Theatre, /quit: The Potential of Community in *World of Warcraft*

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Fine Arts of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

Timothy R. Balzer

June 2009

© 2009 Timothy R. Balzer. All Rights Reserved.
This thesis titled
Theatre, /quit: The Potential of Community in *World of Warcraft*

by

TIMOTHY R. BALZER

has been approved for
the School of Theater
and the College of Fine Arts by

________________________________________________________________________

Jordan R. Schildcrout
Assistant Professor of Theater

________________________________________________________________________

Charles A. McWeeny
Dean, College of Fine Arts
ABSTRACT

BALZER, TIMOTHY R., M.A., June 2009, History and Criticism
Theatre, /quit: The Potential of Community in World of Warcraft (62 pp.)
Director of Thesis: Jordan R. Schildcrout

The massively multiplayer online role-playing game World of Warcraft presents a society that thrives on power, money, and status, relying on destruction and self-propulsion to get ahead. I argue that, by infusing a theatrical experience into the game, this society could, instead, thrive on creation, creativity, and community.

This thesis tracks my attempt to stage a theatrical production in World of Warcraft: from the necessary logistical groundwork to the acquisition of a creative team to the failure of the team to produce the work of theatre. Along with the description of the creative process, I deliberate on why the production didn’t work, which elements did work, and what the future holds for theatrical productions within World of Warcraft.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Jordan R. Schildcrout

Assistant Professor of Theater
For my father, grandmother, and sister,
without whom I’d be lost in this crazy world.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor, Jordan Schildcrout, for his resounding support and his absolute encouragement for me to pursue anything and everything I felt was important.

I wish to thank Paul Henry for maintaining the bubble and Rob Schupbach for giving me reasons to laugh amidst the onslaught of work.

I also wish to thank Wynn Alexander and Mark Lunsford for the long bouts of discussion that helped to develop my arguments.

I am very grateful to my friends and family for their support during the last year.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... 3

Dedication ........................................................................................................................... 4

Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................. 5

List of Tables ...................................................................................................................... 7

List of Figures ..................................................................................................................... 8

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 9

The World of *World of Warcraft* .................................................................................. 14

Production Process .......................................................................................................... 23

  Conceptual Vision ......................................................................................................... 24

  Unsuccessful Rehearsal Attempts .................................................................................. 29

  Strike 1: Emerald Dream Players .................................................................................... 29

  Strike 2: Emerald Dream Players (II) ............................................................................. 34

  Strike 3: Dark Iron Players ............................................................................................ 34

Synthesis ............................................................................................................................ 37

  Why Didn’t It Work? ................................................................................................... 37

  What Did Work? .......................................................................................................... 40

  What Does the Future Hold? ........................................................................................ 42

Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 45

References ......................................................................................................................... 46

Appendix A: *An Ode to 10-Mans* .................................................................................. 49

Glossary ............................................................................................................................. 62
LIST OF TABLES

Page

Table 1. Characteristics of server types ............................................................................ 15
LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1. Avatar creation screen................................................................. 17

Figure 2. Text bubble. .............................................................................. 19

Figure 3. Chat channels. ................................................................. 19

Figure 4. Ingineb alone on his stump .................................................. 33
INTRODUCTION

The hunter stalks his prey through the lush Ashenvale forest. “I’ve got you now,” the player says as he moves the cursor over the Blood Elf paladin standing over a recently slain wolf. After a moment of hesitation, the hunter charges the paladin. His bow follows a tick-tock motion on his back as he gains speed and, axe in hand, yells, “HEYY!!!” The paladin turns just quickly enough to see the hunter come to an immediate stop, inches from his own face. “Now is the time, my friend,” the hunter says. “Now is the time... for a theatrical production right here in Azeroth!! How would you like to be a part of the first fully staged play in World of Warcraft?!”

Admittedly, this anecdote seems farfetched. The hunter should be brandishing his axe with a menacing smile and quickly bringing it down on the paladin’s head. That is the premise of games like World of Warcraft, anyway—to kill creatures and players in order to become more powerful so one can kill bigger creatures and players to get more powerful so they can kill...ad infinitum. But what if the premise could change? Imagine if players tossed aside the stated objectives of the game and tried something new—if they exchanged destruction for creation and found a new reason to play the game. The project envisioned for this thesis was exactly that: ignoring the set objectives in World of Warcraft and, instead, attempting to create theatre in their place, essentially replacing the established society of destruction with a community of creation.

When pursuing academic study on a game like World of Warcraft, one could quickly interject, “But, it’s not real, so why even talk about these communities?” Summarizing Jorge Luis Borges’ “The Lottery in Babylon”, Edward Castronova states,
“a society with a game turns into a game with a society” (Castronova 70). He continues, arguing, “if everyone pretends [a] dragon is real, and reacts as though the dragon is real, then for that society it is real, just as real as the value of a dollar” (74). While *World of Warcraft* is a game, the society that exists within it is consistently deemed real and studied by scholars in a variety of fields: Castronova, an associate professor of telecommunications at Indiana University, studies the economic similarities of online games and their real world counterparts in his book *Synthetic Worlds* (Castronova); in the journal *Epidemiology*, epidemiologist Ran Balicer makes a compelling comparison between a disease outbreak in *World of Warcraft* to that of SARS and bird flu outbreaks (Balicer); and researchers in the pentagon are looking to *World of Warcraft* as a possible world-simulator for terrorist activity (Shachtman). In the theatrical arena, scholars have often viewed role-playing in video games through the lens of theatricality: Brenda Laurel applied the Aristotelian elements of dramatic structure to games (Laurel); Katherine Whitlock explored “the kinship between games and live performance” (Whitlock iii); and Jennifer Kavetsky used studies of gendered speech styles and the performativity of gender to “examine how game culture affects the ways male players perform their gender within [World of Warcraft]” (Kavetsky ii). These examples of ludology, or game studies, place games like *World of Warcraft* in a strong position to serve as a parallel to the real world.

Even though there have been no recorded theatrical performances in *World of Warcraft* to comment on the society in the game, there have been many events in the theatrical vein in virtual realms. In 1997, the Desktop Theater performed
waitingforgodot.com, a production of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* that took place in a chat room full of two-dimensional, stationary avatars (Rosenberg). In Linden Lab’s *Second Life*, players in a non-goal oriented world have uploaded to YouTube everything from beauty pageants to full scale productions of plays. *World of Warcraft* has also been used as a platform, both theatrically and politically, for LGBT rights: the Proudmoore server holds an annual LGBT march in one of the low level areas of the game (Poisso). Most popular, however, is the film style known as machinima.

Described as “filmmaking within a real-time, 3D virtual environment, often using 3D video-game technologies” (Silverman), machinima has risen as one of the premiere ways to re-appropriate video games as a method of narrative storytelling, using games such as *Halo, Quake*, and even *World of Warcraft* to present mediatized drama (“What is Machinima?”). Machinima may be the closest that *World of Warcraft* has come to a community of creation, yet the game has potential for a much richer creative experience. People do come together as a community to create machinima but the product of this community becomes a leisure-time experience—once uploaded to YouTube by the filmmaker, web-surfers are able to view the performance at their own convenience. A theatrical performance, on the other hand, is ephemeral, forging a social contract with the audience which relies on a cohabited space at a precise time and location—allowing the audience to have an active presence at this live performance.

