

WARCRAFT

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES



After bringing us the best real-time strategy game ever, and one of the best hack'n'slash RPGs of all time, Blizzard returns with its most ambitious project yet – a lavish graphic adventure set Warcraft universe. *PC Gamer* has bagged the world-exclusive first look at this awesome game in development, and you'll find six pages of never-before seen pictures and info on one of 1997's most eagerly awaited games.



The latest addition to the *WarCraft* saga takes the epic struggle of orcs and humans to an adventurous new plateau – but does Blizzard have what it takes to make an adventure game about orcs?

BY TODD VAUGHN

Since the earliest days of computer gaming, there have been few genres as alluring or enduring as graphic adventure. Just mention the names of classic like Infocom's *Zork*, LucasArts' *The Secret of Monkey Island*, or Sierra's King's Quest series to a veteran gamer, and you may just see them gaze off into the distance as they reminisce about their favorite adventures, caught up in nostalgia for the days when undiscovered worlds, inventive puzzles, and sharp wit were just a few keystrokes or mouse-clicks away.

While adventure games have always been some of the richest sources of interactive entertainment, giving many of today's top developers their start, traditional adventures seem to have gone by the wayside in recent years, with few publishers willing to undertake the time-intensive task of creating a compelling story and interesting characters.

But now that the *Diablo* and *WarCraft* creators at Blizzard Entertainment have thrown their weighty hats into the adventure-game ring, we may soon see a reversal of the genre's fortune. We went straight to the source for the latest on this unexpected move and uncovered Blizzard's master plan for the future of *WarCraft*.



Blizzard's quest for artistic perfection is evident in the lush artwork and backdrops used in the game.



The dramatic opening sequence sets the stage for *WarCraft Adventure*, as lost Clans struggle in captivity on Azeroth.

THE SANE CHOICE

As we made our way to Blizzard Entertainment's offices, there was little doubt in anyone's mind that the company that brought us two of the most acclaimed real-time strategy games has been at the top of its form lately. Even after a series of delays that led to doubts about *Diablo* and battle.net, Blizzard stuck to its guns, releasing the game only when it was truly finished, and was met with success and widespread praise for an exciting product supported by well-conceived, free multi-player service.

Still, when we first got word of Blizzard's newest project, *WarCraft Adventures: Lord of the Clans*, we wondered if the company had gone quite mad – or at least mistakenly replaced the Roman numeral III with "Adventure." The next WarCraft game wouldn't be *WarCraft III*? We were stunned.

So you can imagine our pleasant surprise when, upon arrival, we found that the folks at Blizzard are not only sane, they may actually be developing a the cure for the adventure genre's current doldrums with a dramatic, humorous, and entirely new journey to the familiar land of Azeroth.

As we were introduced to the story, characters, and influences that drive the adventure game, it became clear that the idea behind *WarCraft Adventures* isn't so far-fetched. Throughout the WarCraft family of strategy games and expansion packs, there's always been a vast and diverse world of fantasy, intrigue, and betrayal simmering beneath the constant battles and resources management. *WarCraft Adventures* merely brings those background elements to the fore; once freed from confines of scrolling mission texts and victory cut-scenes, the rich story line of the WarCraft universe proves to be more than sufficient basis for an exciting adventure.

While the move to adventure gaming might seem strange to fans hungry for another WarCraft real-time strategy game, Blizzard Executive Producer Bill Roper explains that the drive for new products comes from within the company's own tight-knit core of gamers, not from external pressures. And as Blizzard proved with *Diablo*, those gamers are capable of making waves in genre that other publishers might ignore.

"Right now there's a lot of talk within the company about feeding our demons," Roper says. "We don't want to just make real-time strategy games or be known as real-time strategy company. We're all electric gamers, and we want to constantly develop the games that really tap into who we are."



As the animated adventure takes shape, richly detailed characters from WarCraft universe are brought to life.



This preliminary sketch shows Thrall disguising himself as a dwarf as he attempts to infiltrate an aviary.

