

Legion Alpha Blood DK Feedback/Breakdown/Concerns by Troxism

Last updated on Jan 28, 2016, so parts ARE out of date and no longer correct due to patches by now

***Added yet another addendum on Jan 28th to the burst section to clarify that I mean semi-random burst, not just totally random one shots out of nowhere.**

***August 29th, 2016, under 24 before Legion Launch, here is another (long) document for anyone who cares:**

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e4tQmfpPNQN3wR7dL6OPMgg_Fa9JgovGx8XKplyWRNQ/edit?usp=sharing

Foreword

It's been no secret in some places/to some people that I do not like the direction of Blood DK, and tanking in general in Legion. However merely saying 'I like/don't like something' is worthless; everyone has an opinion, and it means nothing without some reasoning behind it. So for the sake of actually giving some reasoning to various statements, opinions, and compiling things for those who don't care to sift through untold pages of chat logs to piece the whole argument together, this document was created. This article consists primarily of my feedback and concerns about certain changes, a bit of commentary on tanking/gameplay design, and a sort of primer or mini-guide to Legion Alpha Blood so it's tone varies throughout. I would recommend for the reader to take it for what it is, which is my thoughts on a variety of related topics, with reasons and argumentation for why I think this way. I don't consider this document comprehensive despite it's length, because due to wanting to keep the length somewhat reasonable, I did not discuss every possible subject in regards to Legion tanking and Blood. However it is better to talk about some things then none at all. I may write more about these other topics later, but I am not sure if it would be worthwhile.

Abstract

Due to the length of this article, it makes sense to go over the points that will be discussed before we do so. After going over some disclaimers, the first thing discussed will be the topic of tank burst, and the exact reasons why it adds complexity to tanking and needs to remain in the game; this section will not be Blood specific but affects all

tank players in Legion. After that, there will be a brief summary of general rotational and ability changes to Blood in Legion, in order to give context to further sections. Then I will discuss some of the general ramifications of the changes made to the spec. After that, I will go into more detail, talking about issues with dealing with burst due to the new design. The whole 'rotational' segment will be concluded with a discussion of the balancing issues between Blood Strike and Marrowrend, a look into why Rune Tap worked out in WoD, and a few possible solutions to the issue.

After that, the discussion will move on to the balance issues caused by the lack of mobility for Blood and explain why claiming 'fantasy' as the reason for the removal of mobility makes little sense. This topic then transitions nicely into a discussion about boss mechanics for tanks and the role of tanks in the game. Finally, I will look at Talents and the Artifact for Legion Blood DK as they currently are on the Alpha, with commentary on their usefulness and current balance, and then move on to some concluding remarks about the whole article and current situation for Blood in Legion.

Disclaimers

I won't cover every change made, as I assume the reader is familiar with most of the spell, talent, and ability changes made, however I will go over the general playstyle of the spec in Legion in order to give context to many of the sections in this write up.

If you wish to read up on some of the changes for yourself, <http://legion.wowhead.com/talent#Mkw> is a pretty good place to start.

This shouldn't really need to be said, but yes, parts of this are obviously predatory. You will notice that I often mention a few possible scenarios for how things will pan out, in order to cover more than just a single possibility, and talk a little about how each result will impact things. However it being predatory does not instantly render every argument invalid; any type of work being done on Legion at this point, either theorycrafting or development is obviously going to be predictive, as testing in the Alpha/Beta or even internal testing is going to have numerous flaws with accuracy at this early stage.

Another disclaimer to get out of the way; When I talk about problems with the spec, I am speaking with the assumption that certain things that are massively overtuned are brought into a more balanced state before live (else everything else won't really matter anyways). And if it won't be obvious just from reading this whole thing, my focus is not

on the overall power of the spec in Legion. It's easy enough to make a spec the worst or best by just tuning numbers. My focus is talking about the gameplay of the spec; how rewarding or engaging it feels to play, rather than just raw power which comes down purely to final numbers.

Finally, while this should be obvious, parts of this document may become out of date with changes made in future alpha or beta patches. These theoretical changes may address some of the problems mentioned, or maybe they will make them worse, but regardless keep in mind the date on this article. I may choose to update it with patches or not, depending on what exactly happens.

On the 'Tank Burst Metagame'

Before I go into other portions of this document, I have to first talk about tank burst and it's place in the game. If one is to browse tank communities, often one will hear the complaint that 'tank damage intake is too bursty'. Blizzard themselves has often lamented this fact and has made attempts to address it in the past, and are gearing up to do it again. Hearing this has always confused me greatly, and in this section I will talk about exactly why burst is an important part of tank gameplay, and removing it would be a disservice to tank players.

To start, it would help to define the ends of the spectrum I am talking about and talk about some of the history of 'burst metas'. A bursty tank meta is one where tank survivability is focused around surviving spike damage; overall mitigation or efficiency in terms of healing required takes a back seat in importance compared to just staying alive. This burst also needs to be *semi-random and fairly frequent, so that there is actual decision making involved, and AM (active mitigation) needs to be strong enough to prevent or counteract lower levels of burst, so that using it is required to stay alive. Healers should not be able to save you from spike damage. Their purpose is to sustain you in between bursts via topping you off, while the tank's role is to just stay alive against burst.

**Added this Jan 28th as I realized this section was too unclear on what I meant by burst due to some people pointing it out. Sadly living only in your own head makes it easy for forget things you take for granted/already know/assume.*

*Completely random burst obviously isn't very interesting either, as that just forces blanket CD usage which is not much more interesting than doing nothing. When I say semi-random I mean something like Sonic Blades on Empress adds; the ability has a cooldown, that you can track, but they don't instantly use it as soon as the CD is up. So you have to prepare for it, but it's not just watching a timer or totally unpredictable. Another perhaps better example is Xhul'horac; the burst on that fight comes from special abilities done by the boss and the adds, which obviously have cooldowns, and you can see them being cast before they hit. However, the way in which these abilities overlap is somewhat random due to how the AI for the mobs works, and different phase push timings/DPS between pulls. So you have to react to the specific situation, but you have SOME idea/warning, so it isn't just an exercise in CD blanketing. Speaking of CD blanketing, I haven't talked about externals in this post, and I probably should talk about those at some point in another article, as they have their own problems that don't appear to be being addressed currently in Legion.

This is more or less the meta we had in MoP, except the fact that tanks other than Death Knights scaled their mitigation with vengeance, which kind of broke things due to strong scaling on abilities like Eternal Flame that made healers not needed. However, DK's worked well this way, as they could not completely self sustain against high damage due to design constraints, meaning that it was the DK's job to not die to burst damage, and the healers job to top him off.

WoD moved other tanks towards the same direction by introducing the Resolve mechanic, which has an easily reachable cap, meaning it did not have the infinite scaling issues of vengeance, meaning no tank could reasonably survive without a healer for an extended period, outside of some edge cases. Burst is somewhat reduced in WoD, which makes most fights boring even on Mythic, due to all but a few Mythic fights being unable to kill you fast enough to force good decision making, however there are still a few that have this kind of damage and are much more fun to play than the others. Note that regardless of this, you still often hear the complaint from healers that they never heal tanks in WoD. I will go into why this is the case later in this section.

The proposed less bursty meta would involve significantly less random spike damage that require the use of mitigation or cooldowns. Damage intake would be smooth, but healing reduced relative to tank health pools, so that it would take a lot of mana to heal a tank to full, and tanks would prioritize reducing or healing back overall damage taken instead of being concerned with dying to burst damage, so that they could conserve healer mana. I will explain why this idea, while sounding nice in theory, fails to provide interesting gameplay for tanks.

So why would a lower burst meta provide less skillful and less interesting gameplay for tanks? Well to explain that, I have to talk about the fundamental nature of difficulty in a game like WoW. At the end of the day, WoW is fairly slow paced by video game standards as the GCD provides a limit to the number of inputs you can make. Most specs are played at around 40-60 Actions per Minute (APM), which is pretty low. You rarely need to aim abilities other than vaguely placing AoEs in the right spots (and you usually have plenty of time to aim). Bosses have 1.5s+ swing timers, abilities tend to be on timers, and pretty much every mechanic has some grace period to react to it. The skill in playing WoW obviously isn't in speed or twitch reflexes or accuracy. So what is the difficulty of WoW gameplay? Well the obvious answer is getting 20 people to do everything right, but that doesn't really explain difficulty on a personal level. On a personal level, the skill is in the choices you have to make every time you can perform an action. What do I mean? Well let us say your GCD is almost up. You can use Death Strike, Blood Boil, or Death Coil. The correct choice depends on the exact situation. What are all your resources at? Are you in danger of death in the next GCD and need to heal? Do you need to save resources right now for something specific later? If for example you are at full HP, have 1 of each rune up, and 80 RP, the correct choice would be to Death Coil. Blood Boil would be the second best, and Death Strike would be the worst. Now I am obviously oversimplifying for the sake of example (ignoring off GCD spells like Rune Tap, cooldowns etc., only counting 3 spells, for example SR, PL, BoS and others would change the factors of your decision and give you more options), but I think you get my basic point; in WoW you are often faced with a bunch of options on what you can do in a given 'decision point' (usually a GCD, but this gets hazier with cooldowns off the GCD), and usually there is a best option, a worst option, and options in between.

Your skill at your spec is determined by how close to optimal the sum of ALL your decisions in a given fight is. Obviously getting some decisions right is more important than others (avoiding death for a tank is more important than slightly optimizing DPS), and boss mechanics also play into your decision making. Sometimes all the options are the same or almost the same; this is the definition of a 'low skill required' situation; where the choice you make either doesn't matter, or doesn't matter very much because the gap between the best and worst option is too small, or for example 90% of the options are basically optimal. A 'high skill required' situation is one where the penalty for making the wrong choice is heavy (big DPS loss, death for a tank etc), and the correct choice is less obvious/gap between them is bigger. Note that in some cases 'no action' can be the correct choice (and can be the hardest to make properly! BoS is a great example of this). For example you might be in a situation with 10 different options as a

tank, but only ONE or maybe a few is/are good enough to let you survive while the others are unacceptable; this comes up very often with burst.

The main ways to make something easier in WoW is to reduce the gap between different options so that making a subpar decision is punished less (ie instead of a 50% gap, maybe there is a 30% gap now between them), reduce the amount of times you have to make decisions (therefore both giving less chances to screw up and more time to think about each one, for example by slowing down rotations), or reduce the number of options you have (remove abilities etc) to pick between to make the decision easier. Keep this section in mind as we go further into this document, as I will be going back to this concept of difficulty and decision making fairly often in other sections as well. In fact, I wish I had more room to write more about this topic in more depth as there is a lot more to say about it.

