GuildMag

February issue #6: From the Mists

In this issue:

Lyssa: The Twin Goddesses
Humans of Cantha
Fanfic: Necklace of Power
Tyria: A World That Could Have been
The Adventures of Soy Oil
And more....

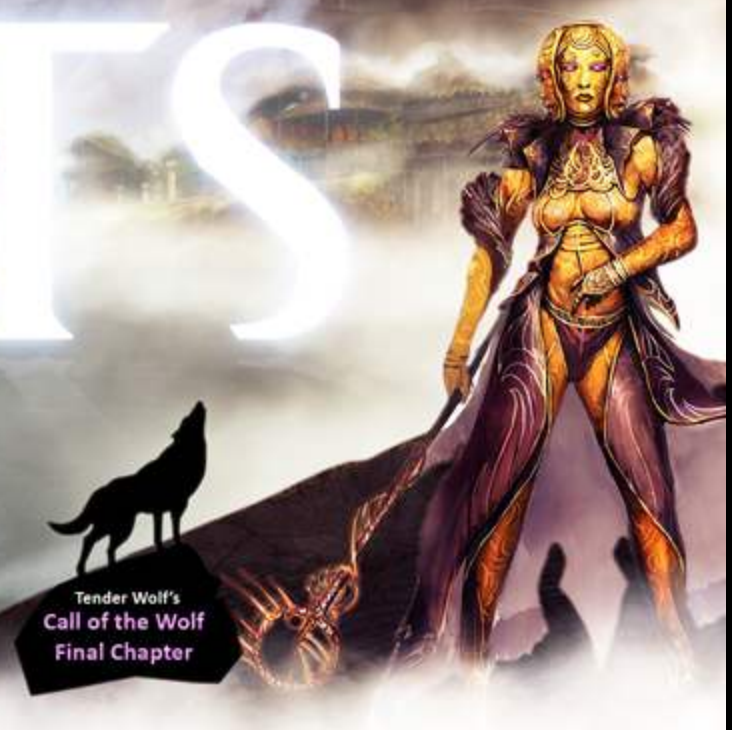






FROM THE

MISTS



GuildMag

February issue #6: From the Mists

Enter GuildMag

For a long while during the months of December and January, ArenaNet has been rather quiet on the Guild Wars 2 front. Now, we've started to see a few things that are hidden behind the curtain, both for Guild Wars 1 and Guild Wars 2. This issue is all about mysterious secrets which we would like to unveil to our readers. These opening changes to Guild Wars are just a precursor to further secrets to be revealed at PAX East, and further into the future. Of course we also have our usual articles like player interviews, fan fiction, and plenty more - just check out the index at the right side of this page!

In other news, we would like to mention the fact that we've totally redesigned our website and added new outlets into the mix. You might already know about our Magazine, Podcast and Blitz news blog, but you may not be aware of the new additions. Introducing: GuildMag Visions - a place for opinionated reviews and community updates from the GuildMag staff - GuildMag Features - where we can bring our loyal fans loads of downloadable goodies - and GuildMag Videos - where our current and future videos of Guild Wars and Guild Wars 2 can be found. Every week we'll try to bring you at least one opinionated blog regarding all kinds of subjects written by different team members, ranging from official news releases to things we would just like to share with you. Also part of Visions is our Community Roundup by Valiant, in which he searches all the happenings of the community over the past week and gives a little description as to what it entails. It's definitely worth checking out if you want to keep up to date on everything Guild Wars. Features and Videos will be less

This issue:

- **Welcome to the mists**
  The beginning. Literally.
- **GuildMag Showdown: Prince Rurik vs Master Togo**
  Who will come out on top?
- **Title Hunters | Legendary Vanquisher**
  These legendary heroes show no mercy.
- **Tyria: A World That Could Have Been**
  Aztechronotopian markets featuring guildbank mounts!
- **The Adventures of Soy Oil: Part 2**
  So easy, even a Norn could do it.
- **GuildMag Featured Artist: Tommy**
  Prolific Nolani Academy artist, Tommy's.
- **The Celestials**
  Learn more about these highly revered celestial deities.
- **Dutch's Talk with Ravious (Kill Ten Rats)**
  Get personal with our favorite blogging superstar.
- **The Team's opinion on... Edge of Destiny**
  GuildMag staff review the much anticipated prequel.
- **Arachnia and the Insectoid Gods**
  Skin crawling research on mysterious insect beings
- **FanFic: Necklace of Power**
  Relic lost to the passage of time.
- **Lyssa: The Twin Goddessess**
  Mesmerizing account on the matron of illusion and beauty.
- **Humans of Cantha, The First to Walk Tyria**
  The history and culture of the earliest humans.
- **Call of the Wolf**
  Tender Wolf's closing chapters.
- **End of the line**
  The last tidbits.

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Welcome to the mists

by Gmr Leon

In the Beginning...

"Before there were humans or dwarves, before there were even worlds or the stars that light the night sky, there was but one thing in the universe—the Mists. The Mists touch all things. They are what binds the universe together, past, present, and future. They are the source of all good and evil, of all matter and knowledge. It is said that all forms of life, no matter how simple or complex, can trace their origins back to this one place."

-Prophecies Manuscripts.

Many do not ask of the Mists. Many may not even be aware of them, or rather, it. The Manuscripts describe the Mists as a place, yet it is both a place, and not a place; it is a substance, and almost not a substance. This is the curious nature of the Mists and part of the reason many do not research or attempt to understand it. It stretches the bounds of the imagination beyond what most are comfortable doing.

Most factual information that is had of the Mists relates to its creative properties and locations within; yet there is even more speculative information surrounding its nature and its connections to other phenomena throughout the world of Tyria. However, it remains speculative as it is difficult to even begin to examine the Mists, and any other research on it was lost with the death of Lord Odran whom was the first mortal on Tyria to enter the Mists and eventually reach the Rift, within which lies the hallowed Hall of Heroes.

It is unknown how Odran located the Rift, since despite it being located in the center of the Mists, the Mists is seemingly a vast area. It should be difficult to navigate its lands and worlds to such a place, especially when one is as inexperienced as Odran may have been in his traversal of the Mists. Nevertheless, he somehow managed to, and some Tyrians have gained access through Odran's efforts and leftover portals to the Rift and the Hall of Heroes.

Known Locations of the Mists.

There are innumerable worlds, dimensions, and planes within the Mists. First and foremost is humanity's most familiar residence, Tyria, although this is suggested not to be their homeland, both in the sense of the world and the continent, by our mysterious scholar Bahltek in the following line: "He was able to traverse through multiple planes of existence, some of which predate the one you currently call your native soil," thus extinguishing the long held idea that Tyria was the first world amongst the many said to be created by the Old Gods, as well as inciting doubt to it being humanity's original ancestral home.

The second and third most familiar locations, while not homes of living humanity, are home to dead humans and the servants of the gods. These are the Underworld and Fissure of Woe, wherein both the spirits of humans reside. While in the latter, many are under the service of Balthazar in his fight against his half-brother Menzies, and some seem to suggest they have yet to pass under the judgment of Grenth.

The fourth notable area is the Realm of Torment, which in some way connects to the Underworld through the Bone Pits, yet due to the Underworld's size has raised many a discussion on whether it should be classified among the many other subregions of the Underworld, such as the Labyrinth, Bone Pits, Ice Wastes, Spawning Pools, and so forth. Within this dark and tormented realm are those souls touched by Abaddon. As it is not only a prison for the cast down god, but an isolation chamber for those he would use to spread his influence and help him to break free.

Alongside this area, though only indirectly connected to it via its presence in the Rift, is the Hall of Heroes. It is more appealing and understandably so, as the Realm of Torment is a hellish place, while the Hall is a fantastic display of architectural magnificence made of gold and possessing many intricate details upon its structures. And in stark contrast to the darkness of the Realm of Torment, it is extraordinarily bright, which causes the gold it is made of to shimmer brilliantly.

Alas, but the Rift has been overlooked! The Rift itself is a tear in the fabric of the cosmos where time goes neither forward nor back, and being the center of the Mists, it acts as the point of supreme balance between the forces of the multiverse, connecting to all things allowing those with the knowledge of how to use it to access any location across the multiverse, to reach anything. It is from here that Odran explored many parts of the Mists, before he met his end in the very place he had made his great nexus.

These are merely six areas Tyrians have explored in the Mists, one of which they simply live on and the others only relating to their afterlives and their deities. However, this is likely only the tip of the iceberg. As Bahltek indicated, there are not only worlds within the Mists but other planes of existence that Tyrians, aside from the hints of Odran, may or may not have crossed into. In other words, there is much, much more to see, and Tyrians have only just begun, which is what makes the rise of the Elder Dragons and Tyrians' focus on survival, rather than the exploration of the Mists, rather disappointing, at least in this writer's opinion.

The Ambiguous Nature of the Mists.

"The protomatter that makes up the Mists strains toward creation, often spawning demonic creations in nightmarish forms. Not all creatures from the Mists are demonic, however. When the Mists come into contact with a suitable human template, for example, it can copy that form, creating a sentient entity with humanoid appearance and an almost human mind."-Nightfall Manuscripts.

"The Mists are the building blocks of reality, the proto-reality that exists between the worlds. It is where we find afterlives and the homes of the various gods and other powerful entities. The Mists also resonate from the worlds around them, such that they form bits of their own reality – islands of existence that reflect the histories of their worlds."-The elusive researcher (Jeff Grubb).



Razah is a fascinating entity, an example for study for those ambitious enough to tackle the Mists themselves. He, or it, displayed its capability to interact with existing specimens and replicate them, albeit with some degree of error, as Razah is lacking certain mental and emotional characteristics. What is also fascinating is the unknown author of the Manuscripts that explained how Razah and other, fiercer creatures come into being from the Mists that intriguingly enough gives some detail as to the underlying elements behind the Mists.

From its explanation, it appears that the Mists is not simply a place - an open space, containing a variety of objects - but the matter before matter, as well as a more passively active form of space. It does not simply contain, it occasionally brings things into being. What causes or influences these events of formation, as it does not seem as though the Mists possess a higher intelligence and thus do not truly create, is unknown.

On the other hand, the elusive researcher's exposition would suggest that the environment itself, which if magic and mesmers are any indication, can be influenced by the mind and may have some hand in the Mists' behaviours. Certainly, it seemed that Razah was a trump card of Abaddon's that he hadn't the time to use, but it is never clarified whether he created Razah or had him captured and was preparing him for another plan. God of Secrets indeed, this is one matter which Abaddon went to the grave with, and Kormir has not bothered to elaborate upon herself, despite mentioning she now has his knowledge.

It is this fascinating situation and the notes of the researcher that leave other researchers of the Mists perpetually intrigued. If the Mists resonate from the worlds around them, what is it resonating from? The world itself, or the inhabitants of the world? If it is the inhabitants, then does this mean that if a person knows what he or she is doing, he or she could manipulate the Mists with a heavily trained mind? Is it the activities or thoughts of the worlds' inhabitants that cause the Mists to resonate with the world? What is it that causes this phenomenon of the Mists resonating with the worlds, producing places around them that reflect their history?

Tyrians and the Mists.

Those questions lead into this next section, which as indicated above, remains highly lacking in research and clarity. There are certain pieces of the puzzle we have, but they are disjointed, and it is difficult to find where they fit together...if they fit together at all. First of all, we have the mesmer's ability to manipulate the ether, the ritualist's ability to feel surges along the spirit threads that they appear to use to commune with spirits; however, we do not know exactly what the ether is or what the spirit threads are and whether either of these in some way connect to the makeup of the Mists.

The following are excerpts from research journals speculated to be Velise's handiwork:



"By focusing the ether around my body, I can create a barrier. It is almost as though the air itself hardens, stopping arrows and deflecting blades...It requires an immense amount of concentration to maintain, and lapses in focus allow attacks to slip through."

"As a horde bore down to me, I manipulated the ether to imbue myself with the vigor of my youth...However, illusions seldom last, and the body must eventually pay for the follies of the mind."

"It is actually a relatively simple matter to use the ether to alter the perception of an enemy, especially one so primitive as the Charr."

"It was this overwhelming desire to stem the tide that inspired my last spell. I have found a way to use the ether to directly inhibit a foe's mind. The weave is complex, but when properly crafted the spell slows a foe's actions."

From Headmaster Quin and her student may we also derive some insight into the abilities of ritualists:

"I have felt a great disturbance along the spirit threads. The spirits tell me that someone has allowed a demon to cross into the material realm."-Headmaster Quin.

"I was trying an advanced spirit-binding ritual; I know I should not have attempted it, I have not the skill...but I felt an intense surge along the spirit threads unlike anything I have ever felt before, and I think it had little to do with my poor skill. It was a powerful evil, and its presence was enough to bring the spirit I was binding into the material realm, where it has been running amok ever since!"-Jakimo.

Both share a common characteristic: a reference to fabric - in the research journals a description of the weave of the ether, and in the ritualists' practice, of sensing the spirit threads. If this is somehow connected to the Mists, we may have an additional level of comprehension of how they may be manipulated by the inhabitants of the worlds within them. Although, it may be that each world has its own unique way of interacting with the Mists, in some way altering the framework of the Mists; so while on Tyria it may be what they call the ether, which seems to have taken on a textile-like form as suggested by the weave of the ether, while on other worlds, it may be completely different. Similarly, the way they sense spirits on other worlds may also be different. It may even differ on Tyria, depending on the race, though of their methods in magic in these areas we know very, very little.

Speaking of races, we have an extremely interesting case with the recently encountered kodan, whose spiritual leaders, known as Voices, are said to open themselves up to the Mists to commune with the will of their god, Koda. Strangely enough, the Voices echo the conceptions of the woven nature of existence:

"No race weaves the thread of life. We are all strands in it, seeds upon the earth, inheritors of nature's balance." -Many Stars.

What makes the Voices unique is not only as stated, but that they are presently the only beings of any race noted to interact with the Mists on a scale that they can literally go insane from it, falling under the condition called the "Rage of Koda" from the visions they apparently receive. What this suggests is astounding, and it is that there is a possibility that the races of Tyria, with enough training, may interact, even if it is only passively, with the Mists themselves. If this is the case, it opens up many avenues of research, making it clearer which pieces of the puzzle fit together, helping to understand this disturbing and amazingly subtly complex entity: the Mists. Unfortunately, however, it may never be known what precisely the experiences of the Voices are like or what their passive reception of the Mists encounters and endures...



The unofficial Guild Wars magazine.

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Welcome to GuildMag Showdown, where in each issue we will bring you a face-off between two of Guild Wars' most unlikely characters. This month we have cast Ressurection Signet twice for this royal rumble between two blue-blooded men of valor: Prince Rurik of Ascalon and Master Togo of Cantha.

The Fighters

Prince Rurik

As a boy he "spent much time in these lands", but after dying, being reanimated into a minion of The Lich and being killed again, we have brought him back only to do battle once more. It all went down hill for Rurik after being exiled from his home by his father, King Adelbern, only to later be beheaded by Dagnar Stonepate while crossing The Shiverpeaks. This was not the end for Rurik however. The sinister Lich reanimated the prince into his own undead minion. But on the dark plains of the Ring of Fire Island Chain, Rurik was finally slain by a certain hero...

Master Togo

In his youth, Togo did small things such as ending an entire war. But in his old age he became the head of the Shing Jea Monastrey

Weapons

Sohothin:

This ancient, flaming orrian blade predates the Exodus of the Gods and never leaves Rurik's side, for now atleast...

Staff:

A simple staff, powerful in the hands of any experienced caster.

Advantage: Prince Rurik

Armour Type

Armour:

Heavy plate armour covers Rurik's flesh from harm.

Robes:

Thin robes provide little protection but allow for easy movement and spellcasting.

Advantage: Prince Rurik

Skills

Defensive Stance, Endure Pain and Healing Signet

Rurik only uses a small number of skills, relying on self-preservation rather than offensive power.

Recuperation, Spirit Burn, Spirit Rift, Vengeful was Khanhei, Vengeful Weapon

Recuperation, Spirit Burn, Spirit Rift, Vengeful was Khanhei, Vengeful Weapon

Advantage: Master Togo

Special Ability

Ascalonian Fury

Master's Patience

After his home being destroyed, his lover being killed, being exiled, being killed, being reanimated, and being killed again, one might say Rurik could be a little angry now we have resurrected him once again only for him to have to fight.

Years of teaching has given Master Togo extreme patience; however, this has also left him with a lackluster sense of timing. In a condition similar to that of Orion, Togo often casts spells at awkward times (most often Spirit Rift when the battle is close to finishing) making it useless.

Advantage: Prince Rurik

Winner!

Prince Rurik

Rurik's superior armour and weapons, along with the fury of a twice-dead exiled prince, easily make up for his lack of skills against Togo's superior arsenal, making him the winner of the first GuildMag Showdown. A fine battle indeed...

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TITLE HUNTERS LEGENDARY VANQUISHER

by Izari

'To vanquish' is defined as the act of conquering by force. Aptly put, as that's exactly the goal when players take on the endeavor of becoming a Legendary Vanquisher.

The meta title is the result of three tracked ones and is earned by successfully clearing out all explorable areas in Tyria, Elona, and Cantha in hard-mode. Although it sounds simple enough, there's a lot of planning and stocking ahead of time, not much unlike what an actual quest of this caliber would be like.

The process is long and tedius and at times unforgiving. Doing research ahead of time, planning your hero builds, and bringing the right equipment is key. Smart use of consets, summons, food buffs, and shrines will all help expedite the process.

The plus side is that Vanquishing goes hand in hand most times with other achievements: specifically exploration and rep farming. Because you have to be sure to cover an entire area to kill every foe that exists, coupling your search with scraping and keeping an eye on your map can help further along your Cartographer progress. Furthermore, many hard-mode areas are great for rep farming, especially in Eye of the North and Elona. Often, the successful completion of a vanquish will offer a considerable about of rep depending on the region.

The rewards from vanquishing also happen to be some of the best in the game; they often make up for the toil and money spent in preparation. At the end of each clear, you're offered experience, gold, and rep on top of whatever drops you managed to obtain on the go. That helps makes vanquishing one of the less tire-some and boring grinds in the game.

This issue we chat with two proud Vanquishers, Racthoth Demini and Anti Welfare, to find out what the experience was like.



Racthoh Demini

Q: When did you decide you wanted to seriously attain the title?
Before it was even put into the game. The announcement of a Hard Mode immediately had me intrigued to give it a shot.

Q: How long did it take you to get the title from the start to finish?
--Was it an over time thing or did you have a specific time-frame and plan to get it done?
I did it over time in conjunction with Legendary Guardian. All and all it took about 3 months to complete, working at it everyday.

Q: From start to finish, how did your experience or play style change? Did you learn any interesting tricks that helped you along the way?
I changed the build I was using a lot as this was a time before PvE skills, consumables, and a better working knowledge of what Hard Mode actually did in regards to raising enemy strength. There was a lot of frustration initially, because enemies were actually kiting and using a movement speed buff in PvE that was practically unheard of. The general approach to things varied greatly depending on human and AI group composition. With a mostly AI group I'd find myself calling a target for the heroes and henchmen to attack while I attacked something in melee so they'd stay put and actually heal or attack. I'd actually chain skills with the henchmen instead of mindlessly stacking skills together. Essentially I had to disregard everything I used to do with the AI, because it just wouldn't work all that well; you can only do so much with half the bar and those flags. Human players certainly made things easier, at least then you'd all be cursing the AI!

Q: Did you do it on your own mostly or did you group with other players to get further along?
There were only a few occasions where the entire group was actual players. Majority of the time it was at most 2-3 other people while the rest were heroes, generally my heroes so I had the fun of constantly retooling bars for the next zone.

Q: Of the three continents, which did you find the easiest or hardest? Which was the most enjoyable for you?
Tyria I'd say was the hardest just because of the patrols and having to adjust to a party size smaller than eight so frequently. Also, because you only had Alesia for all of those four and six man zones, it was always a struggle to decide whether an extra monk was needed or if enough passive defense would do the trick. Most enjoyable would have to be Cantha, but I can't really think of an exact reason! I just know I didn't like Elona that much because using the Wurms was rather dull and the power creep that came with Nightfall was brutal in some areas.

