

PHILORIC'S TEN LEVELS OF WARCRAFT

The purpose of this document is to account for the idle ideas of a foolish daydreamer. For a long time my thoughts have been preoccupied with how I would change World of Warcraft if I had the time and means to do so. Over time my ideas have become so numerous and elaborate that I have decided to put them down on paper.

The ideas presented in this document will mostly revolve around keeping the game content intact and rather providing players with a new way of experiencing the world and the story. I will propose changes to the game rules that would put character progression in a new context. While I worked these ideas out with the original WoW content in mind, they would probably work just as well for another community made world.

However, before even mentioning any of my ideas I will spend a few pages commenting what defects I consider the most bothersome in the current World of Warcraft.

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SHORTCOMINGS IN BLIZZARD'S WORLD OF WARCRAFT

As I'm writing this Cataclysm hasn't yet been released so I don't yet know what lies in store for the World of Warcraft. However, I think that a lot of the things I see as problems with the game will persist even in the next expansion.

The gaining of levels and the end-game challenges

Game play in the World of Warcraft can be divided into two phases. The first is the phase where the character gains experience and his innate abilities grow stronger with his levels. Whenever a character faces a really tough challenge in this phase he/she can always stall and wait to gain a higher level. Eventually challenges that were overwhelming at an early level will become trivial.

A player will enter the second phase of the game once he/she has reached the maximum level. Then some extremely difficult challenges await and the character can no longer overcome them by simply relying on his/her innate abilities. The game turns to a nearly endless hunt for good equipment through reputation gains and dungeon loot.

Many players, perhaps even most players, rush to the maximum level as fast as possible. Some even use pay-services to level their characters for them. They feel only the end-game phase really matters. Why? There could be several reasons for this.

- The mid-game challenges are too easy to be entertaining
- The challenges at maximum level are more prestigious and worth bragging about
- Your buddies are all maximum level and there is nothing meaningful for them to do earlier in the game so the only option if you are to play together is that you rush to their level as fast as possible.

The effect of levels on combat

At level 11 Hogger has overpowered all attempts at capture from the Stormwind guard. At level 21 "Archmage" Arugal commands a private army of werewolves in his castle. A character at level 35 would be able to beat them both with his bare hands. And still he wouldn't be able to even bruise a level 60 rat in Stratholme.

This is because of how World of Warcraft is designed and how levels affect combat. In effect it means that a character at a certain level gets bonuses when fighting against enemies below his own level and penalties when fighting enemies at higher levels. Defeating enemies more than 5 levels above your own is almost impossible and defeating enemies much below your own level is effortless. Apart from the bonuses and penalties in combat, there are also bonuses and penalties to experience gain. For optimal experience gain a character should stick to fighting enemies at his own level.

Is this a problem?

Well, that depends on how you look at it. It does serve a purpose. In effect it narrows down the level span of the opposition a character would chose to fight. It encourages a character to move on from lower level areas as it gives him little benefit to linger there. It also discourages the character from attempting to rush ahead to higher level areas. He is confined to areas of his own level. Indirectly this enlarges the game world.

Personally I do not object to this, especially not the part where a character is prevented from rushing ahead. But there are other side effects of the level system that cause complications.

- The absurd inconsistency of monster levels ruins the credibility of the fantasy setting. While this doesn't affect game play it is something that has annoyed more people than just me. (This will be further commented later on)
- Mostly a character can't enjoy the challenge of earlier stages of the game once he has moved on to a higher level. He would crush any opposition effortlessly. Not everyone may find this as regrettable as I do, but I would definitely prefer a game where the golden oldies lasted longer.

The economy and the general usefulness of professions

The idea with professions in World of Warcraft is great! I love professions! Unfortunately the crafting professions aren't as rewarding as they could be. In my experience - raw materials are more valuable than the refined goods. The casual dungeon crawler will likely make more gold from selling BoE drops than an honest hard working craftsman will profit from his labour. In fact the craftsman will likely lose money if the value of the raw materials is taken into consideration. While professions are admittedly pretty fun to play around with, many experienced players go through the tedious trouble of levelling them up only for the sake of gaining access to a rare few benefits in the end-game phase. Mid-game the professions are too much of a long and often expensive runway.

While there could be several underlying reasons for this I would like to bring these to attention:

- The most desired items are dungeon drops. They can be acquired with reasonable ease and predictability, and so they are preferred over crafted goods.
- Most of the time a character is not in such desperate need of better equipment that he has to pay for it. He can simply bide his time and wait to stumble upon something by chance.
- Perhaps lots of crafted items are either not powerful enough, not useful enough, not rare and prestigious enough, or not good enough looking to be considered a good purchase.

