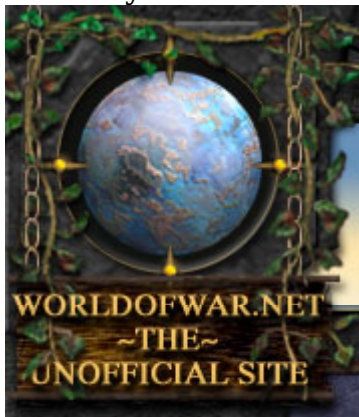
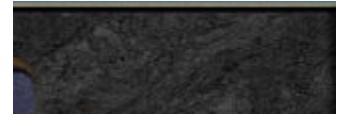


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Gen Con 13 December 2003, Anaheim, California

Contributors: TehSuq, post lifted from Battle.net



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An ongoing thread discussing the information gleaned from this show [can be found here](#). If you have your own report you can leave it there or email it to rush@worldofwar.net.

More information on GenCon demo can be found [here](#).

TehSug's Battle.net GenCon Report.

I went to Gen Con today.

To those of you who weren't there, let me give you a feel for the event:

Think of the geekiest person you ever met, in your entire life. Let's call him "Brian." Now, picture a giant room filled with hundreds of people that Brian would never have hung out with on account of not being THAT much of a geek. Consider the bell curve that defines humanity's traits. You know how much higher on the "coolness" curve Al Pacino is relative to the typical fairly-cool high school sophomore? That's how much lower the average Gen Con attendee is on that same scale than your friend Brian. Mind you, there were fairly normal looking folks there (I'd like to pretend I fall into that category), but some people... Jumpin' Jesus on a pogo stick, they SCARED me. (Note to the 300 pound guy dressed as Liam Neeson's character from Star Wars Episode I: please don't breed.) For these people, Gen Con is like Christmas, Halloween, and Mardi Gras all rolled into one: it is a paradise for the dork's dork.

- Trading card games.
- Video games.
- Swords and medieval weaponry.
- LAPR - that's (L)ive (A)ction (R)ole(P)laying, for those of you unfamiliar with the lingo (and a



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more geekified activity has yet to be invented by the mind of man). Miniatures.

- Anime DVD for sale.
- People in costume – including Boba Fett, Darth Vader, and a gaggle of Storm Troopers, all moving as a pseudo-combat team.
- Roleplaying game events.

The nerd role-call continues. Indefinitely.

All the areas on the main floor (the only floor I visited – apparently, the other floors were for the REALLY dorky events, and I didn't even want to know what THAT meant) were fairly sparsely populated by visitors, except two: the line to see William Shatner and the Nvidia booth's World of Warcraft display. Yes, my friends, even the presence of no less a legend than T. J. Hooker himself was insufficient to thin the crowd waiting to glimpse (and play! Ten minute limit, keep the line moving) WoW. I circled around and looked at various booths and found some pretty nifty looking things. To my mind, the niftiest looking items were Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic and these headphones that vibrated to simulate extreme bass response. I even spotted T. J. while he sipped coffee and waited for the next star-struck weenie to come stuttering with awe as he scrawled his name for them (for free! What an honor!). Personally, I didn't wait to talk to him – I always like MacGuyver better, personally.

The gates opened at 10am. At 10:05am, I had buttonholed a WoW dev. Over the next five hours (yes, five hours), I peppered the poor guy with question after question after question. If he wasn't in the bathroom, at lunch, or helping some other person, he was answering questions for me. (To Josh Kurtz: You played Virgil to my Dante for FIVE HOURS, and I can't adequately express how grateful I am for all your help. You are truly a scholar and a gentleman. Without your help, I would have next to nothing to say in this post.)

What follows is cribbed from the 13 pages of notes I took during my stay at booth 223. Any errors in this text belong to ME, not the wonderful and hard-working Blizzard employees frantically scrambling to help the forty-odd visitors learn as much about what was happening on the two demo computers as possible.

On a side note, George was kind enough to give me a press kit CD; I haven't looked it over yet, but I was promised that it had "Gen Con exclusive screen shots." Does anybody know where I can host those screenies on the web?

Section I: Game Engine

Blizzard has one thing completely, undeniably wrong: they simply don't know the definition of "alpha." Both Anarchy Online and WWIOL were less polished and complete three months after RELEASE than WoW is RIGHT NOW. In the five hours I was there, the two

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demo comps ran non-stop, with new players jumping in every 10 minutes. During that entire time, one computer crashed-to-desktop one time and the other did not crash at all. At no point did either computer lock up, and the single crash was up and running thirty seconds later, without so much as a reboot. To be honest, I wasn't looking when it went down, so I'm just ASSUMING it crashed; the player could just as easily have accidentally exited the game. I guess what I'm saying is that over 10 hours of combined run time, there was somewhere between 0 and 1 crashes. Perhaps the IGN boys can say for sure which it was; they were paying more attention to the game at the time, and might have noticed what happened.

All the Blizzard agents were quick to report that EVERY aspect of the game is still subject to modification, and will continue to be modifiable until beta is well underway. In discussing the details of the game, it seems clear to me that Blizzard has made every effort to close NO doors in the design phase. Often, I would ask a question and be told "we could implement that, but we haven't decided yet if we want to." In other words, it seems highly unlikely that Blizzard will run into many structurally unalterable features in their game (i.e., limited character slots because the engine won't allow more, or only 10 buffs because the game can't be made to handle more).

Right now, the game can (and often is) run in a windowed mode. The booth systems were a power gamer's wet dream: AMD Athlon 2600+, Leadtek-designed NVidia GeForce 4 5950 Ultra (if you haven't seen this vid card, it's basically a heat sink with a little particle board attached), 1 gig RAM. This system chowed through WoW like it was playing minesweeper. This shouldn't be surprising, considering what I was told by the dev: in his office, he runs WoW on two separate machines. On the P4 1.8GHz with the GeForce 4200 Ti, the game works PERFECTLY, with nary a hiccup. On his P3 800MHz (!) with a GeForce 3 (!!), the game runs fine. I'm thinking we won't have a system hog on our hands, here.

