

GUILD MAG

ISSUE 15

INTO THE HEART OF MAGUUMA



SEASON 2 RECAP



THE DRUIDS



MAGUUMA: A PRIMER



EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to Issue 15! With the community abuzz with Heart of Thorns speculation, how could we not dedicate our latest magazine to that very topic, and brave the depths of the jungle? As Guild Wars: Prophecies enters its 10th anniversary, we've taken the time to look towards the future of the franchise, lying deep in the Heart of Maguuma.

We've packed this issue with as much Heart of Thorns goodness as we can muster. Beginning with a comprehensive recap of Living World Season 2, you'll also find a great lore primer on what to expect from the Maguuma region (great if you've never played the original game, or just need a reminder!) and an interesting piece on the druids from Aaron Heath. Kriss Watt also poses the question "what does 'challenging content' mean for Guild Wars 2?" in his editorial piece, and our back pages are filled with the usual assortment of creative fan fiction that's absolutely worth a read.

All of this isn't possible without the amazing team of individuals working behind the scenes to produce each issue. If you fancy being part of this team – as a writer, editor or designer – then get in touch! Navigate yourself to guildmag.com/submit, or to the back pages of this magazine, for all the information.

Now sit up, don't relax, and prepare yourself as we journey into the Heart of Maguuma.

- Valiant



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A RECAP OF LIVING WORLD SEASON 2

WRITTEN BY FERALYN

When the living story's season one ended, the player had defeated Scarlet Briar and her armies in the massive Battle for Lion's Arch, but not before the coalition of Aetherblade, Molten Alliance and Toxic Alliance forces razed the city while the twisted secondborn sylvari formerly known as Ceara achieved whatever she had been doing at the site of a magical ley line in the city's waters. After the roar heard across Tyria, a new generation of heroes--Braham Eirsson, Rox, Kasmear Meade, Marjory Delaqua and Taimi--privately expressed concerns, uneasy with the idea that their trials were merely beginning.

With Heart of Thorns and a (possible) upcoming battle against yet another Elder Dragon on the horizon, it's time to recap what ArenaNet's colorful characters have accomplished in the releases that comprise season two.

FESTIVAL OF THE FOUR WINDS

In the season's retrospective prologue, the Zephyrites' agreed-upon return to Labyrinthine Cliffs, coupled with Queen Jennah's reopening of the Crown Pavilion, were cause for celebration in the wake of Scarlet's destruction of Lion's Arch, and Tyrians soaked in the flying community's zen or raised funds toward the beleaguered city's recovery. With parts of your newly formed guild, you re-experienced some of the simpler pleasures missing these last several months.



Labyrinthine Cliffs

Whispers in Kryta suggested an unknown female human noble freed secondborn sylvari Canach, the guerilla fighter who waged war against the shady Consortium (and you) on Southsun Cove, through a type of indenturement, though nobody seemed able or willing to explain why. Additionally, several traders in Lion's Arch privately mourned the loss of their livelihoods due to the assault, which coincidentally left one trader not just untouched by the tragedy, but thriving in the post-battle economy: Black Lion Captain Evon Gnashblade.

GATES OF MAGUUMA

Following clues in yet another missive from the mysterious E, your guild traveled to a corner of Brisban Wildlands where sentient vines were tearing through the jungle. A brief reunion with Seraph Belinda Delaqua was marred by a skirmish with vines and Inquest that forced the younger

Delaqua back to Fort Salma as the heroes headed out west to an area called Dry Top...

... Where the first sign of life was the burning shell of a Zephyrite ship. Through application of the Zephyrites' aspect crystals, Marjory, Kasmear and the player were able to cautiously explore the wreckage despite occasional clashes with Inquest agents. The allies learned that a sylvari named Aerin, who had recently joined the nomadic sky people, attacked several Zephyrites prior to the crash and likely sabotaged at least one airborne vessel for unknown reasons.

Morning, a crash survivor on the verge of death, implored the heroes to find and protect the Zephyrite leader, the Master of Peace. However, Kasmear later said the dying Zephyrite's words were less than 100 percent truthful. With half-truths and clues about the crash in hand, the heroes headed for Prosperity, a small mining town in the northern reaches of Prospect Valley. There, the truncated group located another set of clues after finding a dead merchant in the town, this time leading them to the Master of Peace's trail. These excerpts from a faded manuscript also offered snippets of knowledge about the Elder Dragons and their innate absorption, not destruction, of magic in Tyria.



Zephyrite ship in ruins

Aerin, the saboteur, quickly painted a stark comparison to the departed Scarlet Briar upon his discovery in Spurbend Canyon, though without any of her demented charisma or unhinged lucidity (or style, according to a disgruntled Taimi) as he frantically searched through sand and spoke with an unknown entity. A brief moment of morbid clarity assailed the doomed sylvari when the Master of Peace appeared, weighed down with an unquestionably large pack as he watched the battle. Though grateful for their help, the Master of Peace refused to return to his people and respectfully declined additional assistance from the heroes, choosing instead to continue on his mysterious journey. A note found on Aerin's body left an ominous message about the pending death of a leader as "the rest will fall in line."

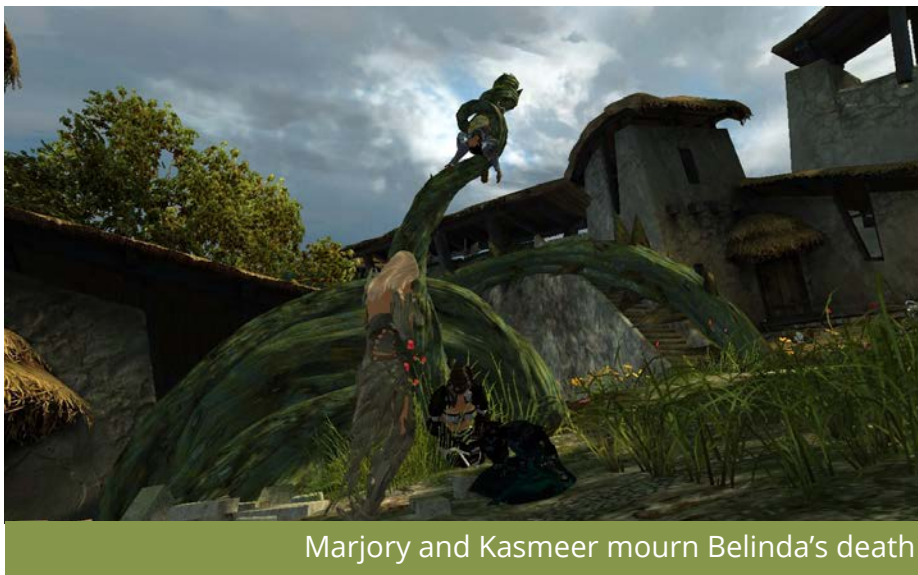
The heroes then learned Scarlet once frequented Prosperity, and even left a number of prototypes and writings at her former residence. As Taimi rejoiced over the unique glimpse at Scarlet's earlier years, including an unsettling drawing of six spheres revolving around the Pale Tree, the adult heroes mulled over the chilling realization that whatever madness afflicted Scarlet may not have been a one-time occurrence.

ENTANGLEMENT

Vines similar to the growth in Brisban presented a double-edged sword after an attack on Prosperity by the now-named Elder Dragon Mordremoth: Though many of the town's shady residents were gruesomely displayed post-mortem, the heroes also found a hidden passage in the aftermath that led to a new area of Dry Top inhabited by friendly centaurs, unfriendly skritt, enterprising Inquest and the enchanting majesty of Scarlet's first ley line hub. But when trouble began to strike at random waypoints across Tyria, Rox and Braham left with the hero to investigate at the Pact's Fort Concordia in Timberline Falls.

Despite its location in the Shiverpeaks, far from both desert and Dry Top, vines destroyed the Pact's fort and forced its inhabitants and travelers to retreat into caves and nearby Goldenlight Hallow Lab. After either escorting a caravan to the lab or locating and rescuing a Priory team--in possession of a powerful Krytan artifact said to always carry an image of the throne's current heir--Rox and Braham elected to stay behind as the player pushed on to the Seraph's Fort Salma in Kessex Hills following reports of another attack.

Regrouping with Marjory and Kasmear (along with Belinda and her squad) at Fort Salma allowed for a split defensive against the plant-based enemies, with the Seraph attempting to contain the fort's western perimeter as Player and Co. battled a lone boss. Tragedy swiftly struck following the attack as Jory faced the aftermath of Belinda's brutal death, forcing her to leave the company in order to transport Belinda's body for burial.



Marjory and Kasmear mourn Belinda's death

The guild mourned Belinda's death even as Taimi relayed her findings at the hub, the site of Scarlet's first toyed-with ley line. The tiny asura explained that the vines and attacks were concentrated extensions of Mordremoth's power targeting waypoints across Tyria. Taimi posited that a recalibration device could make the waypoints less attractive to the dragon's attentions, preserving other waypoints. To the young prodigy, though, that problem paled in comparison to her discovery of Omadd's machine, the cause of Scarlet's shattered psyche, in an antechamber. In her enthusiasm, Taimi raced into the machine to emulate her idol, prompting the player to rush in and switch places--thus revealing the Eternal Alchemy, along with several images of the Pale Tree that could only be explained by the tree's avatar herself.

THE DRAGON'S REACH: PART 1

Meeting with the Avatar of the Pale Tree, however, yielded more questions than answers. She claimed to be the single obstacle between sylvari and "the greatest darkness" of dragon corruption, a role she could not fulfill for the Soundless or the Nightmare Court who had shunned her protection or Ventari's teachings. That said, she offered The Grove for a summit between the five racial leaders and Marshal Trahearne. In order to secure the presence of each leader, however, Hero and Co. first performed a series of tasks geared toward easing the problems each race faced on their own.

Within the Iron Marches, the player investigated Mordrem activity. Afterward, Taimi sent word that Zojja had convinced Concillor Phlunt of the Arcane Council in Rata Sum to examine her device. Though she made the device functional despite the Councilor's rude interference, results were not immediately forthcoming, leaving Phlunt's attendance in question as his guards discussed additional monitoring of Taimi and Zojja, her mentor.