So let us break down each metagame and see what kind of decisions the tank player has to make in each one, and which one ends up making tank gameplay more engaging by making your quality of play matter for your raid.

In the bursty metagame, often the penalty for a bad choice is death. Now obviously that doesn't mean there is always only one acceptable choice; you might for example be able to prevent a burst with two different cooldowns, but then have to account for their lack later in the fight. What this steeper penalty means is that more of the decisions you make in a fight are relevant to your overall performance; more specifically, it is easier to screw up in a significant way. Some might consider this a bad thing (unforgiving), but the sweetest feeling in the world is overcoming a challenge. If you survive through a bursty fight, it feels great because you had to navigate the proverbial minefield of bad decisions you could have made, and either through experience and planning or at least trial and error, you finally managed to get it right. It also creates instant feedback by telling players 'hey you need to improve this part here', while the whole idea of overall mitigation mostly leaves players with a vague feeling of 'well I think I did that right?'. Now obviously making the game very punishing in lower difficulties by having instant death from failure would make it too hard for less experienced players, but because damage already scales down so much with difficulty level, burst is already inherently nearly non-existent or at least massively reduced and less punishing on lower difficulties. So the scaling difficulty angle is already accounted for, as on easier difficulties, failing to deal with greatly reduced burst simply makes it harder on healers rather than lead to instant death.

Now let us talk about the other side of the spectrum. In a world where burst damage is either nonexistent or much less random and frequent, and healer mana/damage taken is a concern, what kind of decisions do you end up making? Well, let us take a simplified example from Legion Blood. You could spend your runes on Blood Strike to generate more RP for Death Strikes, in order to heal + shield, or you could spend your runes on Marrowrend, to get 66% as much RP per rune, but get 3 Bone Shield charges. Now what matters in a meta like this is 'total damage prevented or healed' by an ability. But the problem is for any given situation one or the other of these abilities will be better mathematically, and therefore will always be the right choice. Now, let us sidestep or ignore this issue, and say for various reasons, this balance shifts over a fight, so that the optimal choice varies anyways. The problem is that even then, in a metagame like this, the penalty for making the wrong decision in this case is very small. Let us say in a given situation using runes on Marrowrend is 25% less effective than on Blood Strike at reducing damage (this actually isn't an unrealistic example, in fact this number is probably too **high** and the real difference will usually be less than that). That means the penalty for picking Marrowrend is relatively small, compared to the burst damage situation where picking wrong in a similar choice = dying (for example if you needed those Bone Shield charges to avoid a one shot, but you chose to waste time converting runes to RP and trying to heal instead). Even if healer mana is fairly precious over a fight, and tank healing is a big strain for healers, a single mistake of this mathy nature will have little impact over the entire fight, meanwhile a single mistake in a burstier metagame can lead to death. This means basic tank gameplay in such a model is FAR more forgiving, which means there is much less penalty for playing badly and therefore much less reward for actually bothering to improve. And if there is less penalty for getting it wrong, how exactly does it make gameplay more interesting as is often claimed?

In addition, if the argument made is that 'you can spam AM today for most content' (I would invite people to heal a bad DK vs a good one on a high tank damage fight if they feel this way), then how does that situation improve at all if you remove all the burst moments that require specific AM usage? Removing burst does not suddenly make spamming AM worse; actually it just brings it closer in effectiveness to timing AM, as the differences between optimal usage and random usage shrink in a world where the main difference is overall damage taken. Burst is an increase in the damage taken per second for a certain (usually short) period of time, and even if AM usage is supposed to revolve around mitigating the most damage per use, if you remove burst in favour of smoother damage, then obviously it matters less when you use AM, because you will be talking roughly the same damage per second most of the time. And if damage intake is fluctuating all the time in order to encourage well timed AM usage, well that exactly

describes what burst is. **Removing burst doesn't make AM timing harder or more important, in fact just the opposite.** Obviously consistently bad play over a long period will hurt you in such a metagame too due to straining healer mana, but it will hurt you LESS than in a bursty world as healers will still have the ability to carry you if they overperform, while in the bursty meta, they can't really save you outside of wasting strong cooldowns.

To summarize: Bursty tank damage means you are punished more for bad decisions (usually death), and you have to have greater knowledge of the situation to get by. You also get instant and very clear feedback on if you are playing well enough or not. Your decisions as a tank matter more in such a metagame compared to one where decisions are softer and healers can carry you even if you play fairly badly.

Since it seems people are getting confused in this section I will provide further reasoning here (added Jan 22nd)

To put this all another way: realize that what we call 'burst damage' is simply the idea that damage during a fight fluctuates, either randomly or consistently and there are periods of high damage output, ie 'burst damage' and periods of lower damage output, which are 'non burst', or perhaps more 'normal' damage. Here is why burst needs to exist; imagine a world with damage intake being completely flat. Now imagine how to optimize, for example Shield of the Righteous (SoTR) usage in such a world? Actually it wouldn't matter when you used it. You would always reduce exactly the same total damage no matter when you cast it. So this quickly shows us that if there are no damage fluctuations, there is absolutely no difference between spamming AM or trying to use it intelligently, rendering tank gameplay basically meaningless.

If damage fluctuations are required to actually have gameplay with AM, we then come back to the idea of burst. At that point if you have damage fluctuations, the only argument to be had is 'how much/high they should be', and if they should potentially be fatal (ie the traditional definition of burst damage). And this is when we tie back into the idea of difficulty levels; on lower difficulties the fluctuations exist so that smart AM usage is rewarded (using AM during high damage reduces/heals more), but failing to use AM correctly is not instantly fatal. On higher difficulties, in order to make the game harder, the fluctuations have to go up, increasing the punishment for mistakes accordingly. Eventually you get to the point where screwing up your AM or cooldown usage will lead to death rather than just inefficiency, which is where the highest difficulty should be. And by understanding this, you can then see why 'burst' always exists on higher difficulties; because that is the main way you can increase rotational challenge for tanks. In

addition, this shows that using AM or cooldowns to 'mitigate overall damage' is actually much more similar to using AM or cooldowns to 'prevent burst' than it may seem at first glance; the latter is just a more extreme version of the former. Finally, this also shows that 'lowering burst' is the same as simply lowering the difficulty today, so this claim that with less burst, somehow tanking, AM, or Cooldown usage becomes more skillful does not hold any water.

Now there is another angle to this whole situation that I have so far almost completely ignored, and that is the healer angle. A commonly stated reason for wanting this type of less bursty metagame is because healers want to heal tanks more often and feel that currently they basically ignore tanks. Some healers feel like their gameplay is limited by tank survival being too much in the hands of the tank. This ties back into what I brought up earlier with WoD tanks actually requiring healing, but healers not actually needing to directly heal them. Basically the issue is that 'passive' heals like Beacon, Lifebloom, other HoTs, or the occasional PW:Shield is enough to keep tanks alive, meaning there is no need to do anything further like directly heal tanks. It isn't that tanks actually require 0 healing (outside of massively out gearing content, you definitely need external healing to survive, ask any progression tank), it's that the healers have strong passive tools that cover all the needed healing with little effort on their part. The solution to this problem is to remove (not just slightly nerf) abilities like Beacon, reduce the strength of tank healing HoTs, etc. If the amount of passive healing on tanks was less, healers would have to spend more time actively healing tanks, without having to diminish tank gameplay. The burst model works well for giving both roles a clear job; tanks have to deal with the second to second burst survival, while healers have to sustain them in between spikes/tank self healing so they don't get whittled down over time. Ultimately, my point is that the solution to this healer gameplay problem isn't to simplify tank gameplay, but to fix the broken healer gameplay at the source instead.

*In this section, as I mention a few times, I oversimplify things for the sake of example. In reality, decisions can be limited by factors like resources, or you may have more than 2-3 options, and there might be different levels of 'good enough decisions', esp considering difficulty levels (on Mythic maybe you need to make the BEST choice to survive a given situation, but on Heroic maybe the best two choices are acceptable, on Normal, top 3, etc). But I do this for the sake of avoiding being bogged down in the details.

Rotational Changes in Legion

Blood has seen an overhaul of the resource system and rotation. Runes are now all death runes, and are no longer paired in any way (max 3 regen at a time, but there is no pairing of runes). Rune regen talents are gone from Blood (No RE, RC or BT at all), and the GCD has been increased to 1.5 seconds from 1 second (scaling down with haste, like caster GCDs do).

Spell wise, staples like Plague Leech, Soul Reaper, Bone Shield, Rune Tap, Empower Rune Weapon, Icebound Fortitude and a few others (Icy Touch, Chains of Ice, Plague Strike, etc) are gone as well. Talents have been reworked too but I won't list every talent change/removal.

The base rotation has been altered; Blood Boil is now much weaker, and is mostly there as an AoE pickup tool/disease spread, or when DnD (Death and Decay) is on cooldown/targets have moved out of it. DnD makes your Blood Strike have a short ranged cleave around the target, if the target is standing in DnD. Blood Strike is the 'replacement' for Blood Boil, being a 1 Rune (remember all runes are just runes now, no types) ability that applies Blood Plague (your only disease now), deals minor damage, and generates 5 extra RP (ie it generates 15 rather than 10). Marrowrend has been added to take Death Strike's place in the rotation, as a 2 rune ability that deals twice the damage of Blood Strike, but instead of being able to cleave or generate extra RP, it gives you 3 stacks of Bone Shield (2 baseline, +1 with an artifact trait), which reduces damage taken by 20%. This can be stacked, however remember that like today's Bone Shield, it can be 'eaten' very rapidly by tiny hits such as some bosses AoE tick effects. So it doesn't mean you will always reduce the next 3 melees etc. Finally, Death Strike has been reworked to cost 40 RP, and is a hard hitting ability that heals you for 40% of all damage taken in the last 6 seconds (min heal is 7% max HP).

The general idea is that you spend runes either on Blood Strike or Marrowrend. Blood Strike fuels extra Death Strikes via extra RP gen, and Marrowrend gives you some Bone Shield stacks instead. DnD is used for AoE, dropped on your target, so you can spam a cleaving Blood Strike, however it still has the 30 sec CD/10 sec duration. Crimson Scourge, instead of giving you a free Blood Boil, now resets the CD on DnD. Blood Boil acts as filler in aoe situations if you don't get CS (Crimson Scourge) procs, or targets move out of your DnD.

Now that I've given a basic overview of the new Blood, let us get into the details some more.

