must consider a kind of transgenre storytelling as we move from the *Warcraft* real-time strategy to the online role-playing game *World of Warcraft*. By considering these games together, a more familiar story about the emergence of storytelling from replay in game-based moviemaking emerges. The first indications of this transition occurred already during the beta version of *World of Warcraft*. Many early players knew all about *Warcraft* and were experienced players of the real-time strategy game. As a result, it was no surprise that some aspects of *Warcraft*'s replay culture of player-created game movies carried over as an outlet for performance in game movies by *World of Warcraft* players. Players such as the aforementioned JuniorX recorded gameplay as player biography, documenting every moment in the creation and leveling of a new character, the familiar archival mode of replay. These movies eased players from the mind-set of competitive real-time strategy games, took them to familiar settings from the *Warcraft* narrative arc or reminiscent of multiplayer maps (e.g., Booty Bay or Duskwood), and moved onward into the new game form played as an individual character in the world of *Warcraft*.[17]

We can track elements of the transition from competitive replay movies to engagement with the *World of Warcraft* storyworld in several ways. Consider the breakdown of *World of Warcraft* movies at the leading site for their distribution, ⟨http://www.warcraftmovies.com⟩. As of early March 2007, this site offered more than 5,500 player versus player movies and nearly 400 "instance" movies, both categories are essentially archival replays or demos. This compares to about 673 story line movies and 642 dance/music movies. Thus, it is clear that *Warcraft*'s tradition of replay documentation has carried over to the community of *World of Warcraft* players. At the same time, few, if any, digital games have produced so many machinima projects for storytelling or mediated performance as *World of Warcraft*. Many of these movies are focused on the development of characters, known and unknown, and their exploits in the storyworld. A good example of a transitional movie between replay and story is Daddar's *The Ironforge Bank Robbery* (*Ironforge Bankers* on ⟨http://www.warcraftmovies⟩). It documents a dramatic and unexpected in-game exploit that functions as a sort of skill demonstration for this particularly character type and player. At the same time, Daddar's massacre of the Ironforge bankers became a part of the world's lore through its telling in the movie. Players commenting on the piece noted their desire to roll a new rogue character like Daddar's and see if they could experience a similar moment for themselves; for a while, the replay movie certainly influenced attitudes among players about Horde, Undead, or Rogue characters. When players thought about imitating Daddar, they meant to test out their own skills against a now legendary, if shadowy, figure, but at the same time, the spectacle of Daddar's video also became part of the player community's shared sense of the history of the online game world. This documented moment from the history of the digital world thus helped to shape both the fictional world of Azeroth and its player-created counterpart.

Examples such as Daddar and Leeroy Jenkins suggest that character development has been an important characteristic of *World of Warcraft* textual production by players making story line machinima movies. Clearly, players are fans of the games that they play, and as in other kinds of fan production, they are eager to delve into characters encountered in games such as *World of Warcraft*, or to create new ones as part of their engagement with the game and its storyworld. They can accomplish these goals by setting both developer-authored and original characters in familiar locations, with hooks grappling into narrative structure or elements that might be from Blizzard's games, novels, or the role playing game. In turn, the stories told through these movies add new narrative elements or even

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35.9 Daddar escapes Ironforge in the *Ironforge Bank Robbery*.

entire story arcs to the world. Riot Films' *Edge of Remorse*, Sleeping Dogs Productions' (Clara/J. Joshua Diltz) *Rise of the Living Dead* trilogy, Bannerman Productions' (Corey Bannerman) *My Life for the Horde: The Legend of Seemos*, and the AFK Pl@yers' (John Hsu, Epla Hsieh, and Outy Yang) *Thrall's Christmas Tree* are examples of such projects.

I have already taken a look at *Edge of Remorse* and will be examining *Rise of the Living Dead* in a moment. *The Legend of Seemos* is the second of a trilogy of movies, in progress, closely tied to an important story arc introduced in *Warcraft III*, the betrayal of the unsteady Orc-Human pact on Kalimdor by Admiral Proudmoore, a key character in both *Warcraft II* and *Warcraft III*. As the ten-minute movie begins, it is announced as "a tale inspired by the history of *Warcraft*." The focus is "one hero that stands above the others"; this hero, Seemos, is an entirely new character introduced in the movie, though characters from *Warcraft*, such as the Orc leader Thrall (in the narration) and Proudmoore, appear in it. A conventional story about a hero's impact on Azeroth's history, the creators show how machinima can provide new textual elements to fill in previously unexplored aspects of the gameworld's history.

