World of Warcraft: War Crimes by Christie Golden Review

I’ll start off the review by saying that I am a fan of Christie Golden, but this book in my opinion just did not live up to her previous releases, and after reading it a second time to see if I may have just overlooked a few things, felt that it could have been much better, and it seemed a little rushed when I think about the events that could have been fleshed out more, or I felt ended with a weak ending.

Defender and Accuser

The courtroom scenario could have been much more interesting, but several things took away from it. They made up a bunch of titles, turning World of Warcraft into your strict real life courtroom scene, and too many times I found the use of newly introduced titles annoying to the story. Tyrande Whisperwind, High Priestess is not referred to by that title any longer, but is now called Defender, or Chu’shao. The High Chieftain, Baine Bloodhoof is now the Defender, and I can’t remember if there was another title similar to Tyrande’s, or if I just cannot find it now. Taran Zhu is the judge, now called Fa’shua and the Celestials are the jury I assume. It is very similar to what you would watch on a courtroom sitcom, “Objection!” Replaced with “With respect, I protest”, and feels like that is used very often, and the Judge (Fa’shua) overrules, or says ‘continue counsellor (Chu’shao/Defender/Accuser). I just know it would have felt like the story wasn’t so forced if they called her Tyrande or High Priestess, and Baine by his name, or the High Chieftain, if they were going to be so formal at this trial.

The whole point is to decide if Garrosh deserves to be executed, or serve a life imprisonment, and after reading it twice, I still don’t get why they chose Baine to fight for life imprisonment, he has no reason to fight for Garrosh not being killed, it’s not a law firm where the higher ups are saying win this so you become partner, he is just thrown in there because he is a horde faction leader, and for the most part it feels like it shows in his defense, so why was he even chosen?

At the beginning, it is decided that the Alliance will be the Accusers, and the Horde will be the Defenders. Each side is supposed to choose one person from their side to play that role, and one of the rules is that each side can veto once, because...I don’t know, they can just veto a choice.

So, Sylvannas volunteers because she seems to hate Garrosh as much as Arthas now. There is not a lot of reason for this as far as I know, he put his own guards in Undercity, but I don’t think he really did much else there, and he calls her a bitch in a cut scene in game, I could see her not liking him, but it doesn’t seem like there should be this all-consuming hatred between them, but she hates him unexplainably and wants to be a defender so she can make sure he gets executed. So, Vol’jin decides
she isn’t the right choice, nor is he, and a blood elf or goblin aren’t because something about blood elf’s they’ll veto the choice, and a goblin who has probably earned a lot from the war events Garrosh began isn’t chosen either, what do they want him around for, to bring in more gold? Goblins hate that stuff.

The Horde chooses Baine, who is their best choice, after all, Garrosh only killed his father, sat by while Thunder Bluff was overthrown, and made many veiled threats to him.

The Alliance first choice to be the Accuser is Varian, then Tyrande because the Horde used up their veto. I don’t really get why they get a veto still, or why it matters who the alliance pick, did Varian think he would do an amazing job at putting a defence together, and that’s why he was picked first? As the book sets it up, no one has a reason to fight for Garrosh getting not-executed, or a reduced sentence, the entire Horde wants him dead, and so wouldn’t they want whoever could set up the best case for execution to be chosen? Or are they afraid that the Alliance suddenly became the Defenders and Varian will do so poorly at his role that he won’t want Garrosh executed? Yes, he did stop Thrall from bringing the hammer down, but just because the decision wasn’t just his...or something like that, the book seems full of strange little situations like that.

If someone has no reason or motive to defend Garrosh, I don’t get why it is that he is chosen to do said task, perhaps they could have introduced a different character to fill this role, and maybe this is where Zaela of the Dragonmaw clan could have played a more interesting role. She’s in the story, she supported Garrosh, would have a reason to want to see him alive, and by being part of this ‘trial’ would know when to hit to free him. As the book is written, she is a pawn of the Bronze Dragon, Kairoz all the way on Kalimdor I think when she wakes up, badly hurt from falling off her proto-drake during the fight in the siege of Orgrimmar. I guess the trial has begun shortly after the Siege, so she was badly hurt from a huge fall, recovered, gathered an army with a co-conspirator, made it to Pandaria and freed him. It would have been more logical, and interesting to the story to perhaps put her character in, since she supports Garrosh, and wants to help him, but I guess that her role as it was written makes more sense.