Overall Rotational/Spec Overhaul Comments

Playing around with Blood on Alpha gives a very swift (haha) impression of the spec having a ton of downtime. This is not much of a surprise, as rune regen has been nerfed, RP procs on auto attacks are gone, the GCD extended, and the RP dump is more expensive than before. On top of this, with SR (Soul Reaper) and PL (Plague Leech) being gone, there is much less to fill the rotation. In general, when doing activities like questing as Blood, or doing Dungeons, your rotation mostly involves throwing down DnD and spamming Blood Strike, with some Death Strikes tossed in. However you can only do this a short time, before you run out of resources, and start sitting there and waiting. A lot. In addition, not getting random DnD resets on AoE can severely gimp your AoE damage, which can be very frustrating as you are forced to use the much weaker Blood Boil over Blood Strike simply due to bad RNG.

All this leads to a spec that feels completely different to play than it ever has been in Cata, MoP or WoD; it's VERY slow. Using Marrowrend or the talents with resource costs only makes this worse, as they consume more runes per GCD than Blood Strike, and then you end up with even more downtime in the rotation. Rune management is greatly simplified, as abilities like Blood Tap, PL, and Empower Rune Weapon no longer exist (no more dumping before usage, storing etc), and Death Strike is now RP based, meaning you never really save runes for any reason. The concept of tracking rune pairs to make sure one was up and the other was charging is gone completely, apparently in an effort to fix rune desync, although I don't really see how that was ever a problem if playing correctly (and fixing it was very simple with BT).

Having fewer cooldowns like Rune Tap, Bone Shield, and IBF means the concept of knowing when to stagger or cycle through CDs is diminished significantly as you simply can't really do this anymore. So all those mental charts one would have for progression fights on exactly what cooldown or spell to use in what order during certain times are much simpler now (not completely gone of course). A lot of your options have been shrunk, and Blood, which has always been the tank with the deepest active toolkit, now has a greatly reduced toolbox, and has such a slow rotation that what remains amounts to making far fewer decisions per minute. The amount of different combinations of ways you could do a fight has shrunk down massively, meaning it is much easier to figure out the optimal way to do a fight. For example if there is a specific high damage mechanic or phase, you have so few CDs that it becomes very simple to figure out that you pretty much have to use them all there. With many little cooldowns before Legion, often the

trick was figuring out when a small cooldown was enough, and when you needed larger cooldowns, and figuring out what you could get by with and what you could save for later danger periods. Now obviously something like this is always going to be somewhat subjective, but the summary is: resource and Cooldown Management, which were both the hallmarks of the spec before have been massively reduced in prominence. I'm not sure which 'fantasy' that is supposed to fulfill, but there it is.

In MoP and WoD, Blood has always had very poor baseline mitigation compared to other tanks, but many little cooldowns, and fairly frequent Death Strikes. The idea was that especially in higher end play, you had to cover for your inherent weakness by a mix of Death Strikes, cooldowns and other sources of healing, to make up for taking significantly more damage at a baseline level, and this created a beautiful 'flow' to the spec on hard content; you were always thinking about your next moves, and every melee swing was a threat to deal with. You couldn't really afford to take 'unmitigated hits' (obviously DSing right after a hit counted as well), so you always had to cycle through all your little options the entire fight. Now you can't really do that; a lot of these decisions have been removed by virtue of simply reducing the amount of things you have to use. This makes the gameplay feel very lacking in Legion, as simply put, there is much less you can do about anything that happens to you.

A common argument for a slower rotation (for all tanks, not just Blood) is it makes you think more about your choices. However what really ends up happening, especially on easier content where the quality of your decision does not really matter and you basically just spam, is that you just end up sitting there doing nothing for longer. And even when you do have to make correct decisions (ie burst/difficult scenarios), it just gives you more time to think about it. Why? Because if your ability to actively deal with threats to your survival is reduced, the developers are forced to balance around the 'nerfed' version, meaning the amount of threats has to decrease appropriately, or something/one else needs to be able to deal with them (for example healers) instead of the tank. Either way, either the amount of decisions you have to make, or their relevance, or both, is reduced for the tank (remember, we talked about decision making and difficulty before). Due to being able to use abilities so infrequently, you end up just waiting for the best case scenario, which is much easier to identify than a situation where you might not get the 'best possible Death Strike', but a 'good enough one' that you should take due to other factors. This problem becomes even worse if the tanking environment in Legion changes to a less bursty 'slower damage intake' playstyle, because then it will literally become 'DS for max healing', which can easily be done via an addon to tell you the size (I remember a certain discussion about an addon used for DoT snapshotting in MoP which has parallels to this).

To put it another way: Blizzard's angle on tanking in Legion is that they need to reign in Active Mitigation by reducing its frequency. To use a Blood example, what changes is that each Death Strike is about the same strength, but it is half as frequent. This means if you make a mistake on a Death Strike it is the same penalty as before, but you have half as many chances to actually make a mistake. This is the definition of making it easier.

But wait you say! Having half as many Death Strikes will make the remainder more meaningful, because each one is a bigger percentage of the total! Except that isn't how it works. Let us say today a DK heals back 60% of the damage he takes (actually a pretty realistic number from old progression logs). If he can heal half as much in Legion, he heals only 30% of the damage taken, meaning healers go up from healing 40% of the damage to 70%. The thing is, the total did not go down. If there were 100 Death Strikes cast before, each one was 0.6% of the total healing on the tank, so making a mistake with their usage would impact that 0.6% slice. But in the second example, 50 Death Strikes are cast, but still each one is 0.6% of the total damage taken by the tank. So no, the impact of your choices upon the raid's overall success (or in this case, tank survival) is still the same per Death Strike, and you just have half as many chances to get it right or wrong. And on top of that, you have twice the time between usages to think about it, further making it easier to make the right choice in the first place!

The thing is tank mitigation/healing does not exist in a vacuum. Healers play a role, so anything that is taken from tanks, either has to be picked up as slack by the healers, or the boss simply needs to be nerfed (and if you nerf tanks in half and nerf the boss in half, you are basically back to square one, and it causes all kinds of problems with killing tank burst, which as I explained previously is important to make tanking actually challenging). Tanks do not self sustain with no healer input currently, barring either extremely short fights, or massively out gearing lower difficulty content. If you think this isn't the case, try soloing Mythic Iron Reaver as a 700-705 ilvl DK (a self healing tank, so clearly you would just never need a heal!). See if you can survive the 6+ mins that fight usually took back then. And that fight has no debuff to force a swap (artillery always does full damage to you), so it isn't a case of taking tons of extra damage due to a mechanic. *Yes I know the example isn't perfect, but I think you get my point. There is a huge difference between a tank popping every cd for 30 seconds and actually being able to survive a fight of normal length with little to no help. Again, the issue is passive healing being too strong, especially considering you can spread out Beacon healing across both tanks, and the tanks tend to swap a lot/both take damage.

The best way to sum what has happened to Blood gameplay in Legion is this: Imagine if the game was slowed down to half its normal speed. Really, think about it. The GCD is longer, meaning you can do fewer inputs (as if the game is running slower), your resources come back slower, your cooldowns have longer cooldowns (that sentence), etc. This is the same thing as just slowing down the game speed globally for you as a Blood player. I also talked about the nature of difficulty in WoW in the burst damage section. I talked a lot about how difficulty is determined by number of choices, but little about the idea that if you have more time to think, it is easier to make the right choice. Slowing down the game in this way does not in any way make it harder because of this. Look at other games and their slowing down mechanics. You see FPS games with 'bullet time' which makes it much easier to aim. Starcraft II slows the game speed down on lower difficulty levels. This is done for a reason; to make it easier to react in time. I know I have beaten this to death, but **slower is not harder** in any way shape or form.

Reworked Death Strike/GCD/Burst issues

The first thing that should jump out alarmingly at any Blood veteran is the return of the MoP era Death Strike 'damage taken mechanic' and the Cataclysm 1.5s GCD. The healing mechanic was removed in WoD in favour of an AP scaling Death Strike, and frankly there was a good reason for it. In MoP, DKs often struggled with hard hitting bosses (which MoP had many of), as they did not scale mitigation with Vengeance (which honestly was fine by itself), and Death Strike relied purely on damage taken in this same way. The problem was that absorbs (such as your own shield, or healer shields) didn't count to this healing value; parries obviously don't count, and having a 50% DR (damage reduction) on yourself literally meant 50% less DS healing for the duration, meaning pretty much anything you did or your healers did was actually hurting your overall mitigation. Now BY ITSELF this was not a problem, but the issue was when a boss hit you once to clear all your shields (or maybe you parried), then hit you again for 80% of your HP (either with melee hits, or some special attacks or combos with adds, Xhul for example this tier), you were left with a weak Death Strike because the first hit, while being inside your 'Death Strike window', added 0 healing to your Death Strike. This is even more of a problem with a slower rotation, and a longer GCD than it was then, and a Blood Shield that is literally over 3 times weaker than it was in MoP (more on this coming up next).

DKs dealt with this problem in MoP by 'pre shielding', or using the shield from the last big DS to shield the next hit, and then alternating, or some cooldown usage. That 'kind of' worked, because like said above, shields don't count to the NEXT DS, so you just kind of delayed the problem, but also in MoP the healing portion of DS was maybe 30% of the whole effect (you had about 150-250% shield value on average), but now it is more like 70% of the effect, meaning overhealing with DS is a huge no-no today, meaning 'pre-shielding' is horribly inefficient. The problem in MoP was that Blood was always trying to fit a square peg in a round hole in terms of doing hard hitting fights, which led to the changes in WoD. Now in WoD, this issue was addressed because DS healing was now based off AP (and Resolve, but that counted absorbs and DRs, so was way more consistent), and you had Rune Tap added to the game, exactly to help address this burst damage issue DKs struggled with in MoP. This meant Blood Shield values could be lowered, and DKs become more of a healing tank, then an absorb tank, which made more sense, and the counterintuitive mechanics of having damage reductions/avoiding attacks penalise you were gone. But now we are going back to that same old system that failed to function correctly last time.

As for the GCD, Blood veterans should still remember Firelands Heroic for Blood DK; you could die on the GCD without even being able to react because the boss would hit you twice during your GCD with some DoT/Special + Melee because DKs lacked **strong** preemptive mitigation unlike other tanks. While certainly such heavy burst can be toned down, all that does is just make the game easier; it's better to have really high burst, but give all tanks the tools to deal with it if they play correctly, and make it so the burst is lower on lower difficulties, meaning you don't have to make 'as correct' of a decision to survive.

And as mentioned previously, the amount of cooldowns you have to use has been cut significantly, so even that option for dealing with burst has been reduced heavily compared to Cata and MoP.

Now obviously this doesn't mean DK is going to be 'underpowered', as that is pretty much up to boss tuning and how other tanks fare in the same situations. But what it means is DK is going to have far less ability to play really well to smooth out it's damage intake profile to make it so healers don't have to save you. With your tools being either removed, hamstrung by extra limitations or by the longer GCD and slower resource generation, the amount of times you will be able to have an impact by playing well is going to go down. Obviously this also won't be a problem if burst is overall toned down, but I already explained why that would be a poor idea.

