The Storyworld of Warcraft:

Exploring Narrative Linearity in an MMORPG

Written by
Astrid Skov Vanman

Supervised by
Brian Russell Graham

Master's Thesis in English and Media Studies
Aalborg University

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Introduction

> Video games do a thing which no other industry does. You cannot be bad at watching a
> movie. You cannot be bad at listening to an album. But you can be bad at playing a
> video game. And the video game will punish you, and deny you access to the rest of the
> video game. No other art form does this. – Dara O'Briain

In the wide understanding of interactive digital narratives, there is a consensus that we do not

altogether know what to do with them. It is such a new field, and spans so widely genre-wise, that

methods for analysis on one text is not always applicable on another. However, underneath the

wide-reaching canopy of 'interactive digital narrative', subsections exist. One of these is that of

video game narratives.

Especially with video games, but also present in other media of entertainment, the reader's

experience of the text differs from the setup of the narrative universe. We have all sat and read a

book and realized that we did not actually read the last page, or had to rewind a film because we

lost attention. Somewhat similarly, the need for a certain level of skill in video gaming means that

the player will at times not be able to progress past a certain point in a dungeon, and will have to

redo the previous steps, thus generating the cyclicality that Krzywinska argues for in "World

Creation and Lore: *World of Warcraft* as Rich Text":

> Complicating both linear chronology and the sense of being in the world in temporal terms,
> some aspects of the game have a rather complex recursive time structure; you may, for example,
> have killed the dragon Onyxia, but you will still find her alive in human form as Lady Katrana
> Prestor in Stormwind Keep at the side of the human boy-King, and encounter her repeatedly in
> multiple visits. In this sense, the game does not have a consistent linear chronology; as with
> retellings of myth, battles are fought over and over again, and in this there is a cyclical organization
> of time. (2008, 134)

World of Warcraft's status as one of the most recognizable fantasy role-playing games makes

it ideal for a case study, not just because it is exactly the game Krzywinska mentions, but also

because of its popularity and commercial success (see appendix A). As such, it not only carries a great deal of cultural weight, but also influence. Its gameplay as well as narrative are not only influenced by similar texts (traces of Tolkien's work are evident throughout the game, for instance), but have also in turn influenced newer texts. As such, it is an ideal starting point for analysis of video game narratives.

What this paper argues is that, even though the player experience may be cyclical, the narrative itself is linear: It has a clear beginning and, arguably, although the franchise is still on-going, an end. Utilizing both interactive, digital platforms and traditional, literary form, the *Warcraft* narrative spans across real-time strategy games, novels, comic books, and of course, *World of Warcraft*, the online role-playing game. As such, while Krzywinska only takes the main text of *World of Warcraft* into account, this paper will aim to include the rest of the texts, if, for nothing else, then to show the wider context of the narrative.

This claim of linear narrative not only opposes Krzywinska's view, but also the basic idea behind the study of ludology: Video games cannot contain narratives. So before proving the linearity of its narrative, I will prove that the game itself has a narrative. To do so, I will cover basic narrative theory as well as transmedial narrative theory, again due to the transmedial nature of the text. To ensure the interactive, digital aspects of the text are also touched upon, a fair amount of theory on this subject will also be used.

Theoretical Foundation

Before diving into the theoretical material, it needs to be introduced. Firstly, specifically for video game analysis, there is an ongoing (or at least, unfinished) debate between two opposing sides: **Ludologists** and **narratologists**. This debate must be addressed, and a stance must be taken regarding which theories and methods can be utilized in this particular paper. Secondly, a fair

amount of traditional **narratological** methodology and theory must be reviewed and utilized, to introduce the analysis to a wider, **narratological** context. Within this context, there will also be a focus on narrative beginnings as well as **temporality**, as this will enable me to discuss the chronology of the game's narrative; since the *Warcraft* narrative does not have an ending (at least not yet), using traditional, **narratological** tools to determine structure will not do much good, as the narrative is still ongoing.

For the sake of the primary text, work on **transmedia** will also be included, and therefore also a fair bit on **medium-dependence** of narrative texts. Through this, discussions of the main text in a **transmedial** narrative, the **macrostory**, as well as its affiliated **microstories** will be made. Lastly, the concept of **storyworlds** within a video game analytical context will also be utilized, primarily to explore the full potential of the narrative of *Warcraft*. With this arrangement of theoretical and methodological material, it will be possible to examine and explore the linearity and supposed cyclicality of the *Warcraft* narrative.

Narratology versus Ludology, Taking a Stance

Firstly, to establish the *Warcraft* **storyworld** as not only a narrative, but a linear one, there is a need to establish the basic theory of **narratology**. From there, it is possible to branch into interactive digital narrative, as well as **transmedial storytelling**. Why work with basic **narratology**? Because it directly opposes the established view in video game narrative theory of **ludology**.

Therefore, an establishment of this opposition is necessary to proceed to actual theory. The **narratology** versus **ludology** debate is a much-discussed subject, with some of the participants considering it a non-debate (Frasca. 2003; Murray. 2005), as they believe the two oppositions to be quite alike. However, considering the weight and importance of this debate, regardless of the meta-discussion, it will be drawn into the foundation of this particular analysis.

Arguably, the first, major introduction of **ludology** was from Jesper Juul, who stated, quite simplistically and straightforwardly; "the computer game is simply not a narrative medium." (1999, 1). However, **ludology** is naturally a much more diverse and less easily defined entity. Juul explains his stance as being built around the very definition of a narrative: A narrative is *told*, where a game is *played*, or, as he puts it: "It may be reasonable to claim that the weight of the narrative comes from a sequence of past events, […] Interactivity and games, on the other hand, are defined by that the reader/player can influence the events now." (1999, 1). His argument, evidently, builds on the fact that interactivity renders constructed storytelling unattainable. Furthermore, as Koenitz puts it: "Jesper Juul's argument conflated two claims; notions derived from narratology—or related disciplines—are not effective to read games, and games cannot convey narratives." (2015, 3). So it is not simply that an interactive medium cannot contain a narrative, but that the entire school of **narratology** does not belong in video game-related theory, according to Juul.

Juul has since retracted this statement, stating that narratives can exist in games, insofar as *everything* can be a narrative (2001). However, his belief that **narratological** devices should not be utilized simply because they *can* is evident: "Narratives may be fundamental to human thought, but this does not mean that everything *should* be described in narrative terms." His "Games Telling Stories" relies on not utilizing **narratological** theory on video games, but rather to compare the two; that is, to put them on equal footing.

Juul, however, is not the only the player in the game of **ludology**. Frasca, mentioned previously, is of the belief that the entirety of **narratology** versus **ludology** is flawed from conception, because of the lack of clarity surrounding the terms themselves. He considers **ludology** to be synonymous with game studies (2003, 2), and uses the term "narrativist" instead of "narratologist", as "narratologist" is used in other fields with different purposes (2-3). The definition of narrativist that he uses is from Mateas' *Interactive Drama, Art and Artificial*

Intelligence, and formulated thusly; "the narrativist claim that game-like interaction is fundamentally at odds with interactive narrative." (Mateas. 2002, 15).

Frasca's definitions and terms will generally be used throughout, when discussing the **ludology** vs. **narratology** (non-)debate, although narratologist will also appear at a later time, as narrative theory becomes relevant. A very interesting point that Frasca makes is that there is "difficulty to find the identity of the narrativists" in the debate (3), stating that "it would seem as if they never existed" (3). Whereas he quite easily distinguishes the ludologists by name (Jesper Juul, Espen Aarseth, Markku Eskelinen and Gonzalo Frasca, himself), the only name he mentions as narratologist is Janet Murray, which Frasca disputes, as Murray, while working from an approach of storytelling and drama, has never taken a clear stance against **ludology** (2003, 3). Although Frasca later casually mentions Marie-Laure Ryan as the only narrativist to not "systematically fail to provide clear, specific definitions of what they mean by narrative" (2003, 6), he seems to still be of the belief that there are none.

As I believe I have made clear, even the discussion surrounding **ludology** vs **narratology** is multifaceted, and hard to decipher anything from, that all who are involved agree on. Especially the concept of **narratology**, or "narrativism" as Frasca (2003) and Mateas (2002) call it, is disputed quite heavily. It could easily be concluded that this is because, as Frasca says, there perhaps are no narrativists.

As it so happens, this particular paper is setting out to not only prove that a narrative *is* present in a video game, but that that particular gaming narrative *can* indeed be analyzed according to **narratology**. However, discounting the entirety of the **ludologist** study would naturally be counterproductive, as it closes off possibilities for analysis. So while this paper can quite easily be identified as (perhaps) the first **narratological**/narrativist paper, a fair amount of the **ludologist** approach will also be utilized.

This decision was based on the fact that leading **ludologists**, such as Frasca (2003) and Murray (2005), have concluded that **ludology** and **narratology** are not as far as apart as all that. However, while they insist on this, there is also a fair bit of antagonistic feelings towards narrativism among the **ludologists**, as Simons observes in "Narratives, Games, and Theory" (2007). Unsurprisingly, it has received little attention, as it came out some years after the heat of the **narratology** versus **ludology** debate had been vanquished by the **ludologists** themselves.

As Simons points out: "The issues at stake seem to have been blissfully ignored rather than resolved", and that the **ludologist** arguments are "ideologically motivated rather than theoretically grounded" (2007). Considering the harsh descriptors **ludologists** have been known to use, and their general discrediting of **narratologists** (of whom, as was established, there seem to be none), a stance must be taken against **ludology**, although not as harsh a stance as the **ludologists** have taken against **narratology**/narrativism.

To summarize, this paper will take a **narratological** stance, but will include points throughout on how **ludology** would have differed, in an attempt to clarify the differences within this (non-) debate. Perhaps this will result in a conclusion that aligns with Frasca's, and **ludology** and **narratology** will really prove not to be so different from one another.

Narratology and Ludology's own stances

To achieve this clarity, there will be an explanation of the general **ludologist** stance, and then a proposal, based on the **ludologist** opinion of **narratology**/narrativism, of how **narratology** might look. From then on, I will branch into a wider understanding of narrative theory that includes **transmedial narrative** and **storyworlds**, as defined by Marie-Laure Ryan (2014), as this seems pertinent to **narratology**/narrativism: The inclusion of non-video game **narratology**. The inclusion of **non-medium-dependent** narrative theory also demands a statement on the **medium-**

dependence, as one of the cornerstones of **ludology** is that video games cannot be analyzed like other forms of media.

Ludology

As mentioned previously, the **ludologist** stance depends on the **medium-dependence** of video games: Video games are simply too different from other forms of media to be analyzed like a book or a film. The difference is, of course, the interactive element. Aarseth, in one of the first ludological papers, explains that "This is not a difference between games and literature but rather between games and narratives. To claim that there is no difference between games and narratives is to ignore essential qualities of both categories. And yet, as this study tries to show, the difference is not clear-cut, and there is significant overlap between the two." (1997, 3).

In other words, **ludology** is not focused on the difference in *medium*, but on the difference in *function* of the relevant media, meanwhile admitting that establishing the difference is not as easy as all that. Frasca elaborates on this two years later, in 1999, when he defines **ludology**, arguing that it is necessary in much the same way that **narratology** proved necessary "to unify the works that scholars from different disciplines were doing about narrative." (1999). He would later go on to dispute this fact (2003, 2), stating that, through Juul's findings, the term hails back all the way to 1982, yet admits that the term gained popularity and regular use after his 1999 article (2003, 2). Therefore, it will be his definition of the term that will be used in this paper.

Frasca's definition of **ludology**, however, is much more wide-reaching, as he insists that **ludology** is interchangeable with the term game studies (2003). This definition can, for obvious reasons, not be used in this particular paper, not only because it is highly disputable, but because it renders **narratology** mute.

Frasca makes a distinction between two actions: play and game, or "paidea" and "ludus" (1999). Play (paidea) is open, without an end-result, whereas game (ludus) is (generally) structured,

and has at least one possible end-result. He builds this on Bremond's narrative roles from "Lógique du récit" from 1973, in which an agent can choose different options, thus ending up the winner or the loser (the two possible results) (from Frasca. 1999).

Frasca establishes quite firmly that this does not mean narrative and ludus are in any way alike, due to the, possibly, largest factor: Interactivity. Whereas narratives are a set of pre-determined *sequences*, ludus indicates a non-pre-determined *session*. As he points out, it is entirely possible to create a narrative on a ludus session: When the choices have been made, this creates a sequence, and the player has, therefore, achieved a narrative ("a sequence of past events", as Juul put it). However, the game itself does *not* contain a narrative, and there are indeed games where this sequence of past events could never create a narrative, such as Tetris (Frasca. 1999). This brings us to paidea, or play.

In short, "*Paidea* videogames have no pre-designated goal. So, there is no "winning plot", as in adventure videogames. The player has more freedom to determine her goals." (Frasca. 1999). Frasca's point seems to be not to discredit the less structured video games (again, such as Tetris), or to discount them completely, in favour of applying **narratological** tools to more narrative-heavy games, such as games in the adventure genre. However, again he stresses the agent's (player's) importance in **ludology**: if the player sets an end goal (such as gaining a specific number of points or amount of in-game resources, etc), the session can become a ludus. I wish to stress here that it is not the game that suddenly transforms into a ludus. The structure of the game remains unaltered, it is only the player whose experience has changed from paidea to ludus.

Juul also works extensively with this idea of past and presence, and how this is a vital factor in dividing traditional **narratology** and "new" **ludology**. He again stresses the difference between what Frasca also defines as sessions (the player is in a gaming session) and sequence (the book has narrative sequences), as he uses the terms "story time" and "narrative time", terms he has borrowed

from **narratology** (1998, 30). The narrative time is the **temporal setting**, whereas story time is the chronological retelling of the events of the story. In video games, he argues, both story time and narrative time, as well as reading time, denoting the time the reader spends reading, are concurrent (33).

Just like Frasca underlined his point that it is interactivity that renders narrative impossible in video games, Juul utilizes the point of the pre-determined time-types of narrative to prove that "you cannot have interactivity and narrativity at the same time." (1999, 35). He moves on to explain how the passing of time (duration) in video games is constant: There are no flashbacks, flash-forwards, skips (ellipses), or the like, although he makes an argument based on how the player interacts *with* the game, and how this might affect game time, although this is open to interpretation from this statement: "This does not mean that every game takes equally long time; there are probably no two games of Space Invaders or two games of Doom II, equally long." (1999, 35).

All in all, there is consistency among the arguments for **ludology**: The player influences the passing of time/the session of the game, which renders narrators and the like unusable, as both story time, narrative time, and reading time progresses concurrently; the inclusion of non-narrative games such as Space Invaders and Tetris renders **narratological** tools unusable, as these games do not possess sequential story progression; and finally, there is a difference in what the game presents and what the player experiences.

Narratology

As already established, Frasca mentions Ryan as a narratologist, and does also count her as a narrativist (Frasca. 2003). However, the term "narrativist" was practically unused before "Ludologists love stories, too", and has afterwards not gained as much usage as it could have, perhaps due to the fact that "narratologist" was already so firmly established. Therefore, and considering the fact that Ryan has never called herself a narrativist, the term will not be used for

this subchapter, to avoid confusion. Frasca's definition of narrativism is one he borrows from Mateas, which states that narrativists use "narrative and literary theory as the foundation upon which to build a theory of interactive media." (2002, 43).