The game is 100% customizable: all keys can be remapped, and devs are working on revamping the interface right now. There was some mention of the interface being customizable with "skins," much like the Real Player or Windows Media Player has now, so as to change the look and feel of your interface in the game. Whether that happens, and if so, whether it happens before the game is released, remains to be seen. The camera can be rotated to any position in three dimensions, and pulled quite far back (if you've played DAoC, the camera here is very similar). You can play in 1st person or 3rd person modes, and the mouse scroll button adjusts the camera's distance from your body. If the camera gets close enough to you, 3rd person mode seamlessly transitions into 1st person mode - a very nice touch that looks quite classy and polished. The ten slots with pictures in them at the bottom of the screen are, as many have guessed, a hotkey bar. Any useful trait

s can be dragged and dropped onto this bar and accessed with the number buttons on the keyboard. Also, there are multiple pages of these hotkey bars (apparently about 10 of them), so you shouldn't have much worry about running out of hotkey slots.

On to the game.

Section II: Skills

World of Warcraft breaks abilities into two separate fields: skills and talents. Skills are those items that do not directly affect combat - included here are languages, riding on steeds, trade skills, and some miscellaneous abilities (discussed more in other sections). Talents are combat-oriented abilities: attribute increases, defense, regeneration, magical abilities, holy specialization, magical resistances, slayer talents, weaponry skills, invisibility detection, etc. As of now, there are no racially restricted skills or talents, although the devs expressed some hope that there might be racially restricted skills later on. (More on talents later.)

Every level, a player earns 1 skill point. Talent points start accruing at 10 per level, but increase at higher levels (you actually earn MORE than 10 per level when you gain advanced levels). Since the two channels are separated, you will never have to gimp your character to participate in trade skills. However, since skill points are level based, you will not have level 1 trade mules. Currently, respec's are in discussion, but not finalized: Blizzard doesn't ever want a player to feel that they screwed themselves with a particular spec. There was some discussion that a maximum-level character might be able to acquire extra skill points through buying them or questing for them, but this is far from decided.

With skills, there are three levels per skill. For example, to get the first level of mining ability costs 3 skill points, second level costs an extra 5, and third level costs 7 additional skill points. While the dev mentioned keeping this concept open for change in the future, there currently is no plan to change skills to "many cheap levels" rather than "three increasingly expensive levels." One should expect to spend roughly 10-15 skill points to max out a skill. As of now, there are about 20-25 skills in the game:

Blacksmith: this skill makes the chain and plate weapons, as well as the metal weaponry. There is no separate skill for armor or weapons; blacksmiths make both. In addition, blacksmiths can make whetstones, consumable items that can be applied to armor or weapons to imbue them with magical abilities for a limited time period - think of a whetstone that could grant a sword +2 fire damage for 60 minutes. Blacksmiths are important for tanks, but they need to be supplied through mining.

Leatherworkers: most characters will get their

armor from these folks. They make all leather-based armor. Furthermore, they make the consumable "leather patches" which imbue leather armor with special bonuses for a limited time, e.g., a +3 AC patch that lasts 30 minutes.

Clothiers (tailors): these people make clothing to customize all players' looks, cloth armor for pure casters, and also the bags that hold your gear. There is no weight attached to any items; your carrying capacity is limited only by the size of your bags. As a result, these tailored bags will be VERY important in the game. While the dev mentioned that magical bags are possible, he added that there was no current plan to implement magical bags of any kind.

Enchanters: these people add consumable temporary enchantments to any equipment; also, they can add permanent enchantments to any item. As of now, there is no limit to the number of enchantments that an object can carry, but that is obviously subject to change for balance purposes.

Cooks: these people make the food that we all enjoy. In game, food increases your health regeneration while sitting (example: I found jerky strips on some troggs I killed, and they were labeled "increases health by 98 points over 23 seconds while sitting." Think of food as portable regeneration spells). Similarly, beverages (water, milk, etc.) are to mana what food is to health. Right now, brewers might be pulled out of the game until after release, with the current plan being to roll beverage creation into the cook's role in the game. Before you get sad, let me mention that while brewing may be out of the game (for now), alcohol will be IN the game. The devs mentioned that they are still hammering out the details as to HOW alcohol will be implemented - one idea that I found hilarious and wonderful: "if you're a human male, we're toying with the idea that alcohol will make ALL humanoid PCs and NPCs look to you like a beautiful human female for awhile." Classic Blizzard humor - huzzah!

Alchemist: of course, these are the people who make your friendly neighborhood potions. Just as smithing requires mining, so alchemy will require herbology for gathering raw ingredients.

Mining: calling all dwarves...mining is how we get metals from the earth for making into weapons, engineered items, and armor. Expect to find high-quality metal veins in dangerous dungeons.

Herbology: the same thing for gathering rare plants. Expect to find high-quality herbs in dangerous dungeons as well.

Fishing: I have to mention this one, because it's so nifty. You get a fishing pole and go to a stream, river, or ocean. Cast into the water and wait. When your bobber dips, quickly click on it - if you were fast enough, you'll catch a fish; if not, you must try again! It was the only example of "twitch gaming" in WoW, according to the devs, but I saw it in action, and it looked like some major mindless fun.

Engineering: while engineering is quite useful to the engineer, it won't be a very tradable skill. For instance: an engineer can create dynamite to blow the bejeezus out of his enemy, but to USE dynamite, you must have the engineering skill, so it can't just be sold to other PCs like a potion could. The one engineered item that IS marketable is that engineers make the guns and ammo in the game. Right now, steam tanks cannot be built OR used, although they appear in game as part of the scenery here and there.

Fletching: not yet in game, but coming.

