World of Warcraft: What Makes a Good Quest?

A look into the factors that contribute to a quests popularity in World of Warcraft

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Introduction

One of the more noteworthy aspects of World of Warcraft is its questing system. There are thousands of quests in which players can engage with while adventuring in Azeroth. The large yellow exclamation mark lingering above a NPC's (non-player character) head has become a common spectacle and something that all World of Warcraft players recognize and have come to appreciate. Quests are an important essence to World of Warcraft because they give players the opportunity to gain special rewards, experience points, and play through exclusive content. Each quest is a different adventure. When prompting a quest, a small rustic piece of parchment with text appears, introducing a quest line (a small storyline). Upon completion of a quest, the player is presented a list of rewards to choose from as compensation. Also, a player is given additional XP (experience points) or Rep Points (points that increase a player's reputation with a certain faction).

Why are quests important to World of Warcraft? Quests allow for players to engage in small storylines. These storylines make the players experience with the game much more individualistic. It is individualistic because their character is viewed as a Hero. Video game scholars believe that Quests allow for the character to follow a path similar to Joseph Campbell's format of the Hero's Journey (Krzywinska, 2006, p.386). In the Hero's Journey, there is a beginning or a "Call to Adventure" (Campbell, 2008). Quests in World of Warcraft serve as this call.

Quests are beneficial to the experience a player with the game. Psychologically, the completion of a quest provides a sense of accomplishment to the player. In studies on player motivation, (Yee, 2006, p.5) describes "The Achievement Component" and divides it into three sub components:

Advancement: The desire to gain power, progress rapidly, and accumulate in-game symbols of wealth or status.

Mechanics: Having an interest in analyzing the underlying rules and system in order to optimize character performance.

Competition: The desire to challenge and compete with others.

(Yee, 2006, p. 5)

The Achievement Component that Yee describes provides an individual progression for players, which keeps them coming back for more.

A study conducted by Tychsen et al. (2008) looked into factors of player motivation in Role-Playing games. In their findings, they discovered that Discovery and Immersion within a game is a significant factor. Discovery and Immersion emphasize both exploring a games unique world and starting new quests or adventures.

Another relevant perspective to this idea comes from research done by Landwehr et al. (2009)

As players explore the plot points contained in different quests, they come to new conclusions about the cultures, story, and world created by the game's developers (Landewehr et al.,2009, p.2)

By completing quests, players also become immersed and get more familiar with the game's dynamics, history and lore.

Within World of Warcraft, there are several basic types of quests with unique objectives in which a player can engage in:

Gather a number of items and return them to the quest giver or some other NPC.

Kill a number of creatures and return to the quest giver or another NPC.

Deliver an item (usually a letter or a package) or some items from the quest giver to another NPC.

Escort an NPC from one place to another, usually through a dangerous area.

Find and speak to an NPC, which usually leads to a subsequent quest. When such quests are designed to have the sole purpose of leading a player from one zone to another, they are known as Bread Crumb Quests.

Explore a particular region or area and return to the quest giver or other NPC.

A goal of my research is to determine which of these types of quest are most popular and also which types of these quests are least popular and why. While researching this topic, I will also gather consensus from players in the World of Warcraft community to make a list of the most popular quests in the game and analyze the factors that contribute to making them the most popular.

Research Method

To explore the factors that contribute to a great quest and hopefully determine whether there is a recipe for success when constructing a quest, I approached this topic through multiple parts. The first part consisted of gathering data from the Blizzard Online Forums. I did this to

accomplish three goals. The first goal was to try and determine a type of quest favored by players. The second goal was to try and determine a *least* favorite type of quest for players. The third goal was to try and gather a list of some of the most popular quests in World of Warcraft. The third goal proved most difficult because currently, there are 12,377 quests in the game (Wowhead) which consist of. Because of this, I had to set specific parameters when collecting the data. These parameters and the method for discovering the most popular quests will be expressed in further detail later on.

