

# The Question of Morality in the World of Warcraft

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij Engleskog jezika i književnosti  
(nastavnički smjer) i Njemačkog jezika i književnosti (nastavnički smjer)

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## **Abstract**

Written by several authors, the *Warcraft* novel series began to attract masses in the early 2000s. Moreover, popularized by the corresponding video game franchise *Warcraft* by Blizzard Entertainment, the storyline got an additional boost. In 2016, it reached its peak with the release of the first movie *Warcraft*. The original trilogy was published by Richard A. Knaak. Later, other authors filled in the backstory and created more sequels both in written and video game format. By creating characters with several layers to them, the authors have opened the plot to interpretation from several points of view. The aim of this paper is to explicate and elaborate on the chosen, morally gray, main characters and related events in the *Warcraft* series and to show why they make the novels such a good read. The chosen characters of Medivh, Garrosh Hellscream, Thrall, Arthas Menethril, and Illidan Stormrage will be analyzed through original written book sources and philosophical outlooks on morality in popular culture as well as their depictions in the movie *Warcraft* and Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft*. Finally, the impact of the MMORPG will be observed through the prism of morality in the players themselves as the video game offers morally gray situations and options.

**Keywords:** *Warcraft*, morality, MMORPG, popular culture, film, popular fiction

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## Introduction

*Warcraft* is an all-encompassing multimedia enterprise comprised of novels, video games, card games, comics, manga, film adaptations, and other creations published by Blizzard Entertainment and originated at the end of the 20th century. Readers, players, and enthusiasts believe it to be one of the most complex mythologies in gaming history with a two-decade long narrative that is still spawning new planets, characters, and alternate timelines (Tucker). To fully grasp the extent and meaning of one element, one must engage with other, if not, all the elements of the *Warcraft* series. While video games have amassed a huge and profitable following, it is the novels that started the lore. Nowadays, one is directed to explore the short stories or novels between new game expansions to fill in the gaps and backstories that could not be expressed in the format of a video game (Nelson). The oeuvre of *Warcraft* contains the twenty-one books in the novel series *The World of Warcraft*, published between 2006 and 2020, as well as the original seven novels published between 2001 and 2007 that set the *Warcraft* saga and its history. The first four books: *Of Blood and Honor* (by Chris Metzen), *Day of the Dragon* (by Richard A. Knaak), *Lord of the Clans* (by Christie Golden), and *The Last Guardian* (by Jeff Grubb) represent the *Warcraft Archive*, while the following three: *The Well of Eternity*, *The Demon Soul*, and *The Sundering*, all written by Richard A. Knaak, comprise *The War of the Ancients* trilogy. The original seven are then followed by the first of the twenty-one novels in *The World of Warcraft* series, *Cycle of Hatred* (Tucker).

The original video game *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans* was developed over the years and released in 1994, marking the beginning of the *Warcraft* franchise. As one of the highest-grossing video games in the world, the game has thus far grossed over \$11 billion mostly on the shoulders of the online multiplayer role-playing game (RPG) *World of Warcraft* first released in 2004 (Lopez). The video game also falls under the special category of the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) that is distinguished from the single-player games by the number of simultaneous players in the world and by its continuous evolution even when the player is away from the game (Öqvist 2). The subscription-based game has had several expansions or upgrades, which have drawn new players along with the increasingly advanced customization options for players' avatars. The avatars can change race (Human, Dwarf, Night Elf, Gnome, Draenei, Worgen, Pandaren,

Troll, Orc, Blood Elf, Undead, Tauren, Goblin) and class (Hunter, Mage, Monk, Warrior, Paladin, Rogue, Priest, Shaman, Warlock, Druid, Death Knight, Demon Hunter), as well as more common RPG characteristics (face, hair, beard, hair color, accessories). The success of the game has greatly been due to the ability to adventure solo and accomplish something without wasting a lot of time on technicalities like looking for other player groups. Moreover, the RPG format has been on the rise since the early 2000s, when the game was first released, attracting millions who wanted to escape into a virtual world of magic, terror, and adventure. The subscription numbers peaked in the year 2010 with 12 million paying subscription accounts. The current number of users is around 6 million, which is still an impressive following considering the more saturated RPG market (Lopez).

The aim of this master's thesis is to explore the term morality from a reader and player perspective while mostly focusing on the specific relation to chosen main characters from the original book series (Medivh, Garrosh Hellscream, Thrall, Arthas Menethil, Illidan Stormrage). The paper also explores the philosophical outlook on morality from the player's or gamer's perspective and his/her relation to the game. Morality and ethics come hand in hand when defining each term. While ethics is often defined as the philosophical study of morality, morality in turn is represented as the ideal code of conduct, the ability to distinguish between good and bad behavior. While ethics focuses on the theory, the morality offers examples in practice (Öqvist 1).

The first chapter offers a theoretical overview on morality and philosophy in the context of popular culture as the basis for the further analysis. The second chapter defines morally gray characters and how the chosen main characters' stories are formed around their morally gray personalities and actions. The examples from the novels are paraphrased to present polarizing points of view with reflection based on the influential philosophical ideas. Each section of the chapter focuses on one chosen character. The third chapter conducts a visual comparison of each character related to the shift they experience through their depiction in the movie, the video game or visualizers. Finally, the fourth chapter takes into account the philosophy behind the average *World of Warcraft* player and reflects on how the game influences one's own morality. By being the most popular and played game in the category of Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG), *World of Warcraft* sets a precedent for future research in correlation of belief systems, morality, and video games.

# 1. Philosophy of Morality in Popular Culture

The widely accepted analysis by Gilbert Seldes in *The Seven Lively Arts* from 1924 defines high and low art, great and popular art, cultured and uncultured art. Seldes' distinction that popular arts are equally as interesting and entertaining as important has sparked interest among the academics who used to shy away from societal features with broad appeal through mass media (O'Connor 3). From the first printed bestsellers, morality has been at the forefront when it comes to capturing audience's attention in printed or digital formats. The ability to judge one's actions, beliefs, and wants allows for a debate on a variety of different people with different outlooks. By presenting polarizing situations and allowing for a conversation on a larger scale, popular culture has captivated millions of people willing to share their point of view on forums, blogs, and feeds. However, by allowing so many on a platform where their ideas could resonate equally, philosophy, as a concept of reasoning on the actions of the real world and principles of moral judgement, has been diluted. As an illustration, in his 2005 paper, Brian L. Ott claims that philosophy has "officially been pimped" (1). He lists popular culture franchises like *The Simpsons*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The Lord of the Rings* to explicate the reasoning behind his claims that philosophy is being commercialized (Ott 1). In exploring the inner ideas of these franchises, Ott discovers the overwhelming influence of Plato, Immanuel Kant, and Karl Marx. Luke Cuddy expands the list by recognizing the ideas of nihilism and Friedrich Nietzsche (28).

First, Plato's pursuit of the notion of "the good" and "the real" is what drives the narratives in most of popular fiction. Second, Kant's views on empiricism and rationalism combine sensory experience and the rational mind (Ott 2). Applied to popular culture and philosophy, simplified Kantian philosophy can be interpreted as "fans of popular culture will buy anything that mentions what they're fans of" (Ott 3). Third, Marx's ideas on the superstructures expressed through historical materialism are a fond topic when creating popular fiction dystopias. If applied to the consumers of popular culture themselves, the patterns of exploitation and oppression can be observed. What the popular culture market has seen over the years is the shift of interest, whether from paperback to digital or televised to streamed. The oppressed consumer class is dictating the mass production and in turn simulating the ruling class influenced by the economic interest (Ott 3). Finally, Nietzsche's ideas can be observed in characters who behave on the principles of Nietzschean Overman. This higher evolution of man does not conform under any value system but is rather his own value system (Cuddy 32). Nihilism takes it step further and denies the existence of

unarguable values or behaviors one should adopt (Krellenstein 2). Moreover, moral nihilism occurs when moral absolutes like “right” or “wrong” are denied and replaced by the wording “favor” and “oppose” (Krellenstein 20). When it comes to the influence of the Enlightenment and Postmodernism, they allow for the exploration of emancipation, egalitarianism, and metanarratives. Postmodernism challenges traditional ideas and widely accepted foundations of universal claims and reexplores language and self-legitimizing discourses (Ott 4). Sociological approach to morality in popular culture is mostly derived from the ideas of Marx who asserts that all actions are the result of class conflict while differences in social classes are based on many iterations of power (a political system, a force, an influential person) (Sadeghi 125).

The interplay of popular culture and philosophy has been explored by a critical studies series published by Open Court titled *Popular Culture and Philosophy*. Each series explores a popular culture phenomenon, like the aforementioned three, as well as many more like *Paris Hilton and Philosophy: “Existentialism, That’s Hot!”*, *Brad and Jen’s Breakup and Philosophy: Mr. & Mrs. Ubermensch*, *Black Sabbath and Philosophy* and the most relevant for this paper, *World of Warcraft and Philosophy: Wrath of the Philosopher King*. The authors and editors are encouraged to dim down on academic language and to “teach without being teachy” (Huss 20). According to John Huss, there are two distinctive models in bringing philosophical content to non-academic audiences. Academic philosophers have adapted the *pedagogical model* and the *applied philosophy model*. In the *pedagogical model*, popular culture is dissected, and particular examples are taken with the aim of acquainting the consumer or reader with key problems, ideas, and history to achieve philosophical literacy. In the *applied philosophy model*, scholars offer new dimensions to popular culture phenomena and franchises by illustrating the philosophical influence and value when interpreting the content (Huss 19). While different in definitions, both models rely on a pedagogical approach when conveying their message (Huss 21).

