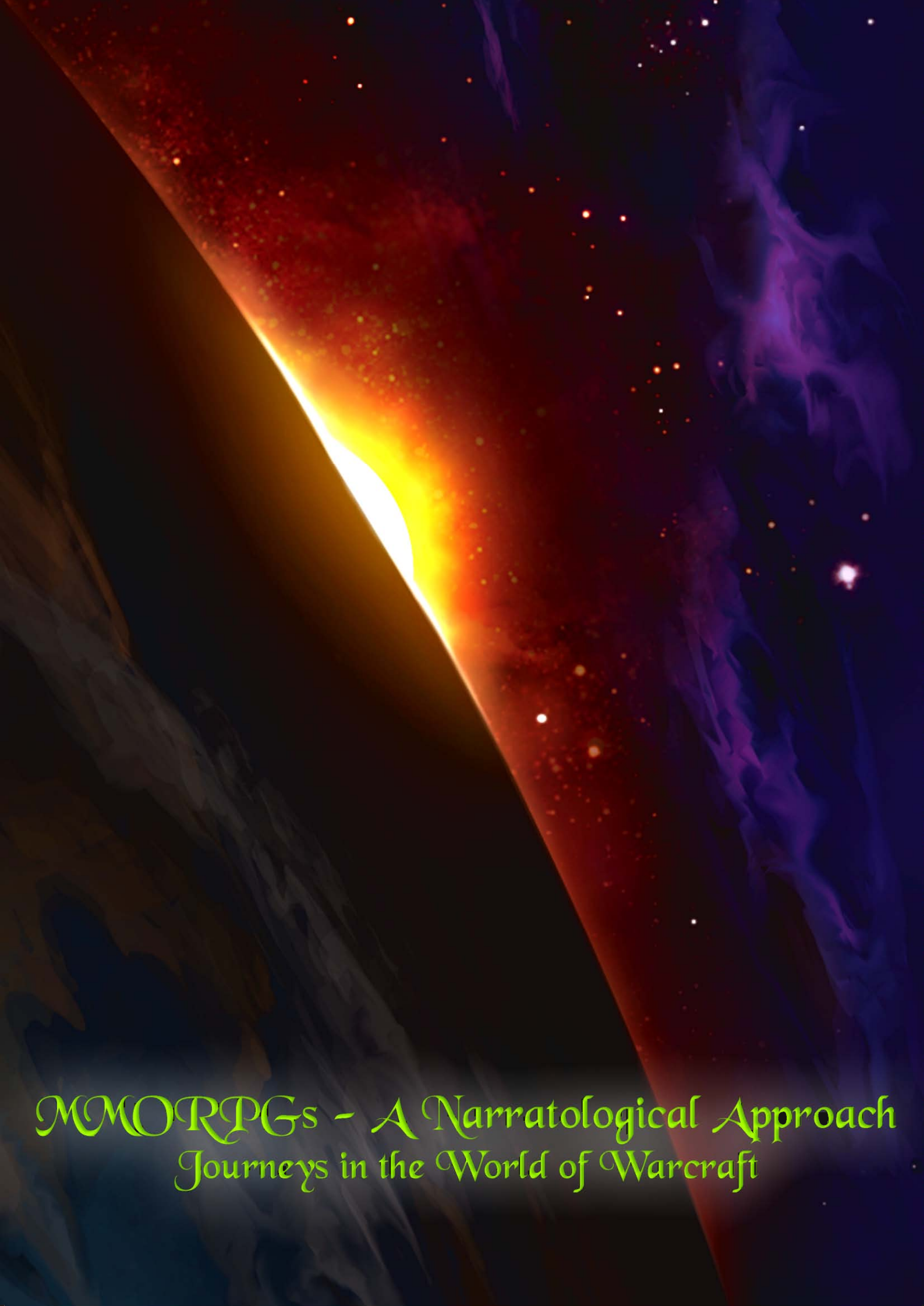
MMORPGs - A Narratological Approach
Journeys in the World of Warcraft

Titelblad

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-Journeys in the World of Warcraft

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MMORPGs – A Narratological Approach

1. Introduction

With the emergence of the moving image around the turn of the 20th century, many speculated whether film might mean the end of written texts such as novels, or if it would ever be successful at all. Novels were the predominant medium for conveying narratives of adventure and excitement to readers around the world. Since that time, novels and film have existed side by side, and sometimes even supplemented each other, in a symbiotic relationship, where novel are adapted to screenplays, or movies inspire novels and so on. Then came the personal computer, and offered owners the possibility to play adventure and sports games in their homes. The last 20 years have been a gradual evolution of the computer game medium, just like the filmmaking industry has evolved since its first incarnation. Over the last 5 years or so, a new type of game has grown from a sub-culture activity, to a mainstream pop-cultural phenomenon. With the ever growing number of players world-wide, Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games have become a new interesting medium. They rely heavily on written text whilst also being audio-visual in format, and interactive in nature. This means that the narratives provided in MMORPGs are very much of interest to the field of literary criticism, which has previously been engaged in literature (text based) and film and television with minor excursions into computer games and Virtual Reality. These different mediums all have in common the ability to immerse the user (player/viewer/reader) in a narrative, with the possibility to interact to a lesser or greater degree depending on the medium. It is my intention to form an analytical tool, useable for analysing MMORPGs, from existing theory, or at least, to create some part of such a tool. Ideally, I will be able to show how narratological theories can be used as valid tools to analyse MMORPGs, and thereby arriving at conclusions yet unexplored by ludology theory.

Literary criticism theory has long been involved as analytical tools to understand and break down narratives in film, novels, and computer games and so on. It is normal for narratological literary theorists to apply their already existing theories to new media when they show up, to make sense and meaning of them. This has also happened with the

modern computer game. Other theorists believe that computer games should be understood on their own terms, and thus they have been labeled ludologists, from ludology, the field of game studies. The narratological view is that games should be understood as new forms of narrative, and thus be studied using narratological theories. There is as of yet not a definitive literary criticism theory that fully describes the MMORPG phenomenon, but I have taken it upon myself to try and create part of such a theory, a foundation for a larger work, if you will. I will do this through a narratological approach, using existing theory, and then trying to adjust said theory to fit the MMORPG. No theory remains unaltered in the meeting with a new medium. It is my intention to create, through this thesis, a theory that will allow anyone interested, be it readers, players, academics or other, to find and examine journey patterns throughout MMORPGs.

1.1 Method

My starting point is that whenever we encounter narratives, a journey occurs. It can happen on several levels, but the most well-known is probably that of the Hero's Journey so often found in film and novel as well as games. I will validate my arguments by using theory from established theorists, and testing their theories against the (currently) most popular MMORPG, *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*), starting with Wolfgang Iser and his thoughts on the reading process (includes Roman Ingarden). I will then briefly discuss how this can be applied to the computer game. Marie-Laure Ryan introduces to my thesis the concept of immersion, and with her and Richard Gerrig, I will discuss how immersion allows the reader to become lost in a book, so to speak, and how this is the first part of a journey on the part of the reader. There will be parallels to the Hero's Journey. The concept of the Endlessly Receding Horizon is introduced. Then follows a general discussion of how the theory so far can be applied to *WoW*, as well as an examination of the narrative structures used in *WoW*; mainly the quest structure. A detailed look at Christopher Vogler's Hero's Journey allows me to see how the concept of journey is constructed, and I then apply it to journey structures found in *WoW*.

Next I discuss how viewers normally engage in the on-screen action of a film, and how that process is similar as well as different to the one experienced by someone playing *WoW*. I will be using Murray Smith's Structure of Sympathy for this. A final discussion and conclusion will enable me to demonstrate how narratology applies to MMORPGs (or at the very least, the case study *WoW*), but also why this theory is valid and useful. They element of 'journey' should bring all these elements together, and a finalised tool for analysing journeys within MMORPGs should be available. Through this I can illuminate how narratology continues to influence narratives across media.

I would like to thank in particular Steen Ledet Christiansen for his willingness to discuss my findings and comment on my analyses and for pointing me in the right direction on my own journey.

2. World of Warcraft – An Introduction

In this thesis I have chosen to support my findings and arguments with the help of a case study, which will also allow me to apply my own theories and see how they hold up, when applied to a proper work of fiction. I have chosen the widely popular computer game *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) released by Blizzard Entertainment on November 23, 2004. Since then, *WoW* has been updated several times, and an official expansion pack titled *The Burning Crusade* was released on January 16, 2007. Since its release, *WoW* has grown to be the most popular game of its type in the world. As of January 2008, Blizzard Entertainment has surpassed 9 million registered users.

WoW differs from 'normal' computer or console games in that there is no single player function. You cannot buy the game, install it, and then play it on your computer. The game installs necessary game components on your computer, but you can only play the game online, on one of Blizzard*'s* servers. This means that the game is played on a computer controlled by Blizzard Entertainment, and not on your own. A monthly fee is required to keep your account active, and every game session requires you to log on with your unique account information.

The game itself is set in Blizzards own fictional fantasy world, and the game owes a lot of its back story to the three real-time strategy previously released in the same setting. *WoW* takes place four years after the action experienced in *Warcraft III*. Unlike the previous three games in the Warcraft series, *WoW* is a so-called MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game). You create your own character (an avatar), design look, race and class and make up a name. Then you enter the game through the log-on screen, and you are then online with thousands of other players.

The game itself revolves around improving your character and solving quests. You start at level 1 (minimum) and can potentially reach level 70 (maximum with *Burning Crusade* expansion). The game is geared towards the player increasing in level. However, it also seems that the game is never-ending, which is of course part of the economical success of the game. There is always room to improve you character.

Questing is the *modus opperandi* for navigating through the game. In this thesis I will be looking at questing from three specific perspectives: the simple quest, questing from level 1 to 70, and raiding. I should note here that 'raiding' is the term that is used to describe an activity within the game, for players who have already reached level 70. The features a lot of content only made available when reaching this level. This so-called end-game content is centred on players coming together five or more players, in a raid group. This raid group then explores 'instances' in hopes of overcoming challenges. A raid experience is similar to the quest experience, but for a larger group of people.

More information about how the game is played, built up and functions can be found here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_of_warcraft

3. Reading and the Immersive Journey

This chapter deals with how we as readers read a text and form meaning of it. I look at how we create an 'imaginary world' when reading, and how we become immersed in it by reading. I then examine how reading and immersion is encountered in *World of*

Warcraft, and finally discuss the structure of the quest, which is an important part of the journey concept in *WoW*.

3.1 The Reading Process

In literature, reading is the process of recognising words and forming meaning of strings of words (sentences). Being able to read is the base prerequisite of understanding a text, be it a novel or academic theories. This is the starting point of my thesis, and examining the reading process in greater detail will be necessary for an understanding of what happens when a reader picks up a text. As I will also argue, the reading process is not one limited to the actual reading of written words, but just as well one of watching a film, or even playing a computer game.

In his article *The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach* Wolfgang Iser (1972) examines the relationship between reader and text. More so, he explores the process that takes place, when one reads, and the meaning one makes of what is read. A literary work, according to Iser, is not the written text itself (a novel for instance), nor is it the readers interpretation of the text, but rather a product of the two (the literary text). When reading the words 'a blue car' the reader's imagination as well as recognition is activated. The reader understands the words as an automobile of the blue persuasion, and the reader's imagination conjures up an image of what the mentioned car might look like.

> *"The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination"* (Iser, 1972 p. 215).

So the literary text is, essentially, constructed during the reading process by the reader, as he reads the text.

Iser examines how he perceives the reading process, but also includes thoughts and observations made by others. Iser's old teacher, Roman Ingarden, comments on the way sentences are constructed and read, but Iser also finds useful insight made in a plain

novel. Through his book *Tristram Shandy* Laurence Sterne, an 18th century novelist inspires Iser to describe the act of reading as:

> *"…an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination. If the reader were given the whole story, and there were nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field, the result would be boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us. A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative. In this process of creativity, the text may either not go far enough, or may go too far, so we may say that boredom and overstrain form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of play"* (Iser, 1972, p. 212-213)

From this we see how the reading process not only calls for the reader to understand the text and create the literary text, but the text itself must also offer the reader with the right amount of challenge. This is where the reader takes an active part in the reading process. There is a kind of interaction between reader and text, and this is a point that will be useful later on in the discussion of film and computer game as literary text. Also, we see that complexity is tied closely to the enjoyment of the reading process. Too simple or too complicated a text ruins the enjoyment, which is a point that has relevance in my examination of the quests in *WoW*.

Further exploring the reading process, we find that the interaction on behalf of the reader, suggested by Sterne, is a vital part of both the enjoyment and creation of a literary text. It is a trait of most text that there are 'gaps' in the stream of sentences. These gaps offer the reader with the possibility to speculate, to fill the gaps, so to speak. Roman Ingarden ascribes great significance to this gap-filling as part of the reading process:

> *"Once we are immersed in the flow of Satzdenken (sentence-thought); we are ready, after completing the thought of one sentence, to think out the 'continuation', also in the form of a sentence – and that is, in the form of a sentence that connects up with the sentence we have just thought through. In this way the process of reading goes effortlessly forward. But if by chance the following sentence has no tangible connection whatever with the sentence we have just thought through, then there comes a blockage in the stream of thought. This hiatus is linked with more or less active*

> *surprise, or with indignation. This blockage must be overcome if the reading is to flow once more"* (Ingarden, 1968 p. 32).

What Ingarden points out is an important part of reading. Each sentence is read, and understood and modifies the one before it. When a blockage occurs, the process of reading and understanding, anticipating and modifying is halted. The reader's mind must then supply what the reader thinks reasonable to assume; that is, the reader connects two sentences that are separated by a gap, by filling it with a reasonable assumption. When the mind is challenged to fill these gaps, to keep the flow going, the reader is engaged in the text, and this process creates immersion, as we shall see Marie-Laure Ryan discuss later. One should note that gaps or blocks can be so large that they pose an incredibly difficult challenge, while others are easily dealt with. This is important, because it is the premise of the same principle as the one described by Laurence Sterne. If the text is too complicated for the reader to follow or be engaged in, or indeed, too easy, we either become frustrated or bored, both of which might lead us to stop reading. The important point here is that complexity will be discussed later in regards to the quests in *WoW*.

I am also looking at journeys (on more than one level), and Iser makes an interesting point, that I would like to discuss here. It has to do with immersion and beginning the journey.

