

Faction Expansion in Destiny

a design exercise by Max Golden

Summary

Factions in destiny currently serve as investment vendors, allowing players to purchase gear that enables high-level play after investing sufficient time to unlock the powerful weapons and armour. My proposal is to expand the roles of these factions to fulfil that same purpose while also giving players a greater sense of progression, giving them goals that tie into cooperative elements, and making the factions themselves more distinct.

Motivation

I've played hundreds of hours of Destiny and I firmly believe that the biggest weak point is a lack of end-game content for high-level players. Currently, the only reason to be playing the game near level cap is to raid for high-level legendaries and run Nightfalls for a shot at acquiring an exotic. I think that by more fully fleshing out the faction systems, players can be given a clear progression path outside of the XP and armour based level systems. Players can then feel like they are making a choice that will complement the way they choose to play Destiny while also becoming invested in the long-term reward system.

Disclaimer

"No battle plan survives contact with the enemy," as they say, and the same is true with system designs. While the systems described have tried to take into account the totality of Destiny as it exists, there are certainly corner cases I haven't considered which might not become apparent until they are implemented and played with. Additionally, I don't have access to player data, so I have made all of the choices based on my own experiences with the game and the anecdotes of others.

Example Player Story

Erik bought Destiny after seeing his friends stream Crucible matches online. He was never a huge Halo fan, but he played WoW PvP and he falls in love with Destiny's multiplayer. He does a few story missions, but he reaches level 20 mostly through Crucible experience and Crucible bounties.

When he hits level 20, he receives a quest item asking him to come to the tower to speak with the Future War Cult. Erik is offered membership in the faction and he is shown the gear and weapons

available to the faction. He can unlock two full sets of armour and a weapon of each archetype as he ascends the ranks and, if he should hit faction level 21, he will be able to purchase an exotic hand cannon called Butterfingers. Erik decides that he MUST get Butterfingers and he accepts the offer to join the Future War Cult.

He is then able to accept the two daily Faction Bounties available only to characters aligned with the Future War Cult. They revolve around killing players in Crucible, which is right up Erik's alley. Completing the first pair of bounties gives him the experience to reach FWC Faction Level 1, giving him the FWC class item which adds 10% of his earned XP to his faction level.

From then on, Erik checks the FWC bounties daily to increase his faction rank. He notices that he is receiving faction XP bonuses from players in his matches who are a higher level in the FWC than he is, which further increases the rate at which he can climb the FWC ladder.

As he progresses through the low levels of the Future War Cult, he unlocks the first set FWC armour. It won't get him the light level needed to hit level cap, but it's better than almost all of the gear he has encountered in the game so far, so he purchases each piece as soon as it becomes available. The FWC weapons unlock next, all of which have perks which he feels benefit his Crucible game. At every level up to 10 Erik is given a consumable item which temporarily increases faction XP gain for him and anybody else in the FWC in his activity. At level 10 he is able to purchase these directly from the FWC vendor.

The final few ranks to 21 each take Erik several days apiece to unlock, but he is rewarded by unlocking piece-by-piece a full set of armour that is some of the best in the game. Even better: at faction level 20 he can complete the set, which has a set bonus effect equivalent to his faction consumable being activated at all times. He roams the tower like an elder god in his armour which menaces with spikes of gold and sapphire and crimson.

Finally, after weeks of dedication to his bounties, he reaches Faction Level 21 and can finally get his sweaty palms on Butterfingers. It binds to his character, so he can't pull it out of the bank to use on his freshly minted Warlock, but that doesn't matter to Erik. He's achieved his goal, and he feels the sense of accomplishment of having shown the dedication to unlock one of the best guns in the game. He knows that if he continues to level up in the Future War Cult he can unlock more cosmetic items and a crazy shader, but for now, Erik is content.

That is, until one of his friends tells him about the Dead Orbit exotic sniper rifle...

Defining the Factions

In the current iteration of Destiny, when the player first is able to join a Faction they all seem superficially similar: they all expose a set of armour and a few guns in the faction's colour scheme, but

the choice of what faction to join ultimately feels less important than getting ANY gear at a high light level. One of the key pillars of this document is to define and differentiate the roles of the factions so that players can make a meaningful choice about the way they want to play Destiny.