Other skills include things like weapon skill (if you don't start with the ability to use guns, spending some skill points, not talent points, can acquire you the ability. You'll never be as good with your gun as a native shooter, but it's a start), languages, cartography, camping (lets you make fires - useful for cooking skill) and riding steeds. For you dedicated trade skillers, expect your craft to be valuable: according to the dev, the best item of a particular kind might be purchased from vendors, crafted, or dropped, and will change as you level. (Example: maybe at level 5, the best damage-boosting dagger is crafted, but at level 10 the best damage-boosting dagger is dropped, and at level 25 it might be purchased from a vendor. Also, at some levels there might be multiple identically "best" items that overlap. Always, there will be different KINDS of items, so that a defensive paladin's best 2H hammer could be significantly different from an OFFENSIVE paladin's best 2H hammer, which could differ again from the magical paladin's best 2H hammer. You get the idea.)

In order to train a skill, you must speak with the trainer for that skill. Secret skills WILL exist: to get these skills, you may have to journey far to find a hidden trainer who gives you the skill you seek. Incidentally, if you don't have a skill it does NOT show up in your skill list, so if you haven't found the Flaming Kitten Juggling trainer yet, you will have no way of knowing that the Flaming Kitten Juggling skill even exists. That having been said, the devs recognize that spoiler sites WILL exist, and WILL propagate this information widely. They have no intention of interfering with this. (Aside: throughout my conversation, I got the distinct impression that Blizzard has no starting opinion as to what the "right" way to play the game is, and does not intend to impinge on our own playing styles unless we are actually interfering with the gaming experience of

others. Power gamers and casual gamers are welcome; trade skillers and adventurers, RPers and spoiler-mongers: all have their place in WoW, and Blizzard will not try to arbitrarily stop people from "playing the wrong way.") If you want to find stuff on your own, you will get the reward of discovery; if you want to hit the spoiler sites, you're welcome to do so. In fact, the devs even mentioned that as "hidden" talents get more widely discovered, the game itself could change: perhaps an NPC in a barroom may mention the new skill to you in passing, and even point you in the right direction, or start you on a quest to ultimately find that trainer.

Currently there are about 20-30 recipes in game per skill. (While recipes can be found or bought for gold, they will never require skill points to gain.) The color of a skill has NO IMPACT on the product made - there is no "quality" for items, there is no variable ingredient cost, etc. If you are capable of making an item, you will succeed 100% of the time, and the product you make will be identical to one made by someone 100 skill points higher than you. Trade skills in WoW are designed to be FUN. They are limited not by time (trade skills are not the click-fest that they were in EQ, and are not the timer bombs that they were in DAoC); rather, the key slowing down trade skill advancement will be the gathering of the ingredients. That will be time-consuming enough that every item you make will be like a mini-quest in gathering the ingredients. The color of the recipe (red to grey) only affects how many points you gain in the skill when you complete the recipe; it has nothing to do with the end product itself.

Some tradeskills will require the crafter to be in a specific region: smiths need a forge, found only in cities and cooks need a fire (any fire will do, and camping skill will let you MAKE fires). Other skills (enchanting and tailoring, for instance) can be done "in the field."

Section III: Talents.

Every level, a character gains talent points (10 per level early, MORE than that later on). These talent points can be spent anywhere - you do not need to speak with a trainer to gain new talents. Your class will determine what talents you have access to, and there are MANY talents to choose from. To gain talents, you merely open your character screen (or "paper doll" for you UO graduates) and click on "talents." Prices show up immediately. Unlike skills, you can always determine ALL talents that you will EVER have access to - they will simply show up in red if you are not yet of a high enough level to take those talents. All talents will be combat-oriented. While skillful choice of talents may create a stronger character, it will be IMPOSSIBLE to gimp your character into unplayability by making really bad choices. Examples of talents:

Shield: warriors have access to the shield talent. If you improve your shield talent, your

character will benefit more from equipping a shield. (Shields boost your armor and defense, but a high-shield warrior will get a larger bonus to armor and defense from a shield than a low-shield warrior will get from the same shield.) Increased shield talent also gives a player access to stronger shield-related skills, like Bash (stunning move) and Wall (makes your character extremely hard to hit, but completely prevents him from attacking).

Weapons: melee characters can improve their talent with a particular weapon. In doing so, they access new and deadly weapon styles.

Dual wield: rogues get dual wield talent at level 4ish; Hunters also gain dual wield talent early in their career. Other classes may be able to buy dual wield as a skill (not talent) later in their career. Skill-based combat abilities will generally be vastly inferior to talent-based combat abilities: while a warrior who bought the dual-wield skill may be able to wield a second weapon, the rogue who advanced his dual-wield talent will be superior with two weapons due to having special dual-wield styles and abilities (i.e., damage bonuses, etc).

Defense: while armor increases your damage reduction (every 5 points of AC reduces the damage taken per hit by 1), the defense talent increases your damage AVOIDANCE (makes it harder for your enemies to land their blows on you).

Archery: again, while most classes can buy an archery skill, bow Hunters will have class-specific archery TALENTS, making them superior with a bow.

Offense: just as defensive talents can increase your defense, so too are there offensive talents.

Invisibility detection: stealth-haters rejoice - EVERY class has access to this talent if they want it.

Magic ability talents for mages and warlocks.

Holy specialization talents for paladins and priests.

Magical resistance talents can improve your defenses against certain classes of magic.

Slayer talents can make you especially deadly against a particular type of enemy.

Regeneration talents can help those non-healers get back on their feet more quickly, or survive fights more easily.

Sorry, folks - while there will be a skill for unarmed combat that anybody can take, there will be no

unarmed talent for any class currently scheduled for release. While you CAN fight without a weapon, it will NEVER be the best choice for you.

