

**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
BAHÇEŞEHİR UNIVERSITY**

**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
GAME DESIGN MASTER PROGRAM**

**EVOLUTION OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF
ELVES IN COMPUTER ROLE PLAYING GAMES:
FROM MYTHOLOGY TO PRESENT**

Master's Thesis

YASEMİN BARAN

Supervisor: ASSOC. PROF. DR. BARBAROS BOSTAN

İSTANBUL, 2018

**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY**

**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
GAME DESIGN MASTERS PROGRAM**

Name of the thesis: Evolution of Visual Representation of Elves in Video
Games: From Mythology to Present

Name/Last Name of the Student: Yasemin Baran

Date of the Defense of Thesis: 15.08.2018

The thesis has been approved by the Graduate School of Social Sciences.

Asst. Prof. Burak Kuntay
Graduate School Director
Signature

I certify that this thesis meets all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of
Master of Arts.

Asst. Prof. Güven Çatak
Program Coordinator
Signature

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and we find it fully adequate in
scope, quality and content, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Examining Committee Members

Signature

Thesis Supervisor
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Barbaros Bostan

Member
Asst. Prof. Güven Çatak

Member
Assoc. Prof. Çetin Tüker

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank Güven Çatak for all his efforts to create the Game Design program and for his relentless work to improve it. Without you, I would not have this fantastic opportunity to learn and grow. Thank you.

I would like to extend my thanks to my advisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Barbaros Bostan for his guidance and help in completing this work. I thank my mother Leyla Baran and sister Emine Baran for their endless support and patience, but most of all, for believing in me. I extend my gratitude to Elif Kadriye Özkılıç, who held me by the hand and walked me through when I felt lost in all of this. And finally I thank to Blizzard Entertainment, for gifting this world with such inspiring games, which helped me push through my thesis writing period and finally bring it to a finish.

Istanbul, 2018

Yasemin Baran

ABSTRACT

EVOLUTION OF VISUAL DEPICTION OF ELVES IN COMPUTER ROLE PLAYING GAMES: FROM MYTHOLOGY TO PRESENT

Yasemin Baran

Game Design Graduate Program

Thesis Supervisor: Assoc Prof Barbaros Bostan

August 2018, 60 pages

Elves are mythological creatures that have fascinated people since ancient times. Their presence is so powerful that elves are now a must-have part of role playing game culture. What makes elves so popular is their otherness, they are what humans are not. To describe elves in their own unique way, video game developers alter the depiction of these creatures in their games. Creating different cultures and outlooks of elves is an important part of role playing games, since it makes these creatures more believable in the game's world. In this thesis, I have looked into how the visual depictions of elves are portrayed in various video games throughout history. How much their description has or has not changed from the folktales of Northern Europe to computer role playing games created in the modern times.

Keywords: Elves, Visual Depiction, Role Playing Games, Mythology, J.R.R. Tolkien, Culture, Architecture, Garment, Design

ÖZET

ELFLERİN DİJİTAL ROL YAPMA OYUNLARINDAKİ GÖRSEL BETİMLEMELERİNİN EVRİMİ: MİTOLOJİDEN GÜNÜMÜZE

Yasemin Baran

Oyun Tasarımı Yüksek Lisans Programı

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Barbaros Bostan

Ağustos 2018, 60 sayfa

Elfler, insanları eski çağlardan beri etkileyen mitolojik yaratıklardır. Varlıkları o kadar kuvvetli ki, günümüzde rol yapma oyunlarının olmazsa olmaz bir parçası oldular. Elfleri bu kadar kuvvetli yapan unsur onların ötekiliğidir, onlar insanların olmadığı her şeyler. Oyun tasarımcıları, oyunlarında elfleri kendi özgün şekilleriyle tasvir edebilmek için bu yaratıkların betimlemelerini değiştirmişlerdir. Oyunların geçtiği dünyalarda, bu canlıların inandırıcı durabilmeleri için, elflere farklı kültürler ve görünümler yaratmak rol yapma oyunlarının önemli bir parçasıdır. Bu tezde, tarih boyunca farklı bilgisayar oyunlarında elflerin betimlemelerinin ne şekilde değiştirilmiş olduğuna baktım. Betimlemelerinin, Kuzey Avrupa halk hikayelerinden günümüz rol yapma oyunlarına kadar ne kadar değiştiği veya değişmediğini araştırdım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Elfler, Görsel Tasvir, Rol Yapma Oyunları, Mitoloji, J.R.R. Tolkien, Kültür, Mimari, Giysi, Tasarım

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ABBREVIATIONS

2D/3D	: Two Dimensional/ Three Dimensional
CD	: Compact Disk
CRPG	: Computer Role Playing Game
FPS	: First Person Shooter
MMORPG	: Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game
RPG	: Role Playing Game



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE HISTORY OF ELVES

In the history of video games, humans have been matched with and against various inhuman races. Some of these races are game-specific, where they only exist in the world of that game; or they are repetitively used sometimes in similar fashion, and sometimes they are completely reshaped and re-imagined by the game developers. But most games that have racial diversity make use of one race ever so often: Elves. They can be found in multitudes of fantasy and science fiction video games throughout the world.

In origin, elves are a type of fairy in the northern European mythology and folklore. So how come these tiny fairies became the epitome of the beautiful, magical, elegant, tall, superhuman, almost divine and most times un-aging beings that we see today in video games? There are so many kinds of elves in modern day, even though they have certain common aspects from game to game, they also differ so much in culture, style, fashion, looks and architecture. A lot of the times, in the Western world, elves in video games are portrayed as the *first-born race*, meaning they were the first race that gods created. They were here before the humans, and they will outlive them. Being first, they are the ones that shaped the world, shaped the history and cultures. While in most video games elves are somewhat similar creatures in terms of their looks, understanding of aesthetics and type of culture, the game developers come up with completely different ways of reimagining them. And in between the mythological fairy and the modern concept of elves today, one great step of their evolution was created by the author and professor of Oxford University, J.R.R. Tolkien. He is widely accepted as the person who has created the elves we know today.

Being a visual artist, I have been intrigued by the evolution of a wood-dwelling small fairy becoming one of the most used inhuman race in video games and how they are physically portrayed similarly or differently in various video games. The growth of an uncanny mythological being into a popular playable race that many video game players admire today is astonishing. And not only did they evolve into a single race with single

culture, there are multitudes of different sub-races of elves that can be seen in the Western video game scene. Along the way, elves have become a favorable creature to fantasy and science fiction fans, and they have thus evolved into what we see today in games. So how did the game developers differentiate *their* elves in their games? How did the elves we see today in video games come to be? We can observe different video games use different cultural references, various terrain and weather of elven habitation to affect the looks and development of elves in their universes.

In this thesis, I will be looking into the evolution of the appearance of elves from mythology to modern video games in the West.

To understand the evolution of anything, one must look at its origins. The first appearance of the mythological creatures called elves were encountered in the Scandinavian folk tales known as sagas, recorded by Snorri Sturluson (1916, p.30-31) in *Prose Edda*:

“Many places are there, and glorious. That which is called Álfheimr is one, where dwell the peoples called Light-Elves; but the Dark-Elves dwell down in the earth, and they are unlike in appearance, but by far more unlike in nature. The Light-Elves are fairer to look upon than the sun, but the Dark-Elves are blacker than pitch (...) It is said that another heaven is to the southward and upward of this one, Andlangr; but the third haven is yet above that, and it is called Vidbláinn, and in that heaven we think this abode is. But we believe that none but Light-Elves inhabit these mansions now.”

There is also mention of elves, but as a subtype of fairies found in Germanic and English folktales. In the Scandinavian mythology, the elves were born out of the ice giant Ymir’s flesh, as maggots. The gods gave shape and certain powers to these creatures, then divided them into two groups. Guerber (1992, p. 10) describes it as, “These uncouth beings now attracted divine attention. Summoning them into their presence, the gods first gave them forms and endowed them with superhuman intelligence, and then divided them into two large classes.”

One group of elves the gods deemed to be dark and shrewd, were called “Svartálfar” (dark elves), and they were sent to live in Svartalfarheim; the other group that the gods deemed to be good, light elves, were sent to live in the Alfheim. The light elves’ realm, Alfheim is described as heaven-like; whereas the Svartálfar, realm of the dark elves, is in the underground. These light elves then come to the ‘green’, the human world,

mingled among the flowers and nature, danced in the moonlight; Guerber (1992, p. 11) writes:

“The remainder of these small creatures, including all that were fair, good, and useful, the gods called Fairies and Elves, and they sent them to dwell in the airy realm of Alf-heim (home of the light-elves), situated between heaven and earth, whence they could flit downward whenever they pleased, to attend to the plants and flowers, sport with the birds and butterflies, or dance in the silvery moonlight on the green.”

As part of the English folklore, the elves are to be considered fairy-like tiny creatures that dwell in forested areas. They are described to dance in circles, holding each other's hands. The spots in the forest where the elves danced were named the ‘fairy rings’. Guerber (1992, p. 246) writes:

“Holding one another by the hand, they would dance in circles, thereby making the "fairy rings," which were to be discerned by the deeper green and greater luxuriance of the grass which their little feet had pressed.”

As part of the lore, according to popular belief, if a mortal would stumble upon and stand in such a circle, the elves would favor the mortal and allow themselves to be seen. Yet in the Scandinavian interpretation of the same lore, the man should die. The Story of Olaf is a portrayal of this belief; in the story a young man called Olaf sees fairies dancing in a circle while he is on his way to his wedding. The fairies invite the man to dance with them, yet the young man refuses the offer saying he must leave to attend his wedding. The next day the man is found dead, along with his bride and mother. In England, these elves were referred to as fairies, and if a mortal witnessed their music and dancing, they would be compelled to dance with them. The person would then being unable to stop dancing, unless the music itself was stopped by the fairies, would die from exhaustion –the only other alternative to stop the dancing would be for the person to play the tune backwards in their mind, says Guerber (1992, p. 10-11, 246-247).

1.2 J.R.R. TOLKIEN AND ELVES

In today's fantasy literature world, J.R.R. Tolkien is considered the father of modern fantasy. He was a professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford and he was the author of one of the bestselling novels still to this day, *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien's passion about the poetic sagas, mythology and folklore had started when he was introduced to Old-English, also known as Anglo-Saxon, and he discovered the epic saga of *Beowulf* when he was still in high school. Carpenter (2000, p. 42-43) writes:

"Reading this first in a translation and then in the original language, he found it to be one of the most extraordinary poem of all time: the tale of the warrior Beowulf, his fight with two monsters, and his death after the battle with a dragon." And there was a third element playing a part: his desire to create a mythology for England. He had hinted at this during his undergraduate days when he wrote of the Finnish Kalevala: 'I would that we had more of it left –something of the same sort that belonged to the English.'