Q: Do you have any horror stories to share, like a bad wipe or an ill-timed disconnect?
Lornar's Pass. Our group from Camp Rankor was too tired to continue onwards after vanquishing Snake's Dance and Dreadnought's Drift so we agreed to just continue the next day. So, we had a group of six, with practically no AoE, and no enchantment removal, no PvE skills, no consumables. There is one group in particular there that spawned with three Dolyak Riders. It was the last group we had left to kill after hours of clearing and all of us had hit 60 DP. I'd say it took us another 30 minutes of ever so slowly breaking that group down one by one until we had the clear. I was the only melee in the group so I got to run in and try so hard to hold everything on me while we tried to kill something. At the time I was using a Superior rune in my helmet so I had taken that off for extra health. I died so many times on that one group, and every time I did we'd practically be crying on vent, flagging heroes to distract the enemies while one person with a hard res ran away. Moral of the story: vanquish those three zones in one sitting, give yourself plenty of time.

Q: Did you ever find yourself getting bored / frustrated? How did you alleviate that?
Tyria zones were a headache sometimes. You had zones that only took a few dozen kills, then others with thousands. I made sure to alternate the three maps, filling up the three at roughly the same pace so I never had to deal with too many dull zones in a row.

Q: What sort of game-plan did you usually set yourself up with before each vanquish?
I'd think back to when I did the campaigns and think "was there anything here that gave me trouble the first time around?". I found myself using skills I'd never used before in a PvE setting like "Shield's Up!" and Protector's Defense, trying to plug in as much passive defense as I could into whatever slots were available. Extra hex removal for zones like Joko's Domain or anywhere that had a lot of physical hate.

Q: How did it feel when you finally got all 3 Vanquishing titles done and maxed out? Sigh of relief?
It was more of a "well, now I'm bored again" kind of feeling. The sighs of relief generally came from the huge zones being done and just being thankful that I never disconnected when being so close to a completion. Even the second time around on my Paragon, the feeling was about the same, perhaps moreso since he was more fun to play.



Anti Welfare

Q: What sort of advice would you give to aspiring Legendary Vanquishers?
Know your build's weakness and adjust appropriately if you suspect you'll face your counter. The skill split, consumables, and PvE skills have certainly made things a lot easier, but in the off chance you find something that stops you, just make the necessary adjustment.
Q: When did you decide you wanted to seriously attain the title?
A: i guess obtaining the title for me all started once i made the decision to get GWAMM. i had already vq'd a handful of areas in Tyria with guildies by the time i had made that decision.

Q: How long did it take you to get the title from the start to finish?
--Was it an over time thing or did you have a specific time-frame and plan to get it done?
A: i really didn't have any sort of time frame set for myself to obtain the title. from start to finish it only took a few months. tyria probably took me the longest simply because i didn't grind at it, whereas i was able to knock out cantha in 3 days. i really didn't consider that 3 days to be a grind, was pretty casual gameplay for me.

Q: From start to finish, how did your experience or play style change? Did you learn any interesting tricks that helped you along the way?
A: my playing style didn't change a whole lot. it gave me some opportunities to try a few different things as far as strategy and skills that i normally wouldn't have looked at. for the most part i used 4 different bars throughout everything with minor changes here and there. can't say that i learned any tricks per se, but i did learn to plan ahead a bit. i tried to make use of my time and cover some of the skill hunter and carto stuff along the way.

Q: Did you do it on your own mostly or did you group with other players to get you futher?
A: probably 60% of the title i did on my own with h/h. my brother who also plays went along for some as well as a few guildies here and there. vq really isn't something most people look forward to doing so a lot of it is spent alone.

Q: Of the three continents, which did you find the easiest or hardest? Which was the most enjoyable for you?
A: i can't really single out any continent as being hard or easy. each has their own areas that prove more difficult than others. parts of the city in cantha can be tricky as well as areas like joko's domain in elona. i found cantha to be the most enjoyable overall though. once you get outside of the city, the scenery is pretty cool if you take the time to look at it.

Q: Do you have any horror stories to share, like a bad wipe or ill-timed disconnect?
A: i can think of more than a few horror stories while doing vq. i actually ended up vqing snake dance twice with a couple guildies. we got down to the end and had missed a group someplace. the three of us decide to split up and go searching to save time. after 2 hours of looking and not finding anything the only option we could come up with was that the group missed were giants and had passed into another area. i had noticed this happening in another part of the sourthern shiverpeaks as well. usually if you stand there for a minute or two they'll pass back into the area and not be a problem. another time was vqing in elona i got a really bad lag spike and dropped from the server. after i reconnected i was able to continue with my vq without having to start over, but my path of red dots was gone. i knew about where i was when it happened, but it resulted in another hour looking for a missed group by the time i was done.

Q: Did you ever find yourself getting bored / frustrated? How did you alleviate that?
A: i never really got bored or frustrated while doing vq. most of it was done alone so i got to set my own pace and go as i please. to be honest i really enjoy doing vq. i've helped friends with areas and even done some for hire while whomever afk's.

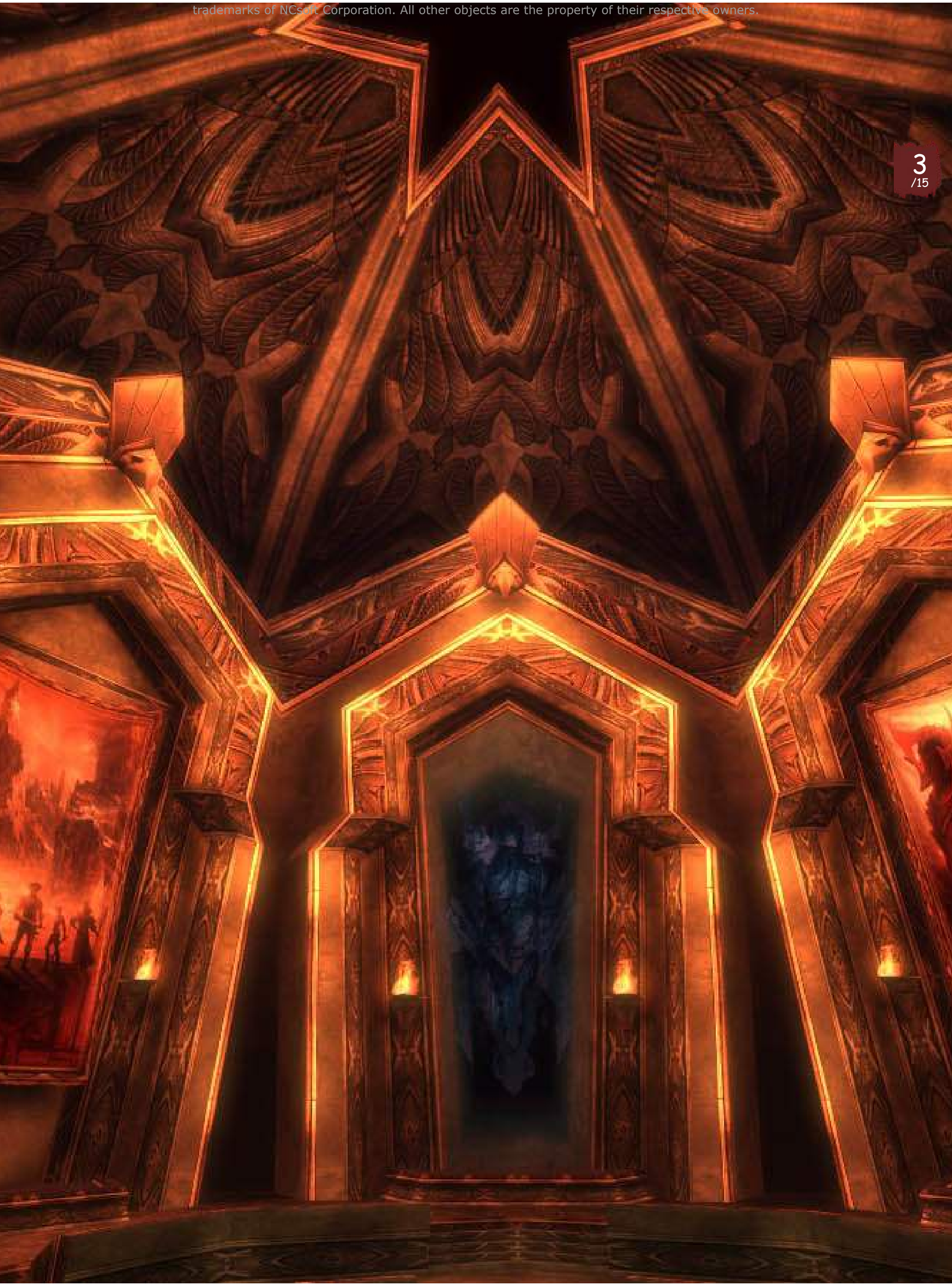
Q: What sort of game-plan did you usually set yourself up with before each vanquish?
A: the only game plan i really used was to make a big circle around an area and then cut back through the middle. i found this to be the easiest way to help prevent missing a group. granted there are some areas that strategy doesn't work, but for the most part it's a pretty solid plan.

Q: How did it feel when you finally got all 3 Vanquishing titles done and maxed out? Sigh of relief?
A: once i finally obtained legendary, it was a pretty good sense of accomplishment. ranger is my primary toon so it's not like i'm dealing out massive dps or aoe like some of the other classes are able to do.

Q: What sort of advice would you give to aspiring Legendary Vanquishers?
A: the only advice i really have to offer (and it's been said a million times before) is try to double up on other titles at the same time. carto and skill hunter become much more easy while doing vq. other than that, try not to think of it as a grind. go at your own pace and have fun with it. after all it is just a game.

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Tyria: A World That Could Have Been
by Valiant

Change. It's a word that can bring both sadness and joy to a gamer's life. When it comes to MMOs, change is always a constant factor. Guild Wars is no exception to this golden rule; the game is constantly changing. Game features come and go like the wind. The Xunlai Tournament House was removed and hero battles are gone, while Guild Wars Beyond content keeps piling on, preparing us for Guild Wars 2's ultimate release. Some take this constant cycle of change a blessing, whilst others might call it a curse. But what of the content that never came to be? What of the features that players didn't ever get a chance to experience besides a few entries in the .dat file? In this issue, we'll explore what Tyria could have been had these elements been included in the game; from the ultimate world-changing features lost in time, down to the various skills and spells that could have changed the way we farm raptors today. So, without further ado, let us open the gates to obscurity and take a step into the mystical world of the Tyria that never was.

Guild Wars Utopia:
The Campaign that Never Was

Enter Campaign 4



The original Guild Wars campaign, now known as Prophecies, came out in April of 2005. Factions and Nightfall followed in the short years to come. With new content being periodically pumped out every six months or so, people wondered what would come after the release of Nightfall. What theme would the next campaign have this time? What classes would be created? What sort of cool new skills would we be able to use? For months, an air of mystery surrounded the entity now referred to as the mythical Guild Wars Utopia; campaign 4.

In May of 2007, an article appeared in PC Gamer Magazine that shook the Guild Wars community to its core. "GUILD WARS CAMPAIGNS CANCELLED" they so frantically proclaimed. We found the game we knew and loved, scrapped. A pat on the back and the promise of a sequel was a tough pill to swallow for most of us. It seemed as if our beloved Guild Wars Trilogy would stay just that - a trilogy. As it never saw the light of day, very little is known about the fourth installment in the Guild Wars franchise. Rumours began emerging about possible locations and features that were to be included in the game. "Horses! Mounts!" some shouted, pointing at concept art and promotional images. Others wallowed in disappointment at their thought of not being able to play the lolz-tastic, rumored Chronomancer profession. Ironically, it is these amazing features that drove ArenaNet to scrap the project.

It is a widely known fact that with the release of each campaign, countless issues arose regarding the balance of new skills and abilities to coexist with existing content. Balancing a game is no easy feat. Sometimes solutions are easy, but more often than not, sacrifices have to be made, and the players are seldom happy about it. It's quite likely that a fourth campaign would have brought countless Smiter's Boon situations and tons of hate for Izzy and the rest of the then-balance team. Could the cancellation of Utopia possibly have been a good thing for the game? It seems so, but we can still rage and fantasize about what could have been, right?

I CAN HAZ TIEM MANIPULATION?

A controversial subject that drew a significant amount of attention to Campaign 4 is the professions that were to be included in the new release. With ArenaNet running out of character archetypes, predicting professions became a tough call. Some called for a summoner class, to conjure beasts from the mists to do their bidding. Others noticed intriguing concept art and conjured up their own ideas about a mysterious figure referred to as the chronomancer: a time-manipulating, half-ethereal Doctor Who sort of guy. While the idea makes most of us excited to the point of screaming like a little schoolgirl (no? just me?), it's not hard to imagine how it would have proven itself either utterly useless or jaw-droppingly overpowered. How far can you go with such a profession without breaking the game? I get a chuckle out of the thought of one chronomancer casting a spell somewhere in the outskirts of Lion's Arch and everyone in the game having to wait for the flow of time to return to normal.

Other pieces of concept art pointed at yet another meele fighter class. After the warrior, paragon, dervish, and assassin, you would have thought ArenaNet would have run out of ideas. And you would have thought wrong. Concept art appeared of characters wielding a surfeit of martial weapons, some new, some reimagined. Maces, halberds, and javelins, as well as two-handed and dual-wielded flavors of existing weapons like swords, axes and spears all made an appearance. Some expected a new class specializing in wielding this wide array of weapons, while others insisted that these would be new tools at the disposal of existing professions. I would imagine it was the people theorizing and looking forward to these features that were hit the hardest by the news of Utopia's cancellation.

Aztecs? In my Guild Wars? Where?!

Another popular topic of debate that lingered even before Campaign 4 was announced was the location of this new content. Some pointed at the huge empty plot of space in northwest Tyria, while others insisted that the new content would expand the world east. Although this topic is one we will most likely have no clarification about, it is still a popular subject of discussion even among Guild Wars 2-watchers hoping for the new game's map to expand the boundaries beyond what was seen in the original trilogy.

A clue that was a hot topic for a while in Guild Wars Guru were several pictures players had taken, from places such as Fahranur, The First City, and western Kourna.These pictures all showed a strange sight: an icy, Mount Everest-sized mountain seemingly in the middle of the ocean. Was this a forgotten hint that ArenaNet left in to tease us? Was this intended to be a connection to the new content? Some players thought that this meant that the new campaign would implement sailing, and that we would sail over to investigate this mysterious mountain. The discussion went on for quite a while, but after no official confirmation was given, the thread was buried in the dead pile.

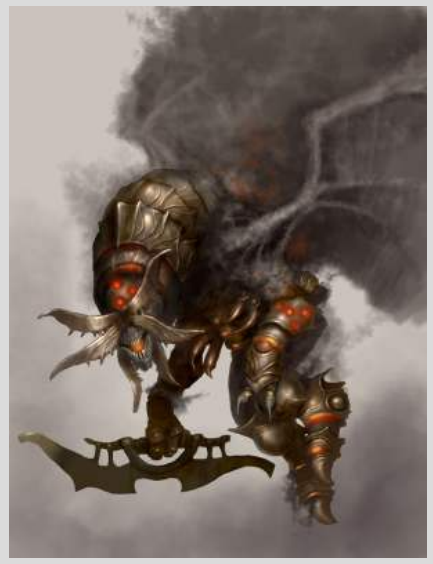


We may never know where the new campaign was to take place. Hell, maybe not even the developers knew at the time of cancellation. The only thing we can hope for now is to see some of the new areas in Guild Wars 2.

What? We DID see some of the new content?

When news of Campaign 4's cancellation came around, with it came notice that the content that was made for the campaign would be implemented into Eye of the North, and Guild Wars 2. Most of us are most familiar with the former, and what features hinted at influence from Utopia.

The asura, for example, have architecture and culture based partly on the Aztec people of Mesoamerica. This was a concept originally intended for Campaign 4. Perhaps more important than the asura, however, are the golems they constructed in the Eye of the North expansion. Golems are featured in artwork, and appear as some sort of remnant of an earlier civilization. These everlasting pieces of machinery would be a testament of the older civilization. Much of Campaign 4's storyline is rumored to have been involved with the golems and their relation to the earlier empire. The golems' smaller role in Eye of the North seems to imply that their relation to the older civilization was scrapped.



Could the Aztec architecture be a shadow of a fallen empire's former glory? Perhaps the asura just simply walked into ~~Mordor~~, the remains of the former civilization, and took over from there, as some assumed was the case with the asura gate network. This we can't know for sure, but it is a possibility.

The precursors to the destroyers also starred in concept art for Campaign 4, just not as they appeared in Eye of the North's release. Creatures called Tanneks (or Tannecks, Tanecks, or Tannecs, depending on who you ask) appeared to have a similar role in Utopia as destroyers in Eye of the North – to wreak havoc on the world. These Tanneks, however, were fleshy creatures reminiscent of a mix between a dredge, a charr, and a norn of sorts. They were seemingly the main villain in the storyline, purportedly impeding players from learning more about the fallen civilization that used to exist in the new continent.

The Tanneks' transformation to their current fiery form can be observed in transitional concept art. For example, the following image shows a hybrid between a Tannek and a destroyer. It is unknown whether this was created after development of Eye of the North, or if it was made to adapt the infernal creatures to their present state.

Well, at least we'll still see some of the cool stuff in Guild Wars 2, right?

We, the players, were informed that development for Utopia was scrapped in favor of Guild Wars 2. Does this mean that some of the unseen content (pun intended. Mursaat, pretty please?) will be featured in the long-awaited sequel? I for one sure hope so. While it has been stated that the chronomancer will not be making an appearance, there is still some hope for the other amazing things we saw in concept art. The Tarnished Coast, for example, is inspired by areas intended for Utopia. We only saw a small fraction of it in Eye of the North, however. Most of the map area to the west was inaccessible, leaving much to the imagination. What is that island in the middle of that body of water? Where in Tyria is the Mursaat homeland? So many questions yet to be answered.

It seems everybody has a different interpretation of if, and how, that content will appear in Guild Wars 2. Only time will tell, however. What does this mean to the average player? Well, it means yet another reason to anxiously anticipate the release of Guild Wars 2. Just what we needed, right?

The Xunlai Market:

A new way to trade?

The Xunlai Market:

Going back as far as the Beta Weekend Events, people have experienced problems with the trading system in Guild Wars. Players often found themselves drowning in an ocean of trade-related text, where ads for all manner of items set up camp and remained until they swapped owners, only to be replaced by two more moments later. All things considered, it was a vicious circle of trade-spam. To rectify this unsightly situation, a new Trade Channel was implemented – a feature most players are now very familiar with. The great thing about this aspect of the game is that not only does it make trading easier by displaying a list of traders in a town or outpost, but it also separates them from the non-traders, thus allowing those not interested in purchasing massive amounts of ectoplasms to communicate without being interrupted every few sentences. Theoretically, everyone wins. In reality, however, it hasn't really made trading all that much easier. Technically, all the posts - the constant barrage of text - is still there, just hidden. Despite a dedicated trade channel and a list of all people willing to buy or sell something, players often continue to spam their messages in attempt to increase their clientele. So what happens when a non-trader wishes to sell an item they realise they no longer want, whilst still looking to chat to the other people in their district? In essence, it becomes very difficult to do so as they're going to be forced into spamming their advert when there's a gap in the barrage of messages, whilst still looking to keep ontop of what's happening in the 'normal' channel . So, to turn the tides on the trading war, the developers decided to do something about it. The brainchild of this venture was the development and implementation, or lack thereof, of the mythical Xunlai Market.

The Xunlai Market may have been just the thing to revolutionise the way players trade in Guild Wars. Despite never being officially announced (or even hinted at, for that matter), there's a surprising amount of information about the Market thanks to people tech-savvy enough to dig through the .DAT file back in early 2008. Summed up, the Xunlai Market was to be an outpost structured specifically for trading. Players could sell their items at a fixed price (as opposed to an auction-like affair). A player would pay a variable fee for their item to be displayed in a categorised list full of items just waiting to be bought. This list was to be accessible thanks to a button named 'Market' in the Party Search panel. Once an item was listed, it was to remain in a player's inventory for as long as the offer stood valid. After said item was bought by another player, it would be automatically transferred to the buyer's

inventory, whilst the gold would be placed into the seller's storage. Most tradeable items were to be accepted into the trade system, though unidentified, customised and equipped items were unable to be added to the Market. With all the available information, it appeared at the time that the Xunlai Market was definitely being given the green light – some even found localised Spanish and German strings in the file, which indicates that the project was fairly advanced in its development. And then, on 31st January 2008, all traces of the Xunlai Market disappeared. The merchants' paradise between the Great Temple of Balthazar and the Zaishen Challenge outpost, seemed to have vanished into the Mists.