Section IV: Character development

Every character will be completely playable - that is Blizzard's commitment to the gamer. There will be no class/race combinations that go unused because they are "gimped." The devs' end goal is to have maxed-level characters differ primarily because of spec paths, not racial characteristics. In fact, I was told the primary differences between the races are aesthetics and racial intrinsics (racial abilities). I asked what all the starting racial abilities of all the races were, but I was told that (1) they have recently changed those around and (2) they are still in flux. The devs present did not know off the top of their heads the racial abilities of all races, nor did they feel confident that the ones currently in place would be the ones in place when the game goes live: that is an area that is currently actively being debated for balance reasons. Blizzard has not yet decided whether they want the racial abilities to be purely cosmetic, minor, or major, and whether they should affect PvP or not. One thing is for sure, though: there will be no negative racial traits. (Again, this is in keeping with Blizzard's goal of making the game eternally fun.)

I did get a dev to tell me the mounts for EVERY race:

Orcs and Trolls both get wolves. Dwarves and Gnomes both get battle rams. (No war bunnies! Arrrgh....) Humans will ride horses. Taurens will have the "plains running" ability instead of a steed. Night-Elves will ride giant cats, like panthers and white tigers. The Undead will ride dead horses (not skeletal, but expect them to have bones and guts showing, in true undead style).

Nightmares will be in game as mounts, but they will be a Warlock-only summonable mount (via a spell).

Due to the confusion from yesterday, I asked point-blank about fighting on mounts; the response was that it is currently unknown whether mounted fighting will be allowed or not.

Furthermore, races determine the "taxis" that each race will take from travel nexus to travel nexus:

Humans, Gnomes, and Dwarves will ride Griffons. Taurens, Trolls, and Orcs will ride Wyverns (although apparently Taurens look rather silly on them). Night-Elves will ride Hippogryphs. The Undead will ride giant bats.

Also, most races will have their own "language" that they can speak. The exceptions to this rule are the Humans (who start out only speaking Common, the Alliance tongue), Orcs (who start out only speaking Orcish, the Horde tongue), and the Undead (who start out speaking Common AND Orcish, and are therefore

the only race capable of communicating across factions without spending any skill points). While a Gnome could choose to speak Gnomish, and therefore render himself unfathomable to most Dwarves, he could also always choose to speak Common, making himself understood to ALL alliance characters.

When you create your character, you will be given the choice of what race, class, and sex you would like to choose for your character. Female characters are always shorter than the male characters of the same race, by about 10-20%, depending on the race. Taurens are the tallest race, and Gnomes are the shortest. While I never saw the two next to each other, judging by the other stuff around them I'd have to say that a Gnome female would probably stand roughly as tall as a Tauren male's kneecap.

The only thing in the game uglier than a Tauren female is a Troll female. Please don't ask me to elaborate - I'm already anticipating nightmares about them tonight. Suffice it to say I don't expect to see many female Troll characters running around in-game.

The most surprising sex difference was for the dwarves: while dwarven males look like hung-over, half-dead coke-fiends (BURNING red eyes and fierce scowls), dwarven females are actually quite cute. And while I didn't cycle through all the options, they didn't seem to have facial hair (thank goodness). Oh, and the Gnome girlyies are cute as a bug's ear.

After you pick your race, sex, and class, you can then customize features like your face, hair color, hair style, and skin color. There are about 4-5 choices per feature for customization, although I fully expect that number to rise markedly before release. (Another nice feature: rather than having "the starting setup" from which you can customize, Blizzard automatically randomizes all these characteristics every time you create a character. As a result, don't expect to see a zillion "default dwarves" running around.)

At this point, you select your name, hit the create button, and a cutaway scene starts: every race has its own cutaway scene (or will; as of now, only the Undead have theirs in game). The Undead cut scene lasted about 2ish minutes, and gives useful back story information about the race. Right now, you do not commit your account to just one faction when you create your first character (i.e., you can have Horde and Alliance characters on the same server and on the same account); whether that will remain true at release I do not know (although I doubt it for PvP balance reasons). The cut scene uses the game engine, and the camera moves, eventually stopping focused on your brand new character - it is a seamless transition into the game, and very snazzy. (Side note: these are not the only cut scenes in the game; there are already several others. As of now, most cut scenes revolve around either epic quests or epic dungeons; i.e., when you finish a stage of your epic quest, you could get a cut scene advancing the

story. Similarly, when you first enter a particularly spectacular and important dungeon, you could get a cut scene telling some of the story of that dungeon. This would happen during the zone-in to the instanced area, so as not to affect gameplay for you or those around you.)

Did you notice that I did not mention your stat selection? There's a reason for that: upon character creation, you cannot alter your stats. That's right: EVERY character of a particular race/class combination will start out with IDENTICAL stats. I asked a dev about this and I was told (QUITE accurately, I might add): there was a common problem in a previous MMORPG (*cough*EQ*cough*); a true novice, creating their first character, could accidentally render that character forever gimped by putting points into the wrong stats. Given that at creation a player is LEAST likely to know what is best for their character, Blizzard prefers to save stat adjustment until later in the game, when the player has a better feel for how the character's development should be handled. Personally, I couldn't agree more, and I think Blizzard made an unusual but brilliant choice here.

Upon creation, my character started with literally two quest-giving NPCs IN SIGHT of me, their yellow exclamation points subtly beckoning me closer. Quests are a major part of WoW: one dev told me that his character has rarely been in a situation where he didn't have at least two active quests on his books, and that only because he hadn't ventured far enough beyond his current zone. Oh, and when I say active quests, I mean ACTIVE quests; the quests on his books were ones that he could advance and even complete at that moment, rather than 5 (or 20) levels from now. The quest structure is easy and convenient. A player can (and at times WILL) get 100% of their exp from completing quests. Another nice feature: you can select a quest to be your "active" quest at the moment; by doing so, you will get information onscreen about what you still need to do in order to complete that quest. Also, your mini-map will provide you with guidance for finishing your quest; if you are close to a necessary mob or an important NPC, a small arrow will appear on the mini-map pointing you in the right direction to go in order to help advance (or complete) your quest.