Tolkien took inspiration in these mythological stories with fairies, elves and gods, and shaped his own stories and poems, creating his own world *The Middle-Earth*. Tolkien designed this world to be as an alternative history of England, for after reading the mythological tales of Scandinavia, he desired to create similarly epic stories for his own country. Carpenter (2000, p. 97) writes:

"And there was a third element playing a part: his desire to create a mythology for England. He had hinted at this during his undergraduate days when he wrote of the Finnish Kalevala: 'I would that we had more of it left –something of the same sort that belonged to the English.'

Before *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien had started his mythology, unbeknownst to him at the time, very early in his life with a poem about a voyager who would discover a new world. All of the mythology and tales, he compiled in a book that is came to be known as *The Silmarillion*. Though there are elves and dwarves in Tolkien's stories, as there are in Scandinavian folklore, as Carpenter (2000, p. 100) states:

".... but the elves of The Silmarillion have nothing whatever to do with the 'tiny leprechauns' or of 'Goblin Feet.' They are to all intents and purposes men: or rather, they are Man before the Fall which deprived him of his powers o achievement."

He has taken the tiny, fairy-like elves from the sagas and had turned them into tall, graceful and magic folk that the world has come to known them. JRR Tolkien was a very religious man, a Catholic. Even though the common conception that Tolkien has

been affected mostly by what he has seen in World War I as a soldier, a lot of his influences came from religion. In the Scandinavian folktales, the elves were put together with gods and been referred to as ‘angelic beings’, and Tolkien has followed this fashion of visualizing elves as holy, almost divine creatures. Though through conflict and rich storylines, Tolkien’s elves separate into light and dark elves, into many groups that show different cultural and personality traits. While in Scandinavian mythology there are only two kinds of elves, now there are many who are each their own groups with their own cultures, purpose and specialization; thus making Tolkien the first known person to create *sub-races* of elves. These varieties of elves have thus given many world creators inspiration on how much the theme of elves can be expanded.

Tolkien wrote the tragic, romantic and adventurous stories of elves, down to many details. In Tolkien’s writings, there are more descriptions of the inner workings and nature of elves, than there are physical descriptions of them or their dwellings. In *Unfinished Tales*, Tolkien has written a few descriptions such as (1998, Appendix p.7): “Finduilas the daughter of Orodreth was golden-haired after the manner of the house of Finarfin...”

And (1998, *Aldarion and Erendis*, p.2):

“Aldarion, for so he is called in all tales, grew swiftly to a man of great stature, strong and vigorous in mind and body, golden-haired as his mother, ready to mirth and generous, but prouder than his father and ever more bent on his own will.”

Elves in Tolkien’s writings are described as fair in skin color, and can be understood that the hair color may vary. Eye color descriptions are even more rare than the hair. It is not known if Tolkien has ever read the *The Saga of Thorstein, Viking’s Son*, but it is another Nordic poem, published in 1877 that describes elves as: “They were fairer than any other people save the giants.”

So with these descriptions, the elves that were once the maggots in Norse mythology, evolved into a creature that represented fairness, elegance and magic. Throughout the years, in Europe, many stories and tales were written that included elves, either as mean creatures or as helpful fairies, sometimes -as it was in the Norse mythology- portrayed

almost as fallen angels or gods. Some of these tales and elven characters are: the ballad of Elveskud from Denmark; tale of Thomas de Ercildoun from Scotland; ballad of Tam Lin from Scotland; the Tuatha De Danaan from Ireland; Morgan Le Fey from Arthurian legends in England; Oberon the fairy king in Shakespeare's *A Mid Summer Night's Dream*, who is originally from a French song of heroism named *Les Prouesses et Faits du Noble Huon de Bordeaux*, a version of Oberon can also be found in *Nibelunglied* from Germany. The story of elves were interesting enough for humans to repeat over and over again, while transforming the creatures, depicting them in various ways, even including Santa Claus' tiny helpers. Until Tolkien's writings though, mostly the elves remained very similar in appearance throughout the stories as small fairy-like creatures. It was Tolkien who first depicted elves being similar in height to humans. Tolkien's idea of elves was closest to the Norse description, that they were beautiful (after being transformed by gods from their first appearance as maggots) and they were separated as groups. While most fairytales describe them as a singular group living in the forest, king Oberon's domain and stories about 'elven queens' are in abundance. The divided elven groups in Tolkien's writings are very similar to that of human cultures and races. For the purposes of this thesis, these groups will be referred to as 'sub-races' to describe a deeper understanding of how these groups are divided into different cultures, in various video games.

1.3 EARLY VIDEO GAME GRAPHICS

As video games started to develop in 60's and 70's, in terms of graphics, the technology at the time did not allow the stylish visuals that the video games today have. Due to low graphic cards, the early art for video games were all pixilated, referred to as "pixel art". Because pixel art is bound to the amount of pixels that a monitor can have per inch, the amount of detail that could be achieved was very limited in the early years of video games.

Figure 1.1.



Reference: Atari Games. Gauntlet, 1985

Again, due to the amount of colors that could be achieved with the available monitors at the time, it was not possible to create complicated visuals. The technology did not allow for many levels of tones and saturation. Thus, the earlier games, such as Gauntlet from Atari Games, lack small details and usually every game asset consisted of 1 to 3 tonal values, which can be observed in Figure 1.1. above.

As time went by and technology improved, so did the monitors, the amount of pixels they had and the amount of color and tonal variations they could show. This improvement in the technology allowed for more complicated visuals, thus more visual information could be communicated to the players.

Figure 1.2.



Reference: Ocean Software Ltd. Elf, 1991.

The improvement of technology in video games opened room for intricate design and allowed for in-depth exploration of style. Today, video games have a wide range of hyperrealism to recently popularized, modern pixel art. All of these styles and different storytelling allowed game designers to be free and more expressive with their design choices.

2. THE INFLUENCE OF TABLETOP RPGS

2.1 DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

Dungeons and Dragons is a table-top RPG game. It is a medieval based world setting with the addition of magic, other fantastical races and monsters. Dungeons and Dragons has its own rules and dice set with which the players and the Dungeon Master, the facilitator of the game, use to find out if certain actions can take place or not. The games usually consist of a couple of players going around in this fantasy world with characters of their own creation with specific talents. They accomplish missions they pick up along the way and do combat with monsters or other characters that the Dungeon Master prepares. The game has rule books that contain the rules of how to play, as well as statistics for items, armor, creatures and such. Within the Dungeons and Dragons brand, there are several different worlds, such as Dragonlance and Forgotten Realms. These worlds are different from each other, yet they have overlapping elements with other fantasy genre settings, such as the races of elves, dwarves and orcs, and are based in a medieval looking world yet includes the use of magic.

The roots of Computer Role Playing Games come from the tabletop role playing game Dungeons and Dragons, which, in turn, is highly inspired from mythology and the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien. The concept in Dungeons and Dragons is there is a single storyteller, called the Dungeon Master and a group of players. The Dungeon Master narrates the unfolding story and describes the environment or situation where the players' characters exist. The players, which could be any number of people, all come up with their own ideas for a character they will be playing, or rather acting, within the game's realm. The rules, guidelines and the limitations of the game and characters can be found in the respective books on the subject, such as Dungeon Master's Guide and Player's Handbook, written and published by Wizards of the Coast, the company that produces the game.

Dungeons and Dragons was first published in 1974, according to Dungeons and Dragons website. Since its inception, the game is responsible for inspiring many video games. It is one of the first games to have descriptions of different races that coexist and

has images of these said races, which include elves, see example in Figure 2.1. The way Dungeons and Dragons work as a game helped build the first steps of CRPGs.

Figure 2.1.



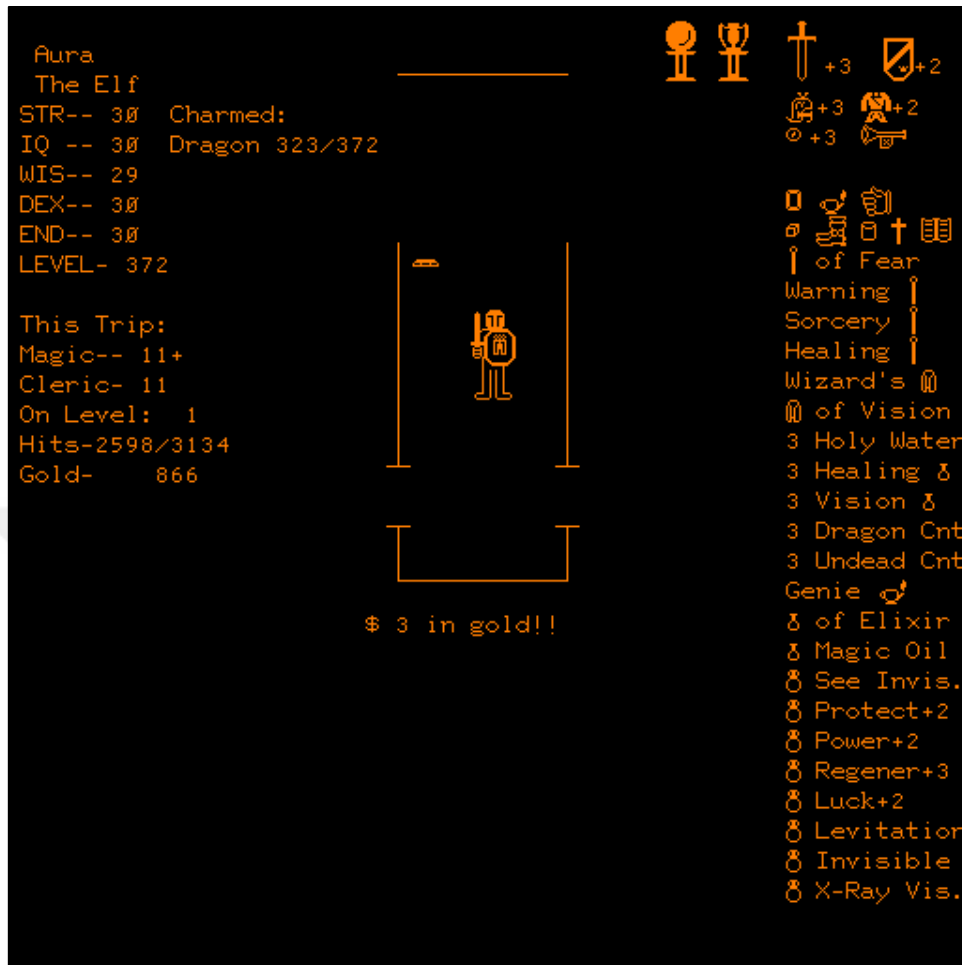
Reference: TSR Hobbies. Dungeons and Dragons Fantasy Adventure Game Basic Rule Book #1, 1981

2.2 DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS BASED CRPGS

Some of the earliest examples of CRPGs are Dungeon (1975), pedit5 (1975) and dnd (1975), all created for the PLATO system, which was a system that allowed multiple people in different locations to be able to connect to the system simultaneously, which paved the first steps of one of today's most played CRPG genre: MMORPGs.

The early CRPGs began as text based role playing games, see Figure 2.2. These games had minimum graphics, especially because they were mostly created by individuals or by a few people, but also because the technology at the time did not allow for complex images. Text based RPGs focus more on the action that would take place in the game. Mostly, these games did not have as much narrative as a Dungeons and Dragons game. They would usually have an objective for the player to complete, which included monster killing and item or currency collecting, could also be referred to as rewards.