The differentiation is made explicit by the nature of the faction vendor equipment, the faction exotic, and the faction bounties. I will discuss each faction's approach to these areas separately.

Future War Cult

The FWC seeks to train humanity for the coming fight with The Darkness, and, as such, they are the most directly combat-oriented of the factions, with a specific focus on Crucible prowess. They map closely to Richard Bartle's description of 'Killers' in his taxonomy of multiplayer online gamers.

FWC armour and weapons reflect this. They include perks to reduce reload times and add cornercase lethality to give FWC members a slight edge in some player versus player situations. The bold primary colours make unshaded players stand out like lethal circus performers ready to juggle daggers straight into the faces of their foes.

The FWC exotic 'Butterfingers' is a clear PvP gun. It's a high-capacity handcannon that instantly reloads the gun after killing an enemy who is reloading THEIR gun. Much less useful in PvE situations, but a skilled player can bring an enemy team to their knees in Clash or Inferno.

FWC bounties are basically an extension of Crucible bounties, with specific attention to getting skill kills in PvP or killing other Guardians with the whole range of weapon archetypes. By having the FWC bounties revolve around multiplayer, a solo Future War Cultist has a high likelihood of being matched with other FWC members to benefit off of the FWC battle buff.

Dead Orbit

Dead Orbit seeks to expand off of Earth into the stars, which makes them the faction du jour of Bartle's 'Explorer' archetype. Sometimes solitary, their faction-specific equipment seeks to empower them to battle against the forces of darkness.

Dead Orbit equipment is often about giving players the ability to do more with less, giving armour perks that increase availability of class abilities and weapons that have additional crowd-control effects on nonhuman enemies. Dead Orbit armour gives players the feeling of being a badass space Van Helsing, holding back darkness and advancing beyond the frontier of civilisation.

The Dead Orbit exotic is a large-magazine stable sniper rifle named 'Moby'. But rather than shooting out a series of techno hits, this Moby has the ability to stagger most enemies with the first bullet out of the clip. Useful for stiff-arming bosses while clearing out lesser mobs, Moby gives member of Dead Orbit a little breathing room while saving the universe.

The bounties for Dead Orbit are mostly about clearing specific overworld encounters on the planet surfaces. A typical example might be to complete a public event on Venus within a fixed time after it spawns. Because all Dead Orbit adherents will be receiving the same bounty, the Dead Orbiter will naturally be drawn to the same spaces as others in his faction, allowing them to benefit off of each other's bonuses. Oftentimes the specifics of the bounties will serve to enrich the lore of these encounters, giving the players the rush of discovering more nuances of plot.

New Monarchy

The final of the three current factions, New Monarchy is all about the internal struggles of the surviving humans. Featuring bounties which often revolve around team activities, the more social players can coordinate with other players before setting out to attack their challenges.

New Monarchy equipment is mostly about adding buffs from for allies or receiving buffs from their actions. Some armours have perks that increase how much super energy is restored by orbs of light, others might increase shield recharge rate when extremely close to allied players. Garish and striking, New Monarchists stride about the tower like a flock of red and white peacocks glistening in the sun.

The New Monarchy exotic machine gun 'Disassembler' offers further benefits for teammates: it's a gun that, upon killing an enemy, has a chance to generate a random ammo box for teammates (it is, of course, unable to spawn heavy ammo in Crucible). A fully decked-out Monarchist is a welcome addition to any group for any activity.

The New Monarchy bounties often call for players to execute as a team. Tending to revolve around the matchmade Strike playlists, their bounties include goals like completing the fights efficiently and minimising player death time over the activity: tasks which become almost trivial with a little help from your friends.

Faction Consumables

Faction-based XP bonus consumables have been mentioned a few times, but they deserve a more detailed look. These are items which are given to players when upon ranking up and become purchasable after reaching Rank 10) at which point they are no longer given out "for free").

When activated, the consumables give a limited time (~2 hour) faction XP bonus of 5%. This bonus stacks with the class item XP siphon and with other people's bonuses in a reducing manner: The first instance of the buff gives the player +5% XP (for a total of 15% with the class item), the second gives an additional 2.5%, the third gives a further 1.25%, etc. (with this system the absolute maximum bonus would go to 20% as the number of stacking buffs approaches infinity). The buff is applied to all players within the same fireteam or matchmaking instance with the same faction (a Dead Orbit bonus

won't help somebody from FWC and vice versa). The stacking rewards players for playing with others in their same faction, creating a sense of in-universe fraternity.