"If you looked at roleplaying games a year ago, they were stagnant," he says. "There weren't many publishers doing them, and the few that were released just weren't breaking new ground. As a result, everyone claimed RPGs were dead, but they were dead only because developers weren't doing enough with them, and people got bored and moved on to something else."

"When Condor brought *Diablo* to us, it was such a natural and obvious concept that we all thought 'This will kick butt. This will be cool.' Because it addressed -us as gamers and brought something fresh to the table."

Roper says the same sort of intuitive spark flashed when the idea of an adventure games was presented to them.

"When Capitol Multimedia (a division of Davidson – the company that owns Blizzard) came to us and presented us with the idea for an adventure game based in the WarCraft universe," he says, "it seemed a very natural course to take. The idea of expanding on the WarCraft brand with the depth of an adventure game just seemed a perfect fit for who we are."



Throughout the course of the game, Thrall's quest to unite the clans takes him to some familiar places in the WarCraft universe. Here he must investigate the inside of DeathKnight temple.

ANATOMY OF AN ADVENTURE

Despite the success Blizzard has had with the advanced techniques used to create the look and feel of games like *WarCraft II* and *Diablo*, Blizzard has decided to forgo the latest bells and whistles and take a very traditional approach to the graphics and gameplay of *WarCraft Adventures*.

"We're not necessarily looking to make the next great innovation in adventure game interfaces or rewrite the book on how adventure games are done," Roper says. "There are some very defined standards, and people expect an adventure game to work a certain way, so our main goal is to tap into all the elements that make adventure games enjoyable in the first place – and that's basically a fantastic story and sense of humor.

"Graphically, we wanted to go with the hand-drawn 2D look, as opposed to the 3D-rendered stuff, because 2D art really captures the WarCraft feel," he says. "The characters for *WarCraft II* were rendered 3D models, but then we had artists hand-draw over top of the models so we could give them a very animated, almost cartoonish look. We want to try and maintain a consistent look and feel through both the adventure and strategy games while having that artwork be just as gorgeous as possible."

The huge task of producing the mass amounts of high-quality art needed for the adventure game falls to a group of animators located in



By drawing on the diverse characters used in the WarCraft strategy titles, Blizzard hopes to reinvigorate the adventure game genre.



During one dramatic scene, Thrall must match wits with the dragon Deathwing.

St. Petersburg, Russia. As we pored over a mountain of production sketches, painted cell art, and characters drawing, it became obvious that WarCraft's trademark look and feel was in safe hands, making the transition from top-down strategy game to 2D adventure with surprising ease. Still, Roper says communicating the WarCraft vision to an outsider isn't easy.

"The things that's tough when you're dealing with a third party, whether it's one artist doing just one thing or hundred doing a number of things, is communicating ideas that are possibly new to them," Roper says. "As we're working with the group of animators in Russia, art will come in four approval or changes, and there are times when we have to say, 'This doesn't look right', or 'Change this to look like this.'

"Part of the difficulty is that we're very anal-

retentive about our products," he says. "Within the company there's a very focused and universal understanding of the WarCraft universe, the characters, the story lines, the look and feel of all these intimate details – and as we're working with the animators and Capitol, it can be a real challenge sharing that vision. But we're definitely pleased with the results."

WHAT DOES AN ORC SOUND LIKE?

With the advent of CD-ROMs and sound cards, vocal characterizations have become an important feature of nearly every game on the market, and the WarCraft series is certainly no exception. But after establishing memorable and offbeat characters through short audio clips in the strategy games, Blizzard was faced with the challenge of recording the hours of dialog required for *WarCraft Adventures* – and making sure it lived up to the series' standards.

After recording tons of dialog in Boston using professional voice-over actors, the speech patterns of the various orcs, goblins, and trolls began to come together. But, as Chris Medsen reveals, Blizzard's drive for perfection finally led the company to some big names with booming voices.

"When we wrote the script, we didn't cast anyone in specific roles," Medsen says. "We really didn't have anyone in mind as far as main characters went, but after we did the voice-over work in Boston, there were just a few characters that we felt needed an extra boost, we just wanted something more.