Figure 2.2.



Reference: Gary Whisenhunt and Ray Wood. dnd, 1981

Text based RPGs included lists of items and spells, the objective of the game and the mechanics of the game, such as the health and statistics points of the character, amount of armor he wears, amount of damage his weapons can inflict, how much health points the monster has etc... Some of the text based CRPGs such as Rogue even had the main character and the monsters visually represented with letters and symbols such as '@' in its earlier version in 1980.

Figure 2.3.

```
.run adven

WELCOME TO ADVENTURE!!  WOULD YOU LIKE INSTRUCTIONS?

yes

SOMEWHERE NEARBY IS COLOSSAL CAVE, WHERE OTHERS HAVE FOUND FORTUNES IN
TREASURE AND GOLD, THOUGH IT IS RUMORED THAT SOME WHO ENTER ARE NEVER
SEEN AGAIN.  MAGIC IS SAID TO WORK IN THE CAVE.  I WILL BE YOUR EYES
AND HANDS.  DIRECT ME WITH COMMANDS OF 1 OR 2 WORDS.  I SHOULD WARN
YOU THAT I LOOK AT ONLY THE FIRST FIVE LETTERS OF EACH WORD, SO YOU'LL
HAVE TO ENTER "NORTHEAST" AS "NE" TO DISTINGUISH IT FROM "NORTH".
(SHOULD YOU GET STUCK, TYPE "HELP" FOR SOME GENERAL HINTS.  FOR INFOR-
MATION ON HOW TO END YOUR ADVENTURE, ETC., TYPE "INFO".)

- - -
THIS PROGRAM WAS ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED BY WILLIE CROWTHER.  MOST OF THE
FEATURES OF THE CURRENT PROGRAM WERE ADDED BY DON WOODS (DON @ SU-AI).
CONTACT DON IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, ETC.

YOU ARE STANDING AT THE END OF A ROAD BEFORE A SMALL BRICK BUILDING.
AROUND YOU IS A FOREST.  A SMALL STREAM FLOWS OUT OF THE BUILDING AND
DOWN A GULLY.

east

YOU ARE INSIDE A BUILDING, A WELL HOUSE FOR A LARGE SPRING.

THERE ARE SOME KEYS ON THE GROUND HERE.

THERE IS A SHINY BRASS LAMP NEARBY.

THERE IS FOOD HERE.
```

Reference: William Crowther and Don Woods. Colossal Cave Adventure, 1977

Colossal Cave Adventure is another adventuring game that only consists of textual depictions and the whole game was played through writing (Figure 2.3.).

The core idea of these early CRPGs was the same: A party of adventurers go into dungeons and kill monsters, collecting loot and earn experience points to become stronger. These types of games came to be known as ‘dungeon crawl games’, one of the most popular RPG types even to this day. In 1979 another text based CRPG was published, called the Temple of Apshai. This was one of the first CRPG to even have room descriptions.

Although the early CRPGs reference Dungeons and Dragons and are predecessors of fantasy RPGs of today, they do not contain too much visual indication of any racial or cultural differences. Due to lack of detail and technological limitations, the graphics are made to look generic and not specific, allowing the player to imagine how the character would look like in reality. Without giving much visual cues to what elves should look like in these early games, the players did not have much to imagine off of either. Thus,

in the early CRPGs, 'elf' was just a word and the way it looked was no different if the choice of race was 'human'. As time passed and the computers improved, the game designers became experienced and the art and the importance of description have improved. Yet, the early CRPGs were not quite able to deliver information on the aesthetics and design understanding of elves within the game itself.



3. ART AND DESIGN OF ELVES

3.1 THE RISE OF HIGH FANTASY CRPGS IN THE 80'S

High fantasy RPGs are games that take place in a medieval feeling world that contains different races than humans, such as elves, dwarves and orcs along with magic and magical creatures like dragons. In the 80's, the technology became advance enough for this genre to flourish.

In the 80's, computers greatly improved due to the advancement in technology. This allowed for the video games to have better and more detailed graphics. For video games, that meant less textual description and more visual descriptions of the world, items, environments and characters. The improved graphics allowed for different races such as elves, humans, dwarves and such to have visual differentiations from each other. While the graphics were still not suitable for realistic or visual information with intricate details, some of the aspects of the visual differentiations were not so obvious.

Figure 3.1.



Reference: California Pacific Computer Company. Ultima I: The First Age of Darkness, 1981

One of the biggest and longest running intellectual properties from this era is the Ultima series. It is the longest running CRPG series to this day. Ultima I was released in 1981 and was a huge success. It has been originally made for Apple II and since then released for other platforms and had remakes done in the later years. The game was so popular

that Ultima game has been turned into a series of 9 games and a couple of spin offs of the original series. The pinnacle of the series is Ultima VII, which was released in 90's, which I will look into in the next chapter.

Figure 3.2.



Reference: California Pacific Computer Company. Ultima I: The First Age of Darkness, 1981

As seen in Figure 3.1. and 3.2. Ultima I had very low graphics. All made by pixel art and is hard to distinguish the details of any of the characters. The most differentiating aspect of the different characters are the positioning and the silhouette of the objects.

Up until Ultima V the graphics quality of the game is quite similar. Some screens with story pieces in them have images in Ultima IV.

Figure 3.3.



Reference: California Pacific Computer Company. Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar, 1985

These images in Figure 3.3. have more details in them, yet it is not very distinguishable if the people in the images are human or elf. And their costumes are not very descriptive of any culture either; rather they look like generic medieval clothing.

Another iconic game from this era is The Bard's Tale, published in 1985. It has become popular for its humorous storytelling, as well as its advanced, realistic (considering the limitations of the graphics during this time) and partially animated images.

Figure 3.4.



Reference: Interplay Productions. Tales of the Unknown: Volume I, The Bard's Tale, 1986 edition

In both these examples (Figure 3.4. and 3.5.) there is an obvious improvement in the graphics in The Bard's Tale. There is light and shadow, but also their indication of realistic items and characters have identifiable faces and distinguishable clothes. Most importantly, in Figure 3.5., there is the first noticeable indication of an elf in a fantasy CRPG of this era. The two figures to the very left of the image, with green and orange shirts, have pointy ears, unlike the other figures in the room. One or two more extra pixels allow the players to finally see the visualization of what elf is supposed to be in a fantasy genre game.

Figure 3.5.



Reference: Interplay Productions. Tales of the Unknown: Volume I, The Bard's Tale, 1986 edition

Pool of Radiance was another CRPG released in 1988. It takes place in a world that TSR, the publishers of Dungeons and Dragons, owns called Forgotten Realms. On the tabletop version of the world, there are several kinds of elves. While the Pool of Radiance was still affected by the limitations of graphics, the elves were still present in the game.

Figure 3.6.



Reference: Strategic Simulations, Inc. Pool of Radiance, 1988

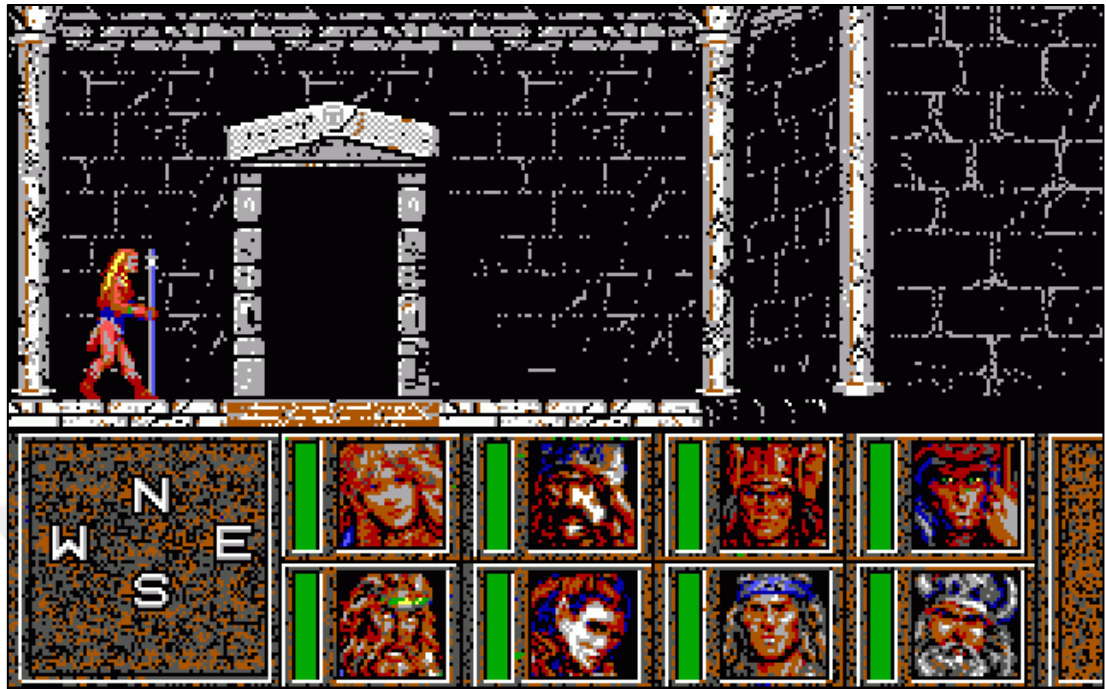
Again the limitations of the technology did not allow for too much detail and references to cultural background or indication of geographical area of habitation that might affect their outlooks. Though, one common idea of an elf's habitat was still considered to be the forest in Dungeons and Dragons lore, and thus the elves in Pool of Radiance seem to be designed to have more 'earthy' clothes: brown, light fabric and capes to hide among the nature.

Starting with the tabletop RPGs, people had a common idea that elves were all forest dwellers, as was in folktales, and wore natural clothes. Some tabletop games incorporated the idea that elves did not like metal, as it was man-made and that it was unnatural, thus did not wear metal or heavy armors. In such fantasy games, elves are usually depicted as wearing leather or light fabrics. Pool of Radiance might have just been taking that idea of elves and incorporated it into their digital game as well. It would also be appropriate since the world the game takes place in is from a tabletop game with previously defined visuals.

Just as the Pool of Radiance, seeing the popularity of CRPGs, more Dungeons and Dragons video games were released in the late 80's. One change Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes of the Lance brought into the scene was a side scrolling game. Up until then, almost all the games were first person view and would take place in a closed environment, since they were geared towards dungeon crawling, thus most games took place in a dungeon.

Heroes of the Lance brought a different perspective to CRPGs. The game was based off of the Dragonlance book series by TSR, which was another role playing universe they had created. The game was also different in trying to bring in the Dungeons and Dragons mechanics with real-time action game play. The characters in the game are also from the books and the game has the character portraits visible on the screen. The world Dragonlance also had established elf races from the books and the tabletop game mechanics. Thus the design of the elven characters is taken from the original content material, even though the graphics would allow only certain amount of detail, still.

