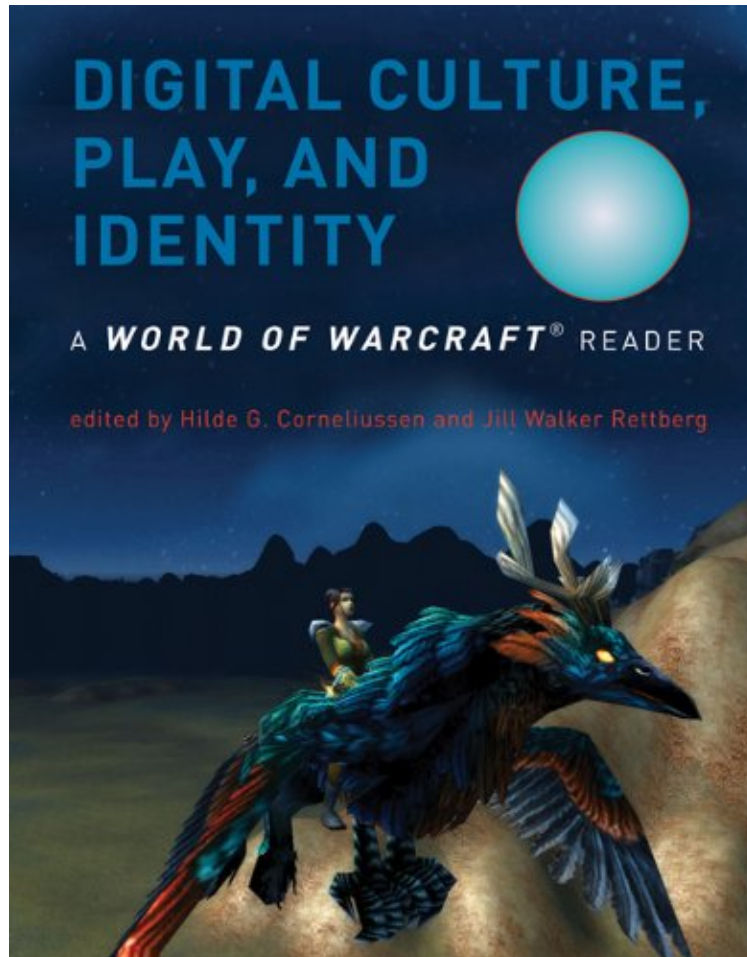


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From The MIT Press : Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader (MIT Press) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader (MIT Press):

29 of 37 people found the following review helpful. Uneven and incomplete, despite its strengthsBy Marcy L. ThompsonLike many anthologies, this one is uneven. Nevertheless, it contains some very interesting articles, especially about gender and culture as expressed in World of Warcraft.My problem with the book, however, is that it purports to have a sort of dual viewpoint, being that all the academics writing about World of Warcraft here are also players. The problem is that none of them, as far as I can tell, have achieved level cap and immersed themselves in the endgame.Like many MMORPGs, World of Warcraft is many games all rolled into one. There is the leveling game

(where you take a new character and head off into the world to have adventures, gradually gaining strength and power as you defeat various challenges). There is the player-vs-player game, where you engage in battles against other players, either in groups or solo. There is the professions game, where you learn to create items in the game and get gradually better and better at doing so, until you can (if you wish) create a business providing services for other players. There is the economic game, where the goal you set yourself involves making as much game money as possible. There are games related to earning what are called Achievements (although these did not exist when this book was being written), and thereby earning yourself titles and/or items such as special in-game pets or mounts. And there is the raiding endgame. In the raiding endgame, you reach the level cap and play around in small group encounters, gaining skill and gear until you are ready to join larger groups of players, setting off into some of the most intricately designed content in the game. The encounters there are complex and require serious coordination between largish groups of players to defeat. (To give you a sense of the complexity involved, there are some encounters that have taken groups of 25 people numerous attempts to defeat -- and by "numerous", I mean three or four hour sessions twice or three times a week for a month or more.) The organization required to put together a raiding team and keep it going strong for months on end is not trivial. Most World of Warcraft players at least try out the raiding game; some of them define themselves in part by their refusal to play that game. Different players take different approaches to this raiding game. Some define themselves as "hardcore" and treat the raiding game almost as a job (and they require a group of people to raid with who share the same approach, with the necessary level of organizational infrastructure to support such an approach). Others define themselves as "casual raiders" who seek to experience raiding content as part of what they do, without in any way treating it as "another job". Since the fall of 2008, the raiding game has been available to most players who are at the level cap, at least in a very casual way. While one can certainly play World of Warcraft without ever raiding, no one can accurately describe the game or the social groups that develop within it without discussing raiding. The vast majority of the authors in this anthology have not reached level cap, and those that have (for the most part, and by their own admission) have hardly scratched the surface of this important part of the game. So much of the game design is built around raiding, so many of the social structures are organized around this activity, that it's hard to take seriously a book about World of Warcraft that doesn't address it. On the other hand, it's a relief that these authors did not write about something they haven't experienced. Most people who have raided, whether they still do so or not, will confess that it's not really what it looks like from the outside. People raid for a variety of reasons, and the groups they form to support their raiding habits vary a great deal in response to their motivations. It's tiring to read about "raiding" when the writer has obviously never done it, and can't evaluate for herself what her informants tell her about their experiences doing it. At the same time, the lack of substantive consideration of the "raiding game" leaves a big gap in this book. It's as if someone were writing a book about Major League Baseball and chose to act as if the American League simply did not exist. It's hard to get a real sense of World of Warcraft if you don't talk about the endgame (that is, the things people do in the game once they have reached level cap and determined to keep playing), yet the authors are largely not able to do that, since they haven't gotten there yet. That's a shame, because the dual-lens of player + academic is a valuable one, and I wish that this book had not ignored such a big part of the game.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Good Topics and a Great Intro to the Anthropology of Videogames
By Sandro Massarani
Well, this book surprised me and it's one of the best books, if not the best, about anthropology and "virtual worlds". This is because the essays in the book are relevant to academic discussions of anthropology. Postcolonialism, Gender issues, Rites of Passage, and more topics are well explained in the context of World of Warcraft, creating a very good link between any videogame and the theoretical studies of the discipline.