Some would call the Xunlai Market a haven for traders and non-traders alike. Though while some were disappointed about the loss of such a useful feature, others rejoiced in this 'relieving' piece of news. The Xunlai Market would almost certainly reduce the number of people posting in the Trade Channel with the usual 'WTB' or 'WTS' messages in other towns, but perhaps in doing so it would just relocate the trade-spam to a new outpost. Not everybody would have their items bought by other players immediately after listing their wares. Impatient groups may then resort to advertising the fact that they have items in the Market as a way to increase sales. So, in this sense, would the Xunlai Market really have made a difference? Besides, other means of trading already existed in fan forums around the internet. Though sometimes unreliable, the solution was already here.

All in all, the Xunlai Market would most likely have received mixed reviews, as with many new features added to the game. Does the Xunlai market have any hopes of ever being implimented into Guild Wars? As the place of trade it was originally intended to be – no. However, we may at least receive a taste of the Market's aesthetics. For those unaware, there is an upcoming update featuring an outpost named Embark Beach, which will provide access to every mission the player is currently allowed to enter. The importance of the new Embark Beach outpost is that it is thought by many to use the map originally made for the Xunlai Market. The Xunlai Market might just make it to the game after all, just not as it was originally intended.

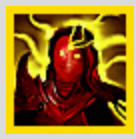
Moving forward 250 years, there will in fact be a marketplace coming to Guild Wars 2. Players will even have the ability to browse the marketplace and check on their items from the comfort of a smartphone or web browser, without having to be in-game. Perhaps the reason behind the Xunlai Market's lack of existence was the possibility that the developers needed those extra 250 years to tweak the marketplace before releasing it...

Unimplimented Skills:

It's no secret that not every skill made it past the design process. There is a nice little compilation of unimplemented skills over at the official Guild Wars wiki. This is a compilation of our favorite unimplemented skills. Be it due to their supremely overpowered nature, or due to the strange way in which they were taken care of, these skills drew our attention the most.

"I'm using REMOVE!"

These skills, like the others in this compilation, never made it to the game. What makes these special, however, is the fact that they were renamed before being removed. Why was this? Was the name spoiler-related? Was it simply to mark the skill for removal by other developers? Well, only a fraction of content developers know today.



REMOVE (Leadership skill). Energy cost 5, recharge time 45s.

• Elite Stance. For 15...51...60 seconds, you gain +2 Energy for each ally effected by your Chants and Shouts (maximum 8 Energy).

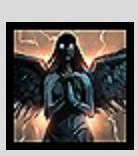
This one is a good one. With enough shouts and party members, this skill could have actually made the paragon a bit useful for a change!



REMOVE (Soul Reaping skill). Energy cost 10, recharge time 10s.

• Enchantment Spell. For 10 seconds, you gain 5...41...50 Health whenever a creature dies.

This one had an added bonus for the necromancer's primary attribute. It's hard to say why it was removed, but it seems like a decent skill. Perhaps it was a bit overpowered compared to other professions' primary attributes.



REMOVE (Wind Prayers skill). Energy cost 10, recharge time 20s.

• Enchantment Spell. Lose all Enchantments. For 30 seconds, your attacks deal lightning damage. When this Enchantment ends, all adjacent foes are Weakened for 4...9...10 seconds.

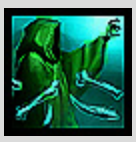
Yet another generic initial -> duration -> end enchantment for the dervish. This skill seems useless aside from one or two areas with monsters weak to lightning damage. I for one won't miss this skill.



Ice Skates

• Stance. For 10 seconds, you move 66% faster.

WHEEEEEEEEEEEEE!



Verata's Promise. Sacrifice 33%, Energy cost 15, recharge time 30s

• Enchantment Spell. For 10...50...60 seconds, your minions have +10 Health regeneration. When Verata's Promise ends, all your minions die.

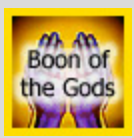
Yet another skill that was to be named after the same random profession trainer from Pre-Searing Ascalon. Well... can anyone say invincible minion spike?



Bloodletting. Energy cost 5, recharge time 5s.

• Enchantment Spell. For 10 seconds, you have + 1...5...6 Health regeneration while Bleeding. When this enchantment ends, 1...3...4 conditions from which you are suffering are transferred to a nearby foe.

With only a level 5 in Blood Magic, you are immune to bleeding and transfer conditions. This would have had SO many possibilities for abuse.



Boon of the Gods. Energy cost 5, recharge time 30s.

• Elite Enchantment Spell. For 5...17...20 seconds, Spells you cast cost 1 less energy for each Enchantment on you.

With enough enchantments, you could practically cast away to your heart's content. Caster dervishes salivate over this skill everywhere.



Cry of Lament. Energy cost 15, recharge time 5s.

• Spell. All party members are healed for 10...34...40 Health. If any party members are dead, Cry of Lament heals for an additional + 5...53...65.

A spell that rewards your party for having dead party members? What is this wizardry?

Will these controversial skills ever make an appearance in the game? Probably not. I mean, look at them, some of them would be more imbalanced than an Imbagon. Hell, one of them would even be able to REPLACE the Imbagon. I for one would have loved Boon of the Gods; at least until it was nerfed due to D/E bonders abusing it. Hey, isn't there a dervish update coming soon? Wait... OH NO!

The Guild Vault:

Moving to the continent of Cantha, the release of Guild Wars Factions brought with it many new features, particularly some of interest to the guilds of Tyria. Perhaps the most influential of these updates was the ability to speak to the Guild Lord and purchase services for the guild hall, such as merchants, skill trainers, Xunlai storage agents and even a Priest of Balthazar. This essentially



allowed a guild to have a self-sufficient outpost in the form of their guild hall. Nowadays, successful guilds are often measured by the content of their halls: a total cost of 510 platinum will give guild leaders and officers the right to say they have a 'full guild hall'. This simple statement can make recruiting a breeze, rather than having a meagerly empty members list. One feature, however, was noticeably missing - the Guild Vault. This feature would have allowed members to put their unwanted items in a place where any guild member could access it. As well as the above, it also allowed for a legitimate place to hold the guild's common property. So what if this feature had been implemented after all? Would we no longer look for guilds with a full guild hall, but instead seek those which offer 'full' guild vaults instead? It's certainly a possibility. But what ever happened to the guild vault? And, in all honesty, would it really have been that useful in the first place?

Many would immediately argue that a guild vault would have been extremely useful. It's unknown how much this service would have cost, but many players know of its existence and possibly uses.
Officially, it's described as 'item storage for the guild's common property' – but what does the term 'common property' entail? Would any, and all, items have been welcome in the guild vault, including gold, or only a select few such as crafting materials? Many players see the guild vault as a communal storage area for members to give and take from as they please, whilst others view it as a means to help raise funds for the guild; an idea that would require some sort of 'lock' on the vault to prevent others from withdrawing items. Whether or not this would have been the case is unknown, though some measures would almost certainly have to be taken to protect the vault from those who see it as a way to steal items from other guild members. This is where, inevitably, trust comes into play. It's due to this lack of trust that made many players express a sigh of relief when the guild vault didn't come into existence.

Trust has always existed in games which offer clans, guilds or any other form of group. In Guild Wars, officers are usually trusted members of a guild and have the ability to expel, recruit and even promote others to the rank of officer. This means, theoretically, one renegade officer could bring down an entire guild in a matter of minutes. All the hard work put into creating a successful community would be instantly evaporated, and guild members' faith in their leader would vanish eternally.

Unfortauntely, a similar guild-wide apocalypse may have been equally as possible with the advent of the guild vault, should there have been a lack of security measures. Due to a lack of information regarding the specific mechanics of the vault, it's possible that any member may have been able to take as much as they like from it, as soon as they'd joined a guild - and then what? Could a guild then recruit new members, safe in the knowledge that their guild's shared property would still be there five minutes later? Most likely not. But it's not just the members, new and old, that a guild would have to be wary about: leaders can also succumb to temptation. What would stop a guild leader from 'raising guild funds', only to turn around and bag themselves a few hundred platinum pieces? One assumes that a guild leader would have complete and total control over the vault, and hopes that the developers would have created some ingenious solution to prevent such sadistic events from occurring, else they'd be flooded with complaints about many an item disappearing from the vault. Despite all this negativity, though, the staff at ArenaNet didn't appear to be phased by it. They still planned to have a guild vault, right up until the near-release of Factions. In the 49th edition of Fansite Friday, this was confirmed in an interview which stated that guild vaults will indeed feature in Guild Wars. So what happened?

Two words: server issues. That's all we're told. Perhaps, truly, having a shared storage panel was strenuous on the Guild Wars servers - after all, it would be like having thousands of extra storage panels accessible by many people, possibly simultaneously. On the other hand, another, off-the-record, option may have simply been because they were unable to resolve the final details of how a guild vault would work; as already noted, it's open to a lot of exploitation. This is an issue that will probably never receive a full answer, so we can do nothing but speculate. The guild vault may have been an extremely useful way to share items amongst fellow guild members, or it may have emerged as a way for some players to earn some quick gold, but I guess we'll never know... But, if I may, let me ask you this: what ever stopped guild members from asking for any spare items via the guild chat? Personally, I can't think of anything wrong with that system. What the vault hoped to achieve is still very possible, it just involves a little more talking and trading. What's so wrong with a little human interaction?

Conclusion:

There have been a vast array of unimplimented items throughout the game's lifespan, and we have but scratched the surface of the content we never saw. Undoubtedly, there is more lurking in the shadows than any of us dare to imagine. What's more, with the constant reassurance from ArenaNet that whilst developing Guild Wars 2 they're encapsulated in a cycle of testing what works and what doesn't, it's quite likely that there's already a large list of unimplimented content for that game too, and perhaps, in a few years, others will be attempting to exhibit what Guild Wars 2 may have been like, just as we have attempted. One thing's for certain, however: any game, no matter the genre, learns from its unimplimented content. It teaches the developers what would hinder a game's success - and what would improve it. And, ultimately, it allows for sequels to expand on these ideas to make one hell of a game.

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COMEDY



The Adventures of Soy Oil: Part 2

by BarGamer

This work of parody and fiction is inspired in part by this guy.

Following her disastrous first year of teaching, Soy Oil left the teaching field and spent some time taking up expensive hobbies, such as collecting Jadeite and other gems, buying expensive clothes, turning herself into snowmen, golems, and other creatures, and other frivolous activities. She also somehow started talking like an old Asuran housewife. At least she hadn't called anyone a "bookah," yet. It wasn't important. Nothing was important anymore.

Then she heard a rumor of a Monk who overheard a prophecy, and took up the heavy armor of a Warrior. "A Monk of Dwayna may choose to worship Balthazar as well, and use Warrior techniques," thought Soy Oil, "but she won't get very far wearing full plate after years of wearing next-to-nothing!" Soy Oil, for her part, was quite content with her current attire: a Canthan dress, in the pink that she got from some charity or other. "A Guardian, really! Ah well, a babysitter by any other name..."

The days passed. Suddenly, a heavily-mailed fist knocked on the door of her tiny room in the Shing Jea Monastary. "Who is it?" she called, quickly locating her shaded glasses and slipping them on. Her initial training as a Ritualist required her to go blindfolded, and as a result, made her eyesight a bit weak. They were expensive, but extremely effective at their stated purpose. Quite like the Asura themselves, really...

"Snowthunder Trollson the Warrior, seeks training in Weapon Spells from Soy Oil the Legendary Guardian," came a deep voice. A Norn, perhaps? "Ask Michiko at Kaineng Center!" Soy replied, a bit irritated. What did she look like, a merchant?

"Snowthunder ask, but she no teach who, why, or when to use them. You teacher." The title sent a still-not-entirely banished pain through Soy Oil's heart. "I was a teacher. I failed. Ask someone else." Soy Oil started to turn away...

Thump-thump-thump. "Master Mhenlo say teaching Ormathunder good for you." That halted Soy's turn away from the door. Well, REALLY! He could have ASKED her first. A note, even. Soy Oil considered. Quite by accident, her gaze fell on her empty armor racks, still waiting to be filled with exotic, elite armors. Soy pursed her lips, and opened the lips of her purse. Oh, THAT's where she put the ashes of Khanhei. "How much platinum you got, Snowthunder?"

So Soy Oil taught the Norn Snowthunder about advanced Weapon Spell strategies. It was a funny sight to see the big brawny Norn contort himself into the ritual dances to summon the weapons, but he did know them all, even the secret Dwarven one. Soy had to admit that when he held that mace and shield and all but buried the target dummy, that there wasn't much that the spirit of the Great Dwarf could do to improve it. He didn't even complain when she cast Death Nova on him! And well, she did manage to purchase that elite Norn armor set...

But it was the nights that bothered Soy Oil. She watched him, as he communed with the spirits of the wild, casting the weapon spells over and over again, the dances becoming shorter, less ritual and more... martial. If Soy didn't know better, she'd swear he had taken lessons from a Mesmer on how to shorthand his incantations. But when she asked him about it, he just shook his head. "Snowthunder gotta prove it," was his only explanation.

One fateful night, he suddenly stopped casting, and just stood there, holding that hammer of his as if it was grafted to his hand. He knelt, and raised his shield to cover him. Roaring loud enough to wake the neighbors, he came to his feet, and with a bright flash that DEFINITELY woke the neighbors, a giant hammer of blue energy manifested, and proceeded to utterly demolish the nearby target dummies. Soy Oil gaped. "What in the Six Gods...?"

Snowthunder grinned, turning at the sound of her voice. "I did it! I really did it! Oh Raven, everybody's gonna be SO happy!" Soy Oil grabbed Snowthunder's pinky, as it was the only body part she could reach and put her arm around, and dragged... led him back inside, to the annoyed shouts and curses of the irate neighbors. "Alright, Snowthunder Trollson. Out with it. Tell me what just happened."

Slowly, patiently, Snowthunder explained. As she suspected, he was a young Guardian, sent to gather together the best skills that were used with Warriors like himself, and adapt them for Guardian use. He recited a dizzying list of what seemed to be Norn philosophy and your standard boot camp rhetoric, half of which she immediately dismissed as ridiculous tripe. "Norn hunt alone. Norn live forever in the memory of all." Ridiculous! Jora hadn't been so reluctant to accept help, had she?

Meanwhile, Soy Oil struggled to fit the pieces together. And then Snowthunder scattered the pieces to Grenth and back. "Come with Ormathunder. Teach Spirit Weapons to all Guardians."

Soy Oil shot to her feet. "WHAT?! You must be crazy! I can't do... that!" She pointed out the window at the slowly regenerating target dummies. "An idiot like you, barely intelligible... discovering... how to combine..."

Well, alright, it HAD been a while since she had to recall her old Magic Theory, but in essence, he had combined the high-level Mesmer spell Illusionary Weaponry with the spiritual concept of Weapon Spells, in this case, Great Dwarf Weapon, and made a new class of spell. NOBODY would believe that the lunk had figured it out himself, and now that she knew the theory, she was confident she could do it as well. Just to prove it, she rapidly summoned a hammer, a sword, and a shield, with hardly any dancing at all. Which was fortunate, since her tiny monastery room was barely larger than a closet. She quickly banished them, but not the possibilities percolating in her mind.

"...I wonder if you could put Death Nova on them? You never complained about that, ONCE! Haha, teaching you weapon spells was the best time of my life. Yes, this Spirit Weapon technique just might change the whole nature of battles. You say there's more of you?" Soy Oil decided that she liked the name for the new technique.

"I'm glad he was able to help you, Soy Oil," came the impossibly-sexy voice of Master Mhenlo. "I foresaw that your destiny was not to remain here, so I arranged for Snowthunder here to help you out of your grief. And see? Now you can help others, just as you've always wanted."

Soy Oil froze in shock and terror. She HAD woken him up! And then moved with fury. "You! You... you knew, then." Soy deflated. She knew when she was beaten, fair and square. Mhenlo nodded, the stars seeming to caress the shiny skin of his head. Damn, she was going to miss him. But not as much as she'd miss this chance to 'live forever in the memory of all.' Stupid Norn philosophy.

Soy Oil capitulated. "Alright. ALRIGHT! You win. I'll teach the rest of you Guardians. If a Norn can learn it, anyone can learn it. But you're carrying my armor collection! And how much is the pay?"

The unofficial

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GuildMag Featured Artist: Tommy

by Arghore



Another Issue, another Artist. For this issue, we contacted Tommy's, who might be less known around the Guild Wars community outside the frequent Nolani Academy visitors on http://www.guildwarsguru.com, but not less an artist. He is a great example of how Guild Wars inspires people to start and create art, and as such the progress one can make if you just start and keep practicing...

GuildMag: Can you tell us a little about your IRL self?
Tommy's: Sure I can, I'm 19 years old, and I'm in my second year of Law in Amsterdam (the Netherlands) at the moment. Besides drawing you will often find me in the gym or on the hockey field (for all you Americans, that is field hockey). And as a regular guy I of course go dancing on the weekends, have vacations with my friends and the usual stuff. I am quite an average guy.

GuildMag: When did you join GuildWars?
Tommy's: I'm not really sure to be honest. Together with a few friends of mine I played Warcraft III for a long time. Then we wanted something different and when they saw an advertisement on one of the gaming programs, we decided it should be Guild Wars. One of my friends bought it right away and when we asked how it was: well this is my character (one unbelievably ugly Necro) and I can sit here and dance go out and fight and that's about it; we were like 'meh'. He never left pre and we never played the game together. After a while I got really bored of Warcraft III and remembered that my friend had this game called Guild Wars. He gave it to me, and I did like it! I remember that after spending months in pre and post searing Ascalon killing stone elementals forever, someone showed me that the game was actually bigger. And then my adventure began :p I think at that moment Factions was just released, so I think thats 4-5 years now?



GuildMag: Do you have a favourite profession?
Tommy's: Yes I do. I'm one of those few that loves to heal. I have played very little apart from my Monk, only my Ranger and Ritualist got some attention too. But favourite profession would be Monk by far. Oh boy I cried when I heard they wouldn't make it into Guild Wars 2.

GuildMag: When did you start making Guild Wars related Art? (was there a special occasion that sparked it?)
Tommy's: I was at work and it was extremely boring, so I went browsing GuildWarsGuru. I came to a place I had never been before: Nolani Academy. I came across Lili Frogs comics and some great artists and asked myself why the hell I had never been there. I kept watching the threads, until i came across one that was about drawing something yourself. That was about October 2009. My first drawing was for Tzu I believe. Then I did a few doodles, mostly elf kind of things for Hoodie, who was the best help around then. But it was for the Wintersday Workshop 2009 that I really started to like drawing and did it more often. I think that workshop was a real turn for me, and I'm really glad people take effort in hosting these workshops. They are really great for starters as well as for the more progressed artists. So I've been drawing for slightly over a year now.

GuildMag: Did you do art before starting making Guild Wars related art?
Tommy's: No, I sadly enough haven't. I started with Guild Wars as my subject, and after a year it's still what covers most of my drawings. Though as much as I love the people in Nolani and I like Guild Wars, I do plan on doing more non-Guild Wars (or any game for that matter) related art.

GuildMag: What is your favourite art form? do you have a favourite medium for your art?
Tommy's: My favourite art form would be digital painting. I love the rough paintings a lot more then those line art drawings with way too smooth shading. I think Kekai has a great gallery that matches my taste! As for the medium, I do all my drawings on the computer with Photoshop and a tablet (Wacom Intuos4 M, for those who are interested) but I'd really like to learn to paint with oil and acrylic. I guess this summer would be a good moment for that.

GuildMag: Have you ever won a prize with your Guild Wars art (be it official or workshop?
Tommy's: I have tried three times in the official art contests now (Halloween '10 and Wintersday '09 and '10). The first entry I didn't expect much from, hell I was only drawing so shortly, but last contest I hoped for a mention. Sadly enough, Arena Net disagreed. As far as the workshops go, last Wintersday Workshop I won the Best Progress award, which I'm really happy with. In previous years I've also won prizes in the workshops, but those were rewarded for my kind behaviour.

GuildMag: Will we be seeing you (and your art) in Guild Wars 2 ? (if yes, any idea on what sort of character you will play?)
Tommy's: Most likely yes, if time lets me. I don't want it to get in the way of my drawing time too much, but I'd love to see how the graphics are in Guild Wars 2. I haven't decided what I want to play yet. At first I was thinking of a human, but I must say I find the norn more and more compelling. I really like the lore and the scenery of the sylvari as well, but I'll have to see what they look like in game first. As far as the professions go, something that can dual wield swords and a gun. But I doubt Arena Net is going to let me. Also a ranger for sure. We'll have to see what looks good around release.

