

# **Module 5: Expansion Planning**

World of Warcraft has had several different expansions launch over the years. The first was The Burning Crusade, released in early 2007. The second was The Wrath of the Lich King, released in late 2008. The third was Cataclysm, released in late 2010. The fourth (and, as of this writing, current) expansion was Mists of Pandaria, released in September of 2012. As of right now, a fifth expansion has yet to be announced, although it's been confirmed that there *will* be a fifth (and even a sixth!) expansion. But there is a BlizzCon happening in November of 2013 where I strongly suspect they'll announce a fifth World of Warcraft expansion. They announced Mists of Pandaria during the BlizzCon in 2011, which was in late October. If they announced Mists of Pandaria in late October of 2011 and it came out in late September of 2012, that's about eleven months between announcement and release.

Blizzard has stated that they want to hurry up development cycles for both patches and expansions, to make expansions come out sooner than every two years or so. Still, they probably want to have close to six months for testing purposes, testing the new expansion both on beta servers and many of the 6.0 changes on the public test realm (PTR) servers. Assuming they announce the new expansion at BlizzCon in November of 2013, I would probably give about eight months between the announcement and the launch, putting it around late July or early August for launch, at the very latest.

I also think that's likely to be the case because of the fact that no one likes being stuck in an instance for a year. The 5.4 patch is currently on the PTR servers as I write this and it brings with it the final raid instance of the game, the Siege of Orgrimmar. Between the 4.3 patch, which brought the Dragon Soul raid instance into the game, and the launch of Pandaria, it was ten months. Ten months of killing the same eight bosses over and over again. Well, it was better than Wrath of the Lich King, where, except for a single boss instance (Ruby Sanctum with Halion), players were pretty much stuck in Icecrown Citadel for a full *year*. Seriously, Patch 3.3

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opened the Icecrown Citadel raid on December 8th, 2009 and Cataclysm came out on December 7th, 2010. That is way, way too long for anyone to be running an instance.

Developers have even admitted that's too long, so what if they drop it down to about 8 months or so? That's probably still too long, but would be a definite improvement over Dragon Soul and its 10 months. As such, we may be able to get a clue as to the release of the new expansion depending on when patch 5.4 goes live.

Considering that 5.4 is currently being tested on the PTRs, perhaps we can extrapolate an approximate release date for 5.4 that is based on the 5.2 PTR testing dates.

Patch 5.2's earliest PTR raid testing took place in mid-January of 2013. Patch 5.4's earliest PTR raid testing took place in late June of 2013. Patch 5.2 was released on March 5th, so that's about two months later. Assuming all goes well, we can probably expect Patch 5.4 to go live in late August or perhaps early September. Of course, Blizzard is always reminding us that things will ship when they're ready, so this estimate may be wrong. Still, I would imagine August 27th or September 3rd would be good possible dates for the new patch.

Assume Siege of Orgrimmar, being the last raid of the expansion, will last about eight months and you get to late April or sometime in May before the release of the new expansion.

Further assume that they do make the announcement at BlizzCon in November. The beta would need to start very shortly thereafter to get anywhere near a release in April or May. Of course, they're not going to start the beta *during* BlizzCon, when so many of their customers and their employees are at the convention. They may not do a whole lot in December, either, given the holidays.

So let's split the difference. Let's say Siege of Orgrimmar lasts 9 months between launch to expansion, which would give us a June release. That's plenty of time for testing between an announcement

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at BlizzCon and, while it's still a long time in terms of lifespan of a raid tier, it's still a tiny bit shorter than Dragon Soul was.

***This is, of course, all speculation and I have no insider knowledge as to the release dates for various Blizzard products.***

You may now be wondering why I went through all of that just to say that I don't actually know anything about release dates. It's simple: we're going to work on the assumption that the new expansion will come out in June of 2014. For simplicity's sake, let's select the date of **Tuesday, June 10th, 2014**. This module will walk you through what you need to do, complete with a schedule as to when you should aim to get things done, when it comes to preparing yourself and your guild for a new expansion.

Of course, I could be wrong about various dates. If an announcement is made earlier, that could offset everything. If an announcement is made later, that could offset everything, too. Remember, I'm basing this schedule on an announcement at BlizzCon in November of 2013. If that announcement happens in September, move everything on your schedule back two months. If that announcement happens in January, move everything on your schedule forward two months.

