Alliance Expedition: Prologue

My name is Caym, and I am an undead warlock. A few parts of my identity were confirmed while I was still in the crypt. First, I am part of the Horde. This meant that other undead, trolls, orcs, and taurens were my allies. And it meant that the Alliance, being humans, night elves, dwarfs, and gnomes, were my enemies.

As a new warlock, I felt quite sheltered. The first time I even saw someone from the Alliance was just outside Zepplin Landing. It was a human female, wearing her guild’s tabard. She had roughly the same experience level as I did. I watched her as she tried to hide behind buildings. I tried to talk to her, and she ran away. She didn’t understand my language, and my presence alone had undoubtedly frightened her.

Why wouldn’t it? Any new Forsaken that ventures into the Undercity Apothecary knows how we are supposed to treat the Alliance. Humans and dwarves are hurled into cages and become lab rats for our alchemists’ deadly potions. They cry out in pain while we laugh at their misery.

The ‘war’ in World of Warcraft has been taken very seriously, created and strengthened by the game’s developers at Blizzard. World of Warcraft’s initial storyline and beta testing phase presented gentler relationships between the Horde and Alliance. However, as the game grew more popular, relationships between the two factions became more distanced and more violent. Such attitudes are only corroborated by the lack of available communication between factions, something I found very difficult to challenge in-game.

In this paper, I examine the changing relationship between the Horde and the Alliance through a review of pre-game Warcraft lore, through the beta testing phase, initial release, and subsequent patches. Close attention is paid to player opinions on the subject of cross-faction communication, and the nature of player interactions as the game evolved into a better-defined state of war.

Alliance Expedition: Prologue

The Alliance doesn’t have a reason to hate me. I do not consider myself a threat to them. I avoid conflict unless it is necessary. I am a tailor, and the only reason I fight humanoid mobs is to collect cloth for my craft. Regardless, a single Horde wandering alone in contested territory is an easy target.

The Alliance hates me, not because of who I am, but because I am Horde. That is the way this world works.

The members of my guild think it’s equivalent to committing suicide, but I think I’ll do something to change it.

According to Northrup’s stages of escalation, conflict is closely linked with identity (Northrup 1989). How each of the factions views itself in relation to the world around it, beginning with the back-story, sets the stage for violent relations. However, it does not actually cause them. At the same time, conflict is not static. It contains many levels, and
evolves over time (Northrup 1989). Blizzard developed this cross-faction war very systematically, as discovered in the development of this game.

In fact, while Warcraft’s timeline is filled with violent confrontations, it is far more complex than two warring factions. For example, night elves and tauren have shown amicable relationships, both races sharing similar belief systems, such as a common respect for the spirits of nature (Thelvadyen 2004). It is a trait that they share with many of the Horde races. The orcs, humans, and night elves also fought alongside each other against the Burning Legion and the Lich King’s undead minions. At the end of Warcraft III, those races had signed a non-aggression pact. One could also easily compare the relationship of the undead Forsaken with the other Horde to the non-aggression pact made by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in World War II, allies “in times of desperation” only (Thelvadyen 2004). They are not trusted by the rest of the Horde, and are certainly despised by the rest of the Alliance.

The beta testers were first introduced to the idea of two factions, although those factions were not yet involved in a full-scale war. The two groups were actually at peace, but it was on quite rocky terms. In fact, in the beta testing phase, PvP action was quite limited. Early players complained about Blizzard representatives’ stand on the issue, criticizing other players who wanted the game to include more fighting.

But even at the beginning of the beta, Nortrhup’s second and third stages of escalation were being put into place, supported wholeheartedly by Blizzard. The development team specifically constructed the game to promote a distortion of the other side, and through it, a rigid classification of ‘us vs. them’ (Northrup 1989).

The implications of an ‘us versus them’ scenario are far-reaching. In creating their game, Blizzard mimicked real life, to the extent that in real wars, the other side is always distorted.

