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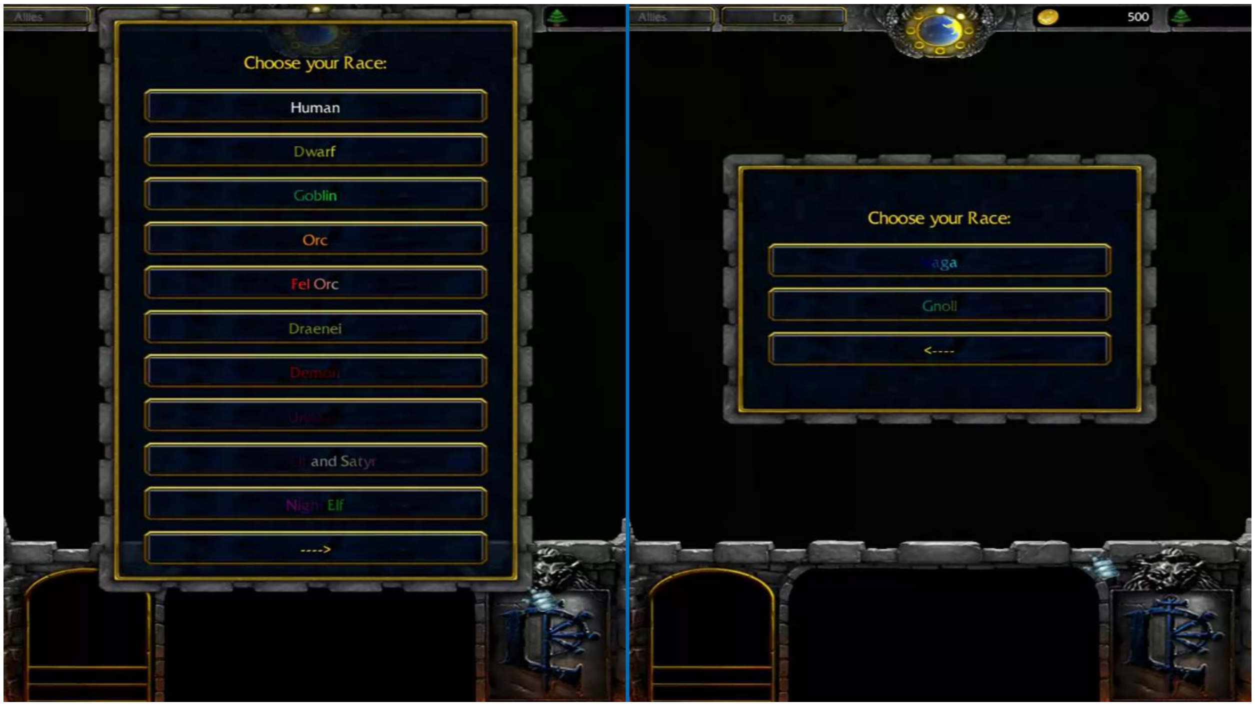
Warcraft III - Gameplay Mod - **Warcraft IV: Evolution**



Platform:
PC

Tools Used:
Warcraft III World Editor

Duration:
3 months

Overview

[Suggested Reading Soundtrack]()

Battle as the race of your choice as you evolve and fight with many new units.

Warcraft IV: Evolution supplements the original four races present in Warcraft III (humans, orcs, night elves, undead) with 8 more based on other creature factions present in the lore: dwarves, goblins, fel orcs, dranei, demons, naga, gnolls, and dark elves & satyrs.

Each new playable race meant custom-designed units, structures, abilities, and tech trees, resulting in unique playstyles being introduced to the game to expand on preexisting themes.

Introducing New Races to the Vanilla Game

If you haven't played Warcraft III before, the basic flow of the game goes like this:

- collect resources for construction and training
- build up base structures
- train army units from your base's structures
- combat the enemy army
- destroy the enemy base

Before playing, you choose your race: a species/class/faction of units with its own theme and take on how to wage war. For example, whereas humans build traditional structures, night elf structures are actually living trees, which can uproot themselves and join the fight as massive units. Their units also 'cloak' to become invisible during the nighttime, hence the race's name.