Figure 3.7.



Reference: Strategic Simulations, Inc. Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes of the Lance, 1988

The portraits of the characters in the Heroes of the Lance are taken straight from the illustrations of the book.

Figure 3.8.



Reference: Larry Elmore. Dragonlance, Dragons of Autumn Twilight, 1984

Figure 3.8. is showing the character Tanis Half-Elven. His portrait can be seen in the left, second line of portraits in Figure 3.7. The in-game portrait is a pixel art version of the same portrait.

Another overlapping detail in Tanis Half-Elven's portrait is his attire. He's wearing a green cloak and brown, possibly leather clothes. Even though he is only a half-elf, meaning one of his parents was an elf and the other human, his attire is very similar to the elf character portrait in Pool of Radiance, in Figure 3.6. The go-to attire of people related to nature in the stereotypical way in medieval fantasy genres. In the 80's and most of 90's, the idea of green or brown cape with brown to earth-colored leather clothes is a repeating pattern for fantasy characters who are of or related to nature.

3.2 CRPGS IN THE 90'S

Most CRPGs started using 'character creation' stage at the beginning of the games. It started towards the end of the 80's, it was a process that Dungeons and Dragons had since its beginnings. It allowed the players create their own vision of a hero and chose how to strengthen their characters, allowed the player to have control over the character they would be spending their hours and beat the game with.

Some games, during the character creation stage, depending on the race the player chooses, offer a short story of the race and different racial bonuses or penalties the race gets. Even if the story would not be affecting the game play, less so in earlier examples of the genre and more so in the 2000's, knowing and understanding the roots of the character added depth to the game and the story. It helped the player immersion. In some MMORPGs, the race chosen even affects where the player begins the game.

The 1990's is when the computer role playing games became popular and continues to be since then. During this period, computers and technology improved significantly. The computers now used CDs, which were a lot more compact and could carry larger quantities of data. This allowed developers to produce higher quality and more complex games. Yet, these technological advancements mostly allowed game developers to show off the most distinguishing trait of the elves: pointy ears.

Order of the Griffon (1992) uses character portraits, which allows the players to be able to connect with the character more and it was being used before Order of the Griffin, but the way they chose to position the elf is interesting. One of the most distinguishing physical features of elves are their pointy ears both in mythology and has been the commonly accepted idea about the fairy-like creatures. Knowing this, Westwood Studio developers decided to have the elf's face visible from the side, while all other characters are facing the player, as seen in Figure 3.9. This choice also shows that the developers wanted to make their game stand out by giving the players that even if the characters may look similar to each other in low graphics, but they wanted to assure the players that elves are indeed in the game and here is the proof of it.

Figure 3.1.



Reference: Westwood Studios. Order of the Griffon, 1992

One of the most iconic games of this era is Shadowrun, published in 1993. It is a cyberpunk themed role playing game and is adapted from the table top role playing game of the same name. There are different races in Shadowrun, which include elves. In Shadowrun, humans start giving birth to elves and dwarves due to genetic complications. In the game, elves are described to have any skin color like humans, light to dark, and they are lightly built, yet as strong as a human. They have hair only on their heads and have almond shaped eyes. They have unusually (in human terms) long life due to magic in their genes and are almost vegetarian. Some of these descriptions and traits are very similar to elves in mythology and in Tolkien's Middle Earth. The

woodland fairies of the northern forests were small, thus light built, yet they had the means of capturing people, defend themselves in necessary. They are a part of nature, so the idea of thinking elves not consuming meat does not fall far from the folk tales. The pointy ears (see Figure 3.10.) and almond eyes are basically how Tolkien's elves were depicted, and were depicted thus in Dungeons and Dragons game world as well. Also elves having less body hair is an idea Tolkien's elves had, which in a way symbolized their purity, in comparison to humans.

Figure 3.10.



Reference: Beam Software. Shadowrun, 1993

Figure 3.11.



Reference: Beam Software. Shadowrun, 1993

As seen in Figure 3.10. and 3.11. the elves in Shadowrun have clothes that were imagined to be futuristic, at the time the game was made. One character is clearly someone who survives on the streets, stealing –considering he seems to be hacking a computer-like device, perhaps a member of a gang or a small group of deviants indicated by his and his companion’s choice of clothing and both carrying guns on the street.

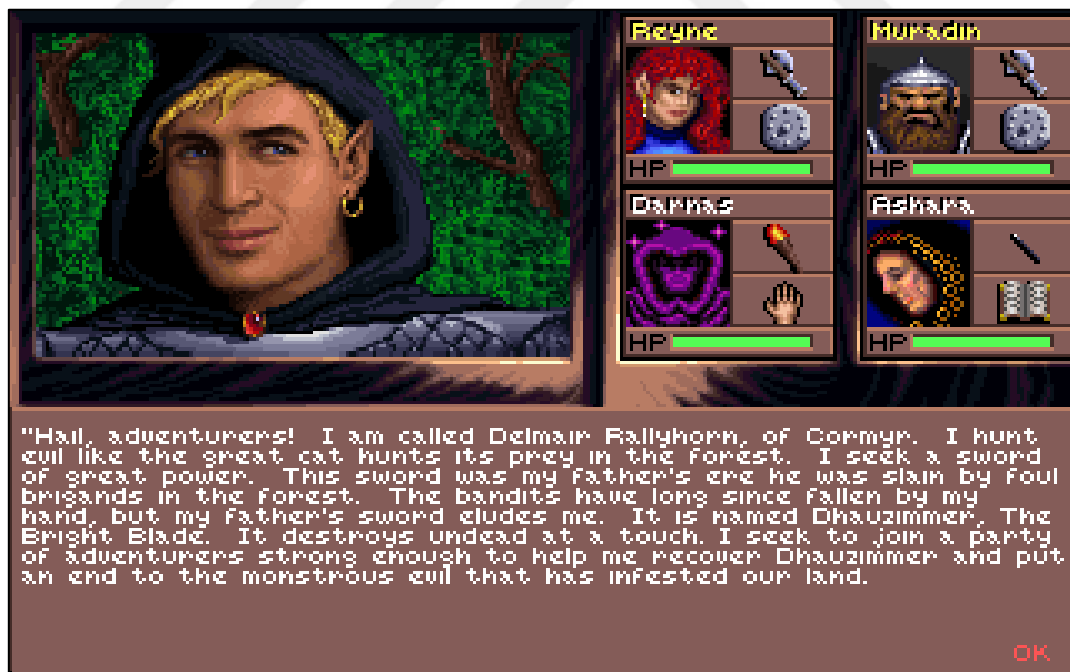
The idea of elves having lowlight vision, the ability that allows them to see in dim light was something Dungeons and Dragons had within their game mechanics. It has no specific parallels of this ability in the folktales, but elves singing and dancing in the forest at nighttime may have caused some inspiration. As most of the CRPGs were drawing inspiration from Dungeons and Dragons, Shadowrun seems to have taken this ability of seeing under low light environments and implemented into their mechanics as well. Even though this is not a physical description of elves, it is a trait that is carried into almost every elf race in RPG games in general.

The most significant feature of the Shadowrun elves is that these elves are nothing like the forest fairies in the folk tales or the divine beings in Tolkien's Middle Earth. Shadowrun took the pre-conceived idea of elves and turned it into something more high tech and unique. This is one of the first examples of deviation from the common idea of elves as a medieval world dweller, in CRPGs. Yet, even though they live in a completely different kind of environment and idea of time frame, the elves still carry the stereotypical look of their origins: pointy ears and almond shaped eyes.

In 1993, Eye of the Beholder III: Assault on Myth Drannor was released. The game has significantly improved graphics. Even though in the 90's the game art was pixelated, the amount of pixels the monitors had and the color choices had increased, which in turn made the art look even more realistic.

But even with all the realism, the sense of designing a completely different culture and showing this on the monitor was not a big priority for the games at this point in time.

Figure 3.12.



Reference: Strategic Simulations, Inc. Eye of the Beholder III: Assault on Myth Drannor, 1993

In Figure 3.12. we can see the very realistic rendition of an elf portrait from Eye of the Beholder III: Assault on Myth Drannor. Just like in Order of the Griffin, the portrait has

been drawn slightly facing to one side to bring out the ear. The dark backdrop behind the lighter toned ear really helps pop it out. Developers of Eye of the Beholder understand that the players really like to have visual representation of the characters they are interacting with or are playing. Being able to visualize the characters, help the players connect more to the world and enjoy interacting with it, remind the players that they are indeed in a fantasy world. So, showing off elf ears in a portrait really convinces the player that they are dealing with a non human being. Yet, the elven garments are still not very different than the human garments. Rather, all the characters seem to be dressed in generic clothes.

In the 90's, technology had improved in so many ways. One of these developments was 3D art. Unlike pixel art that is 2D, 3D allowed the in game environments to be explored differently. This also meant the characters would be rendered with volume too.

One of the first examples of a 3D dungeon crawling game from 1994 is called Menzoberranzan. While game the environments and characters looked 3D, the characters portraits were still in 2D, as seen in Figure 3.13.

Figure 3.13.



Reference: DreamForge Intertainment. Menzoberranzan, 1994

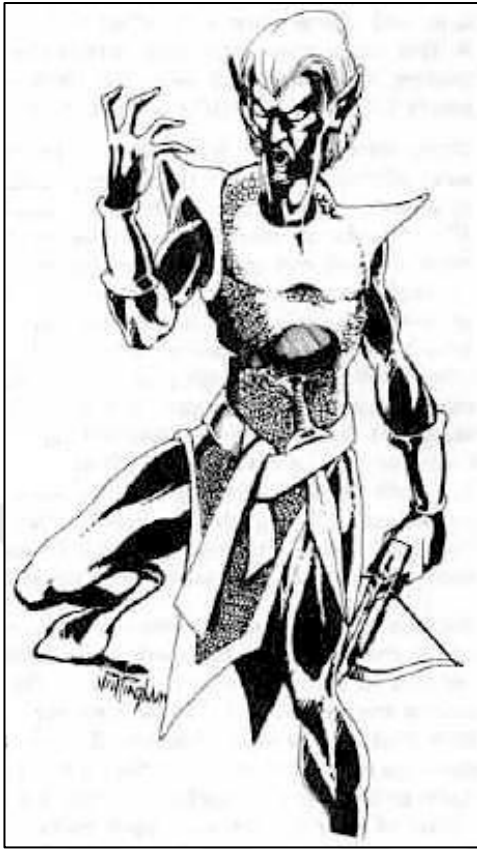
The portrait second on the right belongs to a dark elf character named Drizzt Do'Urden. He is one of the iconic heroes of Forgotten Realms book series. The title of the game, Menzoberranzan, is the city of dark elves, where Drizzt had lived. Drizzt's fame came from the fact that he was nothing like the regular drow. He was kind and good hearted. Thus he made a perfect NPC to use in the video games. Dark elves are a sub-race of elves in Forgotten Realms, and as the name suggests, have dark skin and they are, by nature, evil. They worship the spider goddess Lloth, who advocates violent behavior. Dark elves are very cruel; they have a reputation of showing no mercy, love or anything that would normally be considered pleasant. They like torturing. The dark elves, as they are also called 'drow', live underground. The city of Menzoberranzan is miles under the earth. These elves can have a very harsh environment to live in and cold hearts as well.

