

WoW Archivist: Patch 1.12, Drums Of War

I'm not ashamed to admit when I've made a mistake. Which is good, because today's Archivist would be awkward otherwise. Last week's classic WoW recap was a smidge premature. I haven't covered patch 1.12 yet. Why? Because I thought patch 1.12 was patch 2.0. Patch 2.0 would go with the Burning Crusade-era patches. Patch 1.12 isn't patch 2.0, however, so we're mired in classic WoW for one more week.

Patch 1.12, Drums of War, released in August of 2006. It contained the feature that has set the standard for all group content in World of Warcraft: cross-realm Battlegrounds. In addition to cross-realm Battlegrounds, patch 1.12 also included sanctioned world PVP (which didn't work) and a number of UI improvements that you probably take for granted all these years later.

Let's dive in, shall we?

Cross-realm Battlegrounds

I remember the good ol' days when there were no cross-realm Battlegrounds. You played exclusively with the players on your server. You forged friendships. You forged rivalries. The strong PVPers were well known, and they were feared. It wasn't just gear and honor points that drove you to PVP. You knew your enemy and you wanted to kill them right in the face.

Oh, and it took over 12 hours to get an Alterac Valley to pop because there weren't enough people queueing up on one server to fill it. The smaller Battlegrounds such as Warsong Gulch could take multiple hours to get started, too. We all lament the loss of community that occurred when the game switched over to cross-realm Battlegrounds, but let's not kid ourselves -- it was necessary. You can log in and queue up for a Battleground whenever you want and actually get into one because of this change. Prior to it, you most likely wasted your entire play period waiting in a queue. Serverlist101 Alternatively, you logged onto an alt on the other faction to make a ruckus in trade chat trying to encourage the other guys to queue up and shorten the wait.

Cross-realm Battlegrounds, the ability to pull players from an entire battleground rather than just one server, were an immense boon to that area of the game. PVE players immediately began asking for it for 5-man dungeons. A person who wasn't in a large, cooperative guild often had a very difficult time putting together a dungeon group, too. Some players argued against it, citing that loss of community cross-realm Battlegrounds caused. Even Blizzard often waffled on the topic. It took the developers over three years to implement the Dungeon Finder (patch 3.3, December 2009) and offer that cross-realm functionality.

Of course, then we all wanted this functionality for raids. Once again, there was the same resistance to the idea, both from the players and the developers. Now, at the tail end of 2011, we've learned that we will soon be receiving the cross-realm Raid Finder tool.

Cross-realm Battlegrounds showed plainly that the more players you have to pull from, the better. The benefits of being able to go out there and see content far outweighs the drawbacks of artificially limiting the population. When there are millions of players in a given region, the idea that you can't run a Battleground, dungeon, or raid because there aren't enough people to do it with is pure, simple madness. If you have the population, build the tools that allows them to play together.

To reiterate: It took five years to transition from cross-realm Battlegrounds to cross-realm dungeons and into cross-realm raids. Crazy.

World PVP objectives

Patch 1.12 implemented world PVP objectives in Silithus and the Eastern Plaguelands. In classic WoW, the endless battle between Tarren Mill and Southshore was easily one of the most popular player activities between dungeons and Battlegrounds. Don't stand around in Ironforge or /Orgrimmar; go kill the other guys in Hillsbrad! The problem with that is ... Blizzard doesn't particularly like it when players PVP inside of cities and quest hubs. Blizzard wants you to take it outside. Especially when the PVP is as disruptive to regular play as the War for Hillsbrad had been. It discouraged that war as much as possible, then attempted to provide alternatives.

Silithus The goal in Silithus was to gather silithyst, a red crystalline dust that both factions wanted for research purposes. You would find silithyst laying in the desert, pick it up, and try to return it to your faction's home base to turn it in. Players would fight over the silithyst, killing each other's silithyst carriers, and so on. Whichever faction had the most of it would win.

Eastern Plaguelands The Horde and the Alliance was locked in a land war in the Eastern Plaguelands based around a series of towers. Each faction needed to cap the control points to gain control of the zone.

First, basing a PVP objective around collecting buckets of sand is just absurd. Yeah, it's a nod to Dune, I get it, but making players actually fight over sand is a lot less engaging than the pop culture reference suggests. We have no context, no drive, no Azerothian story or plot. I freaking love Narnia, but I'm not terribly interested in PVPing over the fate of a closet.

Second, we already had PVP options that use these same mechanics. If I wanted to play capture the flag, I would queue up for Warsong Gulch. If I wanted to cap towers or control points, I would queue for Arathi Basin or even Alterac Valley. Battlegrounds provided the same experience these world PVP objectives did, except they were stronger offerings with better rewards. These objectives had no draw whatsoever.

Blizzard tried to push onwards with these PVP objectives in The Burning Crusade, but those weren't very popular, either.

What made Hillsbrad so enjoyable that these objectives lacked? I don't know. All I can give you is my theory: Sometimes you just want to murder the crap out of someone's video game character and not think much about it. You don't want to run flags. You don't want to defend a tower. You just want to faceroll across your buttons until something (or someone) dies. Blizzard has always been against creating a massive deathmatch Battleground with no objective other than to kill the other guys, so we created our own battlefield for that purpose. Blizzard squashed it.

Can there be another Hillsbrad one day? Sure. Plop down two cities on opposite ends of a great, bloody plain. No vehicles, no bombing runs, no elite guards one-shotting everybody. Offer a basic participation reward that gives players an incentive to do it to match the current Warcraft modus operandi of incentives for doing anything and everything. Sit back and watch the blood flow.

Don't underestimate the draw of the deathmatch.

Floating combat text

There isn't a lot to say about the addition of floating combat text to the base UI, certainly not as much as I've said about PVP this week, but I wanted to call attention to it regardless. It's another example of a UI element we now consider a base, essential part of the game that simply wasn't there in WoW's early lifetime. User-created UI modifications popularized the concept and showed the developers how essential it was to include the feature in core offerings. So they added it.

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