



• The common cold won't bring these tripods down.



• One of the most compelling new factions is the Consortium—suave, cutthroat “businessmen” of the spirit trade.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE BURNING CRUSADE

You can't go home again

PUBLISHER: **Blizzard Entertainment** DEVELOPER: **Blizzard Entertainment** GENRE: **MMORPG** AVAILABILITY: **Retail, Download (www.worldofwarcraft.com)** ESRB RATING: **Teen**
MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: **800MHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 10GB hard drive space, World of WarCraft MULTIPLAYER: Massive-scale VERSION REVIEWED: Retail v2.0.6**



REVIEW



Most games are static; MMOs are epochal. The *World* I once knew—the *World* that set a million lives on the road to ruin in November of 2004—died sometime around April of 2005. A sea change swallowed up the golden !s and ?s, replacing them with Scholomance pick-up groups, Emperor runs, and icy phrases like “my six-item tier zero set bonus.” That second game died several months later, supplanted by one of resistance-gear farming and strenuous raid encounters that stopped just short of requiring on-the-fly calculus. Group dynamics, guilds, and military coordination—ideas that barely existed in the November 2004 incarnation of *World of WarCraft*—suddenly revealed themselves to be the very core of Blizzard’s MMO to end all MMOs. “Life begins at level 60,” the message boards warned—and they weren’t kidding.

In January 2007, that third game died, too—sucked away through a big swirly green aperture and off into the twisting nether.

REBIRTH (RANK 4)

The Burning Crusade is more of a resurrection than an expansion, a vast and munificent span of content that both refines and totally invalidates what came before it. Similarities abound—*BC*’s certainly “more of the same,” with extra nicotine, less tar, and a bonus pinch of crack cocaine—and the differences are all functions of Blizzard’s own experience curve: *BC*’s “XP grind” undergoes such scientific refinement that you can practically see the equations and spreadsheets in your quest log. The leveling pace fits tightly to the content, and quests yield far greater XP rewards than simple blind slaughtering (even more so than before—Hunters complain of out-leveling their favorite pets too quickly), so reaching level 70 means never having to mindlessly kill monsters simply for the purple numbers that pop up over their heads. Quests are bountiful (each of the new Outland continent’s seven giant zones features upward of 40), and the new areas’ size rivals some other MMOs’ base games. You can niggle about a bug here or a glitch there...but on the whole, *BC* is phenomenally polished.

“Kill 20” and “collect 10” quests still make up the norm, but they’re more frequently accompa-

nied with a twist and some flair—use those 20 skulls to summon an enormous undead drake, who swoops in from the other side of the zone (folks on flying mounts might even pass him in the sky) after a dazzling display of violet fireworks. Slaughter an enormous herd animal, and an even more enormous sandworm explodes from underground, *Dune* style (complete with Dib’Muad’s Crysknife as a quest reward), to consume it.

That’s not to say *BC*’s some sort of grind-free MMO miracle—not at all. Blizzard simply removed the grind from the leveling process and dropped it into the end-game Reputation farming, as evidenced by the multitude of faction-specific quartermasters (vendors carrying high-end gear, only available to characters who earn adequate Reputation with that faction—by turning in 1,000 jackalope nostrils, for example) populating the land. While the original *WOW* only dabbled in the notion of Reputation as an endgame advancement path, *BC* practically revels in it. Faction isn’t just used for raid gear, either—it’s also necessary to access the heroic (i.e., “harder”) versions of *BC*’s instanced dungeons.

The new instances wisely follow the “winged” model of old favorites such as Dire Maul and Scarlet Monastery, split into subsections that take about two hours apiece to clear; shed no tears for the death of the five-hour Blackrock Depths crawl. Early instances such as Hellfire Ramparts and the Underbog are pretty much a breeze for anyone used to *WOW*’s endgame non-raid instances, but a clear turning point comes at around level 65, when you enter Auchindoun’s wicked and unforgiving Mana-Tombs. Populated by the “ethereals” (a new race of profiteering energy mummies who day-trade souls instead of shares), the Tombs require the kind of class coordination and party cooperation typically reserved for raids. Its bosses—and those that come after—present brilliant, collaborative fantasy math puzzles that require lightning wit.