Vines in the Iron Marches

The player then journeyed to Hoelbrak for a rendezvous with Braham and his estranged mother, Eir, about Knut Whitebear's attendance. Though sympathetic to the idea of another Elder Dragon's awakening, Eir surmised that Whitebear's focus would remain on the known threat posed by Jormag and his Icebrood--likely right up until Mordrem appeared on Hoelbrak's doorstep. To combat this, the leader of Destiny's Edge proposed a raid in Svanir territory to lighten the norn's burden, freeing up time to attend the summit. Battle proved a bonding moment for mother and son as they bore witness to the other's combat prowess for the first time.

Trouble with Ascalonian ghosts rounded out this episode's set of instances as Rox finally reported to Rytlock Brimstone following her failure to kill Scarlet personally. Publicly unamused, but privately unconcerned about the feat, Rytlock said the Branded and Ascalonian ghosts were of greater concern to Emperor Smodur the Unflinching. To convince him, Rytlock enlisted the player and Rox to assist with a ritual created by the Six human gods in an attempt to break the Foefire curse with his sword, Sohothin. The ritual overall failed, causing Rytlock to lose and pursue his sword into the Mists, but removed enough of the ghosts to ensure Smodur's attendance.



THE DRAGON'S REACH: PART 2

Queen Jennah's presence was put into question when rumors of a Jubilee-era conspiracy between the royal and Scarlet Briar emerged. With quick thinking from Kasmeer and Countess Anise, revealed as the human noble who purchased Canach's snarky freedom to serve as a bodyguard (of sorts), Minister Estelle was outed as the source, freeing up Queen Jennah's calendar.

A final demonstration of Taimi's Waypoint Recalibration Device, which would keep interfaced waypoints running at the lowest minimum energy, thereby spoiling their appeal to Mordremoth, was carried out to Councillor Phlunt's satisfaction. However, the Arcane Council spoiled her success by securing rights to the device and anything else Taimi created, causing her to run off inside Scruffy. Braham and the player quickly rescued Taimi and an unresponsive Scruffy from greedy Inquest agents. Shaken by the harrowing experience, and bitter about the sacrifice necessary to make the summit reality, Taimi relinquished the W.R.D. to a smug Phlunt.



Convincing world leaders at the Summit

The mid-season finale saw the summit commence, with each major leader escorted into the Grove, though there was more to the spectators than initially appeared. After a well-placed remark by Canach about a disguised Countess Anise's illusions provoked the sharpest response on record from the unflappable Shining Blade leader, her true intentions in purchasing his billet--to be "a knife that can be employed before anyone realizes it's struck"--were revealed. A conversation with Trahearne confirmed that the Pact would begin staging for battle against Mordremoth, stalling its initial plans to seek out Kralkatorrik. Finally, a brief interaction with Caithe suggested the Firstborn was also looking for ways to stop the jungle dragon, but with no elaboration.

The summit itself was cut short after the player tentatively convinced each leader to unite against the dragon as the Shadow of the Dragon, a familiar foe to sylvari players, appeared at the Pale Tree. Defending against the powerful lieutenant left the Pale Tree gravely wounded, forcing the player to keep the dragon minion at bay. After the Shadow of the Dragon retreated, the Avatar of the Pale Tree shared an ominous vision of wilting flora, beams of light and an artifact -- but of what that all signified, exactly, the Commander was unsure. While leaders hurried to report their experience to their respective colleagues, Trahearne privately suggested that the attack was too convenient to be an accident or luck: Someone in the know had ordered the assault. As the Marshal departed, Canach commented that he would be shadowing the Pact's movements on the Countess' orders.

ECHOES OF THE PAST

Season two's return opened with an unexpected rescue mission of a Durmand Priory explorer from the violent, Ascalonian-esque Seraph spirits who perished at Fort Salma, Belinda Delaqua included. A brief interlude with her departed sibling led to Marjory being gifted with her sister's spirit, which possessed and imbued her old sword with an unknown power.

Following that, the player reunited with the Pact, Destiny's Edge, and their guild at Camp Resolve, the coalition force's staging area in The Silverwastes. As the members of your guild worked on various personal errands, the present members of Destiny's Edge--Eir, Logan and Zojja--commented briefly on Rytlock's continued disappearance in the Mists without serious concern. Unexpectedly, three Zephyrite Masters of the Aspects were there and thanked the player for assisting the Master of Peace with Aerin. That said, they also offered no insight into his final destination or goal before departing on their own journey to find him.



Glint's Lair

Caithe and Canach, the Commander soon learned, were out on a reconnaissance mission that required extraction. Following the trail of Canach's specialty mines to the Firstborn, the defensive battle proved informative as the recon team located a glowing Mordrem (later identified as the Mordrem Vinewrath, a PvE meta event in The Silverwastes) behind thick vine walls before being extracted by a Pact chopper.

Explorer Campbell, the Priory member saved at Fort Salma, provided the player with a cipher necessary to reach the order's research rooms in Lornar's Pass, leading the player, Kasmear and Marjory to Magister Ogden Stonehealer in Special Collections, who immediately revealed his knowledge of the player's vision from the Pale Tree. After assuring the player that his information was provided by those who "have Tyria's best interests at heart," he directed the group to an ornate hourglass, which transported them to Glint's crystalline lair. There, the player witnessed echoes of the Master of Peace retrieving Glint's egg as Jory and Kas recounted the story of Glint, who was freed from the Elder Dragon Kralkatorrik's control by the Forgotten before quietly allying with humans.

TANGLED PATHS

With the Pact on the verge of deploying for the Maguuma Jungle's heart, the player politely declined an opportunity to fight once more with Destiny's Edge, imparting their knowledge of Glint's egg to the four present members before picking up Caithe as a surprisingly knowledgeable companion and departing with Rox to track the Aspect Masters. Kasmear revealed that Marjory had picked up swordplay, though the necromancer shared that her sole drive was to end Mordremoth with the blade.



View from the Tangled Labyrinth

The trail of the Aspect Masters proved easy enough to follow, but the group could not reach them before Mordrem struck down the Master of Sun. In thanks for saving the other Aspect Masters, the Master of Lightning shared information about a Zephyrite symbol they had been using to track the Master of Peace, which led to an underground cavern. With their guild and Caithe, the player found themselves unexpectedly separated from the others, forcing them to regroup in order to battle a Mordrem Predator looming over the Master of Peace. With his dying breath, he spoke of the egg's importance to Tyria's future and requested the player safeguard it, but his request was quickly buffeted by Caithe's immediate theft of the egg and parting words as he died: "No time to explain."

Less than quietly, the guild wondered if Caithe had fallen to Mordremoth's corruption, though the player's remarks placed only confidence in her actions.

SEEDS OF TRUTH

The only clear path to Caithe's motives appeared to lay with the Pale Tree, still badly wounded from the Shadow of the Dragon's attack. While Jory complained about a seemingly pointless goose chase against the backdrop of a murderous Elder Dragon, the Pale Tree provided four memory seeds that would offer key glimpses into Caithe's past, perhaps better illustrating her thought processes.

The seeds, which transported the player into an echo of Caithe, followed some of the sylvari's earliest days in The Grove when the race was new and Caithe traveled with Faolain, her sharp-tongued lover, as the firstborn--then called the elders--administered their younger siblings. Foreshadowing took the form of a tinkering secondborn named Ceara, fiddling with asuran technology, and a disgruntled Cadeyrn discussing his criticisms of Ventari's Tablet, part of what became the Nightmare Court's foundation. Tension erupted between a caustic Faolain and the firstborn Wynne, mediated by Trahearne, as they argued over the merits of forcing the newly awakened to adhere to the tenets of a long-dead centaur versus allowing their free will to reign. Privately, various firstborn expressed concerns about the quickening pace of new awakenings overrunning the tree's protections, exposing inexperienced sylvari to the dangers of the wilderness, the Inquest and each other.

Faolain, on the other hand, unsuccessfully focused on wheedling a powerful secret out of Wynne, who soon departed for The Silverwastes to research Ventari with a peaceful centaur tribe. A distress signal from a newly awakened sylvari soon led Caithe and her tempestuous partner to the second memory seed site, the Inquest

base at Hexane Regrade, where Canach and several other secondborn were being experimented on to power Inquest golems. Aware of the dangers, Faolain actively destroyed several golems, leading to the deaths of several captive sylvari as she attacked the asura Vorpp. Securing the remaining sprouts' safety, the future duchess said their next mission would be to learn Wynne's secret, which "could exert unspeakable power over all sylvari."



A third memory seed, planted in the sand of the Far Silverwastes, explored the couple's journey to the peaceful tribe. Though Faolain expressed confidence in their ability to convince Wynne, she had enlisted several "shadowy" compatriots along with Cadeyrn to accompany them, allegedly as protection against the centaurs. Though the tribe was welcoming toward the Pale Tree's children, Faolain's blunt insults against their appearances and way of life soured their opinion of her. During Caithe's conversation with the tribe's leader, Nekhii Burnthide, an unseen commotion "forced" the hand of Faolain's shadowy companions, with her claims of betrayal leading to the annihilation of the tribe by Faolain, the companions and Caithe. Sickened by the actions of her kin, Wynne's discovery of this massacre led to her immediate departure through a rock wall adorned with strange symbols.

POINT OF NO RETURN

The door's strange symbols were seals left by the Forgotten, said Ogden Stonehealer, and a set of trials similar to Ascension were conducted in the Durmand Priory's Special Collections to provide the hero with a tool necessary to open the door. Though the trials would not cause the player to Ascend, the spirit of Turai Ossa, facilitator of those ancient rites, helped the player attain Divine Fire, which they were able to use on the sealed cave's door in the Far Silverwastes.

With one memory seed remaining, the player and companions returned to Camp Resolve just in time to defend against a harsh Mordrem attack on the base. The battle's aftermath revealed a few aspects of the Destiny's Edge dynamic: Though the guild's members had fought fiercely to defend one another, they knew very little of their personal lives, as evidenced by Logan and Zojja's surprise upon being introduced to Braham. The Pact underway, the player and their guild left to complete their own mission with the last memory seed.

That seed, planted near a pallet in the inexplicably golden cave of an unknown civilization, revealed the critical turning point for sylvari as Caithe and Faolain located Wynne. Under threat of torture from the vicious Faolain, Wynne surreptitiously told Caithe a secret that could destroy their race: Their existence was not to become the free-thinking beings they were, but to serve as Mordremoth's minions akin to the Icebrood, Branded, Destroyers and Risen. Faced with the knowledge that her lover would do more harm than good with this information, Caithe fulfilled her sister's pleas for help with a merciful death; the only way to ensure that the secret would remain such.