Figure 3.14.



Reference: Wizards of the Coast. Dragon Magazine, Terry Dykstra, 1991

Figure 3.15.



Reference: Wizards of the Coast. Dungeons and Dragons Fiend Folio, Don Turnbull, 1981

In the tabletop games on Forgotten Realms, female drow are depicted wearing next to nothing, just enough garment to cover their privates; meanwhile male drow are usually depicted wearing armor that leaves most part of their bodies revealed, as seen in Figure 3.14. and 3.15. respectively.

In 1993, *Betrayal at Krondor* was released. There are elves in the game, though there was not much of a cultural reference to elven clothes, there is at least one scene that refers to the geographical location of their habitat. In Figure 3.16. game narrates “Travel through the ancient elven forests, over snow covered mountain passes, or into the stench of the royal sewers!” The game clearly suggests elves live in an ancient forest, another historically rooted suggestion that elves are found in old forests. Even though some games deviate from this classic idea, most games at the time placed elven habitats in forests, mostly in ancient ones.

Figure 3.16.



Reference: Dynamix. Betrayal at Krondor, 1993

In 1996, Birthright: The Gorgon's Alliance was released. In the user manual, the history of the world and races are stated. And it's easy to see that the story of elves is very similar to the folktale version of the elves, with a touch of Tolkien's rendition. In the user manual it is written (1997, p. 21):

"Cerilian elves are of fairy dust and starlight, gifted with immortality and powers of mind and body beyond those of humankind. They are a force for neither good nor evil: an elven wood can be perilous for human travelers, but even more so for goblins or gnolls."

The elves have immortality, which refers back to their angelic or fairy roots, depending on whichever folk tale version is chosen, but here a bit of both seems to be taken as basis since both 'fairy dust' and 'starlight' are mentioned, starlight referring to divinity or the heaven above.

Also in the continuation of the above quote, it is said on page 21: "More than anything else, elves are unpredictable, doing what pleases them from one moment to the next." This also refers back to their fairy origins from the folktales.

3.3 THE MILLENNIUM AGE

1990's was the blooming period of CRPGs, but the 2000's became the period where CRPGs leveled up to a whole new phase. Massively multiplayer online role playing games, MMORPGs for short, became the new popular gaming choice. While not every player preferred it, 2000's were certainly the pinnacle of the genre. But besides the MMORPGs, a few iconic games were released in this time period.

Single player is a type of game where the player controls one or more characters and is bound by the linear storyline, also cannot wander off into anywhere in the world as they please. The players are limited with what the storyline and accessible locations offer.

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn stepped up the graphics early on. The character creation screen had realistic and beautifully rendered portraits to choose from.

Figure 3.17.



Reference: BioWare. Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn, 2000

Since the game's setting comes from Forgotten Realms world, the races and cultures are already established for the tabletop version and the books. In Forgotten Realms, the

elves have the common trait of pointy ears and almond shaped eyes. Yet, the transfer of that information, starting from Baldur's Gate I and Icewind Dale I, continues to get better with each new game.

Figure 3.18.



Reference: BioWare. Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn, 2000

As seen in Figure 3.18. the characters are still not very detailed and the isometric view creates limitations on how much detail can be seen by the player. Most games, like Baldur's Gate II, knew this limitation so in these games most of the visual descriptions of the characters are shown in their portraits, as in Figure 3.17. and in textual descriptions. It's important to keep in mind that the habit of textual descriptions also comes from the way tabletop RPGs are played. So the computer version almost tries to imitate this exercise.

After its success with the first game, Icewind Dale II was released in summer 2002. The game continues on the story and is still set in Forgotten Realms. Thus the elven races are still the same with the ones on the tabletop version of the game and that their descriptions are the one the game uses, one new selectable elf sub-race they added was the drow. Dark elves were finally a playable character in Icewind Dale II, unlike the rest of the Forgotten Realms video games.

Both in Baldur's Gate II and Icewind Dale II, since the graphics are very similar to each other, the visual description of the heroes almost depend on their portrait pictures.

Figure 3.19.



Reference: Black Isle Studios. Icewind Dale II, 2002

In Figure 3.19. a drow portrait is visible. The male dark elf is portrayed with a bare chest, a kind of shawl or fur to cover the shoulders, a pair of pants the material of which is not very specific, a belt with at least one pouch hanging from it and some decorative items. He also seems to be holding a sword of some sort. The portrait gives a vague idea of the creature, the picture is not very realistically rendered so it's hard to make out the material of some of his clothes. But perhaps that is the idea behind the style of rendering, that this elf is really from out of this world and the materials he picked for his clothing may as well belong to another world. The black skin and the white hair are the trademark of dark elves in Forgotten Realms. It's such a significant difference from the fair and light elves, that the portrait in Figure 5.3. has most likely been designed to bring out the characters charcoal black skin and striking white hair. Some crisscrossing lines on his belt buckle and the hand guard of his sword hints at the spider goddess

Loth the dark elves worship and respect, this detail shows the players a good sense of this character's cultural background.

One award winning game that changed single player RPGs for the next generations was Neverwinter Nights, released in 2002. This game was a continuation of Forgotten Realms CRPGs and it had implemented the new Dungeons and Dragons game mechanics and it was celebrated as the game that had the best imitation of the tabletop system. But this was not the only change this game had.

Neverwinter Nights, a predecessor of Baldur's Gate and Icewind Dale series, was also visually impressive. The game left the isometric camera angle and integrated full 3D view, like most games released in this period and later on. This meant the camera angle could be changed and the world could be viewed from anywhere. The players could change the angle or zoom in and out very closely. This meant that the game had to drastically improve its graphics. The characters can be seen in close up all the way to their faces.

Figure 3.20.



Reference: BioWare. Neverwinter Nights, 2002

Figure 3.21.



Reference: BioWare. Neverwinter Nights, 2002

In figure 3.20. there is an elf female, in front. She does not seem to be wearing much, almost adding to the long debate of how women are portrayed in fantasy video games. This character, who is supposed to be a fighter of some sort to save Neverwinter, yet she only has two straps of fabric enough to cover her breasts and what seems to be a high top underwear. It's definitely not a protective gear against attacks, nor does it seem suitable for long travels, which the player has to do in the game. Depicting female characters with minimal and revealing clothing has been a long running habit in video games, so the choice of clothes for most of these CRPGs are not surprising and explains the reason for their being: everyone else was doing it. The drow female in Figure 3.21. is another example of lack of clothing. Though, the drow have always been sexualized in Forgotten Realms games and books. The more interesting part of the clothing in Figure 3.21. is the references to spiders, both in texture and shapes used. There is a red hourglass-like shape right on the belly, which refers to one of the most deadly spiders: the black widow. Drow are known to be deadly and their skin is as black as the black widow's body. Both in appearance and habitat, the black widow is a great reference. The spider is a well known species for the players, thus taking real-life references into games strengthen the storytelling as well. Around the waist area are some textures very similar to a spider's body and body hair; also on her pauldron (the shoulder guards) are

spikes that very much resemble a spider's sharp teeth and feet. Also, as pointy shapes create a feeling of danger to viewers, putting spikes on the shoulder really makes the character look scary and deadly. Portraying a deadly character with references to a deadly animal creates an impact in the player's mind, helps get the idea about the character across.

Most MMORPGs are open world games, which means the players can roam off to anywhere on the world and that there is no linear storytelling. Open world games offer a more realistic immersion experience, where the player can truly feel like they live on this world and they are free to experience what they want. Some players may even never talk to anyone and just go around the entire world and take in the scenery. There is still a story in the game, yet there are no rules to follow it, though not catching up to the main storyline may deprive the players from the grand storyline.

The biggest difference in the open world games versus the single player games is that there is more information that can be explored by the players, and also the world creation process requires more completeness. The world itself should make sense and since every place is open to exploration, all details must be previously thought, designed and put into the game.

The open world games I will be looking into have grown and evolved from their first time of release. In some games not all races were available in the beginning and in some games races came and went due to battles or other historical reasons. So to be able to analyze the races in these games, I will be looking into the general timeline of the games to give a better reading on the elves, their cultures and their appearances. Since the cultural references and the background of the races do not change drastically, it will be appropriate to study the bigger picture for each of these games.

The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind was released in 2002. The series continues to grow still to this day. Just like Neverwinter Nights, Morrowind was the game that Elder Scrolls adapted the full 3D camera angle into their games. The players could now look more in detail to their environments and the characters from all angles. This forced the developers to deliver more for the players, create more believable worlds. One thing the Elder Scrolls setting did was to play around with classic names. In this world the elves

are called ‘mer’ and the sub-races are called: The high elves are Altmer, wood elves Bosmer and dark elves Dunmer. This deviation from the classic term ‘elf’ allows the developers to create their own unique world experience, but at the end of the day, as with appearances, personality and habitat, not much changes in games. Since the idea is to have elves without calling them ‘elves’, the product still must be recognizable to the players. Since ‘elves’ are such an iconic part of the fantasy genre, it’s almost inevitable to not look for elves in a new story.

In Elder Scrolls, the elves have the common outlook of pointy ears, almond shaped eyes and slender, frail bodies.

Figure 3.22.



Reference: Bethesda Game Studios. The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind, 2002

In Figure 3.22. is an Altmer, a high elf. They are described as slender, small built, tall (taller than humans), with pointy ears, almond shaped eyes and pale golden skin. The Altmer are one of the oldest species on this world, which is an idea similar to Tolkien's, and also similarly to his ideas, Altmer believe they are direct descendants of the original mer race. Their name means "High Ones" or "Cultured Ones" and like in most fantasy worlds the high elves are considered the ancient, divine and the snob elven sub-race. In Elder Scrolls, this is no different. In Figure 3.22. the characters lavish and decorated dress is a reference to her financial status and her life style. The expensive looking red and green fabric, adorned with big jewelry gives the sense of medieval European royalty, again giving the players a relatable idea to make them connect with this world.

In Figure 3.23. is a Bosmer, a wood elf. Wood elves in Elder Scrolls are native to a region called Valenwood, wild forest area. As the name suggests, wood elves are found in forest areas in most fantasy worlds, and in Elder Scrolls it's not so different either. The wood elf in the picture has less expensive looking garment in comparison to the Altmer. A green tunic with brown pants, possibly leather, a belt with a noticeable buckle. This character has simple clothes, which is what the wood elves in Elder Scrolls prefer. They are elves that have embraced nature and are not into lavish life styles. Their homes are built on walking trees that wander in the forests of Valenwood. Surprisingly, the wood elves are one of the smallest races to live in this world, unlike their Altmer cousins. They have skin colors varying from pale tan to light brown. Some even may have horns grow. The wood elves decorate their bodies, which allows them to blend into the surrounding. 'Elves being invisible to mortal eyes' is a concept Tolkien also had, nobody who wandered into Lothlorien ever made it out. The elves and the nature almost becomes one, this is also proven by the fact that sentient trees allow these elves to live on their bodies.