Liveness, which is a key characteristic of theatre, may be disputed in the realm of virtual performance. Two elements define liveness: time and presence. With any sort of broadcasted imagery, there is an element of latency, or lag, between the time information
is sent and the time it is received. If a performance in this medium is not as immediate as its real world counterparts, the performance itself can be deemed mediated or recorded. As far as the lag time within the game is concerned, text or actions sent over a typical connection are received by others in a span of, at most, one second—a speed comparable to the amount of time it takes music at a concert to reach listeners deep into lawn seating\(^1\). If this concert “time lag” still allows the performance to be live, so must it for an in-game performance. Presence, however, is a bit more complicated. Because players are not sharing a physically tangible space, can a performer be “in the presence” of an audience member? On a topical level, the eyes are merely seeing reflections of light in both instances, yet this question digs much deeper. More than just visual and auditory stimuli, theatre is often thought to share a more visceral and phenomenological stimulus with the spectator—what Philip Auslander recalls from his investigations in live performance as “the magic of live theatre” and “the ‘energy’ that supposedly exists between performers and spectators in a live event” (Auslander 2). He goes on to argue that “where these concepts are used to describe the relationship between live performance and its present mediatized environment, they yield a reductive binary opposition of the live and the mediatized” (3). Perhaps the liveness of a performance in a virtual world shouldn’t be placed in such a simple binary or live versus “mediatized” and, rather, it should be looked at on a continuum of liveness: labeling it as less live than a typical stage performance but more live than a recording.

---

\(^1\) Typical broadband internet speeds yield a latency anywhere from 10-500 milliseconds.
While the aforementioned theatricalized, virtual events display the live, performative characteristics of theatre, they lack the organic, community-based creativity that forms theatre’s backbone. The purpose of my project was to transcend the aforementioned theatricalized events and bring the virtue of a community of creation to a virtual world steeped in greed of power, commodity, and status. What follows is an account of my personal experience trying to subvert the current societal goals in *World of Warcraft* by bringing a theatrical production to the game. I examine the process from a variety of angles: theatrical, technical, ludological, and personal. To begin, I describe the logistics of the game’s society to establish a starting point for the production. I then move to the production process and discuss my conception for the play, the mechanics of production, and my unsuccessful attempts at putting on a performance. Finally, I attempt to explain why the production failed to manifest, describe which parts of the process were successful, and look ahead to what the future can hold for theatrical performance in a goal-oriented virtual world.
THE WORLD OF WORLD OF WARCraft

World of Warcraft was released in November 2004, by video game publisher Blizzard, Inc.² It was the fourth game released in Blizzard’s Warcraft series but the first to feature online play. The game was met with, and continues to receive, large critical and consumer acclaim, winning a host of “Game of the Year” awards and, as of October 2008, touting over 11 million subscribers worldwide (“WoW -> Awards”; “Blizzard Entertainment…”). With an ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) rating of “T”, for teen, the game is rated suitable for anyone age 13 and older (ESRB). The software packs for the game range from $19.99, for the actual game, to $39.99, for the latest game expansion. The game also requires a maximum monthly subscription fee of $14.99.

The game can be quite intimidating for anyone unfamiliar with it. There is a complex interplay between the logistics of the genre, server types, character creation, character leveling, and player interaction that allow the game to function. In tandem, these elements teach the player how to play the game as well as detail the atmosphere of the world, illuminating the intricacies of what it means to be a citizen in World of Warcraft’s society.

The genre of World of Warcraft immediately defines the societal environment of the game: it is classified as an “MMORPG”, an acronym for Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game. “Massively multiplayer” because each server, or partition, of players can number in the thousands; “online” because the game is interfaced though a

² While much of this information is common knowledge for those familiar with the game, the provided logistical information can be found in the game’s manual or on the game’s website, worldofwarcraft.com.
combination of computers and the internet; and “role-playing game” because players actively assume the role of their avatar, or character, in the game. This genre brings about a world in which a player, performing as his or her avatar, is consistently interacting with other players, who are performing as their avatars.

Following the purchase and installation of the game, the player is asked to choose a server to play on. These servers give the player a choice of two major criteria: whether or not they can openly attack the rival faction of players and whether or not they are encouraged to role-play strictly as their avatar (see Table 1). The server distinctions are important because they define the boundaries in which the avatars can interact in this society. From the outset, the game forces players to choose how actively they want to role-play and how comfortable they are with being a live target to other players.

Table 1. Characteristics of server types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Server Type</th>
<th>Allows inter-factional player battle</th>
<th>Promotes role-playing and “in-game” conversation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PvE: Player vs. Enemy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PvP: Player vs. Player</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP: Role-Playing</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPPvP: Role-Playing Player vs. Player</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next step in the player’s journey is to create an avatar (see Figure 1). Avatar creation is the player’s chance to define his or her role and physical look in the game, allowing the player to choose from the following attributes: race (Blood Elves, Dranei, Dwarves, Gnomes, Humans, Night Elves, Orcs, Tauren, Trolls, and Undead), gender (male and female), class (Death Knight, Druid, Hunter, Mage, Paladin, Priest, Rogue, Shaman, Warlock, and Warrior), faction (Horde and Alliance), and appearance (skin color, facial type, hair style, hair color, facial hair, and piercings). This process, however, is very restricted in creativity, allowing only a limited pool of combinations for the millions playing the game. The only truly unique aspect to avatar creation is the selection of a name, which must be exclusive on the server.

Upon creation, the avatar is thrust into a three-dimensional, quasi-medieval world called Azeroth. Once in the world, the game gives a set of tutorial quests, allowing the player to become accustomed to the environment of Azeroth, while teaching the player how to read the game’s interface, interact with NPCs (non-player characters), participate in quests, battle, and use weapons and armor. While these tutorial quests are meant to teach the player how to play the game, they also lay the groundwork for the game’s innate push for the acquisition of power by stressing the importance of killing and obtaining commodities like weapons and armor.
The goal set forth in the game is to raise a character from the beginning rank, level 1, to the highest rank, level 80, by accruing set amounts of “experience.” This “experience,” or XP, is a numerical reward for doing certain tasks and, while XP can be earned from exploration and delivery quests, the majority of it is earned by killing enemy monsters or people, furthering propagating destruction in the game. Each rank level is

---

3 While the game relies heavily on destruction, it is possible to obtain the highest level character without killing anything. This is extremely difficult, however, and only one character has been noted for achieving a pacifist level 80 character (Westley).
bestowed upon the avatar after gaining a set amount of experience (for example, to get from level 1 to level 2, a player must gain 400 XP; from level 2 to level 3, another 900 XP, etc.). Simply enough, experience begets power and the more experience the avatar attains, the more power it has. As an avatar increases its level rank, new locales, quests, and gear are made available. Still, this “character development” offers little in the way of creativity and, instead, forces the player to interact with others in order to define a personality for their character.

There are many ways in which a player can communicate in *World of Warcraft*. The most basic is called an “emote.” This is a gesture, sometimes accompanied by a standardized vocalization, that the other players can see/hear—for instance, entering “/wave” to wave at another character. One can communicate to players in a close proximity by using the “/say” command followed by text. A “/yell” command will act similarly but can be seen in a much greater proximity. All text used in a “/say” or “/yell” command is viewed by other players as text in a speech bubble (see Figure 2), never an audible translation. The “/whisper” command followed by an avatar’s name will send a private message to that player. There are chat channels within the game as well—such as General Chat, Trade Chat, Local Defense, etc.—that can send text to any players currently in that channel (see Figure 3).

---

4 The game does allow for voice chat in groups for players who have microphones installed on their computer.
Figure 2. Text bubble.

Figure 3. Chat channels.
As well as these standard commands, communication also occurs through the group-wide “party chat” and “raid chat” channels. Any collection of five, ten, or forty avatars of the same faction can form a “party” or a “raid group.” These groups rely upon player interaction, characteristically banding together in order to complete quests or kill other groups of players. One type of quest, a dungeon quest, takes the avatar to an area in which only one group can enter at a time; a “dungeon” where enemies are more difficult and the loot dropped is the best in the game. Dungeon quests promote the most communication within these groups because of their usual 5-10 player size. Typically, though, player communication only takes place to set up these killing parties or to barter for the game’s commodities.