To create each of the new races, I had to evaluate the following:

- thematic approach (humans have the most advanced technology, undead have necromantic control over corpses, etc.)
- worker/resource mechanics
- construction/structure mechanics
- themed unit abilities
- balancing via cost and tech tree path viability

Construction Styles

One of my favorite distinguishing factors between races is that they each have a unique base-building mechanic. Each race's method of base construction is different in terms of both the process and the worker interaction involved. In designing the new races, this was something I diversified to develop unique new gameplay.

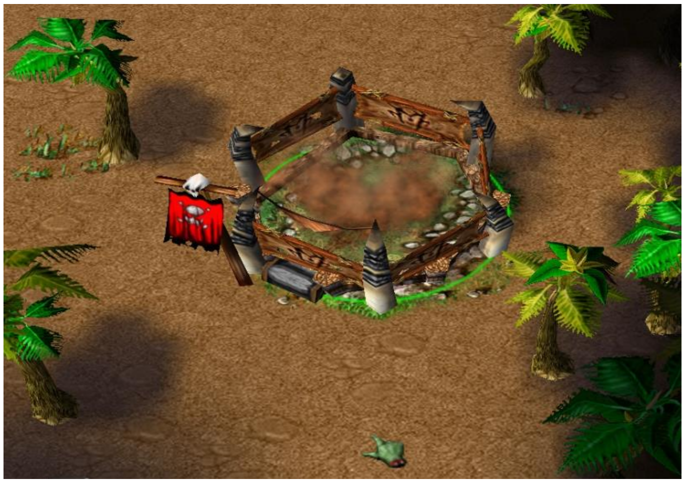
Constraints included:

- worker involvement
    - varying the degree of worker expenditure (does the worker perish in the process, become weaker, level up to become capable of building better structures, etc.)

    - worker affectation (what happens to the worker, if not be expended – does it temporarily disappear during construction, or does it simply have to start the construction and then it gets to be free)
        - some structures can build, destroy, and reconstruct themselves into other structures
    - number of workers that can be involved (for example: 2 workers are required to work on a structure the race wants to build)
- placement rules (must it be adjacent to another structure, within a power field, or on a certain terrain type)
    - terrain compatibility (does it have to be placed on uneven terrain, or must it be placed on the side of a cliff, in water, etc.… or does it not matter)
    - building auras that affect the terrain (see the Undead example of "Blight"); building auras that create energy fields which other structures require
    - grid alignment (perhaps the structures must be placed in rows and columns, or perhaps they can be placed at any point)
    - some structures can relocate themselves (robotics that lift off with rockets, trees that uproot, etc.)
- [new constraints I came up with along the way]

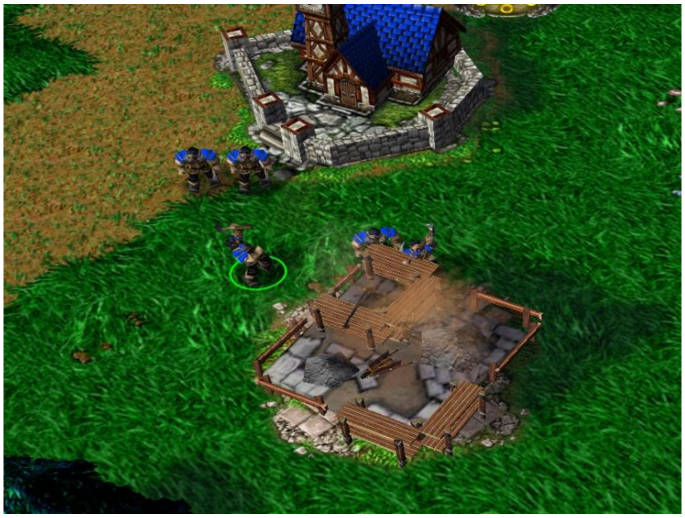
First let's look at the original four races and their unique building construction mechanics:

- Orc - "Pitching the Hut from the Inside"



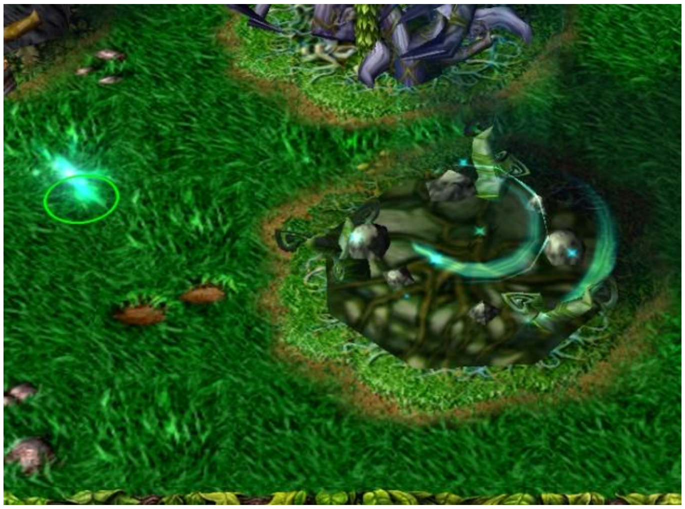
Orc structures are built in perhaps the most basic fashion. An orc worker unit, the Peon, is given the command to build a structure at any location not obstructed by uneven terrain. The Peon travels to the point, “becomes” an in-progress construction, and once that finishes the completed structure is there and the Peon pops out next to it (or wherever the player replaces the flag rally point). This makes sense given that orcs are a bit more nomadic than humans and so their structures are more tribal, like pitching a tent.

- Human - “Ingenious Cooperation”



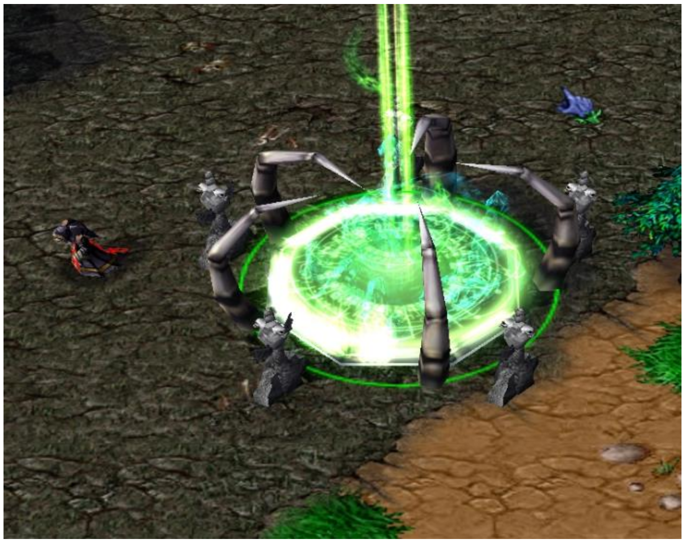
Human structures are built by Peasants. They have the advantage of “technological ingenuity”, you might say, in this case the inspiration that multiple Peasants working together at the same time can get the job done faster. Orcs aren’t capable of working this efficiently because they prefer to assign lowly Peons their own tasks and leave it at that.

- Night Elf - “Spirit Seeding”



Night Elf Wisps, which are a kind of tree spirit, actually become the tree structures they create. In this manner they serve as soul seeds for the bodies of the trees. So unlike the other races, you must effectively expend a worker in order to create a tree structure, but the trees then have the lifelike benefit of moving around as massive units. In the picture above, the wisp on the left is an example of what his friend to the right looked like before he began growing into a tree.