GuildMag: If any of our readers would like to check out your art, where should they go?
Tommy's: I have my personal page with some of my art at http://overtoom.deviantart.com/. If you'd like to see progress as well as unfinished paintings, doodles, scraps and the like, you should visit my thread on GuildWarsGuru.

GuildMag: Anything you would like to share with our readers/your fans?
Tommy's: Yes I would. First of all, I'd like to give a big thank you to all the people over at Nolani for getting me to really like



drawing and giving me a hobby I fell in love with. There are way too many to name them all here, but I'm sure they know who I mean.
Secondly, I'd like to say to all the people who are thinking about getting into drawing or the like: don't hesitate, and come join us over at Nolani. And as Guild Wars is almost coming to an end, we also have an art section ready over at GuildWars2Guru! We would love to help you out and help you improve.

GuildMag: Thank you Tommy's for your time.
Tommy's: No problem, I hope these are the answers you've been hoping for...

GuildMag: They sure were, a nice read and a little more insight in the artist behind the Art.

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The Celestials

by Thalador Doomspeaker

"The stars in the night sky cast their light down upon the world, making physical replicas of themselves."
- Suun, Oracle of the Mists

In the Empire of the Dragon, people generally worship the Six Gods. However, beside this primal religion there are "lesser deities" that Canthans also venerate. These enigmatic beings are the Celestials, physical replicas of the stars that appear on cloudless nights. They take on the form of animals or other creatures living on the world of Tyria.

Not much is known of their true origins, although legends were told about the identities of some of them, and these legends later became accepted among the Canthan people. The exact number of the Celestials is still unknown to many, since there are celestial animals with different names, but based on depictions made by Canthan artists, they look very similar. Currently, we guess their number is between 13 and 16 – and the possibility is there that there are more, yet-to-be discovered celestials.

The Celestials

Hai Jii, the Phoenix

"Hai Jii, the Phoenix, the representation of fiery eternity awaiting those in the Underworld."
- Suun, Oracle of the Mists



Born to a noble family, Hai Jii was the youngest boy among his eight brothers. Turning away from the family custom of becoming a warrior, he became an incredibly talented painter.

The Phoenix is one of the Celestials that are easily confused with another animal. The Celestial Rooster's depictions are rather similar to the Phoenix. Because of this, it is assumed that the two are one and the same. On the other hand, the Rooster is the embodiment of completely different aspects, thus in the end it may turn out that despite their look, the two celestial animals are separate beings.

Kaijun Don, the Kirin

"Kai Jun Don, the Kirin. The embodiment of corruption. The being of pure good, turned to pure evil."
- Suun, Oracle of the Mists



Kaijun Don's story is probably one of the most saddening and shocking of the Celestial legends. Kaijun Don was a beautiful healer who offered her aid to anyone, even to those who could not pay for the mending. Her beauty, however, became her downfall.

She caught the eye of a vile gang leader, but when she refused her scoundrel suitor, his men attacked Kaijun Don and scarred her fairy-like face so brutally that even her strong magic could not heal the grim wounds. She let her anger control her actions and swore to make her attackers pay for what they had done to her. Over the years, her obsession suppressed the compassion in her soul, which led to the point where she made a pact with a demon, who promised her powers that would allow Kaijun Don to have her revenge – if she completed the ritual that would make the demon flesh and blood. The horrible slaughter she performed that day left her soul corrupted forever.

It is a mystery why the gods made her a Celestial. Perhaps they understood what made her do what she had done and felt that she deserved a second chance. Or, the world needed to know of evil corrupting even the most innocent and good, and the gods made her the example that they could use as a warning for their own people.
The Celestial Kirin is also very reminiscent to the Horse; however, the divergence between the things they embody is even greater than in the previous case. Considering this, it is more likely that they are similarly separate and unique celestials.

Kuonghsang, the Turtle Dragon

"Kuonghsang, the Turtle Dragon. The eternal paradox, not one thing or another. A reminder that we will never fully understand the Mists."
- Suun, Oracle of the Mists



Kuonghsang, a wise old man, served his emperor as a sage and advisor. Kuonghsang was gifted: he could commune with the spirits. Because of this gift, he could always give good advice to his emperor. It happened once that the emperor's daughter got diseased by an unknown illness. Kuonghsang consulted with the spirit and told his sovereign what he had gathered: in order to cure the sick girl, the oldest daughter of every Canthan household had to be killed. The emperor believed his loyal sage, since he had never been wrong before, and gave order for the horrible "medication." When the last victim fell dead on the ground, the emperor went on to check his daughter. He was sure that she would be healthy once more, but instead he found her cold body lying in her bed. Realizing that he had misinterpreted the riddles of the spirits, Kuonghsang took the emperor's sword and decapitated himself in shame and grief.

In my understanding, this is why his story is a reminder of the fact that we cannot and thus will never fully understand the Mists. Even a wise sage such as Kuonghsang couldn't fully decipher what the spirits were saying. The essence of their riddles might be traced back to Mists, and since the Mists is probably everything and the source of everything what we see today (the eternity, in our current world view) and possibly cannot be understood wholly, the meaning of these "spiritual" messages is also impossible to perfectly decipher.

Tahmu, the Dragon

"Tahmu, the Dragon. A constant reminder of atrocity, pain, and anguish."
- Suun, Oracle of the Mists



Tahmu was an empress of a now forgotten time. She was kind and generous to her people, who loved her and respected her in return. One day, the naga besieged her empire and threatened the city, its citizens, and the empress. Tahmu went against the suggestions of her bodyguards, and instead she told her people to take up arms against the invaders. Tahmu also joined the fight against the naga hordes, but in the end, she and the inhabitants were overpowered. The empress was left alive so she could witness the murder of every one of her own. After seeing the violent massacre of her people, her rage gave her the strength to break free, and once she did, she summoned a fire from the heavens that took on the form of a giant dragon. The searing, draconian flames incinerated every naga despoiler within the city. It's unknown whether she survived that or not.

Tahmu's suffering and the vengeance she unleashed secured her a place among the celestials.

Currently, Tahmu's story is the most debated among historians. In a similar scenario to Hai Jii's and Kaijun Don's stories, Tahmu may be an entirely distinct celestial from the Celestial Dragon - mainly because of the divers aspects they embody. Arguments on her story are also quite common. Some speculate (including myself) that she had lived in the Late Pre-Imperial Era - when the naga might not have been as peaceful as they were before the Jade Wind - before Kaineng Tah united the Canthan clans. Whilst others say (e.g., my colleague, Gawain Draxynnus) that this Naga Revolt happened some time after the Jade Wind (explaining the unusual behaviour from the naga, who were reported to act so hostile after their near-extinction more than 200 years ago).

Chong, the Celestial Pig

"The Pig is traditionally honest, tolerant, and supportive in Canthan folktales."
- Lorespinner Ri So



Back in the Late Pre-Imperial Era, when the humans first walked the world, there was a man called Chong. He embodied the virtues of tolerance, support, and honesty. Near the end of his life, the gods wished to ascend him and make him a celestial. Chong shared the aforementioned virtues with a fellow pig, and this way he chose that as his celestial animal. At least this is what the Canthan folktale says.
Even then, it is intriguing that the people behind the celestial animals might have been elevated to the gods' side, and the ethereal beings we see during Weh No Su and the Canthan New Year are basically their avatars or celestial representations.

The Celestial Dragon

"Celestial dragon, figurehead of our great empire, benevolent constellation that watches over us, guides us, and protects us, we beseech you."
- Emperor Kisu

As I mentioned before, it is quite likely that Tahmu and the Celestial Dragon are not the same after all. First known records say that the Celestial Dragon appeared after the Jade Wind. Emperor Hanjai, the late Emperor Angsiyan's (who was murdered in cold blood by Shiro Tagachi during the Harvest Ceremony) son, was facing tremendous difficulties. Refugees were flooding Kaineng City (and they all needed shelter and food), the Empire's army was low on people (the Jade Wind had annihilated many of the Imperial soldiers), and they couldn't keep peace as effectively as before. In short: the Empire was on the verge of collapse.

Then, a mighty celestial dragon swooped down from the heavens and told the troubled emperor that Cantha would be great once more. Inspired by the unearthly wonder, Hajnai worked relentlessly towards restoring and securing the Empire. His hard work indeed made sure that Cantha became as strong (if not stronger) as it was.

The Other Celestials

I would like to note the embodiments I listed below are not proven, but based on my discussions with Emperor Kisu's court

astrologer, these virtues seem the most likely to be embodied by the remaining (and unfortunately almost unknown) celestial animals:

Rabbit – sapience, grace, and security
Dragon – power, strength, and wealth
Snake – wisdom, perception, and mysteries
Horse – curiosity, intelligence, and independence
Sheep – creativity and talents
Monkey – ingenuity, agility, and versatility
Rooster – tenacity, precision, and observation
Dog – reliability, confidence, and dedication
Rat – passion, charisma, and persistence
Pig – tolerance, support, and honesty
Ox – dependability, patience, and truth
Tiger – courage, vigor, and independence

Celestial Events

Weh No Su

> *You must defeat the avatars of these four celestial bodies if you wish to become Closer to the Stars.*
> *- Suun, Oracle of the Mists*

Weh No Su – also known as "Closer to the Stars" – is an event where the person who undergoes this test attains a form of True Sight and gets to see spirits that are hiding themselves from mortal eyes. The test is made of four challenges: the person has to defeat four celestials (Hai Jii, Kaijun Don, Kuonghsang, and Tahmu) to fulfill the objective of the task. It is administered by the Oracle of the Mists.

Canthan New Year

> *Each celestial animal is associated with a set of virtues in Canthan folktales. Every year at Shing Jea Monastery a different celestial form descends from the heavens for a great feast.*
> *- Lorespinner Ri So*

Canthans celebrate the particular celestial (one of the above 12) that will watch over them and provide good luck for them in the coming year. On the last day of the celebration, the celestial itself descends from the heavens to have a marvelous feast that the Canthan people made to satisfy the being of starlight.

Dragon Festival

> *The multi-day festival reaches its climax when the emperor arrives at the monastery. He then performs an ancient ritual to call upon the constellation of the Dragon to give its blessing to Cantha.*
> *- Master of Ceremonies*

Established long ago, the festival was originally much smaller than it is now. It has become the massive multi-day holiday for the citizens of the Empire shortly after the Jade Wind. The Dragon Festival is celebrated in honour of the mighty Celestial Dragon that gave hope for both the young Emperor Hanjai and the Empire of the Dragon in their hour of need. The finale occurs when the emperor himself arrives and together with his people, they pray to the Dragon for the blessing of the lands. The grand Celestial complies and bestows its gift - Celestial charges whose energy the Imperial Sorcerers harness.

We can say that the Celestials remained a mystery, even to Canthans. There are plenty of questions that need to be answered, and, given the nature of the celestials, it is not impossible that more would arise in the process. However, for the time being, let us celebrate another wonderful New Year in Cantha. And let's hope that the Winds will not Change the weather for the worse.

May the gracious Celestial Rabbit bless you all with good luck for 1590 CC/1080 AE!

Thalador Doomspeaker
Day 28, Season of the Zephyr, 1080 AE

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Dutch's Talk with Ravious (Kill Ten Rats)



by Dutch Sunshine

In the past two issues, I had taken a look at two familiar faces ingame, Mad Queen Malafide and Daniel Frozenwind. In this issue, I want to focus on a different aspect of what makes up the Guild Wars community: bloggers. Since I know that our next candidate, Ravious, has been writing about the world of Tyria for a long time, I really wanted to have an interview with him this time. Ravious is a writer over at KillTenRats.com as you'll perhaps already know or are about to read. In my view, his articles have been both insightful and fun to read, and for me, he's an example on how good blogging is done. I hope you guys enjoy this interview, perhaps it might even give you an extra motivation to start blogging yourself!

Dutch Sunshine: Hey Ravious, how's your day so far?
Ravious (KillTenRats): Can't complain. Bacon for breakfast, and some charr for lunch.

Dutch: Must be tasty, those charr. Could you perhaps tell us some more about yourself and what you do?
Ravious: Sure! I write for a blog called Kill Ten Rats, where a few great MMO players band together to share thoughts. We each kind of have our niche, and mine is totally, and everything, Guild Wars.

Dutch: You write for Kill Ten Rats, but why did you start blogging in the first place?
Ravious: I really liked the creative outlet it gave me for my favorite hobby. A lot of people talk about how playing MMOs can just be "lost time." The level cap will raise, the awesome gear will suck, and the next faction won't give a hoot about the fantastic rating you have in an old one. I don't exactly agree with the "lost time" view unless it applies to all entertainment activities, but I do feel that blogging lets me give something back, in a way. I am a big proponent of mindful meditation, and believe me, there is very little better for that than reviewing play habits when I blog about my last play session in an MMO. I also love all the social science in MMOs that many players just forget about as they play. I think blogging about MMOs is a way to link to that magnificent MMO culture from outside the game (and forums).

Dutch: What makes Kill Ten Rats your blogging home?
Ravious: Two reasons: it is ad-free and filled with other great writers. Since we don't give a hoot about advertisers or hits/day to generate GoogleAds or something, we are really free to write about what we want. I think all the KTR writers are very mature in their writing, and we generally don't write one-sided, flame bait posts (although they can be fun, like a changeup pitch). But, that's getting back to being appreciative of your readership. Treat them as part of your blog and the blog will grow. The other thing is I don't have the time or energy to write daily posts. The other KTR writers fill the gaps and also give me ideas. I love when we are able to hit a community blogging node to discuss one certain aspect of MMOs. The posts that result are some of the best.

Dutch: So Guild Wars is your thing, obviously, but why Guild Wars? What made Guild Wars so special for you and what attracted you the most?
Ravious: In the beginning it was that a band of ex-Blizzard employees were making a non-subscription MMO. I followed it from the start, and I completely missed most of World of Warcraft's beta because I was so focused on Guild Wars. Now, it's just an amazing game with the most fun per dollar I have ever had, and I am amazed at the updates that keep coming. Of course, Guild Wars 2 is going to rock the MMO genre to its core, too.



Dutch: We'll come back to Guild Wars 2 later on; let's stick to Guild Wars for a moment. During your career as a blogger and player, what has been your most impressive or fun experience that you've experienced?
Ravious: As a player, it was definitely the first time I took the Hall of Heroes before Factions was released. I am not in a very hardcore PvP guild, but we worked hard for weeks on getting our team strategies together. I still have the Celestial Sigil from that first win. There have been others such as vanquishing with the guild, getting a great PUG on a Zaishen event, or doing the festivals... but the most memorable are all PvP related.
As a blogger, I am just humbled every time ArenaNet gives Kill Ten Rats an interview. We've worked hard to create a very good blog with thought-provoking articles and some great readers/commentators, and I like to think in some way that MMO developers agree. My favorite though was the time I asked ArenaNet to comment on a blog post I wrote regarding the change MMO players would face in going from conventional, compartmentalized quests to the event-based system in Guild Wars 2. Eric Flannum came through big time with a great testing story and design thoughts. That is definitely one of my favorite moments as a blogger because instead of an interview it was almost a talk among colleagues. I will be attending PAX East where I hope to have more face-to-face discussions along those lines with ArenaNet developers.

Dutch: Yeah, I got to agree with you on that one. So you've mentioned Guild Wars 2 already, what's attracting you the most about the announced elements of the game so far and why?

Ravious: By far it is the ability to group together without commitment. Working full-time and being a dad of two small kids, my time is very precious. Nothing enrages me more at the MMO genre than spending so much time trying to simply group for specific content. I loved the open grouping system in Warhammer Online, and Rift's dynamic content is pretty fun too. But, I think ArenaNet did the best thing by creating all of the open world PvE content around events. I am very interested to see what kind of herd will result from the dynamic events. Of course, I am also a big fan of the buy-the-box business model, and will champion that one to my grave.

Dutch: Well, you sure seem excited for GW2, any idea what you'll be doing when the game launches when it's released?
Ravious: Well taking the day (or week) off, that's for sure! I am actually a little worried about what effect the launch will have on my blogging. All the time put into blogging is sadly time spent not playing. I will definitely have to be mindful of taking time to relate, what I believe will be, my awesome experiences in Guild Wars 2. One thing that really eases this worry is that I believe it won't matter if I am "behind the curve." I think that between the business model, replayability, and instantaneous travel, the low to mid levels are going to be hopping for a long, long time.

Dutch: So for our readers who would like to start up a blog, do you have any tips for them on where to start with?
Ravious: Just write. In the beginning your writing and readership will suck. Don't watch hits/day or number of comments. Just write. Also read and comment on other MMO blogs. It is called the blogosphere because it is an interconnected community. Don't write in a vacuum. If you keep it up, first other bloggers will notice you. They might link one of your articles on one of theirs. That will send a few readers your way, and they will look around your blog. Make sure it is easy to find "About" and "Favorite Articles." But, just keep writing. Be consistent, and be mindful of possible readers. They will come.
Also, the more thought-provoking and deeper your article, the less comments it will get. Some sort of weird law of MMO blogging. But still write those posts! It will make you a better writer all around.



Dutch: Okay, anything else you would like to add before we finish off this interview?
Ravious: Sure. I think that the Guild Wars/Guild Wars 2 fan community is one of the best out there. It is really getting quite strong with the approach of Guild Wars 2. GuildMag is simple a fantastic addition filled with many strong community contributors I know pretty well. One thing I noticed about GuildMag writers is that so many are parts of many Guild Wars communities from the big forums to small blogs. I think that it really helps create a very well-rounded community, which I hope will just continue to bring more players to the Guild Wars series.

Dutch: Heh, thanks! Also, thanks for your time to do this interview!
Ravious: Anytime. It was very nice talking to you, and I can't wait to see the next GuildMag issue.

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The Team's opinion on... Edge of Destiny

by the GuildMag team



[SPOILER ALERT]

Thalador Doomspeaker (Writer):
Edge of Destiny... the book that I wanted the most for 2010, and which I eventually received only in 2011. It was a very exciting, and action-oriented novel. In comparison with Ghosts of Ascalon, the number of conversational parts (where the key characters discussed major events (re)shaping the world) was less, yet it didn't lack too much on the emotional side. What I really loved was that it had a great deal of humor - which I little bit missed from GoA. I found myself laughing quite often, mainly at the Rytlock & Logan situations/bickerings, and nearly everything that had to do something with Master Snaff or Rytlock (that guy should run a show). On the negative side, many of the fighting scenes felt a little bit forced, though a few of them still had me excited of what was coming next. Even then, the Battle of the Crystal Desert was by far the best.

I liked every member of Destiny's Edge, and it was good that Mr. King didn't emphasize their good characteristics only. Also, the "supporting" characters were formed really well too. Queen Jennah was my favourite, immediately followed by Magnus. I can't wait to get the legendary guild back together, thus I truly hope that the "someday" that was mentioned in the end is in "danger close."

The new information on the Elder Dragons and Tyria was really appreciated and it reignited some good discussions on the lore forum of GW2Guru. Because of this and the aforementioned things, I'd like to thank everyone who helped Mr. King in writing this book.

(@ Kralkatorrik: I hope you're reading this. I don't care what my chosen order wants to do with you, but you will go down for what you've done, you son of a... flying dune lizard.)

Rating: 9/10

Konig Des Todes (Writer):
Edge of Destiny was a nice read. There were multiple parts where I couldn't help but cringe. There were a lot of jokes put in that felt really forced in there, and in turn becoming jokes which only those well versed in some amount of GW lore (mostly gw1) would know. For instance, early on in the book the narration says Rytlock was in torment but "not the Realm of Torment," said mention of the Realm of Torment had no connection outside the word "torment" and to me, that is a double-edged sword. Outside of forced jokes, there were a small handful of lines in the fight scenes which just otherwise feel forced in (particularly, how they kill Morgus Lethe). Likewise, the book felt too fast-paced and, in turn, too mushed together. The first third of the book was fine in this regard, but once the group gets together and starts hunting champions, you get gaps the size of months and so few events between those gaps. It begins to feel like they disappeared for months before they did anything again, as if nothing happened and then everything happens and then nothing happens again. But perhaps I'm just over-exaggerating.

However, the characters were exceptionally enjoyable to read. Despite what people say about Logan after they read the book, I enjoyed how each and every character was made. Unsurprisingly, Snaff was my favorite character - I think he was for most people. My only hope is that there's still more to the Elder Dragons than what the novel reveals.

Rating: 8/10

BarGamer (Editor):
Four word review: Needs more fart jokes.

