

## Green Jesus of Azeroth:

### Hero Myths and Fan Based Perceptions of Similarities Between Jesus of Nazareth and the *World of Warcraft's* 'Thrall'

A. Asbjørn Jøn

University of Canterbury  
New Zealand

#### Abstract

*Blizzard Entertainment's World of Warcraft includes a range of deep intertextual links. In exploring those links, as part of the fandom process, fans have widely developed a perception of similarities between Warcraft's character, Thrall, and Jesus of Nazareth from Christian faiths. Links between Thrall and Jesus have become so widely recognised, and openly acknowledged in fan discussions of Warcraft lore, that Thrall has been renamed 'Green Jesus' by the fan base. This paper explores those perceived links and considers some influences on the creative processes of Chris Metzen (the original Creative Director for the game) that may shed light on this perceived use of Jesus-like character types while exploring the ways that they may also represent links to Indo-European Hero Patterns and the elementary ideas of mythic archetypes.*

#### Key Words

*World of Warcraft; Thrall; Jesus of Nazareth; Virtual Worlds; MMORPG; hero; hero pattern; fandom; comparative mythology;*

It would seem that mythological worlds have been built up only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments. (Boas 1898, 18)

**B**lizzard Entertainment's *World of Warcraft* includes a range of deep intertextual links and borrowings that cover themes such as: popular culture, tributes to historical figures, and, mythological symbols, motifs and archetypal formulas / patterns. In engaging with that highly mythicized content, fans have interpreted and analyzed the role that it plays within the *Warcraft* plot and mythos, as well as the way that it adds depth to the setting—fleshing-out the creatively crafted cultures within it—, while helping to shape a shared interpretation of the central characters and plot. Among those shared interpretations lays fan based perceptions of similarities between the *Warcraft* 'hero' and non-player character, Thrall, and Abrahamic mythology's central protagonist, Jesus of Nazareth. Perceived links between Thrall and Jesus have become so widely recognised and openly acknowledged by the fanbase that in unofficial discussions of *Warcraft* lore Thrall has been renamed 'Green Jesus' (for examples see: Sinarda-Drak'Thul 2015, Orkling-Emerald Dream 2015, Ireken 2014). That use of the 'Green Jesus' name for Thrall is complex, often including negative or derogatory connotations—suggesting that, as a character, Thrall is too powerful and perfect.

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Scholarly studies of *World of Warcraft*, and similar fantasy games, have most often focussed on aspects of: the social interactions between players (Bessi re, Seay, and Kiesler 2007, Williams et al. 2006, Chen 2009), an analysis of gamer subculture (J n 2010), and, aspects of the broad MMORPG phenomenon (Golub 2010, Smahel, Blinka, and Ledabyl 2008). This paper, however, sets out to explore connections in the tales of Thrall and Jesus, mapping the key overlapping elements that fan-led discussions of the Azeroth mythos and histories have identified, in order to present a case for deeper analysis of the way that the MMORPG blends elements of myth with creative story telling within the clothing of its twenty-first century interactive high fantasy setting through its stable narratives and uses of applied / adapted mythology.

In this way, the stable narratives of this ever-evolving game-world, and their links to folk narrative and mythic elements, are made central—positioning this study in an area of anthropology, game and folklore studies. This area of research is currently underrepresented and is much in need of scholarly attention so that our understanding of the intricacies of this form of applied and adapted mythology might be improved. Recent research into research methodologies for game studies, by Lankoski and Bj rk, has suggested that:

formal analysis [might] focus [...] on the different elements of a work, that is, asking questions about the elements that constitute the parts of the work and the role of each element in the composition as a whole. (Lankoski and Bj rk 2015a, 24)

Further, in keeping with the themes and content of this study, Lankoski and Bj rk noted that key sources for this style of analysis might include, and methodologies might mirror: Frazer’s comparative study of religion and magic in *The Golden Bough* (1983), ‘Campbell’s [significant] monomyth theory’ (Lankoski and Bj rk 2015a, 24)—as outlined in his text on the Hero Pattern, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968), and Propp’s (1968) analysis of folktale morphology. Those prompts, particularly around Campbell (1968), provide an ideal climate for investigation of the hero pattern within the stable narratives of high fantasy MMORPG games.

The most exhaustive commentary of this particular topic, to date, was presented by Kenzuki, as a 373 word online bulletin board post titled: ‘Thrall is Jesus: A Study of the Orcish Messiah’. Kenzuki’s discussion piece was posted on the 18th of August 2007 in the ‘WarCraft Lore Discussion’ section of the *Scrolls of Lore Forums* (Kenzuki 2007). While Kenzuki was very insightful in the scope of connections presented in that initial analysis, the brevity of it has meant that the suggested similarities were unable to be explained or examined. This discussion will, in part, explore Kenzuki’s claims, and provide information about the way they relate to the narratives of Abrahamic mythology.

Many of the concepts and arguments noted by Kenzuki are, based upon the present writer’s many years of participant observation in the *Warcraft* community, theories that predate his post considerably. They are so widely recognised, and openly acknowledged in fan discussions of *Warcraft* lore, that in 2012 Fenton posted on the official Blizzard Entertainment forums that ‘when [as a Warcraft enthusiast] you read

the words “Green Jesus” you immediately know what they mean’ (Fenton-Dream Killer 2012). As such, several of the directly comparative points that are presented here are based upon collectively fan developed theories, and general conjectures, that are at times espoused - usually with no supporting evidence - within the ‘trade chat’ live discussions and forums of many *World of Warcraft* servers / websites.

Discussion will begin with an exploration of myth, and then the way in which similarities between Thrall and Jesus dovetail with what scholars refer to as the Indo-European hero pattern—a similarity not mentioned in fan discussions at all. The hero pattern is a theme that has been discussed by scholars of Folklore and Anthropology for decades now, sparking from the work of significant early studies (Raglan 1934, 1936, Rank 1909) which followed the pattern being proposed in J. G. von Hahn’s *Sagwissenschaftliche Studien* (1876, 340). Initially however, “the [... pattern] made very little stir in scholarly circles. In Germany and on the continent generally it was rarely commented upon” (Taylor 1964, 116). The most important early use of the Formula outside those core studies was by Nutt (1881), who contributed significantly to the way that we now interpret some events within its cycle. Since being adopted by scholars such as the highly influential folklorist Dundes (1976), and anthropologist / religious studies scholar Campbell (1968), the pattern has gained much wider acceptance (Nagler 1974, Connelly and Massie 1989, Olson 1989, Mbele 1982). After identifying the way that core events surrounding Thrall fit with the hero pattern—and the way that Dundes interprets that pattern through Jesus—the specific events recognized by Kenzuki and the fan base will be treated in greater detail.