You will see later in this article examples of new mechanics that help counter burst for DK. However they do so in a passive way. Dealing with burst passively is pretty much the opposite of how DK has worked for many expansions. People play a spec like Blood to be rewarded for making the right choices, and punished for making the wrong ones. Not to just show up and mess around and then hope your spec is good enough this patch because your actual personal input is too limited to really change anything. Guardian players should be familiar with this issue; Guardian burst mitigation has traditionally been mostly passive, meaning either it was good enough in a given tier (and Druid ended up being easy and boring to play that tier) or it was too weak for a given tier (and Druid ended up being underpowered that tier with little recourse or way to fix it). While I sympathize with the concept of making it easier to get into tanking, Blood has traditionally been very strong on easier (non bursty) content due to how Death Strike functions so having slightly more complex gameplay to deal with burst didn't really hurt beginners as they never really needed to worry about it. At the end of the day, problems with the difficulty of lower skill level content should be solved by tuning that content, rather than global changes to spec mechanics.

The Blood Strike vs Marrowrend Problem

I have already vaguely touched on this topic before, but this is a major core issue with Legion Blood that deserves it's own section as it has a lot of far reaching impacts into the artifact and talents as well.

What is the 'Blood Strike vs Marrowrend' problem? As explained above in the rotation section, you can choose to spend your runes on one of these two abilities. Blood Strike will give you 50% more Death Strikes, while Marrowrend will give you a few charges of 20% damage reduction. On the surface there is nothing wrong with this, but if you look past that, major issues start to crop up.

The first issue is rotational downtime. If I spend 8 runes on Blood Strike, I will generate 120 RP, which is enough for 3 Death Strikes. So I end up spending 11 GCDs. If I spend 8 runes on Marrowrend, I use 4 Marrowrends (they cost 2 runes each remember), and generate 80 RP, which is only 2 Death Strikes. So every 8 runes using Marrowrend, you only fill 6 GCDs, which is almost half as many as Blood Strike. Now obviously this is a bit of a polarized example, but it illustrates my point. The rotation already has tons of downtime. Using Marrowrend only makes it much worse, and makes you not want to

use it at all. This will lead to many players just preferring to spam Blood Strike, because 'it feels like they are doing something rather than just waiting'. And this will work fine on 95% of content, but it will encourage a two button rotation.

An offshoot of this problem is that you end up doing more damage with Blood Strikes; Blood Strike does half the damage of Marrowrend, but gives you 50% more Death Strikes, and Death Strike is your hardest hitting spell right now in the Alpha, meaning you do noticeably more damage ignoring Marrowrend, and you can cleave with Blood Strike, once again meaning you are encouraged to only cast Blood Strike. Now this could be solved by lowering the damage of Death Strike, but this would both feel awkward/weird, as DS is the signature ability of Blood DK and has always hit the hardest outside of execute SR (Soul Reaper), and wouldn't completely eliminate the issue unless DS literally did 0 damage. The damage of Marrowrend could also be buffed, but then you would be forced to take the Ossuary talent on any non single target fight so that you could spam Marrowrend for AoE because it's damage per rune would be greater on AoE than Blood Strike. And then you would just have the reverse problem; Marrowrend would be more DPS, and better against burst, so why even cast Blood Strike? You can start seeing in these examples of possible changes why the balance between these two abilities is so awkward; any change in either direction just means one or the other becomes the new thing you spam and the other will become mostly ignored.

The next major point is that while the basic idea is you use Marrowrend for preemptive mitigation and Blood Strike > Death Strike to heal back after damage, this falls apart in lower end content (you don't take heavy burst on easier content), or if the game actually does do away with bursty tank damage as discussed before. If burst damage either does not exist or is not significant (or is rare enough that you just CD through it every time it does come up), then you will always use whichever of these two is mathematically superior for overall damage reduction, and never even touch the other one. Once again, we are back to one of these abilities being ignored. Even if burst still exists, something else to remember is that Bone Shield has only a 1 second ICD, meaning a baseline 2 charge Marrowrend can sometimes disappear before the GCD used to cast it is even up. With the artifact trait this goes up by a second via an additional charge, but even then this ability does not last long. Even with just a single boss swinging at you, and the artifact trait, it lasts only 3-4.5 seconds depending on the timing of the swing (but reduces 3 hits either way). This makes the whole issue with the longer GCD and burst discussed previously even worse as this ability that is supposed to counter burst is cumbersome at best to use due to being potentially very short and on the GCD at the same time, and Marrowrend's 20% reduction is quite anemic even if you

do get it right. So even if burst damage exists, Marrowrend is a poor tool against it currently (Ursoc testing was a good example of this). Even worse, Blood Strike > 1.5x more DS already does give preemptive mitigation, in the form of Blood Shield, and one of the artifact traits I will talk about later. So this whole distinction of Marrowrend vs burst and Blood Strike otherwise is already heavily blurred by this and other factors.

Is Marrowrend better than getting $\frac{1}{4}$ of a Death Strike ($\frac{1}{2}$ with Heart Strike talented)? Depends on the size of the boss hits and a few other factors, but at current tuning, usually not. But the reality is that the difference between the two is even smaller now with the nerfs to them, so really, does it even matter if there is only a 10-15% difference between the worst and best option? Now think back to what I talked about with a less bursty tank meta. If the difference between the two options is this small, then even the often floated idea that difficulty in such a metagame will be about maximizing overall mitigation seems to make little sense as the difference between playing perfectly and terribly will be too small to really matter. Remember that just item level inflation from the release of HFC to now has almost doubled your DPS, healing and mitigation for the entire raid, meaning for example Mythic is easily more than twice as easy as it was at the release of the tier, considering that damage, healing and mitigation have multiplicative effects on each other and fight mechanics/phases. And mythic even on release is not tuned around 100% perfect play, so if the gap between Blood Strike and Marrowrend is small, then does it even matter which one you use?

Finally, while the balance between Marrowrend and Blood Strike is awkward to begin with, what makes it worse is that many talents, stats, and other effects mess with it, to the point where it is effectively impossible to make these abilities balanced against each other. In terms of stats, remember that Mastery only buffs Death Strike, so it has 50% more benefit when using Blood Strike over Marrowrend. Via an artifact talent, crit increases the effect of Bone Shield (and DS can crit with its heal now too, so it is affected as well). And Haste benefits Bone Shield more, because of the 'diminishing returns' caused by overlapping shields. Versatility only benefits Death Strike, and not Bone Shield as well. All of these factors make the balance between the two even trickier. A baseline mechanic that affects the balance between these abilities is the DnD making Blood Strike AoE; on AoE Marrowrend will always be very weak, because its charges are eaten faster by many targets (yes, it has a 1 second ICD, but with many attackers, it is far more likely to be hit right as the ICD comes up, then with only one attacker meaning the charges on average drain faster), and it does no AoE damage. There is a talent (Ossuary) that attempts to address this, but the problem is rotational imbalance should not be fixed by forcing you into a talent to fix it. Other talents buff Blood Strike significantly (Heart Strike, Bloodworms indirectly), so this works both ways,

meaning no matter how you tune these abilities, your choice of talents will railroad you into using one 90-100% of the time and ignoring the other because those talents only buff one or the other. So this is not an issue that can be changed by just tweaking a few numbers, but is a systemic problem made worse by the talents and other mechanics of the spec.

Why Rune Tap Worked and Possible Solutions* to this Core Rotational Issue

Marrowrend is currently an expensive and weaker Rune Tap on the GCD, which makes it hard to compete with Blood Strike as discussed above. If it is tuned to be better, than Blood DK basically becomes Prot Paladin (roll % reduction, with some healing tossed in), and you never cast Blood Strike except on AoE (or take Ossuary and still use Marrowrend). If it is worse than Blood Strike, then its only role is against burst damage, and Marrowrend is so weak right now that it barely fills that role anyways. Rune Tap worked out much better because the cost in using it was the cooldown, not competition for resources, which made it a situational tool to be used wisely rather than pushed to the sideline because of having to compete on resource efficiency against other options with no cooldown as Marrowrend does. Also, the fact that Rune Tap could not be spammed, meant it could actually be strong, while Marrowrend (and really all rune abilities for Blood) is(are) forced to be weak. This is because most of the mitigative benefit of spending runes is locked into the 10 RP per rune which can be used for Death Strike.

This whole gnarly issue demonstrates why a runic power Death Strike and 6 Death runes cause so many difficulties in making a core rotation that involves more than two buttons, and why Marrowrend and Blood Strike are always going to have this awkward face-off in the current system. The best solution would be to go back to the old system (Death Strike costing runes + different rune types + some other RP dump), but that has about zero chance of happening, so an alternative would be to replace Marrowrend with Rune Tap (ie give it a cooldown but make it impactful), and then figure something else out for the third primary rotational ability. Something else that could be done to balance these abilities would be to tune Marrowrend to be better for mitigation and Blood/Heart Strike better for DPS to create a mitigation to DPS tradeoff*, which may actually be the current intent, but is difficult to balance due to the fact that extra RP generation gives **both** damage and mitigation instead of just damage now, so the ability would need to be reworked to give less RP (or none) but deal more damage per rune so that it is a

mitigation loss. This means that once again, Death Strike being runic power based gets in the way. This change wouldn't totally solve all the problems either as you would still mostly use two buttons either way, but at least would give each strike a clearly defined purpose unlike currently.

*I don't generally like giving suggestions on how to fix things, as generally it is more important and desired to point out problems and let the developers do what they will. Also another problem is that to truly fix this Blood Strike vs Marrowrend problem major changes are required, and those are not likely to happen at this point, so the best I can do is offer band-aid solutions that require little work but aren't perfect either. However people keep asking me to make suggestions, so I have added a few.

*I've written at length a long time ago about DPS to mitigation tradeoffs and why they are important before, but honestly I wish I could rewrite it to be clearer and with better argumentation. This is one of the topics I omitted from this article for the sake of length that I may write more about later if I feel there is a point to doing so.

Mobility

Another thing that has changed is Unholy Presence is gone (Blood Presence bonuses are passive now), and Death's Advance has been removed as a talent. This means that now Blood DKs quite literally walk at 100% normal speed, with no ability to move any faster outside of a once per fight Swiftess Potion (or equiv). Now this has a few ramifications. One, obviously, this just feels terrible. Death's Advance wasn't much, but it helped make DKs at least not lose a foot race horribly to every class. In Legion, just walking in a dungeon with your group, you fall horribly behind now and everyone has to wait for you. Very annoying if trying to do the dungeon quickly, or doing CMs etc. This is very noticeable in any content from soloing, to dungeons, to raids.