(Honestly, if things look to be significantly "off" in terms of timing, if I really didn't anticipate the dates very well, I will likely post a FREE PDF schedule at my website at <http://kurn.info>. Make sure you're signed up for my mailing list on that site or that you're following me on Twitter (@kurnmogh) to make sure you stay up to date.)

All right, now that the pesky "when will the expansion release???" question has been addressed, albeit not exactly *answered*, let's get started.

## **- Step 1: Assessing the Situation (Announcement to Late January)**

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As soon as the expansion is announced (and remember, we're assuming this happens at BlizzCon in November of 2013), that's when you need to spring into action. There are several questions you need to ask yourself before you get started with the planning process.

- 1) Do *you* want to continue playing?
- 2) Do *you* want to continue being the guild master of the guild?

If either of the answers to those questions are “no”, Module 6 may be the module for you, since it covers how to gracefully quit the game. At the very least, it'll teach you how to quit the game or your position without screwing over everyone else in your guild. So we'll assume, for the purposes of this module, that you answered “yes” to both of those questions. You want to keep playing and you want to continue being the guild master of the guild.

- 3) Do *you* want your guild to have the same focus? If no, what do *you* want the new focus to be?

If the answer here is “no”, figure out what the new focus should be and talk to your officers about how they might feel about moving the guild in that direction. We'll assume your answer here is “yes” for the purposes of this module, though. (The Epic Bonus will cover stuff about changing the guild's focus.)

The next thing to do is figure out if you already have the people in your guild to achieve your goals for the next expansion or if you'll need more or different people. Here's the tricky part – a lot of people just flat-out will not know right away after the announcement. A lot of people will probably wait to see beta, will wait for more details and datamining. Others will hate the theme and decide they don't want to play in the expansion. Others will love it and will rededicate themselves to the game and, hopefully, to the guild.

Figuring out what people want is going to take time. So if the announcement goes out in late November of 2013 and beta opens,

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perhaps, in early January, don't expect to know much until late January.

That's okay! It'll give you and your guild a chance to start exchanging information and discussing things. Immediately create a new section of your forums dedicated to talking about the new expansion. So that's what you do, from late November until late January, while continuing to do your regularly-scheduled guild activities.

During this time, encourage people to think about what they want to do in the expansion. Will they retire from the game? Will they change mains? Will they race change? Perhaps real-life friends or family play on another server or another faction, will they join them? Expansions are natural beginnings and endings. A lot of things will change between the announcement of an expansion and its launch and still more will change in the first couple of months of the expansion.

The best way you can be prepared, despite all of this uncertainty (which, personally, drives me up the wall!), is by engaging in conversation. Be casual, talk about what's interesting to you from what you've heard about the expansion and the like. Remember, it's *okay* if people don't know yet!

## **- Step 2: What People Want**

### **(Late January to Early March)**

Okay, by now, more and more of you ought to be getting into beta if you are opted in for the beta test. You do this by logging into your Battle.net account and, to the right of "YOUR GAME ACCOUNTS", you'll see "Beta Profile Settings". Click on that. You should then select the World of Warcraft properties. You may have to run a test program on your computer to report your computer's details to Blizzard, which gives them helpful feedback about what kind of computers people want to play WoW on.

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Anyhow, at least some people in your guild will be in beta. What you want to do as soon as possible in beta is select a server and have your guild formed there. Having a beta realm guild is *fantastic* for checking out potential new members, but we'll talk a bit about that later.

Now that people are getting more and more familiar with the expansion, they're getting a better idea of what they want. By late March or thereabouts, at least according to my presumed schedule, you should be allowed to hit the level cap on beta. This is extremely important in discerning how different classes play. Some people might hate what's happened to their class, some people might love it. Some people might have been very excited about a new class or race, only to find it leaves them feeling blah. Still others might have been lukewarm about a race or class, only to discover they *love* that race or class. This is the time in which you want to approach your guildies and find out what it is that they'd like to be doing in the expansion. While I'll be using a 25-man raiding guild as an example for much of this module, all the basics are the same regardless. You can use these steps for a 10-man casual raiding guild, a PVP-related guild or even a social guild.

