



The Warcraft Civilization: Social Science in a Virtual World

William Sims Bainbridge

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World of Warcraft is more than a game. There is no ultimate goal, no winning hand, no princess to be rescued. *WoW* is an immersive virtual world in which characters must cope in a dangerous environment, assume identities, struggle to understand and communicate, learn to use technology, and compete for dwindling resources. Beyond the fantasy and science fiction details, as many have noted, it's not entirely unlike today's world. In *The Warcraft Civilization*, sociologist William Sims Bainbridge goes further, arguing that *WoW* can be seen not only as an allegory of today but also as a virtual prototype of tomorrow, of a real human future in which tribe-like groups will engage in combat over declining natural resources, build temporary alliances on the basis of mutual self-interest, and seek a set of values that transcend the need for war. What makes *WoW* an especially good place to look for insights about Western civilization, Bainbridge says, is that it bridges past and future. It is founded on Western cultural tradition, yet aimed toward the virtual worlds we could create in times to come.

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