> *"The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be* different *from his own (since, normally, we tend to be bored by texts that present us with things we already know perfectly well ourselves). Thus we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own. The impact the reality makes on him will depend largely on the extent to which he himself actively provides the unwritten part of the text, and yet in supplying all the missing links, he must think in terms of experiences different from his own; indeed, it is only by leaving behind the familiar world of his own experience that the reader can truly participate in the adventure the literary text offers him"* (Iser, 1972 p. 218).

What is worth noting here is that the reader, when filling gaps and imagining what is being read, as described above, he draws upon his own experiences. That means that the blue car mentioned before will look different to each reader, as each readers has led a life different from anyone else's, and thus no two literary text blue cars imagined will look the same. So a reader supplies a part of his life experience when reading, to fill gaps and create a literary text. In turn, the literary text offers the reader an adventure to take part in. This point will have relevance when I discuss immersion and beginning the journey later.

The Reading Process has relevance to *WoW* in a couple of ways. First off, I see the reading process as a journey, as it is also hinted at by Iser. The process is one that entails decoding symbols and meaning, which in turn activates your imagination and engages and immerses you in a creative process, where you create something that is greater than the total sum of the parts of the original fictional work. Secondly, the forming of meaning occurs throughout the reading of a text. We try to make meaning of it, with every sentence we read; each one modifying the one before it; each one modifying the entire text before it. Our mind constantly revisits previous passages in the text, and modifies our reading of them, or the sense we have made of them. Only at the end of the text do we have a finalised "meaning" of the text; our own reading. We continually read, form a hypothesis of meaning, reinforce or modify them, and sometimes discard or replace them. It is a continual cycle that goes on from start to finish, where the reader tries to make sense of the text; tries to guess the outcome of a murder story, for instance. When you observe this process of reading, it becomes apparent, that this is also the way computer games are experienced, because they present you with bits of information about the action taking place (the plot) and the characters involved, much like a film or novel would. Thirdly, many MMORPGs rely heavily on text-based communication, both between players and between user and game. This reading of text is at times exactly like described above by Iser, and very much like reading a novel. In *WoW*, it is often required to read passages of text for a quest, or read some part of the back-story for the action going on. For these reasons, I feel confident that the theory of a Reading Process is very valid and usable for analysing a computer game like *WoW*, even though the medium is quite different.

3.2 Immersion

As I move on and explore the journey concept, it becomes apparent that immersion, the act of 'losing one self' in a narrative, is a large part of undertaking a journey. Marie-Laure Ryan, a literary critic working in the areas of narrative theory and electronic textuality, also sees this connection between the process of reading and immersion and the journey a player makes, when playing computer games. In her book *Narrative as Virtual Reality* she states:

> *"When VR theorists attempt to describe the phenomenon of immersion, the metaphor that imposes itself with the greatest insistence is the reading experience:*
>
> *As [users] enter the virtual world, their depth of engagement gradually meanders away from here until they cross the threshold of involvement. Now they are absorbed in the virtual world, similar to being absorbed in an engrossing book.*
> *The question isn't whether the created world is as real as the physical world, but whether the created world is real enough for you to suspend your disbelief for a period of time. This is the same mental shift that happens when you get wrapped up in a good novel or become absorbed in playing a computer game."* (Ryan, 2003, p. 89).

This short paragraph revolves around the essence of immersion; the ability to be transported to a created place (or world) and suspend your disbelief, so you can enjoy the experience. The point of this chapter is to illustrate the type of immersion that *WoW* offers the player, and how the game exists as a textual world. The paragraph above suggests, that if sufficiently real (real-like), the game should be able to transport us somewhere else for the duration of play. Michael Heim, in Ryan's book sums up the concept of world with these four features: *"connected set of objects and individuals; habitable environment; reasonably intelligible totally for external observers; field of activity for its members"* (Ryan, 2003 p. 91). In the very least, *WoW* is able to fill this description with ease. A set of objects and individuals is easily all the NPC's and their environs found throughout *WoW*. The habitable environment for players manifests itself with the cities throughout *WoW*, where your "home" is represented by an inn in some city. The world itself is intelligible to outside observers, simply by the fact that it is recognizably similar to our physical world: objects in *WoW* that looks like trees are trees, buildings look like buildings, people like people etc. The field of activity for its members

(in this case, the players) is represented by the quests throughout the game, and even simpler, by the opportunity to simply move about in the world. This theory is originally used for purely text-based narratives, but I will show just how appropriate it is for the MMORPG games as well. The reading experience when reading a novel, is not all that different from the reading (or playing) experience of *WoW*, as Ryan also points out. Therefore, I feel confident in using immersion as a tool to explain the journey a reader or player begins, when they pick up a book or start playing a game. From Ryan's quote: "*As [users] enter the virtual world, their depth of engagement gradually meanders away from here until they cross the threshold of involvement"* I see an obvious parallel to the Heroic Journey discussed later in this thesis, where the hero also must cross the threshold from his Ordinary World to embark on his journey in the Special World. To emphasise the concept of journey, or the process of journey, if you will, I will look at the reader's journey when picking up a book, because it is similar to the Hero's Journey in some aspects, and it is relevant to both novel and game, where Christopher Vogler's Hero's Journey is inspired by film. Hopefully this will illustrate the point of a transmedia journey process shared by players, readers and protagonists of film, novel and game alike.

3.3 The Reader's Immersive (Heroic) Journey

In her book *Narrative as Virtual Reality* Marie-Laure Ryan (2003) uses a theory by Richard Gerrig to support her arguments on the immersion process when reading. As I said, I will argue how it also describes the process of journey in general. Gerrig's model is a theory of how one becomes 'lost in a book'. This again was originally written with text in mind, and thus not audio/visual narratives, but it will suit the purpose just as well. Gerrig sets up this 'journey' for the reader:

> *1. Someone ("the traveler") is transported…*
> *2. by some means of transportation…*
> *3. as a result of performing certain actions.*
> *4. The traveler goes some distance from his or her world of origin, …*
> *5. which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible.*
> *6. The traveler returns home to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey.* (Ryan, 2003, p. 93-94)

As we will see later, this model looks a lot like the one Vogler describes as the Hero's Journey. I will briefly compare the two, allowing us to better superimpose Gerrig's model when reading the chapter on the Hero's Journey later in this thesis.

The 'someone' that is transported is originally thought to be the reader of a novel or similar textual narrative. This simple statement means that the reader's imagination is brought to a foreign world, so to speak. This is similar to the starting point of a hero's journey. The Ordinary World and the Call to Adventure of Vogler's model is where the hero (in Gerrig's model, the reader) is at home, and then is called upon to embark on a journey. The reader picks up the book, and begins the journey, just as the hero is called to action.

The 'means of transportation' in Vogler's model can be quite a few things, though Gerrig's is the novel. The process by which the hero is transported is more of an internal alteration. The Refusal of The Call and Meeting with the Mentor is the part of Vogler's model where the hero's mind is finally made up that he can no longer remain in the Ordinary World, and must therefore be on his way. So his transportation is one of inaction to action. The reader is transported by the beginning of a reading process that will force him into the reader's role as described by Iser before.

Certain actions are performed, and in the case of the hero, it is the Crossing of the Threshold. The point where he finally leaves home and prepares to face the challenges of the Special World. The reader performs his own actions, namely engaging in the reading process. Even Gerrig recognizes this process as part of the immersive journey:

> *"The goal of the journey is not a preexisting territory that awaits the traveler on the other side of the ocean but a land that emerges in the course of the trip as the reader executes the textual directions into a 'reality model'"* (Ryan, 2003, p. 93-94).

This reality model is the same as Iser's 'literary text'; the world conjured forth when combining writing and the imagination of the reader. So the reader leaves behind his own

mundane world, and by the action of a reading process is transported to a literary text; a land that emerges in the course of the trip, just like the land the hero now faces beyond the threshold.

Step four of the model has to do with the difference between the world from which the reader came, and the one he is visiting. *"When visiting a textual world, the reader must…adapt to the laws of this world, which differs to various degrees from the laws of his native reality"* (Ryan, 2003, p. 94). This seems an accurate description of the difference between the Ordinary World and the Special World described by Vogler. As the reader is no longer in his native world, other rules apply. The hero on his journey makes this discovery in the Tests, Allies, Enemies and the Approach to the Inmost Cave in Vogler's model. The hero, like the reader, realizes that in the Special World things are different, and he has to learn the ways of that world and abide by them.

The world of origin becomes inaccessible. For the reader this can have several meanings. The rules of the textual world supersedes those of the world of origin, meaning the reader can no longer count on his own experiences of how the world functions to be valid in the textual world, but it can also be a comment on how the immersive experience takes over, and the reader forgets his immediate surroundings, and as such is wholly absorbed into the textual world, for a time at least. For the hero, this process happens in the Supreme Ordeal. The hero is faced with a great challenge, and overcoming that challenge changes him forever and he gains the full understanding of the Special World. This change in the hero means that he can never go back to being the person he was before crossing the threshold, and thus part of his Ordinary World is now inaccessible to him.

That the traveler returns changed by the journey is a spot on description of the Return with the Elixir step in Vogler's model. After having overcome adversity, the hero can finally return home, though forever changed. The hero brings home knowledge and understanding of the Special World, and when we look at this quote from Ryan's book, it is easy to see the similarity to the process the reader has been through: *"The reader who returns from the open seas of his feelings is no longer the same reader who embarked on*

that sea only a short while ago" (Ryan, 2003, p. 94). So the reader too returns home with the knowledge and understanding of the textual world (or literary text as Iser says), and is changed by the immersive experience, where his emotions have been activated.

Hopefully, it is evident how the reader undertakes a journey when reading a novel. This process is facilitated by the reading process, and in turn, the reading process and journey creates immersion, which then again heightens the experience. Also, it should be evident that the concept of the Hero's Journey is similar in nature to the reader's journey, although a bit more complex (as I will examine later). So even though the Hero's Journey is written with films in mind, I think this comparison validates it as a theory usable also on novels and audio-visual media other than film.

3.4 Towards the endlessly receding horizon

While I am on the subject of immersion as a journey, I would like to briefly discuss the concept of the receding horizon. I believe it is useful because it illustrates how immersion and the reading process have a symbiotic relationship, and also helps to explain the enduring fascination for players of *WoW* as a narrative that seems to go on forever. In Louis Marin's article "*Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present*" he uses the concept of the endlessly receding horizon. Marin examines the etymology of "horizon" and "frontier" from an observer's viewpoint. The horizon is the place "where gaze and earth seem to coincide" (Marin, 1993 p. 397). The horizon is an unstable place, though, as the point from which the observer beholds the horizon is subject to change. On the subject of frontier, Marin writes: "This is the merging place of Utopia, a neutral place, an island in between two kingdoms, two states, the two halves of the world, the interval of frontiers and limits by way of a horizon that closes a site and opens up a space, the island Utopia merging in the "indefinite" (Marin, 1993 p. 411). Marin suggests, it seems, that an intangible place, a utopia of sorts, exist just beyond the horizon, on the frontier of the unknown. Reaching this place seems impossible, and it seems to have qualities that are 'fantastic' in nature. It is reminiscent of Vogler's Special World, and a journey towards Marin's Utopia bears resemblance to both the heroic journey, and also the Reading Process. Marin's journey then becomes a readers journey, but also a player's journey, if

we contemplate is with regards to *WoW*. The two differ, though. The reader's journey, and the immersive journey as well both come to an end, with the reader returning home to the world of origin, changed by the journey. Marin suggests a journey that is never-ending, a quest to find the ultimate goal. This is the point I am trying to make. The journey of a film or novel comes to an end, but the journey in *WoW* seems to continue. Both types rely on the reading process and immersion, but the endlessly receding horizon of *WoW* keeps the player underway indefinitely. This point is crucial to the way the journey structure differs in *WoW* from other media.

3.5 The Reader's Journey and World of Warcraft

Having examined how the reader begins the reading process and is transported and immersed into a world of the imagination, I believe it will be of interest to look at how this journey, this immersion, takes place in *WoW*. This examination of Gerrig's model and *WoW* will introduce the journey of the player, where the player takes on the role of the reader. Obviously, this means I find great similarities between a reader of textual narratives to a player of computer games, and in particular, MMORPGs. Therefore, I now apply Gerrig's model to the case study *WoW*, and see how the two compare, to support the argument that reader and player is the same concept, only for different media.

The player (just as the reader) is transported. In *WoW*, this process begins when the game icon is clicked. An interface screen comes up with the latest game news. You press 'play', and the log-in screen comes up. You enter your account name and password. In a more figurative analysis, you can see this screen as a gate keeper, only letting those enter, who know the secret password. Incidentally, the graphics of the log-in screen depicts two massive stone guardians on either side of a swirling portal or vortex. Once "the guardians" let you through, a list of characters comes up. These are, of course, the characters you have on the selected server. These can also been seen as different personae, you can adopt. Once you have chosen your character (which person you will travel the world as), you press the button "enter world" (there literally is a button that says that). A load screen comes up, and as the load bar fills, you are, as Gerrig puts it, transported to the *World of Warcraft*.

You are transported by some means of transportation. In this case, the game, and the string of different load screens, which each represent getting a step closer to the world, is the vehicle of transportation. In written literature, a novel might as well be considered your transportation. Simply by picking up a book, and opening it, you are transported once you begin the reading process. Often, a narrator will help facilitate the process of moving from the real world to the textual world, by simply explaining when and where the action takes place. This happens in a slew of novels and films, and the first time you log into *WoW* with a new character (avatar), you also see a short narrated movie-like clip that explains the race you have chosen, the capital of the race and what objectives members of that race usually have in world affairs. This serves to transport the player (as mentioned), and also to give a sense of belonging, and a purpose with your avatar. This film clip gets the story rolling, and gets you underway in the *World of Warcraft*.

The actions you perform that transport you include those mentioned above, but also the willingness to suspend your own disbelief. It is also your own will to be a part of the text, and your own willingness to take part in the text, that helps you reach the goal. As Ryan points out, the reader's enjoyment depends on his or her own performance. The *World of Warcraft* awaits the players a few clicks away, but the world the player experiences, once there, is (ideally) greater than the sum of its parts. The player's participation is the key to the experience of being involved, rather than being a spectator, just as the reader must involve part of himself in the reading process to create the literary text.