Figure 3.23.



Reference: Bethesda Game Studios. The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind, 2002

In Figure 3.24. is an official concept art for the wood elf habitat. The round shaped houses look like onions, or perhaps a flower bud may be more appropriate for people who live so intimately with nature.

The housing pods look like woven tree branches. Their shape also gives a sense of calm, budding environment. The pods are very private and have a respectful amount of distance in between them. This may point out that wood elves are respectful of each other and are aware of the people they live together with.

The most decorative items in the town are the banners with different designs on them, hanging from the buildings. The soft lighting gives a sense of peace to this place.

Figure 3.24.



Reference: ZeniMax Media Inc. The Elder Scrolls, 2012

The third kind of elf in Elder Scrolls III is the Dunmer, the dark elves. These dark elves are different from the drow of Forgotten Realms. They do not have only black skin, but their complexion varies from dark grays to dark greens. They have glowing red eyes and are on average same height with humans. But just like in Forgotten Realms and most other games, the dark elves are considered cursed; well it's not so far off. The origin story of the Dunmer does involve a curse, and turn another type of 'mer' into the Dunmer. That curse is the reason their eyes are red and glowing and also explains their dark hued skin, as the curse caused their skin to look as dark as their hearts.

Most fantasy video games revolve around the balance between the good and evil. Dark elves usually are found to be useful to fulfill the 'evil' role in games. It is a common pattern in games that incorporate dark elves into their worlds, that the dark elves are dark skinned –hence the name, either evil or cursed, but either way their skin is explained by the darkness of their hearts or deeds. This idea creates an opportunity to explore a wide range of stories, but also design. People with only darkness or a cursed placed upon them would most likely experience the world differently and it would affect their appearances

Here in Figure 3.25. are examples of both a male (left) and female (right) Dunmer. These are their common clothes. Natural brown tones, leather and fabric garments that cover their whole bodies, adorned with a hood. They're wearing a leather belt and a simple knife on their belts. There is not much character in these garments. Yet it seems fitting for their survival in Raven Rock, a town where Dunmer made their home.

Figure 3.25.



Reference: Bethesda Game Studios. The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind, 2002

In Figure 3.26. is a look at Raven Rock, Dunmer city. It used to be a mining area, which perhaps explains the dry, dusty landscape. The city was not built by the Dunmer, it was being operated as a mining colony by a company before the dark elves moved in. So the architecture may not accurately represent how the dark elves would have chosen to build their structures. The way it is now, though, resembles almost bugs or bug shells. The whole town looks very dark and colorless, which adds to the image of the Dunmer.

The city walls and the metal-made looking structures give a sense of industrialism to the town. The barren land around the town also amplifies the industrial look of it.

Figure 3.26.



Reference: Bethesda Game Studios. The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind, 2002

A couple years after Morrowind, Blizzard Entertainment released the newest Warcraft game: The World of Warcraft, in 2004. Captivating millions of people around the world, turning a RTS game into a RPG heavy game captured the attention of a bigger audience. A lot of players were already intrigued by the storytelling in the Warcraft series, and now the players were going to be exploring the world of Azeroth in a whole new way. The rich worlds of every race were available to the players. Now, with improved technology all the races had their culture, fashion and architecture were much distinguishable.

At the time of the release of World of Warcraft, only Night Elves were present in the game. Since the game expanded further in later years, in the 2000's, I will present all the sub-races and the analysis on their design.

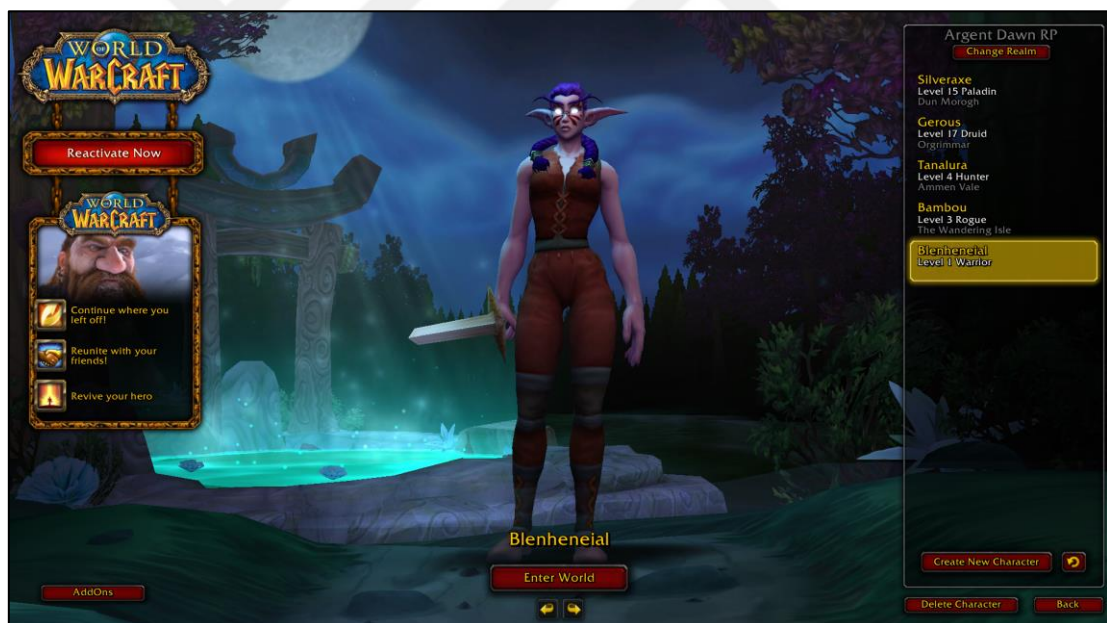
In Azeroth, the world that Warcraft takes place in has multiple sub-races of elves: Kaldorei, the night elves; Quel'dorei, the high elves; Sin'dorei, the blood elves; San'layn, the darkfallen.

While the name of the sub-races change, the typical elven look still prevails: pointy ears and almond shaped eyes, but Warcraft elves deviate from their counterparts in other games is that their ears are very long, pointy ends facing downwards and they have glowing eyes with no pupil.

The Kaldorei, night elves, are the first of the elves in Azeroth. A group of trolls that settled next to the Well of Eternity has been affected by its magic and in time transformed into the night elves. The well turned their skin to a violet hue. Their hair colors range from tones of green to purple. Their eyes have no pupil and look like golden glowing orbs.

In Figure 3.27. is the example of a beginning level night elf warrior character. She is dressed in simple leather clothes. She has a light violet skin and purple hair.

Figure 3.27.



Reference: Blizzard Entertainment. World of Warcraft, 2018

Within the game, the garments depend on the class the player chooses. And as the player progresses, new garments are offered for better armor or other special abilities. But the overall style of the kaldorei culture is very in tune with nature. They wear light clothes with armor or only accessories, depending on the social responsibilities of the character.

They have elaborate hair styles, especially those in high stature, such as Tyrande Windrunner the High Priestess of Elune, in Figure 3.28.

Figure 3.28.



Reference: Blizzard Entertainment. World of Warcraft, 2018

To further understand the general style and culture of night elves, here are some screen captures from the cinematic trailers from World of Warcraft Classic and World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, in Figure 3.29. is a night elf. She has very minimal clothing, which covers her genitals, her shoulders, forearms and shins. Her garments are highly decorated with thin, circular lines that almost imitate vines or ivies that reference

the bond night elves have with nature. Her shoulder pads have what look like feathers underneath, which is also another reference to nature, birds.

Figure 3.29.



Reference: Blizzard Entertainment. World of Warcraft, 2004

Her clothes are mostly in purple hues. She is also adorned in accessories that imitate organic shapes, like her necklace and her armband on her left arm. There is some, what looks like metal, pieces on her as well, over her shoulder pads and over her shins. The lack of armor on her gives the impression that she is not a combatant person. Later in the cinematic trailer, she transforms into a leopard, which also shows her connection to nature.

Below in Figure 3.30. is a blood elf, they are depicted to have light colored skin, light hair and green glowing eyes. She's dressed in deep red clothes, like the night elf, there is not a lot of fabric covering the body, in Figure 3.31. the rest of her body is visible. She is wearing a bustier, tall boots and long gloves. She also has golden jewelry on her

upper arms, on her wrist, belt and a tiara on her head. This character seems to be a priestess, as we see her raise a fallen ally later on in the trailer.

Figure 3.30.



Reference: Blizzard Entertainment. World of Warcraft: Burning Crusade, 2007

Figure 3.31.



Reference: Blizzard Entertainment. World of Warcraft: Burning Crusade, 2007

Both elven sub-races have a similar style, that their armor or metallic accessories have pointy edges. The general design on both races is a balance of circular, elegant shapes that end in points. This almost tells the viewer these characters are approachable, yet still dangerous.

The blood elves are technically high elves. Their exposure to fel magic, a type of demonic magic, caused them to mutate and turned their eyes green. The actual high elves of Warcraft have blue glowing eyes. They are described as the embodiment of perfection in the elven societies. This view of perfection causes high elves to be very narcissistic and see themselves above the other races. But after some historic events, the high elves lose most of their population and home. Thus they start living in human cities. In Figure 3.32. is Queen Azshara, she was an adored leader of her people, yet her obsession with power caused her to bring down her kingdom.

Figure 3.32.



Reference: Blizzard Entertainment. World of Warcraft: Burning Crusade, 2007

Queen Azshara is a perfect example of the high elves, as she was the person the high elves looked up to for a very long time.

Queen Azshara is wearing light cloth garment that is mostly revealing, as most elven women seem to prefer. She's wearing a tight bustier and golden jewelry with pink gems on them. She looks revealing and chick. There is a green floral design on her skirt, referencing nature. Also her bare feet show her comfort in touching the nature and ground she walks on.

In Figure 3.33. is the Sunstrider Isle, the starting point of the blood elf players. The blood elven architecture is predominantly red, grey and gold. Like their night elf relatives, the buildings have curvy lines as decorative elements.

Figure 3.33.



Reference: Blizzard Entertainment. World of Warcraft, 2018

In Figure 3.34. is the interior decorations from the starting point. The pillows and the cushions on the floor have elaborate floral patterns on them. Even with the flower decorations, almost all pillows a reference to the sun, symbolizing the fire that blood elves resonate with.

There is a very large carpet on the floor, decorated with curvy lines that resemble shapes in the nature. The marble table with gold decors and the chairs with purple and

gold colorations add to the feeling of a high class society, as gold, marble and ornate decoration are usually related to higher economic stature, which would help the players get a sense of the blood elven culture.

Figure 3.34.



Reference: Blizzard Entertainment. World of Warcraft, 2018

The plants on the either side of the table shows that blood elves are also affinitive to the nature, thus they place pieces of it in their living quarters.