Given the frequency of these player interactions in the game, communities of reputation and renown inevitably form. Avatars may be celebrated for their ability to perform well in combat or provide good quality or low priced items and gear. Such associations are often made across the server and, subsequently, form a branch of acquaintance community that is quite common in the game. Along with this acquaintance community, there are two other ways for players to interact as a community in World of Warcraft: the short-term communities, such as parties and raid groups mentioned above, as well as long-term communities called guilds.

Collections of ten or more players have the ability to form a guild, allowing the creation of a guild name and crest that are visible to all other players. The guild seems to be World Of Warcraft’s strongest form of community as it signals the players’ connection to onlookers, allows them to use a guild specific chat channel (“/guild”), provides them a
community storage area and bank account, and gives the members a sense of familial fellowship. This fellowship is typically seen through good-natured camaraderie and the ability to call on guild members as reinforcements or protection. These guilds do provide nurturing fellowships for their members but still rarely use their community for anything more than individual self-propulsion and destruction.

Player status can also be extremely important in *World of Warcraft* as certain guilds will only accept players who have the most prestigious armor and weapons or a high PvP status from fighting the rival faction. Being in one of these guilds, or separately having prestigious loot and PvP status, can elevate avatars in the eyes of other players, giving them a sense of renown and power. Similarly, players of a lower status level are often labeled “n00bs”—slang for newbies—and are typically the first to be attacked by invading rival factions or to be mocked and blamed for failure by their own faction. A player’s status not only boosts his or her own personal morale but makes it easier and less demeaning to exist in Azeroth’s society.

The forced player interaction as a means to develop personality and acquire power and prestigious loot displays *World of Warcraft*’s subtle support of a destructive societal model and, in turn, shows how the game inhibits the progressive movement of community towards creation. Even the creativity inherent in character role-playing—which may be the most creative aspect of the game—offers no “fixed goal” (Dormans) other than, perhaps, “provid[ing] the structure for the activity” (Montola 25). While role-playing does distract players from the “goals” of the game, it is often viewed “not as a play-style in itself, but rather as a mindset that can be added to the instrumental play-
styles of questing, fighting, and leveling” (Copier 42), offering nothing to the community at-large. With the game’s innate necessity for power, commodity, and status for players to progress, *World of Warcraft* creates a community shaped by self-propulsion and destruction. By implementing this type of community, thoughts of creativity and creation within the world are dispelled due to questions of necessity: why should a player spend his or her time being creative if it offers no benefit to the goals of the game? A theatrical production in the game, however, may subvert these goals and, similar to productions in the real world, give the society an opportunity to participate in a community of creation.
While there are parallels between the real world and the society in *World of Warcraft*, this does not mean there is a virtual analog for everything. Theatre, for instance, is something that has had no recorded presence in Azeroth. Actually, there is little recorded presence of creativity in the game at all. Certainly, there is some creativity in generating an avatar and assuming the role of a character but, more often, this creativity stops after the creation and rarely extends further than a few invented character traits. Azeroth seems to be, instead, stricken with players concerned with attaining power, commodity, and status. The very premise of the game calls for a collection of experience that is mostly gained by killing and often results in looting, selling, power, and status—none of which demand creation, creativity, or community: three of the pillars of theatre. Elizabethan dramatist Thomas Lodge said that theatre-goers “attended to virtue” (Lodge 168), a virtue, perhaps, that cannot be attained by killing monsters to become stronger than the next player. Theatre is a necessity to balance out this world driven by greed and destruction; a way that players, instead, can attend to the virtue of community, creativity and creation.

In November, 2008, I began to lay down the logistical work of transplanting theatre into *World of Warcraft*. All of the in-game components of this project were completed over the span of three months and the information presented reflects my conceptual vision and the process by which I tried to implement it.
Conceptual Vision

When transporting the conventions of theatre from the real world to the virtual, there is, inevitably, a bit of translation. I wondered to myself: Will an audience be able to translate a string of speech bubbles into a dialogue? What is keeping the audience from walking onto the stage? What is the stage? What are the jobs of director or stage manager in a virtual landscape? What happens if the rival alliance decides they want to start a brawl? It seems that, throughout history, these questions were likely asked of any new venue of performance. Other than the speech bubbles, of course—although they could be construed as another language—these questions seem very commonplace. Projection, capacity limitations, conventions, practicality, and potential feuding are universal concerns for theatre artists. Certain logistics of production, though, must be carefully considered and defined: speech, performance space, production jobs, auditions, and rehearsals, as well as potential pitfalls of a virtual performance—such as the possibility of feuding factions and loss of internet connection in the game.

As discussed previously, there are a number of ways to communicate within World of Warcraft: voice chat, /say, /yell, /whisper, etc. Unfortunately, these are typically person to person chat types and are not often used to address or entertain large groups of players. This presents a very large problem: how will the characters converse in such a manner so that the entire audience can hear/see the dialogue? Using /say and /yell seemed to be the best option but there are two major downfalls to this plan: the audience will have to follow strings of text bubbles rather than fluidly hear the dialogue and they must always be in relatively close proximity to the action. While the text bubbles may just take
some getting used to, the problem of proximity is easily solved by having all audience members stand in one designated area that is close to the stage.

Movement, however, is a bit trickier than speech. The characters can walk and run in desired directions but cannot easily move appendages or change facial expressions with precision. While emotes can give generalized movements—/sit or /wave, for example—certain movements, like winking or coughing, will necessitate descriptions through dialogue.

In order to present the dialogue and movement necessary for theatre, we would need a venue to perform in. World of Warcraft does not allow players to create structures within the game, though—thus negating any form of physical stagecraft. Using found space, however, seemed to be a viable option: rather than relying on a manufactured stage, the production could make use of hillsides, castle walls, or even the fully furnished rooms in Azeroth’s homes. Fortunately, too, the game gives the avatars a permeable mass—allowing them to pass through one another like ghosts—permitting all audience avatars to stand in one precise spot. The fact that the production’s entire audience can, quite literally, occupy the space of one character dismisses the need for audience seating, allowing nearly any space the actors can fit into to become a fully functioning stage.

There is also little room for props in a performance in World of Warcraft. There are very few objects that multiple players can interact with. Weapons can be used as props but allow for little active manipulation. It is possible to create a fire for players to gather around or toss a ball from player to player but, aside from these examples, there is
little to no visible object manipulation in the game. While this is a hindrance in some respects, it can easily be overcome through dialogue or mimed movement.

After the stage was set for a production, I needed a troupe to fill the jobs required to present a play. Just as the production jobs on stage differ from those on television or film, there are variations when transplanting theatre into the virtual realm. Knowing, also, that there may be limited interest in the project, I pared down the requirements for the production crew, leaving the essential core as producer, playwright, director, stage manager, publicist, scenographer, costume coordinator, and actors.

The producer’s job in the production process is to orchestrate the entire event: to seek out the production staff, connect them together, keep tabs on the production process, and make sure the production happens without a hitch. Serving as the troupe’s producer, I learned that a culling a team isn’t as easy as posting flyers; I spent hours online in Azeroth’s big cities, recruiting and answering questions via chat channels.

When envisioning this project, I felt it necessary for the play’s text to reflect the social conventions of the specific society in which the production was taking place, thus the need for a playwright. The playwright, I felt, must be well informed about the nature of the world and be able to fuse that experience with his or her own creativity to create the play. For the maiden voyage of this theatrical experience, I set the parameters for a ten-minute one-act play with 5-10 characters.

The positions of director and stage manager function almost identically to that of their real life counterparts. This project does, however, make slight modifications to some staple theatrical positions. Without the need for a “set” to “build,” a scene designer was
replaced with a scenographer, whose job is to find a specific locale, or locales, for the performance. Similarly, a costume designer could not “design” costumes because the in-game tailoring/blacksmithing professions can only craft very generic clothing/armor templates for the avatars—necessitating a need for a costume coordinator instead.