To collect the first two types of data, I used a list of predetermined keywords to search through the forums. These keywords pertained directly to my research question. When a term was searched, I recorded the amount of forum posts that were remotely related to the keyword. I then went through each thread individually. I looked for threads that seemed to have the most relevance to my research. It was deemed relevant if the title contained one to three words that were included in the keyword. Due to time restraints of research, only the first 10 pages of thread results were searched through for relevant threads.

Keyword	Favorite Quests	Quests	Best Quests	Popular Quests	Unique Quests	Best Quest Lines	Best Quest Rewards	Favorite Type of Quests	Least Favorite Quests	Fun Quests
Threads Yielded	4,001	250,289	14,823	1,264	3,621	1,013	1,917	293	794	26,475
Useful Threads	5	0	2	0	2	2	1	6	5	1

Figure 1. Keywords used and the results they produced

After discovering relevant threads, I individually looked through each post. When looking through the posts for information, I was specifically looking for that would be useful and could be coded. To fit this requirement, it needed to contain either the exact type of quest that the

player either favored or disliked or a description of what was done in the quest. If a thread contained one or more useful posts, I logged a success rate for that keyword. If a post contained only a description and no exact quest title, I relied on Wowhead (a website that has a quest database including details for every quest in World of Warcraft), to find the quest referenced.

Once I had useable information, I organized the data from the post by logging the character's name, level, class, faction, favorite/least favorite type of quest, a reason (if given), and the date of the post. These pieces of information were important to my research because they provided potential for research gaps or future research opportunities. An example of one of these potential gaps is to see if player's quest preferences changed over time (as Blizzard releases new content over time).

For the third goal of my research topic, which was attempting to gather a list of the *most* popular quests in the game, my coding method went into a little more depth. I found threads in the forums the same way as I did for the first two goals. The information I collected to code was different and required a lot more detail. This was because when asked what their favorite quest was, players responded with either a large list (four or more) of their favorite quests, or quests that were outliers in data (random quests that were only favored by one person). To collect this data, I used posts that contained a list of three or less quests. I also used posts that had a description of the quest that was detailed enough to find an exact match on Wowhead. I qualified a description as detailed if it contained reference to a specific goal of the quest, name of an NPC in the quest, or the zone in which the quest was given. I was able to use Wowhead to fill in the missing pieces of information. The data I organized and coded included: Character Name, Level, Class, Faction, Favorite Quest/Quest Line, Reasoning (if given), Date Posted, and Zone where

the quest was given. After the data was collected, I then generated a list of the two most commonly referenced quests and looked into why they were so favored.

Results and Discussion

After reviewing the organized and coded data, I was able to determine the most popular type of quest, the least most popular type of quest, and I was also able to generate a list of some of the most popular quests in World of Warcraft.

Least Favored Quest Types

When evaluating the least favored quest type, the list of useful responses determined that the two least popular types of quest were the Escort type and the Gather Type. The Escort type was disliked by 57% of the 120 useful posts and the Gather type was disliked by 33% of the 120 posts. The fact that the Escort type was least favored is not surprising because many players responded that this type had lots of down time and uninteresting parts to the quest. This is contributed to by the fact that in Escort quests, NPCs who are being escorted travel at a speed much slower than the speed of a player, thus taking more time while waiting to reach the destination. Gather quests were disliked because of the low drop rates associated with the necessary items needed to be collected.