However, considering this subchapter deals with **narratology** and the **narratologist** viewpoint, a narratologist's definition will be used. Considering Ryan as either the only one, or one of a select few, narratologists, it will be her definitions and usages that will be used. As an established scholar, Ryan has made a number of statements on **narratology** in video games through the years, such as this statement regarding the importance of not throwing away **narratology** in video game:

> The inability of literary narratology to account for the experience of games does not mean that we should throw away the concept of narrative in ludology; it rather means that we need to expand the catalog of narrative modalities beyond the diegetic and the dramatic, by adding a phenomenological category tailor-made for games. (2001)

She also briefly determines **narratology** as a **transmedial** study in *Narrative across Media*, three years later:

> Narratology, the formal study of narrative has been conceived from its earliest days as a project that transcends disciplines and media." (2004, 1)

And lastly, in "Defining media from the perspective of narratology", she introduces Abbott, a 'traditional' **narratologist**, where she also determines that narrative can be **medium-independent**:

> Representing a common view among narratologists, Abbott reserves the term narrative for the combination of story and discourse and defines its two components as follows: 'story is an event or sequence of events (the action), and narrative discourse is those events as represented' (2002: 16). Narrative, in this view, is the textual actualization of story, while story is narrative in a virtual form. If we conceive representation as medium-free, this definition does not limit narrativity to verbal texts nor to narratorial speech acts." (2013, 3)

Overall, Ryan's view on narrative and **narratology** seems pretty consistent; she finds narrative to be independent from forms of media, and even utilizes traditional narratologists (Abbott. 2002). However, she departs from Abbott's definition rather quickly;

> As we have seen, Abbott regards stories as sequences of events, but this characterization ignores the fact that events are not in themselves stories but rather the raw material out of which stories are made." (2013, 3)

This is quite interesting, as this *sequence of events* is what Juul defines as narrative (Juul. 1999, 5), which Frasca also supports (Frasca. 1999). So already here, **narratology** deviates from **ludology**. Also interestingly, Ryan's argument against this definition of **narratology** in modern media stems from a familiar-sounding logic;

> Torben Grodal comes much closer to the nature of story than Abbott when he writes: "a story is a sequence of events focused by one (a few) living beings" (130); here I take "focused" to mean "mentally represented." (2013, 3)

Much like (yet totally opposite of) Frasca's, Juul's and indeed all **ludologists'** argument that narrative cannot exist in video games due to the agent (player) that exists within the concept, Ryan believes that it is *only* because of this agent that the narrative can exist at all, using Grodal's (2003) more elaborate definition. Grodal also supports that narratives do not necessarily depend on form of medium, but can transcend medium:

> Some researchers e.g. define narratives by referring to literary works, others, like Brenda Laurel, describe computer games and other computer applications by reference to theatre and theatrical structures. Such descriptions have some advantages, but also problematic consequences, because phenomena like 'story' or 'narrative' are then only defined in relation to their media realizations, not by their relation to unmediated real life experiences and those mental structures that support such experiences." (2003, 1)

Considering Grodal's focus on computer games, and his obviously **narratologist** stance, it is peculiar that Frasca does not mention him as a narratologist or a narrativist in "Ludologists love stories, too" (2003) . Regardless of **ludology**'s view (or lack thereof) on Grodal, this gives us a good foundation for the **narratologist** viewpoint: video game-specific **narratology**, much like **ludology**, also introduces an agent to actualize the narrative: without an agent, the narrative is simply a "raw material out of which stories are made" (Ryan. 2013, 3), as previously stated. Indeed, Ryan seems more focused on *story* than *narrative* throughout. However, for the sake of argument, some narrative theory will be reviewed before moving on to **transmedial narrative**, and **storyworlds**.

Non-Academic Video Game Analysis, and its stance

Regardless of academic video game study's general attitude on **narratology** versus **ludology**, non-academic titles on video game analysis are abundant, especially within recent years. Writers like Skolnick (2014), Dille & Flint (2007), and Bryant & Giglio (2015), as well as Fernández-Vara (2015) have all written on different methods to analyze video games, with foci such as working with an extensive, creative team, or utilizing modern, video game-specific tools to write your video game, or how to analyze video game. All of these books, however, find the idea of video game narrative elementary; at least, they all include the concept as if they consider it elementary.

Skolnick, for instance, utilizes the concept of the monomyth, practically a **narratological** celebrity (2014, 27), whereas Dille & Flint focuses on elements of plot (2007, 25), and Bryant & Giglio go so far as to devote a chapter to the importance of narrative in video games (2015, "Do Games Need Stories?"). Fernández-Vara even comments on what she dubs the "sophisticated discourse on games", stating that "only a very small group of scholars and an even smaller number of practitioners and critics, are familiar with it these days." (2015, 3).

In other words, while an academic and scholarly discourse does exist, it has not caught on with the general public, which might explain why game writers and game analysts like the aforementioned do not really take it strongly into consideration. This should also be considered when discussing the **narratology** versus **ludology** debate, as this puts it into a bigger perspective, and, unfortunately, one in which its influence becomes smaller and smaller.

A reason for this could be the age of the debate, and, as Simons has pointed out previously, the fact that it never reached an ending, but was left hanging without a real conclusion to the problem at hand. Similarly, Fernández-Vara complains that there are few to none methods of game analysis, and that there is a "limited vocabulary" (2015, 12) in game studies. Surely, this only adds to the divide between academic and non-academic work on game analysis.

Traditional Narratology of Film and Literature

So after deciphering **narratology** from **ludology**, what is the point of bringing literary **narratology** into the picture? Firstly, it directly opposes the **ludologist** view that **narratological** tools should not be used on videogames, which must therefore add to the **narratologist** perspective of this paper and its analysis. Secondly, it supports Ryan's idea of a **medium-independent** narrative: Quite simply, if the idea of interaction is taken into account, there should be no hindrances in applying methods that are not of the same medium.

This is both done in an attempt to further strengthen the distinction between **narratology** and **ludology** in videogame studies, and in an attempt to shed light on both the possibilities and limitations of literary **narratology** on non-literary media. As an added bonus, it will also become evident whether there are any similarities between **ludological** methods and (traditional) **narratological** methods, or if the two can amend each other's shortcomings.

The sources used for this chapter will consist of *Narrative and Media* by Helen Fulton et al, which "[contextualizes] narrative within a range of analytical traditions and practices related to

media texts, [hoping] to maximize the possibilities for deconstructing this most pervasive of representational systems." (2005, 2), especially "The basics of narrative theory" (Rosemary Huisman) and "Film as narrative and visual mode" (Julian Murphet and Helen Fulton).

Considering the fact that videogames is an audiovisual medium, including theory specifically for an audiovisual medium seemed suitable. Lastly, a short comment will be specifically made to the concept of narrative beginnings, as explained by Niels Buch Leander in *The Sense of Beginning: Theory of the Literary Opening* (2012), as the concept of beginnings and ends are vital to the **ludological** concept of ludus, and could provide an excellent point for comparative study.

Beginning with "The basics of narrative theory", Fulton uses a lot of terms by other theorists, such as Genette, but contextualizes them within media theory. As the chapter is basically a step-by-step guide, there is no particular thing she focuses on. However, there are a few that stand out in relation to this paper's needs.

Firstly, focalization. Fulton defines it as a "mediation from some perspective" (2005, 13), and as "the perspective from which events are narrated" (98), as well as "positioning narrative voices" (111), while Murphet elaborates that it is "the anchoring of narrative discourse to a specific subject position in the story" (2005, 89). In other words, focalization introduces an element of subjectivity within the text; it is rooted in a specific perspective, such as one character's, or from a specific timeframe. To put this in a videogame context, focalization could come heavily into play when you must make choices based on the different (and often differing) presentations of the narrative that is given to you as a player (for instance in *Fallout 4*, where the player must choose between factions who each present their own focalization). Whether the player has any focalization herself is up for debate, as the player is not strictly within the story, even if her avatar (playable character) is.

Temporality is also a concept that introduces some facets, especially considering Juul's insisting on the complete lack of narrative time in videogames. **Temporality**, as Huisman describes

it, builds on the structuralist idea of a chronology of events (2005, 24), although she, as a post-structuralist, subscribes to six temporalities, of which three are "of ordinary human experience" (which we will work with) and of which three are "of the non-organic physical world that humans can come to understand through scientific technology and mathematics" (which will not be addressed, as they go beyond the scope of **narratology**) (24). The three based on human experience are as follows:

Sociotemporality (a culture's understanding of its history and being over time), human mental temporality (the personal present, which includes memory and prediction […]), and organic (living) temporality (this most closely corresponds to that of the structuralist's 'story'). (24) Put in a videogame context, **temporality**, when divided into these three, seems suddenly more useable. For instance, a sociotemporality could be applied to dystopian games (again, like *Fallout 4*).

A concept related to **temporality**, and generally time in narrative is duration, which is an indicator of the steadiness with which the narrative progresses in relation to how long it takes to experience the narrative (read the book, watch the film, etc) (Huisman. 2005, 13-14). Considering the interactivity of videogames, duration seems a pertinent to include in a videogame analysis, as it is a **narratology** concept that goes beyond the narrative, and includes the reader (or, in this case, the player).

A **narratological** concept strictly *within* the narrative is that of Umwelt, "the fictional world, the fictional 'reality' that is perceived in the telling," (Huisman. 2005, 19), a term borrowed form biology. The definition is nowadays more associated with that of diegesis, which in the twentieth century became associated with "that which is told" (19). However, for the sake of simplicity, Umwelt will be used for the purpose, while diegesis will be used in regards to the presentation of the narrator:

> With diegesis, 'the poet himself is the speaker and does not even attempt to suggest to us that anyone but himself is speaking'. With mimesis, the poet tries to give the illusion that another – whom we might call a character – speaks. (18)

The reasoning for this archaic choice of definitions is to keep the term, Umwelt, relevant, as this relates nicely to Ryan's **storyworld**. Furthermore, the dichotomy between diegesis and mimesis may prove valuable in deciphering the narrator-role in, for instance, tutorials and HUD walkthroughs.

These concepts are just a few of many more that could be applied to the interactive, digital medium, videogames. However, for the time being, these are the ones having been selected, as they both support Ryan's (and to some extent Grodal's) **narratologist** perspectives, and also because they oppose Juul's, Frasca's, and Aarseth's **ludologist** perspectives.

To support the chosen, literary **narratological** concepts, an understanding of visual media **narratological** concepts shall also be introduced. As mentioned previously, this will not only support the **medium-independence** that Ryan subscribes to, and therefore carry on the **narratologist** torch, in a manner of speaking, it will also fill in the gap that a strictly literary **narratological** background must have. Videogames are, after all, audiovisual, generally speaking. Even in games where there is no dialogue, there are still sound effects and soundtracks, meant to support the immersive qualities of the game (this is especially true for older titles such as *Heroes of Might and Magic* (1995), and newer indie titles, such as *Inside* (2016)).

Julian Murphet dubs the shot the "raw narrative unit of the medium" (2005, 48), elaborating that "film's ability to reproduce actions in photographically realistic space is the most important property it brings to telling stories." (48). With digital visual technology, however, he admits that shots and, more importantly, cutting, cannot exist. He does, however, explain that this new technology "adapt[s] to existing habits of perception and comprehension" (48, footnote). In other words, the new adapts to the old, in order to appear like it and gain a sense of familiarity in the

player. In relation to videogames, this is definitely relevant. In the early days, the usage of *FMV*

(full motion video) was abundant (such as *Night Trap* (1992)), used as a non-gameplay element to

enhance narrative, and obviously inspired by film format, as the FMVs technically *are* mini-films.

Time is also an aspect that affects film narrative. Murphet goes as far as to call narrative a

temporal mode (2005, 60). Murphet separates "time of the story" from "time of the plot", the first

of which denotes "the period covered by all of the events narrated during the film", the second of

which "can slow itself down to an otherworldly crawl, or accelerate to a frantic blur, or even skip

tears altogether without a word." (61). Time of the story is, in other words, everything that the story

encompasses, whereas time of the plot is much more structured, only dealing with everything from

introduction of conflict to the solving of conflict (61). However, Murphet also introduces a time that

goes beyond the scope of the narrative, that of "screen time". As opposed to literary media texts,

"the speed of its [film's] projection is mechanically fixed" (62).

When put in the context of videogames, narrative time can both mirror that of film media and

literary media. As Juul explained, the literary types of time (story time, narrative time, and reading

time) all merge together when applied to videogames. Is this true, however, considering the

definition of story time? For example, in *StarCraft II* (2010), the character Sarah Kerrigan rescues

the character Jim Raynor from a prison ship. This is a plotpoint in the game's narrative. However,

in the larger story, facets of both Kerrigan's and Raynor's character not only determine their

motivation and actions in this particular plot point, but dictate both future and past actions as well,

weaving into the greater story time.

Another interesting aspect is that of narrative voice. Murphet discusses for an entire

subchapter, and introduces the concept by contextualizing it in relation to narration:

> The relations between narration proper and the points of view of the characters being narrated
> are every bit as complex as the relations between story time and 'plot' time. In any narrative

form, there is a spectrum of what we can call 'distances' between narrator's 'voice' and the mental and sensory states of his or her characters: from alpine to godlike superiority, through gradations of nearer proximity and outright identity to the point where the characters know more than the narrator. This spectrum of relations clearly hinges on a question of apparent 'knowledge', although we also know that, in some ultimate sense, the film 'knows itself' throughout; it *produces* various narrators to tantalise us with their different degrees of knowledge. (2005, 73)

Murphet goes on to lament the lack of narrative voice in cinema, stating that "by and large, for most movie-going people around the world, film is a *narrative medium without a narrator*" (2005, 75, his italics), arguing that this is due to the complete lack of narration in most modern movies (Murphet exemplifies using Jackie Chan movies). Here, it is important to understand that Murphet does not simply talk of a story's narrator (a character that narrates *within* the story), but rather a mediator between narrative and audience (he talks extensively about the non-presence of directors, for instance).

Similarly, there is not an immediately obvious narrative voice in videogames. However, much like Murphet allows for certain films to present a worthy voice (2005, 75), such as stylistic choices that set certain film directors apart from the rest (Murphet mentions Quentin Tarantino as a "choppier, more fremetic and stylistically variegated 'narrator'" (77)), we must not be so quick to dismiss the effects of a narrative voice. A newer example where the narrative voice became apparent would be the newest installment of the *Mass Effect*-series, *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (2017), which was created by an entirely new team of developers.

Before moving on to narrative beginnings, a summary of the focal points is in order. Firstly, Fulton describes general narrative theory in a media-conscious context, going over topics like focalization, **temporality**, duration, Umwelt, and diegesis and mimesis. Building on this, Murphet delves into audiovisual medium-specific **narratology**, establishing that new media will mimic old, and then defines different narrative times applicable to audiovisual media, finishing with a comment on narrative voice.

Narrative Beginnings

Because of *World of Warcraft*'s status as part of a larger series of video games, some confusion may arise regarding where the narrative beginning of the *Warcraft* **storyworld** is. Using Niels Buch Leander's work on narrative beginnings, *The Sense of a Beginning: Theory of the Literary Opening* (2012), a dissertation specifically working with literary openings (as evident in the title) may not appear to be the ideal choice, but, as Buch Leander himself points out, there is a serious lack of focus on narrative beginnings (2012, 1) in general. And, as Murphet previously argued, since a new medium will try to emulate an older medium, utilizing theory made for an older medium on a newer medium is not a completely impractical endeavor (2005, 48, footnote) – especially when considering there is no medium-specific theory on narrative beginnings in videogames.

Buch Leander extensively talks of the favoritism in literary criticism towards the narrative ending (2012, 7), where he himself claims that beginnings are "more important than endings […] Admittedly, we note a symmetry between beginnings and endings in so far as an ending marks the reversed transition from the narrated world into the reader's world" (2). He considers the beginning to be a "building block, which cannot or should not be scrutinized, and on which other knowledge is therefore constructed." (42).

Utilizing a theorist who values beginnings more than endings on a text that, arguably, has no ending, seems not only practical, but pertinent. However, it is also Buch Leander's understanding of the relationship between a particular type of beginning and ending that is useful; he argues that an open beginning tends to generate open endings, meaning they "contain little resolution" (2012, 117). Considering the *Warcraft* narrative has a complete lack of definitive ending (so far), but a slew of minor endings for minor narratives, Buch Leander might be able to shed light on the openness of the *Warcraft* narrative's beginning.

He does determine that there are two aspects of beginnings, start and origin. Where a start is prospective, origin is retrospective; the first is focused ahead of itself, where the latter is "insights into a previous moment's starting potentialities that were now 'closed' and determined by time's passing." (2012, 37). Considering how the *Warcraft* narrative contains several 'starting points', differentiating between the origin and the start of the narrative will prove useful in illuminating the true, narrative beginning of *World of Warcraft*.

There is also the aspect of structure within a given narrative's beginning. Buch Leander argues that there are certain cultural cues that clue us into where the beginning is (and where it ends):

> Beginnings may be difficult to understand, yet typically when we open a book, we as readers locate the beginning quite easily. The indication of a literary beginning therefore works at a different level, as an implicit transition into fiction. Yet, since a beginning is a radical phenomenon, our ability to comprehend a beginning must depend on much more than explicit markers: it must depend very strongly on an "agreement", which again depends strongly on a number of cultural codes, such as a conventionality with regard to the structure of books, in the first place, and a conventionality with regard to the structure of texts, in the second place. (71-72)

He further elaborates that within this 'structure of books' and 'structure of texts', there's an added layer of the structure of the beginning, which acts as a familiarizing formula that makes the beginning as a structure relatable and recognizable to the reader (2012, 94). In a videogame context, there are definitely also formulas that games will employ to address the player, to clue them in on what type of game narrative (and game in general) that they are being presented with.

Other than an aspect of familiarity, there is also an aspect of performativity. Buch Leander utilizes Genette's types of narration, namely "heterodiegetic narration" and "homodiegetic narration", to discuss performativity of the literary opening. Before discussing types of narration, a distinction must be made between a literary opening and a beginning. Where an opening "belongs

to the level of presentation, the beginning [belongs] to the level of the story" (2012, 98). In other words, an opening is a tool of "sjuzhet" (form of the story), whereas a beginning is a tool of "fabula" (the order of the story).