According to Rob Pardo, the lead designer of World of Warcraft and one of Blizzard’s Vice President of Game Design, the environment is designed in order to bring players into constant conflict with the other faction. Early quests are designed to present the other faction in a negative light, and promote an ‘us versus them’ mindset. For example, quests from the undead town of Tarren Mill involve traveling to an Alliance town, and killing human peasant non-player characters. “We feel that is a great way to remind the players that a war is still raging between the Horde and Alliance. It gives both sides reasons to dislike the other players. An undead player in Hillsbrad is made to feel like the humans are his enemies, and vice versa” (Pardo 2004).

Kevin Robins, in his article, ”The Haunted Screen” saw the same relationship in both the serial killer genre and the Gulf War. This war, Bush “made clear, was a war between good and evil, a war to protect and defend the moral order of the world” (Robins 1994). Propaganda for the war focused on that simple confrontation. The United States was considered good, and their enemies were considered evil. Reports of Kuwaiti babies being murdered when Iraqi soldiers removed them from incubators turn the foreign people into merciless creatures (Robins 1994). Whether or not these reports were even true was beside the point. America identified with the ‘hurt child‘ image, and therefore became the ‘good parent’ (Robins 1994).

In World of Warcraft, the opposing faction is distorted by these early quests, which function like wartime propaganda, detailed with the crimes that the opposing faction has supposedly committed. The reports may or may not be true, but the player is not at liberty to question them. Through their characters, they are meant to play the role of the ‘good parent’ as well, and fight to defend their own side’s “moral order” (Robins 1994).
In the real world, distortion of the opposing side in a war is exacerbated by lack of communication. In early stages of a conflict, there is still open communication between two sides. But as conflict increases, the two sides become increasingly intolerant of the other side’s viewpoint. Conversation stops “and information is used as a weapon... Information that would lead to a solution no longer flows between the parties” (Carpenter 1988). Once conflicts become escalated, “available communication channels and opportunities are not utilized, or they are used in an attempt to mislead or intimidate the other” (Deutsch 1973).

In the beta testing phase of Warcraft, where the state of conflict between the Alliance and the Horde was not as well defined, communication was also not as limited. Nor was Blizzard so steadfast against communicating between factions. As Prado described, “the way we handle languages also supports this division between Horde and Alliance. The two sides can't communicate with each other. That's actually not a hard and fast rule; they just speak different languages” (Pardo 2004).

In the beta testing phase, it wasn’t a hard and fast rule. There were several ways that factions could communicate with each other. The Undead could understand both Common and Orcish. Some players used them as translators in the second wave of Beta tests. As late as October 22, 2004, characters could learn the language of the opposing faction and speak with them, although it cost a massive amount of skill points. That is no longer a viable option.

There was also a simple elixir that could be made by a trained alchemist that allowed players to understand each other’s language for a short time. Dubbed the elixir of tongues, it could be bought with only 25 copper pieces and could be activated by anyone at level 5 or above. Although references to this potion still exist, the item itself disappeared at the end of the beta phase. And while the game currently has a spell entitled Curse of Tongues, which forces the caster to speak only in demonic and slows the casting time for all their spells, the elixir of tongues is not present in the game at all.

By the time the game was finally released, World of Warcraft represented Northrup’s fourth and final stage, collusion (Northrup 1989). The identities of both the Horde and Alliance are entrenched in conflict. “If the enemy was not truly devious and aggressive before the distortions began, they certainly begin to behave just like enemies in response to the distortions” (Northrup 1989).

By the release version, communication between the two sides was also forcibly halted. The only exception involved leet, which is a form of typing that uses numbers and symbols instead of letters. The game literally mimicked the state of conflict at which communication channels are no longer being utilized for the common good. Indeed, as Deutsch observed in the real world, it was sometimes used to mislead the opposing faction. During game play, I observed Alliance players using leetspeak to distract Horde players during combat. I also fell victim to such a plot. While I attempted to decipher the leet text on my screen, I was taken out by a level 60 rogue who had been waiting in stealth mode.

On March 24, 2005, Blizzard finally eliminated the exploit that allowed Horde and Alliance players to communicate using leet. The two groups were completely cut off from one another in regards to communication. Players could only communicate across faction lines through game-sanctioned emotes. Because of this inability to communicate, interaction between the two sides became even more warlike.