It is important to recognize, and understand, the connections between Thrall and Jesus as they allow deeper insight into the structure and workings of the stable narratives of the game setting. Through that understanding, we can better see the way that individual narrative elements, across a broad web of stories, have shifted forms from traditional religious associations in the everyday settings to plot motifs within high fantasy digital worlds. That progression illustrates an example of religious folk motifs evolving as shifts take place within society.

## Mythic structures

Individual myths, whether modern (such as the myths of Thrall) or traditional (such as the myths of Jesus), are socially and culturally located stories that explain natural and / or social forces. In that way, myths function as tools for their societies, allowing people to engage with a common understanding of the expectations of a society, and the way that society understands built and natural environments. Those environments can include elements that are: geographic, material, sociological, cosmological, or even virtual. Therefore, a strong interrelation exists between myth and constructed social reality (Malinowski 1954)—particularly when a myth is considered as part of a mythos. A mythos, is a set of such myths, which collectively tell the mythic stories of a particular group, society or religion - with mythoi being the plural of mythos. Then, through analysing the aesthetic of a mythos—and the common ideas within it, we

might come to “a description of the life, social organisation and religious ideas and practices of a people [...] as it appears in their mythology” (Boas and Tate 1916, 320) in an ethnographic sense—and that ‘people’ can be applied equally forcefully to both real world geographic communities and subcultural groups formed within virtual spaces (such as the *World of Warcraft*). Operating inside those mythic stories however, are a series of archetypes:

In abandoning the search for a constantly accurate picture of ethnographic reality in myth, [and focussing on deeper levels of meaning such as those of archetypes and structural patterns,] we gain, on occasions, a means of reaching unconscious categories. (Lévi-Strauss 1976, 172-173)

Joseph Campbell, extending the work of Carl Jung (1962), explained that “archetypes [...] are the common ideas of myth” (Campbell and Moyers 1991, 60)—or what might be considered mythic building blocks. Those core elements within myths, archetypes, ‘are biologically grounded. [...] All over the world, and at different times of human history, these archetypes, or elementary ideas, have appeared in different costumes” (Campbell and Moyers 1991, 60-61)—taking forms that match the needs and aesthetics of the cultures and societies that ‘spin them’ into mythic stories that construct intangible, cultural, layers of meaning upon all aspects of the human experience and environment. So “the differences in the costumes are [just] the results of environment and historical conditions” (Campbell and Moyers 1991, 61).

As the elementary, and even biological elements of myth, archetypes are thought to be very ancient—perhaps even pre-dating language (Cassirer 1957), which according to Jung exist in their most pure form within a ‘collective unconscious’. Therefore, myth can be considered “as a ‘language’ which, properly understood, will tell us things otherwise un-revealed” (Ryan 1973, 51). Further, scholars of folkloristics have discussed and developed a theoretical framework for understanding myth and folklore in terms of biological metaphors for some decades (Hafstein 2005).

Archetypal patterns, or stories, are then stories that are typical representations of those core archetypes—and which can access and stir those deep elementary, or even biological, ideas within readers / listeners who engage with them. This is not to suggest, however, that the patterns, and their corresponding archetypes and myths, are universal. Myths are clearly linked to, and have adapted or evolved because of, cultural and geographic environments. While they include elementary archetypal ideas, which scholars have identified as including biological elements, those elements have clearly been shaped by evolutionary processes based upon geographic settings and cultural factors just as other aspects of variation between human groups have.

Consequently, “archetypal patterns endure because they give expression to perennial dilemmas submerged in the collective unconscious” (Pratt 1981, 220) of those which they are culturally and / or geographically relevant to. As Joseph Campbell has noted, ‘it used to be that these stories [religious myths and their archetypes] were in the minds of people’ (Campbell and Moyers 1991, 2)—but as Western societies have moved towards a lesser engagement with religion, more modern archetypal stories

and myths, such as the tales of Thrall, have become an increasingly common way for people to engage with, and communicate, archetypal / mythic motifs. Structural analysis has shown that hero patterns form one of those archetypal elements that exist within myths, and which are found across mythoi.

### **How readers of the *World of Warcraft* engage with myth**

*World of Warcraft*, as a text, is presented as a persistent world MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game)—drawing on, and often trail-blazing, conventions for that genre. This means that players enter a world that carries on developing even when they are not playing the game, adding to the immersive properties of their experience. They can take part in just a few events of the stories of that world, or in most of them—depending only upon the amount of time that they can dedicate to the game and the level of skill with which they play. Within that format, players take on the role of a ‘hero’. Their hero starts with a reasonably mundane life then develops skills and powers to the point that they can not only help shape world events, but come to interact with and do combat against the very elements and divine beings of their world and beyond. Throughout those adventures, player’s characters remain closely linked to the region of their origin, and not only represent it in wars and conflicts, but are responded to with honorifics at times by the citizens and troops of that faction (such as ‘commander’ or ‘hero’).

Scholars such as Krzywinska have noted (2005, 3) that when we analyse that process in terms of anthropological theory it becomes clear that we are looking at a game system that provides players with an opportunity to enact the notion of the hero myth / pattern. Joseph Campbell wrote extensively about the mythological structures associated with hero tales, explaining that within their formulaic structure:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Campbell 1968, 30)

Consequently, the experiences of the player, and his/her level of immersion within the game, is intertwined tightly with his/her engagement with the mythicization of his character and the development of his/her exploring this recrafting of mythic hero narratives to shape an interactive experience within the clothing of a modern high fantasy virtual world and society.

Bringing further depth to that textual structure, and the way that players experience it, *Warcraft* provides not only detailed histories for the regions of the game world (Azeroth), but also distinct cultures and religious traditions for the denizens of each of region within that virtual world. Cultures and traditions are varied, and their respective myth / legend hordes are crafted in keeping with the accepted notion that religions / mythologies are a response to both natural and built environments.



Figure 1. The monument to the defeat of Deathwing in Stormwind.

This is established through clear links between the mythic content of regions and their geographic, material and social features—demonstrating an adaptive example of Eliade’s argument that through myth man is able to ‘transform the landscape of nature into a cultural milieu’ (Eliade 1963, 140). Consequently each player ‘hero’ is able to engage not only with the broader structures of heroic myth, but also with the notion that their legendary / mythic actions can influence the way that all residents within the virtual world view / interpret the natural landscape—as their actions, at crucial plot points, can have real consequences for both societies and landscapes.