Visiting a textual world means the reader or player must adhere to a set of laws that are inherent to that world: *"…the reader must…adapt to the laws of this world, which differ to various degrees from the laws of his native reality"* (Ryan, 2003, p. 94). Much like our own world has e.g. laws of physics, or the laws made by man, to maintain a civilized society, so too has the textual world laws that must be abided. Also, there is a sense of what is plausible (or real) in our world, the reader and player's world of origin. This set of unwritten "facts" is shared by the major part of the population of the physical world, and also helps constitute the law-set of the world. In the textual world, these laws need

not be similar to those of the physical world. Often they are not. If one is reading a dramatic novel set in 1984 in Los Angeles, chances are the laws of the textual world presented will be similar to those of our world, i.e. the world of origin of the reader. But in many cases, the textual world can present a set of laws that test the boundaries of our imagination, and also, our suspension of disbelief. Such is it the case with Science Fiction and Fantasy and a lot of other genres, where the reader is presented with various digressions from the set of laws he knows from his own world. In SF, for instance, one might encounter a flying car, spacecrafts capable of flying faster than the speed of light, robots, cyborgs etc. These are all things we would agree, are outside the set of laws that make up the real world, but are very much a part of the textual world. *"Readers may import knowledge from life experience into the textual world, but the text has the last word in specifying the rules that guide the construction of a valid reality model"* (Ryan, 2003, p. 94). So the reader must abide the new set of laws when travelling to the textual world. This is no different for the player.

In *WoW*, many things are, naturally, as they would be in our world: people live in houses and cities, horses are used for riding, there is normal gravity etc. But there are many points, where the textual world of *WoW* differs from our own. There are orcs, ogres, dragons, elementals and undead and an entire slew of other creatures normally associated with Fantasy or mythology. Also, Magic exists, like in *Harry Potter*, and magical items like Excalibur of the Camelot tales. So the player must accept these things as part of the fabric that make up *WoW* (the textual world) and therefore also accept that certain parameters of the real world no longer apply, which brings about the point that some aspects of the world of origin will be inaccessible. As Ryan notes, there are a few possible interpretations of this statement, but the most relevant is the statement that the laws of the real world are overruled by those of the textual. In *WoW*, you could not try to ignore a "fireblast" spell, simply because you know magic does not exist in the real world, because it does exist in *WoW*, and will very much hurt your avatar (character). So for the player, just as the reader (and Vogler's Hero, for that matter), this point is where the player is fully immersed in the textual world, and also where the literary text of Iser's theory is created by the reader and player.

So when Gerrig mentions immersion or absorption in the textual world as a way of making aspects of the origin world inaccessible, it is the essential point of the theory of being lost in a good novel, to the point where you forget everything else around you, because you are so caught up in the textual world and the narrative and its characters. This happens with *WoW* too, although, I think, for a slightly different reason. When reading a novel, as I have already discussed earlier, you participate in the forming of a world-concept that is more than the text-based description thereof, by adding your own personal experience and imagination to the reading process and gap-filling theory. Since *WoW* is an audio-visual medium some of that work is done for you. The player adds less imagination, since he has no need to imagine what a certain object looks or sounds like. It is presented on the screen. But on the other hand, there is an even greater amount of blockage (to use Ingarden's term) that hinders the flow of the reading, because very little actually happens in the game, unless the player takes action. So you do not play exclusively to see what happens next, as the reader does, because you really decide yourself what happens next. Granted, if you follow a quest line, you can play to see what happens on the next part of the quest, i.e. the story line you are currently following, but you can digress at any moment and go on to do other things. And it is exactly that degree of freedom, and the possibility of exploring the world and interacting with it that is the main reason people 'lose' themselves in *WoW*; the main reason your surroundings and everyday concerns disappear from consciousness and make your world of origin inaccessible. So even though the process of 'reading' differs a bit between player and reader, it is still the need for overcoming 'blockage' that drives the narrative forward, and reveals the next part of the story.

Lastly, the traveler (reader or player) returns somewhat changed to the world of origin. There may be many ways in which a novel can change a reader, which I will not get into here, for having read a good novel or played a good computer game can indeed be very rewarding, and in that respect, reading and playing is very similar, but it is also the capacity for interaction with others through *WoW* that seems to be a great source of change for some. You may improve your written or spoken language skills, your ability

to work in a team environment, and to generally improve on your social skills (or retard them, in the case of those people unable to stop talking about *WoW* when socializing with non-*WoW*-players). In any case, both player and reader have embarked on a journey and return from it changed somehow, just as it is the case with the Hero undertaking his heroic journey.

3.6 The Quest

Before I move on to examining the Hero's Journey and how this journey is a dual aspect for both player and character (hero/avatar), it is prudent to first have a look at the concept of 'quest', and how it is used in *WoW*, because the quest structure is also similar to the Hero's Journey, as I will show later, but with a few important changes. The point of this chapter is, essentially, to build up an understanding of what the narrative structure of *WoW* is, in order to have a reference base when examining the journey of the hero and player later on.

A quest is an assignment you chose to take from a Non-Player Character (NPC) in *WoW*. These may be found all over the World and number in the hundreds. Each quest is a Call to Adventure, to draw a parallel to Vogler's theory. Most quests, by far, calls for the player to perform a certain task, and then return to the questgiver upon completion. Sometimes these quests are a one-off, and others lead to a new quest upon completion of the first. When several quests are linked in this fashion, they are referred to as a quest-line. At the end of every quest, there is some kind of reward for performing the task. Experience is awarded, and to that some combination of money, items or reputation increase. As explained in the introduction of *WoW*, the point of the game is to increase your characters level and power. Each quest comes with some story that explains why you should do the quest, and all these stories are equal, in some way, to reading small bits of a novel. In any case, all these bits of story add up to a whole that prompts a reading process in the player. Only instead of reading about a protagonist performing these tasks, the player has to maneuver his avatar around and complete them himself. I will give an example of such a quest-line to give an idea of the story tied to it. I have described the

quest in a novelist manner, to increase the understanding of the story the player (as reader) experiences by following the quest-line. The following is that description:

When travelling the *WoW*-world, you may come across Duskwood; a dead forest haunted by ghosts and wolves and other foul things. Duskwood is dominated by the Ravenhill cemetery, a place riddled with skeletons and ghouls. It is here that we find a small wooden shed, in which resides Abercrombie, the hermit. He is an old man; a herbalist of some sort. He asks for your help with various tasks; among them finding different ingredients for his potions. As you bring him more of his requested items, his manner starts to change. He begins by slipping up, sometimes saying things that sound far from pleasant. When you bring him his last item, he cackles maniacally, and asks that you bring a letter to Ello Ebonlocke, the Mayor of Darkshire in Duskwood. When the delivery is made, the Mayor is terrified, and explains the situation. As it turns out, Abercrombie is an alchemist, driven mad by the loss of his wife Eliza, and he now seeks his revenge on Darkshire. The ingredients you have brought him have allowed him to create his own Frankenstein monster: “Stitches”. He then sends this animated behemoth of dead flesh on a rampage of destruction towards Darkshire. The guards and any adventurer, who cares to participate, can then join the fight to destroy Stitches. You are then told the sad story of Abercrombie, the Embalmer. Lastly, you must seek out the undead remains of Eliza. She has been brought back to life by the Embalmer, when he placed his own dark heart into her dead body. When you slay her, and remove the heart, his dark power is broken forever.

This quest-line has 11 steps, and as the description above indicates, you read a small bit of the narrative with each quest. So, much like the Hero’s Journey, you undertake a Call to Adventure, and return back. I will discuss this in greater detail in the next chapter. When you finally reach the top level, you can no longer gain levels. But the game does not end. Instead, the nature of the game changes, as you are still able to complete quests, and gain items superior to those you already have. So the motivation for continued play changes, which I will also discuss in greater detail. Therefore, I will look at how an individual quest is similar to a Hero’s Journey, but also how the entire process of

levelling from 1 to 70 can be seen as a journey. Then I will look at the game after level 70, and how heroic journeys are still happening when players turn to 'raiding'.

4. The Avatar's Journey

To illuminate the concept and process of journey in *WoW*, I will discuss, as mentioned above, how questing is large part of this process. First off, I will describe the Hero's Journey, as Christopher Vogler's describes it, and then I will compare it to various types of journey structures found in *WoW*. I have already shown how Gerrig's journey of immersion functions for the reader, and also how this relates to the player. Therefore, the following will be focused solely on comparing the Hero's Journey to *WoW* and the quest as journey.

In 1949 mythology professor Joseph Campbell wrote his well-known work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In this work Campbell explores the original myth, which is the basic 'story' that all other stories since then has elements of within them. He argues that all stories are essentially constructed the same way, from the earliest cave paintings to the stories of Greek mythology and beyond. In 1992 Christopher Vogler, a novel and screenplay analysist for Hollywood studios, wrote *The Writers Journey*, a book largely based on Campbell's original discoveries, but modified to suit modern novels, TV and, most of all, film. As Vogler suggests, stories told today carry essentially the same themes as those of ancient times, regardless of their medium. The journey consists of the following twelve parts. Below follows a summary of Vogler's 12-part structure.

Ordinary World;
Call To Adventure;
Refusal Of The Call;
Meeting With The Mentor;
Crossing The 1st Threshold;
Tests, Allies, Enemies;
Approach To The Inmost Cave;
Supreme Ordeal;

Reward;
The Road Back;
Resurrection;
Return With Elixir.

4.1 Summary of the Hero's Journey

The story begins with the hero in his normal environment, sometimes very similar to our 'real' world. It can also be a setting different from our world, which is often the case in Science Fiction and Fantasy. In any case, the Ordinary World is the place where the hero is 'at home'. At some point the hero is called to adventure. The Call may come in many variations depending on the story and genre. The hero might be asked to solve a case or crime, to find something lost, to right some wrong doing etc. Some person or force or event occurs that calls the hero to action. The Call also establishes the goal for the hero. Often the hero decides not to act when the Call comes, or even directly refuses the Call. This means the hero must be further motivated, either by a person (often a mentor), or another occurrence or event that reinforces the Call. The hero must get over his fear of the unknown and heed the Call.

The mentor may take many appearances, but it is often a person older or wiser than the hero. An old wizard is a very common depiction, like Merlin, Gandalf or Obi Wan Kenobi. The Mentor is wise and knows the ways of the unknown world beyond the Threshold. *"The function of Mentors is to prepare the hero to face the unknown. They may give advice, guidance or magical equipment"* (Vogler, 1992, p. 22). The Mentor will not be able to go with the hero all the way to the goal, and is mainly required to perform the actions described above, and get the hero on his way. The journey begins when the hero crosses the first threshold. He leaves his known environment behind to venture into the unknown world, and deal with whatever challenge he accepted in the Call to Adventure. This also means that the hero enters 'the Special World', which Vogler mentions. *"Once across the First Threshold, the hero naturally encounters new challenges and tests, makes allies and enemies, and begins to learn the rules of the Special World"* (Vogler, 1992, p. 23). This part of the journey is an unspecified amount

of time where the hero learns of the world and its special rules, and nearly all characters will have been introduced by the end of this part. This part of the journey can be seen in the film *Star Wars*, where Luke goes to Mos Eisley spaceport and simultaneously learns about the Force. This part of the journey ends when the hero approaches the goal of his Call.

The Inmost Cave is a place or state of mind that represents the evil or that which most be overcome. It is an unsafe place for the hero, and peril is almost certain to follow. *"Approach covers all the preparations for entering the Inmost Cave and confronting death or supreme danger"* (Vogler, 1992, p. 25). Once the hero decides to act, after reaching the Cave, the Supreme Ordeal ensues.

> "*The experiences of the preceding stages have led us, the audience, to identify with the hero and her fate. What happens to the hero happens to us. We are encouraged to experience the brink-of-death moment with her. Our emotions are temporarily depressed so that they can be revived by the hero's return from death. The result of this revival is a feeling of elation and exhilaration"* (Vogler, 1992, p. 26).

Every story needs a moment where the hero or his goals are in mortal jeopardy. The Ordeal is designed also to allow the viewer, who (hopefully) has an emotional investment in the hero, to feel with the hero, thus enjoying the feeling of accomplishment, when the hero is successful. Often the Supreme Ordeal can have a cathartic effect on the viewer, a point I will discuss later.

The Reward for surviving the Ordeal can take many forms, or be a concept. It could be a magical sword, an elixir to cure the land or a loved one, a way to defeat the evil, love and so on. Rewards are what the hero needs to complete the quest, and finally do what he set out to do in the Call to Adventure. On the Road Back, the hero deals with any remaining forces of evil, and also realises that he cannot remain indefinitely in the Special World. He faces Resurrection, and as Vogler says, this is another battle or trial similar to the one faced in the Supreme Ordeal to see if the hero has learned the lesson taught by the first Ordeal. The hero of course learns from these ordeals and death/rebirth experiences and becomes a changed person. He has new experience, and now understands the ways of the

Special World. The hero is changed by the experiences of the journey. Finally the hero can return home to his Ordinary World, a changed person. The items to return with may take an abundance of forms. It can be like the Holy Grail, or useful knowledge and experience. It can be love, freedom, wisdom, knowledge of the Special Worlds existence and ways, or just a good story to tell. In any case, the hero must bring back something from the journey (the Elixir), to show what has been learned. Failing to do so, dooms him to repeat the adventure.

4.2 The Basic Quest

At first, I will look at the basic quest. It is the simplest form of journey a player and avatar undertakes when playing *WoW*. I will look at the similarities to Vogler's structure and later discuss differences and similarities. In *WoW*, the Ordinary World, can be a few places. If we look at a basic quest, the Ordinary World is the state or place the avatar is in, before accepting a quest. Normally a quest becomes available when certain parameters are fulfilled (like reaching a certain level, or completing another quest). In *WoW*, a person usually gives the quest (a questgiver), although 'wanted-posters' also provide quests, as well as items one might find or pick up. When one of these things happens, you have the opportunity to read the quest, to see what it is about, and what you need to do to be successful. If there is a reward, it is also mentioned here. It could be argued that the Ordinary World only exists prior to accepting your very first quest, rather than previously to accepting any quest, but I think that is more a case of semantics. For this thesis, I will argue that it exists at the beginning of every quest.