The PvP-community craves good items even mid-game and is willing to pay for it. While I have never immersed myself much in PvP I am so glad that you twinks are out there buying my wares. However, considering what a great concept the professions are I really think they should be allowed to reach their full potential – and I believe they haven't.

The expansions and the disasters they have wrought

Yes, yes, this has been discussed over and over and over again. Lets just list the most essential problems caused when the previous expansions were released.

- Game content that was made to pose monumental challenges on an epic scale has now become trivial and the thrill of possibly finding good loot is gone.
- An array of craftable items have become completely obsolete and have no market. (Especially between levels 56-60)

Apparently a lot of people feel the PvP got a lot worse with Burning Crusade. I was never into that sort of thing so I wouldn't be able to tell. Being unfamiliar with PvP I won't give that part of the game much attention in this document, sorry.

The level of difficulty and the amount of effort required

Personally I really like challenge. And if I'd get to choose between an ordinary challenge and an extraordinary challenge I really prefer the latter. This is an area in which "Wrath of the Lich King" is lacking. While I think the expansion has many qualities it has one severe weakness – it is by far too easy.

The reduced level of difficulty increases the accessibility to a greater portion of the game content for a greater number of players - but at a price: the satisfaction of overcoming the challenges involved is equally reduced.

It is difficult to cover every aspect of this problem but here are a few issues.

- In recent patches a lot of dungeons have become less difficult than they originally were and certainly not as difficult as they reasonably should be.
- The excess of accessibility features such as portals, flight paths and summoning stones that were meant to be helpful have had an undesired and deteriorating effect on the thrill of the game.

The fantasy setting – the pretentious, the counter-intuitive and the simply too unreal.

Out of everything I've chosen to bring up I'm aware that this part is clearly the one most subject to individual opinions. What I think in this matter is that too much of anything is never good. And since the launch of the game its universe has become the staging ground of so many different conflicts where so many different factions pursue so many different agendas that a player will eventually come to a point (usually sooner rather than later) where he just stops bothering about it all and simply turns to a database to see where he can find the best loot.

Blizzard has put a lot of effort into presenting us with an alternate reality with beautiful and mesmerizing environments. They deserve credit for it. The herds of mammoths are really impressive as they move across the Borean Tundra. But why bother creating this delicate shroud of realism when it is torn apart the next moment? The mighty mammoths can easily be grinded en masse by a lone player and if you're lucky they occasionally drop a chunk of meat.

The quality of items and the strength of enemy creatures is not proportionate to their visual splendour. Take the pieces of armour for instance. At one stage I can come across the ornamental "Über Doomplate of Death and Destruction", and at a later stage I will acquire a rather plain "Travellers Vest" which is three times as good. This can in part be explained by the release of the expansion packs, but no matter where we choose to lay the blame it is a fact that all too soon the treasures of the game are revealed for what they really are - just a bunch of figures. A pity! Couldn't the illusion have been upheld for just a little while longer?

I am certain that in this particular field the opinions are very diverse about what the game should be like but I have listed a number of issues where I believe the game is improperly designed.

- The hierarchy of items and their intended increase in quality over the levels is uneven and the associated names are not proportionate to their worth.
- There is an absurd inconsistency in prowess of enemies that look equally impressive to the beholder.
- The factions in the game are too numerous and their agendas are either too silly or too fuzzy to really add anything of interest to the game world. I feel some of them only exist for the purpose of distributing the so called "welfare-epics" from quartermasters.
- There may have been intrigues surrounding the various bad guys and villains in the world but somewhere along the road I sure lost track of them. Why are we killing Magtheridon?
- Is there really a main plot in the game?

THE NEW WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Many times have I toyed around with different ideas about how to change the game rules and rectify all the things I consider flaws in the game. I have come up with a new game design that I am about to present to you but before I do so I want to point to a few fundamental conditions.

- ! It is not my main concern to alter the game content but rather re-organizing the original content in a new way.
- ! While I am not against PvP, I have decided to only consider the PvE game experience at this point. Some of the changes I propose could create serious imbalance in PvP combat, be that as it may. PvE remains the main concern.
- ! I imagine the game being hosted in a utopian world with nothing but nice and well-mannered players who really enjoy immersing themselves in the setting.

ESSENTIAL CHANGES

These changes constitute the core of my new World of Warcraft. Anything stated here will be discussed in detail later on in this document. I'll just give a brief overview here.