As the memory faded, present-day Caithe appeared, forthcoming with information about the events that led to Wynne's death. Providing context on her willful separation from Faolain and the realization that her actions only delayed the inevitable, Caithe outlined the bare facts: Tyria would know of the sylvari's secret soon enough, if they didn't already, and Glint's egg would be critical to their future. The firstborn used the Shadow of the Dragon's reappearance as an exit cue, escaping with the egg and leaving the player guild to vanquish the first true enemy of the Dream.

However, even as the heroes basked in their momentary success, the dragon was rising.





PREPARING FOR MAGUUMA: WHAT TO EXPECT

LORE

WRITTEN BY DARRYSHAN

Far west of the main population centers of Tyria lies a wilderness, part desert, part jungle. Known as the Maguuma Jungle, we recently learned that this region of the world is home to yet another Elder Dragon, Mordremoth. We were first brought here during the conflict between the Shining Blade and White Mantle in Prophecies. Later, the Tarnished Coast took on greater importance in Guild Wars: Eye of the North when the Great Destroyer, a minion of Primordus, drove the asura to the surface. Due to their technological prowess, the asura are now the dominant race near the Maguuma Jungle.

Although they are absent from the Heart of Thorns previews, the most notable current natives of the inland Maguuma area are the centaurs. Those remaining in the region have stayed out of the conflict in Kryta with humanity, appearing to share the pacifistic philosophy of Ventari. This includes the principle of hospitality that led Ventari to establish a refuge for humans and centaurs alike over two hundred and fifty years ago. Conflict around the original site forced him to relocate to the Tarnished Coast, where the Pale Tree would later be planted.

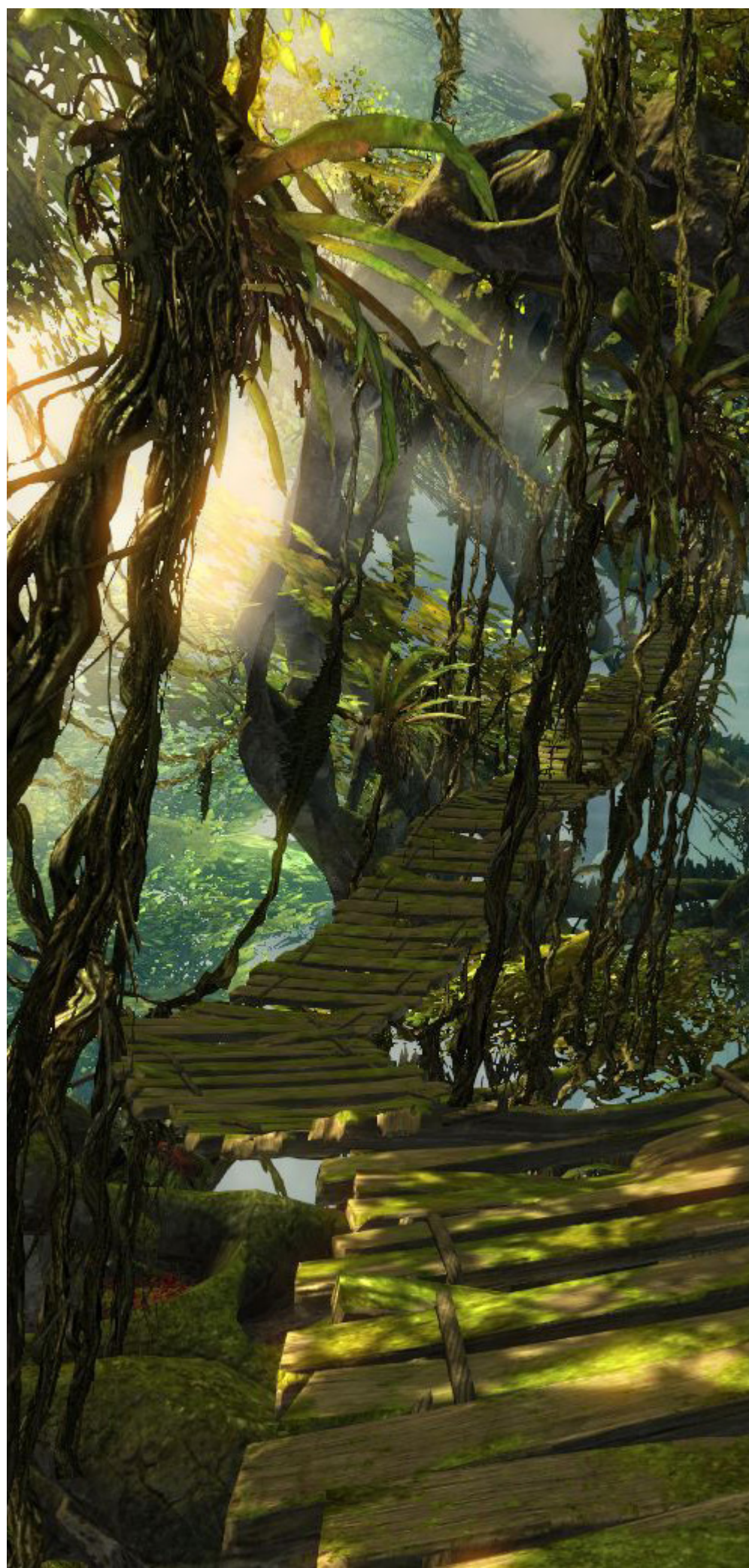
In 1302AE, the sylvari emerged from the pods hanging from the large and mysterious Pale Tree in Arbor Bay, swiftly becoming a close second to the asura in terms of population. It is possible that another Pale Tree exists deep in the Maguuma Jungle, with the sylvari Malyck seeming to have woken up by the banks of a river, far from the original tree. If this is the case, Malyck's relatives may be affected more by Mordremoth's influence, due to lacking the protection of the Dream of Dreams.

Unlike the heavily populated coastlines, the already explored part of the actual Maguuma Jungle (or Wastes, rather) is fairly uninhabited, with only a few towns and encampments dotting the maps. While there was at least one important settlement, Prosperity, the centaur settlement in Dry Top is more populous. With Heart of Thorns, we'll be travelling even farther into the jungle, most likely to lands never explored before in any previous campaign. Though most of what we'll find in the Maguuma Jungle is a mystery, we can make some educated guesses based on previous games and the lore.

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IT IS POSSIBLE ANOTHER PALE TREE EXISTS DEEP IN THE MAGUUMA JUNGLE

A quick glance at the in-game map shows a large stretch of desert north of the Tarnished Coast. The Maguuma region was once more jungle-like, with the plant life flourishing in the many canyons criss-crossing the land. The tops of the canyons were desert-like, much as Dry Top and The Silverwastes are to this day. But through mysterious forces, often (perhaps mistakenly) attributed to the Elder Dragons, the jungle began to dry out. From what we've seen in previews of Heart of Thorns, the climate is similar to areas seen in Guild Wars 1, so one can safely assume that there are regions of Maguuma that remain lush and fertile. Either this means that the force which dried up the landscape is not present here, or it deliberately condensed the plant life into a much smaller area. The hypothesis that Mordremoth caused this change would fit with the latter explanation, while another force leading to the rising aridity would favour the former. Nevertheless, the Heart of the Jungle is, from what we've seen, an ideal location for a whole host of tropical plant life.





A landscape full of plants inevitably means a landscape full of other lifeforms, both intelligent and not. The Maguuma region is perhaps best known for its fauna, ranging from insects to dinosaurs, jungle stalkers to dust mites. The dinosaurs in Guild Wars 1 were located in the Tarnished Coast, but the recent settling there has most likely pushed them further into the jungle, toward the areas that will be playable in Heart of Thorns. If what we see in the trailer are dinosaurs, which seems likely, then we could perhaps expect more animals from the Tarnished Coast to make their way inland, such as hippopotami and simians.



The hylek are another race seen both in Guild Wars 1 and in the Heart of Thorns pre-release material, seemingly having thrived in the deeper Maguuma region due to the lush climate. But these hylek, the Itzel and the Nuhoch also seen in the trailer, vary in appearance to the other subspecies by a large amount, more than the difference between their nearest-known relatives, the Cuatl, Michotl and Durotl in Metrica Province. Perhaps the influence of the forces which dried up the Maguuma Jungle have created a sort of island, separating the species from the rest of the world, leading to a much greater range of biological diversity. The Heart of Maguuma has a very similar climate to the areas seen in Guild Wars 1, as well as the Tarnished Coast in both games. As a result, we can expect to see some fauna from Guild Wars 1 re-emerging in the expansion, like root behemoths and various insects.

If we are to mention the hylek, we mustn't forget the most prominent race in the trailer: the Exalted. Located in huge golden cities, these mursaat-like entities appear to hold some power in the Maguuma Jungle, their magic capable of shaping and restoring the ruins of long-lost civilizations. We should see a lot from the results of these magics, as the Maguuma Jungle was absolutely full of ruins in Guild Wars 1. There are four ruined forts in the Silverwastes alone. And in Dry Top, the town of Prosperity bears a resemblance to the pueblo-like structures seen throughout the Maguuma Jungle's canyons. Perhaps we will find yet more ruins repurposed by races other than the Exalted? The Maguuma region is one of the more magically mysterious areas of the world, home to a bloodstone in a location aptly named Bloodstone Fen. This was the source of a constant effort between the mursaat and the White Mantle to unlock its powers, an effort that may still be



ongoing. It could also be the source of conflict between other groups, even involving Mordrem forces. It would be foolish to assume that the bloodstone shard has been left alone by the jungle's denizens since Guild Wars 1, due to its immense power and significance.

This bloodstone may have caused some of the magical features of the region, such as the healing properties of water and floating rocks, which were ever-present in Guild Wars 1. These unexplained curiosities of the Maguuma Jungle may even be due to ley lines, which certainly exist in the area.



In the expansion's trailer, we also see creatures that seem at home in lava, and are almost made of stone. The Elder Dragon Primordus, who awoke in the Depths of Tyria in 1120AE, has minions across Tyria, from Mount Maelstrom to Kessex Hills,

with a presence recorded near the Maguuma Jungle and Rata Sum, as chronicled in "Edge of Destiny." Therefore, it would not be too much of a stretch to see the first Elder Dragon to awake to be present in the Heart of Maguuma. But if this is the case, will we see a conflict between Destroyers and Mordrem? It is clear that the Elder Dragons are not allies, but merely similar entities feeding on the same food source: magic. When multiple creatures share the same food source, conflict almost becomes a certainty. And if these fire-imbued creatures in Heart of Thorns are indeed Primordus' minions, we may end up fighting a war on two fronts.