Authors and editors who contribute to the *Popular Culture and Philosophy* series consider popular culture as a ready-made source of examples more easily understood than the complex parables of classical philosophers. The interest in philosophy on a non-academic level has been proven by the appearance of pseudo-philosophy (crystals, astrology, tarot cards). Similarly, science was commercially pushed aside by pseudo-science of paranormal phenomena, UFOs, Bigfoot and Loch Ness sightings. Therefore, providing an acceptable format of scientific and philosophical content that can be understood by the non-academic

consumer is a valuable endeavor (Huss 22). Not every problem can be resolved by the means of philosophy, but the *applied philosophy model* seeks to provide the means on how to apply the philosophical analysis on the problem (Huss 23). The *pedagogical model* has also been accepted in some philosophy curricula where instructors demonstrate complex ideas on content recognized by younger learners like *Star Wars*, *Batman: The Dark Knight*, *The Matrix* or *Blade Runner*. It is pertinent that the ability to form educated critical reflections is promoted from an early age and that one can ponder on presented ethical dilemmas, rights, values of existence, and nature of issues (Diminick 3).

As far as ethics is concerned, different definitions provide similar conclusion on the concept. Randy Cohen, most famous for his “The Ethicist” column in the *New York Times Magazine* summarizes ethics as “the rational determination of right conduct, an attempt to answer the question, ‘How should I act now?’” (qtd. in O’Connor 13). The main values that Cohen and others emphasize are honesty, compassion, kindness, fairness, freedom, and egalitarianism (qtd. in O’Connor 13). Next, according to Immanuel Kant, the human obligation is to reason about their actions on the basis of a categorical imperative or universal rule (Öqvist 3). Kantian ethics have been revised by the industrial revolution philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and Stuart Mill through the principles of utility (morally right act promotes benefit and reduces harm) and the principles of equability (benefits and harms are equal for all) (O’Connor 4). In the westernized world, which is the prime consumer of popular culture, these are often derived from traditional fundamental religious values bestowed in Judeo-Christian societies. Even though postmodernism attempts to deconstruct these religious foundations, one cannot deny the importance of values that are adopted by the basic principles of these religious systems, like the Ten Commandments. One does not necessarily need to practice their religion to benefit from its ideas of freedom, acceptance, responsibility, and honor (O’Connor 6). These are a common motif and an instigator of plotlines in popular fiction.

In the context of the *World of Warcraft*, main characters are constantly found in situations where they have to prove their honor, take responsibility, and fight for the freedom of their people and values. As such, the *Warcraft* franchise has opened itself to philosophical analysis in many of its formats (book, video game, movie). By being extended over several mediums, *Warcraft* offers itself to analysis based on both the *pedagogical* and *applied philosophy model*. When it comes to ethical theories, *Warcraft* can be analyzed from the *transparency model* and the *heroic model*. Cohen defines the *transparency model* as a type of

behavior when people act as if everyone were watching. In this way, a person is more likely to conform to regional community norms. The *heroic model* is defined by a person who possesses impressive role models and tries to emulate them throughout their lifetime. The disadvantage of such example lies in the disconnect between general time and place, and one's own distinctive challenges (Cohen qtd. in O'Connor 13). In terms of *Warcraft*, the *transparency model* reflects on the characters who do as is expected of them in the societal position they are in. The *heroic model*, which will be greatly described and analyzed in the following chapter, represents people in line to rule or who wield enormous power for which they are ill-equipped, either by their upbringing and childhood traumas or emotional instability and immaturity.

## 2. The Morally Gray Characters in the *World of Warcraft*

Morally gray characters are defined by their personalities that cannot be put into a single box of good or bad, protagonist or antagonist. They are those who are willing to cross the line and make a difficult decision. A well-written morally gray character has a reason for his/her actions that is often met with an interesting obstacle. They are not too mysterious and can easily be understood, often in terms of one's personal experience. What is impactful is that they are working on their flaws and often show feelings of regret and remorse. These are the characters whose storyline expands through several editions, often in flashbacks, prophecies, or legacies ("How to Write a Morally Grey Character").

The interest in such characters may stem from "the moral bankruptcy of today's culture" (Rand). In her essay "The Cult of Moral Grayness," Ayn Rand distinguishes between the ideas of "black" (bad) and "white" (good) actions as the only possible alternatives when it comes to altruism. Rand suggests that if two were to mix, they would still, in the context of morality, be "black" rather than "gray." This is why she suggests one should not regard such moral code in applicable reality as moral issues are far more complex. However, she recognizes that moral grayness as a concept is best explained as a restatement of the proposition: "There are two sides to every issue" (Rand). It does not mean that both sides are equally valid or justified, but that one should be able to acknowledge both sides exist. More often than not, one side will fall under the category of "white" (Rand).

When engaging in an extensive lore of *Warcraft*, one can emphasize several key characters whose stories leave a significant mark in the storyline of their own time and the future ones. In this paper, actions, thoughts, and beliefs of Medivh, Garrosh Hellscream, Thrall, Arthas Menethil, and Illidan Stormrage will further be discussed in terms of the provided description of morally gray characters. When discussing these characters, attention will primarily be paid to the original book series as a source for literary analysis. Additionally, the characters' depiction will be explored in the following chapter in terms of the movie *Warcraft* (2016) and the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft*. Visual impact of these characters on the viewer or player also paints the picture of the shift these characters experience in their lifetimes.

## 2.1. Medivh

### 2.1.1. The Origin Story

Firstly, the character who is the reason for all conflicts that ensue will be accounted for. Magus or Magna Medivh is an immensely powerful yet tragic character. He carries the title *The Last Guardian of Tirisfal* and is also known as *the Prophet* and *the Oracle*. This position was created to protect a distant world known as Azeroth from the *Burning Legion*. Many powerful mages perform a ritual in which all the mages from the Council give a fraction of their power to fuel the new Guardian. This role or position is held until the Guardian dies or abdicates. Then, a ritual is performed to strip them of their power and transfer it to a new subject. Medivh inherited the position of the Guardian from his mother Aegwynn who was the apprentice of the previous Guardian Magna Scavell. She fought against stereotypes by showing incredible talent<sup>1</sup> and became the first female Guardian (Stickney, “Know Your Lore: Aegwynn”). Most notably, she fought Sargeras, the Demon Lord, and defeated him. Before disappearing, however, Sargeras put his essence into Aegwynn’s body so when she gave birth to Medivh, his destiny was already sealed by the corrupted spirit of Medivh. Against his will, Medivh begins to search for a way to destroy the world he swore to protect, and he eventually succeeds. Moreover, he builds a portal that connects Azeroth to the world of Orcs and with that he also paves the way for the demons of the *Burning Legion* to enter Azeroth. When his betrayal is discovered, he is swiftly killed by the ones closest to him (Wachowski, “Know Your Lore: Medivh”). His destiny will be explicated as being morally gray due to his inner conflicts, which occur when he fights the corrupted spirit within him. Medivh is the prime example of a character that is morally gray because his true nature is good: when the invasion of demons occurs, he protects Azeroth with his life. On the other hand, he also dooms Azeroth because of the corrupted thoughts planted into his mind, which caused the invasion in the first place. In the end, as a final act of redemption, he reappears as a mysterious prophet during the Third War to help the mortals defeat the Legion (“Medivh’s Story” 00:12:24-00:13:33).

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<sup>1</sup>Aegwynn managed to read the *Metire Scrolls*, the spells of long dead Highborn mages, which very few were ever able to read. Her magical skills were equal to other apprentices of Magna Scavell and her diligence earned her the respect of her peers. She believed the Council should allow her to proactively hunt down any threat before it became dangerous or harmful.



### 2.1.2. Why Is Medivh Morally Gray?

The metaphorical graying of Medivh's body and soul is to be understood in connection to Sargeris, a titan, the creator, leader, and main antagonist of the *Burning Legion*, who implements a part of himself in Medivh's mother's Aegwynn's womb as she defeats him in a fight:

"I am, for when Aegwynn killed my physical body I hid within her womb, and invested her very cells with my dark essence. When she finally chose to mate with a human mage, I was already there. Medivh's dark twin, completely subsumed within his form."

"Monstrous," said Khadgar.

Medivh grinned. "Little different than what Aegwynn had planned, for she placed the power of the Tirisfalen within the child as well. Small wonder that there was so little room for the young Medivh himself, with the demon and the light both fighting over his very soul." (Grubb 235)

Aegwynn had chosen her son to be her heir long ago, but what she did not know is that his soul would become a battleground between the light of the Guardian and the darkness of Sargeris. The real Medivh, as it appears, never stood the chance of existing, having been tarnished from inception.

From the first encounter with Medivh in the novel *The Last Guardian*, the reader is made aware of the strain that magic leaves on his body. Khadgar, perhaps the most powerful magi in Azerothian history and Medivh's apprentice, describes Medivh as being of middling age and with his hair already starting to turn grey (Grubb 27). The cruel side of Medivh does come to show in fights. On an occasion, Medivh and Khadgar had to fight some orcs and as Medivh scorched and maimed them he did it with a smile on his face. Fighting the orcs came easy to Medivh, because he only had to wave his hands, and the creatures would be incinerated and decapitated (Grubb 67). As the member of the human race, Medivh finds it easy to fight the orcs as an inferior race. Orcs, who later form the Horde, are depicted as a race of people whose belief system is similar to marginalized and colonized real-world cultures. Similar polarization can be found in Tolkien-inspired races of elves and dwarves. Each side deems their actions as morally "good" (Langer 87). However, Ayn Rand's idea that one side will ultimately be chosen as the justified is the source for debate on the official Blizzard-sponsored forums and discussion websites. What really separates the two factions is

otherness and the lack of familiarity (Grubb 87). Moreover, it is unclear whether Medivh can control his magic. At least, he seems aware that mages should stay away from some powers. This is illustrated when once Khadgar asks him if he ever sought out a particular vision, searching for a specific future. Medivh's mood darkens instantly making it very clear that there are things even a master mage has to respect (Grubb 82). Medivh showcases signs of ethical impact in regard to the *heroic model* when he understands the responsibilities and boundaries made by his influential predecessors (Cohen 13).