"We'd sit around and say things like 'When I was a kid, I remember watching 'The Transformers,' and Optimus Prime had this bitchin' voice!' And we thought, 'Why not try to get him?'" As a result, Peter Cullin, the one and only Optimus Prime from the classic "Transformers" cartoon series, was brought on to do some of the voices for the game.

Tackling the lead lore as Thrall is Clancy Brown, (best known for his work as the evil Kurgan in the cult film *Highlander*) whose snarling baritone and wry delivery help define the orc hero throughout the game. Another booming presence in the game comes from the vocal talent of Tony Jay (Disney's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*), who lends his powerful voice to a number of characters.

"We definitely knew we couldn't have the orcs running around saying 'Zug-zug' all the time," says Bill Roper. "That would be too goofy for the game. But with the voice-overs that we've done, we've been able to match that vocal style and really define each character at the same time."

ORCISH EMANCIPATION

The story begins shortly after the end of the *WarCraft II's* expansion pack, *Beyond the Dark Portal*. A group of orcs has become trapped in the human realm of Azeroth, with no hope of returning to the Horde. As the human council on Azeroth comes to term with the loss of its own forces to the realm of Drenor, the humans decide these orcs won't be slaughtered; they'll be detained on reservations as long as they stay out of trouble. In the course of the game, you'll interact with these captive orcs as you attempt to reunite the fragmented clans.

Blizzard's Chris Medsen explains that opening up the world of the orcs means a chance to show another side of the brutish race – and weave a compelling story in the bargain.

"The thinking behind the story is that most of what we've seen of the orc characters in the previous WarCraft games was pretty much along the lines of 'Oh, they're just mindless savages'," Medsen says. "But throughout the course of the game, we can get into the orcs' back story, where we get to see that they're also a very honorable, tight-knit group. As the story progresses, you'll realize that we're not really focusing too much on orc vs. human conflict; it's a much darker conflict, as treacherous orcs are selling their buddies out for favor among the humans."

To give the player character for the adventure is thrall," says Roper. "He's an Orc from a long-lost wolf-rider clan, raised by human soldier named Lieutenant Blackmoor, who found him on a battlefield. Since he's been raised by humans, he doesn't know much of the orc history or background. We've done that to give the player a fresh start with the universe; they're basically on a journey of discovery with Thrall as they begin interacting with other characters. We wanted to make a title that would allow you to jump right in and become immersed in this world, and if you're familiar with the strategy games, you're going to be engaged as well."



Elements from the WarCraft universe, like this Death Knight temple, are used in WarCraft Adventures.



During the opening sequence, rival Orcs – Rend and Maim – are locked in battle with Thrall's father over the fate of the Horde.

"In the beginning, Thrall basically has no free will, no control over his destiny," Roper says. "He's ordered by Blackmoor to fight a troll, because Blackmoor wants to prove to some visiting generals that he has complete control over this orc. As Thrall enters the arena, Blackmoor orders him to just sit there and take a pounding from the troll until Blackmoor tells him he can't fight. Once Blackmoor orders him to fight, he of course makes short work of the troll, and when he's obviously won, Blackmoor orders Thrall to kill the troll. That's when Thrall decides he's had enough, that to kill the troll wouldn't be honorable, because the



Using a group of animators in St. Petersburg, Russia, Blizzard is recreating the WarCraft feel the old fashioned way – one character at a time.

not a bleak look at how terrible things have become for the orcs."

One recurring source of humor comes in the form of an ongoing dwarf and goblin rivalry as each race attempts to outdo the other's technology, with Thrall invariably caught in the middle. Roper describes one situation where Thrall must actually impersonate a dwarf.

"Since Thrall is an accomplished magic-user as well as an accomplished warrior, Thrall has to change himself into a Dwarf and go into a Dwarven camp so he can spy on them for the Goblins," he says. "There's this Dwarf maiden that has the lots for him – it's very funny."