Anyways, Tyrande seems to have problems with Garrosh too, I think the weakest cases would be from the dwarves or the gnomes, I don’t even think gnomes were mentioned, and Moira did not seem to have any recent problems from Garrosh that I know about.

So, the stage is set, and Garrosh at the ‘hearing’ begins clapping, laughing and says “The show has barely commenced and already I give it a standing ovation. This promises to be more entertaining that the Darkmoon Faire!” At this point you think this could be good, he finds this a joke, and maybe he has something interesting up his sleeve, that he’ll have a defense set up for himself and start turning things around, creating rifts between the faction leaders, turning them against each other.

Sadly, that’s pretty much it, he goes from this point till the end of the book not saying a word more in the ‘courtroom’.

**The Bronze Dragons**
One of the drawing points for me to this book was that there would be no sleazy courtroom tactics, no twisting of events. The Bronze Dragons would be attending, though now that I think about it, it is a little strange that they, Alexstrasza, and Ysera were even there. For some reason Wrathion was interested in what Garrosh was up to, and plays a role later, but the other two haven’t really had any encounters with him, so why they’re there is another thing written in that seems pointless.

Anyways, the Bronze Dragons are there because they have a brilliant device, a time turner type device that shows whatever event the user wants, like a movie so they can show exactly what happened in their defense. It is mentioned that there is a limited amount of this “time sand” to fuel the time turner…thing, but they either brought so much that they didn’t come close to running out, or forgot that they can only use this time turner thing so much because the possibility of running out is forgotten.

So, my thought of the whole sleazy courtroom tactics not happening in this potential cool story were thrown out in the first day along with a bunch of nobodies by the Shado-Pan because the Accuser (Tyrande) would keep stopping the playback partway through an event, and give her take on it, putting a spin on the story that would quickly be proven false when you un-paused it for a few seconds more. The idea of showing any event to really show the monstrous side of Garrosh, or help defend him felt like the characters were replaced by some crappy lawyers who really didn’t have much stake in this event.

Many events are brought up, though for the first bit of the book, I was wondering why they even showed them at all. The point when they are first arriving at the Temple of the White Tiger, some of the alliance are claiming that the whole horde should be on trial for Garrosh’s actions, and in a way they’re right in that train of thought. Garrosh didn’t pilot the zeppelin over Theramore, didn’t summon Molten Giants, didn’t personally control the Kraken, he had others carry the heart of Y’Shaarj to the Vale, others WERE there, but all that is put aside for now, it’s Garrosh on trial, so let’s focus on what he is responsible.

Only, that seems to be forgotten, as the event of Telmor is shown with Velen on the stands. It would be a great testimony for the orc race, but it was already decided we’re not wiping out orcs here, we’re focusing on Garrosh, who wasn’t even there, and from Beyond the Dark Portal lets us know, he was sick with the Red Pox in Nagrand. Why it’s brought up is pointless, I wasn’t sure what this scene was trying to say except “here’s what happened in a previous book, in case you didn’t read it, okay, let’s move on.” Tyrande shows the events of Rise of the Horde where they sack the city, showing Thralls father stop from killing a draenei girl, but then having someone from the shattered hand clan do it anyway. Baine shows that right after Tyrande stops the video, a few seconds later is Durotan’s wail of grief, and the chapter ends with Tyrande asking Velen if this was before the orcs drank Mannoroth’s blood, which he says they hadn’t yet had that happen. How this is a defense or accusation against Garrosh is unclear, we just are told something from the orcs history, which again isn’t on trial, but seems to be brought up several times.