As an example of the way that each player ‘hero’ could shape the landscape, during the *Cataclysm* expansion Patch 4.3 (Blizzard Entertainment 2010), the residents of Azeroth (essentially all players and a range of plot characters) were encouraged to band together to fight the dragon Deathwing—who was threatening to rip the world asunder. The finale for that sequence of events was a ‘raid’, or group based challenge, called the Dragon Soul. In the Dragon Soul raid players were able to finally defeat Deathwing and free Azeroth of his influence. After Deathwing had been defeated on a *Warcraft* server a monument to his defeat appeared on the edge of the capital city for the player’s faction, to forever commemorate that victory. Another example being the direct actions of each player ‘hero’ leading to an individual garrison being constructed to aid in their hero-arc during the *Warlords of Draenor* (Blizzard Entertainment 2014) game expansion.

Arguably, the relationship between *Warcraft*’s player-centred hero-arc structure, and the place of Thrall within the broadly experienced stable narratives Azeroth, drives the in-game dynamics which have led to the ‘Green Jesus’ name and a set of negative connotations that surround it. This is as while each player is immersed in the process of developing an individualized hero arc for their character, the stable narratives continually implant Thrall in their stories, positioning him as a more powerful hero. In that way, the label of ‘Green Jesus’, as a derogatory term, can be seen to reflect Thrall’s near perfect role as a hero within the narratives of the game setting. Thrall is, in the eyes of many players, a plot character that appears too frequently (Brans 2012, Nihlus-Khadgar 2015), and like Jesus, one who can be interpreted as a sign of miraculous events that will lead to salvation for all. Consequently, the term ‘Green Jesus’ also indicates a general feeling that Thrall is too perfect, and perhaps over-powered (Volkán 2011). Therefore, through developing a better understanding of Thrall, and the structures and web of stories which drive his perceived connections to Jesus, we can unpack the way that players perceive their virtual setting and interactions with the hero pattern.

### **Thrall and the Hero Pattern within the *Warcraft* MMORPG**

Hence the hypothesis: what if patterns showing affinity, instead of being considered in succession, were to be treated as one complex pattern and read globally? (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 432)

There is, as yet, no single, agreed, Indo-European hero pattern—as the patterns proposed by the core studies all have some distinct differences in interpretation of

the sequence of events. Scholars have attempted to amalgamate patterns—such as Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968)—but such approaches are often labelled as ‘a synthetic composite’ (Dundes 1976, 8) because they look primarily for broader parallels among the tale type. Consequently, when coming to work on the life of Jesus as a hero pattern, Dundes chose to engage with three major prior offerings: von Hahn (1876), Rank (1913—but originally published in 1909) and Raglan (1934)—a tactic that several scholars have since adopted. As Dundes noted, ‘it is difficult to compare the three patterns’ (Dundes 1976, 9)—and all three have particular merits and varying links to the Abrahamic Jesus myths. In applying Raglan’s pattern to Jesus however, Dundes was able to score 17 out of a possible 22 points for pattern matching events within the myths (Dundes 1976, 10)—providing the strongest parallel of those three patterns. The other patterns do however also provide an interesting spread of matches.

Drawing on the comparisons of hero patterns undertaken by Dundes (1976, 8-9), the following table outlines instances where the Thrall narratives fit within broader notions of the hero pattern—by providing matches to the patterns of von Hahn (1876), Rank (1909) and Raglan (1934). The table explores events 1 through 17 only, as events 18 to 22 of the hero pattern are set after the death of the hero—which has not yet occurred in the saga of Thrall. The life of Thrall fits closest to the hero pattern of Raglan—with 11 out of 17 possible events aligning. Notably however, there is only one event within the cycle, when drawing from all three versions of the hero pattern, where a match cannot be made—indicating that Thrall may represent a possible re-telling of the archetypal story of a hero. For many events in the sequence, Thrall’s life matches with more than one of the patterns. Therefore, noting links between the lives of Thrall, Jesus and these three interpretations of hero patterns, not only allows for a structured comparison of Thrall and Jesus, but also opens the possibility that similarities may in fact be the product of influence and engagement with the mythic symbols, iconography and archetypes of the hero pattern, instead of just representing borrowings solely from Jesus myths.

### **The costumes of myth and variations in hero patterns**

In considering the life of Jesus as a representation of hero patterns, Dundes found “that the life of Jesus must be understood as a version, a very special version of the Indo-European Hero Pattern” (Dundes 1976, 30)—with the variations that make it a special version occurring due to the cultural and historical influences that contributed to shaping its mythic and folkloric content. Those variations are then, in essence, located in the way that the mythic narratives, symbols and archetypes, have been both assembled and included and / or omitted, as elementary ideas, in response to the context within which they were formed. Therefore, they represent an application of myth through which man was able to ‘transform the landscape of nature into a cultural milieu’ (Eliade 1963, 140)—with the landscape being not only the geological location, but also the material, social and political elements of a society.

**Table 1.** Hero Pattern events and links to the like of Thrall<sup>1</sup>

Event #	Hero pattern matching Thrall.	Event.	How it applies to Thrall.	Dundes' match for Jesus with Raglan's pattern (1976, 10).
1	Rank (1909)	Child of distinguished parents.	Durotan and Draka ruled the Frostwolf Clan (of Orcs).	'Virgin mother'—matched.
2	Rank (1909) Raglan (1934)	Father is a king. Father is a king.	Durotan was the Chieftain of the Frostwolf Clan.	No match listed. However we might here consider the Abrahamic 'God' as the King of heaven.
3	No direct matches.			No match listed. In Von Hahn's pattern though event 3 is 'father is a god'—a definite match.
4	Von Hahn (1876)	Prophecy of ascendance.	During <i>Warcraft 3</i> (Blizzard Entertainment 2002) a prophecy of Thrall's ascendance to power is introduced. This however happens out of sequence as Thrall was already an adult—but not yet the leader of the Horde.	'Unusual conception'—matched.
5	Von Hahn (1876)	Hero abandoned.	Thrall was indirectly abandoned, alone in the woods as a babe, due to the murder of his parents.	'Hero reputed to be son of god'—matched.
6	Von Hahn (1876) Rank (1909) Raglan (1934)	Suckled by animals. Saved by animals or lowly people. Attempt (usually by father) to kill hero.	While not an animal per say, Thrall was suckled by a human woman—which is another species. While not lowly, Thrall was saved after being left for dead in the woods, by the human commander Aedelas Blackmoore. Thrall was left for dead, as a babe, in the woods to be eaten by animals after an attack on his family by assassins.	'Attempt to kill hero'—matched.