In relation to this, the performative act of the opening, in particular, can be either homodiegetic or heterodiegetic. Particularly for the *Warcraft* narrative, which is an interactive narrative, there's a discussion to be had for whether the narrator (which we can both consider the questgivers and tutorials to be) is homodiegetic or heterodiegetic. Buch Leander defines the homodiegetic as being "with an openly declared narrator who takes part in the narrative itself" (2012, 59), where the heterodiegetic narrator "does not participate in the action" (61). It should be noted that Buch Leander, however, finds the heterodiegetic definition to be insufficient, as vastly different narratives can both be heterodiegetic (107). For the sake of simplicity, however, this paper will use his definitions regardless, as they still give a good indicator for what type of narrator is employed by the *Warcraft* narrative.

To summarize, Buch Leander tries to fill a gap in modern, narrative theory, namely that of the literary beginning. He differentiates between the two aspects of beginnings, start and origin, as well as commenting on the openness of beginnings, and how they determine the openness of the ending. Secondly, he also differentiates between heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narration, and shortly comments on the performativity – and familiarity – of the opening.

The Medium-Dependence of Video Game Narratives

Someone who supports and extensively talks of **medium-dependence** is David Herman in "Toward a Transmedial Narratology" (2004). The essay is part of *Narrative Across Media* (2004), edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, whose opinion on **medium-dependence** is made clear in the introduction:

> Even when they seek to make themselves invisible, media are not hollow conduits for the transmission of messages but material supports of information whose materiality, precisely, "matters" for the type of meanings that can be encoded. (1)

Why discuss **medium-dependence** at all? For one, **medium-dependence** is one of the core differences between ludologists and narratologists: In **ludology**, narrative cannot exist, because of the type of medium that videogames is. Secondly, to show that a **narratologist** analysis can illuminate points not only present in interactive texts, but also in the (gradually increasing) body of non-interactive paratexts that exist around the main, interactive digital text, since the text I will be analyzing contains non-interactive paratexts.

Herman's method to discuss how much medium matters in relation to narrative is presented as thesis, antithesis, synthesis, meaning he goes through why narrative *could* be **medium-dependent**, why it *could not*, and finishing off somewhere in the middle. He explains it thusly:

> Thesis posits that narrative is medium independent and that essential properties of stories remain unchanged across different representational formats. Antithesis construes stories as radically dependent on their media, making the distinction between spoken conversational and literary narrative a fundamental one – to the point where spoken and written versions of a story would not be "versions" at all but, instead, different narratives altogether. Synthesis posits that medium-specific differences between narratives are nontrivial but only more or less firmly anchored in their respective media; intertranslation between story media will be more or less possible, depending on the particular formats involved. (2004, 50)

Herman goes on to explain the arguments for each, starting with thesis (narrative is **medium-independent**). Herman begins by explaining that a watered down version of **medium-independent** narrative is "a basic research hypothesis of structuralist narratology" (2004, 50), thereby further implementing the **narratology** versus **ludology** debate into a larger scheme of **narratology**. The game narratologists are not simply narratologists: They build specifically onto a structuralist perspective.

Herman further explains that "The medium-independence thesis carries with it methodological consequences, in effect determining what counts as "data" that can be used to illustrate narratological theories" (2004, 52), which is quite logical, considering the thesis' structuralist corner stones. This extreme, logic-based thought process is also what, according to Herman, led early analysts believing in **medium-independence** to not be certain of the degree of **medium-independence** that should be involved (52). So already here, it becomes evident that medium must be considered to some extent; that the question of dependence is more a matter of degree.

This leads into the antithesis (narrative is radically dependent on its medium). Similarities between Herman's antithesis and **ludology** can be seen almost immediately with this following statement, dealing with interaction:

> The narrative-determining force of sign systems stems from their being not only media of expression but also resources for (inter)acting. Thus, in Barbara Herrnstein Smith's critique of structuralist narratology the medium-dependence antithesis informs her arguments that stories, which are always told *by* someone *to* someone (else), should be viewed as socio-symbolic transactions instead of inert, preexisting structures. Insofar as narratives are acts, doings more than things, stories will inevitably unfold differently across different tellings. (2004, 53).

This is a stance that is much wider than the thesis, which would serve as the representative for **narratology** (in videogames). Firstly, it includes both a producer and a recipient (writer and reader, developer and player, etc), (where **narratology** seldom reaches beyond its narrative,) which mirrors **ludology**'s focus on interactivity. To contextualize further, Ryan herself, in a later appearing essay of the same novel, ""Will New Media Produce New Narrative?", actually comments on the difference between her understanding of narrativity, and a ludologist's (In this case, Espen Aarseth's) understanding:

> In my own view a retrospective availability of meaning is sufficient to ascribe narrativity to games. Aarseth would reply that when the game is over it is over, and its fall into narrativity means its death as simulation. (2004, 334)

This only further strengthens the ludologists' perspective on **medium-dependence**: The simulation (its interactive qualities) are alpha and omega, and while there can exist a narrative *after* the simulation has occurred, this is irrelevant. This was discussed previously, in "Ludology", where Frasca allowed that a past gaming session could, retroactively, become a narrative, but that the session itself was not a narrative (1999).

Herman weighs the strengths and weaknesses of his antithesis thusly:

> If thesis has difficulty accounting for the ways in which narratives are shaped by their telling, antithesis struggles to capture the intuition that stories have "gist" that can remain more or less intact across fairly dramatic shifts in context, style, degree of elaboration, and so on. (54)

These weaknesses of both thesis and antithesis are why Herman proposes a synthesis: A more fluid understanding that allows for both usages, and considers the entire dichotomy more of a spectrum. He argues that "work done under the auspices of synthesis provides an initial point of entry into the relevant region of the constraint system at issue" (2004, 55).

So, to summarize, Herman's thesis-antithesis-synthesis setup illuminates the difficulty in determining **medium-dependence** of a given text, but also provides measures for counteracting this difficulty. There is a certain amount of similarity between Herman's antithesis and **ludological** thinking, and likewise between his thesis and **narratology**.

Transmedial Narratology

Considering the **medium-independence** of videogame narratives that we have now established is present in **narratology**, an understanding of **transmedia** is necessary, as this paper deals specifically with **transmedial** texts that can now seem unmanageable. The source chosen for

this is "Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production" by Carlos Alberto Scolari (2009). The reasoning behind this choice is Scolari's focus on narrative worlds in **transmedial narrative** theory. Considering the vastness of *World of Warcraft*'s narrative world, and the many media it traverses, Scolari seemed the ideal source.

Scolari approaches **transmedia** with a combination of semiotics and **narratology**. Before beginning, however, he explains his view of semiotics as being "not just the "science of signs"", but "a discipline concerned with sense production and interpretation processes", arguing that it is a study of "complex, cultural processes" (2009, 586). In essence, Scolari combines **narratology**, which has always been viewed as never looking beyond the text, with a theoretical tool that can allow just that, in this case semiotics.

Scolari goes on to define **transmedia** storytelling according to Henry Jenkins' (2003) definition of the ideal form of **transmedia**, which focuses on taking advantage of each medium's strengths, thereby strengthening the **transmedia** text:

> Each medium does what it does best - so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa. (Jenkins. 2003)

Although utilizing this definition, Scolari further explains that **transmedia** "is not just an adaptation from one media to another. The story that the comics tell is not the same as that told on television or in cinema" (2009, 587). In other words, Scolari stresses the importance of utilizing the correct medium for the right story: **Transmedial storytelling** is not to re-tell the same story in different media, but to expand upon the original story with the tools that other media can provide.

However, in a greater, **transmedial, narrative world**, which medium is the 'main' medium? Scolari uses the TV series *24* as a case study to better understand **transmedial storytelling**. With this case study, he defines a number of terms to do with **transmedial storytelling**, most central of which is the "macrostory", the medium-based narrative that is considered the main narrative (for *24*, this is the original television series) (2009, 598).

For the *Warcraft* narrative, the **macrostory** is quite obviously the MMORPG game, which has been an ongoing narrative since 2004. However, Scolari stresses the importance of "the real consumption situation" (2009, 598-600), which is another way of saying that the individual consumer's understanding of (and introduction to) the narrative matters greatly in deciphering which is the **macrostory**. Since *World of Warcraft* (2004) is not the original text in the narrative, its status as **macrostory** could be questioned. *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans* (1994), the first installment, could also be a contender for the title of macrostory for many fans of the franchise, as it was this real-time strategy videogame which laid the very foundation for the rest of the narrative world. The entire pre-*World of Warcraft* game series (up until and including *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne* (2003)) could also be considered the **macrostory**, as *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans* (1994) leads directly into the rest of the trilogy, which all are of the same medium format (real-time strategy videogame).

However, it was with *World of Warcraft* (2004), the open-world role-playing game, that the playerbase grew to eight million individual subscriptions in January 2007, right before the release of the first expansion, *World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade* (2007), a number which steadily grew to twelve million in September 2010, right before the release of the third expansion, *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (2010), after which there was a steady decline of subscriptions. However, the sheer fact that, even at its lowest point during *World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria* (2012), the

game still had six million subscriptions (all the above-mentioned numbers are to be found in Appendix A) must matter in regards to the real consumption situation.

Scolari has a few rules for centrality of narrative universes, which mainly deals with popularity and visibility of the installments that could be the **macrostory**:

> However, this centrality may change from one narrative universe to another one. In the case of Batman, this place is occupied by the comic, in Harry Potter by the novels, and in Tomb Raider by the video game. The real consumption situation may also introduce variations in the centrality of one media inside a certain narrative world. For example, in many countries, Batman was introduced by the TV series in the 1960s, and for many young children, Harry Potter is a movie character. (598-600)

In other words, since *World of Warcraft* (2004) is undeniably the best-selling installment, it is not far-fetched to deem it the **macrostory** of the entire narrative world, since the very concept of centrality revolves around consumption. There is also the factor of game genre to consider: *World of Warcraft* (2004), with all its expansions, is not a real-time strategy game, like its predecessors. Therefore, the *Warcraft* RTS trilogy cannot be considered on equal footing with *World of Warcraft* (2004), as the two are not technically the same genre.

So what about the rest of the installments? What about the novels, comic books, manga, online short stories and, of course, the original real-time strategy game series? Scolari has a number of strategies he defines as ways to expand upon the fictional (narrative) world:

- "**Interstitial microstories**": This method expands periods between macrostory installments, such as between seasons of *24*, or, arguably, between expansions of *World of Warcraft*.
- "Parallel stories": These create another story that unfolds at the same time as the macrostory. Certain novels (*Illidan* by William King (2016) , which runs concurrently with *World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade* (2007), for instance) arguably employ this technique, but not all.

- "Peripheral stories": These are more or less distant satellites of the macrostory, such as the *Warcraft: Legends* manga pentalogy (2008), which contains stories that are either not at all or rarely touched upon in the main story of *Warcraft*.

- "User-generated content platforms": These are platforms outside of the canon of the narrative, created and maintained by users (readers, viewers, players, consumers) of the narrative. For *World of Warcraft*, this could be the www.wowhead.com website, along with numerous other wiki-sites and forums.

  (2009, 598)

Using these four types, most of the *Warcraft* fictional world can be categorized, and analyzed according to the **narratological** tools already introduced in previous chapters. However, this way of analysis treats each text as singular, as something separated from the rest, which does not do the **transmedial** qualities of the narrative justice.

These are also reminiscent of what Colin B. Harvey utilizes in "A Taxonomy of Transmedia Storytelling" from *Storyworlds Across Media* (Ryan & Thon, ed. 2014). His taxonomy is legally based, rather than on a basis of narrative or medium, which does create a different approach that can somewhat expand the understanding of the relationship between each text. Harvey describes them as not referring to "the position of third-party producers in the creation of **transmedial storytelling** but to the degree of control exercised by the IP holders" (2014, 255), in other words a producer-centric analysis. Harvey names them as such:

- "Intellectual property", which is, of course, the main text.

- "Directed transmedia storytelling", which "refers to those transmedial extensions over which the IP holder exercises close control", in other words material produced by the holder, or in accordance with the holder's wishes.

- "Devolved transmedia storytelling", which "suggests more of a degree of flexibility", where certain parts of the narrative universe can be deliberately left out or changed, as long as it is within the terms of agreement.

- "Detached transmedia storytelling", which is a type that does not fall under the IP holder's license, which also means texts that fall under this category are not produced by the holder, either. Legally, this is of course a troublesome category.

- "Directed transmedia storytelling with user participation", which is "content produced by consumers of the franchise that is circumscribed by the owners of the IP or the license holders", for instance merchandise, but also license holder-moderated award shows, conventions and similar.

- "Emergent user-generated transmedia storytelling", which is most often known simply as fan fiction.

  (2014, 254-255)

Within these parameters, it will not only be possible to discuss and analyze the **transmediality** from a strictly **narratological** standpoint, but also from a business standpoint, which will bring the nuances of the choices behind certain forms of **transmedia** texts in to the light. However, this does not enable us to discuss a given **transmedia** text's medium in *relation* to the main text. Scolari (2009), however, with his text analytical focus, does consider type of medium in his case study of *24*, so by utilizing both methods, a well-rounded analysis can be made.

To put it in a *Warcraft* narrative context, Harvey's method can be used to put *World of Warcraft* (2004) on equal level with the *Warcraft* RTS series, as all are the intellectual property of Blizzard Entertainment. This is up for debate, of course, as *World of Warcraft* (2004) can in this instance also be viewed as directed **transmedial** storytelling, built on the RPG trilogy (and

expansions), much like Harvey sees the *Doctor Who* video games as directed **transmedia** storytelling of the *Doctor Who* TV series.

Where Harvey's method cannot be used to further delve into **transmedial** relationships between different texts of the *Warcraft* narrative, it can establish some consciousness of the individual text's place in relation to the other texts, and therefore how to treat it. For instance, while the *Warcraft* comics published by DC Comics are canon (with characters from the comics later appearing in the MMORPG), can they be considered on the same level as the online short stories published directly by Blizzard Entertainment themselves? This is something that can be explored with Harvey's method.

Scolari uses a table-structure to introduce chronology into his case study of *24*, with medium-type horizontally, and individual text arranged vertically, thusly:

TV	WWW	Comics	Mobile	Videogames	Novels
					Trinity
		One shot			
		Nightfall			
					Op. Hell Gate
					Veto Power
					Trojan Horse
					Cat's Claw
					Vanishing Point
					Chaos Theory
					Collateral Damage
	Day Zero				
Season 1					
					The House...
Season 2					
				The Game	
	Countdown				
		Midnight Sun			
		Stories			
Season 3					
			Mobile game		
			Agent Down		
					Storm Force
		Cold Warriors			
Season 4 prequel					
Season 4					
Season 5 prequel					
Season 5					
Season 6 prequel					
Season 6					
	Day 6 Debrief				
24: Redemption					

Table 2. The *24* transmedia narrative world (updated December 2008).

(Scolari, C. "Transmedia Storytelling" (2009). 596)

While this table does not elaborate much on how text A makes way for text B, etc, it quite succinctly shows the chronological development of the narrative, even including a text that, in itself, is multimedia, namely a mobile game, which Scolari has deemed fitting in two categories, namely "Mobile" and "Videogames".

Again, this table does not much discuss the relationship between the texts, such as how the novel, *Storm Force*, narratively situates itself between season 3 and season 4 of the main text, the television show. For the *Warcraft* narrative world, a novel, for instance, can both be an **interstitial microstory** and a parallel **microstory**, and simply putting them in the same category does not take their different influence and relationship with the main text into account at all. As such, it cannot be considered a complete tool for analyzing the **transmedia narrative world** of *Warcraft*, but it is a good starting point for discussion and analysis of the chronology (and thereby the linearity) of the *Warcraft* narrative.

All in all, **transmedia** is an aspect of the *Warcraft* narrative that cannot be ignored, if a thorough analysis is to be made. Even if discounting its many literary and non-interactive, digital texts, the **macrostory** has great ties to a different medium, the real-time strategy videogame series upon which is was created, which has had a huge impact on the **macrostory**, not only in regards to gameplay and look, but also narrative composition and development.

Although the **narratologist** approach demands a focus on narrative that overshadows the type of medium the narrative might be situated it, it would be ill-advised to completely dismiss the difference in impact a videogame has as opposed to a novel, and the different analytical approaches one must take towards either to extract its full potential.