They tell at one point when they bring up Alexstrasza, about how the Dragonmaw clan treated her when she was their captive. Again, I’m not sure how that’s really an argument against Garrosh, he was still back in Outlands at this point, still suffering from the Red Pox, and is not a part of the Dragonmaw clan.
I guess the argument would be that he has the Dragonmaw clan as part of the Horde now, but if that were the case, why are they still, if it’s such a problem. I guess bringing up the Dragonmaw clan’s past crimes would have people turn on a member of the Dragonmaw clan if one were there, but it doesn’t have anything to do with Garrosh, and if someone were defending Garrosh properly they would point out that neither side has a flawless record of alliances, and that the old leader was killed, and many races of the horde have done the daily’s to get exalted with that faction (not in those words, but the idea is that it doesn’t seem like Garrosh was alone getting help from them). That whole scene ends with Alexstrasza saying that despite all the orcs are done, she’s fine forgiving them. It’s still not clear which side of the fence that whole bit is supposed to fall on as far as Garrosh is concerned, if they’re trying to blame him for Dragon enslavement, and all that when much of that happened before he was part of the horde, it just seems like much of what they present has little relevance to Garrosh, and its why this doesn’t seem like Christie Golden’s best work.

Only a few events seem to actually be tied to Garrosh, a few beatings, which Baine argues that Garrosh may not have had any knowledge of. Its events like this that it would have really shown what the time turners could do, because if they can call up any moment in time, they could say “here he is finding about it, and clapping Malkorok on the back” but that doesn’t happen, its left a mystery and makes it seem useless really having them.

Theramore is brought up, no new information is given, but people are shocked at seeing what actually happened. Jaina should have been calling for his head at this point, but she’s just heartbroken at seeing it again, and everyone is sympathetic, and Vol’jin and Baine wonder why the hell they’re defending Garrosh. It doesn’t show that they had a part it in, just the aftermath. A lot of stuff like this seems unnecessary, it may have been better to write in some new things, not Jaina defeated, but Garrosh celebrating his victory to show he had no remorse. They took an odd point of view of much of it, and it didn’t really add to Garrosh’s case.

Baine doesn’t really seem to have a case for why Garrosh shouldn’t be executed. At two separate points, he brings up Thrall and Vol’jin. His defense against them is that, if they were the Warchief, and someone was talking about, or threatening, or planning on killing them would they be considered traitors? Yeah, of course, that is what a traitor pretty much is, so yeah they would be considered traitors, but it isn’t really a defense since they weren’t executed, though Vol’jin almost was, I guess he was trying to say that Garrosh had every right to kill him. Some tension supposedly arises between the horde leaders now, but it isn’t explored, it’s hinted at. If they’re mad about it, maybe they shouldn’t have picked someone who didn’t want to defend Garrosh to defend him, and at the same time, I don’t really see how Baine really helped Garrosh’s case, it was just something to turn some horde leaders against each other.

Garrosh and Anduin
They released an excerpt in March of Garrosh meeting with Anduin, and it looked promising, but in the book the whole chapter wasn’t really continued, just left on the side of the road. Arthas is mentioned, and an interesting take would have been to show Garrosh’s knowledge of human history, and induce doubt into the Stormwind prince. Arthas, and even mentioning a more recent warrior of the light, Archbishop Benedictus. Two well-known warriors of the Light, turning to the dark side, and even a mention of Medievh with Warlords of Draenor coming up would be interesting. The point of that could show that warriors of Anduin’s ‘light’ were known for becoming terrible threats to more than just the horde, and humans were close to harming all of Azeroth, not just the opposing faction.

There was an interview before the book’s release that Christie Golden was saying that not being able to combat physically, Garrosh would have to rely on his other strengths. He is supposedly a very tactical leader, it would have really been interesting if he could have gotten under the other faction leaders skin, created rifts in the characters relationships and turned one against another. He doesn’t show any regret, during the first day after the introductions he finds the whole ‘trial’ a show, but it pretty much ends there.