7	Rank (1909) Raglan (1934)	Suckled by female animal or humble woman. Hero spirited away.	Thrall was suckled by a humble human woman— which is another species. Thrall is taken away to the internment camps.	‘Hero spirited away [flight into Egypt]’ — matched.
8	Von Hahn (1876) Raglan (1934)	Is high spirited. (Nutt (1881, 2) interprets this point as ‘is of passionate and violent disposition’.) Reared by foster parents in a far country.	As a child Thrall was trained as a gladiator— where he proved to be an excellent warrior. Thrall was reared by humans in an internment camp.	‘Reared by foster parents [Joseph]’ — matched.
9	Rank (1909)	Hero grows up.	Thrall grows to adulthood.	‘No details of childhood’ — matched.
10	Raglan (1934)	Goes to future kingdom.	Thrall travels to Kalimdor.	Matched.
11	Raglan (1934)	Is victor over king, giant, dragon or wild beast.	Thrall is victorious over the murloc armies of the Sea Witch while travelling to Kalimdor, and is victorious over a band of wild centaurs after arriving in Kalimdor. Thrall was also victorious over demonic beasts at the Battle of Mount Hyjal.	No match listed.
12	Von Hahn (1876) Rank (1909)	Founds cities. Acknowledged by people.	Thrall helps found Durotar in Kalimdor (named after his father) and the capital city Orgrimmar. The Trolls and the Tauren acknowledge Thrall as a great leader.	No match listed. Jesus would however match with Rank’s ‘acknowledged by people.’
13	Rank (1909) Raglan (1934)	Achieves rank and honors. Becomes king.	Thrall became the War Chief (read King) of the Horde.	‘Becomes king (cf. the mock title of “King of the Jews”)’ — matched.
14	Raglan (1934)	For a time he reigns uneventfully.	For three years Orgrimmar grew and there were only minor incidents.	Matched.

15	Raglan (1934)	He prescribes laws.	Thrall and Jania Proudmore set out a revolutionary Horde / Alliance peace treaty. This leads to increases in peace. Thrall also negotiates to bring Blood Elves into the Horde.	Matched.
16	Raglan (1934)	Later, he loses favour with gods or his subjects.	Thrall loses favour with other important Orcs, including Garrosh Hellscream—who challenges him to a duel.	‘Judas’—matched.
17	Raglan (1934)	Driven from the throne and city.	While a slightly tenuous link - due to world events Thrall leaves Orgrimmar and joins The Earthen Ring—a neutral faction of shaman who protect Azeroth with their powers.	Matched.

Like ranges of mythic symbols and archetypal patterns, to those found in the Jesus tales, appear within various cultures, geographical spaces and time periods. Similarities between those culturally diverse mythoi, which use like ranges of mythic symbols and archetypal patterns, allow the development of recognisable tale types (including hero patterns), despite significant aesthetic and stylistic differences between them. The mythoi do remain as individual and distinct bodies of expression. In some functional terms though, the aesthetic and stylistic differences primarily position them ethnographically within their own societies, spaces and temporal periods. In that way, these tales use archetypes and mythic symbols to connect with particular concepts in readers / listeners on an elementary, or fundamental, level—a level of communication that can be witnessed in mythologically adaptive fantasy texts such as those of the *Warcraft* franchise. Notably, we can also see in the *World of Warcraft* an adaptation of the way that myth transforms landscapes into cultural spaces—with the events of the Thrall hero tale interlocking neatly with a range of social and political elements of the game world in order to craft a more cohesive set of cultural narratives.

The versions of the hero tale that we see in the lives of both Jesus and Thrall then, following Campbell, are ones that represent the “environment and historical conditions” (Campbell and Moyers 1991, 61) within which they were assembled, while communicating the elementary ideas associated with the hero, and perhaps also the sage and mystic. In turn, modern neo-mythological retellings of the hero pattern which are arguably influenced by / remnant of the Jesus narratives (such as the story of Thrall), still simultaneously represent both: the costumes of their own ‘environment and historical conditions’, and, the influence of their mythic and / or archetypal inspirations. In this way the fan identified similarities and links between Jesus and

Thrall can be seen as identifications of links to the broader hero pattern, through an archetypal and symbolic language of myth—perhaps with the Jesus myths being the closest ‘analogue’, the most obvious inspiration and most evident likeness, to Thrall’s modern digital and high fantasy clothing of that mythic formula / pattern.

The notion of manipulating archetypes and symbols within digital worlds to construct engaging environments and personalities has been commented on by a range of scholars (Maffesoli 2008, Turner and Bidwell 2007). Stefik even argued that participants in digital worlds are able to *better* access inner archetypes, such as that of the adventurer (Stefik 1997)—one of the ‘hero’ tales that players engage with in the *World of Warcraft* exemplifies. Myth, mythic symbols and archetypes, continue to hold relevance and engage people in this way—as Xianglin notes:

‘In the modern and postmodern historical and cultural context, myth hides in our spiritual and cultural activities in various altered forms. Having evolved into a mythic form in the contemporary sense, it continues to play a powerful psychological role and to act as a midwife of conscious activities and forms.’ (Xianglin 2010, 111)

### **The role of Chris Metzen and an acknowledgement of using archetypes**

When analysing possible uses of mythic patterns and archetypes in the *World of Warcraft*, and links between Thrall and mythic figures such as Jesus, it is important to consider the position and mindset of key individuals in the development of the *Warcraft* mythos, such as Chris Metzen (born November 22, 1973). Metzen is employed as Blizzard Entertainment’s Senior Vice President of Story and Franchise Development. Duties that he has undertaken over the years have include: being the voice actor for Thrall, creating settings for games, being the Creative Director for *Warcraft 3* (Blizzard Entertainment 2002), and, contributing to the script-writing and character development for the *World of Warcraft*. Metzen is important to this discussion because of both: his influential role in shaping characters like Thrall, and, the way that he identifies his creative process—relating it to being something like re-arranging archetypes and mythic symbols.