Finally, a publicist’s job is to get the word out about the production, even given that within the game, there are no commercials, radio ads, flyer boards, or newspapers. The publicist, instead, must promote the event using only textual advertisements in the game’s chat channels—banking solely on interest and word of mouth.

After the production staff is set, the logical next step is hold auditions to find actors. Auditions, in the standard, real-world aspect, function as a quick test of talent. Given the circumstances of a virtual performance, talent becomes a hard ability to measure—how does one, for instance, gauge the ability of a player to retype text? There are still preliminary requirements for the actors, though. Rather than having a player audition in a traditional sense, they must fit the conditions of the role and of the performance: the actor must have or be willing to create an avatar that fulfills the playwright’s requirement for the role (gender, class, etc.), be able to meet at the predetermined rehearsal and performance times, and be willing to receive a copy of the script via email outside of the game. Upon meeting these prerequisites, the roles are on a first come, first served basis.

After auditioning and casting the play, a time must be chosen for rehearsals. Creating a rehearsal schedule to meet the needs of the entire cast seemed futile with both the number of cast and crew members that would be needed and the variety of times in
which most players play. The most efficient way to schedule rehearsals is implementing one predetermined weekly rehearsal that each production member must agree to before signing on to the project.

The ideal schedule gives two rehearsals of the script, one dress rehearsal, and, on the Sunday following dress rehearsal, a performance at the same time. This offers a rehearsal/performance span of one month to begin and finish the production. The first rehearsal is mainly to focus on the director sharing his or her vision with the cast and giving them their movement patterns, or blocking. The second rehearsal allows the director to see the actors in motion and fine tune the performance. The dress rehearsal presents the performance as if it were real. While this may not seem like a long rehearsal process, it is certainly plausible: the players do not need to memorize their parts, since they are merely speaking and moving based on their script and notes.

Given the breadth of all of these mechanics in a theatrical production, problems inevitably arise in conception—a performance in *World of Warcraft* would be no different. Even though unique problems arise due to the rules and conventions of the world, they are often analogous to age-old problems in any medium or venue. There are practical concerns—such as safety and technology—but also theoretical concerns like the liveness of a virtual performance.

In the social atmosphere of *World of Warcraft* there is potential for thousands of players to interact. These interactions can manifest violently on Player vs. Player servers as one faction can overtly attack the other in most areas of Azeroth. These attacks pose a threat to performance in this world because, at any given moment, a group of avatars
could begin an assault on the actors. Although this chance for assault also technically exists in the real world, the likelihood of it is drastically higher in the game. Fortunately, assault is much easier to manage and avoid in the game. If participating on a server that allows factional battle, the easiest way to avoid attack is to stage the performance in a “non-contested area”—one where players are unable to attack one another. If this is detrimental to the vision of the creative team, it could be very beneficial to hire a militia that can stay on guard for protection. Either of these options can effectively neutralize potential factional assaults because, after all, the safety of the performers is a key part of a successful theatrical production.

Similar to surfing the web, a performance streaming on the internet can suffer from connection problems. If one of the acting players has an internet connection drop, their avatar is quickly removed from the game, leaving the production with an incomplete cast. While there is little one can do to prevent a surprise connection failure, the only thing the troupe can do to prepare is to work out contingency plans. These plans could be as simple as stalling the production with improvisation or as elaborate as developing plot devices that allow for a sudden departure of any character.

Unsuccessful Rehearsal Attempts

Strike 1: Emerald Dream Players

After completing an entire conceptual outline for the production, I began putting my ideas into motion. I did not choose the path of least resistance: however rough, I attempted to structure the project in ways that offered the most integrity to the research. My goal was to start from scratch, to show that theatre has the ability to produce
community, by creating a new character with no money, skill, power, or, most importantly, connections to other players. This anonymity made it much less tempting to turn to real world and in-game friends for help. Likewise, it represented an avatar with clean hands in the world of greed and power. This virtual tabula rasa, however, became merely the earliest of setbacks in the theatrical journey.

I deliberately chose a Role-Playing Player vs. Player server for this project. I felt that the elimination of possible spontaneous inter-factional battle (PvE & RP) also eliminated a certain sense of competition that lies within the game, rendering the society of the server quite a bit less goal-oriented. With PvP and RPPvP remaining, the easier choice was made for the circumstances: RPPvP. The role-playing aspect was chosen to help eliminate “out-of-game” banter (any talk about real world matters) as well as to give a more organic feel to the process: more pressure to convince players to participate for the sake of the Azeroth rather than the sake of real-life academic work. Admittedly, this may be viewed as the easier route, given that the players were already in a realm of hyper-role-playing, but, with that taken into account, the goal of a virtual performance in a goal-oriented society would be accomplished nonetheless.

With server style chosen, a level 1 Undead rogue named Ingineb entered World of Warcraft’s Emerald Dream server. I quickly made my way to the closest large city, Undercity, and began recruiting. The recruitment pitch was as such: “Hello all! The time has come for theatre in Azeroth! The Emerald Dream Players are currently seeking a full

See Table 1 for server definitions.
production staff for an upcoming theatrical production! PST if interested.” 6 Quickly, my chat screen was filled with response.

Immediate responses included “Woah,” “God yes,” and “that is... seriously cool.”7 One player asked why theatre was chosen rather than “something like a boxing competition.” I found myself answering a barrage of questions over the next week of recruitment. Many players were concerned about what they would get out of this performance. A few players expected monetary reimbursement for their time and some expected the performance to be recorded and placed on YouTube as a machinima-style video. I was very clear to these inquirers that there would be no compensation outside of personal gratification and work within a community of interested individuals. This lack of recompense, however, turned many away—though they were still interested in tracking the progression of the work.

Much like theatre in the real world, actors were not hard to find. The only requests I received in the first week of recruitment were for acting positions. The lack of reimbursement or fame turned some recruits away and some were deterred by the constraints of the rehearsal schedule. For every one player turned away, though, another was quick to spring up. After filling my actor quota, I was still turning down so many actors that I formed an impromptu group of militiamen for the performance just to keep these people involved. The actors-to-be became so prevalent that the recruiting pitch

6 PST: please send tell; PST is the request for someone to /whisper you.

7 Because of the nature of the project and, in order to protect those involved, quotations and persons involved are left unsourced.
quickly became adapted to include “Actors need not apply, in need of production staff only.”

The search for a production staff progressed much more slowly. Eventually, though, the roster began to fill up. In two weeks’ time, the Emerald Dream Players had a group of 13 actors, a director, a playwright, a stage manager, an assistant stage manager, a costume coordinator, a publicist, and a motley crew of militiamen. I commissioned a script and, after two more weeks, all was set for our production: a one-act comedy about putting together a small raid group entitled *An Ode to 10-Mans*. With a full production and acting team, rehearsals became the next step in progression.

In order to notify the cast and crew of the first rehearsal, I ran into a bit of a speed bump: no money for mail postage. After a day of earning gold by grinding through quests, though, I dropped letters in the post for each member of the Emerald Dream Players:

Subject: Rehearsal: Emerald Dream Players!

Body: Hello everyone and thank you for your interest! We now have a script and are ready to begin rehearsing. Our first rehearsal will be in front of Undercity at 5pm server time. We will be distributing roles and setting a game plan. If there are any questions or if you cannot make it, please let me know.

Thanks, Ingineb.

In the three days preceding the rehearsal, I received one response from a player who could not make the rehearsal time. Other than that, no one said a word. It felt great
Knowing everyone, sans one, could make it the rehearsal or, at least, that is what I thought the silence meant.