For some reason, Garrosh requests Anduin’s presence specifically. Why this is, it is again, not really clear, it just seems like an idea hit to have both characters interact, but it doesn’t flow well. Whether Garrosh wanted to instill fear in him, or Anduin wants to somehow help Garrosh isn’t made obvious, but it could have been better. At the end, Garrosh could have torn Anduin’s arm off when he warns him his (possibly) last meal was poisoned. Seeing a rat die from eating it, he decides not to, which is pointless on several levels. Anduin could have just said before the food was handed in that it’s been tampered with; Garrosh hasn’t shown any growth in the novel, but for no reason in that moment he decides not to kill or maim Anduin. He’s tried to kill him before, killing the prince would really hurt Varian, something that Garrosh delights in, and with his death coming up, what’s he got to lose, one last blow against the Alliance, but just doesn’t.

It was a wasted opportunity that could have been much more. Anduin’s character seems very naïve, meeting a terrifying opponent who hates him, and trying to discover why could have shown depth. He is supposed to be filling Jaina’s role of peace at all costs, coming fact to face with the orc who completely changed Jaina should have some effect to change that a little, hear why he destroyed Theramore, realize he had no regrets or hesitations about it, how he enjoys killing alliance. Anduin sees the destruction of Theramore, meeting the person behind it should have been more dramatic.

**Jaina and Kalec**

This book is supposed to show that Jaina and Kalec are in a relationship since Tides of War, and are now having problems. The problem is that Jaina is still angry about what Garrosh did to Theramore and still wants revenge, and no longer wants the horde around as a threat. The solution of Kalec’s is to give her an ultimatum, get over it and stop wanting revenge on Garrosh, or this is over.
Another possible situation between two good characters that was good in idea, but not delivered well. Kalec has lost people as well, he was still angry Anveena for a long time, and it was mentioned that he is still sad she is gone in Tides of War, but he got his revenge against Kil’jaeden, he’s had closure essentially. Jaina lost a lot more, an entire city, and not to an invading demon, to the people that she has been working towards peace for a long time, and her city was destroyed by many that she thought she could achieve that through, and was betrayed by the Sunweavers and much more. She’s had a pretty dark few years, and someone who ought to be there to help her through is just thinking of walking away if she can’t get over it. It’s poor character writing on both ends.

Kalec comes across as not understanding, and ready to abandon her, and I haven’t really seen him much in the MoP expansion so it seems like Jaina and him are in a relationship where he stopped her from getting revenge, which would have involved her killing too many innocents, and that was good, but then leaves for a long time while she goes through a lot more heartache and then comes back and tells her to get over it.

Jaina at the end of Tides of War had decided to not late the hatred consume her, but its apparently an issue again, but the quick rap up where she does at the end after almost dying, and Garrosh getting away, seems forced. I didn’t really see any great life changing event that could have caused it, aside from ending things with Kalec, but it would have made more sense if he was more of a part of her life before that ought to have done it.

The Windrunner Sisters

After all this time, a reunion between them should have been a little more interesting. If she knew for a while that Sylvannas was the Forsaken Queen, and didn’t want to contact her, there should have been a reason. If the trial was how she found out she was alive, why was there all the secrecy? The horde know Sylvannas’ name, they know Veressa, it shouldn’t have been the first they knew of each other, but the reunion should have had more impact. It seems that the only reason she has to reunite with her sister is this common goal to kill Garrosh.

Veressa has a reason to, though it shouldn’t have been all consuming as it was written. She has two sons, and Tides of War didn’t paint her as a revenge driven machine at the end. The events of MoP shouldn’t have turned her into that, but now for some reason, she is so driven to killing Garrosh, and going to live with her long lost sister, she’s ready to abandon her kids to go live in a city of the dead. The Windrunner sisters may have been close, but shouldn’t it be the other way around, Veressa has something to go home to, Sylvannas has none of that; she misses her sisters, but she knows that Veressa has been alive all this time, and made no effort to contact her.