With the limited resources available right now, not much can be said for certain about the Heart of Maguuma. The limits of what we know for sure come from gameplay which, lorewise, took place over 250 years before the events of Guild Wars 2. A lot will have changed in a region as remote as the Maguuma Jungle. One thing can be said for sure: expect surprises.





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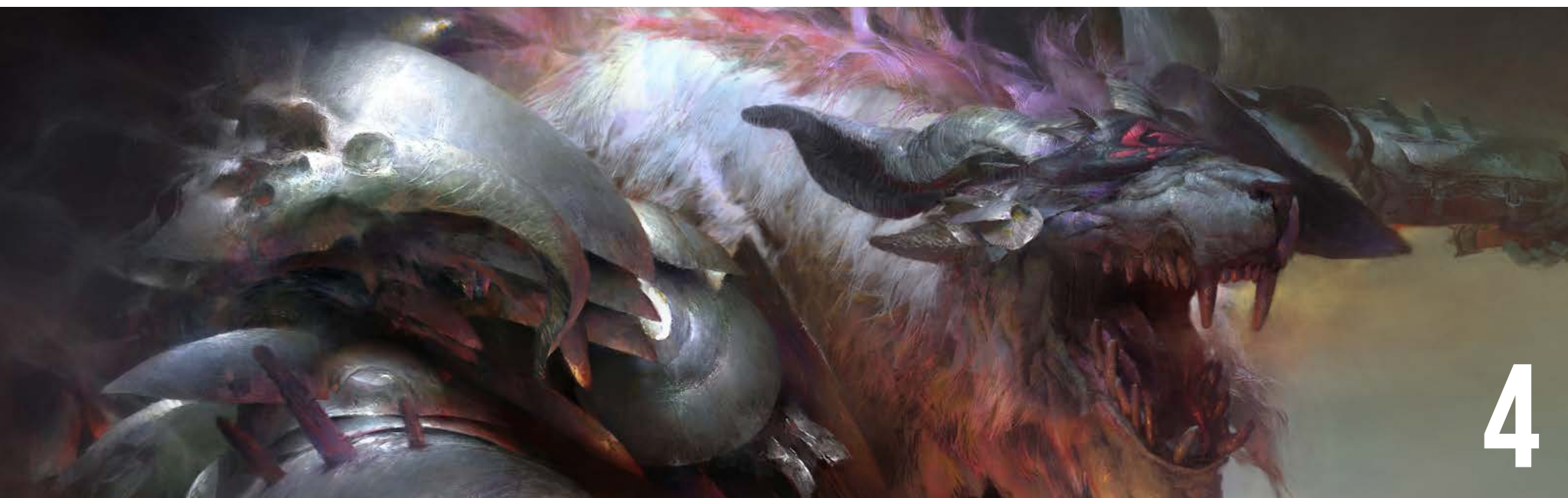
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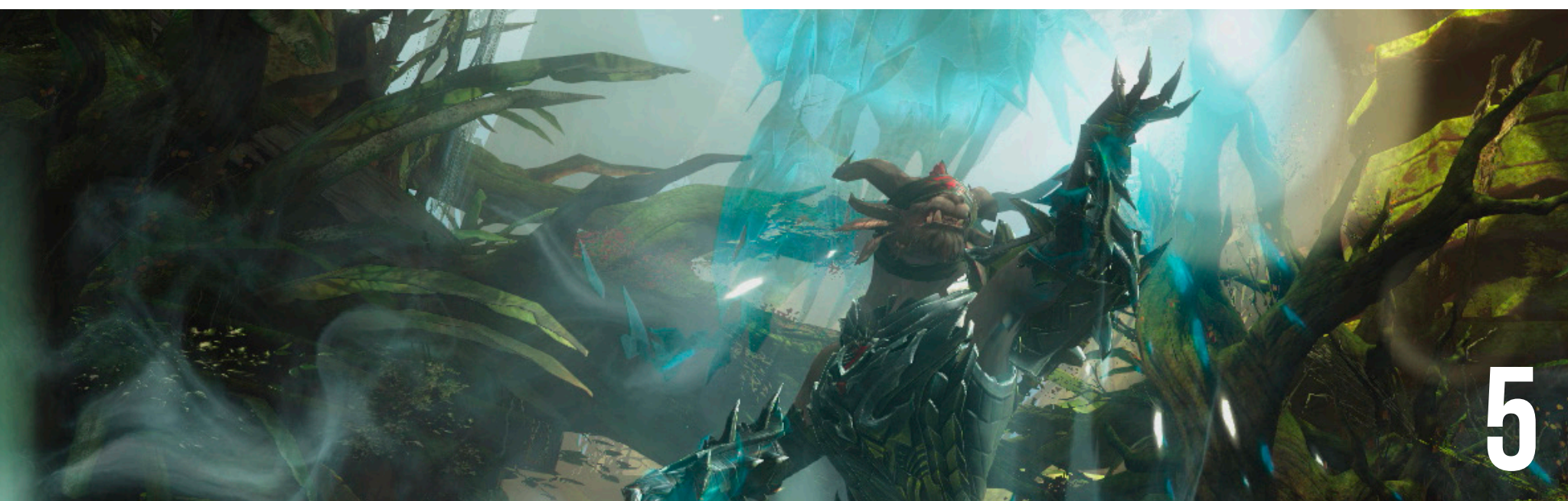
FROM RUNTLOCK TO REVENANT



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MY JOURNEY HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN.
BE READY FOR ANYTHING.

6

WRITTEN BY KRISS WATT

When Guild Wars 2: Heart of Thorns was revealed to the world at PAX South, it came with the promise that we would “tackle challenging group content” as we probe the depths and scale the heights of the Maguuma Jungle. Through Points of Interest we’ve seen glimpses of an impressive battle with a flame-spewing Legendary Wyvern, and have been introduced to the reworked defiance bar, which should prove key in making crowd control useful against powerful enemies. Here, we’re going to discuss what we know so far and how it can give us an idea of the challenges that might be put before us in the upcoming expansion.



EDITORIAL

WHAT DOES ‘CHALLENGING CONTENT’ MEAN FOR GUILD WARS 2?

DUNGEONS

Very little has been said in response to the various pokes and prods from recent interviewers on the subject of whether or not we’ll be seeing more dungeons released in the expansion. While there are a lot of players who complete dungeons every day—mostly as a consistent and reliable source of gold—the system has remained relatively untouched since the release of Guild Wars 2; Twilight Arbor received one new path as part of a Living World release, and there were two other temporary dungeons (Molten Facility and Aetherblade Retreat) which were eventually recycled into Fractals of the Mists.

Dungeons aren’t something that have ever been a big focus for me, not because they are in any way insufficient, but because the experience can be very hit and miss. The ideal situation is to have a group of friends that know the content and can blast through it for fun and profit, but the reality

for a lot of us is often having to use the ‘looking for group’ tool; where you end up in that scenario is very much a mixed bag. If you’re lucky you might end up in a team who know the dungeon well and are happy to walk you through it. If not, you could end up in a group whose only interest is in completing the content in the quickest way possible, usually to the detriment of those of us who are still trying to find our way.

At present, whether or not we’ll see more dungeons added could definitely go either way. The community has said again and again that it would like to see more dungeons added to the game, and there is an established system in place (i.e. running story mode to unlock explorable paths, daily token/gold rewards) that is sufficiently distinct from the way that Fractals work so as to make 5-man dungeons worthwhile. On the other hand, it’s difficult to gauge from the outside quite how much work needs to go into creating a new dungeon with multiple paths. It needs to make sense as part of the unfolding story of the Maguuma jungle, and would likely—as

with the current set of dungeons—come with a new set of armor and weapon skins, paid for with yet another token currency.

Given the long development schedule for the expansion none of these factors should rule out the creation of new dungeon content, and it would be a very positive sign to the player base to see at least one new challenging dungeon created. Small-scale instanced content should be the *perfect* sandbox within which to push the boundaries of what is possible with new game mechanics such as the aforementioned defiance changes, and it would be a missed opportunity if the dungeon system wasn't added to in any way with Heart of Thorns. If we don't see any developments in this area, the implication is—potentially—that the concept of dungeons is being abandoned.

FRACTALS

One part of the current endgame group content that has been mentioned—albeit during coverage of the Mastery system—is Fractals of the Mists. For those who aren't familiar with Fractals, they are accessed via a portal in Lion's Arch and challenge you to complete three randomly selected instances, followed by one of three possible bosses, rewarding ascended rings and some of the best weapon skins available. When entering Fractals, the group selects a difficulty from 1 to 50, which changes encounters in various ways in order to increase the challenge; higher level Fractals require characters to have agony infusions on their ascended items in order to resist otherwise largely unavoidable damage.

Master Fractals: Uncover new depths in the Fractals of the Mists to gain powerful new abilities to overcome difficult fractal challenges, garner greater rewards, and unlock more powerful infusions. — official blog post

It seems likely that Fractals Masteries will pave the way for the difficulty cap to be raised from 50, and that the new abilities unlocked through this track will be required to

negate increasingly deadly agony-based attacks, possibly giving skilled players a way to temporarily boost their agony resistance above what can be achieved solely through infusions; they might also function as a way of boosting players who are new to Fractals that have low resistance (which can only be a good thing). At present, those running at the highest difficulty are generally doing so because they enjoy what is realistically the most challenging, small-scale content in the game, and also to roll the dice for specific weapon skins (randomly dropped above level 10 difficulty, and anecdotally often extremely frustrating to get a specific skin) or the Endless Fractal Tonic, which only drops at level 50. Higher difficulties, besides providing a greater proving ground for elite Fractaliers, would no doubt require even greater rewards: could we see a new set of weapon skins—or perhaps even armor sets—for the most determined players?