In any case, the Call to Adventure requires the hero (in this case the avatar, and by extension, the player) to complete some task. In both film and *WoW*, this task may be any number of things, e.g. *"…to win the treasure or the lover, to get revenge or right a wrong, to achieve a dream, confront a challenge, or change a life"* (Vogler, 1992 p. 20). Expressing the nature of the Call as a question will enable us to see what is at stake e.g. will the hero save the girl; will the hero win the race etc. The Call to Adventure is directly parallel to reading a quest you are being offered. Whether to accept it or not, is up to the player, however, refusing a quest means you wont receive the reward or the

experience associated with it, but you can move on to another quest. In some cases, refusing a quest will prevent you from later gaining access to certain quests, because they have as a parameter that you must have completed a certain quest, which you turned down. You must the go back and do the quest, before you can get the later ones. The Refusal is not a very commonly used aspect in *WoW*, and seems more a convention of the film than of the game. In film, it serves as character and story development. While the Refusal is often encountered in film or novels or other narratives, it is somewhat pointless to include it in a game, which has as its purpose to go on quests. The Refusal often is employed when trying to set up the Hero as a Reluctant hero or sometimes even Anti-hero. In *WoW*, there is no use for this. The game is interactive, and a refusal will not change the avatar one way or another, but simply hinder the game from unfolding. Refusing a quest only retards the narrative progress and the flow of reading, as Ingarden says.

Meeting with a mentor is often less spectacular in *WoW* than on film. Often, the mentor is an important character in the film, while it seems they are more a vehicle for moving the action along in the game. I would argue that the Mentor is very, very often the quest-giver, which, according to Vogler, is a totally viable option. Many quests call for the Hero to obtain something for the quest-giver that cannot be collected without a special instrument, or spell or other prerequisite. Therefore, it is quite common for the quest-giver to impart both knowledge about where to find the item(s) in question, and any trinkets or spells necessary in obtaining said item. This means that the role of the mentor is narratologically speaking the exact same in both film and game, but the mentor as character is of less importance in the game. He serves the purpose of getting the player and avatar on with the action. When the player accepts a quest in *WoW*, he starts out his journey, and must then travel to the place indicated by the quest-giver (mentor), where the items he is required to obtain may be found.

When the player begins his journey, so too begins Vogler's 'Tests, Allies, Enemies' step of the journey. The player guides the avatar to the place, where the objective of the quest can be found. Often, it involves defeating scores of MOBs (Monster Or Beast), but it can

be other challenges as well. Sometimes you even have to find one item first, in order to obtain the second item, which is the quest objective. This is akin to the obstacles and challenges of the hero's journey. It is also possible to meet other avatars that are on the same quest as you. Or rather on a parallel quest, identical to the one you are on. However, it is possible to join forces, and thereby making it easier to obtain the quest item, and two or more avatars will be able to complete the quest, even though there is only one item to be found. These other avatars might be considered your allies, and the mobs are your enemies, both of the heroic journey theory. Learning the ways of the Special World is somewhat absent in the simple quest structure. It seems this is done between quests, rather than on them. Or rather, doing several quests allows you to learn, over time, the ways of the Special World.

The Approach to the Inmost Cave is a continuation of the trials experienced, but this is where the going gets tougher. Obviously, this part of any quest is when you get close to the area where the quest object is. Often, it is, in fact, a cave of some sort, or other hard-to-get-to place, with increased amounts of mobs, making it even more difficult to reach the item. At times these caves, castles or other places can be quite large, and once you start inside, you will have very little time for rest before you reach the resting place of the item. Often, players will refresh spells and other useful blessings they have on them, to maximise their duration and effect, and to avoid them running out before reaching a place to draw breath before the Supreme Ordeal. Then again, sometimes a quest objective will be something simple, like killing 10 wolves. The approach then is simply finding the area the wolves are in, and this type of quest makes for a far less spectacular and intense Approach to the Inmost Cave.

Having fought through adversity, the avatar will now have reached the hardest part of the quest. This is where the hardest MOBs will be confronted. Sometimes there are even special MOBs, with a unique name and abilities guarding the quest item. Often it is a matter of simply killing a named MOB or removing it so the item can be reached. Certainly, death of the avatar is a distinct possibility here. The player does not have the same emotional investment in the avatar, which is essentially the main protagonist, as he

would have when watching a film, as I will also explain in greater detail in the Engaging Avatars chapter. But it is to be expected that the player may get physically and emotionally wound up anyway, because concentration is needed, and skill applied, in order to avoid death. And should the player have tried the same quest over, and over again, but have been killed in the Ordeal each and every time, tempers might flare at the prospect of yet another death. It stands to reason that overcoming a difficult MOB and not dying will result in elation and a feeling of accomplishment. So, with less emotional investment in the character, the Supreme Ordeal of Vogler's theory is also found in the quests of *WoW*. Again, the Supreme Ordeal is harder to pinpoint in *WoW* as a specific location or time in the narrative, but the essence of the Ordeal is clearly present. Overcoming a hard obstacle, will let the character progress, and much like the Reading Process, reading (or play) can now continue.

Having completed the task set forth in the quest, the player will now see writing appear on his screen saying '[name of quest] complete'. This is, of course a very literal and game-like feature, whereas Vogler Reward describes a theoretical concept in film, that has no diegetic "quest completed" type announcement to the viewer, but essentially those two are the same. The hero has now obtained or done whatever it was he needed (to do), to complete his quest. He still needs to make his way back to the quest-giver, but the hard part is over. Reward and completion of a quest are the same. Having survived the fight and obtained the quest item, the player fights his way out of the area, which might still crawling with mobs, unless he has been especially quick and brutal, in which case they will all still be dead, and leaving, therefore, will be a piece of cake. With most quests in *WoW*, once they are done, the only real challenge is finding your way back to whoever gave you the quest in the first place. The dangers, temptations and tests ahead, then, must be those of quests to come, or maybe even a follow-up quest to the one the hero just completed, like the Embalmer quest line described earlier.

Much like the Road Back, Resurrection with its cleansing process and another Ordeal is hard to find in *WoW*. Actually, it is somewhere between the Road Back and the Ressurrrection that some Hollywood movies have their climax. Yet this part of the Hero's

Journey seems to be absent from the simple quest in *WoW*. Having finished a quest, you return to the quest giver with the quest item, and hand it in. You are then rewarded with experience points, money, equipment, an increase in reputation or some other object to help you along your way, or a combination of these things. The experience points gained is a direct game-technical term for the knowledge and wisdom the Hero learns upon his Journey. When an avatar has enough experience points to go up a level, he can learn new abilities, which also represents his increase in the ways of the Special World, and he thus becomes more powerful. If a player has not succeeded in obtaining the quest item, the avatar cannot hand it in (obviously), and he is therefore 'doomed' to redo the quest until he gets said item.

4.3 Discussing the basic quest

As suspected, it seems *WoW* employs a simpler version of the Hero's Journey; one that gets the Hero out on adventure faster, and over and over again. You get the quest from the Mentor, cross the Threshold, and then there is 'action' which encompasses Tests, Allies, Enemies, The Approach and the Supreme Ordeal. This action segment of the quest has no clearly defined lines as Vogler's structure does, but the essence of the three steps of they journey are still present in the simple quest, just compressed into what seems like one segment. In the simple quest format the player is offered an experience similar to that of the reader and his reading process. The player is changed, as Vogler says, when he returns from his journey, the quest. Doing multiple quests means that the player is continually engaged in a cycle of change. The player continues to learn about the game, or the Special World, and even the avatar partakes in this continual cycle. The avatar gains experience, goes on a new quest, gains more experience and items, and so on, all the while increasing in power. It is like the reading process, where the reader overcomes obstacles to allow flow, and simultaneously allowing each sentence to modify the one before it, and in this process, creating Iser's literary text. I will return to this point later in a discussion of how *WoW* in general differs from Vogler's structure.

4.4 Life of an Avatar (Levels 1 through 70)

Increasing your avatar in level and power is the objective of the game, and as such the quest for the highest level possible can be seen as a journey, that takes player and avatar all over the world in search of new quests and experience. Like the simple quest, I will discuss how the process of levelling up compares to Vogler's theory of the Hero's Journey, and then briefly discuss my findings at the end of this chapter. For obvious reasons, the starting point of levelling will be the same, and just like the simple quest, the Ordinary World is where the game begins, and the avatar is level 1. Like a character in a movie, it can be assumed that the protagonist has lived some time before the viewer is introduced to him, but when this happens, he becomes the main character, and the story begins. So too, is the avatar assumed to have lived some time in the Ordinary World, but only when the story begins is he considered the Hero, and given the level of 1. When beginning the game, for the first time, you are introduced to a starting area, or zone, where the monsters or beasts (MOB) are neutral, and do not attack you on sight. This is the place where you learn a lot of basic information about the game and your place in the world. It is not a tutorial, but part of the game. The player is called to perform some quests, but they are all somewhat menial tasks that do not interfere with the Ordinary World (though some are extremely violent). Player and avatar end their stay in the Ordinary World when the final quest available in the starting zone prompts them to leave the starting zone and move out into the unknown world, for some reason or other. This quest is the Call to Adventure. When levelling, the refusal can be seen as a refusal to leave the safety of the starting zone. However, if the player wants his avatar to eventually reach level 70, he must leave the Ordinary World, and venture out into the Special World. There is only so much experience to be gained in the Ordinary World.

Different from the basic quest, I think the levelling process call for a wider scope, so to speak. So I think of the entire process of levelling when looking for meeting with a Mentor. Of course there are encounters with quest-givers, but when levelling you have a number of mentors that are not merely there to hand out quests. Therefore, the Mentor of the basic quest is not the same as the Mentors found in the levelling process. These are referred to as trainers. Whenever the avatar needs to learn new spells, abilities, recipes

and the like, there are various trainers around the world to help facilitate this. I would argue that they fill the role of mentor, in that they help the player understand (and the avatar develop special abilities connected with) the Special World, much like Obi Wan Kenobi and Yoda teaching Luke the ways of the Force in *Star Wars*. As explained before, these trainers need not be wizened old wizards, but are always superior to the avatar in their abilities, and thus their knowledge of the Special World. So in this respect, it is not actually the mentor that sends the avatar into the Special World, but rather the objective of the game itself: an increase in level and power. The Threshold is crossed when you finally decide to leave the starting zone and venture out into the world beyond.

The 'Test, Allies, Enemies' part of Vogler's structure is the most accurate description of the levelling process. The various quests one undertakes for various people are all tests. You make enemies with MOBs, or perhaps even other avatars, that you for some reason cannot get along with, and you make allies of both NPCs, and even more so, other avatars, and the players behind them. There is actually a 'friends' list in the game interface, that allows you to add other avatars to a list, enabling you to see if they are online, what level they are, and where in the game world they are. And the talent point system, where you can learn special abilities as you rise in level, is very much akin to learning the ways of the Special World. But this aspect is dual. While the avatar learns special abilities, and the player learns to control them, the player is also learning about how you interact in the game. What are the most commonly used abbreviations? What are the implicit rules of conduct? Where does one learn to mine, or use a crossbow? All these questions, and many more like them, are answered through play. The player learns by doing, or playing as it is, and just like the hero on his journey, the player is forced to learn the rules of the Special World, or fail in his quest.

An avatar levelling will not (at least in my experience) face any Inmost Cave, and therefore neither any Approach to this place, nor the Supreme Ordeal that takes place within it. If one wants to argue for an approach, it could be the final few levels before reaching 70. In this case, preparations made could be the player making sure the avatar has the best equipment available, as well as being stocked on food and drink and other

consumables like potions and magical scrolls to give the best chances of reaching 70 fast and without dying too often. But I would venture that this is not really much different from the levelling process at any other stage. Players tend to maximise the potential of the avatar, to make levelling easier. Though these steps are absent, or indeed just hard to pinpoint, the essence of the still permeates the levelling process. During the levelling process there has been several times where the psychological aspects of the Inmost Cave and Supreme Ordeal have affected the player. So just like the simple quest, these steps of the Hero's Journey elude a solid positioning in the process of the journey when levelling, but the characteristics of these phases of the heroic journey still apply. There is still a feeling of elation and accomplishment when one finally reaches level 70, because it has been a long and hard time getting to the finish. However, the thrill of the Supreme Ordeal that a viewer gets when watching a film is somewhat less so experienced by the player. He always knew he would get there, if he just kept working. This does not mean that a player will feel less satisfied than a reader or viewer. Indeed the overcoming of the obstacle will give great satisfaction, as it is the player himself, who had to do the work, rather than read about or watch a Hero finally succeed. So the reward lies in the interaction performed by the player, rather than the reward of having a film or novel Hero, whom you share an emotional investment with, win out in the end. Reaching level 70 also gives the avatar a great amount of rewards when there, or rather, the possibility to get rewards. Many items require an avatar to be level 70 before they can be obtained or used, and many quests and dungeons require the same. So instead of having reached an end, the avatar, in reality, is just getting ready for other challenges, which I will look at shortly. Reaching level 70 is, actually a digression from Vogler's structure, as there is no Road Back. If anything, there is incitement to keep moving forward, but there is also a shift in lifestyle for the avatar. Equipment and various other items are replaced, as they are no longer needed for levelling, and often, avatars will get ready to start raiding.

The Return with Elixir is, in Vogler's sense, also absent. If you look at the player instead, it is possible to have a Return with Elixir. Reaching level 70, the player cannot really fail this objective. He has played for so long that he should know the ways of the Special World, which is to say the *World of Warcraft*, by now. The object of Vogler's Return is

that the hero must have gained wisdom and have learned from his journey. For the player, this wisdom is learning how to play the game, learning the 'language' of the game and so on. The player may not have obtained any items, but he has reached the goal of level 70 and the reward is wisdom and knowledge, and for the avatar, it is the last set of abilities, and access to even more powerful items. If, by some unknown cause, the player has managed to get his avatar to level 70, without really ever learning the 'ways' of the game, he might be forced to level another character until he learns them. Most players will not let an inexperienced level 70 player/avatar join for raids, for instance. So you could say, it is possible to repeat the quest again (levelling), until you 'get it right', i.e. until you learn how to act and how to play your avatar.