Ok, in all seriousness, I liked EoD a lot more than GoA. Never mind the banter, never mind the action, never mind the rushed ending that left the remaining members shattered, physically and emotionally. I identified with Logan more than Dougal. Logan is brave, smart, funny, and can kick several kinds of ass. Dougal is an emo coward who can't even keep his sword in one piece. I cared more about The Golem's Eye than I did about Dougal. When he got betrayed, I actually cheered for his death. On the other hand, when Logan "betrays" the rest of Destiny's Edge, I just knew that someone was about to die. I had to encourage myself to keep reading and steel myself against the anguish of losing someone I had just gotten to know.

draxynnic (Writer):
I commented in the Ghosts of Ascalon review about how books based in game worlds (and shared worlds in general) tend to be somewhat simplistic compared to other books in the genre. While Edge of Destiny is still not exactly the book you would choose for complex plots and twists developed across hundred of pages, it is definitely a step above the usual fare, and quite an enjoyable few hours of reading.

One thing that helped to give EoD some more depth was a different style compared to Ghosts of Ascalon - the latter was essentially written as an introduction to the world to a reader unfamiliar with the world, while Edge of Destiny is more inclined to just get on with the story. This doesn't mean that it gives insufficient information for a reader new to Tyria to avoid getting lost, but like most novels it sticks to the information directly related to the plot and avoids the long information dumps that characterized its predecessor.
I found the interactions between the characters quite entertaining, and Rytlock's joviality in general serves to show the more playful nature of the charr in contrast to the seriousness and somberness evinced by the charr we had seen before, Seer Fiercereign's morbid humour notwithstanding.

Going into potential spoilers: Regarding certain controversial events, I don't really think Logan could have made a different choice and still been true to himself, even with the personal consideration. One of Logan's characteristics that is hammered throughout the book is that he is more defensive than offensive in nature - with other threats closer to Kryta, the chaos that could have resulted from Logan refusing the call for help would likely have increased the overall danger to the people of Kryta more than the continued survival of a single, relatively distant threat. Furthermore, the actions Logan took after making his choice likely set the stage for the charr-human truce.

Rating: 8/10

Malchior Devenholm (Head-Editor/Podcaster):

First off, Ghosts of Ascalon and Edge of Destiny are the only two fantasy novels I've read, so if you consider yourself a fantasy novel connoisseur, then you have every right to take my words with a grain of salt and disregard them. These are just my first impressions on the novel.

I found Edge of Destiny about 5-10 times more enjoyable than Ghosts of Ascalon. Where GoA fleshed out lore and delved into the history between Guild Wars 1 and Guild Wars 2, Edge of Destiny just seeks to deliver kickass combat throughout the entire novel. From the battle in the night where Logan and Rytlock first confront each other, all the way to the battle against Kralkatorrik and the attack on Ebonhawke, the novel always seems to want to shove the reader into a battlefield of some kind. However, it is when the story shifts away from the battlefield that I saw some awesome intricacies that stood out from the endless combat. Logan wants to be as strong as Dylan, even though he doesn't realize he surpassed Dylan even before their duel in the queen's garden. Eir wants to avenge her father, but she's so critical of herself that she felt their failure against Kralkatorrik was from her inferior plan. Snaff knows Zojja has more innate talent than himself, but her lack of knowledge can make her a threat, both to herself and everyone around her. Rytlock strives against bullies from his past, which ultimately allows him to accept a human into his warband. The character development in Edge of Destiny goes on and on, which allows you to feel more attached to these heroes than anyone in Ghosts of Ascalon, (except for Caithe. A sylvari for 10-20 pages, then turned into a generic Assassin. I miss Killeen!)

The pace of the story feels entirely rushed during the second part of the book. There is no time given to explore the environments, or mill about in the cities they are trying to defend from the dragon champions. There isn't even a detailed plan of attack, any sense of time, or a connection to the heroes. It's just the gang already present at the champion's lair, following Eir's plan, maybe running into a bump or two in the execution of said plan, and ultimately, succeeding with hardly any difficulty. I mean, we've seen how people can get one-shotted by the Shatterer in the demo, so why do six people handle three dragon champions with such ease? It feels like each champion could have been a book in themselves, with further content in between about the struggles to reach each champion, and further plot developments into the heroes' histories and relations between each other.

Finally, the ending just made me want to bury my head in my pillow and cry (which I almost did). It's so absurd and frustrating, yet at the same time, completely reasonable to relate to Logan leaving the group like he did. Then again, it's not his fault. It all falls on that witch Jennah, who knew the gravity of the situation, but fell to her human fears, urges, desires, or whatever the reader can insert to represent his or her own intentions. Ask yourself, "If faced at the point of death, where you felt you could not survive, wouldn't you call your loved one to see them one last time?" Jennah's choice at the end of the book is a perfect example of how we humans tend to use power, status, position, or any kind of leverage to get whatever we want, no matter the consequences. I still want to punch her in the face when I see her in Guild Wars 2, but I applaud J. Robert King for connecting to the reader in the deepest way possible, the innate, fallible nature of his or her human self.

Overall, Edge of Destiny is a great link to both the heroes and the personalities of each of the races of Guild Wars 2. A fresh mind eager to dive into the Guild Wars universe would not be dismayed by picking up this book, but it is best enjoyed by one who has played the original Guild Wars and can compare the atmosphere, hardships, and racial characteristics of the original game to their counterparts found in Edge of Destiny.

Rating: 9/10

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Arachnia and the Insectoid Gods

by Konig Des Todes

In the darkest recesses of one's mind, truth can always be found in the form of secrets. If one is brave enough to embrace fear and torment, one can learn much. Have you delved into the recesses of fear itself? If not, you should; there are some interesting things there.

Deep within the Realm of Torment, buried throughout the Domain of Fear, lies hints and clues - some more subtle than others. These mere implications lead to things that no creature wants known, and only those vigorous enough to dig deep into the bowels of knowledge will find this most interesting secret.

With so many shadows covering the information, this knowledge is filled with holes and potential inaccuracies. Digging deeper into the recesses of Fear leads only to less solid information. Alone, these things would be dismissed, abandoned, and forgotten – just as those who hide this knowledge desire.

I speak of none other than the proclaimed deceased god Arachnia.

When I first stumbled upon this information, it was a mere whisper - an escaping mention or three of this supposed "now-dead spider god." Since then, I have sought and hunted down the knowledge of this ancient deity. I have found much, but not enough.

One should familiarize themselves with the Domain of Fear in order to know this subject, for that is the sole location of this information… outside one possible fleeting connection... but that comes later.

It is near impossible, if not indeed impossible, to go into the Domain of Fear and not see the constant appearance of limbs of giant insects and arachnids. There are even multiple statues depicting something of an insect design. But once more I get ahead of myself…



Let us start at the beginning of the line of clues: a location referred to as the Arachnia Plateau. This location is described in ancient plinths, columns of knowledge located in the Realm of Torment, as a "field of soft, leathery soil broken up into rolling plates, like the palm of one's hand, or the underbelly of a spider." It is also said to give slightly when you walk on it and even is claimed to make a soft sighing noise.

In my mind, after searching throughout all of the Realm of Torment, this can only be one location: outside of the Gate of Secrets within the Domain of Fear (did you expect somewhere else?). This location looks very much like the underbelly of a spider: eight spider-like legs stick up out near a cliff, two of which create bridges to nearby ledges. This doesn't perfectly match the underbelly of a spider, of course, but no one ever said it was one – merely like it.



This conclusion is furthered by knowledge of another location that I found: referred to as "the Spider's Heart." This is in fact the origin of the knowledge of Arachnia as a dead spider god. The plinths describe this place as a "glowing radiance of evil at the heart of Arachnia" – which gives us the name "Arachnia," the same as the plateau – perhaps named after the spider god. But the location's description goes on, even with uncertainty in the description itself, as it says, and I quote: "Said to be the remains of a now-dead spider-god, older than Abaddon and the Five True Gods themselves."

An interesting implication indeed! Something older than the Six Gods? I know many human scholars who will go into a frenzy over such information. Interestingly enough, with the exception of plinths and rifts, the sole place I can find that "glows" on its own in the Realm of Torment is a faint glow in the ground just off to the side of the Arachnia Plateau.

While pondering over this, I recalled a comment that a fellow knowledge-seeker, the Apostate, had once said of Abaddon: "There were other gods before him, before he was imprisoned here. And I believe that while the power he uses cannot be destroyed, he may be supplanted, as he supplanted his predecessor."

Could it be that Arachnia is one of these other gods that came before Abaddon? Perhaps Arachnia is even his predecessor. Well, mere theories and speculation. But one thing is for sure: the Apostate knows more than he's willing to reveal… no matter how many times I talk to him. It would seem that even he desires for this knowledge to remain unknown to all, just as those who had initially hidden this knowledge.

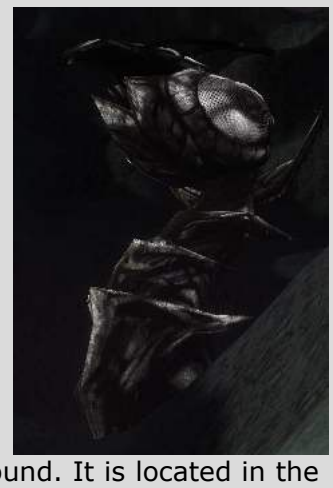
The next thing I came upon was a location known as "Harvestman's Lair" – a lair of a spider? It did nothing but interest me further on this subject. The plinth I found this location's name on also had a description - one obviously not caring for facts either, but rather for creativity, which makes it even less trustworthy but mentionable all the same: "A flooded cavern filled with remains of the gods of insectoid beings. No native spiders are ever seen, but there is the scurry of thin legs and something made all those webs."

Gods of insectoid beings? Perhaps these are the gods that the Apostate mentioned briefly. When I found this, I had made connection



after connection, but none were definite. I desired, and needed, more information. For instance, are these gods insectoid or is it merely their followers which are? And then something struck me. A remembrance of how a being I passed had described the Domain of Fear, that it "may indicate the power of a previous, spider or dryder-like race in the world."

Time after time, it is more about spiders than anything else. Fitting for the Domain of Fear, considering arachniphobia and how insects have been a fear of humanity for ages, but interesting.



Before I move on, I feel I must bring up one more thing about the "gods of insectoid beings." Throughout the Domain of Fear reside countless statues - with one in Nightfallen Jahai, which also houses a second object of interest. These tall, pitch-black idols contain insectoid eyes, mandible-like beaks or mouths, and a sharp spinal-like base. One can say that these are depicting a mix between a bird and an insect. Could these statues be depicting one of these "gods of insectoid beings?" Surely not Arachnia, but perhaps another…

There has been one more discovery as of the time of this writing, which I feel to be necessary to mention. It is that other object of interest which resides within Nightfallen Jahai: a giant spider. I couldn't be anymore specific than that, for that's what it is: an eight-legged arachnid which is buried halfway into the ground. It is located in the southwestern area of the region, but there is something peculiar about it…

The spider-like creature appears to be "burst open" as if its exoskeleton was peeling away at just one spot. Through this, we can see its glob-like insides moving, slowly, in a breathing-like motion. Up and down, repetitively.



I cannot help but wonder if this is a remnant of those old gods.

I will continue to search and seek for new answers on this topic... this piece of history that all other beings knowing it wish covered up will one day be revealed.

-Journal of Xaphan Sariel, Researcher and Lorekeeper of Kurzick House Sariel

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FanFic: Necklace of Power

by Arghore

A fan-fiction story based upon historical and in-game facts about an item that got lost in the mists of Guild Wars' history, and the quest of a young necromancer trying to find this item, fabled in her grandmother's stories …

I was just a little girl when my grandmother told me these stories, which were handed down to her from her grandmother and from there on backwards in time; to a time before Abaddon - back to a time that is shrouded in mist; back to a time when magic was dealt with in a whole different way, at least, so her stories told...

According to my grandmother, magic did exist before Abaddon, and it was not just the ritualists who used it by communing with the dead. Back in those days one didn't acquire magic through practice and training: one acquired magic and skills by attaining magical crystals, setting them in rings. Extensive training was then used to harness the magic locked within these crystals.

This tradition is most likely why we are still limited to using eight skills today; together with it being a likely restriction the gods inscribed on the bloodstones, after Abaddon handed out magic so freely that chaos arose on Tyria. With this gift from Abaddon and the other Gods, the use of crystals was no longer needed, and as such they were lost in time.

With the loss of the rings and crystals as a way to practice magic, so did another item get lost in time; an item my grandmother called The Necklace of Power. This item worked very much in the same way as the rings did as one would set a crystal in the necklace, allowing them to harness its power. The necklace had a restriction though: since the crystal was set into a necklace and not a ring, the crystal had to be recharged by a skill trainer after being used. My grandmother stressed that the loss of these necklaces became a loss for all Tyrians, because there would be many times when a single use spell could be very useful. Moreover, since the particular skill could be of any kind of magic.

Over the hundreds of years since the exodus these necklaces had all been lost. Most likely they had been melted for their gold and turned into other items of value. I didn't fully understand why I had to know about this history if I couldn't use crystals or rings, and all these necklaces had been lost. My grandmother stressed it was good to know the historic truth, as there would always be people trying to spread their own versions of history to benefit their own cause. To some extent I'm glad she told me these stories, because they were a nice way to remember her after she had passed away.

Several years later, these stories sparked a quest of my own. At the time I was training under Necromancer Munne in the catacombs of Ascalon. One day she scared off a young man named Horace by threatening to turn him into a minion. She had caught him stealing items from deceased people, and as he ran off he had shouted:

"The dead have no use for these items, and I have to eat."

When I asked Munne about this, she told me the deceased had often been buried along with their possessions, since the erection of the catacombs, around the time of the founding of Ascalon. I'm not sure why, but I realized that if I could find a grave old enough it was very likely that I had a chance of finding a necklace, and thus see for myself if these stories were true, or just the ramblings of an old woman about a long lost time. With the help of Horace I could probably find my way in and back out of the catacombs.

The first thing to do was to search for an old grave. What better way to go about this than searching the Historical Documents of Ascalon? I headed back to town and convinced a scribe that I was looking for information about my ancestors. I am fairly sure the argument: *"I am interested in the history of my bloodline and I want to write a story about my family's history"* won him over, as he began telling about how he had started his career as a scribe in a similar way. So I was granted access to the Ascalon Library, which held documents on the birth and death of all Ascalonians, as well as the section of the Catacombs in which they were buried. So not to arouse any suspicions I started with my parents and grandmother and worked my way back in time. I wrote down the names, birth and death dates on pieces of parchment.

It is funny what you can find through this kind of research. Apparently I am related to Baron Egan some few hundred years back, though clearly I ended up in the wrong family branch. The further I went back in time the thinner the archives got. Apparently registration in the archives was reserved for the upper class at some point in history. To some extent this brought some doubts to my plans. Grave robbing a high profile tomb just to find out if my grandmother's stories were true? Then again, if these stories were true and I could attain such a necklace, I would have an extra spell, which would surely give me an advantage over anyone I were to cross in my life ahead. Also, having an upper class grave would make it a lot easier to convince this Horace in joining me. More value meant more to eat...

When I finally came to the era before the exodus the archives were just a few parchments thick. Unfortunately almost all these graves were located in the caved in sections. Nowadays the catacombs are all caved in, but back in the days of which I am writing, one could exit the catacombs at various locations throughout the Ascalon region. If you are old enough and from around Ascalon you might know about the bridged gap at the north-eastern entrance. That hadn't always been there: it was constructed when a hallway caved in years ago, sealing off a large part of the older graves and revealing what had been hidden in the ground for centuries.
The last entry (or should I say the first?) gave me hope. It was in a section I was unfamiliar with, but the signet suggested it was not in one of the caved in sections. The name of this person though made me gasp for air: King Doric! In a haste I ran through the archive again. Surely there must be another grave I could reach other than a royal grave? But there were none. Well of course there were other graves, but there was no way I could ever reach them except for maybe with a full geared expedition and clearance to excavate the cave…

I decided not to tell Horace the name of the deceased when I met him at his encampment, I merely told him I had found the location of an upper class grave and asked him to join me in collecting some 'unused objects'. Nor did I tell him about the necklace. I told him that any necklace we found would be for me, and that we would split up any other spoils. I am not sure if it was the campfire or the prospect of gold, but I am fairly sure his eyes lit up when I told him the grave would be of someone of the upper class. And so we agreed, we would meet the next night outside Barradin's Estate and enter the Catacombs from there.

Horace met me outside the Estate just after sun down and we walked towards the Catacombs. As soon as we entered he grabbed a torch from his backpack and lit our way. Luckily the young gargoyles were not aggressive and we made our way across the bridge. If only these hadn't caved in I would probably have felt less guilty of what we were about to do.

We made our way into the first chamber which was littered with coffins and graves. I had a quick look around and, after a fight with some adolescent gargoyles, I concluded this was not the right section. This was something I had expected; the ancient first king of Ascalon would not be amidst the more recently deceased.

"The grave is not here, we need to go to this section", I told Horace as I showed him the signet which indicated where to find the entrance to the tomb.

"I know of that section, but there are no graves."

"What do you mean, no graves?"

"Well it's just an empty hall, I will show you."

We exited the burial chamber and made our way through the catacombs along a curly trail, littered with juvenile, non-aggressive gargoyles.

"We are close now, so watch out for..." Horace could not finish his sentence as two aggressive skeletons roared and came our way, weapons at the ready.

I quickly placed a few hexes and decreased the skeleton's fighting speed, casting another few hexes to drain their lives, quickly switching from one to the other while trying to block blows with my staff. As I looked around Horace was nowhere to be found, and as I looked on the ground there were only two piles of bones.

"HORACE!"

"Coming!" He shouted as he came running from his hiding place.

"I'm not much of a fighter so I, ehrm, well I hid around the corner"
"You could have told me that up front!"

"Well you didn't mention any fighting, just collecting some valuables."

This didn't bode well for the rest of our quest. The catacombs were notorious for their traps and dangers. I quickly went through my backpack.

"It should be in here somewhere, ah yes, my family stone."

It was one of the few valuables my grandmother had left me, a summon stone that had been in the family for ages I had never used it and I hoped…

"There it is! Above the bridge!" I looked at Horace pointing at a sign on an arch just behind the bridge up ahead, it did indeed look a lot… *"and they are in our path!"* Horace shouted out.

Two more skeletons were guarding the bridge ahead. My summon stone had better work.

With a puff of smoke it squeaked into existence, a bright shining fire imp. With that by my side I at least stood a fighting chance down there. I fired a bolt of dark energy from my staff, and caught the skeletons' attention as they roared and made their move forward. Luckily my fire imp followed my lead and hurled a bolt of fire at the one of the skeletons. I quickly slowed down the other skeleton's attack speed and drained whatever life it had left in it.

Meanwhile I kept hurling dark energy at the other skeleton, with the fire imp doing the same with fire. As one skeleton slowly pounded on my armor, the other one burned to a crisp. As I turned my attention to the remaining skeleton, so did the fire imp. A few more hexes and fire bolts took care of it, and as it crushed in on itself it dropped its rusty blade on the ground.

"Horace?! You can come out now." Horace came running from his hiding spot around the corner.*"Here pick this up, you might not be a fighter, but I'd rather have you armed in case you need to defend yourself."*

"But, but..." With a little muttering Horace picked up the blade; necromancers can give a convincing stare.

I examined the signet above the doorway. It was slightly overgrown with moss but there was no doubt about it depicting the section of the Catacombs where we needed to be. Unfortunately the writing below the rune was covered in more moss, and I could not make out much more than *"…nger… … gua..s …"* and some more text, so I mostly hoped there wouldn't be any warnings for imminent death and proceeded forward.

As we entered we saw four more skeletons guarding the room. Luckily they patrolled in pairs and they were dealt with two at a time, similarly to the ones on the bridge.

The large square room had two stone structures in it, two unlit rusty braziers and a large wall painting of Grenth, the God of Death. If the structures had been large enough to hold a coffin you would think you had just found a tomb, unless they buried their dead standing in the past.

"I told you there was nothing interesting here." Horace had come from his hiding place and strolled around the room.

"Well there are two exits, but they just lead to other sections of the Catacombs."



I made my way through the room looking for any levers or pulleys of some sort to open up a secret doorway. Horace had started tapping the walls.

"It all sounds like solid stone to me."

The only peculiar thing that I had found were some red smears on top of the stone structures. The structures looked somewhat like doorways, but rocks sealed off any entrance, if they were indeed doorways. The red smears looked somewhat similar on both structures and must have been some sort of decoration that hadn't withstood the test of time. In desperation I had started examining the rusty braziers for possible clues, but most of it looked like simple decoration.