There has been nothing in the announcements thus far to indicate that new Fractals will be added, although it seems probable, whether it be with the release of Heart of Thorns or afterwards. The Thaumanoval Reactor Fractal that was created after Ellen Kiel was elected to the Captain's Council of Lion's Arch (a mistake that the community ought to rue to this day) shows that these short instances can be used to give backstory: maybe they'll use Fractals as a way to let us play through Rytlock's adventure in the Mists and have us aid him in reclaiming Sohothin and becoming Tyria's very first revenant, an idea that went down very well recently when put to people waiting in line to play the Heart of Thorns demo at EGX Rezzed in London!

Using Fractals as a way of telling tangential (but super-exciting) stories like this could work well at tempting unfamiliar players in, although something would need to be done in order to allow them to play through certain instances without coming up against the existing random selection mechanism, such as a 'story mode' as was done for the Thaumanoval Reactor Fractal when it was first introduced. Utilising the map voting system that was recently added to structured PvP would certainly be an option, but would definitely lead to groups only choosing to run the optimal



Fractals and ignoring those which are particularly tough or time-consuming. While this could potentially be countered by tweaking the reward structure, it would probably make more sense to allow story-heavy Fractals to be run as individual instances which don't count towards upgrading your personal reward level.

OPEN WORLD

In a continuation of their design goal of making Tyria feel vibrant and active, it's likely that a lot of the challenging group content that we'll be seeing in Heart of Thorns will play out in the open world where anyone can jump in and participate. While this can make life difficult for super-guilds who want to fill out a whole map with their own members, it has become a proven formula for encounters ranging from 5 to 50+ players, and worked to great effect in the Silverwastes, culminating in the fight against the Vinewrath. We already know that Outposts (content hubs in the new Heart of Maguuma maps) will be a fulcrum for large meta-event chains, and it's very likely that these might lead to large-scale coordinated boss encounters; facing something the scale of Tequatl or Scarlet's Twisted Marionette on a daily basis—and having a very real chance of failing if not sufficiently well organised—is a very exciting prospect.

So far we've seen players battle a Wyvern (pronunciation left to your imagination) in a pre-beta Heart of Thorns convention demo: a fun example of new fire animations, visual ability cues, and how the defiance bar can be used to prevent certain enemy abilities from being used. ArenaNet developers have said that this particular battle is somewhat toned down in order to make the demo accessible to people who might not be so familiar with Guild Wars 2, and it's an enticing prospect to imagine how these new mechanics can be utilised going forward, particularly when you factor in abilities that will be unlocked via various Mastery tracks to be used while facing specific jungle denizens.

Taking existing large-scale encounters as a baseline, there is both cause for hope and room for improvement. Tequatl—completely overhauled last year—is an enjoyable fight, but pretty much on farm status at this point, assuming at least a couple of commanders who know what they're doing. Triple Trouble, the three great wurms that appear in Bloodtide Coast, proved tougher to take down but are now very much a known quantity. My personal highlight would definitely be the Twisted Marionette fight, created by Scarlet Briar in season one of the living world. The 'raid' has to split up between five lanes, defending it against a tide of mechanical constructs, before taking turns to defeat a different sub-boss on each of five floating platforms to break a chain holding up the giant Marionette. While fairly routine for properly organised teams, it failed often, but rewarded players based on how many chains were broken. While elements of the fight were distilled into the Vinewrath encounter in the Silverwastes, the sheer scale of the Marionette made it feel

epic; it stands as a high watermark for boss design in Guild Wars 2, and would be very much welcomed back in some form, perhaps as a guild raid?

GUILD RAIDS

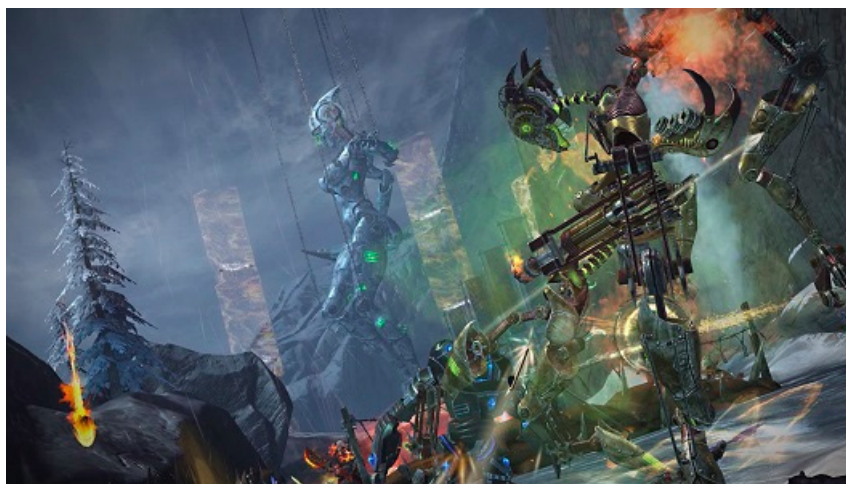
Last, but by no means least, there's the ever-present elephant in the room when discussing group content: raiding. A staple of some incredibly popular MMOs, it's something that a lot of Guild Wars 2 players are hankering for, but will it ever happen? There was cause for hope last year when a CDI discussion was opened up in order to gather feedback on the subject of guild raiding; around the same time a job posting appeared looking for a game designer with a focus on raid content. Taken together, it certainly looks like some kind of content targeted at large group guilds could be in the works.

Guild halls were announced at PAX South—to great applause—as a way to very much put guilds back in their place as a core pillar of the game, but there has been no subsequent guild information released. Given everything that has gone before, it seems likely that these halls and whatever new systems they encapsulate are an important first step that could conceivably lead to raiding done 'ArenaNet style'. We're not closer to figuring out what exactly that might be, but game director Colin Johanson almost seems more excited for us to learn about the guild system changes than anything else, which has to be an encouraging sign.

It's conceivable that instanced raiding could be launched from inside guild halls, with a portal taking us deep into the Mists in order to take down legendary foes of past, present, and future. ArenaNet would need to determine which approach suits Guild Wars 2 better between fixed group sizes (e.g. 20-man, 40-man), or a scaling approach as currently happens with open world mega-bosses like Tequatl. The former would almost certainly be easier to balance, but would result in people being unable to join in; the subs bench for raid night in other MMOs was never a fun place to be. Whatever decisions are made, assuming that we're not barking up the wrong tree entirely, raiding is something that a lot of people are looking for from an MMO endgame (myself included) and forays into that territory could really expand the appeal of Guild Wars 2 to a whole new set of players.

Lead game designer Isaiah Cartwright, speaking to community workhorse WoodenPotatoes at an NCSoft event in Brighton, explained how they're eager to push challenging content across the entire game world. They want to put encounters before coordinated groups of players

that "beat the snot out of them until they figure it out", growing and improving their skills in the process. Bring it on!



DRUIDS: FACT OR FICTION?

WRITTEN BY AARON HEATH

With the upcoming release of Heart of Thorns, we will soon be venturing into the heart of the Maguuma Jungle. Its deepest reaches will be home to all manner of fantastical beings, from dinosaurs to the mysterious “Exalted,” but one particular group of entities transcends mere habitation to resonate with the Maguuma region on a much deeper level. The druids, as they are known to the races of Tyria, were a pivotal presence in the Maguuma Jungle circa Guild Wars Prophecies, and it would be almost ludicrous to suggest that they would not be granted a role in Heart of Thorns. But what are the druids? Who were they?

The druids were a group of nature aficionados who, at a time unbeknownst to history, ventured into the Maguuma Jungle to strengthen their ties with Tyria. It is not known whether they were humans, non-humans, or a faction made up of assorted races. Human history dictates that the druids were once human, and some sources state that they were ardent devotees of Melandru, the human goddess of nature, earth, and growth. These accounts are supported by druid ruins in the Maguuma Jungle that feature Old Krytan runes, a language unique to the human race. It is said that the druids vanished mysteriously sometime around the year 970 A.E. (After Exodus), though in truth, according to the Guild Wars 2 Wiki, they shed their physical forms in a druidic ritual in order to become one with the jungle. After this point, they became a part of nature itself, immaterial, save for when they chose to manifest themselves physically as druid spirits in both Guild Wars Prophecies and Guild Wars 2.

But were the druids actually human? Other sources of history claim they were beings alien to humans and were driven into the Maguuma Jungle by force. While their history is too murky to be able to know for certain, recent evidence would suggest

that druids were, and still are, made rather than born.

One of the biggest features included in Heart of Thorns will be profession specializations. These will work as a sort of sub-profession that characters can opt in and out of, gaining new abilities and losing old ones. As of right now, only one of these has been revealed: the ranger’s druid specialization. This is one of those rare cases in which a gameplay feature serves to clarify a hazy bit of lore. With players now able to learn druidic abilities, it would seem that the druids were never

some mystical race with innate magical abilities akin to the mursaats or seers. Instead, they were simply ordinary Tyria-goers who developed their own unique branch of magic through study and practice.

Regardless of their humble beginnings, however, the druids eventually succeeded in transcending their mortal bodies and became one with the Maguuma Jungle. They themselves are the only beings who fully understand the ramifications of such an act, though there are some clear implications. By effectively dissipating into the collective consciousness

“THEY SHED THEIR PHYSICAL FORMS IN A DRUIDIC RITUAL IN ORDER TO BECOME ONE WITH THE JUNGLE”

of nature, one could theorize that the druids now possess an innate connection to all things naturally born of Tyria, including a certain recently awakened race of bipedal plant people.

The sylvari possess a particularly interesting racial elite skill: Summon Druid Spirit. This skill is fairly straightforward in its execution in that it, well, summons a druid spirit. But why can the sylvari do this and not the other races? In order to possess this ability, would they not have to have a unique connection with the druids?

Due to the fact that the sylvari Pale Tree grows from the soil of the Maguuma Jungle, it is likely that the druids, whose collective spirit is now an innate part of the jungle itself, possess a strong connection with the Tree, its "Dream of Dreams," and by extension, its fruit. However, though it is clear why such a connection exists, it is unclear why the druids acquiesce to being summoned at a sylvari's leisure.



It is extremely likely that the druids' fusion with the jungle and implied connection with the sylvari will affect the narrative of Heart of Thorns. It is possible that the druids hold so much sway over the jungle that they could be vying with Mordremoth for control over it. Similarly, they could even have direct access to the Dream, and could therefore play some role in its protection. However, heavy foreshadowing in both Guild Wars Prophecies and Guild Wars 2 suggests that the druids may not be as helpful as the players might like them to be.