Reduce the number of achievable character levels to 10

Along with this change, all zones, quests, spells and talents would have to be modified – an intriguing task to begin with. Furthermore it would result in a more dynamic world where a player is not quite as confined to roam in a specific area, or with such a narrow selection of people.

Levelling up should be tied to progressing in quest lines

While the new levels mentioned above would be much harder to achieve in terms of XP, I did not plan for them to be quite as costly as the whole 1-60 grind. Rather, in order for any character to ascend to the next level, he would have to prove his worth by completing a quest, which would in turn be tied to one of the various plots in the world. Thus, a character gains levels not only by grinding monsters, but also by following the storyline.

Remake all profession recipes from the bottom up

Giving professions a makeover would have been good regardless of other changes. But with so few levels there would be more recipes for each level and the plethora of craftable items would disperse in a lateral manner with a much wider assortment of gear.

SECONDARY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

In the wake of the changes proposed above, several questions arise and several new opportunities open up. Here are some further ideas for changes that share the same purpose the ones previously mentioned, to stick to the present game content but within a new framework. While not altering the whole game, some of the changes may yet have a significant impact for certain classes.

Remade talent trees

There would be new, smaller talent trees. You'd only get to spend 9 talents over the course of the game and each talent spent would have a much greater impact. The "ultimate" talent of each tree would be at talent point number 5, but it would actually not be the end of the tree. It would be possible to advance deeper still.

Spirit based regeneration for everyone

It remains to be seen how Blizzard will bring spirit into play in Cataclysm. But I'd like every class to receive 30% mana-regen while casting – more with talents and trinkets. Some classes and races (like trolls) may keep 30% health regeneration in combat too.

Dungeon gear drops made less potent in favour of crafted items.

The general purpose would be to make professions more important and invigorate the economy. On the other hand, I'd like to make more recipes require certain rare materials that only drop in dungeons, such as Primal Nether and Abomination Stitching.

FURTHER IDEAS FOR DISTANT CHANGES

So far I have only presented ideas that I believe would leave the game content intact. If the changes mentioned above were properly implemented a guy could still face a certain encounter in a dungeon and say "Yeah, I know this place and the tactics, I've been here before."

However, here follows a brief summary for further ideas that would cause a greater impact on the game and go beyond mere re-organization of the present game content. Some of the changes proposed here would naturally call for the designers to recreate instances and for the players to rethink their strategies. Some may cause big imbalance issues.

I'm just mentioning them here as food for thought. None of these will be further commented in this particular document but I might write another separate one to explain more about their purpose and implementation.

Change of the block / dodge / parry mechanics

The arc in which a tank can automatically perform these would be slightly narrowed. On the other hand it would be easier to perform them on the target you currently have selected. This means mitigating damage from one target would be made easier, perhaps for all classes, even those not traditionally meant as tanks. Taking on two or more enemies, on the other hand, would be harder for any class.

New specializations for the classes that are the least diverse

As it is right now certain classes, like mages and rogues, basically do the same thing regardless of where they place their talent points. Druids and Paladins on the other hand are excellent examples of classes very diverse in the roles they can play. I would like to see the other classes similarly diversified.

Here is an example: I would scrap the Warlock class and merge it into the Mage class which would have three new talent trees – Sorcery, Wizardry and Mysticism. The Sorcerer is the familiar DPS mage, casting fire and frost spells. The Mystic is the former Warlock specializing in summoning magic. The Wizard is the arcane mage but with a whole new twist.

Introduction of a new archetype in the group lineup

I like to call it a "utility" character. Such a character specializes in giving bonuses to allies or penalties to enemies. The arcane mage, the Wizard, would be an example of this. The typical utility character would place strong buffs or debuffs on others in battle at the expense of his own DPS or healing. Utility players would also excel at crowd control, spell interruption and other stuff that would probably make them terribly annoying in PvP.

THE CHANGES EXPLAINED

THE NEW LEVEL SYSTEM

Let us start out by once again taking a look at how players approach the level concept of the game in its present form.

A lot of players find little or no interest in the early- and mid-game content. They rush their characters to maximum level as fast as possible. For all they care the characters could just as well have started out at level 80 straight away. In fact, a lot of private servers let them do so already. A character will spend most of his life being maximum level anyway. Alternatively, why not stay level 1 all through the game? The whole level-concept seems to have lost its meaning, right? Why not just make the entire game dependent on reputation and good gear?

Well, I can't see how anyone could pull something like that off and it wouldn't be very satisfying either, would it? So what do we do? Perhaps a compromise would be in order. Let's heavily de-emphasize the levels. Or rather, let us radically re-emphasize the levels in a whole new manner.

The total number of achievable levels for characters should be reduced and the levels of all monsters, quests and items should be adjusted accordingly.