Through the various phases of development, Blizzard has successfully created a virtual war. However, not all players could have willingly signed up for this metaphorical draft. Through both quantitative and qualitative methods, I sought to discover how players in one particular PvP realm felt about being thrust into this virtual war. To what extent do players on Kil’Jaeden choose to play by Blizzard’s terms of war? To what extent is
communication between the factions desired? Can peaceful interaction between the factions exist, and in what forms?

Alliance Expedition: Day 1

After much planning, (or as some of my guild would insist, death of my common sense) I set off towards Alliance territory with the goal of spending a week there. However, still too inexperienced to survive on my own, I needed an escort through the contested territory that separated Horde and Alliance homelands. A kindly troll priest took me as far as the north gate of Don Morogh. But after an influx of Alliance guards, she realized that escorting me on a diplomatic mission was too much of a hazard to her health.

She hearthstoned home. I quickly learned the reality of my place in this war.

I resurrected, weak, in the heart of Gnome territory, and rushed to the forest. The trees could provide some cover until my health could recover.

I started exploring, but there wasn’t much I could do.

I can't approach any of the major cities. There are mountaineers who could easily decapitate me. I can't even sneak into Anvilmar, as mountains surround it. I wandered too close to Kharanos at one point, and found myself shot several times by the guard. I escaped with little health, but still alive.

There's a decrepit campsite in the Grizzled Den. I think I could call it my home if I wanted to. It's deserted, and only a few mobs trail the area. For the next week, it will become my only sanctuary.

It is hard. I cannot associate with anyone. I cannot sell items or repair my armor. It makes me feel like even more of an outsider. It is clear that I am not supposed to belong here. I’m also surprised about how much I depend on my other senses. I constantly listen for footsteps. Danger could lurk around any corner. I cannot cease my vigilance, even for a moment here.

I approached these questions from several different angles. First, I collected some quantitative data on player behavior in Kil’Jaeden by posting a questionnaire on several realm-specific forums. On those same forums, I also posted several short answer questions on various topics relating to PvP experience, communication, and peaceful interactions. This allowed me to collect a great deal of qualitative data from the forums as well. Instead of posting a single qualitative survey, I chose to ask each separate question in a different topic. I felt this would attract a wider array of players than a single topic, and thus some part of my questionnaire would remain on a forum’s main page at any given time.

Inside World of Warcraft, I posed many of the same questions by traveling to different areas and posting them in the general chat channel. This way, I could speak with several players at once. Once they expressed interest, I set up more detailed conversations through private messages. Not wanting to focus solely on the Horde, I had planned to conduct the same interviews in Alliance territory as well. However, the March 24th patch forced me to change my approach.

While I could have created an Alliance character to conduct these in-game interviews, over the course of playing the game, I became fascinated by Blizzard’s implementations toward ending communication. Unable to use leet after March 24th, though, I employed a translator to meet with my character in Alliance territory and help me conduct interviews. I asked many of the same questions, but also asked for participants to provide overall reactions to my Horde character conducting peaceful research in Alliance territory. At the same time, such an experiment allowed me to explore to what extent the other faction would interact peacefully with me.
In all four approaches, my sample was random. I put forth a question, and collected all the information that was provided. I did not target any particular factions, races, or levels of character because I wanted the data to be applicable to the realm as a whole. However, I admit that for each of the different methods I explored, if looked at individually, could be skewed. While in Alliance territory, my interaction with other players was extremely limited. Only players interested in cross faction communication or peaceful relations would approach an invitation that sounded like an obvious trap. I was not able to get as wide a response as I would have hoped. The forums attracted players from both factions equally, but they generally tended to be extremely high levels. The areas that I conducted in-game interviews in also delineated the level of player that I encountered. Taken as a whole, however, the data becomes more encompassing.

**Alliance Expedition: Day 2**

Eventually, I met up with my gnome confederate. As my first few attempts at communication were met with complete failure, he agreed to translate for me.

He received rather nasty replies from most of the nearby gnomes, and after a group of six tried to slaughter me, I was forced to hide in the woods near the road. Apparently, advertising that an undead warlock wants to hold talks on peaceful Horde/Alliance relations in a secluded wooded area sounds like the perfect invitation to a deathtrap.

At the campsite, I’ve had a couple visitors. Most approach with caution, waiting to see what I’ll do. If I take even a step forward, they run away. I’ve become surprised by how eagerly I wave to them, in an attempt to stop them from leaving. Perhaps I just want some social interaction.