Veressa’s sudden change of heart to warn about the poison to Anduin was too quick. Again, there wasn’t really a life changing event, she just remembered that she had kids, something she shouldn’t have forgotten in the first place, and the all-consuming need for revenge was unexplained. Revenge, yes, revenge at the cost of everything? No, no really.
Sylvannas’ end was disappointing too, as there was really no closure, not even a note from Veressa saying “I decided not to come live in Undercity”, but nothing, and now hate consumes her even more.

**The Final Battle**

At the end of the book there is a battle. Up until then, it’s a dialogue driven book. The end battle seems to come out of left field, and was too chaotic, and presented us with scenarios that make little sense.

Kairoz who was working with Baine as a defender is sitting beside him, playing with his time turner, and everyone finds this rude but no one says anything. Chromie is missing, and Anduin just finished saving Garrosh from eating poisoned food before he is going to head off to find out if he’s being executed or given a life imprisonment, which, here’s the surprise – the Celestials weren’t judging Garrosh, they were here to judge everyone to find out if they’re worthy of...

Whatever, they realized by not everyone wanting to kill Garrosh, that they are. That’s revealed at the end, after the big fight scene.

So, before they can, several things are all happening. Garrosh says he regrets NOTHING, none of what he did, and goes into some long rampage, spewing curses and shouts, and many people leave the courtroom because this is so shocking, but they let him carry on because....

So, Anduin somehow comes across Chromie, caged up, two guards knocked out from Wrathion’s henchmen, he knows because of the arrow, or crossbows, or something. Wrathion appears, and he’s behind it, Garrosh has to be free because...next expansion or something, very untidy finish.

In the courtroom, before Anduin can make it in time to say “Kairoz is behind it” the Bronze dragon pushes the time turner off the table and unleashes his god like powers, bringing forth dark versions of everyone in a huge radius. The big powers – Dragons and Celestials – can’t get close or a dark version of themselves will suddenly appear, and I guess now that they’re here, there are no rules, and each main character has to fight a dark, twisted version of themselves.

Thrall has to fight what would have been him if he was still under Blackmoore’s control, Baine has to fight a version of himself, which would be him if he decided to kill Garrosh and take over the horde, something he never expressed an urge to do, and the dark version is wearing Thrall’s old armor, it fits now and he wears it because...

There’s a cowardly Anduin who stops Garrosh from killing the real Anduin by jumping on his back, but he dies. A crazy Kalec, because he may have gone crazy for some reason, there was a revenge driven Jaina, who attacks the non-evil Jaina because she’s not horde, or attacking her. It’s all very poorly explained why this fight broke out, and why if they can’t get close for fear of making a copy of themselves, why can’t they just walk far enough away, but nonetheless, outside the Dragonmaw are attacking now. Those that were inside fighting are now outside, still fighting because Kairoz teleported himself and Garrosh to the outside, just far enough away for a short head start.
Not everyone is there, Vol’jin is doing something, but all the Alliance and Horde major leaders and powers are there, just barely holding their own against a force that has just started forming since Zaela woke up, and people are getting hurt, Jaina almost dies, but Anduin, Thrall, Velen can’t save her, until Chi-ji comes and grants some blessing, and she’s barely alive, and her and Kalec’s relationship is fine now.

Varian almost got Garrosh, but he got away because Jaina was shot, and he had to go back for her. Alexstrasza, Ysera, the Celestials, Chromie, Thrall, and whoever else tried to help, but I guess there was a situation at the temple door, where they all tried to squeeze out at once, but got stuck, Garrosh managed to escape on a few dragons, but they’ll get him next time, maybe.

Anyways, I guess there is some tension in the horde now, over Baine’s attempt to call Vol’jin, and Thrall traitors to the War Chief, but the alliance is stronger than ever because they realize they wouldn’t want to kill Garrosh now, even after all he’s done, they can forgive.

All in all, it was not Christie Golden’s best work, I have bought every book she’s written, but maybe it was just too many characters to deal with, maybe it was the courtroom setting, but it was a great opportunity squandered. I don’t know if she was trying to put the horde, or Garrosh, or everyone on trial, but it seemed like it was all over the place instead of having a clear focus. I hope that your next book turns out better.

C.