

The cover art features a large, imposing stone archway in the foreground. A character with white hair, wearing ornate green and gold armor with a blue cape, stands in the lower right, looking towards the arch. In the background, several soldiers in red and white armor stand on the battlements of a stone wall. The sky is bright and hazy. The title 'WORLD OF WARCRAFT' is at the top in a stylized font, with 'THE WAR WITHIN' below it. The main title 'HEARTLANDS' is in large white letters, and 'BY ADAM CHRISTOPHER' is in smaller white letters below it. At the bottom, the text 'ECHOES of the PAST' is written, with a large number '2' between two horizontal lines.

WORLD  
WARCRAFT  
THE WAR WITHIN

# HEARTLANDS

BY ADAM CHRISTOPHER

2  
ECHOES of the PAST

STORY

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“I don’t care who you are,” said the guard, “you can’t enter with *him*.”

Jaina and Thrall stood before the gates of Stromgarde. It had been years since she had visited the stronghold, and she didn’t remember the entrance being so imposing.

Certainly, it had never been so unwelcoming.

There were six guardsmen at the gate—Stromgarde regulars rather than 7th Legion—and above, on the towers that flanked the entrance, another six armed with crossbows aimed squarely at them.

Jaina tried to keep calm, but it was difficult. The walk to the city had been slow going, and she was very aware that Thrall’s strength was being steadily sapped by the arrow’s poison. Even now, as they stood before the gates, he was leaning heavily against her, his head bowed, his breathing labored.

“We are here to see Lady Marran Trollbane!” Jaina raised her voice and looked up at the guards on the towers, hoping that maybe one of them would show more sense. “My name is Jaina Proudmoore, Lord Admiral of the allied kingdom of Kul Tiras. This is Thrall, orc representative to the Horde Council, who is gravely wounded. We are *both*

here at the direction of Danath Trollbane on a mission of peace, and we have urgent business with your regent. *I demand you open these gates!*"

The guard in front of them simply shook his head.

"I don't think you understand," Jaina said through gritted teeth, her staff glowing as she channeled the arcane. "I ask permission only as a courtesy—"

She felt Thrall's big yet gentle hand on her forearm. "Danath's message may not yet have arrived, Jaina."

Jaina drew breath to argue, but Thrall pushed himself away from her. "We have a job to do, and I am a hindrance." He nodded at the guard. "Do not make a mistake today. The Lord Admiral is here to meet your regent. I suggest you let her in."

The guard remained steadfast, but there was movement behind him, and as Jaina glanced up, she saw there was one fewer soldier on the wall above. Moments later came the sound of heavy chain and creaking wood.

Jaina sighed with relief and relaxed her grip on her staff. *Somebody* was willing to listen, at least. As the gates began to slowly move, she turned to Thrall, ready to lead him in, but he shook his head.

"You go," he said.

Jaina frowned. "Thrall, you need help. I can't leave you."

"It is *I* who leaves *you*," he said. "And I will get help, but not here. I will go to Hammerfall. Aggra will have spoken to Geya'rah by now." He nodded at the open gates. "Talk to Lady Marran. Remember our mission."