He also puts in place his own set of values he decides to follow, which can be interpreted through the prism of Nietzschean Overman. On an occasion, Medivh and Khadgar investigate the deaths of two high ranking mages. Medivh concludes that the victims were trying to summon demons but could not discern their reasons. Knowing his enemies could be lurking anywhere, he states that it probably had something to do with their hubris and overconfidence, but most of all their fear of him (Grubb 121). By being the strongest mage in Azeroth, Medivh does not only intimidate other mages and enemies, but also his closest friends. One of them named Lothar expresses his belief that Medivh is "danger incarnate" and that he admires "anyone willing to be under the same roof with him." While it may have sounded as a joke, it is noted that Lothar did not smile when saying these things (Grubb 134). Afterwards, the fear of his peers is revealed as justified as it was in fact Medivh who murdered those mages. In this important character-building moment, it is made obvious that Medivh did not criticize the actions of those mages but that he rather reflected on his own. He was talking about his own pride and hubris, as well as his conviction that he could control the power of a demon. He pretends to investigate others, while he really investigates himself based on the value system he holds. He does not feel remorse or regret, because, in true Nietzschean Overman nature, he accepts the good and the bad aspects of his existence and all its manifestations (Cuddy 32).

The tragic side of Medivh's character is revealed when Khadgar eavesdrops on Medivh and hears him say how tired he is of worrying about everything and that for once he wants to worry about himself (Grubb 180). Moreover, the fact that he inherited a position and power he did not have the chance to choose for himself grants him the disparity he feels about all the responsibility that lies on his shoulders. Like many great mythological heroes, Medivh, in the rare moment of true self-expression, finds himself questioning his faith and predestination that left him no freedom of choice. Perhaps he just wanted a normal life and not the one cut short through evident accelerated aging caused by the burden of inherited

powers. In addition, in fulfilling the role he so despises, Medivh's rage for the ungrateful world he is dying to protect grows. It escalates to the point where Medivh opens the Dark Portal that allows the Orcs to enter Azeroth. In an impactful conversation between Medivh and his mother Aegwynn, Sargeras' seed reveals itself as the toxic amplifier of Medivh's emotions used to manipulate him:

Tears were starting to form at the old man's eyes.

"What happens if these orcs succeed?" said Aegwynn. "They worship dark gods and shadows. Why would you give Azeroth to them?"

"When they succeed," said the past Medivh, "they will make me their leader. They respect strength, Mother, unlike you or the rest of this sorry world. And thanks to you, I am the strongest thing in this world. And I will have broken the shackles that you and others have placed on me, and I will rule." (Grubb 199)

Here, his pride, which he inherited from his mother, comes before any responsibility or duty to protect the world from doom. Medivh truly believed that he would be able to control both the orcs and the demons. In turn, he would finally have the freedom, he would free himself from the burden of the title of the Guardian as well as from himself. The normal life, which he truly craved, was never an option. The only thing he could do was to control the damage already done by saving his mother from Sargeras. In a poignant moment, Medivh becomes fully aware of his mistakes and misdeeds and allows regret to overwhelm him. He lets out "the howl of a lost soul, screaming to the heavens for forgiveness that will never be forthcoming" (Grubb 200).

At the end, it is very hard to distinguish between Medivh and Sargeras as Medivh becomes the vanishing twin whose task is to provide the body for the spirit of Sargeras. Sargeras' actions are completely immoral based on the Kantian rules of the Categorical Imperative that state that one should never use a moral agent merely to achieve some goal (Serchuk 111). The former signs of remorse are gone, and the body-soul overtaking is reaching its final stage:

"Magus, whatever has happened, I'm sure it can be fixed," said Khadgar, walking slowly toward him ...

"Why should I fix it?" said Medivh with an evil smile. "All goes as planned. The orcs will slay the humans and I will control them through warlock-chiefs like Gul'dan. I will lead these misshapened creations to the lost tomb where Sargeras's body is,

protected against demon and human but not against orc, and my form will be free. And then I can shed this lumpish body and weakened spirit and burn this world as it so richly deserves.” (Grubb 234)

Finally, Medivh’s fury towards an ungrateful world seems to escalate only due to Sargeras’s influence. In search for a “normal” life, Medivh allows the Sargeras’s plan to unravel leaving himself oblivious to the fact that all the hate, misery, and pain he feels is not self-induced, but rather tactically planned by someone else. Once Medivh starts to manifest the abilities of the Guardian, Sargeras “shuts him down” until he plots the scheme of how to control him and rob him of his youth and the true potential for good that the Guardian possesses (Grubb 235). In the movie *Warcraft*, in the final rare moment of sanity, Medivh’s last words are: “I wanted to save us all. I always did” (01:42:52-01:43:11).

All in all, Medivh’s actions, whether influenced by Sargeras or free will, can be judged from the utilitarian point of view. In terms of utilitarianism, to see if his actions are moral, one must observe whether they maximized everyone’s happiness. When the Dark Portal is opened and the First War begins, both the Alliance and the Horde suffer numerous casualties. While orcs enjoy battle, they shy away from suffering and death. Overall, the First War did not benefit either side and it would have been more beneficial if Medivh had not opened the Dark Portal. Following this train of thought, this action can be deemed as immoral on the basis of utilitarianism (Serchuk 110).

## **2.2. Garrosh Hellscream**

### **2.2.1. The Origin Story**

Garrosh Hellscream is a former Warchief of the Horde, which is one of the two major political factions of the mortal races in Azeroth. He leads the Horde as a replacement for Thrall (or Go’el) during the events of the Cataclysm because Thrall was required elsewhere. Garrosh becomes one of the most hated orcs of all time because of his actions during the Alliance-Horde War and the crimes committed on Pandaria. In his youth, Garrosh was a weakling who suffered from the Red Pox. While his father Grommash Hellscream was the first to drink from the demon Mannoroth’ blood that greatly empowered and corrupted the orc race, Garrosh is seen as a weakling because he is not tainted by the demon blood. Despite his father’s actions, he becomes a chief of the Mag’har orcs (uncorrupted orcs). Eventually Garrosh learns that, even though his father doomed the orcs with the blood of Mannoroth, he

was also the one that sacrificed himself and killed the Archdemon when it came to freeing the orcs from the manipulation and influence of the demons. After finding out the truth, Garrosh changes his outlook, gets empowered and motivated, and is led by the two main Horde mottos: “You will serve the Horde... or be crushed beneath it” and “Conquer all, or die trying” (“Garrosh Enters the Nexus!”).

### **2.2.2. Why Is Garrosh Hellscream Morally Gray?**

The analysis of Garrosh will focus on Christie Golden’s novel *War Crimes* in which he is put on trial for all the atrocities committed under his command. The presentation of his morally gray characteristics will be done through a devil’s advocate debate that allows for him to be seen not only as the force of destruction and pure evil. For example, one of the counts of the indictment relates to the killing of Cairne Bloodhoof in a Mak’gora (“duel of honor”). In the duel, Cairne dies from poison applied to Garrosh’s blade. However, Garrosh was unaware that the axe was “blessed” by an evil shaman (Golden, *War Crimes* 18). His enemies rather assume he was involved in this plan to make sure he was victorious than to give him the benefit of a doubt.

At the beginning of the story, Garrosh has a vision of his father. The only thing he wishes to know is if his father was proud of him but, before an answer is revealed, his father vanishes as Garrosh is woken up (Golden, *War Crimes* 6). Garrosh feels extreme anger but manages to calm down, showing he is not a mere monster everyone perceives him to be (Golden, *War Crimes* 8). The fact that he wants this question so desperately answered points to his childhood trauma. At first, he grows up thinking his father was a traitor, then suddenly he is revealed to be the greatest hero in the orcs’ history. From that moment on, he just wants to make his father proud and be worthy of him. He evolves from the sick orphan to a Nietzschean Overman and sets his own value system built on the tradition of the Old Horde. Garrosh wants to crush the Alliance<sup>2</sup> and achieve a total victory for the Horde. To defeat such an opponent, Garrosh has to resort to merciless war crimes. His greatest sin is the destruction of Theramore, the city-state. In his quest, Garrosh Hellscream kills hundreds and tricks the Alliance into sending its finest generals and admirals to help. Instead of facing them in an honest fight, Garrosh decides to drop a mana bomb, fueled by pure arcane energy and

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<sup>2</sup> The Alliance is the other major political faction in Azeroth consisting of many different cultures and groups. The Alliance is built upon commitment to tradition, progress, preserving peace and order, and other high abstract ideals like honor, justice, and nobility (“Taking Your First Steps”).

empowered by an artifact stolen from the blue dragonflight. This magical bomb kills instantly everyone in the blast radius in the heart of the city (Golden, *War Crimes* 9). If he is to be judged by the principles of utilitarianism he claims to represent, the trial would be cut short, and his deeds would definitely be labeled as immoral crimes. Since true utilitarianism promotes benefits of all sides involved, Garrosh does not stand the litmus test, since his only goal is the welfare of the Horde.

In truth, Garrosh only wanted a glorious Horde, which he truly loved (although more the orcs than other races) and was willing to do anything to fulfill this goal. If he had been successful, the history, written by victors, might have remembered him differently. Much like his father, he could have been remembered as the next great hero. Garrosh is even prepared to use the powers of the sha, the physical manifestations of negative emotions, to empower his troops to be strong (Golden, *War Crimes* 66). Even Saurfang, one of the oldest orcs alive and one of the very few orcs that even the Alliance respects, vows his loyalty to Garrosh, deeming him to be loyal to the Horde and the people. Saurfang sees that Garrosh has left the ways of recklessness and impulsiveness after giving him “a long, appraising look” (Golden, *War Crimes* 122). Garrosh embodies the Machiavellian principle where “[f]or although the act condemns the doer, the end may justify him” (Machiavelli 61). From the Horde’s perspective, Garrosh would have made them an independent nation, free from hunger and poverty. Yet, since Garrosh’s accusers see him as someone “who does violence with intent to injure . . . [and] not [as someone] . . . who does it with the design to secure tranquility, [he is the one] who merits blame” (Machiavelli 61). Kant follows this idea when describing morally worthy actions as those being done by a person who feels the need to manifest their good will. According to Kant, this is the highest good (Simmons 86), and if judged by those principles, Garrosh’s trial would be cut short.