However this has a more than annoying impact in raids. Many boss mechanics, and many tank mechanics, involve movement and reward having high mobility (esp burst mobility like leaps or rolls). Examples from WoD would include kiting Blackhand with the siege engine (most guilds didn't do this strat, but some did and it was the intended strat), Artillery/Empowered Doom Spike in HFC, and others. These are far from the only mechanics that rewarded mobility, and those mechanics were always more difficult for

Death Knights to deal with, sometimes requiring you to use life grips on DK tanks while other tanks did not need this. Now there are a few factors to consider here:

Obviously there is nothing wrong with having weaknesses. I personally didn't think DK mobility was way out of line in MoP or WoD, as there wasn't really any boss a DK could not do because of a lack of mobility (it was just sometimes harder for a DK to do a boss). And that is fine. But when Legion is adding yet another mobile tank class in the form of DH with 2 dashes, and there is supposedly a bigger focus on tank mechanics, meanwhile DK loses all of its mobility, well the problem becomes that this weakness is being made significantly worse, to the point where it's quite possible DKs will be struggling on some bosses.

Now, sure, I do not know the exact future. Maybe in Legion, fight designers will account for DK's lack of mobility, and make every single boss mechanic doable with just 100% run speed. This probably won't happen (it's very likely 1-2 bosses will slip through by mistake), but let us say it does. The problem with this is the increased gap between DK mobility and the other tanks from WoD to Legion will mean that any mechanic that is doable by a DK will be trivial for most classes who actually have some form of mobility cooldown or dash. If you can do a mechanic with just 100% run speed, imagine a DH with passively higher run speed and 2 dashes, and how easy it will be for them. This creates a situation where you cannot possibly make a mechanic a challenge for every class without making it impossible for DK. Either you make it possible for DK, but a simple for everyone else, or impossible for DK, but challenging for everyone else. This isn't fair to either side no matter how you do it. I don't think players of other classes want every movement mechanic to be trivial for them just for the sake of Death Knights. Again, obviously weaknesses/some mechanics being harder for some classes is fine, but the gap was already considered too big today by some (not me, but I am not everyone), but is getting much bigger in Legion, so whatever issues may have existed now, are likely to get much worse.

The argument given as to why DK mobility is being reduced is 'class fantasy'. This is frankly ludicrous. Anyone who has played previous Warcraft games knows that every form of Death Knight before WoW has ridden a mount in combat, and was very mobile. In WoW, many DK npcs/mobs ride mounts, even in combat (trash mobs in Naxx, Baron Rivendare, mobs in Icecrown). So the idea that the DK class should be really slow because it walks everywhere at 100% speed makes no sense in lore or fantasy at all. In fact, the idea of DKs riding a mount is more core to the DK fantasy than the idea of a Frost or Blood spec, which were both just taken from the Dreadlord and Lich in WCIII, and had nothing to do with DKs originally. Even the class name, Death **KNIGHT**, implies

a mounted warrior, which is not something you would equate to 'slow as molasses'. For an expansion supposedly so focused on fantasy, it would make more sense to make DKs fight on horseback instead. People talk about how 'cool' stuff like Bonestorm is or whatever, now imagine if DKs always fought on a mount in combat. That is a hell of a lot more 'fantasy' than some random ability. Gameplay wise this could be giving them say 30% extra run speed passively, and the tradeoff would be no other speed boosts of any kind. If you think about this, this would actually be pretty balanced vs other classes; typically burst movement like blink/leap/dash is much better than just running faster, so DKs would still somewhat struggle with some mechanics, but the tradeoff would be that they would win in a footrace against other classes. This would make them both fun to play (you would feel like a **knight**), but still have limitations.

Now obviously, you could argue 'fantasy has changed since then, your version of DK fantasy with mounts is no more legitimate than anyone else's'. This is true, but it underlines the problem with the whole idea of using fantasy as an argument for gameplay changes; it is completely arbitrary. You can twist almost anything into fantasy for many classes - that doesn't mean it should happen. Gameplay should always come first, and it seems like that motto has been forgotten lately.

More to the point, imagine if every other spec in the game received a negative fantasy much like DK mobility being low. What if Fire Mages did 40% less ST damage to compensate for their good AoE? What if Fury Warriors took 50% more damage because they are 'reckless'? This is something that is actually being attempted, but at least they are giving compensation in the form of extra maximum health, but Death Knights do not get any compensation for a lack of mobility at the moment (even DK utility has been reduced). What if Assassination Rogues had absolutely no AoE spells, because 'assassins only kill a single target at once'? You can apply this type of logic to every spec, and can easily see why this idea of giving everyone negative fantasies would never work out. There is a reason gameplay should come first at the end of the day. Yet why does DK get this negative fantasy for absolutely no reason? And if anyone expects DK to get more damage, or something else in trade for this, well frankly I highly doubt this would ever happen, because then other classes would (rightfully) complain about being gimped compared to DK damage and about how it was not fair in some situations. Honestly I would not want for this to happen as it would just create other problems.

Another point on this matter: Yes, it is true DKs get grips. However, note that Mass Grip is gone from DPS DKs and is on a 3 min (2 min talented) CD for Blood DKs. And normal grip is only useful in a few situations in PvE. While in PvP, you can easily make the argument that 'grip is DK mobility', the solution to this isn't to gimp PvE mobility. In

MoP/WoD, nobody took Death's Advance for serious PvP, because Asphyxiate/Chilblains were a lot better. So it worked out for both sides just fine. Something else to note is; other tools like a ranged RP dump, and Chains of Ice are also gone from the spec. The only ranged attack Blood now has is Death's Caress, which is basically Icy Touch, and is a waste of runes to use for anything but applying diseases at range/pulling. And Blood has no way to slow enemies at all anymore, ranged or melee. So you can no longer even make the argument of 'well DKs have a lot of ranged abilities/snares', even if that argument was always ludicrous for serious PvE content, as the issue was never really damage at range, but actual self positioning demanded by boss mechanics. Even for AoE, DKs are now limited to their DnD area to do significant AoE, further cutting down their 'mobility'. Now if mobs have to be moved every 5 seconds because for example they drop puddles (Blast Furnace Shields anyone?), guess what, your AoE is gimped unless you get lucky procs. So even all these side arguments for DK mobility being low because of other reasons like having ranged spells, snares, or utility, have been nerfed or removed in Legion, at the same time as overall mobility has gone down for the class. At the end of the day, if DKs are supposed to be slow, what is the tradeoff for it? What are DKs good at? DK utility and ranged abilities have been nerfed as well. So why bring a DK over any other class?

Mechanics and the Tank Role

In response to complaints about simplifying cooldown usage, resource management, AM (active mitigation) usage, reducing burst damage, etc., people often make the argument that 'tanking should be about mechanics/positioning anyways, so what is the problem?'. Well, the first one that was mentioned in the previous section is the fact that many mechanics involve mobility, and this has never been balanced (on purpose) between tanks (and neither should all tanks have exactly the same mobility, but the point is making it too important is a bad thing).

Another issue is that the complaint often given about burst is it is too binary (I don't really agree with that as I explained before, as at the end of the day that is basically the only way to have high difficulty levels actually be hard), and that is said to be bad (even though this is only the case for the most difficult content). However replacing burst with mechanics is just shifting that issue into something else that is also binary; tank mechanics such as Empowered Doom Spike tend to be simple but very unforgiving. They are forced to be relatively simple and easy because otherwise guilds with sub par tanks struggle to progress (and while I don't generally support simplification, I can

understand the reasoning here). Even DPS mechanics are often binary, it is just that the most difficult DPS mechanics tend to be 'opt-in' like soaking Doomfire, so you can have your best players handle it, while tanks don't really have this luxury, further forcing encounter designers to keep tank mechanics simple for the 'average' player. Either way, the whole idea of shifting the difficulty from burst to mechanics doesn't really make much sense, as it doesn't 'solve' the supposed issue with burst being too binary, it just shifts it into something else.

Now I actually do think tank mechanics could and should be improved. Too many mechanics for tanks in HFC involve running out and standing there doing nothing (Artillery, Kromrok Explosion, Chakram, Empowered Doom Spike), or suiciding on purpose to avoid having to waste DPS (Source of Chaos), which are both fairly easy to do and not exactly very interesting. Generally speaking mechanics should involve more actually tanking* (in fact, some mechanics cause burst, and dealing with that is done via actual tanking gameplay which is how it should be) and less running around, especially if DK mobility is going to remain the way it is currently in Legion. And it is possible this will actually happen in Legion, and would be a good thing if it did. But it should not come at the expense of all other tank gameplay, but in addition to what already exists.

*What are examples of good tank mechanics? The taunting on Xhul'horac; while it was similar to taunt at X stacks, it was at a much faster pace (once again, slower is not more interesting or challenging), while having to deal with adds at the same time and heavy burst with boss plus add. Many tanks considered that one of the best fights of the tier. Managing Scorpion on Paragons, with trying to survive tanking one or two of the Paragons during Scorpion for maximum damage via vengeance. This was much better than say the Socrethar robot, because there was actually min maxing to be done with cooldown usage to get more vengeance, and it was not you playing a 3 button vehicle for an entire fight, but only for short spurts, then back to actually tanking with your character again. Blackfuse's shredders were also a really good tank mechanic, because they involved positioning the shredder, surviving it's damage (sometimes out of range of the healers), and doing burst damage in a short window of time. Other really good fights included Dark Shamans (not very hard, but I enjoyed the 'clusterfuck' nature of it if tanking them together), Fallen Protectors (only if solo tanking, since you had to deal with the conal stun and the Gouge at the same time which made it interesting), Horridon (add management into a massive CD rotation to survive the soft enrage), Will of the Emperor (alternate dodging into heavy tank damage then repeat), Grand Vizier (if you were tanking him in the corner solo and having to dodge all the attenuations and stay alive), and obviously Grand Empress (utterly insane burst damage during intermissions which forced solid play). Note that with all of these, survival is a big factor, either in the

form of active mitigation, or cooldown usage. Also note that some of the good mechanics do involve mobility; the issue isn't having to move (or even move out of range), it's running around without doing anything else interesting and without making the movement mechanic actually hard.