I usually propose 10 levels, but it is actually just a general guideline. If I'm to be completely honest I could really imagine that some other, greater number would be optimal. Regardless, what would such a change accomplish? I would like to bring these benefits to attention:

- A character at any given level would be in reach of a much greater portion of the game content, while it wouldn't make it any less challenging - on the contrary.
- A character at any given level would be in contact with a greater portion of the player base, being able to team up with buddies who are at an earlier or later stage in the game and still do something worthwhile together.
- Naturally this would present the opportunity to rearrange the levels of all instances so that some that have long been overlooked are allowed to return to their former glory and rightful place. (And some probably should be removed altogether)
- As a side effect of readjusting the levels of all creatures, their prowess relative to the player and to each other would likely become more sensible and realistic. So would all quests that are associated with them.
- Reaching the highest level would probably be less time consuming for those who want to get there fast and know their way around.

We're already used to expansions that are 10 levels. The Burning Crusade was 10 levels and it didn't make it any less challenging, did it? Wrath of the Lich King is 10 levels too and it isn't very challenging at all but that hasn't got to do with a lack of levels.

If the game would be remade with so few levels then certain problems would arise. A lot of them, of course. One would be how to manage spell ranks and talents. Another would be issues with individual zones or instances and how to properly adjust the abilities of the monsters. The list of difficult nuts to crack could be made incredibly long and go on for pages. However, I would like to just turn a blind eye to that for the moment. I'd like to move on and explain the other big feature in the new level concept – the “level-up-quests”.

GAINING LEVELS AND FOLLOWING QUEST LINES

Ok, so the levels are fewer but players won't get away with levelling easy! They're going to have to work hard! Each "ding!" would be a milestone. Naturally the amount of experience required for gaining each new level would be greatly increased. But apart from that a character would also have to complete a quest for their class trainer before being allowed to move on. I propose that from now on these quests be referred to as "level-up-quests".

On the first few levels the level-up-quests would be rather simple but pretty soon they would each involve completing a quest chain and usually assaulting a dungeon. This might turn out to be an even more controversial proposal than the reduction of levels itself so before I say anything more about what this would be like, let me explain its purpose and potential benefits.

- At each and every stage of the game a character would be forced to face difficult challenges similar to those in the end-game phase. In order to overcome those challenges the character would have to rely on skills and good gear.
- In response to the increased challenge of getting through the mid-game phase there would likely be a general surge on the market since mid-game characters would demand good equipment to a greater extent.
- With the right design, the level-up-quests could pave the way for making equipment demands more diverse. A greater variety of overlooked items, such as resistance gear for example, would become useful or even necessary to a character in his pursuit to complete certain level-up-quests.

Does it sound complicated? In most cases the class trainer would inform the character of the next level-up-quest right after completing the previous one (and thus gaining the new level). So the character will immediately know what is expected from him in the level ahead. And since each level might last 10 times as long as they normally do today the character will have ample time to complete the task in the manner that is most convenient to him. Besides, almost every level-up-quest would offer several optional ways to complete it.

What would level-up-quests be like?

This may be subject to change but I imagine them being tied to a kind of token system. To proceed from one level to another you need to obtain a token proving your worth. Such tokens are obtained by completing quest chains. On the lower levels the quest chains are pretty simple and straight forward so gaining a token isn't much of a problem really. But on higher levels a character is forced to really commit himself to one plot or another in order to eventually be awarded a token.

The first few levels with tokens

A human character starts out in Northshire Abbey. There he completes all the quests and gains enough experience to advance to the next level. He moves on to Goldshire, speaks with the trainer and is promoted to level 2 without having to bother with a token. (Yay! Only 8 more levels to go!)

It won't be that easy again though. Now the trainer tells the character that in order to advance to the next level he will need to show his selfless nature and gain a "Token of Gratitude". Where can such a token be found? It is infact awarded at the end of several easy quest chains in the world, but the trainer is kind enough to give some direction: "I've heard that the Stonefield family and the Maclures are quarrelling over a lost necklace. Perhaps you can help them out." This gives the character a nudge in a good direction, though he would easily stumble across such a token by improvising.

Once the character has both completed his level-up-quest and gained enough experience the trainer promotes him to level 3. Now it is dungeon time! The trainer says that in order to advance to the next level he needs to show remarkable valor even in the face of great danger. He must

find a “Token of Bravery”, an uncommon quality item. The trainer says: “Gryan Stoutmantle of the People’s Militia in Westfall calls for adventurers to investigate a group of bandits pillaging the countryside.” This means the character has to follow the quest chain for the Defias bandits and eventually enter the Deadmines and slay Van Cleef to obtain the precious token and advance to level 4. (Note: The token is a reward for the quest, not a drop from Van Cleef’s body)

Had the character been questing in Kalimdor the trainer would perhaps have said “The druids of the Cenarion Circle are concerned about a disturbance in the Barrens” and this would have led the character to Wailing Caverns, which would also have awarded a token.

