

Dark souls 3 and blood borne have something special to them and it's their world design. Never before have I stepped into two games with worlds that felt as consistent, beautiful and practical. MMOs of all genres have had issues achieving this, a strange thing to occur knowing that these games also have some of the largest worlds in gaming; world of Warcraft stands out as the largest of these games. World of Warcraft has a set of issues that all can make the world feel disorganized, ugly and just uninteresting to explore through. The colour pallet and asset use are the most immediately recognizable aspects of wow's bad world design to any player regardless of how much experience they have. The way the world can go from being a lush green plain to a desert and then to a frosted winter-wonderland in a couple of minutes worth of walking in game is both hilarious and a reality for many players even in the newest expansions. Similarly the games ambient lights and sky colours aren't directly linked, wow doesn't have an organic day and night cycle every region Azeroth adheres to, what could be bright clear-sky day in a place like Stormwind could be a dark and gloomy night just a few zones down. This same disconnect between the environment and what's in it is also occurs in the games quest design and enemy placements; the vast majority of wow's quest barely require the player to move a significant distance - unlike smaller games like RuneScape 2 - and the way enemies are placed discourages exploration among players. Mounts also destroy any sense of exploration players can have despite their function because they make it too easy to get around in most locations in wow. So much content in game can be skipped easily with a flying/land-based mount and the worst part of it is that those mounts are easy to get and abundant for most players. The safety mounts offer to the player also exemplifies the games auto regeneration problem. Unlike in most other games, world of Warcraft allows the player to endlessly regenerate health in the over-world which means the player is never put into a position where they have to find somewhere to stop, rest and find healing items at to survive and continue playing. This is terrible and only buries the mentality among most players that they can simply play and ignore the games content whenever they feel like it, and not deal with the consequences of their actions in-game at any time, since all they have to do is briefly move away from their enemy or call a mount in to ride away to the next quest. For a lot of players like myself hoping for a meaningful experience this problem with a major component of wow's design can become unbearable and make the game feel boring. What's worse, the games over-world locations are never designed to accommodate for smaller player sizes. Many locations in wow function as "trough levels", zones with large open areas and densely packed enemies meant to be played by a group of people all the time without consideration for the idea that maybe only one or a few will play through these zones at any given time. What happens is that these areas often lack the kinds of hidden paths, encounters, hidden loot, lore and more you would find in plenty of single player titles, especially dark souls 3 and blood borne. Ironically, with this the games map can feel weirdly empty, despite how considerably huge it really is with all of its content.

Content, content... World of Warcraft's content, visually is chaotic. As mentioned before, the colour pallet of the game is constantly changing to a cartoonish degree and the models look as distinctly fictional. There's a set of reasons for this, world of Warcraft from a writers perspective is thought of as a world despite the fact that lore-wise and in-game it's closer to the size of a continent like tamriel. Furthermore the art direction of world of Warcraft isn't structured around a single theme. Much of the games aesthetics are built around Tolkien's work and a lesser known ip "the lost Vikings" - for now its abbreviated as TLV. What's wrong is how much material is designed around it. TLV is responsible for most of the games weird body proportions and character models. If you've played Warcraft you'll know what I'm referring to: the shoulder-plates that make most armour sets look like football gear, the weird body proportions for nearly every race, especially males; the impractically huge weapons that

lore-wise are considered commonly used among the major factions. It all came from this, and it just makes the games aesthetics work horribly with the mood at several important moments in its overarching stories unless the developers go out of their way to hide this(see Arthus). Despite this LOTR is less of a problem as a reference material, but not less of a problem with how wow is visually designed. Earlier I mentioned wows art team don't operate off a single theme, this is still true and what's worse is that when content from LOTR is used to model aspects of wow, instead of one component being used to model a group of things of wow, several are used to model independent sets of wow instead. What happens is the constant shifting in art design and colour, the multiple races that don't look as if they inhabit the same continents much less the same planet or game at times if we're being completely honest. What world of warcrafts environments need is cohesion, they need one set theme to define every other ones. There should be a defined colour pallet that connects all the other, one defined set of assets that build up most of the world, one set of attributes all races of wow share that makes them easy to differentiate but reasonable to assume their placement and role in the bigger story. A personal suggestion would be to model most of wow after the original locations of stormwind in the first Warcraft titles. A large open world primarily consisting of grasslands, chaparrals and plains with simple but medieval style infrastructure for most towns on any faction and coniferous trees as far as the eyes could see. This would remove most of the visual problems within wows zones: it would make transitioning between areas feel a lot more natural, clarify differences between zones far more subtlety, and make Azeroth a much more visually consistent place. The best part is that none of this would even be out of place as this is based on what was already imagined for the game in both the lore and the games it was based on.