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Just What I Wanted
By Ladydars
I ordered this book to help me write my thesis on online interaction, leaning towards writing about MMORPGs. It was just what I wanted. The range of topics is really good and each article is insightful. I really look forward to reading more from these authors. Its certainly helped open up a few more avenues for research!

Exploring World of Warcraft as both cultural phenomenon and game, with contributions by writers and researchers who have immersed themselves in the WoW gameworld. World of Warcraft is the world's most popular massively multiplayer online game (MMOG), with (as of March 2007) more than eight million active subscribers across Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia, who play the game an astonishing average of twenty hours a week. This book examines the complexity of World of Warcraft from a variety of perspectives, exploring the cultural and social implications of the proliferation of ever more complex digital gameworlds. The contributors have immersed themselves in the World of Warcraft universe, spending hundreds of hours as players (leading guilds and raids, exploring moneymaking possibilities in the in-game auction house, playing different factions, races, and classes), conducting interviews, and studying the game design -- as created by Blizzard Entertainment, the game's developer, and as modified by player-created user interfaces. The analyses they offer are based on both the firsthand experience of being a resident of Azeroth and the data they have gathered and interpreted. The contributors examine the ways that gameworlds reflect the real world -- exploring such topics as World of Warcraft as a "capitalist fairytale" and the game's construction of gender; the cohesiveness of the gameworld in terms of geography, mythology, narrative, and

the treatment of death as a temporary state; aspects of play, including "deviant strategies" perhaps not in line with the intentions of the designers; and character -- both players' identification with their characters and the game's culture of naming characters. The varied perspectives of the contributors -- who come from such fields as game studies, textual analysis, gender studies, and postcolonial studies -- reflect the breadth and vitality of current interest in MMOGs.

Multidisciplinary in their perspectives, thoughtful in their analyses, and above all deeply and collaboratively engaged with the online world whereof they speak, the contributors to this 'World of Warcraft Reader' have fashioned not only a valuable introduction to one of the core texts of the new digital literacy, but a working model of the most rewarding forms this emergent literacy may take. (Julian Dibbell, author of *Play Money: Or How I Quit My Day Job and Made Millions Trading Virtual Loot*) With its millions of users around the globe, World of Warcraft points to a future cyberspace far more fantastic and revolutionary than we had ever imagined: entire human societies immersed for thousands of hours in pursuit of fictional dragons. The essays in this book reveal the differences and similarities found in the human societies of World of Warcraft, explosive combinations that will shock our century as game worlds come to dominate daily life. (Edward Castronova, Indiana University) The authors represent a new breed of academic scholar, researchers who don't just study games, but play them as well. The essays reflect the intimate knowledge of the game, the many hours logged into the digital world of Azeroth, and the deep love/hate relationship with World of Warcraft that every player knows so well. Because they are in fact players, the authors' joy and excitement for the game shines through every essay in the collection. (Eric Zimmerman, Co-Founder of Gamelab, and co-author of *Rules of Play*, and *The Game Design Reader*) It's a delight to read so many astute game studies scholars approach one game, in one volume. World of Warcraft Reader provides an invaluable comparative resource for the field. (Mary Flanagan, Department of Film and Media Studies, Hunter College, and co-editor of *re: skin*)

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