Next, an important connection between Thrall or Go’el and Garrosh needs to be explained. Go’el named Garrosh the leader of the Horde and wanted him to be a hero like his father. During the trial, Go’el wonders if the burden of leadership is something even the elderly would struggle with. However, he defends his choice by noting Garrosh’s honor in Northrend and his influence during the war as well as the horrors of Scourge where Garrosh is seen as courageous and the symbol of hope and victory (Golden, *War Crimes* 202). When it comes to Garrosh, he agrees that the burden of the title is too much and that he is better equipped as a warrior and a leader of a troop. While he would wholeheartedly smash any enemy army, the politics of the Horde is too much for him (“I would rather have a sword in

my fist than a scroll!”) (Golden, *War Crimes* 203). What Go’el could not man up to confess is that Garrosh accepted this role after being pressured. Much like Medivh, Garrosh is given a huge burden at a young age. Perhaps the appeal of these characters lies in the ability to identify with their stories of trial and error, ability and responsibility, which are prevalent in many traditional Judeo-Christian stories.

During the trial, Garrosh evidently becomes the scapegoat for the crimes of his subordinates. For example, his subordinate Malkorok tries to hide his own crimes by claiming he was ordered to do so by Garrosh. However, a witness named Kor’jus confirms that Malkorok never stated where the order came from and that in fact, Garrosh never knew about the atrocities done under his name (Golden, *War Crimes* 109). In addition, his words are misinterpreted and manipulated to fit the prosecution’s narrative. The trial allows the admission of witness’s opinion, which is a further challenge the defense tries to tackle: a witness named Vol’jin interprets Garrosh’s intention to “enslave” as finding new recruits to fight in the army. It is also the way the Horde expresses its sentiment. Furthermore, Garrosh’s war cry “Storm the shores, and paint this new continent red!” allows a double interpretation: one witness claims that Garrosh wants to paint the continent red with the blood of his enemy, while the other believes he refers to the color of the Horde’s flag, which is red (Golden, *War Crimes* 174). In addition, Baine Bloodhoof and Anduin try to humanize Garrosh throughout the whole trial the example of which is their attempt to portray Garrosh as a proud leader concerned about any threat to his position and people to counteract the Horde’s accusation that Garrosh unreasonably banished Darkspear trolls from the Capital of Orgrimmar. They argue that he banished the trolls because he was afraid of them (Golden, *War Crimes* 186). The whole trial is basically a display of the interpretation of moral “right” and “wrong” based on one group’s absolute values. This is where moral nihilism rather offers the ability to strongly favor or oppose an action to completely dismissing it as one polarized notion (Krellenstein 20).

Garrosh is a complex character with a specific set of personal values and philosophy. However, those who believe to understand his values and abide by them are not as successful. For Garrosh, only he himself can act out his values and affirm those actions as just. On an occasion, Garrosh lashes out against one of his own commanders, Overlord Krom’gar, who murders an entire village of innocents by dropping a bomb on them, following what he believes to be Garrosh’s philosophy for the new Horde. His dishonorable act is met by a swift death (Golden, *War Crimes* 331). This example points out how Garrosh is perceived by his

underlings. They want to imitate the new great leader and act as his extension. These underlings showcase the morality based on the *transparency model* where they prefer to conform to the norm, which in the context of the Horde means honor and conquest. However, here the lack of Garrosh's political experience comes to show. If he had laid down his principles in a document available for all to see, his underlings would not so freely have done atrocities in his name. Just because Garrosh is brutal with the enemies of the Horde, it does not grant the others the right to do the same deeds on the innocent.

The pensive conclusion to the trial occurs when alternate versions of persons in the court enter through a portal. While Garrosh escapes, these alternate selves start battling their counterparts who appear as the darkest, most twisted versions of themselves. Baine's counterpart is Warchief of the Horde, a title that he clearly achieved by murdering Garrosh in an act of revenge for killing his father (Golden, *War Crimes* 378). Baine is the only one who realizes that this is a sort of a test. He exclaims that everyone carries a version of Garrosh Hellscream within and the potential for good and evil is to be accepted, not fought (Golden, *War Crimes* 379). This idea follows the Nietzschean Overman principles in which in order to achieve this evolution one must accept all manifestations of oneself (Cuddy 32). After they all manage to accept their other selves, the four Celestials appear confirming that the justice has been done because Garrosh was not the only one on trial. Moreover, they explain that the trial was necessary for all the participants to realize the error of their own ways. Go'el could not instantly comprehend such claims, but soon came to accept it (Golden, *War Crimes* 397). This ending is specific because it has a moral to the story, which is applicable to everyday situations and people's own perceptions of others. While justice should be served by the appointed powers, it is far more important for a person to fully accept themselves.

## **2.3. Thrall**

### **2.3.1. The Origin Story**

Thrall, who also goes by his birthname Go'el, is former Warchief of the Horde and founder of the nation of Durotar in Kalimdor, named in honor of his father Durotan. His parents are murdered shortly after his birth at the beginning of the First War. Thrall is found by Blackmoore, who named him Thrall, and raised as a gladiator. Thrall assists in the freeing of orcs from slavery and is named Warchief after Orgrim's death (Stickney, "Know Your Lore: Go'el"). Thrall reorganizes the Horde into something more than an alliance of



bloodthirsty warmongers and puts freedom at the forefront of his rebuilt Horde. Because of such an ideology, the Horde becomes an amalgamation of many diverse races, even accepting the Forsaken (Undead). The new Horde, very different than the original one, is strange for the orcs of old, who came through the dark portal hellbent on conquering Azeroth. Thrall's character is also different from the other orcs because he was raised by humans and as a slave after his parents' death. No one ever taught Thrall the ways or how to be an orc (Stickney, "Know Your Lore: Go'el"). His name in fact comes from an Old Norse word *þræll* meaning "slave" ("thrall (n)"). Even though Thrall was only eighteen years old when he became Warchief, destiny has had other plans when leading him to free the orcs and becoming the first shaman since the corruption of the orcs. He leads the orcs to their new homes and founds a nation for his people. Before Thrall, the orcs were a tattered people. Seeing their progress under Thrall makes other races join the Horde (Stickney, "Know Your Lore: The Undeniable").

### **2.3.2. Why Is Thrall Morally Gray?**

Thrall, or the "Green Jesus," is perhaps the most biblically influenced character of the *Warcraft* franchise. However, Thrall's nickname refers to a complex deeply rooted in his character that wields great power and responsibility (Jøn 82). In his desire to produce a perfect outcome for his people, he fails by naming the wrong successor. The reasoning behind the name is also connected to the video game itself because of frequency of his appearance, often in *deus ex machina* ways (Jøn 88). While his new name also holds etymological value, his birth name Go'el stems from Hebrew term "ga'al" meaning "to redeem." Some Judeo-Christian teachings relate the term to the Abrahamic god or Jesus as their main role was to redeem their followers through the ultimate sacrifice (Jøn 96). Significant visual links can also be recognized as both Jesus and Thrall are often depicted as long dark-haired males with beards, wearing a brown or beige robe (Jøn 97). Their charisma and the ability to gather a large following is what also binds them in leading a new sort of congregation. For Jesus it was the congregation of the first Christians and for Thrall it is the congregation of the new generation of the Horde. As this new generation is no longer bound by Gul'dan's corruption because of Thrall, it is their ability to deliver freedom through their supernatural nature that relates them (Jøn 98). Jesus's ability to heal the body and cure diseases is captured through the shaman powers of Thrall who has two notable abilities, which the video game calls "Cure Poison" and "Cure Disease" (Jøn 100). With the new patch

and the player upgrade of the character in the video game, shamans can also gain the power of “Resurrect Spirit,” which is in direct relation to the story of Lazarus and Jesus’s ability to resurrect the dead (Jøn 101).

On most accounts, Thrall appears as a great hero and, overall, a good guy. However, his relationship with Garrosh Hellscream opens the debate about his morally gray character. Thrall, while mighty in combat, is more a political leader, not a warlord. Garrosh, with his brown skin, a symbol for the old, uncorrupted orcs, embodies the old ways Thrall had left behind. Thrall feels the connection with Garrosh because of the friendship with his father Grommash but cannot overcome the obvious differences between Garrosh and himself. He meets Garrosh Hellscream during the events of *The Burning Crusade* when he finds out about uncorrupted orcs that still reside in Outland. As a sign of good faith, Thrall shows Garrosh a vision of the sacrifice his father committed turning Garrosh’s feelings around. Initially, Garrosh felt hatred for his father, but now filled with pride, he is ready to go back to Azeroth and join the new Horde. What he does not expect is the shift in lifestyle. However, during the events of *Wrath of the Lich King* Garrosh leads the Horde forces to Northrend and becomes the symbol of the old ways opposite to everything Thrall stood for (Borman, “How Warchief”).