"*If anything is written on there, it'd be 'light my fire'* " Horace scoffed as he lit the brazier I was inspecting. The sudden bright light made me close my eyes

"Thanks!"

"No problem, I'll light the other."

As Horace moved over to the other brazier I stared into the room, my eyes still adjusting to the freshly lit light beside me. I shouted "*WAIT !"*, but Horace had already lit the brazier.

"What?"

"Look at the structures."

Slowly but surely there were runic symbols appearing in the red smears on the structures, as if they were slowly charging up.

"Well, it looks like we are making progress, why did you say wait?"

"The first had already started lighting up when you lit the brazier."

"SO? This just speeds things up!"

"True, but if anything is to happen it's now going to happen in two fold."

"Can you read those symbols Arghore?"

"No, they are of a language I have never seen before."

"Well, let's hope they open a secret door."

We stared at the symbols as their glow intensified. Then all of a sudden they started blinking, first slowly, then faster and faster, as if they were some sort of timer.

"What's happening?"

"I have no clue Horace, but if anything it looks like it's about to happ..." A loud bang overpowered my voice, dust and stone splinters splashed across the room, a moment of silence, then a loud roar echoed through the room. If only it had been an echo. From each structure, of which the blocking stones had been forcefully removed, came forward a large brightly glowing skeleton with a mighty axe and shield. Horace ran out of the room with a large squeal, and for a moment the thought crossed my mind to do the same. My fire imp thought differently though, if indeed it thought. It had started hurling fire at one of the skeletons which, infuriated, made his way toward us.

There was nothing left for me to do but fight, for my life, as turning my back on these things would surely be the death of me. I switched my hexes from one to the other, while I hurled dark energy at the skeleton pounding on my fire imp. I was glad I trained my hexes, because that at least slowed them down a bit.

The imp suddenly screamed as the skeleton pierced his shoulder with his axe. Surely this skeleton wouldn't last much longer it was bright ablaze and noticeably suffering from my hexes. The other skeleton was pounding on my armor and while its blows hurt, my life siphon made sure no vital damage was done. Another scream from my imp. The axe had made a large gash in his leg; he was bleeding badly.

I did hope he would outlast these skeletons, because I surely couldn't take both on at the same time. Then, a bright blue glow engulfed my imp, the bleeding stopped, and the wounds started to heal themselves. *"Like a bag of tricks these imps"*, I thought to myself. Then the skeleton crushed in on itself, leaving a pile of burning bones.

"One down, one to …ARRGGH", a spike of pain ran through my arm, the axe had pierced my armor and apparently my life siphon had ended. Then the blue glow engulfed me as well, the bleeding stopped and the wound started to close. *"What in the name of Grenth is going on?"*

No time to ponder on it though, as this skeleton was serious in its intentions, and defeating it needed my full concentration. With just one skeleton to focus on it was luckily just a matter of time before it too was nothing more than a pile of burning bones, but the fight left my imp and I panting for energy.

"*I thought I'd lend you a hand*," said Horace as he whispered a spell. My imp started glowing blue again.

"You're a monk!?"

"Well, not as holy as that might imply, but yes I know a few spells."

I shrugged. *"We should inspect those structures, perhaps they lead somewhere?"*

We made our way to the right structure and peered inside, no staircase, but at the back of the chest-like structure was a rusty handle.

"*Wait! Let's check the other one first*", the other one had the same handle inside. "*I would like to suggest one at a time, this time.*" Horace pulled the lever and we backed off a bit, expecting anything to happen. When nothing happened we pulled the second lever, then we heard a click, then the rattling of chains and the high pitched sound of rock against rock, like fingernails on a chalkboard. It made the hair on my neck rise.

Horace had already made his way closer to the entrance of the room. The chain rattling continued, then a large bang at the back of the room stopped it, then silence. I must have stood there gripping onto my staff for about a minute, expecting anything to show up, roar or otherwise, but nothing happened.

"Let's check out the back of the room, I'm sure the sounds came from there."

We walked towards the large painting of Grenth at the back wall, Horace tried to light it as best he could with his torch.

"This looks more recent than the rest of the room, look here at the bottom, the masonry."

"You're right, the stones look different, as if someone closed off a doorway and plastered over it to conceal the difference in stones."

Horace tapped the wall. "*Still as solid as before though.*"

"*Too bad you are not a hammer warrior, a sledge hammer sure would help.*"

"*I think I have something better*", Horace started to go through his backpack and pulled out a barrel.

"You might want to go and hide behind one of those structures", as he planted the barrel in front of the wall.

"I found these in a bandit encampment, they produce quite a bang."

He lit a cotton strap on the barrel and made his way behind the other structure. A loud bang, and again the room was filled with dust, and fragments of stone flew around. Someone was surely going to find out we had been here. For a moment I realized again what it was we were going to do. In all the excitement I had forgot to consider backing off, but with that hole in the wall we had already gone too far to turn back.

Horace stepped through the gap and lit it from the other side so I could step through. As we stood in the narrow corridor it was clear it made a sharp turn to the left after a few meters. Then we descended down some stairs leading to a platform and took another turn to the left.

"Stop!" I grabbed Horace's arm. "Look on that platform, that green glow, it's a trap."

"Now what?"

"Now we do what Munne taught me, disable it with a minion. If there are any corpses around that is."

I started my spell. As green spell symbols appeared around me I could hear the growl of a minion around the next corner.

"Cover your eyes!"

Chunks of flesh and bone flew around as the minion hit the trap.

"It's disabled now."

"The trap as well?"

"That's what I mean you silly. Let's move on."

At the small platform the turn left revealed another staircase leading down into blackness.

"Keep your eyes open for any more traps", I said.

"Look, torches, should I light them?"

"Glad you asked Horace, sure go ahead, I doubt they do any harm, as they look like they are placed to light the stairs."

We moved down the stairs, torch by torch, down into the dark, damp tomb. At the bottom of the stairs the next hurdle on our quest made itself apparent; a large wooden double door without any locks or handles. Faint colors and paint chips made it apparent that this door had once been elaborately decorated.

"*Looks like this door will only open to the right spell, as I see no locks or other means to open it.*"

"Or the right tools", said Horace as he pulled out another barrel from his backpack.

"This had better work, because it's my last one. Best stand back a bit."

After Horace lit the cotton we made our way up the stairs again. A large bang echoed through the staircase.

"And?"

One of the sides of the door had come loose from one of its hinges and offered a gap big enough for us to enter.

"Looks like it worked, sort of …"

The door itself barely had a scratch on it, it was obviously protected by some sort of magic, but the hinge hadn't been protected by this magic or had simply corroded away through the centuries. We worked our way past the door and ended up on small circular platform on the other side. In front of us was a large stone bridge leading into the darkness. Horace held his torch as high up in the air as he could, but we couldn't see much more than the bridge up ahead.

We made our way toward the start of the bridge and peered over the side. Deep down below there was the faint glow of a lava river.

"Eeww, there is something yucky in this ditch."

Horace dipped his finger in the ditch that ran on the side of the bridge and smelled it.

"It's some sort of oil."

Before I could say anything he had already lit the fluid with his torch. The flame spread across the bridge running wild across the room, and back up the other side of the bridge.

"Let there be light", he smirked.

I hit him on his shoulder. *"Think next time will you! For all we know it could have set this place on fire!"*

"Well, you're probably right, but it didn't ok, now look."

We stood in awe as we looked onto the lit platform ahead, the yellow glow of gold dazzled the mind.

"HORACE, WAIT!"

It was too late. Horace ran off onto the bridge.

"Gold! I'm rich!"

Bang, Horace lay flat on the floor. He had tripped on a stone, as he turned on his back and sat up, he shouted:
"The stone gave way, there is some decoration on it!"

As I looked onwards onto the bridge I could see various stones with symbols on them, decoration for the unwary, but an obvious warning for the informed not to step on them.

"You probably triggered some trap! Let's hope it won't kill us now that we are so close!"

I made my way towards Horace making sure neither I nor my imp walked on one of the decorated stones. We were almost on the other side of the bridge and I could see a life-like statue of what was most likely King Doric, standing watching over a stone coffin. His hands were resting on what would have been his sword, and around the statue's neck was a gold necklace with a glimmering crystal hanging from it. A Necklace of Power! I had found one.

Nothing had happened yet, but we also hadn't moved after I had helped Horace back on his feet.

"*Maybe the trap is broken? Or it has been triggered in the past already, so it won't now. Can we move on?*"

"I don't know Horace, but it sure looks like it's safe to move."

I had spoken too soon. We had barely made one step forward when strange translucent blobs with tentacles showed up from behind various gold, decorated objects around the platform.

Horace giggled: *"Look, living pudding. What are those going to do, suffocate us with vanilla?"*

A bolt of energy flew towards Horace and hit him right in the chest, he screamed in agony.

"I think not Horace, brace yourself, or run, and don't step on any more of those tiles!"

Horace whispered a spell and a blue ball of energy started circling around him, he repeated the spell until my imp and I had the same blue ball circling around us.

"I'm too close to run now", Horace said as he gripped on to the rusty blade I had made him pick up earlier, *"and besides, it's only pudding."*

My imp had already started hurling balls of fire back at the tentacle puddings. Summoned creatures are a great help, but they do have a mind of their own. I joined my imp as I started hurling dark energy with my staff and spread some hexes around. Horace took point as he defended our position against a couple of 'puddings' in melee range. It was hard to see if he made any progress though, as his blade sliced through the creatures as a knife through butter. You could hardly see he hit them as any wounds just closed up after the blade had run through.

More of those creatures had started showing up, it was as if the trap had opened the floodgates of a massive pudding storage, but luckily we had defeated some, so they could be killed.

Then our fighting got interrupted shortly by a soft thump sound and some dust and rubble coming down from the ceiling. It had even surprised these creatures, as for a brief moment all fighting stopped, only to continue shortly thereafter. The second thump sound only seemed to be noticed by me, as Horace, the imp and these creatures kept fighting like nothing had happened. Then another

louder bang, and again rubble and dust rained down on us from up above. I checked around the room, there were more creatures showing up, and only our strategic position on the bridge was keeping us alive at this point.

"We can't win this Horace, we have to run, my imp will hold them off."

"But we are so close!"

"Yeah! Close to our deaths you mean!"

Another loud bang and more dust and rubble seemed to stress my point. This one was loud enough to stop the fight for another moment, I didn't hesitate and grabbed Horace by his arm.

"RUN, and don't step on those stones!"

My imp held them off long enough for us to escape. We hurried over the bridge, through the door, and up the stairs. As we moved up the stairs the thumps seemed to get louder and more frequent. We stepped through the gap in the wall, into the room, still lit by the two braziers. We ran outside over the bridge.

"To the right here, we will exit at the Abbey."

We didn't make it far, as the route towards the Abbey was blocked by a huge cave in.

"Back the way we came Horace, and quick, something bad is happening."

We ran back past the bridge. As we entered the twisting path towards the graveyard, we ran into Oberon quite unexpectedly.

"Hello Horace, Miss Arghore. On an early stroll through the catacombs?"

"Hello Oberon. Something like that. Do you have any idea what's going on?"

Another thump seemed to shake the ground beneath our feet as to point out what exactly the question was about.

"Not the slightest clue young ones, but it felt urgent enough for me to make my way up from down below. Better safe than dead."
"I think we agree on that, let's move."

There wasn't a gargoyle to be seen on the path towards the gravesite, I figured they too had concluded this place was not safe anymore and had made their way somewhere else. I was right about that. As we turned left to enter the large room with the bridge over the old graves, we found it was filled with overly excited gargoyles, both juvenile and more adolescent ones.
Horace pointed behind us. The large grave chamber had caved in and early morning light shone through the ceiling. Here and there things were burning. Ahead there was light shining through the entrance of the Catacombs, but as of now, our route forward was blocked by these gargoyles.

"They won't let us through without a fight", Oberon pointed out *"and the juveniles will follow the adolescent ones so it'll be a tough fight."*

I grabbed my family stone again, but nothing happened.

"It will only work every so often, so if you used it recently it won't be of much use now."

"Thanks Oberon, I didn't know that, so I guess I can put it away."

"Did you train the minion skills I taught you?"

"Yes I have, and there is bound to be some fleshy corpses in that caved in grave room. Good thinking."

"What about you Horace? Can you fight?"

Horace seemed somewhat out of it as he stared with glazy eyes. *"What? Yes I can fight."*

"Horace is really a monk, so perhaps he should take the backline?"

"I'm not that much of a monk, I just know a few spells", he said as he whispered his blue ball spell three times.
"Well maybe warrior will be a good second profession for him to pick up if we make it out of here alive, you can never swing a sword often enough."

"Let me try and get some minions at least, to help him out", I said as I walked to the entrance of the gravesite.

"It's no use, they can't make it over the rubble blocking the entrance, so it's just the three of us for now."

"So be it, Horace you take point, I'll help you magnify your damage with a mark of pain, just keep hitting your target and the mark will do the rest", Oberon said.

Horace let out a loud roar which made some gargoyles look our way. Then he just ran off towards them and started hacking with his blade. Oberon placed his mark of pain on the gargoyle he was hitting, on every hit a high pitched sound rang and several gargoyles around Horace were hit with shadow damage. The gargoyles dropped to the ground left and right.

Both Oberon and I threw hexes around and tried to raise as many minions as we could. It was quite a sight; gargoyle blood splattered around, minions raising where gargoyle had dropped. Bolts of various kinds of magic flew through the chamber and hexes flew from one side and the other.

Every time Horace slew a gargoyle he let out a roar and moved to the next. I even had to shout at him to remind him to heal himself. He seemed not the Horace I left with yesterday evening. Even when there were no more gargoyles standing, he kept hacking at a gargoyle corpse. When Oberon turned it into a minion, Horace was ready to release his fury on said minion.

"HORACE, NO!"

He stopped and looked around. He was covered in gargoyle blood and I was sure I could hear him mumble: *"kill, kill, kill."*
During all this the thumps and bangs had not stopped, sometimes loud and nearby, other times soft and further away. It felt like it was raining heavy objects, but what exactly was going on was yet unclear.

"Let's make our way out of here, before whatever it is makes this whole room cave in upon us."

We marched over the bridge towards the exit of the catacombs, Oberon up front, then me, then Horace, followed by a whole pack of roaring minions.

As we exited the catacombs and adjusted our eyes to the morning light, it did not feel like a bright and sunny day. It looked more like the sky was ablaze and large boulders of fire rained from the sky. In the distance we could hear the warning bells and trumpets from the Estate. It was the day the Searing had begun. The charr were attacking Ascalon, and to make matters worse for us, a war band of about ten charr had spotted us and charged forward roaring like madmen.

"Brace yourselves, CHARR!"

Horace froze to the ground, then he fainted at the sight of these charr charging at us. Luckily for Oberon and myself the army of minions didn't know fear, and seeing they had been trailing behind us the charr had probably not seen them when they thought us easy prey. About fifteen to twenty minions swarmed the charr. Oberon cast his mark of pain and other hexes, so did I. The minions formed a protective meat shield between us and the charr. For any that fell, a new corpse was ready to be turned into a minion. We did take some hits before the fight was over, as these charr were formidable archers. Oberon used a healing circle spell to keep us from harm.

"It also works great to keep minion's alive", he said after the fight.

Then came the hard part. We tried to wake Horace up but he was too far gone, and we couldn't carry him. Necromancers are not exactly known for their physical power. Oberon had said we'd best leave him behind. There would be more charr soon. The way he was covered in blood any charr would think him for dead, and he was smart enough to save himself once he awoke.

We made our way towards the estate and were about to call for back up to retrieve Horace. The chaos that arose when a few of those burning rocks hit the estate made that impossible, not to mention the blowing horns of the charr, warning us they were not far away. We had to make sure we survived before going to rescue Horace. I did not see Horace again until about 2 years later…

The searing changed a lot for Ascalon, if not to say everything. Not only that, it changed people as well. Oberon had gone mad during the war, and I of all people had to take him out. He had been a mentor to me, and if it weren't for him I doubt Horace and I would have made it past those gargoyles, let alone those charr. But in his madness he was a threat to the surviving population in Ascalon. He had to be taken out.

I met Horace in Ashford Abbey, or rather, Sardelac Sanitarium as it's called today. When I met him the conversation was somewhat awkward.

"Hello Horace how are you doing, remember me?"

"Are you here to take me back? I don't want to go back. Don't take me back. I'm staying right here."

"Sure no problem. Do you remember anything from last time we saw each other?"

"ROCKS! ROCKS!" Horace laughed hysterically.

"And our mission?" I prompted.

"Pudding... all gone... the pudding with the yellow."

"Yeah you could think of it that way."

"Where's my pudding?"

"Sorry... got any plans?"

"Here... yes, here... good."

Necromancer Munne had pulled me away from him and told me I best not talk to him too much, as he didn't seem to like people talking to him. He had gotten quite some attention at the start of the Searing. He was found by a patrol, covered in blood, surrounded by about ten charr bodies. It had given a lot of heroes courage before going to the front. These charr could be killed! If one man could kill ten, how many could a regiment kill?

Munne said she didn't understand how he had done it, as she knew Horace was a monk by profession. Seeing Horace stand there, somewhat lost in time, I could not bear to tell her the truth. The Searing had taken its toll on Horace, as it had done with so many. With this story he at least kept some dignity and honor.

That was years ago, and I feel I have to write this down for posterity as I will embark on what could be a final quest. Rumor has it that Lord Odran's myths are true; that there are portals that connect the realm of the living with The Mists. After all that I have been through in the last few years, that isn't too hard to believe. The Mists touch all things. They are what binds the universe together. Past, present, and future, so there is no telling if I will make my way back, or where or when I will turn up, if I find and enter the gates into The Mists.

Don't think less of Horace. So he hadn't slain those charr, but he fought bravely against those oozes and gargoyles and only the Gods know what he has been through during those two years I didn't see him. And the necklace? Well, it existed long ago, and with the catacombs in the state they are now I doubt they will ever see the light of day again…
(Post Explanation: the necklace was an actual armor item in one of the early versions of GuildWars, it could be loaded up with a spell crystal of any profession and used once, after which the crystal had to be recharged again. It was meant as 'a card up the sleeve' and was/is the sometimes referred to 'ninth skill slot' in GuildWars. Obviously this item didn't make it into the final game, and it was 'lost' in the mists of GuildWars' past.)

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Lyssa: The Twin Goddessess

by Draxynnic

And it was, that a stranger came to the village of Wren seeking shelter and employment. Though young in years, her body was stooped and twisted, her flesh eaten by disease.
"Ye have the mark of plague upon ye," said the citizen named Gallrick. "Leave this place lest you sicken our people."
"I've lost my family and my home," cried the desperate woman. "Have you no heart?"
Yet each person, in turn, did look away.
Then from the crowd came a young woman, Sara. She looked upon the woman with pity. "If you need help," said Sara, "I will give it." And Sara did approach the gnarled, bent woman and did offer her a helping hand.
Then the sickened woman pulled from her body the robes of plague, revealing Herself to be the goddess Lyssa.
The people of Wren fell to their knees, begging Lyssa's mercy. But lifting Sara gently, saith She, "True beauty is measured not by appearance but by actions and deeds. Many have eyes, but few have seen. Of all here, you saw the beauty behind the illusion. And you alone shall be blessed with My gifts."
-- Scriptures of Lyssa: 45 BE

While each of the gods keeps their secrets from the view of mortals, it is Lyssa who may be the most mysterious. Alone among the gods, she presents herself not as a single goddess, but as twins ruling over the concepts of beauty and illusion. So far, the individual names of the twins have never been revealed to mortals, or even knowledge of whether Lyssa is truly two separate goddesses presenting a united front under a single name, a single goddess somehow split into two, or even if Lyssa's duality is simply the mask she chooses to show to her followers.

Thanks to her masks, both physical and magical, it is perhaps unsurprising that it is Lyssa who, among the gods, has the most variance in how she is interpreted across the known human-inhabited lands. Her matronage of illusion and beauty is a constant – in fact, statues of her true likenesses are said to be of such beauty that susceptible young men can be trapped, entranced by the sight until thirst overtakes them. Throughout the known continents, this extends to a matronage of the arts that produce works of beauty or rely on the glamours of the theatre to entertain. While rarely referred to directly except among adventurers, the powers she can grant to those she favours indicates that she also carries some responsibility over the raw energy of magic itself before it is converted into the stuff of life, death, or the elements, and thus passing into the domain of her peers.