On the first few levels the level-up-quests are pretty straight forward and they don’t yet affect which quest you have to do on your next level. However, after a while they get more complex. Perhaps the class trainer may inform a character that he has to perform several tasks over the course of the next level. Perhaps he would get a quest with the following requirements:

1. Complete King Magni Bronzebeard’s task
2. Complete Arch Druid Staghelm’s task
3. Complete Prophet Velen’s task
4. Complete High Tinker Mekkatorque’s task

Well, there’s something to keep a guy busy for a couple of days. This particular scenario would of course require for new quests to be scripted and implemented in the game. Even so, each of them could be made to merge into one of the existing quest chains in the game. Perhaps upon completion, each task awards you a token of the right type for that particular level-up-quest, and once you have all 4 of them you can return to your trainer and level up.

Another way in which the level-up-quests might eventually increase in complexity is that the manner in which you completed your quest on one level may affect the next. In order for this to work it would require very careful design. The idea is that if your character has started following a long quest chain and been awarded a token at some point, it would make most sense and be most convenient for him to stay on course and keep pursuing that plot for another token. He isn’t strictly confined to it though. He could start over with another quest chain but the first few tokens of that other quest chain wouldn’t help him level up. It wouldn’t be until he had progressed to a more advanced stage that he would get a token powerful enough to qualify him for the next level.

Summary

Does all of this seem terribly confusing? It might be a bit difficult to digest. Let me just summarize the main benefits of the proposed feature of level-up-quests. I’ve said some of these things before but I’m saying it again.

- **Challenge on every level of the game**
When a task seems difficult, the character doesn’t have the option of waiting for a higher level before confronting it. He has to shape up and meet the challenge or he won’t be able to level up. This in turn means that there might be a demand for better gear on each and every level of the game.
- **Rewards for following a plot**
With the right design the level-up-quests would encourage a character to follow one plot and stick to it through several levels. I for one think that would make the game more interesting and focused.
- **Game content distinguished by storylines, not levels**
Instead of sorting zones and dungeons in a linear fashion, where one is told apart from the other by its associated level, the game content would rather disperse laterally. There may be a lot of dungeons and zones for any given level but they’re separated by their associated quest chains.
- **A more convenient path to the end game**
If properly implemented I believe this system would speed things up for people who have played the game before and just want to get to max level as soon as possible.

PROFESSIONS REMADE

Ah yes, professions... There is so much to say on this topic alone that one could go on for pages about it. It is difficult to cover this without going through the whole new itemization that would follow with reducing the number of levels. Lets point out some basics first regarding all items, crafted or not.

Some basics about items and levels

When going through 80 levels of WoW you quickly learn this simple truth about items: First you have a crappy item, then you get a better one, and then an even better one, and then one that is better still. And it just goes on and on, piling on more levels of item imbaness. Pretty soon the relative strength of the items lose all credible proportion and realism.

While some items do differ from each other laterally, since they have different stat bonuses and so on, a lot of items are simply repetitions and duplicates of other items on an earlier level. The type of bonus may be exactly the same, it is just the magnitude that is different.

With the levels being reduced to only 10, the suit of items would change. The repetitions would still be there because in part the current array of items would simply be truncated into those 10 levels (or even the last 7). But it is also quite clear that a lot of them would be removed. For someone with a crafting profession, he might need only a fraction of the recipes he's currently got to cover for those levels.

Is this when you're saying "Oh, thank goodness! Good riddance to all those recipes."

Well I think we ought to stuff the recipe list with some new ones instead.

A wider array of crafted items

I love professions and I want players to be able to select from a greater array of crafted items, a wider selection in terms of appearance, bonuses and level requirements. Resistance gear, for example, should be easier to come by and of course I hope dungeons could be tweaked in such a way that this extra resistance was of great use.

I imagine there would be more items associated with certain places of the world. Each zone would somewhere reward a new recipe for almost every crafting profession and in certain zones it would perhaps be possible to get the recipes for an entire armour set.

