Ten years can be an extremely long time, and can seem even longer when
committed to something. Empires, be they financial or political, can rise and fall within
such a time. Relationships and marriages can crumble and disintegrate contained inside
a decade. But for this writer and many others, the past ten years have been filled with
good times, irritations, and hefty commitments towards the online game *World of
Warcraft*.

*World of Warcraft* may seem to the casual observer just what it appears: an
online game, or even more simply put, just a game. But to myself and for ten million
other players, *WoW* (an abbreviation for World of Warcraft often used by players) has
gone beyond that, giving us a world where jargon, skills, stories, and artwork are shared
between others, much as it is in the real world. At its most basic *Warcraft* is and should
be viewed as a recreational folk group, where people come together to play an
immersive and entertaining game and in doing so create their own traditions, values,
and tales through playing.

*Warcraft* can also be viewed as occupational folklore. In Ben Gillis’ *An
Unexpected Font of Folklore* (2011) he describes how people who play *World of
Warcraft* are indeed folk and specific types of folklore that they exhibit. Gillis offers
examples and explanations on how players of *Warcraft* participate in occupational lore,
sharing skills, jargon, and narratives common with workers in any job and that many of
these are informally learned and learned on the spot.
Over the last decade *World of Warcraft* has gone from a relatively small online game with a few thousand players to an explosive ten million. Released in 2004 by Blizzard Entertainment, *World Warcraft* takes places on the world of Azeroth, where players can create engaging characters for themselves. Choosing from thirteen different races and eleven different classes, a player can immerse oneself into the war-torn world of Azeroth, becoming a savage Orc warrior, a stoic dwarf paladin, or even a wise pandaren monk. Since its release, Blizzard has expanded upon the Warcraft series, releasing five expansions allowing players to travel to new and forbidding lands, and even allowing players to travel beyond the world of Azeroth.

*Character selection and creation screen from World of Warcraft*

The lore of *World of Warcraft* is immense, rich, and incredibly entertaining. There are two factions in *World of Warcraft*, the Horde and the Alliance, and each of these factions are made up of the races on Azeroth, all with hundreds if not thousands of
stories belonging to them. With *Warcraft* and its four expansions, the main arch of the story takes players on incredible journeys that usually involve saving their world from certain destruction of one form or another. With the original *World of Warcraft* (referred to by players as “Vanilla”) heroes from all over Azeroth were tasked with the daunting task of defeating the black dragon Nefarion and his army. The first expansion, titled *The Burning Crusade*, had heroes from Azeroth travel through the Dark Portal to the broken world of Dreanor to stop the immortal Illidan Stormrage from using his demonic powers to destroy Dreanor and Azeroth. The second expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King*, had players return to Azeroth and travel to the frozen landscape of Northrend to prevent the undead horde of the Lich King from overtaking the world. Players saw the world of Azeroth sundered with the next expansion titled *Cataclysm* where the malevolent dragon Deathwing, believed by many players to have been killed, shattered the elemental bonds that held the world of Azeroth together. Travelling south, players were introduced to a mysterious land that had been shrouded in mists for ten thousand years. In Mists of Pandaria players discovered an unheard of race known as the Pandaren who had once lived in peace and comfort in their hidden land were thrown into a devastating war against an ancient enemy known as the Thunder King, who had been released from his earthen prison after the world shattering destruction wrought by Deathwing. Warlords of Dreanor, the most recent expansion released just last month, had players travelling back through the Dark Portal to Dreanor to stop the bloodthirsty orc warchief Grommash Hellscream and his newly formed Iron Horde from destroying Dreanor.
While a brief telling on the history of World of Warcraft, players have made stories and tales for themselves thanks to this massively multiplayer online role playing game. Groups and folklore provide a sense of belonging, and World of Warcraft reflects that in its gameplay and the entertaining tales created by players. Some of this author’s funniest and fondest memories are from playing WoW and interacting with others who also played the game, and I know of others who would say the same. Warcraft is far more than just a “game”. It provides players with merriment, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging, which at its core is what folklore is all about.

For many players, the motivations for playing World of Warcraft are social in nature. “Years ago, about a year after WoW came out, I was in a guild with many
people I considered close friends,” stated Douglass Hunnewell, who has played World of Warcraft since its release. “We were on every night usually killing enemies in AQ40 [An’Quiraj is a dungeon in World of Warcraft that required forty players to complete] and since we all played at the same times and were always grouped up, we just like, became friends who had never met in person. That’s kind of weird when I think on it, but in another way it really isn’t, ya know?”

Zachary Herrod, another long time player of World of Warcraft, agrees with this assessment. “I remember when I met my buddy Stan for the first time. It was, like, three weeks in to Burning Crusade and I see this dwarf warrior running by me with two fel lords on him screaming ‘Jump away everyone! Jumping makes you go faster!’ Jumping of course does not, in fact, make one run faster. But he ended up killing, like, forty some odd people because of those fel lords and out of all of them he came over after we rezzed [resurrected from death] and paid me for my repair bills [repairs are needed after the death of your character] and said ‘I feel bad for killing a holy paladin, you guys are far too rare.’ Ever since then we’ve been great friends even though he lives in British Columbia. We still Skype and chat a few times a week. Do I think having a friend I’ve never met face to face is weird? Hells no. It’s the same as when you’ve made a friend and they have to move away but you still keep in touch, and that’s not weird.”

This is a viewpoint shared by many, but in today’s world where thanks to the internet, thousands and even millions of people exchange thoughts and ideas every day, which is folklore’s very essence. Becoming friends and companions over the internet is seen as commonplace today, when almost anyone with the internet at their
disposal can reach out and talk to someone, and *World of Warcraft* is a facilitator for such outreach.

*World of Warcraft* can be seen as a game, it can be as demanding and time consuming as a job, and to others it can seem as a huge waste of time. But to over ten million players it is something more. *World of Warcraft* is exactly what its name suggests: a world. A world where people from all corners of the globe come together to share ideals, values, jokes, puns, put downs, rash jokes, thoughts, and feelings. At its very heart, *World of Warcraft* is folklore.

*The author’s World of Warcraft character:*
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