And as Thrall makes his way of one predicament or another, those familiar with the characters from the strategy games will find themselves rubbing shoulders with some of Azeroth and Drenor's more infamous characters. Roper says that part of the reason has been response from the fans of the strategy games.

"We get constant E-mails and letters from people who've read the manuals and loved the story," Roper says, "and they'll say 'Wow, this is more like an RPG or an adventure game.' They always have questions about what happened to certain characters or what's the real story behind the end of the expansion pack. This is our chance to tell them."

troll is completely outmatched. So Thrall's sense of honor erupts, and he attacks Blackmoor – only to be thrown into a dungeon for assaulting a human.

"That's where you start the game. Thrall is an accomplished warrior and an accomplished magic-user, and over the course of the game you'll have to become the embodiment of everything that is orcish."

As Thrall begins to explore the world of Azeroth's orcs, he'll encounter a broken and fragmented society that's become bitter and complacent. Once-proud clans like the fearsome Shattered Hand have taken a turn for the worse in the time away from the Horde.

Featured in the *WarCraft II* expansion pack, the Shattered Hand held honor above all else, and proved their loyalty by cutting off their left hands and replacing them with weapons. Now confined to the reservation, the members of the Shattered Hand Clan have sold all their weapons to buy pacifying elixir known as black ale.

While the story elements paint a grim view of orc life, Chris Medsen says the game's not all gloom-and-doom.

"A lot of the issues we deal with in the game are very intense," he says. "There's betrayal, there's the issue of the orcs being confined to what are basically internment camps, and issues of slavery – we knew if we maintained that tone, it would simply be too dark and gritty, so there's a lot of humor. It's



Blizzard decided to develop its latest game as a traditional graphic adventure.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR *WARCRAFT III*

Considering the high production values and traditional approach guiding the creation of *WarCraft Adventures*, it looks like Blizzard's first entry into the adventure game genre will be a memorable one. But as our meeting with Blizzard drew to a close, the inevitable question of WarCraft's real-time strategy future still hung in the air.

We pressed Blizzard for information – any information – on *WarCraft III*, and were assured that Blizzard isn't about to let WarCraft's influence fade from the real-time strategy arena.

"There's two things we want to do with the adventure game," Roper says. "The first, of course, is to do something different with the brand. We love adventure games, we love the WarCraft universe we've worked hard to create, and we thought it would be a lot of fun to bring the characters out in new light.

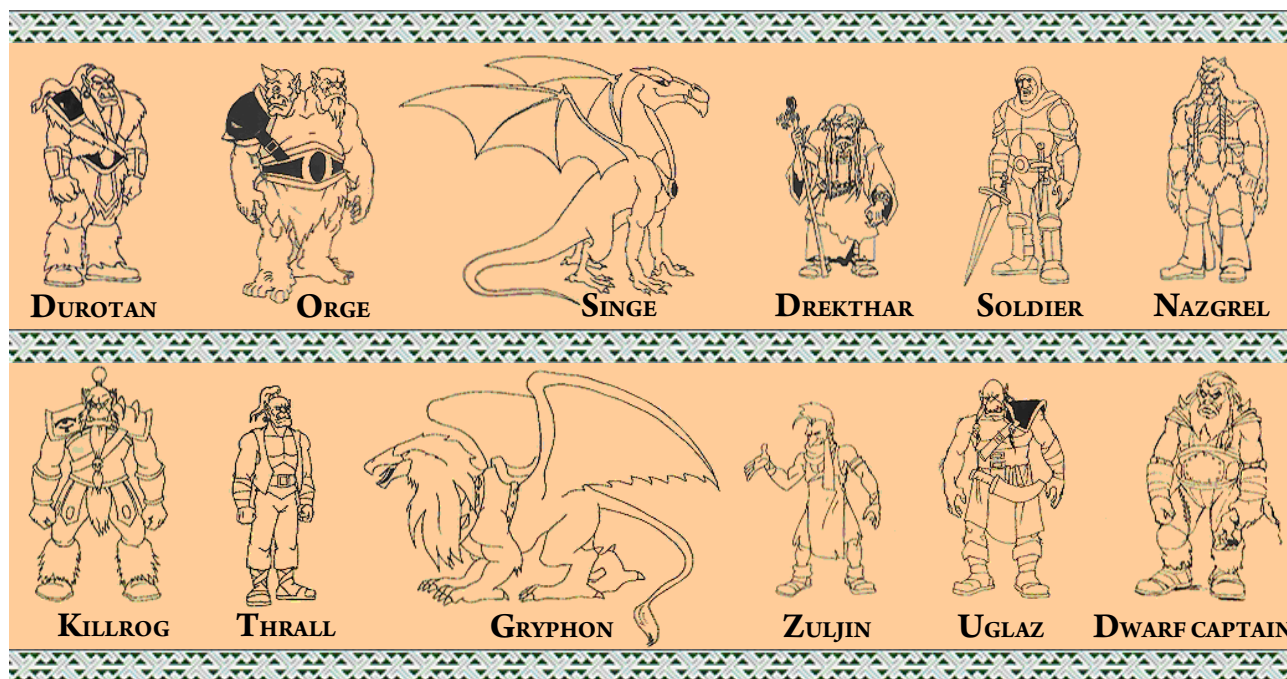
"But we also know that we want to continue to have a presence within the real-time strategy genre after the release of *StarCraft*, and *WarCraft Adventures* allows us to set the stage for *WarCraft III*," he says. "We don't have a release date – we don't even have a year – but *WarCraft III* will happen. We already have an idea of where we want the next strategy game to start, and we'll definitely be developing those ideas over time.