On the flip side, what are bad tank mechanics? Things like Artillery, where you just run out and stand there for a while, maybe use a cooldown. You aren't playing your character at all. Same with Empowered Doom Spike, Ko'ragh's Arcane debuff (aka run around like a headless chicken debuff) and the Kromrok orange explosion debuff, as they are basically the same thing. Going down on Fel Lord, and then basically just running around and dodging without actually tanking anything was also pretty boring, but not as bad as these other ones. To stop ragging on HFC so much, bad mechanics from previous tiers included pretty much any boss that boiled down to just taunt swaps with nothing else going on (Nazgrim, Sha of Pride, Butcher), or mechanics like Iron Juggernaut mines (repeated on Iron Reaver just to make that fight twice as stupid). Glaive Combo also wasn't very good, since it came rarely and was the only real damage in the fight, meaning it was dead simple to figure out how to do it perfectly (use CDs here). Source of Chaos on Mythic Archimonde however takes the cake for one of the worst tank mechanics ever created, as this is a mechanic that involves suiciding on purpose (let yourself tick down and do nothing at all while being pushed into a rock) to make it easier for your raid, which makes absolutely no sense for a tank mechanic. Note that the good/fun mechanics always involve actually *tanking* and have room to somehow min max your effectiveness and the bad ones involve not playing your character at all and/or are very simple to do perfectly. I could give more examples of either type, but obviously there is little point going through every boss in every tier. In general, HFC was a very bad tier for tank mechanics barring Xhul'horac and I hope there are lessons taken from it going into Legion.

To touch on the topic of the place of tanks in the game, at the end of the day, the way you kill bosses in this game boils down to this: you do damage to kill the boss/adds, and you try to survive as a raid (so that you can keep doing damage). Everything boils down to these two simple facts; why do you need a tank? So the boss doesn't kill the DPS with its one-shot melee swings. Why do you kill adds? Usually because they somehow threaten the raid or are required to progress the encounter. Why does positioning the boss matter on some fights? Either because it optimizes DPS somehow, or because it helps the raid stay alive. Why do you do mechanics? Because if you don't, your DPS or survival is somehow reduced, usually via massive damage that kills someone (or everyone). And so on. Currently, DPS and healers fall into that design quite nicely, as DPS do damage (duh), and healers keep the raid alive. But then tanks fall into this

weird in between, where they are like a weak DPS combined with being concerned with survival, but only on a personal level. This is where a lot of these constant issues and reworks with tank design stem from, as this is a core identity problem with the role where it exists in this awkward middle state. And it is also why making healers more responsible for tank survival than they already are simply further erodes the remaining 'playspace' of the tank role, which is already pretty narrow. A tank is basically a bad dps plus a bad healer right now, and it's no surprise people don't want more taken away from the role. The 'mechanics/positioning' argument doesn't really work because DPS and healer mechanics tend to be just as or even more complex as the tank ones, again due to what I mentioned about about the opt-in nature of having only a few DPS or healers have to handle the hardest mechanics in most cases. Somewhat of a tangent, but I wouldn't be too shocked to see the tank role be cut from the game entirely way down the line, as honestly more and more with the direction that has been taken with tanks lately, their actual usefulness is mostly forced. Look at most fights; the only reason you need tanks on most fights is just because the boss or adds hit hard, and the only reason you need two tanks is usually some debuff. Nearly every fight could have tanks completely removed by greatly reducing boss and add melee damage. It is no wonder that there is so much argument over the role of tanks and what their place should be; how much damage they should do, what should their responsibilities be, etc.

Talents (<http://legion.wowhead.com/talent#Mkw>)

As a general note on talents; I haven't spent as much time on this section, simply because I know talents are still a WIP and are very likely to be changed at this point. So this section may have things I overlooked/are inaccurate because I just didn't think about it very long, and some talent commentary is very hastily written and may need revision.

Level 56

Bloodworms

This portion is now out of date due to the beta patch; my new thoughts on the updated talent are below it.

Where to even start... This talent is deeply flawed in its current state. What it does is store all overhealing done by DS into a pool that is instantly popped if you drop below 50% HP (or don't overheal for 10 seconds straight). Just at a glance, the obvious ramification of this talent is that DS usage more or less devolves into mindless spam. While some consideration for damage taken to increase the size will continue to exist, keep in mind you cast so few DSes with the slower rotation that it is much easier to just wait for the optimal moment and you are basically never forced into decide if a subpar DS is worth it anymore. The other problem is this talent fixes the whole burst damage issue talked about previously. Now why is this a problem? Because it does so in the stupidest possible way; via a totally passive mechanic that encourages degenerate gameplay. When I say I want DKs to have tools to deal with burst damage, I do not mean 'passive things that require little to no input', or in this case, actually remove decisionmaking from DS usage, which is even worse than just being passive.

Another problem is that since DS heals can crit now, it is much easier to accidentally overheal (50% of damage taken in 6 seconds can be quite a lot in some cases, then multiply that by a crit), so this talent becomes even more powerful/outright mandatory. And what is worse, is that it is a mandatory talent that isn't just passive and easy but actively simplifies the game, while at the same time being the best choice.

Now obviously there are two major possibilities for the tank 'metagame' as I said earlier. In the current bursty metagame, this talent is utterly mandatory, as it completely fixes all burst problems for you without even requiring your input, and simplifies your rotation. But would this talent be balanced in the alternative metagame? No. If damage was smoothed out and burst didn't exist anymore, this talent would run into the opposite problem; it would be useless. In a world with little to no burst, optimal play would devolve to 'wait until 20% HP, then DS, repeat forever'. And in that world you will never overheal (the rotation is slow enough that it's easy to avoid if there is no threat of dying in the next global), so this talent would do nothing.

I'll be honest, this talent needs major revision, or even better, to be removed. All it does is take away gameplay from the spec. Yes, it fixes the burst problem, but in exactly the worst possible way.

This talent has since been changed, and now it has gone to being more or less pointless. Even if you want a passive option for ease of use, Heart Strike is much better

than this, unless the Blood Worms are going to be buffed to do way more damage in the future. With only storing 30% overhealing, and with a supposed focus on less burst this talent is horribly inefficient now and no longer worthwhile.

Heart Strike

In many ways, this talent is the opposite of Bloodworms as instead of mitigating burst it focuses on raw HPS. It buffs Blood Strike to cleave automatically, and generate 20 rather than 15 RP. If you have read the previous section on Blood Strike vs Marrowrend, this should instantly be raising huge red flags for you. I mentioned in that section that the two abilities are already going to be a struggle to balance so that both are relevant, and a talent like this buffs Blood Strike so much, that frankly it is difficult to see Marrowrend be of any use at all if this talent is selected outside of rare cases. But hey, at least your rotation doesn't feel slow as molasses with this specced, so I guess it fixes your rotation? Except talents shouldn't be a bandaid for core issues, as it just makes the other talents in the same tier feel bad to select if you end up needing to pick them for some reason.

Consume Vitality

The problem is by making all runes the same, you end up with abilities like this being hard to balance, and they ended up adding a 30 second cooldown to this in the latest beta patch because of it. Before that, this did insane damage. Now it still does quite a bit of damage per rune, and its healing is decent considering it still gives you RP for the runes, so it is only really competing against Marrowrend. The problem is you cannot take other actions for 5 seconds, and this means you will want to use this when not actively tanking as a DPS gain which is pretty weird. The other problem is Heart Strike, depending on how many of them you do in your rotation may still end up giving you more damage than this via more Death Strikes, although that probably won't happen at current health pools vs damage since this does % of your HP as damage.

Summary

They nerfed Bloodworms to be mostly useless, because even if you just want a passive option, Heart Strike is much better. Heart strike also speeds up the painfully slow rotation and brings a lot of overall healing and some DPS, on top of easier cleave.

Consume Vitality is a thing you do while offtanking for damage, and may end up doing more damage than Heart Strike, but is not very good for anything else. Depending on the details of further changes to Consume Vitality, it may come down to a choice here, but not picking Heart Strike makes your rotation feel even more terrible.

Level 57

Bloody Reprisal

This is a weird version of Unholy Blight + Outbreak, and might actually be good in an AoE situation, if it wasn't for the 6 charge cap. At best, it does 18 ticks of Blood Plague worth of damage and healing (Blood Plague heals 1% max hp per tick), and can help spread diseases, except as you will see, there is another talent in this tier to help with **the exact same thing** except easier to use and passive. Not sure what the point of this is to be honest outside of a small DPS gain (and hitting this on cooldown every 1.5 mins for tiny damage and healing is quite literally the definition of useless button bloat that adds no real gameplay).

Bloodbolt

Okay so this talent takes your Icy Touch, and makes it AoE like Blood Boil, except at a range. So you can cast ranged Blood Boils that apply diseases rather than just spreading them and do about half the damage. Sounds terrible, considering Blood Boil is already a much weaker AoE tool than AoE Blood Strike is, so you would never want to actually spam this for AoE, and for AoE disease application, you could just as easily drop DnD + Blood Strike to apply diseases in an AoE. Now obviously this works without setup and at range, so it has an advantage, but it is strange to have two talents in the same tier that help with spreading diseases, except this one is way easier to use. Honestly this talent seems like a talent for beginner players, which in and of itself is fine, but then what is the point of Bloody Reprisal as it does the same thing but less efficiently?

Ossuary

This talent is very out of place in this tier. It is a talent focused on making Marrowrend keep up with Blood Strike on AoE, by both making it cleave in the same way, and reducing the issue of 'weak adds eating my bone shield charges for little effect' by giving you some extra charges. So first of all, on any AoE fight, you will never use Marrowrend without taking this talent. In addition, it is the only talent in the tier with a

potential strong performance benefit; Bloody Reprisal is a 18% heal on a 1.5 min CD that isn't even instant with minor damage thrown in. And once again, this talent ties into the Blood Strike vs Marrowrend problem; if you don't take this, why would you ever cast Marrowrend on 1+ targets? And being forced to take a talent, once again, to fix a core problem, is silly. If you want choices in talent selection, don't force players to work around flawed basic spec design by cherry picking 'solution' talents and ignoring everything else.

Summary

Bloody Reprisal is pretty weak, but the best option on pure ST as the others do absolutely nothing in that case. Bloodbolt is for people who struggle to pick mobs up, most of its utility being in the 5 man environment. Ossuary is a 'fixer' talent that is mandatory if using Marrowrend on 1+ targets, and doesn't have any relation to what the other talents in the tier do. Ossuary is by far the strongest talent in terms of actual effect, but doesn't apply in all situations, while the other two are disease spread assistants.

Level 58

Rapid Decomposition

This is a passive talent that is currently very weak, especially outside of mass AOE. DnD does very little damage on its own currently, and the healing from Blood Plague has the core issue of being a heal over time, and those are worthless in a tanking environment that involves any kind of burst. Also on a single target, the healing provided is extremely low: 0.5% max HP every 3 (tooltip says 5 but I assume it's still 3) seconds. I get that the idea is to give an easy talent every tier, but this one effectively does nothing outside of AoE.