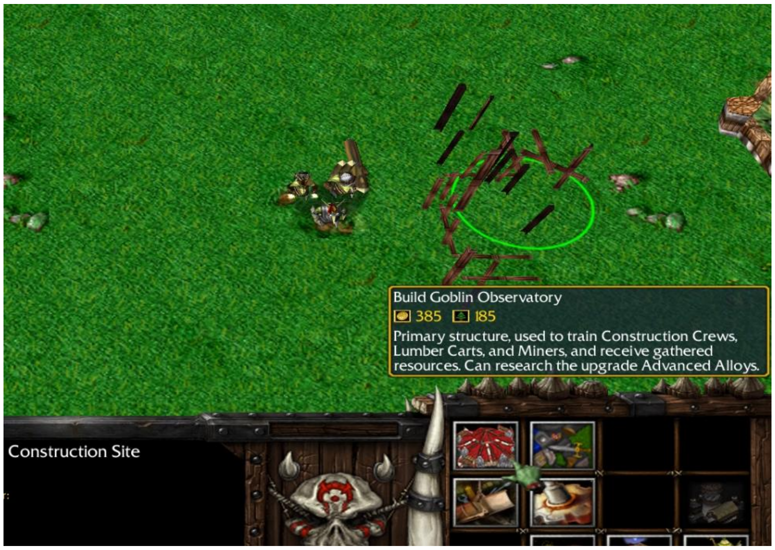
- Undead - “Summoning Ritual and Forget”



The Acolytes of the Undead have perhaps the best deal when it comes to creating structures. They merely have to start the structure summoning off and then it will summon itself, leaving the worker to do other tasks such as gold collection. But the ease of summoning comes at a cost: undead structures, which defile the land around them into “Blight”, must be placed on Blight to begin with, which effectively limits the position of Undead structures to a radius within the other structures.

Now let’s consider my favorite new construction mechanics I added:

- Goblin - “Construction Sites”



Build Goblin Observatory

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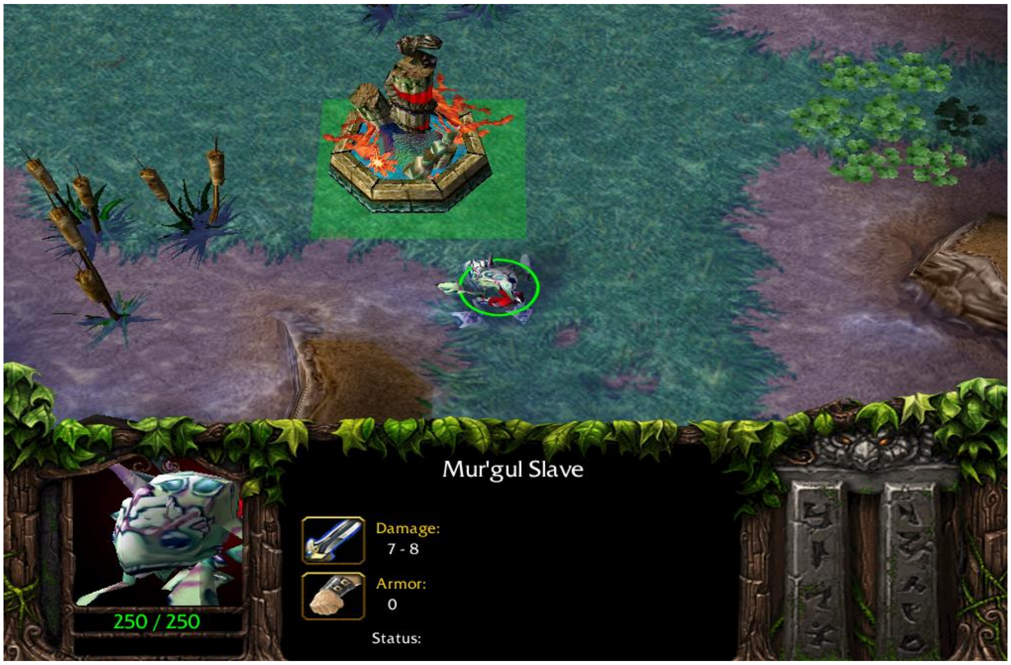
Primary structure, used to train Construction Crews, Lumber Carts, and Miners, and receive gathered resources. Can research the upgrade Advanced Alloys.