A character's combat damage rating will be determined by their primary skill, whatever that may be for the class. In other words, a stronger Warrior will hit harder, but a more AGILE Rogue will hit harder. Your accuracy in combat (to-hit rating) will be determined by your level, not your stats (although stats may modify this; I was unclear on this point).

Character advancement is expected to be quite smooth, with the leveling curve getting more severe at a fairly steady rate (no more "hell levels" or plateaus in your leveling ability; 31 will be somewhat harder than 30, and 32 will be somewhat harder than 31, etc). The details are still being tweaked, though,

as is the maximum level. (Yes, I asked point-blank; as of right now, the maximum level in game is not yet determined.) Hear ye, hear ye: ALL classes will be able to successfully SOLO all the way to MAX LEVEL if they so choose. However, not every creature will be killable by a solo character, and the best loot cannot be gotten by a soloing player. On that point, I was told that you should NOT need “zerg mobs” (hey, it’s their word, they can use it if they want) to take ANYTHING down. Specifically, I was told that while you might need 40 characters to drop a truly epic baddy, you will NOT need 80. Ever. The speed of leveling will be determined by the character’s play style (of course – again, Blizzard is not going to tell us how to play the game, and will make all paths viable and enjoyable), but they are looking to probably have the average gamer take at least a few months to reach max level, with power gamers doing so (significantly) faster and casual gamers doing so slower. Of course, even at max level Blizzard is hoping to have lots for the player to do, be it trade skills, PvP, exploration, loot gathering, guild diplomacy, etc.

Also, ALL classes will be useful in PvP, although their method of balancing PvP is yet to be determined (i.e., will they take a rock-paper-scissors approach of archer beats caster, caster beats tank, tank beats archer, or will they try to balance all classes against all others).

Section V: PvE and PvP

I wish I had enough information about PvP to justify giving it its own section; unfortunately, the devs are just now turning to PvP issues and as a result much about PvP is either unknown or unrevealed to the public at this time.

Enemies in WoW will NOT be cookie-cutter versions of one another. Already, there are in-game “tank mobs,” “archer mobs,” “caster mobs,” “priest mobs,” and “rogue mobs,” each with different abilities related to their category. For example, expect a tank mob to have huge hit points, incredible defensive skills, no ranged attack, and light damage-dishing capabilities. Expect casters to be nuclear bombs at range, but soft and squishy up close, with minimal melee ability, next to no armor, and very low hit points. Rogue mobs will be DANGEROUS: flimsy little wood-chippers capable of withstanding little in the way of attacks but capable of producing AMAZING damage. Archer mobs and priest mobs follow suit. Furthermore, the tactics that a particular mob will choose will depend on their foes, and will likely fight with strong AI. (Example: in game, there is a mob called a Night Saber. These are the big albino cats that the Night Elves favor. Well, if a Night Saber gets low on hit points, it will cast shadow meld on itself and go invisible!)

Grouping will be dynamic and useful. As of right now, a player’s buffs are limited only by stackability; e.g., a player can have any number of buffs on at a time, but only if those buffs can stack with one another. Two of the same buff, for instance, will not stack. One

character can only cast one buff on each PC, so there will be no such thing as a “useless” class to a group. (No longer will groups shun the second “buffer” from their ranks.)

On to the individual classes:

Rogue: the attack styles of a rogue fall into one of two categories – ones that build points (“opening moves”) and ones that use points (“closing moves”). As we have seen, when a rogue starts combat with an enemy, five small white circles form in a semi-circle along the right-hand side of the enemy’s image at the top of the screen. At first, they are all white; as a rogue uses openers, more of those white bubbles fill in with red. When all five bubbles have turned red, the rogue gains nothing more from opening moves. Every closing move will use ALL the red bubbles, and without any red bubbles, closing moves cannot be used. The more red bubbles consumed, the more effective the closing move will be (either it will do more damage, be more effective, or last longer). Every style a rogue uses, whether it is an opener or closer, will consume some endurance; without endurance, the rogue’s styles are unavailable.

Early on, rogues gain the ability to dual wield. While 1H weapons do roughly have the damage of a 2H weapon, there are times when two 1H weapons will be preferred and times when a single 2H weapon would outperform. Specifically, the rogue, by buying dual-wield related talents, can increase the effectiveness of his dual wield fighting, such as adding damage to every hit (doubled, since he attacks twice per round). This means that against a thinly-armored enemy like a pure caster, hunter, or fellow rogue, the rogue will dish out massive and steady damage. However, since tanks get damage reduction as a fixed number (NOT a percentage – every 5 points of AC decreases damage from EVERY hit by 1 point), a dual-wielding rogue will have a hard time dropping a well-armored tank. Rogues will also be able to create poisons, and will even be able to poison weapons for use by other characters or other classes. Once an item is poisoned, you do not need any poisoning ability to use the item effectively. Oh, and don’t worry – Rogues CANNOT steal from other players. While they CAN steal from mobs, they do so from a separate pool, so you never have to worry about a rogue stealing that fantastic item from the ubermob you are fighting.

Hunter: There are two separate categories of hunters – gun hunters and bow hunters. For instance, Night Elf Hunters will be bow hunters but Tauren Hunters will be gun hunters. The differences are just what their ranged weapon is; a Tauren Hunter will become as skillful with a gun as a Night Elf Hunter will become with a bow. However, since Tauren Hunters have guns as a talent but bows as a skill, they will never be as good with a bow as they are with a gun; the opposite is true of Night Elf Hunters. The Focus bar is the Hunter's meter for "ranged-weapon styles." While a Hunter is standing still, Focus gradually increases. The moment a Hunter moves, Focus drops to zero to prevent kiting. (Blizzard seems to be very anti-kiting; several other features to minimize kiting are in place as well.) With a full Focus bar, a Hunter will be capable of doing MONDO damage – as I was told, "if you blow an entire Focus bar, you just did a TON of styles." Therefore, the lack of kiting shouldn't be a major worry. Also, if all else fails, the Hunter can fall back on his pet and his weapons (dual wielded; I realize there are mixed messages about this, but a reliable dev gave me information suggesting Hunters get dual wield early on in the game and automatically, and as a Talent, not a Skill). As to pets, a Hunter can tame any beast of a low enough level. Beasts are a special flag that some but not all non-humanoid mobs have (sorry – no Dragon pets, you Hunters out there). Beast Tracking will be a Hunter talent that helps them find these beasts (they will show up on your mini-map). Also, Hunters have a Beastmaster mode they can enter that will render them neutral to all beasts, although they will therefore be unable to attack beasts while in this mode.