The Taiwanese group's *Thrall's Christmas Tree* takes the rather different tack of introducing new minor characters to reveal aspects of established characters from the Blizzard's *Warcraft* library, such as Jaina Proudmoore, Rexxar, and Thrall himself. They accomplish this by inventing a young character named Sirloin Bloodhoof, whose unremarkable party sets out to locate a unique Christmas tree to satisfy Warchief Thrall's reputation and impress Lady Proudmoore. Nothing quite satisfies the great Thrall, of course. This comedic machinima movie takes Bloodhoof's group to locations throughout Azeroth, which are recast through the various compositing and editing techniques employed by AFK Pl@yers, ultimately they arrive at the World Tree, a location of special significance to the storyworld's history explored in *Warcraft III*, and bring it to Theramore to satisfy Thrall's need to impress. The juxtaposition of *My Life for the Horde* and *Thrall's Christmas Tree* shows us that the players who create machinima works

35.10 Thrall makes an appearance in a scene from AFK Pl@yers' *Thrall's Christmas Tree*.

can operate along a range of character and story elements, from the heroic to the ordinary, and the familiar to the unexpected.

Diltz's *Rise of the Living Dead* trilogy is one of the most ambitious machinima projects set in the *World of Warcraft*, running nearly eighty minutes in length altogether. It also builds on the narrative structure established by the *Warcraft* series, and develops borrowed and new characters to create an original story. *Rise of the Living Dead* is an eerie, heavily atmospheric movie that tells a new story about the prophesied "end of days" in Azeroth, as the dead rise everywhere to overcome the living. It uses distinctive cinematography, postproduction editing, voice acting, and sound effects to follow two story lines: the sacrificial attack by Captain Bernandette's troops against the massed Undead in Andorhal, and the efforts of a smaller band led by the Elven General Tal to pass through the Unholy Gates and destroy the source of this threat to their world. It is a light versus darkness story focused on a possible end of the storyworld. Diltz and his collaborators build on both the library of story elements provided by the game and familiar aspects of gameplay while moving their original story forward. Narrative touches from the Blizzard library mix in familiar quotations, non-player characters, and other elements from *World of Warcraft*, and scenes are set in well-traveled locations from the game.

These connections to the game resonate as part of an experienced storyworld; viewers who have played the game are drawn in by these subtle touches, as when a character says "beware the living" (a common utterance of Undead non-player characters in the game) or a "mob" ("mobile" or AI-controlled opponent) previously encountered in the game, such as Araj the Summoner, is given a speaking part that fleshes out his role—insofar as this can be said of an Undead character. Araj presides over Andorhal, a human town overrun by ghouls and skeletons in both the game world and the machinima trilogy; even though his appearance in *Rise of the Living Dead* is brief, players who have dealt with him immediately touch back to the game as a narrative context for what transpires in the video. Narrative elements in the game and machinima story work reciprocally as the new story line unfolds, reinforcing the engagement of viewers who have played the game. Indeed, more stories set in the campaigns established by the trilogy can easily be imagined, for example, to provide backstories and biographies of the characters. In effect, *Rise of the Living Dead* demonstrates the possibility of presenting new vast narratives within *Warcraft* as an established storyworld.

The *Rise of the Living Dead* trilogy does not only rely on the library of story elements provided by the game, however; it also presents gameplay such that players can hardly refrain from dissecting its key action scenes as they would a replay or player versus player video. Diltz does this primarily in two ways. First, he reflects on moments, actions, or conversations that players frequently experience in *World of Warcraft*. For example, in *Rise of the Living Dead II*, the small party under General Tal discusses how it will cut through enemy lines to reach its goal, the Unholy Gates of Hell. Significantly, the small group is made up of five members, the canonical size for in-game parties before the larger endgame raids, and like many such parties, they begin to plan their attack by discussing strategy. Until this point in the story, the characters have spoken entirely in keeping with their characters. Now they reveal their tactics in the language of players, speaking in terms typical of in-game parties—Tal cautions to "stay clear of mobs," the troll Tourach advises his sister, a rogue, to "sap the bears," and

35.11 Jane of Blades in Sleeping Dogs Productions' *Rise of the Living Dead III: The Turning*.

35.12 The beach scene from Myndflame's *Illegal Danish: Super Snacks*. The scene was composited and constructed from various game elements, including the *Escape from Orgrimmar* trailer.

the human soldier Dartric proclaims, "I'll tank the ghostly knight." In a humorous transition back to the atmosphere and roles of the story, Tal begins what players now understand as a climactic "instance crawl" by saying to Councilor Keltwyn, "My Lord, will you do the honors of pulling the first mob?" This scene subtly recalls the narrative structure of games in the *Warcraft* series and *World of Warcraft*; by briefly portraying the characters as players, it suggests that the party will move the story forward by successfully concluding the impending skirmish.