INADEQUACY ISSUES

BC’s predominantly geared toward post-60 life in Outland, but it also drops in two new races—the Blood Elves and the Draenei—for those who enjoy *WOW*’s early-game innocence. Both races populate beautiful newbie zones (though early-game progression barely differs from any of *WOW*’s original races), and both succeed at making your pre-*BC* characters feel inadequate and downright primitive. Their stories are richer >

COLLECT ‘EM ALL



Even if you purchased it simply for the in-game pet, it’s worth digging into the collector’s edition of *Burning Crusade*. While the excellent art book (with art worth looking at) and Outland map mouse pad are swell,

the winners are the beautiful, atmospheric (although incomplete) soundtrack and the behind-the-scenes DVD—the latter of which contains a must-watch collection of fascinating BlizzCon panels that help you appreciate the game even more. Honest!



YOU CAN PRACTICALLY SEE THE EQUATIONS AND SPREADSHEETS IN YOUR QUEST LOG.



<Power Word: Shield> fades
<Rain of Chans> fades

• The new post-60 skills and spells aren't just filler. You'll quickly wonder how you ever lived without the Priest's Shadow Word: Death or the Warrior's Spell Reflection.



• Not shown: two tiny twin fairy priestesses who speak at the same time.



• "I crossed vast dimensional rifts and consorted with demigods for these reinforced mail boots."



• Items from factions like the Sha'tar require Reputation or special "soulbound" trade-ins instead of cash—Blizzard's bid to fight gold farmers?

and stranger...and their racial abilities are, quite frankly, unfair. The Draenei abide in an enormous interdimensional spaceship (part of a much larger interdimensional spaceship that serves as one of BC's final dungeon series) that crashed into WOW's world of Azeroth and mutated the land

with shattered mobility crystals. They hang out with glyph-gods from The Beyond that sing pure joy into the hearts of men, and simply being around any ol' Draenei's "heroic aura" improves other players' abilities. The Blood Elves enjoy similar sophistication and are able to suck mana from living things and spontaneously weaponize it, refilling their own magic bar and squelching nearby spellcasters. Old Azeroth's Trolls? They wear bones in their hair and are slightly better at throwing things.

But the strange science fiction/fantasy blend serves WOW well, and BC surprises with its compelling story. While WOW always makes it easy to worry about the "how" (bring me 15 bat faces!), BC puts forth a strong case for finally caring about the "why." Despite the comparatively primitive presentation—no cut-scenes, no lip-synched acting...just yellow boxes of text to read—I find myself reading every quest, stopping for every book, and chatting with everyone who offers me a dialogue balloon.

If the original WOW hypothesized that art direction trumps technical prowess, two years later, BC proves it. Weirder and wilder than Azeroth's occasionally drab environs (sorry, but Desolace, Tanaris, and the Badlands were a bore), Outland's architecture, flora, and fauna invoke oohs, ahhs, and OMGs. Walk past the bog giants and fen striders of Zangarmarsh, fly over the porcupine-quill mountains of Blade's Edge, and

witness the power of a well-wrought shape and a carefully chosen color palette.

EVIDENCE OF THE OLD WORLD

Burning Crusade is characterized as much by what's new as by what's not: As lovely as Terrokar Forest looks, familiarity is anathema to an alien world...and the illusion breaks just a little when you enter a town and realize the inn, tower, and tavern are just rubber stamps of the ones in old Azeroth, or when you encounter yet another old-world wolf among the warp stalkers, strange moths, and other new creatures. But despite this and all the other things BC didn't add, but could have—no new classes, no "hero classes," no fourth talent trees, no guild halls or player housing zones—Blizzard's savant still feels more complete than any other MMO out there.

On November 23, 2004, I declared to anyone who'd listen that from that day forward, WOW was the only game I'd ever need. Today, that claim is still 100 percent valid. •Sean Molloy

CAVERNS OF TIME



Old Azeroth isn't completely pointless for post-60 characters. It hosts one of *Burning Crusade's* most interesting instance series, the Caverns of Time—which shove your party back in history to key points in *WarCraft's* past as you try to prevent some meddling dragonfolk from messing with the flow of time. The first encounter, which has you ensuring Thrall's successful escape from Durnhold, is absolutely frantic—and quite possibly BC's most entertaining instance.

VERDICT

➤ Unique art direction; fascinating new races; brilliant instances; more of the same.

❑ Too many reused models; leveling to 70 is quick and easy; more of the same.



WOW: BURNING CRUSADE

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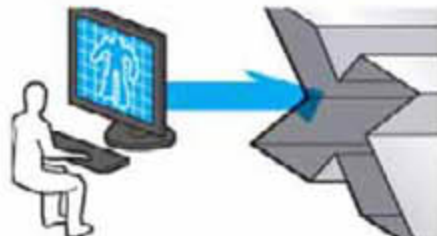
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