Red Thirst

A weird version of Plague Leech tied to Vampiric Blood, which is very strange. The thing is, buffing a major cooldown has a core flaw attached; tanks already don't die during major CDs, especially if playing correctly. So getting more healing/mitigation during your major CD, is mostly just a waste. Having said that, this is the only talent in the tier with a notable DPS gain, but encourages you to spam Vamp Blood on CD to speed up your slow rotation, which feels awkward and strange, and the talent in general is pretty weak

(1 rune and maybe 10-20 more RP MAX every minute is not much). Its best use is pushing DPS in a situation where you don't care about wasting Vampiric Blood, except it is very weak even for that, to the point of it not really being worth the risk anyways except on trivial content.

Anti-Magic Barrier

Okay well one good thing about this; an actually active way to deal with burst, something I keep harping on multiple times in this document. It also changes the way you use AMS slightly by allowing you to make it useful on a fight with little to no magic damage, and having that option isn't a bad thing. In today's tanking world, this would actually be really strong. Vampiric Blood only grants 15% max HP on live, and is still fairly useful as a cooldown. AMS is on a low cooldown even in Legion, and with this talent grants 25% max HP for 10 seconds. If burst is less important in Legion as stated, well this talent will be much less useful, but on live I would take this in a heartbeat as its effect even extends past the 5 second duration of AMS, so even if you are using AMS to soak magical damage, this gives you an effective 5 seconds of extra CD coverage.

Summary

Another mishmash talent tier with no clear theme. The passive option is only good on mass AoE, one is a really weak 'push DPS' or 'overkill survival during a CD' talent, and the last talent is insanely strong against burst. In a bursty tanking environment I would take AMB every single time without even thinking about it, it's that good.

Level 60

Rune Tap

This talent is in an awkward place in this tier, being a mix between anti-burst and healing. With its recent buff, it is fairly efficient now, but Mark of Blood will heal quite a bit more for free, and Purgatory is way more reliable to save your life. Not sure what to think of it post buff, before buff it was awful, but I feel like the choice here is more between Mark of Blood and Purgatory. The biggest issue is that this has to compete with Heart Strike and Marrowrend for rune efficiency and has a long cooldown, and currently is still not much more efficient than either of those two spells, and infact is sometimes less efficient depending on exact boss damage output.

Purgatory

An old favorite, and frankly it is hard to see anyone picking an alternative to this. If the tanking metagame remains bursty, this is just way better than Rune Tap, because it is passive and doesn't eat precious runes. And if the metagame is not about burst, well the third talent in this tier wins by default then (and it's not exactly very engaging to play with either).

Mark of Blood

Effectively puts a HoT on yourself or your co tank (half strength in that case) for 20 seconds, on a 3 min CD. As said before, HoTs are very weak for tanks, and this talent mostly seems to bank on 'cool factor'. The gameplay of this talent is pretty simple, as you will more or less just hit it on CD; it doesn't help survive burst as it heals too slowly, and if burst is a factor at all, Purgatory is about 100x better than this in the same tier. And outside of burst, you just pop this every 3 mins on the boss, and maybe lay off on other healing slightly for 20 seconds. Infact many Blood talents are like this; heal over time, with maybe a DoT on the target as well, and any experienced tank will tell you: HoTs on tanks basically don't matter unless they are either completely free/passive or tick very hard to the point where you actually play around them.

Summary

If burst is at all an issue, Purgatory will be the only thing you ever pick here, and if it isn't, you just pick Mark of Blood and cast it on cooldown. Rune Tap comes in at an awkward middle ground of actually providing healing, but being somewhat inefficient in comparison to Mark of Blood in this tier, and other rune cost abilities that you have, which will likely be its downfall.

Level 75

Tightening Grasp

If you missed it before: Gorefiend's Grasp is Blood only, and has a baseline CD of 3 mins for Blood. This lowers it to 2 mins. If you are actually using mass grip in a fight/situation, you always pick this. And since the other two talents in this tier are also very situational, the choice is always made for you based on the situation you find

yourself in (but honestly this is better than most of the other tiers, at least here you will actually swap talents; realistically choice will never truly exist with talents unless they are all identical or so weak the differences don't matter).

Tremble Before Me

Pretty much a replacement for Remorseless Winter, but without the windup time. but shorter duration. As said above, completely situational especially in PvE, but will see uses in 5 mans at least, and in some raid situations where you can CC mobs.

March of the Damned

With IBF and Desecrated Ground gone, this is the only remaining CC immunity talent (can't break CC however). In most situations you cannot break PvE CCs, but this may be situationally useful whenever you actually can. Not much to say; this is obviously going to be taken if there is CC you can immune with it.

Summary

It is difficult to say much about these talents; they are all situational, so you just pick whichever one applies, or whichever one applies MORE if more than one does (usually Mass Grip wins because it helps other people too). This tier is basically the same as the old 90 tier was, with slight reworks to make it a little more even between all 3 options, so overall it is an improvement.

Level 90

Will of the Necropolis

The wording on this is not completely clear; does it reduce the entire hit by 20% if it would bring you below 35%, or only the portion that would bring you below 20%? Old WOTLK Ardent Defender worked in the latter way, so I am curious. Either way, the idea with this talent is to fix the burst issue described above, but once again, it does so in a passive way that doesn't involve gameplay. The other problem with this talent, is at current tuning you would never use this over the other two anyways (I assume it works like WoTLK Ardent Defender, but if it works like WuE this won't be the case). Another (another) problem is that this talent does the same thing as Bloodworms and Purgatory (but much worse, again assuming it works the way I said and it's pretty hard to test that

atm), and generally speaking you want to diversify your toolkit to deal with more different situations, rather than having a bunch of tools that do the same thing, and the other options in this tier definitely help you diversify.

Exhume

This is old Bone Shield, but slightly buffed, so it's pretty good. In terms of reducing burst on demand and overall mitigation it is massively helpful, and while it has a cooldown unlike WOTN, as any experienced tank knows, an on demand CD is better than a passive reduction, even if it is overall weaker. This talent also helps you push Marrowrend out of your rotation, which is kind of what you want to do anyways currently as Heart Strike makes Blood(Heart) Strike > Death Strike a much more favorable way to spend your resources. This talent helps bring back some of the active gameplay to DK, but the issue is it is basically giving us back something we have always had as a talent rather than a baseline spell, which is never an enjoyable thing.

Foul Bulwark

I mean this is just a better WOTN at the moment. This talent helps make Marrowrend a bit better, once again harkening back to the Blood Strike vs Marrowrend balance issue, and this talent weighs in on the Marrowrend side, but by making it better at it's already intended role; burst damage reduction. At the moment this talent encourages you to stack up Bone Shield before the pull on a dummy and get summoned to bosses, but this will likely be fixed.

Summary

The choice here is really between Exhume and Foul Bulwark (unless WoTN works differently then I said). Basically if you can deal with burst with just the 20% DR from Bone Shield, you take Exhume, but if the burst comes very often to the point where you need the 'on demand' abilities of Marrowrend (or Marrowrend is buffed directly or indirectly to make it more attractive in general), or the burst is so high it literally kills you from 100 - 0 in 1 GCD, you need to take Foul Bulwark. Of course all this assumes the metagame even involves burst (see my many cents on it near the start of this monster of an article); if it doesn't, well you just take Exhume and hit that on CD while never casting Marrowrend.

Level 100

Bonestorm

Well I am sure everyone is thinking it, but I am still not going to say it. This talent (and really, this whole talent tier) really bank on being 'cool' rather than actual gameplay. What this talent quite literally is, is Rushing Jade Wind with a healing bonus added, and a hefty cooldown + resource cost. If it suffers no diminishing returns on the healing aspect on AoE, it will trivialize many AoE encounters for the DK, which in my opinion would be a pretty stupid thing, but hey, apparently some people think 'I win buttons' are fun. *With the latest alpha patch, the healing is 3 times less, so it is 6% per target over the duration rather than 18%. So this won't be as bad anymore (keep in mind this still generates RP for DS so its healing isn't too bad overall). Gameplay wise, you hit this on cooldown, and it slows down your already slow rotation by costing 2 runes. Occasionally you might delay this if adds are spawning very soon, but with a 1 min CD, saving it for more than a few seconds is almost never going to be worthwhile.

Blood Mirror

This talent seems to want to bring back the old vengeance mechanic, with little understanding as to why vengeance was actually interesting and fun. Vengeance was not interesting because it 'made you hit harder when the boss hit you harder', it was interesting because it encouraged you to play the survival game better, to be able to take more raw damage without actually taking more real damage post mitigation, and then see a DPS gain from this, neatly making actual survival skill transfer into DPS, raising the skill cap massively, without making it impossible for the less experienced player by simply making survival really hard. Now non DK tank classes kind of broke this dynamic by actually scaling mitigation off of vengeance unlike DKs, which made them not actually have to play much better vs higher damage (and this is the core of what made vengeance really broken; some tanks specs taking advantage of it too well).

But I digress: This talent is a thorns effect you apply to yourself for 10 seconds on a 2 min CD. Its most interesting use is when AoE tanking, to focus all that damage you are taking from many targets onto a single target, and it may prove useful on some specific fights. Otherwise, it is another active cooldown, but it is pretty weak (20% for 10 seconds on 2 mins? Really?). Not a terrible talent, but its power is pretty low outside of niche situations where you will be able to reflect a lot of damage by stacking CDs and

tanking 'all the things in all the puddles'. Still, it is the most interesting talent gameplay-wise by far in this tier, and probably in the entire talent tree as it actually takes some thought to min-max depending on the fight rather than just 'hit on CD or maybe delay 5-10 seconds sometimes'.

Blood Beasts

It isn't clear if the beasts will ever die from the redirected damage before the 15 second duration, but I assume they will not be able to. Currently on alpha their damage and therefore healing is very low, so it's hard to draw many conclusions until it is buffed a little. The problem with this talent is once again, like some others, it focuses heavily on 'flash' and not much on gameplay. Gameplay wise, this is a HoT on you, and a DoT on your target, with 20% DR thrown in. As I said before, HoTs for tanks are kind of awkward, esp weak ones (but maybe this one will be strong?). But 20% DR + a HoT + DoT seems lackluster for a FIVE MINUTE cooldown. Tuning may make this the best talent, but if that is the case, it still has the problem of 'hit me on cooldown', because generally speaking saving a 20% DR doesn't make much sense if you can get 20% from Bone Shield (and 9% max HP with Foul Bulwark on top of that) in a single GCD, and HoTs aren't really something you save as a tank.