I mentioned level requirement earlier. Yes, some items could stand out from the rest by either having an unusually high or unusually low level requirement. The latter is easier to give an example of. Let us say a master tailor of high level comes by a rare recipe for an exquisite ceremonial linen robe. Though linen is a basic material, the craftsmanship is superb and includes some rare and expensive extra materials, and the result is a quite powerful robe that costs a lot but has low level requirement - twink stuff. (By the way I wouldn't mind scrapping the Enchanting profession)

Like I said before, this is a huge area to cover. Let me just pick a few professions and give a few examples of changes I'd like made.

Blacksmithing

A blacksmith will soon learn that different metals have different properties. Items made of silver give a bonus to shadow resistance. Items made of gold give a bonus to intellect. Certain alloys may have properties that the pure metals don't. Bronze for instance may give a bonus to nature resistance. Because of this there may be recipes in the endgame phase that actually require materials more commonly seen in the early and mid game.

Alchemy

The flora won't be the same in every part of the world so an alchemist in Kalimdor could simply not expect to make the same potions as one in the Eastern Kingdoms. But there would be plenty of potion recipes for everyone! Alchemists would be able to make explosive concoctions, similar to the dynamite of the engineers. Low level alchemists would maybe also be able to make a rather cheap oil needed by high level leatherworkers to cure their finest hides.

Cooking

This is a damn cool profession! Let cooks be able to make delicious and exotic dishes with many rare and tasty ingredients. Some meals should be timed items, disappearing after 10 minutes. So you have to buy them straight from the cook and eat them while they're still hot! Effects of such food might include a bonus to experience gain from kills, an effect that may persist through death.

Inscription

I like inscription but I would like to revamp it quite a lot. No glyphs! The scribes selection of recipes should more than any other profession depend on achievements, class and other professions. Let's say the scribe has become an expert fisherman. This achievement unlocks a new recipe. He can now write a book about fishing! – "The casual angler" or something like that. This item gives a modest bonus to fishing skill for 10 minutes or so upon use. Or if he has discovered all of the eastern hemisphere another recipe is unlocked, the "Hitch hikers guide to the Eastern Kingdoms". (Though frankly I don't know exactly what it would do) Furthermore, high level scribes can make tomes that teach new spell ranks to lower level characters. The scribe can only make tomes for his own class, though. This would just be one out of many ways in which characters can learn new spells and they should never have to rely on scribes alone.

Sorry for repeating myself but I say once again: This is such a huge topic to cover and there is an obvious risk of getting caught up in all the details, which I try not to do. At least not here and now. I hope some of my enthusiasm for professions has rubbed off on you because I'd like to make the levelling of professions as interesting as levelling ones character, and almost as important. I guess in a way I wish that honing ones skill in a profession would become this huge enterprise that was the main objective of the game, instead of gaining levels. It would be more prestigious for a character to boast mastery in a profession than to be max level.

TALENT TREES FOR 9 POINTS

The standard procedure in ordinary WoW is to spend nearly all your talent points in one tree until you get to the very end of it, where there is an "ultimate" talent of that tree. Afterwards you can spend your few remaining talent points in another tree to support your main specialization. There are certain alternative builds where a player can divide his talent between several trees, but these builds are uncommon and most of them are looked upon with distrust.

I'd like to propose a series of changes. Some are meant to adapt the talent system to the 10 level concept, others are meant to shift the balance in favour of generalists.

The basic talents of each tree would be powerful. They would lay the foundation for the use of their respective spell school and be defining for the characters style of play. Here is an example of what could be an entry level talent in the Holy tree of a priest:

"Increases the amount of healing from your Holy spells by 50%."

Powerful, yes, but the idea is that entry level talents should be truly defining. Is your priest going to heal? Well then he will need this basic Holy tree talent. It is as simple as that. Furthermore the "ultimate" talent of a tree would come earlier on, but still deep enough to prevent a character from reaching the ultimate in more than one tree. Unlike ordinary WoW there would be yet another row of talents beyond the ultimate, but they would be pretty modest and only provide situational benefits.

Contrary to the Blizzlike WoW, the talents later in the tree would generally be weaker than those early on, with the exception of the ultimate. As a result most players would go for something that could be described as a generalist build. They would probably spend 5 talent points to get the ultimate in a tree of their choice, and then spend their 4 remaining points to get some basic talents from the other trees. However, a few people may decide to spend all 9 or their talents in one tree and thus completely forsake all other aspects of their class.

It may be easier to get my point through with a visual model. To the right are two basic layouts for 9 point talent trees.

The first tier of talents should be strong and perhaps at least one of them should be crucial for use of the associated spell school. While the actual effect of the talents should be simple and straight forward, they would provide a sweeping boost for the whole style of play associated with that talent tree. Even so, some of them may be designed as complementary talents for characters who specialize in a different tree.