Even though Thrall wants a new Horde without bloodlust and warmongering, he, at the same time, appoints a successor welcomed by the orcs who are impressed by Garrosh’s leadership in glorious combats, symbolizing the old ways of the Horde. In the novel *Tides of War*, after Garrosh commits the atrocity of dropping the mana bomb on Theramore, Thrall openly expresses his fury at making him his successor:

Thrall closed his eyes for a long moment. He was grieving, shocked, furious. He wanted nothing more than to don armor, pick up the Doomhammer, and march on Orgrimmar. To punish Grom Hellscream’s son for all the foolish, arrogant, devastating things he had done. Garrosh was his mistake, his responsibility, and no one else’s. Thrall had tried to instill orcish pride in Garrosh, but instead of taking the best of his father’s lessons, the young Hellscream had taken the worst of them. But he could not go, could not satisfy his pain. Not yet. (Golden, *Tides* 283)

Thrall blames himself for the mistake he did as well as for the bloodshed of the innocent. In a discussion with a dear friend and a powerful mage, Jaina, Thrall expresses his grief for “so many deaths in so brutal a fashion” (Golden, *Tides* 354). He acknowledges that the lives

cannot be brought back and fears the retaliation that will cause even more bloodshed. His solemn attitude is met by a reality check from Jaina who directly accuses him of causing the terror by appointing Garrosh as the leader of the Horde. She was the one who in the past warned him not to give such a great power to Garrosh. Their friendship breaks by the end of the discussion when she exclaims:

They're not people. They're monsters. And so are you! My father was right — it took an entire city of people slaughtered before I could see it. I was blind to what the orcs were, because of you. You tricked me into believing that there could be peace, that the orcs weren't bloodthirsty animals. But you lied. This is war, Thrall, and war hurts. (Golden, *Tides* 354)

What both Jaina and Thrall struggle with is to overcome stereotypes of Azerothian races. The inability to accept diversity and not to blame the whole race for the deeds of the few only deepens the divide between the Horde and the Alliance. Even when they try to overcome their preconceived notions, actions like those of Garrosh eventually lead them to accept the fear of otherness (Grubb 87). At this point, Garrosh is beyond redemption as far as Thrall is concerned. He is hellbent on confronting Garrosh especially during the events described in *Mists of Pandaria* and *The Siege of Orgrimmar*. He considers challenging Garrosh for the leadership of the Horde but decides against such a course of action. After Garrosh is defeated at the Siege of Orgrimmar, Thrall acts as the judge, jury, and executioner by killing him with the Doomhammer (Stickney, "Know Your Lore: The Undeniable").

During the Trial, Garrosh's attorney Baine questions Thrall or Go'el as he is referred to in *War Crimes*. Baine conducts a merciless line of questioning, leading Thrall to admit there was no perfect choice when it comes to his successor (Golden, *War Crimes* 202). Thrall's pride stops him to admit his wrongdoing as he had many opportunities to remove or reform Garrosh and his ways. The choice of doing nothing is quite possibly the worst choice he could have made. It seems strange that he is oblivious to the possibility that better options were at hand. He refuses to admit that someone other than an orc is fit to be a Warchief.<sup>3</sup> The Trial, furthermore, can be viewed through the lens of "act-utilitarianism" (Brandt 4) as it, in a way, represents the comment on the notion of morality of killing (Goodrich 127). The expectable utility of an act can decide on how morally right or wrong it is (Brandt 4). The

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<sup>3</sup> Generally, Cairne Bloodhoof, who was later killed by Garrosh, appears as the obvious choice for a Warchief. Perhaps it was his age that stopped Thrall from choosing him (202). The only other option was Saurfang who refused the position, much like Garrosh initially. Yet, unlike Garrosh, Thrall was afraid of Saurfang's aggressive nature.

case of Thrall-Garrosh relationship can be related to the parable presented by Goodrich in the article “The Morality of Killing” where he concludes that everyone who had the chance to kill Hitler would still be considered a killer regardless of whether they went through with it. On the one hand, they would be considered killers of one man; on the other, they would be considered complicit in the murdering of thousands who were killed as a result of keeping Hitler alive (Goodrich 127). However, an act (of murder) is not necessarily morally right by the utility of its consequences (Brandt 4).

The story of Thrall and Garrosh reaches its climax during the events described in *Warlords of Draenor*. They have a final showdown, in a final Mak’gora. During their clash, they talk and Garrosh claims that everything he did was for the Horde, yet Thrall insists he failed the Horde. Enraged by his words, Garrosh starts pummeling Thrall, screaming that it is Thrall who failed him. The blame shifting occurs on both sides and in the end Thrall executes Garrosh using his shaman powers. Generally, shaman powers are forbidden in Mak’gora, but the rules of the duel are quite ambiguous. In agony, Garrosh says his last words, proclaiming that Thrall made him what he is (“Thrall vs Garrosh” 00:00:32-00:02:09). By believing that it was Garrosh who chose his own path, he dies in denial of his influence on his life. In reality, the racist tendencies stopped Thrall from searching for a Warchief outside the orc race. Anne Stickney, in her article “Know Your Lore: The Undeniable Failure of Thrall,” summarizes their relationship as follows:

Thrall found a tiger in the jungle, pulled a thorn from its paw, then dragged it home with him and expected it to act like a domesticated house cat. And despite the blatantly obvious fact that said tiger was a wild creature and far from domesticated, he left it alone to its own devices, and when it turned around and killed the neighbor's chickens, he killed it. Not only did he kill it, he blamed it for being a tiger, he blamed it for doing what was pretty much in its nature, and told the tiger, as he squeezed the life from its lungs, “You chose your own path.” . . . Whether he realizes it or not, the rise, fall, and death of Grommash Hellscream's son lies solely on Thrall's shoulders. That was not the life that Garrosh Hellscream deserved. It wasn't the death he deserved, either.

Ultimately, Thrall’s biggest vice – his pride and belief of infallibility – have left a big stain on his legacy and character as a whole. In a way, his desperate wish to kill Garrosh represents his desire to erase his own mistakes. On the one hand, no man can be blamed for other people’s actions. On the other, an individual in the position of power who makes a

questionable choice is equally responsible for the consequences that follow his choices. Unlike other characters whose morality is impacted by interference of dark magic or negative influence, Thrall paints himself gray by sticking to his flawed choices and by lacking strength to fix them.

## **2.4. Arthas Menethil**

### **2.4.1. The Origin Story**

The most beloved morally gray character of the *Warcraft* franchise, also known as the Lich King, is Arthas Menethil, the Crown Prince of Lorderon, the Knight of the Silver Hand, and heir to the throne of the Kingdom of Man. He is trained as a paladin, a warrior that wields the power of the light in order to smite all evil. When the scourge of the Undead starts to plague the land, Arthas has to make the toughest decision – to purge the city together with non-infected humans or to let the plague of the Undead spread. To defeat the ruler of the Undead, he successfully uses the cursed runeblade Frostmourne, but loses his soul forever due to the sword. Arthas becomes the Lich King knowing that someone has to hold the scourge at bay. The evils he commits are, however, caused by the corruption, which is upon his soul. Yet, he redeems himself as a morally gray character by raising the insanely powerful warriors, known as the Death Knights, and training them. Moreover, their task is to eventually defeat Arthas and finally set him free from the curse. Lastly, Arthas will forever be remembered as a man willing to do everything, from giving up his soul, killing an entire city, and committing other atrocities just for the greater good, making him the ultimate case of a morally gray character (Borman, “Warcraft: The Fall”).

### **2.4.2. Why is Arthas Menethil Morally Gray?**

To understand why Arthas Menethil is a morally gray character, it is important to distinguish two of his iterations. The split occurs once he picks up the cursed blade Frostmourne. By picking up the sword, the voice of the Lich King starts to manipulate and corrupt him. Even though his friend begs him not to make the biggest mistake of his life and abandon the path of vengeance the sword offers, Arthas does not listen. The true moral debate within him takes place till he picks up the sword so that prior period will be the focus of the following analysis.

As a young prince, Arthas is spoiled and hot-headed, showing little compassion for his foes. After the destruction of Stormwind, Arthas reveals his attitudes towards the orcs when talking to his friend Jaina Proudmoore, whose brother was killed by the orcs in an earlier battle:

Arthas turned his head for a better look. They were orcs all right. Some of them were on the ground, curled up and covered by blankets. Some walked here and there, almost aimlessly, like animals in cages, but lacking a caged beast's almost palpable yearning for freedom. Over there was what looked like a family unit—a male, a female, and a young one. The female, slighter and shorter than the male, held something small to her chest, and Arthas realized it was an infant.

“Oh,” whispered Jaina beside him. “They look...so sad.”

Arthas snorted, then remembered the need to be quiet. He quickly glanced up at the tower, but the guard had heard nothing.

“Sad? Jaina, these brutes destroyed Stormwind. They wanted to render humankind extinct. They killed your brother, for Light's sake. Don't waste any pity on them.”

(Golden, *Arthas* 51)

While Jaina shows signs of compassion, Arthas keeps his ruthless poise, seeing the orcs' misery as deserved punishment. Arthas does not necessarily snarl at the orcs because of their race, but because they are the enemy of the Alliance. His hatred is inherited from the great warriors and his father, the king. He is a prime example of how the *heroic model* reflects on a person in their developmental years (Cohen qtd. in O'Connor 13).

When it comes to his sister, Arthas, however, feels compassion. Yet, as he grows older realizing the burden of his duty, he is disillusioned by their childish hopes and dreams. For instance, when he hears his sister cry, he feels despair as his sister is heartbroken because their father arranged for her to be married off even though she is only sixteen years old. The initial despair is quickly replaced by reason and the feeling of duty. He does not feel remorse, nor does he argue with the father, but rather somberly proclaims that everyone has their duties. His sister's duty is to marry the person her father chooses, and Arthas's is to choose for himself a marriage beneficial for the kingdom. The words “I'm sorry, Calie” after all mean very little to his sister (Golden, *Arthas* 59).

Arthas shares a special bond with a horse named Invincible, whose birth he witnesses when he is nine years old. Two years later, the horse is gifted to him, and Arthas feels it is

fate that brought them together to grace the world (Golden, *Arthas* 34). Whenever Arthas feels troubled, he takes his trusted steed and goes for a ride. This all comes to an end when he is nineteen. During one snowy day, they ride along their usual route and want to make a jump over a ravine that they have crossed countless times before. Yet, this foolish decision costs him dearly, because his horse slips, and they both fall and injure themselves. Arthas breaks his ribs and Invincible's two legs are maimed (Golden, *Arthas* 71). Arthas knows what has to be done, and shows true sadness while putting his old friend out of his misery:

“I'm sorry,” he said. “I'm so sorry.”