"If we were a purely commercial-driven company, we'd probably be on *WarCraft XI* by now, but I think those concerns always need to be tempered and driven by a consistent vision that can address our desires as well. The adventure game is one of those desires."

Fair enough, as far as we're concerned. Blizzard's desires haven't been wrong so far.



Lush backgrounds have to be created as Blizzard moves the WarCraft universe from top-down strategy to 2D adventure.



STARCRAFT IS COMING!

No visit to the Blizzard offices would be complete without a thorough shakedown of the company's eagerly awaited real-time strategy game, *StarCraft*, so we twisted a few arms to sample the latest work-in-progress, and the outlook is good.

StarCraft was put on hold so the team could help Blizzard North finalize *Diablo*, but Blizzard has obviously redoubled its efforts on this science fiction real-time strategy game – the version we saw showed substantial improvements over earlier builds.

While the graphics for terrain and units are easily some of the best we've seen in a strategy title, we were especially impressed by the new special effects that have been added. Real-time light-sourcing creates a dramatic effect during heavy firefights against multiple enemies. And lighting effects won't just be cosmetic; some of the units will be able to generate their own light sources, allowing them to reveal more of the map – while simultaneously making them tempting targets when approaching enemy territory. Also on display was a great cloaking effect, which makes units all but invisible behind a lightly shimmering disguise.



As our latest look at Blizzard's *StarCraft* revealed, this real-time epic is destined to heat things up when it's released in the fall.



StarCraft's graphics for the individual units are some of the sharpest we've seen.

Nearly all of the unit types from the game's three races (Protoss, Terran, and Zerg) have been implemented, and the design teams are in the process of programming artificial intelligence routines to control them.

For multi-player competition, Blizzard is planning a new variation on alliances that will let multiple gamers command units from a single base. One player could manage the economy while other players control military units. While the all-too-brief demo of *StarCraft* left us thoroughly impressed, a lot has changed since the title was first announced. With more than 20 real-time strategy games due by year's end, the feeding frenzy surrounding the genre Blizzard helped define has created an intensely competitive environment. Still, Blizzard is confident that *StarCraft* can deliver more the goods better than anyone else's game.

"We know *StarCraft* is going to be the best real-time strategy game out there," says Chris Blizzard's Medsen. "With this many titles coming, it's going to

be hard to cut above the chaff, but I think what we offer is the same sort of thing we brought to the *WarCraft* games – a compelling character package that you can connect with and relate to, and that goes way beyond whatever gameplay elements or units we add to the game."