The second way in which this and other machinima movies build on the player's experience of the game is through actual gameplay. A lengthy fight scene in part two of the trilogy plays a crucial role in the story. The antagonists are two groups of characters, one Horde, and the other Alliance; in the backstory provided by knowledge of the game, these are natural enemies. After fighting, though, they realize, as Tourach points out, that "our worlds are one and the same," and they must unite to fight the same enemy. Still, the preceding fight draws players into the action by focusing on the various abilities, spells, and tactics used by the combatants; during the fight, the diegetic context for the characters' actions is less that of in-story roles than of in-game player classes and skills. And yet, the camera angles, editing, and voiced dialogue show these "moves" as players would never see them during their own gameplay, resulting in a carefully scripted replay.

The content of machinima is often completely independent of the games used to make them, even when artistic assets and character models are used virtually without alteration. Even so, players are acutely aware of gameplay, and carefully "read" the skills, tricks, and decisions on view as a crucial aspect of their appreciation of these projects. Even when machinima creators tell stories based on games that can be appreciated and enjoyed by anyone, players are in a sense incapable of not seeing them differently from non-players. This is perhaps a quality that machinima shares with other forms of "transmedia storytelling." As Jenkins (2007) has put it, producers of such stories "have found it difficult to achieve the delicate balance between creating stories which make sense to first-time viewers and building in elements which enhance the experience of people reading across multiple media."[18]

Story line machinima movies made with *World of Warcraft* raise an important question: How much narrative freedom can movies created inside a game world have from texts presented in those games; that is, from the content created by the game developers? This question is at the heart of what differentiates the relationship of machinima to game from, say, fan fiction to the novels or films that inspire them. In a nutshell, any response to this question must take into account, as I have already

noted, that game developers produce both narrative *texts* and narrative *engines*. Fan fiction based on *The Lord of the Rings* or *Star Wars* cites these texts (even remix is a form of citation, rather than copying), but short of plagiarism it does not *use* them. Machinima creators use the games they cite as movie production technology at a minimum, but often for sets, artwork, and animation as well.

Much of the most recent history of *World of Warcraft*–based machinima, in particular, revolves around efforts to open up a dependence that machinima artist Tristan Pope described with respect to the making of his "Not Just Another Love Story" as, "I only executed what the pixels in *WoW* suggest."[19] In Pope's case, this statement was a defense of the depiction of sexual imagery in his movie by half-jokingly arguing that he had merely showed "what *WoW*'s pixels imply." Another take on this theme was offered by Deeprun Goldwin Michler's *The Man Who Can*, which depicts a character who escapes the limitations imposed by Blizzard's pixels by dancing with new moves animated by Michler. Later machinima projects such as Rufus Cubed's (Terran Gregory and Ezra Ferguson) *Return: A Warcraft Saga*, Mike Spiff Booth's *Code Monkey*, or Myndflame's (Clint and Derek Hackleman) insanely fast-paced *Zinwrath: The Movie* and *Illegal Danish: Super Snacks* used model viewers, compositing, and postproduction editing in ways that broke open creative (but not necessarily legal) constraints on the use of server-based online games and their artistic assets to make independent movies. As Gregory has put it:

> The power of the modelviewer lies far beyond its individual features: It is what I would deem the "Key" to unlocking *WoW* Machinima as a whole. As its enthusiasts would claim, Machinima is supposed to be an empowering art form that delivers you from the typical restrictions and limitations of real-world filmmaking, allowing you to realize your vision irrespective of your resources. . . . Modelviewer was the great virtual socioeconomic equalizer, that truly allowed *WoW* movie makers to experience all of the freedoms that are inherent to Machinima.[20]

35.13 The party scene at the conclusion of Myndflame's *Illegal Danish: Super Snacks*.

The storyworld of *Warcraft* was constructed as an accumulation of text elements from games, and then accumulated across several games and other media; a piecewise rather than a unified notion of story production has resulted from this process. When Gregory writes about the Model Viewer as the key to unlocking the independent production of machinima made in *World of Warcraft*, he suggests that machinima makers have opened up access to both the text library and the narrative engine in a way that lends them status as coproducers of the *Warcraft* storyworld.

Conclusion: Conflict or Cooperation?