There have been a few successes, though. While sitting at my campsite, a dwarf came up to me. He waved, tentatively. Then, to my surprise, he sat down with me, and had a drink. I had few supplies with me, and no need to replenish my mana, but I drank with him anyway.

Through these different methods, I was able to see several patterns emerge. First, players are very aware of the rigid classifications between Horde and Alliance, and this prescribed ideology affects how they engaged in PvP interaction. Second, opinions on the subject of cross-faction communication varied greatly, both on an ideological and a practical level. Finally, I learned that players can and do exploit the system in order to resist the ideology of war that Blizzard has created.

A PvP server like Kil’Jaeden was molded on a warlike environment, as mentioned earlier. The boundary between Horde and Alliance is very rigid. One participant described the lay of the land like this, “We win, they die. We spit on their corpses” (K1). There is a state of war, and life within this game is therefore dangerous. Players generally react to that environment as prescribed, and may even choose this realm because of that danger.

In my quantitative survey, not a single participant disagreed with the statement, “I fight players of the other faction because they attack me.” When I posed that question in general chat, the overwhelming response was, because “they kill us” (M1). This response is rich with ideological reasons.

I observed many players that react to the game in a way that supports Northrup’s stages of conflict escalation. The rigid classifications, and to some extent the player vs. player action, is a direct result of dehumanization. As one of my participants suggested, “dehumanizing the opposing faction removes another barrier to PvP...you don't really think of them as other players on a personal level, and some people will have fewer qualms about killing them” (G1).
Compared to other games, this dehumanization is very thorough. "In Everquest, if someone offended you, your first impulse was to blame the individual, because you immediately recognized that they were an intelligent (well, maybe) person with his or her own motivations. You might also blame their guild, if you knew that sort of behavior to be the norm amongst them. In World of Warcraft, I think people are more likely to just write off antagonistic behavior as, 'well, that's just how those Horde/Alliance people are.'" (Q1). Another participant agreed. Low-level quests strive to present the idea that the opposing faction is less than human. "By the time you are mid-level Alliance, for example, you have stopped thinking of Horde members are humans and rather as something for you to avoid or destroy, like some super-intelligent mob" (G2).

Members of their own faction are their potential friends. Members of the other faction are their enemies, and to my surprise, are often subject to negative real-world stereotypes. When asked about the other faction, one participant could no longer separate the player from the character. “I don't want to understand a 30 year old man that lives in his parents' basement and plays World of Warcraft 20 hrs a day. I'd rather ignore that person” (O1). This suggests that at some level, the scenario of war extends beyond the character interaction. The actual player becomes dehumanized!

Presenting players with a black and white view of war does nothing to counter these stereotypes. If anything, it solidifies Robins’ “symbolic value of war” (Robins 1994).

These statements, though, according to the participants, have practical roots as well. Players of both sides are frequently affected by ganking, in which high-level characters kill lower-level characters that pose absolutely no threat to them. This leads to a great deal of resentment between the two sides, and only fosters their feelings of aggression. As I discovered through conducting interviews in both Alliance and Horde territory, each side views the other as an uncontrolled aggressor, especially where ganking is concerned. As I found out, both sides are also equally guilty.

But just as real-world conflict cannot be completely separated from communication, PvP experience cannot be studied independent of communication either. The distortion of the opposing faction is made all to clear by their inability to communicate like civilized beings. The 'us vs. them' mindset doesn’t just signify faction vs. faction. On the basest level, it becomes the players you can communicate with and the players you can’t. This attitude fosters the environment of war, as there is no use for diplomacy, and even humanization, without the ability to communicate. As one participant noted, “[language] would make the horde seem more human and less like bloodthirsty killers” (S1). The same could be said for the Alliance as well.

Thus, communication between factions was a very impassioned, although divided, topic. On an ideological level, some of the participants felt that the lack of communication was essential to maintaining the environment that Blizzard had created. In the context of war, they believe that communication would only foster more hatred between the two factions.