On Sunday, January 18, 2009, Ingineb arrived in front of Undercity at 4pm server time, an hour early because I could not contain my excitement. At 4:45, I channeled my anticipation into the effort to find the best spot to stand. At 4:50, I found the perfect spot to address my colleagues, a tree stump outside of the city! At 4:55, I brought up my “friends list” to silently cheer at my fellow thespians as they signed on. At 4:58, I began to worry. At 5:00, I stood alone, on a tree stump. At 5:05, I began second guessing myself, wondering if I had announced another time. At 5:10, I stopped second guessing and at 5:15 someone actually signed on. This player apologized for being late; he was the head of the militiamen—the one group I said didn’t have to be there. At 5:30, I gave up on the inside but continued to stand on the stump. At 6:00, I typed /quit.

Figure 4. Ingineb alone on his stump.
Strike 2: Emerald Dream Players (II)

Following two days of baffled wondering, I attempted to contact all of the players to find out if they were still interested in pursuing this venture. Most of the players apologetically responded, offering forgetfulness or other priorities as excuses, and for those who did not respond, I found replacements. Perhaps, I thought, adding players and requiring the first rehearsal to be only days away would give a better turn out. Again, I gave a Sunday rehearsal date. This Sunday *did* yield more attendees but, unfortunately, only two more: the same militiaman, the playwright, and one actor. I couldn’t even do a two person show. Again, a disheartening /quit.

This was the first time I really questioned my hypothesis. Admittedly overreacting, I wondered if, maybe, this virtual society was unable to create a community of creation, that this was solely a goal-oriented society with players that took pleasure in nothing else but being better than everyone else. Against all odds, though, something gave me hope: *An Ode to 10-Mans*. The play that the playwright wrote proved that someone cared; it proved that there could be creation for the sake of creativity and community. And, to note, it spoke of the very difficulty of getting a group of people together within this world. I knew I had to give it another attempt and that I had to try something different.

Strike 3: Dark Iron Players

When I first began playing *World of Warcraft* in 2005, I began on a PvP server called Dark Iron. I had raised a character up to level 48 and quit playing for nearly three
years. Since I started this project, I had been moonlighting on my “main character” on Dark Iron and playing with a couple of real world friends. A fleeting thought led me to try my next theatrical attempt on the server where I already had money, power, and a few connections. I felt that maybe money might be enticing enough to draw in a cast and crew to use for the performance. Sadly, I had no idea how short-lived this idea would be.

I led Ingineb back to Undercity and began recruiting again, barking to the Dark Iron server, with a few altercations to speed up the process:

Hello all! The Dark Iron Players are currently seeking a full production staff for an upcoming theatrical production right here in Azeroth! This is not a video; it is a performance for other characters! PST if interested.

Just as before, response was nearly instant—but exceedingly different. Over the span of days, I received private and public responses such as “that’s a sounds retarded [sic],” “apparently the guy likes weiner [sic],” “go spam an RP server!,” “sounds gay,” “what a faggot,” etc. These comments were both shocking and disheartening. Later still, despite the ignorant comments, a player threatened to report me as a hacker because I said I would need to email the script outside of the game: “i know your kind... you hacker... if i open your email you’ll hack my computer [...] you cant do that [...] i’ll report you, asshole and get you banned [sic].”

Alas, amidst all of the ignorance and threats, I was able to get interest from only five players, including one who is my friend in real life. I realized there was no way I’d be putting on An Ode to 10-Mans but decided to set up a meeting anyway to bounce possible ideas off of all that were interested. Same setup: Sunday, 5pm server time,
outside Undercity. Sadly, the same result: under 25% attendance. And, to be honest, it was only my friend in real life that showed up.

Typing /quit never hurt so much.
SYNTHESIS

While my attempt to mount a performance in *World of Warcraft* was not successful, it would be foolish to merely dismiss the idea because of the failure. Instead, synthesizing the reasons that the production failed along with the aspects of the project that were a success not only gives insight to the function of art in *World of Warcraft* but also can serve as an informative resource to future theatre and performance artists working in virtual worlds.

Why Didn’t It Work?

Simply blaming the troupe’s absences on laziness or forgetfulness is quite easy but there may actually be larger, underlying causes for the failure of the performance. While the average gamer in *World of Warcraft* may pay no mind to theatrical antics, these players not only sought out more information on the play but also *actively* signed up to be a part of it. On top of that, the players that signed up obviously had motivation enough to log on to the game and kill things in their free time, yet they suddenly had no drive for a theatrical form of expression. The real lack of player motivation, then, may be due to one of the following notions: a player without fame, a game of leisure, a society of ignorance and bigotry, a world with no repercussions, or a community without oppression.

When recruiting the production team for the Emerald Dream Players, nearly half of the questions I received in reply asked if the performance was going to be aimed at a YouTube audience. And, of those curious individuals, three quarters of them became disinterested with my negative answer. The immediate loss of interest leads me to believe
there is an element of fame at play, that the idea of a performance may only seem appealing if it has the opportunity to be the next viral internet sensation. A player may simply want to brag about their fame to gain notoriety both in and out of game. For these players, a community of creation may be small potatoes if internet stardom can make them the next Leeroy Jenkins.8

Perhaps World of Warcraft itself is inherently perceived as a leisure-time activity, so much so that the thought of putting forth the “working” effort of being part of a production negates the rationale of playing a relaxing game in the first place. Nick Yee points out, in his article “The Labor of Fun: How Video Games Blur the Boundaries of Work and Play,” that players sometimes “characterize their game play as a second job” and occasionally stop playing altogether (Yee 69). It could be that players use their World of Warcraft time simply to unwind and when the game is no longer about mindless fun, they stop playing and diligently working on a theatre project just isn’t fun for them. Likewise, these players could prefer bouts of creation via community in the real world instead.

As stated previously, the reception to recruitment for the Dark Iron Players was nothing short of crass and indecent: I was receiving a bevy of disparaging, pejorative, and downright homophobic replies to a simple plea for theatre. These replies may simply be adolescent mockery but it could also be a response to the common association of femininity with theatre: that art, inherently, doesn’t serve a purpose in a utilitarian world,

---

8 Leeroy Jenkins was a character in World of Warcraft whose in-game antics turned him into an internet and pop culture sensation—so much so that he has been mentioned on a question on the game show Jeopardy (Sterry).
that it isn’t “manly,” or—as the jock battle-cry often went in my high school days—that “theatre is for pussies.” Players buying into the hyper-masculine agenda of the game (getting stronger, killing for power and wealth, getting the most “epic,” long sword, etc.) may view a night at the theatre to be as “gay” or “faggot[y]” as a “guy lik[ing] weiner [sic].” Conceivably, this fear of appearing feminine or homosexual is not only preventing close-minded, ignorant bigots from participating but also any players looking for the status to be accepted by higher ranking and more powerful characters. While the discourse of racism and sexism in World of Warcraft has been rampant since the game’s inception, there has been little discussion of sexual orientation tolerance aside from Blizzard’s alleged anti-gay guild recruitment policies, especially discussion tackling player versus player interaction.

The excitement of the Emerald Dream Players quickly evaporated when, at most, three players showed up for scheduled calls of all cast and crew. If a player had enough enthusiasm to actively seek out more information about the performance and sign up for it, how could they just write it off and never show up for any meetings? Anonymity: these players have the freedom to show interest and sign up for anything that excites them at the moment, yet if they suddenly don’t feel up to it on the meeting day, they suffer no real repercussions if they just forget about it. In a virtual world, there aren’t

---

9 Aspects of racism and sexism are constantly talked about on the WoW forums, as well as World of Warcraft news websites such as WoW Insider (Bowers; Dean).

10 In 2006, “Blizzard was accused of being heavy-handed by threatening to expel a player for advertising a gay-friendly […] guild” (Ward).
many ways for a player to be held accountable for not showing up to a rehearsal: a virtual
director’s scorn isn’t likely to affect a player’s real or in-game life.

Playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Bertolt Brecht viewed theatre as the perfect
vehicle for social or political change, yet, in a community full of voluntary societal
participants, why should someone take part in the game if they are unhappy—especially
if that unhappiness is being purchased for $14.99 per month? Because participation in
this society is voluntary, the players seem to have little desire to provoke social change.
Those unhappy with the game simply leave it.

What Did Work?

While the failure to mount the production in *World of Warcraft* was
disheartening, it was not a complete loss. At the very least, the idea of a theatrical
production in the game did spark definite interest from other players. Although the
players offered little follow-through, upwards of twenty-five people *did* sign up to
participate in a variety of ways. Also, the playwright of the troupe *did* succeed in writing
a rather well-written play for *World of Warcraft*. In the end, not only were people
interested in creating something in this society, something creative actually came out of
the process, leading me to believe there is potential for a theatrical production in this
world. And this potential gives me hope for the future.

Rebecca Kozma’s 10 minute, 10 character satire of *World of Warcraft, An Ode to
10-Mans*, is certainly a product of the world in which it was born, yet the themes
addressed in the play are not exclusive to *World of Warcraft*. Kozma, who uses the avatar name Armi, was able to comment on in-game gender and class stereotypes, power dynamics of players with different social statuses, and the meta-sensibilities of the game while still making the play fluid and accessible to the audience of players.

*An Ode to 10-Mans* follows an avatar named TPC, The Plucky Coordinator, as she attempts to organize a 10-man party to raid one of the game’s dungeons. What she finds, however, is that not everyone is ready to proceed because they get caught up in their own business along the way. For instance, Female Player consistently assures other players that she is, indeed, female...and sexy; Ayeffkay gets sidetracked by excitement in the real world; Twelve is consistently hassled by his parents; etc. As soon as one player is ready to proceed, another runs into a problem. TPC incessantly tries to get things in order until she finally puts a stop to all the antics, takes charge, and leads the group into the dungeon.

Throughout the play, Kozma has the audience questioning the identity of the play’s characters. TPC, who is recommended to be played by a female, does not actively show her gender while Female Player puts on a stereotypical female persona that, in the game, would quickly give away “her” identity as male. The use of Epicz, a character using the game’s premier armor and weapons, also gives the audience a look into the social hierarchy in the game. Epicz’s staunch declaration, “if anything goes wrong it’s everyone else’s fault but mine and I’ll tell you what your [sic] doing wrong,” allows the

11 For full text of *An Ode to 10-Mans*, please see Appendix A.
audience to see the animosity that exists between the most “epic” and the simply “fair-weather” players.

Most interestingly, Kozma was able to accidentally predict the tribulations of the play’s staging before they even manifested. She successfully created a piece of theatre about the foibles of collaboration for a troupe that had nothing but trouble with just that. While this may have just been a fortuitous accident, Oscar Wilde did point out “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life” (Wilde 627).

If life does, indeed, imitate art, Rebecca Kozma has created a wonderful piece of theatre: in the end, everyone puts aside their differences and joins hands to reach their destination. Unfortunately, though, until the players in World of Warcraft join hands for a theatrical production, An Ode to 10-Mans will patiently wait in performance limbo for its chance to reach the stage.

What Does the Future Hold?

Despite the failure of both the Emerald Dream Players and the Dark Iron Players to successfully mount a production of An Ode To 10-Mans, the idea of a theatrical production in general within World of Warcraft has not yet proved to be doomed. The experience itself has suggested a number of solutions to the problems faced during production. Based on participant feedback, further research, and speculative hypotheses, I’ve decided upon five options for potential success: utilizing a troupe of out-of-game friends, a promise of fame and fortune, an element of “star power” in the production, tackling issues of ignorance and bigotry, and the plausibility of “invisible” theatre within World of Warcraft.
The single largest problem in attempting to mount this performance was the lack of dedication by the participants. From director to stage managers to actors, the anonymity of the world provided players with waning devotion the option of a “clean” breakaway. By utilizing the prior out-of-game relationships of a player’s circle of friends and bringing the staff to the game, the anonymity is dropped. Little can stop a group of already acquainted friends with a passion for creating theatre.

Within both groups of players, the compensation for participating in the production was literally only their own satisfaction and happiness with the finished product. This model relies upon an extreme amount of dedication from those involved. Perhaps one way to stir more devotion—and even interest—would be to promise the cast and crew that a copy of the performance will hit YouTube and, possibly, give them fame outside of the game. Similarly, one could promise lump sums of the game’s currency to the participants of the production which, while enticing, still becomes just another means to obtain money in the game’s already greed-focused society. This option also begs for investors within the game to help pay for production’s constituents.

*World of Warcraft* is not only slyly making its way into the entertainment industry via television shows like *South Park*, but also in a large way with the “geek chic” culture with shows such as *Project Lore*, a video podcast that offers how-to’s for some of the game’s in-game content, and *The Guild*, a fictional web series that follows the exploits of a small guild in the game à la *The Office*. These shows offer a unique opportunity to populate, popularize, and publicize future theatrical performances in a venue that is aimed towards individuals already savvy with the game.
Rather than the possible light reprimanding that is often doled out to purveyors of ignorance and bigotry within the game, theatre could serve as a reactionary battlefront against it. A group creating theatre with an agenda of acceptance could offer individuals who feel insulted or oppressed by the racism and sexism within the game a better option than just staying quiet or quitting the game. Also, the performances could be set to run in tandem with events like the Proudmoore server’s annual gay pride march.

In the 1970’s, Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal began his work on what he termed “invisible theatre.” In his work, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, he describes invisible theatre as such:

[Invisible theatre] consists of the presentation of a scene in an environment other than a theater, before people who are not spectators. The place can be a restaurant, a sidewalk, a market, a train, a line of people, etc. The people who witness the scene are those who are there by chance. During the spectacle, these people must not have the slightest idea that it is a “spectacle,” for this would make them “spectators.” (Boal 143-144)

Without placing the label of “theatre” on the performance, invisible theatre would immediately dispel any of the feminine notions of theatre described previously. This form of theatre also requires a smaller number of volunteers because the performance organically assimilates bystanders. Given the aforementioned stumbling blocks for production, invisible theatre seems like the most provocative and efficient means of mounting a theatrical production within *World of Warcraft.*
CONCLUSION

Shakespeare’s Hamlet argues “the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature” (Shakespeare III.ii.20-2). What is to be said, then, for a society without theatre; a society that does not have a means for self-reflection? It makes little sense that theatre is able to survive in the real world if there are so many parallels that exist between it and World of Warcraft. Perhaps the problem lies within the means rather than the product: theatre in the real world sometimes does make use of the power, commodity, and status that the world covets. The production staff gets paid and receives renown for their work: this is, after all, what ultimately gives them the power to continue to make theatre. Perhaps, in the real world, it isn’t possible to separate the power from the creation, the commodity from the creativity, and the status from the community. Maybe we need to learn to take the sugar with the medicine.

Given what I’ve learned from the experience and the hope I’ve garnered along the way, there is certainly hope for a production in the future. Whether the theatre is destined for YouTube, invisible to the masses, or a tool to fight injustice, it will most certainly take advantage of one of its lesser known talents: the ability to persevere in the most adverse conditions. After all, the hunter only stops stalking prey when it is time for the feast!
REFERENCES


Sterry, Mike. “Guerilla Gaming.” The Guardian. 18 November 2006. 13 May 2009
   <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2006/nov/18/games.culture>.


Westley, Brian. Weblog. WoW Pacifist Undead Priest / Gnome Rogue. 4 May 2009

“What is Machinima?” Academy of Machinima Arts & Sciences. 3 August 2005. 5 April

Whitlock, Katherine. Theatre and the Video Game: Beauty and the Beast. Diss. The Ohio
   State University, 2004.