Most game research depicts the game designer as auteur and development teams as offering the primary creative impulses in game culture. How have the replay and machinima projects described in this chapter extended player engagement with the storyworld created by Blizzard's developers? And is the relationship of these two forms of creative expression—those of developers and players—characterized more accurately as one of conflict or cooperation? I would answer this question differently with respect to archival and textual production. In the case of game-based movies based on *Warcraft* and *World of Warcraft*, even supplementing the notion of developer as author by

allowing that players have elaborated stories created by Blizzard seems inadequate. In the case of replay, it is clearly the case that we are dealing with the player not only as performer but also as creator of the medium of presentation as well as the new forms of spectatorship associated with it. Archival replay also produces stories, which I have described as historical accounts of documented players and games. In short, replay is the domain of the player as performer, though as I have argued, just as gameplay may ignore lovingly created in-game narrative texts, replay has had little to say about *Warcraft*'s storyworld. Even though games can incorporate texts and be used to tell stories, playing *Warcraft* no more requires taking note of these stories than playing basketball requires knowledge of the history of that game.

With so-called story line machinima, however, the situation is more nuanced and the results are different. Even if developers created texts and textual elements that players may or may not choose to have "read" or even noticed during gameplay, these texts nonetheless have added up to a consistent storyworld proven capable of supporting many new texts and games in a variety of media. Some players are eager to add their own texts set inside the storyworld or extend their deep commitment to *Warcraft* as a game by figuring out how to use it in new ways. These players work out projects that combine their skill as players, technical chops, and storytelling verve. They create game-based texts that for the thousands of players who download and view their movies, extend engagement with both the game and the storyworld.

Let me say clearly that critical attention to game design, to the game developer as author, is important. It is certainly true that players would not be using games to make movies if game developers had not given them compelling games. That said, the creativity of players is often just as compelling as game design. This creativity, as well as the forms of performance and spectatorship it has spawned, certainly deserves more attention than it has thus far received from game studies. Like Michael Jordan painting on James Naismith's canvas, players are the experts on using digital games as performance space, and showing off their own moves as players and storytellers.

Notes

1. My account of this match is partly based on my observations as head referee of this event, supplemented by viewing the replay, and reading commentary on clan and replay Web sites.

2. These ideas about narratives based on gameplay are influenced, of course, by Hayden White's writing on "metahistory" (1975, 7–11) as well as John Fiske's work on enunciative fan production (1992, 30–49).

3. Strictly speaking, most replays are viewed not in video formats but as demo or replay files executed by the game. This distinction is significant both for spectatorship and machinima production, but it does not affect my argument about the relationship between watching replays and watching story line machinima.

4. For the history of machinima, see Lowood (2006a).

5. The awards that *Edge of Remorse* has received include "best overall film" of the Xfire Summer Movie Contest 2006 as well as "best direction" and "best visual design" at the 2006 Machinima Film Festival.

6. Henceforth, I will use *Warcraft* to refer to the *Warcraft* real-time strategy game series, including its revisions and expansions. Game titles will be named individually—for example, *Warcraft III*, when necessary. *World of Warcraft* is not included when I refer to *Warcraft* as a game title.

7. For details on the history of the real-time strategy genre, see Lowood (2007b).

8. Naismith's original thirteen rules are available quite literally as a text, published originally in January 1892 in the Springfield College newspaper, the *Triangle*.

9. The best guide to thinking about issues related to this notion remains Murray (1997).

10. These choices are compatible with the modes of fan production offered by Fiske (1992).

11. The balance for sentient versus sentient play was largely because "humans" were an in-game race.

12. Conversation with Bill Roper, Stanford University, March 1, 2004.

13. This structure resembles the "beads-on-a string" model proposed by Costikyan (2007, 8) for combining games and stories.

14. I am indebted to former student Rene Patnode for this notion of game syntax.

15. This video was created by the Pals for Life guild (<http://www.thepalsforlife.com>) in May 2005, perhaps under the title *A Rough Go*. The original video is available at <http://www.warcraftmovies.com/movieview.php?id=1666>.

16. On media and sports, see Crawford (2004, 130–153).

17. This perhaps is one way in which the multiplayer game heightened engagement with *World of Warcraft* as a compilation not just of *Warcraft* story settings but also of its competitive game settings.

18. Jenkins has written widely on this topic.

19. Quoted in "Videos," available at <http://www.craftingworlds.com/videos.html> (accessed April 2005). On the controversy unleashed by Pope's movie, see Lowood (2006b).

20. Email communication, December 11, 2006. Gregory is referring to the Model Viewer authored by John Steele.

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