Warriors: Rogues get their bubbles and Hunters get their Focus, but Warriors get a Rage bar. Rage builds while the Warrior is in battle, depending on his stance. A defensive stance means the Warrior builds Rage for every point of damage he takes; an offensive stance means the Warrior builds Rage by DEALING damage; a berserker stance means the Warrior builds Rage by both dealing AND taking damage. The higher a Warrior's Rage, the more styles he can do. The dev I spoke to exclusively plays Warriors, and so gave me much information about them (but much less info about casters – sorry, folks). Warriors have a special ability called Kick which does what it sounds like, but the effect is simply to interrupt

casting (very nice for the Warrior).

Druids: shapeshifting gives a druid access to the abilities of the form they acquire. Examples include Panthers (a stealthy form with access to abilities called "rend" and "tear" - I didn't see them, but they sure sound nasty) and bears (heavy-hitting damage dealers). The purpose of shapeshifting is to enhance the melee ability of the druid.

Priests: will have access to the healing spells AND crowd control spells in the game; as such, I expect them to be extremely group-friendly folks. Dominate is a higher-level Priest spell that gives them total control over another humanoid creature (as of now NOT over a PC, but that may change) so long as they do not move. The domination lasts until the Priest dies, the mob dies, or the Priest breaks the spell.

Paladins: sound like something of a Priest/Warrior hybrid with a commensurate decrease in overall mastery to provide balance (as per usual). Expect to see Paladins wielding 2H hammers, since that is their primary Talent area - they don't seem to have much shield access, and while they can get sword skills, they have no sword talents.

I heard very little about Warlocks - sorry, folks. I did find out that Warlocks can summon Nightmares as their own personal steeds.

Same for Mages, although I did find out that high-level Mages will be able to teleport to and between towns pretty much at will.

After a fight, a player will regenerate both mana and health faster by sitting down or lying down (as of now, there is no difference between the two, although that may change later). Action is pretty fast and furious. All characters will be able to play the entire game and achieve max level without ever setting foot in a dungeon if they so choose, but in doing so they will never face the toughest monsters, nor will they ever find the best loot.

While dying should be avoided, the final consequences of death have yet to be determined. As of now, there is just a "death sickness" that wears off after awhile, but that WILL change, although we do not yet know how. It is still being actively discussed.

You've seen those item levels on gear, right? Such-and-such a sword is level 21 (min 18). What does it mean? I asked - it turns out that for a sword with that

description, the “target” level is 21; that means that the average 21st level character should be wielding an item of about level 21. However, an 18th level character who is lucky enough, rich enough, or twinked enough to get this weapon will be able to use it TO FULL EFFECT. That’s right: in the hands of an 18th level character, this weapon will function just as well as it would in the hands of a 21st level character. Of course, you could use it long past level 21, but to do so would gradually hamper your character’s abilities. Tank characters will be quite equipment-oriented (as per usual in MMORPGs); casters less so. Speaking of equipment, each character has 1 helm slot, 2 ring slots, 1 necklace slot, 1 bracer slot (they come as a pair), 1 boot slot, 1 glove slot, 1 belt slot, 1 cloak slot, 1 tabbard slot (not likely to be magical – just for guild symbol and decoration), and 2 “trinket” slots, in addition to a primary hand, off hand, and ranged weapon slot (all distinct, so no more switching out gear to change from bow to weaponry). Incidentally, guns are all “ranged” gear, so there cannot be 1H guns (similarly for bows, but you knew that already).

Of course, your character name will be unique, server-wide (one per server, not per faction). Last names are not yet implemented in game, so we do not yet know how that will be handled, although there WILL be last names available.

Equipment will be randomizable, much like it was in Diablo 2, where a specific drop could have random magical abilities. This allows for some INCREDIBLY rare items. These rare items might drop once out of every 10,000 kills of a particular level of mob, or even once out of every 100,000! While they are technically able to be replicated, the odds of doing so might be as low as one in a billion, so don’t hold your breath....

Oh, and don’t worry about “flavor of the month” classes. Blizzard is committed to keeping this game aimed at making classes FUN. They don’t want to have nerf-centric balancing, or buff-centric balancing; rather, if a class isn’t being played much, Blizzard will increase the “fun” factor of playing that class instead of buffing them up or gimping everybody else.

As I said, PvP information was of depressingly short supply, despite the fact that every 15 minutes someone would ask a poor dev about PvP. What I did glean from my time there was this:

- There will be no collision for players. As a result, I’m quite curious to see how they plan to let meat shields do their job, although the devs said they have some “good ideas” about this.
- Siege gear will be in the game for PvP, although it will not be a trade skill. It was unclear to me how, exactly, siege gear will be implemented.
- Blizzard is banking heavily on their RTS experience, and hoping to bring that experience to PvP (as well as every other aspect of this game).
- Uberguild dominance of PvP is not likely. The

devs have some ideas about this, too, including such things as limiting entry to PvP areas by level and skill (as determined by previous performance). Other ideas were not yet ready for discussion.

- Nothing in-game prevents one faction from invading the cities of another faction; whether this would lead to any lasting benefit for the faction remains to be seen.

Section VI: Economy

First, let me set the record straight: 100 coppers = 1 silver, and 100 silver = 1 gold. There is no currency beyond gold, nor are there plans to have any. Apparently, we won't need it; Blizzard plans to keep money tight.