In Guild Wars Prophecies, players could interact with the druids via their spirit forms several times throughout the Maguuma Jungle. During the quest "Wisdom of the Druids," the player is allowed to witness a druidic ritual in person. During this ritual, the phrase "all that exists is all that must be" is repeated numerous times. While this phrase seems docile at first, it bears new meaning when applied to the Elder Dragons and the Pact's mission to annihilate them.

Theoretically, the dragons exist to maintain a cyclic state of balance in Tyria. It is likely that when the druids became one with nature, they also gained incredible knowledge concerning Tyria and its place in the universe. It is entirely possible that they then became aware of the Elder Dragons and their role in Tyria's life cycle, which could be why that repeated phrase in their ritual supports similar warnings given by two other figures in Tyria's history.

The first figure was a margonite called The Apostate. A book by The Apostate titled "The Map of the All" can be found in

the Durmand Priory's Special Collections area. The book suggests that Tyria is a part of a greater abstract cosmic mechanism known as "The All." In this book, the Apostate states that "Should the energies become imbalanced, the world will tilt and all beings will fall off it into the void." It is likely that this refers to the balance the Elder Dragons bring to Tyria, and by extension "The All." Essentially, it is a warning against meddling with the natural order of things, something which the druids were also staunch advocates of if their own cryptic admonishments are anything to go by.

The second figure is one of the druids themselves, a spirit known as Dark Oak. This druid, found deep in the Maguuma Jungle in Guild Wars Prophecies, presents the player with a bit of intriguing dialogue: "Darkness and light, good and evil... all are a part of nature. There is no regrowth without death... without decay. Such is the lesson that I can teach you, stripling." This could be taken to mean that the destruction of Tyria by the Elder Dragons is not a process that should be meddled with, but rather accepted.

Bearing this ominous information in mind, it seems very likely that the druids have intimate knowledge of the Elder Dragons and Tyria's place in the universe. If this is true, they are almost certain to come into play in Heart of Thorns in some capacity, if not many. The proximity, foreshadowing, and opportunity are simply too perfect for ArenaNet to ignore them.

So there it is. When it comes to the Maguuma Jungle, the druids are in the very woodwork. Nothing that pertains to the jungle does so without pertaining to the druids as well, for they are one with the jungle. Whether it be as an entity of great wisdom providing cryptic council, a dormant force rising up to aid the player, or a formerly neutral entity now turned enemy, the druids will have their say in the invasion of their home, for better or for worse.





DOES GUILD WARS 2 REALLY **NEED** HEART OF THORNS?

EDITORIAL

WRITTEN BY MIKO RIEL

Can you remember how you felt when ArenaNet announced they'd begun development on Guild Wars 2? Did you feel you had enough to do in the existing campaigns between March 2007 and the launch of Guild Wars 2 in August 2012?

When it did launch, ArenaNet brought to the industry a title that changed the way it delivered its content and promised to bring its players an actual living and changing world through its quest system and story. Yet, it's taken two and a half years for ArenaNet to finally announce an expansion to this game - very different when compared to the original Guild Wars which had two expansions already in the same amount of time.

Many players with experience in other MMOs (such as World of Warcraft, Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn, or EverQuest) have been vocal about the need for an expansion to Guild Wars 2: there isn't enough "end game" to sustain players' interests, and the Living World, though introducing content updates every two weeks, holds one's attention like a TV show - while the season is active. Once a season ends, players are left with repeatable content that hasn't changed much since launch.

The counter sometimes heard is that ArenaNet have added one new path to one of the eight repeatable dungeons (Aetherpath in Twilight Arbor) which is challenging enough

to be a dungeon on its own. They also added Fractals of the Mists, randomized dungeons requiring you to negotiate four separate encounters to complete, and which can also be increased in difficulty should the dungeon party choose it. Add to this two separate game modes to play in should a player wish, and it would seem there's plenty to do in Tyria and the Mists.

And yet, when ArenaNet announced at PAX South that an expansion - Heart of Thorns - will be released soon™/when it's ready™, the overwhelming reaction from the community was one of joy, followed quickly by an "It's about time!" A new class; a new progression system; a new explorable region with maps built vertically as well as horizontally; expanded profession abilities; more challenging content; new WvW and PvP maps; and finally guild halls, will all be introduced with Heart of Thorns.

Since the announcement, ArenaNet have shared more information about almost all of these new systems and given players the chance to try out the new class, part of one of the zones, and the new PvP map.

One question still remains, though: how are they addressing "end game" content? Thus far, we know boss encounters will have a change to the defiance mechanic with the addition of





a break bar that shows when a boss is susceptible to crowd control skills. We've also seen and heard reactions from players who've played through the wyvern encounter. Some of those with raid experience in other MMOs have said the wyvern fight feels like it could be a raid boss, especially when taking Colin Johanson's comments that the difficulty of the encounter was scaled down for the demo and first closed beta stress test. If this "baby wyvern," as Johanson called it, is an easier introduction to the more challenging content many veteran MMO players are used to, then ArenaNet may have some treats up their sleeves. Will this be enough to bring players back to Guild Wars 2? It's no secret that many players left the game because they did not feel challenged enough; so far the several 75% off sales have brought in new players, but few returning ones, with many holding out until more is announced regarding this promised "challenging content."

What Heart of Thorns promises in terms of gameplay content, though, must also be balanced with story content for many fans of the franchise. The original Guild Wars campaigns were rich in lore, each campaign interconnecting in some way with the previous expansion's storyline, even if this seemed tangential at first. ArenaNet have showed they are committed to their original changing game world concept and have built their future Living World updates directly into the Heart of Thorns expansion. This model will require players who want to continue the Living World story to buy the expansion when it is released. This is an interesting departure from ArenaNet's previous strategy of creating standalone campaigns that are interconnected with existing game lore but did not truly require the other expansions to be able to play through and enjoy the story. Now, without the context of the base game's lore, new players will be at a disadvantage, which could provide another reason for the frequent discounted sales on Guild Wars 2 recently. While it's true that the official wikis and fan-produced lore pieces like those produced here at GuildMag can help catch players up, some may still feel that first-hand experience will be best (something that's still not possible with Living World season 1). The question, then, is: how much time and money are these players willing to invest in order to understand a new expansion's content?

Delving deeper into the heart of the Maguuma Jungle allows ArenaNet's writers another opportunity to continue tying back into the original game lore. In Guild Wars: Prophecies, players met the centaur Ventari and his human companion Ronan. Through exploration, adventurers learned of a seed that Ronan found and planted with Ventari. Players were able visit the tree that sprouted from the mysterious seed and bask in its purity. Fast forward 250+ years in Tyrian history and we have the sylvari, born of the Pale Tree that Ventari and Ronan planted and tended. Clearly, the sylvari's introduction as the new playable race in Guild Wars 2, complete with a tutorial instance fight against the now recognizable Shadow of the Dragon, should have planted foreshadowing seeds in attentive story watchers' heads. With this mind, ArenaNet's choice to head west in Tyria's future, with its ties to the Prophecies campaign, makes sense.

Following Prophecies storyline, with its ties to Ventari, the Ascension trials, and Kralkatorrik's champion-turned-good dragon, Glint, it would seem ArenaNet may be planning to open more of Tyria's landscape before heading to another continent. By choosing to pursue Mordremoth first, connecting in Glint and her rebellion against Kralkatorrik and what this might mean for the future of the Elder Dragons, ArenaNet can explore the sylvari storyline first before

possibly heading southwest into the Crystal Desert or elsewhere.

THE SEVERAL 75% OFF SALES HAVE BROUGHT IN NEW PLAYERS, BUT FEW RETURNING ONES, WITH MANY HOLDING OUT UNTIL MORE IS ANNOUNCED

This echo of the past story, with its connections to the earlier trek through Maguuma to uncover the secrets of the White Mantle and their ties to the mursaats, requiring Ascension in order to meet Glint and confront

the mursaats, seems to be coming full circle now. In order to understand the original campaigns, it makes sense to start from the beginning. Guild Wars lore not only needs Heart of Thorns but Guild Wars 2 itself needs it for its survival. The game has been out long enough. It's about time!



A SHATTERED PACT: PART II

"Agh! Confound this confoundable jungle and its murderous botanical inhabitants!" Drixx howled angrily, snapping his fingers and setting the thorny vine that had been trying to throttle him ablaze.

"Drixx, put that out this instant, this is a highly flammable environment!" Flune admonished, looking alarmed.

Scowling, Drixx snapped his fingers a second time and the dancing flames sizzled as they were doused with water. The vine writhed and twisted violently, but did not attack again.

"Better," said Flune with a hint of smugness.

"You and your precious plants," scoffed Drixx. "We've been wandering around this infernal jungle for three days now, eating roots and berries, the wildlife attempting to murder us every waking moment, and searching for a bunch of charr who in all honesty are most likely dead, and you want to lecture me on lab safety procedure!"

"They aren't dead," Arcadia Steelfur cut in before Flune could respond. She was several paces ahead of the two asura, staring at the jungle floor resolutely. "They can't be."

Drixx reddened, clearly regretting losing his temper.

"I didn't mean..."

"To speak your mind? You think my warband's lying dead in a pile of jungle thorns somewhere out there, do you?" Arcadia continued, her tone ominously calm.

"I, I, um,"

"Well, let me clue you in. If a pea-sized, floppy eared, whiny, sorry excuse for a scientist like you could survive that fleet going down, I think my friends are just fine. No one's making you come with me. I can search for them on my own, and if you and your little girlfriend can't handle it, perhaps you should run along back to your Priory with your quills and your ink and your cozy feather beds and let me get on with saving my warband!"

At this, both Flune and Drixx stood dumbfounded behind Arcadia, eyes wide and ears standing straight up. Then, after several seconds of silence, the two asura erupted in indignation.

"I object to your insinuation that Drixx and I are voluntary lab partners!"

"Her?! My what?! The very concept is ludicrous!"

"Are you two listening to yourselves!" Arcadia bellowed, finally turning to face the two babbling asura, "the Pact is in ruins, thousands of our comrades are dead and thousands more are either dying, lost, or both! Not only do I not need your help, I don't want it!"

Arcadia stormed angrily into the jungle, shredding the obstructing vegetation with her claws. What use were those two buffoons, anyway? The only thing they care about is bickering.

"Tell us about your warband, Arcadia."

The big charr whirled around to see the two asura standing feet from her.

"I thought I told you two to get lost."