Spamming was undoubtedly the biggest practical concern among players that I interviewed. In a PvP setting, players genuinely fear that taunting and insult slinging would overflow from the general chat channel. When leetspeak was still exploitable, comments such as ‘n00b’ did appear from the other side, but I did not observe them to the level that my participants described. At the same time, however, I observed just as many taunts and insults coming from members of my own faction.

Insult slinging aside, the vast majority of players believes that the nature of the game itself would be better off if communication were allowed, even in the context of war. For many players, Blizzard’s war is overly simplistic, based on hand-to-hand combat instead
of real strategy. To quote Sunzi, from *The Art of War*, "to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill."

Cross-faction communication would add meaning to what they perceive as a senseless war. "By removing the ability to talk to our enemy in any means, we cannot spar at a higher level, the level of diplomacy. I would love to be able to duel my enemy to determine who has the right to a hunting area, to wage a battle for the rights to an instance, to establish a guild’s supremacy through combat" (K1).

For players like K1, fighting for the sake of fighting isn’t rewarding in its own right. Fighting simply to hunt in a secluded area is also meaningless in the long term. For some, communication would also add an element of realism to the game. As one participant stated, without communicating, "you can't have real rivals and enemies. They don't seem as deep, like a real person" (S1).

Adding communication between factions would also create levels of trust and deceit where currently there are none. This became an unavoidable issue when I started conducting research in alliance territory as a horde character. Getting players to even approach me demanded an act of trust. But because of the blatant dehumanization, it is currently very difficult to trust anyone. As one of the Alliance participants noted, "when you're face to face with the horde, and you think you have a truce, you can never trust them for sure" (K2).

With trust, there can also be deception. In that respect, communication between factions would allow for backstabbing and betrayal, a strategy often employed in real war. Blizzard has not yet achieved this level of combat, which some players might find rewarding. Others would probably consider it another form of ganking, as deplorable as the example I fell victim to earlier – using leetspeak to distract an enemy from a stealth attack.

However, a large number of participants also desired cross-faction communication for peaceful relationships. The extent to which these participants resisted Blizzard’s model of game play was surprising, especially considering the lengths that Blizzard has gone to in order to stifle them through the development of the game itself.

Even within the bounds of player vs. player combat, participants witnessed and performed many peaceful acts themselves. Through the use of emotes, participants frequently attempt to communicate with the other faction, or at least attempt to show their enemy that they pose no threat. Players, though, approach this differently, with varying degrees of success. Because no single emote means the same thing to every player, such a form of communication is risky.

Often, the emote chosen can make the difference between combat and peace. For example, my first instinct when approached by characters of the opposing faction was to stay still and kneel down as a gesture of respect. None of the Alliance members read it as such. It was either read as setting a trap or simply a death wish.

The favorite emote among my participants is dancing. “I've always found dancing is the universal message of peace. I've never been attacked by hostile alliance while I was dancing” (Y1). I found truth to this during my experiment in Alliance territory. During my time wandering in Alliance territory, though, I learned that a simple wave could be just as effective.

However, this is not always the case. The peaceful emotes do not necessarily lead to peaceful interactions. Some of my participants preferred to communicate using hostile emotes. “The newbies that think a simple /wave will buy them their lives are the first to die” (A1). And, as another participant noted, there are strict limitations to emotes as well. “It's
impossible to communicate with them, and communication is the key to peace. I can't just /smile and /wave my way through stormwind” (G3).

For more involved interactions, players generally agreed that a more advanced form of communication was necessary. While, most were content to use third-party systems, such as AIM or IRC, or voice communication software like Ventrillo, some participants wished for integrated messaging systems, such as those used by the game developers at Square Enix.

The vast majority of participants, however, believed that if communication between factions could be arranged, it would need to happen in the game itself. This could happen in one of two ways, either by inventing exploits or by learning to translate the opposing faction’s language. However, only a few participants, whom I would consider dedicated players, actually use them (Salen 2003).

Given the fact that half of all the resources a game developer uses are spent on tracking down hackers, Blizzard’s stand against the use of exploits is unwavering (Salen 2003). Players caught modifying the game are subject to having their accounts banned. Regardless, thousands exploits currently float around on the Internet. There are a few communication exploits, but most of them were rendered useless with the March 24th patch.