Summary

Blood Mirror has by far the most potential gameplay here, as the other two more or less are just 'hit me on CD' with little thought required (Bonestorm may sometimes be delayed for add waves). But even Mirror will likely be used this same way most of the time. Which one is better will depend on if it is an AOE situation (Bonestorm is the only talent that scales directly with number of targets here, Mirror only scales with their damage, which likely won't be as high as the bosses). Blood Beasts is by far the least interesting as its effects are all very subtle by nature, and its cooldown is obscenely long. It is also weird this tier lacks a passive talent, but I guess that is what Blood Beasts is trying to be. Overall one of the better designed tiers, mostly because there are no blatant problems with any of the talents (they don't screw anything up), but likely it will be Blood Mirror on ST, Bonestorm on AoE, unless Beasts is tuned to be higher on average than Mirror. And only Mirror is in any way interesting.

Artifact

Here is a link to the artifact tree for those who are unaware of it:

<http://beta.wowdb.com/artifact-calculator#ZAAAAAAAAIAAAAAAAAA>

I suggest looking at it, as I won't explain every detail.

*Obviously I have to mention the fact that this artifact is clearly a WIP. It has things like 'Death Coil heals you for a % of damage done', which makes no sense since Death Coil is no longer a Blood spell. Stuff will change and this portion is certain to be out of date quickly. So yes, I know things will change here.

From just a simple glance at the artifact tree, one will note the return of mathematical min-maxing in the form of the artifact talents. We now get glorious choices like 3% damage reduction vs 3% armour, or 10% DnD damage, which is all the worst aspects of the old talent trees brought back. Experienced players will quickly figure out the best path through the tree, while inexperienced players will stumble through more or less randomly, and in the end, it will make little difference (because the differences are pretty small). Frankly I don't see the point, but it doesn't really matter either way, and it isn't something that is worth the time or effort to try to address or fix, it's just something that bugs me for no reason (it doesn't even affect me, just feels like it was a waste of development time to even make these artifact trees if this is all they are going to be). The reality is this stuff will likely not matter at all, depending on if you can max the entire artifact tree before raids open or not, and we do not know the answer to that question right now.

I won't go over all the 'buff X by Y or X DR' stuff individually because there is no point, I will just look at the artifact innate ability and the major traits as those actually have some relevance to gameplay.

The Proc

The artifact has a random proc to increase your max HP by 15% for 10 seconds, and leech health from the target. Not sure what the target proc rate is, but unless the uptime is 100%, it is going to create some weird situations with fluctuating max HP levels. However this might not end up being a bad thing if it forces you play around that for

burst in an actually reactive and intelligent way, but hey, maybe we won't see burst at all (in which case, what the hell is the point of max HP procs?). So I don't mind the max HP portion too much, but the leech portion just seems random and pointless (it does quite a bit of damage and leech too), as it just makes it easier to randomly overheal through no fault of your own. It's obviously there for flavour but mostly just serves as another passive benefit that works without any player input. Meh.

Consumption

This is the starting trait you get, and it is effectively a double death strike on a 45 second cooldown that costs no resources. It deals twice the damage, and heals about 2.5x as much (50% of damage taken in the last 12 seconds is about 2.5x 40% damage taken in the last 6 seconds). Honestly this will basically just take you to full health in most situations, so it's kind of like a stronger on the gcd Death Pact, but delaying it is a huge DPS loss. Because it does so much damage, it can't really be taken off the GCD, but because it is on the (long) GCD, it is awkward to use in its seemingly intended role of saving your life. I guess the idea is you use this when Purgatory procs so you don't overheal too much, but then that kind of assumes a specific talent choice. A strange ability to use due to being anti burst but on the gcd but also being a short cd and a bad idea to delay due to doing lots of free damage, but hey, that is more interesting than half the other abilities in the toolkit; at least you can't say it's completely obvious how to use this perfectly unlike most of the talents.

Skeletal Shattering

It seems odd to put a trait that affects your stat weights so deep into the artifact tree, but to be fair as mentioned before, we have no idea if you will be able to unlock all of them before raids open or not, so it may not matter much. Either way, this is a nice way to make Marrowrend scale with Crit, much like Blood Strike > Death Strike does because DS can crit now. This does not help at all against burst however, due to being completely unreliable (may as well say parry prevents burst too then).

Umbilicus Eternus

Like a beefed up version of Red Thirst, this seemingly suffers from the same problem Red Thirst does; making an already strong button stronger even when it is overkill. However it does so by extending the effect rather than strengthening it, so that is at least an improvement. It also has the issue of scaling massively with AoE, further

solidifying the whole 'be completely immortal on AoE' theme along with Bonestorm and Blood Plague, and I already said how much I dislike that concept. I feel like with the reduction of Vamp Blood to a 1.5 min CD, this is likely to be scrapped or reworked.

Unending Thirst

This trait is broken for so many reasons. First of all, it is yet another completely passive solution to burst problems that requires minimal input but is very strong. Secondly it further encourages Blood Strike > Death Strike usage over Marrowrend, as you want to actually get low then pop your shield to get tons of free damage and healing. Also means you don't actually want to get healed too much by healers in some cases to maximize the size of this proc. Also means you technically want a smaller Death Strike to maximize damage from this, which is pretty counterintuitive. Likely this will get nerfed, or removed, as it is just so awkward and currently very overpowered as is (seriously if you think about it you pretty much don't need a healer at all with this and all your other healing). The type of playstyle that will be required to maximize a trait like this will be similar to things like doing /sit to proc LoV as paladins do currently.

Summary

It's hard to say much about the artifact, since it's so obviously a work in progress and is the most likely thing to receive significant changes, but as it currently is I really hope Unending Thirst just gets deleted, and Umbilicus Eternus gets a rework. Everything else falls into the 'awkward, but I can see this being kind of interesting to play with depending on details' category. The random leech proc doesn't really need to exist, only the HP portion of it as that actually has gameplay around it, but whatever, 'flavour/fantasy'. I would rather healing be focused in active tools like Death Strike however, than passive procs/HoTs like this one.

Closing Comments

The loss of gameplay defining talents like Blood Tap, Plague Leech* and Breath of Sindragosa is pretty painful and takes out a lot of the ability to play the spec better vs worse, or in the case of removing Blood Tap, diminishes resource management as something that was traditionally important for the spec. Many of these new Legion talents either ruin gameplay by removing important aspects of the spec, feel like they are required to fix the basic rotation (Heart Strike, Ossuary, Foul Bulwark), or are just

really weak to the point where they feel like they barely matter, or are useless compared to the alternatives in the same tier (Bloody Reprisal, Will of the Necropolis, Rune Tap among others). Some are fine, and even bring back some of the active gameplay (Blood Mirror to some extent, Exhume, MAYBE Consume Vitality if it is tuned just right?), but none of them really define gameplay in the same way some of the old talents did, and in general the spec feels gutted in terms of having complex gameplay or depth. Coupled with a slow rotation and reduction in options, and every single choice you make mattering far less due to abilities all competing for the same resources and therefore being forced to be roughly equal, this really makes the class feel like something completely different than it ever has been. Blood now feels much more like other tanks, and in an expansion supposedly focused around 'bringing back the fantasy to every spec', players should not feel like their spec was more unique before the changes.

*How did Plague Leech add gameplay? It made you think about your diseases and disease application, rather than having them be automatically refreshed by doing your basic rotation. In Legion, diseases for Blood are a purely passive effect past the initial application. While Plague Leech was not perfect, it was the only disease interaction the spec even had and now it is gone.

At the end of the day the reason I and many others play a game is to discover and master its mechanics, and then feel rewarded for my effort via ingame success. In the context of WoW this means things like helping my group succeed by bringing more damage, utility, or making other people's jobs easier by playing better myself. It needs to feel like optimizing my performance actually makes a difference, and it is dangerously close to hitting the point where reaching the effective skillcap (not failing mechanics and not dying) is becoming both simpler and the absolute limit to how much you can improve as a tank player. The types of changes going into Legion Blood are the latest and largest steps in a long line towards this result. Basic mechanics have been simplified, and advanced mechanics like Breath of Sindragosa that gave you something to strive for after succeeding at the basic requirements are gone. I understand quite well that many players play this game for other reasons; social aspects, acquiring power (loot, levels, etc), 'spectacle' (a good story, good cinematic, pretty vista, etc). But gameplay for players like me does not need to be cannibalized for those other groups of players. There is a reason difficulty modes exist, and there is a reason WoW is not purely raiding; because it tries to cater to many groups and tastes. Having advanced mechanics in the game, that are either 'opt-in' such as Breath of Sindragosa, or via not being required on lower difficulty levels, does not hurt other types of players. So why remove these things just to hurt mechanically focused players?

Another point about simplification: yes, sometimes you need to remove stuff to make room to add other stuff (imagine if every spec had 50 rotational buttons because 5 more were added every expansion). But this is not a case of removing a few things and adding others. What is happening is more like removing baseline things, bringing some of them back as talents, and then replacing some complex things with very simple things (this happens a lot in the talents). On top of this, the number of decisions to make during basic gameplay is being reduced and their importance lessened (resource management, slower rotation, weaker AM). So this is not a situation of 'out with the old in with the new', but simply a lot of removal with worse or no replacement.

I think I have given more than my few cents at this point on this whole subject of Blood and Legion. I certainly do hope that further patches move towards addressing some of these problems, but the direction taken in the last patch leaves something to be desired. Even after saying this much I do not really feel that I have adequately covered all aspects of all the points of conversation, but this document is already so long I fear few people will even have the patience to sit through it. And with that, I leave anyone who has read all the way to the end, to ponder on the points and arguments I have made and draw their own conclusions. Hopefully I at least made you think about some things that you have never considered before.

3 hour podcast discussing some of these issues (and some not mentioned in this document such as tank DPS) in great detail (Me, Magdalena and Llarold discussing tanking in legion).

<http://www.thetrainingdummies.com/2016/02/05/episode-119-might-as-well-be-stunned-part-1/>

<http://www.thetrainingdummies.com/2016/02/05/episode-119-might-as-well-be-stunned-part-2-2/>

If you want to read more about some things mentioned but not heavily discussed, such as survival 'soft caps', how they force the inclusion of mitigation to DPS tradeoffs for tanks, and on Breath of Sindragosa, esp the old Chains of Sindragosa, I recommend reading another (less long but still long) article by me at:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NFWCisTeljwQM_OSCKVonGw5cLg1eF5dTw8Z63QOAM/edit

If you want to discuss/comment on this document, I recommend one of these forum threads:

<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/20421003829#1> (Req alpha access to post)

[http://www.mmo-champion.com/threads/1938933-Thoughts-on-Tanking-and-Blood-going-into-Legion-\(LONG\)?p=38459370#post38459370](http://www.mmo-champion.com/threads/1938933-Thoughts-on-Tanking-and-Blood-going-into-Legion-(LONG)?p=38459370#post38459370)

Or my twitter if it isn't a long thing (@Troxisism)