Speaking about his influences, and the development of his creative processes, Metzen commented in 2008:

I loved D&D [*Dungeons & Dragons*—I loved the big worlds, the big spanning themes, the big epic quests, the unfolding settings with ancient civilizations and ancient secrets coming back to haunt the present. I loved all that. I love mythology. (Chris Metzen in: Brodnitz 2008)

He also explained:

I think we soak in content. We chew on it. We digest it. What are the bits of these themes or these characters or these places that strike the chords within us emotionally? And our job is to spew back into the world. Spin the archetypes, right? Sometimes it’s a matter of mixing and matching different archetypes. Sometimes it’s a matter of just

paring an idea down to its most naked truth. I think spinning ideas back out with our own spin on it is really where the magic comes from. It's not necessarily from the innovation, although that's very striking as well. But I bet if you tracked a lot of innovative ideas, they're born from two or three other things that that person had seen already. We all stand on the shoulders of titans. (Chris Metzen in: Brodnitz 2008)

Consequently, in the hybridized hero pattern of the life of Thrall—and its close similarities to the Jesus myth, there is quite arguably a Metzen “mixing and matching [of] different archetypes” and “spinning [those] ideas back out” after they were “born from two or three other things” (Chris Metzen in: Brodnitz 2008). On some levels Metzen's stated approach is reminiscent of the classical literary device, *contaminatio*, which respected scholars have noted in the creation of other mythological high fantasy texts for some decades (Ryan 1966, 57).

Further to that idea, within the realms of *Dungeons & Dragons*—which Metzen lists as a large influence - the borrowing and blending of religious archetypes is commonplace, and, the personalization of, and active interaction with, the myth-like hero tale is the core business of the experience. Placing that within a tighter frame, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* books like *Deities & Demigods* (Ward and Kuntz 1980) and *Legends & Lore* (Ward and Denning 1990) would arguably have played a significant role in shaping the thinking of a young Metzen's creative processes regarding the blending and re-shaping of archetypes to gamify traditional mythological elements. Those texts take a range of real world religions, deities and heroes, and then present ways that they can be transposed into high fantasy gaming experiences for *Dungeons & Dragons*—perhaps providing a springboard for Metzen's later work with mythic archetypes and patterns.

### **Around and beyond hero patterns—the parallels stressed by Kenzuki and the *Warcraft* fan community**

Turning now to the similarities highlighted by Kenzuki and the *Warcraft* fanbase—these fan led arguments most commonly begin with likenesses between the narratives that extend around Thrall's and Jesus' births. Both sets of birth tales connect to a series of early hero pattern events, including not only matches with the pattern events themselves, but also a range of other ways. Unpacking the way that fans perceive those similarities, and explaining them through evidence from the two sets of narratives—beyond just the overlaps within a hero pattern—allow a deeper insight into how closely Metzen and his team have accessed motifs that are identifiable with wider known myths and archetypes as well as consider the way that this modern audience is interpreting, and constructing meaning from, the material.

Both Jesus and Thrall were descended from royalty and born amid serious social difficulties—yet both are left in the care, through different circumstances, of people with a much lower station. This similarity between the two tales conforms to Rank's definition of the hero's birth myth:

The hero is the child of most distinguished parents, usually the son of a king. His origin is preceded by difficulties [...]. He is then saved by animals, or lowly people (shepherds), and is suckled by a female animal or a humble woman. (Rank 1913, 65)

We learn of the belief that Jesus is descended from both Abraham and King David—the second king of the United Kingdom of Israel and Judah—from Matthew in the *Bible*. Matthew presents a line of paternal descent that is traced through three segments, each covering fourteen generations and spanning the periods between significant points of time within the Judeo-Christian mythos. While the genealogy presented by Matthew clearly possesses several historical difficulties, most obviously around the time frames spanned by each segment of fourteen generations and the omission of known historical figures, he presents a clear family tree for Jesus through Joseph in that format. However, while Joseph was the legal father of Jesus, he was not of any biological relation (see the *Gospel of Matthew* 1:18-25 and the *Gospel of Luke* 1:26-38). Culturally and historically that genealogy positions Jesus as a Jew who was descended from royalty and connected to the earlier interactions between Yahweh, the Christian god, and mortals.<sup>2</sup> The case of Thrall establishing links to royalty is less tenuous - as he is the son of Durotan and Draka. Durotan was the Chieftain of the Frostwolf Clan (of Orcs), a title gained through undisputed hereditary lines.

Building upon those hereditary links to royalty, Thrall himself, later in his life, held the titles of Chieftain of the Frostwolf Clan and Liberator of the Orcs. He also went on to become the Warchief of Orgrimmar and even the Warchief of the Horde - thus truly making him truly 'royal' in Orcish terms. While Jesus did refuse to accept earthly kingdoms (see for example the *Gospel of Luke* 4:5-8) he was declared the King of the Jews from the time of his birth (*Gospel of Matthew* 2:1-2). Furthermore, in the *Bible*, the title 'King of Kings' appears six times (*First Epistle to Timothy* 6:15, *Book of Revelation* 17:14 and 19:16, *Book of Ezra* 7:12, *Book of Ezekiel* 26:7 and *Book of Daniel* 2:37) including two uses in the *Book of Revelation*. Both uses of that title in the *Book of Revelation* refer directly to Jesus—which Kenzuki likens to Thrall becoming the 'king' of all faction 'kings' as Warchief of the Horde.

Often the most strongly highlighted parallel regarding these two birth stories focuses on the almost immediate mortal threat faced by both babes—and loosely covers events six and seven of the hero patterns (Hahn 1876, Rank 1913, Raglan 1934). Vis-à-vis Jesus, while 'most recent biographies of Herod the Great deny it entirely' (Maier 1998, 170), the *Gospel of Matthew* (2:1-23) tells us that upon learning of the birth of Jesus - the predicted future King of the Jews - King Herod the Great attempted to locate the babe and slay him in fear of his own position as ruler being usurped. When Herod's initial efforts to locate the baby Jesus were foiled he sent out soldiers to kill all boys, who were up to two years of age, within Bethlehem and the surrounding region. While we are told of the soldiers murdering several babes, Jesus managed to escape the massacre through his family fleeing the region before the soldiers arrived. *Warcraft* lore enthusiasts often argue those events as loose parallels to tales of assassins who killed Thrall's family while he was a new-born infant, leaving him with his slain parents to be eaten by the creatures of the forest. That tale tells us that the assassins

were employed by Gul'dan of the Stormreaver (Orc) Clan's spies—who had learned that Thrall's father, Durotan (and his ally Orgrim Doomhammer), intended to confront Gul'dan about the Shadow Council, the demonic bargain that he had struck, and the treacherous path he had set the Orcs upon. Like in the case of King Herod having people killed at the time of Jesus' birth, the assassination of Thrall's family took place through a desire to maintain Gul'dan's power base. What is more, Thrall survived certain death by 'luckily' being found and removed from the area (after his parents were murdered) by Aedelas Blackmoore—who took him to an enemy internment camp. The argument is that both events show Thrall and Jesus escaping certain death as babes by leaving the region within which murders occurred, perpetuated by the actions of men in the employ of leaders who feared the loss of their present power base at the hands of those they sought to murder. By extension, looking at this aspect of their lives, we could also identify here that they were both brought into a world where hostile powers had large influence over their immediate futures. These likenesses go well beyond the confines of just being matching hero pattern events.