Looking at the levelling process as a journey has revealed a dual nature. Both the player and the avatar undergo the transformation described by Vogler's heroic journey. Indeed, Vogler also foreshadowed this discovery when he said: *"At heart, despite its infinite variety, the hero's story is always a journey. A hero leaves her comfortable, ordinary surroundings to venture into a challenging, unfamiliar world"* (Vogler, p. 17). Much like the adventure books, where the reader has the option to make simple choices as what the Hero does next ("turn left: go to page 21, turn right: go to page 43"), the player may be viewed as the hero in *WoW*. Indeed, some of those books even had the sentence "You're the Hero" printed on the cover. This relationship between player and avatar is similar to that of reader and protagonist, or viewer and hero. I will extensively discuss this in the chapter "Engaging Avatars" later on. For now, it is important to note, that the Hero's Journey structure once again was compacted somewhat, to only include The Call to Adventure from the Ordinary World and Crossing the Threshold into the Special World, where some kind of 'action' takes place that includes the characteristics of 'Tests, Allies, Enemies', 'Approach the Inmost Cave' and 'Supreme Ordeal', with following that specific pattern. In the end 'Reward' and 'Return with Elixir' round up the journey, omitting 'The Road Back' and 'Resurrection' all together.

4.5 Beyond level 70: Raiding and the Journey

As I have said previously, the focus of the game changes after reaching level 70. Questing is no longer the primary drive forward, but part of the original focus of the game is still the same: to improve in power. As just described, a lot of the game's content is only made available to the player, when his avatar reaches level 70. Ironically, this content is often referred to as end-game content, when in fact the end of the game is hardly in sight. The end-game content focuses heavily on avatars grouping together in parties of 5 or more players, in order to face even greater challenges normally impossible to overcome alone. This grouping of avatars is known as raiding, and most level 70 avatars engage in this activity to explore the end-game content. These raids also mean a different journey for the player and avatar alike. I will now discuss how they compare to Vogler's structure, and again have a summary at the end of this chapter to see where likenesses and diversions occur.

Same as with pursuing quests, in the raid situation the Ordinary World is the safe place in which the avatars dwell, before venturing forth upon their mission to slay some foe(s), or overcome a similar obstacle. When assembling a raid, the Call to Adventure is usually the raid leader making inquiries as to who might be interested in joining the raid, and what the goal is. In any case, the Call requires the hero (in this case the avatar, and by extension, the player) to complete some task. In both film and *WoW*, this task may be any number of things, e.g. *"…to win the treasure or the lover, to get revenge or right a wrong, to achieve a dream, confront a challenge, or change a life"* (Vogler, 1992 p. 20). In raids, refusing the Call means you will probably not go. It could also mean that the other avatars stand a poor chance of success, because they lack the numbers to take down the bad-guy. Exactly who the mentor is in a raid situation can be argued. He is either absent, or the raid leader is the mentor for the other players through his capacity as leader. He is the one that knows all the strengths and weaknesses of the evil monster the raid faces, and he also knows the secrets to defeating it. Having assembled a team of heroes, the raid group is ready to embark on their journey. The Crossing of the Treshold in a raid situation is interesting though. When the avatar enters the dungeon of choice, there is actually a load-screen that transports him from the Ordinary World to the Special

World of the dungeon. He literally crosses a swirling, green, vortex-like barrier, and the load-screen appears, and he then appears 'on the other side', and is on his way towards the goal. Similarly to normal questing and levelling, the raid, once it has crossed the threshold, now face all kinds of monsters, usually minions of the main evil the raid group has come to destroy. These are enemies like Vogler describes. The raid group, however, will never encounter allies. They have each other, from start to finish, to glory or death. It is interesting here to note that often, raid groups will try and kill the same evil monster several times. Each try takes them closer to their goal, and in that process of trial and error, the group learns the right tactic to take down the monster; to slay the dragon, so to speak. This process, while dissimilar to Vogler's description in its repetitiveness, still mimics the hero's ability to learn the special qualities of the Special World, and how to act within it.

Again I find that the raid group has a similar experience to a single avatar questing and levelling. Their Approach is often happening simultaneously with the 'Tests, Allies, Enemies' part of their journey, since making their way to the monster is both journey and approach. In raids, players too will keep spells and other abilities replenished, so as to be as lethal as possible as a group, thereby enhancing the chances of success. Often the room of the monster itself is separated, if not geographically, then by looks, from the rest of the lair. So you could argue a second threshold exists on the verge to the room/place where the epic battle will take place. This is the place a group will take their last pause, to refresh all spells, and drink potions, elixirs and so on, to be as ready as possible, and at this time, the raid leader goes over the tactics of the fight, to ensure everybody knows what to do during the fight. Weaknesses are discussed, as well as where to stand during the fight, to avoid certain special attacks and so on. The raid is then ready to launch their attack on the monster. The raid group experience, at this point, is different from levelling and questing. There is a clearly defined Supreme Ordeal, and in this the avatars have reached the Supreme Evil, and the fight starts. These battles may take up to 10 minutes, as opposed to normal fights in the wilderness that take about 20 seconds. Therefore, the player controlling the avatar will have to remain focused and concentrated for a much longer period of time, and even if he performs perfectly, he can still worry that any one of

the other raiders can make a mistake and cause the monster to kill everyone. And the raiders will then have to start over on the fight, which is why elation and exhilaration here comes closest to Vogler's description, I think. There is a genuine catharsis effect of finally being able to kill a monster that has taken weeks of preparation and trying to kill. Also, the fight may seem to be going badly, but somehow the group manages to turn things around and still kill the enemy. Some of the raiders may have died, but the remaining heroes have killed the beast. Here is the 'black moment', the brink-of-death experience that Vogler refers to.

Raiders are rewarded in a more mundane and direct fashion during 'Reward'. The kill was the object of their quest, and the reward in itself, but the monsters in dungeons can be looted when dead and they have a fantastic treasure of gold and items. After a kill, the raid then divides the loot between the participating avatars, however they see fit. So often, the loot from these monsters becomes the real goal of the quest, and the kill is just a means to an end. Players come back and kill the monsters, each time hoping that it will be their turn to get some wonderful new, powerful item for their avatar. Again the game's objective of increasing the power of the avatar shines through. When a raid has killed the last Evil, they are free to return to wherever they normally 'live'. There is no quest to hand in, or item to deliver to someone. And there are no monsters left alive to harass them on the Road Back. Again, it seems here that Vogler's structure does not apply to the raid journey. The game seems to be focused on either getting you on another quests as soon as possible, or rewarding you for having done well, by not forcing you to play through a lot of difficult encounters (The Road Back) after having reached your goal. Once again, the Resurrection part of Vogler's structure is lacking. The Return with Elixir in the raid journey looks very much like what I have described earlier with questing and levelling. Avatars returning from a raid will have new items to show for their exploits, and like Vogler says, if they have not brought back anything (failing to kill the evil monster), they must go back and try again, until they succeed.

It is interesting to see that the raid type journey, like the two others described is very similar. The raiding journey has somewhat more clearly defined Approach and Supreme

Ordeal phases, but is otherwise similar to questing and levelling. I suspect this is because a raid journey comes to an end, more so than the quest or levelling journey. Like the two previous journeys, raiding too lacks both The Road Back and Ressurrection from Vogler's journey.

I will have to examine how these three types of journey in general differ from Vogler's Hero's Journey, as this will enlighten how *WoW* keeps the narrative moving forward, seemingly unending, as opposed to the finite journeys described by Vogler and Gerrig. I will come back to this point, and elaborate on it in my discussion of the concept of journey in general in this thesis, and how the different journeys compare. The in-game raiding reminds me just how social a game *World of Warcraft* is, in that there are hundreds of other players playing the game at the same time as you. Also, it reminds me that even though a player has hit the maximum level, the playing does not stop. Therefore, I will now briefly discuss the concepts of sociability and playability.

4.6 Sociability, Playability and World of Warcraft.

That the game of *World of Warcraft* is a social game at its foundation is hardly a surprise, It is indicated by the genre it belongs to, namely the MMO game, which as mentioned stands for Massively Multiplayer Online game. I have so far demonstrated how theory from the field of narratology can be applied to *WoW*. So far it has proven both useful and worth while. When dealing with a subject like a MMO, one has to be careful to found a Masters thesis such as this on sound theory, and argue well for how the theory applies and why it is a valid way of exploring the subject. The danger of doing a thesis on a game like this could be the writer lacking serious theory, thus ending up with a work that has more to do with the writer's enthusiasm for a game (or film or novel for that matter), and not having founded it well enough in the narratological field. I strive to avoid making such a mistake, which brings me to the point of this chapter. Recently, I read an article that further supports my claims made herein. The article is *"Professorens Klumme – PLUS-værdierne: Playability, Likeability, Usability, Sociability"*, InDiMedia newsletter, June 2006, by Jens F. Jensen, professor and leader of InDiMedia, the research center for Interactive Digital Media at Aalborg University. Jensen discusses the concept usability in

the field of Human-Computer Interaction, where usability is defined as "*the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use"* (Jensen, 2006 p. 4) In short, the article is about the recent shift away from usability-engineering and usability studies towards the field of human experience. Usability is replaced by human experience, and usability engineering is experience design. Jensen states that usability over the last few years has become an increasingly inadequate concept in handling human experience and subjective satisfaction. A new test lab under Jensen has come up with a new set of parameters to better handle human experiences with experience-oriented design products. The PLUS-values form the focus of this test lab called HELP+, and in particular I am interested in Sociability and Playability. Sociability deals with the level of social qualities in an interactive digital media product, where playability deals with gameplay. A given product should give a sense of fellowship or community, a feeling of sharing the experience with others. A game product should also be fascinating and engaging, and have interesting challenges and a satisfying gameplay. (Jensen, 2006 p. 5).

This is what interests me about this article, if you keep in mind what I have stated about the Hero's Journey and the Reading Process and playing *WoW*. The article brings validity to this thesis, because it adds a dimension to my discussion of the game. Throughout the game, interaction with other players is prominent, and especially so, when raiding. This communication is often text-based, but can also be done by voice through the game's in-game voice-chat function, or by using a so-called 'third party' program. Sociability deals with the social aspect of interaction, and the creation of dialogue, through players talking to one another, becomes like the act of reading. Talking entails understanding a sentence and an answer as sentence modifies the one before it, like when reading. So the reading process creates an 'imaginary world', and by extension, promotes immersion, and the process of dialogue creates sociability, which entails a sense of community, thus heightening the enjoyment of the game.

As I have stated earlier, *WoW* seems to be never-ending, and still it has gameplay and obstacles to overcome. It provides a sense of community, and you share the experience

with others. Fulfilling some of Jensen's PLUS values, enlightens why the game keeps engaging players, even after they reach level 70. It will be of interest, when I discuss how the journey structures in *WoW* are different to those found in novels and film, and also help explain why. I will return to this in my discussion.

5. Engaging Avatars

"An **avatar** is computer user's representation of himself or herself, whether in the form of a three-dimensional model used in computer games, a two-dimensional icon (picture) used on internet forums and other communities, or a text construct found on early systems such as MUDs". (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avatar_%28computing%29)

In order to fully enjoy a MMORPG, book or film or other narrative, you have to have someone present within the story with whom you can identify. The more you identify with someone (usually the main protagonist), the more likely it is that you will have an emotional investment in said narrative. In any case, a narrative is easier to get through, if you can relate to the things transpiring, just as with the difficulty level when reading. If you have no real interest in the protagonist, it is much more difficult getting to the end of the story, than it is if you are right there on the sideline with the hero. Obviously, sometimes we do not identify with anyone in the narrative, and most likely we will not find it compelling, but what happens when we do identify with someone? Text and cinema has the potential to invoke within the reader/viewer an emotional response to fictional characters. How is this achieved? Emotion and empathy both play an important role, as Murray Smith demonstrates in *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, And The Cinema (1995)*. This chapter will serve to illuminate the emotional relationship that exists between player and avatar, and explore the theory of Catharsis.

Smith establishes that three concepts make up what he calls 'The Structure of Sympathy'. These are recognition, alignment and allegiance. These are all concepts that are experienced emotionally, when reading or watching a film. He also states that each of these concepts are modified or supplemented by how they are empathically experienced, be it emotional simulation, motor/affective mimicry or an autonomic reaction (Smith,

1995, p. 73). The process of identifying with a fictional character or characters is often one of imagination, which Richard Wollheim divides into two modes: central imagining and acentral imagining (Smith, 1995, p. 76). Essentially central imagining is saying 'I imagine...' and acentral is saying 'I imagine that…'. The example given by Smith is that of jumping off a building. If centrally imagined, you would imagine yourself hurtling towards the ground, being 'inside' so to speak, whereas an acentral imagining of that situation would just be entertaining the idea, without visually experiencing it in your head. This theory is included, as Smith points out, because identification with fictional characters can be both centrally and acentrally experienced.

Smith argues that his Structure of Sympathy is an acentral structure that contains and draws upon central imagining. Acentral imagining is tied to identification, while central imagination is empathic in nature. Smith therefore argues:

> '*…central imagining plays a very important role in our experience of fiction, although the central imagining is unlikely to be restricted to that based upon a single character, and whatever central imagining the narrative elicits is imbedded within an overall structure of acentral imagining'* (Smith, 1995, p. 81).

Smith points out that the concepts 'identification' and 'empathy' are only loosely defined in everyday discourse. Empathy is generally thought of as the adoption of another person's mental state and emotions, but a definition eludes psychologists. Smith states that

> *"…much debate hinges on whether empathy is to be defined principally as the cognitive ability to 'perspective-take', that is, to imagine being in the situation of the perceived or target subject; or whether empathy is more appropriately defined as the replication of the emotions of the other"* (Smith, 1995, p. 96).

Empathy has to do with all reactions that are distinct from sympathy "*in that they do not require the perceiver to share any values, beliefs, or goals, with the perceived"*; a mode of reaction normally associated with sympathy. Therefore, "*acentral imagining and sympathy, and central imagining and empathy are then, respectively, cognate terms"* (Smith, 1995, p. 96). Exploring Smiths Structure of Sympathy further will allow us to

better understand how readers or viewers sympathize with textual characters. Hopefully, it will give us a better understanding of how this effect, if at all, functions in the computer game.