In Cantha, however, greater attention is made of the duality of the twin goddesses and the paradox it represents than in other continents; concepts that recur elsewhere in Canthan culture (such as in the history of the celestials that must be faced in the test to become Weh No Su). This duality extends to her being viewed by Canthans as the mistress of fortune and misfortune both. Through her dominion over luck and over artistry such as that displayed in the feast of the celestials, one might assume that Lyssa would take a special interest in the Canthan New Year celebrations, but if so it seems she is content not to steal the spotlight from the celestial visitations.

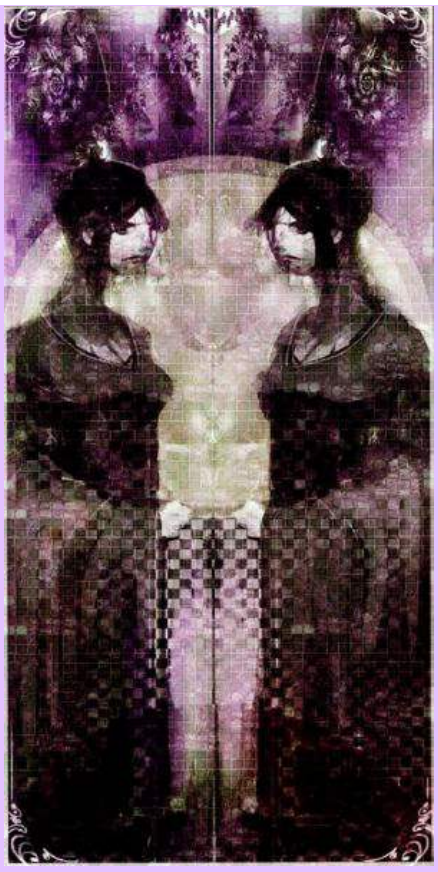
Elonians, by contrast, speak of truths about Lyssa's teachings that, in other continents, are mostly acknowledged only by those of her own favoured magical profession... and those that have first-hand experience of their arts. Namely, that she has rulership not only over beauty and illusion, but also directly over the emotions that they can inspire. This has naturally lead to her being viewed as the presiding goddess over courtship and marriage, and thus over the beauty, emotion, and, all too often, illusions of love. She is, however, feared as well as loved, as her changing nature and love of trickery leads some to see her as a bringer of chaos, a force that can destroy as easily as create.

While Lyssa's footprint has generally been a light one on the known history of the world, she did prove to be the most active of the gods during Abaddon's rise and fall, subtly but overtly stepping in as the Sunspears made their way into Vabbi to show her followers the threat posed by Varesh and the Margonites and ensure their support of the Sunspears. When the Sunspears reached the ruined Temple of the Six Gods in the final stages of the crusade against Abaddon, it was Lyssa that blessed the heroes that would go on to destroy him. Why it was Lyssa that spoke instead of Dwayna, as the usually accepted leader of the five gods, is unknown – perhaps it was because the other gods felt that it was more meaningful for the message to come from Lyssa as the matron goddess of one of the nations most damaged by Nightfall's approach, or maybe they simply felt that Lyssa's talents made her the best placed to raise the spirits of those about to face the fury of a bound god.

Followers and Temples

The adventurers and soldiers most intimately associated with Lyssa are, of course, mesmers. Drawing upon her teachings, these illusionists and enchantresses sew confusion and disruption among their enemies through illusion, emotional manipulation, and turning their magic against them, whether by interfering with their spells as they are cast or simply by draining energy from their victims for their own use.

In Cantha, assassins also frequently pay homage to Lyssa, although less for her beauty than for the trickery and deception that can allow them to get close to her marks. They also claim to be attracted to her duality, although the assassin's guilds are tight-lipped as to what exactly may be meant by this. While possibly simply the tendency of assassins to wield a weapon in each hand, it may also be a reflection of the aliases and dual lives that many assassins employ in their occupation.



Among the professions that pay homage to all of the gods, Lyssa is most commonly invoked for her power over the raw stuff of magic. Elementalists may invoke her to improve their ability to contain and manipulate the energy contained within themselves, although most elementalists likely hold the deity or deities responsible for their element(s) of choice higher in their regard. For dervishes, as well, Lyssa's favour aids them in maintaining and replenishing their own reserves of magical power, and her avatar grants them the ability to contain significantly more energy within themselves, as well as to punish foes that attempt to wield magical powers or advanced combat manoeuvres in their vicinity.

Outside of adventurers, worshippers of Lyssa tend, unsurprisingly, to primarily be found among those who appreciate the arts, whether as patrons or as creators. It is unlikely to be coincidence that the leaders of many performing troupes and theatres practice the mesmeric arts, employing illusion and more benign mood-influencing magic to enhance their performances – one only hopes that the use of such arts to hypnotise audiences out of their money is kept to a minimum! Interestingly, however, this connection seems at its weakest among the Kurzicks – while each of the houses encourages talent in their chosen art forms, only House Brauer dedicates its paintings and sculptures to Lyssa.

The nation of Vabbi, believed by its inhabitants to be shaped and blessed by Lyssa herself, is another question entirely. While reverence is still shown to the other gods, the Vabbians regard Lyssa as their special patron, and a number of sites holy to Lyssa can be found within Vabbi's borders. The Seborhin trees that lend the Garden of Seborhin their name are believed to be the trees favoured most by Lyssa, with a leaf caught as it falls on the wind seen as a sign of Lyssa's favour. A more direct connection is seen in the Font of Lyss, used by Vabbian nobility and guests to refresh themselves before attending one of the celebrations or ceremonies of that land.

The heart of the Lyssan faith, however, was the Sebelkeh Basilica, which floats by magic over the waters of the Mirror of Lyss. Reached through teleporters on either side of a golden statue of Lyssa in a secondary shrine on the shore of the sacred lake, the Basilica was one of the holy sites desecrated by Varesh in her campaign to break Abaddon free of his prison. In fact, it was the blood rites that brought the demon known as the Blaspheme into the Basilica to transform it into an open gateway into Torment that lead Varesh's last human general and his remaining loyal soldiers to finally realise the insanity of her plans and defect, lending what aid they could to the Sunspears. With Abaddon's defeat, the restoration and reconsecration of the defiled temple has become a high priority in the eyes of Vabbi's priests and princes.

Perhaps the most mystical site of Lyssa, however, is found not in Vabbi but in a mysterious frozen cave in the area known as the Mineral Springs on the eastern edge of the southern Shiverpeaks. Now inhabited mostly by ice imps, the only recognisable structure is a statue of Lyssa situated beneath a hole in the cavern's roof that allows light to stream down, illuminating the statue as well as the snowflakes that drift around it. Stranger, however, are the devices that share this chamber with the statue, pulsing with energy of an unknown nature. The function of this energy is unknown, but if the attraction of the Eidolon known as the Ice Beast to the area is any indication, they likely represent a powerful source of magical energy to any that can harness it. This is the only known site where Icy Dragon Swords can be found, although how they came to be here - placed in storage or somehow created there - is unknown.





One thing that connects each of these holy sites is water – the Font and Mirror of Lyss and the ice crystals that form the walls of the cave as well as melting to pool on the floor. Even the seat of House Brauer is sited beside the river that flows through the Echovald Forest from Drazach Thicket towards the Jade Sea. The attraction of water to followers of Lyssa is perhaps obvious in the inherent beauty of water features and the mirages and tricks that water can play on the eye, even if it is not officially among Lyssa's responsibilities.

This may, however, be one more thing that is set to change. As the pantheon adjusts to Abaddon's fall and Kormir's ascension, prophets and mystics are predicting that Lyssa may make a move towards claiming the domain of water for herself, adding it to the rest of her wide and multifaceted range of interests.

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Humans of Cantha, The First to Walk Tyria



by Velentine

The Canthan Ecology

An Overview

Humans stretch far and wide across the world of Tyria and are commonly considered one of the most, if not the most, widespread and influential races throughout the world. Humans arrived in Tyria alongside the gods, the gods' existence only predating that of human existence a short time. Humans were first noted as settling in Cantha early in 786 BE; from Cantha, humans spread throughout the world of Tyria.

Cantha

History

As stated earlier, Canthans were among the first humans to walk across the world of Tyria, their arrival being marked at 786 BE, five-hundred years earlier than the first recorded humans on the continents of both Tyria and Elona. Through this, one can assume that perhaps the true gods first created the continent of Cantha and then came to Tyria, bringing humans to the world. This period is known in the Canthan Calender as the, "Late Pre-Imperial Era," and is believed to be the period where the Kurzicks and Luxons, as they are known today, claimed their ancestral lands. During the year 510 BE, Kaing, the warlord, united all of the tribes through militaristic force under his name and declared himself the first emperor lord, thus changing his name to Kaineng Tah and founding the empire of the Dragon as most denizens of the world know it today.
Kaineng's death in 464 BE was said to have been caused by his horse going wild. Kaineng's son, Yian Zho took over the empire, and others soon fell victim to his bloodlust. Within the first decade of his rule, Yian began assaulting the Kurzicks and Luxons, forcing them to unite under a single name and, in fact, become vassals for the empire. The war between the Kurzicks and Luxons is often put upon Yian's shoulders.

Canthans remained isolationist until the year 100 BE when the first Canthan ambassador made his way to Ascalon. One-hundred years later, magic was given to the races of the world, and the heroic professions became common. Consequently, a man named Chaing Hai made his way to Shing Jea Monastery for training. In his time there, Chain Hai wished to become Weh no Su and succeeded, thus becoming the first ascended emperor of the Canthan nation.

The war between the Luxons and the Kurzicks was still rather heated, but apart from this, Cantha had been rather peaceful for around two-hundred years. During this time, the Dragon Empire of Cantha made the first recorded contact with the other human kingdoms of Tyria. Also, during this time, Emperor Singtah fell victim to one of the most well-known assassinations in Cantha. Singtah was murdered in his own palace as it burned down. A short time later the palace was rebuilt - as it is seen today - by Sinvoh, the son of Singtah.

During the Age of the Dragon, beginning in 872 AE, Luxon and Kurzick animosities were nearly severed by Shiro Tagachi, the emperor's bodyguard. Shiro spoke fluently in a language that both factions could understand, which helped him greatly in enacting peaceful negotiations. In 865 AE, Shiro helped save emperor Angsiyan's son from corrupt ministries, causing Angsiyan's trust in Shiro to grow.



Unfortunately, the emperor's trust in Shiro would be his downfall. A fortune-teller tricked Shiro into thinking the emperor had planned to kill him; Shiro began plotting to steal the power of the harvest ceremony. While the emperor was praying to receive Dwayna's blessing, Shiro slew him and took the power for his own. Saint Viktor and Archemorus were warned of the assassination by the temple bell ringing too soon. They made their way to the top of the Harvest Temple and found Vizu attempting to hold off Shiro. Luckily, Vizu had dealt a hefty blow to Shiro, leaving him weak, and allowed for Saint Viktor and Archemorus to slay him.

In 880 AE, the tension between the Canthan people and the tengu had been rising. Settlers of the empire needed to move to Shing Jea Island so they could farm on the lush, untouched country-sides in order to stabilize the Canthan culture. Unfortunately, the settlers began to take the land of the tengu and started creating animosities between the two cultures.

The small skirmishes between the people of Shing Jea and the tengu were merely over land. However, war nearly went full-scale when a group of Sensali tengu murdered an entire village of Shing Jea farmers and were believed to have devoured the bodies of their victims. Emperor Hanjai's assistant and a chieftan of the Angchu were able to make peace treaties, but this caused the Sensali to turn hostile towards the Angchu tengu.

However, as Canthans continued to settle Shing Jea, the peace accords between the tengu and the humans grew thin. With the new settlers came disease that caused the tengu to kill their young, and after so much devastation was brought to the tengu, an all-out war quickly broke out. Soon, peace was once again restored, and this was marked as the Day of the Tengu.

The Angchu honored the treaty between the tengu and the humans. Unfortunately, the Sensali faction of the tengu claimed the Angchu to be traitors and kept raiding outposts and farms. In 902 AE, the trade relations of the northern kingdoms were closed off, sending Cantha into isolation. In 1070 AE, Cantha finally opened up trade to Lions Arch again under watch of Emperor Kintah.

Canthan Politics

The Empire of the Dragon stretches far and wide over the continent of Cantha. With a single ruler, it is impossible for one person to constantly look after an entire nation individually so Canthan politicians use a bureaucratic system. This bureaucracy is known as the Celestial Ministry. Emperor Kisu currently looks over the Celestial Ministry, which is divided into four smaller ministries: The Ministry of Flame, the Ministry of Earth, the Ministry of Water, and the Ministry of Wind. Unfortunately, the ministry is corrupt, and most know it. Canthan citizens hate the bureaucratic way the nation is run but love the emperor.

Emperor's Court

The Emperor's Court is separate from the Celestial Ministry. Whereas the Ministry meets with the emperor on given dates, the Emperor's Court is often in his presence daily. The court is made up of many nobles and even a few Luxon and Kurzick spies. Emperor Kisu knows of the spies in his presence and uses them to control what information the clans receive.

Within the Emperor's Court one will find the many facets of the emperor himself. These different facets consist of: the Emperor's Blade, a deadly bodyguard who is the master of the sword as well as the emperor's right hand, the Emperor's Voice, who speaks the words of the emperor, and the Emperor's Hand, the person who solves problems where words aren't enough and violence isn't the key.

Ministries

As stated earlier, the Empire of the Dragon is split into four ministries. While the power is out of balance and the ministries are corrupt, most citizens see this as a necessary drawback. Without the bureaucracy, Emperor Kisu would not be able to dabble within all of the affairs of such a huge continent and would have much more trouble leading it.

Ministry of Flame

The ministry of Flame is the oldest established Ministry within the Canthan bureaucracy. Ministers of Flame have control over law enforcement and justice. Those persecuted might suffer from incineration. In a mythical terms, the Ministry of Flame is set to control the rising and setting of the sun. Minister Zal is the current minister of Flame.

Ministry of Earth

The ministry of Earth deals with paperwork, construction, record keeping, and other tasks that would fall under similar categories. The Ministry of Earth is often known for starting projects that often go unfinished but prove profitable to those involved with the ministry. The ministry's mythic power grants control over the bounties of the land, such as animals, vegetable, and minerals. The current Minster of Earth is Minister Jaisan.



Ministry of Water

This ministry is in charge of irrigation, the empire's water supply, and fishing regulations. The Ministry of Water also shares a harbor with the Ministry of Wind; this is a persistent conflict between the two ministries. This ministry's mythical power is the control of the moon's rising and setting. The current Minister of Water is Minister Nai.

Ministry of Wind

The Ministry of Wind controls most trade as well as most things that actually require the wind to operate, such as ships. Captains of ships must pay taxes to the Ministry of Wind. It is claimed that these taxes make the wind blow in favor of Canthans. This ministry shares harbors and ports with the Ministry of Water; this balance has often led to many disputes between the two minstries. This ministry's mythical power is controlling wind and storms. The ministry's leader is currently Minister Tao.

Canthan Culture

Canthans are bound by honor and spirituality. They revere the five gods and also pay homage to lesser spirits. Much like humans from both Elona and Tyria, they can train in five professions; however, Canthans have two specific professions they may train under - training under the cunning assassin and the spiritual ritualist.

Death among the Canthan culture is honored. Mortals that lead dishonorable lives during life are sent to the Oracle of the Mists in death and do her duty as envoys, guiding fresh spirits into the Mists. Those that died in honor, however, are lead into the Mists to their final resting place, where their spirits may lie in peace.

Factions

Sometime before the Jade Wind, the Kurzick clan and the Luxon clan formed - the Kurzicks settling within the deep corners of the Echovald Forest under comfort of the lush canopy and the Luxons carving out a way of life through the wakes of the Jade Sea. Conflict was ignited between the two factions far before the Jade Wind, even before any sort of empire existed within Cantha. And, through all of the trials and tribulations both clans have had to endure, they still find reasons for conflict and bloodshed.

Luxon

History



The Luxon Armada, believed to have sailed upon the Unending Seas with the margonites, mainly inhabits the Jade Sea. Once manning great ships that swam over giant waves and through vicious maelstroms, the Luxons find themselves grounded after the Jade Wind solidified the sea. Luxons are a very combative and nomadic faction, constantly moving around the Jade Sea looking for more bountiful places to settle. The armada is split into three clans: The Crab, The Snake, and The Turtle. The armada itself is lead by a a Council of Elders consisting of one elder from each clan.

Currently, the Luxon origin is unknown; however, the Luxon's reputation and namesake predated the unification of the Empire under Kaineng Tah. Early in Canthan history, the Luxons faced heavy persecution from Yian Zho and had many of their elders publicly executed. The Luxons then rose up and united to strike back at the Empire and quickly became vassals to ensure the killings would stop. Under orders from the Empire of the Dragon, the Luxons fought alongside the Emperor's troops against the Kurzicks. Scholars believe this is what may have ignited the hatred between the two cultures that still stands today.

The Luxons and Kurzicks were peaceful for awhile, bound by multiple treaties under Emperor Angsiyan's rule. All this was shattered when the two champions were slain by Shiro Tagachi, causing the two factions to return to skirmishing. Soon, the skirmishes ignited into vicious battles when war was officially declared between the two factions. However, some years later, Emperor Kisu returned the war to simple borderline skirmishes we know today due to signing treaties with Kurzick leaders. Shortly after, due to Shiro's second return, the two factions found peace; this peace was quickly shattered after Shiro's second death.

Culture

Luxons thrive on wanderlust and strength. The Jade Sea is the ultimate test of both, forcing the Luxons to be determined and resourceful - both qualities the Luxons possess and are proud of. Many things in the Luxon clans are determined through strength, certainly the leadership of the clans. Once a year the Council of Elders meets to revise the code of the Luxons and discuss the previous years' revisions. Revisions are monitored for one year; during this trial period, if they do not work, they are removed or revised again.

Another annual ceremony the Luxons hold is the Convocation. During this ceremony, the Spear of Archemorus is handed over to the winning clan. When the clans meet at the Convocation, their champion and elite guards battle to the death. The winning champion then gets to slay Zhu Hanuku and claim the right to possess the spear for a full year. The clan that receives the spear acts as the leading clan until the next Convocation.

Apart from strength and determination, Luxons value architecture and use the elegance around themselves to create beautiful structures that coexist alongside the land. Naturally, Luxons worship Grenth, Lyssa, and Balthazar, as they value strength, beauty, and war. They also worship three demi-goddesses: Alua, Elora, and Ione. These deities are known as the Three Queens. Nothing is known about these three demi-gods.

Luxons who are considered traitors or are cast out from the Luxon society become Outcasts. The Outcasts hold true to their name and cease to take any part of the Luxon lifestyle and are forced to wander the Jade Sea until insanity sets in or they become Oni due to the curse of Kanaxai. The Outcasts generally work within their own unknown system but have been known to work with Kurzicks; however, these occurrences are rare.

Clans

The Luxons are divided into three different clans. The clans tend to get along even worse than the houses of their Kurzick counterpart but are always willing to put aside their differences when it comes to their hatred of the Kurzicks. Each clan has a captain as their leader, and these titles are earned upon the captain fighting his or her way to the top.

Turtle Clan

Of the Luxon armadas, the Turtle Clan is the most widely known of the three Luxon clans and possesses the finest Luxon warriors and most devastating magic within the whole of the Jade Sea. Befitting to the clan's name, The Turtle Clan breeds and raises the mammoth siege turtles, living devices of war. These turtles must be raised from hatchlinghood - a long and difficult process. Unlike their brethren, members of the Turtle clan cast aside leviathans and prefer their siege turtles as means for transportation. Juno is the current leader of this clan.

Crab Clan

The Crab Clan often boasts of its ability to find the richest veins of the most magically concentrated jade within the Jade Sea. Because of their jade mining abilities, the Crab Clan is the wealthiest clan among the Luxon armadas. The Crab Clan, seemingly enough, travels around in great leviathans shaped like crabs; also, many reavers are a part of this clan, pillaging remains trapped within the Jade Sea. The current leader, Queen Amara, usurped her title from her brother, who quickly took over after their father's death. Amara, long thought dead after a skirmish along the border, returned with a following of dragons and Crab Warriors, quickly ending her brother's reign.