An additional and significant parallel that the fanbase also highlights, around the respective birth narratives, is the poverty that both Thrall and Jesus were born into - with Jesus being born in a barn and Thrall finding himself orphaned and living in a prison-like internment camp as a babe. This also highlights links, in both the case of Thrall and the case of Jesus, to the archetypal image of a wise sage-like spiritual figure living with poverty. Many mythoi explore the notion of divine inspiration being gained through either ordeal or sacrifice, and that sacrifice can clearly include the sacrifice of worldly wealth and the ordeal of poverty and poor living conditions. Once again here mythic symbols are used to construct archetypal character types within both myths.

### **Fan cited links that step away from the hero pattern**

Fan-based commentary on the links between Jesus and Thrall also covers a range of factors that seem to be beyond the scope of comparisons usually made within discussions of archetypal hero patterns. The following paragraphs will highlight some of those links between the two figures—stressing the idea that while the creative force for Thrall's development may have been a response to archetypal hero patterns there is probably some level of influence from Jesus-like narratives as well.

The most interesting parallel within this category draws upon onomastics and names given to Thrall. Thrall was born with the name Go'el. Notably *go'el* is Hebrew, drawn from the term *ga'al* ('to redeem'), and meaning 'redeemer'. In some Christian teachings the label *go'el* is applied to Jesus, as he takes on the role of redeeming his followers through an act of personal sacrifice. Similarly in the *Book of Isaiah* the Abrahamic god is labelled as the redeemer of Israel - as he was purported to have freed the Israeli people from captivity and lead them to a more significant purpose. (The *Book of Isaiah* 43 in the New King James Version has the subheading 'The Redeemer of Israel'; also, the *Book of Isaiah* 43:14 reads: 'Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer'.)

This connecting link between Jesus and Thrall, and by extension broader Abrahamic mythology, through the name Go'el, has been commented upon extensively by the *World of Warcraft* community members (see for example the forum thread "Please don't call Thrall 'Go'el' in WoD"—and in those discussions animated comments such as the following even tend to appear: "every time he's [Thrall] in the room, I can't hear what he's saying over the I AM JESUS I AM JESUS I AM JESUS I AM JESUS I AM JESUS" (Gildà-Emerald Dream 2015).

Alongside the links suggested by names, fans also note significant visual links between the two figures. One strong visual image associated with Jesus, and propagated through both popular culture and Christian church based imagery, is that of a long dark haired man with a beard and clad in a brown / beige robe. In Blizzard Entertainment's depictions of Thrall after the *Cataclysm*—such as on the cover of Golden's novel *Thrall: Twilight of the Aspects*—he is shown wearing a brown hooded robe. Thrall is customarily portrayed with long dark hair and in many representations also possesses a well-groomed beard. Thrall further takes on the classic image of a wise metaphysical leader through that stylised appearance.

Links between events within the life stories of Jesus and Thrall have also been noted by fans that extend past the parameters of the hero pattern. Stepping away from some aspects of the hero patterns—yet keeping with event number eight for Thrall (as it is interpreted by Nutt (1881) in particular)—are fan comparisons of the later stages of their young lives, highlighting that both Thrall and Jesus worked with their hands in humble and physical 'jobs'. It is widely believed that Jesus began life as a carpenter or builder of some kind - and the *Bible* includes passages that identify him as the son of a carpenter, in a society where occupations were largely hereditary (see the *Gospel of Matthew* 13:55-56 and the *Gospel of Mark* 6:3). In comparison, Thrall also had a manual occupation - although one that unlike the carpenter trade, is very lowly - as he was trained in a prison internment camp as a gladiator. It can clearly be said that both gladiators (who survive) and carpenters (whose buildings do not fall down) are highly skilled. Obviously quite significant differences exist between those two vocations however the bow is often widely drawn by enthusiasts exploring the connection between these two mythic figures to make a link that they both worked with their hands and from the 'sweat of their brow'.

Turning further from the patterns—and instead perhaps mimicking the folkloric patterns of tales of gains in shamanic wisdom, Kenzuki and fans have noted parallels in the processes undertaken by Jesus and Thrall to begin their respective ascents to positions as mystical leaders. Jesus went through a 'gateway' life experience in meeting with John the Baptist. During that gateway process Jesus was baptised by John—which can be seen as ritualistically providing him with insights due to the highly spiritual nature of baptism and the significance of that event in the awakening of Jesus' deeper mysticism. That process of spiritual awakening is arguably best illustrated by the appearance of the 'Spirit of God' at the baptism and the way that the gospel explains that the spirit descended into Jesus during the ceremony (see the *Gospel of Matthew* 3:13-17). Following his baptism Jesus embarked upon an arduous journey into the

desert (for 40 days) where he sought wisdom and overcame temptation. This kind of ordeal - and exposure to nature - is typical in texts that explore gateways towards shamanic wisdom. Soon after that journey we see in the *Gospel of John* (2:1-11) that Jesus went to a wedding in Galilee and performed his first miracle by turning water into wine. This was the first real show, by Jesus, of miraculous mystical powers.

Similarly, in the *Warcraft* mythos Thrall also passed through a 'gateway' meeting with Grom Hellscream. After gaining Grom Hellscream's trust Thrall was taken into his confidence, and taught the Orcish language. Eventually Grom explained Thrall's lineage as part of the exiled Frostwolf Clan to him - after recognising a significant swaddling cloth that Thrall carried. It could be argued that the act of learning Orcish was a ritual which, like Jesus' baptism, unlocked a deep and powerful connection to important knowledge and ancestral wisdom / power- which took place with the revelation of his own past. That significant revelation was what inspired Thrall to undertake an arduous journey seeking his roots in the snow-capped Alterac Mountains - and ultimately to discover his destiny and mystical powers as the first real Orc shaman after the corruption of the Horde. In both tales we see a protagonist who goes to a keeper of wisdom, undergoes a process unlocking knowledge and connections to their hereditary powers, and then embark upon significant journeys into hostile natural environments before beginning to perform powerful supernatural acts. Notably that process also has a plethora of parallels in the tales of shamanism globally—where enduring arduous journeys into hostile environments is a central motif in the process of unlocking deeper spiritual and mystical understandings.