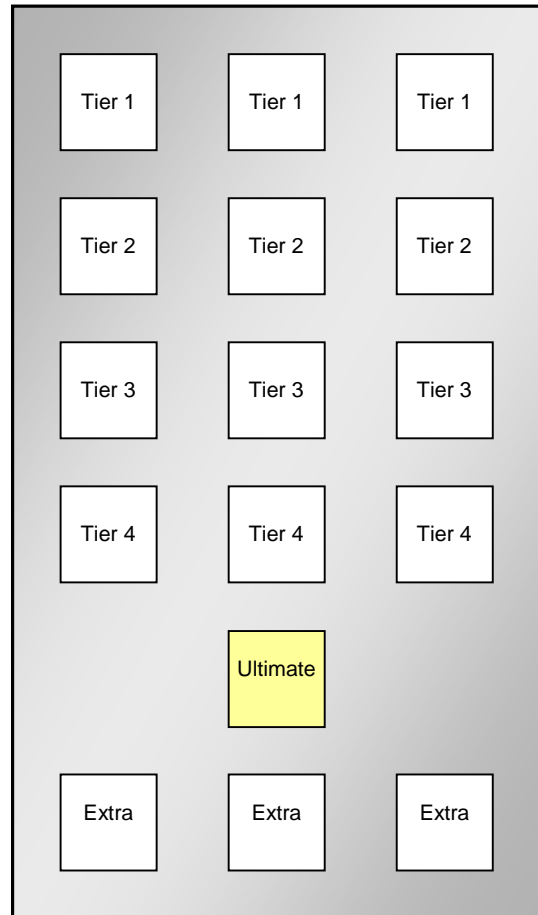
The subsequent tiers of talents should be less important for the spell school as a whole but rather give a bonus in one particular field. Perhaps they enable the casting of a particular spell. In any case they gradually become less and less important for characters who aren't serious about specializing in that particular tree.

The ultimate talent is ... well, the ultimate. Which spell it would be, considering the truncated state of these trees, would have to be discussed for each class and spec individually.

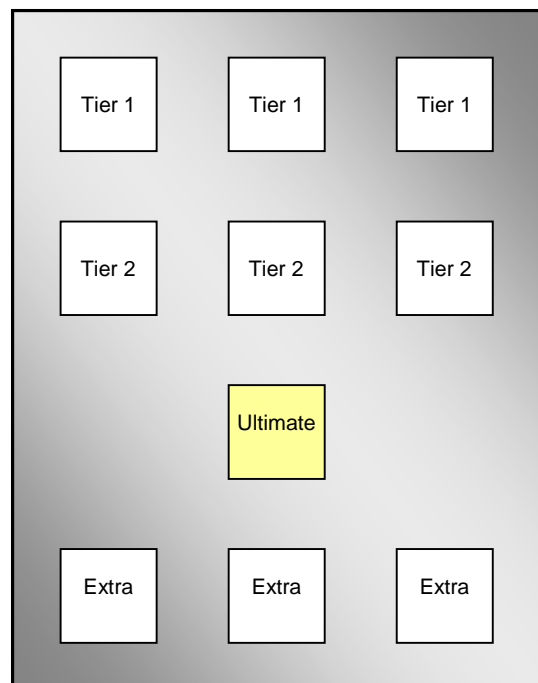
Beyond the ultimate talent is another row of extra, optional talents. Contrary to the talent trees in ordinary WoW, where the last few talents are the strongest, these aren't necessarily that powerful. They provide some extra perks for their own spell school but don't synergize at all with other talent trees. They only appeal to someone who wants to completely embrace the style of play associated with that tree, possibly leaving no talent points at all to spend in another tree.

Conclusion

In addition to adapting the talent system to 10 levels, I imagine that these changes would make the point distribution much more interesting and diverse. I believe the number of viable builds would become greater. In a sense every class would get 6 different specs. 3 generalist builds leaning towards specialization in one tree each, and 3 dedicated specialist builds.



With this layout each new tier would be unlocked after one point spent in the previous.



With this layout the second tier would require 2 points spent in the first. The ultimate would be unlocked after 4 points spent. Extras would be unlocked after the ultimate.

SPIRIT BASED REGENERATION

This is rather self-explanatory. Spirit is a stat that hasn't seen much use which is a pity because it isn't a bad idea. It just hasn't been put to good use. I propose a rule change that gives all classes 30% spirit based mana regeneration in combat. Certain talents, spells and items should affect this, perhaps with penalties as well as bonuses.