Invincible regarded him calmly, trustingly, as if he somehow understood what was about to happen, and the need for it. It was more than Arthas could bear, and for a moment tears again clouded his vision. He blinked them back hard. Arthas lifted the sword and brought it straight down. He did this right, at least; pierced Invincible's great heart with a single strong blow from arms that should have been too chilled to do so. He felt the sword pierce skin, flesh, scrape against bone, and impale itself into the earth below. Invincible arched once, then shuddered and lay still. (Golden, *Arthas* 72)

This moment marks a huge shift in Arthas's character. He feels extremely guilty for what happened and lies to everyone about the accident. He cannot bear the burden of truth and what would happen if everyone knew what really occurred (“Arthas” 00:01:43-00:02:25). At this moment, Arthas vows that “if anyone else ever needed protection—that if sacrifices had to be made for the welfare of others—he would do it. *Whatever it takes*, he thought” (Golden, *Arthas* 73).

Growing up destined for greatness, Arthas struggles to showcase his true emotions. He feels his strength should represent the ruler he will once become. In a rare moment, Arthas speaks about his feelings to Uther, a great paladin, warrior and “the very image of rock-solid steadfastness to the Light” (Golden, *Arthas* 75). Although Arthas is intimidated by the paladin, whom he has known his whole life, he feels safe enough to express his thoughts. Uther assures Arthas that no one ever feels ready or worthy of their duty, task, or title. He calls this doubting feeling – *grace*, and states that all races are inherently unworthy, but the Light guides and loves everyone. One should, according to Uther, strive every day to be worthy, even though it is nearly impossible. In being so, Uther represents the Nietzschean ideas on the Overman who strives to accept all manifestations of oneself (Cuddy 32). He hugs Arthas, smiles, and gives him the final words of comfort: “So stand there today, as I did,

feeling that you can't possibly deserve it or ever be worthy, and know that you're in the same place every single paladin has ever stood" (Golden, *Arthas* 75).

On another occasion, Arthas struggles with emotions related to his love life. He comes to a realization that Jaina is a potential companion with whom he could share his life and kingdom. Yet, he also feels doubt, making him wonder if he will ever be worthy and good enough of a husband, king, and father. Jaina sees his doubts and expresses her love and reassurance. She comforts him by saying they do not have to have children right away. However, this is not enough for Arthas who is clearly still scarred by the trauma of his sister being married away at a young age. He keeps repeating that he is too young and not ready. He thought he had been ready when he first became lovers with Jaina, but he soon realizes that their affair is of consent and mutual desire: "She'd asked him this, the night they became lovers. *Are you ready for this?* she had whispered. *I am if you are*, he had replied, and he'd meant it.... He really had thought he'd meant it" (Golden, *Arthas* 119). This is not enough for Arthas as what he needs is to ask that question to himself before answering Jaina's. Much like previously mentioned morally gray characters, Arthas struggles with introspection and rather opts for denial and suppression of his true feelings and desires.

Everything changes once the Plague of Undeath starts to rise. Arthas and the army fight the undead at the infested granary when they encounter the necromancer Kel'Thuzad. Arthas stays behind at Hearthglen to defend it and orders Jaina to find his mentor, Uther, and seek aid. To the horror of Arthas, he discovers that the Plague is not only a means to kill, but that it also resurrects the dead into a new army (Golden, *Arthas* 160). Arthas's forces are at the brink of defeat when he is finally saved by Uther. Arthas continues his quest to stop the Plague from spreading but sadly realizes that he had arrived to Stratholme too late because the tainted grain has already been used to make bread. While Uther, Jaina, and Arthas try to come up with a plan, Arthas is convinced that they have to sacrifice these cursed and already lost lives in order to save countless other people. The burden of the difficult decision Arthas must make is reflected by the fading color of his face. He knows he has to declare all those people infected. While some surely are, there is no way he could have known that everyone had consumed the grain. On the one hand, stunned by this radical idea, Uther and Jaina protest and ask for a different solution (Golden, *Arthas* 176). As Arthas releases Uther from his duty, and Jaina cannot talk sense into him, she leaves the city, unable to witness her beloved do such an atrocity (Golden, *Arthas* 182). Three days later, Jaina returns to the now



destroyed city and seeing the corpses, wonders how many of them would ultimately attack her if Arthas had not slayed them.

On the other hand, the troops supporting Arthas lift his spirits when proclaiming that they themselves would rather be hacked into a thousand pieces than to turn into the undead. In turn, Arthas reassures his troops about the reality that they face: “‘There is no pleasure in what we do here,’ he said, ‘only grim necessity. Only the need to halt the plague, here and now, with the fewest casualties possible. Those within these walls are already dead’” (Golden, *Arthas* 182). Knowing how to motivate the armies and led by the example of his father, Arthas follows the cliché of a ruthless commander and allows the soldiers to destroy homes, dwellings, shelters. He confirms that it will not be a glorious and great battle; that it will be ugly, painful, and regretful, but still urges his men to grip their weapons and attack in the name of Light (Golden, *Arthas* 182). Killing the already turned was easy, but it became much harder when they had to face those who were still unturned. The first one Arthas comes across is a young boy “barely out of puberty” (Golden, *Arthas* 184). Arthas screams in pain as if his pain was greater than the boy’s. Not only do his lover and tutor leave him, but also the Light he swore to serve (Golden, *Arthas* 184). The Light starts to leave the hammer he has been using to accomplish this goal. The Light does not necessarily serve only good people in *Warcraft*, but rather those who truly believe in what they are doing (“Arthas” 00:04:17-00:04:21). Arthas refuses to yield, even though each kill becomes harder. He keeps his helmet on, so that no one would be able to see his pained face; he takes a torch and sets fire to a building filled with people; not even their screams would falter his steeled resolve (Golden, *Arthas* 184). Once again the idea of “act-utilitarianism” is notable but in a different context. Here, for the greater good in the long run (Brandt 4), Arthas chooses a violent option of mass murder to protect the potential future victims of a conflict on a potentially larger scale. Following the Hitler parable on the notion of morality of Arthas’s deed, he rather “kills Hitler” to prevent the future killings (Goodrich 127). His deed is supported by the majority of his followers who carry out his order pointing to another subset of utilitarianism called “rule-utilitarianism” (Brandt 4). The people he commands affirm to his morality and moral code and accept the decisions for the greater good.

Before Arthas takes cursed Frostmourne into his hands, he confesses his sins and comes to terms with his own self. He finally introspects and sees he is no longer a boy, but a man who did what was necessary (Golden, *Arthas* 208). He is aware his spirit is already scarred, and the curse is something that is destined for him. Moreover, he acknowledges that

the scarring occurred because he needlessly killed his injured steed, because he was terrified of watching the dead rise, because he was affected by the betrayal of his beloved Jaina Proudmoore. The confession continues as he remembers the hundreds slaughtered on his command by men he lied to or silenced if they would disobey him (Golden, *Arthas* 218). Finally, the curse he decides to take upon himself is seen as morally ambiguous redemption as he is ready to do anything to save his homeland.

## **2.5. Illidan Stormrage**

### **2.5.1. The Origin Story**

Lastly, we will analyze Illidan Stormrage, one of the most notorious characters in the *World of Warcraft* storyline. Even in his two most common nicknames, “The Betrayer” and “The Chosen One,” the duality of his character that promises a morally gray storyline can be seen. Illidan was originally a powerful night elf sorcerer and twin brother to Malfurion, the greatest druid to ever live. Just like his brother, he tries to become a druid, but after stumbling in his progress, he decides to opt for the arcane magic rather than nature magic. Thus, he becomes a formidable night elf sorcerer (Rossi). His affinity for magic, or the lack thereof is strange because Illidan has been born with amber eyes, which are a symbol of great destiny and innate talent and druidic potential (Knaak 55). When the demons invade Azeroth, Malfurion realizes that the enemy has been drawn to magic and plots to destroy the Well of Eternity. Illidan is strongly against this idea because the Well is the source of his magic and the elves’ immortality. The destruction of the Well is a price he is not willing to pay (Rossi). Illidan’s hunger for power grows more evidently as he becomes the new leader of the Moon Guard, a group of elite night elf sorcerers (Knaak 381).

### **2.5.2. Why is Illidan Stormrage Morally Gray?**

To comprehend Illidan Stormrage moral grayness we first have to look at his ruthlessness. His ruthlessness comes to show particularly when he becomes a new leader of the Moon Guard. For instance, Illidan orders the Moon Guard to transfer their power into him to enhance his own spells, rendering them defenseless if demons attack. Illidan even drains one of his soldiers to the point where the soldier is losing all of his life force (Knaak 315). However, Illidan sees it as a necessary sacrifice to defeat the Burning Legion. For Illidan,

there are no unarguable values or moral codes he has to follow as shared values are not good enough for him. As such, he represents the ideas of moral nihilism (Krellenstein 2). Illidan struggles to find the sustainable way to cope with his emotions, which is quite evident in his relationship with a priestess named Tyrande. This proves to be another flaw in his character because he has been blinded by love towards Tyrande who was quite obviously in love with his brother Malfurion. Nonetheless, Illidan proceeds to woo her through the impressive displays of magic, which she is not interested in (Knaak 124).

Illidan hatches a new plan to stop the Burning Legion by deciding to feign allegiance with the enemy in order to infiltrate them and find a way to stop them. In wanting to obtain an artefact of immense power called the Demon Soul, which would allow him to close the portal from which the Demons enter Azeroth, he crosses paths with Sargeras who supports his efforts. Sargeras also decides to give Illidan a *gift* while still residing beyond the portal. In a ritual, he burns out Illidan's eyes, replaces them with mystic fire, which enables Illidan to see all magic and covers him in demonic tattoos. Moreover, he receives a vision during this ritual, which shows him the true strength of the Burning Legion as a scourge upon the whole universe and not just their world. At that moment, he realizes that defeating them on Azeroth would mean nothing and that he needs to find a way to defeat them for good (Stickney, "Know Your Lore: Illidan"). The revelation he receives can be related to the ones of John from the New Testament. Much like John, he sees the hell that will come to his world if preventative actions are not taken.