World of Warcraft Community Site. Blizzard Entertainment. 5 April 2009

“What - > Awards.” World of Warcraft Community Site. 5 April 2009

Yee, Nick. “The Labor of Fun: How Video Games Blur the Boundaries of Work and
APPENDIX A: AN ODE TO 10-MANS

An Ode to 10-mans
By: Armi [Rebecca Kozma]

Cast of Characters:
(Notice, none of the characters have actual names, making them easier to cast. Also all parts can be played by any sex/race/class but preferences are listed)

The Plucky Coordinator - Known as TPC. Would preferably like TPC cast as a female, any race or class will do. As she will represent the normal girls on WoW.

Listener - Listener, preferably a male of any race/class, is on time, has his potions and food and is ready to go. He starts the scene with TPC

Silent Hero - Silent Hero is a non-speaking role for most of the show, he shows up on time but never actually says anything. He only uses emotes to speak and at first TPC and Listener don’t even notice he’s there. Preferable: Tauren Male, any class.

SUMMONS! - Spends most his time off stage asking for a summon instead of just heading to the spot himself. Preferably male.

Female Player - Constantly draws attention to the fact they are FEMALE in every way possible. Expects certain rights for having boobs and playing video games. Obviously female, but can be played by a Male Blood Elf in a dress for extra hilarity.

Twelve - The 12 year old player. Constantly gets booted from the game by his MOOOMMMM and then sneaks back on right as they are about to get a replacement. Tank class, preferable.

Ayeffkay - The AFKer of any group, and it’s always for some dumb reason.

EPICZ - The hardcore raider of the group. Impatient and doesn’t stand for anything that isn’t Serious Business.

Wrong Spec - Hired as a healer, but comes specced as DPS. This is the only part that must has a class that can heal, or else the joke is lost.

Forgetful - You gotta love forgetful, he tries to hard to show up on time only to constantly forget everything he needs. Caster class needed so they can forget their wonderful reagents.

12 Text used by permission of author. Spelling/grammatical errors not corrected as some may be intentional.
ACT ONE AND ONLY

(SILENT HERO is sitting toward the back of the stage, he should barely be noticeable and will not be moving during the first exchange. From Stage Left enters TPC and LISTENER. Both stop at the middle of the stage and turn to look at each other.)

TPC
Ah! Right on time, and ready to go. I knew this run would go well today!

LISTENER
(Clears his throat) Um, We’re the only two here.

TPC
Well, I’m sure everyone is ready and flying here now. Don’t worry, everything is going as planned.

(The two walk around in awkwardly for a bit of time.)

TPC
Okay, where is everybody? (LISTENER shrugs) I mean we’ve had this set up for an hour, we should all be here, Ready to go and get us some Epics!

LISTENER
I’m ready to go… and get us… some epics.

TPC
(She sighs) you don’t count.

LISTENER
Thanks?

TPC
Oh, you know what I mean!

LISTENER
Not really I mean --

(Before he can finish his sentence FEMALE PLAYER, wearing an outfit that doesn’t leave much to the imagination, enters from S. Right. She instantly goes and stands next to LISTENER, very very closely)

FEMALE PLAYER
I’m here! I’m here! I’m SO SORRY, my BOYFRIEND was talking to me and then he
started TICKLING ME and threw me to the ground! *(She giggles)* Being a girl and all I thought it was SO HOT.

*(There’s silence for a bit as they process that mental image)*

**TPC**
It’s no problem, besides him over there, you’re the only one here.

**FEMALE PLAYER**
(Looks behind her and sees SILENT HERO) No I’m not, he’s here *(Points to SILENT HERO)*

*(TPC and LISTENER look behind them to see SILENT HERO sitting in the background. TPC looks surprised as he rises and comes to the front of the stage.)*

**TPC**
Why didn’t you tell us you were here? *(SILENT HERO shrugs, but offers no explanation)* Well, as long as you made it on time, I guess it doesn’t matter. I’m going to see where the others are. *(Walks off S.Right.)*

*(SILENT HERO Nods)*

**FEMALE PLAYER**
(Talking to LISTENER) So how old are you?

**LISTENER**
Um.. 21.

**FEMALE PLAYER**
I’m 19, I started playing when I was 17 in between modeling jobs.

**LISTENER**
Modeling…jobs…?

**FEMALE PLAYER**
Yeah, I used to be a model but my agent told me my boobs were too big and I had to stop! *(Pauses for a second)* Where do you live? If you live near me we should get together sometime.

**LISTENER**
Didn’t you say you have a boyfriend?
**FEMALE PLAYER**
*(Laughs)* He doesn’t mind. I’m too hot for him to care about anything I do.

**LISTENER**
*(Begins to back away)* You’re both very… progressive.

**TPC**
*(Comes back from S. Right and sighs)* Okay, Three people are on there way, one forgot his raiding gear, one went AFK, and I don’t know where the other one is.

**SUMMONS!**
*(Offstage, From S. Left)* CAN I GET A SUMMON PLEASE!?

**TPC**
Can’t you just fly here!?

**SUMMONS!**
NO.

**TPC**
Why not?

**SUMMONS!**
*(Pause for effect)* CUZ.

**TPC**
Fine! *(LISTENER and TPC both mock summon)*

**SUMMONS!**
OKAY I GOT IT.

*(TWELVE then appears S. Left and comes over to the group)*

**TWELVE**
You guys may need to find a replacement for me.

**TPC**
Why? You said you’d be able to stay the whole time.

**TWELVE**
My mom is mad that I didn’t clean my room.
LISTENER
Clean your room?

TWELVE
Or finish my homework. Or come down to eat with them for dinner. Parent’s are pretty lame.

TPC
Okay, I guess we’ll start looking for a replacement, then.

SUMMONS!
(Offstage, from S. Left) GUYS I ACCIDENTLY DECLINED CAN I GET ANOTHER SUMMON?

LISTENER
Yeah, I guess. (SILENT HERO and LISTENER mock summon again)

SUMMONS!
THANKS! BE THERE SOON.

(At this AYEFFKAY Enters from S. Right and instantly sits down near the exit)

AYEFFKAY
I’m here but I gotta go wash my dog dish, AFK.

TPC
Okay (looks over to TWELVE) I think we have a replacement for you if you want to leave.

TWELVE
Nah, it’s cool, I blocked the door with my bed so my mom can’t get in. She’s screaming at me through it though. Parent’s are lame.

TPC
You… blocked.. The… (Sighs) Never mind, I’ll tell the guy we don’t need him anymore.

(FEMALE PLAYER saunters over to SILENT HERO)

FEMALE PLAYER
So how long have you been playing? (He snorts but says nothing) I’ve been playing for two years, cuz I really like video games. And people think that’s so WEIRD cuz I’m a GIRL and SO POPULAR. Do you think it’s weird? (SILENT HERO Snorts again, but
says nothing) I knew you wouldn’t think it was weird, because you like video games too. 
(SILENT HERO blinks at her) You’re a really good listener.

AYEFFKAY
I’m back.

TPC
Welcome back

AYEFFKAY
Oh hold on, my cat got out. AFK.

(WRONG SPEC and EPICZ walk in from S. Right at the same time.)

EPICZ
I am not raiding with that guy! (Points to WRONG SPEC) He’s an idiot! In fact, you’re all idiots for inviting him as a healer!

TPC
Excuse me?

LISTENER
He said he was a healer.

EPICZ
Noobs, did you even look him up in armory? He’s DPS specced! How is he going to heal!?

TPC
(To WRONG SPEC) Really?

WRONG SPEC
Well, technically yes… but it’s TOTALLY okay. I can TOTALLY do this. It’s no problem.

TPC
What’s your bonus healing?