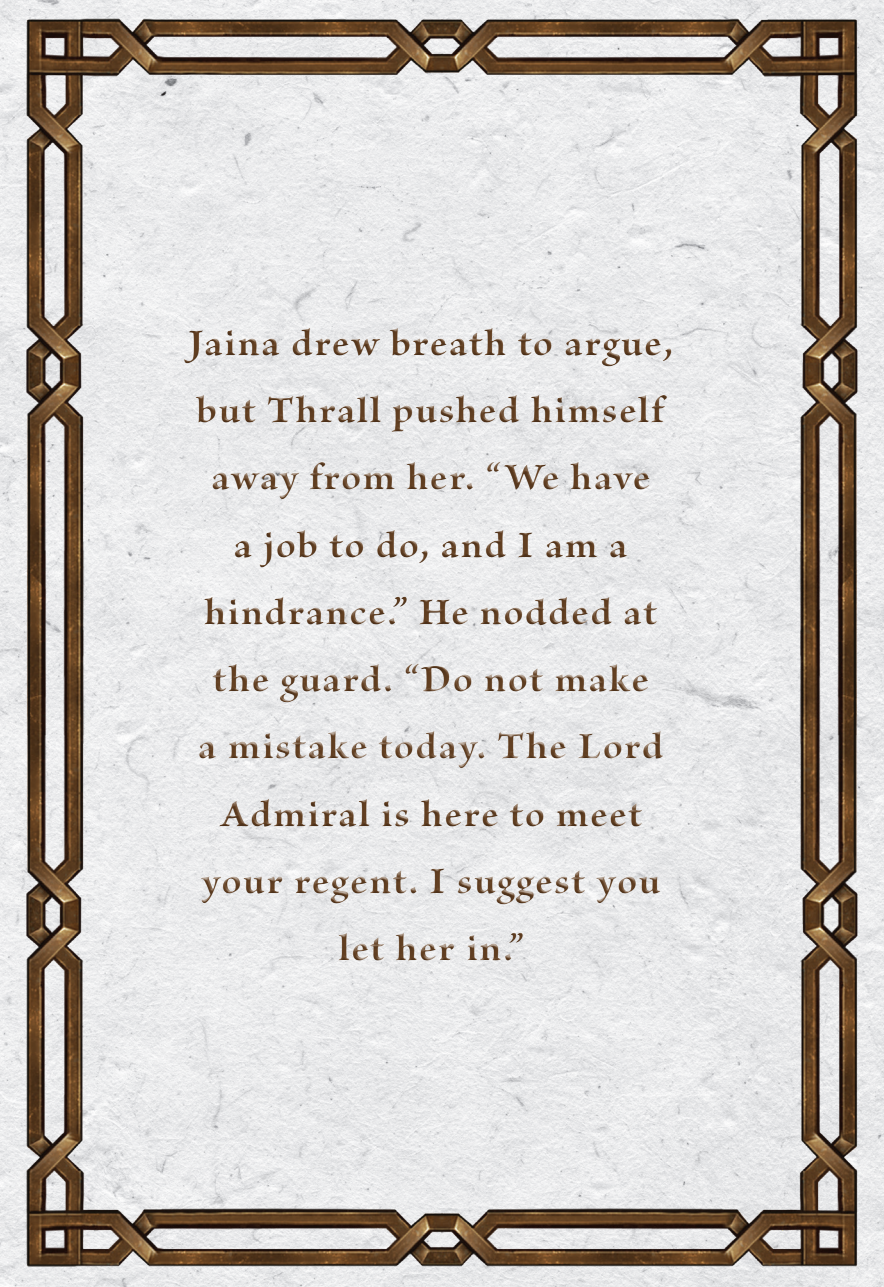
Jaina sighed, then turned as the guard from above—clearly someone with both more rank and sense than his comrade—appeared before her.

"Follow me," he said.



As soon as she stepped through the gates of Stromgarde, Jaina felt the eyes of the entire city on her.

It was busy, certainly—and it wasn't just the 7th Legion Auxiliary here. The main body of the army itself, the liveried soldiers, filled the streets, nearly outnumbering the common folk. Despite the bustle, it seemed the normal business of the city had



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ground to a halt, with stores, inns, and houses not just closed but boarded up, as though Stromgarde was preparing to weather a great storm. What regular citizens were out stopped and stared as Jaina and her escort passed.

All looked afraid—a common response to a battle happening outside the city walls perhaps, though Jaina couldn't help but sense there was something strange afoot. The people scattered before her, dragging children with them, slamming doors and windows behind as if *she* were the enemy.

*Beware the Daughter of the Sea.*

The unhappy memory sprang unbidden into Jaina's mind. She dismissed it as quickly as it arrived, but it did nothing to improve her mood.

Soon they reached the keep, the doors of which opened as they approached. Two burly legionnaires emerged, followed by a small woman in more elegant, but far less protective, armor. She was perhaps forty, old enough to know the many perils that had faced Stromgarde in Jaina's lifetime, and she carried those burdens in the sharpness of her eyes, the taut line of her mouth.