"And yet, here we are," quipped Drixx.

Flune silenced him with a sideways glance, then continued, "We apologize for our inconsiderate behavior and request that our partnership continue. That is, the three of us searching for your warband, not, um, what you suggested was going on between Drixx and I earlier...Are you alright, Arcadia?"

The charr was doubled over, her sides heaving as she laughed hysterically. Looking up, she brushed tears of mirth from her streaming eyes, finally calming down enough to reply.

"You sound like a cub asking for extra rations!"

"Be that as it may, we'd still like to accompany you," said Flune, "This is a hostile environment, and our odds of survival are higher if we stick together."

"Yes I suppose you're right," Arcadia acquiesced, "I owe you for saving me, anyhow."

Flune smiled and fell into step next to Arcadia, though she nearly had to jog to catch up with the charr's enormous strides. Drixx ambled along behind them, his expression resigned.

"So, Arcadia, tell us about your warband," Flune chirped conversationally.

Arcadia smiled sadly as she replied, "Well, there are four of us in total -"

"Four? From what I understand, charr warbands generally consist of five soldiers," interjected Drixx.

"You're right, they do, in charr society. We all met after we'd joined the Vigil. I'm a gladium, as is everyone else in my warband. When I joined the Vigil, they had already formed a warband, and I was allowed to join. So you see, we aren't an official charr warband."

"What happened to your original warband?" asked Drixx.

Arcadia did not respond, but instead stared off into the thick jungle canopy with a faraway look in her eyes. Flune dealt Drixx a hefty blow to one of his large ears.

"You don't have to answer that, Arcadia, Drixx was just shutting up. What were their names?"

At Flune's words, Arcadia snapped out of her reverie, "Oh, yes, well, there's me, Gron Steeljaw, Novia Steelcurse, and Faze Steelfiend. Gron and Faze are Blood Legion, and Novia's Ash."

"What legion are you from," asked Flune tentatively.

"I'm Iron Legion. I specialize in ballistics engineering, but I don't mind working the engine room when I'm in the air. To tell you the truth, I feel pretty useless without all my gadgets. What about you two? What did you do at the Priory?"

"Well," chimed in Drixx, puffing up his chest and looking very pleased with himself, "I graduated from the College of Synergetics with special honors for my thesis on the properties and effects of magical energy, and -"

"He's an expert on dragon magic," said Flune in a bored tone, cutting Drixx short.

"Savant in applied magical analysis!" Drixx corrected her indignantly.

"And I'm the Priory's senior historian on the Maguuma Jungle," Flune continued, ignoring Drixx's protests.

"Wow, so you must know all about this place," said Arcadia, looking impressed.

"In theory. Now that Mordremoth is rising, it isn't clear what sort of effect his influence will have on the jungle."

"I'm going to go out on a limb and hypothesize increased hostility," said Drixx impishly.

"Aren't you just the cleverest," retorted Flune, rolling her eyes.

At that moment, Arcadia's ears twitched as she heard what sounded like excited shouting ahead. She held up a hand and stopped, dropping into a crouch and listening intently.

"Do you hear that?" Arcadia whispered. The two asura nodded but remained silent.

"We need to get closer. Follow me, and stay as quiet as possible."

On all fours, Arcadia stalked forward through the undergrowth like some fierce predator, her tail swaying hypnotically behind her. As the trio moved forward, they were

able to make out what the shouting voice was saying.

"Have at ye, you thorny toads! Come, who will be the first to taste the cold kiss of steel!"

Arcadia's brow furrowed, and Flune and Drixx glanced at each other, their eyebrows raised. Finally, the trio reached the edge of the large clearing where the commotion was taking place. Parting the leaves of an enormous bush, Arcadia, Flune, and Drixx stared out into the clearing.

A tall, thin, bright green male sylvari dressed in Order of Whispers attire was brandishing an elegant, slender rapier at three hulking Mordrem husks. The husks were attacking him relentlessly, but the nimble sylvari was too quick for them, dodging their attacks and hurling challenges and insults at them all the while.

"Whoops! Haha! Too slow again! You'll have to work on that, er, swipe, my large friend. Woefully slow."

"We have to help him," said Arcadia, starting to rise.

"No, don't," said Flune sharply. Turning to Drixx, she looked at him expectantly.

Drixx grimaced and sighed, "Fine."

Springing to his feet, Drixx leapt out into the clearing, brandishing his peculiar staff. The husks spotted him and made for him immediately, tired of their evasive target. The strange sylvari seemed thoroughly unsurprised by Drixx's appearance, waving at him as the husks charged.

"Splendid timing my good man! My sincerest thanks, the scoundrels don't seem to tire out! A couple more swings and they may have had me!"

"Er, right," replied Drixx, but the time for pleasantries was over. Raising his staff over his head, he brought it swishing down through the air. An enormous column of flame burst from the head of the staff, tearing into the Mordrem and incinerating them within seconds. When the flames abated, the only remnants of the husks were three small piles of grey ash.

Flune looked at the shocked expression on Arcadia's face with satisfaction, "Now do you see why I keep him around?"

Arcadia shook her head in wonderment as she replied, "I don't even know any elementalists in the Vigil that powerful."

Flune smirked. Pact or no Pact, there would always be rivalry between the three orders of Tyria.

Emerging from their secluded position, Arcadia and Flune stood next to Drixx, eyeing the strange Sylvari. He hailed them as he approached, continuing to speak to them in his excited, enthusiastic manner.

"Spectacular! Marvellous! Most impressive, sir," he said jovially, drawing level with the trio and extending his hand to Drixx, "I am Delwynn, the finest swordsman alive. Whom do I have the pleasure of addressing?"

NIGHT OF TERROR: PART I

WRITTEN BY KENT BENSON

"I never asked for this. From the moment I woke from under the boughs of the Pale Mother, my last hours in The Dream have plagued my thoughts. The menders and eventually Mother, they all tried to comfort me, ease my burden," the lone sylvari whispered, her hands gripping the cold metal railing in front of her. She was speaking to a small moth peacefully resting on the warped railing.

It fluttered its wings in response.

"Mother explained that in her grief over Scarlet's attack and eventual death, she had exposed me to secrets that could compromise the stability of our people." A tear fell to the metal flooring underneath her feet. "So I left The Grove after a couple of months for the Durmand Priory. I couldn't be around so many of my own people, not with what I knew. The guilt... was unbearable. At least when I was around the other races, I didn't feel as bad; I didn't feel like I owed them the truth."

The moth crawled onto her gray hand. The sylvari lifted it to eye level before it fluttered away towards the jungle canopy, still smouldering from the fleet of destroyed Pact airships. The smoke blotted out the evening the sky.

"I was wrong," she wept, sobs seething through her clenched teeth. Frost began to form around her hands and spread to the railing. She let go as soon as she noticed. "The crew will want to know. They'll make Braskiir do it; he's a powerful mesmer. I-I'll have to run, but I have nowhere to go."

Without warning, there was the sound of heavy footsteps clunking against the metal floor. The sylvari fell silent. Someone else had entered the wreckage. She quickly checked the sides of her petaled dress for her sheathed daggers before dissolving into a cloud of mist. In this form, she retreated to the captain's station inside the wreckage of The Illusive, an airship once commandeered by Captain Amanda Carlisle, now a crashed husk decorating the cliffs of the Maguuma Jungle. The main body of the vessel had managed to survive mostly intact, but the wings had been ripped off and the pontoon, ruptured.

From her vantage point, she'd be able to spot the unwanted guest before they found her, allowing her to make the first move. Finally, the intruder emerged from the ramp that lead below deck to the engineering and arsenal stations.

"Toiraesa? Are you still here?"

The sylvari, Toiraesa, shook her head silently, holding back tears. She was crouched low and barely peeking, but she recognized the voice. It was her priory mentor, Magister Braskiir Vroanson.

The brown-skinned norn was massive, even for one of their race, and the sylvari had seen a sizable number of their kind in her almost one year alive. Like some norn, he wore his red hair long and braided with a decorative headband to keep it all out of his face. He was an orphan. The young norn had been rescued by human nobles who were hunting foxes and wolves in the foothills of the Shiverpeaks. One of the younger nobles brought the child home to Divinity's Reach where he and his wife decided to raise him as their adopted son.

"Why him? Why did it have to be him?" she lamented.

"Here you are!" said a voice from behind.

Without a second thought, Toiraesa rolled on her back, whipping one of her daggers at the second figure before she realized it was the norn. The projectile hit its mark, but this second visage shattered into a flock of pink ravens. Her dagger fell to the floor, clanging hard against the metal. "A clone," she gasped, jumping to her feet, whipping around to where she'd first seen him. That Braskiir had also shattered, his arm pointing towards where she'd originally come from: the outer front platform.

Now outside, Toiraesa spotted her mentor casually watching a single moth flutter around his outstretched hand. She saw the warm smile across his thick bearded face vanish as she approached.

"You... you look like you haven't slept since the crash. It's been two days," he scorned.

"How could I sleep, Braskiir? How could anyone sleep? Each night... the screaming..." the sylvari said, limbs flailing about before she sunk into a sulky demeanor.

"A few of the crew are still recovering from injuries. The captain recommended we rest as much as possible before we attempt to rally survivors in the jungle."

"That's suicide!"

The norn shrugged and heaved a heavy sigh. "Sure. It's not the safest course of action, but it's the right thing to do."

Toiraesa broke into tears. “Braskiir, please, I’m begging you; don’t force me to go into that jungle!”

Silence came between them. The wind picked up, whistling over the red sandblasted stone, which the two had come to see much of since their arrival in the Maguuma Wastes. Braskiir’s expression softened as he gestured his novice to come to him. His smile returned as her paranoia appeared to give way to his welcoming arms. The sylvari did her best to hug back, but her arms could only encompass the front of the norn’s lower torso. The silent embrace only lasted a couple of minutes before the Magister spoke.

“The sylvari crewmembers on the aircraft, you’ve been thinking about them, right?”

“I still see the rage in their crimson eyes and the terror of the one who had not turned,” Toiraesa replied, gloom hanging from each word. She looked past the norn to the small campfire glowing beyond the airship wreckage. Three silhouettes stood watch around the perimeter. There were nine crewmembers left from the original twenty three. Of the six missing, two had been other sylvari that had gone mad, one, a sylvari who begged the crew to kill her before she succumbed. Braskiir and Toiraesa were not members of the airship crew, but researchers who wanted an opportunity to explore the ruins of the Maguuma Jungle and thought to hitch a ride with the Pact fleet. Unfortunately, the Elder Dragon Mordremoth had other plans.