#### **1) Ask your players, in an official capacity, to privately let you know what they would like to do in the expansion.**

When planning for Mists of Pandaria, I asked people in mid-May to start thinking about what they wanted to do in Mists. A week later, I reminded them to think about what they wanted to do in Mists. A week after *that*, I posted this to the forums.

**ALL RAIDERS OR HIGHER** (not Initiates yet) should now start sending in responses to me via Private Message (PM) on the forum.

- 1) Would you like to continue raiding as a member of Apotheosis in Mists of Pandaria?
- 2) If so, would you like to remain your current class and spec or would you like to reroll?

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- 3) If you want to raid and would reroll, what would you reroll to (class and spec)?
- 4) Would you be able to continue to raid during the current days/times on a 75% attendance basis? (Tues/Thurs/Sun, from 9pm ET until 12am ET, invites at 8:45pm ET) If not, what days/times might work better for you?

If you're not SURE, please let me know and give me what you're leaning towards, both if you want to raid at all or class/spec stuff.

I asked them if they wanted to continue raiding so I could better see what our roster would need going forward. I asked them if they wanted to reroll because I knew we had monks coming out and I wanted to know if we'd have 17 people who wanted to be monks, because that's just a wee bit problematic. I also asked them if our schedule would cause any issues if it continued as it had been for the last two years. A new expansion is a great opportunity to shift things around a little bit, even add another day to your events, or maybe even remove a day, along with possibly shifting times around.

I also added this to the post, to address the large number of non-raiding members of the guild:

**If you are NOT a current raiding member of Apotheosis,** but you might like to start in Mists, please answer the following questions in a Private Message (PM) to me on the forum.

- 1) Would you like to raid with Apotheosis in Mists of Pandaria?
- 2) If so, what class and spec would you likely be playing?
- 3) Are you able to make the current days/times on a 75% attendance basis? (Tues/Thurs/Sun, from 9pm ET until 12am ET, invites at 8:45pm ET) If not, what days/times might work better for you?

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If you're not SURE, please let me know and give me what you're leaning towards, both if you want to raid at all or class/spec stuff.

You have approximately one week to get this info to me. (Initiates will be asked for this information if they pass their trials.) I'll start sending out nastygrams to people as of 12:01am ET on Monday, June 11th. ;)

I wanted to see which, if any, of our non-raiding members were interested in becoming members. And I gave people a week.

If we're assuming that the new expansion is coming out June 10th of 2014, the equivalent time period would be:

- **Tuesday, February 11th, 2014:** Get people to start thinking about things
- **Tuesday, February 18th, 2014:** Remind people to think about things
- **Tuesday, February 25th, 2014:** Ask questions
- **Monday, March 3rd, 2014:** Receive answers

I like to use Tuesdays because that's the start of the WoW week, but you can use any day you want. Just make sure you post two weeks ahead of time to get them thinking, then one week ahead of time to remind them to think about things and then post the questions the following week with answers back to you by the next week.

Why do this? Why be so formal about everything? And why so *early*?

These are all excellent questions. The answers date back to my first "real" transition phase as a guild master. Apotheosis was formed during the Burning Crusade expansion, so we hadn't really gone through the planning stages of an expansion before. I knew we had a few people who wanted to swap to a Death Knight (which was the cool new class back then) and I knew we had a few people who were

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quitting after Burning Crusade was done. What I didn't anticipate was the fact we had a very bare-bones roster, with a very lax attendance policy. As such, we couldn't get past Thaddius in Naxxramas, the entry-level raid, because we didn't have enough DPS. We had plenty of healers and tanks, but not enough DPS and even the healers and tanks in their DPS gear wasn't enough to get us through Thaddius. As such, we stopped progressing and recruitment was terrible and we basically just gave up after barely raiding for a month, since no one in the guild was really interested in 10-man raids.

As such, when I restarted Apotheosis at the *end* of Wrath of the Lich King, I over-recruited for all positions. And, based on how many people stopped raiding within the first couple of months of Cataclysm, I had a basic idea of how many people I wanted in each role going into Mists of Pandaria.

Hence, the formal approach. No one should be caught off-guard at the start of an expansion. It's infinitely easier to recruit at the very tail end or very beginning of an expansion than it is to recruit just two months into an expansion. This gives you a very good idea of possible problem areas and gives you three months to do something about those problems.

Problems, you ask?

Problems. There *will* be problems. But don't worry. We'll fix them!