Storyworlds and *Warcraft*

The introduction to *Storyworlds Across Media* (2014) by Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon explains how the book builds on *Narrative Across Media* (2004), also by Ryan, which has previously been used in this paper. Ryan and Thon stress that while *Storyworlds* can be considered a sequel to *Narrative,* it has a more modern focus, which embraces a new method for narrative-creation:

The replacement of "narrative" with "storyworld" acknowledges the emergences of the concept of "world" not only in narratology but also on the broader cultural scene. Nowadays we have not only multimodal representations of storyworlds that combine various types of signs and virtual online worlds that wait to be filled with stories by their player citizens but also serial storyworlds that span multiple installments and transmedial storyworlds that are deployed simultaneously across multiple media platforms, resulting in a media landscape in which creators and fans alike constantly expand, revise, and even parody them. (2014, 14)

This ties in with Scolari's methods for expanding fictional worlds, which comprises not only creator-made, but also fan-made texts based on the **macrostory**, as well as the concept of multiple installments to one fictional world (Scolari. 2009). However, Ryan and Thon not only focus on "serial storyworlds", which is arguably Scolari's focus (as shown with his chronology of *24*), but on "multimodal representations of storyworlds that combine various types of signs and virtual online worlds *that wait to be filled with stories by their player citizens*", which not only includes fan-creations, but allows for an actual, player-driven story.

Ryan and Thon elaborate on this using Herman's definition of narratives as "blueprints for a specific mode of world-creation" (Herman. 2009, 105), which they then redefine as blueprints for a specific mode of world-*imagination*, "for while the author creates the storyworld through the production of signs, it is the reader, spectator, listener, or player who uses the blueprint of a finished text to construct a mental image of this world" (Ryan & Thon. 2014, 16). In other words, the recipient is in focus for Ryan and Thon, when it comes to the experience of the **storyworld**.

This is quite interesting, when you consider the words of Juul: "Interactivity and games, on the other hand, are defined by that the reader/player can influence the events now." (1999, 1). Clearly, this supports that **ludology** and **narratology** are more similar than one would think. It also supports Ryan's previous statements regarding **narratology**, where she says that it is because of a living being that the narrative exists at all (2013, 3), which has previously been commented on.

Ryan's view on **transmediality** in relation to **medium-dependence** is also elaborated upon, as she states that interactive media are "a good example of a transmedially valid yet not medium-

free concept" (2014, 16). Here, again, it is clear that Ryan defines a given text (and thereby how to handle it) from its medium and outwards, but allows for certain media to have more impact on the text than others will. This is also evident earlier, when she says that "any attempt to adequately discuss the manifestation of narrative meaning in different media must begin with the assessment of the relations between narratological concepts and media categories" (16), which further supports this argument of medium-centrality. Ryan suggests that:

> Medium is best understood as an inherently polyvalent term whose meaning involves a technological, semiotic, and cultural dimension. The degree of prominence of these three dimensions differs from medium to medium, but all of them must be taken into consideration in the description of a medium's narrative affordances and limitations." (2014, 18)

Put differently, there are three vital factors to deciphering a medium's weight, being the technical dimension, the semiotic substance, and the cultural dimension (2014, 39). Semiotic substance "encompasses categories such as image, sound, language, and movement. […]Examples of semiotically based media categories are mostly art forms: music (sound), painting (two-dimensional image), sculpture (three-dimensional image), and oral verbal art (language)." (39). For the technical dimension, Ryan establishes that the dimension:

> Includes not only media-defining technologies such as film, TV, photography, and so on but also any kind of mode of production and material support. […] The case of multilayered modes of production suggests a distinction between technologies that record and transmit other media (writing for language, books for writing, scripts for video, radio for speech and music, and digital technology for every kind of visual or verbal medium) and technologies that capture life directly (photography, film, and sound recording). The technologies that transmit other media may, however, develop their own idiosyncrasies and evolve from mere channels of transmission into autonomous media of information or artistic expression (e.g., artist books for books, serials and live broadcasting for TV, and computer games and hypertext for digital technology. (2014, 39)

Lastly, she also comments on so-called cultural dimensions, which she argues presents an excellent form within which the analyst can place their text for analysis:

"Cultural dimension addresses the public recognition of media as forms of communication and the institutions, behaviors, and practices that support them. I regard as culturally based media those means of communication, such as the press, the theater, or comics, that are widely recognized as playing a significant cultural role but that cannot be distinguished on purely semiotic or technological grounds." (39).

These three dimensions creates what Ryan calls a "media-conscious narratology", which she visualizes with this figure, where she places video games within both "media", "technologies" and "arts/entertainment":

Fig. 1.1. A map of media. Radio, TV, and others, have both artistic and informational manifestations. The press uses a technology—printing—but it is not distinctive. Art categories are either semiotically defined (music, painting, dance, mime) or culturally defined (comics, theater, opera). In this case they do not rely on a distinctive set of signs.
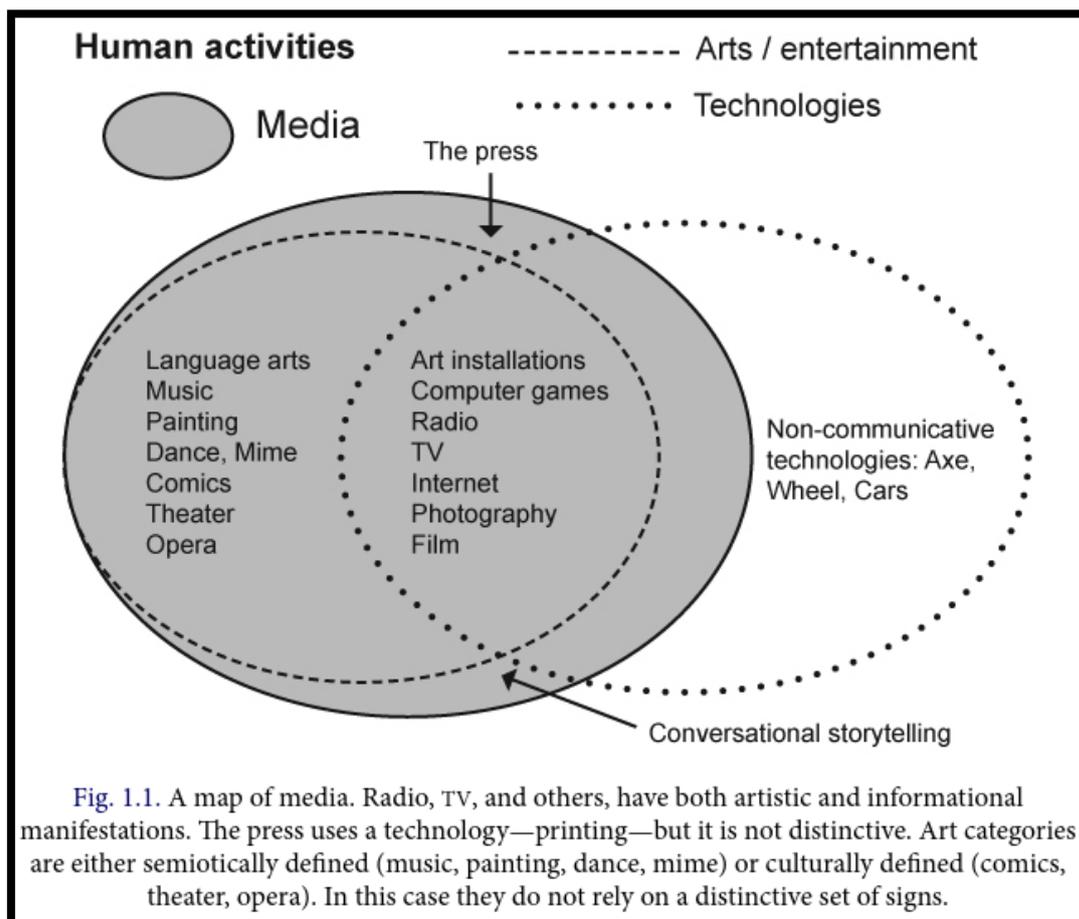
Ryan, M. *Storyworlds Across Media* (2014, 40).

Having thus established her view on media, she moves on to **storyworlds**, which she

immediately clarifies does not relate to its meaning in literature. Instead, it "differs from this

interpretation of "world" in at least three major ways. First, it is something projected by individual

texts, and not by the entire work of an author, so that every story has its own **storyworld** (except in

transmedial projects, where the representation of a world is distributed among many different texts

of different media). Second (and this point may seem obvious), it requires narrative content, so the

applicability of the concept of **storyworld** to lyric poetry is questionable. Finally, it cannot be

called the "world of the author" because in the case of fiction, authors are located in the real world

while the **storyworld** is a fictional world. "If a storyworld is anybody's world, it is the world of the

characters." (2014, 41).

In relation to the *Warcraft* narrative, this is yet another interesting point, as it is not a work

created by a singular author, or creator. It has taken a team of varying individuals years to create the

entirety of the *Warcraft* narrative, and some of those individuals have left the team, while new

members have come on board, continually changing and rearranging the narrative as well as the

game. Secondly, considering Ryan's note on **transmedial** projects, it is a vast, multimedia and

multifaceted narrative, although some texts (and some collections of texts, such as the *War of the

Ancients* trilogy (2004)) can be considered their own, individual **storyworlds**, existing within a

larger, narrative matrix.

An important thing to note is also Ryan's conceptions of the **storyworld**, of which there are

two: The "logical conception" and the "imaginative conception". Ryan defines the logical as a

rewriting of an existing narrative, "modifying the plot and ascribing different features or destinies to

the characters, it creates a new storyworld that overlaps to some extent with the old one. While a

given storyworld can be presented through several different texts, these texts must respect the facts

of the original text if they are to share its logical storyworld." (2014, 18).

Arguably, the *Warcraft* film narrative is this type of plot-modifying **storyworld** that still respects the facts of the original text. However, the film could, of course, simply be considered an adaption of the original narrative. Likewise, there are instances where novels overlap with the game, such as the previously mentioned *Illidan* (William King. 2016), which are perhaps cleaner examples of the logical conception.

Opposite the logical is the imaginative conception. Here, "a storyworld consists of named existents and perhaps of an invariant setting (though the setting can be expanded), but the properties of these existents and their destinies may vary from text to text. Whether logical or imaginative, however, the concept of **storyworld** will only earn a legitimate place in the toolbox of **narratology** if it opens new perspectives on the relations between media and narrative. To demonstrate the theoretical usefulness of the notion, Ryan examines the interplay of world- internal and world-external elements in various media." (18).

To summarize, Ryan and Thon's **storyworld** is a **transmedial** narrative structure that can encompass multiple installments of multiple types of medium, and is, most importantly for this paper, player-centric. In short, the concept of **storyworlds** allows this paper to focus as much on the the player's experience as on the narrative itself. Using this, as well as the other theoretical and methodological concepts already reviewed, this will enable me to explore the linear qualities of both the narrative world of *Warcraft*, and of the player's experience of the **storyworld** of *Warcraft*.

Transmedial Interrelationships, Chronologically

This first chapter of analysis will deal with the chronology of the *Warcraft* narrative and **storyworld**, which was decided to lay a foundation for the remaining analysis; without first deciphering the plot progression of the narrative, it seems difficult to build any credible analysis of the linearity of said narrative. First, the table of chronology inspired by Scolari will be presented, then an analysis of specific **microstories** and their relation to the **macrostory**, ending with a short example of how the **interstitial microstories** hold sway over the **macrostory**, and how the *Warcraft* narrative has since avoided this, granting the **macrostory** the highest place in the hierarchy.

Table of Chronology, and its Usage

As mentioned, Scolari utilizes a table to map out the chronology of the **transmedial** text, *24*. A similar table can be made to map out the chronology of the *Warcraft* narrative. However, also as mentioned, Scolari's table can only reach so far, as it does not take the interrelationships of the texts in question into consideration.

The following table can be described as a development of Scolari's. His usage of multiple medium-classifications (namely how he considered the *24* mobile game both "mobile" and "video game"), and method for visualizing this, has here been flipped 90 degrees. In other words, while the lines between media is firmly drawn, certain texts overlap in chronology, simply visualized by removing the lines between each.

It should be noted that one particular series has been omitted from the table, namely the manga *Warcraft: Legends* pentalogy (2008). This series has been omitted as it is a collection of short, peripheral stories with little to no influence on the progression of the *Warcraft* narrative. Another thing to note is that it is not uncommon for the novels in particular to use both prologues and epilogues to go beyond the narrative time frame that the body of the text is situated within.

Especially *The Well of Eternity*, *The Demon Soul*, and *The Sundering* (2004-2005) are a special case, as these include time travel. All texts have therefore been placed according to which part of the timeline the majority of the text is situated within, so as not to have them show up twice.

Lastly, date of publishing has not been included in the table, as the table is only meant to show the chronological, **transmedial** interrelationships of the **macrostory** and **microstories** of the *Warcraft* universe. The characters mentioned in this table have also been put into a narrative context, and are therefore omitted from the Character Gallery Appendix (See Appendix C). The focus of this table is the 'Central Myth' column, far left, which reviews the most important points in the myth of Warcraft. This column indicates how closely connected the adjacent **microstories**, whether interstitial, parallel or peripheral, are to the **macrostory installments**. Due to the inclusion of this column, and the inherent lack of narrative in the *Chronicle* books (2016-), the *Chronicle* books have been omitted from the table.

Table 1: The *Warcraft* narrative transmedia world, inspired by Scolari (2009).

Central Myth	Videogame	Novel	Short story	Comic	Manga	Web series
The titans grant the Dragon aspects power over the natural powers of the planet Azeroth		Dawn of the Aspects				
The Legion invades with help from the night elf queen, Azshara, but ultimately fail.		The Well of Eternity				
		The Demon Soul				
		The Sundering				Burdens of Shaohao
On planet Draenor, the Legion sow conflict to incentivice the orc Horde to invade Azeroth.		Rise of the Horde				
			Unbroken			Lords of War series
The orc Horde invade Azeroth, and burn down the human kingdom of Stormwind. This is	Warcraft: Orcs and Humans	The Last Guardian				

known as the First War.							
The Horde and Alliance do battle again, and the Horde loses. The portal between Azeroth and Draenor is broken by the victorious Alliance.	Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness	Tides of Darkness					
Remnants of the Portal remain, and, while both humans and orcs are stranded on Draenor, the planet is torn apart.	Warcraft II: Beyond the Dark Portal	Beyond the Dark Portal					
			Road to Damnation				
Medivh sends the orc, Thrall, and the subdued orcs across the planet to Kalimdor in an attempt to ensure survivors of the undead Plague. Meanwhile, prince Arthas of Lordaeron becomes corrupted, which leads to the fall of his kingdom, and the elven kingdom. On Kalimdor, Illidan Stormrage becomes a demon to kill an agent of the Legion, and is banished. Meanwhile, the orcs form an alliance with the tauren.	Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos	Arthas: Rise of the Lich King	Vol'jin: The Judgment	World of Warcraft: Ashbringer	World of Warcraft: Death Knight	World of Warcraft: Sunwell Trilogy	
Maiev Shadowsong hunt Illidan Stormrage, who is trying to defeat the Lich King, leader of the undead Scourge, the unliving	Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne						

remnants of the human kingdom. Meanwhile, Sylvanas Windrunner, former elf, now a banshee, becomes the leader of a renegade group of undead set on killing Arthas, who has become the Lich King. Lastly, Thrall builds a home for the orcs, called Durotar, and helps Jaina Proudmoore take the human city of Theramore on Kalimdor, bringing a tentative peace between the two factions.								
The red dragon aspect, Alexstrasza is captured by evil orcs, and forced to breed dragon mounts for them. Meanwhile, Theramore and Durotar are on the verge of war, as a third party playing the two against each other, but eventually make up.		Day of the Dragon						
		Lord of the Clan						
		Cycle of Hatred						
The king of the rebuilt Stormwind, Varian Wrynn, is abducted by the black dragon, Onyxia, who rules Stormwind in his stead under the guise of Katrana Prestor. Meanwhile, remnants of the Old	World of Warcraft		War of the Shifting Sands	Dark Riders				
			Gallywix: Trade Secrets of a Trade Prince	World of Warcraft: The Comic				

Events	WoW Expansion	Novels			Curse of the Worgen	Bloodsworn	Class Series
Gods surface, and corrupt the land.							
Illidan Stormrage returns to Draenor (now Outland), where he overthrows the Legion's presence, and starts building his army to kill Sargeras, the leader of the Legion. He is defeated by Azerothian adventurers.	World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	Illidan					
		Night of the Dragon	Lor'Themar Theron: In the Shadows of the Sun				World of Warcraft: Mage
The long-slumbering Lich King reawakens, and the Alliance and Horde go to Northrend to defeat him once and for all. An agent of the Alliance, Bolvar Fordragon, now undead, takes the mantle as leader of the Scourge, so the undead can be kept in check.	World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King		Garrosh Hellscream: Heart of War				
Neltharion, the black dragon aspect, emerges as the corrupted Deathwing to wreak havoc on Azeroth, altering the world forever. Meanwhile, Thrall leaves the mantle of leadership to Garrosh Hellscream, a promising young warrior, who bombs Theramore in an effort to make Kalimdor a continent for the		Stormrage					
		The Shattering: Prelude to Cataclysm			World of Warcraft: Curse of the Worgen		World of Warcraft: Shaman
			Baine Bloodhoof: As Our Fathers Before Us				
			Council of Three Hammers				
	World of Warcraft: Cataclysm	Wolfheart	Genn Greymane: Lord of His Pack	Gelbin Mekka-torque: Cut Short		World of Warcraft: Blood-sworn	
			Varian Wrynn: Blood of Our Fathers	Charge of the Aspects			
			Tyrande and Malfurion: Seeds of Faith				

Horde, ending the tentative peace that's been instated for years.		Jaina Proudmoore: Tides of War			
The mists around the mysterious continent, Pandaria, disperse, and the Horde and Alliance bring their war to the continent. Hellscream searches the continent for a way to empower himself, only to be thwarted by the son of the human king, prince Anduin Wrynn, who almost dies in the process. Hellscream is put on trial but escapes to an alternate reality of non-ruined Draenor.	World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria	Vol'jin: Shadows of the Horde		Pearl of Pandaria	
		War Crimes			
Garrosh subverts the Legion's influence on the orcish Horde in this alternate reality, and thus gains their trust and help in trying to take the Azeroth from which he came. Garrosh is finally defeated by Thrall, who declares Vol'jin the troll leader of the horde, but in Garrosh' place rises Gul'dan, a minion of the Legion, who escapes back to original Azeroth, to conquer the planet once and for all.	World of Warcraft: Warlords of Draenor			World of Warcraft: Warlords of Draenor series	
				World of Warcraft: Legion series	

Gul'dan arrives on Azeroth, and extorts a strong energy source from a lost, elf civilization, so he can infuse the dead body of Illidan Stormrage with the power of Sargeras. Before he is defeated, however, he manages to kill both faction leaders, Varian Wrynn and Vol'jin. Anduin becomes king, and Vol'jin chooses Sylvanas to become warchief.	World of Warcraft: Legion					Harbingers

With this table, it not only becomes evident that there a several overlapping **microstories**, but also that the **transmedial microstories'** narratives mainly take place from *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* (2002) and onwards, thinning out again after *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (2010). Of course, this table only takes transmedial interrelationship into account; publishing dates would show a completely different table.