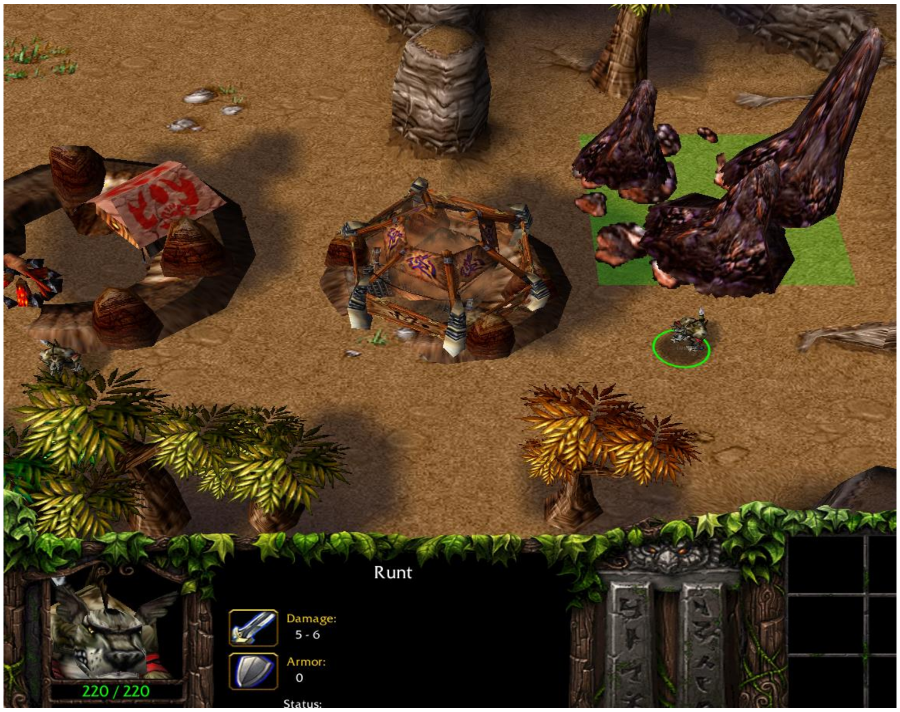
Goblins in the Warcraft lore are very engineering driven. They tinker with doohickeys, figure out ways to mechanize them, and are adept at blowing things up. To translate that theme to construction, I took an approach most similar to the summoning paradigm of the Undead. Goblin Construction Crews quickly put up Construction Sites which have the advantage of constructing themselves (exhibiting the mechanization characteristic). This is engineered to be more efficient than say, humans or orcs, because the worker doesn’t have to be busied with the task. Furthermore when you do begin construction, you have the time until it is completed to revert the operation, which instead of destroying the structure, conveniently returns it to the Construction Site state, allowing you to reconstruct a different structure without sending out a Construction Crew again. This reconstruction capability exhibits the tinkering characteristic of Warcraft’s goblins.

- Naga - “Tidal Reefs”