One of these is Babelfish, named after the Internet translator of the same name. It would automatically translate messages coming from the other faction who are using the /say command. However, in order to be understood, it required that both players have the exploit installed. Another was leetspeak, which translated all messages into leetspeak. This exploit, of course, is no longer usable.

While Blizzard sees these as illegal modifications of the game, those that create these exploits defend their right to do so as a form of transformative play. As the creator of babelfish commented, “I feel that a language barrier between the Factions is artificial and limits our Roleplaying creativity. We should be free to communicate, and open the door to new styles of play outside of the box of the standard Blizzard plotline” (Colorado 2005).

Translation of the opposing faction’s language is even more difficult. The reason why there are so few communication exploits is that the language barrier is that difficult to penetrate. Some dedicated players have attempted to systematically translate Orcish into Common, and vice versa. So far, though, they have not succeeded.

As one World of Warcraft researcher noted, “I am sure without a doubt that 100% accurate translation is impossible” (Szepietowski 2004). Instead of being a direct letter-to-letter translation, each letter has a token value. In a non-commutative equation, those values are calculated across the entire word, and by the number of letters in the word. That solution is then compared with a preset nonrandom table of words (Szepietowski 2004).

While complete language translations are impossible, because of the lack of randomization in the language, players have learned translations for some common words. When a horde types ‘hello’ for example, the Alliance reads it as ‘majis.’ The expression, ‘lol’ translates to ‘kek.’ However, ‘horde’ also translates to ‘majis’ and ‘all’ also translates to ‘kek’. As one participant noticed, “this can create some interesting misunderstandings... just like language/cultural misunderstandings in the real world” (G2).

Projects like these, whether legal within the confines of the game or not, negotiate Blizzard’s artificial war. Ideologically, they represent a desire of some players to change the state of conflict that Blizzard has written for them. Use of dialogue, of course, is instrumental in changing attitudes of the other side (Northrup 1989).

The extent to which dedicated players attempted to create peaceful relationships in World of Warcraft was not just limited to communication between factions. I also observed a
couple of strategies that sought to resist the boundaries of war placed by Blizzard. Such attempts also mirror real-world attempts at solving conflict.

Some participants, like G3, suggested building trust by adding neutral enemies that would not be loyal to either faction. Such combat would force players from opposing factions to team up, at least momentarily, for a common goal. Northrup uses the same example in describing the Robber's Cave study by Sherif. In a new threat, the factions would be “forced to legitimize each other, to recognize the existence and importance of each other” (Northrup 1989). Even though this is not supported in the game, players often experience this attitude. Several participants relayed experiences of joining forces with the other faction to fight higher level mobs and gather items (E1, D1, I1).

The in-game economy also supports the idea of war. Trade between the factions is forbidden. Through one of the most recent patches, even mounts have become faction-specific. While Blizzard has set it up so that the Horde can only trade with Horde and Alliance with Alliance, several players have concocted other strategies. A free-for-all auction house exists in Gadgetzan, Tanaris. One of my participants even provided a step-by-step how-to list to ensure that an item can be successfully traded across faction lines (N1). It is difficult, but given the effort in the instructions, it is obviously possible.

A cross-faction guild also exists, albeit on a role-playing server. Unfortunately, it has received little attention (NemesiZ 2005). While the guild advertises that it exists for the purpose of organizing battles and raids, it also supports a variety of team play. It is the first guild of its kind for World of Warcraft. Belonging to this guild certainly affects the nature of one’s interaction with the other faction.

Alliance Expedition: Day 5

I was wandering in the wilderness and a human mage spotted me. She took no hesitation in turning me into a black sheep before killing me. The metaphor here is intriguing.

However, there have been a few successful interactions. I have earned the trust of several gnomes and dwarfs. One even put me to a test, attacking creature that would surely kill her, just to see if I would come to her rescue. I did. And she then trusted me enough to allow me to come and sit by her side in an open clearing. Inspired, I spent many hours running behind the towns helping lower level Alliance kill mobs.

What they say is true – Trust is not given. It must be earned.

However, by this point, my armor’s strength has been reduced to practically nothing. Earlier, I made the fatal mistake of wandering into a new area, and ran right into a cartel of dwarf miners. I was almost in the clear, having escaped them, when suddenly, a high level night elf struck me from behind. I am suffering from resurrection sickness, and I have no way to fix my goods. My translator comes only once every couple of days, and only for a couple of hours at a time. The rest of the time, I must fend for myself.