When considering the narrative structure of the *Warcraft* **storyworld**, it is important to note its style, which differs greatly from the 'typical' narrative. Firstly, there is the factor of changing **macrostory** centrality to take into account; the *Warcraft* narrative's backbone was, for many years, the real-time strategy trilogy, before *World of Warcraft* came out. Secondly, the factor of continuous installments: While it is entirely possible that Blizzard Entertainment have planned out the entirety of the narrative – beginning, middle, end – it is just as possible that they are simply going expansion by expansion, **macrostory installment** by **macrostory installment**.

Since there is no end in sight for the *Warcraft* narrative just yet, let us go forth with the latter presumption. Using this **macrostory installment**-specific focus, it becomes possible to see a

pattern in the narrative structure: Each installment, from *World of Warcraft* (2004) onwards focuses on one specific antagonist, and usually ends with killing the antagonist, yet leaving the storyline open for future usage. Beyond this, there has also been a sort of overarching narrative regarding the main characters (although this term is used *very* loosely), and the main conflict, the wars between the Alliance and Horde.

There is definitely a matter of faction-specific narrative voice in the **storyworld**. Since one of the first choices a player must make is whether she wishes to play one faction or the other – Alliance or Horde – it is obvious that this conflict is a focal point for the game. With **macrostory installments** like *World of Warcraft: Warlords of Draenor* (2014), where one of the highlights is one Horde warchief fighting another Horde warchief on the Horde's home-planet, it is obvious there is an unbalanced focus. Similarly, when a hero of the Alliance, Bolvar Fordragon, becomes the solution to a problem instigated by a fallen hero of the Alliance, Arthas Menethil, in *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King* (2008), the pendulum swings the other way.

Overall, this pendulum swings back and forth according to expansion, although there are also character-specific conflicts that reach into this overarching faction-based conflict, such as Sylvanas Windrunner killing the son and heir of Gilnean King Genn Greymane (*World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (2010), which is a conflict that can, of course, reach across **macrostory installments**, which it also does, as King Greymane gets his revenge on Sylvanas in *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016) (see Appendix D.2)

A particular pattern, however, is hard to decipher, beyond the fact that there is one major antagonist, and that the storyline associated with this antagonist is typically left open-ended (Bolvar Fordragon becoming the Lich King, for instance). Obviously, for each **macrostory installment**, there is a climax, where the antagonist is defeated; a pre-occurring build-up, during which the

player gathers her forces and hones her skills so she can defeat the antagonist; and (typically) a lead into the next **macrostory installment**-specific narrative.

Types of Microstories in the *Warcraft* Narrative

While some, like the *Harbingers* shortfilm series (2016), run somewhat concurrently with the release of their respective **macrostory installment** (i.e.: the *World of Warcraft: Legion* expansion (2016), in this instance), some, like *Tides of Darkness* (Rosenberg. 2007) are released much later than their respective macrostory (i.e.: *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness* (1995)), and some are not tied directly to a video game installment (i.e.: "World of Warcraft: Mage" (Knaak. 2010)). Therefore, the *Warcraft* narrative must be assumed to contain both **interstitial microstories**, parallel **microstories**, and peripheral **microstories**, according to Scolari (2009). User-generated content platforms do not immediately appear relevant to this study, although a note should be made on behalf of "Lor'Themar Theron: In the Shadows of the Sun" (Pine. 2012), as this piece was originally a fanfiction text (and, as such, user-generated), but was later recognized by Blizzard Entertainment as official lore. However, this is the only apparent instance of user-generated content having an impact on the *Warcraft* narrative, and should therefore be viewed as a special case.

As already established, the video games act as the **macrostory**, and the novels, short stories, comics, manga, web series and chronicles will therefore be considered **microstories**, as will the real-time strategy game trilogy and accompanying expansions. Where there are instances of the **microstories** influencing the **macrostory** (characters and character arcs initially introduced in a **microstory**, and later brought into the **macrostory**), the **macrostory** is generally the deciding party in what becomes official lore, and what does not.

For the most part, the video game installments act as one cohesive, consecutive narrative, although some breaks exist, especially between the earlier video games (*Warcraft I: Orcs and Humans* (1994) to *World of Warcraft* (2004)). From *World of Warcraft* (2004) onwards, the

installments act as a constantly evolving narrative, where there is an overarching narrative, and smaller, installment-specific narratives, much like there are season-specific narratives and one overarching narrative in a TV series.

For instance, during *World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria* (2012), the installment-specific narrative dealt with exploring a new continent, Pandaria, where the overarching narrative dealt with dethroning a corrupt faction leader, Warchief Garrosh Hellscream (See Appendix C.1). This has always been the tradition with the *Warcraft* narrative, from *World of Warcraft* (2004) and onwards.

Skewed Interrelationship

The fact that the **macrostory** is constantly changing is not a new concept, even if the medium of choice is not known for doing it. Scolari's own example, the TV series, *24*, similarly has installments (seasons), and an overarching narrative, which also includes its **microstories**, but can (to a certain extent) be enjoyed without these **microstories**.

Similarly, the *Warcraft* narrative, being firmly situated in the interactive, digital medium, should also have its major plot points and character arcs happening in the **macrostory**. However, this has not always been the case. With the release of *The Shattering: Prelude to Cataclysm* (Golden. 2010), a literally game-changing death occurred. The racial leader for the Tauren, High Chieftain Cairne Bloodhoof (See Appendix C.2), was killed in honorable combat by the aforementioned corrupt warchief, Garrosh Hellscream. This removed Cairne from the game as of *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (2010), as the novel, quite clearly preludes this installment of the **macrostory**. The playerbase reacted negatively to the fact that a major character death happened outside of the **macrostory** ("When Did Cairne Bloodhoof Die?" 2010), expressing anger towards Blizzard Entertainment for not honoring a beloved character with an in-game death, as that would be how the most players, naturally, would be able to experience it.

Cairne's death has also led to a fair amount of confusion among the playerbase, as the events of his death are not clear among the majority, since the **microstory** in which his death occurred is not accessible to all. After this novel, Blizzard began publishing their short stories online, which are all free to access, as well as their web series, also free to access, and, in the case of *Chronicle Vol. 1* (Metzen et al. 2016), released a free preview on their website, worldofwarcraft.com.

In short, it is not hard to see that the response to *The Shattering: Prelude to Cataclysm*'s (Golden. 2010) ending a focal character of the **storyworld** has been negative, and that this is therefore considered a low point in the **microstory-macrostory** interrelationship of the *Warcraft* narrative. however, what has come from this instance is that the hierarchy of the **transmedial storyworld** of *Warcraft* has become more transparent, and that the **macrostory** installments are now the only ones to include major character deaths.

Illidan – And the Importance of Interstitial Microstories

To discuss the importance of the non-video game installments of the *Warcraft* narrative, the novel, *Illidan* by William King (2016), will be the main focus, although other texts will be drawn in as well to not only support arguments made, but also to add nuance: As will become evident, the literary (and non-literary, non-video game) encyclopedia behind the *Warcraft* narrative is a vast one.

Deciphering a Microstory

Most of the *Warcraft* literary materials take place in between video game installments, and could easily be written off as **interstitial microstories**. *Illidan* (King. 2016), however, runs somewhat concurrently with an older expansion of the *Warcraft* **macrostory**, namely the *World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade* expansion (2007). Considering the almost-decade long span between the release date of the expansion and the book, the author had not only a responsibility to stay true to the original material, but also the challenge of keeping the material interesting. After all,

the expansion's storyline is still available for playthrough to this day, left untouched so the player can experience it as a part of the grander, narrative matrix that *World of Warcraft* (2004) is.

King opted for creating a new insight into the expansion's storyline, by showing the plotpoints of the narrative through the eyes of several antagonists. A key point, which acts as the foundation for this analysis, is the climax of the book, a final battle between the supposed forces of good and evil: The playerbase against Illidan Stormrage (See Appendix C.3), the namesake of the book.

Illidan has throughout the novel attempted to fight against the Legion – a demonic force that seeks to destroy the entire world – while the warden Maiev Shadowsong (See Appendix C.4) has attempted to hinder his every step. While there are many facets to the story itself, especially since motivations that were left unclear (or even willfully portrayed wrongly) in *World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade* (2007) are explained in *Illidan* (King. 2016), the focus of this analysis is how the book treats the playerbase as characters within its story.

Fulton's and Murphet's definitions of the concept of focalization (2005) become relevant with instances such as that surrounding *Illidan* (King. 2016) and its relationship with its **macrostory**, since it is a change of focalization that allows for the parallel **microstory** in the first place. Via this change in focalization, it also became possible for *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016) to not only feature decidedly antagonistic characters as good guys, but also to explain their (perceived) change in allegiance.

This brings us into Ryan's idea of conceptions (2014), since I will argue that both types are to be found in the *Warcraft* narrative, again, due to its previously mentioned large and versatile repertoire. Again, *Illidan* (King. 2016) will be used as an example, though other texts may be drawn in as well, to further illuminate the nuances of the **macrostory**/**storyworld** at hand.

Considering Ryan's rather unwavering definition of the logical conception – "these texts must respect the facts of the original text if they are to share its logical storyworld." (2014, 18) – in relation to what has already been established as a parallel **microstory**, *Illidan* (King. 2016) can very easily be established as a logical conception of the *Warcraft* **storyworld**.

The final battle follows the gameplay of *World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade* (2007) very well. Firstly, it utilizes phrases uttered by NPCs (Non-Playable Characters) found in the battle (King. 2016, 287; Blizzard. 2007). Secondly, and more interestingly, it utilizes the playerbase itself, dubbed *adventurers*. Inclusion of the playerbase in this way is quite normal; in *Vol'jin: Shadows of the Horde* (Stackpole. 2013), there is also a recount of an in-game scenario (a specific type of instance), called "Dagger in the Dark" (Blizzard. 2012), in which the main character, Vol'jin (See Appendix C.5), talks directly to his 'companions' (Stackpole. 2013, 20-21), a fictionalization of the playerbase. Here, the reader – who is most likely also a player of the game – can imagine themselves as the unnamed, unspecified character that Vol'jin speaks to.

Translating a Battle from one Medium to Another

The original version of the battle takes place within the Black Temple raid, an instance in which a group of players can face a more challenging foe together than the open world otherwise provides. Within the instance are sequential bosses that you have to fight your way through in order to get to the final boss, in this case Illidan Stormrage. Along the way, it is very typical to "wipe", meaning the whole team dies, and has to try their hands at whatever boss killed them once more, sometimes many times more (Blizzard. 2004-).

Different players have different responsibilities throughout the fight. One or two players are responsible for tanking – basically taking hits from the boss, so the other players can focus on bringing down the boss' health. These damage dealing players are usually the largest subgroup, as a lot of them are needed to kill the foe. To keep the tank and damage dealers alive is usually a healer,

sometimes more. The typical raid is composed of two tanks, five healers and eighteen damage dealers.

The game mechanics of fight in *World of Warcraft* are very simple: You press a button on your keyboard, and the ability is activated. This simulation cannot, of course, be translated directly to the written medium. Instead, King has opted to describe the final fight between the adventurers and Illidan thusly:

> Illidan leapt forward and struck a powerful blow with his warglaive. The warrior raised a shield to block it. Illidan took advantage of the opening to slash at his neck with the left-hand blade. Blood spurted from the warrior's throat, but healing magic surged in, drawing the blood back and knitting torn flesh and severed veins.
> […]
> Illidan sensed a presence behind him, a shadow figure bearing two blades. The poison coating the swords made his nostrils twitch. He turned just as his assailant was about to drive the weapons into his back. With one hand he caught him by the throat. With a word of power, he ignited his foe's flesh with persistent fire and cast him aside to burn down to blackened bones. (2016, 309)

Three characters are here introduced: A warrior in the role of a tank, some unspecified type of spellcaster in the role of a healer, and lastly, a rogue in the role of a damage dealer. Already in these short descriptions, the book deviates from the game. Within the frame of the gaming medium, the player is able to choose a variety of classes, not only the three mentioned in the book.

Considering the fact that the narrative progression differs from game to book, this appears to be an instance of parallel story, as defined by Scolari (2009), which I also initially determined it as, as it builds its story parallel to the **macrostory**. Of course, it is arguable whether this is the case for the entire novel, as most of it could be considered an **interstitial microstory**, since it expands rather than subverts the **macrostory**. The subversion of **macrostory** (in gaming terms, "retconning the lore") is something that will further be elaborated upon in the following chapter.

Artistic liberty has obviously been taken to ensure a certain level of immersion; a typical fight in *World of Warcraft* (2004) is just not all that fascinating, if directly translated into the written medium, whereas a fight scene, in which each character acts more according to the simulation than the reality of the gameplay (in other words, according to the fantasy the game tries to set up) makes for more compelling reading material. During this short fight scene, we see a healing spell in effect, which presents itself much more interestingly than simply refilling a health point bar, as is the case in the game: Here, Illidan manages to slash through the warrior's neck, the literary equivalent of a very large hit in the tank's health point bar, and an imagining of how this might heal is described as a sort of rewinding; the blood flows back into the veins, and the wound is "knitted" shut.

Similarly, the rogue employs an ability known as "backstab", which is described thusly in-game:

Melee attack that generates 1 Combo Point, and **deals more damage when you are behind the target**. (Appendix B.1, my highlights)

The unnamed rogue character in the novel obviously mimics this move, although in a much more exciting way than a simple click of a button. This is reminiscent of the usage of food to restore energy found in *Arthas: Rise of the Lich King* (Golden. 2009, 160), as well as the usage of a hearthstone in *The Shattering: Prelude to Cataclysm* (Golden. 2010, 86-87). In other words, it is the implementation of gameplay elements – an ability, a restoration method, and a teleportation method – that lends some credibility to the novel as a re-imagination of the game's narrative, since the narrative is, inherently, interactive. Since the book cannot suddenly become interactive, it instead includes re-imaginations of interactivity.

Clearly, the gameplay has been taken into account, when writing the fight scene, and then adapted to the literary medium. This attitude towards the **microstory installments** almost perfectly fits Jenkins' understanding of **transmedia**, previously mentioned:

> Each medium does what it does best - so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play. (2003)

Of course, Jenkins' definition does not allow for parallel stories, but the gist of his meaning still fits the *Warcraft* narrative, although, perhaps, flipped slightly on its head: Introduced in a game, expanded (and revisited) through novels, and comics, and reimagined in a film.

