CORRUPTED BLOOD

A virtual pandemic and its impact
World of Warcraft

• I’ve never played so....

• Action / Adventure: Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) made by Blizzard

• Create a character, go adventuring in an open world, and participate in raids

• Virtual world has urban and rural areas with non-player character (NPCs) and other player characters
GAMEPLAY MECHANICS

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• Raids, events, and dungeons
THE ZUL’GURUB RAID

• Raid introduced in 2005

• End boss battle with Hakkar the Soulflayer

• He could apply ‘debuffs,’ a temporary status effect that would hinder you in some way

• Debuffs are gone if you leave Zul’Gurub
CORRUPTED BLOOD

- One debuff was called *Corrupted Blood*
- This affliction would cause damage to your character and could spread
- Raid groups had to fight spread out to avoid extra damage during the battle
- Had the power to *K I L L* a lower-level player in a few seconds
- Debuff was temporary, and lost if you traveled outside of Zul’Gurub
BUT SOMETHING WENT WRONG....
SPREADING THE AFFLICTION

A glitch

Pets could contract Corrupted Blood, and then be dismissed.

When a player left Zul’Gurub, they could summon their pet again......still afflicted with the debuff that automatically infects nearby characters.
Blizzard has now accidentally created a pandemic model with millions of participants.
Lower level players were killed off in seconds.
Higher level players could keep themselves alive, potentially spreading more.
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• Healing-based characters volunteered to assist with keeping players alive, potentially contracting the disease themselves and passing it on to other they interacted with
• Players fled high-density urban areas
• Malicious players intentionally infected others, and did not try to help contain the pandemic (griefing)
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- People thought it might be a purposeful event by Blizzard
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- Infected players would escape quarantine
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- Curiosity: players would rush in to watch and then try and leave, mirroring journalist behavior
**IMPACT**

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- Dr. Ran D. Balicer published an article in *Epidemiology* about how the event mirrored the then-recent SARS and avian influenza outbreaks... Dr. Balicer also published a follow-up in *Science*.
- The CDC contacted Blizzard to ask for statistics on the event
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• Essentially: people will follow quarantine and comply with authority figures
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Dr. Nina Fefferman, coauthored, now researches perceptions in a pandemic, especially relating to social media
LESSONS LEARNED

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• Did Blizzard?
  • Had a (planned) event in which they released a zombie plague for advertising their new expansion Wrath of the Lich King
  • Was more true what a disease acted like (less than 100% transmission rate)
  • Critically praised
  • Green Fire Incident.....
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  • Green Fire Incident.....exact same as corrupted blood, pets transmitted debuff from boss battle. However, was fixed in a day, and kept under control this time.