Once Illidan acquires the Demon Soul, he hatches a plan with his brother Malfurion to seal the portal. Unfortunately, drawing such power caused the Well to grow even more unstable. Before the Great Sundering occurs, which splits the supercontinent Kalimdor into pieces, Illidan manages to take a couple of vials from the Well in order to create a new one. This decision is gray because when creating the new Well of Eternity to preserve the magical essence of Azeroth, he also heralds the next invasion. While his peers believe that the next invasion can be prevented by destroying the Well, Illidan is convinced, influenced by his vision, that the power of the Burning Horde makes the next invasion inevitable either way. Illidan saves the Well, but his deed is soon revealed by Malfurion and Tyrande. They are horrified by his actions and believe him to be a great traitor. Malfurion orders Illidan's imprisonment, right below Mount Hyjal. After ten thousand years, he is released by Tyrande as the foreseen second invasion happens (Stickney, "Know Your Lore: Illidan"). The imprisonment itself seems quite sinister and offers the question why Illidan chooses to help

the people who locked him up in the first place. Was it the innate great destiny, a corrupted hunger for power or the chance to impress Tyrande one last time?

Another instance or proof of his morally gray character is the search for the skull of Gul'dan, which Illidan aims to absorb to possess its demonic power. With this act, Illidan forfeits his soul forever, signing a pact with the devil, just to be able to protect the ones that cast him away ten thousand years ago. Illidan travels to the war-torn forest Felwood where he clashes with none other than Arthas, the champion of the Lich King himself. There Arthas informs him about the powerful artefact, the Skull of Gul'dan, which has corrupted the forest. To further bait him, Arthas emphasizes the enormous power that the artefact holds. Even though Illidan does not trust Arthas, he is captivated by the way Arthas speaks of the artefact, which further confirms Illidan's reckless greed for power (Wachowski, "Know Your Lore: Illidan"). Illidan is still blinded by a need to prove himself to his people, but most importantly Tyrande. His delusion points to sheer idiocy on his part as he has had many times before demonstrated power and failed miserably in her eyes. Finally, he manages to shatter the seal and take the power of the Skull transforming himself into a demon able to completely destroy the enemy forces at the price of giving up everything that made him an elf. From an existentialist point of view, Illidan struggles to reconcile the desire to protect his people and hold great power. As the latter is met with disdain from elves who prefer to use the power of nature (which he failed to master) even if it means defeat, he finds himself conflicted. His value system encourages him to step in and help even if it means ten thousand years of suffering.

In the end, Illidan loses everything for the questionable prize of immense power. However, he becomes a beacon for all those damaged and affected by the Burning Legion. They see him as a guide, and he trains them to become Demon Hunters able to slay demons, drink their blood, and eat their hearts. These warriors are to be called the Illidari. The warriors have to complete another difficult trial after witnessing the true magnifications of the Burning Legion. They are to gouge out their own eyes for heightened senses and strength in the battles to come. This is a great sacrifice for the Demon Hunters, but one they are willing to make. These individuals have lost everything, and they live only because of their desire to avenge the destruction of everything they have ever known and loved. Becoming a Demon Hunter is the ultimate sacrifice because once they consume the demon spirit there is no going back. Furthermore, they are completely aware of the fact that once the war or hunt is over (if it is ever over), there is no way for them to come out alive. They gave up everything they once were to become instruments against the Burning Legion, no matter the

cost. They are well aware that even if they managed to destroy every single demon, they would have to destroy themselves to destroy the spirits within themselves. They are well aware that there is no happy ending for them and that the only certainty they have left is death (Stickney, "Know Your Lore: Illidan"). Demon Hunters are the perfect reflection of Illidan. He is the one who created them and as such they are all copies of his resolve and ideology. Through them, Illidan's philosophy becomes evident. Illidan is willing to sacrifice everything, no matter what it takes and no matter how "evil" a deed seems; he will do it if it means stopping the Legion.

### 3. The Visual Depiction of the Characters' Moral Corruption

For years, ardent followers of the *Warcraft* franchise have been paying attention to any change their favorite characters undergo. Whether in *Heartstone* cards, a new expansion of the video game, or the new book sequel, the characters' moral transformations have often been reflected on their physical outlook. Blizzard Entertainment began noting and spotlighting these changes in the series of lore articles that emphasize one character at a time (McCurley). Most notable changes occur in relation to outfits and color schemes. The philosophy of color reveals how the representationalist view can effectively be used to convey a universal message. While interpretations differ due to subjective experience, some stereotypes emerge when generalizing (Maund). This chapter provides a brief overlook on the chosen characters' transformations with a reflection on their moral and philosophical shift.

#### a) Medivh

Medivh, as described in the original trilogy, is reimagined during his latter reappearance as a prophet spirit in the video game and the movie. However, Blizzard Entertainment and the rich *Warcraft* community have released some visualizers that best



**Figure 1. Young Medivh**

[https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/d/d4/Medivh%2C\\_the\\_Guardian\\_HS.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20160902162257](https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/d/d4/Medivh%2C_the_Guardian_HS.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20160902162257).

depict the change that occurs in him. In *The Last Guardian*, Medivh's apprentice, Khadgar, describes how a young mage is dressed. He is wearing simple, well-cut fitted robes and is of a large frame. His trousers are tucked into his oversized boots as he is wearing a heavy maroon cloak around his broad shoulders. His clothes are adorned by discrete silver filigree (Grubb 27). At first, he is seen as the bright, joyful, and charismatic character fulfilling his role. His cloak is adorned with fluffy patterned feathers (Figure 1), which will later be replaced by dark, sharp eagle feathers (Figure 2).

*The Last Guardian* provides some inspiration when visualizing Medivh as he grows older. While his mother looked well even when she was hundreds of years old, the strain of power is already visible on Medivh in his forties. His face is worn out and the power he wields must be insanely great for it to have such an effect on his body (Grubb 28). While his mother kept her sanity, Medivh's mind is not his own, which is reflected on his physical form as well. As his bitterness grows encouraged by the corrupting spirit of Sargeras, Medivh takes on a different appearance void of positivity and sociability. He is seen with dark nails and clothes, ominous presence, and piercing, glowing eyes. In the illustrations in Figure 2, he is surrounded by the colors of evil in the *Warcraft* world – purple and green.



**Figure 2. Corrupted Medivh**

[https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/7/73/Medivh\\_the\\_Corrupted.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/1000?cb=20160118131023](https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/7/73/Medivh_the_Corrupted.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/1000?cb=20160118131023) and [https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/2/27/Medivh\\_Cropped.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20150615151106](https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/2/27/Medivh_Cropped.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20150615151106).

The particularly impactful visualization of Sargeras overtaking Medivh's body and soul actually occurs in the movie *Warcraft* (2016) where Medivh becomes completely disfigured by this demonic force simultaneously turning the mana pool green, which is the color of Hell and evil. In a later stage of transition, Medivh, or Sargeras, takes on the new demonic body of massive stature with horns. Horns are often used to symbolize great power, immortality, and aggressiveness as the real animal horns are used for fight and are extremely durable. Ancient Egyptians, as well as Carl Jung, identify horns with madness and rage ("Horns").



**Figure 3. The corruption stages of Medivh**  
*Warcraft*. Directed by Duncan Jones. Universal Pictures, 2016. *Netflix*, 01:16:05-01:17:10 and 01:29:11-01:38:15.

#### **b) Garrosh Hellscream**

Before becoming corrupt, Garrosh is seen as a great warrior representing the old ways with the brown color of his skin. The left image in Figure 4 represents a rather young Garrosh in one of his first sights in the game. On the right, there is his visualization from the WoW card game *Hearthstone* once he is older and more experienced. He carries the tusks of a demon his father slayed as the symbol of pride and his acceptance of his father's legacy. He also carries his father's axe. Once he is corrupted by the absorption of the heart of an old god, he becomes a taller, ginormous, purple, evil-looking creature. Figure 5 is another illustration of corrupted Garrosh from the WOW card game *Hearthstone*.

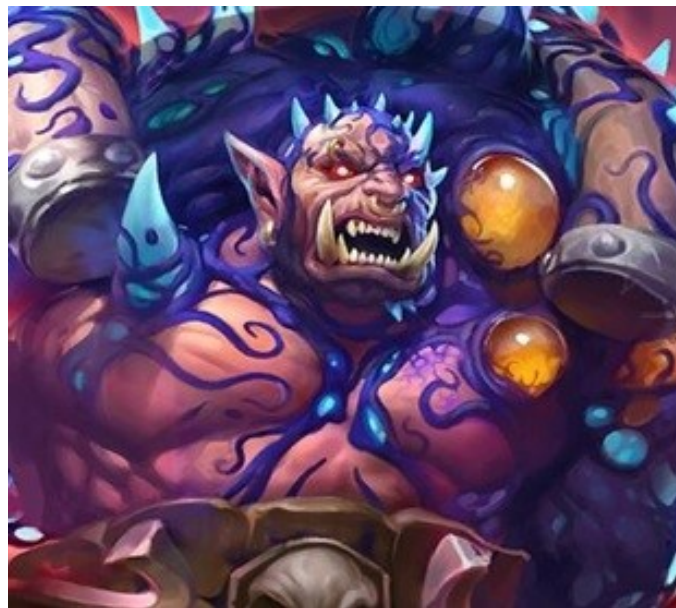




**Figure 4. Young Garrosh (left) and Garrosh, the leader of the Horde (right)**

[https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/b/bf/Garrosh\\_Glowei\\_-\\_cropped.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20180914143616](https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/b/bf/Garrosh_Glowei_-_cropped.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20180914143616) and

[https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/f/f3/Garrosh\\_Hellscream.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20141220074321](https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/f/f3/Garrosh_Hellscream.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20141220074321).