This statement is also highly reminiscent of Herman's (2004) **medium-dependence** synthesis, where **medium-dependence** is not so much a dichotomy as it is a spectrum. Arguably, this is what allows for a narrative progression in *Illidan* (King. 2016) that shifts from **medium-dependent** ('enhanced' fight scenes that are reminiscent but not faithful to the original fights), to relatively **medium-independent** (elaborating plot points via a viewpoint focused on the original antagonist). If one were to view *Illidan* (King. 2016) as part of a larger, literary, narrative encyclopedia, there must also be allowed for a spectrum, rather than a dichotomy of **medium-dependence**.

The *Warcraft* narrative spans across novels, short stories (both physical and online), comics (also both physical and online), manga, animated miniseries, and even a three-part chronicle (out of which two have been released), for a total of more than 30 titles of various levels of narrative importance and accessibility. While some, like the *Chronicle* trilogy (2016-), carry huge, narrative weight (more on these later) since they not only deal with, but affect almost every aspect of the greater, narrative settting, others, like the *Dark Riders* graphic novel (Costa. 2011), carry very little narrative weight, as they deal with characters that were not to take part in the **macrostory** (although

some of the main characters of *Dark Riders* were included in the *World of Warcraft*: *Legion* expansion in 2016). Arguably, little else could be expected from such a large and versatile repertoire.

It should also be noted that many of the earlier titles of *Warcraft*'s narrative encyclopedia were supposed to be part of much larger volumes (such as *Dark Riders* (Costa. 2011)), whereas others have been subverted by newer additions (such as the *World of Warcraft: The Comic* (Simonson and Simonson. 2007), which has been subverted by the *Chronicle* books).

Taking this somewhat inconsistent repertoire into account, concluding that *Illidan* (King. 2016) can be situated on different points of the **medium-dependence** spectrum appears more plausible. One must also consider the sheer size, age and type of the narrative in question: Since *World of Warcraft* (2004) is a constantly expanding (and sometimes, like with *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (2010), revised) **storyworld**, there is no precedence, and therefore, no format to adhere to.

To summarize, *Illidan* (King. 2016) is a parallel story to *World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade* (2007). Although *Illidan* is the newer installment, it does not subvert the original narrative – especially not regarding the interactive element of the original narrative (i.e.: the influence of the playerbase). It does, however, include re-imaginations of interactivity, namely usages of in-game abilities. In regards to **medium-dependence**, it introduces a spectrum, which well aligns with Herman's synthesis (Herman. 2004), and which is also supported by other parallel **microstories** and **interstitial microstories** within the *Warcraft* narrative.

Exercising Control – And the Relevance of Interstitial Microstories

As now proven, the **interstitial microstories** employed by Blizzard Entertainment to tell their narrative follow Ryan's definition of logical conception. However, arguably, there is also a case for an imaginative conception, although this one is debatable. As Ryan describes it, in imaginative

conception, characters' "destinies may vary from text to text" (2014. 18). In other words, this could

be applicable to alternative, narrative universes.

The Macrostory Affecting Microstories

     After the release of the *Harbingers – Khadgar* animated shortfilm, a character was seemingly

retconned with one sentence; "After your failings, it was decided that none could resist the

temptation of such power" (2016, 01:58). This sentence is said to the supposed ghost of Medivh

(See Appendix C.6) – the Guardian of Tirisfal before his son, Med'an (See Appendix C.7), took up

the mantle. However, with this sentence, Med'an's role as Guardian of Tirisfal (which he had been

since 2009, according to the *World of Warcraft: The Comic* (Simonson and Simonson. 2007)

becomes subverted. After some debate back and forth, the Lead World Designer, Alex Afrasiabi,

tweeted that only Med'an's status as Guardian of Tirisfal had been retconned – the character was

very much still part of the lore (Afrasiabi. 2016).

     However, there is no mention of the character in later installments, such as *Chronicle Volume

II* (2017), where the relationship between Med'an's parents is described rather vaguely:

> She had no information he needed, and she was a curiosity. He had not seen her during his visits to Draenor, and he made no mention of those sojourns to her. She was neither truly orc nor truly draenei. **Garona was an outcast, and he sympathized with that.** What was more, she was remarkably intelligent. Garona could already speak the human tongue fairly well. Medivh taught her new words and phrases. She picked them up rather quickly.
> It was clear that Garona was no threat to him, and thanks to Gul'dan's endless cruelty, she had no real love for the Horde. **Medivh decided that it would be more valuable to have an ally – or even a friend –** among the orcs than another spirit haunting his home. He freed Garona, but he also extended an invitation to her: **she could return to Karazhan whenever she liked.** (2017, 118, my highlights)

     Evidently, there is no proof of a romantic relationship between his parents, or of the character

himself. However, in the **microstory**, *World of Warcraft: The Comic* (Simonson and Simonson.

2007), the character is still considered canon, even though he has not been introduced into the

macrostory, like other characters that emerged in microstories have. Ergo, *World of Warcraft: The Comic* (Simonson and Simonson. 2007) can in this context be considered an alternative, narrative universe – an imaginative conception of a **storyworld**.

Microstories Affecting the Macrostory

With *Dark Riders* (Costa. 2011), the character of Revil Kost was introduced, a human priest (See Appendix C.8). As evident from the table of chronology, this **microstory** runs concurrently with the **macrostory** *World of Warcraft* (2004). In *Dark Riders*, Revil Kost searches for an artifact called the scythe of Elune along with a few other artifacts. By the end of the comic, the scythe has been given to others for safe-keeping. As such, we can assume that these companions of Kost kept the artifact safe until it reappeared in *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016), along with Revil Kost and a few other characters from *Dark Riders* (Costa. 2011).

Discounting the great leap in time, the inclusion of **microstory** plotlines (finding the scythe of Elune), and **microstory** characters, is an interesting showcasing of the IP holder level of control that Harvey (2014) talks about. After all, much like Scolari's strategies for expanding narrative worlds (2009), when a type of strategy has been decided upon, it should remain unchangeable. However, specifically with the plotline and characters of *Dark Riders* (Costa. 2011), a change has occurred in how tightly Blizzard controls their text.

Dark Riders (Costa. 2011) – as well as the *World of Warcraft: The Comic* (Simonson and Simonson. 2007)*, World of Warcraft: Curse of the Worgen* (Neilson and Waugh. 2011)*, World of Warcraft: Bloodsworn* (Wagner. 2013) and *World of Warcraft: Pearl of Pandaria* (Neilson. 2012) – is published by DC Comics, a third party to whom the license has been given. This could either make *Dark Riders* (Costa. 2011) a piece of directed **transmedia** storytelling, or a piece of devolved **transmedia** storytelling. Considering the fact that *Dark Riders* so closely follows the "ruleset" established by *World of Warcraft* (2004), it is quite easy to write it off as directed **transmedia**

storytelling. However, to do so would be to discount the very crux of the matter: *Dark Riders* (Costa. 2011) adds characters and plotlines to the established narrative, which would count as a changing of the narrative, and therefore make *Dark Riders* (Costa. 2011) a piece of devolved transmedia storytelling.

Introducing plotlines and characters from devolved **transmedia** storytelling installments made by a third party into the main intellectual property indicates that the IP holder (Blizzard Entertainment, in this case) obviously considers the plotlines and characters important to the **storyworld**. In other words, Blizzard Entertainment has proven the narrative significance of its devolved **transmedia** storytelling installments, and thereby its **microstories**, by introducing aspects of said **microstories** into the **macrostory**. Similarly, the fact that the Med'an plotline from *World of Warcraft: The Comic* (Simonson and Simonson. 2007) has *not* been included in the **macrostory** indicates a lack of narrative value in this particular **microstory**.

The Role of the Producer

However, it is not only the **microstories** which can differ from the **macrostory** in the case of *World of Warcraft* (2004). The *Warcraft* **macrostory** comprises several, individual installments, as previously established. However, it is not the same team of creators that creates each installment of the **macrostory**. A notable change in creator occurred in late 2016 when many senior team members left Blizzard Entertainment (Higgins. 2016), including Chris Metzen, Senior Vice President of Blizzard Entertainment, and unofficial mascot and spokesperson for *World of Warcraft* (2004) (Metzen has also voiced the character of Thrall, a central figure in the *Warcraft* narrative since 2002 (Blizzard. 2002-)), as well as Tom Chilton, Game Director of *World of Warcraft* since its conception.

The new Game Director for *World of Warcraft* (2004), Ion Hazzikostas, has stated that he and

the team has respected the input from Metzen during the development of *World of Warcraft: Legion*

(2016), which was led by Hazzikostas' team:

> A decisive defeat of the Burning Legion would effectively close the book on all the major
> chapters of Warcraft lore. More to the point, it closes the door on many of Chris Metzen's
> visions, who served as the prime mover of Warcraft's lore for more than two decades. Metzen
> left during the mass exodus following *Legion*'s launch, and I asked Hazzikostas if the
> upcoming seeming final showdown with the *Legion* was meant to be a symbolic farewell to
> Metzen as well – an act akin to Shakespeare's Prospero casting his staff into the sea at the
> close of The Tempest.
> "Metzen was invaluable in big-picture guidance, and we would kind of run concepts by him
> and pitch him ideas for our expansion, because there are few people who have the same knack
> for nailing what is cool as Metzen. It's not like he was the one writing the quests, or sitting in
> the meeting rooms every day. He was a far too busy person for that," he says.
> (Johnson. 2017)

So evidently, while Hazzikostas et al have effectively taken over the game narrative, the

World of Warcraft: Legion installment adheres to the **storyworld** set up by Metzen et al. This, of

course, makes sense, when one considers the fact that Hazzikostas was not brought in to replace

Chilton, but rather worked for Chilton as Assistant Game Director for almost two years.

This ties in well with Ryan and Thon's idea of the **storyworld**: that it is not defined by the

author (in this case, the team of developers), but by the reader; the author/producer merely provides

a blueprint (2014, 16). However, for the *Warcraft* narrative, at least, providing a consistent

blueprint is a priority, as made evident by the fact that the new producer turned to the old producer

to make sure the new **macrostory** installment was reminiscent of (and up to par with) the older

ones.

This point can also be argued for within the realm of **narratology**, using Murphet's theory of

a "narrative voice" (2004). Evidently, there is a loss of narrative voice that has occurred after

Metzen's departure. However, this is something the remaining team is aware of, and are trying to not only adjust to, but emulate.

So, to summarize, Blizzard Entertainment exercises control of their intellectual property, *World of Warcraft*, in a number of ways. Firstly, they decide what is lore, what is not, and what might be in alternative narratives. Secondly, these **microstories** – even when not created directly by Blizzard Entertainment – *can* influence the **macrostory**, but still revolve around the **macrostory**; the **macrostory** has the highest position in the hierarchy. Lastly, while it is not the same producer (or producers) who have worked on the **storyworld** throughout its continuous inception, the **storyworld** still remains consistent, and so does the narrative voice.

Player Agency in the Narrative

It has now been established that the **transmedial microstories** are not only important to the *Warcraft* narrative, but that they can influence the **macrostory**. Little attention has been granted to the interactive qualities of the narrative, however, which will be given now. The point of this subchapter will be to map out the central ways in which the player influences the narrative of *World of Warcraft* (2004). The reason for doing this is mainly to ensure that the text in question is still treated as an interactive, digital text, but also to explore the role of the player in the narrative.

Ludus and Paidea & Play Styles in *World of Warcraft*

Firstly, I will explore the player's role within the realm of the MMORPG, and the player's influence on the game's narrative, using the **ludologist** concepts of ludus and paidea. Why branch into **ludology** in an otherwise **narratologist** analysis? The reason is twofold: Firstly, considering the **ludologists'** proven usage of **narratological** tools, it seems only fitting to further bridge the gap between the two not-so-opposites, and, secondly, there are few to none **narratologist** texts dealing directly with the player's influence on the game narrative.

I will argue that both ludus and paidea are present in *World of Warcraft* (2004), in its current format, simply because it is up to the individual player how they wish to play the game, and whether they wish to play with a specific goal (which would make the play session ludus). Paidea, in its purest form, is simply exploring unendingly the possibilities that the game in question offers. To some extent, paidea is therefore – in the case of *World of Warcraft* – a necessary first step to achieve ludus.

World of Warcraft (2004) contains within it many different gameplay styles, such as dungeon crawling, questing, resource gathering, role-playing (which is the only one mentioned that does not increase your avatar's level) and pet battling (defeating, levelling, and taming vanity pets).

However, these are only the play styles directly offered by the game. Other than this, it is also possible to 'play the auction house', which means to trade back and forth using the in-game auction house, and of course an infinite amount of social games you can play with the other players. I argue that almost all of these different play styles start with the player simply wanting to play, and only later, if the style appeals to the player, will the player create a goal.

This is not to say that paidea and ludus are on equal footing within *World of Warcraft* (2004). Ludus far outweighs paidea, considering the end-goal-orientation put forth by the game itself with its achievement system (Appendix B.2), as well as general, chronological gameplay with its level-based progression. However, the game is still set up in a way that encourages you to explore these diverse play styles, which means that an introductory level, paidea is encouraged.

Player Agency & Role-Playing

Speaking specifically of player agency in a narrative context, it might also be helpful to view ludus and paidea as a spectrum, rather than a dichotomy. In *World of Warcraft* (2004) it is possible to role-play; there are even servers dedicated to this specific purpose. Role-playing can be anything

from a spur-of-the-moment thing between two strangers to a meticulously planned course of action among a larger group.

Role-playing, in a context of ludus and paidea, is an interesting topic. Where Frasca insists that the difference between narrative and ludus is that narrative is a pre-determined sequences, and ludus is a non-pre-determined session (1999). However, for certain role-playing sessions, despite the term, there is a great amount of pre-determined, sequential content. While each character, played by an individual player, can choose what to say, it is possible for a game master to decide the general layout of the session, and how (and whether) it ties into a larger narrative amongst the group.

However, on the other end of the spectrum is the impromptu role-playing session. Here, two players will engage with one another in-character (the premise is of course that they have created characters for their avatars), with no pre-determined goal, other than, perhaps, to have fun improvising. Here, arguably, is a case of paidea: Neither player has a particular goal with the playing session, and they cannot communicate about creating one, as this would break character, thereby ruining the game. Of course, considering paidea and ludus a spectrum would allow for the most important aspect of a **ludological** perspective, which is what has laid the foundation for paidea and ludus to exist: The player's intention is central to whether the playing session is one or the other.

Player Agency in Game-created Narratives

However, these findings are, of course, only relevant in player-created narratives, which the game can very well allow for, but not dictate or mediate. The player's involvement in the *Warcraft* narrative is an interesting one. Much like Ryan argued, the narrative begins when the player starts it (2013, 3). For the sake of simplicity, when talking about the beginning of the game's narrative, I specifically mean the immediate questline a player is met with after having created their avatar, not

the beginning of the central myth of the *Warcraft* narrative. While the game certainly encourages the player to start this quest immediately (usually by placing the player right in front of the first quest-giver, see Appendix B.3), the game will not 'lock' the player in by refusing the player the remainder of the game, if the player chooses to simply walk away from the quest. The player may seek to establish her own narrative, or her own ludus, as discussed above, but the game's built-in narrative cannot start without the player's say-so.

As such, the player can be argued to not just simply be an agent in the narrative, but *the* agent in the narrative. Of course, this statement presupposes that a narrative is not, as the **ludologists** claim, a sequence of past events, but rather a sequence of pre-established events, which is more in line with Ryan's understanding of narrative (2013). Again, though, the narrative only begins when the player decides, so how does the narrative appeal to the player?

Firstly, the game utilizes exclamation and question marks to indicate a quest (Appendix B.3), which act as the primary driver for the narrative. These quests will not only bring the player around the open world, but also occasionally into closed-off instances (dungeons and raids). However, what do these signposts mean without an indicator that they are just that? To help the new player along, there are tutorials in place, which will pop up on the HUD for any new player (appendix B.3). This direct addressing evokes thoughts on Fulton's discussion of diegesis versus mimesis (2005, 18).

While it is arguable whether it is the game or the producer (text or poet, basically) that speaks directly to the player, it is evident that there is no illusion of character to veil the message during the tutorial. Ergo, for the sake of aiding the player in beginning and continuing the narrative, illusion (and immersion) has been subverted in favor of direct assistance, which becomes diegetic.

However, for the remainder of the game, mimesis is almost constantly employed. Although there are instances of quick-time events (QTEs), where simple instructions will pop up on the screen, for the most part, instructions are given via the quest-giver, an in-game character. These

instructions will not only tell you what to do (usually kill something), but also where to do it, why to do it, and in some cases how to do it. Motivation on the quest-giver's behalf is therefore given, where the player's (as well as the player's avatar's) is assumed.

Narrative Beginnings, Endings, and Non-Endings

This part will deal specifically with linearity and cyclicality of game narrative and -play. Now that the importance and relevance of **microstories** has been established, and the interactive aspects of this particular narrative have been reviewed and analysed, the main focus of this paper can now be determined: Whether or not the *Warcraft* narrative is linear or cyclical.