I can’t survive out here much longer.

In sum, my results show that although the vast majority of players enjoy player vs. player action in the warlike environment Blizzard has developed, a small group of dedicated players still chooses to resist the rigidity and the dehumanizing aspects of this virtual war.

Communication between factions was a much more complex issue than I expected. Just as many players sought cross-faction communication for peaceful relationships as those who sought it for wartime strategy. As one participant suggested, “I bet if they started talking, they’d start trusting each other, so there’d be no war” (C1). On the other hand,
others felt that adding communication would only lead to more spam. A few desired to use language as a tool in combat, either through simple distraction or more thorough blackmail.

As for the environment itself, Blizzard’s development team took the game through each of Northrup’s stages of conflict escalation, designing their PvP server to mimic a real-world war. Because of this, player interactions are based, to a large extent, on reacting to that environment. Classification of a player through their faction is incredibly rigid, and players generally accept that. For those who play this way, communication is a non-issue. There is only one way to talk to the opposing faction, and that is, to quote one of my participants, “with the tip of your sword” (B1).

At the same time, while those who resist the war environment are few and far between, they put forth an enormous amount of effort to circumvent Blizzard’s ideologies. The attempts made at Orcish/Common translation suggests that players want to communicate with the other faction. Those that do use communication exploits do so fervently. Those who create them feel quite strongly that what they are doing is ethical, despite Blizzard’s terms of use policy.

A few of my participants actually wanted peace. But most just wanted a feeling of mutual trust. “When I see alliance, when I am playing horde, I hope we are all just civilized people. And that we can just walk past each other without incident” (G3).

Alliance Expedition: Day 7

I have been spit on, poked, annoyed, just to see what I’d do. But to my surprise, many of the interactions turned out peaceful. Two alliance characters entered my campsite today with their pets, ready to attack. Instead, we ended up dancing. They said something to each other, which I did not understand.

With my translator, I successfully talked to a higher-level Dwarf. It was frightening. He could have easily killed me.

I asked if he trusted me.

“So far, so good,” he replied.

I even got the opportunity to flirt with a male human. At first he kept a very long distance away from me, not daring to venture closer. After I killed some attacking creatures, he grew friendlier. He started flirting with me, and eventually we kissed.

Not long after that, a night elf rogue struck me down. I attempted to beg for my life, but to no avail. When I resurrected, I learned that the attack had broken every last piece of my armor. My belongings are so damaged; they might not even be able to be repaired. My health is too far diminished, the cost of resurrection sickness too high.

I know I am too weak to survive here any longer. I have to hearthstone home.

Regardless, I have enjoyed talking with alliance. I have enjoyed sharing with them that the Horde isn’t as evil as they make us out to be.

Such findings only shed a small light on the truly complicated nature of player vs. player environments. Many more questions have arisen at this point in the study.

First, the complex ways that the two factions have interacted, and still have the potential to interact, must be explored in greater detail. Do Yee’s player motivations or Bartle’s player types affect how players choose to interact in this environment? Which player types are more likely to accept or resist Blizzard’s war?

The language barrier, and attempts to break it, can also be studied. Because there is a non-random element to the language, there is still hope that part of the code can eventually be broken. To what extent do long-term players pick up a working knowledge of
the other faction’s language? How does that affect their relationship with players of the other faction?

Lastly, greater emphasis could be placed on the dedicated players who choose to resist the war scenario. What motivates them to go against Blizzard's game development? What exactly places them at odds with this ideology? Or are they simply engaging in a form of transformative play because it interests or challenges them? New studies are needed to elaborate on this topic further.

Alliance Expedition: Epilogue

I finally managed to repair all of my armor. Monetarily, I lost about eight silver pieces in Alliance territory. And many of my tools and weapons had to be discarded because they were in such bad shape. I will need to purchase them again.

The true cost of my trip, however, wasn’t physical. It was mental.

It seems strange to be among my fellow Horde again after trying to survive a week among the Alliance. It feels strange to walk freely around the Undercity after constantly living in the shadows. The habits I learned in Alliance territory are hard to break.