In the narrative description of the faction, I also mentioned the fact that the wearing a full set of the high-level faction gear gives a set bonus: the buff effect is permanently enabled. This further draws low-ranked players in a faction to high-level mentors, extending the sense of community.

Faction Consumables are only able to be activated while a player is affiliated with the specific faction. If the player switches faction, she will no longer be able to interact with the faction vendor or use any stored Faction Consumables.

Faction Ranks

As mentioned earlier, players rank in these factions starts at 0 and ends at rank 20. Here is a table of what the player sees at each rank:

Level	Reward
0	--
1	Faction Consumable, Faction Class Item
2	Faction Consumable, Low Tier Boots Unlocked
3	Faction Consumable, Low Tier Gloves Unlocked
4	Faction Consumable, Low Tier Chest Unlocked
5	Faction Consumable, Low Tier Helmet Unlocked
6	Faction Consumable, Basic Nameplate
7	Faction Consumable, Basic Shader
8	Faction Consumable, Shotgun Unlocked
9	Faction Consumable, Pulse Rifle Unlocked
10	Sniper Rifle and Consumable Unlocked
11	HMG Unlocked
12	Rocket Launcher Unlocked
13	Scout Rifle Unlocked
14	Pulse Rifle Unlocked
15	Auto Rifle Unlocked
16	Hand Cannon Unlocked
17	High Tier Boots Unlocked
18	High Tier Gloves Unlocked
19	High Tier Chest Unlocked
20	High Tier Helmet Unlocked
21	Faction Exotic Unlocked
22	Faction Nameplate Unlocked
23	Faction Spaceship Unlocked
24	Faction Sparrow Unlocked
25	High-Tier Shader

Hitting Faction Rank 21 (unlocking the exotic weapon) for one faction on one character should be a long term investment; it should probably take at least 50 hours of faction rank grinding to get there. Hitting that target requires calculations of average XP per playtime which are difficult to estimate without hard numbers.

Players should be free to switch faction whenever they choose, but there is a penalty of reduced rank if/when they return. This penalty can be simply described in three cases:

1. Player is faction rank 0 or 1: There is no rank penalty for changing faction.
2. Player is faction rank 2 – 10: Player loses a single rank upon their return.
3. Player is faction rank 11 – 25: Player loses two ranks upon their return.

These penalties must be made explicit to the player when they attempt to change faction. A prompt could say something along the lines of **“Are you sure you want to leave the Future War Cult? Your Future War Cult rank will drop to 16.”**

The penalty encourages players to see a specific faction through to Rank 25 before jumping ship, but it also gives players the freedom to find a faction that might be more in line with the way they wish to play Destiny. For instance, a player joining the FWC and then noticing that the bounties all involved Crucible would be well served to jump ship early without losing too much of their invested effort.

Other System Interactions

Outside of the bounties, a main source for faction XP should be Raiding. Completing a raid for the first time in a week should give around the same amount of faction XP as completing both daily bounties. Note that this is for the first time completing EITHER raid, so if a player completes both Vault of Glass and Croata’s End in a week, the large XP bonus will only apply to the first raid.

However, raids will also give reduced faction XP bonuses (~10%) for repeat clears in a week. This gives players an additional incentive to help friends complete a raid instance even after they have done it themselves; if the other players are faction aligned and using consumables, this made even more enticing.

Another point deserving discussion is what I described as armour sets. Currently, set bonuses do not exist in Destiny, and players tend to use whatever is working best for them at the time. The set bonuses on high-level Faction armour exist in an alternative Destiny universe where there are multiple Legendary Sets with corresponding bonuses; the faction armour with its faction-centric

bonus will simply be one option for high-level players making decisions about how to equip themselves for endgame content.

Numeric Estimates

This part has a considerable amount of hand-waving for coming up with the numbers, but I hope to explain the goals and the process for producing the numbers that I do.