"Recognition *describes the spectator's construction of character: the perception of a set of textual elements, in film typically cohering around the image of a body, as an individuated and continuous human agent"* (Smith, 1995, p. 82). A character is a textual construct, consisting of textually described traits that we assume correspond to analogical ones we find in our own real world. Or put in another way, when reading, we recognize characters as being "human" because they are described as having traits matching those of real people in the real world. As Smith mentions, on film, we tend to recognize the image of a human body as being human, insofar as the visual representation corresponds with the analogical version of the real world human body. Having both a visually recognizable body and visual or textual traits to go along, we can recognize the representation as being a character, and thus we can identify with it, although we may not necessarily gain Alligience with them.

"The term Alignment *describes the process by which spectators are placed in relation to characters in terms of access to their actions, and to what they know and feel"* (Smith, 1995, p. 83). This has to do with the way the reader or viewer gains story information through characters. This can be said to be given 'filtered' by the character, meaning that a certain character will leave his personal mark on the information given to us. It may be his version of something happening, whereas other characters might have perceived that event differently and thereby given us different story information. How information is related to us, and to what degree we have access, is further theorized by Smith, as he established two functions designed for further analysis: spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access. *"Attachment concerns the way in which the narration restricts itself to the actions of a single character, or moves more feely among the spatio-temporal paths of two or more characters"* (Smith, 1995, p. 83). Essentially, this has to do with how information is given to us from one or more characters. Story information may be attached to one or more characters, and spatio-temporal attachment has to do with how

this information is locked to certain characters (or not) within a given narrative. The other concept, subjective access, *"pertains to the degree of access we have on the subjectivity of characters, a function which may vary from character to character within a narrative"* (Smith, 1995, p. 83). Simply, this has to do with how much we know of what is going on inside the character; how well we know him, so to speak, which may influence how we receive story information given by that character, based on how we think he may have 'colored' certain information. "*Together these two functions control the apportioning of knowledge among characters and the spectator; the systematic regulation of narrative knowledge results in a* structure of alignment*"* (Smith, 1995, p. 83). Seeing and hearing can create alignment, or help create it, but is not essential: "*Perceptual alignment – optical POV and its aural equivalent – is regarded as simply one resource of the narration in controlling alignment"* (Smith, 1995, p. 83). Perceptual alignment is a tool to help facilitate the structure of sympathy, and not a means to creating alignment in its own right.

"Allegiance pertains to the moral evaluation of characters by the spectator" (Smith, 1995, p. 84). The third theoretical term making up the structure of sympathy, Allegiance, Smith explains like this:

> *"Allegiance depends upon the spectator having what she takes to be reliable access to the character's state of mind, on understanding the context of the character's actions, and having morally evaluated the character on the basis of this knowledge. Evaluation, in this sense, has both cognitive and affective dimensions; for example, being angry or outraged at an action involves categorizing it as undesirable or harmful to someone or something, and being affected – affectively aroused – by this categorization. On the basis of such evaluations, spectators construct moral structures, in which characters are organized and ranked in a system of preference"* (Smith, 1995, p. 84).

As Smith states, Allegiance is what we normally think of when we say we can 'identify' with someone or a certain situation. Many factors are evaluated when we try to identify with a given characters, such as class, nationality, age, ethnicity, gender and others.

Smith argues that his structure of sympathy is unaffected by, what many seem to regard as an integral part of an identification process, perceptual alignment, meaning Point Of

View (POV) or its aural equivalent. Smith states that POV does in fact not provide us with greater access to characters than other devices, and he simply recognizes POV as just one of many narrative devices that provides us with information about a certain character.

> *"…POV neither entails, nor is essential to, recognition, alignment, or allegiance. All three levels of structure can operate without POV, and with the self-evident exception of perceptual alignment, the use of POV does not necessarily result in our recognizing a character, being aligned with a character, or being allied with a character"* (Smith, 1995, p. 84).

He argues that while many theorists claim that POV is inseparable from allegiance, Laura Mulvey among them, it is in fact clearly separable. He continues to discuss scopophilia and voyeurism, but is clear in his arguments that his structure of sympathy is indeed separable from POV. I have included a long passage here, as any attempt to summarize it would only end up taking more space and maybe even clouding the point:

> *"Neither recognition nor alignment nor allegiance entails that the spectator replicate the traits, or experience the thoughts or emotions of a character. Recognition and alignment require only that the spectator understand that these traits and mental states make up the characters. With allegiance we go beyond understanding, by evaluating and responding emotionally to the traits and emotions of the character, in the context of the narrative situation. Again, though, we respond emotionally without replicating the emotions of the character. For example, in watching a character perform certain actions, and in seeing the character adopt a certain kind of posture and facial expression, we may infer that the character is in a certain kind of mental state, or possesses certain traits – say anger as the state, or brutality as the trait. These inferences contribute both to our recognition of the character, and to the pattern of alignment, since we are dealing here partly with a question of subjective access; but such inferences in no way mandate that the spectator be moved to think or feel (let alone behave) in the same way. If we do go on to be moved, by the engaging with the character on the level of allegiance, our responses are at a tangent to those of the character: they are acentral, sympathetic rather than empathic. In order to respond emotionally in this way, the perceiver must first understand the narrative situation, including the interests, traits and states of the characters. I do not mean to imply that the spectators understanding and evaluation of the traits of a character must be either complete or immutable in order for allegiance to occur, but merely that at a given moment in the narrative the spectator must believe that she has some basis for evaluation, in the form of beliefs*

> *about what traits comprise the character in question"* (Smith, 1995, p. 85).

As previously stated, recognition, alignment and allegiance are empathically modified or supplemented through the concepts of 'emotional simulation', 'motor/affective mimicry' or 'autonomic reactions'. Emotional simulation is most obviously related to central imagining.

> *"Observing the behaviour of a person in a certain situation about which we have limited knowledge – as is the case with a character in fiction – we imaginatively project ourselves into their situation, and hypothesize as to the emotion(s) they are experiencing"* (Smith, 1995, p. 97).

As with the reading process, we form hypotheses. These are emotional rather than intellectual constructs, but the principle is the same. When a character in a film is seen, we 'try on' the emotional states and traits we find most likely to be the ones experienced by the character. We try on different, as our hypotheses are reformed and new information about the character is learned. If, for instance, we see someone crying on film, our first hypothesis might be that the emotion is 'sad'. So we try it on; we emotionally simulate the state 'sad'. We may then learn the character has just won something fantastic, so we reform our hypothesis that the character is, in fact, overly happy, crying tears of joy as it where. And so our emotional simulation changes, and continues.

> *"Such emotional simulation constitutes a form of 'affective trial and error' through which we build up a picture of the states of others (or, in a fictional context, characters). If this is correct, then one of the very mechanisms through which we form beliefs about the traits and occurrent states of characters – the kind of information on which the structure of sympathy depends – is, in fact, a form of empathy. For in simulating an emotion or any other intentional state, we are not merely recognizing or understanding it, but centrally imagining it"* (Smith, 1995, p. 98).

Affective mimicry is similar in some ways to emotional simulation, but the main difference is that mimicry is involuntary. It is a kind of *"reflexive simulation of the emotion of another person via facial and bodily cues"* (Smith, 1995, p. 99). Like when we someone who is sad, and we feel a lump in our throat. When we are faced with

emotion, we are prompted to feel the same, or adopt the same facial features, i.e. a smiling face prompts us to smile in turn, and perhaps lifts our spirit. Motor mimicry is essentially the same, except

> *"…we mimic the muscular actions of the subject we are observing. Watching a basketball player set and then throw, our bodies may – especially if we are watching closely and have a keen interest in the outcome – tense up, in imitation of the muscular control being exercised by the player"* (Smith, 1995 p. 99).

Thus it is not an emotional response, but a physical one; a weak or partial simulation of a physical motion. So mimicry (both affective and motor) is in essence an unintentional reaction to some emotionally laden physical appearance or act by someone other than one self. When we mimic patterns of facial muscles, we are able to recognize at least some basic affects like sadness, happiness, fear, surprise, disgust, anger etc. Like 'trying on' an emotion as emotional simulation when forming an emotional hypothesis, so too do we adopt some of the physical (and emotional) affects when reacting to expressions. For both affective and motor mimicry *"…we do not merely see and categorize a certain expression, and hence affect, we experience it, albeit in a weaker form"* (Smith, 1995, p. 100).

Lastly Smith discusses autonomic reactions briefly. The startle response, when we hear a loud noise, or see violent, unexpected movement, is an example of an autonomic reaction. These reflex actions are responses to audio-visual 'shocks', which can be both diegetic and non-diegetic.

> *"We experience an identical shock to the character, and in this sense the response is central or empathic. In this case, however, the response does not arise from an engagement with the character, as it does with both simulation and mimicry, but directly from the represented visual or aural environment in which the character moves. Both the character and the spectator react to the unexpected noise or movement, rather than the spectator responding 'through' the response of the character"* (Smith, 1995 p. 102).

5.1 Applying the Structure of Sympathy

Having explained Smiths structure of Sympathy in detail, I can now discuss how this structure of responses may apply to playing *WoW*, rather than watching a film, which was the premise for Smiths theory originally. Since MMO's are very much an audio-visual medium, is should be possible to apply this theory. I will start with how the structure applies to the character of a player.

Recognition is easily obtained. The character you play (your avatar in *WoW*) is the protagonist of your game, the main character, and you recognize him or her as a humanoid creature. As mentioned, you can play as a human, but also as other races, some of which are more fantastical in nature. The Tauren are an example of this. They are a race of bovine creatures very similar to the Minotaurus of Greek mythology, but far more civilized, and very spiritual and in touch with Mother Nature. Whatever you chose to play, you recognize the character, since is has two arms, two legs, a body and a head, and is humanoid in all other respects. So even though there are no analogical versions of the character in the real world, fantasy literature and films and Greek mythology will have the model player prepared, and thus we still accept them as our character, and can identify with it. Smith states that recognition does not necessarily entail gaining allegiance with the character. I will argue that allegiance is unavoidable in *WoW* shortly.

Alignment was to do with how much information was imparted or what kind of access we had to the character(s). I *WoW*, we have direct access to the character, but more than that, we also have direct control over it. This means that we are in no way dependant on how little or how much information is divulged by the film, because in this case, the avatar is an extension of the player, and as such has the same knowledge and emotions as the player. They are one and the same. Smith also mentions spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access as part of the way alignment functions. Attachment in *WoW* is restricted to the actions of the avatar, and thereby the player. Information about the game is almost exclusively learned through the avatar as he moves through the world, and engages other avatars and NPC's. It is possible to play with a group of people, and with that group explore the world, but the information you receive about the game is still

through your own avatar, and his Point of View (POV). As with attachment, subjective access has to do with information learned through the character, specifically, how the character may have 'coloured' the information before relaying it to the viewer. As mentioned, the avatar is an extension of the player, and as such there is no filter between the information given to the avatar from other avatars or NPCs, and the information passed on to the player. Also, perceptual alignment exists in *WoW*. The player shares POV (and the aural equivalent) with the avatar, which reinforces alignment with the avatar, though, as mentioned before, there is little distinction between player and avatar.

Allegiance is the morale evaluation of the character by the spectator. It depends on the viewer having reliable access to the characters state of mind and knowledge of why they act as they do. A character's actions are placed in the viewer's moral structure, and whether those actions are approved by or frowned upon by the viewer. It is what we mainly think of when we say 'identify with'. In *WoW*, we have full, unrestricted access to the reasons behind actions performed by the avatar, since it is the player himself making them. Smith argues that class, nationality, age, ethnicity, gender etc goes into the evaluation process when deciding on a level of allegiance. In *WoW*, all of these traits have been chosen for the avatar by the player himself, when he made the character, so there is no reason allegiance should be retarded in any way by such parameters. Most likely, they will only further create allegiance between player and avatar. It is possible to imagine, though, a player creating an avatar, choosing all the traits he dislikes, thus ending up with a character with a silly name, a class or race the player does not want to play, and other characteristics that will disrupt the enjoyment of the game. This hypothetical situation would most likely retard allegiance for the simple fact that the player would most likely not want to play that particular character, preferring other avatars with a more appealing set of traits. And while it is a theoretical possibility, I find it fruitless to speculate on such matters (except for academic purposes), as players will always strive to maximize the enjoyment of the game, as they spend a lot of time and money on it.

Smith offers a theoretical discussion of the importance of POV to the structure of sympathy. As mentioned earlier, he argues that POV is in no way essential to recognition, alignment or allegiance, and that POV is separable from the structure. Without repeating too much of the theory (see above), I will both agree and disagree with Smith on this regarding *WoW*. If we consider a person watching someone play *WoW*, say, looking someone over the shoulder, I would venture that this person, just like the player, would be able to attain 'recognition' of the things happening on-screen, regardless of whether the spectator is a model-reader (model-player) or not. Recognition depends only on the ability to recognize the on-screen images and link then to real-world counterparts. Therefore, I agree with Smith that POV is not pivotal to recognition, nor is it to alignment and allegiance for the same reasons. A spectator would be compelled to follow the action from the point of the player, and presumably gaining alignment and allegiance with the avatar of said player. This is also the reason I disagree with Smith on the matter that POV is separable from the structure of sympathy. Obviously, *WoW* is an audio-visual medium different from film, and Smith's theory is based on film, and hence I find that POV is key in *WoW*. Mainly because of the way the interface is set up. The 'camera' always follows your avatar, the character. Everything you experience in the game has your avatar in the middle of the screen. You can change the distance and angle of the 'camera' to be either in an omnipresent position above and behind, or you can go 'inside' your avatar, completely removing the animation of the figure, and having the entire screen as your point of view. Going inside, so to speak, will of course enhance the feeling of Virtual Fantasy, putting a greater emphasis on you, as player, being present in the world, and less on the avatar other people see when the meet you in-game. So it is possible to shift back and forth how 'involved' you are in the game, depending on whether you like being a puppeteer operating your avatar from above, or looking out of the eye sockets of the avatar yourself, or somewhere in between. This is why I argue the POV is essential in *WoW*, because you cannot experience the world in any other fashion. It may vary a bit, depending on your personal preference, but in any case, the camera is always centered on the main protagonist, the avatar.