WRONG SPEC
Well… 20. But I swear I can DO THIS!
**EPICZ**
He is going to keep me from my epic sword that I need to make my set complete and I won’t raid with him!

**TPC**
Do you think you can go back and respec?

**WRONG SPEC**
I’m telling you, I won’t even need to, man. It’s all good.

**EPICZ**
You cannot and it’s not all good!

**SUMMONS!**
OH DUDES! YOU’RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE THIS BUT I ACTUALLY DECLINED AGAIN! LOL!

**TPC**
You did not!

**SUMMONS!**
CAN I GET A SUMMON PLEASE?

**EPICZ**
You could have been here by now by flying instead of being stupid.

**SUMMONS!**
(Pause) CAN I GET A SUMMON PLEASE?

**TPC**
(Sighs) Yeah. (Points to FEMALE PLAYER and SILENT HERO, who mock summon him again)

**SUMMONS!**
BE THERE SOON! FOR REAL THIS TIME!

**EPICZ**
I’m sure. (Grunts) If that sword drops tonight I call it!

**LISTENER**
You Can’t CALL gear.
**EPICZ**
Yes I can. I was in the TOP RAIDING GUILD on this server and they let us call gear all the time.

**WRONG SPEC**
Why aren’t you still in it then, man?

**EPICZ**
They weren’t hardcore enough for me, this server is full of scrub. I’m transferring to Nihilum’s server, that’s where the best players go.

**AYEFFKAY**
Alright, I’m back.

**LISTENER/TPC/FEMALE PLAYER/WRONG SPEC**
Welcome Back.

**AYEFFKAY**
Hold on, my mom is on the phone wanting to know what color to paint the wall. AFK

**TWELVE**
Speaking of mom’s, mine just took the door off the hinges and is yelling at me. You might want to get a replacement.

**TPC**
I’ll see if the previous one is still free.

*(The final member of the group finally makes his appearance, **FORGETFUL** enters from S. Right)*

**FORGETFUL**
Sorry guys, I had to find my raiding gear, I was PvPing all day today.

**LISTENER**
It’s no problem.

**FEMALE PLAYER**
PVP! I love PvP and I’m so GOOD at it. People always ask me if I’m really a girl because I’m SO GOOD at it and I’m like OF COURSE I’m a girl. If I wasn’t then these BIG BOOBS would look really stupid!

**FORGETFUL**
Oh man, I forgot all my food. I need to go to my bank real quick. *(Exits S. Left)*
TPC
The guy said he could come if you want to leave now.

TWELVE
Dad is yelling at mom now, I’ll think I’ll be okay to run now.

TPC
Are you sure?

TWELVE
Yeah, mom and dad fight for hours. Makes the dog bark a lot. Parent’s are lame.

TPC
Are you sure? I do have someone who can go.

TWELVE
Yeah it’s no prob—-(Stops moving completely. Everyone sorrounds him and begins to poke him, except for TPC who just sighs again)

LISTENER
Looks like he got DCed

(SILENT HERO Nods and grunts)

WRONG SPEC
Oh man, harsh.

EPICZ
While he’s gone, you should really go respec to something useful

WRONG SPEC
Hey, I’ve totally healed this place as this spec before. It’s totally cool, I got this.

FORGETFUL
(Enters from S. Left) Okay, I got my food. I’m ready to go now.

SUMMONS!
(His voice is now coming from S. Right) HEY GUYS I NEED A SUMMON!

TPC
How did you get over there!?
SUMMONS!
I KNOW RIGHT? I HAVE NO IDEA.

FORGETFUL
Damnit, I forgot my reagents. I’ll be right back. (Exits S. Right)

AYEFFKAY
Alright I’m back.

LISTENER
Welcome--

AYEFFKAY
Whoa dude, there’s a weird light coming from outside. AFK

EPICZ
You have GOT to be kidding me!

WRONG SPEC
Maybe it’s a UFO, that would be pretty awesome.

EPICZ
In my old guild this would never happen! We would all be ready right when it was time to go! And we’d clear the raid in 1 hour! AND we’d get awesome drops all the time!

SUMMONS!
CAN I GET A SUMMON NOW PLEASE?

TPC
I’ve got a replacement on the way for--

TWELVE
I’m back.

TPC
Ah, hell.

TWELVE
Mom pulled the plug, but I snuck over and plugged it back in then put my dresser in front of the door so she can’t get in.

LISTENER
You are a freakishly strong kid.
FORGETFUL
(Walks back in S. Right) Okay, I’m sure I have everything this time.

TPC
Great, then most of us are here. We just need to wait for him (points to AYEFFKAY) to come back.

SUMMONS!
SUMMON PLEASE!

TPC
Okay since most of us are here now I think we can go in and start. Remember who our main tank is and who our main healer is and when we get to the first boss wait so I can explain it to people who haven’t done it before.

FEMALE PLAYER
Hehehe. Done it. I’ve done it before and I LOVE DOING IT.

LISTENER
Oh lord…

EPICZ
I’ve done every raid like 50 times so if anything goes wrong it’s everyone else’s fault but mine and I’ll tell you what your doing wrong.

FORGETFUL
Oh hell, I forgot my pots! (Starts to walk off S. left)

(SILENT HERO goes and blocks the exit and grunts)

EVERYONE ELSE
STOP!

(FORGETFUL stops and looks up to SILENT HERO who glares at him)

TPC
(Points to FEMALE PLAYER) She’s an alchemist, I’m sure she has extra pots handy.

(FEMALE PLAYER walks over to FORGETFUL)

AYEFFKAY
Man, they were just car lights. I’m back. (Walks to the center of the stage) Are we ready yet?
**TPC**  
We’re about to go in now.

**AYEFFKAY**  
About time.

**FEMALE PLAYER**  
Need anything else, babe? Besides a picture of me, though I KNOW you want one!  
*(Giggles)*

**FORGETFUL**  
No, I think I’m good.

**TPC**  
Okay, everyone. Let’s head in!  
*(Everyone exits S. left, leaving the stage empty)*

**SUMMONS!**  
GUYS I STILL NEED A SUMMON. *(Pause) GUYS?*

*(SILENT HERO and TPC come out from S. left)*

**TPC**  
Oh, sorry! Forgot about you! *(Both mock summon him)*

*(SUMMONS! Enters S. Right)*

**SUMMONS!**  
Yeah! Let’s get this party started! *(Starts dancing)*

**TPC**  
What are you doing?

**SUMMONS!**  
This is the only time I’m on stage, I’m making the best of it.

**SILENT HERO**  
You stupid as hell. *(Walks off S. Left. SUMMONS! Stops dancing)*

**TPC**  
You heard the man, let’s go.

*(Both TPC and SUMMONS! Exit S. left)*
AYEEFFKAY
(From offstage)
Guys, I have a pee. AFK

(Everyone groans)

THE END
GLOSSARY

Avatar: The three-dimensional representation of a player’s character within *World of Warcraft*.

Azeroth: The planet which serves as the setting for *World of Warcraft*.

Emote: A gesture, sometimes accompanied by a standardized vocalization that the other players can see/hear.

Machinima: “[F]ilmmaking within a real-time, 3D virtual environment, often using 3D video-game technologies” (Silverman).

MMORPG: Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game.

NPC: Non-Player Character, a character or monster in the game that is not controlled by another player.

PvE: Player versus Enemy, a type of game server that does not allow combat between rival player factions.

PvP: Player versus Player, a type of game server that does allow combat between rival player factions.

RP: Role-Playing, a type of game serve that promotes exclusively “in-game” role-playing chat and does not allow combat between rival player factions.

RPPvP: Role-Playing Player versus Player, a type of game serve that promotes exclusively “in-game” role-playing chat and does allow combat between rival player factions.

XP: Experience, a numerical reward for doing certain tasks that a player can accrue to raise their character’s level rank.