Blizzard is always discussing the economy, but setting up a perfect economy is HARD. As one dev put it, "our real world economy is screwed up; how can you expect a game economy to be perfect?" The devs basically felt that money sinks of some kind were a necessary evil to the proper functioning of the economy and to prevent the massive twinkling and inflation that often destroys economies in games. Some money sinks in-game include taxi pads and trade skills, particularly consumables (which EVERY trade skill has). One of the ways they plan to control the economy is by always having something "fun" and "cool" that players can save up for. This is particularly true for guilds, although nothing specific was mentioned (the dev was purposefully vague on this point, admitting that this area is still under discussion).

As of now, there is an auction channel in the game. This will probably change from its current implementation, although what it will eventually evolve into will be decided during beta. If a channel is bothering you, though, you can always turn an entire channel off to avoid the spam.

Cooperation will be very important for trade skills, and since those trade skills will be very important for adventurers, we can expect to see a vibrant economy resulting from this.

For you loot hounds: yes, Virginia, there is a random number generator available to players for loot rolls.

As long as we're talking about the economy, let's talk storage. Every player starts the game with five bag slots. Since there is no encumbrance in the game, your carrying capacity is limited only by the size of your bags. You can find or buy new and larger bags to fill those slots of yours, and yes, there are some very rare and VERY massive bags in the game. Similarly, your bank starts with a limited number of bag slots (somewhere between 3 and 5; people were hazy on the specifics). You can upgrade these with new and bigger bags just as you can your inventory bags. To access your bank account, you must travel to a MAJOR city; the small towns will not have banks.

However, whichever major city you find yourself in, you will have access to all the equipment you have stored in your bank (this is the same as all the other MMORPGs that I've played). One new and delightful feature: while your character can never have more than 5 bags, your bank CAN. Specifically, by paying a one-time fee (no maintenance cost) you can upgrade the size of your bank vault to provide more bag slots. The maximum is fairly large (something like 20), but the more bag slots your bank vault has, the more expensive the next slot becomes. Thus, buying your 6th bag slot for your bank might be relatively affordable, but buying your 20th may very well be crushingly expensive.

For those of you who are worried about the fact that you can only bank in major cities, fret not: according to Blizzard, you will be spending a great deal of time in the major cities. Trips to the city will be frequent for things like new equipment, replenishing supplies, training, trading, etc. Also, unlike other MMORPGs, returning to the city will be EASY and FAST, especially at higher levels. Plus, since there won't be any "camping" needed, or any seven-hour dungeon-breaks to worry about, pausing the action to head to town won't be traumatic for the team. Expect a trip to the bank to take a high level character about 2 minutes or so - yeah, it's that easy.

Expanding on the subject of bags, there will be some stackable items; specifically, consumables. As of now, potions stack (depending on the type; some stack to 5, others to 10, and some even to 20), food stacks (up to groups of 20), and beverages stack (also up to 20). I saw some loots stacking, but those might have been in one of the aforementioned categories.

Section VII: Guilds

As of now, guild information is a bit sparse. However, here's what I've got so far. As of now, they have not yet implemented the guild interface. However, eventually you will approach an NPC who will give you some sort of sign-up sheet. You then circulate that like a petition to the potential members of your guild. They take the sheet, click an "accept" button, and give it back. After you get the requisite number of guildmates (expect this number to be about 10), you return it to the NPC and voila: your guild is formed. (Nice feature: no longer do you all have to gather together at once just to form your guild.)

The guild structure will be similar to guilds in EQ, with a loose hierarchy of control, often determined internally. Inter-guild alliances have been discussed but are not yet finalized. I was surprised to discover that Blizzard has considered having a MAXIMUM number of members for a guild! While this is far from certain, Blizzard wants to avoid the superguilds that can devour entire servers. Of course, the definition of "too large" has yet to be determined.

Customizing your guild's look is done through tabards (basically, these are loincloths). The tabard has your

guild symbol on it. While symbols are not uploadable (due to the crushing burden that places on the customer representatives in verifying that the images are acceptable), they are heavily customizable: as of now, there are two colors per tabard (with 20 choices per color, with a different set of 20 for foreground color and background color), one symbol per tabard (from 40 choices), and one border per tabard (from 20 choices), giving a dizzying array of choices for the guilds. I did not determine whether tabard choices would be unique or not, but I assume they will be, since they are meant to distinguish the guild's members from the assorted hoi polloi.

There will, of course, be a guild chat channel - as one dev put it, "that's one of the main reasons to form a guild in the first place." Gathering together your guildmates should not be difficult, especially if they aren't TOO scattered or if they are of a reasonably high level.

Worries about guild dominance of a server are unfounded. The best mobs are in instanced areas of a dungeon; if an uberguild is raiding the ubermobs, your group can do it, too, with no interference. The same is true of major quest mobs - they all appear in instanced areas of the world.

Section VIII: Appearance.

The details in this game are already unbelievable. Just breath-taking. Examples:

- Characters blink.
- Facial expressions adjust during emotes.
- When a character moves, he leaves footprints that linger for a noticeable amount of time. (No footprints when you are invisible, though.)
- In cold country, you can see your character's breath - little puffs of white came from my Gnome's lips every few seconds.
- Movements are absolutely fluid and natural-looking, from fighting to running to emoting to standing still (and fidgeting).
- Natural and artificial fires will burn a character, causing damage.
- Music was developed in-house with areas in mind. The designers led the composers through the game, saying "OK, here it should sound ominous. Here, make it sound tense. Here, things get safer. Danger over here. Etc." The music is wonderfully mood-enhancing, but subtle enough not to even be noticed most of the time. Of course, there is situational music (i.e., battle songs) as well as regional music. (Side note: as of now, there is no in-game MP3 player, but that is being discussed, and may be implemented after the game goes live. Even without it, you can always run one in the background, since the game can be played in a window.)

