

Bandit Minefield - Design choices

We wanted to share some insights into our thought process regarding the design of our new Bandit Minefield spell. It plays an integral role in our upcoming rework of Bandits and will be a very powerful new tool to make the faction viable in PvP.

Bandits in PvP

Our goal with the upcoming rework is to make Bandits a great faction in PvP across any skill bracket. To reach this state we started to take a look at the current position and issues of the faction.

Unique T2 Bandits cards have been mostly underwhelming. This limits the options of tweaking the faction, as a buff to a splash card always has an impact on 3 additional factions. Bandit Stalker buffs were an attempt in the past to help in that regard. Outside of unique faction cards, many decks in PvP gain strength through splash synergies. For Bandits, almost all of them are limited to offensive setups. This leads to the state where the deck can be really explosive when played from ahead. It makes the deck fun to play and is definitely something we would like to preserve.



However, with the lack of access to crowd control and building protection, Bandits was left with extremely low defensive capacities, in addition to limited strategic options to secure advantages on open field trades. This heavy reliance on outplaying your opponent through micro locked the faction behind a large skill barrier for new players, while keeping it exposable upon facing a somewhat equally skilled opponent at higher Elo ranges. Because of this, the new cards are supposed to help with trading and keeping your economy alive in the first place. It is not supposed to warp the entire identity of Bandits as an offensive faction, but it increases the chances of getting into this position in the first place rather than being forced to proactively defend any opposing siege attempt all the time. On top of this, it should help lower the skill floor of Bandits, making it much more new-player-friendly while still preserving skill expression elements for the more experienced and skilled players.

Decision to add a spell

The decision to add a new spell to Bandits wasn't a very difficult one to make. The spell arsenal of Bandits is lackluster: Its unique Warriors Death spell is rather poorly designed and far too specific. On the other hand, the splash options for T2 spells are expensive (≥ 100 power) making them very situational. When opting for a splash in T2, crowd control options from Nature and building protects from Frost are usually the most desired tools. Bandits has access to none of these.

Fortunately, there are already 2 viable factions without the strong spell support of a Nature or Frost splash. Pure Fire and pure Shadow both are powerful factions in their own way, but they share a similarity in the spell department. Both have a unique faction defining spell (Wildfire/Nether Warp), that

expands playmaking potential at various situations. These cards also give the option to counteract the classic offensive pattern where the enemy aims directly for the power well, while buying enough time to destroy it with crowd control. On top of that, both factions have a lot of power loaded onto a few cards, which really helps with slot efficiency, an important consideration in PvP deck building. Therefore, from the existing examples of pure Fire and pure Shadow, we derived the following requirements for the new Bandits spell:

1. Needs to have a clear impact on open field trading
2. Should be significantly cheaper than existing spell options (Aura of Corruption, Lavafield)
3. Should enable more defensive options when it comes to protecting the economy structures
4. Ideally, the spell should be sufficient as a replacement for cards from the existing T2 rather than just complementing them (deck slot efficiency).



Design Decisions and First Proposal

The next step of the design process was finding a mechanic that fulfils these requirements, while also fitting into the style of Bandits as a faction. For example, adding hard cc would not be ideal for a mixed identity around the colors of Shadow and Fire.

Because of this, we decided to look for a zoning tool that either works around DPS or knockback, and which is derived from an existing Bandits ability. At first, we talked about something similar to Sandstorm, but in the end the Soulhunter ability ended up being the preferred choice because of its potential to be unique. An added bonus was that it was an easy concept to implement.

In terms of design there are certain similarities to Wildfire, which scales extremely well into attacks, something Bandits were already good at. Therefore, we removed the ability to deal damage to power wells, as this has been proven to be oppressive against factions that have no access to building protect spells. We wanted to focus on open field trading and maximize the defensive potential, so we added knockback and damage to the card. The knockback and damage, combined with being cheap, was supposed to allow the spell to zone enemies away from an area for a certain amount of time. To avoid permanent choke point zoning, we made the mines deplete after 10 seconds with a 20s cooldown. By looking at previous design requirements this led to the following proposal:

Initial card Design

- Places 4 mines in a line of 20m
- Cannot be placed next to hostile units and structures
- Mines disappear after 10 seconds
- Power cost: 65
- Knockbacks S and M units
- Reusable every 20 seconds
- Each wave dealing 100 (300) damage

The biggest question mark was how placement restrictions would end up working in a realistic PvP environment. For example, how close can Minefield end up getting placed, can swift units dodge it before triggering the effect, etc. Our hope was that swift units would be able to dodge Minefield successfully.



The process of fine-tuning

Once we got our hands on the card, we immediately noticed that Mines appeared far quicker than we had anticipated, and that the line placement allowed you to guarantee mines triggering before swift units like Burrowers and Nightcrawlers could leave the area. This led to very reliable CC due to the constant M knockback, ultimately making the spell much more powerful than anticipated.

For this reason, we had to remove the M-knockback in order to add more reasonable counterplay to the spell. A second side-effect of guaranteed activation was the circumstance that activated mines could zone for 12 seconds, which decreased the window of entering an area during its cooldown. We tried to compensate for this by increasing the cooldown by an additional 5 seconds.

After playtesting, we still thought Minefield fulfilled its intended purpose too well, so we also increased its power cost to 70, matching some of its common counter options more evenly (Netherwarp, Surge of Light, etc.).

To keep the spell functionality consistent with the existing card Mine, we also added 25% building damage to structures, with the exception of Power Wells, Orbs or Walls. This should give the spell a more intuitive feeling when using it in a PvE environment, considering its solid potential for use there as well. Through fine-tuning, we were led to the following final adjustments for Bandit Minefield:

Summary of fine-tuning process:

- Increased power cost by 5
- Increased cooldown by 5 seconds
- Removed M-Knockback
- Added 25% damage vs buildings (power wells, orbs & walls excluded)

This leads us to the current design, and we are excited to observe how this spell will perform in the hands of our players!