Serpent Clan

Engineers of the Serpent Clan were the first to create leviathans and adapt to the newly solidified Jade Sea; due to this, the Serpent Clan is often called the Leviathan Clan. These glorious land-sailing ships, sometimes walking on two legs even, are this clan's preferred method of transportation. One of the clan's favorite tactics is to load siege turtles onto a large leviathan and deploy the slow-moving reptiles near Kurzick enemies, allowing for a nice surprise attack. Among the clans, the Serpent Clan is home to the best pirates and reavers and are able to access sunken vessels long though inaccessible by other clans. The Luxons consider piracy an honorable - even necessary - part of life. Their current leader, Lexis, dueled her way to the top of the clan; however, her notable skill in piracy has allowed her to keep it.

Kurzick

History



It is not currently known how the Kurzicks came to be, but Kurzicks were known as such before the unification of the Empire of the Dragon. Much like their Luxon counterparts, the Kurzicks suffered much persecution from Yian Zho during his reign and were subject to mass execution. The Kurzick factions resides in what remains of the Echovald Forest after the Jade wind turned to stone; they make their homes in the very trunks of what were once living trees. The Kurzicks are lead by their Council of Nobles alongside the five great houses.

During Angsiyan's reign, the Luxons and Kurzicks were united after their full-out war years earlier due to multiple treaties, causing them to become enveloped within the Canthan government. This peace didn't last long, though, due to Shiro slaying the Emperor and each faction's champion. War soon spread after the death of the champions, perhaps more violent than ever; this can be attributed to the lack of food alongside the already scarce jade and amber.

Both factions passed off their skirmishes as minor disagreements until 1017 AE when both factions finally declared war. Soon Emperor Kisu lessened the fire that burned between the two nations due to treaties with Kurzick leaders, reducing the war once again to borderline skirmishes. As history would recall, Shiro returned, causing peace between the two nations. This peace, however, was quickly shattered after Shiro's second death, as stated earlier.

Culture

Kurzicks pride themselves in art, music, and worship. They all revere the True Gods, but each house has a single patron deity they revere the most. The Kurzicks are all a part of one of the seven houses, five great houses and two known smaller houses. Each house has a distinguishable trait and a patron deity. Despite this fact, all Kurzicks care for the forest they live and and protect it with their lives; all wish to see life return to the statues of the Echovald Forest.

Most Kurzicks look to the Council of Nobles and the Redemptor, spiritual guides who have connections to the saints and the gods. The Council of Nobles often seeks guidance from the Redemptors. Aside from Redemptors, Tree Singer, Kurzicks who have a direct link with the few living trees in the fores, are among the honored people of the Kurzick nation. Tree Singers are the main components of one of the Kurzick's most sacred ceremonies known as the Awakening Ceremony. During the ceremony a volunteer gives up their body to become a Juggernaut, a giant sinuous being made from what seems to be sentient plant, and participate in rigorous protection of the Echovald Forest.

Houses

Control of the factions is divided up into houses. There are five greater houses and two lesser houses. Each house has a head of the house and a saint, as well as a patron god. The houses generally squabble amongst themselves, but when it comes to the hatred of the Luxons, the houses are always ready to put aside their differences.

House zu Heltzer

House zu Heltzer is one of the most politically powerful houses among the other houses. Members of this house can trace their ancestry back to Saint Viktor and often times are not afraid to use this knowledge as leverage in political controversy among the houses. Most of the cultural renaissance seen within the art, philosophy, magic, and medicine can be attributed to this house. Count Petrov zu Heltzer leads the Houze zu Heltzer; the settlement for members of this house is House zu Heltzer, the primary patron being Dwayna.

House Vasburg

Paying homage to Balthazar, the House Vasburg sees violence as the most pure form of beauty. Vasburg has lost the most soldiers and guards to the Luxon Armada and is very proud of the fact. Most members of House Vasburg seek an honorable death and train as if their final breath would be their next. Baron Mike Vasburg and Baroness Attia Vasburg lead this house. Their primary settlement is within the Vasburg Armory

House Lutgardis

House Lutgardis is the home of the performers. Almost every form of music circulates from Lutgardis. The members of House Lutgardis boast talent in music as well as all sorts of performing but also hold the talent of creating the finest musical instruments in Cantha. House Lutgardis is also home to the Tree Singers. The patron god is Melandru, and the house is lead by Duke Holtz Lutgardis in Lutgardis Conservatory.

House Durheim

This house is known by many nicknames - the most common of which is “the old house.” House Durheim keeps the records of the Kurzick nation and strive to maintain culture with the Kurzicks. This house claims to have a special relationship with Grenth, the patron god of House Durheim. Through this relationship, members of the house are able to gather history of every Kurzick who ever lived. This house is lead by Count Durheim and Countess Sandra Durheim in the Durheim Archives.

House Brauer

Members of the House Brauer take pride in their elegant and beautiful sculptures, revering beauty and elegance over all else. Among all the houses, House Brauer is least suited for war, but when their duty is needed, they are more than willing to serve. House Brauer's patron god is Lyssa and is lead by Count Archek Brauer in Brauer Academy.

House Ulrikar

One of the lesser houses, House Ulrikar consists of the ambassadors who traveled to Kryta in attempt to spread the Kurzick beliefs and culture to another land. Due to hostilities in Kryta, this house was exiled from Kryta. This house is lead by Baron Ulrikar, but it is unknown who the patron god is and where the House Ulrikar resides.

House Gorhopf

Nothing is known about this house apart from the dedication to peace and harmony with the Echovald Forest.

After-Word

The humans of Cantha are shrouded in both mystery and intrigue. While delving deeper into the depths of Canthan lore, I learned a great many things about the humans of Tyria that I never would have known; it's really humbling to see so much from our past but still understand so little. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to include the entire pool of information I had amassed, so I would encourage you, young readers, to lend your eyes to some nearby tomes and conduct some research of your own. I think you will find many interesting things about your past. But I digress, for my research is still on-going, and I must be delving deeper into our pasts in both Elona and Tyria throughout the coming months so that I am prepared for the next publication. For now, I have tomes I must dust. Farewell, readers.

- Mel Hoppenheim

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Call of the Wolf
by Tender Wolf



Chapter 9

There was a knock at the door. Roston opened it and greeted Adelbern and Rurik.

"Please, come in," he said.

"Thank you, old friend," Adelbern replied as he and the prince stepped inside.

"Hello your majesties," Connivia said.

The king and prince nodded at Connivia.

Then, there was a second knock at the door. Roston opened it and there stood Sarah, the town's herbalist, and her daughter Gwen.

"Welcome ladies! Come right in!"

"Thank you Mr. Wolfsong," Sarah said.

"Sarah, please, you can call me Roston."

"And you can call me Connivia," his wife said.

Sarah smiled. "All right then. Roston. Connivia."

"Where's Keiondra?" Gwen asked.

Her mother put her finger to her lips. "Ssshhh. It's a surprise."

Gwen nodded and smiled eagerly. She was only ten, but she was always so bubbly and excited. She'd met Keiondra a few months ago when she'd been running an errand in Ascalon City for her parents. She followed Keiondra around and the two had become good friends.

"There we have it," Connivia said as she presented a pan full of large birthday cupcakes. "Keiondra loves these so much. I do hope she isn't getting too old for them."

"Nonsense!" Roston said. "She looks forward to these every year."

"I'm sure she'll love this party," Rurik agreed.

Connivia and Roston had discussed the previous night whether or not it was wise to invite the king and prince to the party. They didn't want others to think favoritism was at work, but then realized that if Adelbern and Rurik thought that way, they would not show up at all. After all, Adelbern and Roston were good friends.

"She should be awake soon," Connivia said as she placed a second pan of cupcakes on the table.

********** ********

The sun shone threw Keiondra's window. She rolled over and put her pillow over her eyes and tried to get a few more minutes of sleep. But then she realized that the sun was shining through her window at last.

"Yes!" she said to herself as she jumped out of bed and rummaged through clothes.

Keiondra had had a hard time falling asleep the night before. She was so excited for this day. It was the day of her thirteenth birthday. She tossed and turned the night before and kept getting up to see if the sun was shining, but she kept seeing the moon instead.

She'd finally managed to fall asleep, but now it was morning. But no matter how tired she was, Keiondra was determined that now that it was morning, she would wait no longer. She hoped her parents got her the present she'd been wanting since she was eight years old – a paper saying that she could now begin her training to become a ranger.

Keiondra had practiced using the bow for the past five years, but she still wanted to get all the training she could. She could barely contain herself as she put her hair into a braid and added a leaf for an effect of nature.

Finally, she was ready. She turned the knob of her door and stepped out.

"Surprise!" shouted several overlapping voices in unison.

Keiondra did a doubletake and saw that her mother, father, Sarah, Gwen, and even the king and prince were standing in the kitchen cheering and clapping.

"Oh my gods!" she screamed happily.

"Happy birthday Keiondra!" her parents said as they went over to give her a hug.

"Happy birthday!" Gwen shouted as she wrapped her arms around Keiondra's legs.

"I don't know what to say!" Keiondra said in awe. "Thanks so much! I must say, I never expected this!"

"Well you certainly deserve it," said Sarah.

"Your highnesses," Keiondra said as she bowed to Adelbern and Rurik. They nodded back and smiled.

"Let's get started, shall we?" said Connivia. "Here you are. As always, the birthday girl gets the first bite!"

"Birthday cupcakes! Oh Mother, thank you!"

"How could I forget? These are your favorite and you've had them for your birthday ever since you were three years old."

Keiondra took a bite of her cupcake. It was sweet and tasty, just the way she liked it. As soon as she took a bite, the rest of the cupcakes were served and everyone else ate theirs.

When everyone was through eating, Roston approached his daughter with his hands behind his back.

"Keiondra," he said. "This is your thirteenth birthday, and I know you've been very eager for it to arrive. And of course, what good is a birthday without a present? So my mother and I are honored to present this to you."
With that, Roston pulled his hands out from behind his back and placed a piece of paper in Keiondra's hand. She opened it and read it. Then, she beamed and jumped for joy.

"Oh, thank you so much!" she said as she hugged her parents tight. Her hoping had paid off. Her parents had gotten her enrolled in the Ascalon Academy and she would begin her training to become a ranger in a week.

"Now Keiondra, this is going to take much time and effort," her mother said. "But I know that this is what you truly want. Your father does as well. Just be safe and careful. We're already all proud of you."

"Thank you Mother," Keiondra said as she hugged her mother again.
The other party guests clapped and cheered. Then everyone helped themselves to some more cupcakes.

********** ********

Six months later, Keiondra walked to Lakeside County. Her first ranger teacher was named Artemis, and for the past several months, she'd been learning all about aiming and the art of marksmanship. Today, Artemis told her she had one final test to do.

"Good morning, Keiondra," said Artemis as she saw her student approaching.

"Good morning," Keiondra replied.

"All right, let's get to it. As I said at our last lesson, after you pass this final test, you will be ready to begin more advanced training. This is just basic."

"I am ready, teacher. What is this final task?"

"I'm sure you've seen all the skale around here. Rumors are that the skale have a queen by the river bank. If you slay it, you'll have passed this part of your training. Can you do it?"

"I can and I will!"

Keiondra grabbed her bow and ran to the river bank. She snuck around bushes and avoided the skale. Then, she saw the skale queen herself. So, the rumors were true.

Keiondra stood up, raised her bow, aimed, and fired the arrow. The skale queen dropped dead in a single hit. Clearly it wasn't very powerful or threatening.

Keiondra picked up the corpse of the skale queen and took it to Artemis.

"Well, look at that! You did great!"

Artemis pulled out a scroll and filled something out on it.

"All right," she said, "your next trainer will teach you how to charm an animal to fight by your side. His name is Nente, and he can be found in Regent Valley. Journey there to begin your training."

"Thank you, Artemis. I shall never forget you."

The two rangers waved to each other before Keiondra departed for Regent Valley.

********** ********

The walk to Regent Valley was not very far. Keiondra spotted Nente right away. He was surrounded by several devourers and was slaying them rapidly. Keiondra watched in awe. She hoped to one day be that good of a ranger.

"Who goes there?" Nente asked as he turned and saw Keiondra approaching. Keiondra pulled out the paper Artemis had given her and presented it to Nente.

"I'm Keiondra Wolfsong," she said, "and I was instructed by Artemis to see you about learning to charm an animal."

Nente glanced over the paper, nodded, and handed it back to his eager student.

"All right, then let's get started. I suppose you already have an idea of what kind of animal you want. Most rangers do when they see me."

"Yes, more than anything I want a wolf."

"Ah, well I promise one day you will get a wolf. But first, you must learn how to charm an animal, and the tamest animal around here is a Melandru's stalker. You must charm a stalker first, but before that you must gaze at Melandru's statue just down the road."

"Gaze at Melandru's statue? But why?"

"You'll know when you get there. She'll help you to receive the knowledge you need to charm an animal."

"All right."

Keiondra hesitantly walked down the road. She saw the statue of Melandru up ahead. It was beautiful, depicting a lovely woman with wings made of leaves and legs of a tree trunk pouring cascading water down into a fountain.

Keiondra saw a plaque under the statue. She read it and found that Nente was right; the statue filled her with the knowledge she needed to charm an animal.

Keiondra turned and saw a nearby stalker. She took a deep breath, braced herself, and began the process. The stalker turned aggressive and began to attack her, but Keiondra didn't let up. At last, the stalker was hers and under her control.

She smiled and ran back up the path to tell Nente, with her new pet tagging along behind her.

"I see you managed to get yourself a pet," Nente said as Keiondra approached. "Congratulations."

"Thank you. But what do I do now? Am I allowed to have more than one pet?"

"Oh no, a true ranger only has one companion who is very loyal and trustworthy. You must talk to a pet trainer to get rid of a pet before you can charm a new one. Jarrel here is one such person. But before you do this, consider something. Animals are a ranger's most loyal companion. But having a pet takes much work. You must feed it and keep it satisfied and never abandon it. It's wise to leave it behind if you're venturing somewhere that it may not make it out alive."

"I understand all this. And while I am fond of all animals, I am very strongly attached to wolves. I can't explain it."

"Ah, now that is something many good rangers have – a strong attachment to one particular creature. All right then, talk to Jarrel here and he will make sure your stalker gets a good home."

"Thank you."

Keiondra talked to Jarrel and he agreed to care for the stalker.

The training continued for a few more hours, but at last the sun began to set and Keiondra returned home for dinner. But on her way, she passed Ashford Abbey and saw a wolf. It looked lonely yet loving. She decided to test out her new knowledge.

Approaching quickly but quietly, Keiondra kept her eyes on the wolf. When she got close enough, she began to charm the animal. The wolf's eyes seemed to change color as it knew it was about to be controlled. But alas, Keiondra finally got the creature under her control.

"You're such a gorgeous creature," she said to the wolf. The wolf howled in response. Keiondra laughed and wrapped her arms around her new pet. "That's the perfect name for you," she said. "Howl. I'll call you Howl."

The wolf made a growling noise, but it sounded like it was a happy noise, as if to say "thank you". Keiondra smiled and continued on her way home. Howl followed her. Keiondra smiled the whole way home. She loved Howl deeply already and couldn't wait to show him to her parents. She was loving being a ranger already. She couldn't wait to continue her training the next day, only this time she'd have Howl by her side.

Continue to chapter 10 ->

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Call of the Wolf
by Tender Wolf



Chapter 10

For the next two years, Keiondra attended her training. She learned from many different rangers and felt herself becoming stronger every day. Her parents had loved Howl and were proud that she'd chosen such a "fitting" companion.

But Keiondra was worried. Lately she'd been helping some new friends (namely Devona and the prince) with things, and they'd seen Charr south of the Great Wall. She hoped there was nothing to worry about, but every time she closed her eyes at night, she was reminded of a dream she'd recently had.

In the dream, Ascalon was no longer beautiful. Instead, it was scorched and ruined, as if something terrible had happened to it. And she always saw something resembling a Charr in the background. But she hoped that this was nothing to be concerned about.

Besides, she had enough on her mind as it was. She was now 15, and her mother was always telling her that she was rapidly becoming old enough to be "courting". She even went so far as to say that Prince Rurik would be a great suitor.

Keiondra tried to brush this off. She wasn't ready for a relationship. She wanted to focus on her training. She'd managed to tell her father of this and, being the level-headed man he was, he'd talked to Connivia and she'd finally settled down. But she hadn't stopped altogether.

Still, Keiondra had become accustomed to it. She had stated that she was not ready for a relationship and wouldn't be until after she'd finished her training. Only then would she consider becoming romantically involved and leaving home.

********** ********

Roston gazed down at the battlefield below him. The Ascalon and Charr armies were at a constant war with each other and had been for as long as he could remember.

Adelbern approached his side and gazed down at the same sight. "Horrid creatures, those Charr," he said. "I hope they never reach our beloved Ascalon City."

Roston turned to the prince and replied, "I hope the same. The guild wars are bad enough."

"What do you mean by that? You were a member of Ascalon's Chosen, remember?"

"I know, my king. It seems so long ago, too. But I was only saying that I fear if the guild wars drag on, the Charr could use this to their advantage."

"Nonsense. The Charr could never overcome us. We are stronger than they are."

"I suppose you're right."

Both warriors watched below as several Charr fell to the ground at the mercy of Ascalon soldiers.

"See that?" Adelbern said. "Nothing to worry about. They don't stand a chance."

"But what of the Charr we've seen south of the Great Wall as of late?"

"Only a few. We will always be superior to the Charr, Roston."

"You're right. We will always be superior to the Charr."

Roston walked away with those words in his mind. "We will always be superior to the Charr." Was that really true? Roston felt a deep weight on his heart. As if he knew something was wrong, something terrible. But what could he do about it?

********** ********

Sun beamed in through Keiondra's window. She sat up abruptly and felt her heart pound with excitement. Today was the day. Today, she would graduate from Ascalon Academy. The past two years of training would finally pay off today.

There were even rumors of today's graduates being allowed to accompany Prince Rurik and drive a Charr leader out of Ascalon. Keiondra hoped that the Charr wouldn't actually be in Ascalon, but if it was, she was determined to help bring it down.

********** ********

"There's the cause of all this trouble!" Prince Rurik said as he pointed ahead of him. He and the students graduating from Ascalon Academy had just killed several grawl, and they now saw Charr ahead of them.

Vaatlaw Doomtooth grunted at the humans before raising his bow. He and his furry followers engaged in attacks. But they were no match for the prince and students.

With one final thrust, Rurik's sword dropped Vaatlaw to the ground. He and the students cheered. Keiondra was very proud of herself. She finally graduated from Ascalon Academy. She and her fellow students walked back to Ascalon City with Prince Rurik.

Once there, families cheered and embraced each other as a celebration struck out. Keiondra spotted her parents waving to her in the crowed and ran over to them.

"Congratulations, Keiondra!" her mother said. "We're so proud of you!"
"Indeed we are!" her father agreed.

Keiondra beamed and she couldn't stop smiling. Then, her mother presented her with something.

"On your thirteenth birthday, you received our permission to study to become a ranger," she said. "Your father presented the papers to you. But today, you have graduated from the Ascalon Academy. And so it's my time to present you with a gift that will hold great meaning for you. Keiondra, my dear, your father and I proudly present you with this longbow."

Keiondra gasped and took the bow. It was carved out of beautiful wood from the Lakeside trees and even had a few leaves still on it. It was truly a beautiful bow, and she would treasure it forever. She would use this bow, and only this bow, for when she fought.

Suddenly, in the midst of the happy celebration, the sky suddenly fell dark. Then, the ground seemed to shake and a rumbling sound could be heard in the distance. Everyone looked up and they saw the sky fall.

Giant meteors crashed into Ascalon City, nearby homes and buildings were set aflame, and citizens ran, screaming for their lives.

"Fall back!" Prince Rurik called. "Run and save yourselves!"

No one hesitated to comply with what the prince said. They grabbed their loved ones and took off running. Keiondra ran with her parents and Howl. They knew not where they were going, but they only cared about being safe and staying alive.

There seemed to be no end to the bombs. The sky seemed to keep falling and not let up. But alas, after what seemed like centuries, the bombs stopped. But the damage was not yet gone. Fires roared through country sides and several people were burnt to a crisp instantly.

The survivors jumped up rapidly and ran to the river to get water to put the fires out. The work was great, but finally the fires were put out. Only then did everyone look around and see what had transpired.

The grass was no longer green, but brown, black, or gone completely. The trees had lost their leaves and were nothing more than black sticks stretching toward the yellow and orange sky. And the water was beginning to turn black with tar.

But the worst happened when the citizens saw that the Great Wall was lying in wreckage. And then, to everyone's horror, several Charr burst through the gate of Ascalon City.

Everyone's worst nightmare had come true. Ascalon had fallen to the Charr.

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