Emotional simulation does not occur in *WoW*, since a player does not 'try on' different emotions in the hypothesis process trying to figure out what the avatar is feeling and why he does the things he does. Rather it is the player that controls the actions of the avatar, and it is the emotions of the player that are transferred into the actions of the avatar. A kind of reverse emotional simulation, if you will. Again the reason is the player's direct involvement with the main protagonist, thus being active in the creation of the narrative, and not being a passive observer, but an active participator. On the other hand, we might sometimes experience affective/motor mimicry. Normally you would not expect this, as the people and faces you see on screen are merely pixels piled together to form a graphical, cartoonish representation of their real-world counterparts. However, it is still possible to see an avatar laugh or dance or some similar display of emotion, and experience it yourself as player, albeit in a weaker form as Smith states. The facial cues of the animated figures are still enough to trigger a smile or some other involuntary response from the player, which is quite interesting, since these constructs are incapable of emotions. Also, you sometimes find yourself tensing up if your avatar is engaged in intense action, like combat, or trying to jump a potentially fatal gap. You might feel your pulse increase if you have to keep track of a lot of in-game information in a short period of time. You might notice that these physical responses are both triggered by watching your avatar interact with his surrounding environment, but also by actually having to do physical and mental work yourself, or being stressed out by having to do a lot of things in a short period of time in order for your character to survive (in combat, for instance). So affective/motor mimicry exists as Smith describes, but I would also argue that a type of reverse motor mimicry occurs, insofar as the player decides which actions the avatar takes, and when the avatar is plunged into combat, the skill of the player (reaction time, hitting the right keys, making combinations etc.) are vital to the survival of the avatar, which means that the increased activity and stress incurred by the wild sword swings of the avatar is experience to a lesser degree by the player, by hitting keys and getting stressed himself. The player's frenzied activity at the keyboard is mirrored by the avatar, and vice versa.

Smith stated that his Structure of Sympathy is an acentral structure that contains and draws upon central imagining. Keeping my argumentation above in mind, my theory is that the structure of sympathy employed when playing *WoW* is a centrally imagined structure, with acentral imagined sidenotes. Or maybe even a centrally *experienced* structure, which contains and draws upon acentral imagining. This is primarily because of the interaction offered by the game that allows the player to place himself in the center of the action. So the difference in imagining between Smiths structure and the structure that exists in *WoW* is essentially one pertaining to the degree of interaction available. Instead of forming hypotheses as we do when watching film, we instead have direct control over, and access to, the main protagonist, thus eliminating the element of speculation altogether. So while Smiths structure is a less than perfect match for the identification process that goes on in *WoW*, it still has useful elements.

5.2 A matter of psychology: Catharsis

Having written the theory and examined it throughout this thesis, it has become increasingly evident that there is an element of psychology involved. As this is a narratologial thesis it is not my intention to add psychology as a factor to my analysis. Rather, I would just like to touch on one element I think is important to the concept of journey. Through Gerrig, Iser and Ryan, I find that the reading process entails both immersion and a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader, and also the player. They must bring a part of themselves into the creative process of reading, and identify with the character of the story. Likewise, they create an emotional investment in the character or avatar, and experience emotional simulation, and in Vogler's Hero's Journey, the viewers experience the Supreme Ordeal like the Hero, and find they are elated and exhilarated, when the Hero returns from (seeming) death, to triumph. These are all things that point to a cathartic effect.

Aristotle discussed the concept of catharsis in his work *Poetics* (ca. 350 B. C.), but did not seem to make a solid definition. In chapter VI: Definition of Tragedy, Aristotle states:

> *"Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic*

> *ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions"*.

The Greek word *catharsis* means 'purgation' or 'purification', the difference being that the former deals with the removal of something, while the latter is removal of unwanted parts in something. Purification can also be taken to mean 'cleansing'. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms* M. H. Abrams (1993) states: *"Aristotle in the first place sets out to account for the undeniable, though remarkable, fact that many tragic representations of suffering and defeat leave an audience feeling not depressed, but relieved, or even exalted"*. I recognize this, as I said before, in my analysis of the journey concept. The reader of a novel or a viewer of a film will experience this feeling of relief or exaltation, not purely in tragedy, but in general. The point of the Supreme Ordeal can be seen as having tragic elements, in that the Hero suffers fear and evokes pity, which Vogler also describes. The Ordeal is where the Hero is faced with death, resulting in a mirroring of the Hero's emotions in an audience. The apparent death of the Hero affects the audience, because they share an emotional connection to him, and through that share his fear and they die with him. When the Hero is found to be alive, the audience is relieved or even exalted, as Abrams states.

As I have discussed above in my examination of Smith's Structure of Sympathy, the player in *WoW* shares a similar bond with the character in the game, the avatar. Though the avatar is an extension of the player, it is also removed from the player in much the same way as the Hero is to the audience. And since the quest structure in *WoW*, or rather the journey structure, is similar to journeys found in novels and film, it seems logical to deduce that a player will experience similar feelings of fear and pity, relief and exaltation. In all fairness it might be argued that these feelings are of lesser strength than those felt by the audience, as the player has some control over the fate of the avatar, but they exist none the less. Thus it is my argument that the journey, and by this I mean the journey found in all media, offers the traveler a cleansing and feelings of relief and exaltation, as the hero (in this sense, the trans-medial main character), whom the traveler identifies with and share an emotional connection, or the traveler himself, embarks on his journey, faces

death, and returns home, changed by the experience. This would explain part of the fascination with the MMORPG, since the player is continually set on journeys, or rather, a never-ending journey, with ever-recurring moments that offer the benefits of the catharsis effect.

6. Discussion of the thesis

Throughout this thesis, I have referred to my elaborating discussion. This is that chapter. This discussion has as its focus to pick up all the threads left in the previous chapters, discuss them in greater detail, and condense them into a theory usable by others. I will start off by briefly recapping the basic ideas of my theoretic chapters, and then I will elaborate and discuss in greater detail. I will then synthesize the various theories and concepts of journey into a solid theory of how the duality of 'journey' exists in WoW, and how these journeys function.

The Reading Process starts off this thesis, as the act of reading to me is the foundation for understanding narratives in different media. By the act of reading, it is important to stress that I do not mean solely the interpretation of letters forming sentences (text) as such, but rather the process of 'experiencing', for lack of a better word, a narrative in an unspecified medium. This means I equate the processes of reading a text, watching a film or playing a computer game. This equation is validated in my examination of the Reading Process. The reader forms meaning of sentences, and brings into being a literary text, an 'imagined world' by adding his imagination and own life experiences to the creative process of creating said world. The viewer has a similar experience. While the process of imagination is lessened by the visual qualities of the medium, the viewer still forms hypotheses about the on-screen action, constantly modifying these hypotheses as the narrative unfolds. The viewer has to constantly make sense of what he is seeing, guessing what happens next, just as the reader has to make sense of the gaps or blockages in the text to make sense of what he is reading. The player of WoW has elements of both styles of 'reading' present is his reading of the game. He deals with both textual and visual elements within the game. So he employs both ways of reading, to form a Reading Process of playing.

The Reading Process (that is, the general process of understanding narrative) creates immersion, which is the theory of how the generic reader is 'involved', 'engaged' or even 'submerged' in the story. This immersion presupposes a willing act of suspension of disbelief, but the act of reading also helps create this immersion itself, and immersion as a process seems inseparable from the act of reading, as Ryan and Gerrig demonstrate. Since a reading process also appears in WoW, immersion is bound to ensue. Another significant factor of attaining immersion is the generic reader's emotional connection to the main fictional character in the narrative. I examine this relationship in Smith's Structure of Sympathy, a theory that is also directly applicable to novel, film and game.

The Structure of Sympathy is originally one of acentral imagining, with centrally imagined elements. I claim that the sympathetic structure found in WoW is centrally experienced, with elements of acentral experience. This is important in two ways. First, it means that Smith's structure, in its meeting with WoW, is inverted, from acentral to central. Secondly, I say it is experienced rather than imagined. By this is mean novel and film are passively imagined (observed), whereas the game is actively imagined (enacted). By this I mean the observation of the hero and protagonist is passive, in that you have no control over their actions. This does not mean that reading a book or watching a film is a passive process. As Iser explained, it is a very active and involving process. The player has a far greater degree of involvement in the narrative and with the avatar than a reader or viewer has of their respective narratives. Mainly because the avatar, arguably, is the player represented within the narrative. Therefore, immersion is created for the reader and viewer in the classical sense described above, whereas the player experiences immersion in a more literal sense, because he is present himself in the narrative.

The idea of the endlessly receding horizon also points to a point where the narratologial structure of WoW differs from novel or film. My examination of the quest structure reveals it to be a non-finite narrative, whereas the film and novel are both finite. This is, of course a general observation, but worth noting. I argue that WoW is never-ending, with its ultimate goal being ultimate power, but the goal remains elusive, always on the

horizon. This is the reason players keep playing the game, even after reaching level 70, because there is still much of the end-game content to see, and plenty of opportunity to rise in power. On the narratological level, it makes sense that films and novels must come to an end. A film or novel that keeps pushing a possible end in front of it endlessly does not present the main character with closure to his journey. In Vogler's term, he has no Return home with the Elixir. This would lead to a confused audience, and given time, they would abandon the narrative prematurely, in the same way as if a blockage in the reading process becomes so large that the gap cannot be filled, and no plausible meaning can be formed, would lead to a breakdown of the reading process. For the audience the cathartic effect would remain absent, as they are not allowed the cleansing effect when the main character triumphs finally. Film and novels then, in general follow the heroic journey pattern, and while specific narratives will not always include all points of the journey, they must all, as a medium specific group of narratives, come to an end. Nothing else will make sense of the narratives. WoW also follows the heroic structure. Looking closer at the quest structure of the game reveals a journey resembling the heroic, though a somewhat condensed version, also being an ended narrative. Each quest rewards the player with a Return with the Elixir, and thus the cathartic cleansing of having completed the task. However, taking a step back and observing the game as a whole reveals that it is in fact a non-finite narrative. The quest structure is just cycled endlessly, thus offering the player hundreds of short, finite journeys as part of a larger, never-ending quest; the quest for the ultimate goal in the horizon. From a narratological viewpoint this allows the game to make sense, even when the infinity aspect of the game should suggest otherwise. In the end, it is the player who decides when to end the journey. Not because the game has come to an end, but because the player decides the end has come.

If one is to speculate outside the realm of narratology there are other reasons for making MMOs never-ending. For obvious reasons, making a MMORPG that has a final end is an economical blunder. Blizzard Entertainment has over 9 million subscribers that pay a monthly fee of around 12€. By keeping the game open ended and by keeping up playability and sociability, the players will keep playing the game, and most importantly, keep paying. WoW provides a sense of community, and you share the experience with

others. Fulfilling some of Jensen's PLUS values, enlightens why the game keeps engaging players, even after they reach level 70. In theory, Blizzard Entertainment could have chosen to make WoW with an end. This would affect the sociability of the game highly. When your game came to an end, you would no longer have access to your in-game friends, and the community feeling would be greatly decreased.

I have added the theory of catharsis to this thesis, as it seems an ever-present convention of the journey structure. It is found in the bond between readers, viewers and players in their respective counterparts in narratives. Smith even states: *"For in simulating an emotion or any other intentional state, we are not merely recognizing or understanding it, but centrally imagining it"* (Smith, 1995 p. 98). This is clearly what the catharsis effect is about, and as I have stated that WoW is centrally experienced, this too means that the player experiences catharsis, even though his emotional investment in the avatar is lessened by the fact that the avatar is representation of himself, meaning that a player will actually experience the catharsis effect (at least) equally as strong as the reader or viewer, because he does not centrally imagine it, he centrally experiences it.

6.1 The main character and his recipient

I will now argue for a merging of concepts, and the headline of this part should be read without any connotations attached to the words 'character' and 'recipient', and seen as simply neutral descriptors of the two concepts I will discuss herein. I have shown the numerous similarities between 'reader', meaning the person making meaning of textual narratives, 'viewer', meaning the person making meaning of film, and 'player', meaning the person that makes meaning of a computergame (and more specifically, WoW), and I therefore want to synthesize these terms into one generic term, that includes them all in its definition, to avoid confusion in the following discussion, and because they essentially serve the same purpose, with a few medium-dependant differences. It is useful to have such a terms that signifies this 'recipient' of a narrative, as I will be going into a non-medium specific discussion about the concept of journey. It would be possible to simply use 'recipient' as the signifier for this merged concept, but I find it has connotations of being passive, which is undesirable, since I have explained how all three engage in an

active reading process and emotional connection. I propose then, to use the term ‘Player’ (as opposed to ‘player’, which signifies only one of the three). A generic Player then is reader, viewer and player in one. I choose Player to signify the three as one, knowing full well the resemblance to ‘player’, but this thesis is about the meeting of narrratology and interactive digital media, represented by WoW.

Likewise, a signifier for the concepts ‘protagonist’, meaning the main character of a novel, ‘hero’, meaning the main character of a film, and avatar, meaning the main character found I WoW, will be prudent, for the same reasons as those listed under Player. The term ‘Avatar’ (as opposed to ‘avatar’) will then serve as the general term for all three types of main character. Both Player and Avatar should then be read without connotations to their digital media counterparts.

6.2 Discussing narratology

Having established Player and Avatar as terms, it is now easier to get into a less media specific discussion. As I have said before, no theory remains unaltered in its meeting with a new medium. The point of this thesis is to look at how narratological theory can be applied to a MMORPG. I have found in the previous chapters that imposing narratology on WoW alters the applied theory, but to a far lesser degree than I had initially anticipated. They link that binds it all together is the concept of journey. Both Avatar and Player undertake a journey. Variations in the journey structure occur with each type of structure and medium, which is to be expected, but they remain similar in structure, and the overall structure of the journey remains intact. I will get to a discussion of the journeys explored throughout this thesis later, but for now I find that Player and Avatar are tied together at a number of points. First, the Player is transported from his world of origin to the special world by way of a Reading Process. This also marks the point of beginning immersion. The Avatar is introduced and the structure of sympathy shows how the Player finds recognition, alignment and allegiance with the Avatar. Through this process of identification and immersion, the Player comes along on the journey the avatar undertakes. Through emotional investment and the catharsis effect the Player experiences a journey parallel to that of the Avatar, but unique to the Player. The Avatar and Player

returns home, respectively, changed by the experience, and cleansed by the catharsis experience.