Speaking of lore, mounts are often something that lore wise definitely do feel arbitrary. Many of wows mounts have designs and functions that feel completely out of place in the games setting, either because they feature organisms and machines not naturally found within the territory of a given zone, or because they don't fit anywhere in the in game lore as mounts, sometimes even as creatures. Painted armors, TLV influenced creature models, and mounts that aren't ingame mobs or creatures used by NPCs all are common traits with them. This shouldn't happen, mounts should be exclusively based off ingame mobs and creatures already used as transport by NPCs to avoid sticking out, they should feel like natural inclusions to the game world. Mount gear also should serve communicate practicality in its design, overly extravagant gear, glistening with jewelry and trophies only looks ridiculous to any player not involved in a transmog contest. Mounts also have issues with their traversal capabilities, many of them make it too easy to get around and skip content. Flying mounts are the worst offenders, they shouldn't have ever been included in world of Warcraft at all and should provide the player with restricted mobility in dragon flight so players don't lose reasons to play through the game. For the rest, they should be designed in a way so that they only offer faster alternatives to fast travelling via in-game with designated paths and hubs where they can be summoned; hubs where mounts can be bought, sold, and summoned should be only unlocked to the player once they've discovered that hub to begin with. Furthermore a universal sprinting option should be given to all races, this would make travelling on foot less tedious for the average player and give them more incentives to explore through larger areas without constantly relying on mounts to get between zones. What's important to recognize that in reducing the struggle of traversal, wows mounts have made it harder for the average player to acknowledge the real size of the world they're in or be willing to fully explore most of what it has to offer. By reducing the influence mounts have travel and empowering the player, players gain incentives to play through more of the games content: auto-regeneration counters this.

Auto-regeneration in wow refers to the tendency of the players health, and mana to automatically regenerate out of combat, and its effects have discouraged exploration and changes in tone of the gameplay during free roam sessions among players. No sense of urgency to find a place to stop and rest is communicated to the player when every interaction they have with the enemies always ends with the player back at full health. Worse, this makes taking the time to find and gather the resources required for potions, buffs and medicines irrelevant to the exploration experience encouraging players to simply skip content and rush towards any rewards in it. When combined with the reality that sitting speeds up the process, an action that directly takes the player out of gameplay it can make the game feel unimaginably slow and uncoordinated. This type of mentality also changes how players feel about pvp and generic mobs. Players are inclined to take on as many enemies as possible wherever they're because there's no penalty for stepping into combat unprepared. This effect is made worse with how easy it is to maintain mana levels - personally I think this is a horrible feature of rpg games and should be replaced with scrolls and consumables like in dark souls 2 for the sake of balance - that also regenerate with time, and most spells require little of it. Thus the pacing of traversal and combat is always inconsistent and anything slowing it down always makes the experience less fun for the player. This mechanic needs to be removed from the base game, it's just not fun to play with and it's only tolerated by veterans that already optimise the fun out of several more components of wow for their own reasons; auto regeneration pushes an impatient play style for players.

Trough areas also push impatience among players, not alone, but in groups. Many of world of warcrafts locations are unusually huge given the actual player count of any zone at any time. Often only 1-3 people are ever in the same space, far lower than the 5-12 players these places could handle on average. Often, many of these locations have an enemy to player ratio of 16+ for a single area, most of these enemies placed in near proximity to each other with cartoonishly low aggro distances. That's a lot, often these enemies aren't necessarily weak thus many locations have a terrible sense of pacing and enemy spawns often feel random and inappropriately placed. Worse, trough areas can emerge in places where they absolutely have no sensible reason too, this would include small dungeons, caves, or any other subterranean/indoor setting where most areas in the real world couldn't realistically handle more than a few people at most at any time . These places are also typically reused for multiple quests, thus ruin any sense of progression tied to the players location at any given time throughout gameplay; what's important to takeaway from traversal tied progression is that it can establish a clear sense of purpose to each set in a game world, open world or linear games need this basic aspect of world design to justify the space used in them and make them feel finished. Wow rarely has these places and often relies less on revamping the zones it does have to include areas for where quests can happen but rather teleport the player into instances single player sequences where a quest is meant to be filled, often in the exact same location as the zone they're in. Bad design is marked all over here and it alienates players from each other, it alienates the player from the active game world they're supposedly a part of, it ruins any sense of purpose to the original zone as a part of the game world and damages pacing because of the sudden breaks in the game world and *quest worlds*. An easy fix is a simple one, do what RuneScape 2 does and create specialised areas for quests meant to be done solo or in small groups that don't naturally exist in the game world and can't be accessed all the time. It would allow the overworld to have a clear sense of direction in terms of where the players are supposed to explore, and prevent them from ending up in places that lack an immediate purpose. It would also help reduce the map size which could help with performance on higher graphical settings.

What wows base world needs is a revamp. Dragon flight and shadowlands have addressed some of the issues with the way retail wows world design is structured, but the way the base overworld, the

land every player will see and regularly interact with, must adhere to these changes and many more as well listed before. Features like mounts, regeneration of hp, mana and other essential resources, discourage exploration and playing through content; design models like *quest zones* and *trough areas* ruin the games sense of pacing and encourage impatience when traversing the world and its content; the elements of the sets of biomes, buildings, foliage, and armours all counter each other's visual appeal due to the lack of consistency they bring to the worlds aesthetics when they're all in the same place. A revamp of the overworld inspired by the visual design decisions of dragon flight, and the consistency and pragmatism shared by the original Warcraft trilogy and RuneScape 2 would create an aesthetically pleasing and far more interesting place to explore for players of all levels; even if the depth of the design of each zone is superficial it would still be a massive improvement over what wow currently has.