I am more afraid than I thought I would be. Even now, when I see other Horde, I check them first, to find out what they are like. I know they won’t hurt me, but that doesn’t stop me from looking. I still listen for footsteps. And I am still sticking to the walls and shadows. I have yet to say anything to anyone.

Never a very talkative undead, it seems strange that I can hear conversations now. And it feels strange to understand what I hear. Although the language barrier remains complete, I was able to learn a few simple words in common. When they say ‘me,’ I know they are greeting me. When they say ‘majis,’ I know it either means they are pointing me out as a horde or trying to say hello. ‘Goth’ means ‘nice.’ ‘Waldir’ means ‘thanks.’ I do not know how to actually speak in common, but I can at least pick out a few words. I look for those words now.

The trip was difficult. It made me feel very little, very afraid... Very alien. Which I suppose I was.

But I understand the other side a bit better, and hopefully, they understand us a little better too. That is the first step towards peaceful interactions. Without understanding, there can be no foundation for peace.
Appendix A: Quantitative Questionnaire

I am a college undergraduate enrolled in a course on MMORPGs at Trinity University. We are doing ethnographic research inside World of Warcraft. If you wish to contact me in game, my character’s name is Caym. I will be happy to answer any questions.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to define the relationship between the Alliance and the Horde on a PvP server. All information will be kept confidential, and you will remain anonymous in my term paper. If you want to learn more about the class, visit the website at http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/mmo/faq.html

Please answer the following for your MAIN character on this server.

Character Race:
Character Class:
Level:

Rate the following sentences from 1-5, 1= strongly disagree, 3=neutral, 5= strongly agree.

(the term ‘other faction’ implies Horde for those who play Alliance and vice versa)

___ I like to fight players of the other faction.
___ I like to fight mobs more than I like to fight players of the other faction.
___ I like to go on massive raids.
___ I would rather duel players of my own faction than fight players of the other faction.
___ If I see a player of the other faction in contested territory, I would attack
___ If I see a player of the other faction in my territory, I would attack
___ I only attack players of the other faction who are weaker than I am
___ All players of opposing factions are a threat to my safety.
___ I would help a much weaker player of the other faction fight a mob
___ I fight players of the other faction because they attack me
___ If a player from the other faction spared my life, I would still kill them.
___ I would like to travel through contested territory without being attacked
___ If a player from the other faction tried to help me, I would accept help willingly.
___ I would like to fight alongside players in the other faction against my own faction.
___ I like to emote to players from the other faction.
___ If a player from the other faction tried to talk to me, I would try to talk back.
___ If I saw a player from the other faction, I would approach them peacefully.
___ If a player from the other faction begged for their life, I would spare them.
___ If a player from the other faction tries to run away, I would not pursue them.
___ I would like to kill players of my own faction.
___ I would like to talk to players of the other faction.
___ I would install a program that would allow me to talk to players of the other faction.
___ If a member of my own faction held a peace rally, I would attend.
___ If a member of an opposing faction held a peace rally, I would attend.
___ I would hold a peace rally.
Appendix B: Qualitative Interview Protocol, both in game and out of game

I am a college undergraduate enrolled in a course on MMORPGs at Trinity University. We are doing ethnographic research inside World of Warcraft. If you wish to contact me in game, my character's name is Caym. I will be happy to answer any questions.

I am studying Horde/Alliance relationships, and would appreciate your input on the following ideas. All information will be kept confidential, and you will remain anonymous in my term paper. If you want to learn more about the class, visit the website at http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/mmo/faq.html

- What is your opinion of the Horde/Alliance?
- Describe a couple of typical encounters with players from the opposing faction. Were they violent or peaceful?
- How do you feel about the 'war' that is being waged? Is it imposed on players by Blizzard or created by players?
- Do you feel that lower level quests prepare you for PvP interaction?
- Do you want to be able to talk to the opposing faction, and why?
- Do you want to be understood by the opposing faction, and why?
- What is your opinion of Blizzard’s removal of leetspeak? How would adding communication change the nature of the game?
- Do you want to co-exist peacefully with the other faction?
- What is your reaction to my attempt at being here as a peaceful observer? Do you trust me?
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