The entire world was created by HAND: there was no automation whatsoever in the process. As a result,

every tree is slightly different, every hill nuanced, every road and mountain and shrub subtly changed from the others around it. Of course, everything FEELS like the Warcraft world, with its cartoonishness and artistic beauty.

As to lighting, the game is well lit, and you will never need artificial lighting. However, if you WANT it, you can always buy a (permanent) torch and wear it (unfortunately, it goes in your primary hand slot, so you can either wield a torch or a weapon). Torchlight flickers realistically and casts shadows.

Section IX: Travel and Communication

The world is big - really big. According to one dev, it takes one hour and forty-five minutes to travel from one extreme tip of a continent to the far other tip, using roads and going by foot. Your first trip to ANY destination will be by foot - until you visit a travel nexus (a.k.a. "taxi port"), you will not have access to traveling there via the faster methods, so you will NEED to explore the old-fashioned way to begin. Later on, travel will get MARKEDLY faster for a character, what with steeds, magic, taxis, boats, and other travel options. (Interesting example: there is a train that runs from Ironforge to Stormwind.) At maximum level, that hour-and-forty-five-minute trip will be MUCH faster - even instantaneous for some classes (mages, for example, can teleport to cities and then between them). Early on, you will find yourself limited in your travel range, mostly by the dangers of long-distance travel and how unsafe the world is. This won't be disastrous, though; starting areas are RIFE with content, not to mention well-populated. Also, some races start quite close to one another (e.g., Dwarves and Gnomes, or Taurens and Orcs), so you'll even have interracial grouping possibilities right from the get-go. According to one dev, after about the 10th level it should be fairly easy to move around the world and gather with your friends.

Getting lost will be well-nigh impossible. The mini map can will always have pointers indicating interesting destinations, like local dungeons or cities. Furthermore, there is a built-in world map that shows you where you are relative to the globe, and the world map can be zoomed for more detail on a zone-by-zone basis. (As of now, there is talk of enhancing this feature with the Cartography skill, but how that would work has yet to be determined. For now, there is no "fog of war" or "unlocking" to be done on the global map, though that may change in the future.) Also, all of your current group members show up on your mini-map, so there won't be any more 20-minute sessions of trying to find the guy who went LD while you were running from hither to thither. Basically, unless you are VERY deep in a dungeon, you shouldn't have to worry about getting lost, and even THERE, Blizzard is working to make it easier to find your way.

When your friends log in, you will instantly be alerted to their presence; similarly when they log out. Both the Friends list and the Ignore list are long enough to

be non-binding. (I asked one dev which of his was more full and he didn't even hesitate when he said "Ignore." I thought he was kidding, but he insisted he was being serious; apparently, Blizzard's in-house crew has quite a few Chatty Cathy's in the mix whose mouths runneth over.)

Section X: Beta.

Unfortunately, I have little to say about this, since information is (understandably) hard to come by. I DID find out one thing: they WILL miss their Q4 goal. The dev who told me this seemed surprised to find out that this was not common knowledge, and other devs told me that there was still no word as to whether or not they would make Q4, but we have all pretty much come to the conclusion that Q4 isn't realistic anymore, and the dev who said they would miss the deadline was quite reliable. Besides, it sounds like they won't miss it by MUCH.

When the beta goes live, here are some things to expect:

1. Hefty community interaction. Blizzard sees no reason to start a beta and NOT rely on tester feedback. Expect some sort of "team leader" style channeling of information, although how exactly they gather info from testers is still open for discussion. Ultimately, though, Blizzard IS interested in finding out what its testers think.
2. Right from the start, Blizzard wants the beta server to be "populated." There was discussion of throwing in 500 testers (ARBITRARY number) right off the bat to stress-test the n00b zones, so expect the initial invite to be sizeable, though not infinite.
3. "When the server can handle 500, we'll throw 1000 at it. When that works, we'll move to 5000. No timeline." In other words, beta will grow as fast as possible, but not at any artificial pace. How quickly new players are added will be determined organically, based on what works and what doesn't. (Again, all numbers in the beta section are arbitrary.)

Section XI: Miscellany.

Well, I've included almost everything from the thirteen pages of notes I took at Gen Con, but there were a few miscellaneous tidbits that didn't fit anywhere else. Here they are, in absolutely no order:

- As of now, there is no falling damage in game. However, that will change - mountains are obstacles, and should be treated as such. What the falling penalty will be is not yet determined, though; the devs are unsure whether they want falls to be potentially lethal or not.
- Scrolls come in two types: casting scrolls and learning scrolls. Both are one-shot deals, but whereas a learning scroll permanently adds a new spell to a caster's spellbook, casting scrolls can be read by many (for some scrolls, ALL)

- classes for a one-time effect.
- Scrolls grant new spells and are acquired either as loot drops or from trainers (at a price).
- As of now, there are no mini-games implemented, though the devs want to include them, even if they don't make release. Two Orcs may very well unwind from a long day's bloodletting over a relaxing game of Mah Jongg....
- Ammunition, arrows, guns, and bows all have quality markers. You can use outstanding ammunition in a shoddy gun, or shoddy ammunition in an outstanding gun. Same for bows and arrows.
- Rituals require more than one character; the largest ritual is yet to be determined, but the devs are bantering around the number "20" as of now. These rituals will be cast in sequence, with the first character casting the first part, the second casting the second part, and so on until the ritual is done. Some rituals may need all characters to be of a single class, while others may not. As of now, only warlocks have rituals, but that could easily change in the future - potentially, there might be some wartime ritual that requires 20 Warriors to perform.
- While some attacks are positional (i.e., "backstab"), there is no positional bonus; i.e., you gain no extra to-hit bonus or damage bonus just by standing behind a mob, as opposed to in front of it.

Whew! That's all. I started this project 14 hours ago, and this post is the culmination of my time. I certainly hope you found it useful.

Fantastic TehSug, thanks.

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Anything to add? Have we missed something? [Let us know.](#)



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