"Lord Admiral," Marran Trollbane approached, her arms clasped tightly behind her back. "Thank Thoradin. We are short on allies in this land and welcome your counsel."

Jaina frowned, trying to take measure of the woman. "Yes, my lady," she said. "I've come a long way to talk to you. Danath, said—"

"We've not much to offer in the way of hospitality," said Marran, cutting Jaina off, "but any child of Arathor is always welcome under our gates. Come, please, follow me."

With that, the regent turned and walked through the doors and into the keep.

Adjusting her grip on her staff, Jaina followed her inside.

"I'm quite glad you've come," said Marran as she led Jaina through the keep's wide halls. "Truth be told, I've driven my retainers to distraction, trying to find a solution to this mess."

Jaina heaved a sigh of relief—perhaps the situation could still be salvaged. "I am glad to hear it. Should we convene with your council or meet privately first?"

"Let us talk before summoning the others," said Marran, waving off the guards as they opened the doorway to her study.

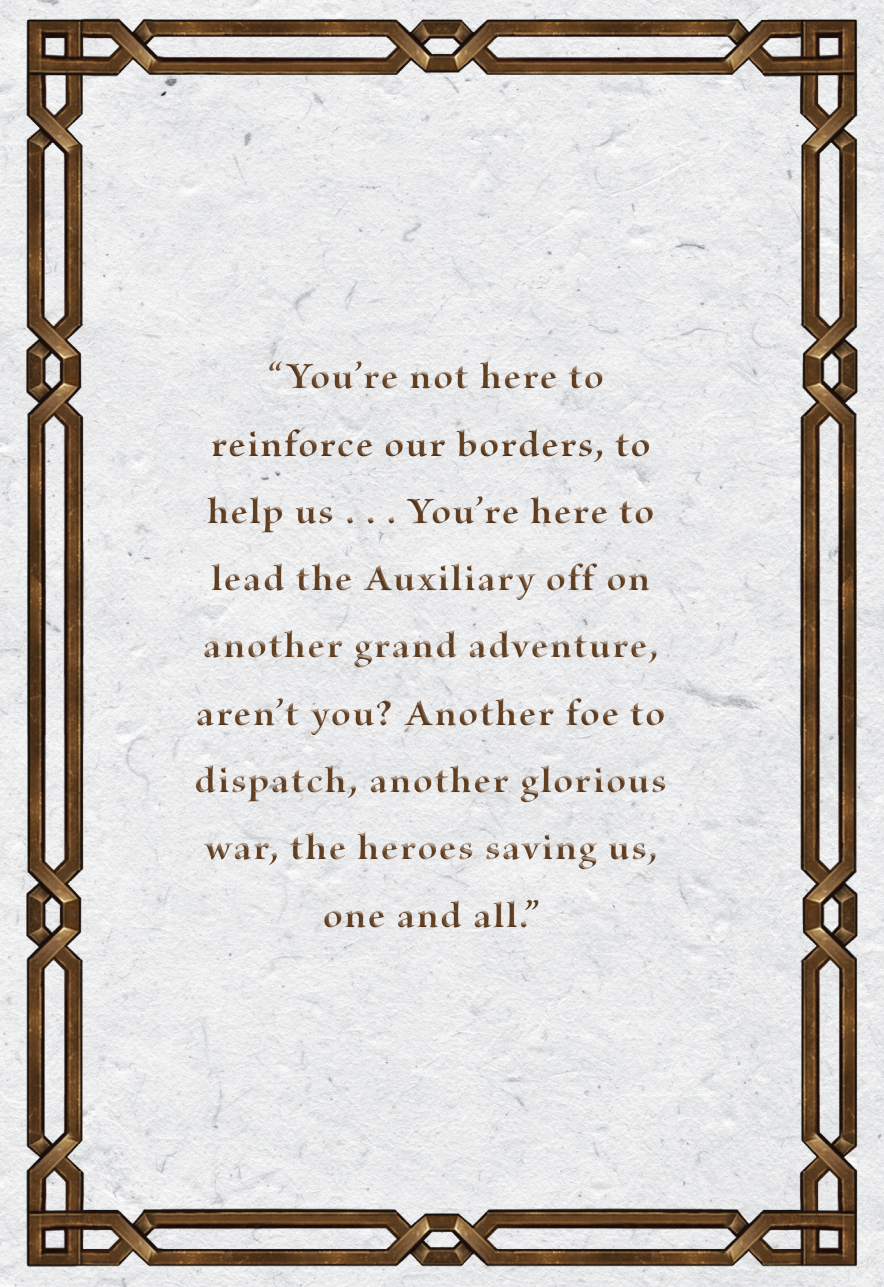
"I appreciate your attention on this matter," said Jaina, settling into a plush velvet chair at Marran's invitation. "Most urgently, I came here with an emissary from the Horde, but he was injured in the crossfire of a skirmish between the 7th Legion and the Kor'kron. Your guards would not let him enter, so he left for Hammerfall. I suggest we start there—summoning him back, negotiating a peace he can take to the Mag'har." She paused. "But time is against us. There is much else to discuss. Dalaran—"