**Figure 5. Garrosh Hellscream after the corruption**

[https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/hearthstone\\_gamepedia/images/5/59/Corrupt\\_Garrosh\\_full.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/350?cb=20191101114000](https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/hearthstone_gamepedia/images/5/59/Corrupt_Garrosh_full.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/350?cb=20191101114000).

### c) Arthas Menethil

Arthas Menethil is depicted with golden hair and strong hammer before he becomes the Lich King. He is in a gold armor, a shining prince, a savior. His appearance drastically changes as he takes on the curse of the sword Frostmourne and becomes the Lich King. The sword becomes his main weapon as he is often portrayed on his throne. His armor is now donned with skulls and spikes while his hair is white. A promising look of a young warrior is replaced by menacing, glowing eyes of the king of the Undead.



**Figure 6. Arthas - before and after becoming the Lich King**

[https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/0/0f/Arthas\\_HS\\_cropped.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/685?cb=20170728094710](https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/0/0f/Arthas_HS_cropped.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/685?cb=20170728094710) and [https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/a/a2/Lich\\_King\\_by\\_Raneman.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/1000?cb=20210415161401](https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/a/a2/Lich_King_by_Raneman.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/1000?cb=20210415161401).

### d) Illidan Stormrage

Illidan Stormrage goes through several changes in his appearance, which are greatly depicted in visual iterations of the *Warcraft* franchise. The young Illidan still has his natural skin color, amber eyes destined for greatness, and wields a type of magic that is fearful to many. As he receives the “gift” from Sargeras, his amber eyes are shut down and replaced by the glowing green ones. His body receives tattoos in the ritual and his whole demeanor changes affected by the demon spirits. His final demon form is with wings and horns and the disfigured body. His stature is larger, muscles bigger, and power stronger. As one contrasts

the first with the other two images in the Figure. 8, it is clear that the focus is put on the green color in Illidan's portrayal.



**Figure 7. Illidan Stormrage and the three stages in his physical development**

<https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/b/bf/Illidanarchive.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/250?cb=20181026174833>,

[https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/allstars\\_gamepedia/images/2/27/IllidanArt.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20150908134613](https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/allstars_gamepedia/images/2/27/IllidanArt.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20150908134613) and

[https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/e/e0/Illidan\\_the\\_Betrayer.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20150907112817](https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/wowpedia/images/e/e0/Illidan_the_Betrayer.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20150907112817).

## 4. The Question of Morality in MMORPG

*World of Warcraft (WoW)*, the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG), warrants itself as a philosophical phenomenon unseen in the gaming industry. In the book *World of Warcraft and Philosophy: Wrath of the Philosopher King*, edited by Luke Cuddy and John Nordlinger, chapter after chapter is dedicated to the creative minds working under Blizzard Entertainment who search for popular cultural and philosophical meaning or intertextuality in the franchise. In the prologue, the authors aim to provide philosophical insight into the storyline and the decisions that the characters must make. They also aim to provide the reader, who is assumed to also be a player, with the extensive guide in the principles based upon certain philosophies so that the gamer is able to recognize them in real time as they play (Cuddy and Nordlinger 14).

Monica Evans, for example, presents a case where philosophies of players of *WoW* clash. She dives in the incident from March 2006 where a guild called “Serenity Now” crashed an in-game funeral held in honor of a real person (Evans 4). *WoW* has a built-in feature of allowing players to form guilds. Each guild is built around players with similar interests and goals of either the Alliance or the Horde. The guild is a social glue for its members and is often related to the principles of tribalism that is based on unity, cooperation, friendship, and accomplishment (McKenna et al 1). A popular activity that guilds engage in is raiding. In order for a raid to be done successfully, a large number of players must cooperate for several hours. When it comes to quests, they are more structured, with the game providing a pattern of action. The quest starts with a quest giver providing the background information, followed by objectives and offer of reward if the quest is done successfully (McKenna et al 2). The “Serenity Now” guild documented their raid in which they killed the avatars of gamers attending the funeral and the video posted on several platforms has amassed over four million views. The comments section is still active to this day with people discussing their actions. “Serenity Now” claims to be the “hardest-of-the-hard-core” Player versus Player (PvP) guild. While they had every right to do so based on the game’s terms and conditions, the question of perception and morality arises. What is ethically and/or morally correct behavior and can it be defined within the MMORPG? Players who decided to hold the funeral consider the game an extension of real life, while the raiders see it as a competition where domination, skills, rewards and tactics take supremacy over morality of their actions. The latter separate their characters, fundamental ideas, personalities, and principles from the ones they hold in real life interactions (Evans 3-4). *World of Warcraft* has certainly taken the

principles used in writing and transferred them into the players by opening the world to any choice and action. By building a community, the game itself has, for some, become an extension of real-life principles taking it a bit more profoundly than the average competition-oriented player. And while both have the right to perceive it in either way, the debate on morality continues to underline their actions. Evans furthermore explores the question of morality as a social construct by contrasting it with the story of the Ring of Gyges from Plato's *Republic*. The Ring provides its wearer with invisibility and much like the guild who hides behind their usernames and the name of the collective, it allows for any action without the fear of retribution from society. Even though Blizzard Entertainment can ban an account, they cannot stop a person from opening a new one. Every time an account is created, the player gets his/her own Ring of Gyges (Evans 4).

The expansion *Wrath of the Lich King* pays special attention to inspiring ethical questions within the gamer when it comes to making decisions. The game intends to put the player in an array of morally questionable situations that mimic Arthas's own experiences. When the time for a duel comes, the player is met with a choice whether to follow the universal principles or to sympathize with Arthas. This special addition is new to the game and makes it more personal for the player (Evans 6). However, several problems arise when it comes to narrative ethical dilemmas: the consequences of players' actions are not very lasting (mostly because of game mechanics), some places cannot be spared or saved (like the lost capital city of Gnomeregan, now a dungeon), some people and races cannot be saved (like the infected Gnome citizens, or Edwin Van Cleef). While the developers tend to shift the gamers minds by including dubious scenarios, the complete dedication to philosophy and principles is still limited by the technology of the time. Particularly in relation to Arthas Menethil, players can choose to become the Death Knights or evil servants of the Lich King but are limited by game mechanics and cannot stay evil. The morally gray area is inevitably painted black and white with the necessary quests to redemption and shifting allegiances to the Alliance or the Horde (Evans 6-7).

The purposefulness of the game itself is briefly discussed by the editor himself, Luke Cuddy. He does not see *WoW* as yet another aimless game with infinite quests and tasks but rather as a true community. In order to level up, one does not have to talk to anyone, yet players tend to engage in the game at the same arranged time as part of their daily dose of friendly interaction or communal play. This is why *WoW* has become known as a social game (Cuddy 28). Cuddy dives deeper into the philosophy of the game by comparing its purpose

and meaning with the teachings of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer who discusses the fleetingness of human life. Cuddy concludes that no matter how short or insignificant one's existence is in the time-space continuum, it is still significant enough for one to partake in the world one finds itself in. The *Warcraft* franchise takes into consideration the fleetingness of interest and availability of their products and continues to focus on expansions both in the video game and the written storyline (Cuddy 30). And for the nihilist who do not conform to the traditional view of the world, by entering the Magic Circle of *WoW*, one agrees to the rules and order of the game-world. In conclusion, if human life is meaningless and insignificant in the real world, it can find both those concepts within the game-world (Cuddy 32-33).

Furthermore, in his PhD thesis *Computer Games, Player, and Ethics*, Miguel Sicart asserts that in discussions of video games one should solely focus on the player as the complex being. He argues that players reason, argue, and think things through when it comes to ethical implications and values of their actions in the game-world (qtd. in Öqvist 5). On the other hand, Thomas Powers in his 2003 paper titled "Real Wrongs in Virtual Communities" argues that most ethically or morally questionable situations in a video game are dismissed by calling it what it is – a game. He asserts that the only time the consideration is put into one's actions in terms of moral acceptability is when there is a strong bond and the ability of identification between players and their online avatars (qtd. in Öqvist 5). Researchers continue to argue whether virtual communities have a real moral value, but most acknowledge that it is a social phenomenon that undeniably affects the real human being (Öqvist 5). In 1950, another pioneer, Norbert Wiener, published a book *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* where he argues that the computerization will affect people in the same way as the industrial revolutions (qtd. in Öqvist 5-6). More and more of people's lives have transitioned from face-to-face interactions onto the online platforms where they are available to a much wider audience. MMORPGs have taken the concept further accepting the impending future where most of human existence resides online and have provided a new division, an emotionally and socially stimulating game-world for those advanced enough to fully emerge themselves and participate.

## Conclusion

All in all, the captivating world of the *World of Warcraft* is not just a mainstream product but rather a philosophically based storyline. Many can argue in favor of either side with respect to a particular character and never reach a conclusion. It is a story that keeps on giving and will proceed to be expanded. Moreover, one can approach the story from multiple mediums, video games, novels, and movies. This multiverse that follows the same storyline is what appeals to all generations. The open forums and the engagement of the *WoW* community is what attracts many. Questions opened by careful consideration of characters' actions, beliefs, and backgrounds are to be answered by an engaged player and reader and then compared with peers. Ultimately, as the trial of Garrosh shows, everyone is able to become the best or the most twisted version of themselves because the potential lies in every uncorrupted being from inception. Once a person introspects and realizes their own wants and beliefs, they can fully become what they are meant to be. What many chosen main characters have in common is the inability to fully understand themselves as they rely on the destiny or other people as an excuse for their actions. It is no wonder that a story of responsibility and difficult choices has resonated so well amongst young people, especially men who partake in the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game. The game serves as a test run or a scheme for some decisions these players will face in their own lives. Furthermore, the game encourages critical and divergent thinking. As a popular cultural phenomenon, the *Warcraft* franchise continues to stand the test of time by constant adaptations and upgrades, making their subscriber and reader base constantly involved.

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