“They’ll want answers. Answers I did not have the courage to give; answers that have stained my hands with the blood of hundreds. What I’ve kept is unforgivable; I cannot t-”

The norn shrugged again. “Tell me? There is no need; I already have several conclusions,” he said. “As for the others, they’re content to make any assumptions they want, but I’ve made it clear to them that you are my responsibility.”

“I am grateful. I hope you know,” she replied, pulling away slightly, Braskiir’s hands clasped against her shoulders.

He lowered into a squat. “Toiraesa. I wouldn’t have chosen to mentor you if I felt you couldn’t be trusted. Just remember that it goes both ways. I won’t betray you, but I also won’t let you shut yourself away from the world. Eventually, your actions will weigh more than the burden of the secrets you carry and the quality of your character will be how people remember you. Consider that in the days ahead.”

The sylvari wiped away the last of her exhausted tears before fully leaving the embrace of the norn, her confidence rekindled enough for a feigned smile. Together, they slowly wandered through the airship wreckage to the campfire. The perimeter guards paid them a brief glance before returning their attention elsewhere. Around the fire was Amanda Carlisle, the human captain; Luzon, the ship’s lead engineer, an asura; two charr: first-mate, Jedrikk Cinderege and the helmsman, Sidcar Gunsling; another human, Navigator Yahli Gemesh; and Quartermaster Johanna Ullasdottir, a norn. Only a couple appeared happy at Braskiir and Toiraesa’s return. Most of them seated on moved boulders or seats made of debris.

“I’m glad you two made it back. I’ve just started to prepare dinner,” the quartermaster spoke.

“It was kind of you to make anything at all,” Toiraesa responded with as much cheer as she could muster while masking her unease. She knew she’d have to test the mood to discover who her allies were.

Johanna bought into her act. “Nonsense! We may not have a ship, but I still have my duties and most of our supplies. Moreover, I’m sure no one is in any hurry to refuse a cooked meal, especially someone with as legendary an appetite as your mentor.”

The captain chuckled tiredly as she polished her two pistols, her red, jaw-length hair glowing in the fire light. “Lay off the magister’s portly stature, Jo. If he takes a swing at you, he’ll take the whole cliff side with him,” she said.

One of the two charr snickered just before Toiraesa quickly slapped a hand over her mouth to hold back her own grin. Having been with Braskiir for over half a year, the sylvari had heard many comments about her mentor’s size. While she found the jokes cruel, Braskiir’s pouty expression amused her greatly. Most norn reveled in their size, but having grown up with humans, Braskiir had always had trouble fitting in. The jokes still soured his mood, if only briefly.

Johanna was quick to remember. “My mistake, Braskiir. I meant it as a compliment; I’ve heard some impressive moot stories about you around Hoelbrak,”

The magister accepted her apology with a shameful smile. “I was younger and wished to immerse myself in my native culture after leaving the human capital. When I finally woke from the stupor of the moots, the rites, the hunts, I was seven years older and about a drum heavier,” Braskiir said, finishing with a loud singular laugh and slap to his gut. “In the end, I’d be liar to say that I hadn’t enjoyed those days.”

The two charr quickly chimed in with celebratory tales of their own, but the humor and shared stories were short-lived. A piercing scream echoed in the jungle below followed by several gunshots. The crew sat quietly. Many similar disturbances occurred the previous nights. Everyone in the camp knew in their guts what was happening, but were not prepared to descend into the jungle to search for Pact survivors. The blue-furred charr rose from the fireside, his sniper rifle in hand.

“Sid, the sun’s almost gone. You won’t be able to see a thing,” the captain said, shifting her position on her boulder seat to watch her helmsman scan the terrain through his rifle’s scope.

The cries of stranded Pact survivors pierced the evening air for nearly an hour. The rest of the group was silent and wide-eyed. The charr finally lowered his rifle and lumbered back to the campfire with a slight hobble. He’d twisted one of his feet in the crash, but wasn’t about to let a minor injury keep him from moving about. Johanna had healed it as soon as she was able with her guardian magic. The other survivors were still standing due in no small part to the norn’s talent for healing and her constant threats to crewmates that tried to overexert themselves.

"It's as I suspected; the Mordrem appear to be more active in the dark," the helmsman growled. "I saw a few isolated Pact groups picked-off, with the exception of the sylvari; they're being taken prisoner. Have any theories as to why, sprout?"

Toiraesa watched as the charr's yellow eyes pierced hers. She could feel a lump in her throat as she looked to Braskiir. The other crewmembers averted their stares. Johanna, whose back was to the charr, sneered disapprovingly.

"Don't look to your mentor to protect you, sylvari. Your silence is as incriminating as a dagger in the back, or several, as your kind appears to be abandoning us in droves," the helmsman spat.

"I suggest you address your question to someone with proper field and research experience. Toiraesa is one of the brightest pupils I've known, but I have been with the Priory for five years; you can direct your questions to me in the future," the norn said, gripping the hilt of the ornate buster sword strapped to his back. "Know that if you push hostilities against my pupil any further, I won't hesitate to take what little sanity you have left."

Sidcar reached for one of his pistols, but was quickly stopped by the other charr, who grabbed his wrist. Johanna had taken hold of one of her butcher blades, poised to spin around and attack.

"Enough!" the captain cried, spearing the charr with a glare. "Sidcar. A word. Now!"

The two stood. The rising tension pushed the sylvari to intervene. "No! Wait," she said, arm lazily stretched towards the captain and her helmsman. "I can answer his question."

Captain Carlisle and Sidcar remained standing, waiting for the novice's explanation. The fire crackled between them; another distant terror-filled scream came from the void.

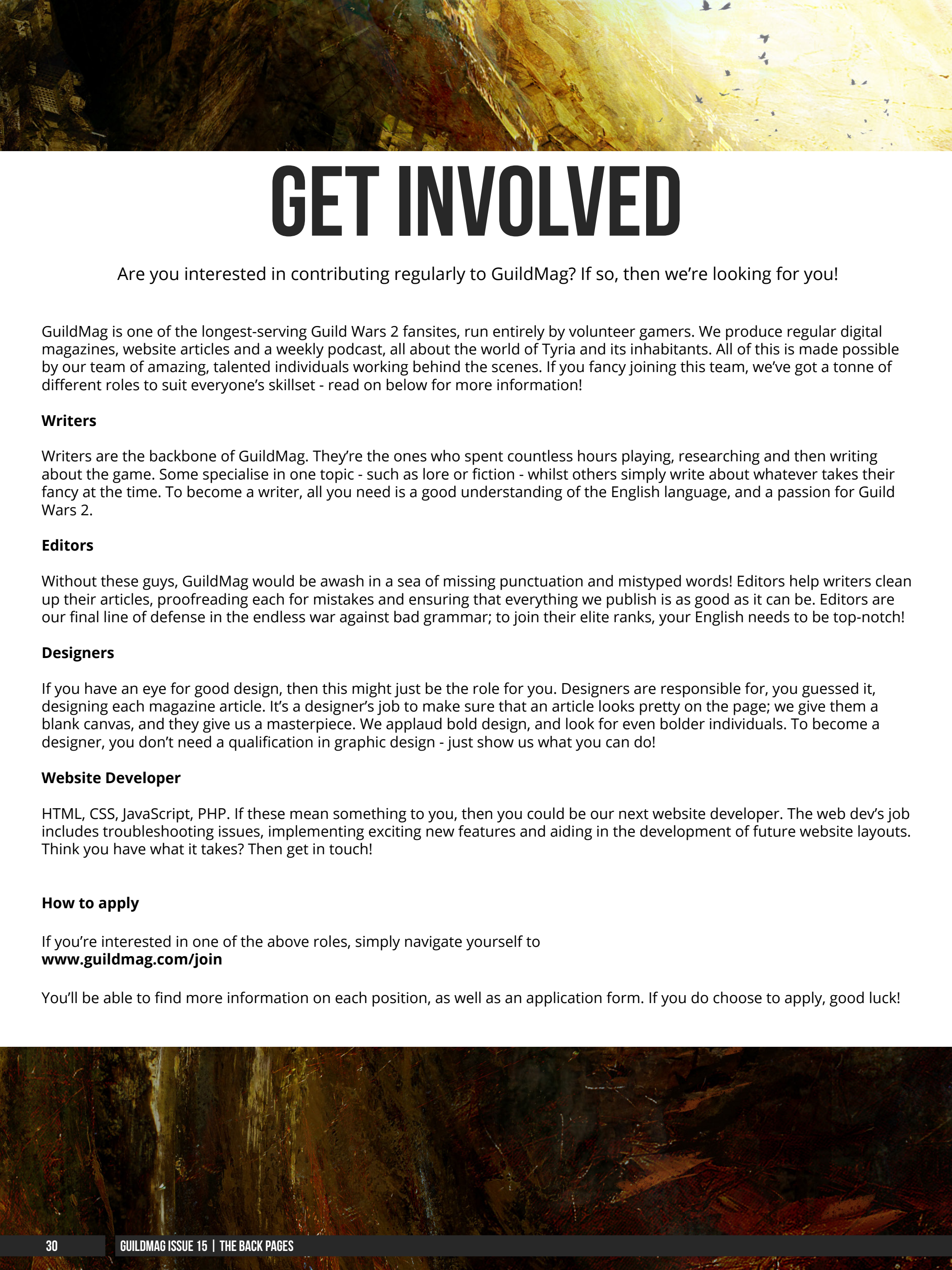
She took in a meditated breath and exhaled like her mentor when he would practice his mantras. "We, the sylvari, are vulnerable to Mordremoth's power; we can be corrupted. First, it was Scarlet and then we heard about Aerin. Both had been broken by the dragon's will. It is likely that the Mordrem are taking my brothers and sisters captive to force them to turn."

Johanna was the first to comment as she continued to stir the stew. "So what? The Sons of Svanir and the Icebrood are similarly corrupted, lured in by Jormag's promise of power. It just means your people—"

"It's not the same!" Toiraesa interrupted, her face distraught, on the verge of tears. She took another deep breath to rally herself. "The norn were never created to be servants of Jormag, but we, all sylvari, were born to eventually serve Mordremoth."







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