"*Dalaran?*" Marran cut in. She cocked her head at that, as if she hadn't heard right. Then the regent moved around Jaina and sat in a more austere high-backed chair behind her desk before settling her elbows atop a mess of parchments. "I know you've seen a lot of war, Lord Admiral. I know how long you've ruled Kul Tiras." She rifled through the pages on her desk until she found the one she sought. "But do you know how many bushels of grain your kingdom needs for the winter?" She held up another parchment. "How many horses plow the fields of Stormsong Valley?" Another scrap of paper. "The cost per hundredweight of iron ore?" She shook her head. "For years, Stromgarde has lost too many battles and cared too little for its people."

Jaina felt stung—she was losing her. "Of course," said Jaina. "But there is another fight coming, one that threatens more than just our small kingdoms. It is a fight we must join against, orc and human alike. Fighting each other only diminishes the strength we must show, united. Let the 7th Legion and the Kor'kron fight side by side," she said. "And perhaps in doing so, an understanding—a peace—can be found between your people and the Mag'har."

"A *peace?*" asked Marran quietly. "A *peace*, while my people mourn their kin, lost today to senseless violence?" Jaina could see the woman was actually trembling with rage, but she had to press on. She tightened her grip on her staff and inclined her head in the affirmative.

Marran nodded, but now she looked at her desk. "I see. Now I see." She looked up. "You're not here to reinforce our borders, to help us . . . You're here to lead the Auxiliary off on another grand adventure, aren't you? Another foe to dispatch, another glorious war, the heroes saving us, one and all." Marran's expression hardened. Jaina's heart thudded in her chest as the regent's face flushed, her words almost hissed through clenched teeth.



“You’re not here to reinforce our borders, to help us . . . You’re here to lead the Auxiliary off on another grand adventure, aren’t you? Another foe to dispatch, another glorious war, the heroes saving us, one and all.”



“And with the Auxiliary gone,” said Marran, “the orcs will have their chance. They will put Stromgarde to the sword, and the Highlands will be theirs for the taking.”

Jaina shook her head. “How could that—”

Marran spat a laugh. “I shouldn’t be surprised that you’ve come here to ask this of me. This is what the Alliance does, asking us to sacrifice ourselves for the greater good. But I tell you now, we have been cut to the *bone* while the Alliance chases its next battle. I am here for Stromgarde. These are my people. Their lives matter, and I will make sure of it.”

“Marran, please—”

“I am the lady regent and will be addressed as such. As an ally of this kingdom, you will be given proper quarter, but I think it best you depart at dawn.”



That afternoon, Jaina watched from the window of her guest chambers as the courier mounted a horse and, with a kick of his heels, tore off toward the main gate of Stromgarde, carrying with him a message to Stormwind.

She hoped it was the right decision—she’d felt compelled to write to Danath, outlining her concerns about Marran and asking him to make haste his return. But Jaina was aware that summoning Danath back could well throw fuel on the fire of an already volatile situation.

Following her confrontation with the regent, Jaina had been abruptly dismissed and taken by escort to her guest quarters—and perhaps it was just as well. It had been a long day, and Jaina was happy to let Marran compose herself so they could have a more reasonable discussion later. In the meantime, Jaina decided to walk the city and get a sense of the situation for herself.