4. CREATING ELVES

When creating a race it's important to understand where they came from, their history, their culture, everything that makes up their identity. When considering the physical appearance though, anything counts. It is the part that world creators can go crazy on, yet when creating a new version of an existing concept, there will be boundaries. When designing an elf race in a new world, to stay true to the idea of 'elves', a creator must stay true to what makes an elf recognizable. Identity and appearance are two ways that can help design a new type of elf.

Looking into the common concepts of elves in fantasy CRPGs, one reoccurring idea is that they are 'better' than humans in the sense that they live longer, they see further, they hear better, they can see in the dark, etc... And in most cases, elves are associated with nature, thus they are portrayed as having ornate architecture replicating shapes found in nature and an elegant sense of fashion with floral patterns. They mostly live in the woods, in homes built on trees. They are usually portrayed as attuned to nature and animals. Concerning the physical appearance, elves are usually portrayed as having pointy ears, almond shaped eyes, slim and elegant physique, cat-like grace and so on. They are usually described as having a longer life span or in some cases they do not even age after reaching adulthood. Collecting these basic ideas of what resembles an elf, it is possible to create a new type of it.

In Figure 4.1. there is a portrait of a female elf. The ears are pointy and large in proportion to the rest of the face. This can be justified as elves tend to be described as having a keen hearing capability. The eyes are more elliptical like an almond and are slightly slanted giving her another earthly feel. This particular elf I created is a gray elf and as the name suggests, the character has pale gray skin and dark gray eyebrows.

She has high cheekbones, which gives the face elegance and an alien look. Reminds the viewer that this is not human.

Figure 4.1.



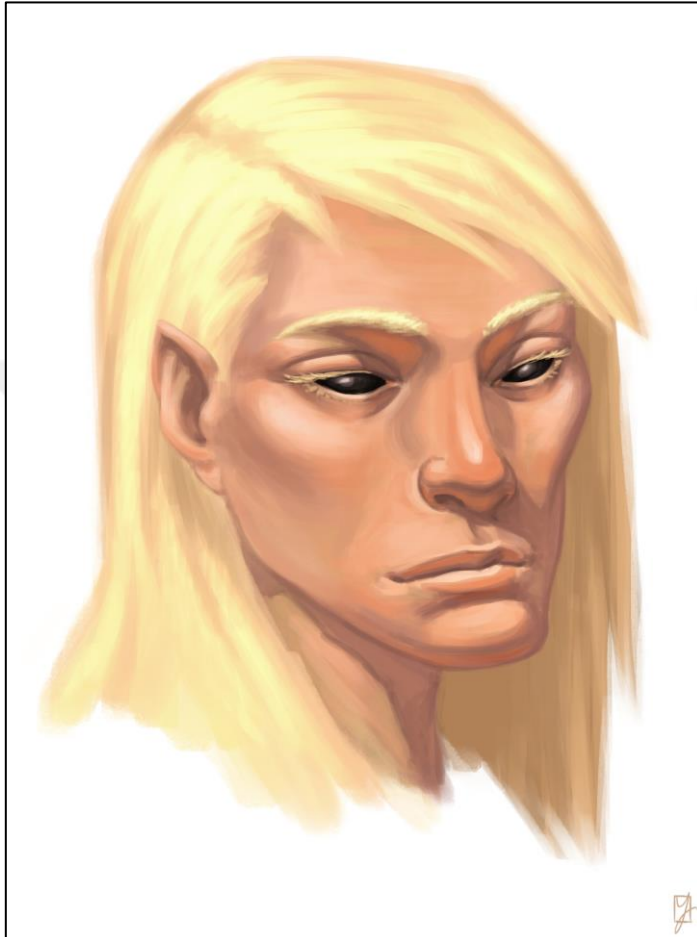
Reference: Yasemin Baran. Gray elf, 2018

Here in Figure 4.2. there is another elf I have portrayed. Yet this time it's a blond elf with yellowish red skin and completely black eyes. This male elf also has high cheek bones, carrying the common facial trait.

Elves are usually described as having elegant and sharp facial features. This gray elf has a pointy nose and a chin. Her cheekbones are high and from this 3/4 angle, they seem like the most protruding part of her face. Her chin is a wide angle triangle, which make her seem inhuman and seem sharp in the mind as well. This indicates high intelligence, independent of the fact if this character is indeed a smart one or not. To an outsider, her facial features will imply a form of mental superiority, which allows the design of this gray elf to seem not human. If the bone structure did not support the idea of an elf, the design could easily resemble a human with pointed ears, which is not necessarily a wrong way of designing an elf, but to have a stronger distinction between different

races, it is important to get the idea across to the viewer that they are looking at a creature unrelated to reality.

Figure 4.2.



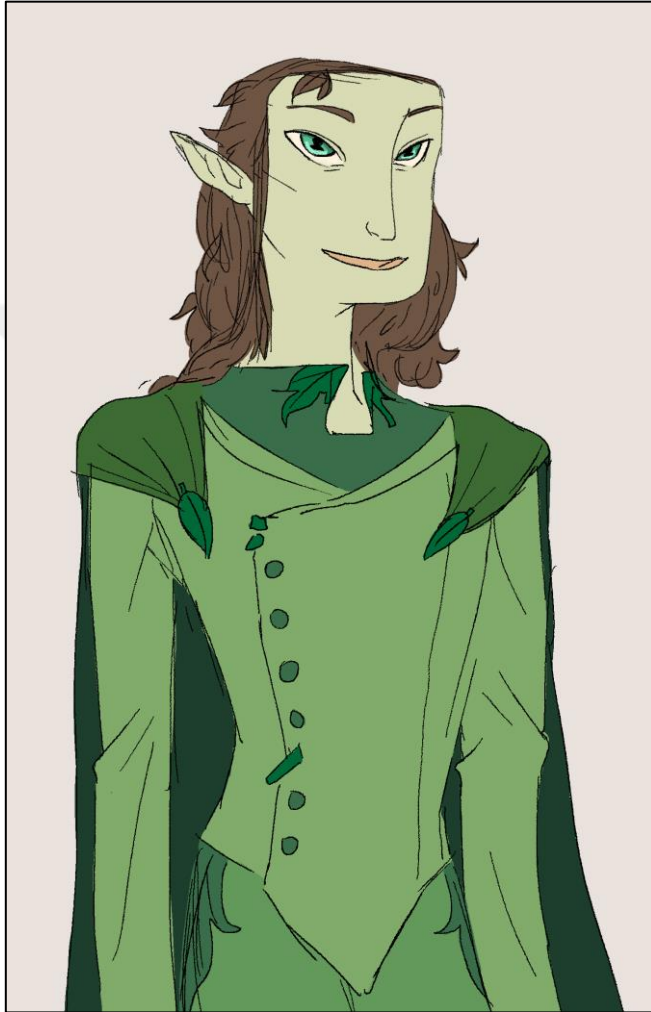
Reference: Yasemin Baran. Sun elf, 2018

This sun elf though has smaller ear with a smaller point, compared to the gray elf. His eyes are less slanted but are a more exaggerated almond shape and there is no white of the eye. The skin coloration of the elf has given it its name.

Figure 4.3. is a wood elf. The names of the elf types most usually come from the root or creation of the elf. Coming from this concept, this wood elf is dressed in green fabric adorned with life shapes. The color of the elf's hair is brown like a tree's trunk and the green eyes are like the leaves. The ears are yet again pointed, but slanted in an angle and are thin and long, resembling a leaf. With these design choices, I was able to achieve replication of nature elements reflecting from the creature that feels related to the

nature. The wood elves are commonly known to be part of the woodlands, most times they see themselves as guardians of nature. They are usually secluded people who live among the trees.

Figure 4.3.



Reference: Yasemin Baran. Wood elf, 2018

In the Figure 4.4. is a dark elf costume design I have done, drawn on a generic elf model. The dark elves, just as in Nordic mythology, are depicted as evil by nature, in most fantasy worlds. So to show the concept for evil, I have decided to add pointy shapes all over the costume of this elf. I have added repeating shapes along the leather armor to imply unity of the character, making his costume feel more like a uniform, thus implying that this is either a warrior wearing a generic armor, or it could imply the uniform of a soldier.

Figure 4.4.



Reference: Yasemin Baran. Dark elf, 2018

The dark leather of the armor is to support the idea of dark elves hiding in dark corners, allows them to camouflage and be invisible in shady places.

His clothes are tight around his body, while that would not be ideal in a real life scenario, in a video game it allows the character to have a distinguishable silhouette,

making his moves readable by the audience, plus it looks more aesthetic than looser clothes that would actually allow this dark elf to move more freely.

Figure 4.5.

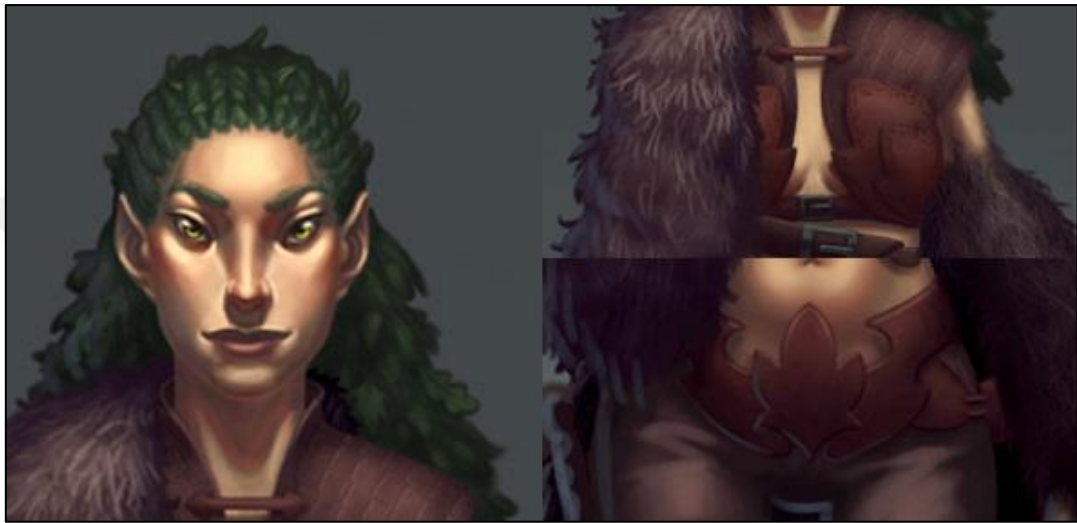


Reference: Yasemin Baran. Wild elf, 2018

In Figure 4.5. is a wild elf druid design I have done. Druid is a class in RPGs, they can be described as protectors of nature. They can communicate with plants and animals, they have magic that allows them to transform into animal forms. This wild elf I designed allowed me to play with the idea of an elf kind that is so attuned to earth and nature, that the nature started to grow on them. Her hair is made of ivy and leaves, as can be seen in the details shots in Figure 4.6. She has leaf shaped decorations on her leather clothing as homage to her culture and beliefs. The concept of carrying nature on

herself could also work as a talisman. The leather clothing and the fur over her shoulder shows that she only provides her needs from the very forest she dwells in. In this case, I have not only chosen the materials of her costume considering her respect to nature, but also due to the resources such a character would have access to in the deep corners of an ancient forest.