Many players' posts expressed strong dislike for these two types of quest and gave further insight (sometimes humorous):

Posts Regarding Escort Quests

"I hate escort quests because of their awkward walking speed. It's faster than walking, and slower than running." – Karat, 90 Blood Elf Death Knight

'"Hurry, we need to escape/go here/get to the choppa! Time is CRITICAL!" NPC then proceeds at a leisurely stroll.'- Boomfizzle, 90 Goblin Warrior

Posts Regarding Gather Quests

"Collecting junk. I am not a freakin' errand boy! You want me to kill something? That I can do. You want me to bring you something of importance? Okay, sure if its important. You want me to collect carrots or turnips? GTFO." –Paladius 90 Blood Elf Paladin

Most Favored Quest Types

The most overall favorite quest type was much harder to determine because players were more vocal about their least favorite quest types. Ultimately, the most favored quest type was the Kill quest type. It was determined that this was the most favored type because they tend to yield the most excitement, greater quest rewards/experience points, and have the most interesting quest lines. This relates to Achievement Component from (Yee, 2006). A player experiences advancement because they will gain higher leveled gear and Experience Points from a Kill quest. (Yee, 2006) suggests that this type of advancement leads to feelings of competition amongst other players. The Kill quest type had no real competition and yielded a preference from 65% of forum posts.

Most Popular Quests

My method for determining the most popular quests produced a list of six quests that were mentioned at least five times each. Each occurrence of one of these quests was logged.

It was determined that The Day that Deathwing Came was perceived as one of the most popular quest lines in World of Warcraft. It is perceived as *one* of the most popular quests

because my method for coding could not have possibly determined the ultimate quest line preferred by all players.

Quest Line Title	Popularity (% of posts)	Quest Location (by Zone)
The Day that Deathwing Came	38%	Badlands
Harrison Jones and the Temple of Uldum	19%	Uldum
Gnomebliteration	16%	Uldum
In Service Of The Lich King	16%	Heart of Acherus
It's Goat Time, Baby	5.5%	Badlands
Blood Tinged Skies	5.5%	Eastern Plaguelands

Figure 2. Six determined popular quests

Breaking down the Quests

The Day that Deathwing Came, a level 47 quest, can be acquired in the Badlands and is given by the NPC Martek the Exiled. It is conceived as the most popular because of its humor. The quest entails several NPCs including Martek the Exiled, discussing rumors about when a Dragon Boss called Deathwing came to Azeroth and how he was dealt with. It is deemed humorous because part of the quest allows the player to see irrational and comical ways that Martek the Exiled combatted Deathwing. This includes the NPC punching Deathwing in the face. Ultimately, the quest is favored because of the interactions the player has with the NPC and his dialogue.

Harrison Jones and the Temple of Uldum is also humorous because the NPC Harrison Jones is an allusion to the motion picture Indiana Jones and the quest line closely resembles the plot of one of the movies.

Other factors that contributed to the six quests being popular included the role they play in World of Warcraft Lore, and the objectives of the quest (like punching goats off a mountain in It's Goat Time, Baby).

<u>Conclusion</u>

I set out to better understand the factors that contribute to what makes a good quest. In this process, I needed to determine what players' favorite and least favorite types of quests were. It was discovered that players would rather engage in a quest where the goal is to kill a boss or kill a certain number of enemy mobs. It was also discovered that the type of quest a player would *not* like to engage in involves escorting NPCs or gathering items. I was also able to generate an approximate list of some of the most popular quests in World of Warcraft. By doing so, the major factors that contribute to a quests popularity include humor, unique or special NPCs, quest lines that relate or advance the game's lore, and quests that have unique and fun objectives. These factors fall under the game mechanics aspect in the Achievement Component that (Yee, 2006) researched. Quests keep players engaged in the game because they enjoy progressing through fun quest lines. In the process, they improve their skills and gain levels. Quests also allow for players to be immersed in World of Warcraft like (Landewehr et al.,2009) concluded. This is because quests help players to explore the world and become more familiar with the game and game lore.

The questing system in World of Warcraft is an important aspect because it strengthens the connection between the player and the game. Quests resonate feelings of individualistic accomplishment and progression and keep players interested. This type of advancement is a way for any player to follow the Hero's Journey from (Campbell, 2008). This information could

prove useful to Blizzard because they could produce more popular quests and thus enhance a

player's journey in the game.

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