It is possible that bonuses to spirit regeneration would work in a way similar to resistance. Just as there are certain buffs that give a base resistance without stacking (paladin auras, potions, totems), there could be effects that similarly set a base regeneration. Then there could be other effects on top of that which would stack with each other and give an additional bonuses.

CHANGES TO DUNGEON DROPS

Dungeons play a big role in World of Warcraft because it is through dungeons you acquire the best equipment, at least before the raiding starts. I don't really mind that, but I'd like to tweak it a little bit. I would like to adjust the picture so that most people feel the main aspects of doing dungeons are these, in order of importance:

1. Dungeons are crucial for advancing in quest chains.
2. Dungeons are important sources of crafting materials.
3. Dungeons offer a chance of finding a powerful item.

If you've read through everything in this document up to this point you have noticed that I'm fond of quest chains and storylines. So it probably comes as no surprise that I'd like to let storytelling be the central aspect of dungeon crawling. But in case you didn't read the previous parts, look to page 8 for an explanation of the intimate connection I'd like to create between dungeons, the story and the progression of a character.

Another thing you may have noticed about me is that I like professions. So much in fact that I feel the dungeon drops are too good and too easy to come by, thereby stealing the attention from crafted goods. In addition I have always been somewhat disappointed with how predictable boss drops are. Because of this I propose the following change:

Boss drop tables should be larger and more unpredictable

(With exception of parts of armour sets and other items that are meant to drop consistently)

While dungeon drops in general don't have to get less powerful, I do think they should get more unpredictable – so unpredictable that only the most desperate or fanatic of players would bother to farm a boss for a specific item.

One of several actions that should be taken to accomplish this is to make the drop tables significantly larger. Another would be to make more items have random properties, like the "Archaedic Stone" for example, a ring that drops off the final boss in Uldaman.

If a player is looking for an upgrade for a specific equipment slot he would thus be far better off browsing the auction house than farming a dungeon. Still, casual and hardcore adventurers alike would experience the thrill of possibly finding a great item when they're in a dungeon.

Now someone might object and say: "Ok, but if most characters only go to an instance because they have to complete some quest there, which may be only once, wouldn't it be difficult to find good goods?" Yes, it might. This brings me to the second change I'd like to make.

Rare materials should be found in dungeons and possibly be soulbound

There are already a couple of such items in the game. The Ancient Lichen is an example of a herb that only appears in instances, though it is also tradable. Frayed Abomination Stitching is another example. It isn't strictly an ingredient but I'm sure you get the picture. It drops in Stratholme, it is soulbound on pickup and you use it for getting good equipment.

I'd like to make it so that various rare materials would appear quite frequently in instances throughout the game. Such materials would commonly be required whenever a craftsman would make an advanced item. However, no craftsman should be forced to go to dungeons simply to level up his skill. I imagine there would be a lot of less costly recipes for that.

Though I regard it as a matter of further discussion exactly how this feature should be implemented, the purpose is quite clear – to shift the focus of dungeon crawling from finding equipment over to finding materials. Earlier I said that finding materials would become the second most important aspect of doing dungeons, ahead of finding good gear. Perhaps this isn't entirely correct. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that finding materials and finding gear would be tied for second place. Completion of quests would remain the most important aspect.

FINAL COMMENTS

When Blizzard decided to make a game with so many levels they probably went for a sure bet. It was a practical and foolproof way of creating a game that would last long. They probably reasoned: "Lets make this a game with loooaaads of levels so people have to busy themselves for weeks with bashing ogres, and then we reward them every now and then with some instance action." I agree that this probably was the best idea at that time. I would probably have done something similar if I had been game designer on their team. Regular "dings" give the casual player an encouraging reward and a feeling of accomplishment. When you aim to please a huge community of people, all with different tastes and level of understanding of the game, you have to keep it simple and straight forward.

However, from a more mature gamer's perspective it may not be an optimal way to experience the world of Warcraft. And if you're like me, a guy who likes to escape into an alternate reality, it turned out Blizzards creation wasn't very realistic either.

I am certain that the level system I have proposed here would be a better foundation for experiencing the original world of Warcraft, or any community made world for that matter. I think it would be especially well suited for smaller communities of dedicated players, which is exactly what one would find at private servers.

Apart from my ideas regarding the levels, changes to professions and talent trees, I have extensive and elaborate designs for new and diversified class specializations, game mechanics and itemization. I wouldn't mind exchanging some thoughts and ideas on this topic with other people who share my interest. I may also write further articles regarding them. To me it isn't overly important that any of these ideas actually come to realization, but I do enjoy toying around with them.

If you feel like contacting me, try sending a mail to: philoric@gmail.com