A further parallel that fans highlight, which still ties to the supernatural powers of both figures, is that both Jesus and Thrall have become venerated and spiritually powerful leaders of organisations with significant followings. Jesus, as the ultimate earthly embodiment of the divine within the Christian mythos—and in essence the leader of an entire faith; and Thrall, as the first new shaman since Gul'dan's corruption of the Horde—and therefore the first and foremost of a new generation of shaman. In that position as a spiritual and mystical leader Thrall took on a pivotal role with The Earthen Ring (a society of powerful shaman who seek to restore balance within the world of Azeroth) and then helped lead a band of heroes to save the entire world of Azeroth from certain destruction at the hands of the great dragon, Deathwing, during the events of the *Cataclysm* (particularly in *World of Warcraft's* Patch 4.3 (2011))—the sites of which have been encoded with cultural meaning from the myths and hero stories (both regarding player characters and non-player characters) of those myth-like events. Further, those events, and Thrall's struggle through the conflict with Deathwing, including the place of the events within the broader mythos of Azeroth, were explored deeply in Golden's 2011 novel, *Thrall: Twilight of the Aspects*.

Strengthening that position, both Jesus and Thrall can be seen to have freed their respective people from corruption through their supernatural, or divine, powers. For Thrall that is achieved by freeing the Orcs from their demonic blood curse, and for Jesus it was to free his true followers from the bonds of sin. Referring primarily to the crucifixion the *Epistle of Galatians* (1:4) explains that Jesus "gave himself for our sins

to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God.” In *Warcraft 3* (2002) fans learn that, whilst on Draenor, Grom Hellscream and many other Orc chieftains chose to drink demonic blood—knowing that it would bring the blood curse upon the Orcs and enslave them to the Legion (an evil demonic army). That choice has been likened by many fans to the human choice to indulge in sin as in both cases an act bringing immediate gratification is chosen in spite of the long lasting horrible consequences that it will bring. While confronting Grom Hellscream, Thrall managed to capture the very essence of Hellscream within a ‘soul gem’. Through the use of ritual magic, that involved elements of shamanism, Thrall managed to purge the demonic corruption from the ‘soul gem’ and save not only Hellscream’s, but all of the orc’s souls from the demonic blood curse.

Finally, we can clearly identify that both figures led their respective peoples back to prior traditions of worship or sacred practices. Jesus championed the process of direct communication for his people with their god through direct prayer as opposed to priestly avocation. Thrall returned his people to their traditional shamanism. (Notably here there are also several distinct similarities between the tales of legendary shaman and those of Jesus.) This is a significant link because it underlines the way that both figures were highly influential over the culture and *weltanschauung* of their followers—to the point of generating shifts in religious thinking and practice.

Links to nature, constructed through like narrative elements in the Thrall and Jesus stories with clear shamanistic overtones, further help the two mythoi to construct a layer of cultural meaning upon their respective geographical landscapes—thus providing a further similarity in the function of the two characters. Eliade stresses that common understandings of myth help construct cultural meaning for landscapes (1963, 140)—a process which the digital landscapes of *World of Warcraft* have undergone at the sites of major acts of shamanic power by Thrall—while the earthly landscape is marked by several now touristic and spiritual sites (for example see: <http://walkwherejesuswalked.com/places-of-interests/>).

### **Parallel mystic abilities—still beyond the hero pattern**

Modern anthropologists, such as Pieter F. Craffert (2008), have argued that gospel depictions of Jesus, including both: significant life events and their sequencing, and, his mystical abilities; can be seen as meeting the broad characteristics of a shaman. Furthermore, it can be argued that the development of his shamanic powers following the ‘ordeal’ of his baptism and trial in the desert further meet with the generally accepted process of gaining shamanic wisdom and power. Consequently it is very interesting that the powers ascribed to shaman, and representations of powerful archetypal shaman (such as Thrall), match many of the mystical powers of Jesus. Thrall is listed as a Shaman within the *World of Warcraft*. This is a parallel that Kenzuki made some mention of, but did not explore in any depth. Within the *Warcraft* franchise’s framework shaman are viewed as spiritual guides who are deeply connected to, and able to influence, the elements.

Arguably the core mystical power attributed to Jesus is that of healing. In the *Gospel of Luke* (18:35-43) we are presented with the well-known story of Jesus passing by the town of Jericho and encountering a blind man—who he heals and restores the sense of sight to. As early as level seven in the *World of Warcraft* shaman gain an ability called ‘Healing Surge’ which enables them to heal themselves or their allies—and later in the game signature abilities like ‘Chain Heal’ (level 44) and ‘Healing Rain’ (level 60) are added to the shaman’s healing arsenal.

To further the theme of being a healer, Jesus is often characterised as a divine figure with the ability to cleanse the body and cure diseases. The *Gospel of Matthew* (4:23) provides us with a tale of Jesus curing sickness and disease as he travelled through towns and villages. Furthermore, in the *Gospel of Luke* (17:11-19), the *Gospel of Mark* (1:40-45) and other segments of the *Gospel of Matthew* (8:1-4) we hear tales of Jesus cleansing people who were afflicted with leprosy. Turning to Thrall and his abilities as a powerful shaman—prior to the *World of Warcraft* patch 3.2.0 (released 4 August 2009), ‘Call of the Crusade’, shaman had two significant cleansing abilities; ‘Cure Poison’, and, ‘Cure Disease’. Those abilities are reasonably self—explanatory and could be used either upon the shaman himself/herself or upon an ally. In the 3.2.0 patch those two abilities were combined into a new power titled ‘Cure Toxins’ (or ‘Cleanse Spirit’ in the case of Restoration Shaman—a shaman class subtype who are totally focussed on healing) which cleansed both poisons and diseases. The ‘Cure Toxins’ ability was then removed from the shaman class patch 4.0.1 (released 12 October 2010) for the launch of the expansion *Cataclysm* while ‘Cleanse Spirit’ has remained a core shaman ability gained at level 18.

One other notable mystic power of Jesus is the ability to walk on water. In the *Gospel of Matthew* (14:22-33) we see an episode where Jesus walks out across the sea to a group of his disciples who were in a boat. In that episode Jesus was able to confer that ability, temporarily, upon Peter as well—although after walking across a notable span of water Jesus did need to ‘catch’ Peter after he began to panic about the situation. Comparatively, Thrall—as a shaman—also has the mystic ability to walk upon water through a spell known as ‘Water Walking’. (‘Water Walking’ is a spell gained at level 24.) Notably, as with the case of Jesus sharing the ability to walk across water with Peter, shaman (such as Thrall) in the *World of Warcraft* are also able to confer their ‘Water Walking’ ability upon allies.