Figure 4.6.



Reference: Yasemin Baran. Wild elf details, 2018

The wild elf has green hair due to the plant-like nature of her hair, and accompanying that, she has green floral eyebrows. Her yellow-green eyes almost reflect the connection she has to nature. Her eyes are at a steep angle, compared to humans. This is to emphasize her inhumanity and remind the viewer that she is a 'wild' elf and she is more savage than civilized, as if her wild animal-like nature is reflected on her in a physical form. Her ears are pointy towards up and are not too larger than a regular human ear in comparison to the scale of her head.

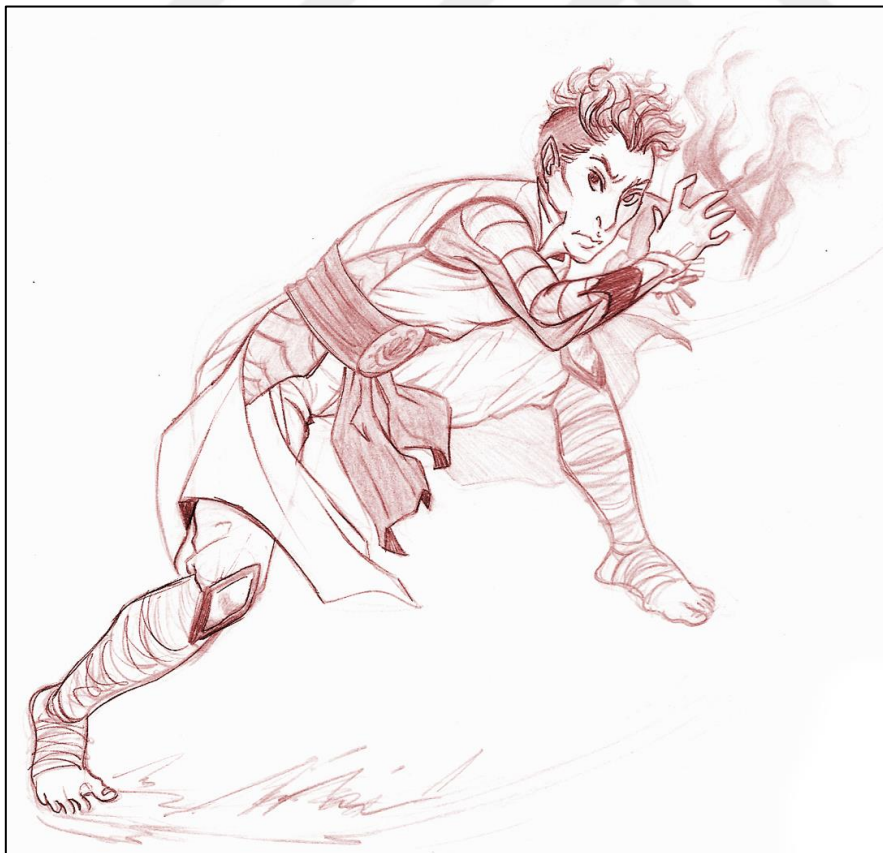
Looking at her full body proportions in Figure 4.5. by comparing it to a human, we can understand that she is pretty much as tall as a human or slightly taller, for her legs are long for her body. Ideally a human's height is around 7.5 times the size of their head, this measurement was coined around the Italian renaissance, mostly with the help of anatomic studies of Leonardo da Vinci and other artist like him. Taking this measurement as a basis, warping what is natural to the human eye, it is possible to create other beings that are recognizable to us. Elven height changes from world to

world. Tolkien described them as taller than humans, while in mythology and folklore they show variety depending on the source. In fantasy CRPGs, depending on the world and the sub-race of elves, they show variety. Some world creators consider the evolution of the different type of elves' height depending on their environment. This tells us that there is no standard height for elves in the common knowledge. With that information, I have designed the wild elf in consideration of her environment.

So by changing bone structure, height, coloration, skin texture and environment, among other elements, a single common concept of elf can give birth to many sub-race ideas and creation.

Culture and environment plays a great part of a person's life. Thus, when creating a race, it is a very important part of its creation. It affects the outlook of the people, how they walk, talk, think, dress, work, live etc...

Figure 4.7.



Reference: Yasemin Baran. Fire elf wizard, 2018

Figure 4.7. is a drawing I made of a fire elf. This sub-race concept is not highly unique, as some fantasy worlds have fire elves, but the one I have designed here has its own unique features. His hair is curly and flowing, almost resembling a burning fire. His clothing is made of red materials, referring to the color of fire. I have designed this fire elf as a wizard and he uses his whole body to active his magic. For this purpose, I have chosen to dress him in body tight clothes with soft fabric, to allow free movement; yet I have added some flowing fabrics to give him more variety on his silhouette to strengthen his character, that he is not one dimensional. The kind of fabric and the cut of it gives the sharp edge that replicates the feeling of the danger of fire. This way, I can communicate within the design the culture of the fire elves, how much the actual fire plays a role in their daily lives, by placing its reminders in the elf's physical appearance.

Looking at the defining elements of the elf race, this fire elf has almond shaped large eyes, yet they are angled in an inhuman way. He has very high cheekbones and a short forehead. His face is overall long and pointy towards his chin.

So when creating a sub-race or a unique type of elves, paying attention to the common ideas of what makes an elf and changing them slightly to give personality is important. Considering the life style and culture of the elves, their costumes and their features may vary. Playing around with different combinations, it is possible to create endless types of elves.

5. CONCLUSION

In this thesis I aimed to look into how the visual depiction of elves have evolved through time, from their mythological outlooks to what we see in video games today and how their different cultures are depicted through garment and architecture.

Through my research, I was able to pin point certain features that are common to almost all elves found in western CRPGs. These common traits include almond shaped eyes, pointy ears, high cheekbones and small body frame, lean muscular anatomy, light and agile bodies, a love for or connection to nature and last but not least, elves usually have the most amount of sub-races in most fantasy CRPGs. This shows the audience that elves are a very active race and full of complicated history.

From the woodlands of Northern Europe, the elves have turned into a cultural part of many video game players. This evolution has allowed video game developers to create new kinds of elves with different cultures in their games, allowing wild imagination to spark in the players' minds. While the world of video games have many imaginative and creative environments and stories, the multitude of elven groups and sub-races still defy the original roots of the creature.

Starting from the Norse mythology described in Prose Edda to British folktales, to the imagination of J.R.R. Tolkien to Dungeons and Dragons, elves have evolved so very little in reality. Not many games have broken the stereotypical understanding or the depiction elves. Thus the elves have survived centuries being the forest dwelling magical creatures, who have pointy ears and are dangerous to deal with, unless they represent the holy, the divine beings that humans are not. Almost every CRPG game in the west that has elves in them has at least one group of elves that are higher in stature than everyone else, they are the ancient race, the immortal beings that everyone either loves or despises. Their connection to nature is so strong that their garments and architecture references the organic shapes found in nature. Yet as the technology improves, it is possible to see sub-races of elves flourish in video games, usually as descendants of the high elves or have somehow derived from other creatures or else, cursed. There is always something magic about all of these elves.

The only time it is possible to see change in the design of the elves is with the sub-races. Some of these minority groups or despised creatures have moved or forced out of the woodlands and thus gave birth to different cultures and architecture.

Still, the humans' perception of elves remains close to the origins. Few games change the common understanding of elves and offer few changes. If the elves in a particular game have deviated from the folktale roots, they are still very much magic, they still have pointy ears and almond shaped eyes, be they live in a medieval setting or in a futuristic, technology driven city.

The most evolution these creatures truly see is that their kind has spread into sub-groups in some games, sometimes the length of their ears have changed or the type of trees they have dwelled under has changed.

At this point, in the present time, the elves have such a presence in fantasy CRPGs in the western world and a stereotypical look carved into the players' minds that it seems changing their appearances further will only seem like a completely different race with just the same name.

Upon looking into the design aspect of what makes an 'elf', it is possible to see that there are a few common features that are expected from the appearance of elves. Yet, by fulfilling these expectations with modifications, it is possible to evolve the idea of elves that we have picked up throughout the history and change them into something never thought of before, while staying true to the idea of 'elf'. As I have explored in chapter 4, considering these design elements that have become the 'norm' throughout the years, the best a designer can do is to modify the appearance of the elf only enough to protect the above mentioned features while adding variety that will not confuse the audience.

Usually in CRPGs, the regular elf is the derivative of the common, expected kind of elf and the world is then sprinkled with sub-races of elves that evolved into their variety of environments and conditions. The effect of conditions can easily be observed among the different elven races of World of Warcraft, the magical Well of Eternity actually distorts and evolves a completely different race, dark trolls, into what we know as elves today in the game. The magical powers of the well affects the trolls living around it, and

they gradually evolved into night elves. As night elves spread out in Azeroth and as different historic events took place, these elves get affected and transform into various sub-races that are playable today in World of Warcraft.

Just as the designers at Blizzard Entertainment created a mythos of the creation including that of elves in Warcraft universe, all games have their own unique perspective on the evolution of all their races and elves are no exception to this. Each game studio come up with their own history for their elves and evolves them differently, in accordance with the historic events and geography of their world. These unique differences is what mostly separates elves in different CRPG games.

Solely looking into the visual design of the elves would not do justice to the design decisions made during the development of a game though. Depending on the type of game and game play a certain product has also affects the design decisions. An isometric game will have a different view angle than a FPS game for example, thus the elves in the game will only be observed from either a very limited camera angle or in any angle the player wishes. These different game angles affect the design choices just as much, because spending time to design something that will never be seen is a great time consumption; which also brings the topic of economics. The elaboration of design will always be affected by the production budget in any game. Depending on the money spent on any particular game will affect the amount of details that can be put forth. Thus if a game has smaller budget, maybe the designers and game developers will not concern themselves with coming up with a unique kind of elven sub-race, instead they would conform to the expected traits of an elf to make their job easier and would not have to worry so much about going over the budget.

Another aspect that affects the visual development and design choices of elves in any CRPG is the visual style of the game. Some game studios have their own unique visual styles that they use in all their games. Some studios change the visual style from game to game. It really depends on the vision of that particular studio. But that vision affects the design choices and thus may either change how their elves look like or stick with the expected norm of elven design.

All in all, throughout the history, elves have found a special place in the hearts of both the developers and the players. They have not evolved a lot visually all this time and are still recognizable by their descriptions in British folktales. The biggest design change the elves went through is that they are no longer small forest fairies, but are a fully fledged race with their own tribes or civilizations. Depending on the world they reside on, depending on the budget of the game they are designed for and depending on the historic events and geological location they dwell in, elves have taken various forms in each game. The visual evolution of elves is not a linear one, nor is it a very obvious change from its roots. But each game has managed to take the mythological depiction and characteristics of this race and has made it their own in various degrees to accommodate various necessities. Looking at different games throughout history though, however they may have been re-imagined, it is clear that the elves have almost never lost their pointy ears, almond shaped eyes and their affection to nature in the western CRPGs.

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