Open-end End-game Gameplay

Ironically enough, I will start out with a counterargument to narrative linearity in the *Warcraft* narrative first, because the newest installment of the **macrostory**, *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016), has somewhat changed its narrative chronology. With the previous installments, the narrative progression has hinged on a level-based progression, in which the player had a few choices to make regarding which zone to play in, but must choose one fit to their level. Usually, the game will aid the player in choosing a new zone, when they have played through the given zone-based questline, by offering a quest that will introduce the player to the next zone (Appendix B.5) – a so-called "breadcrumb quest".

However, for *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016), and possibly due to the switch in producer team, zone progression is no longer linear. The player now has the option to choose between four zones, Val'sharah, Stormheim, Azsuna, and Highmountain. When the player has reached max level, another zone, Suramar, becomes available (see Appendix B.6 for map of the zones). With a patch released on March 23rd, 2017 (Blizzard, *World of Warcraft: Legion*. 2016), yet another zone,

Broken Shore, became available. Let us for now focus on the first four, since both Suramar and Broken Shore follow a linear, **macrostory** narrative.

Within the four zones, there are still linear narratives, all culminating in finding a different relic, and all having one specific antagonist from whom the relic must be kept safe. The only non-linear aspect is the fact that it is the player who chooses where to go. It is possible to abandon a zone early on, but the game will encourage the player to finish the zone-specific narrative via the previously mentioned relics, to fully experience the story of the zone. Along the way, there are achievements and cut-scenes – non-gameplay rewards – that also encourage the player to continue.

Does this lack of linear zone-progression mean that the *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016) installment of the **macrostory** is cyclical? I would argue not, due to the fact that the overall narrative is still linear, when including the previously mentioned end-game zones, Suramar and Broken Shore. Although the individual zones, which could be seen as individual parts of the macrostory, much like television show episodes are part of a season, do not have a set, sequential order in which to experience them, they have similar, narrative properties. Lastly, since the player does not return to the narrative content of the zones, the linearity of the overall narrative of the **macrostory** is not changed by the playerbase choosing their own zone-progression.

There is, however, also a different argument to be made towards narrative linearity of *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016), and that one has to do with player-specific progression. As previously mentioned, there are a variety of classes to choose from, all of which, until *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016) only changed the playstyle. However, with *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016), a concept called 'class order halls' were introduced, in which the player, depending on which class she has chosen, will have a slightly different experience, although, like with the four basic zones, there are many similarities in the narrative progression.

In "Exercising Control", the character of Revil Kost was mentioned, who reappears in *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016) as a quest-giver. Kost only appears, however, for three out of the twelve available classes, as he is only tied to three of the class-specific questlines. With Kost, it is not so much a question if linear or cyclical narrative, but one of player-specific versus story-specific linearity. The *World of Warcraft* (2004) **macrostory** also has this factor to consider, which has been mentioned beforehand: That each player creates her own narrative by simply experiencing the narrative. By considering the narrative a producer-provided blueprint once again, the problem of player-specific narrative disappears.

Narrative Time and Temporality

To explore the nuances of linearity, Fulton's and Murphet's (2004) works on time and **temporality** will be used. Firstly, a decision will be made regarding which of Fulton's three **temporalities** of ordinary human experience the narrative of *World of Warcraft* (2004) belongs the most to, and why. Thereafter, it will be possible to discuss narrative time, story time and screen time. Lastly, after having decided on **temporality** and structure of narrative time, the duration of the narrative can be explored. The duration, in particular, is essential to analyze the body of the narrative, and can therefore lie a foundation for the next subchapter, "Narrative Beginnings".

Fulton's post-structuralist **temporalities**, socio**temporality**, human mental **temporality** and organic **temporality**, deal mainly with the human experience with the narrative (2005). So while it might be an obvious choice to call the *Warcraft* narrative socio**temporal**, considering its vast and long-lived myth, the interactive element, again, has the last word. Since the *Warcraft* narrative needs the player to interact with it, human mental **temporality** must be considered the main **temporality** of *World of Warcraft*. The human mental **temporality**, in this case, depends on each individual player's experience within the narrative, and, as such, changes depending on the player.

This is, of course, not to say that socio**temporality** is irrelevant in a *Warcraft*-context. Considering the strong, social bond that the community has together, and the shared memories that the playerbase have, socio**temporality** becomes relevant both outside and inside the plot of *World of Warcraft*. Inside of the plot, *World of Warcraft* builds a truly gargantuan narrative matrix, with racial tensions, love stories, tragedies, and the odd humoristic item, all relating to particular parts of the chronological progression of the narrative. Outside of the plot, and thus again dependent on the player's experience, there is also a social network that the player can interact with, and thereby generate a narrative through her usage of these user-generated content platforms (Scolari. 2009).

Strictly within the narrative context is time of story and time of plot, terms Murphet utilizes (2005) to describe the difference between what happens throughout the entire myth, and what happens purely during the plot, respectively. This distinction is perhaps the easiest tool for differentiating between myth and plot in the *Warcraft* narrative. As evident from the table of chronology in "Transmedial Interrelationships, Chronologically", some **microstories** serve only to lay the foundation for the central myth of the story, and do not, as such, partake in the plot development of the **macrostory** of *World of Warcraft* (2004).

Narratively speaking, while Juul dismisses reading time (1999), which can correspond with Murphet's screen time (2005), screen time can become relevant through usages of older medium forms embedded into the **macrostory**, namely cut-scenes. Particularly with the newest installment of the **macrostory**, *World of Warcraft: Legion* (2016), editing of these cut-scenes are reminiscent of typical film-making (much like Murphet has argued previously (2005, 48, footnote). Therefore, what is chosen by the creator to show (such as close-ups) during these cut-scenes affect the screen time in these instances (Appendix D.2).

Similarly, if we see reading time in a broader sense, perhaps by calling it consumption time for the time being, surely the choices behind quest-lines have been made to deliberately accentuate

some aspects of the narrative behind these quest-lines. A specific example could be an interaction-focused quest-line to be found in Hearthglen, a subzone in the larger zone Western Plaguelands. The climax of this quest-line is to kill a traitor within Hearthglen. However, before then, instead of killing her way to him, or simply just being told to kill him, the player must interrogate other residents of the town, and thereby gain the evidence against him. Thus, the narrative time is lengthened, the consumption time is increased, and the narrative quality is expanded meanwhile.

In the light of these different narrative times and **temporalities**, **microstories** can also express their worth, particularly the parallel **microstories**. Here, it is important to distinguish between **microstories** that simply run parallel with the chronologically corresponding **macrostory** installment – such as "Gelbin Mekkatorque: Cut Short" (Dayton. 2011) and its relationship with *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (2010) –, which should rather be considered peripheral **microstories**, – and actual, parallel **microstories** – such as the previously analyzed *Illidan* (King. 2016), which expand and explore the corresponding **macrostory** installment, *World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade* (2007).

Using its **transmedial** properties, the **microstory** can thus expand consumption time for that particular, corresponding **macrostory** installment, thereby influencing the plot time for the entire **macrostory**. Especially for the dedicated parallel **microstories**, such as *Tides of Darkness* (Rosenberg. 2007), which re-tells the story of *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness* (1995), a clear layout of the plot time is created, and, interestingly, an alternate consumption time is introduced. After all, reading a book and playing a game are vastly different actions.

This brings us to the final, **temporality**-related issue at hand: Duration. For Juul, duration denotes a passing of time, which, in video games are without flashbacks or –forwards (1999). However, for Huisman, duration simply denotes steadiness of narrative progress (2005). Arguably,

duration is, in this understanding, simply an indicator of the nature of the relationship between story time and plot time.

Making a detailed analysis of the duration of the *Warcraft* narrative would of course take up far too much time and far too many pages, but due to the previously mentioned table of chronology, we can see indications of the duration throughout, by looking at how many titles occur in how close a formation during certain installments. For example, around the *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (2010) **macrostory installment**, there are fourteen **transmedial microstories** of varying length and relevance to the **macrostory installment**. It can be assumed, like with *Tides of Darkness* (Rosenberg. 2007) adding to the time of *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness* (1995), that each **microstory** adds somewhat to the plot time during this part of the **macrostory**, both by adding and expanding plot.

On the other end of the spectrum are instances like the time around *World of Warcraft: Warlords of Draenor* (2014), during which there was only one **microstory** released, the "Warlords of Draenor" comic series (2014), which does not even run narratively concurrently with the expansion, but situates itself before the first **macrostory** installment. As such, it can be assumed that the narrative time in this instance is slower paced than in the previous example. We can therefore presume that the duration of the *Warcraft* narrative fluctuates fairly much, considering the overall inconsistency in interstitial and parallel **microstories** spread across the **macrostory**.

To summarize, the *Warcraft* narrative primarily utilizes human mental **temporality**, as it is an interactive piece of medium, and the focus must therefore be on the player experience of narrative time. The narrative still retains some socio**temporality**, though, both inside and outside of the plot. There is a distinction between the game's plot time and story time, the first of which spans only across the **macrostory installments** and its adhering **microstories**, the latter of which includes

every text that encompass the *Warcraft* myth. Lastly, a definitive conclusion cannot be given regarding the duration of the narrative, but there are indications that it fluctuates.

Narrative Beginnings

With narrative times and temporality now sufficiently covered, focus can be put on the narrative beginnings, which will be built on Buch Leander's work on literary beginnings. As also mentioned in the dedicated theory section, Buch Leander, while working strictly with literary beginnings, seems the most suitable source, as he is the only one working strictly with narrative beginnings, and his work can rather easily be adjusted for the interactive digital medium, which has hopefully been proven in the aforementioned theory section.

Before diving straight into narrative beginnings, however, a focus must first be given to *how* this beginning is narrated to the reader (in this case, the player). Buch Leander focuses shortly on Genette's concept of homodiegetic versus heterodiegetic narration, the first of which includes the narrator as "an openly declared narrator" (Buch Leander. 2012, 59), the second of which keeps the narrator strictly outside of the narrative (61). Interestingly, depending on viewpoint, I argue that both are relevant for the *Warcraft* narrative.

Firstly, the homodiegetic narration, which I argue the multitudinous quest-givers serve as. Considering the fact that these quest-givers give a comprehensive motivation for the tasks and errands they send the player on, a fair bit of narration is included via this giving of motivation. Since it is not specified that there has to be one particular narrator for the homodiegetic narration to work, I am taking liberties, and assuming there can be more than one. Of course, I am also taking liberties with the definition of narration, which can shift between characters, but rarely stops in the middle of narrating to make room for plot-driving action, as it arguably happens in *World of Warcraft* (2004).

This is where heterodiegetic narration enters. Between these instances of homodiegetic narration, I argue that the gameplay is filled with heterodiegetic narration, in the form of tutorials and other HUD-based giving of information to the player (Appendix B.3 and B.4), which, to a certain extent, narrates the game session for the player. The HUD will, for instance, show if there are any rare enemies nearby, will display directions to the current quest (although the player can switch focus to another quest at her own volition), and display any nearby resources the player might be interested in gathering. It should be noted that all these features can be turned off.

As such, the heterodiegetic narration is a much more open narration, whereas the homodiegetic narration is more definitive: The player can either accept or refuse the quest. In comparison, the heterodiegetic narration offers the player these aforementioned, different directions she can bring her gameplay continuously, acting much like the blueprint for further narrative previously mentioned.

Therefore, it can also be concluded that it is up to the player (as it has continuously been proven to be) which type of narration she prefers, and adjust accordingly. Can it therefore be said that the heterodiegetic narration is the most relevant? I'd say not. Again, considering the player's importance in this decision, both should, for a paper that does not focus specifically on reader-response, be considered equally relevant, as the player can at a moment's notice change from a primarily heterodiegetic narration to a homodiegetic narration, or vice versa (not to mention the difference in preference from player to player).

Regarding these form-specificities, there is also the matter of transitioning from the narrated world to the real world, and back. Rather logically, this can be translated to entering and exiting the game, which, in itself is not exactly an action bound in narrative.

Another narration-tool that can be found in *World of Warcraft* (2004) is that of racial introduction cut-scenes. Quite simply, when the player first creates an avatar, a cut-scene plays that

introduces the game, and more specifically, the chosen race to the player (Appendix D.1). This type of cut-scene introduction is quite normal for video games, and therefore employs another of Buch Leander's concepts of beginnings: Genre familiarity.

However, here, it is important to differentiate between an opening and a beginning of a narrative. As the above-mentioned cut-scenes are formulaic and a genre-trait, it can easily be distinguished as a part of the narrative opening, not beginning. But what is then the narrative beginning? Is it dependent on the player, as she creates her own narrative on the basis of the blueprint granted by the game, or is it dependent on said blueprint?

Utilizing yet another of Buch Leander's narrative, oppositional pairs, namely that of start and origin, I can shed some light on these questions. I argue that while the start, considering its prospective properties, indicates a player-focused narrative start, the origin of the *Warcraft* narrative incorporates the player experience in the grander **macrostory** of *World of Warcraft* (2004). In other words, the player's influence facilitates the start, for which the origin acts as the foundation. A note should be made specifically regarding the *Warcraft* origin. Although certain **microstories** do take place before the **macrostory installments**, these should be seen as part of the myth, and *not* as the true origin of the narrative. The origin of *Warcraft* should only be the original texts, which means the original RTS trilogy, *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans* (1994) to *Warcraft III: Frozen Throne* (2002).

So to summarize, both heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narration is utilized in the *Warcraft* narrative. This enables the game to address the player in a variety of ways, and in turn allows the player to influence the narrative progression at her own discretion. The difference in opening and beginning, in turn, allows for the game to create a formulaic, recognizable opening. From then on, the game's narrative beginning starts with the player, but is facilitated by the origin written into the central myth of the *Warcraft* narrative.

Player-driven Narrative Progression and Game-created Narrative Blueprint

As has become evident at this point, there is a considerable difference between the player-driven narrative progression, and the game-created narrative blueprint. Not only is there a difference in narrative time, but also in narrative beginning and narration in itself. As has also been briefly discussed, there is a third factor, namely that of gameplay, and the genre-conventions that gameplay must adhere to, which influence the overall impression of the *Warcraft* narrative.

Distinguishing these three from one another without completely separating them also sheds light on the **ludology** versus **narratology** debate, naturally taking the **narratological** stance. Whereas **ludology** believes not only narrative, but **narratology** itself, to be antithetical to game analysis, **narratology** can, by differentiating between the three abovementioned, narrative components, decipher the worth and influence of each component in a narrative context.

I introduced this entire paper with a quote by Irish comedian Dara O'Briain, regarding the interactive element of video games, and how this element makes the genre deviate from other types of entertainment (books, film, television, etc). I argue that it is from this culturally accepted concept of being able to fail an entertainment form that the idea of cyclicality in video games come from.

As already mentioned, while the player may experience instances of gameplay several times, her individual experience of it can never be circular, as these instances of gameplay still take part in a larger, linear narrative. As shown, the video game, while definitely the primary component of its narrative, is only a part of a larger narrative that includes non-digital, non-interactive texts, and these also establish the linearity of the narrative itself.

As evident, the genre-conventions hold some narrative and **narratological** value, which might surprise the **ludologists**, when viewed in a context of narration. Of course, focusing particularly on narrative linearity, the two most important components are the interactive factor and the pre-existing narrative put forth by the game itself. While it is absolutely possible for the gameplay to

appear cyclical, the narrative itself cannot be cyclical (as evident from the table of chronology), and neither can the player's experience or self-made narrative, as the game is constantly developing its **macrostory** by putting out new titles.

The focus on the narrative blueprint introduces a basic but resolute linearity, as the narrative progresses – both through the **macrostory**, parallel **microstories** and **interstitial microstories** – linearly and continuously. The focus on each individual player's experience of the game, on the other hand, that the **ludologists** have themselves proposed also lays the foundation for the argument of the individual, linear narrative, as each player creates his or her own narrative. While it is absolutely possible for the player to revisit certain zones and instances, the experience of each revisit will differ from the last (and the original) visit.

Conclusion

Before rounding off the conclusion for this paper, a summary of the theory used is in order, to fully illuminate how I reached the conclusions I did. Firstly, I included the debate on **narratology** and **ludology** to put this paper in a wider context of video game analysis. Also, these two branches of video game analysis introduced game-specific methods in an analysis that would otherwise have been rather narrative theory-heavy, which would have been unfortunate, considering the specific medium of the primary source.

Secondly, I included narrative theory, both general and medium-specific, which was done to not only honor the concept of video game **narratology** – which this paper leans towards – but also to acknowledge the non-digital, non-interactive aspects of the narrative at hand. Literary narrative theory by Niels Buch Leander (2012) was used specifically to analyze narrative beginnings, which was supported with theory dealing with **temporality**, duration and narrative times.