A further, yet crucial, feature of the myths of Jesus is the narrative of his rising from the death after the crucifixion (Matthew 28:6). Comparatively; Thrall, and shaman generally, possess a mystic ability in the *World of Warcraft* called ‘Reincarnation’. (‘Reincarnation’ is a spell gained at level 32.) The ‘Reincarnation’ ability allows shaman to resurrect themselves upon death.

Finally Jesus is loosely depicted to have the ability to raise, or resurrect, the dead and gift upon them an eternal form of life. In the *Gospel of John* (11:25-26) Jesus states that he is: ‘the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.’ This provides a parallel to another of Thrall’s shaman powers—‘Resurrect Spirit’. As early as level

14 shaman gain the 'Resurrect Spirit' spell, which allows them to resurrect fallen allies. Consequently the shaman (and hence Thrall) is able to, loosely, offer eternal life through the use of 'Resurrect Spirit' upon his followers and 'Reincarnation' upon his/herself when the need arises.

### **The flux state of *Warcraft's* Applied Mythology**

Azeroth's applied mythological landscape, and the narratives of Thrall, were complicated by the 2016 release of the motion picture *Warcraft: The Beginning* (Jones 2016). In that film the director, Duncan Jones, used a range of visual and oral language techniques to emphasise story arcs that re-shaped Thrall's characterization to align him more strongly with Abrahamic Mythology's Moses. Notably, the story for *Warcraft: The Beginning* was written by Chris Metzen—so the notion of the text being one that blends archetypes and mythic figures / tales is in keeping with his stated creative process (Augustine 2012, Brodnitz 2008).

Fans of the *Warcraft* franchise have noted similarities between Thrall and Moses both before and after the release of the film (Trassk 2013, Rollonthefield 2015), at times even suggesting that "Thrall is [both] Jesus and Moses" (Diamondwolf 2016), as 'in the book *Lord of the Clans* (Golden 2001) he looks like Moses cuz he got found by a strong lord and then he run away and then he set his people free to go to the far promised land like Moses'. Consequently, it is fair to say that there is some contention among fans in identifying the closest mythic parallels to the web of stories surrounding Thrall—with Moses being the other most commonly identified mythic figure that seemingly sparked Thrall's character. Notably here, along with Jesus of Nazareth, scholars have also considered Moses when exploring both general notions of the hero figure (Coats 1986), and found his character to provide a parallel to the Hero Pattern (Rank 1913)—so the identification of Moses as a possible parallel further reinforces the links between Thrall and the Hero Pattern. In analysing the parallels, Moses does not appear to link as neatly to Thrall as Jesus, and fan perceptions of links between Thrall and Moses have not been strong enough to spark a Moses—related name.

### **In sum**

Starting from the premise that: 'more than just rules and play, all games involve a series of cultural structures against and within which the play of the game occurs' (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, 509); scholars such as Salen and Zimmerman have recognised that 'the game designer only *indirectly* designs the player's experience, by *directly* designing the rules' and settings of the game world (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, 316). Metzen and the *World of Warcraft* design team have openly included a wide range of intertextual elements, popular cultural references and symbolic mythological borrowings within their designs—unquestioningly including a representation of the hero pattern through the deeds / tales of Thrall. That much, is clearly a design feature.

Those elements help flesh out an immersive environment, and have encouraged players to connect more deeply—bringing prior knowledge from their everyday lives and going beyond the text in interpreting the game and the *Warcraft* mythos. There is then a point at which the borrowings of the content creators cease, and additional similarities that are not intended, but none the less exist on some level or other, are noticed and given meaning by dedicated fans—as the fans take ownership of the *Warcraft* texts through engaging with both intertextuality and the use of elementary, or archetypal, ideas.

With that line, between the sphere of content intentionally created and the additional sphere of fan—based interpretations and extensions of meaning through accessing either intentional or unintentional memory prompts, recognised, *World of Warcraft* blends a range of mythological elements from diverse spiritual traditions and accesses the archetypes associated with clear mythic formula—such as the hero pattern. Clear parallels exist in the official story arcs and class abilities of Thrall to elements within the biblical stories of Jesus of Nazareth. While the tale of Jesus is interpreted as one that focuses upon a virginal birth, a devout life and a sacrificial crucifixion to redeem others, within broader Western society, fans of the *World of Warcraft* have highlighted many parallels between Thrall and Jesus—to the point of demonstrating that the story of Jesus arguably must have, to some extent, been among the myths that Metzen and his team had in the back of their minds when it was time to “spin the archetypes” and “spew [them] back into the world” (Chris Metzen in: Brodnitz 2008) to shape the tales of Thrall in Azeroth. “The differences in the costumes are the results of environment and historical conditions” (Campbell and Moyers 1991, 61)—not just when such similarities exist between mythoi, but also in the similarities between these two versions of the hero pattern. In this way, we might consider *World of Warcraft* as a neo-mythological piece of applied folklore which draws on both hero patterns and the Abrahamic myths of Jesus in the construction of Thrall.

In 2012 Metzen discussed the power of characters like Thrall, and the extent to which the *World of Warcraft* fan base, as an active audience, connected to Thrall on an emotional level.

So many players have come up with these NPCs and these characters like Thrall [...]. We can move these characters around the board and create a lot of emotionality and create a lot of engagement with people who know these characters. Even if you're not a hardcore story person, or into the lore or whatever, you live in this virtual space, you know who these people are, you've done quests for them and such. That's an amazing place to be, to be able to pull these levers and dials after all these years and have it count. (Chris Metzen in: Augustine 2012)

Critical analysis of fan responses to texts and the fandom process, have recognized that active audiences like this not only embellish the stories and worlds of their fandom, but also take on a ‘form of cultural ownership’ over the brand or particular elements of the story, characters or traditions that it represents (Crisp et al. 2013, 324). In that light these fan based perceptions of links between the characters of Thrall and Jesus become

more significant even beyond concrete and symbolic links, or even through Metzen's thought processes regarding the use of archetypal material, as they are an integral part of the formation of a subcultural group's shared experiences. The fan discussions of links then become an almost standalone part of the lore and community identity.

### Notes

1. The events draw on Dundes' (1976, 8-9) collations of hero pattern events.
2. The Gospel of Matthew (1:17) in the New King James version of the Bible reads: 'So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.'

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