As soon as she stepped out onto the streets, she could sense the tension in the air, the citizens and 7th Legion alike keeping their distance with wary looks, if not outright hostile stares. Jaina ignored them. If nothing else, being left alone gave her the space to think.

Despite her concerns, Jaina *could* understand Marran’s position, even if it was ill-advised. Stromgarde was ever at the mercy of the hostile forces that surrounded it, and it had been a major battlefield in the Fourth War. Jaina knew all too well what it was

like to inherit a kingdom in distress, to have enemies lurking around every corner—to discover that your family's greatest ally had betrayed you. Marran was only doing what she thought best for her people, but she desperately needed guidance. Her uncle's, Jaina hoped, but she feared Danath's return to Stromgarde was more likely to start a power struggle than calm tensions.

In the end, she had opted to be prudent and penned the letter. But as Jaina crossed the city, she became acutely aware of just how little time she had. Danath might come, yes, but he might come too late. Jaina was here, now.

It was up to her to find the right way forward.



*One, two. One, two.*

Thrall counted his steps, focusing on nothing else as he inched across the Arathi Highlands.

*One, two. One, two.*

But he was getting slower. He knew that. He also knew that Hammerfall was a long way away and that the poison was doing fine work, draining his strength with every breath. Already his left arm was completely numb. Already he could feel the ice-cold spread of the poison from the wound, the pain of which pulsed in time with his heartbeat.

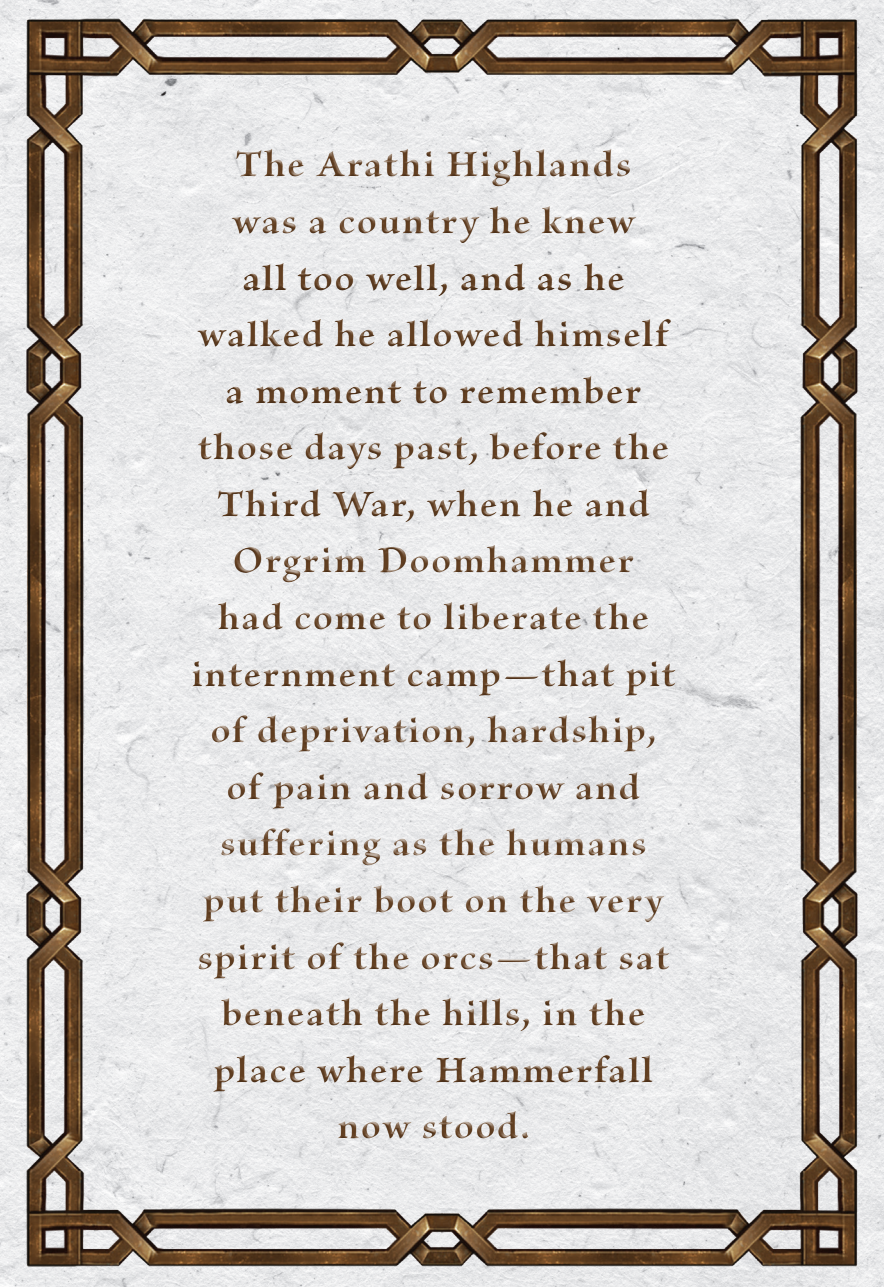
At least, he thought with a weak grimace, he knew where he was going. He could reach Hammerfall with his eyes closed. The Arathi Highlands was a country he knew all too well, and as he walked he allowed himself a moment to remember those days past, before the Third War, when he and Orgrim Doomhammer had come to liberate the internment camp—that pit of deprivation, hardship, of pain and sorrow and suffering as the humans put their boot on the very spirit of the orcs—that sat beneath the hills, in the place where Hammerfall now stood.