The three main sources of faction rank XP are:

1. Percentage of Total XP Earned
2. Daily Faction Bounties (x2)
3. Raid XP Bonuses

Currently, the bounties on any given day are worth between 40,000 and 50,000 XP per character if a motivated player finishes all of them. The daily heroic is worth around 4800 XP, and then there are lower rates of XP for killing monsters and doing patrols. I'm not privy to actual data, but for the sake of the math, we'll assume that a well-motivated player's daily potential is 60,000 XP per character.

Let's also assume that, on average, the faction class item and any active faction XP buffs allow the player to capture 15% of that XP for faction ranking, which amounts to 9000 faction XP per day.

The daily faction bounties can be more easily tuned for the desired progression rate. For the average player, we want faction bounties to be the major daily contributor to faction rank. For the well-motivated player, I'll settle for a little less than half coming from the bounties. Having both bounties be worth 3750 faction XP each puts the daily faction bounty XP total at 7500.

Raiding for the first time in a week should produce a faction XP bonus equivalent to both daily bounties, or 7500 XP. The second raid will be worth 10% as much, or 750. Both of these are modified by faction XP bonuses, so we'll add about 15% to give us around 9500 XP per week from raiding.

The well-motivated player doesn't take days off from his Destiny grind, so it is safe to assume that they are hitting these maximum values consistently, giving them a weekly faction XP total of:

$$(9000 + 7500) * 7 + 9500 = 125,000 \text{ XP per week}$$

We are hoping that the dedicated player will not be able to get the faction exotic (faction rank 21) for one character on one faction for at least two or three weeks, so we'll be targeting a cumulative total of between 250,000 and 375,000 XP to reach rank 21.

It was a stated goal to have completion of the first two Faction Bounties award enough XP to bring a player from level 0 to 1, so we'll go ahead and call the XP required for faction rank 1 7500. Tuning the

rate of change allows us to alter the cumulative totals to match our stated cumulative XP goals; by setting each faction rank to cost 750 more XP than the previous level, the cumulative total comes out to 315,000 XP for rank 21:

Rank	XP Required	Cumulative XP Total
1	7500	7500
2	8250	15750
3	9000	24750
4	9750	34500
5	10500	45000
6	11250	56250
7	12000	68250
8	12750	81000
9	13500	94500
10	14250	108750
11	15000	123750
12	15750	139500
13	16500	156000
14	17250	173250
15	18000	191250
16	18750	210000
17	19500	229500
18	20250	249750
19	21000	270750
20	21750	292500
21	22500	315000
22	23250	338250
23	24000	362250
24	24750	387000
25	25500	412500

This system allows a dedicated player to get an average of just under one faction rank per day to reach level 21. At the earlier levels they might be able to get several ranks in a single day, later ranks might take a couple of days each to unlock.

What about a “normal” destiny player?

Again, my lack of hard data makes answering this question difficult, so I’ll look at the case of a player who only has time for Destiny 3 nights a week, doesn’t raid, but still wants to climb the faction ladder. This player might get, through non-faction bounties, 20,000 XP per day that they play, 15% of which

amounts to 3000 faction XP daily. If they're also doing both faction bounties, they can look forward to the 7500 XP per day from them as well. Their weekly haul looks like this:

$$(3000 + 7500) * 7 = 31,500 \text{ XP per week}$$

With the rank XP values listed above, it takes this player about 10 weeks to reach the faction exotic, or about 3 months. This does not seem unreasonable, especially given the fact that they will be constantly unlocking useful equipment as they ascend the faction totem pole.

Extra Credit: Quest Gates

The plan presented above is what I consider the minimum feature set for a rework of factions. However, if additional resources could be spared to create short, faction-specific quest chains, the impact to players' perceptions of the world of destiny could be dramatic.

Such a system would give players a short, lore-related quest upon reaching a certain rank. They would then be prevented from gaining ranks until reaching the end of the quest chain. The quests could be structured in such a way to build longer stories for the player to explore. For instance, one could put quest gates at 5, 10, 15 and 20 which together build into a longer narrative arc about the faction's in-universe goals.

Implementing this could reduce Faction Bounties' burden of communicating what the faction is all about, which would then allow the bounties to become less faction-specific and more appealing to a broader set of players.