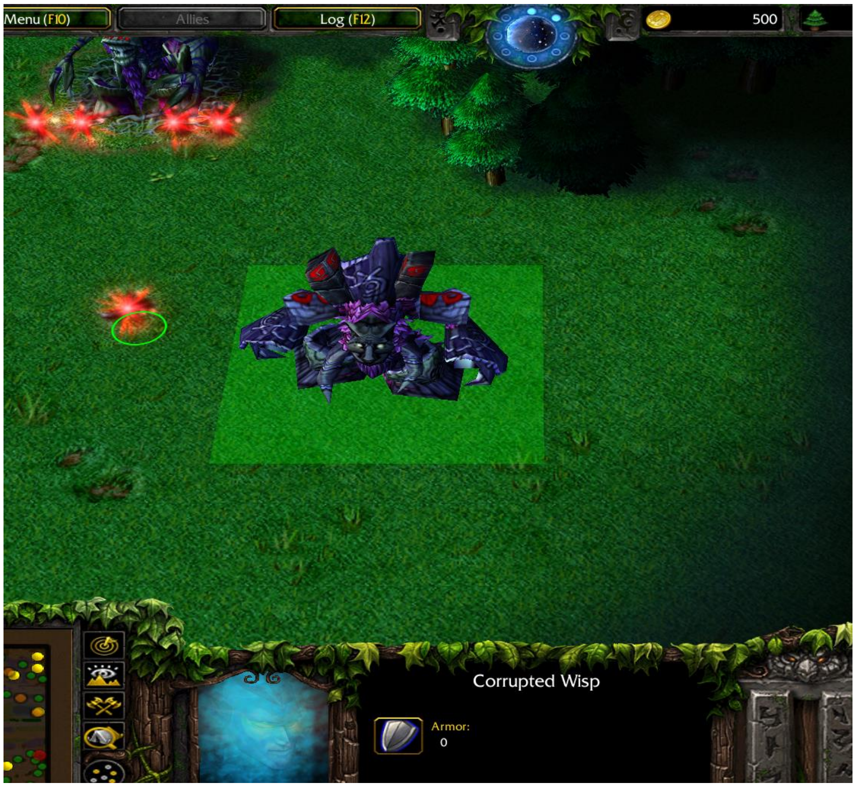
The naga are humanoid sea serpents. When leading surface expeditions, they tend to claim watery areas. As such, the unique characteristic of this race’s construction style is the ability to place structures in the water. This allows the playstyle advantage of “towering”, which is a reference to the predominant strategy in tower defenses of creating a maze or blocking off routes entirely, to be employed in water areas of the map where for other races the terrain would prevent them from controlling the area in that fashion. Naga find battlefield control in the water as a result, where they are also immune to “cheesy” rush tactics such as early enemy tower construction right outside their base.

- Gnolls - “Repurposing Rocks”



Gnolls have always been present in Warcraft, but originally they were just neutral enemy creeps to kill for experience, occasionally also guarding gold mines and healing wells. To introduce them as a playable race in Evolution, I wanted to retain their connection to the map and the land, as opposed to giving them the sudden capability to build proper cities. In order to expand their base, gnolls must target preexisting terrain doodads such as rock formations to “upgrade” into structures. This restriction makes gnolls heavily dependent on the map layout and so characterizes their relatively uncivilized culture. However, the tradeoff they get in return for this disadvantage is greatly reduced structure costs; most of the resources that would be put toward building a structure have already been handled by nature.

- Dark Elves & Satyrs - “Dark Transformation”



The Dark Elf and Satyr faction is actually two races with similar dispositions. Dark Elves are corrupt Night Elves who have sworn allegiance to the Burning Legion. Satyrs are bestial demons straight from the same demonic forces. Many of the unit abilities of these races are effectively more extreme versions of the Night Elves; whereas Night Elves gain the advantage of stealth during the night, the Dark Elves and Satyrs transform to have alternate ability sets when the day goes dark. This also describes the basis of their construction style. Essentially it’s the same to start as the Night Elven approach. Wisps, now called Corrupted Wisps, become living trees, which can uproot into massive units. However, construction (transformation of Corrupted Wisps into trees) can only take place at night. As a result, base building is restricted to an alternating schedule, and the early (day) phase of the game is characterized by an aggressive playstyle of harassing enemy base development. Corrupted Wisps are untargetable, and can infiltrate the enemy base to Corrupt enemy structures, slowing their production, upgrade efficiency, and even stealing income when Corrupting resource drop-off structures. These unique tactics characterize the corruption of the Dark Elves and the evil transformative aspects of both races in the dark.

Further Design Discussions

This only breaches the surface of the design involved in creating this mod. In the future I could discuss other Evolution design points:

- distinct resource harvesting mechanics
- the task of balancing the powers of each race for fair gameplay
- tech tree design: tiering units to different structure types, upgrades available to research, structures allowing specific new units to be trained, abilities only unlocked via upgrades, etc.
- the scripting of unit abilities
- organization of art and sound assets
- designing racially-specific user interface changes
- creation of the map/battleground