An interesting question imposes itself. What function does the avatar fulfill? Obviously, as I have discussed, it serves a type of narratological tool, just like its hero and protagonist counterparts. But it has a dual function, the other being that of a game-mechanic as part of the game interface. On one hand it serves as a character with which the player shares an emotional investment, but on the other, the avatar is controlled by the player. Unlike its narratological counterparts, the avatar takes no actions unless directed to do so by the player. This could mean that the avatar is no more important to the game than a keyboard or mouse would be, as they all serve a function that allows the player to move around. Entertaining that thought leads me to think of Virtual Reality, where the interface also only serves the function of allowing the player to enter the virtual world. The avatar is then reduced to a vessel for the player, as he moves about, allowing him to interact with the virtual. This dual nature of the avatar modifies the question, and instead it would be a question of what function the avatar serves more? To be honest, I have no final answer. In the end, I suppose it is up the individual player. Some player's talk of their avatars, as if it were themselves ("…yesterday I killed 10 orcs" and so on), while others refer to their avatar in the third person, as an individual removed from themselves. Whatever the case may be, the avatar serves both functions, and neither can be disregarded, though I suppose, you cannot have one without the other, either.

6.3 Comparing Journeys

Throughout this thesis I have discussed some types of journey. Gerrig's model is of an immersive journey on the part of a reader, but as I discussed, this immersive journey also happens to viewers of film, or a player playing WoW. As I've already stated, these three fall under the term Player, and because they share a similar journey, I have simply chosen to explore the Player's journey as an immersive journey. As I am examining journeys in WoW, I have chosen to include the three types of journey I have explored previously. These are the Simple Quest, The Levelling Process and Raiding. I compare these three journeys to the Hero's Journey, as it is based on the findings of Joseph Campbell and his

work with the ancient Greek Myths. To that I add the Player's Journey. Below is a chart that has the five journey types in the top bar, and the twelve parts of the Heroic journey in the left bar. Each box will have one of three symbols. 'X' means the part of the journey is present in the corresponding journey type. A '-' means that particular journey step does not exist in the corresponding journey type. A '0' denotes that the step appears in the corresponding journey type, but in an altered or reduced version. Obviously, the Hero's Journey will feature all steps as model, though individual stories will not necessarily feature all, but it helps visualize how the other journeys differ from it. Below, I will discuss the journeys in greater detail.

Journey Type	Hero's Journey	Player's Immersive	Simple Quest as Journey	Levelling as Journey	Raiding as Journey
Ord. World	X	X	X	X	X
Call	X	X	X	X	X
Refusal	X	-	-	-	-
Mentor	X	-	-	X	X
Threshold	X	X	X	X	X
Tests	X	0	0	0	0
Approach	X	0	0	0	X
Ordeal	X	X	0	0	X
Reward	X	-	X	X	X
Road Back	X	-	-	-	-
Resurrection	X	-	-	-	-
Elixir	X	X	X	X	X

Looking first at the Player's immersive journey, it neatly features six points of Vogler's structure that as suspected coincide with the six steps of Gerrig's immersion model. The Player in his Ordinary World, and decides to e.g. watch a movie. He is transported to the special world, and called to adventure along with the Avatar together they cross the threshold, even though they are on different journeys. The test and approach is where the immersed Player learns of the Special World without being a specific step like Vogler's structure suggests. Having experienced the Special World the Player is changed (Ordeal) and returns to his world of origin, changed by the immersive journey.

Any immersive journey must be a completed journey, with the return in the end, for the reasons I stated above in my discussion of the thesis. Even an immersive journey in *WoW* must have an end, though this journey will occur frequently, perhaps unendingly, each time with a journey coming full-circle, and beginning anew.

Looking at the three quest-type journeys in *WoW*, it is apparent they are very similar. Accordingly, I will discuss them at the same time here. At its foundation, the quest journeys have three things in common. First, they have a call to adventure, namely that of the quest-goal itself. Secondly, they have a middle part that is centered on some kind of action, often combat or puzzle-solving, without having a clearly defined Test, Approach or Ordeal. Thirdly, they are particular in rewarding the returning Player with some sort of reward (not to be confused with Reward). The quests then follow a pattern of quest > action > reward founded on the Heroic Journey. It is of interest that none of the three journey types have a Refusal, Road Back or Resurrection steps. This is likely a media specific occurrence. *WoW* has no need for a Refusal of the quest. It is illogical to refuse the quest, as it is the point of the game to solve quests. Repeated Refusal would cause a total breakdown of any forward progress in the game, thus eliminating the concept of journey altogether. Movies and novels use the Refusal to build character personalities, and *WoW* has no need for this, as the avatar is the player's extension. Similarly, Road Back and Resurrectio serves to wrap up plotlines and answer any unanswered questions in the movie or novel. Since *WoW* aims to get the Player bac on another quest quickly, these steps are redundant, because of the dual nature of the game as finite, and non-finite. Somewhat opposite of what I had initially thought, the raid journey is actually the one of the three that most closely resembles the Hero's Journey. In addition to what I have just stated, it also has somewhat well-defined Approach and Ordeal steps. In retrospect, if one was to recount the events of a raid, it would sound a lot like recounting a film. However, the raid is experienced in a group, something that is unique to that journey alone. It is interesting that the game actually increases its narratological verisimilitude to novels and film only after the Players has reached the maximum level. It seems almost deliberate, as to keep the Player interested, or possibly even heightening the Players interest. If I

entertain this line of thinking, this then reduces the leveling process to a Tests, Friends, Enemies and Approach of an even larger journey structure, teaching the Player the ways of the Special World in preparation for the real Supreme Ordeal of raiding. It may not be a solid narratological analysis, but an interesting thought none the less.

6.4 Using narratology as an analytical tool on MMORPGs

Having applied the various journeys to a narratologically based chart is becomes apparent that as interactive a medium as MMORPGs (or at least *WoW*) is supposed to be, it follows very linear narrative structures. *WoW* presupposes that a given Player will accept the quests that permeate the game. Refusal to do so is illogical and will hinder the narrative from unfolding. Even as the game seems unlimited in its interactive dimension (allowing players to freely move about, doing as they please) it reveals itself to be founded on a narratological base. From this viewpoint, the game offers little in the way of freedom, since the Player, who can move the Avatar about freely, must still follow a strict pattern laid out invisibly before him.

It stands to reason that the theory presented in this thesis can be applied to other MMORPGs. The application of the Reading Process reveals the interaction of the Player needed to create immersion, and through this, an engagement with the Avatar. Using the chart above as a guideline, it is possible to search any interactive narrative for signs of narratologial influence and structures. If the gameplay shows similarities to any of the journeys in the chart, it is possible that the narrative in question allows for far less interactive freedom than it might at first suggest. It could be that I have been ‘lucky’, so to speak, in finding these narratological elements in *WoW*, and that they are absent from other MMORPGs. I realize that the analysis of just one game, like *WoW*, does not allow me to make any statements about how MMORPGs are structured in general, but it does add validity to research into the field. It is amazing to find strong mythical elements in *WoW*, because it illustrates that though the game is a textual and audio-visual interactive digital narrative, it still draws on the ancient structures discovered by Joseph Campbell in the Greek Myths and in tales of folklore that reach back to the first cave paintings, and offers its players with a type of psychological cleansing first described by Aristotle.

7. Conclusion (The End of the Journey)

The previous discussion to an extent summarised the theory used throughout this thesis. I will therefore focus this conclusion on commenting on what I originally set out to do.

It was my intention to explore the medium of MMORPGs from a narratological point of view as opposed to a ludological one. To my knowledge, exploring the field of narratives in interactive digital media using literary criticism is something narratologists are interested in, but few, if any, substantial works have been written on the subject. I do not propose to think that I am a pioneer in any way having written this Masters Thesis on the subject; indeed such was not my intent. My goal was to create a small part of a literary criticism focused on dealing with digital interactive media from a narratological perspective.

I have created a guideline for finding and analysing specific narratological elements specifically in MMORPGs, since the entire field of interactive digital media is too vast to for me to handle alone. I have used the game *World of Warcraft* as a representative of the MMORPG genre. By subjecting it to various theories I have arrived at an understanding of the narratological influence present in the game.

As my starting point I used film and literature theory, as the game is an audio-visuel medium with textual elements. Using reader-response theory, the Reading Process, and immersion theory, I was able to distinguish how a Player reads for meaning in the game, and how the Player is immersed in the game. Adding to this the mythical structure of the Hero's Journey I was able to explore how immersion becomes a journey the Player undertakes. Subjecting the Avatar to the same theory showed an identical journey pattern to the Players, suggesting a connection between the two, similar to the relationship between reader and protagonist.

I then examined how a Player identifies with the Avatar, learning that the Structure of Sympathy that exists between an audience and a film hero was actually inverted in this case. I found that the Player centrally experiences his emotional investment with the

Avatar, which is quite opposite of how the structure usually functions. The structure also seems to suggest a cathartic experience at times through this relationship. Examining catharsis as a theoretical concept and applying it to Player and Avatar showed that this cleansing of the Player also takes place in *WoW*.

Having seen elements of the mythical structure, I applied the Hero's Journey in full to *WoW*, and compared it to the game's equivalent journey, the quest. There were immediately recognisable traits of the heroic journey found in the quest structure. I was then able to discuss how different versions of the journey concept appeared in *WoW*, and discussing how the game narrative structure owes much to narratological theory.

7.1 Findings

With *WoW* I have applied the theories and analysed how they work within the game. Interestingly, the does rely heavily on a condense version of the heroic journey. It is expressed in the quests within the game. The game itself is based on the Player's willingness to perform these quests, as short, finite heroic journeys. Refusal to follow the linear patterns of the quest results in the game coming to a stop. Curiously, the game is centered on getting the player back on another quest as soon as possible, and while the quests are finite narratives, the game itself is a never-ending journey. The endlessly receding horizon imposes itself as an analogy of the purpose of the game: reaching for the goal in the horizon, but never attaining it. In the very least, I managed to show how narratology still applies to modern media, as was my intention with this thesis.

I realise *WoW* is not representative of the whole MMORPG genre, but my chart of the journey structure will allow for others to examine other MMORPGs for the same type of structure, and thereby gaining a more nuanced picture of the genre as a whole. This is beyond the scope of this thesis, and should be the goal of some larger body of work.

The game reaches its full potential as a social game, in the raiding process, and this collaborative journey process is something unique, I think, to the MMO game. It would be interesting to look at other MMORPGs and examine whether the sociability and

interaction possibilities of the game are the primary reason for their success, or whether possibly the lure is playing out heroic journeys, being rewarded and cleansed, in a continuous cycle towards the endlessly receding horizon.

8. Summary (Dansk)

Dette speciale er skrevet fra et narratologisk synspunkt med det formal at afsøge interaktive digitale medier for narrative strukturer baseret på narratologisk teori.

Mit specifikke udgangspunkt er at undersøge MMORPG'er, og jeg bruger spillet *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) som repræsentant fra denne genre. Jeg vil skabe et analytisk værktøj, der sætter andre i stand til at undersøge MMORPG'er for narrative strukturer med narratologiske rødder. Ved at bruge mit værktøj som rettesnor er det forhåbentligt muligt at gennemskue hvordan disse narrative elementer ser ud, og hvordan man kan analysere dem.

Jeg bruger Wolfgang Iser's Reading Process som udgangspunkt for at vise, at spillere også oplever en læse-proces, hvorigennem der skabes en tekstuel virkelighed hos læseren. Dernæst viser jeg ved hjælpe af Marie-Laure Ryan og Richard Gerrig hvordan læseprocessen fordrer immersion. Jeg argumenterer for, hvordan denne immersive proces kan ses som en rejse læseren foretager.

Jeg gennemgår Christopher Vogler's Hero's Journey-teori, som er baseret på Joseph Campbells bog *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Selvom denne heltens rejse er skrevet med film som reference viser det sig, at denne struktur også passer på quest-elementet i *WoW*. Jeg gennemgår kort hvilken funktion questen har i spillet. Derefter sammenligner jeg 3 typer af quests med Voglers journey teori. Det viser sig at alle 3 typer af quest passer på Voglers model med et par variationer. Derfor argumenterer jeg for at quest strukturen i sig selv er en rejse.

Jeg bruger Murray Smiths Structure of Sympathy teori til at påvise at der findes en emotionel forbindelse mellem spiller og avatar, der tilsvarer den man finder mellem læser og helt. Her bruger jeg også Aristoteles katarsis begreb, og argumenterer for, at eftersom questen i *WoW* ligner den heroiske rejse, der indeholder katarsis elementer, således indeholder questen også katarsis elementer, der opleves af spilleren igennem sin emotionelle investering i avataren.

I min diskussion ser jeg på hvordan de forskellige quest rejser adskiller sig fra den immersive rejse og heroiske rejse. Jeg finder frem til de heroiske elementer findes både i film og romaner og quests i *WoW*. Alle tre medier har en afsluttet rejse, hvilket betyder at læseren, seeren og spilleren alle oplever en afsluttet rejse i stil med den Vogler beskriver, og oplever katarsis gennem denne rejse. Men til forskel fra roman og film har quest rejserne et dobbeltaspekt. De er ganske vidst afsluttede, men de gentages igen og igen, hvorved den enkelte quest opløses i en lang række af quests. Spillet har som formål at spilleren skal få mest mulig magt og opnå det højeste niveau tilgængeligt. Men spillet er designet således, at selvom man opnår det højeste niveau, så er der stadig mulighed for at stige i magt, en mulighed der virker uendelig. Dermed bliver denne kontinuerlige cyklus af afsluttet quest rejser til an større uafsluttet rejse, nemlig jagten på den ultimative magt.

Det er her spillet adskiller sig fra klassik narratologi, fordi den indeholder et element af uafsluttet rejse også. Jeg underbygger denne uendelige rejse med begreber som Sociability og playability (Jens F. Jensen) og The Endlessly Receding Horison (Louis Marin), og det er i jagten på det uopnåelige at spillet opnår sit fulde potentiale som medie.

Min diskussion koges sammen til et skema, der visualiserer hvordan de fem forskellige rejser, jeg har set på i opgaven, adskiller sig fra hinanden, og hvor der er lighedspunkter. Det er dette skema, der sammen med en forståelse af hvordan det skal læses og kendskabet til de narratologiske teorier og begreber, der ligger til grund for det, at man opnår det teoretiske værktøj, der var mit oprindelige mål med opgaven.

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