Yes, Thrall knew the way.

*One, two. One . . . two.*

*One.*

Thrall closed his eyes, the blood roaring in his ears. He willed himself to keep walking even as the dark world behind his eyelids began to spin.



The Arathi Highlands was a country he knew all too well, and as he walked he allowed himself a moment to remember those days past, before the Third War, when he and Orgrim Doomhammer had come to liberate the internment camp—that pit of deprivation, hardship, of pain and sorrow and suffering as the humans put their boot on the very spirit of the orcs—that sat beneath the hills, in the place where Hammerfall now stood.

And then—a push on his shoulder, a strong, friendly hand guiding him, directing him. His comrades, his warriors, willing him on. *Reach the camp. Free your people.*

*Yes, Orgrim. Yes, I hear you!*

Thrall opened his eyes—and there, ahead. He was not imagining it, and he was not alone. Was that Orgrim ahead, just disappearing over the next rise? And there, beside Thrall, his men-at-arms, ready to march with him.

If he could just take one more step. Then another, and another.

*One, two.*

*One.*

Thrall fell. Was it night already? Surely it couldn't be that dark? He blinked and rubbed his face with the hand that still worked, but his vision was dark and danced with black sparks.

Shapes, moving around him—orcs? No. Humans! Coming in for the kill!

Thrall tried to rise, but he had no strength. He raised his right hand, his fist curling around the handle of an axe that wasn't there. He called out, shouting a warning to Orgrim that they had been ambushed, but somehow he couldn't hear his own voice.

As Thrall's vision faded, the humans rushed toward him, surrounded him. Thrall cried out for his friend, for the Horde. He tried to rise again, but the world around him was now a cold, bottomless ocean, and he felt himself sinking, farther and farther and farther into its depths.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Adam Christopher is the New York Times bestselling author of Star Wars: Shadow of the Sith and Stranger Things: Darkness on the Edge of Town. He has also written official tie-in novels for the hit CBS television show Elementary and the award winning Dishonored video game franchise. Co-creator of the 21st century incarnation of Archie Comics superhero The Shield, Adam has written for Greg Rucka and Michael Lark's Lazarus series from Image Comics and Big Finish's Doctor Who universe. A contributor to the internationally bestselling Star Wars: From a Certain Point of View anniversary anthology series, Adam has also written for the all-ages Star Wars Adventures comic from IDW. Adam's original novels include Made to Kill and The Burning Dark, among many others, and his debut novel Empire State was both a SciFi Now and Financial Times Book of the Year.*