Thirdly, works on **transmedia** and **medium-dependence** was used as it hearkened back to the **narratology** vs **ludology** debate, since **medium-dependence** was something the two quarreled

over, and it was relevant to use on a **transmedial** narrative such as that of *World of Warcraft* (2004), which contains a **macrostory** parted into installments like a television show, as well as a slew of different **microstories**. This particular, theoretical foundation opened up a possibility to use Ryan's and Thon's (2014) work on **storyworlds**, a narrative frame that is not so much concerned with medium as with content.

The **microstories** acts as the set points between gameplay, which I argued showed a narrative progress that could not allow for cyclicality within the narrative blueprint. To establish this, I created a table of chronology, where the central myth acted as a guideline for progression of the entire narrative, and the **macrostory installments** acted as a guideline for progression within the **microstories**. I showed that there are **microstories** that are parallel, that there are **microstories** that are interstitial, and that there are **microstories** that are peripheral; in other words, I can conclude that the **storyworld** of *Warcraft* is not only vast, but also quite diverse in its usage of media.

However, it is not only the narrative blueprint that matters when it comes to video game analysis, since there is also the aspect of interactivity to consider. According to **ludology**, the most important component of video game analysis is, after all, the interactive aspect, and via this, the player. Frasca's work on ludus and paidea (1999) specifically concludes that the narrative is dependent on the player: Without the player to play the game, the narrative within the game cannot occur. As such, there are two different aspects of narratives to consider: the narrative blueprint that the game presents, which is a much more structured entity, and the player-driven narrative, which unfolds depending on the player.

It could roughly be said that the narrative blueprint is a **narratologically** inspired structure, whereas the player-driven narrative is a **ludologically** inspired structure, but this should not be considered the entire truth, as there are many aspects of both that deviate from this statement. Also, both narrative aspects are needed to create the full experience of the **storyworld** of *Warcraft*. One

of the arguments supporting this synthesis of narrative blueprint and player-driven narrative is the inclusion of the player in the **microstories** of the narrative, in which they become active parts of the **storyworld**.

As evident, both the narrative blueprint and the player-driven narrative (or ludus, in a **ludological** context) bleed together to create the **storyworld** and full narrative of the game. However, this has not disproven the cyclicality that Krzywinska argues for (2008). This is rather simply because cyclicality of gameplay cannot be disproven. A player can, for all intents and purposes, choose to only experience the same gameplay feature for every single one of her game sessions (even if this would put a natural ceiling on her progression, and would, naturally, be impossibly dull). However, Krzywinska does not take narrative structure and narrative linearity into account at all with her statement, despite building it on narrative aspects of the game.

With this paper, the intention was not to debunk or invalidate Krzywinska's argument of cyclicality, but rather to show that there is an element of linearity in the game. This was done with a pre-existing understanding and knowledge of the many **microstories** the **storyworld** includes, as well as a wish to acknowledge and respect the interactivity of this particular text. In other words: I wanted to find a compromise between traditional narrative text and interactive, narrative-free text (as the **ludologists** believe it to be), and build my analysis on that.

Appendices

Appendix A

Follow below link for interactive chart:

http://www.mmo-champion.com/content/4878-WoW-Down-to-7-1-Million-Subscribers

Appendix B – In-game Sources

Appendix B.1

Appendix B.2

Appendix B.3
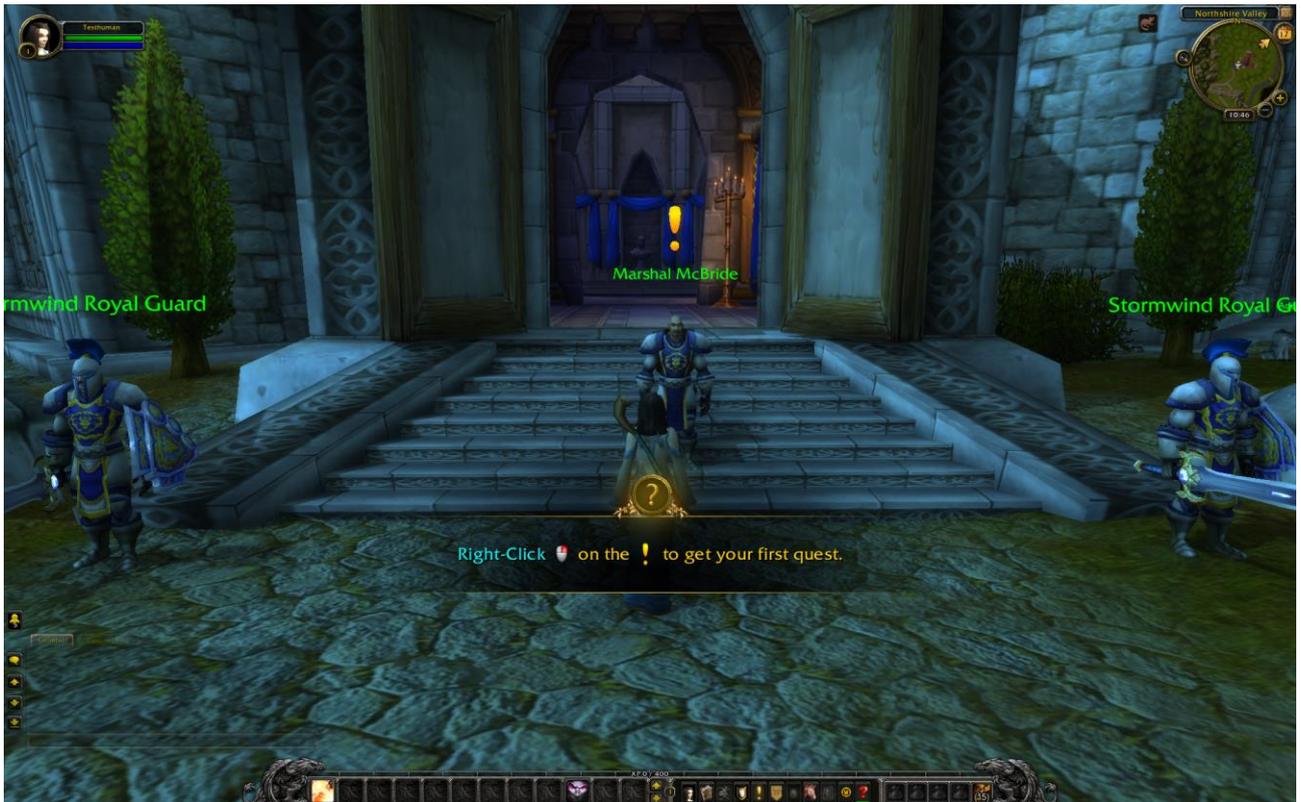
Appendix B.4
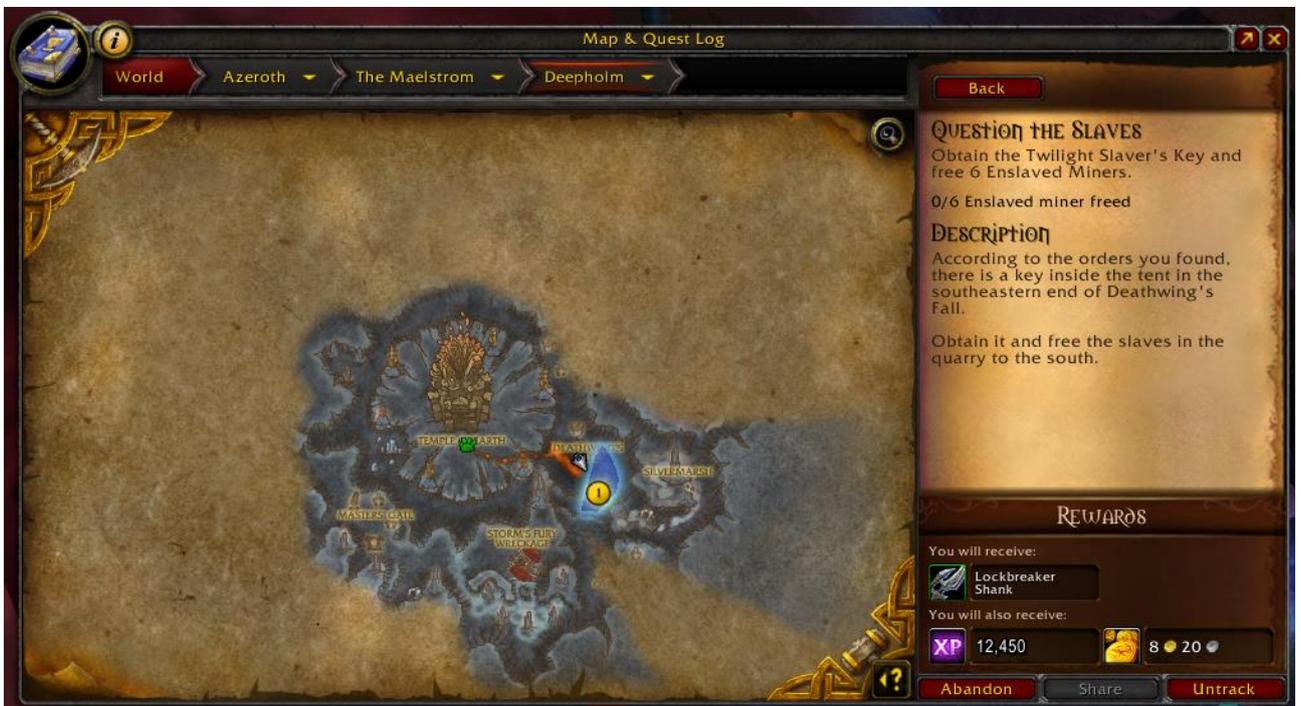
Appendix B.5
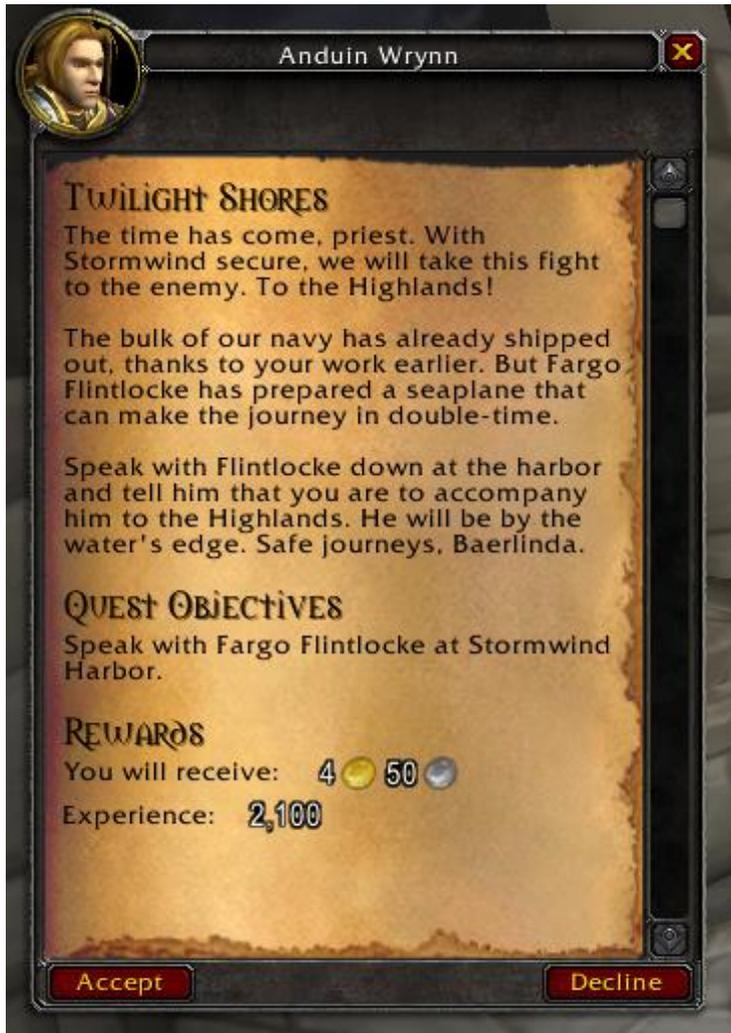
Appendix B.6

Appendix C – Character Gallery

Appendix C.1 – Orc Warchief Garrosh Hellscream

Garrosh Hellscream is the son of Grommash, the first orc to fall to the corruption of the Burning Legion. This shame weighed heavy on him, and acted as his motivation for trying to prove orcs the superior race.

Appendix C.2 – Tauren High Chieftain Cairne Bloodhoof

Cairne Bloodhoof is a chieftain of a peaceful people, and features more heavily in the original trilogy than in the MMORPG. His death was a plotkey for the further deterioration of the Horde, as he had always acted as a mediator between the more aggressive other racial leaders.

Appendix C.3 – Night Elf Illidan Stormrage

Illidan is arguably the anti-hero of *Warcraft*, as he has consistently done the wrong thing for the right reasons, starting with his demon-ization, and leading to him taking over the ruined world of Outland, in an attempt to defeat Sargeras, leader of the Burning Legion.

Appendix C.4 – Night Elf Warden Maiev Shadowsong

Maiev is the original jailor of Illidan, and eventually kills him in Outland, afterwards returning to her people to train more Wardens, eventually having to work together with Illidan, which displeases her. She is a ruthless, idealistic individual, which is also where her motivation to kill the antihero, Illidan, stems from.

Appendix C.5 – Troll Warchief Vol'jin

Vol'jin has a warrior-attitude and mystic connection with the loa – troll spirits – which has led to him clashing with Garrosh Hellscream, leading to his eventual (and failed) assassination. During his healing process, he becomes a calmer leader, which is why Thrall eventually chooses him as warchief.

Appendix C.6 – Human Guardian Medivh

Medivh was raised to be the Guardian of Tirisfal, a sort of safe-keeper instated after the Burning Legion's presence became known. He has been possessed by Sargeras since his birth, however, which let Sargeras use him as a puppet to summon the orcs to Azeroth. His downfall let to the dismantling of the Council of Tirisfal, as it was decided that much power in one individual was too dangerous.

Appendix C.7 – Multi-race Guardian Med'an

Med'an is the son of orc-draenei Garona and human Medivh. In the *World of Warcraft: The Comic* series, he is the new Guardian of Tirisfal. However, in the macrostory, he does not appear.

Appendix C.8 – Human Priest Revil Kost

Revil Kost is an idealistic, devout priest, who is not afraid to speak his mind. His knowledge of the artifact, the Scythe of Elune, led to a druid adventurer (the player) recovering it. He also encounters other adventurers – a death knight and a warlock – both of whom he shows obvious dislikes towards, but aids them nonetheless, on the condition that he gets to return the remaining artifacts scattered around to their rightful owners.

Appendix D – Video files

Appendix D.1 – Introductory Cut-scene for Humans

See "Appendix D.1 Video" for video

Appendix D.2 – Zone-specific Cut-scene for Stormheim

See "Appendix D.2 Video" for video

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Summary/Resumé

This paper sets out to explore the narrative linearity of *World of Warcraft* and its transmedia texts. It does so by utilizing theoretical material focused on both traditional narratology and digital, interactive narratology. It brings in the narratology vs ludology debate to further establish itself as a video game analysis, meanwhile focusing on transmedial interrelationships of texts within the narrative universe of *World of Warcraft*. Hierarchical relationships between the many interactive, non-interactive, digital, and non-digital texts are explored and analyzed to fully ascertain the main text, or macrostory, of the narrative universe, or storyworld.

This paper, as stated, branches into traditional narratological theory and methods, as non-digital, non-interactive texts are included in the analysis, and attempting to analyze these without the correct tools would be pointless. This possibility of using non-digital, non-interactive narratological theory is opened up by discussing medium-dependence, which is also a focal point for the narratology/ludology debate.

The narrative temporality, duration, and narrative times have also been analyzed to a certain extent on the basis of a table model of chronology within the narrative universe of *Warcraft*, which also acted as the foundation upon which the hierarchical qualities of the transmedial texts were ascertained; in other words, how closely related to the macrostory the individual microstories were, and how this affected the duration and temporality of the narrative.

The basis of this paper's problem formulation is a statement made by Tanya Krzywinska in 2008, which focuses on the inherent cyclicality of the player experience of *World of Warcraft*. While the specific goal was never to disprove Kzrywinska's statement of inherent cyclicality, or to contradict it, but rather to offer an alternate viewpoint of the issue in question. Yes, the gameplay formula of *World of Warcraft* can indeed be quite circular (although this does depend on the player's preferred playstyle), but this does not mean the entirety of the game is circular or cyclical.

The overarching goal of this paper is somewhat twofold, as it both attempts to establish a linear narrative within the game *World of Warcraft* that is further developed through its supportive, transmedial texts, and simultaneously seeks to establish that the interactive element should not be dismissed – and does not have to be dismissed – simply because a paper is primarily focused on narrative in video games. I have used player-driven narrative progression (which mirrors the methodological qualities of the ludological "ludus") to do this.